carbon

Oxford Brookes University Fine Art Degree Show, 2017.


Artists of the House Brookes
Oxford Brookes University Fine Art Class of 2017

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Carbon is the second most abundant element in the human body, the fourth most present element in the Universe and is common to all known life. It is unsurprising therefore, that humans are accustomed to documenting their existence using carbon in either direct or derivative forms. Whether graphite, chalk or charcoal, for artists, this element is omnipresent. It is a way to make a mark. A connection. It is this sense of connectedness to the material world that sets an appropriate tone for Carbon the Oxford Brookes Fine Art Degree Show 2017. This graduating student group are individually diverse and their works are wide ranging in media, theme and context. However the 42 participants in Carbon have one thing in common. They share an experience of developing their practice on a broad based Fine Art programme designed to equip each student with practical, critical, technical and professional skills, whilst placing each individual at the heart of their own study.

In Carbon the mind and body are not easily distinguished. Differing practices reveal the internal and external mechanisms and influences that determine individual and collective perception. One work reveals the confused inner workings of the human mind. In an attempt to grapple with difficulties and contradictions, a filing system is introduced to bring order to an existentially chaotic scenario. In other works, conventions of beauty are challenged in photographs where the bodies of world record-breaking athletes confound stereotypes. Elsewhere freckled skin is revered as something beautiful, precious or even other worldly whilst acting as a testimony to the vulnerabilities of physically standing out. Degenerative conditions are similarly treated with painstaking care in drawings that reveal not only the physical effects of a long life, but also expressive changes brought about by diseases such as Alzheimer’s.

A graspable sense of reality eludes everyone in an age of post-truth and ‘fake news’.
We have become accustomed to the ubiquity of celebrity culture, compounded by social media and exemplified by a situation where it is easier to, for example, ‘keep up with the Kardashians’ than access accurate coverage of the war in Syria. It is easy to lose sight of real world dangers in the pursuit of an elusive Pokemon-Go character, or learn about the craze for ‘Brazilian Butt-Lift’ cosmetic procedures whilst ignoring the violent realities of FGM. In the time of Brexit and Trump, an understandable sense of a disturbing present and uncertain future permeates the thinking and practice of artists and intellectuals alike, but there is still hope. Can we use technology to re-invent humanity? In Carbon, one participant proposes—through experimental animation—an accelerated cyborg evolution.

Encounters with organic and inorganic landscapes are mediated as we are invited to wonder at an ever changing sky through the utilitarian frame of a Velux roof-light. As a counterpoint, we become immersed suggestively in landscapes abstracted from equally domestically recognisable forms made by bed linen. Other terrains are more indeterminate, proposing nocturnal introspection where ideas of interior and exterior might more aptly be applied to the human psyche. Juxtaposed with meditative compressed earth balls known as ‘dorodango’, a relationship between material, action and mind-set is evident.

Elsewhere earthen metamorphosis is accelerated through systematised actions as ‘self-sculpted’ ceramic objects reveal their violent means of production relative to architectural sites. In other works the laws of gravity are also at work as primordial ‘ooze’ is updated for the 21st century. Such uncontained materiality is explored through mechanisms of leakage, unsettling audiences through simultaneous attraction and repulsion in artworks that can neither be described as paintings nor sculptures. The senses are challenged too by optical disturbances, which play on the way that neural connections translate vision into understanding. The results are geometrically beautiful yet simultaneously nauseating. If all this leaves audiences feeling queasy, do not fear.
Fairy Therapeuta is on hand to administer a psychedelic antidote comprising tea, chocolate and good cheer, which (through gritted teeth) thinly veils a frustrated and complex persona.

Words are questioned as adequate or inadequate descriptive systems for real life worldly encounters in which the fleeting transience of life is reflected in text, which physically lifts from the page. This creates an intangible poetry of sorts. The sonic ergonomics of embodied human voices are another way in which the constructed conventions of songs and poetry are pared down. The grunts, rumbles, squeals, clicks and slaps of such a vocal form of address are developed into a new audible lexicon in which language becomes simultaneously rawer and paradoxically more complex.

