



## **EXTENDED HANDOUT**

### **Nicola Ellis and Ritherdon & Co Ltd: No gaps in the line**

**13 June 2021 — 1 August 2021**

Nicola Ellis was introduced to Ritherdon & Co Ltd (est. 1895) by The National Festival of Making's Art in Manufacturing programme in 2018. Following that Ellis has spent a further two years to date as artist in placement at this family-run manufacturer of specialist steel enclosures based in Darwen, Lancashire. Ellis has been working closely with experienced members of the Ritherdon team; observing, participating in, and at times, disrupting the ecosystem of the factory.

The nature of Ellis's project resonates with the activity of the Artist Placement Group (APG). Founded in 1966, the organisation sought to reposition the role of the artist within a wider social context, including government and commerce. The success of this current situation, where both artist and manufacturer can observe, learn and benefit from each other, is testament to Ellis' ability to build enduring relationships, as well as the openness of Ritherdon & Co Ltd to the placement of an artist in their working environment.

Some elements of the works in this exhibition are dictated by the nature of the materials, processes and systems that made them. Ellis' working methodologies have been informed in particular by studying the application of Lean Manufacturing philosophy – a philosophy aimed at the reduction of waste in the form of time, energy and materials. Other elements of the exhibition have been dictated by the dimensions, capacity and context of the exhibition space. The works create overlaps and new relationships between two separate geographical locations, organisations, and industries. Creating new ways of seeing: the gallery, the factory the artist and their potential.

Castlefield Gallery has supported and followed Ellis's work over several years. She has taken part in numerous exhibitions at the gallery including: *LAUNCH PAD: Meanwhile See This* (2012), *Nicola Ellis & Aura Satz* (2013) and *Oh, it is easy to be clever if one does not know all these questions* (2018). In 2019 Castlefield Gallery celebrated our 35th anniversary with the exhibition *No Particular Place to Go? 35 years of sculpture at Castlefield Gallery* which included work by Ellis, and later that year we took her work to the Manchester Contemporary Art Fair where *Dead powder series: Yellow*, (2019) was selected by The Manchester Contemporary Art Fund for acquisition into the public collection of Manchester Art Gallery, where it is now on display. *Nicola Ellis and Ritherdon & Co Ltd: No gaps in the line* is her first major solo exhibition in a public gallery. In 2020 Ellis has been the recipient of an Artist Award Scheme established by the Henry Moore Foundation and designed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Nicola Ellis and Ritherdon & Co Ltd: No gaps in the line has been supported by** The Ronnie Duncan Arts Foundation and Castlefield Gallery Commissioning Patron Prof. Chris Klingenberg.

Nicola Ellis would like to give a special mention to: Ben Ritherdon, Danny Hartley, Nigel Ormerod, John Wright, Brian Derbyshire and every member of staff in the Ritherdon team. You have been extraordinarily generous with your time, resources, knowledge and skills.

