Salvadore

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Confirmative Praxis Report

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Preface:

This report discusses the creative journey in developing creative responses to theory around Memory, Identity and the importance of biodiversity within the agriculture and the recycling of items destined for landfill.

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Introduction

Like Louise Bourgeois, the work *Salvadore* stems back to childhood trauma of family incidents, one of witnessing my late father burning family photographs and albums of early childhood. In his book *Lost Times* (2000, p.37) David Gross who postulates that ‘’ [……] the remember returned to the past because he or she was obsessed with some loss or alleged ‘’wrong turn’’ that happened.’’ Further to this, Linda Berman (2023) on Bourgeois exhibition *“The Return of The repressed* (2012),” cites Sigmund Freud (1915) that ***“the uncanny [unheimlich] is something which is secretly familiar [heimlich-heimisch], which has undergone repression and then returned from it…”*** Berman (2023) explains further stating:

> By ‘the return of the repressed,’ Freud meant that, at some point, thoughts and feelings that have been unconsciously concealed, will return to consciousness, perhaps triggered by recent events and experiences.

My work is a form of healing in revisiting such traumas to find an understanding of who I am, and how these traumas shaped me as a person.

For the viewer, the exhibited artwork will mean something different to each individual, evoking melancholic feelings of incidents that happened in their past.

Revisiting Bourgeois book *Cells, Structures of Existence* (2015), the work titled *From the Bell Jar to the Cage involved* sketches (p22-23), and installation of a house placed on a plinth encased within a metal cage (p134-135), representing a bell jar, used as a means of protection of Bourgeois fears (p136) seen in figure 1.

Figure 1

This method of display provided motivation to construct a solid base for the heart of the proposed installation, aiming to resemble a specimen for preservation, to be protected from outside influences and not to be destroyed.

In the writing of the developmental path of Bourgeois' *Cells*, Julienne Lorz states:

> while a house can be a place of safety, providing a protective skin shielding the private person from the public, it is, in addition, a place that silently bears witness to the occurrences within: it absorbs traces left by its inhabitants, physically storing the past as a place of memories. (Lorz, 2015 p. 20)

In addition to Bourgeois work, Tacita Deans book *Floh* (2001) depicted, found images of various locations and subjects of past and present times, seen in figure 2 *Floh*, provided an invaluable source of inspiration to incorporate the found photo album, destined for landfill into the installation piece.

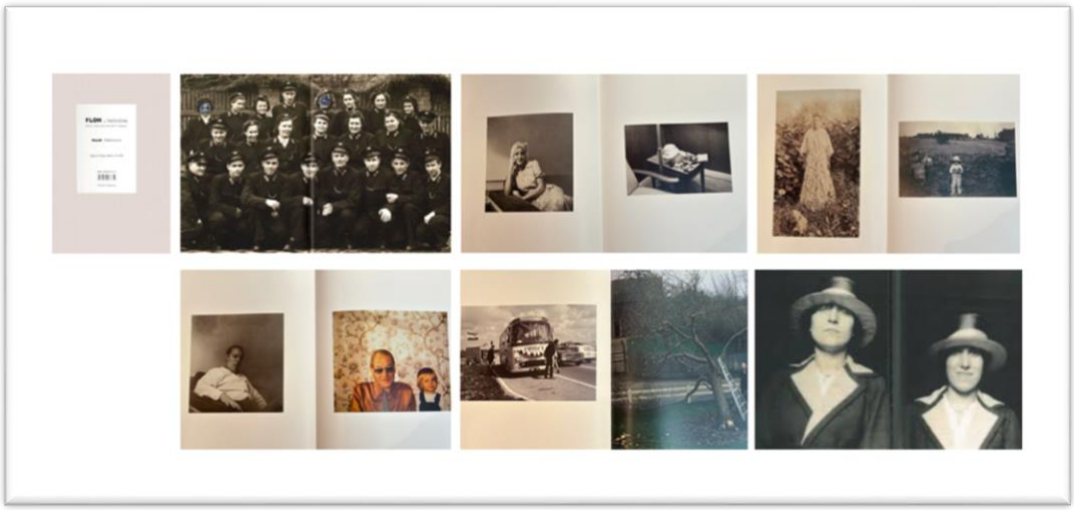

Figure 2

The Victorian album mostly housed studio portraits of people unknown. Although, through studying the beautiful inscriptions on the reverse of the studio portraits, revealed local names and addresses of the photographers and studios that the people would have visited over one hundred years ago. Women and men mostly dressed in mourning, and children in lighter attire, would raise more questions than answers. Leaving the imagination of the viewers to arrive at their own conclusions of their own family memories, and an insight into time that has passed.

