

A YEAR IN THE FIELD

Field-Work PAD 11

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TALKING with maps

Act. 1

Source an original **map** of your selected **site**. Make several new maps from this by laying down the map on top of a sheet of paper. Take a sharp tool such as a needle or **compass** and prick through the corner points of the site. Lift away the map and join up the points. Use a ruler and pencil or connect the points **free-hand**. Fold and place in your pad. On regular walks, add in or adjust local details that are of interest to you or perhaps the **things** that are omitted from the original map. **Devise a legend** for the things that you discover, using a variety of colours, shapes and lines. Or, using a camera, **record in real-time a series** of images - of the things you find in the place you are in. Track the day, month and year. Describe or draw the weather **patterns**. Notice any extreme changes? Are there plants in bloom, that you would not expect at this time of year?

NOTING migratory species

Act. 2

Depending on the site that you are in, certain plants will be found standing uneaten among the grass, growing on walls, breaking through concrete or floating on water. Some **species** may even **dominate** the space, though this will change from season to season. Why not adopt a favourite? Look at it every day if you can. Watch it grow and change. Record whether it is in full bloom, fading, ripening or in seed. Notice how the colour changes from day to day, and from month to month. Can you find out the name of the plant? Where has it come from? How do you think it got here?

SOUNDING out the landscape

Act. 3

Listen for any unusual sounds. Who or what is making each sound? Can you tell if the sounds are **man-made** or **natural**, or perhaps a combination of both? If you are curious in listening to birds, why not make a **bird-hide** or set up a tent. Place it in an area where birds visit frequently. Make sure it is comfortable so that you can easily sit in it for a time - looking, taking notes, making sound recordings and drawings. Consider how birds interact with one another and possibly you! Where do they land - on water, grass, concrete? Different species can be determined by their colour and shape and by the **markings** on their bodies - even by the size of their bill, and whether it is pointy or curved. Try making some quick sketches of their movements, both on the ground, and as they move at perfect ease in the sky. Note the range of wing patterns for each bird you see.

LIVING cultures and water pools

Act. 4

Locate and mark any **shallow** water-pool, deep water **channel**, and/or **drain** on the site.

Peer in. What colour is the water? Does it smell? Can you describe it? Is it boggy, salty, or fresh? Can you find the **origin** of the water source? As a **guide**, look at your original map and check if there are any water-features marked. Are there plants growing in the water?

If you have a net, cast deeply into the various water pools that you discover and see what you can bring up. Make a list in your pad of what you find. Be careful to put anything that's living, back where you found it.

Digging the ground

Act. 5

Dig a spade full of **soil**. Collect it and bring it indoors. Spread it out in a shallow box or tray. Then try either of the following:

(1) Cover with a pane of glass and keep the soil warm and damp. Pull up and re-plant any seedlings, which sprout into pots.

(2) Allow the soil to dry out. Break up the soil and extract any number of seeds you may find. Examine these under a **magnifying glass**. Pick out and draw the seeds that **differ** from the rest. Store the seeds in paper bags or airtight containers in a cool, dry place. Next spring, plant out the seeds in pots or in your garden.

This is a perfect opportunity to **monitor** the growth patterns of a plant as it begins and ends from seed to seed. Think about starting a local **seed-bank** with friends so that you can **exchange** the different varieties of seeds sourced from a range of **habitats**.

Asking around for details

Act. 6

Seek out the help of a local **specialist** who is familiar with the place that you are exploring. This could be a plant **botanist**, bird/butterfly/insect watcher, **geologist, historian**, or anyone who has knowledge of the area. Libraries are a good place to find contacts and to source local books. Take a walk with this person, ask questions - stop, look and chat. Record conversations by jotting down notes or sketching, or else by using a digital sound recorder. If you choose a botanist, discuss the kinds of plants that you find **en-route** and whether they are considered **weeds, wildflowers** or grasses, and what these differences may be. Keep a record of their names. Collect a small **sample** and press between the pages of your pad.

MOVING into micro-habitats

Act. 7

If it is safe to do so, lie belly-down on the grass or whatever surface you have been walking on. Stretch your legs out. Wait. Allow your gaze to focus ahead. Watch for any movement that catches your attention. If you don't see anything, on your next visit lay your pad flat on the ground. Gently shake some grass, flowers or branches over the page. You may be surprised to see tiny creatures land on the surface of your pad. Gently move the insects into a glass jar or lunch box. Look at them under a magnifying glass and draw them **in situ** as they move, without lifting your eyes from the magnifying glass or looking at your pad.

