

Thousand folds

Seeking safe ground

Lived experience - Seeking safe ground

This project is grounded in the relationship between spatial experience and well-being. Through carefully sequenced thresholds, sensory considerations, and environments that balance refuge with social engagement, the design responds to the emotional and practical needs of its users. Inspired by the Common Crane and Trauma-Informed Design principles, the project explores how atmosphere, materiality, and spatial organisation can foster dignity, belonging, and recovery for homeless individuals. By placing lived experience at the centre of the design process, Thousand Folds demonstrates how interior space can act as a framework for protection, empowerment, and meaningful inhabitation.

Brief + Concept

Thousand Folds is a trauma-informed day centre for people experiencing homelessness, located within Bristol's former fire station and developed in partnership with Help Bristol's Homeless. The project emerged through research into Bristol's hidden River Frome and the marshland landscapes that once surrounded the site. These wetlands supported the Common Crane, a bird whose survival depends upon shelter, adaptability, and the search for safe ground.

Parallels emerged between the crane's behavioural patterns and the experiences of individuals facing homelessness, both navigating tensions between visibility and concealment, security and exposure. Rather than treating homelessness solely as a social issue, the project explores it as a spatial condition.

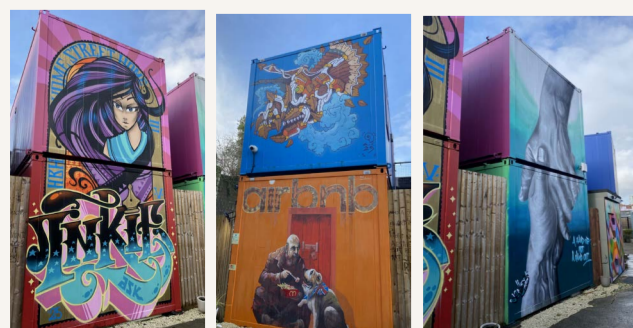
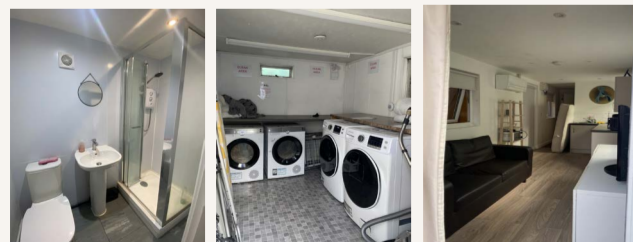
Structured around three principles - Protection, Resilience, and Visibility - the design creates a sequence of environments that support refuge, creativity, recovery, and social connection. A publicly accessible café and gallery acts as a threshold between the day centre and the city, challenging perceptions of homelessness while creating a circular model in which artwork produced within the centre can be exhibited and sold, supporting confidence, opportunity, and independence.



Client and site visit



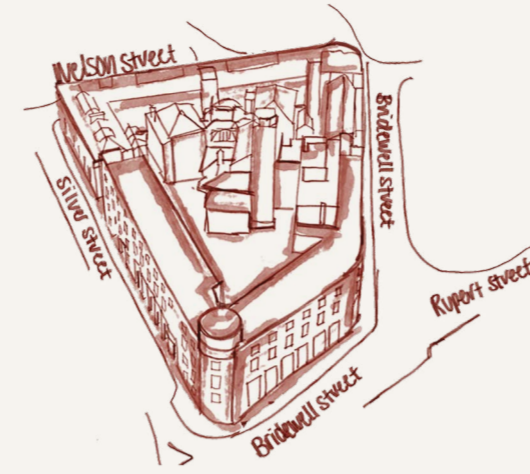
A site visit to HBH demonstrated how space can foster dignity, recovery, and belonging. These insights informed a spatial strategy that balances refuge with community through a sequence of communal and private environments.



Volunteering experience video

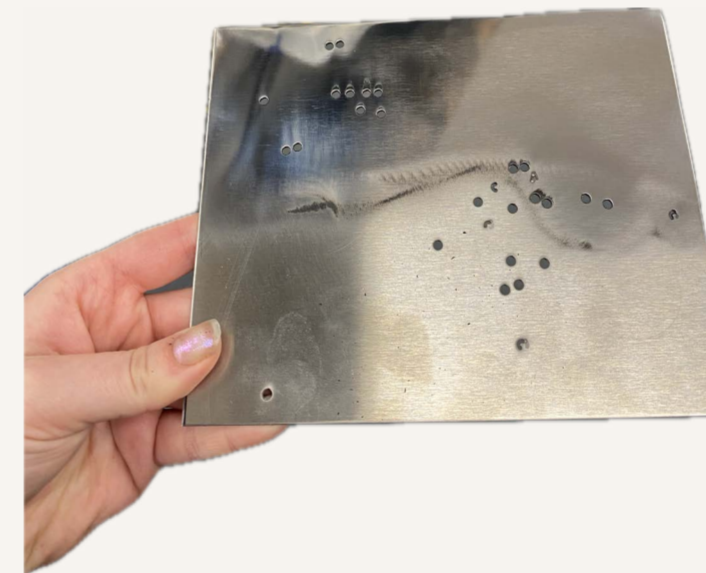
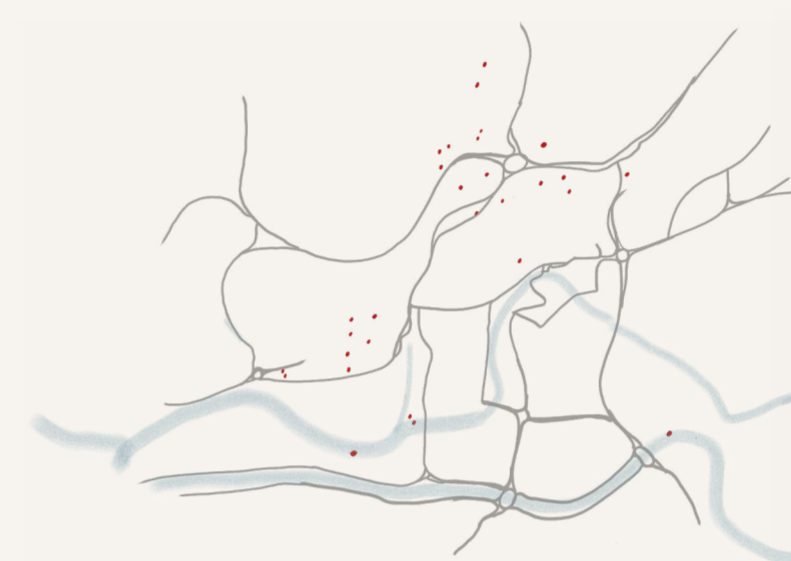
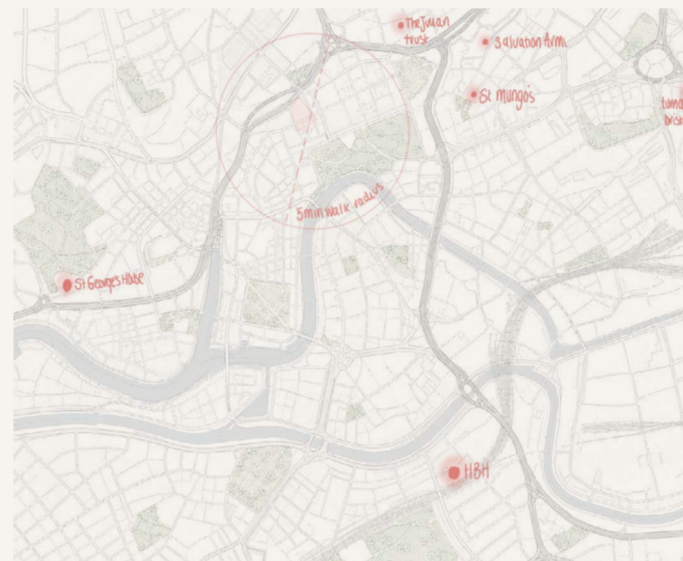


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Site

Viewing the former Bridewell Fire Station through the lens of Trauma Informed Design revealed how the building may be approached and perceived by someone experiencing homelessness, highlighting the importance of welcoming thresholds and visible points of arrival.



Site Response

A walking observational task of homeless individuals in relation to available help in Bristol. I dotted where individuals resided within the city to further understand the homeless culture within Bristol.

Homelessness in Bristol

Bristol has one of the highest rates of homelessness among England's core cities. Since the pandemic, homelessness has risen by 25%, with over 4,000 people seeking support in 2023-24 alone.

Alongside the rising housing costs and more than 20,00 households on the social housing waiting list, many people experiencing hidden forms of homelessness. For every person sleeping rough, many more are living in hostels, sofa surfing or relying on temporary accommodation.



Authors own image - Homelessness in Bristol

Trauma Informed Design

“One of the biggest choices somebody has to make is whether to go inside or not and ask for services.”

-Jill Pable

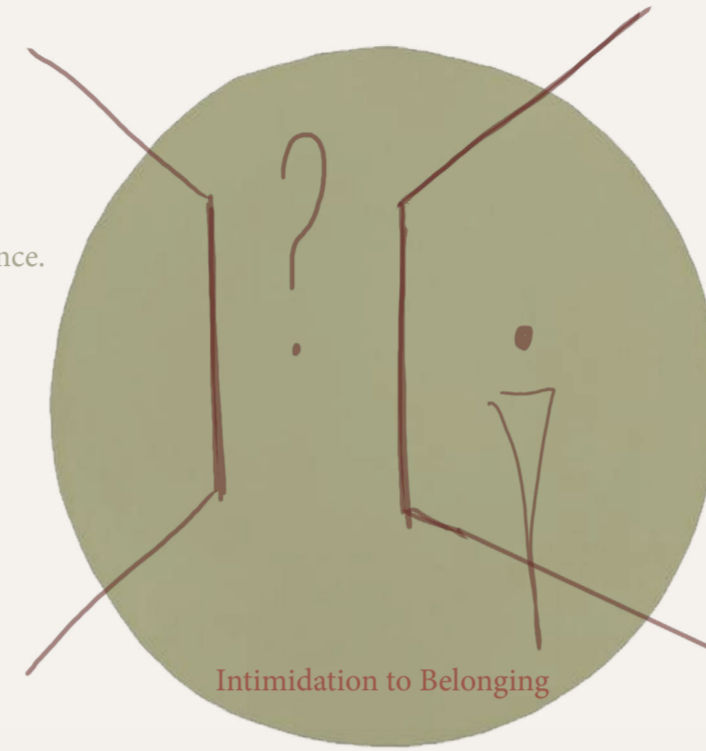
Protection

Social Distress Theory + Threshold Fear

- Individuals experiencing homelessness often live in a state of heightened awareness and vulnerability.
- Volunteering highlighted the importance of calm, supportive environments.
- Layered thresholds, counselling pods, warm lighting, and soft materials create spaces of refuge and reassurance.
- Inspired by marshland ecologies, the design prioritises safety, privacy, and emotional comfort.



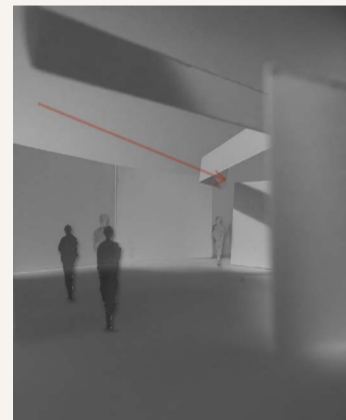
Layered thresholds - combating Social Distress and Threshold Fear.



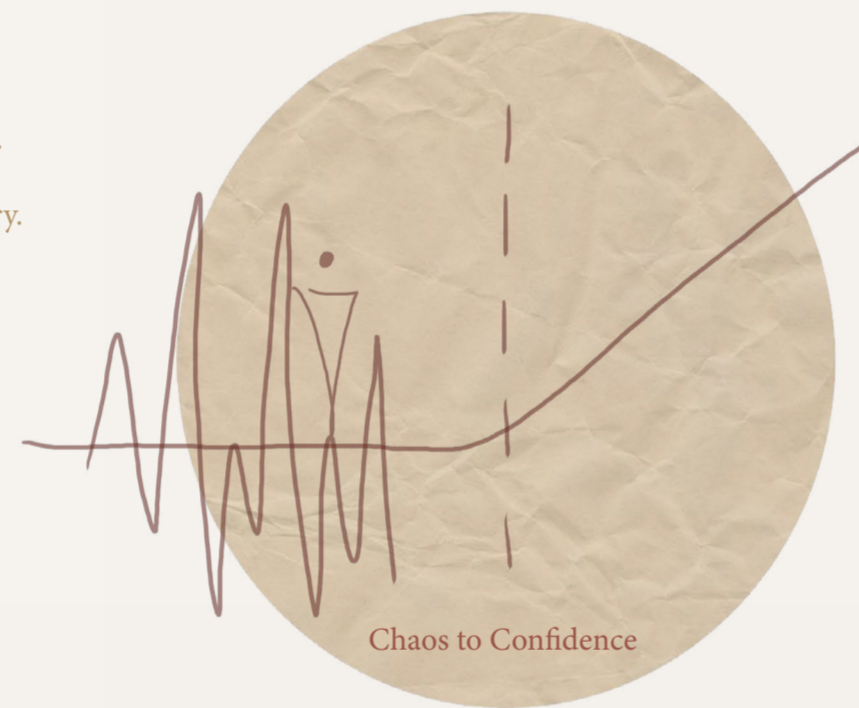
Resilience

Scarcity Theory + Creative Participation

- When basic needs are unmet, energy is focused on survival rather than growth.
- Rachel Davis identified creative making as a tool for confidence, self-expression, and well-being.
- Inspired by Senbazuru, the art studio views creativity as a process of transformation and recovery. Adaptable spaces encourage autonomy, learning, and personal development.



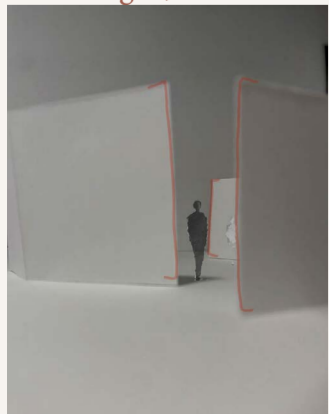
Clear sight lines - helping Scarcity theory and Creative Participation.



