

Fowler, Martin ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0128-4231> and McCall, Billy (2024) In The Dark Times. University of Cumbria.

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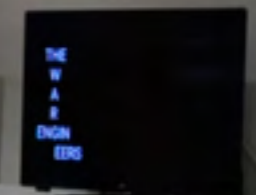
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IN THE DARK TIMES

This document is a record of the exhibition by **Martin Fowler** and **Billy McCall** at the **Vallum Gallery**, University of Cumbria, Brampton Road, Carlisle.
21 October - 01 November 2024



*In the dark times
Will there also be singing?
Yes, there will also be singing
About the dark times.*

- Bertolt Brecht

Drawing its title from Bertolt Brecht's 'War Primer' (1937), **In The Dark Times** offers a critical counter to so-called liberal humanist society and the pernicious myth of progress.

Referencing the oil industry, weapons manufacturers, the British Army and

neoliberal 'freeports', this vivid, cartoony and often scabrous exhibition points to the legitimisation crisis engulfing the governmental aristocracy and its potentially catastrophic impact on political and civil society.

Taking inspiration from diverse sources such as Disney's 'Fantasia', John Gray's

'Straw Dogs', 1980's amusement arcades and the poems of Tom Leonard, this 'state of the nation' report offers a critical and disturbing reappraisal of 21st century Britain and the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.

MARTIN FOWLER



Martin Fowler
Fun & Games (15-63). 2024
acrylic on board
12 x 30 cm

*'Alas, we who wanted kindness,
could not be kind ourselves'*
- Brecht



Martin Fowler
Fun & Games (36 - 38), 2024
acrylic on board
12 x 30 cm

Fun & Games: 'Seascapes' of modern Britain

Comprising images of a contemporary St. Andrew, his identity concealed behind a welding-mask, crucified on an x-shaped cross; a lone palm tree; rising sea-levels; the conning towers of nuclear subs - replete with engorged phalluses (a reference to both the experience of women serving in the British Navy's submarine service and Ukania as willing dupe to American hegemony); and the façade of an (un)welcoming citadel (in reality the façade of the Tower Amusements in Portobello, Edinburgh) – 'Fun & Games' offers an anti-illusionistic counter to a morally corrupt governmental aristocracy and an intellectually debased avant-garde in service to bourgeois ideas and interests.



Martin Fowler
Fun & Games (1-14), 2024
acrylic on board
12 x 30 cm









With Ensor's scathing critiques of the Belgian Establishment circa 1890, Beckmann's 'Bird Hell', Nolan's 'Ned Kelly', and the small paintings of late-career Guston in its backlight, *Fun & Games* offers a painful vision of a so-called modern Britain defined, in reality, by vandalism, sadism and violence.

Taking aim at the petro-chemical industry, the military-industrial complex, the British 'deep-state' and the possessive-individualism of the professional managerial class (PMC), these critical realist images seek to counter bourgeois ways of seeing, knowing and telling. So defined, these political modernist

paintings, challenge liberal humanism's potentially catastrophic belief in the pernicious myth of progress, whilst attacking the formalism of a 'new Right' in thrall to the residual traces of Thatcherism's vulgar philistinism.

