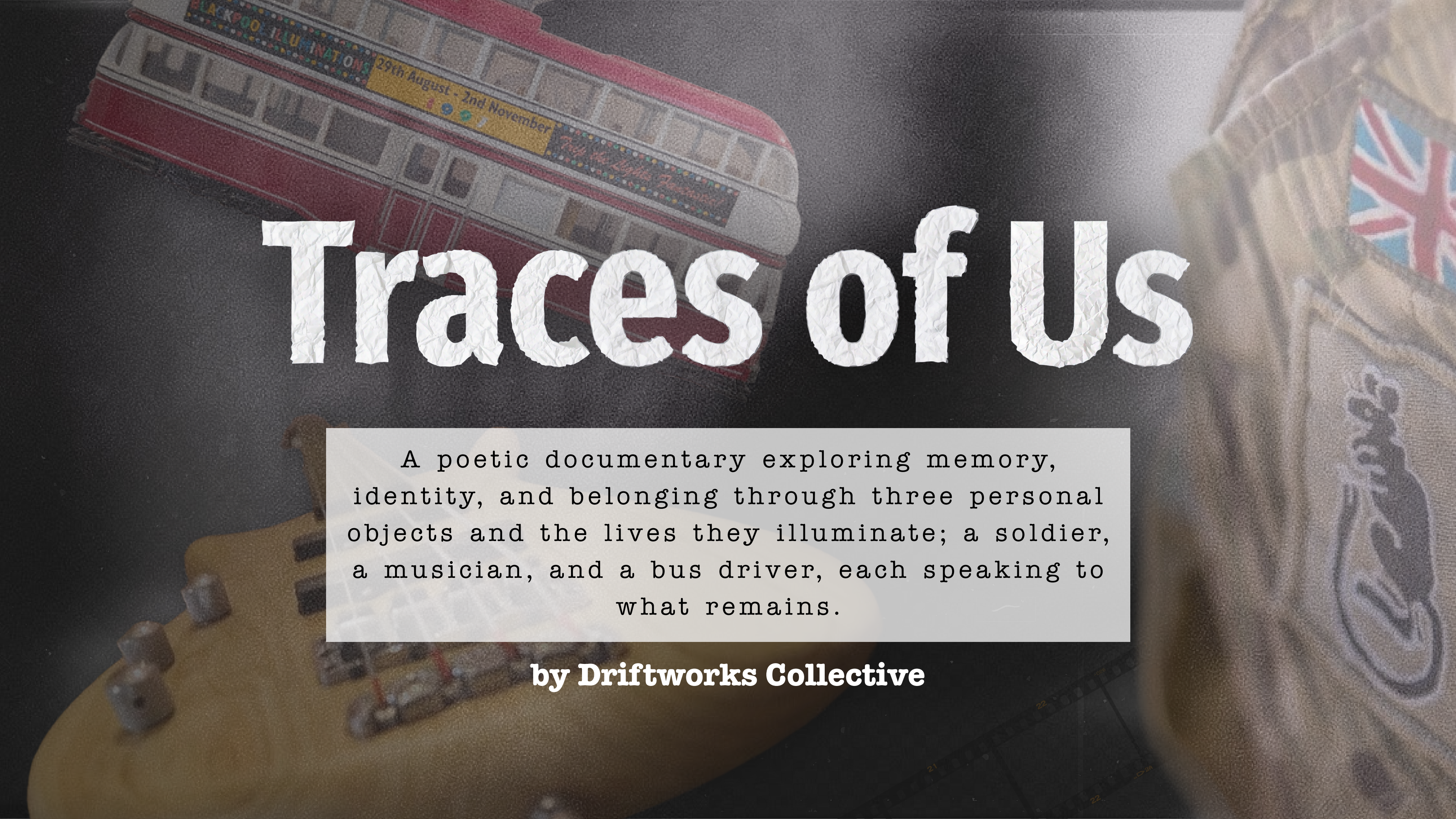


The background is a dark, textured collage of personal objects. In the top left, a red double-decker bus is visible with a yellow banner that reads "BLACKPOOL ILLUMINATIONS 29th August - 2nd November". In the bottom left, a yellow electric guitar is partially visible. In the bottom right, a film strip with numbers 21, 22, and 23 is visible. On the right side, a Union Jack flag is partially visible. The title "Traces of Us" is written in a large, white, crumpled paper font across the center.

Traces of Us

A poetic documentary exploring memory, identity, and belonging through three personal objects and the lives they illuminate; a soldier, a musician, and a bus driver, each speaking to what remains.

by Driftworks Collective

Traces of Us - Project Overview



A collaborative short documentary exploring memory, identity, and the quiet persistence of past selves. Through the reflections of a veteran, a former musician, and a tram driver, the film traces how personal histories shape the present, each story anchored by a single object that remains in colour within a desaturated world.

Shot in colour and treated with black-and-white LUTs, the film uses selective colour to highlight memory and motif. Ambient sound and minimal music guide emotional tone, while contributors speak in quiet monologue, responding to unseen prompts. The final minute shifts into VHS-style archive footage, offering a collective reflection on presence, change, and belonging.

Traces of Us is not about loss, but about what lingers, a gentle meditation on identity, camaraderie, and the traces we carry forward.

Traces of Us - Press & Marketing

Poster Design

Traces of Us

Memory lives in the things we keep.



A Driftworks Collective Film

Directed by Emma Smith, Simon Wachlin & Chris Kirk

Featuring 'Mike Jaimes', 'Chris Cottage' & 'Matthew Talboys'

UK · 2025

Traces of Us - Director's Statement

Traces of Us is a collaborative poetic documentary that listens for memory in the quiet presence of the objects people keep. Created by three directors working in dialogue, the film unfolds through intimate portraits, each shaped by trust, stillness, and observation. Our contributors; a veteran, a musician, and a tram driver, reflect on personal objects that connect them to former selves. These objects become emotional anchors, guiding how identity endures even as life moves forward.

