

ALISTAIR McCLYMONT

EVERY

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THING

WE ARE

CAPABLE

OF SEEING



FEBRUARY 1 – APRIL 28, 2013

MUSEUM COPY

IMAGE: *The Limitations of Logic and the Absence of Absolute Certainty*,
2011; fans, humidifier, scaffolding, lights

Alistair McClymont—*Everything We Are Capable of Seeing*

ON VIEW FEBRUARY 1–APRIL 28, 2013

British artist Alistair McClymont suggests new ways of experiencing art—he makes nighttime rainbows, suspends raindrops in mid-air and creates tornadoes with deceptively simple machines. Working in sculpture, photography and video, McClymont describes these ‘phenomena’ as artworks, in which he tries to capture natural, often overlooked, occurrences and evoke a sense of wonder.

For his first museum exhibition in the United States, McClymont selected works that focus on processes. His artwork is a continuing evolution of discovery and experimentation. Each piece follows the last in a journey of investigation into cultural and physical phenomena. As you visit this exhibition, you will see that at times artworks take the form of direct demonstration, or experimentation: phenomena are removed from the world and reduced to their essence. At other times the artworks are formed by phenomena: the sculpture or image is created by a process that is out of McClymont’s control and the final work points to that process. The work is underlined by a search for what it is to be human. — *Elysia Borowy-Reeder*

Interview

FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT NECESSARILY FAMILIAR WITH YOUR WORK, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY AND RESEARCH IN YOUR PRACTICE?

I think of myself as a conceptual artist (though the term itself is perhaps a bit difficult to pin down), but my work always stems from an idea and the form follows. I don’t work with a particular material or method. I’m as happy making a steel sculpture as an iPhone application.

I think the history of conceptual art has allowed me to make art in this vein and in that sense it’s very important. It’s impossible to ignore all that’s gone before you when you make a piece of work, you must be aware of any conceptual pitfalls. I’m always keen to reduce the work down to the essence of the point I’m trying to make so you have to have an understanding of the associations people will make.

I do enjoy spending time at the library before a big project and will look into the subject both artistically and scientifically. I tend to get more enjoyment reading about science than art. The *Raindrop* artwork required more research than any other—this even got to the level of reading research papers on the subject to better understand the process and refine it.

WHAT INFLUENCES DO YOU DRAW ON THE MOST AND WHY?

I discovered Chris Burden’s art in my teens. His playfulness and ability to combine science and art really interested me and this may have helped me to eventually embrace both of those interests. I’m interested in a number of other artists, often people who fall slightly outside of the normal art world. But my direct influences for my artwork are rarely from anything within the art world. I will see something happening or read about something in a science book and will find it beautiful.

YOUR WORK BRINGS TO MIND A FEW DIFFERENT METHODS OF CREATING ART, INCLUDING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH, DRAWING AND A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT ARTISTIC PRECEDENTS. DO YOU SEE YOURSELF WORKING AT THE INTERSECTION OF THESE VARIOUS TRADITIONS?

I’m not sure that I’m at the intersection of those things as that would suggest an intention, perhaps. An amount of recent work has crossed over into scientific areas, but I think this reflects the limitations of what we decide art can be. I’m very interested in singular concepts, or ideas and the artwork will normally result as a physical representation of that. The material and method are very important, but they are driven by the concept.

I’ve been keen to try to produce artwork with a notion of the scientific paradigm, in the sense that the scientific paradigm is involved in discovery and the creation of knowledge. I try to produce artworks that efficiently distill a piece of knowledge into a physical form.

HOW DID YOU PREPARE FOR YOUR FIRST MUSEUM EXHIBITION?

Almost all of the work has been made specifically for this show and it’s a body of work that represents my current thoughts. The more complex work has taken years to develop so this show is a culmination of those efforts and it’s really interesting to see these works together.

WHERE DO YOU SEE DESIGN FITTING INTO YOUR PRACTICE?

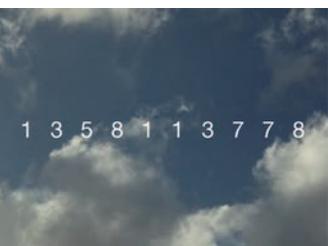
I’ve worked as a graphic designer in the past so I have an awareness of design. In artworks such as *Unix Time*, which is an iPhone/iPad app, I’m directly competing with things that are normally ‘designed’. I think having experience in this field is useful, just as training as an artist is useful if you’re going to show art to people. You need to be aware of what’s gone before you and what’s around you.

I don't believe there are clear dividing lines between design and art—there's no need for there to be one.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW THAT HAS INFLUENCED YOUR STUDIO PRACTICE?

My trained background is a BA in Fine Art in Hull, UK and a MA in sculpture at the Royal College of Art in London. But before I started my BA I was accepted onto an Engineering BSc and changed my mind at the last minute. So I've always been a keen maker with a scientific edge. Hull was an important place to start out—it's a big industrial city with lots of space to make art and lots of cheap materials. But the Royal College of Art probably had the greatest influence. Even though I was on the sculpture course where you were encouraged to do whatever you wanted, my work was already quite experimental. There I discovered that boundaries weren't very important and the nature of my work started to really spread out.

