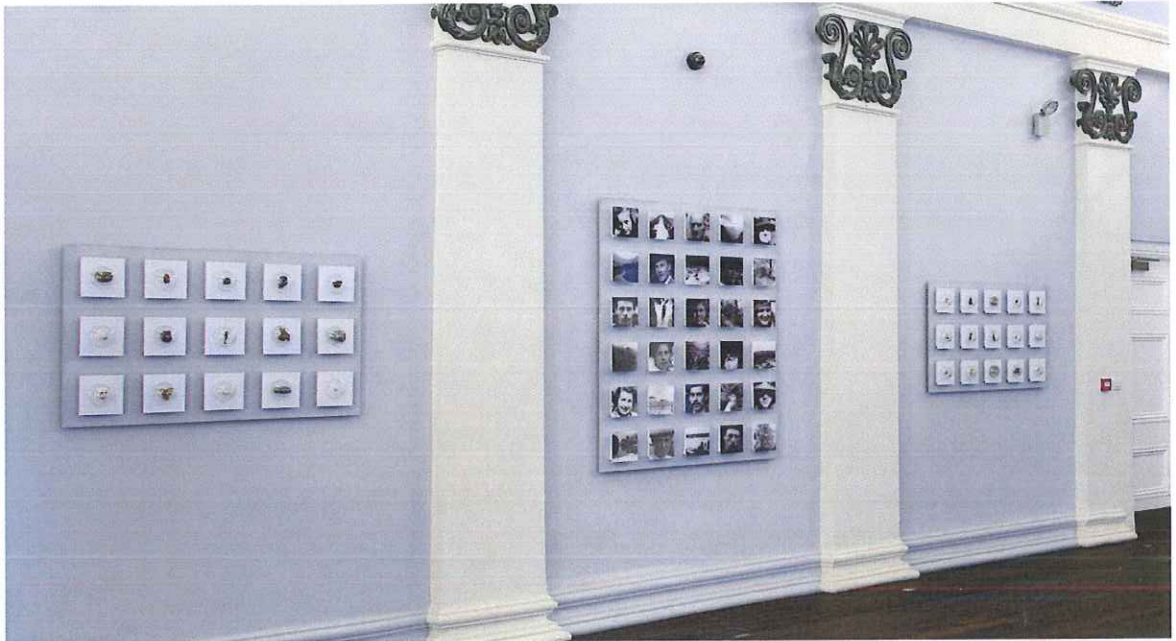


Shirley Chubb

*Charles Darwin on the verandah, Down House, 1881.
Photograph by Messers Elliot and Fry.
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Pen Rest

In 2001, artist Shirley Chubb was invited to make a new work relating to Darwin for Rowley's House Museum and Art Gallery. The resulting exhibition entitled *Thinking Path* looked at Darwin's daily ritual of walking the same path at Down House in Kent, his family home, for 40 years.

Ten years on, her new commission for Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery focuses on Darwin's formative years growing up in Shrewsbury. *Pen Rest* brings together a mix of video, sculptural installation and photography to explore and reveal the extraordinary in the mundane. The intention is to bring the outside back into the museum.

I have always been intrigued about the level of scrutiny that has gone into Darwin - his life, his work, his theories; everything about him is highly analysed, even down to when manuscripts

*Pen Rest, 2014
Photography by Keith Pointon*

are being transcribed the slightest mark on the original texts is pondered over. How things are written, where things have been crossed out, where things have been added - all of that is carefully mulled over and positioned, the implications are considered - quite rightly, that's part of understanding. There was one reference made to what were described as dots on these manuscripts, and they didn't always appear to be punctuation or amendments. They are referred to as a pen rest: where the pen has just stopped on the paper for a split second. I found that a really resonant idea, because it immediately conjures up the thought of Darwin just stopping and thinking about what he's writing and what he's considering. It was a very beautiful thing to come across. Immediately it becomes a formative element that begins to identify what I want the work to be about.

Pen Rest is very much about focus, slightness, stillness - it is much more internal than



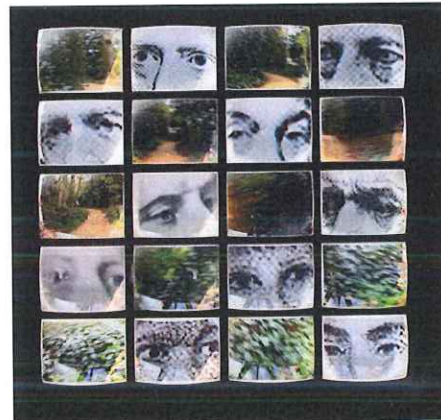
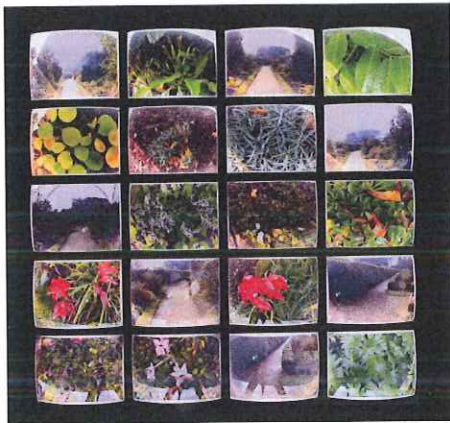
Thinking Path. The dome shapes resemble small worlds, containing a small item, familiar but significant. Some of them are part of the museum collection and some are my own objects. In choosing the objects I am considering how they speak to each other: a feather, a fossil, the skull of a blackbird.