Visually, the film is presented in black and white, with each environment desaturated to unify tone and focus attention on gesture and sound. The personal object in each segment remains in colour; a vivid thread in a softened world. This choice honours the emotional weight of the tangible and evokes the way memory clings to detail.

The film is shaped by tone rather than narrative. Ambient sound; marching boots, guitar twangs, distant traffic forms a shared language of remembrance. Contributors speak through the camera, not to it, their voices drifting like thought.

In the final minute, VHS-style archive footage from our own lives blurs the boundary between filmmaker and subject, offering a gesture of connection and shared authorship.

Traces of Us is a reflection on how people carry their pasts. It's also an invitation to recognise our own traces within the lives of others.

Traces of Us - Technical Information

Detail	Specification
Title	Traces of Us
Runtime	
Year of Production	2025
Country of Origin	United Kingdom
Language	English
Format	
Aspect Ratio	16:9 (1920x1080)
Frame Rate	25fps
Sound	Sterew (minimal music, ambient sound)
Colour Treatment	Shot in colour, graded B&W with selective colour accents



Emma Smith

Emma is a seasoned producer and editor with a long-standing career in television production. Her experience spans international projects, including serving as Executive Producer on The Ocean Race – The China Plan, overseeing 17 half-hour episodes with a remote crew in Beijing. Emma brings a sharp editorial eye, strong audio sensibility, and deep organisational expertise to every project she undertakes.

Her passion lies in documentary filmmaking, guiding viewers through personal journeys and allowing them to see the world through others' eyes. She's fascinated by the genre's versatility, often exploring multiple interpretations of the same story across platforms. Her current obsession is with eight-thousander climbing documentaries, particularly the 1975 Oscar-winning The Man Who Skied Down Everest, which she admires for its cinematic precision and emotional depth.

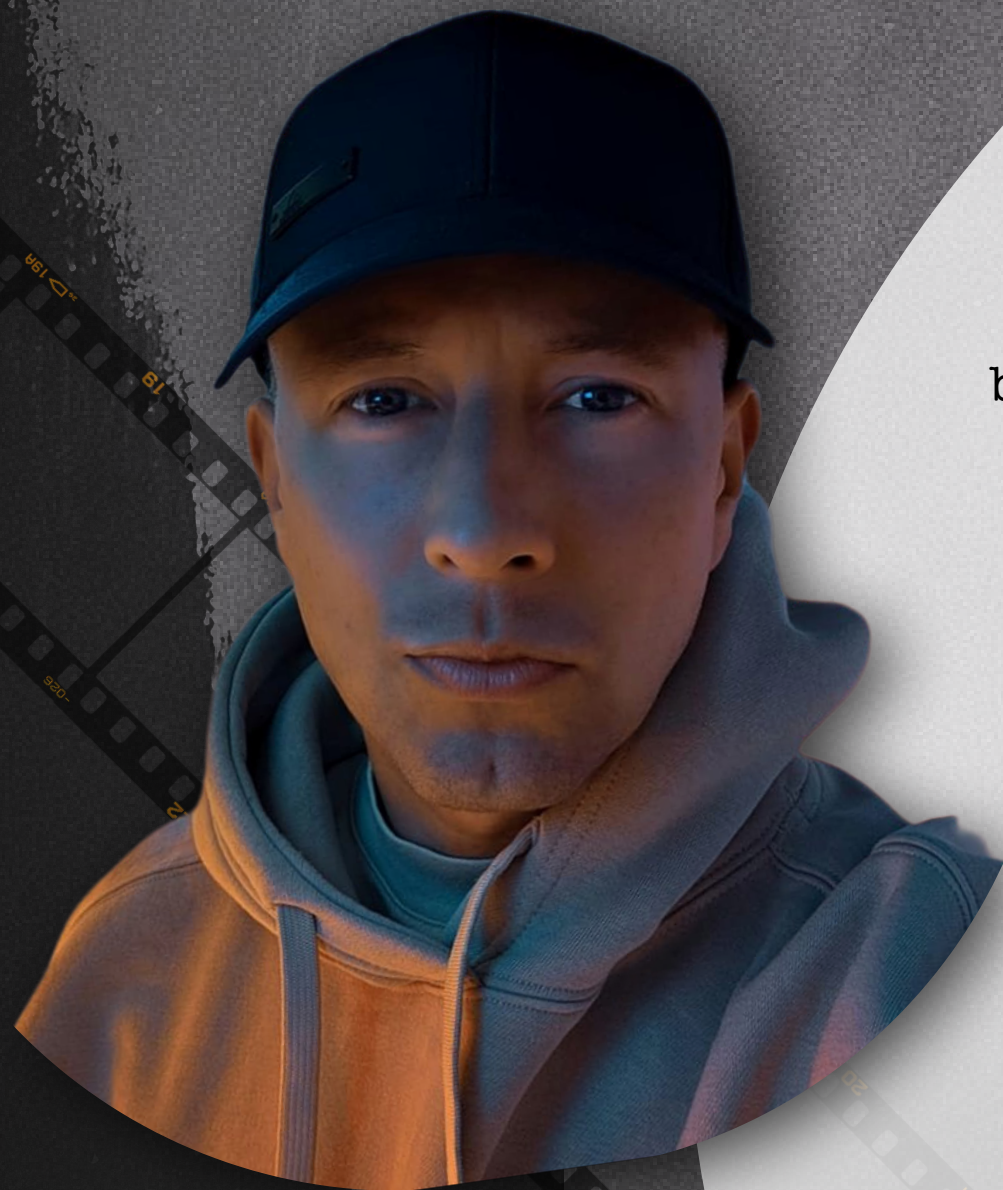
For Traces of Us, Emma directed the portrait of a session musician, crafting a segment that explores rhythm, memory, and the emotional residue of connection. As Organisation & Platform Lead, she also managed scheduling, ensuring the film's delivery was smooth and cohesive. Emma sees this project as a chance to reinvigorate her creative practice and expand her storytelling horizons.

