

KAREN CUNNINGHAM DEPLOYING CULTURE

24 March - 5 May 2018
SAMPLE LINE

déployer (*fr. trans*)

deploy
display
unfold
spread
extend
exert
unfurl
stretch
array
dispose
shake out

Contextural, 2018

Dimensions (approx): H 2.5m W 3m D 1.7m

Aluminised Mylar

Bamboo

Braided copper thread

Cat5e cable

CCTV cable

Cotton rope

Cotton string

Copper wire

Electrical cable

Jute twine

Linen

Optical fibres

Plastic twine

PVC Tubing

Rubber cable housing

Single core conduit cable

Sisal rope

Steel rope

USB connector cables

Woven fibreglass

*Substance of We Feeling (Interrupted
processes and the endless return of matter)*

2018

Dimensions (approx): H 3cm L 2.9m W 1.9m

Clam shells

Coral

Injection moulding poly pellets

Periwinkle shells

Post-consumer plastic

Sea Urchin spines

Television screen glass

Movable Type; Under Erasure, 2016

HD video

Duration 13 mins 30 sec

Colour, stereo sound

Monologue written and read by Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak, 15 January 2016, University of Columbia,

City of New York



My work is concerned with the notion of technology in its widest forms as a measure of a culture's progress, and specifically with how emergent and residual forms of culture and technology overlap within material, visual and experiential processes of knowledge transfer. Insofar as the subject of each work that I make determines its medium and process of production, my practice operates across installation, moving image, sculpture, and photography.

Deploying Culture continues and expands my interest in the foregrounding of materials and processes with two new works whose process of making is evident in the resulting work. The exhibition's title is informed by a consideration of how both 'display' and 'deploy' are rooted in the same late Latin word *deplicare*, meaning to unfold or explain, with deploy coming into use in the English language via the French *déployer*. This exhibition, through both its title and content, evokes the difference between deploying and displaying; deploying connoting actions, movements and gestures that aim to reach-out or take-over, whilst displaying (essentially the act that the materials undertake when arrested within the exhibition) suggests a more passive viewing or form of encounter.

Both *Contextural*, which assumes the form of a tapestry, a screen or an interface, and the temporary floor-based work *Substance of We Feeling (Interrupted processes and the endless return of matter)* invite and ramify the experience of viewing as does my film *Movable Type; Under Erasure*, which will be screened on specific dates throughout the exhibition period.

All three works resist the privilege of a singular vantagepoint, and instead, through physical and cognitive engagement, invite multiple and subjective interpretations.



Twin and Earth

Grounding Karen Cunningham's Materials

Tina Fiske

CAMPLE LINE is delighted to host *Deploying Culture*, a solo exhibition by artist Karen Cunningham that brings together three works: two new installations made for our upstairs space and a recent moving image work *Movable Type; Under Erasure*, 2016, which will be shown in our downstairs screening space.

The two new installations that Cunningham has made at Cample include no less than twenty-six material elements between them. The selection and anticipated combinations of those materials have been a primary focus for Cunningham, and all the materials she has used are specified in this booklet. The sources of those materials include commercial suppliers, recycling companies, as well as businesses and families local to Cample and surrounding communities.

Some have made more considerable journeys than others: a defining moment in the preparations for Cunningham's installation was the successful delivery of a 4-metre long piece of tropical bamboo through 3-foot snowdrifts. The bamboo's handover in the yard of neighbouring Armstrong Joinery drew discussion not of its being out of place but rather of its use in construction and the physical properties (its high strength-to-weight ratio for instance) that make it excellent construction material. More to the point, the momentarily uncanny sight was illustrative of Cunningham's own longstanding interest in the transformations, extractions, diversions, and interruptions that materials undergo, the forms of technology we have developed and continue to develop from them, and the ways, in cultural terms, we continually absorb and adapt our social selves and behaviours in the overlaps or slippages between such developments.

The three works that Cunningham has brought together in *Deploying Culture* share those concerns, and each in their own way conjures with such overlaps or slippages in ways that are essentially located. It is in this way that Cunningham brings them to light, makes them accessible, relatable. Her film work *Movable Type; Under Erasure* centres on a pictograph carved into the rockface at Writing-On-Stone in Alberta, Canada, apparently depicting a Model T Ford type automobile. In some ways, Cample itself, formerly a weaving mill that would have housed looms, has provided interesting traction for Cunningham in related terms, and hopefully provides a compelling context in which to give her work the close attention it invites.

Cables, ropes, fibres and wires array *Contextural*, 2018, a delicate hanging construction 3m wide and 2.5m deep that Cunningham has suspended from both a ceiling truss and the 4m long trunk of bamboo hung in parallel to it by means of weave, lash, slip knot and tie. Even before close inspection, you understand the work bears itself lightly and coheres with economy: structure is detail and detail is structure. Loose ropes, wires, cables and fibres of numerous gauges, colours and flexibilities fall from the horizontal bamboo, some stretching across the floor; sections of more closely worked string and sisal, developed in their early stages on a loom made in Cunningham's studio, form the basis of the whole hanging, along with a central panel of woven fibreglass, which Cunningham has intentionally undone, loosened and trimmed. Some lengths of glass fibre have migrated elsewhere to the left and right, up and down; here and there are more obvious interlopers, such as stray wires, insulating foil or pieces of tubing.

