



ALCHEMY

The Old Fire Station Collective

Venice Biennale 2026



ECC Venice Biennale

Alchemy

The Collective

The Guardians of Two Shores

VENICE





THE EXHIBITION

The Venice Biennale is the most prestigious and one of the longest running art biennials in the world.

The Old Fire Station Collective has been formally invited to exhibit with the European Culture Centre as part of the Venice Biennale 2026, one of the most prestigious and competitive platforms in global contemporary art. This acceptance represents a significant international endorsement of the collective's work.

Over 130 years old, since its inception in 1895, the Venice Biennial has hosted the likes of Henri Matisse to Andy Warhol. For 2026, our work will feature in the contemporary art exhibition: Personal Structures 2026 organised by European Culture Centre Italy. Visitors will be welcomed from 9th May to 22nd November 2026, with previews running 7th and 8th May. Running alongside La Biennale di Venezia, this exhibition will unfold across three iconic venues, Palazzo Bembo, Palazzo Mora, and the Marinaressa Gardens, offering a vibrant stage for installations, paintings, sculptures, and performances.

Personal Structures 2026 is shaped around the theme Confluences, an image inspired by rivers meeting and generating new currents. The exhibition explores how different artistic practices, cultural backgrounds, and ways of thinking intersect, becoming part of an ever-changing collective fabric. It features a wide selection of artworks from internationally renowned and emerging artists, photographers, and sculptors as well as worldwide galleries and academic institutions.





“You remember the story of the founding of a great city on the shores of the Adriatic. The inhabitants formerly lived on the mainland. They were wealthy because they were industrious and accumulated wealth by their work and industry. They had no sooner accumulated this wealth than they were raided by tribes at a distance, their wealth was carried away, and they were left bleeding and plundered. They accumulated fresh wealth; they were again raided. Time went on and they decided that their only safety would be to build a city upon the adjoining marsh and swamp, inaccessible to their enemies. They drove piles into the marsh and swamp and on these piles, they built their city — Venice. The district has been subjected to earthquakes which have temporarily emptied the canals, but the buildings have not been brought down — they have remained through it all. So will it be with your Art if you found it on the public and the masses of the people. There may be disappointments with the public, individuals we have trusted may have failed us; but take the broad masses of the people and you can with safety rely upon response to high ideals, and on the foundation of that response you can build securely. We have here in Great Britain all the best traditions of Art and have produced during the last three centuries some of the greatest painters, sculptors, and architects the world has ever seen; but Art for Art’s sake is meaningless. Art for the service of humanity and for the People is a great and inspiring ideal.”

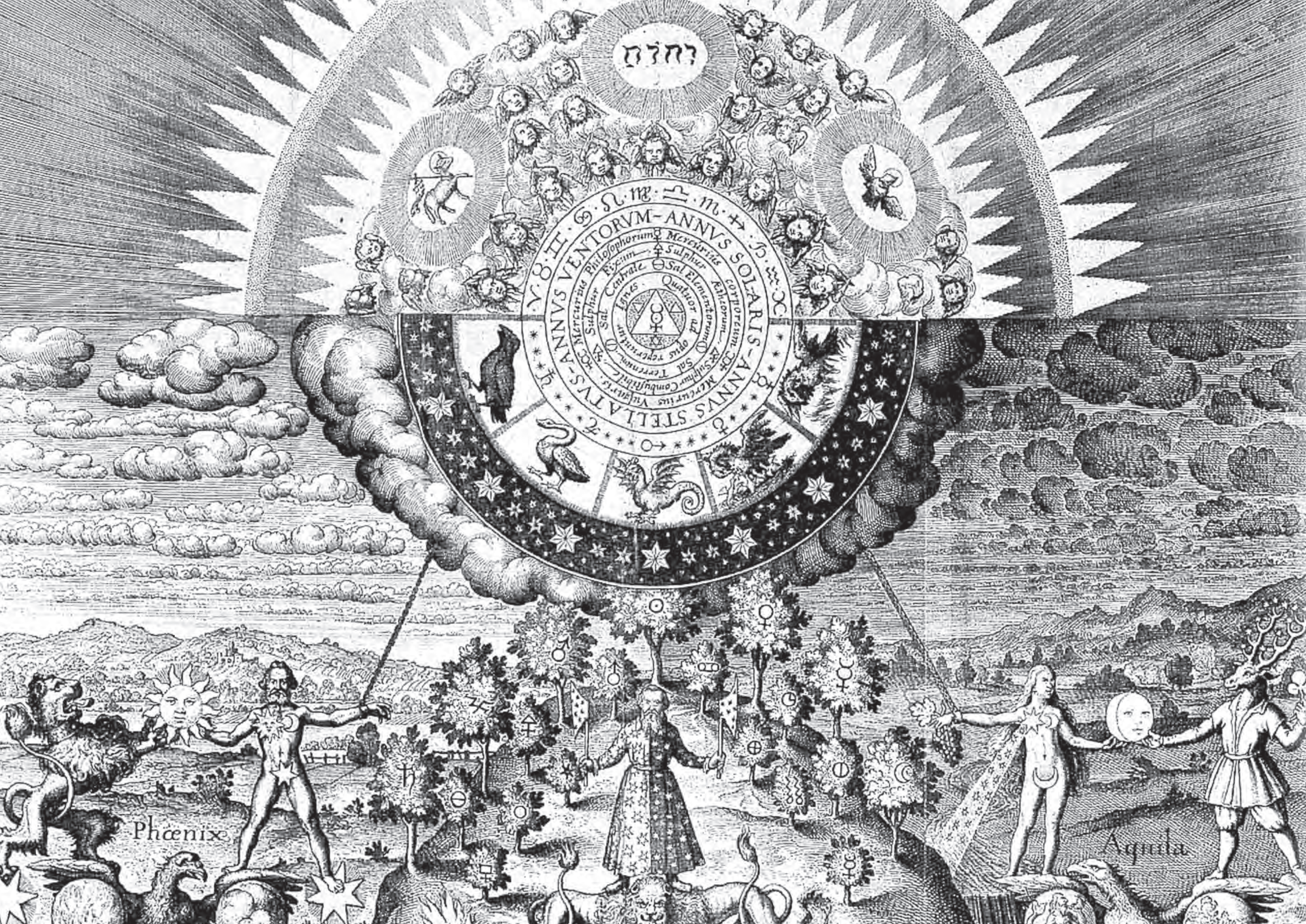
—Sir William H. Lever, II. Address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Imperial Arts League, at Leighton House, on March 18th, 1915



ALCHEMY

*“Therefore, I have surrendered to magic so that I may
recognise what holds the world together at its core.”*
— Goethe

