Material Remains  The Afterlife of Personal Objects

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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October 2014
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Clare Humphries
October 2014
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ABSTRACT

When a family member dies, their personal possessions begin an afterlife. After death material objects enter new systems of circulation and value, and even ordinary belongings can resonate with significance. In this practice-based PhD I explore the idea that objects of deceased family can arouse an experience of aura. I take my own collection of inheritances as a point of departure, and turn to printmaking to examine how an auratic encounter with them can be visualised. Through a theoretically engaged, creative enquiry I grapple with the notion of aura and ask how it can be re-conceptualised in relation to inherited objects. In a reciprocal gesture I also turn my attention to printmaking itself, and question how the materiality of personal objects can inform an approach to contemporary practice. My aims are to produce an exhibition of artwork that invites an auratic experience of personal objects, and to engage with making as an embodied form of reflexive enquiry. Together, the studio work and exegesis propose a re-thinking of aura, where it is conceived as an experience of present-absence. I suggest that an auratic object is one that creates binding connections to absent people, producing simultaneous feelings of intimacy and separation. In addition I extend a methodology of linocut printmaking and explore ways to reconfigure the relation between hand and surface in print-based practice.
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When a loved one dies, suddenly their personal belongings and defining possessions come to the foreground of consciousness—they are truly noticed.

—Margaret Gibson
BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

The year I commenced this project, curator Alex Baker wrote about the afterlife of personal belongings. He reflected that when a person dies their personal objects remain as poignant traces of a life lived. “In the end it is our things—our material possessions—that outlive us,” he began. “Anyone who has lost a family member or close friend knows this: what we have before us once that person is gone are the possessions that formed a life and memories.” In this doctoral project I share Baker’s understanding of objects as material remains and contemplate how personal belongings become animated when a family member dies. I turn to printmaking to explore how objects are experienced, and to consider how an auratic encounter with them can be visualised. My objective is to create print-based artworks that engage with the aura of prosaic belongings.

I grew up around the relics of my deceased family. As a child, stories about my grandparents were narrated to me through their possessions, and their ghostly presence was welcomed into our home through photographs and 35 mm slides (see fig. 1). My grandfather’s Box Brownie camera sat on a bookshelf in the lounge room, and my grandmother’s silverware nestled


2. Throughout this exegesis, and especially in the introduction, I include documentation of objects that I have inherited. The images are not intended to function as an exhaustive inventory, but rather to give the reader insight into the belongings that triggered the project.
into the back of the crystal cabinet. On occasion I was permitted to polish the silver, or rummage through a box of tools in the garage as my dad relayed anecdotes from the past. At the time I did not understand my urge to feel the rough texture of rusted wood rasps under my fingertips, or to see tarnished silver reclaim its white glow, but a desire was instilled in me all those years ago to understand the power of personal objects.

According to sociologist Margaret Gibson, my experience of family belongings is not unique. She observes that most of us live with intergenerational objects which “through death…rise in symbolic, emotional and mnemonic value sometimes outweighing all other measures of value.” Our experience of objects, Gibson argues, is restructured in bereavement, and even the most prosaic things can take on heightened meaning.

In addition to Gibson, many other contemporary scholars before me have explored the significance of inherited objects, notably in fields such as sociology, anthropology, archaeology and psychology. I began this PhD with a conviction that art-based research could contribute a unique perspective to the study of material remains. I agree with theorist Paul Carter who calls creative research a “process of material thinking” that “enables us to think differently about our human situation.” In fact, my desire to explore the afterlife of belongings intensified through viewing creative works by Ruth Maddison, (see fig 2 and 3), Doris Salcedo (see fig 4) and Dianne Longley (see fig 25 on page 34) in the lead-up to this PhD. My experience of their work was one of the triggers that prompted me to ask: How can I use printmaking and installation to explore the aura of personal objects left behind by deceased family members? My personal connection to


4. Although I use the term “thing” here, and throughout this exegesis, as a colloquial substitute for object, I recognise there is a significant body of literature that borrows from Heidegger’s distinction between an object and a thing. See Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” special issue, Critical Inquiry 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 1-22.


fig. 1
Recto and verso views of family photographs, taken and processed by my maternal grandfather in a makeshift darkroom in his bathroom. © Clare Humphries.
fig. 2 (left)
Ruth Maddison
Inkjet print from Polaroid original, 31.9 x 30.9 cm, © Ruth Maddison. Courtesy of the artist.

fig. 3 (right)
Ruth Maddison
*The beginning of absence* (#9), 1996/2006
Inkjet print from Polaroid original, 31.9 x 30.9 cm, © Ruth Maddison. Courtesy of the artist.
family relics provoked another question: How can the materiality of family relics inform my approach to printmaking, and what possibilities does this offer contemporary practice?

The enquiries above constitute the core questions that have oriented my project. They reveal my intention to engage with belongings on two levels: firstly as the subject matter of a printmaking practice (indicated in the first question), and secondly as a participant in, or metaphor for, making (suggested in the second). By marking out a space for objects to influence my practice, the questions set the scene for a project where method and subject matter exert a reciprocal influence on one another. In effect, I ask how process (printmaking) and content (objects) can inform one another, and I therefore attempt to maintain the connection between knowledge and method that Carter argues for in visual arts research.7

In the questions above I use the terms installation and materiality in specific ways that have a bearing on the project. By materiality I do not refer to the physical matter of objects, but to the changes that occur in objects through their engagement with bodies. My focus is on the traces of fleeting touch and the subtle signs of use that appear on personal possessions. This approach draws close to the idea of “relational materiality” as it is expressed by John Law and Annemarie Mol, where the connections between people become embedded in physical things.9 It follows that I do not use the term materiality to refer to the material entity itself (the handkerchief, box or vase), the physical constitution of objects (wood, plastic, metal, glass), or the functional possibilities of their constituent materials (melting, breaking, tearing).10 I am not asking how the

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7. Ibid.


9. I do not endorse the extreme view that objects do not exist in and of themselves, and I do not, therefore, limit my research to the relations, or process of engagement, between people and objects. My focus is not on the relations between people and things, but on the material effects of those relations on concrete objects.

fig. 4

Doris Salcedo

*Atrobilliarios*, 1992-1997 (detail)


form, substance or adjectival qualities of objects can inform my practice, but how traces of human contact on objects can transform my approach to printmaking.

I use the term installation in the research questions so as to co-locate my enquiry within the performative act of making work, as well as the presentation of that work in an exhibition context. In the research I consider an independency between pictorial and spatial experience, and hope that when a viewer encounters my work they may be prompted to contemplate, or even experience, the aura of objects. I do not engage with the concerns of “installation art” in its narrowest definition, but I maintain an awareness of the viewer’s experience of my artwork in a conditional, discursive space.

In addition to utilising the terms materiality and installation, the research questions clearly situate this PhD in the realm of the personal. I look specifically to the objects of my deceased family in order to understand how material possessions can be experienced when a loved one dies (see fig. 5 and 6). My personal encounters with belongings are therefore central to my enquiry. Like the artists I introduce in this chapter, I draw on my subjective experience of objects to fuel my creative engagements, and I use personal reflections as a resource to be integrated with broader theoretical and practice concerns.

Since my encounters with inherited objects are pivotal to this project, it is pertinent to acknowledge my experience of them. The power of my inherited objects has been amplified, I believe, by my maternal grandmother’s unexpected death in traumatic circumstances. In 1976, whilst travelling in convoy en route to a family holiday, my parents, siblings

and I witnessed a semi-trailer truck collide with the passenger side of my grandparents’ vehicle, killing my grandmother on impact. Three months later my paternal grandfather also died unexpectedly, only a few days after falling ill.

Since I was only three years old at the time of the accident, I have no conscious recollection of the traumatic events that befell my family in 1976. However, my siblings (fifteen and twelve years my senior) report clear memories of our absent grandparents and the circumstances of their loss. All that I recall is the silent presence of my grandparents’ objects in our home and a family culture of memorialising that accompanied me through childhood. Over the years my family attempted to bridge the gaps in my memory by providing narratives for personal objects and photographs. The belongings that were once used by my grandparents became the tools through which I learned about who they were (or at least who I was told they were). They were ordinary things—a purse, photographs, clothing—but they became substitutes for lost relationships I do not remember. Their belongings became ensouled, a term Harold Nelson and Erik Stolterman use to describe objects that create binding connections with people from the past.12

Over time other belongings have also become absorbed into my personal and family schema of ensouled objects. My remaining grandparents passed away seven and seventeen years ago respectively and, most recently, on Christmas Eve in 2011, my sister-in-law died after a brief period of illness. I had already thought a great deal about objects of the deceased before my sister-in-law’s death, and my experience of her loss (and my relationship with her objects that I inherited some time later), has inevitably shaped and been shaped by my journey through this research.

fig. 6
Crystal sugar bowl and teaspoons owned by my paternal grandmother (left). Razor and tin containing measuring scales owned by my paternal grandfather (right).
© Clare Humphries.
When a family member dies the personal belongings they leave behind can take on new significance. In the absence of our ancestors and loved ones the ordinary things they once used can carry extra-ordinary connections to identities and biographies, and may even substitute for the bodily presence of those who are absent. Unlike memento mori, inherited possessions are not originally intended as memorial artefacts, yet after death they may be reinterpreted in terms of loss, remembering and melancholy. Generational objects also function as kind of inverted vanitas because they endure and outlive people, asserting immortality rather than impermanence. In Gibson’s words “there is the strangeness of realising that things have outlived persons, and, in this regard, the materiality of things is shown to be more permanent than the materiality of the body.”

The symbolic charge afforded to objects of the deceased is not unique to our contemporary condition. According to archaeologists “post-mortem” inheritances have been used since as far back as the Bronze Age to negotiate identities, relationships and histories, and to objectify a collective ancestral past. What appears to be distinctive about the contemporary perspective of objects is an increasing attentiveness to their subjective and memorial aspects; this has arisen in relation to a number of shifts in critical orientation in the past decade, including the turn to the personal that has accompanied feminist criticism, an increased emphasis on subjectivity, and the emergence of “new forms of enquiry…that emphasize the affective relations between past and present.” Now it would seem, we ask not only what things mean to culture and society, but also to individuals.

13. Memento mori is a Latin phrase translated as “be mindful of death” and “remember that you will die.” In fine art it is a tradition wherein artworks aim to remind people of their own mortality. See Helene E. Roberts, ed., Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998).

14. Vanitas is a meditation on the fleeting nature of life. The Latin vanitas is loosely translated as “vanity” and corresponds to the futility of earthly pleasures and transience of physical goods. See Roberts, Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography.


16. Lillios, Objects of Memory, 247.


20. *The Object Ethnography Project* invites people to donate an object and share a story associated with it. Public contributions include objects received from deceased family members. The project aims to examine how object narratives influence worth, economies, and circulation. See www.objectethnography.wordpress.com.

21. The Barbican’s *Objects with Stories* project is a participatory image collection that was initiated in response to Song Dong’s installation *Waste Not* (2005-ongoing). Participants were asked to submit one photo of an object from a family member, and share a memory of the relationship the object brings to mind. See www.barbican.org.uk/objectswithstories/.

22. *The Object Stories* project involves an interactive booth inside the Portland Art Museum that records people sharing stories about a personal object that has meaning to them through video and photography. The project aims to put ordinary things at the centre of inquiry. See www.objectstories.org.

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Fig. 7
Screen shot from www.theheirloomproject.co.uk

*The Heirloom Project* invites participants to share an image and a story of an object that they have inherited. It aims to investigate how hand-me-downs shape identity. © Joakim Blockström, www.theheirloomproject.co.uk.

Courtesy Joakim Blockström.
Over the course of this project I have noted a rise in web-based projects, books, memoirs, film and theatre that address personal belongings, suggesting that we have, indeed, reserved a new place for thinking about objects and subjects in the twenty-first century. Numerous online platforms have emerged, for example, including *The Heirloom Project* (see fig. 7), *The Object Ethnography Project*, the Barbican’s *Objects with Stories*, and the Portland Art Museum’s *Object Stories* that invite the public to consider how personal objects are linked to narrative meaning. Authors including Joan Didion, Paul Auster and Edmund de Waal have explored their personal connections to family objects through memoir and narrative, whilst scriptwriters have examined the complications of inheritance. Margie Fischer, for instance, performed an autobiographical monologue *The Dead Ones* at recent Australian fringe events, sharing her experience of clearing objects from the family home after her parents died, whilst the 2008 French film *Summer Hours* follows the experiences of three siblings who mourn the loss of their childhood mementoes as they divest their mother’s estate.

A concern for the personal is also evident in contemporary art practice, which has shown a deepening interest in the subjective experience of domestic objects. This shift towards the personal is particularly apparent in the work of artists who have explored the objects of their own deceased family and who therefore provide a critical context for this research (see fig. 8-20 overleaf for a visual survey of the artists listed below). In the last few years Andrea Tese (*Inheritance*, 2014), Song Dong (*Waste Not*, 2005-ongoing), Beatriz Ruibal (*Mother*, 2010-2012), Catalina Jaramillo (*You are Always Here*, 2011), Natividad Navalón (*My Mother’s...*
**fig. 8** (this page, left)
Beatriz Ruibal
*Images for Memory*, 2010-2012
Type C photograph, 50 x 75 cm, © Beatriz Ruibal. Courtesy of the artist.

**fig. 9** (this page, right)
Shellburne Thurber
*Edinburg, Indiana: My Grandfather’s Bed*, 1976
Gelatin silver print, 76.2 x 76 cm, © Shellburne Thurber.

**fig. 10** (facing page, top left)
Tai Snaith
*Evolved Heirloom second-hand*, 2013
Gouache on coated plywood, 100 x 90 cm, © Tai Snaith. Courtesy of the artist. Photography by John Tucker

**fig. 11** (facing page, top right)
Anna Lorich
*Pillow brooch*, 2006
Cloth, tread, 14k gold, photographs, resin, ink, dimensions unknown, © Anna Lorich.

**fig. 12** (facing page, far right, middle)
Catalina Jaramillo
*The Memorial (Mom)*, 2011
Performance conducted at the exhibition *You are Always Here*, © Catalina Jaramillo.

(I discuss the exhibition in chapter three)

**fig. 13** (facing page, far right, bottom)
Jonas Becker
*Aninut (72 hours)*, 2010
Video installation comprising five HD video projections, each projection 121.9 x 609.6 cm, 72 minutes, © Jonas Becker.

**fig. 14** (facing page, bottom left)
Tracey Emin
*May Dodge, My Nan*, 1963-1993
Wooden box, glass, doll, five works on paper, photographs, ink, printed papers and wool, 182 x 181 x 16.2 cm, © Tracey Emin. Courtesy of the artist and White Cube Gallery. Photography by Antonia Reeve. Collection of the Tate Gallery, London.


See also http://www.shellburnethurber.com/early-interiors/49qycpvw87ymw5dqlnq4l9dph3aivzf

Image redacted for copyright reasons.

fig. 17 (facing page, bottom right)
Andrea Tese
Shoes, 2010-2012
From the exhibition *Inheritance*, 2014
C-print on paper, 102 x 127 cm, © Andrea Tese. Courtesy of the artist.

fig. 18 (facing page, bottom left)
Sylvia Griffin
Keepsakes, 2011 (detail)
Textiles, wax, timber, LED lights, 165 x 185 x 15 cm (overall), 13 x 9 x 3 cm (each block), © Sylvia Griffin. Courtesy of the artist, photography by Marty Lochmann.

fig. 19 (this page, bottom left)
Rosalind Atkins
*Secret Grief I*, 2008
Wood engraving, wood block, linocut, monotype, unique state, 90 x 63.5 cm, © Rosalind Atkins. Courtesy of the artist, photography by Tim Gresham.

fig. 20 (this page, bottom right)
Sophie Calle
*North Pole*, 2009 (detail)
Light box, sandblasted porcelain plaque, video, screen, color photograph, frame, dimensions variable, © Sophie Calle.

(I discuss this work in chapter three)
Suitcase, 2010), Monika Strasser (Heirloom Brooch, and Shadow Brooch series, 2007), Rosalind Atkins (Secret Grief, 2008) and Jonas Becker (Animut [72 hours], 2006), for example, have each worked directly with objects formerly belonging to deceased family members. These works follow earlier explorations by Ruth Maddison (The beginning of absence, 1996/2006), Dianne Longley (Threads from the past, towards a digital future, 2006), Joachin Froese (Portrait of my mother, 2006), Amelia Stein (Loss and Memory, 2002), Kim Donaldson (From the Lecture: A Reminder of Life, 1996), Marina Abramović (The Hero, 2001), Shellburne Thurber (Edinburg, Indiana: My Grandfather's Bed, 1976) and Tracey Emin (May Dodge, My Nan, 1963-1993).

I encountered Ruth Maddison’s series The beginning of absence (1996/2006) in 2007 at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra (see fig. 21 and 22). The work left a lasting impression on me, particularly Maddison’s recognition of mortality in everyday things. The series arose when her father was seriously ill in hospital. The artist stayed in her parents’ home and wandered from room to room noticing “empty chairs, the bed, the pile of books waiting to be returned to the library, the Tattslotto tickets.” Through the objects she felt what she describes as the beginning of absence, and proceeded to document her father’s shoes, a freshly ironed handkerchief, and the borrowed books he would never take back to the library. Each object is captured in place in the home, appearing quiet and sorrowful as if it, like Maddison, awaits the inevitable passing of her father. Images of his unoccupied armchair and empty slippers are bathed in a golden light and evoke a powerful sense of loss and reverence.
fig. 21 (left)
Ruth Maddison
The beginning of absence (#2), 1996/2006
Inkjet print from Polaroid original, 31.9 x 30.9 cm, © Ruth Maddison.
Courtesy of the artist.

fig. 22 (right)
Ruth Maddison
Inkjet print from Polaroid original, 31.9 x 30.9 cm, © Ruth Maddison.
Courtesy of the artist.
fig. 23 (top left)
Amelia Stein
*Change Purse*, 2002
Gelatin silver print, Kodak ektalure, 25 x 25 cm, © Amelia Stein.
Courtesy of the artist.

fig. 24 (top right)
Amelia Stein
*Ornaments*, 2002
Gelatin silver prints, Kodak ektalure, 25 x 25 cm, © Amelia Stein.
Courtesy of the artist.
(See also fig. 83 on page 178).

fig. 25 (bottom left and right)
Dianne Longley
*Threads drawn from the past, towards a digital future*, 2006
Small suitcase of postcards, book and memorabilia, 17.5 x 23 x 11 cm
(suitcase closed), dimensions variable
(suitcase open), © Dianne Longley.
Courtesy of the artist.
Where Maddison captures images of her father’s belongings shortly before his death, Amelia Stein’s series *Loss and Memory* (2002) documents similar belongings after her parents passed away, evoking the poignancy of things that persist after the human body has perished (see fig. 23 and 24). The photographs show everyday and sentimental objects including gardening tools, travel purses, a box her mother kept for cards and delicate china ornaments. The body of work is both intimate and austere, and is described in the gallery text as “portraits in absence.”

Stein captures bare traces of light and records the crumpled darkness behind each object as if it too allows absence to be registered. She calls the work an attempt to “weave a safety net out of the threads of…memories,” and says the project is a response to her fear that once the family home was cleared of objects, she may find herself unable to recall the minutiae of her exchanges with her parents.

In Dianne Longley’s book *Threads drawn from the past, towards a digital future* (2006), the experience of acute grief that is evident in Maddison and Stein’s photographs appears to have passed. Yet Longley works with family objects as things that continue to elicit reverence (see fig. 25). A single, silver fork and a folded handkerchief are among the items of family realia carefully preserved in a wine red storage case. At one time the fork was a utilitarian object, now Longley reveals its transcendence into another register of value and explicates the thoughtful acts of preservation that inheritances can demand. The title of the work, together with the online database that accompanies it, suggests that intergenerational belongings map mnemonic trajectories from the past into the future.

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32. Ibid., para. 6.

33. The website associated with this work contains an open-ended repository of stories, see www.diannelongley.com.au/threads/.
Dianne Longley is not alone in her concern for the mnemonic efficacy of personal objects. The connection between objects and memory has been a powerful thread in art practice generally. Notably, the memorial potential of belongings was explored by Marina Abramović in *The Hero* (2001), a work dedicated to her father who was a soldier in World War II (see fig. 26). Although the most widely known aspect of *The Hero* is the video footage of Abramović sitting motionless on a white horse with a white flag blowing in the wind, the installation also comprises a substantial collection of her father’s belongings including photographs, medals, shoes and a leather bag. Abramović made the work after her father’s death as a tribute to him, and a way to honour the story of how her parents met. She notes that through the work “I wanted to emphasise the past and memory.”

A final work that helps to contextualise this project is Song Dong’s installation *Waste Not* (2005-ongoing), which was most recently exhibited in 2013 at Carriageworks in Sydney (see fig. 27). *Waste Not* comprises over 10,000 personal belongings, including family heirlooms, furniture, clothes, toys and plastic bags neatly folded for reuse. The items were all kept by Dong’s mother, Zhao Xiangyuan, who was driven to preserve things of sentimental or reuse value after her husband’s death. When it was first exhibited Dong described *Waste Not* as a representation of his mother’s grief, whilst Xiangyuan wrote of trying to extend the life of the objects in order to preserve memory. The artist’s mother also said, “I think, that when someone is no longer among us, their things should still remain.”

Over the course of its numerous installations *Waste Not* has been increasingly interpreted in terms of family loss and remembering, even though it has other cultural resonances. The memorial significance of the...
fig. 26 (top)
Marina Abramović
The Hero, 2001 (detail)
Exhibition view showing memorabilia of the artists’ father Vojo Abramović, dimensions variable, © Marina Abramović.

fig. 27 (bottom)
Song Dong
Waste Not, 2005–ongoing (details)
Over 10,000 objects belonging to the artist’s mother, Zhao Xiangyuan (1938–2009), including the wood frame of her house, dimensions variable, © Song Dong.
work intensified following Xiangyuan’s accidental death in 2009. The first time Dong had to reconstruct the piece without his mother he said that if he immersed himself in the objects his mother would still be there with him. “In fact,” writes curator Wu Hung, Song Dong tried to convince himself that “her spirit was actually there, among the things she had gathered around herself for so many years.”

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

The practices surveyed above reveal how artists have explored connections between family objects, mourning and remembering. The works cited support Lisa Saltzman’s observation that contemporary art has a preoccupation with memory and its connections to history, loss and grief. Marina Abramović, for example, seeks to venerate her lost parents and reconstruct the moment they met, Amelia Stein attempts to stem the tide of forgetting by documenting objects that may be sacrificed as she sorts through the family home, Dianne Longley weaves narrative threads from the distant past into the future, and Song Dong struggles to preserve memories of his mother and father through immersing himself (and the viewer) in their belongings. Notably, Maddison’s work offers a different focus. She emphasises the notion of anticipated absence rather than retrospective memory, and it is for this reason that I have frequently returned to consider her work.

Like most of the artists discussed, my practice before this project was also engaged with material culture as a mediator of family identity and remembering. However, a clear shift in my practice occurred through this project as I began to ask: how else do these objects function? Are they


more than repositories for stories and social histories? Are they more than a representation of the extended self, or a mediator of mourning? What other work do they perform in the present?

My project began with a “hunch,” 40 to use Carole Gray and Julian Malins’ term, that objects have an aura. Not that they possess a physical property, but that an auratic experience can arise when a subject encounters them. I thought of aura as being more than great value, and departed from the widely held understanding of Walter Benjamin’s aura—that is, the aura of an original work ripe for deconstruction. 41 I designed this research project to explore a new understanding of aura through printmaking, and to produce visual works that might, in turn, encourage reflection on the auratic potential of objects.

Practice as research

In this project I have engaged with the processes of making and experiencing artworks in order to reflect on what is revealed through studio practice. I proceeded on the assumption that artists generate encounters for themselves and their viewers that can change the way we think about the world around us. 42 The method for this project is therefore grounded in practice. The creative work of experimentation and making prints has played the lead role in my investigation and has been informed by theories and practices that I brought into the studio. I take the view that enquiry through practice is the methodology of practice-based research, 43 whilst the method involves the processes, tools and techniques that are used in studio investigations. 44 I have therefore approached practice as a form of research where the affects and effects of creative process (including but not limited


42. Gray and Malins, Visualizing Research, 30.

43. This is a view supported by numerous artist-researchers including Gray and Malins in Visualizing Research.


44. I also share Peter Dallow’s position expressed in “Representing Creativeness” that it is not necessary to adapt or borrow methodologies or methodological nomenclature from the social sciences. In fact, I am sceptical about the translation of methodologies from the humanities, along with other artist-researchers including Brad Haseman. See Brad Haseman, “A Manifesto for Performative Research,” Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy 118 (2006): 98–106.
to its artefacts), are privileged as forms of thinking. Concepts are created out of matter, doing gives rise to lines of thinking and questions emerge that suggest new possibilities for practice.

I have carried out this project in the belief that aura cannot be defined conclusively, nor can our relationship to objects be described definitively since knowledge in this domain is pluralistic, subjective and constructed.

I agree with Stephen Scrivener who said “the artist makes no claims for any specific meanings and hence no claims for their truth or otherwise. In effect, the artist provides perspectives or ways of viewing the world, which may or may not be true.” He calls the artworks produced in practice-based research “apprehensions,” that are grasped by the senses and the intellect of the viewer to “offer ways of seeing and being.” My aim through producing prints is therefore to open up possibilities for thinking about the personal objects we encounter in our intimate spaces.

My project is designed to explore, to reveal, to raise questions and to evoke connections in ideas through printmaking modalities.

Method

The method I used to develop the main body of research work emerged through an extended process of experimentation with materials, tools and ideas. I spent twelve to eighteen months scanning, photographing, taking rubbings, casting, embossing and unravelling textiles (see fig. 28 to 34 over the following nine pages). I unstitched, re-wound, collaged, cut, captured, glued, carved, etched, poured, rubbed, exposed, submerged, sanded, burnished, painted, moulded, cast and scanned an array of materials. My intention was not to produce resolved works, but to unpack my relationship to the objects, generate questions and uncover possibilities for a visual language.

46. Ibid., 10.
47. Ibid.
48. I took curator Caitlin DeSilvey’s advice at this stage, that it is possible to look beyond the social history of objects by attending to their physical presence. I hypothesised indexical processes might facilitate this process since they require the material participation of the referent. See Caitlin DeSilvey, “Observed Decay: Telling Stories with Mutable Things,” Journal of Material Culture 11, no. 3 (2006): 318-338.
fig. 29
Examples of early studio research, 2009-2010. All photographs © Clare Humphries.

(this page and facing page, top)
Exploring containment, and absence through the illusion of presence

(facing page bottom)
Sample of serial embossings taken as I unwound a doily to contemplate loss and letting go.
fig. 30 (facing page)
Studio views, 2009-2010.
RMIT University, School of Art.
© Clare Humphries.
Photography by Lesley Duxbury

fig. 31 (this page)
Studio research, 2009.
Plaster cast of residual linoleum block, exploring the memorialisation of residue in printmaking practice. © Clare Humphries.
(See also fig. 53 on page 97).

fig. 32 (overleaf)
Clare Humphries
Re tracing your finger-tips, 2010
Artists’ book, unravelled thread, embossing, 10 x 25 x 1.7 cm, © Clare Humphries.
Photography by John Brash.
(See also Re tracing your finger-tips, again, 2010, fig. 82 on page 172).
fig. 33 (this page)
Studio view, 2010.
RMIT University, School of Art. © Clare Humphries. Photography by Lesley Duxbury.

fig. 34 (facing page)
Studio research, 2009.
Exploration of scanning as an imaging method that depends on physical contact with the object. (See also fig. 51 on page 93). © Clare Humphries.
Details of a selection of objects from my personal collection of inheritances.

© Clare Humphries.
Although I was initially uncertain how the research method would develop from its exploratory beginnings, I believed, with Scrivener and Chapman,\(^49\) that practice is not a means to bring forth a known end but is the principal driver of thought. I was also reassured by Hans-Jörg Rheinberger’s view (writing as a philosopher of science), that it might not be possible to ask the questions that will be revealed through a research method before the method is implemented.\(^50\) Research, he says, is “a machine for making the future,”\(^51\) it is a process to materialise questions and possibilities that “are not given from the beginning.”\(^52\)

As Rheinberger’s view of experimental research suggests, through engaging my mind and senses in performative enquiry new opportunities for apprehension arose that transformed my approach to research. The initial studio research heightened my awareness of touch, materiality and notions of loss and recovery. From here a method of printmaking emerged that I define in three phases: \emph{embalming, burial} and \emph{exhumation}. These terms describe the practical processes I used to produce the core body of work in the project, and also function as a series of conceptual metaphors that I explore in depth in this exegesis.

**The objects**

Since I have identified personal family objects as the site for investigation, my own collection of ensouled belongings forms the population of objects under study (see fig. 35 to 40 overleaf). The decision to work with my own inheritances was influenced, in part, by the artists discussed earlier. In the works I cited, each artist used their own family possessions as a site of enquiry. My strategy also reflects Roland Barthes’ approach in

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51. Ibid., 309.

52. Ibid., 310.
Camera Lucida, in which he relies heavily on his personal attachment to the “Winter Garden” photograph of his mother to develop his ontology of photography. This is the only photograph he discusses in depth (although he does not reproduce it within the text), yet the snapshot of his mother as a young child leads Barthes to confront the connection between photography and death. Barthes asks the question, “What does my body know of photography?” I have asked a similar question of myself in this research and used my embodied relationship to the research objects as the source of data about aura.

By choosing to use my personal collection of objects my project has been unavoidably impacted by the histories of the belongings in my charge. Notably, it means that I have engaged with a collection that has been curated by others—my mother, father, brother, sister and grandparents—according to commemorative values. Inheritances are, by definition, curated objects. Anthropologist Katina Lillios calls them “objects that are curated for multiple generations.” Since curatorship is selective, for every item kept there is also a silent history of things that were sacrificed, lost or discarded. My family’s desire to remember (preserve objects) and forget (divest or dispose of objects) has fundamentally shaped the items that have found their way into this research. I have inherited silverware, glassware, tools and books, not deodorant sticks, underwear or bed-sheets. The former objects tend to represent individualised personality traits worthy of intergenerational preservation, whilst the latter are more willingly, perhaps wilfully, forgotten.

54. Ibid., 9.
55. It is also apparent that in the process of selecting objects for my work I made my own sacrificial decisions, rejecting objects that did not hold a requisite degree of emotional resonance or visual potency for me to pursue the work.
fig. 37  (opposite page)
Leaf-shaped serving plates owned by my paternal grandmother.
© Clare Humphries.

fig. 38  (this page)
Kilt pin, recto and verso views, owned by my sister-in-law.
© Clare Humphries.
fig. 39
Basket and box of tools owned by my paternal and maternal grandfathers. © Clare Humphries.
Notably, I have received many feminine objects, reflecting the primary responsibility that women in my family have assumed for generational objects. Gibson notes that in contemporary Western society it is women who tend to sort, select and distribute the objects of the deceased.57 This view is also supported by Diane Bell’s anthropological study into family objects.58 According to Bell the passage of significant objects in a family, from one woman to another, provides a means to restructure a past that is located in women’s experience, helping women to fashion ideas of self in family and society. In my family, the material culture of women has established an inter-generational connectivity between mother, grandmother, daughter, aunt and sister, and has contributed to my construction of a gendered self-identity. In addition, I have generally found greater affinity with exploring “feminine” objects in this project. Vessels and fabrics, for example, readily evoke connections to the body and skin, and seem to imply a form of visual embodiment that is pertinent to the research. Whilst hand-tools, in contrast, might suggest a connection to the hand and trigger thoughts of grasping, they do not substitute for the body or potentially contain it as such.

