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Hadrian's Wall as Artscape

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws upon the concept of "artscape", a term adopted in studies of contemporary urban and borderland contexts. Nine artworks sited along Hadrian's Wall form the case studies. These interventions aim to challenge the traditional concept of Hadrian's Wall as a fixed and well-defined ancient monument set within an unchanging landscape. Many of the projects reflect, directly or indirectly, upon the ethics of contemporary bordering practices. The artworks may have succeeded, at least to a degree, in challenging people's understandings of the current significance of the Wall by encouraging local people and visitors to contemplate the constraining characteristics of modern borders and frontiers. However, the communication of Hadrian's Wall as "open to all" elides ethical issues and the paper explores the extent to which these artworks may have encouraged or provoked public responses.

KEYWORDS

Artscape; border; frontier; heritage; migration; mobility

> I was eating fish and chips and hearing a voice telling me: "Your ancestors were working here. They were ferrymen from the Tigris". I was nodding my head and saying, yes, my ancestors were slaves here. Slaves under the same sky. (Shimon 2006, 77).

Introduction: Artscape Research and Hadrian's Wall

This article focuses upon a contradiction that underlies attempts to communicate Hadrian's Wall as a landscape that is "open to all". The Wall has become a popular venue for staging artworks and many of the nine examples considered here seek to take visitors on a journey through time and space in a manner that brings the remains of this Roman frontier structure into the context of concerns about borders and bordering in the current world. A context is provided by the art focused on (and around) modern Walls and security fences, such as Israeli-separation Fence and Mexico-USA Wall, works which often seek to unsettle and challenge the politics and practices of bordering (Moze and Spiegel 2022). This paper aims to demonstrate that research on ancient frontier works can make a useful contribution to the current interdisciplinary debate about today's borders (cf. Hingley 2018; McAtackney and McGuire 2020; Gardner 2022; Hanscam and Buchanan 2023).

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Samuel Shimon's poetic reflection upon his ancestry while visiting the east end of Hadrian's Wall (above) helps to illustrate the contradiction between the creation and constraining of mobilities on this Roman frontier, linking the present to the past in this specific landscape setting. The Wall once formed the home for military communities – men, women and children – derived from across the full extent of the Roman Empire (Nesbitt 2016). This included people who traveled from North Africa and the Near East. Shimon, who was born to an Assyrian family in Iraq, was inspired to write his poem *Kika and the Ferrymen*, during a visit to Tynemouth (Tyne and Wear) at the east end of the Wall, where he drew upon the presence, almost two millennia ago, of a unit of Tigris Bargemen, from the area of modern-day Iraq, at the Roman Fort of South Shields (cf. Breeze 2006, 115). The diversity of the ancient population along the Roman Wall, as illustrated by Roman inscriptions and material culture, provides a theme explored by several of the artworks reviewed below. Yet, Shimon's reference to his ancestors as "Slaves under the same sky" reflects upon the policies of enslavement and dispossession that unite the recent and contemporary world with the ancient empire of Rome (cf. Mattingly 2006).

The Wall was built during the sustained and violent occupation of southern and central Britain by the Roman military (Hingley 2022). It was imposed on the pre-existing (Iron Age) communities with the strategic was to control the movement of certain people across the frontier into the lands to the south. Nigel Mills and his co-authors, in a discussion of Artwork 3 (considered below), ask what better place is there to encourage people to think about UNESCO's agenda of encouraging peace and tolerance than Hadrian's Wall, a monument that owes its status as a World Heritage Site to conflict and military occupation? (Mills et al. 2013, 184).[1] The development of border tourism focused on more recent frontiers and borders, including the Berlin Wall, places these comments in context since the interpretation and display of these works often drive a message of peace and cooperation between peoples that have previously been in conflict (Gelbman and Dallen 2010).

Published visitor surveys have yet to address the geographical origins of visitors to the Wall, although anecdotal information indicates that those from Western Europe, the USA, New Zealand and Australia, are far more common than visitors from North Africa and the Near East.[2] Tourists make a significant contribution to the local economy in this area of the UK which has many economically marginalized communities (Tuttiett 2014; Warnaby, Medway, and Bennison 2010). The ancient remains of the Wall are world famous, but recent initiatives have aimed to broaden the appeal of this ancestral frontier landscape by seeking to bridge the divide between past and present (Adkins, Holmes, and Mills 2013; Tuttiett 2014). A range of initiatives and events – including community heritage projects, large-scale re-enactment events, digital interventions and artworks – have been staged to bring the ancient monument to life and to communicate its contemporary relevance and importance to local people and visitors (Collins and Shaw 2021; Griffiths 2021; Birley and Griffiths 2022; Brown and Robson 2022). Nigel Mills and Bill Griffiths remark that "Whilst promotion of Hadrian's Wall has been a key objective of many of these events, … [they have] also been seen as an opportunity to interpret heritage differently" (2022, 30).[3] One motivation is to attract individuals and families that have not traditionally been drawn to Hadrian's Wall and to encourage them to visit the ancient monuments, museums, villages and towns along its line (Adkins, Holmes, and Mills 2013; Collins and Shaw 2021; Roberts 2021; Savage 2022; Claxton and Poad 2022): To create greater public access to "Hadrian's Wall Country" (Hadrian's Wall Country 2023).