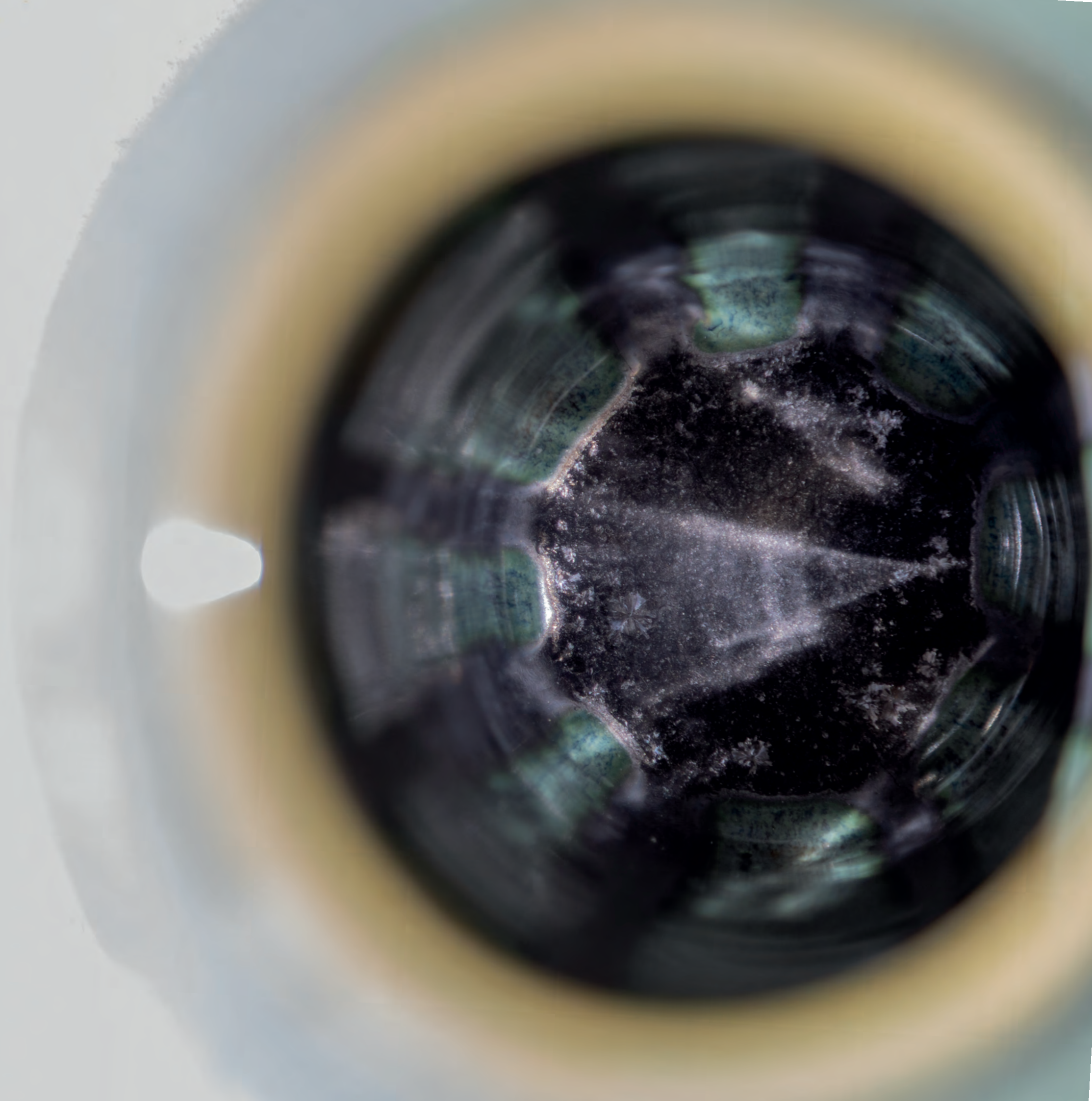


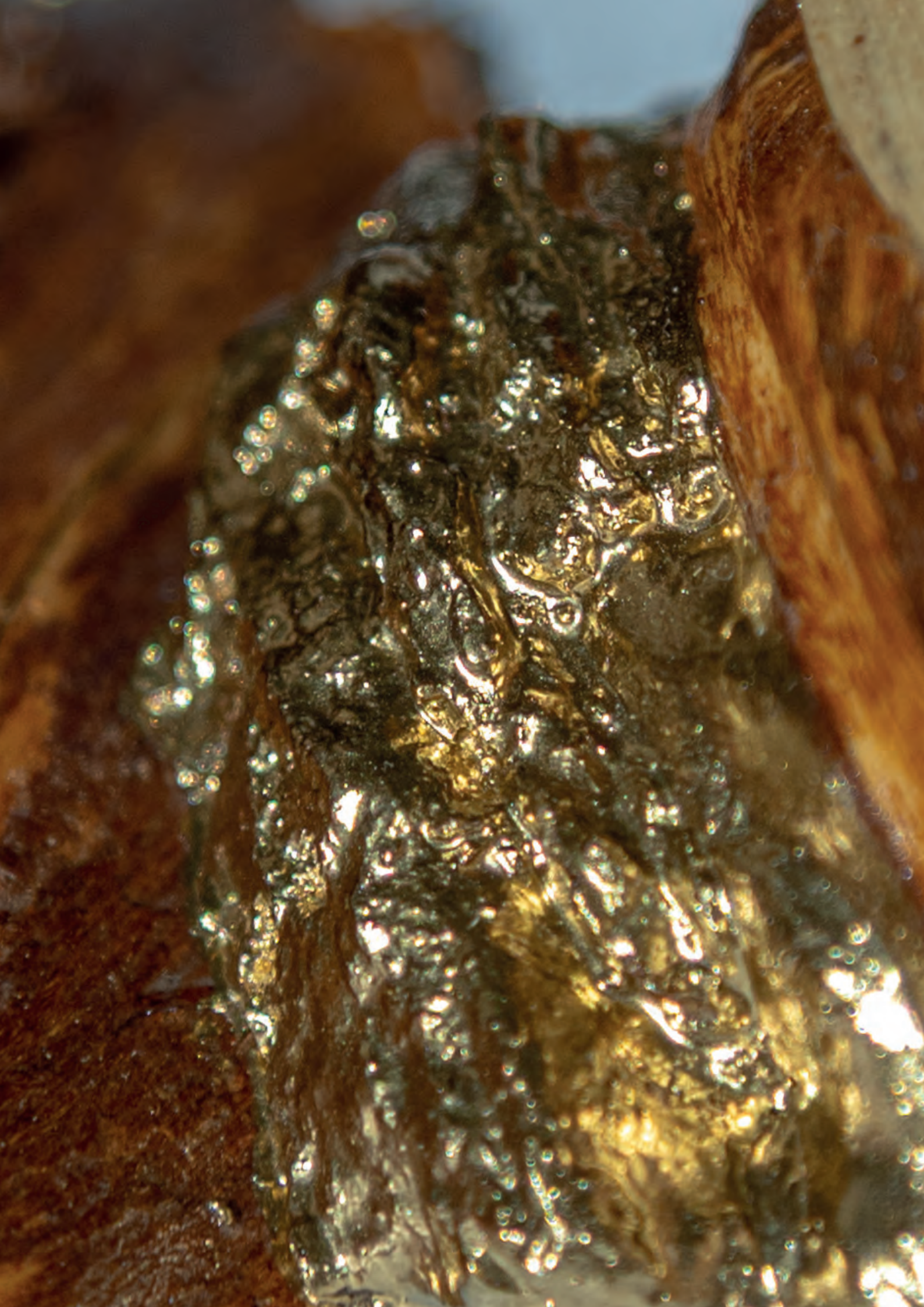


Alchemy: interconnecting artists, as a collective, to each individual practice. It is their occupation.

