Study

for a

Shield

After Battle



CHARLOTTE SAINT CULLEN

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Study for a Shield after Battle (A New World Lay Inside the Old One) is part of a body of works which consider the potential of action held in the archaeological findings of shields and defensive materials found after battle. These fabricated shields have taken on intersecting forms, holding marks from the metal working process as scars of the action of their production. The labour and tools of this labour are present and can be decoded and understood through their material condition and implied industrial processes; held in their material action and moment of change, cuts become scars, burns an affect. Within this the interlocking forms are woven together, incorporating historically gendered labour which suggests care and coming together. This oscillation between traditionally women's craft and traditionally masculine materials challenges the historical legacy of sculpted metal, often monumental and commemoratory. Instead, these woven, self-supporting, scrappy sculptures value labour and the material memory of those whose labour they enact.

applying techniques including plasma cutting and welding to create almost fragile feeling steel sculptures. The material becomes torn, scarred and burnt, and the processes from the metal workshop are often visible. I incorporate techniques including weaving into metal to create intersecting forms that hold and support themselves. The work returns to questions of care and healing amongst this material impact. These materials and processes come through labour and socially-classed labour, working with tools and materials from industry or applying techniques from other forms of labour including textiles and care work. Central to my exploration across metal and mark-making are holding space for reflections on care, caring, long-term health conditions and disability. Resilience, vulnerability, grief, healing and the labour of care appear within the marks, material choice and material conditions.

These sculptures in mild steel and aluminium are scarred and bent. Their surface drawn into with a plasma cutter with marks which sit within a lineage of descent, including school desk etchings and graffiti. Spot welding fixes broken off-cuts back into the form. The untreated surface registers the impact of production through evident burn marks and scratches. While making I work within the sounds of the metal workshop; the ventilation whirrs, the tools crackle, the metal scrapes. I imagine myself, as naïve voyeur, standing within the Stanton ironworks which brought my family to this country. It's noise and smells and heat engulfing me. The steel is woven with aluminium, creating forms which interlace and stand through their interdependence. In this the sculptures prioritise care, healing, and acts of repair which resonate with socially working-classed women's labour.

Study for a Shield after Battle resonate around forms of care and healing. These sculptures are bodily and complex, creating space for intersecting experiences including of class, disability, gender, trauma and migration to hold space and to refuse co-option. The sculptures are jagged and raw, scarred and bent and engage with disciplines that encompass a material practice informed by socially working-classed labour.

This woven element was explored for two reasons; the first was informed by socially working-classed and gendered labour. I use metal in my work for its historic roots in classed labour and how this intersects with the gendered histories of sculpture. This material enables me to enter into and unpick complex, intersecting histories through the embodied material nature of class and disadvantage. After undertaking research into how working-class people are documented in archives and collections through a residency with Leeds Central Library, I recognised that this material favoured a gendered path into my histories, and I sought methods to imbed, and give visibility to, gendered working-class labour in my work. Thinking about work in textile mills, cleaning, and care, the action of weaving developed as a method which gave form to gendered and under-documented work while retaining the use of metal as central to my conceptual impetus. Developing alongside this I was also thinking about ways to materialise care and healing within my practice. My body of work 'Study for a Shield after Battle' use the stand-in of a shield scarred from battle to give form to an embattled body; a body – a person – who due to a culture which lacks compassion must fight for survival. A disabled body, a body in ill health. The shield as an object is embodied through its use as protection and in its scale and in this sense these sculptures have fought and are worn and hold ground in the aftermath of battle. In this the weaving aspect embodies care, healing and compassion, and physically holds the sculpture together. The marks on the sculpture are created through plasma cutting, a technique which allows a drawing relationship with material. Marks are informed by battle, graffiti, school desk etchings, personal cultural links, mythologising tales, and research into fights for survival including strike action, protests, autobiographies. The sculptures are at once fragile and resilient, torn and robust.

EXHIBITION | **STUDIES FOR A SHIELD AFTER BATTLE**
★★★★☆ | PATRIOTHALL GALLERY, EDINBURGH

Well-steeled for battle

ANGUS REID admires a unique transformation of metal into nuanced artworks of alienation, identity and social conflict

CHARLOTTE CULLEN makes work from steel and aluminium. It has sharp corners, torn edges and a bleak industrial monochrome and the rough surfaces on her assembly Studies for a Shield after Battle bear the traces of assault.

From the metal plates she makes prints — when pressed into paper, the identity of the battle reveals itself and at the centre of the show are two sequences of three small prints, each whispering the sources of her work.

Marrow I, II and III are like the random messages scratched into a school desk or a battered bus stop. It is not the content of the words that speak, so much as the invocation of a conflicted adolescence.

While the fantasy of ancestral battles lurks behind the work, the real ones are those of alienation, gender identity and social conflict and you feel her empathy with the agonies of the ordinary, universal teenager.

Following the Ghost I, II and III extends this fascination with arbitrary mark-making into the very material of steel. Her own delicate rainfall of micro scratches liberates the expressive grey tones and softness of the industrial material, as though it had its own tale of battle to tell and its own sombre relationship to trauma.

The material is a metaphor for the human body and the show teases out these complementary inside stories, one human and the other elemental. It then dares to explore them as three-dimensional presences.

