

The image is a full-page background photograph. It depicts a landscape during the 'blue hour' or twilight. The sky is a deep, dark blue with some lighter, wispy clouds. The horizon is a straight line. Below the horizon, there is a field of tall, dry grass or reeds, which are silhouetted against the dark sky. The overall mood is somber and atmospheric.

# BLUE HOURS

LUCY MAY SCHOFIELD



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One of the most imaginative minds in science, Albert Einstein, believed that equations were waiting to appear to the person who looked hard enough, like secret finger-writing on a mirror, revealed when steam hits the surface. Finding them just required the right conditions—and insatiable curiosity. “You can act as if everything or nothing is a miracle,” he wrote. The remarkable work of Lucy May Schofield revels in a similar quiet belief in the miraculous nature of the everyday. As this year’s VARC artist in residence, Schofield examines with wonder both minute details of the Northumberland landscape and its more intangible elements, such as how light and time inform our experience of location.

The length of time VARC provides for an artist in residence at Highgreen is generous, but even a year is finite. Schofield adopts this constraint as a robust structure for a series of works which narrate the seasons, days, hours. She charts her experience of this landscape through twelve months, from dawn to dusk and in all weathers. There’s an Icelandic saying, *glöggst er gests angað* or “the visitor sees things with a clear eye.” By tuning her artistic practice respectfully to the established rhythm of the seasons, this clear-eyed newcomer is able to enter into dialogue with a time-honoured experience of the landscape. The surroundings of Highgreen may change down the generations, but patterns of growth and decay recur, planets and constellations return to the same point in the sky. Just so, the viewer will be able to recognise motifs and devices running through this body of work, such as the signature blue colour, or the variations on the perfect rectangle—whether a hand-made sheet of paper or a window frame.

Such attention to the temporal makes every day an event to be celebrated, but Schofield has created major works to mark the turning points of the four seasons. The Vernal Equinox, for example, saw Schofield’s sleep performance *Awake*, in which the artist slept outside from sunrise to sunset, her (occasionally shifting) body shielding the sheet on which she lay from the daylight. The light transformed the exposed areas of the sheet, turning the UV light-sensitive silk blue. A time-lapse film of the performance charts the colours of the moor, which change from sere to russet as the sun sinks below the horizon. Plane contrails appear and fade, but these are not the only travellers. Schofield’s film *5.55–18:33* brings to mind the vast distances the light journeys from the sun, the dizzying speed at which it moves towards us. Human



timescales are slower, shorter. It takes an artist to interpret the spring light, to show its true colours.

During her residency Schofield reflected on the meaning of blue: “The depth of indigo, that dive-into-the-blueness blue, the blueness of loss, of wonder, of grief, of freedom, of desire, of lament. That bluest of blue.” Since ancient times, blue has spoken of distance and memory. In Leonardo da Vinci’s instructions to painters, he writes about how to create the illusion of remoteness: “the next most distant make less outlined and more blue; that which you wish to show at yet another distance, make bluer yet again; and that which is five times more distant make five times more blue.” Blue is the deepest water, the remembered hills; and from space we are reduced to blue, as in NASA’s iconic 1968 *Earthrise* photograph of our “blue planet” with its swirling surface.

Schofield’s use of cyanotype calls to mind the work of the botanist Anna Atkins, a Victorian pioneer of scientific illustration, who used the process to make exquisite studies of sea algae. Cyanotype is a traditional medium for recording observation of the natural world. But Schofield moves away from representative image-making; rather than laying botanical specimens on the light-sensitive paper to create a ghostly silhouette, her cyanotypes witness the action of light itself. In *The Last Light* 160 tiny sheets of paper, having been pinned to an inner wall of a derelict shooting hut, record the light at the Winter Solstice. The variety of blue tones on these sheets echo the blue of the sky—itsself an illusion, the result of the selective scattering of sunlight by air molecules. This light from the sun, so essential to life on earth, is dearest to us on the shortest day. This haunting work is partnered by *The Longest Day*, created at the Summer Solstice, in which Schofield completely covered the hut’s south-facing exterior wall with sheets of paper on a scale befitting summer’s plenty. Over one thousand time-lapse images record the infinitesimal tonal shifts on the cyanotypes and in the skies above during the long hours of daylight.

