

For degree show, I have focused solely on one piece of work, this work is to be my final production on this course as a whole, and I wanted to go out with a bang. For this I decided to build a fictional Pagan Goddess of protection for Essex women and to act as a love letter to the women in my life. I aimed for historical accuracy so I have been working closely with curators at the British Museum (Dr. Sue Brunning and Dr. Sophia Adams) to ensure the elements I want to include are as close to the Celtic/Roman invasion of Britain period as possible. This would soon change after a critique with Erika Tan and how she asked what the future may hold for Essex women, and to focus less on facts and think about fiction. I am still working with Dr. Brunning and Dr. Adams to ensure specific elements are correct to the period I am emulating, but I am also constructing a sculpture that thinks about the future of Essex and what it can be.



The initial sculpture would be a four armed warrior on a plinth, I wanted her to reach 10ft tall so whatever the size of the sculpture the plinth would make up the rest of the height. I contemplated different ways of making her; papier-mâché, using a foundry to cast her in metal, and styrofoam were my main explorations but logistically I decided to use a mannequin as the base and build on top of that. For her weapons I chose to keep them historically accurate, so working with Sue and Sophia we found a handful of pieces I could recreate. A spear head (top left), a ferrule (bottom left) and shield (right) were chosen from their archive and I was given the pleasure of physically examining these objects with my hands.





I thought about the material I wanted her to be made out of/look like, I decided to use English Alabaster stone but as I want sculpting her face I moved towards making her look like bronze, so I pivoted and researched into what I could use to paint her bronze with the clearest effect. Ultimately I spoke to someone at Cass Art near Leicester Square and they recommended Liquid Leaf, a type of solvent paint that would dry with the texture of real metal, I chose the colour Florentine Gold as it was the closest to bronze.



During construction of her face I looked at composite images of what Iron Age East Anglian women could have looked like and chose to mix contemporary Essex women faces with the historical to try and create a look of timelessness, I also give her slightly more masculine features to imply an element of ambiguity to her gender. This also plays into the ideas of masculinity and femininity and what makes a woman, womanly, is it her appearance? Clothes? Physicality? This is a question I want spectators to ask themselves.

