

# MADELON HOOYKAAS

VIRTUAL WALLS | REAL WALLS

GESTURES, SIGNS AND TRACES OF CHANGE, RESILIENCE AND URBAN ACUPUNCTURE

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HORSECROSS ARTS JOURNAL FOR CRITICAL WRITING | EST. 2007 | ISSN 1755-0866 | ONLINE

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ARTIFICIAL MOON (2010) BY WANG YUYANG. EXHIBITION VIEW FROM THRESHOLD ARTSPACE, PERTH CONCERT HALL

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*GRID* (2017) BY MADELON HOOYKAAS | DETAIL VIEW FROM A PERFORMANCE AT MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART (MU HKA), ANTWERP

**‘VENICE IS EVER THE FRAGILE LABYRINTH AT THE EDGE OF THE SEA AND IT REMINDS US OF HOW BRIEF AND PERILOUS THE JOURNEYS OF OUR LIVES ARE; PERHAPS THAT IS WHY WE LOVE IT SO’.** ERICA JONG [1]

Madelon Hooykaas (born Maartensdijk, The Netherlands, 1942) ought to be acknowledged as one of the most representative visual artists in Europe for her enduring and pioneering experimentation in contemporary art. Since the 1960s, Hooykaas has developed a rigorous artistic practice and visual research in photography, film, installation, video, interactive and performance art. Her works revolve around recurring themes that include landscape and nature, water and light, memory and mindfulness, loss and abstraction. Her latest performative drawing project *Virtual Walls | Real Walls (2017-18)* arrives at the intersection of these themes and practices as it enters the Horsecross Arts museum collection of contemporary art at Perth’s Threshold artspace, after its successful iterations in Venice, Amsterdam, Berlin and Perth.

Hooykaas’ project started its travels across Europe in Venice. In his famous *Itinerary* (1617) the traveller and author Fynes Moryson wrote that Venice ‘is worthily called in *Latin Venetiae*, as it were *Veni etiam*, that is, come again’ [2]. This imaginative etymology – mentioned by the Venetian humanist Francesco Sansovino in the 16th Century – still resonates to this day as an open invitation to visit and travel to the lagoon city, ‘the most important city not only in Italy but in the world’ [3].

If the beauty and splendour of Venice has been described in the accounts of hundreds of explorers, poets and artists throughout the centuries [4], the city has always been very busy, given the limited space and its international vocation to commerce and exchange. Today, though, the daily presence in Venice of thousands of tourists adding up to 30 million a year severely impacts on the sustainability of its urban environment and ecosystem, on the quality of life for its mere 55,000 residents. Similar issues have been emerging globally and are at the centre of a public debate that aggressively polarises residents and tourists with the

spread of an anti-tourism movement across old Europe not likely to subside [5].

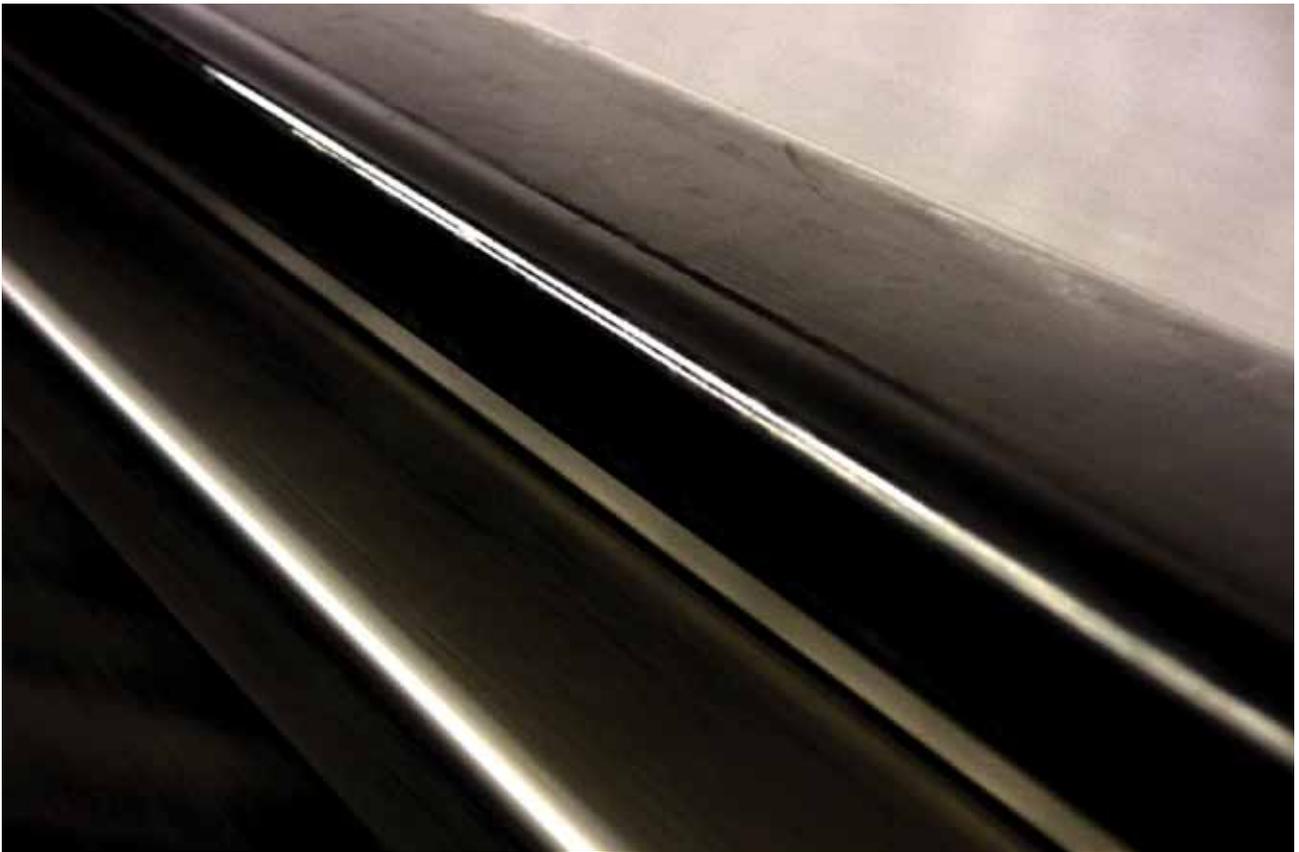
This crisis was only just one of the premises which fuelled Hooykaas’ performative project *Virtual Walls | Real Walls* in an attempt to stimulate regeneration in cities where – like Venice – this fragile environmental balance seems compromised. Using the wall as a cultural metaphor, Hooykaas’ work aims to question collective and personal perception of barrier and confinement; it yearns to restore the balance between the inhabitant and the inhabited, the host and the hosted, temporality and permanency.

