

UNDER THE WEATHER

A new work by Nicky Coumts



During 2013 and 2014, artist Nicky Coumts has been working in the unusual setting of The National Trust for Scotland's Inverewe Gardens in Wester Ross. Supported by Creative Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage, Nicky launches her new artwork *Under the Weather* as part of 'The Year of Natural Scotland.'

Coumts opted to work at Inverewe as its landscape represents many of the contradictions inherent in our understanding of the term "natural world". Her shelter on the shoreline speculates on how we experience landscapes with layered and complex histories.

The gardens at Inverewe are in many ways an anomaly; a sub-tropical oasis in what should be rugged and barren terrain. They only exist because a shelter-belt of trees and the warming affects of the gulf stream in combination, protect their tender exotics from the elements. Without either the trees or the Gulf Stream, the gardens as they are now would perish. Inverewe would become simply a maritime gardens in keeping with the landscape that surrounds them, no longer a place that borrows and nurtures plants from far ranging latitudes around the world.

Under the Weather, installed on the shoreline of Inverewe, reflects on the visionary achievements of the Victorian founder of the gardens, Osgood Mackenzie who sought to shape the natural environment in his image, to compete with The Royal Horticultural Gardens at Kew. For Mackenzie this meant the gardens must reflect not so much his time spent locally on Scottish soil, but his observations on the growing habits of plants from all the places he visited further afield, literally "grubbing up" specimens to trial in his Northern micro-climate.

Coumts was fascinated by this overlaying of one "natural environment" on another and sourced, based on scant notes, a series of images referencing the exact dates of Mackenzie's travels. These form a prominent part of her shelter. The interior of the artwork yields a fascinating array of 23 small circular windows. You can literally see through transparent images of the places Mackenzie saw, such as the Drakensberg Mountains in South Africa, an Olive Grove in Palestine to the stark, empty Scottish headland beyond resembling Inverewe before the planting began.

This strangely beguiling artist-designed structure straddles in many guises the boundaries between worlds: wild and managed; interior and exterior; safe and unprotected. It has one prow-like end directed towards the oncoming Atlantic winds; a reminder of the fragile hold the gardens have on their locality. The shape of the structure offers a nautical feel, with its portal windows it looks and is placed as though it might float off in a storm. Yet this is contradicted by a distinctive bronze-weather vane with glow-in-the-dark arrows, foxes and exotic plants, whirling majestically on its highest point recalling a more land-tied structure bound by the rituals of farm or church.

Nicky Coumts' unique structure operates as a practical shelter protecting visitors from the familiar sudden squall common and unpredictable in the region; but is also a compelling quiet space in which to re-imagine how our experience of landscape is formed.

PRESS INFO

Under the Weather is at Inverewe Gardens, Poolewe, Achnasheen, Ross-Shire IV22 2LG until October 2014.

A film of Nicky Coumts, by Catherine Weir, talking about the residency and artwork.

<http://vimeo.com/91368968>

Nicky Coumts' work has been shown internationally both in a residency context and in solo and group exhibitions. Coumts works across different materials and techniques includes photography drawing, film and sculptural installations. In recent years, her work has been shown in Germany, Austria, Japan and notably was commissioned to make new work for the highly regarded Tatton Park Biennial, 2008.

Currently, she is exhibiting in two groups shows - **The Negligent Eye** at The Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool (until 15th June 2014) and **Printmare, Against Nature** in Camberwell Space, London (until 30th May 2014).

Coumts is represented by Danielle Amaid Contemporary Art, London and teaches in the Printmaking Department at The Royal College of Art, London.

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Artists phone interviews and high-res images available: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/122632347@N03/> Contact: Nicky Coumts nickycoumts@talktalk.net