The positive message of the diversity of past populations across this landscape is set in several of artworks (considered below) against the militaristic and divisive character of the frontier structure, past and present. Given this contradiction in meanings, I seek to distinguish some of the different ways in which nine (diverse) textual, visual and sonic artworks themed through or sited along the Wall have engaged with its landscape (Figure 1). In addition to these artworks located in the landscape of this ancient monument, other art projects have featured the Wall in a range of venues across the UK, including museums, art galleries, stations and airports. The artworks located away from the Wall line are not considered here. Artworks are yet to receive any detailed attention in the archaeological and heritage literature on Hadrian's Wall, although they play an increasingly important role in attracting new audiences and in challenging presumptions about the monument.

Artscape Approaches and Border Art

Artscape as a concept incorporates theories derived from recent approaches to landscape and art (Hawkins 2017, xvii). It has been adopted in academic studies stemming from diverse disciplinary subjects, including urban and border studies (Aushana 2012; Harris 2013; Whatley and Sabiescu 2016; Luger and Ren 2017; Moze and Spiegel 2022; Stiassny 2022). These publications define this term in various ways. Key to its value here is the potential of art to provoke a reaction in those who experience it and the idea that art is often used to reflect on border landscapes (Massey 2006, 36; Ren 2017, 1–2).

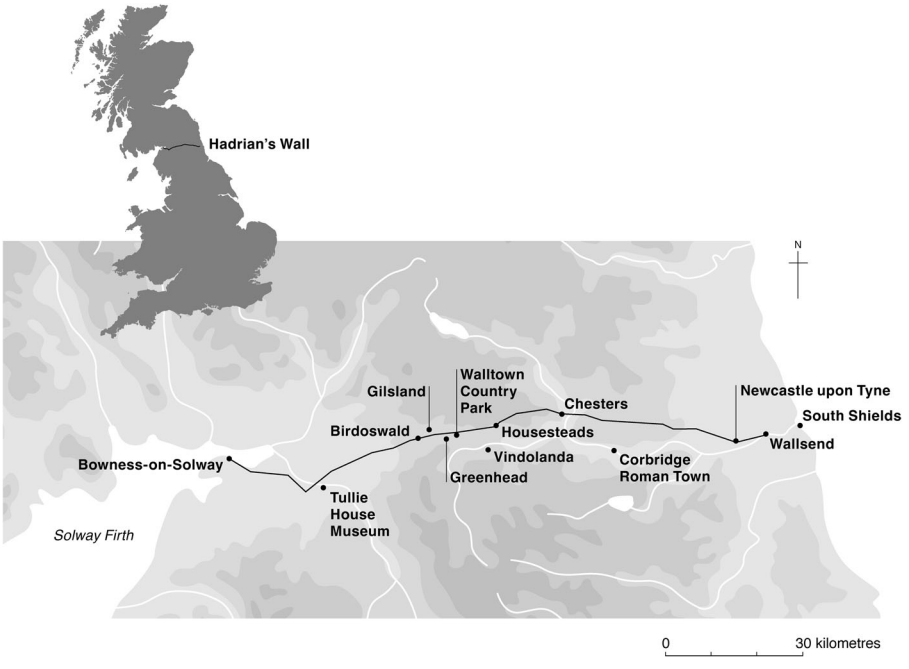

Figure 1. Hadrian's Wall, Showing Locations Mentioned in this Article. Drawn by Christina Unwin.

Other studies address the variety of roles played by artists by adopting the concept of "border art" (e.g. Amilhat Szary 2012; Madsen 2015; Pötzsch 2015; Sheren 2011; Fors 2019; Ghoshal 2020). Giudice and Giubilaro, for example, write about "Border Art as a space of critical imagination and creative resistance", and of an "art of dis-bordering" where artworks can unsettle the regime of borders (2015, 83–6). The observations draw upon the long history of artists and writers challenging the regimes and structures of bordering.

The *East Side Gallery* in Berlin helps to explain the relevance of the concept of artscape when exploring borderscapes. When the Berlin Wall was ceasing to function as a political divide, artists created interventions designed to challenge the dominant political powers and divisive policies and practices that had caused this border to be constructed and maintained (Bach 2016). The *East Side Gallery*, which preserves and manages as a 1.3-kilometre-long series of artworks produced by 118 artists from twenty-one countries, was first opened on 28th September 1990 to commemorate the recent abandonment of the Wall (East Side Gallery no date).

Comparable artworks have been sited on modern Walls and security barriers as challenges to dominant narratives, such as along the Israeli-separation wall and the USA-Mexico Wall (Parry 2010; Sheren 2011; Giudice and Giubilaro 2015, 86–92; Schimanski 2015; Madsen 2015; Moze and Spiegel 2022; Kudžmaité and Pauwels 2022, 267–9; Patteri 2022). These works often attempt to elucidate and contest the divisive political narratives that focus on and around these frontier works. dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary (2015, 8), reflecting on "borderscapes" in the contemporary world, observe that:

> From music to caricature, through literature and visual arts, all of the cultural objects on which the authors focus *make* the border; they *scape* its material and imaginary universes even when their explicit purpose is to resist the dominating border regime.

The other elements of such borderscape include its physical characteristics and the policies and practices that maintain it (cf. Brambilla 2015).

