

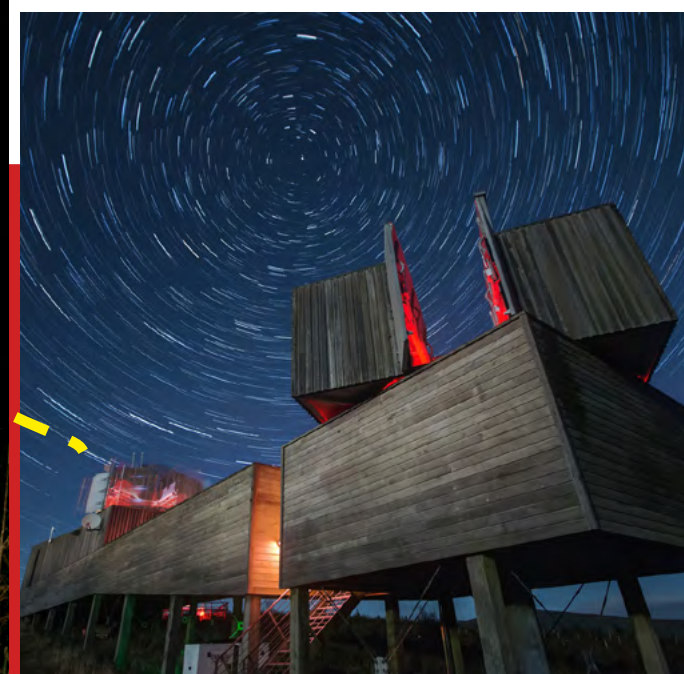
# Stargazing at the 'Invisible': Photography and the Power of Obscured Light - A Research Partnership with Kielder Observatory.

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This **practice-led photography** research project explores **what new encounters with dark skies emerge** when a photographic artist and an astronomy organisation (Kielder Observatory, UK) work in partnership.

Through methods of creative reflective practice, the work **reconsiders the clichés** in ubiquitous Astrophotography through **new perspectives, engaged with place and encounter.**



Arts and Humanities Research Council



University of Sunderland

Kielder Observatory is an educational outreach charity situated under the protected dark skies of **Northumberland International Dark Sky park**. More than 20,000 visitors attend events each year.

The PhD project is funded by the National Productivity Investment Fund (part of UK gov's 'Industrial Strategy'), enabling impactful researcher-industry partnerships. This project is designed to **mutually benefit the photographic field and Kielder Observatory** by supporting a new art programme, and offering a model for future art and 'science outreach' collaborations.



<https://kielderobservatory.org/>

Image: Kielder Observatory



Blog: <https://invisiblestargazing.blog>

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What new encounters with dark skies **emerge** when a photographic artist and an astronomy organisation work in partnership?

Can photography visualise the **experience** of dark sky observation in Northern England?

Can creative reflective practice **expand** artistic interpretations of dark skies?



Installation: 'SelfScapes' exhibition

Dalby Forest, 2021.