The first steps towards a surprisingly joyous assertion of a queer aesthetics, these scratched and war-torn sheets of metal — carriers of unexpected intimations of inner life and memory — arise, balance themselves and find ways to stand up together and suggest purpose and motion.

It is refreshingly genderless, a far cry from the sanctimonious narcissism of Anthony Gormley's endless repetitions of his own naked body, and it recalls the post-minimalist school of which the short-lived American sculptress Eva Hesse was the leading light.

But Cullen has reconfigured the aesthetic into another culture, another experience of class and our own historical moment.

It greets the needs of the present without sentimentality and with clear eyes. The show expresses a burgeoning confidence in its own unexpected and mysterious beauty.

This is a new community of queer subjects that are becoming sure of themselves and beginning to dance. A shame they only had the briefest of showings last weekend.





https://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/article/c/well-steeled-battle



There is something visceral about Charlotte Cullen's work. It is the knots in your stomach, the lingering trace of emotional impact, a tentative salve on still hot wounds. Bitumen and metal are contorted around themselves, each other, precariously existing despite, because of, their scarred surfaces.

Cullen's past work has incorporated everyday objects into precarious sculptures revealing the cruel optimism of financial hardship and aspirational working-class cultural memory. This show blends past and present. Lingering emotional affect collides with actions that almost appear to still be happening. From this perspective at least, it feels like a work-forever-in-progress.

The past here is evidenced not through written or spoken record but through its undeniable trace embodied within the materials themselves. In a world built for impossible neatness, the artworks' (and artist's) existence is an insistent reminder of the 'failure' and support of the bent, the broken and the queer.

- Dr Hali Santamas



Study for a Shield after Battle (After the Knight) .2023
Mild steel and aluminum
Exhibited in Leeds Artist Show at Leeds Art Gallery 2023



Study for a Shield After Battle (The Knight Gives), mild steel, aluminum, rivets .2022
Study for a Shield after Battle (After the Knight) .2023
Mild steel and aluminum
Exhibited in Short Lived at Hypha Studios, Stratford .2023



L) *Study for a Shield After Battle (The Knight Gives),* mild steel, aluminum, rivets .2022 R) *Study for a Shield after Battle (After the Knight)* .2023 Mild steel and aluminum
Exhibited in Short Lived at Hypha Studios, Stratford .2023



She's the Arrow (if destroyed still true) I .2024, *Study for a Shield after Battle (Forever)* .2023 mild steel, aluminum
WIP *I Loved So Well* .2025 Mild steel, pewter
Photo credit Sam Hutchinson