Chris Kirk

Chris is a filmmaker whose practice blends documentary, memory, and imagination. With a background in editing and sound design, his work explores forgotten landscapes and lost structures, often revealing the quiet places where nature reclaims what once was. Drawing on influences from media archaeology and memory studies, Chris uses editing as a tool to reanimate the past, shaping rhythm, absence, and presence into emotionally resonant storytelling.

For *Traces of Us*, Chris directed the portrait of a former bus driver, capturing the emotional residue of everyday camaraderie and the longing for connection. His segment evokes nostalgia through ambient sound, archival echoes, and contemplative pacing. As Post-Production Lead, Chris also oversaw editing, sound design, colour matching, and technical delivery, ensuring the film's emotional rhythm and visual cohesion. His approach is grounded in human-centred storytelling, where contributors speak directly to memory, giving voice to histories that might otherwise fade.





Simon Wachlin

Simon is a filmmaker and visual storyteller with a background in fashion, styling, and buying. His early career in the fashion industry shaped a strong eye for texture, mood, and composition, qualities that now inform his approach to filmmaking. Simon's work spans poetic documentary, experimental film, and travel-based content, often blending atmospheric visuals with emotional depth.

He works primarily with image-led media including drone cinematography, natural light, and intuitive editing. His films explore themes of memory, presence, and place, using rhythm and tone to evoke feeling rather than follow traditional narrative structure. For *Traces of Us*, Simon directed the portrait of a former soldier, focusing on the quiet weight of camaraderie and identity. As Pre-Production Lead, he also oversaw submission strategy, EPK design, and visual cohesion, shaping the film's aesthetic and emotional tone from the outset.

Simon values collaboration, emotional honesty, and a sense of calm in his work, aiming to build a distinctive visual language that bridges disciplines and invites reflection.

“The Former Bus Driver – Mike Jaimes”

Mike Jaimes is a man defined by motion, by the sound of engines, the screech of wheels on rails, and the quiet companionship of long shifts spent guiding passengers safely from one stop to the next. Once a bus driver, then realising a lifelong dream of becoming a tram driver, Mike lived for the work. It wasn't just a job; it was an identity, a vocation, and in many ways a love affair with movement itself. In *Tracing the Rails*, his enthusiasm for transport and history shaped his presence on screen as both a storyteller and an explorer, the co-presenter whose humour and warmth grounded the documentary's sense of journey.

But in *Traces of Us*, we meet a different Mike, the real person. Now an IT technician, efficient, capable, but disconnected, he sits surrounded by screens instead of windows, and bytes have replaced the smell of diesel. The object he shares with us is a small piece of transport memorabilia: a relic from the life he left behind. It's a physical link to a world where he once felt entirely himself but had to give up for the sake of marriage, mortgage and bills.

What makes Mike compelling is that he doesn't carry bitterness. He's on the cusp of marriage and home ownership, building a life of stability and companionship. There's contentment there, a sense that he knows life moves on, yet beneath that calm surface lies a quiet, nagging nostalgia, a longing for the feeling of purpose and camaraderie that driving once gave him.

In tone and texture, Mike's story is a brief study of the tension between progress and preservation, motion and stillness, belonging and loss. His sequence will be filmed with gentle light and reflective pacing, a man comfortable in his present but forever shaped by and nostalgic for the roads and rails that once defined him.

“The Musician – Chris Cottage”

As the youngest boy to a docker and with 14 siblings growing up in the East End of London Chris's life was about escape. He found that in music. Over the decades he crafted his skill, determined to be better than his compatriots and create a niche for himself. This he did and was a much sought after session musician for his skills on the bass guitar.

He was always in a band with the same members but in different band guises over the years with some dropping out and re-joining as time passed by.

This is a man who went along with the scene of the 70s, 80s and 90s and took so many mind-altering drugs that he forgot that his band toured West Germany. He now has memory sparks of things long forgotten, when he; played on a track or two with Hawkwind, created the music for Black Tower wine commercials, wrote and sold a song to Alice Cooper, and played the bass for Wet, Wet, Wet studio tracks - unknown to their bassist, and without meeting them.

This eventually led to buying his own studio in Hertfordshire where he and his bandmates spent their time. But it was a struggle, and he eventually lost the studio, this triggered a falling out with his band member who he thought had let him down. it was this time he all but rejected music and dove deeper into addiction.

Now in his 60s he's working as a forklift driver and mill operator for a building supplier and picks up one of his 19 guitars occasionally. They're all sound different and they've all got stories. He's built a life but the thing missing is the camaraderie of his band. Now that time moves on and the members begin to pass it is becoming clearer that this lost part of his life is unlikely to be relived.

“The Former Soldier – Matthew Talboys”

In his early 40s now, he once served as a Corporal with the 207 Signals Squadron, the headquarters of the 7th Armoured Brigade, the famed Desert Rats. He spent years moving from base to base, living within a close-knit unit bound by trust, discipline, and shared danger. The military gave him a sense of belonging that civilian life rarely offers: comrades who became family, a clear purpose, and a daily rhythm that never faltered.

Today, he works as an operations manager for a highways contract. The environment is ordered but sterile, with a tidy desk, stacked paperwork, and the quiet hum of screens. His day unfolds with mechanical precision, emails, scheduled meetings, calls, and long stretches of silence. He is respected and even liked. But the laughter and chaos of the mess hall have been replaced by polite small talk and solitary lunches. He moves through the office methodically, a man maintaining structure because structure is the one thing that still makes sense.

Discipline and leadership remain his anchors. He still rises early, keeps routines, and expects the same steadiness from those he leads. Yet nostalgia lingers. He misses the shared language of service life, the shorthand between men who knew each other's limits and fears. Pride in his time in Iraq is tempered by guilt: for leaving before Afghanistan, for stepping away while others continued. As a reservist, he carries a quiet readiness and a need to prove he could still serve if asked.

