

Patricia MacKinnon-Day:
Tracing the Narratives of 21st Century
Women Shepherds



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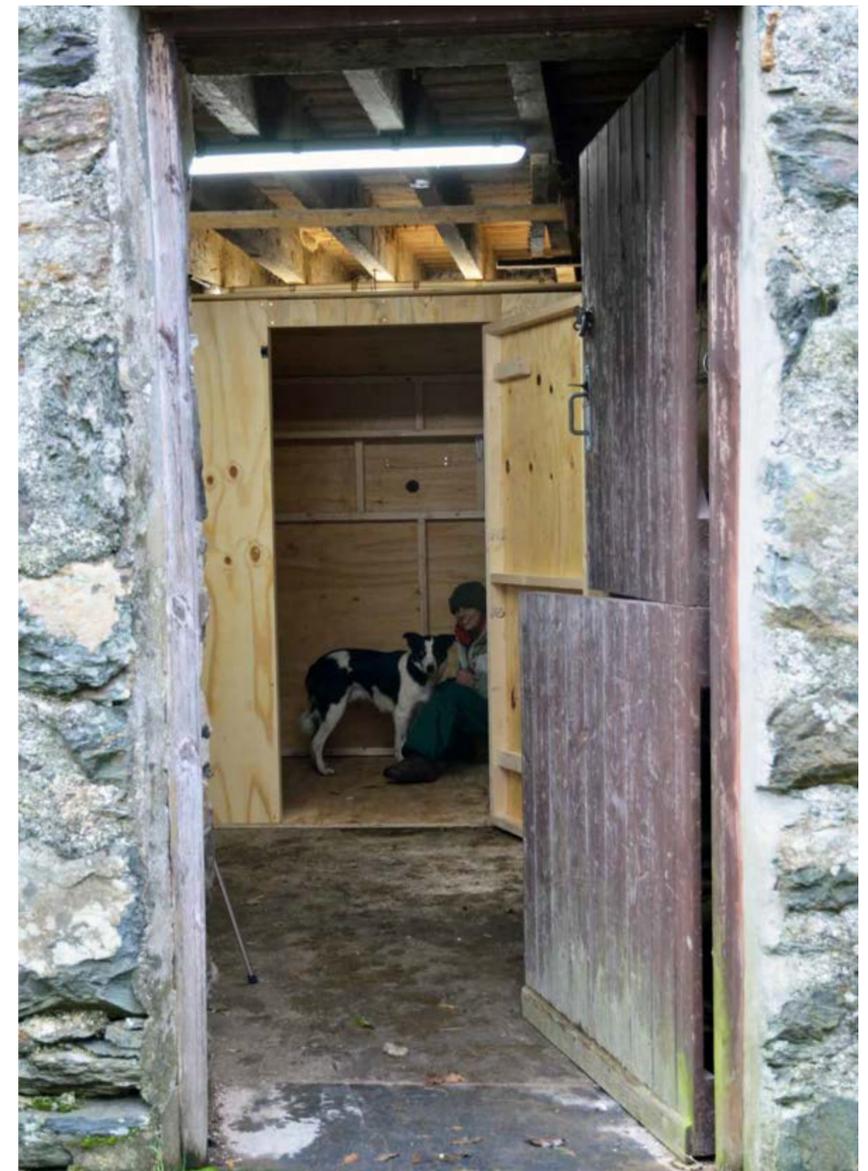
A neglected workforce: Women's place in the history of British farming

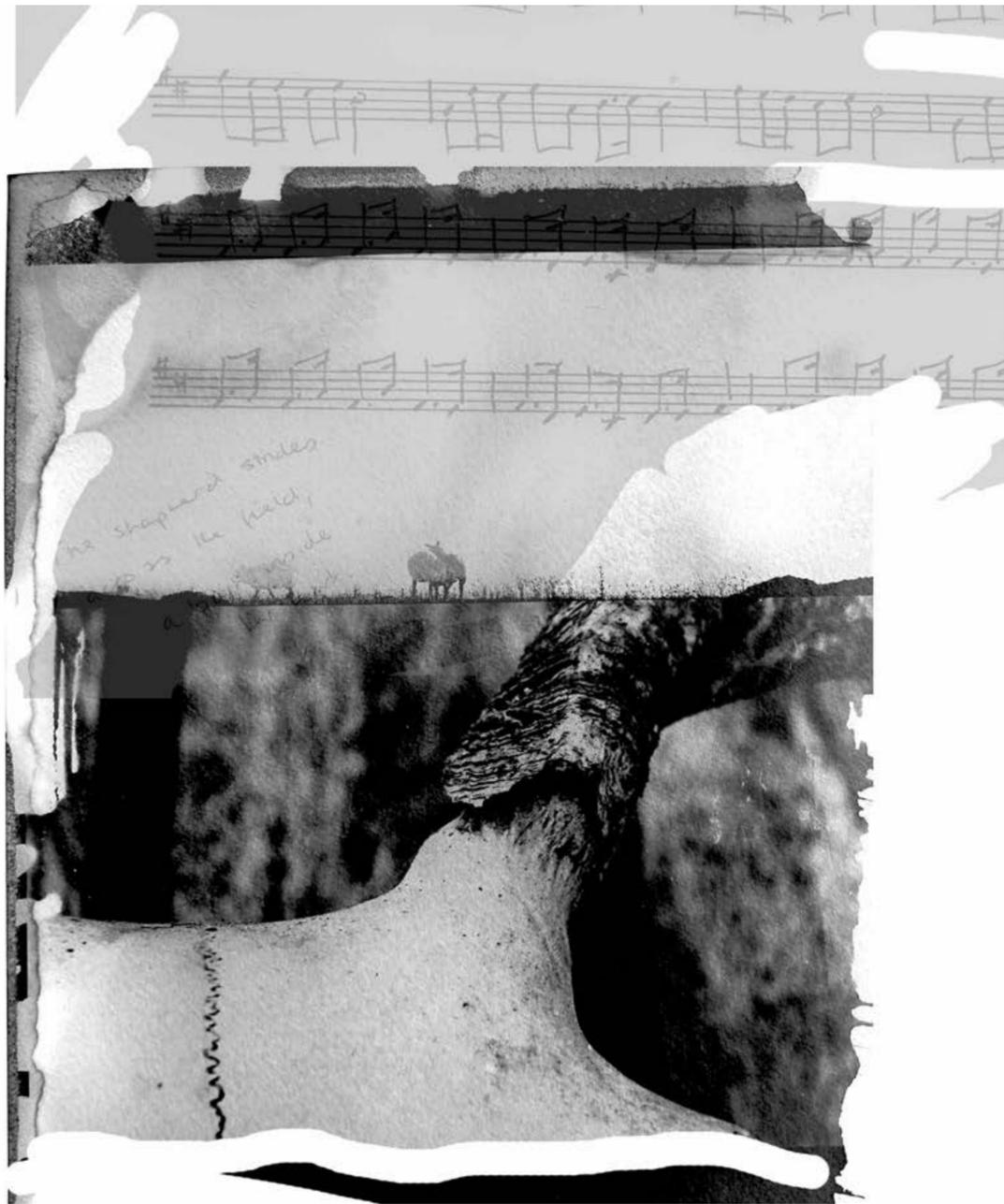
ESSAY BY NICOLA VERDON

Lisa Gast (shepherd) Isle of Bute, Scotland



Although farming is an industry that has traditionally been dominated by men, Patricia MacKinnon-Day's work with a range of farm women over the last decade has highlighted the many and diverse ways that women contribute to agricultural production today. Through *The Calling Sheds*, the stories, challenges and achievements of one distinct group of farm women, sheep farmers, are being told. These contemporary women stand in the footsteps of generations of females who have worked on farms, but whose roles have historically been marginalised and underestimated at best, belittled and erased at worse.





On family farms women's labour was unpaid and largely undocumented, and the census, which recorded detailed occupational information from 1851 onwards, omitted much of women's part-time, seasonal and unpaid labour on the land. Yet by delving deeper into the sources, we can see the valuable and often vital role that women played in the agricultural industry in the past and draw parallels with their experiences today.

Despite its problems, the census data can be a useful starting point, and immediately reveals a surprisingly high number of female farmers in the Victorian and Edwardian era. Far from being invisible, in fact one in ten farms in England and Wales was headed by a woman. Scotland and Ireland kept separate records, but a similar pattern was found there. Many of these women were widows, maintaining a holding position until a son or other male relative could take over the running of the farm. Where farms were tenanted (and most were) this was a way to maintain smooth continuity of family occupancy across the generations. However, it is clear that some female farmers were running their own enterprises and managing everything that went with this including the hiring and supervision of labour, and the selling and buying of livestock, grain and other products at market. Hired labour was predominately male, corn and livestock exchanges were male dominated, as were pubs, agricultural societies and clubs, and female farmers had to negotiate these heavily gendered spaces in order to succeed.

