



SHADOWLIGHT
ARTISTS

RISING

SHADOWLIGHT ARTISTS **RISING**

Tom Breach
Mark Hemsworth
Russell Highsmith
Richard Hunt
Lucy Skuce
Danny Smith

Edited by
Chris Oakley & Richard Duriez 2018



Still from **Revenge of the Penguin**
Tom Breach 2018

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Time for a Change
Danny Smith 2018
Image: Roger Gilboy

Foreword

Paul Hobson



Abul Kasem, Wendy Belcher and Maureen Trowell in
Undersea Adventure
Video still
The Shadowlight Artists 2018

I first came into sustained contact with people with learning disabilities in the early 1990s through my parents who were consultants in the National Health Service. At that time, my mother oversaw services for people with learning disabilities along with a wide portfolio of care-in-the-community provision in the West Midlands Health Service. I had intermittent contact with people with learning disabilities throughout my teens whenever I visited the hospitals where my parents worked, and for three years during my university holidays and two years after I graduated, I worked with people with learning disabilities who had recently been re-settled into the community. It was one of the most developmental and rewarding experiences of my life.

Creative activities formed a part of the daily routine of life in the homes where I volunteered and naturally, being very interested in art from an early age, I was an eager participant. I witnessed first-hand the powerful role that creativity plays, giving enjoyment and a mode of self-expression and communication to those who have complex needs, often with powerful and arresting results.

Now, many years later, as Director of Modern Art Oxford, I have been reflecting recently on these experiences and others I have acquired along the way, working with different types of artists and audiences in the arts sector for more than twenty-five years. This is in part because we are currently in a moment of significant change in the art world, one in which institutions like Modern Art Oxford are being challenged to interrogate their purpose and redefine their mission in relation to society.

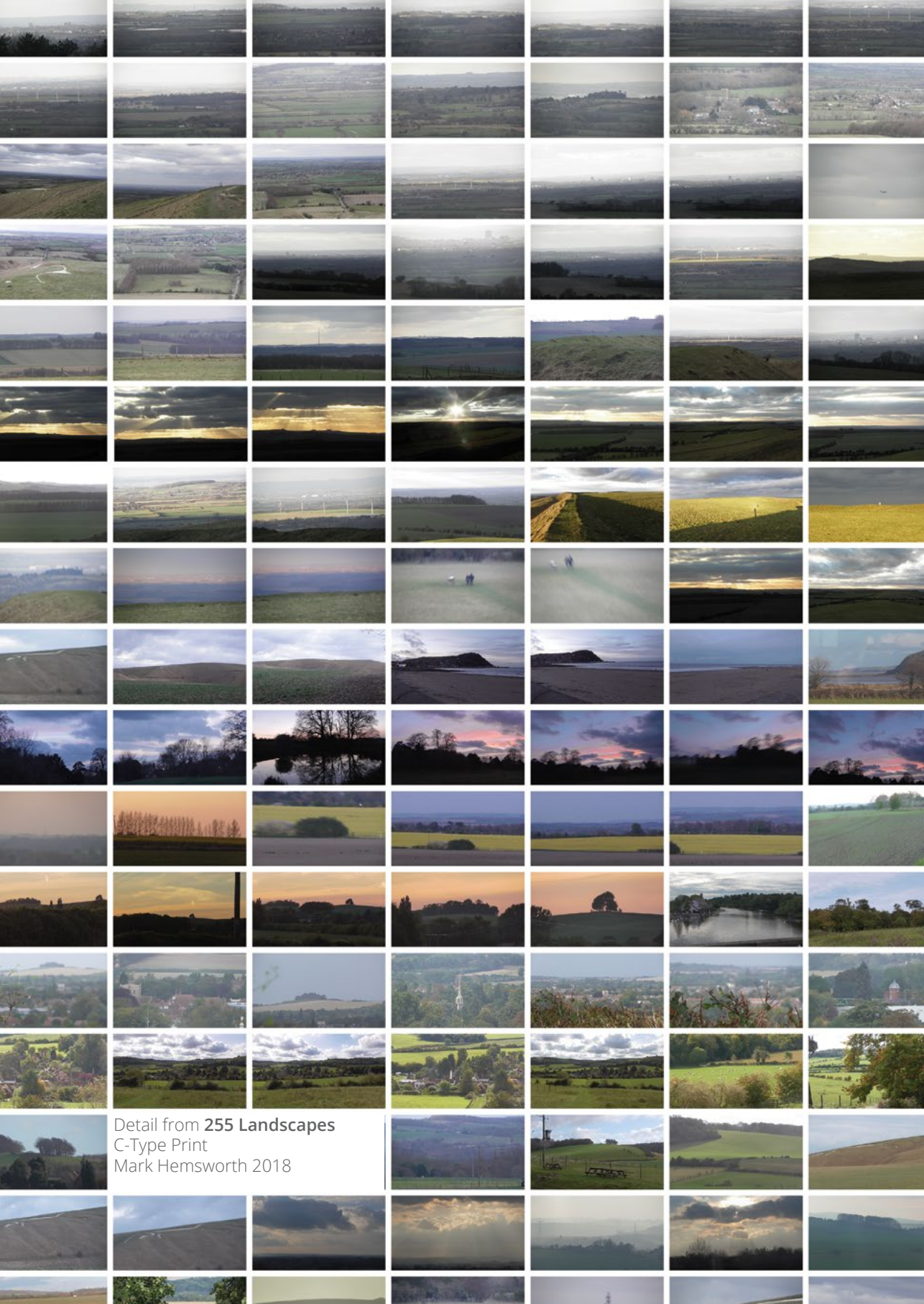
Responding to the current socio-political context – a decade of austerity and the devastating impact it has had on different communities, the divisive issue of Brexit, a pervasive climate of prejudice, intolerance and fear fueled by concerns of terrorism, immigration, so-called ‘fake news’ and the ‘post-truth society’ – arts organisations are at the vanguard of a counter-cultural movement to promote equality, diversity and inclusiveness with a renewed evangelical zeal. One of the many outcomes of this movement is an assertion of the important role creativity plays in society, an embracing by mainstream art establishments of a diversity of art and creative practices shared by a wider spectrum of participants, and a determination to make culture accessible to everyone. Having the opportunity to be creative and to participate in cultural life is not optional; it is a fundamental human right. Furthermore, the creative case for diversity makes organisations like Modern Art Oxford relevant to a wider constituency than traditional gallery-attending audiences and enriches our programming through a far broader range of creative talent, experiences and perspectives.

It is therefore a pleasure and privilege for the gallery to be working again with the Shadowlight Artists, in partnership with Film Oxford, on a two-venue exhibition with Arts at the Old Fire Station titled ***Rising***. We offer our sincere thanks and congratulations to the participating artists, and our gratitude to Richard Duriez and Chris Oakley at Film Oxford, and our colleagues at Arts at the Old Fire Station, for the opportunity to partner with them on this show. *Rising* evidences the rich creative contribution that artists with learning disabilities can make to our cultural life and celebrates the role that creativity can play in all of our lives.