Further to Dean's work, Cindy Steiler has been instrumental in the creation of *Salvadore*. Steiler's work *Vestiges (2018),* seen in figure 3, exhibited at Boise Department of Art and History US.

Figure 3

The work included installations of suspended houses constructed from discarded photographs held together with thread. **‘’The way that the work is displayed demonstrates the sympathetic nature of the pieces to the era that they belonged to’’ (Burton, 2019).**

Like Dean, Steiler, not only reanimates the forgotten back to the present, both visually, but in different contexts, she too questions the subjects in found images, as the recipient of the images, it will never be known whether the person was kind or caring, weak, or selfish. The use of these photographs have no origin to her work, they are merely evidence that the subjects once existed.

Time comes to everyone when they are ‘gone,’ and all that will remain for remembrance are names, sometimes carved in stone and a place to mourn. However, as time passes, the remembrance becomes less, and the deceased forgotten. *Vestige* presents the subjects in the photographs in a way of giving them a new sense of worth and meaning. In creating this work, Steiler reminds herself that life is short, and time needs to be used constructively to shape her ‘’ legacy with intent as well as prepare for the unexpected ways my personage may echo after I am gone’’ (Steiler, 2108).

The relationship between the use of memory with photography in this work is powerful. Yet, imperfect and somewhat unfinished in a way due to the items being ‘lost and forgotten.’ Steiler aims to readdress the balance in incorporating textiles that remind her of family comfort and connection to the people found in the images.

Chapter 1: Biodiversity in farming / discarded objects

“We live in a throw-away society and we’re paying the price; we don’t know what to do with all our waste” (Annon, 2019).

Landfill sites crush and compact collected waste. Following this, it is transported to other sites where it is buried beneath layers of soil to decompose, which takes years due to the type of material and conditions of the sites, that are often lacking in moisture and oxygen. According to the International Solid Waste Association (ISWA) report (2015/6 (Annon, 2016):’’ if the current situation continues and we do not act, landfill sites will **account for 10% of greenhouse gas emissions by 2025**.’’ The gasses caused by these sites increase the planets temperature and cause climate change. Due to the contamination of soil by these sites, this in turn has a negative effect on the bird population. Birds feed from these sites, ingesting toxic waste, which can prove fatal, shown in figure 4.

Figure 4

As well as soil contamination, ground water becomes polluted, again causing devastating effects on the environment.

Agriculture plays a major part in essential eco system processes to support all living things, within the plant kingdom and animal/human life. In provides the air that is breathed, to the food that is consumed.

Living on a working farm, the diagram/figure 5 below, shows the importance of biodiversity is crucial in maintaining earths eco systems through adaptive systems to regulate the future of climate control,