By the early 1900s agricultural and horticultural colleges such as Swanley and Studley were offering training courses for women who were keen to follow an independent career in farming. Many women who took these courses were from middle-class, non-farming backgrounds, drawn to farming as a profession which offered health, happiness and liberation and by the interwar years the numbers of single women farming in their own right was increasing. However new entrants to farming were advised to stick to what were labelled the 'lighter' branches of agriculture, namely dairying, poultry and horticulture, as these were deemed to fit prevalent gender and social norms.

More numerous but in many ways more obscure in the historical record were the wives and daughters of farmers. Although farmers' wives were vilified in the early nineteenth century by commentators such as William Cobbett for withdrawing from outdoor labour (he called them the 'Mistress within'), in fact most women and girls born into farming, lived and worked on the family enterprise, and like today, provided crucial physical, intellectual and emotional labour. Husbands and wives were recognised as partners in the family business in practical farming manuals, encyclopaedias, and agricultural journals stretching back to the 17th century, and by the 1920s and 1930s the two main farming magazines in the UK, *Farmer and Stockbreeder* and *Farmers' Weekly*, rewarded farm women with their own 'home' sections.

Farm women's labour was understood as distinct but complimentary to their husbands, and traditionally the farmer's wife took command of the dairy, poultry and other farmyard animals, and the kitchen garden, producing for family subsistence and selling surplus to market. She pickled, preserved and cooked food for family, labourers and visitors, she brewed beer, administered herbal medicines, spun, quilted and made rugs. She provided childcare, reared and educated the next generation, she supervised maids and servants (if there were any) and she often kept the accounts. She also took part in outdoor farm work and by the middle of the twentieth century she increasingly expanded the farm portfolio by providing bed and breakfast and other leisure facilities for a growing tourist market. The daily work round of the farmer's wife depended on the size of the farm, the region and the social status of the family, but her activities, be they manual or supervisory, were lifelong and indispensable. Just like contemporary farm women, the farmer's wife historically was fully embedded into the local community, worked year-round indoors and outdoors and provided a cornerstone to the family business.

Women also formed part of the paid labour force on farms. The division of labour was highly gender-segregated and a large pay gap was a long-term feature of British agricultural work. Young, unmarried women were hired as servants on farms, often 'living-in' year-round, to perform work in the dairy, the household and outdoors. Other women were employed on a casual or seasonal basis, paid by the day for work such as weeding, stone-picking, planting and picking root crops. Women followed the reapers in the hay and harvest fields, turning, stacking and carting the crops. In some areas, most notably in the border regions of Northumberland and south-east Scotland, women were employed full-time throughout the year as 'bondagers', their work essential to the cultivation of the land. Whilst the number of women employed as labourers in agriculture declined in Victorian times, well into the twentieth century women workers remained vital in dairying and horticultural production. During both world wars, thousands of additional women who had never worked in agriculture before were brought into the workforce under the Women's Land Army scheme, a very visible and essential component of the wartime domestic food production programme.

Despite the masculine image of farming, we have seen that the work of women was an important and often essential element of the farm. But do we find women working with sheep in the past? Certainly the literary and artistic figure of the shepherdess was deeply embedded in the British cultural imagination, but where she exists in the historical sources, the shepherdess usually embodies a particular kind of romantic rural idyll, associated with courtship and pleasure, rather than work (after all, Little Bo Peep fell asleep and lost her sheep). In contrast male shepherds were portrayed as stoic and wise, at one with nature and environment, independent and responsible. As in other male-dominated industries, the skilled traditions and knowledge of shepherding were developed and strengthened through occupational inheritance within families along male lines. Women, as the wives of hired shepherds or as the wives and daughters of sheep farmers, might have had the knowledge and ability to shepherd and were called upon to do so when needed, for example during times of male labour shortages or family crises, but they did not, or could not necessarily lay claim to the occupational identity, or remuneration, of a shepherd. Indeed, the official records suggest that such work was exceptional, with no female shepherds recorded in the nineteenth-century census returns. Despite its association with natality and nurturing, traditionally shepherding has been marked out as a man's world.

Yet if we explore further there is again evidence that women were able to eke out a place for themselves as sheep farmers. In the 1890s, the Yorkshire town of Driffild had two friendly societies, called 'Shepherds' and 'Shepherdesses', with juvenile branches of both. The 1901 and 1911 censuses gave a handful of women the official occupational designation of shepherd. In the mid-1930s *Farmer and Stockbreeder* included several women who worked with sheep in their 'Successful Women Farmers' series. During both world wars women were featured as shepherdesses in various official Women's Land Army publications, earning widespread praise for their practical skills and dedication. Since the Second World War, and particularly in the last couple of decades, the visibility of women in the sheep sector has continued to grow. There are several reasons for this. Farming has increasingly come to rely on the labour of family members (rather than full-time hired workers) meaning the contribution of women has become even more important. Gender divisions within farming have diminished, albeit slowly, and it has become more acceptable for younger generations of women, increasingly armed with formal agricultural training, to take over family or independent farm tenancies. Recently the ability of women to harness the power of social media has brought attention to the work of some exceptional female sheep farmers.

Over the last decade Mackinnon-Day's research and artworks have brought the varied roles of modern-day farm women into the public arena, with *The Calling Sheds and Tracing Shadows* providing a window into the world of the shepherdess. Crucially these works provide space and time for women to voice their own narratives, struggles and successes and give deserved attention and recognition to a group of rural women whose work has for far too long been relegated to the realm of artistic fancy.

Nicola Verdon
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Research image (2021)
Mackinnon-Day

Tracing Shadows (2022)

ART GENE. CUMBRIA

Tracing Shadows:

And though they can be born too late

Kim Moore (poetry) Nick Rogers (soundscape)

and though they can be born too late
or too early, be too tiny to survive

the wind and rain, a sudden storm,
though they can be born too big to leave

their mother's body, too big even
to be pulled into the world by hand,

though their mothers can be bitten by midges
their bodies taken over by a virus

that twists a lamb and fuses it inside,
though they are born hungry and some will

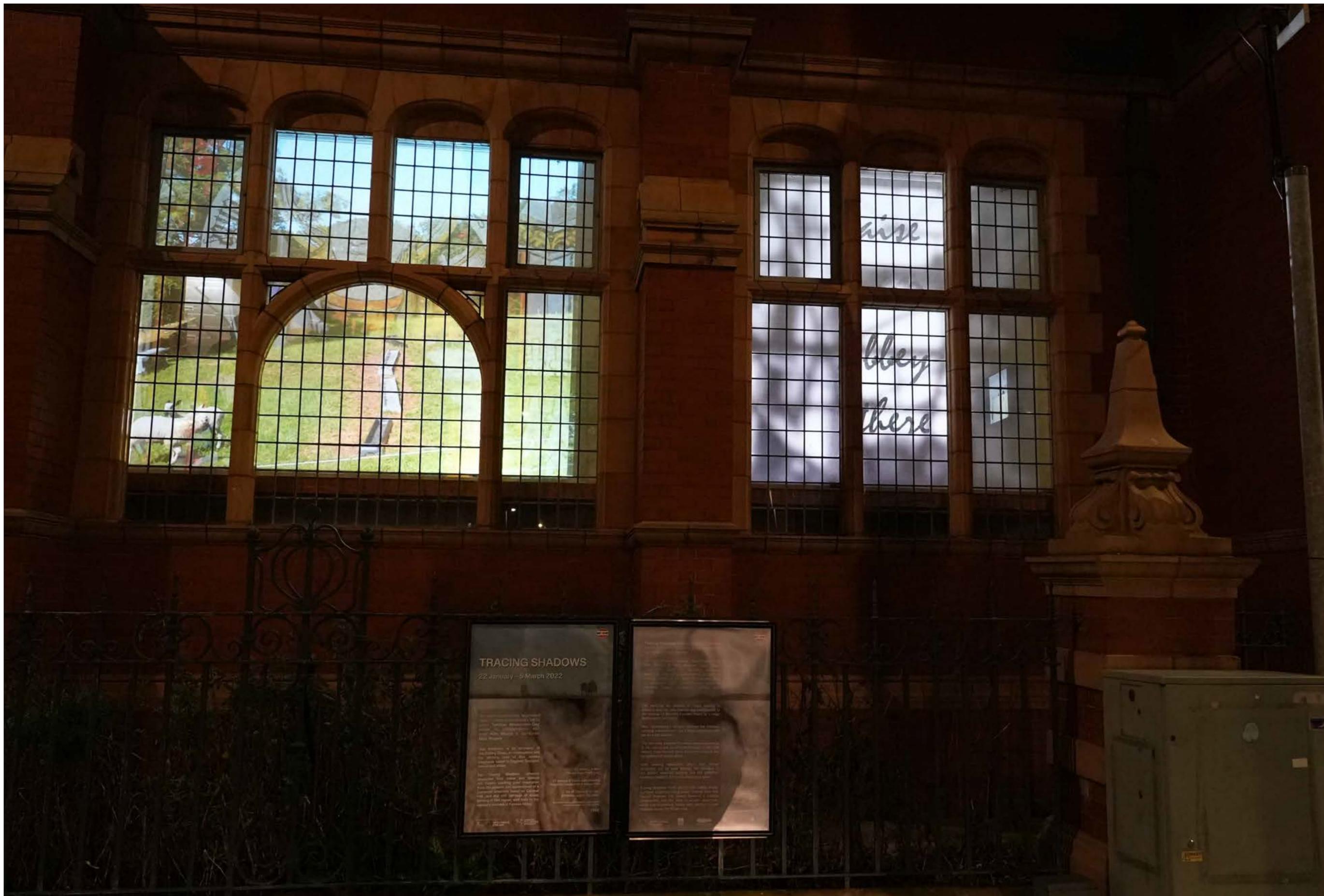
stay hungry and die, though some
will be carried off by something in the night,

