

Bookreview: Chat moss. By Derek Hampson and Gary Priestnall. Nottingham: CMG 2005. ISBN 1-870522-42-7

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Chat moss. By Derek Hampson and Gary Priestnall. Nottingham: CMG. 2005. 70 pp. £6.00 paper. ISBN 1 870 522 42 7

Collaborative research between artists and academic geographers has grown considerably over the last decade and *Chat Moss*, as both artwork and publication, makes a fascinating contribution to this burgeoning field. Developed by visual artist Derek Hampson and geographical information science (GISc) specialist Gary Priestnall, the project takes an area of non-descript peat-land between Liverpool and Manchester, which famously threatened the building of the world's first passenger railway in 1830, as a case study site from which to investigate the challenges of representing landscapes that are complex both in terms of their history and in how they are experienced by different people in different ways. This publication documents the major output of their research, the creation of a 40-metre-square ceiling painting by Hampson (made up of more than 100 specially designed ceiling tiles) depicting the contemporary and historical nature of Chat Moss. It includes full-colour images of the artwork and an evocative series of black-and-white photographs of the area; these divide five short essays, which explore issues of representation in the context of both painting and GISc.

Derek Hampson's account of the multiplicity of encounters, experiences and processes through which his depiction of Chat Moss evolved, offers rich insight into the 'conduct' of representation and the role of embodiment in the creation and interpretation of visual art. These ideas are also explored by art critic Peter Suchin who interconnects Hampson's experiential knowledge of the site, the representational strategies employed in the work and the physicality involved in viewing the painting. Moving away from discussion of the painting itself, David Matless uses the image as a point of departure from which to engage with various activities historically associated with Chat Moss. In doing so, Matless presents this area not as a landscape of emptiness, but as a place of cultural complexity, where the human and the natural are entwined through a diversity of practices. This chapter also makes for a thoughtful route into the main section of images detailing the work which directly follows. Texts by Gary Priestnall and Glen Hart present a more scientific perspective on the project and provide insightful consideration of the phenomenological idea of embodied representation in relation to the practices and methodologies of GISc. Through contemplating GISc in the context of painterly practices, both Priestnall and Hart look towards further research into how people interact with, and gain understanding from, different types of geographical data.

Read as a whole, *Chat Moss* not only provides a truly multifaceted exploration of a particular place, but also richly extends Hampson and Priestnall's desire to explore the *representation* of landscape as both a place of history and a place of experience, where looking emerges as very much an engaged activity – for both artist/image-maker and viewer. As such, this book will be of particular relevance to those interested in the 'performance' of visual art (and other forms of representation), and, more broadly, to anyone interested in landscape as practiced environment and the possibilities of collaborative research.