MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

FLOAT

LIVERPOOL

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MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester

Manchester Metropolitan University

Canal & River Trust

Donald Insall Associates

MSA LIVE 25

Team

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Partners

We are excited to collaborate with The Canal & River Trust on this upcoming design initiative at the Salthouse Dock! They are a non-profit organisation responsible for caring for 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales. The Trust plays a vital role in maintaining Liverpool's docks through daily operations, historic conservation, and major engineering projects. Their work supports boating communities, enhances water quality, and fosters engagement through learning opportunities.

Alongside our clients, we are thrilled to have Donald Insall Associates on board as consultants for this project. Specializing in conservation architecture, heritage consultancy, and townscape advice, they bring invaluable insight to projects that balance preservation with innovation. Their recent work on Liverpool's waterfront includes the upcoming International Slavery Museum and a regeneration scheme at the Canning quaysides. As advisors on this project, their guidance will help shape a floating space that respects the dock's rich heritage while creating new opportunities for community engagement.

Introduction

FLOAT

This MSA Live project works alongside the Canal and River trust and floating pontoon within the Salthouse Dock which has been derelict for 2 years and needs rennovation. It is down to the MSA Live group 14 team to come up with some initial designs for the floating platform to present back to the trust for further development.

Learning Outcomes

Collaborative Engagement - Demonstrate the ability to work collaboratively with an external stakeholder (Canal and River Trust) to understand client needs, community values, and site-specific challenges.

Design Development - Develop initial design proposals for the renovation of a floating pontoon, incorporating research, contextual analysis, and creative thinking.

Site Analysis and Environmental Awareness - Undertake site-specific analysis of Salthouse Dock, including environmental, historical, and social factors, to inform sensitive and sustainable design interventions.

Communication and Presentation - Effectively communicate design ideas through sketches, drawings, models, and digital media, culminating in a professional presentation to the client.

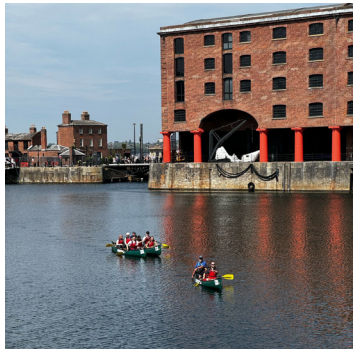
Teamwork and Project Management - Participate in structured team-based design processes, demonstrating organisation, time management, and peer collaboration throughout the project.

Introducing the Site

Over the course of this Live Project, we visited the site twice to meet the collaborators in their environment, situate the project in its historic surroundings and get out onto the water!

Februrary 17th; On our first visit, before meeting our BA team, we travelled as a group to visit the Salthouse Dock in Liverpool, the site for the new floating activity hub. In the morning, we met with the Canal & River Trust team based in Liverpool, who took us on a boat tour around the docks! It was a great opportunity to hear more about all the work they do around the docks; the life underwater that they encourage, and their ambitions for the future. We were also able to see the condition of the existing floating structure which was damaged beyond repair after a storm in early 2024.

In the afternoon, we had the chance to sit down with Donald Insall Associates alongside the Canal & River Trust, who talked us through the work they're currently involved in on the docks, such as the International Slavery Museum and the Canning dock. This was a valuable insight into how the docks are evolving and gave us important context to consider when designing the new floating activity hub.

