

# berwickgymnasium fellow 1999 by fionacrisp

One of the most remarkable features of the Berwick Gymnasium Fellowship programme is the range of artists that it has attracted over the last seventeen years. To my mind, this is in part due to the fact that the fellowship is unconditional; there is no remit, no agenda, just a requirement to produce an exhibition at the end of the period of residency. The openness this approach engenders is reflected not only in the diversity of work produced but also in the vastly differing rationale that each artist has for wanting to work there in the first place.

Below is an account of my own time on the Fellowship programme during the winter of 1999–2000. The text is an abridged version of an interview published in the 2008 catalogue *The Berwick Gymnasium Fellowships: an archival record*.

After graduating from The Slade (MA) in 1993 I continued to live and work in London. I had my own studio and darkroom in London Fields, was doing various part-time jobs: slide librarian at Birkbeck College, lecturer at Lewisham College and then Camberwell; as well as continuing to make and exhibit work in the UK and abroad. My practice had evolved from a background of sculpture and installation on my BA but by the time that I left the Slade my work had moved almost entirely into photographic installation. Despite this shift, the root of sculpture – and of negotiating an image as an object in space that is affected by the architecture that surrounds and contains it – has always remained very important.

The work I was making prior to doing the residency was concerned with liminal spaces, where points of passage or exchange between one place or state and another were made visually or psychologically explicit. At this time I was

working mainly with constructed spaces or generic architecture but was becoming increasingly interested in travelling to specific locations that articulated these concerns through the way in which I looked at them.

I was drawn to working in Berwick because, given the town's social and political history, it is a place where notions of inside and outside – of what is contained within its walls and what is ejected beyond the citadel's boundaries – are extremely complex.

I found Berwick to be extraordinary. In all senses it is truly a border town, riddled with fissures of history, ranging from the momentous and bloody national feuds of past centuries to the present-day signifiers of national allegiance played out through football leagues, pubs and electricity suppliers. Due to Berwick's historical and architectural significance though, a great deal of the town falls under the jurisdiction of English Heritage – as a visiting tourist, one therefore really only understands the town through History with a capital 'H' and it is much harder to fathom its contemporary identity. This 'management' of history became one of the most compelling aspects of Berwick to me but ultimately one of the hardest to deal with visually.

Before I started the fellowship, I had ideas about specific places and architecture in the town that I wanted to use as starting points. I began in the first couple of months using conventional cameras, trying to approach some of these places and ideas but nothing worked – it was as though I was trying to constantly address something that eluded me and consequently the images always failed.



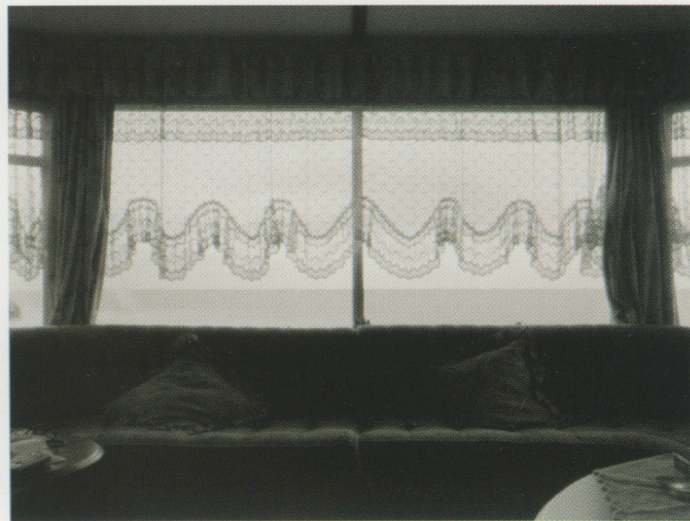


*Cocklawburn 2000 Fiona Crisp*

I then started using pin-hole cameras with large-format film – something I had done on different occasions in the past – and I began to move further afield up and down the coast, sometimes literally looking back at Berwick, trying to conceptually assimilate what I felt Berwick was.

As a 'frame' for the view, I used my own car, reflecting upon the fact that so much of our contemporary experience of the world is mediated through screens – cinematic, television, computer. In these 'car' works we are simultaneously given access to and separation from the exterior, the vehicle acting as a permeable structure that divides up the view. The work *Halidon Hill* was taken from a high vantage point, overlooking Berwick from the North. It was here in 1333 that one of the bloodiest massacres of the Scots by the English took place; it is now a car park with a commemorative plaque.

Often when I was walking on the ramparts in Berwick I was drawn to the sight of the sprawling holiday park on the cliffs just north of the town. From the aesthetically controlled aspect of Berwick, this caravan park interestingly stuck out as a planning travesty and I was fascinated by all the living-caravans lined up so close to the cliff edge, all vying for pole position, all attempting to possess an uninterrupted view of the sublime. Subsequently, I was generously given access to work in many of these caravans and each became, for me, a proxy for the camera itself where the nuanced identity of the interior frames, through its own individual picture window, an image of the exterior world.



*TD8 2000 Fiona Crisp*

On the day I was awarded the fellowship, I found out that I was pregnant with my first child and inevitably my world turned. There is no way of separating my experience of the fellowship from that of my pregnant state. Having said this, the experience of such an intensive relationship with a subject and place was formative, in that it produced a methodology of working that subsequently provided a model for my practice. Two years later, for example, I held a six-month fellowship at The British School at Rome where I had the opportunity to extend some of the questions I had begun to formulate in Berwick regarding ideas of heritage, tourism and visual control.

My exhibition in Berwick was an installation of 12 large-scale photographic works – two colour and ten black & white – in August 2000. I produced the work in my studio back in London, after leaving the fellowship in February and giving birth to my daughter, Luka, in March.

There is no doubt that the experience of working in Berwick has had a beneficial impact on my practice professionally. After exhibiting the fellowship work in Berwick I subsequently showed eight of the works in London and as a result of this, I was invited to be represented by Matt's Gallery. Works from the fellowship are now in the Arts Council Collection as well as private collections.

Images can be seen at [www.mattsgallery.org](http://www.mattsgallery.org) or [www.fionacrisp.com](http://www.fionacrisp.com)