

Dan Hicks is a professor of contemporary archaeology at Oxford University and curator of world archaeology at the Pitt Rivers Museum. *Lande: The Calais "Jungle" and Beyond* was a collaborative temporary exhibition at the museum created with artists, activists and people who lived at the site. The project attempted to make visible the physical and ideological landscape of "borderwork" and to reimagine Calais as a (post)colonial space.

## Interview by Leonie Hutch

**What actually is contemporary archaeology? And what does it mean for a museum like the Pitt Rivers to have an exhibition of "contemporary archaeology"?**

Contemporary archaeology works at the interface between archaeology and anthropology. It begins with the relationships between objects and people, and the past and present. It is about what happens if we apply an archaeological way of thinking, seeing and intervening to the recent past, or the near present. Our field is still thinking through the place of museums in the project of contemporary archaeology. Anthropology museums are technologies that emerged in the Victorian period as a colonial device to objectify others. I wouldn't say the Pitt Rivers is a legacy of empire, because empire isn't over: it has an ongoing time-geography of inequality. Museums were not just spaces involved in the representation of people in material form, as if they were the past, but were used to extract and to fabricate the illusion of a universal vision.

In that context, an exhibition like *Lande* represents an intervention in an ongoing (post)colonial space, a different, more partial way of seeing. In writing the book, Sarah Mallet and I used this motto: as the border is to the nation state so the museum is to empire. With our co-curators we used Hannah Arendt's notion of the "space of appearance" to talk about the politics of what can be seen and what can't, and who is actually making those visual regimes - to imagine how a museum might be not a space of representation but a space of appearance. My role as a curator was really to hand over the power of the exhibitionary complex to colleagues who were already using the politics of what can and can't be seen as a form of resistance against borderwork.

**Can you say more about what you learned about how objects, people and landscapes translate into "appearance"?**

In the hostile environment at the UK's national border at Calais, impermanence is being used as a form of governance. Under these conditions, duration itself gains a political dimension. Holding onto things, salvaging things, standing still, making things last, even just putting up a tent, have some to constitute a kind of resistance concerned the politics of what survives, which is of course also who lives - the endurance of human life in the context of what Achille Mbembe has called "necropolitics". Whether it's the 38,000 photographs Caroline [Gregory] took on her iPhone, or the salvaged cross from the Eritrean church, or the artwork made by unaccompanied minors, these living, vernacular forms of contemporary archaeology were already going on amongst people who lived at the "Jungle". *Lande* was an exhibit in which everything was on loan, we haven't accessioned anything, haven't 'collected' or undertaken an archaeological excavation. Every object thus began with a person and with a relationship, and everything was returned to the owner. There's just one exception: a sample of the Calais security fencing, which I acquired myself, and which is perhaps the most violent object I've ever seen in my life. I plan to accession it into the Pitt Rivers Museum's extensive collections of weapons.

**In *Cannibal Metaphysics* the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro talks about how (post)colonial resistance has to do more than take a position, it must create a perspective. How did this exhibition create a perspective?**

Partly, it was a temporal perspective on the humanitarian ideology of "emergency". The destruction of the jungle in 2016 was only the most recent in a seven-year cycle: destructions in 2002 at Sangatte, destructions in 2009 of what was known as the "New Jungle", and then 2016. Global media repeatedly reports the removal of the Calais jungle, but of course in between those moments there remain just as many displaced people because of the recent history of the externalization of the border, what in technical language is known as the "juxtaposed" border control. There a geographical perspective too. To claim asylum in the UK displaced people are forced to make an irregular crossing of the Channel. At the point at which the exhibit opened more than two hundred people had lost their lives attempting to make that crossing. These images and objects are a witness to the tactics of exhaustion, the policy of 'deterrence' - the destruction of tents, the routine use of tear gas, of pepper spray on sleeping bags, of batons against trouser pockets to break mobile phones, the removal of a single shoe so that it is impossible to run or to walk. Seeing the time-geography of this "slow violence", it contrasts with media spectacle, the performance of removal and the rhetoric of a "crisis" that might pass. Archaeology is a technique that can show the ongoing nature of this borderwork. There's a parallel here with the temporal regimes of anthropology museums themselves.

**In that time is used to construct particular ideologies and places?**

In the 1980s, Johannes Fabian described an old model of how temporal violence was enacted through anthropological museums: in the past under empire the temporal violence enacted upon the global south was based on the ideology that the further away you moved in space from the metropolis the further back in time you went, until you arrived at some Tasmanian, South American, or African “stone age”. In the Calais landscape you see a new sort of temporal violence, which is not about putting humans into the past, but putting them into an unceasing present, an epoch of violent and abject precarity. The displaced people in Calais have come predominantly from Afghanistan, Sudan, South Sudan and Eritrea – all former ‘informal’ territories in 19th- and 20th-century British corporate and militarist colonialism, which are now shaping Britain and Europe.

**And from this exhibition, looking beyond the present, what are your hopes for the future?**

Each demolition and dispossession at Calais is an act of exclusion and of silencing. To make something invisible is a very distinctive form of silencing, in which the effects of the physical erasure of the human landscape is like a redaction of a document. The images and objects people have kept – and the counter-building of restaurants, shops, places of worship, a school, library, theatre and even a nightclub – were all material acts that were forms of resistance against the border and of witnessing the situations of displaced people. That is what we aimed to open our doors to at the Pitt Rivers. To repurpose the museum in the same way that production at Calais jungle repurposed the border, and to learn from how that repurposing might help us see more clearly the most hostile dimensions of the ongoing histories of anthropology museums as environments.

Museums are places where curators pretend that they can keep things the same. I prefer to see that stasis as a state of hesitation. The Pitt Rivers Museum has been hesitating for years, and maybe there is a new role for it to play. Facing up to inhumanity, just as in the urgent case of cultural restitution to Africa, we can’t pretend that the violence of the past, or the present, can be undone in a space like this, “decolonised” out of existence. But it can nevertheless be seen. Anthropology museums can be sites of conscience, for the present as well as the past; not frozen end-points but ongoing processes. ●

*Lande: the Calais “Jungle” and Beyond* was co-curated by Majid Adin, Shaista Aziz, Caroline Gregory, Dan Hicks, Sarah Mallet, Nour Munawar, Noah Salibo, Suzanne Partridge and Wshear Wali, and ran at the Pitt Rivers Museum from March to November 2019. The accompanying book, *Lande: the Calais “Jungle” and Beyond*, is published by [Bristol University Press](http://Bristol University Press).

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