



Do not watch the arc

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# **Return to Ritherdon**

**In February 2018, I was introduced to Ritherdon & Co Ltd: a family owned manufacturer of steel enclosures in Darwen, Lancashire. I undertook an Art in Manufacturing residency at the Ritherdon factory, to make an artwork for the 2018 iteration of the National Festival of Making.**

**The potential for further cooperation and collaboration between the Ritherdon workforce and I became quite difficult to ignore. After the festival commission was complete, Ben Ritherdon, the Managing Director, agreed to let me return and continue developing the recent work made on site and initiate some new lines of inquiry. The two-year project Return to Ritherdon began in February 2019, thanks to an Arts Council England Project Grant and Ben's curiosity.**

**I am often asked why Ben agreed to let me return for two years. I asked him this question myself and he replied with the following three reasons. Firstly, supporting an artist with access to the factory seemed like a good thing to do. Secondly, it would be interesting to see the reaction at the factory. Maybe it would make working there a bit more interesting for everyone? Thirdly, the process would expose everyone on-site to a bit more contemporary art.**

**Return to Ritherdon is a two-year period in which I can study the ecosystem of the Ritherdon factory and its business operations. In turn, this creates opportunities to develop new artworks, skills and methodologies. A particular area of interest in this ecosystem is 5S (a system to ensure efficient, effective and safe working practices) and its relationship to lean manufacturing philosophy. Also, the occurrence of an artist placement in industry resonates with Artist Placement Group (A.P.G) activity. Therefore, absorbing A.P.G. material at Tate Archive is an on-going action throughout the project. Overall, the project creates opportunities for an Artist and Manufacturer to witness each other's**



**work in the factory, studio, gallery and respective communities.**

**The artist placement situation demands an on-going assessment of ‘value’, in relation to the process of making art on an industrial site, and the artwork itself. Most of the work leaves the factory at some point, therefore its ‘value’ changes according to the shift in context. I try to understand what is gained or lost as it is moved between the factory and the studio or gallery. And if it can exist on its own terms outside of the manufacturing environment.**

**Some new sculpture has already made its way out of the factory, into exhibitions over the last twelve months. More works featuring audio, video and data visualisation are currently being developed with the help of some tech-wizards and knowledgeable collaborators. I look forward to sharing them after the project ends in February 2021.**

**Covid-19 restrictions put manufacturing and artist placement activity on pause. This temporarily shifted my focus to the digital material amassed throughout the project to date. This publication contains some of this digital material: photographs and a selection of watercolour paintings, which reference them. The paintings celebrate both the fixed and paramulating landmarks in the industrial environment, for their beauty and their functional role. Extracting these landmarks from the manufacturing context and re-creating them in a clean space is my way of offering them up for consideration as sculpture.**

# **Ritherdon & Co Ltd.**

**Ritherdon & Co Ltd. was founded in 1895 by Percy Ritherdon, the current Managing Director's great-grandfather. Operating in a property on Great Moor St. Bolton, the company focused on electroplating and enamelling processes for the Edwardian bicycle boom. Archive material from Percy's era, also, documents his interest in the technical side of entertainment and performance. As a testament to this interest, he opened a second Ritherdon workshop at North Bridge Mill, which fabricated magician's props and tricks. Will Dexter described his visit to the workshop in his book The Riddle of Chung Ling Soo, stating 'no two men were permitted to handle more than one part' of each fabrication.**

**After the turn of the century, Ritherdon plated many millions of parts for the First World War effort, and the 1920's and 30's saw the introduction of sheet metalwork to the factories technical capacity. Roland Ritherdon took over the business in 1936 and, under his direction, the company produced their first steel enclosure for Navy ships during the Second World War. After moving to the current Darwen premises, Ritherdon continued to respond to the demand for further specialised sheet metal work throughout the mid-twentieth Century, producing control panels for the early nuclear industry. During the 1970's, Ritherdon worked closely with the electricity boards to develop new products, the designs for which informed several products still being made at the factory today.**

**Howard Ritherdon became Managing Director in 1986. In the following decade, Electroplating process were phased out in order to reduce the company's environmental impact, along with securing the first**

