

AINSLEY HILLARD

The audio-textile installation “Traces” by Welsh textile artist Ainsley Hillard utilises traditional aspects of textiles alongside sophisticated digital software. This work was made in November 2008 and consists of ten to fifteen hand-woven structures that create an ensemble, suspended in space together with digital surround sound effects for a theatrical event. The visual, the tactile and the audio converge to create a multi-layered sensory experience.

Interested in making connections between the past and the present most of Ainsley Hillard’s creative output to date has been in the form of site-specific works. Ideas of memory or nostalgia are visited and the traces left behind and kept within a particular place are signified and represented. “Traces” evokes the former use of the Mission Gallery, Swansea, Wales - a seaman’s chapel and community meeting place.

Photographs of the place were taken and then digitally enlarged and manipulated using Photoshop. The resulting images were digitally printed on to heat-transfer paper and then on a viscose yarn to be used as the weft for a textile with a nylon monofilament warp. The semi-transparent appearance and the resilient structure of this warp allow the images to be recognisable. However, they become slightly distorted during the hand weaving construction as the imagery shifts and is misaligned. This adds to the poignancy of the work, in terms of memories being ‘askew’ or slightly inaccurate. Both sides of the work are visible as the audience moves through the space, its imagery coming in to view and disappearing, scenes fading and merging, recognisable forms being revealed and concealed.

Original sounds of the space are recorded by Ainsley Hillard using the ProTool software package, specifically used for digital surround sound effects. Whispered echoes and the chiming of bells accompany the sound of the audience’s footsteps and voices; silence is also factored in. To connect strongly with the woven forms, the sounds were edited and played at intervals of around forty seconds to mimic the passing of weft threads over and below the warp of a plain weave. The sounds are emitted randomly from the five speakers, placed at a height of 1.5 metres in the gallery space. The artist describes the end result as an ‘audio fabric’.

“Traces” successfully communicates the history of the space where the work is cited and engages fully with the audience for a work that is viewed by the eye and received by the ear.