

Upper Gallery

1. **Utopia**, 2015. Single channel colour video projection, audio. 6 minutes 13 seconds. Courtesy of the artist and Roundhouse, London. Commissioned by Roundhouse, London

“Without iron human life is simply impossible, just as it is without fire or water – but we could easily do without silver and gold, if it weren't for the idiotic concept of scarcity-value. And yet kind Mother Nature has deliberately placed all her greatest blessings, like earth, air, and water, right under our noses, and tucked away out of sight the things are no use to us...”

Nor can they understand why a totally useless substance like gold should now, all over the world, be considered far more important than human beings, who gave it such value as it has, purely for their own convenience. The result is that a man with about as much mental agility as a lump of lead or a block of wood, a man whose utter stupidity is paralleled only by his immorality, can have lots of good intelligent people at his beck and call, just because he happens to possess a large pile of gold coins...”

2. **The Same Road is a Different Road**, 2018. Single channel colour video projection, audio. 11 minutes 27 seconds. Courtesy of the artist, commissioned by Modern Art Oxford, supported by Wellcome Trust

“When the same road is a different road... I live at the top of this road. Angel is at one end and Kings Cross at the other and I walk it almost every day...”

Maybe it'd be safer to get on a bus but if sut'n happens - I'm trapped. And if someone I don't know gets on, and he looks at me and I look back that could be calling it on, but if I look away it's a sign of weakness so best I keep walking.

...Being caught slipping means being caught off guard. Walking without being very aware of your surroundings. ...”

3. **When I First Saw a Gun**, 2018. Black and white video on a monitor. 10 minutes 15 seconds. Courtesy of the artist, commissioned by Modern Art Oxford

“When I held the gun, it made me feel a sense of power, but also a sense of nervousness knowing I could hold something so powerful. I was so shocked at what I'd done... but what it left me with is what was useful. It was realising what an 11 year old child – what chaos I could cause – with a gun. That left me with such a realisation of the violence of which we are all capable ... I had to spend the rest of my life trying to stop people killing each other.”

Middle Gallery 1

4. **Out of the Rubble**, 2015. Colour video on a monitor. 18 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and British Film Institute (BFI), London

“After the war [in 1945] there can be no thinking of returning to cramped houses and crippling streets of slums like a lingering death from the last century. In the days to come, we must feel that it is not every man for himself but every man for all people living.”

5. **Jerusalem**, 2014. Black and white video on a monitor. 9 minutes 30 seconds. Courtesy of the artist and British Council Film, London

8. **I Chose the Wrong Ride**, 1976. Etching on paper. Courtesy of the artist

“That was one of the first etchings I ever made. It was when I was doing that course [at Ruskin summer school] ... I felt very out-of-control at that time because I had broken away from this idea that I would be a housewife ... I had sort of jumped and I wasn't sure that there was anything to catch me. I wasn't on this safe ride that was going round and round, the horse and I took off and I didn't know where we were going, it was terrifying but also exhilarating.”
– Penny Woolcock

10. **Sparkling, Singing, Soaring**, c.1980. C-type print on paper. Courtesy of the artist

11. **Grand Nude**, c.1980. C-type print on paper. Courtesy of the artist

“I rarely had an audience apart from my friends who were also struggling artists – I wasn't commercially successful in that way, but it was a moment of completion, of being who I wanted to be and I think all of that work speaks to that joy.” – Penny Woolcock

13. **Dressed In Glittery Raiment They Drank Heavily, Laughing Loudly**, 1983. C-type print on paper. Courtesy of the artist

“It's an empowered image of women together, enjoying each other's company, and behaving outrageously ... I got into making films within two or three years of making that painting.” – Penny Woolcock

16. **Dreaming Spires I & II**, 2018. Single channel colour video projection, audio. Two parts, 6 minutes each. Courtesy of the artist, commissioned by Modern Art Oxford

““Charles – what in the world's happening at your college? Is there a circus? I've seen everything except elephants. I must say the whole of Oxford has become most peculiar suddenly. Last night it was pululating with women. You've got to come away at once, out of danger. I've got a motor-car and a basket of strawberries and a bottle of Chateau Peyraguey – which isn't a wine you've ever tasted, so don't pretend. It's heaven with strawberries.”
– Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, 1945