While the ‘tourism-phobia’ was sweeping across some of the most popular European destinations in the sweltering summer of 2017, we met Hooykaas and hosted her first exploratory visit of Perth. We discussed her upcoming performative project and the first in the series *Virtual Walls I* in Venice. The potency of the issues of environmental sustainability, human exploitation of resources and noise pollution made it a co-curatorial imperative for us to bring an iteration of this performance to Perth’s Threshold artspace in the wider context of Hooykaas’ most recent artistic practice.

The nature of the tourist flows in Scotland might be different from those in Venice, Barcelona and Amsterdam, yet a wider reflection on how we perceive, inhabit and exploit the urban space, we felt, was much needed. After almost a year after Hooykaas’ ‘mini-residency’ in Perth *Virtual Walls | Real Walls* arrived to Scotland.

The genesis of the *Virtual Walls | Real Walls* performative series could be traced back to the artist’s own home city of Amsterdam in 2015 when the imbalance between the resident population of nearly 1 million and the number of tourists per year soared up to 17 million people. This added to the anti-tourist sentiment making the city somehow ‘unlivable’ for many residents who have complained and protested.

Throughout 2015 and 2017, while developing the project, the artist undertook two residencies at Emily Harvey Foundation, researching and filming in Venice. The second residency culminated with the first public iteration of *Virtual Walls I*. [6]



*UNDERGROUND* (2012) BY MADELON HOOYKAAS. VIDEO STILL



*VIRTUAL WALLS | REAL WALLS* (2017) BY MADELON HOOYKAAS. VIDEO STILL

Structurally, the artist's performance is beguilingly concise. An artist's film – shot on location in the city including the soundtrack of the trolley suitcases trundling along the cobbled streets – is projected onto a paper-clad flat surface rising from the floor up. Hooykaas, with her back to the audience, intervenes over the projected image only with mark-making, tracing and charcoal drawing. The artist's silhouette casts a shadow while her drawing hand gestures expand, interact and modify the moving image identifying and magnifying some of the city outlines derived from the artist's abstract documentary.

On close inspection, the polka-dot mesh through which the film seems to have been shot appears to be a close up of the sun filters stuck on the windows of the water busses aka *vaporettos* operating on the Grand Canal. The images are thus filtered through a dark and thick, almost honeycomb grid. If at first sight, this might seem a post-production feature, the artist uses a very simple but effective, built-in expedient. The window framing, the sound of the ferry engine rolling and the instability of the image are enough to ignite the imagination of the viewer, who is suddenly transported on a vicarious *vaporetto* journey in Venice.

Through this veil created by the filter, the audience can catch glimpses of the quintessential Venetian landscape – the historic architecture, the gondolas, the canals, the light and the blue sky. And yet, this picture-perfect image is somewhat distorted and out of focus. In fact, at various points in the 'journey' the viewer is prevented from seeing anything but the sun filter itself. The filter creates a reflecting, mirror-like barrier that ultimately becomes the subject of the video frame itself – a virtual wall beyond which only fragments of reality can be grasped.

It is through the artist's live intervention that what appears to be partially hidden behind the veiled surface could be seen. In the subsequent iterations of the series – *Virtual Walls | Real Walls I* at Oude Kerk, Amsterdam on 21 December 2017 and *Virtual Walls | Real Walls II* at Scotty, Berlin on 23 February 2018 – the images of stone walls alternate with a sequence featuring once again a metallic grid that is placed as the filter between the viewer and that what is beyond. It is the artist's role to reveal, perform, re-act and re-enact rather than just faithfully represent the landscape. [7] The barrier –

ultimately a wall – places itself as a mediator between the landscape and the viewer, between object and subject, offering guidance and protection. In *Virtual Walls I*, the viewer however stands in front of a 'triple-fortified wall' – that of the landscape, the grid and the one generated by the live action.

It is this iconic film still from Hooykaas' *Virtual Walls I* which captures the elusive, invisible 'city of mirages' [8] which was exclusively commissioned by Horsecross Arts as a set of ten limited-edition prints on brushed aluminium to accompany Hooykaas' first UK solo exhibition at Perth's Threshold artspace. It was published as part of Collect + Support, an ongoing initiative established in 2006 to encourage the viewers to start or nurture a collection of their own while the first of all newly commissioned limited editions is acquired for the Horsecross Arts public museum collection of contemporary art.

The materiality of the grid is echoed by the metal surface of the limited edition. It is also a key trope which dominates Hooykaas' performance art piece entitled simply *Grid* (2015). Most recently presented at M KHA in Antwerp on 19 October 2017, *Grid* was further re-imagined and re-mastered both as a single- and 22-channel video installation incorporating the original film footage and the documentation of the performance as part of Hooykaas' first UK solo exhibition before being acquired for the Horsecross Arts collection of contemporary art at Perth's Threshold artspace. In a comparable way, as part of *Grid*, the artist performed live on a projected film. But in that case, the film featured initially an overcast sky, marked by a black, thick geometrical structure reminiscent of a 'forest of steel rods' ready to be poured over with concrete on a construction site. In the live performance, Hooykaas drew on the blank canvas another structure that contrasted and opposed the projected grid. In the end, the constant movement of the projected grid, the sign of the artist's hand and the landscape merged, responding to each other until this barrier of a wall faded again.



