



# The Crystal Story Walls

A public art commission for  
Carlton Hill, Brighton 2010-2012.



**WHEN I WAS YOUNG  
I THOUGHT I WOULD BE A POTTER  
MAKING BREAKFAST BOWLS AND CUPS  
FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

**IT HASN'T TURNED OUT THAT WAY.**







The project has two objectives - to have relevance for the local community and to serve American Express and EPR Architects to enhance their new building.

Hundreds of people from the local community were involved, making some of the clay pieces that depict images that mean something to each of them personally - adding significance and history.

The concept is to inspire story telling using the hidden images amongst the pieces. This idea was borne of story telling with my daughter Scarlet when she was young... we called these "stories from my throat"....



I would improvise a story, using three chosen objects, weaving things I wanted to teach her about, with fantasies to entertain us both. It was always a story of surprise and pleasure. This piece is dedicated to Scarlet who is now 15.

American Express provided the money and the team supplied the hard work and focus. I couldn't have done it without either. It was a huge undertaking from my small studio with a workforce that amazingly appeared when I needed them. Thank you.

This book also serves as a record of the making of the largest ceramic project I have yet made.... I have commissioned Jennifer Goulding to write the following essay to explain the story.

"Hooray for clay" *Kate Malone*



Kate specialises in highly decorative ceramic pieces, which are sold by exclusive Knightsbridge-based art dealer Adrian Sassoon; her work is in 40 museums in the UK and abroad, including the Victoria & Albert Museum, Musée National de Céramique-Sèvres and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; she is collected by 'extraordinary' and 'fascinating' individuals; and she travels to glamorous parts of the world for solo and group shows. 'It's more than I could ever have dreamt of,' she says.

Yet it doesn't appease her social conscience. 'I believe we are quite helpless politically, but what we do have is the power and responsibility to enrich our local communities.' Hence her commitment to public art for hospitals, parks, libraries and other communal spaces.

'My aim is to make pieces that represent and become part of the community's history, but are also accessible. Ceramics are perfect because people are familiar and comfortable with the medium.'

*It was so much larger than anything I had done before  
I had long wanted to step up and make something really ambitious.*

In 2010, when Kate received an email from Brighton & Hove City Council inviting artists to submit ideas for an 'art wall' at the new offices of American Express, which were to be erected in the Turner area of the city, she was uncharacteristically reluctant to apply: 'I was in the middle of relocating to London from Barcelona; it was terrible timing for a huge new project.'

A cursory look at the brief tempted her to reconsider. The wall in question is on a north-facing street at the back of the building. It comprises four sections, which are staggered to accommodate the gradient, each around 3.5 metres tall and 12 metres wide – a massive 160 square metres in total.

Tempted to explore the brief more thoroughly, Kate came across a photograph of the flint-stone walls common to the Georgian buildings in that part of Brighton.

'I instantly saw a connection with the bubble-like oeil de perdrix patterns on the ornate Sèvres porcelain I had been studying at The Wallace Collection,' she says. 'It was a direct line to my personal research, which encouraged me to take the project seriously.'



[E.P.R ARCHITECTS COMPUTER SIMULATION OF THE NEW AMERICAN EXPRESS BUILDING]



*Finding the feature shapes would be a game: it would transform the wall from something passive to something interactive . . . .*

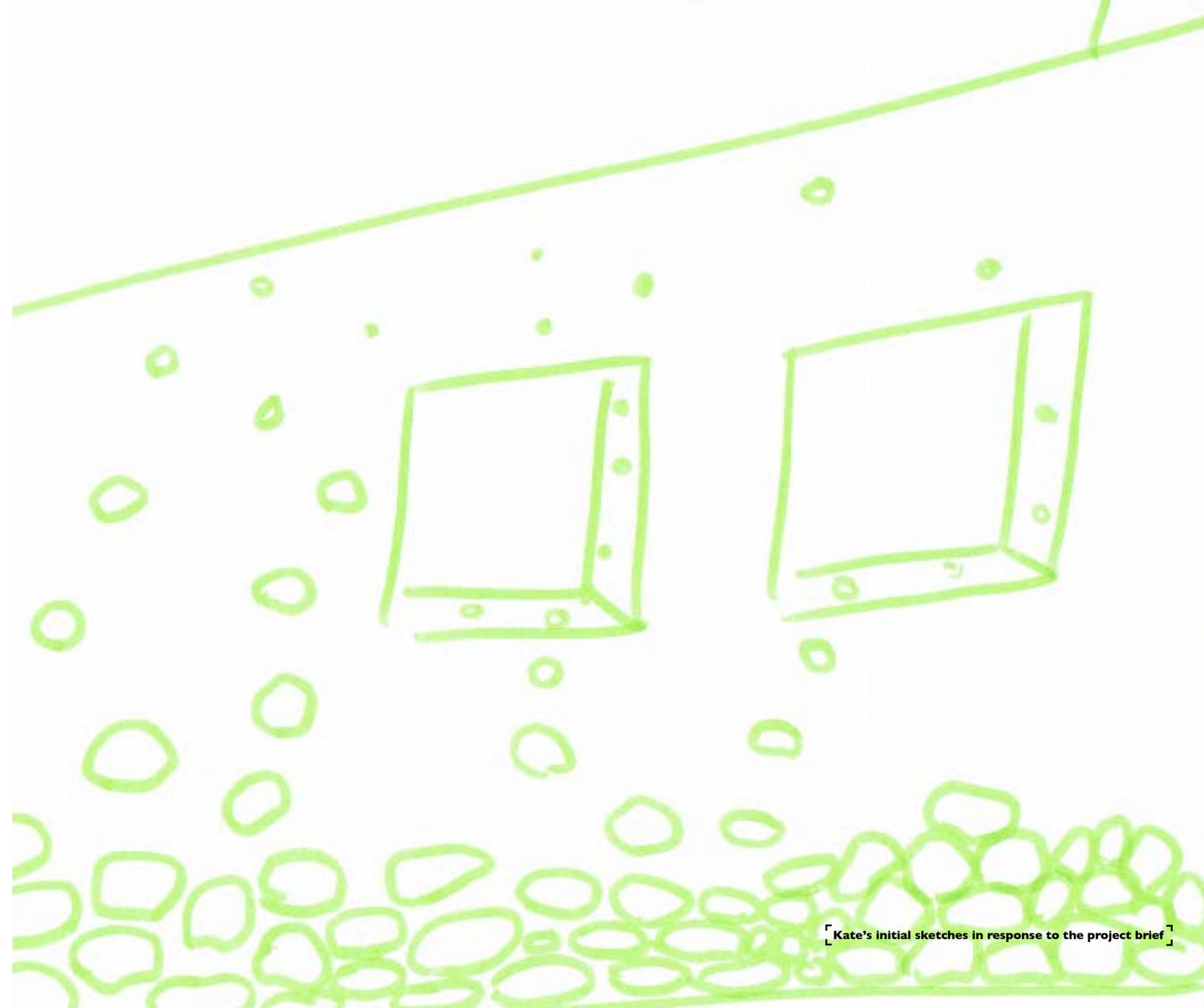
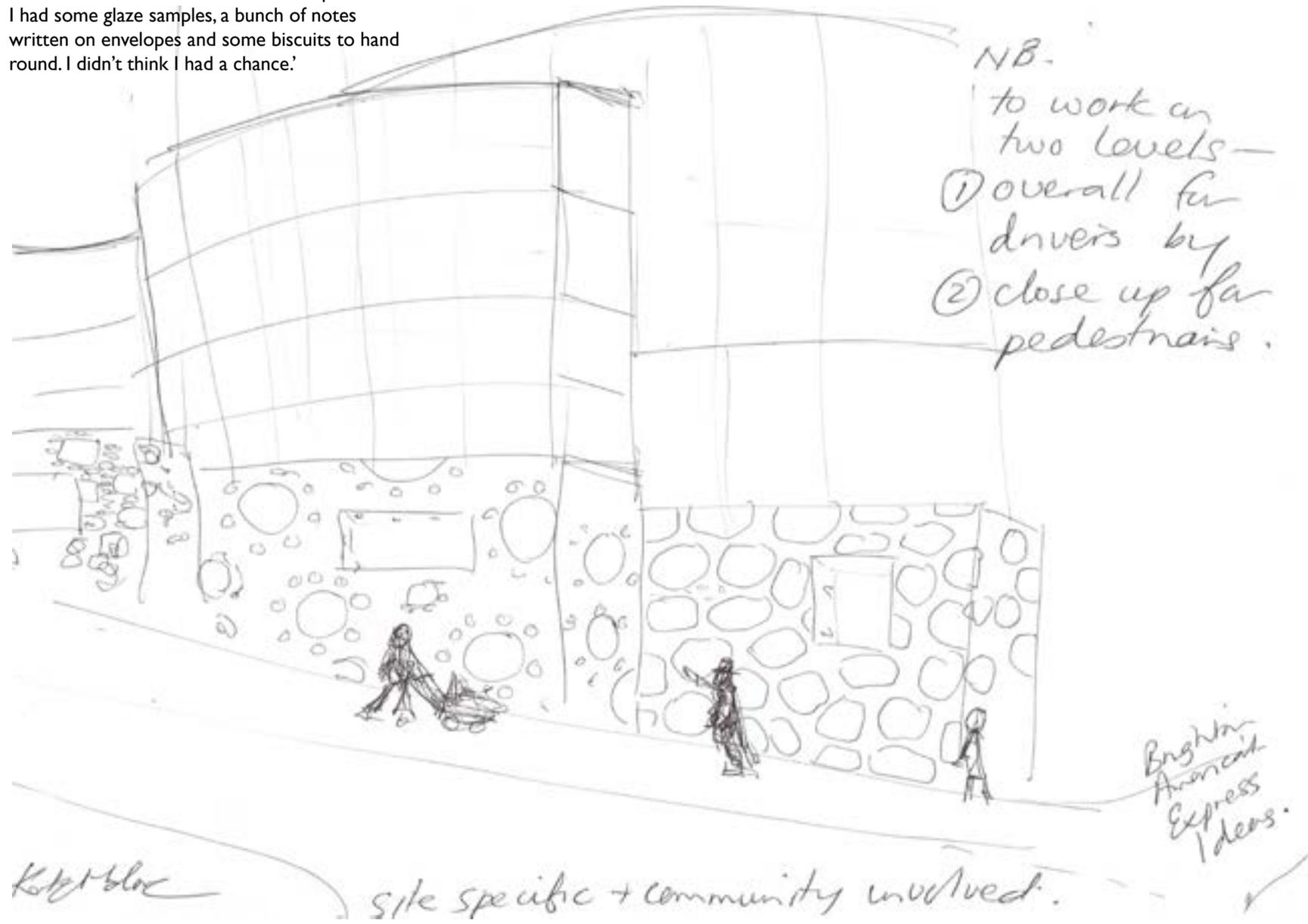
Gradually, an idea evolved in Kate's mind to clad the walls in flat, stone-like ceramic shapes, treated with her trademark crystalline glazes, and arranged like a Brighton flint-stone wall. 'Most of the shapes would be neutral and amorphous, giving the impression the wall is simply a sweeping, golden, shiny, light-giving thing.

