

**AYAN FARAH, TANIA KOVATS, BILL WOODROW**

*From a distance*

8 June – 29 July 2017



Tania Kovats, *All the Islands of All the Seas*, 2016 (detail)

'It is not about a longing to be in these places exactly - but rather a way of understanding your own place in the world comparatively.'

- Bill Woodrow

*From a distance* will look at how Ayan Farah, Tania Kovats and Bill Woodrow engage with the natural world by putting the viewer in close proximity with far-flung destinations. Addressing notions of mapping, globalisation and climate change, the exhibition will also assess the dependent and increasingly fraught interaction between mankind and nature.

Ayan Farah records the physical and ephemeral traces of distant geographical locations, treating swatches of fabric with natural pigments and organic materials sourced from around the world before stitching them together and stretching them as one, map-like landscape. One of the new works in the exhibition is made using clay collected by the artist from the Dead Sea on a trip to Israel; drawing upon historic modes of fabric production such as Bogolanfini mud-cloth making, the resultant effect is similar to the shimmer of dappled sunlight falling across water. The other work, laden and grey like a rain cloud, is comprised of vintage linen, India ink, salt and rainwater sourced from China. Significantly, the water was generated through cloud seeding, a process of weather modification whereby chemicals are dispersed into the air in order to induce rain. This technological form of rainmaking, historically associated with ceremonial forms of dance, highlights Farah's fascination with man's lasting relationship with the natural world.

Tania Kovats is renowned for producing sculptures, large-scale installation and temporal works which explore our experience and understanding of landscape. *All the Canals* (2017) comprises a single glass vessel containing water mixed together from each of the 182 capillary-like canals that run through Venice. The slow moving, murky water is distilled and held still like a 'liquid photograph'. As sea levels continue to rise, Kovats preempts the impending demise of the city by preserving the water somewhere between a scientific specimen or holy relic, listing the names of the canals in alphabetical order next to the bottle in memoriam. The sculpture is paired with one of the artist's most significant drawings to date: *All the Islands of All the Seas* (2016). Using *The Times Atlas* as her source, Kovats has made meticulous studies of all of the islands that are located in the world's 92 seas. These translucent drawings are then layered (sometimes up to 10 drawings at a time) and clustered into their seas before being pinned into individual frames. In doing so, the artist releases the islands from their cartographic fixity, creating an imaginary archipelago where national boundaries and frontiers are cast aside.

A key theme in Bill Woodrow's work from the past decade has been an interest in global trajectories, as well as climate change's effect on indigenous communities. The sculptures that feature in the exhibition are from the artist's *Black and White* series from 2012 in which scenes of Inuit activity, cast in bronze, surmount glossy pools of black, oil-like rubber. The precariousness of the glacial structures upon which these scenes play out, cardboard-like in appearance, alludes to the threat of climate change upon the livelihood of these people. Similar iconography will be employed in Woodrow's forthcoming commission for the Folkestone Triennial in September 2017. The same Inuit figures appear in a series of drawings in which golden, amorphous clouds of pollen float in the sky like the *Aurora Borealis*. In the artist's monograph *The Sculpture of Bill Woodrow* (Lund Humphries; 2012), Julia Kelly explains 'works that come about through Woodrow's travels and ruminations on such experiences are further demonstrations of sculpture's role for the artist as a lens: a way of viewing and framing the world around him.'

### **Ayan Farah**

Farah was born in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates in 1978 to Somali parents and grew up in Stockholm, Sweden. She lives and works in London, UK. Farah received an MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art, London (2012). Her work can be found in the permanent collections of the David Roberts Art Foundation, London and Saatchi Gallery, London.

Recent exhibitions include *Maps*, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London (2016); *Kadel Willborn*, Düsseldorf (2016); *Notes on Running Water*, Almine Rech Gallery, Brussels (2014); *Le musée d'une nuit (script for leaving traces)*, David Roberts Art Foundation, Fondation Hippocrène, Paris (2014); *PROXIMA*, Museo Británico Americano, Mexico City (2014); *The Figure in the Carpet*, Bugada & Cargnel, Paris (2014); *Xtraction*, The Hole, New York (2013) and *Wanderlust*, Contemporary Art Society, London (2013).

### **Tania Kovats**

Tania Kovats first came to prominence when she won the Barclays Young Artist Award at the Serpentine Gallery, London in 1991. Her work was the subject of a major solo exhibition at The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh in 2014, encompassing works which explored the artist's ongoing preoccupation with the sea. In 2015, she was nominated for the sixth edition of the Max Mara Art Prize for Women in collaboration with the Whitechapel Gallery, London.

Best known for her works in the public realm, Kovats has recently produced *Tree* (2009), a permanent installation for the Natural History Museum in London, where she took a thin slice from the entire length of a 200 year-old oak tree and inserted it into the museum's ceiling; and *Rivers* (2012), installed in the landscape of Jupiter Artland outside Edinburgh, where Kovats collected water from one hundred rivers around the British Isles and housed the collection in a specially constructed boathouse.

Kovats has shown extensively in the UK and abroad, with solo shows, in addition to those above, at the Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester; Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield; Peer Arts, London and Newlyn Art Gallery, Cornwall. Group shows include those at BALTIC, Gateshead; Hayward Gallery, London; Tate Liverpool; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Kettle's Yard, Cambridge; Kunstraum Innsbruck and ICA, London, amongst many others. Her sculptures and drawings feature in numerous public and private collections including the Arts Council Collection, UK; British Council Collection; Speed Art Museum, Kentucky; National Maritime Museum, London; Government Art Collection, London and Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Kovats will have a solo exhibition at Humber Street Gallery, Hull in August 2017 as part of Hull 2017 City of Culture.

### **Bill Woodrow**

Acclaimed British sculptor Bill Woodrow is renowned for his cut-out works from the 1980s constructed out of found objects, typically recycling obsolete products of consumerist society such as old furniture and electricals. Manipulating the remains of everyday objects to bring forth others, these works wittily revealed the unexpected in the ordinary. By the early 90s, bronze had become Woodrow's principal medium, best demonstrated by his monumental edition of the Fourth Plinth, Trafalgar Square in 2000.

Woodrow's first solo exhibition was at the Whitechapel Gallery, London in 1972. In the early 1980s, he represented Britain at Biennales in Sydney (1982), Paris (1982, 1985) and São Paulo (1983). He was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1986 and was elected a Royal Academician in 2002.

Other selected solo exhibitions have included those at Modern Art Oxford (1983); ICA, Boston (1985); The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (1986); Tate, London (1988); Seattle Art Museum (1988); Chisenhale Gallery, London (1993); Camden Arts Centre (1995); Tate, London (1996); South London Gallery, London (2001) and Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2005).

Woodrow's work is held in numerous public collections including MOMA, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art; New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Tate, London; British Museum, London; Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam; British Council, London; Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington; Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museo Tamayo, Mexico City; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Musée d'Art Contemporain, Montreal and Kunsthau Zürich, amongst many others.