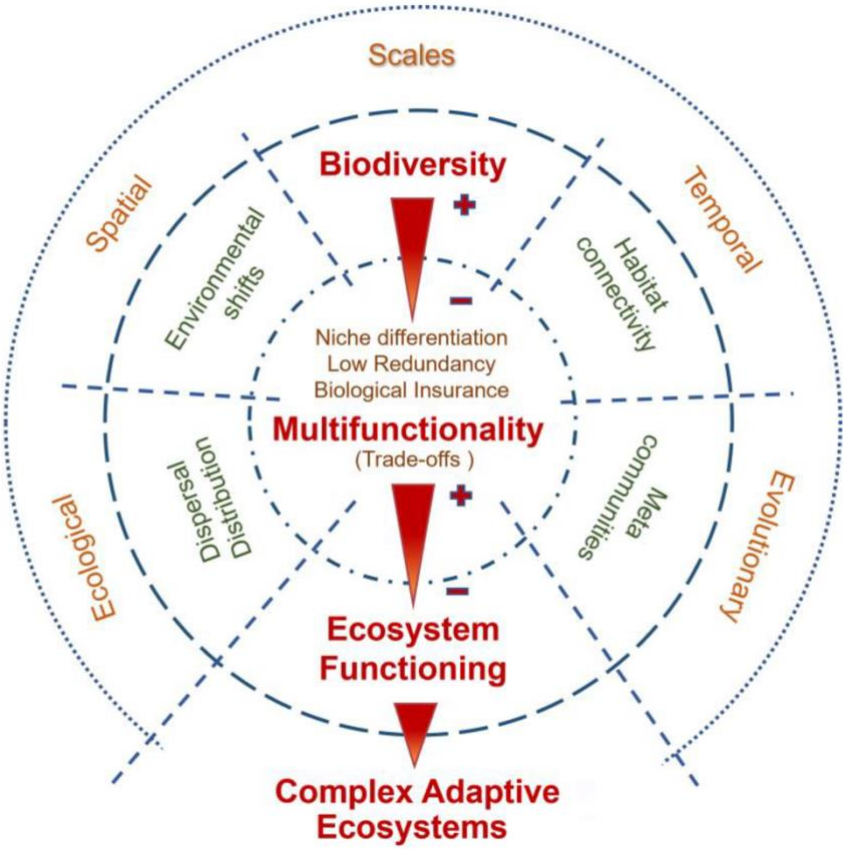

Figure 5

According to Stiles (2024), farming as an industry has depended on biodiversity and continues to work on conserving the land for pollinators, such as insects', birds, and mammals to thrive. Pollinators are the third of the worlds crop production. The human and animal population, and plant life are reliant upon invertebrates to help maintain the health of soil, so that the soil is swarming with microbes. These microbes are vital to releasing nutrients that plants and crops need to grow. Whereas

the contamination of soil, kills these complex organisms. In order to maintain areas of sustained wildlife on a farm to increase biodiversity, woodland needs to be preserved to provide food and shelter, which improves ecosystems and in turn, wellbeing.

As Will Simonson (UNEP, 2020), senior programme officer for climate change and biodiversity posits:

> Protecting forests is key to this - they cover almost a third of the global land area and harbour most of the Earth's terrestrial biodiversity. We cannot protect the Earth's biodiversity without protecting our forests.

Furthermore, a Welsh Government directive published in 2023 states ''that farmers need to consign 10% of their acreage to woodland'' (McAuley, 2023). This percentage allows farmers to claim a grant to develop the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

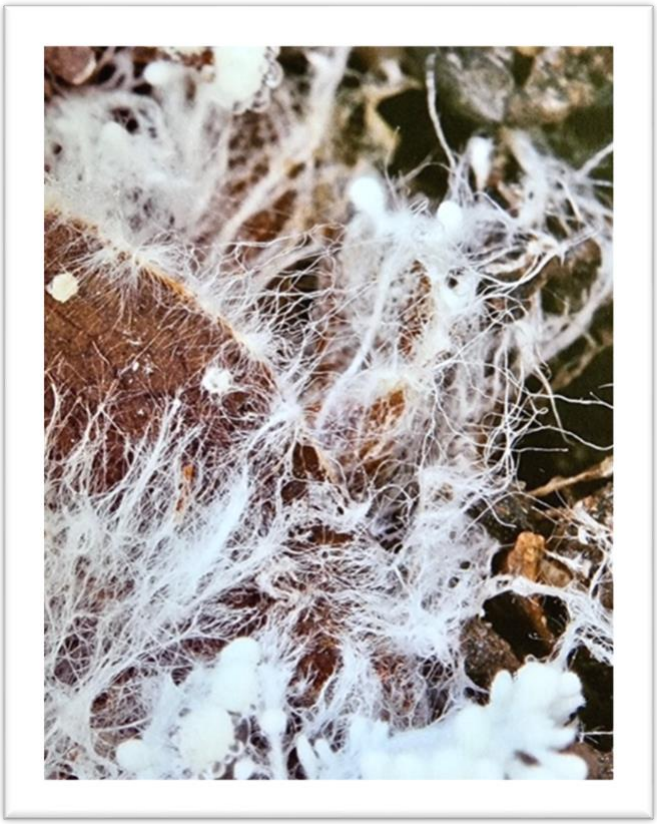

Figure 6

Decomposition is everywhere, native woodland allows mosses, plants and fungi to grow within the dead undergrowth in oak and hazel copses, Seen in figure 6

challenging humanities ‘binary notions of life and death’. In addition to this, trees are able to exchange nutrients and information with one another through mycelial networks. In return the roots deliver carbon to the mycelium, storing it deep within the earth- meaning the key to combating climate change may be through mycelia (Sheldrake, 2020).

Chapter 2: Salvadore

The intention for this project was, to recreate a method of curating artefacts and memorabilia of the Victorian era, in relation to their everyday lives and professions, in the form of an assemblage, seen in figure 7.

