

‘Where Have They Gone?’ Fay Ballard

Thu 19 June - Sun 20 July

PV: Sat 18 Oct 3 - 7 pm

White Conduit Projects is pleased to present an exhibition of new drawings by Fay Ballard in response to a residency at the Pier Arts Centre in the Orkney Islands and trip to Japan in 2024.

The imagination’s invention of grieving rituals and eternal worlds beyond this one after we die, is the subject of this show. Fay Ballard is an atheist; we are matter, made of the universe: carbon, oxygen, nitrogen and iron, which were formed primarily within the stars. But how do we come to terms with the death of a loved one and with our own finite lives and what coping strategies do our imaginations provide?

In 2023, Fay began visiting Neolithic megaliths, drawn to their mysterious psychic charge; recumbent stone circles in Aberdeenshire and burial chambers at Newgrange and Knowth near Dublin (3200 BC). In 2024, she took an artist residency at the Pier Arts Centre in the Orkney Islands to be with Neolithic standing stones and ancient burial sites that lie dotted across the archipelago. A trip to Japan followed, to visit Neolithic Jomon settlements, standing stones and stone circles near Aomori and to the mythical river Sanzu, that takes us to the afterlife. These places inspired the drawings in this exhibition.

In Orkney, visiting islands by ferry, Fay climbed into burial chambers built to house the dead whose remains were taken into an underworld of dark passageways where they were laid to rest before their souls ascended to join the sun in the sky. Food and belongings were offered to meet their needs and provide comfort during eternity. The Neolithic boundary between life and death may have been porous; in the afterlife ancestors worked on behalf of the living to ensure good harvests.

North of Aomori in Japan lies remote Mount Osore, an active volcano and mythical site of the mouth of the River Sanzu that takes the deceased to the afterlife. A nearby Buddhist temple is surrounded by a barren landscape of hot sulphuric springs (Hell) and a lake and forest lie beyond (Paradise). It’s a pilgrimage site where mourners leave offerings: food, saki and slippers for adults, plastic windmills, sweets and toy cars for children. Stone piles are built in sympathy for children who die before their parents; the children remain in purgatory forever building these piles until the Bodhisattva Jizo, a protector of children, rescues and sends them to the afterlife. Grief was palpable in this desolate place; a tree was hanging with clothes and shoes of a loved one.

The drawings, made with sumi ink from Nara in Japan, are shown alongside circles of gesso on wood. Connections are made to previous work: a blackboard drawing from Fay’s childhood, autobiographical studies and circles from an ongoing series. Materials comprise: soot, chalk, graphite, rabbit skin glue, paper and wood.

Tamar Yoseloff has written a poem ‘The Ship’ in response to these drawings.

It is included alongside an essay by writer and curator Paul Carey-Kent in a book published to accompany the exhibition, available from the Gallery. This poem is presented in a specially printed version designed by Paul Neale of Graphic Thought Facility.



Where Have They Gone?, 2025,
95 x 67cm, sumi ink, white ink on paper

About Fay Ballard

Fay Ballard's practice is centred on drawing. She believes drawing is a conscious and unconscious act where internal and external worlds meet, and is interested in psychological ideas about the artist's process.

Her drawings respond to place. Early work documented the natural world: medicinal and historic gardens and two meadows in Transylvania. After her father's death in 2009, who was the widely acclaimed writer J.G. Ballard, she took the family home as a site to explore her childhood. In 2019, after returning from Iran, she began a long-running series of concentric circle drawings inspired by domes of mosques and archaeological sites. In 2023, she began visiting Neolithic sites in the UK and making drawings in response. In 2024, she took a residency with the Pier Arts Centre in Orkney to spend time with its rich history of Neolithic remains followed by a study trip to Japan to learn about Jomon culture and to visit Mt Osore, the mythical entrance to the afterlife.

Her drawings have been widely shown including: Freud Museum, Garden Museum, Royal College of Physicians, Charing Cross Hospital, Patrick Heide Gallery, Handel Street Projects, Birkbeck University of London, Centre for Recent Drawing, University of Cambridge, & Model Gallery Leeds, Close Ltd Somerset, National Gallery Romania, New York College Art & Design, Huntington Library LA, Nijo-jo Castle Kyoto, S.Togo Memorial Sompo Museum of Art and Marucube Gallery Tokyo.

She was a visiting artist at Hammersmith Hospital in 2017 and 2018, and sits on Imperial Health Arts Advisory Committee. Her work is held by the late Queen Elizabeth II, King Charles III, The Prince's Foundation, Women's Art Collection University of Cambridge, Royal College of Physicians and Imperial Health.

Fay's drawings will be published in 'Drawing as Placemaking: Environment, History and Identity' edited by Jill Journeaux and Simon Woolham (Bloomsbury 2025).

Fay read History of Art at University of Sussex (1976-79) and completed MA Fine Art Central Saint Martin's (2002-04)

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Gallery Hours
Wed + Thu: 11am – 6pm
Fri 12pm – 5pm
Sat 12pm – 6pm
Sun 11am – 4pm
Nearest station Angel



Another World 1, 2025, 50cm
diameter circle gesso and ink on board