

After my experiments with growing algae, I opted to continue exploring projects that involved growth and nurturing of organisms. Returning to the sampling of Camden for green algae, I again appropriated elements of my surround in order to construct a concentrate, and potentially enlightening, experience.

In this project, in place of water-borne algae, I used moss, collected from damp walls and brickwork in order to introduce a more physical need to address habitat; By harvesting the moss I had placed myself in a position of responsibility to it, and while my aim was to present the moss as a concentrate environment, I was also forced, similarly to the algae, to address its requirements in order to do so.

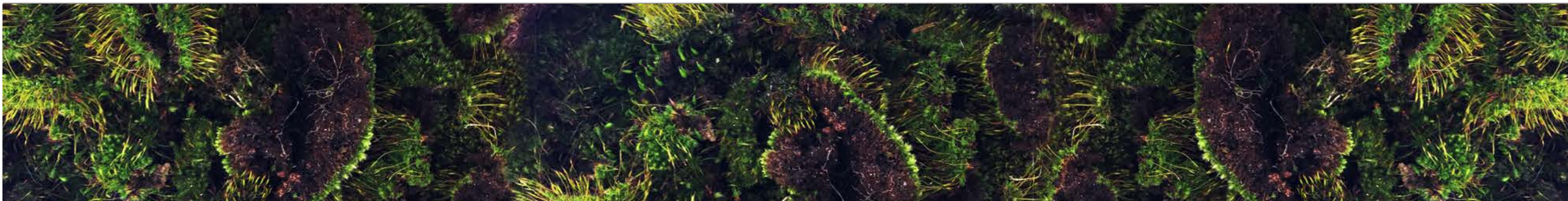
To do that I had to explore

‘ENVIRONMENT AND APPROPRIATION’

After witnessing the properties of the cultures of *Pyrocystis Lunula*, I was interested in creating an immersive experience. I was most interested in achieving an experience that was able to transport the viewer: As the tropical algae represented a tropical sea, I wanted the moss collections to also depict an environment.

However, while the bioluminescent algae is genuinely a feature of the warm seas of the tropics, I wanted to be able to take more control of the experience I was looking to engineer: I felt that the purchasing of algae, purpose grown, and shipped from 800 miles away was almost cheating.

Instead I wanted further the concept of appropriation in my work, utilising found objects and materials, and transforming them so that they could achieve the same weight of experience as the algae.



Appropriated Organism: Moss



Collecting moss from my surround, I encountered several different species in different environments.

To keep them alive, I places them in a series of glass vessels.



Since the glass would not allow water to escape, I had to avoid waterlogging but also maintain high moisture levels since I had removed the moss from its naturally damp environment.

Using coco-fibre to maintain moisture levels meant the moss could thrive in an environment I assigned to it.

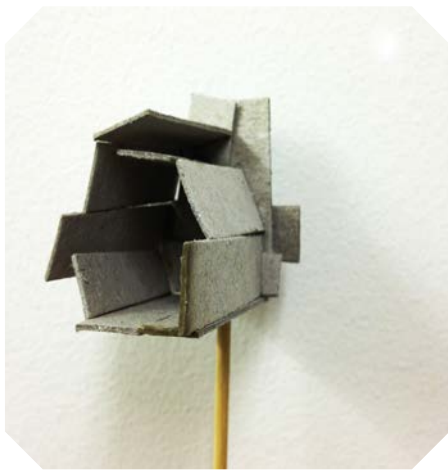




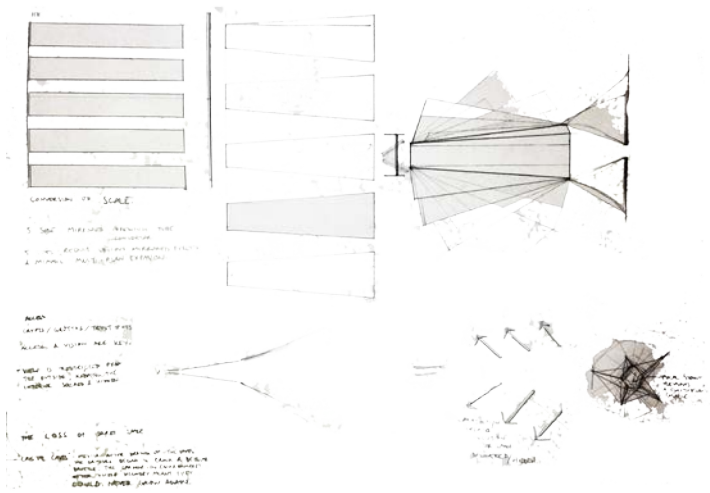
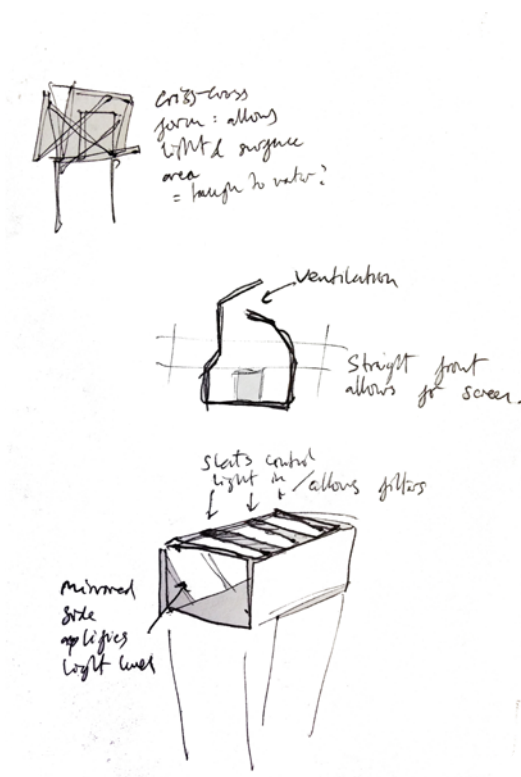
Constructing maquettes and exploring possible hosts for the moss lead me to construct a series of models.

