

# Ilona Sagar: Deep Structure

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Photos by Reuben James Brown

### Organisms, organisations, machines

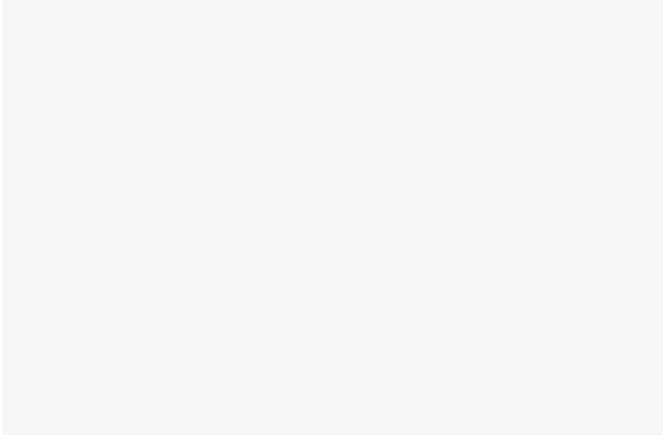
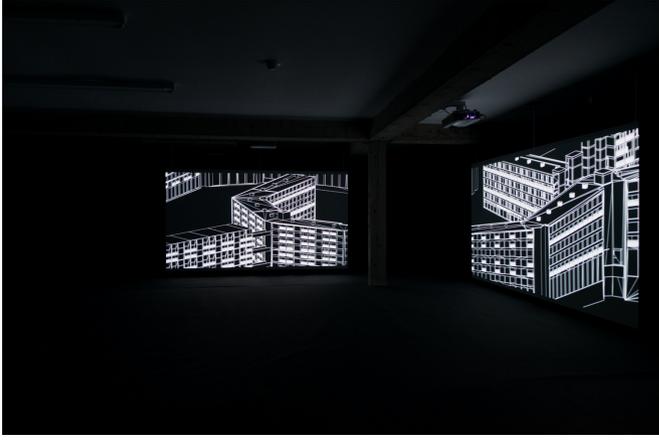
The above refrain repeats throughout London-based artist Ilona Sagar's major new film and solo exhibition, *Deep Structure* showing at S1 Artspace until 14 December. As with previous shows at S1, Sagar's is inspired by aspects of Park Hill's iconic architecture and its 1960s social experiment. Does social planning have social effect?

In this case what is presented is an utterly beguiling combination of archival material from Sheffield Archives and Local Studies Library, with voiced survey material from Park Hill's former residents of the early 1960s. There is beautiful contemporary film footage from Hope Cement Works, and the Materials Science and Engineering Department at the University of Sheffield, plotted alongside a montage of extraordinary digital spatial data. Strange bedfellows one might think, and it is difficult to describe the piece in words (hence it not being presented as such), but this unique combination of material – images of scientists at work, a moving living diagram of Park Hill as fish-like, breathing and winding organism, lonely shots of individuals amidst the brutal architecture – forms a bleak and captivating visual whole. It is more than an exhibition.

Turning survey data from the archives into poetry, a voice speaks out sharing questionnaires about how the residents were finding life in Park Hill. In 1961-2, the resident 'housewives' were asked about their levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their Park Hill dwellings. Every fifth household was asked about their choices, sunlight levels, opportunities for children to play outside, whether they were happy with the lift and stairs, with the proximities of other people and so on. The results confirmed that 'nervous symptoms' were equal amongst those living both on lower and higher floors. That its residents were even asked for their opinions is perhaps a radical step by its Brutalist architects. The question: 'does data speak, or is it seen?' haunts this work, leaving the viewer unsure of the answer.

The complex partnerships involved in this piece really seem to work, exploring wellbeing and welfare through looking at buildings as organisms but linking complicated mathematical algorithms with human voice. We see through the 'eyes' of the structure of Hope Valley Cement Works peering onto the surrounding Peak District landscape: nature and industry combined. Two screens at right angles mean the film unfolds and envelops the viewer – it's definitely something at which to stay awhile and watch the whole piece. Hard to pin down in language, I recommend going to immerse yourself awhile. It will make you reconsider what it was and is to reside in such an iconic piece of socially engineered – and even anthropomorphic – architecture.

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