

Sarah Jane Gorlitz and Wojciech Olejnik
The Vibrating Self

PAVED ARTS

March 9th - April 14th, 2012

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Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Friday, Noon – 6 pm;
Saturdays Noon – 4pm.

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When the writer Graham Greene ventured into the uncharted regions of the Liberian forest in 1935, he anticipated an exotic adventure, a riveting encounter with the unknown. Instead, during his long journey on foot, he was overwhelmed by a profound, unshakable boredom. He writes: "I had to try in vain to occupy the mind, to think of things to think about. I would calculate: I can think of this place or that person for so many hundred steps, and I would have a sense of triumph when the thought lasted me for a few dozen steps further than I had hoped. But usually it was the other way; the image or the idea lost

interest a long while before I had taken the hundred paces. And this succession of thoughts had to be kept up for six or seven hours on end."¹

To move, to drag one's feet across unfamiliar soils and grasses is little different than walking through a familiar neighbourhood. This kind of movement is not chosen for recreation, speed or efficiency. Sometimes, as Greene discovered, this exercise can seem pointless; surrounded by mundane thoughts he became a disinterested passenger, even in the heart of the Liberian forest. Yet, just as easily, walking can clear one's thoughts, sharpen or shift one's focus. When one walks, takes in and reacts to one's environment (consciously or unconsciously), one is already in a conversation, in the midst of the other. Perhaps it is the slowness of the movement that allows this engagement, the possibility to easily pause, spontaneously change directions, or be interrupted. Perhaps it is the one-two rhythm of each pace, or the regular pulse of circulating blood that provides a patient, undertone to thought.



Within our artistic practice, we take a lot of walks, we talk, we discuss our projects, we forget what we talked about, we become distracted, and all of a sudden we are home - for us to step outside is to step into a conversation. In the exhibition *The Vibrating Self*, each video presents a binary relation, between a landscape and an individual, between stagnation and a moving train, between a paper-mâché plant and a shadow of a greenhouse. Each is an encounter, another attempt at a conversation. One becomes not only a keen listener and spectator, but a traveler attempting to enter a deep forest, then exit it, constantly stepping in and stepping out. This process is especially notable in *Solitary Man with Nature* (2011), which presents a disruption that occurs within an old photograph of a man standing in tall grass. As he examines the unspoiled nature that surrounds him, both he and the landscape alternatively go in and out of focus, their edges literally fluctuating in the process. The relationship between the two is based on a continuous, irresolvable dialogue, which vibrates to the point where the boundary of each becomes indefinite and unsure.

The St. Helena Olive Tree went extinct in the late 19th century, was rediscovered eighty years later, and disappeared once more in 1994. As the only species in its genus, its brief revival involved many conservation attempts to propagate the tree. Cuttings and seedlings were shipped to

greenhouses around the world, but to no avail, all attempts failed, leaving no remaining tissue in any botanical collection. It is difficult to establish when this plant died, when it no longer had being. It seems that this tree's boundary, the boundary of what it was, what it is, changes even now. A paper replica of the tree (modeled after the sole image of the plant on the internet) appears in the stop-motion animation *St. Helena Olive Tree, Extinct 1884-1977, 2003-* (2010). The plant stands motionless, nakedly in its paleness, as grid-like shadows of a greenhouse slowly move across its surface, and the displaced sound of its movement in the wind is heard offscreen. The plant, in its history and its ghostly presence, demonstrates not only the expanding and contracting of its being, but the impossibility of establishing the boundary of being - that it slips into superstitions, suppositions, into indeterminable, hypothetical realms. Sometimes the tree is just a papier-mâché replica, sometimes it is its sound, sometimes it is even the bounding, invisible greenhouse, but it could also be the viewer's impression, a memory of the viewing experience, or a text about this work.

¹Graham Greene, *Journey Without Maps*, (London: Vintage Books, 2006), p. 144.