PICKING out smells

Act. 8

Pick a **nose-gay** [bunch] of the most varied wildflowers, grasses and weeds that you find on your walks. Tie together with string. Give to the next person you meet on your trip, or bring home and keep fresh in water. Can you **distinguish** the particular smells? If you can, describe the smell(s) in words or images? Are you reminded by the smell(s) of anything, or anyone, or anywhere? Over the course of a few weeks or even days, paint or draw a **still life** of the flowers on the same sheet of paper in your pad. Notice how the **form** of each changes, as the colour fades, and how your drawing changes too. The poet Emily Dickinson [1836-86] wrote many poems about the flowers that she grew and collected from her garden. Why not write yours?

SEARCHING for other sites

Act. 9

Identify other sites close to the field/ground/place that you have explored in this past year. Are they **related**? Consider the physical **remnants** [if any] found there. Do these things, including the **flora** - tell you anything about the site, how it was used, the people who lived or worked there? Build a **profile**. Begin by searching through local **archives** [held in libraries], and speaking to people from the area. Photograph the site as it is now, and compare with previous photographs that you may have sourced in your research. What changes have taken place? Consider using found materials from the site, to create something new. **Merge** old and new **documentation** to write or draw an alternative story that **invigorates** the site.

SOURCING root systems

Act. 10

Plants have **complex** root **systems**, which support and hold plants in place, absorbing water and nutrients. These roots can live above and below ground in different ways.

Rhizomatic roots consist of long shoots; **fibrous** roots are threadlike; and **taproots** grow downwards from the main stem. To begin with, consider digging up either a dandelion or ground elder as these are very common plants that can be found growing in different places. Shake the soil from the plant's roots and lay the roots flat on a sheet of paper or the ground on which you are standing. Draw the roots in **sections** or as large as your paper will allow. If you don't have a magnifying lens make a **viewfinder**. This can be easily made from a small sheet a card with square shape cut out at the center of the card.

Create a series of drawings based on looking through the hole of the view finder, concentrating on the form and **texture** of each root system.

TRACING seasonal patterns

Act. 11

Many leaves fall from autumn onwards. Collect as many different kinds that you can find and press between the pages of your pad. In the following year, when trees are in full bloom, **retrace** your route. Note whatever you may have missed the previous season.

Collect new leaves to use in a number of ways. Make **contour** drawings by laying a leaf flat, on paper. Trace the edge of the leaf with a pencil. Make textured drawings by laying a sheet of paper over the leaves. Rub a pencil directly on the paper covering the leaf.

Select a number of leaves that are **vibrant** in colour. **Separate** these into four main colour **categories** - red, green, yellow and brown. Put them into jars containing **methylated spirits** and leave for a few weeks. Has the colour of the liquid changed? Dip a brush in to test each colour. Use as drawing ink to explore the variable forms, margins, and veins of each leaf.

ROAMING as you sketch

Act. 12

Cut an **A5** sheet of card. Make a hole in the centre and push a pencil halfway through.

With your pad and drawing **device**, take a walk at any time of year - weather permitting or not! Record very quick sketches of the entire **space** [of the paper or the field]. Because the card covers the page of your pad, your concentration is in and of the space, rather than what you sketch, which means you can't see what you are drawing! Alternatively, collect a range of **objects** that you find on your walk. Place in your bag and take home. Look at each object, considering its size, texture, what it is made of, its colour and use. Compose a number of drawings with these objects and glue or tape into your pad.