Light, together with the physiology of sight, enables our visual experience of the world. Schofield describes her own way of looking as a “caress,” a term which encompasses the physicality of sight, the way the eye glances along an object and lingers on those aspects it finds most intriguing or beautiful. Schofield distils these “caresses” through *mokuhanga* printmaking, a form of mark-making in which the



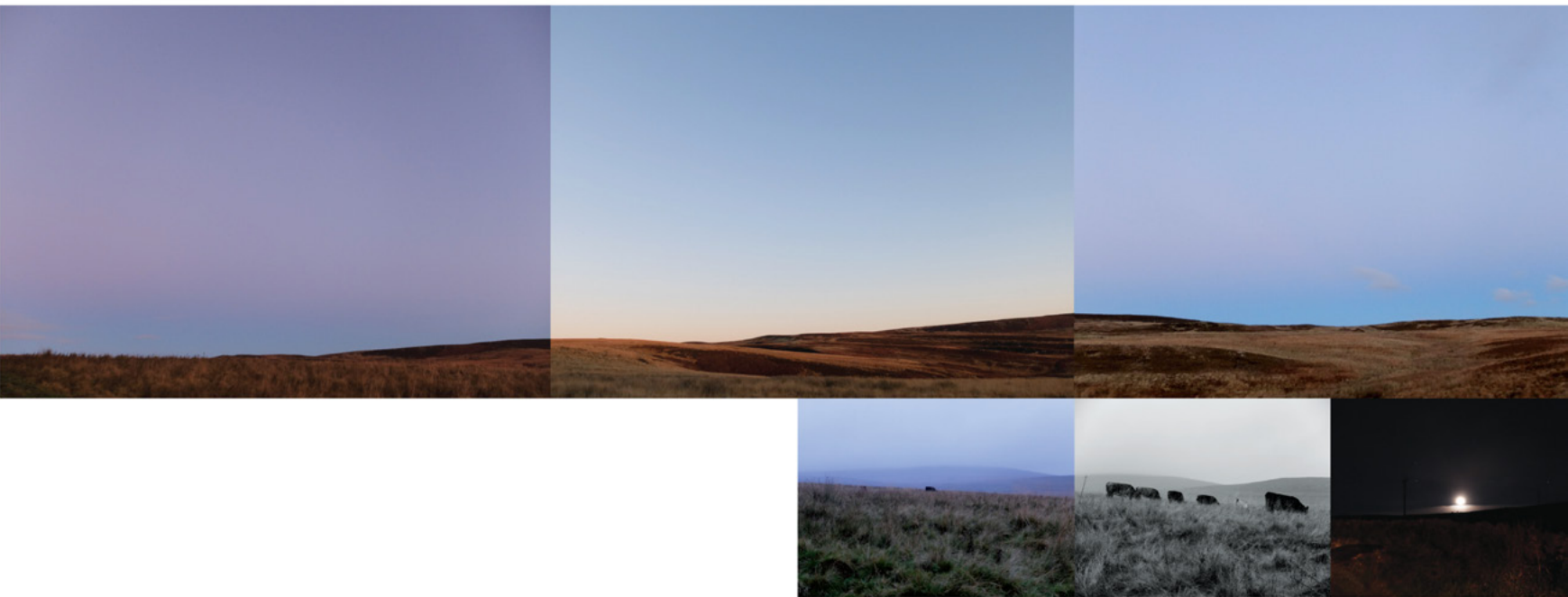
"Look deep  
into nature,  
and then you  
will understand  
everything  
better."

*Albert Einstein*

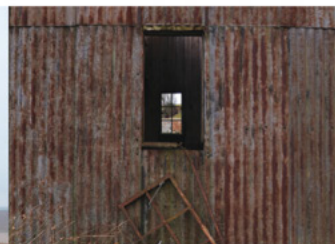
artist's intentions are mediated through gestures with carving tools in wood. The woodblocks are printed using water-based pigments, and as the paper is peeled back the image is revealed in reverse, as in a mirror. Over time these discrete observations gathered on daily walks and worked on back in the studio have grown into a mesmerising collective record of Highgreen through the seasons.

