In Pursuit of Elusive Horizons
Martin John Callanan, Simon Faithfull, Rebecca Partridge, Katie Paterson, Richard T. Walker
Pursuing an elusive horizon conjures an image of the romantic figure in a lone and distant landscape, both longing for and questioning the existential relationship between self and nature. A decade ago, to describe an artwork, or an artist, as ‘romantic’ would be to suggest the absurdity of this scene, the romantic hero lost in his own subjective illusion. However, despite the dismissal of subjective states as serious subject for artistic enquiry, the impulse towards feeling and imagination remains. As one of the artists in this exhibition recently remarked, ‘I am, I guess, a wonder junkie’, one of a generation of artists who are increasingly returning to grand narratives and timeless themes, though embraced with a simultaneous sense of distance, critique and irony.

This exhibition brings together five artists whose practice is expressive of this emergent sensibility, all of whom use landscape as a platform for exploring larger ideas. Each of the artists, in their own way, make works which fluctuate between multiple perspectives, positions, between feeling experience and objective reasoning, while drawing on a wealth of art historical languages. In 2010, cultural theorists, Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen defined this emerging cultural condition as Metamodern, ‘meta’ coming from Plato’s ‘meta’ which describes an oscillation between oppositional poles. In their key essay, ‘Notes on Metamodernism’ they articulate a pervading sense of oscillation in contemporary culture, from the detached irony of postmodernism to a desire for sincerity, to wanting to believe in something, to ‘resignify the present’. This re-engagement with feeling and meta narratives manifests through juxtapositions, collaboration and interdisciplinarity. Through this lens, medium specificity, or the idea that any means of production may be outmoded, seems in itself backward-looking; instead, works generated from digital technologies sit next to paintings, each acting as elements in a broader conversation of multiple parallel positions.

The exhibition plays with scale both physically and imaginatively; relational distances expand and contract both with individual artworks and their relations to each other. Martin John Callanan’s A Planetary Order – a 3D printed terrestrial globe, depicts the global cloud cover during a single second on 2 February 2009. This quiet and unassuming work is a physical visualisation of real time scientific data taken from NASA and European Space Agency weather monitoring satellites. Kneeling down to observe its detail, what appears to be a simple sculpture is in fact a compression of big data – beyond our human capacity to quantify.

Katie Paterson’s Ave is in dialogue with Callanan’s work, similarly employing objective scientific research to trigger incalculable spaces of the imagination. Paterson invests ‘the ordinary with mystery’ to quote Novalis. Here a string of festoon lights brings the universe into the gallery – each light producing a luminosity relative to the brightness of each star in a constellation. Cuddle (from Earth into a Black Hole) tracks a journey through space as it burns through layers of scent, unique perfumes corresponding to planets and places in the universe. This combination of Minimalism and Romantic vastness creates a tension, opening up incomprehensible spaces that far transcend the means by which the work is made.

For several of the artists, their practice depends on physically going out into the landscape. Rebecca Partridge’s 30 Day Sky Studies are the result of a month spent on the north west coast of Norway, recording with her camera the cycles of changing light and weather, often walking great distances. The resulting images assist in the making of paintings which demonstrate sustained care and attention. By employing the strategy of Minimalist seriality, exploring the same subject from multiple view points and distances, the paintings attempt an objectivity that in its ultimate impossibility, expresses an equally Romantic impulse. Simon Faithfull’s Going Nowhere 1.5 leads us into the sublime landscape as he walks the rapidly disappearing borderline of a sand island in the North Sea. Faithfull, too, shifts distances – the camera shots alternating between near and far, detached from the landscape while documenting a total immersion. We could read this as a latter-day variation on Friedrich’s painting of the monk contemplating the sea. Again, a simple gesture, that of tracing the outline of a landscape in the protagonist’s steps, becomes a complex art historical parody; it is both sincere and absurd, detached and fully embodied – as the artist literally submerges himself. There is a quiet to this performance: despite knowing he is ‘going nowhere’, he carries on seemingly undeterred, because this attitude – even if naïve – is permissible to nihilistic defeat.

Richard T. Walker journeys into the unpopulated deserts and mountains of the American south west. In the guise of the solitary Romantic hero, his experience is interrogated; pulled apart and reconstituted as film, image, sound and sculpture. Walker’s speculative, ambivalent dialogue between himself and the landscape poignantly articulates a sense of paradox, of yearning for meaning and connection which remains ever elusive. By serenading the distant peaks with his guitar in a seeming attempt to woo them and bring them closer, Walker not only parallels very human relational dynamics with a sense of humour and absurdity, but he reveals something of our relationship to language and its failure to fully articulate felt experience. This evident return to Romanticism, as proposed by Vermeulen and van den Akker, is because Romanticism can equally be defined by a sense of oscillation, between projection and perception, and attempts at transcendence which ultimately, can never fully be realised.

Contemporary Romanticism functions in full awareness of it’s failures, yet carries on ‘as if’ there is a possibility for alternative futures.

Through shared concerns for meta-narratives of scale, time and perceptual relationships to landscape, the artists here have found ways of combining languages, from the scientific to the sublime, that generate both fertile ambiguity and intellectual clarity. ‘In Pursuit of Elusive Horizons’ articulates a sense of exploration and curiosity, demonstrating that ultimately, our need for wonder is part of the human condition and affective experiences cannot be dismissed as being mutually exclusive to critical rigour. Instead these artists, through a variety of strategies and a diverse range of media, incorporate and embrace the contradictions and uncertainties of our time.