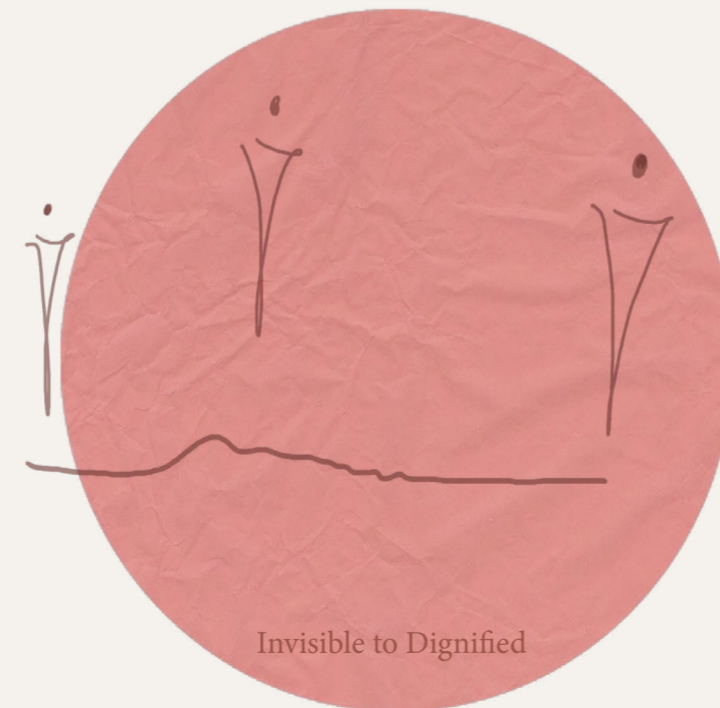
Visibility

Marginalisation Theory + Terror Management Theory

- Volunteering highlighted the contradiction of homelessness: often invisible when support is needed, yet highly visible when occupying spaces society feels they should not.
- In contrast to the project's refuge spaces, the café and gallery embrace visibility. Through art installations, exhibitions, and creative expression, these spaces challenge perceptions of homelessness and encourage engagement.
- This tension between refuge and exposure transforms visibility into a platform for recognition, dialogue, and social awareness.



Yin and yang approach — implementing the opposite of Trauma Informed Design to raise awareness of the experiences and perceptions surrounding homelessness through visibility rather than refuge.



Unfolding the journey

Shaped by research and lived experience, the building unfolds through the principles of Protection, Resilience, and Visibility, creating a layered journey between refuge, creativity, and connection.

Resilience

Visibility

Protection

Interview - User of the space

H - Homeless individual

I met 'M' through volunteering his experiences helped shape the project.

M (47), a former Architectural Spatial Technician and self-taught painter, experienced homelessness following a relationship breakdown and unstable work. Preferring green, open landscapes to crowded accommodation, he found refuge in places that offered a sense of control and ease.

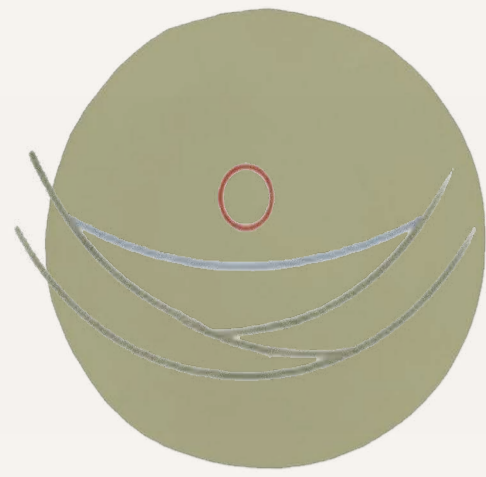
Carrying a portable watercolour palette, he spends his days sketching the city, with drawing remaining a constant throughout periods of uncertainty.



Section A-A



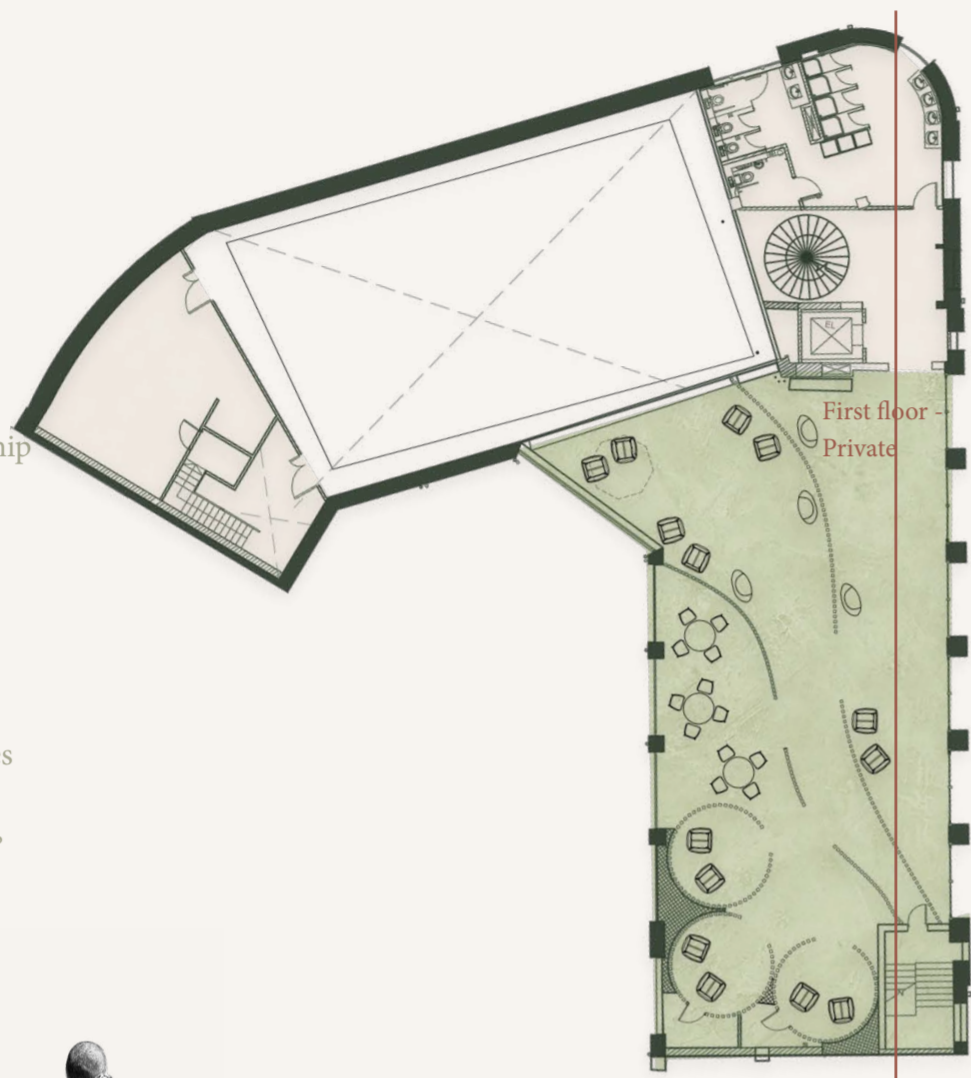
Protection



"My biggest fear is being dragged out of my tent and being attacked"

Homeless individual

Everyone deserves a space that feels safe to them.



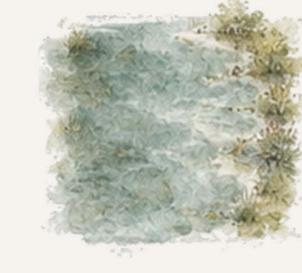
Tall reeds and shrubs



Moss and wetland



Shallow water



Nesting area



Marshland Ecology and Spatial Strategy

Inspired by crane habitats and the site's marshland history, the design interprets wetland ecologies through layers of enclosure, filtered light, and reed-like forms. Suspended lighting casts shifting, water-like reflections across the interior, creating a gentle rhythm of movement and orientation informed by Trauma-Informed Design principles.

