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Are islands ecosystems for the arts as well as the environment?

'The celebrated opening line of the novel juxtaposes the icy clarity of his new home with the grey dread of Oceania. "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen"

Robert McCrum, 'Kurt Jackson on George Orwell's Jura', 2021

A Scottish island's landscape inspired environmentalist artist **Kurt Jackson** whilst on a residency in 2011-2013. This is now the subject of an exhibition on Cork Street, '**Orwell's Jura, Morag's Skye**', 1 - 23rd December 2021.

74 years ago George Orwell, stepped onto the island of Jura to complete "the grisly job of working on my novel". Amid the island's wild beauty and isolation and by then seriously ill

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with TB, he settled at Barnhill to write one of the most iconic works of 20th Century literature.

'[Nineteen Eighty Four's] jagged brilliance was forged in a very special kind of solitude and it's this – the cradle of the natural world now threatened by climate change not Big Brother – that Kurt Jackson's glittering art has captured for all time'

Robert McCrum, 2021

Jackson travelled to Jura in 2011 on an invitation to take up residence in Barnhill. The remarkable body of painting made here will be shown for the first time at Messums London this December alongside work from a second residency in a traditional 'blackhouse' on the Isle of Skye. Together they explore the intersections of art and environmentalism, literature and landscape. The exhibition stands testament to the creative potential of artist residencies and unique inspiration that comes from dwelling on small islands.

'Over looking the sound I immediately start to scribble and sketch while the clouds stay high enough and the rain keeps off long enough to see across to the mainland. I list through my sky: sea eagle, golden eagle, short-eared owl, buzzard, hen harrier' –the most intense bird of prey saturated hour I have ever experienced. After this introduction the following dreich days are spent either painting in the rain and gales amongst the sodden bluebells, marsh cinquefoil, orchids and bracken, spied upon by red deer and cuckoos'

Kurt Jackson, Sketchbooks Lund Humphries, 2014

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Barnhill was a place where Orwell had fished, swam, tended to his garden and meditated on the spectacular surroundings. It was also the place, most notably, where close to death and beset by creative demons, he penned his masterpiece Nineteen Eighty-Four. During Orwell's time on Jura, "[l]ife was simple, even primitive. There was no electricity. Orwell used Calor gas to cook and to heat water. Storm lanterns burned paraffin. In the evenings he also burned peat. [The] fug in the house was cosy but not healthy. A battery radio was the only connection with the outside world." [Robert McCrum]

Positioned above the Sound of Jura, Barnhill looks out towards the mainland. It is about as Westerly a point as Jackson's home in St Just, Cornwall and the artist kept a few crab pots, tied to the low water rocks, to help supplement his food supply - the remote location is more than 5 miles away from a road and more than 20 to the nearest shop.

Jackson painted the house, the haunting stillness of a home frozen in time, 'Orwell's lingering presence'. He painted the churning waves over the Sound of Jura, rain and gales

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amongst sodden bluebells and bracken, the wildness of the remote, boggy landscape and the changing light that envelopes it.

On Skye, Jackson stayed in Morag's Croft - a century old house, small and low, that sits in a small, fenced plot on the edge of a crofting community. "There were sounds of sheep and pipits, the wind blew; occasionally a small tractor would pass but otherwise it was quiet," says Jackson.

"I was aware of the Scottish blackhouses of old, the "tigh-dubh." I had read about the homes of the crofters that were built with the materials to hand, thatched, low local stone walls, dumpy and sturdy, they were the vernacular architecture," he says. "[Now] forlorn, sinking back into where they came from."

It was stepping back in time to a simpler way of life. Outside the sea was visible with the islands of Lewis and Harris on the distant, hazy skyline. Largely alone, Jackson captured the scenery that surrounded him - out to the ocean, looking inland towards mountains, the house, the lanes surrounding it and the hinterland beyond.

"Jackson's subject is nature, both human nature and the natural world, and the relationship between the two – a vital subject for us today []. The artist is not alone. He is part of a rising tide of awareness of what we are doing to the planet. He is the equivalent in art to films of the natural world, such as those of David Attenborough, Alastair Fothergill and Keith Scholey, but his art goes a step further, or, rather, takes a step back, as we all have to do if we are going to save our world." [Julian Spalding]

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Jackson's artistic practice ranges from his trademark visceral *plein-air* sessions to studio work and embraces an extensive range of materials and techniques including mixed media, large canvases, print-making and sculpture.

A dedicated environmentalist, Jackson's holistic approach to his subject seamlessly blends art and politics providing a springboard to create a hugely varied body of work unconstrained by format or scale.

The son of artists, Jackson was born in Blandford, Dorset in 1961. While studying Zoology at Oxford University he spent most of his time painting and attending courses at Ruskin College of Art. On gaining his degree he travelled extensively and independently, painting wherever he went before putting down roots in Cornwall with his wife Caroline in 1984.

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About Messums Wiltshire

Messums Wiltshire is a leading multi-purpose gallery and arts centre. It has become a platform for creative expression across artistic genre and a meeting point of minds to explore how art as a language is made, interpreted, resolved and shared.

The gallery opened in Autumn 2016 after a two-year restoration project to bring a thirteenth century tithe barn back to life as an exhibition and event space. The gallery's one year anniversary was marked with the opening of the Long Gallery, a former dairy that lies perpendicular to the main barn to present two-dimensional works of art and objects of scale as well as The Mess Restaurant. The exterior landscape was remodelled in 2020 with sculpture grounds and outside seating,

In 2020 a Membership Programme was launched to help support the ambitious artistic programming in Wiltshire, including international artist residencies, Contemporary Dance premiers and educational workshops. Messums Creative sees the act of physical making, often lacking in a digital world, brought back into focus via ceramic workshops, which have been running since Summer 2021.

This September the gallery is marking its five year milestone with a show of Elisabeth Frink's sculpture: Man is an Animal represents one of the most significant collections to be brought together in this country since the artist's death in April 1993 and runs until January 2022, and recontextualises the importance of figurative sculpture in the latter part of the 20th century. The gallery also launched a Photography Department with a presentation of Robert Capa's work at Photo London and an ongoing collaboration with leading contemporary photographers.

The gallery's ongoing Active Environmentalism programming, a series of talks from leading minds and thinkers, aims to inform individual thinking around collective decisions - thinking at the intersection of science and necessity sits closely with the problem solving inherent in the creative process. Underpinning all of this is an appreciation and respect for nature to which most artists and individuals would readily align.

Messums Wiltshire is an independent business run by a team led by Johnathan Messum with exhibition and event spaces in Cork Street London and Messums Yorkshire in James Street in Harrogate.