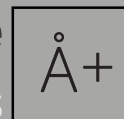


Philip Newcombe
Dead Souls



Souls
come
and
go
in
many
ways,
but
sometimes
it
is
only
their
stories
that
lead
to
the
tricky
dead
end.

Åplus is pleased to once again host Philip Newcombe. This time the artist is presenting a second body of work, a series of drawings (smoke on paper) consisting of 21 conversations with the dead.

The scarce and laconic appearance of these recordings does not need to defend itself with abundant, insistent explanations. Newcombe’s drawing tools were remnants of partially burnt votive candles found on church floors visited by the artist during a voyage around Europe.

Primarily lit on rails next to altars in the memory of the deceased the candles that had fallen down were presumably unable to resist gushes of air or unexpected displacement. Philip Newcombe collected and - back in his atelier - rekindled them. By doing so he was able to extend the candles’ lights (lives) and the memory of the people that they were representing. Newcombe executed this act of revival in the form of taciturn, abstract conversations which in a way recall spiritualistic séances, but in which no questions were asked and no answers were delivered from beyond.

The viewers can perceive their singular outcome in the current exhibition at Åplus, that is, 21 diagrams of smoke piled flatly on white squarish paper sheets.





DS 01, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 02, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 03, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 04, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 05, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 06, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 07, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 08, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch





DS 09, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 10, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 11, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 12, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 13, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 14, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 15, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 16, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch





DS 17, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 18, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 19, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 20, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch



DS 21, 2016-2020
Smoke residue on paper, 30,5 x 30,5 cm / 12 x 12 inch

‘DEAD SOULS’ By Philip Newcombe

Interview with Alexis Vaillant, March 2020

- You have just realized a series of works on 180g white paper. They are all 12 x 12 inches, and they show furtive traces of halos of smoke. What is the story behind them?

‘DEAD SOULS’ is a series of works that are made with candles that had fallen to the ground after having been lit once by people I’ve never met or seen. At some point, these candles have been extinguished by either natural forces (a breeze) or possibly deliberately (a breath); it’s impossible to know. Their length was dependent on the time from being lit to their extinction, and therefore contained separate life-spans. I started collecting them across a number of churches across the whole of Europe between 2016 – 2017.

- Were you traveling a lot at that moment?

I was then living in a van, after deciding to opt out of life for a while. Or opt ‘in’. And driving a lot.

- What struck you so much that you started picking up those extinguished candles?

I remember that at El Rocio in Southern Spain, there was an allocated building specifically for this act of lighting candles for the dead. I was really taken with the ceiling which was blackened by all the smoke from the thousands of candles over the years, all these remnants of projected people and superstition. There seemed to be something purgatorial with the ones that had fallen to the ground. I thought it would be curious to defibrillate them for a short instant and capture their souls. They are, in essence, portraits. Nothing more. Nothing Less.

- Each work has the same format. Why that?

The square format avoids the reading of looking at them head on. This way, they have the ability to move around and inside this frame; seep out and circulate.

- Why 21 ‘portraits’?

‘21’ links to a previous work of mine: a dead bird that weighed exactly 21 grams. There is a hokum theory from the early part of the 20th Century, that the human soul has mass. A doctor who weighed his patients at the moment of death, determined the weight of the departing soul to be 21 grams. Although a somewhat discredited study and not seen to be credible, it holds together as a point of departure to engage the imagination and put into place a counter position to many factual-based knowledge systems we seek today. Analogically, ,21’ is when the work stopped, while allowing a suspension of disbelief. Additionally, it should be noted that this aspect of the work acts as an aside; a brief comment, not a monologue.

- Like a fleeting breath, one can say that your ,DEAD SOULS’ series kind of stages a conversation with the dead.

