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[Show/Exhibition]

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GARAGE  
IMAGINARIES



DOCTORING THE EVIDENCE III:  
GARAGE IMAGINARIES

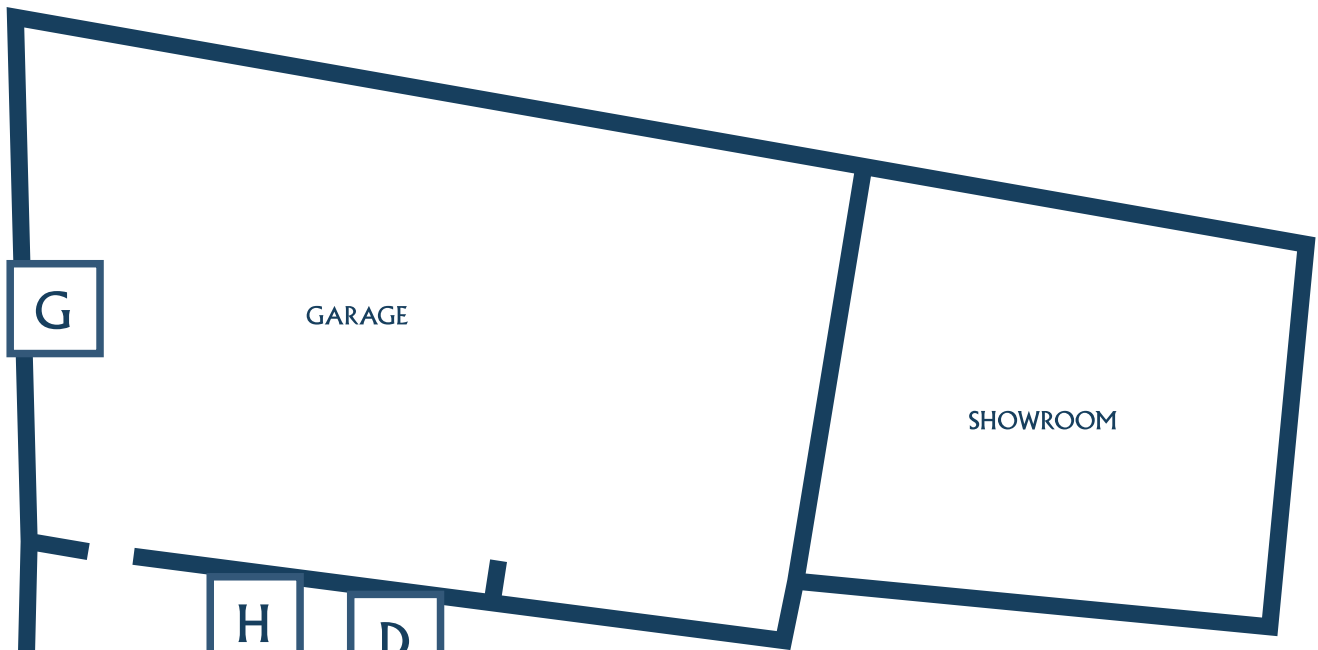
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BELSYRE GARAGE, 75 WOODSTOCK ROAD, OXFORD



## THE PLAN: 75 WOODSTOCK ROAD

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G

GARAGE

SHOWROOM

H

D

C

WORKSHOP

F

OFFICES

HALL

RECEPTION

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# INTRODUCING GARAGE IMAGINARIES

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CHRIS DORSETT



## It's a garage

It used to be a Saab dealership. There is a showroom, a large workshop, a reception area, an open courtyard.

## It's an empty garage

We could call these spaces studios, exhibition spaces, performance venues, but it's none of these. Everything will be demolished as soon as planning permission is approved so that a new headquarters for the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies can be built in its place. In the meantime, I'm saying these spaces are imaginary.

## Please explain *imaginary*

In contemporary anthropology, 'the imaginary' is a field of research that ascribes ways of thinking and believing to the reservoir of images and symbols each culture holds dear. This idea is derived from Jean-Paul Sartre, who argued (astutely I think) that a conscious mind devoid of imagination would be hopelessly mired in reality.

## Say it again: it's a garage

It's real. One might think that the emptiness disappears when an art event takes place. It doesn't. It remains. Art projects are no more than strategic imaginings. The artificiality is exposed the moment art is projected onto the void. I've watched it happen again and again.

## So it really is a garage

Yes, I've organised contemporary art projects in these buildings many times. Each act of imagining cannot bear the persistent emptiness. What we imagine is either an intrusion or a transformation, and the difference is fundamental to my speciality: interventionist art practice. So lets call what we do ...

## Garage Imaginaries

Postscript: say something about being a veteran of practice-based research in art schools. The point here is that the garage is a place where we can research the personality of contemporary art at the moment it is truly exposed to scrutiny.