Extruded Nest Staircase

Inspired by a crane's nest, the staircase wraps gently around the user, creating a journey of light, shadow, and shelter. Deeper treads slow the pace of movement, creating a more gradual transition between exposure and refuge.



"Rest is part of rebuilding"

Interview Rufus - RSPB

Once widespread across the UK, cranes declined through habitat loss and overhunting, forcing them to seek increasingly scarce places of refuge.

Nesting within marshlands, cranes rely on water, reeds, and vegetation to create protective boundaries between vulnerability and security. This relationship between habitat and survival forms the foundation of the protection zone.

Like cranes, individuals experiencing homelessness often seek overlooked spaces that offer privacy, safety, and control. Inspired by the spatial qualities of wetland ecologies, the design translates these principles into a series of layered thresholds that foster refuge, connection, and belonging.

The project asks a simple question: what happens when safe ground no longer exists? Through the creation of refuge, it explores how interior space can support those searching for it.



Month 1 - Initial contact

M first enters the centre in heavy rain. He doesn't initially engage with staff. Instead he sits in the threshold of reception.

The reception intentionally avoids security-style barriers or clinical check-in desks. Instead he is greeted by Anna who welcomes him informally and offers him a cup of tea.

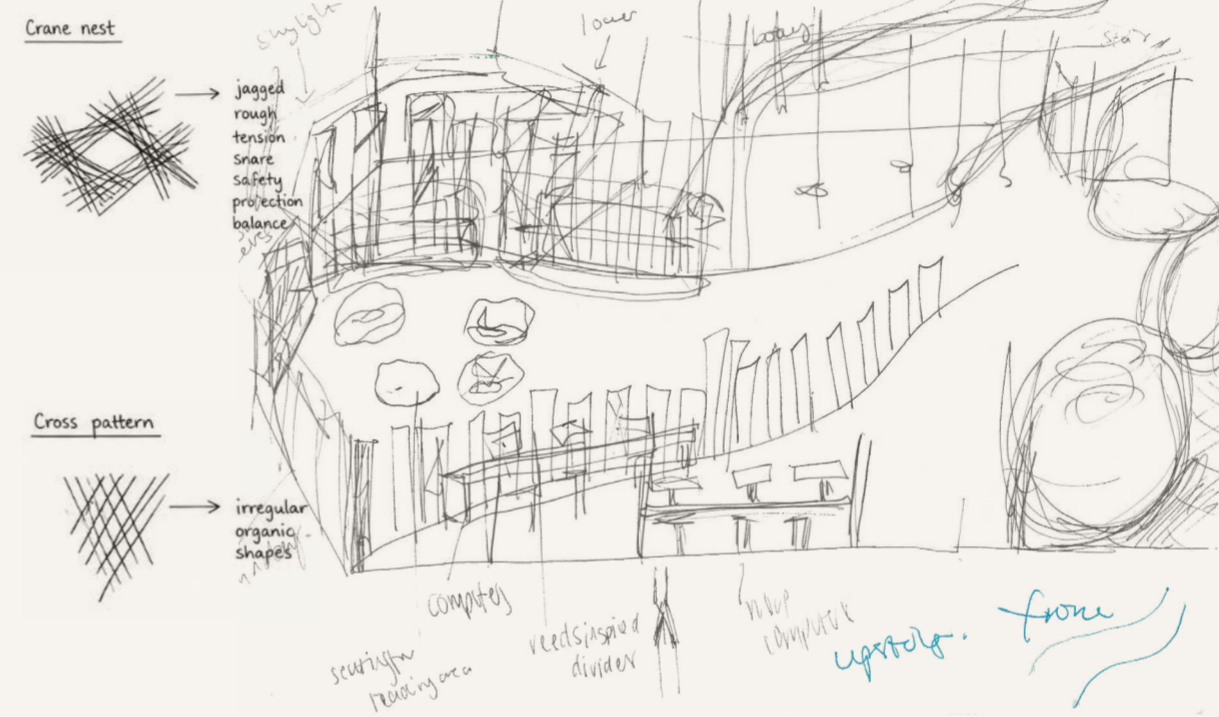
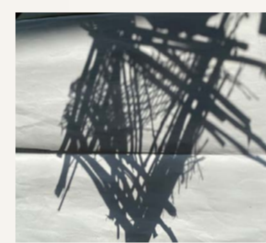
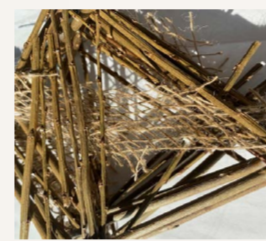
Staff Member, Anna

Anna is the first point of contact for M. She is trained in trauma informed response to reduce anxiety.

She notices the sketch book M has in his hands and mentions the studio holds open sessions.

M leaves after 20

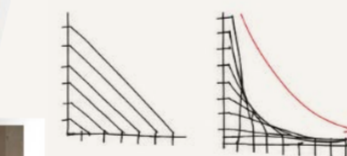
But returns 3 days later.



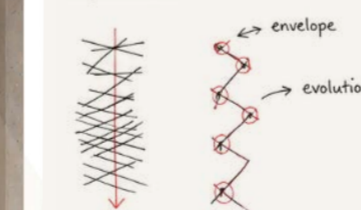
Reed Partitions

Inspired by the reeds of the River Frome, these partitions soften boundaries and shape levels of privacy throughout the interior. Their layered arrangement guides users towards the counselling pods while maintaining clear sightlines.

Curve vs. lines



Layered structure



Month 2 - Establishing Routine

M is now visiting twice a week. He rarely joins in with workshops but often uses spare materials at the edge of the studio. The studio becomes important within his routine.

M begins to shower at the centre and washing his clothes before workshops.



Staff Member, Tom

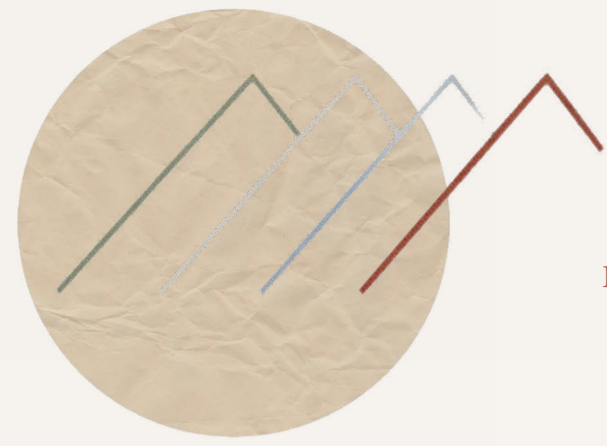
Tom is the Housing and Welfare Advisor. He becomes a visible person to those using the space.

As M grows more confident, Tom offers M safer options than rough sleeping as well as helping set up a bank account so he is able to sell his art within the gallery.

The reading nook becomes one of M's favourite places as it allows him to sketch people circulating the building without engaging in conversation.



Resilience



"This is my first hot meal in two weeks"

Homeless individual

Everyone deserves to feel capable, valued and hopeful.

Interview

Rachel Davis - Arts in health practitioner

Through her work with individuals experiencing illness, mental health challenges, displacement, and dementia, Rachel Davis highlighted the value of creative making as a means of expression, connection, and personal growth.

She emphasised that participation looks different for every individual, reinforcing the need for environments that support different ways of engaging. For some, making can become a form of self-expression when words feel difficult or they are not yet ready to talk.

