

*APT*Elan 1

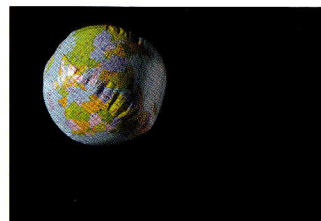
2016

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Gideon Koppel

Dear David, Richard and Ed

Firstly a belated thank you for the day at the Elan Valley the other week. Whatever the outcome, it was a really stimulating and enjoyable afternoon.

I also very much appreciated the efforts The Arts Council of Wales are making to support art practice with an emphasis on and interest in 'the process' rather than the production of artifact. This seems to me, to be a very valuable and necessary approach to art as a genuinely exploratory experience, and one which defines its own moral constructs. It is particularly poignant in a culture where the unknown and unknowable is hardly tolerated and where creative processes in higher education are reduced to assessed curricula and modules.

The Elan Valley with its magnificent quality of wilderness combined with a sculptural network of reservoirs and dams is certainly a provocative and rich environment to work in and with.

The first and perhaps most striking moment of the day was rounding the corner to the visitor's centre and being confronted with the site of a building set against a backdrop of the magnificent dam, which resembles a set from a Tarkovsky film. It is that powerful visual relationship between the engineering and landscape that made me wonder whether Welsh Water have missed a trick with the plans for the Visitor Centre. Wales does seem to be lacking in distinctive and innovative contemporary architecture - so any development of that building is an extraordinary opportunity for an international competition, rather than settling for the safety of a relatively local commission.

As an example of architecture built within and for a specific landscape I would recommend looking at the work of a Swiss architect called Peter Zumthor - who invited me to meet with him at his studio in Switzerland in connection with a project I want to develop on the Hafod Estate. In particular it was The Brother Klaus Field Chapel [<http://www.archdaily.com/106352/bruder-klaus-field-chapel-peter-zumthor/>] and the The Steilneset Memorial in Vardø [<http://www.dezeen.com/2012/01/03/steilneset-memorial-by-peter-zumthor-and-louise-bourgeois/>] which drew my attention to his work.

When I visited The Brother Klaus Field Chapel - about 50Km south of Cologne - there was a car park being built in the nearby village, simply to accommodate the very

large numbers of visitors from all over the world. Innovative architecture attracts this kind of pilgrimage... perhaps more than art.

The Chief Engineer's house was another particularly memorable space we were shown on the Estate. It has a quality of a museum. I couldn't imagine living there as was suggested, but imagined it as a place of accumulated still lives, of found objects and lost memories. I wanted to take a shelf in one of the cupboards to keep a photograph, perhaps some stones... . The quality of light, frozen and forgotten time had a distinctiveness which I think should be preserved.

Both houses we visited and the expanse of land evoke a powerful sense of silence and solitary living. I guess that it is a cliché, but that is a potential throughout the estate. It makes me wonder about whether I would want to share and consequently break the immersion in that experience... so the idea of overlapping residencies seemed out of kilter with the place. But perhaps because I have an equivalent quality of isolation where I live for more than half the year, it does not emerge as a provocative or particularly poignant dynamic for me personally.

The land, the water, the incongruous and vast Victorian engineering works... all excited me. In the space of two hours I filled my notebook with scribbles about ploughing geometric shapes of land and planting potatoes and other crops; of huge projections with screens mirroring the flat expanse of the dams; of naked performance artists scaling the dams; of large format photographs... . I could go on and on... but it is too much stuff and perhaps 'stuff' for 'stuff's sake.

And at the same time I am tiring of the current trend in art, now largely associated with academia, to attach itself to the somewhat tired rhetoric of exploring 'place, memory, landscape...' or even worse 'dealing' with them. Art too has become the champion of ideas about ecologies and environmental polemics. Very worthy perhaps, but is that really art? I hang on to Deleuze's clear and confident statement that:

The work of art is not an instrument of communication. The work of art has nothing to do with communication. The work of art does not contain any information at all.

After all my meanderings, there is really only one thing that I want to do in and in relation to the Elan Valley, one work that is for me 'essential'. In 1978 after two years of undercover surveillance, the police busted one

of the largest LSD manufacturing rings in the world centered on two houses: one near Llanidloes and the other near Tregaron. Curiously The Elan Estate lies between the two. The police confiscated approximately 6.5 million tabs - some of which, it was rumored, were destined for the local West Wales reservoirs... with the intention getting half of Birmingham as high as kites.

While we were driving around the reservoirs, the memory of that story came back to me. I was a teenager at school in Aberystwyth when that news broke... and thought it was a work of genius. I did again. Here are these reservoirs of water - a life-line for the largest conurbation in Britain - concealed as innocuous lakes in a landscape as places of beauty and recreation. Yet each of these lakes has something like a plug hole in a bath... and a pipe which drains the water away. The gravity-fed arteries of water travel across country... are not only discrete, but clandestine - they are not marked on a map because they were [are?] thought to be potential terrorist targets.

I was immediately curious to know the route; how long it takes for the water to travel across Wales to Birmingham; how does the water disperse throughout the City...?

Then there are questions about the politics of water ownership? Is this more than a metaphor for Welsh independence?

I do not want to put LSD into the Elan water, but I do want to trace the powerful connection and dependency between the Elan Reservoirs and Birmingham, Wales and England. I do want to connect the rural isolation with urban chaos.

Instead of LSD I propose inserting a large quantity of brightly coloured, inert dye into the controlled water system. Several days [?] later when the people of Birmingham turn on their taps, flush the toilet... and their water will be this lurid liquid.