These models looked to address:

- 1. Light availability
- 2. Ventilation
- 3. Moisture retention properties



However, while the survival of the moss was important to me, I was still centred on the goal of presenting the moss as a experience: an experience of another place.



In my design of the host for the moss to grow on, I had to factor in this 'other place' that I was looking to emulate.

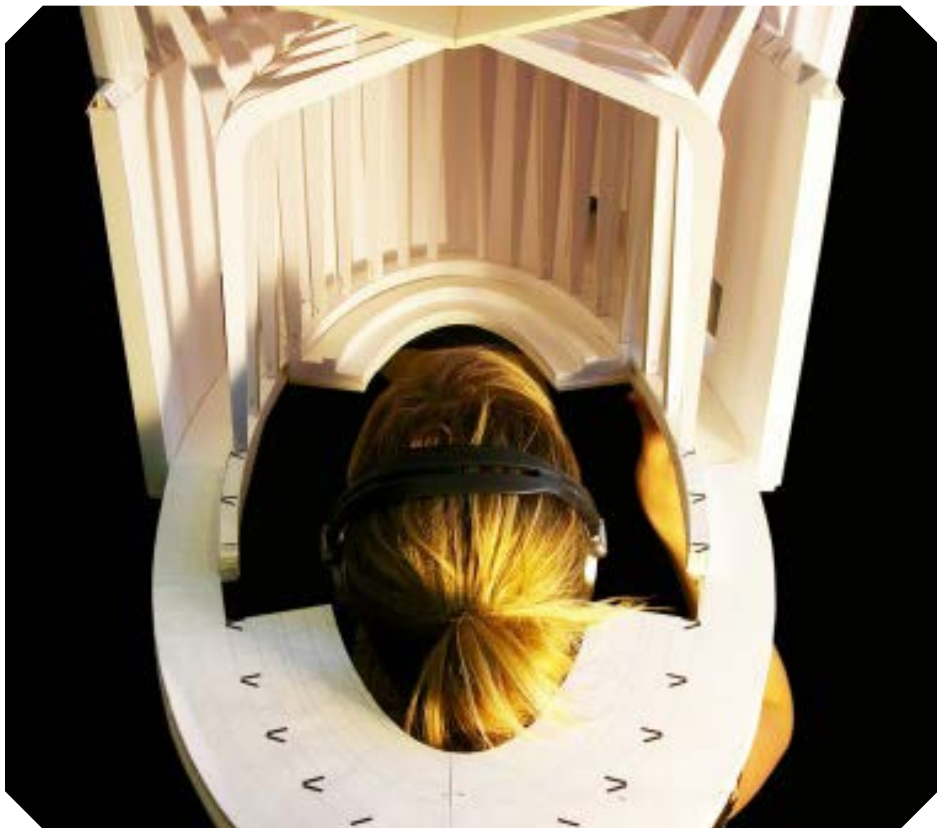


Housing Moss



To create the frame from the moss I used appropriated soft woods that had an uneven surface. Because of the absorbant nature of the soft wood, this gave the moss the highest chance of taking to its new environment.

I also ensured that the surfaces that the moss would cover were set with ridges and a slant: This would allow draining of excess moisture, while the ledge would support the moss in vertical positions,



Adopting a tunnelled box approach to my host I began looking at similar examples of models using this approach. Here Niall McLaughlin Architects employed a similar model in representing their vision for the Bishop Edward King Chapel, Oxford.



Housing Moss



After constructing the host box, I had to create a moss paste that could allow the moss to grow.

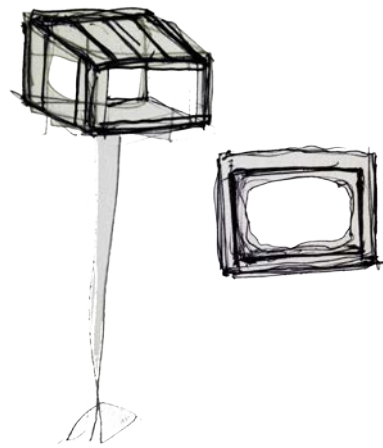
Using a ‘moss graffiti’ technique, I blended the moss along with nutrients like yogurt and buttermilk to support the plant in its new habitat.



I applied several coats of the paste, using a sponge to transfer as much of the solid material as possible.



Moss Box



The moss paste soon took hold on the box, and using the paste as a glue, it allowed more established moss pads to attach to the soft wood and grow,



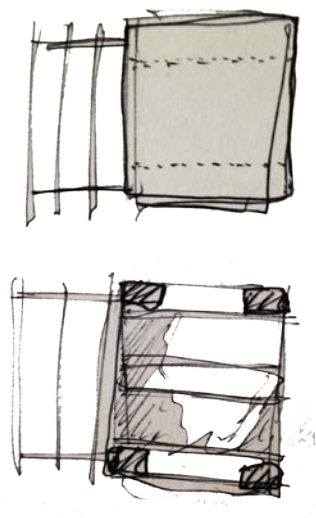
Its wide, head sized form created a natural viewing perspective when in a landscape position.