P.Y.M. (2024)

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ANDREW McNIVEN





'P.Y.M.' shows sites in Belgium and northern France where Andrew McNiven's grandfather, Percy Young McNiven (1891-1972), can be placed during the First World War, including those of the battles of Loos, the Somme and Passchendaele. In doing so, the work aims to recover something of his history and that of his comrades, respond to and offer alternatives to forms of memorialisation and remembrance which have emerged in the years since the last participants of this war died, and to represent a particularly charged landscape from which material traces of the war have disappeared, where, in most cases, only the topography familiar to its participants remains.

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'P.Y.M.' was made for 'De Verplaatsing' (The Relocation) at Pictura, Dordrecht (NL), in 2024, an exhibition collaboration with Frans van Lent. This work was supported by Creative Scotland/National Lottery.



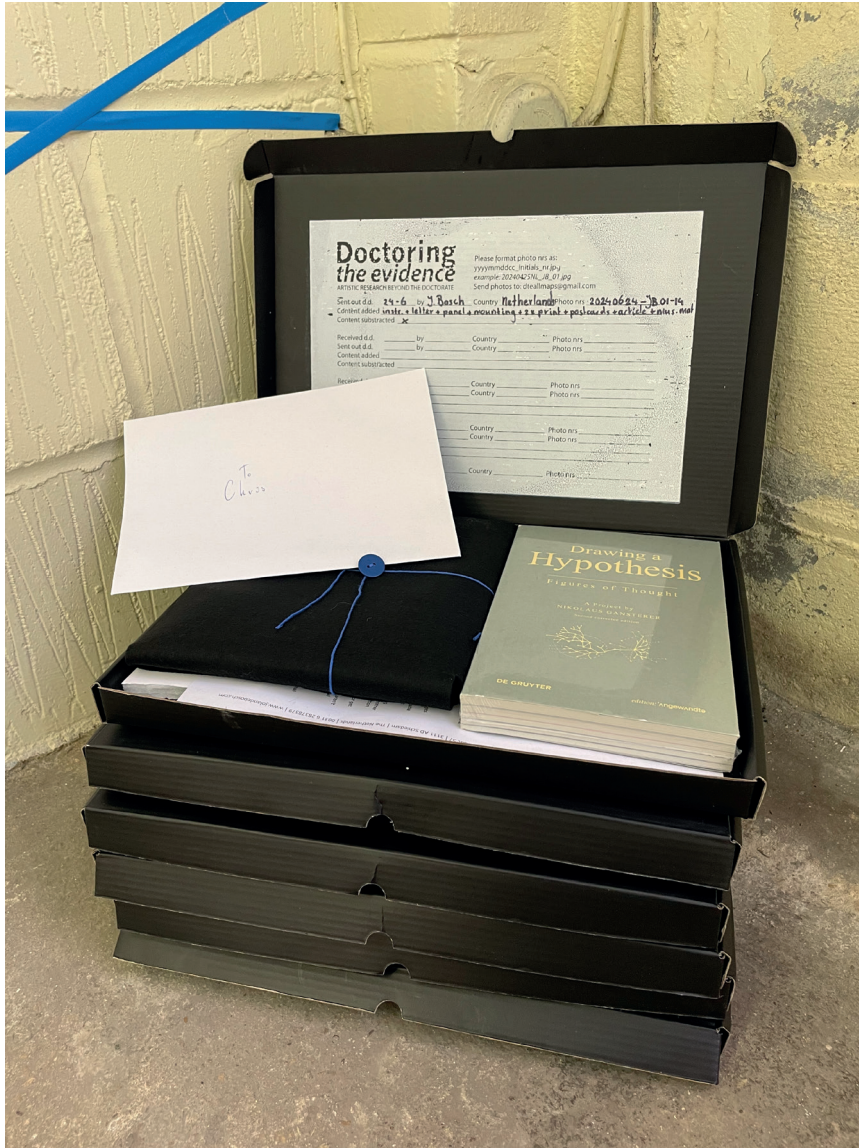
'P.Y.M.' 2024, 16' 53", 4K digital video, stereo digital audio.  
This work was supported by Creative Scotland/National Lottery.

