

## **Christina Mackie at Henry Moore Institute, Leeds** *By Emily Pethick*

Christina Mackie's exhibition "The Interzone" (March 21 - May 26, 2002) was triggered by two events: her observations concerning a feral cat's regular visits to her back garden in London, and a trip back home to the West Coast of Canada to visit her family after eight years' absence.

*Forest Face* (all works 2002) combines two superimposed films of a pine forest, shot from a sailboat off the coast of Vancouver Island. Projected over two orange neon rings, the films form a cat's jagged profile, the light circles appearing as eyes glowing through the shifting composite landscapes like those of a cat hidden in a tree. Filmed by Mackie's brother, *Nightlight* is displayed on a monitor atop a tall wooden stand. It shows a marine light viewed through brackish water, brushed with weeds and catching flickering bubbles in its glare while small creatures swarm around it. Shot from behind, it looks like an eclipsed moon, the humming sound of the underwater lamp's generator providing an obscure industrial soundtrack, bringing the work into the realm of science fiction. Nearby, resting on a window sill is a photograph of a large tangled knot of sea kelp washed up on a beach, resembling a mangled alien body.

In these two works, an overwhelming sense of the natural world is combined with an underlying threat of the unknown, represented by the dark forest and the black water's hidden depths. Mackie's relationship to this landscape is both personal and scientific. She comes from a family of scientists, and for her these associations are inextricably entwined. Having collaborated with her family for this exhibition, they are as present as the landscape in which she grew up.

Hanging on anti-static wire mesh covering the bottom half of the wooden stand is a series of slightly unconventional ceramic plates, which Mackie made in collaboration with her father. He threw them, giving them odd, asymmetrical centers, and she completed them with earthy colored glazes, spinning them in haphazard fashion to create dripping marbled effects, and then finishing them with textbook illustrations of big cats grimacing in predatory poses, surveying and ensnaring their prey.

Mackie reflects here on the act of watching via shifting viewpoints, combining multiple gazes; she observes the cat in her garden, big cats eye their prey, neon feline eyes glare through trees, and a marine light searches for creatures underwater. At the same time, the abstracted nightlight and the concealed cat in the forest represent a certain layering or camouflaging in the works that complicates and confuses their reading. Similarly obscured, *Tide Drawing* comprises layers of fragmented text, lightly drawn over the floor in trails of softly colored sand, the words strewn between disparate heaps of sand and stones (collected and polished by her mother) as if washed away by the tide.

Mackie's show plays with multifarious materials and complex composite layers, the resulting works being enigmatic and difficult to pin down. In the end, perhaps the key to "The Interzone" lies in the artist's attraction to the feral cat in her garden. It roams in the interface between the domestic and the wild, manifesting Mackie's preference for the Dionysian over the rationality and discipline of the scientific.