These insights informed the art studio's spatial organisation. Adaptable furniture, carefully sequenced thresholds, and areas of sensory calm create an environment that accommodates diverse needs while encouraging autonomy and exploration.

The studio is designed not simply as a place to make art, but as a space where individuals can process experiences, communicate without words, and reconnect with themselves and others through the act of making.

Month 3 - Growing Trust

He opens up about his working life and mental health struggles,

He still doesn't want permanent accommodation options. Instead conversations with Tom shift to:

Creative income and financial stability.



Staff Member, Leila

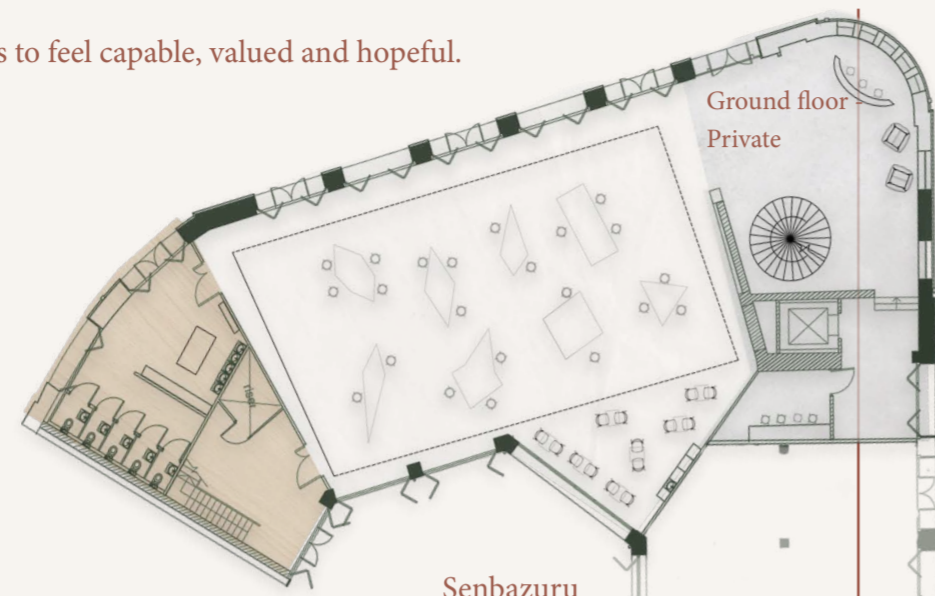
Leila is the Art in Health Practitioner at Thousand Folds, she encourages M to display one of his paintings in the gallery next door.

Initially hesitant,

His painting sells,

The income itself matters less than the validation:

His work is seen publicly rather than hidden within survival.



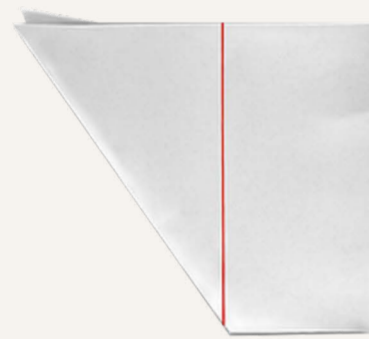
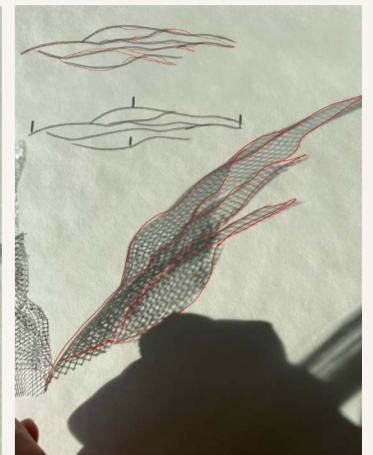
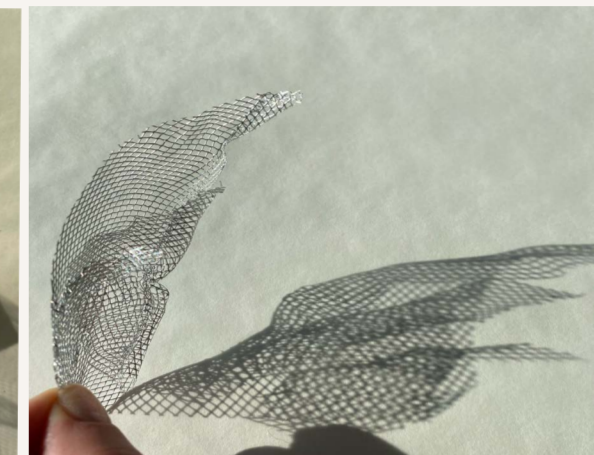
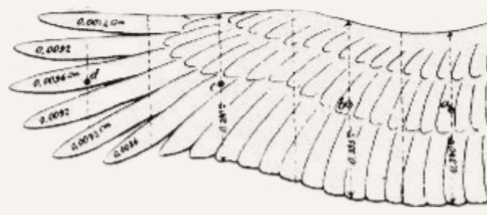
Resilience Through Making

Designed for individuals who may find it difficult to express experiences of trauma, loss, or mental health challenges, this space uses creativity as a pathway towards confidence, self-worth, and connection.

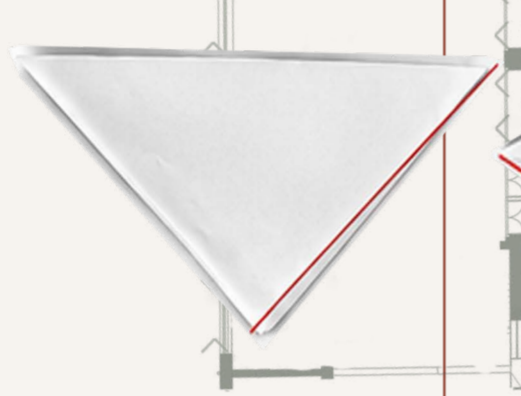
Inspired by Senbazuru - the Japanese tradition of folding one thousand paper cranes - the project draws on themes of healing, hope, and perseverance. Folding becomes a metaphor for transformation; through repeated acts of making, fragility is gradually reshaped into strength.

Acoustic Panelling

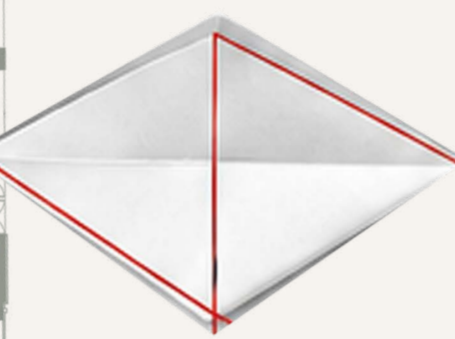
Folded acoustic panels echo the geometry of paper cranes, softening sound and creating a calmer atmosphere. Through material expression and sensory comfort, the studio supports resilience, focus, and belonging.