*VIRTUAL WALLS I* (2017) BY MADELON HOOYKAAS. VIDEO STILL



*VIRTUAL WALLS I* (2017) BY MADELON HOOYKAAS. DETAIL VIEW FROM PERFORMANCE AT EMILY HARVEY ARCHIVE, VENICE

In her germinal essay *Grids* (1979), the American art historian and theorist Rosalind Krauss pinpoints the grid as a key structural element in art, deeply rooted in modernism, identifying among the most fundamental early examples in pre-war painting Kasimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian. [9]. If Mondrian's structures are in some way evoked in Hooykaas' *Grid*, then the filter in *Virtual Wall I* seems in some ways to be also indebted to the Pop Art's grid and Hooykaas' own grid drawings in the 1970s, inspired by the artist Agnes Martin, with whom Hooykaas met several times in New Mexico.

The duality and tension between materialism and spirituality in the grid – as outlined by Krauss – seems to be quite relevant to Hooykaas' work. Although the grid acts like a filter to reality, it represents an attempt to evoke a spiritual healing, something that is more universal and transcends reality. Spirituality and mindfulness are both inextricably linked to Hooykaas' own artistic practice as a practicing Buddhist.

Developing her argument, Krauss also describes the importance of the grid in the 19th Century theories of colour, light and vision. [10] This point also leads to Hooykaas' practice as the artist has explored and investigated the perceptions of colour and light, vision and memory in many of her video artworks, including those created in collaboration with the Scottish video art pioneer Elsa Stansfield. [11]

In her analysis, Krauss also discusses the differences between the modernist 20th Century grid and what seems to be predecessor of the formalist grid in the 15th and 16th Centuries – the perspective cage. Krauss explains that differently from the Renaissance, the grid does not aim to organise, represent and know reality, but 'maps the surface of the painting itself'. [12]

Krauss continues by identifying a centrifugal and a centripetal force in the grid that might prevail in a distinct way in different works. If in the first case, the grid is a 'mere fragment...from an infinitely larger fabric' [13], in the other, the image is 'an autonomous, organic whole'. [14] In Hooykaas' *Virtual Walls I* and *Grid*, both tensions coexist but the first – which for Krauss can be more linked to reality – seems to prevail. In some respect the movement of the camera, the change of focus and the presence itself of the landscape suggest that we are looking at a portion of reality

and we are aware – we feel that awareness, confirmed by our senses – that the reality beyond that grid never ceases to exist: the landscape through the window is there, and the artist's drawing hand is guiding the viewer. Yet, on the contrary, in *Virtual Walls | Real Walls*, following a centripetal force, at some point the grid becomes 'the object of vision', [15] although the image soon goes back to the opposite paradigm.

Embracing a centrifugal tension, Hooykaas' live drawings show an evident, deep relationship with space and architecture where the performative gesture is the key to organise and order reality, and ultimately interact and even subvert the model of the grid. Importantly, the Venice performance culminated subverting this model, with the artist 'ripping' open the projection surface to reveal a window to the outer world, a link between the artwork and reality.

Going back to the analysis of *Virtual Walls I*, it is interesting to notice that two timelines intersect and merge in the performance – that of the present evolving through the live performance; and that of the past, being projected. The projected image is a visualisation of Hooykaas' research in the city, acting as a recording and a testimony. The projection also brings the past into the present. The past becomes once again *hic et nunc* and the video acts as a window to time but also space. With her final subversive act, breaking the unity of the drawing and revealing the reality beyond the wall, the artist made a hole in the drawing to allocate a small telescope aimed at a bridge in front of the building. Ultimately, the marks and signs which gradually populate the white drawing and projection surface appear as palimpsest of time, as vestiges of the performance in silence.

Time and space have been key mediums throughout Hooykaas' practice and research. Examining her 'artistic partnership' with Stansfield and their early collaborative works, for example, *Split Seconds* (1979), *2 Sides of a Story* (1981) and *Time Piece* (1980), we can see a wealth of experimentation with the perception, manipulation and representation of time through video. [16]

Space also plays a fundamental role in Hooykaas' video installations and video environments [17] including *Daydreaming* (2006) – a work, specifically re-created as part of the Hooykaas' first solo UK exhibition at Perth's Threshold artspace and acquired for the Horsecross Arts museum collection of contemporary art. Dedicated to Stansfield, *Daydreaming* features a classic macramé rope hammock from which the lounging, reclining audience can experience the serene landscape projected on the ceiling or screened on the wall within their field of vision. The opening seascape scene includes a close up shot of a pair of bare feet dangling away in the very same hammock, perhaps anticipating the real time, selfie culture of the Instagram generation.

In fact, Stansfield/Hooykaas are widely recognised internationally for their pioneering use of real time video in their collaborative works as early as *What's It To You?* (1975) – an innovative precursor of the participatory and interactive art – acquired by Glasgow Museum of Modern Art in 2016 and shown in the museum as part of the group exhibition *Please Turn Us On* until 22 January 2017. Although the optical illusion in *Daydreaming* persists throughout the film and returns at key moments, the beach seascape scene cuts to a painterly mountain panorama, the crimson sunshine gives way to a stainless steel sky and the red clouds of the setting sun exit from the left of the frame in the final scene. The soundtrack, which invariably includes field recordings from waves gently splashing on the beach to dogs barking up in the hills, also contributes to the atmosphere of serene simplicity and mindfulness, creating a contemplative place for reflection, almost in accordance with the general praxis of Buddhist teachings delivering 'distilled infusions of clarity using elementary language and metaphor to address the most elemental concerns of the soul'. [18]

While expanding the traditional fine art confines of the spatial genre of landscape art, Hooykaas should be noted for the historically significant early works *Sea of Light* (1978) and *Intermittent Signals* (1991). Writing about the collaborative works of the artistic partnership Stansfield/Hooykaas, Nicole Gingras noted: 'Coupled with their determination to record the present and situate the observer in an essential experience is a desire to film the space between, the ephemeral and the invisible, favouring a non-linear rationality [...] they will feel the necessity of

the here and now, the artists' attachment to a particular quality of light, of space.' [19]

More recently, Hooykaas' single-channel video works *Underground* (2012) and *Light* (2015) reverberate with Gingras' writings.

