

SCRUB

A proposal for Singing Apple Press by Caroline Harris

SCRUB will be a series of worked cyanotype prints/poems made with plants in transitional locations.

Scrub – a transitional edgeland

‘Scrub’ is defined as vegetation dominated by shrubs or bushes, forming the margin between grassland or heath and woodland, and in coastal locations. Now recognised as ecologically valuable, it is also seen as a threat to open habitats: scrub encroaches, and its species can be invasive. It is temporary and transitional. An edgeland.

In urban and built environments, scrub forms the ever-moving border between the human-made and the other-than-human: the plants of railway tracksides, derelict land, path edges, motorway embankments.

The potential of cyanotype

I am interested in how we experience the other-than-human world indirectly and at a distance, translated through video, sound recordings, photographs.

Anna Atkins’ 1843 collection *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* was the first book illustrated with photography. Even some of its lettering appears to have been formed from strands of seaweed.

As a process, cyanotype printing, or ‘sunprinting’, is relatively simple. Photograms can be created through direct contact with the subject, as in Atkins’ botanical arrangements or Meghann Riepenhoff’s *Littoral Drift*, where the artist exposed sensitised paper to the sea. They can also be made through a more mediated process, with negatives produced from digital photography.

The poem text and working on the prints

The text will derive from writing born through close observation and engagement with the plants and locations, and through a range of other techniques, such as erasure and *réécriture* (as in ‘Freshwater Fishes’).

Other writing would be a response to photographs and video taken at the sites, and the cyanotypes themselves, following a process similar to that of ‘Five Short iPhone Films About Running Water’, where a species of haibun was created by ‘transcribing’ the video and then selecting three short phrases, which are over-printed on the prose.

I propose to work materially on the prints and text in a number of ways: ‘scrubbing’ at the prints themselves, and experimenting with letterpress printing, and debossing/embossing, so that poem words push through the paper, as scrub plants and roots dent through asphalt.

A number of the print and text-making processes could lend themselves to performance, and this is something that I would be interested in developing.

Locations and practical skills

The prints and poems would be made in scrub locations between Bath, where I live, and North Cornwall. I travel this route frequently by train, bus, car. The final creative piece for my MA was based around the North Cornish coast; this project would form an extension of that work.

I have made sunprints informally, but would also develop my skills through attending the short courses available in making sensitised paper and using various direct and darkroom techniques. I have enrolled on a workshop to learn about printing with the Albion press at Corsham Court.

Biography

Caroline Harris is a writer, publisher and educator. She is the author of *Ms Harris’s Book of Green Household Management* (John Murray) and recently completed an MA Creative Writing (Poetry) at Royal Holloway, for which she was awarded the University of London prize. Her poetry has been published online by The Poetry School and appears in the *Bedford Square 10* anthology. Harris + Wilson, the company she co-founded, has created books for global publishers with authors and brands ranging from ethical bakery The Thoughtful Bread Company to Dorset Cereals. She is a Senior Lecturer in Publishing at Bath Spa University.