

Related events

Exhibition Tours

Free, no need to book

Informal introductions to the exhibitions led by members of the Spike Island community.

Helen Legg
Spike Island director
Saturday 23 July, 2pm

Helen Legg discusses the work of Stuart Whipps, reflecting on her visits to his studio and the process of shaping the exhibition.

Volunteer-led tours

Tuesday 26 July and Tuesday 30 August, 1pm
We also offer free tours in Italian and Spanish, by request. Please book in advance at reception.

Book for events online at www.spikeisland.org.uk, call 0117 929 2266 or visit reception.

Spike Island

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Visitor Information

Gallery open Tuesday to Sunday, 12–5pm
(during exhibitions only).

Admission to the gallery is free.

Spike Island Café open Monday to Friday,
8.30am–5pm, Saturday and Sunday, 10–5pm.

Spike Island aims to be a fully accessible building.

Artist Talk

Stuart Whipps
Thursday 21 July, 6pm
£5/£3 (free for Associates)

Stuart Whipps talks about the disparate narratives that have been brought together for *Isle of Slingers*, his most comprehensive exhibition to date.

Tania Hershman
Flash Fiction Workshop

Sunday 4 September, 2–5pm
£10/£7

Booking advised

Taking inspiration from the current exhibition: Stuart Whipps, *Isle of Slingers*, which weaves its way from Mexican sculptures to ballet and Welsh gardens, unleash your imagination and write some flash fiction — the shortest short stories — with poet and short story writer Tania Hershman. No previous experience required, just pen and paper.

Stuart Whipps' exhibition is supported by AG Photographic.

The film *Isle of Slingers* was choreographed with and is performed by William Bracewell.



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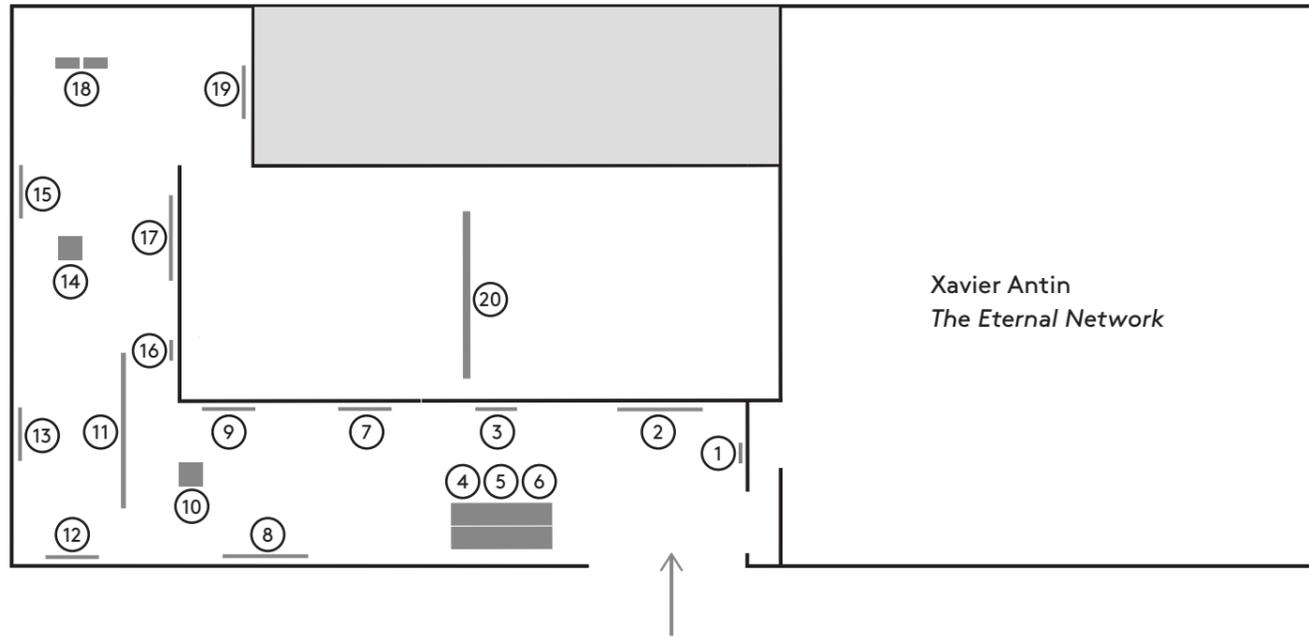