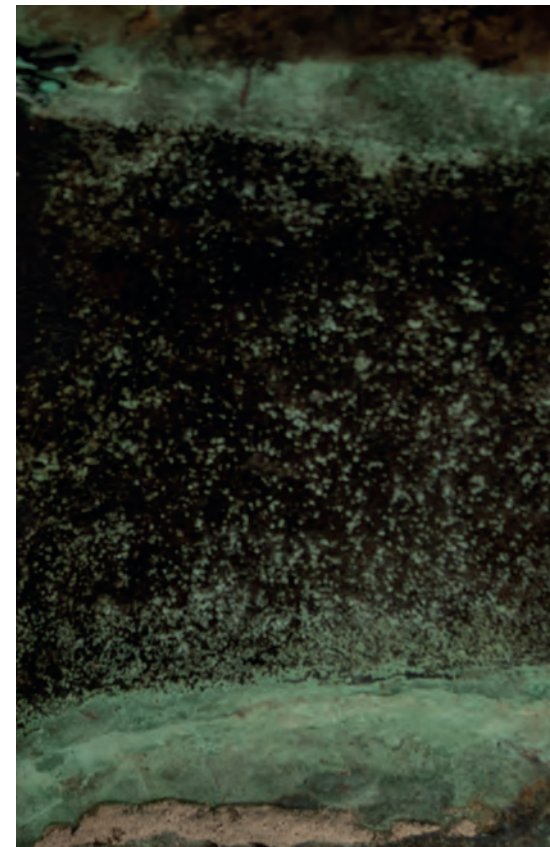
Conduits, between their materials, minds, landscapes, through marks and movements, to new forms. Be it ceramics, sculpture, print, or something in-between—a methodology, a madness. This notion of the creative act, the transmutation, not only the creation. What is alchemy but this seemingly innate and magical artistry of transforming one thing into another?

Working as a collective out of an old Victorian fire station in Port Sunlight (Wirral, UK), The Old Fire Station collective is a group of artists driven by curiosity, environments and elements of nature and the reactions that happen through the process. Natural materials, chemical reactions, alchemy in its entirety. Creating is unpredictable, the brushstroke that just works, the bleed of the wax when casting, the crack in the clay—nature's force pulling back.





Shared making forges something stronger than any single voice...



...in coming together to make this show and these works, we create an alchemy of our own.

— Emma Rodgers

THE COLLECTIVE





A contemporary group of artists working out of a Victorian Fire Station in Port Sunlight, focused on pushing materiality and form.

Built 1902 and designed by William & Segar Owen, the Fire Engine Station is situated in a lane that runs between Park Road and Wood Street, behind the housing blocks. The building was originally used as stables, but became a fire station in 1906. The horse drawn appliances were replaced by motorised vehicles in 1914.

It has been reawakened by Emma Rodgers and The Old Fire Station collective, working across sculpture, ceramics and printmaking. Taking inspiration from the heritage, landscapes and communities of Port Sunlight village, and using contemporary art to connect with the Wirral and beyond.

The collective consists of eight artists:

EMMA RODGERS

JOHNNY VEGAS

PETER HAYES

MAX EUGENI

SOPHIE ANNA GREEN

LONN LANDIS

SIMONE SCHOFIELD

GINA HATTER

Featuring special guest artist:

FREDRIK ANDERSSON





EMMA RODGERS

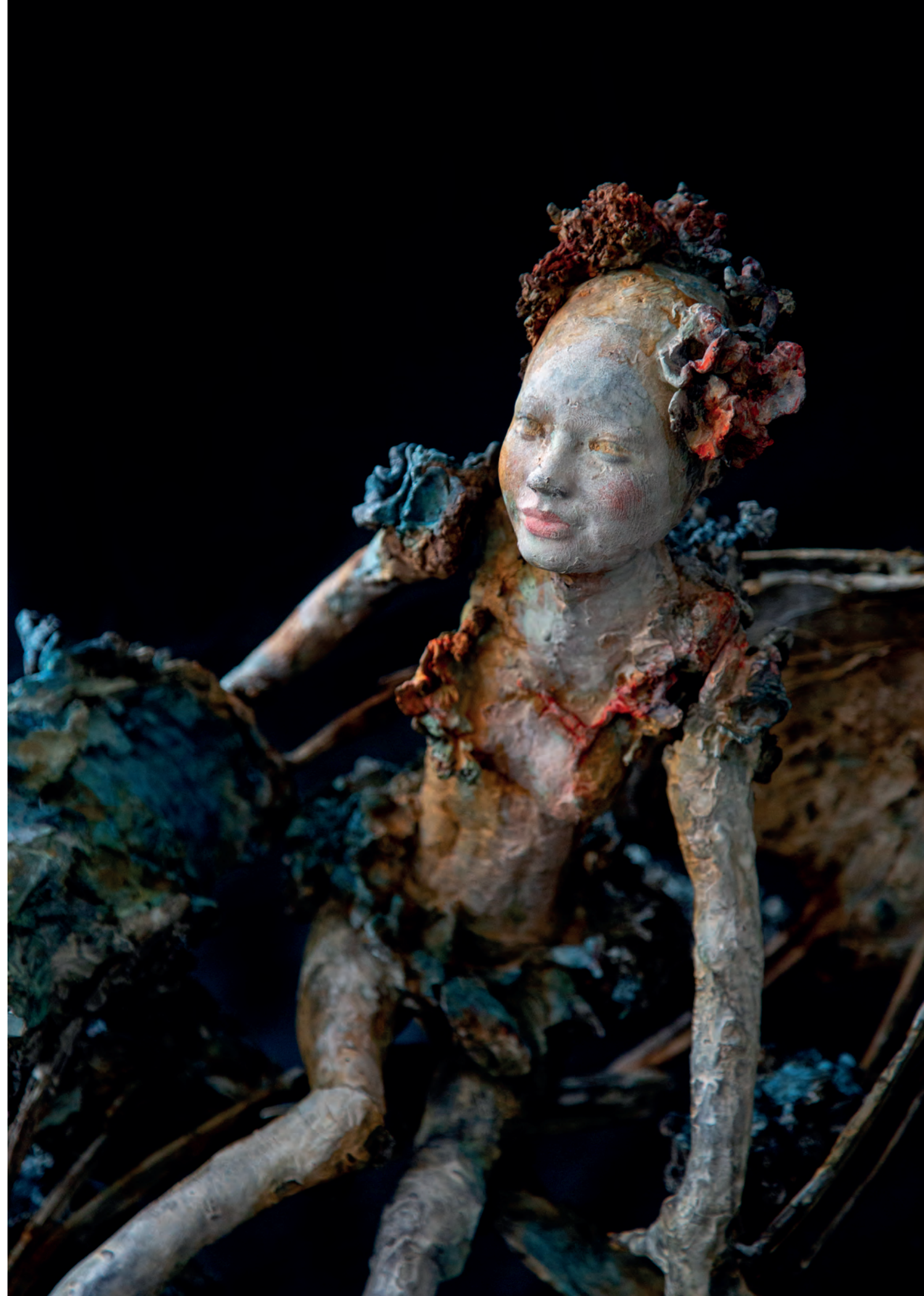
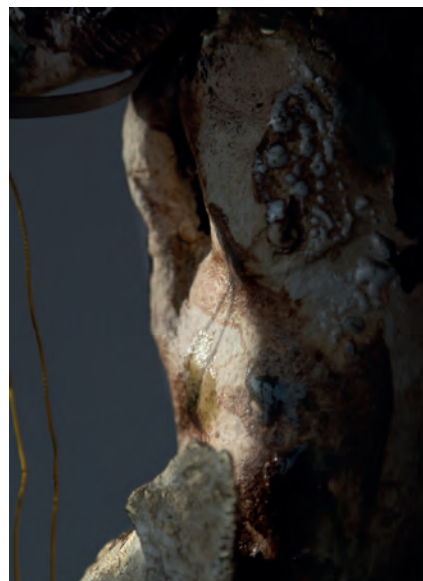
“a heightened sense of movement or tension, absorbed in the trials and dramas of existence.”
- Dr Giles Hansen Sutherland,
Art Critic, The Times