Beneath his composure is a search for meaning. The office provides order but not purpose. The soldier within him has not disappeared. He has simply been repurposed, fighting a quieter battle for identity and belonging.

He stands as a portrait of life after duty. A man, disciplined by the past, loyal to its memory, and learning how to exist in a world that no longer marches to his rhythm.

Traces of Us - Contributor Release

All contributors to Traces of Us have signed release forms granting permission for their image, voice, and story to be used across festival screenings, online platforms, and promotional materials. The film was created collaboratively, with contributors fully informed of its purpose and invited to speak in their own words without scripted dialogue. Interviews were conducted in safe, comfortable environments, with wellbeing prioritised and the option to pause or withdraw at any stage. All audio and visuals are original, with archival material drawn from the filmmakers' own lives to ensure authenticity. The project follows ethical guidelines for documentary practice, respecting dignity, agency, and emotional truth throughout.

Traces of Us

by Driftworks Collective

Opening

Sound The soft clink of metal. The twang of a bass guitar. The distant murmur of traffic. A quiet breath. A room settling into silence.

Visuals Extreme close-ups of textured surfaces. A worn military sleeve. The curve of a fretboard. The painted detail of a model tram. Light flickers across each object as if waking memory. The frame lingers on hands — holding, tuning, placing. Each contributor sits in stillness, surrounded by quiet.

Light, Colour, and Texture The film opens in black and white, shaped by custom LUTs. Each contributor's environment is rendered in muted tones drawn from memory. Natural light drifts through the frame, shifting with the rhythm of thought. Dust floats in the air. Light bends gently across surfaces. Only the personal object remains in colour — a vivid thread in a softened landscape.

Introductions

Each contributor is introduced through gesture, not exposition. A drawer opens. A guitar is tuned. A model tram is placed gently on a table. The camera observes without intrusion.

Ambient sounds build: the creak of a chair, the rustle of fabric, the faint hum of the outside world. The objects begin to speak through texture and rhythm.

Voices emerge in response to unseen questions. Contributors speak as though caught in reflection — recalling, not explaining. Their words drift between memory and the present, revealing fragments of who they once were and who they've become.

Light, Colour, and Texture Light is gentle and searching. The black and white palette is shaped by the spaces each person inhabits. Colour appears only in the object, anchoring emotion and memory. Each frame feels lived in, still, and quietly resonant.

Traces of Us - Treatment

Middle

The film moves fluidly between contributors, guided by emotion rather than narrative. Their voices echo and overlap, forming a quiet dialogue that transcends time and place.

Archival textures surface: a faded photograph, a flicker of home video, a page from an old notebook. These fragments are not explained — they appear like memory surfacing unbidden.

Ambient sounds deepen. The twang of strings. The clink of medals. The low rhythm of engines. These sounds weave together, forming a gentle sonic undercurrent that carries the film forward.

Light, Colour, and Texture Light becomes more present, revealing texture and detail. The palette deepens emotionally, growing richer and more layered. Past and present merge in tone. The visual language becomes one of continuity rather than contrast.

Middle to End

The rhythm of the film becomes its structure. Stories unfold in fragments, shaped by emotion and silence. Contributors speak reflectively, their pauses carrying as much meaning as their words.

Long takes allow the audience to sit within each moment and feel time stretch. The connection between object, memory, and identity grows stronger, revealing how each life holds its own quiet pulse.

In the final minute, the film shifts into VHS-style archive footage drawn from the filmmakers' personal lives. These fragments — grainy, coloured, and emotionally textured — blur the boundary between subject and author. They offer a collective gesture of connection, memory, and shared presence.

Light, Colour, and Texture As the day fades, light softens once more. Surfaces glow with the warmth of late afternoon. The black and white palette remains, but the coloured objects continue to anchor each frame. The VHS footage reintroduces colour and texture, evoking rupture, continuity, and emotional layering. The mood is tender and reflective — a gentle closing of the day.

Traces of Us - Treatment

End

Visuals Close-ups return. The Desert Rat insignia. The curve of a fretboard. The painted lettering of a model tram. Each object returns to stillness.

The camera slowly pulls back. Each contributor remains in their own space — grounded, thoughtful, quietly at peace. Their stories linger, suspended in the air. The final VHS fragments echo in memory, offering a shared heartbeat across lives.

Sound The layered soundscape thins until only ambient tones remain. A final breath. Then silence.

Light, Colour, and Texture The last light is golden and low, bathing each space in warmth. The final tones are soft and human. The feeling of memory is held, not lost.

Fade to black. A final echo. Then silence.

Traces of Us - Platform Strategy

Project aim

Traces of Us is positioned as a hybrid nonfiction short that functions as both a festival film and an artist film piece. The rollout prioritises artistic credibility, ethical engagement with contributors, and long term visibility across festivals, galleries and curated online platforms. The plan sequences high impact European premieres first, consolidates UK/Ireland visibility, expands to North America, and then activates gallery exhibitions and targeted online distribution. Mental health and men's mental health strands are embedded throughout to maximise impact and advocacy opportunities.

Target Audience

Traces of Us is aimed at audiences interested in contemporary explorations of masculinity, identity, and belonging. It resonates with viewers engaged in conversations around men's mental health and emotional wellbeing, and appeals to those drawn to intimate, poetic storytelling and experimental documentary form.

The film's monochrome aesthetic with selective colour, unscripted contributor voices, and symbolic objects create a reflective tone that invites emotional connection. This makes it especially suitable for festival audiences, online curatorial platforms, and communities seeking authentic, nuanced perspectives on men's lived experiences, memory, and emotional inheritance.

