

THE OBSERVATORY

A PLACE TO LOOK IN - A PLACE TO LOOK OUT



Background

SPUD is a learning organisation with collaboration at its heart. We learn from every project we deliver and we are fully committed to offering new learning opportunities to the people we work with. This, combined with our growing reputation has enabled us to attract a wide range of highly accomplished individuals to work with us.

The Observatory is a sculptural, architectural installation offering a work space, a platform, a shelter, a look-out, for a series of twelve artist residencies to take place over 2 years in 4 different and unique locations. The resident artists will be undertaking an investigation of site, environment and community, resulting in an outcome that will be presented to an audience.

The Observatory will generate an exciting and varied body of new work by artists responding to 4 special locations and introduce contemporary art to new audiences, through planned activity and through people 'stumbling upon' the Observatory and its artists by chance.

The project extends and enriches the inter-disciplinary collaboration which lies at the heart of SPUD's work, building new networks and partnerships across the arts, architecture, engineering and education sectors. The Observatory highlights design and the arts as a means to focus on the importance of conservation and the environment, offering creative opportunities to artists with access to art and education opportunities for the public.

'Creating high quality creative collaboration'



Images courtesy Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios

Location, location, location...

Winchester

Winchester Science Centre sits at the westerley end of the South Downs on the outskirts of Winchester. Uniquely combining a biodiverse landscape with bustling towns and villages, the South Downs National Park covers an area of over 1,600 km² and is home to more than 110,400 people. Recognised as an area of outstanding beauty, the South Downs is also home to a multitude of vibrant working communities steeped in history and traditional English culture, from the ancient cathedral city of Winchester in the west to the market town of Lewes in the east.

Lymington

The salt marshes at Keyhaven which are part of the New Forest National Park provides a specialised habitat that supports its own distinctive plants and animals, some of which are only found in this type of environment. The lagoons are some of the most important in Britain with populations of rare species including Foxtail Stonewort, Lagoon Shrimp and Starlet Sea- anemone.

In year 2 The Observatory will move on to locations in South Dorset and the River Tamar and develop new collaborations with artist and partners in these regions.

Hatching the plan

The Observatory builds on a recent SPUD project, the Exbury Egg. The Egg was a temporary, energy efficient, self-sustaining work space designed by PAD architects for artist Stephen Turner on the River Beaulieu. It was a place to stay, a laboratory, a collecting and collating centre which took on the patina of 730 daily tides below the water line, and 365 days of weathering by wind, rain and bleaching by the sun above. The Egg received several awards including the RIBA Small Project Award 2014, the RIBA Regional South Award 2014 and the LEAF Sustainable Interior of the Year Award 2013. It was also shortlisted for the RIBA Stephen Lawrence Prize 2014

A key element of the project was enabling the artist to explore a sensitive SSSI location. Public access had to be severely limited due to the nature of the site. Interest in the Egg was global and the lack of physical public access proved quite frustrating. The Observatory aims to afford artists a similar opportunity to explore the natural environment but offering a much more accessible structure. The Observatory will become an interface for the public to engage with both the artist and the place.



Images courtesy Nigel Rigden/PAD

'Obsworkatory'



At the core of SPUD's work is creative collaboration and The Observatory project exemplifies this. The first stage in developing the project involved a series of intensive workshops, known as 'The Obsworkatory'. These workshops brought together artists, architects, other professionals and students to develop the competition brief for the structures and the artists' brief.

The workshops were invaluable in developing the process and understanding the needs of artists in particular. It was also an opportunity to foreground the role of artists within the architectural design process.



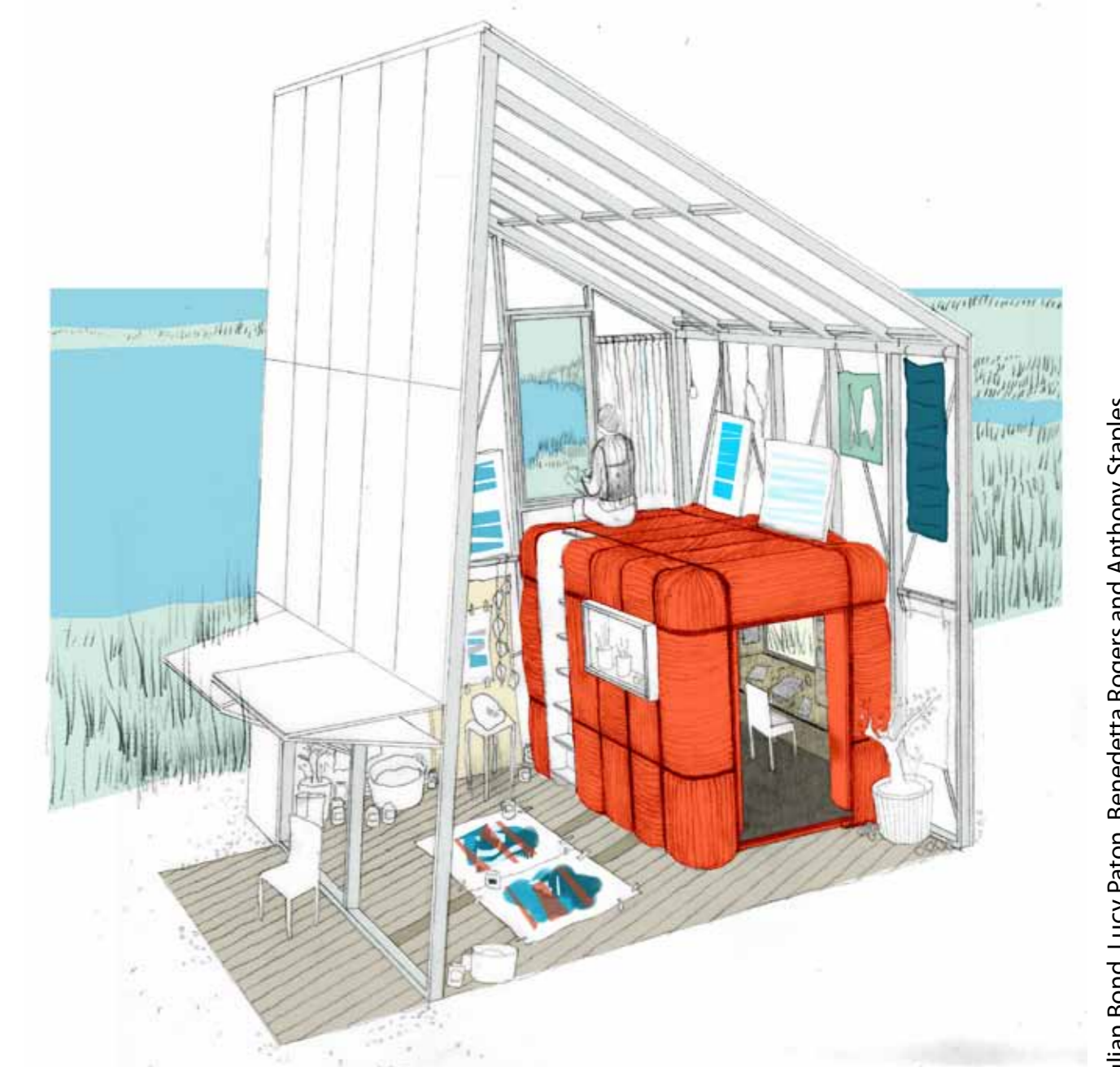
Andrew Wright, Norman Ackroyd and Clare Twomey



