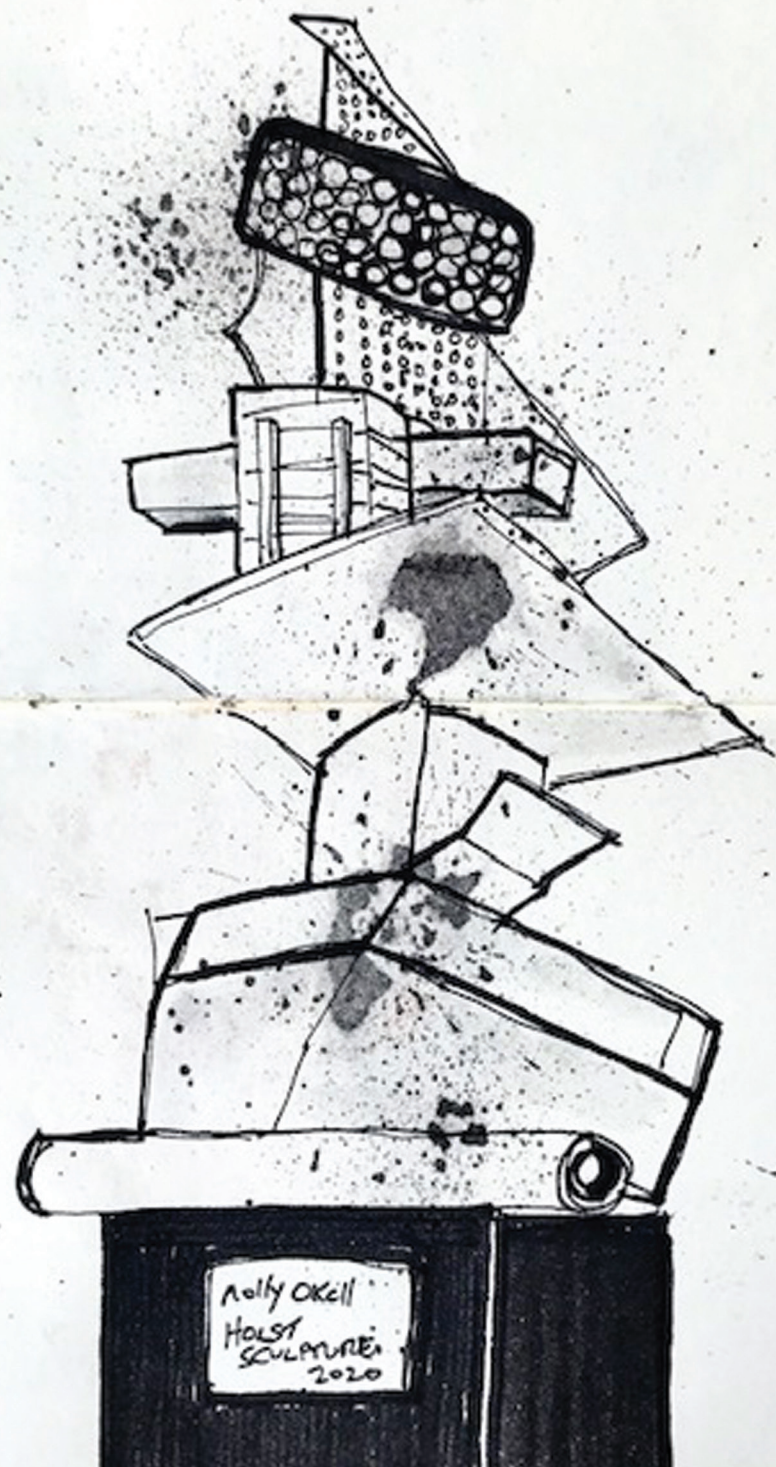


An abstract, geometric composition of overlapping planes and surfaces. The image features a variety of shades including deep black, dark grey, light grey, and a soft pink. The planes are oriented at different angles, creating a sense of depth and three-dimensional space. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, emphasizing the textures and edges of the surfaces. The overall effect is that of a complex, layered architectural or sculptural structure.

