

Future Fossil



Press Release

Future Fossil

Artists Something & Son fossilise a suburban home in Milton Keynes for new public sculpture Future Fossil

Launching late spring 2021, artists Something & Son and Milton Keynes Council unveil the latest addition to the town's public art collection and most ambitious project to date, a permanent commission in Oxley Park, Milton Keynes called *Future Fossil*. The sculpture takes the form of a local, suburban home which has fossilised through the passage of time, decaying from the inside out, leaving behind an imprint of the Anthropocene era. Standing at 8 metres – a life-size replica of a typical home – the work prompts questions, discussion and activities, inviting us to reimagine our coexistence with nature in a time of human dominance and crucially asking, in 10,000 years what will be left behind?

In keeping with Something & Son's past projects and in contrast to the traditionally static public sculpture, *Future Fossil* is active and evolving, both in the materials it is made from and in its collaboration with people. The sculpture takes the form of recycled plastics merged with eco-concrete – the materials of our age – embedded with seeds which will grow over time. The work will slowly take its form both in its adoption by nature and its use by visitors within and outside of the community, being both a stage for people to use and a space for a new ecological environment to grow.

It is activated through an ongoing public programme of local, in-person events and activities running concurrently with a series of digital events. Following a pre-opening and opening programme running from January to summer 2021, the sculpture will be handed to the local community with a *Friends of the Fossil* group developing the future programme.

Andy Merritt of the artist duo Something & Son said, *'We often play around with everyday experiences and provide people with a platform in our work. For Future Fossil we've taken the idea of our work providing a platform quite literally – the sculpture is a stage for people to use whilst also providing space for a new ecology to grow. Most of our works have a door so we can open and shut the project – Future Fossil will be completely open for people to use and, like many of our other projects, it's crucial for the local community to have ownership. We wanted the sculpture to start to bring people and nature closer together in a simple way: to build a house for all.'*

Fiona Boundy, public art commissioner for Milton Keynes Council Culture, said, *'We are so pleased to launch the latest addition to MK's well-known and loved public art collection which is symbolic of the city. This latest sculpture, Future Fossil, not only builds on but challenges the conventional idea of a static sculpture, producing an artwork which brings communities together and asks crucial questions in a time when communities have been separated most.'*

The *Future Fossil* sculpture is constructed from environmentally conscious concrete in a negative casting process fabricated off-site to reduce impact on the local area, running to a conscious build schedule taking into account impact on local nature, such as the newt season and ties in with MK's aim of becoming the world's greenest and most sustainable city, and the first carbon negative city by 2050.

The *Future Fossil* engagement programme is designed to explore ways to use the space through projects which will take place before, during and after installation, aimed at building strong foundations for an ongoing connection with *Future Fossil* and surrounding communities, so that it becomes an everyday place to relax, play and a place for seasonal special events.

The programme begins with a virtual discussion series, the *Future Fossil Spring Talks Series* (late January to late April 2021), inviting a global audience to join artists, academics, researchers, activists, architectural theorists, writers and ecologists in exploring the ideas and themes of the project. Speakers include Caroline Till, Jan Zalasiewicz, Mama D Ujuaje, David Farrier and Dorothea Von Hantelmann and the talks are free and open to all.

Locally, *Future Producers* launches in February 2021, inviting people aged 16–25 to submit a proposal for a one-day event to take place at the site of the new public artwork in early autumn 2021. The event will be the culmination of a summer training programme of production mentoring and development with artists and producers. Other activities happening in spring and early summer 2021 include *Walks and Talks*, open conversations about the artwork whilst exploring the built and green environment of Oxley Park; *Time Capsules*, community interventions in the construction of *Future Fossil* and *Participatory Projects* with schools and the community. More events and projects will be announced in spring 2021.

Further information about the *Future Fossil* programme can be found below in the Editors' notes.

The *Future Fossil* website acts as an accessible resource and portal for learning more about the project and the urgent ideas which have influenced it, with downloadable Art Packs to engage audiences of all ages, and full event and activity listings for how to get involved.

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Editors' notes



About Something & Son

Something & Son (Andy Merritt and Paul Smyth) explore social and environmental issues via everyday scenarios. Their projects often seek to re-imagine the systems required to sustain communities and ecologies existence by building platforms for them to live, through permanent installations, functional sculptures and public performance. Projects are usually long term and involve the creation of systems of support that enables the project to self-sustain.

