

walking Poets

WORDSWORTH AND BASHŌ: WALKING POETS



Art Editions North

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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 ~~first~~ ^{first} ~~best~~ ^{best} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~world~~ ^{world} ~~around~~ ^{around} my feet
~~And~~ ^{And} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~noise~~ ^{noise} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~world~~ ^{world} ~~around~~ ^{around} my feet
 Of seeds of bustling gorse that crach'd 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 sheltering 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 smile of nature & of lonely life
 The venerable ~~Wangley~~ ^{Wangley}, a friend
 As dear to me as is the setting sun
 The low, his track of quiet merchandise
 Following his head. I quoth he had no thought
 Of his away-wandering life. His eyes were shut
 The shadows of the busy elms above
 Dappled his face. With thirsty heart oppress'd
 At length I hailed him glad to see his hat
 Besown with water drops, as if the brown
 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
 Looked out upon the road. It was a plot
 Of garden ground ~~was~~ ^{was} ~~with~~ ^{with} its matted weeds
 Marked with the steps of those whom a busy hall
 Turn to the beginning of the sun's march

The goose berry trees that shot on long bank slopes
 Orivants hanging from their leafless stems
 In scatte clumps had tempt'd to overleap
 The broken wall. Within that cheerless spot
 Where two tall hedgesons of hick ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~light~~ ^{light}
 Joined in a clump, I found a well
 Of ~~crystal~~ ^{crystal} ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~unfaded~~ ^{unfaded} ~~flowers~~ ^{flowers}
 That ~~had~~ ^{had} ~~been~~ ^{been} ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~me~~ ^{me} ~~before~~ ^{before} ~~now~~ ^{now}
 I slaked my thirst & to the shady bench
 Returned & while I stood unconnected
 I catch the motion of the cooler air
 The old man said "I'm around me here
 Things which you cannot see, and see, my friend
 Now 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 words are 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, hindered with
 That deal upon the meditative mind
 And grow with thought. Prone you spring I stand
 And end its waters till we need to feel
 our spirits

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*.

Wordsworth's 'Portmanteau' Suitcase, Bedroom, Dove Cottage
 Photograph courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust

