

Rhys Himsworth

New Silk Roads



PADA studios are delighted to present *New Silk Roads*, the first solo show in Portugal by the Welsh artist Rhys Himsworth.

In this show the artists presents a series of new works that utilise recycled electronic waste to examine questions surrounding globalisation, consumerism, communication and shifting political topographies in the remnants of historic geopolitical forces.

The artist has recently been based in Doha, Qatar, a location that sits on the historic silk road that linked the Far East through the Middle East to the kingdoms of Europe; it saw the trade of goods and services, the flow of information and ideas, and the material wealth on which historic empires and civilizations were built. In contemporary times, however, a new silk road has emerged: it is dominated by the emerging economies such as China as well as the established Western states in Europe and North America in addition to corporations and pan-national institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. Referred to as The Silk Road Economic Belt this important trade route represents an ever increasing bid for natural resources and control between competing geopolitical forces.

The oil and gas used to fuel the factories that produce our consumer electronic goods and power machines and infrastructure that enable our inter-connected cyber culture are sourced predominantly from the Gulf states: Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia which were formerly of the historic silk road. Meanwhile, within the mineral rich areas of The Congo in Central Africa, Australia, Canada and Central Asia, a new scramble is taking place around the minerals and precious metals, often referred to as 'Conflict Minerals', that are essential to modern consumer electronics.

The plastics developed from the production of oil from The Middle East meet the conflict minerals of Central Africa, and the precious metals from around the globe, coming together in the factories of China and South-East Asia. Here, cobalt is used to produce capacitors, neodymium to produce hard drives, tin for computer chips, copper for circuitry wiring and gold, silver, nickel and zinc for circuit board production. From here, the entanglement of new and old routes becomes increasingly complex as a vast network of shipping containers, freight forwarders, logistics specialists and retailers, disperse these goods across the globe using algorithmic systems.

Upon consumption these goods are again transported through the shipping ports of major developed countries, returning to recycling plants back in China where the materials are sorted and separated, with precious minerals being reused and residual plastic being either burnt or discarded in landfills. Throughout this process, there exists an umbrella of corporate and political networks through mining corporations, tech-design studios, retail companies, and logistics firms that oversee this journey in collaboration with governments and pan-national institutions.

This new silk road traces a complex geographical web and perhaps an even more complex set of geopolitical agendas. The works of *New Silk Roads*, act as a vantage point from where the materials used, the location from which they have been sought, and the places they depict, all come together to explore issues surrounding the way in which communication, interaction, trade and consumption take place under the umbrella of a globalized community, constructed of neo-colonial and corporate capitalist structures which we, as consumers, are complicit in.

For this exhibition the artist has produced a series of sculptures and paintings made of reprocessed electronic waste. To do so the artist has travelled to electronic waste recycling areas of Southern China, located in Guiyu, Guangdong Province. Guiyu is an area consisting of a number of villages that process over 100 truckloads of e-waste per day; waste which is imported from the US, Canada and Europe. The artist collects circuit boards, electronic housing plastics, hard drives, processors, and precious metals that make up electrical component circuitry. These materials are then crushed and shredded using a home made crusher constructed by the artist.

Himsworth then licenses photographs from stock image libraries, a resource defined by its remoteness and distance between its source and user, as well as being a medium that produces meaning only when appropriated or activated by other content. The landscapes depicted within these images refer to the locations where the minerals contained within the surfaces of the works were originally sourced. Upon making their way to the artist's studio the artist, through his laboratory-like process, is able to metaphorically and allegorically transport the materials to their place of origin. In adopting this circuitous sourcing method, the artist makes visible the complexity and sometimes, absurdity, of how contemporary geo-political forces organise the allocation of resources.

It seems fitting to host such an exhibition within PADA studios, housed in a former industrial site that saw the transition from an industrial to post-industrial economy, the remnants of that industrial heritage still present within the surrounding landscape whilst the basis for contemporary manufacturing has shifted to the East.

Again fitting is to have the exhibition set in the vicinity of the city of Lisbon. As one of the largest shipping ports in Europe, Lisbon serves as one of the gateways through which the materials used in the work pass through. Therefore, it operates as a significant node within a complex technological, financial, and geopolitical network upon which the work seeks to comment. As the capital of one of the oldest and most significant European empires, Lisbon brings with it a historical dimension to the context of the work with an opportunity for the many iterations of the city's evolution to be reflected within the work, and an opportunity to reflect on historic and contemporary forms of colonialism.

