

Rural Works



Vertical Studio, 2018

Credits

With thanks to:

Mr. J. Nicoll and family
Fallowfield Joinery
Blackhorse Workshop
Welsh School of Architecture

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Forest Aperture
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Scenes through the Vertical
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Rural Gateway
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Contents

2

Introduction

Zoë Berman
Tutor, Rural Works

3

Context

The Lake District
Staveley

14

Group Chapters

Forest Aperture
Scenes Through the Vertical
Rural Gateway

Introduction

This short publication documents the third year of Rural Works, an educational teaching event that has been held annually in the village of Staveley in the Lake District since 2016. The workshop sees a group of architecture students from the Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff embarking on a field trip to the local area. The group respond to the setting with sketches, hand drawings, and the making of temporary installations that students design and install themselves.

With permission from the owners, we again worked this year on the edge of Staveley Park, in the privately owned but publicly accessible patch of woodland that sits along the footpath leading away from the village. Students worked in small groups to create temporary installations that sought to draw attention to an existing element of the site, to in some way enhance the existing setting and add a moment of interest. We worked with a limited palette of low-cost, readily available and simple materials. Working with simple materials is important to the ethos of Rural Works. We test out creative interventions at minimal expense – and put the emphasis on creativity, encouraging students to think about what enjoyable, interesting proposals can be created within finite limitations.

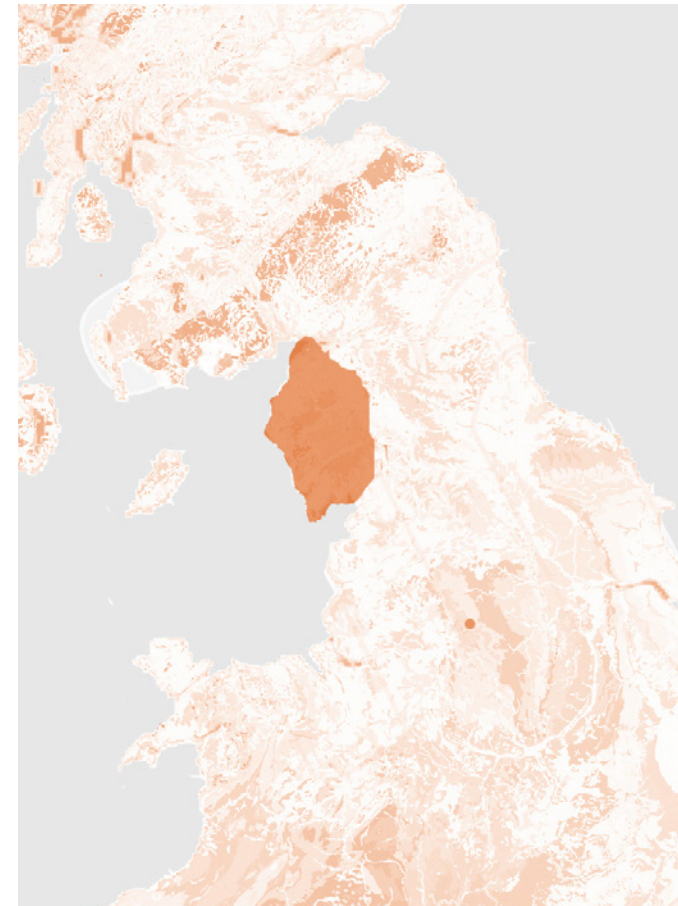
All of the interventions are humble in scale and light-touch. Students worked, over the course of just four days, to design and install a temporary installation. All the installations were set up without any permanent fixings so as to leave no trace on the land after we departed. The installations were then transported and rearranged in the studio spaces of the Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff in an exhibition of work, to show other students and academics what had been created.

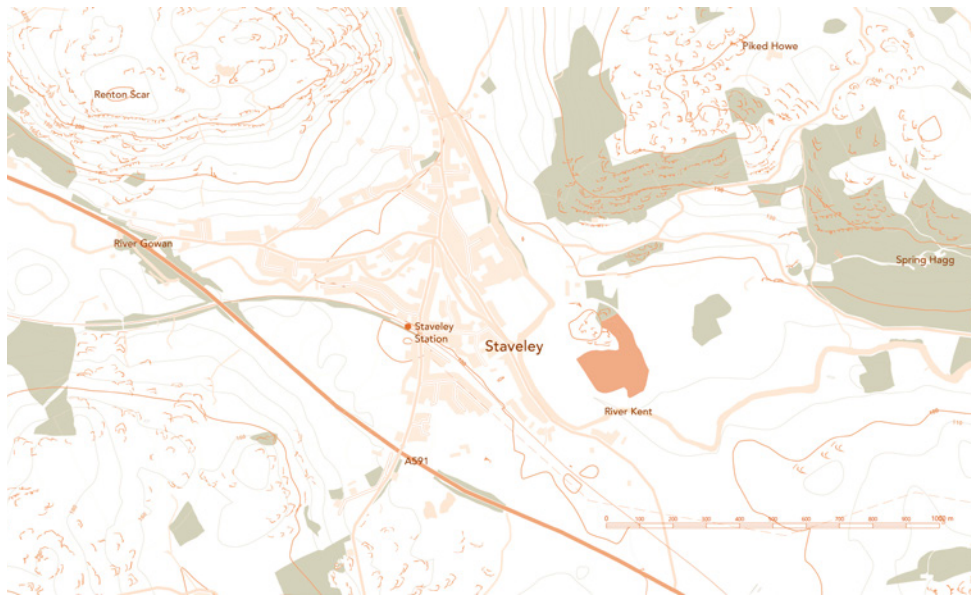
The following pages are a record of the work that was done in the one-week field trip. This booklet has been assembled by myself, and Rural Works alumna students Emily Dawson and Izzy Hopper.

