



# Rachael Champion

Camden Arts Centre / April–June 2012

File Note #70 Rachael Champion *The Ornithopter Garden*

Kate Corder

# The Ornithopter Garden



The cliff face is situated to the northeast corner of the studio. The position, and its proximity reflect a landscape that has formed and eroded over a time span of millions of years. Currently the cliff is growing green vegetation that integrates with the surface soil, prolonging the moment in time before the cliff will cascade into the sea. The plant life supports and sustains a biodiversity that enriches the wildlife of the studio area. Underneath the cliff is a structure that human life might use to build the natural world of the future.



Like ants, humans are constantly rearranging and appropriating found material into building blocks that become objects. These objects are part of human-created nature. What seems artificial, industrial or synthetic, because a human has constructed it, is in fact *nature*. Human engineering systems are designed to enhance human ways of living. Human existence is a nanosecond blip in the time span of this galaxy. What evolves after we are here will adjust to the rearrangement of planetary resources that we have left behind.



Plants can grow wherever they are seeded given the right conditions. The growth of plants is an organic process, the plant reproduction centre is constantly looking for ways to sustain its own life and reproduce. Linseed, wheatgrass and corn, are all plants that produce material that is both edible and consumable in other modes of production. These crop seeds are used to grow plants in sculptural structures built out of elongated coconut hair



*The Ornithopter Garden 2012*  
Installation view / Camden Arts Centre  
Photo: Andy Keate



*Economies of Scale 2011 / 6m x 6m x 2.5m / liquid storage tanks, ceramic insulators, wheat, barley, millet, maize, linseed, forage rape, quinoa / Bold Tendencies 5, Peckham multi-storey car park, London*

sacks suspended in a metal frame. The frame configuration becomes a vertical crop producing a system rather than a garden. These particular crop-plants have an annual life span. The plants can reseed if left to their own devices, but by the time the seeds fall to the studio floor the plant support structures will have been moved to another location and residential occupancy will be over. The installation may reseed



elsewhere. The functional apparatus of the sculptural structure has possibilities to be incorporated outside of the gallery area into any potential space, but while it remains in the gallery it is part of a 21st-century non-site installation. The industrial landscape is rearranging itself as plant life seeks to engineer a way to be part of its structure. Landfill and buildings are hidden under a carpeting of plants made into a landscaped area. Seeds and turf are rooted in the

soil. The soil can be a surface covering with no depth. More buildings can be arranged above the land facade. Soil is applied in layers, seeds scattered, compost dug in. A pseudo-concrete structure grows a lawn. The lawn is constantly tended whilst wildlife creatures try to occupy a habitat within the lawn and the hidden shallow layer of soil. The mumble of concealed energy generating machines systems can be heard when other background sounds merge in and out of an unobtainable silence. It is the paradox of landscape that hides multiple functionalities.

On the distant horizon at the edge of the cliff in the corner of the studio a hidden thought pattern contains a volley of golf balls poised ready for the next oil drilling accident. The golf balls that could not plug the leaking hole in the



ocean floor are rescued and cleaned of oil, like the sea birds that escaped certain death. The golf balls that eluded their eternal ocean floor destiny are once more accumulated in golf bags. At the golf course the balls are balanced on tees and hit at a force to land near the hole on the other side of the manicured golf course. Meanwhile in the ocean at another destination a bloom of algae starts to generate and fill the water, it is a by-product of industrial process and climate.

Concrete and cement were once part of land structure, they were embedded and part of the landscape. Now they too become products, their material is rearranged, modelled into the box like shapes, with human



life support systems hidden within them. Chernobyl's nuclear disaster happened in 1986. In 2007 humans were still working on a solution to contain it. Japan's earthquake and tsunami that happened in March 2011, initiated Fukushima's nuclear disaster. Golf balls cannot fix the crack in either broken energy generating system. A plan for containment at Chernobyl is an intensive composite of re-enforced concrete to mend the cracks. Plants will grow to soak up radiation, but the radiation morphs invisibly beyond the time line horizon. A nuclear accident is a catastrophic event, unpreventable like the oil spill, because humans have pre-made a decision about choice of land management and ways of generating energy. This all can be grassed over, if a layer of soil is placed above the concrete containment structure and seeds applied. A new *Ornithopter Garden* will gradually appear, plant life fixing an existing human constructed problem and generating a seemingly organic solution not necessarily about sustainability but more about the plant as a system that can root itself to adapt to technology.

Kate Corder is an artist and is currently undertaking a practice based PhD at Reading University.



Synthia A philisophical enactment  
with Professor Johnny Golding  
*The Ornithopter Garden* / 30 May 2012



Riverview Court 2012 / Site-specific installation of pea shingle and turf / *Cultivation Field*, The Keep, Reading

Design: Practise & Sara De Bondt studio  
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**Rachael Champion** (b.1982, USA) lives in London. She graduated with a PG Dip Fine Art from the Royal Academy of Fine Art in 2010. Her work has been included in a number of exhibitions including: *Dual Spectrum Subsistence*, Modern Art Oxford, UK; *Cultivation Field*, The Keep, Reading, UK (both 2012); *Bold Tendencies 5*, Peckham Multi-Storey Car Park, London (2011); *The Shape We're In*, Zabludowicz Collection, London (2011); *EAF 06*, Socrates Sculpture Park, New York (2006). In 2010 she won the Red Mansion Art Prize.

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#### Reading List

- J G Ballard *The Disaster Area* Panther Books (1967)
- Rachael Carson *Silent Spring* Penguin Books (2000)
- Buckminster Fuller *Untitled Epic Poem on the History of Industrialization* Simon & Schuster (1970)
- Timothy Morton *Ecological Thought* Harvard University Press (2010)
- Michael Pollan *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* Random House Trade (2002)
- Carolyn Steel *Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives* Chatto and Windus (2008)
- Jonathan Watts *When a Billion Chinese Jump: Voices from the Frontline of Climate Change* Faber and Faber (2010)
- H G Wells *The First Men in the Moon* Gollancz (2001)

#### Viewing List

- Jennifer Baichwal (Dir.) *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006)
- Werner Herzog (Dir.) *The White Diamond* (2004)
- Werner Herzog (Dir.) *Lessons of Darkness* (1992)
- Andrey Tarkovsky (Dir.) *Stalker* (1979)
- The Guardian Online: [www.guardian.co.uk/environment/video/2011/apr/19/novarka-chernobyl-reactor-arch-video](http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/video/2011/apr/19/novarka-chernobyl-reactor-arch-video)

#### Listening List

- Laurie Anderson *Big Silence* Warner Bros Records (1982)
  - The Bad Show: [www.radiolab.org/2012/jan/09](http://www.radiolab.org/2012/jan/09)
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‘My father was an exhaust manifold and my mother was a tree’  
— Tom Waits

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