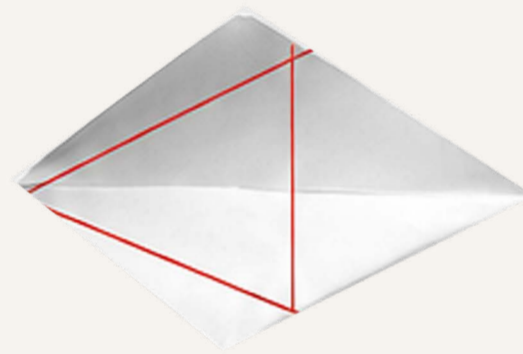
Peace



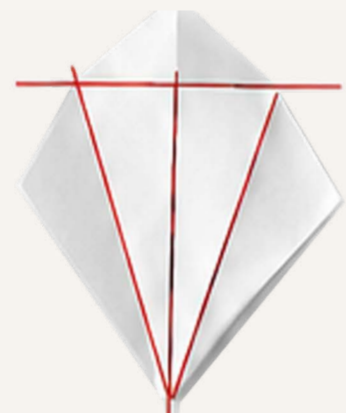
Longevity



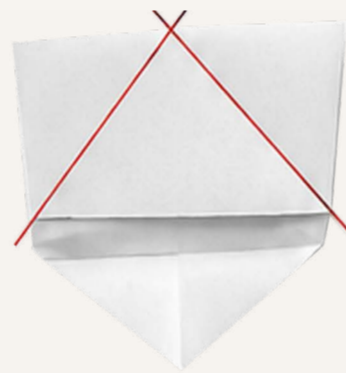
Health



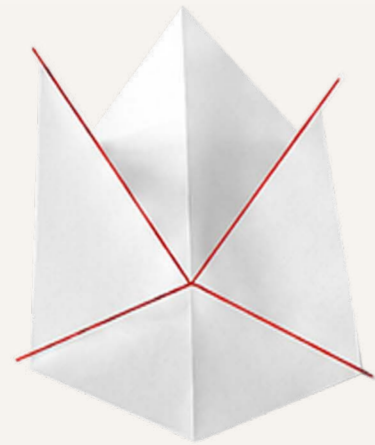
Happiness



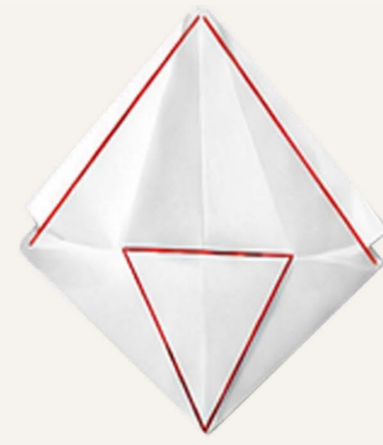
Transformation



Good fortune



Perseverance



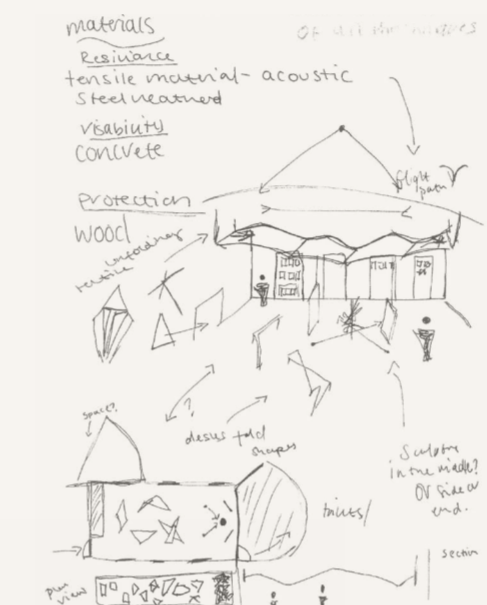
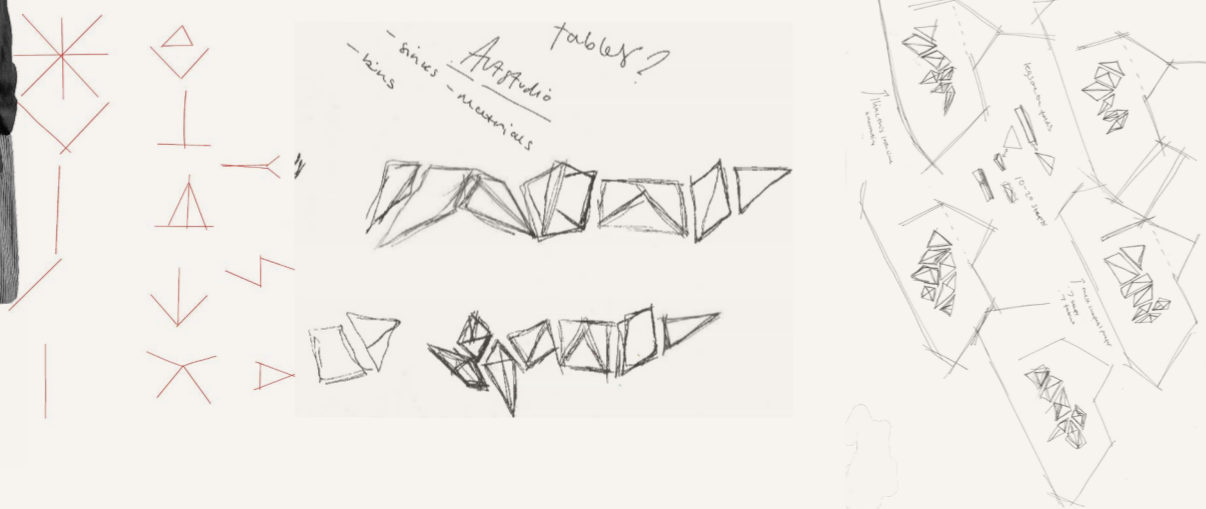
Hope



Resilience

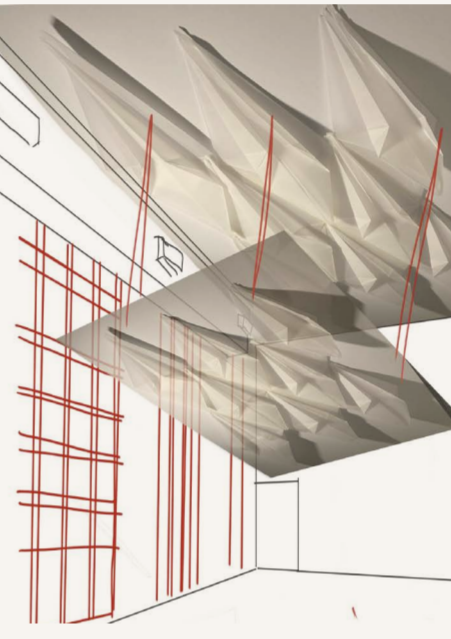
Flexible Tables

Adaptable layouts support different ways of gathering, making, and creating. Moveable tables allow the studio to shift between moments of quiet reflection and shared creativity.



Art as Regeneration

Discovered at HBH, this quote reflects the belief that making can restore purpose and agency. Positioned within the studio, it reinforces the space as one of growth, reflection, and renewal.



Month 4 - Contribution instead of dependency

M begins to prepare materials before workshops.

He informally helps younger members with perspective and water colour drawings.

His identity shifts from 'User' to 'Participant' and eventually 'Mentor'.

"When society is in DECLINE Its ART reflects distraction NOT DIVINITY. Profit Not Principle, Aesthetic Not Alignment. But REAL culture Doe's Not just entertain it, REGENERATES."
- HBH



Visibility

"I either stick out like a sore thumb or I melt into the concrete, either way I'm treated like dirt"

Homeless individual.

Everyone deserves to be seen.