Martin Fowler
Fun & Games (37-45). 2024
 acrylic on board
 12 x 30 cm



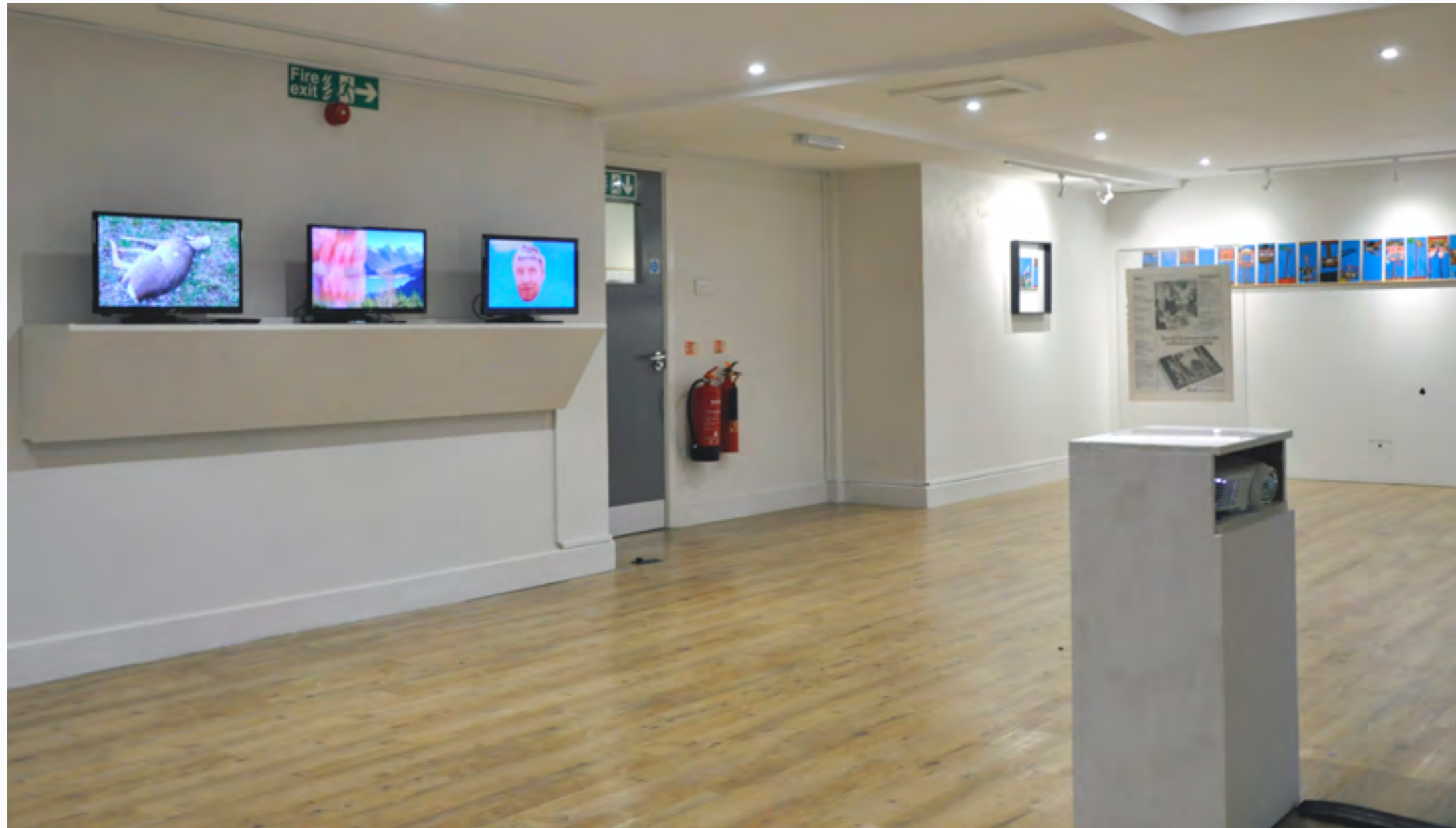
*'Those who don't know the truth
are dummies, but those who
know the truth, and call it a lie
are criminals'*

- Bertolt Brecht



Martin Fowler
Sheep Walk. 2024
14 animations on three screens.
Variable times.

Sheep-Walk: Dissident Montages Against The Capitalist Common Sense



Taking its title from Karl Marx's description of the large-scale industrial farming which resulted in the forced clearance of thousands of Highland Scots from their ancestral lands circa 1820, these stop motion animations challenge, amongst other things, emergent ethno-nationalism, the reductive binarism of the nationalist-unionist / unionist-nationalist discourse (memorably described during the 2014 Independence Referendum by George Galloway as 'Two cheeks of the same arse') and the 'narrowness', 'subjective illusion' and 'romantic nonsense' of so-called modern Scotia.

Grounded in the estrangement techniques of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre, Esther Leslie's 'Hollywood Flatlands' and the nihilistic performances of Paul McCarthy, **Sheep-Walk** offers a dissident counter to the invented traditions which underpin prevailing notions of Scottishness. Epitomised by the supposedly eternal symbols of 'ben and glen' such as the sporran (invented by Tory Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger for his Highland battalions aka the 'shock-troops of Empire'), the kilt (invented by Lancastrian businessman Thomas Rawlinson for his Scottish mill-workers), and tartan (the made-up textile designs of the Anglo-Welsh Allan brothers 'Vestiarium Scoticum' of 1842) - these crudely made truth-to-materials montages challenge the self-delusions of a Scotland, or North Britain, defined by its continuing fealty to militarism, monetarism and monarchism.

Martin Fowler
October 2024





BILLY McCALL



Billy McCall
Achnacarry Agreement. (detail). 2024
3 framed drawings, a photograph in three parts
and river debris.
Size variable

Billy McCall's work is a visual essay which rewards careful reading. His is an art of appropriation, investigation and recontextualisation.

Often lifting screengrabs of classic animation cels and production drawings from auction websites that sell these fetishised drawings and paintings to collectors, McCall takes these familiar childhood/historical images, interrogates them for associations and meanings and then uses them not to cement their original meanings but rather to re-animate these dead cels and production drawings so that they can tell new stories.

Generally "slavish" copying is taboo in art despite its historical importance on learning which places a great economic and spiritual value on the originality of the artist's hand and valorises it as the supreme expression of individualism.

McCall's precisely-rendered tracings problematises this value as it is suppressed in the process of making in favour of the original. McCall becomes an automaton like the mops in the Sorcerer's Apprentice forever





Billy McCall
Above: *The Zombie Managerialist Revolution.gif.*
2020
1 framed drawing with dead sea salt and phone with gif file.
Right: detail from *The Zombie Managerialist Revolution.gif.*
2020
Size variable

* title of episode 11 of 'Scooby Doo, Where are You'