Position of the exegesis and writing work

In his book Material Thinking Paul Carter suggests that writing in creative research is a form of collaboration between text and practice. He advises artists not to write about their work or describe the ideas behind it, but to write of and as creative research.59 My approach to this text is derived from a similar position. As such, this document is not a retrospective account or contextualisation of my project. Instead, I have approached reading and writing as a form of research work in itself and tried to use theory as art
historian George Baker suggests when he says, “Theory does not exist to facilitate the instrumentalization of ideas…Theory, instead, is something I conceive of as a more flexible mode of philosophical thinking.”60 I have allowed selected theoretical concepts to circulate through my making cycles and to trigger, re-frame and rupture my lines of thought. In this way theory has been “just another material” 61 in my studio practice. Accordingly, and in line with artist-academic Lesley Duxbury’s recommendations, “the exegetical text is developed in and through the art project as a working project in itself.”62

This document navigates the connections between text-based and practice forms that have emerged through this project. It follows that, as Ross Gibson advises, “the text is not an explanation of the artwork…[it] is a kind of narrative about the flux of perception-cognition-intuition”63 which brings together studio practice with theoretical engagement. I take flight into diverse lines of enquiry, including Walter Benjamin’s writings on aura, as well as printmaking and photographic theory, concepts of burial and discourses of the haptic. My practice remains at the centre of the research and it does not fit neatly into a preformed theoretical construct. I therefore refer to concepts from literature in a necessarily selective way; my aim has not been to provide a comprehensive analysis of theory but to explore and articulate significant ideas and processes within the project. Similarly, my examinations of contemporary practices are not intended to offer a definitive survey of categories, periods, mediums or artists. The practitioners I discuss are not relevant because of their use of a specific media, but for their creative thinking about belongings and/or the ways they approach making.


Visual documentation

This exegesis is integrated with an Appropriate Durable Record (ADR) that visually records the work produced and processes used. The images provide a visual map of the research to magnify terrains of focus and locate the studio-based investigations within the written component. Through the visual documentation I hope to open a space for non-discursive knowledge about the research and its foci. The images are intended to inform, and also to reveal the sensations of making and the physicality of the tools, materials and substances that constitute the research conditions. I hope that my use of image might elicit an embodied reflection on the research and evoke connections to the tactile experience of making through which the research has developed.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The exegesis is structured into five chapters, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. Each chapter braids connections between studio investigations, scholarly research, and other artists’ practices.

In chapter one, *aura*, I investigate the concept of aura in relation to inherited objects and contemporary practice. I emphasise how my perspective departs from the conventional view of a Benjaminian aura and articulate how I believe contemporary printmaking connects with and deviates from his theory. I reflect on my experience of objects, together with concepts from diverse writers and artists’ practices, to propose aura is an encounter between a subject and an object that evokes a simultaneous awareness of loss and connection. I also identify the core understanding of aura that I have come to through this project: that is that aura encompasses dual perceptions of nearness (presence) and separation (absence).
Chapter two introduces the first stage of my creative method called embalming. Like the two chapters that follow, this chapter interweaves practical, conceptual and theoretical concerns and maps the symbiotic relationship that exists between process, matter and concept in the research. In practical terms embalming involves photographing my objects and translating the images into densely layered relief prints that can withstand the manual forces of burial and exhumation. I conceptualise this as an act of embalming to connect with Roland Barthes’ idea that a photograph embalms its subject through its ability to freeze time and declare “that-has-been.” The term also references Bazin’s argument that mimetic practices mummify the objects they depict. More broadly, embalming is a metaphor I have used to explore questions of touch and suspension in the representation of objects.

In chapter three I examine the second stage of my creative method: burial. I describe my actions of completely submerging each print under a shroud of thick, black ink to perform a literal and symbolic interring of the work. I draw on the writing of Kevin Hetherington to characterise burial as the placement of an absence, and examine this notion as a metaphor for my practice. I also discuss how the ritual of a printed burial has enabled me to reconceptualise the way in which we symbolically bury and exhume our loved ones through storing and handling their objects in our homes, and also when we view representations of other people’s objects.

Chapter four addresses the final stage of the printing method—exhumation—in which I disinter the buried images from beneath the layer of burial ink by polishing the print surface. The process re-locates gestures that are conventionally reserved for the printing plate to the image support, and I therefore discuss how my practice reconfigures notions of the hand

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64. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80.


in printmaking practice. The exhumation process also invests a heightened tactility into the otherwise optical works, and I refer to the writings of Alois Riegl\textsuperscript{67} and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari\textsuperscript{68} in order to explore how an image that blends the optic with the tactile can evoke a simultaneous experience of intimacy and distance.

In chapter five, haunting, I address the pictorial and installation considerations of the resolved artworks presented in the examination exhibition. I discuss how the work activates selected aspects of the Baroque picture plane, considering both historic and neo-Baroque practices. I also address the ways that the formal and material qualities of the work, together with its installation, connect with the conceptual structure of aura articulated in preceding chapters. My aim is to reveal how the work might offer a way of apprehending objects that brings together auratic tensions between absence and presence, illusion and reality, distance and intimacy.

In the conclusion to the exegesis I summarise my key observations and discuss the contributions to practice that I have made through the research. I discuss how the doing of my practice has produced an understanding of objects as auratic agents, and has relocated relations between the hand and image surface in printmaking practice. I articulate how both the artefacts and methods of the research have engaged with the research questions, and I also identify some of the gaps where future research may flourish.

Taken as a total document, this exegesis maps the thinking that I have explored in the research through both the artwork and its means of production. Through the text I aim to open up possibilities for thinking about my print-based work and, by association, the aura of personal objects we encounter in our intimate spaces.


What is aura actually?

—Walter Benjamin
FINDING THE AURA

I recall walking through my sister-in-law’s home in October 2011 when she was receiving palliative treatment for terminal stomach cancer. As I wandered from room to room I noticed the everyday belongings that she would soon leave behind: novels she was reading, her gold watch, a porcelain figurine. Since I was well into this research project I was acutely aware of what her belongings could come to mean after she passed away, but I realised on that day in October that they had not yet begun to transition from everyday into cherished object. They were still entangled in my sister-in-law’s life as objects of function and identity. It was not until she died that her belongings underwent an “alchemic” transformation from commonplace objects to precious relics.

After my sister-in-law died I began to perceive what I describe as an aura through her belongings. They remained the same items in material terms, but my experience of them shifted as they brought me into contact with her presence and her loss simultaneously. In her Yves Saint Laurent perfume bottle and red jacket (see fig. 41, page 70) she now seems both present to me and yet somehow under erasure. Her belongings promise to conflate and compress the distance between us and recover the past.
However, the very fact that they now belong to me reminds me of her absence. In this way I find that her possessions evoke an aura: a compelling sense of closeness to her that is shrouded under a shadow of loss.

In this research project I look specifically to the objects of my deceased family to engage with questions of aura. I have chosen to examine their aura through printmaking—a reproductive practice—despite Walter Benjamin’s well-known claims that reproduction opposes aura. My decision was impelled by my fascination for how the viewer may recover the sensuous activity of print-based imaging, and also emerged from my belief that printmaking is locked in a permanent conversation with aura that has endured for centuries.¹

Whilst my project is not concerned with critiquing Benjamin’s philosophy, his writing remains pertinent to this research given its significance in printmaking scholarship. I therefore discuss his thinking in this chapter with two caveats. Firstly, I do not intend to position Benjamin’s philosophy as a grand context for contemporary printmaking or for my research. Secondly, I do not see my research, or print-based practice more generally, as a logical outcome or rejection of his arguments. As I will argue, Benjamin’s understanding of reproduction lies outside the realm of contemporary print practice and this leads to complications with translating his theory.

My intention in this chapter is to tease out an uneasy but productive relationship between this project and Benjamin’s aura, and to also move beyond his claims. I attempt to uncover new ways of conceptualising aura that are based on my encounters with the objects in this research, and that

¹ I expand on this idea through the chapter, but it is interesting to note at this point that centuries before Benjamin, Pliny the Elder lamented the decline of the aura in the age of reproducible antique busts, an observation that reveals a long-standing conversation between aura and reproduction. See Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 35: 1-14.
reflect my experience of printmaking as a site of auratic potential. I suggest that the conventional understanding of Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* is problematic for printmaking practice because it does not embrace the notion of a multiple-original. I then propose approaching the question of aura based on an exploration of how it emerges, rather than how it declines. This, in turn, suggests new ways to understand the ongoing relations between printmaking practice and aura which have been influential on my thinking in this project.
Three jackets owned by my sister-in-law, and the green bag (left) in which they were given to me.

© Clare Humphries.
BREAKING UP WITH BENJAMIN

The notion of aura has many lives. The term aura derives from Latin for breath or breeze, and a subtle emanation from any substance. In Greek and Roman mythology, Aura is the Goddess of the morning air or wind, a figure who is often depicted with a cloth billowing behind her that catches the breeze (see fig. 42 and 43). In contemporary vernacular, aura is a noun used to name a transcendent or elusive quality that exudes from a person or thing. Lucien Freud, for example, once said that “the aura given out by a person or object is as much a part of them as their flesh…Therefore the painter must be as concerned with the air surrounding his subject as with that subject itself.” New Age thought takes the notion of a corporeal aura one step further than Freud, defining it as a visible field of luminous radiation that surrounds people and objects, carrying the residue of past experience.

The concept of aura has received its most sustained analysis in the field of art, notably through the work of Walter Benjamin who looms large in printmaking theory. Benjamin’s most well known thoughts on aura appear in his 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Here he famously describes aura as an authority that emanates from a unique artwork that is “imbedded in the fabric of tradition,” where the artwork accrues a compelling quality of remoteness. Benjamin’s most well known declaration is that the singularity of an original painting or sculpture is the key to its aura, and therefore the aura is damaged when the artwork is copied through mechanical means (such as photography or lithography) and then allowed to circulate freely in the public domain. He also claims that the loss of aura is a necessary condition for social and political renewal.


Artist unknown
Scene V, Sala di Grande Dipinto
Villa dei Misteri (Villa of the Mysteries)
Pompeii, Italy, c. 40 B.C. (detail)
Fresco, 500 x 700 cm.
Detail showing Aura the goddess of the morning air catching wind in her mantle.
Photograph by Wolfgang Rieger.
Although Benjamin’s most famous pronouncements on aura appear in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, his ideas on the matter are diffused throughout his oeuvre. His thoughts appear in numerous published essays, as well as hand-written notes that now have an aura of their own (see fig. 44 overleaf). Benjamin discusses aura in two lesser-known essays in particular, beginning with *Little History of Photography* (published 1931),7 followed by *On Some Notes in Baudelaire* (published 1939).8 In *Little History of Photography*, Benjamin addresses the development of early photography and makes the seemingly paradoxical suggestion that photography can have an aura, an idea I return to later in this chapter. He also defines aura as “a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be,” a definition that is repeated, almost verbatim, in numerous other essays.10

In *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, Benjamin takes up another of his key propositions, aligning aura to the gaze. He writes for example that “to perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.”11 Here Benjamin broadens the conception of aura to encompass the idea of an inter-subjective encounter between a subject and object. Aura appears, albeit briefly, in numerous other publications including *The Arcades Project* where he proposes that aura is the “distance opened up with the look that awakens in an object perceived.”12 In addition, his first comment on aura can be found in a posthumously published collection of reports titled *On Hashish*. In an entry dated March 1930 Benjamin writes: “First, genuine aura appears in all things, not just in

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10. See, for example “The Work of Art” on page 222 and *The Arcades Project* on page 447.
certain kinds of things, as people imagine. Second, aura undergoes changes, which can be quite fundamental, with every movement the aura-wreathed object makes.\(^\text{13}\)

Although I do not identify with the conventional discourses that have emerged from *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, it remains difficult to study the notion of aura without addressing Benjamin’s seminal contribution. As an artist using print media it is impossible to ignore him altogether. By proposing a relation between aura and reproduction—albeit an oppositional one—Benjamin wrote himself and the notion of aura into the history of printmaking. Writers concerned with theorising printmaking continue to emphasise the seminal influence of his essay, including Ruth Weisberg,\(^\text{14}\) Kathryn Reeves,\(^\text{15}\) Anne Kirker,\(^\text{16}\) Ruth Pelzer-Montada,\(^\text{17}\) Nancy Princenthal,\(^\text{18}\) Desmond Rochfort,\(^\text{19}\) Sydney Tillim,\(^\text{20}\) Robert Verhoeogt,\(^\text{21}\) and Beth Grabowski and Bill Frick.\(^\text{22}\) Part of this research has involved unpacking Benjamin’s thinking in relation to printmaking, not with the aim of reinforcing its relevance for the discipline, nor in the hope of dismissing it, but so that I can ask how my project might inform a contemporary practitioner’s reading of his seminal work.

Whilst Benjamin’s formulation of aura features prominently in printmaking discourse, Kathryn Reeves makes the astute observation that his work is “often cited, often misunderstood.”\(^\text{23}\) There is no doubt his writings on the topic are problematic to engage with since they are “complex,”\(^\text{24}\) “ambiguous,”\(^\text{25}\) “meandering,”\(^\text{26}\) “ambivalent,”\(^\text{27}\) “problematical,”\(^\text{28}\) “opaque”\(^\text{29}\) and “elusive.”\(^\text{30}\) Benjamin’s thoughts are, at times, based on “questionable”\(^\text{31}\) presumptions, and fail to articulate a cohesive enquiry into aura. Andrew Benjamin, the Australian philosopher, notes that there is


26. Ibid.


“lack of consistency” in Benjamin’s writings on aura, particularly in regard to whether the loss of aura is to be celebrated or mourned. He adds that any attempt to find unity in Benjamin’s texts will be thwarted: “Benjamin will never be canonical,” he writes, “but has rather emerged as the site of different canons.”

Given the complications in Walter Benjamin’s texts, it is perhaps no wonder that many writers have uncritically cited his work and contributed to what James Elkins calls “The case of the Benjamin footnote” in which *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* is invoked without regard for the complexity, ambiguity and historic context of Benjamin’s ideas.

“The case of the Benjamin footnote” is certainly apparent in printmaking discourse. A close reading of Benjamin suggests that many aspects of his thought—arguably the most productive ones for printmaking—are overlooked in favour of the aura-reproduction opposition. Little is said, for example, about his paradoxical idea that the aura is “the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be” despite the importance of distance to print-informed discourse, and the fact that “paradox’ can be seen to be a fundamental characteristic of printmaking.” Similarly scant attention is given to his discussion of early portrait photography in which he provides an alternative way to conceptualise aura (as an inter-subjective encounter) that would seem pertinent to contemporary practice. Instead, discussions of Benjamin’s work tend to rehearse a narrow interpretation of aura that focuses almost exclusively on *The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction* essay, and simplifies his position to a conflict between aura and reproduction.

33. Ibid., 140.
36. On this Ruth Weisberg writes, “Whether the image is mechanically or chemically produced on the matrix, it is always once removed from the final work of art. It is this indirection, this displacement, which is the hallmark of the printmaker’s art.”
37. Kirker, “Printmaking as an Expanding Field,” 156.
Although an absence of deep engagement with Benjamin’s writings might place printmaking in Elkins’ line of fire, the tendency to merely footnote Benjamin’s work could also reflect the complications inherent in Benjamin’s “much too famous essay.”39 Most problematic may be the fact that Benjamin’s utopian model against the aura has failed to materialise. Since the publication of The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction the idea of an opposition between aura and reproduction has been widely criticised to the point where “further critique of Benjamin’s hypothesis seems unnecessary”40 to quote David Areford. Scholars argue that reproduction has fallen short of producing the promised critical distance in audiences.41 Furthermore, writers have convincingly shown that reproductions have actually intensified and elevated status of their originals, promoted authorship and helped to construct the canon.42 In Sydney Tillim’s words, “far from eliminating the aura and devaluing original artworks, reproduction just as readily creates an appetite for them.”43 Bruno Latour and Alan Lowe take a similar position when they call the copy “proof of fecundity,”44 and suggest that when an original is copiously reproduced it does not become less auratic but rather more fertile than an original that has no copies.

The capacity of reproductions to enlarge and distribute the aura is not a contemporary phenomenon. During the Middle Ages cult images and relics were reproduced in order to extend their healing powers, as Areford’s analysis of fifteenth century woodcuts suggests. Devotional prints like the Madonna del Fuoco (Madonna of the Fire) replicated cult images and functioned as contact relics (see fig. 45 overleaf). Areford writes that these images were “made in similitude”45 and “it seems that it was this


41. Writers including Erika Balsom and Geir Sigurdsson argue that the revolutionary energies Benjamin saw in cinema have been subject to the same bourgeois aesthetics and ideological determinations of late capitalism that they were supposed to resist, thus neutralising Benjamin’s hope for the medium.


44. Latour and Lowe, “Migration of the Aura.”

The authors highlight that the word copy comes from the same etymology as “copious” which designates abundance.

resemblance, combined with physical contact with the cult image, that endowed the tokens, whether lead or paper, with their efficacy.”46 It was enough to look like or to have touched the venerated object to substitute for the original and accrue some of its aura as well. “Thus the woodcut… acted as a printed surrogate through which the person could feel as if they had touched—or been touched by—the cult painting, and thus by the Virgin Mary herself.”47

Putting aside questions about the relationship between the original and copy, a more substantial issue in applying Benjamin’s thinking to printmaking lies in his understanding of reproduction. Put simply, he is concerned with reproduction as the photographic copying of existing paintings and sculptures, not with the multiple as a fine art practice. Benjamin’s view of reproduction therefore creates two complications for contemporary printmaking. Firstly, it moves printmaking to the periphery, subordinate (like painting and sculpture) to photography and film.48 Secondly, his understanding of reproduction is far removed from contemporary notions of the multiple-original, and represents a “simplified and even distorted”49 view of media capable of originality through multiplicity. He fails to acknowledge, as Douglas Davis points out, that copying technologies can produce “endless”50 and “exquisite variations.”51 Benjamin also overlooks the fact that different methods of reproduction “result in completely different objects—a fact which changes their character and function and the way they are consumed.”52 Differing processes of reproduction have different cultural meanings. As a result, Sydney Tillim argues that whilst it is possible to use the umbrella term reproduction for processes that have technical similarities, it must be acknowledged

46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
51. Ibid., 385.
52. Tillim, “Benjamin Rediscovered,” 68.

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fig. 45 (facing page)
Artist unknown
Madonna del Fuoco (Madonna of the Fire), c. 1458.
Woodcut on paper on wooden panel, 55 x 40 cm. Santa Croce Cathedral, the chapel of Madonna de Fuoco, Forlì, Province of Forlì-Cesena, Italy.
that every reproductive process results in a distinctive outcome. In fact, a reproduction “often develops an ‘aura’ of its own”\(^53\) that “derives from the transparency of the reproductive process itself.”\(^54\)

Although I have suggested that Benjamin overlooks pivotal ideas in reproductive art practice, the problems that I raise with his theory may have more to do with how we might try to locate his contribution in contemporary theory and practice. It is important to be mindful that Benjamin’s objective is not to provide a theory of reproductive art practice (that is, a theory for practices that use reproductive methods to produce original artworks), and that problems arise when we try to make his ideas perform in this context.

In my opinion, Benjamin’s key contribution is to draw attention to the moment of transition between two technologies, “the transition from one set of representation practices to another.”\(^55\) In *Little History of Photography*, for example, he deals with the shift from portrait painting to the daguerreotype and then to commercialised portrait photography. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* he addresses the move from printmaking to photography and then film. In *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire* he discusses the change that occurs in lyric poetry after Baudelaire. Each of these moments represents a shift in the way collective audiences engage with cultural representations. Benjamin highlights that social transformations of this kind can give rise to changes in “the mode of human sense perception,”\(^56\) and the way in which aura is experienced can dramatically shift. This sheds light on why he writes in *On Hashish* that “aura undergoes changes, which can be quite fundamental, with every movement the aura-wreathed object makes,”\(^57\) and also why he notes in *The
Arcades Project that different cultural epochs experience aura in different ways. It is when Benjamin attempts to predict what the movement of aura might be in the twentieth century that I diverge from his line of thought, for where he anticipated the decline and loss of aura I have perceived its proliferation.

THE AFTERLIFE OF AURA

I am not alone in perceiving the continuance of aura. For some, the evidence of aura’s persistence lies in the elastic properties of aura that allow it to move to reproductions. Latour and Lowe, for example, chart how the aura can migrate from original artworks to facsimiles, and therefore parallel Areford’s argument (introduced earlier) that imitation and substitution are mechanisms through which the aura can transmit. Philosopher Boris Groys takes an alternative stance that addresses how artworks operate in the public domain beyond the hallowed white cube. He advises that when an artwork moves beyond its original context it does not lose aura, but enters a new system of circulation characterised by “a complex interplay of dislocations and relocations, of detached reterritorialisations and reterritorialisations, of de-auratisations and re-auratisations.” As a result “every copy…loses old auras and gains new auras.” David Bolter and his colleagues contribute a more wide-ranging claim that “what Benjamin identified was not the end of aura, but rather an ongoing crisis, in which the experience of aura is alternately called into question and reaffirmed.” They add that there is both decay and a constant revival of aura through contemporary art and media forms, and that our culture’s desire for auratic art remains strong.

59. Like Boris Groys in “The Politics of Installation” I also take issue with Benjamin’s characterisation of the public domain as a neutral context that contrasts to the sacred sites of church, museum and gallery.
60. Latour and Lowe, “Migration of the Aura.”
62. Ibid.
There is certainly ample evidence that the aura has proliferated in and through contemporary art, although it is clear that it extends well beyond the domain of original artworks and their copies. In an age that was supposed to have seen the withering of aura, aura can be found everywhere. It flourishes in galleries and museums, in the works of the great masters, (see fig. 46), it lives on in photographs, buildings, art installations and in the objects of the famous and infamous. It lingers in the family objects that I have studied in this project and, according to other artists and writers, aura lingers in their family objects too.

When I started to look for contemporary use of the term aura, I found evidence of it everywhere. The term surfaces in exhibition reviews, curatorial essays and artists’ statements where it is used to describe everything from the physical work, its underpinning concept and the exhibition experience. Curators and writers frequently invoke aura to indicate that something is alluded to, evoked or aroused in artists’ practices. For example, discussions of Christian Boltanski’s work have referenced an “aura of intimacy” and an “aura of spirituality” whilst Doris Salcedo’s installations have been described as evoking “the aura of a silent graveyard,” eliciting “an aura of nostalgia for intimacy,” and amplifying an “aura of human use.” The aura can also be found in the materials and subjects of art: Tacita Dean identifies with “the aura of film,” and Susan Hiller says the personal mementos and souvenirs she uses exude aura. Collaborative artists Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani even undertook a photographic project in search of aura through the camera lens (see fig. 47 and 48 overleaf).


75. Tacita Dean quoted in Rina Carvajal and Tacita Dean, “Film is a Medium of Time: A Conversation with Tacita Dean,” in Tacita Dean: Film Works, ed. Rina Caravajal (Miami: Miami Art Central and Edizioni Charta, 2007), 47.


In this work the artists document abandoned places and seek to visualise the invisible. They use the term aura to refer to the so-called phantom-leaf-effect in high-frequency photography, discovered by the Russian researcher Semyon Kirlian in 1939.

**fig. 46** Crowds of people photographing *The Mona Lisa* at the *Musée du Louvre* in Paris.

Despite being one of the most reproduced artworks in the West, *The Mona Lisa* appears to have gained, not lost aura.
fig. 47 (left)
Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani
*Aura Research*

*The Family Inn, Breunsdorf*, 1994
Colour photograph on Alu Dibond, Dyptichon, 100 x 150 cm (framed), © Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani. Courtesy of the artists.

fig. 48 (right)
Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani
*Aura Research:*

High frequency photograph on Alu Dibond, Dyptichon, 100 x 150 cm (framed), © Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani. Courtesy of the artists.
Notably, the aura also appears in the very practices that were supposed to extinguish it. Alan McCollum, for example, seeks to achieve the aura of the original through repetition and mass production, creating casts that are at once replicated and unique.\textsuperscript{78} Like McCollum, Christian Thompson also hopes to produce aura through his photographic work. Far from seeing aura as a regressive force, he aims to craft it around his photographs in order to engage audiences in a contemplative dialogue.\textsuperscript{79} He calls aura a “meditative space” that can allow viewers to “traverse time and place,”\textsuperscript{80} and through which an artwork can “embody the past and be intrinsically connected to the present.”\textsuperscript{81}

The ongoing engagement with aura in contemporary art suggests the need for a different account of the notion than is commonly understood through \textit{The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction}. It demands an account that activates Benjamin’s thoughts in new ways, and even modifies, transforms and displaces them. A new understanding of aura could begin, I believe, through examining how the aura originates before it is lost. By creatively engaging with the objects once belonging to my deceased family, I have come to the view that if we consider how aura arises (rather than how it declines) a more flexible conceptualisation can emerge which accounts for aura’s persistence.

\textbf{AURA’S (RE)APPEARANCE}

When I re-read \textit{The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction} at the beginning of this project I was left with the same nagging questions that my experience of personal objects raised in me: but what is the aura? And, how does it come into being? Whilst the conventional reading of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{78} Much of McCollum’s work explores the slippage between multiple and singular, including casts that have replicated components but are unique.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Thompson quoted in Morton and Warr, \textit{Christian Thompson}, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Benjamin’s essay focuses on how the aura declines (or rather questions whether it has declined), my objects seem to pose a different question: how does aura emerge in the first place? Paradoxically, it was through reproductive practice that I began to grapple with the question of aura’s (re)appearance.

I recognised early in the project that the belongings in my charge had not always elicited perceptions of aura. Most of the objects were at one time just mass produced goods purchased by my relatives for functional or social purposes. Initially there was little that was compelling, potent or mysterious about them. My grandmother’s long white gloves were originally an off-the-shelf fashion accessory (see fig. 50 overleaf), just as my grandfather’s folding wooden ruler was one of many in a suburban hardware store (see fig. 49). Similar rulers can still be bought on Ebay for about ten Australian dollars. Yet, the ruler I own has become irreplaceable. To use Igor Kopytoff’s terminology, it is singularised.82

What triggered the transition from common ruler to auratic object? One answer that resonates with me is that my grandfather passed away, but not before he touched the ruler and transferred something of himself into the boxwood grain. Now when I hold this simple object a delayed touch passes between the living and the dead. My grandfather has, in effect, imprinted a tactile image of himself into the object so that its history of physical contact produces a compelling sense of being close to, yet distant from him. Here I can align with Benjamin’s notion of aura as a close-distance, or a distant presence as Gerhard Richter83 calls it.

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The author of this book is not the German painter Gerhard Richter, but a North American professor who holds degrees in German and Comparative Literature.

fig. 49 (facing page) Kidpark folding wooden ruler owned by my paternal grandfather. © Clare Humphries.
My ruler, like my other inheritances, suggests to me that aura emerges when absence and presence are brought together, particularly when a missing loved one (an absent person) is located in a tangible object (a concrete presence). Although we may be so close as to touch an object that has been left behind by a loved one, we cannot touch the person who owned it, or recoup the past in which they existed. The desire for contact cannot be fulfilled and instead there is a phenomenological encounter with separation. Georges Didi-Huberman conceived of the aura of the Shroud of Turin (and its photographic negative) in a similar way, stating that the putative body of Christ is both “near and far” in the cloth, which produces “an effect of aura.”

His description makes sense of film theorist Laura Marks’ suggestion that objects with aura function like a fetish. They have a power, she argues, to represent something that is not present by virtue of prior contact with it, and thereby accrue a social value that is not reducible to commodification. In this way the auratic object is a gateway to aura, rather than a container of it.

My understanding of aura as the presence of absence, emerged ironically perhaps, as I experimented with printmaking and photography. I discovered that, far from prying my “object from its shell, to destroy its aura,” reproduction gave me a way to understand aura. I discovered that when I used reproductive technologies to produce mimetic or representational images the work amplified my perception of being near to and yet separated from my objects. When I encountered the belongings in pictorial space (see fig. 51 for example) I experienced what Murray Krieger calls a “double awareness” in which I retained the illusion of the object as something present, and yet also the “self-conscious knowledge that

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85. Laura U. Marks, The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). Marks does not provide a detailed account or analysis of aura, however, her isolated observations (mentioned throughout this chapter), convey a sophisticated understanding of the concept.


Mimetic images appeared to promise a presence, and even asserted “the intractable thereness of things” in my life, but at the same time they produced a sense of being removed from them. Printmaking and photography therefore magnified my experience of aura by mirroring the capacity of belongings to produce simultaneous feelings of intimacy and separation.

What I encountered through my experimentation was, in Hans Belting’s words, the capacity for images to function as a visible absence, which in turn prompted me to reflect on objects as signifiers of a present absence. Belting’s thoughts on the image could equally apply to my inherited objects:

Images traditionally live from the body’s absence, which is either temporary (that is, spatial) or, in the case of death, final. This absence does not mean that images revoke absent bodies and make them return. Rather, they replace the body’s absence with a different kind of presence. Iconic presence still maintains a body’s absence and turns it into what must be called visible absence.

My experience in this research echoes Belting’s conclusion that “images live from the paradox that they perform the presence of an absence or vice-versa.” Jacques Lacan similarly claims that the function of illusory images is to bring our awareness towards what is not there. More specifically he suggests that the primary function of trompe l’oeil is not to deceive but to draw our attention to what is missing. The image promises a presence that is actually withheld, because the trompe l’oeil functions as an absence.
I concur with Lacan insofar as when I contemplate my objects in illusory works my eyes perceive a depth that dissolves into the third dimension, and I imagine reaching out to grasp the voluminous form before me. A feeling emerges that the object is present. Yet I readily appreciate the pictorial surface of my prints. The visibility of the paper edge indicates flatness, and I do not consider moving around the works to see any hidden aspects of the items depicted. In short, I do not believe the object is actually there. What is more, I am acutely aware that it is not. The closer the image draws to illusion (at least to a point) the more it seems to suggest what is missing (see for example fig. 52).

Through the illusory imaging of my objects I developed a heightened awareness of the way a presence (object) can place an absence (person), and in so doing can produce aura. By functioning as a visible absence, images re-framed my experience of what was depicted, and created a new awareness of my spatial and temporal relations with the objects in my care. Mimetic reproduction also suggested to me that the perception of a near-distance is integral to the aura of objects.