But hidden among them would be three different types of feature shape: the fossil, (a clay image or message embedded into a clay base); the stamp, (a clay base imprinted with decorative clay stamps); and the silhouette, (where the clay base itself is fashioned into a simple 2D figure or form).

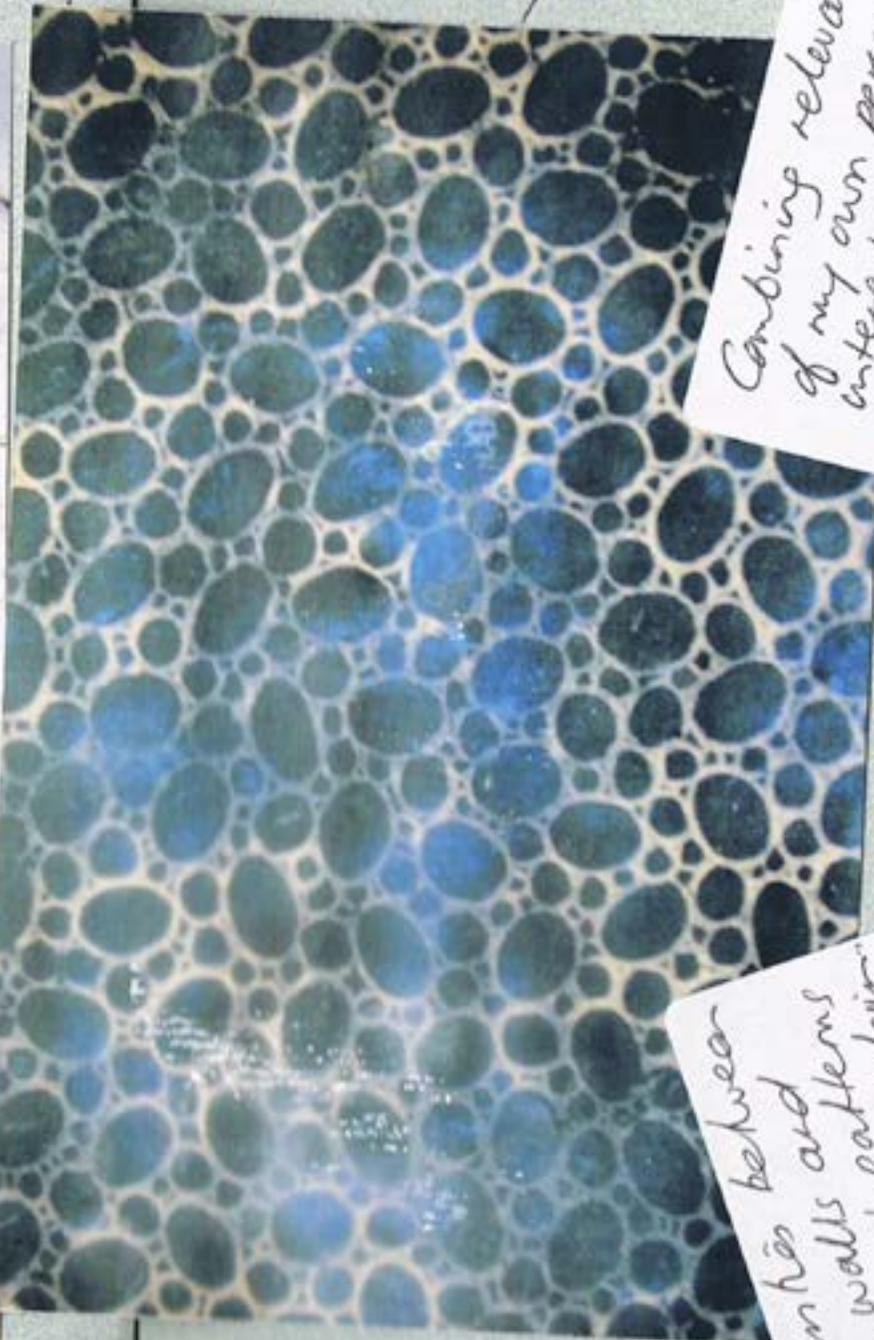
The majority of the plain shapes and the 'silhouettes' would be made by Kate and her team in London, while the 'fossils' and 'stamps' would be made by members of the community, including pupils at Carlton Hill Primary School, whose new entrance looks onto the walls. No moulds would be used; every single shape would be as unique as a flint or a pebble.

Although she was excited about her proposal, she didn't believe she would win the commission, in part because she already had a major piece of public art on display at Brighton's Jubilee Library, but mainly because the move from Barcelona had left her little time to prepare for the interview.

'I arrived at my meeting with the selection committee to find the competition was from international studios with detailed maquettes. I had some glaze samples, a bunch of notes written on envelopes and some biscuits to hand round. I didn't think I had a chance.'