**STORING SCULPTURE**  
MOLLY OKELL







## RESEARCH PROJECT: RISE

Storing Sculpture is an extension of a larger practice-based research project (RISE) Realtime Immersive Sculptural Experience in collaboration with Morley College, London and UCA, Canterbury. The RISE research explores the documentation of temporary public sculptures to find sustainable ways of giving the work new life beyond its temporary site-specific placement.

The RISE research asked the question '*Can photogrammetry be used to capture site-specific sculpture and lead to an immersive VR output that moves beyond the sculptural experience?*'

I began by focusing on my Holst sculpture installed outside Morley College on Westminster Bridge Road, London. It was commissioned to mark the centenary of the composer Gustav Holst and his celebrated suite The Planets.

In response to the Morley College/Gustav Holst brief, the approach I took was less about the planets as solid forms and more about the essence and characteristics of each planet. It is this that is said to have influenced Holst's music and for me evokes visual abstract forms, mass, texture, contrast, and colour.

Holst's work appeared to me as cyclical rather than linear as well as self-referential with both disruptive and flowing rhythms. My intention was to express the complexity of the music with its combined solidity and transience through abstract forms.

## IT'S A QUESTION OF STORAGE

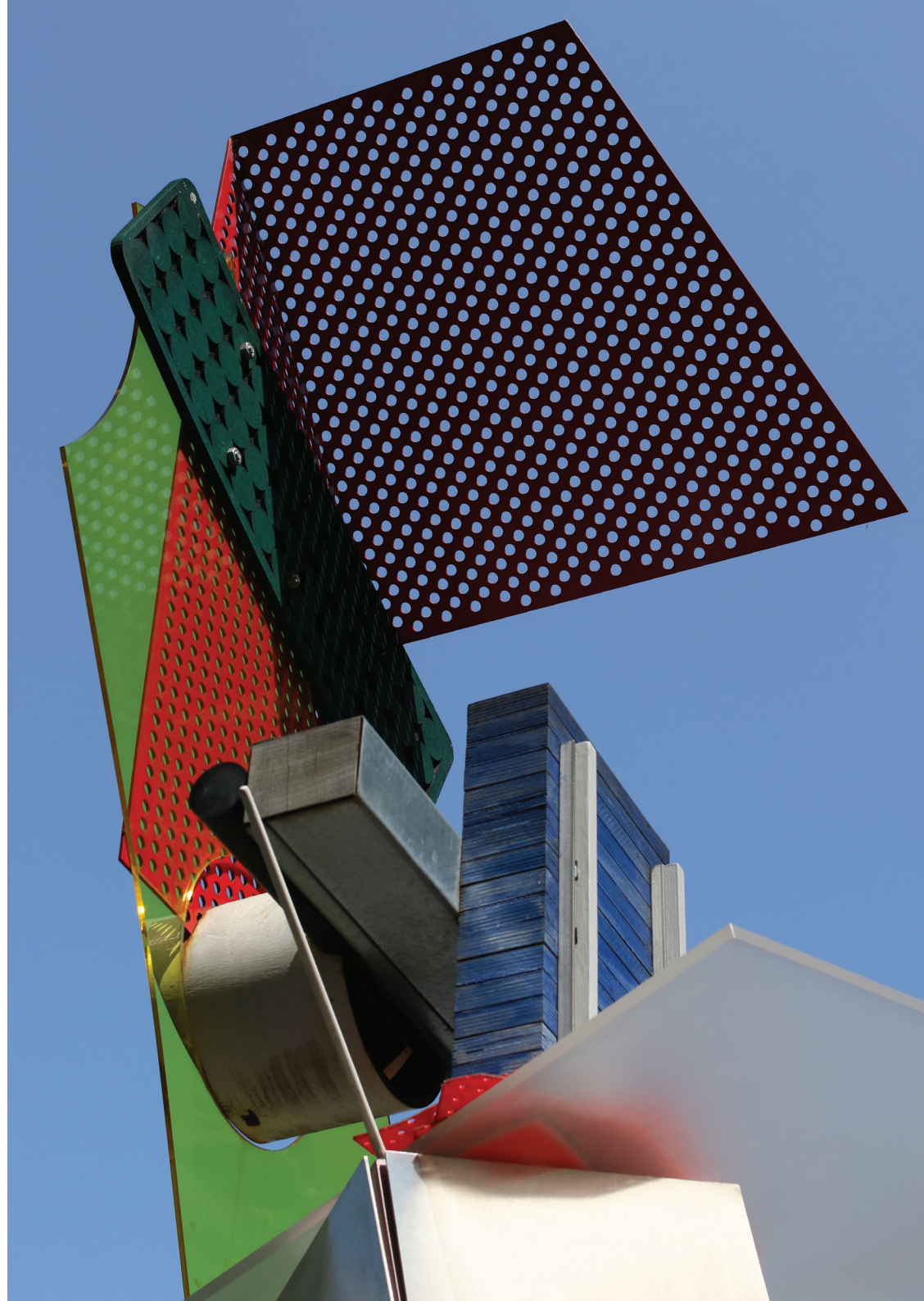
The Holst sculpture was to be situated on the plinth outside Morley College for three years and the challenge was to find a way of storing the sculpture once the three years were up.

