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## Drawing Matters 2021

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# ALL THE THOUGHTS I EVER HAD

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This paper is a reflective document that reviews a presentation/performance titled: all the thoughts I ever had, given at the Drawing Matters Symposium. The term 'presentation/performance' fuses conventional academic research presentations, highlighting the performativity of the process. The presentation/performance used drawings, writings, and drawing/writings from 'The magnified glass of liberation: A review of fictional drawings' published in *Drawing: Research, Theory, Practice* (2018). This article uses an inactive creative period to consider drawing as a type of fiction. It chronicled the preparation of fictional drawings for a Fictional Museum of Drawing created by Phil Sawdon. Reworking this site of fictional drawing, the research advocated drawings' fictions as rooted in foresight where predisposed thinking is navigated and anticipation reigns. This work placed certain recognitions of fiction by considering the material illusions of thought and, importantly for Drawing Matters, the materiality of the text was revisited and performed to disrupt certainty, favouring a presentation of a corporal subject as well as negotiating a process of understanding that played out 'failures' rather than resolves. The title all the thoughts I ever had was a way to introduce the performance/presentation as absurd and inherently situated to 'fail'. This desire to confront failure emerged through the repeated experience of miscarriage. This paper is followed by a selection of the drawings and writings that I went on to make after the Drawing Matters presentation/performance, which became a publication called *Sitting with Uncertainty* (2019).

This paper is a reflective document that reviews a presentation/performance titled: all the thoughts I ever had, given at the Drawing Matters Symposium, by noting its methods, acts, and frameworks. The term 'presentation/performance' fuses conventional academic research presentations, highlighting the performativity of the process. The presentation/performance used drawings, writings, and drawing/writings from 'The magnified glass of liberation: A review of fictional drawings' published in *Drawing: Research, Theory, Practice* (2018). This article uses an inactive creative period to consider drawing as a type of fiction. It chronicled the preparation of fictional drawings for a Fictional Museum of Drawing created by Phil Sawdon. Reworking this site of fictional drawing, the research advocated drawings' fictions as rooted in foresight where predisposed thinking is navigated and anticipation reigns. This work placed certain recognitions of fiction by considering the material illusions of thought and, importantly for Drawing Matters, the materiality of the text was revisited and performed to disrupt certainty, favouring a presentation of a corporal subject as well as negotiating a process of understanding that played out 'failures' rather than resolves. The title: all the thoughts I ever had was a way to introduce the performance/presentation as absurd and inherently situated to 'fail'.

The reflexive space of thinking/making was played out as jointly philosophical and physical; the performance/presentation rippled between sounded and pondered thoughts, showing works on paper and moving image, whilst interweaving speech acts that voiced live questions to the work or the audience to purposefully expose the ponderings of the making and thinking process as ongoing. The desire for resolve, to ultimately determine a 'position', is a tentative issue for thinking/making, as studio activities, prior knowledge, contexts, and frameworks shift as understanding develops. However, suppositions pave the way for tests and developments, and failings and contingences divert hypotheses exposing new ground, ideas, and possibilities.

The presentation/performance wanted to expose the inability to consolidate thoughts to highlight failure. Contemporary fine art drawing practices make links between drawing and becoming (Bryson 2003; Berger 2005; Fisher 2003; Naginski 2000; Sawdon & Marshall 2012) and, previously, I have argued for Drawing Vignettes as a method of becoming using wonder as a critical and practical underpinning for the drawing/writing hybrid to perform as a mode of enquiry. This mode of enquiry was discussed in the thesis as an affective state that compels a 'pensive and reflective' discourse, which becomes participatory as it is enacted by means of practice. This position appreciated the ambiguity brought about by wonder (Fisher 1998; Greenblatt 1991; Benedict 2001) and created an opportunity for the drawing/writing hybrid practice to adopt an interpretative openness. The work discussed in the performance/presentation from 'The magnified glass of liberation: a review of fictional drawings' acted as tools and prompts to share methods of working that united strategies of looking and reading. However, the presentation/performance wanted to consider and expose failure, as they filtered from my experiences of miscarried pregnancies into the work I was making in the studio and the philosophical frameworks I was utilising. What is key to this performance/presentation given at Drawing Matters is that events external to my academic research were so big they could not but impact upon how I thought, made, and wrote.



