



Nostos

Liadin Cooke

The output is an exhibition expanding on an earlier series of sculptures and drawings about place. Nostos is about the importance of key objects that we live with and is underpinned by the ongoing references in Cooke's practice to site/place, object and history - and her experience as an Irish immigrant. The exhibition consists of 3 wall-based sculptures and a series of drawings that look at the most important objects that Cooke thinks are needed to make a living space function – a bed, table, car and books.

Research Process

'Firmamental Product' a wooden wall-based sculpture the size of a desk in Cooke's studio, hangs from the wall by a 13m long crios [a traditional woven Irish belt]. Carved from walnut, it has a round protrusion butting out from one corner that pushes it out from the wall - begging a question of purpose. 'Ignorant Brown' in plywood, is the abstracted shadow of an Irish settle bed. The molten tin poured onto the surface is potentially an indicator of the internal state of suspension in sleep. 'Un-English' looks at European car design and cars that Cooke appreciates. 'Stack 1-5' are watercolours of texts that are a key part of Cooke's creative practice and are visual notes of an intense internal world of exploration and discovery.

Research Insights

The artworks are about embodying need rather than exploring function. The series of works deal with fracturing within issues based, in part, on Cooke's status as an immigrant and her observations on the politics of movement within the modern world. Cooke also examines ideas around belonging, nostalgia and idealised homesteads.

Dissemination

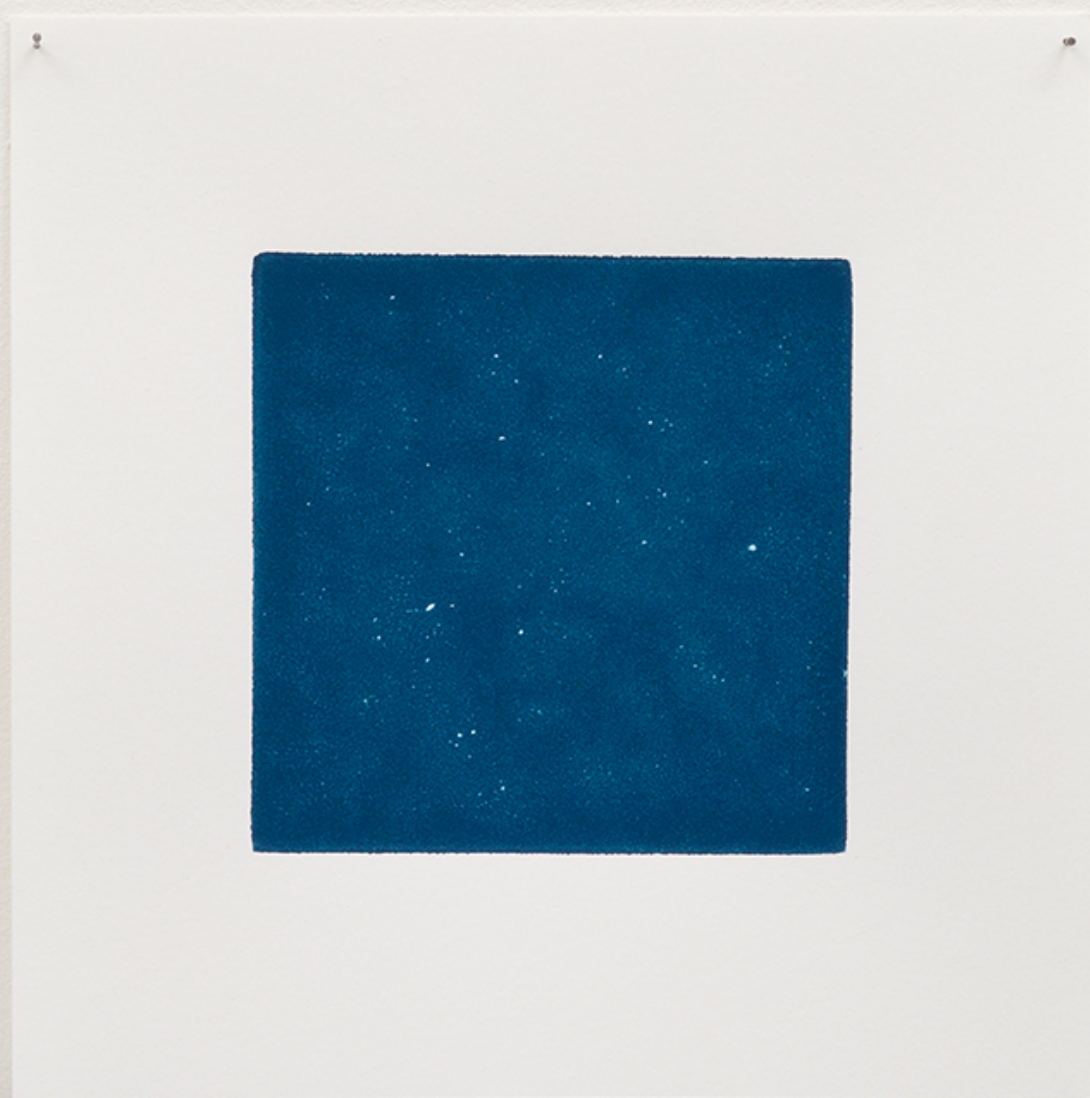
The output was exhibited at noshowspace, London, 25 September – 24 October 2014. An accompanying illustrated publication was printed by noshowspace with an interview between Cooke and Natalie Rudd.