Permanence and impermanence are explored through the relics of a person’s lifetime, systematised as an inventory in memoriam. Gold and lead are used for their alchemical values as well as their qualities of elemental stability, providing some hope of a permanent relic. However, the inevitability of death is treated with abject fascination via cremation rites afforded to animal cadavers, reminding audiences that sooner or later, all life returns to Carbon.

Dr. Clair Chinnery
Senior Lecturer in Fine Art & 3rd Year Practice Module Leader
“Every piece of sculpture, every drawing, every painting is a kind of chemistry. It’s like alchemy.”

-Anish Kapoor

Did you know that there are companies who will turn your dead loved ones into diamonds? Phone 02038075649 to make an appointment; the company is called Lonité, their address is 50 Liverpool Street, London. This is not fake news, these are hard facts, you can trust me. And they become real diamonds, glittering on your finger in perpetuity. Not diamond-like, I mean actual diamonds. Ashes to ashes, carbon to carbon, ashes to diamonds...These people are, in truth, in the alchemy business. They take the ashes from a cremation and submit them to rather secret treatments involving heat and pressure and the carbon in the grey formless human remains is reborn as hard precious gemstones. We might well feel a spectrum of responses. Is this tasteless? Astonishing? Touching? Grotesque? Well, have a good think about that before you phone the number above.

One of our students found a dead roe deer by the side of the road. Already waterlogged, she took it to a pool of water and immersed it. Then she took it out and burned it in a kind of cremation ritual, surrounded by flowers. Then she gathered up the ashes. These desiccated remains were then themselves scattered onto the surface of a dark pond. At each stage, she made photographs - beautiful, sumptuous, refulgent images, the ones you see in this exhibition. These visual residues of this creature’s demise seem somehow to be paradoxically redemptive. An animal is hit at speed by a car: the animal becomes decaying rubbish, a mere minor obstacle, a momentary rumble muted by the suspension as the next car and the next car and the next car flatten its form into a macabre bas relief on the tarmac. Well, one of these animals, at
least, has been noticed, intercepted, retrieved, celebrated - and transformed into art. That is surely an alchemy of sorts.

Isn’t that what artists do all the time? They take their base materials, they submit them to extensive research, they refine and finesse their processes, they turn them into new and extraordinary things. If that sounds somewhat mechanistic, remember that alchemy is also about the intellect. Marcel Duchamp once described alchemy as ‘a kind of philosophy’. One of our students discovered that sometimes children in Japan take earth - dirt, dust, soil, call it what you will - and mix it with a little water. Then they fashion it into an approximate sphere called a dorodango. As they pass the ball from hand to hand, they caress and cajole this lumpen matter into a burnished sphere which slowly grows into an object of near Platonic perfection. When I was in Japan, living in a beautiful house, there was in the vestibule where we removed our shoes a special enclave or alcove, with a kind of altar, called a tokonoma. Each day the patriarch of the house would place into this hallowed locus a single stone, a twig, an ikebana or a fragment of calligraphy. I discovered later that this is a Japanese tradition, building an aesthetic, an ethos to be shared by everybody in the home. Those children idling away the hours making their mud spheres in the street were in reality far from idle. They were, albeit unwittingly, performing an initiation into a kind of alchemy, an aesthetic of perfectibility and minimalism at the core of Japanese sensibilities.

More literally, one of this year’s graduating students has been making work drawing upon alchemy’s iconography. Using scales she places Bibles cast into lead on one side and flax seed on the other, with their promise of linen, a traditional symbol of purity. As you tour this exhibition, you will see plenty of examples of transformative processes and unstable morphologies. One student, for example, starts with the base matter of soft clay and allows the force of gravity alone to determine the subsequent form as she drops her primordial material from various heights. In a parallel series, porcelain is rolled as thinly as can be and then allowed to buckle, ripple and flow as
it adjusts to irresistible natural forces. Another student has experimented to create her own slime (I can reveal that one of the ingredients is borax) which oozes and gloops and seeps as it transgresses the pristine white studio spaces. This could be thought of as a reverse alchemy, in effect creating base matter in a process of ‘unforming’. Georges Bataille, that dark master of Surrealism, would have rejoiced!