FIGURE 1: FRIDA KAHLO (1907–1954), HENRY FORD HOSPITAL (1932) DOLORES OLMEDO FOUNDATION, MEXICO CITY

A series of miscarried pregnancies had created significant changes to the way I worked and functioned. Grief, shame, and failure were overwhelming and these experiences were shaping the work I made as an academic, and within the studio the practice strategies were concealing and breaking expectations. To share miscarriage is uncommon; cultural structures instigate secrecy. Limited verbal or visual cultural materials exist; poetry, film, paintings, and other cultural cues, such as occasional gift cards, are in short supply. Additionally, policies to support these occurrences in the workplace are equally uncommon and widespread understanding of the possible causes of miscarriage is shamefully misunderstood (San Lazaro Campillo et al. 2018). The physical and physiological pain and grief of miscarriage are uncomfortable for our culture and a term known as the ‘Secret Club’, coined by Laura Seftel (2006), positions women like me. With limited exposure to miscarriage, we become silent, blind, and unequipped, thereby perpetuating a culture that is unsure around miscarriage, and subsequently insensitive. Membership to the Secret Club comes through this isolation, and its perpetuation undermines women’s health and wellbeing. To acknowledge miscarriage as circumnavigated in western culture is important, especially if we are to extend our understanding of those experiencing it. This point is duly raised by Roseanne Cecil in *The Anthropology of Miscarriage*, who describes how ‘*the lives of ordinary women have been largely hidden from history*’ (1996: 179). And, as Laura Seftel points out in *Grief Unseen*, ‘*how does one depict an invisible loss? Infertility and miscarriage are essentially about something that is not there*’ (2006: 70). This silence has manifested through western culture and disconnects the visibility and voices of women’s experience of childbirth and its loss. This prompts us to hold back discussions around miscarriage and

regularly leads to self-blame. Judy Chicago's book *The Birth Project* (1985) highlighted the lack of birth imagery in western art. During a significant project working with hundreds of other women to make a large fabric mural that depicts women's reproductive experiences, Chicago gleaned from interviews discussing reproductive experiences with mothers the surprising reoccurring pattern of blame: *'Although it was obvious that all these occurrences were outside their control, I had sat with them and heard each of these intelligent, educated women say the same thing: I felt it was somehow my fault'* (Chicago 1985: 78). Pregnancy and its loss occupy a quiet presence in arts history, with the most pronounced presence coming from pre-industrialised cultures (Tobey 1991). Pivotal works by Frida Kahlo, such as *Henry Ford Hospital*, or *Frida and the miscarriage* (1932, Fig. 1), bring attention to miscarriage with direct and courageous representations of her experiences. Along with Judy Chicago in the 1980s, artist Joan Snyder made a profoundly autobiographical work *Mourning/Oh, Morning* (1983, Fig. 2) with a painting that narrates a personal history of miscarriage, abortion, and a failed marriage. Other artists, like Tracey Emin and Louise Bourgeois, share visceral female experiences related to pregnancy and loss (Fig. 3). Indeed, the discussions and visibility around fertility and miscarriage are without doubt building momentum. Projects, like Laura Seftel's *The Secret Club* bring together artists who make work about miscarriage; there are also curatorial projects, such as the *Birth Rites Collection* housed at King's College Hospital, London.