Figure 7

Notes from the explorative praxis journal were revisited. Furthermore, recapitulating on the mind mapping formations learnt in the creative writing workshop for the thought experiment was executed to generate a title for this work. Words that frequently stood out, in terms of rescue, absence and fragments, were forefront of thinking during the research stage. These words were consecutively documented, and the meanings explored, facilitated in determining the title for the installation.

The word ‘salvage’ became prominent, with further research into its meaning. According to Vocabulary.com (2024), the verb ‘’salvage means to collect or rescue that sort of item, or more generally to save something from harm or ruin.’’

Furthermore, - Merriam-Webster Thesaurus Merriam-Webster (2025), states that, to save is "to set free from confinement or danger." Yet, to save can also be implied as maintaining or preserving an item for its usefulness and its continued use.

Additionally, deeper exploration into the Glosbe Dictionary (2024), the word Salvatore translates from the Latin word to ‘’saviour.’’ And moreover, the Online

Etymology Dictionary (Harper, 2001), states that the Latin word *salvatorem means "*a saver, preserver.'' Yet, according to Joshi (2011), Salvatore is a name given to a male that originated from Italy. The name being a modified version of the Spanish word Salvador that means 'savior', 'rescuer', or 'deliverer.' Joshi (2011) further states that:

> Salvatore and its variations have a long and rich history that has transcended cultural boundaries and continues to be celebrated today. The name also has numerous spelling variations. They include Salvatori, Salvatore, Salvator, Salvadori, Salvadore, and others. Sal, Salva, and Tory can make an endearing nickname for Salvatore.

Researching the meanings and diverse spelling was key in determining the title *Salvadore* in forming a short paragraph, for my abstract as follows:

Salvadore, the exhibit, suggests the idea of merging elements of found photographs, objects, recycling and assemblage, through salvaging, repurposing materials to create something new and meaningful.

Due to the nature of the art pieces created, *Salvadore* became a fitting name for the installation. The name has an abundant record that exceeds ethnographic boundaries, that continues to be commemorated today. Materials and objects destined for landfill have been salvaged and a new and meaningful piece of art has been delivered. The work being sympathetic to the Victorians religious beliefs and fascination of life and death, allows the viewers to explore and interact with the installation, experiencing traces of Victorian life.

The aim of the exhibit was to capture the attention of all age groups. For children, a historical display to generate conversations of life lived in the Victorian era, as well as an educational tool to explore ways of recycling and upcycling items, destained for landfill. For adults, the intention of displaying such artifacts, memorabilia and artistry that the Victorians were accustomed to; even down to the clothing worn in the found photographs themselves, would trigger melancholic moments and conversations that they would have had when visiting their family, who would story tell their life experiences.

Chapter 3: Methodology

My practice comprises of a diverse range of mixed media, in as such, documenting images captured through the medium of photography, research and installation. Akin to Dean's work in response to changes of the digital age, commemorates echoes of time throughout history, the unwavering conditions of nature, and exploring the fragility of human endeavour (Vuitton, 2016-2017). Dean's responses have been my inspiration throughout this project. I too, have an interest in seemingly mundane discarded objects, resulting in works that are poetic, inquisitive, precise, which in turn would draw the attention of the viewer.

During the Summer of '23 on reflection of the Explorative Praxis review and feedback, research and time was devoted in designing a base, to support the whole installation. The base had to be 'solid,' and approximately one metre in height, with a turn table to rotate and house the found photo album, already sourced.

Artist and sculptor, Chris Everett and son, were invited to form a collaboration in constructing a base for the proposed MA show/installation. Time was spent exploring the farms outbuildings and yard for discarded items and parts of old and broken machinery for the 'proposed' item.

A metal wheel of an old wheelbarrow as well as a discarded animal feeding base were sourced. Everett and son welded the objects to old metal piping and fragments of sourced metal scrap. The result of the collaboration seen in figure 8.

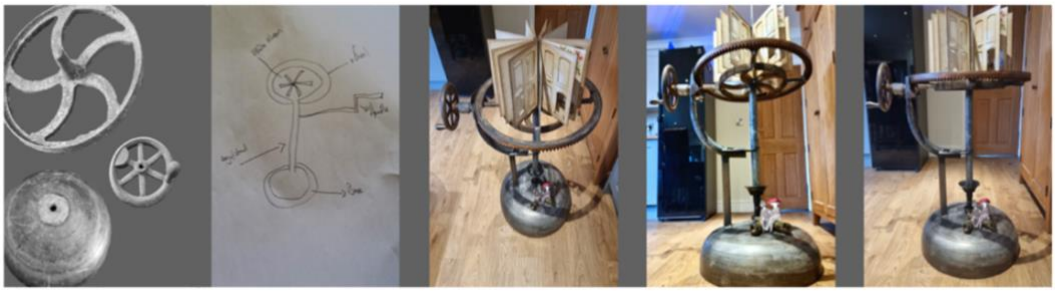

Figure 8

The mechanical base turned out better than anticipated, this strange and whimsical contraption would resemble the Victorian post-mortem standing photography tool

that was used to prop the deceased person in a secure standing or sitting position to be photographed. Seen in Figure 9, these photographs would provide the families with a memento in commemorating the dead and supposedly reduce intense emotional distress of grief.