My own academic year began in Venice where, at the Palazzo Grassi, I visited the huge Sigmar Polke exhibition. The maverick Polke, rather like his heavyweight German compatriot, Anselm Kiefer, and also like the quixotic Rebecca Horn, put alchemy at the very centre of their practices. For each, alchemy represents both a central concept and a strategy: a process of transformation, often subversive, sometimes propitious, always mysterious, and one requiring both faith and hope. The formless, through their alchemical processes, sometimes becomes the fully formed. Here the allegory of alchemy represents the redemptive creative process.

That sounds, to my ears, exactly like the process of creating meaningful art. Making art makes alchemists of us all. Enjoy this exhibition, relish in its generosity, share in our wonder at the range, the variety and the quality of what our students have made.

Dr. Paul Kilsby
Senior Lecturer in Fine Art Theory & 3rd Year Tutor
Introduction

As the Chairpeople of Carbon, we would like to extend a huge thank you to everyone who has supported us over what has been a challenging but rewarding three years as fine art students at Oxford Brookes University. During our time here, we have been extremely fortunate to study in a wonderful environment that exudes creativity and inspiration. After all, where else would you expect to find a gabled roof inside a corridor.

Representing the plethora of work that is inevitable from such a large creative body has not been without its difficulties, which we have been able to overcome with the help of the incredible Fine Art tutors and technicians. We want to extend our enormous appreciation to Dr Clair Chinnery in particular; without her invaluable support, we would likely have all lost the plot.

Our role as chairs would have been much harder without the assistance of our peers, especially our fabulous co-chairs, who were each responsible for guiding a particular sub-committee.

Carbon serves a testament to the talents and achievements of a diverse group of artists, which we are excited to be able to share with you.

Stephen Lawson & Holly Broughton
Chairs of Carbon The 2017 Fine Art Degree Show
Mariana Acevedo

My work involves a state of ‘being present’, where my mind becomes silent and I am able to observe beyond the physical form and discover the true nature of things.

In this state, I recognize myself as part of a wholeness, of being ‘at one’ with the cosmos. In this close encounter and interconnectedness I just listen patiently to what the subject has to say to me.

“To see we must forget the name of the thing we are looking at.”

-Claude Monet

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It is my belief that the body no longer settles as a space that holds an idea of ‘self’, but a realm whereby the ‘self’ is contested. My work is an exploration of human behaviour through reaction and response.

As I set out to question our perception of the world and our place within it, I give power to process and create art not as an object but as a transmission of experience, both alien and relatable at the same time.
Laura Barton-Fox

“There’s always suspicion around a woman’s truth.”

-Kathleen Hanna

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Beth Brookes

“Beneath this mask, another mask. I will never be finished removing all these faces.”

-Claude Cahun

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Holly Daizy Broughton

An exploration of life during and after chronic illness.

I work with my body and bed as though a drawing, being able, through retrospection, I am able to recreate and re-experience the discomfort felt during an extended period of illness and fatigue.

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Hannah Burrows


I have spent the past year exploring the ins and outs of slime and all of its curious qualities, finding out why we are strangely drawn to it but simultaneously so repulsed.

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Dominik Cichon

“The role of the media in contemporary politics forces us to ask what kind of a world and what kind of a society we want to live in, and in particular in what sense of democracy do we want this to be a democratic society.”

-Noam Chomsky
Danielle Clarke

In my work, I explore the representations of women in painting, analysing the portrayal of stereotypically feminine and unfeminine themes. Through striking lighting I seek to depict a modern person, in a visually stimulating image, who is not an idealized Photoshop creation.

My hope is to use oil paints, with its long history in the arts, to express a current phase of the ever-changing gender roles forged by an ever-changing society.

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Sandy Cluff

My art practice reflects my ongoing interest in the symbiotic relationship between animals and humans; and how - in relation to plastic pollution - we can choose to either save or destroy them.

Melting plastics to form corals and other ‘under the sea’ objects is something which I really enjoy, and interests me greatly.

By deconstructing some of the plastic items, I can sculpt them in new and interesting ways into a new 3D form, to create something entirely original and unique. I find this ongoing ‘journey’ totally inspiring and wish to continue developing this further.