A MEETING OF KINDS

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JOLANDE BOSCH





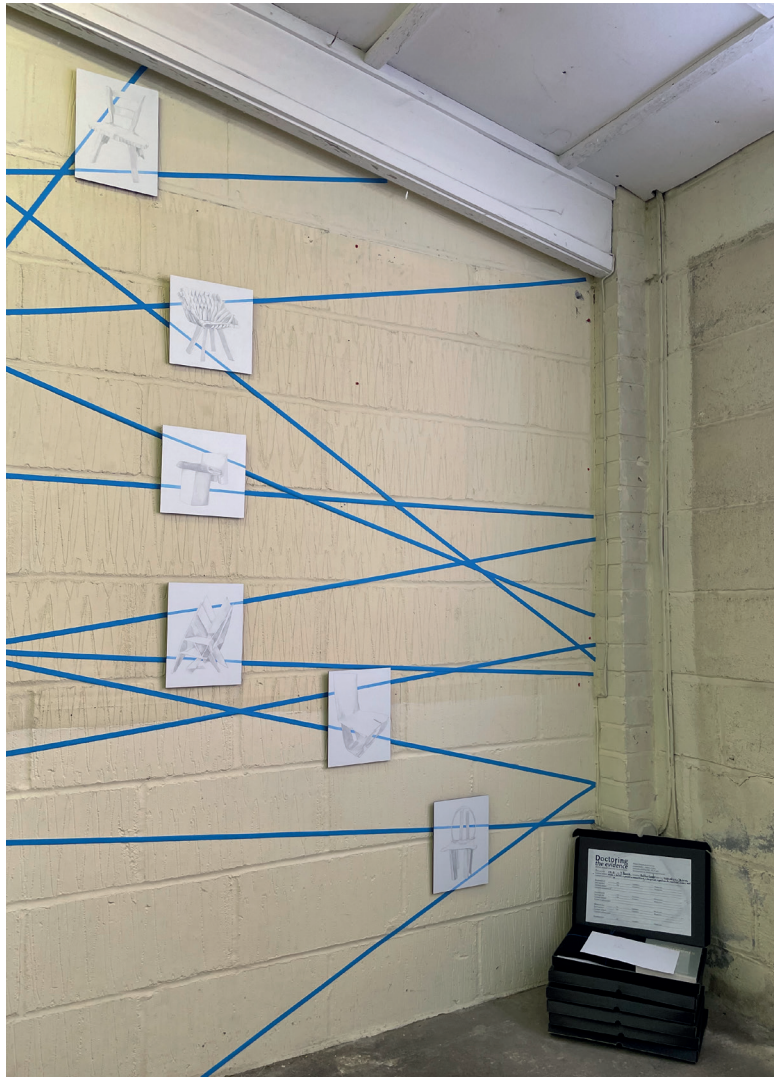
This project consists of a series of hand-drawn silverpoint chairs on separate panels with lines of neon blue acrylic paint that continue as tape lines on the walls when they are installed in the exhibition.

Several different people created the paper chairs depicted and AI generated two of the chairs. All were asked to 'make a chair out of white paper'.

The title 'a meeting of kinds' is a play on the expression 'a meeting of minds' between people, and the notion of 'kinds'. The project exhibition, in line with the overall project 'Doctoring the Evidence' considers learning communities as much more than temporal connections, rather as agents of chance with long lasting effects on communities beyond their own. The curiosity and novelty of practice based research affecting and including extended fields of enquiry, but also close to home; one's own day-to-day practice of making, teaching and even things like friendships and parenthood (two of the chairs were created by my own children). There is, therefore, also a meeting of 'kinds', kinds of chairs, of course, but also kinds of relationships, of conversations, of the exchange of ideas and matter.

The works in this exhibition will afterwards be sent out to members of our research community and beyond in a postal box project which allows them to travel accompanied by materials, letters, gifts etc. and become replaced or extended onto by other physical gestures of contact. Thereby asking the question of what added value a material conversation (and material attention as it were) adds to our online experience of connectedness. After the exhibition in Oxford, all chairs will be rewrapped and sent out to their intended second destination as gifts, accompanied by the letters and other items pre-wrapped in the boxes. Who receives a box is invited to send it along to anyone they wish to include. The wrapping, the unboxing and the contents of the boxes will be documented and displayed in various forms over time.

Most of my work over the years has contained questions about nearness and distance of subject matter and affection through the alternation between the analogue and the digital. The digital phases of the process often being associated with distance and more 'analytical' approaches to subject matter. In this project I have wanted to amplify the absence of physical presence and nearness through the empty chairs that are turned into attentive drawings, carefully wrapped artefacts. Connected through lines of neon blue - a colour I associate with server rooms and data storage - that may reach each other, but also extend much further into areas beyond. Through both material and digital artefacts and interpersonal connections, we find and maintain kinship. The city of Oxford itself is a testament to that.



PARADOXICAL LUCIDITY

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CHRISTINA KOLAITI





*“Episode of unexpected, spontaneous, meaningful, and relevant communication or connectedness in a patient who is assumed to have permanently lost the capacity for coherent verbal or behavioural interaction due to a progressive and pathophysiological dementing process.”<sup>i</sup>*  
(Paradoxical lucidity)

This installation builds upon The Teddy Bear Cabinet, a body of research which explores early attachment as a *“lasting psychological connectedness between human beings”*, within a landscape of disconnection, low nurture and self-alienation. <sup>ii</sup>

A similar, yet unexplained experience of connectedness defined as ‘paradoxical lucidity’ occurs as a brief episode of mental clarity in people who temporarily regain the ability to communicate after their capacity to do so appears lost. <sup>iii</sup> This neurobiological phenomenon signifies a spontaneous episode of *“meaningful and relevant communication”* in the hours before death.<sup>iv</sup>

Such ephemeral self-realisation – the floating teddy bear installation at Garage Imaginaries – discerns authentic recollections of attachment, loss and letting go.