We always experience the environment through a human filter, whether that's our own eye, the camera lens, or another's words. *Weak from Dreaming*, a site-specific installation for the Autumn Equinox, creates a home for the human viewpoint in this landscape. The derelict shooting hut becomes a place to shoot not game but images: an observatory of wonder. Schofield's first photographs of the shooting hut show her fascination with the angularity of the building in contrast to the soft hills, and the way the rusted corrugated iron and splintered wood frames the enduring landscape. If Schofield, who has admitted at times to being daunted by the wide horizons, found security in this man-made structure, which has been re-made by the work of time and weather, she would also appreciate the irony inherent in its friable nature: the roof has fallen in, leaving the "shelter" exposed to the sky. Rather than feeling obliged to repair it, Schofield has turned her intrepid imagination to authenticate its broken-ness, leaving a point of exit/entry for the elements. The structure is ambitious in scale and scope; it frames the sky, and invites others in to share the view or to stargaze. In this, as in all the works collected in *Blue Hours*, Schofield listens, and lets nature speak. She might even be relaying the advice of that famous scientist. "Look deep into nature," Einstein wrote, "and then you will understand everything better."

*Nancy Campbell, August 2017*



| *Northumberland Skies,  
Highgreen, 2016*

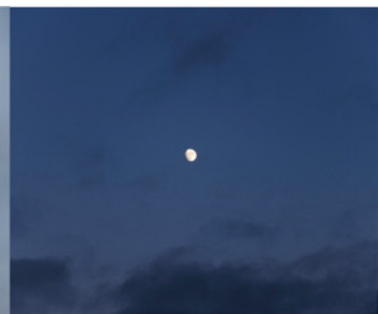
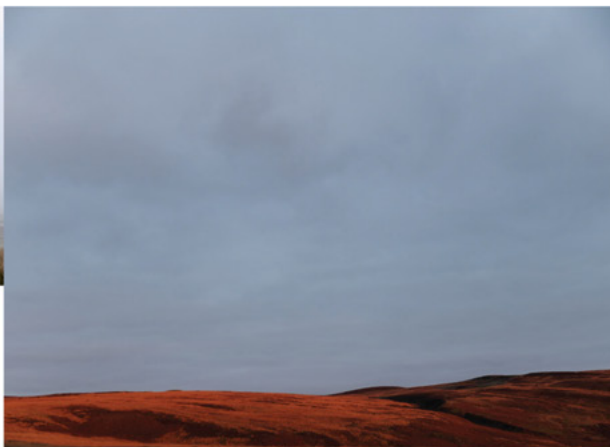
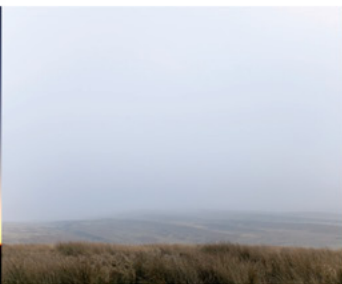
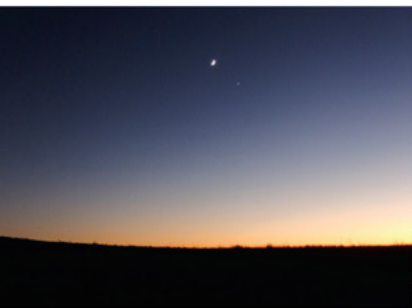






*Derelict Shooting Hut,  
Highgreen, 2016*

## WINTER



| *Winter skies over the moors,  
Highgreen, 2016*



*The Last Light*

*Time-lapse video, 2m 24s.*

*Shooting hut, Winter Solstice, 2016,*

*Photo: G. Brisson-Darveau*



*The Last Light*  
*Projection, exhibition installation,*  
*Blue Hours, 2017, Photo: K. Adibi*





*The Last Light (Blue Hour)*  
Cyanotypes on mulberry paper,  
*Blue Hours*, 2017, Photo: K. Adibi

SPRING



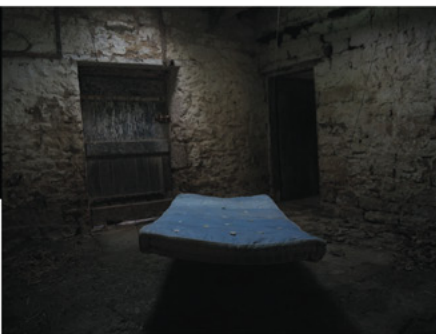
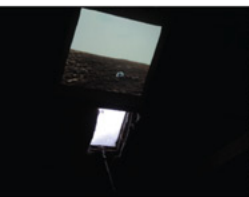