**Investors in People Award and ISO 9001 (then BS5750) accreditation for Quality Management Systems. Ben Ritherdon took over from Howard in 2012, the year a partnership with Leeds City Council resulted in the first Passive Fire safety products. The FireSeal provided an upgrade in the industry standard fire resistance of meter box and riser hatch doors. The world's first passively safe, crash-tested roadside cabinet was developed at the factory in 2013, which lead to a knowledge transfer partnership with The University of Manchester in 2015.**

**In 2020 - the company's 125th year - the thirty-nine members of the Ritherdon workforce continue to design and manufacture high quality stainless steel enclosures to house power supplies for buildings, construction sites, electric car chargers and other related products.**

# Photographs

## Photographs













FIRE EXIT →

LANSING

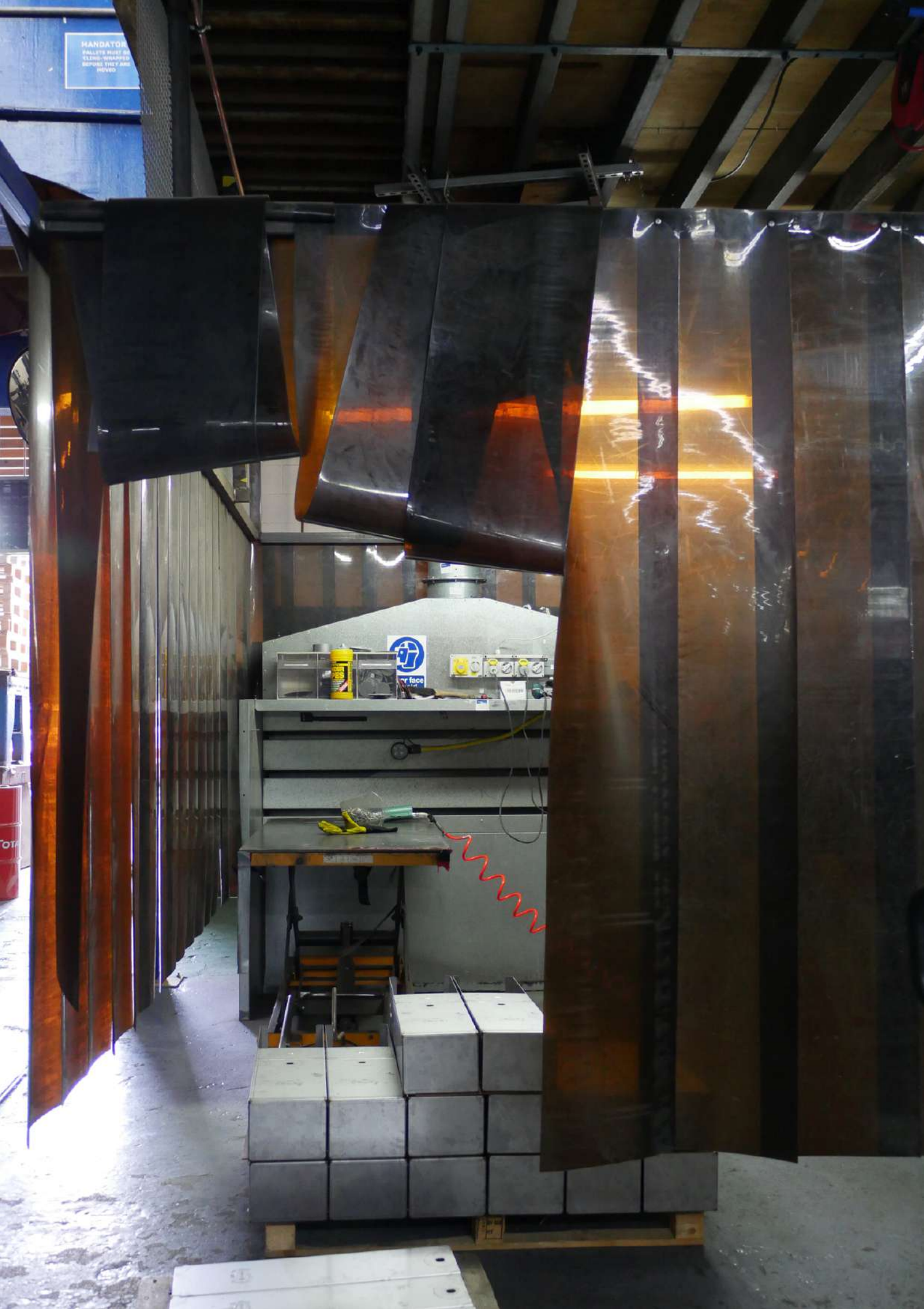
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HANDYMAN  
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BEFORE THEY ARE  
MOVED