“See prestigious colleges looking vibrant in the light / But if you travel around the corner just a couple streets away / Guaranteed you'll see a homeless person trying to plead for change... Everybody think they know Oxford but they're deceived ya / They'll tell ya it's about universities and academia / But here on council estates we all got bleeding hearts / Poor education so what choice is our people starve ... Fathers and mums, sisters and brothers, all in the dreaming spires but were hiding under the covers. While they're hiding us from the public, the voice of the voiceless is yet to be discovered.”
– Black Jack and Side, *Oxford*, 2018

Artist thanks

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Please be advised that this exhibition contains strong language and accounts of criminality. A number of artworks may be unsuitable for children and upsetting to some visitors.

Please ask our Visitor Assistants if you have any questions.

We are grateful to our primary supporters:



Exhibition partner:



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6. **Penny Woolcock in her studio in Jericho, Oxford with her son**, 1976. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist
Penny Woolcock's studio in Jericho, Oxford, 1980. C-type print on paper. Courtesy of the artist

7. **Big Girl, studio in Hoxton, London**, 2018. C-type print on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Sarah Ainslie

“My studio felt like a ship that I was travelling on, and the sails [large paintings and installations] were all part of that – it was somewhere that I could float off in my imagination... That room was the saving of me really, there is a feeling – which is in the piece *Big Girl* – of wanting to break out and get away and wanting to change things. I was so excited at that time. I could actually be an artist in the space that I had created for myself. In that work there's a kind of exuberance.” – Penny Woolcock

9. **Waking Up**, 1976. Etching on paper. Courtesy of the artist

“We had an etching plate and would draw on the plate, put it into the acid and make our own prints. We had notebooks that we wrote in as diaries, then after a couple of weeks you pass the plate and notebook on to the next person ... It was a huge turning point because it meant that you had two other people who were completely intrigued and fascinated and paying attention to what you were doing. You could share this experience and be interested in each other; we all learnt a huge amount from that ... The title is about waking up to be ourselves, we gave birth to ourselves, we've gone in different directions since then yet maintained very strong friendship.” – Penny Woolcock

12. **The Men Watched the Women Talking**, 1982. C-type print on paper. Courtesy of the artist

“From the very early 1970s I was becoming very aware of inequalities between women and men. I didn't want a conventional life. I wanted to be an artist, to be free and to be able to be in the world in the way that men were ... One of the things that I perceived through my own experience is that women are much more able to talk to each other; we share things, we are not afraid of being vulnerable in front of each other and I could see that men didn't really have this. Men are more isolated and there is more front to uphold, and that is true of men of all classes I think.” – Penny Woolcock

Middle Gallery 2

14. **Big Girl**, 2018. Mixed media: Polyester, hollowfibre, cardboard, plastic, drainpipes, wood, thread and audio (looped). Audio: 14 minutes 28 seconds. Courtesy of the artist, commissioned by Modern Art Oxford

“How did it start? How does anything start? Maybe we stitch stories together to help us make sense of things. My mother and I parted company on the 1st of January 1950; we were never as close again.”
– Penny Woolcock

Piper Gallery

15. **La La Land**, 2018. Single channel colour video projection, audio. 14 minutes 22 seconds. Courtesy of the artist, commissioned by Modern Art Oxford

“I'm going to leave here just like I came; naked as a jaybird. You didn't bring nothing here did you? So what makes you think you gonna take anything away? You're not getting away with any prizes. The only thing you gonna leave here with is a suit on.” - Willie

EXHIBITION NOTES

MODERN ART OXFORD



"Peaceful change happens when we break out of the bubbles we inhabit, wake up and connect with other realities."
– Penny Woolcock

The Same Road is a dynamic new film created as part of *Fantastic Cities*. The work presents two subjective narratives, one of the artist and the other of a teenage gang member, on a short walk through the same city streets in North London.

The Wellcome Trust has supported Woolcock's film alongside a research project to increase knowledge about how fear drives violent street crime involving teenagers. The project also hopes to understand exhibition visitors' levels of empathy for the teenagers' mental health. When you have seen the exhibition we would appreciate your contribution to this research by taking part in a short survey and sharing your views in the visitor book for *Fantastic Cities*, located in the Project Space. Please talk to our Visitor Assistants if you would like to complete the survey.



