

A coastal landscape featuring a weathered wooden structure in the foreground, a sandy beach, and a body of water under a cloudy sky. The structure is made of dark, aged wood and is partially covered in green moss. The beach is a mix of sand and small rocks, leading to a calm body of water. In the background, there are rolling hills or mountains under a sky with scattered clouds and a hint of sunset or sunrise light.

Irene Rogan's  
*Unpublished Tour*

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westwords.org | incertainplaces.org

*Irene Rogan's Unpublished Tour*

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**In  
Certain  
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*Cover image:* A view of the Duddon Estuary near the old pier, Millom.

# Introduction

Irene Rogan's *Unpublished Tour*, which took place in and around the landscape and places on the west side of the Duddon Estuary in West Cumbria, between July and November 2021, was an art programme comprising multi-artist engagements with landscape and place, resulting in a number of art works that embraced various media and, indeed, the use of landscape itself as medium.

*Unpublished Tour* was conceived by the artist as a continuation of some earlier engagements with the town of Millom and its surroundings. These projects — *The Making of a Cultural Landscape* (2018) and *Between Silence and Light* (2019), as well as her participation in other projects, such as *Re:Drift* — involve not only significant community engagement to realise the programme's aims, but a process that works through the landscape as an environment that can be seen as a unique but underdeveloped cultural asset. Because much of her work is taken up with the environment around Millom, the projects and artworks that Irene Rogan produces also, therefore, have a value beyond the works themselves insofar as they involve engagements with and visions of the hidden riches of a place that is peripheral to most people's sense of Cumbria as the place of the Lake District. In my own research and writing on West Cumbria I have explored the multifaceted nature of the region's peripherality and would contend that the town of Millom and the landscape around it is like West Cumbria in miniature: once a thriving industrial community by the sea, but now a place that exists in the shadow of the much more famous landscape that belongs to the Lake District National Park.

The significance of the fact that the Duddon Estuary — a major defining feature of this unique landscape — would be the subject for *Unpublished Tour* needs to be underlined. The difficulty for any artist working in West Cumbria is its lack of cultural resources, its sparse networks, insufficient infrastructure and all the other elements that could be argued to constitute the basis for a thriving cultural ecology. In late 2018 when I first met Irene Rogan she was then located in an old school building that she had managed to secure to use

as a studio space — temporarily, as it turned out — which also sometimes doubled as an exhibition space. It was a solution to the fact that she found now found herself — after years of national and international commissions and collaborations — in a place that lacked spaces for artists to work. In fact, not only does the region lack the kind of artists' resources that would be more readily available in urban settings, but the peculiar nature of the broader regional economy — which is dependent on the nuclear industry — makes it very difficult for anything like a creative sector, and hence, the arts, to take root as they might in a region with a more diverse economy and range of employment.

Since the mid-20th century, the economy of West Cumbria has been dependent on the nuclear industry. It is a region that pays some of the highest median wages in the UK, but whose 'single industry' dominance has deterred activity in the cultural and creative sectors, the leisure and visitor economy, and negatively impacted on the development of, and demand for, a wide range of cultural assets and opportunities. The situation, within the context of Millom and its surroundings, is compounded by other factors, including the remoteness of the location and the inadequate communications infrastructure.

These factors have ensured that it remains difficult for West Cumbria, and even more remote places within it, like Millom, to develop a sustainable cultural ecology. It is within this context that one can see the significance of Irene Rogan's work and understand why it has to be viewed in ways that are not reducible to the standard kinds of measures that might be applied elsewhere.

My interest in the artist's work has developed as an aspect of my role with UCLan's In Certain Places, which aims to instigate connections between and amongst artists, cultural practitioners and other stakeholders in the region. In the 21st century, not only do the arts and culture function as key economic drivers, they also contribute more generally to the creative and spontaneous regeneration of places. It is within this context, I believe, that *Unpublished Tour* has a broader significance for the arts in West Cumbria.



Top: Images taken during a walk around the edge of the estuary with Irene Rogan in January 2019.

Bottom: Irene Rogan's studio in The Old Schoolroom, Millom, January 2019.