2004 7.0 53.0

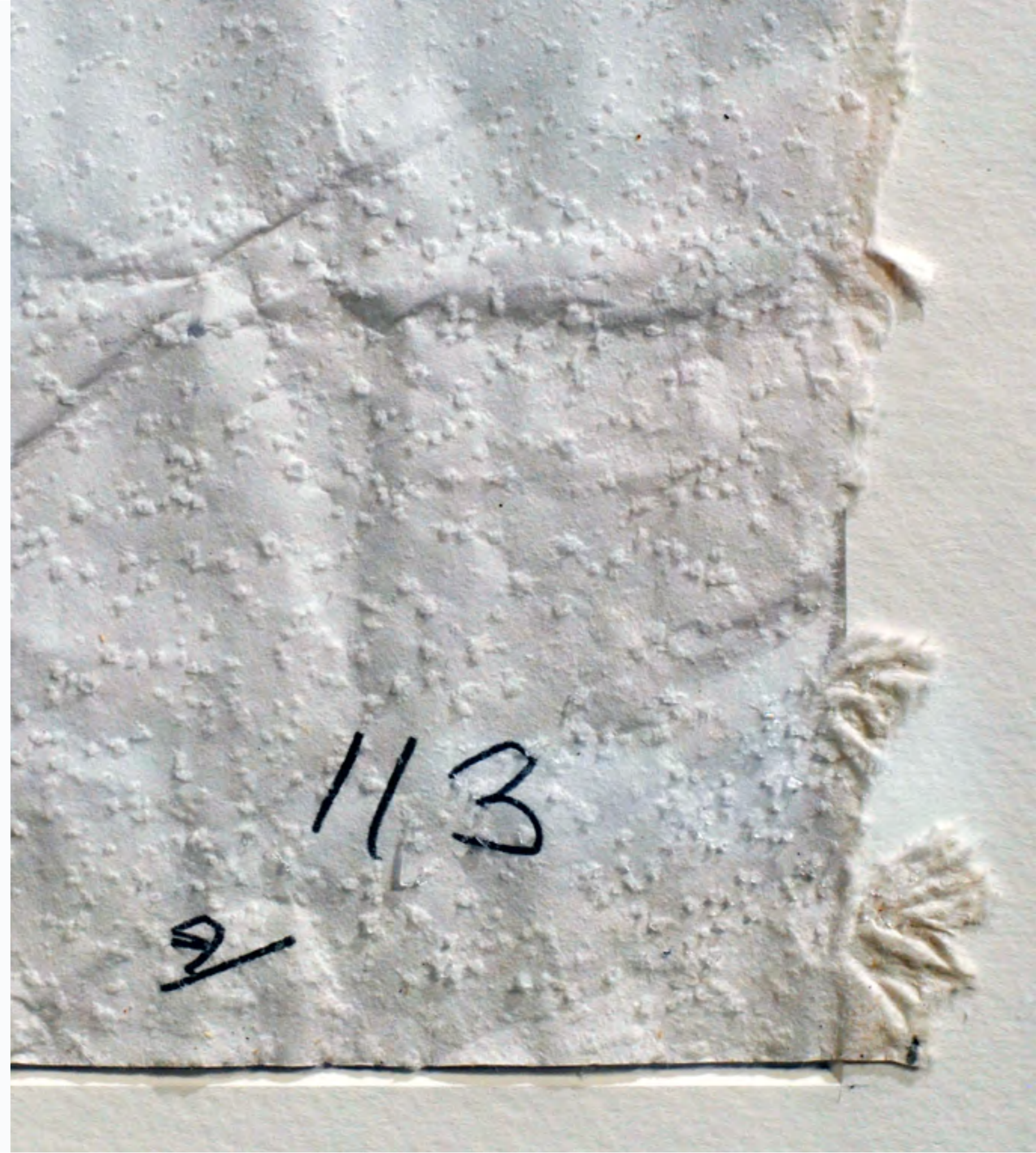
PLATE

02
104

slavish to the original command, unthinking. Once the objects are made he then literally subverts this copy by traumatising the material as a way of breaking the spell but also to indicate a response to the troubling political subject matter.

Themes of trauma, environmental catastrophe and class politics are woven together in a way which appears oblique but on examination is always precisely researched and carefully focussed.

A framed drawing of Mickey Mouse, taken from from the adjacent video is half-caked in salt. In 'The Zombie Managerialist Revolution.gif' the video is a hand-made copy of a Disney pencil test originally made as a study for Goethe's 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice'. Having ordered the blindly obedient brooms to fetch water, Mickey finds himself powerless to stop them. Inundated and desperate he attacks the brooms but while eventually managing to quell the insurrection, Mickey finds it is too late - the room is flooded and Mickey is unable to reverse the spell.





Billy McCall
Achnacarry Agreement 1928. 2024
3 framed drawings, a photograph in three parts
and river debris.
Size variable



A large scale pinhole camera photograph of the grounds of Achnacarry Castle displays further evidence of water damage. Achnacarry Agreement refers to the 1928 meeting of three oil barons - Walter C. Teagle of Standard Oil of New Jersey (Exxon), John Cadman of Anglo-Persian Oil Company (BP) and Sir Henri Deterding of Royal Dutch Shell - in the Scottish Highlands where they agreed a secret price-fixing deal which would secure their profits into the foreseeable future. On the reverse side of the wall their water damaged portraits, copied from existing artwork, hang consistent with the waterline on the large photograph.