*Underground* is a spatial exploration of a familiar space through the artist's signature 'tool' of the reality organising grid which also dominates the structure of Hooykaas' *Grid* and *Virtual Walls | Real Walls*. The slow-motion journey through the underground is delivered with a detailed focus on the grid of the steel escalators and the patterned tiles. A soundtrack of strident field recordings and oscillating instrumentals add further to the sense of out-of-place strangeness. The fragmented, rendition of reality and the photographically eloquent, frame by frame camerawork deepen this sense of unfamiliarity and even hostility where the human presence is hidden from view behind the camera or just allowed to make a brief appearance when in the closing scene a pair of feet step onto the escalator.

Hooykaas' *Light* is another spatial work of significance. It was commissioned by the Museum of Religious Art in Uden for their Chapel. It is a spiritual reflection upon Nature where sound, light, vibrations and movement are able to stimulate a sensorial response in the viewer – a state of meditation, pray and contemplation. This work appears to embody the Japanese word '*komorebi*' which signifies the moments when sunlight filters through the trees and the instances of the interplay between the light and the leaves. Hooykaas' *komorebi* also encompasses the interplay of sunlight and water. The fast-flowing mountain river glistens through a giant spiderweb and dark moss-covered pebbles before it reaches deep, murky waters covered with red autumn leaves. Scenes saturated with the dazzling yellows of the sun cut to scenes with the fiery reds of autumn and back again. Water and light thus become inter-changeable while the river flowing down the stream symbolises the cyclical regeneration. The human presence in *Light* is also in abundance. It is signified by the artist's eyes and the hands of someone praying. With the pupil dilating, the artist's eye looks to the camera but, it seems, not with the intent to look to an invisible audience, but to absorb the beauty and peace of Nature, while the light and cloud pass on the split screen

underneath. The hands in pray sharing the screen with the image of the flowing water seem to seal this union, this pact between Nature and soul.

If the environmental aesthetics of Hooykaas' is made bare and bright in her work *Light*, other such examples include *Vanishing Point* (1992) by Hooykaas/Stansfield. Featuring images of stuffed animals, extinct animals' bones and endangered species *Vanishing Point* explores deeply how Nature is exploited and threatened by humans.

The video installation *Feeling the Invisible* (2012) is another environmentally empowered work by Hooykaas. It is a single-channel video work incorporating a painting executed in bold calligraphic brushstrokes. Here the artist employs the symbolism of the warning sign of ionising radiation aka the trefoil comprised of the three triangles pointing towards a core of a circle. Inspired by the dramatic events of 2011 in the Fukushima Province of Japan, Hooykaas questions how the presence of atomic energy plants in a country of increased seismic activity leading to more frequent and more intense earthquakes and tsunamis, has been endangering the environment and putting at risk both human lives and Nature. [20]

Although from a different perspective, engaging with an urban landscape, *Virtual Walls | Real Walls* also references exploitation, sustainability and the fragile balance between humans and environment, between citizens and visitors. The artist's performative gesture becomes a healing gesture – a form of civic acupuncture restoring this tenuous balance.

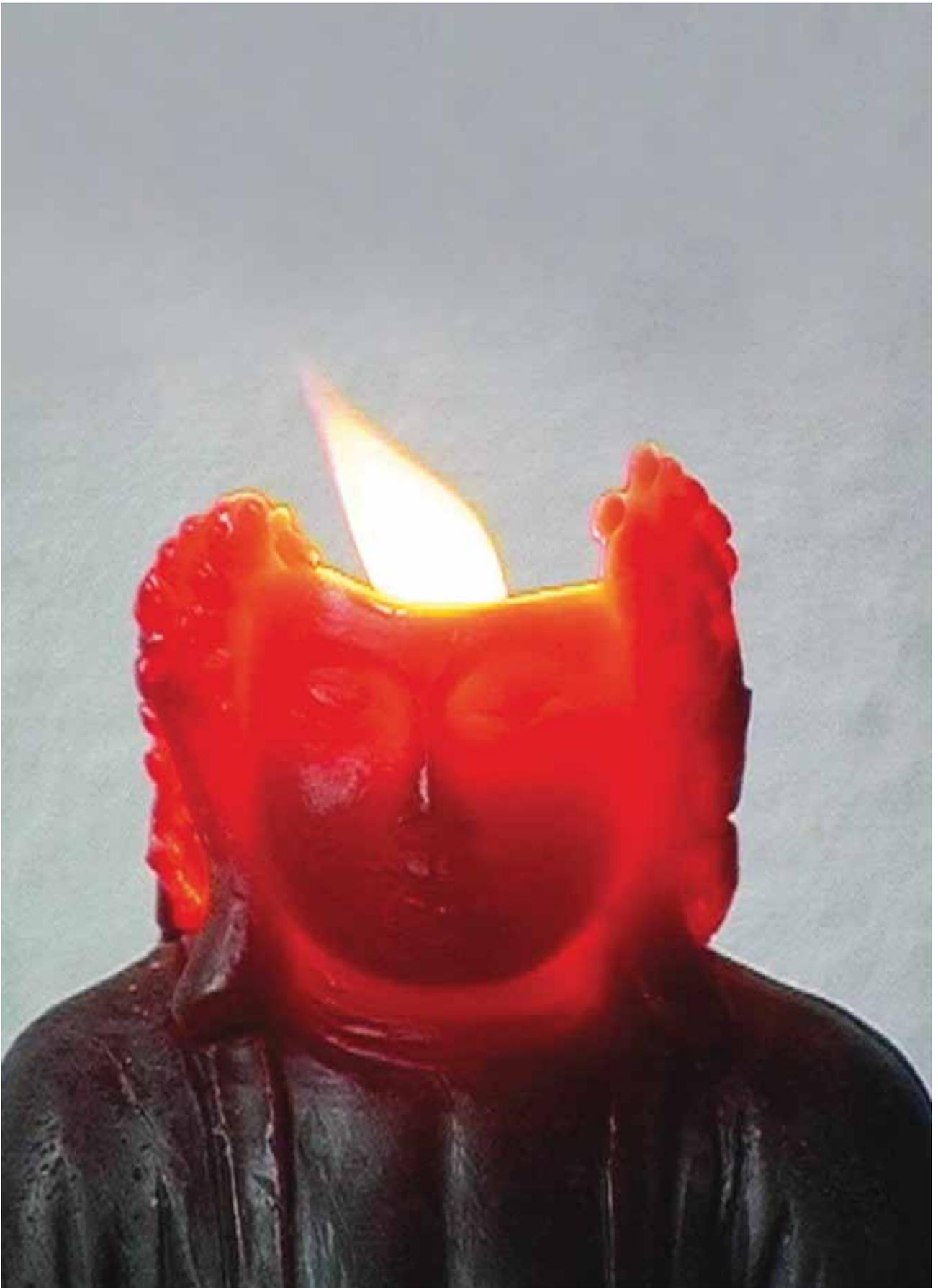
Commenting on the *Virtual Walls | Real Walls* project, Hooykaas remarked: 'I intend to create a virtual wall around the centre of each city as they did in medieval times.' With this powerful intention, Hooykaas stressed another two key characteristics of this work: its ephemeral intangibility and its link with history. This first characteristic is outlined in the title as a dichotomy where 'virtual' clearly evokes the ephemerality of the performance, of the gesture, but also the embodied feelings, sensations and thoughts. The duality of the visible and the invisible, the real and virtual, are recurrent themes in Hooykaas' method of research and reflection, intrinsically linked to her Buddhist and artistic

