Draft outline: September 2014

Edmund de Waal & David Ward

*wavespeech*

**A collaboration, curated by Michael Tooby with the Pier Arts Centre**

**Summary:**

*wavespeech* is the title of a collaborative exhibition of new works by Edmund de Waal and David Ward for the Pier Arts Centre, Stromness, Orkney in 2015.

It is growing from an evolving dialogue between the two artists, which has found focus in the relationship between the Pier, its architecture, its collection and its island setting. They are using this particular context to develop and enrich their own work through dialogue and collaboration, and to critically celebrate the Pier’s particular architecture and some core objects in its collection. Whilst there is a level of experiment and testing new forms and approaches, they also are intent on making and showing substantial and significant new work.

The exhibition will be made for and shown at the Pier. It will be presented in the spaces across the gallery’s upper floors, thereby combining and exploiting the dialogic architectures of the first floor of the original building and the first floor of the interconnected, parallel new building

The artists are pursuing a creative conversation, growing out of a unique context. They are approaching the exhibition in tandem, working with in a collaborative spirit of responsive engagement, interaction and creative exchange. They are extending this collaboration by working with a guest curator and the in house team on a locally devised programme of engagement.

**Content and Materials:**

The exhibition’s title is taken from a passage in James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’. This passage is in part an onomatapeic representation on the page and in the ear and mind of the reader of the sound of the sea, and of the experience of a person’s passage along the coastline.

***Listen: a fourworded wavespeech : seesoo, hrss, rsseeisss, ooos***

Other sources for the exhibition currently in play are examples of sea and ocean literary language ranging from Classical, Nordic, Celtic and modern sources and navigational and meteorological forms of words.

The artists share a recurring interest in the formal characteristics of the horizontal and vertical in relation to the sea, to architecture and the body. Suggestive of the navigational significance of latitude and longitude, the metaphor of co-ordinates extends to the working relationship of the two artists for this exhibition.

These now combine with themes relating to the sea: of ports, of ocean-going, navigation, cargos and trade; atmospherics, coastal light, weather, currents and winds; of horizons and the horizontal plane, reflective surface and inhabited depth; transparency, obscurity, edge, distance, voyaging and odyssey.

The layering and stratification of text, light and space is also within the experience of the awareness of the space of sea and land. The material range of the new work currently being explored includes text, sound, ways of capturing and shifting the architectural form of the building using light, and placing objects in the rich flow of the building’s spaces. The approach to installation will ‘claim’ the way the light comes in with the architecture, and describe it as a form.

In using the original spaces for their own new work made for them, Ward and de Waal will displace works normally displayed in locations which, whilst not fixed, are commonly associated with certain placements. Given the loan out of two other groups from the collection, Ward and De Waal will reintegrate individual examples of the key historic sculptures, such as Gabo’s ‘Linear Construction’ 1940-41and ‘Involute’ 1946 by Barbara Hepworth’ by moving them from their usual bespoke locations and placing them in striking locations in other gallery spaces in an integrated approach to the installation.

**Background and relationship to the Pier Arts Centre:**

Edmund de Waal and David Wardhave pursued significant but distinct career paths. They have over recent years begun discussion of some shared interests. This will be the first occasion they have decided to work together in a unique project..

Both Edmund and David have sought to retain specificity of place as a fundamental in their practice. Location may prompt a sense of identity and history, and at the same time generate a way of prompting shared experience and understanding. Their shared interest in Modernist literature has become a formative way of articulating this.

Both artists, moreover, have substantial past associations with the British Modernist art that is the foundation of the Pier’s collection. Both have worked on curated and site specific projects using collections, including venues that are the close relatives of the Pier such as Tate St Ives and Kettles Yard Cambridge. They both have personal links to Scotland and the Isles.

Each has worked with Michael Tooby as a commissioner and curator at different points in their careers. Mike is a leading curator with a particular experience of the British Modernist tradition represented in the Pier’s collection and has worked the Pier in the past. They therefore also invited Mike to facilitate work on this collaboration. A constellation of interests has thereby formed around this project.

The artists have opened up new avenues of thinking about the Modernist tradition. Edmund de Waal has done so by challenging the apparent division between art and craft, the categories of ‘high’, ‘domestic’ and ‘functional’ that dominated much of the discourse over the 20th century. In comparison, David Ward has integrated photography, performance and architecture into his practice, shifting and eliding the boundaries between these disciplines and the languages of painting and sculpture.

**The Pier Collection:**

The setting offered by the Pier is therefore unique and highly appropriate to their goals. As well as artists whose work is in tune with the architecture and location of the Pier, they have real insights to bring to bear on the collection.

The artists will engage with the collection, re-hanging a selection of the work within the Pier spaces, thus relating to previous, invited re-hangs in the galleries. However, in addition, their responses to the collection will involve bringing items into the Pier that are absent from it’s collection but that are suggested by it. In this way the collection will be re-presented in ways not previously seen at the Pier before, bringing a fresh experience to regular visitors as well as engaging new viewers.

**Dates and timing:**

The exhibition is scheduled for **13 June - 12 Sept 2015** to coincide with Orkney’s annual St. Magnus Festival and is therefore part of a wider cultural context. The exhibition also occurs over midsummer, the long hours of daylight at this latitude being of central importance in the work of both artists.

The exhibition coincides with a showing of Damien Hirst’s work in the ‘Artists’ Rooms’ programme, in the separate spaces of the lower floor at the Pier. Whilst interesting connections will lie in the Pier’s handling of audience responses, (Ward was one of Hirst’s tutors at Goldsmith’s College, for example, and the Hirst display will also make a connection with the collection through the work of Margaret Mellis) the two projects will *not* be presented in any explicitly direct related way.

**Engagement:**

In past projects with David Ward and Edmund de Waal, Michael Tooby has worked with them on participative engagement projects. Ward has collaborated with musicians, dancers and in live and performing arts settings. De Waal has often presented talks and discussions that explore his interest in music and critical writing.

This experience, taken with the locally specific development of the new collaborative works and the re-presentation of key works from the collection, will be taken into a new programme of work with the Pier’s continuing young people’s project *Piergroup*.

Working in facilitated sessions in an off-site location will enable practical and discussion based responses to the 3-dimensionality and architectural elements of the new work and of the works being focussed upon in the collection. Ward, de Waal and Tooby will all take part in this programme in advance of the final show, ensuring that the journey from the local community in winter to the Festival audience in high midsummer is part of the experience of the participants.

**Evaluation:**

In addition to the Pier Arts Centre’s continuing gathering of responses to their programme, the involvement of *Piergroup* will provide an additional opportunity to generate a way of enhancing exhibition-specific evaluation with an evaluative process of gaining wider responses within a local community-generated group who have also worked with the Pier’s collection within past projects.