

Wasteland or Wonderland? New Fitzwilliam exhibition explores the wild edges of our cities

Edgelands

Prints by George Shaw and Michael Landy

27 March to 23 September 2012 | The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge will be displaying two portfolios of contemporary prints that inspire ideas about 'edgelands' – the forgotten, overlooked hinterlands neither city nor countryside, on the urban edge.

Edgelands are those areas that are like a threshold between the two worlds, carrying aspects of both, but representing neither – they are a third type of environment overlooked by most people. The exhibition features landscapes and weeds not usually considered beautiful or picturesque. Drawn by two of Britain's leading contemporary artists, the portfolios *Twelve Short Walks* by George Shaw and *Nourishment* by Michael Landy throw light on these forgotten areas of our cities. The two artists capture different aspects of life on the edge, making us question our preconceptions – can mundane places and ordinary lives become extraordinary when we stop to look?

The idea of the lost urban wilderness of edgelands has become a popular topic in contemporary culture. From stories about their potential environmental importance as habitats, through city foraging walks for edible plants, to movie settings for novels such as J. G. Ballard's 'Crash', edgelands have moved from counter-culture to mainstream. They have been explored in poetry, TV, film and literature, including the 2011 book *Edgelands, Journeys into England's True Wilderness* by the poets Paul Farley and Michael Symmons, which discusses Shaw's and Landy's prints.

George Shaw was shortlisted for the 2011 Turner Prize. Like his paintings, Shaw's prints have a strong autobiographical feeling and *Twelve Short Walks* revisits scenes of his childhood on the Tile Hill council estate in the suburbs of Coventry. Using drawing and painting to create the prints, many of the images create an uncanny, anxious mood through unusual use of viewpoints – the paths that lead into the prints promising an uncertain end to each walk. In this way Shaw explores the haunting sense of loss between his memory and the place revisited, conveying his anxiety at feeling 'out of place' in the landscape of his own past.



Twelve Short Walks, 2005
© George Shaw



Detail from *Nourishment*, 2002
© Michael Landy

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Michael Landy is best known for his 2001 piece of performance art called Break Down, where he systematically catalogued and destroyed all of his worldly possessions in a former C&A store on Oxford Street, London. Surprisingly, for his next project he chose to do a series of very carefully observed drawings of wild plants, which is the portfolio now displayed in Edgelands. Entitled Nourishment, the prints look at the overlooked vegetation found growing through the cracks of pavements, at the margins of car parks and on waste ground. Landy collected a selection of these 'street flowers', and drew meticulous and highly detailed life-sized images of them on etching plates. Weeds are the neglected flora of edgelands, often defined as flowers 'out of place', just as the patches of landscape at the edge of suburban estates provide unexpected encounters with 'countryside' in unexpected places.

As well as the edgelands theme, these portfolios both share a heightened focus on everyday subjects as well as remarkable attention to detail in draughtsmanship and the process and effects of printmaking.

The Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Timothy Potts commented: "All the prints featured in Edgelands were made using traditional printmaking techniques in a fresh way: in particular etching and lithography. Although this is a contemporary look at things, both artists were making very carefully observed drawings with long-established methods. It is an accessible exhibition that should appeal to those interested in the new and the traditional."

The curator of the exhibition, Craig Hartley commented: "It should be stressed that when the prints were made, the artists would not have had any concept or agenda of 'edgelands' in mind. But there is a growing cultural interest in this unexplored zone and these prints have become part of that broader discussion. It touches us all personally. We all walk through similarly neglected landscapes in our own lives: ordinary places that become extraordinary when we stop to look and rethink the familiar things we take for granted, perhaps because an artist has shown us a different way of looking at them, or because we are revisiting them after time has changed our point of view."

In addition to his portfolio 12 Short Walks, this exhibition includes all of the other prints made by George Shaw to date. These include later prints made for Paragon Press, and new lithographs made at Hole Editions, Newcastle, which are being displayed for the first time

- Ends -

For further information and images contact the Marketing and Press Office:

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Notes to editors:

Edgelands: Prints by George Shaw and Michael Landy | 27 March to 23 September 2012
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB
ADMISSION FREE

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00
Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00
CLOSED: Mondays, Good Friday 6 April, Queen's Jubilee 5 June

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Further information about the artists and their works:

George Shaw (born 1966)

Twelve Short Walks, 2005

Portfolio of 12 etchings (dust-grain gravure)

Printed on Magnami Handmade Ivory wove paper, 21.2 x 29.7 cm (plate) 41 x 49.5 cm (sheet), no. 21 of 42 sets

Proofed and editioned by Hugh Stoneman and published by Charles Booth-Clibborn under his imprint The Paragon Press, London, 2005.

Bought from the Pollock Fund with the assistance of the Art Fund 2011

Michael Landy (born 1963)

Nourishment, 2002

Portfolio of 12 etchings.

Printed on 350sgm Hahnmuhle paper, 89 x 77.3 cm (sheet-size; plate-size varies), no. 29 of 37 sets.

Proofed and editioned at Hope Sufferance Press and published by Charles Booth-Clibborn under his imprint The Paragon Press, London, 2002.

Given by The Friends of the Fitzwilliam 2003

The Fitzwilliam Museum

Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge, with collections exploring world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century and outstanding collections of applied arts, ceramics, coins, and Asian arts.

Welcoming over 400,000 visitors a year, the Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation.

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