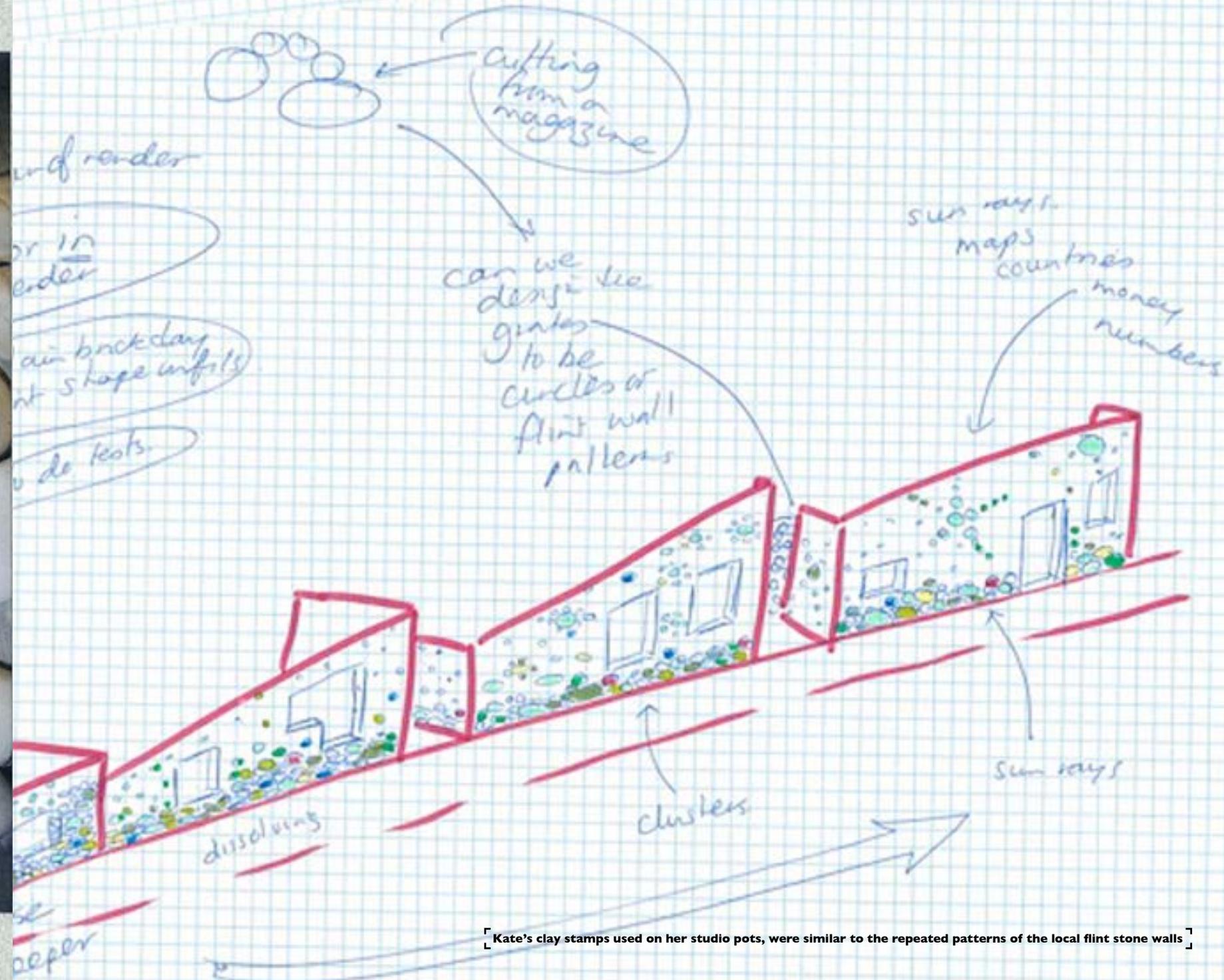


use stamps  
fossils for  
clay

Combining relevance  
of my own personal  
interest in  
and local pattern  
significant to the  
project . . . .

between  
tiles and  
wall patterns  
ground porcelain  
sewers

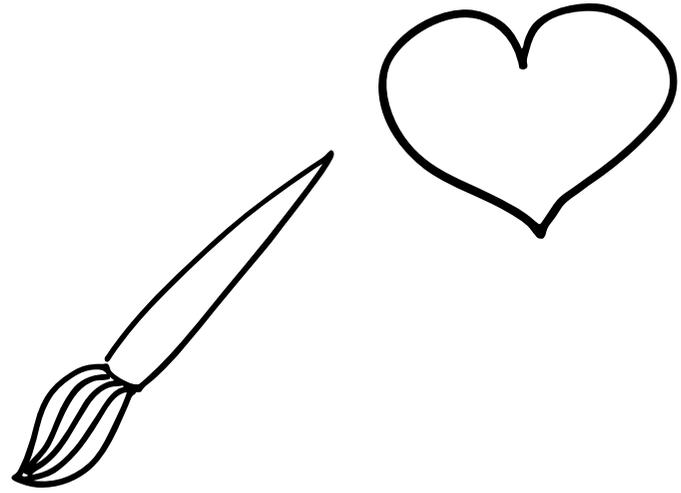
Kate M. Doe



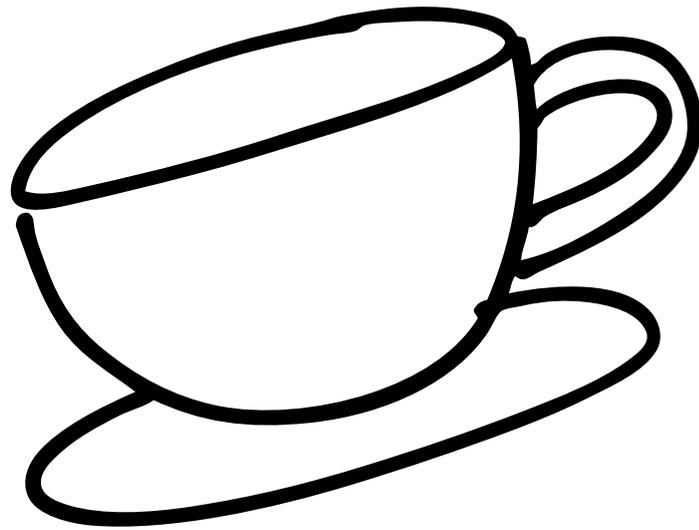
[Kate's clay stamps used on her studio pots, were similar to the repeated patterns of the local flint stone walls]