AURATIC IMPRESSIONS

The notion of aura as a present-absence incites new ways to conceptualise the relation between aura and analogue print media that contextualise my use of the medium. In the first instance, the semiotic structure of analogue representation engages an interchange between presence and absence. The impression can never bring the viewer into contact with the reality that produced it (the printmaking block) and thus the print is always incomplete, pointing beyond itself to something that is missing (see fig. 53 overleaf).
In Pelzer-Montada’s words analogue printmaking requires loss as well as touch.\textsuperscript{94} She observes, following Georges Didi-Huberman, that a print has been close to something (the matrix) that typically remains out of reach from the viewer. Her translation (from the French of Didi-Huberman) reads as follows:

I think that the imprint is the ‘dialectical image,’…something that as well as indicating touch (the foot which impresses itself into the sand) also indicates the loss (the absence of the foot in its imprint); something which shows us both the touch of the loss as well as the loss of the touch.\textsuperscript{95}

As Didi-Huberman remarks, there is no imprint without touch but also none without separation. Thus, in one sense the print points to the matrix and repeats its presence. But at the same time, and in Kathryn Reeve’s words, the “absence of the matrix in the visible artwork seems to point to a loss, an absence.”\textsuperscript{96} The paradox of present-absence is perhaps nowhere better demonstrated than in the printmaking convention of classifying a media according to what we do not see (such as etching, or multiple plate linocut), rather than the visible support (such as ink on paper). Reeves calls this a méconnaissance of print-practice that fails to recognise the visible and instead locates meaning in the invisible.\textsuperscript{97} However, the convention can also be seen as a tacit recognition that printmaking brings the invisible (or the optically distant) close to the viewer.

When identified as the absent-presence of a matrix, the impression is analogous to a shadow, one of the phenomena that Benjamin uses to define aura. Benjamin writes, “to follow, while reclining on a summer’s noon, the outline of a mountain range on the horizon or a branch, which
fig. 53
Studio research, 2009. Plaster casts of linoleum plates, 21 x 21 cm (irregular). © Clare Humphries

This early studio investigation of linoleum plates, amplified my awareness of the printmaking matrix as a site of touch and loss.
fig. 54
Print workshop at RMIT University, 2014, showing one of the etching presses used in the research—now a superseded technology in commercial printing terms. Photography by David Burrows.
casts its shadow on the observer until the moment or the hour partakes of their presence—this is to breathe in the aura of these mountains, of this branch.” If the printed mark is to the matrix what the shadow is to the branch, then when we encounter an impression we breathe in the aura of the matrix that formed the print.

In addition to questions of touch and loss, analogue printmaking may have auratic potential by virtue of its technological obsolescence in our globalised information culture (see fig. 54). When a technology is superseded we develop new understandings of how it functions and attribute new (potentially auratic) value to it. Once a media ceases to function as the dominant paradigm it becomes “othered, different, desirable” and the characteristic way of representing the world that once flourished through it becomes rare. As a case in point, the digital revolution in the twenty-first century has been accompanied by a “renewed aura of the analogue,” encompassing vinyl records, letterpress printing and the Polaroid photograph for example. Susan Luckman, who investigated the renaissance of craft labour within the Etsy movement notes, “an abundance of mass-produced goods reinstates a Benjaminian aura to the analogue and the handmade.” She observes that since analogue goods are no longer the commercial default they have taken on new social values. Furthermore, Luckman adds that handmade objects are “imbrued with touch and therefore offer a sense of the ‘authentic’ in an inauthentic world.”

Like Luckman’s hand-made goods, analogue imaging processes also operate at the horizon of a distant, collective memory. In the words of photographer Elizabeth Skadden, analogue imaging mediums are “dead,”
but “dead mediums...inadvertently give us information about our past through their physicality when integrated into our present.” They operate in a liminal space, conveying a feeling of “forever slipping from your fingers,” and call to mind Laura Marks idea that “aura is the sense an object can give that it can speak to us of the past without ever letting us completely decipher it.” By maintaining traces of the past in the present, outmoded media evoke Benjamin’s idea of aura as a distance brought close.

I share Elizabeth Skadden’s excitement for imaging technology that functions beyond its time (see fig. 55). Like celluloid and film, analogue printmaking media are no longer the commercial default, but continue to exist. Whilst linocut printing initially enjoyed status as a tool for the production of block-printed wallpaper (parading under the guise of the more valued woodcut), it now seems to suggest the outmoded and to evoke historical and bodily time. Linocut now hovers on the periphery, threatening to disappear amid the hype for digital and 3-D printing alternatives. When a viewer encounters analogue artworks they also draw near to something that is distant.

A close reading of Walter Benjamin’s work reveals that he too recognises aura can arise as new technologies displace the old. A clear example of his interest in the transition between technologies appears in his examination of the daguerreotype in Little History of Photography. Writing ninety years after Louis Daguerre’s invention, Benjamin nostalgically laments: “There was an aura about them, a medium that lent fullness and security to their gaze even as it penetrated that medium.” He attributes the mystical aura of the daguerreotype to its characteristic dark tonality and long exposure that fixed the melancholy gaze of the sitter; the aura of photography

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104. Ibid., 74.

105. Marks, The Skin of the Film, 81.

106. Ibid., 74.

107. It could be argued that obsolescence was invited at the conception of the linocut medium because newer media already existed that could transmit information at a greater pace and with higher fidelity.

fig. 55
Print workshop at RMIT University, 2014, showing some of the analogue inking technologies I use, which are no longer the commercial default in the printing industry. Photography by David Burrows.
was lost, he claims, with the rise of “commercial, conventional portrait photography” and its capacity for speed and portability. He concludes the essay with a final tribute to the daguerreotype that emphasises its historical distance: “the first photographs emerge, beautiful and unapproachable, from the darkness of our grandfathers’ day.”

Benjamin’s idea that a photographic aura inheres in redundant technology suggests that aura is associated with a desire for something that is lost and unrecoverable. The daguerreotype is auratic in retrospect because it is irretrievable, or in Benjamin’s words it has become “unapproachable.” When a technology is supplanted we lose hold of one way of representing the world, yet the superseded technology brings traces of the past into the present. This is one reason I have felt drawn to what I perceive as the folded temporality of relief printmaking. Opposites touch in the analogue print. Its place of origin as an individual work and, more generally as a technology, is forever out of reach. The hidden realm of the matrix, and its moribund technological logic, is materialised through the print so that the visible paper surface affords a glimpse of times and bodies beyond itself.

109. Ibid., 519.
110. Ibid., 527.
111. Ibid.
Although it has become “common theoretical currency”\textsuperscript{112} to define Benjamin’s notion of aura in opposition to mechanical reproduction, in this chapter I have attempted to come to a more nuanced understanding of his work. I suggest that Benjamin highlights how reproductive practice changes the relations between audience and image, which in turn, alters the nature of auratic experience. In contemporary culture this has involved the proliferation of aura, rather than its decline. Aura persists in copies and originals, in photographs, film and out-dated technologies. As Douglas Davis writes, “the aura, supple and elastic, has stretched far beyond the boundaries of Benjamin’s prophecy into the rich realm of reproduction itself.”\textsuperscript{113} Aura, as I see it, has also slipped into the cupboards of our homes.

Through exploring the imaging of my objects, I have come to a view that aura develops as it always has, through a dialectic of proximity and distance. The mechanisms through which distance is experienced may have changed in the twenty-first century, but not the nature of aura itself. The church, for example, may have once been responsible for keeping the individual at arm’s length from the work of art—at least in some instances, as Benjamin highlights—whereas now we experience remoteness through other means.

Perhaps Benjamin’s greatest error is to underestimate the capacity of the aura to surface anew, to transfer from one object and one site to another, and to come forth in new milieus. Had he recognised this he might have seen, as Latour and Lowe did, that the aura can migrate from originals to copies, and can proliferate in the media he thought would destroy it. He may also have predicted a day when even commonplace, personal possessions could take on heightened significances and appear in reproducible artworks as sites of vicarious veneration and contemplation.

\textsuperscript{112} Duttlinger, “Imaginary Encounters,” 79.

\textsuperscript{113} Davis, “Digital Reproduction,” 381.
CHAPTER TWO

embalming
...the embalmed corpse not only remains—that is, endures in time—but also reverberates.

—Margaret Schwartz
WHAT REMAINS

Of all the family members and close friends I have lost, none have been embalmed after death. I have sat with loved ones at the time of passing, and visited them in the days thereafter, but their bodies were untreated before cremation or burial. I do not know what it is like to see or touch someone close to me preserved in the stasis that embalming provides. However, if Roland Barthes is right, they are all embalmed in the photos I keep of them. The photograph is a “living image of a dead thing.”

Barthes imagines himself as the subject in front of the lens, envisaging the moment when the shutter opens; he says: “I am truly becoming a spectre. The photographer knows this very well and himself fears … this death in which his gesture will embalm me.”

Bazin made a similar observation when he aligned the photographic image with ancient Egyptian mummification practices. He says the photographic image “helps us to remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death.”

Barthes’ thoughts, and Bazin’s before him, return to me to my experiences of flipping through photo albums or leafing through family snapshots. This is a ritual that I have frequently repeated during the research, motivated by a belief that photographs are objects of the dead in both content.
(image) and matter (object). In the photograph “something of the person is in there, not just as an image but as part of the material object.” In the sensitised surfaces of photographs my loved ones appear to be alive somewhere, having their photo taken over and over again as I watch. Their bodies re-materialise in the images that hover before my eyes and in the worn corners of the sensitive paper that was once touched by them (see fig. 56).

If my family members are embalmed in the snapshots I keep of them, my loved ones are also preserved in their material possessions that survive the grave. As I look through my drawers of heirloom linen and boxes of hand-me-down tools, I feel surrounded by objects that protect the souls of the departed. It would seem that the safeguarding of personal belongings, with its concern for posthumous endurance, belongs in a cluster of practices that includes embalming, burial rites, relic veneration and post-mortem portraiture. Each practice expresses a preoccupation with allowing the individual to live beyond his or her life span, and permits the survival of the soul through generations.

In this project I have come to observe a synergy between my objects as preserved presences, and my studio practice as a method of embalming. First, I began to see mimetic imaging as a means of survival for my objects, and also discovered the potential to preserve myself physically within my work through touch. An extension of this was my growing awareness that pictorial suspension might suggest a pause in the passage of time. In the text that follows I reveal the experiences through which these reflections emerged, and chart the development of my approach to embalming.
fig. 56
Photographs of family members from my collection of inheritances.
© Clare Humphries.
FINDING GHOSTS

Although my process is deeply embedded in analogue printmaking, it was through digital photography that I first gained a foothold in the research, and my method of embalming now begins with a search through the lens. I have come to understand that before I can preserve an object within a printed work I need to find it. This may sound odd since the object is there in front of me, but there is also a sense in which I discover the object—or more precisely my relation to it—through the camera. Through the lens I have found a mechanism to work loose my typical grasp of things, and to allow them to return to me as new presences.

My attempt to find an image through the camera is first an attempt to deepen my perceptions of inheritances. “Making,” as Stephen Scrivener and Peter Chapman remark, “functions not as a means to a preconceived end, but as a means of realising a thing, which has to be perceived, recognised (as the possible thing).” It is through the lens that I “realise” my objects, that is, I grow a new understanding of each object that manifests when what I see in the image resembles a feeling that I have for the belonging. I look for a phenomenological experience that Christopher Bollas describes as “being reminded of something never cognitively apprehended but existentially known.”

In the early stages of the research I wrestled with the challenge of capture, not realising that I was actually struggling to understand my bonds to the humble objects in my charge. Furthermore, I had not yet realised that my method could arise from, and extend on, the embalming action of photography. I initially turned to photography purely for documentation

purposes and assumed a more detached view of the objects. At the same
time my studio experiments ventured into imprinted recordings of the
objects (such as frottage) and explored forms that disconnected me from
the belongings altogether (casts of linoleum blocks for example). At every
turn I felt unable to engage the aura I perceived in my personal items.

In an attempt to shift the conditions of my enquiry, I turned to the idea
that it might be possible to experience aura through making, and abandoned
my attempts to convey it. I began to use the lens to re-discover the objects
and to move “toward the between,” that is, in the direction of the
discursive space flanked by subject and object. I started to take scores of photographs, moving myself around the belongings, adjusting their
orientation and placement on horizontal surfaces. I spent long stretches of
time working, using available light and returning at different times of the
day, sometimes over weeks and months. The studio became my preferred
site of encounter, rather than my home environment. The re-situating of
the object outside the domestic mise-en-scène unburdened the referent
from personal memory and generated new heuristic openings. As Bazin
(somewhat romantically) suggests, I found that the lens allowed me to see
with fresh eyes by “stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those
piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes
have covered it.”

The question that guided me during my search became, how can I allow
an image of the object to emerge in a way that deepens my recognition
of aura? Through repeatedly positioning and repositioning my body in
relation to the objects, a new spatio-temporal understanding of aura began
to form. When the object appeared to drift or fall towards me from an

7. The notion of movement towards the between is conceptualised by Erin Manning in relation to touch. She writes:
“The direction is relational, it is towards. Touching towards means igniting a relation that does not occur between subject and
object, but toward the between…the margin of indetermination.” Erin Manning, “Taking the Next Step: Touch as Technique,” Senses

Manning’s thoughts are relevant here since I take the view that we cannot know objects apart from our perceptions of them.

fig. 57
Studio research, 2010. Investigation of family photographs, conflating the recto and verso surface so as to bring the hand of the person who notated the image into the picture. © Clare Humphries. In the course of research I uncovered Emidio Puglielli’s *Through* project, exploring a similar concept with anonymous, found photographs.
otherwise empty image space, I felt at once close to and yet distanced from the article. Certain photographic qualities activated the relation, such as an arrest of movement, compositional frontality, or an oblique orientation. When the object pushed towards the viewing space, or felt almost touchable with the eyes, there seemed to be the possibility of a haunting connection to the referent. When I looked at photographs of my objects that were constructed in this way I felt I was “being looked at by ghosts,”9 haunted by apparitions from the past that appeared in my present.

In his analysis of the vernacular photograph, Kas Sagafhi suggests that we look at photographs because of a desire to be haunted. He argues, “every photograph attests to the return of the dead or departed…What survives or lives on in a photograph, thanks to the photographic process, is the survival of the dead or of ghosts.”10 In my early studio research I encountered ghosts of my own. In photographs the concrete, touchable objects in my studio become emanations. Their presence ceased to occupy the ontological space of my physical reality, migrating into the metaphysical realm of the image. Absent, yet representationally present, items like my handkerchiefs, cutlery and books assumed a nomadic, spectral character. By playing in the distance between the present and the lost, photographs disturbed my feeling of connection to family and their possessions, and produced an intimate-distance of aura that I discussed in chapter one.

In offering me a way to think about objects as spectres, photography also suggested a method for producing work. The potential to embalm my objects—first through the camera then through the press—emerged, along with it the possibility of producing Bazin’s “phantomlike” presences

10. Ibid., 102.
“halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny.” I became curious about exploring the affective experience of seeing old family photographs, (an idea that also emerged through my explorations of family snapshots and albums, see fig. 57 and 58). Could I evoke the strange temporality of a treasured family image? And how could the idea of embalming inform my understanding of aura?

As will be evident through my discussion so far, my thoughts about embalming had their genesis in photography. Of course, for some time the notion of embalming in the visual arts and culture has been strongly allied to discourses of photography. When Bazin turns his thoughts to the family photo album he describes them not as portraits, but as embalmed presences that inhere in grey and sepia shadows. Barthes also famously suggests that the photograph embalms because it “certifies that the corpse is alive, as corpse: it is the living image of a dead thing…even if it is a matter of objects.”

Even in the age of digital capture the links between photography and mortality remain strong, as Helen Ennis argues in her curatorial essay for the exhibition Reveries: Photography and Mortality. At “the photographic medium’s deepest core,” she writes, lies the desire to create “an imprint that will last forever.” It is perhaps no surprise that so many artists interested in the belongings of deceased family have used the camera lens, such as Maddison, Stein, Thurber and Donaldson, whom I mentioned in the introduction.


13. Ennis, Reveries, 47. Ennis also describes a “paradoxical relationship between extreme connection and the distancing that is integral to the act of taking a photograph,” Reveries, 45-46.

Although some may argue that the materiality of sensitised analogue film is what guarantees a privileged relationship to death, Ennis proposes that the melancholic reach of photography is produced through its action of slicing out a moment in time. See also Paul Willemen and Mary Anne Doane for opposing discussions about digital photography and the index.


fig. 58
This is a love story, 2009

Installation of domestic objects, dimensions variable, exhibition view at Centro des Arte Caja de Burgos, Spain, © Pamen Pereira. Courtesy of the artist.
Writers too, have likened the photographic artefact to an embalmed corpse. Paul Auster is one author who shares an experience of seeing family photographs in his memoir *The Invention of Solitude*. He describes looking through snapshots of his recently deceased father to discover the appearance of his living presence in death:

> Discovering these photographs was important to me because they seemed to re-affirm my father’s physical presence in the world… As long as I kept these pictures before my eyes, as long as I continued to study them with my complete attention, it was as though he were still alive, even in death. Or if not alive, at least not dead. Or rather, somehow suspended, locked in a universe that had nothing to do with death, in which death could never make an entrance.¹⁴

Through the studio research I became concerned with how I might visualise the kind of experience that Auster describes, in which my objects appear somehow suspended in a universe that transcends ontological distinctions between life and death. Photographic capture became my point of entry since the moment of shutter release functions as “a means of arresting time and resurrecting, albeit metaphorically, life after death.”¹⁵ I began to construct images through the lens where the object appeared to be stilled within a continuum of movement, falling or floating within an empty, dark space that I formed in post-production. The compositions that emerged offer what I think of as a defence against the passage of time since the objects are frozen in a specific moment, but lack the contextual clues that might locate that moment in time or space.

In freeing my objects from the bonds of gravity, the approach I developed shares common ground with Pamen Pereira’s installation *This is a love story* (2009). In this work (see fig. 59) the artist suspends actual chairs,
beds, teapots, mirrors, guitars, pieces of fruit and worn-out clothing, as if caught in a joyous dance. Her work mobilises an altered temporal reading of objects that I also consider through visualising suspension (although in my case with a less rapturous, more melancholic effect). The pause implied in Pereira’s installation appears to bring past into the present. Dokushó Villalba writes in the catalogue essay for This is a love story, that the everyday objects (which the artist sourced predominantly from her parents’ home) hover beyond time, producing “an oneiric space where past, present and future melt into one and disappear into a timeless dimension.”

A contiguous line of thinking unfolded at this stage vis-à-vis the relation between touch and embalming. With my objects in hand I became increasingly aware of signs of use on their surfaces, as if the person who habitually handled each object had been embalmed within the metal, cloth or wood (see fig. 60). If, as Walter Benjamin says, “to live means to leave traces,” then to find traces is to re-discover those signs of life in death. Jacques Derrida notes, in a similar vein, that the trace of touch produces ghosts. In an interview he puts it this way: “The spectral is neither alive nor dead, neither present nor absent, so in a certain way every trace is spectral… Even here, there is some spectrality, when I touch something.”

Touch has spectral consequences and can preserve and/or mobilise bodies in a way that parallels the embalmed corpse. I began to wonder, what might happen if I asked my viewers to recover the sensuous activity of my touch from representations of objects? Could I embalm not just the object, but also my bodily relation to it?

16. Dokushó Villalba, “Everything Hangs by a Thread,” in Pamen Pereira: This is a Love Story, ed. Centro de Arte, Caja de Burgos (Burgos, Spain: Caja de Burgos, 2009), 14.


Two drafts of this essay, written in 1935 and 1939, are also included in The Arcades Project.

fig. 60
Studio research, 2009. Experimental scan of bottom of silver teapot, through which I attended to the signs of wear and use on the object. © Clare Humphries.
Despite the fact that the camera can be considered a “prosthetic finger,” I resolved to remove the intermediary technology and investigate the implications of embalming my works directly through my hands. I began to overprint my photographic prints with oil-based ink and then remove the ink and recover the objects by touching, rubbing and abrading the surface. Through submersion and recovery I aimed to generate an effect that might echo the touched skin of the objects depicted, and allow the belongings to emerge back into the world as new presences.

The initial investigations were unsuccessful. Since the photographic image is only a sheer coat of pigment on a paper substrate there was little substance for me to work through. The action of abrasion excavated the ink surface to reveal the fibrous paper beneath, dematerialising the object and bringing the photographic surface to the fore; the investigation engaged primarily with the object of photography, and left me feeling little connection with the referent. It became apparent that I needed a robust, pigmented surface to work on, and a process that would entangle me more deeply within the work.

A parallel notion of embalming emerged through my unsuccessful attempts to produce a haptic image, expressed aptly in Ricky Swallow’s observation that, “the time invested in a piece is somehow contained or embalmed in the object.” Swallow’s comment, in concert with my experience of his labour-intensive, hand-carved objects, suggested to me that I could invest my own body and experience more deeply in the work if it was produced entirely by hand. Swallow’s artworks reproduce everyday items with little commercial value (bike helmets, cassette tapes, shoes and hooded jumpers), but he transforms them through his protracted methodology (see fig. 61).


20. I discuss my experimentation with the processes and materials of exhumation in further detail in chapter four.

The result is that, as Christopher Bedford comments, “Swallow’s work exerts a magnetism that seems disproportionate to his subject matter.” More importantly, at least as far as embalming is concerned, Swallow mummifies himself into his humble materials. To quote Bedford again,

Ricky Swallow builds himself into the material world through this method of translation, complicating common objects through his labour, inscribing them in a new order of meaning that has everything to do with his eye, mind and hand, and little to do with the object’s former outward signification. What they were made for is now immaterial; what matters is how they were made and that they demand a new kind of attention.

As Swallow’s practice testifies, the labour of manual production is a ritual of veneration that can embed an artwork with intimacy. It can even create a “love-worth” as artist Mike Kelly conceives it. As a result, the viewer encounters not only an artefact, but also the artist’s effort and body preserved within it. I recognised that any effort to painstakingly reproduce an item with little economic value might allow me to reveal my subjective enmeshment with the object. Through the labour of production I could ask the viewer to evaluate the significance of my objects, not through the lens of economic or cultural worth, but through my eyes and the touch of my fingertips.

Through the confluence of factors I have discussed above, I took up a reduction linocut methodology as a means to produce an image that retained the photographic quality of an embalmed moment on the one hand, while also investing it with heightened, personal value and a robust ink surface on the other. Through the layered approach to relief printmaking that I describe below, I began to produce dense, stratified


23. Ibid., 27. (Italics in original).

24. Kelly, quoted in Mark Prince, “Art and Illusionism,” Art Monthly (UK) 339 (September 2010), 11.
surfaces that I could work back into with my hands and tools. In turn, it became possible to explore the role of the hand in printmaking and invest myself deeply in the work. My method of *embalming* therefore took shape, and with it the processes of burial and exhumation that follow it.

**A METHOD OF EMBALMING**

The embalming process I use begins with my photographic search (as discussed earlier). Once I have found a spectral image through the lens, I isolate the object and translate it into a reduction linocut print, that is, one that uses a single block to produce an image through many-layers of printing. The photograph functions as a visual reference, particularly for the orientation of the object on the page, and the fall of light over its surface. I also keep the belongings nearby to see their form, surface and colour in the flesh whenever needed. I have found it necessary to physically connect with the object as I attempt to express its presence through ink.

I begin the reduction process by drawing the image of my object on linoleum. My first step is to cut away all areas that are to remain as raw paper, including the background and the darkest areas of the object (hollows, crevices, openings and edges that will disappear into the ground). I then print the first colour, which is always the darkest tone of the image unlike a conventional light-to-dark progression. Once printed, I clean the block and cut away the next area of linoleum and proceed to print the second darkest tone on top of the first. I continue in this fashion, progressively cutting (see fig. 62 overleaf) and printing, working from dark
fig. 62

Work in progress. Close up of cutting linoleum block for *I have never been able to bury her* (2013). © Clare Humphries.
to light until the image of the object is complete (see fig. 63 overleaf). In the process the block is slowly destroyed whilst the paper surface accrues an increasing density of ink in selected areas.

The primary benefit of the reduction method is typically thought to be its registration accuracy, especially when compared with the alternative of cutting one plate per colour. However, I have come to use the reduction method because it creates variations of ink density across the surface that I exploit in the latter stages of my process. The variance of layers is vital to my process because it makes some zones of the image more absorbent (where fewer layers build up) and others less absorbent (where more layers accrue). When I cover the entire image in black ink (in the burial stage) these relative absorbencies determine how the surface will respond. Areas with fewer layers of ink will readily absorb the black burial layer; these aspects appear to recede in the image and suggest the fall of the object away from the viewer. In contrast, thicker areas of the print resist the wet ink and allow me to partially recover the original ink by wiping, sanding and burnishing the black away. The heavily layered sections also take on a glossiness that visually comes to the fore, bringing highlights on the object close.

Printing from dark-to-light is not the only adaptation I make to the conventional reduction process. In line with my interest in tactility I also transfer hand-gestures conventionally reserved for the printing plate—such as sanding and à la poupée ink application—to the paper itself (see fig. 64, page 129). I often sand through the dried ink deposits, for instance, to leave subtle traces of wear between impressions (see fig. 65, on page 130).


26. The term à la poupée describes a method of inking intaglio plates by hand using multiple colours. It is literally translated as “with the doll” since a small ball-shaped wad of fabric called a poupée is typically used to ink the plate.
fig. 63
Work in progress, 2010-2011. Progressive layers of printing showing serial accrual of ink. Facing page shows final resolution of print. Sanding also occurs between layers, (see for example fig. 65), effecting ink density more than surface colour. © Clare Humphries.
In addition I sometimes hand-feather the edges of an impression whilst it is still wet using short-bristled paintbrushes. At times I even scumble extra ink across a print to catch in the printed under-layers, using a process that connects with the Japanese woodblock printing technique takuzuri (rubbing). A key distinction between my work and the Japanese tradition, however, is that I do not rely on a block beneath the paper to catch the ink. Instead the residue of printed under-layers determines where the pigment will settle, catching, for example, in areas with fewer layers. The print itself therefore functions as the matrix that will determine how the ink will gather.

The translation of my photographs into densely layered and touched relief prints unravels an indexical or documentary reading of the work as witness to my objects. But in the process of becoming analogue the work is enmeshed in a new and complex assemblage of forces, including the touch of my fingertips. As a result my method also draws connections to other artists working autographically, such as Maria Kontis, who translates photographic source material through the hand. Kontis lovingly coaxes drawings into being from photographs, and painstakingly transcribes personal snapshots complete with curled paper edges (see fig. 66 and 67 on page 133). The works have the appearance of a photograph but the feeling of a surface sensitised by the body and grafted to the page. They are haunted by their photographic origins yet there is also something organic about them. A spectral quality emerges through the process of translation, as if the image is the ghost of the photographic object she transcribes.

The method used by Kontis invites the viewer to identify with her work beyond its representation as an image because, like Swallow, her bodily and material explorations are also made transparent. Her drawings are

27. Scumbling is typically a painting term that refers to working in a thin layer of pigment using a nearly dry brush. In my process scumbling responds to the variations in density of the ink under-layers, so that the scumbled pigment is more likely to catch in areas where the paper is more absorbent, and less likely to find traction where there are more layers of ink underneath.

28. Takuzuri is a form of front printing (shōmenzuri) in which the paper is laid over a block and ink is rubbed onto the image surface by hand using a soft ball of cloth so that it catches where contact is made between the paper and block. I experimented with these processes in 2012 when I attended a Japanese woodblock-printing workshop at the Australian Print Workshop.


29. Through exploring the relations between hand and image, my practice engages with questions about the discursive structure of printmaking that I address in chapter four.
fig. 65
Work in progress. Sanding the dense ink surface of I have never been able to bury her, 2013. © Clare Humphries. Photography by David Burrows.
not merely pictures, they are surfaces endowed with an intimate, bodily presence (see fig. 66 and 67). In this way Kontis’ practice offers a point of entry into another realm of meaning. Her works reveals the psychological, corporeal and temporal relations that occur between artist and artwork, bringing the viewer into an embodied relation with the objects depicted. Here, it is possible to follow Mark Doty, who observes that a viewer of a hand-painted still life always encounters more than just the content of an image. He suggests:

What is documented, at last, is not the thing itself but the way of seeing—the object infused with the subject. The eye moving over the world like a lover. And so the boundary between the self and the world is elided, a bit, softened.  

Doty’s thoughts appear in his slim volume called *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon: On Objects and Intimacy*, in which he explores human attachments to ordinary things. Combining memoir with philosophy, Doty examines the seventeenth century still life by Jan Davidsz de Heem that serves as the title of the book, using it to consider our contemporary relationships to objects. Doty’s perspective, like my own, is that the viewer of a still life image is invited to see the effort exerted towards the material world by the artist, more than the object depicted per se. The artwork reveals an entanglement between artist and object that can prompt the viewer to reflect on their own connection to things.

If I follow Doty’s reasoning, when a viewer takes in the image of my grandmother’s petticoat, for example, they look across the folds of fabric that I have scrutinised. Having poured my attention over the crinkles, creases and gathered joins of the garment I invite the viewer
fig. 66 (left)
Maria Kontis
Georgina was impetuous, energetic and cold, 2002 (detail)
Pastel on paper, 56 x 76.5 cm, © Maria Kontis. Courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.

fig. 67 (right)
Maria Kontis
He does not remember this day, 2002 (detail)
Pastel on paper, 56 x 76.5 cm, © Maria Kontis. Courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.
to notice all that I have noticed. Moreover, I prevail upon the viewer to observe my way of looking, through my body. Robert Hughes says that drawing—in contrast to a photograph—brings the viewer into a “more fully experienced relation to the object,” one that slows the viewer down to the speed of production. His comments, like Doty’s, acknowledge that the viewer recovers the residue of the artist’s engagement and that their experience of the work is calibrated in line with the artist’s experience. It is as if the artist has also become embalmed within the surfaces of their own production.

UNWRAPPING THE PROCESS

It is apparent from the previous section that my method of embalming brings together notions of optical suspension with surface tactility. It is also clear that my initial motive behind the process was to preserve my objects, to slice out a moment of their life and conserve it in ink. The drive to preserve and protect may, of course, be fundamental to many art practices. Preservation would also seem to be the first impulse of the embalmer’s art. According to Jolene Zigarovich, who examines the role of embalming in eighteenth century England, the desire to preserve a corpse is fundamental to the practice, and reveals anxiety about bodily dissolution. Through hiding the physical signs of mortality and decay we attempt to “overcome any sense of separation or loss” and create the possibility of a secure future for the soul.

At first I conceived of both my objects and my printing method as ways to safeguard the lives of the deceased. I saw the objects, for example, as emblems of post-mortem survival and attempted to mirror and amplify


their quality of endurance through my work. However, through reflecting on my practice in relation to other artists’ “mummification” projects, I have come to view embalming as a complex and contradictory notion. The sculptural methodologies of Alice Anderson and Heidi Bucher, for example, offer a counterpoint to my method, yet their works highlight how embalming functions well beyond the idea of preservation. Although these two artists seemingly conserve objects in time, their works are not isolated in the past. Instead, their practices suggest a new temporality that brings together past and present. The objects they embalm are preserved, but they are also set in motion as new presences in the world.