## **Duddon Estuary (West)**

### **Area of activity**

Roughly, landscapes and places located between the A595 and the Duddon Estuary. Participating artists made research trips onto the estuary courtesy of the Duddon Inshore Rescue service.

### **Remoteness**

Very remote / remote

### **Location**

NW England

### **Population**

c. 8,000 (Millom, Haverigg and other places)

### **Centres**

Town of Millom, village of Haverigg, and smaller settlements on the west side of the Duddon estuary (The Green, Lady Hall, The Hill).

### **Industry**

Former site of major steel manufacture

### **Demographics**

Millom is comprised of three electoral wards for which demographics are produced. One demographic variable that may have an impact on the type and /or demand for cultural activities that is worth highlighting is that of age. The average population age for each ward, as well as for Haverigg, is given below, followed by the median figure:

Haverigg - 42 years; 41 years

Holborn Hill - 41 years; 43 years

Millom Without - 48 years; 52 years

Newtown - 43 years; 44 years

Cumbria, in general, has an ageing population.

## Places

Driving south to Millom on the A595 one can easily understand why it was thought of as almost an island unto itself.

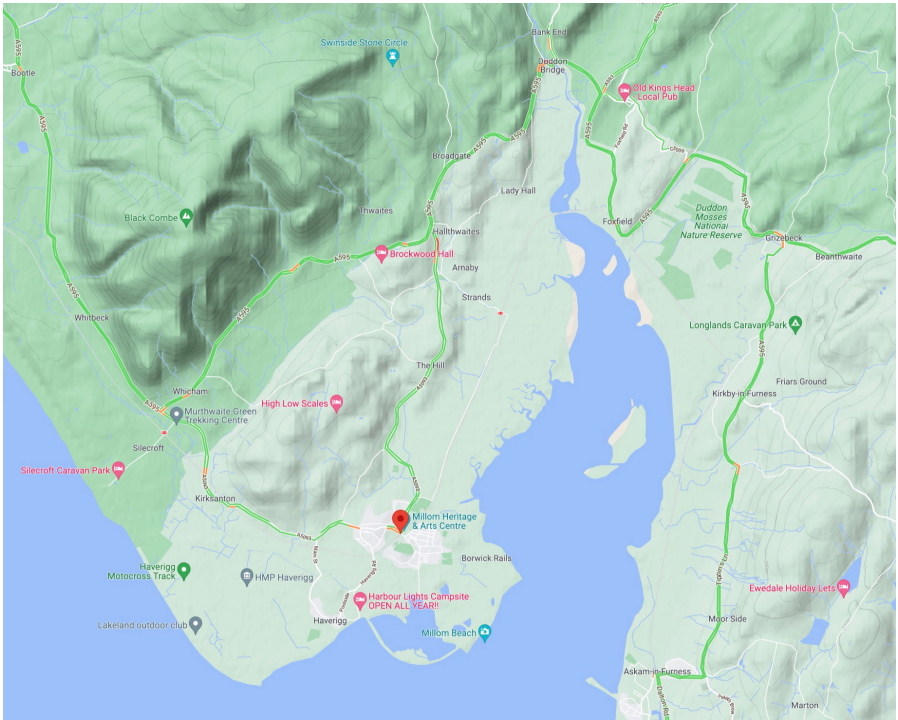
Its hemmed-in position on the Duddon estuary, looking out in all directions to natural boundaries — the sea, and the imposing form of Black Combe, the mountainous terrain of the Lake District beyond the inland edge of the Duddon — when combined with inadequate overland transport networks, had people imagining for a time in the early 1970s that newly developed hovercraft could be a means of keeping it connected to other places. Rather than the thirty minutes or more it could take to drive around the Duddon estuary to Askam-in-Furness, the hovercraft — it was revealed — could accomplish the journey in a mere two minutes.

The remoteness, in other words, is not just a fact of being geographically on the periphery. It is also a matter of the nature of the landscape and the routes in and out of it.