Exhibition Guide

Isle of Slingers Stuart Whipps

9 July to 18 September 2016

Spike Island



- | | |
|--|---|
| ① <i>Beautiful Sculpture, Beautiful Soul</i> (2016)
Chromogenic print | ⑬ <i>Portland Screws; Portland Skull</i> (2015)
Chromogenic prints |
| ② <i>Portland Stones</i> (2016) Chromogenic prints | ⑭ <i>Complaint</i> (2015) Plinth, gold dust |
| ③ <i>Pulpits Rock, Portland</i> (2016)
Chromogenic print | ⑮ <i>Five Sisters. A View of the Shale Bings in West Calder</i> (2013) Chromogenic print |
| ④ ⑤ ⑥ <i>Marbled Books (Yellow); Marbled Books; (Purple); Marbled Books (Grey)</i> (All 2016) Books, tables reclaimed from Birmingham Central Library, marbled paper, stones | ⑯ <i>A Postcard of Victoria Falls Leaning against a Geological Sample from John Latham's Mantelpiece</i> (2012) Chromogenic print
Courtesy of Paul McKeown |
| ⑦ <i>Blaenau Ffestiniog</i> (2016) Chromogenic print | ⑰ <i>M8 Stones</i> (2016) Chromogenic print |
| ⑧ <i>Marble Book; Marble Book (Detail 001); Marble Book (Detail 002)</i> (2016) Chromogenic Prints | ⑱ <i>A System for Communicating with the Ghost of Sir Christopher Wren</i> (2014) Slide projectors, Arduino, slides |
| ⑨ <i>Ffestiniog Slate; Portmeirion Acorn</i> (2015/16)
Chromogenic prints | ⑲ <i>Faust/Fist</i> (2016) Wall drawing |
| ⑩ <i>Tilly Losch, Dance of the Hands</i> (2013)
Video, duration 29 seconds | ⑳ <i>Isle of Slingers</i> (2016) Video, duration 14 minutes, 14 seconds |
| ⑪ <i>Birmingham Central Library Wall</i> (2016)
Bricks, Valchromat, timber | |
| ⑫ <i>Mould 008</i> (2012)
Chromogenic print | |

Isle of Slingers is British artist Stuart Whipps' largest exhibition to date, drawing together multiple strands of his practice that have been in development for the past five years. The exhibition opens up Whipps' working methodology, which he describes as one of 'drilling down into an object.' A kind of social archaeology of the object or image, Whipps conducts detailed research into materials, individuals and their histories.

The exhibition is organised and colour coded around three types of stone and three related individuals: Portland Stone and arts patron Edward James (purple); slate and architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis (yellow) and shale and artist John Latham (grey). For all that this suggests a highly structured, didactic display, Whipps' frequent detours and digressions into back stories, incidental detail and points of connection are slippery, expansive and all too human, undermining simplistic appearances.

Whipps trained as a photographer and three documentary landscapes anchor the exhibition, showing the environment each rock was extracted from. The first shows Pulpits Rock in Portland, an artificial stack left behind as a quarrying relic. The second is a twilight scene of the town of Blaenau Ffestiniog in Gwynedd, Wales, depicting the monumental scale of the slate heaps left behind from the now defunct mining industry. Finally, a view of the West Lothian shale bings, the residue of a process designed to extract and distil products from oil-bearing shale for use as paraffin fuel. Whipps' images reconnect the three stones to their geographic origins and at the same time demonstrate the failure of photography to speak of all that lies behind the image.

Questions of aesthetic value and its relationship to class and labour run through Whipps' practice. The blue-grey slate heaps of Blaenau Ffestiniog were cited by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis (architect of Portmeirion, a fantastical Italianate village in North Wales) as a reason for the town's exclusion from the surrounding National Park, set up in the 1950s, on the grounds that they lacked sufficient natural beauty. The West Lothian shale bings, on the other hand, were declared national monuments after the intervention of John Latham.

The processes and history of photography provide models for much of Whipps' thinking. Fixing – the photographic process of setting an image, of preventing any further change by exposure to chemicals – is a process turned concept in Whipps' work, used to explore the formation of ideas and how things come to be realised in a certain form. A photograph of a marbled book opens onto Edward James, a poet and wealthy patron of the arts, who set up a private imprint to publish his own poetry and that of writers he admired. Initially called Faustian Press, (the two large wall drawings of clenched fists, "faust" in German, were proposed logos), he finally opted for the James Press, and set about producing the finest quality editions using superior printing processes. His own writing often went unfinished, yet he would fix and monumentalise the text at arbitrary stages of its development by having it printed and bound in ultra-luxurious editions – a folly to rival Sir Clough Williams-Ellis' Portmeirion. The video monitor shows a short clip of his wife, the dancer Tilly Losch, performing the *Dance of the Hands* – another way of making form – while *Mould 008* depicts the wooden mould from which elaborate concrete structures were made for James' surrealist garden in the Mexican jungle.

Bisecting the gallery is a brutalist brick wall, which along with the tables near the main door, was salvaged from Birmingham Central Library, a 1970s building currently being demolished. These extend Whipps' interest in leftovers and remnants, while suggesting an institutional environment.

The exhibition finally opens onto the main space where a new film layers aspects from each strand of Whipps' research, bringing them together in a single register. Images are projected onto stone, and – in an echo of Tilly Losch – a dancer uses his body to mirror their forms. An ambient soundtrack is supplemented by a voiceover playing through headphones.