I first encountered Anderson’s work at the 2013 Venice Biennale where she exhibited personal objects—including TV screens, telephones, suitcases and hand tools—bound in metres of copper wire. The objects appeared as treasure fit for a Pharaoh’s tomb33 (see fig. 68 and 69 overleaf). Her practice of wrapping began in 2012 in a response to the anxiety she felt about dealing with redundant studio tools. “I started to wind-up copper thread around objects which appeared to me ‘mummified’ according to the ancient Egyptian’s embalming process for achieving immortality. Time-capsuled they were preserved, made safe, representing a fixed moment suspended in eternity.”34

In Darian Leader’s assessment, Anderson’s repetitive binding actions of pulling, stretching and tensioning, generates “a kind of immediate historicism, turning the core objects into relics.”35 But on seeing Anderson’s work it appeared to me that she does more than relocate objects in time. She also creates a representational paradox by producing forms that are the “original” item, but are also distinct from them, something different.
fig. 68 (right)

Alice Anderson

Headphone (recognisable object), 2013
Copper wire, dimensions unknown,
© Alice Anderson.

fig. 69 (left)

Alice Anderson

Spectacle (recognisable object), 2014
Copper wire, wrapped object, dimensions
unknown, © Alice Anderson.

For related work see also Leader, “Alice Anderson,” 25.
The new, wrapped objects refer to the originating items, and even depend on them for their essence, yet they also exist as a new and unique representation. Anderson’s works create a compelling tension between the object and its representation that I return to shortly.

In Anderson’s wrapping practice I recognise my own attempts to guard objects from time’s inexorable melt, while also transforming objects into new presences. Yet I also identify with Heidi Bucher’s efforts to free belongings from their earthly context. Like Anderson, Bucher also utilised wrapping as a metaphor for mummification. But where Anderson envelopes her objects in perpetuity, Bucher unfurled her wrappings to free the objects beneath.

Bucher began her work by selecting everyday objects and sites of personal significance—such as clothing, personal belongings and architectural elements from her family home—and then embalmed them under layers of tulle and liquid latex. Next she removed the yellowing membrane to produce a cast-off skin that retained the imprint of the surface (see fig. 70 to 72 overleaf). Describing her practice as an attempt to save her past through mummification, Bucher treated the home and its contents as a human (dead) body, thereby expanding the definition of material remains in a manner consistent with my own understanding.

Beyond its connections to preservation, Bucher’s work re-activates the ancient Egyptian belief that the skin is the container of the soul in the afterlife. Typically, when skin is separated from the body it can only mark death, and indeed Bucher’s warped pelts suggest a cadaverous presence. Equally, however, her work liberates the objects and suggests a form of...
restoration and reappearance. Bucher therefore unites mummification with its ideal corollary: resurrection, and in so doing proposes a tension between permanence and flux.

The practices of Anderson and Bucher reveal how an embalmed object or artwork creates two forms of tension: one between stasis and continuity (a tension of time implied in Bucher’s skins), and the other between the embalmed item and the original object (a tension of representation, suggested in Anderson’s wrapped objects). By activating these temporal and representational oppositions, the act of embalming mobilises new orders of meaning.

Although I initially experimented with methods that have greater symmetry with Anderson and Bucher’s approaches (for example, casting objects and unravelling/rewinding textiles), I ultimately turned to image production to bring together something like the implied stasis of Anderson’s copper-wrapped relics, with the movement of Bucher’s floating skins. I sought to activate the embalming potential of the image as it is described by Andrew Benjamin. Benjamin suggests that the hand-made image can invoke stillness and continuity, life and death in the one work. He proposes a view of the image—in particular, of mimetic representation—as a unique form of visual embalming.

Benjamin’s thoughts on the image appear in a catalogue essay on Peter Neilson’s drawings of utilitarian objects. Here Benjamin writes, “image creation is itself already the creation of a form of death.” In being lifeless, the image elicits melancholy and acquires pathos as it presents “lost objects” to the viewer. Yet equally the image produces a relation


39. Ibid., para. 3.
fig. 70 (top)
Heidi Bucher
Ohne Titel (Herrenzimmer)
Untitled (Master’s Bedroom), 1977-1979

fig. 71 (bottom right)
Heidi Bucher
Schublade (Drawer), c. 1980

fig. 72 (bottom left)
Heidi Bucher
OT-TO-TO-TO-TO-TO-TO, 1975
Mother of pearl pigment, textiles, latex, 190-80 cm, courtesy Freymond-Guth Fine Arts, Zürich, © The Estate of Heidi Bucher. Courtesy The Estate of Heidi Bucher.
to presence, to “that which is always there” and “marks ending’s impossibility.” Benjamin concludes that, “Between loss and mourning on the one hand and mere presence on the other there is another possibility.” That possibility is repose, defined by Benjamin as the suspension of an opposition between ending and continuity.

Benjamin’s notion of repose stages a relation to death, but also to pausing, to waiting, and even the future potential to act. Here I am reminded of the human corpse lying in repose, open to public view during the interval between death and burial. I also contemplate Bucher’s skins that appear both alive and memorialised. Benjamin writes, “Repose may mark an end, equally it marks a beginning. To pause is to state the possibility of continuity. Death figures as an interruption within continuity rather than as the absolute end.”

Benjamin’s view of images as like the corpse in repose articulates the aspirations I have for my linocut printing. Benjamin’s thoughts also reprise comments made by Bazin over thirty years earlier that are also pertinent to this project. Bazin notes that, “if the plastic arts were put under psychoanalysis, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in their creation. The process might reveal that at the origin of painting and sculpture there lies a mummy complex.” The “mummy complex” in Bazin’s text refers to the embalmed Egyptian corpse, and thus to the desire for survival after death. He writes,

The religion of Egypt...saw survival as depending on the continued existence of the corporeal body. Thus...providing a defence against the passage of time...To preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, so to speak, in the hold of life.
Although Bazin elevates the photograph as the medium of embalming par excellence, he suggests that painting and sculpture (at least when used to produce a likeness) also operate with the same logic. To build his argument he highlights that the Egyptians used numerous media to allow the body to continue in the afterlife, including the mummy itself, images of the deceased, the sarcophagus shell and small statuettes. Bazin describes, for example the use of “terra cotta statuettes, as substitute mummies which might replace the bodies if these were destroyed.” The statuettes functioned as potential surrogates in reserve, ensuring the mummy’s survival if the human remains failed. The sarcophagus, which bears an image of the deceased on its surface, could also replace the corpse if needed. Bazin concludes “It is this religious use, then, that lays bare the primordial function of statutory, namely, the preservation of life through the representation of that life.” Embalming through art, he claims, allows the appearance of life to be maintained in the reality of death.

Bazin may overstate the importance of embalming to art practice, but his thoughts are nonetheless relevant to my project. Most important is his suggestion that embalming is a form of representation where one thing stands for another through appearance. Importantly, Bazin sees embalming as a practice which opens new discursive space between the image and referent. When a corpse or object is embalmed it is made to be other than itself; it is made into something like the living body but different. Thus, where Andrew Benjamin articulates the temporal dialectics between ending and continuity that images produce, Bazin highlights the paradox of representation, an idea I introduced earlier in relation to Anderson’s mummified objects.
Margaret Schwartz extends on Bazin’s notion of representational paradox in her thoughtful analysis of the documentary *The Unquiet Grave*. She observes that, “the embalmed body is not merely a corpse. Unlike corpses, bodies embalmed for indefinite display do not follow the people they once were into memory. They do not decompose: they remain, at the level of appearances.” The embalmed body is uncannily like the person, and yet it is not that person, not unlike Anderson’s wrapped glasses or headphones which are the same, but different to their pre-wrapped state. Though an image may show a faithful likeness to the object it depicts, “it can never be considered identical to that object—and it is this tension between resemblance and difference that produces new meaning.” Mimesis forces a distinction between the figure and figurative, the object and the referent. An image is both a representation of the referent, but it is also a unique object that is freed from the conditions that gave rise to it and adds something new to the world.

Having discussed Anderson and Bucher’s practices, and considered the writings of Benjamin and Bazin, the question emerges as to how visual embalming may contribute to thinking about objects. How does the metaphor of the embalmed corpse or image reflect back to objects of the deceased? Like corpses and images, objects do not remain within the temporality or presence of the person they refer to. Objects do not belong to one duration; they embody what was but continue to present themselves and “point to the future, too, by means of their persistence, their staying on.” Past, present and future collide and become entangled with one another. Objects also inexorably point towards someone, and defer meaning to the people who once owned them. But, in the end, the object


50. Schwartz, “Proper Corruption,” para. 10.

differs from the person it represents, even as it carries a symbolic likeness to the person. Objects may act as surrogates, but they cannot be conflated with the person they substitute for. It is in the space between like and not like, that auratic meaning is produced.

It is within temporal and representation paradoxes that personal objects gain auratic power. Because the object is allied to the individual, but also separated from them, it allows a new experience of presence to be produced. As representations, objects, like images, also operate with an underlying paradox that brings the idea of continuance and ending together. In addition, because an object cannot conflate entirely with the living person, it actively creates new relations and produces new constellations of meaning. When viewed as embalmed presences, objects possess a structural ambiguity where they allow attachment to the dead and distance from death; they are “embodiments of bodilessness.”

I began this chapter by reflecting on how my deceased family are embalmed in the photos I keep of them. I have inherited many family snapshots, thanks in particular to my paternal grandfather who set up a makeshift darkroom in his tiny bathroom. Now his presence is preserved in the photographs that he has handed on, and not only in the images in which his portrait appears. His touch also resonates in the prints he dipped into the bathtub and pegged onto an improvised drying line rigged across the room. Knowledge of his fingertips, as much as his photographic likeness, carries his presence back to me.

In the boxes and albums of photographs that were once my grandfather’s I discovered a way to think about the preservation and mobilisation of presence. Through them I uncovered an approach to visual embalming that brings together mimesis, touch and suspension. My process begins with an attempt to capture, preserve and sensitise a moment in the life of an object, hoping to produce temporal and representational tensions between now and then, here and not here. My own bodily relation to the object is then embalmed into the paper surface through a protracted process of analogue printing, incorporating touching of the image substrate. By the time I have embalmed an object, I have created a two-dimensional, figurative representation that produces a moment of cessation, in concert with an opening-out of the temporal horizon. The works are then ready for transformation through the next stage of my method: burial.
CHAPTER THREE

burial
Once a person has died his or her family or community becomes responsible not only for the disposal of his or her bodily remains but also for his or her soul.

—Kevin Hetherington.
The title of my second stage, burial, references both the action and effect of interment. During this stage the images I create during embalming are literally covered under layers of ink. The process reflects Robert Hertz’s seminal description of human burial as both an end and a beginning where one body—the physical body—is laid to rest, and second body—the social body that lives on with those who are left behind—is born. The same can be said in the visual life of my prints: the moment of interment is a point of no return where one print is lost and another will emerge.

The burial rite I perform through printmaking is a way to visually process ideas and experiences of death. I characterise the method as a surrogate mortuary ritual for the object and by association the person who once used it. My interest in symbolically interring my belongings emerges from their status as post-mortem objects: although they were not taken to the grave, the significances of the belongings have intensified after their owner’s death. I am also aware that I metaphorically bury objects in my daily life by placing them in the dark cupboards and drawers of my home.
I have developed a practice, for example, of opening up cases of linen and envelopes of old photographs to leaf through them, only to entomb them again in their place of rest for another term.

My introduction makes reference to Robert Hertz because his proposition that burial is both an ending and a beginning is relevant to my printmaking method. In addition, his notion of double-burial provides a useful way to frame the emphasis of this chapter. Hertz suggests that funerary rites often involve two aspects: a wet burial in which the decay of the corpse occurs and the identity of the deceased is dissolved, and a dry interment when rites are conducted with the remains and a new identity as an ancestor is created. Put another way, he suggests that burial includes a physical process that acts on the flesh of the person who has passed, and a performative element that works on the minds of those who remain.

In this chapter I focus primarily on the cognitive transformations that have emerged through making; I concentrate on what Hertz might call my dry interment. (The visual implications of the method—my wet burial—are addressed in chapter five where I discuss the pictorial relationship between the objects and the intense black field that surrounds them). After articulating the mechanics of my printing procedure, I discuss how the printmaking burial has functioned as a cognitively rich activity through which I have reflected on experiences of loss, death and burial. The central idea I pursue is that by making images of objects disappear (and then reappear in exhumation), I imagine and construct new understandings of the ways that objects mediate presence and absence in our daily lives.
A METHOD OF BURIAL

In an interview regarding his installation *Waste Not* (2005-ongoing), artist Song Dong conceptualises the art making process as a ritualised engagement. He suggests that recurrent sequences of production fuse action with self-reflexivity and transform the relations between art-object, material and maker. He says, “when you create a ritual, you create a space, an aura around it at the same time. That space becomes a platform from which to observe the ritual.”

Dong characterises creative production as a ritualised act that connects sensuous, material performance with transformations in the artist’s thinking.

I share Dong’s view that making artwork can scaffold thinking and thereby produce visual and embodied knowledge. It is, in fact, a fundamental assumption of practice-based research that creative work is a self-reflexive endeavour that transforms the researcher and fosters “imaginative insight” into the researched. My experience of rolling and inking black pigment over my images exemplifies this assumption. The burial method has given me a foothold for thinking in the research because, more than any other aspect of my work, the action of covering my prints seems to embody an experience of death and what it brings.

In practical terms the burial stage of my method is relatively simple, especially compared to the more technically challenging procedures of embalming and exhumation. After embalming, the objects I depict have a crisp and intensely pigmented presence on the page. Their contours mark a sharp distinction between foreground and background so that each object sits proud and detached from the blank, open paper field around it. To

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By locating ritual in the making process Dong challenges Walter Benjamin's idea that ritual is a hindrance to the progression of art. The key difference between the two lies in how they position ritual in relation to practice. Benjamin situates it in the experience of viewing an artwork: when artworks are encountered in a church or gallery he claims the work takes on ritual functions that impedes cultural advancement. Dong, however, employs the term to describe the reflexive process of making artwork.

bury the work I roll a dense ivory and carbon black ink onto a flat linoleum block larger than the print I intend to bury (see fig. 73 and 74). The scale of the block demands expansive and repetitive rolling gestures and before long my movements pulse in regular, periodic intervals. The repetitive sequence organises my movements in the space of the studio. Immersed in the sensations of rolling and inking, my thinking becomes conscious, serial and slow. Ideas and memories are roused. I think about my experiences of family death, burial and cremation, of visiting graves and looking at boxes of ashes on the mantelpiece. I visualise the resurrection of the object on the page and imagine future works that might emerge from it.

After inking I lay a print created in the embalming stage onto the blackened block (see fig. 75 on page 156), and invite an “embrace” between the paper and matrix as they travel through the press, “one body pressed against the other.” The passage of the print through the press marks the moment of transition from one state to another. Blackness penetrates into the fibrous body of the paper (see fig. 76 on page 158), permeating through to the verso surface where no underlying ink layer blocks its passage. The pigment also sutures to the dense strata of ink that describe the object on the page. As I pull the print from the black matrix the once crisp image is a barely detectable form that haunts the surface. Darkness claims the object and I experience a dissipation of the material world (see fig. 77 on page 161).
fig. 74

fig. 75
Originally, when I explored overprinting my work I did not conceive of it as an act of burial, nor did I even use black ink. My focus was directed, instead, towards the possibilities of removing the ink by hand. I wanted to produce the conditions that would require me to touch, rub and abrade the surface, to generate a haptic image that might echo the touched skin of the objects depicted. At first shrouding the work under pigment was a means to an end. I explored a variety of hues, abrasion methods and papers. At the same time I was experimenting with a predominantly white palette in other work through blind embossing, plaster casting, unravelling textiles and producing portraits of objects set against white backgrounds. None of these investigations, however, possessed the post-mortem aura that appeared in the darkened scans and photographs I had taken in earlier experiments.

My use of black pigment emerged with my awareness of the role that blackness could play in imparting the void of the afterlife. Black has played a substantive role in cultural representations of death, and is often aligned to notions of absence and separation. Victoria Finlay, for example, calls it the place of no return for the body, Simon Gregg describes it as “an agent of obscurity,” and Mark Doty even suggests black is a “visible form of death,” “the not-here, the not-now…the unknown.” Black can also be traced to funeral and mourning rites as far back as the Neolithic period, and to macabre visions of soot, shadows and burned bones.

Despite the historic and visual significances of black, a key shift occurred when I realised it was not sufficient to simply capture or print a black background, but that conceptually and aesthetically it was necessary to bury the print under blackness. I discovered that the practice of printing
pigment over the image situates the referent in a haunting space where it is lost but also lingers. The belonging ceases to exist as it once did, yet a memory of it remains on the paper as a glossy, silhouetted form. It is suspended in a state of abeyance, neither truly gone nor fully here, reminiscent of the spectral status of my deceased family member who owned it.

FINDING A PLACE FOR ABSENCE

Once I established the burial methodology, the question logically emerged as to why it was necessary to place the object in a state of absence. Why did I develop a process that makes things and the people associated with them representationally absent, only to try to make them present again in exhumation? What was at stake in my re-enactment beyond a material analogy to burial?

If I follow Hertz’ reasoning, the function of my burial process is to enable me to negotiate a new relationship with my deceased family members by redefining their status and identity. For Hertz burial is a mnemonic task that reinvents the person as an ancestor, enabling us to forget (decompose) some aspects of the deceased’s identity, and actively construct others.\textsuperscript{11} It is possible that Hertz would describe my use of black pigment as a representation of forgetting, or even symbolic killing, that makes way for me to develop new memories through the work. To become an ancestor, he writes, “the dead must first be killed…ritually killed and…born anew.”\textsuperscript{12} The creation and subsequent obliteration of my images might enable such a mnemonic reconstruction to occur. Perhaps I let go of a certain vision

\textsuperscript{11.} This is a widespread perspective of burial shared by other theorists and writers in material culture. See for example Douglas J. Davies, “Classics Revisited: Robert Hertz: The Social Triumph Over Death,” Mortality 5, no. 1 (2000): 97-102.

See also Howard Williams, Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

\textsuperscript{12.} Hertz, “Collective Representation of Death,” 73.

Anthropologist Susanne Küchler describes a similar process in her analysis of Malangan funerary ritual, where monuments are built to represent the “skins” of the deceased, and then ceremonially killed. She suggests the ritual is an attempt to control how the living will remember the deceased.

of the item (substitute person) and craft a new, more radiant one through making work. The object is not literally disposed, but a way of looking at it (as an ordinary thing) is discarded and a new vision formed.

However, I do not conceptualise my process as an amalgam of forgetting and remembrance. My task has not been to re-craft identity or commemorate objects. Nor do I see myself trying to forget the deceased and remember the ancestor. As I have come to understand it, the burial I perform grapples with existence and non-existence. I say this because as I submerge my works under layers of black ink the objects appear lost and I become aware, above all else, of the absence of family members who owned them. By making the object symbolically go away I represent the space that my loved one no longer occupies. My method is performed on what is there—a paper surface and image—but also around the presence of what is not. The residue of this action also persists in the atmosphere of the final work, even though the object re-appears for the viewer.

Whilst my action of burial locates my objects within a realm of absence, I have a vested interest in the possibilities of exhumation. Burial is ultimately a means to transfigure rather than seek closure. In this aspect my method differs from that of other artists who have disposed of or buried personal, family objects. As an example, both Catalina Jaramillo and Sophie Calle have interred physical objects left behind by their mothers, positioning their actions as a means to share a loved one’s identity (Jaramillo), and as a rite of closure (Calle).

13. This is a concept that Howard Williams uses to define medieval funerary practice which aligns with Hertz’ perspective. Williams considers how the dead were remembered in early medieval Britain, and explores how objects and spaces were used in ritual performance as technologies of remembrance. See Williams, *Death and Memory.*
After the death of her mother Catalina Jaramillo mounted an exhibition called *You are Always Here* (2011). The exhibition comprised an installation of all her mother’s possessions: nail polish, shoes, hand-written lists, jewellery, perfume and belts, among many other things (see fig. 78 overleaf). Jaramillo placed the objects around the perimeter of the gallery floor in a highly ordered structure to reveal “how mundane objects can become sacred when the person they belonged to is gone.”

But the work involved one more critical aspect. On the closing night of the show the public were invited to take an object home with them after seeing the exhibition. The artist describes it as an attempt to “distribute” her mother’s presence in the community. As I will go on to suggest, her invitation can also be thought of as a symbolic burial, or an act of letting go.

Jaramillo’s strategy of divestment to others is one that many people use after the death of a loved one. Many of us face the task of sorting through what is left when someone dies and we must decide what will be cherished, what will be passed on to others, and what will be thrown away. As Gibson asserts: “pragmatically, most people know that they simply cannot keep everything and that decisions have to be made.” From Jean-Sébastien Marcoux’s perspective one common approach we take when divesting the objects a loved one is to distribute them amongst our kin as a ritualised form of sharing the self. Jaramillo’s perspective is similar as she hoped to part with objects in order to propagate the memory of her mother amongst a wider community.

Another way to understand the divestment of objects after death is suggested in the work of Kevin Hetherington and Margaret Gibson. According to them, by letting objects go into the hands of another person...
fig. 78
Catalina Jaramillo
You are Always Here, 2011
Installation of objects left behind by the artists’ deceased mother, © Catalina Jaramillo.
we effectively act out the disappearance of our loved ones, or enact a symbolic burial. In Jaramillo’s case, making the items “available for adoption”\textsuperscript{21} may function like a gesture of scattering ashes, dispersing the presence of her mother into a wider field, whilst also enacting a ritual of transition.\textsuperscript{22} Of note, Jaramillo reveals that many of the objects in the exhibition were considered “refuse,”\textsuperscript{23} of no reuse or sentimental value. However, she also included more personal items—hand-written letters and her mother’s passport—despite the conflict this produced with her brother who asserted that, “there are some things you just don’t do.”\textsuperscript{24}

Calle took a different approach to the burial of her mother’s objects in \textit{North Pole} (2009).\textsuperscript{25} Two years after her mother’s death she travelled to the northern-most point of the earth to bury a photo, a Chanel necklace and a diamond ring. The exhibited work includes photographs and video that records the artist’s experiences of the event (see fig. 79 overleaf). In the exhibition text she writes: “Yesterday I buried my mother’s jewels on Northern Glacier.”\textsuperscript{26} The artist’s mother had dreamed of travelling to the North Pole, and Calle suggests that she symbolically laid her mother to rest there by using objects as surrogates. The belongings function as a stand in for her mother, enabling the artist to honour an unfulfilled dream.

Where Sophie Calle’s action of literal burial expresses reverence for her mother, Catalina Jaramillo’s work activates discourses about the complications of divestment. She asks, is there a “correct” way to handle or dispose of another person’s belongings? Her brother’s observation that “there are some things you just don’t do” raises the question for me as to whether I could perform a similar burial rite like the one in \textit{You are Always}}
Unlike Jaramillo I do not possess objects categorised as refuse. Could I give away my objects of heightened value and, if I did, what would be the implications?

Since powerful moral economies can operate within families, defining which objects can or cannot be dispossessed, destroyed or sold in exchange for money,\(^27\) it may not be possible for me to damage or literally bury my objects without raising productive questions about the “right” and “wrong” way to handle them (unless, of course, the burial respects a wish of the deceased as it did for Calle). What would happen, for example, if I gave my inheritances away or—following in the footsteps of Michael Landy who shredded all his possessions in *Break Down* (2001)—I destroyed the belongings I had inherited from my family in order to make work?\(^28\)

Through reflecting on the practices of these artists and producing my own work, I have come to a deeper understanding of the moral economy that operates in my family with regards to inherited objects. This project has been shaped by tacit family agreements regarding how I should treat the objects in my care. The unwritten contracts of care came into sharp relief during an early experimental work in which I undertook to unravel my grandmothers’ doilies in order to reconstitute them in new work (see fig. 80 to 82 on the following four page spreads overleaf). Unlike Calle I do not have a mandate for the alteration or disposal of these objects, and unlike some of Jaramillo’s inheritances, the doilies were not classified as waste awaiting disposal. Consequently, the process has sat uneasily with me ever since.

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28. For this work Landy gathered together all his possessions—including his car, kitchen utensils, clothes and works of art—and catalogued all 7,227 of them. With the help of ten workers he shredded every item until only rubbish bags of powder remained which went to landfill. For Landy the work was concerned with the cycles of consumer goods, and the relationship between objects and identity.

fig. 79
Sophie Calle
North Pole, 2009
Light box, sandblasted porcelain plaque, video, screen, color photograph, frame, dimensions variable, © Sophie Calle.
fig. 80
© Clare Humphries. Photography by David Burrows.
**fig. 81** (facing page)
Clare Humphries
*Five things that can never be again*, 2010
Unravelled thread, wood, dimensions variable, © Clare Humphries. Photograph by John Brash.

**fig. 82** (overleaf)
Clare Humphries
*Retracing your fingertips again*, 2010
Artists’ book, unravelled thread, embossing, ink, paper, 10 x 25 x 1.7 cm, © Clare Humphries.
Photography by John Brash.
Although the unravelled thread work produced some successful results, the process was loaded with moral questions that are not my primary concern in this research. On the one hand my actions allowed me to enter my grandmothers’ making space, and re-trace the movements of their fingertips. But on the other, I had deconstructed their work and reconfigured their presence. I learned from the experience that it would not be possible for me to alter or injure the objects in this project without addressing notions of rightness and decency in the treatment of belongings. Although these are thought-provoking questions, they lie outside the parameters of my research concerns. I subsequently began to pursue ways to visually process the objects that did not threaten their welfare; I began to work with the mimetic image as a surrogate for the object.

In the surrogate burial strategy I employ, an illusory image functions as a surrogate for the object. Thus, where Calle uses her mother’s jewellery as a body double, I use the image as a symbolic representative of the object, which in turn substitutes for the person who owned it. In both approaches something material is used to represent the burial of a family member. The artefact (whether literal or metaphoric) functions as a substitute.

Auster addresses the notion of surrogate burial in *The Invention of Solitude*, a text I quoted in the previous chapter. He suggests that when he disposed of his deceased father’s ties it felt like a burial by proxy. In Auster’s words, “it was then, at the precise instant I tossed them into the truck, that I came close to tears. More than seeing the coffin itself being lowered into the ground, the act of throwing away these ties seemed to embody for me the idea of burial. I finally understood that my father was dead.” 29

Auster found, like me, that we may encounter a person’s absence through an object’s disappearance, and this may help us to comprehend how the person ceases to exist.

Although my printing method lacks the cathartic pull of Auster’s experience, it nonetheless allows me to contemplate my connections to family and their personal belongings. The act of obscuring my prints moves me from an awareness of objects as signifiers of presence (an idea that is robust when the objects are visible on the page), towards recognition of the absences that they mediate and manifest (once the object is covered). Through making objects emerge onto the page during embalming, and then depart in burial I experience a representation of the changed family landscape in which people have disappeared. Even after the image is excavated again, the black ground and ink residue register the vestiges of the burial process.

Auster and I are not alone in suggesting that when someone passes away we may discard or otherwise hide their belongings to act out their disappearance. According to Gibson we re-enact the experience of loss whenever we part with inherited objects, including when we throw them away, take them to a second-hand shop, or pass them on to another person. She writes that by “making objects go away” we “indirectly and symbolically enact death and what it brings—loss and disappearance.”

Gibson would perhaps suggest that when I make images disappear and re-appear in this project, I do not craft a new ancestral identity (as Hertz advises), but I perform the disappearance that death has brought about. This is arguably the implication of Jaramillo’s sharing of objects in You Are Always Here, and Calle’s burial of keepsakes in the polar snow.
Hetherington goes one step further than Gibson in his analysis of why we discard personal objects. For him the disposal or burial of things is not just a way to act out emptiness, it is also a means by which we negotiate our relationship with the gaps and absences in our lives. Although Hetherington’s interest lies with waste and consumer goods, he aligns disposal with other actions that create absence: human burial, sacrifice, the storage of objects in cupboards, and gifting things to others. He suggests these activities assist us to understand loss, and refers to them as a “continual practice of engaging with and holding things in a state of absence.” In this way Hetherington claims that disposal is not an act of closure but an undertaking that allows “movement between categories of absence and presence.” The (temporary) obliteration of my prints can be read within his framework as a visual act of entombment.

By aligning disparate actions with the notion of burial, Hetherington emphasises that the way an object is buried is of less significance than the representational effects that are produced in the act. He argues that it is less important to define how an object is placed—that is, whether it is taken to the tip, donated to a second-hand shop, stored in a cupboard, placed in a display cabinet, or given a mortuary rite like the Japanese  

kuyō  

than to consider what happens to our representations of the object and our experience of absence as a result. Hetherington says disposal “is not primarily about waste but about placing...about placing absences.” In an especially relevant passage he writes,

...in the home it is not just the bin that is the conduit for disposal. The attic, the basement, the garage...wardrobe, make-up drawer, or cupboard under the stairs, even the public rooms of the house itself, are all often used in the same
manner as conduits for disposing of things...But what are not disposed of are the translating effects of those objects. Old photographs or family heirlooms might retain a presence in the attic just as powerfully as when they are brought down from the attic to be re-appropriated perhaps by subsequent generations...Even their memory after they have gone from the house can still have effects. Disposal and inheritance are not as far apart as might initially be imagined. These receptacles act more like doorways than trashcans.35

According to Hetherington’s argument, my actions during burial could be understood as an attempt to manage the gaps created by death. In the process of over-printing black I construct an order where absence has a place. When I cover the image in ink a representation of loss is made and the belonging is placed in a state of nonexistence. But, it is never absolutely gone. The depicted object persists underneath the tacky, black ink, appearing glossy in contrast to the matte, blank ground in which it floats. To use Hetherington's language, there is a “trace effect”36 passed on by the object’s absence. The work can therefore become a conduit through which I attempt to reform my understanding of loss. I do this by creating a physical place where an absence can exist in the blackness of the paper.37 I also invite the possibility of transformation and return in the representational order. In these ways I attempt to reconcile how the deceased occupy a ontological category of existence in my life where they are here (through their objects) and yet not here (in bodily presence).