**Castlefield Gallery funders and supporters:**

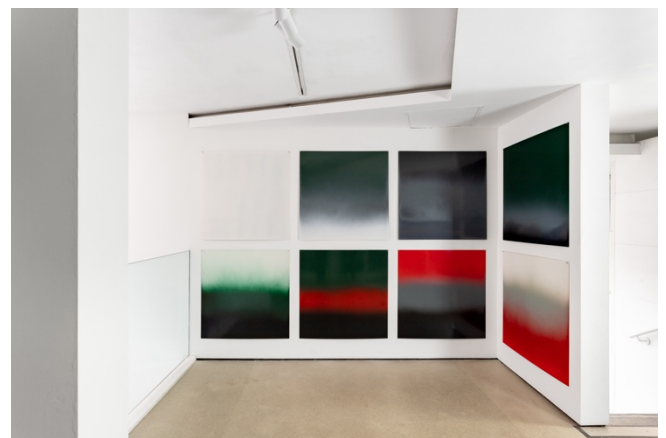


**Castlefield Gallery Exhibition supporter:**

**[creativetourist.com](http://creativetourist.com)**

## ***Powder coated documents: No. 1 – 24***

2020 – 2021



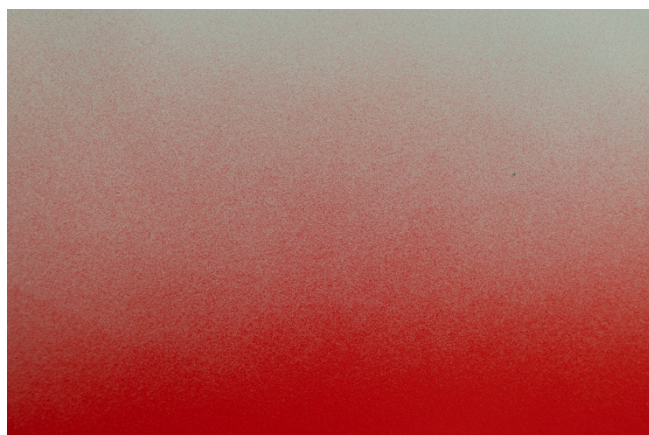
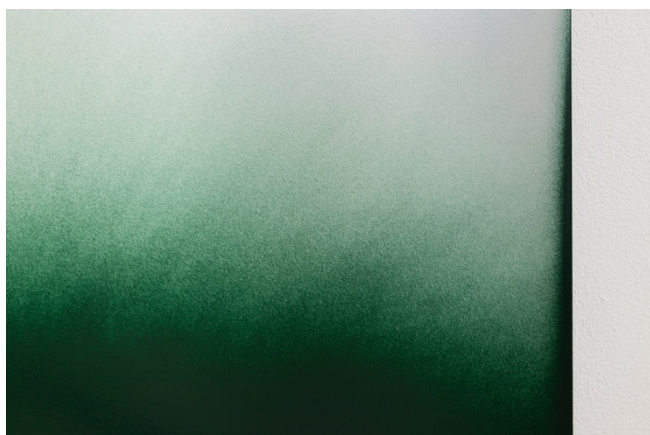
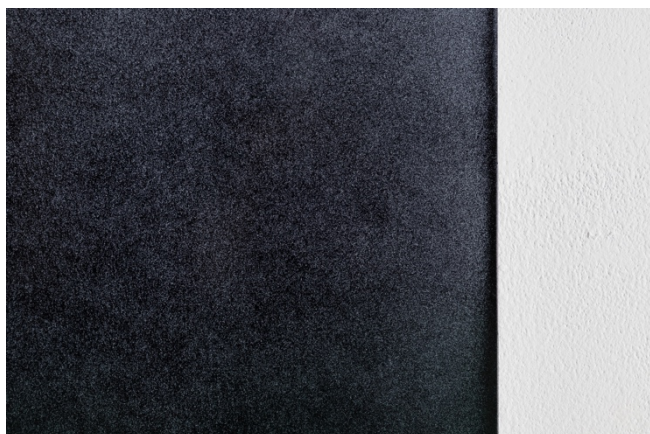
Powder coated mild steel

900mm x 900mm x 2mm

Made by: Matthew Bradley, Arron Davis, Nicola Ellis.

Images courtesy Jules Lister

Installed in the upper gallery, left to right in the order they were made, each panel has been coated top to bottom with the colours used in the paint shop on a single day. These bespoke panels, sized to fit comfortably on the gallery's walls, were put onto the overhead conveyor at the end of each colour run, punctuating the manufacturing line, like a series of full stops. As a result of the factories production schedule some panels are coated in a single colour, others with multiple powders applied to one surface. This series of work makes it possible to compare the subtle differences in powder coating tones and finish, and to see how different powders interact with each other. In the factory context, this activity could be considered a rebellious act as each colour is actively cleaned out of the spray booth before the next can be used, in order to avoid colour 'contamination' of regular products. These works can be understood as paintings and also as documentation of the jobs processed in the paint shop over a series of days. They are a consolidation of data and a visual record of the factories daily activity.