McCall makes use of an existing wall within the gallery to bring spatial ideas of 'behind' to the story of the secretive imperialist plans to dominate the world oil market and uses the notion of future

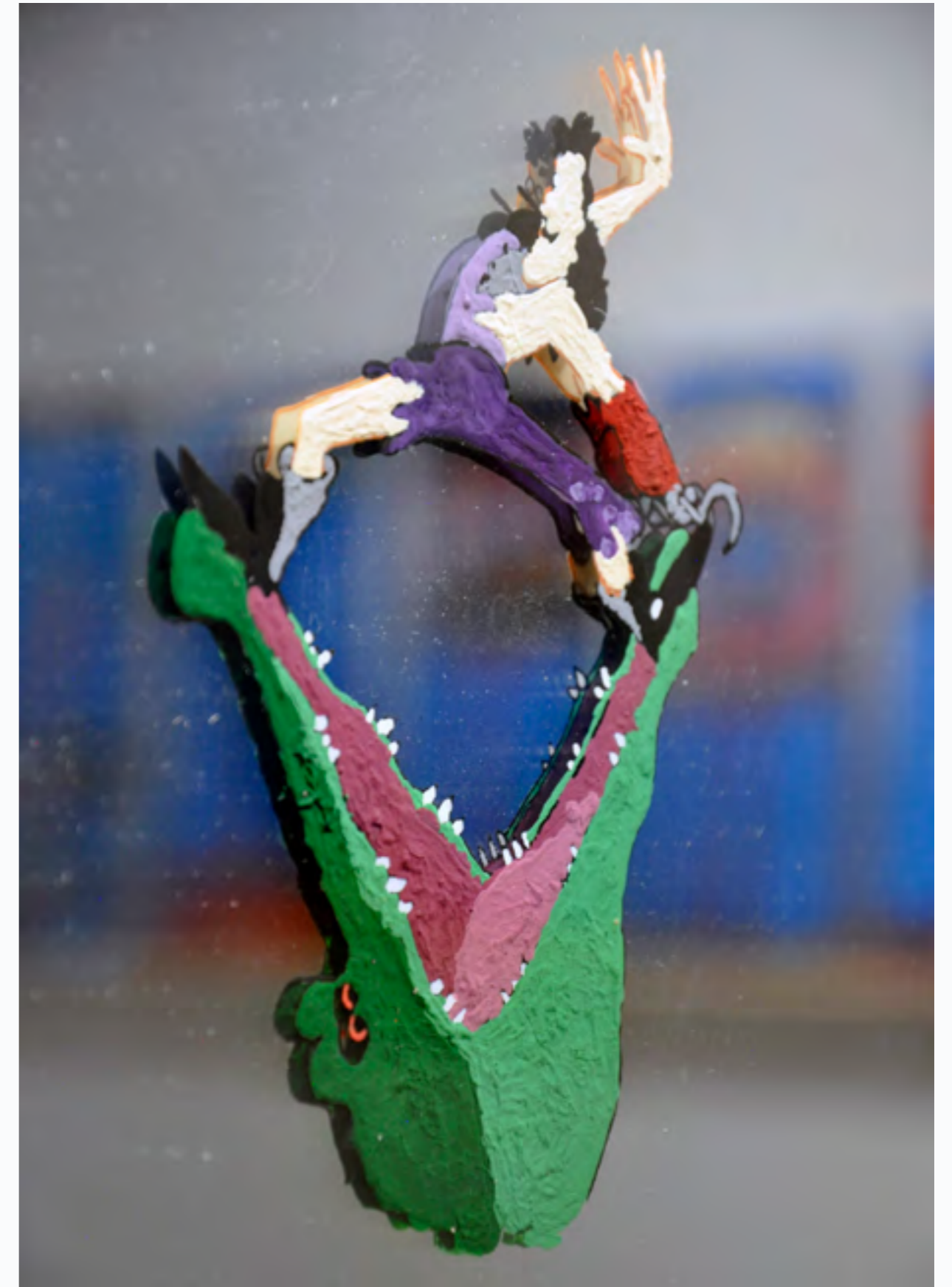
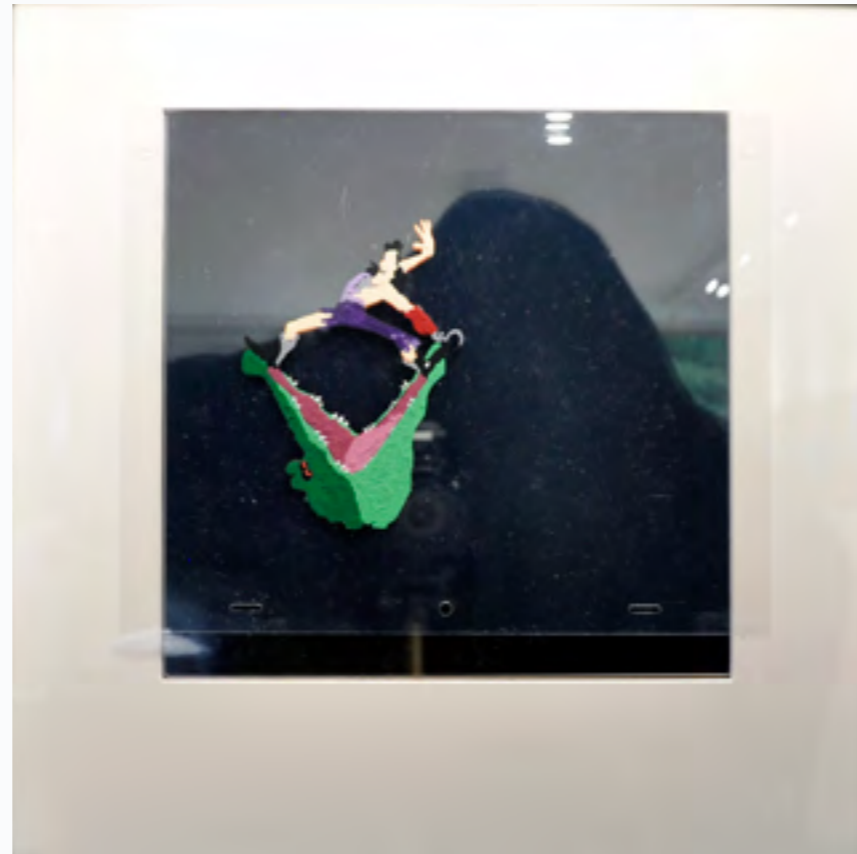
Billy McCall
Left: *Achnacarry Agreement. 1928. 2024 (detail)*
Above: *Achnacarry Agreement. 1928. 2024.(composite photo)*
Size variable