My observations about surrogate burial do not end here, for whilst I suggest that my process is a way to act out my social relations with lost loved ones, I also hope to arouse a similar experience of surrogate burial in the viewer. I base this on the idea that we may confront the void left by

35. Ibid., 166-167.
36. Ibid., 168.
37. Later in the process, after exhumation, the illusory presence of the object also places an absence, since it fails to deliver the physical presence of the object that it depicts.
a missing loved one when we encounter artists’ representations of post-mortem objects, even if the objects carry no direct, personal connection to us. When Colm Tóibín saw Amelia Stein’s photographs, for example (discussed in the introduction), the images triggered recollections of clearing out his own parents’ home. He recalled walking into empty rooms where objects brought to mind the warm human presence that once gave them meaning. Tóibín explains that Stein’s works evoke a dual sense of “disappearance” and “fierce presence” for him, even though the shoes, lipsticks and keepsakes in the work are not entwined in his personal history. Tóibín’s response is no doubt due, in part, to the soft, melancholic stillness that Stein conjures in her works (see fig. 83). Through locating her parent’s objects within a mysterious, encroaching darkness she creates a space of implied emptiness into which Tóibín can import his own objects. Tóibín’s thoughts also imply that mournful representations of personal objects can elicit the same ontological flux of present-absence that disposing of our own inheritances brings about. I can personally attest to a similar experience, for when I look at Stein’s photographs of gardening tools, cooking utensils and empty boxes—all items unfamiliar to me—my own family implements and empty containers flash before my eyes and remind me of the hands that once touched them.

Viewers of my work have also reported similar experiences. On encountering the work I believe in the afterlife (2010) for example, many people have talked to me about the silverware their mothers or grandmothers owned (see fig. 84 overleaf). Ghosts of the past return to them and absence re-asserts itself. These experiences suggest that if we re-experience loss when we make objects go away (following Gibson
and Auster), we also re-encounter our missing loved ones through contemplating representations of other people’s elegiac possessions. This may be especially true in work that offers a vision of things enveloped in an encroaching darkness that gives emptiness a voice.

So far I have suggested that the visual burial of my objects reprises my funerary experiences and acts as a conduit for managing loss. I have also proposed that when representations of loss are brought to bear on or through personal objects, a viewer may re-experience the hollowness death has created in his or her life. Thus, even after the coffin has been lowered or the ashes scattered, we may find ourselves symbolically interring (and indeed exhuming) our loved ones again and again, using possessions or visual representations as surrogates for the body.

Before I conclude this chapter, my approach to production extends these observations one-step further. One of the major implications of the burial aspect of this project lies in what it says about the need for repeated burials. My process involves a recurrent practice of revealing and concealing and this has urged me to reflect on how we repeatedly shift objects between states of here-ness and gone-ness. In my practice the object appears during embalming, recedes when buried, then re-emerges in exhumation. There is an embodied movement back and forth between absence and presence through the stages of making, and the movements repeat each time I produce another print. Once completed each work also holds these states in tension. With darkness licking at the fringes of form, each object is caught in a moment of apparition, an imminent presence on the verge of materialising, or in some works falling out of the frame and vanishing.

**fig. 84** (facing page)
Clare Humphries
_I believe in the afterlife_, 2010 (detail)
Hand-burnished linocut prints, 64 x 48.5 cm each, © Clare Humphries.
Both the artwork and its mode production invite questions about how we hold things in a state of disappearance and appearance, and how we move them between these states.

The recurrent movement between loss and recovery—implied both in my method and the images themselves—has re-framed my understanding of how we use garages, attics and cupboards as spaces for holding things in suspension, only to retrieve them again in the future. In effect we make objects withdraw from view and then materialise, not unlike my action of covering and then exposing images. I have considered, for example, my personal ritual of keeping my paternal grandmother’s tablecloths in the leather case in which they were given to me (see fig. 85). Whenever I close the lid and snib the catches I feel that I have laid her to rest once again. Objects that I fold, position and inter in dark containers are buried each time they are returned to their place of rest. It follows that I have “buried” my nana dozens of times by tucking her tablecloths away, and I exhume her each time I bring them out into the light. Through handling her tablecloths in this way I engage in an endless sequence that affirms my relationship to her is always unfinished, despite how much work I might do to resolve her loss. Using systems of storage I re-enact a movement between states of here and gone, over and over again, in order to try to understand the absence her death has created.

My procedure of burying prints under a sheet of black ink mirrors the recursive act of interring and resurrecting objects from the closets and cabinets of my home. It also implies the need for a continual practice of revealing and concealing in order to manage the haunting presence of loved ones. The blackness that I employ invokes the dark space inside the

**fig. 85** (facing page)
Leather case of linen once owned by my maternal and paternal grandparents. © Clare Humphries.
cupboards, boxes and drawers where objects like my nana’s tablecloths live their lives unseen by me. What interests me is not the literal space or colour of the box or drawer, but the way this space performs in my mind as a void whenever I am not looking inside it. There is potency in the imagined darkness of my cupboards and boxes because it can lure my thoughts inside like the gravity of a black hole. This is a blackness that has an ability to absorb, to draw my thoughts into a reality outside human sense perception. It is a darkness where the object lingers and waits, latent, vibrant with meaning and independent of my physical reality. It is also a space in which things move and re-order themselves without my intervention. I have found that the performance and effect of a printed burial enables me to experience and reflect on these spaces, movements and absences.
At the outset of this chapter I cited Robert Hertz’ view that burial allows the living to come to terms with their separation from the deceased. This research suggests that after a loved one has died the burial of their bodily remains may not be sufficient to create a new order of meaning. We may seek out opportunities, as I have done in this project, to symbolically bury and resurrect them through divesting or storing their objects, and through viewing or creating artworks that provoke these actions in the mind. By way of these encounters we engage in a continual practice of “making and holding things in a state of absence.”

Arising from these arguments I suggest that my process of interring prints can be framed as a surrogate burial: one that enacts the death of the object and by association the loss of the person who once owned it. By covering an image under a sheet of black ink a representation of loss is made. The interment signifies the end of a particular life for the object, and creates the possibility for it to return and re-appear as a changed thing. My method is not an act of closure, but a doorway through which the object may return through an act of exhumation.

CHAPTER FOUR

exhumation
Objects matter, however, because they are part of us—we imprint objects and they imprint us materially, emotionally and memorially.

—Margaret Gibson
LIVING WITH THE DEAD

I characterise the third phase of my methodology as a visual exhumation. In this stage I hand-wipe the burial layer of black ink away from the surface of the prints, and unearth the objects depicted. The method brings my images back into the light after their submersion in darkness, and grants each depicted object a new, metaphoric existence after death. It is as if they are enlivened, or have become “restless,” to use Matilda Mroz’s term. According to Mroz, an exhumed corpse is a restless body because it moves from one place (the grave) to another, and is denied the chance to rest in peace. A similar mobility is implied through my visual disinterment. The excavation of black ink allows the objects to re-emerge as dynamic forms, bathed in light from a source beyond the image frame. Once illuminated, they take on the appearance of things falling or hovering in a shadowy realm. Like Mroz’ corpse, they become objects on the move.

In suggesting that personal objects become active after death, my exhumation process draws conceptual parallels with the unearthing practices of the ancient Maya. Anthropologists theorise that the Maya exhumed the bones of family so that they could cohabitate with their forebears.2 Ancestors continued to be part of the fabric of society after


death, and were buried beneath or next to their houses to remain physically close. Their remains were even periodically unearthed, redistributed amongst kin and paraded in important ceremonies.

Today, in the West, it is not common practice to disturb the bones of our loved ones as the Maya did. An urn of ashes on the mantelpiece is generally the closest we come to cohabitation with bodies of the dead. But, as I implied in the previous chapter, we may symbolically exhume them whenever we unearth their objects from attics, cupboards and boxes. In doing this, like the Maya, we invite ghostly presences into our homes to live with us. I conceive of my visual exhumation in similar terms; that is as an unearthing of the people who once owned the objects I depict.

In this chapter I describe the manual process of exhumation through which I metaphorically invite my deceased family back into the world of the living. I highlight how the method emerged through my reflection on the materiality of personal objects. In particular, I acknowledge that the intersection between objects and bodily touch prompted me to consider new methodologies for visualising aura that involve touching the surface of the print. I go on to describe the development of the method itself, and situate it in relation to other artists who work with exhumation. In the latter part of the chapter I address the effects of my process, considering firstly the potentials for thinking about objects that it raises, and secondly addressing the way it relocates my body, as an artist, in analogue printmaking practice.

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3. There are interesting memorial product developments, largely evident in North America, where cremated ashes are used to produce objects such as memorial diamonds (see www.lifegem.com), and vinyl records (see www.anvinyly.com).
THE TOUCH OF THE SURFACE

Myths of resurrection often call on the power of touch. The *New Testament* describes Jesus bringing the Daughter of Jairus back to life by taking her hand and commanding her to get up.¹ In a lesser-known story, Apollonius of Tyana is said to have raised a girl from the dead on her burial day by touching her and whispering a secret spell.² My attempts at exhumation are also set in motion through skin-to-skin contact (see fig. 86 overleaf). The act of uncovering my images relies almost entirely on my fingertips as I rub and polish wet, black ink from the surface of the print after its burial.

The idea for exhuming works through touch was inspired by my family relics. My thoughts germinated as I handled my loved ones’ belongings in the studio and recognised the residues of contact on their metal, fabric and paper surfaces. I found myself folding and unfolding cloths, leafing through photos, turning over silverware and putting on gloves that didn’t fit. I moved my fingers and eyes across the outer membranes of glasses, cutlery and boxes, hoping that if I stayed close to the surface I might trace connections between the skin of the object and the person who used it.

As I held and moved the objects in my studio, I also replicated the choreography of gestures that my deceased family must have once performed. I became mindful of the hands that once touched the items and noticed the blemishes of use: stains on textiles, old photographs with hand-scrawled notes and cello tape residue, a golden patina on my grandmother’s silver tea strainer from her morning pot of tea. I recognised

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² Apollonius of Tyana was a first century Neo-Pythagorean philosopher. See: Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 4.45.

I acknowledge here that resurrection and exhumation are not equivalent notions. Exhumation typically reveals a decaying corpse, whilst resurrection offers an image of life defying death. However, as I go on to discuss, my approach allegorises exhumation, and may even offer a kind of hybrid notion that blends the action of exhumation with an effect of restoration.
the belongings as the material remains of lives lived with, objects fleshy skins that have been bruised and caressed by those who have left their impressions.

The traces of use on my objects—whether overt or barely perceptible—have become a mechanism through which I decipher their meanings. Bumps, scratches and scuffs prove my deceased family members once lived, and even restore them to a time and place in which they no longer exist. But a paradox also operates, for whilst the objects suggest bodily presences to me, they also testify to loss. In the words of Gibson, objects of the dead perform a contradictory function wherein they “offer a point of connection with the absent body of the deceased,” but they also “have a spectral life: a haunting power.” Ontological distinctions between presence and absence collapse, and I am reminded of Laura Marks’ suggestion that objects with aura represent something that is not present by virtue of prior contact with it. Touch, it seems, traces connections to aura, and I therefore began to contemplate ways to produce a skin-to-skin relation with the printed surface.

Recent, post-human scholarship articulates a new conception of materiality that contextualises my understanding of objects as sites of touch, and frames the tactile approach to exhumation that I developed. Manuel Arroyo-Kalin, for example, distinguishes materiality from matter, defining matter as the discrete material (glass, paper, wood) or the concrete thing (vase, photograph), and materiality is the engagement between bodies, tools, materials and substances that occur through that matter. He proposes that

6. I have found these marks are not always overt. They are sometimes subtle like the quiet signs of decay in Dutch still life bouquets that slowly creep into awareness as you regard the fecundity surrounding them. At other times a tactile history is only ever imagined in my mind’s eye.


8. Marks, The Skin of the Film, 81.


materiality is concerned with interactions between matter, forces, processes and bodies. Materiality is relational and can encompass the connections forged between family generations through inanimate objects.

In this project I propose a similar view of materiality to Arroyo-Kalin, defining it as a set of relations operating on the surface of objects and entangled with forces, bodies and times. It follows that I do not use the term materiality in this research to refer to the adjectival qualities of objects (hard, soft, brown, heavy), or the functional possibilities of their constituent materials (melting, breaking, tearing). Instead, I draw closer to the notion of a “relational materiality,” and explore how the connections between people become embedded in physical surfaces.

One of the concerns of my research is to examine how the materiality of inherited belongings can inform printmaking. Ultimately, I hypothesised that if I directed my body to the paper as I would to a printing plate (see fig. 87) I might produce an image surface that echoes the touched skin of objects. Reflecting on my desire to explore tactility, I began to contemplate how I might metaphorically dig up my images by hand from beneath the burial layer of ink. I found myself looking at the work of painters and drawers to develop my thinking. Rather than limit my research to practitioners who use comparable material supports or processes to mine, I searched for instances where a sympathetic logic of exhumation was at play. During my early experiments into surface reduction, for example, I looked at David Noonan’s bleach paintings in which acts of dissolution and removal generate the image (see fig. 88 and 89), and Emidio Puglielli’s sanded photographs that approach the snapshot as a material surface rather
than as a picture. These practices helped shape my thinking about the potential of visual exhumation. In them, surface reduction functions as something other than erasure, forgetting or destruction. Instead, Noonan employs bleach to reveal or uncover the image whilst Puglielli uses abrasion to generate a sensory charge.

Puglielli’s use of reduction is particularly relevant in my project since it introduces tactility to mechanically produced surfaces and in doing so weaves together sensations of sight and touch. His sanded snapshots suggest a connection to the body (the surfaces abraded by the hand), and yet they are kept at arm’s length from the viewer. In works such as Beach Disruption (2010) and Snapshot Disruption (2010), Puglielli subjects photographic prints to scratching and sanding, as if attempting to expose what lies beneath (see fig. 90 and 91 overleaf). The images have a palpable surface that, if we agree with Mark Paterson in *The Senses of Touch*, does not need to be actually touched to affirm an embodied encounter. Traces of abrasion in Beach Disruption, for example, invite the eyes to travel across the image surface as if they were hands. Looking and touching become entwined. To quote Paterson, “it is the potential for tactility, the sensory appeal of texture and form, an underlying synaesthesia which is the mechanism for the continual crossover between sensory modalities.”

The intimate quality of Puglielli’s surfaces is also interwoven by more distant, visual characteristics. The figures within his photographs can still be identified as distinct forms. There is a lack of visual depth to the images and a flattening of the distant vanishing point that draws in the eye. But, there is still enough distance to see the individual elements of the image.

13. Puglielli’s artworks fall within the practice of concrete photography, which foregrounds its own conditions; the object of photography is the means and the medium itself. See Gottfried Jäger, Rolf Krauss, and Beate Reese, eds., *Concrete Photography: Konkrete Fotografie* (Berlin: Kerber, 2005).

14. The methodologies of both artists can be contrasted to practices in which removal is an act of deletion, obliteration, or re-transcription, such as those of Christian Capurro.


16. Ibid., 94. (Italics in original).

17. The abraded surfaces also regain pictorial status when re-photographed for exhibition.
fig. 88 (left)
David Noonan

*In the garden of Jane Delawney (Lake)*, 2005
Fabric painting (diluted bleach applied to stretched, black cloth), 94 × 73.5 × 6.5 cm,
© David Noonan.

fig. 89 (right)
David Noonan

*In the garden of Jane Delawney*, 2005
Fabric painting (diluted bleach applied to stretched, black cloth), 104 × 78.5 × 6.5 cm,
© David Noonan.
fig. 90 (top)
Emidio Puglielli
*Beach Disruption*, 2010 (detail)
C type photograph, 115 x 102 x 2 cm,
© Emidio Puglielli. Courtesy of the artist.

fig. 91 (bottom)
Emidio Puglielli
*Snapshot Disruption*, 2010 (detail)
C type photograph, 115 x 102 x 2 cm,
© Emidio Puglielli. Courtesy of the artist
Puglielli’s practice suggests an approach to excavation that brings together sight and touch in a way that has been influential in my research. His process navigates tensions between the tactile (intimate) and the distant (visual), uniting what Laura Marks calls haptic and optic modes of reception. Marks describes haptic seeing as an orientation that uses the eye “like an organ of touch.”\(^\text{18}\) She suggests that haptic images infringe on our separateness and may even promote a feeling of “withness”\(^\text{19}\) with things. Marks contrasts the haptic to an optic mode of looking where a distance separates the subject from the object. She writes,

> Optical visuality, seeing things from enough distance to perceive them as distinct forms, depends on separation, on the viewing subject being separate from the object...Haptic visuality sees the world as though it were touching it: close, unknowable, appearing to exist on the surface of the image.\(^\text{20}\)

In distinguishing between haptic and optic modes of looking, Marks follows an earlier formulation proposed by art historian Alois Riegl who used the term haptic to describe the links between touch and vision.\(^\text{21}\) He proposes that haptic vision grabs what it looks at, functioning as a close range, tactile perception that contrasts with the disembodied, long distance vision of the optic. Haptic artworks occupy a shallow space, Riegl argues, that emphasise the tactile connections of skin. In comparison, optical works are concerned with illusory rather than physical space.

Reading Riegl’s seminal discussion, and reflecting on Puglielli’s photographs, I began to ask how I could exhume my artworks in a way that blends these two modes of looking. How could I invite the viewer to simultaneously experience an embodied nearness and a disembodied farness? Is it possible

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21. Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry*. Riegl imported the term haptic from psychology, where it is used to indicate the proprioceptive and kinaesthetic senses (that is, the senses that detect the position and movement of the body in space).
that such an encounter might mirror the auratic dualities of post-mortem objects that I discussed in chapter one? If an artwork is experienced as both embodied and pictorial could it induce something akin to Benjamin’s aura; his “unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be”?22 Finnish Professor of Art, Riikka Stewens, certainly believes that such connections can be made in the depiction of objects through autographic modalities. She notes,

Still life is a strange mélange of the optic and the haptic; objects seem to be both close at hand and at a distance, behind the veil of paint. The dialectics of distance and proximity in still-life painting perfectly match the Benjaminian experience of an aura, the sudden revelation of distance in that which is close by.23

In Riegel’s formulation there is no room for the simultaneous experience of haptic and optic modes of perception that Stewen proposes.24 However, his attempt to oppose the distant against the embodied is clearly challenged by Pugielli’s works, and is also disputed by recent authors including Marks,25 as well as Deleuze and Guattari.26 These writers suggest that although the haptic and optic (or the smooth and striated in Deleuze and Guattari’s nomenclature) are distinct, they exist on a continuum that produces a “lively dialectic or mutual deterritorialization between the two terms.”27 Deleuze adds that it is misguided to “simply oppose manual and optical space” because they “enter into new correlations and combinations in painting.”28

Printmaker Ruth Pelzer-Montada agrees that there are no modes of visuality that are wholly tactile or optic in the visual arts. She says that printmaking invites a caressing gaze that blends vision with touch,


24. Rieg’s work describes an historical progression from haptic to optical art. He argues that the Ancient Egyptian art created a haptic space, whilst Greek art emphasised the illusory and therefore represented a more advanced style of representation.


In this chapter Deleuze and Guattati introduce the notion of “smooth space” as a close-range space, like sand or snow, that must be moved through by haptic or tactile perception. Smooth space is occupied intimately, with little feeling of distinction between the self and surroundings. In contrast “striated space” demands a distant vision that allows one to survey the landscape and make fine distinctions between thin. Striated space invites a distance between the subject and environment, and is lived in through maps, compasses, symbols and other representational abstractions.

27. Marks, “Haptic Visuality,” 82.

and notes the “haptics of the print” lie in “the multilayering that is characteristic of the print process.” Further, Pelzer-Montada writes, “the dragging of (multiple) deposits of ink (of varying density depending on the technique), yields a surface that resembles no other image due to its particular haptic quality.” Later she adds that “the condensed composite of the print induces a microhaptics that we can describe as an ‘excess of surface’...the propensity towards greater density,” especially when compared to other modes of contemporary image production.

A METHOD OF EXHUMATION

My research into exhumation encompasses an attempt to amplify the haptic qualities of printmaking that Pelzer-Montada describes. I began my examination by investigating the responses of different papers and ink layers to sanding. I then tested ways to abrade and dissolve the ink surface on existing prints, inspired by Puglielli’s attempts to score out a tangible grasp on the world. I attempted, for instance, to sand through dry topcoats of ink that I applied over existing works, exploring both colour and black overlays (see fig. 92 to 93 and 96 overleaf). The intervention exposed the temporal strata within the ink layers. However, the dried coat of ink also acted as a layer of archaeological sediment. The logic of wearing through this layer placed me in the role of archaeologist whilst the depicted objects underneath became inert fossils waiting passively to be excavated.

I proceeded to explore ways to dissolve the burial ink (see fig. 94), and remove it while tacky but not fully cured, in the hope this might enable more fluid interactions, closer perhaps to those I saw in Noonan’s canvases. However, the use of solvents flattened the images underneath and altered

30. Ibid., 85. (Parentheses in original).
31. Ibid., 86.
fig. 92 Studio research, 2009-2010. Exploring sanding through a layer of dried ink (varying colours) that was applied over pre-existing relief prints. © Clare Humphries.
fig. 93
Studio research, 2010, exploring sanding through a layer of dried black ink that was applied over pre-existing reduction linocut prints. © Clare Humphries.
the illusion of light that fell on the depicted objects. In these investigations, although the tactile qualities of the print were explored, the illusory presence of the object (and therefore the work’s optical potential) was compromised.

The process eventually cohered when I began to work into a freshly printed (still wet) surface of a robust Japanese washi paper. I discovered that, so long as the ink covers the works with a glistening wetness, there is the possibility of partial recovery for the printed belongings underneath. The method preserves the optical qualities of distance that Marks articulates, since the resulting prints present illusory objects that can be seen “from enough distance to perceive them as distinct forms” and therefore separate the viewing subject from the viewed object. Retinal impressions also arise from the photographic attributes of the images that invite “an optical mode of reception.”

At the same time, tactile impressions also develop through the residue of my touch on the page. I hope to invite the eyes to “linger on the surface of the image” and evoke the sensations of touching firm, rough, smooth and soft things. Reception might then become a “bodily act of looking,” where the material evidence of touch and texture awakens a viewer’s senses to their own corporeal connections with the work. Perhaps the viewer might imagine reaching out to touch the objects, to feel the corners of a worn photograph, to confirm the hardness of glass or warmth of wood—textures that have emerged through my printing, burnishing and

32. *Washi* is a term used for Japanese papers. These papers are characterised by long fibres and are characteristically strong with a soft, smooth surface that readily draws pigment in and can withstand numerous printings and repeated dampening. See Salter’s book *Japanese Woodblock Printing*, 37-39, for a relevant discussion.

I have found the light weight washi papers that I use offer heightened absorbency, permitting ink to impregnate into the fibres and generate a blackness that appears to sit just below the surface. In contrast, the regularity of texture in many Western rag papers disrupts the viewing surface as it tends to reflect light, and push the ground forward like a screen.


fig. 94 (facing page)
Studio research, 2010. Examples of tests to remove ink at different levels of wetness/dryness, ranging from fully dried and cured ink (middle top) to progressively wetter ink (top left to bottom middle, running clockwise). Bottom left shows removal with solvent. Top left shows print prior to burial. © Clare Humphries.
sandling actions. Such an encounter, Marks advises, can “help us feel the connectivity between ourselves, the image and its material support, and the world to which the image connects us.”

By the time my works are embalmed, buried and exhumed they can be described in Pelzer-Montada’s terms as “a surface in excess.” Comprised of six to twelve layered deposits of ink, the variations in density, texture, paper grain, and the effects of sanding, scumbling and burnishing contribute to the surface (see fig. 95). The folded, crinkly and shiny skins of the objects—qualities amplified by black ink residue—also suggest matter. There is the relative roughness of rusted steel, the feel of cotton and the coolness of silver. When seeing the work, the sensing instruments are the fingertips as well as the eyes.

Through conflating connections between the smooth and striated my intention is to sensualise the printed surface and to promote slowness and intimacy while preserving separation between viewer and object. The work allows qualities of the smooth and striated to “slide into one another,” inviting the prints to be experienced through the body yet at the same time be seen at arm’s length. I want to mobilise somatic memories and experiences of closeness, and also remind the viewer of the inexorable

fig. 95
Detail of print from artists’ book There are tears for things, 2011-2014, showing texture produced through exhumation.

Unbound artists’ book, hand-burnished linocut prints, 28 x 28 x 1.7 cm (closed), dimensions variable (open), © Clare Humphries.
fig. 96
© Clare Humphries. Photography by David Burrows.
distances that death leaves in its wake. By engaging interdependency between near and far modes of perception, I hope to evoke aura’s “unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be.”

UNEARTHING OBJECTS

So far in this chapter I have emphasised the development of my exhumation process. I have considered how I established the method and charted the thinking that shaped it. But what are the implications of my process? In particular, what knowledge about objects of the deceased have I unearthed? And what new thinking has the method brought to printmaking?

To address the first of the questions—what have I learned about objects of the deceased?—I return to my comments in the previous chapter, where I likened the coverage of my images under black ink to a surrogate burial. I argued that my burial practice lays the object to rest by proxy, and helps me to understand the transition between here and gone that death brings. If, by making my objects symbolically go away I represent the loss of my family member, then when I metaphorically exhume the work I must also unearth the ghostly presences of my loved ones. As with burial, the action of uncovering my images allows me to explore how we relate to absent loved ones. Specifically, it examines the experience of inviting family members back into our lives through the possessions they once used. The process also considers what it is like to deal with well-known objects that have been assigned new, auratic value.

One of the key features of my method lies in the fact that, at least on the surface, I know what objects I will uncover. Exhumation, as it functions in my project, invites the possibility of a returned presence (not the discovery of a new one). Before I begin, the objects lie dormant in an occlusive black field, latent with the possibility of being unearthed. Wiping away a sheath of black ink brings them back into existence. The process is a recovery more than a discovery and, as I go on to discuss, it deals with changes in the meanings of otherwise familiar objects. This is not necessarily the case with other creative approaches to exhumation. Izabela Pluta, for example, dug up a range of objects from her garden in 2001: corroded metal objects, a gnarled leather shoe, a broken vertebrae (see fig. 97 and 98 overleaf). Although she rummaged in the familiar space of her own backyard, she embarked on the exhumation with no forward knowledge of what she might uncover. Pluta photographed the “distant objects” that she unearthed and exhibited them with other found objects and images. Together the artefacts comprised an accumulation of odds and ends resonant with unknown human presences that no longer remain.

Pluta’s process is informed by an archaeological sensibility. Through it, as with my work, the viewer is given a glimpse into a world of human activity both past and present. However, in counterpoint to Pluta, I know what objects I will find in my exhumation. If I encounter something unexpectedly, it is not the object as such, but residues of feeling and new realisations about my connections to things. My process is a means to uncover the transformations in familiar objects that occur when we lose someone. Exhumation, for me, is therefore a way to discover what happens in our cupboards and drawers after people have passed away.
At base, my process of exhumation has offered a way for me to explore how familiar objects are transformed after the death of their original owners. When a family member dies their ordinary possessions can profoundly transform. On the one hand the objects of loved ones seem to remain in place, exactly where we expect them to be. Clothes still hang in the wardrobe and books nestle into bookshelves. But on the other hand, everything changes. We wake up to a completely new world of things. The network of associations in which the possessions once belonged is radically disturbed. Objects become surrogate presences and begin to circulate within families in new ways.

The method of exhumation I employ makes it impossible for me to avoid thinking about alteration and mutation in the meaning of objects. The process requires a particular kind of attention, one that attempts not to recoup the past state of the image (since this is impossible) but is willing to recognise and work with change. I must occupy a curious space where I accept that I am recovering something familiar at the same time as I am discovering the unfamiliar within it. To allow the work to emerge I must be attuned to the resonances it might activate to the concrete object, and also remain open to the unexpected, allowing the process to generate a different kind of knowledge. A form of double vision is required.

What strikes me most about the exhumation process is therefore the tension it produces between familiarity and strangeness. Wiping away the sheath of black ink brings my objects back into existence, but they return as changed things. I recognise them, yet they are different. It is as if I am seeing them as they appear in my mind—objects imbued with an ethereal
fig. 97 (left)
Izabela Pluta
*Boot (found in garden dig, Wickham NSW September 2010)*, 2011
Chromogenic print, 66 x 66 cm, © Izabela Pluta. Courtesy of the artist, Dianne Tanzer Gallery + Projects, Melbourne and Galerie Pompom, Sydney.

fig. 98 (right)
Izabela Pluta
*Metal part I (found in garden dig, Wickham NSW September 2010)*, 2011
Chromogenic print, 66 x 66 cm, © Izabela Pluta. Courtesy of the artist, Dianne Tanzer Gallery + Projects, Melbourne and Galerie Pompom, Sydney.
fig. 99 (left)
Choi Jae Eun
*World Underground Project Gyeongju (Korea),
Fukui (Japan) Series*, 1986-1991
Buried paper, acrylic resin coating, 150 x 350 x 1.8 cm overall, 50 x 50 x 1.8 cm each,
© Choi Jae Eun. Courtesy of the artist.

fig. 100 (right)
Choi Jae Eun
*World Underground Project Masai Mara Series*,
1991-2006
Masai Mara soil steel, 40.6 x 95 cm each,
© Choi Jae Eun. Courtesy of the artist.
significance—rather than as I see them in the physical world. In my exhumed images the objects become like ghosts—things from this world but no longer of it.

There is also a profoundly contradictory experience of time that arises in my disinterment. On the one hand it seems to be about salvaging something from the oblivion of the past by generating a connection to lost people. History clings to the objects like the viscous ink I attempt to remove. At the same time, as I exhume I am haunted by a past that returns to me without waiting for an invitation. It is therefore unclear to me which direction time is taking in the process. Am I looking backwards in search of an object or missing person, or are ghosts and residues rushing towards me? In the physical act of wiping back my prints and exposing the transformed objects underneath, I experience temporal instabilities and contradictions. It follows that although I anticipate the items I will recover, my exhumed images do not function as static memorials to them. Rather, the process pulls the depicted objects into another context, producing simultaneous resonances of loss and recovery, death and rebirth.

Like me, artist Choi Jae Eun also disinters materials to explore the implications of personal loss. Her work, however, contemplates the effects of burial above exhumation. To illustrate, Choi’s work *The World Underground Project* came about shortly after her mother died in the early 1990s. Choi “embalmed” handmade papers with chemicals and buried them for long periods in sites across Korea, Japan and Kenya. She later unearthed them to observe changes on the surfaces of the paper and to examine microbial activity under a microscope. Her investigations
culminated in numerous artworks including a floor-based installation of excavated papers, and video installations depicting bacterial growth\textsuperscript{43} (see fig. 99 and 100).

Choi’s excavation project takes a scientific approach to decomposition that examines the influence of differing environmental conditions on interred material. By evaluating the material effect of burial in soil, she attempts to comprehend what happens to things (including perhaps people) when they die. Through interring and excavating Choi explores how the human subject participates in the “beginningless cycle of birth, death and rebirth.”\textsuperscript{44} Curator Park-Seo Woon-suk suggests that Choi “digs into the notion of life and space and fundamental notions of time and existence.”\textsuperscript{45}

When one considers the event that triggered Choi’s project—the death of her mother—it seems that she hoped to come to terms with the notion of burial through her practice. It can certainly be difficult to reconcile thoughts of a loved-one’s body decaying in the ground, and \textit{The World Underground Project} may have offered Choi a way to resolve the place of biological decomposition in the order of human existence. In effect, she asks: what are the material effects of interment, and how is knowledge of these effects experienced by the living subjects who remains behind? Also, what transformations and new forms of life are made possible through death and decay?

I understand the difficulty of comprehending that a loved one is decaying in the earth and, like Choi, I believe that practice can help to make sense of the transitions that occur after death. My practice, however, is less concerned with reconciling the processes of bodily decay, and instead


\textsuperscript{44} Soyeon, “Korean Contemporary Art,” 32.

\textsuperscript{45} Woon-suk, quoted in Soo-mee, “Review: Choi Jae Eun,” para. 8.
engages with the experience of haunting that can occur through objects left behind. My prints on paper do not literally rot beneath the earth. They merely lie dormant in a black field and latent with the potential for return as new presences. The depicted objects assume a new power to act as I unearth them to return from the dead. My process therefore suggests that things (and people) have the ability to return to us long after their body has decayed in the ground. It is as if possessions, and indeed the people who owned them, are never buried for good.

RECONFIGURING MY PRACTICE

In addition to what is suggested about objects of the deceased, the second, significant implication of my exhumation process concerns the reconfiguration of the relationship between the hand and image in my practice. By producing a skin-to-skin relation with the printed surface the method transforms practice conventions that commonly distance the artist’s body from the printed image substrate. I have always been struck by the tensions between distance and contact in printmaking, and exhumation offers new ways for me to conceive and wield this dialectic.

Ever since I produced my first print I have been fascinated by touch as both an intimate and distant element within the means of production. I remember my first printmaking experience in which I spent hours making sustained and intense physical contact with the printing plate as I carved an image. I then stood back and witnessed the detached, momentary and mechanical contact between paper and plate as they passed through the press together. I was compelled by the intimacy of plate making coupled
with the fleeting contact necessary to pull a print. I discovered that while touch is always required to make a print, it is a touch that is “removed from the final work of art” as Weisberg frames it.

In cultivating my process of exhumation I found a way to re-configure the somatechnics of printmaking that I identified in my early practice experiences. The procedure relocates the intimate actions of plate making to the substrate: I wipe the wet black ink from the print as I might from an etching plate, and I reduce the image surface as if it were a copper matrix or lithographic stone. I also remove the burial layer of black ink using tarlatan, sandpaper, cotton cloth, lithographic deletion hones, scraper-burnishers and my bare fingers to produce a syntax of textures (see fig. 102 overleaf). Collectively I characterise my actions as a process of burnishing in order to reference the action of polishing by hand, as well as the intaglio plate-making strategy of the same name.

The action and effect of burnishing in my method draws a relation to la manière noire (the dark manner) of David Noonan’s bleach paintings, and of mezzotint practice. A mezzotint process draws the image out from darkness. The work begins as a pure, velvety blackness, and a chiaroscuro image is formed through burnishing the textured surface of the plate. Susanna Castleden has recently experimented with translating the logic of mezzotint to an image surface. In works such as Bermuda Sunset Rottnest Sunrise (2013), for instance, Castleden prepares rag paper with layers of white gesso, laid down to leave a gridded residue of horizontal and vertical lines. She then overlays the white ground with a chalky, black gesso and sands away the darkness to reveal light underneath (see fig. 101). Castleden calls the process an “unconscious act of drawing by erasing,” that allows her to “imagine seeing something for the first time.”

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47. Somatechnics is a term most prominent in the field of new materialism where it is used to suggest a relation between the body and technology. See for example, the Edinburgh University Press journal Somatechnics that began production in 2011.

48. Tarlatan is a fabric similar to cheesecloth used to wipe ink off an etching plate. The open weave allows tarlatan to collect ink, whilst the stiffness of starch prevents the removal of ink from recessed areas of the plate.

49. A deletion hone is a porcelain-based stick of compressed pumice used in lithography to clean small areas of the stone through gentle abrasion.

50. A scraper-burnisher is a hardened steel tool with a triangular-shaped blade on one end and a rounded, smooth curve on the other. The scraper is used to shave off metal from an etching plate, and the burnisher is used to flatten burrs and polish the metal to a shine.

51. In Western printmaking burnishing is a concept most at home on the etching plate, where an area of textured metal is flattened and polished. Burnishing also relates to the Japanese woodblock technique of tsuyazuri—from “tsuya” meaning “to shine”—in which a wild-boar tusk or smooth stone is used to polish a dry print surface to a shine. See Salter, Japanese Woodblock Printing, 111-113.

52. In mezzotint a metal plate is roughened using a rocker to produce a texture, or burr, that will catch the ink. A scraper and burnisher are used to smooth passages of the burr where lighter tones are required.


54. Ibid.
fig. 101
Susanna Castleden
*Bermuda Sunset Rottnest Sunrise*, 2013
Gesso on rag paper, 130 x 220cm,
© Susanna Castleden. Courtesy of the artist.
fig. 102 (this spread and overleaf)
Castleden’s *Bermuda Sunset Rottnest Sunrise* emerged from, and is entirely constituted by, her gestures of removal. The maps that materialised were not preformed images that awaited recovery. In contrast, my burnishing is enacted on a surface that is pregnant with a pre-existing object awaiting return. In fact, the presence of the layered ink substrate under the black surface, functions like a matrix during exhumation. The variable density of ink layers on the paper (laid down during embalming) determines which areas of the print will remain dark and recessive, and which will regain a lighter tonality under the force of my polishing. The pigment lifts effortlessly wherever multiple layers of ink have dried underneath, but it permanently stains areas with only a few underlying tiers. The empty background is the most absorbent area of all and readily soaks up the ink to produce an intense, dark field. Since the strata of ink determines the outcome of my rubbing, the image becomes its own matrix. That is, the under layers function as a set of conditions from which the final image will take form.

The translation of contact from matrix to paper in this research engages with conventions of touch in printmaking, particularly those that separate hand from image. Artist-writer Kathryn Reeves suggests that the printmaker’s hand usually sustains closeness to the matrix but remains isolated (and therefore doubly absent) from the paper surface. In both relief and intaglio processes, for example, the print matrix—not the paper—is engraved, scored, submerged, sanded, corroded, drawn into and burnished by hand. The distance between hand and paper is not an inalienable or absolute separation, and direct interventions into and on the paper are not unfamiliar in printmaking. Nevertheless, the separation between the artist’s body and image substrate describes a

55. Reeves, “Re-Vision of Printmaking,” 70.
56. Manual incisions into the paper, collaging, hand colouring and staining for example, are all strategies seen in print practice.
meaningful structure that a printmaking tradition brings with it. In fact, Weisberg claims that indirection and displacement are the hallmarks of the printmaker’s art.

As already mentioned, although the printmaker’s body is typically once removed from the print, hand-based infringements onto the paper are certainly not without precedent. Perhaps most common is the practice of hand colouring. However, even the nomenclature of this practice reinforces medium-specific territory and underplays the role of the body. Why a hand-coloured print and not a painted one? Or even simply ink on paper? Reeves broaches this subject and notes that the term ‘‘hand-colouring,’’ while accurate in its own way, is limited and does not take into account the desire to invoke the body via the hand in the print. It acknowledges the absence of a colour printing element or matrix and, at the same time, constructs the printmaker’s hand as another matrix. The problem, she says, is that the discourse of printmaking tends to avoid infringement into the territory of painting, and in doing so it fails to recognise the intervolvement of the print and the artist as an embodied subject.

Of course, beyond hand colouring there are other ways in which contemporary artists privilege the body in print production. Three prominent strategies include employing the body as a matrix, using bodily substances as pigment, and engaging the skin as a substrate. Abigail Lane and Gabriel Orozco, for example, have each used the body as a printing plate that transfers ink or paint onto a surface (see fig. 103 and 104). Possibilities for locating the body as ink and as substrate have also been examined in contemporary practice. In Aliento (1996-2002), for example, 

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57. For Reeves, in “Re-Vision of Printmaking,” these distinctions are part of the critical discourse of printmaking.
58. Weisberg, “Syntax of the Print,” 58
59. Reeves, “Re-Vision of Printmaking,” 70.
60. Reeves does not use the term intervolvement. It is employed by Merleau-Ponty who uses the term to describe how the body is entangled in the world and with others. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (1945; repr. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 82.
fig. 103
Abigail Lane
Bottom Print, 1992
Black acrylic paint on paper, 75 x 56 cm (paper), © Abigail Lane. Courtesy of the artist.

fig. 104
Abigail Lane
Blue Print, 1992
Chair with cotton covered felt seat, blue ink on paper, frame 21 x 45.7 x 91.4 cm, exhibition view from Karsten Schubert gallery, London, 1992, Abigail Lane. Courtesy of the artist. Photography by Alex Hartley.
Oscar Muñoz employed breath as a transient pigment, requiring the viewer to exhale onto mirrored plaques screen-printed with grease. Condensation from the breath allows newspaper images of deceased individuals to materialise, albeit briefly. Finally, artist Paul Emmanuel treats his skin as a support to receive blind impressions. His ongoing project *The Lost Men*, for example, involves embossing letter-press type into his flesh to record the names of young men killed in South African conflicts. Since the impressions are fleeting they convey the transience of life and memory (see fig. 105 overleaf).

Each of the artists discussed above improvise with the idea that a print is a trio of matrix-pigment-support, and they each insert the body into one or other aspect of the triad. The issue that Reeves highlights is that print production enmeshes the body in complex ways that may transcend conventional paradigms of this trilogy, at least in ways that exceed established nomenclature. For example, whilst taking an impression of the hand activates the body as a matrix, using the hand to hand-colour does not. In the latter example the hand does not function as a printing block and may be better defined as an autographic mark-making tool.

Reeves observes that the making and reception of prints imbricates the body in multiple ways. She writes that, “Touch always results in a print,” and further, “Interaction with and reception of prints involves very complex body relations. Prints operate as visual, tactile objects…and all involve the body of the receptor.” Reeves’ metaphor of the receptor is a potent idea for this project. She effectively imagines the body of the viewer as a dense collection of nerve endings that responds viscerally to the substance of a print. My intention in working cutaneously on the


63. Ibid., 5.
64. Reeves, “Re-Vision of Printmaking,” 70.

65. Conventions and conceptual paradigms are not fixed conditions in any practice. Artworks and practices may extend, transform, reject and/or continue them, resulting in possible re-framing of histories. It is not my aim to dispense with the conventions of printmaking, but to reposition my practice in relation to them, and by so doing extend the possibilities for thinking that they facilitate.

66. Reeves’ idea that touch always results in a print also raises the possibility of seeing my objects (which are touched) as prints. They are imprints of bodies and they are passed down in an attempt to reproduce the self after death and/or replicate ideas within a family.

Paper has been to stimulate the body of the receptor-viewer, and incite an awareness of bodily contact with the objects I depict. I do not wish to draw attention to my body as such, but to trigger an awareness of objects as touched things. Thus, rather than locate myself as the matrix, pigment or substrate, I use my hands as a medium of subjectivity, a pair of tactile tools that individualise the print surface and activate the viewer’s sense of touch from a distance.

One of my primary considerations in developing a method of exhumation has been to intensify my tactile investment with the printed surface and enhance an understanding of body-to-object contact. I wanted to “invoke the body via the hand in the print,”64 to reactivate the discursive space of printmaking and expand the paradigms of touch that are part of the language of print practice.65 There seemed to be room to explore the point of slippage between the direct and indirect contact of my body on the paper in order to echo the traces of contact on my objects.

By removing the intermediary printing plate—and making direct contact with the paper—my images record the performance of my hands as they work against the resistance of viscous, black ink. The surface functions as a membrane that registers dermal contact, echoing the subtle but significant traces of touch that are carried lightly on the surfaces of objects. Thus, the contact of my hand on the paper as I sand, blend, rub and exhume is an imprinting of my body analogous to the trace of family touch on the objects I am studying.66 The process creates a new intervolvement between the print and the embodied subject, including both myself as artist, and the embodied viewer.
Throughout this research I have worked with a heightened consciousness of what curator Geraldine Barlow calls the primacy of the body in practice. Barlow wrote in her catalogue essay for the exhibition *Before the Body—Matter* that, “The body has always been primary for artists; as the container of the self; a machine for the creation of art; a living lens and a processor through which to perceive and experience the world; a measure of scale, time, mortality and meaning.”

Barlow’s observations offer a pertinent conclusion to this chapter since I have emphasised the importance of my embodied experience of objects. I have also highlighted how the idea of a touched object shaped my conception of printmaking methods. The history of contact that inheres within my inheritances has acted as a conceptual platform for the method of exhumation, prompting me to explore ways to disinter my images with my hands that might embed tactility into the otherwise illusionistic works.

In this chapter I positioned the exhumation process as a palpation of the surface that re-mediates gestures of touch from the printing plate to the surface of my images. The practice reconfigures the place of touch in printmaking, making the paper surface a matrix for the work. The method also visually exhumes my images from beneath the burial layer of black ink and sets the objects depicted into motion. As I peel away the layers of concealment I uncover items that may appear alive in death, strange and familiar, both in and out of history. In the following and penultimate chapter I explore how these temporal and representational contradictions are implied in pictorial surface. Specifically I address the pictorial implications of my resolved work in greater depth, drawing connections to the Baroque, whilst also discussing the presentation strategies used in the examination exhibition.
The pictures...are really ghosts of ghosts.

—Jennifer Blessing and Nat Trotman
In this penultimate chapter I locate a selected body of prints that have been embalmed, buried and exhumed, in the context of the examination exhibition *I believe in the afterlife*. Through the exhibition, I propose a kind of haunting. I employ the word haunting in reference to Jacques Derrida’s writing on the spectre and his notion of hauntology. Derrida uses the idea of spectrality to consider how binary pairs like past/present and absence/presence cannot be separated from one another. He proposes that these doublets are not oppositional, and that each notion contains traces of the concept it is meant to oppose. For Derrida, the ghost is emblematic of the instabilities that exist between binary concepts, since the ghost is neither alive nor dead, it is both here and not here, existing in the past and the present simultaneously.

Nick Peim suggests that Derrida’s spectre “conjures a present absence,” and thereby alludes towards a common ground shared by Derrida’s haunting and Benjamin’s aura. Certainly Derrida’s haunting resonates with my understanding of aura as a present-absence, and as a distance brought close. The notions of aura and haunting

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In this publication Derrida undertakes the task of exploring the presences that “haunt” Marx’s texts, and disputes the proposition that Marxism is dead. He uses the term hauntology to describe a paradoxical state of being and non-being, and is especially concerned with the idea that the present only exists with respect to the past.

both describe a state where oppositions are conflated. Moreover, the two concepts grapple with the experience of ambiguity between supposedly conflicting states. It is possible that when we experience aura, the encounter is a form of haunting (and vice versa).

Through the exhibition, *I believe in the afterlife*, I seek a haunting encounter for the viewer. That is, one that brings together tensions between closeness and distance, absence and presence, past and present. In previous chapters I have addressed numerous aspects of the work through which I hope to produce these ambiguities. In this chapter I extend on my prior observations, emphasising a series of visual strategies in the exhibition that conjure the possibility of haunting. These include the suspension of movement, contextual displacement, the containment of emptiness, pictorial frontality, illusionism and the meeting of darkness and light (see for example fig. 106). I address these aspects by discussing both the formal structure of the prints, and the strategies I use to present them in the gallery.

I begin the chapter with an overview of the exhibited works in order to introduce them and their relations with the interior architecture of the gallery. I then discuss the pictorial aspects of the work, emphasising how I have drawn on the conceptual technologies of the Baroque to construct a haunting effect. In the final section of the chapter I locate my strategies of delivery in the context of contemporary installation practices. Throughout the discussion, I emphasise how I intend my work to be experienced, although I recognise the work may well engender multiple and even inconsistent readings among different viewers arising from their unique experiences and perspectives.

3. Throughout the chapter I refer to the Baroque both as a period of painting in the seventeenth century, and a conceptual technology that produces a transcendent, metaphysical effect through the handling of darkness, light and space.

In discussing the Baroque I do not intend to imply that my work fits neatly into a preformed Baroque scheme. Indeed, numerous aspects of the Baroque—such as decorative proliferation, sensory abundance and exaggerated scale—are not evident in my practice. My primary intention in this chapter is to explore how my work activates selected aspects of the Baroque picture plane.

fig. 106
Clare Humphries
You will die over and over again for the rest of my life, 2014 (examination exhibition view)
Hand-burnished linocut print
68 x 97. © Clare Humphries. Photography by David Burrows.
EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

On entering the exhibition *I believe in the afterlife* a viewer will encounter a suite of prints within the dimly lit RMIT School of Art gallery (see fig. 107 and 108). The works appear in vertical and horizontal orientations supported by plaque-like protrusions, wall-mounted niches and plinths that together evoke a burial chamber or commemorative hall. The prints are bathed in a soft light that falls gently on the paper surface, illuminating depictions of hand-sized objects that are lively and present in the otherwise sombre site. Vessels, clothing and tools appear motile within an impenetrable blackness that engulfs the picture plane and seeps into the shadows of the gallery. The objects are distinct and identifiable, but like ghosts they no longer dwell in a known time or space. With no clear context in the image the viewer encounters the presence of objects alone, surrounded by emptiness. The objects are perhaps phantoms, haunting the viewer from a time and realm beyond the here and now.

Each of the belongings depicted in the exhibition appears in pictorial space, removed from our earthy realm. Inside the paper’s edge the belongings are granted no material setting, and so they float, fall or hover in space. The series *If not alive, at least not dead* (2010-2014), emphasises these qualities of mobility and suspension. The prints in this series are brought toward the viewer on wall protrusions that might resemble memorial plaques. Objects tumble through the image-space. It is as if they have fallen, or been dropped by an unseen hand. Perhaps they travel a trajectory of their own accord. The asymmetrical placement of objects within a vertical (portrait) format suggests the downward pull of gravity (see fig. 109), a strategy Gregg Lambert observes in Baroque works wherein movement...
fig. 107
Examination exhibition view.
fig. 108
Examination exhibition views.
*If not alive, at least not dead* (2010-2014) series appears mounted along the wall.
Artists’ book *There are tears for things* (2011-2014) appears in left foreground on plinth.
© Clare Humphries.
Photography by David Burrows.
fig. 108 (continued)
I have never been able to bury her (2013) appears mounted on gallery wall on left.
You will die over and over again, for the rest of my life (2014) appears mounted on wall on right.
© Clare Humphries
Photography by David Burrows.
appears to be suspended. Through suspension, as I discussed in chapter two, connections to stasis and embalming are evoked. The implied visual pause has the potential to produce a space where past, present and future melt into one another, suggesting the temporal conflation that Derrida ascribes to the spectre.

Other ambiguities between time and movement are also enacted through *If not alive, at least not dead*. When configured serially, the prints allude to the movement of objects through time and space as they travel from one hand to another and one generation to another, becoming displaced from their moments of origin. The scale of the objects is shifted slightly from 1:1, potentially evoking a subtle oscillation in the distance between viewer and object that nevertheless remains within a range of bodily familiarity. Implied repetition within the series suggests the movement of objects to and fro. Each object is nudged forward by a protrusion in the gallery wall that maps out a spatial zone behind the paper, and implies that pictorial blackness might sink beneath the surface. Intervals between the works suggest moments that are lost or obscured in the continuum of time. They are also pauses in which the viewer may return to the experience of their own body moving in space before encountering another itinerant object.

In counterpoint to the motile images in the exhibition, objects in the series *Places to hold absence* (2009-2014) appear to be stilled, hovering or floating in dark stasis (see fig. 110 overleaf). The separate existences of the objects are definitive in these works, as they are with works including *I have never been able to bury her* (2013) and *You will die over and over again, for the rest of my life* (2014). There is no clear pathway to navigate in order to reach these objects and no reference point of gravity or horizon. The eye cannot

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**fig. 109** (facing page)
Clare Humphries
*On a knife edge between*, 2011 (detail)
Hand-burnished linocut print, 67 x 48.5 cm, © Clare Humphries.
avoid each object that asserts central dominance in the visual field. Here
the stillness of the image is a form of suspension that stops time, allowing
the past to resonate in the present.

The intimately sized works in *Places to hold absence* are exhibited
within niches, bringing containment together with suspension (see
fig. 111 overleaf). Each niche is an attempt to insert a pause of quiet
contemplation; a moment of seeing an object eye-to-eye that allows for
losing oneself in the image. The recesses extend the black void of the
images, and serve as spaces that frame a reliquary. A zone of heightened
value is therefore demarcated within the broader architectural scheme.
Each work is conceived as a vessel within a vessel, where what is contained
may be a precious presence or potent absence. The containment of
emptiness in these prints implies the holding of an absence, and therefore
the haunting duality of aura.

In chapter four I emphasised the dichotomy of closeness (tactility) and
distance (opticality) that arises through my methodology. The unbound
book *There are tears for things* (2011-2014) magnifies the qualities of
closeness that I referred to by offering a direct, tactile access to the work
(see fig. 112 overleaf). The invitation for physical engagement is an attempt
to allow the viewer to become absorbed in an experience of folding and
unfolding a handkerchief, turning pages of washi paper so loaded with ink
they take on the feel of polished cotton. The viewer is presented with the
possibility of handling the fragile paper, and unfolding pages in a gesture
that echoes the experience of opening up a box of clothing or linen,
bringing the cloths out into the light, and folding them away again to return
them to rest.
fig. 111
Clare Humphries.
Places to hold absence series, 2009-2014
There are tears for things, 2011-2014
Unbound artists’ book, hand-burnished linocut prints, 28 x 28 x 1.7 cm (closed),
dimensions variable (open),
© Clare Humphries. Photography by Kerryn Woolley
fig. 113
Clare Humphries
*From one hand to another*, 2012
(exhibition view)
Hand-burnished linocut prints, 28 x 65.5 cm (closed) dimensions variable (open), © Clare Humphries.
There are tears for things is intended to recall the rituals of retrieving and burying objects through systems of storage that I discussed in chapter four. The actions of opening and closing the long, folded pages of the loose book activates a movement between absence and presence, as the handkerchief appears in various states of unfolding, and the ghostly echo of its presence on the verso surface dissolves back into blackness. When displayed as a stationary, open book There are tears for things implies the potential for the acts of burying and exhuming, and the parallel sensations they may evoke.

An imagined potential for touch also arises in the work From one hand to another (2012) which, like There are tears for things, is positioned on a horizontal plinth (see fig. 113). This work comprises a pair of prints, one depicting the left hand of a glove and the other the right. The left glove lies on its partner underneath, folded over on itself so that it rests with a wide arc. The image of the left glove sits above the open curvature, implying that the glove could be worn. The viewer is encouraged to imagine inserting their hands into the glove to see it embodied, and to feel its tight weave stretch over their fingers and palm. However, as with the works in niches, the glove ultimately “holds” emptiness.

THE BAROQUE PICTURE PLANE

So far I have discussed the works in the exhibition as comprising a number of series and individual works that magnify differing ambiguities. For example, the series If not alive, at least not dead suggests an instability
between stillness and movement, and *From one to another* evokes embodiment and emptiness. Despite the differences between the works, there are clearly commonalities in formal aspects of the prints. Most notably, each work in the exhibition possesses what could be called a Baroque or neo-Baroque still life structure, where oblique light passes through an encroaching, dark ground to illuminate illusory objects arranged in a frontal composition.5

In this second section of the chapter, I pay particular attention to the formal concerns of the Baroque picture plane through which I aim to construct a haunting effect. In line with Gregg Lambert I refer here to the Baroque as both a period of painting in the seventeenth century, and a conceptual technology that transcends periodisation.6 I therefore contextualise my works in relation to both historical and contemporary Baroque practices.

At the heart of my interest in the Baroque lies the potentials produced by impenetrable blackness. In the Baroque picture plane darkness pushes objects forward, detaches them from the everyday world, and makes it possible for a dramatic light to fall across their skins. These actions of darkness, according to Jean Baudrillard, contribute to an effect of loss and death.7

The haunting effects of darkness that Baudrillard observes can be perceived in the austere canvases of Spanish Baroque still life. In fact, I have found works by Spanish artists Juan Sánchez Cotán (see fig. 114) and Francisco de Zurbarán especially relevant to my research because of the way in which ordinary objects emerge from dense black fields and appear

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5. As I go on to discuss, writers including Gregg Lambert, Maria Rzepińska, and Jean Baudrillard describe these qualities as “baroque.”


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fig. 115 (left)  
Penny Klepuszewska  
Living Arrangements (No. 1), 2006-2009  
Archival digital c-type print, 86.5 x 56 cm, © Penny Klepuszewska.  
Courtesy of the artist.

fig. 116 (right)  
Penny Klepuszewska  
Living Arrangements (No. 4), 2006-2009  
Digital c-type print, 86.5 x 56 cm, © Penny Klepuszewska.  
Courtesy of the artist.
infused with ethereal significance. Domestic vessels and foodstuffs seem somehow more than real, transfigured by a dramatic play of darkness and light.

I keep a reproduction of Cotán’s *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber* (c. 1602) on my studio wall. Whenever I look at his work my sense of worldly vision seems to stop at the far edge of the shelf. My eyes grab at the firm cabbage and slippery cluster of melon seeds, but the scene drops into blindness behind them. The vanishing point is absent, and instead of a receding cavity or domestic horizon, the darkness implies a closer, non-corporeal space. Beyond the ledge the intimately rendered vegetables have no spatial coordinates and the darkness seems to suggest that gravity may cease to exist there.

A similar effect is seen in the dramatic photographs of neo-Baroque photographers Laura Letinsky and Penny Klepuszweska who both document objects surrounded by unrelenting darkness (see fig. 115 and 116 for example). In Klepuszweska’s 2006 work *Living Arrangements (No. I)*, the world beyond the edge of the chair is suppressed. The expanse of blackness shrinks the depth of field and it is difficult to reconstruct the domestic scene in any detail at all. The black field structures the scene with only partial reference to the visible, tempting the eyes to feel their way through the dense background, inviting the viewer to imagine seeing in the dark with their fingertips. Visual traction is only made possible across the folds of the soft, blue blanket that dissipate into the shadows.

To some extent the exhibition *I believe in the afterlife* is as an attempt to visualise my objects within an exalted, neo-Baroque scheme like Klepuszweska’s. As I ponder Cotán’s work I imagine that my inherited
belongings could exist within his canvas. Not unlike Cotán’s ripe quince, my objects are at once commonplace and revered. Norman Bryson writes in *Looking at the Overlooked* that the paintings of Cotán reveal an “interpenetration of what is ordinary and unassuming with what is exalted and sacred.” The depicted items are both part of the everyday world yet are also estranged from that world through Cotán’s dark austerity. In the merging of “the mundane and the supramundane” a dualism of ontological states is activated, and with it the potential for an auratic or haunting effect. For this reason I have placed my worldly objects within a mystical space by extending the impenetrable blackness of Cotán’s vision (see fig. 117).

Art historian Maria Rzepińska suggests that the use of predominant darkness in Baroque paintings allows an otherworldly effect of light to be realised. She proposes that the “dark place…gives rise to a new life.” Like Rzepińska I see the potential for black to function metaphorically as a “primordial darkness” from which objects can emerge to take on new life. I aim to produce this effect, in part, through the passage of light that Rzepińska suggests. The prints in the examination exhibition are illuminated by light sources that are internal to the image but cast from outside the picture plane The light is compressed and unique to each composition, passing through into the dark image space from differing vantage points: above, below, oblique. In so doing I hope to suggest that the light cast into the image is not of the physical world in which the viewer stands, but is a light that the object alone is privileged to receive. The disembodied, pictorial light is, in turn, illuminated under soft globes in the gallery, as one reality (the reality of the image) is inserted inside another.


9. Ibid.


Rzepińska notes that principles of chiaroscuro and tenebrism are used to indicate a *lume divino*, or divine light, that invariably appears as a compressed light from an oblique light source, always surrounded by an autonomous darkness.

Pictorial darkness not only allows a glowing light to fall over my objects. Its presence in my works also detaches the belongings from their earthly contexts, as the spirit metaphorically detaches from the body at the moment of death. Whereas the black ground in Cotán’s works obscures knowledge of familiar kitchens, dining rooms or pantries, I have obliterated connections to concrete space altogether with a darkness that takes up the picture plane. My objects migrate into the zone beyond Cotán’s ledge, or have perhaps fallen off the edge of Klepszweska’s chair. There they float or fall without reference to the world of the shelf, table or chair (see fig. 118).

The unyielding darkness in my works is intended to register the enigmatic existence of objects in my life—perhaps in dark cupboards and boxes—that cannot be perceived by the human eye. Yet, I agree with a view expressed by Mark Doty, that while an object may be cut off from its domestic context in an artwork, its affective connections can remain. He writes that in still life, although objects “have lost their particular contexts, all the stuff of narrative, the attached human stories that would have placed them in some specific relation to a life, but they are nonetheless full of that life, suffused with intimacy.”

Through pictorial blackness I also hope to create a recessive void by tilting the objects out of darkness towards the viewer. I aim to forge a proximal, or near space within a broader emptiness, and to extend these qualities of closeness and recession through my architectural prosthetics. When I imagine someone walking towards my work I hope they may experience a kind of “black-hole gravity” pulling them in to the image to discover an object that seems close—and real enough—to touch but beyond grasp.
Francisco de Zurbarán

_A Cup of Water and a Rose_, c. 1630

Oil on canvas, 21.2 x 30.1 cm, © The National Gallery London.

In this I hope to produce an encounter that might mirror Benjamin’s description of aura as “the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be.”

I experienced the magnetic force of a “black-hole gravity” upon seeing Francisco de Zurbarán’s *A Cup of Water and A Rose* (c. 1630) in the National Gallery, London (see fig. 119). Set against a silky, black ground that lured me to the work, the silver cup and plate visually teetered on the verge of falling off the wall and tumbling into my hands. The forward movement was effected, in part, through the tilted elliptical contours of the crockery. However, the darkness behind the cup and saucer also seemed to push these glimmering objects forward into my space. It reminded me of Doty’s assertion that in still life (writing specifically about de Zurbarán’s Dutch counterparts), objects exist near to the viewers because of the darkness that lies behind them. He writes:

> These things exist up close, against a background of burnished darkness. No wide vistas open behind them, no far-flung landscapes, no airy vastness of heaven. This is the space of the body, the space of our arms’ reach. There is nothing here we could not touch, were these things not made of paint.

Of course, de Zurbarán’s objects cannot be touched, because they are made of paint, just as mine are made of ink. Darkness may push the objects tantalisingly close, but this is ultimately an illusion and separation is the reality. What presents itself in de Zurbarán’s canvas, and indeed in my prints, are objects that can no longer be touched although touch is strongly evoked. Here, images produced by the hand are emblematic of auratic ambiguities between distance and proximity.

