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Sophy Rickett

The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows

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Name:

Sophy Rickett

Output Title:

The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows

Output Type:

Artefact

Date of Publication:

27 September 2019



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Project Overview

The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows represents the culmination of a five-year practice based research project. Through a series of 41 photographic works, a 3,500 word text and a methodology, the project explores ways in which the botanical, cultural, political, social and economic legacies of Victorian privilege and wealth are fetishised or neutralised, through the politics and protocols of heritage culture. History – and historical research methods – are understood as the incomplete outcomes of arbitrary, subjective and ideologically entrenched processes of accessioning and deaccessioning, within the institution and beyond.

The initial inspiration for the project was the life and work of Thereza Dillwyn Llewelyn, a little-known female photographic pioneer, artist and astronomer who was active at the end of the 19th Century. The project combines site visits with original primary research into the papers, documents and photographic archives produced by Dillwyn Llewelyn during her life. The archives are held between the British

Library, and Museum of Wales – and while they hold a substantial amount of material, neither has before now been the subject of a sustained enquiry such as this.

The project explores the legacy of Tereza Dillwyn Llewelyn, particularly in relation to her own subjective individuality, as well as her (formally unacknowledged) authorship of some of the works in her father's archive. More broadly, the project addresses ideas of female agency and the history of photography, with the landscape and geography of the Gower Peninsula in Wales. In it, Rickett establishes links between a remote world of Victorian privilege, early photography, and her own experience of life, work and photographic culture in 21st Century Britain. The project also develops Rickett's interest in archival practices, in particular how the heritage industry stages 'entry points' through which the past is made visible. Using photography and text, she explores the limits of these points, understanding that the place where a trail goes cold – the denial of access, the withholding of permission - can be productive and generative in itself.

Output*The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows*

Other

This research project is an exhibition with an accompanying publication and work about the methodology.

- 1) *The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows* (publication)

Title: *The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows*

Publisher: GOST Books

Published: September 2019

Size: 210x290 mm

PP: 80 pages, inc. 41 duotone image reproductions, 3500 word text

Cover: Hardback, cloth covered foil deboss

ISBN: 978-1-910401-30-9

- 2) Cupid and the Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows (exhibition of artefact)

Venue: Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Alexandra Rd, Swansea SA1 5DZ

Dates: 27 September 2019 – 23 February

2020

Cupid and The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows was a site-specific installation of the artefacts - comprising 24 b/w silver bromide prints, vinyl wall text and a new temporary *conservation-intervention*, Cupid with Surface Dirt/35. Circle on a Plane (produced with Jenny Williamson) on a historic painting by Mario di Fiore c.1650

List of works:

Woman on a Beach, 2017/2018, 25 x 20cm, Silver Bromide print, paper collage.

Tree (divided) Margam Mountain, 2019, 50 x 66cm, Silver Bromide print.

Young Girl, 1973/2019, 27 x 22cm, Silver Bromide print (from archival negative).

Dead Dog, Woodberry Down, 2017, 27 x 22cm, c-type print.

Carpark, Caswell Bay, 2018, 26 x 21cm, c-type print.

Apartments, Caswell Bay, 2016, 33 x 46cm, Silver Bromide print.

Young Woman/ Obsevation (5), 1998/2019, 40 x 57cm, Silver Bromide print.

Tree, Kenfig Burrows, 2019, 34 x 48cm,

Silver Bromide print.

Caswell Bay (1), 2016, 50 x 50cm, Silver Bromide print.

Stones, Kenfig Burrows, 2019, 34 x 37cm, Silver Bromide print.

Hearing Aids, 2019, 34 x 37cm, Silver Bromide print.

Fossilised Earbone of a Whale, 2018/2019, 64 x 64cm, Silver Bromide print.

Archivist (2), Photographic Collections, National Museum Wales, Cardiff, 2016, 27 x 22cm, Silver Bromide print.

Archivist (1), Photographic Collections, National Museum Wales, Cardiff, 2016, 27 x 22cm, Silver Bromide print.

Plait, 2019, 27 x 22cm, Silver Bromide print.

Young Woman/Observation (2), 1998/2019, 20 x 26cm, Silver Bromide print (from archival negative).

Plastic Flowers, Plastic Onions, National Museum Wales, 2018, 40 x 40cm, Silver Bromide print.

Dunes, Kenfig Burrows, 2019, 40 x 40cm, Silver Bromide print.

Young Woman/Observation (3), 1998/2019, 26 x 21cm, Silver Bromide print (from archival negative).

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Rockall, 1961/2019, 50 x 75cm, Silver
Bromide print (composite from two archival
negatives) .

Caswell Bay (3), 2016, 50 x 50cm, Silver
Bromide print.

Caswell Bay (2), 2016, 50 x 50cm, Silver
Bromide print.

Cupid with Surface Dirt/35, Circle on a
Plane.

3) Cupid with Surface Dirt/35. Circle on a
Plane (methodology)



A selection of 8 works from the book – all silver bromide.

