



Nicky Bird

Beneath the Surface / Hidden Place

Collaborators:

Alexander Brown, Karen Hamilton,

Drew Johnstone, Mary Kennedy,

Jan McTaggart & George McTaggart,

Martin Peter, Mark Scott

and Lesley Weir, and artists ~ *in the fields*

and Colin Parker

A major new Stills commission exploring the physical and emotional effects of economic change and regeneration in Scotland.

Gathering together family snaps, historical records and oral accounts, Nicky Bird has been collaborating with individuals and groups from communities across Scotland to unearth personal histories whose physical traces are on the brink of erasure. Presented for the first time in Stills, this new body of photographic works investigates the simultaneously precarious and powerful nature of memory while exploring how photography and archaeology can be incorporated in both literal and metaphorical ways to speak of 'history'.

Nicky Bird has been collaborating with people from different generations in areas where the disappearance of industries or the regeneration of social housing has led to significant change. In each case, family photographs have illuminated the myriad of emotionally charged threads which connect personal histories with a sense of place.

Family snaps in hand, the collaborators took the artist to the spot where their original photograph was taken, helping her to re-photograph the place as it stands today. The importance of an insider's memory, knowledge & experience, when looking at a location where all previous reference points have gone, was paramount. Sometimes the collaborator could orientate themselves through remnants - a drying post, the foundations of a house – at other times the direction would simply be 'yes, it was here' with (seemingly) no physical evidence at all. Maps were referred to when a collaborator expressed uncertainty on the exact location: these proved they were unerringly right.

Nicky Bird then worked closely with her collaborators to carefully place the older image inside the new, creating digital montages which at once trace the inevitable erosion of past realities while achieving an unnerving conflation of time and space. Through slippages and tensions created in this process, *Beneath the Surface / Hidden Place* powerfully reveals something of these elusive personal histories

which have been ambiguously caught in the spaces between the sites, memories and images.

The exhibition launches *Beneath the Surface / Hidden Place* and represents Phase 1 of the project, which will continue throughout 2008 and into 2009. The project was inspired by **Prestongrange, Morrison's Haven, in East Lothian**, arguably Scotland's first industrial estate. Closed in the 1960s, traces of the harbour, colliery and brickworks remain visible: a row of miners' houses less so. This theme resonates across to **East Ayrshire's Doon Valley**, where traces of entire mining villages such as **Craigmark, near Dalmellington**, remain (with families relocated to **Burnton**) although **Lethanhill, Dunaskin**, is now the site of a small but dense forest.

In contrast, the last of six 'multi' tower blocks in **Ardler, Dundee** came down in June 2007, signalling the final phase of its extensive housing regeneration. The names of the multiform the basis of new street names, so retaining a direct connection between housing past and present. This is strikingly different from **Foxbar, Paisley** where Annan Drive was knocked down, replaced with private housing, and renamed.

Given that regeneration in Scotland is at varying stages - some areas nearing the end of theirs, while others are about to start - Phase 2 of the project involves developing further work in areas such as **Craigmillar, Edinburgh**.

In addition to new photographic images, a touring aspect of the project will include a series of temporary site-specific works featuring individual family photographs in the areas where the collaborators are based. All work from both phases will be brought together in a publication to mark the project's completion in 2009. This will not only be a lasting documentation of the entire project, but will take audiences through an investigative art process in which personal family photographs and stories, alongside planning maps and other archival photographs, have played a central part.

Nicky Bird would like to thank:

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