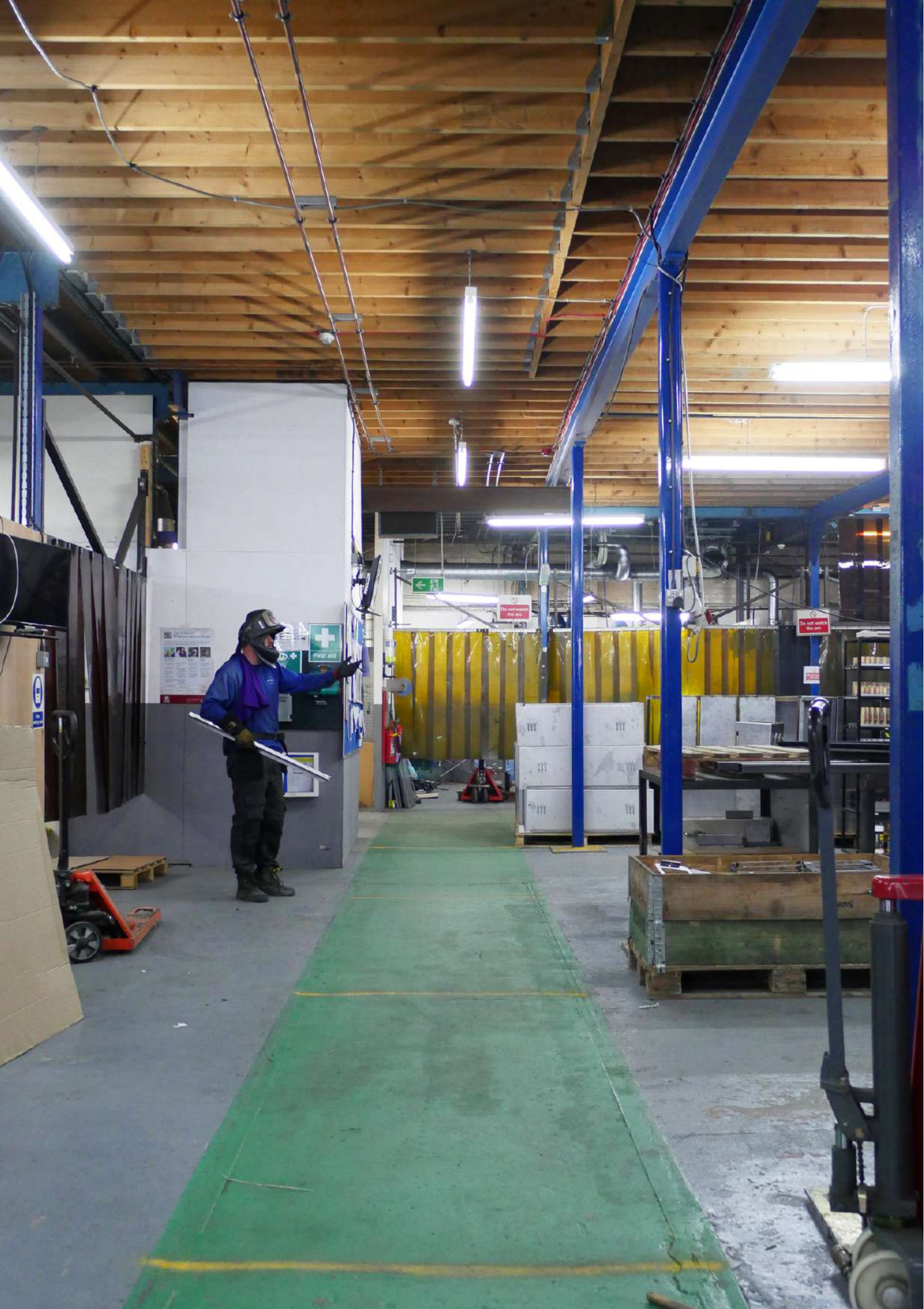


