Strategic principles

- **Form first:** emphasise hybrid nonfiction, reflective tone and formal inventiveness.
- **Ethics and care:** foreground contributor consent, trigger warnings, and post screening support.
- **Intersectional positioning:** highlight identity, memory, place and men's mental health.
- **Layered visibility:** festivals > galleries > online platforms, avoiding premiere conflicts.
- **Sustainable budgeting:** prioritise high impact entries and selective long shots.

Festival strategy

Objective Build critical credibility and audience momentum while ensuring the film can be programmed in documentary, artist film and mental health contexts.

Priority groups and rationale

1. High impact European premieres (establish artistic credibility)

- **Targets:** Visions du Réel; CPH:DOX; Oberhausen; Sheffield DocFest.

- **Why:** These festivals value hybrid nonfiction, experimental form and ethical documentary practice; early selection creates curatorial cachet.

2. Core UK and Ireland circuit (regional consolidation)

- **Targets:** London Short Film Festival; Aesthetica; Docs Ireland; Cork International Film Festival; Galway Film Fleadh.

- **Why:** Home region visibility, BAFTA qualifying opportunities, and access to press and industry networks.

3. Broader European and specialist short hubs (reinforce identity and craft)

- **Targets:** Diagonale; Vienna Shorts; Tampere; Linz.

- **Why:** Strengthen European identity and reach programmers who curate artist film and short documentary strands.

4. North American expansion (audience and industry reach)

Targets: Aspen Shortsfest; Palm Springs ShortFest; Female Eye Film Festival; Toronto Irish Film Festival.

Why: Broaden geographic reach and access North American buyers, curators and press.

5. Mental health and men's mental health strand (impact programming)

- **Targets:** Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival; Unspoken Mental Health Film Festival; Voices With Impact; Men in Mind Film Festival; Flatpack Male Mental Health strand.

- **Why:** These festivals foreground wellbeing, stigma and masculinity; they provide community partners, post screening discussion frameworks and advocacy networks.

6. Prestige long shots (strategic applications)

- **Targets:** IDFA; Clermont Ferrand; Sundance; Berlinale Shorts

- **Why:** Low probability but high profile; submit selectively when premiere rules and timing align.

Gallery strategy

Objective

Place Traces of Us in moving image and contemporary art contexts to deepen engagement and create long term visibility beyond the festival circuit.

Core targets and rationale

- LUX London; CCA Glasgow; CCA Derry; IMMA Dublin — primary outreach for early gallery exhibitions. These institutions programme voice led, reflective moving image and can host talks and workshops.
- FACT Liverpool; Triskel Cork; The Guesthouse Cork; Irish Film Institute — regional partners that bridge film and art audiences.
- ZKM Karlsruhe; Catalyst Arts Belfast — selective international and thematic partners for experimental contexts.

Programming formats

- Single screen screenings with Q&A and panel discussions.
- Programmed evenings pairing Traces of Us with complementary artist films or archival material.
- Long term looped presentations in gallery film rooms for extended visibility.
- Workshops and community events focusing on memory, testimony and men's mental health.

Curatorial approach

Provide a curator's pack: film file (DCP/ProRes), high res stills, director's statement, ethics note, suggested programme notes and accessibility options (subtitles, BSL summary).

Offer artist talk and a short film lecture tailored to the gallery's audience.

Lead times and outreach

- Begin gallery outreach 6–9 months before desired exhibition dates.
- Prioritise institutions with annual programming cycles; be flexible on exhibition windows.

Traces of Us - Platform Strategy

Online platform strategy

Objective

- Extend the film's reach through curated digital platforms that value formal inventiveness and social impact, while protecting premiere status during festival run.
- Primary targets and rationale
- ARTE Court Circuit: strong fit for hybrid nonfiction; prepare French subtitled master and a concise pitch emphasising European resonance.
- NOWNESS; Director's Library: aesthetic, auteur driven platforms that amplify distinctive short documentaries.
- Short of the Week; Vimeo Staff Picks: high visibility for short form; good for audience building post festival.
- Animated Minds; Voices With Impact Archive: mental health focused outlets for targeted impact and advocacy.

Sequencing and rights

- Reserve online premieres until after 12-18 months of festival circulation to avoid conflicts.
- Negotiate time limited exclusives where beneficial (e.g., 2-4 weeks on a high profile platform).
- Prepare subtitled versions (French/German) and closed captions for accessibility.

