



ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024

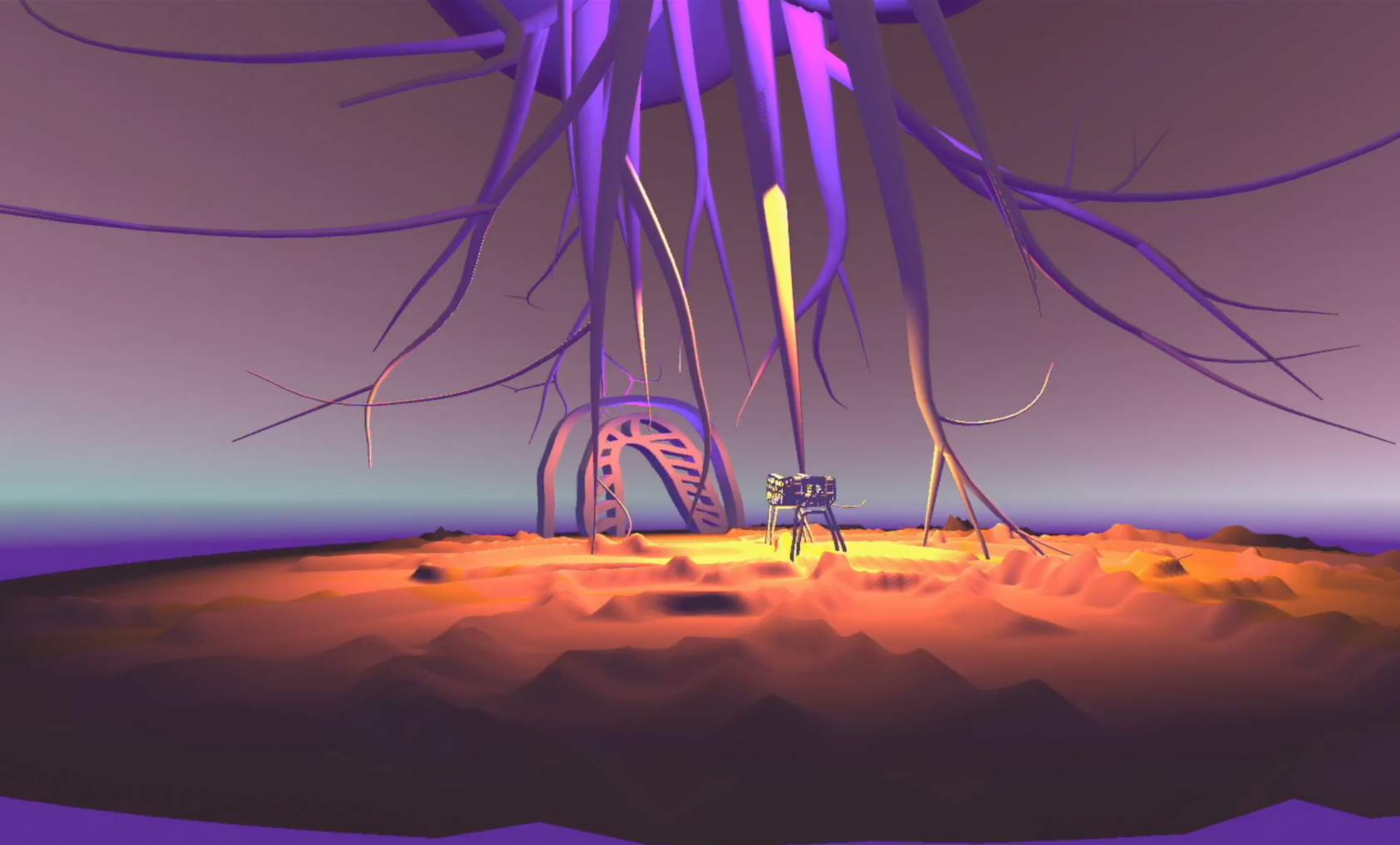
ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