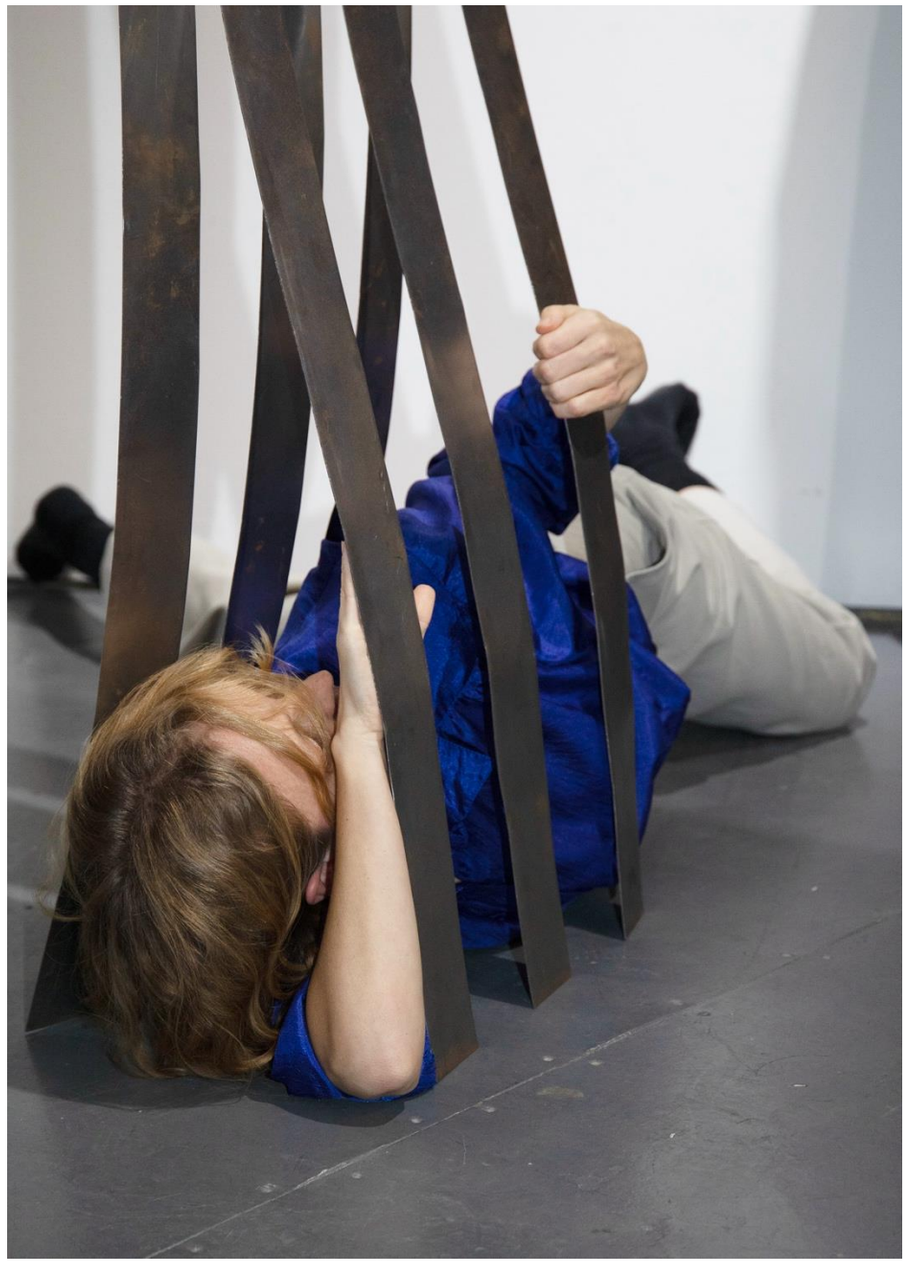




The Voice Falters, solo exhibition curated by Julia McKinley at serf, Leeds 2022, supported by Leeds Inspired with performance and response from Tora Hed, Nathan Walker, K.P. Culver, Lu Rose Cunningham. Photos Sam Hutchinson



The Voice Falters, solo exhibition curated by Julia McKinley at serf, Leeds 2022, supported by Leeds Inspired with performance and response from Tora Hed, Nathan Walker, K.P. Culver, Lu Rose Cunningham. Photos Sam Hutchinson



Tora Hed in response to The Voice Falters .2022





Study for a Shield after Battle (An Active Process) .2023
Mild steel, aluminum, glass
For Any Work That Wanted Doing, at Leeds Industiral Museum, commission for Leeds2023







Study for a Shield after Battle (An Active Process) .2023
Mild steel, aluminum, glass
For Any Work That Wanted Doing, at Leeds Industrial Museum, commission for Leeds2023



Study for a Shield after Battle, install at Patriot Hall, Wasps studios. Edinburgh .2021



Study for a Shield After Battle (A new world lay i*nside the old one),* Mild Steel and aluminium .2021



Study for a Shield After Battle (Goddess of Lead), Mild Steel and aluminium .2021





Study for a Shield After Battle (Goddess of Lead), Mild Steel and aluminium .2021



Study for a Shield After Battle (A preparation of daffodil), aluminium .2021





Study for a Shield After Battle (A preparation of daffodil), aluminium .2021



Study for a Shield After Battle (Goddess of Lead), Mild Steel and aluminium .2021



Dalida, Alluminium, cable ties .2021



Study for a Shield After Battle (Goddess of Lead), Mild Steel and aluminium .2021



















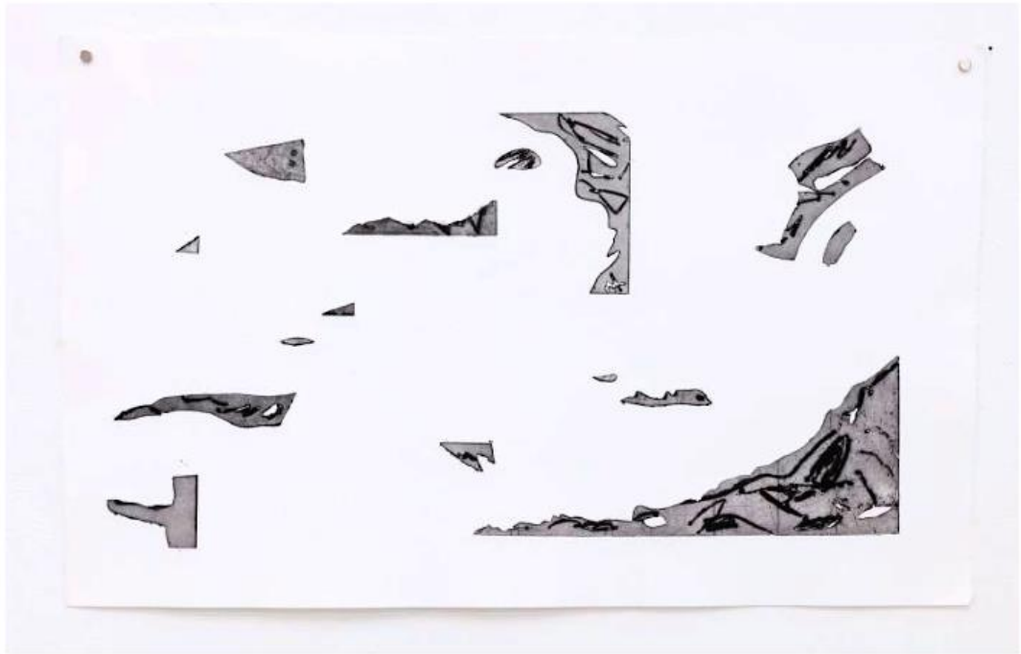


They might Fight, tin .2021



Study for a Shield after Battle, install at Patriot Hall, Wasps studios. Edinburgh .2021





Study for a Shield After Battle (fragments), black ink on white somerset paper .2021
Edition of 3, 420 x 594mm

Study for a Shield After Battle (Inherited on Passing Tongue) I, II, [diptych] III, black ink on white somerset paper .2021 Edition of 3, 420 x 594mm

Study for a Shield after Battle (Inherited on passing Tongue) and *Study for a Shield after Battle (fragments)* evidence the patina and process of sculpted metal. Gestural marks created through plasma cutting evidence the action of heat and pressure, alongside historical marks from the metals production made visible through the printing process. Collapsing the boundary between 2 and 3 dimension, these prints interrogate the surface and histories of metal, fragmented lines become a trace which suggest a landscape while congealed and trapped ink belies the physicality of the printing process. *Study for a Shield after Battle (Fragments)* gathers together off-cuts from the artists workshop to reframe use, wear and purpose. The prints become evidence of process, of action, of battle.