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Supporting material

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noshowspace

A conversation between Liadin Cooke and Natalie Rudd

September 2014

Natalie Rudd: Your earlier work has expressed an interest in architectural space and modernism fused with a desire to put down your memories of spaces once occupied. What strikes me immediately about this recent work is an interest in the poetry of individual, ordinary things. Can you explain this process of honing in?

Liadin Cooke: After I had been looking at spaces I made work that was very intimate and personal so I wanted to bridge this by making something that was about ordinary things, the stuff that you absolutely take for granted. It came out of thinking about why I make work and trying to articulate my position in the world - and whether what I have to say can be relevant to anyone else. It struck me that I needed to look at the basic things in my life: 'what do I absolutely *need* to function as a person and as an artist?' At the same time I was beginning to think more about my roots and the fact that I'm Irish. I started looking at Irish vernacular furniture and became interested in how an object could perform two functions or could be moved easily to make space. I rediscovered a book I was given as a teenager called *Irish Folk Ways* by Estyn Evans and in it I found a charming illustration of a very simple Irish table. It has a slit on its side to hang it on the wall and very short legs - you can't put your feet under it- that triggered something and I knew I had the table.

NR: How did you hone your ideas into the making of *Firmamental Product*?

LC: I wanted to make something that went beyond literal meaning and yet embraced a physical need in all of us to touch and own objects. When I decided to make that work, I gave it the same measurements as my studio desk; a place to sit at, a place of communication or reflection. It made sense to make it out of wood, but then came the decision about which type to use. I wanted something that was native to the British Isles. Initially oak seemed the logical choice; but its symbolic resonance - people talk about it as being strong and rooted in mythology in a way that says 'masculine' and 'outdoors' - felt wrong. English Walnut seemed to have a beauty that went beyond the wood, also you can eat the nuts; walnut is grown as a fruit crop in Europe, the wood is a by-product - I thought that was interesting. And that beautiful surface: it's alive with all these gorgeous growth lines. The markings in the wood seem to mimic the breadth and depth of the skies.

NR: How did you arrive at the method of hanging the work?

LC: I needed something that had a fluidity: I wanted to hold the table up with something that nearly couldn't hold it up, and you can't hold things up with falling water. I had been looking at Turner and making watercolours based on his paintings of water but I also wanted something that had warmth and an element of the domestic. I decided upon a crios, which is a hand-woven belt from the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland; you would hold one end of the wool with your foot as you wove it until the crios was about a yard long, which is the stretch of the body. I found someone in Ireland who weaves them and asked her to make me a crios based on my 'Turner watercolours' that was thirteen metres long; it's so long then you just know it has no use and it pools on the floor.

NR: Tell me how *Ignorant Brown* came into being?

