

# **Practising Creativity: Experimentation, Mistakes and Successes in Art-Archaeology**

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Archaeological materials, recording techniques and methods have influenced diverse work by artists across a range of media, and archaeology has been, practically and theoretically, equally influenced by art, as many a conference session over the years has demonstrated. In this session we want to examine experimentation in art-archaeology and how we turn that initial inspiration to think or work in new ways into things to talk about or show people. Rather than automatically portraying all collaborations as successful and complete acts, we want to discuss the pitfalls and problems in doing creative practice.

Does it matter that many of us who want to bring artistic inspiration to our archaeology are not good artists? Does it matter whether artists do good archaeology? Do notions of the art-archaeologist as conventionally talented or technically proficient obscure the benefits of more naïve experimentation? When an art-archaeologist makes something that could be considered good art, is it? What do notions of good or bad art do to art-archaeology in theory and practice?

This session aims to produce a critical and playful dialogue about the development of individual and collaborative practices in art-archaeology. We welcome papers from anyone currently involved in art-archaeology in any way, those who have tried and moved on, and those thinking about getting involved for the first time. We want to hear about people's outputs, but also about how they got there. We want to hear about experiments, mistakes, successes, all of the practising that leads to a practice.

**Keywords:** art-archaeology; practice; experimental; collaboration; proficiency; naivety

## **When the Artist Outperforms the Archaeologist**

*Prof. Daisy Diggle aka marjolijn kok* (Bureau Archeologie en Toekomst, marjolijnkok@gmail.com)

In this performance Daisy Diggle (your local archaeologist) will show the pitfalls of archaeological art projects, especially when the audience starts to believe you. What happens when a project about critical thinking turns into fake-knowledge. Diggle will elaborate on a cooperation with Dr Iris Taylor from the Flat Earth Museum on Fogo Island, Canada. Followed by a statement by marjolijn kok, director of the Museum of Failure and Unloved Objects about how failure can give us insight into the working of knowledge production. Failure is not an end, it is the opening up of new strands of thought. When we use a well-known form like the museum catalogue to play with objects and interpretation we may fail to be accurate but we could show a deeper understanding of the material culture around us.

## **Engaging with the Ancient Cultural Landscape through Technical Creativity and the “Internet of Things”**

*Laura Johansson (Independent Scholar, [laura.johanssonarchaeology@hotmail.com](mailto:laura.johanssonarchaeology@hotmail.com))*

Some months ago we were presented with an unique opportunity to create a digital work to highlight how a World Heritage Site actually ‘worked’. As we discovered more about the site, it defined archaeological, scientific and technological processes which would all lead our creative vision for the end result. The project combines the latest cloud and “IoT” based services with “maker” grade tech, such as Raspberry Pis, low cost 360 imaging and home-brew sensor packages. The on-site component of the system also runs entirely, and appropriately, on solar energy. The site itself presented a number of challenges and sensitivities that had to be overcome and the final assembly of components had to be utterly contemporary to succeed; all to creatively capture the “perfect” view. The project is ongoing and funded by Historic England.

## **Negotiating Creativity in Acoustic Heritage**

*Catriona Cooper (University of York, [Catriona.Cooper@york.ac.uk](mailto:Catriona.Cooper@york.ac.uk))*

Recent developments in archaeological visualisation and digital archaeology have seen the embracing of creativity as part of the craft and practice. There is a comparison to be made between the commonality in the workflow to create visualisation and auralizations, but the acceptance of creativity in acoustic heritage is still not widely embraced.

The final outputs of the Listening to the Commons project were a series of soundscapes to feature in the Voice and Vote exhibition in Parliament this year. During the final processing the team, made up of Historians, Archaeologists and Acousticians, had to negotiate between following a rigorous methodology and allowing creative practise to make the outputs appropriate for the setting. In this paper I will discuss these negotiations and creative practice in a non-visual setting.

## **Art, Fermented: Comparative Experimentation in Medieval Brewing**

*Brian Costello (University of Chester, [b.costello@chester.ac.uk](mailto:b.costello@chester.ac.uk)) and Reanna Phillips*

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The quality, diversity, and popularity of beer has skyrocketed through the modern ‘craft’ industry worldwide. Innovations in the creation, taste, appearance, marketing, and even label design have raised beer and brewing to the level of a dynamic ‘art-form’. Beer has been archaeologically and historically documented throughout various cultures since prehistory, with research exploring and interpreting the social roles of beer and brewing as well as its production.

Questions such as ‘how was beer brewed in the past?’ or ‘what did beer taste like?’ come to mind in the study of beer. This presentation documents our experimentation with the art of medieval brewing: the process, ingredients, and some may say most importantly, the taste

in comparison to modern brewing. We seek to recreate the art-form of brewing in the past, and in doing so, forge a connection with previous brewsters and brewers of Medieval Europe.

### **Found Sculpture: Negotiating the Art and Archaeology of a Buried Skateboard Park**

*Bruce Emmett (Artist, [bemmett.mail@gmail.com](mailto:bemmett.mail@gmail.com)) and Bob Muckle (Capilano University, [bmuckle@capilanou.ca](mailto:bmuckle@capilanou.ca))*

This presentation tells the story of the struggle to convince an obstinate landowner of the value of alternative forms of art and archaeology, leading to an unlikely collaboration between an artist and an archaeologist. The goal is to excavate one of the oldest skateboard parks in the world, buried in West Vancouver, Canada. The artist views the park as readymade sculpture, an extension of his own appropriative art practice. The archaeologist recognizes the site contains an engaging and significant 20<sup>th</sup> century artefact. The artistic vision of the project remains speculative and propositional as the landowner continues to refuse access to the site. The project has gathered support from artists, archaeologists, skateboarders, historians, and heritage advocates, but there has been little headway in receiving permission to excavate. The artist and archaeologist remain undeterred, and continue to strategize, look for loopholes and workarounds, and explore the intersection between ostensibly disparate practices.