Glen Stellmacher, Nozomi Nakabayashi and Mark Torrens



Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios and Ed Crumpton



Julian Bond, Lucy Paton, Benedetta Rogers and Anthony Staples



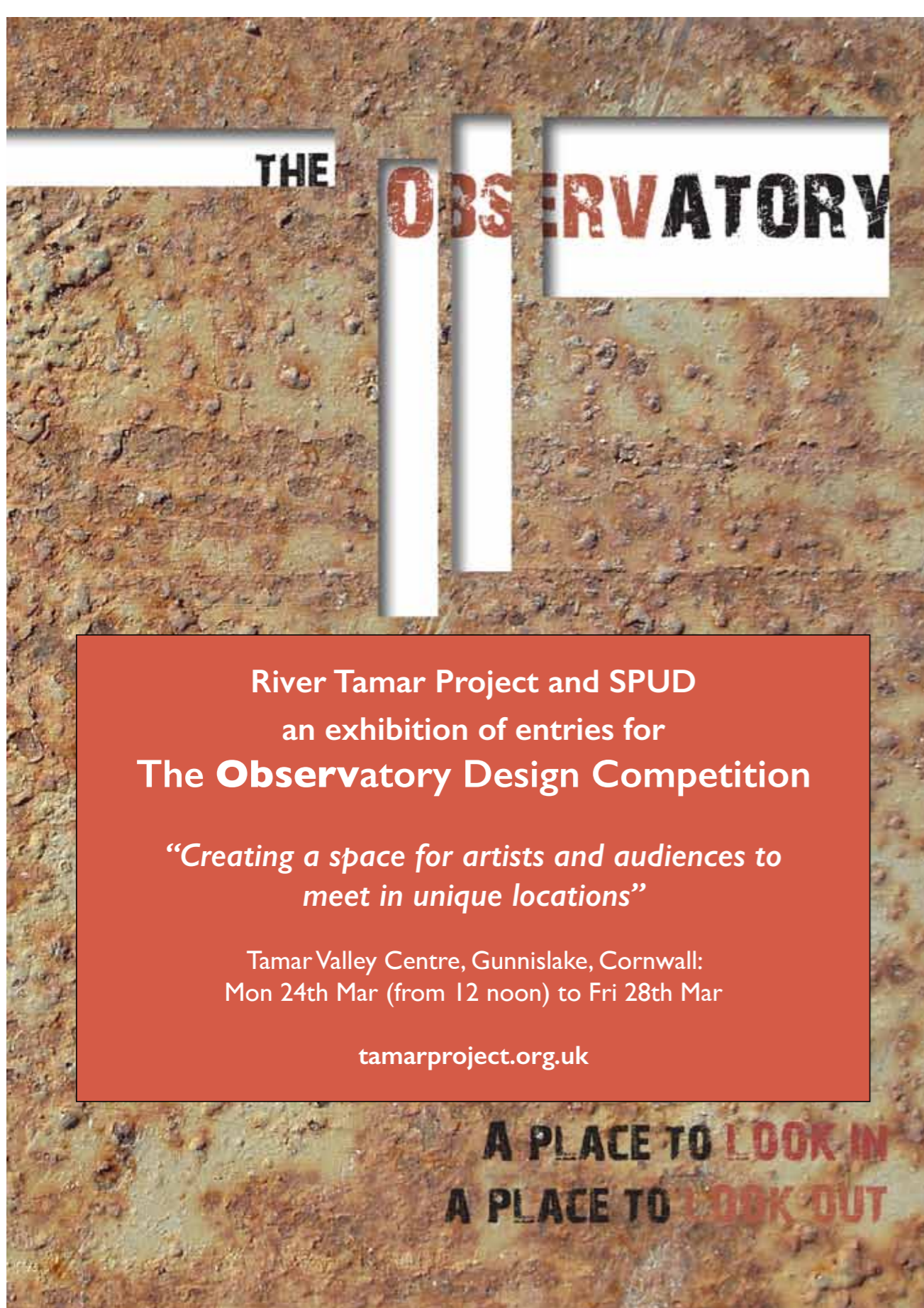
Perran Trehwala and Conor Worth

Competition and Exhibition

The design of The Observatory was chosen through an international competition. An incredible variety of entries was received, which made the job of judging difficult but also very rewarding. A long-list of entries was compiled into an exhibition that travelled to all four proposed Observatory locations. This exhibition gave local people an opportunity comment on the designs and vote on their favourites.

After a rigorous interview process SPUD was delighted to award the winning design to a team of recent graduates working at Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios in London, along with artist, Ed Crumpton. The judges felt their design offered a high quality approach to materials, intrigue in its turning mechanism and a strong understanding of the project brief and budget.

The 5 shortlisted finalists can be seen on the right-hand side.



The Design Team

The design team consists of four young architecture graduates from London, Charlotte Knight, Mina Gospavic, Ross Galtress & Lauren Shevills and Devon-based artist Edward Crumpton. As friends from school, Edward invited Charlotte to collaborate on the competition. Charlotte in turn introduced Edward to the rest of the team, who all met through Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios where they currently work. The team holds a strong ethos in designing sustainably and taking great care in material selection, which can be likened to the practice’s manifesto.

Throughout the design process all contributed their skills, knowledge and ideas with particular attention to the artist in the team, Edward, who gave a genuine insight into the working requirements of a contemporary artist. As Edward’s art is made using traditional British rope weaving techniques, the team have also incorporated his skill into the proposed architectural elements of The Observatory, which refer to the coastal and marine character of the scheme.

As part of the design team’s core principles, it is crucial to collaborate with other types of innovative designers. Entering The Observatory competition was an exciting way to challenge this idea and meet other creative individuals with the aim of building strong relationships with other multi-disciplinary practices. Working with a client such as SPUD, who have such a strong social agenda was a compelling reason to enter the competition, as well as working closely with others who hold the same core values. As young architectural designers the team all work closely together and their strong professional friendship continues to push all aspects of the project. Aside from maintaining a close working relationship with artist and architectural designer, collaborative design reviews were held within the London studio with senior architects and researchers from FCBS. There were also continued conversations with structural and mechanical engineers and a quantity surveyor to ensure that the design is achievable. Their input was invaluable and helped significantly to shape what we believed to be a fully feasible and highly crafted proposal.

As part of the material development for The Observatory, the team applied for the FCBS Research and Innovation grant in April 2014. This reflects the team’s desire to use The Observatory as a learning resource, using the collective material to become a written thesis which may interest other professionals and trade journals. Background interests in crafts and 1:1 fabrications have pushed the teams investigation into the process of Shou Sugi Ban, which they hope to progress alongside increasing the influence of small research driven projects across the UK.



‘As young architectural designers the team all work closely together and their strong professional friendship continues to push all aspects of the project.’

