



Watermans Arts Centre

AIR MATTERS

Learning from Heathrow

October 3, 2019 – January 5, 2020

Kate Carr

Nick Ferguson

Mathew Flintham

Magz Hall

Hermione Spriggs & Laura Cooper

Louise K Wilson

Air Matters: Learning from Heathrow is an exhibition and programme of events that explores the politics of air. Focusing on the neighbourhood of Heathrow, it engages with the air's materiality, occupation, and contestation, as well as with the potential and limitations of representing these themes by means of art.

It comprises newly commissioned artworks, walking tours, workshops and a symposium, bringing together artists, community groups, industry professionals and scholars. It will be of interest to all those who have a stake in the neighbourhood's environment and for whom art is a gateway to its discovery and transformation.

For further information on the programme and accompanying events please visit

watermans.org.uk/whats-on/new-media-arts

#airmatters #watermansartscentre

Curated by Dr Nick Ferguson in collaboration with Klio Krajewska at Watermans Arts Centre.

Advice and assistance: Anna Jochymek, Irini Papadimitriou, John Stewart

Support:



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**ARTS COUNCIL
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Learning from Heathrow

Nick Ferguson

The air is partitioned, apportioned, and legislated like any other part of the environment. At London Heathrow, Europe's busiest airport, state-sanctioned global formations collide with quotidian suburban life, rendering the air a site of significant contestation. For some, it is a hypermodern space of networks, flow, and transit where routines and daily rhythms are structured around economic priorities. For others, it is what they must breathe. The conflation of incompatible requirements within a shared space presents a significant societal challenge that has implications for sustainable development, wellbeing, and human dignity. If these are considerations for policy at national and supra-national levels, then there is a need for fresh thought.

In his essay *Toward the Development of an Air Terminal Site* the artist Robert Smithson speaks of how the artist extracts from a site associations that have remained invisible within the old framework of rational language. He concludes: 'One does not impose, but rather exposes the site' (1967). Smithson's ideas about art's capacity to reveal unseen dimensions of 'the site' (air terminal or otherwise) have been well received in location-driven research across the disciplines. They build on longstanding acknowledgement of art's propensity to withhold judgment, as well as on its capacity to cope with semantic and ontological uncertainty: the bleeding of value, parameter, and number; the instability of truth; the shortage of answers. Moreover, since Smithson's time, art has come to operate in an expanded technological field, and within a much-altered political landscape. Changes include new technologies of capture, display and dissemination, new forms of public life, new dependencies and their attendant rhetoric of creativity and regeneration. On balance, these developments leave art relatively well positioned as an instrument of spatial research, not least because they have placed at its disposal multiple methods, modes of reading - allegorical, encyclopaedic and so forth - and formats for presentation.

This project takes advantage of art's nexus, to proceed within and outside the registers of art – performatively, affectively, representationally – and in the spirit of resolute experimentation, to explore and map the contestation of air at Heathrow. Working at the scale of surrounding territories, we, the researchers, will engage with the air's phenomenological properties and through, for instance, investigations into sound, will consider the space made by the air, and how it shapes what can be thought, felt and performed. Through study of airborne life, air

mobility objects and cavities, we will identify competing users of the air, and explore ways of representing the rivalries in which they are embroiled. Through engagement with empirical data relating to trajectories and patterns of movement, we will make visible, and hence available for scrutiny, aerial architectures. At the same time, we will identify theoretical frameworks through which to position our work in relation to wider discourses on the commons, mobility, territorial justice, and the societal challenges posed by aviation. We will reflect on what art can teach us about the air.

The project will take public form through workshops, an exhibition and trans-disciplinary symposium. What we hope to achieve is, first, a nuanced understanding of the political economy of Heathrow airspace: of the power relations inscribed within it; of how it shapes the societies that it envelops; of its sustainability. Second, we hope to build, in the interests of well-being, and in partnership with local and global actors, an epistemic community that embraces local cultures and practices of air use and will enable urban planners to define the problems they face. Third, we hope to widen recognition of the interplay between urban space and art as an instrument for its discovery and transformation.