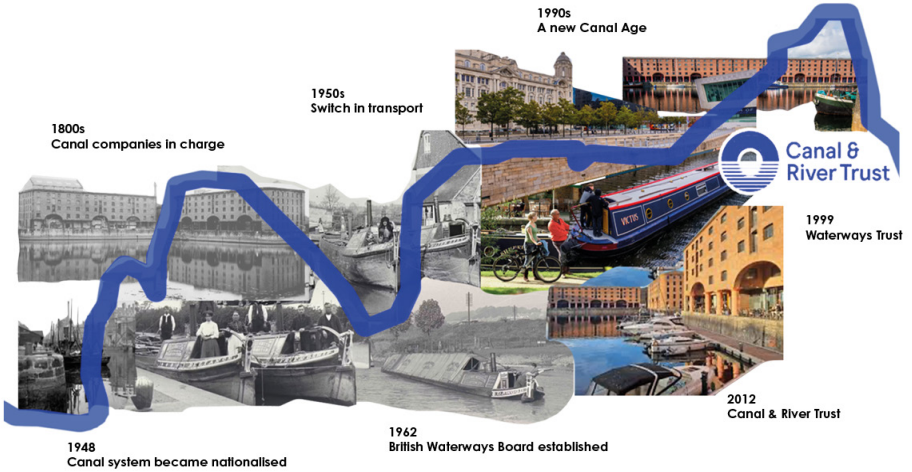


Monday 12th; We launched our two-week intensive design week with an energising site visit to the Liverpool Docks so the BA students could get an up-close look at the pontoon and . Marcus from the River and Canal Trust welcomed us in the beautiful weather with an insightful introduction to the area, outlining key features of the site and the important themes to keep in mind throughout the day.

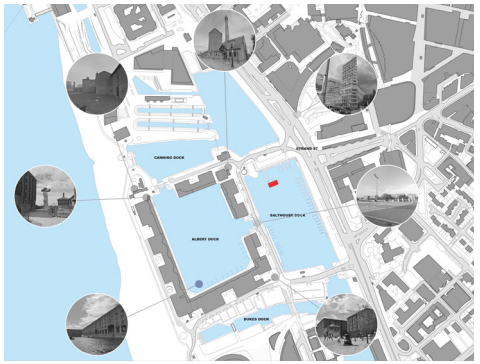
From there, we met Rob on the slipway to get us into our life jackets before hitting the water in our canoes! Approaching the pontoon from the waters gave us a completely new and immersive perspective on how the pontoon interacts with the water-side neighbourhood and marine life. Jellyfish spottings and signs of other aquatic life as we paddled across the waters sparked curiosity and excitement for the upcoming design work. The day ended with a nap on our coach ride back. All charged up for the week ahead!

Site Explorations

History - Group 1 Our history team delved into the rich heritage of the docks, unearthing stories of their significance to the city, as well as the background of our clients, The Canal & River Trust:



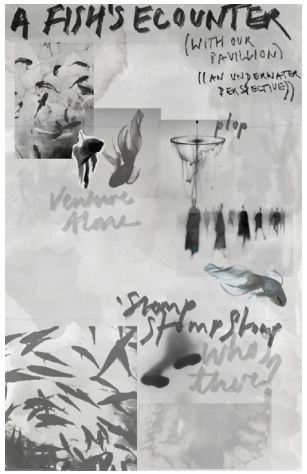
Mapping - Group 2 Our mapping team got stuck into the technical side and encouraged spontaneous peer learning. Our Master's students mentored the BA students in the tools Digimap and AutoCAD, to produce key base maps to sketch and annotate over. An example map of the key views:

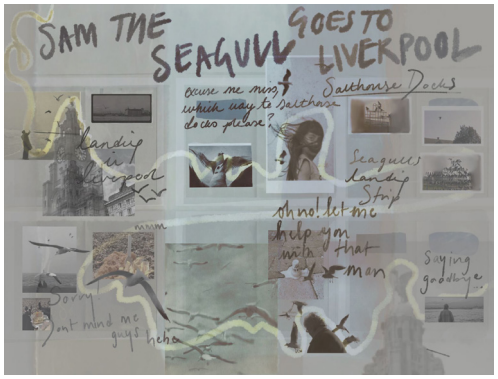


Collaging - Group 3 To reflect on our immersive site visit, we took plenty of photos on the water and the surrounding context around the pontoon. We brought these back to Manchester and collected them together to capture the atmosphere of the site through sketches, serial visions and mixed-media collages.

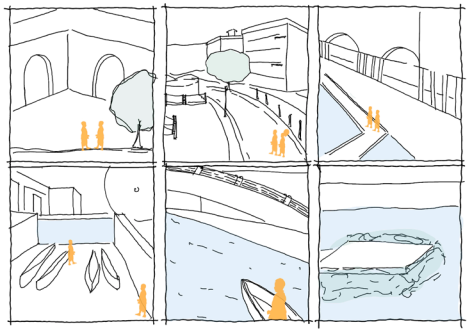
Storyboarding

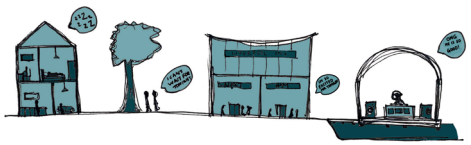
For this task, we introduced the potential key actors of the site, who these might be and the key design considerations these each pose. We showed different methods to convey this, such as through a comic book style or Sarah Wigglesworth's dining table before use, in-use and after use.