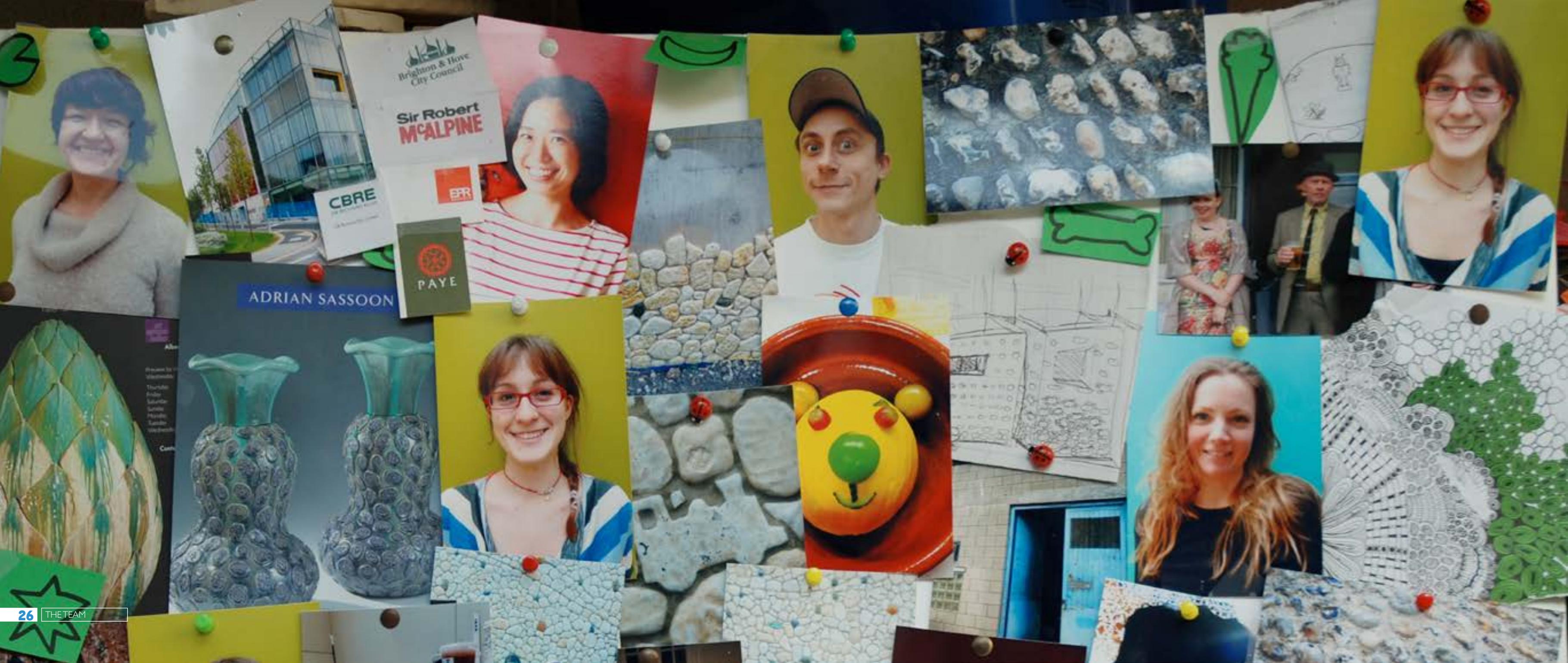
Surprised, thrilled and slightly scared by the news, Kate's first task was to recruit a team.

'Luckily I had a wonderful intern, Cristina Vezzini, who suggested a group of lovely, interesting, self-employed potters working in north London,' says Kate. Among them was Helen Evans, who became project manager: 'It was a special piece of work because it brought together lots of people who usually work independently. Everyone was prepared to put in long hours and weekends because the atmosphere was fun and positive, but also because it was a great learning experience.'



*The team of workers were contacted by chance, word of mouth, most of them rented a studio together already in North London.....*





Brighton & Hove  
City Council

Sir Robert  
McALPINE

CBRE

ERR

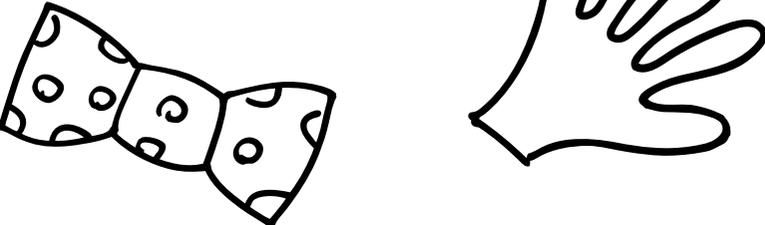
PAYE

ADRIAN SASSOON

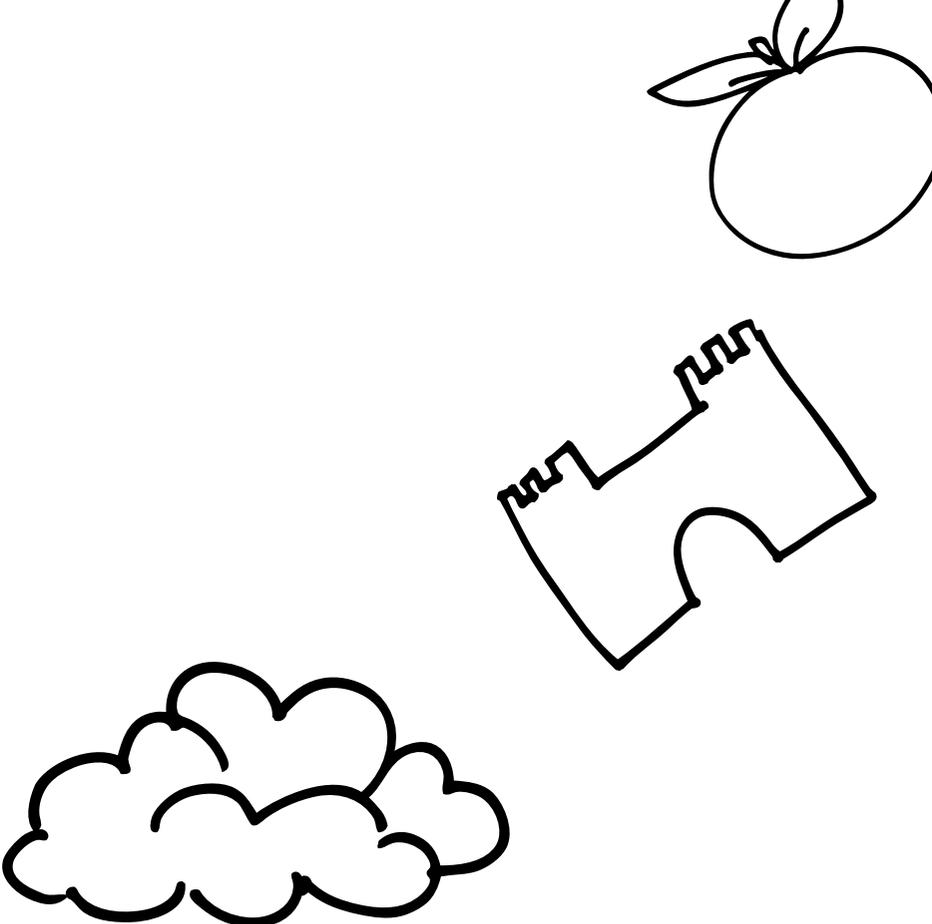


As her own studio was too small to accommodate the project, Kate borrowed the building next door and set up a temporary workshop. 'There was no time to waste,' she says. 'In less than a month we installed lights, an alarm, running water, work benches and two small electric kilns for the bisc firings and purchased 400 plastic boxes to store the 15,000 shapes needed to cover the wall.'

Each shape had to dry before it could be given a bisc firing in one of the small, rented kilns. Once cool, it would be painted with glaze, then carried next door where it received a second firing in Kate's custom-made studio kiln. 'It is one of the largest in London. It's hard to imagine how we would have managed without it,' says Kate. When it had cooled for a second time it would be returned to the temporary studio where the glaze, if it had dribbled over the edges – which was the case for 40 per cent of the shapes – would be ground off using an industrial angle grinder. Only then would it be weighed and sorted into the appropriate colour-coded box ready for installation.



