

Christopher Jones



U N M O N U M E N T A L



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## Becoming an artist-in-residence: the 'mobilities' of Christopher Jones

Being an artist-in-residence is not as straightforward as it seems. I listen to Christopher Jones talking about the four residency projects he has undertaken in the past three years. His descriptions are richly informed by the experience of imagining destinations, realising arrivals and then working towards a homecoming via the emotionally charged process of departure. To deliberately lift oneself out of the hard-won habits of practice in order to travel suggests to me an unresolved tension between the international mobility of contemporary art and the artist's heart-felt need to stay put in a studio and work. What is really happening here? Something about Jones' narratives advocate mobility as a creative condition, it is not just a matter of setting up a project in order to go somewhere else to do something new. His desire to keep on the move could be interestingly examined within the academic frame of mobilities – a field of theoretical research that has, over the past decade, persuaded many geographers to stop modelling human occupancy on sedentary states.<sup>1</sup> The concept of mobilities requires us, as David Bissell argues in his writing on railway travel, to stop thinking of transport technologies as radical modifiers of stationary lives.<sup>2</sup> Because 'inhabiting' has always been a matter of movement, the long interdependence of people and travel turns out to be an important category of knowledge, an area of interdisciplinary study that is as significant for arts practitioners as it is for

<sup>1</sup> A good starting point is Urry, J. (2007) *Mobilities*, Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>2</sup> Bissell, D. (2010) 'Vibrating materialities: mobility-body-technology relations', *Area*, Vol. 42 No. 4, pp 479-486.

social scientists.

Jones tells me about the journeys involved in his residency projects. As he speaks I picture the continuous movement of creative people and their created objects, not just the physical motion of artists and artworks as they are taken from one place to another, but also the reiteration of creative production at one geographic location after another. Perhaps the rapid expansion of opportunities to become an artist-in-residence reflects a wider diffusion of ideas about the location of artistic practice (for example, the discourses associated with site-specificity<sup>3</sup> or relational aesthetics).<sup>4</sup> The interesting point is that the current spatial diffusion of art practice strikes us as such an obvious development – contemporary art seems to require all artists to be out and about within what Rosalind Krauss famously called an ‘expanded field’.<sup>5</sup> Because this expulsion from the studio has been following its ‘post-lapsarian’ dynamic for more than thirty years, it is probably high time artist-researchers in universities made a start on aligning mobilities research with this established art world thinking. Furthermore, maybe the facilitators of residency programmes should pay particular attention to what Bissell says – the different types of vehicles that move us around the world are much more than mechanical disruptors of sedentary living. If Bissell thinks our understanding of travel is based on a false dichotomy between the motile and the quiescent, then it may also be true that the aspirational mobility promoted by arts organisations misrepresents the cloistered stability of studio-bound practices. It seems odd that the ambition to strengthen the scope that artists have to move around the world involves the curiously homely invitation to reside.<sup>6</sup> As the title of this short essay suggests, the ambiguity at the heart of the term ‘artist-in-residence’ is the topic I want to explore in relation to the mobilities of an artist like Jones.

When I myself think about residing I call to mind a landscape in which I did not grow up nor now live, in which I was neither blessed with stability nor

<sup>3</sup> See Rugg, J. (2010) *Exploring Site-Specific Art: issues of space and internationalism*, New York and London: I. B. Tauris

<sup>4</sup> See Bourriaud, N. (2002) *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. S. Pleasence and F. Woods, Dijon: Les presses du réel.

<sup>5</sup> Krauss, R. E. (1978) ‘Sculpture in the expanded field’, in R. E. Krauss (1986) *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp 277-290.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the Dutch website *Trans Artists* describes itself as a platform for ‘stimulating and strengthening artists’ mobility in the Netherlands and internationally’. [online] Available at <<http://www.transartists.org/>> [Accessed 4th November 2013].

imbued with stillness. The place in question is a stretch of modest English 'fold' country stretching between Oxfordshire and Warwickshire that I only learnt to fully inhabit when it became a place of return after periods of university teaching in Newcastle upon Tyne. During these periods of repatriation I noticed, as I had not before, the countless tangled footpaths and bridle ways that measure out and weave together a gentle up-and-down landscape which has been so plotted and pieced that the land mass itself is now almost completely a product of the plough. Everywhere has been neatly honed but the soil beneath your feet turns out to be not so tidy. The degraded spillage of modern farming has littered the earth with plastic shards amongst which, whilst walking by a freshly tilled field, one could easily find enough archaeological or fossil debris to fill several pockets. Thus to learn to reside in this countryside is a matter of knowingly moving back and forth on its ground-up past, on the micro-scale residue that scatters its history throughout both the landscape and the imagination.