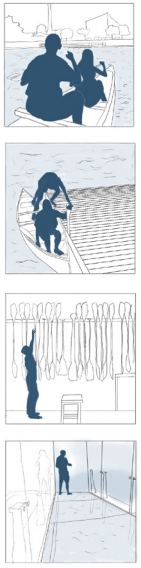




Non-human encounters! Some of our students decided to focus on the unique opportunity to engage with the nature of the site, such as the underwater life, seagulls and the wind!





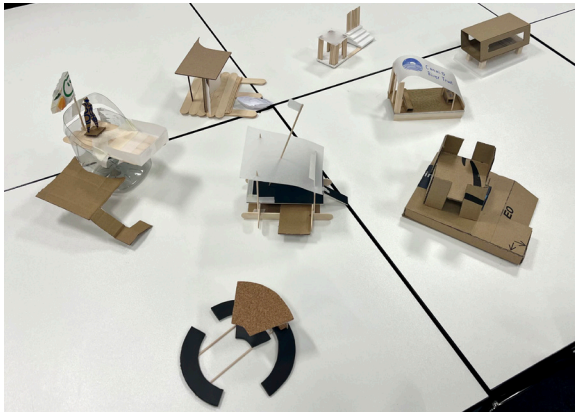


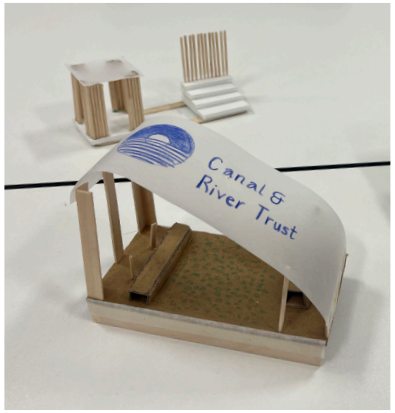
Human encounters! The rest of our students looked into the experience of various user groups from school trips, tourists and researchers. The sketch above looks at broadening their current target audience to include the large university student population in Liverpool through night time events.

Model making!

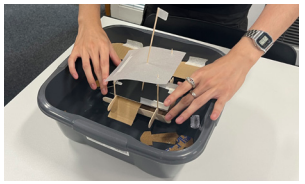
The Albert Docks, built in the 1840s by Jesse Hartley, were pioneering due to it's innovative fire-proof design and the speed and security of loading goods. Before its construction, Jesse Hartley made a model of the Albert Docks and set it on fire to illustrate its ability to be incombustible. We wanted to put our concept designs to test similarly, so we spent a day model-making a 'performance prototype' with the end goal of putting them onto the water to see what would float or sink!

Modelling with recycled materials





Final performance prototypes

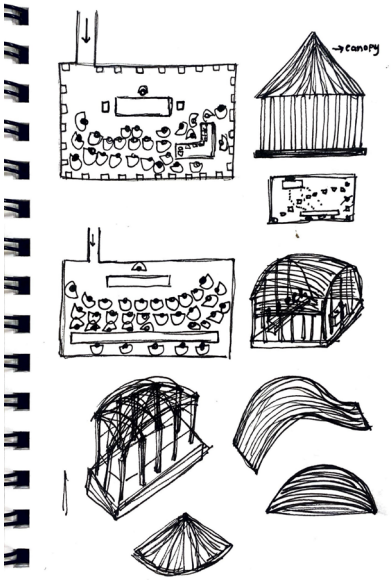


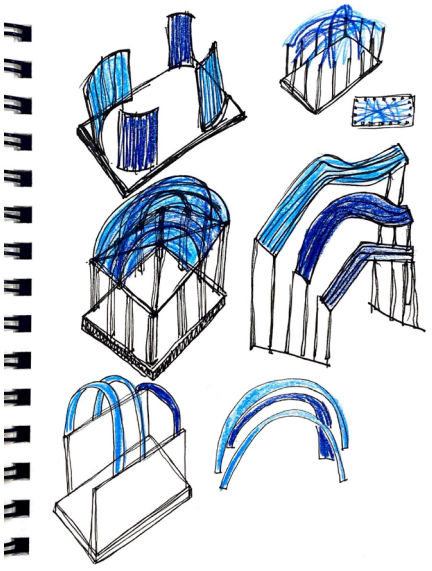
Our models got a dip in the water as we tested out their bouyancy and structural integrity. Most of them stood fast to our 20-second test, but some started to sink!

