

# unearthing landscapes

**Art and Landscape  
Symposium**  
10 October 2019

**University for the  
Creative Arts**  
Farnham, Surrey

# unearthing landscapes



*Unearthed* by Amanda Loomes

## Introduction

*Unearthing Landscapes* explores how people can connect to their natural surroundings through the arts. With a series of talks and debates, the symposium covers historical land art, commissioning new work, engaging communities and wellbeing. The day brings together commissioners, land agencies and artists to learn from and share with each other.

This symposium is the final event in the Surrey Unearthed programme; ten linked projects aiming to connect people with the natural materials of the landscape. Each of these projects delivered by Surrey Hills Arts are presented within this book as a legacy to share.

Ali Clarke  
Surrey Hills Arts

## Foreword

### Joy Sleeman

'Rather than representing it in paint on canvas or in rhythms of steel, a handful of artists chose to enter the landscape itself, to use its materials and work with its salient features. They were not depicting the landscape but engaging it; their art was not simply of the landscape, but in it as well.'

This is how art historian and critic John Beardsley describes the beginnings, in the 1960s, of what came to be known as Earthworks or Land art.

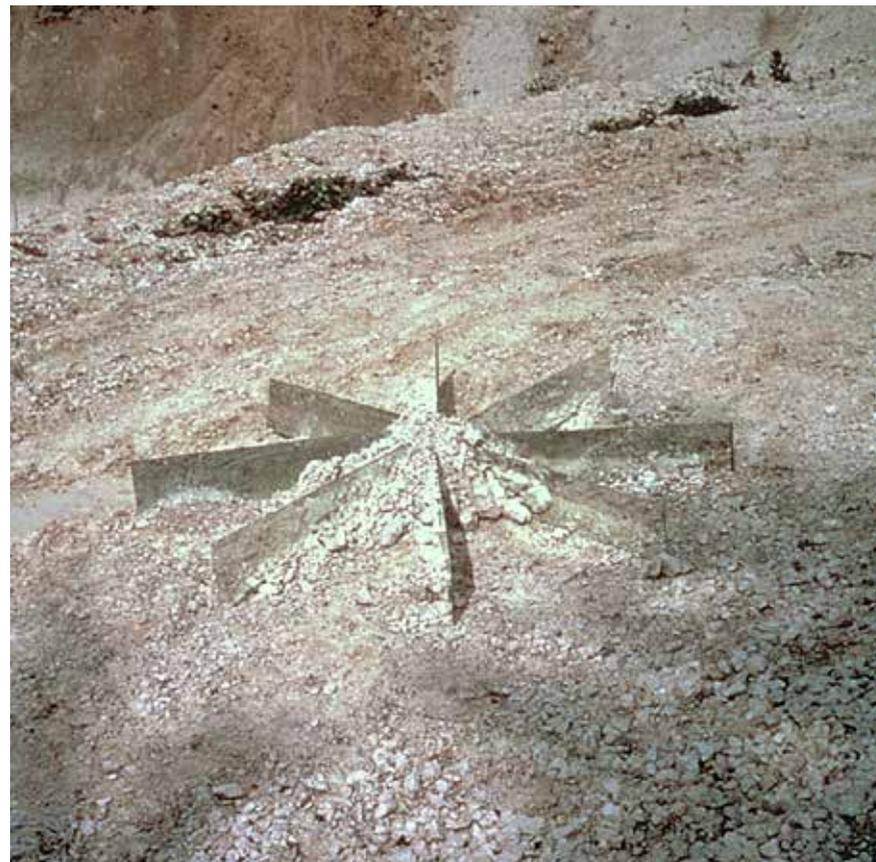
At around the same time that these new forms of art making were emerging on earth some fifty years ago, the first humans set foot on the moon.

Words used to describe the natural world and our responses to it include aesthetic terms such as the one Buzz Aldrin, the second human to set foot on the moon, used to describe its alien environment: 'beautiful, just beautiful'. The Apollo astronauts compared the moon to the high desert of the USA. Through their comparisons and turns of phrase, they turned the moon into a landscape.

As well as recognising a new kind of art making, Beardsley also saw that for all its novelty, 1960s Earthworks drew on one of the oldest and most enduring of artistic inspirations: the landscape. Just as the first men on the moon drew comparisons with landscape environments on earth to capture their impressions of a world that only twelve people so far have experienced directly.

