

Curating The Holocaust

.....

Michael Branthwaite, Lead Artist and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art, Staffordshire University.

Prof. Caroline Sturdy Colls, Professor of Conflict Archaeology and Genocide Investigation, Centre of Archaeology, Staffordshire University.



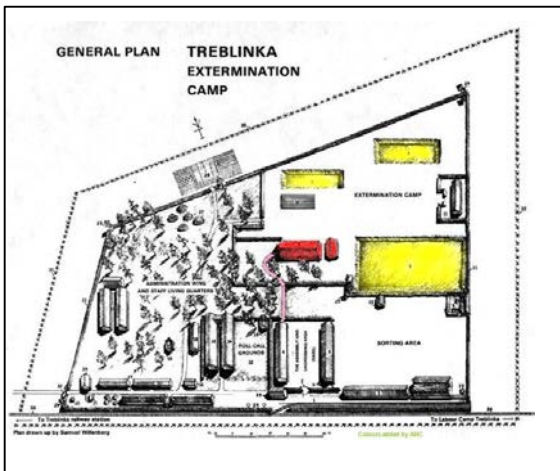


Treblinka extermination camp



Treblinka labour camp





Archival Research



Interviews with witnesses



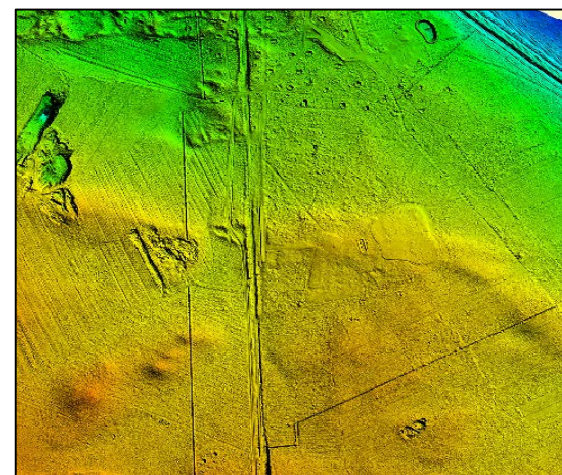
Map Regressions



Satellite Imagery



Aerial Photographs



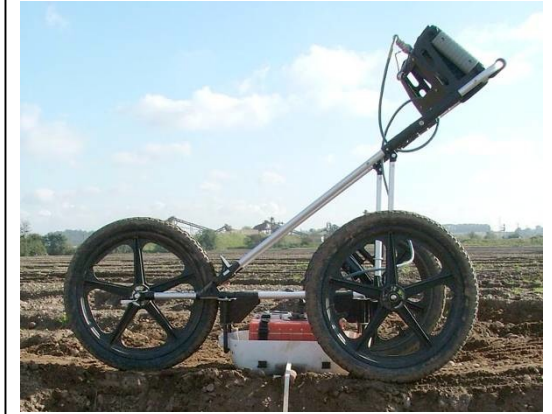
LiDAR



Walkover Survey



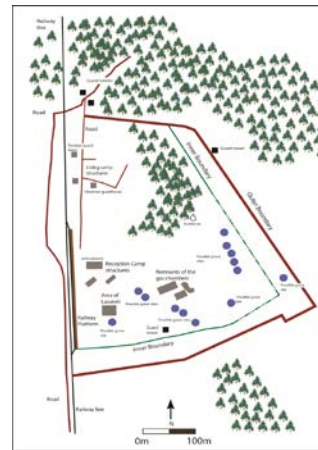
Topographic Surveys



Geophysical Surveys



Excavation



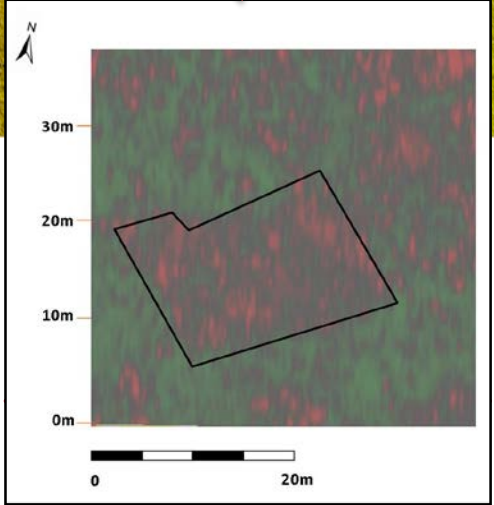
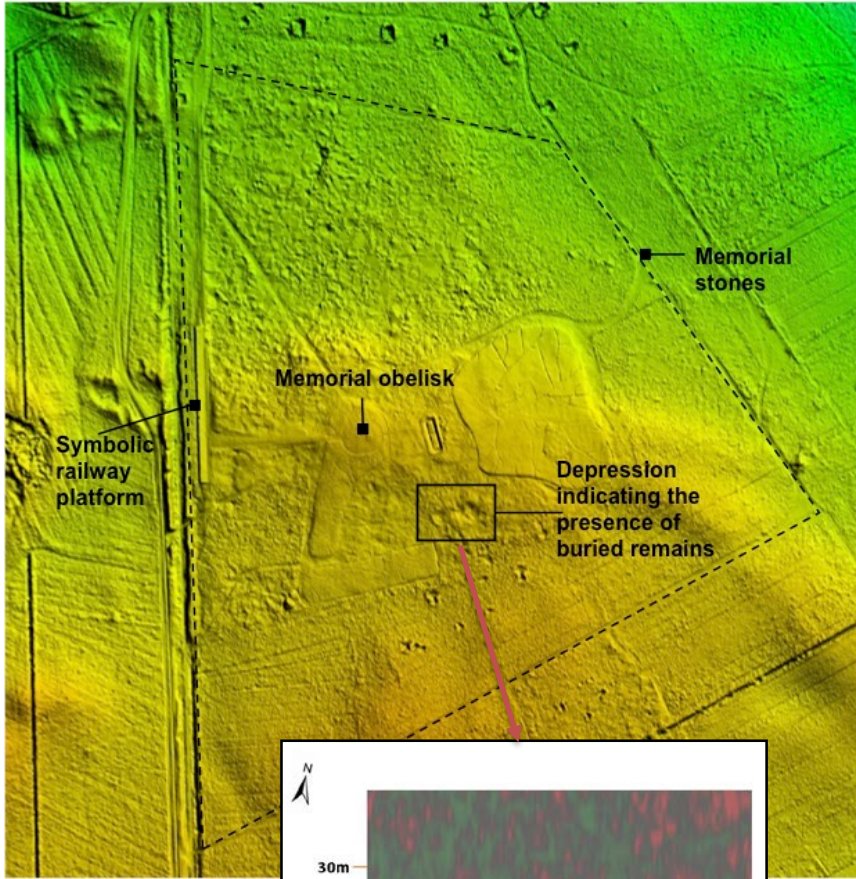
Interpretation