The project will require extensive research - not simply into setting up and controlling the action itself - but in the research which will contextualize the action as an art work. This contextualization would incorporate a political, historical and social background to the work and perhaps in some way to find ways of registering and monitoring its effect.

I realize that this is a provocative proposal which will doubtless encounter numerous bureaucratic, legal and ethical obstacles. But at the same time, I think that

overcoming the obstacles is part of the work and my chutzpah is part of my idiom as an artist.

I sincerely believe that this is a defining piece of work for the Elan Valley and Welsh Water. It is not a piece of decoration or a token gesture to be laid at the alter of environmental political correctness. This is a project which will involve millions of people and will suggest to all those people some vital questions of our time.

Gideon Koppel
March 2014

From: David Alston <[REDACTED]>
Subject: RE: APT Elan
Date: 20 October 2014 12:43:55 GMT+01:00
To: Gideon Koppel <[REDACTED]>, Richard Powell <[REDACTED]>
Cc: "Edmund Parsons ([REDACTED])" <[REDACTED]>

Dear Gideon,

As you can imagine there has been quite a bit of thinking about what you put back us and, forgive me, I am mandated to pick up a discussion with you but have been under the cosh for other pressing matters. Welsh Water see all sorts of reasons why your idea, neat as it is on paper, would be something they couldn't really countenance. Also at this stage it felt like a defined project and over the year we are still looking for artists to engage with the place and with possibilities rather than move explicitly to projects. We still need the quality of your thinking on Elan.

Is there a time you are in Cardiff in the near future? I need to pick up the threads with you. We are getting underway and Richard and Ed are timetabling stays in...but with you I need to meet and carry the discussion a bit further.

Best

David

David Alston

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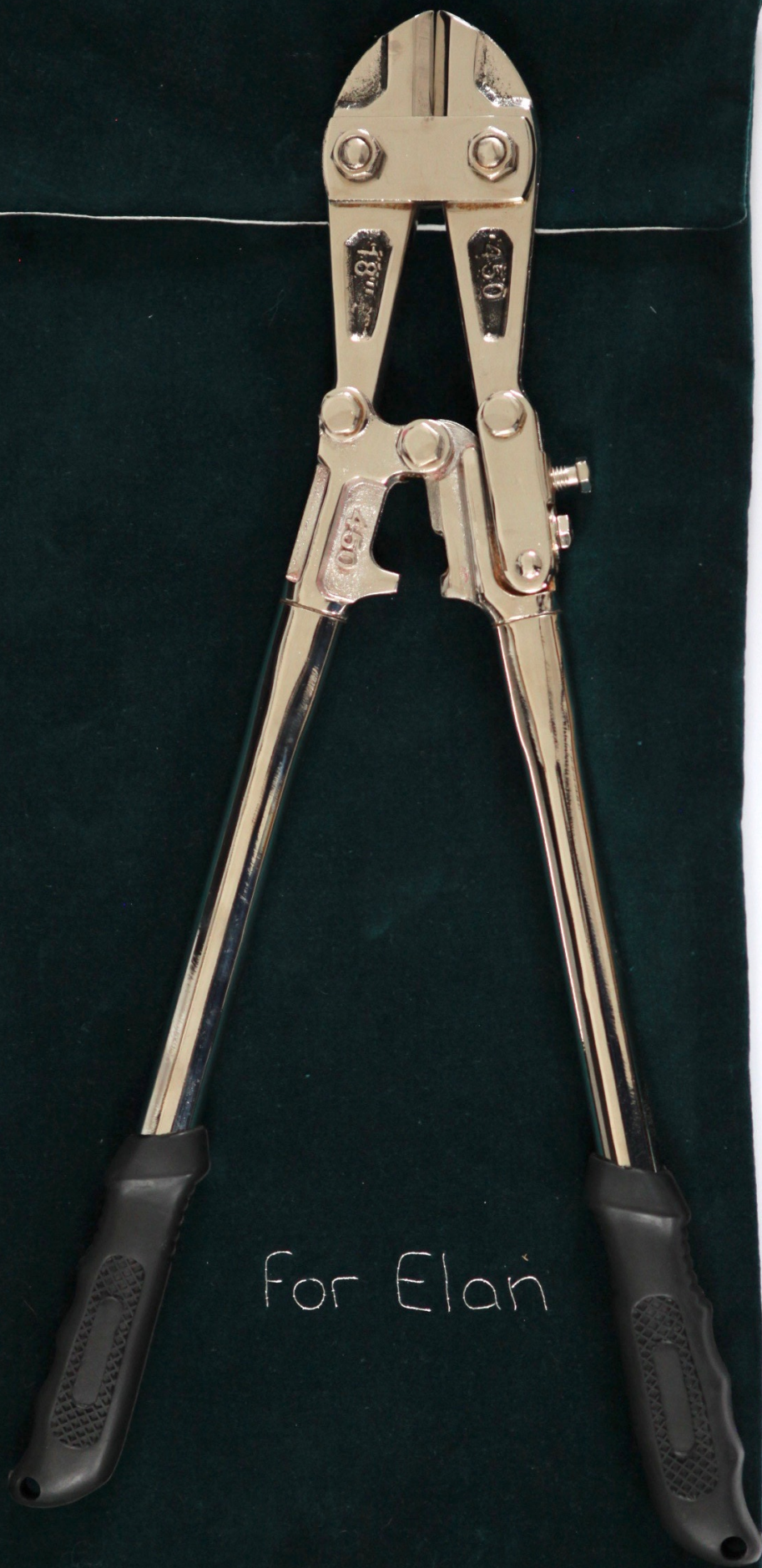
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For Elan



For Elan