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<sup>i</sup> Mashour GA, Frank L, Batthyany A, et al. (2019) Paradoxical lucidity: a potential paradigm shift for the neurobiology and treatment of severe dementias. *Alzheimers Dementia* [8, p.1107]. (Accessed: 25 October 2024)

<sup>ii</sup> Bowlby, J. (1969) *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Loss*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>iii</sup> Alzheimer’s Association (2021) Peterson, A, Clapp, J, Largent, A, E, Harkins, K, Stites, D. H, Karlawish, J. (2 August 2021) *What is paradoxical lucidity? The answer begins with its definition*. Available at: <https://alz-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/alz.12424>. (Accessed: 25 October 2024).

<sup>iv</sup> *ibid*, 2019, p.1107.





LUCY CANCER

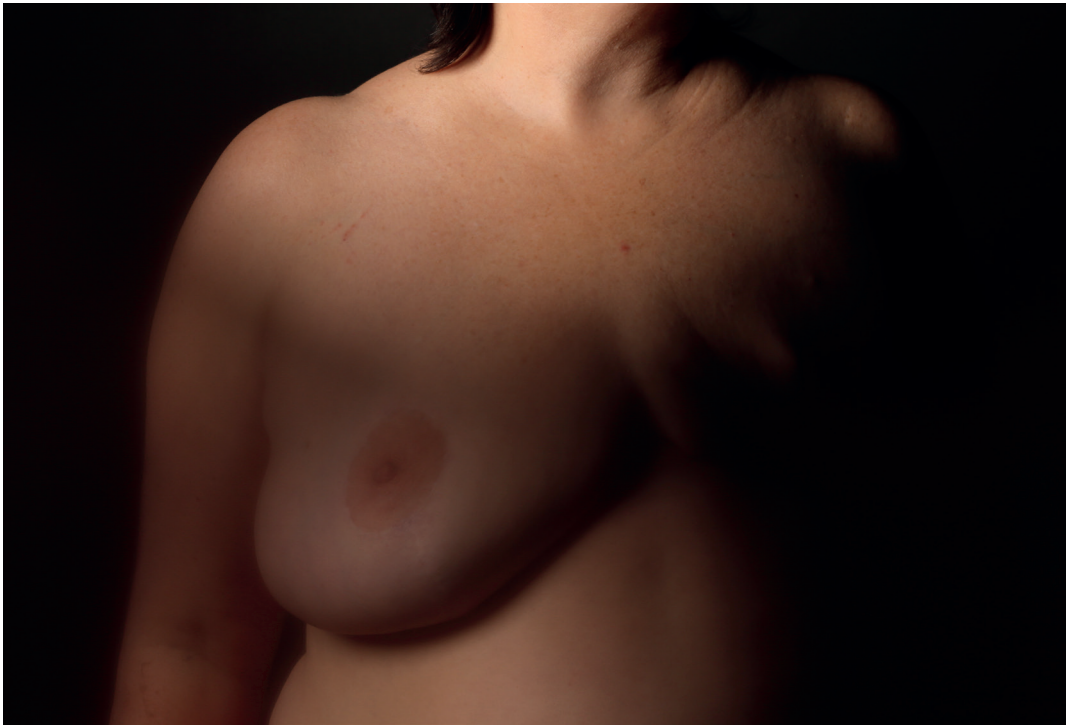
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LUCY O'DONNELL



LUCY CANCER deliberates how we understand ourselves. This autobiographical image of my torso with one breast questions how the body performs in social and political climates. The work shares my experience of having an unstable body shrouded in loss. My PhD thesis (Drawing Vignettes: Perpetual becomings 2016) centered around corporal becoming(s) within the context of drawing research. Since this work I have been motivated to articulate a complex liminality describing bodily state and status as unstable and precarious. Before a cancer diagnosis in 2021 infertility brought waves of loss, a tsunami of difference diverting expectations of life. My artwork challenges common pregnant tropes which perceive these bodies as safe nurturing places. With miscarriage or pregnancy loss death comes before birth. This cultural disruption tangles how we understand ourselves and loss can permeate our bodily and intellectual selves. When I had cancer treatment and a mastectomy I was a new mum, and it made breast feeding my baby out of the question. Cancer challenges the certainty of life, and your body becomes a battle ground. Since these significant life experiences my work faces loss, methods of making have included removal, erasure and reconfiguration. In this work LUCY CANCER uses photography to face loss in the hope it prompts reflections around body identity.

