



**SAM SMITH**

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Project Art Works  
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[projectartworks.org](http://projectartworks.org)





## INTRODUCTION

Project Art Works conduct a wide range of visual art projects with people who have complex and high support needs. The organization is artist led and its programmes focus on the social, cultural and political barriers that impact upon the lives of children and adults affected by neurological impairment.

It is an immense privilege to know and collaborate with Sam Smith. We first encountered Sam as a child when he took the lead, as he does now, in establishing a clear and specific way of “being” in a studio space and interacting with people and materials.

### **An intervention**

The paintings in this exhibition are the result of a carefully negotiated proposition for Sam. Together we constructed a large timber and plywood panel structure measuring 2.5m sq. designed so that it could be broken down into 27 smaller elements. actively the building of the panel responding with lively physicality to the processes of and .

When finished, the structure was hung in our studio at a perfect pitch for the pouring of paint using squeeze pots that have a particular malleability and appeal to Sam. They can also be emptied of paint in one dynamic move. Sam used this approach to make one large initial painting that was then divided so that he could work on each element individually and in more detail.



The structure was designed to capture the range of Sam's mark making, from pouring to drawing.

The artists working with Sam offered him unlimited support to make this new body of work and to respond to the choices that he communicates through sounds, gestures, occasional words and signals of delight as well dislike.

The processes and proposition of the project were informed by observations, trial and error and accumulated learning about how to create the optimum conditions for Sam to operate with interest and pleasure in the studio. Depending on your point of view this is either intervention or collaboration.

Primarily though it is a result of Sam's immense interest in and capacity for making and interacting with the materiality of the world in a way that is wholly unique to him.

## THE BLACKSHED GALLERY

The blackShed Gallery is a contemporary art space in the heart of the East Sussex countryside. Overlooking the hop fields of Robertsbridge, the gallery sits amongst converted farm buildings. It has its moments of intrigue and openness to new ideas delivering a diverse programme from a wide range of artists.

I am the curator of the blackShed gallery which I established in 2009. The gallery was initially inspired by my own visual arts interests. I see the development of the blackShed as an extension of my own artistic practice, allowing each installation as a collaborative process, a way to test ideas and showcase new commissions.

The blackShed seeks to work with artists, but more recently we have been looking to organisations and local

authorities. I first met Kate Adams over 10 years ago and we have since become good friends. However, I knew of Project Art Works from their earliest beginnings, went on to join their team in around 2007 and worked on many of the programmes as a supporting artist. This experience gave me an extraordinary insight into how artists collaborate and combine ideas with a unique set of individuals that together find subtlety of communication through the creation of art.

Following the success of recent projects that underline the value of the blackShed's approach as a collaborative partner, the procurement of Sam Smith, with the support of Project Art Works, offers an exciting opportunity for the blackShed's ongoing programme and audience development.

## SAM SMITH

Sam experiences life through his senses. Like a giant toddler, he endlessly explores the way things feel, vibrate, taste, sound, tear, ooze, fall. He has little use for the spoken or the written word, but loves rhyme and rhythm. He plays keyboards constantly, never imitating tunes he knows, always composing his own patterns and chord sequences, and singing along, loudly and wordlessly. He shows no interest in competitive or co-operative sport, but loves using his strong and muscular body, swimming, swinging, jumping, running up hills. He lives in the moment - socially passive, seemingly without self-scrutiny, bound up in a world of sensation.

His art is the result of this life-long absorption. For Sam, the process is far more important than the finished product. The vibrant colours of the paint, the slurping

sound it makes, the splatter as it hits the canvas, the satisfaction of the muscular effort it takes...each artwork is a whole-body experience for Sam. He's not indifferent to how it looks; he chooses his colours with care, knows when to stop, and shows pleasure when his work is praised- a new and important development. But the real thing is the doing.

