

GROUND

14 May – 3 July 2022

Messums Wiltshire

Surely there is no square mile of earth's inhabitable surface that is not beautiful in its own way, if we men will only abstain from wilfully destroying that beauty. William Morris (1834-1896)



Chris Drury, Narrow Leaved Plantain, 2014 for *Exchange*, the farm art project in West Dorset for Cape Farewell.

The ground beneath our feet has never felt less solid than it does at the moment – yet our awareness of it has never been more acute. As the evidence mounts up revealing how much we have destroyed the earth – painting, poetry, drawing and sculpture can offer some sort of marker in time – visual metaphors for our Grand Awakening.

In this show we want to consider how our relationship with the environment is now at the forefront of our thinking towards solutions.

Common is the ground we stand on, and perhaps what is now taking place is a shift in our own aesthetics, based on that common knowledge that is helping us to see and appreciate our landscape through subtly different filters. Increasingly gone are the clipped landscapes and instead here are the swathes of wildness along with a new appreciation for the interconnectedness of soil and plant; the seen and the unseen. That material has become in a word, more beautiful, or perhaps our sense of beauty has been opened up to it, we have learned to love a different idyll.

The value of art as an advocate for nature was central to the work of Common Ground, the pioneering art and environmental charity that is also a start point for this exhibition. Established in 1983 by Roger Deakin, Sue Clifford and Angela King, it sounded the klaxon about where our negligence was leading, long before most people cared. The mission of the organisation was to work closely with artists, writers, poets, playwrights and music-makers – bringing together art, science and politics in a way that is now readily understood, but in those days seemed almost anarchic.

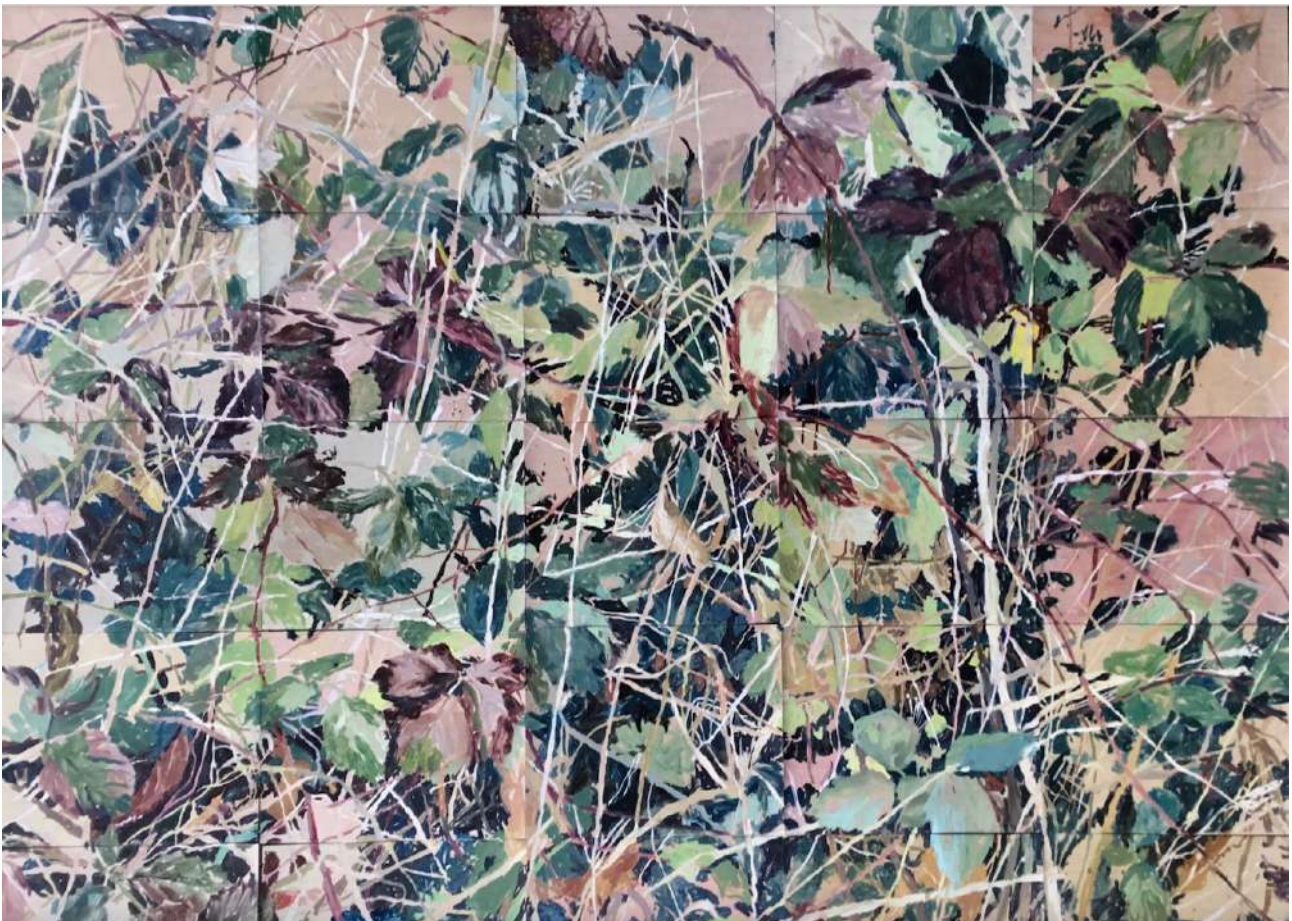
The artists presented in this show – Hannah Brown, Chris Drury, Laurence Edwards, Shaun Fraser, Lydia Halcrow, Tyga Helme, Kurt Jackson, Chrystel Lebas, Yan Wang Preston, Stephen Turner and Antony Williams – share the interconnectedness of art and the landscape and its relevance today. In so doing, they extend the legacy of Common Ground and are arguing, in turn, for a new way of seeing in landscape art – a genre once nearly declassified from contemporary relevance.

It is a powerful and beguiling message that stitches together the language of aesthetics with a message that is fundamentally about our changing relationship with the environment. This exhibition seeks to distinguish how aesthetics are shifting to celebrate the unkempt in the landscape, that which was once unloved, airbrushed out of the pictorial landscape.

Ground here is both conceptual and compositional material in the process of making. The messaging again is layered within the beguiling imagery and is more meaningful for it. This is both an adaptation and evolution of William Morris and the Arts and Craft movement. “Truth to nature” is so suggestive of a source of veracity, but it feels like holding a candle to what nature offers, there is a clear expression of distinction between viewer and object. Today that line feels as if it is becoming more blurred. It might align more closely

today as *Truth in nature*, suggesting a more symbiotic relationship and perhaps even humility in our approach to the ground we stand on.

The exhibition will be supported by a wide-ranging programme of talks by influential environmental thinkers and activists. This will include: a panel discussion with *Tideline* artist Julia Lohmann, Ann Light (University of Sussex/ Malmö University) and Brenda Parker (University College London) talking about the eco-systemic benefits that arise from seeing social and ecological systems as having common interests, and the role of creative practitioners in driving change; an in-conversation event between exhibiting artist Chris Drury in conversation with David Buckland, Founder and International Director of Cape Farewell, discussing their shared commitment to art that addresses ecology and climate; readings from eco-poets Kay Syrad and Clare Whistler, and a talk with Sue Clifford, founder of Common Ground.



Tyga Helme, *Walked out of my Body*, 2022, Mixed media on paper

Please contact
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