practice. Dorothea Franck wrote about this: 'The deconstruction of the stability of the object world is related to the deconstruction on the subjective side, the undermining of the possibility of an objective point of view'. [21]

On another hand, the word 'virtual' references both the past and the present – in particular, the historical significance of the city walls and their crucial importance in defining the world cities of the past. For example, in Classical Chinese, the character *cheng* could stand for both the city and the city wall. Similarly, in medieval times, the Town Secretary of Eisenach in Thuringia wrote: 'What has a wall around it, that we call a city' (1310). [22] Although the historic walls of many cities might have been destroyed during the centuries, they still persist as ruins in the urban fabric, as traces in the ancient maps or at least as part of the collective memory.

The city of Perth was also surrounded by a wall once. [23] Suffice to mention that during the Medieval times, Perth was considered the most fortified city in Scotland and its walls were still standing at the time of the Jacobite rising of 1745. Hardly any visible part of the walls is left today. Some streets in the centre of Perth, such as Albert Close, South Methven Street, Charterhouse Lane and Canal Street derive originally from an alley that ran across the inside of the walls, including Mill Street which is home to Threshold artspace at Perth Concert Hall and Perth Theatre. The proximity of these 'virtual' walls that survive only in the historical and cartographic memory of the city activated the conceptual connection of Hooykaas' *Virtual Walls | Real Walls* to Threshold artspace linking Perth to all the cities which have been 'acupunctured' by the artist's performance to date. Memory, whether collective or personal, historical or recent, is at the centre of this conceptual connection and is symbolically stimulated by the civic acupuncture inscribed in the work.

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*HAIKU. THE ART OF THE PRESENT MOMENT (2007) MADELON HOOYKAAS. VIDEO STILL*

The preventative and therapeutic connotations of Hooykaas' performative drawings signpost to the meditative, mindful and spiritual – all an integral part of Hooykaas' own artistic research and reflective practice permeating in different ways her entire Japanese-inspired body of work. The artist's transformative travels to Japan in the past four decades, started with her permanence in a Zen Buddhist cloister in 1970. This early formative experience led to the publication of her own photographic book *Zazen* (1971). Among her latest films, developed in the last decade, significant milestones of this spiritual research could be traced here.

Hooykaas' *Haiku. The Art of the Present Moment* (2007) is indebted to *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* by the famous Hooykaas' Haiku is a contemplative work which reflects upon Basho's travelogue - in both verse and prose - of his journey on foot across Edo Japan. The documentary makes an elegant use of image and text throughout and in particular juxtaposing lapidarian poetry with iconic stony landscape. Bashō's perfectly crafted haikus recited in Japanese are thus set in evocative images overlaid with the poet's words translated into English. The soft-spoken tone of the performer, the rhythm of the transitions and the tune played by the Dutch musician Ad Baars on the Japanese woodwind instrument *shakuhachi*, stimulate reflection through the changes of the seasons.

Most recently, Hooykaas' undertook another 'creative pilgrimage' – this time reaching the Holy Isle near the island of Arran just off the west coast of Scotland. This journey informs Hooykaas' poetic documentary *Holy Isle. A Buddhist Sanctuary in Scotland* (2016). The film's first-person narrative gives way to the sounds and sights of the real protagonists – the volunteers and the passing seasons at *Holy Isle*. Conceived as an inclusive, inter-faith peace centre project combining Christian and Buddhist traditions, *Holy Isle* is portrayed as a spiritual oasis, where one can 'drink the purity' and 'heal the mind'. It reminds us of the current renaissance of the Way, aka the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela described also as a Buddhist pilgrimage which 'frees the pilgrim of the torments of thought and desire, it takes away all vanity and all suffering from the body, it removes the rigid shell that surrounds all things and separates them from our consciousness; it brings the self into harmony with nature.'<sup>[24]</sup>

Like any initiations, the pilgrimage penetrates the mind through the body, and it is hard to share it with those who haven't experienced it. However, Hooykaas has been leading us along the Way of her creative discoveries as reflected also in her other documentary which together with *Haiku* and *Holy Isle* seems to complete the trilogy about light and vision, memory and mind. Entitled *Seeing in the Dark. In Search of the Last Blind Shamans in Japan* (2014), this work is Hooykaas' heart-felt, personal account of the ascetic practices of *itakos* – the blind women trained to become spiritual mediums in Japan.

