

Colossal

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Project Overview

Lewry, S., (2025) *Studio Culture + Colossal* (photo credit: Matt Thame)



This practice-based research is situated within contemporary debates around post-digital creative practice, socially engaged art and the future of materially driven learning in an increasingly screen-mediated culture. As digital technologies shape how images circulate, fragment attention and render creative labour invisible, this research foregrounds embodied, collaborative and analogue modes of making. It positions Colossal, a mobile screen-printing studio, as an ongoing research artefact through which alternative infrastructures for creative practice, education and public engagement are developed, tested and reflected upon.

The research is intended for artists, designers, educators, researchers, cultural organisations and communities working across graphic design, printmaking, contemporary art and creative education. It is particularly relevant to those concerned with equity of access, sustainability and innovation in creative practice. The work is timely in response to digital fatigue, the erosion of hands-on learning environments and growing calls for inclusive, socially responsive creative methodologies.

The motivation for this research emerged through sustained practice rather than a singular research proposition. Colossal was developed to enable printmaking beyond fixed studio environments, allowing work to take place in streets, schools, galleries and everyday public settings. Projects such as Ink Factory (2025), a live print performance at the Print in Action Festival, made visible the labour, repetition and bodily effort involved in printmaking, reframing production as performance and collective encounter. Studio Culture + Colossal (2025) further repositioned teaching as an action-based, site-responsive activity, situating student-led printmaking directly within public visual culture.

Public engagement is understood not as audience development but as meeting people where they already are. This approach was exemplified through participation in the British Art Show 9 Ambassador programme (2022). Embedded within public and civic spaces connected to a national touring exhibition, Colossal enabled engagement with diverse audiences, including individuals unfamiliar with contemporary art. Hands-on printmaking foregrounded access, confidence-building and shared authorship, while generating insight into audience behaviour, barriers to participation and the visibility of artistic labour within participatory contexts.

Through long-term partnerships with organisations including The Box, Plymouth Design Forum, Plymouth Culture, Real Ideas, schools and community groups, Colossal has functioned as a shared platform for co-creation. The Ford Primary School mural project Founded at Ford demonstrates how large-scale, collaborative processes can operate as a public declaration of trust, authorship and community identity, generating cultural value beyond the production of a single artefact.

A significant strand of the research involves reflective discovery around authorship and visibility within participatory practice. Sustained engagement with Colossal has revealed a recurring tension in which the artist is frequently perceived as a facilitator or “activity” rather than as an authorial practitioner. This insight has become a critical research driver, prompting enquiry into gendered labour, care, visibility and the cultural framing of socially engaged practice.

This research offers new knowledge by establishing Colossal as a model for practice-led enquiry in which artefact, method, dissemination and impact are inseparable. It contributes insight into how mobile, materially driven practices redistribute creative agency, resist passive image consumption and surface the politics of participation, reframing printmaking as a socially engaged, adaptive and critically reflexive post-digital practice.

Research Method

This research was developed through sustained creative practice rather than a predefined academic research design. Much of the work presented here was not initially framed as “research” but emerged through making, teaching, commissioning and public engagement. Over time, it became evident that these activities were not discrete projects but interconnected clusters of activity circulating around a single, evolving practice: Colossal. Knowledge was generated through embodied action, reflection and iteration across contexts. The research, therefore, adopts a practice-based methodology that recognises making itself as a legitimate and rigorous form of research.

The genesis of the research lies in the development of Colossal, a mobile screen-printing studio conceived to address practical and creative constraints around access, scale and mobility. Initially created to enable printmaking beyond fixed institutional spaces, Colossal functions as a mobile research infrastructure through which multiple strands of practice are activated. Its repeated deployment across community, cultural and educational settings has generated a constellation of events, partnerships and outputs that orbit shared research questions. Long-term collaborations with organisations including The Box, Plymouth Culture, British Art Show 9 venues, Real Ideas, Plymouth Design Forum and Arts University Plymouth have shaped the conditions under which insight has emerged, operating as research environments rather than delivery frameworks.

The research method is materially led, socially embedded and iterative. It combines embodied printmaking, participatory frameworks, performative labour, site-responsive teaching and public-facing interventions, consistently mediated through Colossal as both tool and site. These methods are supported by reflective writing, photographic documentation, process notes and iterative adaptation of formats. Rather than separating theory and practice, conceptual understanding emerges through action, repetition and material resistance. Event clusters such as Ink Factory, Studio Culture x Colossal and the GROW Studios residency operate as extended research situations in which labour, visibility, authorship and participation are tested over time.