though their mothers can suffer prolapses,
broken ribs, though some will be born

dead, or almost dead, though some are born
with death already in their eyes, still, look

at this flock, the way they flock together, how somehow they survived.
Their shepherd strides across the field,

a barn inside her heart, the barn
with open doors for sheep to shelter in the night



Et in Arcadia Ego (2022)
Street view. Art Gene, Cumbria



Et in Arcadia Ego (2022)
Duel projection. Art Gene, Cumbria



Tracing Shadows:

This is the ewe who lost the lamb

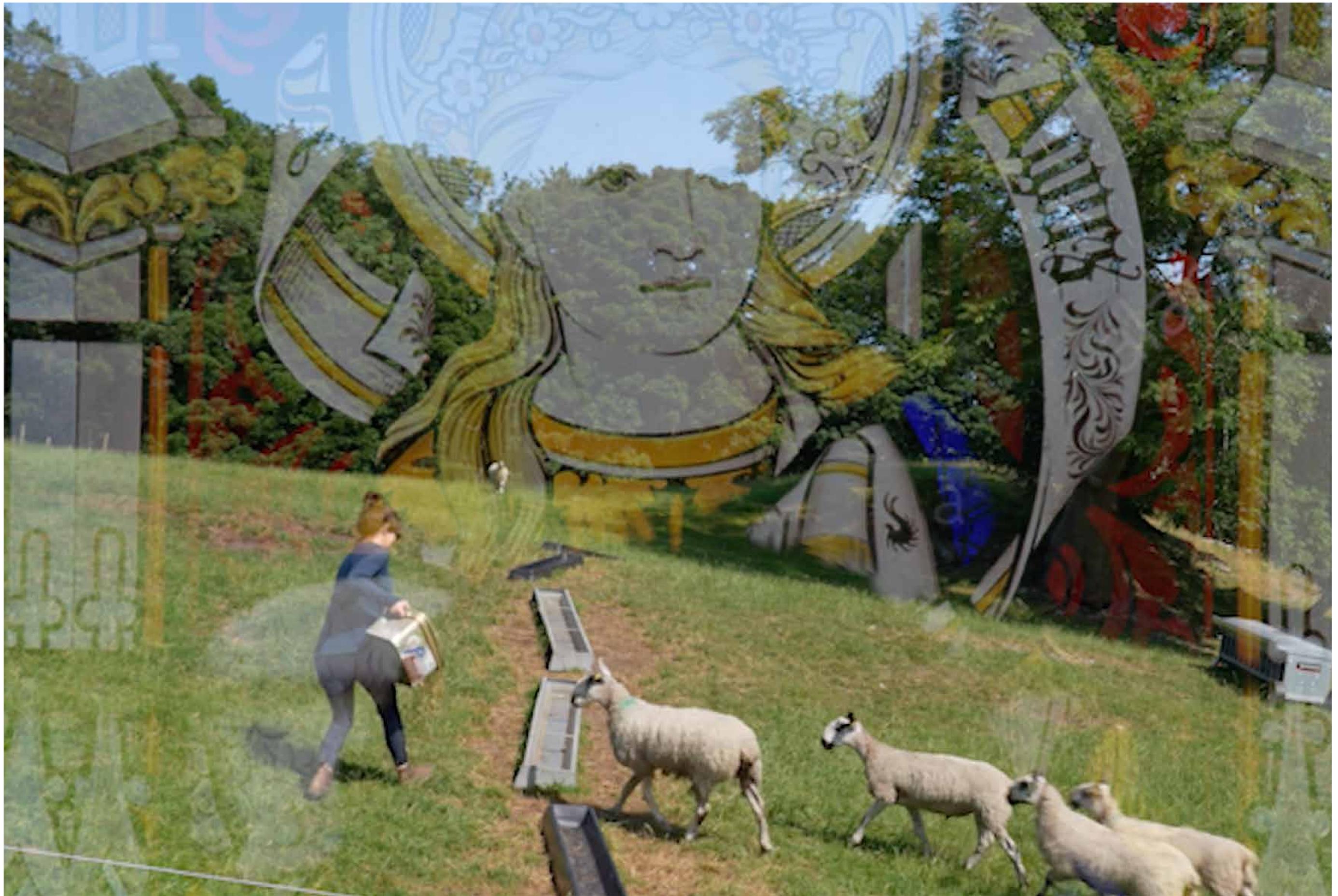
Kim Moore (poetry) Nick Rogers (soundscape)

when we opened up the skull
we found great vaulted chambers
a complete cave system
here were shadows of shadows
bone gathered together a crushed flower
or a dying coral reef
inside the skull we saw the sheepdog
with an eye like a hook
and the sheepdog with the body of a fish
sleeping in the carved-out sockets
where light used to settle like a bird
o all the sky poured in
when the skull was opened to the wind



Et in Arcadia Ego (2022) extract 2
Soundscape: Poetry, Kim Moore, Music Nick Rogers. Art Gene, Cumbria

[CLICK TO PLAY](#)



Et in Arcadia Ego (2022)
Video still. Art Gene, Cumbria



Et in Arcadia Ego (2022) (left and below)
Duel monitors. Art Gene, Cumbria

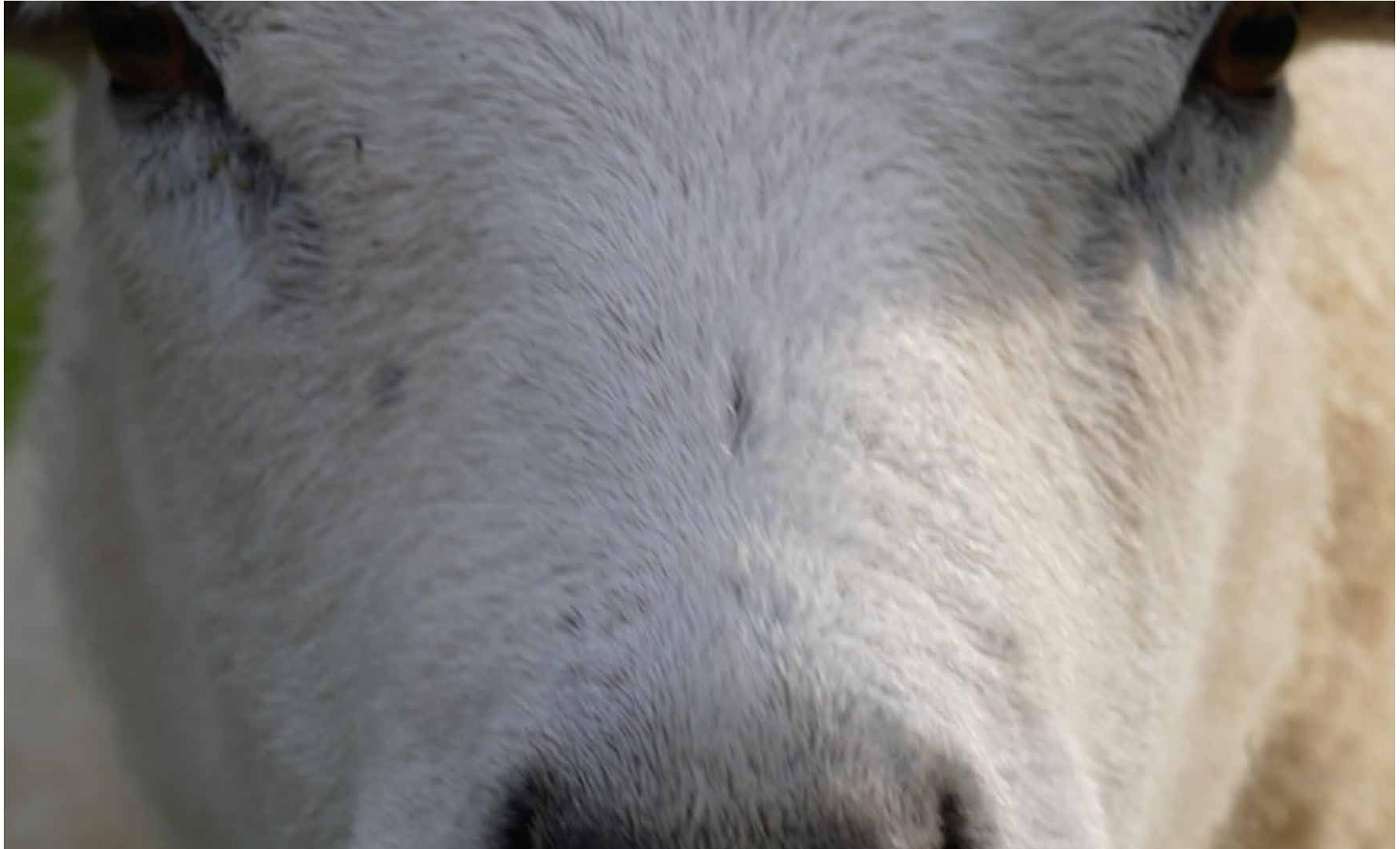
Tracing Shadows (2022) (below)
Kim Moore, Poetry and Nick Rogers, Music



