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#### Citation Details

##### Citation for the version of the work held in 'OpenAIR@RGU':

<b>PUNTON, L. and SPARK, J., 2012. Back to the things themselves. Available from <i>OpenAIR@RGU</i>. [online]. Available from: <a href="http://openair.rgu.ac.uk">http://openair.rgu.ac.uk</a></b>
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##### Citation for the publisher's version:

<b>PUNTON, L. and SPARK, J., 2012. Back to the things themselves. Exhibition held at Wasps Artists Studios, The Briggait, Glasgow, 20<sup>th</sup> April – 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012.</b>
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# *Back to the Things Themselves*

Lesley Punton & Judy Spark

The Briggait, Galleries 1 & 2: 141 Bridgegate, Glasgow, G1 5HZ

**GLASGOW**  
**INTERNATIONAL**  
**FESTIVAL OF**  
**VISUAL ART**  
**2012**

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**20 APRIL**

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**07 MAY**

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## **Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art: Press Statement:**

Taking place every other year, and combining some of the characteristics of a conventional arts 'biennial' with a more event-based experience, Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art is a unique event in the international calendar with one of the most groundbreaking and dynamic presentations of contemporary visual arts practice. GI is a unique event that offers both globally recognised and emerging Glasgow-based artists across the spectrum of the city's art scene a platform to show new work to both national and international audiences while also introducing the work of important international artists. Since its inception in 2005 the Festival has brought together the key organisations in Glasgow's diverse artistic community, presenting unique events and special commissions rooted in the achievements of the local artistic community, while drawing on important international developments in contemporary art.

# *Back to the Things Themselves*

## Exhibition Statement

Lesley Punton and Judy Spark share a concern in their attempts to bridge a certain sort of gap; that of the difference between the physical experience of specific varieties of 'natural' phenomena or places, and their articulation in human terms. Both feel the impossibility attached to this problem, but nonetheless remain dedicated to its resolution through the making of art. For these two artists, the making of an artwork is a process of interrogating lived experience and it is the language used to express this search, which is also a quest for other varieties of understanding, alternative ways of knowing the world. The question of whether such alternative interpretations are subjective or in some way universal is inherent to the work.

The processes of Punton and Spark sustain common patterns; periods of concentrated engagement with objects and places of interest, an awareness during such engagement, of duration, of breathing, of scale, and working methods which mirror these physical experiences; an almost meditative approach to drawing for example. The results stand as evidence of the inquiry, the process itself is what is important. The bodily experience of phenomena is reflected in the consideration of how, and for how long, the viewer physically encounters the work, which is 'quiet' and aims to draw the viewer into a contemplative 'space' in which they might imagine, or consider, their own process of engagement with 'the things themselves.'

Having recognised the similarities between their working practices, the two artists have begun to pay close attention to their contrasting approaches to the pursuit of an idea; Punton's is deeply experiential, entirely dependent upon the measured contact of her feet with the ground of the remote environments she craves. Spark however, despite a natural bent towards phenomenological thinking and certain Eastern approaches to the natural world, feels unable to completely suspend her embeddedness within technologically bound western culture, for her a revised understanding of one, can only impact the other.

From the dialogue generated by these commonalities of practice, as well as their disjuncture, these artists attempt to probe the gaps between experience, whether natural or technological, and its articulation, with the hope of uncovering the fertile ground of potential new understandings. The resulting work takes the form of drawings, photography and recorded sound.

**The following images detail the work of Judy Spark. The sound files on pages 5 and 8 can be played by clicking on the grey bar at the bottom of the page.**



**View of Gallery 1 (to right of front entrance) from Bridgegate.** *The Things Themselves* can be seen in the window to right of shot, *Instructions for Creating a Gap* is also in the window and *A sort of visual rhythm (Symphoricarpos)* is in the centre of the left hand wall.



**View of Gallery 2 (to left of front entrance) from Bridgegate.** *Listening in the Gap* sits on the table in the foreground. *Orrery (Galium aparine)* can be seen in the centre of the right hand wall. *Morning Broadcast* is in the window to the left, just out of shot.



## Gallery 1

### *The Things Themselves*

Two FM radios and transmitters with digital soundtracks, 2012.

The radios are tuned to two small FM transmitters, installed elsewhere in the gallery, that broadcast a series of softly spoken descriptions, in both male and female voices. The descriptions articulate the natural forms that are the subject of the drawings *A sort of visual rhythm* (*Symphoricarpos*) also situated in gallery 1 and *Orrery* (*Galium aparine*) in gallery 2. The soundtracks coming from the two radios are slightly out of sync with one another, so that two different voices can be heard at any one time.