LC: I remember three or four years ago one of my sisters telling me she had slept in a settle bed, which is a traditional seat that opens out into a box-like bed. She had said it was 'a bit like sleeping in a coffin'. I've never forgotten that phrase because a bed is such an important place in anyone's life and death, there was something

about it that just sort of settled there. I wasn't interested in making a settle bed - it was about what a bed is, the 'bedness' of a bed. Then, at the beginning of 2013 I did some monoprints of the outline of a settle bed, which I then stretched through drawings - in a way trying to reinvent its shape. This led to the idea of making something that was a shadow. Shadows are real and yet they are very hard to pin down, and I was struck by that sense of in-betweenness which is so similar to sleep: is sleep a shadow of being awake - that dark, other, tenuous thing that shifts and moves? I had thought about casting something initially, but that felt too rooted, too physical, and then, when the bed became more two-dimensional and wall-based, it seemed logical to make the work in plywood. I like the layering of ply, it reminds me of *The Princess and the Pea*, but it's a layering that references industry rather than the organic world. I had always planned on having something in the centre of the bed - initially it was just paint but in the end I needed something more physical. The tin is the body. The tin is what grounds the work. By pouring the tin onto the surface I lost control over it. I had traced out an outline, thinking 'it's going to be roughly this sort of shape', but the tin just went off and did its own thing; that is *so* like what a dream is and *so* like what sleep is. You cannot control this.

NR: We associate beds and tables with being floor-based and three-dimensional; the flattened forms and wall-based nature of these works is intriguing.

LC: I start off with wanting to make three-dimensional work but things keep flattening out. That may be to do with the space that I'm working in, which isn't huge. *Ignorant Brown* is a nod to artists like Ellsworth Kelly, when I first saw his shaped canvases I thought they were so great, and one of my most profoundly important art moments was the amazing Donald Judd show at the Saatchi Gallery when it was on Boundary Road, which just blew my mind - it's that rigour, it's like a religion. There is something about that purity of purpose that you get with Minimalism.

NR: At first glance these works seem to have an alien, uncomfortable quality to them, as if obstinately resistant to a single interpretation, yet they are based on familiar functional forms designed to enable us to eat, think, sleep or work the land. In a way these works point towards a desire for a simpler existence in an

increasingly commodified world, or are they more a reflection upon a human desire to collect things, to preserve, to have and to hold?

LC: That's interesting. I used to do a lot of performance and time-based work and I stopped doing it in the mid-1990s, because I couldn't hold onto it. I wanted to be able to make something, stand back, have a look at it and change it, and I couldn't if I was in it! So I started making objects. I am always going to be drawn towards the performative and the ephemeral but there is another part of me that wants to have things. I collect stuff that is potentially for an idea and I have a real problem with books! I wanted to pin down the idea of books; I decided to paint every single one that I own, a record of them or rather a record of the excitement of what's in them. I made these very ephemeral drawings in a sense language is ephemeral, you can say a sentence and it will mean one thing to one person and another thing to another. I haven't been able to paint all of them – I stopped, I realised that I'd lost interest in a lot of my books and that maybe it was time to weed them out. That's been a very interesting experience. We all want to hold onto things; we don't like letting things go. My father died quite recently and my family and I have had to go through this process of clearing out the house and you think, well, he collected all this stuff, and then you look at all your stuff and you think ... why do I need this, who is it for?

NR: Did you come to resolve the *Stack* drawings?

LC: I struggled with them. Initially I was very pragmatic; I took photographs of every single book I owned, stacks of books everywhere, I made watercolours but it just felt too literal. It didn't move on. Then I started to ground them by introducing collage and they became more about that immersive quality that happens when you read something, a more intuitive way through their ideas. The drawings are quite flat but something happened when I turned them on their side and suddenly I realised that I needed to stop trying to show the books and instead show what they feel like – not in a physical way but more when you *think* of that book. What does that thought look like as a mark or as a colour? It's quite subtle – sometimes just turning something on its side can enable you to see it with very fresh eyes. The drawings became strangely sculptural.

NR: Literature has a strong presence in past work where you embody particular texts such as *Jane Eyre* or *Juliette* by de Sade; passages of fiction are evoked in poetic and evocative ways through drawings and sculpture. In your recent work on paper, your collection of literature, as it sits on a shelf, comes under scrutiny. I am intrigued by the titles of your work: *Ignorant Brown* and *Firmamental Product*, are in themselves wonderful and linger around in the mind and on the tongue. How important are the titles of your works, how and when do they emerge and how do you anticipate they contribute to the 'reading' of your work?

LC: Titles are really important to me I don't feel like a work is really finished until it's titled. *Firmamental Product* is from an Emily Dickinson poem in which she wrote of the wind as 'a firmamental product', and *Ignorant Brown* is taken from Seamus Heaney's poem 'The Bed'. Periodically the title will come before the work is actually made but most of the time I go to poetry until I come across something that seems to say the same thing.