The 'handful of artists' (if ever it was so few) that Beardsley described has increased and diversified over the intervening years. We are now very familiar with direct approaches to making art in the natural environment, not only in the visual arts, but also in other forms of making, through dance, music, voice and writing. And yet the experience of entering the landscape, using its materials and engaging with its outstanding features directly, remains as profound and affecting as ever. *Unearthing Landscapes* explores some of the ways in which that experience has, is, and can continue to be fundamental and inspirational.

Joy Sleeman is an art historian, lecturer and a researcher in Land Art.



Robert Smithson, *Chalk-Mirror Displacement* (Oxted Quarry), 1969  
© Holt-Smithson Foundation/VAGA at ARS, NY and DACS, London 2019

## Keynote

### Joy Sleeman

Joy's talk for the symposium begins with art works made in Surrey by some of the most well known artists associated with Land art in the late 1960s and 70s. No one is probably more famously associated with Land art than American artist Robert Smithson. His *Chalk-Mirror Displacement* was made and photographed in Oxted Quarry in 1969. Other artists who made work in, or passing through Surrey in the 1960s and 70s include Hamish Fulton and Richard Long.

Prompted by the invitation to contribute to Surrey Unearthed and informed by her current research interests in time, anticipation and futurity, Joy will consider resonances between historic works of Land art and recent work in the landscape.

Rather than being fixed in time as the unique product of an individual artist at a particular moment in the past, art works in the landscape can also be seen as collective events that envisage futures and are still unfolding in the present.



Jonathan Parson's Art Picnic & Talk



Harvest at Box Hill  
Photo: John Miller

## Creatively building a knowledge of the landscape

Jonathan Parsons

Artist Jonathan Parsons outlines the concepts behind his series of landscape installations 'Horizons' and how these relate to communicating knowledge about the geological formation of the Northern Surrey Hills. His research and knowledge feeds into the design of public engagement projects. Jonathan talks us through some of the outcomes of the participation programmes associated with the project and some recommendations for community engagement from art picnics, Arts Award and guided walks.

## Building stronger communities through the arts

Mary Branson

*'When I start planning an installation, I don't limit myself when thinking about scale. I have a natural tendency to think big, always have done, and over the years I've developed an amazing group of volunteers, from all walks of life and all ages, to help realise my ideas. This way of working with the community has grown organically for me and now it doesn't seem right to be making a piece of work without them.'*

Mary Branson's 'Harvest' at Box Hill was an installation that was so large, it required 50 volunteers to create. They gave up their weekends over summer to help make and install the work. The closing event brought hundreds of the local community together to celebrate their landscape at harvest time. Mary's talk examines the dynamics and logistics of the Harvest install and what happens to an art project when you start sharing it with the community.



*Passage for Par*, Rosemary Lee, Groundwork, Cornwall, 2018  
Photo: Graham Gaunt

## Experiencing the landscape through Dance

Rosemary Lee

Rosemary reveals what drives her to create works for outdoor settings and the way in which her work might affect the viewers' experience of and relationship to the landscape they inhabit with the performers. Drawing on examples of her work for public green spaces in the heart of London - *Square Dances* and *Calling Tree* (co directed with Simon Whitehead) as well as her most recent durational works *Passage for Par* and *Circadian* on the shores of Cornwall and East Anglia, she will share the questions that consume her every time she embarks on working in a new landscape. She will illustrate her talk with film extracts and stills.



*Beneath Our Feet*, Katie Green  
Photo: Owen Benson

## Stories of the human experience through time

Katie Green

Katie is a director, choreographer, teacher/mentor specialising in creating site-adaptive dance work - particularly responding to museums and heritage sites - which tells the story of the human experience through time.

She will share some of her experiences working in these unusual sites, in particular developing her more recent work for caves and underground spaces *Beneath Our Feet*, performed at Kents Cavern (Torquay), Cheddar Gorge (Somerset), Stump Cross Caverns (Yorkshire), the Redcliffe Caves (Bristol), the tunnels of Fort Amherst (Chatham) and Carnglaze Caverns (Cornwall).