Tracing Shadows

This is the ewe who lost the lamb

Kim Moore (poetry) Nick Rogers (soundscape)





Echo (2022) jasmine
Gold pigment; glass with audio projected from shed interior.



Echo (2022)
Detail

Can I speak to the *farmer* please? Reflections on the work of Patricia Mackinnon-Day

ESSAY BY ROSEMARY SHIRLEY

Tracing four shepherds (2019)
Soundscape soprano, Lorna Kettle

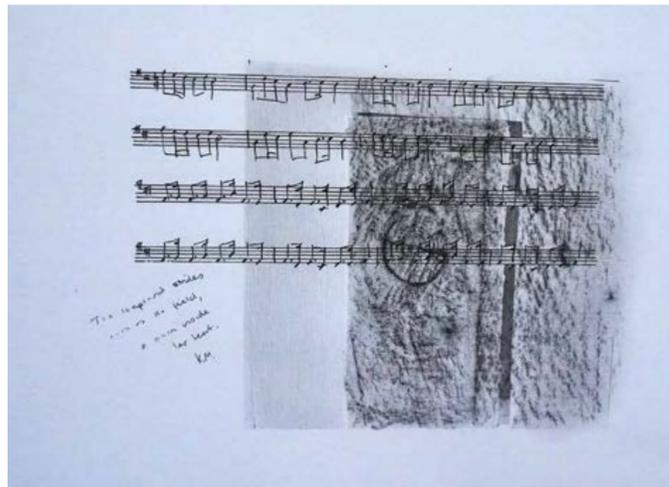


The title of this essay is taken from the words of Mary Brough, a hill farmer from Cumbria who took part in MacKinnon-Day's project Tracing the Landscape in 2018. Mary shared with Patricia her amusement when people knock at the door and asked to speak to the farmer, assuming of course that she was the farmer's wife. 'He isn't here,' answers Mary and gets on with the rest of her day. Such encounters demonstrate the importance of MacKinnon-Day's work in recording the voices and experiences of underrepresented and often invisible female agricultural workers.



As well as helping to raise visibility and challenge stereotypes, this work creates a forum for sharing the day to day realities of farming and the unexpected stories, both of which can encourage us to question our assumptions or perhaps even our lack of knowledge about what contemporary farming entails. It is in this process of sharing where connections are made: connections between gallery visitors and farmers, animals, landscapes, and also connections between the farmers themselves.

Patricia Mackinnon-Day has been working with women in agriculture for almost a decade, but it is her most recent works which are the subject of the reflections below. For *The Calling Sheds* in 2019, the artist worked with four (female) shepherds, interviewing them, filming them at work with their flocks, encouraging them to curate a selection of significant objects and creating a space for them to speak remotely with visitors to the exhibition at Tate Liverpool. For *Tracing Shadows*, exhibited in 2022, MacKinnon-day collaborated with composer Nick Rogers, poet Kim Moore and the Shepherd Lisa Berry (who was also part of *The Calling Sheds* project) to create a specially commissioned work for Art Gene in Barrow in Furness, the resulting films, still images and sculptures explore the history of sheep farming in the area.



Get a Sheep Get a Shovel

One of the visitors to *The Calling Sheds* exhibition, says that she'd heard the expression 'Get a sheep get a shovel', from farming friends.¹ It refers to the highly developed death drive of the animals, sheep are prone to many more diseases and maladies than cattle, giving them a stubbornly morbid reputation. Lisa Berry the shepherd from Cartmel in the Lake District, kick started her shepherding life through an encounter with a dead sheep. She tells us at that when she was quite new to the farm, 'a city girl', in her own words, she came across a dead sheep, its eyes pecked out by crows, a gruesome and upsetting sight. After being calmed down with tea and cake by a neighbour, Lisa went on to confront the owner of the dead sheep. She felt he was neglecting his animals and the ensuing argument resulted in Lisa taking on the flock herself, most of whom were pregnant. In that one life changing afternoon, she began the steep learning curve demanded by not only preventing sheep from dying but helping them to thrive.

As part of *The Calling Sheds* A wooden shed was installed on each shepherd's farm and they were invited to use it as a space to bring together objects that represent their lives on the land, creating their own personal environments and narratives. Amongst Lisa Berry's objects is a lamb's skull which she keeps to remind her of one of the important lesson's she has learned. She tells us that the skull came from one of a pair of twin lambs, both were very small, but this one in particular seemed always to be ailing. There was a bad storm, but Lisa had to go out to photograph a wedding - her other job (it's not unusual for shepherds to need to take second jobs working off the farm) - she'd tried to bring the lamb inside before she left, but she couldn't catch her. All the time Lisa was at the wedding she was worrying about the lamb, and when she got home she found it dead in the field. The skull, she says, 'reminds me to listen to my instincts...and how fragile it all is. There's things that happen that I couldn't have done anything about, but I could have done something about that'.

Historically, works of art and poetry that take rural places, people and practices as subject matter are thought of as belonging to the pastoral genre. This way of representing the countryside has become synonymous with the idealisation of rural places, emphasising ideas of harmony between humans and nature rather than the often unpleasant realities of trying to make a living through farming animals and land. The figure of the (male) shepherd is a popular character within this genre and is often depicted at leisure surrounded by his flock, playing music or flirting with a pretty girl. However, even within such idealised representations of the shepherd's life, death is still close at hand. An iconic painting in the pastoral genre is *Et in Arcadia Ego* or *The Arcadian Shepherds* (1637-38) by Nicolas Poussin. It shows three male shepherds, each with a shepherd's crook, in a classical landscape, they are accompanied by a woman, who may well be a shepherdess (although she doesn't have a crook). The group have come upon a tomb and are reading the words inscribed upon it: *Et in Arcadia Ego*, which have been translated as: 'Even in Arcadia there I am', and interpreted to mean that even in paradise or arcadia death cannot be escaped.²

Untitled (2021)

Gelly print, Mackinnon-Day

The film made as part of *Tracing Shadows* takes its name from this phrase and it reminds us of the constant presence of mortality and the shepherd's role in fending off the many threats to a sheep's life. Here we are given a close up tour of a sheep's skull, the black and white imagery emphasising the texture of bone and horn, the delicate intricacies of structure, river like tributaries etched across its surface, its many hollows and shadows. Kim Moore's poem is spoken over the film, movingly listing the many things that can befall both lamb and ewe: being too small to survive, too large to be born, terrible weather, viruses, prolapses, broken ribs. The first section of the poem ends with the lines:

*though some will be born
dead, or almost dead, though some are born*

*with death already in their eyes, still, look
at this flock, the way they flock
together, how somehow they survived.*

*Their shepherd strides across the field,
a barn inside her heart, the barn
with open doors for sheep to shelter in the night.*³

In these lines we hear the tension that runs through the shepherd's work, a tension which is there in many of the stories the shepherds tell as they are interviewed for *The Calling Sheds*; the constant push and pull between shepherd and flock, between wandering and being kept safe, hunger and feeding, illness and care, life and death. There is a powerful visualisation of this tension in the films which accompany the interviews in *The Calling Sheds*. Here we see the shepherds and their flocks from above, moving through the different landscapes which make up their farms. From this angle the sheep seem to be held taught as one unit which ebbs and flows, performing a collective dance in response to the slight shifts in position between shepherd and dog - a complex choreography of care.