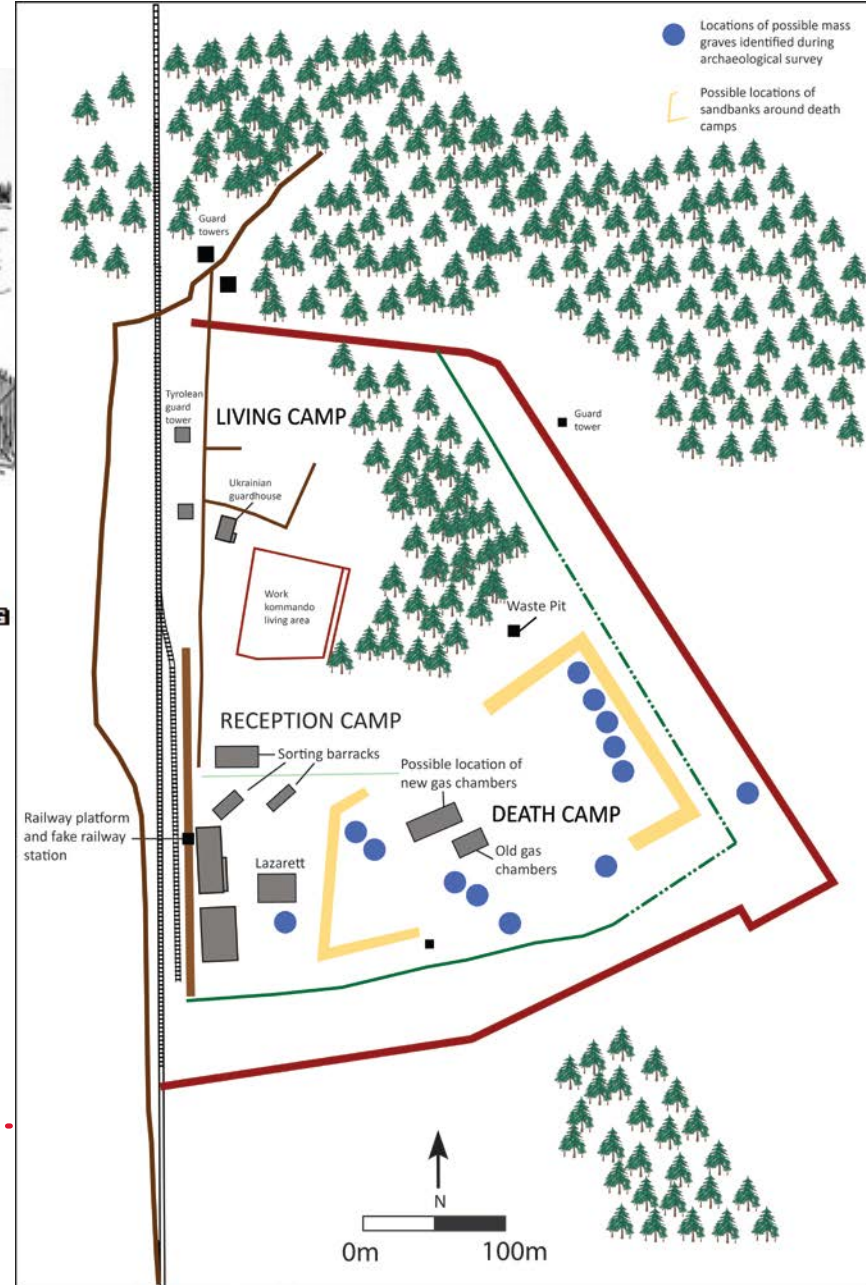
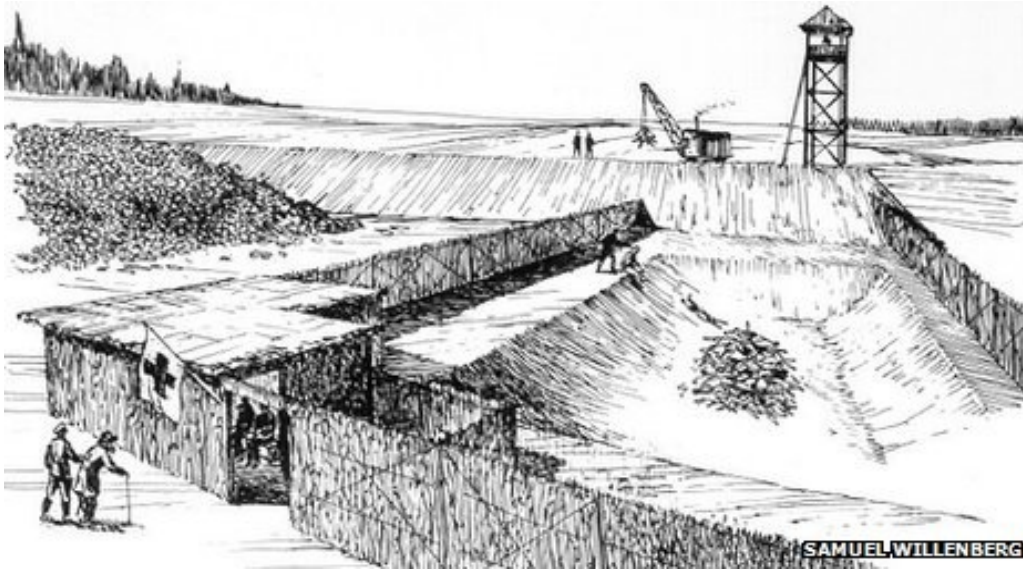
Visualisation