**Above: details of *Powder coated documents: No. 1 – 24*, 2020 – 2021**

Images courtesy Jules Lister



## ***Personal flash in real time (Tony) and Personal flash in real time (Andy)***

2021



Industrial strip lights and light meter

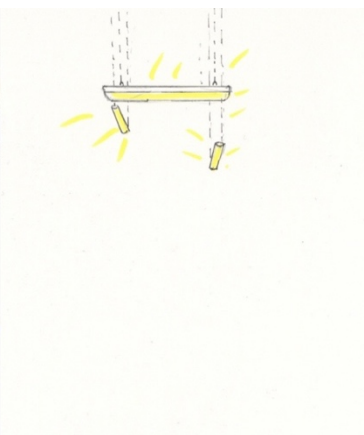
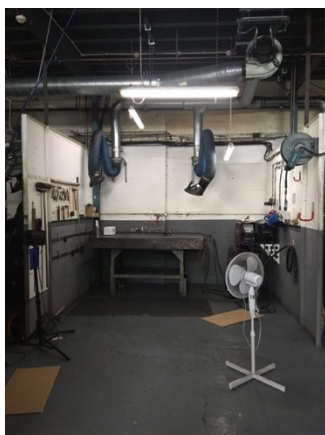
Made by: Andy Bradshaw, Craig Oates, Nicola Ellis and Tony Lowther.

Images courtesy Jules Lister

Two sets of industrial strip lights hanging in the gallery's double height space are connected via Wi-Fi to a pair of light sensors hanging from the ceilings of two welding booths, detecting the 'flash' made by welders at the Ritherdon factory.

At Ritherdon, customer orders inform the workflow management system Seiki, which provides a timeframe in which each welding job should be completed. This work celebrates the welder working within this monitored and structured system by communicating their individual working rhythm in lights. The harsh UV light of the welding process – a barrier separating the individual from the rest of the workplace in the factory context- is translated from something incredibly dangerous and hostile to something communicative.

The light 'data' is transmitted in real time and will only be received in the gallery during the factories working hours (7am – 4pm, Mon-Fri). The work points to the connections, overlap and differences between the factory and the gallery and their respective operating systems. A chart indicating light intensity in both Tony and Andy's booth is visible on the screen in the lower gallery.



Sketch illustrating the position of strip lights in the gallery, mirroring the strip lights in the associated welding booth.