This tension is also evident in the dialectical pull between the compassion taken in the rearing of these animals and the role they play in the meat industry. In a conversation with gallery visitors Lisa Berry encapsulates this contradiction when she says of her sheep: 'I know they have a nice life because they taste amazing'. She goes on to explain that while the primary purpose of her flock is to rear breeding ewes which will be sold at market, there are inevitably male lambs that will become meat. She describes how she works with a local abattoir so she knows the people and trusts them to work responsibly and so that the animals don't have to travel far on their final journey. 'I was there when they were born' she says, 'and I know how their lives ended'.

I can be at the Trafford Centre in an hour and a half

In his book, *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams describes a set of cultural associations which have collected around these two locations:

On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation.⁴

1. In the 2016 BBC documentary *Addicted to Sheep* the farmer says stoically

'A sheep wants nothing better than to die'.

2. For further discussion of the idea of the dark pastoral see Verity Elson and Rosemary Shirley, *Creating the Countryside: The Rural Idyll Past and Present* (London: Paul Holberton, 2017): p.25

3. Kim Moore, *Tracing Shadows* 2022.

4. Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (London: Hogarth Press 1993 [1973]): p.9

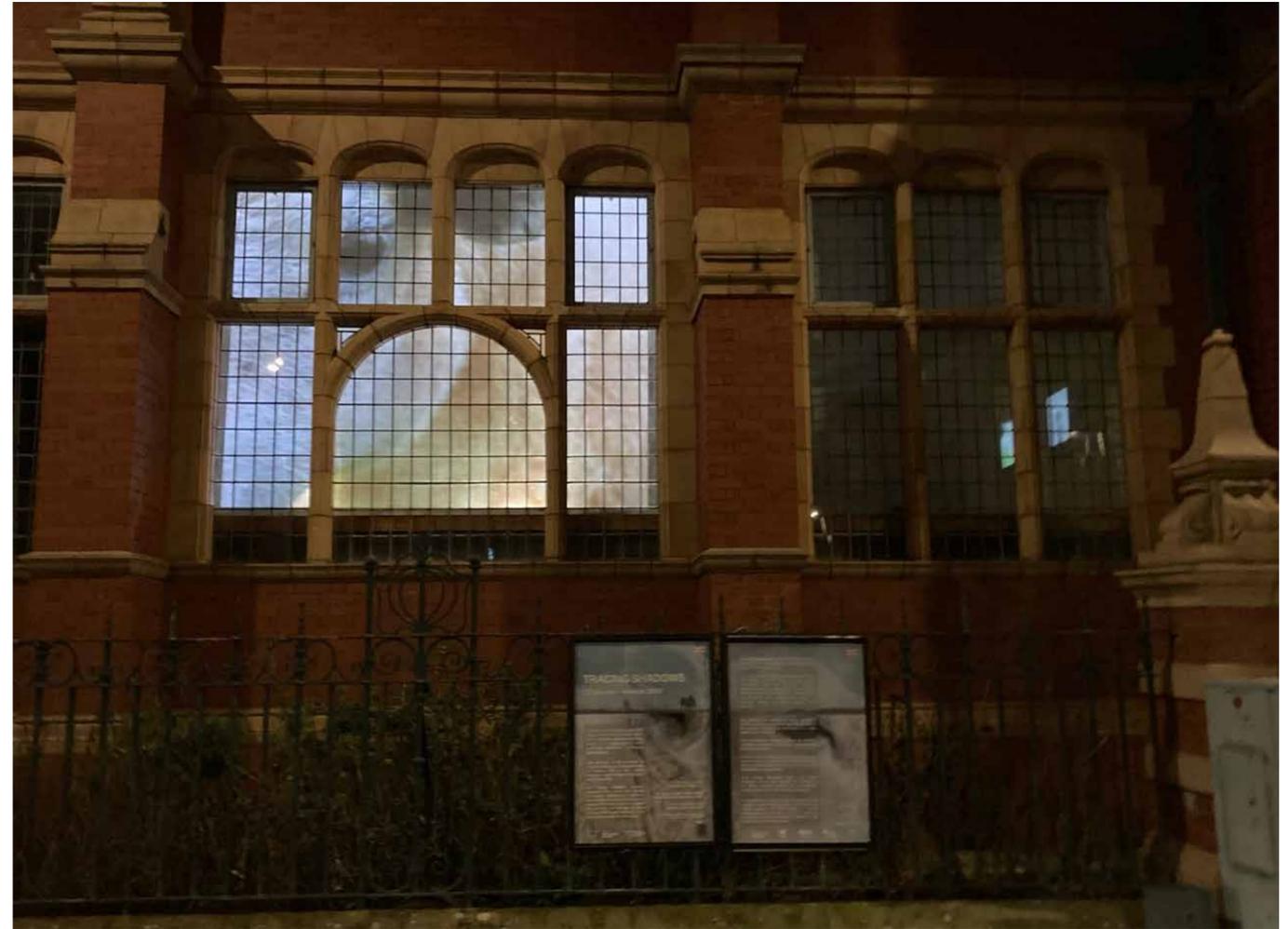
The Irish Calling Shed
Mackinnon-Day and Catherine O'Grady Power (shepherd) (2019)
Glen Keen Farm, County Mayo



These assumptions, which Williams goes on to challenge, are however very powerful and continue to affect how the countryside and the city, their inhabitants, their resources and their needs are imagined.

One such association which seemed prominent in the minds of many of the visitors to The Calling Sheds was the idea of the remoteness of these farms and by extension the loneliness of the shepherd's life. Conversations in the shed often seemed to start with a gallery visitor asking the shepherd about the relative remoteness of their farm. As Williams's words show us, there is something seductive about remoteness, (the idea of getting away from it all is the basis for many a holiday cottage rental), but also something frightening (how many drama's start with the loss of a mobile phone signal?). Perhaps this opposition is at the heart of what makes living remotely so intriguing.

Lisa Berry's reply is disarming, she reminds us that there aren't many places in the UK that are truly remote. When asked if it's lonely where she lives, if 'living in a field' feels remote, she answers that she can get in her car and drive to the Trafford Centre (a giant shopping mall on the outskirts of Manchester) in an hour and a half if she needs a fix.



Et in Arcadia Ego (2022)
Street projection. Art Gene, Cumbria

But what do we understand by the word remote? The dictionary tells us it is the definition of a place situated far from the main centres of population; somewhere distant. This is a definition of remote measured by miles and population figures, but remote also has its ideological uses. The idea of the countryside as remote assumes that there is a centre, somewhere from which all definitions of remote are measured, this is the centre of power, of influence, of resource, and the word remote tells us that countryside is a long way from it.

When we question the word remote, we find that it does not only refer to geographical distance but also distance in time. Sometimes it's easy to slip into old colonial ways of thinking that remoteness in terms of distance also brings with it a remoteness in terms of time; that places that are far from the established centre are also, as William's notes, thought to be backwards, behind, disconnected from the contemporary world. In the UK this unquestioning acceptance of a time lag between the urban and the rural manifests in inequalities of internet speeds and mobile phone signals, public transport, access to health services and job prospects.



Since the coronavirus pandemic what remote means has changed, we might work remotely, have meetings remotely, attend talks and events remotely, chat remotely. When it has been impossible to meet in real life being remote has paradoxically meant being connected, maintaining or making connections when proximal interactions were impossible.

The Calling Sheds took place before the pandemic but it utilised technology which is now so familiar, connecting four female shepherds for live chat sessions everyday with visitors to Tate Liverpool. Presented with a wooden shed inside the gallery space, visitors were encouraged to go inside and talk to one of the shepherds who took it in turns to spend a little time out of their busy days to answer questions and talk about their jobs, their homes, their sheep, and their lives. School groups dithered outside the shed not wanting to go in, feeling shy, feeling the potential for something deeply embarrassing to happen. What do you say to a shepherd?

'This is weird', said one visitor as his eyes adjusted to the dark interior and he realised that he was talking to a shepherd, in a field, hundreds of miles away, but at the same time, here at that moment, in a gallery, on a tiny screen. But the awkwardness never lasts for long. Connections are made, between what visitors already know about farming and the lived experience of these women, assumptions are challenged and conversations happen. Teleri Fielden, the shepherd from Snowdonia, North Wales, talks of what it is like to work alone, not only the psychological aspects but the very practical physical experience; of having to rehang a gate by herself, supporting the weight of it on her shoulders, of finding herself upended in a field covered in mud with no one to laugh at her but herself, of having to work things out on her own and when that's not possible of having to get on the quad bike (there's no mobile phone signal) and ride over to the next farm and see if she can find someone to help or to ask about her problem.

Lisa Berry confounds the expectations of gallery visitors who may be picturing a rural life free from the distractions of the modern world, by sharing that she learned lambing in the same way as we learn most things these days, from fixing a toilet to knitting techniques: YouTube. "There's a lot you can learn from YouTube" says Lisa.