Her talk will include the research phase working with a group of experts, the audience's reaction to the work and her ambition to create live performance experiences that, by drawing participants' attention to a perhaps familiar space in a new way, might, even briefly, enable those participants' to have a greater/clearer awareness of themselves.



*Nissen Hut by Rachel Whiteread*



*Look! Look! Look! Studio Morison*

## Creating connections to landscape

Hayley Skipper, Forestry England

Forest Art Works is a successful partnership between Arts Council England and Forestry England. It is built on the belief that woods and forests are vital places for contemporary artists to engage with, to make and present new work and seeks to create ambitious work that breaks new ground for both artists and audiences.

Hayley's presentation will explore key projects which highlight the strategic approach that has been developed to promote and ensure that Forest Art Works for audiences, artists and commissioners. From poetry and virtual reality to sound and sculpture trails, this presentation will explore key commissions which have created innovative new connections to landscape in woods and forests across England.

## Approaching a commission

National Trust and Kent Downs AONB

Since 2009, Trust New Art has been connecting people to National Trust places through contemporary arts. They have worked with over 200 artists to create new work inspired by their places.

The installations take you to unexplored areas, reveal hidden stories and allow the visitors to see places in different ways. The programme includes visual arts, crafts, architecture, performance, and writing – all inspired by the spirit of these special places.

Grace Davies and Eira Szadurski introduce 'Trust New Art'. With a particular focus on outdoor commissions they will describe the organisational motivations for the programme, and the challenges and opportunities within it. They will be joined by Madeleine Hodge to share her experience of commissioning a major new public artwork for the Kent Downs AONB.



Left: Plaster mould (detail). School workshop -Russell Jakubowski  
 Right: Terrain workshops Jane Ponsford

Human Henge  
 Photo: Yvette Staelens

## Meaningful community engagement without compromising the art

Community engagement is best when it feeds both participant and artist. This element of any project needs sufficient thought and planning and to be integral to the project. Different landscape art projects with successful community programmes share their processes here in an interactive session guided by Kara Wescombe-Blackman, the Head of Learning at Watts Gallery.

Russell Jakubowski's sculptural workshops looking at the contours of the landscape and Jane Ponsford's papermaking using the natural materials of the landscape expose participants to new methods of making. Both these and Katie Green and Rosemary Lee's site responsive performances all link to and feed into their own work as artists. This session is an opportunity for other artists to share their own experiences and to think differently about community engagement.

## Exploring historic landscapes for health

Laura Drysdale

Since 2016, the Restoration Trust has been running partnership projects exploring historic landscapes for health and wellbeing at Stonehenge and Avebury and latterly at Burgh Castle, a Roman Fort near Great Yarmouth. Both projects involve groups with serious mental health problems meeting regularly to walk a local historic landscape in the company of facilitators, artists, musicians, archaeologists and naturalists.

This presentation will describe 'walking with intent' as a process which expands participants' imaginative confidence through connection with place, deep time and the group. It will contextualise Human Henge and Burgh Castle Almanac projects within the developing field of heritage and health and discuss research findings about the mental health benefits attributable to this 'culture therapy' experience.



NNF4 © Original art works by 'And Now'  
Photo: Nick Read

## Extraordinary Events in Extraordinary Places

Kate Wood, Activate Arts

Inside Out Dorset is a biennial festival of extraordinary events in extraordinary places, produced by Activate Performing Arts. Launched in 2007, it is distinctive among its peers in animating, celebrating and creating meaningful relationships with outdoor places both rural and urban across Dorset working with artists from all over Europe.

Since 2005 Activate has worked in protected landscapes, both in presenting and commissioning site specific art works, most notably on a three year national project called Life Cycles and Landscapes with artists 'And Now' in partnership with the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). They have also worked on the Dutch landscape arts festival Oerol. Kate Wood, Executive and Artistic Director of Activate and Co-Artistic Director of Inside Out Dorset, will talk about why they work in these landscapes, how they engage with the community, and the impact of the work.

### *An artistic exploration of the Surrey Hills*

Surrey Unearthed is a programme of ten linked projects exploring the natural materials beneath our feet through sculpture, installation and film.

The programme celebrates the importance of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with its rich history of local industry, farming and culture shaped by the use of natural materials over time from historic settlements to Capability Brown landscapes and Arts & Crafts architecture.