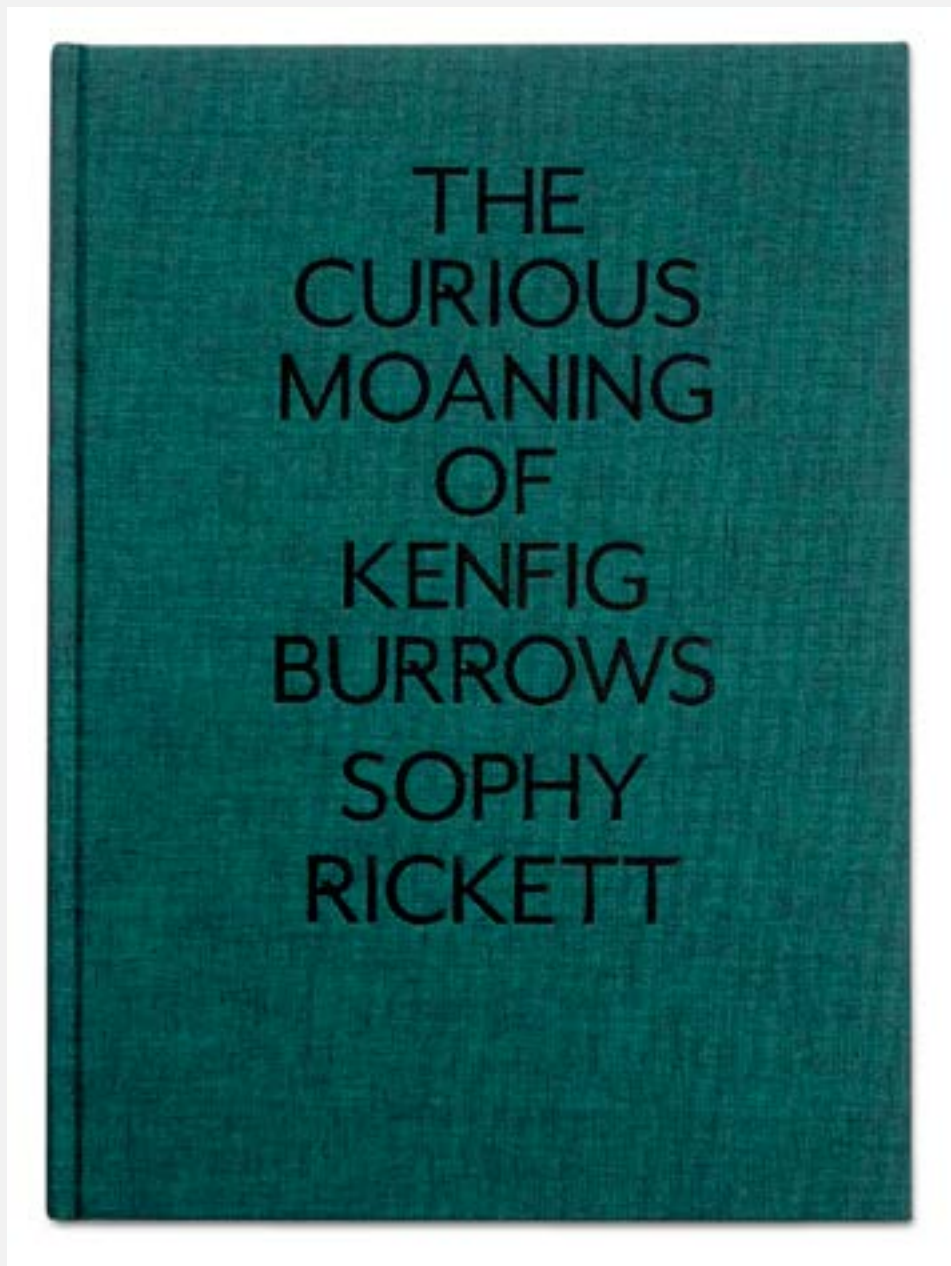


A selection of 8 works from the book –
all silver bromide.





A selection of 8 works from the book – all silver bromide.



Cover of *The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows* publication, GOST Books, London, November 2019



Images of the book



Cupid and *The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows*, Glynn Vivian Gallery, Swansea, Wales October 2019 – February 2020 – installation of photographic works in Gallery 7, with Cupid with Surface Dirt/35.



Circle on a Plane (produced with Jenny Williamson) a 'conservation-intervention' enacted on a historic painting (attrib. Mario di Fiore) c.1650.



Installation of works from *The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows*, September 2019 - February 2020, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, Wales.

Context & Questions

Context

The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows is an extended practice based research project, grounded in the ideas and discourse of conceptual photographic practice that evolved over a period of five years. In the work, Rickett tests and demonstrates the capacity of photography (and writing) to function across different modalities - as a document, as a performance, as process, as an ideological tool, as a means of experiencing the world. It is an approach to practice that combines still imagery with captioning, titling and text, and builds upon work by artists such as Gerard Byrne (Gestalt Forms of Loch Ness – Grid Site Sequence, 2012) or Walid Raad (The Atlas Group, 1989 - 2004), whose methodologies combine research and analysis of certain geo political contexts (Raad) or culturally significant texts or other outputs (Byrne) with strategies such as restaging, or the construction of whole new narratives, in order to explore the processes and protocols of photographic representation itself.

