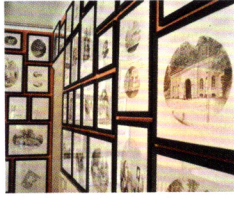




# Meadow Arts the first 20 years



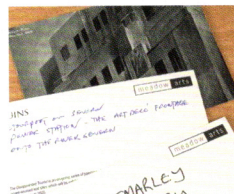
## Artist First-Person: Ellen Harvey



**Meadow Arts collaboration:** *The Disappointed Tourist Shop*, part of *In Ruins* at Witley Court, 2019

**Meadow Arts commission:** *The Exiles*, part of *Time Will Tell* at Croft Castle, 2013

**Temporary loan:** *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty*, part of *Time Will Tell* at Croft Castle, 2013



**TOP TWO:** Ellen Harvey, *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* and *The Exiles* (Meadow Arts commission), both in *Time Will Tell*, Croft Castle, 2013

**BOTTOM TWO:** Ellen Harvey, *The Disappointed Tourist Shop* (Meadow Arts commission), in *In Ruins*, Witley Court, 2019

I like to think of art as the last refuge of the rank amateur. As an artist, you don't really have to know how to do anything properly. As far as I'm concerned, we are all artists. Similarly, I think that anyone should be able to enjoy art. I don't like erecting barriers around my work – I want everyone to feel welcome. As a result, I often use quite traditional aesthetics to make the work seem inviting and initially unchallenging, to lure the viewer into interacting. Of course, once they start interacting, there is a bit of a surprise – the work is not what it initially seemed to be.

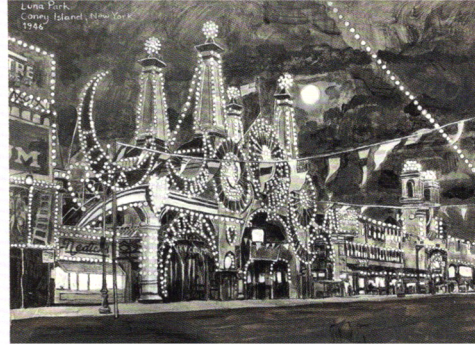
What drew me to working with Anne was the fact that she was open to anything. At the beginning, she said: 'Come and visit Croft Castle, see how the place feels to you.' That was in 2013. So, I came and I spent some time there, enjoying the castle, and talking. Often curators have very strong thematic underpinnings for their work, but there is a sense of freedom that Anne gives you as an artist, a willingness to experiment and to try things. Anne has a really strong sense of the beauty of a place. She's somebody who loves buildings, she loves history, she loves art. It was great fun to be talking about these things with her and being there, watching people experience the castle. As a visitor, you have a sort of temporary ownership, and we talked a lot about that. What does it mean to 'own' a heritage site as a member of the public? You see people looking at themselves in mirrors, inserting themselves into the space, you see them imagining living there. I wanted to make that visible. I wanted people to be seduced into thinking about their relationship with the site.

A heritage site is a place that people experience primarily on aesthetic terms. So, when you put an artwork into something that is already being experienced as an artwork, it's like extra grit in your oyster. Hopefully people end up seeing the oyster differently. The project I made for Croft Castle was called *The Exiles*, an installation of framed mirrors. The frames were all painted so that you would see views of yourself inserted into various painted views of the castle. It was a simple idea, but you start to ask yourself: can I be the star of the castle? Or do I even really belong in this castle? The title references the idea that in the end, much as we are invited into a heritage site, we are also all cast out of it. The doors close at the end of the day and the fantasy that it belongs to us is over.



**LEFT:** Ellen Harvey, *Temple of Bel, Syria*, 2015, 2019

**RIGHT:** Ellen Harvey, *Luna Park, Coney Island, New York*, 1946, 2019



In 2019, I worked with Meadow Arts again on *In Ruins* at Witley Court. I love the idea that a ruin is inherently more ‘artistic’ than an actual building because it isn’t useful. At the same time, your relationship to a ruin is not only aesthetic – it’s also a very emotional relationship because inherent in the ruin is the sorrow of its destruction. It’s a sorrow that we all share because we all live in a world that often feels as though it is vanishing before our eyes, where the forces of war, time, ideology, greed and natural disaster are constantly remaking places that we love but cannot control or save.

Anne and I also share an interest in complicating narratives, where you both acknowledge and contradict the dominant narrative of an experience. For Witley Court, I was particularly interested in the relationship between art and tourism. I kept thinking of how as a child, I would always collect postcards of the places I visited, in particular, postcards of paintings. *The Disappointed Tourist Shop* was a little fake gift shop that gave away postcards of a series of paintings I’d been making of places that can no longer be visited because they have been destroyed. I liked the idea of having people go into a ruin like Witley Court and get a postcard of a different ruined site. The reverse of the postcards invited visitors to come up with a place they would love to visit or revisit that no longer exists and to write it on the postcard and send it back to me. And now I’m making new paintings based on those responses. I think I’ve painted over 200 lost sites so far...

I’ve now painted all these different ruins and they will be shown in 2021 at Turner Contemporary, alongside Turner’s own ‘souvenir paintings’ of places like Venice. It’s a very circular project.

excerpted from

**Meadow Arts: the first 20 years**

ISBN 978-1-5272-8036-6

Published by Meadow Arts, 2021

Edited by Tom Jeffreys and Anne de Charmant

Printed by Gomer Press, Wales