



 the **geranium** 
project R&D

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The Geranium Project R&D involved Research and Development into the creation and display of a mixed reality installation funded by Arts Council England through the National Lottery Project Funding from June 2019 until February 2020.

The project would not have been completed without the support of Wayne Sables, Iain Nicholls and Mike Stubbs and the help of Kimberley Haines and Luke Roberts.

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Space in the imaginary of the Geranium Project

Making virtual reality artworks is presented as a new frontier where there are no maps and the viewer is faced with charting their own course, exploring in a way that suits them and exercising agency in the encounter. The difficulty with VR as a medium is precisely that it seeks to be 'like being there' and 'there' must be somewhere, real or imaginary. It is regarded as a manifestation of Plato's Cave and we are reminded of hisⁱ instruction to return to the shadows to educate our fellow men on the reality that they cannot see. The clarion call of this new technology is immersion and agency towards *gesamtkunstwerk*ⁱⁱ, but it might equally be thought to be "a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing."ⁱⁱⁱ As with any new tool there is a degree of evangelism inherent in its dissemination.

On a simple level Virtual Reality offers an opportunity to address the movement between transcendence and immanence^{iv} as consciousness moves between representations. In 'the geranium project' the photographic stands for the real (transcendent) object(s) and the drawn elements for the represented (immanent) objects. The environment presents as a field for the fulfilment of perception. The 'player' moves through the spaces, looking, listening, considering the changes encountered as they progress. As perceptions challenge the notion of existence the project is an exploration of the act of looking.

The act of "looking" is the foundation of any art work and is the immediate interface with the audience, and this is not in any way a radical viewpoint. The entirety of training in art is about looking in a way that breaks through the filters of perception that are accrued through living. VR offers an opportunity to present a work in a format that reduces the need to suspend disbelief as it tricks the brain into an assumption of presence. It must be noticed that this trick pales with repetition and is both less and more effective with people who play computer games. Any work using this expression has to be sure of the meaning of the perceived presence, in geranium that presence is centred on space.

Discussing the Chauvet Cave paintings^v John Berger remarks that

'The thrust of an animal's neck or the set of its mouth or the energy of its haunches were observed and recreated with a nervousness and control comparable to what we find in the works of a Fra Lippo Lippi, a Velázquez, or a Brancusi. Apparently art did not begin clumsily.[...] There was a grace from the start.'^{vi}

he argues that the difference between then and now is space, rather than finesse, the space, he states, *'in which their images exist as images and were imagined'*^{vii} This connection between the space of the imagination and the physical space in which it is expressed is central to the thesis of the 'geranium project'. Geranium's space is composed of versions of a real space, a private space recreated in different conditions, and versions of that space reimagined as drawings and paintings by the artist. The 'player'^{viii} moves through the gardens from a cave like space within the artist's studio, progressing from reality to reality through the imaginary a number of times during their immersion.

When entering a new space we are faced with a number of responses, curiosity, intrigue, anxiety, or perhaps even irritation. We spend our attention on the environment according to our preconceptions and our intentions within it, so that we may, if we have an appointment, search for signs and follow them trying to exclude distraction, or if we are there without purpose, or only to look, we linger over details allowing ourselves to be drawn into reveries. If this space is a museum we might aim for a studio or a particular

collection or gallery, even a specific work, we might search for order, a chronology or stylistic guide to help us navigate, or we may just wander, a glimpse of colour or light catches our eye and we move towards it, spellbound. When the space is the artwork these same intentions direct us as entering a virtual space is essentially the same as entering a building.

The installation itself is experienced in both the physical and virtual worlds, it is a confined space, around two and a half metres at its widest and of a similar height, with illumination provided by a video projected onto a cloth at its end. The journey through the video is replicated in VR as the introduction to the garden spaces. The space has a soundtrack of birdsong that gradually gets louder with the interjection of thunder at some points as the audience passes. Additionally there is a representation of the birds from within the VR that can be viewed as Augmented Reality objects using an android app. The passage through the installation in its physical manifestation is replicated in the VR world as the player passes through (into) the video and enters the virtual garden.

Sartre suggested that imaginary objects are a “melange of past impressions and recent knowledge”^x and the virtual space in geranium explores this idea. The space is represented in a way that is clearly not intended to be 'physical' reality but is instead an 'imagined' reality requiring the same distance and suspension that we experience when we view a photograph. It is not the 'thing', but we accept a perception of it as the 'thing' without deep consideration (most of the time). Joseph Kosuth's 'One and Three Chairs'^x is a more explicit expression of this kind of thinking. If we accept geranium as, on one level, a manifestation of conceptual space there are still questions of agency and intention within the space. Intention needs to be questioned from the viewpoints of the “player” and the viewpoint of the artist. Geranium presents itself as an exploration of the transcendent act of drawing, challenging the binary contrast with the immanent and the interpretation of the imaginary through the presentation of analogons as described by Sartre^{xi}. The artist asks the player to view a translation, in the mind of the artist, of a photographic view of the garden into a garden rendered in a three dimensional representation of the garden as a drawing. The photographic garden is presented in three ways, playing with scale, weather conditions and intensity of observation, sparsely populated with birds that, upon closer inspection, are discarded drawings. Each of these spaces leads into a rendered garden presenting an interpretation of those differences. All of the spaces, photographic and drawn, are accompanied by a soundtrack of ambient garden noises with slight differences for each. The intention of the player is, hopefully, to explore. The idea of having any agency in relation to an artwork is difficult. On the one hand a work requires the application of imagination as well as the simple choice to engage or not. The structure of the work should coerce the operation of this agency in the audience.^{xii} Against this the audience as 'player' in a VR work has to choose beyond this initial engagement and must exercise this agency within a tighter structure to fully realise the experience. In geranium's gardens the audience choose their speed, and their direction as well as what they see. There are spots where they can stop to listen and there are places where they might find a secret.

Geranium explores the way engagement with all aspects of a space can be imagined and recreated as an immersive artwork.

Project Evaluation

At the start of the project I set out a series of aims beginning with the intention to **create a space that tells a story**. I created the original space as a rectangular environment, with a 4.8m x 3.6m footprint and 2.4m high, with drawings on three sides. Entry was initially through a door in one of the long sides, this was later changed to a corner on the same side to allow for a 'light lock' to keep the interior dark. I made a series of films which were projected onto the short side furthest from the entrance, and recorded a set of soundtracks to accompany the projections. The drawings in the interior of the space were developed from drawings of the original garden from which the project is developed, the films are all of the same space, one simply a long take of the space from a static camera with a soundtrack of background noise recorded at the same time, birdsong, faint road noises, distant machinery etc., the other films are made from sections of motion captured film during early morning and late evening, edited together to exploit the characteristics of the light. Over these are played two recordings, one combines a section of TS Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' from the 'Four Quartets' combined with Tennyson's 'Tithonus', the other is a paraphrasing of this combined poem in my own words. The space was presented to the public on several occasions and used with groups of students and local artists. After evaluation of these events I dismantled the space and reassembled it in a more organic form, to build in more sculptural elements, increase the opportunities for interaction and render the environment more confining. I cut out the overt references to the source material and used only birdsong on the soundtrack.



The first installation being assembled

Alongside this space, and interacting with it, I wanted to **Make a virtual reality space or online space that is explorable and has a narrative component**. I began the VR space at the end of July, after opening the studio for the Doncopolitan Crawl, and had a working prototype by the end of August. The space has developed considerably since then. At the end of December the space has three garden spaces made of photographs and four gardens created from drawings reimagined as 3d models. The poetry from the installation has been split into parts and used as a voice over. The Vr space is now entered from a simple model of the studio and I intend that this space can be created for each location that it is shown in. From here you enter a 3d model of the installation, with the same interactions, and progress through the video screen (now presented as a split cloth moving in the wind) into the first garden, the 'summer garden', from here you move to the end of the garden and towards the first drawn garden through a mist filled tunnel. At the end of this garden you pass through another tunnel to the 'rain garden' and at the end of here

through another tunnel to a version of the drawn garden which is massively raised in scale. From here a long tunnel takes you to the 'frost garden' from which you pass through a tunnel to the 'painted garden'. Passing through here takes you into the longest tunnel through which you enter the 'drawn garden' which uses elements directly taken from the drawings and lofted to create a space littered with forms which you must navigate through. At the end of this space a tunnel brings you back into the studio where you started. Each of the spaces can be fully explored and each features sounds, birdsong, snatches of conversation or reading, that are encountered only in certain sections of each garden. In the tunnels there are longer narrations indicating what you might expect and how you might proceed in the space you are about to enter.



The second installation drawing

My other aim was to **Present the work to an audience and use them to help refine the experience.** The installation was presented to the public at an open event for Doncopolitan Crawl on July 23rd, I set up an exhibition with work by my two graduate artists, Kim Haines and Luke Roberts, as well as installation installed downstairs by Andrea Berry, a local artist recently raduated with an MA from Sheffield Hallam. On the night we had around 80 visitors, 62 of whom visited my installation in its first iteration. After this I staged another event in October with talks by Andrea and me and had 13 attendees, 9 of whom tried the VR environment. On the following two Wednesdays I had students from Barnsley College BA Fine Art visit with lecturers, a total of 36 visitors, 21 of whom tried the VR. Visitors to these events were invited to feedback their thoughts and suggestions on whiteboards and through conversations. I blogged this feedback at the end of October. Additionally 25 more people have visited the studio at various points and tried out the VR space. All of this has been useful for the overall development of the experience.



Upstairs studio for the Doncopolitan Crawl

The project involved me in collaborative work with Wayne Sables, Mike Stubbs and Iain Nicholls, all of whom acted as mentors for aspects of the project. Some of this engagement has been challenging, but all of it has been valuable. Iain was a particular help with the VR and using Unity, Wayne and Mike both gave considerable insights regarding the gestation of the project and Wayne also helped me make valuable contacts towards its dissemination.

The most significant aspect of the project has been developing my understanding of engagement in and display of virtual reality for an audience. The reluctance and self-consciousness of some users highlighted a need to provide different ways of viewing the space, although these obviously curtailed any agency within it. Providing several methods of interaction allowed for a larger concurrent participation in the piece. My professional practice has been validated by the allocation of ACE National Lottery Project Grant Funding. One of the most significant results of the allocation was the change to way I was perceived as a serious artist in regard to a commission with the NHS. Early in 2019 I was meeting a brick wall when discussing options to advance a project, when I subsequently backed off because my commitments to The Geranium Project limited my time the client decided to wait for my availability. This professional acceptance has been the most revelatory effect of my experience this year, considering that I am highly qualified and experienced as an arts educator I was pleased to be recognised in this way by ACE and gratified that it opened some previously closed doors. In short I'm taken much more seriously now.