Paul Hobson
Director, Modern Art Oxford



Still from **Time for a Change**
Danny Smith 2018



Detail from **255 Landscapes**
C-Type Print
Mark Hemsworth 2018

Rising Overview

Chris Oakley

The Shadowlight Artists were formed in 2009, and have in common that each member has a learning disability and a demonstrated track record of commitment to their own work, and a desire to not only be seen as creative champions within the learning disability community, but for their work to be seen on an equal footing to that of 'mainstream' artists. Within a supported framework provided by Film Oxford, the Shadowlight Artists have achieved a considerable degree of self-determination. Through monthly meetings the group decide their future direction as well as providing a mutually supportive platform for the creative discussion of their diverse practices.

The group have continued to build their profile on a national level, with screening of the Group's work at festivals (both nationally and internationally), and Richard Hunt's win at the Shape Open 2017, the first time an artist with a learning disability has won the award. Likewise, Russell Highsmith has become the first playwright with a learning disability to bring productions to mainstream theatres. The group won the 2016 *Haelo* film festival award with their collective works in film, the one medium that the group all still share as practitioners.

This current project, *Rising*, is the latest in a series of projects built around the group by Film Oxford, and continues the group's professional development. The project has been designed to deepen the relationship of the artists to mainstream exhibition venues, as well as to expand their collaboration with 'mainstream' artists. The *Rising* exhibition, alongside the production of Russell Highsmith's play *Singles Night*, has been intended to expose the group to the professional practices involved in working with mainstream exhibition venues; for the first time, the group has had curatorial input to the exhibition at the production stage from both Sarah Mossop of the Old Fire Station and Sara Lowes of Modern Art Oxford. In parallel, the Shadowlight Associates group, aimed at expanding the creative opportunities offered by the project to a broader group of participants, has recruited new members with a view to inducting some of the most committed individuals to the core group in the future.

Building on the 2016 publication *Creative Bridges*, this publication aims to give an insight into working with the group from the perspective of mainstream artists and organisations. Sonia Boué relates her personal experiences of working with Richard Hunt, and the evolution of their relationship from one of facilitation to one of genuine collaboration, giving cause for reflection on her own practice. Sarah Mossop relates her experiences of the changing opportunities for people with learning disabilities in terms of access to galleries, and the curatorial approach to work produced by the group.

I have worked with the Shadowlights as artistic advisor and hands-on collaborator since the formation of the group. My aim for the group has always been for their work to be seen in parity to that produced by non-disabled artists, and towards that end I have worked with Richard Duriez, Shadowlight project manager at Film Oxford, to mitigate some of the barriers faced by the group—not least those imposed on them by their lack of access to arts education. As the profile of the group has grown, so has the ambition of the artists in both artistic and creative terms. My collaborations with members of the group have increasingly challenged my imagination both creatively and technically as their work has developed, resulting in the engaging and diverse body of work presented in *Rising*.



Richard Hunt working on
Rocking the Boat on the Beach

A Song, Some Stones and the Sea

Sonia Boué

What if everything you thought you knew about learning disability was wrong?

You might imagine that in a collaboration between a 'mainstream' and a learning disabled artist the balance of support and benefits would tip in one direction. There is a general perception that such work can be 'rewarding' (a problematic notion in itself when tied in to power imbalance), but no real concept that creative learning and professional development might flow in both directions.

I think this is due to lack of exposure and opportunity in general. As a culture we don't know what we haven't yet experienced—on both sides of the 'outsider/mainstream' divide there has been no established forum for experimentation. So with the Shadowlight Artists' *Creative Bridges* and *Rising* projects, a new proposition has been forged. Such has been my collaborative journey with Richard Hunt that, despite a deep personal and professional interest in 'neurodivergence', I couldn't have predicted the level of enrichment this professional relationship brings to my own practice. My conclusion is that more 'mainstream' artists should consider such work not only as egalitarian, but also for professional development on both sides of this somewhat false divide.

These perceptions work both ways. Richard spoke in the language of day care, and referred to me as 'staff' when we first worked together in a freezing artists' studio in December 2015. I envied Richard's flowing lines (he is particularly gifted in this respect), while he depended on my ability to scale up ideas and plan ahead. Through conversation, and Richard's habit of bursting into song, I began to appreciate the complex iconography he holds in the forefront of his mind. This is a blend of religious imagery, animals, lyrics, and a brand of popular culture peopled by superheroes. From these sources, he is able to create vivid tableaux on almost any surface to hand, be it paper, card, canvas or board. He's brimming with it, and it splashes and spills, through his preferred medium of marker pen, in beautiful fluid strokes. There is also an obvious concern with colour, pattern and decoration which emerges spontaneously and flows naturally.

I came to recognise that many of the cognitive challenges Richard faces relating to working memory are familiar to me. Richard also calls on similar creative strategies to compensate for these difficulties—it's really just a question of scale. Had I not worked so closely with him I wouldn't have gained this insight. We're both great improvisers—you have to be when you struggle with memory—and this is gold dust in a creative practice. What Richard brings to our collaboration is the richness of his experience in the moment. It's all about the present, and capturing it is key. What could be viewed as fragmentary can be made whole if the process is held.

After all, sharing complimentary skillsets is a known collaboration hack, so why don't we acknowledge this where learning disability is concerned?

The grand surprise has been that working so closely with Richard has brought influence and benefits to my own painting practice. Evidence of Richard's love of metallics can be traced in some of my paintings of the period. Among other more obvious factors, exposure to Richard's work with line subtly supported my decision to introduce drawn elements into an important cycle of works for my own Arts Council England funded project of 2016, *Through An Artist's Eye*.

Cross pollination is also common in collaboration, so why not consider this too where learning disability is concerned?

Generally speaking, I'm more able to trust the instinct to improvise since our collaboration began, and "go with the flow", as Richard is fond of saying, because I have a deeper understanding of my working process.

So, looking back we've come a long way.

For *Rising*, Richard upped the creative ante to work in 3-D. His vision for his installation *Rocking the Boat on the Beach* emerged one day at Film Oxford. We had recently completed some work incorporating mosaic pieces with acrylic paint on board, and now Richard wanted to paint directly onto stones. Instantly, I saw the connection: this was both a logical progression and characteristic of Richard's highly creative approach. Background research involved sourcing stones and testing media. We chose scotch cobbles (that are also in my garden), available from a local building merchant, and which are porous and take well to Sharpies but not so well to acrylics or watercolours. Test stones appeared on my instagram feed; I considered their weight and how I might need to find adaptations to avoid hand pain in handling them. I revelled in these new materials, especially the effect of ink on stone. I've yet to discover what echoes this might find in my own work, but I found the exercise absorbing and it engendered many conversations and much comment. What artist doesn't benefit from feedback?

We planned to work in my home studio at the end of the garden—which in effect is a sea of scotch stones. For several weeks Richard valiantly traversed my stones to work on his stones in the studio—a sense of overlapping realities occurred. We were surrounded by stones, and as Richard responded to the shape, lines and contours of each of his stones the task at times felt insurmountable. The challenge at this point was to adapt to the three dimensionality of the stones and to work up Richard's ideas, which sometimes took the form of a provisional sketch. As I encouraged him to push the work on he often told me: it's not easy. Here, I lent Richard some of my professional experience—I could anticipate more readily what would be required in the gallery space. By the end of our process this professional learning was embedded, and can be referred back to for future ventures. It is painful to think about how many learning disabled artists don't get such opportunity to work ambitiously, as this is ultimately what all artists need to raise their game.