<https://selfscapes.wixsite.com/selfscapes>

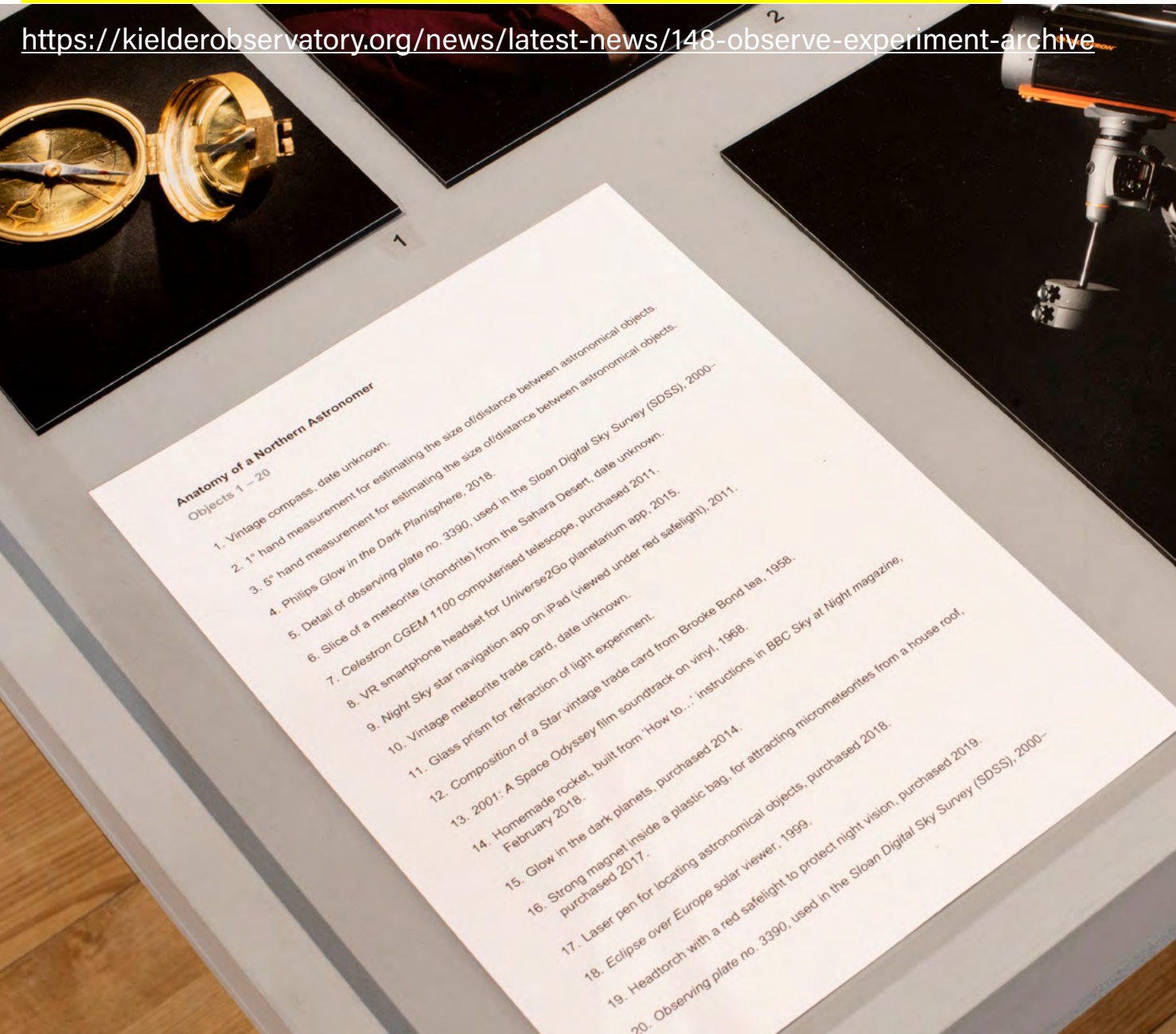






**Installation: 'Observe, Experiment, Archive' exhibition  
Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens, 2019-20.**

<https://kielderobservatory.org/news/latest-news/148-observe-experiment-archive>



**Anatomy of a Northern Astronomer**  
Objects 1 - 20

1. Vintage compass, date unknown.
2. 1" hand measurement for estimating the size of distance between astronomical objects.
3. 5" hand measurement for estimating the size of distance between astronomical objects.
4. Philips Glow in the Dark Planisphere, 2018.
5. Detail of a meteorite (chondrite) from the Sahara Desert, date unknown.
6. Slice of a meteorite 1100 computerised telescope, purchased 2011.
7. Celestron CGEM 1100 computerised telescope, purchased 2015.
8. VR smartphone headset for Universe2Go planetarium app, 2015.
9. Night Sky star navigation app on iPad, date unknown.
10. Vintage meteorite trade card, date unknown.
11. Glass prism for refraction of light experiment.
12. Composition of a Star vintage trade card from Brooke Bond tea, 1958.
13. 2001: A Space Odyssey film soundtrack on vinyl, 1968.
14. Homemade rocket, built from 'How to...' instructions in BBC Sky at Night magazine, February 2018.
15. Glow in the dark planets, purchased 2014.
16. Strong magnet inside a plastic bag, for attracting micrometeorites from a house roof, purchased 2017.
17. Laser pen for locating astronomical objects, purchased 2018.
18. Eclipse over Europe solar viewer, 1999.
19. Headtorch with a red safelight to protect night vision, purchased 2019.
20. Observing plate no. 3390, used in the Sloan Digital Sky Survey (SDSS), 2000-







Arts-science partnerships can offer mutual benefit for artists and science organisations, where collaborative conversations enable reflective practice and productivity for each partner.

Artistic practice can enhance cultural encounters with astronomy.

**Conclusions to date**

Displays of fine art photography can expand the dark sky experience to new public contexts, non-reliant on clear skies or visits to remote places.

Reflective artistic practice can provoke issues with the 'authentic' in clichéd Astrophotography, offering new ways to represent the dark sky experience.

'Photographic encounters' (with a place / people) can offer new, cosmic perspectives of the local environment from where one observes the night's sky.



**Thesis submission in 2024, next steps:**  
Develop creative outputs for display at Kielder Observatory:

- An online exhibition
- A series of pre-event film screenings
- A multimedia exhibition on site