A direct engagement with the land, *Following the Ghost* were created by dragging etching plates along the path of former mill workers in Armley. Each plate evidences a section of the journey, stopping when the supports broke, a decision which allowed the final form to be guided by process and action. This new form of mapping denies historical barriers created by power but evidences a gestural and intuitive response to a landscape marked by the workers who lived within and shaped it.

Considering the etchings made my school children on desks, the act of etching became a marker of a visual language which gives evidence to lives lived outside of dominant structures of control. A way of physically marking out space as an act of rebellion and act of documenting presence. These etchings were created in layers of process, so that marks became blindly added to throughout each layer and included gestural making, notes and other forms of graffiti which speak to other landscapes, migration and a playful escapism. A layer of chine-collé in a neon lime is shockingly unnatural, an aesthetic counter to the etched surface which references forms of mapping techniques which evidence use of buildings, and signal areas marked for development or clearing. This subtle nod to geographical framing positions the prints as a space which counter institutional mapping.

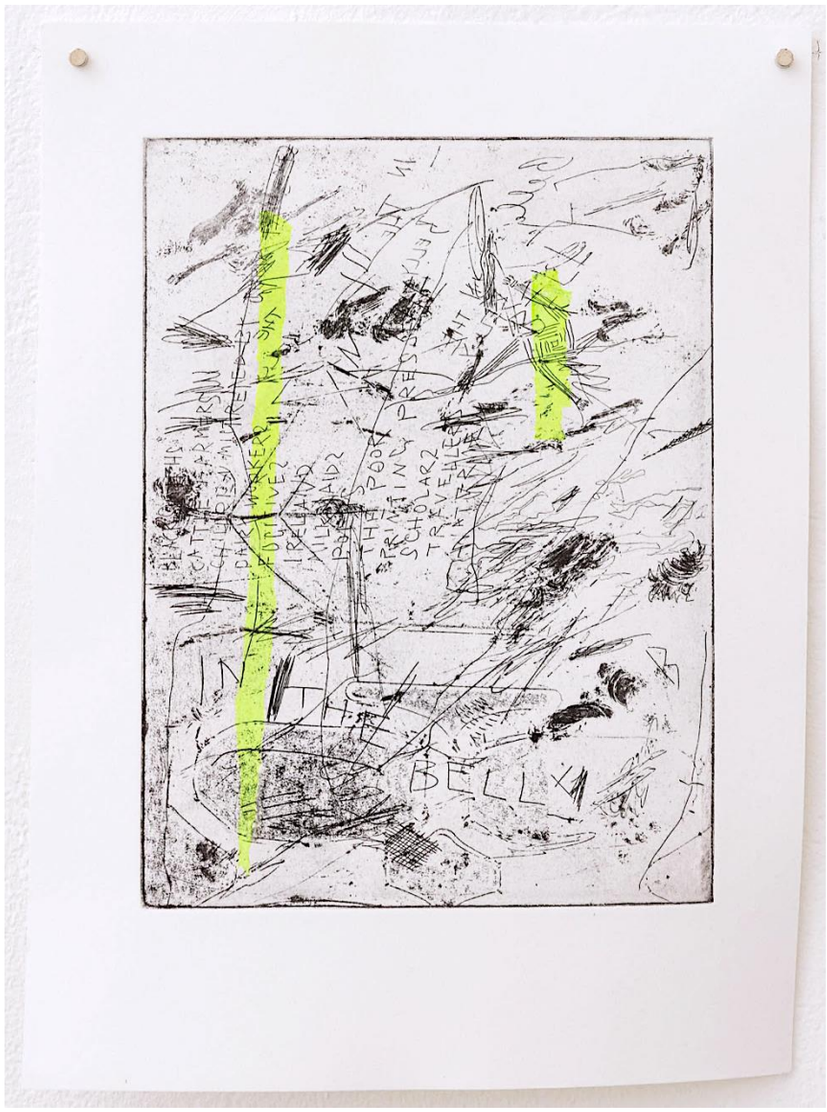






Following the Ghost, I, II, III etching, black ink on white somerset paper .2021
Edition of 10, 148 x 210mm







Marrow (A word inside a stone) I,II, III tissue paper and black ink on white somerset paper, etching with chine-collé .2021
Edition of 6, 148 x 210mm