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LETTERS TO MYSELF  
& INVITATION LETTER TO MYSELF

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POYAN YEE & UUENDY LAU





## Letters to Myself (2024)

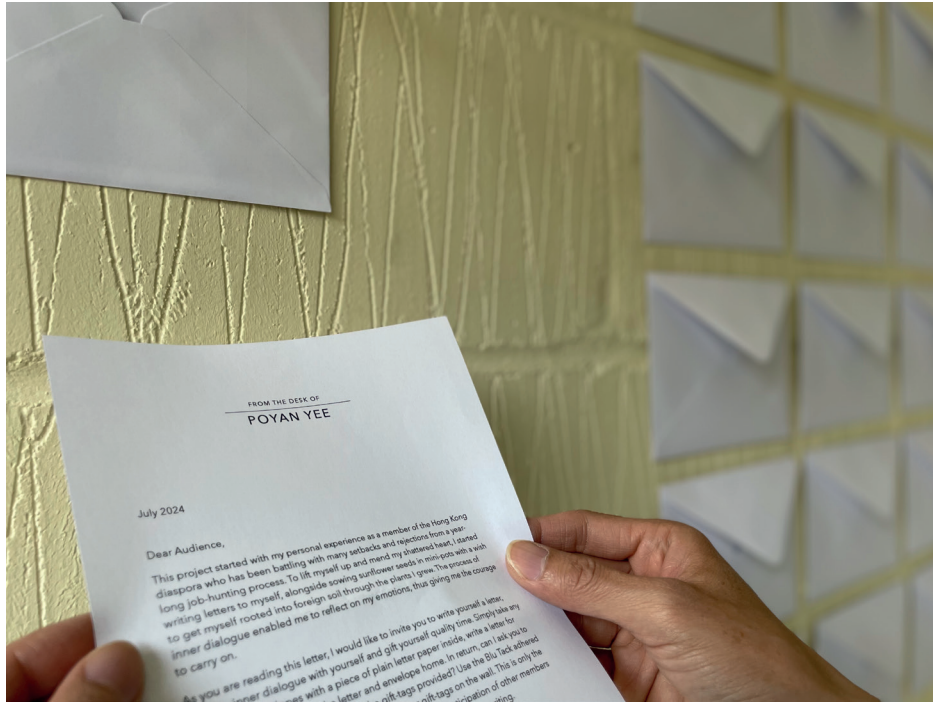
Envelope installation by Poyan Yee

This project started with my personal experience as a member of the Hong Kong diaspora who has been battling with many setbacks and rejections recently. To lift myself up, I started writing letters to myself, alongside sowing sunflower seeds in mini-pots with a wish to get myself rooted into foreign soil through the plants I grew. The process of inner dialogue enabled me to reflect on my emotions, thus giving me the courage to carry on.

This exhibition invites members of the audience to write themselves a letter, have an inner dialogue with their own self and gift themselves quality time by simply taking home one of the envelopes enclosed with a piece of plain letter paper. In return, the audience is invited to share their stories in words or drawings on the space originally covered by the envelope. This project will develop with the participation of other members of the audience.

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In this room, the idea of these two series originated from the first collaborative project I did with Hong Kong artist UUendy Lau (UU) on arts and mental health in Hong Kong in 2021-22. Since my practice-based research project as artist-curator for a hospital in 2006, I have had the huge privilege of working with many artists. As UU is also living in the UK now, I invited her to join me to develop our works on arts and mental health for the UK audience. Relocating to a new country with all sorts of challenges, UU and I responded differently, inviting our audience to embark on a creative journey of self-discovery.



## Invitation Letter to Myself (2024)

by UUendy Lau

We live in a funny world where we reluctantly make ourselves very busy every single day and often become absorbed in work, chores and digital engagement.

Our days are filled with big and small tasks, often at the expense of truly experiencing the present moment.

Subconsciously, we prioritise these over our daily lives and feelings, becoming less mindful of our emotions and ourselves as individuals with unique, beautiful souls.

In this series of poster artworks titled *Invitation Letter to Myself*, each illustration is created as a visual dispatch, an informal and gentle invitation for viewers to make small gestures for themselves—such as looking outside their windows or making a cup of tea—and to truly appreciate these acts. These seemingly ordinary activities, often carried out mindlessly, are presented as alternative opportunities for mindfulness and joy. Through this ‘invitation letter’ series, viewers are encouraged to make time for themselves each day and develop a deeper appreciation for the routine and mundane from which they may reveal the hidden sparks of joy in daily life.