Such pastoral nearsightedness may sit oddly with my theme. Indeed, to speak of residing in this manner brings to mind the world-disclosing endurance of 'dwelling' which Martin Heidegger placed at the heart of human existence. This condition is analogous to, in the philosopher's own words, a 'clearing' in which we have space to cultivate 'access to the being that we ourselves are'.<sup>7</sup> On the face of it Heidegger's concept advocates a need to settle down, build permanent homesteads, and root ourselves in the land. But the journeys that Jones undertakes create room enough in which to dwell if, that is, one recognises the more nomadic dimensions of this idea. When an artist has travelled to some far-flung location even the everyday task of sweeping the studio floor fills the air with dust so strange that it smells like a different planet. For example, Jones has been resident artist in an historic Japanese rice store on the southern island of Kyushu that has been cleared of its agricultural contents in order to establish an empty space for artists to use. To work in this studio is to creatively

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, M. (1971) *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter, New York: Harper and Row, p 53.

negotiate a dusty past that is entirely foreign to an artist from Europe. Jones says that even the artworks he made there turned up like decorous visitors. They would only start to look like art, discretely, after settling into the space. As a result, we assume that his activities 'there' can only be different from his activities 'here' even though, in the end, the resulting artworks will be removed and brought back to his studio in England, a home space in which a short period of residence in Japan can only be, in the greater scheme of things, absorbed into the lengthier cycles of Jones' commitment to his ongoing progress as an artist.

Home for Jones is a converted Victorian chapel in rural Northumberland that is large enough to contain both domestic living space and a studio. To talk about carving out a place in the world is apt. It is a monumental dwelling, an architecturally-conceived structure that was raised on foundation stones which were fashioned by 19<sup>th</sup> century stonemasons to carry institutional inscriptions as far as possible into the future. Across the short distance between this building and the railway line that links the surrounding village to Newcastle, one can pace out in one's imagination the exciting departures made from this chapel as Jones sets out to reside in other studios. Somewhere down the tracks – beyond national railways stations, international airports and transcontinental flights – he can go to work in Hill End, a deserted Australian gold-rush town where century-old corrugated iron houses are rusting into the ground. At Bundanon, another Australian residency on the banks of the Shoalhaven river, Jones uses one of the retreats for artists that the painter Arthur Boyd established on a run-down colonial homestead. To experiment with residing at these distant heritage sites, as my own intensely local perambulations along Oxfordshire footpaths suggests, is a matter of becoming intimate with the ground-up past beneath you, the accumulated and composite residue underfoot that offers immediate opportunities to understand the substance of a place. Thus, for a newly arrived artist-in-residence, the clearing in which Heidegger pictures him or her dwelling is as much a room-making



action as a physical space. After all, at their point of inception, clearings have to be physically cleared, and artist's studios actually swept clean, in order to initiate a state of productive dwelling.

It could be that the 'clearing' metaphor relies a little too much on the idea of securing a space beyond the safety of one's usual frontiers or borders. The current media attention being given to Second World War 'monuments' officers offers a useful example. Robert Edsel's books tell extraordinary stories about courageous experts from the arts being conscripted into the US Army to protect European cultural treasures as the Allies advanced through Italy and France.<sup>8</sup> Amongst foreign ruins, amidst the bewildering territorial gains and losses of frontline fighting, their task was to track down and rescue endangered artworks. This act of emergency mobilization enforced, with great difficulty, cultural 'clearings' where military law held sway.

Different times and contrasting mobilities make present-day frontier-crossing much less dangerous than those experienced by wartime military personnel. The discarded packaging or abandoned rubber bands located by Jones do not need to be rescued. If anything these salvaged objects are inconsequential and ephemeral. Here we should remember that Krauss built her argument in favour of the expanded field around the creative crisis that followed the failure of August Rodin's major public commissions. This was not simply a turning point in the sculptors career, it was also a watershed in the history of European art. After 1898 Rodin no longer believed that his memorial to Balzac would find a permanent site where it belonged, in Paris. In Krauss' account, from this key moment, the sculpture became a non-sedentary object that could be shipped off to exhibitions in galleries and museums anywhere in the world. The historic connection between a monumental statue and a significant civic location had been severed. Eventually, multiple versions of the Balzac figure would become ubiquitous representatives of this artist's oeuvre in major art

<sup>8</sup> Edsel R. M. (2013) *Saving Italy: the race to rescue a nation's treasures from the Nazis*, New York and London: Norton. See also this author's 2010 publication *Monuments Men: Allied heroes, Nazi thieves, and the greatest treasure hunt in history*, London: Arrow. A feature film based on this latter book, starring George Clooney and Cate Blanchett, will be released in 2014.

collections across the globe. This initiated new sculptural practices that, free of any obligation to what Krauss calls the logic of the monument, expanded to embrace the site-specific marking of locations made relevant by artistic convictions rather than civic history. Interestingly, the disillusioned Rodin also believed that Edward Steichen's 1908 photograph of the Balzac statue, standing in his moonlit studio, captured the essence of his thinking as a sculptor. It is not just that this image shows a plaster version of the statue waiting forever to be sent to the foundry, but also that, in the mind of this maker of monumental bronzes, a photographic print could be substituted for the object itself. Out in the expanded field we would define this substitution as an unmonument, a site-less and itinerant form of sculptural expression.