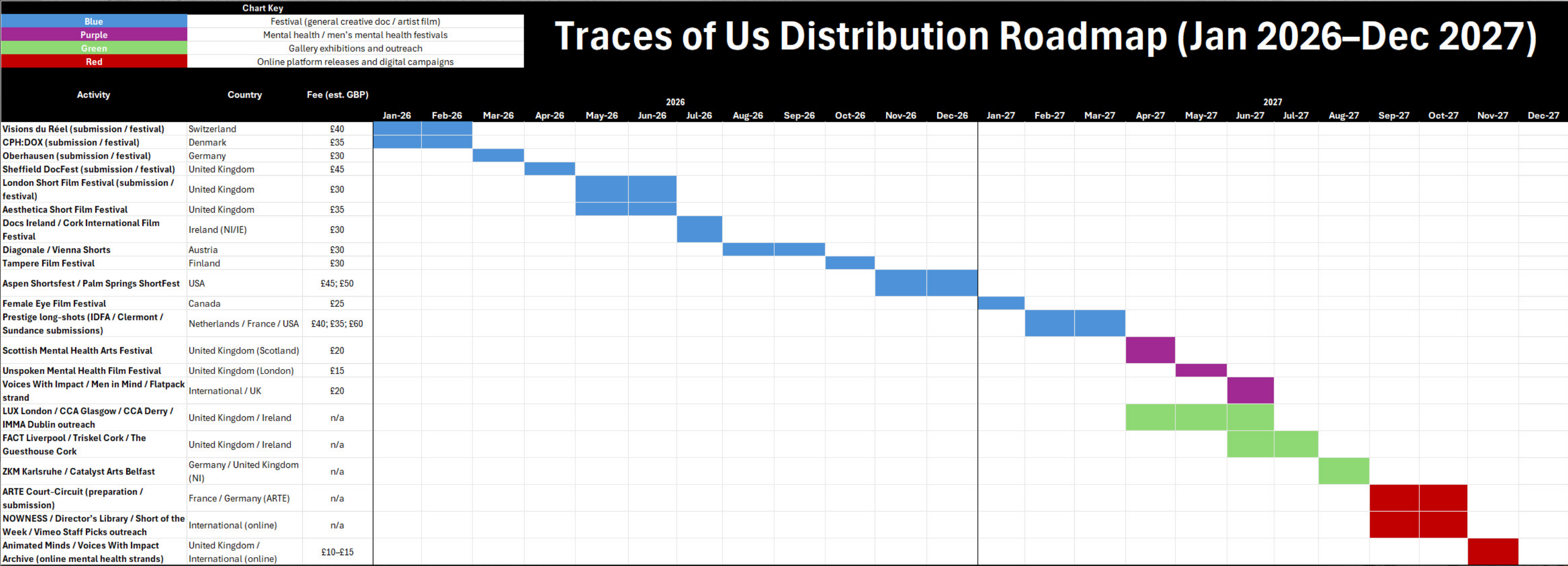
Ancillary online activity

- Create a 60-90s trailer and a short behind the scenes clip for platform promotion.
- Offer a downloadable facilitator's pack for mental health partners (hosted on a private page or via partner platforms).

Rollout planning and timeline

Strategic order

- 1. Early European premieres to establish artistic credibility.
- 2. UK/Ireland consolidation for regional press and industry.
- 3. Broader European circuit to reinforce identity and craft.
- 4. North American expansion for audience and industry reach.
- 5. Mental health festival strand integrated across M16–M18 for impact programming.
- 6. Gallery exhibitions mid run to deepen curatorial relationships.
- 7. Online platform releases after festival exclusivity period



Traces of Us Distribution Roadmap (Jan 2026–Dec 2027)

Detailed notes for each row

Visions du Réel: Submission Jan 2026; festival programming and potential world/international premiere in Feb 2026; prepare DCP and director statement by Dec 2025.

CPH:DOX: Submission Jan 2026; festival in Feb 2026; emphasise hybrid nonfiction and ethics in cover letter.

Oberhausen: Submission Feb 2026; festival slot Mar 2026; target experimental shorts strand.

Sheffield DocFest: Submission Feb–Mar 2026; festival Apr 2026; plan director attendance and industry meetings.

LSFF / Aesthetica: Submissions Mar–Apr 2026; festival screenings May–Jun 2026; BAFTA qualifying considerations.

Docs Ireland / Cork: Submission Apr–May 2026; regional premieres Jul 2026; prepare Irish press materials.

Diagonale / Vienna Shorts: Submission Jun 2026; festival Aug–Sep 2026; prepare Austrian contextual notes.

Tampere: Submission Aug 2026; festival Oct 2026; target short film programmers.

Aspen / Palm Springs: Submission Sep–Oct 2026; festivals Nov–Dec 2026; plan North American travel budget.

Female Eye: Submission Nov 2026; festival Jan 2027; highlight women led production and creative nonfiction voice.

Prestige long shots: Submissions Jan–Feb 2027; selective applications to IDFA, Clermont Ferrand, Sundance depending on premiere status

Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival: Programming Apr 2027; prepare facilitator’s pack and partner contacts.

Unspoken Mental Health Film Festival: Programming May 2027; plan post screening panel with mental health professional.

Voices With Impact / Men in Mind / Flatpack strand: Programming Jun 2027; target men’s mental health framing and community partners.

Galleries LUX / CCA / IMMA: Outreach Jan–Mar 2027; exhibitions Apr–Jun 2027; supply curator’s pack and offer artist talks.

FACT / Triskel / Guesthouse Cork: Outreach Apr–May 2027; exhibitions Jul–Aug 2027; regional programming and workshops.

ZKM / Catalyst Arts: Outreach Jun–Jul 2027; exhibition Sep 2027; target experimental moving image curators.

ARTE Court Circuit: Preparation Sep–Oct 2027; submission Oct 2027; deliver French subtitled master and pitch emphasizing European resonance.

NOWNESS / Director’s Library / Short of the Week / Vimeo: Outreach Sep–Oct 2027; releases Nov–Dec 2027; negotiate time limited exclusives.

Animated Minds / Voices With Impact Archive: Submission Oct 2027; online mental health archive release Dec 2027; provide facilitator’s pack and trigger guidance.

Deliverables and technical schedule

By Dec 2025: Final festival master (DCP and ProRes), 2K color graded file, 60–90s trailer, 3–6 high res stills, poster artwork, press kit, ethics pack.

Jan–Mar 2026: Festival submissions to Visions du Réel and CPH:DOX; prepare tailored director statements and mental health framing for relevant festivals.

Apr–Jun 2026: Attend Sheffield DocFest and LSFF if selected; run press outreach and schedule Q&As.

Jul–Sep 2026: Prepare Austrian and European contextual materials for Diagonale and Vienna Shorts.

Oct–Dec 2026: Finalise North American submission materials and travel budget; prepare educational licensing materials.

