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Version of item: Artist's statement

Andrew Langford, Reader in Fine Art and Design

Taken From the Net

As a young boy in the mid 1960s I would sit patiently fishing, mesmerized by the surface of the sea, a lake or a river, highly attuned to any sort of movement to indicate action below the surface. Despite having to constantly move around the world due to my father's profession, somehow my imagination was continuously caught by images (maybe through cinema, television or boys' literature) of the isolated young hunter surviving in the natural world outwitting living creatures, of the boy bound to nature and of natural landscapes offering escape from the realities of everyday life. When fishing I would marvel at the wide variety of creatures that had evolved to survive in and under water and how boundless and magical this basic earthly element seemed as a space for life, tragedy and imagination. As I grew into early teenage years so did my profound personal concern for the impact of my activity and I stopped fishing. The decision for me at that time felt right and made connections to how I also felt within other human-animal contexts such as trips to zoos and natural history museums (particularly dioramas).

My overarching research interests are in the representation of landscape and environment in the context of accelerated scientific intervention in nature. This work pursues an aspect of the larger human-nature relationship and the narrative of the taming of nature, nature as resource and nature for sport and leisure, but attempts to utilise different methodologies and explores different forms. My established practice exclusively involves the generation and adaptation of my own images taken in locations in the UK and abroad - this exhibited piece does not. Instead, this work capitalizes on the need of people to photographically record themselves with their 'prey' and one could argue the masculine urge to make a permanent record of supremacy over the natural world. Where such images in the past were stored locally in printed form the internet now provides a point of sharing and dissemination through social networks and through wide ranging websites. As if to parallel my wonder at the vastness and sublime characteristics of oceans and lakes and what lies within, I now find that the internet too is such a space for the imagination. Using Google and different keywords as bait I captured my images. The game rules that I set for myself included an upper number limit on the total catch of trophy pictures, images that were too small to be discernable in print would be thrown back and the final work would comprise a collage of all images landed into my storage folder. On the net I found consistent conventions around the pose of captor and prey for the photograph which preserved the event of triumph for others to see. The relative global reach of the net allowed a vast array of types, shapes and sizes to come to the surface. Here I reference both the specimens originally caught and the catchers themselves. I have submitted this piece in the spirit of work-in-progress and speculate that in some part being able to see the work through from concept to wall I may have a clearer sense of how the ideas might continue to be further developed.