

“KATE NEWBY: LET THE OTHER THING IN (REVIEW)”

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**Kate Newby:**  
***Let the Other Thing In***  
 Fogo Island Gallery,  
 Fogo Island, NFLD  
 Jun. 27–Sept. 8, 2013  
 by Kay Burns

*Let the Other Thing In*, by New Zealand artist Kate Newby, is the inaugural exhibition at the Fogo Island Gallery, situated in the newly opened Fogo Island Inn. Newby's creative process was affected by her time on the island, her involvement with local residents and the cultural nuances of the place. Her work is connected to the particularities and everyday attributes of the place, and through that focus it allows her, as a temporary resident, to highlight the fleeting and seemingly ordinary things of this place as something significant.

Newby's installation in the Fogo Island Gallery, created during her six-month residency at Fogo Island Arts, consists of a large, rough wood platform sitting on an irregular-cut piece of moss-green broadloom carpet placed on the gallery's wooden floor. The platform visually alludes to fish flakes that are common structures in outpost communities, left over from historical fishing practices.

Newby's platform contains no fish, however, but instead rows of handmade ceramic sticks and numerous clusters of ceramic stones with handwritten cards naming each grouping. Some of the names reference local people and places, such as "Vanessa's" or "Nicole's."

Some of the rock clusters were given different kinds of names. Much like the title of the exhibition itself, they offer an odd turn of phrase, suggesting an enigmatic connection between the cluster and its name. Names such as "Loads of Difficult," and "I like myself much better when I do," and "Holding on to it only makes you sick" have the potential to be read as perplexing autobiographical statements either of the artist, or of the reader/viewer. Given that playfully interesting names are common in Newfoundland—including place names such as Seldom Come By, Farewell, and Come By Chance—the cryptic names of Newby's stone clusters pique similar curiosity.

In addition to the platform arrangement, in the corner of the gallery space stands a pyramid-shaped display cabinet containing several ceramic stones. The form of the cabinet itself alludes

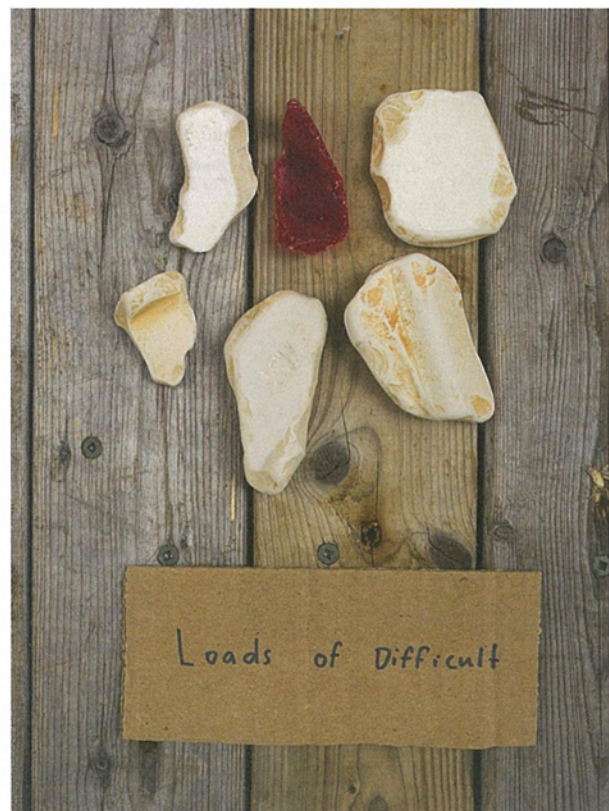
to geological specimen showcases, yet it is also resonant of the shape of buoys or cairns as place-markers on sea or land. The encased stones are nameless and set apart from the rest of the installation; they are stones that Newby made in New Zealand and brought with her to include with this body of work when she installed the show. From elsewhere, these stones contrast with the open arrangements on the platform that are of this place and are reachable tactile objects.