FIGURE 2: JOAN SNYDER, *MOURNING/ OH MORNING* (1983), ACRYLIC, PAPIER-MÂCHÉ, CLOTH, PLASTIC GRAPES, WOOD ON LINEN, PRIVATE COLLECTION

The Artist Parent Index is an online catalogue of artists who use parenting in their practice that brings voices and experiences together. Exciting festivals, such as Fertility Fest, take place in London and Manchester; the Miscarriage Association has given space and support to artists in residence, such as Marjolaine Ryley and her publication *thin red lie, deep blue sea*. Channel 5 advertises its 2020 schedule with a documentary on miscarriage where public figures and celebrities talk about miscarriage and pregnancy loss and The Independent had a supplement, *Understanding Fertility*, focusing upon miscarriage on 12th March 2020. Nevertheless, to acknowledge miscarriage by working with it in my

studio and research it felt somewhat improper; however, to interrogate cultures and modes of thinking felt essential as questions arose from my isolating experiences, and looking to the autobiographic strategies of feminist practices/theories and their ability to express sexed corporeality felt like a reassuring strategy to pursue these goals. So, all the thoughts I ever had became a way to share uncertainty and perform failures to better understand our experiences.

To steer text towards its sensuousness is in conflict with western dualism; yet, it plays a significant role when we reconsider it as a material rather than a mouldable vessel for disembodied rational words. For the presentation/performance, the material needed to perform in a sensuous way, connecting bodily understandings that arise from experiences. Elizabeth Grosz offers a significant stance for the sensuous base of knowledge, where speech is embodied felt and performed: *'The self-images of knowledge's have always been and remain today, bereft of an understanding of their own (textual) corporeality. They misrecognize themselves as interior, merely ideas, thoughts and concepts, forgetting or repressing their own corporeal genealogies and process of production. Knowledge is an activity; it is a practice and not contemplative reflection. It does things'* (1993: 203). I was curious to question how textual corporeality might speak a body's tacit knowledge. Here, in the performance/presentation it could do things: voicing experiences of loss and grief as they were lived, interweaving and moving through them. Bereavement after miscarriage quietly carries grief, but all the thoughts I ever had wanted to perform confusion and difficulties to place a sense of failure or confusion at its forefront, and the mattering of the text at the performance/presentation was motivated by the co-emergence of the pregnancies, shadowed by their failures.

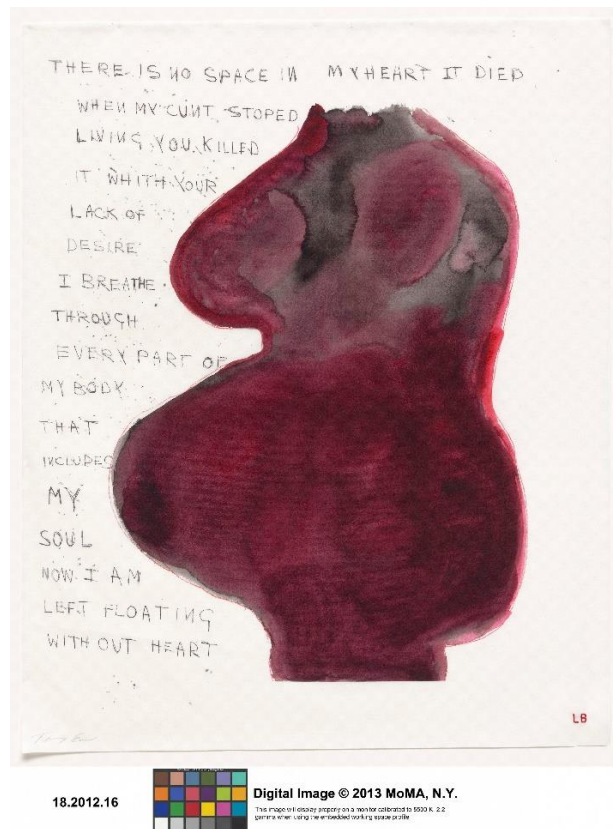


FIGURE 3: LOUISE BOURGEOIS (1911–2010) AND TRACEY EMIN (1963–), WHEN MY CUNT STOPPED LIVING No. 16 OF 16 (2009–2010), 76.2 CM X 61 CM, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK.