References

Smithson, R. 1967 'Toward the Development of an Air Terminal Site' In: Robert Smithson. The Collected Writings. Ed. Jack Flam. Berkeley, University of California Press

The Commissions

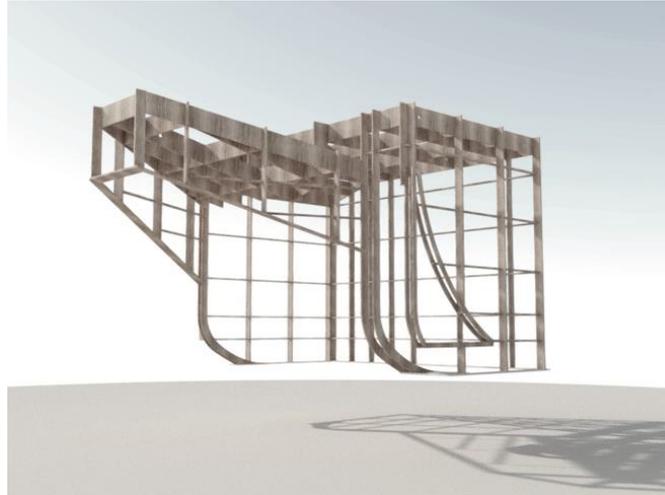
Kate Carr. *Ascending Composition 1 (For planes)*. Mixed media, 2019



Kate Carr. *Ascending Composition 1 (For planes)*. Mixed media, 2019. Photograph: Suzi Corker

The airspace surrounding Heathrow is partitioned both vertically and horizontally. *Ascending Composition 1 (For planes)* seeks to reflect on the governance of this space by using sound to infiltrate its forbidden zones. Working with the conception of the air as a contested space, this artwork inverts the relationship of residents subject to the vagaries of aircraft noise by using helium balloons and kite tail sound systems to take the terrestrial sounds of Heathrow's neighbourhoods into the sky. The three kite tail sound systems shuffle through recordings taken in residential and natural areas surrounding the airport, creating a shifting soundscape intended for broadcast along the flight path. In a world where both who gets to make noise and enjoy silence is so tied to wealth and corporate influence, this work seeks to carve out a moment where forgotten, over-powered and fragile sounds take flight. The composition is broadcast via the balloon-elevated kite tails in Watermans gallery.

Nick Ferguson. *Capsule*. Mixed media, 2019



Nick Ferguson. 2019. *Capsule*.
Digital Drawing: Tommy Haycocks

Capsule is a 0.7 scale model of an aircraft landing gear compartment accompanied by a set of photographic prints. Suspended from the ceiling and occupying a central part of the gallery, the model is proposed as an auditorium/immersive space which evokes the original, that of a Boeing 777. The prints show samples of material gathered forensically from a wheel bay of Ethiad Airways Boeing 777-200LR A6-LRC upon retirement in the UK in March 2019. Captured under an electron microscope, the sample includes sand, spores, seeds, insects and fragments of reflective runway paint which have become trapped and transported from one part of the world to another.

Learn more: <http://nickferguson.co.uk/cavity/>

Magz Hall. *Skyport*. Mixed media, 2019



Magz Hall at Watershed, 2019.
Photograph: Jon Aitken

Skyport takes its name from the pirate radio station Skyport Radio which broadcast from a garden shed under the Heathrow flightpath between 1971 and 1979. The commission extends the artist's enquiry into the contested nature of radio frequencies and their governance. In the skies above London private transmissions from air traffic control compete for wavelength with a range of public transmissions, both pirate and licenced, and indeed, the AM spectrum is dominated by the airport's transmissions. While these transmissions are available for all to hear, in the UK it is both illegal to listen to them and to relay what has been heard to a third party. In defiance of these regulations, aviation enthusiasts eavesdrop on air traffic control and there is a burgeoning market for the scanning technologies that make it possible. On display for *Skyport* are items from the Skyport Radio archive, a set of scanners and a plasma screen showing in wave form current air traffic radio activity. Project research blog:

<https://www.watershed.co.uk/studio/projects/sky-port/blog/air-matters>

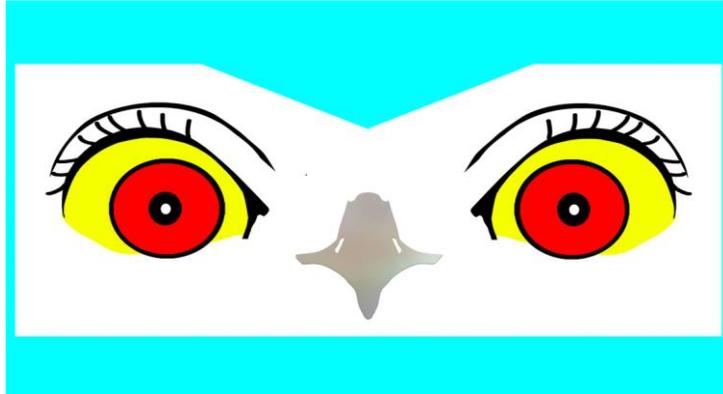
Matthew Flintham. *Heathrow (Volumetric Airspace Structures)*. Mixed media, 2019



Matthew Flintham. *Heathrow (Volumetric Airspace Structures)*. Mixed media, 2019

Heathrow (Volumetric Airspace Structures) is a planning table showing a map of the Greater London area and focused on the land surrounding Heathrow. The shape of the table is defined by the limits of the London airspace control zone which consists of two intersecting irregular rectangles combining rounded edges and hard corners. The map shows the major traffic routes across central and west London, as well as the polygonal restricted and controlled airspace zone over Heathrow. The map also extends vertically, projecting the airspace zones into three dimensions, revealing the invisible volumetric structures that define the London skies. In this way the structure becomes an extension of the map following its stylist design and iconography.

