

art

with Sarah Mayhew



A new exhibition explores our concept of identity, writes SARAH MAYHEW

WHO do you think you are? A question that has crossed most of our minds at some point in our lives. A question that has inspired television programmes, books, and hordes of the recently retired to dig deep into their little-known past in the hope of unearthing something that might shed light on a mystery, inform the present, perhaps even inform the future.

Mine the Mountain is an exhibition of large photographic anthropological installations.

Nicholas Hedges, the artist, maps histories that he has interpreted not as a series of distant events that are dead and buried, but as a collection of encounters and dialogues between the past and the present, histories that resound in the here and now.

Indeed, as Hedges has said: "Family history has played a vital role in my work and my research, enabling me to find anonymous individuals to whom I am related and to explore the places in which they were born, where they lived and died, to walk the roads, tracks and paths which have led to my existence."

Following a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2006, Hedges developed a deep-seated need to connect with his ancestry and a fascination in exploring sites of historic trauma.

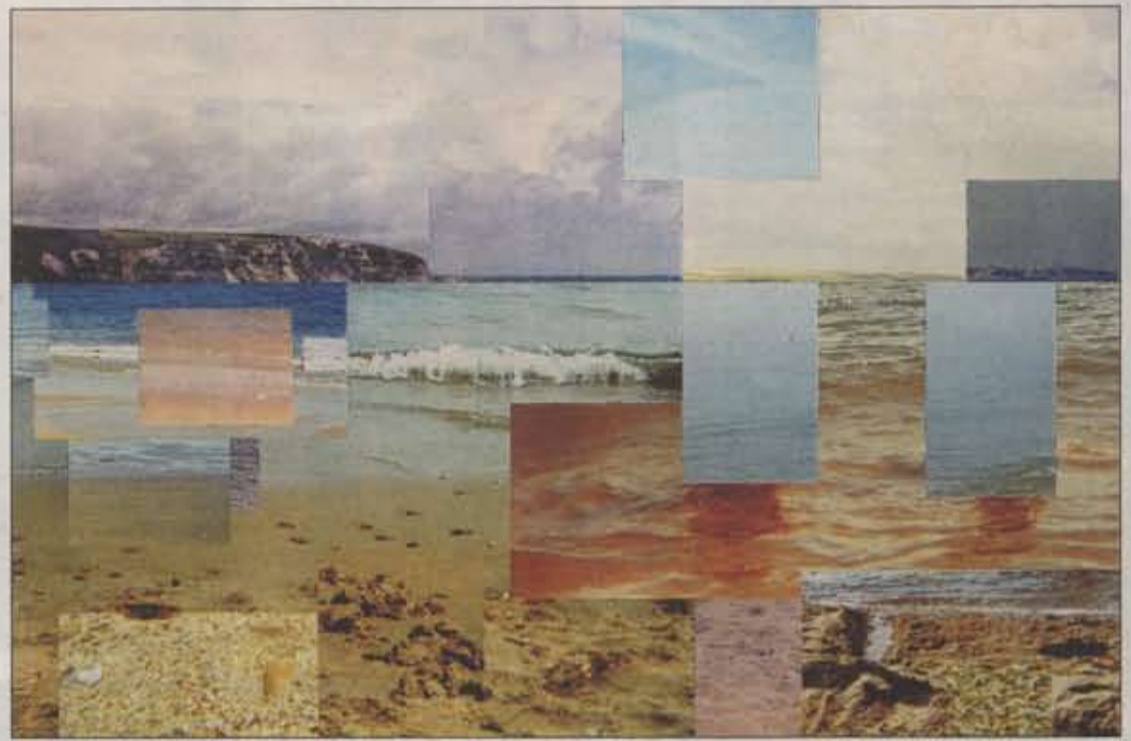
Intrigued by the notion of "dark tourists", *Mine the Mountain* examines the needs of those that feel compelled to visit such sites of mass destruction.

Deeply moved by the anonymity of casualties of atrocities past, Hedges has spent the past four years identifying with the individuals behind the horrific, intangible statistics.

Hedges found his answer in an idea shared with celebrated landscape artist Richard Long; the notion that, as we make journeys, the mark that we make "writes" us into the landscape.

Mine the Mountain shows an intelligent, thought-provoking body of work. A beautifully poetic, bittersweet artistic means of recovering the past, and engaging in a dialogue with those who've gone before us.

This exhibition highlights how, far from being empty, places like Auschwitz-Birkenau and the battlefields of the Somme are full of lines, or Hedges' intricate haberdashery of threads; paths followed and written by hundreds of thousands of people.



of discovery Voyage



Mine the Mountain continues at The North Wall, South Parade, Oxford, until June 26, gallery hours Monday-Saturday, 11am-4pm. Admission free. 01865 319450 thenorthwall.com