

25<sup>th</sup> November – 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2005

Private view – Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November, 7 – 9pm

---

BEARSPACE is proud to present the first solo show by Helen Barff. Barff completed an MA in Drawing at Camberwell College last year and graduated from Fine Art and Art History at Goldsmiths in 1999. For 'Things from the Thames' Helen presents a series of found objects from the Thames shore. These are exhibited as photograms and then covered in a fine layer of felt.

Barff repeatedly walked a set route at low tide along four local sites in Deptford and Greenwich, picking up any object unnatural or incongruous to the river. The four sites were chosen for their historic significance, among them South East London's once working dockyards, manufacturing plants and leisure spaces, all detailed below.

Each object carries an anonymous history, weathered by the river for varying lengths of time. Barff mixes up her finds of industrial waste of a different era, bottles and oyster shells with a bicycle, plastic toys and balloons. The ghostly images of these appear in the form of photograms. These are made with direct contact between light, the object and photographic paper. The negative shadows become something else, beyond the object. This careful exposure to a flash of light allows the object to shine, appearing to give out light.

The conclusion of this process is a ritual wrapping of the object in a fine, tight layer of felt; burying it again, in a meticulous, lengthy and tactile process. In contrast to the photograms, the felt objects seem to absorb light, as if blind. The felt around the object acts like a second skin, both protective and concealing, as in an embalming or mummification. Through these methods Helen is attempting to capture something in-between positive / negative, presence / absence, leaving a permanent skin or remnant. The materials she uses reflect the main recurring themes of her work; light and touch.

Collections were taken from the banks of Payne's Wharf, Deptford, which was built in the mid-19th Century for a company that manufactured boilers. Secondly, the tidal stretch of Deptford Creek, which has been the site of various industries and more recently of regeneration. Further down river is an area directly below the Greenwich Maritime Museum, which used to be a popular beach. Lastly an industrial stretch between Garnite's Wharf and Enderby's Wharf, including a bay allegedly termed 'Heartbreak Hotel', where jilted lovers threw the belongings of their partners in the river.