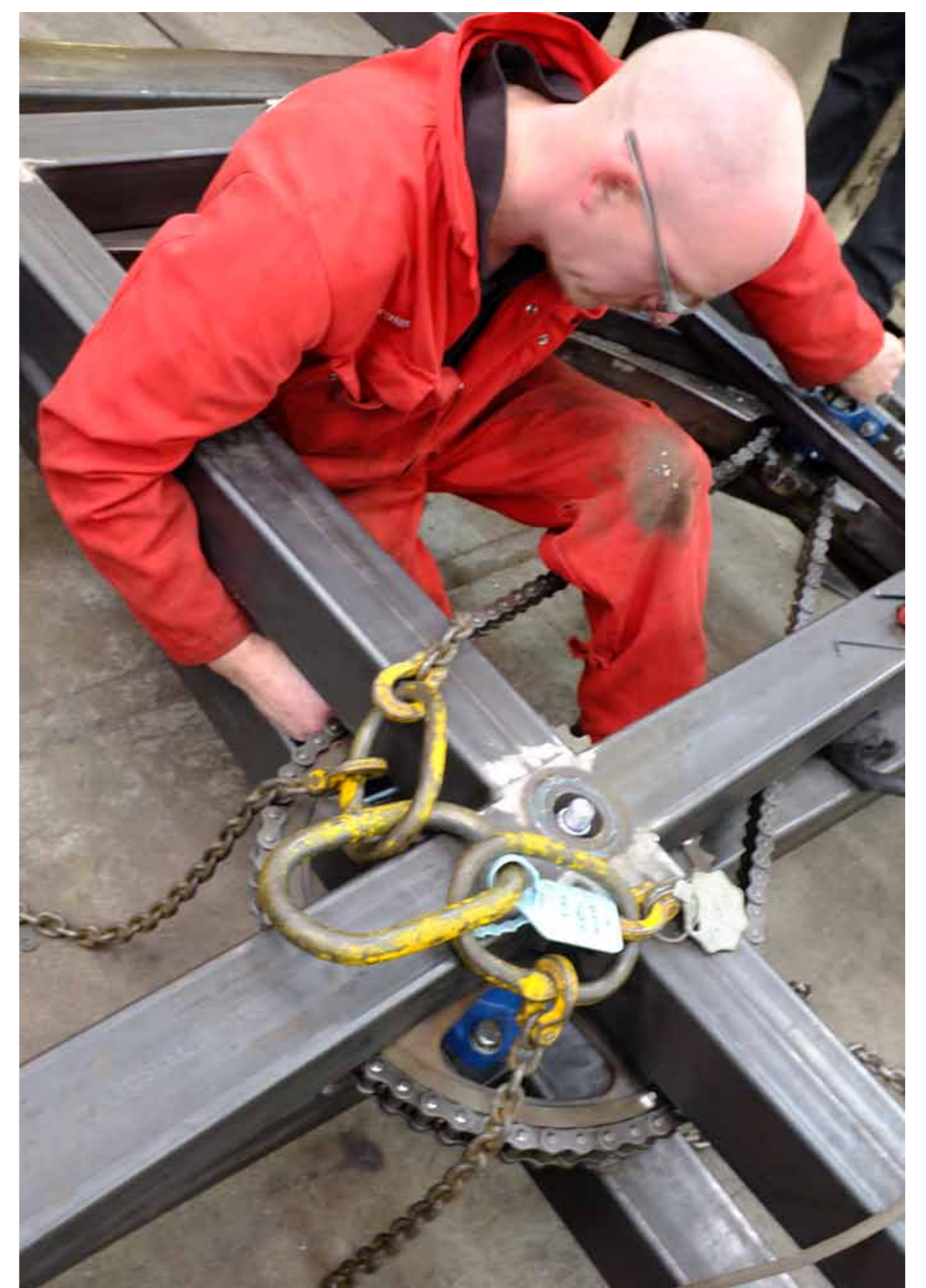
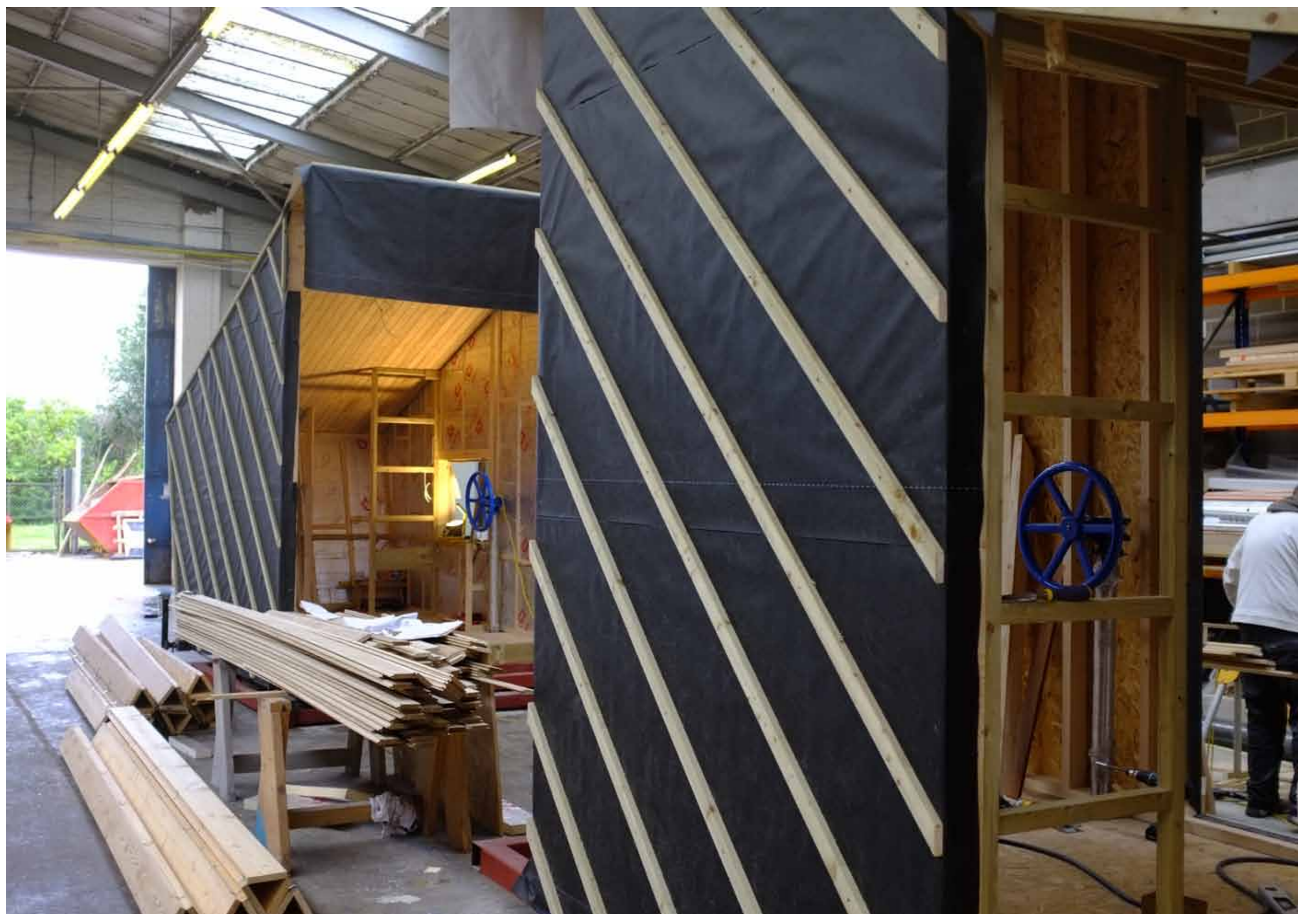
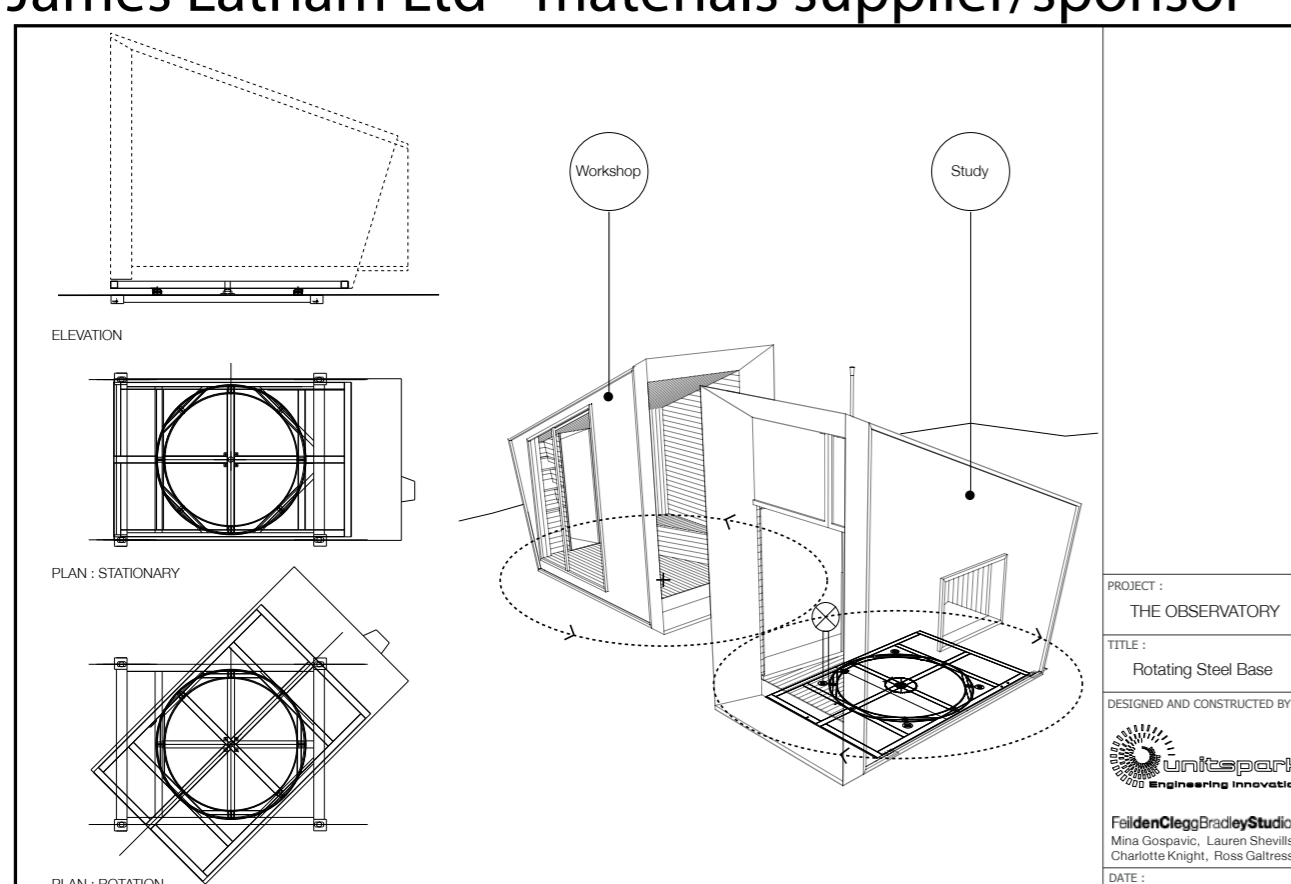