Connecting people with their local landscapes, the artists engage others in their exploration of chalk, sand, clay, grass, wood, and earth. This research unearths hidden insights into a particular material, its uses over time and relevance today.

This programme includes four emerging artists selected by open call who were mentored by those more experienced. This encouraged links and dialogues between the ten very different projects.



*The Lark Descending* Ackroyd & Harvey

## Case Study

# The Lark Descending

Ackroyd & Harvey

Ackroyd & Harvey research and explore Leith Hill, its history, geology, ecology and culture. Their interactive exhibition was built around six key layers of the land itself: **Air | Terra | Soil | Water | Clay | Oil**

The town centre space invited people to share knowledge and feelings about Leith Hill and its imminent threat from exploratory oil drilling.

Leith Hill is a special place. A place where Charles Darwin did formative experiments into earthworms, Tennyson wrote poems and the celebrated composer Ralph Vaughan Williams lived and wrote the transcendent *The Lark Ascending*.

Over many years Ackroyd & Harvey have spent time on the hill – walks, photography and forest feasts – embracing the touch of wildness the place offers. Their sense of revealing its vibrancy and vulnerability was integral to their evolving exhibition, to 'unearth' why we strike a deep relationship with this landscape and why people are compelled to protect it.



*Fossil Ocean Floor* Jonathan Parsons

## Case Study

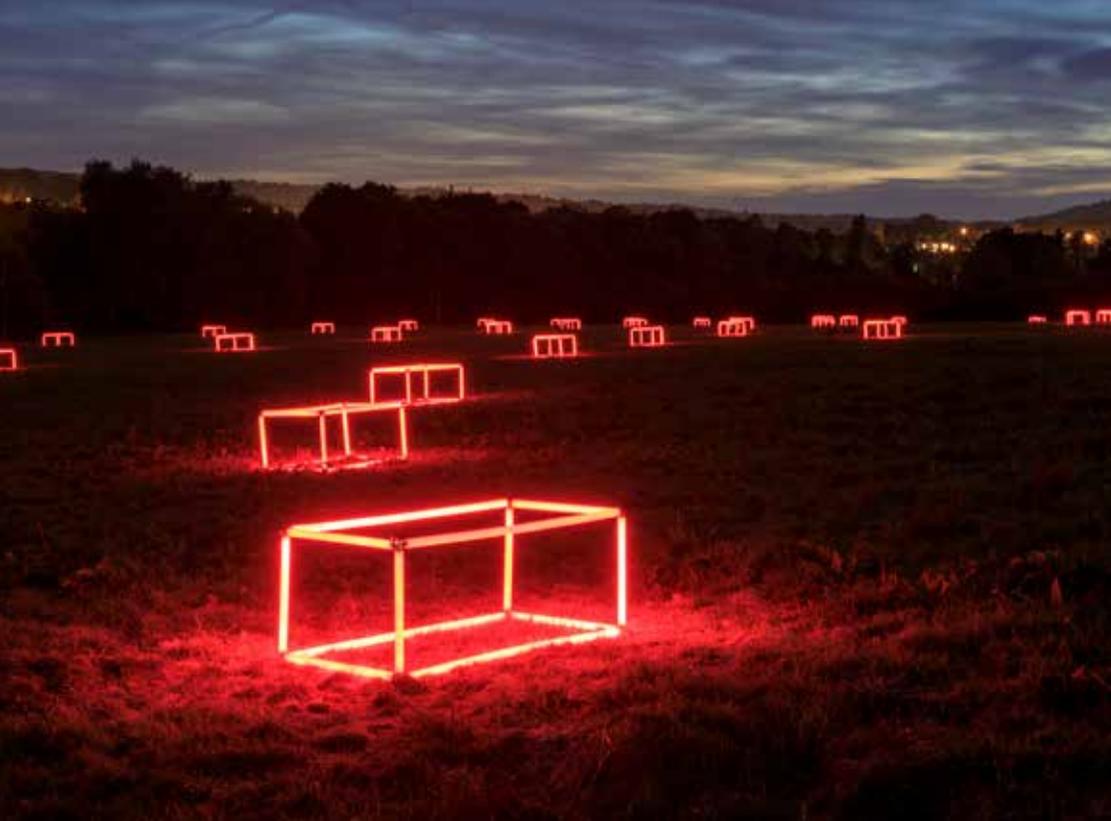
# Fossil Ocean Floor

Jonathan Parsons

*Fossil Ocean Floor* is a site-specific intervention in the chalk landscape of the northern Surrey Hills. Inspired by ancient chalk hill figures, it is visible from a far distance. This monumental text piece with letters composed of a matrix of bright discs aligns into words as the viewer passes.