OVERVIEW

Fermynwoods Contemporary Art delivered an exciting and ambitious programme of rich, multi-layered and inter-disciplinary arts experiences. We mixed urban and rural, local and international, high and low tech, in public and virtual spaces across Northamptonshire. We brought high quality artistic practice to non-traditional arts audiences through collaborations with key partners from within and outside the arts sector.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- The launch of *Xylophobia: Online* saw an immediate spike in website traffic with an 184.6% increase in visitors to our website, resulting in a total of 6,400 page views across the reporting period.
- Our *Ways of knowing* exhibition was featured on ITV Regional News (Anglia) to an estimated broadcast audience of 1 million people, in addition to favourable coverage on BBC Radio Northampton and the BBC News website for Northamptonshire. The exhibition at Barnwell Country Park was visited by approximately 6,000 people over its duration, with West Northants Council suggesting we had "successfully buoyed the region", attributing an increase in park visitors to the exhibition.
- We created a 153% increase in podcast content this year, with 79% of our listeners discovering the Fermynwoods Podcast in 2023. The podcast was streamed in 18 different countries including Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Australia and USA. 4 episode videos featured in Spotify's top 25% most viewed and our podcast rating remained at 5 stars.
- Over 400 people visited **Pale Blue Dot Collective's** *Of Immeasurable Consequence* installation in All Saints Church, Aldwinckle.
- We supported 113 young people (9 not attending mainstream education) to gain Arts Award qualifications (101 Discover, 12 Bronze), plus 6 achieved John Muir Awards.
- We worked with 19 campuses, schools, colleges, universities or hospital inpatient units, plus 2 community groups.
- 1,223 people (549 adults and 674 children and young people) took part in 106 workshops and participatory events, generating an additional audience of 391 people.
- We worked with 66 artists, from 10 countries and 22 different ethnicities.



Underlands (still from gameplay video), Ama Dogbe & David John Scarborough, 2023

PROGRAMME

XYLOPHOBIA

XYLOPHOBIA: ONLINE

Ama Dogbe and David John Scarborough, Spencer Graham, Zhengyang and Zhengzhou Huang, Felix Loftus, Greg Orrom Swan
April 2023 - April 2024

Xylophobia: Online was an exhibition of digitally based work taking its name from the fear of wooden objects, forests, or wooded areas. Responding to the increased needs and fears of outdoor activities in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the featured work presented explorative, experimental and conceptual spaces at this intersection, whilst inquisitive and mindful of the environmental impact of creating and presenting artworks using digital technology.

Imagined and digitised forests, physical wooden objects and speculative graphics processing units, forest inspired audio mixes and digitally fermented film-based work. Visitors were invited to engage with the works and consider their own relationship with the environment, both physically and virtually.

All commissioned work used *The Networked Condition* carbon calculator tool to help plan, shape and evaluate the work, with the footprint of each published alongside the work.

Alongside visitors worldwide, *Xylophobia: Online* was visited by students from Foundation year students from **London Metropolitan University's** School of Art, Architecture and Design as part of their Critical and Contextual Studies module. Further insight was given to Art and Design students at **Tresham College** through lectures and tutorials from Fermynwoods Director **James Steventon** and HNC/HND Art Practice Course Leader **Spencer Graham** - a participating artist in the exhibition.



Reflective Mimicry, Brixworth Country Park, Alyson Shotz, 2023. Image: Elizabeth Blackie

WAYS OF KNOWING

Yukio Fujimoto (Japan), **Heywood & Condie** (UK), **Krzysztof Maniak** (Poland), **Poppy Nash** (UK), **Alyson Shotz** (USA), and **Sarah Taylor Silverwood** (UK)

And *Counterpoint*, a playlist of sound work by **Professor Chill** (UK), **Atilio Doreste** (Canary Islands), **Daniel Garcia** (UK), **Yagi Lyota** (Japan), **Matti Palonen** (Canada), **Russick Smith** (USA), **Tosca Terán** (Canada), and **Zimoun** (Switzerland)

Guest curated by **Yasmin Canvin**
August 2023 – October 2023

Ways of knowing was an international exhibition at Brixworth Country Park, making connections between the environment and our physical bodies. Guest curated by **Yasmin Canvin**, the participating artists employed sound, human-made and natural materials to create physical and intellectual spaces around at the park grounds that explored how and where we as individuals fit in the natural world. As a result, these alternative spaces – literally or within our imagination – made the world feel a little less alien.

Accompanying the exhibition was *Counterpoint* – a series of sound works created by artists and musicians engaging with and amplifying natural forces and elements. Headphones were installed in at Brixworth Country Park to create a listening circle, inviting visitors to focus on a single sense, and imagine the physical presence of the sonic landscape as its individual components were revealed through the aural textures of plants, wind, water and wood.

