



Ferning Foaming Bloom

Amy Gear



13 - 16 FEB 2020 6.30-9PM
PART OF SPECTRA WEEKEND



21 FEB - 15 MAR 2020
OPEN FRI-SUN: 11AM-5PM

32 ST ANDREW STREET, ABDN, AB25 1JA



Ferning Foaming Bloom

Look Again Project Space is delighted to present *Ferning, Foaming Bloom*, a new installation and film work by Amy Gear.

Amy Gear is an artist based in Shetland, and a graduate of Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen and The Royal College of Art. She has previously produced work for Look Again Festival in Aberdeen in 2018, Market Gallery in Glasgow and Shetland Museum. She will also be showing new work as part of The Shape of Water group exhibition touring Scotland in the Travelling Gallery between March and June.

Her practice explores possible (and impossible) interrelationships between land and the body, knotting together notions of identity, language, knowledge and imagination. It encompasses a broad range of media; performance, printmaking, painting, photography, drawing, digital film, sound, poetry and installation.

Look Again is an initiative based at Gray's School of Art that develops and supports the creative sector in the north east. Best known for the Look Again Festival, an annual summer event that presents ambitious contemporary art and design projects across the city, the team also deliver a programme of creative sector support, including new courses at Robert Gordon University, and run the Look Again Project Space.

Ferning Foaming Bloom has been supported by Spectra Festival. Amy Gear will also be performing and presenting at the Spectra Catalyst Conference 14-15th February at Aberdeen Music Hall.

Thanks to Daniel Clark for collaborating on sound design and film editing.

This is an edit of a series of conversations between Amy Gear, and Hilary Nicoll, Co-Director of Look Again.

'when we ovulate, we become more salty' - Amy Gear

'Human saliva displaying ferning. During the fertile phase of a woman's menstrual cycle an oestrogen surge causes salt crystal to appear in the saliva. When viewed under the microscope the crystalline salt structure resembles fern leaves and can be used as an indication of a woman's increased chances of conceiving at this time.' - Anne Weston, Francis Crick Institute

HN: Tell me a little bit about the title of the exhibition.

AG: I was playing with different words, and I was thinking about when you are ferning, that is when you are ovulating, and people say you are blooming, thinking about flowers and leaves blooming. Seafoam happens because of an algal bloom – it's not just frooshie watter, it is organic matter that gets chopped up in rough seas, when it contains particularly high levels of dissolved organic matter, including proteins and lipids derived from algae, so I was thinking about the different ways the word bloom is used within nature and within human nature. Ferning Foaming Bloom marries all these ideas, of nature, of being a woman, of the sea. And it seemed to fit the theme of year of coast and water

HN: Is this also going to be the title of a spoken word piece?

AG: I find it useful to have the title in place almost like a base, and you can build the words up and then do research; there's lovely words associated with sea foam, like 'spume', which is also associated with humans. So, I drive along in the car thinking what rhymes with different words, and that is the base; everything starts to come from that.

HN: That's quite a nice sculptural metaphor, like you are building around a framework?

AG: I am quite dyslexic, and I think that really helps me in my work – I almost don't have the rules that other people have around language, because I can't remember them... someone told me making poetry or a spoken word piece is as much like making a sculpture or making something physical, you just play – you can play with sculpture until it falls over – with words you can play until they really make no sense, and then you have to come back again and make them make sense.

HN: How did the ideas for the exhibition come together?

AG: It's about the way that humans are informed by nature and nature is informed by humans. How we project onto, anthropomorphise, nature. I suppose I am always seeing bits of human in the landscape. One day I realized that barnacles look like little eyeballs... it's really quite straightforward! I wrote a piece a while ago about sea urchins. They look like really, really red tongues that are stuck to the sides of rock pools, and I wrote this piece about tongues swimming through the sea and ending up on the land, so one idea prompts another.

I like thinking of the land being alive and being able to tell a story, so some parts of the landscape have a mouth, some have eyes, some have noses and they all work together – they don't all have all the senses, but they have work together to tell stories.

HN: Tell me more about the role of story and folklore in your work?

AG: That's always been a big part of my practice, even though I didn't always keen it. I was brought up being told all these amazing stories, and have been really influenced by my Granny and the people around me. Storytelling is part of everybody in Shetland actually. People really paint with words here, and it can be very frustrating, because they go into great detail, but I think they are like art works.