The Storing Sculpture (SS) research question was born out of a pressing need to solve this problem.

I began by asking '*Can I reimagine the sculpture in other forms and find alternative ways of 'storing' my sculpture?*'

From an economic, social and environmental standpoint storing sculpture is a huge undertaking and once removed from its site-specific location it lacks the context that is so fundamental to its meaning.

If alternative forms of documentation could give the sculpture new meaning could alternative ways of storing the sculpture achieve the same thing?







### **SOUTH LONDON GALLERY**

Through discussion and collaboration with the Art Assassins youth collective at the South London Gallery (SLG) the initial research aimed to identify a solution for the Holst sculpture which was due to be removed from its plinth on 2 April 2024. The participants were asked a set of questions for consideration around the following headings; **repurpose, reuse, renew.**

Where should it go? Should it be put in storage? Could it be reused? Should it be moved to a new location? How could the materials be repurposed? Could it be taken apart? Should it be renewed or reimaged? Could it become a different sculpture?

Initially the Art Assassins were given the separate sculptural elements to allow them to explore creative ways to repurpose the sculpture. To find solutions that included repurposing the forms for functional use. They were then asked to reuse the sculpture by using the separate elements to create their own sculpture, thereby stripping it of its original site-specific context and meaning. The Art Assassins were finally left to debate the prospect of renewal.



## OUTCOMES

The outcomes ranged from deconstructing the sculpture and passing on the individual elements to emerging sculptors and artists for their use. Changing the properties of the materials so they no longer resembled their original form.

