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Northumbria artists reveal *There Were Islands* at BALTIC 39

Eight graduating artists will tonight launch a stunning group exhibition built around the metaphor of a river estuary and its status as a site of shifting and concealed meanings.

There Were Islands brings together work by final year students from the BxNU Master of Fine Art, a unique two-year course run by Northumbria University in partnership with BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, and based in the vibrant studio culture of BALTIC 39 in the centre of Newcastle.

The artists, who all come from islands (United Kingdom, New Zealand, Cyprus and Ireland), have pursued their own personal and artistic interests throughout this innovative course, but have brought their work together at the end of their degree for a unique group exhibition.

There Were Islands will be open until June 19 with a special preview evening tonight, 9 June, at BALTIC 39 on High Bridge in the centre of Newcastle.

As part of the exhibition, visitors will enjoy Cat Auburn's sculptural installation, film and photographs that unearth the architectural remains and myths surrounding the Royal Arcade in Newcastle. Demolished in 1963, The Royal Arcade was the only Tyneside Classical building ever to be pulled down - its façade was catalogued and the stones and pillars buried throughout the city with the idea of future resurrection.

Visitors will also discover Alexandra Brunt's sound recordings and film that place the viewer/listener in an intimate and poetic relationship with a female protagonist, exploring ideas of agency, the female voice and touch. James Ellis-Clark becomes part of his own artworks during the exhibition as he occupies the gallery, skilfully planing wooden chairs until they disappear or working on a home-made potter's wheel.

Philip Larry questions the audience's perception of authenticity and humour within his work, using stretched canvases or cardboard boxes. Philip uses topical images from national news outlets and social media and combines them with heckling slogans to create a sense of confusion and disquiet. Visitors will be invited to confront the intense authenticity of David Longwill's large canvases that address themes such as the body, the symbolic gesture and the gaze.

Alex Harmon highlights the subtleties of everyday human interactions through objects and film installation. Suffused with the idea of transit – epitomised by the presence of an airliner's flight data recorder – his work plays on our generalised anxiety about the impenetrability of technology played out in personal acts of communication and miscommunication. James Watts brings together objects that have become distressed through prior performances and that speak of the physicality of sound making and the

genre of 'extreme' music. A piano carcass, strung from a pulley and rope system to the gallery ceiling, groans with the sounds of its own journey as it was pushed through the Newcastle streets and a hand-crafted clay saxophone lies on the gallery floor, shattered as the result of an intense performance.

By contrast, Markos Sotiriou, uses his Cypriot homeland as a site for a seemingly playful act story-telling. His work becomes manifest in multiple films, performances and drawings that move between an individuated psychology and a more generalised cultural or political sense of identity.

[Fiona Crisp](#), Reader in Fine Art and BxNU MFA course leader said: "It has been an extremely rewarding experience seeing these eight artists create and develop their work during the past two years and to witness it to come to fruition in such a successful exhibition. *There Were Islands* provides a rich and complex experience for visitors to BALTIC 39 to enjoy and we look forward to the impact that our graduates will continue to have on the contemporary art world.

Sarah Munro, BALTIC Director said: "For the second year running, we are proud to host the BxNU Master of Fine Art exhibition at BALTIC 39 showcasing the talent and development of the graduating cohort. Watching the development of these artists as they progress through the two year programme reminds us of the important role the BxNU partnership plays in supporting and nurturing artistic practice at postgraduate level. This MFA is producing young artists who are contributing challenging, discursive work to the art world and beyond."

The BxNU Master of Fine Art, a collaboration between BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art and Northumbria University, is unique for its innovative approach and the high-level professional and creative environment the students experience. Based in the vibrant studio culture of BALTIC 39 in the centre of Newcastle, the students follow their own personal research interests whilst also working collectively to produce a professional exhibition on graduation. *There Were Islands* is part of REVEAL 2016, Northumbria's annual celebration of its creative courses, including Architecture, Art, Design and Media. For more information about studying at Northumbria University come to one of our upcoming Open Days on 1-2 July. To find out more go to: www.northumbria.ac.uk/opendays

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

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