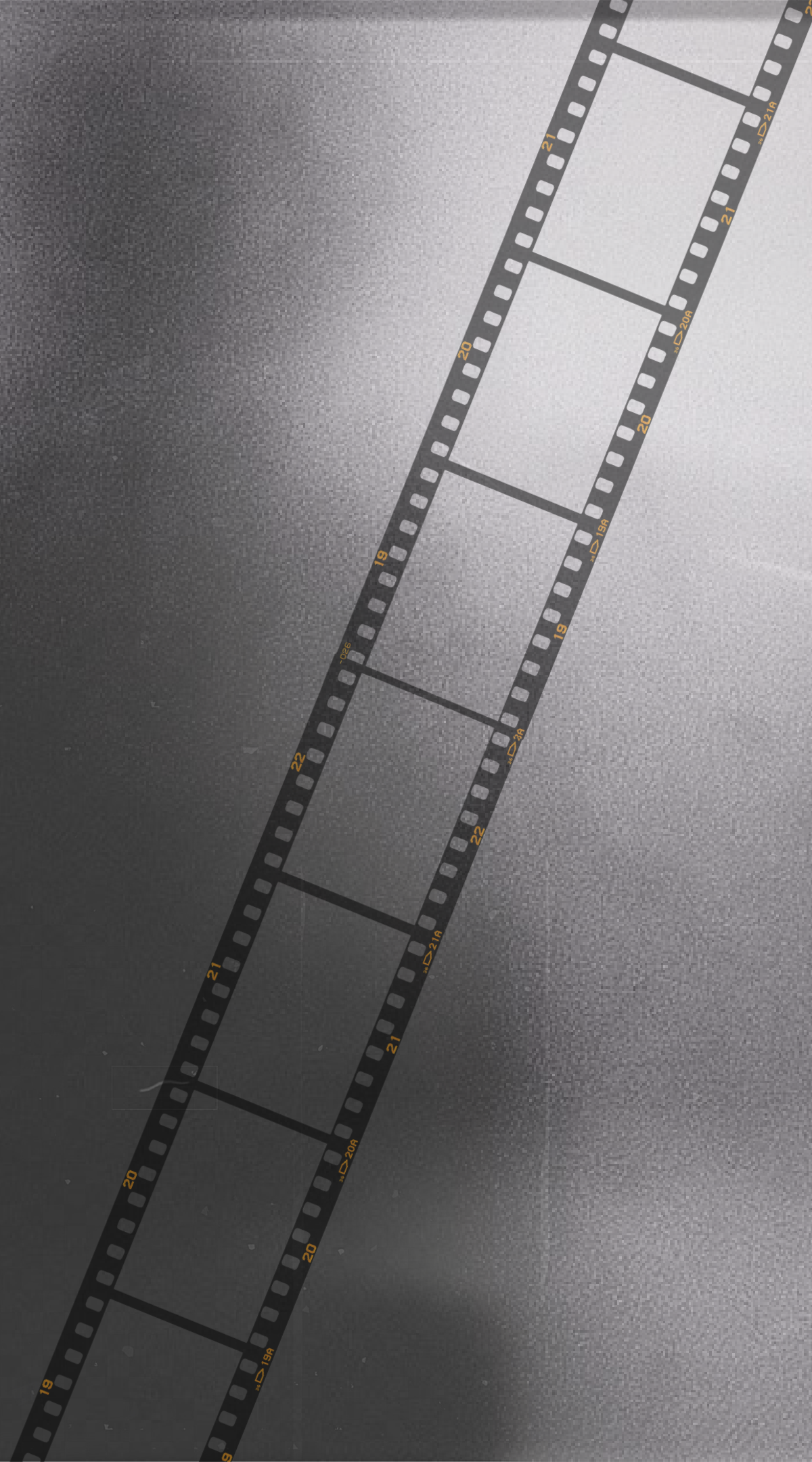
Jan–Mar 2027: Submit prestige long shots selectively; begin gallery outreach with curator’s pack.

Apr–Jun 2027: Run mental health festival screenings with facilitator’s pack and local support signposting.

Jul–Sep 2027: Gallery exhibitions and community workshops; collect audience feedback and impact metrics.

Oct–Dec 2027: Finalise online platform deals; release on curated platforms and mental health archives.

Traces of Us





Visual Bible

Traces of Us

Traces of Us - Introduction

A poetic documentary exploring memory, identity, and belonging through personal objects and quiet spaces

Created by:

Simon Wachlin
Chris Kirk
Emma Smith

Logline Summary:

In a world shaped by silence and reflection, Traces of Us listens closely to the emotional echoes left behind, capturing the stories we carry in the things we keep.

Stylistic Keywords:

Intimate · Reflective · Quiet · Emotionally resonant · Observational

Traces of Us - Tone & Concept

Emotional Landscape

Traces of Us explores the quiet emotional weight carried in everyday moments. Through stillness, soft sound, and close attention to detail, the film invites reflection on memory, loss, and connection. It focuses on the unnoticed, a gesture, a worn object, a silent pause; revealing how deeply personal stories live in the ordinary. The emotional landscape is gentle and introspective, shaped by silence, texture, and the spaces between words. It's a world where feeling is found not in spectacle, but in presence.

Tone Definition

Tone is the emotional heartbeat of Traces of Us. Words like gentle, reflective, vulnerable, and meditative guide how we shape each moment, from camera movement to sound design. These tones help us create a quiet, thoughtful atmosphere where small details carry deep meaning. Our creative choices are led by feeling, still frames, soft ambient sound, and muted colour all work together to evoke memory, connection, and introspection.

Visual Atmosphere

The visual tone of Traces of Us is shaped by soft natural light, solitary figures, and quiet domestic spaces. These images help create a mood of stillness, reflection, and emotional depth. We're drawn to moments where light falls gently across surfaces, where people are framed in silence, and where everyday spaces feel intimate and poetic. This atmosphere supports the film's themes of memory and belonging, allowing viewers to feel the emotional weight of what's left unsaid.

Traces of Us - Camera Style

Preferred Shot Types

Static compositions that invite stillness, observation, and layered meaning.

Detail shots of objects, textures, and gestures that carry emotional or symbolic weight.

Medium and wide shots that situate contributors within their environment, allowing space for reflection and movement.

Slow pans, tilts, and re-framing used sparingly to reveal relationships or transitions.