This article addresses the degree to which the artworks staged along the line of Hadrian's Wall have been able to engage with the critical concepts arising from approaches to artscape and border art. It is argued that such critical concepts lie behind the motivations that have led to the creation of many of these artworks. Many aim to encourage viewers to think in ways that challenge divisions and barriers in our society. How successful have these proved? The direct approach to challenging or provoking visitors to think about issues they would rather sideline or ignore is a more straightforward agenda to pursue for independent associations and groups planning artworks than for the public agencies English Heritage and the National Trust. These two charities, which own and make accessible many of the most impressive sections of the Wall, depend for their income on their members who pay an annual fee and also upon paying visitors to their sites (English Heritage 2023; National Trust 2023). They need to ensure that their projects are acceptable to the authorities that they are accountable to, particularly to the UK government (and the tabloid papers), and to their members and the visitors to their sites. This limits their potential for using art and interpretation to directly challenge visitors (cf. Madsen 2015, 101).

The paper also addressed the degree to which the artworks on Hadrian's Wall have attempted to communicate with and seek involvement from communities and

individuals who have not traditionally accessed the Wall. Corinne Fowler observes, in *Green Unpleasant Land*, that England's rural countryside has served as a place of hostility to those who are not seen by some to belong, particularly Black and Asian Britons (2020, 50–6). The widespread geographical origin of the Roman-period population provides a powerful means for challenging inherited concepts of the rural landscape of the Wall as unchanging and elementally "English". Several of these artworks seek to encourage participation from individuals and groups who might traditionally feel excluded from these landscapes.

Hadrian's Wall as an Artscape

I have selected initiatives by practitioners who define their own work as "art" and works that have been defined as art by observers. One factor is that these interventions usually have a degree of visual impact directed at visitors to ancient sites and heritage venues along the Wall. Many also invite the involvement of local communities and visitors who experience and sometimes contribute to the artwork. The interpretation of these artworks is based upon research on the internet and site visits by the author. Many of these transitory artworks were visual in character, but two have a sonic dimension. Only one (Artwork 3) remains in place (May 2023).

Writing on the Wall, 2001–2006

With funding provided by ARTS UK, this international writing project ran from 2001 to 2006 (Chettle 2006). The core concept, as explained in the edited volume that emerged, was to:

> commission [works from] living writers from the areas connected with the Wall's line—Tyne and Wear, Northumberland, Cumbria and Scotland, plus the 23 countries in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa which supplied original troops and auxiliaries. (ibid., 2).

The writers undertook workshops and readings to create an accessible educational and participation program that encouraged the involvement of local communities along the Wall's line. The book arising from this project, containing the works of a diverse collection of writers who responded to the Wall, includes Shimon's poem (above).

Writing on the Wall gives an insight into why the Hadrian's Wall landscape has become the locus for a diverse body of art since these works are often viewed as a fitting way to encourage dialogues about contemporary identities through reference to the ancient monument and its landscapes. The Introduction to the published volume that arose from this project emphasizes that this Wall was a place:

> where people of all kinds, often drawn from remote places—the Roman army … recruited from as far afield as north Africa, Romania and Turkey—have wandered, fought, loved and worked during two thousand years. (O'Brien 2006, 10).

The individual artists reflected upon their own histories in a wide variety of ways by writing contemporary concerns into the landscape of the Wall. This initiative has provided a model for several later art projects (Artworks 4, 6, 8).

Writing on the Wall provides an insight into the potential value of treating Hadrian's Wall as an artscape. Julie Ren observes that the adoption of an artscape approach to urban street art seeks disruption rather than stability (Ren 2017, 1–2). It allows a geographical study of the "material aesthetics of mutability" that resist the sense that landscape is "timeless, fixed and static" (Ren 2017, 1–2; cf. Appadurai 1990; Hawkins 2012, 63).[4] Many artistic performances and installations, including those that made up *Writing on the Wall*, are temporary, communicating an idea of the transitory to those who witness them. Equally significantly, such activities can also challenge people's assumptions about the stability and meanings of the landscapes that they visit and live within.

That art can challenge the concept of landscape as stable and timeless is key to interpreting Hadrian's Wall. The long-term policy for this ancient monument is to curate (and to communicate) its physical remains as a protected and managed landscape that retains its Outstanding Universal Value as a World Heritage Site (Henderson 2022). This strong conservation message has, often, according to Joe Savage of English Heritage, been delivered in a "didactic, authoritarian tone" (2022, 61). This presents the protected ancient remains in the landscape as timeless and enduring: "islands of conservation" (Stone 2014a, 1). The perception of timelessness masks the considerable transformation of the rural and urban landscapes along the Wall over one and a half millennia, including the clearing, consolidation and display of the Roman remains (summarized in Hingley 2012). Other artworks reviewed below also aim to challenge the notion of the timelessness of this ancient monument.

"Illuminating Hadrian's Wall", Saturday 13th March 2010

This project was designed to coincide with the 1600th anniversary of the ending of Roman rule in Britain, a date traditionally interpreted as AD 410 (Mills and Griffiths 2022, 20–1). The artistic designer isabela Streffen was commissioned to direct this project with the work conducted by London-based *flux events* and around 1,500 volunteers (Streffen 2010; Mills and Griffiths 2022, 20). The culmination of Steffen's residency at this World Heritage Site, *Illuminating* created a line of lights from coast to coast along the Wall's 84-miles length. Lights were placed at 250-metre intervals, creating around 500 illuminated spots stretching from Bowness-on-Solway in the west to Wallsend in the east (Lyn 2022). A point of light was located where there was once a Roman milecastle or a turret, with one light every third of a mile. The volunteers, including the author of this article, set up and manage the individual beacons. A camera crew filmed the event from the air as the line of lights made its way along the Wall from east to west, following the descending sun. The project won a gold British Tourism award and was photographed from space by NASA (Streffen 2010).

