

ArtSway
Contemporary Visual Art in the New Forest

Teachers Pack

AGGREGATE

Jamie Shovlin

14 October – 26 November 2006

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SWAY PARISH COUNCIL



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Exhibition Information for Teachers

Aggregate by Jamie Shovlin

Aggregate is a series of installation works by Jamie Shovlin in which he examines various methods and systems adopted by both individuals and institutions to classify and structure the natural world. Aggregate is an ongoing project that will develop over time as the artist responds to the specific geographical location of the participating gallery venues: The City Gallery, Leicester; ArtSway, New Forest; Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh and Hatton Gallery, Newcastle University.

Aggregate

The starting point for Shovlin's work is often research undertaken by the artist that results in seemingly random and inconsequential collections of information relating to marginal cultural activities that interest him. Shovlin then painstakingly creates artefacts and displays that systemise the collected information. Shovlin's methods of display often manipulate the boundaries between fact and fiction by creating apparently coherent scenarios designed to mislead the viewer. For the Aggregate series Shovlin has already collected information relating to his mother's bird watching habits; different texts of naturalist Charles Darwin's 'The Origin of Species' (1859); jigsaw puzzles completed by his mother and used copies of UK Ordnance Survey Landranger maps. In Aggregate Shovlin treats both authoritative systems of ordering information about the natural world such as Darwin's theory on natural selection and more subjective interpretations of the world in the same way, highlighting the similarities in use of observation and methods of ordering.

In Search of Perfect Harmony

In ArtSway's main gallery space are a series of three grey plinths on which sit 72 jigsaw boxes. This work, entitled In Search of a Perfect Harmony was specially commissioned by ArtSway and is inspired by the rural location of the gallery. For this work Shovlin has produced frottages (a technique similar to brass rubbing) taken from a variety of jigsaws completed by his mother, Valerie - often constructed on her kitchen table as she gazes into her back garden. Many of these jigsaws often depict utopian or idealised natural themes, with titles such as 'Rose Petal Gift Shoppe' and 'Fantastic Waterworld'. The process of rubbing eliminates the jigsaw's original image and reveals its often-ignored structure. The subsequent frottage become an exploration of displaced acts of creation, involving the anonymous artist whose work is reproduced on the jigsaw; Shovlin's mother, and finally Shovlin himself as he makes a frottage copy of his mother's creation. However, the frottage that remains is the sole evidence of the jigsaw's construction, for after a rubbing is made the jigsaws are often discarded never to be made again. The rubbings created by Shovlin also speak of the futility of trying to find the 'perfect grey'. The futile nature of the rubbing is inherent in the artist's choice of materials: Crayola crayons. Rather than the industry standard 'Cadmium Red' or 'Prussian Blue', Crayola instead offer us 'Macaroni and Cheese' and 'Pink Flamingo' - romanticized colours that reflect the idealized titles of many of his mother's jigsaw creations; and colours that could never really produce the ideal grey that Shovlin seeks.

The Origin of Species

Gallery 1 hosts a body of work based on Darwin's seminal text 'The Origin of Species', inspired by the University of Edinburgh where Darwin studied and where the Talbot Rice gallery is situated. The core narrative theme of Darwin's text - 'survival of the fittest' - permeates other elements of Aggregate. Shovlin's installation presents Darwinism through the filter of 'common reader' with multiple second-hand copies of Darwin's book displayed in an exploded view, chapter by chapter. Differently edited versions of the text are displayed with the ultimate aim of revealing a 'definitive' version of the text. Shovlin's method of

presentation applies Darwin's theory of 'survival of the fittest' to his own text - all passages not highlighted by a previous reader are erased with black marker pen.