The studio work he does now that he's in his twenties is an extension of characteristics that have been there since babyhood. Long before we realised that Sam had autism, we commented on his physical daring, his love of grubbing in mud and splashing in streams, his fascination with movement, especially twirling and spinning. He has learning difficulties, and many "intellectual" milestones were reached late or not at all, but from a very early age he

knew colours and responded strongly to them. He referred to people by the colour of their clothes- "blue Grandma", "green Richard"- and was heard, wearing a black jumper and dashing along a slippery path after dark, to caution himself- "Be careful black darling". Doing "art" in the kitchen at home, he would lick and sniff the paint, draw on his tummy with felt pens, fill his hair with play-doh. He loved mixing colours, but was rarely interested in attempting to represent anything on paper. Indeed, after a painting session he would take everything to the sink and rinse it under the tap- brushes, palette, and the picture itself.

He always loved viscous liquid, squirting shampoo, bubblebath, ketchup, cleaning fluid. He filled a doll's bath with honey, made a gloopy cake mixture and deposited it under the sofa cushions. A squeezey bottle still

keeps him occupied in the bath; a beaker still has to be drained of every drop. At Project Art Works, he has been able to direct two decades' experience of squeezing and squirting into the powerful paintings now on show.

It's not just about colour and texture; shape matters too. Sam avoids hard angles. He likes circles and spirals. When he was tiny he divided everything into moons, snakes and helicopters, so a round mirror was a moon, a shoelace was a snake, a honeysuckle head was a helicopter. He would hang his head and rotate so that his hair spun like a helicopter' blades. When he draws, the movement is always circular, and packed with energy. He draws with his arm and shoulder, not just his hand.

Life hasn't always been easy for Sam or with Sam. How could it be, for someone who

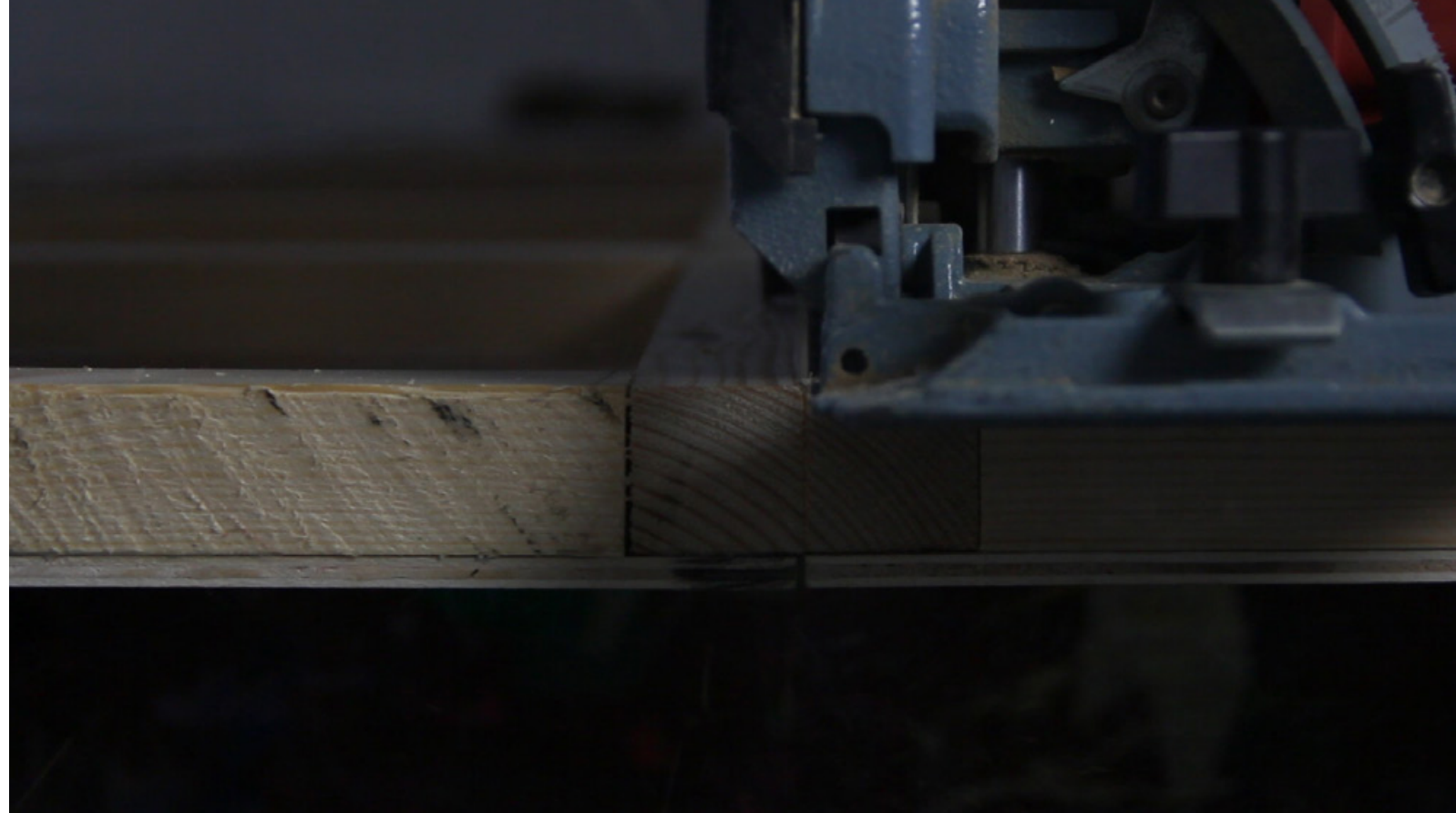
experiences the world in ways most people can't imagine? But PAW has taken many of his challenging characteristics and channelled them; the result is these bursts of coloured energy that give us insight into Sam's enigmatic, passionate involvement with life.