A further methodological strand operates through an ongoing collaboration with Plymouth Design Forum, where over 40 screen-printed beermat editions have been produced since 2018. These artefacts function as deliberately constrained research formats, echoing graphic design traditions of montage, fragmentation and serial production. Through scale, speed and repetition, the beermats test typographic decision-making, colour relationships and registration in live professional contexts. Circulating among UK and international designers, they enable rapid feedback, peer dialogue and iterative refinement, embedding design experimentation within social and professional exchange rather than isolating it within studio or exhibition settings.

Knowledge discovery occurs through cycles of making, observation, reflection and reconfiguration. Each deployment of Colossal functions as a live test site, allowing insight to emerge through comparison across contexts. Audience behaviour, confidence-building, barriers to participation and responses to visible labour are observed and fed back into subsequent decisions around scale, format and facilitation. A key insight to emerge was the repeated positioning of the artist as facilitator or “activity” within participatory settings. This recognition became a critical research driver, prompting further experimentation with performance, scale, repetition and strategic refusal of participation as methodological tools for reasserting authorship without abandoning inclusivity.

Dissemination is embedded within the method and extends beyond self-authored documentation. Student-led films, documentary photography and publications, including Mia Kinchin’s Inspiring Tales of Creative Women Shaping Plymouth’s Art Scene and Zara Lily McDermott’s feature in Mish Mash Magazine, function as reflective surfaces, revealing how Colossal is interpreted and valued across audiences. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, safeguarding, reciprocity and access, are embedded throughout.

This research establishes Colossal as both method and evidence: a mobile system through which practice, enquiry and dissemination remain inseparable.



Lewry, S., (2025) *City Layers* (photo credit: Jay Stone)

Research Insights

This research generated insight through sustained practice rather than predefined hypotheses. While initial motivations centred on access, mobility and participation, the enquiry evolved through repeated encounters with people and places over time. Since Colossal first emerged in 2018, the social and cultural landscape surrounding the work has shifted, forming a changing backdrop rather than a singular driver of the research.

A primary insight is that mobile, materially driven infrastructures such as Colossal can operate simultaneously as artwork, method and site of enquiry. Repeated deployment demonstrated that mobility is not only logistical but conceptual: it reshapes who feels entitled to participate, how imagery is encountered and how printmaking functions socially. Removing printmaking from fixed institutional spaces consistently opened encounters with audiences who did not self-identify as creative, revealing how location, visibility and scale structure access to culture.

The research also revealed that participation alone does not guarantee equity or agency. While collaborative making supported confidence-building and shared ownership, it exposed a recurring tension in which the artist was frequently perceived as a facilitator or “activity” rather than an authorial practitioner. This insight emerged gradually through comparison across contexts rather than as a predefined concern. Recognising this pattern became a critical turning point, redirecting the research towards questions of gendered labour, care, visibility and the cultural framing of socially engaged practice.



In response, the research tested how authorship might be asserted without abandoning collaboration. Experiments with scale, duration, repetition, performative labour and strategic refusal of participation demonstrated that authority and visibility can be recalibrated through practice itself. These shifts confirmed that reflexivity and adaptation are essential to depth and originality in practice-led research.

A further insight concerns dissemination. Third-party interpretation through film, photography and editorial publication revealed how Colossal is translated and valued across audiences. These external perspectives extended the research by exposing meanings not fully visible from within the practice.

Overall, the research establishes Colossal as a coherent, evolving model for practice-led enquiry. It demonstrates how embodied making, mobility, and collaboration can generate meaningful knowledge while responding sensitively to changing social conditions, supporting connection, agency and shared cultural life.

Lewry, S., (2023) *Plymouth Design Forum Beermat series 2018–2024* (photo credit: Tom Carder)

Impact/Dissemination

Lewry, S., (2024) *Creative Intersections Talk* (photo credit: FotoNOW)



Impact and dissemination are integral to this research, with Colossal functioning as both the means of knowledge production and its primary vehicle for public engagement. Access to the research has occurred through live events, exhibitions, performances, workshops, publications, talks, digital platforms and third-party interpretation, reaching audiences across community, cultural and educational settings.

Public engagement has taken place through live print actions, performances and exhibitions at the Ambassador Programme for British Art Show 9, Print in Action Festival, Artober, Studio Paradiso, Alma Yard open studios, and residencies at GROW Studios Plymouth and Ocean Studios. In these contexts, Colossal operated as a visible, participatory artwork, enabling audiences to encounter the research through direct engagement. At The Box Museum Live Print Event (2025), approximately 110 young people actively participated in printmaking in one day, with over 400 additional intergenerational attendees observing. A separate Print Workshop at The Box (2024), delivered through Arts & Minds for people living with dementia and their carers, involved 14 active participants and 2 volunteers.