The Birds in her Garden

This installation in Gallery 3 was realized in relation to The City Gallery in Leicester. This work explores the artist's mother Valerie's fascination with the wildlife in her garden, juxtaposing her verbal descriptions of the inhabitants with a series of drawings and collages that explore the history of scientific ornithological illustration and description. Shovlin is interested in the network of associations between the role of personal observation and the development of the natural sciences and our attempts to tame nature. Shovlin also makes reference to the popular TV genre of narrated wildlife documentaries in which natural history filmmakers such as Leicester native David Attenborough provide an authoritative point of view. In *The Birds in her Garden* the artist's mother suggests her own observations on the wildlife around her in a soundtrack relating to amateur video footage of a sparrow hawk killing its prey in her garden. The narration gradually reveals her classificatory system for ordering the natural world.

About Jamie Shovlin

Jamie Shovlin graduated with an MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art in 2003. Whilst at the Royal College Shovlin diversified his practice, focusing on intensive research and employing a wide range of media to transcribe his findings. This culminated in the richly layered Naomi V. Jelish project (2001-2004), which has been acquired for the Saatchi Collection. Recent solo exhibitions include *Lustfaust: A Folk Anthology 1976-1981* at Freight + Volume, New York; *Beck's Futures 2006*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; and the Art Now Space at Tate Britain, London. He is represented by Haunch of Venison, London.

Aggregate by Jamie Shovlin is a touring exhibition of new work commissioned by The City Gallery, Leicester; ArtSway, New Forest; Talbot Rice, University of Edinburgh and Hatton Gallery, Newcastle University.

Images from *Aggregate* by Jamie Shovlin



In Search of Perfect Harmony, 72 Jigsaw boxes, (installation view), 2006



In Search of Perfect Harmony, 72 Jigsaw boxes with frottages (close-up view), 2006



The Birds in her Garden, mixed media (installation view), 2005-6



The Birds in her Garden (Plate 4 – Evil Bastard the Magpie (after Archibald Thorburn, 1915), mixed media (installation view), 2005-6



The Origin of Species, mixed media (installation view), 2006



The Origin of Species, mixed media (close-up view), 2006

Themes for Lessons and Workshops

As described in the **Exhibition Information for Teachers** part of this booklet Jamie Shovlin's work contains varied themes and ideas – many of which could be adapted for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum for Art, as well as that linked to Natural History and Sociology.

Themes and Ideas to consider for Lessons:

- **Nature/ the Natural World**
- **Truth and Fiction**
- **Research: Collecting, Collating and Presenting Information**
- **Use of Unusual Materials and Techniques**

Nature/ the Natural World and Camouflage

The natural world, and in particular natural history is of particular interest to Jamie Shovlin and fuels many aspects of his work. Nature and our subjective relationship to it (as opposed to the objective narrations of experts such as David Attenborough) is also an area of interest to Shovlin, and in this case the opinions and comments of his mother in *The Birds in her Garden* (for images see page 5). This work features personal commentary by Shovlin's mother, coupled with actual reproductions by the artist from wildlife books. The entire installation is meant to mimic a museum display – and suggest that an untrained individual's opinion is just as valid as that of an expert.

Origin of Species (1865) by Charles Darwin is considered by many scholars to be a seminal text, and re-drew the manner in which we view evolution on Earth. In the case of Shovlin's installation *The Origin of Species* (see page 6), the artist has gathered copies of the Darwin's text from universities and libraries across the UK. Here Shovlin is intrigued by how an individual prioritises what is considered an important text – a text where each word is sacrosanct – and how they select what they consider to be relevant. In the case of each copy of Darwin's book that Shovlin received, the artist obliterated anything not underlined or highlighted by the original reader – leaving only those sections considered relevant – and echoing Darwin's catchall 'the survival of the fittest'.

Shovlin is also fascinated by Gilbert White, who was a curate in the village of Selborne in Hampshire in the late 18th Century and is recognized as one of the fathers of ecology. He was one of the first naturalists to make careful observations of the world around him. It is these 'careful observations' that intrigue Jamie Shovlin – whose installations at ArtSway display his interest in how we categorize the world around us.