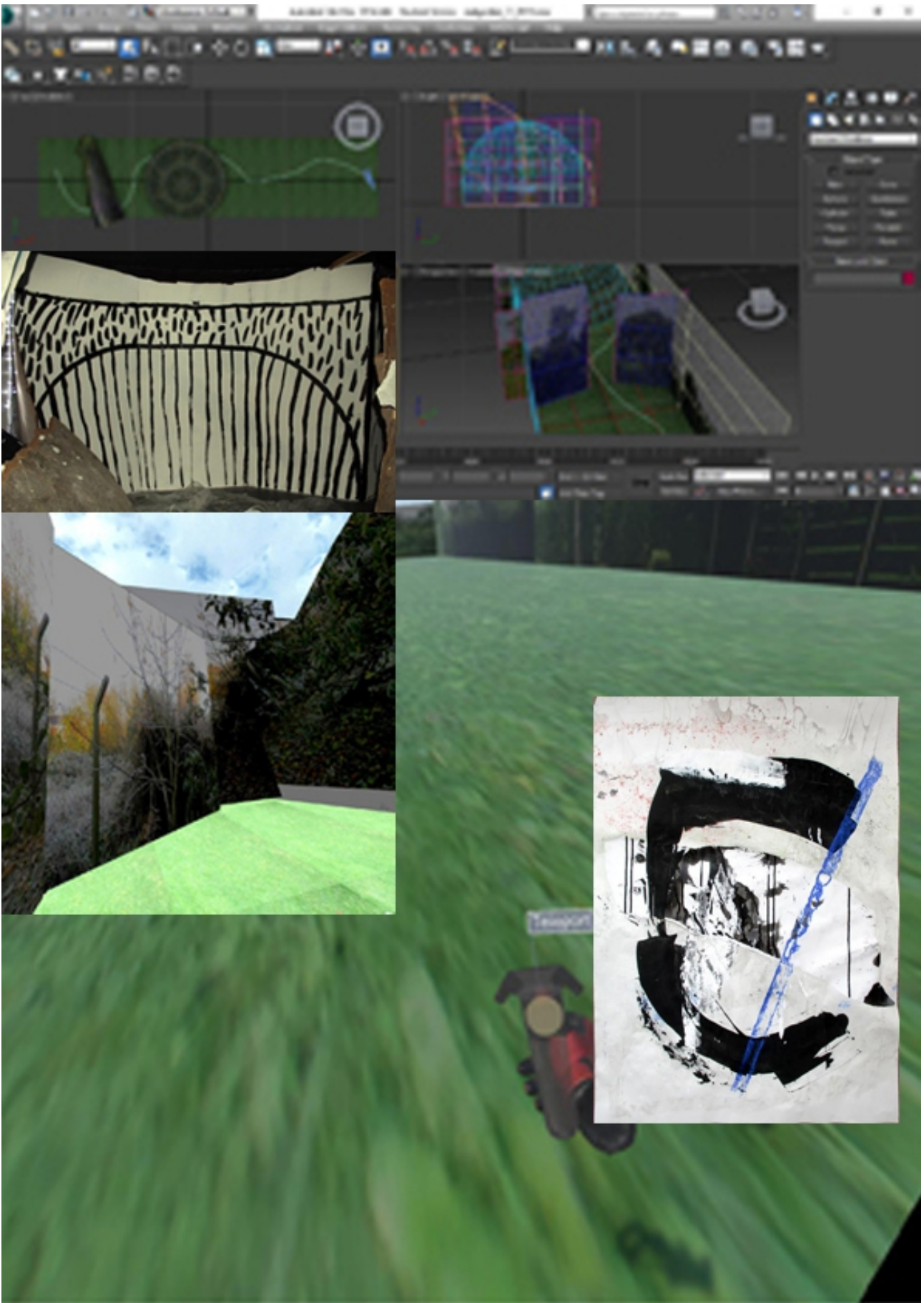


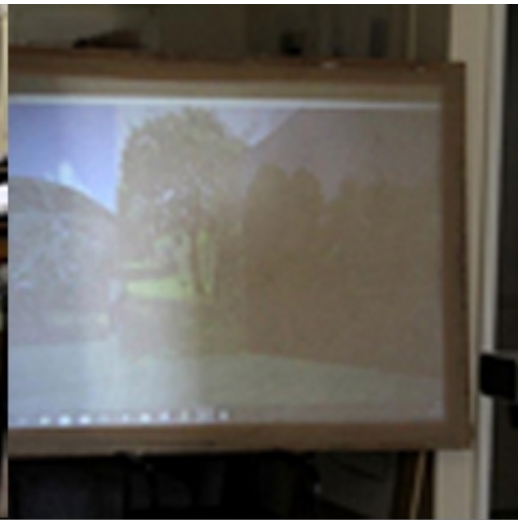
A view of the Crawl exhibition with work by Kimberley Haines on the right and Ian Latham on the left

Photographic Record









Geranium Project feedback - Luke

My involvement in the Geranium project has been motivational, resourceful and educational.

Involvement:

I helped Ian with his development of the installation, virtual reality and augmented reality by providing him with feedback and ideas which influenced his progression of the Geranium project. I also assisted with hosting public events such as the Doncaster Art Crawl where members of the public demoed Ian's project during the early stages. My role involved speaking with guests about the project and guiding them through the virtual space.

I assisted in hosting other events for Ian where he invited people of interest and students to demo his project for feedback. During these events I helped guide people around the virtual space as well as take videos and photographs to document these events.

One of the major involvements I had was helping Ian with Augmented Reality (AR). I showed him the program I used to create AR and provided ways in which his project could work with AR. I mapped his animations to targets in his space which could be viewed through a tablet or phone.

Was it valuable?:

Yes I found the whole experience very valuable. It inspired me and motivated me to work with Augmented Reality once again. With the AR, I learnt new things which could benefit my own project. I learnt that feedback is important in the development of a project; feedback for what works and what doesn't is a valuable asset in the growth of a project.

I also gained valuable insight into starting and managing a project for when I'm ready to start my own.