Figure 9

According to Silvia Iorio (2020), Department of History and Medicine, Rome, Postmortem photography, is the last “picture of life” in “death.”

The photo album was equally as important as the images that it housed. These photos were approximately 100 years old, and they needed the recognition they rightly deserved, centre stage. As Kahneman (2011) states ‘’memories are the architecture of our identity.’’

Contextualising ideas for utilising the found photos within the photo album, would symbolically represent the past, present and future. Needless to say, that ‘’ time flies over us but leaves its shadows behind’’ (Derry, 1999) & (Hunt, 2018). Thus, meaning the photos have now become shadows of the past, like the people in them.

Firmly attached photos were left as intended by its previous owner in the photo album. They commemorated past lives, along with the old photo inlays and experimental crochet squares previously made, were placed and secured within the leaves of the album to re-interpreted dust sheets, as the Victorians would use to protect their furnishings from dust (hrosenthal-admin, 2016).

The intended purpose for the metronome, was to continually tick its iconic noise, symbolising the passing of time, during the opening night of the show. Additionally, found negative post card borders and old negatives of images were used to represent my practise as a photographer.

During Irelands famine, Irish families relied on their crochet and lace skills to earn money to survive (Speed, 2021). What better way to pay homage to these Victorian Irish families by creating crochet photo houses. Only, there was one un-nerving problem, limited found photographs, many of them were experimented on to create installation houses for the Explorative Praxis. The roofs of these houses had been crocheted with thick chunky cotton, which would have to be dismantled then re-made with finer cottons sourced from charity shops.

Deconstructing the roofs previously created, was time consuming and often overwhelming. I had one chance to execute what had been envisaged for crocheting such delicate houses, before the photos would be ruined.

The tools passed down from my great-grandmother were utilised for the crochet work. I felt that I was honouring her skills and her daughter's in doing this work. Choosing and sizing each photo was key for the construction of the houses, some borders around the images were different sizes, and some backing cards were slightly larger in length and breadth. Each roof for each house had to be crochet by eye, It was one thing creating a pattern to crochet with thicker and stronger yarn but crocheting the fine yarn of different thicknesses was so much more intricate. Four strips of crochet columns were made for each crochet house, as the yarn was so thin and delicate, it caused difficulty in sewing the four-sided photographs securely. These crochet columns were glued to each corner of each photograph interpreting quoins or corner posts, to strengthen the base of each house.
Being an inexperienced, self-taught crocheter, became overwhelming and deflating at times. From the realisation of creating such complex and dainty houses was more time consuming than predicted. Throughout the crocheting process for the house, I would have to deal with melancholic moments of loss and cherished memories spent with my grandmother.
What was not expected, was the anomalous connection to my great grandmother that astonished me. "Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that

connects one person to another person across time and space." *(Ainsworth, 1973: Bowlby, 1969),* (Yassin, 2020). I felt a great sense of achievement when all five houses had been completed. Furthermore, at this point of the project, I was emotionally urged to create an assemblage box, see figure 10, in honour of both grandmothers in displaying the actual crochet hooks and thread used to create the roofs, the silver thimble, measuring stick, a laced handkerchief made by my great grandmothers' hand, and crochet booklet, handed down, reused and repurposed to commemorate their lives.

Figure 10

''All life comes from death, and every death foreshadows renewal,'' which can be understood as an eternal circulation of souls between this world and the other, i.e. what Francisco Vaz da Silva calls ''rounds of souls.'' (Mencei, 2011).

According to Speed (2021), the Victorians loved to decorate their homes with fine, elegant, furnishings, seen in figure 11, with the change of landscape as well as the standardized goods during the industrial revolution, this made goods attainable through all divisions of society.