The moss surrounds the entire vision of the viewer, presenting a frame around the target.

The image seen through the moss box became my next focus: it needed to help appropriate the moss to become its environment.

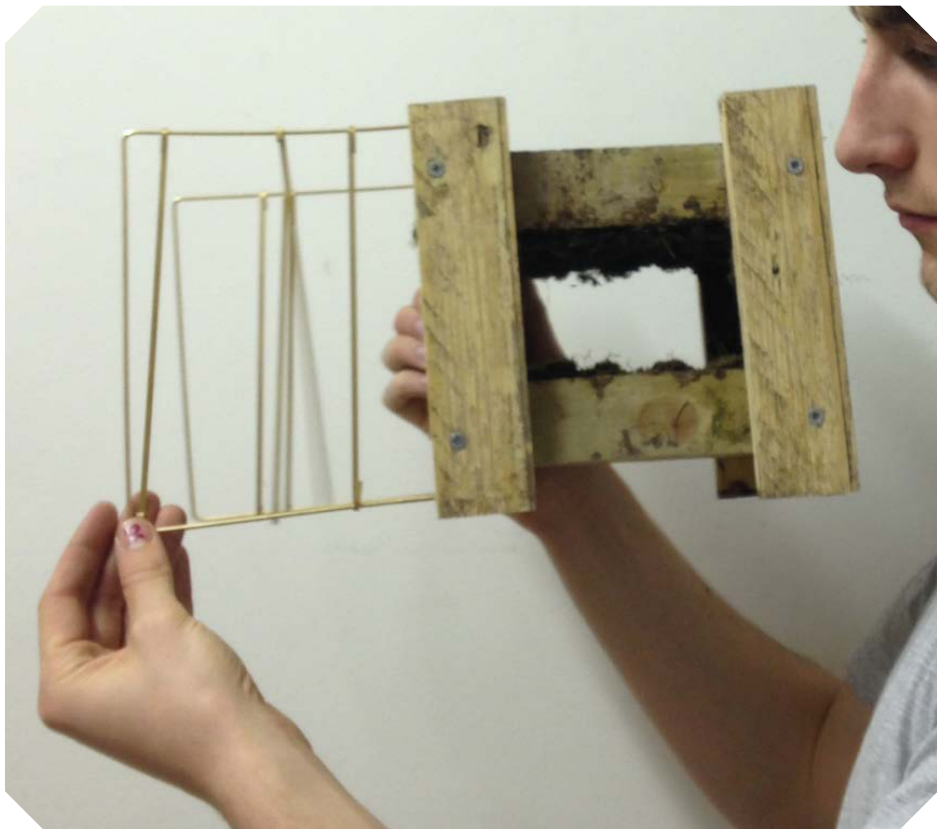


Rainforest View



Using brass wire, I inserted a frame around the back of the box.

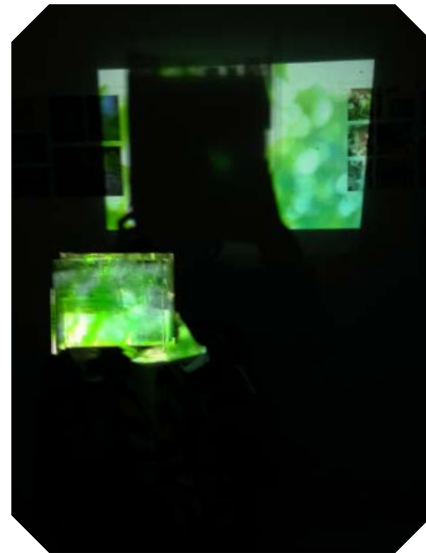
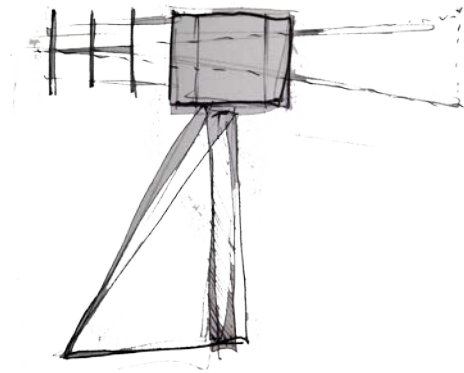
Attached to this were brass lengths, which held in place acetate slides showing a rainforest scene I had chosen.



By holding the box up to a light source, the viewer sees the scene with distinct foreground and background as these were separated on different acetate sheets.



Rainforest Experience



In presenting the moss box as an immersive experience I looked to take control of every sense of those experiencing it.

By placing the viewer in a darkened room I could remove visual stimuli from the surrounds, providing I could light the acetate sheets of the box.



To do so, I used a projector which projected a lightly flickering image that looked to recreate the soft light that would filter down through the canopy in a rainforest.

