HIDDEN SPIRE

Salvages

October 2026



Crisis

OLD FIRE STATION

Salvages

Derelict boatyards
Distant seas
Journeys and migrations
Or you don't even leave.

Escape and exile
Memories and stories to keep
Promise of safety
Threat of danger.

Traces of what's been lost
What survives?
Where will you live?
Departure possible
No guarantee of arrival.

Wreckage and remains
Phantoms of the past
Spirits alive
Disruption and entropy
Precarious beauty broken
Mosaic scraps and remnants

Hope and despair
The art of survival
Plastic don't decay
It's in our hands
Protest, not rest.

Hope is the boat that carries us.

Written collaboratively by the Hidden Spire Collective



About the Hidden Spire Collective

The Hidden Spire Collective brings together adults from different walks of life to create ambitious, publicly shared artwork. What unites the group is a shared commitment to creativity, collaboration and making work that matters. At the heart of the project is co-creation: the group decides what stories it wants to tell, what themes it wants to explore, and what kind of artwork it wants to make. Run by the Old Fire Station and Crisis, this year marks 15 years of Hidden Spire projects.

Salvages is the sixth Hidden Spire Collective project.

The process

We wanted to create a new collaborative project, this time in the gallery. Through discussion and deliberation, we explored different themes before settling on 'hope and despair', developing an exhibition accompanied by a performance.

We began by exploring the theme more deeply. Sessions with artists and academics introduced different perspectives and helped us develop our ideas into an artist brief. We then interviewed three artists before choosing sculptor Ismael Rodriguez to work with us.

Over six weeks, we brought our ideas to life, including making a boat from willow, found objects and reused materials. Working with Ismael, sound artist Daniel Patiño and performance maker Lizzy McBain, we experimented with materials, created a soundscape and explored how to bring the sculpture to life through performance.

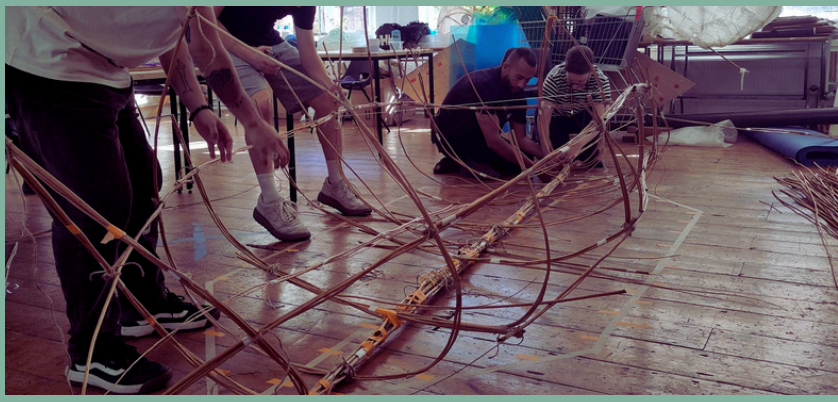
The process was shaped by shared decisions, unexpected discoveries and ideas that shifted along the way. The finished work brings together our different perspectives and imaginations in a collective act of creation.















Writing from the Hidden Spire Collective

The words that follow come from members of the Hidden Spire Collective, reflecting on the themes, materials and ideas that have emerged through the project.

Still I Rise...

Against the hate in your eyes
Against the tide of lies
Against the fore-walls of my building
You opened the door inside
There was so much colour at night
The moon over the hotel was honey light
Do not die, mother nature
Renewal, things come to life
The sculpture has a mind of its own

Written collaboratively by members of the Hidden Spire Collective

Stop The Boats

A dream dreamt years ago: another time: another world: asleep: becomes a prophesy.

In my dream I dream myself waking up in the air-conditioned hot crush of a central government office. Civil servants and advisors with plastic lanyards and fast black shoes and hot screens. I was lying on the carpet and white sun was coming through the floor to ceiling glass. I was curled up on the carpet as though thrown up unconscious on the seashore. I opened my eyes to the blue of the horizon line outside the office windows and I was filled from retina to toes with dread. The seabirds were screaming and buffeting, and the waves were deadly and at risk.

We are by the sea. Somehow they had dragged the vast glass and capital city and steel mechanism to the ragged beach and set up bland camp. Swipe cards and photo ID to get in and G4S slouched outside. Armed police crushing the shells underfoot. A thin black wire runs down from the crazy sinking architecture down to the shoreline and it is this the guns point at.

And inside that building I have begun to shout and stumble and to try to grasp at people's hands because somehow I have woken up knowing exactly what that wire means and why we are all assembled here beside the sea.

They are going to detonate the tides. It means that they are going to kill the tides.

The thin wire runs down into the veins of the sea and disappears. The whole sea becomes a tepid outdoor swimming pool at the beginning of September. Going murky. Full of skin staining cleaning chemicals. Dead insects shimmering and oil spills. A dead mouth full of of unsinkable nappies and plastic sandals and bobbing iridescent vapes like empty boats, moored in waste. A shameful human soup.

Behind the glass I shout. No one seems to listen to me.

Think of a wave. The pull of it beyond all human strength. The incredible scything curve and the impossible beauty as it crests and the thunder as it hits the sand and drags every pebble through its teeth, backwards and forwards, suddenly as minute and delicate as running lace over ankle bones.

Stop The Boats *continued*

I crawl on my knees and try to block the doors. No one seems to see me.

The tides bring boats in their blue arms and they vomit dead and living bodies on the shore. They bring new gods and alien trades and mechanisms to build new boats and messages that they sift and take away again or pound down on the land in minute pieces. Where does a wave go once it is gone? Do the pieces shatter and reform somewhere unpeopled underneath the sea? What does the moon suck on? How do the womb membranes breaking and reforming feel without its navigating signals? Without waves to wade into what do children feel that rhymes with darkness and being rocked?

The government party has paraded out of the office and is at the very seashore now, bearing me with it. Flags are raised and a woman holds out a shiny black detonator that looks as though it came from a comic book but it doesn't matter who really throws the switch. The waves crash as though they also prophecy something and seem to shudder back. Someone pulls downwards but every human hand is on the trigger.

And as the detonation happens I wake up on a mattress on dry land.

Sometimes when the wind catches the sea laps and the people think that the tides have come back again. The muscles of the sea supple again and living and hard. But it's only a memory and the heaped surface is barely disturbed any more. How could it be? We can barely see the water.

Years ago.

Years ago –

By Isabel Taylor

Tray of melons

Strength for today
Hope for tomorrow
A hymn written by a blind man
Not a pity party
Offended by the truth
A voice heard from miles away
Released from the grips of hell
Cleansed from the inside out
A seed of passion planted in my soul
Treated to a tray of melon
On a sunny Sunday.

by Dayna Betote



Rising to Hope, Falling to Despair

In a drama workshop we explore the movements of Hope and Despair...

Hope involves stretching our bodies up, tall, expansive, literally taking your (s)place in the world.

Despair involves folding and moving our bodies down, low, small, taking little or no (s)place.

We make these movements upwards towards Hope and downwards towards Despair spontaneously, without conscious thought or planning.

We also intuitively think that we move up to good places and circumstances and down to bad places and things. These ideas are both embodied and embedded in our thinking, language, idiom and metaphor.

Good places are visualised as existing above us: celestial worlds, the stars, heaven, paradise and the transcendental...Bad places, imagined below: hell, Hades' underworld, Dante's inferno...

Being 'higher' denotes our social position: 'high status', 'high society,' 'high standing' and 'climbing the social ladder'... Conversely being of 'low birth' 'lower class', 'lowly', 'the underclass', 'underdog' and 'born in the gutter' are pejorative, denigrating expressions which profoundly affect people's life chances and self-image. We say, 'it's beneath you' meaning that you are worthy of more than that...

Good things happen when we look up: 'chin up', ' things are looking up for you' signifying an optimistic mood and outlook. As opposed to 'you look down', 'low', 'downcast', on a 'downer', 'down in the dumps,' on a 'downward spiral' and not 'able to pick yourself up'...

Good things happen when 'we aim high' and 'reach for the stars,' when we are aspirational and look up for sources of inspiration. 'Looking up' signifies lightness, airiness, energy as in 'being high as a kite' and freedom, 'free as a bird'...