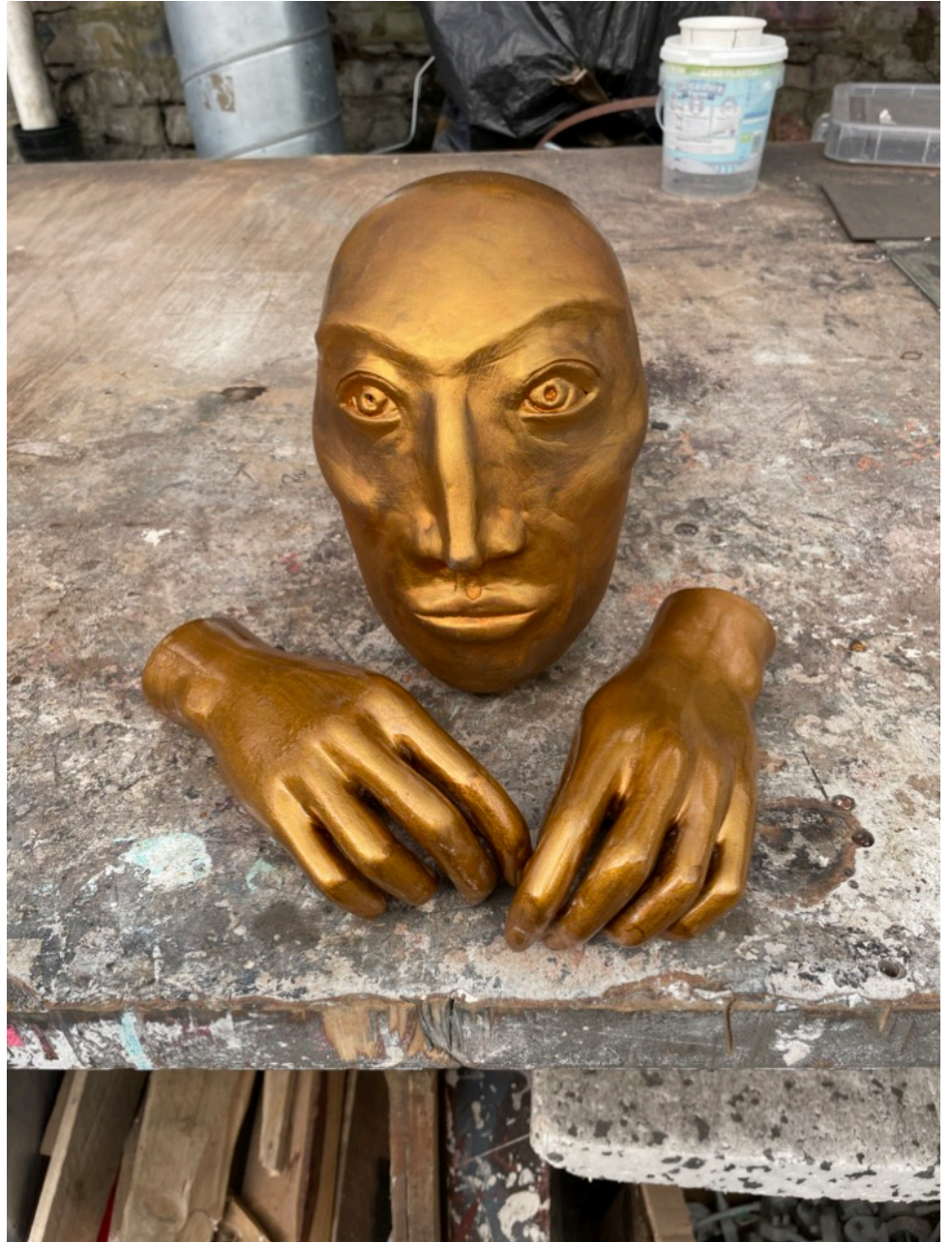


After painting her head and hands I felt good with the progress of the sculpture, I started researching into Brittonic and Saxon languages, to which I decided on her name "Gytha - Skuid Ēastseaxe Banujos (Gytha, Shield of Essex Women), I chose the name Gytha before researching its meaning but Gytha means "Warlike", quite an apt name for a Goddess of protection.

Below is how Gytha would be spelt in Saxon English and I strive to include this somewhere on the piece.



Gytha





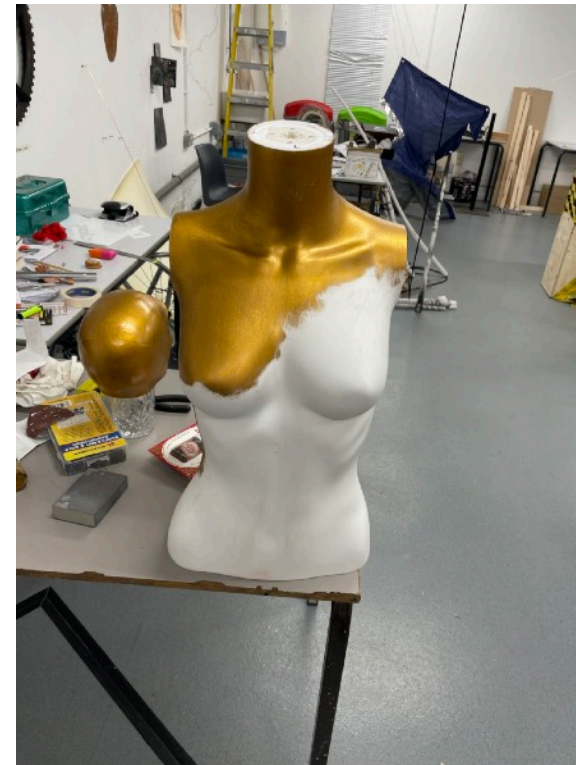
I showed the head and hands of Gytha at a small scale exhibition, we decided to play with the senses, so a dimly lit room with subtle lights to illuminate the sculpture added a mystical element to the work, something I want to attempt to recreate in her final construction.

It was at this point in my process I rethought how I would display the final product, no longer will she stand on a plinth, but instead she will be placed in a grotto with a secret room at the back with a hologram of an oracle of Gytha, the video hologram would emulate Alexander McQueen's Kate Moss hologram, using the theatre trick of peppers ghost to make the hologram, below is a model of the grotto should be placed in.

