

Teelah George

Shannon Williamson

Thematic Mapping



24 MAY - 16 JUNE 2013

M O N A

PROJECT SPACE

A Navigation of Negative Space

The metaphor of cartographer-as-artist is a self-evident yet inescapable one. Mapping is in essence a practice of drawing; one that, at a base level, uses a universal dialogue to divide a paper's surface into positive and negative space. The 'positive' detailing in thematic mapping, for instance, sheds light on a geographically specific, albeit selected, environmental 'truth' – be it social, political, cultural, economic, sociological or agricultural, fact or fiction.

Distinct parallels can be drawn between the interrelationship of the positive and the negative of maps, and that of the two practices interlocked for *Thematic Mapping*: Teelah George and Shannon Williamson's. Given that the negative space of maps is purely a demarcated, neutralised ground, perceptibly rendered for the purposes of emphasising its neighbouring content, it is plausible to then situate all matter that is denied from the view of broader contexts within the sphere of the negative.

Both artists have here adopted independent modes of mapping as means of steering through what is often consciously left in the dark. These sites may be literally unseen, as when dealing with personal psychological spaces and histories, or may otherwise exist in a tangible sense – be they the artists' private studios or homes; spaces typically inaccessible to a public audience that can arguably be considered as physical manifestations of the psyche. Either way, underpinning the explorations of these intimate domains are often traces of obscured, oscillating personal struggles, and evidence of the artists' exertions in overcoming them to regain footing.

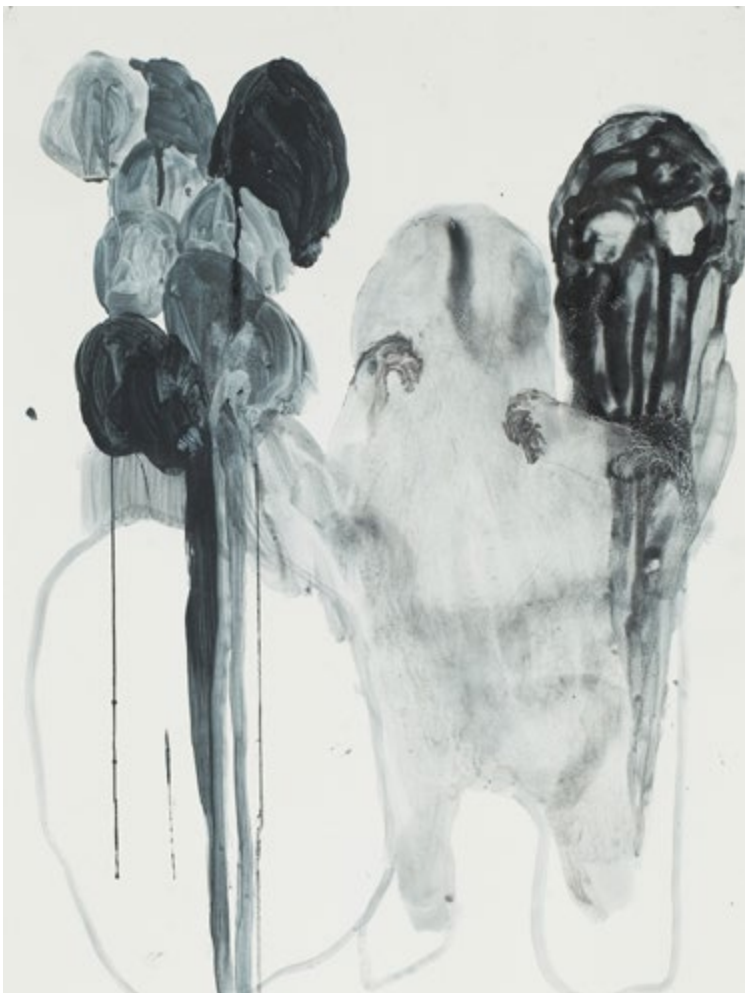
George's series of mixed-media drawings on found remnants of cardboard are first encountered in the thoroughfare leading into the gallery. In these the focus is as much about the contrast of treated and untreated surface area as it is about the interplay between marks forged by a controlled hand and those that have come about via chance. Juxtaposed textures alternate between bleeding washes and deliberate blocks of graphite or charcoal, affecting a range of tensions intensified by areas of exposed board – each one loaded with its own unique presence of memory.

Upon entering the exhibition space proper, one is faced with a landscape of esoteric elements. Atop a concrete slab (cast by George in collaboration with her father) are the earnest remains of a cathartic exercise in which George burned piles of her old artworks, smoking out several years of collected storage in the process. The result: a mound of ashes, supported by a glossy black vessel molded from paper-mâché, also fashioned from recycled artwork. Rusted, rustic star pickets rest on the wall beside a montage of discoloured backs of photographs, with which the artist intends to interact and ultimately dissolve through the duration of the show. Each of these materials were sourced directly from specific sites that were at one point a home to members of the artist's bloodline; their persisting physical presence, in spite of their obliqueness, hints at a recurrent history of denial and fragmentation within George's past and present familial narratives.

In the wake of the sudden loss of her Christchurch home following the devastating chain of earthquakes since 2010, Williamson revisits the motions of map plotting within her artwork as mechanism for navigating inner turmoil. *No more wishes on broken bones* sees two enlarged bird furcula bones rendered in plaster to appear as though fossilised. These lay askew on the ground, leaving chalky white trails that echo the migration patterns of various sea birds. So too does her wall work *Flight Path*, which focuses particularly on the route flown by the arctic tern, a species native to both the coastline of Williamson's hometown in Eastern New Zealand and of her new base in Western Australia. It is perhaps due to the terns' perpetual life of relocation and isolation that the artist has turned to the bird as a motif for orientation within her own displacement. Her visceral line work – configured from charcoal and petroleum jelly – unfurls into the space, echoing the bird's outstretched wingspan. Entangled amongst them are references to the anatomy of birds, as well as fractured parts of the human body, printed in charcoal on sheets of paper that are stitched together like wounded flesh.

Traversing this dynamic range of media and forms is a unifying rawness, sincerity and vulnerability. While these qualities act to authenticate the integrity of the processes surrounding the work displayed, they also elicit closer engagement. As privileged viewers, we see amalgamated excerpts of the artists' private studios or, more specifically, of their developmental experiments over the past six months. Interior processes have been inverted with the help of diagrammatic devices, thus disclosing the typically negative or hidden spaces within the artists' practices and lives.

Kate Mullen



TEELAH GEORGE completed a Bachelor of Arts at Curtin University of Technology in 2006, receiving First Class Honours and the studio academic achievement award in 2007. George has since contributed work to a number of group exhibitions and residencies both locally and internationally, a list that most recently includes a solo exhibition, *Meatworks Mens QRTRS*, at OK Gallery in Perth, and a residency at Fremantle Arts Centre as a part of their Artist in Residence program.

SHANNON WILLIAMSON attained a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours at Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, in 2009, and was the recipient of the university's Ethel Susan Jones Travelling Scholarship in 2010 and again in 2012. Having exhibited extensively in solo and group exhibitions throughout New Zealand, the artist relocated to Perth in 2012 to undertake two research-based residencies: SymbioticA and Fremantle Arts Centre as a part of their Artist in Residence program. Williamson is represented by Brooke Gifford Gallery, Christchurch.

The work presented in this exhibition is produced through the residency program at Fremantle Arts Centre.

This page:
Teelah George
Family Clumping 2013
graphite on watercolour paper

Cover:
Shannon Williamson
No More Wishes on Broken Bones (no way home) (detail) 2013
charcoal and petroleum jelly on print