

Composition (Palm & coconut)

Kate Foster

A milk machine can afford farmers rest at lambing time because it feeds lambs until weaning. I learnt how at one farm it was a welcome investment, saving tired-time late in the evening previously spent mixing milk and hand-feeding lambs. Becoming curious about the milk machine, I drew a portrait of Lac-Tek on one of the bags that the ewe-milk substitute comes in. I wondered how she produces warm milk from so many teats at once. The lambs treat the teat-boards with complacency, sucking at it when hungry to create a gentle whirl as Lac-Tek re-fills.

Work on Lac-Tek stems from a project on sheepscales, which traced a broad picture of how sheep are present in the Scottish Borders. This took me to a lambing shed in 2010, when I noted that spring brings great liveliness to the sheepwalks, shaping animal and human work alike with themes of nurture, love, pain, differential loss and gain. Transformations of shape and texture are acute as life and death absorb themselves to each other. Returning to the lambing shed in 2012, the theme began to encompass more distant environmental changes. Palm and soy oil are amongst the principle ingredients of ewe-milk substitute. Scenes of razed areas of rainforest from Ecuador crept in from the back of my mind. Tropical trees replaced by small straight lines of palms. With this, lamb-flesh is a hard-won product to be considered before consuming.

So far so factual, but other associations emerge while you draw. Phrases can start to circulate in your head.

made with British milk ... as I am, perhaps ... or not ... white and yellow ... milk and colostrum ... many-armed goddess ... lovely bunches ... coconuts ... cosmetic beauty ... machine quality ... you are what you eat ...

Was the paper sack a 'found object'? Rather, chosen by serendipity. This sack led my inquiry and reached to another object, a souvenir from Bethlehem. Visiting Jerusalem in 2010, my British passport let me go behind the Wall to emerge in a tourist desert. Weaving my way through sheepless fields, I browsed in a crib-factory, choosing an olive-wood representation to complement borders sheepscales.

Drawing in the field

'Drawing in the field' describes a project of looking for entwined patterns of co-existence as animals, people, climate and land adjust to each other. This investigation brings me into contact with people whose livelihood depends on the land and highlights the resources of knowledge, skill and design underlying what may be seen as pastoral Borders' scenery. I consider my task as being to look carefully, scrutinise my own preconceptions and draw out new connections. The first outcome was a pack of postcards, now I want to scale up the annotated drawing, experimentally presenting it in different public spaces. This drawing of Lac-Tek smells gently of coconut cream smeared into the paper sack, a version of studio painting in oils.

Grateful acknowledgements to those who made this work possible.

Notes written to accompany exhibition of drawings in the Forest Bookstore, Selkirk by Kate Foster © 2012

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