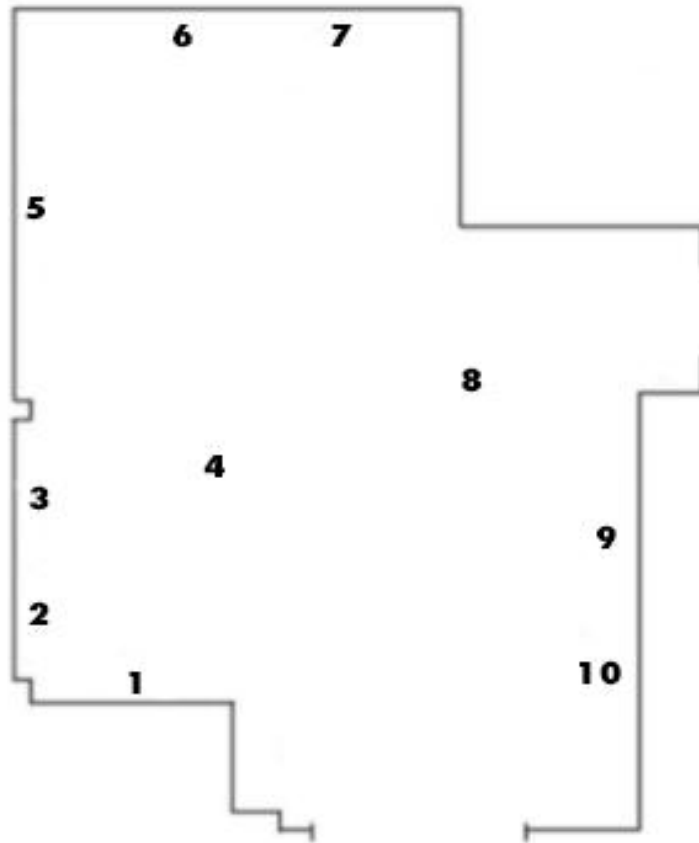
By using the discarded materials of consumer electronics and depicting the physicality of landscape and plant matter from which they originate, the works draw attention to the way in which the seemingly benign acts of virtual communication and data storage not only create a new digital landscape but are continually informing, eroding, and producing new physical terrains and topographies.

The production of the works in the exhibition have been generously funded through a VCUQatar Faculty Research Grant.

About The Artist

Rhys Himsworth is an artist based between Berlin and Wales. He is a recent artist in resident of Kunstlerhaus Bethanien and prior to this he was a fellow at The International Studio and Curatorial Program, New York, Takt Kunstprojektraum, Berlin, and the Virginia Center for Creative Arts.

He has exhibited extensively in Europe, North America, and Asia including solo shows at the National Museum of Wales, UK. CICA Museum in Seoul, South Korea, Kunstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany, Reynolds Gallery, Richmond Virginia, Katara Art Center in Doha, Qatar, and The Indian Art Fair, Delhi, India.



1. Topographies of Decline #03, 2020
Digital UV ink, acrylic and crushed LCD screens on aluminium, 155 cm x 122 cm
2. Phalaenopsis Amabilis Alumen, 2021
Digital UV ink, acrylic and crushed CD-R's on aluminium, 50 cm x 60 cm
3. Pentas lonceolata Aeris, 2020
Digital UV ink, acrylic and crushed circuit boards on aluminium, 80 cm x 100 cm
4. New Silk Roads #03, 2021
3D printed recycled aluminium, ceramics, 40 cm x 40 cm x 100 cm
5. Topographies of Decline #09, 2021
Digital UV ink, acrylic and crushed DVD-R's on aluminium, 190 cm x 152 cm
6. Topographies of Decline #04, 2020
Digital UV ink, acrylic and crushed LCD screens on aluminium, 155 cm x 122 cm
7. Strophanthus Gratus Alumen, 2021
Digital UV ink, acrylic and crushed DVD-R's on aluminium, 50 cm x 60 cm
8. New Silk Roads #02, 2021
3D printed recycled DVD-R's, ceramics, 40 cm x 40 cm x 100 cm
9. Anaphalis javanica Aurum Argentumque, 2021
Digital UV ink, acrylic and crushed computer housing on aluminium, 80 cm x 100 cm
10. Topographies of Decline #10, 2021
Digital UV ink, acrylic and crushed CD-R's on aluminium, 152 cm x 122 cm