Zoë Berman – Tutor, Founder and Director of Rural Works

Context

Staveley, The Lake District, April 2018





Map showing village of Staveley location of the area around which the temporary installations were located.

The first day of the Rural Works programme is always spent sketching. This year, students developed installations in a specific patch of woodland, so this area was the focus of the field sketches that were produced during the first two days of the workshop. Sketching and mark making is an important first part of the programme. As an architect and design tutor, I wholly agree with the principle set out by Janet Swailes in her book *Field Sketching and the Experience of Landscape*, of valuing walking and drawing in the landscape as “good ways of getting to know a place, and find(ing) these activities helpful in thinking and feeling my way through design problems... By actively participating in the landscape... our perceptions are enhanced”. (Swailes, 2016)

This idea of using drawing as a means through which to actively observe chimes directly with my own position as an architect and educator. The act of sketching is a helpful tool to help us look more closely. Drawing is a first a way to see – and subsequently, a tool for designing. In 1952 the critic Harold Rosenberg coined the term “action painting”. (Rosenberg, 1952)

The Rural Works programme pursues an interest in what we might term ‘action architecture’. Swailes echoes this notion - of actively looking and drawing as a way towards developing a design, in her book “The act of looking is connected with making, by the expressive gestures and craft of mark making.” (Swailes, 2016)

The sketches that the students produce are a crucial tool to highlight particular aspects of the site, and a means of expressing aspect of the site they each find interesting. Throughout the day, we pause from drawing and have discussions one-to-one and in small groups to look at the sketches each person has made, and discuss what features those drawings pick out – such as a particular tree, a view, a gap between samplings, the winding uphill of a pathway and so on. The sketches are a method of foregrounding features of interest. Those areas of interest go on to become the focal point for an installation.

Recording the Site

Collective Mapping



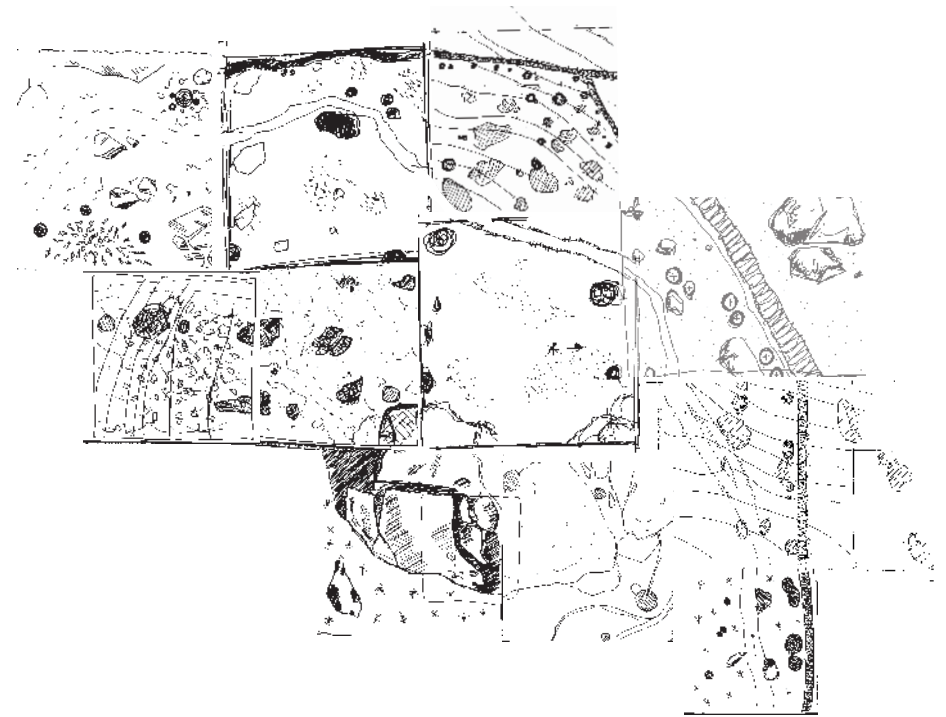
Drawing and Mapping a portion of site

At the start of the week, students were shown the drawings of Alfred Wainwright – fell walker, illustrator and author of a renowned series of guidebooks to the Lake District. Wainwright's drawings are particularly of interest to me in the context of working with design students, because of the range of drawing types Wainwright used and the way he used mark-making and an illustrated, accompanying key of his own making as a means to represent his walked routes.