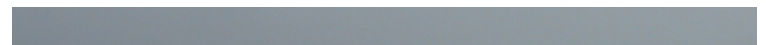
Extract from the spoken texts:

*The arms branch again, this time in three, and again, ever shorter, ever thinner. These spindly lines are contrasted by the solid, fuzzy orbs that are fixed singly or in pairs at their terminal points.*

*It's as if, were it not to cleave and bind to itself and other things and one were able to pick each array up in it's entirety, it would form a sort of perfectly balanced, hanging sculpture or the orrery of some complex universe. But this flowing, binding perfection speaks only from this particular place and time, inseparable from the whole.*

*As the light fades, they seem to recede, become wraith, underexposed versions of themselves.*

**Sound extract: 2.45 minutes:**





*A sort of visual rhythm (Symphoricarpos) detail, graphite on paper, (870 x 680mm) 2012.*



*A sort of visual rhythm (Symphoricarpos) with Lesley Punton's White out receding - Carn Dearg to right.*

## Gallery 2

### *Morning Broadcast*

FM radio and transmitter with digital soundtrack, 2012.

The stirrings of the March dawn chorus can be heard coming from the radio and filtering through the gallery space. The recording is being broadcast from a small FM transmitter elsewhere in the gallery space. The sounds start softly, seeming to come from outside the gallery, and then build to a full chorus.

**Sound extract: 2.45 minutes:**





*Orrery (Galium aparine)*, detail, graphite on paper, (870 x 680mm) 2012.



*Orrery (Galium aparine)*, graphite on paper, (870 x 680mm) 2012.



## *Listening in the Gap*

Bound, printed text of 38 pages, 2011-12

The work consisted of a series of written descriptions detailing what could be heard during a concentrated period of listening in the gaps between broadcasts over the FM spectrum of a *Robert's R25* analogue radio (88 – 108 FM) on the 25th May 2011 between 4.20 and 6.15pm.

