

FUKUSHIMA → CYMRU

Science meets Art in an Exposé of Nuclear Meltdown



image © ffloc

Bright yellow AA road signs around the village of Newborough in Anglesey direct you to FUKUSHIMA → CYMRU. Against the backdrop of hazy Snowdonia ranges and lush farmland, these might seem incongruous. But when you realise that plans are in place for a vast new Hitachi nuclear power station to be built a mere twenty miles away, the idea of mounting a local exhibition that documents the Fukushima experience might suddenly appear timely.

'20 millisieverts per year', the exhibition by artist Lis Fields, shown at the Pritchard Jones Institute in Newborough through August, 2017, is an exploration of the effects of the earthquake and tsunami which caused the meltdown of three nuclear reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in 2011. The title of the exhibition refers to the maximum dose of radiation to which the citizens of Fukushima can now be exposed to in a year. (Worldwide, the maximum permitted non-occupational dose per citizen is 1 millisievert per year.)

Lis Fields travelled into the heart of Fukushima with Green Cross, an international organisation dedicated to assisting people affected by the environmental consequences of wars, conflicts and industrial calamities. Six years after the tsunami, the area is still a radioactive nightmare. Fields' approach is objective, scientific, her extensive research underpinned by interviews with those affected. Her photographs document the nature of the disaster in epic and understated images. There are deserted urban landscapes, farmlands of radioactive topsoil, bagged up but with nowhere to go. The human tragedy is communicated through the mundane – abandoned bicycles, shattered windows and domestic debris. The testimonies of displaced communities expose the complex, disturbing and unresolved issues, described by Fields in the accompanying articles.



Image © Lis Fields

In an adjoining room is an audiovisual installation, where we are compelled to watch the explosions again and again. In a collaborative piece by Fields, musicians Cian Ciarán (Super Furry Animals) and Meilyr Tomos and multidisciplinary arts collective ffloc, original film footage is interleaved with newsreel and interviews from multiple sources, in eleven discrete five-minute sequences which form a whole, through slow-mo, repetition and abstractions, bound by the tidal rise and fall of Ciarán and Tomos' soundscape. The horror communicates itself through the sublime; pink cherry blossom sways in the breeze as we begin to understand that the changes wrought by the radiation at an organic level mean that cellular structures have been fundamentally, irrevocably altered. Cinematic, inorganic geometric forms are laid over natural landscapes, a graphic mayhem on acid orange, binding and contorting, linking us in a global web in which everything is connected.

Fukushima is an ongoing nuclear disaster of the highest level, ranked at number 7 on the international scale with Chernobyl. Former Prime Minister Naoto Kan declared the need for Japan to end its reliance on nuclear power and to promote renewable sources of energy, such as solar – a philosophy shared by other forward-thinking European countries. This exhibition provides a context for reflection and debate, on the fragile ecology of our global society in both scientific and human terms.

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Links and sources: <https://lisfields.org> <https://lisfields.org/20-msvyear-talk/>
<https://lisfields.org/press-release/>