Holding the whole installation piece in mind while allowing for the spontaneity of the individual responses became another concern as the stones began to grow in number. The studio space allowed us to try out groupings, but the decision to show the stones on the gallery floor (not raised as originally planned), for both practical and creative reasons, prompted further discussion and adaptation regarding design. Visual impact from floor level would not be the same as that seen from waist height—not having designed an installation before, these were new ideas for Richard to absorb.

I led on practicalities while Richard led on content. We were co-workers feeling our way into the job.

At the outset Richard had imagined a water element to his installation, and in its first form this was to be a waterfall effect, which we played with for some time. This was kicked into the long grass when an entirely new element emerged at about the halfway mark; a boat! The shifting, layering and building of allusion in Richard's work is an organic process I recognise and share. The boat gave us a whole new challenge, and the waterfall became the sea. It was around this time that Richard began to find the stones in my garden a barrier and we relocated to Film Oxford.

Our work also occurred in two parts time-wise, with an intervening busy patch for me. I was commissioned to make a programme for Radio 4 called *The Art of Now: Return to Catalonia*, retracing my father's exile journey from Spain to England in reverse. At Le Barcarès, site of my father's internment in France, I filmed the sea, and so when Richard switched from waterfall to sea it seemed natural to offer him my footage. Here our practices have merged again, adding another layer to the work. Richard is generous and inclusive, and has given a platform to my creative output within his installation.

At the final stage of our pre-show preparations we practiced the install at my studios at Magdalen Road. Richard appeared like a magician with a bag of tricks, pulling all manner of shells (each one carefully wrapped) out of a cloth bag. He had been on a day trip to the coast of England, and this experience had added to his vision. The piece de resistance was a blue ceramic seal he'd found in a charity shop. He indicated that the colour of the seal was a near match to the painted trim on the boat—Richard's precise colour-matching ability is a feature of his painting practice. Some of this activity was surprising to me; I'd never guessed that Richard might share an important element of my own practice, which often includes assemblage elements and has a strong focus on objects. Richard's process was again uncannily familiar. I too trawl charity shops for inspiration, and this activity is further evidence that Richard is, like many of us, always working.

As we assembled the installation I reflected that Richard's idea to work on small stones and use number to create work on a significant scale is a highly creative and intelligent approach to cognitive challenge. His strength is working close up and in detail—employing a method of repetition (i.e. painting individual stones) with variation (of subject and motif) in this work has been a masterstroke in terms of self-designed accessibility.

A project like *Rising* achieves funding in a highly competitive environment due to a talented roster of learning disabled artists. This is not to play down the extraordinary work of lead artist Chris Oakley, and Richard Duriez at Film Oxford in nurturing the group over many years, but rather to seek to unpick the wider power dynamics at play in the arts. In this sense the Shadowlight Artists are providers of opportunity for their 'mainstream' counterparts, a fact we would do well to remember.

Such areas of practice and enquiry as *Rising* opens out, in the field of collaborative practice across 'neurotype', can inform mainstream arts in my view. This work acts not only as an invitation to view, but also as a provocation to think again about learning disability.



Stone from **Rocking the Boat on the Beach**
Richard Hunt 2018



Left to right: Wendy Belcher, Russell Highsmith, Mark Hemsworth, Danny Smith, Tom Breach, Ricahrd Hunt, Sarah Mossop and Lucy Skuce at production meeting, August 2018

An Outsider View

Chris Oakley interviews
Sarah Mossop

CO: Could you give me a quick summary of your background in the arts, and your experiences of working with groups with learning disabilities?

SM: I trained in Sculpture at Chelsea School of Art. On graduating, I continued making my own work but it had to be alongside working to earn a living and I was keen to find work in the arts sector, or where I could use my art skills. My first job was in Colchester, Essex, at a large hospital for people with learning disabilities. It was back in the days when many people with learning disabilities lived in institutions. Turner Village Hospital was a large complex of Victorian buildings, where adults, from 16-year-olds to people in their 80s spent all their days, rarely going out. I worked in the small Occupational Therapy department, providing art therapy. I found it quite astounding that I was just thrown in the deep end, without any training, and I remember feeling uneasy about the situation. I was struck by how limited the opportunities were for the people I was working with, and I had a sense of unfairness that they were spending the greater part of their lives in an institution, with a very narrow experience of life. Shortly after this, many institutions of this kind were disbanded and care in the community was introduced, giving more people with learning disabilities the support to live independently.

I was in my early 20s, and I felt very ill-equipped to offer a beneficial experience to people with learning disabilities because, up until this time, like many people, my contact with them had been very limited. I worked at the hospital for just under a year, leaving to take up a position at a commercial gallery—it was a very different world. My career changed again when I studied for a postgraduate degree in art education, then taking up a post in the art department at a large comprehensive school.

My early experience of working with people with learning disabilities had a profound affect on me, which informed my approach to teaching in that I think I had a heightened awareness of the creative potential of all students, regardless of their academic ability. Of course, in theory this should always be the case in education, but sadly it isn't always in practice. After five years teaching, I was seconded to set up an education programme at the local art gallery in Colchester. This move into gallery education provided my first experience of working at the interface between art, artists, and audiences with the aim of widening access and opportunities for participation.

My career continued in gallery education, next at the Crafts Council in London then at Modern Art Oxford from 2002. During this time the focus shifted from education programmes largely being devised and implemented separately from exhibition programming to a more integrated approach, with opportunities for developing more long-term relationships and partnerships in the community, such as with Film Oxford and the Shadowlight Artists. In 2014 I started working part-time as Visual Arts Programme Manager at Arts at the Old Fire Station. It's rather a different role, programming and curating

exhibitions, and it's a change for me to be working in an arts centre that showcases work across art forms. The ethos of Arts at the Old Fire Station is very inclusive, prioritising supporting early to mid-career artists with advice, networks and promotion as well as exhibiting their work. The programme is quite broad (including craft and design as well as fine art) and we're open to working with artists who have different kinds of disability, responding positively to opportunities when they arise. For example, Sonia Boué is doing a lot of work to support neurodivergent artists, and we're collaborating with her to show work by artists who may otherwise find it difficult to access mainstream gallery spaces.

CO: Within the context of first working with galleries on outreach programmes, was there a time when you started to see more groups of people with disabilities, specifically learning disabilities, integrated?

SM: For a long period I didn't have any contact with people with learning disabilities. I was aware that there had been a big political shift in the mid 1980s to care in the community, and institutions like the one I had worked at were closed. This coincided with a time when galleries were developing education and access programmes and we started to have gallery visits by groups from organisations who were working with people with learning disabilities; they were making sure they had access to mainstream arts organisations—going to the theatre, visiting galleries, and participating in arts activities.

During the 1990s, there was an increase in galleries getting visits by a wide range of disability groups and opportunities for education and learning teams to work on collaborative projects, helping to find funding and often showcasing the work produced.

CO: Could tell me about your involvement with the Shadowlights over recent years?

