

Stefan Gec

The Shepherd's Whistle

John Hansard Gallery
16 February – 27 April 2019

#JHGGec

John Hansard Gallery, part of the University of Southampton, is pleased to present *The Shepherd's Whistle*, a newly commissioned project by Stefan Gec, from 16 February to 27 April 2019.

The Shepherd's Whistle centres around the artist's fascination with top-secret maps of strategic cities worldwide that were created by Soviet intelligence during the Cold War, alongside an M-72 Soviet army motorbike and sidecar from 1957. These two highly symbolic elements are brought together to create a complex project that explores the socio-political environment of the Cold War era, whilst also touching on current issues of identity, migration and immigration.

Riding the M-72 motorbike and navigating using the Soviet maps, Gec has made a number of journeys to five UK towns and cities that were identified by the Soviets as having strategic importance. The starting point for all of these journeys has been Gec's hometown of Huddersfield in West Yorkshire.

Following the end of the Second World War, there were around 250 displaced Ukrainians, including Stefan Gec's father, in the Huddersfield area. An important development for that community was the formation of the Huddersfield branch of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain, whose headquarters opened in 1956. Starting from Huddersfield, Gec rode the M-72 motorbike to and around Greenock, Derry-Londonderry, Blyth, Barrow-in-Furness and Southampton. Throughout the project Gec has worked with the artist/filmmaker Lee Hassall, to document the journeys using 8mm film shot on Soviet cine cameras of the same era.

For *The Shepherd's Whistle* Gec presents a number of newly-made works, including text and sculpture, shown alongside the film footage made in each location, examples of the Soviet maps and his M-72 motorbike.

During the Cold War, the Soviet military undertook a top-secret enterprise: to create comprehensive surveillance maps of the British Isles. These detailed the widths of roads, heights of bridges, depths of rivers and names of streets. They also revealed the exact location and purpose of every building of strategic importance. Printed exclusively in Cyrillic script, the maps were translated phonetically so that a Russian speaker on the ground could easily pronounce place names. The maps being exhibited in Southampton have an additional significance, as the city is home to the Ordnance Survey Headquarters, and is the final destination for Gec's UK journeys.

The M-72 Soviet motorbike and sidecar that Gec uses is presented along with its original registration paperwork. Manufactured in Kiev, Ukraine, for the Soviet army, the motorbike is a direct, unauthorised copy of Germany's pre-war BMW model R71. Gec has painstakingly dismantled, cleaned and rebuilt the engine and body, whilst preserving its original 'found' appearance.

The Shepherd's Whistle builds on Gec's previous works and thematic concerns, however, for the first time Gec will actively engage as a performer – the journey serves as a reflection on his artistic practice. The chosen locations retrace previous projects that explored similar themes: *Trace Elements* (1990), *Detached Bell Tower* (1995–96) and *Buoy* (1996–present). Alongside the physical experience of revisiting these places, the films help mark the legacy of this research activity in each location.

The Shepherd's Whistle has been commissioned by John Hansard Gallery in partnership with Locus+, and is supported by Arts Council England.

Biography

Stefan Gec's (born Huddersfield, 1958) work focuses on technology and the ways that machines like submarines, satellites and space stations may reveal and illuminate the social political and cultural contexts that brought them into being. Gec also engages with the charged culture of warfare and military innovation in sculptures built from replicas and found objects related to the history of conflict. Gec's work is both abstract and loaded, with complex constructions and models. His pieces are often large-scale and made from industrial materials and salvaged weapons, fusing the dynamic re-contextualization of Marcel Duchamp's readymades with the socio-political rigor of Chris Burden's installations and performances.

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Notes to Editors

John Hansard Gallery

John Hansard Gallery is a locally engaged and internationally recognised contemporary art gallery in Southampton. Being part of the University of Southampton, the Gallery aims to change the world for the better through great art. To realise this the Gallery creates innovative and critically acclaimed contemporary art exhibitions, events, engagement and research projects that excite, challenge, represent and reach the widest possible public audience. Since being established in 1979 the Gallery has been located on the University's Highfield Campus. In 2018 the Gallery relocated to the new purpose-built arts complex Studio 144 in Southampton's city centre, significantly increasing the space available for exhibitions, events and integrated programming. Learning and engagement are at the heart of the Gallery and underpin all its activities. The innovative education and public programme is accompanied by special community-focused projects, including activities for all ages and levels of experience. John Hansard Gallery is supported using public funding as a National Portfolio Organisation by Arts Council England.
www.jhg.art

University of Southampton

The University of Southampton is one of the UK's leading teaching and research institutions, with a global reputation for research and scholarship across a wide range of subjects. The University combines academic excellence with an innovative and entrepreneurial approach to research, supporting a culture that engages and challenges students and staff in their pursuit of learning.
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The University of Southampton has rich heritage and long-standing commitment to arts and culture as an essential part of university life. The University is proud of its unique relationship with three Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations. The Nuffield Theatre opened at its Highfield Campus in 1964 and was joined by the University's concert hall Turner Sims and John Hansard Gallery in the 1970s.

Sculpture by leading UK and international artists is displayed at Highfield and Boldrewood Campuses and exhibitions takes place at the Hartley Library's Special Collections Gallery. The University's Arts and Humanities departments present regular free public activity at its campuses and across Southampton and Winchester. The University is committed to fostering new talent and the University's Students' Union SUSU supports over 40 performing arts societies which host regular public events.

The relocation of the John Hansard Gallery to its new purpose-built home in the heart of the city's Cultural Quarter increases the University of Southampton's presence in that area, close to its Mayflower Halls and administrative offices in Guildhall Square. The opening of Studio 144 symbolises an extraordinary moment for Southampton and the University will be working closely with John Hansard Gallery, City Eye and NST to deepen public engagement, to share its research and present inspiring and accessible cultural opportunities for all.

www.southampton.ac.uk/arts