5:55-18:33

*Sleep performance, 12 hrs 38 mins,*

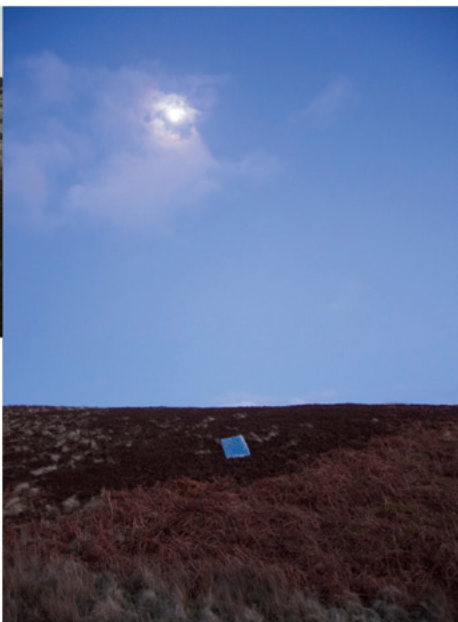
*Time-lapse video, 7m 59s,*

*Vernal Equinox, 2017*



*Awake & 5:55-18:33*  
*Found mattress with projection,*  
*Blue Hours, 2017, Photo: K. Adibi*





*Documentation of Awake*  
*Sleep performance, 12 hrs 38 mins,*  
*Vernal Equinox, 2017, Photo: K. Adibi*

SUMMER





*The Longest Day*  
Cyanotype print installation 18hrs 28mins,  
Time-lapse video,  
Shooting hut, Summer Solstice, 2017





*The Longest Day*  
Cyanotype prints, Exhibition installation,  
*Blue Hours*, 2017, Photo: K. Adibi

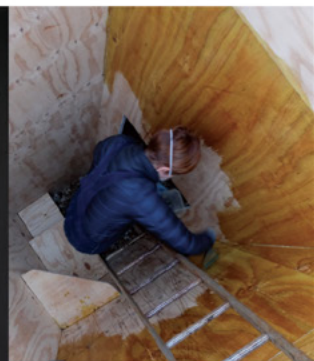




'... I have been moved by the blue at the far edge of what can be seen, that color of horizons, of remote mountain ranges, of anything far away. The color of that distance is the color of an emotion, the color of solitude and of desire, the color of there seen from here, the color of where you are not. And the color of where you can never go. For the blue is not in the place those miles away at the horizon, but in the atmospheric distance between you and the mountains ... Blue is the color of longing for the distances you never arrive in, for the blue world.'