The chalk of the Surrey Hills was laid down on a tropical seabed roughly 90 million years ago. It is composed of the disc-shaped skeletal remains of phytoplankton called coccoliths. They fell as microscopic snow to the ocean floor over millions of years forming layers of silt kilometers thick. This gradually compressed into pure white calcite limestone: the chalk we see today.

Part of an ongoing body of work called *Horizons* Jonathan engages with ideas of landscape as an artistic genre and as something that can be viewed as an image.



## Case Study Harvest

Mary Branson

*Harvest* is a site-specific intervention on farmland beneath Box Hill. In developing this project, Mary Branson explored the relationship of the local farming community to the land, the processes and rituals of harvest time and the impact of the changing climate on their work. *Harvest* is an illuminated artwork highlighting some of the unseen work that goes into shaping the landscape that is often taken for granted.

The drought of Summer 2018 had a negative effect on hay supplies nationally. At Box Hill Farm, Mary Branson's installation features sixty six 'invisible' bales – illuminated outlines, the dimensions of hay bales, arranged in the same formation used in farming across the lower field.

The piece culminated in a community celebration of the landscape at Box Hill viewpoint at Harvest time. The celebratory event included hand-held lanterns and traditional singing from community choirs.

*Harvest* Mary Branson  
Photo: John Miller

## Case Study Unearthed

Amanda Loomes

*Unearthed* is an experimental digital project bringing to light the people who work in the sandpits of the Surrey Hills, people who sometimes slip through the fingers of history.

Focusing on two working quarries near Bletchingly and Oxted, Amanda has extracted information about their geology and archaeology resulting in two art documentaries 'Whole' and 'Persistent Place'. The films playfully explore our relationship to tools, from the Mesolithic hunters who struck flints here, to the machine operators' love for their 40 tonne excavators.

Editing techniques are used to reflect the repetitive processes of sand extraction and to draw attention to the beauty within these industrial workplaces. Touching on our relationship to the extracted materials, *Unearthed* considers the dispersal of the Surrey Hills and the imaginative potential of the sandpits. The films have been shown widely from local screenings and talks, to exhibitions in Portsmouth, London and Switzerland.

*Unearthed* Amanda Loomes



*Terrain* Jane Ponsford



*House of Invisible Hands* Walter Bailey  
Photo: John Miller

## Case Study

# Terrain

Jane Ponsford

Jane Ponsford's practice is rooted in walking and finding materials to base her bookworks, sculpture and installations upon. Her current preoccupation is with materiality and process in response to particular settings and landscapes, the chalk, natural dyes, clay and silt and the traces they leave.

In Surrey Unearthed, Jane has collected, and catalogued the materials using making as a method for investigation, created from traces of the landscape. The installations incorporate her collections and the pieces she has made both independently and with others in the four locations of Box Hill, Newlands Corner, Witley Common and Reigate Hill over a year.

Her walks and talks with individuals and groups are reciprocal allowing an exchange of ideas, stories and anecdotes, including the history of landscape in terms of geology, human history, industrial archaeology, local folk law, and journeys.

## Case Study

# The House of Invisible Hands

Walter Bailey

*The House of Invisible Hands* is a shrine to those whose labours shaped the landscape of Surrey in the making of forest glass during mediaeval times. This practise involved working within the forest using the raw materials of the landscape to keep the furnaces going. The impurities in the materials created the green of the resulting glass objects.

During his research sculptor Walter Bailey became interested in the social aspect of the practice. The glass was made by skilled artisans from Europe and local peasants. Young children often worked long hours stoking the furnaces. This hand carved oak structure sits on a view point on RSPB Farnham Heath as a shelter and rest point for walkers to experience this artwork from outside and within.