Behind the scenes photo of Penny Woolcock and Steve Griffith of Copenhagen Youth Project from the making of *The Same Road* is a *Different Road* (London, 2018). Photo by Ravi Lloyd. Image courtesy of the artist.

In 2019, a new film by Woolcock will be created in Oxford as part of this research, and teenagers traumatised by street violence will meet with neuroscientists to increase scientific knowledge. Selected research findings to date will be shared at an event at Modern Art Oxford on Saturday 2 March 2019. Please see the our website for event details.

Join the conversation:
Facebook/YouTube: Modern Art Oxford, Twitter/Instagram: @mao_gallery

Penny Woolcock, *Fantastic Cities* (2018). Photo by Sarah Ainslie. Image courtesy the artist.

Penny Woolcock, *The First Time I Saw a Gun* (2018). Image courtesy the artist.

"So much more binds us than divides us."
– Penny Woolcock

La La Land presents Woolcock's filmed observations as she walks the short distance from the affluent Los Angeles Arts District to the shocking poverty of Skid Row. Verbal suggestions for mindfulness and consumerism are woven together with fictional and celebrity references, alongside the artist's subjective commentary. In the face of multiple inequalities, Woolcock feels it is important to hear the dignified voice of Willie as he muses that we all become equal at the end of our days.

Dreaming Spires is comprised of two companion pieces reflecting a historical division often referred to as 'town and gown'. One film plays to the popular perception of Oxford as a cloistered seat of privileged learning. The other film presents two young people who grew up in Oxford sharing their personal accounts of life here. For the artist both portrayals are equally valid.

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"Oxford Printmakers made me wake up to the fact that anything is possible if you break out of isolation."
– Penny Woolcock

From 1970 to 1985 Woolcock lived in Oxford, where she transformed her artistic life through sustained friendships forged with other young artists and visits to Modern Art Oxford. In 1977 the friends co-founded a well-equipped printmaking collective as they were short on art materials individually, further demonstrating their strong encouragement of artistic work as a vital way to connect people in the city. In 1985, with equipment borrowed from Film Oxford, she created her first short film which was screened on Channel 4. In film, she had found a medium which was versatile enough to accommodate her prolific creativity and explore parallel world through filmic collaborations.

"Art is an essential part of who we are. Art can slice through in a way nothing else can."
– Penny Woolcock

The groundbreaking work of Penny Woolcock (b. 1950, Buenos Aires) spans film, opera, television and visual art. Compassionate and challenging, Woolcock's work is widely celebrated for its creatively incisive approach to exploring issues of social inequality. Woolcock gives voice to emotive personal stories that reveal the impact of economic and political conditions on people's lives and aspirations. *Fantastic Cities* presents 'parallel worlds' through intimate accounts of real urban experiences that often go unheard, at times layered together with fantastical tales from literature, film and music. This exhibition invites visitors to engage with unfamiliar narratives, to explore how people weave together stories to make sense of intense emotional responses to city life.

Also in the Upper Gallery, two new films offer personal accounts spoken as if confiding subjective experiences to a friend. *The Same Road* is a *Different Road* (2018) describes a ten-minute walk through North London with narration by two local people: the artist shares her confident relaxed thoughts, while a teenager articulates a rarely-heard account of gang life. At a time of increasing violent crime, this film based on actual events hopes to increase viewers' empathy for the traumatised teenagers fearfully lashing out under the acute stress of crossing battlezones invisible to the rest of us. *When I First Saw A Gun* (2018) explores the similarities between a diverse range of individuals who recall their first memorable encounter with a gun, revealing the importance of parents and peers in shaping our perception and experiences.

"It's so much more interesting and life affirming to know people from very different backgrounds and cultures."
– Penny Woolcock

Woolcock was raised in the well-established communities of British expatriates in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay. As an aspiring teenage artist she joined a radical theatre group during the Argentine military dictatorship and was briefly arrested. She left for Barcelona at 18 and then moved with her young son to London and then Oxford. Visiting British cities for the first time, she was shocked by the reality of poverty, housing crises and class differences that were in stark contrast to the romantic expatriate concept of British identity.



Penny Woolcock: Fantastic Cities