

Blog post written by [Liz Rideal](#), Leverhulme artist in residence at UCL Art Museum and Reader in Fine Art at the [Slade School of Fine Art](#).



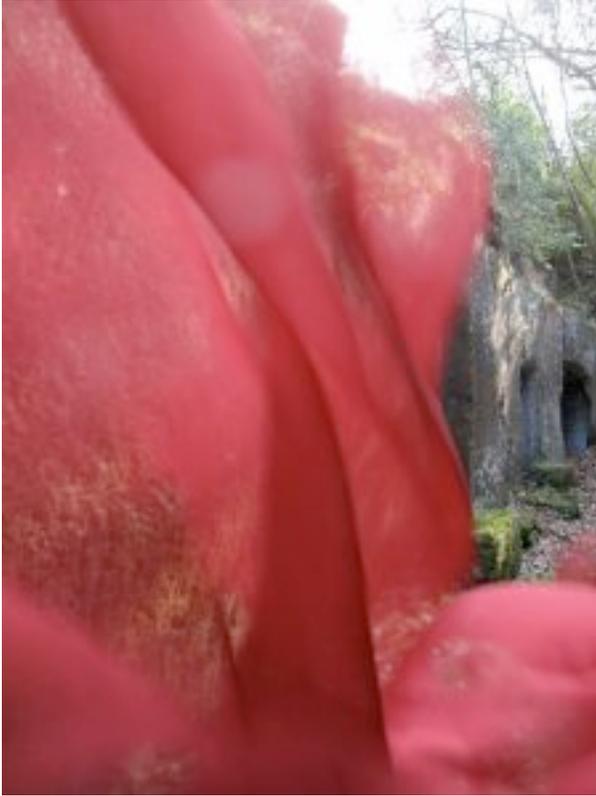
Installation view of Terme di Diocleziano by Mike Dye

The trace is the appearance of nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is the appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us.

Walter Benjamin

Splicing Time, Rome and the Roman Campagna is the research title of my Leverhulme Fellowship, 2016-17. Being invited to take up the role of artist in residence at the UCL Museum was an accidental result of the former competition proposal. One theme was to study Claude Lorraine's *Liber Veritatis* drawings, in the British Museum and attempt to plot their contemporary locations, to study his concept of real, imagined and invented landscape and relate this imagery to my own work in the Roman Campagna today. However, it occurred to me that the UCL Art Museum might also be a fruitful venue for my quest and I decided to approach curator Andrea Fredericksen to investigate. Coincidentally their next exhibition was to concentrate on Richard Cooper, eighteenth century Grand Tour printmaker, an artist who followed the footsteps of Claude and who was thus perfectly suited to my own theme. So, in this synchronous and surprising manner I started to consider Cooper's work.

'What is a ghost?' Stephen said with tingling energy. 'One who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners.'
Ulysses, James Joyce



Liz Rideal, Cerveteri, 2016

...The dangerous miasma of the Pontine Marshes) made the rocky perch of [Terracina](#) all the more desirable, and presently we saw the sea before us. The other side of that rock city offered us a view of a vegetation which was entirely unfamiliar. Indian figs forced their large, fleshy leaves between humble grey-green myrtles, yellow-green pomegranates and pale-green olive branches. Beside the road grew flowers we had never seen before. The meadows were full of narcissus and adonis. We had the sea on our right.

[Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#) - Italian Journey - February 1787 - translation by W. H. Auden and E. Mayer - Collins 1962

I came to the UCL art museum with the concept of the eighteenth century grand tourist and the desire of those visitors to Italy to take something home with them, a feeling that all of us can relate to when on our travels. Cooper was creating standard views for them (like many other artists of the time), as this was a reliable and profitable market. Today our snail-mail postcard equivalent is old-fashioned and instant messaging fills that gap, but then, travelling was for the super rich and their souvenir tastes were for painted postcard views often turned into prints.

My interest is in the repetition of form and the places that emerge in repeated views of the Roman Campagna; the standardisation of vistas and the imaginative

embellishment of these. It was not unknown for artists who had not been to Italy, to draw, paint and make prints of invented landscapes based on other people's work. Van de Velde is one such, and his work was recently on show at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, one might call his work a form of post-modern 'vintage sampling'.

My artwork lies somewhere between the two, and I am creating prints based on old views and using new print technology to investigate the layering of visual information both old and new. I've printed and hand-coloured images of a quarry near Tivoli and also views by Claude of Due Ponti off the via Flaminia. I've re-printed and re-painted them, creating accretions that in some ways replicate the layers of time passing, equivalent to those made visible in rock formation, and so echoing my initial Leverhulme brief of 'splicing time'. These prints will form part of an album like Cooper's thus updating the genre.

Water, perhaps an opposite of rock, is life's essential, flowing through the aqueducts that crisscross the Campagna landscape. Rock in comparison is immutable but used in building houses, roads and irrigation systems, facilitating drinking, washing and for Romans, important public bathing rituals. Rock provides the material for tombs both Etruscan, at Tarquinia and Cerveteri, and Roman such as Cecilia Metella's Appian Way monument and Cestius's Pyramid in Rome itself.