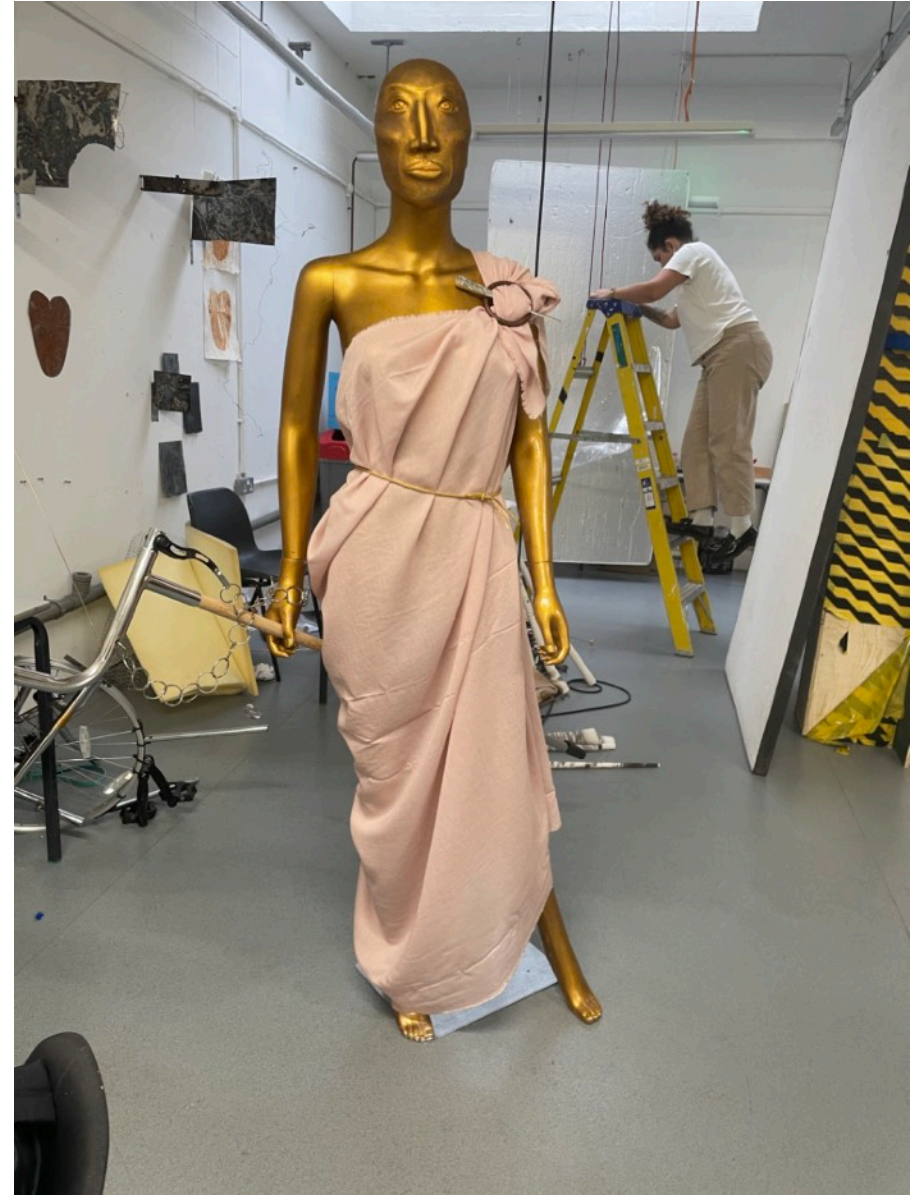


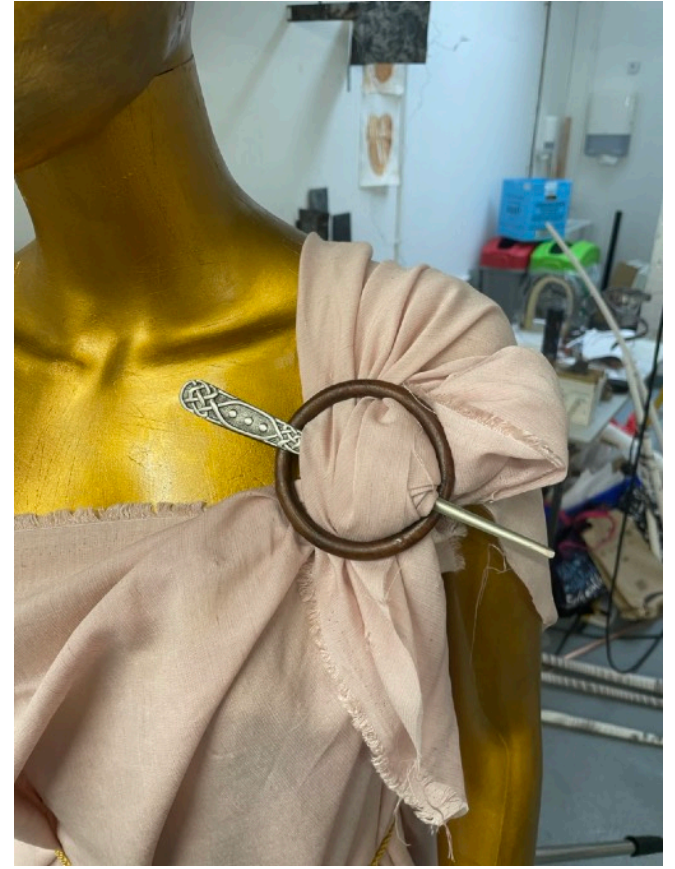


Here I am experimenting with how to clothe her, using a blanket as a test fabric for the drapery I rested it over her to emulate similar clothing styles of statues you would see around London, I decided on using either linen or hemp for her clothing as these natural fibres were closer to what would have been used in the time period I am trying to emulate. I brought the body into the studios and painted her the same shade of gold as I done with the face and hands.



Below is a close up of her weapon, I had originally wanted to make the weapon period accurate but after a discussion with Erika she asked me to think about that the future of Essex could be, think about Essex-futurism and what that could look like. To the right is Gytha fully painted and clothed, I used a soft pink linen tied at the waist with gold roping, her Celtic brooch is made from a wooden bangle and a letter opener I had found in a charity shop. With the exception of her face all components of her construction are repurposed materials.







The start of Herewulf, the stag, Gytha's steed. I firstly stripped the wood of its bark, which was a challenge as where the wood had been stacked and remained slightly damp it became quite tricky to remove the bark, after a month of prepping the wood by removing the bark, cleaning with a jet washer, and drying I started sculpting with chisels and a chainsaw.



I experimented with texture and form with the chainsaw but found the colour of the wood hid most of the texture I had added and as I want the sculpture to have be effigy-like I am not staining and varnishing him, leaving him raw and harsh, similar to 'obby 'orses you would see in English folk festivals. I cut the legs to fit the torso so they sit snugly in the contours of the wood.



After bringing the stag into there studio, one broken trolley and purchasing a sack barrow later, I started work on the head.

The head of Herewulf was simple, using a styrofoam ball and a rather creepy mask, I UHU glued the face and screwed the styrofoam to the neck using several scraps of paper as a buffer to keep the connection snug.