Did you make any connections/opportunities?:

I gained a handful of contacts along the way and improved on some already existing contacts who I'd briefly met in the past. Opportunities also arose from these connections, one being the opportunity to exhibit my own work at the Fringe in Doncaster during one of their public exhibitions. Another being the opportunity to work with another artist and being invited to speak at a Ted talk about my own project.

Overall I felt I have been useful in the involvement of Ian's project, especially with the AR side of it as Ian hadn't worked with AR before. I felt I offered resourceful feedback towards the development of his project too. I gained valuable knowledge and insight which could help me with any future projects of my own and gained contacts which could provide resourceful in the future.

I have enjoyed my time working with Ian and I learnt some valuable lessons from Ian, it has been a pleasure working with him.

Geranium Project Report - Kimberley

With Ian we have discussed the progress of the installation as it has developed, offered ideas and assisted with the successful hosting of preview events to trial the Geranium Project. We have assisted with guests, welcoming them and guiding them through the process of using the VR headset. We have taken photographs and videos to document the ongoing process of the piece, and the various experiences of individual guests that have visited. We contributed to the doncaster crawl, where we had open access for the public to view work by myself, Ian, Luke and Andrea. During this event we networked and given valuable feedback for all our works. Myself and Luke then assisted Ian and Andrea for an artist talk evening where Ian introduced the Geranium Project, as well as Andrea introducing her medium of work both through a PowerPoint presentation. Within the time we have worked with Ian, we have watched the project progress and change in a positive way, the installation has molded into a more interactive space, which combines the essence of reality and virtual into one.

My experience has been very valuable, as I have gained the confidence to gain contacts and to openly interact with a multitude of audiences. I have enjoyed assisting Ian with his works and have realised that trial and error are essential and gaining the resourceful knowledge of others helps to evolve projects further.

I have gained resourceful contacts during this time, networking has been a key element to getting your work known and seen to its full potential. I have been asked/commissioned to assist projects with Wayne Sables and welcomed into other artist collectives. Within this artist group I have been invited to exhibit alongside a large group of other creatives within the fringe.

Overall my experience has broadened, offering a mindful insight into how to manage a successful artist project and how important it is to prepare, manage and exploit the works.

the geranium project in numbers

128 Gb

24 days employment
for artists

46 VR players

of Images & Video

239 Blog visits

548 page views

12Gb DATA in 28 3d models

31 blog posts

**17 open
days**

146 visitors

1 Project
1 Report
1 Newspaper Article
1 Video Interview

Ian Latham; ianlatham1959@virginmedia.com; www.ian-latham.com/blog

Artist Builds Virtual Worlds in Empty Doncaster Shop



Ian Latham, right, with visitors to the geranium project. The installation is in the background

Release Date 06/01/2020

Ian Latham presents his Arts Council Lottery Funded Project 'the geranium project(R&D)' – a combination of installation and Virtual Reality used to create an immersive experience exploring the translation of reality into art through drawing. The installation includes spoken word and film alongside Augmented Reality and traditional painting and sculpture. The Virtual Reality environment takes the participant through a series of gardens made from photographs and drawings accompanied by poetry, sound and film. The project can be experienced in around thirty minutes.

Open, by appointment, from Monday 10th February to Saturday 15th February, or you can

