

Return to Battleship Island: Future of Ruins

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In the summer of 2013, an interdisciplinary team of scholars, funded as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's 'Care for the Future' scheme, visited the island of Hashima, situated 15 kilometres off the coast of Nagasaki on the southern tip of the Japanese archipelago. Once the most densely populated place on earth, Hashima was mined for coal by the Mitsubishi Company from the late nineteenth century until 1974, when the island was abandoned with lightning speed. Today, Hashima's extraordinary modernist tower blocks and reinforced concrete sea wall have been left to rot and ruin – the island a site of elemental distress and erosion, a dark saturn of sorts. In this paper, two of the team (Carl Lavery and Deborah Dixon) perform their own troubled attempts to map the island, and to come to terms with an uncanny sense of temporal disjunction caused by a future that seems, already, to have come to pass.

The performance lasts for approximately 80 minutes, and consists of a 30 minute film by the artist Lee Hassall; a text and image 'portrait' of the island by Lavery and Dixon; and a screening of some super 8mm footage 'found' by Hassall and Lavery (and worked into the performance). There is a short interval of 10 minutes between the film and the portrait piece.