To fully understand and absorb Hooykaas' documentary trilogy and by default, her entire body of work, one must make an active commitment not to succumb to the Western pathology of cynicism, [25] to our flawed self-protection mechanism that readily dismisses anything immaterial and spiritual – any search that goes beyond the triviality of everyday life. Reaching for something that is metaphysical, Hooykaas' works are the embodiment of her true and sincere gestures, signs and traces – gifts of healing acupuncture, change and resilience, reminding us of how brief and perilous the journeys of our lives are; perhaps that is why we love them so.

Iliyana Nedkova is the Creative Director of Contemporary Art at Horsecross Arts, Perth (since 2004) and a Research Fellow at Moray House School of Education, the University of Edinburgh (since 2014). Nedkova has over 25 years of curatorial experience including Associate Curatorships held at the Soros Centre for the Arts, Sofia; Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (FACT), Liverpool; Video Data Bank at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; Wexner Centre for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio; New Media Scotland, Edinburgh; Stills, Edinburgh and Colony of Artists, Edinburgh. Nedkova holds MPhil in Curating Contemporary Art from Liverpool John Moores University (since 2011) and MLitt in English and American Studies from Sofia University (since 1998). Nedkova often contributes papers, presentations and critical writing to various academic and artists' publications and conferences.

Laura Leuzzi is a Research Fellow at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee where she is the Co-Investigator on the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded research project *Richard Demarco – the Italian Connection*. Most recently, Leuzzi was a Research Assistant on the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded research projects *EWVA – European Women's Video Art in the 1970-80s*, as well as *REWINDItalia – Artists' Video in Italy in the 1970-80s*. She completed her PhD in Art History at Sapienza University of Rome in 2011. She sits on the curatorial board of the Rome Media Art Festival. Author of articles and essays in books and exhibition catalogues, her research and curatorial practice focus on video art, new media, art and feminism, time and the relationship between word and image in visual art. She is co-editor with Stephen Partridge of *REWINDItalia. Early Video Art in Italy* (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing, 2015).

# ENDNOTES

- [1] E. Jong, *Shylock's Daughter. A Novel of Love in Venice*, W.W. Norton, New York, 2003, p. 4
- [2] F. Moryson, *An Itinerary Containing His Ten Years Travel through the Twelve Dominions of Germany, Bohemia, Switzerland, Netherland, Denmark, Poland, Italy, Turkey, France, England, Scotland and Ireland* [1617], I-IV, Glasgow, 1907-1908, I, p. 196
- [3] From the quote 'città principale non pur in Italia, ma nel mondo ancora'. The translation is by the authors. See F. Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare*, Venetia, 1581, p. 4. quoted in P. del Negro, 'Uno sguardo su Venezia e la sua società: viaggiatori, osservatori politici', in C. Gozzi, P. Prodi (eds.), *Storia di Venezia, VI: Dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Rome, 1994, pp. 275-301, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/dal-rinascimento-al-barocco-la-societa-lo-sguardo-su-veneziana-e-la-sua-societa-viaggiatori-osservatori-politici\\_%28Storia-di-Venezia%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/dal-rinascimento-al-barocco-la-societa-lo-sguardo-su-veneziana-e-la-sua-societa-viaggiatori-osservatori-politici_%28Storia-di-Venezia%29/) (accessed 30 April 2018)
- [4] See for example F. de Vivo, 'Walking in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Mobilizing the Early Modern City', *Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2016, pp. 115-141, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/685830> (accessed 30 April 2018)
- [5] See J. Pieters, 'Tourism brings €2.7 billion to Amsterdam', *NLTimes*, 20 October 2017, <https://nltimes.nl/2017/10/20/tourism-brings-eu27-billion-amsterdam> (accessed 4 May 2018); L. Gerard-Sharp, 'Venice world heritage status under threat', *The Guardian*, 26 May 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2017/may/26/venice-tourists-cruise-ships-pollution-italy-biennale> (accessed 4 May 2018); W. Coldwell, 'First Venice and Barcelona: now anti-tourism marches spread across Europe', *The Guardian*, 10 August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2017/aug/10/anti-tourism-marches-spread-across-europe-venice-barcelona> (accessed 28 April 2018)
- [6] The performance took place at the Emily Harvey Archive, Venice on 28 September 2017
- [7] See K. R. Olwig, 'Performing on the Landscape versus Doing Landscape: Perambulatory Practice, Sight and the Sense of Belonging', in J. L. Verguns, T. Ingold (eds.), *Ways of Walking. Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, Routledge, London, 2008
- [8] As the American poet and writer Erica Jong who comments about Venice in her novel *Shylock's Daughter: A Novel of Love in Venice*, p.14: 'It is the city of mirrors, the city of mirages, at once solid and liquid, at once air and stone.' See also the recurring reference to the city of Venice in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, 1972: "There is still one of which you never speak."- Marco Polo bowed his head. "Venice," the Khan said. Marco smiled. "What else do you believe I have been talking to you about?" The emperor did not tuck a hair. "And yet I have never heard you mention that name." And Polo said: "Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice." "When I ask you about other cities, I want to hear about them. And about Venice, when I ask you about Venice." "To distinguish the other cities' qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice." [https://monoskop.org/images/0/0e/Calvino\\_Italo\\_Invisible\\_Cities.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/0/0e/Calvino_Italo_Invisible_Cities.pdf) (accessed 1 May 2018)
- [9] R. Krauss, 'Grids', *October*, vol. 9, Summer, 1979, pp. 50-64
- [10] *Ibid.*, p. 57
- [11] Madelon Hooykaas worked in collaboration with the Glasgow-born artist and video art pioneer Elsa Stansfield from 1972 until Stansfield's sudden death in 2004. From 2004 to 2007, Hooykaas continued to work under the name 'Stansfield/Hooykaas' to carry on Stansfield's research and legacy. Since 2008, Hooykaas has started to work under her own name
- [12] Krauss, 'Grids', p. 52
- [13] *Ibid.*, p. 60
- [14] *Ibid.*, p. 61
- [15] *Ibid.*, p. 63
- [16] K. Zijlmans, 'Voyage of Discovery. The Interdisciplinary Art of Stansfield/Hooykaas', in M. Hooykaas, C. van Putten (eds.), *Revealing the Invisible. The Art Stansfield/Hooykaas from Different Perspectives*, Uitgeverij De Buitenkant 2010, pp. 10-11
- [17] Stansfield/Hooykaas' installations and environments are examined in depth in M. Dickson, 'The Video Environments of Stansfield/Hooykaas', in Hooykaas, van Putten, *Revealing the Invisible*, pp. 145-156
- [18] See M. Popova, 'How to Love: Legendary Zen Buddhist Teacher Thich Nhat Hanh on Mastering the Art of "Interbeing"', [website], *Brain Pickings*, 2018, <https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/03/31/how-to-love-thich-nhat-hanh/> (accessed 30 April 2018)
- [19] N. Gingras, 'Time Invented. The Notion of Time and Place, and the Visual and Aural Imagery in the Art of Stansfield/Hooykaas', in Hooykaas, van Putten, *Revealing the Invisible*, pp. 81-92, p. 87 for the quote
- [20] K. Zijlmans, 'Transformation/Inspiration: Madelon Hooykaas and Keiko Sato in the Siebold House Leiden', [website], 2012, [https://www.madelonhooykaas.net/text/Kitty\\_Zijlmans\\_Transformation%20Inspiration\\_ENG\\_FINAL.htm](https://www.madelonhooykaas.net/text/Kitty_Zijlmans_Transformation%20Inspiration_ENG_FINAL.htm) (accessed 30 April 2018)
- [21] D. Franck, 'Deep Looking. A Buddhist Look at the Work of Stansfield/Hooykaas', in Hooykaas, van Putten, *Revealing the Invisible*, pp. 117-134, p. 129 for the quote
- [22] J. D. Tracy, 'Introduction' in ID. (ed.), *City Walls: The Urban Enceinte in Global Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, p. 1
- [23] For an overview of Perth city wall and related bibliography see the essay by Tabitha McKechnie in this publication
- [24] See J-C. Rufin, *The Santiago Pilgrimage*, MacLehose Press, London, 2016, p. 154
- [25] See M. Popova 'Hope, Cynicism, and the Stories We Tell Ourselves', [website], *Brain Pickings*, 2005 <https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/02/09/hope-cynicism/> (accessed 30 April 2018)