In this sense, Jones' use of photography returns us to the monument's moment of crisis. For example, the lozenge-shaped recess that serves as the handle of the door into the Japanese rice store becomes a Kraussian site-marker if, as the artist moves back and forth, this curious device is not simply handled but also photographed. When the resulting image is folded and bent into a small sculptural assemblage the fleeting actions of arriving or departing receive much more than our passing attention. Once this piece is installed inside the rice store, the act of pushing or pulling the door is substituted for the enduring presence of a memorialising statue.

Thus we arrive at a formula in which the transportable character of Jones' assemblages marks a very contemporary opposition to the cataleptic memorialisation of classical European Art. As Jones comes and goes from his residency studio he makes diminutive structures that propose alternatives to the size and weight of traditional monuments. Peter Mason, following Jean-Pierre Vernant, has made it clear that the gigantic Ancient Greek sculptures traditionally known as 'colossi' were associated with the ancestral dead, not towering gods.<sup>9</sup> Thus it was a sense of deathly inertness that created the unheimlich monoliths which now force

<sup>9</sup> Mason, P. (2013) *The Colossal: from ancient Greece to Giacometti*, London: Reaktion Books.

contemporary artists like Jones to work in a non-sedentary fashion – with small throwaway objects.

Recently returned from residing in the Norwegian town of Drammen, Jones brings with him a photographic record of the site-marking activity that became the core concern of his work there. Also in his luggage are the tiny structures themselves. There they are in the photographs marking out an installation that Jones calls: *Unmonumental: For the Silo 2*. After the business of creating a distant clearing, and then creatively residing in this space, I note that there follows an obligation to bring it all back home. Has it not always been the case that an odyssey prefigures a return.

<sup>10</sup> Flood, R.; Hoptman, L.; Gioni, M.; Smith, T. (2007) *Unmonumental: the object in the 21st century*, London: Phaidon. Catalogue published to mark the inaugural exhibition in the recently rehoused New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York.

<sup>11</sup> By this I mean that the option of remaining Calypso's prisoner must have been as tempting to Odysseus as returning to Ithaca. After all, as Milan Kundera points out in his novel about voluntary exile (*Ignorance*, 2002), Calypso must have been his lover longer than Penelope had been his wife. Furthermore, the story of the Lotus-Eaters confirms that throughout his travels Odysseus faced a variety of attractive alternatives (romantic, narcotic, etc.) to returning home.

I look at photographs of the little collages of Blu-Tack and torn boarding passes that Jones installed inside the old brick tower-like silo that served as the residency studio and exhibition space. These are site-dependent unmonuments involving no feat of foundry production, nor any other technique of permanent memorialisation.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, these works retain the powerful ability to mark a site. And what an extraordinary site it is. Jones describes the cylindrical studio-silo as a 'vestige' of Drammen's once-famous paper industry. Thus the clearing that has been marked out by the residency is itself vestigial, like a piece of archaeological debris picked up in a field.

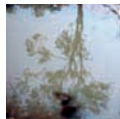
Now that Jones is home again this essay is a way of asking him if he thought about his return whilst he was in Norway. As in the *Odyssey*, written at a time when European culture followed the logic of the monument, mobility has long created conflicting tensions between the state of exile and the need to come home. Odysseus had to choose.<sup>11</sup> Jones doesn't – if his goal is to remain mobile then becoming an artist-in-residence could never be as residential as the name implies.

Chris Dorsett

## BUNDANON



Bundanon, 250 miles south of Sydney, is located on 1,100 hectares of bush land overlooking the Shoalhaven River, near Nowra, NSW. The Australian painter Arthur Boyd gifted his homestead estate to the Federal Government in 1993 as a creative retreat, archive and education centre. In 2011 Jones spent 5 weeks at Bundanon developing a body of paintings, collages, assemblages and video on the theme of the unmonumental.





Listening to Whispers: Tacked

Oil on photographic paper, 7.5 x 8 cm



Listening to Whispers: Circled

Oil on stainless steel, 7.5 cm dia.