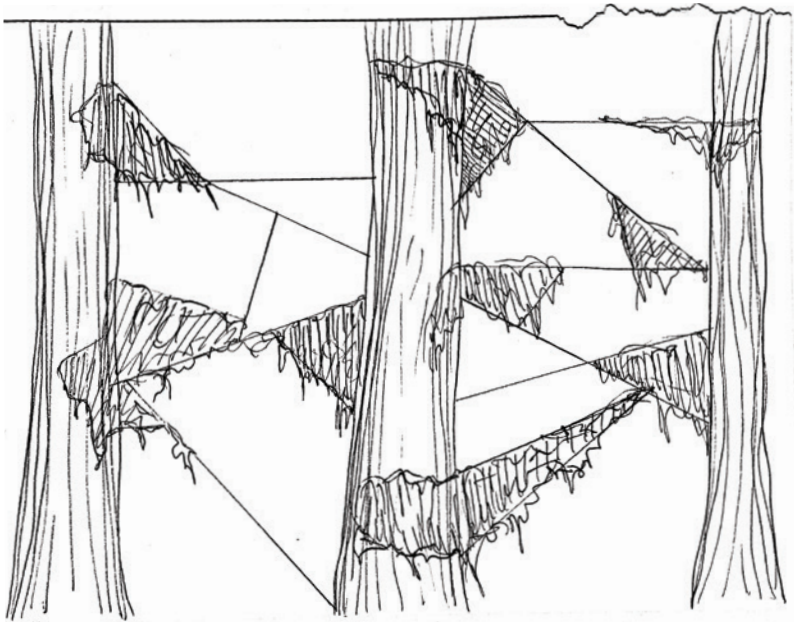
Wainwright moved to Kendal with his wife and son in 1941 and produced drawings of local scenes and buildings – copies of which he sent to close friends. He produced sketch studies of his walks that he developed into more detailed diagrams, mapping the paths he had hiked. He began preparing the Wainwright Guides in earnest after he retired in 1952. He divided the fells into manageable sections, so each guide would cover a specific area: "The National Park had recently been unveiled as a concept and delineated as a territory in 1951, but he largely ignored it, restricting himself to the high ground... Creating his internal divisions was a matter of making use of the natural or existing boundaries – lakes, valleys, passes and roads." (Davies, 1995, pp.137-138)

We used this idea of dividing up an area through drawings, and surveying it, in our drawing workshop. The students chose the site where they would produce their temporary installations. Each undertook to draw a portion of that area, deciding between them on boundaries and edges that indicated the extent of their site. When put together, the portioned drawings create one single, collective survey. This is an exercise in surveying, observing and noticing key site features. It also established the importance of collaborative working and cooperation.

Collaborative Site Plan



Mapping a large area by combining individual site drawings



Forest Aperture

Movement · Framing · Repetition



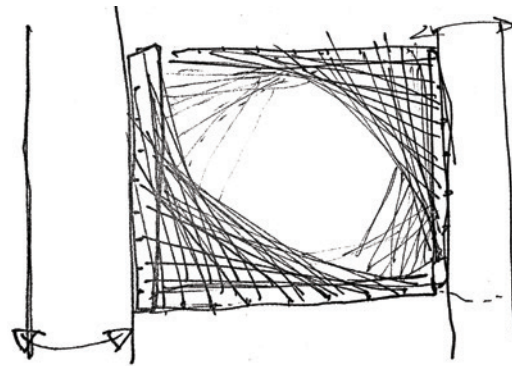
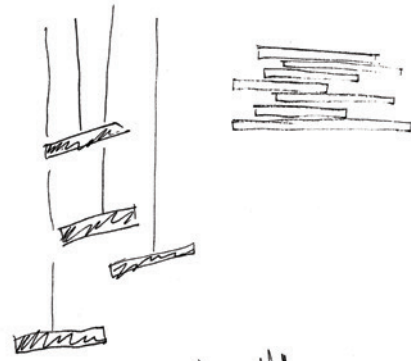
“Walking through the woodland, it is easy to miss interesting views and site-lines out through the trees. Our challenge was to make these moments more apparent. We took inspiration from the form of a camera aperture, which seemed relevant here given that its purpose is the framing of a scene and consideration of what is beyond.

We embarked on creating four ‘L’ shaped frames to be positioned on different planes, that when viewed from a certain point in the woodland would all align together to form a single aperture, to frame the environment.

This was achieved using simple twine and timber, tied together with clove hitches and then repeated by lashing twine between two timber arms. When four of these had been assembled they were attached to our chosen trees using a slot block arrangement, which aimed to allow a certain amount of rotational movement when exposed to the wind so the frames – sail like – could move slightly in the wind. We made this installation over the course of three days. There is potential for the project to expand into the woods with more frames forming further circles and site-lines to further appreciate views within and beyond the woodland.”

