

Embodied Vistas

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PART ONE: Embodiment in the gallery

Painted on the floor in mud is a map of the Thames. Crumbling slightly, it illustrates the area where the river flows through Deptford Creek and places APT Studios in its geographical locale. Blurring the lines between interior and exterior, the gallery is filled with traces of people who had been there before – embodiments of those who live by the river.

From the entrance to the back of the space, there are clay objects that have now dried and set. Round, hard and with imprints of unknown origin, they could almost be stepping-stones leading from one end to the other, dredged from the estuary itself. However, these are the remainders of a performance by Helena Eflerova who has made the indentations as she attempted to perform the river, leaving her body's own signature on each step. The work echoes Richard Long: *A Line Made By Walking, Mud and Journeys* all seem to combine in this attempt to make the external part of the internal, and represent the river's rolling course.

Three rolls of paper cascade from the ceiling to the floor, pressed with handprints and fingerprints. The organic nature of the pieces are part tribal, part reminiscent of Ana Mendieta's *Earth-Body* performances, capturing momentary fragments impressed on the page and then displayed as a hallmark of the bodies that inhabited the space.

The silhouettes of locals are sketched on pieces of paper around the gallery: hung on the wall, they are filled in with silt that has been thrown into them. The result is something that resembles Jackson Pollock's action painting and, as the silt has dried, it has cracked and creased – almost resembling coarse, wrinkling skin. The silt takes on a transformative, life-like quality – drying, hardening and finally breaking – representing the fragile transience of the neighbourhood and the ever-changing topography of the river as it flows constantly on its journey.

The exhibit seems to call on the relationship between sculpture, painting and its live performance counterpart: by combining temporary actions of the body with more permanent material markers left by the clay and silt, it stands as testament to the community and holds a mirror to the River Thames flowing by the building, all of which is completed by the presence of Helena Eflerova's work in translating the riverscape into a physical embodiment of art objects.

PART TWO: Scene embodied on screen

A panoramic screen projection shows a body resting on a rock in the river; the almost deafening noise of the water's flow fills the room and the darkness. The projection flits and changes, sometimes showing the figure as solitary, sometimes in a triptych and sometimes expanding to inhabit the entire width of the space.

The figure in the video – Eflerova – is dressed completely in black, twisting to life with the flow of the river. She bends, turns and emerges, as though she is swimming without being immersed in the water. As the screen shifts between its various positions, it reveals new perspectives and viewpoints. We see both the river and the figure from their different angles, revealing new qualities with each change of a point of view.

We are aware, as the river passes and the body moves, of the flow of time and so the film begins to take on a timeless quality, as though it could occur outside our current era. *When* is this video occurring? It could easily be a record of a performance from the 1970s, such is the ageless atmosphere of this installation. A collaboration between Kye Wilson and Eflerova, it emphasises the omnipotent presence of the river that endures regardless of its surroundings. Though buildings, landscapes and people may have changed, the river remains and carries on towards the end of its journey – as it has done for centuries.

Simultaneously, the nostalgic quality of the performance itself is a reminder of what *has been*. We are given a chance to witness this rare, private act in which human and nature come together, briefly interrupted by mechanical noises and bird song. It is an act of confluence that has now disappeared and will never exist again.

The projection becomes a window into a moment – a point at which to access this convergence between human and nature. Eflerova seems to lose any sense of persona: instead she is one with the river, expressing and embodying its flow. She does not seek to impose her sense of self on the creek, but instead allows the creek to become her.

As she becomes motionless once more, the cacophonous sound of gushing water eases as it fades and the sun that is reflected on the river's surface seems to make it glitter and gleam, returning it to a silent stillness once more. The lasting impression is that of serenity: a temporary embodiment of the enduring passage of the river that survives regardless of the continuing progressive development of its industrial banks.

PART THREE: Performing the landscape

A figure gazes towards the distance. Possessed by some kind of unknown force, she single-mindedly walks towards an unknown point. As one looks to what could be at the end of the horizon, the eye casts itself across a bridge over which trains trundle along, some old well-worn warehouses, as well as the waning waters of the creek. The grand alcove of the bridge's arch acts as an imposing stage, framing a catwalk for Helena to walk down. So adamant is her conviction that one becomes convinced her destination cannot be seen by the naked eye. Eflerova commits to the performance moment and we come a complicit part of her quest.

She becomes disturbed: her path is broken as she stands stock still in the midst of the river. She turns to face us. Perhaps the sound of the DLR crashing across

the rails has distracted her from this single-minded mission, reminded that the river is part of a larger manmade vista. She seems to have a moment of realisation about who and where she is. She notices her reflection in the water below her. Seeing the ripples in the water, she starts to contract her arms in time to the breaks in the water. Moving her arms more and more vigorously, it appears as though she wants to take flight, but elongates and stretches her body around the space, searching for something more solid to cling to.

Sculpture-like, she holds the pose of a flamingo or an exotic bird, then sharply changes, moving her arms as if to welcome in the audience and then returns to the pose once again. She moves towards the arch, looking towards it for a form of support, and unsteadily reaches out for its brickwork to hold her body and guide her back to the banks of the creek.

Unsure, but with purpose, she moves back towards her origin. She has made enough progress for one day. She brushes the water back with her hands, as if this time she is fighting against its flow to get back to the beginning. The audience are forced to contemplate whether her journey has a definitive ending, or if – like the river itself – she will be forced to indefinitely repeat this act in order to reach the destination she very clearly holds in her mind's eye. A destination that seems just beyond reach, sitting on the skyline somewhere further than Deptford Creek appears to stretch.