Newby's ceramic elements read as a playful approach to experimentation with hand-built clay forms and glazing studies rather than the creation of refined objects. This investigative production of stones reaffirms her fascination with everyday things that are frequently overlooked. But rather than acknowledging the simplicity of common objects and practices, the installation confers a sense of preciousness and preservation, resulting in a tension that can be better understood through analogy to the geology of the island.

During the same time period as Newby's exhibition, the Fogo Island Inn hosted a series of geology lectures and walks. Andy Kerr, geologist-in-residence at the time, discussed the transformations that occurred on the island over millennia including the shifting of tectonic plates, volcanic activity, glacial deposition and erosion. He discussed a "dropstone" located near the inn as well as others on the island, rocks that are foreign to a place, having been left there by drifting icebergs during a time when an ocean covered the area millions of years ago. To geologists, dropstones stand out as unusual items. They are not local, yet they provide information about the place they now occupy by giving clues to the geological processes that have shaped it.

As a visiting artist-in-residence, Newby is a dropstone herself—she arrived in the place from elsewhere, and her presence can ultimately reveal attributes about the place to others. Her intrigue with commonplace characteristics of the region, in turn highlights them as facets of significance. Objects and practices that may be ordinary to local residents are compelling to Newby, becoming the focus of her attention. For example, it is highly likely that any coastal home will contain a small collection of stones sitting on a shelf or window ledge, indicating the occupant's desire to collect ordinary things, to allow a simple object to stand in for a remembered place or moment. Newby's work alludes to that common practice, and to others.

Part of the body of work Newby created during her residency was a number of ceramic stones that never materialized within the gallery exhibition, but instead she and others tossed as skimming stones into shore waters around the island as a kind



Detail from  
 Kate Newby,  
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 Thing In*, 2013,  
 installation  
 view.  
 PHOTO:  
 GUY L'HEUREUX;  
 IMAGE COURTESY  
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of enactment of a simple form of play. This evocative dispersal of her stones alludes to the transformative nature of the passage of time—a reinvention of geological time. Will these ceramic stones disintegrate through erosion, or perhaps return on waves to the beach from which they were cast, or materialize as curious out-of-place stones on some other shore?

The ephemeral aspects of Newby's work seemed to be at odds with the preciousness evident within the gallery display. Although the artist was interested in the possibility that the public would interact physically with the exhibition by handling and moving the stones, and walking on top of the platform, the installation inadvertently discouraged it. While some viewers did indeed engage actively, particularly at the opening event, that kind of interaction didn't occur consistently—the height of the platform was too awkward to invite stepping up on, and the clusters of stones with their labels on the platform read as some kind of presentation not to be touched. These features, along with the glass-enclosed display case, perpetuated rather than diminished a sense of preciousness. Yet, this preciousness is in keeping with the geology analogy. Newby's labelled assemblages of ceramic stones suggest both the common compulsion to collect simple stones as we wander, as well as the scientific compulsion to archive, annotate and display.

The tensions and paradoxes within this exhibition are extended through the gallery's practices. During the run of the exhibition, Fogo Island Arts staff came regularly to reset the installation, to realign moved or rearranged stones resulting from participant interaction. And following the dismantling of the installation, the artwork was crated for storage until a buyer can be found (Fogo Island Arts intends to seek buyers for the artworks exhibited by residency artists at the gallery).<sup>1</sup> Newby's work, with its allusions to numerous attributes of the place where it was created—the people, the practices, the geology—combined with chance events and implications of impermanence and erosion, is presented within an institutional context that seems contradictory to the work itself. There is something incongruous when the work becomes a commodity itself, a conserved product separate from the experience that formed it.

On the other hand, when Newby's work is relocated with its buyer and displayed in a new venue, the geology analogy will be reaffirmed anew. Newby's installation, then, will become another geological dropstone, where it will be foreign to its new place but obliquely telling stories of its origins. ×

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Jack Stanley, director of programs, Fogo Island Arts