projections to fast forward to a time in fifty years when the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency's modelling shows that Achnacarry Castle will lie in floodwaters from the nearby river. The material of the work is literally traumatised by the river water in a display of self harm in order to convey the immense damage that occurs when capitalism misuses power for its own ends.

In Floreat Etona an animation cel of Captain Hook and the Croc is copied from the original. McCall displays the image reversed so we see it from behind, it's undistinguished, lumpy backside revealed. The mirror allows us to glimpse the front but we are mostly thwarted from seeing

Hook in his last moments as his arch enemy Tick Tock prepares for dinner.

In J.M. Barrie's original play for 'Peter Pan' Hook's last words were 'Floreat Etona' - 'Let Eton Flourish' the motto of the prestigious, fee-paying Eton College. It seems Barrie has given Hook the dubious privilege of a public



Billy McCall
Floreat Etona. 2024
Goache, animation cel, mirror and frame.
50 x 50cm



Billy McCall feat. Derek Blades
Valley of the Kings. 2024
Achnacarry Agreement 1928. 2024

school education. Are we to think of other Etonians through the same lens as Barrie? Aside from various prime ministers we might recall James Goldsmith, 1980's 'asset stripper' and 'corporate raider' who was often referred to in the press as a pirate.

For the 'European Year of Conservation' in 1970 the oil company BP commissioned a film about environmental damage caused by the misuse of the planet's resources. 'The Shadows of Progress' suggests that the pursuit of technological progress and its

costs is a responsibility we all share.

That some bear more responsibility than others is not something the film addresses.