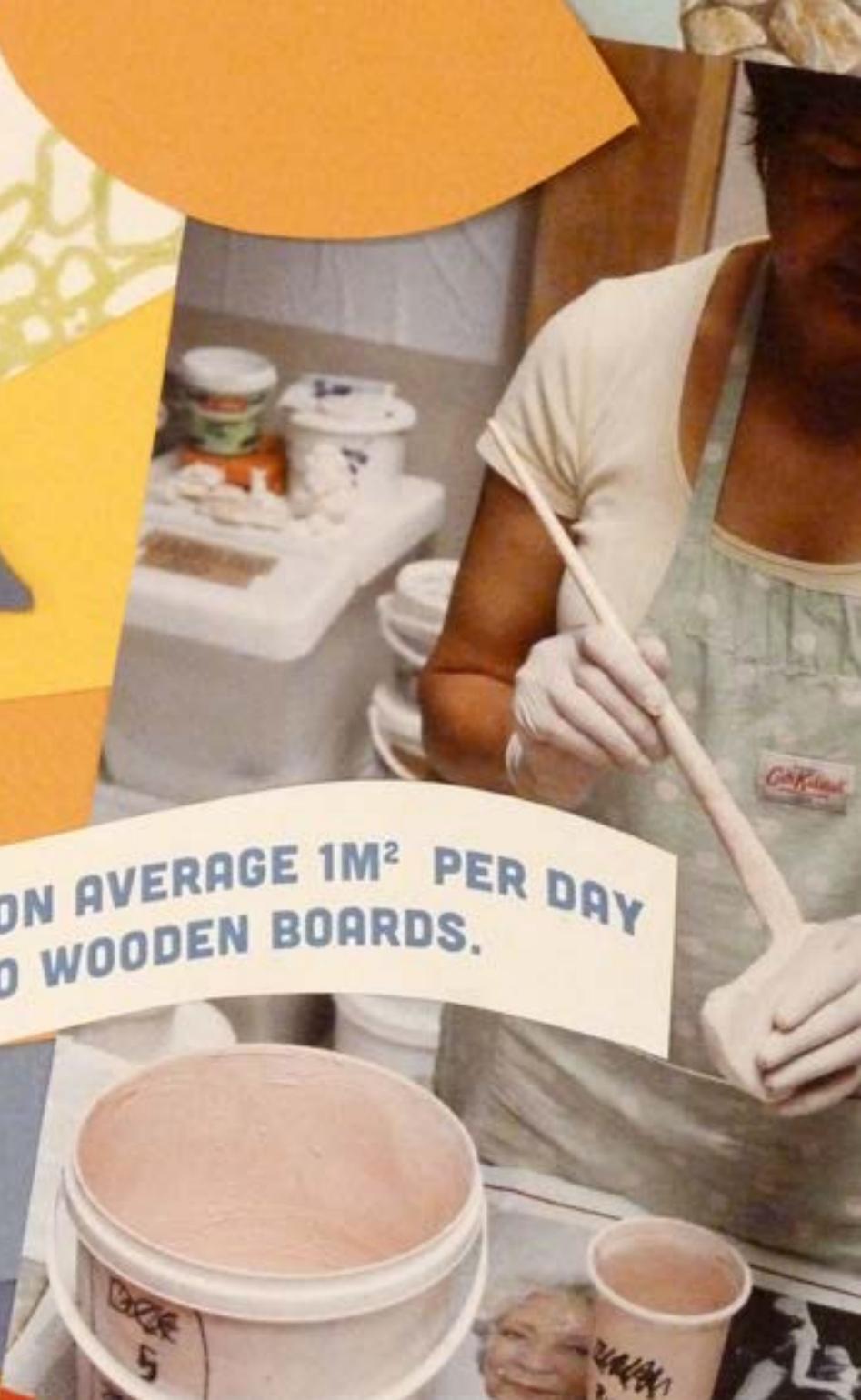
Simply loading the 40 heavy stone shelves of the large kiln with 500 shapes, each on a pyramid of firing props – also made in-house – took two people between four and six hours, which explains why this part of the process alone took six months and some 5,000 man hours.



**AS A TEAM, AT THE PEAK, WE COMPLETED  
15 M2 OF FINISHED GLAZED TILES PER WEEK.**



**EACH PERSON COULD MAKE ON AVERAGE 1M<sup>2</sup> PER DAY  
FROM WET CLAY ONTO WOODEN BOARDS.**





The Local  
Community

Every two weeks Kate and Christina visited Brighton to work with the local community, meanwhile in the London studios work continued solidly seven days a week.

'Everything was done by hand and each shape was touched at least nine times. The work was repetitious and physically challenging, yet it also called for delicacy and sensitivity. The result is bespoke work of craft on a huge scale,' says Kate.

*I want the children to be able to find their own shapes in the wall but also pick out other shapes and use them to make-up stories....*

At the primary school Kate, Christina and two volunteers from the Brighton area, worked with groups of eight, so a series of visits were required to ensure that every one of the 210 pupils could get involved. 'It was all very low key; they just got on with it honestly and quietly. There was absolutely nothing tokenistic about their approach, they really celebrated the children's work,' says Louise Willard (Head Teacher).

'From that point of view it is an evolution of the Wall of a Thousand Stories, the interactive ceramic installation I made for the children's reading room at the Royal Jubille Library, in Brighton, eight years earlier'.

The team went on to the nearby Tarnerland Nursery, where they worked with children aged two and three. This was followed by a visit to the West Sussex Deaf, which has a meeting hall close to the school. 'It was a real mix of ages from teenagers to pensioners; they were very good at making stamps.'

It was also arranged for the employees of American Express to contribute. 'Setting up in the company boardroom was quite funny. I was a little worried the whole thing might feel a bit stiff, and it was difficult keeping the clay off the smart carpet, but they were great, and made some brilliant pieces for the walls,' recalls Kate.

Keen to involve as many people as possible, including those connected to the building itself Kate invited some of the architects and project organisers to a fossil-making session at the temporary London studio.

All in all the local community were to make hundreds of clay pieces that would be integral to the story-telling element of the walls.



Children of Carlton Hill Primary school getting creative



The pupil's of Carlton Hill Primary School were thrilled to work with Kate and her team and to be so involved in the creation of the Art Wall. They have watched it grow and develop with much interest. The completed wall looks quite magical. It is situated directly opposite the school and will be a daily reminder of their creativity for years to come. The wall is totally interactive. The children and their families will use the tiles to find new stories to tell every time they walk past to and from school.

**Louise Willard - Head Teacher**







Each of the 15,000 tiles were touched 9 times in the making

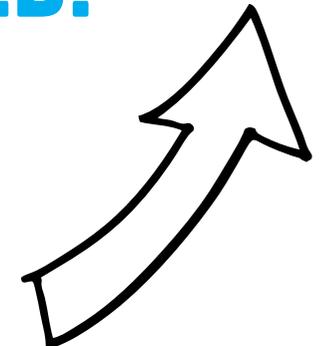


It took 40 giant kiln glaze firings to complete the whole project



*from Ballo Pond studio doorstep, all the way to Carlton Hill in 400 color coded boxes.*

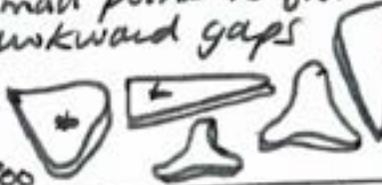
**IT TOOK FOUR TRIPS BY VAN TO DELIVER THE TOTAL PROJECT WHICH WAS STORED IN AN UNDERGROUND CAR PARK UNTIL NEEDED.**



**WE MADE 20%  
EXTRA BECAUSE OF  
THE METHOD OF  
INSTALLATION**



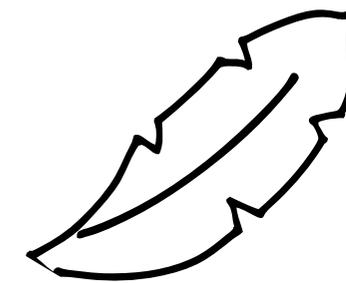
Special Elements - Need 20% extra -  $164 \text{ m}^2 + 20\% = 200 \text{ m}^2$

<p>Porcelain galletts to fill small gaps</p> <p>2,000 tiny colored clay</p> 	<p>Small points to fill awkward gaps</p> <p>800</p> 	<p>Fossils made by the community</p> <p>1000</p> 	<p>Outline silhouettes</p> <p>200</p> 
<p>Normals, narrow</p> <p>15,000!</p> 	<p>Normals with stamps (stamps in clay made by community)</p> 	<p>thick straight edges for pavement</p> 	<p>thin straight edged windows</p> 
<p>medium straight edge for tringle at top of walls</p> 	<p>90° angle for corners</p> 	<p>90° angle for top + bottom of walls</p> 	<p>porcelain galletts for tiny gaps - unglazed</p> <p>some stamped</p> <p>yellow + orange</p> 

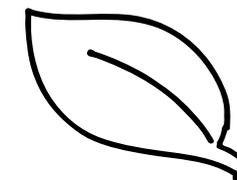




'But credit is also due to P.A.Y.E. the conservation and stonework specialists who installed the wall. They really had to think on their feet. Making sure there were no gaps and ensuring the feature shapes were evenly distributed, was extremely testing. It was like doing a giant jigsaw puzzle. Despite this, and the difficult, cramped conditions the team retained its can-do attitude and kept smiling.'