All the shepherds spoke about their connections with others, the importance of their neighbours and their communities. Many of the objects they chose to be displayed articulate these connections: rosettes from agricultural shows where the farming community comes to together to show off their best animals and socialise, family photographs showing connections with current and previous generations, and policy documents representing committee work and farm advocacy activities. There is a difference between being alone and loneliness, in remote places there is evidently also connection.

Shadows in the landscape

In its original form the term palimpsest referred to a manuscript on which later writing had been superimposed over earlier text, creating a complex surface of different layers. The word has now evolved a broader meaning, referring to something that has been reused and altered over time but that still bears traces of its previous form.

The idea of the landscape as a palimpsest is well known to landscape historians, geographers and archaeologists. Like a coded manuscript, if you know what to look for, it is possible to trace different layers of activity on the land over time, all of which have left their mark. The landscape historian W.G.Hoskins was a key proponent of this approach which he used to read the multiple and complex stories of how the landscape as we know it today has come to look and feel the way it does. In *The Making of the English Landscape* he shows that from the ridge and furrow patterns created by medieval ploughing techniques, to the patchwork of hedges and walls marking field boundaries created by the enclosure acts, to roads, canals and railways, the history of a place is captured by the traces left on the land.⁵

The landscape as palimpsest runs throughout the work of MacKinnon-Day, which understands place as not only a layering of geographical features but also cultural associations and practices, she writes that: 'I use the word 'palimpsest' to describe my process of excavating and investigating multiple layers of a place over a significant period of time.'⁶ Perhaps this is most evident in the series of works: *Tracing Shadows*, made in response to the landscapes of Barrow in Furness. The films, which are shown as a dual projection, form a multi-layered collage both visually and aurally, layering imagery with music and poetry.

Through a series of overlaid images and text we are asked to contemplate the connections between contemporary sheep farming, the ruins of Furness Abbey - historically an important centre of sheep farming in the region, the structure of a sheep's skull, Barrow's dock cranes, and a stained glass representation of St Agnes carrying the Lamb of God. The images move together creating a slow kaleidoscopic set of associations. There is a moment where the stained glass image of St Agnes is superimposed upon aerial footage of Lisa Berry's Lake District farm just a few miles north of Barrow, the criss-cross of the leaded window panes visually mirroring the pattern of stone walled fields.

Centuries if not millennia of sheep farming has made its own contribution to this palimpsest. Sheep farming has created the appearance of the landscapes we may think of as being "naturally" occurring. Many hills and fields would be wooded if it were not for sheep grazing.⁷ Their regular perambulations imprint trails onto the land and favoured sitting or sheltering spots under trees or on hillsides are rubbed smooth through constant use. Sheep become hefted to certain areas in upland farms, this means that in land without boundaries, sheep instinctively know where they belong, and this knowledge is passed on from ewe to lamb.

The sculptor Henry Moore studied the forms and habits of sheep in the landscape, eventually publishing a *Sheep Sketchbook* where he depicts the animals' solidity and embeddedness in the landscape.⁸ Roger Deakin described Henry Moore's representation of sheep as 'animate stones, the makers of their own landscape'.⁹ Perhaps it is no surprise that Moore, who was so accustomed to working with stone, depicted his sheep with a boulder-like permanence, a stability that belies what we know of the fragility of an individual sheep's existence. Rather it speaks to the stalwart continuity of generations of sheep who have inhabited the landscape for many years, passing on their ways of knowing and patterns of living to each new lamb.

5. W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London: Hodder and Staunton 1955)

6. P.MacKinnon-Day for An Artist's Anthropological Approach to Sustainability (Vol.35, issue 3. The international Journal of Art and Design Education 2016)

7. This aspect of sheep farming has placed it as the centre of debates on rewilding, see George Monbiot, *Feral: Rewilding the Land, Sea and Human Life* (London: Penguin 2014): pp.153-166. See also an interview with Teleri Fielden on the impact of rewilding policies on Welsh hill farmers: Tom Levit, 'It will take away our livelihoods: Welsh farmers on rewilding and carbon capture markets' The Guardian, 28 Dec 2021: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/dec/28/agriculture-recycling-carbon-farmers-reframe-rewilding-debate>

8. Kenneth Clark, *Henry Moore's Sheep Sketchbook* (London: Thames and Hudson 2002)

9. Roger Deakin, *Waterlog: A Swimmers Journey Through Britain* (Chatto and Wyndus 1999) p.9

Echo (2022)

Detail. Art Gene, Cumbria



Echo (2022)
Detail. Art Gene, Cumbria

Looking forward

There is a tendency for cultural endeavours that attempt to record the lives of those who live and work in rural places to frame those lives as endangered, as dying out, being exorcised by the modern world, making their capture especially urgent. Raymond Williams demonstrated that over the past seven hundred years or more, accounts of rural places have always adopted a position of recording the last remnants of a golden age about to be lost forever.¹⁰ There is however, little sense of this nostalgic trope in the work of MacKinnon-Day. *Tracing Shadows* is imbued with a feeling of continuity, change is inevitable and constant, but images of the contemporary shepherd, the flocks and skull, speak to the cyclical nature of life within and beyond farming. Whilst *The Calling Sheds*, is not centred on external threats to the countryside or to the practice of shepherding. We know the economic challenges and the paradigmatic shift that climate change will bring, but listening to these women share their passion, their commitment and their energy the future feels full of possibilities.

¹⁰ Raymond Williams, op cit. pp.9-12.

The Calling Sheds (2019)

TATE LIVERPOOL

WELCOME TO TATE EXCHANGE



THE CALLING SHEDS WITH LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY 19 NOVEMBER - 8 DECEMBER 2019

Join us on a journey from Tate Liverpool to Long South Farm, Llynny Isaf Farm, Glen Keen Farm and Scalpale Farm.

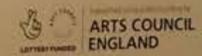
The Calling Sheds is an investigation by artist Patricia Mackinnon-Day into the language and working processes of four women shepherds in four locations. Mackinnon-Day has installed a shed at each of the four locations. In Tate Exchange visitors will encounter a replica of the sheds installed on the participating farms in England, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Speak to Lisa at Long Garth Farm in Cumbria, Tessie at Llynny Isaf Farm in Snowdonia, Catherine at Glen Keen Farm in County Mayo and Lisa at Scalpale Farm in Isle of Bute through live link at 13.00-14.00 daily. This is your chance to find out more about the rural life and work of a sheep farmer. Listen to a sound piece and see a selection of objects from each of the farms, as well as new video works.

Soundscape soprano: Lorna Kettle

More about this project:

The Calling Sheds is a collaboration between artist Patricia Mackinnon-Day and four women shepherds, developed together with Sarah Collicott of Artspace Management and independent curator, Charu Vallabhrai. This project seeks to creatively engage the shepherds while also connecting female farm workers in rural locations across the British Isles. The sheds on their farms become their own year-long private residency space, allowing them to step into another sphere where they live and work.

The Calling Sheds is supported using public funding by Arts Council England.







The Calling Sheds (2019)
Daily live stream with shepherds

[CLICK TO PLAY](#)



▶ CLICK TO PLAY



The Calling Sheds (2019) daily livestream
Between public and shepherds. Tate Liverpool.



The Calling Sheds (2019)
Exhibition details. Tate Liverpool

Tracing four shepherds (2019)
Soundscape soprano, Lorna Kettle



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Making Our Own Hay

ESSAY BY CHARU VALLABHBHAI

Lisa Berry, (shepherd) Cartmel Farm, Cumbria





The stereotypical image of farmers, particularly in Europe and north America, is of privileged landowners operating large scale farming operations but statistics reveal that approximately 80% of the world's food is produced by small-scale farming. Women make up on average 43 percent of this agricultural labour in developing countries. They are the majority in some countries and in South Asia, more than two thirds of employed women work in agriculture.¹

Patricia Mackinnon-Day's decade long study of farming in the British Isles uncovers the little recognised contributions that women farmers make in the twenty-first century to the UK's agricultural industry, a very male sector into which women are making a vitally important impact, in terms of the much required response to climate change and the need for farming methods that bring back balance into the cultivated natural environment. In the coming decades there is greater possibility of women entering farming and redressing gender disparity. In Autumn 2021 Aberystwyth University announced on the UN's International Day of Rural Women that for the first time in the institution's history, the majority of students entering their courses in agriculture are female. Recognised as an important milestone it should also be noted that Dr Pip Nicholas-Davies currently heads up the Agricultural teaching group as senior lecturer in livestock production at Aberystwyth University's Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences. In this role, as teacher to first and to second year undergraduate students, alongside her research focus into the socio-economic aspects of sustainable farming, she is a visible role model to the young women who will enter the agricultural industry following completion of their studies. However, the existing wider context is one of gender pay gaps that cut across all sectors. Regrettably, despite decades of feminist discourse to inform societal change in attitudes and behaviours towards women in the work place, the 'me too' movement of women speaking out indicates that for career progression, women remain at risk of violation and losing their dignity whilst they are preyed on by their male directors, managers, trainers, physiotherapists etc. This is no price to pay to reach the same level as our male counterparts. The four women sheep farmers informing the commissions created for 'The Calling Sheds' and 'Tracing Shadows' all have their own businesses. As their own bosses, together with their partners, their working lives exemplify genuine partnerships, dedication and an instinct to follow their passions and their hearts. Lisa Berry and Catherine O'Grady-Powers have both related how crucial 'following their instinct' has proved to be. It's the human antenna, tuning-in with nature, the seasons and the memory of centuries-old knowledge of our relationship with the land that is embedded in our DNA.

