

Satellites Programme

Ross Little

The Heavy of Your Body Parts and The Cool Air of the Air Condition

22.07.17 – 10.09.17

The Heavy of Your Body Parts and The Cool Air of the Air Condition is a new exhibition and film by Glasgow-based artist Ross Little exploring different forms of globalised labour on a cruise ship and in a breaking yard in India.

In the first section of the new film, footage taken on board a cruise ship documents the contrasting experiences of employees working long shifts and 'digital nomad' passengers whom combine travel with online work. Represented in an impressionistic, dreamlike style and intercut with still images of historic and contemporary maps of the world, Ross connects work on this cruise to a long history of movement and trade – a global exchange of peoples, animals, plants, diseases, ideas, objects and structures. In the second section of the film, we are transported to the breaking yards of Alang, India. Raw footage documents the physical process of decommissioning a ship and the subsequent journey of the material and objects sold as scrap in the local economy.

Though differing vastly in many respects, notably in their ability to speak freely and represent themselves, all workers in the film share a common status as economic migrants. In the process of making the film, the operation of privilege and colonialism became apparent in how workers could or could not represent themselves. The digital nomads, and Ross, are able to speak freely and self-represent, whereas the cruise ship employees were contractually obliged not to talk to passengers beyond their work capacities. To enter the ship breaking yards, Ross had to pose as a nautical science student, due to a distrust of filmmakers and how the industry – which has arisen from the deindustrialisation of the global

COLLECTIVE

north, with shipping companies relocating to the global south to benefit from lax labour and environmental laws – might be represented. This antagonism along with language difference, shaped and limited how the ship breakers could be represented.

Different techniques to document the physical work of shipbreaking and the digital nomad community have been adopted to heighten the different agency both sets of workers have to represent themselves – shifting between cinematic shots, rough moving images, ambient sound, glitching, spoken interviews and performed excerpts from Ursula Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* and Victor Hugo's *Toilers of the Sea*.

For this exhibition, Collective's gallery space adopts a form of affected interior design that can also be found on cruise ships. Soothing lighting and a mini aquarium in an anteroom encourages visitors into a relaxed state, corresponding and contrasting with elements of the new film.

Ross Little graduated from The Glasgow School of Art in 2011. Recent projects include an expanded cinema performance at Counterflows Festival 2016, and 1957 Chevy Apparition at Market Gallery, Glasgow for which he presented films made in Cuba with Florrie James.



Jellytime

Timothea Armour

Current-borne, wave-flung, tugged hugely by the whole might of ocean, the jellyfish drifts in the tidal abyss. The light shines through it, and the dark enters it. Borne, flung, tugged from anywhere to anywhere, for in the deep sea there is no compass but nearer and farther, higher and lower, the jellyfish hangs and sways; pulses move slight and quick within it, as the vast diurnal pulses beat in the moon-driven sea. Hanging, swaying, pulsing, the most vulnerable and insubstantial creature, it has for its defense the violence and power of the whole ocean, to which it has entrusted its being, its going, and its will.¹

Jellyfish, one of the oldest living organisms, predating humans by nearly five hundred million years, are, in contrast to much marine life, thriving. As the sea gets warmer, more acidic, less oxygenated, it begins to resemble Precambrian conditions.² Simulating a return to an earlier geological era, when jellyfish first appeared, this species is blooming like never before. As overfishing, industrial pollution and rising temperatures slowly deplete and suffocate other creatures, jellyfish benefit from the environmental impact of humans on the oceans, and from environmental shifts that threaten human populations too. Their soft bodies, that leave barely a ghostly trace on fossil records, give them an advantage over their crustacean contemporaries whose exoskeletons – that make clear, well defined fossils – dissolve in more acidic waters. Jellyfish time extends much further back into the past, and may reach much further into the future too, further than humans or other more evolutionarily complicated species, primitive, yet advancing.

Of late, humans and jellyfish have become

entangled, the trajectories of one in the tentacles of the other. Blooms of jellyfish, ungrateful to their human benefactors, are wiping out fishing industries internationally, and have been known to bring nuclear power stations to a standstill, drawn into cooling filters by the tonne. They have all this destructive potential yet most species of jellyfish have no brain or central nervous system, no ability to control the direction of their own movement, other than to go up or down. It's also worth noting that they're not actually fish. Jellies. Jelly. Their brainlessness and otherworldliness makes them difficult to comprehend.