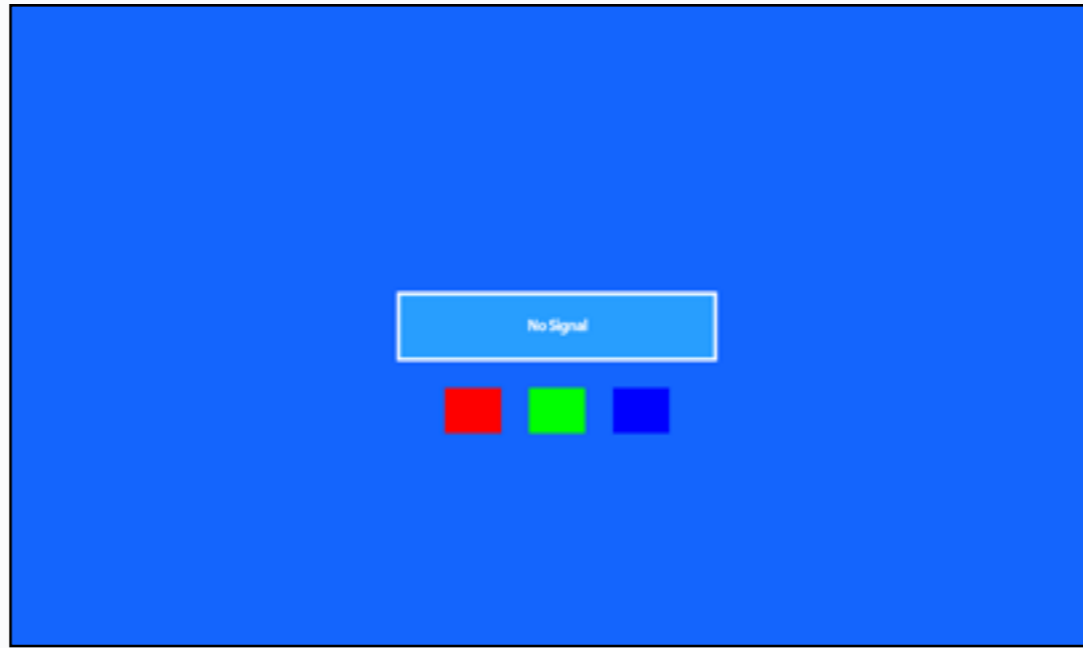
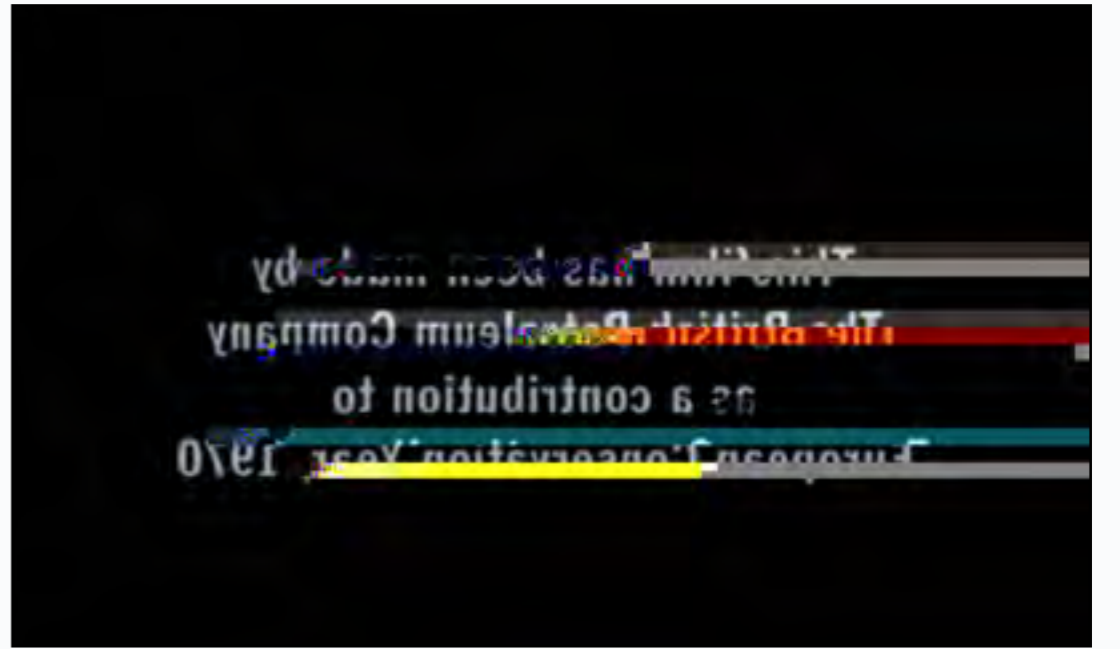
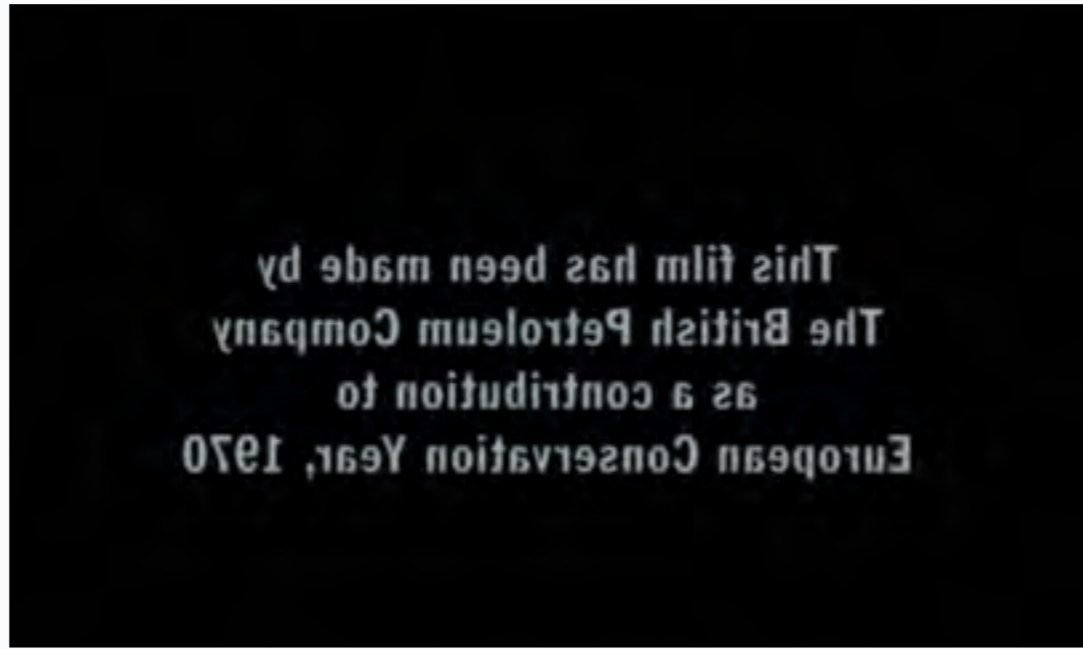
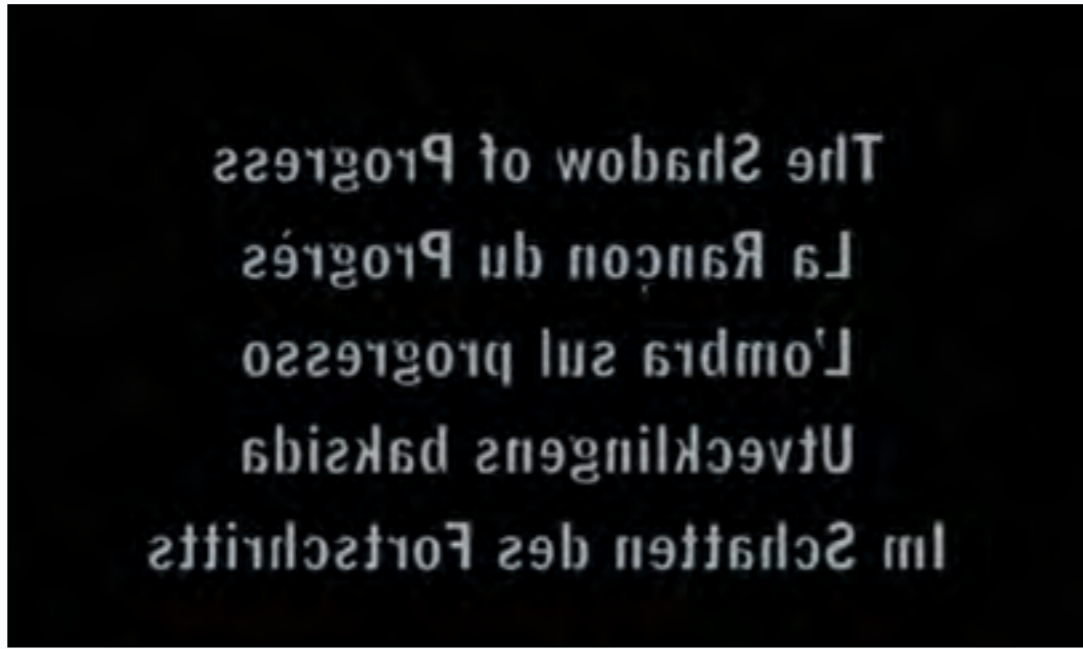
In 'Valley of the Kings' McCall makes use of this documentary. When a showing of the film on terrestrial TV was listed in the