Figure 11

Victorian family life was central to ‘home’ with family and all items of memorabilia. They were curators of unusual wares, be it from foreign lands or their own locality. These unusual objects were curated in a variety of ways, in cabinets or boxes that captured memories (Museum, 2016). These methods of displaying seen in figure 12, provided inspiration for many curios collected over the years for *Salvadore.*

Figure 12

The repurposed wooden boxes were given a new life in the form of a curio assemblage. These were then backed with a padded surface using a salvaged linen pillowslip. *Born with a Silver Spoon* see figure 13.

Figure 13

According to Productions (2016), silver spoons/utensils were reserved for the elite, hence the quote, “born with a silver spoon in your mouth.” The image of the lady was from the photo album. The perfume bottle along with the pewter button hook and purse, were significant additions to this box, due to the lifestyle of a notable woman of that era. The perfume bottle is symbolic to wealth and status, perfume has been used since ancient Egyptian times (Egham, 2020). The use of the button hook increased when women’s fashions began to change in the mid-1870s (Blodgett, 2021, Updated 2023). Victorians were also passionate collectors of stones, some for scientific purposes and some displayed in curiosity cabinets (Museum 2016). Cameos too represent power, wealth and status. The cameo sits on a porous stone found on a beach walk many years ago (Jordan, 2022).

The snuff/ pill box and magnifier glass were also accessories used by the Victorian elite. Snuff taking became an important social aspect of courtly life in Western Europe in the 18th century (Recollections,n.d). Magnifying glasses were not only practical tools for reading or used for fine detailed work but were also known as quizzing glasses. The name “quizzing glass” is said to derive from the act of looking, both Victorian men and women were subject to each other’s gaze, hence why the saying, quizzing glasses (Corner, 2020). Feathers found whilst documenting nature

and the surrounding landscape, were placed inside the perfume bottle, representing the memory of both grandmothers.

Gerdinen Treasures assemblage see figure 14, housed a collective range of mundane artifacts unearthed while excavating grounds around the farmhouse.

Figure 14

These treasured finds of iron weights, pieces of broken stoneware, an unbroken ceramic measuring type vessel, wooden measuring spoon are threaded memories of past lives. Uncles pipe, and a small key along with the pocket watch lost for many years and found one season whilst ploughing, a token and six pence found in the attic are memories of ancestors that resided at the farm. Also, a memento in the form a cat, in remembrance of the rat catcher who once roamed the farm.

Wonders of Nature assemblage, seen in figure 15, are artifacts found within the fields and hedgerows of the farm. The mounted badger skull and teeth with a collection of a found fossil and peculiar stone formation, as well as the rams' skull together with a hatched robin's egg, and a feather were finds from my surrounding landscape.

Figure 15

However, the two male images from the found album together with moths in a broken frame, were found at an antique store. These elements were sympathetically curated in a way that would have been applied during the time when they were popular.

The predominant males' profession during the Victorian era of taxidermy has since become a female occupation, as opposed to be dominated by the male (Would, 2019), (Pretzel, 2018).

Chapter 4: Exhibition Planning

The cohort may have been small, but as artists there was a diverse range of artwork to be displayed. In addition to this, a suitable title for the exhibition that represented all mediums of artwork was needed. Exhibition meetings and W.I.P. symposiums where vital to understand other artists work, and consideration of everyone's needs to be met. Regular meeting dates were set, and notes were taken in preparation for the degree show.

Voting for the exhibition title opened via an online link, the meeting notes from the 14th of March 2024 (sent 15.03.24 Hamish Gane) discussed a range of title words, such as Limina, Inspiration, fragments, Thresholds. A suggested title was 'Shall we give it a name?' 'And Other.' The top vote went to *Thresholds*, in Welsh translates to *Trothwyon*, means crossing a boundary. The reasoning for this was, to represent the finalisation of learning, and to expand on ones' visions to embark new ventures. As a cohort, all involved were conceptually stepping through something new with materials and ideas.