Illuminating was, in effect, a temporary re-peopling of the Wall since the lights represented locations along the Wall occupied around 1600 years before. This joining up of the entire length of the Wall from coast to coast formed a temporary reconstitution of the Wall's line since the physical Roman remains today are highly fragmentary. Agricultural operations and urban developments have flattened and obscured much of the Wall's physical form, especially in the urban sprawls of Tyneside to the east of the line and Carlisle to the West (Hingley 2012, 6–7). This is one of several artworks that aimed to reconnect people along the Wall's length, if only temporarily.

Illuminating reportedly reached an international audience of three billion people (Mills and Griffiths 2022, 20). A reporter who witnessed the event noted the lively atmosphere that accompanied the illuminations and a meeting with two Roman re-enactors who traveled from Germany and Belgium to take part (Sean-Williams 2022). They commented that "it is part of our own history … They're are our own ancestors"; a reference to the presence of auxiliary soldiers from these parts of Europe on the Wall in Roman times. The publicity for this event did not play directly upon the international character of the soldiers who served on the Wall. *Illuminating* was a celebration of the Wall as a national monument in the run-up to the London Olympics.

*The "*Living Wall*", Tullie House Museum, Carlisle, 2011–2023*

This installation forms part of the *Frontiers Gallery* at Tullie House Museum, first opened in 2011. The Museum is built on top of the deeply buried remains of one of the Roman forts that lay to the south of the course of Hadrian's Wall and around this fort developed an extensive town that underlies the center of Carlisle. It holds a very significant collection of archaeological remains derived from excavations at sites across the city and along the Wall itself. The *Frontiers Gallery* places Hadrian's Wall in the context of the northwestern frontiers of imperial Rome, explaining that this Roman monument was just one of those that Rome constructed around the boundaries of its extensive empire (Mills et al. 2013, 182–6).

The Gallery was the result of discussions between heritage interpreters and the museum curator and has five themes, one of which is addressed by the *Living Wall* display. Consisting of a long screen, based on the irregular shape of the World Heritage Site area for Hadrian's Wall, it features projected scenes of human crises on modern borders around the world. This includes photographic images from the lives of migrant people caught up in international borders, such as the Berlin Wall, the EU borders, the USA-Mexico Wall and the Israeli separation fence (Stone 2014b, 134). I am reminded of Giudice and Giubilaro's comments on how artworks can unsettle the regime of contemporary borders and "provoke a crack that is also an opening, where different visions are juxtaposed but never reassembled" (2015, 83–6).

Nigel Mills and the team of interpreters who helped shape *Living Wall* explain that it was developed around the resonances of Hadrian's Wall with the modern world, particularly people for whom the experience of frontiers is part of their everyday lives (Mills et al. 2013, 184). The aim was to "stimulate and challenge" (or to provoke) visitors to think of the moral and ethical aspects of bordering that affect us all (cf. Ren 2017, 1–2). This is a challenging and ambitious aim for a museum that depends on public support and institutional funding.

There has been some assessment of the success of the challenge provided by this display. Visitors are invited to leave their written comments on slips of paper pinned to a board in the Gallery. In 2016, Nigel Mills worked with the Tullie House Youth Panel, a group of young people who have a say in the museum's future, to analyze over 1,000 comments (Mills 2021, 12). Some messages were removed by museum staff as they were considered offensive, but the collected comments reflected a range of different reactions, indicating that many viewers were appreciative of *Living Wall*, with a majority expressing wishes for peace and criticizing the negative aspects of borders

(ibid., Table 2.2). Understandable, offensive messages had been removed although these might have provided insights into the attitudes of people who responded negatively to this challenge.

Living Wall remains the only example of a public heritage display on Hadrian's Wall that adopts a directly challenging form of interpretation (Hingley 2018, 88–9). A prime aim in public displays and events usually is to avoid controversy as negative messages might perhaps impact on the overall success of efforts to market monuments and museums (Hingley 2021; cf. Madsen 2015, 101). The reception of the *Living Wall* graphic display at Tullie House, however, suggests that museums can present relatively safe environments in which to stimulate people to think about problematic and potentially divisive contemporary issues. Temporary artworks on the Roman frontiers have also come to be used to communicate the entangled nature of bordering in the past and present (Artworks 4, 6, 7, 8, 9).

"Connecting Lights", *31st August and 1st September 2012*

This temporary digital art installation is reminiscent of the earlier *Illuminating* event, although more ambitious. *Connecting Lights* was designed by New York-based digital arts collective *YesYesNo* and its founding member Zachary Lieberman and developed by Newcastle University's CultureLab (Newcastle University 2012). Lieberman, a visiting Professor at Newcastle in the run-up to this project, is an artist and educator who creates "interactive environments that invite participants to become performers" (Lieberman no date). *Connecting Lights* was commissioned by the London Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games as part of the national celebrations.

The event created considerable media interest and was covered by several national newspapers and by the BBC. Pui Lee, a freelance artist and educator working throughout northern England and Scotland, received a commission to organize and deliver a series of public workshops as part of *Connecting Lights* (Lee 2012). These sessions explored the following themes: "Home, Connections, Locality, Boundaries & Place". Lee notes that "the participants got the opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas about the meaning of "home" and what connects us as people". These responses provided a starting point for the creative activities that followed.