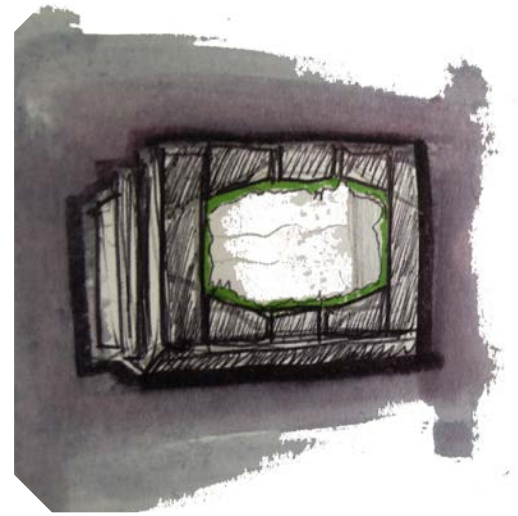
I also played sounds taken from the rainforest alongside the views into the box. These included bird and animals calls, as well as the regular sound of heavy rainfall that such a tropical rainforest is named due to.

Another sense, that of smell was already present in the box:
the moss had a strong, earthy smell to it that immediately transported the viewer to a woodland scene.



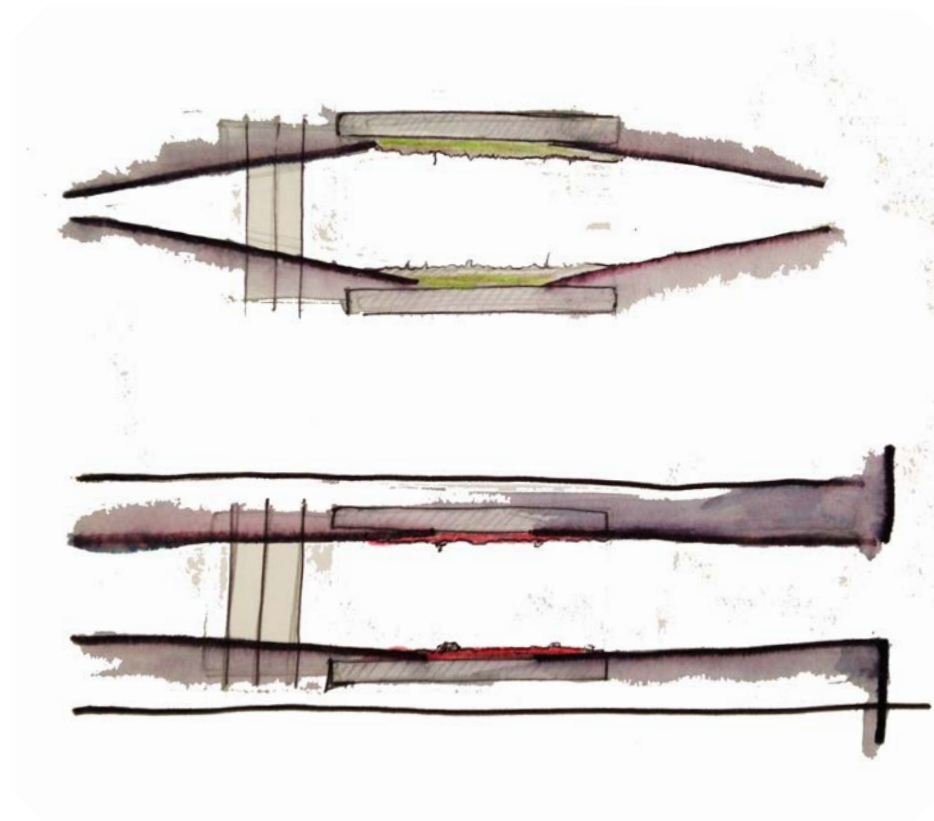
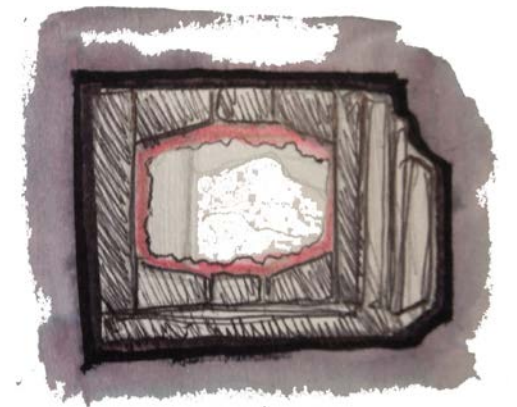


An Opposite Environment

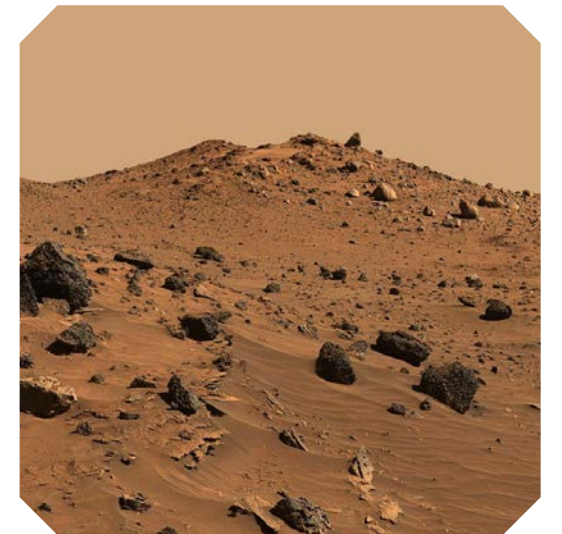


After making the moss box, I wanted to be able to make it more complex, as well as improving its presentative qualities.

I decided to make another, similar box, this time with opposite qualities to the Rainforest Box as it had become.



Taking an opposing situation to that of the Rainforest Box, I chose to depict a desert scene, devoid of life and green plants.