The films are taken from places in Shrewsbury that Darwin knew as a child and which were often part of his daily routine. There is also film of other sites that he visited as a child, from which he describes very fleeting memories, a waterfall in Wales and beaches in the Barmouth area. I'm really interested in these places inasmuch as they are some of the first memories he records in his own writings.

As soon as I get behind any form of camera I am entranced by what I'm looking at and everything becomes, although it's quite unremarkable in some respects, quite extraordinary. I don't always rely on looking through the camera but capturing it in

this way makes you realise how exquisite normality is. I'm trying to still things, still myself perhaps, and hopefully still the viewer. By offering small specimens, images and sections of film I'm suggesting taking time to consider the enormity and connections within or around those small items and fleeting images.

"I come to the museum as an artist, hoping to reveal other ways of thinking. In doing so, I grapple with the enormity of everything that Darwin stands for and encapsulates. In order to do that I focus in on small objects, details of images, landscapes and moments in time."



Thinking Path at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery, 2014
Photography by Keith Pointon

Thinking Path

In 2001, Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery commissioned, for the first time, the making of a work of contemporary art that explored the life and ideas of Charles Darwin. Artist Shirley Chubb was invited to consider this challenge and, after initial research, she chose *Thinking Path* as the central metaphor for the development of a new work.

Thinking Path is a family name given to Darwin's ritual daily walk in the grounds of his home, Down House in Kent. It is also known as the 'Sand-walk'. After his early global voyaging Darwin was to marry and settle with his family at Down House for the remainder of his life, during which time he wrote '*On the Origin of Species*'.

Millions of words have been written by and about Darwin. Chubb allows us to contemplate his life through her own use of the combined languages of contemporary visual art. Sculptural photographic forms, digital moving images, appropriated museum objects and the site itself are made and curated by the artist to collectively become the language of the exhibition. The wall-based panels were created by the systematic accumulation of visual research reinterpreted through a system of 1600 digitised images corresponding to the paces of the Sand-walk or *Thinking Path*. Each image is held behind bespoke glass lenses within a laser cut frame.

The work is a structured combination of alternating images taken from first-hand research including video documentation of the thinking path filmed on the four significant anniversaries of Darwin's birth and death, the return to the UK of HMS Beagle and the publication *On the Origin of Species*. In addition, the work incorporated stills and video documentation of sites of direct significance to Darwin such as the room he was born in, local churches he attended as a child, his study and home environment at Down House. This direct research was supplemented by contemporary and historical imagery reflecting upon the four significant themes of birth, journeying, theory and death linked to the four anniversaries above.

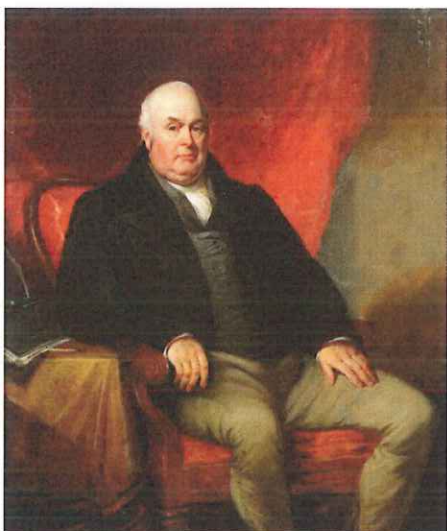
After a long tour, Shirley Chubb's original commission has found a permanent home in the museum.



Pen Rest, 2014.
Photography by Shirley Chubb.

Inspired by:

**Robert W. Darwin (SHYMS:
FA/1991/033/02)**
W.W. Oules, 1870-1910
Donated by F. Taylor



Robert W Darwin, Charles Darwin's father, was a successful doctor in Shrewsbury. He built The Mount as his family home and designed the extensive garden with his wife, Susannah.

The steep bank to the river was terraced, and a walking circuit was created. Robert Darwin called this 'the Thinking Path', and encouraged Charles and his brother Erasmus to walk it every day before breakfast and spend time in reflection. When he was on the Beagle voyage Charles wrote to his family, "I often think of the garden at home as a Paradise: on a fine summer's evening, when the birds are singing, how I should like to appear like a Ghost amongst you".

Every picture tells a story:

**Mallards and Pigeons
(SHCMS: FA.00001)**
Randolph Caldecott, 1876
Transferred from Whitchurch
Museum Collection



Randolph Caldecott's output as an artist ranged from drawings of hunting scenes to oil paintings and watercolours exhibited by the Royal Academy. However, it is as one of the most influential nineteenth century illustrators of children's books that he is best known.

Randolph Caldecott was born in Whitchurch, Shropshire and the museum holds a significant collection of his work.