Incidental no. 3

Oil on photographic paper & copper, 7.5 x 8 x 1.5 cm



Vortex

Photographs & found material, 3.3 x 5.8 x 1 cm



Otherside

Photomontage, 4.5 cm dia. x 0.7 cm





Canopy II

Photomontage, 2 x 5 x 0.5 cm



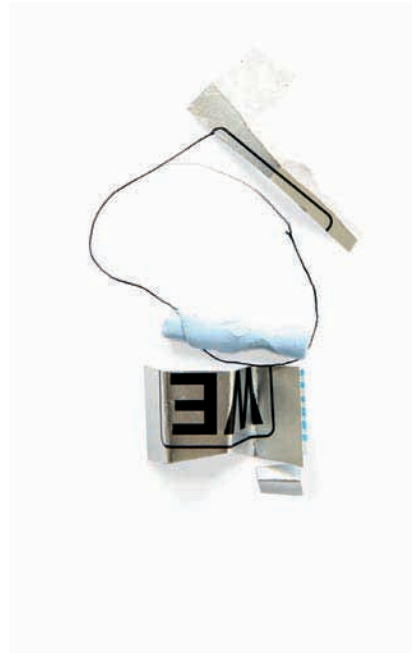
In Clouds

Photomontage, 2 x 9 x 0.7 cm



18 Whispers: no.8

Found material, 3.3 x 5 x 1.5 cm



18 Whispers: no.10

Found material, 4.3 x 6 x 1 cm



Boyd

Photographs & found object, 4.5 x 8 x 1.5 cm

## HILL END

Hill End, NSW, Australia is significant for its well-preserved architectural remains of the mid-19th. century gold-rush. It also has particular importance due to its re-discovery, as a ghost town, in the late 1940's by the so-called Vernacular Modernists. These artists responded to Hill End's architectural dereliction and scarred landscape in works that were to redirect the course of modern Australian painting. Works made in Hill End in Winter 2011 formed Jones' solo exhibition *Between the Hour & the Age* at BRAG, Bathurst, Australia, 2013.





From One to the Other

Oil on copper, 9.5 x 9.5 cm



Apparition

Oil on stainless steel, 7.5 cm dia.



Set

Oil on stainless steel, 7.5 cm dia.



Lit

Oil on gold-plated copper, 9 x 6 cm





One Here, One There

Oil on copper, 8 x 9 cm



Haefliger 2: Two Lights

Photomontage, 4.5 x 8 cm



Haefliger 5: Drysdale Drag

Oil & photomontage, 4.5 x 8 cm



Haeffliger 10: Contradiction

Photomontage, 4,5 x 8 cm



Haeffliger 8: Pirouette

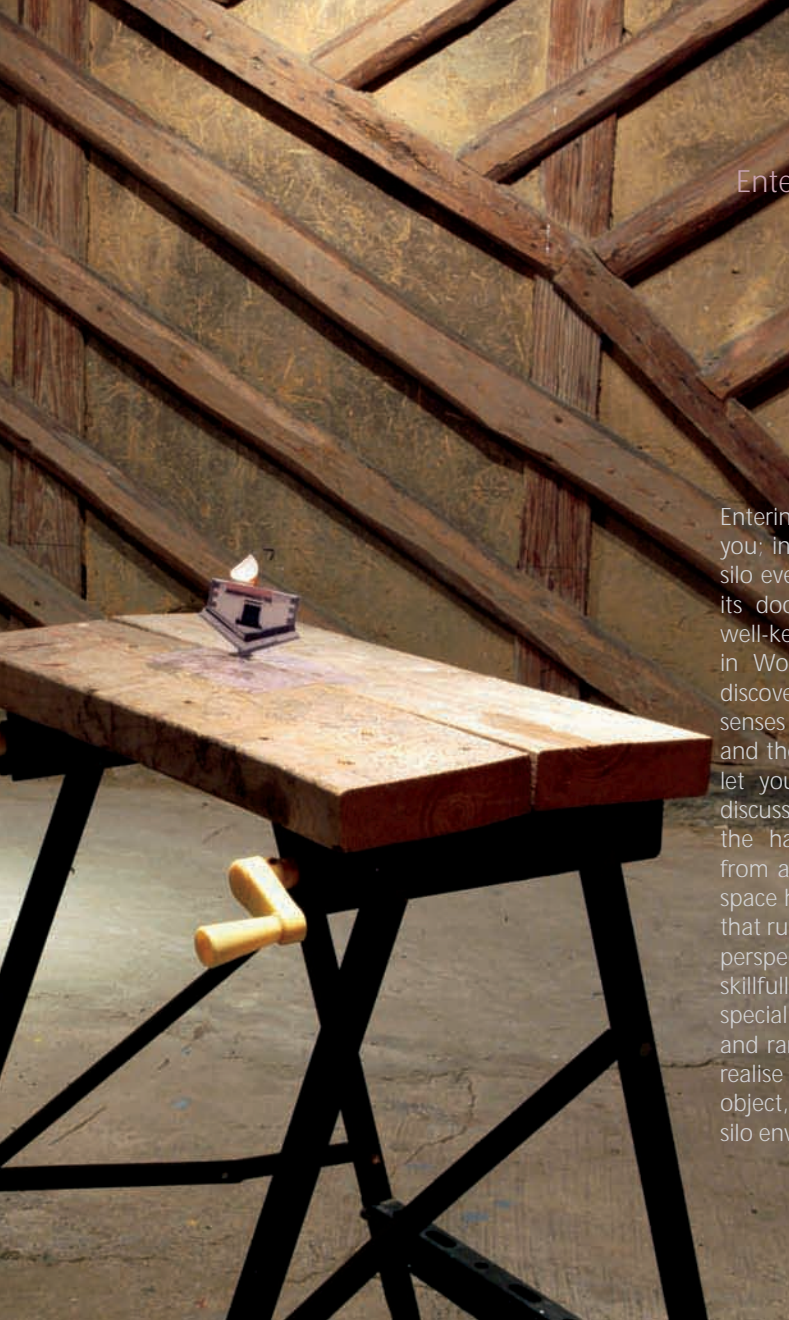
Oil & photomontage, 4,5 x 8 cm

## ITOSHIMA



Itoshima is a rural area of Fukuoka Prefecture between the mountains and the sea on the west coast of Kyushu, the southern island of Japan. During July 2013 Jones developed *For the Silo*, an installation of site-dependent photograph and found-object assemblages for the traditional rice-grain store which is now the project space of Studio Kura, where Jones was resident artist.



A photograph of the interior of a Japanese silo. The walls are made of dark, weathered wood with a prominent diagonal beam structure. In the foreground, a simple wooden bench with a thick top and black metal legs is visible. A small, lit fire sits on the bench, casting a warm glow. The overall atmosphere is rustic and contemplative.

## Entering a space

Entering a space, its atmosphere envelops you; in this one hundred years old Japanese silo even more than usual - walking through its door opens another dimension. Like a well-kept secret, like the rabbit hole in Alice in Wonderland, there is an invitation for discovery. Proportions can change here. Your senses are challenged with the diagonal lines and the richness of all the details, when you let yourself get lured into their miniature discussions. Every little inch has the feel of the handmade, of meaning, of whispers from a time none of us has witnessed. This space has its own aesthetic - though there is that rural, practical side to it, there is another perspective too: it is almost as if this was a skillfully carved container for something very special to be stored, something precious and rare to be kept safe. And suddenly you realise that you have become that special object, that precious piece of creation. The silo envelops you in its own dreams which lull



you to a state of awe and silence.

This particular time of the year, there is yet another aspect to this warehouse: in the extreme heat of Japanese summer, this space warms up, becoming something close to a sauna. It is very hot and humid, no air moves through the space. These circumstances call for lightness: the lightness of thoughts, the lightness of materials, the lightness of textures. I arrive when Christopher Jones, the residency artist at Studio Kura using this special location for his exhibition, has already been working for some weeks. I meet him, in his sand-coloured cotton clothing, just finishing his installation. He blends into the space, as if he truly has become a part of it. Looking around me, I am first surprised by the tiny objects almost hidden in the space. It looks quite empty at a first glance...but then it happens: the miniature sculptures wink at me in somewhat mischievous manner. They invite you to get really close, to really sharpen your vision, to be present and focused. They do not shout, just as this old building does not, but reveal something exhilarating if you give your full attention and enter into the dialogue that is offered.

There is something beautifully non-invasive about Christopher's work in this space. Each tiny object leaves you to decide how much or how little you wish them to reveal. What





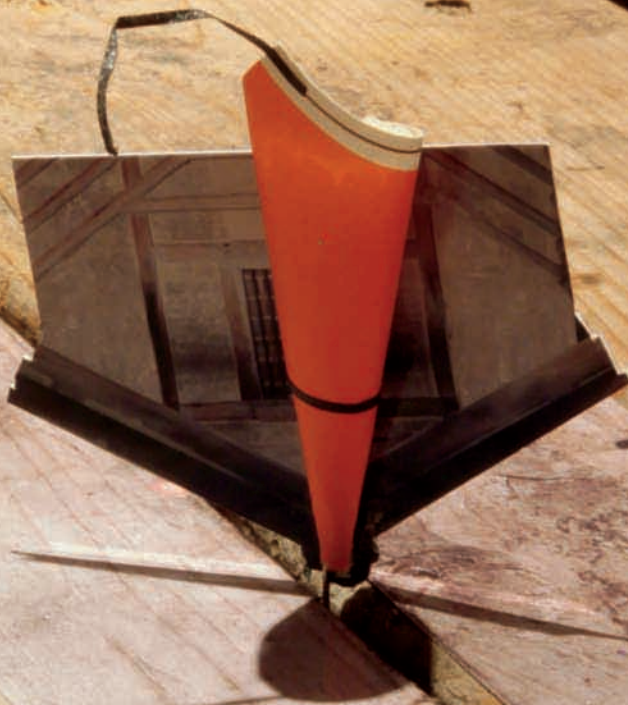
could almost be seen as mere decorative elements, turn out to be miniature sceneries, perspective shifters, sudden comments on Japanese everyday life or even newly found insects. What do YOU see? The meanings seem to be clear and well thought of, and yet, you cannot really be sure - and that is exactly what draws you back, to look yet another time, just a little closer. And some are impossible to reach physically, they are there like a landscape from an aeroplane: your vision is clear yet there is a decided distance you cannot cross. They are very present, still, giving the intimacy of other objects more meaning. They blend in with the lines and structures of the old silo, respecting its uniqueness, adding their own point of view in a playful, gentle way.

I have been invited to perform in this space, for the exhibition opening. It is clear that I do not wish to disturb the sensitive aesthetics here, so I will use my voice only, a simple vocal will be perfect. I feel very connected with this old building that has its own life, like a living being, and the worlds Christopher has created within it. From Christopher's miniature realities that inhabit the silo, which in its turn holds and welcomes us, I continue expanding the space yet a little more: I tune in with my Nordic sense of space, the vastness, the clean air, the fresh waters. My voice turns into a natural element that

soothes and refreshes as I intuitively open up these walls, to bring in some relief from the heat. When I improvise, I follow my voice and let it move freely. I use all kinds of sounds, I do not discriminate. I record layers upon layers, some distant voices, some close, intimate and textured, others fragile. Afterwards, someone tells me that she felt my voice falling like a cool mist on her face and she felt refreshed, as if in a forest. In my own way, I too have managed to stretch the boundaries of our perceived reality.

What we create together here has its own flow. Christopher's work with its quirky observations in playful collaboration with the old silo's fascinating, unique character and my voice, becoming the air that moves through it all; these stories of intuition, tales of innovation, reflections of the past and the unwritten present that we keep discovering, from moment to moment. For a brief instant in time this all comes together, takes a couple of deep breaths, and dissolves again. We leave the heat, the miniature works of art move to another location, my voice flies to somewhere else again. The silo will keep this encounter as one more whisper hidden in its walls. The silence will grow deeper when the winter comes. I wish to return again one day.

Meri Nikula







## DRAMMEN

During October 2013, Jones was resident artist at Union Scene, in **Drammen**, Norway. He worked in direct response to the city's historic silo: a 12 metre high brick tower which stands in the regenerated Papirbredden area of the city as a surviving trace of the renowned local paper industry of the last century. Jones developed *For the Silo 2*, an installation comprising small-scale assemblages - or "unmonuments" - made from photographs taken, and material found, on site.





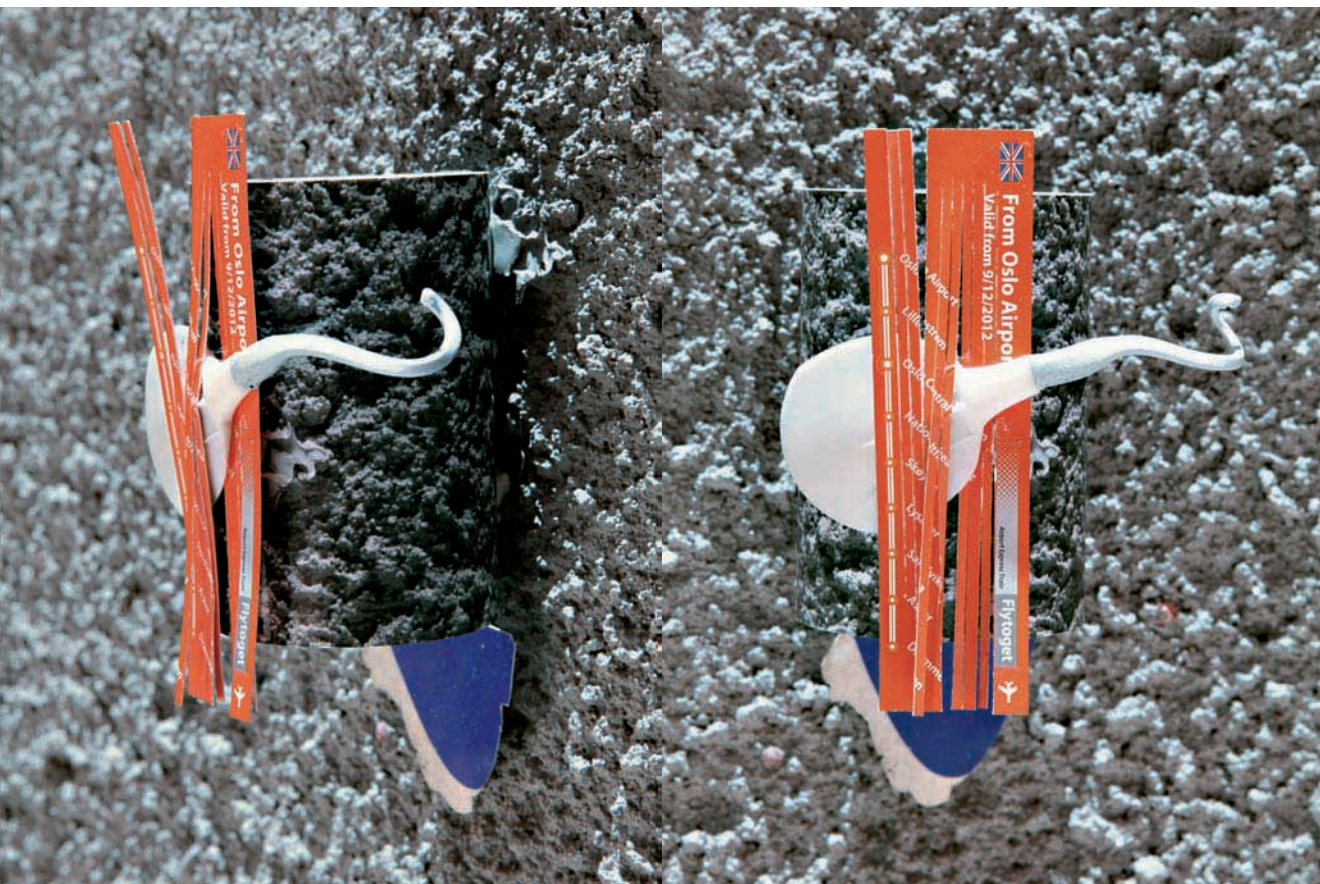












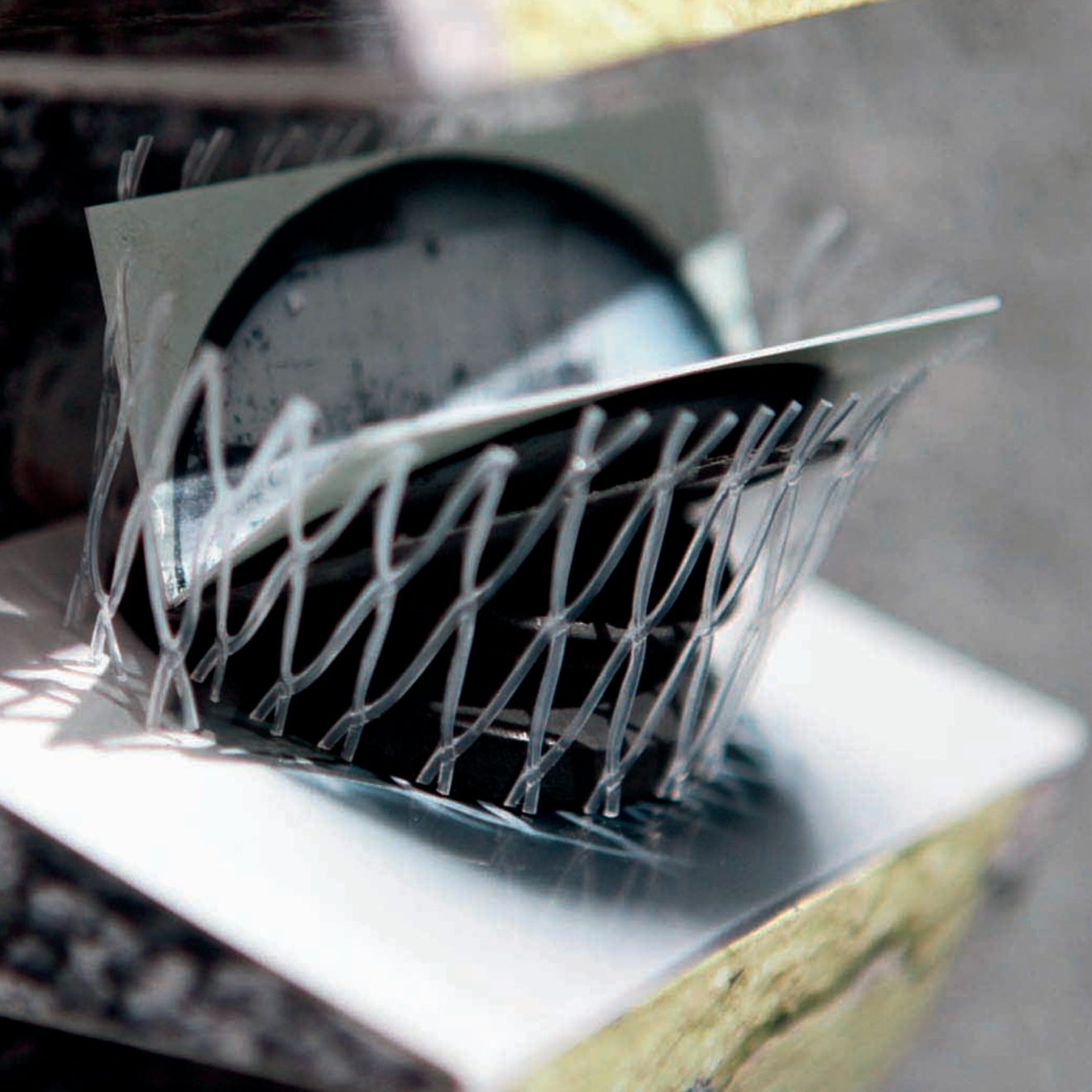
















## BIOGRAPHIES

**Christopher Jones** studied at Newcastle University and Chelsea College of Art and was a Monbusho Scholar at Kyoto University of Arts, Japan 1987-9. He has exhibited widely internationally with solo exhibitions of his work having been staged in Australia, Germany, Japan, Korea, Norway, Slovakia and the UK. He has received awards from the AHRC, ACE, Asem Duo Korea, the British Council, Daiwa Foundation and the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation.

His international residencies include Bundanon and Hill End, Australia; Kyoto Art Centre and Studio Kura, Japan; Seoul National University, S. Korea; the Slovak Artists Union programme at Moravany, and Union Scene, Drammen, Norway. He has also undertaken residencies and fellowships in the UK: at the art schools in Cheltenham and Hull and printworkshops at Lowick House, Cumbria and Northern Print, Newcastle. He is based in Northumberland, England and is Professor of Fine Art Practice at Newcastle University.

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**Chris Dorsett** is an artist and exhibition curator whose career has been built on cross-disciplinary collaborations with collection-holding institutions (most notably, the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford) and fieldwork residencies in locations such as the Amazon rainforest (organised with the Centre for Economic Botany, Kew) and the walled village of Kat Hing Wai (commissioned by the Arts Development Council of Hong Kong). In his projects Dorsett seeks to resituate the changing aesthetic and political ambitions of the visual arts within the widest range of historical and scientific contexts. As a Professor of Fine Art at Northumbria University he produces artworks and texts that interrogate theoretical claims about the construction of knowledge within creative practice.