Ways of knowing featured on **ITV Regional News (Anglia)** to an estimated broadcast audience of 1 million people, in addition to favourable coverage on **BBC Radio Northampton** and the **BBC News** website for Northamptonshire.

Friends of Brampton Valley Way & Brixworth Country Park engaged with artist **Sarah Taylor Silverwood** through a number of workshops to create a Risograph printed zine, revealing resources hidden in the woods and leaving a legacy artefact from the exhibition.

Year 7 pupils from **Spratton Hall School** took part in an onsite artist led workshop by photographer **Andy Eathorne**, featuring a portable photographic darkroom.

The exhibition was launched with a *Curator's Walking Tour* led by Guest Curator **Yasmin Canvin**, Fermynwoods Director **James Steventon** and attended by members of the public.

The exhibition was visited by approximately 6,000 people over its duration.



O' God of Weather, Saoirse Horne, 2024

THE FERMYNWOODS PODCAST

Maja Zećo, Spencer Graham, A Ton of Worms, Tosca Terán, Saoirse Horne, Subterra, Sapphire Goss, Astrid Björklund

The *Fermynwoods Contemporary Art Podcast* is an experimental space for the display and creation of contemporary art which is fully accessible from people's homes. For our *Xylophobia* programme, episodes were guest curated by **Subterra (Marie-Chantal Hamrock and Astrid Björklund)**, inviting listeners to get lost in the unknown, to take a stroll through rich woodlands, dark forests and subterrestrial landscapes. **Subterra** navigate these eerie and unfamiliar spaces, exploring artist talks, discussions, and original commissioned sound art, to complement our public facing programme.

Following her 2022 *Silencer* performance in Corby woods, **Maja Zećo** asked two very important questions: “Who is listening?” and “Who is performing?”, sharing audio recorded from her sensory impairment soundwalking suit. Audio from this episode was also presented at **ISEA 2023** in Paris, the 28th International Symposium on Electronic Art and a major event on the global electronic art scene.

Spencer Graham discussed the specificity of music, tracklists and circular narratives alongside forest themed tracks to coincide with his *Xylophobia: Online* mixes. **A Ton of Worms** presented a rich and profound work exploring themes of time, space, nature and human connection through the chthonic lens of an ancient yew tree. **Tosca Terán** expanded on her work included in our *Ways of knowing* exhibition, drawing from fungal mycelial communication research to reveal the ethereal fungi frequencies of the oyster mushroom, *pleurotus ostreatus*. **Saoirse Horne** combined ambient elements, folk song and field recording to paint a world rooted in messages of phantasm and fabrication for a new audio work, *O’ God of Weather*.

The final episode of the *Xylophobia* season presented a binaural radio play written by podcast guest curators, **Subterra: Marie-Chantal Hamrock and Astrid Björklund**.

This season of the podcast also featured specially commissioned videos by **Sapphire Goss** accompanying and in response to each recorded episode, utilising Spotify’s podcast video feature and also available on YouTube and our social media channels.

Alongside the series of commissioned sound works and discussions, **Astrid Björklund** curated a series of playlists in response to each episode. Unearthing otherworldly ambient tracks, these playlists act as atmospheric landmarks or chapters, further deepening the lore surrounding the work of each artist featured on the podcast.

79% of our listeners discovered the *Fermynwoods Podcast* in 2023. The podcast was streamed in 18 different countries including Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Australia and USA. 4 episode videos featured in Spotify's top 25% most viewed and our podcast rating remained at 5 stars. We created a 153% increase in podcast content this year.



What We Weave Boon & Baum, 2023

HYBRID WORKSHOPS

Boon & Baum, Ashley James Brown, David Birchall, Abbie Canning

Hybrid Workshops were a series of artist led activities utilising the best of the online and offline worlds, connecting people with one another and with the natural world.

What We Weave saw participants spend the day in Fermyn Woods with **Boon & Baum** weaving digitised fabric ‘screens’ amongst the trees to explore the communication that occurs between trees via the mycorrhizal network and its connections to both technology and textiles/weaving.

Through a live performance of weaving **Boon & Baum** created a ‘social fabric’ between the trees and the participants, hosting new connections and conversations. This culminated in **Brendan McDowell** from *Mycosia*’s fascinating online talk about fungi and the world of mushrooms, presented through green screen technology on a network of fabric screens woven by workshop participants, featuring an animation by **Maria Quintas**.

