

Richard Woods

Duck Weave

30 January to 9 April 2016
Public Preview
Friday 29 January 2016, 6–8pm

It was late summer in 2014 that the first sections of 'Duckweave' were discovered. A two-week long archaeological dig had been organised by the staff and students of the nearby Staffordshire University (formerly North Staffordshire polytechnic) at the lower end of Market Street, which bordered the River Stour in the Worcestershire town of Kidderminster.

The local council had originally permitted the dig as a way of continuing the town's fascination with its Saxon heritage. A remote sensor survey had indicated a buried architectural site bordering the Stour, and it was believed, or hoped, that this would reveal more of the town's Saxon history. What the dig actually uncovered was heavily woven remnants that scientists from the university believe could be more than 5,000 years old.

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'Scientists believe that the days were busy for the group of 25 to 30 early humans. Top priorities were hunting and food-gathering, but there was time to weave cloth and fashion tools that would make living easier. Archaeologists were excited to discover complexly woven cloth made of plant fibre, probably palm. The fronds would have been rubbed back and forth until they became twinelike, then woven using bone awls to pack the weave tightly. 'Duck Weave' is the oldest fabric recovered in the Western Hemisphere and possibly in the world.'

Richard Woods' 'Duck Weave' is a new development in the internationally renowned artist's use of materials, patterns, logos and motifs. Eastside Projects presents the first research stages of Woods' 'Duck Weave' construction technique as the inaugural display of 'Production Show 2016–2018'.

No one is quite sure where or why the name 'Duckweave' was started. Local historian Eric Purchase claimed it was originally adopted by the town's folk because of the sites locality to the river Stour. An alternative opinion was that the name was given by the national press because the structures that had been unearthed were made with distinctive 'roughness' or 'physicality'.

Whilst it remains unclear who coined the term 'duckweave', it is clear how the woven structures were made. Using the reeds from the nearby riverbanks and vegetable dyes, the Wyre Men (as they became later known) twisted the reeds and wove them into simple structures. Perhaps what is most extraordinary about this Midlands discovery is that the resultant woven material seems to have been used both as building material and for clothing fabrics. 'Duckweave' was further used as primitive furniture and even as a decorative patterning that was painted directly onto the Wyre Men's large 'daub' built architectural structures that appear to have once lined the riverbank.

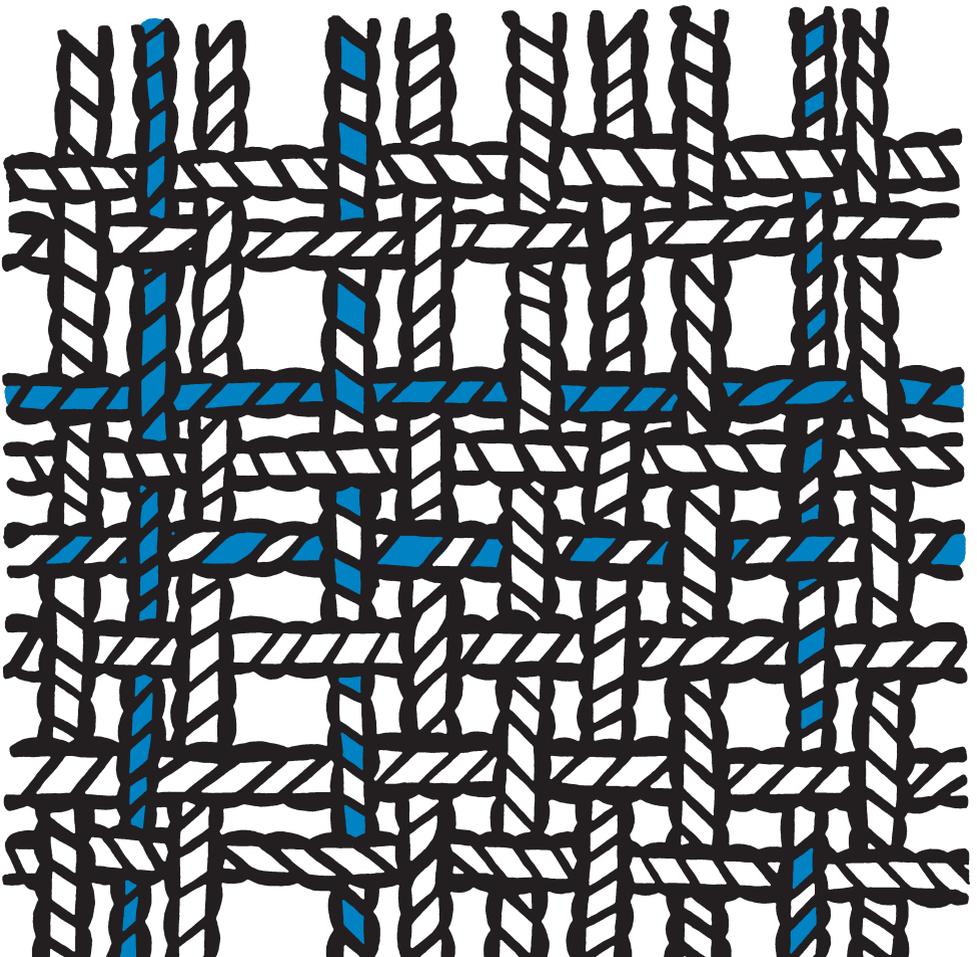
The research into the Wyre Men's remarkable productivity, which has grown out of the 'Duckweave' discovery, continues at Staffordshire University.