Emma Rodgers is a UK based artist represented and held in major public and private collections around the world, including the likes of the RA, V&A, Saatchi, Art Paris, N.Y. and NML. Her work forces mediums to the edge of elasticity. Pushing the boundaries of material: clay, bronze, steel... to deliberately abandon the solidity of form and create energetic movement within her frozen figures. Influenced by natural flora and fauna, histories and mythologies she captures the moment, the motion, whether it be powerful, delicate, tender or disturbing. Rodgers' work has appeared in various environments. Public commissions including Liverpool's Cilla Black statue, Salford's celebratory Salford's First series and Elaine Morgan as a part of the Monumental Welsh Women campaign to rectify the absence of female statues in Wales. She has lectured at The Isaac Newton Institute and had works featured in multiple Marvel movies.

Since 2024, Rodgers has founded a studio and collective in Port Sunlight, Merseyside, called The Old Fire Station working alongside other artists such as Johnny Vegas and Peter Hayes and hopes to continue with her numerous charitable and community-based projects in the area.

This body of work draws on transformation as both material process and metaphor, moving between ancient and contemporary forms of myth-making. Inspired by prehistoric cave painting, Raging Bull embodies primal force—its stripped-back, muscular form amplifying strength into something architectural, poised between realism and abstraction. Cast in bronze, it carries a sense of permanence, its surface echoing erosion and touch, as if both discovered and newly made.

In contrast, Golden Passage traces migration and transition. Small ceramic birds are threaded with gold, mapping a triangular journey from the Wirral to Venice and onward to Africa. The gold, intertwined with wheat, suggests alchemy: fragile matter transformed through movement, time, and passage. This dialogue extends into an epic maritime narrative inspired by Helen of Troy—the face that launched a thousand ships—reimagined as becoming of the sea itself. Her form is adorned with coral, shells, and wave-like textures, merging body and ocean, myth and environment. In Alchemy: A Tale of Two Cities, two sculptures embody the rise and fall of alchemy—one highly refined, the other eroded—revealing hidden messages through surface and decay. Together, these works explore endurance, transformation, and the evolving resonance of symbols across time.





“...a gossamer lightness that can make it appear sketched rather than cast or moulded. And the constant genius of her exoskeletal forms is that they always depict what can’t be seen but is transversally present: the life force, the spirit”.

-David Whiting, Art Critic

Golden Passage: Wirral–Venice–Africa

A gathering of small migratory birds, including chiffchaffs, blackcaps, and willow warblers, form the basis of this body of work. Beginning in the Wirral Peninsula, these birds undertake an annual journey to Africa, with Venice as their singular pause along the way. This moment of rest becomes the conceptual and physical anchor of the pieces.

Each form is threaded with a delicate golden line, tracing a triangular route from Wirral to Venice and onward south. The stitched gold, alongside small branches of wheat carried by each bird, suggests both flight path and alchemical transformation – fragile yet enduring, mapping movement across land, water, and time.

These works hold the instant of mid-journey: not fully here, not yet elsewhere. And in doing so, they mirror our own passages, physical and metaphorical, through places of pause, transitions, and becoming.







*Working alongside her, I see beyond the shadow
of self doubt, I believe I can take on the world,
as long as I remain true to myself. Faith has
conquered fear.*

- Johnny Vegas on rediscovering artistic confidence
through his mentorship with Emma Rodgers

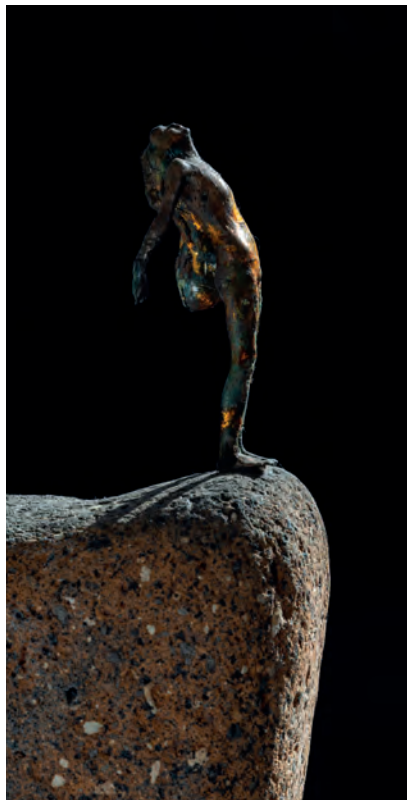


JOHNNY VEGAS

Johnny Vegas works across ceramics, print and found objects, exploring evolution in all things, organic or manufactured, reclaimed by nature or replicated through engineering. His practice sits between the spiritual and the tangible, questioning whether meaning exists only in what can speak.