The work of artist and writer Allan Sekula (1951 - 2013) is also an important

cornerstone for this type of photography. Known for his pioneering approach, Sekula (Fish Story 1989 - 1995); *The Forgotten Space* 2012) revitalised documentary practice in the post war era, by formulating a critical framework, inspired by Marxist theory, with which to conceptualise the relationships between image and text (both long form and captioning). Sekula played a key role in developing a practice where a body of work emerged out of a long period of sustained and rigorous research, rather than an approach that foregrounded the more formal or pictorial characteristics of photography.

In relation to heritage industries and the archive, *The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows* draws upon work by writer Caitlin Desilvey (*Curated Decay*, 2017), whose work explores the politics and protocols of the heritage and conservation industries by calling for a focus on the transience, contingency and impermanence of material and biological processes as an important characteristic of a monument or place – and necessary in understanding (or denoting)

their ‘meaning’. The work of writers such as Kathleen Jamie (*Surfacing*, 2019); Robert Macfarlane (*Underland*, 2019); Olivia Laing (*The Lonely City*, 2016); Rebecca Solnit (*Faraway Nearby*, 2013); Elizabeth-Jane Burnett (*The Grassling*, 2020), whose work acknowledges their own subjective positions as an inescapable element in their understanding of place. Rickett has built upon the work of these writers by introducing the element of photography (as a process, as a performance and as mode of representation) as mediator of territory, history, archive and place.

Questions

To what extent can an artist's process and intervention offer alternative readings to 'heritage' narratives, thereby challenging those which are so often loaded with ideologies that fetishise (or neutralise) the cultural, political and economic legacies of Victorian privilege, violence and wealth?

To what extent do the subjective, affective and contingent processes of creating art feature in the supposedly more objective and scientifically determined processes of Conservation and Restoration? How can the invisible labour, and the role of the Conservator be brought more into the public view?

→

What is the evidence that there are cases of misattribution of authorship in The John Dillwyn Llewelyn Collection in Cardiff? To what extent can Thereza Dillwyn Llewelyn be proven to be author and/or printer of several of the works in the archive, that are currently attributed to John Dillwyn Llewelyn?

Insights

Insights

Representing five years of research (primary archival research as well as studio based visual research), the publication, and exhibition focusses on Thereza Dillwyn Llewlyn – taking her life and work as a case study with which to explore and critique some of the practices and protocols of the heritage and archive industries more broadly.

Not previously known for her photographic and artwork – this project brings the work of Thereza Dillwyn Llewlyn more directly in to view. The project has uncovered new insights about her and her contribution to the John Dillwyn Llewlyn Collection, by affirming the significance of her role in the production (both taking and printing) of the photographs in the archive – all of which until this point - have been solely attributed to her father, John. The project has also generated a new understanding of Dillwyn Llewlyn's interior life – beyond that as subject in her father's photographs. Combining thorough analysis of her documents, papers and drawings with the imaginative process of subjectification and empathy, more affective and responsive

modes of knowledge and understanding are generated.

Through combining imagery and text, Rickett foregrounds the subjectivity of the researcher, bringing the tools of the researcher (conceptual, practical, methodological) into view, through describing the physicality of the institutional spaces, the denial of access due to gatekeeping by the archivist, the sensory affects of being in the reading room, and retracing Thereza's steps by walking through the landscapes that are described in her diaries and pictured in the photographic archives.

In relation to investigating the processes and protocols of the heritage and archive industries, Rickett worked with Conservator Jenny Williamson to develop a new methodology that mirrors, reflects, and represents the similarities as well as some of the tensions, between the distinct, but related, fields of fine art practice and conservation. Their 'conservation-intervention' is proposed as a replicable

methodology that considers the role of aesthetics in the field of restoration/heritage, exploring how subjective, affective processes are a part of more objective, finite, scientific ones. Thus, the subjectivity, contingency, creative decision making and to an extent, arbitrariness that is a feature of much conservation practice is highlighted and brought into public view.

Methods

Methods

Rickett was first commissioned in 2015 by Helen Sear and Katy Freer/Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, to develop some work in response to The John Dillwyn Llewelyn Collection in Cardiff – an extensive archive of photographic prints, and lantern slides, all dating c.1840 - 1870. Rickett was invited to visit the archive and the site of his former estate – Penllergaer Valley Woods, which was at that time, undergoing an extensive restoration project. It was on that first trip that Rickett realised the significance of John's daughter Thereza's contribution to the archive. At this point, it was assumed that Thereza had contributed to the archive, but this was anecdotal and had not at that stage been confirmed.

What followed from that initial visit was a period of about a year's research – where Rickett made several repeat visits to the archive, to Penllergaer, and to other places mentioned in the papers, and seen in the photographs, including Caswell Bay, Kenfig Burrows, Margam Mountain, and Sketty. Rickett also visited the British Library and read all her papers and notes in their original

for, writing and making notes as she went. The more Rickett read, the more she realised that Thereza had a more substantial role in the production of the archive than has been previously documented. Rickett continued her research, combining the information she uncovered through reading the original papers with her own subjective impressions and interpretations.

Rickett made photographs as the project evolved, about 500 in total, which were edited down to 24 for the exhibition and 41 for the publication. She produced a 3,500 word text that moves between different locations, points in time, and subjective positions, so that the narrative operates both as a source of information about Thereza and her life as well as a distraction away from it; tangents, interruptions and other forms of aside function as a conceptual device to allow a distracted and restless yet fully embodied self to construct a new non-chronological version of events. Woven through the text are photographs made at locations associated with Thereza's life, film stills made on location, and images sourced

from internet searches. Photographic representation thereby oscillates between abstraction, pictorialism and illustration.