Like Cleator Moor, further north in West Cumbria, Millom experienced an unprecedented boom in the mid-19th century, as a result of the speed with which the iron and steel industries took off, making it what was once described as a small mining Kingdom. Besides its steel, the most well-known product of Millom, was the poet Norman Nicholson, whose attachment to his hometown seemed to have been matched by the methodical labours devoted to his work. ‘I like to think that when I’ve finished a poem you can drop it on the floor and it won’t break,’ he once said. Perhaps the same was said of the other products of Millom, the steel that flowed beneath the smoke and flames that lit up the sky around the clock.

After the ironworks that spurred on the growth of the community in those boom years closed in 1968, there was a steadfast refusal to do as many economic and industrial experts advised, and simply abandon this town. It had become a little world unto itself.

Nicholson’s work, of course, was often concerned with the Lake District,



Haverigg, Millom, the Duddon estuary and other places (Google Maps).

but that tends to obscure his obsession with life in the Millom that also faced out towards what he described as the dying Atlantic's edge. Looking out in that direction, he was able to see ships falling 'beyond the horizon where the sunset dips' as if, indeed, they had reached a point of no return, disappearing with the sun into a mythic west beyond all sight.<sup>1</sup>

To get close to this sense of being right on the edge, head to Hodbarrow Point and Lighthouse, Haverigg, just outside of Millom. As well as being the location of an extensive holiday village today — with teepees and a sort of caravan riviera rising up around the edge of what locals know as the Lagoon — Port Haverigg Marina Village sells itself as a place for the future, where one might enjoy water-skiing and wakeboarding. One structure that still offers protection to the location is the sea wall. Originally running to 6870ft in length, it was designed by dam engineers and erected at the turn of the 20th century in an attempt to hold back the rising waters that threatened to engulf the Hodbarrow Iron Company's workings.

Today, on parts of the land where the old ironworks once existed, if you don't look too closely it seems that the merest of traces remain of that past. In surroundings that can, at first sight, seem as green and pleasant as untouched nature, it is only the oddly contoured shape of a mound here or a raised path there as you venture forth across the land — walking on what is perhaps a former wagon track — that give a clue as to what was once located in this place.

These were my own initial impressions, as recorded in my book, *West Cumbria: On the Edge*: 'As I traipsed over the land one summer day looking for the site of the old ironworks, it was possible to discern the sound of a loud and dull but distant mechanical pounding. It was the sound of automated clanging coming from back in the town, as if the ghosts of those Millom ironworkers who refused to die continued to invisibly operate some great steel press on the empty land I now found myself standing on.'<sup>2</sup>

1. John Scanlan, *West Cumbria: On the Edge* (Preston, 2019), p. 56.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

## **Artists and type of work**

### **Environmental Art (13)**

Di McGhee  
Tim Pugh  
Irene Rogan

### **Photography (6)**

David Severn + workshop participants:  
Jan Bridget  
Simone Faulkner  
Liz North  
Chris Powell  
Jonathan Powell

### **Writing (2)**

David Cooper  
Wallace Heim

### **Spoken word performance (2)**

Kevin McNally  
Marianne Walsh

### **Digital Art (1)**

Mel Galley.

### **Film (3)**

Laurence Campbell

### **Music**

Hannah Rose Kessler  
Jo Wade  
Neil Wade  
Dave Baker

### **Textiles**

Hannah Rose Kessler  
Di McGhee

## Artists

The range of works made during the short duration of *Unpublished Tour* represent a remarkable attempt to see and give presence to the principal subject — the landscapes around Millom and the Duddon Estuary — as not only a natural environment (containing a number of protected habitats and zones) but one that has edged onto and interacted with a landscape and shoreline that was shaped for human ends. As such, the land around the water's edge is both changed by the action of the tides — at low tide much of the marshland can be traversed on foot — and has been altered by the activities that once took place close to Millom's now vanished industries. The Millom side of the Duddon still looks like an abandoned landscape, its surface marked with small industrial remains: iron spokes protruding from the ground and the kind of otherworldly concrete forms that look like they might be the result of some kind of volcanic eruption.