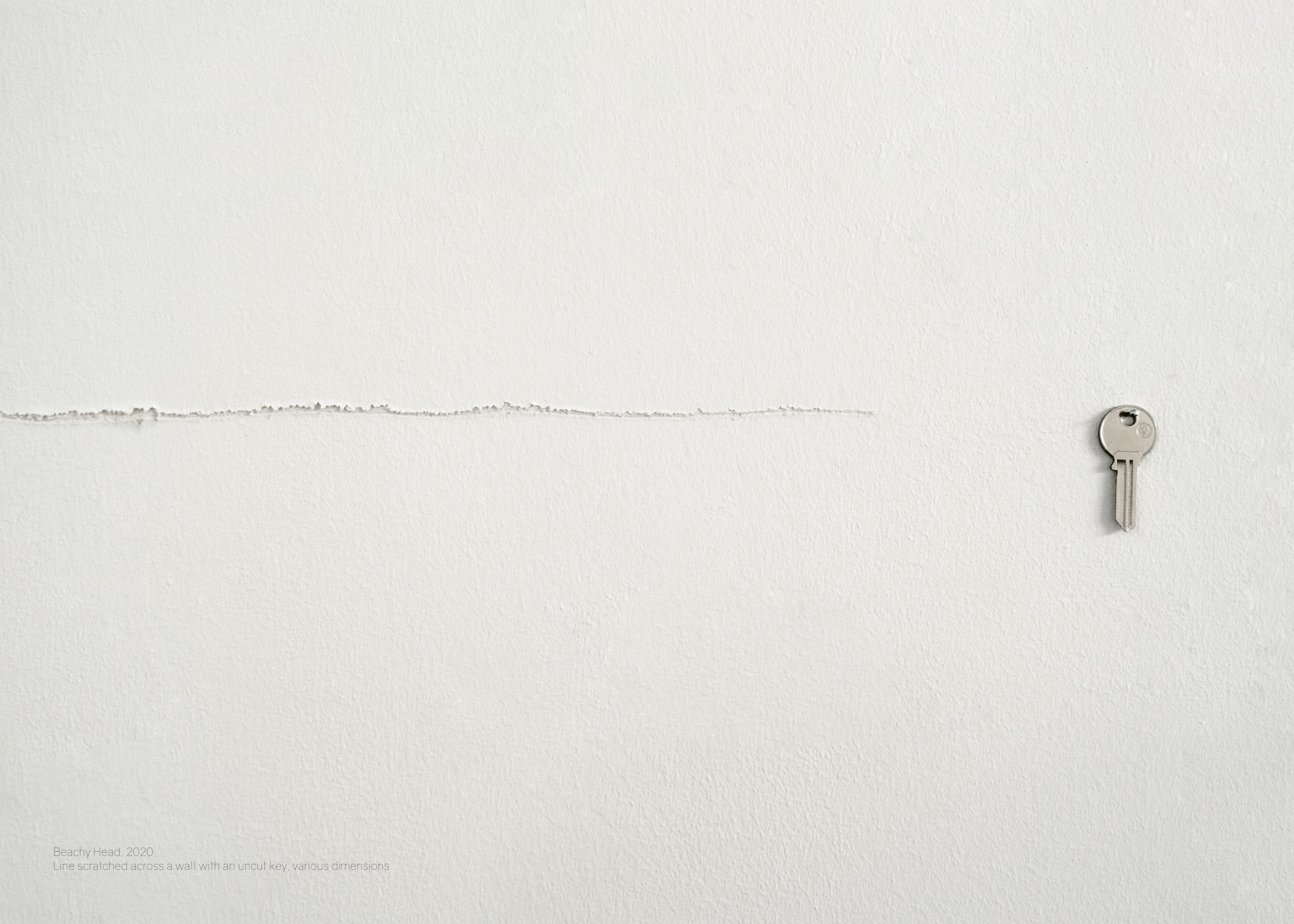
I have used the 2-dimensionality of the work as a tool to be in the 5th dimension. Like often in my work, the process of making was based on intuition, daydreaming, encounters, and conversations. However, instead of a conversation with the dead, I would speak of ‘conversations with the living’. I’ve not tried it with the dead before. In some cases they are probably similar. Depending on who you are talking to...

- ,DEAD SOULS’ make converge pathos and lightness.