*Sounds from a Shallow Sea* Alison Carlier

## Case Study

# Sounds from a Shallow Sea

Alison Carlier

*Sounds from a Shallow Sea* draws upon the materiality of the chalk hills around Dorking, culminating in two works; an audio walk and a participatory 'Calling' event.

Immersing the listener across time and space, the audio walk/podcast flows between the geological language of chalk, local peoples' reminiscences of chalk used in the classroom, regionally sourced historical folk song, observations of the landscape from local poets combined with ambient recordings of the sea.

The 'Calling' provides a unique experience in listening and making sounds outdoors. Traversing the landscape with sound, from Box Hill to Lower Farm, live voices communicated across the Surrey Hills landscape as part of a community event at dusk.



*From Humble Beginnings* Steven Edwards

## Case Study

# From Humble Beginnings

Steven Edwards

This temporary installation by artist Steven Edwards explores the materiality of clay. The project draws from the use of clay extraction for building materials from the seams of clay that stretch for miles across the Surrey Hills. Using a mixture of raw and fired clay, it exposes the viewer to the different stages of using this material.

The clay seam installation stretches around 30 feet, rising from the ground to a peak at the centre in reference to drawing clay from the earth and using it to construct. The narrative sections of the piece begin with the unearthing of clay and its changing states when exposed to 'weathering' through moisture hydration and dehydration. The clay is then drawn from the ground and manipulated to a vertical wall of mathematical tiles that interpret the influential Surrey vernacular building style – an important language of place, that has developed over time to accommodate the values, economies and cultures that produced them.



*Liminal Lease* BrynHallett  
Photo: John Miller

## Case Study **Liminal Lease**

Bryn Hallett

This sculptural structure is an exploration into the history of industry in Surrey and how the use of the landscape has changed over time. Bryn Hallett has used the geological palette to create a tranquil space of calmness and reflection, a rest stop along the Pilgrims Way and North Downs Way.

Drawing on this varied geology, the monolithic mass of the Watts chapel and the importance of the woodland, the sculpture gives a reminder of the interaction between people, industry and the landscape. It provides a place to take in the beauty of the woodland and offer a unique view of the landscape before slowly melting away back to the earth.



*The Travelling Reading Room* Amie Rai

## Case Study **The Travelling Reading Room**

TECHNE student Amie Rai

*The Travelling Reading Room* is based on the design of a book, intended as a shared space that invites us in for collective dialogue and exchange. The flow of the human voice interweaves with the sounds of the wind, the trees and non-human creatures going about their daily doings.

Throughout Summer, this pop-up structure travelled to outdoor sites across the Surrey Hills slowly creating content as it moved to each location – The Devil's Punchbowl in Hindhead, The Watts Gallery in Compton, Leith Hill Place and Gatton Park Reigate. Together, participants came together to read the landscape through deep listening, connection, touch and story-telling. Themes about the environment, tree root communication, networks, reading by touch and oral tradition worked their way into their exchanges.

## Surrey Hills Arts

Surrey Hills Arts is a partnership between Surrey Arts, Surrey County Council and the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Our imaginative programme across the arts aims to connect and engage people in this outstanding natural landscape. We deliver innovative landscape projects engaging local communities, promoting heritage, health and tourism, and developing emerging artists.

[www.surreyhillsarts.org](http://www.surreyhillsarts.org)

## University for the Creative Arts

This specialist creative arts university encourages collaboration between courses, with fine artists studying with budding filmmakers and fashion designers working alongside architects. The Farnham campus offers an extensive range of degree and masters courses from glasswork and ceramics to film and animation.

Farnham is the biggest campus and home to the James Hockey and Foyer Galleries and several research centres including the Centre for Sustainable Design and the Crafts Study Centre, which is a purpose-built museum and gallery dedicated to crafts.

[www.uca.ac.uk](http://www.uca.ac.uk)

## With thanks to:

Joy Sleeman, for her generosity in giving her time, knowledge and advice.

The symposium team Rebecca Skeels, UCA, Caitlin Heffernan and Karl Newman, Surrey Arts.

The Surrey Hills Arts Advisory group particularly Perdita Hunt OBE.

The Surrey Hills AONB team and Surrey Arts, Surrey County Council.