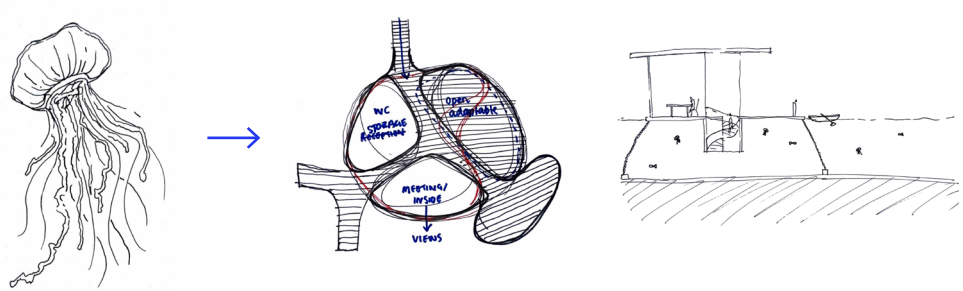
Design development

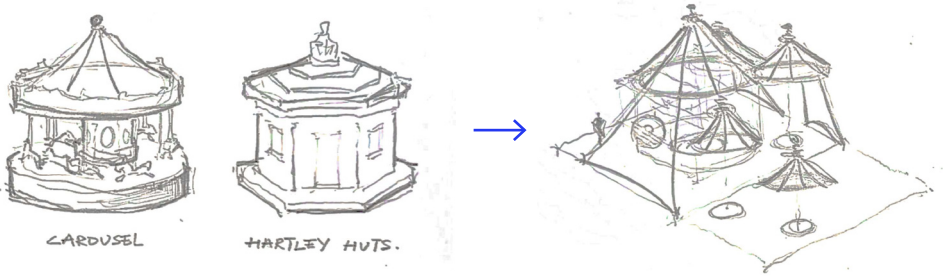
These initial conceptual design tasks in the first week (such as the group sketching pictured below) helped our students get to know the site, each other and to imagine the possibilities of this project. Following on from this we encouraged the students to start to finalise these designs first through sketch plans, elevations and sections. To help make the transition between sketch and technical designs, we held an introductory AutoCAD workshop.

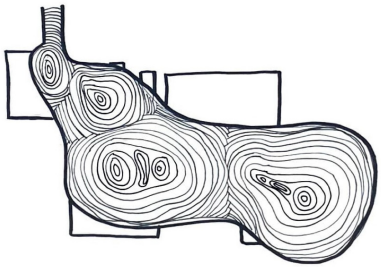
Sketch plans, elevations, sections and isometrics!