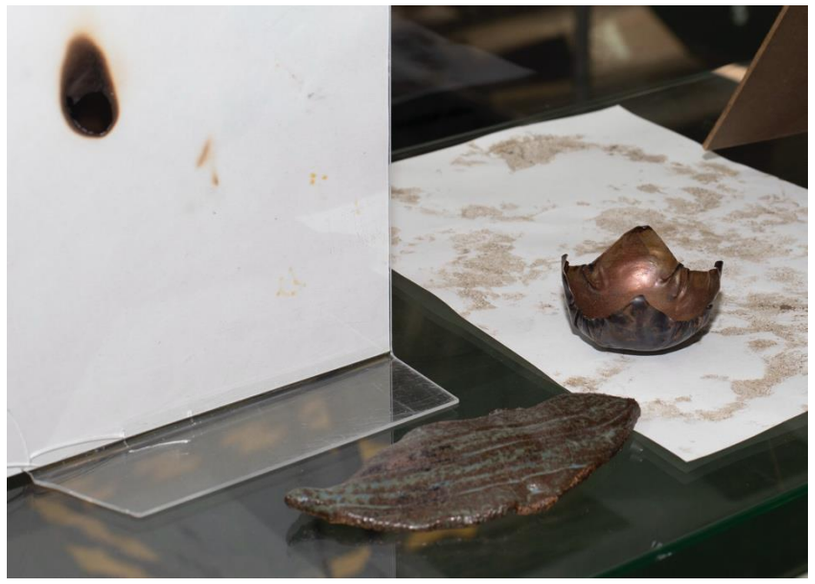




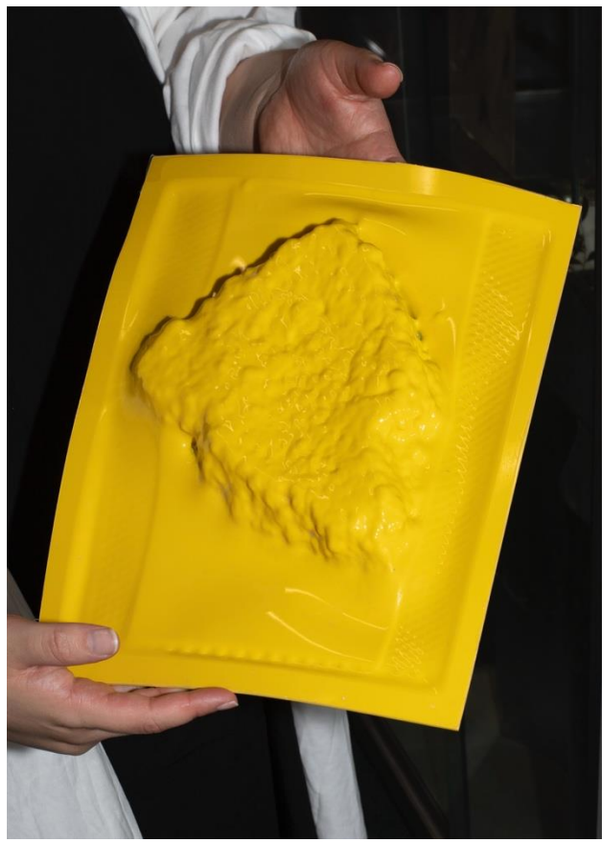


I am the merry-go-round horse dragging up the earth beneath me .2020-21
Collections intervention in the Local and Family History Department in the Leeds Central Library.