***S.A.M.S.P.S.E (Semi-automatic machine self-portrait: Sculpture edition)***  
2021



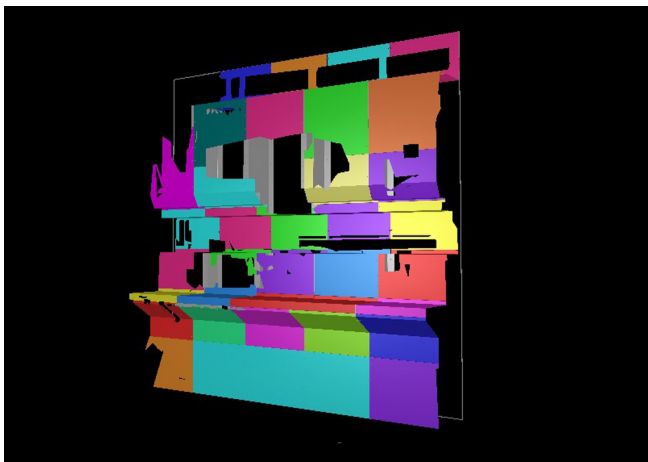
Steel and powder coating

5000mm x 5000mm x 1000mm

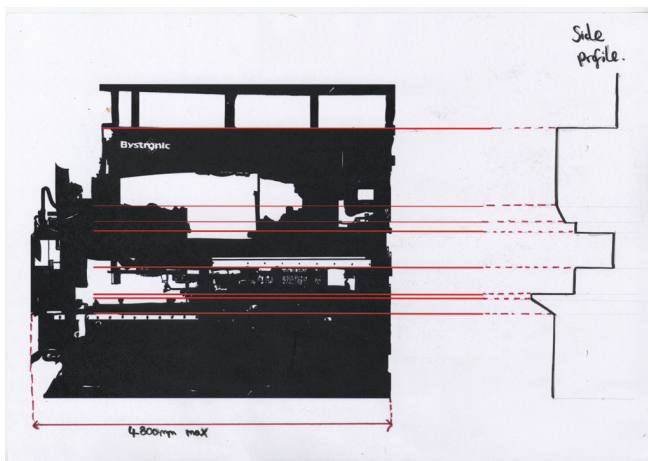
Made By: Mark Blease, Matthew Bradley, Andy Bradshaw, Nicola Ellis, Jason Selby, Adam Wahala, Dawid Wieczorek, Nicola Ellis.

Images courtesy Jules Lister

*S.A.M.S.P.S.E (Semi-automatic machine self-portrait: Sculpture edition)* was produced by disrupting the usual sheet-steel CAD design processes by programming it with a photograph of a press brake (the second machine in the factory line which ordinarily bends Ritherdon products into shape). This program instructed the machinery on the factory floor to punch out and bend a physical version of the translated image, resulting in the press brake machine bending a sculpture of itself into being. Every stage of the standard manufacturing process was renegotiated by Ritherdon staff and Ellis, in order to manufacture this 'alternative product'. Driving the machines and processes beyond the normal parameters of their operations.



3D model for S.A.M.S.P.S.E (2020). Image courtesy Mark Blease.



Left: Simplified photograph of press brake (version one) with corresponding side profile informed by the press brake itself.

Right: Three panels of S.A.M.S.P.E travelling on the overhead conveyor after being powder coated and baked in the Ritherdon paint shop.

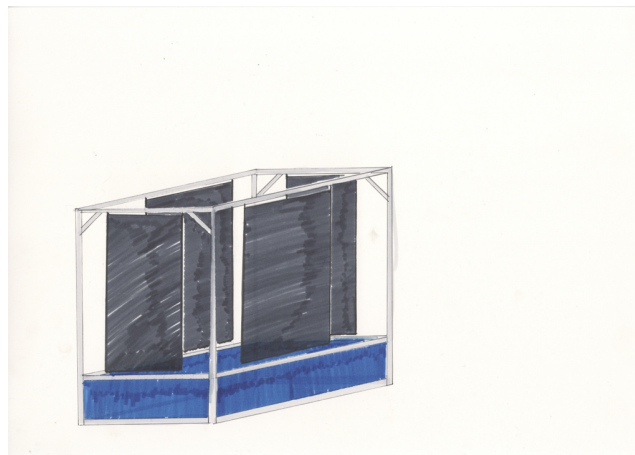


***Donk, spray, clean, repeat***  
**2021**



Four channel digital looped video and audio, mild steel frame  
Made by: Matthew Bradley, Andy Bradshaw, Arron Davis, Nicola Ellis, Rhys Timperley.  
Images courtesy Jules Lister

Four films recorded through the apertures of the Ritherdon powder coating booth are projected onto a corresponding skeletal staging of the booth itself. The films show different powder booth activity including spraying, cleaning and downtime over a period of many months. The work functions as documentation of the Ritherdon paint shop environment and introduces the very specific pace of the overhead conveyor to the gallery space. It also re-orders the paint shop workload, digitally disrupting standard working timelines and procedures.



Original sketch for the projected video installation *Donk, spray, clean, repeat* (2020).  
Image courtesy Nicola Ellis.