Truth and Fiction

Jamie Shovlin has previously produced large and elaborate bodies of work that are later found to be completely fabricated. Although all of the works in *Aggregate* are based in reality, they are nonetheless quite subjective – meaning that although the observations contained in the exhibition (i.e. – those of his mother) are considered as facts, they are rather 'versions' of what we consider to be the truth.

Two examples of large bodies of work produced by Shovlin that deal with the conflicting ideas of truth and fiction are *Lustfaust*, which is concerned with a fictional rock band based in Germany and can be viewed at: www.lustfaust.com; and the *Naomi V Jelish Project*, which deals with the life and disappearance of a fictional 13 year old girl and can be viewed at: www.naomivjelijsh.org.uk. Both these works demonstrate how easily fabricated information can be manipulated and presented to the viewer as fact, and how by

adopting an interest in museology, the artist can reinforce an academic position that gives his work even more credence. This interest in museology – the study of how museums are designed and managed – is particularly evident in the works in *Aggregate*.

Research: Collecting, Collating and Presenting Information

The three installations that make up *Aggregate* are the results of exhaustive research by Shovlin stretching back almost six years. Shovlin's work – as has already been described – revolves around the subjective notions of collecting, collating and presenting of information. In other words – how he presents his work is reflective of the actual work and subject matter itself.

With *Lustfaust* and *Naomi V Jelish* Shovlin had to fabricate many of the works himself – such as hundreds of fake covers for cassette tapes for the former project, and hundreds of drawings purportedly made by Naomi Jelish before she disappeared. The artist also utilized items of found material for the Jelish project – such as photographs, dated receipts and subtly manipulated newspaper cuttings (which he deliberately aged with tea). Similarly, with *Aggregate* the artist has collected and collated found objects – such as the jigsaw boxes from *In Search of Perfect Harmony*, and other found material, such a stuffed Sparrow Hawk bought on eBay. It is in the presentation – with reference to museology – that we detect the hand of the artist. The manner in which he presents his observations and findings to the viewer is critical to them succeeding as installations that comment on how we categorize the world around us.

Use of Unusual Materials and Techniques

In all three elements of *Aggregate* Shovlin has utilized a variety of materials and techniques. The stuffed Sparrow Hawk and entomology case from *The Birds in her Garden* is an example of this – as are the pages from *Origin of Species*. The found jigsaw boxes are transformed into frames, and Crayola crayons become an integral piece of Shovlin's work. In essence, no material or media is off-limits in contemporary art – and by employing a wide-range of materials the artist can convey his ideas much more succinctly.

Shovlin has also employed a range of unusual techniques in his work – such as the frottages of the found jigsaws in *In Search of Perfect Harmony*, as well as traditional techniques. The traditional can be seen in *Evil Bastard the Magpie (After Archibald Thorburn)* (see page 5), where the drawing in the centre of the case is a copy made by Shovlin after the artist named in the title.

Guided Tours and Workshops at ArtSway

ArtSway is always keen to welcome school groups visiting the gallery. Please see the **Information for Schools Visiting ArtSway** section of this booklet for more information. **Please note:** we would only be able to accommodate between 20 and 25 children in the galleries per visit.

Guided Tours

One of the best ways to experience an artist's work, as opposed to looking at images in books and on the Internet, is to actually visit a gallery to see their work in the flesh. ArtSway has hosted many school group visits in the past, offering **Guided Tours** around the gallery by the Exhibition and Education Officer and Audience Development Officer.

The tours sometimes involve power point presentations, but usually consist of ArtSway's Officers taking the students from work to work, explaining the origins and content of the works on display. A tour will usually end with a question and answer session.

On some occasions it may be possible to have the artists present for a school visit.

Workshops

ArtSway employs a wide range of artists to lead workshops. However, they are all professional artists who will charge a fee to lead a workshop. If a school is interested in scheduling an artist to lead a workshop, please contact the gallery. Contact details are in the **Information for Schools Visiting ArtSway** section of this booklet. In some instances we will provide an artist free of charge.