Billy Sayers, Harry Fitzsimmons, Tom Rimmington

Concept Development



Sketches exploring layering and openings



Compiled Frames revealing a select view



Exploded Frames

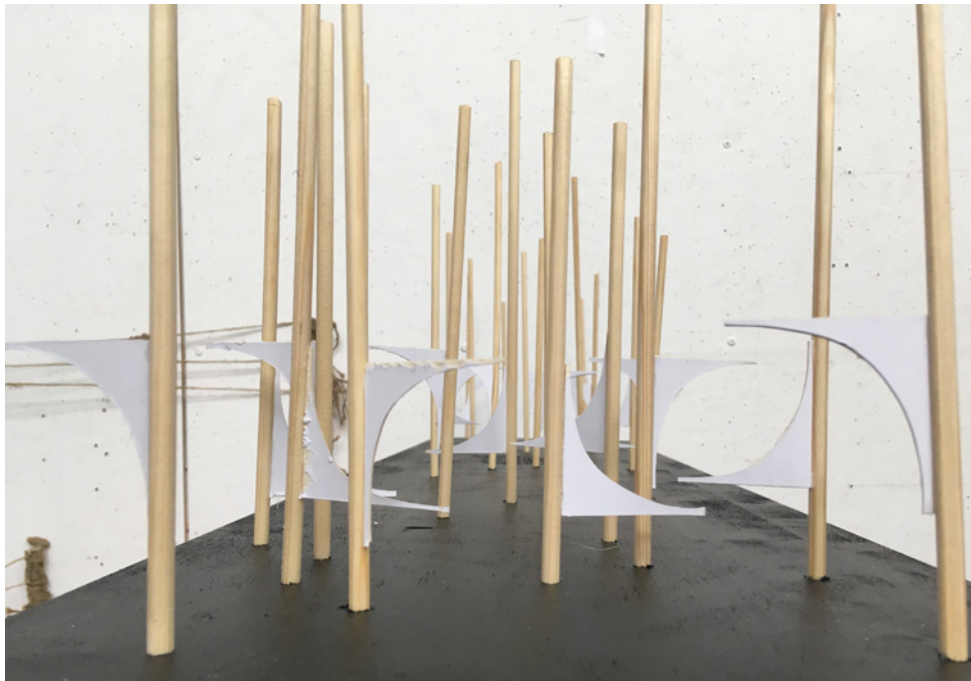


Final Proposal



Movement expressed in sketches of the installation from three different perspectives

Future Development



Model testing increased density and duplication of frames



Visualising the expansion of the proposal in context



Scenes Through the Vertical

Distance · View · Vertical





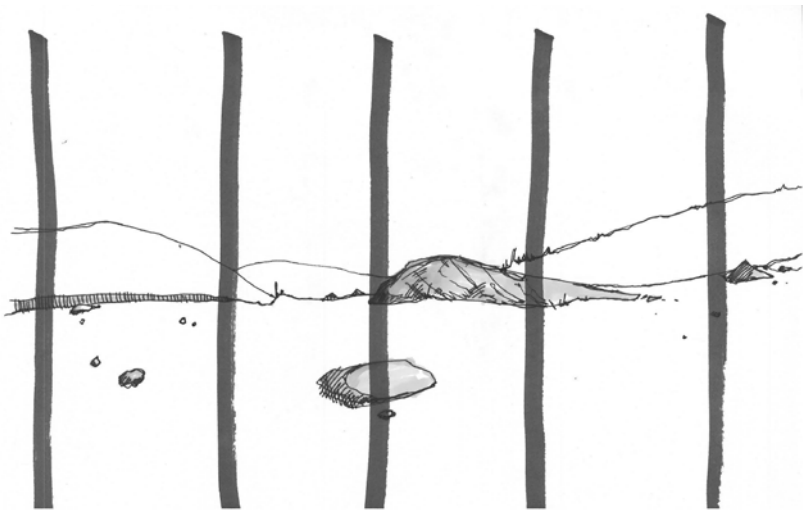
"Entering the woodland and reaching the site, our attention was caught by a contrast between the immediacy of the trees around us and the surrounding, rolling hills. We noticed a strong sense vertical and horizontal axis', created by these two conditions.

As a group we began to develop the idea of a membrane or tunnel – that a visitor to the site would look through, to see the surrounding hills. We began looking at how to create a physical object that could direct and modify the view. With a minimal materials palette, we experimented with constructing vertical lines using twine, our primary working material. Due to the lightness of the twine and the installation's location outdoors in the breeze, we found it hard to create permanent vertical lines.

