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## Letter of Recommendation

### Artist Tim Thornton – Developing Your Creative Practice

My name is John McDonald. I met and worked with Tim Thornton in my role as Andover Town Artist, commissioned for Unlimited CAS: AIR Themes of Life project, At Chapel Arts Studios, Hampshire.

Tim was one of many participants who engaged with the project and I had no knowledge of his background or practice prior to first workshop. In an extremely varied group, he presented himself in an unassuming and humble way, yet became key to the project.

Tim Thornton approached the research phase with a combination of scientific rigour and humanitarian depth, and showed relentless drive in bringing his concept into physical form. He faced innumerable technical, material, and practical hurdles, due both to the ambitious nature of his response to Themes of Life, and to the national Coronavirus Lockdown. Tim proved himself indomitable in determination, and showed both ingenuity and flexibility in the way he was able to adapt, and re-adapt, his plans for firing and fabrication.

Tim faced a particular challenge, as an artist working in ceramics, in the context of my own plans as the Artist in Residence: I am a painter, and my vision for the group show, with Artists I would 'find' in Andover, was of a floor-to-ceiling painting comprised of canvases from 7ft square to just 12inches, which we would construct as part of the project. Tim worked with me, with the group, and with the chapel building itself to create two sculptural installation pieces, which, both materially and conceptually, mirrored the process of the group.

*Knights of the Skies*, Tim's poignant and educational kinetic hands-on sculpture, is also a replica object, a section of plane fuselage constructed, just like the paintings, of wood frame and canvas. The work was also site-specific: created to hang under the Chapel's spiral staircase, a literal way to the sky, and, as a former non-conformist Chapel of Rest, also alluding to the fate of so many of the pilots. It is both complex and minimal. Tim does not need to dramatise his research, his work is hard-hitting enough by presenting both sides.

The second piece of work, Tim's *Royal Flying Corps Memorial*, when the artist delivered his work to the Chapel, seeing this was one of the highlights of the project for me as lead artist. It was outstanding, beautiful, and extremely affecting when brought into its Chapel context. For me it has something of the elemental gravitas of the work of Anselm Kiefer. Again the work mirrored and spoke to the exhibition as a whole, with its raw 'screaming pilot' portrait showing an alternative narrative from the more formal memorial inscription. This is a huge piece of clay, finely fabricated, that seems to defy gravity. The seams, which were the artist's creative solution to unavailability of large-kiln space in Lockdown, call to mind the welding and riveting of plane sections.

I would absolutely recommend Tim Thornton as a suitable recipient for a Developing Your Creative Practice grant. Working with Tim, and talking about both our lives and careers, I felt I was in the presence of someone whose 'artistic quest' was as urgent and essential to him as mine is to me. On

a personal level, I developed a huge respect for Tim. He is a rare example of an artist whose passion, creativity and concept, is equally matched by exceptional skills in organisation, documentation, scholarly research and high technical ability. I believe, with the support of Arts Council England, that Tim Thornton will surprise, delight, and move us: and I believe we will see true innovation in his use of ceramics as a contemporary fine art medium.

Tim was a good man to have by my side and in my team, committing a huge amount of voluntary time to the CAS: AIR residency. He prioritised not only his own practice within the project, but also the wellbeing of others, mentoring and supervising young adult participants, and providing hours of practical support under pressure, to help me finishing and installing *The People's Chapel* Exhibition.

Yours Sincerely,

John McDonald

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