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**INVITATION**



to have a big, big meal

@kempal

**INVITATION**



to look outside your window

@kempal

**INVITATION**



to make a cup of tea with honey

@kempal

**INVITATION**



to buy yourself a yellow flower

@kempal

**INVITATION**



to get a paper and draw a cloud

@kempal

**INVITATION**



to just be yourself

@kempal

ICELAND

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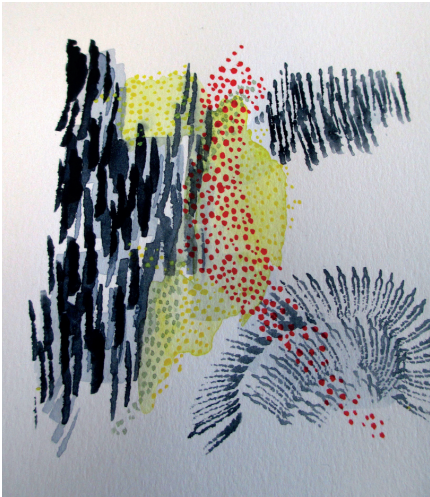
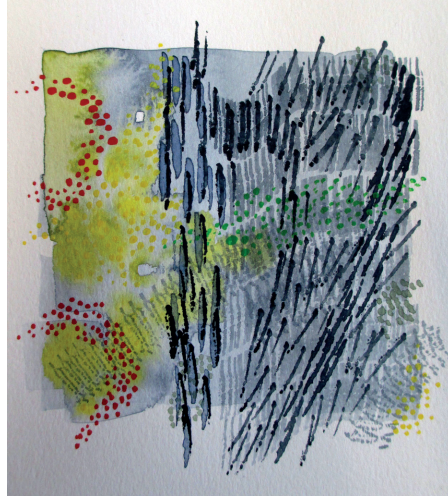
JOHN LAVELL





These watercolour works emerged from a residency in Iceland where I attempted to map the unique landscape with reference to the practice of using grid frames in calculating species frequency. I felt there was a similarity in the practice of criminal forensic investigators when processing a crime scene. Various patterns are employed to cover the ground to glean clues and evidence in addition to often intuitive insights.

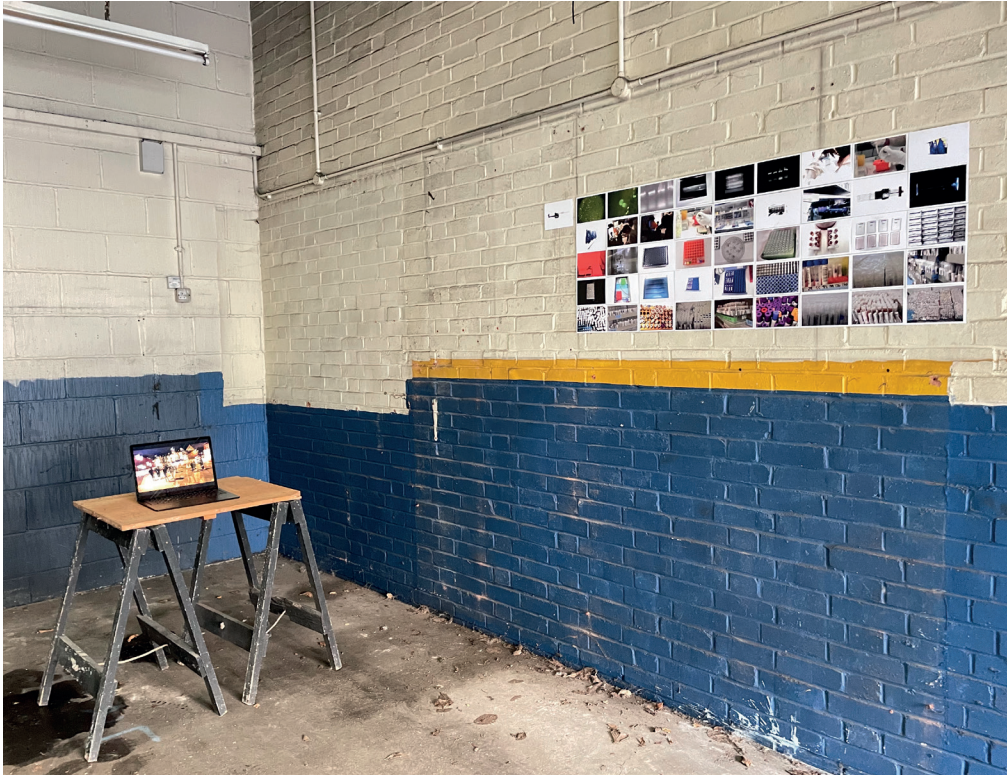
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FINE ART PRACTICE AND RESEARCH  
WITHIN THE CHARITY SECTOR