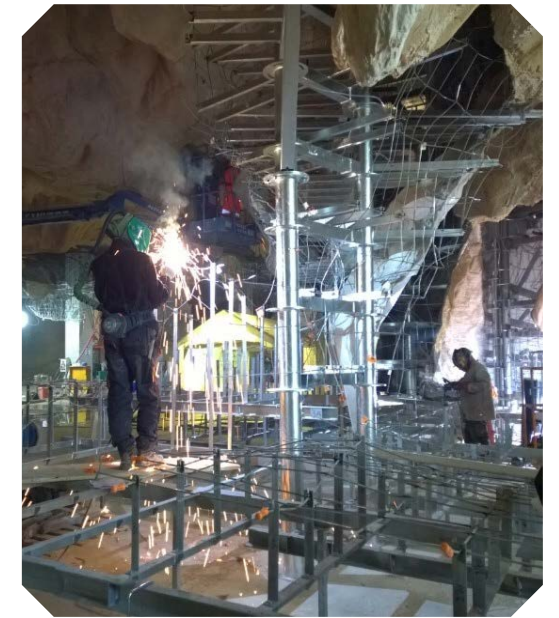


Desert Cave



I constructed an identical box, again from softwood. This box I then lined with thick plaster.

As its surface had supported the moss, it also supported the plaster.



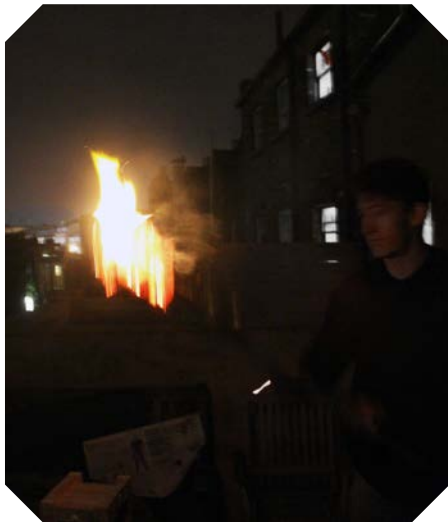
On top of the plaster I laid layers of terracotta clay, embedding moss and stones in its surface.

In creating my Desert Cave I looked closely at the reconstructions of the Chauvet Cave replica in France.

This fitted my brief perfectly: it was an imitation, built with materials that had been appropriated for its construction.



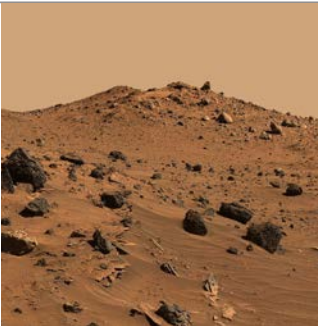
Torching the Cave



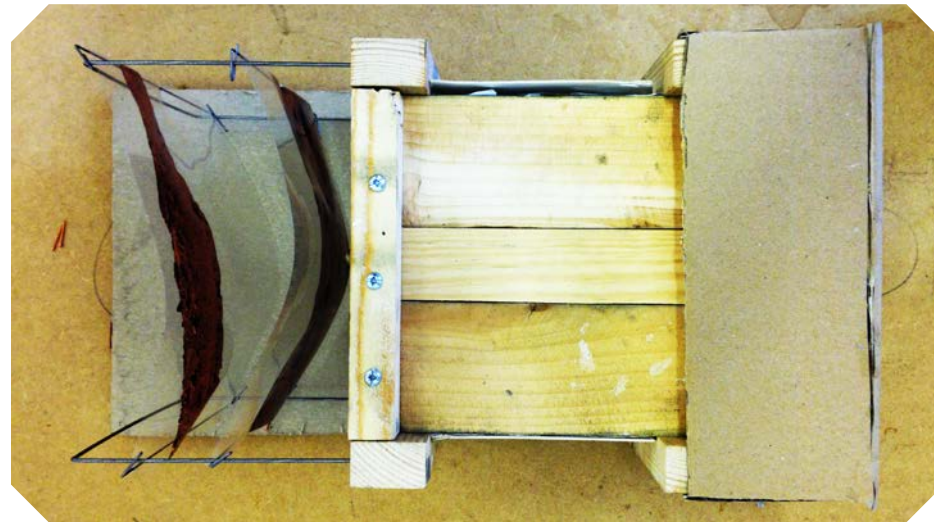
Just as the replica Chauvet Cave painters aged and distressed their work and the plaster of their 'cave walls', I set about doing the same.

The clay I had used needed oven firing, and so by torching the inside of the box, the clay hardened and also took on a darker, more weathered look.

By adding plaster to the frame before the clay, the wood was protected from any serious heat and although singed, was not damaged.