Sound artist **David Birchall** and Fermynwoods Education Curator, multi-disciplinary artist **Abbie Canning**, guided participants to build interactive audio circuits to sonically explore Fermyn Woods through Bluetooth headphones before broadcasting live via internet radio.

Digital artist **Ashley James Brown** invited participants to reflect on the future landscape of the forest working with participants to build hybrid sculptures containing analogue electrical components that produce tangible otherworldly vibrant electronic sounds.



Workshop with The CE Academy, Bruce Asbestos, 2023

ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

THE CE ACADEMY

Abbie Canning, Andy Eathorne, Ashley James Brown, Babylon Arts, Boon & Baum, Bruce Asbestos, Carol Jacobs, Dale Holmes, Daniel Johnson, Daniela Labosova, Dave Elsom, David Birchall, Elaine Lim-Newton, Garry Smiler, Georgina Barney, Graham Fudger, Jack Halford, Jo Wheeler, Laura Cooper, Maya Chowdhry, Oscar Lewis, Pale Blue Dot Collective, Phiona Richards, Ruth Lewis-Jones, Sam Read, Stuart Moore

Our fourteenth year working in partnership with The CE Academy with Key Stage 3 students permanently excluded from school, dual registered, and school age mothers, continued with a wide range of artist led workshops at **Sudborough Green Lodge** in Fermyn Woods, on location at **Brixworth Country Park**, and at new outreach locations **East Carlton Countryside Park** and **Stanwick Lakes**. Session took place twice per week across the remainder of the 2022-2023 academic year, with our fourteenth year beginning with the start of the 2023-2024 academic year.

Highlights included students working with interdisciplinary artist **Bruce Asbestos** to challenge ideas around the commercial art world by coming up with increasingly elaborate ideas on how to stretch a canvas to its limits, including attaching them to a car by ropes for them to be dragged along a forest track.

British visual artist and filmmaker **Laura Cooper** is concerned with documenting interspecies relationships, questioning how filmmaking is both an act of capture and embrace. As part of the *Midlands4Cities* Doctoral Training Partnership Laura was artist in residence with Fermynwoods Contemporary Art, working with students from The CE Academy to explore filmmaking techniques, thinking about camouflage, movement, looking and other animal perspectives, creating and filming camouflaged bodies.

Students also worked with artists from the **Basecoat Collective** who travelled from **Babylon Arts** in Cambridge to work with the young people to translate a series of experimental processes to form designs on tote bags.

Pale Blue Dot Collective artists **Louise Beer** and **John Hooper** worked with students to provoke discussion and consideration of climate change, exploring the local environment through sound, drawing, microscopic photography and collage.

During this period students worked with over 30 artists across a wide range of disciplines over 74 full day workshops including visits to **Brixworth Country Park**, **The Rooftop Arts Centre**, and **All Saints Church, Aldwincle**. Participating students achieved Arts Award Discover and Bronze qualifications, plus John Muir Awards for connecting with, enjoying and caring for wild places.