Treblinka extermination camp

"I saw before me a room, which was not too large. It looked like a regular shower room with all the accoutrements of a public bathhouse. The walls of the room were covered with small white tiles. It was very fine clean work. The floor was covered with small orange terracotta tiles". ¹²



Treblinka extermination camp



Challenges

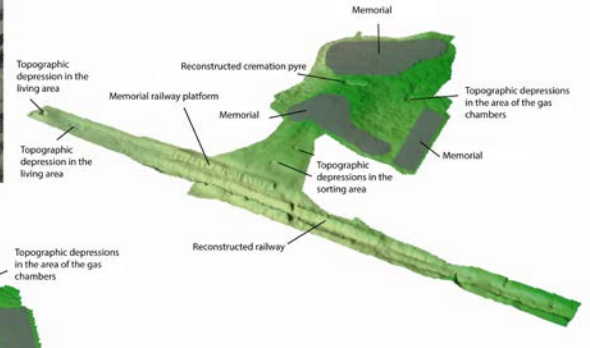
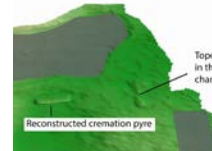
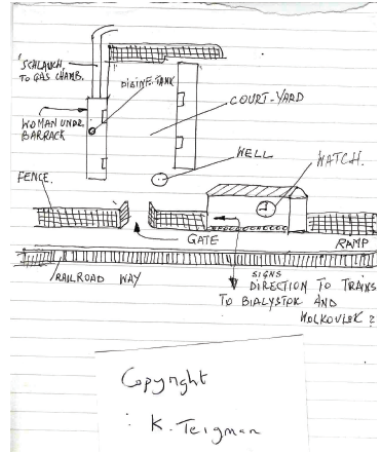
- Following these new discoveries, it was necessary to revisit and revise the accepted narrative of Treblinka and to disseminate this new information as widely as possible, in order to provide new opportunities for commemoration and education.
- However, material culture did not previously have a notable role in narratives or heritage presentation at or about Treblinka
- Challenge: Introducing this newly discovered material into these narratives and ensuring that its value was recognized amongst scholars and the public

Approach:

In order to address these challenges and to ensure that a successful dissemination strategy was developed, we collaborated to achieve the following:

- raise awareness of the historically important, but barely known, crimes perpetrated within the camps via the material culture relating to them
- explore how archaeology and art could:
 - enhance public knowledge about sensitive and traumatic events
 - provide an alternative form of access to archeological findings
 - explore some of the philosophical questions posed but certain objects

Implementation:



Evaluation trench Treb04



Depth of trench 1.08m

- In situ structural remains (stone and brick)
- Structural debris (brick, tile and stone)



Jenny Steele – 'Finding Treblinka'

120 words about your work

'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 in furniture, mattresses and textiles.

A multitude of hair clips were found by 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 arm chair. The pattern acts as a welcoming design from a distance, but on close inspection the combs teeth and broken objects appear menacing. The ability to relax and reflect, sitting on an arm chair, is a stark contrast to the situation of those who lost their lives in the camp.

(128 words)

100 words about yourself- just a brief monolog and some key exhibitions/ projects/ commissions etc.

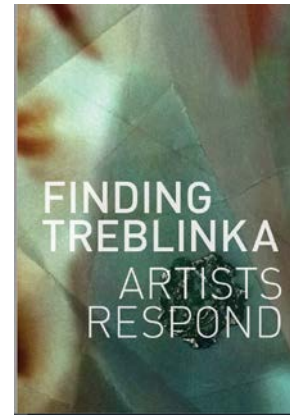
Steele's work considers 20th century architecture and interiors, and has referenced post-colonial, post-industrial and most recently, modernist sites. She is interested in the permanent nature of architecture and its ability to both withstand and embody changing governance and social histories. By exploring formal and decorative aspects of architecture and interiors, she makes work through drawing, sculpture and printmaking, sometimes creating pseudo furnishings that sit between art and functional object.