Charlotte Moore.

Sam notation 4			Body folds in	
Sander on surface BUZZ Rocking rhythmically Side to side	A splatter of black	Intense squeeze Light blue Eyes widen Fingertips flutter at forehead Mouth stretches open Silent	Blowing across black paint pot HUFF HUFF HUFF	few  drops
Sander in hand Body dips Side to side Face squeezes tight	A squeeze of grey SLOSH	HMMMMMMMMM A bubble sails through light blue	Intense squirt Red A bubble slips through a river of red	Head to hand Fingers rest Colour settles below
Fingertips to sandpaper Palm hovers near TAP TAP A tender touch	Eyes widen ZZZZZZZZZZ AAAAEEEEEEE	A dribble of dark blue Then a full pour	A blow between fingertips Gentle rocking back and forth Blinking Smiling Eyes close	
BUZZ SCRATCH SCRAPE	Empty the pot PUFF PUFF PUFF	A bubble slides through dark blue		
Steps across a soft surface	Intense squeeze Peach Pouring down	A pour of pink A flood of pink	OOOOOOOOH Smiling Raising both hands Snapping fingers together SNAP SNAP SNAP	
A clean white board	Swift squirt Brown Wide smile	HMMMMMMMMM Smile Eyes skywards Left and right	Smiling Rocking	
Vast	Pause	Empty black paint pot PUFF PUFF PUFF	A shake of red	
A squirt of red Slow red streams PSTTTTTT HMMMMMMMM	A gentle hold round the rim of a mug A sip of tea	Blinking Leaning back Blowing across fluttering fingertips	Last	













