

Getting There, 2018, Fabrica, Brighton, UK

'It's so superfluous', says Jo Lathwood of her vertiginous installation 'Getting There', during a conversation about the work which takes place at the foot of the spiraling wooden sculpture. The word certainly captures the sense of scale (it's huge; her largest piece to date), play and the recklessly unnecessary; the looping forms recall the iconic rollercoaster at the end of Brighton pier. Temporarily erected not far from the pier, in Fabrica's vaulted chapel interior, it has performed a comparable function, carrying visitors high above ground level to the roof's apex via a circuitous route which twists back on itself midway through.

Making journeys and pathways from wood is what Lathwood likes to do most, though her practice also includes smaller scale 'material experiments', which she focuses on in between larger commissions. These two sides to her work are united by their concern with process, making and materiality. She's learnt the art of bronze casting, a technique many artists leave to foundries but Lathwood insists can be practiced in the studio. This has led to research into methods for casting lava, on which she has collaborated with volcanologists and petrologists at Bristol University. This interest to molten rock is telling, transitions interest her. The wood used in 'Getting There' is largely recycled, and Lathwood talks of finding poetry in the fact that her materials have a life before and beyond her use of them. It is Lathwood's longstanding interest in process and materiality that prompted Liz Whitehead, Co-Director at Fabrica, to invite the artist to propose an idea for a commission. The future programme at Fabrica will see the emphasis shift further toward education and widening participation, and Whitehead sees foregrounding making as a subtle if engaging way to do this, while putting artist's practice at the centre of activity as Fabrica always has.

'Getting There' is wholeheartedly site-specific, and the (former) church context is significant if not defining. Lathwood's intervention serves as a counterbalance to the tradition of high ceilings in church and cathedral architecture, a form designed to inspire awe and to dwarf the individual. 'Getting There' bridges the gap, transporting the visitor to the heavens in a move Lathwood compares to the building of a tree house; the pleasure of defying gravity. Another ecclesiastical interpretation relates to the labour of building and dismantling the work, which - like a durational performance - was all executed in full view of the visiting public. This association is unintentional on the part of the artist, but it connects to a tension at the heart of the work, that between purpose and purposelessness. Why build a structure so elaborate that it will take longer to build and deconstruct than the exhibition will run for? Why climb a twisting staircase when all that's left upon doing so is to retrace your steps?

Lathwood's staircase undermines the sense of purpose inherent in the labour of building by virtue of its temporariness, and - with its wilful indirectness - frustrates the climber, too. For the artist, this reflects societal obsessions with drive and ambition; itches we can never

scratch. 'We are always trying to find, to get a sense of, what is missing, what we need, what, in Lacan's terminology, we lack. The sources we seek are the sources of frustration.'¹ So writes Adam Phillips in *Missing Out: In praise of the Unlived Life*. 'Getting There' frustrates our journey, forcing us to loop back on ourselves, before both delivering and puncturing the final satisfaction of reaching our promised destination. Having reached the apex we can only return to the bottom, satisfaction unequal to the promise of the ascent. If, as Phillips here suggests, desires are the source of our frustration, Lathwood might contend that those inescapable frustrations are nonetheless important; each incline necessitates a decline.

The work may reflect unsatisfiable desire, but Lathwood does not see it as impotent or purposeless; she rightly believes in its power to subtly transform and locates its power and value primarily in the memories and experiences of those who walked the pathway. Though our conversation begins with aspects of sculpture and materials, it soon becomes clear that Lathwood values the intangible effects of her work most highly. 'There is a percentage of people who came here and touched the roof' she reflects, 'and when they come here again, when this isn't here, they'll know that they were here.'

Robert Moor describes trails as 'born of a mixture of mud and thought'² constituted by memories as much as by matter. Moor understands the trail as the trace of an action much repeated, and in this sense it is a verb as much as it is a noun, constituted by the people who make it. This link between line and action also recalls Lathwood's comment that the making of 'Getting There' was in some ways like drawing; the overall arrangement laid out like a sketch in situ rather than pre-planned; responsive and organic. Lathwood's staircase traces more than a line of thought, it's a line of flight: a short-lived trace of journeyers striving upward.

Laura Purseglove is a writer and creative producer based in London.

¹ Adam Phillips, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life*, (London: Penguin, 2012)

² Robert Moor, *On Trails: An Exploration*, (London: Aurum Press, 2016)