

A Place Bears the Name

By Lydia Porter and Sam Wills

Press Release

Functioning as a visual essay, *A Place Bears the Name* explores the social and psychological effects of the ruins found within Crystal Palace Park. Developed as a collaborative research project, Lydia Porter and Sam Wills have created a body of work that investigates the spectre of an empire that is felt but not seen.

At the top expanse of the park, nestled amongst the Sphinxes and headless statues ever falling slowly into disrepair, sits a small birdhouse made by Sam Wills in 2018. Within the trees overlooking the ruins of the Crystal Palace, the birdhouse nods to a more peripheral history attributed to The Great Exhibition and to our inadvertent interaction with a site both saturated-with, and detached from the past. Departing from the birdhouse as the project's starting point, *A Place Bears the Name* explores the ruins within the park as a gateway into ideas of collective amnesia, colonial memory and national melancholia. Viewing the site as an invisible ruin, Lydia and Sam investigate the long-term effects of The Great Exhibition, focusing on the absence and negative space left by the palace. Drawing on Freud's theory of Melancholia and Paul Gilroy's subsequent theory of Post-Colonial Melancholia, the mostly immaterial ruins are read as ghosts haunting the contemporary site.

Employing video, print, text and collage, *A Place Bears the Name* layers research and context to create re-assemblages of fragmented material as a calling-to-being of the indeterminate loss embedded within the site. Paradoxes emerge from reinforced concrete posing as classical ruins, Egyptian Sphinxes as playground artefacts, the footprint of a building that altered the landscape and then burnt to the ground. Montage is used as an investigative medium to examine the site's complexities as a contested space - hanging in the balance between redevelopment, canonised memorialisation, and simply remaining as a public park.

Lydia Porter and Sam Wills are both South London based artists who met while studying for an undergraduate degree at Chelsea College of Art. Lydia primarily works with video, investigating the medium's materiality, exploring the surface of the image as an active site and a means of translation. Sam's practice concerns itself with ideas of the serendipitous encounter and employs alternative methods of distribution and display as its primary artistic medium. Both artists often draw upon specific sites of personal, political or historic interest to contextualise their practices.