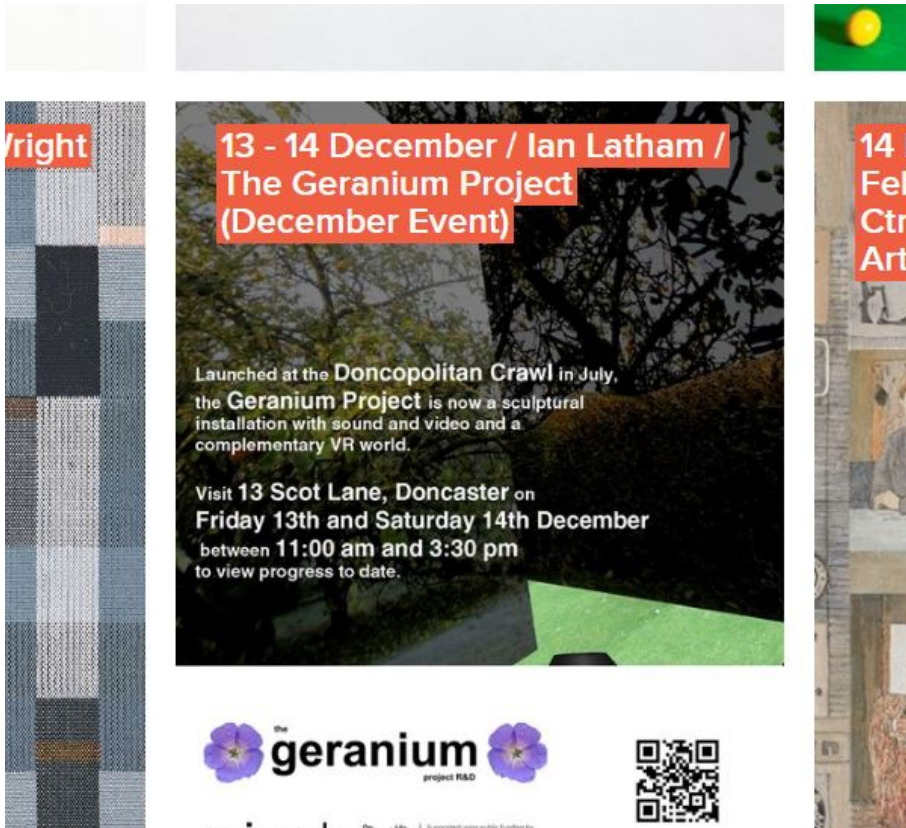
drop in between 11:00 am and 4:00 pm on Wednesday 19th February, Friday 20th February or Saturday 21st February. The Geranium Project is exhibited at 13 Scot Lane, Doncaster, DN1 1EW. This empty shop is rented through Axisweb, a national charity that provides studio spaces for artists.

This exhibition marks the culmination of the first stage of the project which began in June 2019. During the past six months over one hundred and twenty people have called into the shop to experience the installation and try out the virtual reality using a HTC Vive headset. The project has been assisted by local creatives Wayne Sables and Mike Stubbs who have been mentors and Iain Nicholls, an established virtual reality practitioner from Barnsley, all of whom have exhibited Internationally.

Ian Latham, BA Fine Art , MA Creative Technology, Senior Fellow Higher Education Academy, is a digital sculptor. After a long career in FE and HE he retired in 2018. He has worked with organisations such as the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, Oxfam, Doncaster Museums and Archives, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Responsible Fishing and the Wayne Sables Project and the Cooper Gallery, Barnsley. Ian makes paintings and sculpture based on real and remembered landscapes that are presented together to suggest non-linear narratives, he works with computer based 3d modelling to create virtual environments reflecting the superimposition of memory over place. He has exhibited throughout the North, there are paintings currently on display at Joro restaurant in Sheffield, and had previous exhibitons, solo and group, at DARTS in Doncaster, the Contemporary Gallery in Barnsley, the Ferens open in Hull and the Keighley Open. He has also shown work in small galleries like the Brevon in Doncaster, Artscreative in Chesterfield and at Granary Wharf in Leeds.

To book a slot to see the installation and try the VR please use the form here <http://www.ian-latham.com/blog/book-the-geranium-project-rd/> or, if you have difficulties, contact the artist, Ian Latham, by email; ianlatham1959@virginmedia.com, or telephone 07596619792. You can call into the studio at 13 Scot Lane without an appointment but bookings will be accommodated before drop in visitors.



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13 - 14 December / Ian Latham / The Geranium Project (December Event)