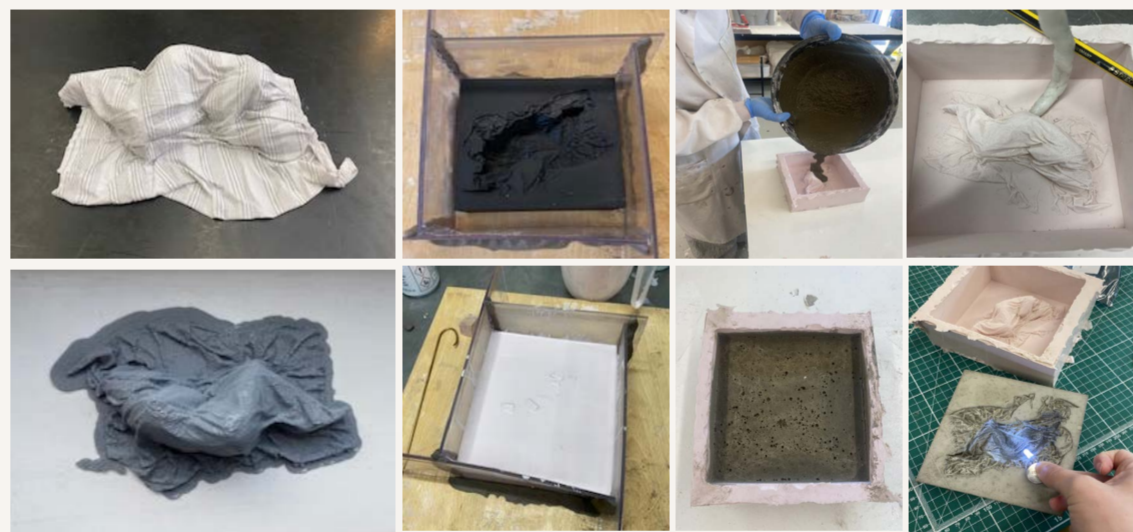
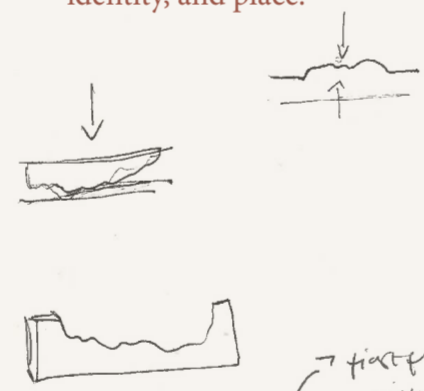
Perception

Experiencing homelessness often means viewing the world from a different perspective. Through scale and verticality, this installation inspired by my site response encourages visitors to look upwards, creating a moment of reflection and empathy.



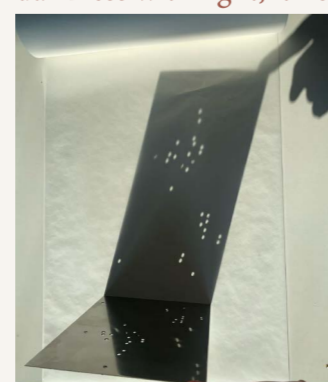
Rough Sleeping

This installation responds to the feeling of "melting into the concrete", capturing the physical and emotional burden of life on the streets. As the figure dissolves into its surroundings, it speaks to exhaustion, invisibility, and the gradual erosion of comfort, identity, and place.



1,611 Lives

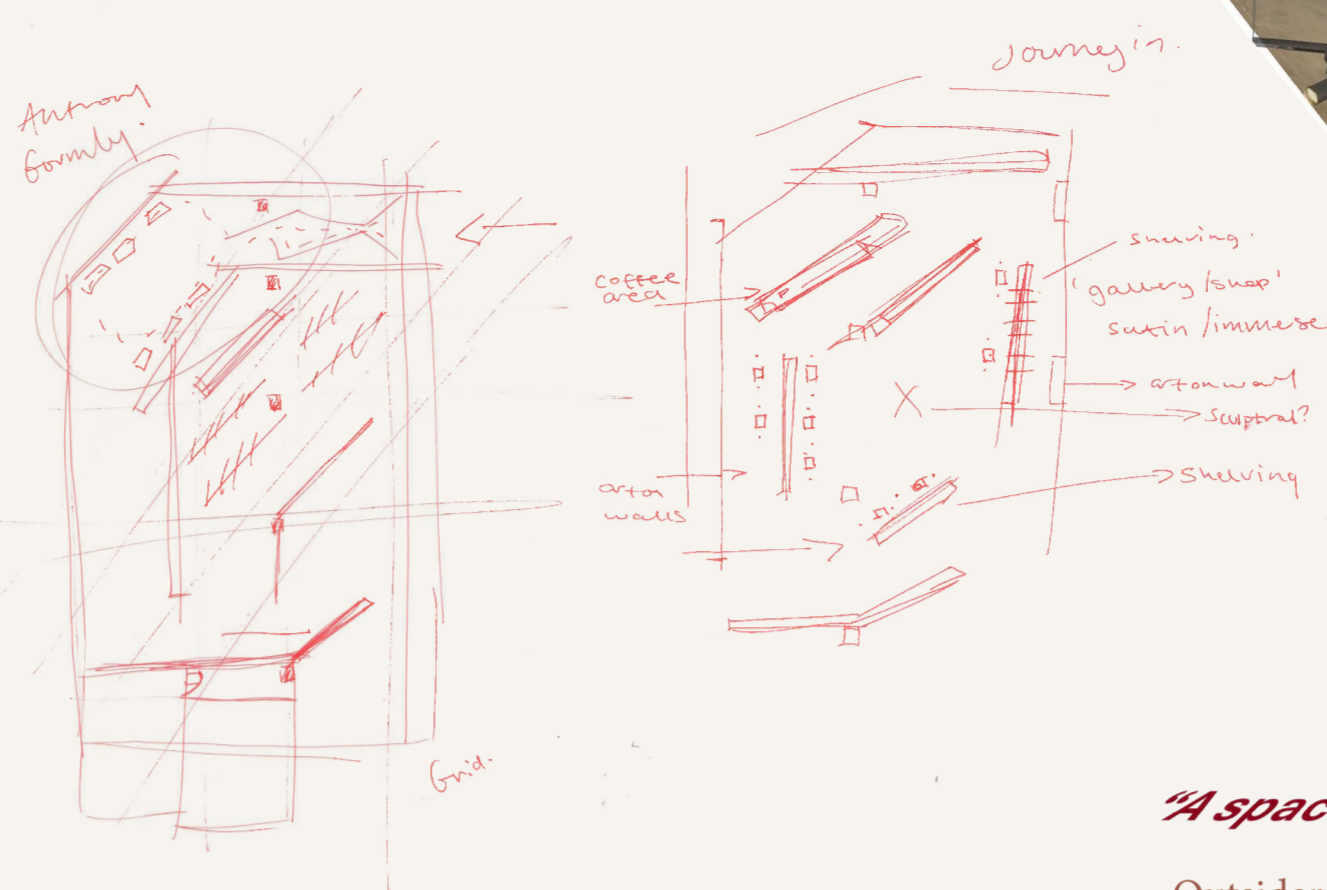
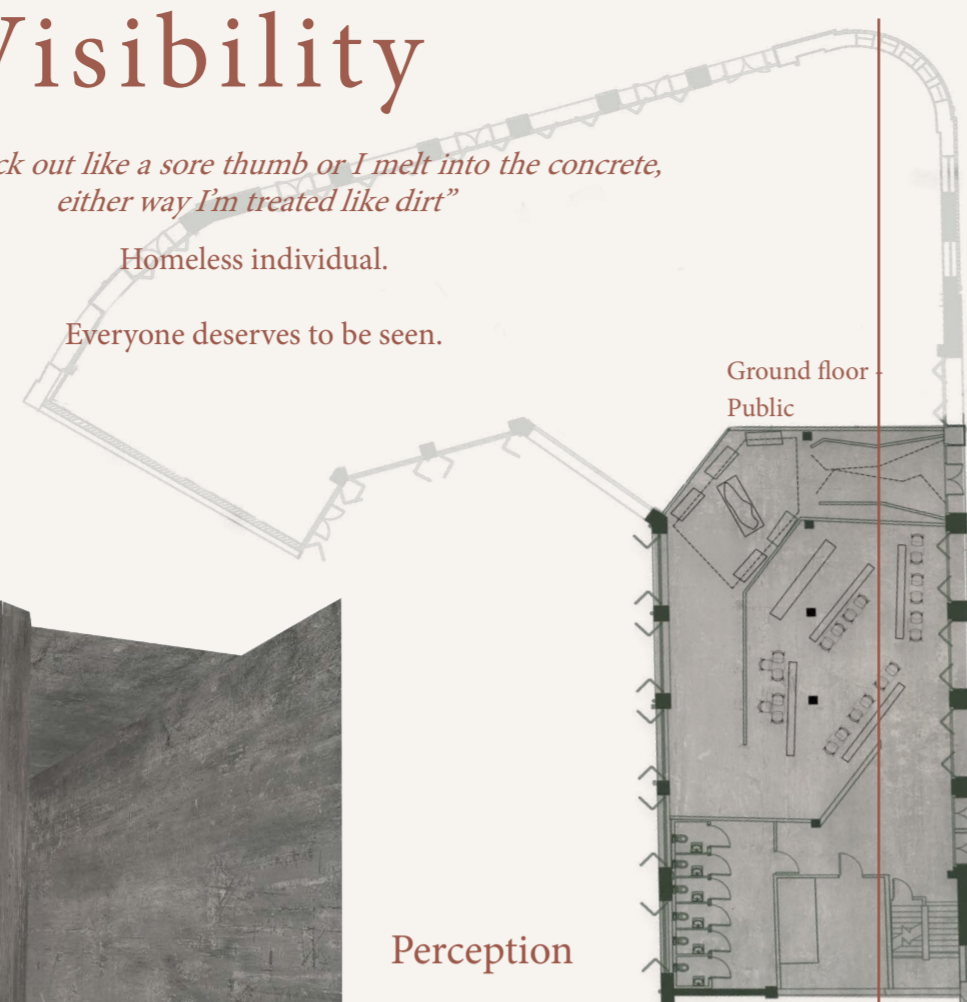
Representing the 1,611 deaths of people experiencing homelessness in the UK, this installation serves as a quiet memorial. Balancing darkness with light, it honours lives often overlooked while creating space for reflection and remembrance.



