

*Sacred and Profane History*, it aimed to represent 'at one view the rise, revolutions and fall of the principal states and empires of the world'. While Hawes's idiosyncratic chart conveys the impossibility of objectively mapping time, and is effectively undone by its own conceit, the explicit connection that his map makes between notions of time and imperialist ideologies (Africa, for example, barely makes an appearance) underscores how temporal measurements designed in the service of capital are imbricated with sexist, racist and classist modes of control and dominance.

All the practitioners featured in 'A Synchronology' have, over the past decade, worked with the Common Guild in Glasgow, a non-profit organisation comprising exhibition spaces and a reading room. That Paterson could draw together a show from its roster of artists to celebrate its ten-year anniversary that so intensively and coherently grapples with questions of temporality testifies to how fundamental these issues have become to contemporary production. Who organises our time and why? How might feminist, queer and anti-racist notions of temporality contest neo-imperialist capitalist cycles and reductive designations of 'productive' versus 'unproductive' occupations? Keeping these questions in mind, this exhibition proposes, is vital if we are to retain agency and awareness in relation to definitions of time. ■

**CATHERINE SPENCER** is a lecturer in art history at the University of St Andrews.

## Andrew Lacon: Fragments Kate V Robertson: This Mess is Kept Afloat

Dundee Contemporary Arts  
9 December to 25 February

With their respective exhibitions 'Fragments' and 'This Mess is Kept Afloat', artists Andrew Lacon and Kate V Robertson both respond to the site of DCA, producing new works that acknowledge their environment and instigate a relationship with it. Presumably coincidentally, both artists have produced



**Kate V Robertson**  
'This Mess is Kept Afloat' 2017  
Installation view

floor pieces that visitors are encouraged to walk on, Lacon's *Fragments*, 2017, the sole work in his display, is a raised terrazzo platform framed by the walls of the room, while in among the larger show, Robertson's *Restore*, 2017, revisits the concrete casts of Tupperware, takeaway containers etc that visitors to Glasgow International 2016 will be familiar with, again using them to form a cobbled floor of sorts.

While floor-based pieces, specifically those intended to be walked on, have established canonical precedents such as those by Carl Andre, it still feels antithetical to proper gallery behaviour to step onto the surface of an artwork. This is something that Lacon toys with, intentionally leaving a border of gallery floor in front of the piece, while expanding to fill the rest of the room, allowing the possibility to enter the space without walking on the piece, encouraging a degree of uncertainty. Even knowing full well the artist's intention, the temptation nonetheless remains to wait for someone else to walk on the work, thereby granting tacit permission to those around them.

Lacon's floor consists of square pieces of terrazzo, constructed from white marble and cement, with pigment added to create sections of red, blue, green, yellow and orange in a geometric pattern, echoing the irregular diagonals of the building's ceiling as well as the crazy paving found in suburban gardens and driveways throughout the UK. From the right viewing position, the work finds further resonance wherein its colourful grid is almost replicated in the sign of a nearby Mecca Bingo seen through the window. Visiting midway through the exhibition, the surface now acts as a record of the visitors who have walked on it, their footsteps having gradually worn down the material's surface, even creating breaks around the corners of some of the terrazzo pieces, demonstrating the surprising fragility of material that is perceived as being sturdy and hardwearing.

Robertson's *Restore* can be read similarly, yet in even more detail, because the individual pieces of her floor are more sensitive and liable to break, creating a surface that shows you the patterns of visitor behaviour, with some areas left almost untouched while others, particularly around the piece's border with the gallery floor, break and crumble. Robertson finds a surprising degree of variance within her loose grid of concrete forms, giving the viewer something intricate to examine. The breadth of colour is also surprising, with the concrete showcasing a range of grey-blue and warm pink tones, which are mirrored in the wall piece behind, *Ad Infinitum*, 2017, where Robertson has plastered the wall in a rectangular pattern of blank *Financial Times*-pink newsprint and pale blue billboard paper.

Similarly to Lacon, it is interesting to examine visitor behaviour when interacting with Robertson's *Restore*, and while people confidently stride atop Lacon's floor, Robertson's elicits a more tentative response, as the individual pieces make for an uneven surface which moves underfoot. These movements create the pleasing sound of the concrete casts knocking against one another as we walk across the surface. This is interrupted, however, when a breakage occurs, causing a satisfying sensation. In allowing for the pieces to break with relative ease, Robertson plays with the perception of concrete as a solid, reliable building material, making us reconsider the permanence of the infrastructure around us.

While traversing Robertson's floor, something in the far corner of the room catches the eye, an object rapidly spinning, seen through a small window in the gallery wall seemingly created specifically to elicit this sort of curious reaction. This is *Latent Waste*, 2017, and as the spinning pauses, the mystery object is shown to be a rough chunk of polystyrene hanging in what looks

like a small tiled recess in the wall, although these 'tiles' are in fact undeveloped photographs (Robertson once again using material in unexpected ways). In encouraging viewers over, she entraps them in a sort of voyeuristic act, since peering through the small, secretive window, looking into what appears like a tiled bathroom, feels like encroaching on something private.