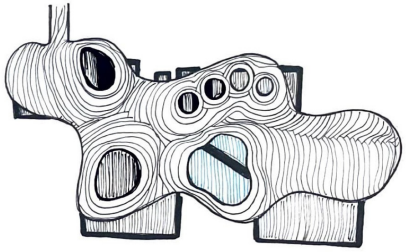


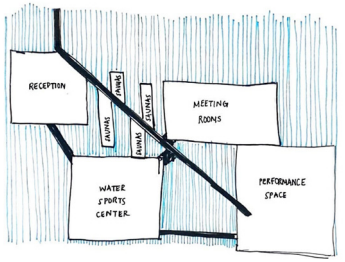


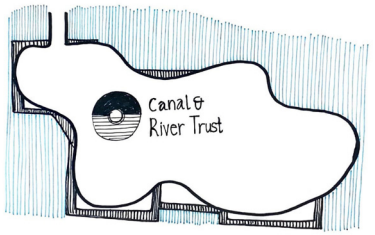


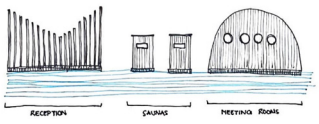


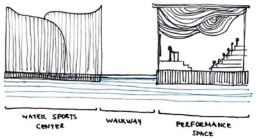








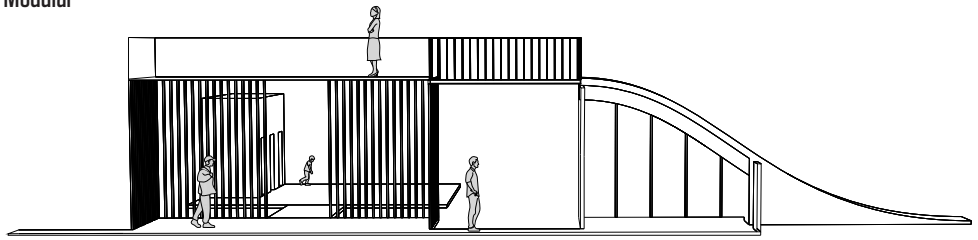


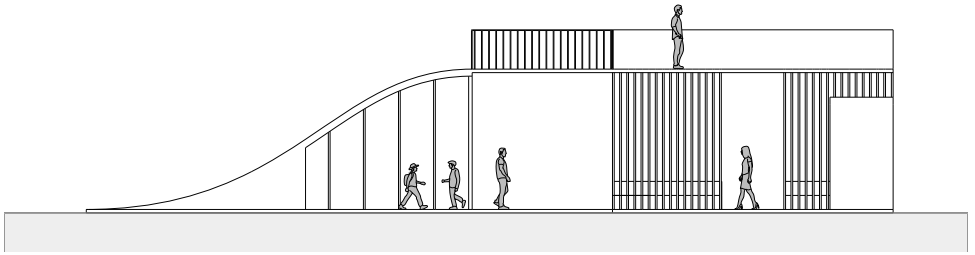


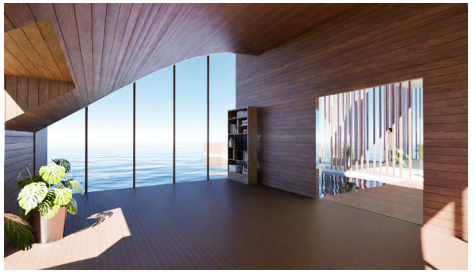
Final designs

In the second week we worked on final designs and visualisations to present to the Canal & River Trust. To help develop our proposals, we met mid-week with heritage consultants Donald Insall Associates who gave feedback and provided support to the students designs.