SM: I know the group was formed in 2009, and it must have been fairly soon after that that I first had contact with them; I was invited by Film Oxford to an event where the Shadowlight Artists were presenting their first project. I was impressed by the quality of the work and also the way in which Film Oxford was giving a voice to the artists, and not trying to speak for them. I was very moved by how that was happening. After that, Richard Duriez got in touch with me and asked if there were any opportunities to show the work by the Shadowlight Artists at Modern Art Oxford.

I think our first collaboration was an event in the basement space where films were screened and a number of artists talked about their experience of working on the project. It was amazing—a fantastic number of people came along, and the artists spoke very eloquently about their experience

and the importance of Film Oxford's support, even for things like arranging travel so they could get to Oxford, and a lot of practical considerations which clearly had been really carefully thought through to enable them to meet regularly as a group and to produce work.

After leaving MAO I kept in touch and saw their first exhibition in the Project Space there. I'd hear occasionally from Sonia Boué about the work she'd been doing with Richard Hunt. More recently, Richard Duriez contacted me about the possibility of an exhibition across Modern Art Oxford and Arts at the Old Fire Station. The different kinds of spaces enable us to show the breadth of work across digital media, painting, installation and photography. It's a good way of mixing audiences across the two venues and getting a wider range of people to see the work.

CO: One of the things about this project, following on from Creative Bridges, the last project, is that increasingly many of the artists have moved away from digital media, which was always the original starting point, to move into increasingly ambitious forms. The breadth of that is going to be shown across the two sites, reflecting that sort of 'spread'.

SM: I presume that's come about because of the support that's been given to the artists' development: the more time they've had to immerse themselves in their creative practice, and through contact with other practitioners, they've found there are particular areas of interest; as with all art practitioners, they've gravitated towards whatever media best presents their ideas. Artistic development is interesting to see and track, particularly for the members who have been part of the group from the start.

CO: I'm interested in the evolution you've seen in the group as an involved outsider over the years. Are there any changes you've perceived over that period?

SM: I recently attended a meeting at Film Oxford, and most of the artists were there, talking about their plans for the exhibition; I presented myself as one of the people they'd be working with, this time as a curator. I was conscious that it was very similar to sitting with any group of artists who were working towards a group show. There was a real sense of respect for each other, each artist having time to talk about their work and show images so I'd get a better sense of what was being planned, with the support of Film Oxford making it possible for everyone to be there and providing the platform for the meeting to be happening. In terms of professional development, it felt like a group that was fully formed and confident with each other. There was a sense of both familiarity with each other (there was quite a lot of humour), and also curiosity and interest in each other's work. I remember at one point somebody saying, "Oh, I haven't seen that one before", and there was an interest in how each other's work was developing.

curiosity and interest in each other's work. I remember at one point somebody saying, "Oh, I haven't seen that one before", and there was an interest in how each other's work was developing.

We have already shown Russell's play, *Singles Night* at the Old Fire Station, so in terms of the sequence of events it's been quite interesting to see how a theatre event was presented and what the reaction of the audience was to that, before we have the gallery event. In the theatre it's more concentrated, you're getting feedback straight away, and with exhibitions it's often much more dispersed in terms of the nature of the engagement. We're having an opening event, so that will be an opportunity for the artists to celebrate their achievements and to hear responses to their work.

CO: How do you see the role of work made by artists with learning disabilities within mainstream settings? How do you see it sitting amongst the programme as a whole?

SM: For me it goes back to that early experience of working in the hospital, and in terms of equality and inclusion, I think it's interesting to think of it the other way around—why should artists with learning disabilities not have an opportunity to show their work, given that they're all members of society, and they're all contributors?

In the context of an exhibition, some artists with disabilities are happy to have their disability identified, and others prefer not to. It's important to respect individual preferences. The Shadowlight Artists have always identified as having learning disabilities. It's not the main reason for showing the work, but I think it's quite important that it's there because it's helpful for the public to recognise the context.

For example, I thought understanding that context really enhanced my experience of Russell's play, because there's a certain innocence to the dialogue; it wasn't too 'knowing'. It highlighted some of the qualities I recognise in the visual artwork as well, and it's important to be careful how you describe it, because I don't want to imply that we're not using the same curatorial criteria when assessing the quality of work. It's made me think again about what we're planning for the exhibition text and how much information to provide about the work. Initially, you want people to go into the gallery, see the work and be drawn to it just in itself, but I think there's an additional layer of appreciation audiences can get by having text about the artist and their intentions. I've noticed on numerous occasions in the past, particularly when I've been discussing exhibitions with visiting groups, that you see people who seemed a bit disengaged suddenly start to take more of an interest.

CO: This touches on an interesting area for me. From a curatorial perspective, are you making quality judgements about the quality of work in the same way as you would for work by 'mainstream' artists, or do new criteria come into play?

SM: I suppose the answer is not really. In agreeing to the exhibition I had already made a judgement that the quality of work was suitable for the gallery. There's usually a selection process by the artists themselves; very few artists would show all the work they've produced, and the same applies to the Shadowlight Artists—indeed, I know you and Richard already helped the artists select which work to exhibit even before I saw what was being proposed for the exhibition—and you've asked my opinion about a few pieces. For any artist, it's important to get experience of how to make these judgements themselves, and often it is done with advice from other people, such as curators. At the OFS we apply exactly the same kind of rigour to the advice about which work the Shadowlight Artists should show; then there are other considerations – such as hanging systems, framing, exhibition layout etc; the same amount of time and resources are put into the way the work is displayed as with any other exhibition. This all contributes to the public experience. I think it's very important that the work is displayed professionally; this is something I've felt throughout my career working in galleries – if you're showing children's work or school exhibitions, it's really important to apply that same kind of rigour to the presentation of the work.

CO: Are there any other aspects or challenges to the exhibition of disability arts from a curatorial perspective?

SM: I think that's what I was touching on before, talking about the sensitivities of how people want to be identified. The Shadowlight group are clearly happy with being identified as artists with learning disabilities, and Film Oxford support that in a way I feel is appropriate. I think it can add to the viewer's appreciation of the artwork to know something about the artist's background and intentions and the context in which it was made; it can help provide insights into the work. Last year, at a conference, I attended a workshop led by the National Disability Arts Collective & Archive; one of their slogans is "Nothing about us without us", and that's prompted me to check that we include the voice of the Shadowlight Artists in this interview and in the exhibition information.

CO: Are there any other observations you have about the work the group has produced?

SM: Perhaps because there's been quite a gap between this exhibition and my last experience of working with the artists, I particularly enjoyed the familiarity of returning to Film Oxford and hearing the group talk about their work. As with other artists, their individual style of working remains

recognisable but I think their work has become more ambitious, such as Lucy Skuce's installation, and sophisticated in the presentation, e.g. Mark Hemsworth's large-scale multiple images. I was interested to hear Richard Duriez comment that Richard Hunt is very prolific, which indicates how much his art practice means to him. It's clear being part of the Shadowlight group has become a significant part of each of their lives. My observation is that the project has produced fantastic results, and the longevity of it is really remarkable. It's a credit to the artists themselves, and to Film Oxford's commitment to continue supporting the group—and securing opportunities to showcase their work. I think what's particularly interesting is the model of having mainstream artists, such as Sonia Boué and Chris Oakley, acting as artist-mentors, and supporting the artists with learning disabilities on a one-to-one basis to develop their work and access a wider audience. I think it would be very difficult for people with learning disabilities to negotiate all this on their own.