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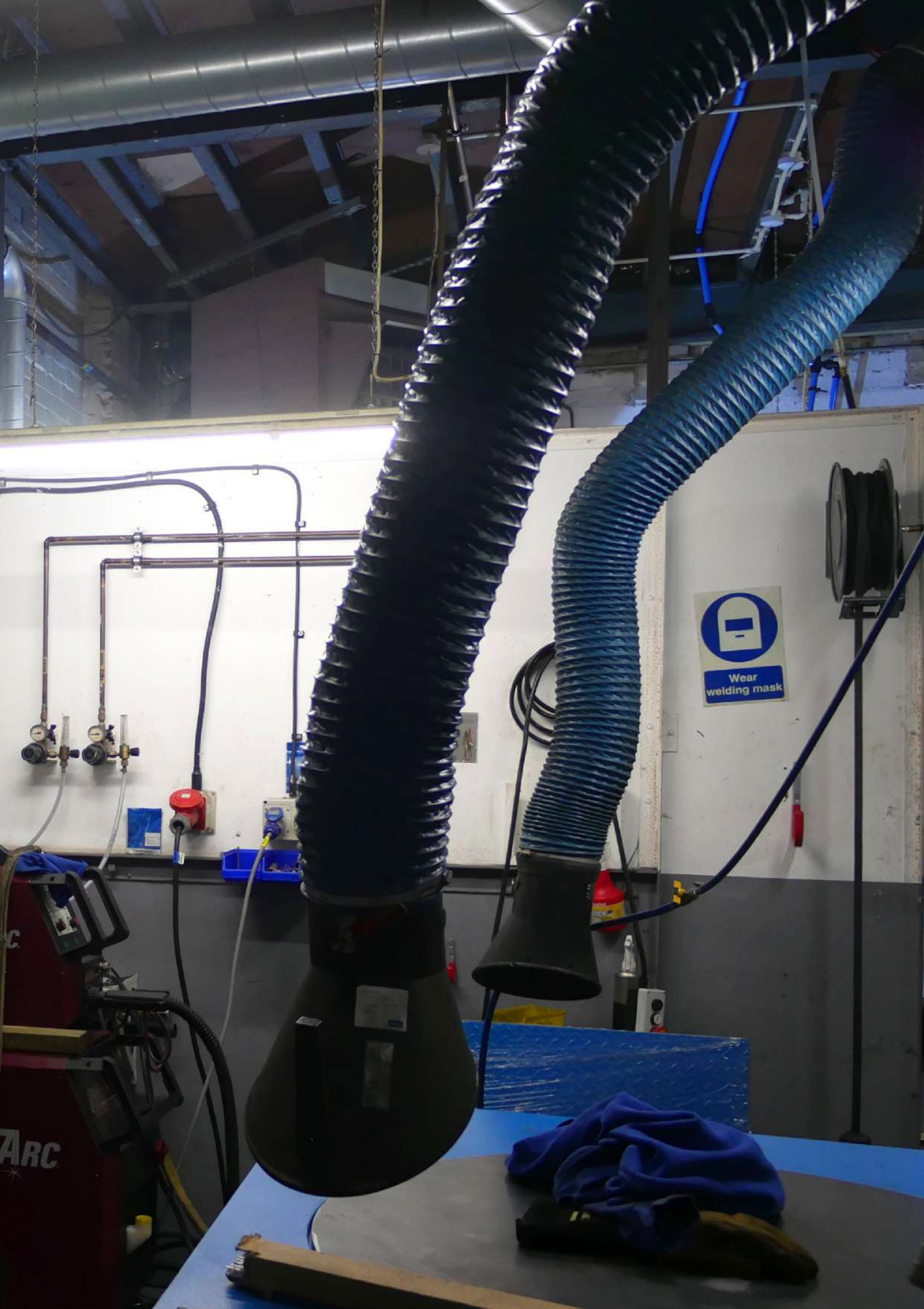