Over 400 lighted balloons were stationed along the course of the Wall from Bowness-on-Solway to Wallsend, including eight main "stations", that transmitted messages digitally between each other as internal LED lights changed color in response (Newcastle University 2012). People could visit the lights in the landscape and were also enabled to connect with the event worldwide through a weblink, although the weather intervened and damaged the impact of the event (Mills and Griffiths 2022, 22). Lieberman observes that *Connecting Lights* aimed to communicate Hadrian's Wall as a bridge, not a barrier, "allowing people to express their experiences and thoughts about the barriers, physical and emotional, in their lives today" (Lieberman no date; cf. Fors 2019, 64). He also titled it "an inverse wall" (BBC 2012). Ruth Mackenzie, director of the Cultural Olympiad and London 2012 Festival, commented that this "beautiful installation invites us to re-imagine borders as places not where people are separated but where we meet and communicate" (Banks 2012).

Cooper and Rumford, commenting on *Connecting Light* and other border monuments, observe that "social focus points along borders can create an awareness and perception of others who, via the interface of the place, are both similar and different" (2013, 120). *Connecting Lights* also clearly reflected the ability of artscapes to challenge the concept of the Wall as a stable and timeless landscape of conservation by temporally reconnecting people over a large area with the physical remains of the monument (Cooper and Rumford 2013, 107, 122; cf. Ren 2017, 1–2).

Septimius Severus *at Corbridge (Northumberland), June 2021*

Joe Savage has observed that English Heritage has developed a *Creative Programme* to engage with artists, makers, poets, musicians, and community members, which enables "new, sometimes contested, viewpoints and creative expressions to sites" (2022, 61). English Heritage is an independent trust and charity that cares for displays to the public over 400 historic monuments and archaeological sites (English Heritage 2023). Corbridge is one of English Heritage's four pay-to-enter sites along the Wall. At this important site, visitors can explore the archaeological remains of the Roman town and the internationally important collection of artefacts housed in the on-site museum (Roberts 2021, 41).

In 2021, English Heritage commissioned a series of portraits of six historic figures as part of a project titled *Painting our Past: The African Diaspora in England*. This provided a dispersed exhibition at their properties (English Heritage 2021). One of these paintings, by the artist Elena Onwochei-Garcia, portrayed the Roman emperor Septimius Severus and was displayed at the on-site museum at Corbridge. This artist, who has Spanish, German and Nigerian heritage (ITV News 2021), creates artworks to explore "racial issues and ideologies through humor" and how they have shifted through time (English Heritage 2021). This painting drew upon Severus' origins at the Roman city of Leptis Magna (Libya) and his travels to Britain in AD 208–11, when he probably visited Corbridge. Clearly partly inspired by surviving Roman busts of Severus, the image avoids the direct use of humor, perhaps reflecting critically upon an emperor whose extremely violent invasion of northern Britain led to mass slaughter (Hingley 2022, 247).

With reference to this artwork, Savage notes that English Heritage is aiming to move toward a more questioning and value-led approach to Hadrian's Wall which is partly based on the knowledge and experience of visitors. Anna Eavis, the Curatorial Director of English Heritage, remarked that: "African figures from the past have played significant roles at some of the sites in our care but many of their stories are not well known" (ITV News 2021).[5]

"Collision + Conflict", *Gillsland and Greenhead (Cumbria), October 2021*

In October 2022, *Green Croft Arts* staged a "Geolocated Soundwalk" entitled *Collision + Conflict* through the Northumbrian and Cumbrian landscape (Green Croft Art 2021). Supported by funding from the Arts Council and Northumberland National Park, *Green Croft* commissioned fourteen artists to create songs, music, stories and prose to explore the historical, archaeological and environmental conflicts and issues affecting

contemporary communities (ibid.). These artists were selected due to their links to Northumberland and Cumbria and to reflect the diversity of the communities that built, manned and lived along Hadrian's Wall, an agenda presumably influenced by Artwork 1.

The GPS-triggered app *Echoes* includes nine of these commissions which enable visitors to follow a plotted circular walk, partly along the Hadrian's Wall National Trail, triggering artistic responses to connect to specific locations on the route (Green Croft Art 2021). An art sheet provides details of these works, including a piece by electronic music composer Dean Dennis and artist Jose Snook entitled *Peregrinations*, which "makes use of the songs and calls of selected migratory birds to reflect upon the historical presence and experience of the African people who lived and worked along Hadrian's Wall." The work *All Walls Must Fall* by theater director Olivia Furber and actor and director Ramzi Maqdisi "transports listeners to 3 conflicted landscapes in which we hear the accounts of inhabitants whose lives have been divided by a wall". *Recurve* by artist Dan Fox places the listener in the shoes of a Syrian cavalry archer stationed on the Wall 3000 miles from his home. Other works address issues such as climate change and environmental deterioration.

Collision + Conflict was the third artwork, following on from *Writing on the Wall* and the *Living Wall*, to directly champion the Wall as a context for raising critical perspectives on modern issues of mobilities and the practices and theories of bordering. *Green Croft*, a not-for-profit organization based at Gilsland, chose to draw more deeply on critical approaches to challenging the politics of bordering narratives than some of the trusts and agencies that have initiated the earlier Wall artworks.