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Ceri Cotter

With iconographic reference and metaphor, I have explored the roots and identity of Middle Eastern cultures. I have used themes of faith, conflict, displacement, and boundaries to shape the narrative of my work and explore this process as a channel through which to understand human attachment to place and space.

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Freddie Davies

I’ve often wish’d that I had clear,
For life, six hundred pounds a year;
A handsome house to lodge a friend;
A river at my garden’s end.

- Jonathan Swift

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Rachel Dent

My artwork seeks to express raw inner feelings, thoughts and emotions. The way I work is that an essence appears in my mind at random.

I try to grasp at these essences and let them come out of me and into a visual art form. I want to touch people with my art. I want them to come away from seeing what I have created and feel it has added something to their lives.

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Love all that you serve, trust that you can cope with all of your heart, you will be stronger.
Jessica Dickins

Working closely with the juxtaposition between chance and control within decay and manipulation, process and materiality are fundamental to my practice.

Using primarily scientific methods and equipment, I am able to exploit a material’s intrinsic properties and associations resulting in abstract variations of otherwise ordinary objects.

My art is an exploration of the physical limits of different materials. Through this I often force a natural form of decay. As a result, I can capture and preserve an otherwise unattainable chance moment in time.

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Hannah Duckworth

Alchemy and alchemical philosophy are fundamental in my art practice. The symbolic and sacred alchemical metals of lead and gold intrigue me with their materiality and meaning. Through the use of these materials I hope to explore the concepts of immortality, religion, death, redemption and authenticity.

The idea that an object can be authentic through an ideology or belief system drives my artwork deeper into answering the ambiguities of the most primordial questions.

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Amy Dyer

I would describe myself as a bold and abstract artist using a mixture of black and white, or bright colours, working with frames, boxes, photographs and paintings. I explore ‘nature’, ‘fences’, ‘life in frames’, ‘landscapes’ and ‘reflections’.

Currently I am focusing on the environment, inspired by the natural world and its relationship with technology. My work often comes from photographs of nature, focusing on how it changes over time.

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Eve Gould

“We have no other means of recognising a work of art than our feeling for it.”

-Clive Bell

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Laura Hartfield

“Such an accumulation makes one want to be free of possessions, unencumbered; the quick self wishes to flee from the heavy baggage of time.”

-Mark Doty

I arrange still lives that possess an inherent power, that are unsettling, evanescent and ambiguous in narrative. By distorting the perceived scale of found materials, I play with the connection we have with the inanimate.

Juxtaposing objects that lay dormant or dead, from natural forms to redundant technology, the ritualistic, and domestic, I breathe new life into them and memorialise what they once were.

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Emily Hawkings

“Hi I’m going to be honest if that’s ok? Lol I’m back in England for a few weeks and just looking for a bit of fun with a nice girl, if you’re interested then please message back :) x”

-Sam, 24 (04.02.2016)

“Hi do you like raisins? Or maybe you prefer dates?”

-Alfie, 21 (22.07.2015)

Tinder: when does the virtual become reality?

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Hattie Hawks

I aim to communicate a sensual memory of moment by pushing the art of abstract painting and creating sculptural forms out of a painted surface. In doing this, I create a subtle conflict of hard and soft painterly marks and bend materials against their will. This generates a voyeuristic idea whereby the viewer cannot access the works entirely, yet their inner desire would suggest they are desperate to see more.

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Charlotte Hazell

My work aims to highlight the fragility of human perception, concentrating primarily on optical illusions and the effect they have on the brain.

Once installed, these illusions allow the audience to experience bending walls and disappearing corners as their brains attempt to decode the black and white illusions which inhabit the room. As well as altering perceptions of depth and space, my work attempts to emphasise how effortlessly our reality can be manipulated, raising the question ‘is our reality the only reality?’

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Anne Hoxey

Within our world, where social and political issues are constantly increasing, mental illness is at an unparalleled high with no indication of slowing down. Consequently, we are torn between our thoughts, feelings and methods of communicating with one another.

Through daily activities and life experiences we are hesitant towards the parts of ourselves we should listen to. Communicating with different people requires us to adopt a multitude of different personas and we are forced to put on a different mask with each new encounter.