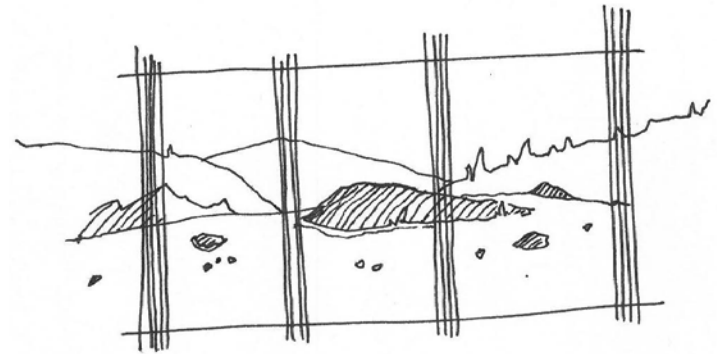
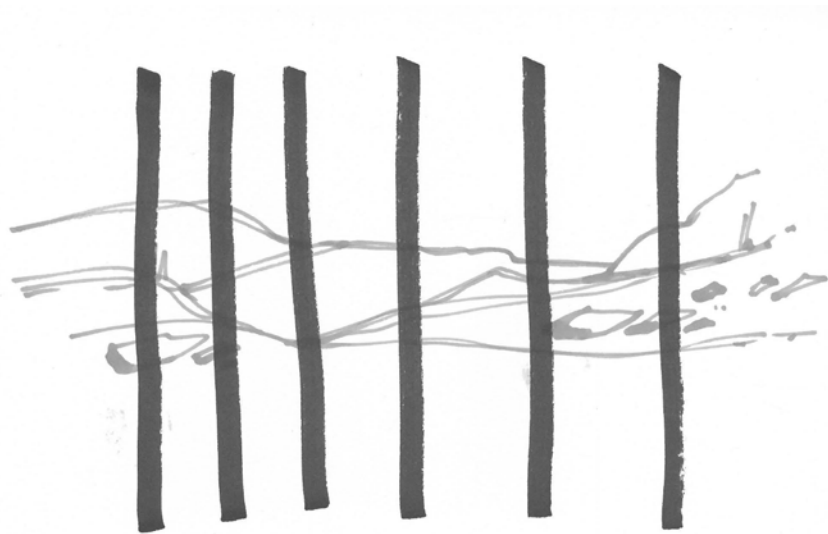
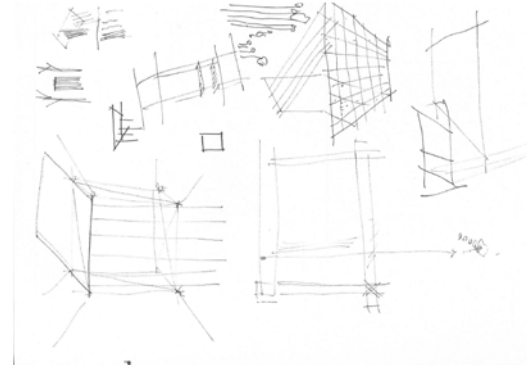
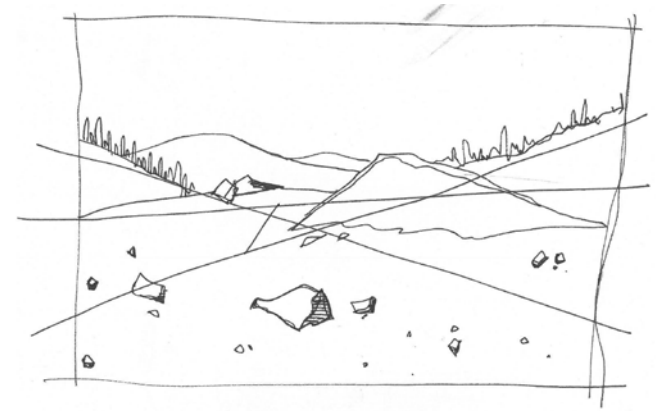
Not wanting to distract from the view with an extensive frame, we tested tying small rocks to the bottom of each length of string. We discovered an expression of many individual rocks, suspended in space, that we hope creates a beautiful reflection of both the trees and the rocky outcrops in the landscape."

Alexander McCormick, Natalie Ballone, Robert Carter

Initial Design Sketches



Development Sketches



Ideas about framing the scene and a vertical axis

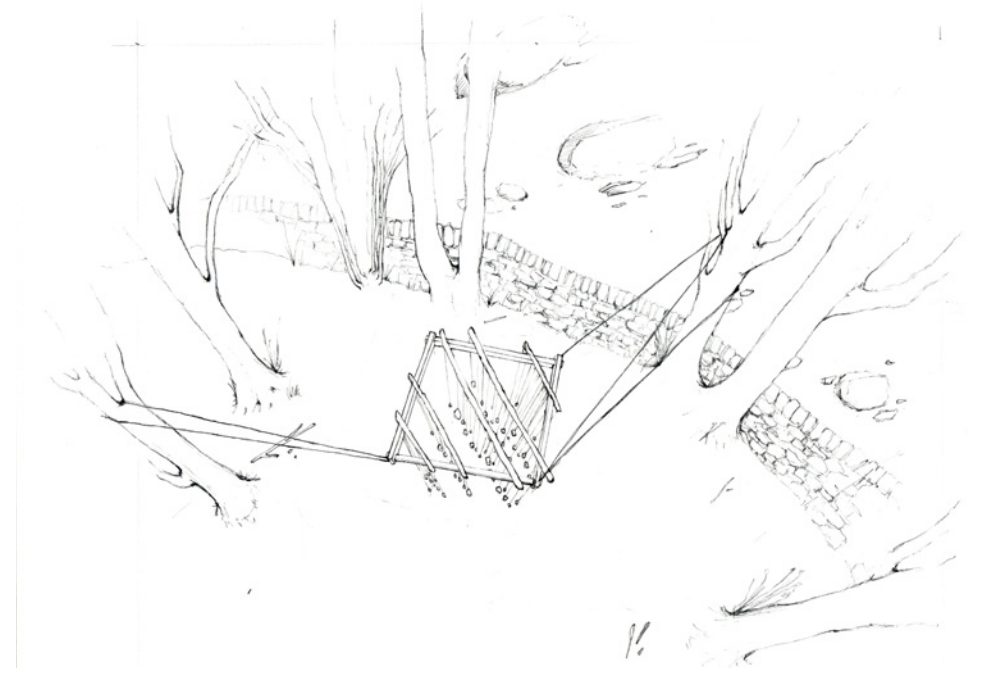
Dividing the view and exploring a frame structure