GLOSSARY

- MAP**
Can be a flat drawing of a place or part of the world.
- SITE**
A plot of ground where things grow, people live.
- COMPASS**
Instrument for drawing circles.
- FREE-HAND**
Drawing without the use of a guide such as a ruler.
- THING**
Refers to living and non-living things.
- DEVISE**
Create or imagine something new.
- LEGEND**
Tells you, which signs on a map represent what is natural or man-made. May indicate a unique character in a story.
- RECORD**
Set down in writing, and/or visual form for the purpose of preserving the knowledge or experience of an event.
- REAL-TIME**
Actual time when a process takes place, or as it happens.
- SERIES**
Continuous succession of similar things.
- PATTERN**
Arrangement of marks and/or decorative elements within a composition whereby part of the image may be repeated.
- NOTE**
To mark down, draw, write and record [film, sound photography] something of interest that you see.
- MIGRATORY**
Move from place to place according to the seasons.
- SPECIES**
Class, collection, population, which bear a close resemblance to each other.
- DOMINATE**
Many of the same kind that exercise a powerful position and/or control over smaller or vulnerable living things.
- MANMADE**
Made or produced by artificial means.
- NATURAL**
Material world as is unchanged by humans.
- BIRD-HIDE**
Shelter made from different materials, often camouflaged to blend in with its surroundings to observe wildlife at close quarters.
- MARK**
The visible trace or impression of something - such as a line drawn on paper. 'Field-marks' are the distinctive stripes, spots, patterns, colours found on birds, but can also include animals and plants etc.
- LOCATE**
Find where some thing is.
- SHALLOW**
Not very deep.
- CHANNEL**
Bed of a stream, river, or other waterway.
- DRAIN**
Pipe, channel, dyke that carries water.
- PEER**
Look into something with concentration.
- ORIGIN**
Where an idea of a thing may have come from and how it evolved.
- GUIDE**
To lead the way, provide information.
- SOIL**
Upper stratum of the earth's surface in which plants have their roots. It is made up of many things, such as weathered rock and decayed plant and animal matter.
- MAGNIFYING GLASS**
Convex lens used to produce an enlarged image of an object.
- DIFFER**
Distinct in nature, express an alternative view-point.
- MONITOR**
Observe, record - detect change.
- SEED-BANK**
Storage facility to house seeds for future use.
- EXCHANGE**
Too give and receive - receive and give.
- HABITAT**
Environment where an organism or population lives.
- SPECIALIST**
Person who devotes their life to a particular subject.
- BOTANIST**
Person who studies and learns from plants.
- GEOLOGY**
The dynamics and physical history of the earth. A 'geologist' is a person who specializes in this area.

HISTORIAN

Person who studies and writes about the past.

EN-ROUTE

Another way of saying - on the way.

WEED

Wild plant, which grows where it wants too.

WILDFLOWER

Usually refers to flowering uncultivated plants.

HERBARIUM

Collection (sample) of pressed plant specimens.

MICRO

Smaller than average, the opposite is MACRO.

IN-SITU

Positioned in the here and now.

NOSEGAY

Bunch of flowers, historically known as 'tussie mussies' or 'talking bouquets' – used to hide bad smells.

DISTINGUISH

Mark as different, be a distinctive feature, attribute, or trait, sometimes (but not always) in a very positive sense.

STILL LIFE

A painting/drawing depicting commonplace objects.

FORM

The shape or external appearances of a body or thing.

IDENTIFY

To recognize, and name.

RELATE

Establish a connection between things, and people.

REMNANTS

Fragments of a whole thing in separate parts.

FLORA

Plants of a particular region or period listed by species.

PROFILE

Outline, description of a person, place or thing.

ARCHIVE

Repository of stored data in textual and visual form.

MERGE

Join, blend, and mix things together like paint.

DOCUMENTATION

The material evidence of an event, which occurred in the past.

INVIGORATE

To re-form, or unearth something that had previously been forgotten.

COMPLEX

Composed of many and different parts.

SYSTEM

Combination of parts forming a connected whole. For example leaves + roots + trunk + branches = TREE.

RHIZOMATIC

Fleshy, creeping underground stem by means of which certain plants propagate themselves.

FIBROUS

Composed of many fibers that are inter-twined.

TAPROOTS

Straight roots growing down-wards.

SECTION

Distinct part studied in detail from the whole thing.

VIEWFINDER

Act of looking, seeing or beholding the world, through one's own field of vision.

TEXTURE

Physical qualities of material things, which can be described as rough, smooth, hairy, glossy, sandy, etc.

RETRACE

Go back on a previous journey, pathway, and/or route.

CONTOUR

The outline of a figure or object.

VIBRANT

Energetic, strong and vivid – can't be missed.

SEPARATE

Remove or isolate something from its original environment.

CATEGORY

To place, put, arrange things in a particular order.

METHYLATED SPIRITS

Alcohol for general use made unfit for drinking.

A5

Standard paper size half A4.

DEVICE

Formed by design or invented and used for a particular purpose.

SPACE

Three-dimensional void that things occupy, the empty space between things.

OBJECT

Some visible and tangible thing.

Colophon

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Biographical note

Christine Mackey is an artist and independent researcher who employs diverse disciplines, subject matter and tactics in devising works that can generate different kinds of knowledge of place - their hidden histories and ecological formations. Using diverse graphic sources and quasi-scientific methods, her work explores the interactive potential of art as a research tool and its capacity for social and environmental change. <http://christinemackey.com>

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