'Duck Weave' is also the first show of painting on canvas by Woods who is widely known for his large-scale transformative graphic artworks on architecture, his inventive, playful sculpture, and woodblock printed furniture. Painted weaving patterns are applied to the gallery walls and prototype painted panels prepared for a staging of basic dwellings, clothing and shelters.

'Duck Weave' epitomises vernacular construction. Its continuous use for at least 6,000 years owes much to cheapness and abundance of raw materials. It starts with primitive building and spans the entire history of England until the craft's demise during the eighteenth century. The craft was used across the world but the scope here is confined to English traditions.

The origins of 'Duck Weave' stem from primitive buildings, where huts were constructed of poles, woven panels and earthen walls. Archaeology shows the 'Duck Weave' techniques were numerous and their boundaries ill-defined. 'Duck Weave' walls, bearing no significant difference to the construction of hurdles, used the same technique as fencing for boundaries, penning wind- resistance and privacy.

Remarkably, this method of weaving remained one of the most common and unchanging forms of walling from primitive building down to its gradual demise during recent centuries, and now Richard Woods is developing a new stage in its evolution. With his new craft of 'Duck Weave' Woods is positioning the artist close to the builder, weaver or thatcher and proposing a new grouping of 'helyers' or 'cooperatores'.

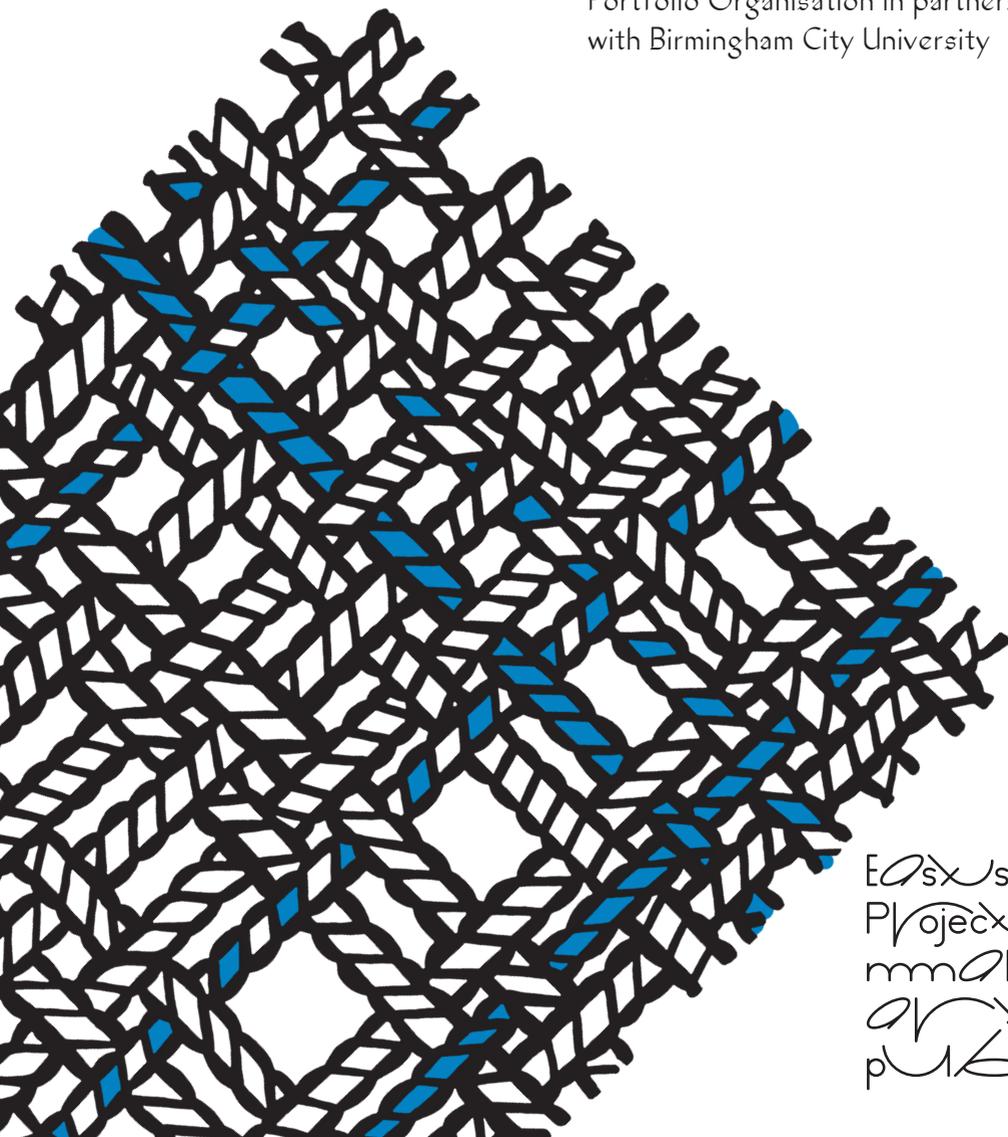


'Production Show 2016-2018' is an evolving process – a programme of relationships, commissions, exhibitions and events spanning two years which explodes Eastside Projects as an active space of research, development, prototyping, manufacturing and display.

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