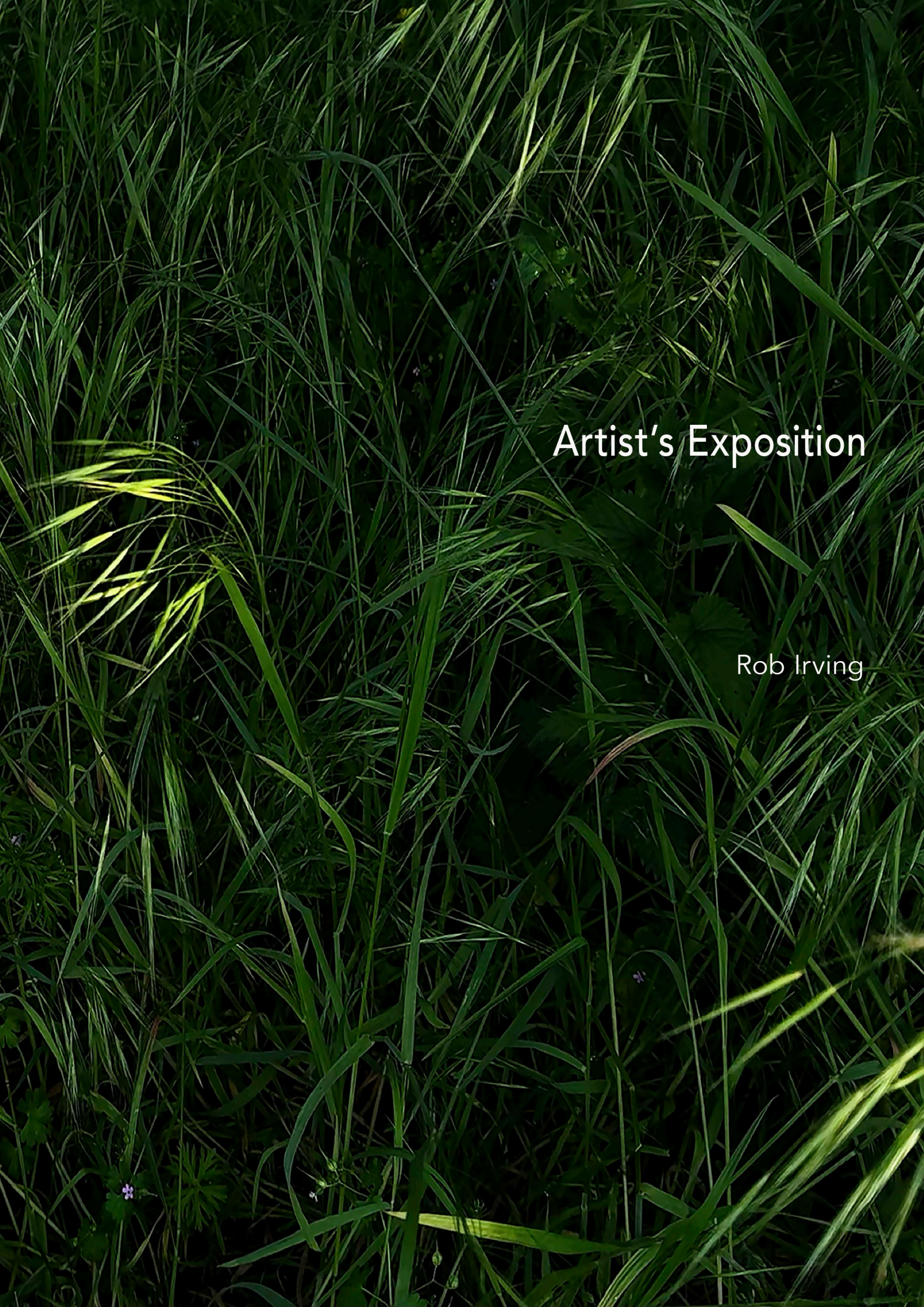


A close-up, high-angle photograph of a dense field of tall, green grass. The grass blades are long and thin, with some showing a yellowish-green hue, possibly due to sunlight or a specific variety. Interspersed among the grass are several small, purple wildflowers. The overall texture is very busy and organic.

