

# OF THINGS DARK AND DISTANT

Mythic unknowing through installation practice

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## ABSTRACT

This research investigates the perceptual and imaginative implications of my practice of interior air-drawn sculpture gardens.

Neurologists, psychologists and philosophers suggest that we can only ever know the world by way of imagination and illusion – whether it's the illusion that the world is full of sprites and spirits, or that we know what the world is through accumulated 'facts' about it. But some illusions are more life-sustaining than others. I refer in the writing to Iain McGilchrist and David Abram who share a concern that the kinds of illusions we have inherited in the West may be responsible for a growing alienation between ourselves and the mysterious more-than-human world, with potentially devastating consequences. So my project has been an effort to take an ostensibly formalist arrangement and nudge it a little beyond the limitations of such language structures, to suggest that nothing is ever *nothing but*- but always *more than* our assumptions about it. The work is thus in pursuit of an open-endedness and a subtle unworldliness.

These up-in-the-air installation-compositions rely on out-of-consciousness manoeuvres, degrees of unknowing and cohesive ambiguity, rather than utter bewilderment, for their effects. To this end I find help from the Ryoan-ji stone garden in Kyoto, the architecture of Carlo Scarpa, the writings of Rudolph Arnheim and others on perceptual psychology, and the spatial theories of Edward T. Hall and Yi Fu Tuan.

Underneath all these sources lies the stabilising influence of composer Arvo Pärt and his careful, methodical approach to a music of resolute harmony and austerity. Pärt's practice suggests that a work need not be chaotic or challenging, indeed may have deep structure, and still engage and transport. For Pärt musical notes have cosmological implications, which for the purposes of my project needn't be over specified, but here help identify my effort as one not of nonsense or nihilism, but of mythical strangeness and poetic unknowing.

The exegesis should not be thought of as a necessary companion to the artwork, any more than compositional analysis should be thought necessary for musical appreciation. The writing spells out what should, if I have played my hand right, occur prior to or underneath words in the experience of the installation.

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