Rickett was also drawn to the collection from the point of view of its own '*archive-hood*', developing an interest in the archive as a subject, but also recognising the conditions in which that subject was held as a subject in itself and not, as is so often understood, invisible and assumed.

When, in 2017, Rickett was invited to exhibit the work in a solo presentation at Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, she was also invited to select work(s) from the collection to exhibit alongside her own work. She visited the store, and encountered the painting of Cupid, its surface and frame covered in a thick layer of dirt. Apart from it being listed as one of the items in Glynn Vivian's initial 1911 bequest, very little was known about its provenance. Rickett was struck by the painting, interested in the thick layer of dirt, which she imagined as a forensic layer of time that acted like a veil over the subject of the painting, drawing a connection between →

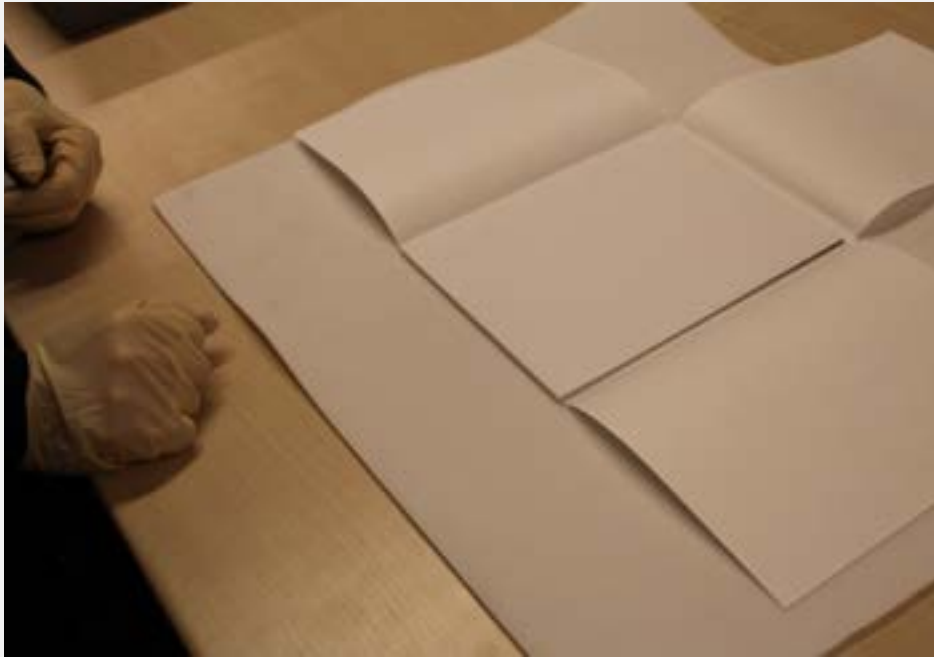
the film of coal dust that obscured its subject, and the dark smoke of the colliery mines so intrinsic to life in that part of the world. Rickett approached Glynn Vivian's conservator Jenny Williamson, who, after considering and consulting with peers, embarked on the conservation journey of Cupid, agreeing to the pause in the middle, to allow it to be exhibited in a partially restored state, alongside the photographic works and text.

The creation of a small test patch in a discrete corner of a painting is a normal part of the conservation process. What is unusual in this project, is the positioning and shape of the cleaned area. The circular motif, near the centre of the painting suggests a peephole through time, or the lens of a camera. It is a gestural flourish that emphasises the subject (Cupid and his sleeping eye); a radical departure from the normal protocols of conservation technique.