CO: I have a question from Danny Smith: *"The Shadowlight Artists are a talented group of artists with learning difficulties. What is it like to work with the group compared to working with other artists?"*.

SM: The main difference is that I'm working with the group as well as the people supporting the artists. We had an exhibition at the Old Fire Station a couple of years ago; that was a similar situation where a very talented disabled artist had an artist-mentor and it involved working with both of them to put on the exhibition – the mentor had a very important role in coordinating and curating the exhibition, but the disabled artist's work was entirely her own and it was shown to the same high standard as any professional artist. It's similar with the Shadowlight artists. The Film Oxford team and artist mentors have an important support role, but I don't think that in any way undermines the individual voices of the Shadowlight Artists. That is the only difference, everything else is exactly the same as working with other artists. We still have the same technical and marketing requirements, and the production process required is the same.



Elements of **Rocking the Boat on the Beach**
Richard Hunt 2018

About the Artists



Still from **Revenge of the Penguin**
Tom Breach 2018

Tom Breach

Tom Breach is 22, lives in Oxford and has Asperger's. Tom is the most recent addition to the Shadowlight Artists, having joined the core group from the Associates group during the course of the 2015-16 ***Creative Bridges*** project. Tom demonstrated strong drawing skills alongside an interest in the cartoon and comic book forms from the outset of his involvement with the group. His work often features elements documenting the geography of his upbringing in South London alongside fantasy elements.

For his first solo project with the core group, Tom has produced ***Revenge of the Penguin***, an animation which blends autobiography and fantasy. Starting with an incident in Tom's early childhood, during which he threw his sister's toy penguin into the lake at Thamesmead, the film imagines the penguin re-emerging from the lake 20 years later to exact its revenge on the adult Tom.

"Working on Revenge of the Penguin was interesting and good fun. Between me and my dad we came up with the idea. When I was very young, like 5 or 6, I threw my sister's toy penguin in the lake—that inspired the story"



Stills from **Revenge of the Penguin**
Tom Breach 2018





Elements from
Rocking the Boat on the Beach
Richard Hunt 2018

Richard Hunt

Richard Hunt was born in 1972 in Plymouth, and grew up in Gibraltar. He now lives in Rose Hill in Oxford. Richard is a prolific painter, who in 2017 won the Shape Open Award with work produced during the *Creative Bridges* project.

Much of Richard's earlier work is based around painting, and reflects his interest in popular culture blended with his identification of the act of painting as a devotional activity; he identifies his creativity as an extension of his Catholic faith, and sees painting as a direct expression of his belief. He has been working in collaboration with artist Sonia Boué for the past four years, and this partnership has helped Richard to develop his self-taught technique and work on a larger scale in the context of a professional studio environment.

After winning the Shape Open, Richard decided to expand his practice to embrace elements of sculpture and textured surfaces. Continuing his successful collaboration with Sonia, Richard has recently been experimenting with incorporating elements of mosaic into his painting, and utilising painted found objects to create new works. His installation work for *Rising* continues Richard's interest in water, recreating a seashore scene utilising painted rocks and a boat form. Each of the rocks represents a song, and has a unique iconography often relating to popular culture—in particular musicals.

"I enjoy working with Sonia—it's different to the way I work on my own. We've been working together for a few years now. Sonia helped me find a way to work on the rocks for Rocking the Boat on the Beach."

Richard's ambition is to be respected as an artist by the wider community, and not to be defined as an artist with Down's Syndrome.

Sonia Boué

Sonia Boué has a multiform artistic practice, with a focus on themes of exile and displacement. She specialises in object work, painting, installation, video and performance in an ongoing postmemory project about the Spanish Civil War—*Barcelona in a Bag*.

Sonia also develops and leads creative projects, such as the Arts Council funded *Through An Artist's Eye*. Recent work includes a film collaboration with Tate Britain about the British artist Felicia Browne. A painterly collaboration with Richard Hunt of the Shadowlight Artists won the Shape Open Award 2017. Other recent work includes the BBC Radio 4 programme *The Art of Now: Return to Catalonia* with Overtone Productions. Her new project is the Arts Council funded *Museum for Object Research*, which includes a professional development initiative for autistic project leadership.

"Objects are intimately associated with memory, and acquire a human imprint. I believe that objects are not passive observers; they hoard our deepest recollections, document narratives, and act as active participants in human consciousness. Their infinite potential to tell a story inspires all the branches of my multi-form practice."

Story telling around the objects I find allows me to be both autobiographical and to comment on the wider picture as I see it. Disparate fragments of experience, memory and observation become fixed on a surface in a work, providing layers or snatches of meaning. I am especially aware that at any moment compositions could change, be blown by the wind and scattered again. My work makes a show of permanence, a semblance of coherence from what is essentially temporal and chaotic."

soniaboue.co.uk



Richard Hunt and Sonia Boué
Oxford, 2018



Sparkle of the Pear
Mixed media
Richard Hunt 2018



Rocking the Boat on the Beach
Test assembly
Richard Hunt 2018



Video still from **Blue Sash Window**
projection video
Lucy Skuce 2018

Lucy Skuce

Lucy Skuce was born in 1981 in Banbury, Oxfordshire, and grew up in Worcestershire. She lives in Didcot, Oxfordshire.

Lucy is an artist and filmmaker who was born with profound and multiple disabilities. She bought her first VHS camcorder as a young woman and started to film her life, including the objects and places she identifies as important. Since working as part of the Shadowlight group, her interests have expanded to working in media other than film, and in recent years Lucy has increasingly embraced sculptural and installation forms. Much of Lucy's work expresses her desire for independence, exercised through her ownership and control of the production process: scripting, shooting and editing her films herself. Her work in film has been screened both within the UK and internationally, including Liberty Festival (National Film Theatre BFI Southbank), and Abilities Festival (Toronto).

For *Rising*, Lucy has created an ambitious installation work resulting from her interests in construction and domestic architecture. *Blue Sash Window* features an imposing sculptural element based around a real sash window, through which we see Lucy in her ideal environment, recreated through video projection. This is Lucy's most ambitious project to date in both creative and technical terms, and Lucy wishes to incorporate the work into her domestic environment after the conclusion of the exhibition.

"It was a fantastic project to work on, making my perfect blue room, which is a virtual room made with 3D animation, projected on my big blue sash window in a frame. It has me turning on switches for my lights and my fan. I acted this out with green screen filming."

Chris Oakley

Chris Oakley works with video, digital media and installation, and exhibits internationally. He has worked with the Shadowlights since their formation in 2009, and collaborated with Lucy on ***Blue Sash Window***.

