

ffotogallery

MIKE PERRY  
**LAND / SEA**

Teachers Resource

40  
1978  
2018



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# THE ARTIST

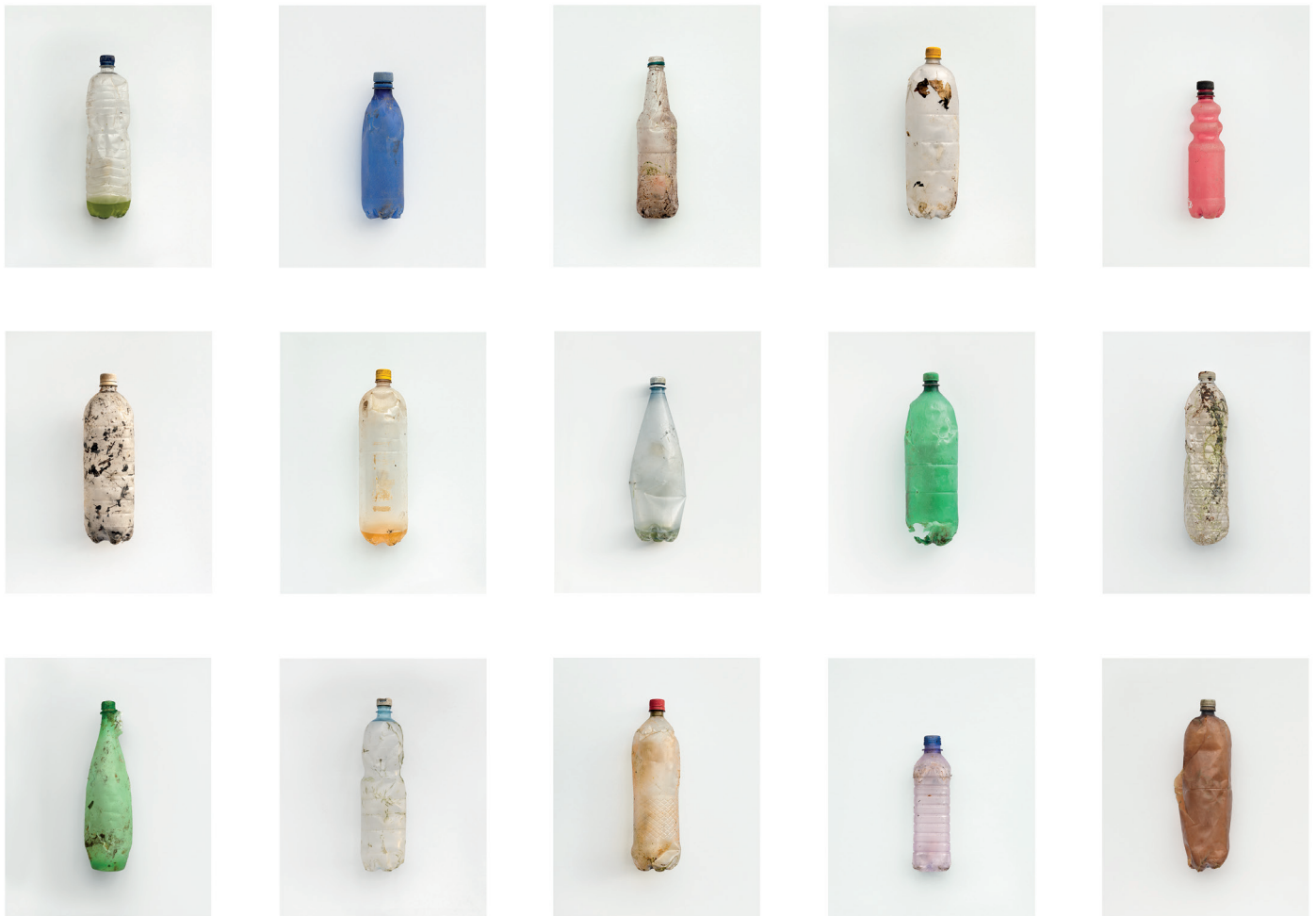
Mike Perry is an artist whose work engages with significant and pressing environmental issues, in particular the tension between human activity and interventions in the natural environment.

His first public show *Beach* was at the Photographers' Gallery in 2004, and in 2007 he was a featured artist in BBC 4's *Arts Documentary, Britain in Pictures*. In 2009 he won best picture at Christies of London's 25th anniversary photographic competition, and in 2012 was part of the group show *New Ground: Landscape Art In Wales since 1970*, curated by The National Museum of Wales, including Richard Long, David Nash and Keith Arnatt. In 2013 his

collection of plastic shoes was on show at the Institute for Contemporary and Interdisciplinary Arts (ICIA) and selected for The National Eisteddfod of Wales 2013.

In July 2014 *Môr Plastig* was included in Cornelia Parker's *Black and White Room* at The Royal Academy of Arts, and in 2015 at the internationally curated *Vita Vitale* exhibition at The 56th Venice Biennale.

Mike Perry received a Creative Wales Award in 2015, by the Arts Council of Wales and in 2016 his photographs of plastic pollution were included in *Found* at The Foundling Museum, London.



Soft Drinks Bottle Grid x 15, Pembrokeshire, Wales 2012  
Digital Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag,  
280 cms x 196 cms

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# THE WORK

Land/Sea focusses on the coastline and rugged landscapes of West Wales, where Mike Perry lives and works. Collecting and photographing man-made objects washed up on beaches, and recording in forensic detail the landscape around us, he alerts us to humanity's negative impact on the ecosystem, but also the beauty of the flora and fauna, and nature's amazing ability to renew itself.

