**'Write off the Map' GOUGH\_exhibition narrative 2013**

TIME, THE DEER, IS IN THE WOOD OF HALLAIG

Tha tìm, am fiadh, an Coille Hallaig

6th – 11th June 2013, [St. John on Bethnal Green](http://www.stjohnonbethnalgreen.org/), London

**Paul Gough**

Practice-based research work selected for an exhibition on the theme of forests, history, and social and environmental memory held in central London in early June 2013, at the historic St John on Bethnal Green.

**'Write off the Map'.**

an exhibition on forests, history, and social and environmental memory

<https://timethedeer.wordpress.com/curator/>

The conceptual framing of the exhibition curated by Dr Amy Cutler is on:

<https://timethedeer.wordpress.com/a/>

**BACKGROUND**

**Field of enquiry**

Gough’s work (both published texts and practice-based studio works) are framed within the discourse of cultural geography, more specifically within the field of the iconography of commemoration, with a particular focus on the value of trees in capturing arboreal memory, trauma and remembrance.

The key outlets of such work are military, war and peace museums (Gough has had his art works selected and shown in the Imperial War Museum, London: New Zealand War Memorial, Wellington; The Canadian War Museum, Ottawa, Canada) and conference events such as the Royal Geography Society and International Geographers Society (Gough, 2014) [[1]](#footnote-1)

Key thinkers in this discipline are Stephen Daniels on human and cultural geographies, Nicholas Saunders on the material culture of war memory, Paul Cloke in human and arboreal geographies.[[2]](#footnote-2) Just as their ideas on arboreal memory have informed Gough’s practice and his publications, so his published work has been cited by them many times. [[3]](#footnote-3)

Saunders has cited Gough’s published work and has also invited and/or peer reviewed his contribution to present to selected conferences [[4]](#footnote-4) and included Gough’s work in peer-reviewed books. [[5]](#footnote-5) Stephen Daniels selected Gough from an open invitation to chair the £5million UK Arts and Humanities Research Council commissioning panel for ‘Landscape and Environment’. [[6]](#footnote-6)

Arboreal iconography and memory is an emergent field of practice-based enquiry but Gough’s work around the ‘negative sublime’ and the power of apparently moribund nature to incite and arouse specific memory and associations has been referenced by a number of younger emerging artists, most notably Gail Ritchie in Belfast, Northern Ireland (who creates drawings of tree rings that echo the age of combatants who died in the Iraq war) <http://www.gailritchie.com>

and Sydney-based painter Gabrielle Hirst who has been creating drawings and paintings of flowers of the battlefields during her residency in Berlin. <http://www.gabriellahirst.com>

Gough’s work addresses the need to create a visual language capable of describing ‘memory trees’ and their vital role as nodes of trauma.

**CONTRIBUTION**

**Research Question**

Gough’s practice-based enquiry addresses the following questions:

* How does the informed studio practitioner create a visual language capable of describing ‘memory trees’ as icons of remembrance;
* What practice-based approach is best deployed to convey certain memorial landscapes as nodes of trauma
* How can practice-based enquiry inform the field of memory studies within the greater discourse in cultural geography.

The pieces that were selected for this exhibition (by curator Dr Amy Cutler) are drawn from an extensive suite of large-scale drawings and paintings in the *Upas Series*. Gough was sole creator of these large-scale works.

The act of making, drawing and painting fused the direct reference of particular memory trees that are well cited in the literature (The *Danger Tree* on the Somme, the *Oklahama City National Tree*; the *Survivor Tree*, NYC, etc) with Gough’s own visual language. Gough’s methodology is a blend of site-based on-the-spot drawing and visual recording [in Northern Europe and also in Gallipoli, Turkey] as a form of deep mapping and site-disciplined fieldwork. These drawings become the basis of extended studio periods which extend and elaborate the ideas generated by deep reading, writing and further studio work. Much of Gough’s published peer reviewed writing in this field acts as an adjunct to the studio-based enquiry.

Future work will address the challenges of preserving sites of martial memory, possibly by relying on the drawn and imaginary image to conjure fresh possibilities for the conservation of arboreal icons. These environmental concerns are especially urgent given the increased footfall of battlefield tourists (known also as *thanatourists*) on a restricted number of sites of memory.