Workshop with Northants Hospital & Outreach Education, Abbie Canning, 2023

ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

NORTHANTS HOSPITAL & OUTREACH EDUCATION

Abbie Canning, Carol Jacobs, Stuart Moore

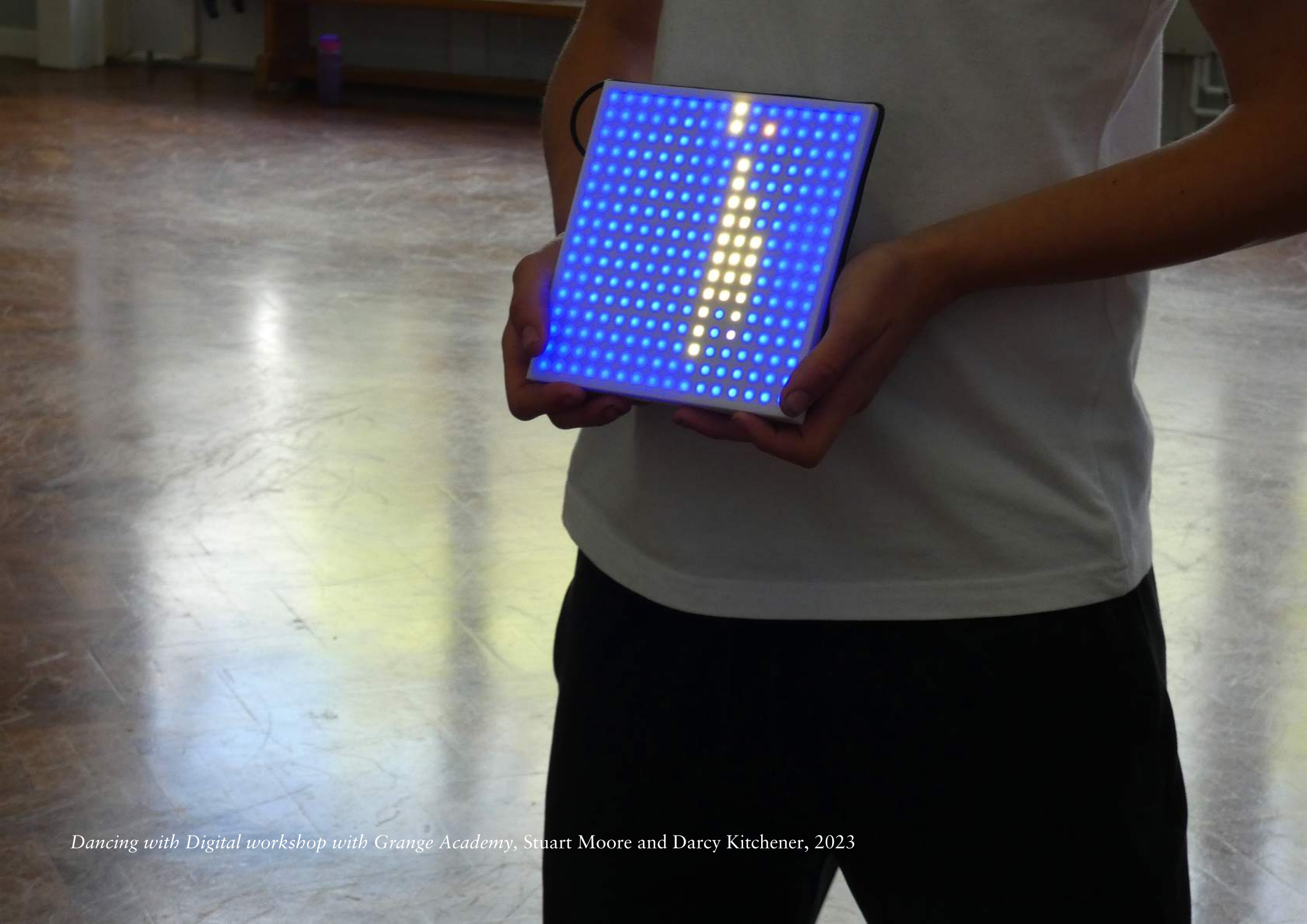
Artists **Abbie Canning** and **Carol Jacobs** continued our provision of artist led workshops for young people who cannot attend mainstream school due to a diagnosed complex medical and/or mental health condition, in partnership with **Northamptonshire Hospital and Outreach Education (NHOE)** to reach children who have been referred to them by the child's mainstream school and are supported by a medical practitioner.

Workshops took place in **NHOE's** Children and Mental Health Inpatient Units, and **NHOE's** Gatehouse Campus in Kettering.

Students worked with **Abbie Canning** to create tactile felted sculptures which produced digital sounds upon touch, plus with **Carol Jacobs** to create a series of glazed, ceramic plates.

Our digital output with **NHOE** was showcased at **University of Northampton's Merged Futures 5** annual innovation event with a participatory presentation by Fermynwoods Director **James Steventon** and Education Coordinator **Stuart Moore**.

NHOE's Leader of Learning Adam Drake, commented, "*The commercial art world is all about money, but real art is about making people feel alive and you've made these children feel alive.*"



Dancing with Digital workshop with Grange Academy, Stuart Moore and Darcy Kitchener, 2023

DANCING WITH DIGITAL

Stuart Moore and Darcy Kitchener

SEN children from **Grange Academy**, Bedford worked alongside artist **Stuart Moore** and dancer, choreographer and educator **Darcy Kitchener** of Moving Together.

The movement of pupils dancing was captured digitally, developing new movement sequences to improve confidence and self-expression in pupils. As long-term memory can be an issue with these children a digital display was created as a lasting legacy for the school foyer area.

Supported by **Harpur Trust** and a **Local Giving Magic Little Grant**.