Framing Techniques

In *Traces of Us*, framing is simple and intentional. We use still tripod shots with off-centre compositions and negative space to create a quiet, reflective mood. Our B-roll focuses on small, meaningful details, objects, textures, and empty spaces that carry emotional weight. These shots aren't just filler; they help build the story's atmosphere and give space for the audience to feel. By focusing on everyday moments and subtle gestures, our framing supports the film's gentle tone and emotional depth.

Traces of Us - Camera Style

Camera Movement

The camera in *Traces of Us* is mostly still, using tripod setups to hold quiet, steady frames. This stillness creates a calm and contemplative rhythm, allowing space for reflection and emotional depth. By avoiding fast movement or handheld energy, the film invites the viewer to slow down and focus on small details, a gesture, an object, a silent pause. These choices help shape a gentle tone and support the film's themes of memory and presence.

Traces of Us - Sound Design

Ambient Sound

We use ambient sound to evoke place, memory, and emotional tone. Marching rhythms from military parades, the distant twang of a guitar, and the soft murmur of traffic form a layered sonic landscape that reflects both public ritual and private reflection. These textures are captured with care and used to hold space, guide pacing, and deepen the viewer's sense of presence, always in service of the story's emotional truth.

Tone Definition

Music is used sparingly and with intention. We favour minimalist, ambient, or acoustic compositions that support emotional arcs without leading them. Our music choices reflect the tone of each scene; subtle, spacious, and emotionally attuned, always leaving room for silence and breath.

Voice Treatment Approach

Contributor voices are treated with respect and clarity. We preserve natural cadence, breath, and rhythm, avoiding over-editing or artificial polish. Voice is not just a vehicle for information, it carries emotion, memory, and presence. Our treatment foregrounds authenticity, allowing contributors to speak in their own time and tone.

Traces of Us - Colour & Atmosphere

Black & White

Our films are shot in colour but treated with custom black and white LUTs in post-production. This approach allows us to retain full control over tonal contrast and texture while selectively preserving colour in key objects. These colour accents often symbolic or emotionally charged, act as visual anchors, drawing attention to memory, presence, or personal significance within otherwise desaturated frames.

TRACES OF US - COLOUR & ATMOSPHERE

Emotional Visual Tone

We aim for a visual tone that is quiet, reflective, and emotionally resonant. Light is used softly, with natural falloff and minimal artificial shaping. Shadows are embraced as part of the emotional landscape. Our framing and colour treatment work together to evoke intimacy, absence, and the passage of time, always in service of the contributor's story and the film's emotional arc.

Consistent Atmosphere

Across all projects, we maintain a consistent atmosphere built on restraint, texture, and thematic cohesion. Our use of black and white, selective colour, and ambient soundscapes creates a shared visual language that feels both grounded and poetic. The final minute of each film shifts into colour archive footage with a VHS-style treatment, a deliberate contrast that signals memory, rupture, or continuity, depending on the narrative.

Filmmaker Quotes

“Cinema is a matter of what’s in the frame and what’s out.” — Martin Scorsese
A reminder that storytelling is shaped as much by absence as presence.

“A film is—or should be—more like music than like fiction. It should be a progression of moods and feelings.” — Stanley Kubrick
This reflects our approach to rhythm, tone, and emotional layering.

“The most honest form of filmmaking is to make a film for yourself.” — Peter Jackson
We value authenticity and emotional truth over spectacle or polish.

Documentary Influence

Our work draws from the poetic and observational modes of documentary filmmaking, as defined by Bill Nichols. We’re inspired by films that prioritise atmosphere, emotional resonance, and contributor presence over exposition.

Key influences include:

A Thousand Suns (dir. Mati Diop) —
for its lyrical pacing and symbolic imagery

The Gleaners and I (dir. Agnès Varda) —
for its intimacy and personal reflection

Leviathan (dir. Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Véréna Paravel) — for its immersive sound and abstract framing

These works inform our commitment to quiet observation, layered meaning, and emotional depth

Visual Storytelling Tools

We use a range of visual techniques to evoke emotion and meaning:

Metaphor and symbolism; recurring objects, gestures, and textures that carry emotional weight.

Negative space and framing; allowing contributors to drift in and out of frame, suggesting presence and absence.

Slow pacing and minimal movement; to invite reflection and deepen atmosphere

Selective colour and LUTs; black and white grading with colour accents to highlight memory and motif.

Archive integration; VHS-style colour footage used to signal rupture, continuity, or historical layering.

These tools help us build a shared visual language across projects, one that's quiet, intentional, and emotionally honest.

Traces of Us - Visual Treatment

Explanation	Visuals	Sound & Tone
Opening – Objects Awaken memory stirs in quiet spaces. Objects hold the first breath of story.	Close-ups of a Desert Rat insignia, bass guitar, and model tram. Light flickers across surfaces. Hands hover, hesitate, touch.	Soft clink of metal, distant guitar twang, murmur of traffic. Ambient tones drift in slowly.
Gesture – Traces of Presence Identity emerges through movement. The past lives in gesture.	A drawer opens. Strings are tuned. A tram is placed. Contributors remain partially out of frame. Camera observes without intrusion.	Chair creaks, fabric rustles, faint hum of the outside world. Voices surface — quiet, reflective.
Stillness – Atmosphere Held Time stretches. Emotion settles into space.	Wide shots of lived-in rooms. Dust in sunlight. Shadows on walls. Objects in colour, environments desaturated.	Engine hum, medal clink, string vibration. Voices drift, overlap, echo. Silence becomes rhythm.
Memory – Archival Fragments Past and present blur. Memory surfaces unbidden.	VHS-style footage overlays: faded home video, analogue textures, glimpses of personal archive. Colour returns in grain and distortion.	Tape crackle, muffled voices, watery reverberation. A fractured chorus of shared memory.
Connection – Shared Pulse Separate lives intertwine through tone and texture.	Long takes of contributors in stillness. Objects revisited. Camera slowly pulls back. Light softens.	Metal, strings, engines blend into one shared heartbeat. The soundscape thins. A final breath. Then silence.