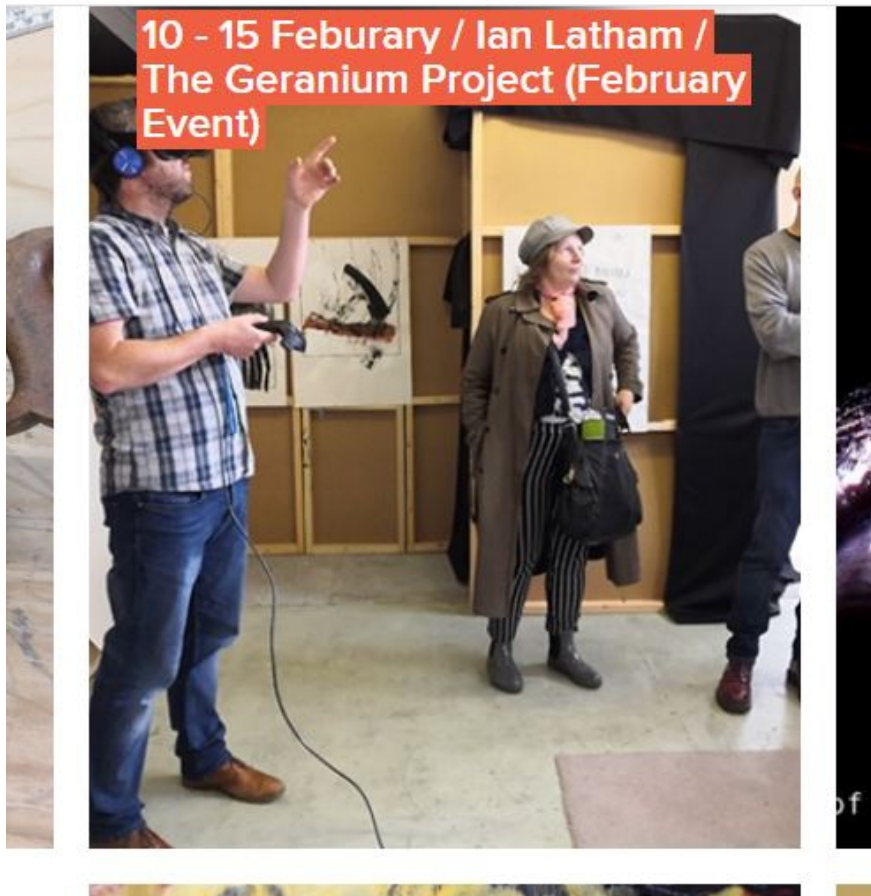
Launched at the Doncopolitan Crawl in July, the **Geranium Project** is now a sculptural installation with sound and video and a complementary VR world.

Visit **13 Scot Lane, Doncaster** on **Friday 13th and Saturday 14th December** between **11:00 am and 3:30 pm** to view progress to date.

Axisweb What's on for December, and below for February

Social Works: Live Art & Artists Oppo



10 - 15 February / Ian Latham / The Geranium Project (February Event)

Ian Latham

Ian Latham is an artist based in our Vacant Space in Doncaster which he has converted into a studio and gallery space. Ian uses sculpture, drawing and virtual reality technologies to create immersive environments.



Axisweb Interview link <https://www.axisweb.org/films/2019/ian-latham-axisweb-vacant-space-doncaster/>

A screenshot of a Twitter post from Axisweb (@axisweb) dated Feb 7. The tweet text reads: "#WhatsOn 10th February 2020 - 15th February 2020 'The Geranium Project (February Event)' by @latham1959 at 13 Scot Lane in Doncaster @axisweb #Axisdirectory axisweb.org/p/ianlatham/ev...". Below the text is a video thumbnail showing three people in a studio; one man is wearing a VR headset and pointing, while a woman and another man look on. The tweet has 1 like and a retweet icon. On the left, a sidebar shows navigation options: Home, Explore, Notifications, Messages, Bookmarks, Lists, Profile, and More. At the bottom left, there is a "Tweet" button and a "r.com/home" link.

Twitter publicity from Axisweb

5 minutes with Ian Latham

Step in to a virtual garden

Since childhood, Doncaster artist Ian Latham has loved pink and purple geraniums - even though he couldn't tell you their name and now they have formed the focus of his latest work. The Geranium Project, which is funded by the Arts Council Lottery, has been created by Ian and is a combination of installation and Virtual Reality.

Both of these things are used to create an immersive experience exploring the translation of reality into art through drawing. Ian said: "There is a purple or pink flower with five petals, it has long palmately cleft leaves that are broadly circular. Drifts of these are used to grow in my mother's garden and in my own garden now, and I've always loved them. For a long time I've had a blind spot about the name, when I see the flowers I'm suddenly at a loss but when I can't see them I can remember. It has reached the point where my wife refuses to tell me what they're called. This is why the project is called geraniums, after this technology - an inability to remember a particular word - I've suffered from for a number of years."

The Geranium Project is exhibited at 13 foot Lane, Doncaster town centre. This empty shop is rented through Artworks, a national charity that provides studio spaces for artists. Ian has always liked to use his art to explore the relationship between form, surface, and memory.