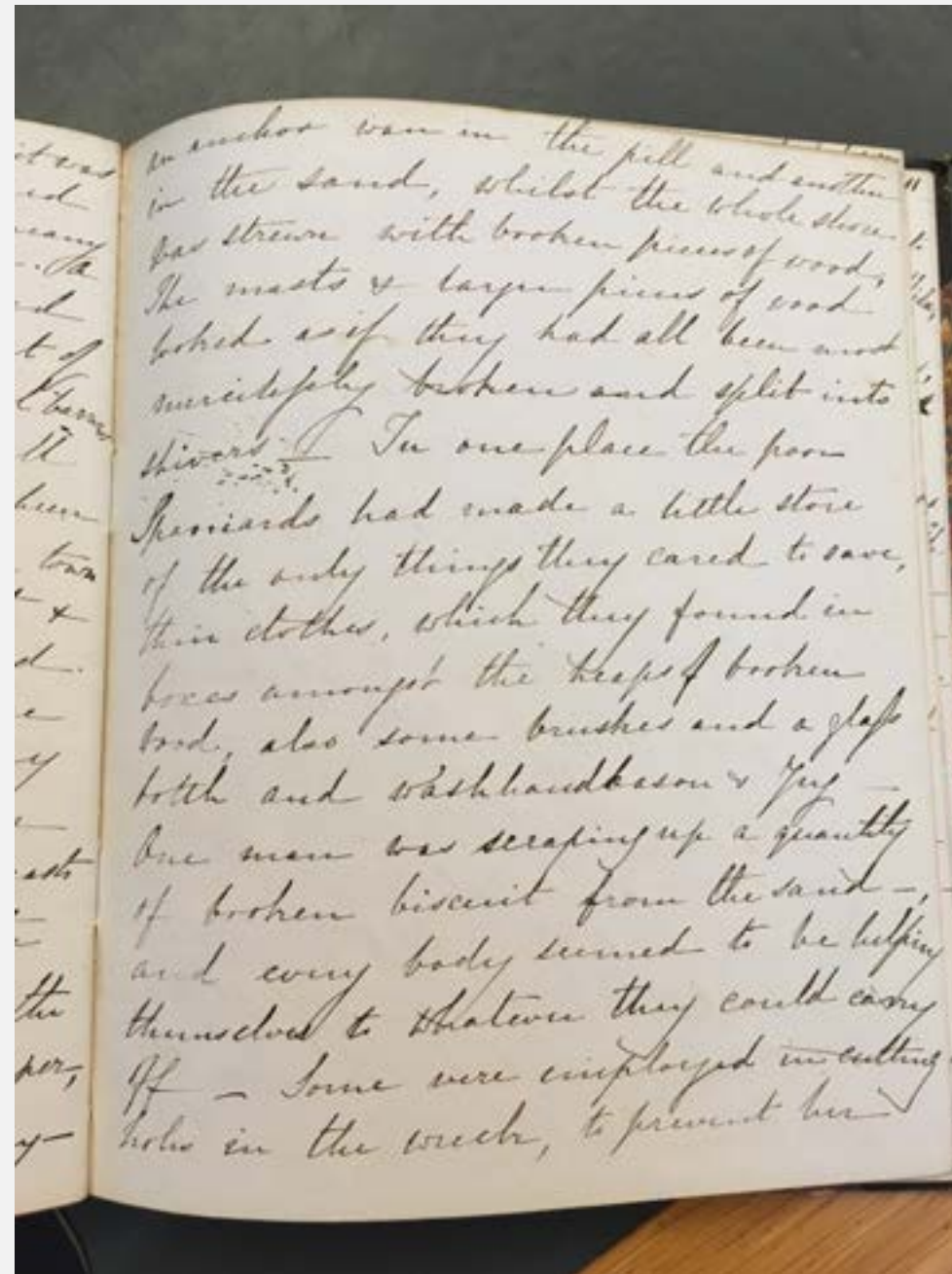
The ethical questions raised by the '*conservation-intervention*' are complex, starting with issues relating to the agency of

the original artist, and the possibility this project raises of working against the artist's (Di Fiori's) original intentions. To what extent does a temporary intervention of this nature compromise the artist's original intention, and how might that compromise be mitigated?

Rickett and Williamson propose the '*conservation-intervention*' a replicable strategy – a methodological approach to public engagement and conservation practice that could provide space for an institution to activate new interpretations and understandings of objects in their collection, to challenge 'intuitive' and/or received ideas already in circulation, to reveal the hidden cultural labour of the conservator, and to participate in and advance debates around institutional responsibility, culpability and ethics.



Visit to The John Dillwyn Collection Archive, Cardiff Museum, April 2017. Image in archive of Thereza Dillwyn Llewelyn looking out to sea with a telescope – discussed in the text.



Page from diary of Thereza Dillwyn Llewelyn in The British Library, London. Accessed September 2016.



Site visit to Margam County Park, November 2018.





First visit to Penllergaer, with artists,
trip organised by Katy Freer and
Helen Sear. 11 June 2015.



First visit to Penllergaer, trip organised
by Katy Freer and Helen Sear.
11 June 2015.



Cupid, c.1650 attrib. Mario di Fiore – in storage – first encountered during visit to Glynn Vivian Art Gallery collection, November 2018. The painting was covered in a thick layer of dust and dirt and there were no records of it ever having been exhibited in public.



Cupid (c.1650) on easel in conservation studio at Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea.



Detail of Cupid (c.1650) showing extent of dust and dirt on surface of painting.



Conservator Jenny Williamson, examining the surface of the painting, before the conservation-intervention was agreed to by the institution. April 2019, Conservation Studio, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea.



Printing silver bromides for exhibition.
Metro Imaging, London 19 July
2019.



Installation of *Cupid and the Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows*, Gallery 7, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, September 2019.

Dissemination

Dissemination

<https://www.glynnvivan.co.uk/whats-on/sophy-rickett-cupid-and-the-curious-moaning-of-kenfig-burrows/>

Group exhibitions featuring *The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows*

[Zeitspuren: The Power of Now](#)

Venue: Pasquart

Dates: 9 September-18 November 2018

[The Moon and a Smile](#)

Venue: Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Alexandra Rd, Swansea SA1 5DZ

Dates: 4 March–23 April 2017

Family Engagement Activity

Working with the organisation [White Wall Yellow Door](#), we produced a kids' activity, to help disseminate some of the ideas that the Cupid intervention explored, to a wider audience.

Event included demonstration of conservation work Cupid and free family activity inspired by the project.

Reach and esteem

The project was originally commissioned by Katy Freer and Helen Sear for a group exhibition, *The Moon and a Smile* to be held at Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, Wales in spring 2017.