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Doty’s comments on still life above echo Baudrillard’s examination of Baroque trompe l’oeil, which also bears some relation to my exhibition and interest in haunting. Baudrillard claims that the dark void encompassing trompe l’oeil objects fosters a lack of spatial depth that reverses perspective (see for example fig. 120), creating a tactile vertigo in which the artefact decentres towards the viewer like a mirror.15 He adds, however, that “the tactile hallucination is not that of objects, but of death…every composition in trompe l’oeil contributes to the effect of loss, a sense of losing hold on the real through the very excess of its appearances.”16 Mimetic or illusory images, such as those I have produced, may therefore function as a visible absence by referring to things that are not physically present, and by resembling those objects so closely that their “close resemblance…is that of death.”17 Along with the melancholy effect of mimesis, the reversal of the perspectival system in trompe l’oeil instantiates an effect of haunting. Baudrillard notes:

Here death is what is most at stake, the very thing to which one accedes in the reversal of the perspectival system of representation. Everything makes its contribution: the opacity of the objects, their banality, the flat field without depth (the veins of the wood are like stagnant water, soft to the touch like a natural death), but above all the light, this mysterious light which has no source and whose oblique incidence no longer has anything in common with reality.18

Baudrillard’s perspective is echoed by Hanneke Grootenboer and Norman Bryson who agree that a heightened horizontality and lack of spatial depth in the trompe l’oeil inverts Renaissance linearity.19 If I follow these writers, then the dark, flattened space of my compositions might be thought to reverse perspective, making the viewer the vanishing point of their
own gaze. Perhaps viewers of my prints will not look into my pictures as a window, following orthogonal lines that recede towards a vanishing point. Rather, the viewer’s gaze might “ricochet off the surface” and return to its place of origin so that the objects appear to “look back.” A connection arises here to Benjamin’s proposition that “to perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.” I wonder if the returned gaze of the object produces both an effect of aura (following Benjamin) and contributes to an experience of loss and haunting (following Baudrillard).

THE EMBODIED VIEWER

As will be clear from my discussion so far, I believe in the afterlife is an exhibition in which the pictorial surface offers a key site of engagement for the viewer. Each print functions as a vessel where the edge of the paper marks a boundary around the world of the object, and delineates a space separated from the everyday, phenomenal world. There is a universe within the borders of the paper edge, possessing a simultaneously contractive and expansive spatiality that characterises the Baroque form to which my works refer (see fig. 121).

Although the representational system of the exhibition is principally pictorial, I do not present I believe in the afterlife as a collection of autonomous prints that are independent of the gallery setting. The oscillation between nearness and distance that I seek within the formal structure of my works is amplified by their mode of delivery in the gallery. The prints are not simply “hung” or arranged in the space, and the glazed

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21. Ibid., 56.

22. Benjamin, “On Some Motifs,” 188. It is important to note that Benjamin’s comment here is not made in reference to the photograph or the sitter’s gaze, but to the relation between humans and inanimate or natural objects.

23. Lambert, Return of the Baroque.
fig. 121
Examination exhibition view.
From one hand to another, 2012, appears on the plinth closest to camera. He has no need of them anymore, 2013-2014, appears on the two plinths further from camera. © Clare Humphries. Photography by David Burrows.
frame has likewise been abandoned. I have renegotiated the gallery shell so that it ceases to function as a cube of flat surfaces, and instead subtly pushes and pulls the objects in space to increase ambiguities of nearness and distance. The use of plinths, niches and plaques, together with controlled gallery lighting, is intended to allow an oscillation of proximity (see fig. 122).

One way I contextualise my strategy of presentation is to call my works prints in context, a term I use in reference to Michael Fried’s now famous 1967 essay *Art and Objecthood*. Fried distinguishes between autonomous artworks that trigger absorption, and artworks in context that rely on the presence of the viewer for their apprehension. His notion of artworks that are experienced in context suggests that a particular way of encountering the work can augment the artist’s conceptual intent.

In the twenty-first century, art is often considered an experience that relies on the physical presence and interaction of the viewer. Installation and performance-based artists, in particular (but not exclusively) exploit theatrical strategies, and recognise that the interior conditions of the exhibition space are indispensable to an experience of the work.

In my own exploration of intimate objects I maintain an interest in eliciting an embodied awareness in the viewer, to invite them into a phenomenological engagement that might transform their awareness of objects. The presentation of my works therefore remains essential to their effect. For example, my prints are grafted to wall protrusions that suggest memorial plaques. They also hover in niche recesses, and lie in repose on plinths. The viewer encounters not just images, but images that hover and

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25. There are multiple, parallel histories that have contributed to this development, as Claire Bishop discusses, including the work of the American Minimalists in the 1960s which sought to heighten the bodily experience of the viewer, and promote their awareness of the space beyond the particular art object. See Bishop, *Installation Art*, 8.

oscillate forward and backward in relation to the room. I have what Claire Bishop calls “a desire to heighten the viewer’s awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in a space, and of our bodily response to this.”

The installation strategies I employ privilege the image as the site of primary significance, and therefore my practice in this PhD is not an installation practice in its narrowest definition. Rather than immerse the viewer in a total experience of the work, I wish to keep object and viewer at arm’s length from one another. By focusing the core energy of my exhibition within the edges of the paper, the possibility of separation is produced. Ann Hamilton’s practice offers a clear counterpoint to my approach in this regard, even though aspects of our subject matter and influences overlap. Her installation Mantle (1998), for example, highlights the distinctions between our methods, as she seeks to integrate the viewer into the work, rather than preserve separation as I have (see fig. 123 and 124).

Hamilton performed Mantle at the Miami Art Museum in Florida (now the Pérez Art Museum). The work condenses references to decay, loss, time and seventeenth-century painting. The artist sits silently on a chair, her back turned on a long steel table laden with a heaped pile of 60,000 cut flowers (sourced from around the globe, not unlike a Dutch still life from the 1600s).

Hamilton appears oblivious to the mass of decaying flora behind her, and unaware of the babble of voices and static that emerges from seven short wave radios buried beneath the mound. Her attention is absorbed instead in the activity of her hands as she stitches sleeves onto woollen coats.
Ann Hamilton
*Mantle*, 1998
Mantle, 1998 (details)
Cut flowers, seated figure, woollen coats, materials for mending, radio receivers, dimensions variable,
Hamilton performs her repetitive, domestic task while facing an open window, bathed in a natural light that produces atmospheric and spatial conditions similar to Vermeer’s genre paintings. Over the duration of the installation, hours of labour are invested into a pile of sleeved coats that grows on the back of her chair. At the same time, the cut flowers behind Hamilton wilt, materialising the passage of time suggested in seventeenth-century vanitas. Mantle is, in Joan Simon’s words, “a lush still life, at once a vanitas and a memento mori.” The work is characterised by a “mournful atmosphere,” and evokes contemplation on notions of time, loss and labour.

Although I share some of Hamilton’s Baroque leanings, her work clearly functions according to a different system of representation from my own, and these points of divergence help to highlight my intentions. In Hamilton’s work nothing separates the viewer from the work or the viewing context. There is immersion in the work, rather than a separation or distance from it. The sensations of presence are privileged, rather than the idea of present-absence. Hamilton’s practice shifts an emphasis from the permanent and autonomous object to the sensations of experience—the smell of dying flowers, the sound of disembodied voices and the flood of light, for example—as she invites the viewer to share the space and time of representation.

Like Hamilton I aim to construct a contemplative spectatorship in physical space. However, my work is not immersive in the same way, and it contains two-dimensional artworks that the audience views from a distance. I do not intend that the exhibition situation, in its totality, constitutes the work of art, but rather I manipulate space so that meaning condenses...
inside the paper edge. My approach may therefore be differentiated from installation practices like Hamilton’s that depend on scale, site specificity and immersion to generate a somatic experience.

In *I believe in the afterlife* I attempt to engage an alternative register of meaning from that which Hamilton pursues. In my approach, artworks continue to function as semi-autonomous objects of contemplation and are neither contingent on a specific site, nor reliant on the temporality of the exhibition (see fig. 125). The viewer does not enter the work of art and they do not co-exist in the same space as the objects depicted. Instead, focal length distances the viewer producing a phenomenological barrier between them and the objects at the centre of attention. In addition, as images, the works point to the absence of what they describe. The prints draw on the absence of objects because, in Hans Belting’s words, “Images live from the paradox that they perform the presence of an absence or vice-versa.”

One of my key concerns behind the work and its exhibition is to utilise pictorial space to place the objects within a different time and space from that of the viewer, at the same time as viewer and image meet in the gallery. Within the image my objects are tangible and embodied relics that have a presence beyond the temporally bounded exhibition. They do not require the interaction of an audience to be animated since their presence precedes those who come into contact with them. The objects depicted do not, therefore, depend on any viewer in order to exist.

fig. 125
Examination exhibition view, showing a detail of
There are tears for things, 2011-2014. © Clare Humphries.
Photography by David Burrows.
Although I characterise the prints in the examination exhibition as self-contained artworks, I also refer to them above as “semi-autonomous” objects. By using this term I suggest that an experience of the work depends on particular environmental conditions, including the absence of daylight, the relations between individual works, the strategic fall of lighting, and the altered planar conditions of the gallery walls. The viewer and the work are together in a discursive environment.

It follows that the exhibition strategy I use sits somewhere between Fried’s conception of an autonomous art object and the immersive situations that installation practice produces. In this murky and contested ground, my approach could be described using something like Sheldon Nodelman’s term “pictorial installation.” Nodelman employs this hybrid term to suggest an exhibition method where the artist invites a conditional experience of otherwise autonomous art objects. Other writers have employed the phrase, and adapted it to terms such as “video installation” and “sound installation.” In each variation of Nodelman’s term an exhibition strategy is implied where a medium-specific object of contemplation is presented and the total experience of the exhibition is also considered. The use of terms such as pictorial, video and sound installation suggests that while some practices operate without a conventional medium at all (Hamilton’s medium is the space itself if we follow Groys) there is a need for language to describe practices that hybridise traditional media with contemporary exhibition strategies.

In contemporary printmaking a plurality of approaches to exhibition practice exists, embracing the full continuum of installation modes from “installation art” to “pictorial installation.” Prints and print-informed works

36. Nodelman uses this phrase in reference to Mark Rothko’s strategy for the Rothko Chapel, where an experience of his paintings is contingent on their dynamic relation to one another, to the architectural setting and lighting conditions. Nodelman suggests that Rothko’s work pioneered an understanding of the interdependence between painting and place.
37. See, for example, Federica Palomero’s discussion of Julio Valdez and Enrico Lunghi on Tina Gillen.
38. Rosalind Krauss uses this term to encompass practices that use video to embrace the viewer (such as Bill Viola’s work), and others that use distance between the monitor and audience to encourage critical reflection (such as Harun Farocki’s work). See, Rosalind E. Krauss, Under Blue Cup (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 113.
are increasingly being adopted in site-specific and spatial interventions. Thomas Klipper and Richard Woods, for example, both respond to internal and external spaces as conditions that determine the form and subject matter of their works, sometimes resulting in installations on an architectural scale.

Other practitioners, such as Rob Swainston, may not pursue the immersive extreme of Klipper or Wood’s installations, yet he still considers the relation between print, space and audience. Swainston uses the term “printstallations” to refer to his papering of rooms, as well as his more restrained compositions that subtly articulate from the vertical wall surface onto the floor or ceiling, or across a corner of the gallery (see fig. 126 and 127 overleaf). Swainston produces a conditional experience of the print in space, while continuing to locate the pictorial surface as the site of primary meaning. He also argues for an ongoing exploration of image, and its capacity to expand our understanding of the contemporary condition.

In Swainston’s approach the exhibition space is used to transform or amplify an understanding of the pictorial surface. He explores interdependencies between print and place that I have also sought in I believe in the afterlife. For example, I have deepened and extended the pictorial void via niches and protrusions as previously discussed. The surfaces of my prints are also in a state of flux under the soft glow of gallery lighting. An experience of the surface changes as the viewer walks across the gallery floor and reflected light passes over the polished ink. Light oscillates and refracts, emphasising the position of the viewer in relation to the objects and suggesting objects that are both here and not here: like ghosts haunting the gallery.


fig. 126 (left)
Rob Swainston
Plexus, 2011
Woodcut print on paper with mirror, dimensions variable, © Rob Swainston. Courtesy of the artist.

fig. 127 (below)
Rob Swainston
Portraitapocalypse, 2004
Woodcut print on paper, dimensions variable, © Rob Swainston. Courtesy of the artist.
Like a daguerreotype imprinted onto highly polished silver-coated copper that requires tilting this way and that to bring the image into view, so too my objects seem to disappear from their illusive presence and become flat ink on paper. As the light catches the works from an oblique angle they fade into shadowy silhouettes, a mere skin of pigment. When viewed frontally, however, the fall of light glints off the ink to articulate highlights on an object made flesh. As the work is experienced through movement, the light oscillates across the print and produces the illusion of a close, touchable object and the distance of an empty shadow. In this I hope to prompt the perceptual conditions under which a feeling of distance, brought close, might be experienced.
Derrida suggests that haunting has a temporality that is concerned with revenance. The figure of the ghost arrives when we encounter things that return: ideas, objects and memories from the past. His haunting also implies a particular ontology (or hauntology), where categories of being and non-being conflate.\(^4\) The ghost or the spectre does not belong here or now, but continues to affect the here and now.

The temporal and ontological ambiguities that Derrida observes in the figure of the ghost recall Benjamin’s conception of aura as “a strange weave of space and time.”\(^4\) Both writers attempt to conceptualise how the past persists in the present, how distance can draw near, and how absence can materialise. In the exhibition, *I believe in the afterlife*, I aim to visualise and manifest these instabilities through an encounter with visual art. Through a selected body of prints I hope to evoke an auratic, and therefore haunted reading of personal objects, and suggest that belongings of the deceased have come back to disrupt “the smooth logic of time.”\(^4\)

The lives of my family members have not ended; rather they linger through their possessions in pictorial space. Like ghosts, the objects in *I believe in the afterlife* make their past-ness, and their absence felt.

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43. Derrida argues that he opposes ontology and articulates a hauntology instead. However, as Johnathan Joseph suggests, hauntology is merely an alternative ontology.


45. Nick Peim suggests that photographs function in this way. See Peim, *Spectral Bodies*, 75.
The dead are never lonely.
—Louiseann Zahra-King
RETURNING TO THE END

Andrew Benjamin writes that, “Any departure from the origin presupposes the possibility of a return.” In the spirit of his observation I conclude this exegesis with a return to the questions that instantiated the project, to reflect on what was revealed through practice. I consider how the performance of my practice has transformed my thinking, and discuss how my project has contributed to contemporary printmaking. I also reflect on the gaps in my research, questioning what other opportunities for thinking might have surfaced through alternative approaches.

My studio enquiry was forged by a number of over-arching questions: I asked, how can I use printmaking and installation to explore the aura of personal objects left behind by deceased family members? I also questioned, how can the materiality of family relics inform my approach to printmaking, and what possibilities does this offer contemporary practice? Together these questions established a project method where the process (printmaking) and content (objects) exerted a reciprocal influence on one another.
The first research question articulates a problem of practice. It has prompted me to find a way to make and exhibit works that will expand thinking about objects and their relation to aura. My attempts to uncover a mode of production began through scanning, rubbing, casting, unravelling and embossing processes. The explorations were uncertain at first, but through them unexpected possibilities materialised. Funerary metaphors emerged—embalming, burial, exhumation and haunting—that offered me a structural and conceptual methodology to contemplate aura, and functioned as a means to create printed works that evoked the feeling of things transmuted by death (see fig. 128-135 throughout the chapter).

In the method of embalming, burial, and exhumation I discovered not only a material process for making work, but also a series of surrogate rituals that enacted the death and reanimation of the object. In both process and output I uncovered a way to explore the idea of aura as a present-absence. My thinking in this regard began in the performance of making. Each stage of the method allowed me, as maker, to experience an embodied movement back and forth between absence and presence. The production of a mimetic depiction during embalming, for example, amplified my awareness of objects as signifiers of an enduring, suspended presence. After embalming, the action of covering the works during burial reminded me of the absences that personal objects sustain. Exhumation and haunting then explored the desire for return, or the belief in a realm of continued existence that manifests in the things people leave behind.

By allowing me to experience and reflect on the movements of objects after death, the research method fostered my “imaginative insight” into the notion of aura. The making process operated as a series of surrogate rituals that enacted the death and reanimation of the object. In both process and output I uncovered a way to explore the idea of aura as a present-absence. My thinking in this regard began in the performance of making. Each stage of the method allowed me, as maker, to experience an embodied movement back and forth between absence and presence. The production of a mimetic depiction during embalming, for example, amplified my awareness of objects as signifiers of an enduring, suspended presence. After embalming, the action of covering the works during burial reminded me of the absences that personal objects sustain. Exhumation and haunting then explored the desire for return, or the belief in a realm of continued existence that manifests in the things people leave behind.

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rituals that enacted the death and reanimation of the object and, by association, the person who formerly owned the object. It allowed me to re-experience the losses of family members, and to re-encounter their presence. In the movement between visual presence and absence I grappled with questions of existence and non-existence and explored the foggy, auratic ground between these two states that personal objects occupy. I therefore discovered that I could explore the aura of objects by reconstituting the rituals and experiences that brought their aura into being.

In addition to asking how a printmaking method can explore aura, the first question prompted me to consider the exhibition of my artworks, and to reflect on how the presentation of my work could engage the idea of aura. With this in mind I recognised that the sole function of my prints should not be to bring objects into awareness, but to trace a way of encountering them. Ultimately, my aim has not been to expose a collection of specific things in the world, but to stimulate a shared sensitivity towards objects. I hope to elicit experience of, or reflection on, aura in which seemingly contradictory notions of closeness and distance, absence and presence, are brought together. In the work, objects may seem present, but they are also illusory, distanced and displaced in pictorial space. The viewer is brought into contact with intimate aspects of production, such as the visceral effects of my touching, rubbing and caressing of the paper surface. They may even experience texture from the inside of their bodies as they remember how glass, cotton and metal feel under their fingertips. However, despite the invitation for closeness and touch, the objects are also kept out of reach and held at scopic distance.
A play between nearness and distance is amplified when the works are installed within the gallery architecture. The void within the picture plane is extended and deepened by niches and protrusions that push the objects near, yet keep them out of reach. An experience of the printed surface mutates as the viewer moves through the dimly lit gallery space. Light oscillates and refracts off the surface so that the objects dissolve from an illusionistic presence and become flat ink on paper. Tactile objects become empty shadows, only to reappear as the viewer moves in relation to them. By engaging independencies between print and exhibition space, I have aimed to produce the perceptual conditions under which a feeling of distance brought close might be experienced.

The second question—a compound of two interrelated enquiries—concerns my approach to printmaking practice. I asked: how can the materiality of family relics inform my approach to printmaking, and what possibilities does this offer contemporary practice? I discovered that I could explore a new approach to making linocut prints through experimenting with touch on the paper surface. I recognised that traces of touch on belongings can arouse a belief in presence (through a history of contact with the deceased) and an awareness of loss (by substituting for the absent body). Since accrued signs of wear on the surface of objects become the mechanisms through which their meanings are deciphered, I questioned how I might create prints where notions of touch were central to the means of production. Could I produce images in which wear on the paper surface generates a means to apprehend the work?
In developing the methodology for the research I explored ways to increase my tactile investment with the printed surface. I recognised that the printing plate is typically the site of bodily contact. Drawing, carving, submerging, polishing and burnishing are all hand-based gestures directed to the matrix, yet the artist’s hand maintains relative distance from the substrate. I therefore investigated ways to transfer tactile contact to the paper and translated actions of sanding, à la poupée ink application, wiping and burnishing to the strata of ink on the paper. Each manual intervention relied on the printed under layers to determine the effect—the relative densities of ink layers, for example, determining how the surface responds to sanding or inking—with the result that the substrate becomes its own matrix.

**What is my contribution?**

Through my explorations of the core research questions my project contributes to contemporary art practice in three ways: firstly by expanding the conversation about objects of deceased family beyond discourses of remembrance; secondly, through exploring how a printmaking practice can re-conceptualise the notion of aura; and thirdly, through reconfiguring a methodology of making linocut prints.

The first of the contributions concerns the subject matter I have investigated. My body of work participates in an ongoing conversation about family belongings, and shifts the dialogue away from notions of memory and identity and towards questions of auratic experience and
encounter. The work prompts consideration of where the value and power of objects might lie, and offers an embodied encounter that may sensitise a viewer’s thinking about prosaic belongings.

It is through investigating objects in relation to aura that my research makes a second contribution. I argue for an understanding of aura based on how it emerges rather than how it declines, and therefore offer a different way to account for the notion than is commonly asserted in printmaking discourse. Through the artwork and text I explore how aura comes into being when something that is desired—the past, a person, or even an artwork—appears within arm’s reach but also hovers beyond grasp. Aura may develop wherever seemingly dialectical notions are brought together in productive contradiction, such as when touch and loss co-exist, and nearness and distance coalesce. Aura is, I believe, in the reaching, never the grasping. My understanding of aura is therefore underpinned by the idea that it is not located in the object and not threatened by a mode of technical reproduction. Instead, aura lies in the way an object or imaging technology is experienced by a person. The auratic object or technology can speak to us of things that are not present (such as absent people or past times), without letting us recoup these things.

The notion of aura as an interpretive engagement has recently been explored by a number of visual theorists including Carolin Duttlinger and Miriam Hansen. Pamela Smart also suggests that aura exists in the relations between persons and objects. In her writing on art museums and audience engagement she suggests aura is experienced when a viewer’s attention is directed to the pure presence of the object, and not when it is diverted away from the object to other systems of representation (such as the

3. Duttlinger, “Imaginary Encounters.”


historical or cultural resonances of the item). The auratic object, she writes, is not a passive recipient of interpretation. Instead, it invites the viewer into an active dialogue.

Thinking through this project I have come to share Smart’s proposition that an aura is characterised by a visceral engagement where the subject’s territory is invaded in a way that demands a response. “Indeed,” as Smart writes, “it is precisely through the suspension of the alienation between subjects and objects that the auratic operates,” and “subjects and objects are mutually constituted.” Where Walter Benjamin wanted to strip the object of mystery, and grant the audience mastery over the meaning of an artwork, I suggest that this is neither possible nor necessarily progressive. An object (or artwork) cannot be laid bare and made more accessible. However, the terms of apprehension can be redefined so that we no longer see aura as a regressive force, but as a conduit for encounter and dialogue with the material world.

The contributions of this project lie not only with the content that I have investigated—such as the notion of aura—but also with the means of my investigation. Whilst I hope to have evoked new connections in ideas about the aura of belongings, ultimately my research questions ask how to go about a printmaking practice, and how printmaking may be transformed as a result. The third contribution of this project therefore lies in the way I have explored printmaking through my attempts to affirm and question the role of the artist’s hand in practice. If the vernacular of printmaking maintains a dialectical tension between the hand and machine, and even keeps the artist’s hand at arm’s length from the finished work, this project opens a terrain of possibilities for engaging the practice otherwise. I have

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7. Ibid.
relocated methods of hand contact from the printing plate to the paper substrate, a transferral of contact that questions and extends the discursive structure of printmaking.

Through the PhD I found myself mapping an expanded territory of printmaking in which it comes to share a space that encompasses the autographic processes of painting and drawing, without being defined by them. Since my early printmaking experiences I have been fascinated by the slippages that can occur between autographic practices that privilege touch (such as painting and drawing), and practices that defer it (such as printmaking). I perceive these points of slippage as porous openings through which practices inform one another, rather than divisive boundaries separating them.

For some time, I have incorporated simple handwork techniques into my prints, such as stippling the edges of wet ink impressions to create tonal transitions between layers. In this research my tactile investment with the printed surface has intensified to become one of the defining aspects of the work. I examined how I could call upon the participation of my body in a way that extends the logic of printmaking practice, reconfiguring the place of the artist’s hand in relation to the print itself. The research has involved opening up printmaking by experimenting with, and reworking principles of touch on the surface of printed works, whilst asking if the layers of ink in an image can function as both support and matrix simultaneously. In manoeuvring the somatechnics of printmaking I have approached the medium of print as a discursive space that allows for continual reactivation, rather than a technological process or specific set of materials.
What knowledge have I produced? And what are the gaps?

The contributions to practice that I propose emerge at the confluence of the resolved work and my reflective engagement with material processes. I do not, therefore, believe that the artworks are the sole site of knowledge production in this PhD. I have engaged with printmaking as a form of research in which both the work and the means of its creation produce knowledge. I have remained attentive to concepts that emerged from my engagements with material processes and the artworks created through them.

My claim that this project produces knowledge raises the query “what sort of knowledge?” To return to my comments in the introduction, my intention has not been to discover or argue for a specific truth, or to create artefacts than can transfer verifiable information. Instead I follow Simon O’Sullivan’s idea that new knowledge in art practice involves a transformation of subjectivity; it allows a different state to emerge that changes the subject (the person who makes and/or views the work), allowing them to go beyond their habitual way of being in the world. Art allows us to think about our relations in the world differently, to explore alternative spaces and temporalities beyond the typical configurations we encounter, and to engage in introspection as a technology of transformation.

Neither the viewer nor I are empty vessels filled by delivery of knowledge through my work. However, experiences of making, feeling and looking can draw forth new “apprehensions” and forge fresh connections in the way we may think, including the ways we consider objects, artworks and practice generally.

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Notwithstanding the apprehensions created through my practice, there are inevitably questions that remain and opportunities that are as yet unfulfilled. Most notably I am aware that since I suggest aura is an enigmatic notion, the question of how to approach aura will always remain contested. It follows that there are inevitable gaps in my approach. There are paths I could have taken, and may well explore in future projects. I wonder, for example, what knowledge might have been produced if I had pursued the use of my physical objects in the exhibition, rather than mimetic representations, or invited other participants to share their experiences and/or possessions? Further, could an examination of aura depart from the literal object altogether, and instead evoke a somatic experience without deferral to concrete artefacts or their depictions? What alternative insights about aura might emerge by researching different objects, such as more masculine items, belongings that were thrown away, or possessions of people who are unknown to me? What thinking might have been produced if I had ignored Walter Benjamin’s legacy? And how could methodologies of embalming, burial and exhumation operate through other print or reproductive media?

Despite the limitations of my approach, and as difficult as it is to visualise or evoke thoughts of aura, I found an opportunity to explore aura through identifying with symbolic processes of death—such as entombment and unearthing—and it is my intention that the artworks present the residue of this journey. The density of darkness, the smoky veil of pigment, the traces of gentle touch, and the passage of an oblique light through the picture plane, all experienced within an exhibition space that borrows from funerary architecture, collectively allude to an object that is formed by a melancholy journey that produces aura.

**fig. 132**
Clare Humphries
*Passing through*, 2010 (detail)
Hand-burnished linocut print, 55.5 x 36 cm, © Clare Humphries.
What thinking has emerged?

So far in this conclusion I have primarily addressed how my project has contributed to thinking about the subject matter of aura and the field of printmaking. However, questions still remain as to what my research has revealed about personal objects. What insight into objects has my practice produced?

The recurrent movement between loss and recovery—implied both in my method and the images exhibited—has prompted me to reflect on how we may enact appearance and disappearance through the way we store, divest and handle objects. We re-encounter loss, for example, when we make family objects go away, such as when we discard, divest or store them in dark cupboards and drawers. Conversely, we re-experience the ghostly presence of missing loved ones when we uncover and touch their former belongings, and even when we contemplate representations of other people’s inheritances in the form of artworks. We seek out opportunities, as I have done in this project, to symbolically bury and resurrect our loved ones by parting with or storing their objects, and through viewing or creating artworks that evoke these actions in the mind. These are the material practices crucial to re-experiencing loss and recovery, and we use them to shift objects again and again between states of here-ness and gone-ness.

Inevitably, this research has prompted me to ask why we might repeatedly perform symbolic, funerary actions long after we have lowered our loved ones into the ground or scattered their ashes. Why do we need to bury and exhume our family over and over again? More specifically I questioned: if

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fig. 133
Clare Humphries
I have never been able to bury her, 2013 (detail)
Hand-burnished linocut print, 68 x 97 cm, © Clare Humphries.
I willingly re-experience losses through making artwork, does this imply the original losses of my family members are still unresolved, even though acute grief and mourning have passed? And if a viewer re-engages with experiences of bereavement when they encounter my works, do they also carry lingering sorrow? If so, are the unresolved losses maladaptive and is complete separation desirable?

During the past decade grief theorists have embraced the idea that it is normal to maintain a connection with the deceased, leading to the concept of “continuing bonds.” \(^{11}\) Recent research suggests that when a family member dies we do not cease to have a relationship with them, even though the relationship is transformed. There is a need to seek threads of continuity as well as points of transition in our connections to those who are dead, and to explore the meaning of their absence. \(^{12}\) Jandy Nelson examines the notion of continuing bonds between the living and the dead in her novel *The Sky is Everywhere*. The protagonist, Lennie, characterises the experience as follows: “My sister will die over and over again for the rest of my life. Grief is forever. It doesn’t go away…Grief and love are conjoined, you don’t get one without the other. All I can do is love her.” \(^{13}\) Loving her sister involves feeling grief, and it also therefore means experiencing and re-experiencing her sister’s death over and over again.

My research suggests that we create connections and disconnections with the deceased through objects that have been left to us, and through artworks that arouse thoughts of those possessions. This means that inheritances can serve as more than representations of the past, or as historical repositories. They also help effect a specific and transformative relationship to people who are no longer alive. The possessions, and the


practices we mobilise around them, bring us into contact with people who are out of reach and thus enable us to construct new relations with them. Moreover, it would seem we willingly allow this to occur. We permit inherited objects to appear and disappear, to manifest absence and to maintain connections to presence when we store and retrieve them. In this we participate in the production of the very aura we experience. Together with our objects, we co-construct the “strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be.”

The practice of embalming objects through this research has also suggested to me that, before we even enact practices of revealing or concealing around an object, the object’s mere presence as a substitute body produces a profound tension that I call aura. When we encounter belongings of the deceased we discover something that appears to merge with the person, but is actually distinct from them. The object creates its own connections and disconnections; it joins with and breaks from the deceased, just as the embalmed body is contiguous with and yet separate from the living person. Ultimately object and person cannot be conflated, just as mimetic images cannot be reduced to their referents. In both instances there is a perception of closeness between object and representation that is allied to a realisation of inexorable distance.

Although objects will never return our loved ones to us, some of their power lies in the fact that they are more than mere things. After death their potency is increased through their relation to ideas, bodies and events that lie outside their concrete forms. It becomes impossible to place a complete and determinant meaning on the object. Even though aspects
of the item catch the eye and demand interpretation (worn corners, loose threads, and stains for example), they also resist an exhaustive explanation. Consequently, other people’s objects are seared with unknowable truths. Artist Allan McCollum once said in an interview that objects of deceased family members have an “imminent meaningfulness.” 

In regard to his grandmother’s objects he says:

It’s an extremely strange feeling to have an object that meant something to somebody who’s gone. You don’t know what it meant, but because it had meant something to someone you loved it now means something to you. It’s hard to say how much the objects mean because they only seem to almost mean something, but they mean enough to you that you save some of them…these objects have an aura of meaningfulness that’s unknowable and nonspecific.