NR: It seems to me that a process of layering is key to your work, a layering of references, literature and memories, but also in terms of material process, as seen in layers of plywood, topped with paint, adorned with tin, or in the ethereal traces of books stacked, like archaeological strata. Would this be accurate and can you explain its origin?

LC: I love research. I love looking things up and finding out about them. It is a really important part of how I make work in the studio. I use the internet a bit but I am much happier using books, they're just much more substantial to work with. In terms of using something like layering within the actual physical work, I think that's a subconscious thing. There are elements within what I do that can be quite obsessive, when a lot of time goes into something: whether it's my time or someone else's time, and I think that comes back to craft, to the hand of the artist, where time becomes an element. And that obsession, that time spent doing something is a really nice process because you have done all of your thinking, all the 'whys?' and 'whats?' and 'hows?' have been answered, and then you just do it. There are so many different parts to making a work, I'm not sure if this answers you.

NR: Can you explain the exhibition title *Nostos*?

LC: Really the whole show is about looking inwards, looking inside something and from there being introspective - thinking about where I live and how I would like to live. I've always thought a lot about who an immigrant is and why the idea of emigration is so loaded and why do people, when they migrate, find it so hard to let go? I've always been interested in the idea of the Diaspora, these pockets of people from all over that are connected through a culture, and it never stops, it's always happening. Then I came across the word *nostos* Greek for 'return' and that seemed to reference the idea of some sort of cycle. To return to something is to go back to something - the implication being that you have come from somewhere else, it's that cyclical motion of moving around, going inside and outside, that struck me. Art doesn't exist in a vacuum. You can never lose site of the fact that you are coming from somewhere. I also liked the sound of the word: it looks good, it's tight, it holds the work together.

September 2014

Natalie Rudd is Curator of the Arts Council Collection, having held previous curatorial positions at Tate Liverpool (1998-2002). She has published on modern and contemporary art, including a monograph on the artist Peter Blake for Tate Publishing in 2003. Natalie has curated many exhibitions of modern and contemporary British art including a forthcoming survey of British sculpture of the 1980s.



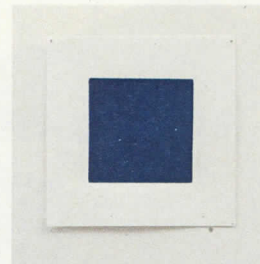
Firmamental Product 2014

Walnut, wool

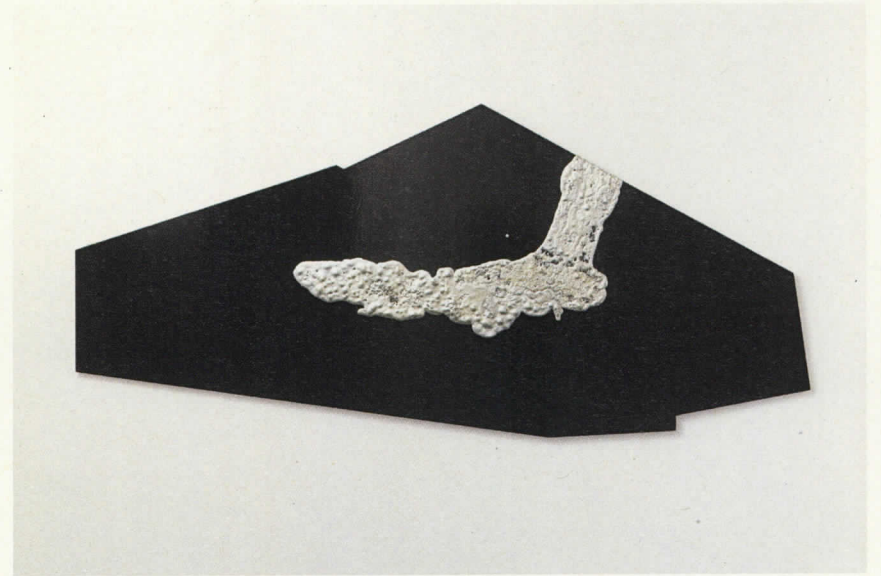
Wood dimensions 1272 x 755 x 126 mm, installation variable