The publication was shortlisted (down to final 3) for the Kraszna Kraus Photography Book Award 2020- link to a film created by the Kraszna Kraus Foundation is here:

<https://vimeo.com/454791052/094f65e862>

The publication *The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows* was reviewed here

[The Brooklyn Rail](#)

[The British Journal of Photography](#)

[Photomonitor](#)

Speaker at Peer Review Conferences

Cupid, Canvas, Circle, Plane: Conservation and Conceptual Fine Art Practice – paper by Sophy Rickett and Jenny Williamson.

[Conservation and Philosophy: Intersections and Interactions](#) organised by ICC (The International Institute for Conservation of

Historic and Artistic Works) 26 and 27 November 2020.

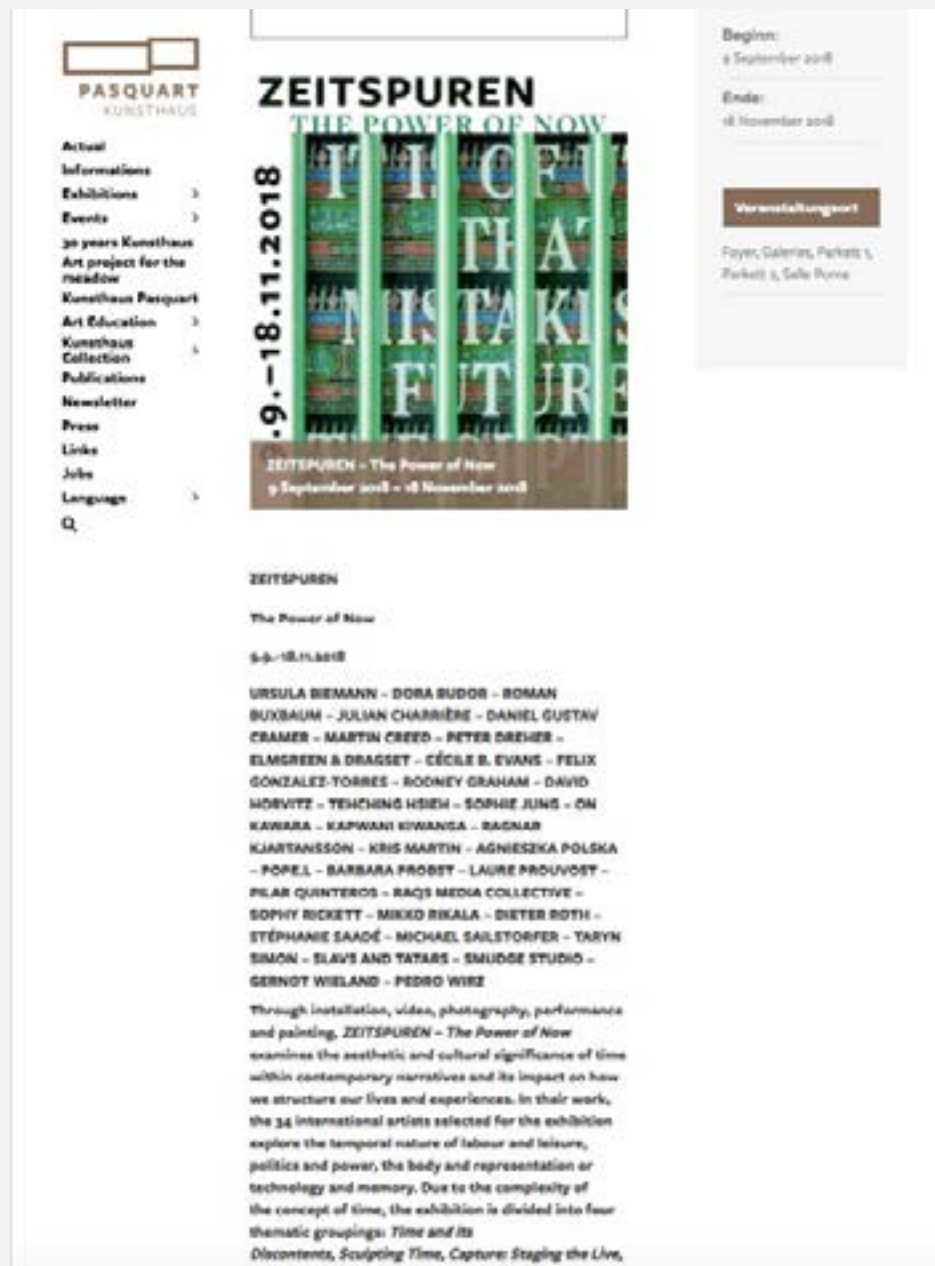
[Landscape, Drunkenness, Affect](#) - a paper by Liz Orton and Sophy Rickett, delivered in plenary convened by Orton and Rickett) at the Royal Geographic Society Annual Conference, 2017 called Speculative landscapes: art as geographic practice.

Talks

21 November 2019, Invited to present findings in [talk at Glynn Vivian Gallery Swansea](#) to public audience.

Sophy Rickett in conversation with artist Rut Blees Luxemburg, 21 November 2019 at Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea – ticketed event for public audience.

The Curious Moaning of Kenfig Burrows was discussed by internationally renowned curator, and Director of IoP, New York, David Campany in a symposium at Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea on 4 March 2017.



Zeitspuren: The Power of Now at Pasquart, 9 September-18 November 2018.