"Future Pasts", *around Housesteads Roman Fort, May and June 2022*

Housesteads Roman Fort, an impressive Roman monument situated on the upland section of the Wall on Whin Sill, is owned by the National Trust and managed by English Heritage. The National Trust is another charity in Britain that looks after and displays historic monuments, country houses and landscapes and the Wall is part of its holdings (National Trust 2023). This is also the most impressive section of the monument since the curtain Wall is so well preserved. Kiki Claxton and Andrew Poad work for the National Trust, and observe that:

> We are … looking at new and different ways to tell the stories of our places, layering different approaches on top of the more traditional ways of engagement such as interpretation panels and the factual aspects of a site. We are trialling more inclusive approaches to, and dialogues around, contemporary identity. By doing this we can enable deeper engagement with a wider group of people, while still engaging our core audiences. Many of our National Trust sites have a multitude of different stories, histories and identities: this plurality is even more apparent at Hadrian's Wall, thanks to its 1900-year-old history, and its changing ownership and occupation throughout the millennia. (Claxton and Poad 2022, 62).

The Trust, like English Heritage, has been commissioning artworks to "break down boundaries" and communicate the Roman past in different ways. Working with *D6 Culture in Transit*, the Trust has been supporting the Finnish artist Henna Asikinen's project *Future Pasts* (ibid.; Future Pasts 2022). *D6 Culture in Transit* is a visual arts

production group that works with artists and community groups with the vision of a "world in which the arts and culture play a major part in creating a fairer, kinder and well informed society".

Asikainen organized *Future Pasts* around several community walks on the central section of the Wall around Housesteads. This event coincided with Refugee Week in 2022 and aimed to bring together participants, partners and artists to experience this landscape (Future Pasts 2022). Significantly the website notes that:

> The participatory project invites families and people with lived experience of migration and displacement, often new to the North East, to come together to discover and explore local landscapes. As Henna says: "The approach is grounded in the notions of friendship and radical hospitality and recognition—meaning to make welcome and to dissolve the barriers that prevent people from participating fully in their communities."

The walks aim to invite people to access the history and character of green spaces and break down social and physical barriers of access to these landscapes, an approach that directly challenges the conception of the English countryside, including the central upland section of Hadrian's Wall, as "a white, homogeneous space, with socially conservative values" (Future Pasts 2022; cf. Fowler 2020).

According to the Future Pasts website, Hadrian's Wall therefore provides:

> a rich location for reflection on what it means to belong and the interconnections between communities throughout time. The wall acts as a powerful reminder of the long history of migration to Britain—this year marks 1900 years since it was built. During the Roman Empire, many people from across Europe and North Africa lived, served and ruled along the wall, bringing with them local customs, plants and animals, for example, the carrot, celery and the sycamore, the rabbit and the pheasant. "All of these are now common elements of our landscapes and in many ways, they could be said to be a far more significant inheritance than the archaeological remains of forts and walls," says Henna.

It is intended that *Future Pasts* will culminate in an exhibition of new artwork and visual media that reflects upon the walks and the themes explored in Asikainen's work as a venue to develop artistic narratives about "migration, diversity and cultural heritage" (ibid.).

The Future Belongs to What was as Much as What is, *Housesteads Roman Fort (Northumberland), July to October 2022*

The latest installation positioned on an ancient site through English Heritage's *Creative Programme* was erected at Housesteads Roman Fort in July 2022 (Figure 2; English Heritage 2022a; Brown 2022). It contributed to *The Hadrian's Wall 1900* celebrations, a coordinated commemoration of the 1900th anniversary of Hadrian's decision to build this Wall (cf. Mills and Griffiths 2022, 27–9). The Housesteads artwork, with a rather lengthy and complex title, "installed a contemporary and colourful take" on top of the foundations of the original northern Roman gatehouse of the Roman Fort (English Heritage 2022a). It will be referenced as the *Housesteads Gateway* in this paper. This art gateway, which had an impressive impact on the fort's landscape, was created by the artist Morag Myrescough with some input from members of the local community. It was designed to be the same size as the Roman gateway and had windows and doors which drew upon knowledge of the appearance of the original structure.

Figure 2. *The Future Belongs to What was as Much as What is*, Housesteads, Artwork by Morag Myrescough. Photographed from the South-East, August 2022. (c) R. Hingley.

To create a vivid impression, this monumental but temporary artwork was covered with colored wooden placards that formed the outer face of the structure which was raised on a scaffold frame. The placards were marked with words and phrases derived from Myrescough's collaboration with poet Ellen Moran, also drawing upon the contribution of members of local communities who were involved through several workshops. Myrescough observed: "It's not whether people like something, or they don't like something … if they start talking about it then that is very exciting. It's about being surprised by something." (Brown 2022). Here again, we have the idea of art challenging people's preconceptions.

Kate Mavor, the Chief Executive of English Heritage, commented:

> Hadrian's Wall is one of England's most iconic landmarks and to mark its anniversary, we wanted a meaningful way to connect people of 2022 back to AD122. We hope that placing such a bold contemporary art installation in this ancient landscape will not only capture people's imagination but maybe also challenge their ideas of what the Wall was for. Not just a means to keep people out, but a frontier that people could—and did—cross. (Brown 2022).