This, of course, makes the Duddon estuary, in particular, a fascinating cultural and historical landscape. Indeed, the programme's title was inspired by Wordsworth's writing of the same title, and the main image used to represent *Unpublished Tour* — and featured prominently on its website — is a photograph taken by Irene Rogan from a train passing over the estuary at night; the reflections of the interior of the carriage on the window that opens out onto the view across the water underpins the interrelationship of the natural world and the seemingly separate human perspective on it.

In a similar manner, Wallace Heim's two monologues (performed and recorded by actors Kevin McNally and Marianne Walsh) reveal the subtle ways in which the landscapes around Millom and the Duddon inhabit our thoughts, work on our senses and give form and purpose to everyday activities: there is no way to separate the perceiving mind from its object. The environmental artist Tim Pugh, who produces temporary sculptures from whatever he finds lying around in the places he works, quickly moved around the water's edge near Borwick Rails in Millom, erecting forms made of pieces



Tim Pugh at Borwick Rails, Millom, where he made his work, 'Industrial Toad'.

of brick that were scattered along the tideline. One piece titled 'Borwick Spire' was 'influenced by images of past industrial activity related to the area' and also the sight of the local church spire (St. Georges) that can be observed from this point in the landscape. The temporary nature of Pugh's work is not accidental — it is something that seems to reflect his own attitude to the idea of the permanent artwork. 'I like the idea that the work crumbles and disappears,' he told me.

On one return visit to the location where he made most of his pieces for *Unpublished Tour*, it was indeed possible to see some of them had disappeared under the incoming tide. But elsewhere along the tideline, we found that someone else had started making their own brick works, no doubt inspired by the objects that Pugh had left dotted around the landscape.

Di McGhee's temporary installation, 'Flow', which was situated on marshland, was in part inspired by her experience of taking a boat trip around the estuary with the Duddon Inshore Rescue team. The bright yellow and orange colours of the Inshore team's wetsuits and the fastenings on the boat gave her the idea to use these elements to fashion from fabrics and plastics something that would reflect both the way that the rescue crews endured against the challenging tides and weather and climactic conditions around the estuary and the form of a small stubborn thistle-like flower that likewise sprouted on the former industrial landscape (known as the Carline Thistle), an represented an instance of nature reclaiming the landscape from its former uses.

Other works — if not most of the works produced — were inspired by the experience of being taken around the estuary by the Duddon Inshore Rescue. Laurence Campbell's film 'Sing to Remember Me' captures footage from one of the trips, recording not just the view from the boat and the sonic experience of the trip, but plunging the viewer underwater to suggest that whatever we make of the landscape, there is yet more to it than we can fully comprehend.

Of the other works commissioned by Irene Rogan, David Cooper's meditation on the lines and lifelines that carry us through the world and start



Di McGhee works on her installation.

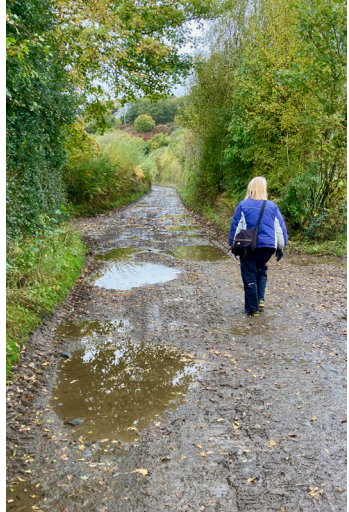
to become more apparent everywhere you look in a landscape like the one that is his subject in ‘The Duddon Estuary: The Myriad Lines of its Relation’ serves, in many ways — and probably unintentionally so — to tie together many of what might seem to the outsider to be the disparate elements of this programme. His writing helps to bring everything back to the broad scope of Irene Rogan’s vision in devising *Unpublished Tour* as a way of building on previous work and getting more deeply into the multi-faceted nature of this place by engaging other artists who work in different ways, or use different media, but whose contributions — in total — would allow for a broader and deeper exploration of a place in all of its cultural, imaginative and physical (and even microscopic) aspects.