For SPUD, collaboration doesn't stop at the initial design stage. It pervades all the work we do and was a vital ingredient in realising The Observatory. The knowledge, skills and experience of all the team members led to a truly stunning outcome that has been realised on budget and on time.

Choosing the construction team was also a challenge as The Observatory was by no means an off-the-shelf solution and required both skill and imagination. We were very fortunate to have S&S Construction (Andover) take the lead on construction and provide much of the work as sponsorship.

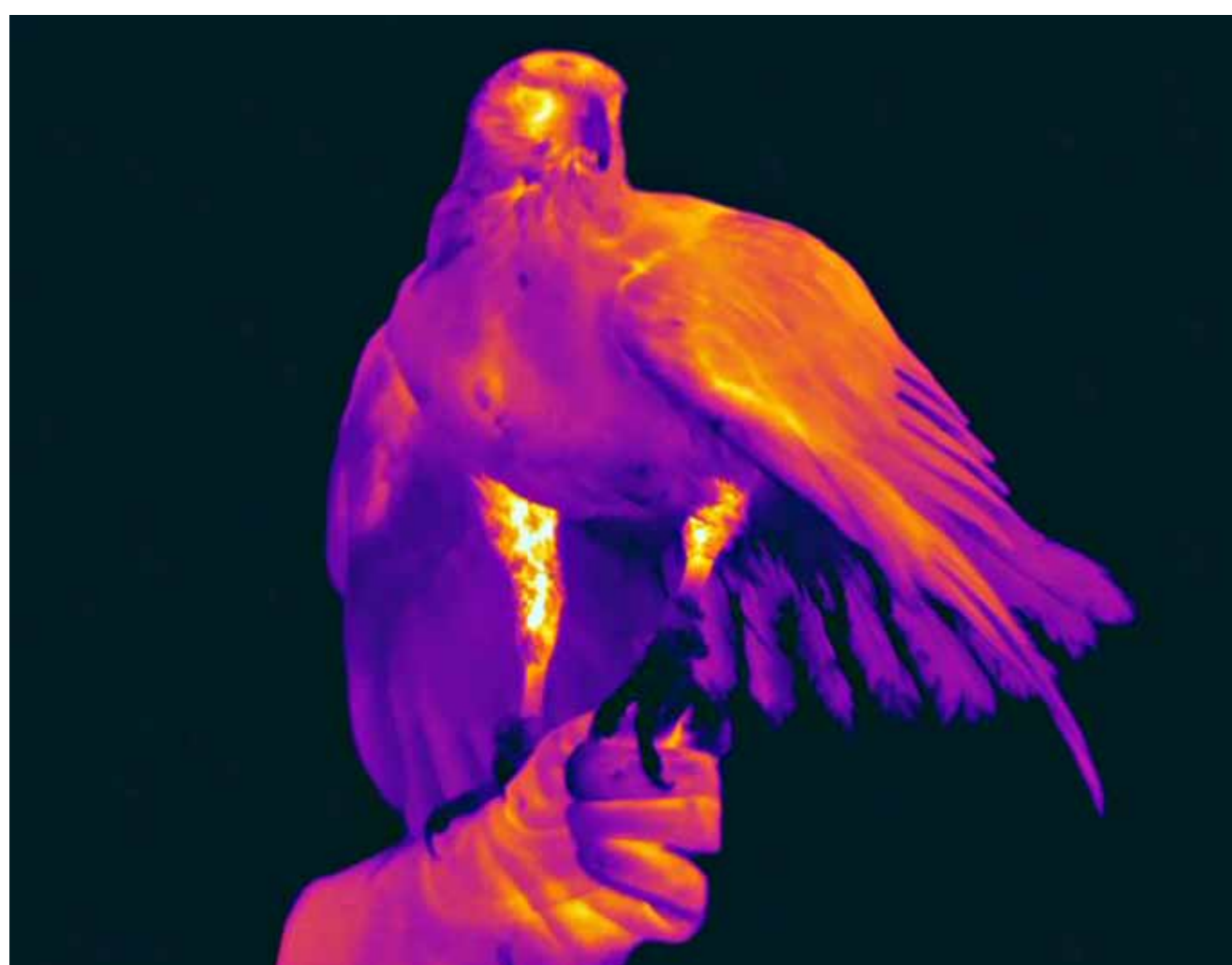
The designers from Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios have been hands-on throughout the process, including days spent in wintry fields helping S&S to char the timber for the cladding.