This leads us to the question: ‘what is really going on inside our heads?’

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Karin Christina Hurley

I use skills traditionally associated with women’s work in a bid to rediscover my own history as a woman artist. I combine handcrafted needlework with current political issues surrounding women today to create beautiful works that hold deep meaning upon closer inspection.

There is a strong, feminist voice resonating throughout my work, where I highlight and playfully poke fun at the absurd. I have a keen interest in botanical illustrations, incorporating them into my work wherever possible.

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I am interested in the concept of digitality, and how it increasingly makes a place for itself in every aspect of our lives.

Digital technology has been so deeply assimilated into our culture and society that we seldom stop to consider it, instead noticing only its effects - often through the interface of a screen.

My work is concerned with how the digital itself can affect our behaviour, and make its mark on the physical world through our actions.

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Mariel Kouveli

My work is based on sociology and psychology, the study of human behaviour through social influence and/or external – or situational - factors, and evaluating and assessing the relationship between humans and our surroundings.

I am interested in the way that humans change throughout the years, with different trends and technologies that emerge. The processes and materials I use vary, but usually include photography and sculpture.

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Painting is more than just a way of approximating an aesthetic ideal of beauty; it provokes vivid human emotions, can connect deeply with people, and can reveal profound insights about the world we live in.

It is often hard to express one’s ideas or feelings through words alone, but painting provides a means to bridge this epistemic gulf between our minds and the world we experience. One of the themes I have focused on is homelessness. I have tried to convey the human stories and emotions of homeless people through my paintings; by focusing on expressive or impressionistic sketches, I have tried to catch the vividness and pain of their lives in the light of the moment.

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Abigail Lark

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
... In the mountains, there you feel free.

-T.S. Eliot

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Steve R Lawson

“If you make the fantasy too real, I think it loses the quality of a nightmare - of a dream.”
-Ray Harryhausen

Animation is kinetic; it centres on a transfer of energy, of life, from the animator to the animated. As an animator, I am obsessed by the sheer uncanniness of seeing a lifeless physical object or puppet come ‘alive’.

That connection to a physical character is crucial to my process; we two become one through Vertov’s kino (or cine) eye, creating a cyborg. That world, therefore, is an illusion, mirroring our own reality. A surreal fantasy.

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“Is it not for us to confess that in our civilized attitude towards death we are once more living psychologically beyond our means, and must reform and give truth its due? Would it not be better to give death the place in actuality and in our thoughts which properly belongs to it, and to yield a little more prominence to that unconscious attitude towards death which we have hitherto so carefully suppressed? This hardly seems indeed a great achievement, but rather a backward step…”

-Sigmund Freud

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Oriane Pierrepoint

“A gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates”
-Michel Foucault
Cara Powell

“The common perception of machines and their significance is clouded by myths associated with their power and dominance. Using a machine is far from being a neutral activity. Machines affect the user at least as much as they empower them.”

-Richard Colson

Studying Fine Art and Publishing as a combined honours degree has offered me a dual perspective to my practice. Approaching projects from both a creative and theoretical angle has enabled me to create cross-media interactive pieces and spaces, with these pieces relying as heavily upon audience participation as they do individual creativity.

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Alice Preston

Within my work, I am extremely interested in illustration, drawing, print and book arts. I see myself as a multidisciplinary artist, basing my work on forms, particularly architectural structures and studies, text and the written word, the form of the human and animal bodies, and myself.

Through contemporary practice it has become evident that my work is, in many ways, a self-portrait. Art is how I display my emotions and I see my life as an ongoing creative process. Through painting, drawing, etching and book arts I am able to better learn about my relationship with the world around me.

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Sibtay Shaheed

I work in a variety of mediums; using memories and personal experience as inspiration for my art. My practice communicates how memories can fade away with cultural changes. The work I create makes me nostalgic and connects me with my past and my roots. As a result, my work is always in a state of flux and fluidity. Using my own knowledge of traditional arts and crafts, I want to explore how I can create something contemporary.

I consider myself a nomad with many homes, and no fixed destination, always on the move, exploring. I live between multiple worlds, not belonging to any, yet I am touched and affected by all thus forming my multi-cultural identity.

