

The Cowboy and the Spaceman

On 10 February the exhibition 'The Cowboy and the Spaceman' opens at Peacock, showing photographs, prints and sculpture by Orkney artist Colin 'Puck' Kirkpatrick. A large part of the show is formed by a film made by Puck and Peacock's Adam Proctor. The film addresses the serious environmental concerns in Orkney, but does that with a smile. In this interview Puck explains how he got inspired.

Where does this wild west fascination in your work come from?

A lot of the aspects in my work originate in childhood memories. This is no different in the film 'The Cowboy and the Spaceman'. I had an uncle who was a real outdoor man, a hunter. He also showed a lot of responsibility and taught me that wildlife is important for future generations. He was the first activist I knew. Two of my other uncles were cattle farmers and in a child's imagination it is a small leap to see my uncles as cowboys and rural Orkney as Montana.

After growing up in fishing town Stromness you went to the city of Aberdeen to study painting at the Gray's School of Art. How did this influence you as an artist?

After three months of living and studying in Aberdeen I went home for a visit. It was a major revelation: the architecture and landscape of Stromness just struck me as being so organic and beautiful. This was visually an important moment in my early career, because I started seeing things with different eyes. I remember fellow students wanting to get as far away from home as possible, to the brightest lights they could find. I just wanted to go home.

Environmental issues are very much a theme in your work. How come?

I saw fundamental social and ecological changes happening in Orkney due to the oil industry and salmon farming. I have always felt strong about this and for quite a few years I was heavily involved in marine and fresh water conservation. When I should have been making art I was writing protest letters. This activism has eased down now, but environmental issues still very much touch my work.

Apart from your childhood and environmental issues, what other sources of inspiration have influenced your work?

In recent years I very much got inspired by the many artists that came to live and work in Orkney via the Piers Arts Centre Fellowship. I also got inspired through an international artists workshop via the North Ullst Triangle Arts Trust. It was here that I met the Indian artist Raghavendra Rao who helped me making my first short film 'Machair Cowboy', and eventually convinced me to shoot the film 'The Cowboy and the Spaceman'.

What do you hope people will learn from seeing 'The Cowboy and The Spaceman'?

Humour is difficult when addressing environmental concerns, but I certainly don't want it to be a heavy exhibition. The film is a serious piece, but I hope people will smile at it too.