*Rebecca Solnit, A Field Guide to Getting Lost, 2005, (p.29).*

# AUTUMN





*Weak From Dreaming*

*Site-specific installation, 360 x 180 x 180 cm,*

*Shooting hut, Autumn Equinox, 2017, Photo: K. Adibi*

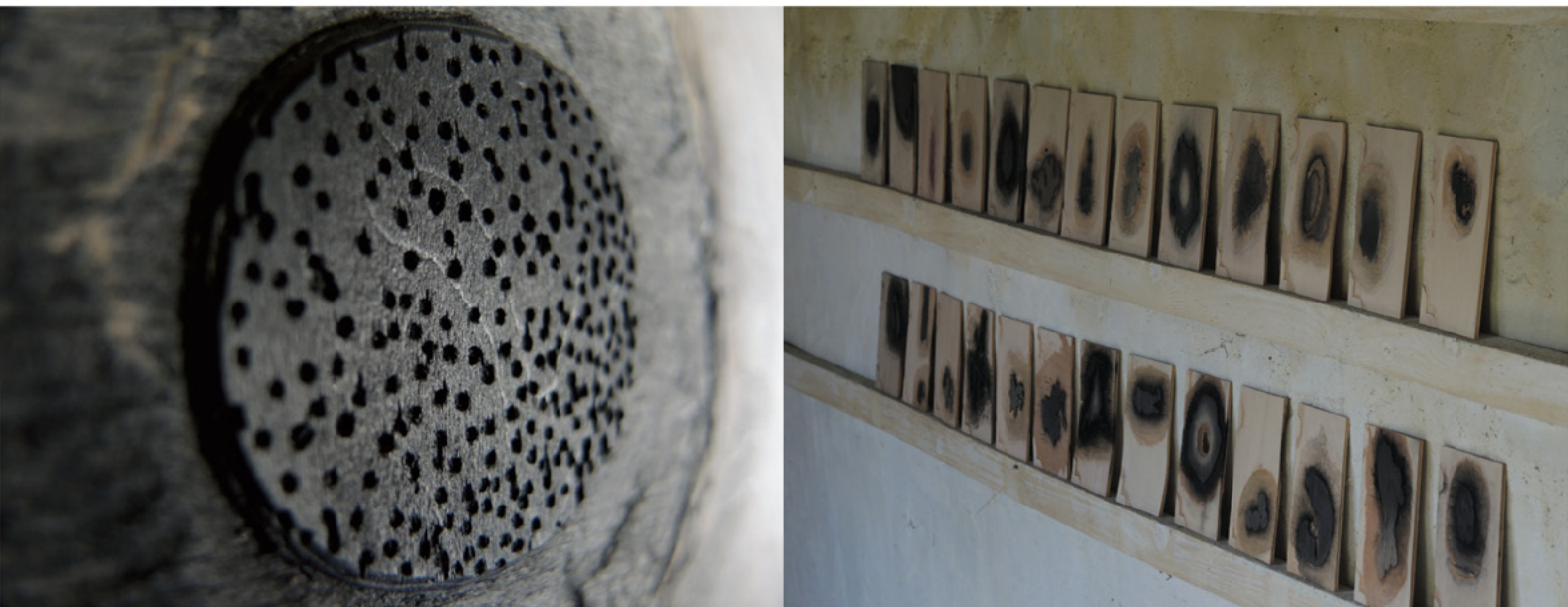
## YEAR ROUND



### ***Moonrise***

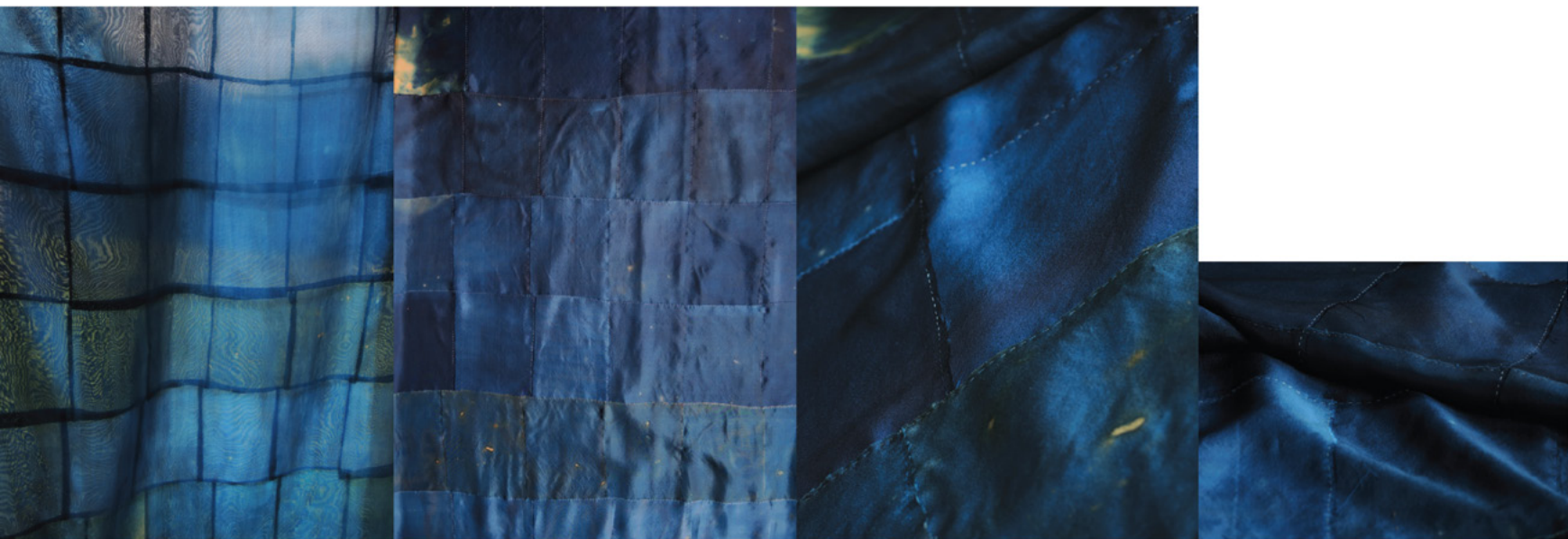
*Time-lapse video, 1m 11s,  
Projection, Exhibition installation,  
Blue Hours, 2017, Photo: K. Adibi*