Irene Rogan’s work in Millom implicitly locates the human within an extensive ecological context that not only provides the basis for art that has environmental concerns, but art that is specifically located and offers up the work as a product of the interaction of elements within a place. From the samples she takes from land and water to be observed under microscope, to the use she makes of natural materials (willow), the allusions to the animal landscape (sheep’s fleece) and the use of water as a medium, it is a kind of work that involves negotiation with the land and also with the people and organisations who exercise stewardship over some of the places that she works. It is not, in other words, work that is easy to realise or bring to completion.

In the case of the art works she undertook as her own contributions to *Unpublished Tour*, it was often affected by circumstances that she could never control — the weather, transport problems, a lack of time — which is perhaps to be expected with environmental art.

When she started to have conversations with potential partners about the idea that she was to develop into *Unpublished Tour* in early 2020, she was interested in the geomorphology of the estuary and its surroundings, and in the fluidity of rivers and estuarine waters and the habitats that surround them. As it turned out these early preparations were disrupted by the effects of the pandemic.

The work that was the most involved was the one that took the artist



Laurence Campbell (above left, wearing cap) films Irene Rogan at Millom Network Centre as she works on the wooden raft that was a centrepiece of her work, *An odyssey*; and (above right) pictured returning from Lady Hall marsh which became an 'outdoor studio'.



20.10.21

# ENCOUNTERING *An Odyssey* FEAR & HOPE

a performative installation on the Duddon estuary  
at Foxfield Viaduct viewed from the train  
on the Cumbrian Coast Line  
and from the embankment

to one of the remotest locations on the Duddon estuary. For *An odyssey: encountering fear and hope*, she brought her art-based research into direct contact with the main element of the environment — the sea — to create a site performance within view of the passing trains on the West Cumbria line, from where she would be seen first being launched into the Duddon on a raft that she had specially made, before later being carried back to land. On the morning of the performance, Rogan was interviewed by BBC Radio Cumbria about the launch of her raft, with flyers distributed along the West Cumbria coast line by one of her assistants to alert passengers whose journeys were likely to coincide with the event.



## Public Engagement

Prior to the start of *Unpublished Tour* proper, Irene Rogan had been commissioned by the Cumbria Wildlife Trust to develop a number of participatory events for their ‘Dynamic Dunescapes’ programme, which took place during the summer of 2021 and was timed to coincide with the first ‘Global Sand Dune Day’. Incorporating environmental art, sound works and musical performance, these events aimed to encourage people to explore and make use of the dunes and to learn more about the ecosystem peculiar to such landscapes.

The first of these events, which would ultimately become as one with the wider aims of *Unpublished Tour* to explore the places around the Duddon estuary, involved local schoolchildren, who were able to participate in workshops with the environmental artist, Tim Pugh. Tim’s classroom presentations were followed by practical activities and direct engagement with the environment at Haverigg Dunes, during which the children made of temporary art works from materials that were found in the habitat.

Richard Scott, a local ecologist and former botanist with the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology who had developed expert knowledge of such habitats in various locations around the UK, led members of the public in a guided tour of Haverigg Dunes, providing insights into how plants adapt to life in the dunes. This event was featured in a report by Fiona Marley Paterson on ITV Border News, during which Irene Rogan, Richard Scott, and Dynamic Dunescapes’ Eve Mulholland were interviewed about the ecology of the dunes and also the forthcoming arts events that would be taking place in the weeks ahead. Members of the public who were given postcards to fill in and record their impressions of the walk were overwhelmingly impressed in their responses by what they learned about this under-appreciated resource, the diversity of the flora and fauna, and the possibilities the walk opened up for future self-directed explorations.

The walking tour was followed up a week later by an art workshop in Haverigg Dunes titled ‘Quadrantation’ (after the name of the traditional unit of

