

DAN SHIPSIDES - Touchstone Void Exhibition

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Links to different elements of the exhibition:

Echo Valley

A Guiding Dilemma

Dolerite, solarized pigmatosis

Blind Landscape texts

Exhibition Press Release

Outline information:

"I have no sight at all - so I didn't have any fear climbing - it probably helps not to have any idea of what 20metres looks like from above. As long as it feels safe I enjoy the climbing and I don't have any fear - it doesn't come into my mind. The only time I'm scared of heights is in my dreams."

Touchtone test piece is an exploratory art project based around climbing with a blind person.

Artworks; *Echo Valley* and *A Guiding Dilemma* made through this activity are exhibited at the Void Gallery, Derry from May20 th May to 20 th June.

Background

Over the last fifteen years Dan Shipsides has developed an art practice which uses climbing to think creatively about the spaces around us - in particular landscape spaces and ideas about what landscape is or could be.

The project belongs to an area of art practice that operates as a kind of research - in an inquisitive, inquiring sense. As art it's free to ask questions or develop creative ways of exploring ideas which aren't rooted in specific fields of thinking.

This particular project was based at the University of Ulster Art & Design Research Institute and funded by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) under its Landscape and Environment programme which seeks to explore pertinent ideas around landscape and environment.

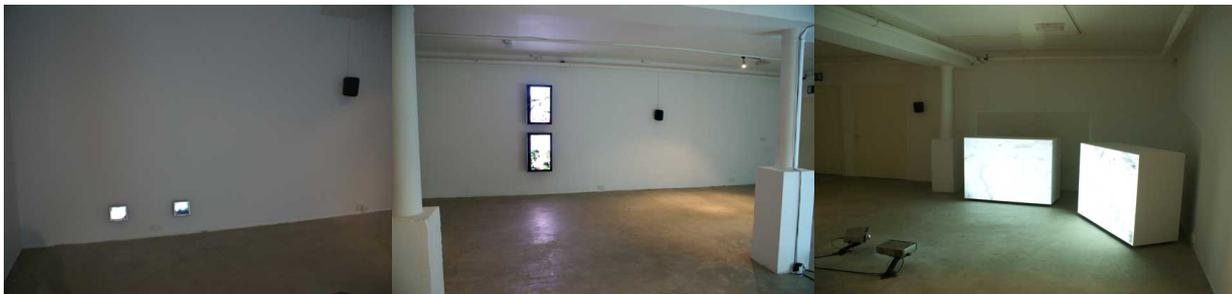
For this project over the last few years Dan has been taking John, a blind man from Derry, climbing regularly. Within this activity they've been thinking how to capture or describe something of this landscape experience. One way they developed this was to attach a range of tiny micro cameras to John's fingers, backpack and feet so that they could record "finger tip" footage of his climbing.

The approach is based on the idea that, whilst sight is crucial to making it easier, climbing isn't primarily about sight. It's as much about movement and physicality.

It's also about our ideas of landscape. Landscape as a cultural idea is very visually based. Images of landscape are rooted in painting and are usually ordered around narrow sets of framing principals, view points or perspectives relating to ideologies such as nature, beauty, ownership, control or identity. Whilst these are important issue this project aims to deal differently with landscape by trying to negotiate a landscape which is less sight based.

Gallery 1

Echo Valley



Echo Valley is a 6 screen video work which presents John climbing *Little Bootie* (Grade S / 4). It screens in synchronized real time - it is 32minutes long and comprises of close-up otherworldly footage from John's fingers and feet - seeking out holds as well as wider footage from cameras on his backpack giving a sense of the body's vertical height, balance and movement.

The six screens comprise of:

Two large projection screens about 1.5m wide feature the footage from the finger cameras. These are black and white – and very close up and almost abstracted.

Then there's two large 37 inch screens turned vertically – these feature footage from larger cameras attached to John's backpack filming up and down. This footage gives a sense of the body's position and movement on the cliff as the cameras move in relation to John's body. It's quite dramatic as John gets higher on the climb.

The final two screens are very small 6 inch screen and they feature the footage from cameras on John's climbing shoes. These are in colour and are very close up – but generally feature the toe ends of the shoes as they make contact with the rock.

The audio is in real time and in sync with the footage.

The title comes from the valley in Spain where this climbing route is located.

Gallery 2

A Guiding Dilemma



A collection of works entitled *A Guiding Dilemma* are located in Gallery 2

A Guiding Dilemma consists of video works, landscape texts and photography which include the wider aspects of the activity; conversations and the fun, human stuff.



Dolerite, Solarized Pigmatois

Dolerite, Solarized Pigmatois, Two channel DVD 12min.

Presenting footage of a climb in Donegal at Dumore Head. The black and white footage is taken from just the finger cameras and is very abstracted because of the sunny day which solarized parts of the footage – making the sun itself appear black. It is in real-time and is approximately 12minutes long. During this climb the cameras started to malfunction on the short descent poetically adding to the sense of visually trying to record a physical or tactile experience.

Additional audio is added to the start and end of the video which discusses aspects of blindness and anatomy.



Touchstone

The next small work is called *Touchstone* and is a photograph showing some of the technology as it was worn by John whilst climbing.



Guiding Dilemma

Guiding Dilemma. DVD 12min.

The footage is ambient or pertinent footage from the project – but is not climbing footage. It includes footage from walks, cafés, bars, driving, landscapes and other incidental footage. The audio is from conversations which discuss in a casual way various aspects of the project.

The audio is on headphones.



Blind Landscape Texts

Blind Landscape Texts and are a series of wall hung 5 A0 texts (18 A0 sheets).

These are transcribed conversations between the Dan, John and his friend Gerard discussing elements of the project. In particular in relation to ideas about landscape and whether to guiding or not during the climbing and how that effected the project.

Links to the *Blind Landscape Texts*:

Sense of landscape; landscape [1]

Guiding Dilemma: landscape [2]

Landscape as a blind person: Landscape [3]

Landscape and memory: Landscape [4]

No Fear: Landscape [5]