Construction Phase

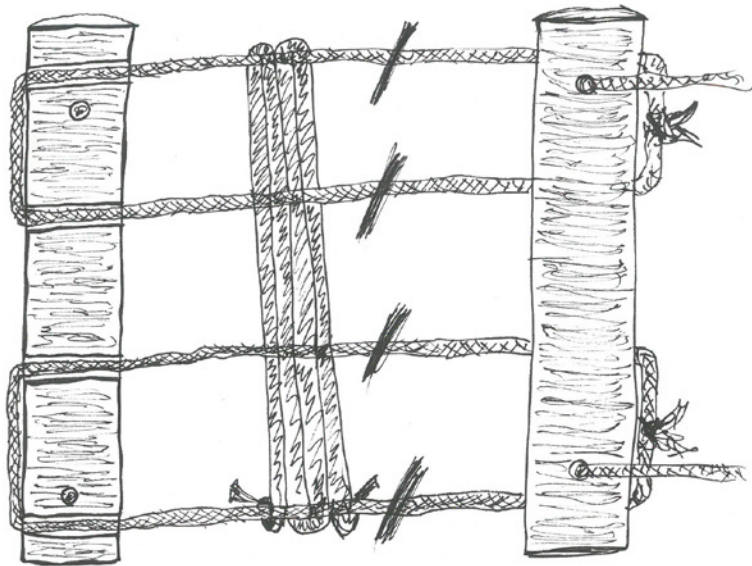


Drawing study of rocks and twine in final installation

Final Installation



Drawing study - View from above



Rural Gateway

Density · Repetition · Negative



Capturing density and life at the woodland site

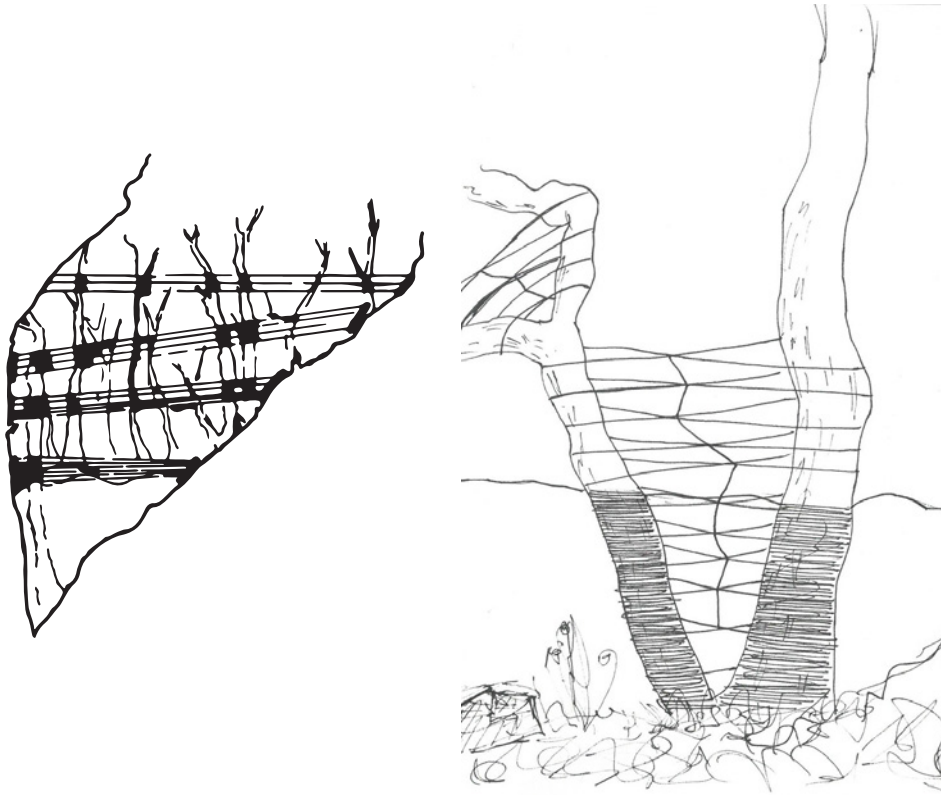
“Within the woodland site, we were collectively drawn to a large boulder rising from the dense undergrowth. Adorned with a crown of distinctive silver birch trees, the boulder had a certain gravitas -offering a point from which to enjoy 360 degree views and an apparent concentric circles of trees surrounding it.

Our concept evolved through making. We experimented with the potential of twine and how we could make natural connections with the surrounding trees. Twine was used to represent density among the landscape and reduce the amount of information required to describe what we saw on site.