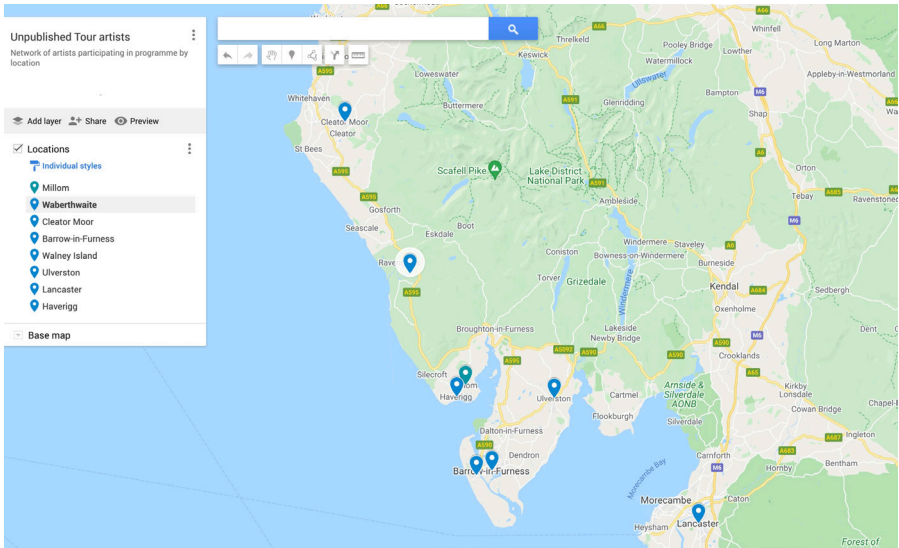


'Restoration Remix' was a sound performance event that took place in the dunes at Haverigg on 30 August 2021, featuring readings by Irene Rogan, music from Hannah Rose Kessler and participation of volunteers to turn the dunes into a soundscape.

study used in ecology and geography, the quadrat), during which members of the public who had signed up to participate in the event were invited to mark out their own quadrat as the basis for artistic explorations that might reflect something of the flora and fauna within specific areas of the dunescape. As with the earlier exploration of the dunes, those who responded with postcard comments saw the experience as variously enjoyable, revelatory and the spur for new ways of using art to engage with the conservation of such places and (in the words of one respondent) ‘to be green, away from screens. Art uses little carbon, working together builds community.’

Another artist commissioned by Irene Rogan to develop arts activities for public participation was David Severn, an internationally recognised and award winning photographer, who led a group of local volunteers through a number of workshops spread over five weeks, during which he shared his insights on how to use photography to develop a deeper understanding of place. Severn later produced a selection of these photographs for the *Unpublished Tour* exhibition and created a filmed presentation featuring the work of each of the participants along with their own recorded narration. The filmed presentation of these works during the *Unpublished Tour* launch event at Millom Palladium on November 27, 2021 was a highlight of the evening, revealing the ability of the arts to inspire, engage and produce new visions of places that are perhaps too often taken for granted.

A website for *Unpublished Tour* was launched (at unpublishedtour.uk) in late November. It contains online copies of all the original works produced by the participating artists — incorporating writing, sound performance, spoken word readings, film and photography — which is intended to preserve a record of the programme, detail further information on the group of artists who took part in it, and be a resource for anyone who would like to find out more about the landscapes and places around Millom and the Duddon Estuary. At the time of preparing this report the site had registered almost five thousand page views and been viewed by almost fifteen hundred unique visitors.



All but two of the participating artists came from a number of places spread across West Cumbria (Custom map from Google Maps).

## Networks

While *Unpublished Tour* was a programme that developed through a series of artistic commissions, Irene Rogan is not a curator and would not want to be thought of as such. Looking at the programme from an external perspective, one of her main roles has been to act as a kind of mediator and facilitator. This is evident, for instance, in terms of the working relationships she has established with other non-artistic partners, including the Duddon Inshore Rescue, local schools, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, UCLan, Millom Network Centre, the ecologist Richard Scott, the farmers and other local people who helped with access to areas around the Duddon, and others.

This is work that is concerned with making connections, opening conversations and bringing other people and organisations on board as part of the programme (often as volunteers). But likewise, the artist's efforts and initiatives also serve specifically to initiate new networks of artists. As the map above shows, artists involved in *Unpublished Tour* came from a number of places across West Cumbria. The number of artists from each place is shown in brackets below:

- Barrow-in-Furness (1)
- Cleator Moor (2)
- Haverigg (1)
- Millom (7)
- Ulverston (3)
- Waberthwaite (1)
- Walney Island (1)

The number for Millom includes the five workshop participants who produced creative outputs as part of David Severn's 'Stories from the Forest, Stories from the Sea.' Two artist participants came from outside Cumbria - David Cooper (Lancaster / Manchester) and David Severn (Nottingham).