It is recurring in what I do. I am into the un-laboured, the fleeting, and the durational possibilities with objects. There’s no surprise that my works act like interruptions (for example, ‘Beach Ball filled with air from the lungs of a dying man’ from 2010, which is what it says it is, has slowly been deflating / expiring since 2010). In the same spirit, ,DEAD SOULS’ ambition is to let the work breathe. Therefore, if the elements of the series appear incomplete or in a position of something quite transient, as if captured mid-flow, in a sort of photographic way, this is deliberate. I think it’s quite interesting that the works are ,flat’, as in 2-D, where it is not too dissimilar to looking at a painting, or drawing, from an i-phone, or similar. I rarely work ,in the flat’. That’s why, as mentioned earlier, it is hard not to read these ,DEAD SOULS’ as portraits. I also think that the title adds to a directness, as opposed to something more esoteric. It says something descriptive about the process.

- By handling the sheet of paper above the flame, you couldn’t see the traces of halos the flame of the candle was actually leaving on the paper. These ‘portraits’ were produced almost blindly. When did you know it was time to stop not seeing them anymore?

I think I wonder more why or when it starts. When does it happen that there is a decision to ‘start’. These objects were collected from 2016 and carried around with me in my van so in a way, the conversation sort of started to emanate then. Maybe it was like listening to a conversation coming from the other side of the room, where you hear snippets. Maybe these objects were coaxing something from me; encouraging a conversation to start. Maybe the process of lighting the candles and making that work, was similar to when a conversation becomes intimate and both parties are on an equal level. Therefore, the ‘reveal’ is a private encounter. It is important to say that each candle is never re-lit. It’s a one-off. When the candle is held underneath the paper, I never see what is actually happening. It might be possible to consider this moment as the true conversation. There is a manipulative process at play from my position yet the ‘re-animation’ is uncertain; a brief connection. However, seeing them as a unit, as a ‘body’ of 21 souls, the encounter now becomes something else. They appear somewhat trapped and look back at me as if to ask, ‘Why have you done this? Why couldn’t you just leave us alone?’



Beachy Head, 2020
Line scratched across a wall with an uncut key, various dimensions

Philip Newcombe

*1970 Germany
lives and works in Reading

2003 MFA Fine Art, University of Reading
1994 BA (Hons) Fine Art, St Martins School of Art, London

Exhibitions (selected)

2021
CCA Andratx, Mallorca

2020
Dead Souls, Åplus, Berlin (solo)

2019
THE ESTATE, Open Hand Open Space, Reading
Somewhere between us is the scent of orange, Edmund Felson Gallery, Berlin. 2019 (solo)

2018
Elymus Repens, Bar Babette, Berlin
A Clown Walks Into A Gallery..., GRUNDY Art Gallery, Blackpool
,Cellar', ATTIC, Brussels (solo)
ODEON, Monte Vista Projects, Los Angeles, 2018 (solo)

2017
mosquito, Å+, Berlin (solo)
Studio residency: CCA Andratx, Mallorca

2016
12 page supplement for Sluice magazine, launch at Bushwick, Brooklyn
Quiz 2, MUDAM, Musée d'art Moderne, Luxembourg

2015
Kosmografia, Croxhapox. Ghent
'into, lu:d, Maria Stenfors, London (solo)
The Whole Wide World, The International 3. Manchester

2014
Quiz, Galeries Poirel, Nancy
Dolph Projects, London
Morphisation, APT Gallery, London
démocratie, Tripode, Rezé, Nantes
COMPANY, Maria Stenfors, London (solo)
El Hotel Eléctrico, M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp
Truly Flabby Preludes (for a dog) 1/3 : Pink noise, La Maison Populaire centre d'art contemporain, Montreuil
Art Rotterdam (with Maria Stenfors)

2013
Pollen, CAPC, Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux (solo) Curated by Alexis Vaillant
The 5th Dimension, Ricou Gallery, Brussels
Drunk vs Stoned III, Neon Parc, Melbourne. Aus
Biopic, Maria Stenfors. London
Butterfly, Artangel 100. London
Spilt Milk, FORT. London (solo)
Mostyn 18, MOSTYN. North Wales

Recent Selected

The One Show, FORT Gallery, London; BigMinis: Fetishes of Crisis, CAPC, Musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux;
You've got a face like a sack of spuds falling to the floor, Performance at the International Rotterdam Film Festival
(De Player); Sphinx, Stuart Shave / Modern Art, London; New York Art Book Fair, with Jessica Silverman Galle-
ry. San Francisco; Legend, Centre d'art Contemporain, Chamarande. France; Pilot 3, Venice (nominated by Marc
Camille Chaimowicz)

