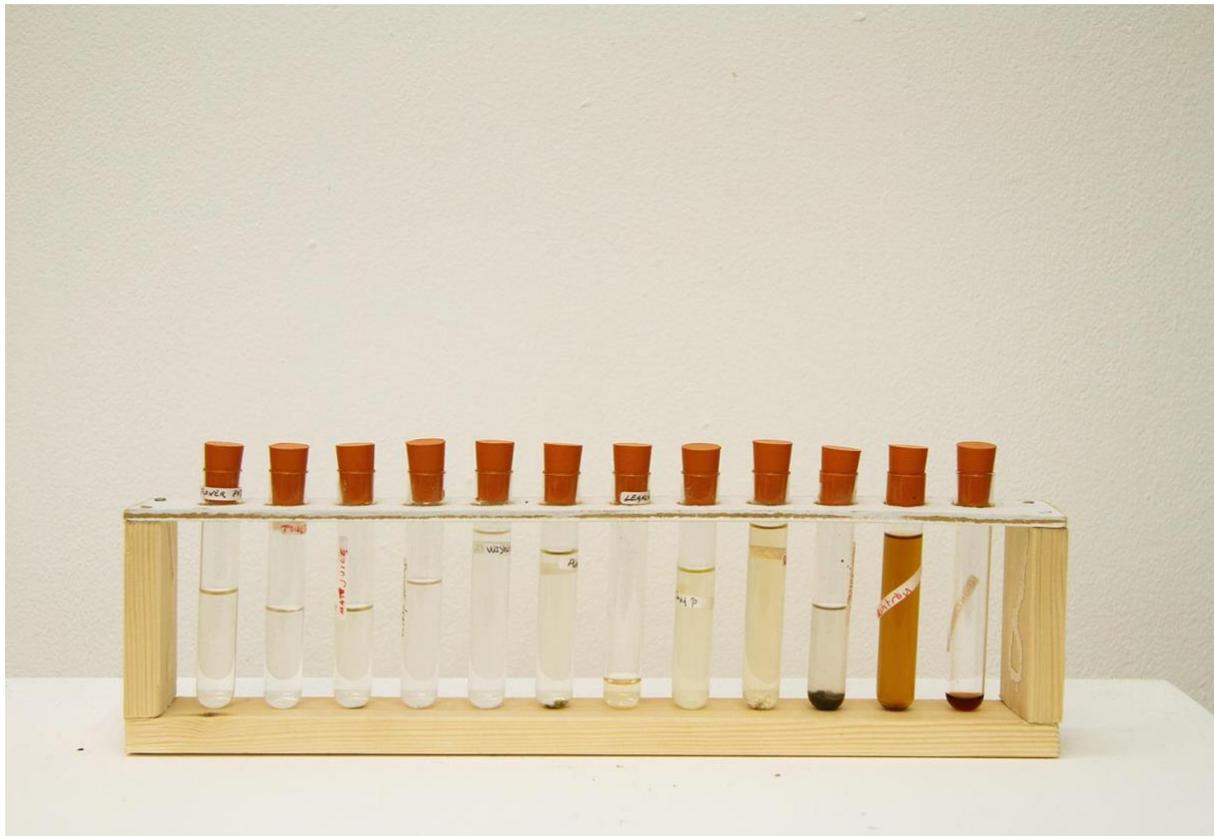


Dirty Waters by Charles Robert Harrison (edited by Katie Simpson)

N — E 9 W "(S) Seasonal School at Jupiter Woods



(Collected water samples)

Introduction

Water is vital for all known forms of life, but it is colourless, tasteless, odourless and provides no calories or organic nutrients. In the UK we are lucky to have potable drinking water available on demand, but water is a finite resource, and in some parts of the world people rely on unsafe water sources. Water is becoming scarcer in certain places and its future availability is a major social and economic concern. Currently, about a billion people around the world routinely drink unhealthy water. Poor water quality and bad sanitation are deadly; some five million deaths a year are caused by polluted drinking water. Bacterial contamination of water may not be detected by taste, smell or sight and can be caused by floods or animal waste entering a well. Public water supplies should be tested regularly, but contamination can also happen in the home, i.e. in water tanks or bad plumbing.

Workshop Description (15/03/19 – 2:30pm-5pm)

The chaotic nature of habitation at Jupiter Woods has left many visitors uncertain of the water quality on site. The status of the water received through the pipes, taps, showers, pools and toilets is unknown and the decision to drink, bathe or discard water is based on trust – inhabitants are still alive, and no immediate upset is evident. We wouldn't normally look deeper into rainwater or drink from the toilet – but maybe this water has the best qualities? How could we know until we brought some order to this system?



(Toilet and pipes at Jupiter woods)

After introductory readings (details below), participants in this workshop were asked to draw out and imagine sources and movement of water on the Jupiter Woods site. Twelve samples were identified, collected and labelled:

- bathroom drip
- ashtray
- pipe juice
- roof leak
- swamp
- leaking pipe
- plant pot
- washing machine
- shower drain
- mat juice
- toilet bowl
- flowerpot

These samples were tested for bacteria, lead, iron, fluoride, cyanuric acid, carbonate, alkalinity, copper, bromine, pesticides, nitrates, nitrites, chlorine, pH and hardness. A full drinking water safety test was conducted on the water from the kitchen tap and a further sample from the 'swamp' was tested for bacteria's E.coli, serratia, enterobacter, ctirobacter and klebsiella, which if positive would have been detected by UV light. Participants were asked to label, analyse, interpret and consume their samples.



ON THE LOCK GATES AT EARITH

*“A Sea of Land, far reaching to the sky,
Long dykes, whose mist at even dims the air.
Tall reeds and wavering grass, the lonesome lair
Whence startled coot and duck and moorhen fly.
The plovers’ call, the herons’ plaintive cry,
Break the soft stillness born of nature’s prayer
Till birds and reeds and stream all seem to share
The calm in which rushes scarcely sigh.
O lone Fenland, where silent nature sleeps
As through they meads the sluggish river creeps,
Edged by the blue forget-me-not, towards the sea.
They who best know thee, know thy bosom keeps
Deep stored, great lessons all may learn of thee,
O dim weird land, enwrapped in mystery.”*

T.F.Fullard

Motivations and Memories

Katie and I grew up in the Lincolnshire Fens which has a beguiling relationship to water. Now fertile for industrial agriculture, this land originally belonged to the sea and was drained in the 1630s (although earlier Roman hydraulics also survive). The workshop started with readings from texts relating to this history including the above poem by T.F.Fullard from *Old Dykes I Have Known* (Peter R.



Charnley, 1997) and the introduction to *From Punt to Plough* (Rex Sly, 2003) describing the deep pride and connection to the land that many fenland dwellers feel. This pride remains embedded and life in Lincs is slow. Political and personal allegiances are strong. In recent times the area has seen migrant labour arrive to work the fields and Boston and South Holland (the districts where our families live) recorded two of the highest Brexit votes in the UK. Local councils are in the midst of deep cuts and there is limited cultural investment so whilst the flood defences hold, there is a rising tide of tension and division.

The workshop also featured a short [video](#) from KTN News in Kenya. This broadcast from 2018 detailed how the government was advising Kenyans to collect and store all rainwater to protect water supplies in case of upcoming drought. I was born in Nairobi and feel oddly bonded to Kenya, but my family left when I was 2 years old so these resonances are not based in memories I can recall or trust. Though displaced, I channel virtual news from this

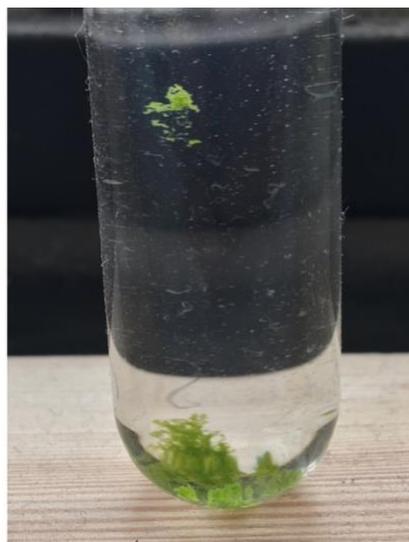
nation but have never physically returned. This (birth)place is at another water extreme, where community survival does not depend on holding water back but harvesting every drop gifted from the sky.

These personal insights aimed at grounding the workshop in a wider context, but the focus on the day was very much on site; within the boundaries of the inhabited space. Our current home is at Jupiter Woods, so for the workshop we were particularly interested in addressing liquid flows within the space. The water testing felt like a detour from other workshops which had been primarily creative, so the methodical investigation manifested in an offbeat atmosphere. I remember thinking that everyone was rather quiet and a little disinterested in the process. Towards the end, some appeared tired and bored. I have memories of school science lessons like this – on a Friday afternoon who has the energy for accurate analysis or restricted technique? Some rebelled towards the end, whilst others persevered till there was nothing left to diagnose.

Vibrant colours appeared on the various testing strips, indicating chemical and biological balances, but shortly after the workshop these faded into dull and comical pastels – results were only in the moment. Nothing to worry about, but probably best not to consume water from an ashtray (more memories of teenage antics here but I won't go into it). The drinking water was safe. In fact, most of the samples seemed pretty safe, if we are to trust the materials and methods we used. Maybe some of these water sources sustain other creatures - the rats, birds and cats that also reside. There may even be ghosts in these potions; entities beyond our initial observation.

The only aspect included for exhibition was a recording of the toilet flush. Half-way through the public event we realised that guests were waiting outside the toilet for the phantom flusher to exit, but the 'real' water in the toilet bowl remained inaudible and unmoved.

Months later, the water samples stood still on my studio window receiving the daily cycle of light and warmth. One day I noticed that there had been growth – new life from the apparently impotent droplets. The water collected from the toilet bowl now had rich green mossy structures growing in it, and the sample from the plant pot contained some sort of sci-fi entanglement reaching up through the liquid; seemingly built by microscopic agents making a break for some air (see above images). Eventually the sun got too hot to handle and these intriguing proliferations expired. I wonder if there are more to come.



Further Growth

There are lots of 5-year strategy documents for water conservation & pipeline plans available online and I've been looking into temporary ponds. They are drying up. Half-dreaming, I once observed a pond where the static water surface wasn't horizontal. There's an Attenborough episode where water floods a delta and lush habitats and otherworldly gardens bursts into life. I have memories of it ending with hapless eel's cut-off and writhing in the mud, but maybe that was a different sequence.

As I write this, I've been drinking water poured from a chilled glass bottle, Brita filtered from the tap at my in-law's spotless house. The plumber has been around twice this week because of a leak in the shower. Chance dictated a two-month lockdown in Lincs, away from our home at Jupiter Woods. For better or worse, we have spent this extended time closer to our familial home than we have been for the last 15 years. We have watched as the agricultural fields have gone from being bogged by excessive rain, to be ploughed, planted, covered and irrigated. Sometimes the water in the dykes and channels looks chemical blue from runoff. The furrowed fields have turned green from brown, with plants to supply our continued demand. We've woken to dawn chorus and seen Heron stalk fish or poach eggs in the reed margins. The local swans have built their nest and sat atop through changing winds, but cygnets are yet to appear.

N — E 9 W "(S) Seasonal School invited us to think about our home(s), whether place of birth, growth or dwelling. These varied bodies may host deep lessons but even after time and reflection the sources remain imperfect and mysterious; beyond comprehension, test or resolution. Water will continue to flow through our trenches, bends and filters but I'm convinced there are lurking movements, unimagined and undetected, braced to overflow.

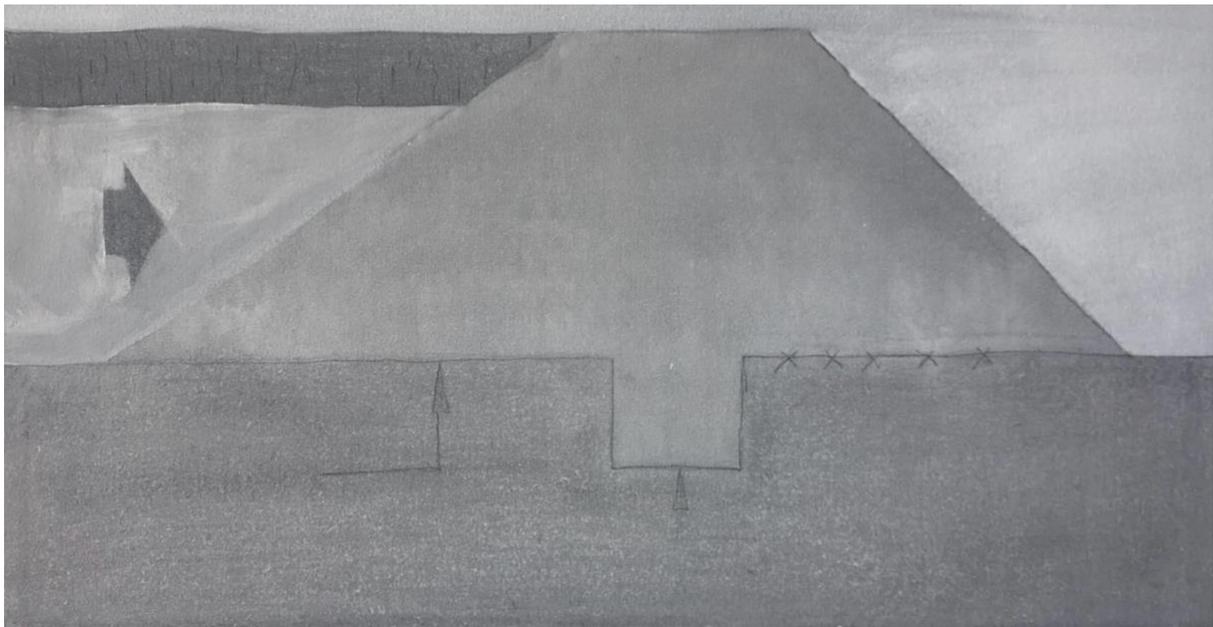


(Kenya) National Water Conservation & Pipeline Corporation (STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2020)

B. 1986, Nairobi. Lives and works in London.

Charles Robert Harrison employs painting, sculpture and installation alongside interdisciplinary techniques like documentation, data analysis and experimental design to expose the fragility and agility of human perceptions. Applying theories of affordance, his material distortions of familiar objects and environments explore ethical, social and personal dimensions of public and private action. Past projects playfully observed interactions with street furniture, civic infrastructure and pub toilets whilst current work is particularly concerned with agricultural methods, sanitation and online knowledge sharing.

Charles graduated with a BA in Painting from University of Northampton in 2007. He has exhibited at Jupiter Woods, London, Lifespace, Dundee and recently completed residencies at Wellcome Collection and Barbican Centre. His artistic methods and conceptual understanding have been shaped by collaboration and interdisciplinary research alongside artists, curators, social scientists, neuropsychologists, motor-neuroscientists and members of rare dementia support groups. These collaborations have particularly focussed on the historical development, values and deficiencies of standardised testing methods and have led to novel social science and arts and health research funded by Wellcome Trust, University College London and the Economic and Social Research Council.



Charles Robert Harrison, *Good Foundations*, Acrylic on Canvas, 2019