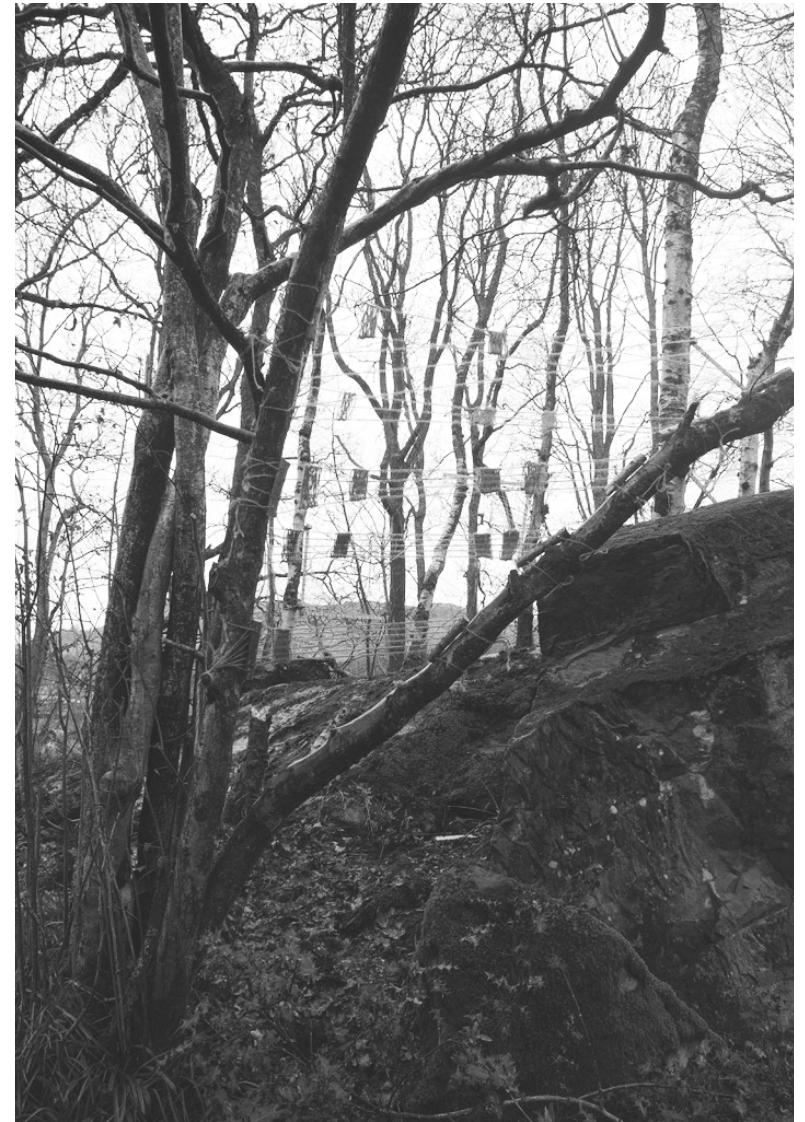
With an emphasis on hand crafting, our working process was reflective of our surroundings as we looked to find ephemeral gateways through negative spaces; gaps in between and connections between elements. The design developed into the creation of small, temporary fixings that provided a connection between twine and tree. The modularity allowed us to repeat our intervention in any woodland situation, because we could alter the length and orientation of the screen that connects from tree to tree, from branch to branch. The resulting installation is a meditation on connections, weaving and linking together of parts”

Isaac Shepherd, Spencer Nicholls

Concept Development



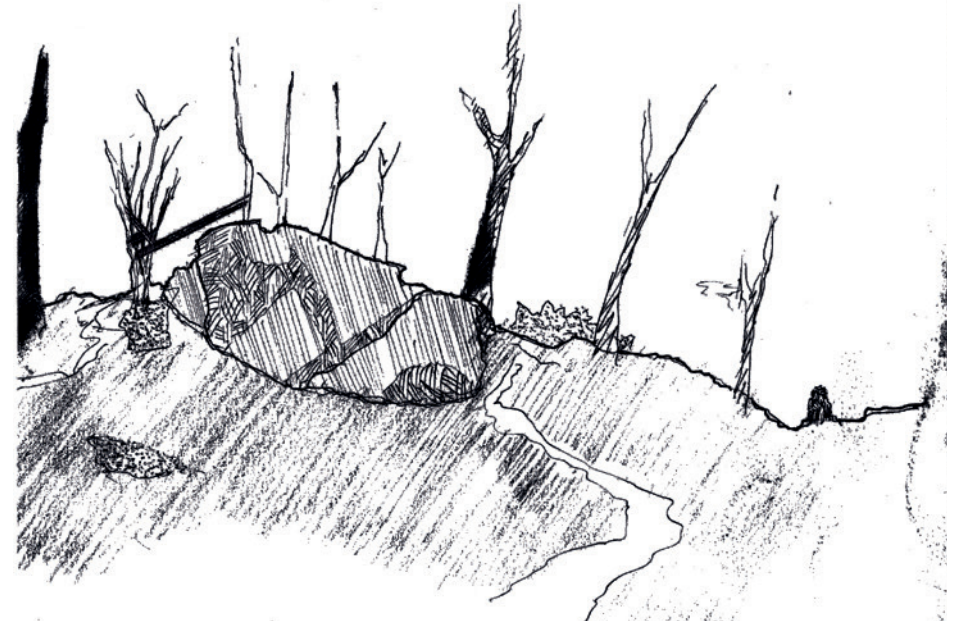
*Drawings exploring themes of connection and negative space
Making moments in the spaces in-between*