A PSYCHO-  
GEOGRAPHIC  
WALK AROUND  
PERTH  
CITY WALL

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TABITHA MCKECHNIE

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*DAYDREAMING* (2006) BY STANSFIELD/HOOYKAAS. EXHIBITION VIEW FROM AN OLD MILK FACTORY, KOLDERVEEN



*DAYDREAMING* (2006) BY STANSFIELD/HOOYKAAS. EXHIBITION VIEW FROM AN OLD MILK FACTORY, KOLDERVEEN

## PERTH: THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

Looking around the modern-day city of Perth, one cannot even begin to imagine the thousands of years of history beneath the shop fronts and brick accommodations. Once the centre of many major and thriving industries such as whiskey and weaving and dyeing and agriculture [1], the easily accessible City of Perth continues as a successful hub for insurance and the arts, and capital interests now featuring a newly refurbished theatre, a local university, and a vast shopping area along High Street. The beautiful landscape of the place between two inches, featuring Kinnoull Hill and the River Tay, as well as stunning architecture such as the A.K. Bell Library, designed by William MacDonald Mackenzie, shows Perth as a somewhat picturesque town - indeed it did not regain its city status until 2012. [2]

It is however, its prime location, which made Perth Scotland's capital city from the 10th to 15th Centuries. [3] Having the Tay as an access route allowed Perth to become a centre for trade and industry until the introduction of the railway system. The land - such as Kinnoull Hill - allowed for a high view point, much appreciated during the 1300's, and is what accounts for original settlement in the area. A city with such a rich cultural heritage certainly has its relics. In the 1970's, 'The Mediaeval Excavations at the High Street Perth' took place. During this time, archaeologists were able to gain an idea of how people lived in the area, as well as the tools and trades of the time, and the changes in weather. Although some artefacts remain from that dig, there are very few monuments dedicated or preserved of the original settlements in Perth. [4]

## THE PERTH WALL

Standing in the small alley way of Albert Close, I look up at a remaining piece of the original 14th Century wall, each brick coated in moss crumbling away, with a cemented on plaque stating the object: 'Portion of Old City Wall'. Thinking of this last remaining portion of a long history, and the wear and tear it is going through, I consider what other aspects of the Wall do we preserve? There are a few mentions of this physical wall in various publications, but no specialised tribute - surely such a significant part of Perthshire history deserves to be indefinitely preserved? Due to lack of records and the current state of the Wall segment, there are some questions of its authenticity, which can be partially explained with reasoning

of how the Wall was repaired and mentions of it being the original wall during the 19th Century. Following the timeline below, it is worth noting that the remaining portion is actually from the 2nd recorded wall built around Perth. [5]