Workshop with Irthlingborough Nursery and Infant School, Liz Lake, 2023

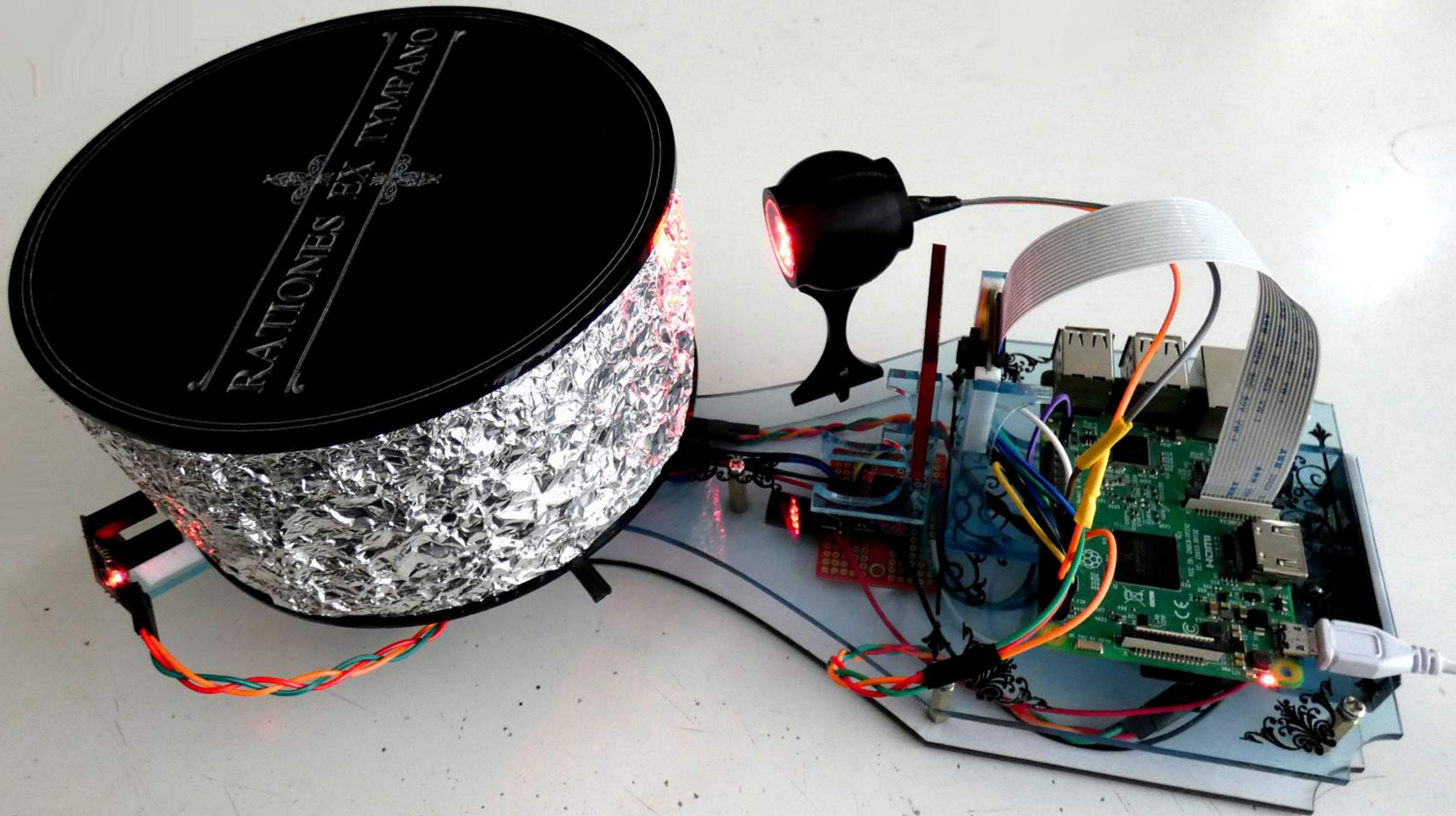
NORTHANTS CEP

Liz Lake

Children from **Irthlingborough Nursery and Infant School** worked with artist **Liz Lake**. After sharing her research into whether regular sensory activities based on early years education could help Foundation Art and Design learners become more confident in their engagement with materials, Liz explored the reverse approach through a variety of drawing and mark-making exercises with pupils that culminated in 3D paper reliefs.

