

Trade Winds

Susan Stockwell, with a response from Carla Suthren

SUSAN: *Trade Winds* is a sculptural installation made up of many small boats crafted from international paper currency, maps, and travel tickets that float on top of a mass of copper coins. The flotilla of boats, as if on a journey to elsewhere, weaves its way across the coins, that resemble both a sea and a continent. Are the boats contained or free? Is the money enabling or restricting?

Concerned with issues of migration and borders, trade, colonial and social history, geo-politics, ecology, mapping, and material culture, this artwork asks pertinent and open-ended questions that are especially relevant to our current and future world.

The work provides a quiet space for reflection in which to enjoy the playful, tactile objects while also provoking questions about our relationship to money and how it shapes our fragile world ecology. In the context of this beautiful, tiny chapel, *Trade Winds* acquired a reverential, intimate feeling with added meanings provided by the Norman origins of St. Peter's Church at Kettle's Yard and his status as the patron saint of fishermen.



Fig 32.1. Trade Winds © Susan Stockwell 2019. Photo by Paula Beestelstone.

As part of the Migrant Knowledge event this artwork added a different voice. Visual art can have a rich multiplicity of meanings and readings, which are often difficult to articulate and are best seen and felt. Perhaps this piece acted as a mirror for the viewer's own experiences and stories. People were protective towards the small, fragile paper boats, reading meanings into the combinations of currency, text, and maps and asking what shape or continent the coins formed. The irony of money as artistic material placed within the context of a church invites many questions: for instance, do we worship money as we worship art? What is our relationship with money? Are we ruled by the power of money and is this destroying us?



Fig 32.2. Trade Winds © Susan Stockwell 2019. Photo by Subha Mukherji.

Global warming, too, is largely a result of colonial trade and colonial behaviors. The future of migration and the inevitable displacement of peoples are, in turn, bound to be inflected by climate change. We are all citizens of the world and yet we divide it up and claim areas as our own — colonizing. It is these places of irony and interrogation from which the ideas for my work come. Being involved in the Migrant Knowledge event brought this into sharper focus and has inspired new ideas and work.

CARLA: Carved into the heart of the tiny, picturesque church of St. Peter's in Cambridge is a tale of migration. The building has been altered and reduced and reconstructed over the centuries, but the oldest element that remains is the distinctive square font, decorated with a series of stone mermen, each holding the tails of his neighbors in either hand. This dates back to the mid-twelfth century: era of crusades, cathedrals, and the rise of the Plantagenets. As the guidebook to St. Peter's observes, "Mer-

men and mermaids grasping one end of divided tails are a fairly common motif in French Romanesque churches but rare in this country.”¹ This striking and unusual feature hints at the movement of people, ideas, and skills in the Anglo-Norman world.

As a setting for *Trade Winds*, it could hardly have been more evocative. Copper coins were spread and heaped like a dragon’s hoard across the stone floor, trailing up to the doorway and past the altar, and lapping fortuitously around the font. The tiny boats nestled in dips and troughs, or perched precariously on the crests of coppery waves. Driven by imagined winds, some shoaled together, while others crisscrossed one another’s paths or ventured off alone. The tonal variation among the coins, from those crusted over with age to the shiniest new pennies, transposed the infinite variety of the sea into a strange new palette. And yet, change your perspective, and the massed coins become the continent, shaped by an invisible sea. Skirting around the edges of the church, treading carefully, you could walk all the way around the installation, experiencing it from every angle. Being able to reposition yourself spatially in relation to this multifaceted artwork offered embodied ways of re-knowing.

This physical engagement extended further still. As visitors flowed in, they began to add their own coins to the work spontaneously, some tossing them in as if it were a wishing well, others carefully shoring up coastlines or building little promontories. Adults as well as children added their contributions with consideration and delight. Some instinctively wanted to repair “damage” caused by coins being displaced by a careless foot here and there. One small girl very solemnly and carefully picked up the tiniest boat which had been knocked over, and nestled it back into a bed of coins. Meaning was continually created through this collaborative curatorial enterprise by strangers, just as it was created through the interaction between the work and the space of St. Peter’s Church, and recreated through the

1 Lawrence Butler, *Church of St Peter off Castle Street*, Cambridge, <https://cdn.visitchurches.org.uk/uploads/images/Churches/Cambridge-St-Peters-Church/Cambridge-St-Peters-Church-Guidebook.pdf>.

personal histories and perspectives of each person who encountered it. Transforming the paraphernalia of the everyday into an imaginative provocation, *Trade Winds* shaped alternative and mutable forms of knowing, across space and time.

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Edited by Natalya Din-Kariuki,
Subha Mukherji,
and Rowan Williams