## PERTH WALL: A CHRONOLOGY

- 1304: The English fortified Perth with a Wall
- 1312: Robert the Bruce removed the Wall
- 1336: Edward III rebuilt the Wall
- 1715 & 1743/45: Reports of repairs of the Wall by the Jacobites
- 1762-1766: Demolishing of most sections of the Wall
- 1849: Mentions of the Wall, specifically the potential remaining section
- 2018: A plaque declaring 'A section of the old Perth Wall' sits erected on Albert Close - just across the street from Threshold artspace at Perth Concert Hall

Although there are authentication issues with that statement due to queries about the thickness of the Wall (too thin), it does follow the lines of where the original wall from the 14th Century would have been, and the thinness could be related to repairs. Due to those reasons it can be considered the last remaining section of the Old Perth Wall. [6]

## TOWARDS A FIGURATIVE APPROACH

Although the wall I am referring to was a physical wall completely surrounding the entire City of Perth, the concept of a wall can take on a more figurative approach. Often idealisms or situations create invisible, or virtual, walls. Financial boundaries stop people from living in certain areas. Discriminatory laws and common practices prevent communities from accessing other countries based on nationalities. Lack of empathy and understanding discourages individuals from accessing mental health help. Although not physical, these issues prevent physical migration.



*LIGHT* (2015) BY MADELON HOOYKAAS. STILL FROM VIDEO

I completed a small survey with a few people around Perth College, University of the Highlands & Islands to gauge their immediate awareness of the Perth City Wall including the following initial questions:

- Are you aware that the City of Perth used to be surrounded by a wall?
- Do you feel the history of Perth's wall is easily accessed and well preserved or presented?
- Can the concept of the wall be considered a figurative idea as well as a physical construction?

The responses I received proved a complete unawareness of a previous wall, 'no idea' of where to access information about the wall or even where to begin research. Interestingly, each participant suggested that a wall can indeed be a figurative idea.

It is often said that people 'put up a wall' in an emotional sense, as a mental barrier, when in difficult situations or dealing with personal issues. This concept is relatable, as more likely than not, all of us have had a time where we have individually experienced a mental wall.

## DRAWING THE WALLS: AN ARTIST'S PERSPECTIVE

As an artist, I wanted to explore the ideas of the different types of walls humans create, and the landscapes they thrive in. I started by considering the bridges across the river Tay. As connecting structures, they also seem to wall-in the Tay between the two parted sides. This has allowed for growth, economically and industrially, but also arguably demonstrates the want to preserve or claim an essential piece of Perth livelihood. With the pressure and control coming from England in the past, [7] it is no wonder the Scottish needed to thrive and contain. Due to access by ships, Perth was a centre for trade. However, with the introduction of the Scottish Central Railway line in 1848, there was limited need for trade by boat which led to a decline in nautical usage. [8] The railway could thus be seen as another potential 'wall' concept.

In my investigative research as artist, I came to the conclusion that it is human nature to generate some kind of wall for protection – whether that be physical or figurative.

Although we think of walls as a form of protection, in the current, contemporary atmosphere that word often has a negative connotation or provokes a strong emotion evoking The Berlin Wall, or Donald Trump's wall separating the USA and Mexico. The Great Wall of China is an example of human determination for not only fortification, but also for using a structure to present strength and power.

The High Street of Perth is one of my personal favourite 'walls'. The tall buildings with their imposing architecture, the pedestrianised access, the classic High Street shop fronts, the occasional food market events. This long stretch of establishments, cafés, and shops creates physical walls towering over us, but also virtual walls of human interaction and financial barriers.

Perth as a city is strong and determined to thrive with the proof found in the constant rebuilding of its flood defense walls after and the proliferation of new industries after each setback. After having lived in many different world cities, from Glasgow to Vancouver, and after having walked the streets of where the Medieval wall structure once stood, I can honestly state that Perth has been the most welcoming city, truly removing any physical or figurative walls in my way.

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Tabitha Mckechnie is a contemporary artist and costume designer who works in multi-dimensional and multi-media forms. Mckechnie's work often features use of geometric shape and bold lines. She has a background in theatre studies, fine art, art history and sculpture. In 2018 Mckechnie participated in exhibitions including *Platform Festival of Perthshire Creativity, Liminality* at the A.K. Bell Library, Perth and *Members' Show* at Generator Projects, Dundee. This research essay is part of Mckechnie's curatorial placement at Threshold artspace which she undertook in 2018 as part of her course in Contemporary Art Practice and Contextual Studies at Perth College, University of the Highlands and Islands.

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LIGHT (2015) BY MADELON HOOYKAAS. VIDEO STILL

## ENDNOTES

- [1] *Fife, Perthshire and Angus*, Her Maj.'s Stat. Off, Edinburgh, 1996, pp. 38, 49; and G. Smith & R. Smith, *Perth*, Sutton Pub, Stoud 2000, pp. 33-37 for supporting information
- [2] G. Hutton, *Bygone Perth*, Stenlake Publishing, Catrine, 2005, pp.67; Industry in Perth is discussed in J. Gillon, *Perth Through Time*, Amberley Publishing, 2017, pp. 52-53
- [3] R. Finlay, M. Lynch and D. Broun, *Image and identity*, John Donald, Edinburgh, 1998, p. 201
- [4] For information related to original settlements in Perth see N. Bogdan & J. Wordsworth, *The Mediaeval Excavations at the High Street, Perth, 1975-76*, Perth High Street Archaeological Excavation Committee, Perth, 1978; All landscape information in *Fife, Perthshire and Angus*, Her Maj.'s Stat. Off., Edinburgh, 1996 p. 38, and see J. Gillon, *Perth Through Time*, Amberley Publishing, 2017, pp. 5, 6, and 11
- [5] J. Duncan, 'The Defence of Perth', in ID., *Lost Perth*, Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2011, pp.135-141
- [6] J. Gillon, *Perth Through Time*, Amberley Publishing, 2017 see p.11 for Perth's early history related to Perth Wall
- [7] Finlay, Lynch, and Broun, *Image and Identity*, p. 201 for the information related to the relational strains between the Scots and the English
- [8] J. Gillon, *Perth Through Time*, p. 40, for the information regarding the Railway