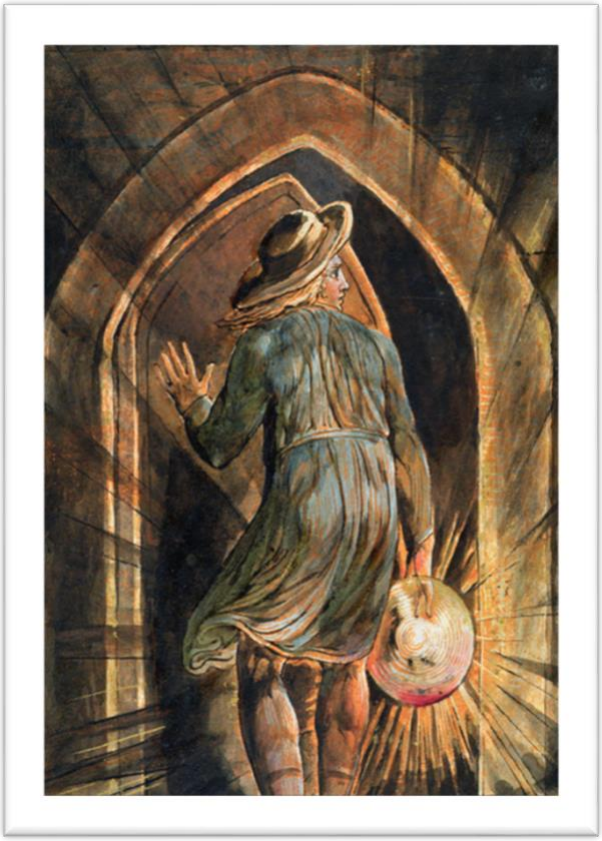

Figure 16

According to research from the *Orthodox Arts Journal, On the Gift of Art Part V: The Threshold (1804-20)*, reveals a deeper understanding of art historian A.K. Coomaraswamy's argument between two distinctions of 'significant, liberating art.'

This focuses on the path of the divine understanding, that leads directly to the end of the spiritual journey, to the 'insignificant, worldly art' (pagan and eccentric). This then emulates anything and everything influenced by emotions and desires.

In William Blakes' etching, *Frontispiece to Jerusalem*, ca.1804-20. Seen in Figure 16, A concept that likely evolved, suggested by Philip Sherrard author of *The Scared in Life and Art*, states ''A work of art which can bring us to the threshold of mystery is not the same as a sacred work of art, which discloses the mystery itself and makes us share in it'' (Justiniano, 2016).

Essential meetings addressed ideas discussed for producing a one-page zine with suitable formats and printable materials agreed. The first section of the double-sided zine page would be printed with the artists statement, and the second section would exhibit an image that would overall represent the individual artists exhibition.

This was my opportunity to produce a photographic image representing my practise as well as the overall aesthetics of the installation. During the research stage for this project, memento mori, seen in figure 17, derived from a Latin phrase meaning "remember you must die" (Stoic 2021) had been explored. Throughout history (as far back as ancient Rome and Greece), the concept of this phrase had been applied, in addition of having prominence in human culture and religion across the world.

Figure: 17

Writers, philosophers and artists alike, have examined the iconic symbols and meanings of such artifacts ranging from skulls, flowers, candles and hourglasses, evoking melancholic feelings, “a reminder to reflect on one’s own mortality and the fleeting nature of life” (Arnett 2023).

According to Socrates’ philosophy, it is in examining life that human being’s transition into wisdom, courage, justice and temperance meaning virtue (Weaver, 2024, Lake 2021). The Victorians shared these virtues, an idea depicted from such ideals was explored and developed into an overall image for the second section of my zine.

Curating a still life ‘Memento Mori’ to photograph was invigorating, surrounding the found metronome and badger skull (intended and displayed in the exhibition), with dead roses and petals, along with decaying fruit and a lit candle. This installation would represent the Victorians obsessions with death. Seen in *figure 18,*

Figure 18

Fortunately, the cohort worked well curating their individual art pieces within the allocated spaces provided, as well as helping one another when needed in unpacking exhibits for display. Responsibility was given to each artist to advertise the exhibition on social media networks, such as Facebook and Instagram. Time was spent in hanging posters and placing arrows to direct the public to the Thresholds/*Trothwyon'* exhibition.

Collectively, the team used good communication skills and organisational techniques, which resulted keeping within set deadlines along with invigilating timetables set and adhered to.

The exhibition area was limited to the way the work could be installed. Unlike Bourgeois, who surveys the space and makes creative responses to it, seen in Figure 19, this option was not available to the group.

Figure 19

Whereas Steiler creates responses to the space as seen in Figure 20, work titled *Vestige* (2018).

