

Falling Away 2004-2006

Falling Away was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Arts Council England. The research was motivated by the thought that photographs as documents were unable to reveal much more than the surface appearance of the material world and that scientific interventions such as biogenetics are essentially unseen and therefore a different visual strategy would be needed in their representation. A reductionist visual approach was explored which mirrored the status of DNA in the human genome projects maintained in genetics. Stedman (2006) wrote that the work,

“...is drawing attention to the interventions that man is now capable of carrying out to genetic material, but which remains unseen. Using the authority of photography he (Langford) is setting up a tension - how far can we trust what we see? The viewer is drawn into considering the validity of the image as digital technology can be used to construct images, the authority of documentation can no longer be taken for granted.”

The starting point was to digitally ‘capture’ plant root material, but to circumvent conventional lenses and light-dependent surface and texture in favour of a method which only recorded basic structural data. The materials were collected from dry river beds in the Parque Naturale Cabo de Gata in southern Spain. The linear complexity of these roots were testament to the basic survival needs of such plant species native to harsh arid desert conditions. A three dimensional scanner was used with support from Warwick University. Once scanned in three-dimensional VR terms (basic unit of visual structure now polygonised triangles) objects could be viewed on screen from all angles in real time, endlessly reconfigured and spatially redirected. At small scale the plant structures took on the appearance of photographically rendered objects, but at large scale the underlying structure took on architectonic proportions normally associated with constructed environments. The final wall based image sets explored illusion and virtual reality, presenting ambiguous landscape images with implausible additions. Alongside the wall mounted work, large scale suspended digital line drawings of the wire structures and the actual plant materials in display cases were presented. Visitors were invited to consider sequential connections from real materials in conventional glass cases through to large scale mechanised drawings and onto electronically rendered plant roots improbably placed within natural settings from their point of origin in the landscape.

The research entitled Falling Away was shown publically at the University of Northampton and within the research collaboration which culminated in the 2006 exhibition Common Ground hosted by Rugby Art Gallery and Museum. This group exhibition set out to explore landscape within a contemporary art context and a range of critical/perceptual relationships between painting and photography and the landscape. It was externally funded by Rugby Art Gallery, Rugby Borough Council, The Landscape Research Group Of Great Britain (LRGofGB) and Howard Smith Paper. A 32 page colour catalogue was published which included an essay by Nancy Stedman (LRGofGB) entitled ‘The Landscape and Its representation In Art’. A public seminar was held which attracted 70 guests and included presentations from the three researchers and Dr. Judith Tucker, AHRC Research Fellow from Leeds Centre CATH. It examined contemporaneity and Romanticism, manifestations of constructed realism and issues of representation of nature and landscape.

Stedman, Nancy. *Common Ground*. Rugby Art Gallery and Museum. 2005