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ALEXANDRA ROWE





## **Fine Art and Healthcare Communication**

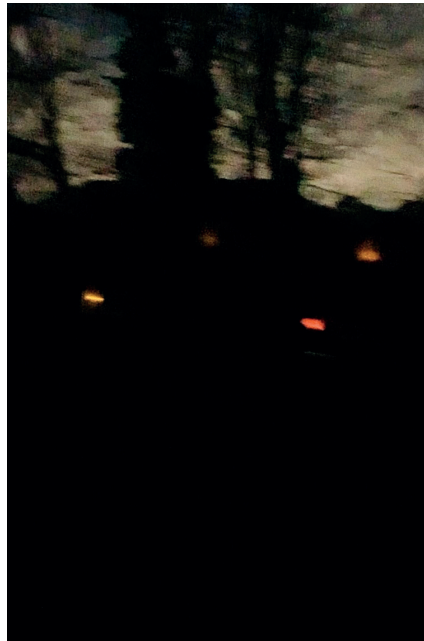
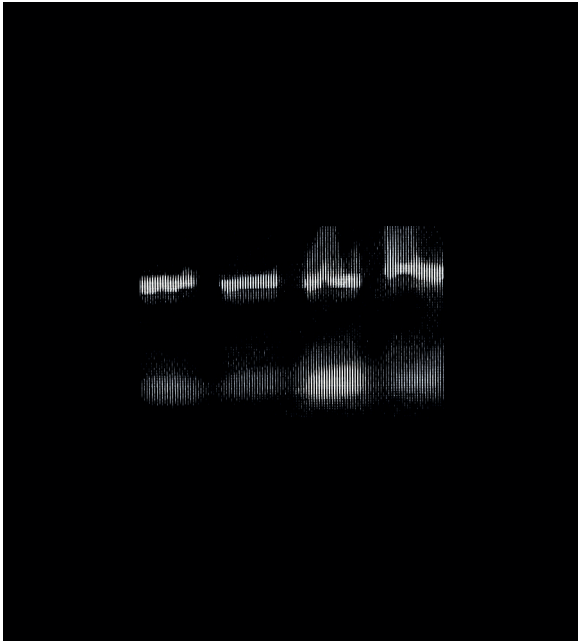
In 2014, Dr Alexandra Rowe collaborated with The Anthony Nolan Trust. This project involved producing a photographic exhibition that seeks to improve 'patient and social understanding' of the complex processes involved in the collection, testing and extraction of DNA. The aim of this project is to advance communication and knowledge transfer between scientists, doctors and patients. This involved observation and co-creating narrative art, posing the question: can scientists, doctors and patients' communication and knowledge transfer be improved through Fine Arts? The artworks explore the shared ownership and demonstrate the complex juxtaposition of this relationship and the knowledge that can be communicated.

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## **Activism Against Gender-Based Violence**

In 2023, Dr Rowe collaborated with the children's domestic violence and abuse (DVA) charity Acorns. Acorns provides trauma-informed therapy to children and young people who have witnessed and experienced DVA. This project involved producing a film-based project that facilitates a better social understanding of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence through a trauma-informed approach. This collaboration involved observing a peaceful march by domestic violence and abuse survivors and their children, as well as co-creating a short experimental film with the charity. The film follows the survivors as they walk with lanterns at dusk through Wallsend. The aim of the film is to communicate the process of walking through the darkness of trauma and into the light.





TRANSMISSION

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CATHERINE FLEXEN



**“Without division there can be no love”**

*Philip Rawson*

When considering the history of the recently acquired premises of an old SAAB garage by the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, thoughts on ‘transmission’ in both motor engines and religious thought came to mind.

The mechanical work of caring for the assembly of transmission systems bears interesting comparison with tantric ideas of the union of separate parts and the consequential realisation of potential. I began exploring the terminologies of form and function in car engines: ignition, transmission, alignment, differential and tolerance, and examining technical drawings from SAAB manuals. Then came an exploration of Sanskrit words for the renaming or captioning of engine parts. The female and the male are unavoidable, one might say urgent, in both the operations of an engine and tantra. The figure opposite, Yoni\_Lingham, is one of a series of recaptioned drawings made on the windows of the now-empty garage.

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## ANDREW McNIVEN

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Dr Andrew McNiven is a Scots/Irish artist, academic and curator. Born in Edinburgh in 1963, he studied fine art at Goldsmiths' College in London, graduating in 1987, a contemporary of many of the artists who rose to international prominence during the 1990s. He received his MA from Goldsmiths' in 1995. Since 1990 his work has been shown internationally, including the Lisson Gallery, the Whitechapel Gallery and the Akademie der Kunst, Berlin. He was a lecturer at Edinburgh College of Art until 2004 and completed an AHRC-funded, practice-led PhD at Northumbria University in 2010. He is currently Senior Lecturer in Visual Culture at Zeppelin University, Friedrichshafen, Germany.

[andrewmcniven.com](http://andrewmcniven.com)

## JOLANDE BOSCH

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Dr Jolande Bosch works and lives in Schiedam (Rotterdam area) the Netherlands.

She finished her PhD project 'The Strategic Studio: How to Access and Assess Decision-Making in Visual Art Practice' in 2009 and has thereafter been working at several art schools in the Netherlands as research and professional development tutor. Jolande's artistic work, teaching and independent research all share an ongoing interest in alternating generative and analytical focus in practice. Additionally, the fostering of learning communities through notions of building kinship beyond studentship is an ongoing interest inspired by specifically the all maps welcome research group, but also by the other communities Jolande is involved with.



## CHRISTINA KOLAITI

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Dr Christina Kolaiti is a Senior Lecturer in Photography at York St John University.

Her practice-led PhD research project 'The Influence of Photographic Narrative in Healthcare Dialogue' developed as an AHRC New Collaborations Award between the University of Northumbria and Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. In 2011, this project was recognised "for an outstanding contribution to the art and science of photography" and was awarded the prestigious Photographic Society's Combined Colleges Medal by the Royal College of Surgeons, and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of England.