Studio-based enquiry offers a fresh approach to visualising these sites of memory, bring into being places that are largely empty to the casual eye; the artist can re-imagine such sites of trauma in a way that words and photography can often struggle to do.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

The impact of the entire portfolio of work might best be summarised:

* It has fuelled a dialogue and relationship between a number of practitioners – Elizabeth Turrell (UK); Gabriele Hirst (Australia /Germany) and Gail Richie (N.Ireland) with a common cause around the ‘flowers or remembrance, which has been of heightened value in the centenary year 2014;
* Gough’s standing as a practitioner and published peer-reviewed academic has led to invitations not only to contribute to academic debate, conferences, peer-reviewed publications, and exhibitions, but also to contribute to the debate about battlefield conservation and the heritage of sites of memory:
* Gough’s work has been cited, as the main academic source, in the official report on battlefield preservation; *The Vimy Declaration for the Conservation of Historic Battlefield Terrain*:

<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/overseas/first-world-war/france/vimy/declaration>

* Gough’s work was commissioned by the British Library; First World War web resource, a highly curated selection from the full *Europeana* catalogue. His illustrated essay on British and Belgian artists in the First World War: <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/why-paint-war-british-and-belgian-artists>
* Gough’s work as an exhibited painter led to an invitation to contribute top a 40 minute programme on BBC Radio 4; *Free Thinking: Wood and Trees, War and Remembrance* (TX 1st July 2014) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b048bm10>

And more recently ‘Deception by Design’ (ABC TX 19 June 2016)

<http://iview.abc.net.au/programs/deception-by-design/AC1403V001S00>

The exhibition was curated by Dr Amy Cutler; it was reviewed in various websites, bogs etc.

Dr Amy Cutler

<https://timethedeer.wordpress.com/curator/>

Gough’s work was featured on this gallery site, which also gives extensive contextual background to the UPAS tree theme and has reproductions of the two large pieces under the title of the *Upas Enigma*.

<https://timethedeer.wordpress.com/2013/06/19/paul-goughs-upas-series/>

1. Gough, Peer-reviewed speaker *Royal Geographic Society* Annual Conference, London, 26-28 August 2014, ‘Commemorating and Remembering the First World War at its Centenary’ (Sponsored by the Historical Geography Research Group at The 2014 RGS-IBG Annual Conference)

   <http://conference.rgs.org/AC2014/59> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Introducing Human Geographies, Third Edition***,** Paul Cloke, Philip Crang, Mark Goodwin, Routledge, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Encounters with Popular Pasts: Cultural Heritage and Popular Culture,*

   edited by Mike Robinson, Helaine Silverman, Springer, 2013, p.238. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. # See Gough, P.J. (2014) ‘Planting Memory’: the Challenge of Remembering the Past on the Somme, Gallipoli and Melbourne, in Garden History, Journal of the Garden History Society, Vol.42, Suppl.1, 2014, pp.3-17; and Gough, P.J. ‘Calculating the future’ – panoramic sketching, reconnaissance drawing and the material trace of war, in Saunders, N and Cornish, P. (eds.) Contested Objects: Material Memories of the Great War, Routledge, London, 2009, pp. 237-251. ISBN 978-0-415-45070-6; and Gough, P.J (2013) ‘The Sounds of Silence’ The sounds of silence at repatriation and remembrance ceremonies, IWM conference on Materialities of War: Conflict and the Senses, Imperial War Museum, London, 6-7 September 2013; Gough, P.J. (2007) Voids of war – the empty battlefield as a place ‘full of emptiness’ Materialities and meaning in contested places, 1900-2007, 4th University College London/Imperial War Museum Conference on Materialities and Cultural Memory of 20th Century Conflict (26May 2007)

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Gough, P.J. and Davies, K. (2016) ‘Dead air’: The acoustic of war and peace – creative interpretations of the sounds of conflict and remembrance, in Nicholas Saunders and Paul Cornish (eds.) *Conflict and the Senses*, Routledge, in association with the Imperial War Museum. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://www.landscape.ac.uk/landscape/index.aspx [↑](#footnote-ref-6)