*Nature Caress*

*Mokuhanga, sumi ink on kōzo washi,  
Series of 30 woodblock prints, 16 x 11 cm,  
Highgreen, 2016–2017, Photo: K. Adibi*



*Losing You for Good*

*Hand-stitched quilt, Cyanotype silk, North of England mule black fleece,  
150 x 77 cm, Vernal Equinox—Summer Solstice 2017, Photo: K. Adibi*



*This Place you Return to is Home*

*Knitted cocoon, Locally-dyed indigo yarn, Blue Faced Leicester sheep,  
160 x 90 cm, 2016–2017, Photo: K. Adibi*



In October 2016 Lucy May Schofield began her yearlong residency at Highgreen. Prior to her arrival, she had spent two years in Japan and she brought with her to Northumberland an Eastern approach to nature; an acute awareness of ourselves in relation to our natural surroundings, and the small details that shift day by day signifying the changing seasons. To observe closely and make minimum impact upon her surroundings were two guiding principles to her residency. Lucy has allowed the vagaries and power of the basic elements to play a major part in creating each art work.

From VARC's perspective, this residency has been made special not only by the works themselves but by the spirit of respect and thoughtfulness Lucy has treated her surroundings, the materials and tools with which she works, the people around her and in the way she has so generously shared both her skills and her creative processes with neighbours, friends and visitors.

Students from Thomas Bewick, Thornhill Park and Percy Hedley schools based in Newcastle and Sunderland have benefited from Lucy's inspiringly led printmaking activities during full-day visits to Highgreen. Local First schools and the Wood Elves group all received a visit from Lucy in the Autumn term where they were invited to make a *mokuhanga* print. The same opportunity was taken up by over seventy people during 'The Late Shows' at the Holy Biscuit, Newcastle in May this year, when Lucy offered Japanese printmaking alongside her exhibition 'Light Meditations' on show in the gallery, which received over four hundred visitors.

Most recently, a group of local residents were treated to a full weekend workshop in which Lucy led participants gently and with great knowledge and professionalism through the processes of carving a three-colour Japanese wood-block print. Those who took part left with a beautiful print and were full of praise for the way in which Lucy had imparted her knowledge, skills and expertise that enabled them to achieve such stunning results.

Moreover, neighbours and friends of VARC have participated in key moments during the artist's year: the gathering of 160 component pieces of paper during '*The Last Light (Blue Hour)*' as night fell on the moors, illuminated only by the light of handmade paper lanterns; a celebratory woodland feast followed

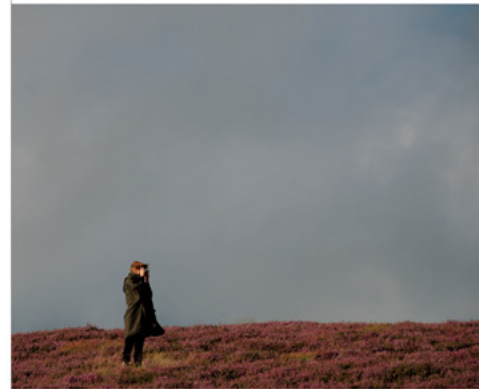


by a walk to view *The Longest Day* during its creation as well as a chance to experience the vast skies through the artist's site-specific observatory *Weak from Dreaming* that marked the Autumn Equinox and the conclusion of Lucy's year with VARC.