"Working with Lucy on this project was very rewarding. Lucy wanted to make a piece continuing her previous work in sculptural installation. As with most of Lucy's work, it is centred around her current interest in construction, and her long-standing obsession with the design of sash windows. For Lucy, creating this quite architectural piece allowed her to explore the roles involved in construction, and consider each element of the construction in great depth."

chrisoakley.com



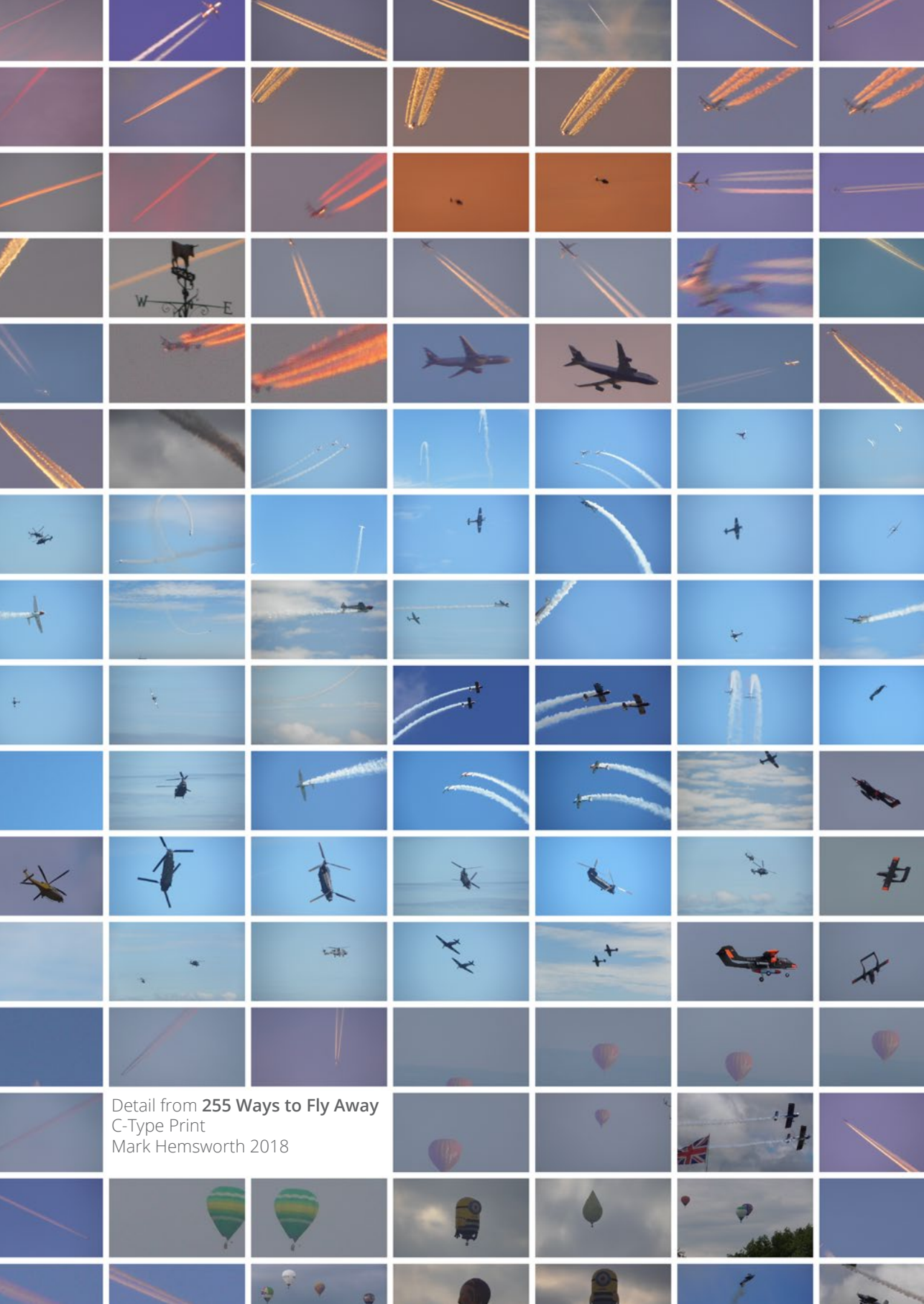
Chris Oakley and Lucy Skuce
Film Oxford, 2017



Lucy constructing **Blue Sash Window**
Lucy Skuce 2018



Filming greenscreen for **Blue Sash Window**
Lucy Skuce 2018



Detail from **255 Ways to Fly Away**
C-Type Print
Mark Hemsworth 2018

Mark Hemsworth

Mark Hemsworth was born in 1968 in Reading and grew up in Cholsey, Oxfordshire with his family.

Mark has a very broad base in the visual arts: he is a skilled draughtsman and accomplished watercolourist whose interests in recent years have shifted towards photography, film and video. He is passionate about walking and the landscape, and this passion has converged with his obsession with making and collecting images and recordings on his frequent photography walks.

Working with filmmaker Naomi Morris and artist Chris Oakley Mark has created an entirely new body of work for ***Rising*** consisting of a series of large digital print works. Each piece features a grid of 255 images themed around a classic photography subject (sunsets, landscapes, flowers etc.), and represents a selection of the many thousands of digital photographs Mark has taken over recent years. These works are accompanied by a film which gives us an insight into Mark's thought processes whilst on his photography walks.

"I am 100% happy with my prints, the next time I see them will be on the gallery wall. I feel super excited and proud, my moment in the limelight."

Naomi Morris

"Mark and I have continued to explore the Oxfordshire countryside, this time focusing on his photography and the way he collects images. Mark has walked his local landscape all his life and has studied, in great detail, all that it has to offer. As a result, he is able to navigate the terrain with exceptional accuracy and has a catalogue of photographs representing his natural regional environment in all weathers and seasons. Mark's work reminds me of my own obsession with capturing memorable moments, locating myself in space and the building of memory maps.

Creativity and self expression are important to me. I am a multi form artist experimenting mainly in film, photography, projection and movement. I support people to express themselves and have worked with Pegasus Theatre, Dance to Health, Anjali, Oxford Youth Dance, Ciao!, and OYAP."