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ARC





































































# Paintings











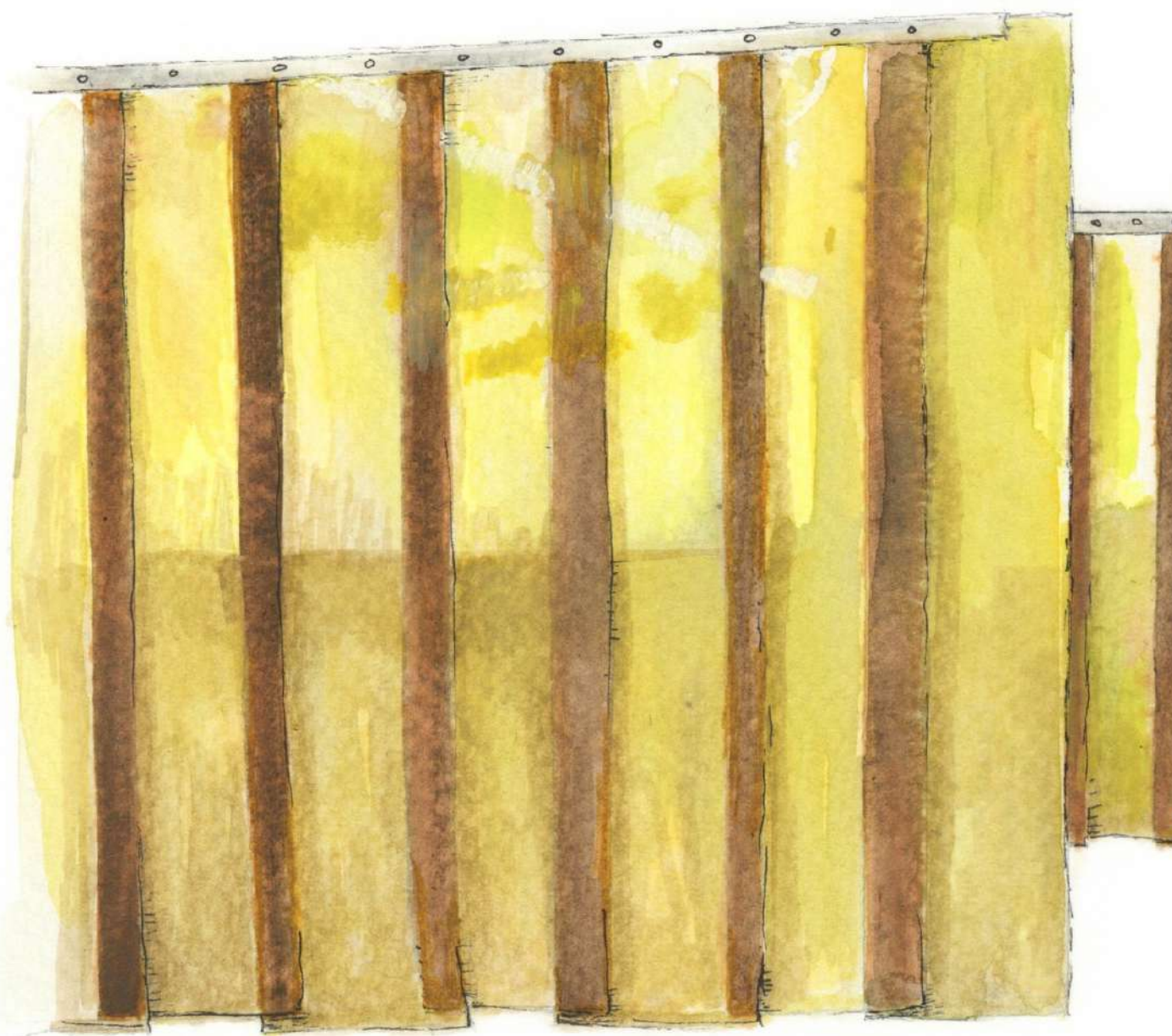




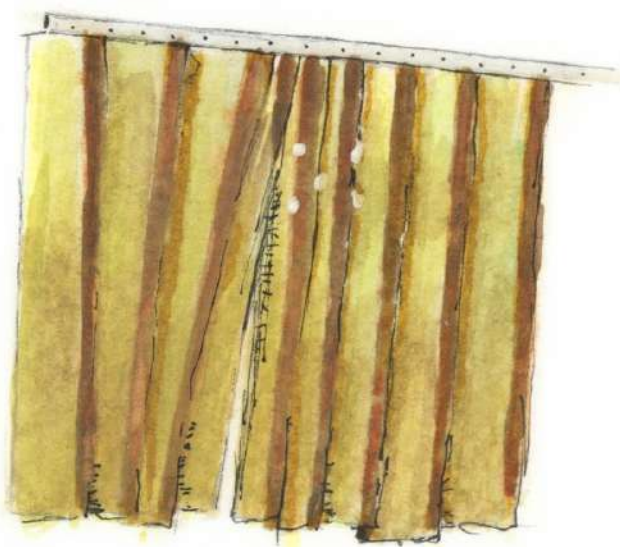












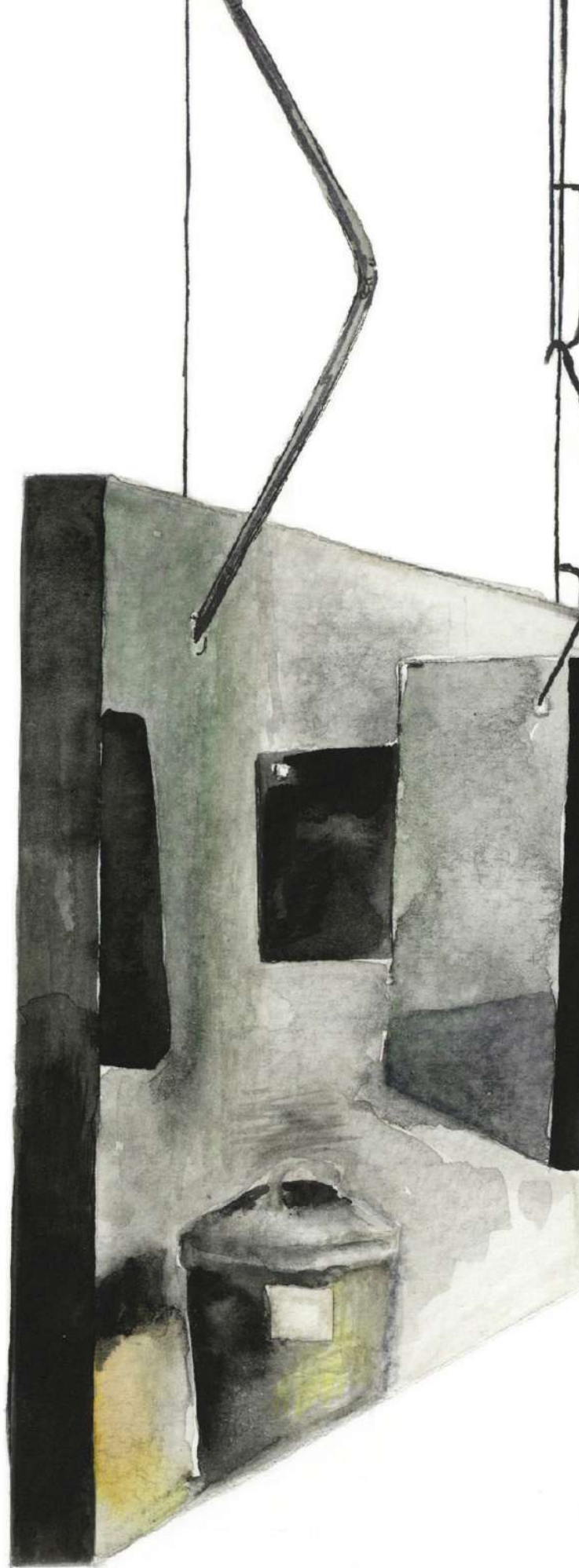
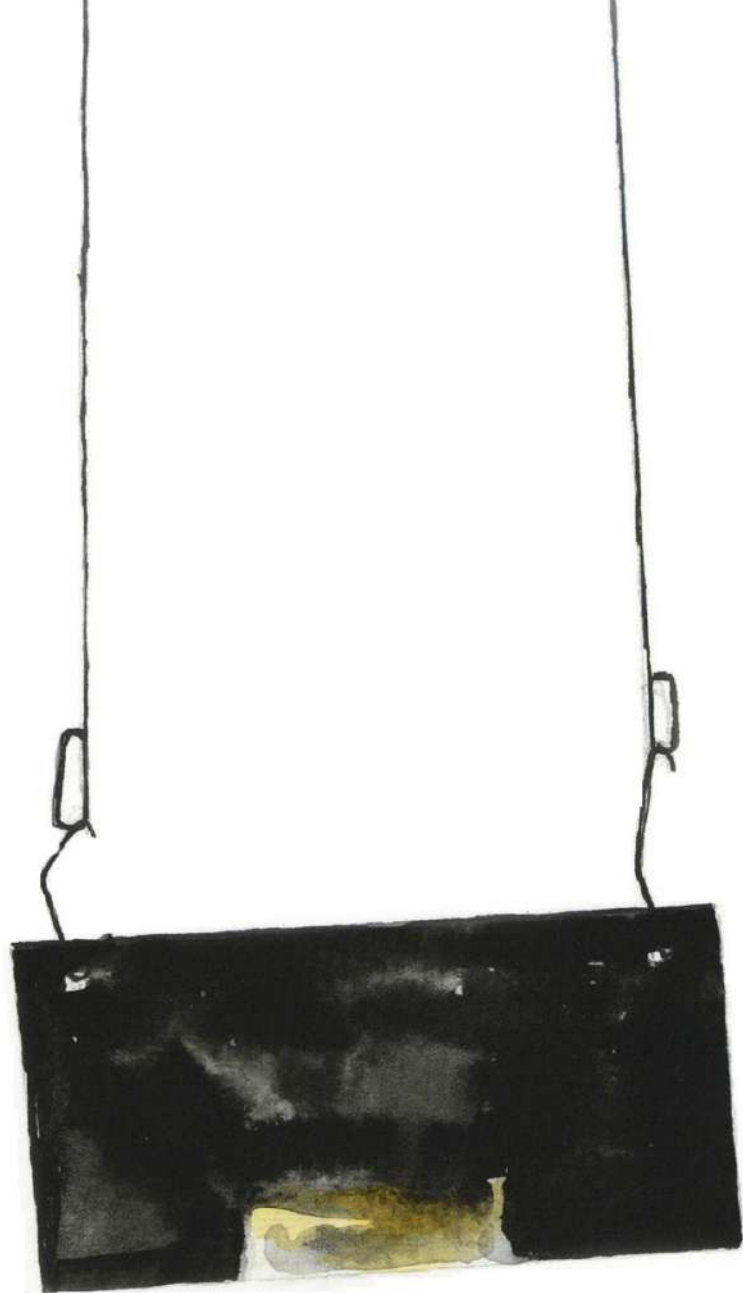