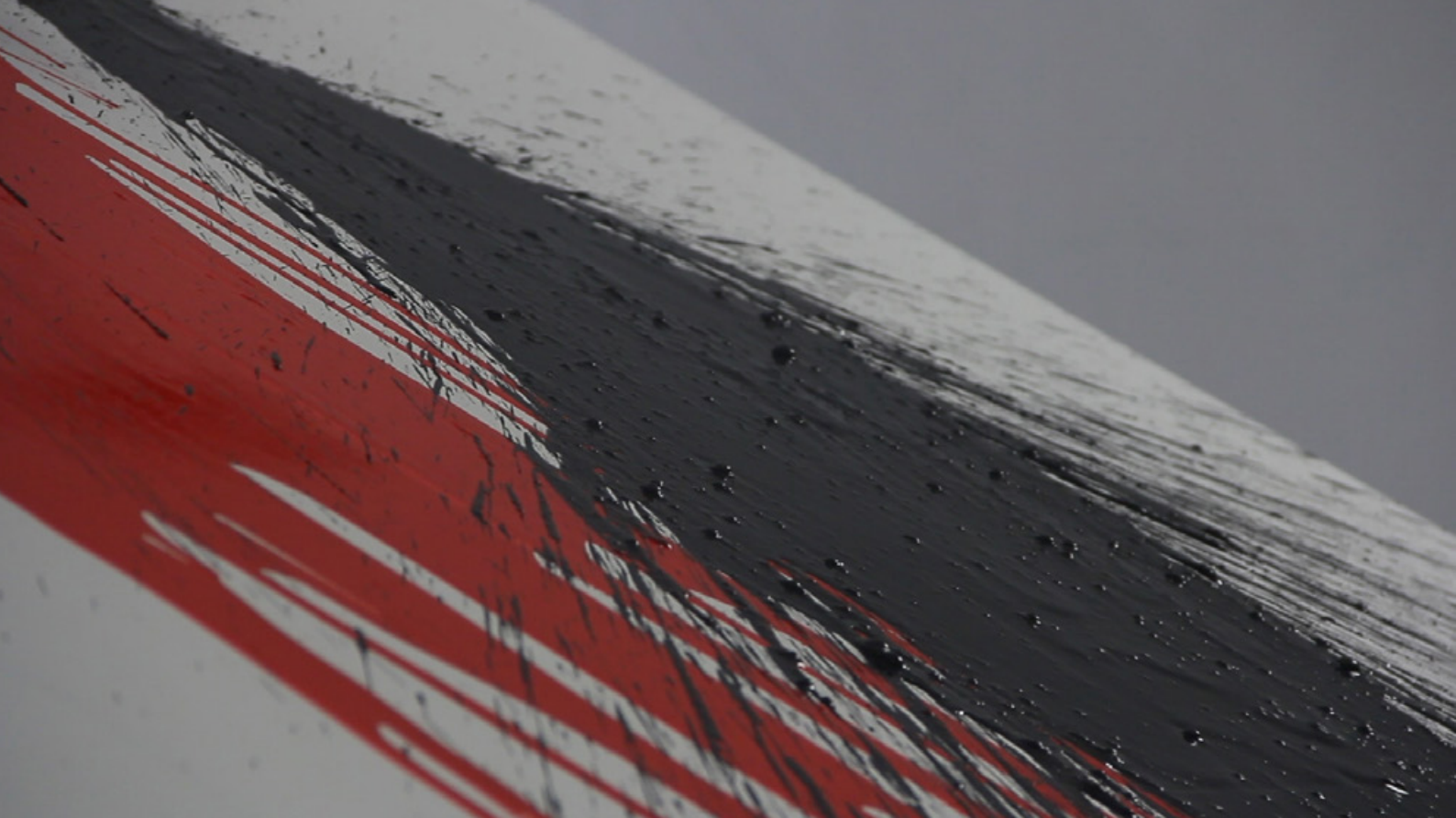




















































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## NEW WORKS

Project Art Works and the blackShed  
gallery invite you to the opening of  
SAM SMITH  
NEW WORKS

at the blackShed gallery  
Russet Farm  
Redlands Lane  
Robertsbridge  
East Sussex TN32 5NG

**Saturday 2 April, 5-7 pm**

Charles Moore will open  
the exhibition at 5.30pm

Exhibition continues until  
Saturday 14 May

[projectartworks.org](http://projectartworks.org)  
[theblackshedgallery.org.uk](http://theblackshedgallery.org.uk)

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Image courtesy Tim Corrigan, Project Art Works, 2016

A photograph of a person's face partially obscured by their hands, which are holding several white, circular objects that look like painted lids or small plates. The person's face is in the upper right, looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred, abstract composition of red, white, and grey tones.

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