

Escape & Invasion - A photo story about dispersal.

Two years ago I decided to make six one meter plant containers and leave them out in the wilds of Cornwall. The plan was to monitor and photograph the plants that germinate.

I've spent many hours weeding in my allotment laboratory pondering where they all come from. Thistle, dandelion, bramble and nettle are the worst but also the most obvious. Surrounded by hedges made up almost entirely of these four it's no wonder they make up the majority of my labour. Pondering the origins of weeds have always been idle thoughts until one day I found a giant *Gunnera* pushing up through the soil.

Like many, native to the southern hemisphere this plant escaped from private collections and into the wild. The mild winters and damp summers are an ideal alternative to the foothills of the Himalaya, river banks in sub-Saharan Africa and the forests of New Zealand. The seeds of the *Gunnera* can be airborne or travel on birds and animals and cover huge distances. Parts of Ireland and Scotland are struggling to keep them under control. Deemed a dangerous invasive species. What other nasty's are floating above my head? The breeze has been weaponised and the plant with the best seed design, tolerance to the elements and speed of growth would dominate the unattended pockets of land, and thrive. Or would they?... and this was the start of the soil sensors.

To catch the airborne invaders as they land let them germinate, catalogue and photograph. The plan was to build a few large plant containers, fill them with sterile soil, set them in different environments and see what happens. Thankfully I didn't think about the details before I announced I was going to do this, if I had considered shifting 3.5 tonnes of soil to six locations in a four mile radius and then flat copy photograph them through rain and shine every 3-4 weeks for a whole year. I would have stayed at home.

So three years from the *Gunnera* moment here is *Escape & Invasion*

From the start I wanted to copy biologists who use quadrants to survey density of species across a given area, so I made my soil sensors 1m square with a resulting square image. This also made it easier to build up a larger image over time as a tiled mosaic, storyboarding and sequencing across the edit. I've also been influenced by the depictions of movement and time by Muybridge

[http://www.masters-of-photography.com/M/muybridge/muybridge\\_galloping\\_horse.html](http://www.masters-of-photography.com/M/muybridge/muybridge_galloping_horse.html)

and more recently the contact sheets of Yoshihiko Ito

<http://www.pgi.ac/content/view/109/66/lang,en/>

The squares are also the pixels of a much larger image. One unit of information in my concept camera. Where the soil is the reactive sensor, the seed is the photon of light, the plant is the development of the latent image.

Soil Sensor no.1 - by the apple tree no.1



Soil Sensor no.2 - by the apple tree no.2





Soil Sensor no.3 - by the shed



Soil Sensor no.4 - under the hazel hedge





Soil Sensor no.5 - under the conifer tree



Soil Sensor no.6 - in the meadow by the allotment

