

**Encountering Place: Film and exhibition, Boldshaves Garden,  
Woodchurch, Wealden Literary Festival, 2017**

I was delighted to be invited as Artist in residence for the second Wealden Literary Festival. The work made during the residency has been in response to a number of questions.

*How to deal with or respond to this space?*

I had a strong feeling that I couldn't go on working in the same way as before. It was hard to identify the exact reasons - even though my work is not political as in polemical, what is going on in the world has its effect; immunity isn't an option. Through this residency, my work became much more about the real world.

*How to tackle the Festival theme of The Nature of Place?*

Especially since my relationship to specific places has, through most of my life, been one of detachment. My nomadic childhood and a mostly nomadic adulthood have meant that I don't have a strong sense of rootedness in a specific place. So my regular visits in March, April and May were very much about encountering place and making the garden a temporary place in which to **work**. My work, which consisted in a return to observational drawing, collection of video footage and photographs, was mirrored by the work done by Duncan, the gardener, both of us in some sense engaged in shaping, creating, structuring and constructing visual pleasure.

Johnson (2012) quotes Frances and Hester (1990) describing the garden as a "complex ecology of spatial reality, cognitive process and real work".<sup>1</sup>

*What is it that seems to have ticked all my boxes about this project?*

The answer may in part lie in this paragraph from a review in the Guardian on the show at the Royal Academy:

"Monet died in 1926. The 20th century had even worse horrors to come than the slaughter that made his willows weep and it's in that shadow that his painted gardens matter. They are glowing islands of civilisation and hope in a modern world guilty of so much barbarity and violence."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, P. (2012) 'Derek Jarman's Garden' *Heterotopian Studies* [<http://www.heterotopiastudies.com>]

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Jones, *Painting the Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse*, The Guardian Newspaper, 25 January 2016  
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jan/25/painting-the-modern-garden-monet-to-matisse-review-royal-academy-london>

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At Boldshaves, I did at times feel cut off from the world, but the world was never that far away, as represented from time to time by the noise of an aeroplane overhead.

According to Johnson (2012)<sup>3</sup> a garden is

"a space marked off for a particular protective purpose"

But you can mark a space off and surround it with barriers all you like: borders are habitually crossed, defences breached: rabbits break through the rabbit proofing, weeds establish themselves. As well as so-called native plants, the English garden incorporates exotic plants and foreign invaders.

Robin Lane Fox, writing in the FT (29 March 2017)<sup>4</sup> says

"The very definition of a native is slippery, some of our best loved  
"British" trees having arrived with the Romans"

and moreover,

"The secret of the "English garden" is that it has never been narrowly  
English at all."

In that sense, Boldshaves is a truly English garden: it builds on heritage, renews it and projects it optimistically into the future through a lineage of newly planted trees chosen by family members. Through the Festival it has also begun a new tradition that welcomes the contemporary and a wider public.

Moreover, and to conclude, in relation to my own interest in the tensions between the identities and traditions informed by my mixed Chinese/English heritage, the material of the garden meets the material of my monotypes: an English garden given expression on Chinese paper.

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson, P. (2012) 'Derek Jarman's Garden' *Heterotopian Studies*  
[<http://www.heterotopiastudies.com>]

<sup>4</sup> UK gardeners shouldn't be patriotic when it comes to plants, Financial Times,  
29 March 2017 <https://www.ft.com/content/93259c3c-0ef4-11e7-b030-768954394623?mhq5j=e1>