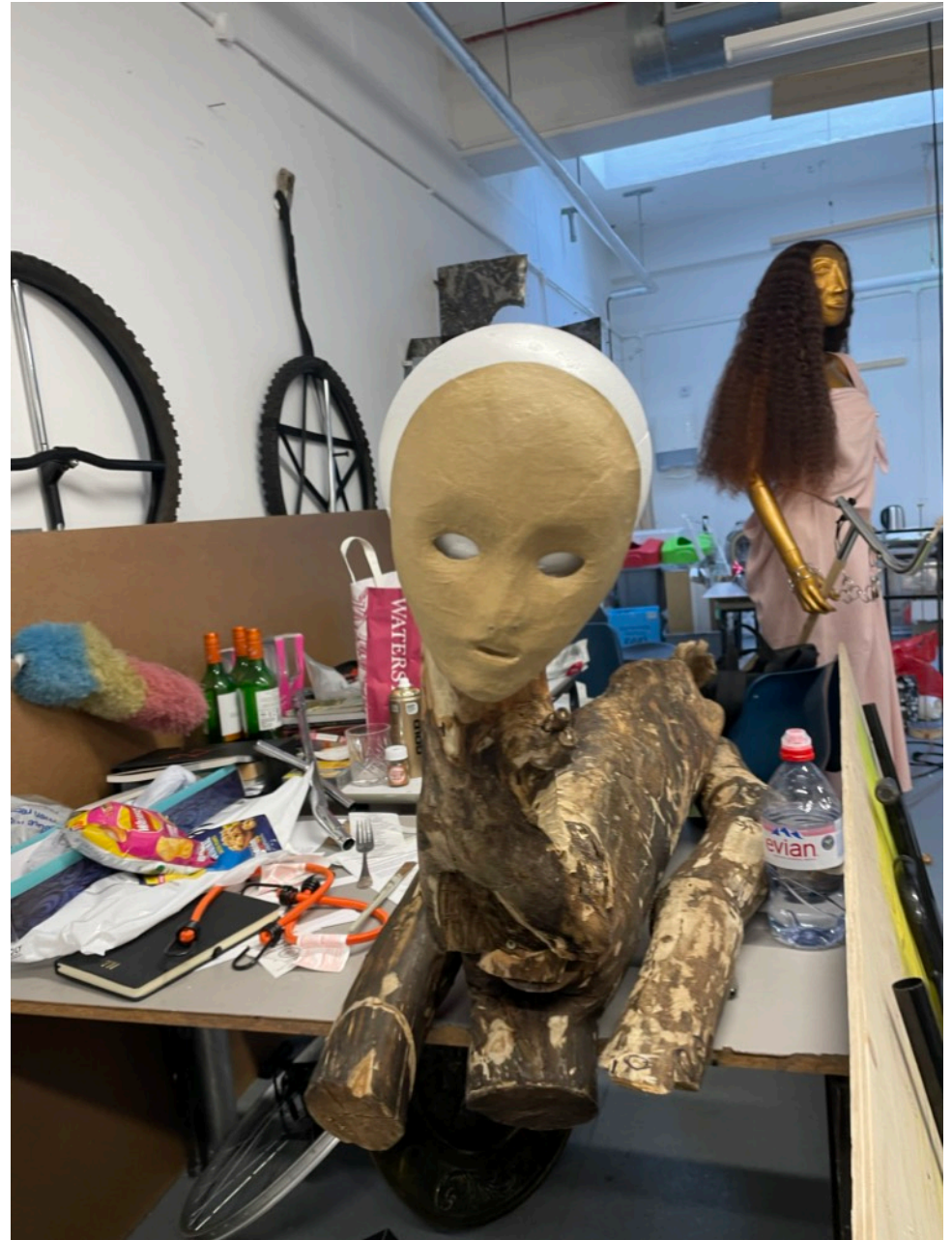
The name Eyr is old Brittonic for Stag, found online with a Google Translate style website which I have used before to aid with translations of; Middle, Old and Ancient English.