Team:
Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios - designers
S&S Construction - lead contractor
UnitSpark - construction engineers
James Latham Ltd - materials supplier/sponsor



Simon Ryder: Winchester

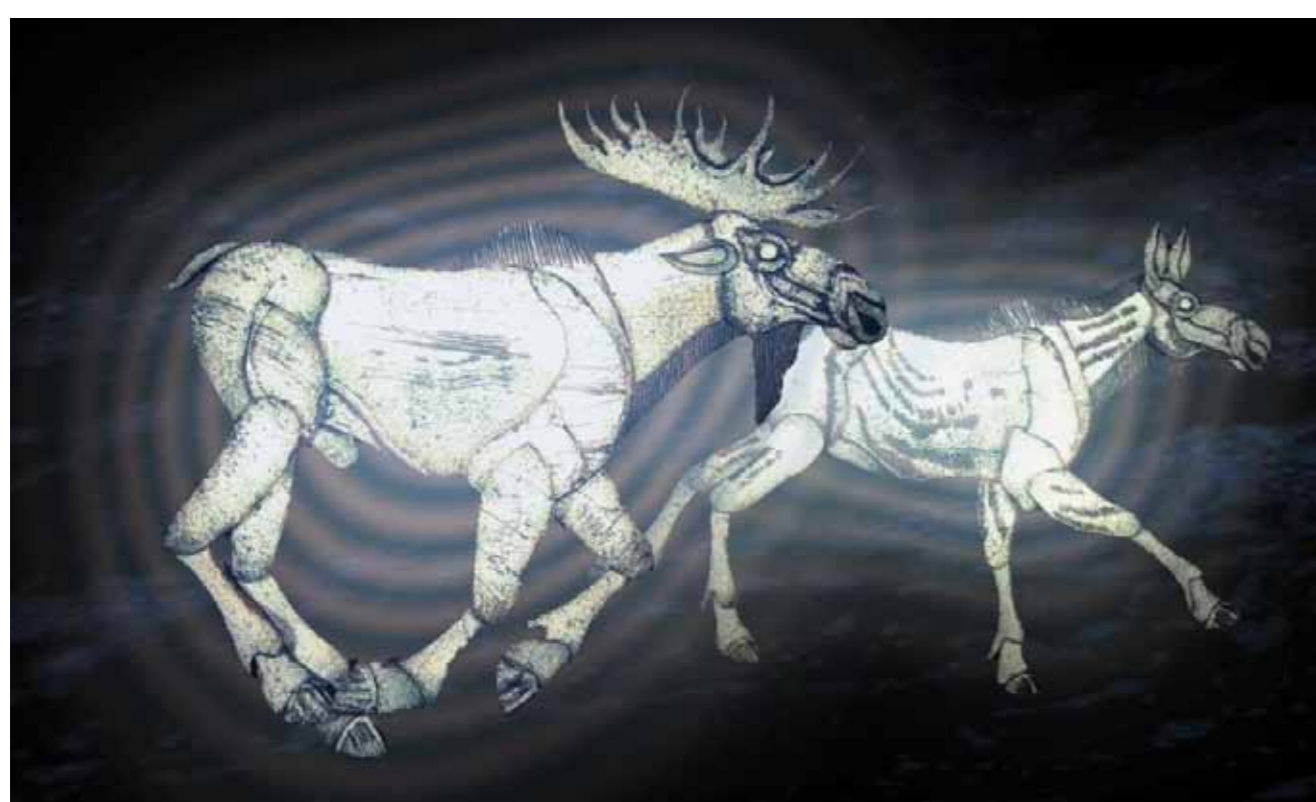
From a Gothic cathedral to a 1970s milking parlour, from the mudflats of the National Wetlands Centre Wales to the cells of HMP The Verne, Simon Ryder has worked as artist-in-residence in a wide variety of locations around the country and abroad. For him the value of residencies is two-fold: first, it lies in discovering how we relate to individual places, how, as the author Robert MacFarlane puts it, places “have long offered us keen way of figuring ourselves to ourselves, strong means of shaping memories and giving form to thought”; second, it lies in being flexible and choosing processes or technologies that are in some way indigenous to each location to make his next piece. To see how this works in practice, Simon keeps an online journal of his work-in-progress at: www.simonhryder.wordpress.com



Sean Harris: Winchester

Over the last decade, I have made films that attempt to distill ‘sense of place’ – the intangible resonances emanating from intersections within a web, woven by many generations, that we project onto the land. In the course of this process I have, through collaborations with archaeologists, travelled back to the post-glacial re-population of our landscape. Elsewhere, wanderings overseas have further extended the scope of my lens.

The Observatory, in its location adjacent to the UK’s largest planetarium and on the boundary of the UK’s newest National Park, will be an outpost on the edge of two ‘wildernesses’. In spending time here making proto-animation devices, using as catalyst the narratives that cultures past and present have projected onto the heavens – which mirror their terrestrial world-view – I hope to create a portal into the physical landscape, journeys through which might enable fathoming of the landscapes within us.



Isabella Martin: Winchester

Isabella Martin is a cross-disciplinary artist who explores how we develop and are formed by our perception of place. She uses language as a means of navigation, in an approach shaped by questioning, conversation and collaboration. Her work is context specific, driven by a synthesis between experimental play and active research, and ranges from outdoor interventions to performance and participatory projects. Isabella has exhibited nationally and internationally, and completed residencies in North America, Wales, Denmark and Japan. She is a member of the international curatorial and research collective Camp LiKle Hope, and an associate artist at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich and KeKles Yard, Cambridge. Currently based in the East of England, she graduated with a BA in Fine Art Sculpture from Brighton University in 2010.

www.isabellarosemartin.co.uk



Katie Surridge: Lymington

My sculptural work often includes found materials, and these are used in conjunction with prefabricated parts to construct large structural forms. Using these elements in my sculptures gives them a new place in the world. I aim to show the viewer items or materials that might otherwise be overlooked.

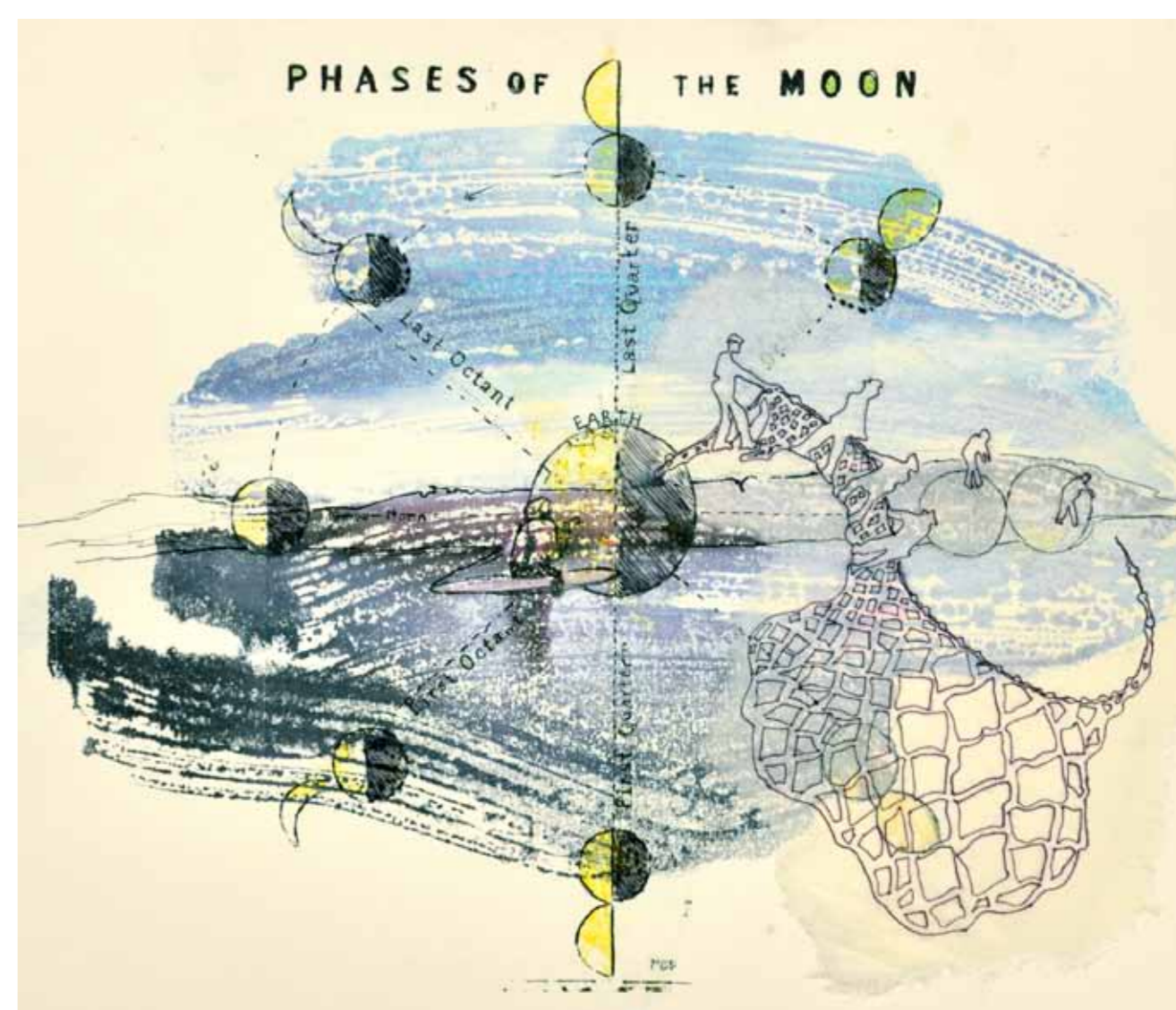
Travel provides me with structural ideas, new materials and exciting cross cultural references. The reflections I make on my surroundings or environment come through my careful choice of objects. I rely on visual experiences and chance discoveries to evolve work. This process of discovery and development is integral to my practice.