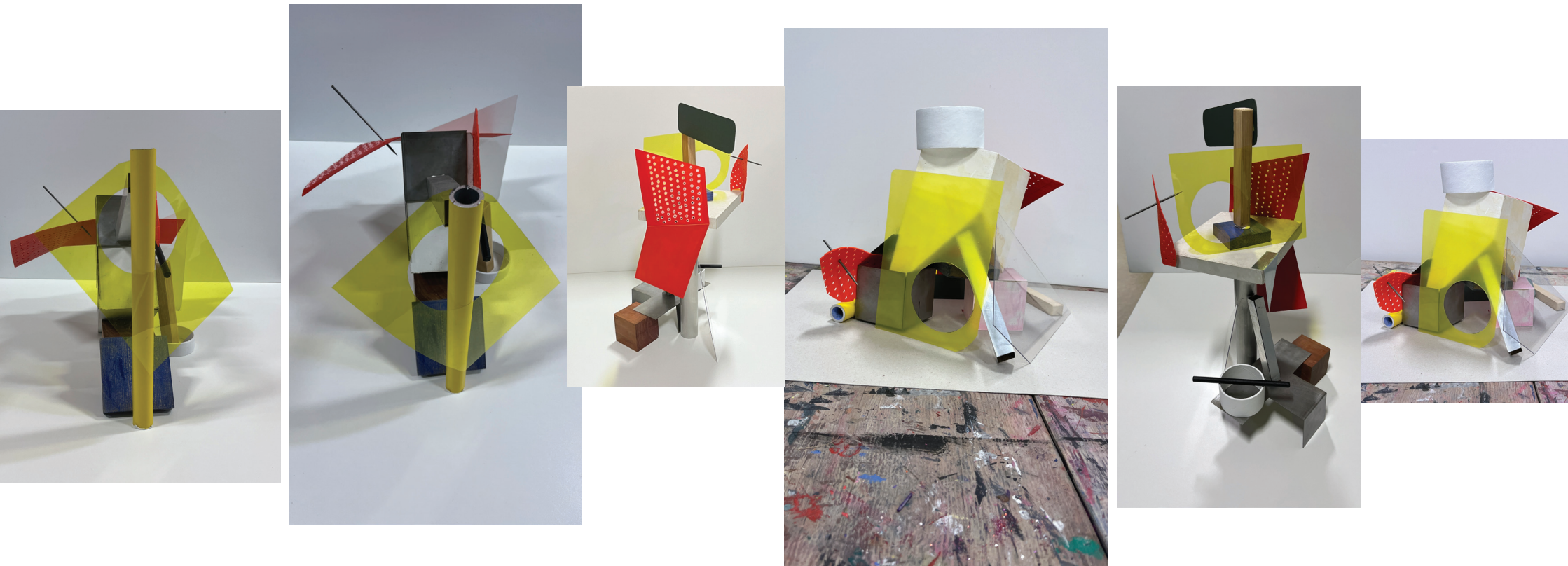
They also included engaging with existing sustainable systems within a circular or recycling economy. Taking each element and transforming it into entirely different objects for a functional purpose which included chairs, tables, shelves and lamps. Exploration into the materiality of the sculpture by melting, burning, bending, cutting, stripping, gouging, hitting and dividing elements so they took on their own form. Repurposing the elements into a new sculpture that responded to an alternative site-specific environment. Altering the properties of the materials so they no longer resembled their original form and could be used purely for play.

## FINAL OUTCOME

The Art Assassins agreed on the following final solution: Deconstruct the sculpture into its separate parts, 16 in all. Label each part with the following information height, width, depth, weight, material and makeup including colour and coating, texture or finishings, varnish, powder coating, sealants, paints, sprays or veneers. Describe any fixings, internal structures, or fillings.

Each element would be given to students immersed in a form of sculptural or spatial practice. The original sculptor would have no claim over the sculpture and could not influence or interfere in any way with the sculptural elements after they had been released, as it would no longer be their work or property.

That said, the elements came with an understanding that they possess the sculptural DNA of the original sculptor.





## **IN CONVERSATION WITH JONNY DAWE ART TECHNICIAN AND ASSISTANT TO RACHEL WHITEREAD**

MOLLY: We are talking about temporary sculpture that is shown for finite periods of time either in a gallery or in site-specific locations where the sculpture has a time limit in that space or location. It needs to be transported to a new location and stored.

JONNY: Art storage is a huge business.

MOLLY: What is your experience of storage within your professional work?

JONNY: It's a large part of the artistic process and the amount of space dedicated to it and the number of people involved is enormous.

MOLLY: Do you think artists are prepared to reuse or repurpose their work?

