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# *walking Poets*

WORDSWORTH AND BASHŌ: WALKING POETS



## Art Editions North

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*Wordsworth and Bashō: Walking Poets*  
At Dove Cottage & the Wordsworth Museum  
24 May to 2 November 2014

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# CHRISTOPHER MCHUGH

## 28. *Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau)*

2014

Porcelain, terracotta, soda glass, mixed media

120 x 60 x 50 cm

McHugh's work responds to themes of memory and the ephemerality of the human condition in the work of both Bashō and Wordsworth. While Bashō often revisited ruins and other sites of communal memory in his poetry, Wordsworth was concerned that human endeavour—both monuments and works of literature—were at risk of destruction through catastrophe and would be outlasted by nature. Both poets were also interested in uncovering for posterity the marginalised histories of everyday folk (the flotsam and jetsam) they met on the road.

Similarly, throughout much of his ceramic work McHugh evokes potentially overlooked narratives and materialises that which otherwise might remain absent. 'Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau)' is an installation piece consisting of hundreds of mainly slipcast and press-moulded ceramic components. By combining durable ceramic elements with an ephemeral, reworkable mode of presentation,

the 'scarred' porcelain fragments in the installation occupy an ambivalent position somewhere between absence and presence, manifesting a sense of enduring loss and melancholia. Blades of grass made from soda glass grow through the ceramic assemblage, suggesting the endurance of nature over culture.

Figure 24, A section of Buson's scroll 1 ('The Narrow Road to the Deep North') containing *The Summer Grass haiku*. Courtesy of Kyoto National Museum



The installation title references Wordsworth's portmanteau suitcase which is on display in Dove Cottage and alludes to Bashō's 'The Records of a Travel-Worn Satchel'. A portmanteau is also a word formed through the combination of two or more other words, resulting in a new meaning. This piece synthesises something of the essence of both poets, repackaging their words into a new object with contemporary resonances. It is inspired by verses 68–92 of Wordsworth's *The Ruined Cottage* and a *haiku* written by Bashō when he visited the abandoned castle at Hiraizumi in 1689 (see figure 24).



*Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau)*, installation shot



*Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau)*, installation shot

*Flotsam and Jetsam (Portmanteau)* (detail)

Could find no rest, nor weak nor wise  
The ~~inward~~ heart ~~beats~~ ~~with~~ ~~its~~ ~~own~~ ~~power~~ ~~+~~  
And ~~found~~ ~~their~~ ~~murmers~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~arduous~~ ~~noise~~  
Of seeds of bustling gorse that crach'd and round  
From and turned towards a group of trees  
Which midway in that level stood alone  
And thither came at length beneath a thorn  
Of hithering elms that sprang from the same root  
I found a ruined house four naked walls  
That stared upon each other. I looked round  
And near the door I saw an age man  
Alone, and stretched upon the cottage bench  
An iron pointed staff lay at his side  
At the instantaneous joy I recognized  
That pride of nature & of lonely life  
The venerable ~~Demogorgon~~, a friend  
As dear to me as is the setting sun  
The low, his track of wicker merchandise  
Following his head. I quoth he had no thought  
Of his away-wandering life. His eyes were shut  
The shadows of the bryar elms above  
Drooped his face. With thirsty heart oppress'd  
At length I hail'd him glad to see his hat  
Droop'd with water drops, as if the brow  
Had nearly scoop'd a running stream. He rose  
And pointing to a sun-flower bade me climb  
The wall where that same gaudy flower  
Look'd out upon the road. It was a plot  
Of garden ground ~~was~~ ~~with~~ ~~its~~ ~~matted~~ ~~weeds~~  
Mark'd with the steps of those whom a tree had  
Turn'd to the beginning of the sun

The goose berry trees that shot on long bank slopes  
Overhanging from their leafless stems  
In scantly clumps had tempt'd to overleap  
The broken wall. Within that cheerless spot  
Where two tall hedgesons of hick ~~with~~ ~~their~~ ~~rough~~  
Join'd in a clump ~~with~~ ~~rough~~ ~~found~~ ~~well~~  
Hall ~~with~~ ~~rough~~ ~~found~~ ~~well~~  
I slaked my thirst & to the shady bench  
Returned & while I stood unconnected  
I catch'd the motion of the cooler air  
The old man said "I'm around me here  
Things which you cannot see, and see, my friend  
Nor we alone but that which each man loves  
And prize in his peculiar nook of earth  
Dies with him or is changed, & very soon  
Even of the good is no memorial left  
The Poets in their elegies & songs  
Lamenting the departed call the graves  
They call upon the hills & streams to mourn  
And simple rocks no idle for they speak  
In these their invocations with a voice  
Ominous to the strong creative power  
Of human passion. Sympathies there are  
More tranquil perhaps, hinder'd both  
That dwell upon the meditative mind  
And grow with thought. Pray you spring I stand  
And end its waters till we need to feel  
unconnected

## WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

### 29. *The Ruined Cottage*

1799 (and later)

Hand of Dorothy Wordsworth

Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust

This manuscript, one of two red leather bound notebooks used simultaneously in the late 1790s and early 1800s, was used mainly for fair copies of earlier drafts of poems. The earliest drafts of 'The Ruined Cottage' date from 1797 when the Wordsworths were living at Racedown in Dorset; this version was to see further revisions before being published in 1814 as part of Wordsworth's longest poem, *The Excursion*.