The idea of balance is another common theme in my work. Whether it is physically balancing or suspending items like test tubes or silk worm cocoons with bricks, or balancing materials in a more sensitive way in terms of colour, shape or form, for example.

Alice Angus: Lymington

Alice Angus’ work combines public art, illustration and textiles using drawing, embroidery, digital textile printing. She is interested in people, stories and heritage of places, with a particular interest in people and their relationships to landscape and environment. Alice is also Co-Director (with Giles Lane) of non-profit arts organisation Proboscis where she works on projects that include public artworks, academic research, arts and community commissions.

Alice said - “ I’m looking forward to working with people who live, work, visit, study and care for the Lymington-Keyhaven Nature Reserve and learning about the natural and social history, human stories and folklore that are bound up in the landscape. During my residency I will investigate how the knowledge of the communities that use, visit or work on the Marshes can merge with scientific knowledge and studies into environmental change and coastal erosion to offer new thoughts on the role of local knowledge in terms of adapting to environmental and social change.”



Jilly Morris: Lymington

Jilly is concerned with marks that tell a story, moments that retain a physical presence, a mapping and collection of memories. Jilly is fascinated in how time affects landscape and how moments in time affect communities and their environment. Her current work is rooted in drawing, particularly with tools or objects not normally associated with the drawn process. She addresses a different aspect of the physicality and gesture of a tool by exploring its inherent qualities through mark making. Rich and textural surfaces evolve over time through experimentation and repetition; fusing process, intention and structure into a totality that generates form.

Her work embraces different disciplines, including drawing, installation, collecting and recording data, and sculptural interpretation. Her artwork is often considered to reside in the grey area between fine art and making; integrating traditional craft techniques such as stitch into contemporary frameworks.