*It took 3 men approximately 9-10 weeks to install the tiles and grout them*



While the scale of the project presented logistical challenges for Kate and Helen – from co-ordinating a team of part-time workers to meet a series of non-negotiable deadlines, to arranging a truck with the capacity to hold one and a half tonnes of shapes to make the four trips necessary to deliver the finished project to site for installation – it was the paperwork that Kate found most daunting.

'American Express and Sir Robert McAlpine handed me these big thick contracts; I'd never seen anything like it,' says Kate. 'Reading and understanding the small print, and where necessary, negotiating the terms, was incredibly time-consuming. A project of this size has legal ramifications that I simply hadn't considered. Luckily American Express and Sir Robert McAlpine were incredibly helpful and supportive, not just with the contracts, but also with the maintenance folder and the table of on site procedures – two documents I had never come across, but was required to provide. They really held my hand and guided me through the process.'



Helan was key to  
the project - organizing and  
recording + ever willing to  
work so hard





*It would be reminiscent of the tide moving over the shore . . . . .*



Kate was also surprised to discover she had to pass an exam to walk about unaccompanied on-site. 'At first I thought it was a bit of nuisance, but I soon realised it was absolutely essential as the site was huge and potentially very dangerous. There are epic stories behind these big buildings. We picture them being created by machines, but actually it is the boldness of men that makes it happen.'

As well as adapting her working practices, Kate also adapted the design of the wall. 'I had this idea that members of the community could bring us their broken necklaces, and we could mix the beads into the grout to give the wall another dimension,' she says. However, this would have weakened the grout. Rather than resort to plain epoxy resin, a material she describes as, 'shiny and horrible, like melted butter,' she collaborated with the technical department at Mapei - which specialises in adhesives for the construction industry - the engineers at Sir Robert McAlpine, and the team from P.A.Y.E. to develop an alternative grout containing microglitter. 'It is gold and silver, rather like sand, and when it is dark it will glitter and glimmer in the uplighters that have been set into the pavement.'

*we used ten tonnes of clay to*

One of Kate's trademarks is high fire crystalline glazes, which form crystals during the cooling phase of the glaze firing, creating beautiful frost-like effects on the surface of her pieces. The size and shapes of the crystals are very difficult to control or predict, but for Kate that is part of the appeal, and the reason she has spent 15 years researching and developing glaze recipes. She tends to give her studio pieces vibrant and colourful glazes, and imagined treating the wall in much the same way. However, when Scott Paton suggested making the wall all white, she was intrigued. 'I could see that it would look like a pebble beach, and that felt right. So, with the help of Christina, I developed six new glazes ranging from white to pale yellow and pale orange. We also ended up using four types of clay, as my supplier didn't have enough of the clay I normally work with. But that was great because that created further variations in the glazes.'

*complete the project*

The beach concept was taken a stage further when Kate and Scott put the first sample shapes up on the wall. 'We were a little disappointed because it looked a bit like crazy paving,' recalls Kate. 'My original design had a number of gently undulating lines between the shapes, which connected the four sections of wall. Scott reminded me of this, and we decided to reinstate them, partly to give the piece visual cohesion, but also because it would be reminiscent of the tide moving over the shore.'





Although Kate has allowed the wall to evolve from the original design she presented, she has nonetheless delivered exactly what the panel wanted. 'She really bedded into the project and the area. You couldn't take the wall and put it somewhere else, it is perfectly site-specific,' says Paula Murray. 'Kate was always thinking about the children; there will always be some new detail of the wall for them to enjoy. They are so proud of it,' adds Louise. EPR Architects, meanwhile, were so impressed with the results that they asked Kate to contribute to a new project in London's Saville Row.

'It was a fine balance creating a piece of community art that is also a sexy piece of architectural art,' says Kate. 'I don't think you would look at it and know it is my work, unless you were very knowledgeable about glazes. It is much more about the community and the environment. But I hope it has the same fun, optimistic spirit of my studio pieces, and in that sense it has my label on it.'

Written by Jennifer Goulding

Kate Malone: [www.katemaloneceramics.com](http://www.katemaloneceramics.com)  
Adrian Sassoon: [www.adriansassoon.com](http://www.adriansassoon.com)



### The 'K' Team

- Erika Albrecht
- Christina Vezzini
- Petra Sajkas
- Mark Scott-Wood
- Namiko Murakoshi
- Despina Karaeleftheriou
- Sara Lowes
- Anna Barlow
- Helen Evans

### Brighton Council

- Paula Murray

### Sir Robert McAlpine

- Jeff Tidmarsh
- Bryn Rodgers
- Paul Gregory

### American Express

- Angela Hayler

### PAYE

- Robert Greer
- Dominic Peachey
- Terry Mason
- Jo Burnet

### C.B.R.E

- Matthew O'Shaughnessy

### EPR Architects

- Daniel Cove Burgess
- Zlato Slijepcevic
- Scott Paton

### Community Helpers

- Maktha Mitchell
- Maddie Millett

### Carlton Hill School

- Louise Willard
- And Teachers

### Ceramic Suppliers

- Ceramatech
- Scarva
- Potclays
- Bath Potters Supplies

Looking back at the two years from interview to completion of the Story Walls, it was the team spirit of the people who all pulled together to make it happen that made it such a pleasure. To everyone a huge thank you.

**Kate Malone**

## The 'K' Team Statements

"I remember the day the bulk of the clay arrived. It was a mountain. I recall thinking how ominous it looked but slowly and surely we got through it; all the tiles got made, fired and glazed."

"I can't wait to see the wall completed and I hope it brings as much joy to the local area as it has done making it. Also, look out for the alien head with 3 antennae, that's one of mine!"

"It is not everyday that you have the opportunity to work in such a big project"



"Kate said to the kids "when you are grown up, even if you move away, you come back to Brighton, walk up that hill and say - that's mine". Listening to this made me realise how powerful this project was."

"It is fascinating making these tiles - it was repetitive, but, at the same time, allowing for creativity and freedom of artistic expression."

"Having been a studio potter myself usually making small pieces, working for Kate on the AMEX project was something beyond my imagination"