Questions of matter and the maternal looked towards the matrix and its functionality. Coming from Latin word 'womb' and its roots corresponding to matter and I was interested in Bracha Ettinger's *Matrixial* (1995) where the co-emergence and co-becoming of subjects were beginning. The opening essay by Alison Reilheld in a special addition of the *Journal of Social Philosophy* acknowledges miscarriage as a 'liminal event' a state of being that is betwixt and between (2015). This ontological and social ambiguity is offered as a reason why miscarriage is not spoken of, as falling between a series of binaries asserts its displacement. She asserts miscarriage as falling between 'having procreated' and 'not having procreated', between 'parent and not being a parent', between life and death and abortion and pregnancy (Reilheld 2015). Miscarriage becomes imperilled to laws seeking to control pregnancy and abortion where there are expectations to prove or disprove voluntary or involuntary terminations. We do not have the same level of language to talk through miscarriage as we do pregnancy: *'without a clear notion of what miscarriage is, I fear we will re-peat again and again the negative ethical fallout of failure to understand miscarriages liminality. The result? Women who miscarry will again and again be isolated, their troubles sequestered, their experiences and fates enrolled in debates which hardly bear on miscarriage at all'* (Ibid.; for more resources built around this idea of in-between, see Browne 2018 and Bueno 2019). For those experiencing miscarriage it is intrinsically linked to failure; the language you encounter will describe your pregnancy as 'non-viable' and, for many, a lack of answers or investigations follow. If we are conditioned to function within goal-orientated doctrines, pregnancy without birth is gargantuan, parting the fertile bodies from non-viable pregnancies.

The text used in the performance/presentation wanted to translate the sensuous by transcending its printed matrix of syntactical structures and reforming its potential to reverberate growth and its collapse. How could the format of the performance/presentation with its emphasis and reliance on the spoken word become alternative methods where failure could publicly occur? I was interested in how the audience would perceive me, if I wavered between the expectations of conventional academic settings by reading a research paper but then adding irrelevant noises and cries that occupied another disconnected thought. For example, shouting out 'chicken' whilst organising my papers, and then throwing them on the floor. The performance/presentation played though expectations and less conventional behaviours of a symposium where departures from proposed goals to share knowledge or reach speculative probabilities publicly failed, whereby the organisation and delivery of the text were disorganised. The performance/presentation provided a suitable arena to apply methods of confusion, such as playing video work and sound work simultaneously, and making multiple places and ideas of reference or focal points, all of which brought a disunited collective of material. The performance/presentation was a work where its delivery signalled its agency and where its textuality was performed through its acts.

By acknowledging and sharing the miscarriages, the performance/presentation applied the failures of pregnancy loss as paths not realised by reanimating their failings. Our bodies do not always perform as intended; they can and do miscarry a pregnancy: they 'lose it'. This language implies clumsiness, irresponsibility, like losing a bunch of keys or till receipt. How can we process this experience of miscarriage, when we first we have to navigate the language offered to us, which is used by medical professionals and society alike? When miscarriage is confirmed, the medical staff that previously used the word 'baby' when describing your pregnancy replace it with 'material of conception' and, in doing so, our relationship with our emerging infant is renamed and changed forever (for a discussion of the appropriateness and impact of the language to use during pregnancy, see Davis-Floyd & Dumit 1998). Our bodies undergo descriptive differences; the language used reaffirms the corporeal change of direction from the viable 'baby' to a 'failure'. The performance/presentation wanted to reanimate

failings to play over and over to become meaningful and it, therefore, relied on this reworking or overworking within its construction process. The text from the fictional museum of drawing could perform its claims that drawings' fictions are rooted in foresight where predisposed thinking is navigated and anticipation reigns. By returning to reworking the text from this paper, its content and arguments were used as material to draw on. The arrangement of words and ideas were material to test again, to overwork, and reapply by using the gaps, slips, and modifications of meanings and possibilities.

It is worth a pause at this point to confirm the term drawing; this paper places drawing as a specific propositional activity: a space for exploration and discovery. To use text as a drawing material returns to the notion of the essay as speculative positioned in line with drawings' propositions (Farthing 2005; de Zegher 2003; Petherbridge 1991). By using the published essay, fictional museum of drawing publication, as material to make live drawings, the performance/presentation animated these propositions by speculating the commutable passages of exploration and inquiry, as well as considering how the social-political aspects' sexed difference could find avenues of reflective dissemination. Encounters with failure inevitably accompany this process and, by using text to redraw the presentation/performance, all the thoughts I ever had exposed failures which attempted to navigate a flood of possibilities where possibility is multifaceted and bewildering. In the presentation/performance, this was presented as an overworking of ideas, recorded texts, and multiple voices working through a variety of pathways attempting to reason. Here, the process of drawing could mirror the task of processing the miscarriages as both daunting and demanding of contingency.