There are a series of one-hour workshops available; taking place after the tour of the exhibition that will be lead by ArtSway's Exhibitions and Education Officer. These workshops, that will involve simple drawing and paintings techniques, will be based on the themes outlined in the **Themes for Lessons and Workshops** section of this booklet. These themes will be relevant to the Alison Turnbull exhibition and are: **Nature/ the Natural World; Truth and Fiction; Research: Collecting, Collating and Presenting Information; Use of Unusual Materials and Techniques**

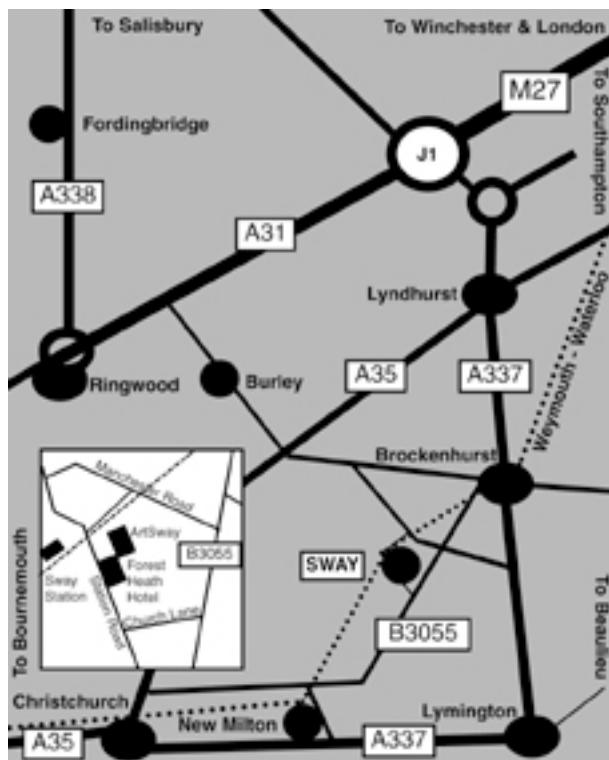
A Timetable of a Typical School Visit to ArtSway

- 10.00am – 10.10am: **Introduction and welcome to ArtSway.**
- 10.10am – 10.30am: **Tour of the exhibition.**
- 10.30am – 11.30am: **Workshop activities.**
- 11.30am – 11.45am: **Discussion and round up of activities.**
- 12.00pm: **End of workshops and school visit.**

Information for Schools Visiting ArtSway

The following is information for school groups visiting ArtSway for **Guided Tours and Workshops**.

Getting to ArtSway



By Rail: Sway Station is on the London Waterloo to Weymouth Line.

By Car: Follow signs to Sway from Brockenhurst, Burley or Lymington, then follow signs for Village Centre & Train Station. ArtSway is just behind the Forest Heath Hotel on Station Road.

Access: All parts of the gallery are accessible via level access.

Parking: ArtSway has its own car park that is reached along the access drive between the surgery and chemist on Station Road in the centre of Sway.

In the Galleries

Works of art, especially those by Jamie Shovlin, are very fragile and cannot be touched. We ask that children visiting the gallery take care both of their own safety and of the artworks on display. Teachers and their assistants are responsible for their groups. At the beginning of the tour the relevant ArtSway Officer will give a brief explanation to the visiting children of what they can and cannot do in the gallery.

Contact Details for ArtSway

If you would like to discuss a visit to ArtSway, or what we could offer in terms of educational resources, please contact:

Exhibitions and Education Officer Peter Bonnell on Telephone: 01590 682260 (extension 14), or Email: peter@artsway.org.uk

Address: ArtSway, Station Road, Sway, Hampshire, SO41 6BA

Telephone: 01590 682260 **Fax:** 01590 681989

Email: mail@artsway.org.uk **Web:** www.artsway.org.uk

Opening Times: Tuesday to Sunday, 11am – 5pm. **Admission is FREE.**