

Ambiguous Machines Transcript

Background: Any more sailing now? We're just sailing... How many we got Stuart?...Half an hour cruise

Shezad Dawood

We had a great first visit as part of the commission where we were taken out in a former fishing boat, and we were out with seaweed, shrimp and cetacean specialists. I love chatting to scientists, but then trying to sort of make their learning more accessible. I'm Shezad Dawood. I'm an artist who works across a number of disciplines, and I'm pretty obsessed with the sea, nature environments, but also how we as humans respond in the built environment. Amazingly, one part of the commission was to work with a Yorkshire based writer...

Daisy Hildyard

There were quite a few things that Shezad and I were both interested in. We'd both been thinking on deep time frames. It sounded interesting to me immediately to be working with him and working in Scarborough. And I was also quite intrigued by the idea of developing something that exists in the digital sphere. It's very much not my world.

I'm Daisy Hildyard. I grew up in Yorkshire, not far from Scarborough, and I'm a novelist. I've written a non-fiction book about how climate change is affecting the way a person might experience what it's like to be in the world now.

Shezad Dawood

I got quite into Eugenius Birch, who basically built the aquarium in Scarborough after having worked on the Bengal railways. So there's this sort of connection in time through colonial histories and others. But that links to say Daisy's writing, when she looks at how something happening in rural Yorkshire, maps out to Bangladesh or the Philippines, and weather climate impacts that are kind of actually rippling that far.

And we've had some great sessions with Disability Action Groups, with sixth formers in Scarborough, to sort of bring them into a kind of process of workshopping and co-creation.

Daisy Hildyard

Hi everybody. It's nice to be here and to see you all. When Shezad asked me to come to Scarborough and work with him on this project, thinking about the marine life here, that just sounded like an absolutely dreamy thing for me, because it's kind of where I'm from what I'm interested in, but it's also working with Shezad, who has, like, a kind of very big, kind of wild approach to these things.

Workshop participant

They've evolved, like, because of the how they've adapted, they're then adapting to their environment. I get what you're saying that we do as a species, we mould our environment significantly more than any other creature, but I don't think that then...

Daisy Hildyard

We talked in very, very far reaching ways, about the kinds of characters that we might develop, the kinds of worlds that we might develop, and how we might create a story that moves through them and also captures all this stuff from Scarborough and the wider world that we've been looking at and thinking about.

Shezad Dawood

We started off going quite kind of wacky, even with some of the six formers, some really wonderful kind of ideas that came out.

Montage of Sixth Form Students

This one, which is more algae based, more humanoid ones, where it's like humans, with fins... in symbiotic relationship with one of the sea creatures in Scarborough, like how corals grow, world, I felt like mermaids should be more chubbier.... This is a character you can like, roam around there it's got trident, gills...

Shezad Dawood

The first phase is to have these three characters in line with this idea of thinking about, what if we all, in the future, become hybrid human marine creatures. And we thought of, actually, why don't we make each of the three characters an echo of like the three scientists we went on the first boat with, because we've had ongoing conversations with them. You know, initially, you know, Magnus is a marine biologist, and he talked to us for ages about shrimp's eyeballs and how they turn 360 and retract in the face of danger, we were like, what if you have a future, you know shrimp,

Magnus Johnson

But if you take a shrimp from shallow water, you'll find that it's only reflective at the bottom of the eye, and that's because it doesn't want to be shiny on top.

Shezad Dawood

I got really excited, and was researching how pistol shrimps that are normally found in tropical or Mediterranean waters are starting to appear in the North Sea due to warming temperatures. And pistol shrimps are pretty cool because they have one claw larger than the other, that can, like, shoot out a bubble of trapped air to stun a predator. It was like, oh, we should make that shrimp character, Magnus, the shrimp.

Magnus Johnson

I don't look like a shrimp... Magnus Johnson, I'm a senior lecturer in Marine Environmental Science at the University of Hull. Look. The other thing that I spoke about with Shezad was about human adaptability, and if you could no longer live in the surface, and human beings had to live in the sea.

Shezad Dawood

Initially, when it was just going to be one AR character, I thought of a kelp being coming out of the water. Jane Pottas, who's a seaweed scientist, you know, we had a great morning with her on the

beach, you know, looking at the different seaweed, algae, kelp species, that were there, and how that was changing as well, and getting to understand that a bit more

Jane Pottas

I can do some research.

Shezad Dawood

What species are you looking at Jane ?

Jane Pottas

Well, it's Fucus Spiralis. So Spiral Rack which grows on the upper shore. There's very little upper shore here, so you don't actually see it on this bit of the coast.

Shezad Dawood

And then I was interested in Stuart, who's a really interesting chap, because he's more of a citizen scientist.

Stuart Baines

I'm Stuart Baines I'm involved in the wild eye project. I am the Yorkshire representative for a group called Sea watch, we record cetaceans - that's whales, dolphins, porpoise all around the UK.

Stuart Baines

Well, we didn't have to see any cetaceans on that particular trip. We do boat-based surveys at a fishing village further north called Staithes in the summer. And last year, we had dolphins called common dolphins seen, common worldwide, but uncommon in the North Sea.

Shezad Dawood

One of the things was thinking about what it is about the digital that is interesting, and I think it's where it opens portals to like seeing future scenarios, architectures, what being-ness means. So we're thinking about the North to the South Bay and everything in between, to have three different ARs that are geo located at different points on the coastline, so people have to actually go on a journey. How do you make it interface with what's there and exciting and add to the appeal?

Magnus Johnson

The thing I love about working with artists is that they make us raise our eyes to the horizon and look further out.

Daisy Hildyard

My impression is that people are educated to the extent that they know, in a broad sense, what the problems are, even if people don't know all the details. So I'd like to just kind of draw those quite real things into a story that then becomes a world that in the near future where the human, animal and marine creatures have kind of merged and are creating this kind of new civilization together.

Lucia Scazzocchio

You just heard the voices of artist Shezad Dawood, writer Daisy Hildyard, Dr Magnus Johnson, senior lecturer at the Marine Biology Unit within the School of Environmental Sciences at the University of Hull. Dr Jane Pottas, retired seaweed researcher from the University of Hull. Stuart Baines, a representative for the National cetacean organization, the Sea Watch Foundation, local workshop attendees and students from Scarborough Sixth Form College.

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This project is part of Wild Eye, an art and nature programme celebrating Scarborough's incredible wildlife and coastal environment. Wild Eye is delivered in partnership with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Invisible Dust and North Yorkshire Council.