Mike Perry's work resists easy categorisation. Photography is central to his practice, yet it is always in dialogue with painting and drawing, sculpture and installation art. The influence of Minimalism is strong with Môr Plastig in its serial arrangements, grids, and an interest in form, surface detail and abstraction.

Wet Deserts, his large-format landscape photographs in contrast, reference the Romantic painters of the 18th and

19th century and their threatening evocation of the sublime. Referencing Edmund Burke's 1757 'A philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful' the artist says...

"Wet Deserts photographs are reintroducing an older notion of the sublime to the landscape, but its a contemporary horror story made by humans rather than a threat from the unknown powers of nature"

Perry's photography avoids the campaigning rhetoric of straight environmental documentary. Instead, it poetically alludes to what we might be leaving for future generations.



Loch Cluanie, Western Highlands, Scotland 2009  
C Type Print 195 cms x 165 cms



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# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT



Peter Kennard, Haywain with Cruise Missiles, 1980

Land/Sea depicts bleak landscapes from Wales and the UK, and striking forensic images of found objects washed up onshore. The work is visually arresting, and also carries a powerful message about the environment.

**How do you make a piece of work that describes an issue, not just a place?**

Art and political activism have a very rich history together. Consider Picasso's *Guernica* - one of the most potent reminders of the tragedy of war in the history of war.

**What are the differences between an artist and an activist?**

**Can you find examples of artworks that have been used to campaign for change?**

**When does a piece of art, stop being a piece of art, and start becoming an advertisement for an political campaign?**



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# CONSIDER THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THESE TWO IMAGES:



John Constable, Branch Hill Pond, Hampstead (1819)

Mike Perry is influenced by movements in painting. The Wet Desert landscapes make reference to the Romantic landscape paintings of the 19th Century.

**Which paintings do the works evoke for you?**

**Can you incorporate references to landscape paintings in your films and photographs?**

Three concepts established during the philosophy of the Romantic era divided the natural world into categories: the Beautiful, the Picturesque, and the Sublime. Although difficult to define, they help to map a variety of aesthetic experiences.

Find examples of Sublime, the Picturesque and the beautiful in landscape painting.

Discuss Mike Perry's landscapes within these three key concepts.

**What does the term Sublime mean to you?**



Bench, Elan Valley, Powys, Wales, 2015  
C Type Print 195 cms x 165 cms



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# HOW ARE THESE TWO WORKS DIFFERENT:



Carl Andre, Equivalent III (1966)

The grid is a visual structure that lies at the heart of contemporary art. As a graphic component in painting, it came to prominence in the early 20th century as seen in the abstractions Dutch-born Piet Mondrian, and continued to be developed through the latter part of the century by architects, designers and artists such as Agnes Martin, Sol LeWitt and Gerhart Richter.

Find examples of art, architecture and design that follow a strict grid format.

Look for repeated patterns and geometry in images of nature.

Photograph or sketch a repeating pattern or grid in the objects or architecture around you.



White Crate Fragment, Freshwater West,  
Pembrokeshire, Wales 2016



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# MATERIAL CULTURE:



Shoe 22, Playa Santa Maria, Havana, Cuba 2014

Material Culture is a field in which archeologists and anthropologists piece together an account of how our ancestors lived by collecting and studying the objects left behind which have survived in the environment. Môr Plastig uses a similar forensic approach to recording, preserving and classifying objects which have been lost or discarded.

**Can you select an object from Môr Plastig and devise a plausible story about its original owner?**

**What would the archeologists of the future understand about us from the objects we leave behind?**



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# DO IT YOURSELF

## Make a book work, blog or series of images which describe environmental change in your immediate vicinity.

Use any or all of the following; photography, drawing, text, collage

Make a record of -

- A natural skyline
- A man-made skyline
- A man-made feature
- A natural feature
- Something natural and man-made together

## Find an object someone has left behind:

Photograph it in 3 different ways  
Photograph 3 different objects in the same way

Find an old photograph or painting of your area and rephotograph what is there now, showing the changes that have taken place to the environment.

Ask an older relative or friend for their recollections of the way in which the landscape has changed in their lifetime. Make a drawing or collage based on their recollections of an earlier time.

Write a foreword to your work which describes what you have discovered by making this artwork.

Which of your images best illustrates your description? Use this as the cover image for your book or blog.





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# KEY WORDS

CAMPAIGN	FORENSIC	ECO SYSTEM	REWILDING	ANTHROPOCENE
PLASTIGLOMERATES	CONCEPT	AESTHETIC	ABSTRACTION	MODERNISM
MINIMALISM	STRUCTURE	GEOMETRY	PICTURESQUE	SUBLIME
PASTORAL	BEAUTIFUL	ROMANTICISM	EVOCATION	DEPICTION
LANDSCAPE	URBAN	SUBURBAN	WILDERNESS	RURAL
NARRATIVE	CLASSIFICATION	ARTEFACT	EVIDENCE	SUSTAINABILITY
ACTIVISM	MANMADE	SYNTHETIC	NATURAL	DOCUMENTARY

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# REFERENCES

## Artists:

Agnes Martin  
Sol LeWitt  
Donald Judd  
Yves Klein  
Cy Twombly  
Piet Mondrian

Roni Horn  
Gerhart Richter  
Alex Hutte  
Andreas Gursky  
Thomas Struth  
Olafur Eliasson  
Tony Cragg

## Links:

<http://understandingminimalism.com/>  
<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/the-romantic-sublime-r1109221>  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/wales/entries/babb21b6-f7c4-3b41-9a14-3dc173530f2f>  
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<http://icewatchparis.com/>  
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