According to McCollum an experience of imminent meaningfulness arises when objects, and indeed artworks, refer “to things that we value without necessarily knowing all the reasons why.” His comments make sense of Marks’ argument to reconsider the aura “as a way to talk about how objects encode social processes.” Objects with aura, she says, function like a fetish because they have a power to represent something that is not present by virtue of prior contact with it, and they accrue a social value that is not reducible to commodification. In this way, and in line with Theodore W. Adorno’s advice, the auratic object is not a mere receptacle for the projection of the beholder’s psychology, nor is it dependent on subjective interpretations in order to be animated. For aura to exist, the object must also exceed the projection of the subject.
McCollum’s grandmother’s objects offer a perpetually deferred meaning for him, just as mine offer the sense of a distant value that lies at the vanishing point of memory. The belongings once owned by my family are profoundly unknowable, especially those of my grandparents who passed away in 1976. I have nothing but the stories of third parties to enliven the items, so I will never know what they meant to my grandparents. The objects exceed my memory and surpass my life span, yet they came from people who are integral to my history. My grandfather’s bone handled knife and my grandmother’s petticoat look as if they might unlock secrets about my family. But everything is putative and the objects will remain forever unknowable. Here lies the potential for aura.

**Art. Death. Life**

Bruno Latour says that when all else fails we can turn to art to make objects “visible” to us, because art “can bring…the solid objects of today into the fluid states where their connections with humans may make sense.”

As I approach the end of this project, I realise that my enmeshments with inherited objects have indeed begun to make sense to me, and I hope that new understandings are also aroused in viewers of my work. What has taken shape for me is perhaps best described as a cluster of feelings, a sensation, or a way of “holding” objects in my mind. I know that, ultimately, my apprehensions cannot be neatly expressed in a research abstract, or summarised in concluding commentary, but that they live in the artworks I have produced. The prints I have created offer a way of encountering objects; they enact an interplay between subject and object and thereby materialise what I cannot express or even think in words.
But why did I need to make sense of the connections between humans and objects? To answer this, I return to the story of my family. I was born only a few years before my maternal grandmother and paternal grandfather died. I do not remember them, so in one sense I have never grieved them. In another sense, their loss has been palpable and left me with the problem of understanding the belongings that survived them. When my grandparents’ possessions were handed on to me I was given what seemed like incomplete objects, half-told narratives and echoes of presence. There was (and is) something restless about them that resists understanding. Why can objects, which bear no direct, personal memory, resonate with such meaning? How can I understand my experience of these objects as an artist, and without the interpretation of other family members on my behalf? These are the personal enquiries that have underwritten the formal questions of the research.

Since my childhood encounters with restless objects, I have lost other family members and new objects have entered into the fold of my inheritances. My sister-in-law’s objects—my most recent inheritances—carry an especially poignant weight. Now, inevitably, I wonder about the future. When I die, how do I want my presence to inhere in the world through my things? When will the next cohort of posthumous objects come in to my life? Since I am the youngest in my family of origin, will I be left one day with nothing but a handful of cherished possessions from my parents, my brother and my sister? As Edmund de Waal puts it, “There is no easy story in legacy,” and one way or another, other people’s objects
will continue to complicate my life. Now I have produced artworks that create another inheritance, and disperse the presence of my objects in a wider field of awareness.

Conceivably this research was prompted by my awareness that before I die, it is likely that I will have to face more objects of the dead, so I had best learn something about them. Something about what they are, what they mean, how they might help me, when to let them go and how to keep them. At some stage most of us will tackle these problems. Loss does not discriminate and the majority of us will face the task of sorting through the objects of our loved ones. “People die all the time. Every day. Every hour. There are families all over the world staring at beds that are no longer slept in, shoes that are no longer worn.” Every one of the objects that a person leaves behind is small and insignificant, but also as vast as the universal experience of loss that flows around it.

To some extent this research could be framed as an exploration of bereavement. However, first and foremost it is concerned with the way everyday things participate in and constitute experiences of aura after death. Through the project I suggest that the graves of our family are never sealed. Where we may expect to find closure, personal objects create “impossible,” open-ended relations with those who have passed away. We are close to our lost loved ones through their possessions, yet we are distanced. It is through auratic objects that the dead are here, but never here; they are present in absence.


Ennis, Helen, ed. *Reveries: Photography and Mortality.* Canberra, ACT: National Portrait Gallery, 2007. Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra, ACT, the University of Queensland Art Museum in St Lucia, QLD, and the Mornington Peninsula Gallery in Melbourne, VIC.


Gregg, Simon, ed. *Dreamweavers*. Sale, VIC: Gippsland Art Gallery, 2011. Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name shown at Gippsland Art Gallery in Sale, VIC, McClelland Gallery in Langwarrin, VIC, Maitland Regional Gallery, in Maitland, NSW, Swan Hill Regional Gallery in Swan Hill, VIC, Redland Art Gallery in Cleveland, QLD, Devonport Regional Gallery, Devonport, TAS, Plimsoll Gallery in Hobart, TAS, and Western Plains Cultural Centre in Dubbo, NSW.


Rochfort, Desmond, ed. “Printmaking, Technologies and the Culture of the Reproducible Image.” In *Lines of Site: Ideas, Forms and Materialities*, edited by Desmond Rochfort, 8-11. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1999. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at the Royal College of Art in London and Musashino Art University Galleries in Tokyo, Japan.


Villalba, Dokushó. “Everything Hangs by a Thread.” In Pamen Pereira: This is a Love Story, edited by Centro de Arte, Caja de Burgos, 9-18. Burgos, Spain: Caja de Burgos, 2009. Published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at Centro de Arte in Burgos, Spain.


CURRICULUM VITAE

The following section provides a curriculum vitae for the period of candidature (2009-2014), followed by selected visual documentation of exhibitions, catalogues and media publications. The purpose of the section is to provide a record of the research dissemination that I have undertaken during my candidacy. The visual documentation also reveals some exhibition strategies that have been trailed, and provides context of other artists’ practices.

Biography

1973 Born Melbourne, Australia
1995 Bachelor of Occupational Therapy (Honours), LaTrobe University, Melbourne, Victoria.
1995-2008 Occupational Therapist in rehabilitation and psychiatric facilities.
2004 Diploma of Arts (Visual Arts), Box Hill Institute of TAFE, Box Hill, Victoria.
2006 Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) with Distinction, RMIT, Melbourne, Victoria.
2008 Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) Honours, RMIT, Melbourne, Victoria.
2009 Doctor of Philosophy, RMIT University, Melbourne, Victoria.
2011 Sessional lecturer, RMIT School of Art, Melbourne, Victoria.
Solo exhibitions (2009-2014)

2014  *I believe in the afterlife*, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria.

2010  *Material Remains*, c3 Contemporary Art Space, Abbotsford Convent, Abbotsford, Victoria.


  *Afterlife*, The Edge, RMIT University, Melbourne, Victoria.

Group exhibitions (2009-2014)


  *Swan Hill Print and Drawing Award*, Swan Hill Gallery, Victoria.

  *Seventh Skin*, curated by Claire Watson, Hatched Contemporary Art Space, Victoria.


2012  *Transparency*, curated by Summer Ventis and Michael Holmes, University of Colorado Boulder Print Exhibition Space, Colorado.

  *Found and Lost*, Leeper Library, Trinity College, Melbourne University, Victoria.


  *Scholarships Exposed: Where are They Now?* Australian Print Workshop, Fitzroy, Victoria.

  *Lost and Found*, First Site Gallery, RMIT University, Melbourne, Victoria.
*Contemporary Australian Printmaking*, James Makin Gallery, Fitzroy, Victoria.

2010  *Ephemeral by Nature*, Deakin University Art Gallery, Burwood, Victoria.
*BIMPE VI (Biennial International Miniature Print Exhibition)*, Federation Gallery, Vancouver Canada; Dundarave Print Workshop and Gallery, Vancouver; Society of Northern Alberta Print Artists, Alberta.
*Exchange*, curated by John Domjan, Ruth Johnstone, Nicole Macdonald, Anna Willoughby, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne.

2009  *52: A Folio of Prints by Victorian Artists*, curated by Rona Green, Geelong Gallery
*Thinking Through Practice: Art and Design as Research*, curated by Associate Professor Lesley Duxbury, Associate Professor Andrea Mina and Professor Sand Helsel, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore.
*Siemens Fine Art Scholarships Exhibition*, RMIT Gallery, Storey Hall, Melbourne, Victoria.
*Banyule Works on Paper Art Award 2009*, Banyule City Council, Ivanhoe, Victoria.
*Burnie Print Prize 2009*, Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Burnie, Tasmania.

**Awards, Residencies and Commissions (2009-2014)**


2012  Acquisition Prize *Silk Cut Awards for Linocut Prints*, Glen Eira City Council Caulfield, Victoria.
Awards, Residencies and Commissions (2009-2014, continued)


2010  Acquisition Prize *2010 Fremantle Print Award*, Fremantle, Western Australia.


2009  Acquisition Prize *Silk Cut Awards for Linocut Prints*, Glen Eira City Council Gallery, Caulfield, Victoria

2009  *Australian Postgraduate Award*, Commonwealth Government of Australia

Corporate/Institutional Collections (alphabetical listing, 2009-2014)

Anglican Church Grammar School, East Brisbane, Queensland (2010)


Canson Australia, Pty Ltd., Keysborough, Victoria (2010)

Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia (2013)

City of Maroondah, Ringwood, Victoria (2010)

City of Banyule, Heidelberg, Victoria (2010)

Geelong Gallery, Geelong, Victoria (2009)

Grafton Regional Art Gallery, Grafton, New South Wales (2010)

Grinnell College Print Collection, Grinnell, Iowa (2012)

Highlands University Print Collection, Las Vegas, New Mexico (2012)

Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana (2012)

Kosdown Printing, Port Melbourne, Victoria (2010)
Little Creatures Brewing, Fremantle, Western Australia (2010)
Mackay ArtSpace, Mackay, Queensland (2010)
Monash University Print Collection, Clayton, Victoria (2012)
Murray State University Print Collection, Murray Kentucky (2012)
National Art School, Sydney, New South Wales (2013)
Presbyterian Ladies’ College, Burwood, Victoria (2010)
Print Council of Australia, Fitzroy, Victoria (2010)
Port Jackson Press, Fitzroy, Victoria (2009)
RMIT University, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria (2013)
Silk Cut Foundation Inc., Highett, Victoria (2014)
Tasmanian College of the Arts, Hobart, Tasmania (2013)
Tintern Schools, Ringwood East, Victoria (2010)
Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2008)
University of Arizona Print Collection, Tucson, Arizona (2012)
University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, Colorado (2012)
University of Iowa Print Collection, Iowa City, Iowa (2012)
University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland (2013)
Wesley College, Glen Waverley, Victoria (2010)
Selected Bibliography (2009-2014)

Crawford, Ashley. “Beneath the Seventh Skin.” Catalogue essay in Seventh Skin, edited by Claire Watson, 3-4. Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, curated by Claire Watson, shown at Hatch Contemporary Arts Space in Ivanhoe.

Glen Eira City Council Gallery, ed. 2014 Silk Cut Award for Linocut Prints. Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at the Glen Eira Council Gallery in Caulfield, Victoria.

Glen Eira City Council Gallery, ed. 2013 Silk Cut Award for Linocut Prints. Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at the Glen Eira Council Gallery in Caulfield, Victoria.

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Watson, Claire, ed. Unravelled: Artists Books and Topographical Prints from the Bayule Art Collection. Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, curated by Claire Watson, shown at the Banyule Arts Space in Ivanhoe, Victoria.

Glen Eira City Council Gallery, ed. 2011 Silk Cut Award for Linocut Prints. Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name shown at the Glen Eira Council Gallery in Caulfield, Melbourne, Victoria.
Australian Print Workshop, ed. *Scholarships Exposed: Where are They Now?* Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at the Australian Print Workshop in Fitzroy, Victoria.


Monash University, ed. *Impact 7 International Printmaking Conference Exhibitions, 2011.* Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition program of the same name, shown at Monash University in Caulfield, Victoria, 2011.


Fremantle Arts Centre, ed. *2010 Fremantle Arts Centre Print Award.* Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre, 2010. Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at the Fremantle Arts Centre in Fremantle, Western Australia.

Selected Bibliography (2009-2014, continued)

Green, Rona, ed. *52: A Folio of Prints by Victorian Artists, 2009*. Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, curated by Rona Green, shown at Geelong Gallery in Geelong, Victoria.

Banyule Council, ed. *Banyule Works on Paper Art Award 2009*. Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at Banyule City Council Gallery in Ivanhoe, Victoria.

Burnie Regional Art Gallery, ed. *Burnie Print Prize 2009*. Exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name, shown at Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Burnie, Tasmania.

Peer Reviewed Publications and Conference Presentations (2009-2014)


This article addresses my work and professional experience prior to the PhD, and introduces the way I hoped my work would develop in the PhD project.

Images redacted for copyright reasons.
fig. 138
Clare Humphries
_Nana’s Destiny_, 2009
Reduction linocut print, 25 x 25 cm,
fig. 139 (facing page)
Studio views from residency at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop (VTW) in South Melbourne, Victoria, March 2010.

(far left, top) Loose threads hanging from the verso side of tapestry.
(far left, bottom) Spools of thread.
(middle, top) Tapestry in progress.
(middle, bottom) Tapestry loom.
(far left) Working on Retracing your fingertips, 2010, at the VTW.

fig. 140 (this page)
Clare Humphries
Retracing your fingertips, 2010 (detail)
Artists’ book created during residency at the VTW.
Unravelled thread, embossing, paper
10 x 25 x 1.7 cm, © Clare Humphries. Photography by John Brash.
See also fig. 32 on page 45, and fig. 81 to fig. 83 on pages 168-173.
fig. 141
Exhibition catalogue for 2010 Fremantle Arts Centre Print Award, shown at Fremantle Arts Centre in Fremantle, WA, September 25-November 21, 2010.
fig. 142
Clare Humphries
I believe in the afterlife, 2010
Hand-burnished linocut print, 64 x 133 cm. Awarded acquisition prize at the 2010 Fremantle Arts Centre Print Award. Collection of Little Creatures Brewing, © Clare Humphries.
Exhibition catalogue for 2010 Silk Cut Award for Linocut Prints, shown at the Glen Eira City Council Gallery in Caulfield, Victoria, September 4-19, 2010.

Image redacted for copyright reasons.
Focus on linocut: ideas from the 2010 Silk Cut Award for Linocut Prints

IMPRINT Editor Sue Forster asked three finalists in the 2010 Silk Cut Award for Linocut Prints to explain how they made their prints.

Antonietta Covino-Beehre
L’Albero di Pace – The tree of peace
For this illustrative work Covino-Beehre cut her line blocks using conventional line-cutting tools and printed them by hand onto 10 interior hoop print paper. With a technique similar to plywood, hoop pine was chosen because it doesn’t absorb too much moisture. The tree background panels were treated with a light transparent colour to highlight the wood and then printed using a greenish-black ink.

Antonietta Covino-Beehre, L’Albero di Pace – The tree of peace, 2010, line prints on hoop paper, 180 x 179 mm


Images redacted for copyright reasons.

Note:
Printmakers: Barbara Berkenbosch and Gary Silko, bold face, sans serif, white ink with marbling results. Berkenbosch uses heavy paper of similar weight, a series of a repeat, and always wears a face mask and heavy duty gloves to handle caustic soda. An old brush can be used to paint the caustic solution from a jar.

Clare Humphries
I believe in the afterlife
Clare Humphries’ objective of mixing silver etchings strongly resembles a traditional mezzotint but is actually two meticulously printed reduction line prints. In reduction printing all colour layers are printed from a single block in which the surface is gradually reduced through cutting. As the printing plate is gradually carved into estivation, the image on paper builds up an increasing density of ink. Clare has used this method in I believe in the afterlife, printing in warm tones of grey and white onto oil, white Kozo paper. 

Kozo, says Clare, is a light vegetable-based paper that has an ephemeral, ghost-like fragility. This quality is integral to the subject of her prints. General objects left behind by deceased family members. As a signifier of the touch of the dead owners, the surface wear on these objects is emotionally loaded. Clare’s printmaking process has evolved into a very effective visual tool intended to amplify the role of touch.

Finishing her print with a solid layer of black ink, Clare ‘burns’ her objects before ‘inhuming’ them again through extensive hard burnishing of the paper’s surface. In I believe in the afterlife the process mirrors that of polishing the family shrine. With the artist titiated at a slight angle, the embossed humps took curious animation — almost alive. For Clare printmaking is a process of replaying something from oblivion, even though a part ‘always remains lost’.

Entries for the 2011 Silk Cut Award for Linocut Prints close on 19 June 2011.
www.silkcutlinocut.com or www.gleneira.vic.gov.au
fig. 145

Images redacted for copyright reasons.
fig. 146 (right)
Clare Humphries
All that remains, 2010
Hand-burnished linocut and multi-plate relief print, 49 x 31 cm. Commissioned by the Print Council of Australia Print Commission 2010, © Clare Humphries.

Collection of the City of Maroondah, Ringwood, Victoria, the City of Banyule, Heidelberg, Victoria, Grafton Regional Art Gallery, Grafton, New South Wales Mackay ArtSpace, Mackay, Queensland, Print Council of Australia, Fitzroy, Victoria, and other institutional and private collections.

fig. 147 (below)

Image redacted for copyright reasons.
Exhibition catalogue for *Thinking Through Practice: Art and Design as Research*, curated by Associate Professor Lesley Duxbury, Associate Professor Andrea Mina and Professor Sand Helsel, shown at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Singapore, 10 March-11 April 2010.

Exhibition view of *Thinking Through Practice: Art and Design as Research*, showing documentation of studio views. Images redacted for copyright reasons.
Jacqui Cheah (PHD)

Title of Project: Jewellery in the urban milieu: explorations in emergence

Summary: This practice-led PhD positions jewellery—both a practice and as an artifact—within the context of urban socio-cultural dynamics. In order to question, test and extend how jewellery practice might engage with the urban milieu through processes of making and wearing. The practice of jewellery is often understood as one which is concerned with the body or with symbolic value for an individual or observer. This research emphasizes processes rather than outcomes and is informed by contemporary theories of emergence. The work in jewellery practice can contribute to the ways of thinking and behaving within urban environments will be the focus of experiments combining making and wearing. As a spatial and social level, it will also test how this kind of jewellery can effect and alter relations between bodies and the city. This work is what I refer to as ‘urban jewellery’. It is not what I want to produce, but how I want to produce it. The objective is to examine the aesthetic, formal, conceptual potential of these transformative practices and the potential it offers for the practice of jewellery.

Research question: How can contemporary jewellery practice engage with the urban milieu in ways that explore processes of emergence, and what possibilities does this offer jewellery and its relation with the urban context?

Charmaine Atta Ramsson (CPHA)

Title of Project: Re-imagining Malay Myths & Legends through a Multidisciplinary Approach in Contemporary Sculpture Practices

Summary: I will investigate the myths and legends of places through their physical landscapes. Significant events such as the landscapes, place names, and legends, the people and the natural environment will be the focus of experiments exploring three-dimensional work related to land art and contemporary sculpture. Works will reflect on the cultural contexts and its development until the present in Malaysia and internationally.

Research question: How can I create sculptural work in an outdoor context which portrays the narrative quality and interprets certain Malay myths/legends?

Clare Humphries (PHD)

Title of Project: Material remnant: the afterlife of personal objects

Summary: Through this research I will investigate the meanings of personal objects that have been left behind by family members after their death. I will draw on my own collection of small-scale objects that I inherited from my grandmother. This will help me develop a body of work that is connected to these possessions, and to simultaneously consider how this notion of an ‘aera’ can inform printmaking practices.

Research question: In what ways can I use printmaking and installation practice to explore the heightened significances, or ‘aura’, which is connected to personal objects that are left behind by family members after their death?
CLARE HUMPHRIES MATERIAL REMAINS

Building D, Level 1, West Corridor

Materiality has become an important value in contemporary art practice. Printmakers are increasingly conscious about the materials they use and processes they employ, mindful of the cultural and conceptual associations that each triggers. This has accompanied a turn towards the material qualities of print in its varying modes. A recent emphasis on investigating the 'haptic' of the surface. In this paper I consider the materiality of analogue printmaking in relation to ideas of loss, misprints, accretion and wear. Drawing on my print-based research into family 'relics', I explore the idea that materiality concerns more than the physical substance of a print or object. It also encompasses a field of unseen relationships between the body, the materials of making, the act of viewing and the passage of time.

In this way I will examine the parallels that exist between the surface of the print and that of the objects passed down when a person dies. Intergenerational possessions, for example, carry a history of deterioration and wear on their surface. They substitute for the loved ones who have touched and held them. In other words inherited belongings, like prints, exist as material remainders, as what is left over. Both indicate that something has been touched by something that is now lost, and in doing so engage a dialectic between here/then and now/then. In examining these implications through my print-based research I propose a view of materiality as a set of relations that operate on the surface, whilst being entangled with forces, bodies and times that exist beyond and beneath it.
**fig. 150** (facing page)

(Hardcopy catalogue shows outside cover and partial inside view).

Images redacted for copyright reasons.

**fig. 151** (this page)

This presentation shows an early exploration of preliminary works in *The tears of things* (2011-2014). See fig. 111 page 247, and fig. 131 on page 295 for later resolution of the work.
Artists’ books and typographical prints from the Banyule Art Collection.

Unravelled presents explorations in typography and the interior world of the artist’s book. It examines the visual and evocative power of text in contemporary Australian printmaking and the book as an artistic device for experimentation and invention.

Artists include Raymond ARNOLD, GW BOT, Angela CAVALIERI, Jasmina CININAS, Lesley DUXBURY, Judy HOLDING, Clare HUMPHRIES, Rob JOHNSTONE, Hertha KLEGGPOTT, Peter LYSSOTIS, Mandy MARTIN, John NIXON, Rosslynd PIGGOTT, Michael SHIRREFS, Theo STRASSER, Else VAN GARDEREN, Arthur WICKS, Gosia WLODARCZYK, John WOLSELEY and Jude WORTERS.

Exhibition invitation (left) and education kit (right) for Unravelled: Artists Books and Topographical Prints from the Banyule Art Collection, curated by Claire Watson, shown at Banyule Arts Space in Ivanhoe, Victoria, September 22–October 12, 2011.
fig. 153
Clare Humphries
All that remains, 2010 (detail)
Hand-burnished linocut and multi-
plate relief print, 49 x 31 cm, © Clare
Humphries.
Words. They can act on a passion and quick our imagination — triggering visual imagery in our minds, transcending the line and page, setting us adrift in a world beyond what we can see. Words are the tools with which we express our thoughts and feelings, our desires and dreams.

There are two types of poetry: free verse and structured verse. Free verse is a form of poetry that does not follow a specific pattern or structure. It is often used to express emotions and ideas in a more relaxed and spontaneous way. Structured verse, on the other hand, follows a specific pattern or structure, such as a sonnet or a haiku.

The University of California Press publishes some of the best books in the world. We are committed to publishing books that are both intellectually stimulating and academically rigorous. Our goal is to make the world's best scholarship available to the widest possible audience.

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The University of California Press is a member of the University of California system, which includes the University of California campuses, the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. We are located in Berkeley, California, and are a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.
Exhibition catalogue for *Unravelled: Artists' Books and Topographical Prints from the Banyule Art Collection*, curated by Claire Watson, shown at Banyule Arts Space in Ivanhoe, Victoria, September 22–October 12, 2011.

Images redacted for copyright reasons.
Exhibition catalogue for 2011 Silk Cut Awards for Linocut Prints, shown at Glen Eira City Council Gallery in Caulfield, Victoria, September 3-18, 2011.

Image redacted for copyright reasons.
fig. 156
Clare Humphries
Living with last thing, 2010 (detail)
Hand-burnished linocut print, 64 x 155 cm. Awarded an acquisition prize at the 2011 Silk Cut Awards for Linocut Prints. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia collection, © Clare Humphries.
fig. 157 (left) Exhibition invitation for Contemporary Australian Printmaking, shown at James Makin Gallery in Fitzroy, Victoria, January 11-29, 2011.


Image redacted for copyright reasons.
fig. 159
Documentation for Transparency Print Portfolio, curated by Summer Ventis and Michael Holmes, shown at the University of Colorado Boulder Print Exhibition Space in Colorado, Boulder, March 30-April 6, 2012.
fig. 160


Images redacted for copyright reasons.

Images redacted for copyright reasons.

Images redacted for copyright reasons.

Most of us live with the traces of the dead—the personal belongings left behind when someone dies. David Malouf once wrote that inter-generational objects gather the fingerprints of their users, allowing us to somehow keep contact with lost loved ones. His literary image suggests that belongings are transformed through physical contact, that their very substance is charged by and charged with the body. Through the print-based works in Material Remains I explore the significance of inherited possessions. In the making I have drawn on ideas of surface wear and bodily contact, and subjected the works to a passage of burial and exhumation through layers of ink. In this way I have sought to engage with personal objects as both subject matter, and as a metaphor to shape the making process.
fig. 162
fig. 163 (this page, left)
Exhibition invitation for *Lost and found* exhibition, shown at First Site Gallery RMIT in Melbourne, Victoria, September 20–October 1, 2011, © Clare Humphries.

(this page, right)
Exhibition view.

Image redacted for copyright reasons.
fig. 164
Documentation of exhibition lighting on image surface for *Lost and found* exhibition, shown at First Site Gallery RMIT in Melbourne, Victoria, September 20–October 1, 2011, © Clare Humphries.
fig. 166
Clare Humphries
On a knife edge, 2011
Hand-burnished lino-cut, 31 x 43.5 cm,
W© Clare Humphries.
fig. 167

Image redacted for copyright reasons.
Clare Humphries

From one hand to another, 2012 (detail)
Hand-burnished linocut print, 47 x 110 cm. Awarded an acquisition prize at the 2012 Silk Cut Award for Linocut Prints, acquired for the National Gallery of Australia collection, © Clare Humphries.
fig. 169 (this page)
Exhibition catalogue for *2013 Silk Cut Awards for Linocut Prints*, shown at Glen Eira Gallery in Caulfield, Victoria, September 6-21, 2013.

fig. 170 (facing page)
Clare Humphries
*I have never been able to bury her*, 2013 (detail)
Hand-burnished linocut print, 58 x 61 cm, © Clare Humphries. Collection of RMIT University/RMIT Gallery.

Image redacted for copyright reasons.
Exhibition invitation, *Seventh Skin*, curated by Claire Watson, shown at Hatch Contemporary Arts Space in Ivanhoe, Victoria, June 18-August 2, 2014.

(below)
Exhibition view.

(facing page)
Exhibition catalogue with introduction by Claire Watson and catalogue essay by Ashley Crawford.

Images redacted for copyright reasons.
Is there an essential core that makes us who we are, or are we more akin to a prism of many colours?

One and all, we inhabit strange worlds, realms where the anthropomorphic is on everyday fact and strange meetings of the organic and inorganic are commonplace. And here we have creatures with horns, creatures bleating peels and baring teeth, a tortured skies, writhing bodies, disembodied heads, melding forms, salmon and strange things, woozy wolves, spired people and tiny people.

As Claire Watson notes, feeling comfortable in our own skin has an expression that has undergone significant change in the current age. This exhibition aims just how many layers do we present through our public face to the world? And what is real and what is disguise? This question seems particularly pertinent in the day and age of Facebook and Twitter, a time when one can create an online persona that is in all likelihood this little bit oxidized with reality. But even in reality we all wear another person's dress as we wish to be perceived, we all out side to disguise inevitable features, we wear lipstick, we build masts, all as protective layers against the aggressors of the world.

"What is real and what is disguise? Where does the skin end? There is a seam between, in fact, the seven layers of skin: stratum basale, stratum spinosum, stratum granulosum, stratum corneum, the upper epidermal layer and the lower reticular layer. Added to this little known fact is the additional skin area we wear to it, the patellaris of jeans, kaftans, waistcoats, gloves, socks, in the body. The secrets of layering here are multiplied. At times they are anthropomorphic - the "Rainbow" is a very long and very small. The body is an element of disguise. The skin is what we wear."

The Skin is a boundary that can be all the skin that it is to do with reality. But even in reality we all wear another person's dress as we wish to be perceived, we all out side to disguise inevitable features, we wear lipstick, we build masts, all as protective layers against the aggressors of the world.

Images redacted for copyright reasons.
Bass Strait Light, Jennifer Marshall, Linocut, woodblock, 96 x 89cm

Simple Shells, Olga Senkey, Inkjet print & sandblasted glass, 62 x 102cm

Stocks, Hannah Quinlivan, Pastel, pencils, Indian ink and embossing on BFK Rives, 160 x 81cm

Gods of Zenith, Ken, Brian Robinson, Linocut, 39 x 100cm

Kerou still is hot for Matlock, Stephen Woolham, Lightjet, 60 x 65cm

Recycled, Claire Wilkinson, Mezzotint print, 50 x 5cm

In the woodland green, Papaloon & Kate Zarys Intaglio print, 50 x 20cm

Fascinating, Rod, Diantha Drury, Charcoal, ink, oil pastel on paper, 178 x 103cm

Past, Present, Future, Kathryn McGovern, Charcoal, pastel, ink, watercolour & gouache on paper, 70 x 106cm

A convergence of north south, Paula McLaughlin, screenprint, 54 x 76cm

The Fig Tree, Elizabeth Nelson, Pen, pencil, charcoal, conte, crayon, ink and gouache, 146 x 229cm

Into the void, Steve Bibian, multi-plate etching, printed relief, 60 x 64cm

Del. Andrew Southall, Pencil, 67 x 77cm

Crime and Punishment, Clayton Tremain, Artist’s Book - 14 Etchings, 21 x 15.5cm

Fil and Dan Kelly, Batik, Pastel, Charcoal, ink, oil pastel on paper, 178 x 103cm
Awarded the Grand Prize at the 2014 Silk Cut Awards for Linocut Prints, acquired for the Duroloid collection.
fig. 174
I have never been able to bury her, 2013  
Hand-burnished linocut print  
68 x 97 cm

You will die over and over again for the rest of my life, 2014  
Hand-burnished linocut print  
68 x 97 cm

From one to another, 2012  
Hand-burnished linocut prints  
28 x 65.5 cm (closed)  
Dimensions variable (open)

If not alive, at least not dead, 2010-2012  
(series, works 4-12 on floorplan)

I believe in the afterlife II, 2010  
Hand-burnished linocut print  
67 x 48.5 cm
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>I can see through to the other side</em>, 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>67 x 48.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Relliquaries II</em>, 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>67 x 48.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Relliquaries I</em>, 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>67 x 48.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I believe in the afterlife</em>, 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>67 x 48.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Life after living</em>, 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>67 x 48.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Afterlife</em>, 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>67 x 48.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>On a knife edge between</em>, 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>67 x 48.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>There are tears for things</em>, 2011-2014</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unbound artists’ book, hand-burnished linocut prints</td>
<td>28 x 28 x 1.7 cm (closed), dimensions variable (open) (gloves are available for viewing this work if desired)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Places to hold absence</em>, 2012-2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(series, works 14-16 on floorplan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lacrimae rerum</em>, 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>38 x 39 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Too much is certain</em>, 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>28 x 25.5 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>As long as I hold them before my eyes</em>, 2014</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>28 x 31 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I measure the distance between us</em>, 2014</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>49.5 x 98 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>He has no need of them anymore</em>, 2013-2014</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hand-burnished linocut print</td>
<td>49.5 x 98 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>