Beyond the Noise COULLINKS

An exploration into the nature of place



Figure 1 – Rose 2018

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Project Statement

Beyond the Noise: Coul Links is at its heart an exploration of place, not only the physical space, but the sociological and anthropological space it occupies.

For me and the relatively few others for whom this place has personal significance the images stir memories and emotions tied to their unique experiences and relationship with Coul Links. For those who have only more recently become aware of Coul Links because of the proposed golf course development and the controversy that ensued, the images provide insight into a place they may have never seen or only seen from a distance. And for both groups the aerial moving imagery provides a completely new perspective on the vastness and complexity of the landscape.

The images, still and moving, reflect the dynamism of change from season to season and the miniatures show some of the plant and animal life in a scale that complements the large format prints and cinematic video. The installation is immersive, with the viewer in a darkened space presented with only one image at a time and of a scale that gives the impression they are standing in Coul Links or flying above it.

Final Images for Submission

Large format photographs, small scale photographs arranged in collage, and video images formed a part of the exhibition and hence this submission. All the photographs are presented here and the videos are accessible via the included hyperlinks. Each were critically important elements of my exhibitions. Each contributed not only information vital to the story I was trying to convey, but as importantly in conjunction with the way they were shown, created the sensorially immersive environment, visually, aurally, proprioceptively.

Beyond the Noise Trailer presented at exhibition entrance

https://vimeo.com/370190622



Figure 2 - Rose 2018



Figure 3 – Rose 2019



Figure 4 – Rose 2018



Figure 5 - Rose 2018



Figure 6 - Rose 2018



Figure 7 – Rose 2018



Figure 8 – Rose 2019

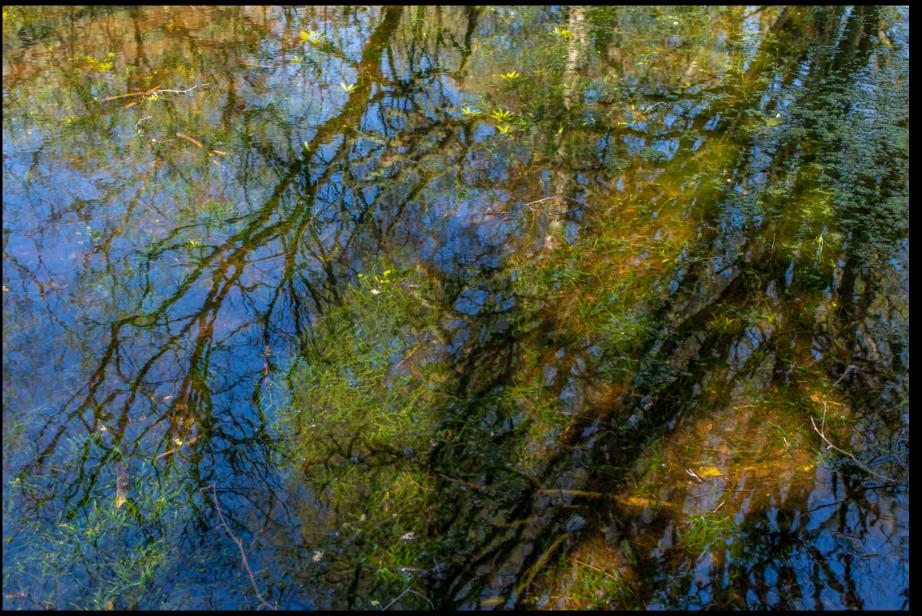


Figure 9 – Rose 2019



Figure 10 - Rose 2019



Figure 11 - Rose 2019



Figure 12 - Rose 2019



Figure 13 - Rose 2019



Figure 14 - Rose 2019



Figure 15a - Rose 2019

Flora and Fauna miniatures on foam core and then mounted 3 dimensionally on mat board



Figure 15b - Rose 2019



Figure 15c - Rose 2019

Coul Links Today 03 October 2019

https://vimeo.com/364380866

Primary moving image projected to cinema screen

The Changing Faces of Coul Links

https://vimeo.com/369866656

Periodic moving image projected to cinema screen

Dornoch Exhibition Installation Views

The exhibition took place at the Dornoch Social Club with a private viewing on 01 November and a public viewing on 02 November 2019. There were 60 attendees for the private viewing and 90 visitors on the public day.

This exhibition was designed to be immersive and sensorially engaging. To do so required designing, building and arranging display fixtures that took control of light, the way in which viewers engaged with each photo or video, and affected the way they moved through the exhibition space in general. It also took full advantage of the large cinema screen and surround sound system to create a sense that viewers were in Coul Links and not in an exhibition space. The miniature photographs of flora and fauna were scaled to be proportional with the large format prints and designed to pull viewers in to examine them more closely.

Beyond the Noise: Coul Links



Ashley Rose

MA Photography Exhibition

A multi-media photographic exploration of Coul Links, this exhibition is a part of a longer term project. The work looks past the controversies to examine Coul Links as it is and how it has responded and adapted to past uses and seasonal changes. This exhibition is the culmination of the MA Photography course the photographer has been undertaking over the past two years.