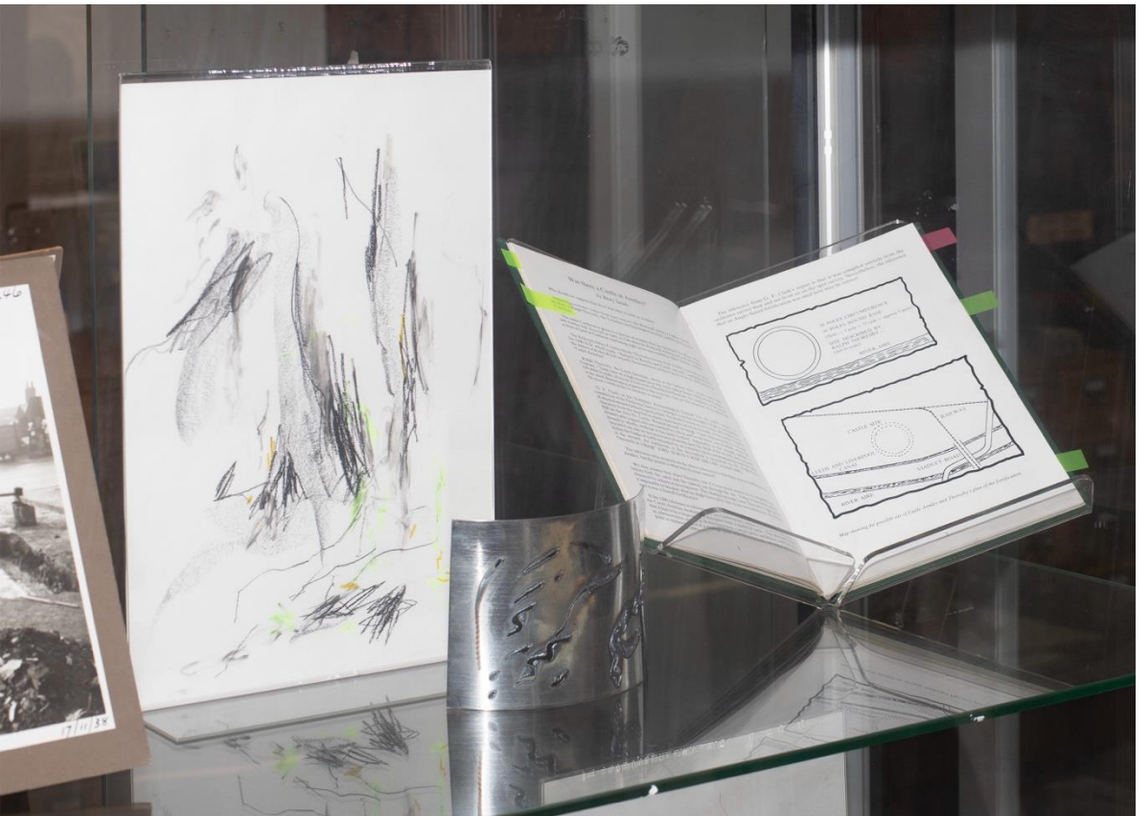








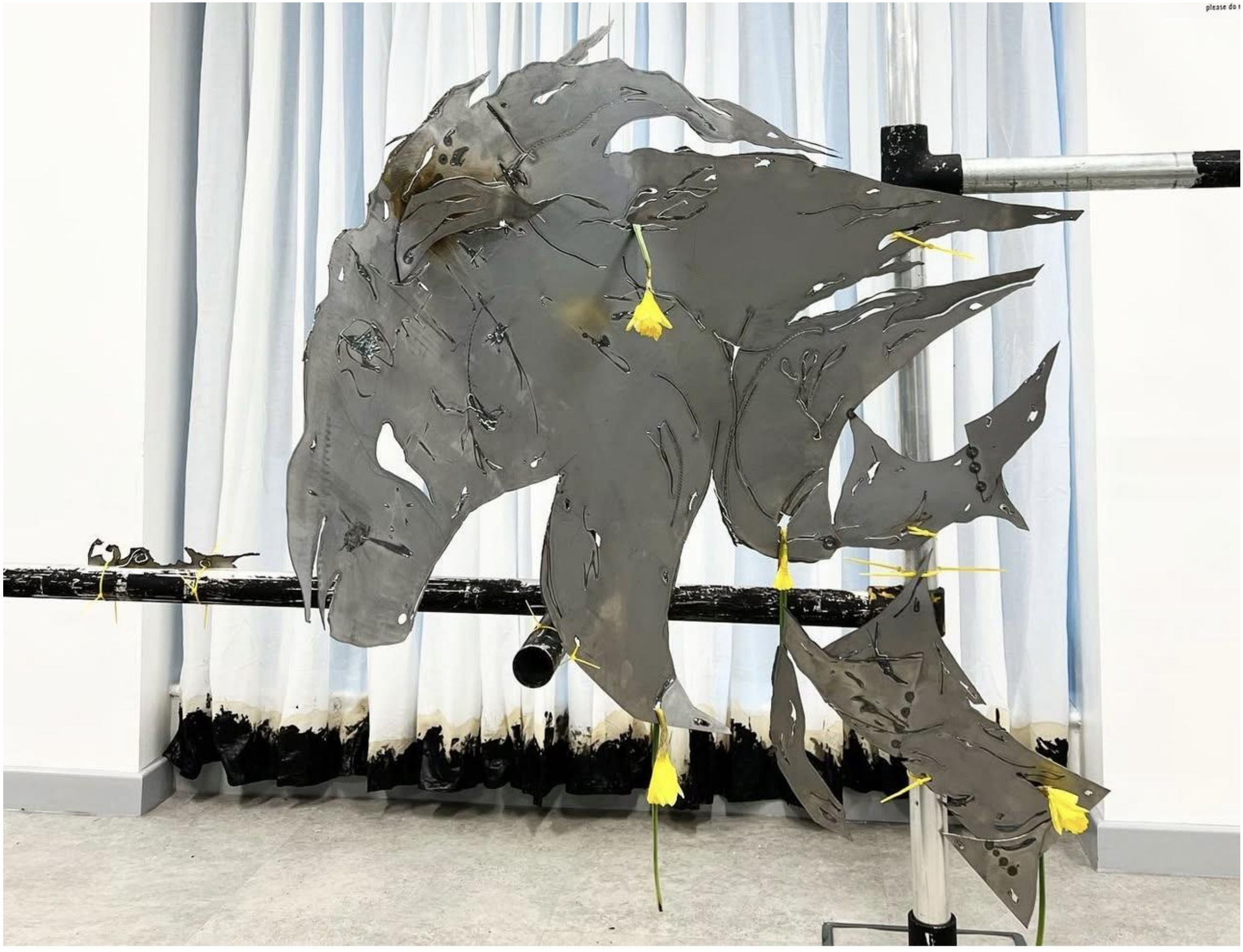








I am the merry-go-round horse dragging up the earth beneath me, in I give, _Blank, Leeds .202



I am the merry-go-round horse dragging up the earth beneath me, in I give, _Blank, Leeds .2022