Tied blithely to strands of cotton string in one section of *Contextural* is a thin curve of fresh white insulated cable. It looks like a bone – a stark rib - or some kind of bleached adornment or trophy. A precise cut in the cable sleeve arrests the eye. *Never cut a cable* – a parent's prohibition to their child. Exposed are three thin strands - brown,

blue, yellow/green - twin and earth. Frustrated conductors, those wires carry only a phantom charge, but the urge to recoil remains. Elsewhere, the obvious redundancy of some of the wires lessens the hesitation – the old live red - *Not the red!*

In 1903, George Johnson published *The All-Red Line*, an account of the development and realisation of the last great British Imperial cable-laying project across the Pacific Ocean from Canada to Australia and New Zealand. Subtitling his essay ‘the problem of an empire-girdling state-owned telegraphy system,’ his detailed account focused significantly less on the technical challenges that laying the submarine telegraph network raised as it did on the substantial political and corporate efforts and interests that governed its development. With the completion of the Pacific Cable, the British Empire realised communications connectivity on a global scale for the first time. Symbolically coloured red in order to designate Empire, the ‘line’ facilitated Imperial war efforts, trade and political dominance – a larger project of which Johnson pointedly suggested ‘the globigerina-ooze-buried Cable’ was only a part. Writing some 50 years on from the first cable-laying efforts and extensive discussion around cable design, and with the foundations of wireless technology being laid, it is interesting that Johnson viewed the submerged cable and the accumulating marine effects acting upon it (that ‘globigerina-ooze’ he mentioned) as secondary matters.

The materials that Cunningham has integrated into *Contextural* allude in various ways to communications technologies both old and new, low and hi tech. Some do so more directly as with the CAT5e cable (*Violet, full copper, UTP. Low smoke*). Jute, rope, wire, copper, rubber, glass, Mylar - all have purposes that they are designed for, regular or regulated contexts of use, and provoke in us sets of associations, triggers, behaviours. Cunningham is herself highly attuned to these aspects, as she is to their physical properties, their origins, their nature

and status as ‘products’ or ‘components’ and to their un-making as ‘waste’. Her own consciously low-tech approach to construction is in noticeable contrast to the refinement processes that produce materials such as fibreglass or optical fibre.

Cunningham’s floor-based work, *Substance of We Feeling (Interrupted processes and the endless return of matter)*, shares some of the allusions and materials of *Contextural* – shells and coral matter purchased commercially by Cunningham speak of our commodification and colonisation of the oceans, as much as the deft knots and steel wire rope (*1 x 19 stiff*) refer to the technologies with which we do so. Cunningham has made previous versions of this work using commercial synthetic sands in vivid colours. In this instance, she has combined marine detritus with various different types and grades of materials interrupted from specific recycling processes or reuses. Blue and red plastic regrinds (*full fat; skimmed*), recycled glass from TV monitors and plastic pellets for injection moulding (*lettuce green; apple green*). The visual excess of the work is in marked contrast to the quiet presence of *Contextural*, and indeed speaks of how aesthetics also inflect our relationship to surplus, waste and repurposed materials. Moreover, by overlaying the materials as she has, Cunningham subverts the principles of separation that regulate approaches to material reclamation and the preparation of recycled products.

Early on in her film *Movable Type; Under Erasure* Cunningham intercuts a sequence of shots of the pictographs at Writing-on-Stone with that of a black arrow, a computer cursor, moving around a monitor screen. It is a telling juxtaposition that resonates meaningfully alongside the two new works, and speaks to those overlaps and slippages that Cunningham’s work engages. The physical presence of the recycled glass in Cunningham’s floor work itself inflects back on the film, and has the effect of elevating our sense of the material nature of the monitor screen as it appears in the film. Another slippage occurs.





Karen Cunningham has recently participated in the group exhibitions *Here Was Elsewhere: >>FFWD*, Cooper Gallery, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, Dundee (2018) and *Make Something, With Your Body*, VBKÖ, Vienna, Austria (2017). Her moving work has recently been included in the screening series, *Its origins are indeterminate*, curated by Erik Martinson for Whitechapel Gallery, London (2018).

Previous solo shows include *Plasma*, Walden Affairs, The Hague (2013) and *Factish Field*, Collective, Edinburgh (2013), which presented her film *Fib*, commissioned by LUX, London, and Collective. Her 2016 film *Movable Type; Under Erasure* features a monologue written and voiced by the post-colonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and was commissioned by LegionTV. *Movable Type; Under Erasure* was first screened at The Showroom, London (2016) and will feature in the forthcoming group show *Video Days* at Bonington Gallery, Nottingham Trent University (2018).

Cunningham received a 1st class degree in Photography at Edinburgh College of Art, which included an exchange to the Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, USA. She undertook her MFA at Glasgow School of Art and is based in Glasgow.

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