James Thompson’s Expanding Spaces is a recording project whose subject is cell no.4 of High Royds, a former psychiatric hospital in Menston, West Yorkshire. This architecturally significant hospital, originally known as the West Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum, was designed by the architect J. Vickers Edwards and opened in 1888. In addition to care facilities, the complex of gothic buildings comprised a library, a surgery, dispensary, ballroom, butchers, dairy, bakery and its own railway system linked to the local line. High Royds finally closed ten years ago and the 300 acre site is currently being redeveloped as a new village. The architectural features of the former hospital buildings are thus inevitably becoming traces; once incorporated into the new design schemes they no longer have any authentic or functional value, but become signifiers of a general nostalgia for the past.

Thompson is not interested in the decorative potential of the abandoned interiors, but in how they might be remapped and re-interpreted. Consequently, rather than using conventional means - such as photography - to document the room, he has taken inspiration from the Cubists’ analysis of the duality of space and time, which enabled them to express multi-dimensional experiences of reality. By devising different methods of measuring and recording the space, each following an alternative line of logic, he arrives at a range of unexpected re-envisionings, as well as thought-provoking experiences of place. The distinctive architectural details of the room, such as the door with its sinister peep holes, a shuttered window, an air vent, a radiator and the remaining piece of furniture – a chair – recur again and again in different materials and in different combinations.

In Rotating Space (mounted on the stairs between ground floor and basement) the various parts of the cell can be identified on a rotating red latex belt, whose overall length corresponds to the perimeter of the room and where each of the corners of the cell are marked by a high frequency audible signal. The sinuous belt rotates at 0.3mph, whereas the average walking speed is 3mph, and so by reducing the speed of travel the perception of distance is increased, allowing the dimensions of the cell to be experienced ten times larger than in reality.

Freestanding pieces include 1 hour 53 minutes, two seats of bright blue silicone rubber supported by reconstituted foam blocks, which Thompson made by pressing his bodyweight against shapes within the cell. Re-constructed Space comprises a shelf structure and architectural table that arise from his recording of distances within the space by means of Jesmonite and fibreglass casts. In the case of the shelf, the largest section of Jesmonite is the negative form of the run from door frame to an adjacent curving wall and on into a right angled corner. This part of the room has been up-ended and re-assembled to include a section of window frame.

In Inflated Space, the casts taken of the cell’s window, door, radiator and air vent are represented as shiny, bulbous latex elements, fused together and inflated to a pressure of 15.696 psi, compared to
a standard atmospheric pressure of 14.696 psi. It seems to re-envision the room as spirit or alien presence. In the low-resolution video Reflected Light, the viewer experiences the same architectural features by means of the varying light levels recorded in the space. Another kind of cross-reference might be noted here in the way the pixelated quality of the video is reflected in the patterning of the Jesmonite surfaces of the Re-constructed Space objects.

Taking a different approach the large digital print titled From Window to Door, and the related smaller framed prints, were created by scanning the interior of the cell, as far as Thompson could reach, by means of an adapted hand-held device.

Cell no. 4 in High Royds will soon vanish, its functional use relinquished and its utilitarian features beyond the ideals of preservation. But while the actual room is now redundant, through Thompson’s Expanding Spaces project tangible ideas of the space have proliferated, so that it now exists in numerous parallel and conceptually engaging ways.

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**James Thompson** studied for a BA in 3-Dimensional Design (Furniture) at Leeds College of Art (2007 – 2010) and for an MA in Design Products at the Royal College of Art, London (2010 – 2012). His work has been seen at Social Interaction, el Matadero, Madrid; RCA Paradise, Milan; and Collective RCA MMXII at Dutch Design Week, Eindhoven (both 2012). From 2012 - 2013 he was an Associate lecturer at Leeds College of Art. www.jamesthompson.info

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Images of his work-in-progress at High Royds can be seen at: http://room-four.tumblr.com

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**Marsden Woo Project Space** is curated by Tessa Peters

The Marsden Woo Project Space 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.