What ADHD denies it also gives. Social unease creates space to find wonder and untold stories in objects and structures often overlooked in nature and engineering. "I see beauty in shape. Some people do not. As a loner I have learned to find solace and inspiration in the inanimate and the visually discarded. I am drawn to the background of a photograph rather than the subject. My attention resists expectation".

The quiet blueprint of human endeavour fascinates Vegas. We strive for perfection while ignoring the beauty of evolution. Vegas' work aims to keep a grateful record of silent achievement. Themes of flight, faith, fear of failure and emotional change run through my practice. He tries to capture fleeting thoughts in two or three dimensions before they escape again.



*His thoughts arrive like a restless flock—
winged, insistent, impossible to quiet.
These are not distractions, but signals:
fragments of feeling gathered briefly
before dissolving into the unseen.*

- Johnny Vegas





Flight, faith, and the fracture of belief sit at the heart of the artist's work—an ongoing alchemy of transformation, where fear and hope are transmuted into form. He is drawn to the angel not as a figure of perfection, but as a messenger caught between worlds—carrying doubt, yet compelled toward light.

- Johnny Vegas



PETER HAYES

Peter Hayes is a British sculptor and ceramicist renowned for his “evolved” ceramic forms that explore the intersection of ancient craftsmanship and natural erosion. His work is deeply informed by decades of travel, where he studied under tribal and village potters in Africa, India, Japan, and Nepal. This global influence is reflected in his use of diverse materials—including Raku-fired clay, glass, marble, and Damascus steel—and his signature technique of layering, burnishing, and polishing surfaces to create a striking contrast between raw texture and refined smoothness. This philosophy of balancing opposites—rough and smooth, fire and water—resonates throughout his sculptures.

Described as both ancient and otherworldly, his work reflects a deep curiosity about the history of sculpture and humanity’s connection to the Earth. Inspired by archaeological finds, such as Neolithic and Roman shards uncovered during his student years, and by natural forms and cultural artefacts, his pieces evoke a sense of timelessness.

His upcoming showing in Venice, specifically at the Venice Biennale 2026, represents a significant milestone as part of a major sculpture project. This exhibition draws on his lifelong fascination with how objects interact with their environment over time. Hayes often introduces minerals like iron and copper into his ceramic surfaces and then submerges the pieces in river or sea water for months or even years, allowing nature to dictate the final patina and texture. This process of “controlled erosion” results in work that feels both modern and prehistoric, perfectly suited for the historic, water-bound setting of Venice where time and decay are central themes.



*Embracing the beauty of the
broken, sculptor Peter Hayes
transforms his ceramic pieces,
proving that within the raw cracks
of the clay, the light truly gets in.*

- Peter Hayes







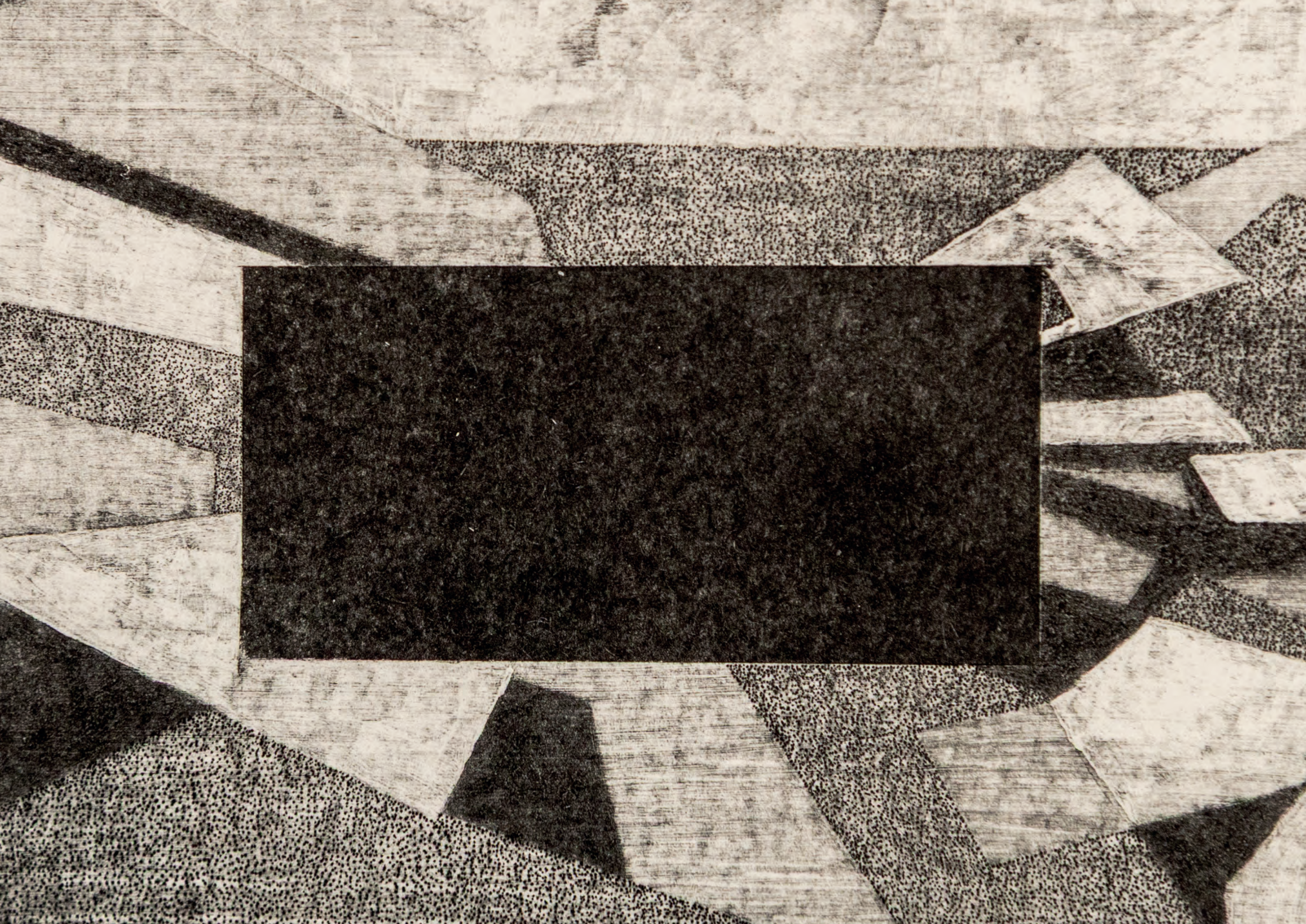
MAX EUGENI

Max Eugeni (b. Wirral, 2000) has just graduated with an MA in Print from the Royal College of Art and is now continuing his practice in The Old Fire Station, Port Sunlight as a part of its collective. Rooted in abstraction Eugeni is interested in the manipulation and alteration of form through printmaking, sculpture, and painting.