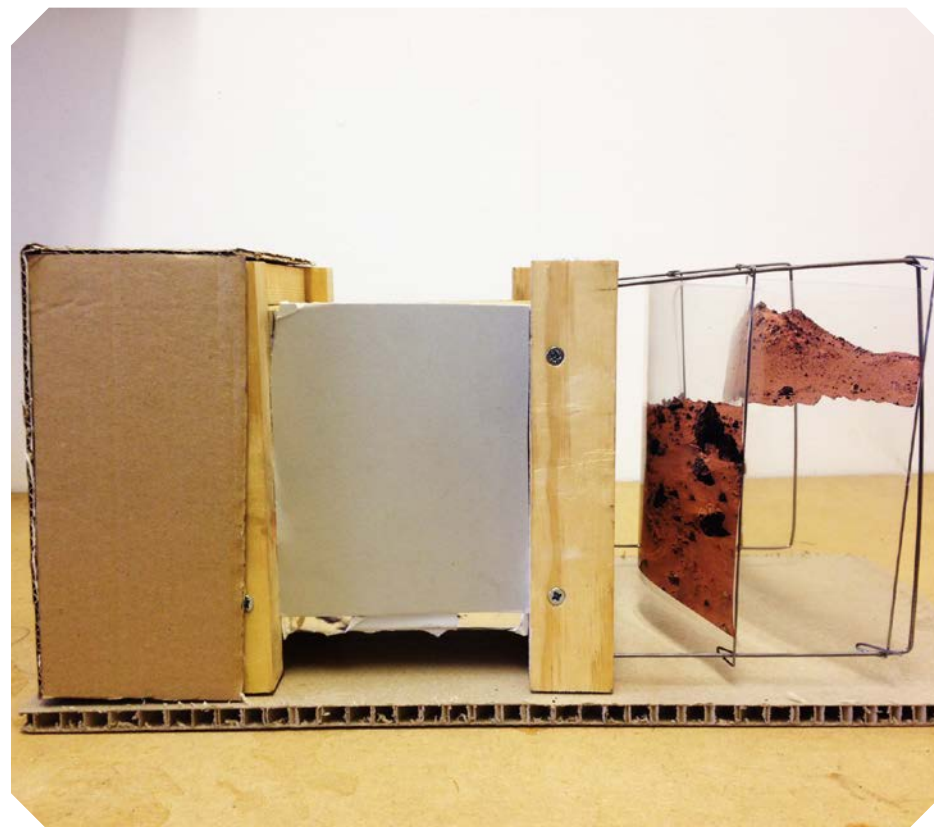


Environment and Surround



After creating the interior for the Desert Cave box I again hung photographs from the wire protrusions to depict a scene.

Attaching a front to the box, I removed small hole for the view to look into, also attaching mirrored side panels. I hoped these would reflect the interior, giving an effect of a larger landscape.



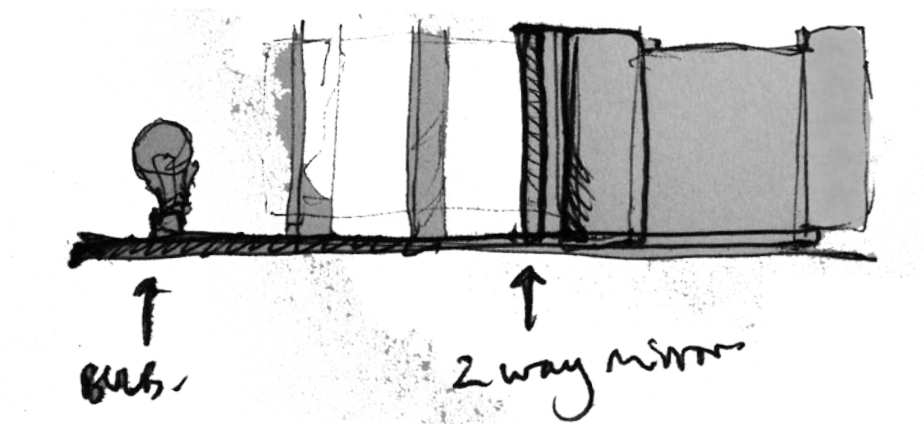
This was in order to restrict their view, and control what they could see, and therefore understand:

I wanted the experience to feel as genuine as possible, and by removing evidence of how it was created, this was heightened.

However, due to the small front opening and acetate on the back, only a small amount of light could enter, and it became difficult to see the foreground.