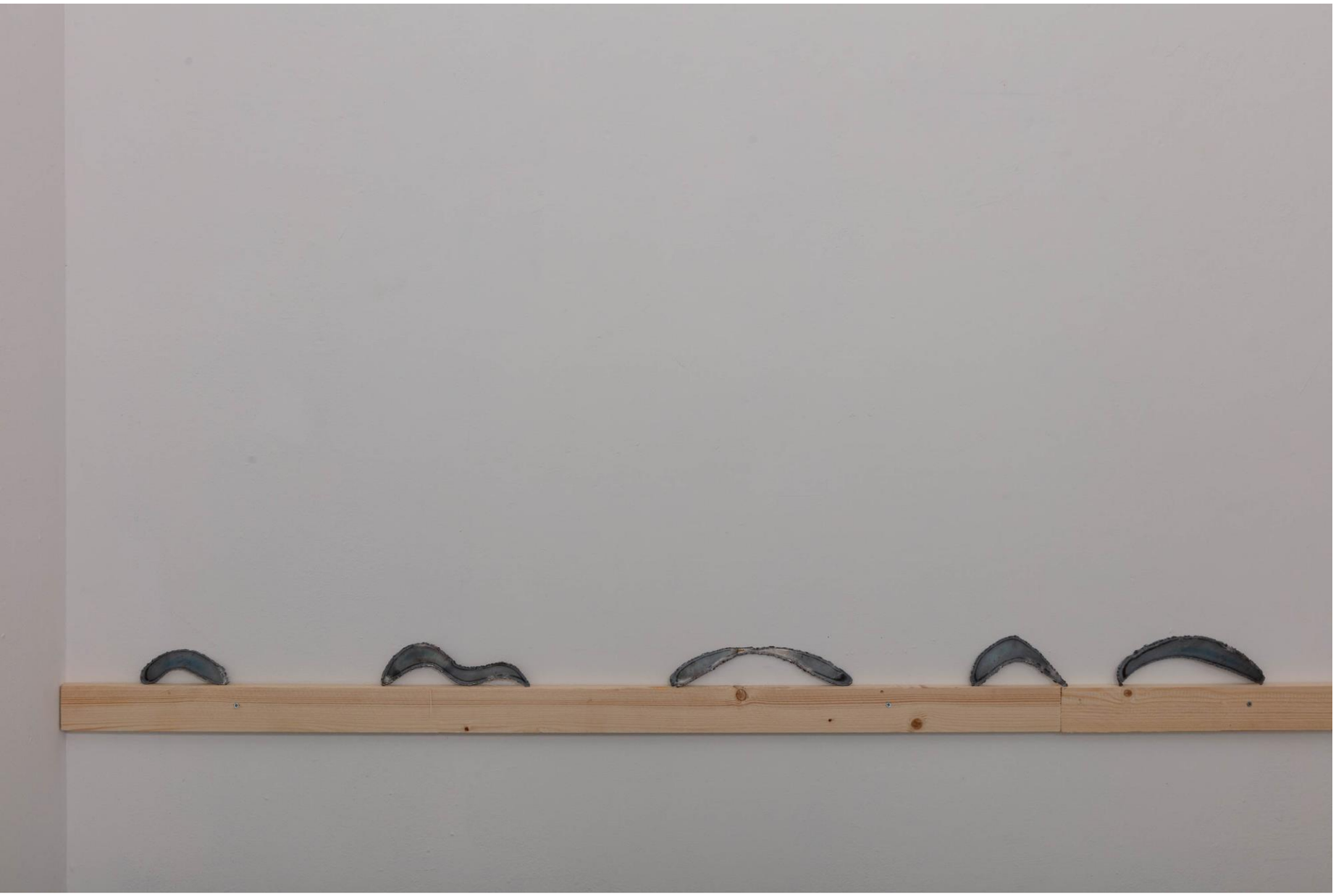
I am the merry-go-round horse dragging up the earth beneath me, in I give, _Blank, Leeds .2022