English Heritage (2022b) also noted that, inspired by the idea of the Roman past as a colorful and vibrant place:

> the local community through workshops with the English Heritage historians, curators and the artists, have made their own mark through colour, pattern, words and symbols on the form of painted panels. The inspiration for these came from artefacts from Chester's Museum, the history of the wall and contemporary discussions about what Hadrian's Wall is and means to them now.

The on-site museum at Chesters Roman Fort, a few kilometers east of Housesteads, contains an internationally significant collection of Roman inscriptions. Experiencing and

contributing to artworks can challenge people's assumptions about the stability and meanings of the landscapes that they visit and live within (Ren 2017, 1–2).

I counted around 140 messages on panels during my visit in August 2022 and the overall impression of the terms used on all four faces of the gateway is that they were positive in tone, including the terms "joy", "love", "hope" and "life". Phrases such as "open your mind", "dreams and imagination" and "reunify" reflect criticism of bordering practices and perhaps of Brexit. A few of the words ("barrier", "discuss or argue") also indicate a more critical position, although it is impossible to tell exactly what these words reflect without more information about the intentions of the artist and commissioners.

Mae Losasso in response to this "eye-catching piece" commented critically that it "reveals the bubble of our present moment, our inability to look back to the past, and the extent to which we've moored ourselves in the contextless sea of *now*" (2022). This attempt to make the Roman past contemporary, according to Losasso, has the effect of "blotting it out altogether" (cf. Jones and Yarrow 2022, 24–6). Divorcing the words included on the placards from any fuller discussions of their contexts means that none have "the revolutionary style of protest signs", robbing words such as "Hope" and "Everlasting" of their "political or transcendental power" (Losasso 2022). In another context, Holger Pötzsch has reflected that "the effects of the practices surrounding the work can either play into, or undermine or even reverse, the intended political message suggested by a particular content based attitude." (2015, 119).

English Heritage, as Losasso acknowledges, has a range of approaches to the artworks that it commissions.[6] Another initiative during Autumn 2022, *Untold Stories – Poetry at English Heritage Sites*, was used to highlight the voices and visions of Black poets, although none of the published poems on this occasion addressed Hadrian's Wall (English Heritage 2022c).

It is significant that the planning of this project at Housesteads clearly aimed to cast a reflection on the contemporary age while drawing upon the past monumentality of the Wall. Afterall, the gateway drew upon the size, location and architecture of the original Roman structure, while the idea of placing words on the placards also drew upon the words inscribed on Roman inscriptions at Chesters. The idea of challenging people's conceptions of what ancient and modern walls were/are for may, however, have been lost on some visitors, despite the efforts of English Heritage.

"Apertura", *Walltown Country Park, September to October 2022*

The Hadrian's Wall 1900 celebrations led to the creation of an interactive sonic sculpture in the Walltown Country Park on the line of the Wall (Apertura 2022). *Apertura* is a Latin word meaning opening and this artwork drew directly upon this term. The English word "aperture" is derived from this source, meaning an open space between portions of solid matter (Oxford English Dictionary 2023). Apertura was conceptualized by a musician, a designer and an architect (Ed Carter, Nicky Kirk and Tony Broomhead) and commissioned by Northumberland County Council. Conceptualized as a response to the history and topography of Walltown Country Park, this sonic artwork was set in a backfilled and landscaped quarry, the digging of which destroyed a lengthy section of the Hadrian's Wall many decades ago (Apertura 2022; cf. Hingley 2012, 255–61).

Apertura built on the concept of a gap or aperture in the Wall, exploiting a "visual fissure" in this landscape (Apertura 2022).

With the ambitious aim to "frame and provide a new viewpoint" for this section of Hadrian's Wall (Finnigan 2022), *Apertura* was made up of 1,900 copper chimes and aimed to create an "evolving soundscape in the changing breeze", inviting visitors to experience a "constantly changing, interactive spectacle of shimmering lights and sounds" (Apertura 2022). The artwork formed an east–west opening that enabled visitors to pass beneath the structure holding the copper chimes, framing an impressive section of the Wall for walkers approaching from the west. *Apertura*, like *Illuminating* and *Connecting Lights*, was sited to enable access along the line of the Wall while encouraging people to think about gaps in frontier Walls.

The publicity for *Apertura* commented:

> Inspired by the role of Hadrian's Wall as a cultural meeting point, the piece reflects on Rudolph Arnheim's comment that "openings mediate between the worlds separated by architectural barriers", and encourages a dialogue around our shared experience of borders, boundaries and thresholds. (Apertura 2022).[7]

This spectacle of shimmering light and sounds was intended to reflect upon the disuse and partial destruction of the ancient physical barrier of the Wall at this location. By directly exploiting the idea of an aperture, the designers presumably aimed to encourage people to think in terms of the possibilities of "dis-bordering" across the world (cf. Cooper and Rumford 2013; Giudice and Giubilaro 2015, 83–6).

It is unclear whether many visitors picked up this message from exploring the artwork. The integration of the *Apertura* soundscape into *Green Croft Arts'* preexisting Geolocated Soundwalk *Collision + Conflict* may have helped some visitors to understand the innovative inspiration for *Apertura*. The redesigned walk now started at Walltown Crags, exploring the *Apertura* structure before visiting the other locations across the Wall's landscape that had inspired the narratives that were included on the *Echoes* app (Green Croft Arts 2022).