Billy McCall feat. Derek Blades
Valley of the Kings. 2024 (detail)back to back
Radio Times pages



Billy McCall feat. Derek Blades
Valley of the Kings, 2024 (detail)
Painted animation cels, frame.



literally became the flipside of the BP film. In an ominous coincidence the episode includes a scene where the antagonist is thwarted by an explosion in a science laboratory.

McCall's video projector appears to malfunction shortly after the reversed and corrupted intro and faint voices and music can be heard from behind the screen. There we find three, gold-framed animation cels accompanied by the nostalgic sounds of Scooby Doo mixed with the clipped, narrative tones from 'The Shadows of Progress' in a haunting, glitch-ridden mashup.

'RadioTimes' in November 1970, McCall discovered that an episode of the cartoon 'Scooby Doo, Where Are You?' was listed on the reverse side of the page in the same location so that the Scooby Doo episode

Billy McCall

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Tel: **07310821352**
Instagram: **blankheadstone**

Academic Qualifications

1990-4 B.A. Hons in Fine Art, Glasgow School of Art (Environmental)
1994-6 Master of Fine Art, Glasgow School of Art

Exhibitions

2024 **In The Dark Times** (with Martin Fowler), Vallum Gallery, Carlisle.
2013 **Oh No!** Glasgow Project Room, Glasgow, November.
1998 **Wheels of Steel** in cellar (with Paul Carter)
Transmission Gallery, Glasgow, May-June.
1995 **"...almost no relation to reality... - a retrospective"**
in collaboration with John Calcutt and Peter Lynch
Collective Gallery, Edinburgh. September.

Group Exhibitions

2024 **Love on the Dole**, Queens Park Railway Club, Glasgow
2018 **Flim Flam**, Orbit, Edinburgh
2017 **Billy McCall/Neuschloss** Room 113 Newcastle, March -
June
2016 **Still Future III** Hidden Door Festival, Edinburgh, August.
Still Future II Dick Institute, Kilmarnock January - April.
2015 **About this th n th nxthing** (with Chad McCail and Martin
Fowler) Platform, Easterhouse, Glasgow November - January.
2014 **Still Future** St Margaret's House, Edinburgh, February.
2011 **Billy McCall/Martin Fowler**
Liars of Earth, Thankerton, South Lanarkshire, July.
2005 **There is Always an Alternative**
Temporary Contemporary and International 3, June and September
2004 **Birthday Party** Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, August
2003 **Home Made** Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth, January
Haunted Swing Collective Gallery Project Room, May
2002 **Hotpics** North Edinburgh Arts Centre, November
Berlin Art Forum Berlin, Germany, October.
no title Andrew Mummery Gallery London, April
Art in the Home Edinburgh.
2001 **Berlin Art Forum** Berlin, Germany, October.
Art in the Home Yamaguchi, Japan. October - November

2000

Arco Madrid, Spain

Video Shop Vogue video, Edinburgh. November.

1999-2000

Pixelvision the Lumiere, Museum of Scotland, December.

Touring to Waygood Gallery, Newcastle.

Hull time based arts, Hull.

Lost and Found Amsterdam.