At a Drake Shopping Centre public event, approximately 100 people created prints, with an estimated 500 additional public observers. During Ink Factory at the Print in Action Festival (2025), an estimated 300–450 visitors passed through the exhibition over two days.

Lewry, S., (2024) *Inside Colossal* (photo credit: Sue Lewry)



The British Art Show 9 Ambassador programme (2022) provided significant national reach. Across activations linked to the touring exhibition, the Colossal project engaged 280 active co-creators, 130–215 additional in-person audience members, and recorded over 18,000 digital interactions, based on evaluation data collected for The Box and Plymouth City Council.

Additional workshop-based engagement includes Vacancy Atlas (18 workshop participants; 47 exhibition sign-ups via Eventbrite), and creative sessions delivered through Real Ideas (12 participants in Layers of Expression collage; 8 in Layers of Play print). ARTOBER exhibitions at Royal William Yard recorded 3,800 visitors over 10 days (2024) and 2,600 visitors over 10 days (2025), with Colossal's Ink Factory exhibited during this period.

Dissemination has also occurred through invited talks and presentations. A public talk at Creative Intersection (Print in Action Festival, 2024) was attended by 34 audience members, excluding volunteers and staff. An invited online session at the Make Happen Institute (2025) engaged 10 master's students and one lecturer. These contributions positioned Colossal within discussions of practice-led research, sustainability and creative entrepreneurship through crowdfunding.



Lewry, S., (2025) Artober (photo credit: Sue Lewry)

Publication and editorial coverage have extended the research beyond live audiences. A six-page feature in Pressing Matters magazine (2024) reached an international print readership through a print run of approximately 4,500–5,000 copies. Online features for Handprinted and Plymouth Culture reached an estimated 5,000 regional and national readers. Independent editorial interpretation through Mish Mash Magazine (approx. 80–100 readers) and Mia Kinchin’s documentary book and film project (approx. 25 viewers) further disseminated the work within peer and educational contexts.

The 2022 Crowdfunder campaign raised £8,100, including £3,500 match funding, with 136 individual and organisational pledgers. The associated launch event recorded 136 booked tickets and 125 attendees. Ongoing social media dissemination averages approximately 2,500 views per Instagram reel, contributing to national and international visibility.

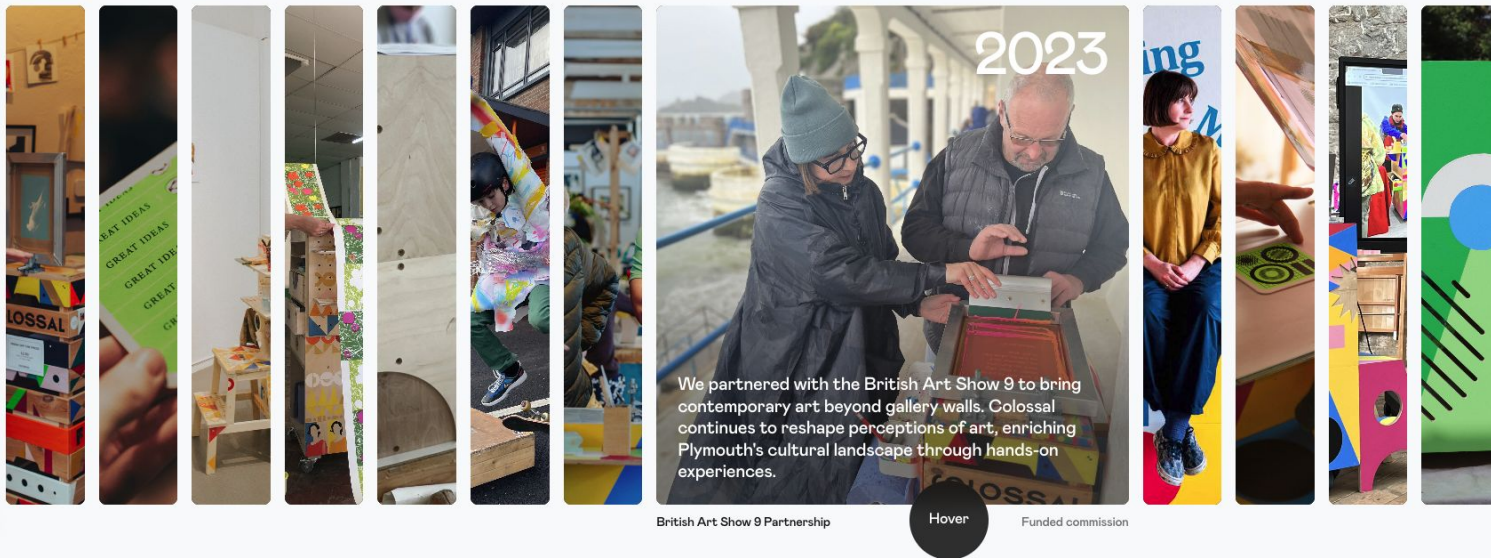
Funding led to commissioning Designer-Maker Matt Holmes to undertake the digital fabrication and also supported the digital dissemination of the project, sustained through Crowdfunding and social platforms including a Colossal website designed to reach wider audiences (www.colossalprint.uk)