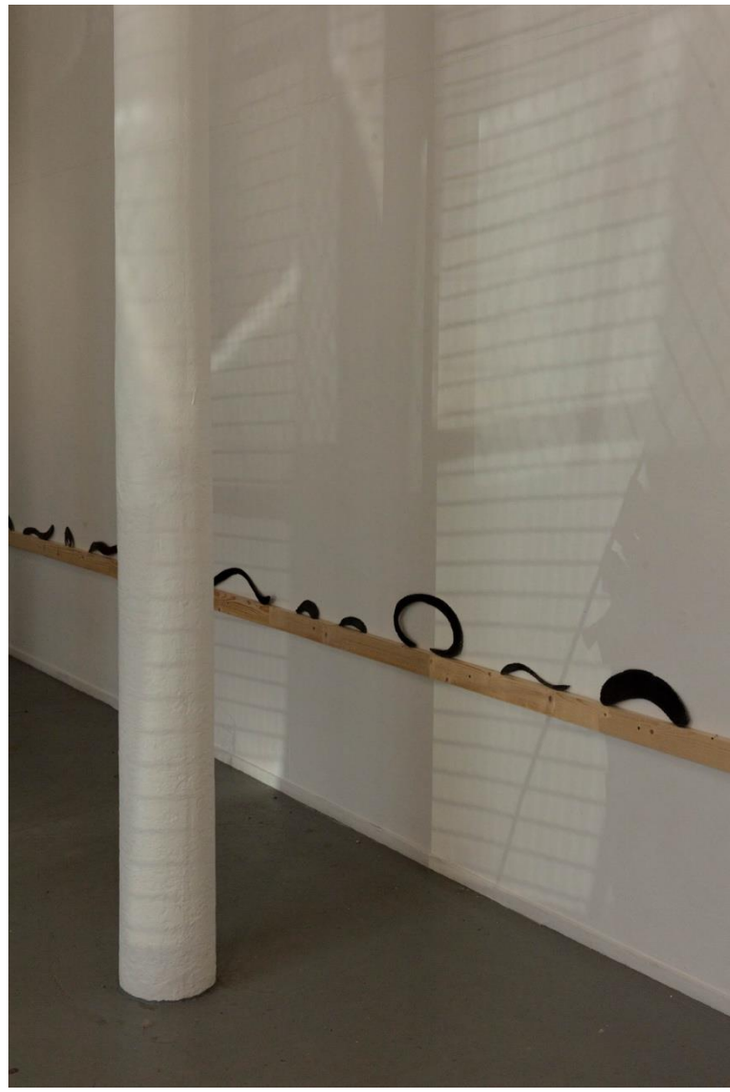


The Voice Falters, video 10min .2022
PANIC! commission



Untitled .2021





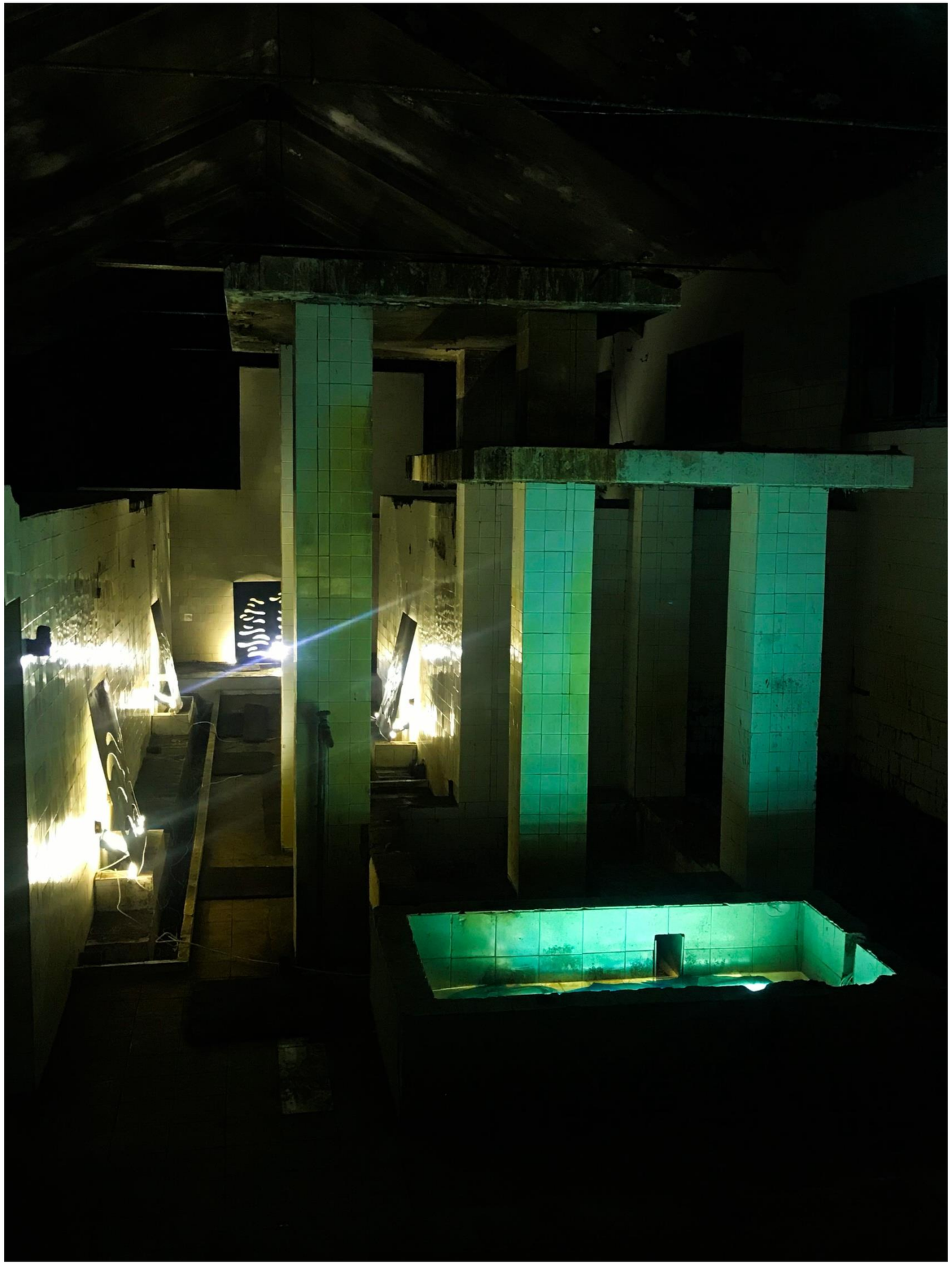
A Wound Held Dear (Fragments from Guard of the Watergate) steel off cuts, wood .2019 – 20







Preliminary studies for a shield after battle .2020



Guard of the Water Gate .2019
YiYuan Tang Museum, LuVah, Chongming Island, Shanghai
Mild steel, lights, glass, plastic bags



Guard of the Water Gate .2019
YiYuan Tang Museum, LuVah, Chongming Island, Shanghai
Mild steel, lights



Study

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