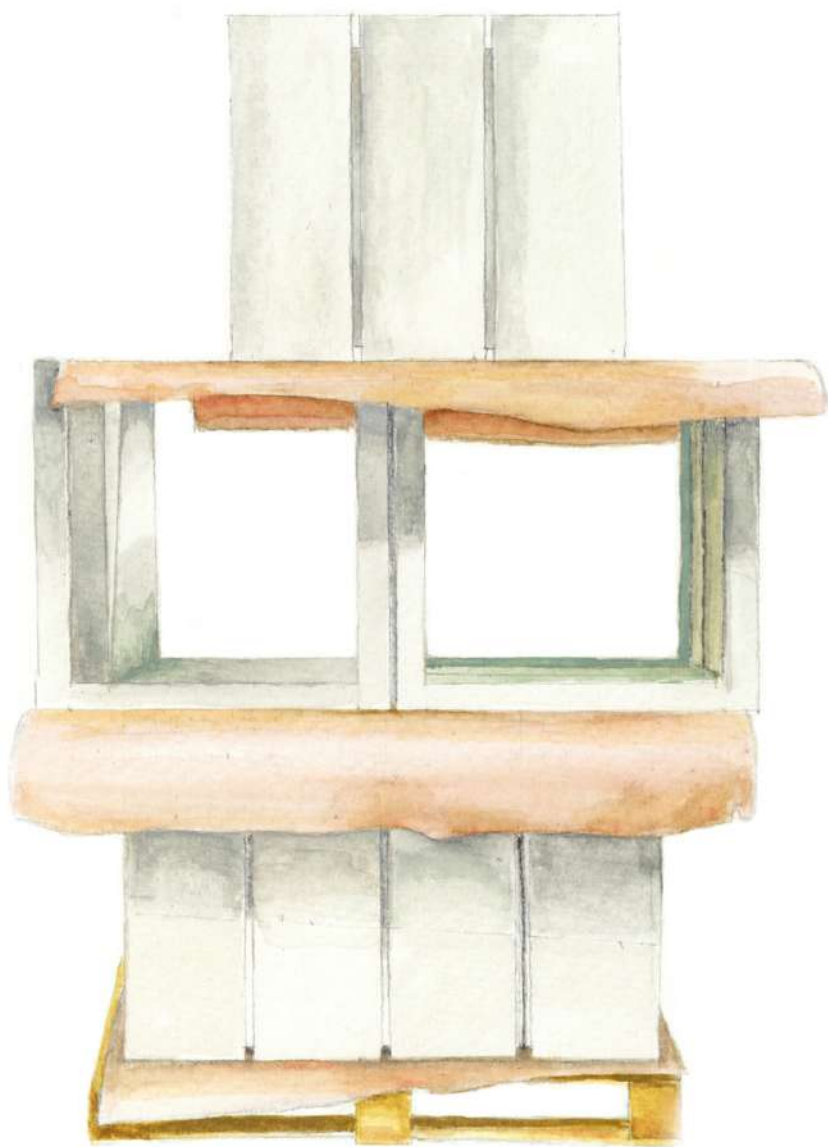
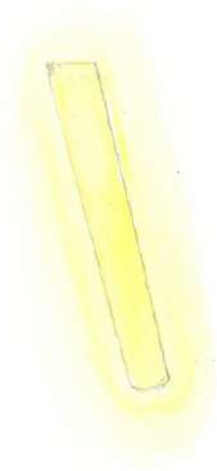
