Artist's Exposition

Rob Irving

Cover image and spread: *First Light*, 2025 — still from video, 56 minutes: 24 seconds

Artist Exposition: Rob Irving (Dr)

My approach to art is aligned more with anthropology than conventional ideas about decorative art. My video pieces, with their static, single-point perspective, reflect my journey as a photographer. Along the way, I must have drawn inspiration from Andy Warhol's "anti-films", characterised by stillness and the passage of time, with little action. Yet, the end-product is not nothing; the *non-ness* is intended to allow space for recipients to reciprocate, a two-way exchange opening channels to tranquillity and transcendence. One critic described my works as 'spare', meaning lean, without an ounce of fat—that is what I'm aiming for.

I use time-manipulation techniques to capture what often goes unnoticed in real time, mainly transient natural phenomena and the differences between what the camera sees and what the eye and mind perceive—cloud movement is fascinating, for example. Conversely, at the other end of the timescale, I'm attracted to slow processes, like the barely perceptible movement of a sunbeam crossing a patch of grass, illuminating seedheads one by one. This process does not require constant watching, as it unfolds over a longer period than most people are willing to observe—an occasional glance is enough. By the next, the light will have changed. Nevertheless, slow as it is, the sunbeam's progress can be reassuring. The idea that nature and healing follow their own tempo is implicit in the experience.

Sometimes the video pieces are recorded with two or three cameras, each slightly out of sync with the other/s, frames separated by thin lines to show my process, but also a pleasingly syncopated kinetic abstraction where the frames meet.

However, the art may be at its most optimal in sound. While the visual element is a focal point, it acts as a MacGuffin or an "object correlative"—a plot device that hints at context or something more complicated; an emotion, a knowledge, an instinct, but that is ultimately unimportant, as the audio carries a different agency, quietly moving through corridors and around corners to reveal a more subliminal form of art experience.

I'm intrigued by how this feels and how we talk about it, and I can't think of a better way to do that than to quote Penny Hallas's clear-eyed description of art inspired by human relations and their social context, where

...a piece of art is a focus of tensions, a place where different aspects of reality are brought into relation, react with one another, and open up new lines of communication.





In this context, the artist creates situations and environments that foster dialogue between the artwork and recipients, with social interaction as the primary medium. My work falls under a relatively new broad category: Multimodal Anthropology, akin to Visual Anthropology, but recognising the individuality of different media, such as sound. Hence, 'recipient', not viewer. The social implications of this go beyond art as decoration, and have very little to do with elevated notions of an "art world", to encompass lived, experiential engagement and emotional impact. Its relevance to place and space encourages a shift in thinking about art, emphasising its potential to act and make a difference in specific settings, such as within a medical practice.

As an artist interested in art's influence in healing environments, I'm free to explore the mysterious, emergent idea that the "art experience" or sense of wonder that art arouses is a vital part of an alchemical reaction rooted in reciprocity. What begins in the mind as a poetic quality, as we surrender to it, it "magically"—today's magic being tomorrow's science—transforms into a potential to heal by stimulating the human body's immune system. The range of what constitutes this kind of social interaction includes "forest bathing," kindness, music, dance, and other art forms. With music, it is understood that in response to stimuli, the mind has a remarkable capacity for transformation, encouraging neuroplasticity and reshaping neural networks. This is particularly true of the surprise bumps that art, at its core, and nature offer as part of the joy of life. Researchers describe this transmutation from emotion to something more visceral as the body's sixth sense.

Reading the medical academic literature, it is clear that researchers are gaining an understanding of the chemistry and biophysics involved in this transformation, and stress reduction or calmness is a vital factor. Breath exercises, singing, humming, and massage also help stimulate primary therapeutic pathways from mind to body. The conversion of sensory stimuli into biophysical responses via the nervous system and its ability to trigger processes that resist unhealthy cells is remarkable. Suppose art has a role to play in this, even subliminally, regardless of how culturally insignificant we might think art is. If so, it could be of value to consider and utilise in this context. It's a worthwhile 'What if?'

Rob Irving