Rising to Hope, Falling to Despair

We can rise above terrible circumstances, oppression, abuse, discrimination when we 'fall on hard times', 'fall flat on our face' or 'fall from grace,' a downward trajectory of bad luck, but come back from adversity, 'rising from the ashes' and in Maya Angelou's poem, 'Still I rise' ...

It's extraordinary the number of everyday expressions we use equating up with good things and down with bad things and how our body language, movements and gesture both mirror and constitute this fundamental thinking and even being in the world...

In another drama workshop we walked around the studio adopting different ways of moving, leading our bodies by our chin first, then knees, then feet...It was interesting to see how changing one aspect of our physicality in turn changed how we felt inwardly... This is a good way of building character from the outside/in.

An Outside/In Body Experiment...

Adopt a hopeful position: stretching, reaching up, elongated, tall...

Adopt a despairing pose, folding, crouching, collapsing in on yourself...

Experiment with taking aspects of both positions for example, your upper body stretching up while your lower body pulls you down...

Observe how these changes in bodily position change how you feel from the inside; how they alter your mental state...

By Gill Shreir

Make a choice

The world and the seven seas
Will become a junkyard
If we don't decease
We treat with contempt
Its destruction
We seem hell bent
In in our hands
from seas rivers land and sand
Profit equals destruction
To protect it is our true function
With greed we feed
More than we need
So take a seed to grow
And watch the land flow
Tell your friends your neighbours
Spread the word so everyone has heard
The people rise
Ignore government
And multinationals lies
Protect everything from the trees to flies
One planet
One live earth has soul
Like your son daughter and your wife
Swap your car for a bike
Live with hope
Leave behind the despair
United together
We can live forever
Let's believe
Speak the truth
Not live in the never never
Mother nature
We don't really hate yah
We want to live in peace
Share your bounty full feast





Make a choice *continued*

North South West East
Let’s save it all
Not just for the rich
Don't forget the poor
Let's rebuild
And the destruction yield
To your mind
Your emotion
I appeal
Look in the mirror
See how you feel
Choose love
And spread the word
Among the heard
Across the sea
Of globalisation
Stand up nation by nation

By Search

I was sad that time by the sea, because I did not have a passport.
I want to buy a ticket, I'm stuck on land.
Orange, lemon, olive trees grow. I'm hungry. I ate the fruits, it tastes good.
The olives are satty like the sea.
I can't cross.
The sea and the mountains behind is beautiful.

By Dilman Khasro Nori









Stop The Boats

Controlled rage open and not caged
Pull down the doves and white flags
Raise the skull and bones
The homeless without homes
Who controls
We all know who knows
Backs against the wall
Across the seas they rows
Stop the boats
Think about it
The real message it shows
Open your eyes
Seperate the truth from the lies
Let's look and be honest
Not disguise it with lies
United together let's stop the rise
We all can see what's happening
It's no surprise
Destruction
The responsiblity
We know very well at whose door it lies
Man women
Humankind
We can't live like we are blind
To the planet mother nature
Even to man
Recycle take care
It's simple to be kind
Home today
Gone tomorrow
When the planets dead
You me all of us
Don't want to and should not
Live with the sorrows
The deaths the loss is our planet nailed on a cross

Stop The Boats *continued*

Do the we and the elites
Care about the loss
If we have to fight with hostiles
What's the facts
There is no mysteries
Rise up
And fix what's wrong
Cause we go too
when the planet's gone.

By Search



Thunder and lightning
Flashing and cracking.
The rage of the sea
On the raw rocks crashing.
You can't quit this quest gotta keep on smashing through the storm.
Until the destination is mapped.
Steering the ship all alone
You can't turn back.
If the doubts leaking in
Cover the holes up with planks.
If you get too deep in the fear
Then you'll sink.
And you won't ever reach new land.

By Anon

One day you may reach the shore once more,
and find new strength in life restored.
You will look back at the storms you survived
and know that through hope
your spirit stayed alive.