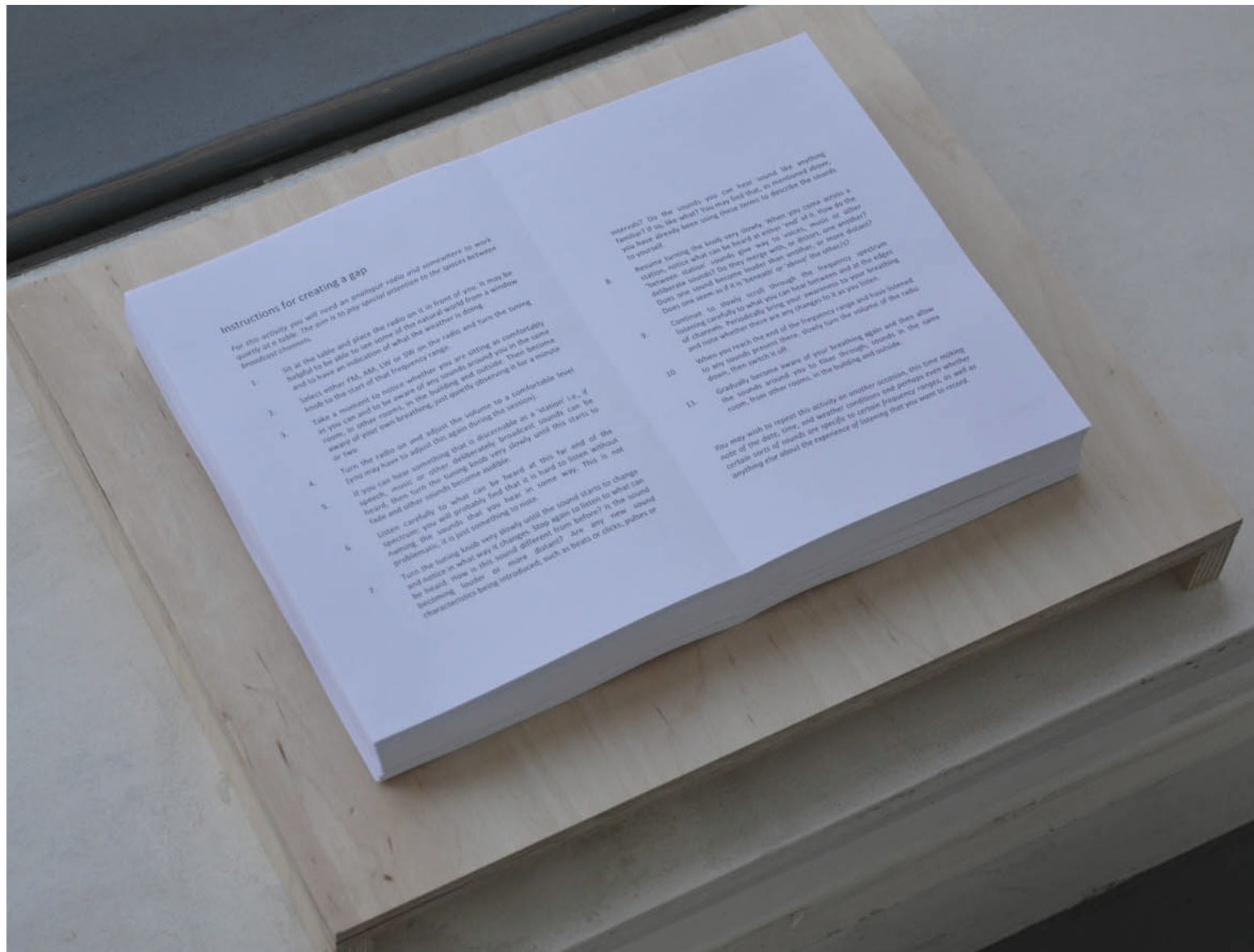
### **Extract from the text:**

*102 – 104*

*Soft hiss, like rain in trees, but at a distance. The spinning high-pitched sound is there but less keen. The odd crackle, like dust on a record, can be heard. These sounds play around the edges of deliberately broadcast ones.*

Through in Gallery 1, printed *Instructions for Creating a Gap* (shown on the next slide) were available for gallery visitors to take away.





# Instructions for creating a gap

For this activity you will need an analogue radio and somewhere to work quietly at a table. The aim is to pay special attention to the spaces between broadcast elements.

1. Sit at the table and place the radio on it in front of you. It may be helpful to be able to see some of the natural world from a window and to have an indication of what the weather is doing.
2. Select either FM, AM, LW or SW on the radio and turn the tuning knob to the start of that frequency range.
3. Take a moment to notice whether you are sitting so comfortably as you can and to be aware of any sounds around you in the same room, in other rooms, in the building and outside. Then become aware of your own breathing, just quietly observing it for a minute or two.
4. Turn the radio on and adjust the volume to a comfortable level. You may have to adjust this again during the session.
5. If you can hear something that is discernible as a 'station' (i.e. if speech, music, or other, deliberately broadcast sounds can be heard), then turn the tuning knob very slowly until this starts to fade and other sounds become audible.
6. Listen carefully to what can be heard at this far end of the spectrum: you will probably find that it is hard to listen without naming the sounds that you hear in some way. This is not problematic, it is just something to note.
7. Turn the tuning knob very slowly until the sound starts to change and notice in what way it changes. Stop again to listen to what can be heard, now in this sound different from before? Is the sound becoming 'louder' or 'more distant'? Are any new sound characteristics being introduced, such as beats or clicks, pulses or

intermittent? Do the 'sounds' you can hear sound like anything familiar? If so, like what? You may find that, as mentioned above, you have already been using these terms to describe the sounds in yourself.

8. Repeat turning the knob very slowly. When you come across a station, notice what can be heard at once: and at it slow do the 'between station' sounds: give way to voices, music, or other deliberate sounds? Do they merge with, or distort, one another? Does one sound become louder than another, or more distant? Does one seem as if it is 'louder' or 'above' the others?
9. Continue to slowly turn through the frequency spectrum, listening carefully to what you can hear between and at the edges of channels. Periodically bring your awareness to your breathing and note whether there are any changes to it as you listen.
10. When you reach the end of the frequency range and have listened to any sounds present there, slowly turn the volume of the radio down, then switch it off.
11. Gradually become aware of your breathing again and then allow the sounds around you to filter through, sounds in the same room, from other rooms, in the building and outside.

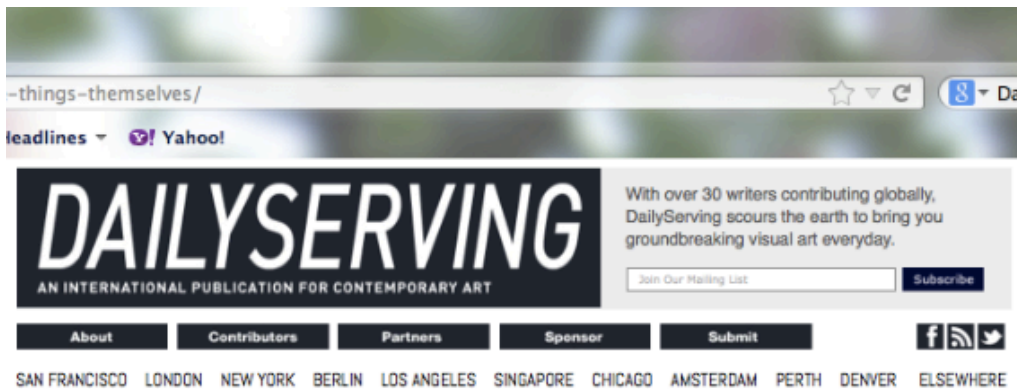
You may wish to repeat this activity on another occasion, this time making note of the date, time, and weather conditions and perhaps even whether certain sorts of sounds are specific to certain frequency ranges, as well as anything else about the experience of listening that you want to record.