Modular

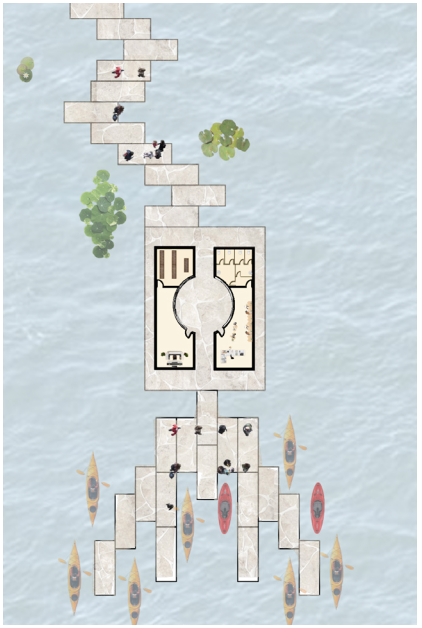




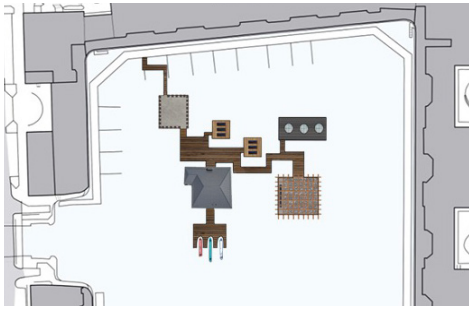


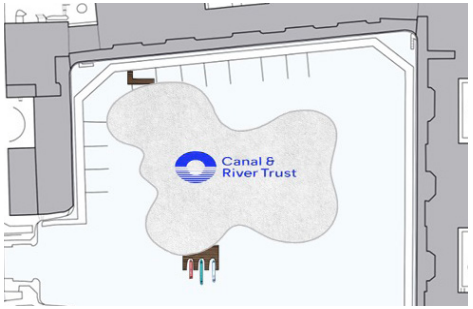
The Carousel

Stepping stones



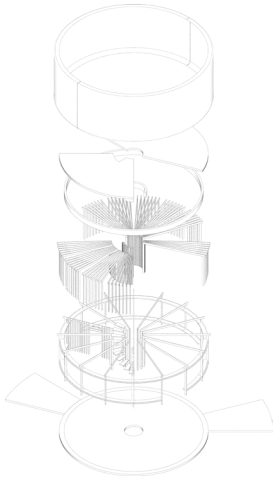
The Canopy

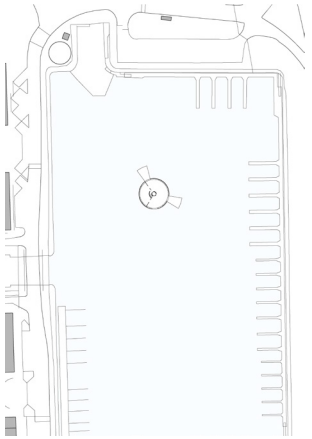


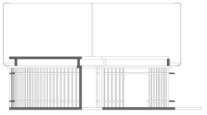


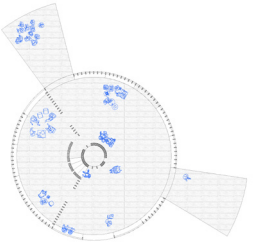
Final designs

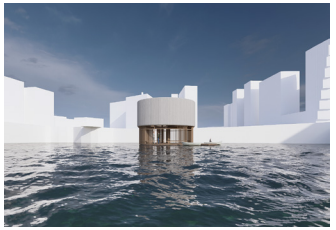
Illumination

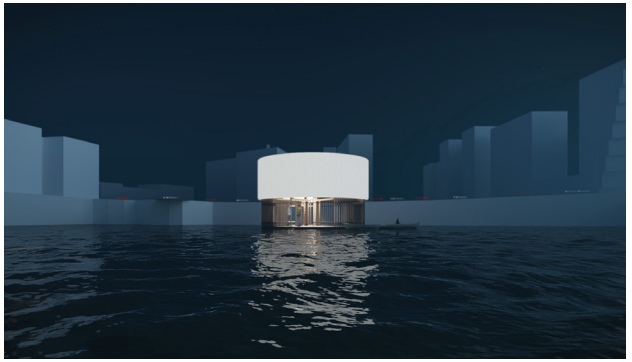


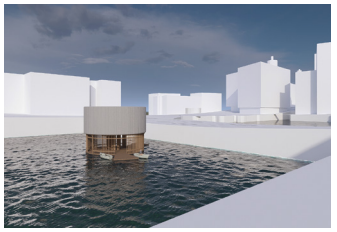




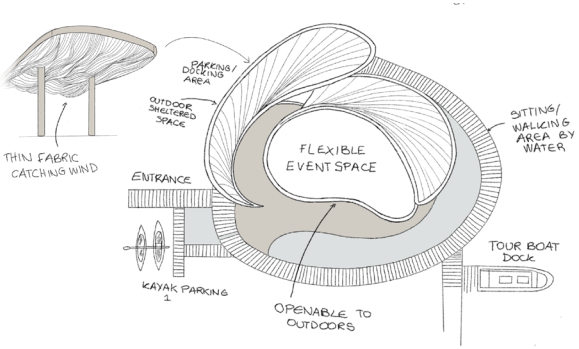




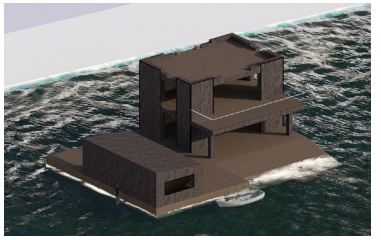




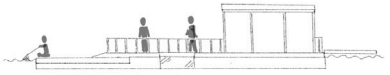
Organic

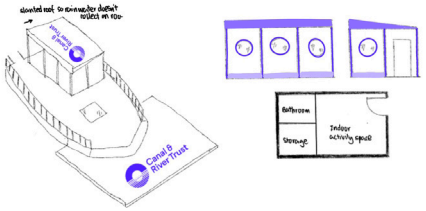


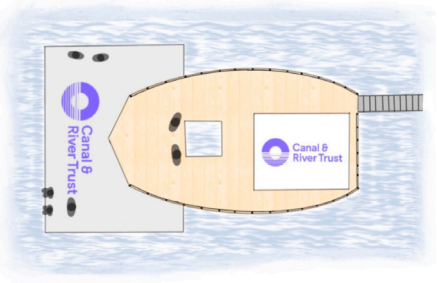
The Landing



Boat Reuse







Client presentations

On the final day we presented our final ideas to the representatives from Canal and River trust, James and Marcus. They were really pleased with the student's outputs and were surprised with how well the designs had come in the short amount of time. They praised the range of ideas produced and especially liked the idea of storyboarding the different perspectives of the different users of the pontoon.

They are going to take the range of ideas forward to achieve funding for a new floating platform within the Salthouse dock which will house a range of activities for many different types of users. The students brought a different perspective that both James and Marcus were unaware of which was that University students in Liverpool aren't familiar with the Canal and River trust. They proposed some ideas where they could expand their user focus towards students through providing space to study or even have a DJ / performance platform. It was also important to give the pontoon a representation at night-time, a couple groups did this simply through illumination. To expand on the users the Trust already

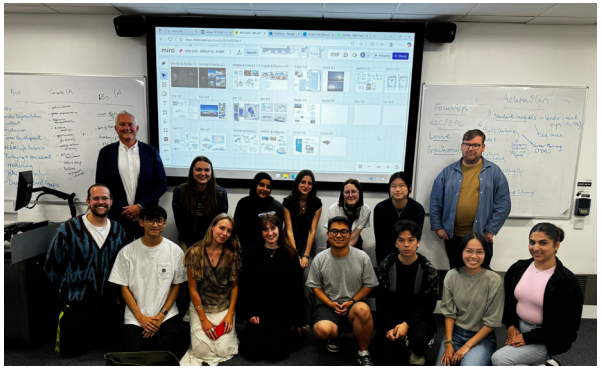
Reflections

The final designs explore a range of different ideas showcasing themes; adaptability, modulation, flexibility, representation, organic and adaptive reuse. They explore the threshold of public and private allowing for secure and exposed spaces. The Canal and River trust pushed the idea of getting the public close to interact with the water which is the focus of many of the final designs produced, this has been done through ramps, viewing platforms and cutouts.