Conclusion

Together with the re-enactment events, community projects and festivals along the Wall, these artworks serve to *re-make* Hadrian's Wall (cf. Hingley 2012; dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015, 8). Ila Nicole Sheren observes in a study of the USA-Mexico border:

> the physical presence of the borderline is something that can be coupled and decoupled from the artwork, but the fact remains that without the border-as-metaphor, there can be no border art. What, then, about an art that seeks to erase the very conditions of its existence? (2015, 16).

In the case of Hadrian's Wall, the Roman frontier has long ceased to serve as a physical barrier to movement, bringing it into connection with recent borders such as the Berlin Wall that have ceased to fulfill their original roles (cf. Bach 2016). Despite this, many of the artworks stationed along Hadrian's Wall consciously highlighted the divisive ideas that drive the modern policies and practices of bordering.

The analysis of these artworks on the Wall raises two issues of significance. First, the materiality of the Wall has influenced several of these artworks (cf. Witcher, Tolia-Kelly,

and Hingley 2010). One approach that has been utilized by several of the designers and artists is to draw directly upon the physical archaeological remains when conceptualizing the artwork, as in stationing the beacons at Roman turrets and milecastles along the line of the Wall in *Illuminating* (Artwork 2) or the use of the Roman bust of Severus as a basis for the painting displayed as part of the *African Diaspora* exhibition (5). The idea for the words and phrases that adorned the *Housesteads Gateway* (8) was taken from the Roman inscriptions displayed to the public at Chesters Roman Fort. The placement of the *Living Wall* (3) instillation alongside a more traditional display of Roman artefacts also linked ancient and contemporary borderlands to the ancient past of northern England. This innovation, which drew upon some of the narratives developed through *Writing on the Wall* (1), also finds reflection in several other artworks addressed above (6, 7, 9).

These approaches to drawing the past into an intimate relationship with the present perhaps answer the critique that creative artworks may devalue and entirely blot out the past (cf. Losasso 2022). These artworks contribute to the borderscape of "Hadrian's Wall Country" by supplementing its historic and cultural significance. It remains to be established to what extent these artworks have been understood by visitors in the ways that designers and artists intended (as discussed for the *Housesteads Gateway* and *Apertura*).

Second, many, if not all, of these artworks, aimed to inspire visitors to reflect upon the policies and practices that create barriers and constrain the mobility of many today. They used this disused ancient frontier as a geographic and historical context for encouraging people to think about coming together cooperatively and to support thoughts of peaceful coexistence and partnership between the peoples of the world. Such works seek to encourage people to question the policies and practices of contemporary bordering. Those who work on interpreting and marketing the Wall, as shown by these artworks, clearly wish to communicate tolerant approaches to visitors at this time of global fragmentation. As a result, several artworks have focused critical attention on the plight of migrants and marginalized communities and this seems to be a growing trend (3, 6, 7). Others pursue a more subtle approach to this issue.

Challenging visitors to think about issues they might rather ignore is a more straightforward aim for independent associations and groups, such as *D6 Culture in Transit* and *Green Croft Arts*, than for agencies such as English Heritage and the National Trust (above). Despite this, the Tullie House Museum, the National Trust, and English Heritage have directed and supported artworks that aim to encourage people to reflect on contemporary bordering policies and philosophies. The responses "provoked" by the *Living Wall* Gallery (3) have been evaluated through a study of the reaction of visitors to this graphic display, with encouraging results.

There remains a concern, however, that if the political context of any works that seek to be changeling or provocative to viewers is too obscure as the result of a desire not to offend, the work may even serve to undermine or reverse the intended message (e.g. Pötzsch 2015, 119). The Wall continues to be used in a directly nationalistic manner as a symbol of exclusion by other commentators, in debates about English national identity, migration into Britain and discussions of Trump's Wall (Hingley 2020; Bonacchi 2022, 114–37). Hadrian's Wall has been drawn directly into debates about the UK's borderscape which indicates that messages conveyed by such artworks are regularly undermined and reversed.

The value of addressing the Wall as an artscape lies in the creative and critical focus that these materials and ideas provide. Further ventures to explore the aesthetics of the Wall through art may inspire more visitors to the Wall to think critically about the binary concepts that characterize the political imposition of borderworks and practices in today's world. The monument's popularity with international visitors, together with its role as a powerful reminder of the long history of migration to Britain, and the forceful and violent way in which this frontier was imposed upon the population of the central British landscape nineteen centuries ago, all help to explain the value of thinking in terms of critical artscapes.

Notes

1. Hadrian's Wall was inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1987 (Witcher, Tolia-Kelly, and Hingley 2010, 108).
2. This observation is based on a map of the world formerly displayed in the bar of the Inn at Twice Brewed (Northumberland) on the Wall that used to invite visitors to place a plastic-headed pin at the location that they had travelled from. This was removed during the renovation of the Inn several years ago.
3. For the complex relationship between archaeology, heritage and tourism, see Dallen and Tahan (2020).
4. For aesthetics and borders/borderscapes, see a special edition of *Geopolitics* 20(1) for 2015.
5. There had already been some public display of the role of Severus on the Wall through an exhibition, *The Archaeology of Race*, that toured the Wall between July and October 2009 (Tolia-Kelly 2011, 80).
6. English Heritage has been updating the interpretation at all its properties along the Wall to provide and enhanced account of the archaeological remains (Roberts 2021).
7. Arnheim was a German-born writer, art and film theorist.

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