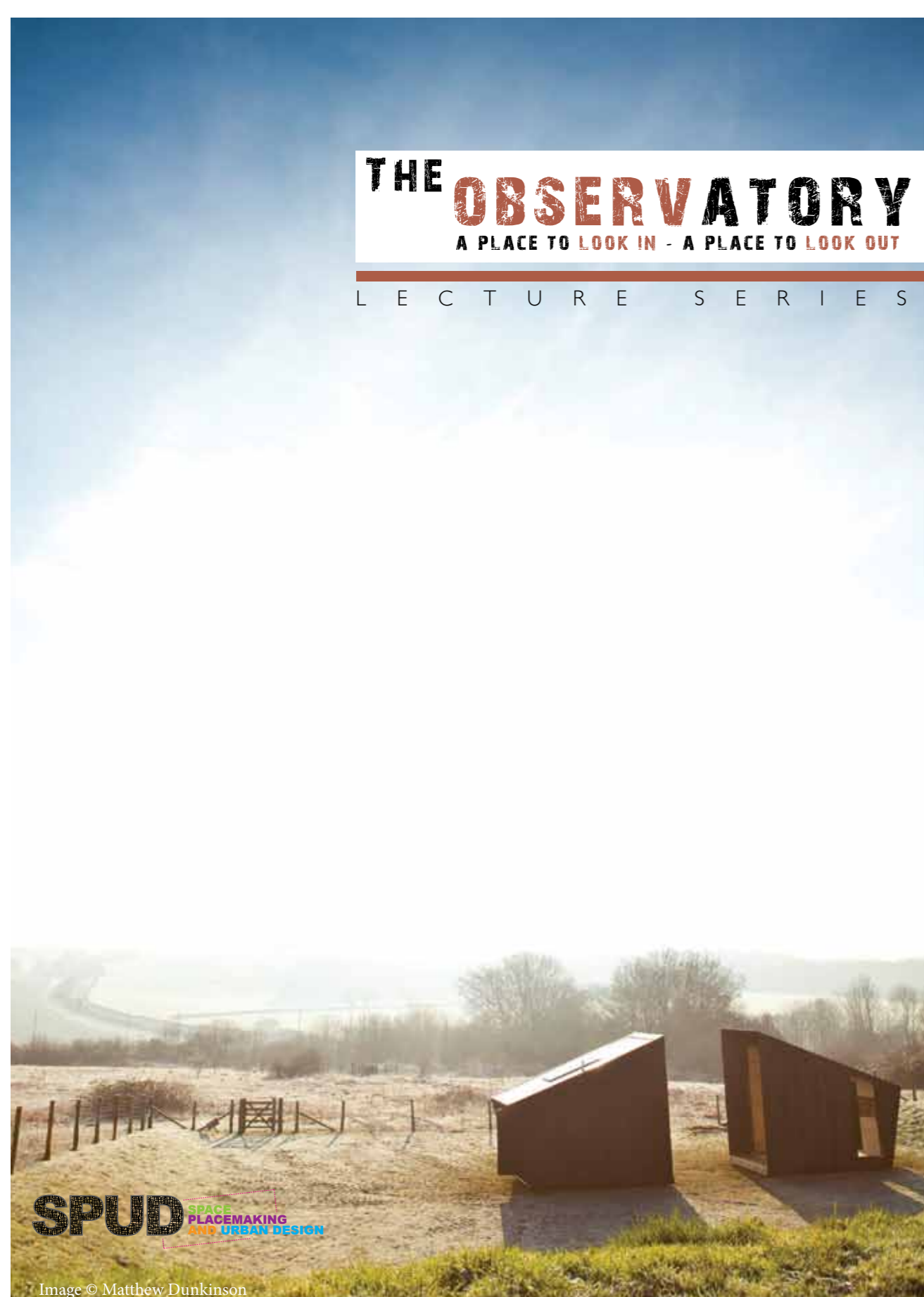


Learning and Engagement

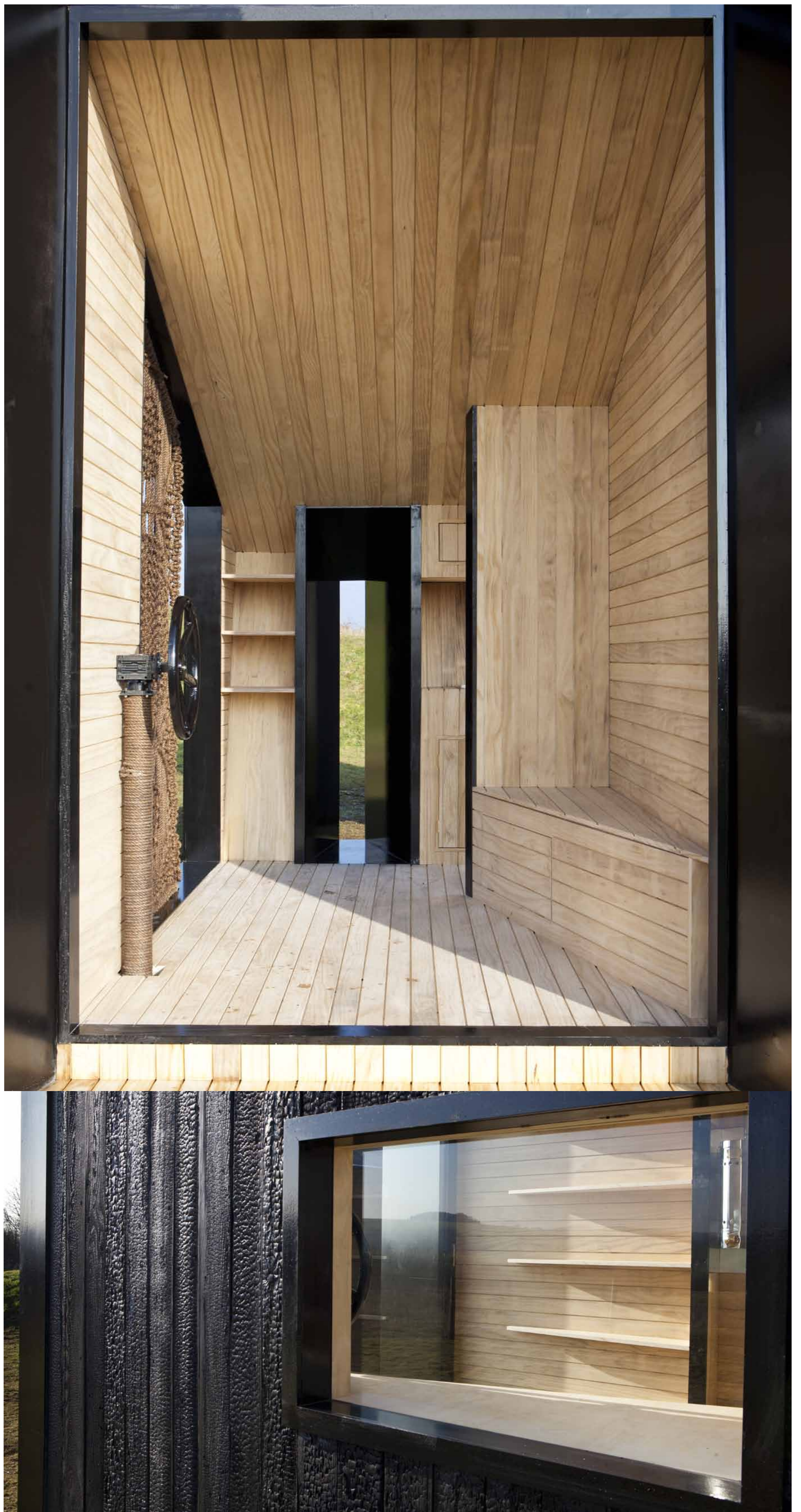
The Observatory will act as a beacon for engagement - encouraging people from all walks of life to explore art, architecture and their environment. The structures facilitate direct access for the public to look in and look out - meet the artists, see their work and watch the creative process unfold. We hope The Observatory will encourage a sense of shared ownership and experience between artist, audience and landscape.

The very nature of The Observatory takes both art and artists out into the community. The Observatory will reach out to thousands of school pupils, college and university students, adult learners, community groups and the public through a learning and engagement programme that includes formal and informal learning, talks, events, and exhibitions. By facilitating chance encounters with contemporary artists and their work, The Observatory will also develop new audiences, for example, those that would not normally visit a gallery and perhaps have little, if any opportunity to directly interact with an artist. Through SPUD's suite of on-line learning resources, social media and artists' blogs, The Observatory will be accessible to audiences across the globe.

The Observatory will stimulate conversation, collaboration and meaningful engagement with working artists and architects, and in the process help to demystify contemporary art practice.



Images courtesy Matthew Dunkinson



Already The Observatory has begun to leave its legacy, by creating new partnerships within and across different sectors and professionals. For some professionals (architects, engineers, etc.) it is the first time that they have worked with an artist and in an inter-disciplinary collaboration. This may very well set precedents for future activity. It has also led to considerable learning for all parties that will be shared through a major conference held at the culmination of the two-year programme.

Following on from the successful delivery of year 1 of The Observatory at Winchester Science Centre and Lymington Salt Marshes, the structures will travel to the South Dorset Ridgeway and to the River Tamar, where the project connects other major regional initiatives. The Observatory will actively bring together partners across a wide number of sectors including two national parks, seven local authorities, three universities, five nature and conservation organisations and numerous other organisations and individuals.

A further legacy of The Observatory will be an exciting and varied body of new work in response to 4 special locations. The Observatory will enable 12 artists to observe a location and undertake close investigation that may cover geology, geography, heritage, social history, nature and environment, leading to interpretation and a richer perception of place, with the outcome being artwork that can be shared with an audience. At the end of The Observatory's time in each location there will be an exhibition of the artists' work in the local area.