Eugeni's work centres on how we experience and navigate reality. Focusing on the constructed nature of perception, his work for this exhibition frames seeing as an alchemical process, one that actively distills the complexity of reality into a useable stream of conscious experience.

Planes of objects and space become tools for organising experience, boundaries become realised, patterns are formed. His artistic practice mimics this human centric form of processing, as compositions continually rotate through phases of construction, deconstruction, and reorganisation; and both outer and intuitive forms are merged to create unstable environments.







SOPHIE ANNA GREEN

Death . Life . Omen . Material . Virgin . Healer . Yew .

An Idol; an icon of dualities.

These trees are poison, indeterminably old, a witness of death, a site of life and healing, a place of pilgrimage, a churchyard centurion, a cure to cancer...

... etymologically they are compared to the name of 'God (Yew, Iw / Jahweh, Jehovah, the Immortal).'

Yet they are all simply roots, wood, bark and pines.

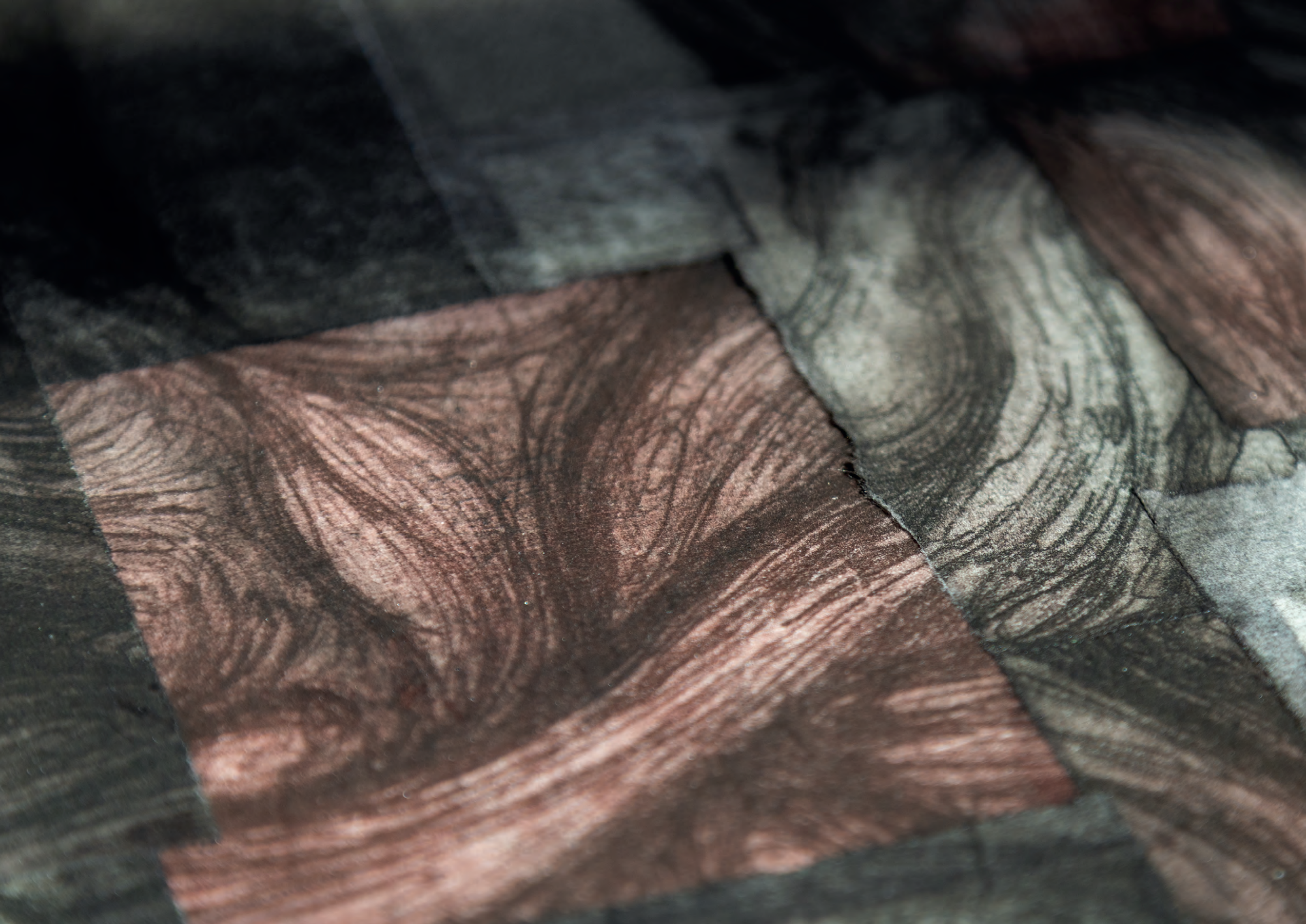
To place such weight of ideology and superstition into the limbs of a yew tree is to venerate. It charges these figures with the weight of our own beliefs, our own fears and faiths. It layers the topography of land, of nature, with our own overbearance.

'we, altar', is a weaving of these generational worships, condemnations and commonalities found throughout history into etchings. An idol tapestry, a constricting frame and a series of gilded tablets create the body of worship. A forest contained within image.

Sophie Anna Green (b. West Sussex, 1999) seeks to represent forms of landscape through crafting an unveiled perception of geological, anthropological and ecological studies. In weaving together, the materiality of land with the theoretical influences of poets, writers, scientists and thinkers she explores journeys; not just of the physical, but of the mind and of time. Through the processes of printmaking and photography, she embeds narratives and auras within marks, reinterpreting her own experience of the land.

Having graduated from the Royal College of Art in September with an MA in Print, Green has exhibited in independent shows and mixed exhibitions. She now works in a studio in The Old Fire Station, Port Sunlight, and is part of a collective named after this heritage building.







LONN LANDIS

Lonn Landis (b. Pennsylvania USA, 1968) is an artist and ceramicist inspired by and through the land and seas. Cultivating a regenerative practice, his hand-thrown ceramics embody place, time and geological identity. Through the laborious foraging of natural ingredients: crushing, grinding, milling, drying... his works are a slow and steady premeditation of what it is to take raw material through to a new state and consideration.

Landis' practice is an antithesis to our fast-paced, consumerist society. For him, materials are precious, hard fought for and cherished, from mussel shells to granite and quartz — each a manifestation of an individual landscape, it's memory and inherent nature. Foraged clay is used to form every work. Glazes become his playground, and chemistry drives his process. Every material reacting and interacting in a synthesis which must be understood and utilised.