My studio practice is between a warehouse space in South Bermondsey in London and various rooms in my home (for photographic and computer based things). I make absolutely everything that I can in my artwork. There are some things that I can't do, such as make various electrical parts, but to me it's vital to try to do everything possible. Through the process of making something, you discover vital things about the work and move the work along. I recently set up a darkroom in my house in order to print all the black and white photos for the *Eclipse* work.



Almost all of my artwork has gone through a number of stages—always trying to refine it to remove what is distracting or unnecessary and improve how the piece demonstrates and brings across the concept. So my various studio areas resemble a workshop, a laboratory, various computers and sometimes an art studio.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE VISITORS LEARN FROM YOUR EXHIBITION?

I would like people to come away having discovered something new. My aim with most of my work is to capture that joyful feeling of realisation. There is a moment when you suddenly understand something for the first time that is quite beautiful. Much of my work is about capturing that feeling.

HOW DID YOU DEVELOP THE TECHNOLOGY FOR THE TORNADO AND RAINDROP PIECES?

After seeing the *Wizard of Oz* I wanted to see a tornado. Living in England the chances were quite slim so I wanted to build my own. I started off by looking on the internet for examples and researching how they worked. There were a number of science museums who'd built demonstration tornadoes and instructions from the 50's on how to make tabletop tornadoes. Most of these involved lots of fans and enclosed areas, but I wanted to

reduce the thing to the bare minimum and make it completely open so you could walk through it. It was also important that you weren't presented with a magic trick, with the parts hidden away. I think that an important part of the piece is in the understanding of the process. I spent about 2 years in the studio trying to get it to work, it was a joy to see it for the first time.



The *Raindrop* work began when I saw a documentary about weather. There was a tiny segment where a machine in a laboratory in Manchester held a raindrop in mid air. I got in-touch with the scientists involved and was

sent the original paper describing the experiment involving the machine. I had very little to go on other than a small sketch of the outline of the machine and a description of what was inside. Like the tornado it's been about 2 years to get the machine to this point, but the knowledge that it was possible makes you more determined.

YOUR OBJECTS ARE BEAUTIFUL AND AMAZING TO LOOK AT, DO YOU THINK ABOUT BEAUTY WHEN CREATING WORKS OF ART?

I do all the time. Beauty is one of my primary concerns and I'm interested in its relationship with knowledge. I think that one of the most beautiful things is the moment of understanding—a singular point at which you make a leap from one point to another. So in one sense the tornado is beautiful in a traditional way, form, light etc. But when you stand in the room you will feel all the air move around you, the structure will direct you a little more to what is happening, then you might understand the vortex in the centre and suddenly there's a shift of understanding.

The rainbow, *Everything we are capable of seeing*, is all about beauty in a way. It was made as a reposte to the poem *Lamia* by Keats. In that poem he suggests that Newton has somehow "unweaved the rainbow" by explaining it. But the understanding of things does not destroy their beauty—it can enhance it. *Everything we are capable of seeing* is entirely about beauty and understanding.

LAST QUESTION—WHAT IS THE BEST ADVICE YOU WERE EVER GIVEN AND BY WHO?

To pick out one person would undermine the collective experiences that made me do what I do—which is to experiment and wonder about the world. I was always encouraged to question things by my parents and that has had the biggest impact on me and is the most important thing you can do. This questioning is what drives me as an artist. The most influential people to me have never given the kind of advice that comes as a succinct phrase, but instead helped me to make my own decisions and given me tools to do that.





Ask yourself

Recently, McClymont was chosen to be part of the *100 Curators 100 Days* project on Saatchi Online by Carson Chan, Curator of the Marrakech Biennale 4. *100 Curators 100 Days* was a major initiative that recognized talented emerging artists from around the world.

McClymont's artworks are founded on scientific and mathematical concepts. Does there need to be a distinction between works of art and scientific experiments? / Which of these would feel at home in a science museum? / Why or why not?

Exhibition Related Public Programs

FIRST FRIDAY Friday, Feb 1, 2013 | 6–9 p.m.

Meet Alistair McClymont and experience a special presentation of his nighttime rainbow. CAM Raleigh student docents from 6:30–8:30 p.m. Regular museum admission. Free for Members.

ARTIST GALLERY TALK

Saturday, Feb 2, 2013 | 2 p.m.

Meet Alistair McClymont as he gives an informal tour of his current exhibition. Tour is free with museum admission. Free for Members.

HIGH SCHOOL WORKSHOP WITH THE ARTIST

Saturday, Feb 2, 2013 | 10 a.m.–1 p.m.

Participants will engage with Alistair McClymont in a special scientific process which will be documented in photographs and film.

Open to grades 8–12. \$30.

For registration, contact julia_rice@camraleigh.ncsu.edu

Sponsors

Alistair McClymont—*Everything We Are Capable of Seeing* is generously supported by:

The 2012-2013 student docent program is generously supported by:



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Alistair McClymont—*Everything We Are Capable of Seeing* is organized by CAM Raleigh. It is curated by Elysia Borowy-Reeder, executive director of CAM Raleigh and coordinated at CAM Raleigh by Kate Shafer, gallery and exhibitions manager and Jeff Bell, lead preparator with special thanks to exhibitions intern, Chloe Woodson. Exhibition graphic design by Joshua Gajownik, NC State's College of Design, Class of 2004.

camraleigh.org/exhibitions/2013mcclymont/