JONNY: Yes some artists I work with will reuse their work, deconstruct it and repurpose it or even destroy it. It does depend on their relationship with the individual work.

MOLLY: I agree the artist's relationship with their work is an important factor. You could say it's a lifelong relationship with individual pieces of work, but that relationship is not always the same with every piece.

JONNY: I have been present when work is returned to the artist from a gallery, or its location and the relationship may depend on whether the work is put straight into storage or is returned directly to the artist's studio.

MOLLY: I couldn't afford to store my sculpture and I had no room in my studio to return it to, so I had to reevaluate my relationship with the work. As part of a research project I collaborated with the Art Assassins at the South London Gallery where they devised a deconstruction solution where the sculpture was broken down into its material elements and given to young sculptors/creatives to use, but universities I contacted had neither the time nor the infrastructure to accommodate this, so I had to destroy it. Not dissimilar to an artist you work with.

JONNY: Yes but that particular piece of her work was always meant to be destroyed.

MOLLY: There is a long history of art being deliberately destroyed, dumped or damaged. Is this preferable to death by storage?

JONNY: It's a legacy issue.

MOLLY: I agree it is about time. How work is 'valued' over time. Storage is a necessity for legacy.

JONNY: For an established artist at some point legacy becomes an important part of their practice.

MOLLY: Unless a work is permanently placed in a location in perpetuity or sold to a museum or private collector, all artists have an ongoing relationship with their work. It is created – it goes out into the world – it returns. I am interested in the return.

JONNY: Yes, this is a part of the cycle that I have seen with some artists. If a work is returned to the studio it can be revalued, perhaps even deconstructed and used to make new work. I've experienced artists not being too precious about their work once removed from the gallery/storage context.

MOLLY: I know this to be true of my own practice. The work needs to be 'right' but the creative process itself means that you need to let go of perfection and sometimes be messy – brutal even – with your work, to get it to where it needs to be.

JONNY: When the work is within the gallery setting gloves are used!

MOLLY: I really like the idea that work is given back to its creator after being in an extremely reverent setting and freed from the constraints of perfection and potentially given a new lease of life, reimagined.

When you make a work you have a relationship with the material, you know how robust it is, whether it can or can't take knocks, if marks can or can't be removed and whether those matter. You are in full control of the work, you 'know' it bodily. You can't tiptoe around it when you are making it, so you aren't going to do that once it's finished. Galleries treat it with reverence, artists treat it with a different kind of reverence, 'knowing'. I wonder if this is why I could destroy my sculpture? Because I know it so well, I could rebuild it at any point.

London 2025



## SOLUTION

Based on the Art Assassin's final solution the process began to find a suitable place for the 16 sculptural elements. Individuals, relevant art institutions, alongside charitable, business and government run organisations were contacted.

The results were not surprising; no-one could store the sculpture nor take responsibility for its dissemination. The concept was received well but the practicality was one of reluctant refusal. As part of the final solution devised by the Arts Assassins the sculptural elements were prohibited from being taken by my institution. The Assassins argued that as the original sculptor I may interfere with the use of the elements if I saw them being used around the institution.

## SOLUTION-NON-SOLUTION

With the deadline for removal approaching, I booked a Luton van and took the sculpture, weighing over 80kg, off its plinth and drove it to a tip for hardcore materials and dumped it in their skip.

The Holst sculpture now only exists in the form of a 1:3 scale maquette, as photographs, drawings, paper models, original design sketches, vector files, sections of prototypes and in the minds of those who saw it in its original site-specific environment outside Morley College on the Westminster Bridge Road.

The original work has disappeared, been destroyed, it can no longer be repurposed or reused so I am left with the only other solution within my research framework and that is renewal. Research into renewal is taking place in the following formats VR: *RISE Realtime Immersive Sculpture Experience*. FILM: *Circles in Circles*. PRINT: *In The Making Of*.





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