

An Aeroplane Flies Over Singleton

August 12th 2022. A sunny day. A heatwave in fact. In one of the buildings that make up the Weald & Downland Living Museum near Chichester – a mediaeval house, relocated from Kent. Low on the wall in the double-height space that makes up the largest part of the building I noticed a perfect ellipse of light perhaps 80mm long maybe the size of an egg. We looked at it a while trying to work out where the shaft of light was coming from – obviously from a gap in the roof tiles above us but very focussed and concentrated, a tiny hole. I held my hand to the light drawing it away from the wall trying to plot the position of the source. Then Jane held a piece of card in front of it as if moving the little oval of light away from the wall. At that at that point the image of an aeroplane passed across the ellipse of light, tiny on the card. Not a shadow or a silhouette but an *image*, clear and precise, the “pinhole” in the tiled roof making the whole building into a spontaneous *camera obscura*. Physics had reproduced an even in the world for us in miniature; it was a spontaneous, and almost miraculous, act of image making with just two witnesses. Will it ever happen again, will anyone ever see it again in that way? Those are two different things, of course; things happen all the time but they are not always *witnessed*. Not ‘officially’, by people who make a point to tell other people and say “we saw this...”

Maybe there is a regular flight passing over that point and once or twice a year the plane’s passage will be there to see like the rising sun shining into a burial chamber on a solstice morning. For some time I have been coming around to the idea that art pretty much *makes itself*; and we (artists and spectators alike) just come across it and point it out to one another in some way - say “we saw this...”

Thinking back, it puts me in mind of a work that was made for the Ukrainian pavilion of the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019: this, in its simplest terms, was the shadow cast over the Giardini at a certain time on a certain date of a Ukrainian-made Antonov AN-225 Mriya, the largest cargo aircraft in the world, as it passed over on a return flight between Venice and Kyiv. The aircraft carried in its cargo hold a single huge hard-drive on which was stored a database of the work of every living Ukrainian artist. I’m not sure what was on the aeroplane we saw over Singleton. Lots of people on their way somewhere nice for their holidays maybe.

It may be that a more perfectly-resolved image of the Antonov AN-225 Mriya might have been visible here and there in the city in dusty forgotten attics and sheds via unremarked pinholes – gaps in ancient roof tiles, knotholes in old timbers and the like. I didn’t see it’s shadow, though. I wasn’t there when it flew by but I saw an aeroplane in a mediaeval house somewhere else instead; seeing it felt like a gift. It was a reminder that remarkable things happen *all the time*. Its just that we don’t very often happen to be there to see them.