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Land of the Ley

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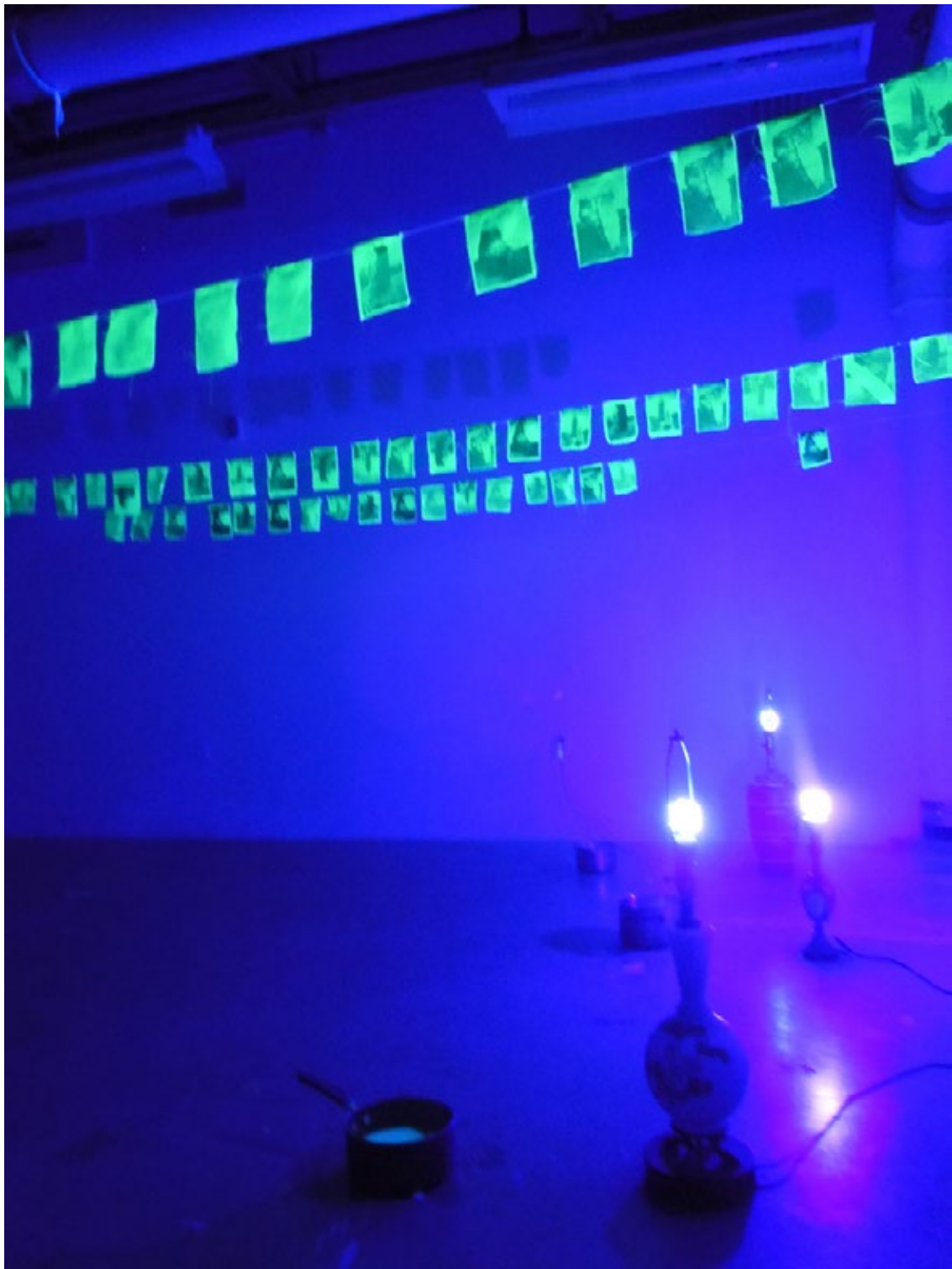
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Land of the Ley