The base of my work really over the past few years has come from one thing; something my Granny said. The giants in the folklore she'd been telling me, many of them were female. She'd just missed that part out when I was little, or she maybe said it but I didn't register it. She just said it off-hand one day, and I realized that I had always viewed the landscape through the perspective of male giants. And that was a real turning point. I had to really reassess how I was looking at things and how I was understanding things.

HN: It would be interesting to hear more about what you want to say about gender in your work?

AG: In the last few years, I've really started 'noticing' gender, since I stopped being a student I've noticed my place in different work environments and it's become really important to me to speak about gender and that there are still huge inequalities. I am interested in unseen women's labour and the sacrifice involved in that. In the exhibition, everything used to make the cave/island, which is also like a body or a nest, has previously been used to make somebody else's home – the bed sheets and the curtains. So reusing bed sheets for paintings and curtains for the cave, there is maybe something there about making a home in your body and making a home in a building and the work that involves. But I hope people from any gender can connect with my work – through the landscape – through other things – this is for everybody.

HN: You used the word silly to describe some of your work – humour and the absurd certainly figure. There is an idiosyncrasy in your work that is hugely effective...

AG: Yes, I like the words silly and sad. I want people to laugh and then to cry – that's hard, but I do manage it sometimes. I made my Grandad cry because of one of my pieces – it's not the main aim – but if you are being really sensitive to a subject it touches them in a way – it's cringey and hard to do... But if I wasn't embarrassed by it, it would fit societal norms and wouldn't say what I want it to say. The artist Mary Reid Kelley says 'when I am embarrassed, I know that I have done the right thing'.

HN: You think a lot about your audience, and how viewers will respond to your work; is this do with your location? You are in quite a peripheral place, without a large art-going public, so I wonder if this makes you think more carefully about how to bring people in to your work, than perhaps you would in a city? Because you are part of a whole community. I am thinking here about a well-known Glasgow-based artist who recently talked about how in Glasgow you can be with artists all the time – at the school gate, in the studio, you can be in an 'art bubble' all the time....

AG: I don't know how that affects me – in a way, because I am running Gaada*, so in a way I am working with artists almost every day, not with professional artists all the time, but I am working with artists almost every day. This has opened up the way I make work, because I know that anything is possible in a way – especially working with artists with disabilities, because they are working in such an honest way, just being themselves and this is affecting the way I work.

One of the other things about being here – you don't have the option to use any materials you want or make in any way you want – you have to make in a way that works for your location. Also, I was really keen also to somehow to use recycled fabrics. Currently the textiles industry is destroying the environment. I am realizing that I have to practice what I am preaching, if I am speaking about human connections to nature and nature's connections to the human; and that's quite hard. So, I've got a beautiful selection of material from charity shops on the island - they save stuff for me. I used pink bed sheets and I've done a lot of painting on them. I have an idea that they may be old sheets from the hostel where I used to stay when I came over from the smaller island where I lived to go school on the mainland. That was a kind of home from home, so really fits with the ideas in the work, of home and nesting and the labour involved in providing comfort. And all of the sheets for the girls were pink.

HN: Can we talk about some of the artists you are interested in?

AG: I remember the moment when I realized you don't have to like everything. I didn't have to like all art, I just had to make work that was like the work that I liked, and it was such an amazing way to feel. Artists like Laure Provoust and Mary Reid Kelley who make an immersive environment. I think if you make an environment that people can step into it is easier for them to be there and connect with the work. I want them to feel like they have entered another world... a world when you could be inside a body or outside in a landscape, a sensory world that you can lose your sense of self in....

I hope that folk can connect to the work in some way, even just a little bit of it – I don't expect to move everyone, but if one bit touches them or they have a memory, or they think of somebody like their Mam or their Granny, then that's enough.

**Gaada is a visual arts workshop based in Burra Isle, Shetland, that works with communities in Shetland to develop meaningful + critical art activities including workshops, exhibitions, events, publishing + research.*

Are we closer to the sea
If once a month we share with she
The ability to make a home
For he or she or they
Somewhere for a tiny person to go
It's because we turn salty
That they have a place to grow

Amy Gear