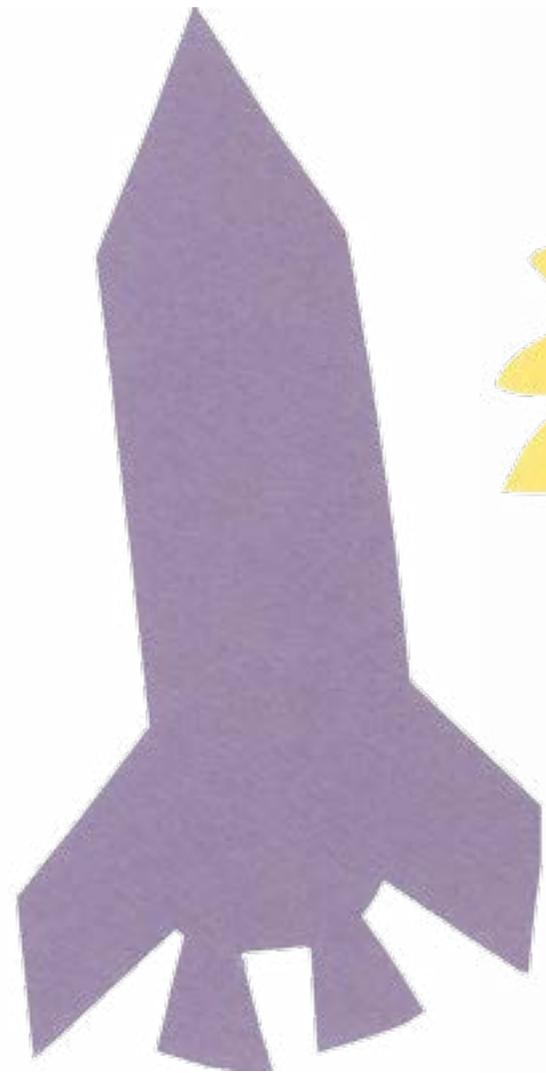




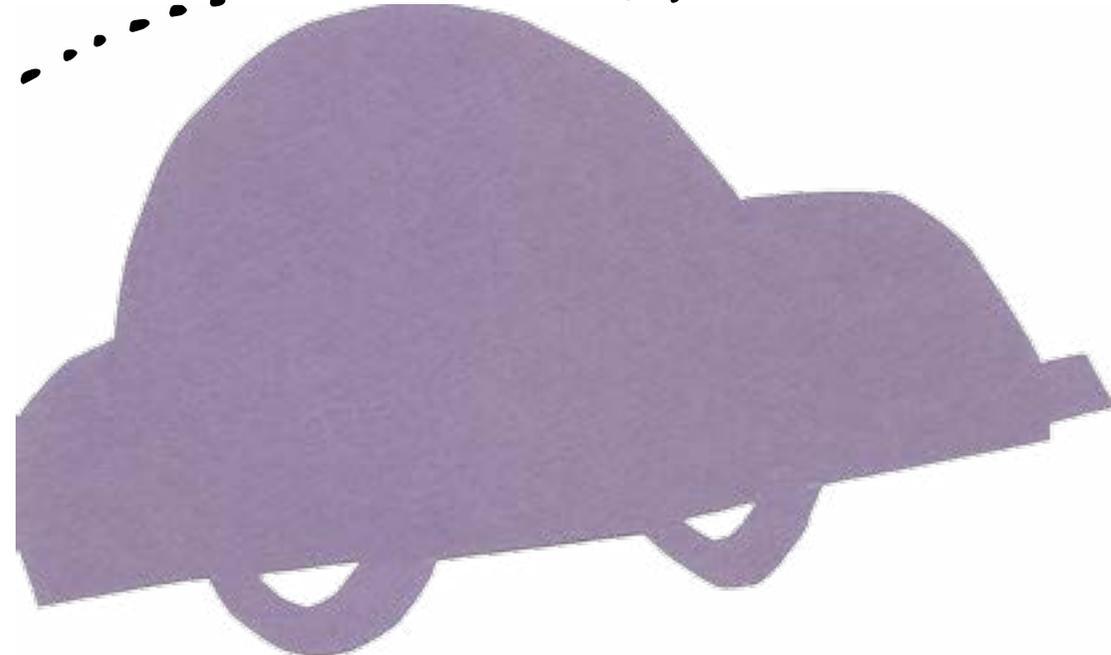


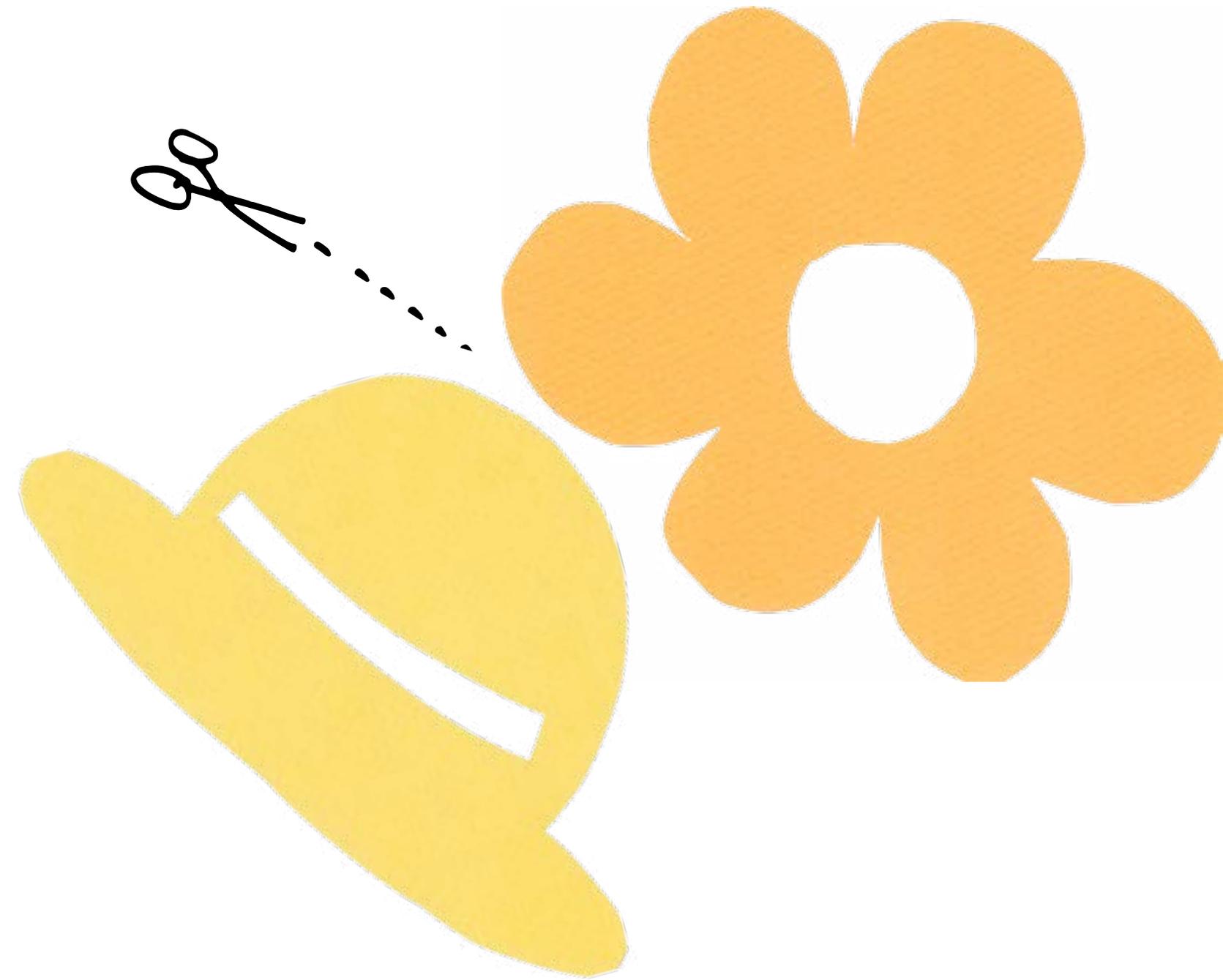


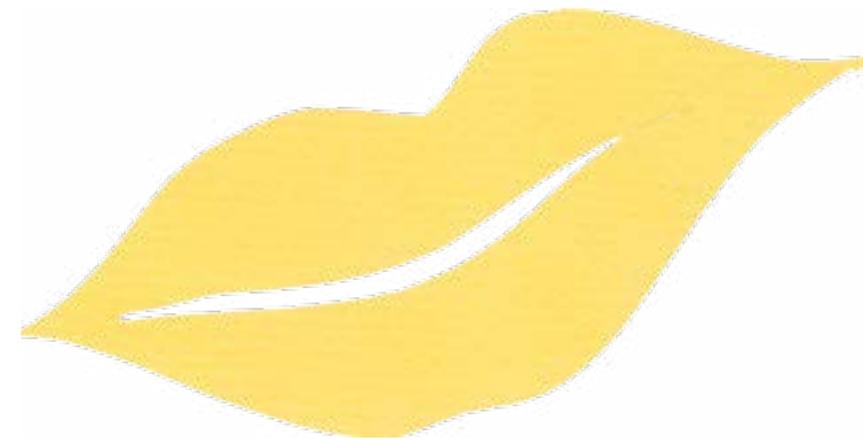
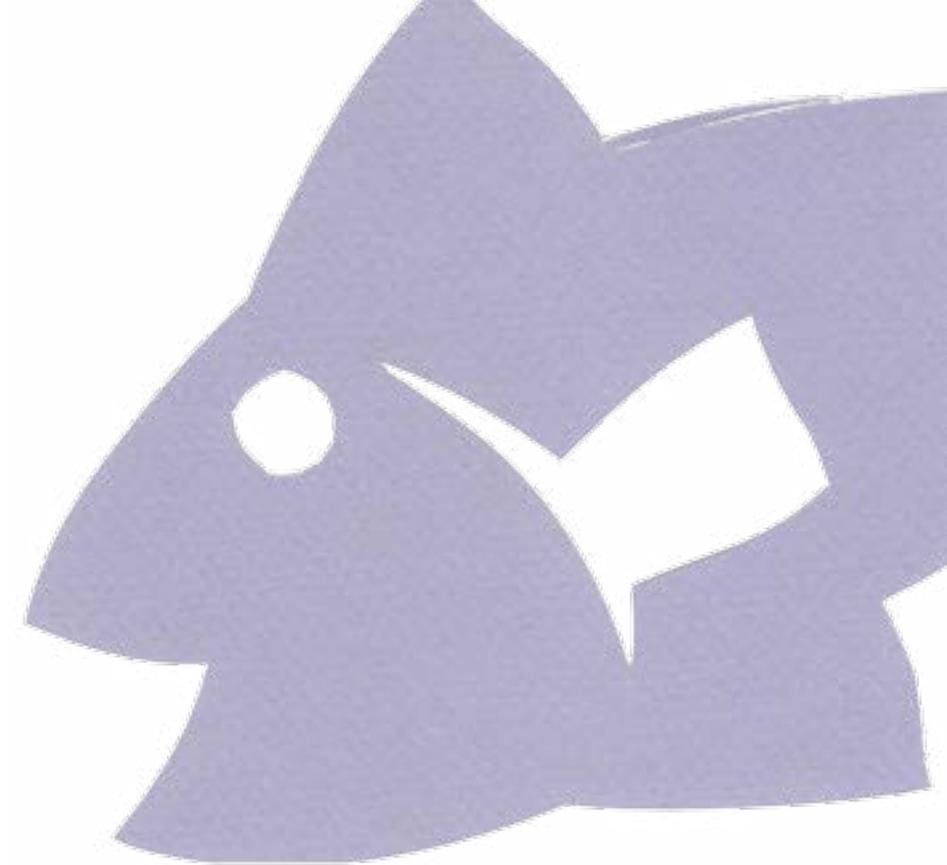
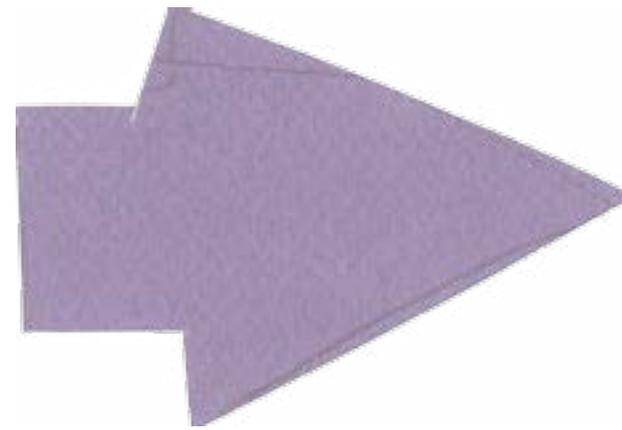