Since the completion of her PhD project in 2010, the methodology of 'photographic re-narration' which is coined from psychoanalysis, has continued to position photography as a form of knowledge transfer and public engagement, within a range of studio-based, interdisciplinary and pedagogical settings.

In 2015, she joined York St John University as a subject specialist to design the inaugural curriculum of the BA Hons Photography. She currently teaches on the BA Hons Photography and MFA Art at the School of the Arts.

Christina's current artistic research focuses on early attachment and includes the publications 'Inertia', 'Mal de Débarquement' and 'The Teddy Bear Cabinet'.

## LUCY O'DONNELL

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Dr Lucy O'Donnell's practice centers drawing as a conceptual and material mode of thinking and articulating. She is concerned with translating experiences utilizing feminist trajectories in explorations of the body, health and fertility. Social, political and phenomenological reflections filter through both her writing and studio practice. Recent projects acknowledge drawing as open-ended, playing with ideas of becoming and 'failure', where writings, performances and works on paper deal with pregnancy without birth, the maternal figure, and her body as a unstable sabotaging dwelling.

## POYAN YEE

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Dr Poyan Yee has shifted her artistic practice from photography to curating with a focus on arts and well-being. From 2006 to 2010, she conducted a practice-based doctoral research project 'Healing Through Curatorial Dialogue' at Northumbria University as artist-curator in collaboration with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. She devised and developed a series of participatory art workshops for healthcare staff, patients and local artists, and has demonstrated the positive impacts of contemporary arts practice within the hospital.

Her participatory approach was then adapted to projects in Hong Kong, where she organised arts workshops for various NGOs. She is currently based in the UK.

## UUENDY LAU (UU)

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UUendy Lau (UU) holds an MA in Critical Design from Goldsmiths, University of London and brings the academic foundation to her work as a mixed-media artist and illustrator. Her practice focuses on narrative drawings, speculative designs and participatory arts inspired by nature. Viewing nature as a universal and inclusive subject that permeates cultures and languages, UU explores the connections between people, community and the environmental landscape. Her projects inspire unfolding stories that foster fresh perspectives, and invite audiences to engage more thoughtfully with the world around them. By cultivating alternative ways to connect with nature, her work also strives to empower wellbeing and resonate with our inner thoughts and emotions.

[uuendylau.com](http://uuendylau.com)  
IG: @uuendylau

## JOHN LAVELL

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Dr John Lavell graduated in 1991 from Newcastle Polytechnic with a BA (Hons) in Fine Art. He lived and worked in Japan and Canada from 1997-2003 holding various teaching posts and regularly exhibited. Experiences in Japan particularly relating to training in traditional martial arts profoundly influenced a reframing of approaches to studio practice. John returned to the UK to complete a Masters Degree in Fine Art Practices in 2003-2004 at Northumbria University. This resulted in a new body of research attempting to explore a 'forensic aesthetic' or mindset.

In 2005 he was awarded doctoral funding by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. His practice led research was centred around a continuing and enduring fascination with the field of criminal forensics: its methods, techniques, philosophy, and practice. Through exploiting and co-opting techniques, terms and glossaries associated with this discipline resulted in a further body of work and an accompanying body of research activity. His PhD thesis ranged over a 'terrain of interests' from the taxonomies of natural history classification to the reception of art works and was completed in 2010.

From 2008-2012 held a variety of teaching posts and roles at Northumbria University and Tyne Metropolitan College. In 2012 John relocated as Senior Fine Art Lecturer to The British Higher School in Moscow.

[johnlavell.com](http://johnlavell.com)

## ALEXANDRA ROWE

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Dr Alexandra Rowe is a Newcastle-based artist who uses digital mixed media, experimental film, printmaking and poetry to facilitate, illustrate and communicate, a personal emotional response to a specific social environment and circumstance. Dr Rowe's programme of work aims to establish a visual language that uses fine art practices to develop and improve communication. The artworks investigate the potential of fine arts practices as mechanisms to explore the communication and visualisation of pain and trauma. Dr Rowe manipulates and explores the use of colour within her work; this is achieved by experimenting with printmaking and digital video techniques.

## CATHERINE FLEXEN

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Catherine Flexen is an Associate Artist at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies and a member of the Drawing Research Group at Arts University Bournemouth. She graduated from Chelsea College of Art & Design in 1993.

## CHRIS DORSETT

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Professor Chris Dorsett is an artist-curator known for pioneering exhibitions at Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum in the 1980s. He has organised similar interventionist projects in Sweden, Finland, Amazonia, and Hong Kong. As professor of fine art at Northumbria University, he published extensively on the interface between experimental art practices and the museum sector. His personal archive is now held by the Pitt Rivers Museum, and he runs the international Associate Artists scheme at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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With thanks to the curators Professor Chris Dorsett and Poyan Yee, the staff, scholars, researchers, invited artists Lucy O'Donnell and UUendy Lau and associate artists at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, the All Maps Welcome Research Group and York St John University for supporting this project.



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BELSYRE GARAGE

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