

A·P·T GALLERY

Press Release

Simon Callery Thames Gateway Project

"We have a unique opportunity - now and for future generations. The Thames Gateway Strategy we are launching today shows how we are investing £6 billion across the Thames Gateway to create sustainable communities, stimulate economic development, deliver sustainable homes, enhance the local environment, and restore historic town centres."

So announced the ex-deputy Prime Minister John Prescott on a visit to Gravesend with Tony Blair in March 2005, launching a major central government initiative. Besides the claim to deliver the Sustainable Communities policy (ODPM, 2003), the Thames Gateway regeneration offered an exceptional opportunity to examine our relationship to landscape during an historic period of change. The regeneration zone encompasses a 40-mile corridor of land in south east England running along the river Thames from Tower Hamlets in London through Kent and Essex to the estuary mouth where it meets the North Sea.

The 'Thames Gateway Project' represents an engagement with this landscape through the medium of painting – a tradition where we are accustomed to find evidence of our shifting attitudes in relation to landscape. The objective of this work has been to develop new forms for landscape-based painting in response to this new environment. Simon Callery has worked in collaboration with Oxford Archaeology, who provided on-site access to a number of locations within the Thames Gateway over a three-year research period. Sites of work have included a flood relief scheme at Washlands Basin, Dagenham, the A2 road rerouting at Gravesend, Kent, at Woolwich Teardrop, Woolwich Arsenal and at the London Gateway container port development on the Thames estuary at Shellhaven, Essex. Commercial excavation sites are characterised on one hand by the materiality of the construction site and on the other by a tangible sense of temporality. They are rapidly changing landscapes, where briefly future function and evidence of past human activity fuse.

This exhibition consists of two related groups of paintings; Pit Paintings and Wall Spines. Both groups employ a recasting of the support (stretchers) for painting to a more central role, the use of organic form found in archaeological features and the opening up of the paintings to give access to the interior. In combination these qualities involve the viewer in an encounter that initiates visually but leads, through a structured perceptual route to a physical register. Significantly, the aim of these paintings is to mobilize the viewer, encouraging movement from edge to edge, and to peer inside the open body of the works.

These new works connect with current thinking in archaeology, architecture and the fine arts where an ambition is growing to accommodate record and communicate lived experience, proposing an alternative to the image-based culture that dominates contemporary life.

The Thames Gateway Project is an Arts and Humanities Research Council Creative and Performing Arts Fellowship. In collaboration with Oxford Archaeology and Wimbledon College, University of the Arts London. This exhibition is supported by the Arts Council England, Lottery Funded.

Exhibition Details: Simon Callery Thames Gateway Project
9 October to 1 November 2009
Exhibition open Thursday to Sunday from 12 to 5pm and at other times by appointment

APT Gallery
Harold Wharf
6 Creekside
Deptford
London SE8 4SA

aptlondon@btconnect.com
www.aplstudios.org

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