Currently based in the Wirral, and sourcing his materials from his local beaches, to further afield in the Welsh mountains and Peak District, Landis is a part of The Old Fire Station collective working out of Port Sunlight, Merseyside.

'Ice Age' traces a material journey across geological time and human touch.

Fragments of stone—distinct, adjacent, unresolved—are ground by glacial force into clay: an “impure but well-mixed” body shaped by pressure, movement, and coexistence. What begins as proximity becomes integration.

In the studio, this process continues. Clay and mineral are recombined, transformed through hand and fire into vessels that embody both difference and cohesion. Variation is not erased but held in tension—visible in seams, surfaces, and glaze. Reflecting on a contemporary moment in which mixture is increasingly resisted, and difference is treated as something to be refined or removed. Yet the vessel cannot survive such correction intact.

Through fracture and repair, the pieces suggest another possibility: that strength lies not in purity, but in composition—in the capacity of disparate elements to remain together, altered but enduring.







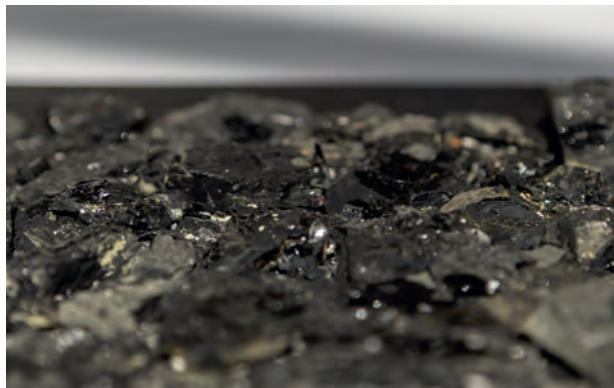
SIMONE SCHOFIELD

Simone Schofield is a Cheshire-based artist whose work journeys through the arc of grief and its quiet alchemy. Her practice begins in the raw weight of loss, the physical and emotional echoes that grief leaves on the body and mind, moving towards a quieter state when pain is reshaped into acceptance and eventual peaceful memories. Over time, these memories shift, softening, becoming talismans of joy and connection to those who came before. Schofield's sculptures speak to how past generations continue to shape the present, their influence unseen but ever-anchoring.

Working with natural materials: raw coal, costal driftwood, ceramic and glass, Schofield brings together a muted, elemental palette. Each work emerges as an alchemical fusion: dense and fragile, grounded and ethereal. The pieces carry the resonance of material history, as though drawn from earth and water, and hold within them the layered narrative of grief's passage into beauty.

In Venice, these forms find a profound mirror. Just as the city rises on ancient wooden piles, invisible beneath its waters, Schofield's works acknowledge that the present stands upon the unseen strength of the past. The wooden foundations of Venice bear the weight of centuries, supporting structures that are in a constant metamorphic state. Similarly, her sculptures hold the silent presence of those no longer here, sustaining the living in their evolution.

Schofield holds a First Class BA (Hons) degree and a Master of Arts in Fine Art from Liverpool John Moores University, as well as a Master of Arts in Art Practice from Glyndŵr University, Wales.







GINA HATTER

Gina Hatter (b. Liverpool, 1993) is a textile artist whose craft explores architecture through needlework. A graduate of the Manchester School of Architecture (2015), where she achieved a First Class Honours Degree, Hatter has been drawn to the built environment from an early age, a fascination that has progressed into a material investigation of structure, surface, and form.

Her ongoing series Urban Fabric began during her final year of architectural study, where embroidery became a way to translate rigid architectural language into something more tactile and impressionistic. By working with thread, Hatter reveals the cityscapes as a layered and constructed surface, where precision and imperfection coexist.

Often presenting the reverse of the stitch as the finished surface, her work challenges ideas of control and instability, reimagining buildings as forms held together through tension. Alchemy is explored through transformation as thread becomes a means of transmuting architecture into textile, shifting from permanence to fraying edge. In these works, the skylines of Liverpool and Venice meet, connecting the two through shared materiality and stitch.

Hatter's work sits between architecture and textile, evoking the ways in which cityscapes are woven from histories, materials, and human intervention.





The city emerges not as a fixed form, but as something held together by tension, movement and imperfection.

SPECIAL GUEST

FREDRIK MIKAEL ANDERSSON

Born Gothenburg, Sweden, 1972
Lives and works in London

Fredrik Mikael Andersson is a Swedish-born, London-based sculptor whose work explores the relationship between structure, transformation and the enduring strength of the human spirit. His sculptures bring together symmetry, movement and refined surface with a heightened sensitivity to light, texture and balance, resulting in works that feel both precise and quietly emotive.

Rooted in a deep appreciation of classical sculpture, Andersson's works can be seen as contemporary interpretations of Greek and Roman ideals of harmony, proportion and poise. Rather than directly replicating classical forms, he reimagines them through a modern lens — simplifying, refining and abstracting the figure to reveal essential structures and rhythms.

The result is a body of work that sits between antiquity and the present, where timeless sculptural language is translated into a distinctly contemporary expression.

Working across sculpture, painting and textile, Andersson's practice is informed by a profound understanding of form and anatomy. Organic structures and subtle mythological undertones emerge through processes of layering, shaping and refinement, creating works that speak to endurance, vulnerability and renewal. Personal experiences and early encounters with loss have shaped a visual language that ultimately affirms resilience and the possibility of transformation.

Alongside his studio practice, Andersson has developed a parallel career in facial aesthetics and restorative dentistry in London. This dual engagement with art and anatomy informs his sculptural approach, where techniques of precision, hand-finishing and material sensitivity are central to the making process. Sculpture becomes a dialogue between control and intuition — a careful construction of form that reveals itself gradually through light and movement.

Light plays a fundamental role in Andersson's work. Surfaces are composed to capture reflection, translucency and shadow, allowing each piece to shift subtly with its environment and the viewer's perspective. The works invite a close and contemplative encounter, balancing technical discipline with a poetic exploration of beauty, balance and resilience.

Positioned between scientific understanding and artistic expression, Andersson's practice reflects an ongoing search for harmony between the physical and the emotional — an exploration of form shaped by knowledge, experience and a belief in the transformative power of making.
Works held in private collections in the UK, Europe and the USA.





THE GUARDIANS OF TWO SHORES



**The Guardians of Two Shores,
a shared vigil, two figures standing guard of their ports.**



The Wirral and Venice are connected through a shared language of civic symbolism rooted in maritime identity, history, and power. The Wirral, shaped by monastic foundations and later by sailing and global trade, expresses its origins through the lion and crosier—symbols of authority, guardianship, and spiritual legacy—reinforced by the anchor that acknowledges dependence on the sea. Similarly, Venice, a city entirely defined by water, is represented by the winged lion of St Mark, an emblem of divine protection, sovereignty, and maritime dominance. In both places, the lion functions as a timeless guardian figure, standing for strength, continuity, and civic pride, while coastal geography underpins their economic and cultural development.