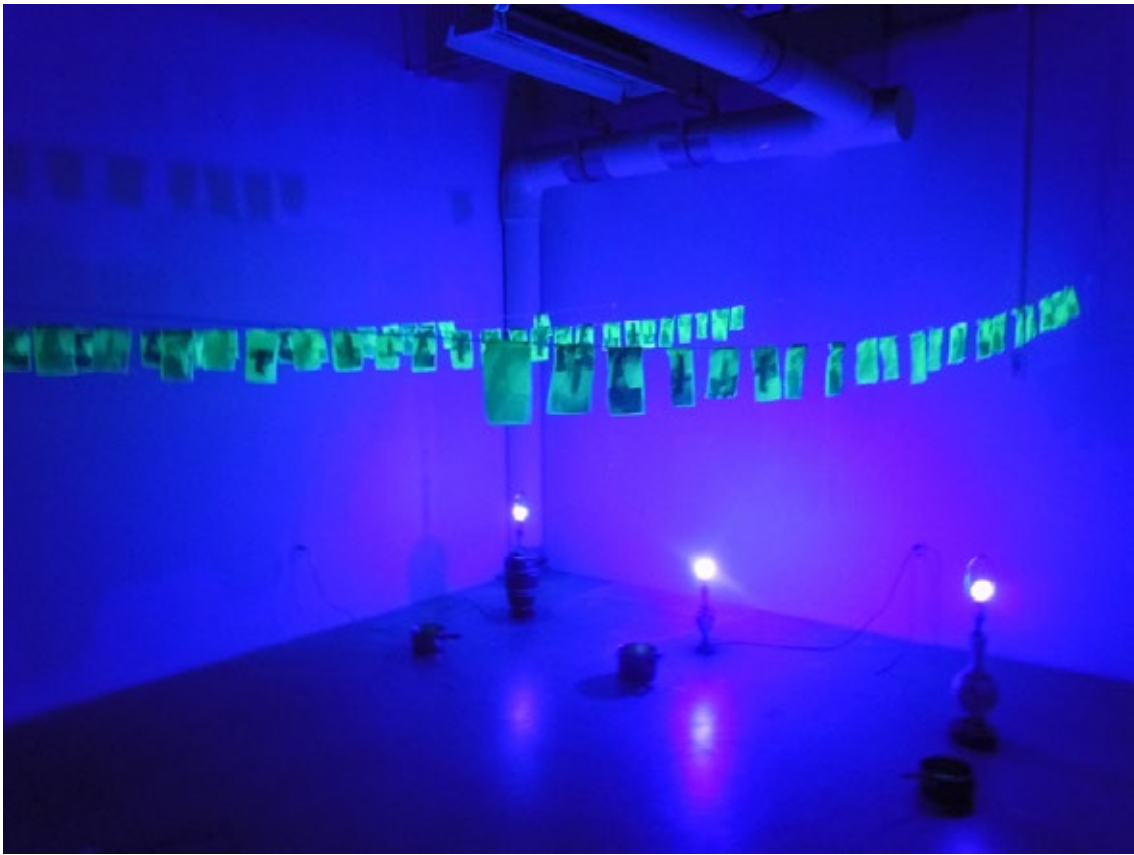
by Grace Huddleston

The line separating phenomenon and science has become blurred in the investigation of ley lines. Ley lines can be described as “invisible” lines that link different places of interest and significance, either historical or geographical. This is a very loose definition, but it must remain vague, as it has to account for the various understandings of the lines. These individual interpretations are noted by Atkins Webster in his introduction to “Do Quasar Ley Lines Really Exist,” in which he states that “one supposition is that these ley lines were intended for some practical purpose, perhaps to mark a track or territorial boundary, whilst another is that they fulfilled some ceremonial, religious, or mystical function” (179). It is these variances in interpretation that ultimately stimulated many of my decisions for my installation-based piece “The Lay of the Ley.”

The article “Photography, the Index, and the Nonexistent: Alfred Watkins’ Discovery (or Invention) of the Notorious Ley-lines of British Archaeology” by Michael Charlesworth provides insight into the discovery of these lines as the author introduces us to Alfred Watkins (1855-1935), an amateur archaeologist as well as “an inventor of photographic instruments” (133). Charlesworth explains that “It came to Watkins in a flash that ancient prehistoric sites, medieval churches . . . and a variety of other features of the British countryside . . . tended to be aligned with each other in chains of such features stretching for miles across the land . . . Watkins construed prehistoric Britain to have been crossed by a system of straight trackways, probably established by the late Neolithic period (ca. 2500 BCE)” (133). Charlesworth notes that Alfred Watkins spent his life in the area where he found the leys, and was the president of a local society that, at the time, investigated archaeology and natural history in that area. This may explain his title of “Amateur Archaeologist,” and why Watkins’ discovery was given clout at the time.

Alfred Watkins introduced his discovery of ley lines to the public in his book *The Old Straight Track*. Shortly after, the debate regarding the origin and significance of ley lines began, and many interesting speculations have surfaced since. The topic of the existence and significance of these ley lines has polarized archaeologists. Most academic archaeologists believe the lines are non-existent, and that any spiritual relationships found between places are simply projections made by the individual. Yet many stories can be found that describe events or discoveries that center around the lines.





In “Line of Sight: Alfred Watkins, Photography and Topography in Early Twentieth-Century Britain,” Stephen Daniels examines how perceptions of these lines have changed throughout history. Daniels posits that these shifts in the belief in and understanding of the ley lines stems from “the republication in 1970 of *The Old Straight Track* with a forward by John Michell” (n. pag.). Daniels argues “Ley Lines became connected with all manner of enigmatic lines in the landscape” (n. pag.). These statements brought greater mystery to the lines, leading me to wonder about the individuals who would seek spirituality or a supernatural experience through the leys. This further heightened my interest as I began to imagine the various people who represented the theories (both supernatural and scientific) surrounding the lines.

I was most interested in the debate and mystery surrounding these lines, and I worked to represent their bizarre quality and effect, the way they teeter on the edge between the realms of science and supernatural. My process was influenced strongly by the idea that any significance placed on the lines was merely a projection. The idea of projection led me to work in a way that left many of

the visual elements up to chance. I used lithography to print images of standing stones that I found online (which are said by some to mark the leys) on fluorescent fabric, printing in a way that allowed for mistakes in inking and alignment to occur. I chose to do this because I was interested in the idea that variances in the images of the stones could represent the different interpretations of the ley lines. It is my hope that the viewer will read the mistakes based on their individual backgrounds with varying understandings of spirituality and science. I chose to print on fluorescent fabric, and used black light bulbs in lamps as the only form of illumination in the installation space in an effort to create an exhibit that felt both mysterious and mundane. I hung the prints from string suspended over pots of glowing liquid to allude to the photographic development process. The liquid and lights were positioned at one end of the room and the lines extended to the opposite wall so that the hanging images disappeared into the darkness of the room in order to create a heightened sense of inscrutability. I accompanied the physical elements of the work with an audio loop composed of several layers of both found and recorded industrial and natural sounds that I lengthened and distorted. This sound emanated from speakers located on the dark side of the room.

It fascinates me to alter spaces to I create a complex narrative or character such as “The Lay of the Ley”— to blur the line between science and the supernatural, between impulse and the credible.

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