Something & Son have exhibited at Tate Britain; Tate Modern; V&A Museum; Manchester International Festival; Gwangju Biennale, South Korea; Artangel; Milan Design Week, Italy; Cultural Olympia; Somerset House Trust; Folkestone Art Triennial, UK; Artcatalyst; Design Museum, London; Vienna Biennale, Austria; Kinsale Arts Festival, Ireland; Arts Council Wales; Royal Botanical Gardens Kew; the Wellcome Collection, UK and Istanbul Design Biennial, Turkey. Alongside *Future Fossil*, upcoming projects include a major new permanent sculpture in the River Thames, a series of sculptures across Liverpool and a food based project supported by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

About Future Fossil

Future Fossil is commissioned by Milton Keynes Council and funded through s106 developer contributions for public art. The commissioning process has been supported by the Future Fossil Steering Group comprising of Shenley Church End Parish Council, The Parks Trust, Oxley Park Academy, Westbury Arts Centre and Community Action Milton Keynes.

The *Future Fossil* programme of events and activities is realised in collaboration with MK Gallery, MK Lit Fest, MK College, The Pilgrim's Trail, the Arts and Heritage Alliance – Milton Keynes, MK Futures 2050 and Westbury Arts Centre.

Events and Activities

Future Fossil Spring Talks Programme
Late January to Late April 2021
Live online, free, open to all



1

Time & Transformation

What happens to materials over time?

Thursday 28 January, 7.30–8.45pm

Caroline Till hosts a conversation with Jan Zalasiewicz, Andy Merritt and Mama D Ujuaje exploring our understanding of permanence and transience and learning about and through the materials of *Future Fossil*. The Talk asks how materials are transformed by time, investigates what the materials of the future might look and feel like and ultimately thinks about how we might develop new ways of relating to the physical world in the future based on the activities of earlier human cultures.

Free tickets to join the Talk can be booked here. To be notified when ticket links become available for subsequent talks please visit futurefossil.online or follow the Future Fossil social channels.



2

Artificial Traditions

What happens when art is placed in the landscape?

Thursday 25 February, 7.30–8.45pm

Author and Professor David Farrier hosts a conversation with artist Andy Merritt (one half of Something & Son who realised *Future Fossil*), art historian and curator Dorothea Von Hantelmann, and others, exploring the relationship between the tangible and intangible aspects of *Future Fossil*.

In Spring 2021, *Future Fossil* – a fossilised house 10,000 years from the future, made from the ubiquitous materials of the 21st century – will surface in the suburban landscape of Oxley Park in Milton Keynes. However, the physical manifestation of the sculpture is only one element of Something and Son's work. The occupation and activation of *Future Fossil* plays out the artists' intention for the artwork to be remade every time a child plays inside, a family gathers, a bird perches, or a seed grows in the concrete crevices. This Talk thinks about the artwork as a platform for the tangible and intangible and asks what legacy it leave behind.



3

Collaboration and the Art of Working across Disciplines
Thursday 25 March, 7.30–8.45pm

Artist Paul Smyth (one half of artist duo Something & Son, who realised *Future Fossil*) hosts a conversation with some of Something & Son's current and previous collaborators.

The Talk explores what happens when you encounter people from different disciplines, the development of Something & Son's approach to creating artworks and installations and their unique 'open platform' approach, collaboration with non-human species, and what community participation means in the context of their work.



4

Public Art in a Post-Growth World
How do artists, programmers and commissioners create work that is politically, environmentally and socially sustainable?
Thursday 22 April, 7.30–8.45pm

Public art commissioner Fiona Boundy, who realised *Future Fossil* in Milton Keynes, hosts a conversation with artist Taz Bashir and others exploring how the commissioning of art works within the public realm can support civic placemaking ambitions, creating meaningful interventions, which help to shape the cities of the future. The Talk takes Milton Keynes as a starting point specifically exploring how the new town's public art collection has helped create a distinct sense of place, whilst also reflecting various and changing approaches to commissioning. Looking further afield, the discussion will also introduce international examples of public artworks, which have captured and reflected a political or social zeitgeist, delivering lasting change within an urban context.

We hope the 2021 programme can run fully and as scheduled, but some changes may be necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.