The first session was based around music, with the pupils drawing to sound with diverse materials such as sand, chalk, paint, ink and charcoal, in a lively and fun session. In the second session the children looked at the Detroit artist **Charles Mcgee**, particularly his patterned relief sculptures. The pupils then set about cutting and tearing their pictures into strips that were then woven, weaved and twisted together onto coloured mount board. The results looked fantastic and the children and school were very happy with their outcomes.

These workshops were supported by **Northants CEP**.



Tinfoil state machine, Stuart Moore, 2023

CRYPTOGRAPHIC MACHINES

Stuart Moore

Where NFT's typically use blockchain technology to provide a public proof of ownership, at huge energy cost and carbon footprint, artist and Education Coordinator **Stuart Moore** used the processing power of school maths classes to process and validate the proof of ownership of digital artworks, rather than an environmentally and energy expensive algorithm, encouraging collective ownership as an alternative to hyper-capitalism.

Children from **Irthlingborough Nursery and Infant School, Newton Road School** and **Lodge Park Academy** worked with Stuart to create and operate a series of cryptographic machines, such as an augmented dial-up telephone producing unique patterns from lights, only able to be replicated by their own personal codes.

Students learned how encryption works, starting with simple encryption devices generating 16 combinations, through to encryption devices generating over 32,000 differing combinations.

The workshop developed an online database of abstract assets that students came up with to 'own', with ideas such as 'the love of Marie Antoinette' and 'the thought process of an ant' being just two! Students created NFT's to prove ownership of these abstract ideas, helping them to grasp the ideas of authentication and ownership.

Funded by the **Margaret Giffen Community Fund**.



Workshop with Grange Academy, Pale Blue Dot Collective, 2024

GRANGE ACADEMY

Pale Blue Dot Collective

During their residency with Fermynwoods Contemporary Art, **Pale Blue Dot Collective** (artists **Louise Beer** and **John Hooper**) worked with SEN students from **Grange Academy**, Bedford worked to explore young people's thoughts on the environment and climate change, resulting in a site specific sound sculpture for permanent installation in the schools sensory garden.

Students undertook a variety of slow looking and listening activities including drawing, collage, photography and working with a variety of microphones and sound equipment. Students particularly enjoyed listening to nature and the sounds of the school site using a parabolic microphone.



Of Immeasurable Consequence, All Saints Church, Aldwinkle, Pale Blue Dot Collective, 2024

LOVE + LIGHT

OF IMMEASURABLE CONSEQUENCE

Pale Blue Dot Collective

24th March to 7th April 2024

The culmination of their four months residency with Fermynwoods Contemporary Art, and the first activity from our new *Love + Light* programme, *Of Immeasurable Consequence* was an immersive photographic and sound-based installation by **Pale Blue Dot Collective** installed in **All Saints Church, Aldwinckle**.

Artists **Louise Beer** and **John Hooper** use installation, photography and sound to examine our place within the universe, framing the impact of the climate emergency through the eyes of evolution and the immense time period it has taken for each form of life to arrive at this point.

Funded by **Northamptonshire Community Foundation's Northamptonshire Creative Climate Action Fund**, the work combined images, sound and light to transport the viewer to an imagined forest environment. With the artists' interest in the deep time nature of our existence on the planet, the installation that explored both the fragility and the miraculous nature of life on Earth.

Sound recordings from Fermyn Woods, made with a variety of homemade and professional microphones, were combined with their own archive of field recordings collected from around the world. The final composition transported the audience to a forest outside of our experience. Images taken under moonlight during their residency were installed in the central body of the church, juxtaposed with their own astronomical imagery, prompting us to consider our place in the wider cosmos.

Of Immeasurable Consequence was launched with an interactive telescope viewing session and talk with astronomer **Paul Fellows**.

Pupils from **Trinity C of E Primary School** visited the installation for a workshop with Louise and John in the incredible setting of **All Saints Church**. Engaging in some deep listening to the accompanying soundscape, identifying where in the Milky Way they would like to visit and designing their own planets, prompted pupils to consider their relationship to the planet and think about life in and outside of the universe.

Students from **The CE Academy** also visited the installation, exploring the space in Virtual and actual reality, creating astral and earthly phenomena using VR headsets around the installation.

Funded by **Northamptonshire Creative Climate Action Fund**.

