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Edgelands, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

By Jackie Wullschlager

Two artists are paired in an exhibition of lyrical portraits of urban wildernesses



One of George Shaw's 'Twelve Short Walks' (2005)

In different ways, George Shaw and Michael Landy are interested in the edges of things – overlooked places; the surplus and rubbish of consumer excess. Shaw made his name as a painter depicting the outskirts of Tile Hill, the Coventry housing estate where he grew up, and was shortlisted for last year's Turner Prize. Landy became known in 2001 for "Break Down", a performance piece in which he systematically catalogued, then destroyed all his possessions.

The Fitzwilliam has had the intriguing idea of pairing these artists, who seem to be at opposite ends of the contemporary spectrum – painterly versus conceptual – through a small show of prints evoking "edgelands". The result is a group of lyrical portraits of elements of urban wildernesses – empty, neglected, yet haunting as wonderlands as well as wastelands – and a suggestion that a focus on such milieux is part of an early 21st-century

cross-genre Zeitgeist.

Landy's "Nourishment" is a surprise: he made these studies of wild plants, or "street flowers" – vegetation growing up through the cracks between pavements, at the corners of car parks, football pitches – as his next project after "Break Down", replacing the theme of destruction with work governed by meticulous observation, simplicity, a pleasure in growth and the everyday.

Shaw's "Twelve Short Walks" are set in a world we recognise: the queasy atmosphere of his paintings. Paths go nowhere; unusual viewpoints disorientate; details of a claustrophobic alley of puddles and weeds are by turns intricate and hazy; scrubland sprouts blighted young trees and concrete posts as a natural/manmade jungle. Shaw's real theme is time: the prints are simply a series of moments, the setting of a story, but without the action. "I wanted it to be almost like you can walk down and get to the end point and you can turn left or right and that might be the next image," Shaw says. "You don't know what's in the bushes, you don't know what is round the corner."

Until September 23

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