

When I first encountered *Song of Grief* (2011) and *Bore Song* (2011), two works that confront the lived pain of bereavement, unashamedly laying out an open wound and all its anguish for the audience to deal with as they might, I thought about how we externalise emotion in order to incorporate it into life. Though this public mourning may have performed a cathartic function, the vulnerability and courage it would have necessitated must have been compelled by a world in which nothing else would make sense. This work is insistent, necessary and unavoidable: it had to be made. Much more than an exercise in grief, than a representation of a singular loss, it deals with the immersive experience of emotional suffering in general and in that, it addresses us all. The sculptural aspects of *Song of Grief* – two projectors facing each other, criss-crossing strips of film running imagelessly through the gallery with the same pitched shout of grief on each – tells the story of two sisters' lives, connected yet separate. Beyond its metonymical function, the dark space and penetrating sound consumes and collapses the distance between what is signified and what it immediately is – the work contains and enacts its meaning, through the audience's experience.

To listen requires humility – opening us with equanimity to the world, placing us out amongst things as they arise, a counterpoint to the agency of looking in which we can avert our eyes, or direct our focus at will. Where light provides determinate clear space filled with distinct objects, true darkness dissolves into a mysterious depth that emancipates the body from the framework of objectivity. In *Body of Water* 2010 (the concluding part of a trilogy that includes *Bore Song* and *Song of Grief*) immersive darkness and sound carried audience members on a journey to the Severn Estuary, by way of attentive listening. I was one of the participants who sat in a dark space listening to a field recording of a tidal surge as it swept along the shores. I could feel the immense volume of water in a correspondence between the sound and my inner landscape, whose horizon was made present by the darkness which unmoored my body from the room. The implacable progression of the body of water, an evocation of the force of grief, was punctuated by bells ringing in a nearby church which heightened an air of solemnity whilst reinforcing two contrasting attitudes in the act of listening: acquiescence to the manifesting force of the tide; and a human intervention that interrupted the flow of time to mark and describe it.

*Absolute Pitch II* 2014 is a new work that proceeds from the ground laid in that earlier trilogy. Five projectors on plinths with human proportions occupy a dark space, on each film strip is recorded a particular musical note (B above middle C) as it is sung by a chorister, and the colour (projected as light in a dark space) that they each elected when asked to describe in hue the quality of sound that they felt was conveyed in their voice. On each line of film we hear the distinct grain, texture and duration of the individual chorister's voice as they sing until the note falls away and breaks, adding a sense of vulnerability to their voice. The loop is completed in this work – from external stimulus (the note given), to an internal horizon (feeling the sound through the voice and imagining a colour with the mind's eye), to the manifestation in a social sphere (the colour and voice projected).

This exercise in transduction maps equivalences between colour, light and sonority across private and shared worlds, translating from one form to another. The five filmstrips span the space echoing the five lines of a monoprint by Fairclough's sister, Hetta, found in one of her sketchbooks. Sonorously, the sustained pitch elected for each line and performed through individual vocal textures, expresses the intensity of those lines marked on paper. Following the death of her younger sibling, Fairclough discovered that these drawings expressed a confluence in their creativity, parallel imaginations addressing similar

concerns: lines tracing pathways of thought or journeys through landscapes and over bodies of water, and was compelled to enter into a notional collaboration with the work.

The drawing is treated as a score – a key to an already existent yet unmanifest composition – decoded and interpreted with composer Richard Glover who had collaborated with Fairclough on another work *Compositions for a Low Tide* 2014. In this, two of her sister's drawings were interpreted as scores from which Rochester Cathedral choristers dressed in traditional church attire sung a single phrase as it appears in the drawings 'What Shall I Do With My Hands' and 'Can People See Me Swallowing' at a series of sustained pitches, repetitively, whilst walking a mile out to sea along an ancient shingle spit in Whitstable. The unrelenting succession of moments felt despairing and absurd, as if progressing together into a seemingly unending void, the audience collectively experienced their individual wills sublimated to a simple instruction – to place one foot in front of the other, to keep moving forwards towards an ungraspable horizon however futile it seemed. There was a sublime calm, in which the condition held us in a dream-like state of acceptance and acquiescence that echoed the often helpless state imposed by psychological disturbance.