Duddon Inshore Rescue, a voluntary organisation (seen above returning from a trip around the estuary), were engaged by the artist early in the planning stages and played an integral role in widening the participants understanding of the area.

It is also notable that among those participating were two early career artists (Mel Galley and Hannah Rose Kessler) for whom *Unpublished Tour* provided the kind of opportunity that is at the core of ACE strategy for development in the creative professional sector.<sup>3</sup>

One might view Irene Rogan's non-artistic 'facilitating' role in *Unpublished Tour* in terms of the so-called Actor Network Theory that Bruno Latour developed in his studies of science, whose purpose was to show that instead of the heroic figures or inventors who are usually credited with great breakthroughs, science is fundamentally a social activity that takes place in networks of actors and actants (these two terms are sometimes used interchangeably).

An actant is a person or a thing that plays a role in a network. Libraries and books, for instance, would be considered 'actants' in the process of learning. When it comes to looking at human actants, as Latour argued, 'as soon as one actant manages to persuade others to fall into line, it thereby increases its strength and becomes stronger than those it aligned and convinced.'<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, if we consider Irene Rogan is person A, making connections to others (persons B, C, D) who may have had no existing or prior connection, she also — to use another term of Latour's — 'translates' the wishes, skills, intentions and interests of these others in line with a common aim (in this case, to produce works of art for *Unpublished Tour*), thus facilitating links between artists C, D, B, and so on.

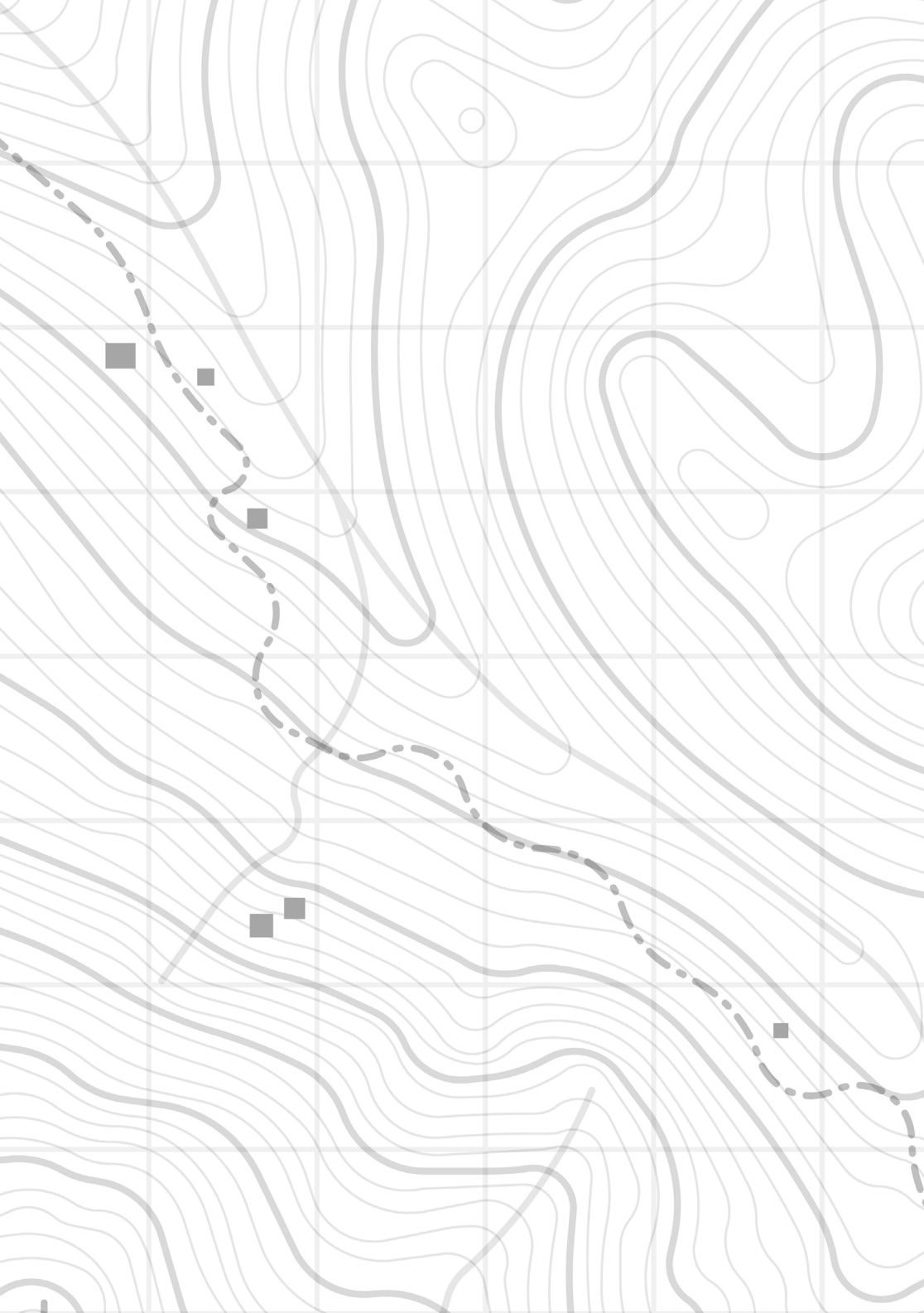
So, to put it in other terms, *Unpublished Tour* exemplifies the ways in which small-scale arts initiatives can contribute to creative, spontaneous regeneration of the kind that becomes essential to developing the broader cultural ecology of places. Within the context of Millom's remoteness it is a crucial role for generating new networks in circumstances where the other actants are geographically dispersed, and the informal network lacks a 'centre' in the way that urban settings, with their dense concentrations of people