My dual focus is on water and the abstract cutout caves peppering the Roman countryside, specifically stone quarries and their connected Etruscan hewn tombs. The latter describe simple repetitive sculptural forms made from malleable tufa much used as Roman building material. Yet, it is the spirit that I want to conjure and catch as it slides along the aqueducts and shifts shapes among the tombs and fountains. The essence of the people who inhabited the spaces long before the tourists roamed. To this end I've invented a way of suggesting their fragile presence through photographing trailing light-coloured fabrics. Thus Etruscan and Romans appear to inhabit my images in wraith-like bursts. Echoes of their ghosts are caught on camera like brief sparkles of morning dew, enticing us suspend our disbelief and enter the realm of art.

All of the [UCL Museums](#) exist in compact spaces, the Art Museum is no exception with [John Flaxman's](#) (1755-1826) sculptural bequests crowding the walls, leaving small gaps for temporary exhibitions. The advantage here is that the plethora adds to the excitement around what is available to see, and the [Legacy](#) exhibition of Richard Cooper Jnr (1740-1822) makes an unusual eighteenth century complement to the permanent display. Cooper Jnr's prints are exhibited so that one can compare, contrast and appreciate their repetition of landscape format and small scale. We can recognise the tropes made familiar by his precedents, Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), Claude Lorraine (1604/5-1682) and lesser known but more famous in his day, Herman van Swanevelt (c.1603-1655) with their reiterated Italianate views made popular by print and available in

albums. Curatorial assistant [George Richards](#)'s Masters focussed on The Dutch Golden Age. A landscape print of Richard Cooper Jnr's 'after Swanevelt' was in the display, through sharing art historian [Sue Russell](#)'s research into Swanevelt, further connections could be made, a previously unimagined benefit of my [Leverhulme](#) research grant.

The 'Roman Grand Tour' views, whether imagined 'capriccios', 'veduti' or containing ancient Roman monuments obviously pre-date but are in visual accord with a [Warholian](#) philosophy vis-a-vis art production through their reliance on repetition and familiarity. Hence Cestius's Pyramid pops up again and again locating us in Rome, similarly Cecilia's Mausoleum on the Appian outskirts, the cascades of Tivoli and the lake at Nemi. The idea of referring to another artist, making a homage or copying for inspiration and learning is also present. These are the strands of research that interest me and on which I expand, in particular how the figure (or suggestion of) is pictured within the open landscape and connects to immutable rock both there and also in the shape of Roman sculpture. My triptych; Terme Di Diocleziano, shows how the coloured drape can breathe life into static ancient form by building on its readymade drapery and adding real drapes, suggesting fleeting energy by photographing the active cloth in motion. In recognition of Cooper Jnr's interest in new technology, I'm employing the digital to both create images and print them onto translucent silk, for installation in the three window apertures of the UCL Museum.

I am also showing a series of prints gathered together in portfolios as loose works. Like Cooper Jnr's, they reveal interpretations of still extant Roman places such as the [Theatre of Marcellus](#) and the [Temple of Vesta](#). Additionally subject matter includes abstract quarry spaces, the locus of building materials for all these edifices. These prints hover between what might be called photographic reality and painted interpretation. Some printed and over printed, coloured in layered washes or details painted in specifically to fox the viewer and play games with the notion of suspended disbelief. Because many of the views are ancient the slippage and shift of time comes into play in ways that also reflect the actual production of the artwork whether it be painted, printed or photographed.

My new work, inspired by travels funded by Leverhulme, investigates Roman sculpture, architecture and the Campagna, and explore the idea of disrupting the monumental severity of Classical Antiquity with lightweight, mutable, coloured cloth. The resulting images suggest fleeting human presence through my leitmotif freeform flying fabric; the soft-edged folds of bright silk held in momentary tension against the formal patterns of crafted stone.

I aim to create more traces and call forth auras, conjuring aspects of nineteenth century spirit photography and dreamy archaeology. Whereas it seems standard for landscape paintings to be interpretations and sometimes fictional elaborations of known and recognisable scenes – *Painting can feign reality without having seen it*, according to [Roland Barthes](#), photographic imagery is accepted as a

simulation of 'actual life' and used as documentary evidence suggesting that the photograph does not lie, when we know that it can and does.

The photograph masquerades as an echo of reality while revealing ghosts – traces of people once living who inhabited their recorded spaces. Furthermore, in nineteenth century portrait photography, when individuals moved during the process of image making, so their liminal trail was equally caught on camera like a soft vapour. It is these ghostings that intrigue me as they appear to reflect a real animated past life in a way that their immobile compatriots cannot.

My images strive to answer questions that elide photography with painting, and focus on drapery as subject. Perhaps these cloth photographs suggest roving spirits by capturing their fleeting presence as translucent wraiths in digital code? My records of activity add a poetic dimension to the layers of data available on Rome and the Campagna and aim to temper the mountain of diagnostic accumulated material on this familiar subject.

[The trace is the appearance of nearness](#)

Liz Rideal's was on view at UCL Art Museum as part of the *Legacy* exhibition January - June 2017.