

Tacita Dean, Landscape, Royal Academy, London, U.K.

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Tacita Dean

← *Four, Five, Six, Seven and Nine Leaf Clover Collection*, detail, since 1972.

Photo : Augustin Garza, courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London & Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris

↑ *Antigone*, film stills, 2018.

Photos : courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London & Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris

Tacita Dean

Landscape

It is difficult to describe, in British artist Tacita Dean's work, the nuanced interweaving of highly achieved craft with a sense of magic, or that which is beyond human control. "All the things I am attracted to are just about to disappear," the artist has said, in reference to the content as well as the material forms of her work—predilections that carry through *Landscape* at the Royal Academy, the third and final part of a trilogy of recent exhibitions across London institutions. At The National Portrait Gallery was *Portrait*, while The National Gallery hosted *Still Life*, and here in the RA's new suite of rooms devoted to contemporary displays, *Landscape* similarly engages with an age-old genre to new, expansive, and thought-provoking ends.

What is here outwardly a focus on the prefix *land*, might equally include other particular, idiosyncratic environments: mindscape, for instance, or moonscape, sky, time, memory, present, past, and futurescape. A snowy peak looms, drawn in chalk and painstaking detail across nine joined blackboards that measure twelve by twenty-four feet. Entitled *Montafan Letter*, the work refers to a letter that describes a wave of avalanches that occurred in the Austrian Alps in 1689: the first buried a village, the second covered the priest who was officiating at the funeral of the dead, and a third uncovered him. Dean's immense chalk drawing—a form she has worked in frequently—seems to gleam and glimmer, as light reflects off snow and ice.

On old Victorian schoolroom slates, are "cloud drawings" made by blowing liquid chalk. From beneath these smudged, wispy, and ethereal shapes emerge the traces of old words—incised, handwritten fragments that seem prescient in their evocations of time and place: "Bless Our Europe" and "I do remember now" and "Where England?" Alongside these works are Dean's collections of found natural objects: an immense display of four, five, six, seven, and nine-leaf

clovers collected in a glass case; a handful of white spherical stones from the artist's ongoing *Round Stone Collection*. Here there is an emphasis on luck or the haphazard, or perhaps to that which reveals itself upon close looking.

At the heart of *Landscape* is a new two-screen, fifty-six minute 35mm film entitled *Antigone*. Made using Dean's "masking" technique, in which editing and exposure is done within the camera, the film is full of striking juxtapositions, many of which hint at themes of vision and blindness, how the light of the day rises, fades, and dies. Things that vanish. Things that dissolve, fall apart, come back together, re-join, anew. Things that catapult, heave, seethe, rush, shine, shimmer—in the distance, or in the foreground. British actor Stephen Dillane stumbles across the stark, open plains of Cornwall's Bodmin Moor, while Canadian poet Anne Carson, in Thebes, Illinois, discusses aspects of Greek myth. Is he the blind Oedipus? Is she the fated, fateful Antigone? As ever in Dean's work, image and sequence are in complex conversation, extending question after rich question to the audience, rather than proffering straightforward answers. Herein lies the magic.

Emily LaBarge

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