

Shared narratives of place and Future Folklores

Sophie Brown

“-But let us pray that our rulers remember that the world is a temple as well as a market, and that in their efforts to build up the new town and develop a great industry, the sweet retreats by hill and shore be guarded with jealous care.”

Thomas White-Ogilvie (1901)

The Small Frame

Prior to our fieldwork in Rovaniemi – my thoughts were clouded with stories from my own community.

I had been working on a project to encourage creative conversation with residents in the area of Torry in Aberdeen, Scotland who were in the midst of protest against the development of Green Energy infrastructure over the last remaining green space St Fitticks Park – a site of great significance to the inhabitants of the area, their history and the diverse ecology that residents within wetlands and burn (Scottish word meaning small river) that feeds it.

This proposed development is the newest in a chain of change to Torry’s landscape - both environmentally and socially - with hundreds of residents now under threat of relocation.



The person is trapped in the man-made, unwillingly and unknowingly causing damage to the environment around him.

Figure 1. Sketchbook. Brown 2024

The stories the residents shared with me were filled with sadness for a past that may be forgotten and an ecosystem that will be forever altered by

the re-direction of Tullos burn. They spoke of their memories of the community – their experiences and reflections – from its past and present, as well as their hopes for the future.

It was this concept of ‘hope’ we created imagined futures for this community using collage as the medium. This process allowed for the abstract thought and surreal expression the brief spoke to, and reflecting on these workshops, I decided it would work well within the framework of LiLa for me to continue working with this material.

This was a narrative I found to be shared with the experiences shared with those living in Rovaniemi, who’s own landscape has changed in the wake of the emergence of Green Energy infrastructure. Themes of disturbed wildlife, redirected rivers and the uprooting of people from their homes exists between these two very different places.

I knew that I wanted to continue my investigation into how a sense of place can be affected by changes inflicted by Green Energy, welcoming an expanded dialogue with other communities out with the small frame of reference I have had to reflect on in Torry.

Revisiting Practice and Connecting with Process

Within our online seminars, it became apparent that this was not an isolated experience, and the same protests against Green Energy in Scotland, were also happening in Finland and beyond.

Despite my very tentative decision to focus on collage, I went into the fieldwork with very limited criteria for what kinds of materials I would gather and where I may seek out inspiration.

Within the past few years, I have begun to establish my practice as one that is reliant on reflection, through conversation and connection, walking and

immersion in nature to connect the dots between concept and creativity – so provided myself the space to fully experience all that the fieldwork had to offer.

It was through the means of connection and immersion I established the process to which I would create the body of work ‘Stories Hereafter’.

Kae Tempest (a writer and performer) speaks on the role of creativity in establishing deeper connections to ourselves, others and the world around us. It was in their book ‘On Connection’ (2022), I began to understand how the sharing of stories and narrative through art can achieve more than simply surface level ‘getting-to-know-you’ and can generate real power. They write;

“Stories and songs bring us into contact with our best and worst natures, they enable us to locate ourselves in other people’s experience and they increase our compassion. But these things in a vacuum are useless. A story doesn’t cultivate empathy just by virtue of its having been thought up; it must be engaged with to become powerful; the story must be read the song must be listened to in order to acquire its full charge....To really be useful in the connective power of the text, rather than interrogators, we must be the conductors. We, the readers or listeners, are crucial to the text, story or song becoming powerful. We are not impartial observers; we are a fundamental part of the circuitry: if we are not connected, the charge will not be able to flow” (Tempest 2022: 49-51)

I would describe the experience of LiLa as a moment of circuitry in connecting stories and experiences directly to modes of creative outputs.

During the week spent in Lapland, we encountered an array of different stories, delivered verbally, artistically and through the landscapes we explored.

As I previously mentioned, I had initially planned to focus on collage as my main medium within creation, so utilised my camera in capturing reference material to work from upon my return to Scotland.

I also gathered materials such as maps, pamphlets, magazines and guides from each new visit to each cultural hub we visited along the way – seeking out interesting imagery to reflect a contrasting sense of place outside the depictions of nature I gathered in my photography.