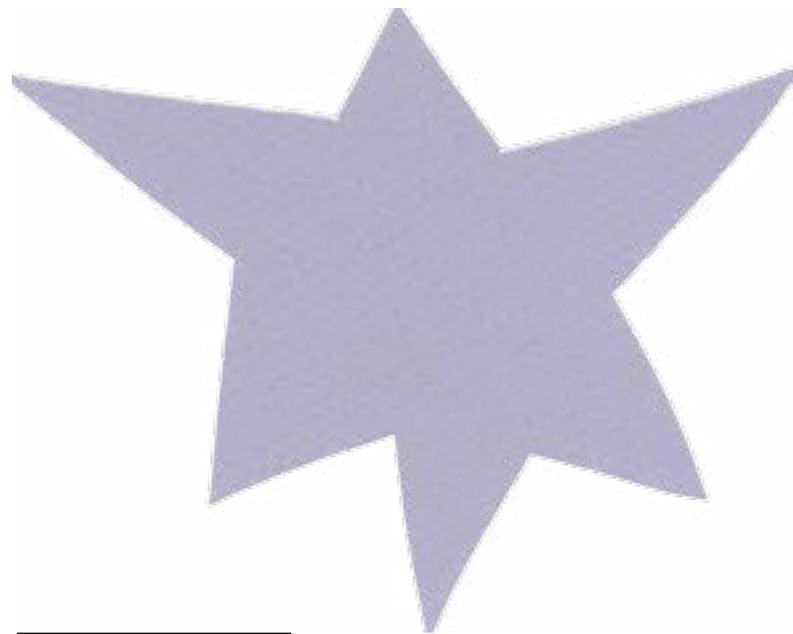
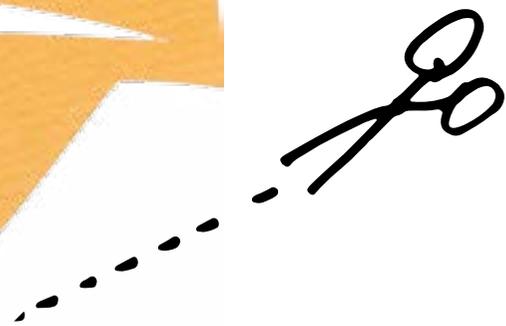
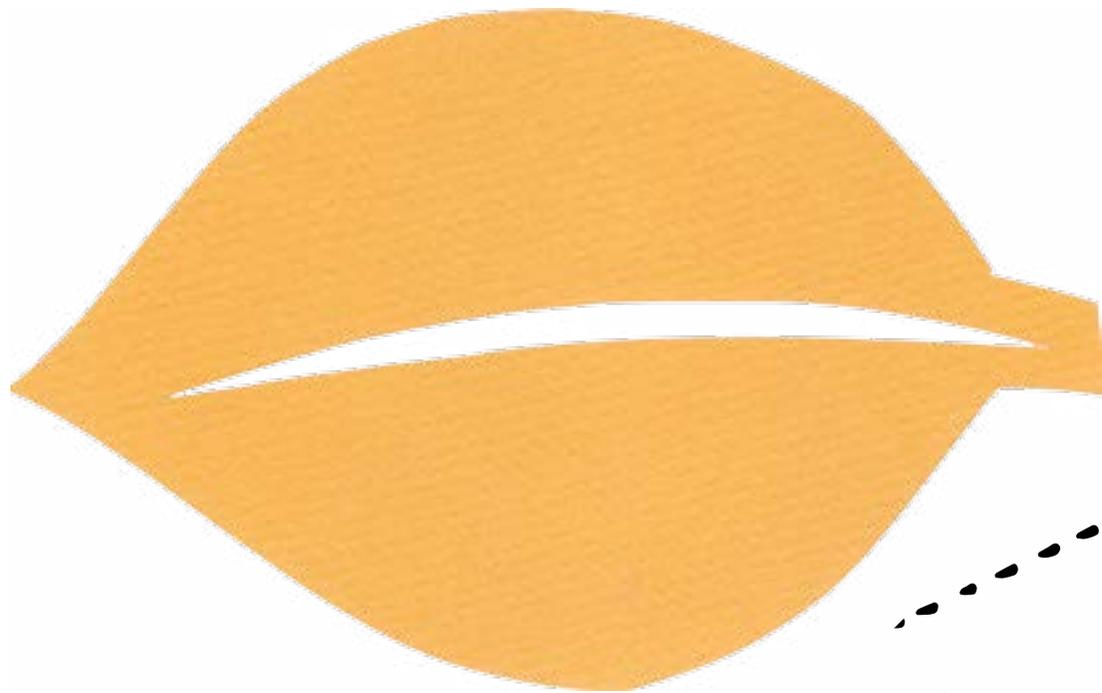




*cut out to make your own stories*









Book designed by my nephew  
MAX MALONE.. "top marks Max".