We have pushed the students this week to communicate their ideas through renders or collaging. A range of styles have been displayed which were all well received in the final presentation to the clients. This week was a great opportunity for peer-learning, creativity and teamwork. The students should be proud of the work they have produced throughout the two weeks.

Well done team! Thank you to the Canal and River trust for coming to see our presentations and we hope you might use some of our ideas to gain funding and develop an adaptable and inclusive floating pontoon.

First day of MSA Live - Liverpool Site Visit



Last day of MSA Live - Client presentations

ABOUT

Each year the MSA LIVE programme unites Masters Architecture year 1 and Masters of Architecture & Adaptive Resuse students with those in BA year 1 and year 2 and Masters Landscape Architecture 1 in mixed-year teams to undertake live projects with external partners to create social impact.

LIVE PROJECTS

All MSA LIVE projects are live. A live project is where an educational organisation and an external partner develop a brief, timescale, and outcome for their mutual benefit.

SOCIAL IMPACT

All MSA LIVE projects are for community benefit or have social impact. Social impact is the effect an organization's actions have on the well-being of a community. Our agendas are set by our external collaborators.

EXTERNAL PARTNERS

MSA LIVE projects work with many organisations: charities, community groups, social enterprises, community interest companies, researchers, practitioners and educators.

STUDENT-LED

Our MSA masters students take the lead in the project conception, brief development, delivery and co-ordination of a small project. Other cohorts joined for an eventful 2 weeks of activities at the end of the academic year.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Working in teams within and across year groups and courses; MSA students participate in peer to peer learning. In addition, collaborators, participants and students engage in the transfer of tangible and intellectual property, expertise, learning and skills.

LARGE SCALE

This year approximately 650 students from 5 cohorts in MSA have worked on 40 projects with partners.

QUESTIONS

For questions about MSA LIVE please contact the MSA LIVE team:
msalive@mmu.ac.uk

BLOG

live.msa.ac.uk/2025

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