



A Teachers Resource

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Catalogue





image from Decoy © Jane Prophet



Biography

Jane Prophet graduated in Fine Art in 1987, completing a PhD in 1995. Her work includes large scale installations, digital print, websites and CDROMs. Her art reflects her interest in complexity theory, landscape and artificial life. She is Director of the Centre for Arts Research, Technology and Education at the University of Westminster.

'Decoy' was commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella. Supported by the National Touring Programme of the Arts Council of England and East England Arts.

Decoy is a series of animated digital landscapes each of which starts with a photographic image of a National Trust landscape garden. This landscape, which is read as natural, metamorphoses over a few minutes, into a virtual image of a digital landscape in which lakes become woodlands, earthworks obscure houses and fractal trees grow in the place of organic trees.

Decoy simulates the work of 18th century landscape designers such as Launcelot 'Capability' Brown and Humphry Repton, who created the English Landscape Garden. These landscapes are as artificial as Prophet's digital landscapes. To create the gardens Repton and Brown would lower hills, create lakes and divert streams. Repton used his 'Red Books' to show what the gardens would look like when they were mature. In the same way Prohpet shows 100 years of growth in 100 seconds.

The Work

References

- <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/gardens/>
- Croome Park, Worcestershire
- Blickling Hall, Norfolk
- Petworth House, Sussex
- Wallington Hall, Northumberland
- Stourhead, Wiltshire
- Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen



film and video umbrella

Decoy

Activity



Historically, the garden designer Humphrey Repton used what he called the Red Book to help his rich clients see what their gardens could look like in 100 years time. The Red books showed watercolour views of the gardens before his improvements and by folding over a 'slide' or flap the client could see their garden once it had reached maturity. Television shows like *Ground Force* and *Home Front* set the fashion for instant garden design today, we can see the results in 20 minutes on TV.

Artists like Gainsborough and Poussin painted these picturesque landscapes, usually with the owner in the foreground. The TV shows usually end with a shot of the owner enjoying their garden. What does this tell us about the people who own the gardens?

These three images show a progression through one of six 'paintings' in *Decoy*. The first image shows the 'natural' view of the National Trust landscape. In the second image the organic trees are replaced with fractal trees. The third image shows an avenue of digital trees creating an 'artificial' landscape.

In Jane Prophet's work there are many ideas that you could discuss with the class. Here are a few that you could explore.

- Why has Prophet called the work *Decoy*?

A *Decoy* is a lure or something masquerading as something else.

- The National Trust landscapes are artificial, but they look natural. Do the students think their own gardens at home are natural or artificial?

Activity

- Ask the class to bring in a picture (painting or drawing or photograph) of their garden.

- Ask the class to redesign their garden by laying flaps of card over parts of the picture and redrawing what they would like to see.

- If they do not have a garden, then they could use a local park.