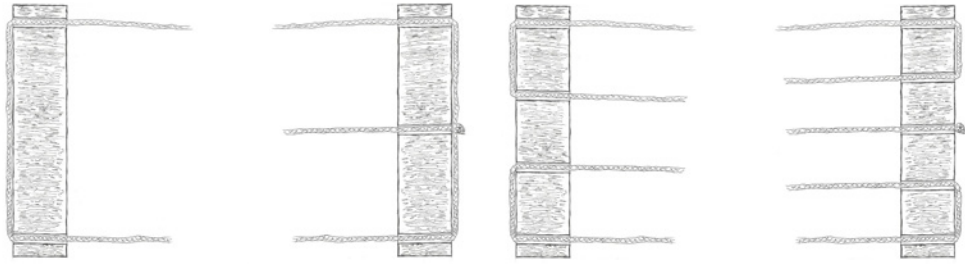
Plan



Elevation



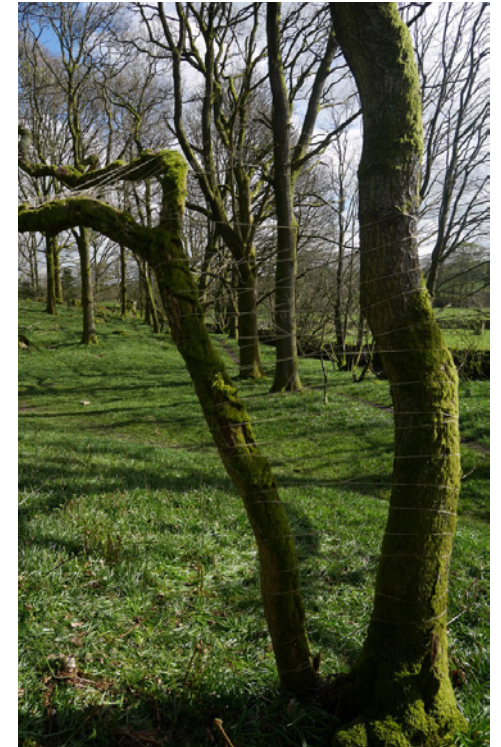
Construction - Joins in Detail



Sectional drawing of Toggle



Continuing the lines - transitional moments of fastening



Display

Sharing findings



Rural Works is run as part of a wider annual programme called Vertical Studio, organised by the Welsh School of Architecture. First and second year ungraduated architecture students participate in a range of different unit, taking part in a field-trip or area of special study for two to three weeks. Rural Works is one of the unit options.

At the end of the programme – when groups have been working variously in and around the UK, and sometimes abroad – the whole year-group reconvenes in the design studios of the Welsh School of Architecture, and each group presents the work that they produced following their respective trips. This 'show and tell' is a chance for students to review their own work, explain it to others, and answer questions from students and other tutors about what they produced. The exhibition provides a platform for students to critically reflect on their learning experience. Because Rural Works has been running for a number of years, this exhibition also offers a chance for students who have participated in the unit in the past, to visit and see what was produce year-on-year. This provides a moment for knowledge and learning to be exchanged from year to year. Students who have continued through their studies return to review the latest work done by the current Rural Works cohort.

Summary

What Next?

Rural Works began as a three-week workshop run in 2016 and 2017. In the year of 2018 the Welsh School of Architecture, where the students are enrolled, reduced the programme to happen over a two-week period. This meant that there wasn't sufficient time for students to produce their own booklet and write-up, as was done in the first two workshops. Believing it is important the work done is documented, I as the instigator of Rural Works have undertaken this recording exercise myself, supported by alumna of the programme.

I have participated, both as a student myself and years later as a visiting tutor, on the Studio In The Woods summer school that was established by the architect Piers Taylor and colleagues in 2005. The workshop is a vehicle to test ideas through making at 1:1. Each year, Piers Taylor, Kate Darby, Meredith Bowles and Gianni Botsford are joined by a number of other practitioners and academics in leading workshops with students over 3 or 4 days in summer time. Here, five parallel groups of architects and students design and construct – with a simple kit of parts and a limited palette – a research project over three days.

When I started Rural Works, this was what I had hoped to gradually, over years, work towards emulating. However the first three years of running this event has shown to me that this is quite a different context, in a number of ways. Firstly, Studio in the Woods is exactly that – it is always run deep in a beautiful, remote woodland setting, and it moves from one woodland to the next every one or two years; never staying in the same place. Secondly, it is supported by a number of highly experienced architects and skilled makers, who bring a deep level of knowledge to the workshops each year. Lastly, participants are multi-generational and come from a diverse range of backgrounds, bringing multiple experiences to the workshop. Together the Studio in the Woods cohort can amount to some 60 – 70 people.

As I have discovered, Rural Works doesn't operate in the same way. We locate ourselves in the same place year on year. We work in, around and on the edge of a village, rather than hidden in the depth of tranquil woodlands. The village, and all its facilities, are a much needed resource for us – to eat, shop and get hold of materials. As we work, local people pass by and stop to chat – are curious about what we are up to and might visit us again to see how the work is evolving over the week. In contrast to Studio in the Woods (SITW), I am one tutor joined by a small number of fellow guests, working with 8 – 12 students. All of the students are first and second year architecture students, and this brings a different kind of focus to the work than the 60+ team at SITW.

One of the great strengths of Rural Works, is it being located in the same place. I myself am familiar with the area. I have family here and grew up in the next village in the valley. But I do not reside here full time. Year on year, I am gaining a closer understanding of this place, as are my co-tutors – and the local village is becoming more used to us appearing each year.

This familiarity is something to embrace. It brings the benefit of an increased understanding about this place that is enhanced each year. The drawings that students produce are creating an extensive survey of this place, and that drawing collection – a form of observing, analysing and generating ideas – evolves year on year. That knowledge is passed from one group to the next each year, and that will enable us to develop something that has the potential to constructively evolve.

One of the striking things that has become apparent, that I hadn't fully predicted when I began the workshop, is the interest that it generates from passers-by from in and around the village. This has been a crucial point of evolution, and potential for us.



Rural Works:
Vertical Studio 2018

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