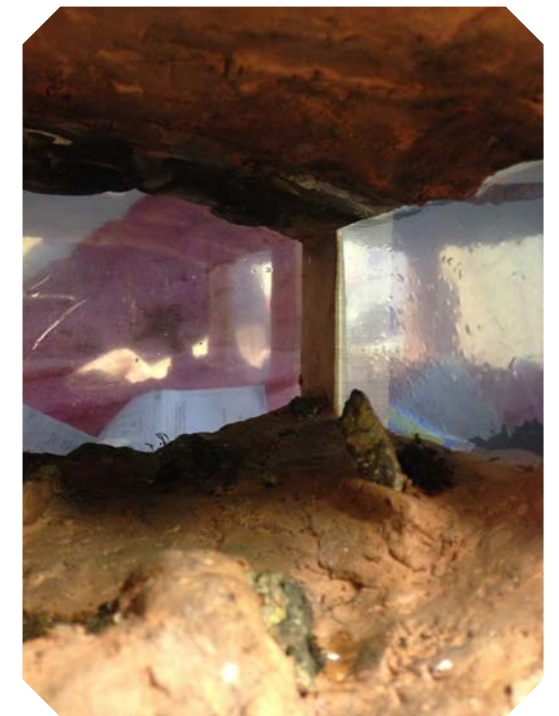
2-Way Mirror System

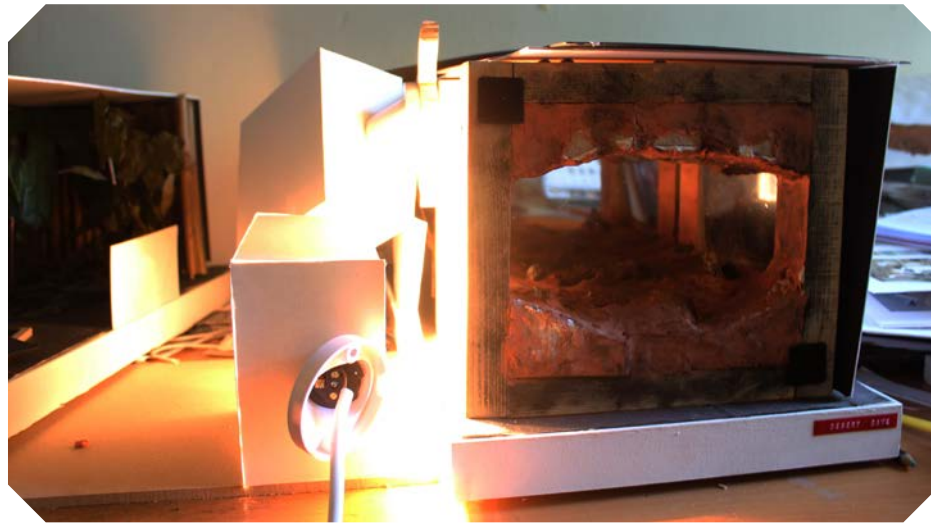


To overcome the issue of lighting the box, I replaced the surrounds of the landscape with clear perspex. Then using 2-way reflective film, I made a 2-way mirror system at both the end and sides.



This mirror system allowed light into the box, lighting the interior. It also continued to reflect the image of the interior onto the other side, maintaining the image-to-infinity effect that would make the landscape seem larger.

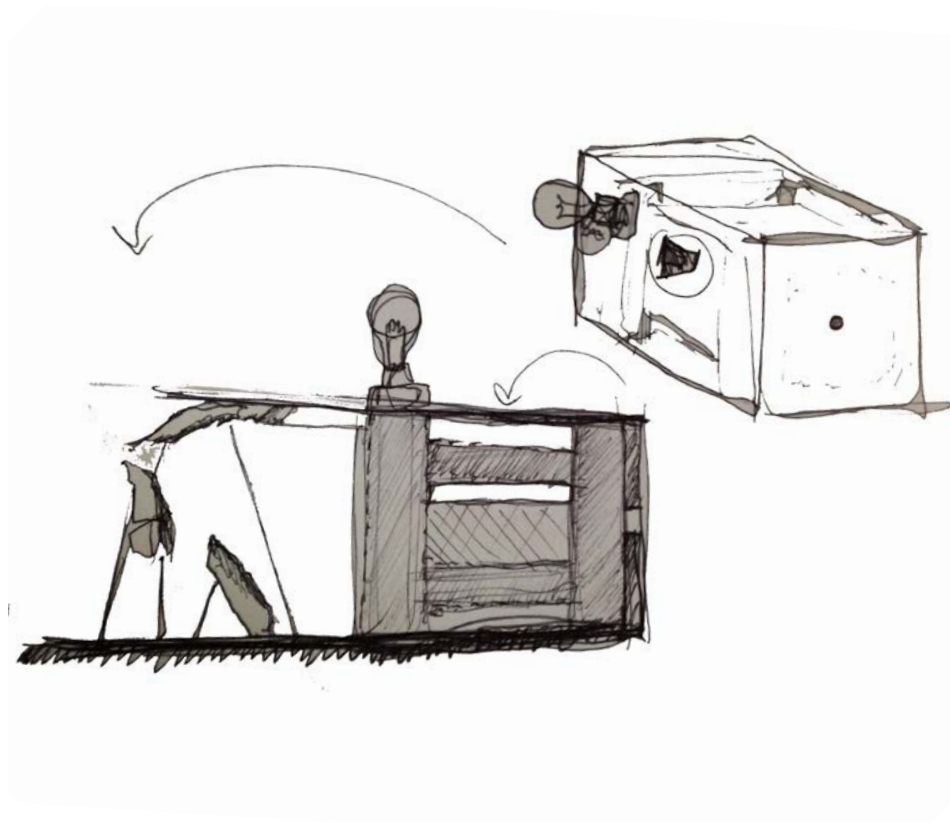




Installing the two way mirror system also opened up other features.

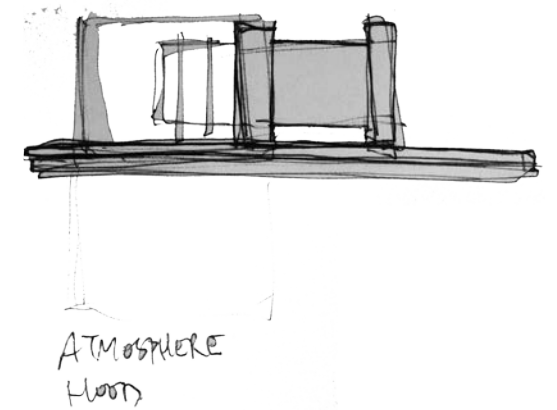
The two way mirror only appears to be a mirror when the light levels from the position of the viewer are brighter than those from the other side of the mirror.

Using this, it is possible to change a mirror from reflective to transparent by changing the light levels on either side.



By attaching a light source to the box, and also attaching a handle, it was possible to then switch between the foreground of the box, and the background of the image behind.

By lighting the box, I was now able to also move away from using acetate images, and could extend my constructed environment.



Constructed Background



Using the view from the box to frame my imagined landscape, I designed and modelled both the Desert Cave and the Rainforest.