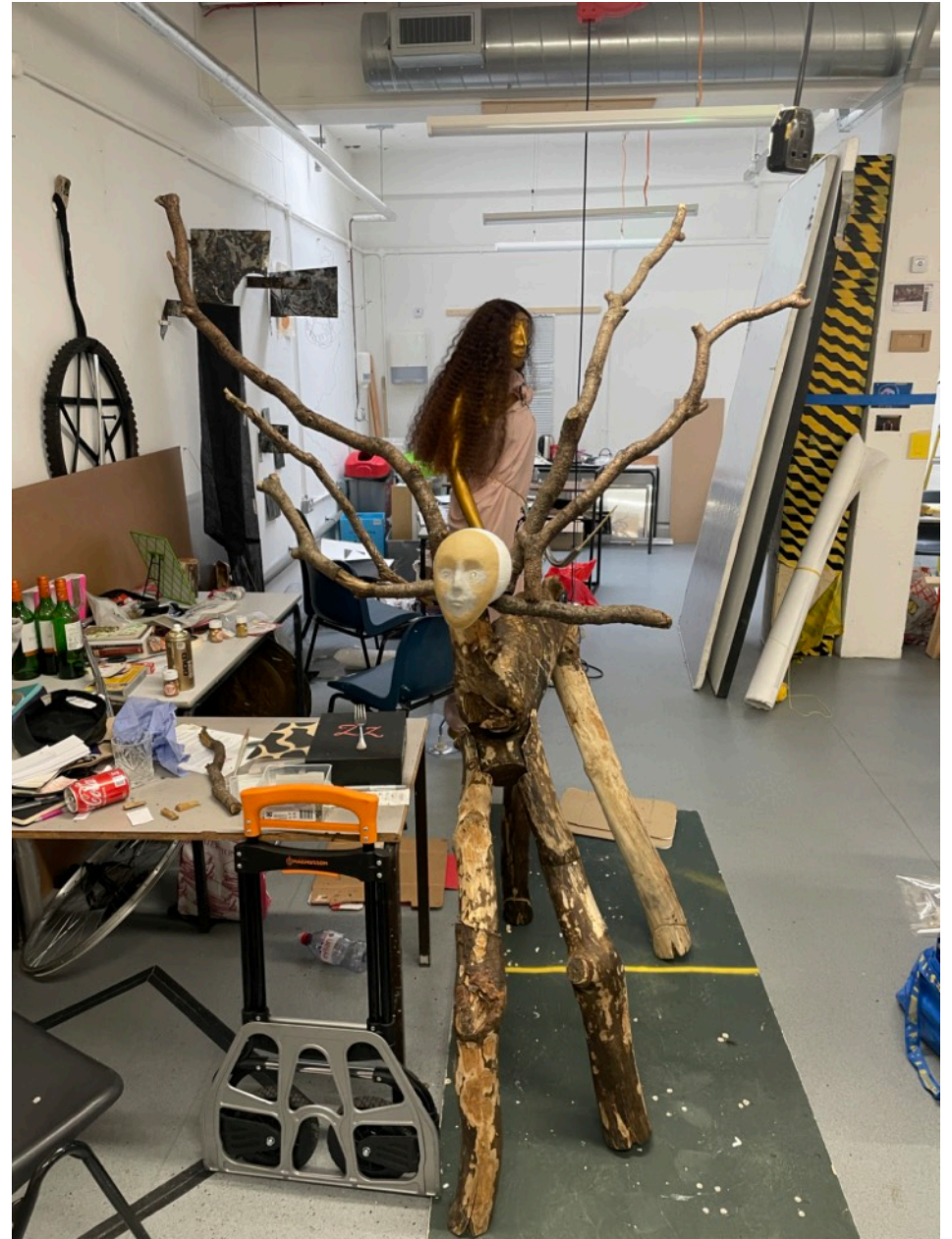
After attaching the head to the form I worked on his final construction, sculpting a face, attaching the legs to the torso and forming the antlers.

