



HOLLOW EARTH

ART, CAVES & THE SUBTERRANEAN IMAGINARY

**24 September 2022 –
22 January 2023**

**Nottingham
Contemporary**



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



HOLLOW EARTH

ART, CAVES & THE SUBTERRANEAN IMAGINARY

24 September 2022 –
22 January 2023

Beneath Nottingham are over 800 caves, hand-carved into the sandstone bedrock. For centuries, they have played host to dwellings, mines, cellars and tanneries. Inspired by this shadow city, *Hollow Earth: Art, Caves & The Subterranean Imaginary* brings together 150 works by more than 50 artists to explore the image and idea of the cave.

Every culture and religion tells stories about what lies beneath. In myth and sacred texts, caves are the domain of gods and monsters, places of birth, burial and rebirth. Today, they remain closely associated with danger and survival, connected with seed vaults, doomsday bunkers and the possible source of pandemics.

For thousands of years, these portals to the deep past have captivated artists. Some even argue that the cave was the earliest studio and the first museum. Following 19th-century discoveries of rock paintings, caves have been imagined as spaces of revelation, providing clues to the origin of our collective impulse to produce images. After World War II, artists came to associate the cave with the primordial creative space, a bunker-like refuge from the atomic era. Today, in an age of ecological breakdown, caves are portals to both the deep past and troubled futures, places where species and time intermingle.

Mapping specific sites and imaginary underworlds, *Hollow Earth* considers why and how so many artists, musicians and filmmakers have been drawn below. Echoing a descent into a cave, the exhibition unfolds in five parts. Begin at the mouth and travel down into the depths with us.

THE THRESHOLD

GALLERY 1

Lee Bontecou, Steven Claydon, Juan Downey, Laura Emsley, Barry Flanagan, Ed Herring, Michael Ho, Athanasius Kircher, René Magritte, Santu Mofokeng, Caragh Thuring, Joseph Wright of Derby, and materials from local archives

Cross the threshold. What awaits? This gallery invites you to peer through portals and into voids. It introduces some of the exhibition's central themes: transformation and illusion, the hidden and the unearthed. Can we trust what we see? A selection of paintings, film, photography, sculpture and archival material draws us down into the realm of shadows.

THE WALL

GALLERY 2

Hamed Abdalla, Sofia Borges, Lydia Ourahmane, Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio, N.H. Stubbing, Aubrey Williams and documentation from Leo Frobenius's expeditions

Look up. The first paintings were created on the walls and ceilings of caves. They are our oldest art galleries, our first studios. Cave art is a feature of every continent except Antarctica, with the earliest being made over 30,000 years ago. This gallery assembles very different responses to cave paintings and carvings encountered in Algeria, Egypt, France, Greece, Guyana and Spain.

THE DARK

GALLERY 2

Brassaï, Mary Beth Edelson, Peter Hujar, Gordon Matta-Clark, Henry Moore, Nadar, Ailbhe Ní Bhriain, Pauline Oliveros, Robert Smithson, Michelle Stuart, and objects from local archives

Close your eyes. Darkness can be at once terrifying and freeing, a state for silent contemplation or creeping unease. This space brings together objects, artworks and music that consider what it means to dwell in the dark. Here you will find catacombs, solitary rituals, subterranean reverberations, and long-forgotten bodies.

THE CITY

GALLERY 3

The Center for Land Use Interpretation, Frank Heath, Hans Hollein, Alison Knowles, Antti Lovag, Goshka Macuga, Gordon Parks, Walter Pichler, Ben Rivers, Kaari Upton, Jeff Wall

Do you feel at home? Our language for caves is often architectural – they have chambers and chimneys, vaults and arches. Some of our earliest places of shelter and dwelling, caves have today been reimagined as places of survival and safe-keeping, from doomsday bunkers to seed vaults and data farms. In this gallery are speculative proposals for how we might retreat below ground, and what worlds might await us there.

THE DEEP

GALLERY 4

Matt Copson, Chioma Ebinama, Ilana Halperin, Emma McCormick-Goodhart, Ailbhe Ní Bhriain, Flora Parrott, Liv Preston

Go even deeper. The further down we go, the less we know. Exploring caves allows access to layers of time that go so far back they are difficult to grasp. In this gallery, works explore speculative approaches to mapping and recording unknowable spaces. The pieces reflect on myth, ceremony and deep time, and are narrated by communities of explorers and storytellers lurking in the shadows.

RELATED EVENTS

EXHIBITION WALKTHROUGHS

Wed 28 September, 11am
Welcome Walkthrough

Wed 5 October, 2pm
Wednesday Walkthrough
by Charlie Pratley, School
of Arts & Humanities,
Nottingham Trent
University

Wed 23 November, 2pm
Wednesday Walkthrough
by Norma Gregory, Black
Miners Museum

Wed 14 December, 2pm
Wednesday Walkthrough
by Niall Farrelly, Assistant
Curator of Exhibitions,
Nottingham Contemporary

**Wed 18 January 2023,
5pm**
Wednesday Walkthrough
with our Gallery Assistants

**12.30pm every Tuesday,
Thursday and Saturday,
starting Tue 4 October**
Join one of our friendly
Gallery Assistants for a
short exploration of a
favourite artwork, artist,
theme or idea from the
exhibition

FREE FAMILY ACTIVITIES

During school holidays:
**18–20 October,
25–27 October**
Submerge yourself and
explore the themes in the
exhibitions through making
and play.

KEYNOTE LECTURE

**Sat 10 December,
5pm–6.30pm**
Philosopher and writer
Kathryn Yusoff discusses
the subterranean, queer
ecologies and origins of
cave art.

For more information about
the exhibition, related events
and learning programmes, visit
nottinghamcontemporary.org
or scan here:



Curated by Sam Thorne with Gilly Fox and Niall Farrelly.

Hollow Earth: Art, Caves and the Subterranean Imaginary is a Hayward Gallery Touring exhibition, developed in partnership with Nottingham Contemporary and in collaboration with The Glucksman, Cork and RAMM, Exeter where it will tour throughout 2023–24.

Exhibition graphics by Åbäke.

A special publication with information on all works in the exhibition is available from our shop. £5

This exhibition is generously supported by the Centre for the GeoHumanities, Royal Holloway, University of London, as part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and the Leverhulme Trust through the Phillip Leverhulme Prize.

All of our programmes are made possible through the support of our audiences. If you enjoyed visiting today, please consider supporting. Suggested donation £3.

AFTER YOUR VISIT

At The City of Caves, you can discover the largest publicly available section of Nottingham's vast underground network. They are located at the bottom of the steps at the side of our building. Show these exhibition notes to receive a 10% discount on your ticket.

DURING YOUR VISIT

DEEP LISTENING PROMPTS

"Listening is what shapes the musical mind."
Here are some listening exercises inspired by Pauline Oliveros' *Anthology of Text Scores* (Gallery 2). Oliveros' approach to music-making emphasises the importance of listening deeply. Try these out while you explore the exhibition.

My body is sound

Breathe deeply and relax. Begin by sensing your body from head to toe. Think about the natural rhythms of your body – your breath, heartbeat, blinks and steps. What other rhythms can you hear when you listen deeply?

Everything is music

Just listen. Consider all the sounds around you as music. Sing along, either inwardly or out loud.

Receiving / returning

Choose a sound. Breathe deeply as you prepare to make that sound. Breathe in, then make your sound as you exhale. Choose another sound and repeat. If you are with others, do this together. What kind of music can you make together?