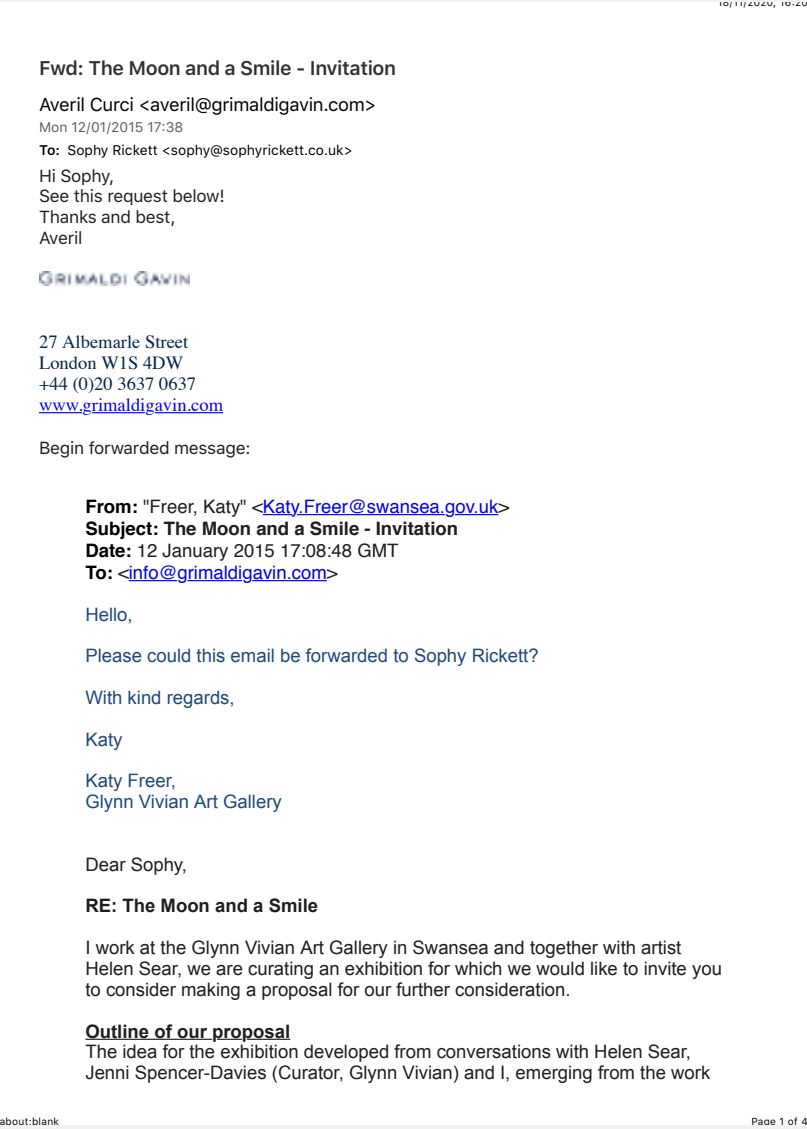
Screen shot of Glynn Vivian Gallery exhibition archive, showing information about the exhibition. The exhibition dates were extended twice, and in the end it closed on 20 February 2020.



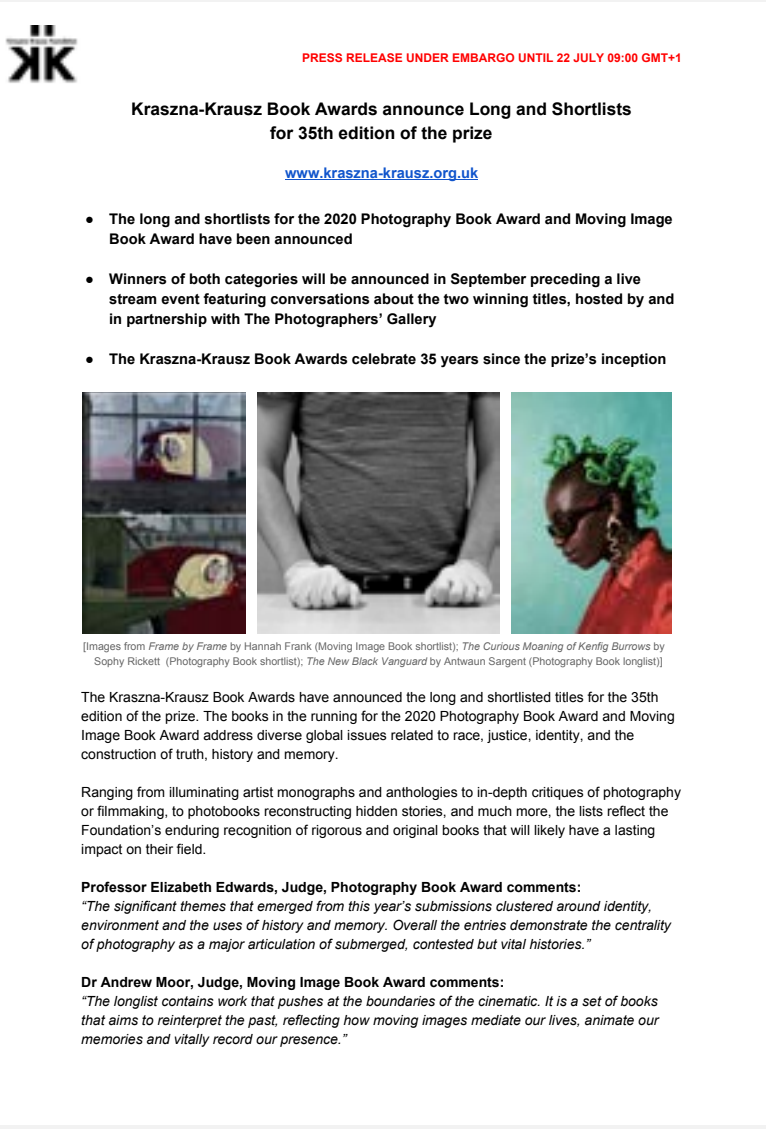
Family Workshop at Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea hosted by Jenny Williamson and Sophy Rickett. 11 January 2020.