## Instructions for creating a gap

*For this activity you will need an analogue radio and somewhere to work quietly at a table. The aim is to pay special attention to the spaces between broadcast channels.*

1. Sit at the table and place the radio on it in front of you. It may be helpful to be able to see some of the natural world from a window and to have an indication of what the weather is doing.
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6. Listen carefully to what can be heard at this far end of the spectrum: you will probably find that it is hard to listen without naming the sounds that you hear in some way. This is not problematic, it is just something to note.
7. Turn the tuning knob very slowly until the sound starts to change and notice in what way it changes. Stop again to listen to what can be heard. How is this sound different from before? Is the sound becoming louder or more distant? Are any new sound characteristics being introduced; such as beats or clicks, pulses or intervals? Do the sounds you can hear sound like anything familiar? If so, like what? You may find that, as mentioned above, you have already been using these terms to describe the sounds to yourself.
8. Resume turning the knob very slowly. When you come across a station, notice what can be heard at either 'end' of it. How do the 'between station' sounds give way to voices, music or other deliberate sounds? Do they merge with, or distort, one another? Does one sound become louder than another, or more distant? Does one seem as if it is 'beneath' or 'above' the other/s?
9. Continue to slowly scroll through the frequency spectrum listening carefully to what you can hear between and at the edges of channels. Periodically bring your awareness to your breathing and note whether there are any changes to it as you listen.
10. When you reach the end of the frequency range and have listened to any sounds present there, slowly turn the volume of the radio down, then switch it off.
11. Gradually become aware of your breathing again and then allow the sounds around you to filter through; sounds in the same room, from other rooms, in the building and outside.

*You may wish to repeat this activity on another occasion, this time making note of the date, time, and weather conditions and perhaps even whether certain sorts of sounds are specific to certain frequency ranges, as well as anything else about the experience of listening that you want to record.*



► GLASGOW

May 3, 2012 Written by [Magdalen Chua](#)

## Back to the Things Themselves



Installation view of Back to the Things Themselves (Lesley Puntun & Judy Spark). Image courtesy of Lesley Puntun.

[Back to the Things Themselves](#), on show at [The Briggait](#), presents artworks by [Lesley Puntun](#) (LP) and [Judy Spark](#) (JS) who both explore possibilities and limits of translating one's lived experience of the environment, and the potential for connections between a subjective experience with universal ways of knowing the world.

Magdalen Chua (MC) had a conversation with Puntun and Spark, as a second part of a feature on exhibitions presented during the [Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art](#) that place emphasis on the process of collaboration and the subjective experience within artistic practice.

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## Extract from the interview with Magdalen Chua: 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2012 at the Briggait

MC: *When did you start looking at the idea of the lived experience and venturing into remote places?*

LP: *I've always believed that you would make something that has some relationship to how you connect with the world. The intensity of the experience of walking and climbing mountains was something important and I became a bit obsessed with it. It felt unnatural not to do something with it*

JS: *My route to making work about lived experience was through a concern with mechanisms like environmentalism that are established to get people to recognize the value of their surroundings. Environmentalism of any kind – whether related to ecology, renewable energies etc., – depends upon the scientific mechanisms that have created the problems that we're facing in the first place. In the last 5 or 6 years, I've begun trying to find ways to think about how people engage with their surroundings. Conversely to Lesley, my landscapes might be right under my feet. It tends to be urban because that's the environment I'm treading on all the time, and that's how things come to consciousness.*

MC: *How did you meet and what led you to decide to collaborate on this exhibition.*

LP: *A mutual friend was planning on hillwalking in 2004 and we started regular weekend walks.*

JS: *We did talk about the possibility of showing work together for years and have had many conversations. When we secured the show, I became very busy. Lesley has a young son and we both work. The collaborative aspect probably starts now in the debriefing of what we've done.*

<http://dailyserving.com/2012/05/back-to-the-things-themselves/>