3. Arts Council England, *Let's Create: Strategy 2020–2030* (Manchester: ACE), p. 26

4. Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988), p. 172

would be more capable of developing. Places like Millom — and south Copeland more broadly — arguably require interventions of the kind that Irene Rogan has made with *Unpublished Tour*. The programme has been an important means of making the public, and artists themselves, aware that there is, in fact, artistic and cultural life and an audience in such marginal places.

The various artists and the public came together at the *Unpublished Tour* launch events on 27th November 2021 at Millom Palladium. In the afternoon, an exhibition was staged featuring the work of artists Di McGhee, Tim Pugh, Mel Galley, Irene Rogan and the participants in David Severn's photography workshops. While this was taking place, another artist — Wallace Heim — used the recording facilities in the basement of Millom Palladium to record the performances of her written work that would be repeated later in the evening by two actors, Kevin McNally and Marianne Walsh, so that they could also be uploaded to the *Unpublished Tour* website. In the evening, presentations and performances were enjoyed by a packed 'sold out' audience, whose number included members of the public from Millom and beyond, representatives of nearby arts organisations, as well as local partners who had provided essential support to the programme, such as the Duddon Inshore Rescue team.



IN CERTAIN PLACES is a curatorial partnership led by Professor Charles Quick and Elaine Speight. It is based in the School of Art and Media at the University of Central Lancashire. Established in 2003, it seeks to generate new and creative ways of inhabiting and informing the future of places through an ongoing programme of artistic interventions. Interdisciplinary in nature, and spanning a range of art forms, its work includes temporary public art works and architectural commissions, artist residency and research projects, and public talks, discussions and events. Collectively these activities generate new understandings of the urban environment, enable new ideas to be tested in public spaces and instigate ongoing collaborations between artists, academics, urban planners, activists, public institutions, businesses and other individuals and communities in the places it works and beyond.

JOHN SCANLAN is cultural historian, theorist and practitioner. He has been working with In Certain Places since 2017, where his work has been concerned with the unique place characteristics of West Cumbria and includes writings and other publications as well practical initiatives that seek to develop the cultural ecology of the region through partnership working. His work in West Cumbria has been funded by Westlakes Research Ltd, an independent educational charity located in West Cumbria.

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