However, what came as a surprise to me was the reconnection with drawing I had during this trip. I have strayed from drawing as a practice recently with feelings of ‘not having enough time’ to dedicate to the level of concentration required from the process and new and exciting ways of creating turning my head away.

But it was on the man-made beach on the shore of the dam built on the previously inhabited and now flooded village, I found myself drawn to represent this place and the history of its new landscape by using soft sketching pencils on paper.

During this visit to Porttipahta reservoir, we collected found objects from the beach to create boats that we released onto a nearby river. I found this to be a pivotal exercise in establishing the direction of my work exploring human and non-human relationships and how they can be changed with our manipulation and interventions – both positively and negatively.

I was attracted to capturing shapes reflected in the river, catching glimpses into a new surreal and abstract landscape depicted in its mirrored surface, imaging a completely alternate sense of place.



Figure 2. Collage from collected materials. Brown 2024



Figure 3. The dam at Porttipahta Reservoir. Brown 2024



Figure 4. Boat released onto water. Brown 2024

Finding Narrative

A surprising revelation to me came on a day we were provided free time to explore out-with planned excursions. A group of us ventured out in our cars and spontaneously visited the Gold Museum, in Tankavaara, Lapland, Finland. This was a part of Finland's history I had not been aware of previously and I found it interesting to compare this new perspective I had gained with the stories shared by the artist Arja Kustula and her lost home due to the construction of the dam.

Figure 5. Gold Museum, Tankavaara. Brown 2024



Gold as a visual narrative holds connotations of greed, reminiscent of Midas in Greek mythology which felt a fitting metaphor in the case of modern-day perceptions of Green Energy as a money making industry with the global renewable energy market is projected to reach 2,025.94 Billion USD and witness a compound annual growth rate of 9.6% from 2022 to 2030 (NextMSC: 2022).

However, the Gold Museum's content also represented a conflict in how the industry of gold min-

Figure 6. Gold Mask. Brown 2024



ing was initially one that respected the limitations of the environment and brought communities that participated within the practice a lot of good. I felt that this duality of meaning behind this visual metaphor was an element I wanted to include within the body of work I wished to create; encompassing

difficult dialogues that can be shared when discussing the implications of Green Energy. During our travel to Vuotso, we stopped in Sodankylä to visit the Alariesto Gallery, an artist who depicted the folklore of Lapland within painting and sculpture with storytelling a primary focus of his artwork.

I felt inspired by Alariesto's 'collaged' approach to the representation of history and myth of the region and enjoyed the whimsical, eccentric and brutal depictions of scenes of life in the region.

The interactions I had with his work led me to establish my own desire to represent my experiences of home and afar within the realm of the imagined with acknowledgement to the shared lived realities

of man-made change to both landscapes.

Upon my return to Scotland, I used the materials I had collected to create the 'monsters' of industry represented in the stories shared as part of the fieldwork. I wanted to represent these impositions on the landscape in a way that felt very physical and uncomfortably mechanical - contrasting the beauty of nature cohabiting with - but also referencing the very human-led reasons for such 'prescribed' developments.

In reflection on what I encounter within the fieldwork and my experimentations once back in my own environment, I decided to follow the direction of representing a fictionalised and fantastical

Figures 7, 8 & 9: Future Folklores. Brown 2024



folklore of the future, and how the stories of change and destruction of homes, landscapes and communities may be represented in years to come.

This journey opened me up to expanding on all I had listened to, explored and immersed myself in within both settings, developing ideas of how I could represent these larger complex ideas of the benefits and flaws of Green Energy within representational and recognisable imagery.

References

Tempest, K (2020). *On Connection*. Faber.

Ogilvie, T, W. (1901). *The Book of Saint Fittick*. [online] 1st Edition. Aberdeen: Bon Accord Press. Accessed: 1 September 2024: https://www.electricscotland.com/books/saint_fittick.htm

Next MSC, (2022). *Renewable Energy Market*. Accessed: 21 September 2024. <https://www.nextm-sc.com/report/renewable-energy-market>