### **A Case for the Embedded yet Autonomous Artist: Lessons Learned on *The Pallasboy Project***

*Brian Mac Domhnaill (Artist/Archaeologist *The Pallasboy Project*, [b\\_mac\\_domhnaill@hotmail.com](mailto:b_mac_domhnaill@hotmail.com))*

The Pallasboy Project, launched in 2014, set out to explore the creative process involved in the crafting of prehistoric wooden artefacts. The recording strategy (in the hands of an artist/archaeologist) would serve to reveal and document a contemporary experience of craft and in doing so provide a new perspective on an ancient creative process. Initially it was intended that any additional artistic lines of enquiry would run in tandem with archaeological experimentation, but also directly influence the record itself. However, this resulted in a tension born out of dual roles, between the responsibility to record and the expectation to create. Although materials and methodologies inspired and informed artistic research and process along the way this mostly happened outside of the main thread of the project and over a longer period of time. Artistic influence on the record was slight, at times playful, but never quite finding its own moment. Perhaps it is yet to come.

### **Deep Dreaming through Iron Age Eyes**

*Matthew Thomas (University of Chester, [1523222@chester.ac.uk](mailto:1523222@chester.ac.uk))*

The art-experiments reviewed in this paper were undertaken as a proof-of-concept: is it possible to train image-recognition software to see through Iron Age eyes?

The heavily stylised imagery marking the separation between ‘Celtic’ coinage motifs and their figurative Hellenistic prototypes is suggestive of radically different visual perception and/or interpretation of the perceived world. Training a neural network with a corpus limited to such imagery could allow for such perception to be simulated, quantified and utilised in the creation of novel IA ‘Celtic’ coin imagery.

Preliminary ‘Deep Style’ (Gatys, Ecker & Bethge 2015) experiments allowed for recreation of contemporary coin designs in an IA ‘Celtic’ style, and moving imagery from individual movie-frames of animals running. This highly subjective methodology, lying between data-centric and art-archaeological approaches, provides novel and inspiring insights into the iconography employed by past societies, as well as revealing limitations of the technology.

### **Wandering Around Looking at Stuff**

*James Dixon (Wood Plc, james.dixon@woodplc.com)*

I've spent a lot of time working with artists and have always been inspired by these engagements to try new things. But I've also always felt that this art-archaeology must have some kind of structure, rigour, to be useful archaeology and to respect the art it takes inspiration from. In this paper I will use a few recent art-archaeology projects to explain that process of turning wandering around looking at stuff differently into something a bit more formal, and why it's taken over a decade of art-archaeology for me to finally allow myself to say I have a practice.

### **Bard Times: Archaeology as Poetry in Practice**

*Penelope Foreman (Clywd-Powys Archaeological Trust, Penelope.foreman@cpat.org.uk)*

If you've ever submitted your curriculum vitae

In the form of an ode to demonstrate why

You deserve that job in archaeological outreach

That you've got significant skills to teach;

If without a cringe you upload to YouTube

A performance poem that's actually one long boob

Because you went full grade socialist ideal

When museums must make a profit to keep it real;

If you wanted to tell your excavation story

In ways that capture that intricate glory  
Of the past that's only every one fraction  
Of a scrap of a second of a piece of the action;

If you yearned for a song on the colour of soil  
Whilst tipping it out on the mound of spoil  
Or tapped out a rhythm of trowel on clay  
That thrummed with the haze of a heatwave day;

This paper's for you, and in it I'll say  
Archaeology is Poetry, and here's my way.

### **Making Visible the Invisible**

*Rob Irving (Independent Scholar, rob\_irving@me.com)*

There is only one name for the study of the material objects of the human past... 'archaeology'. Those who devote their main interests and capacities to this study are archaeologists.

Stanley Casson, *Archaeology* (1930, 5).

The same definition could serve for 'artist'. In an anthropological theory of art, to quote Paul Klee, 'art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible.' Art elicits emotional responses as an innately human reality. Archaeology, decoupled from positivism, should engage with such approaches.

My doctoral research considered the creation of Avebury's identity as a 'thin' place - a threshold between physical and perceived non-physical realms, where objects of belief manifest as observable phenomena. Following Andrew Lawson (2007), such sites are engendered by fantasy and our inability to fathom them. I argue that Avebury's 'ritual landscape' acts as it did to its architects, with their aesthetic sensibilities contributing to our imagination of place.

### **Sometimes I just Want to Draw**

*Katy Whitaker (University of Reading, k.a.whitaker@pgr.reading.ac.uk)*

# SOMETIMES, I JUST WANT TO DRAW...

MY COMIC STYLE IS INFLUENCED BY AN ART TEACHER...



...MAPS, ENGRAVINGS, E.C.M.E. ARTWORK, AND RAILWAY POSTERS.

HANNAH SACKETT, JOHN SWOGER, KATHERINE COOK, JANE BRAYNE, THE COMICS GRID & OTHERS SHOWED ME THAT...



...ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMICS CAN BE SCHOLARLY, EFFECTIVE, VALUABLE.



I CAN DO CORPORATE, THAT'S NO CHALLENGE

I'M AN OLD HAND

EXPERIMENTING & DEVELOPING MY PRACTICE DURING MY PhD IS GOING O.K. —SO FAR: BUT HOW WELL AM I COMMUNICATING TO AUDIENCES?



LOVED THE POSTER BUT WHERE'S THE RESEARCH QUESTION

SUCH FUN! BUT WHAT'S THE METHODOLOGY? I WANT BULLET POINTS.

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