# Acknowledgements

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Deco Publique and Super Slow Way for matching me with Ritherdon & Co Ltd. during the initial Art in Manufacturing residency.

The Turnpike, Platform A Gallery, Bury Sculpture Centre, Dr Clare O'Dowd, John Plowman and Mark Parham for inviting me to exhibit work from this project over the last twelve months.

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Marsha Bradfield, Polly Wright and the Incidental Unit for your ongoing interest in Return to Ritherdon activity.

Castlefield Gallery, comissioning patron Prof. Chris Klingenberg and The Ronnie Duncan Art Foundation for supporting the upcoming exhibition at Castlefield Gallery

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This publication was commissioned by Castlefield Gallery and produced by Nicola Ellis in anticipation of her upcoming solo exhibition in 2021.



## **Exhibitions and events featuring artworks or discussion about Return to Ritherdon:**

**Artworks exhibited in Major conversations: the industrial narrative at Platform A Gallery, Middlesbrough.**

**Art and the possible Discussion panel at the National Festival of Making 2019.**

**Artworks exhibited in Major conversations: Theodore Major in dialogue with contemporary British Artists at The Turnpike, Leigh.**

**Artworks exhibited in Each Toward the Other at Bury Sculpture Centre.**

**Artworks exhibited in No Particular place to Go? 35 years of Sculpture at Castlefield Gallery.**

**The artwork Dead powder series: Yellow selected by The Manchester Contemporary Art Fund at the 2019 The Manchester Contemporary art fair for acquisition into the public collection of Manchester Art Gallery.**

**Introduction to Return to Ritherdon and steel enclosure assembly workshop delivered during the Incidental Assembly at South London Gallery, hosted by Incidental Unit.**

## **Live links**

**[www.nicolaellis.com](http://www.nicolaellis.com)**

**[www.ritherdon.co.uk](http://www.ritherdon.co.uk)**

**Return to Ritherdon blog**

**[www.castlefieldgallery.co.uk](http://www.castlefieldgallery.co.uk)**

**[www.incidentalunit.org](http://www.incidentalunit.org)**

**[www.festivalofmaking.co.uk](http://www.festivalofmaking.co.uk)**