The name Herewulf is a Saxon name, here meaning army and wulf meaning wolf, together they come to mean “wolf of the army” or “warrior wolf” a fitting name for a companion to Gytha.

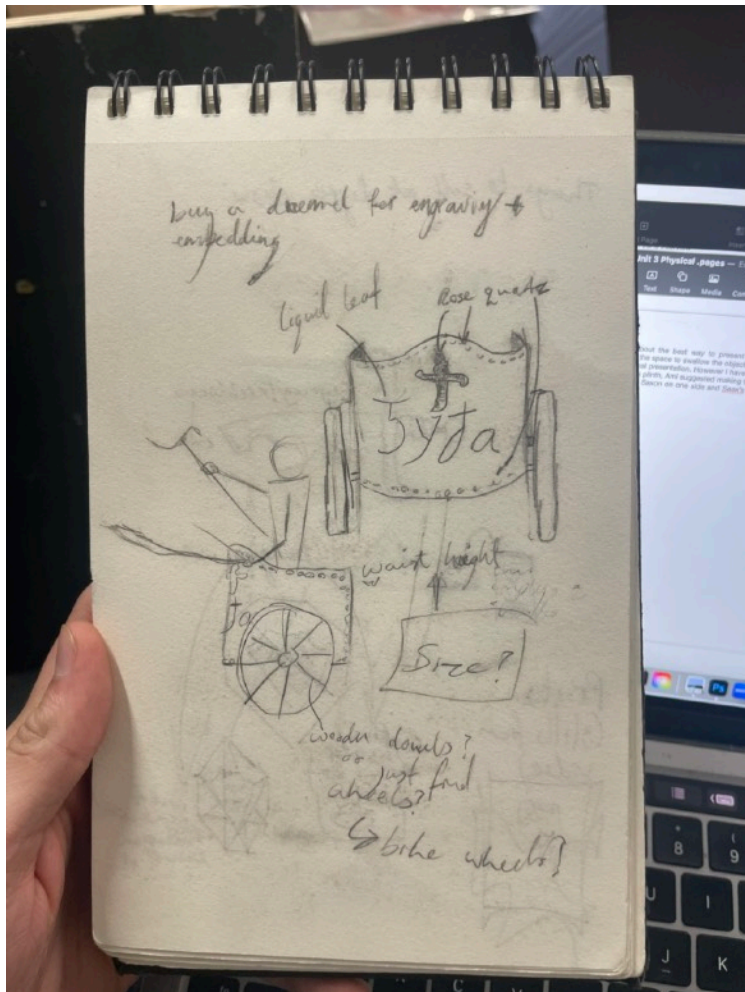


herewulf

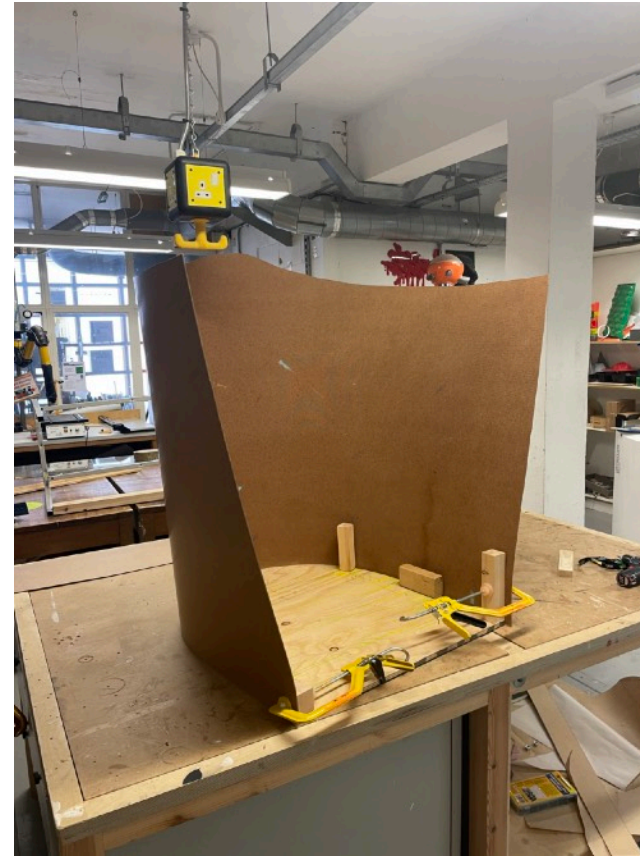




I have been contemplating the final presentation of my sculptures, thinking about the best way to present them in a way that compliments the work and doesn't take away from their significance. I don't want the space to swallow the objects and diminish them. And after discussing with several tutors and collaborators I am still unsure of the final presentation. However I have decided on building a chariot for Gytha, she will sit on the chariot and will most likely be presented on a plinth, Ami suggested making the plinth a light box as I have been thinking about making a neon-esqe sign that has Gytha's name in Saxon on one side and Seax's on the other three. Below are pictures of the chariot I am constructing for Gytha to stand on.



After several tutorials with various tutors, staff and peers I have decided to not use a plinth for the final construction and have Gytha standing victorious on her Chariot with her steed Herewulf walking either beside her or pulling her chariot. While I have not yet finished all three components their base objects are close to done and I can work on perfecting them. I want to use this time to leave them open to discussion for where I can add or subtract elements. I have had a clear vision from the start of this unit on what I wanted to make and I have used this time for research, although I have not experimented as much as I could have, I find that because my vision has been so clear and my research so thorough, I was able to get to work straight away and create what I had been visualising in my head, sketch book and notes document.















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Books