Irrepressible, emotionlessly damaging and with a logic that seeks only to colonise, the spread of jellyfish blooms seems at once a product of, and analogous to, global capitalism.

A fishing net heaving with jellies makes visible the messy material reality of this global system of trade, labour and industry in a similar way to the Alang breakers' yards in Ross Little's film *The Heavy of Your Body Parts and the Cool Air of the Air Condition*. Here, huge vessels, cargo ships and cruise liners alike, arrive at the end of their lives, are broken down in a decomposition-like process, dispersed and then recirculated. Terrific masses of stuff constantly being created, piling up, largely unwanted by-products of industry. What are we going to do with this gelatinous mass, these miles and miles of rusting propellers, lifeboats, mattresses? It is what is beneath the surface of the gleaming, somewhat abstract world of the 'digital nomad', that can't exist without infrastructure, superstructure, air conditioning units, pool inflatables. Matter can't be made to disappear, it can only change form or be broken down. When a *Turritopsis dohrnii* jellyfish dies, and begins to disintegrate, some of its cells, on

escaping the rotting body, will then find each other again somehow, re-aggregate, and form a polyp, a mass of cells from which more jellies are born.³

At the same time, a jellyfish is not similarly bound by maps, territories or shipping lanes, and its perspective is unstable. Maybe we ought to adapt, view the world through jellytime, or through the jellyfish-as-lens. From these older-than-ancient life-forms we could derive alternate temporalities. This would mean doing away with an overarching narrative of human progress and its fixed vantage points and becoming part of a tentacular, intertwining mesh. A concept of jellytime is drifting, diaphanous multi-directional and slippery. It occurs everywhere at once, has no particular direction of travel. Anthropologist Tim Ingold defines 'transport' as travel along prescribed routes, between point-to-point connectors that create an empirical network across the surface of the world, such as the maps of trade routes that are included in *The Heavy of Your Body Parts* [...]. It is defined in contrast to 'wayfaring', a more embodied way of travelling which threads through the world rather than over it, creating a "tangled mesh of interwoven and complexly knotted strands".⁴ In filmmaking or storytelling, this might translate as both filmmaker and viewer being immersed in a subject matter, drifting and wave-flung like Ursula LeGuin's jellyfish. It could also mean seeing two subjects simultaneously; the depths viewed through the bell of a jellyfish, seeing both the abstract labour of the digital nomads and the physical labour of the workers in the breakers' yard, the osmosis between one and the other, one as part of the other.

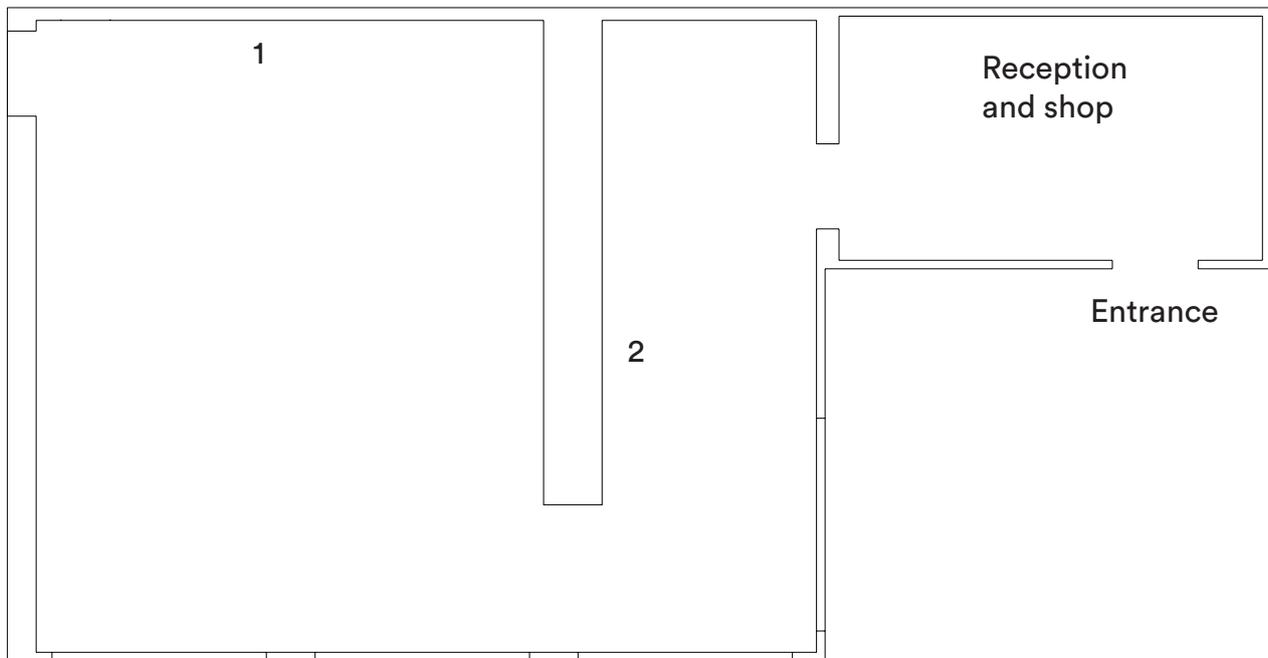
Cruise liners and ocean freighters take on jellyfish