The sketchbook drawings are the gravitational heart of a new exhibition at Danielle Arnaud gallery – the first encounter, a rubric or legend for other works. Photographed on a 1:1 scale and processed so that the centre of the page rises towards the viewer as the original might if held in one's hand, they express a fidelity to the strong visual language of the originals. At times the drawings are visual poems and traces of a person's inner world, a mind revealed in latent utterance, form given to feeling: anxious and unrelenting. In this fact an ethical question of consent ensues and a responsibility towards Hetta's memory and the audience's involvement. It seems clear that this unique visual language, which belongs to the tradition of concrete poetry and visual scores, describes the ways in which ruminating anxiety manifests itself physically. In this sense Hetta herself was approaching illness as subject and placing it out in the material world.

Kafka gave his most intimate writings – his personal diaries – to his lover whilst he was still alive. In this act they became a form of correspondence in which he revealed his confounded and fearful worldview. Sometimes the closest of relationships render a person opaque, when the investments in one another are too freighted – parents for example, or lovers. Fairclough addresses her sister in this work in what feels like an attempt to know her fully; and these works are proposed as part of an ongoing correspondence that traverses the period between Hetta's drawings and Fairclough's work, echo-sounding an unfathomable depth between worlds.

Collaboration is central to this body of work, whether working with the photographer Milo Newman to re-present the sketchbooks in medium format, with composer Richard Glover, or extending to the mind's eye of the vocalists in *Absolute Pitch I* and *II*. With sound and voice at its core, the entire body of work is modular - functioning both singularly and coming together chorally. The musicality reflects the overlaps between authors, orchestrating resonances between works that fill the space: taking the pitch of B above middle C in *Absolute Pitch II* as a constant from which all other works, including a performance on the opening night, respond.

There is a reverence and sensitivity in the rendering of Hetta's drawings that acts as a counterpoint to the conviction of the installations and performances which have at times boldly asked the audience to walk or stand in the presence of despair. The drawings are instructional and imperative and Fairclough's response is not tentative in its approach. It pushes up against you insisting: this is how it is; this is what I am; don't look

away; don't seek distraction; don't soften my edges. It is intensely demanding, intimate and profoundly courageous. In it, emotional disturbance is felt as a material component – space is re-described not just formally but socially and psychologically.

*I wish I could be a stone*, 2014, devised in collaboration with Richard Glover, is exemplary of this existential concern. The original drawing outlines a cluster of pebbles each one containing the aspiration 'I wish I could be a stone'. It is hard to see this drawing and not see it in relation to the series of drawings John Cage made in 1983 entitled *Where R=Ryoanji* (referring to the Zen temple and kare-sansui - a dry landscape and rock formation that enhances meditation practice). Cage traced the outlines of those revered stones in a drawing which was the notation of a composition. Here, Hetta's drawing is treated as a score, diagrammatically dictating the actions of two choristers sitting on a beach with an approaching tide: pick up a pebble resembling one you identify in the drawing; incant the words at the given pitch whilst holding it in your hand; replace it and repeat. The field recording of these repetitive actions includes the sound of hands raking through the shingle in search of a suitable stone and it dropping again after the engagement has played out. It is presented as a sound installation involving two turntables and four speakers and provides an audible undercurrent to the exhibition. These stones, like the sketchbooks, are fragments we are asked to hold (literally or imaginatively) through which to focus our attention on the small and feel the immense. The stuff of obsession, of despair and worry may be embedded in a specific landscape, yet can transform a universe. The shingle is not incidental: it is at once individual and collective; existential and environmental. It probes the mystery of an individual in relation to a world. It is ever moving and along whose extension the human body might understand the progression of time and distance and at one time would have bourn the mark of Hetta, who sat there drawing, meditatively, leaving her transitory mark in the physical landscape. The everyday pebble of a British beach may not be exceptional in its beauty. But who hasn't held one in their hand and known its cold weight, the peaceful presence of its slowness, its surrender to the tides of time that have smoothed and delivered it to its temporary resting place. Our notion of it at once contains this peaceful residing and its inanimate being that appears to be unconflicted by individual will or isolation.