Neil Dixon creates an imaginary architecture to propose an alternative reality. He explains: ‘The buildings are based on my interpretation of and reflection on the architectural styles of the real world ... traditional, modernist and contemporary styles ... DIY buildings such as slums and tree houses ... I imagine a new architecture and society built on the ruins of an old one.’

Key reference points are found among strange combinations of the historical and the modern that are highly familiar within British urban environments, and consequently overlooked. One example he offers is Nottingham’s 1960s Broadmarsh Shopping Centre - just a short walk from his studio. Its walls give way to the city’s network of ancient man-made subterranean caves, used from the Dark Ages to the 1940s as dwellings, factories and store rooms, and nowadays a tourist attraction. Nottingham’s particular ability to incorporate the old and the new has been described by architectural critic Owen Hatherley as resulting in ‘a city of contradictions and tensions, juxtapositions which initially appear accidental, but acquire a certain perverse logic.’

Dixon’s sculptural constructions, assembled from sawn timber blocks and sticks, or modelled in polymer clay, might be seen as expressions of utopian cities, such as ‘New Babylon’, the vision of CoBrA and Situationist International associated artist and architect Constant Nieuwenhuys. Alternatively they may be understood as sprawling shanty towns, representing an architecture that is provisional and organic, collaborative and vernacular. But while at first sight the works may seem to be naïve models, they soon begin to exert a powerful influence on the viewer.

The phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard and the cultural critic Susan Stewart have both made close studies of the effects of miniaturization and the insights they offer are helpful when considering Dixon’s visual language. Bachelard suggests that the purpose of such poetic images of space is not to reflect or to represent our experience of the real world, but to invite new ways of thinking. He notes how these complete worlds on a miniature scale allow us to daydream, to experience a life within a life. In the case of Dixon’s ‘Structures’ the changing rhythms of the patterns of the timber end-grains and the varying configurations of connecting cells fascinate the eye and provide a succession of sites for thought. Similarly in the floor-piece ‘Structure/Places’ the chequerboard patterns, tiny ladders and staircases and other minute details are discovered only at intimate distance, as we kneel down in order to explore its narrative potential. The titles of his detailed drawings ‘Area/Map’ and ‘Area/Structure’ hint at their original purpose, as a way of understanding ideas and considering processes, but they have developed an independent identity. Within all such diminutive spaces and places time is transformed. As Stewart observes ‘the miniature is a world of arrested time ... once we attend to the miniature world, the outside world stops and is lost to us.’
Neil Dixon studied Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University, graduating in 2009. His work has since featured in a number of exhibitions including the Royal British Society of Sculptors Bursary Award exhibition, London (2010); Nottingham Castle Open (2011); Sanyi Wood Sculpture Museum, Miaoli and Huanshan Creative Park, Taipei, Taiwan (2012); and the Commissioned Programme of the Wirksworth Festival, Derbyshire (2012). In addition to gaining an RBS Bursary, he won the Deirdre Hubbard Award for Sculpture and a Quad Future Focus Bursary, all in 2010.

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The Marsden Woo Project Space, curated by Tessa Peters, is a space for experimental new work in art, craft and design and runs alongside our established programme of solo and small group exhibitions by gallery artists. The Project Space allows us to respond quickly to significant bodies of innovative work, particularly that of talented emerging artists and designers, as well as fresh directions in the work of more established artists. The exhibitions are organized at short notice, so please check our website regularly for news on forthcoming shows and events.