2 November 2019 Dornoch Social Club 1000—1600

Admission Free



Figure 16 - Rose 2019

Exhibition Introduction

This "Artist's Statement" was posted on the first panel next to the trailer video to provide an introduction and some background on the exhibition and my purpose in undertaking the project. It was also used to introduce the concept of place which was discussed further in the Artist's Talk.

BEYOND THE NOISE

My work over the past two years is first and foremost an exploration of place. The intent was to look past all of the on-going controversy to get to know "photographically" this place known as Coul Links. I have used my cameras to record what constitutes Coul Links today and how it changes in response to natural forces. It is just the beginning of a longer-term project to study how Coul Links adapts to whatever changes it sees in the future.

"Place" is a rather more complex concept than just physical existence. Think of the old question, "If a tree falls in a forest on a deserted island, does it make a sound?" If you don't know it exists, is it a place, or is it only when significance is attached that a space becomes a place? A house becomes a home because someone lives there. Our increased mobility and the never-ending onslaught of information that takes our attention results in us all being faced with more and more "non-places" in our everyday lives; spaces we pass through or spaces of which we are not even aware.

Coul Links was a largely unknown space until a proposal surfaced to use it in yet another way than it had been used over the centuries of its existence. The number of people who actually knew of Coul Links beforehand was quite small, and there are still a significant number of local people who have never been on Coul Links. As for the 90,000 people, most of whom from well out of the area, who signed a petition opposing the development, Coul Links remains for most of them just a space or "non-place" to which they have no real connection or likelihood of ever establishing one. It is just another in the long list of non-places for most of these people.

For those who know Coul Links and who have established their connection to this place, that connection takes different forms. Coul Links has been many things over the years and remains many things to those for whom it holds some significance. For me it has been a slow courtship that over the past two years has led me to an intimate understanding of and connection to Coul Links. I have discovered things and places that I suspect few people know and I have watched and documented with great interest how this magnificent landscape changes and adapts to the forces which act upon it. It remains and will continue to remain in its ever-changing forms Beyond the Noise.

Ashley Rose





Figure 18 – Rose 2019



Figure 21 - Rose 2019



Figure 24 - Rose 2019



Figure 19 - Rose 2019



Figure 22 - Rose 2019



Figure 25 - Rose 2019



Figure 20 - Rose 2019



Figure 23 – Rose 2019



Figure 26 - Yates 2019

Exhibition Video 01 November 2019

https://vimeo.com/373574782

Video courtesy of Mick Yates



Figure 27 - Yates 2019



Figure 28 - Yates 2019



Figure 29 - Yates 2019



Figure 30 - Yates 2019



Figure 31 - Yates 2019



Figure 32 - Yates 2019

Artist's Talk 01 November 2019

https://vimeo.com/373511083

Embo Exhibition Installation Views

The exhibition took place at the The Old School in Embo, a village of 250 residents located immediately to the south of Coul Links. The exhibition opened in this venue 08 November and ran until 24 November 2019.

The Old School is a smaller and brighter space that necessitated a different approach to the installation than that in Dornoch. It is consequently less immersive and a more traditional gallery installation except for the video being played on a large television.



Figure 33 - Rose 2019



Figure 34 – Rose 2019

Reviews and Audience Engagement

The Dornoch exhibition was very well attended and a guest book was available for commentary. I was most gratified to have a number of people who had close associations with Coul Links tell me stories of memories stirred by my photos. The next phase of my project will seek to capture those stories in more detail.

The Embo venue is not staffed full time, but reports indicate that in the first week about 75 people have viewed the exhibit and it has been useful in establishing and reinforcing contacts and relationships with people in the village of Embo who will experience some of the most immediate effects of the proposed development.

Press Coverage and Reviews

Northern Times - https://www.northern-times.co.uk/news/coul-links-beyond-the-noise-185174/

Mick Yates - https://www.yatesweb.com/week-seventeen-reflections-cromarty/

Patrick Argyle - "I think there were two aspects of this exhibition that came together to make it work so well: the quality of the work on display; the way the work was presented. I greatly admired and appreciated the quality of the work, especially the still photographs. The images were beautiful and beautifully printed and presented. The use of images of different sizes and presenting them either individually or in groups was very effective. The layout of the displays throughout the room was done in such a way that I could spend time studying each individual section before being led on to the next in a natural and relaxed way. There was a real flow from one area to the next. I felt the use of different media to present material was handled very cleverly, exploiting the strong point of each:

- a small screen video presentation on entering the gallery gave an excellent overview and background and history of to Coul Links;
- photos arranged to great effect, some large scale showing wide areas of landscaped conveying the atmosphere of the location, other large ones of small areas of the links showing detail of the land and it's contents;
- other walls displayed boards on which were presented multiple miniature photos on certain topics such as flora and fauna;
- a projection wall divided in to quadrants, onto each of which was projected, simultaneously aerial film taken by drone of the land showing it in the four seasons of the year.