Recipes for the Future



Chiara Delle

CLIMATE
ACTION



HEALTHY!

Get your climate action for a better future

CLIMATE ACTION TOOLKIT

Chiara Dellerba, Abbie Canning

Children from **Irthlingborough Nursery and Infant School, Newton Road School, Northamptonshire Hospital and Outreach Education, Oundle CE Primary School and Stanwick Primary School** took part in artist led workshops exploring different aspects of climate change.

Working with Education Curator **Abbie Canning**, students produced stop motion animations that will be brought together in a film to support the launch of a *Climate Action Toolkit* later in the year that artist **Chiara Dellerba** will produce from artwork created by students from schools across Northamptonshire.

From animating veg to contributing to a film about food justice, designing their own climate super heroes to detailing actions that can be taken to contribute to saving our planet, pupils were challenged to consider what actions they could take to help reduce their impact on the environment. Many children later challenged their schools to reduce food waste, improve recycling and even go a day without electricity.

Funded by **Northamptonshire Creative Climate Action Fund**.



Glovebox, Brixworth Country Park, Poppy Nash, 2023. Image: Elizabeth Blackie

STRATEGIC & ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

After securing future programme funding through **Northamptonshire Community Foundation's Northamptonshire Creative Climate Action Fund**, to follow the completion of our **Arts Council England** funded *Xylophobia* programme, Fermynwoods Contemporary Art appointed consultancy team, **People Make It Work (PMIW)**, to help the organisation work towards securing a sustainable future and a permanent new home, with the support of the significant philanthropic donation received towards the end of the previous financial year.

PMIW assisted Fermynwoods in reviewing opportunities and exploring different models for achieving our organisational ambitions within the boundaries of North Northamptonshire, carrying out organisational and governance reviews to help scope and plan future strategy. **PMIW** engaged with our team, Board, partners and key stakeholders, facilitating consultations with our artists and our communities.

PMIW co-authored a route map with the Fermynwoods team and Board, to inform our organisational development over the following two years.

A key decision was taken to vacate our long-term outreach base, **Sudborough Green Lodge**, in March 2024. Delivery of our Alternative Provision programme was transferred to new temporary bases at **East Carlton Country Park** and at **Stanwick Lakes**.

We recruited **Abbie Canning** to a new post of Education Curator, to extend the capacity of the Director and to support our existing team in the delivery of our *Alternative Provision* programme with **The CE Academy**, whilst maintaining and strengthening our relationship with **Northamptonshire Hospital & Outreach Education**, and establishing and developing other workshops and partnerships with mainstream and non-mainstream schools. Following a successful probationary period this post was extend from 2 to 3 days per week.

Garry Hines joined our team as Maternity Cover for our Education Coordinator **Jenny Johnson**, whilst previous student placement from **University of Northampton's** BA Childhood and Youth degree, **Sam Lane**, took up the Education Coordinator support role until the end of 2023. From 2024 onwards, this role was filled by artist **Jack Halford**. Our new BA Childhood and Youth placement for the reporting period was **Louisa May Mackenzie**. Louisa worked with **CE Academy** students on our Alternative Provision programme, in addition to gaining experience in our schools workshop delivery across Northamptonshire.

Fermynwoods were recruited to **Engage's** pilot *New Routes* programme, to enable organisations across the UK to participate in a placement programme for young people 16-21 years, with a support package of training, collaborative programming, and shared resources facilitated by **Engage**. The aim of the *New Routes* pilot is to draw on the expertise, experience, and insights from the collaborating partners to co-design a new model of training for organisations and young people followed by accessible and flexible paid placements. **Engage** will work with partner organisations to pilot a placement and vocational training model that seeks to address the lack of diversity within the sector and develop pathways into cultural education and employment in areas of low cultural engagement.



Workshop with The CE Academy, Laura Cooper, 2024

TEAM

James Steventon (Director)

Abbie Canning (Education Curator)

Ella Harvey (Social Media Coordinator)

Jack Halford, Garry Hine, Sam Lane, Stuart Moore, Jack Page, Alice Page (Education Coordinators)

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Richard Clinton (Chair)

Joshua Allen

Yasmin Canvin

Barbara Dougan

Christine Goodwin

Graham Keddie

Valeria Medici

Rhona Rowland

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Company Registered no. 5434735

Cover image: *Fire (still from interactive demo)*, **Zhengyang & Zhengzhou Huang**, 2023