



REVIEW - 12 FEB 2018

‘The Land We Live In - The Land We Left Behind’

Hauser & Wirth Somerset, Bruton, UK

BY ELLEN MARA DE WACHTER

'There was a boy / A very strange, enchanted boy / They say he wandered very far ... very wise was he.' The lyrics of 'Nature Boy', penned by the American musician **eden ahbez** <<https://frieze.com/article/tune-drop-out>> in 1947 and vocalized by Nat King Cole, hint at the singular ambition of 'The Land We Live In - The Land We Left Behind'. The song was a tribute to ahbez's mentor Bill Pester, an advocate for the *lebensreform* (life reform) movement, which promoted a back-to-nature lifestyle of health foods, nudism and sexual liberation. Its utopian message produced socialist, apolitical and right-wing offshoots. Such ideological transformations are evident throughout the exhibition, an eccentric collection of more than 150 objects, artworks and documents – including the 'Nature Boy' score – relating to rural culture. The show spans some 500 years, and is curated by Adam Sutherland, director of Grizedale Arts, an organization based in the UK's Lake District with an ethos that promotes the use-value of art.

Selected Press Frieze



'The Land We Live In - The Land We Left Behind', 2018, installation view, Hauser & Wirth Somerset. Courtesy: Hauser & Wirth; photograph: Ken Adlard

Many of the contemporary works on view were made at Grizedale or by artists connected to its programme. In one gallery, tableware by more than 20 artists, including Aaron Angell, Laure Prouvost and Francesca Ulivi, lavishly furnishes a banqueting table. Nearby, artist Marcus Coates and Sutherland Hussey Harris Architects' *Anchorhold* (2015) – a wooden structure based on a tenth-century Anchorite meditation chamber – is available as a retreat for one-to-one conversations, and doubles as an apple store with fruit for visitors to eat. Coates's 'British Mammal Shits' (2012), bronze casts of droppings from wild animals including foxes, Scottish wild cats and hedgehogs, serve as paperweights on archival documents. Fernando García-Dory, whose goat pavilion, designed with Hayatsu Architects, is stationed outside the main building, also introduces organic processes into the gallery, with a mobile cheese factory and *Life-force / A Choir of Microorganisms Involved in Fermentation* (2018): a heap of compost dumped next to four anthropomorphic fruit-and-plant allegories of the seasons painted by Giuseppe Arcimboldo in 1572. The proximity of these works exemplifies the radical egalitarianism with which Sutherland has treated the items in this exhibition.

References to William Morris and the ideals of the arts and crafts movement are dotted throughout, from a copy of his 1890 science-fiction novel *News from Nowhere*, set in a postindustrial socialist utopia, to a drawing by Edward Burne-Jones of Morris climbing a mountain in Iceland. With a wealth of esoteric material on show, juxtapositions are often interesting but they can also be obscure, and although gallery attendants have been briefed to answer questions, it's the kind of show where visitors end up following their noses.



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Morris's influence, especially his championing of the handmade, is evident right up to the present day. The final room is devoted to transdisciplinary groups, including the Fairlands Collective, which formed in 2016 after working with Grizedale Arts. Their idiosyncratic list of skills includes photography, anthropology, cheese-mongering and art. A series of arts and crafts-style posters by Kultivator, the Swedish organic farming and visual arts cooperative, came out of a meeting of artists from Scandinavia and the Middle East in Beirut in 2010. When they reconvened after the first wave of the Arab Spring, they drew on their experiences of the revolution to produce 'Post (R)Evolutionary Exercises' (2011): 12 illustrated posters with slogans such as 'Disregard borders', 'Help a farmer' or 'Buy Nothing', surrounded by a border featuring Morris's 1874 'Vine' pattern and a floating stamp of his head. They can be downloaded for free, enabling anyone to reclaim Morris's aesthetic from the bourgeois niche into which it has been pushed and put it to a use that is closer to its original radical and activist intent.

'The Land We Live In - The Land We Left Behind' <<https://frieze.com/event/land-we-live-land-we-left-behind>>
curated by Adam Sutherland at Hauser & Wirth Somerset, Bruton, runs until 7 May.

Main image: Marcus Coates, Turtle Mountain, 2012, digital video still. © the artist