Past exhibitions include the The Fair at Glasgow OH Art Festival (solo exhibition) (2015), Jerwood Drawing Prize (2012), and residencies at InCertainPlaces, Preston (2012) and 501 Artspace, Chongqing, China (2011). Upcoming projects include a solo exhibition at The Grundy, Blackpool, UK (2016). I am a graduate of Goldsmiths MFA (2007).

(119 words)



First Exhibition



Second Exhibition: The Wiener Library

- How could we re-tell the history of Treblinka without the objects that had influenced this new narrative?
- How could we use the artworks as travelling “surrogates” and what were the implications of doing this?
- How could we utilise the wide range of other material discovered during the archaeological work and the holdings of the Wiener Library?

Finding Treblinka Exhibition: The Wiener Library in London



**DERUMANISATION AND COMMODIFICATION
'ARM CHAIR' — JENNY STEELE**

Shaving the heads of the women, and citing hygiene as the rationale, helped the camp officials propagate the myth that they were sending people to a bathhouse before being transported elsewhere. However, the reality was that the process served both to dehumanise the women, and strip them of their dignity and any remaining belongings (such as hair clips). Witnesses also indicate that the hair was retained as a commodity for stuffing furniture, mattresses and other textiles.

'Arm chair' is informed by this barbarous process of human hair removal on entry to extermination camps. A multitude of hair clips were found during archaeological research at Treblinka, and an interior fabric has been developed from drawings of these and then upholstered onto an original European 1930s club armchair. The pattern acts as a welcoming design from a distance, but on close inspection the comb's 'teeth' and broken objects reflect their menacing reality. The work functions in a way that reflects the multiple layers of the truth: were carried out in the camp, whilst also alluding to speculation about how some of the retrieved materials were used.



TREBLINKA
ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS
AND ARTISTIC RESPONSES
CAROLINE SHERBY COOK
AND MICHAEL BRANTHWAITTE

Centre of Archaeology
Book Series: Special Issue



Issues of anonymity, identity and absence



Hair clips found during archaeological excavations in the extermination camp area
© Staffordshire University



