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David Murphy, Untitled (Climbing), 2015

Picture: © the artist, courtesy New Art Centre

ART

## Groundwork: Five go wild in Roche Court

*Wiltshire's quintessentially English Roche Court is given a subversive makeover thanks to five London-based artists*



BY LOUISA BUCK

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The [New Art Centre](#) at Roche Court has a long and illustrious tradition of combining tradition and modernity. It first opened in Sloane Street in 1958, when Chelsea was still a hotbed of all things artistic, then in the early 1990s moved to its current location in a handsome Georgian house set in rolling Wiltshire parkland between Salisbury and Andover. This gracious Austen-esque setting forms a bucolic environment for both 20th and 21st century artworks (the New Art Centre works with the estate of Barbara Hepworth and Kenneth Armitage) while also continuing to be the family home of its founder, the redoubtable Madeleine, Countess of Bessborough.

Alongside the racks of wellies and presided over by Lady Bessborough's amiable in-house Great Dane, there's an adventurous programme of temporary

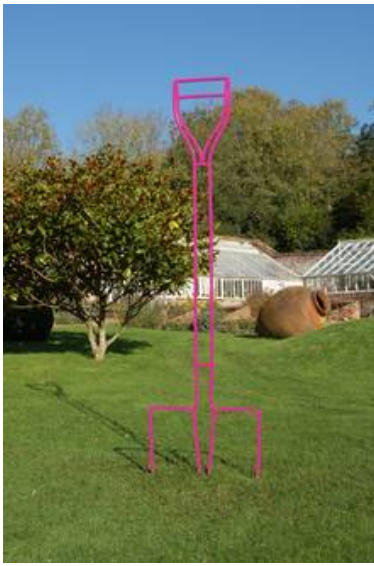
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Michael Craig-Martin, Spade (purple), 2013

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shows and residencies which take place in a coolly elegant (and award-winning) gallery extension and artist's house designed by Stephen Marshall: everyone from Gavin Turk to Edmund Du Waal has shown there. At the same time Roche Court's surrounding gardens, woods and fields have become internationally renowned as one of the country's most lovely sculpture parks, playing host to a constantly-changing lineup of more than 60 works, often by the biggest names in British art.

Michael Craig-Martin's giant fuchsia pink spade and red wheelbarrow currently reside in the gardens and there's a colossal Caro in Corten steel above the house. Other pieces include a squiggly Conrad Shawcross, a linear Julian Opie nude carved into stone slabs on the terrace, a knobbly Richard Long

stone line pointing the way to an ancient oak, and a pair of gargantuan Barry Flanagan hares frolicking in an expanse of meadow.

But right now amongst this roster of dignitaries there's also the more subversive presence of five young London-based artists who have been invited to make a more beady-eyed contemporary response to Roche Court's rolling acres. Working under the umbrella title of **GROUNDWORK**, this urban quintet use a multiplicity of media to infiltrate their surroundings and to complicate the seemingly comfortable co-existence of nature and culture by questioning what the landscape means to us today. There are nods to classic Land Art as well as to the ancient earthworks in the surrounding woods and

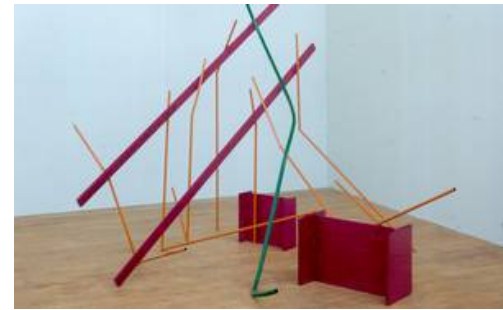
nearby Stonehenge, but here the emphasis errs more towards the domestic than the epic and the messages are often decidedly mixed.

In the hands of Miriam Austin the delicate blooms of delphiniums, lilies and foxgloves mutate into gorgeous monstrosities, embalmed in smothering layers of claggy, drippy prosthetic silicone and then laid out as if for some bizarre nature-worshipping ritual. David Murphy's garlands of red steel rose spacers creep over the venerable brick summer house, while in the crisp modern surroundings of the gallery and artist's house Freddy Dewe Mathews messes with notions of the sublime in photographs and prints taken in and around Alpine sanitariums. He also introduces into the mellow walled garden a slightly macabre

procession of weatherbeaten garden statues that span the ages of man from peeing putto to gnarled old rustic.

Tom Lovelace photographs legs teetering ridiculously on precarious bundles of stilt-like sticks and the idea of groundwork is given literal expression in sculptor Rob Chavasse's cheeky sideswipe at Roche Court's oh-so intrinsic Englishness, in which he has the audacity to insert the endorsing 'CE' logo of European Conformity directly onto its manicured lawns – an earthwork for our times, indeed.

*GROUNDWORK: Curated by Holly Willats and Alma Zevi is at the New Art Centre, Roche Court, until 27 September*



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