

Turner Contemporary

Hamish Fulton: Walk
(17 January – 7 May 2012)

'I am an artist who walks, not a walker who makes art.'

Walk is Hamish Fulton's first solo exhibition in the UK since 2002 and includes a body of work made over four decades. The Canterbury-based artist (born 1946) has been producing photographs, text works and sketches resulting from the experience of solo and group walks since the early 1970's. At the heart of his practice is the belief in walking as an art form in its own right. Fulton has worked with Turner Contemporary over the last four years to conceive this exhibition for the gallery.

Fulton studied at St. Martin's College of Art in the late 1960's and was keen to react against art made at the time. He is one of a group of artists who were exploring new forms of art and sculpture not necessarily resulting in the production of objects. His work thereafter evolved in stages, but all involved physical walking. Fulton wanted to emphasise the activity and his engagement with nature. In 1973, after walking over 1000 miles across Britain, he decided to only make art deriving from the experience of walking. Although only Fulton experiences the walk itself, the resulting notes, text and images allow us to engage with his experience.

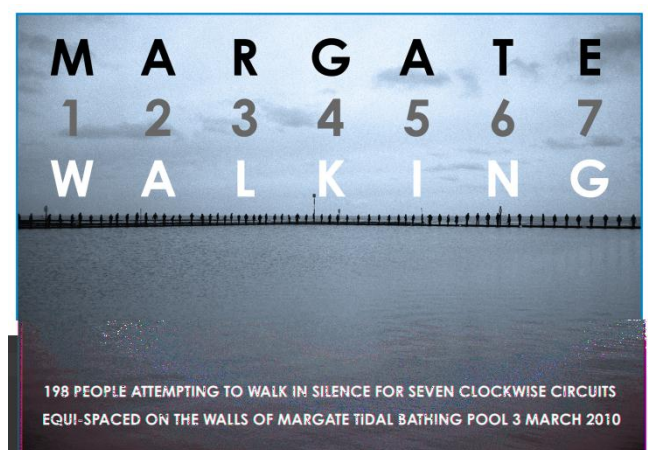
For Fulton walking can be many things. It is a meditative experience with a clear beginning and end. Participants on group walks are asked to follow simple rules to help focus on the walking experience. Counting while walking and the repetition of routes a number of times encourages concentration and provides a method of measuring the walk in the landscape. Walking can also be a physical challenge and mountaineering provides Fulton with a form of walking based on an extreme relationship with nature. He closely identifies with mountaineers and their approach to walking, perhaps more so than to the approach and work of other artists.

Central to Fulton's approach is a direct connection with nature and a desire to leave the landscape unchanged by his presence as he passes through. This differentiates him from 'Land Artists' who may actively seek to leave a mark or alter the landscape in some way. His commitment to sustainability extends to the exhibition itself; the works selected have travelled no further than from the artist's studio in Canterbury.

Key works:

Margate Walking

On 3 March 2010, 198 people took part in a group walk in Margate; one of a series of three walks led by the artist, commissioned by Turner Contemporary. Participants were asked to walk slowly around Margate's boating pool in silence seven times, whilst maintaining a distance of one metre from the person in front of them. Walkers appear as a continuous moving line on the beach. The film – the first that the artist has produced – shows the location before and after the event, highlighting the fleeting nature of the



Margate Walking 2010 © Hamish Fulton

experience. Fulton has stated that *'a walked line, unlike a drawn line, can never be erased'*.

The number seven is significant for Fulton, appearing not only in this work but also in wall works describing a series of seven one-day walks in Kent between 1996 and 1998. He describes seven as a 'readymade' number to walk with; a number that already exists in nature and history, e.g. seven days in a week.

Chinese Economy, Tibetan Justice

This recent work comments directly on the political context in which the walk took place. Resulting from expeditions on the Nepal and Tibet border, it refers to China's occupation of Tibet. Fulton has previously described his art as a form of protest, allowing him to comment on our impact on the environment and native cultures. He believes the role of the artist is to present opinions of life which can't be found in politics or media: *'Art can point to something or speak about life in a democratic society.'*



Chinese Economy, Tibetan Justice © Hamish Fulton

The term 'Kailash' in this text refers to the most sacred of mountains located behind the Himalayan divide in Western Tibet. 'Kora' is Tibetan for the devotional practice of walking in a clockwise direction around a holy place. In 2007 Fulton and his daughter undertook such a walk around Mount Kailash along an ancient pilgrimage footpath, helped by a Tibetan nun. When he returned in 2011 to complete another Kora around this mountain, he was shocked, though not surprised, to find that the ancient footpath had been destroyed to make way for the foundations of a new road. Fulton highlights that the new Chinese road signs all point counter-clockwise.

Fulton's text works provide us with information about the location, time and length of his walks. Often included are descriptions of experiences or incidents that could not be portrayed in a photograph. The typography used fills the squares created. He aims to create visual patterns, free of odd spaces. Letters have different personalities throughout a work, with different colours and font sizes providing character to words.

The Pilgrim's Way

One of the earliest works in the exhibition results from a walk along an ancient route known as the Pilgrim's Way between Winchester and Canterbury in 1971. Fulton has made a number of walks along such routes in England, Japan and Spain. Pilgrimage provides another approach to walking; similar to mountaineering it is as much about the journey experience as reaching the destination. Natural features such as boulders and trees act as natural markers to locate oneself in remote environments. This is complimented with images of milestones and signposts elsewhere in the exhibition.

Questions to consider:

- The exhibition puts Fulton's work in a local and international context as his walks take place in Kent, around Britain and around the world. Which walks appeal to you more? Why?
- If Fulton considers walking to be his artwork, how do we view the work displayed in the exhibition? Can you think of any other ways a walk could be documented?
- Which type of work tells us more about Fulton's experience: text, photographs, sketches or film? Why?
- What role does colour play in some of these works?
- Fulton describes one of the products of a 21 day Mont Blanc trek as 'small, stupid pieces of wood'. How does this contradiction of scale affect our view of this walk?
- How does Fulton's consideration of the gallery architecture add to this exhibition?
- Large text works measure 6m x 6m, but encroach into the room less than 1mm. Can connections be found between Fulton's approach to walking and exhibiting?