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- *Othered in a Region Historically Othered, Chapter 1: Contemporary Echoes of The Subjugation of the Women of Essex*. 2021 [video art] Directed by E. James.
- *Othered in a Region Historically Othered, Chapter 2: A Jab Jab Awakening Towards a New Essex*. 2021 [video art] Directed by E. James.
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- *Horrible Histories: The Movie - Rotten Romans*, 2019. [film] Directed by D. Brigstocke.
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- Greer, G. 2001. *Long Live the Essex Girl*. *The Guardian*, [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/mar/05/gender> [Accessed 14 July 2024].

Exhibitions

- *The Cult of Beauty*, (2023). [exhibition] Wellcome Collection, 183 Euston Rd., London NW1 2BE, 26 October 2023 - 28 April 2024
- *Concrete Dreams: Can't get enough*, (2024). [exhibition] Firstsite, Colchester, Lewis Gardens, High Street, Colchester, Essex, CO1 1JH , 20 April 2024 - 10 November 2024
- Add other relevant shows I saw recently (Fitzrovia galleries)

Lectures

- Gibson. M & Houlbrook. C (2023) *Hunting for Essex Witches Through Archives and Archaeology* [Lecture]. Essex Records Office, Chelmsford. 29 April

- Chelmsford Heritage Open Days (2024) *Chelmsford's Dark History Witch History Walk*, [lecture]. Bell Meadow Park, Chelmsford. 12 September
- Dodsworth, M (2024) *The Witch Trials Talk* [lecture]. Grays Brewery Yard, Chelmsford. 13 September

Websites

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- *The workers that kept Britain going during the Second World War* (no date) *Imperial War Museums*. Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-workers-that-kept-britain-going-during-the-second-world-war> (Accessed: 5 September 2024).
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Research from British Museum reference list:

- Spears:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?place=British%20Isles&material_culture=Iron%20Age&object=spear&image=true&view=grid&sort=object_name_asc&page=1

- Shields:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?place=British%20Isles&material_culture=Iron%20Age&object=shield&image=true&view=grid&sort=object_name_asc&page=1

- Swords:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?place=British%20Isles&material_culture=Iron%20Age&object=sword&image=true&view=grid&sort=object_name_asc&page=1

- Chain mail armour:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?place=British%20Isles&material_culture=Iron%20Age&object=mail-armor&image=true&view=grid&sort=object_name_asc&page=1

- The Staffordshire Hoard is an assemblage of primary sword fittings that have been removed from their weapons and hoarded together in the ground. It is divided between Birmingham Art Museum and Gallery, and the Potteries Museum in Stoke-on-Trent. The academic publication about it is open access, here:

<https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/39941>

- The Sutton Hoo material is on display in Room 41 at the British Museum, along with some other contemporary weapons from other sites in England. Some background to Sutton Hoo:

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/galleries/sutton-hoo-and-europe#introduction-to-sutton-hoo>

- Some general books on war-gear of the period:

https://library.britishmuseum.org/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=244191&query_desc=anglo-saxon%20weapons

https://library.britishmuseum.org/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=21843&query_desc=anglo-saxon%20weapons

https://library.britishmuseum.org/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=137183&query_desc=anglo-saxon%20weapons

- Look also for weapons in the list of object types in this academic typology of A-S objects:

https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/aschron_eh_2013/types.cfm

- As I mentioned, very few examples of body armour survive from the early A-S period. It might be that body and head protection was typically made from reinforced leather or textile, rather than metal (reserved for the highest status warriors). The Sutton Hoo ship burial contains the only known coat of mail armour, and one of only five (depending on how you count) complete metal helmets. You can read about them, and the various weapons also in the grave, in this book:

<https://library.britishmuseum.org/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=40197>

- Unfortunately it is out-of-print, but you could likely access it in a good academic library or even make an appointment to visit our departmental library at the Museum. Info on how to do so here:

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/resources/library-and-archive>

- The record for the Sutton Hoo mail-armour is here:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-92

- The few metal helmets that survive from the period are all distinctive, suggesting bespoke designs rather than a well-established convention. The most ostentatious is the Sutton Hoo helmet, published in the book linked to above, but also in a more bitesize format here:

https://library.britishmuseum.org/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=60084&query_desc=sutton%20hoo%20helmet

- I have also made a video about it, here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYk0GH5iFYI>

This is a useful general article about A-S helmets:

<https://www.thegns.org/blog/there-are-five-anglo-saxon-helmets-and-the-staffordshire-helm-isnt-one-of-them>

Boars are a popular motif on helmets from this period, and this echoes references to boar-emblazoned helmets in the famous poem *Beowulf*, which you might like to look up (Seamus Heaney's translation from the Old English is my favourite, and the most evocative).

Shields from the period are circular and made of lengths of wood. They have domed metal bosses in the centre. The higher status ones are decorated with metal mounts, often in the shape of stylised predatory animals. This includes Sutton Hoo, which is also unusual for having a metal rim and for its large size. For information, see:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/1831/1/dickinson2.pdf>

Spearheads are typically iron, socketed to fit on long wooden (normally ash wood) shafts. They are the typical weapon of the A-S warrior, regardless of rank, along with a shield – swords seem to have been more exclusive, to higher status warriors. They were used for thrusting rather than throwing. You can see the major types of spearhead in the academic typology, linked above. The shafts don't tend to survive in the ground, but a few have in fragmentary form. Those from another high status burial at Prittlewell in Essex appear to have been painted and carved with animal images. Here is the publication:

<https://library.britishmuseum.org/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=198643>

Swords were the most prestigious weapons of the period. I've made a video about them, here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nb9vTu73xmE>

The sword from Sutton Hoo, and the sword fittings from the Staffordshire Hoard, give an impression of the most ostentatious types of decoration. Another distinctive type from the period is known as a ring-sword, which is mentioned in the video. Here is an example of one in the BM collection:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1963-1108-751

The rings remain mysterious to interpret, but they are typically seen as symbolising an oath sworn by a warrior to their lord. If you read French or have Google translate on your phone, this is the defining work:

<https://library.britishmuseum.org/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=63621>