This inclusion of failure acknowledged Samuel Beckett's 1983 story *Worstward Ho* where he writes, *'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better'* (1983: 8). The presentation/performance performed its failings; however, did it fail better? The propositions drawn out of all the thoughts I ever had were questions of the maternal, of the potential of textual materiality, of how corporeal lived experiences could interrogate a particular state of being, and of how to manage contingencies. Looking towards Bracha Ettinger's matrixial as a place of co-emergence began to unravel some of these issues; here, being and absence are interwoven. Acknowledging the fusion of m/Other, *'Matrixial theory addresses partial elements or multiple and partial relations between unknown elements'* (Pollock 2009: 5). This fusion of co-emerging beings offers some reflective analysis for the grief of miscarriage. It is difficult to work through miscarriage without widely understood support structures, and our position of hosting life and losing it brings not only shame but also confusion. Pollock describes, *'One of the great paradoxes we inherit from the very sphere of theory and practice that promises us tools, ideas and concepts for feminist thinking about subjectivity and sexual difference – psychoanalysis – is the linking of that which gives life (the maternal-feminine) with death'* (2009: 6). Contingencies are poised within the maternal and, when the status of my miscarried infants shifted from its state of growth and potential to 'non-viable' or 'material of conception', the loss reverberates through the bodies of m/Other. To question how we understand ourselves in the process beyond failure is an isolating place to be, and it was this that the performance/presentation exposed, the point where the becomings spoke back from a body that was jointly experiencing failures and challenging maternal expectations.

Interested in the union and possibilities of drawing/writing and performance/presentation, sounded formats were used to extend the form and material of the work. Often spoken and recorded using methods from the paper work to overlay sound and distort information, thereby reclaiming the inscriptions away from organised syntax structures to expose the polyvocal events of thinking/making. What was significant about the work was that the autobiographies arising through it were

acknowledging phenomenological experiences that vocalised uncertainties. What was at play here was the difference of the expected delivery of information, findings, and hypotheses that a symposium expects through a continuation of using text as a material that remained contemplative of the possibilities of exposure and failure. The performance used the symposium to restage its possibilities rather than to organise and present articulate concluded thought. Instead, it offered up the difficulties of drafting and presenting as an unruly place fraught with disarray via the performance of all the thoughts I ever had. Building these links of anticipation and becoming to drawing and writing, the practices grew in confidence to expose the failures. The studio practice was looking back to look forward to re-examine, draw out, and talk through its progression and aims. It drew on the communicable passages of thought argued for in 'The magnified glass of liberation: a review of fictional drawing' by focusing on the threads that distorted clarity and replayed thought. All of these research threads acknowledged restrictions, rules, and systems, and it was at this point they needed to build and break. To fail. To expose that failure, accept, and work with it. All the thoughts I ever had wanted to draw out the duality of the practice where the experiential and the intellectual meet. The practice and its connection to failure was to become the subject of the work by reconnecting to failure and performing it. The mattering of the work wanted to join the affect and event, aiming to restage the experience of failure as sensual with its material, acknowledging the sensual nature of text word and its possibilities. To move the text away from its printed letter matrix allowed questions of the maternal to join the deliberations of failure and the emergence of self and other: the borderlines between being and absence.