For life is a voyage, uncertain and deep,
with promises to hold and memories to keep.
And though despair may visit along the way,
Hope is the boat that carries us into a brighter day.

by Eunice

Hidden Spire Collective artists

BB
Claire F.
Dayna Betote
Dilman Khasro Nori
Eunice
Gill
Isabel Taylor
Laura Walton
Luce Lace
Mr. Musa
Search
Simon Garrood
Anonymous
Anonymous

Creative collaborators

Ismael Rodriguez – Visual artist
Lizzy McBain – Performance
Daniel Patiño – sound artist

Old Fire Station & Crisis team

Jak Bennett-Eves
Sarah Cassidy
Dan Knight
Jodie Lamb















Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who helped make this exhibition possible.

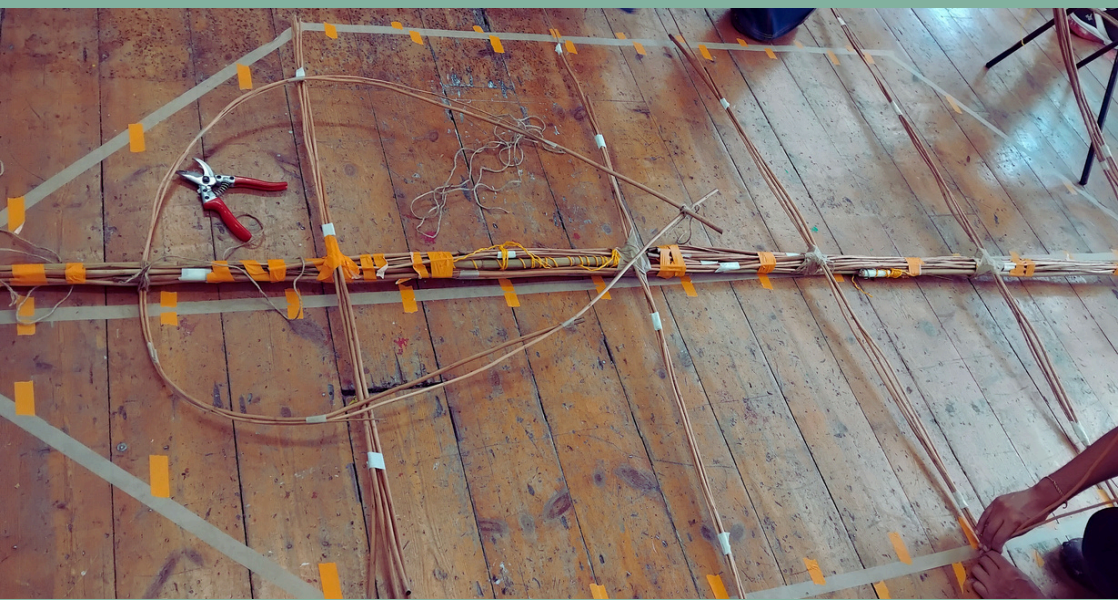
Thank you to the academics and artists who inspired our work during the first phase: TORCH and visiting academics from the University of Oxford: Alex Coke, Matt Finch and Halina Suwalowska; and artists Katie Taylor and Lizzy McBain.

Our Hidden Spire programme would not be possible without the support of funders and donors, including Oxford City Council, National Lottery Community Fund, Adrian Swire Charitable Trust, Diana Parker Charitable Trust, Mr & Mrs J A Pye's Charitable Settlement, The Leigh Trust, Helen Roll Charity, Katie Bradford Arts Trust, Bartlett Taylor Charitable Trust and 29 May 1961 Charitable Trust.

This exhibition was funded by Howes Percival LLP, City of Oxford Charity, and a generous individual donor. Thank you.

Support our work

If you would like to support future Hidden Spire Collective projects, you can donate through our website or speak to a member of staff. To find out more about our work, please get in touch using the contact details below. We'd love to hear from you.





About the Old Fire Station

The Old Fire Station is a welcoming and inspiring multi-form arts centre in central Oxford. We create an inclusive public space that challenges inequality and brings people together locally and globally through art, stories and a shared commitment to social impact.

Our foundational partnership with homelessness charity Crisis, with whom we share our building, has evolved over 15 years into a nationally recognised model of social inclusion.

Arts at the Old Fire Station
40 George Street, Oxford OX1 2AQ
Charity No.: 1140525

www.oldfirestation.org.uk
01865 263980
info@oldfirestation.org.uk