

# Traces: How Art and Oil Can Mix (Extended Abstract)

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*Callum David Kellie (Robert Gordon University)*

The social structures and communities of the North Sea oil industry are typically under-documented. Due to various logistical barriers, both real and imagined, their histories (with a few notable exceptions) have gone mostly undocumented.

Traditionally, heavy industry impacts and shapes the community that surrounds it. In the North Sea, that industry is over the horizon and its workforce comes from around the world to form a new temporal community. This invisibility of offshore oil production to those not involved in the industry creates a unique social structure for the workforce based on their shared experience.

Over the past two years, an ongoing collaborative project with Marathon Oil (and, more recently, Rockrose Energy) has been placing art students from a variety of disciplines within the offshore workforce. The project tasked the artists with responding to and documenting the communities that they found, both on their platforms as well as the among supporting onshore workforce.

The project presents a challenging yet authentic learning experience to the students, accelerating their academic progress and their exit trajectory once they leave their studies. For the workforce, the project has had unexpected benefits, including improvements to staff moral and the development of mentoring skillsets.

Whilst the students were guided and mentored in the transferable skills necessary for fulfilling the potential of their work within the project, they were not directed or constrained in terms of the mediums that they could use for their final artworks. This resulted in a broad range of strategies and artistic mediums being used, including painting, photography, sculpture and sound art.

The project outcomes have been exhibited multiple times, both onshore and onboard North Sea installations, and a book has also been published. This public exposure has given the workforce the space to reflect about the communities created around this industry - not only within themselves, but also with family and onshore colleagues.

Responding to the conference theme of oils envisioned, this paper will showcase methodologies that can be used when artists and the oil industry collaborate, as well as highlighting the tangible benefits to both student artists and the workforce itself. The paper will present case studies of the artworks, and will also answer questions on aspects including liabilities, intellectual property, health and safety, corporate governance, staff development and student mentorship.