The artwork 'Echo' comprising sculpture, music and spoken word created by Mackinnon-Day as lead artist collaborating with poet Kim Moore and musician Nick Rogers has been directly informed by the recollections of the shepherds, in particular Lisa Berry whose farm Moore and Rogers visited in 2021. The sculptural elements in this multi-media composition are also influenced by Mackinnon-Day's experience of attending church as a child, growing up in a working-class area of Glasgow. She and her brother were raised by their single mum with comparatively basic facilities at home. Brought up in the Catholic faith, Mackinnon-Day recalls the church building as the first place she visited that was rich in visual culture. There she saw paintings depicting scenes from bible stories and also stained-glass windows relating narratives in jewel coloured opulence, as well as statuary and figures in gold. The sculptural elements of 'Echo' relay a different narrative though - one in which four-winged golden sheep, representing the shepherds of this project, lead a flock of stark white sheep to the safety of a shed or barn. These winged shepherdesses, with glittering precious stone eyes, refer indirectly to the glorious objects displayed in the church interior of Mackinnon-Day's childhood. But the conventional symbolism of a flock representing the congregation is disrupted here. The sheep are being guided to shelter in a form that is a simple wooden farm building rather than an architecturally ornate church. The scene illustrates the real experience that occurs annually in mid-Spring after lambing, when a bad weather event such as a storm relies on intervention of a caring sheep farmer. While the ewe will feed and nurture her lambs, she is unable to protect and take them to safety away from driving wind and rain during the night. It is therefore only the shepherd who can lead the animals to the relative warmth of a simple but comforting interior. Any weak or vulnerable lamb left in the field

on a squally night is likely to perish. Portrayal of the shepherds as leaders of the flock represents their feeling of being very connected to their sheep. Lisa Berry explains this as an example of humans, animals and the natural environment in harmony together. The flock is able to survive alone but the support of their shepherd, the flock is additionally nurtured and healthier. Catherine's connection to her flock stems from Glen Keen farm being her family home for generations and how she now views herself as caretaker and protector of the farm. Growing up on the farm where she was surrounded by sheep, Catherine feels a deep association to the Mayo landscape that has supported the sheep for centuries and emphasises how much the sheep are also an integral element in management of the natural environment. The sound elements of 'Echo' combine Moore's spoken word and Rogers' music, capturing the many moments of fragility that occur during the lambing cycle in Moore's poem 'Flock'.

In the work Et in Arcadia Ego, another collaboration led by Mackinnon-Day with Moore and Rogers, images of St Agnes taken from stained glass windows are layered over scenes of the shepherd with her flock on the farm. The story of Agnes' martyrdom is a tale of horror from fourth century Rome at a time when Christianity was viewed by the Roman Emperor Diocletian as a punishable cult. In depictions of Agnes, the patron saint of girls, she clutches a lamb which is symbolic of both her innocence and purity. As a figure she represents strength of will in the female, making a stand against the challenges set by the male dominant society of her day and brutal persecution that was accepted as norm. The shepherds themselves sense purity and innocence embodied in their lambs, but this is informed by their experience of helping in bringing these new-borns out of their mother's body - on seeing their gentle eyes and feeling their helplessness when they are first born. In rearing pet lambs, that are either orphaned, born to a mother with no milk or the smallest of triplets that the mother cannot feed, the shepherd provides milk from a bottle so the lamb will survive. In this role the shepherd is fundamentally an adult in the world, feeding a non-human baby.

In many parts of India, to survive, farm women and men living in rural areas divide their time between the city and their farms where their homes are. In the twenty first century, in order to have access to mobile communications and the internet – which these families need – their farming livelihood has to be supplemented with manual jobs in the cities. In Desra, a former village now subsumed into the town of Bilimora in Gujerat State, my aunt lives as a retired civil servant. There are women, their husbands and in some cases their older children who sleep on my aunt's veranda. She offers them a dry place, sheltered from rain where they have formed a small community together with her. They cook and eat together, and as my aunt has a television in her front room, they watch it with her in the evening after they have returned from a day hard at work on building sites. At night they sleep in the open air with bedding on the wooden veranda boards that are disinfected daily, so they have a clean resting place. Without this space, they would be living on the street in the city even though they have their own homes and farm-steads in rural India. Across the developing world a farmer's livelihood needs to be subsidised. While that is an extreme picture of the reality for women farmers and their families in India, here in the UK, without additional income, it is extremely difficult for small-scale farmers who are dedicated to ethical farming to survive. This is exemplified in the four women shepherds who Patricia Mackinnon-Day has researched and engaged in her projects. They talk of their experiences in the dual channel moving image work 'The Calling Sheds' commissioned for exhibition at Tate Liverpool. Lisa Berry, based at Cartmel Fell in Cumbria, has two additional sources of income. She is a professional wedding photographer, a business she established years before relocating to the South Lakes. Together with her husband she also manages a catering business. Rob is a trained chef, passionate about cuisine, and Lisa handles all administrative areas of that business. Teleri Feilden, in upland Snowdonia, now runs a farm with her husband Ned. They are young 'first generation'

farmers, neither of whom were born into farming. Teleri trained through the National Trust's annual scholarship in partnership with Wales Young Farmers Club, that was developed to help young farmers gain practical experience of managing a nature friendly farm. Teleri and Ned's farm is not a recipient of agri-environment payments through governmental programmes to help farmers manage their land in an environmentally friendly way. This means they both have to work 'off farm' and in Teleri's 'other day-job' she is a policy officer at the Farmer's Union of Wales. Catherine O'Grady-Powers' family business is Glen Keen Farm in County Mayo, the farm on which she grew up. After completing her education in the Republic of Ireland Catherine moved to London and worked in the airline business, where she met her husband Jim, and then moved with him to New York, where her parents had also once lived before she was born. Catherine returned to Glen Keen Farm with her husband after her uncle asked her to take on responsibility of the farm, which also needed upgrading. After running the operation for four years it became apparent that in order to keep the farm sustainable as a business, there was need for diversification. Being located in County Mayo, expansion into tourism was a natural option. The farm now offers an accommodation facility so that visitors can experience both the natural and cultivated landscape of western Ireland. Catherine and Lisa Berry both believe that their current and past experience in business, working for corporations and different industries, bring essential skills back into the running of their farm operations. Managing the farm finances and stock control, as well as marketing, are examples of farm management that rely on the structured approach and skills that their past careers have furnished them with. Lisa Gast, based at Scalpsie Farm on the Isle of Bute, had a very different experience of education and working life where she grew up outside Frankfurt in rural Germany. As there was no formal route for her to enter farming, she worked as a book-keeper after leaving school and describes herself as 'the worst book-keeper in the history of Germany'. Her route into farming was through a shepherd in her village who she had known since childhood, as he passed her house on the banks of the river Main with his flock of sheep daily. Knowing that she wanted to work with animals, and fascinated to know about working with sheep, Lisa would question the shepherd about his job. Her interest in his work resulted in him presenting her with her first dog, Clara, an old German herding dog (altdeutsche Hütehunde). Clara was similar to a border collie. In her early 20s, realising that a working life of book-keeping would not satisfy her, Lisa returned to the shepherd in her village and he helped her find work in 'lambing', at a farm in north Germany. There Lisa found that the intense rearing of 3,000 sheep had no similarity to the way her friend, the village sheep