200 Gertrude St. Melbourne.

Catalyst Arts, Belfast.

Museum Magogo Independent Studios, Glasgow.

PB Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.

1999

Locale City Art Centre, Edinburgh. May-June.

Vault The Arches. Glasgow.

1998

Browser 2 Changing Room, Stirling. December - February.

Family Credit Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, August-Sept.

Various Artists East Kilbride Arts Centre, East Kilbride, May.

1997

Hollywood Extra Embassy Gallery, London. August.

Klick 1st Floor Gallery, Melbourne, Australia. June.

Anti-matter 3 month Gallery, Liverpool. May.

Made In Glasgow Demarkten, Brussels, Belgium. April.

Speel Artis, s-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands. March.

Running Time Collective Gallery and Cameo Cinema,
Edinburgh. January.

1996

Klick Transmission Gallery, Glasgow, December.

Glasgow/Berlin Karl-Hofer-Gessellschaft, Bahnhof

Westend, Berlin. November.

Be er Monster Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Dublin. May,
September, October.

Curatorial Projects

2017-2018

Room 113 Domestic exhibition project bringing two artists
from Glasgow and Newcastle with artsits such as Alberta
Whittle, Rachel Lancaster and Neuschloss.

2003-05

Tag Team Experiment Domestic exhibition project.

Working with artists such as Bob and Roberta Smith, Mike
Nelson, Chad McCail, David Burrows, Philip Lai, Ilana Halperin
amongst others.

Residencies

2021

Hospitalfield House, Arbroath

Dr. Martin Fowler PhD

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Tel: **01228524987**
Instagram: [martin_fowler_paintings](https://www.instagram.com/martin_fowler_paintings)

Academic Qualifications

2022 **PhD**, University of Cumbria
1995 **MA European Fine Art**, Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton
BA (Hons) Fine Art, Drawing & Painting, Glasgow School of Art, 1994

Publications

Scotland the Brave: A Graphic History of Scotland 1514-2014
The Tension of a Line: A Portrait of Perth Prison

Exhibitions

2022 **Supermarket** The Vallum Gallery, University of Cumbria, July
2019 **Supermarket**. The Markethall, Carlisle, April;
2015 **Scotland the Brave: A Graphic History of Scotland 1514-2014**
The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, July.
2014 **Scotland the Brave: A Graphic History of Scotland 1514-2014**
The Old Town Hall Gallery, Langholm, Oct.
2013 **Scotland the Brave: A Graphic History of Scotland 1514-2014**
The Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh
2010 **The Tension of a Line: A Portrait of Perth Prison**
Perth City Museum & Gallery, Perth
2009 **The Tension of a Line: A Portrait of Perth Prison**
HMP Perth
2008 **Portraits of the Lifers**. The Legal Dept., University of Edinburgh
2006 **Portobello Stories**. Patriothall Gallery, Edinburgh
2003 **Wish You Were Here** The Round Room, Talbot Rice Gallery,
Edinburgh University

Group Exhibitions

2018 **Still Future II**, The Dick Institute, Kilmarnock,
2017 **Still Future I**, St. Margaret's House, Edinburgh
2014-5 **About this th n th nxthing**
(with Chad McCail and Billy McCall) Platform, Glasgow.

Residencies

1995 Guest Student, Dusseldorf Kunstakademie
1993 Hospitalfield Scholarship, Hospitalfield House, Arbroath

Conferences

2021 **PREFAB: Dissident Art Making Against The Nationalist Common Sense**
The 4th International Xenophobia, Racism & Nationalism conference, Poland (online), July
Presenter and Chairperson.
PREFAB: Dissident Art Making Against The Nationalist Common Sense
University of Cumbria Graduate Summer School, July
Presenter
PREFAB: Dissident Art Making Against The Nationalist Common Sense
Royal College of Art / National Assoc. of Fine Art Educators (NAFAE) conference, June
Presenter.

2019

Supermarket: The Tyranny of the Status Quo
Arts Research Initiative (ARI), Institute of the Arts, UoC, 15th June
PREFAB: Dissident Art Making Against The Nationalist Common Sense
Cultural Production and the Redundancy of Work: Precarity, Automation & Critique, The Raymond Williams Society, The Friends Meeting House, Manchester, 26th – 27th April
PREFAB: Dissident Art Making Against The Nationalist Common Sense
pecha-kucha presentation residency, Royal College of Art, Doctoral Summer School, Institute of the Arts, UoC, July 2018
PREFAB: Dissident Art Making Against The Nationalist Common Sense
Doctoral Colloquium, pecha-kucha presentation, University of Cumbria, 14th July 2018
Supermarket: The Tyranny of the Status Quo
University of Iceland
Prefab: Making Political-Art Politically Austerity, Adversity, Art?
National Association of Fine Art Educators (NAFAE), University of Wolverhampton, 23rd March

2017

2014

A History of the Village of Figgate: Cultural Materialist Readings of the Contemporary Painting
Doctoral Colloquium, University of Cumbria, 15th July
Scotland the Brave: A Graphic History of Scotland 1514-2014. Arts Research Initiative (ARI), Institute of the Arts, University of Cumbria, 14th July

University of Cumbria, Brampton Road, Carlisle.