Free family activity, produced for the project by White Wall Yellow Door. Selection of images that show the kids activity – produced by White Wall Yellow Door to help families with children engage with the ideas.



Copy of email with initial invitation. The project was originally commissioned by Katy Freer and Helen Sear for a group exhibition, *The Moon and a Smile* to be held at Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, Wales in spring 2017.



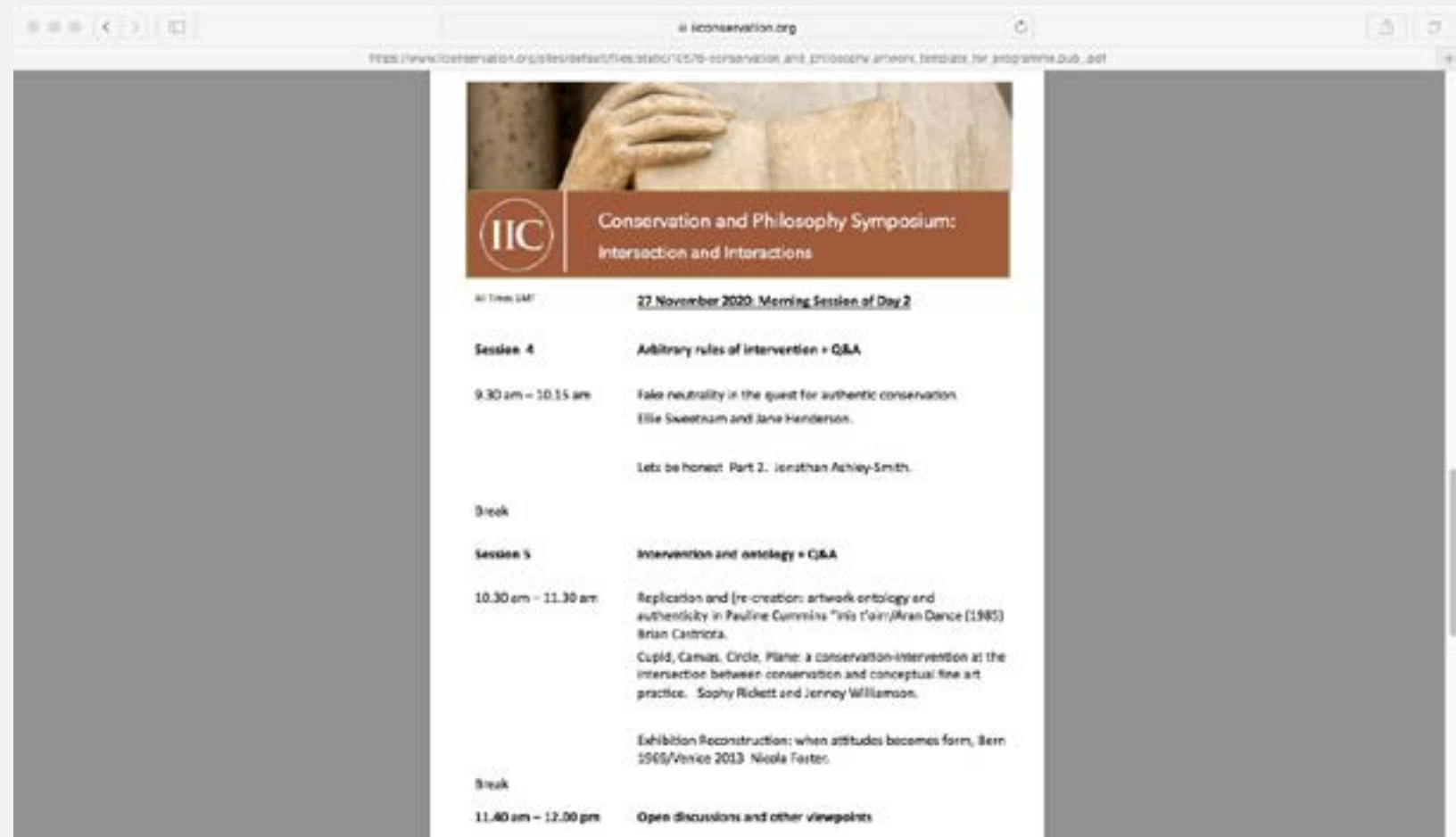
Press release announcing Kraszna Kraus Photography Book Award, 2020 Shortlist and Longlist.



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