FIGURE 4: LUCY O'DONNELL, SITTING WITH UNCERTAINTY (2016)

### Sitting with uncertainty

The drawings and writings included here aim to create a platform that enables conversations around miscarriage and pregnancy loss. Here, four large drawings are documented bequeathing the four pregnancies I lost. This text gives an overview of the work which emerged through a dialogue with Ruth

Bender-Atik, the Director of the Miscarriage Association. We reflected on how miscarriage has been shared and documented, as well as the difficulties of its early phases, a time when assurances cannot be given and when doubt and uncertainty become all consuming. This led our dialogue to use the phrase, 'sitting with uncertainty', and this expression became the title for the exploration of my drawings and motivated this initial poetic work that reiterates the pace and sensation of uncertainties:

The it of the clock

As the what of the tock

The what of the it

The me and the this

The wanting the waiting

The void and the aching

The peeing and looking

The calls and the booking

The blaming and longing

The feelings of wronging

The wronging and righting

The writing the fighting

The tit and the tat

The this and the that

The in and the out

The tap and the spout

The entrance the exit

The exit the next bit

The what's and the whys

The naps and the cries

The silence and aching

The sleep and the waking

The patterns keep going

Speeding and slowing

All in the clock of its ticks and its tocks



FIGURE 5: LUCY O'DONNELL, SITTING WITH UNCERTAINTY (2016)

I had my first miscarriage the day after my PhD viva. I passed the process yet, despite this successful result, I felt a great sense of failure. I spent days in hospital with various complications from miscarrying this pregnancy. Things were never going to be the same again; I had persistent encounters with uncertainty throughout the four pregnancies I 'lost'. The drawings in this catalogue are the first significant body of work since my PhD. They connect to and process my miscarried pregnancies. They speak to the taboos of negotiating miscarriage in silence, thereby interrupting the repetition of repressed voices and aspiring to open up conversations around this difficult and complex experience. Each drawing in this catalogue is made up from multiple smaller drawings organised within a grid format. The intention for the drawings is for them to use their individual parts and appear to propagate within the grid structure by making an image that references a range of things, thereby creating a bigger picture of colliding forms and shapes. These drawings refer to each miscarriage I had: four works depicting one body that endured four failed pregnancies. It was my intention that these drawings appear to grow and break, with unexpected forms, activities, and narratives.



FIGURE 6: LUCY O'DONNELL, SITTING WITH UNCERTAINTY (2016)

Miscarriage is scary, sad, uncertain; physically and mentally painful; filled with loss, grief, and distress. It is hard. I wanted to make these drawings to work through/with/in this place of uncertainty and failure. Drawings are often perceived as places where potential arises by thinking through something and allowing the unknown to be untangled: they inherently possibilise. These drawings worked through failure by narrating the in-between of pregnancy without birth. I was interested in shifting my previous application of drawing as a site of potential to perform failings. The repetitive rhythms inherent within a grid set a systematic structure that delineated certainty and inevitability. I liked the way the grid could offer this rigidity whilst the smaller units that made up the work could accommodate difference, alternatives of form, pattern, and nuanced associations with cells, bodies, spaces, and landscapes. It appeared that this format could offer a place for the unexpected to disentangle and enact failure. The smaller units of drawings acted like little chapters of time that make up a bigger picture, a wider narrative. A place where activities are both micro and macro. The process began with my reflections on both landscape and the sonogram, where the ultrasound waves provide a monochromatic image of an unrecognisable place and a strange relationship between image and self-perception, where the unseen and unknown collaborate. This place is like a landscape, an unearthly one, and it offered me a reference point to think about the body's terrains, activities, and cycles. The politics of the body in representational terms was negated through the monochromatic suggestions of the sonographic image.

The sonographer's image gives access to the private domain of your body, to the place your baby dwells. It is this image that can quickly resituate the language used for your pregnancy. The status your body once possessed changes within the language gleaned from this image and where, for me, my baby changed and became material of conception. In this shift expected events ceased and biological growth became a vessel that had fucked up.