Hermione Spriggs and Laura Cooper. *The Substitute*. Mixed media, 2019



Hermione Spriggs & Laura
Cooper 2019. *The Substitute*.
Digital drawing.

The Substitute is a sci-fi ghost story responding to the “bird free” environment of Heathrow Airport. The story is delivered via Tannoy speakers common to airport announcements and pest control, and is accompanied by a spinning bird decoy on which are mounted images of the artists’ eyes. It is presented in the square overlooking the river Thames, Brentford Ait and Kew Gardens, natural reserves for birds. Narrated through the speakers, *The Substitute* explores the spectral transformation of birds as we know them into data bodies and zombie-like decoys.

Louise K Wilson. *Frequency*. Mixed media, 2019



Louise K. Wilson. 2019. Production documentation for
'Frequency'. Sarah Denyer (an independent member
of the Passenger Services Group at Heathrow)
recalling her experiences of take-off and landing.

Frequency is a sited audio installation accompanied by a set of drawings. Voice and field recordings are combined to explore the affective and 'felt' experience of air travel. Verbal accounts from passengers describing their memory of take off and landing are undercut with a layer of airport location recordings. These soft, whispered voices are suggestive of recordings made in an ASMR ('autonomous sensory meridian response') register, typically created with the intention of stimulating a 'tingling' and relaxing sensation. They are amplified with the use of resonance devices that turn the skylight windows themselves into speakers, broadcasting the voices both downwards into the atrium space and outwards into the ether. Elsewhere, recordings of the 'sonic fallout' collected from the Airport provide a 'darker' background for the presence and effect of aviation. The material for the accompanying postcard drawings has been sourced from photographs distributed on social media showing passengers' window views of cloudscapes. Frequency alludes to a set of contradictory positions implicating anxiety and desire within the context of air travel.

The Workshops

Listening to Signals in the Air. Saturday October 5. Please join design writer and maker Jane Norris to design and build listening devices. The devices will enhance hearing, help pick up signals and capture everyday airborne sounds that might otherwise pass unnoticed.

Programme available at <https://www.watermans.org.uk/whats-on/new-media-arts/>

Heathrow Sound Walks. Saturday October 12 & 26, 2019. Please join artist Kate Carr in search of sound, atmospheres and airborne life in the Heathrow suburbs. You will learn to conduct fieldwork and make audio recordings.

Programme available at <https://www.watermans.org.uk/whats-on/new-media-arts/>

Artworks for Birds. Saturday October 19, 2019. Please join artist and anthropologist Hermione Spriggs and artist Laura Cooper to explore bird experiences of the air and exchange ideas on how rethinking animal-human relations can be passed on through art and design education.

Programme available at <https://www.watermans.org.uk/whats-on/new-media-arts/>

The Symposium

The Politics of Air. Saturday November 9, 2019. 10:15 – 18:00

Watermans Arts Centre invites you to join us for a day of presentations, discussions and debates on the politics of air in the Heathrow neighbourhood. What are the local cultures of air use? How does the air shape our societies, and how democratically is it governed? How is the air fought over and by whom? What ethical questions around air use, noise and air pollution do planners face and how might we equip them to shape its future?

We will bring together perspectives from the audience, community representatives, industry professionals and academics across the arts, geography, environmental science and politics. The ambition is an event of international significance in which participants define challenges, generate strategic questions, and instigate new approaches to the struggle over air.

Keynote: Professor Derek McCormack, Professor of Cultural Geography, Oxford University. Author of *Atmospheric Things. On The Allure of Elemental Envelopment*. Duke University Press, 2018.

Programme available at: Full programme available at <https://www.watermans.org.uk/whats-on/new-media-arts/>

Artists' Biographies

Kate Carr has been investigating the intersections between sound, place, and emotionality both as an artist and a curator since 2010. During this time she has ventured from tiny fishing villages in northern Iceland, explored the flooded banks of the Seine in a nuclear power plant town, recorded wildlife in South Africa, and in the wetlands of southern Mexico. Her work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Wire*, *Pitchfork*, *Fact Magazine*, *The Quietus*, and *The Guardian*. It has also been played on the radio on stations ranging from various channels of the BBC, to independent stations in Estonia. Her music can be found on the labels Helen Scarsdale (US), Rivertones (UK), Soft (France) 3Leaves (Hungary) Galaverna (Italy) as well as on her own label Flaming Pines. She is a PhD candidate at London College of Communication. [Kate Carr's website](#)