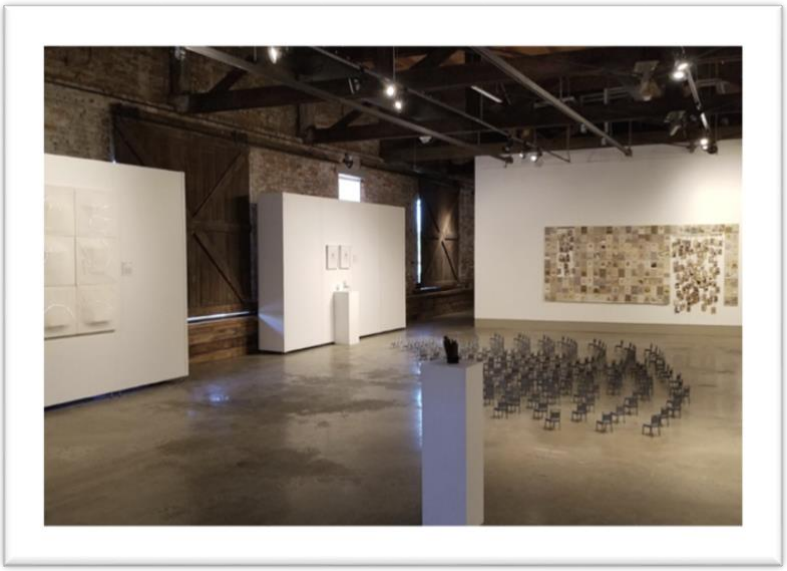

Figure 20

I too wanted to display my installation signifying the sympathetic nature of each art piece to the Victorian era.

Conclusion:' Thresholds/*Trothwyon' (2024)*

The vision of exhibiting the work had only been in my thoughts, regardless of the research sourced previously. I was excited to proceed in positioning the art pieces the way envisaged, as personal studio space lacked room to experiment with any installation possibilities.

The mechanical base was designed for and positioned so that the viewer could walk freely around the base and interact with the art piece if desired. The space was also considered for the suspension of the crochet houses above it.

Support with the installation was readily available, boxes were fixed to the wall in creating a 'floating effect' with no fixings visible to the naked eye. To follow, the found photo album had to be secured to the mechanical base, ensuring it was level. The metronome was secured to the top of the album to conceal the tubing used to secure the album into place. With further assistance, the crochet houses were threaded with invisible thread and secured with metal stoppers inside the roof sections. These were then attached to lighting plinths at different lengths above the central art piece. Direction was given in hanging each house to be suspended in-between each assemblage box that had been fixed to the wall.

I had considered positioning the assemblage boxes as a cross section of a house, the thought was to replicate the role of the Victorian woman (who were the home makers of the era). However, due to the limitations of the space, it was suggested that the assemblage boxes should be displayed as individual art pieces, which in turn became a piece of artwork in their own right.

The distance, proximity and height levels between each art piece was key for the audience to appreciate every item of artwork individually. As well as viewing the installation as a whole, bringing the everyday mundane objects back to life, as well as paying homage to the Victorian era, but the fact that such artifacts had been saved and repurposed was the focal point of discussion during the show.

There were times throughout the day when it became overwhelming with the way that the installation was taking on a life of its own. As initially envisioned, the exhibit had transformed the space evoking a sense of wonder and mystery, together with

the responses from the photography lecturers, technician's and Gane satisfied my expectations of the curation.

Taking advice from senior lecturers, advising not to over complicate the intricate nature of the simplicity of the installation, the felted miniature mushrooms, mushroom headed people and a couple of crochet framed photos were omitted. Although days had been spent in creating these pieces, I agreed not to over complicate things. Further adjustments to the height of the houses were made to a level where they were finally required.

In preparation of the opening night, the cohort worked in ensuring all surfaces were made good. Zines consisting of fifty English and twenty Welsh per artist were folded and displayed in readiness for the public to take at their convenience.

The opening day of the exhibition was very emotional, not only was it the first major exhibition, but the venue itself. The actual space where the installation was showing was where my journey started at university, see figure 21.

Figure 21

Studio one in the photography department is where the interview to start the BA, six years ago took place, and now exhibiting my Master's showcase. Completing this creative journey in a place where I had first started was overwhelming, bringing the meaning of my installation and my journey of learning together.

The response from the viewers was very positive. Many comments received verbally related to happy family memories and tactile photographic material, as well as the nostalgic objects displayed in the boxes.

Figure 22

Several conversations documented, seen in figure 22, enquiring who the people were in the photographs. Viewers demonstrated an interest in knowing where the materials came from and were surprised to learn that all items were destined for landfill.

To conclude, the master's degree has taken me out of my comfort zone. It has given me confidence to learn new skills and implement these, not only in the creating and curating my installation, but for future art practices. I have realised that I am not just a photographer but a researcher and installations' artist. The project for me has been challenging in utilising materials destined for landfill.

From this experience, the creative journey will continue…….

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