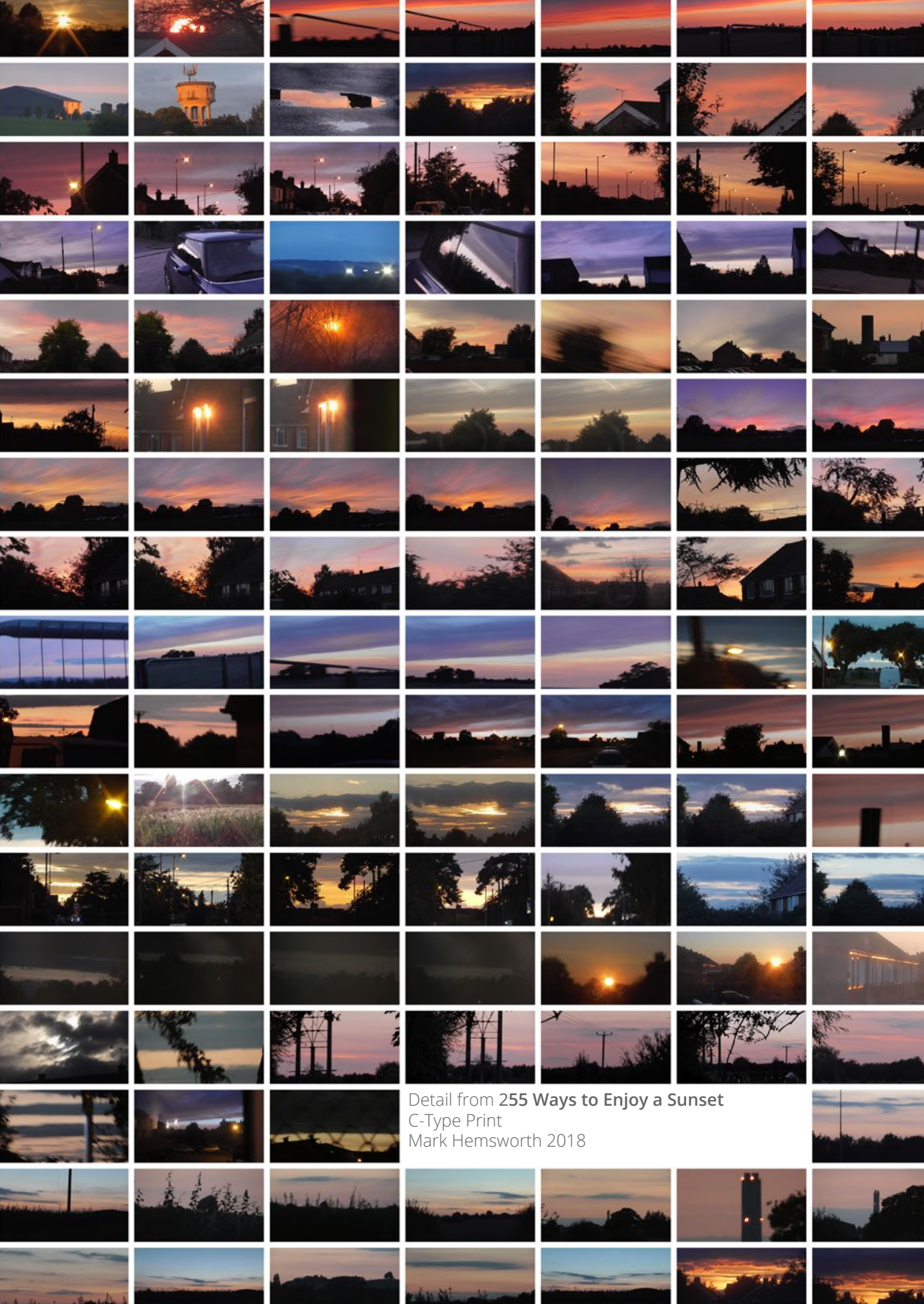
naomiemorris.wix.com/portfolio



Mark Hemsworth
Photography walk at Turville 2018



Detail from **255 Missions to the Moon**
C-Type Print
Mark Hemsworth 2018



Detail from 255 Ways to Enjoy a Sunset
C-Type Print
Mark Hemsworth 2018



Singles Night
Performance photograph
Russell Highsmith 2018

Russell Highsmith

Russell Highsmith was born in Oxford in 1985, and lives in Abingdon. He is the UK's only playwright with a learning disability.

"I was 16 weeks premature. I weighed 798 grams (half a bag of sugar); I was so small I nearly died. I have right-sided hemiplegia and learning disabilities. I have been script writing since 2007, and won an award for one of my scripts in 2010. I always loved old comedies from the 70s and 80s like Dad's Army and Porridge. I thought "I can also write something that will make people laugh". I wanted to write about real life situations, including some from my own life."

Russell originally joined the Shadowlights to explore filmmaking, but in recent years has turned his attention to writing for the stage. Building on his previous writing and direction projects, Russell has expanded his writing from short film scripts into long-form work.

*"I wrote my first comedy play two years ago, which grew out of a screenplay. Playwright Mark Ralph-Bowman from Film Oxford helped me transfer it to the stage. It was called **The Big Shock**. It was performed in 2016 to a packed house at the Cornerstone in Didcot. I also got more advice from local writer Paul Mayhew-Archer (co-writer on *The Vicar of Dibley*) who gave me lots of encouragement."*

Following on from the success of **The Big Shock**, Russell developed a new play in collaboration with playwright and theatre director Mark Ralph-Bowman. Drawing on Russell's own experiences of the dating circuit, **Singles Night** explores the comedy and pain of falling in love.

Mark Ralph-Bowman

"I've worked in and with theatre in the UK, Europe and Africa as teacher, director and writer. Much of that work has been attempting to support and promote young theatre practitioners. Building on the experience Russell and I had working together in 2016 has been exciting for both of us. He has begun to embrace and explore the possibilities of how actors bring to life characters and action in an empty space as opposed to containing them in a realistic set within the frame of the screen."



**Russell Highsmith and
Mark Ralph-Bowman**
Script editing session, May 2018



Singles Night
Rehearsal photographs
Russell Highsmith 2018





Danny Smith and Roly Carline shooting
Time to Leave
Danny Smith 2018
Image: Roger Gilboy

Danny Smith

Danny Smith was born 1975 in Wallingford where he grew up, and now lives in Oxford.

Danny has clear artistic intentions: to show independence, demonstrate emotions associated with change and personal empowerment. Danny identifies pride in being a role model for other disabled people seeking an independent life. He has broad artistic interests and has worked in a wide range of media from painting and photography to performance, animation and documentary. His work across these media shows a common theme; Danny's desire to demonstrate self-determination, and explore the emotions triggered by change in his own life. In recent years, Danny has moved from New Cross in London where he lived for 15 years to Oxford, where he continues to live independently. His work in painting, photography and video has been exhibited within the UK and internationally, and his film *Time for a Change* screened at New York's Sprout festival.

Working with interdisciplinary artist Roland Carline, Danny has continued to explore the performative elements of his practice in the video piece *Time to Leave*, which originated from Danny's interest in the dream state. Danny sees dreams as a gateway to our ancestral life, and continues some of the themes of the rituals of human prehistory and how they relate to everyday life. In the film, Danny performs a dance in an elaborate fish god costume adorned with iconography representing elements of Danny's life.

"What I liked about Roly is he's a good person to work with—he's an interesting character. He's good at working with other artists—he understands what I'm into."



Video stills from **Time to Leave**
Danny Smith 2018



Roland Carline

Roland Carline (b. 1981, Aberystwyth) BA (Hons) Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, 2001-2003. Post Graduate Diploma Royal Academy of Arts 2015-2018

Roland Carline makes interdisciplinary work individually and collectively that covers most media, including painting, sculpture, film and performance.

Roland believes in the act of making and showing as a transformative process that can be a powerful vehicle for learning, relationship building, social and political resistance. He is interested in the ways in which humour can lighten this complex process.

"Danny and I began this film by thinking about water as an amazing source of regeneration. We have a lot in common as artists; we are both performers, we love costume and spectacle and we are both fascinated by ancient rituals and magic."



Video still from **Time to Leave**
Danny Smith 2018

Shadowlight Associates

The Shadowlight Associates were formed to offer artistic opportunities to a broader group. They work with the Shadowlight Artists on group productions, which assists the Associates who wish to explore or extend their skills whilst benefiting the core group who work in a mentoring role.