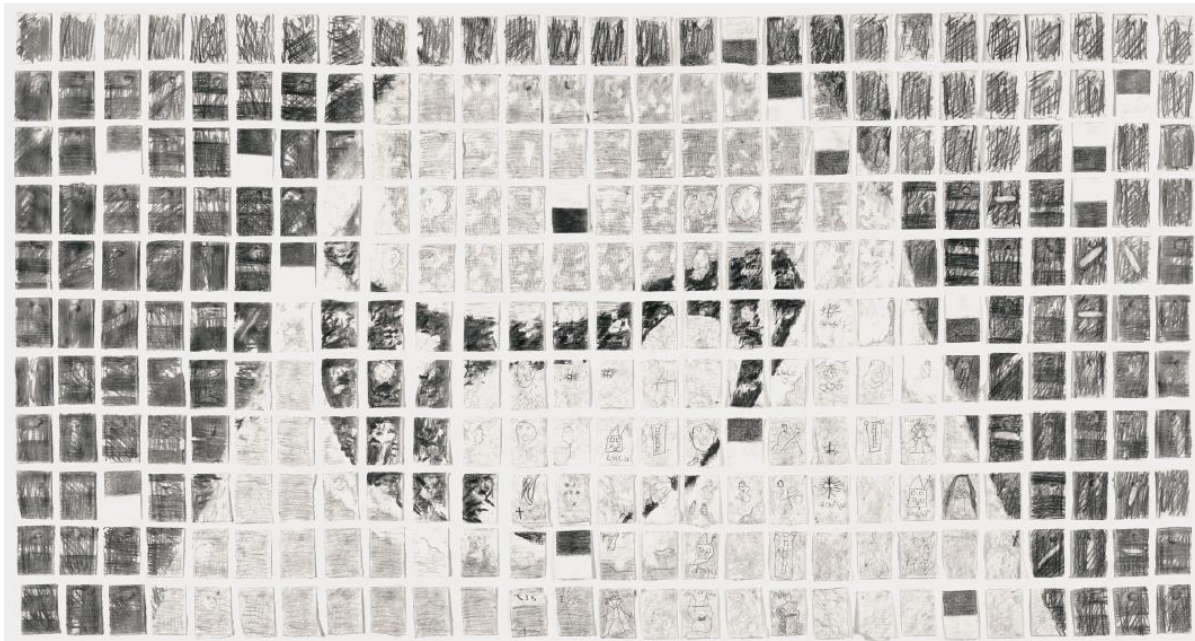


FIGURE 7: LUCY O'DONNELL, SITTING WITH UNCERTAINTY (2016)

My GP and midwife had been telling me about my baby, about their due date, and gleaning information from me to fill in forms and make plans. But a miscarriage deletes this and, on the same day when medical professionals talked about my 'baby', others named it the 'material of conception'. Both my infants and my own status had changed. You and your body did not do its job and your baby has been let down ... by you. Blame and shame take over and, with limited answers as to why such a catastrophic occurrence has happened, a pragmatic you is asked for: Please change your idea of baby, its care and safety, its successful development, your nurturing, and place as mother in order to sort out this 'material'; alter the importance of baby as baby does not exist its matter now and its coming out unfinished. The professionals need to make sure you know what options you have, and you are given choices for 'miscarriage management'. You do not want to take any of these choices; you don't want the material to exit; you want your baby back.

These experiences of loss filtered through into the drawings, sometimes with words, sometimes with ambiguous shapes that appear as like blobs or splats, whilst other times more recognisable forms came forward, such as nappies or bottles: the things that have also been taken away. The drawings were worked in small detail, like stars in the night sky, tiny dots inhabiting dark vast spaces. The process of making these drawings was about the physical activity of labouring marks and surfaces as a time bound suspension of mercurial forms. Pregnancy propels you into a future: medical staff plan, explain, and prepare, as do you, both physically and mentally. What do you need, what do you have, what do you need to arrange? All of this disappears and takes a tangent, where the choices are not wanted and all lead to the same outcome: the 'material' must leave you. The newness, the expectations, the potential of growth all go ... but the desire does not ... the love does not ... the connection does not ... These, however, get replaced with failure. The rich potential of growth is replaced with loss, and what do you do with loss? The drawings are interwoven with the narratives and experiences of miscarriage, so to talk about the drawings is to talk about the miscarriages. The drawings connect to the expelling; they ponder the tentative time between the viable and non-viable, between baby and material, between maternity and expulsion.

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