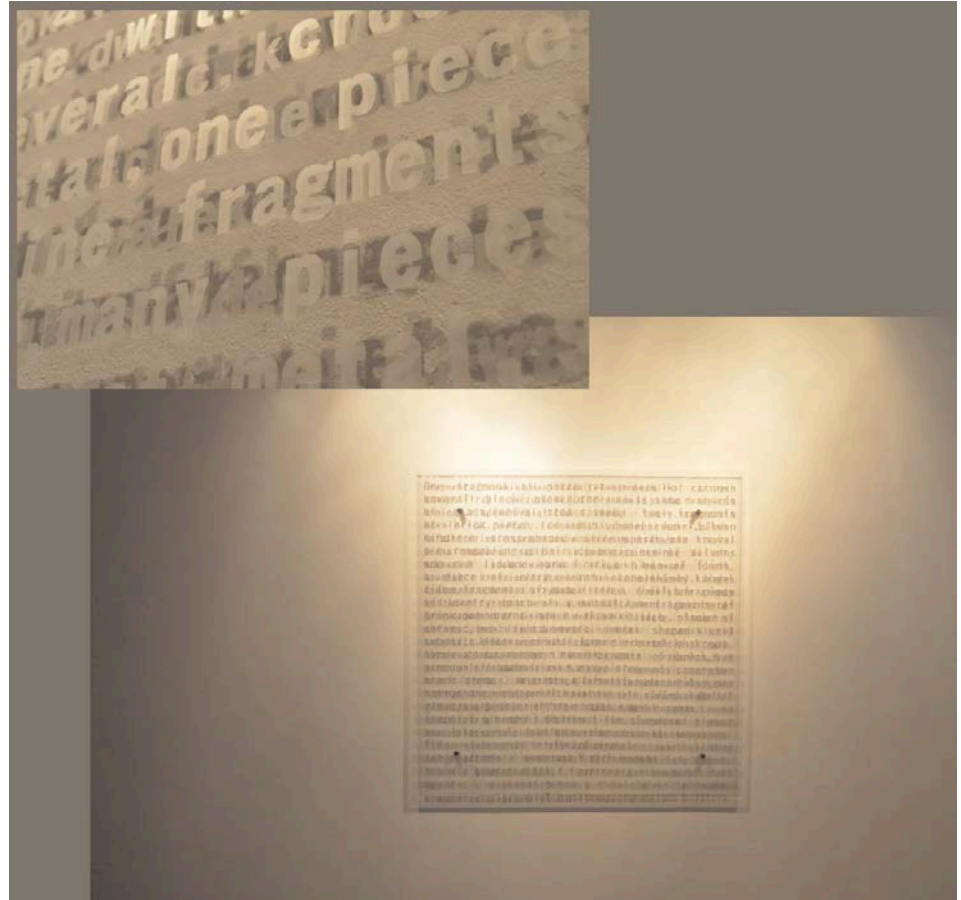
'arm c(hair)'/ Jenny Steele

Using art to explain science and its processes



Deep Field/ Dave Griffiths

The scale and nature of the findings - a subjective response to an objective activity?



Treblinka Finds/Hilary Jack

Reimagining the past in the present and linking to the future



Rose Brooch/Janine Goldsworthy

Ambiguity and many truths



[ABOVE] Walkover survey in the forest and around the camps led to the recovery of many objects that lay on the surface, some of which date to their periods of operation.
© Staffordshire University



A Pan/Michael Branthwaite

Consequences of transdisciplinary practice

- Should we provide opportunities to question the work that we do, particularly in the age of denial, or does our ability to question our own work actually somehow validate our scientific, unbiased approach?
- How do we deal with the fact that our work sometimes challenges the narratives of survivors?
- The artists raised issues we had not anticipated
- The artists all focused on materiality and on the extermination camp

Responses

Contrasting experiences highlight the subjective and personal nature of engaging with historical information.

- "Artistic responses - engaging and thought-provoking"
- A Pan/ "I was confused by the pan – sorry"
- What did you learn?: "that the Nazis can't escape what they did", "how beastly man can be"
- Many people commented on materiality but also the maps, testimonies and photographs

Responses

"a powerful and necessary addition to the study of the Holocaust.
Thank you for this exhibition"

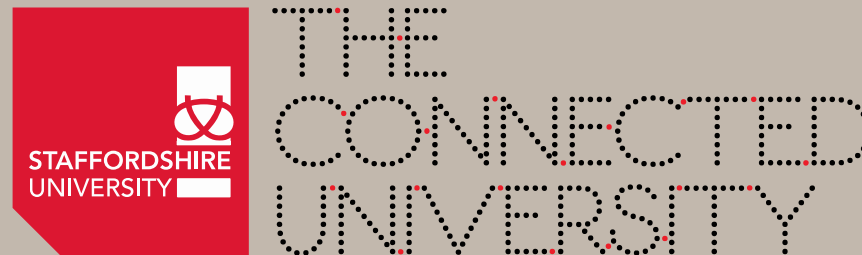
"It would be nice to know where to get more information on Treblinka
and specifically individuals stories"

"I love the fact that this exhibition is taking place so long after it all
happened and in a country that wasn't directly involved with the crimes
committed"

Sturdy Colls, C. and Branthwaite, M. 2017. "This is Proof:?? Forensic Evidence and Ambiguous Material Culture at Treblinka Extermination Camp, *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*

[DOI: 10.1007/s10761-017-0432-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10761-017-0432-3)

[Download at: http://rdcu.be/ukBA](http://rdcu.be/ukBA)



More information about the exhibitions: www.staffs.ac.uk/archaeology

Professor Caroline Sturdy Colls: c.sturdy-colls@staffs.ac.uk

Michael Branthwaite: m.branthwaite@staffs.ac.uk