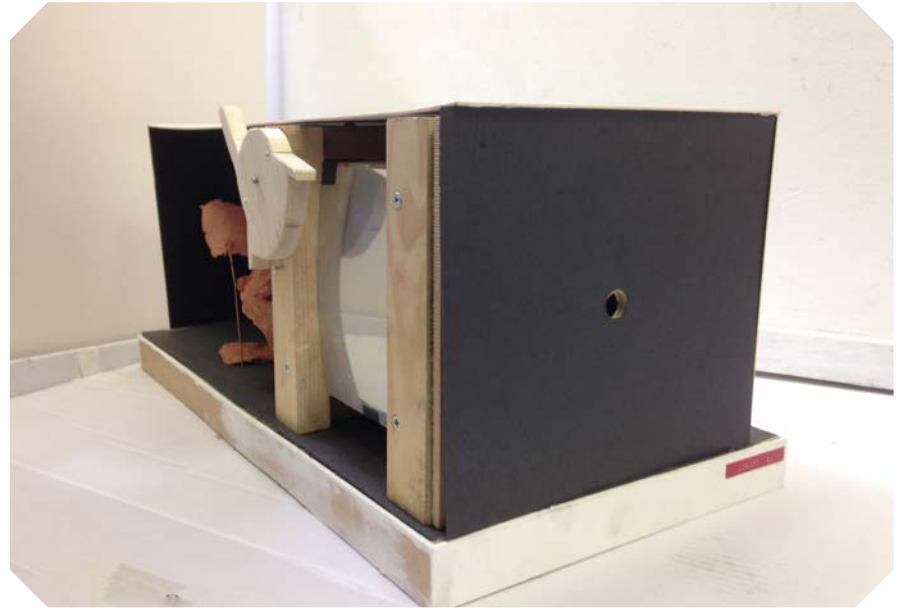
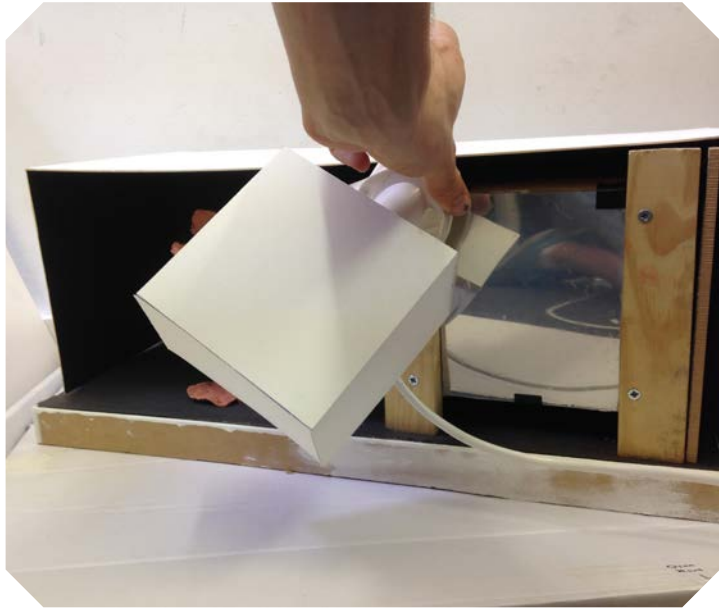
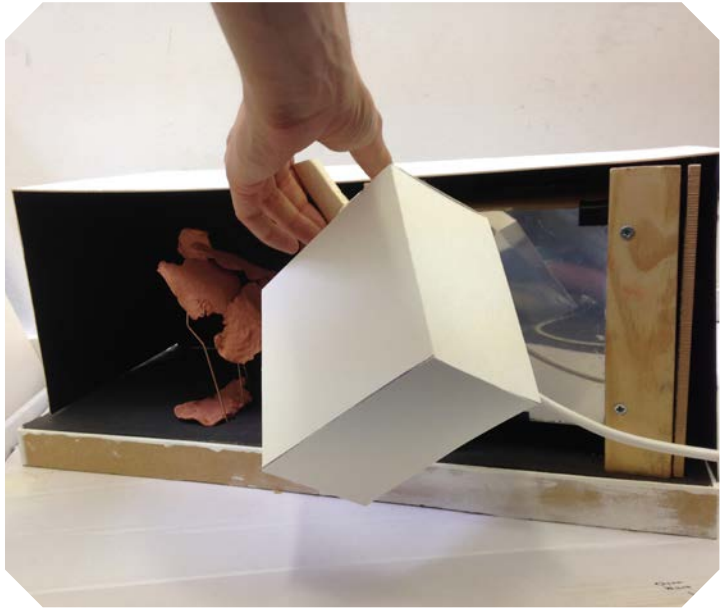
In each case I used appropriated materials, either modelling clay in the desert box or leaves taken from parks and gardens



Using a foam based tray, I stuck in thin dowels and attached leaves in the Rainforest model an used copper wire in the Desert Cave model.

Other elements such as bamboo were added and were useful in making a wall around the scene: I aimed to keep light out, but eventually decided a card surround worked best.







These models proved successful and their strong points seemed to stem from their mystery.



The viewer was restricted to a small hole through which they could experience the environment, with the rest of the model hidden from view.



This meant the moment of looking-in carried a more spectacular weight





Crate Packaging



Despite the success of the models, their blank surround did not address the nature of their contents.

Because of this, I decided to package them in a more sympathetic style.



Tapping into the language of crate boxes and travelling cargo, I dressed the environments in soft reclaimed pallet wood.

I also used stencils to mark the wood, heightening both a sense of expectation before looking into the box, and also influencing the perception of the scene.



