

Urban Rural Exchange

Karen Wood and James Aldridge

8th November – 27th December 2019

Private View: Thursday 7th November, 6-9pm

Spitalfields Studios: Sky Gallery is pleased to present *Urban Rural Exchange*, a new series of paintings and a mixed-media installation, the culmination of a year-long collaboration by place-based artists, Karen Wood and James Aldridge.

Together, Wood and Aldridge walk regularly in their respective locations of London and rural Wiltshire, documenting their journeys via a shared Instagram account - a digital space and visual diary for their ongoing dialogue. Using a range of media, they record their interactions with 'place', including architecture and debris, signposts and markings, pathways and waterways, wildlife and people. Back in their studios, they create works in response to these findings, encapsulating their local environments, and together interrogating the notion of a perceived Urban-Rural divide.

Based here at *Spitalfields Studios*, Karen Wood calls herself an 'Urban Explorer'. Walking in her East London surroundings, Wood draws and photographs architecture, road markings, road signs and construction sites, documenting a pre-occupation with industrial colour and geometric form. Using these source-gathering explorations and further editing processes, she shows permutations of cityscape through drawing, painting and printmaking, with a specific emphasis on how space and movement are controlled and restricted. For *Urban Rural Exchange*, Wood has created *Urban Edit*, a series of paintings developed from her observational electrical tape drawings, referencing urban markings, architecture and minimal colours. Layers of paint with varying levels of translucency create a sense of space, which counters the flatness of their planes, along with structural lines and geometric shapes framing what she calls the 'spacebetween'. Wood's industrial colour *Palette*, playfully presented alongside this triptych, gives the viewer insight into her making and editing process.

Based in rural Wiltshire, James Aldridge makes work that seeks to capsule his experiences of the surrounding environment. On his walks, he collects found materials, using them to create 'walking pages' and 'walking bundles', sculptural assemblages that form a tactile microcosm of each encounter with the landscape. Underpinning Aldridge's work is an ongoing exploration of how art can enable experiences of continuity and connection. His digital works for the *Urban Rural Exchange* Instagram include double exposure-style photographs, layering his and Wood's 'rural' and 'urban' images and merging two seemingly polar worlds. Aldridge's practice is concerned with the blurring of perceived binaries, informed by queer perspectives and the subversion of inherited systems of compartmentalization. In his work, artificial boundaries between Urban and Rural, Inside and Outside, Physical and Digital, Human and Nature are questioned, dismantled and converged. In *Walking Beyond Binaries*, Aldridge's 'process' is simultaneously presented as his 'outcome', in a mixed media installation that invites the viewer into his embodied experiences of place and situated methods of research.

Urban Rural Exchange is a discourse in the form of an exhibition, where two bodies of work both conjoin and confront one another. Mounted on opposite walls of the *Sky Gallery*, the dual-installation symbolizes the continual exchange between these artists, who have each remarked on how the act of collaboration has unexpectedly reinforced the distinctiveness of their own practice and identity. At the same time, shared meditations on what is 'between' (be it the void-like space present in Wood's works, or the artificial threshold to be crossed in Aldridge's practice), is what seems to energise this ongoing conversation – one that calls for collaboration over isolation, the bridging of divisions, and finding joy in noticing the over-passed in the everyday.

Kirsty Kerr, 2019

THE SKY GALLERY
at Spitalfields Studios

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Further Information

On Saturday 9th November, James and Karen will be leading a live 'walk, talk and make' in East London. For more details and to book your free place, visit: <https://cutt.ly/URE-walk>

Please note that outside of openings and public events, *Urban Rural Exchange* is viewable by appointment. Please contact Karen to arrange a visit: kbwoodnews@gmail.com.

Follow *Urban Rural Exchange* on Instagram: [@urbanruralexchange](https://www.instagram.com/urbanruralexchange)

About the origins of *Urban Rural Exchange*

Karen Wood and James Aldridge began their collaborative project in November 2018, through Chapel Arts Studios (CAS), Andover, where they are both active associate artists. Find out more about CAS on their Instagram page: [@casartists](https://www.instagram.com/casartists)

About *Spitalfields Studios* and the *Sky Gallery*

Spitalfields Studios is an artist-led creative hub in the heart of East London. The *Sky Gallery* is our new mezzanine exhibition space, a dual-platform for showcasing contemporary artists and artworks in dialogue or discord with one another.

About Kirsty Kerr

Kirsty Kerr is an artist and curator based in East London. Previous *Spitalfields Studios* exhibitions she has delivered include *Observations* (2017), *Spring Clean* (2018) and *Postcards* (2018).

Further Contact Details

Spitalfields Studios | spitalfieldsstudios.com

i. [@spitalfieldsstudios](https://www.instagram.com/spitalfieldsstudios) | t. [@safestudionow](https://www.tumblr.com/safestudionow) | f. [/spitalfieldsstudios](https://www.facebook.com/spitalfieldsstudios)

James Aldridge | jamesaldridge-artist.co.uk

i. [@jamesaldridgeart](https://www.instagram.com/jamesaldridgeart) | t. [@jamesaldridge4](https://www.tumblr.com/jamesaldridge4) | f. [/JamesAldridgeArt](https://www.facebook.com/JamesAldridgeArt)

Karen Wood

i. [@kbwoodnews](https://www.instagram.com/kbwoodnews) | t. [@kbwoodnews](https://www.tumblr.com/kbwoodnews)

Kirsty Kerr

i. [@kirstyjkerr](https://www.instagram.com/kirstyjkerr) | t. [@kirstyjkerr](https://www.tumblr.com/kirstyjkerr)

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Spitalfields Studios, 7-15 Greatorex St, London E1 5NF