

James Beckett

05.27.14

AUTHOR: CLAUDIA AROZQUETA

05.02.14-06.28.14 Artspace

ARTFORUM

Dowsing, or divining, is a practice that stems from ancient times, in which one uses rods or sticks to find a diversity of hidden objects, such as metals, oil, archeological remains, or even missing persons, under surfaces. In 2013, Netherlands-based Zimbabwean artist James Beckett, whose practice centers on revealing the nature of found objects and historical narratives, invited two dowsers from the United Kingdom to explore the grounds of various educational institutions in Amsterdam.

In this didactic exhibition, the results of the project are configured into an installation that investigates the representational machinery of museums. *Dowsing Schools: Preliminary Findings and Corresponding Survey Kit*, 2013, presents in two display cases a selection of books published between 1939 and 1980 devoted to dowsing, as well as a collection of Y- and L-shaped diving artifacts, such as a natural forked branch harvested from a British garden and an industrially made South Korean telescopic brass pen rod, from different locations. Exploiting traditional anthropological museology aesthetics, a survey kit with a variety of objects used by the dowsers to inspect the academies—including a plane table used for mapping, flags for marking the layout of buildings, a metal pendulum, a shovel, and a fiberglass umbrella—is also carefully arranged in the gallery.

Additionally, two audio recordings with the dowsers' testimonials, describing their methods based on vibrations or electromagnetic waves to find objects, envision the practice either as a magical divinatory system or as a pseudoscientific praxis. With this work, Beckett explores institutional cultural modes of legitimization while becoming a dowser himself, revealing what is invisible: the subculture tradition of diving that exists independently from general, and more evidently artistic, view or knowledge.