The University for the Creative Arts for hosting this event.

The students and volunteers who have provided valuable help on the day.

Graphic design by Bullet Creative

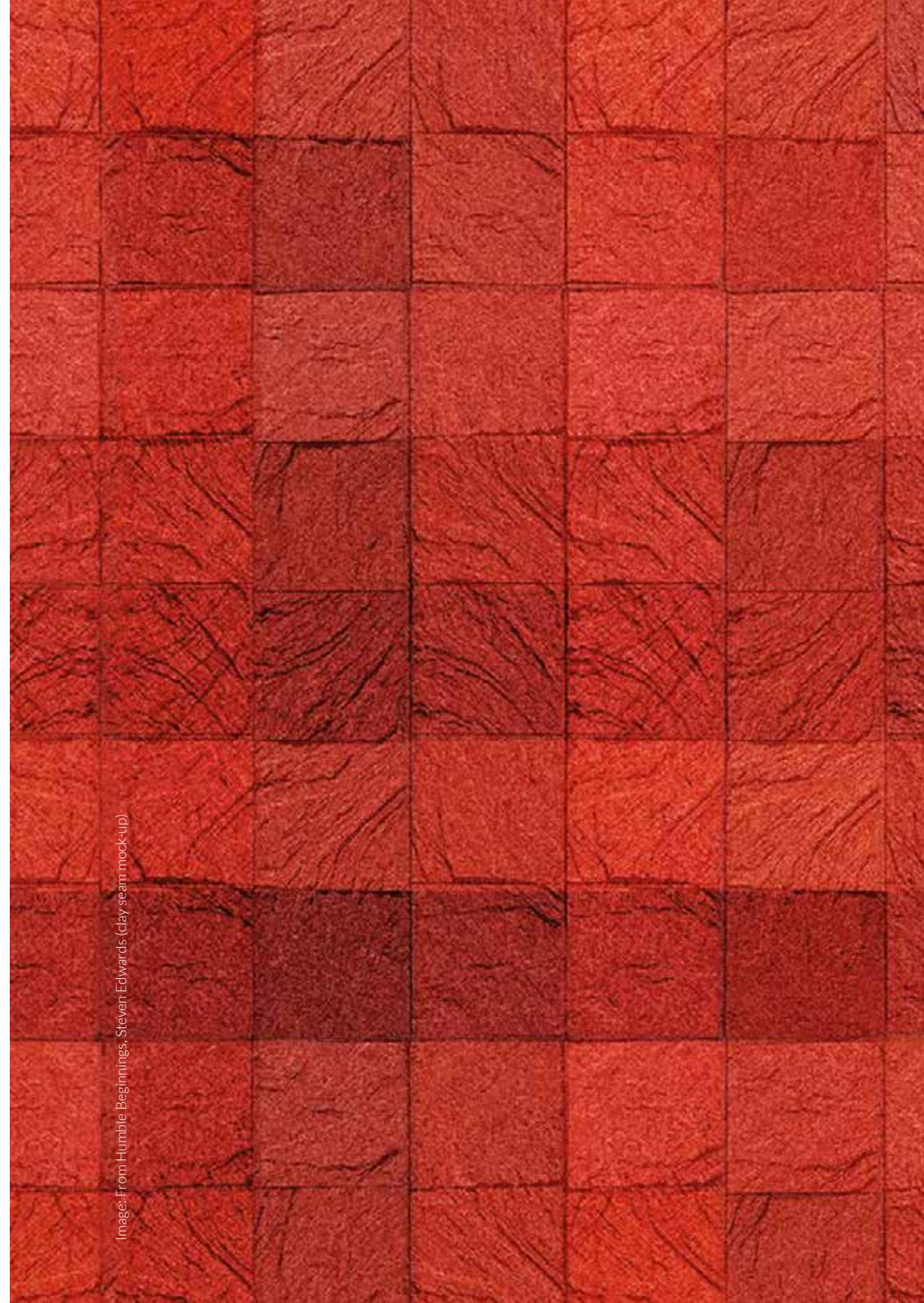


Image: From Humble Beginnings, Steven Edwards (clay seam mock-up)

ISBN no: 978-0-9930502-0-6

 **Surrey Hills**  
*Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*



Supported using public funding by  
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