Research image (2021) Mackinnon-Day





Tracing four shepherds (2019)
Video still. Tate Liverpool



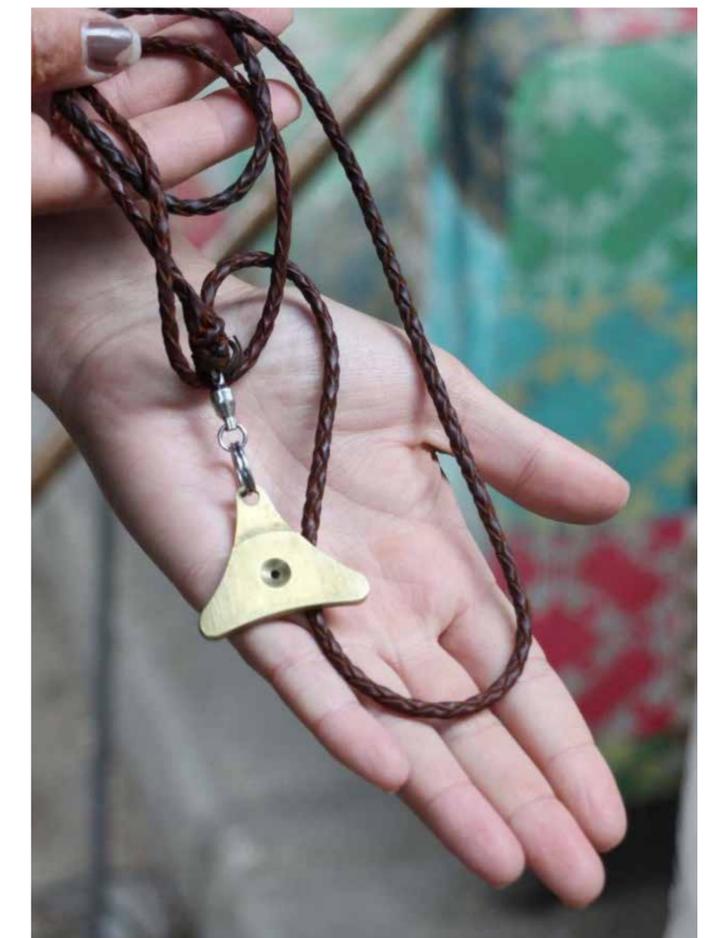
The Calling Sheds (2019)
Detail. Tate Liverpool

Shepherd's whistle (2021)
Mackinnon-Day

Research commissioned by Oxfam indicates that in supporting women farmers globally hundreds of millions of people could overcome hunger and poverty. In the longer term this backing may also make a positive impact on climate change, as food produced locally for communities, rather than export, would have a smaller carbon footprint:

“Growth in small-scale agriculture is two to four times more effective at reducing hunger and poverty than any other sector, and women farmers are playing a central role. They produce a huge amount of food for their families and surrounding communities. Agriculture is more likely than other sectors to provide diverse opportunities for empowering women. However, women farmers are held back by barriers that prevent them from feeding their families and reinvesting in their livelihoods. They face restrictions related to their gender while also experiencing the financial struggles shared by all small-scale farmers. Women do not receive the same support as men farmers do. They have less access to land, loans and machinery.”²

In the next three quarters of this century farming will inevitably adapt radically from the methods developed out of mass industrialisation and advances in post-WWII technology. Whilst down-scaling a huge agricultural operation is unlikely to occur, existing farmers - who have already responded to challenges - as well as new entrants to farming, are adopting and learning about sustainable approaches to agriculture. A more equitable global future, where investment is made towards the nearby availability rather than the long-distance distribution of food, is possible.



farmer, cared for his flock and decided to find a lambing job on a smaller farm through the website ‘helping hands’. This led Lisa to move to Scotland and work on a farm in the Borders region. After 9 weeks Lisa was offered long term employment there and decided to return to Germany, sell her belongings, and move to Scotland. Gaining experience on a variety of Scottish farms and in north east England she eventually joined the farming team run by Ian and John Dickson on the Isle of Bute. Now, like the other farmers of this project, Lisa has her own business as a sheep dog breeder and has more recently branched out into providing holiday accommodation. Lisa’s aim is that through the ‘glamping pods’ she has developed, visitors to the Isle of Bute can experience the rural beauty of a Scottish Island. For Lisa Gast, Teleri, Catherine and Lisa Berry the future of farming lies in individuality, innovation and versatility in order to farm with the environment that the sheep occupy rather than controlling it or applying farming methods that are in discord with traditional landscape management. Lisa Berry has described the long-established process of hay-making, rather than buying hay in, as incredibly rewarding in addition to being more cost effective. In documentation of ‘The Calling Sheds’ exhibition, Lisa Gast is seen speaking to visitors at Tate Liverpool about the quality of the lambs bred at Scalpsie Farm, where they roam and graze

close to the beach. Seaweed inevitably becomes a part of their diet which affects the taste of the lamb and makes it an entirely different experience on the palate compared to New Zealand lamb that is imported in large quantities to the UK’s supermarkets. This raises the question of why much lamb consumed in the UK has travelled half way across the world before reaching our domestic kitchens. The interactions of the four shepherds by remote links from their farms into the exhibition gallery at Tate Liverpool offered the gallery’s visitors a daily opportunity to speak to, and hear it directly from, the farmer. So often our perceptions of others’ lives that we don’t have direct experience of are mediated, and at worst controlled or fabricated, to inevitably give the wrong picture. Our governments, popular culture, social and mass media can unwittingly or deliberately conspire to build ‘knowledge’ that doesn’t exist in reality.

². Quoted directly from Oxfam’s website in Spring 2022



Lisa Gast (shepherd) (2019)
Isle of Bute, Scotland

End Note

During the life of this project, since it was awarded a National Lottery Project Grant by Arts Council England, we all experienced hiatus. A gap of over two years divided 'The Calling Sheds' exhibition at Tate Liverpool, marking the launch of the project in November and December 2019, and 'Tracing Shadows' presented at Art Gene in Barrow-in-Furness in January - March 2022. The gap, as we know, was filled with the Covid-19 Pandemic and successions of lockdowns that prevented Mackinnon-Day travelling to Cumbria to start filming for the next new commission and me from getting there to carry out project research. During this time each of the shepherds experienced difficulty. Catherine, Lisa Berry and Lisa Gast each have secondary businesses that rely on tourism. Teleri's National Trust scholarship ended, resulting in she and Ned establishing their own ten-year tenancy of a farm in Snowdonia during the period of lockdowns. The six of us, experiencing our own challenges, lost a sense of momentum with the project that only really re-established after Art Gene were able to commit to reopening their exhibition space - which was only possible after the threat of further lockdown was dispelled. Positives that developed out of adjusting to restrictions are numerous too. Mackinnon-Day, forced to work from her studio at home, developed the sculptural elements for 'Echo'. A decision was made to bring on board musician and poet collaborators for the project drawn from the Cumbria area, so that travel to Barrow and Cartmel Fell during a future lockdown would be less complex. Neither Patricia nor I are based in Cumbria. Without connections to poets in the north west of England, Kim Moore was invited to participate in the project through her response to our 'open call' for a poet. We couldn't have anticipated that the Director of Kendal Poetry Festival, and a resident of Barrow, would respond. Kim has recently published her first work in prose and was invited by Candlestick Press, to select ten poems about music for their 'Yellow Album', alongside their 'Blue Album' of selections by musician and broadcast DJ Cerys Matthews. Bringing musician, Nick Rogers, into the project enabled him to mix the final edit of the sound compositions, layering Kim's poetry in spoken word over his music. Since Nick is based in Kendal, he travelled to Kim in Barrow with his mobile recording equipment and then returned to his studio at home, setting the soundscapes to the visual work in moving image and sculpture made by Mackinnon-Day. On my first journey to Cartmel Fell to find Lisa Berry's farm on 7 June 2021, after working on this project for two years, I sent a text to my old friend Jo who I once worked with in Manchester. She would travel to the South Lakes regularly to visit her grandmother and recalled stories of her life, once on Cartmel Fell. Jo and I discovered on this sunny June day that Lisa Berry's farm is next to the very same house that her grandparents, Judy and Roy Manby, lived in after retiring from many different professions - which included running a farm in Cumbria after moving from London. At the farm on Cartmel Fell, Judy took on a flock of sheep to graze the land. As a teenager, Jo had lived for a short time with her parents and brothers in the barn her grandfather, a former architect, had converted to what is now Lisa Berry's home. Life can reveal extraordinary surprises.

Tracing the Landscape (2017)

ABBOTS HALL, CUMBRIA



Mary Brough (shepherd) (2017)
Chapel House Farm, Udale



Tracing The Landscape (2017)
Abbots Hall, Cumbria

Yes, this is my Album,
But learn ere you look
That all are expected
To add to this book
You are welcome to quiz it
But the penalty is,
You must add for
others to quiz.

as

Farewell to the Highlands,
Farewell to the North,
The birth-place of valours,
The country of worth;
Whenever I wander
Whenever I roam,
The hills of the Highlands,
fare us I love.

M. Taylor,
In the Garrison Academy
1848

Tracing The Landscape (2017)
Abbots Hall, Cumbria



Rural Voices: From Depmore to Shocklach (2013)

RURAL TOURING NETWORK, CHESHIRE





Rural Voices (13.45 mins, duel projection) (2013)
Portraits of farm women

 [CLICK TO PLAY](#)

Private Views Made Public (2010)

HABITATS & HILLFORTS, CHESHIRE