Together, the Wirral and Venice demonstrate how maritime communities encode their histories, faith, and power into enduring symbols that link land, sea, and identity.



Arms of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council



Coat of Arms of the Republic of Venice



Building on Rodgers' long-standing relationship with Chester Zoo, the Old Fire Station Collective were granted rare access to work directly from Nilay and Shanti, their pair of lions.

Through clay, camera, and sketchbook, we observed, recorded, and translated their presence into form. These works emerge as a response to that encounter: a merging of place, symbol, and lived study.



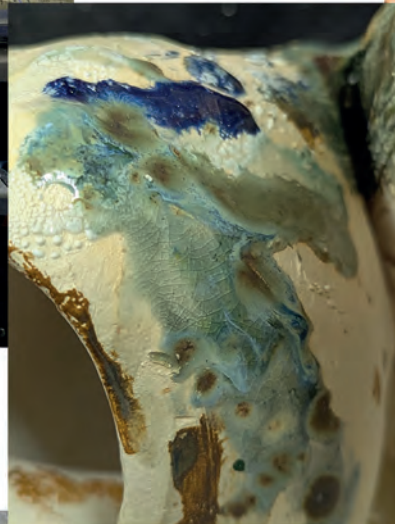


DESIGN PROCESS



Each feather is an impression of a cuttlefish hand-pressed by Peter Hayes. These are carefully configured into two majestic wings for the Venice lion.

A series of tiles were designed and carved by Max Eugeni and Sophie Anna Green, each featuring details from the architecture around Port Sunlight and Venice.



The limbs of the lions are Landis' reformed vases, shaped by Simone Schofield and Emma Rodgers in the forming of their musculature.



Vases and pots are precisely thrown by Lonn Landis, and then etched into by the two printmakers featuring flora of both Port Sunlight and Venice – the Birch and the Oleander respectively.



Emma Rodgers heats and hand forms the heads of each lion. Her beautifully rough and impressionistic style leads the group.



Beautiful crawling glazes are Emma Rodgers specialty – these underlay the skin of the lions. Fluid glazes are then applied with loose brushmarks by Johnny Vegas giving life to the beasts.



Peter Hayes' slab built forms are used to construct the torso of each sculpture. They are representations of an organic but architectural form – facades become ribcages, coving translates to mane.



Johnny Vegas and Simone Schofield hand shapes details of the lion's mane. They also crafts their tails and the Wirral lion's anchor.





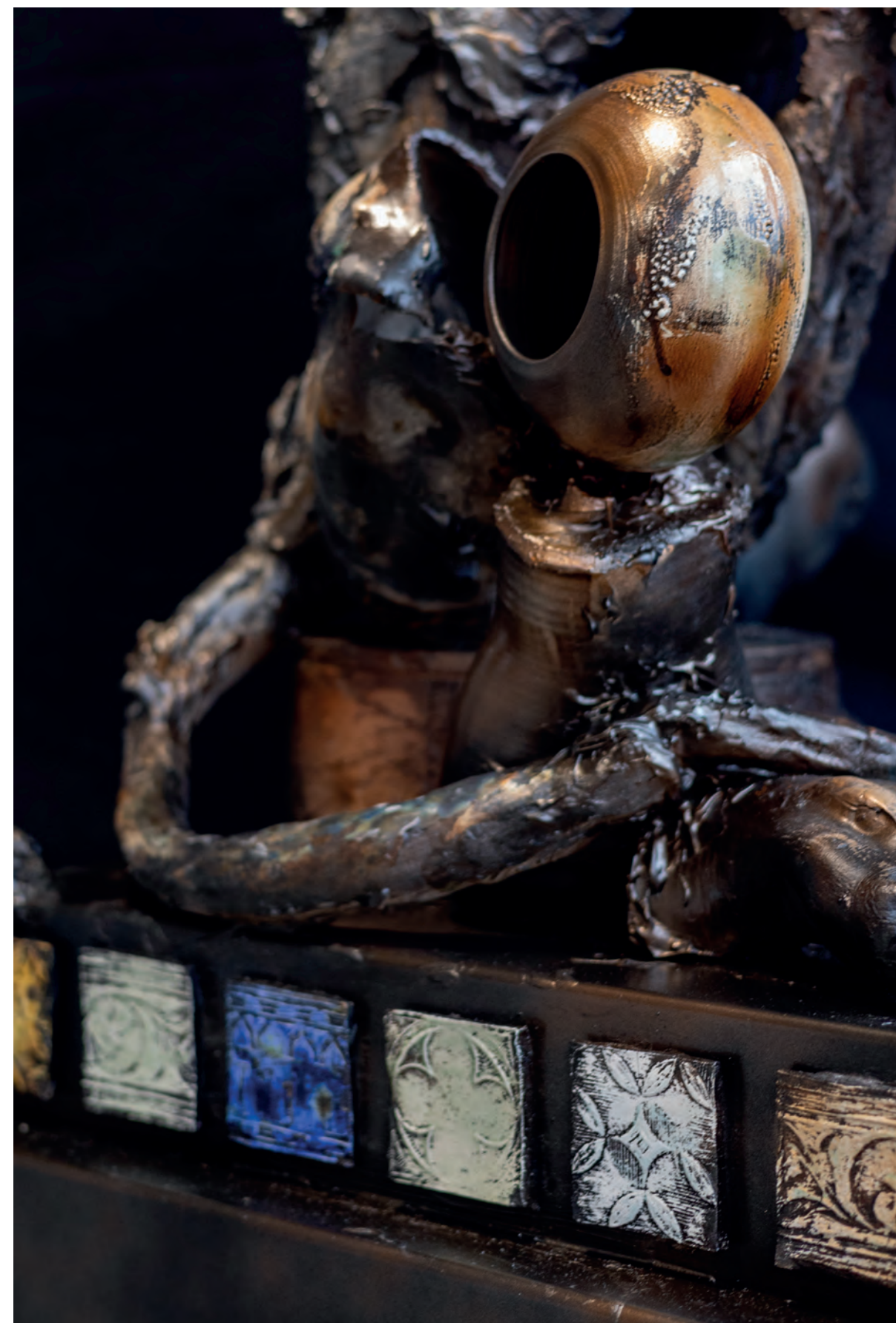


Guardians of Two Shores 'Wirral'
Ceramic and Steel
H46" L35" W23.5"



Guardians of Two Shores 'Venice'
Ceramic and Steel
H47" L35" W23"













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