Installation view Liadin Cooke *Nostos* 2014, noshowspace, London



Skyey 2014
Relief print, series of 5
200 x 200 mm



Ignorant Brown 2014
Ply, paint, tin
810 x 1860 x 30 mm



Un-English 2014
Ceramic
410 x 250 mm



Stack 1 2014
Watercolour, gouache on paper,
620 x 520 mm framed



Stack 4 2014
Watercolour, gouache on paper,
620 x 520 mm framed

Liadin Cooke

1958 Born in Ireland. Lives and works in West Yorkshire

Education

1983-1987 National College of Art & Design, Dublin

1994-1996 Goldsmiths College, MA Fine Art

Solo exhibitions

- 2014 *Nostos*, noshowspace, London
2010 *Holden*, Huddersfield Art Gallery, New Art Centre, Roche Court
2006 *Overlay: Sculpture & Drawing*, Yorkshire Sculpture Park
2003 *Ballroom (ornament)*, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds
1994 *Two Worlds*, Green on Red Gallery, Dublin
1992 *Sliced*, City Arts Centre, Dublin
1991 *Beyond Reach*, PS1 Contemporary Art Centre, New York
1989 *Salt Reading*, Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick
1988 *Making A Dream*, Project Arts Centre, Dublin

Selected group exhibitions

- 2014 *Conversations around Marlow Moss*, & Model, Leeds
2012 *Exchanges around construction*, Derwent London Gallery, London
2011 *Northern Art Prize*, Leeds Art Gallery
2010 *Leeds Open 2010*, Leeds Art Gallery
2009 *Ballroom*, Borris House, Ireland
2008 *Prospects and Interiors*, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds
Open Window, St James Hospital, Dublin
atp08, Public Libraries on the Transpennine Route Between Manchester & Leeds
2007 *Artfutures '07*, Bloomsberg Space, London
Summer Show '07, Royal Academy, London. [invited artist]
2006 *The Square Root of Drawing*, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin, Ireland
2005 *New Sculpture from Ireland*, New Art Centre Sculpture Park and Gallery, Roche Court, Wiltshire
Strata, Pontrhydfendigaid, Wales; Kells, Ireland
Kirklees-Art, Besancon, France
2004 *Para Sites*, Bridport Arts Centre, Dorset
Birds, Sligo Art Gallery, Ireland

2003-11 *Flix*, Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

- 2000 *0044*, PS1 Contemporary Art Centre, New York; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Ormeau Baths, Belfast; Crawford Gallery, Cork
A Measured Quietude: Contemporary Irish Drawings, The Drawing Centre, New York; Berkeley Art Gallery, California; David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island
1999 *Contemporary Responses to the Burlington Cartoon*, Ormeau Baths, Belfast
Gaze, Artist Project, Circa Issue 88
1998 *Dark Field*, Boiler House, London
1997 *Not Yet Titled*, Kirsty Ogg, Norwich
1996 *National Collection of Contemporary Drawing*, Limerick City Gallery of Art, Limerick; Model Arts Centre, Sligo
NCAD 250 – Drawings 1746 - 1996, RHA Gallagher Gallery, Dublin
1995 *Mix*, Annexed, London
1993 *Fields of Vision*, Trout Gallery, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, USA
EV+A 93, Limerick City Gallery of Art
Summer group show, Green on Red Gallery, Dublin
1991 *In A State*, Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin
1990 *Irish Artists in New York*, Touring Exhibition
1989 *Prints From the Black Church*, Solomon Gallery, Dublin
1988 *EV+A 1&2 88*, Limerick City Art Gallery, Limerick
Sculpture Trail, Merrion Square, Dublin
WAAG, Guinness Hop Store, Dublin
GPA Awards for Emerging Artists, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin
Meta-furniture, Sculptors Society of Ireland Exhibitions, Limerick; Galway; Sligo; Monaghan, Belfast; Dublin; Cork; Waterford
1987 *SADE*, Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork
Irish Exhibition Of Living Art, Guinness Hop Store, Dublin
1986 *Irish Women Artists*, Battersea Arts Centre, London
Irish Exhibition of Living Art, Guinness Hop Store, Dublin
1984 Dublin Film and Video Festival

Commissions

- 1997 Camden Town Hall, London
1993 Office of Public Works, Dublin Castle
1987 Irish National Insurance, Dublin

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26 September - 25 October 2014

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