



## **When the past overhauls the present, you will forget that you can't remember**

**Garry Barker**

A solo exhibition of drawings, textiles, animations and ceramics.

This solo exhibition focused on the development of allegorical narratives including drawings made in response to stories told to the artist by recent migrants to Chapeltown in Leeds. The exhibition also included textiles, ceramics and animations, all of which were designed to open out the allegorical possibilities of recent stories told to the artist.

The exhibition was an opportunity to show a much more extensive range of approaches to making work than previous exhibitions, as it included an opportunity to take over other spaces as well as the large gallery space itself.

The exhibition was also used to showcase a second new set of specially designed cards and a board game that were used to help audience members generate their own narratives.

Two artist's talks were held during the time of the exhibition, one in the gallery itself and the other at Edinburgh Printmakers.

A catalogue including a dedicated text by Angela Kingston and a short story by Ray French, accompanied by maps made by the artist, was produced for the exhibition.

### **Exhibition**

**When the past overhauls the present, you will forget that you can't remember,**  
Blenheim Walk Gallery, Leeds Arts University, Leeds, 15 April - 1 July 2016.



**Garry Barker**

**When the Past Overhauls the Present You will  
Forget that you can't Remember**

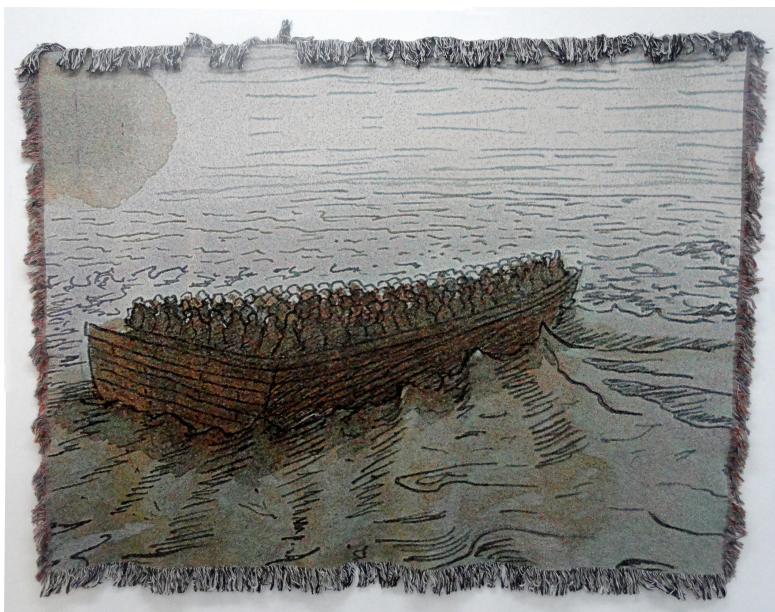
**Curator's Foreword**

Garry Barker is a Leeds-based narrative artist and one of the longest serving members of staff at Leeds College of Art having taught here since 1974.

Barker's research-practice is concerned with the relationships between the local and the global, a dialogic process which always begins with a conversation. The work is painstakingly detailed and intermedial – here the Fine and Decorative Arts comingle.

The exhibition is allegorical and topical. Fantastic though it may at first appear, imagery of floating boats, oil, monumental towers and falling bodies encourage visitors to rethink the political realities on our doorstep.

We would like to thank Angela Kingston and Ray French for their contributions to this catalogue, and Ciaran Davies and Anne Wyman for the photography. Finally, warmest of thanks to the artist for his patience, good humour and storytelling throughout the making of this exhibition and its catalogue.



The Promise of Arrival: 2015: Woven textile

## **Garry Barker**

### **When the past overhauls the present, You will forget that you can't remember**

Angela Kingston

Garry Barker is a local artist. For many years he's made drawings of the streets around where he lives in Chapeltown, Leeds, and then worked this imagery into larger drawings. Garry Barker is also a local man. By this, I don't mean he was born there but rather that he knows his neighbours and takes an active interest in what's going on. He campaigns about local issues, takes part in things, he's created a gallery in his house, he walks to work.

Living local with this kind of intensity bucks the trend: the feeling that everywhere is interchangeable; the dislocating effects of the internet; communication by email and mobile phone; the daily commute. What's more, we have an increasingly global economy: whenever capitalist enterprise detects advantage elsewhere, it simply moves on, with scant regard for what's left behind. Even the most prosperous location has only contingent value and significance.

The historian Paul Kennedy writes:

... the 'privileging of the global'... has led to a situation where place, and those who struggle to engage in the place-making activities appropriate to it are at best regarded as marginal and, at worst, the locations they inhabit and the lives they create are in effect discursively erased.<sup>1</sup>

Garry Barker's drawings work against this erasure. For one thing, his portraits of Chapeltown – the streets, buildings, people – are inked, large-scale, clear and emphatic. And, for another, they embody the life he has created, in particular his creative inner-life. Yet his work is not only about local matters but also world events – the latter always from the perspective of his immediate neighbourhood. During the banking crisis, when total collapse seemed possible, he pictured an agrarian revolution happening outside his kitchen window – people digging up the road, planting crops and raising livestock. And the Chilcot Inquiry into the

Iraq war has given rise to 'In Memory of Forgotten Truths,' a fantasy of total revelation in which monsters surge out of underground chambers in Chapeltown's parks.

To identify as a local artist is not without cost. Look no further than The Economist, mouthpiece of the free market economy:

To be a good bet against near-zero interest rates and unpredictable currency fluctuations, art needs the potential of a global market. Thus, 'local artist' has become a synonym for insignificant artist and 'national' damns with faint praise. 'International' is now a selling point in itself.<sup>2</sup>

This place where Garry Barker lives, the focus of his work, is also economically 'off-stage' – in the north and not the south, in a suburb of Leeds and not the centre. The once-grand houses built for nineteenth century industrialists have in large part fallen into disuse or been divided into low-rent flats, attesting that capitalist enterprise has moved on from or skirted around Chapeltown, many times over.

On the other hand, in Chapeltown there's a particularly high degree of exposure to global events: the fall-out is strongly felt. His neighbour is Palestinian; next-door-but-one lives a Russian; there's an Iraqi family further down. As Garry Barker reflected: "Chapeltown soaks up people." Now, with the migrant crisis, there are particularly high numbers of new arrivals and a new sense of uncertainty. As the artist told me, "The immigration wagon came next door at four in the morning, trying to find illegal immigrants." He also pointed out a cluster of tents in another neighbour's garden that are used to store emergency supplies such as blankets and clothing.

This gives a particular kind of immediacy to Garry Barker's sense of himself as the grandson of Polish Jewish immigrants. And it's spawned in him a more angry kind of drawing. In 'The bloody eye of God,' the outer shell of a huge building, rendered in red, hurtles over the Chapeltown skyline, while lightning strikes and thunderclouds roll. In 'I stand in deep mire, where there is no sinking,' another up-ended, red, hollowed-out building tips a lone human into a wind-whipped flood. The artist explained how he arrived at this imagery: "the West is talked about at the Refugee Centre as being the answer to their problems, but this gives the lie to previous immigrants who are still struggling here. To me, the West is hollow."

It becomes clear that the rapid intensification of local conditions has served to change this local artist's practice. In terms of content, his scenario is now something like a present-day, doomed version of 'Exodus.' And the increasingly phantasmagorical imagery, the sudden shift to red, the dramatic, looming angles, the spills of ink – all of this signals an acute sense of upheaval and urgency.

Garry Barker is experimenting as never before with new materials. Finding he can't contain what he wants to say within his drawings, he's been working with computer imaging, animation, ceramics, installation, and, most surprising of all, woven textiles. 'The Promise of Arrival' is a drawing of a small boat overloaded with refugees – one of the most potent media images of this crisis – which has been converted into a woollen weaving. As the artist explained:

I made a drawing, which was then scanned as a very large file. It was then worked on digitally, at the same size as the final output, so that each pixel was seen as a 'thread.' A test weaving gave me an idea of colour change between monitor and actuality and then the final image was sent off for weaving on a Jacquard loom.

'The Promise of Arrival' is the size and shape of a Muslim prayer mat: it's a gesture of sympathy, a reaching out by the artist. Several transformations have been necessary to create this artefact and its symbolism, and it chimes with the current desire among artists to "discover innovative means to forge social bonds with transnational conditions."<sup>3</sup>

The West's promise of arrival may be hollow – but the gesture of the local individual, in Chapeltown, can be one of humanity, nonetheless.

Angela Kingston is a curator and writer. She trained as an artist at Winchester School of Art (to 1979) and Leeds Polytechnic (to 1982), following this with a Social History of Art MA at Leeds University (to 1984). In Leeds, she was part of the group of women who set up the Pavilion, a feminist photography gallery which was recently the subject of a film by Mark Fell and Luke Fowler.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Kennedy, 'Local Lives and Global Transformations: towards global society,' 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The Economist (24 June 2010).

<sup>3</sup> T. J. Demos, 'The Migrant Image,' 2013.

# Human Geography

## Ray French

Liam found the notebook on a number 2 bus. It was mid-afternoon, there were only two other people on the top deck, one sat at the back, the other half way down. It was lying on the front seat – at the beginning Liam assumed someone had got off in a hurry and forgotten it. Later he would question this. It was a blue A5 Oxford notebook, he'd always loved the simple but elegant design of the Oxford range, and owned several himself. He liked the way the sturdy ring binding allowed you to lay the notebook perfectly flat, or fold it over without damaging or creasing the spine, which made it perfect for anyone who wanted to write while on the move. His first instinct was to look for some way of returning it to the owner, he'd have been mortified if he'd left one of his notebooks on the bus. Unfortunately there was no name, address or phone number inside.

The first few pages were filled with a series of abstract reflections.

*You think you know a place, then one day you take a wrong turning and find that you're lost. That is the beginning of true knowledge.*

*If you go out determined to find something extraordinary, then you won't. You have to be in a constant state of readiness, yet never expect anything. Its tiring work, to train the mind to maintain such a state, but it's the only way that you'll succeed.*

*Certain places reverberate with memories, unfinished stories, unvoiced yearning. The people who plan cities are ignorant of such things, believing there is only one world, the one they picture when they draw up their schemes.*

*Roads bisect the city, designed to ferry us through it as quickly and efficiently as possible. Then there are the other, hidden paths, created by people down the years. Discovering and recording these are my work.*

*On such pathways there are extraordinary things. I have seen them.*

It continued in this vein for several pages. At first Liam was tempted to dismiss it as the work of a crank. However the owner's handwriting was rather elegant, and the text was not marred by the tell-tale exclamation marks, capital letters, or heavily underlined passages favoured by the deranged. And one stylistic tic struck Liam - the high crosses on the ts. A couple of years ago Alison had developed a sudden passion for graphology. She'd told him that such ts indicated a confident person, someone able to plan ahead and set themselves lofty goals, and believe they'll achieve them. When Liam pointed out that such traits could also indicate the person was delusional she accused him of treating her like an idiot, and stormed out of the room. Yet now Liam couldn't help feeling the handwriting style was evidence of a sharp, enquiring mind. Was it possible the writer had discovered some hidden aspect of the city that had eluded him? The writing stopped after a few pages, and the rest of the notebook was filled with a series of hand-drawn maps outlining various routes across Leeds. Many locations had crosses and notes written next to them:

*Sighting here*

*Best in the early morning.*

*Take note - a woman at Number 83 stares out of the window at you if you linger here for more than a few minutes.*

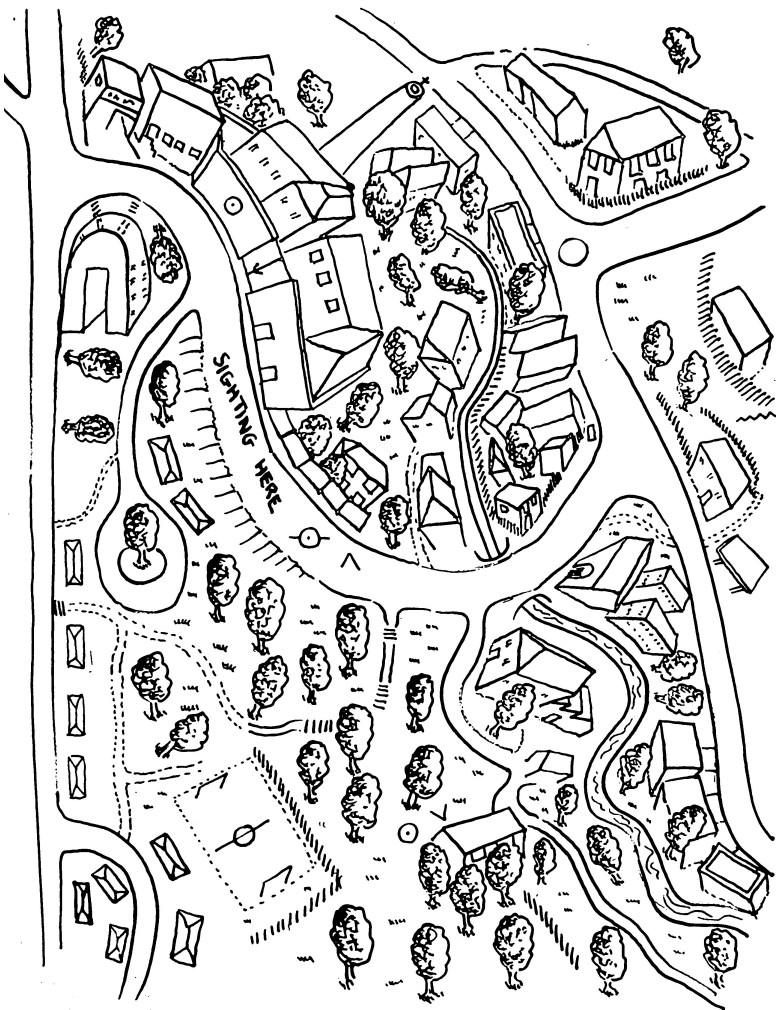
*Three sightings, each one slightly different, all at twilight. Significant?*

As well as the notes, some of the maps had symbols drawn on them. Liam suspected it might be some kind of code.

The owner had wandered in every direction across Leeds, criss-crossing back streets and ginnels, trudging along canal paths and over waste ground, through affluent and deprived neighbourhoods, retail parks and industrial units, before finally skirting the edges of the city. The longer Liam studied the maps the more certain he grew the writer had unearthed something remarkable. Then he would snap out of it, and berate himself for being as credulous as Alison when she'd discovered graphology.

Would he have taken this so seriously if it had been written in red ink in a cheap exercise book, instead of with a fountain pen in an Oxford notebook? Then he'd change his mind again and grow excited by the possibility he'd stumbled upon some sort of guide to a liminal world, a spiritual Baedeker.





He was so engrossed in his thoughts he lost track of time and it took him a while to realise that the bus had come to a halt. When he looked around he didn't recognise his surroundings – a row of red brick semi-detached houses, flat, anonymous countryside stretching out beyond.

The driver shouted up the stairs.  
'This is it, mate – the end of the line.'

Over the next couple of days Liam read and re-read the notebook, still unable to decide whether it was the work of a visionary or a charlatan. He realised the only way to resolve his ambivalence was to walk some of the routes himself. Over the next week he rose early and explored one route before he went to work, and another in the evening. It seemed sensible to begin with places close to where he lived or worked, and this proved relatively easy since there were so many maps to choose from.

He trudged from Chapel Allerton through Meanwood and along the edges of Headingley; through Woodhouse and Bagby Fields and up the twists and turns of Buslingthorpe Lane to Sheespcar and then on to Potternewton; through Harehills, Burmantofts and Osmondthorpe; along ginnels, snickets, alleys and lanes. Each time he would begin walking in a state of high expectation, only to gradually succumb to disappointment as he failed to spot anything out of the ordinary. When he stood in those places marked with crosses or symbols all Liam saw was an empty ginnel, a patch of waste ground, a tree or pile of rubble.

By the end of the week Liam was forced to accept the writer was a fantasist who'd expended an enormous amount of time and care recording things that only he could see, or imagined that he saw. The notebook was nothing more than the record of some poor soul slowly unravelling. Liam suspected the writer was a sensitive, intelligent person, at one time very successful in their chosen field, who'd become gripped by *idée fixe* and had lost his or her way. He felt an enormous compassion for them, after all, who hadn't lost their way at some point?

There was no denying it, Liam had been terribly gullible, eagerly seizing on the idea that the notebook offered a way out of his torpor. He needed *something* to shake him out of his current state, but this wasn't it. That evening when he got home he chucked the notebook into the recycling bin.

It was hectic at the University the next day, but Liam was grateful there was no time to dwell on his ill-judged adventure. After work a colleague asked if he'd like to join him for a quick drink.

Liam had sensed a wariness from the others in the department since he'd returned from sick leave, as if they were biding their time. Obviously waiting to decide if he'd fully recovered after his long absence, or whether he might go under again. So he gratefully accepted the invitation from Richard. He enjoyed himself and ended up staying far longer than he'd intended. As he walked to the bus stop he realised he was a little tipsy, but what matter, he was finally on the mend.

When he got home Alison was sitting at the kitchen table reading.  
'Where did you get this?'

She held up the notebook – she must have picked it out of the bin. Probably thought it was his and her curiosity had got the better of her. Her eyes were bright and focused, her cheeks flushed; he couldn't remember the last time he'd seen her so animated. For months she had been avoiding him, scuttling into her room whenever she heard his key in the front door, barely speaking when they'd bumped into each other in the kitchen. He saw she had an A-Z of Leeds open on the table in front of her and realised with a sinking heart she was already besotted. When he told her how he'd found it a week ago, she gave him a sharp look.

'Have you tried following any of the maps?'

Just when Liam thought he'd put this strange episode behind him he was forced to recount his increasingly frustrating attempts to find some kind of pattern or meaning in the directions. Alison listened to him stony-faced.

'You gave up after a week?'

She was angry – this was not a good sign.

'Alison, listen to me, there was nothing to see. I walked for miles each day, and I *saw nothing*.'

She gave him a withering look.

'I'm not surprised.'

'What's that supposed to mean?'

She opened the notebook, began to read.

'If you go out determined to find something extraordinary, then you won't. You have to be in a constant state of readiness, yet never expect anything. Its tiring work, to train the mind to maintain such a state, but it's the only way that you'll succeed.'

She looked up triumphantly.

'It sounds like you didn't heed that advice.'

It took him a few moments to recognise the look in her eyes, it was one he hadn't seen for so long: determination. Since dropping out of University eighteen months ago all his attempts to have a conversation about what she planned to do next had been angrily rejected. Apparently working as a barista in a coffee bar fulfilled all her needs. Now he began to fear that, like him, she saw the notebook as a way of breaking out of her torpor.

'Well if you're finished with this notebook I'm sure you won't mind if I take it.'

'Alison...'

'What?'

He looked at her, this young woman who'd once been nothing but a tiny white bundle in his arms. Who he'd carried on his back as he and Marie walked the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path that drizzly summer. Whose accusing look as he left after dropping her off at nursery used to cut him to the bone. Yesterday he'd studied the framed print of her feet, made when she was just a week old. Tiny feet that belonged to a fairy creature, a doll. What a miracle that such a tiny being had transmuted into this defiant, fragile young woman now sitting in front of him, spoiling for a fight. He remembered her reaction when he'd poured scorn on her passion for graphology, and before that derided her enthusiasm for paganism, Alan Watts, Gurdjieff, reincarnation and countless other fads. He had lost so much over the last few years, and the thought of losing her as well was not something he could bare. She would embark on the quest he'd abandoned, she'd tackle it with her usual bright-eyed enthusiasm at first, believing she would uncover some profound truth. Then would quickly grow disillusioned and retreat once more into an internal exile, rarely leaving her room whenever he was in. He would watch it happen and not try to stop her. But he would be there, waiting patiently for whenever she was ready to finally accept his care and concern. He would not fight with her anymore.

'What?'

'Maybe you're right – maybe I did give up too easily. You take it. On one condition.'

She looked at him warily, suspecting a trap.

'Let me know how you get on.'

She searched his face for any hint of a slight, then nodded.

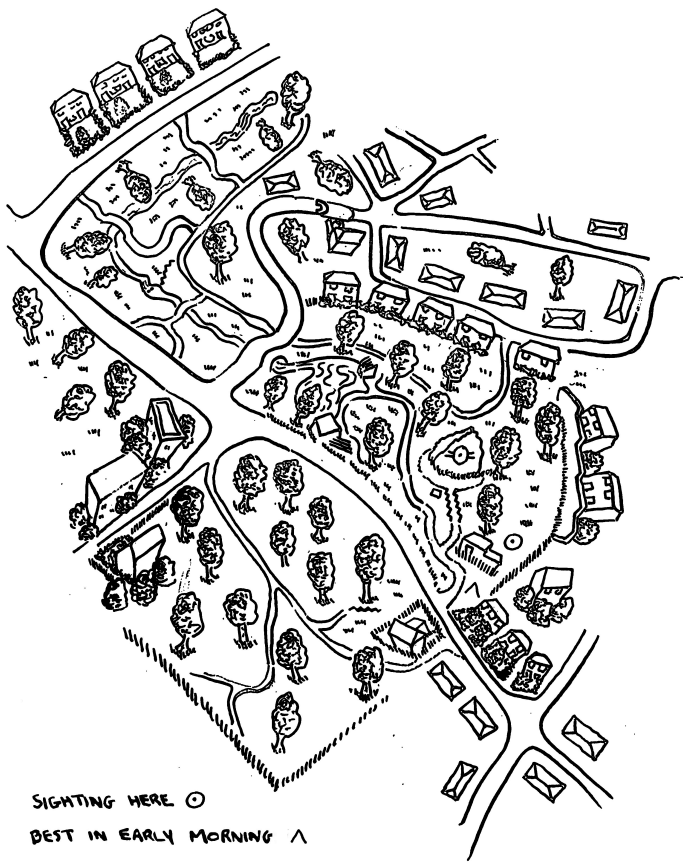
'Okay, it's a deal.'

Over the next couple of months Alison stuck to the task admirably; Liam couldn't help admiring the way she had slowly, methodically traced the myriad routes across the city.

She assured him that her work, as she called it, was going well, but refused to answer specific questions about it.

‘I’m asking you to trust me,’ she told him, ‘And in turn I promise to let you know when I’ve found something.’

Since her mood had improved so dramatically, and they were getting on so much better now, Liam agreed. Though he continued to worry how upset she would be when finally forced to admit the notebook was not the key to some hidden world.



Then one Sunday evening she asked if he'd like to accompany her on one of the walks.

'You'll find it interesting, I promise.'

Which was how they found themselves walking through Gledhow Valley Woods as dusk fell. When they reached Gipton Spa Bath House in the south east corner of the woods she came to a halt. Liam had no idea what she had in mind, and by now was struggling to contain his scepticism.

'We've arrived.'

She seemed to think this explained everything.

'What do we do now?'

'Wait.'

'For what?'

She put her finger to her lips and whispered, 'It's very important that we stay perfectly still, and keep very quiet.'

He was struck by her intense concentration, the utter seriousness with which she approached the task. She reminded him of one of those wild life cameramen who will perch on a rocky outcrop for hours on end in the hope of seeing a Snow Leopard. He complied, and they stood like icons for fifteen, twenty minutes, the only sounds an occasional rustle behind one of the ash trees as a small animal scurried past, the first cries of the pipistrelles overhead.

Then she grabbed his arm, nodded towards the bath house.

'Look,' she whispered.

He followed her gaze and saw it for himself. A boy of about six or seven, playing inside the building. He was making little machine gun noises, furrowing his brow and pointing his imaginary weapon at some enemy. Then he smiled and ran off. The whole thing was over in a few seconds.

'Did you see him? Asked Alison.

'I saw *something*,' said Liam quietly. 'Or at least I think I did.'

He fell silent, still trying to process the encounter. The boy had been dressed in the type of school uniform that had last been popular in the 1950s – baggy, uncomfortable looking short trousers, a grey blazer, grey pullover, white shirt, a tightly knotted tie. He wore no cap, so Liam got a clear view of his crude pudding bowl haircut.

'He's here every Sunday evening about this time,' Alison told him. Liam stared at her. What had he been thinking of? He should have tried talking her out of this, it had got completely out of hand. Even the writings of that old fraud Gurdijeff made more sense than this.

'Alison, I don't know what we saw, but-'

'It was a memory, dad.'

'What?'

She slid her arm inside his.

'Come on, let's go home. I've got something to show you.'

Liam opened a bottle of wine, he needed a drink by now. They sat at the kitchen table, both sipping from newly filled glasses. Alison had brought her laptop, and turned the screen towards Liam.

'Take a look at this.'

It was a website called *Human Geography*. She tapped the blue notebook, lying on the table between them.

'It's devoted to these.'

'These?' said Liam.

'You're not the only one who found a notebook like this – people across Leeds have picked them up on buses, in cafes... one person found one on a seat in the railway station, another left on a table at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, several more in public libraries.'

'Wait,' said Liam, 'are you saying that somebody has deliberately left a whole series of these notebooks in public places, hoping that people will pick them up, read them and begin following the routes?'

'Yes – and lots of people have, and they're talking to each other about it.' She tapped the screen, 'There – read about it for yourself.'

The website had a blog where people shared their stories about how they'd found a notebook, and swapped theories about what it might mean. It quickly became clear that each notebook was unique, containing different maps and aphorisms. Liam pushed the laptop away.

'No, this is nonsense.'

'Dad, listen to me. Please don't dismiss this as some kind of conspiracy or an outbreak of mass hysteria, I've met some of the people who've been posting on here, I've met the guy who runs the website. They are not crazy. They're just trying to understand what this means.'

'You've *met* them? Alison, what in god's name have you got into?'

She frowned, reached for his hand.

'Dad, don't get so upset. Come with me, talk to them. There's a meeting in *The Chemic* tonight.'

*The Chemic Tavern* was once an old haunt of Liam's at one time, but since getting ill he'd stopped going to pubs, bar the outing with his colleague a couple of months ago. He got himself and Alison a drink, then joined her and the others at a quiet table in the corner. There were five of them, and they were chatting amiably as Liam approached. He'd felt increasingly anxious about the encounter the closer they got to the pub, for reasons he couldn't fathom. Now he felt distinctly queasy as they greeted him with the kind of enthusiasm he associated with members of a cult welcoming a new recruit. As Alison smiled at them, and nuzzled up beside him affectionately, he felt the panic rising. The man who'd built the website, a hipster in his late twenties, introduced himself and summarised what they'd discovered.

'From the accounts I've collected, it seems clear these sightings or images are manifestations of people's memories. People have seen, as you have tonight, children playing, people holding babies, lovers kissing, an old woman sitting in a rocking chair, staring into the distance as if she was waiting for someone to call, a man reading a letter and crying with joy...' He waved his hand, 'The full range of human experience is out there, hidden from most people but available to those willing to look.'

Liam said nothing. He was desperate to leave. Alison sensing his unease, was watching him carefully. However the hipster had sensed nothing wrong, too wrapped up in his explanation to notice how tense Liam looked.

'This is the way I see it,' he continued. 'Matter is recycled, right? You know that the air we breathe contains elements of the same gas molecules that Caesar, Jesus and Napoleon breathed. We've all been intrigued by that one. So, here's the thing - if matter doesn't disappear but is recycled, then why not the spirit too? How many times have you been to a place where you feel the presence of something indefinable, that's clearly outside your own imagination? What if that's what we're seeing here? A kind of human geography.'

When Alison nudged him Liam smiled, then took a long swig from his pint. He could feel the sweat trickling down his back. The hipster finally twigged that Liam was uncomfortable and shrugged, 'That's my theory, but I can't prove it as yet.'

'No,' said Liam, 'I can see how difficult that would be.'

'Our next task is to identify the person who's left these notebooks for us to find, if we could speak to *them*, then we could finally piece all this together.'



Obviously I'm hoping they'll see the website and get in contact. But no-one knows who they are.'

One of the group, a red-haired woman clutching a bottle of Belgian beer, had been staring at Liam for some time. Now she said, 'I saw him. Just as I picked up the notebook I looked round and he turned back for a moment. When he caught me looking at him he panicked and ran out of the café.'

'What did he look like?' asked Alison.

'You know what he looks like,' she said, her eyes never leaving Liam. 'You're sitting next to him.'

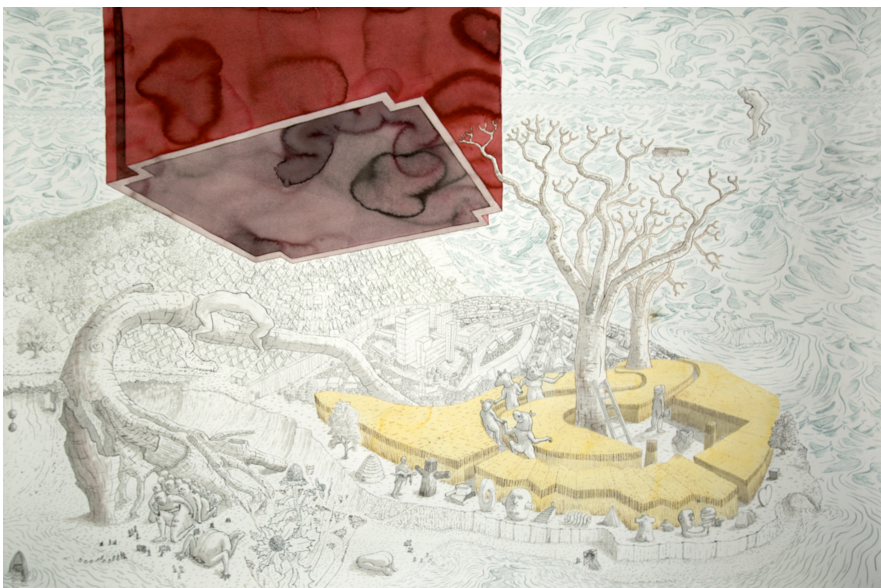
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Ray French is a novelist and short story writer. He is interested in the importance of place in writing. He has taught creative writing at the University of Leeds, Leeds Trinity University, Leeds College of Art, and for Yorkshire Arts Circus and the Open College of The Arts. In 2005 he received a Time To Write Grant from Arts Council, and in 2006 a Writers On Tour Arts Council grant to enable him and the other writers of *Four Fathers* to perform their work across the country to a wide range of audiences.

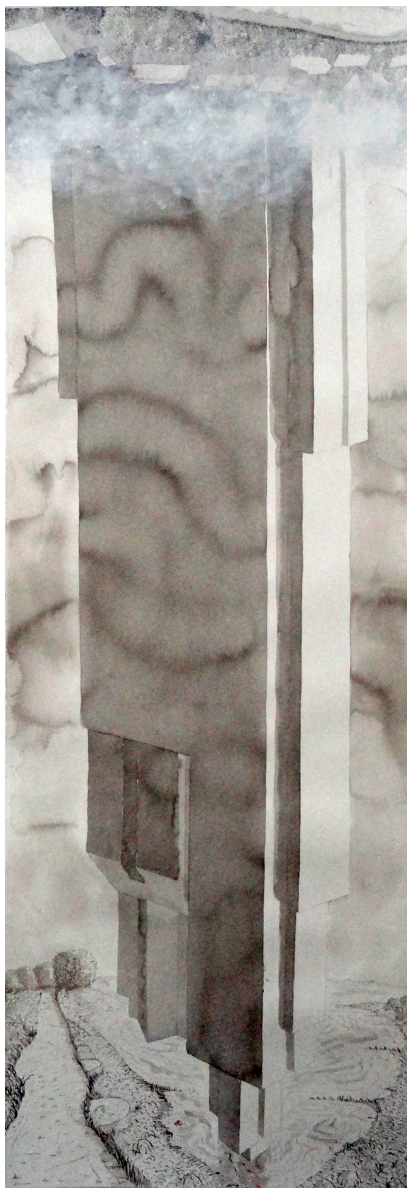
## Catalogue



S<sup>L</sup>OS<sup>T</sup>: 2016: Ceramic, salt and woven textile



DECUS ET TUTAMEN: 2016: Watercolour and pen and ink



The Phantom of Liberty: 2016: Watercolour, pen and ink



Detail: In Memory of Forgotten Truths: 2015: Pen and ink





Entrusted with Carnival Business: 2013 Watercolour pen and ink



Of Noses of Roses that Charm the Pink of Charnel Houses: 2014: Pen and ink



I sink in deep mire where there is no standing: 2015: Watercolour, pen and ink



Not Here not There: 2016: Watercolour, pen and ink





This is not an Oracle: 2016: Ceramic and Wallpaper

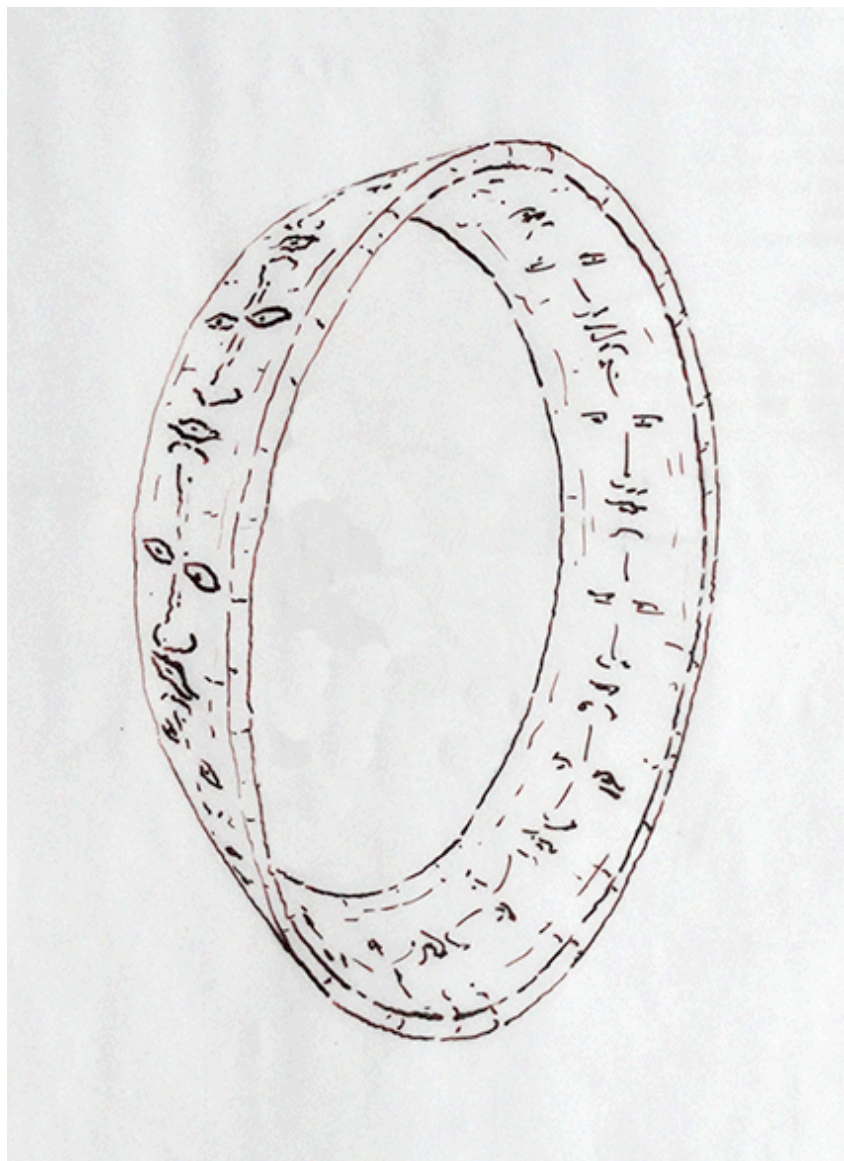


Like bacteria floating on an early sea: 2016: Ceramic



Immanent Infinity: 2015: Animation





Facewheel: 2016: Animation