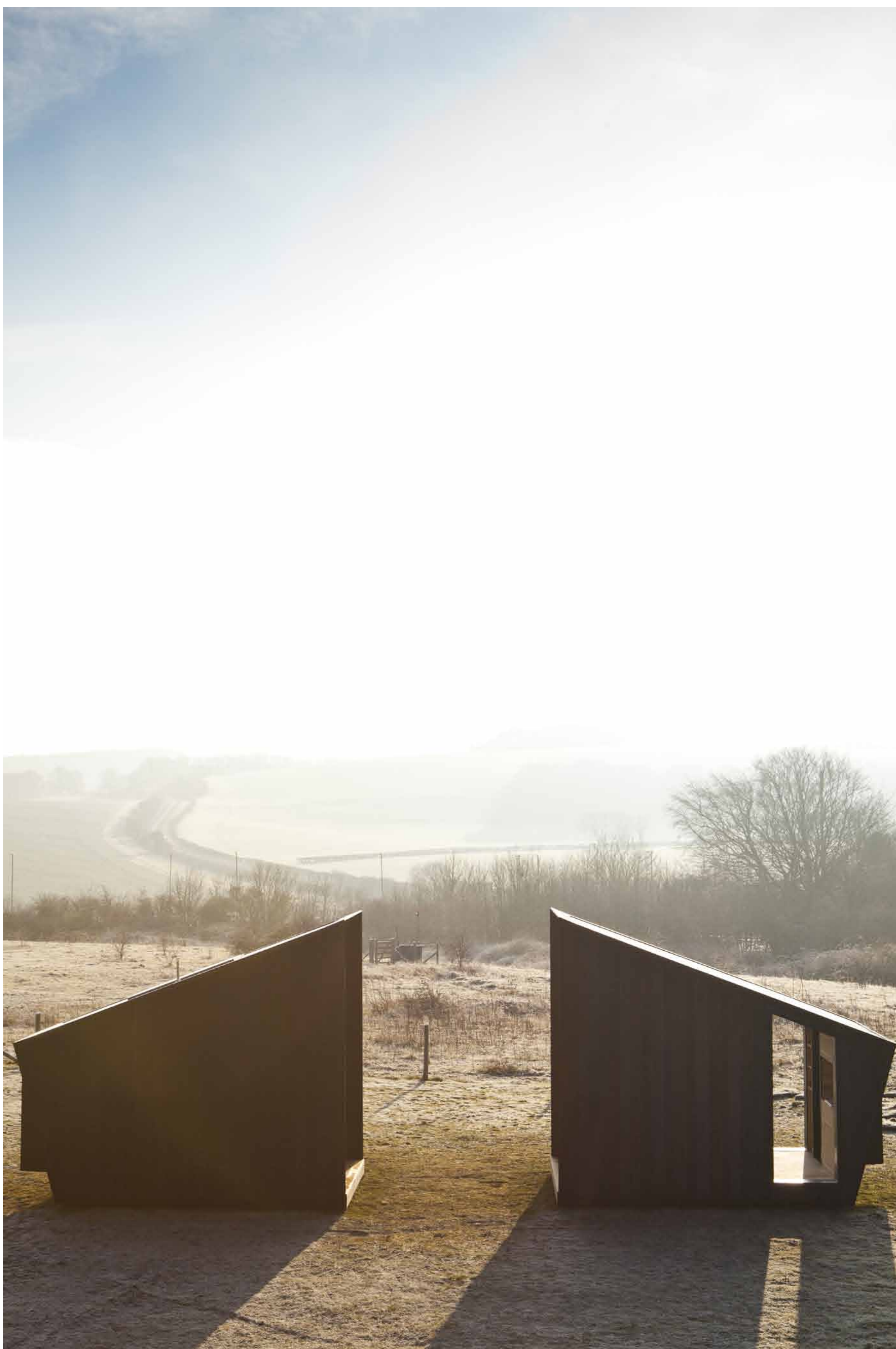
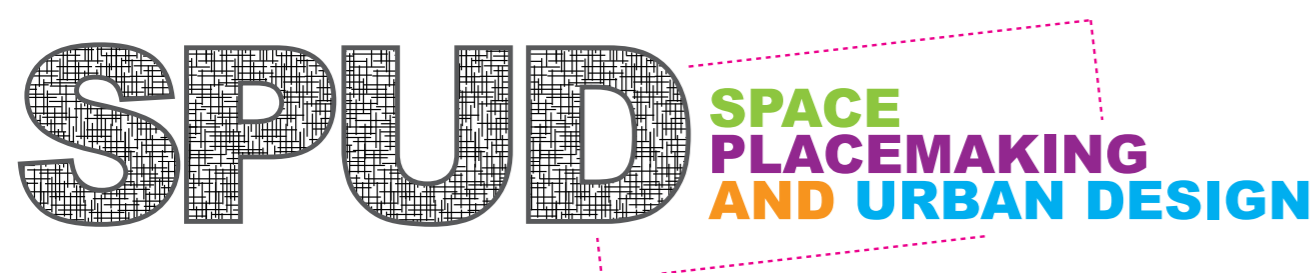
Perhaps The Observatory's most important legacy will be the new audiences that have been introduced to the landscape, contemporary art and architecture through their engagement and chance encounters with The Observatory. The sense of shared ownership and experience between artist and audience that The Observatory will create, will highlight the value and role of artists and demystify some of the practice around contemporary art, enabling new audiences to appreciate art, architecture and the landscape in new ways.

Partners for Year 2 include:

D I V A c o n t e m p o r a r y
digital • innovation • visual • audio



River
Tamar
Project



Images courtesy Matthew Dunkinson

THE OBSERVATORY team and supporters

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THANK YOU TO:

Partner Organisations:

Winchester Science Centre
South Downs National Park Authority
New Forest National Park Authority
Hampshire County Council – Countryside Service
St Barbe Museum and Gallery
DIVAcontemporary
South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership
River Tamar Project

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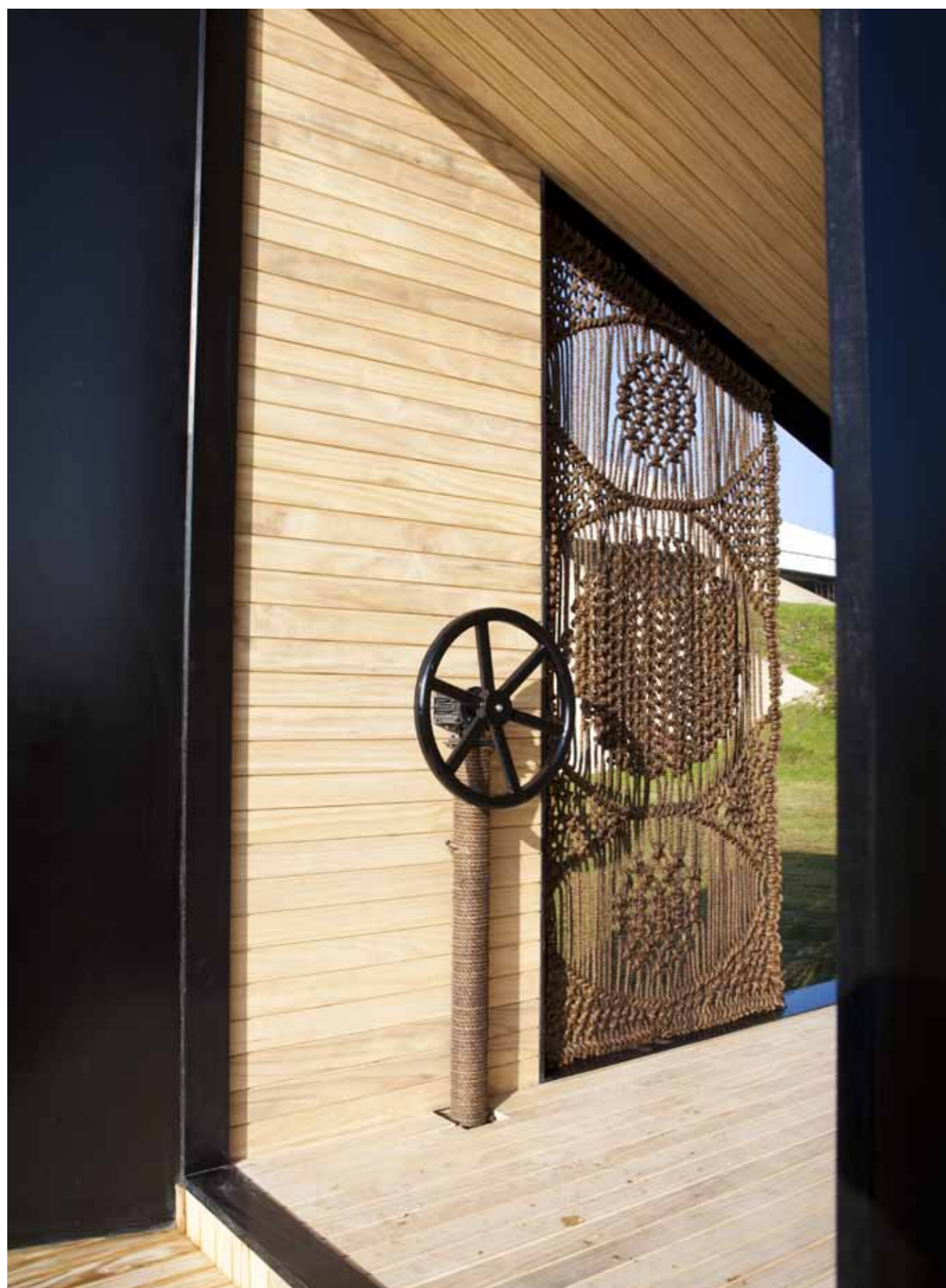
Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios - Designers
S&S Construction Ltd – Construction Company
Unitspark Ltd – Construction Engineers

Funders:

Arts Council England
Winchester City Council
Hampshire County Council
South Downs National Park Authority
New Forest National Park Authority



Image below shows the rope screen created for The Observatory by artist, Ed Crumpton.



Images courtesy Matthew Dunkinson

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