Richard T. Walker, the fulibility of intent 
$\frac{\sqrt{3}}{2}$ and $\frac{\mu}{2}$, 2015
Cut-out archival pigment print, 121 x 81.5 cm each ↓

Text: Rebecca Partridge
Katie Paterson

Ideas (An ice rink of frozen water from every glacier), 2014
Micro-waterjet-cut Sterling Silver, 28 × 60 cm

Ara, 2016
Festoon lights, dimensions variable

Martin John Callanan
A Planetary Order, 2009
3D digital print, 40 cm diameter
Katie Paterson  
_Ara_, 2016  
Festoon lights, dimensions variable  
A string of festoon lights in which each bulb produces a luminosity relative to the brightness of each star in a constellation  
_Ara_ forms part of a series of all 88 constellations.

Katie Paterson  
Ideas (A mountain carried away stone), 2017  
Micro-waterjet-cut Sterling Silver, 28 x 60 cm

Katie Paterson  
Ideas (A map of galaxies still to come), 2017  
Micro-waterjet-cut Sterling Silver, 28 x 60 cm

Katie Paterson  
Ideas (An ice rink of frozen water from every glacier), 2014  
Micro-waterjet-cut Sterling Silver, 28 x 60 cm
Simon Faithfull

**Earthscape #2: Wadi Rum, 2018**

4 framed digital photographs, 60 x 60 cm each

Simon Faithfull

Going Nowhere 1.5, 2018

Single channel HD video (silent), 9 mins

Dimensions variable
Richard T. Walker
a paradox in distance (inserted) #1 and #2, 2014
Chromogenic transparency in lightbox,
Casiotone MT-68 keyboard, tripod
Overall dimensions variable
Lightboxes 61 × 61 × 12.7 cm each

Richard T. Walker
a is that is not always, 2015
Single channel HD video, 9 mins 16 secs
Dimensions variable

Katie Paterson
Candle (From Earth into a Black Hole), 2016
Scented candle, 23 layers, paraffin wax,
wick, fragrance, 29 × 3 × 3 cm
Artist Biographies

Martin John Callanan
b. 1982, UK
Lives and works in Scotland

Martin John Callanan’s artwork has been exhibited and published internationally. He has recently been awarded the prestigious triennial Philip Leverhulme Prize in Visual Art 2014-17 for outstanding research, and in September 2017 he was awarded Alumnus of the Year for Excellence in the Arts by Birmingham City University. He was the first artist-in-residence at the Bank of England from 2015-16. Recent solo exhibitions include: Noshowspace, London, Horrach Moya, Palma de Mallorca, Baltic 39, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Or Gallery, Berlin.

Simon Faithfull
b. 1966, UK
Lives and works in London and Berlin

Simon Faithfull is Reader in Fine Art at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, London. His wide-ranging practice is well known internationally and his works are represented in many public collections including the Pompidou Centre in France and the Government Art Collection, UK. Recent exhibitions include solo shows at the Musée Des Beaux Arts, Calais, Fabrica, Brighton and Kunstverein Springhornhof, Germany. His practice, combining video, digital-drawing, writing and performing, has been described as an attempt to understand and explore the planet as a sculptural object, to test its limits and report back from its extremities.

Rebecca Partridge
b. 1976, UK
Lives and works in London and Berlin

Rebecca Partridge studied at the Royal Academy Schools, and is currently a Lecturer in Fine Art at West Dean College, UK. Recent solo exhibitions include ‘In The Meantime’ at CCA Andratx, Mallorca, and ‘Notations’ at Kunstverein Springhornhof, Neuenkirchen, Germany. Recent international group exhibitions include ‘Inorganic Landscape’, GIG, Munich (2017), Nature Art Biennale, Gungu, South Korea (2016), ‘A Planetary Order’, Galerie Christian Ehrentraut, Berlin (2014). Grants awarded include Terra Foundation for American Art Summer Fellowship and residencies from Kunsthalle CCA Andrats and The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation. In 2017 she was awarded a residency from the Nordic Artists’ Centre where she made the works for this exhibition.

Katie Paterson
b. 1981, UK
Lives and works in Scotland

Katie Paterson studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, London. Paterson’s work is known internationally. Recent solo exhibitions include Utah Museum of Fine Art, USA, Somerset House, London, Centre PassArt, Biel, The Lowry, Salford, FRAC Franche Comte Besanon, France; Kunstverein Springhornhof, Germany, Mead Art Gallery, University of Warwick, Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge, and BAWAG Contemporary, Vienna. Her work is included in important international collections including the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, Arts Council Collection, London, Arts Institute of Chicago and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Richard T. Walker
b. 1977, UK
Lives and works in San Francisco

Richard T. Walker studied at Goldsmith College, London. He has exhibited and performed world-wide, including solo and group exhibitions at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, The Contemporary Austin, Austin, Texas, Times Museum Guangzhou, China, Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, Hiroshima City of Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan, Witte De With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, Netherlands. His work is held in collections including San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Kadist Foundation, San Francisco/Paris, and the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf.