

Cumulation
Jenny Purrett



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Life is cumulative. We are shaped by the build-up of our experiences.

All around us, the landscape shows the effects of cumulation.

However small an action might be, however tiny an element is, it is significant. It is part of the big picture.



Finding and sorting the threads

Peter Davies

Undertaking a twelve month residency is a brave decision, especially moving from an urban conurbation to Tarsset, Northumberland, one of the most sparsely populated rural areas in England. It necessitates a break, to be open to new challenges and indicates a willingness to change direction. Such a move requires social, work and life planning. It means a commitment to a different pace of life - older, quieter, more in cycle with nature, the weather and the open upland landscape. Drawing strength from the hardy community and the annual seasons under fleeting skies.

Romantic, yes, but not easy to achieve and harvest; nevertheless Jenny Purrett has put her year to good use in accumulation on all levels. Her practice has widened and deepened, and new skills and new experiences have been acquired. One senses a more profound engagement with her work, and with place, ideas and material.

Drawing underpins Purrett's work about 'cumulation', or perhaps more fundamentally about the impact of the natural changing cycle of growth and decay. Seemingly like Robinson Crusoe marking the days on his island, a body of drawings relates to the passage of recorded time. Significantly this has been achieved in a daily drawing, building up linearly into a one *Year-long Line* drawing, densely compressed in a concertina book.

This dedicated process of mark-making and reflection has similarly been developed in an ongoing series of *One Week* drawings. *Line As Experience* comprises of seven daily drawings overlaid on a single sheet of paper. Each day has its own individual colour, the sensuous soft lines using in time the full pastel production range of nearby *Unison Colour*. In these the drawn line holds the thoughts and feelings between the artist and the world at a certain time, space and place. A week's worth of lines, one on top of the other, recreates the time connections. Not as a diary, or travel itinerary, but rather in the mode of the constructivists or process artists laying down a system, which is followed to unknown outcomes.

More dramatic are Purrett's gunpowder and shotgun works. These human 'acts', setting light to drawn lines of gunpowder and firing at a length of paper with a shotgun, may be seen to have obvious associations to hunting wild animals, and even perhaps to the bloody cross border history and the Reivers. I believe though these are 'found' images and the artist sees the hunter as intrinsically part of rural life. These become a metaphor for nature's hardness, the indiscriminate path of life and death.





The deliberately violent act is transformed to another function and end. A line of fired gunpowder exists as a virtual image and memory. Nothing tangible is left behind in space / time. Similarly the experimental investigations of shooting long rolls of paper with shotgun pellets are another means of drawing. The act of fired shot is realized in the blasted strip along the centre of the paper, which naturally tends to curl up. Hung from the ceiling these circular long hollow rolls of paper make a dramatic installation in an old outbuilding. The roughly treated surface is shredded and punctured with shot holes, the edges torn. Yet the work maintains a certain austere presence and may be read in several ways. Immediately *Shot Paper* looks like a stand of silver birch, perhaps like earlier birch drawings with 'scars', or rather more mysteriously like wraiths or somewhat sinister figures.



From her daily walks and forays Purrett has brought back a wide range of found, mostly natural objects, materials and plants. These are often worked into little objects or constructed models. Materials become a source for work, including drawings and prints. Sheep are the constant moving presence in the landscape. The 'wool on a rusty nail' indeed leads to the finding, collecting and making of *Wool Balls* of different sizes. Her experience learning to shear resulted in *Felt Sheets*, each one made from a single fleece.

The work then, from field drawings, observation and touch, addresses large issues and themes; the dependence and interdependence of living things in nature, one with another; the measure and recording of the passing of time, a narrative that encompasses growth and decay; and the human condition in the landscape. The residency has given Jenny Purrett time to make an impressive body of work, accumulate ideas and to reflect on her practice. Now is the time for display and wider dissemination of the work and ideas.



I believe that the residency opportunity, environment and people have profoundly impacted on the artist. This is a rich two-way transaction - what better accolade then for the unique programme of Visual Arts in Rural Communities.

Peter Davies has been involved with the support and development of the visual arts as an academic, consultant, arts administrator and artist.

Overleaf: *Collected Wool I*
Monoprint
From a series of 2 prints
Each 150 cm x 150 cm

Wool caught on a rusty nail. Wispy in contrast to the solidity of the metal, it moves in the breeze. The whorls of wood grain on the fence post echo the waves and whirls in the wool.

I've now got a pocketful of wool collected from barbed wire, overhanging branches and fallen trees.

The wool spun into the landscape.

(Notebook entry Wednesday 2nd March)





Previous page: *Fallen Lichen*
Monoprint
150 cm x 150 cm

Warm sun and sub-zero nights. The snow melts and refreezes.

This afternoon, on the smooth snow-white lawn, a blue grey shadow emerges beneath the canopy of the sycamore.

The canopy is bare, skeletal.

The shadow is lichen brought down by the icy weight of snow, now embedded into the surface of the ground.

(Notebook entry Thursday 9th December)

Opposite and overleaf: *Limbs*
Graphite powder on paper
From a series of 10 drawings
Each 84 cm x 59 cm

It's the calm after the storm.

The woods are filled with birdsong rather than the terrific roar of the treetops which was all that could be heard last night.

The wind was awesome.

Two Scots pines uprooted in the wood, limbs in the road. I stop to pick one up. As I inspect the bashed and splintered surface, flakes of lichen and bark crumble away in my hands and fall to the ground.

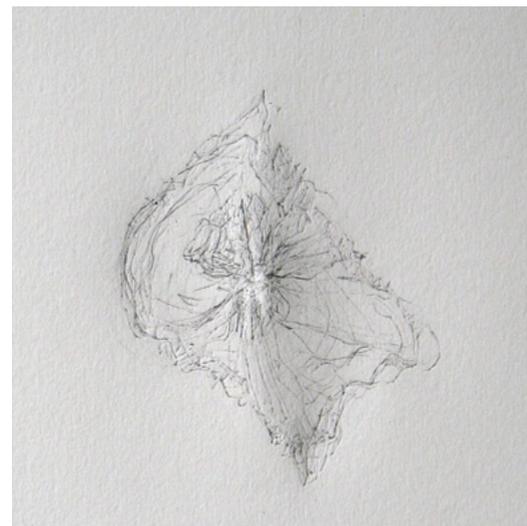
Everything is so precarious.

(Notebook entry Saturday 5th February)





Below and overleaf: *Scars*
Pencil on paper
From a series of 20 drawings
Each 30 cm x 24 cm





A young ash.

The bark is skin-like, smooth with a sheen, wrinkled and folded where a new branch has grown. It is scarred and pock-marked at the base of the trunk where it has been nibbled by rabbits. The folds are so fine they are like fabric. Lichen has established itself in some of these folds. In other places the lichen growth has distorted with the folding and stretching of the bark.

The tree's story etched into its skin.

(Notebook entry Monday 24th January)

Shot Paper

This page - Installation view

Overleaf - Detail



Dead birch lying in the grass. A filigreed encasing of bark lying proud of the trunk as though the body of the tree has shrunk leaving behind too-big clothes.

The trunk is in fact being slowly eaten away by woodworm, the maze of their burrows and trenches create a crumbly layer beneath the stiff papery surface. Eventually only the surface will be left.

(Notebook entry Wednesday 6th July)





Previous page: *Wool Balls*
Dimensions variable
Installation view

The sheep impact on the landscape here.

They leave trails of wool in their wake: caught on fences, on grass, on tree trunks and as a veil across the heather: sheep litter.

The wool itself becomes shaped by the wind and rain and gathers elements of the landscape within it; moss, lichen, grass, mud.

Sheep shape the landscape; the landscape shapes the wool.

(Notebook entry Tuesday 2nd May)

Felt Sheets
Series of 3
Each 150 cm x 300 cm
This page - Installation view
Overleaf - Detail



I do what I do in response to the place in which I find myself.
It is something that allows me to connect to the landscape.
I walk. I stop. I look. I see. I hear. I smell. I touch.
I absorb these experiences.
The work is a result of this cumulative experience.

I want to connect so I look closer. I look again and again.
I make marks over and over and find something new each time.
I want to build a relationship so I draw or I collect.
I enjoy the process of repetitive actions.

I work intuitively. I choose materials that feel good to use.
I like the feel of pastel or charcoal or pencil or pen on paper.
Of wool and soap and lanolin beneath my fingertips.

Title



Below and overleaf: *Year-long Line*

Pencil on paper

15 cm x 3500 cm





Drawing is a way for me to connect with what is there.
When I draw I am not just seeing,
I am using all my senses.
The whole experience is there in that line.

Opposite and overleaf: *Line As Experience*
Pastel on paper
Series of 52 drawings
Each 84 cm x 59 cm



Re-living the year-long line.
The experience comes back. Sometimes it's a glimpse.
Other times the whole thing is really vivid.

In re-drawing, I recall. I reconnect with my previous self.

In these drawings, I'm in two places at once.



Overleaf: *Line As Memory*

Lit gunpowder

Dimensions variable

The life of this line is momentary.

The flame makes its journey across the surface.

The line drawn in memory.



Jenny Purrett arrived at Highgreen in the autumn of 2010. During her twelve months as artist in residence Jenny has completely immersed herself in the Tarsset community and landscape. Throughout the year, every day and in all weathers, Jenny has walked and completed drawings outdoors; a discipline which has made her intensely aware of the details of nature and of the relationship between living things, and in turn their relationship with the landscape. Whilst Jenny Purrett has worked with a number of media - ink, sheep's wool, lichen, moss and paper both as a surface and sculpturally - the process of drawing is central to Jenny's practice.

Jenny has led many drawing workshops during her residency and through gentle and encouraging tutoring has passed on skills and her passion for mark-making. Local residents and people from further afield attended two series of workshops over the winter months, after which they were inspired to continue to meet weekly in the village hall as a self-supporting drawing group. Another group enjoyed an intensive Creative Drawing Day. Later in the spring Jenny organised and led a whole range of activities for visiting students and staff from Thornhill School in Sunderland, a school for young people with autistic spectrum disorders.

An interesting three-day project explored rural and urban connections. It brought young artists from NewBridge Studios in Newcastle up to Highgreen to make artwork alongside Jenny in response to the buildings and landscape of this isolated rural location. This process will be repeated in reverse when Jenny spends three days in Newcastle in the autumn developing these pieces for exhibition in a very different city environment.

It has been a pleasure having Jenny Purrett as VARC's twelfth artist in residence. She has made the most of her year at Highgreen. She has been committed in the creation of her art and embraced with enthusiasm everything the community and landscape of Tarsset has to offer. She has given generously in return and has become a member of this scattered but strong community.

Janet Ross

I think it was Paul Klee who said 'a line is a dot going for a walk', well Jenny's daily journals - to say nothing of the rest of her work - are evidence of an artistic marathon. VARC is delighted to give this opportunity to someone with such a reflective and thoughtful approach coupled with a keen and sensitive observation; Jenny's mind and her hand seem to work with such mutual understanding that they simply become invisible, leaving only the art itself at which to wonder and enjoy.

Leo Amery

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Special thanks to Leo Amery and VARC whose generosity has enabled me to have this experience, and to Janet Ross for bringing it all together.

Jenny Purrett

Jenny Purrett studied Fine Art at UCE, Birmingham and gained a Masters in Fine Art from Bath Spa University in 2009. She has exhibited work in Bath, Bristol, London, Birmingham and the North East. Since completing her Artist Residency at Highgreen, she continues to make work in response to the landscape of the North East.

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