

## Digging Deeper

It starts with thirty giants. Sisters all, each a powerful queen.



These giants were the first to arrive on England's shores, according to the 'Grantz Geanz', an early mediaeval origin story of England. They call their new home Albion, after Albina, the eldest of the sisters. Here they procreate with spirits and live in harmony until their shores are invaded by Brutus of Troy, who banishes them underground, into "caverns deep".

How deep does England reach under the surface?

English stories, from old myths to modern children's books, are full of giants, kings and dragons slumbering below, waiting to arise again when the time is right. In another tale, Sir Gawain felt 'etins aneleden him', or 'giants blowing after him' as he moved through the English landscape.

They will tell you it's always been like this...

Englishness is tricky and contentious to define. What is a 'true' and 'authentic' England? Over centuries of migration, colonisation and empire, how deep do we look? The term 'Deep England' has started to take root in general discourse. A somewhat abstract and idealised view of a green and pleasant land, Deep England is used both in the service of parochial conservatism and radical enchantment. As both Raymond Williams and NYX & Gazelle Twin in their latest album have pointed out, the "golden era" always seems to be located (somewhere) in the past, it was "better in my day". But it is often the mystical topography of England that inspires the term; stone circles and tors, caves, ancient trees, tumuli and holloways. Their presence summons ancient and ulterior knowledge: legends of oppressed peoples fighting back, folk rituals of communal joy and powerful energies latent in the land.

Where do we find 'before'? Is it beneath? Is it below?

It is through this muddy prism that we, as artists, have been engaging with the notion of Deep England as a term of both inspiration and complexity. We ask ourselves: how do we belong to a landscape with such a tangled and haunted history? What is enchantment without glorifying an

idealised and problematic past? Where do we find a land-based mythos for England today that is radically inclusive rather than parochially exclusionist? Perhaps by rupturing the pastoral surface—listening to the land as a living body with all its messy and leaky potential—we can understand more about Albion.

Time that was before, is now.

Deep in the 'heart' of England, there is a lesion in the land, a cavernous rupture splitting through neatly organised borders. Excavations in the caves of Creswell Crags have shown occupation by a multitude of species over the past 40,000 years, including Neanderthals, Homo sapiens, bears, lions, spotted hyenas, woolly rhinoceroses and reindeer. The caves contain the only verified palaeolithic cave art in the UK, traced to at least 12,700 years ago, showing images of bison, reindeer and birds, as well as abstract symbols which may have had religious significance.

The caves also reveal hundreds of protective symbols carved into the rock, so-called 'witch marks'. Usually used to protect domestic thresholds such as windowsills and fireplaces from evil spirits, the Creswell marks were an anomaly, in that they protected a deep hole inside the cave, perhaps keeping something in...

There are lesions in the land. Something has been seeping through the cracks.

The speculative potential of prehistory is compelling. Excavations reveal stories of migration, global trade, changing climate and extinction. We wanted to respond to the cave as a living body, collaboratively and collectively. After sifting through the archive at Creswell Crags' research centre, we found it highly methodical and academic. However, moments of intimacy and poetry punctuated the statistical analysis. Fieldnotes scribbled on aged graph paper, close up photographs of hands clutching soil, paintings that imaginatively reconstructed Ice Age life. Even with all this data collected on the caves, something was missing: experiential, practice-based knowledge. What affect did the cave have; what did it feel like? What did it sound like? In order to fill this gap in the material, we decided to bring a more explicitly feminist approach.