The idea of 'waste', as referred to in the work's title, is a recurring theme throughout Robinson's exhibition, with various waste products being re-formed into art objects; whether in attaching a motor to a chunk of discarded polystyrene packaging, casting disposable takeaway containers in concrete or crushing seemingly endless eggshells for *Terra Bits*, 2017, Robinson seems fascinated by detritus, things that are discarded and considered useless. She takes this a step further with *Extra*, 2017, the title implying that these sculptures are created from resin left over from her 'Stratas', 2017, series exhibited adjacent. In applying the same critical eye towards her own work that she does to society more widely, Robertson demonstrates a thoughtfulness in her practice, an engaging willingness to think small as well as big. ■

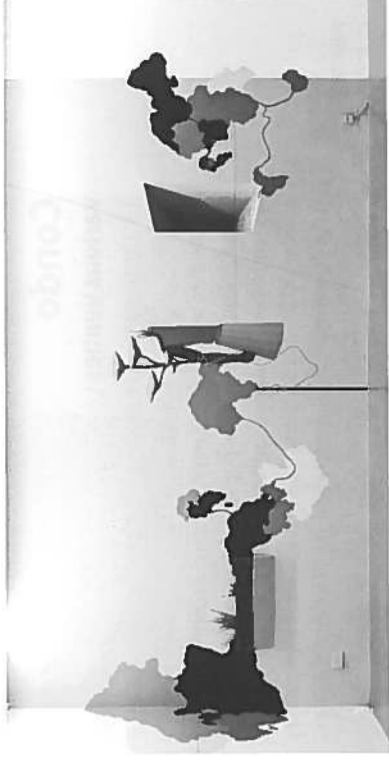
**TOM EMERY** is a writer and curator based in Manchester.

## Otobong Nkanga: The Breath from Fertile Grounds

Temple Bar Gallery Dublin  
8 December to 10 February

The network is integral to Otobong Nkanga's practice. It is what connects one idea to another, what turns conversation into collaboration, labour into goods, research into realisation. The network finds its form in her visualisation of unseen, intangible channels, distributing information and objects while incrementally transforming them in the process, and in her cultivation of a variety of disparate, even contradictory, readings around a chosen material. In Nkanga's previous works, precious metals served to represent both the economic and the aesthetic, denoting value as commodities (as forms of currency but also as components in computers and smartphones) and as decoration, while pointing to her own cultural background as a Nigerian based in Antwerp, a hub of the world's diamond trade. As Natasha Ginwala has written: 'the mineral morphs into performative terrain – as groundwork – across Nkanga's work and into a testimonial subject, interwoven with the artist's biography'. Recounting Nkanga's youth in Nigeria, her habit of drawing images in mica on the asphalt pavements, and her hobby of collecting minerals, Ginwala also acknowledges that this firsthand testimony is simply one example of the many readings contained within the object, and a demonstration of Nkanga's 'continually excavated knowledge across disciplinary thresholds'. Material is therefore a nexus for ideas around technology, geology, economics, colonialism, the personal and the political.

In *The Breath from Fertile Grounds*, an installation of entwined, interrelated sculptures and wall paintings, this connectivity is literally represented through lines. A waist-high horizontal band stretches along the gallery walls, undulating, diverging, transforming from the diagrammatical into disembodied limbs and organs, shapes of shaded colours and passages of writing. The line becomes an iron rod in *Hands/shake*, 2017, connecting the central pillars of the exhibition space and, in the middle, cradling a lichen-covered rock. In another section, a metal stem emerges



**Otobong Nkanga**  
'The Breath from Fertile Grounds' 2017  
Installation detail

from the dirt of a glass plant box and branches diagonally into open air, before reattaching to the adjacent wall. Elsewhere, the line angles outwards, turns sculptural, executes a neat twist (a decorative flourish adapted from the wrought iron gates of Dublin's Guinness Factory) and realigns itself into a holder for several overlapping sheets of fabric.

While Nkanga's preparatory research involved several different lines of enquiry – from visits to Dublin's botanical gardens, the National Museum of Ireland, the Guinness Factory (the famous stout, while seen as a quintessentially Irish beverage, is now more popular in Nigeria) to meetings with masons, scientists and writers – her response to these exchanges is necessarily subjective, tinged with conjecture and speculation. As curator Caroline Hancock explains, the artist's initial, almost impressionistic visit was followed by a more intensive installation period within the gallery, working on the wall drawing and the placement of certain fabricated pieces. As an interloper in the gallery, therefore, the artist imbues her chosen materials with a perspective that is conspicuously incomplete. Where uncertain, she lets others take over – bespoke objects, commissioned texts, unruly plant life – or makes room for second-hand knowledge, fragments of social history, even stereotypes and misunderstandings. If the arrangement feels tentative, then perhaps this is a consequence of Nkanga's engagement with her environment: a relationship that is inevitably half-formed and ambiguous, based on informal encounters and loose associations. This haziness also finds its way into the interpretation of the installation. The patches of colour recall both maps of vaguely familiar territories and patterns of camouflage, as if alluding to the mutability of such undefined, abstract elements. A relief of brickwork with a trunk-like protrusion appears as both an architectural offcut and an uncontained outgrowth. *We could be allies*, 2017, suggests a conduit from one item to the next. A pipe plunged into organic matter seems to contaminate its neighbouring parts; an amorphous blob of mottled clay clings limply to the pole; stains of mildew spread over hanging sheets; a perpendicular walking stick is encrusted with limescale. The layered cloths of printed texts, each page partially obscuring another underlying message, bear writings by Nkanga and the poet Doireann Ní Ghríofa. These writings, intended as 'an invitation to different writers for the emergence of multiple narratives, timeframes and languages', capture Nkanga's working method, where distinct media and materials, and their attendant associations, intersect and infect each other. As one passage asks: 'If I connect to you / If I am consumed by you / If I crumble with you / Then what do we call us? what can we become?' ■

**CHRIS CLARKE** is a critic and senior curator at the Glucksman, Cork, Ireland.