Nick Ferguson is an artist and academic based in London. His research examines the relationship between art, space and power, with a current focus on London Heathrow, its neighbourhoods and airspace. His work has recently featured at/in the Royal Geographic Society (2019), *Places Journal* (2019), Tate (2018), and the *Journal of Cultural Geography* (2017). In 2018 he was awarded an Arts Council Project Grant to curate the exhibition and public programme, *Air Matters. Learning from Heathrow*. He holds a BA from Oxford University, an MA from the University of the Arts and a PhD from Goldsmiths, University of London. He is Associate Dean for Research at Richmond University and Senior Lecturer in Critical and Historical Studies at Kingston School of Art. [Nick Ferguson's website](#)

Matthew Flintham is an artist and writer on representations of landscape and issues of militarisation, security and surveillance. He has a BA in Fine Art from Central Saint Martins, an MA in Cultural Studies from the London Consortium, and a PhD from the Royal College of Art. His work intersects academic and arts practices, exploring speculative relationships between film, architecture, power and place, and the possibilities for arts methods to reveal hidden relations in the landscape. Between 2016-19, he was ECR Fellow at Kingston School of Art, and most recently, a Research Associate in the Department of Architecture at Cambridge University.

[Matthew Flintham's website](#)

Magz Hall is a sound and radio artist. Her work has been exhibited at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, The British Museum, Tate Britain, The Sainsbury Centre, Whitechapel Gallery, Barbican, the V&A, Jerwood Visual Arts, and widely in Europe and the US. *Tree Radio* at YSP was a finalist for the British Composer Award in Sonic Art 2016. She has curated exhibitions, broadcast, and led workshops. She also leads the artists' group Radio Arts. Much of her sound-based work is concerned with speculative futures of FM, inspired by 100 years of international radio art practice. She holds a PhD from the University of the Arts, London and is Senior Lecturer in Radio at the School of Creative Arts and Industries Canterbury Christ Church University. [Magz Hall's website](#); magz@radioarts.org.uk; Twitter [radio_mind](#)

Hermione Spriggs and Laura Cooper come together for special projects as the Anthropology of Other Animals. "AoOA" is a multi-species conversation dedicated to discussion and experimentation around our collective status as human animals. "AoOA" is also a sound produced by both humans and animals at moments of capture and release. "AoOA" explores the possibility of making art for humans and other species of animal through the creation of multisensory lures, decoys and traps, and is more broadly engaged in topographic translations between species, perspectives and sites. The Anthropology of Other Animals has developed in alliance with The Political Animal Reading Group (The Showroom, London/ Dublin), Land Art Mongolia (Ulaanbaatar/ Berlin), Titanik Galleria (Turku, Finland), East Side Projects (Birmingham), the Multimedia Anthropology Lab (London), Mildred's Lane (Pennsylvania) and Emerging Subjects of the New Economy at University College London.

Artist's websites: <https://hermione-spriggs.com>: <http://lauracooper.co.uk>

Louise K Wilson is a visual artist who makes installations, live works, sound and video works. She frequently involves the participation of individuals from industry, museums, medicine and the scientific community in the making of work and previous associations have included the Thackray Medical Museum in Leeds (audiology collection), Newcastle Internal Airport (air traffic control), Montreal Neurological Institute, the Science Museum, London and the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training facility in Moscow. Recent exhibitions include the Meetings Festival (ET4U, Denmark, 2019); More in Common (A.P.T. Gallery London, 2018); Thackray Uncovered (Thackray Medical Museum, 2017); Submerged: Silent Service (Ohrenoch, Berlin, 2015); and Topophobia (Danielle Arnaud Gallery, London; Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool and Spacex Gallery, Exeter, 2012). Her programme Cold Art - exploring artists' fascination with Cold War sites - was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in 2018. She attained her Doctorate from the University of Derby and is a lecturer in Art and Design at the University of Leeds. [Louise K Wilson website](#)

Watermans Arts Centre

Watermans is West London's leading arts centre. It attracts over 250,000 visits a year to its thriving and inclusive programme of independent cinema, theatre, exhibitions and courses. Watermans runs a year-round programme of cutting-edge digital arts for which it receives National Portfolio Organisation funding from Arts Council England.

Watermans also leads several other major projects outside its venue. These are primarily concerned with broadening access to high quality arts in communities that engage little, if at all, in the arts, to support community cohesion and economic regeneration:

Bell Square, a purpose-built outdoor arts venue in Hounslow Town Centre

Circulate, a London-wide outdoor arts touring network

Creative People & Places Hounslow, Arts Council England's major investment in increasing arts capacity in underserved areas, working in Feltham, Heston and Cranford, Brentford and central Hounslow

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