Overall, I found the exhibition much more interesting than I had expected and you showed me beauty in Coul Links I did not expect to see."

Reviews continued

Matt Sillars - Lecturer in Photography University of Highlands and Islands & Chair, FLOW Photofest

Reflections on 'Beyond the Noise'

This body of work takes an anti-essentialist perspective. It refuses to walk the easy path and set out opposing positions, in relation to the development of the links, by defining the characteristics of each and placing them in opposition to each other – and then simply photographing the stereotype. The artificial construction of identity, as 'developer' and 'environmentalist', is deliberately disrupted and the links are presented as a complex space with a complex set of uses by individuals, rather than by 'bodies' of people who are ideological positioned in a debate.

Seeing the links as a historical space and not simply as a contested contemporary site, reveals its relationship to people over time and acknowledges that it is not, and never has been, a space easily defined by the broad brush strokes of heritage studies. In the photographs are evidence of human intervention, from the buildings, fence posts and pathways, to the plantations, monuments and open ground. Each indexical of people engaged in labour, industry and lives lived. Although seemingly passive landscapes sculpted by the elements, they evoke a range of paradigms which privilege people over nature and speak of the dynamic relationship between land and people – the definition of 'place'.

Foucault discusses heterotopias as places which exist in the world, but which are connected in ways to other places and spaces, by ritual, by use, by assemblage. The photographs of the links inscribe hetertopias of time and space. Time, where the landscape has collected the past and represents it in snippets and glimpses. Thus, the past is always present in a natural museum, whose rooms and glass cases are the dunes, grasses, embankments and plantations. Space, where the fragments glimpsed are of different uses, are different spaces – of industry, or leisure, or travel, of work.

The body of work challenges the normative view of the 'environment in need of protection', and through the use of video and drones, plays with understandings of reality in a vein similar to Baudrillard's hyperreality, where the difference between fiction and reality is blurred. Understanding is mediated by drone and digital technologies and the links are artificially reproduced in ways that play with the internet mediated campaign instigated to 'save' them. 'Beyond the Noise' references not just the ideological noise, but the digital noise of hyperreality and conspicuous environmentalism, which has almost replaced conspicuous consumption as the 'right' of the middle classes.

The body of work, quite bravely, argues that the essentialist nature of the debate is irrelevant and actually unworthy of the links, which have a heritage and have a future regardless of the slice of reality we are confronting today, now.

Comments

- "The essence of Coul Links is captured in every sense." Mike H.
- "Totally worthwhile historical document of a treasured spot in this area. Love the smaller collages of the wildlife against the larger landscape pictures."

 Matthew Harris, Professional Photographer
- "From someone who knows Coul Links intimately, you have done the most wonderful job of capturing its unique essence." Viki M.
- "What an amazing exhibition." Lynne Mahoney, Curator History Links Museum
- "Thankyou for breathing life into Coul Links! You have seen its hidden magic..." Jenny T.
- "What a great exhibition! I applaud your efforts to widen folk's perceptions both specifically of Coul Links and more broadly about the whole concept of 'sense of place'." John Alderson, Chairman East Sutherland Camera Club
- "An incredibly well thought out and presented exhibition" Mike T.
- "I loved the way you presented your photographs, it made them appear so real, like you're actually there." Alex D.
- "A wonderful exhibition giving a unique insight into the flora, fauna and dunes which goes largely unobserved." Anonymous
- "You have revealed the unsung beauty of an otherwise 'unknown' landscape." Alison D.
- "An excellent display. Having been shown around the proposed golf course, your video has given me a new dimension to contemplate the development. I look forward to seeing your further work on this wonderful site." Barry K.
- "Great set of images of a complex area giving me lots of food for thought on its future ecology." Stan H.

Online Presence and Promotion

The exhibition interview and announcement was published by the Northern Times newspaper and posted also in their on line edition as indicated in the previous section.

My website <u>www.chasingthewildlife.com</u> has a section dedicated to the FMP project as well as work compiled throughout the MA Programme and other personal projects.

Instagram, both personal @chasing_the_wild_life, and @falmouthflexiblephoto, and Facebook were used to promote the exhibition and generate interest in my work in general. Shares and reposts were valuable for reaching beyond the realm of my followers and in particular those of my caterer (the Courthouse Café) and the Dornoch and District Community Association (owners of the Dornoch Social Club) had an especially wide reach. For the Embo exhibition, the Embo Trust and Embo Old School reposted announcements and invitations to visit there.

The Evite platform was used to generate and track invitations to the opening reception and while 75 responded they were coming, weather and a few extenuating circumstances resulted in 60 attendees.

Posters were placed in businesses and community centres in Dornoch, Embo, Golspie and Brora, the latter of which resulted directly in the request by the Northern Times for an interview.

Promotion via word of mouth and e-mail through organisations like the East Sutherland Camera Club of which I am a member was also successful in driving traffic to both venues.

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