1,611 deaths of homeless individuals in UK

28 observational light beams

= 57.5 sheets



"A space where art tells someone's story"

Outsider Art

A gallery and cafe space that sells art made by the work shops and resident artists.



Parallel Users

Shawn 63,

Retired Carpenter,

Stumbles in out of curiosity, he enjoys the maker style and its sense of authenticity.

He will buy handmade sketchbooks and small sculptures.

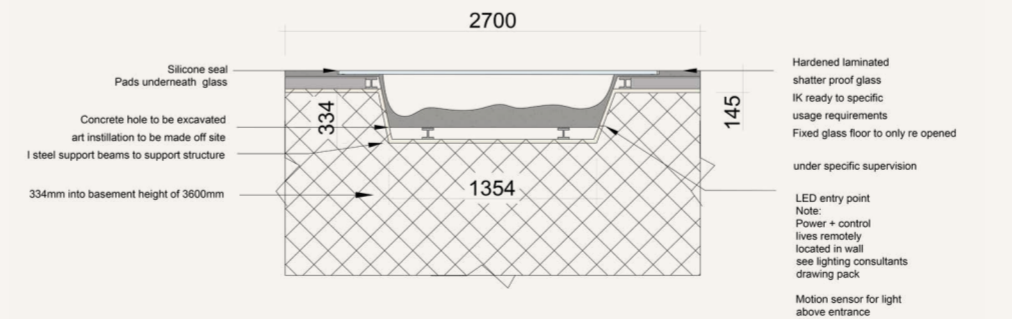
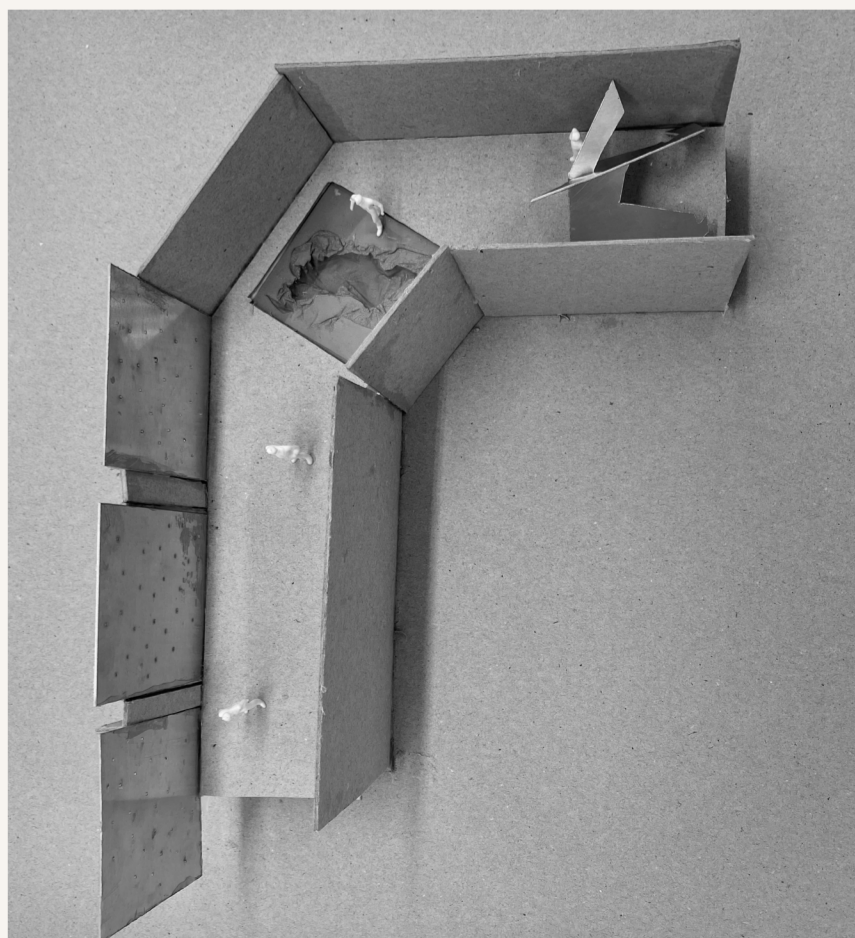
Gracie 28,

Freelance Graphic Designer,

Hears about the gallery through word of mouth,

She is drawn to the quiet interior, the handmade art and the rotating displays.

She will buy handmade cards and prints.



Silicone seal
Pads underneath glass
Concrete hole to be excavated
art installation to be made off site
1 steel support beams to support structure
334mm into basement height of 3000mm

Hardened laminated
shatter proof glass
IK ready to specific
usage requirements
Fixed glass floor to only re opened
under specific supervision
LED entry point
Note: Power + control
lives remotely
located in wall
see lighting consultants
drawing pack
Motion sensor for light
above entrance