He added: "Geraniums began as a room, approximately five metres by four metres, that depicted a garden as a drawing and by projection onto one wall. The audience can explore the drawn surfaces which include text and interactive elements, watch the filmed garden where shadows drift across the loam, suggesting people, and listen to the bird song and poetry playing in the space.

"It has turned into a more refined space that channels you towards and through the projection into a virtual world."

The installation includes spoken word and film alongside Augmented Reality and traditional painting and sculpture.



The Virtual Reality environment takes visitors through a series of gardens made from photographs and drawings accompanied by poetry, sound and film. The project can be experienced in around thirty minutes. Ian Latham, BA Fine Art, MA Creative Technology, Senior Fellow Higher Education Academy, is a digital sculptor. He qualified with a BA in Fine Art in 1981 and then completed a PGCE in Art and Design in Further and Higher Education in 1991. The qualification enabled him to build a career teaching art students.

In 2004, he took a break from work to study an MA in Creative Technology, working with 3D modelling alongside real and virtual environments to shape the superimposition of memory over place. Ian said: "I have wanted to create a space that tells a story since I completed my MA in 2007 and became fascinated with non-linear narratives or stories that can be navigated by the audience. My intention is that encountering this space, listening to the poems and hearing snippets of the narrative offers one or two clues that can be explored through an online space or using virtual reality.

"I see the project as an opportunity to find out how to best present the idea to an audience and to use that initial audience to help refine the experience so that it becomes coherent."

Ian worked at Doncaster College between July 2007 and June 2014, first as a Programme Manager Creative Arts and later as Assistant Director School of Creative Industries. He retired from his work in further and higher education in 2018 to focus on his own work. This exhibition marks the culmination of the first stage

of the project, which began in June 2019. During the past six months, over 100 people have called into the shop to experience the installation and try out the virtual reality using a HTC Vive headset.

The project has been assisted by local creatives Wayne Stubbs and Mike Stubbs, who have been mentors, and Iain Nicholls, an established virtual reality practitioner. The trio have all exhibited internationally. The Geranium Project is open to view by appointment from February 10 February 15. Alternatively, art lovers can drop-in to the shop between 10am and 4pm on February 19, 20 or 21. To book a slot to see the installation and try the VR, e-mail ianlatham@vive.virginmedia.com or call Ian on 0192479796. People are invited to call in to the studio at 13 foot Lane without an appointment, should be accommodated where drop-in visitors. Visit www.ianlatham.com for more information.



- i Gill, N.S. "The Allegory of the Cave From the Republic of Plato." ThoughtCo, Jan. 28, 2020, thoughtco.com/the-allegory-of-the-cave-120330.
- ii <https://interlude.hk/richard-wagners-concept-of-the-gesamtkunstwerk/>
- iii <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56964/speech-tomorrow-and-tomorrow-and-tomorrow> from Macbeth
- iv Where an experienced, represented, and remembered object (e.g., a tree) is inside consciousness (immanent), whereas the real object itself is outside the mind (transcendent).
- v Chauvet Cave (also known as Chauvet-Pont d'Arc) is currently the oldest known rock art site in the world, apparently dating to the [Aurignacian period](#) in France, about 30,000 to 32,000 years ago. Hirst, K. Kris. "Chauvet Cave." ThoughtCo, Jan. 28, 2020, thoughtco.com/chauvet-cave-france-170488.
- vi Berger, J. 2015. The Chauvet Cave Painters (c 30,000 years BC). In: Overton, T ed. PORTRAITS John Berger on Artists. London: Verso, pp 1-6
- vii Ibid p2
- viii The term 'player' is used deliberately in the context of Virtual Reality, more active than 'viewer' whilst still, in effect, a witness.
- ix Sartre, Jean-Paul, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* Translated by Jonathan Webber, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004)
- x https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_and_Three_Chairs
- xi [http://dictionary.sensagent.com/The_Imaginary_\(Sartre\)/en-en/#Analogon](http://dictionary.sensagent.com/The_Imaginary_(Sartre)/en-en/#Analogon)
- xii In the social sciences there is a standing debate over the primacy of **structure or agency** in shaping human behaviour. *Structure* is the recurrent patterned arrangements which influence or limit the choices and opportunities available. *Agency* is the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices. The structure versus agency debate may be understood as an issue of socialization against autonomy in determining whether an individual acts as a free agent or in a manner dictated by social structure. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agency_%28sociology%29