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Katherine Small

“I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my own silhouette). I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). Through my earth/body sculptures I become an extension of nature and nature becomes an extension of my body.”

-Ana Mendietta

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Andra Stavarache

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.”

-Albert Einstein

Throughout my practice as a visual artist I use photography and video-based performances to mirror my beliefs and concepts in an abstract, coded representation. Along with a psychological approach, these are mediums designed to highlight the architecture of the body and the mind, the body as material, and the mind as muse.

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Jasmine Stonehewer

My practice is at its best when I am pushing my work into new realms, constantly translating things from one form to the next, and allowing myself to become immersed in the processes that I use. At the heart of my practice lies the documentation and development of simplicity into complexity.

“If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If it is still boring, then eight. Then sixteen. Then thirty-two. Eventually one discovers that it is not boring at all.”

-John Cage

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Katherine Summers

My work revolves around sleeping. I find this topic interesting because we spend a third of our lives sleeping, and many milestones happen in the world of the bed such as dreaming, birth, and death.

I believe that in the rushed world we live in, many take the practice of sleeping for granted and think of it as unimportant, which is why I create art depicting the sanctity of sleep. I mostly work with oil paints and through these I explore the body in sleep.

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Philosophical questions regarding the metaphysical nature of existence fuel my practice as I explore notions of loss, materiality and liminality. I am currently investigating the dematerialisation of physical traces and print, while capturing these forms hovering in a fragile temporary state between being and nothingness.

Inspired by oriental aesthetics and phenomenology, I deconstruct what we think we know in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the transient within our constantly changing sensory environment.

“So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp; it has inner light, even from a distance—and changes us, even if we do not reach it, into something else, which, hardly sensing it, we already are…”

-Rainer Maria Rilke

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Katy Watson

My work stems from my dreams and desires and is filtered through my innate individuality. I hold a mirror up to my inner world, and attempt to give it a voice. I try to connect with others through what I choose to reveal, hide, or disguise.

As part of this process I am driven to create, to perform via all of my faculties. I use the written and spoken word, song, dance, movement, costumes... all of these becoming ways to express myself, to communicate and, above all, to make connections.
Livvy Wheatley

“Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals the human spirit.”

-E.E. Cummings

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Chloe Williams

Spaces that inspire, relax, or create intrigue are the drive for my practice. As my work has progressed, creating an environment that immerses the viewer has become my primary focus.

It is paramount that my audience are transported to a place that can create a sense of calm, when there is so much around us that doesn’t. Whether this is through a familiar scene, a new experience, or a positive environment, the space that surrounds us interests me the most.

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Rosamund Yip

“We are all born poets whether we like it or not, though what we do with it is our singular responsibility.”

-Gaston Bachelard.

I seek to explore the idea of a higher mind. Through a series of movements and sounds, I am attempting to travel cognitively between physical and mental states.

It is consciousness that travels between the two dimensions.

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From Thursday 06 July - Monday 10 July 2017, many of the artists featured in Carbon will be part of ‘art week’ at Free Range, which takes place annually at the Old Truman Brewery, Brick Lane, London.

Free Range has earned a great reputation for bringing together graduating students from arts colleges and courses from around the country, providing an invaluable platform for showcasing work to potential employers, and to the industry.

The exhibition is free; you can find out more about it at www.freerange.co.uk. Everyone taking part in Free Range has a little egg logo on their page in this catalogue.
Sponsors

In the face of a degree show where the expenses are seemingly endless - catalogues, materials, websites, etc - it’s almost an annual tradition to panic over the state of fundraising in the approach to the finale.

This year, not only have our friends and family have pulled through for us, but also a number of generous sponsors from the local Oxford community and further afield. In doing so they have helped to secure the future of another generation of artists from Oxford Brookes, and for that we are extremely grateful.
Wimbledon International Music Festival is firmly established as one of the capital’s major autumn events, and it seems to get better and better.”

Barry Millington, Evening Standard

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Printed in 2017 by Tewkesbury Printing Company, Gloucestershire, United Kingdom. Typeset in Futura and Futura Condensed.

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