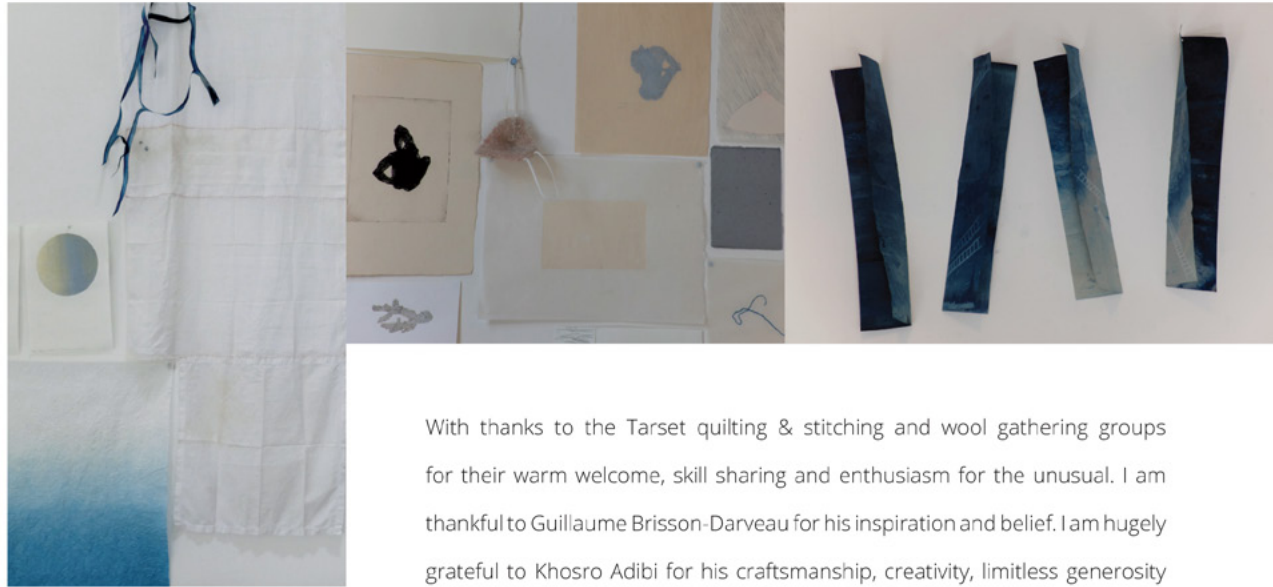
VARC has enjoyed having Lucy as our eighteenth artist in residence, and is pleased to have provided the opportunity for her to make this new body of work. We are very grateful for the knowledge, skills, creativity, grace and generosity she has brought to the post and to Highgreen and wish her every success and happiness for the future.

The artwork Lucy has made during her year is illuminated beautifully in this catalogue by poet and writer Nancy Campbell.

*Janet Ross, Project Director, VARC*



| Photo: K. Adibi



With thanks to the Tarsset quilting & stitching and wool gathering groups for their warm welcome, skill sharing and enthusiasm for the unusual. I am thankful to Guillaume Brisson-Darveau for his inspiration and belief. I am hugely grateful to Khosro Adibi for his craftsmanship, creativity, limitless generosity and inimitable hugs. To Janet Ross for providing constant guidance, kindness, patience and support over the year. I am indebted to VARC for this unique opportunity and to William & Cynthia Morrison Bell for their openness and encouragement throughout. With gratitude to Rebecca Solnit (my company in the dark) and to Nancy Campbell for so poetically revealing the work. I am forever thankful to the residents of Tarsset for sharing their skies.

Blue Hours is for Jude.

*Lucy May Schofield*

| *Artist's studio,  
Highgreen, 2017*

Visual Arts in Rural Communities has funded and managed a programme of twelve-month artist residencies since 2000. It has also initiated associated arts projects. Through the residencies and projects it aims to give artists opportunities to develop new work and benefit to the community and visiting groups through creative activity and engagement with art and artists. It also aims to benefit young people with special needs, particularly those on the autism spectrum, through creative projects.

This year our particular thanks are to Gillian Dickinson Trust who have funded much of our work with SEN students over the past three years. Also huge thanks to volunteers who have made workshops this year more smooth-running and enjoyable for all; Mark Robinson, Laura Ross, Jane Dawson and Ariane Baty. As always, VARC would like to thank all our neighbours, Tarsset residents and friends and Cynthia and William Morrison-Bell for their generous and constant support.

Nancy Campbell is a writer and book artist whose work explores northern environments. *Disko Bay*, a poetry collection written at Greenland's most northern museum, was shortlisted for the Forward Prizes 2016 and the Michael Murphy Memorial Prize 2017. She writes on art for the Times Literary Supplement, *Printmaking Today* and the Royal Academy.

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