The Associates are individuals who have been identified by the core group as having artistic potential, or who are already accomplished in a specific artform and wish to experiment with a new medium. The Associates are also seen as a recruitment pool for the core group, and it is hoped that Associates will go on to become full members of the group. The Associates have worked with the core group on the video pieces *L.R.R.H.* and *Undersea Adventure*.

Otto Baxter

Otto is an actor and performer who has appeared in independent films, including the BAFTA nominated *Samuel-613* and a number of television documentaries. He is a member of Drag Syndrome, the UK's first Down's Syndrome drag act.

Wendy Belcher

Wendy has been involved with Film Oxford for a number of years, and enjoys the performance aspects of her work with the Shadowlight group.

"The Shadowlight Artists is a really nice group. I like talking to people and making friends. My favourite things are doing the camera work and acting. I am really looking forward to doing more fun activities with the group."

Maureen Trowell

Maureen creates rich artwork that has been an asset to the group productions, with a particular interest in animal subjects. She has been gaining confidence in front of the camera, and is increasing her appearance in the group's filmed output.

Abul Kasem

Abul's interests lie in filmmaking, and he is particularly keen to develop his skills as a camera operator.

Sophie Henderson

Sophie is an actor and singer. She is a member of Chipping Norton Adult Drama Group and has appeared in productions including *The Addams Family*, and Chipping Norton Singers. She also attends the Cherwell Theatre Company. Sophie was in a production of *The Monstrum* which was originally performed at the National Theatre.

Shadowlight Associates Collaborators

Following the model of the individual projects, the Shadowlights and the Associates have collaborated with professionals in creative and technical support roles on their group projects. These projects have been led by Chris Oakley with support from Daniel Breach.

Daniel Breach

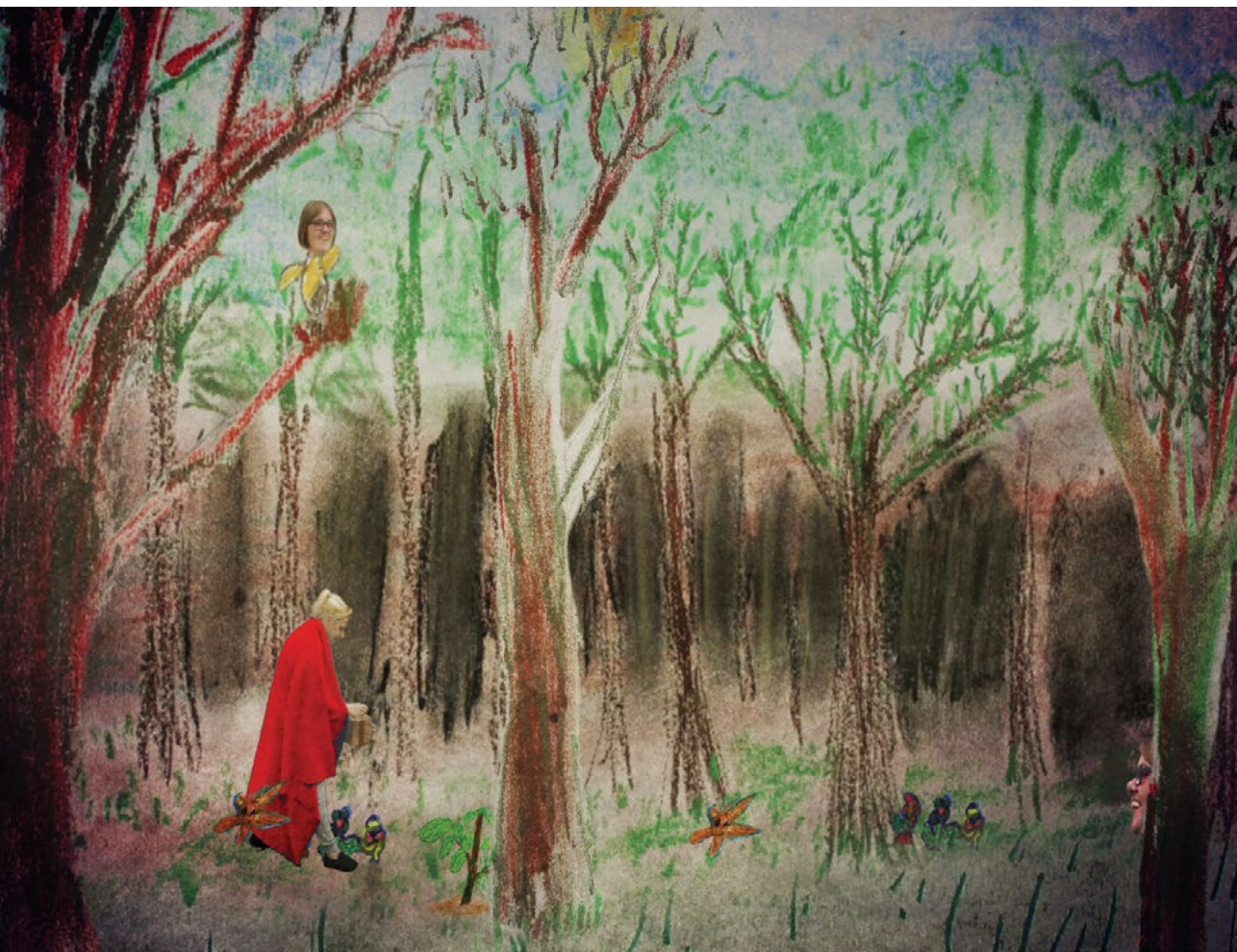
Danny has provided creative and technical support on the Shadowlight group projects, in addition to supporting the production of some of the individual artists' work.

"As an artist and filmmaker I enjoy any opportunity to help others learn and explore creative processes using the media of art and film. Having health issues that restrict my ability to work full-time, it is rewarding to volunteer utilising the skills and knowledge I have gained over time.

When people like the Shadowlights Artists get the chance to show their combined and individual talents, it is especially rewarding to be a part of the team helping the artists to make and showcase their work."

Having over the years studied creative forms of music technology, drama and theatre skills, fine art and film making along with screenwriting and song writing I am open to future collaborations and paid or volunteer opportunities, especially if they give others with some form of disadvantage the chance to explore finding within themselves abilities they may not have realised they had.

It is great to help others to discover more within themselves that may give them a sense of pride and achievement and to help show the creative industries that we all have talents. "



Wendy Belcher and Sophie Henderson in **L.R.R.H**
Video still
The Shadowlight Artists 2018



Wendy Belcher and Tom Breach in **L.R.R.H**
Video still
The Shadowlight Artists 2018



Sophie Henderson and Wendy Belcher in
Undersea Adventure
Video still
The Shadowlight Artists 2018



Abul Kasem, Wendy Belcher, Sophie Henderson
and Maureen Trowell in **Undersea Adventure**
Video still
The Shadowlight Artists 2018



Abul Kasem, Wendy Belcher, Sophie Henderson and Maureen
Trowell in **Undersea Adventure**
Video still
The Shadowlight Artists 2018



Otto Baxter in **Undersea Adventure**
Video still
The Shadowlight Artists 2018

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