[www.chrisdorsett.com](http://www.chrisdorsett.com)

**Meri Nikula** is an experimental vocalist, performance and video artist who uses her voice and body as the core elements of her practice. In a form she refers to as 'Vocal Mosaic' she layers vocal sound as an aural 'collage'. Born in Finland, Meri graduated in 2007 from the Royal Academy of Art, the Hague, with a solo performance for voice, body and video. She explores the limitless possibilities of the voice through cross-disciplinary performances and video works, collaborating frequently with other international creative practitioners. Recent projects and performances have been presented in Estonia, Finland, France, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

[www.merินิกula.com](http://www.merินิกula.com)



Hill End Artist-in-Residence Programme  
Hill End, NSW, Australia  
July 2011  
Bundanon Trust Residency Programme  
Nowra, NSW, Australia  
October 2011  
Studio Kura AIR Programme  
Fukuoka, Japan  
July 2013  
Union Scene Residency  
Drammen, Norway  
October 2013

Published by Northern Print  
ISBN 978-0-9555846-8-8  
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Supported by:  
Arts NSW  
Bathurst Regional Art Gallery  
Bundanon Trust  
Drammen Kommune  
Drammensbiblioteket  
Newcastle University  
Northern Print  
Studio Kura

Special thanks to:  
Ann-Magritt Bekink  
Robina Booth  
Chris Dorsett  
Hirofumi Matsuzaki & family  
Meri Nikula  
Monica Nyhus  
Richard Perriam  
Siân Bowen & Isla Jones

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