in ballast water, contributing to their conquering of the oceans by transporting them and depositing them in new territories. In an entropic collapse of metaphor, global trade routes interrupt and carry along the directionless drift of the jellyfish (as they always have done with people, diseases, ideas). Do jellyfish sometimes slump out of ballast tanks when a cruise ship at Alang is being broken down for scrap metal, like a sad ghost of the future of the ocean?

Endnotes

1. Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Lathe of Heaven*, (New York: Avon Books, 1971), p.1
2. The Precambrian is the earliest period of the earth's history, spanning from the beginning of the earth to about 541 million years ago. It precedes the Cambrian period, which is when hard-shelled organisms began to appear.
3. Tim Flannery, 'They're Taking Over', a review of Lisa-Ann Gerswin's book *Stung! On Jellyfish Blooms and the Future of the Ocean* for The New York Review of Books. URL: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/09/26/jellyfish-theyre-taking-over/> (13/06/2017)
4. Tim Ingold, *Boundless Worlds – an Anthropological Approach to Movement* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2008) p. 37

Timothea Armour is an artist and bartender. She is a graduate of Edinburgh College of Art and a committee member at Rhubaba Gallery and Studios. Timothea is the second Associate Producer at Collective in 2017 and has been commissioned to develop texts in response to the exhibitions as part of Satellites Programme 2017.



1. *The Heavy of Your Body Parts and The Cool Air of the Air Condition*, HD Video, 42 minutes and 24 seconds, looped, 2017.

Excerpts read by Kati Kärki.

Music and voice recording by Tom Marshallsay and Richard McMaster.

2. *I Hear a New World Calling Me*, Jellyfish, 2017.

Thanks to Alang Sosiya Ship Recycling and General Workers' Association, the workers of Plot 19 Alang, the crew of the MS Sovereign, the digital nomads from the cruise, Florrie James, Joe Sloan, Anna Pearce, Beth Heron, Oliver Pitt and Sam Bellacosa. Thanks also to Rory Fox of UK Jellyfish.

The Heavy of Your Body Parts and The Cool of the Air Condition is part of Satellites Programme, Collective's development programme for emergent artists and producers based in Scotland. Satellites includes three solo presentations by artists and two projects presented by Associate Producers. The programme is specifically developed to facilitate artists at a pivotal point in their career. The 2017 programme includes new exhibitions and projects by Grace Johnston, Timothea Armour, Alex Impey, Ross Little and Adam Lewis Jacob.

Collective is a contemporary visual art organisation that brings people together around the production and presentation of new of new exhibitions, commissions and projects.

To donate to the City Observatory redevelopment please visit our website or JustGiving for our Buy-a-Brick scheme or text COLL38 £5 to 70070.

(Donations will usually incur your standard text message fee.)

www.collectivegallery.net