



FINDING
TREBLINKA
ARTISTS
RESPOND

“Finding Treblinka: Artists Respond” is an experimental exhibition which explores the application of art as a means to provide access to scientific and historic data, and open up contemporary discussions about the ways in which we relate to past events – in this case, findings at the Treblinka extermination and labour camps. The camps at Treblinka were operated by the Nazis and between 800,000 and one million Jews, Poles, Romani and political prisoners of various nationalities were murdered there during the Holocaust. Yet, the history of both camps is not well known; few people are aware of the scale of the killings that took place there or the complexity and diversity of the camps’ architecture. The inspiration for the “Finding Treblinka: Artists Respond” exhibition is the non-invasive archaeological and historical research that has been undertaken at Treblinka over the past seven years, which has attempted to deepen public knowledge of these events and locate new evidence concerning the nature of the Nazis’ crimes. This work has included archival research, the collection of original witness testimony, forensic search, topographic survey, geophysical survey and excavation. This project has generated a wide range of new information about the camps, the actions of the perpetrators and the fates of the victims, as well as a large body of material evidence, including personal belongings, maps, plans, specialist survey data and documentary sources.

We designed “Finding Treblinka: Artists Respond” to complement the forensic archaeological exhibition at Treblinka (“Finding Treblinka: An Exhibition of Forensic Archaeological Research”). We commissioned five artists, each of whom has responded to the archaeological findings and themes associated with the history of the two camps. Their responses have been driven by their individual practice and concerns over how specialist scientific information can be communicated to a wider audience. The show focuses on how artists can create new discourses and dialogs that create change in the way we think about history and its relationship with the present. It explores how we process and build histories around objects, and how science and art can come together to enhance public knowledge about sensitive and traumatic events. The artworks themselves range from text-based wall works to free standing sculpture. Re-appropriated objects also feature, such as a re-upholstered chair exhibiting motifs from the objects found during the excavations at Treblinka. Since the objects found during these excavations will remain at the site, the artworks will eventually provide a travelling surrogate, offering viewers a conversational experience that will also hopefully encourage people to visit Treblinka. We believe that this exhibition represents an innovative collaboration between artists and archaeologists, and we hope that the works will raise awareness of the crimes committed at Treblinka amongst a broad, international audience.

Mr Michael Branthwaite, Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Staffordshire University and Leading Artist.

Dr Caroline Sturdy Colls, Associate Professor of Forensic Archaeology and Genocide Investigation at Staffordshire University.

Curators of “Finding Treblinka: Artists Respond”.



“A Pan” uses an item found at Treblinka to explore how we relate to, and create, stories about and around objects. In this case an actual saucepan, found during an archaeological walkover survey, has been placed on a rotating display with a frosted display case over the top. On each side of the plinth an interpretation panel describes the pan and its origins, with each of the 4 panels offering a different story about the pan collected during on-site research. The work aims to start a dialogue concerning how we relate to historical events in a contemporary setting and the nefarious ways in which fact, memory and language can work to render no singular meaning as quantifiable fact.

Michael Branthwaite’s work focuses on how we relate to objects and the symbolic narratives we place on them. His work often uses found or re-appropriated objects and materials that are then placed in specific contexts to generate further discourse about their extended meaning; this often occurs at the end of the object’s life as a thing of value so can often been seen as a way of using its end point as a moment of departure for new debates. Branthwaite has worked on commissions, residencies and exhibitions internationally including: Platomas Train Station (Greece), Wirksworth Festival (Derbyshire), and Zona Dynamic (Berlin). He supports his artistic practise by holding a Senior Lecturer post at Staffordshire University.



The artwork is inspired by one of the found objects during the excavations at Treblinka: a tiny rose brooch only 5cm in diameter. The brooch was transformed into digital material and then laser etched into black cotton paper. Alongside this, the work includes a 5 second video found on the Internet when searching for "Treblinka". Processes involved folding, cutting and shaping the paper whilst mirroring this physical manipulation through digital material gathered; cutting, shaping and folding the video. These two components of the work then reside in the third space using mapping projection software. The work brings questions forward concerning validity; on the one hand relating to the irrefutable nature of the physical objects gathered and, on the other, the vast realm of ambiguous virtual online information. The video is only 5 seconds in duration but is infinitely looped allowing the timeless qualities of sculpture to reside over the usual time-sensitive digital footage. The paper is held upright using synthetic Tyrian purple pigment, appearing like the sand that originally held the object in the ground.