The Plymouth Design Forum beermat series (2018–2024) produced over 40 editions, with an estimated 4,000 handprinted beermats circulated at professional events, alongside digital audiences of 25.7K for social media reels for specific designer collaborations. This demonstrates reach within UK and international design networks.

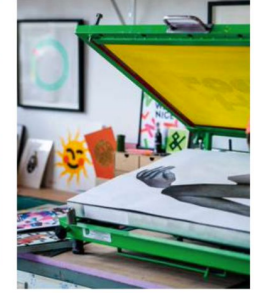
Funding and institutional support for Colossal have included Historic England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, British Art Show 9 (Hayward Gallery Touring), Plymouth Culture, C-Care (European Regional Development Fund), HM Government initiatives, Learning Academy Trust Plymouth, and support from Plymouth Design Forum CIC, Real Ideas, Creative England, Mayflower 400, Vacancy Atlas, Eat Work Art, and GROW Studios.

Collectively, these indicators demonstrate sustained local, regional, national and international reach. The combination of quantified participation, institutional partnerships, funded commissions, publication and digital interaction evidences not simply activity, but demonstrable engagement and emerging significance across creative practice, education and socially engaged cultural work.

Colossal achievements



Lewry, S., (2024) *Colossal Website* (website design: Calum Campbell-Coles)



"From that first time applying ink and pulling the squeegee across the paper surface, I knew I'd found my thing."

SUE LEWRY

This is my printmaking world. The images you see here are a collaboration between my friend and photographer Rae Warne and me. We went to school together back in the '90s and coming together to capture these moments in my studio was such a fun and special experience – we reflected on our school life and where we both are now. To be honest, it's been great to reflect on things and it's shown me how far I have come.

My printmaking practice centres largely around collaborative making and photo collage. Before I pulled my first screenprint back in 2013, I was a graphic designer and art director working in the fashion industry in London. Following my newfound passion for print, I completed a masters in printmaking in 2021 at Arts University Plymouth. I am now an associate lecturer in Graphic Design at AUP and run my screenprint space from the vibrant creative community at Alma Yard Studios. From there, I make high-quality, affordable print pieces alongside commissions and continue to experiment with paper and textile processes, including woodwork and doll-making.

My journey from graphic designer to printmaker has been a pretty gradual one. I have always designed for print and I'm well-versed in working on computers and proofing digital printing processes, however I vividly remember when I pulled and revealed my first handmade screenprint it was a transformative experience for me. From that moment on I fell hook, line and

sinker for the possibilities of printmaking and decided to pursue my newfound passion, specialising in screenprint.

Printmakers' rituals are important. From putting on my well-inked-up apron to learning the nuances of my craft, from the handling of the tools and materials to improvising solutions, feeling the labour of my work ache through my body at the end of the day is something I value. This kinaesthetic approach to image-making ignited something dormant in me ten years ago and from that first time applying ink with my hands and pulling the squeegee across the paper surface, I knew I'd found my thing.

Since that memorable moment, I have been continually learning and developing my skills and knowledge, peppering it with other interests that have emerged along the way and engaging people (both arty and non-arty) to see where it can go. Recently, I have introduced a conscious compromise ethos into my studio practice. I carefully consider my material choices based on their ecological and social impact and contributing to this empowering movement towards sustaining a thriving planet has become increasingly important to me. I use print-offs to make mini original cards and repurpose rejected screenprints to make collage print artworks – working with my materials process in clever ways with a resourceful mindset brings so much freshness to my creative practice.

Lewry, S., (2024) *Pressing Matters Magazine* (image credit: Rachel Warne)

Credits: Collaborators, partners and funders

Matt Holmes [Holmseyllogic Creative](#) (digital fabrication)
Calum Campbell-Coles (website design)
Aynsley Neville (technical support)

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