Janine Goldsworthy is a Fine Artist based in Manchester. Recent exhibitions include the Creekside Open, End of the Beginning MA Show at Holden Gallery (Manchester School of Art, October 2014) and Third Space Cardroom (Manchester). Goldsworthy has undertaken studio and research artist residencies at Compeung (Chiang Mai Thailand) and Chatterjee and Lal (Mumbai, India). Goldsworthy is an Artist Founder of "rednile projects", an organisation recognised for their innovative projects including: the Factory Nights Project (recognised as Visual Arts Entrepreneur Award Finalists by the The British Council) and Hydraulic Colony (for Cragside National Trust, curated by Judith King). Upon moving to Manchester in 2014 Goldsworthy set up NySpace Manchester in partnership with artist Michael Branthwaite. Projects currently under development include collaborations with curators and artists from Sunderland, Prague, Texas and Japan.



“Looking squarely ahead, brave and joyous, at the world. The squads march to work. All that matters to us now is Treblinka. It is our destiny”. Song by Kurt Franz, Treblinka Commandant, August - November 1943. “Deep Field [Looking Squarely Ahead]” is a 35mm Black and white microfilm collage, which uses a microfiche reader (350 x 400 x 350mm). Viewers browse through a layered, compressed representation of TREB04 - the trench excavated in the centre of the Old Gas Chambers. Magnified microfilm fragments depict archaeological finds that indicated the presence of the gas chambers and corroborated Holocaust eyewitness testimony. Viewers perform the evidence, as durational observers who optically uncompress the material over time. They navigate the brief time and space of Camp II’s mechanised, chaotic extermination and demolition, enacting gestures inherent to decoding the indexical illusions of both photography and forensic evidence. Griffiths combined data and images from the excavation with microfilm’s archival potential as carrier of textual evidence for future translation.

Dave Griffiths is an artist and curator based in Manchester, UK. He explores our contemporary use of photographic images as lenses through which we commemorate and navigate our history. Griffiths combines archive fragments and acts of durational seeing, with hybrid remixes of film, video, print, sculpture and network media. He was nominated for Northern Art Prize 2013. In 2012 he was included in the first ever video art exhibition in Tripoli. His 2012 solo exhibition Babel Fiche at Castlefield Gallery was supported by Film and Video Umbrella and MIRIAD. In 2010 Griffiths co-curated the major exhibition UnSpooling – Artists and Cinema at Cornerhouse.

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For “Treblinka Finds”, Hilary Jack has focused on the objects found during the archaeological excavation of a one metre pit at Treblinka (TREB04). The objects found in the pit confirmed the purpose of the camp. The list of objects have been translated into Polish and printed onto Perspex the same size as the excavated pit using a font resembling the signage at the Treblinka railway station.

Hilary Jack works across media in research-based projects involving the collection and re-use of found objects. She produces on site referential artworks and sculptural installations, commenting on our relationship with everyday objects, the concept of obsolescence and the politics of location. Hilary has exhibited across widely across the UK and internationally. She is currently exhibiting InsideOutHouse at Manchester Art Gallery (UK) as part of Lost Gardens of Manchester. She has also exhibited newly commissioned artworks in Packwood Follies (Packwood House, Warwickshire) and Emergency Meadow, (at the Irwell Sculpture Trail). Hilary is also preparing for a solo show, The Late Great Planet Earth, which will be held at Bury Sculpture Centre in September 2015. Her work is in public and private collections.



'arm c(hair)' is informed by the barbarous process of human hair removal on entry to extermination camps. For both hygiene reasons and dehumanisation, for the benefit of camp officials, the hair was also commonly retained as commodity for stuffing furniture, mattresses and textiles. A multitude of hair clips were found during archaeological research at Treblinka, and I have developed an interior fabric from drawings of these which has been upholstered onto an original European 1940s club armchair. The pattern acts as a welcoming design from a distance, but on close inspection the combs' teeth and broken objects reflect their menacing reality. The ability to relax and reflect, sitting on an armchair, is a stark contrast to the situation of those who lost their lives in the camp.

Jenny Steele's work considers 20th century architecture and interiors, and has referenced post-colonial, post-industrial and, most recently, modernist sites. Steele is interested in the permanent nature of architecture and its ability to both withstand and embody changing governance and social histories. By exploring formal and decorative aspects of architecture and interiors, Steele makes work through drawing, sculpture and printmaking, sometimes creating pseudo-furnishings that sit between art and functional objects. Past exhibitions include the The Fair at Glasgow OH Art Festival (solo exhibition) (2015) and the Jerwood Drawing Prize (2012). Jenny has held residencies at InCertainPlaces (Preston, 2012) and 501 Artspace (Chongqing, China, 2011). Upcoming projects include a solo exhibition at The Grundy (Blackpool, UK, 2016). Jenny is a graduate of Goldsmiths MFA (2007).

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