Art Making in the Face of Fear

Helen Shelley

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Acknowledgements

This paper is dedicated to my wonderful dad, who gave me all of his heart and did everything humanly possible for our family. In life and in death he has been one of my greatest teachers. My supervisor Lindy Lee whose absolute generosity of spirit made my experience of the Masters degree more rewarding than I could have possibly imagined.
To Barbara Campbell, Shoufay Derz, Emily O’Brien and Kath Fries who generously donated their time without question.
My wonderful mum, Barbara Shelley. Whose steady, loving presence has supported me in every pursuit. To my sister, Annette Shelley, who gives me strength, even when distance separates us. My wonderful husband, Kaushik Sen. Who has supported all of my endeavors with great faith and love. And to Leo, our beautiful son, who gives so much joy. How lucky we are to know you.
Abstract

Modern medicine in Western Society has in part alienated people to the process of dying. We obviously benefit from modern medicine, with the prospect of prolonged life and reduced suffering. However, the medicalization of death also provides ideal conditions under which we can wall away hard truths; this can set up a pernicious cycle of death-avoidance and denial. Denying death can prevent the opportunity of a good death, one in which both the patient and the bereaved cope with the undeniable. This paper explores how visual arts practices provide the bereaved with opportunities to process their grief and how this act subverts the dominant Western view to deny death. Further, this paper analyses how through contributing to the discourse surrounding death, artists provide the opportunity to strengthen social ties and partially reclaim death.
Introduction

This paper researches the role of visual art in the process of grieving. Specifically, this paper focuses on how artists have found opportunity to process personal grief through the development of visual language and how tangible expressions of grief contribute to the discourse surrounding death.

Chapter one focuses on how those living in Western society have largely been alienated to the process of dying due to modern medicine. Further, a departure from organized religion and the affect of post-industrialism on cultural customs, means those in the West are often without means to be present in the face of death. Chapter one looks to examples from Mexican culture to see how the bereaved may return the dead to social actor and then finds example of people doing so in the West. This leads to questions of how image making can be used to help the dying and bereaved face death.

Chapter two focuses on both Australian and international artists whose work explores the following themes; birth, death and life as a continuum, art as a tool to assist in the grieving process, legacy through memorialization, symbolic immortality and returning the dead to social actor. Particular focus is placed on artists whose exploration of these themes has occurred after the loss of a loved one and through making they have found opportunity to process personal grief. The act of bringing expressions of grief into the public realm, then presents opportunities to discuss the often-avoided topics of death and grief.

Chapter three describes the development of my visual language as informed by personal grief. This chapter emphasizes the importance of having tangible expressions of grief in order to bring the topic of grief into view. Significantly I explore how art making can return our late loved ones to social actor in order to strengthen social ties with the living.
Chapter One – The Dying Process

I am not so much afraid of death, as shamed of it.
It's the very disgrace and ignominy of our natures, that in a moment can so disfigure us that our nearest friends, wife and children stand afraid and (alarmed) at us. ¹

My father’s cancer had been slowly growing for years: the pain felt in one rib was a small indication of the huge changes taking place in his body. His bones made incredibly fragile through the presence of many tumours, he was made vulnerable to forces hidden within. With the prospect of treatment, more time could be granted. Our family was absolutely elated but fearful. Grieving began upon my father’s diagnosis for life’s fragility was palpable. The dance between fear and elation continued for many years. Seven years after his initial diagnosis, my father died. Only at that moment was I truly aware of the irrevocable nature of death.

This experience of death led me to question the way in which secularized society deals with mortality. In particular how artists can create rituals to provide framework to honour this most universal experience of loss and how visual language can help us deal with this directly.

I would like to begin by outlining the ways in which our secularized western society has medicalised and unwittingly alienated us from intimacy with our processes of death and dying. Our alienation with death further heightens our fear and affects our ability to be present when faced with mortality. Enormous expectation is placed on modern medicines ability to reduce suffering and prolong life. However, scientific advancement does not render us immortal and we must all eventually face the inexorable journey of our bodies’ demise.

The onus that is placed on the medical industry to deal with most matters pertaining to death first occurred during 20th and 21st centuries. In part, this phenomenon occurred due to the significant developments of medical science during this period. Phillipe Aries wrote of the implications for the “displacement of the site of death” ² from the home to the hospital. Where once the hospital was a venue for the impoverished to gain shelter, its role was transformed to a site where one received care and “struggled against death.” ³

I had incorrectly assumed that when my father was dying I would be informed as such. However, due to the success of medical intervention, particularly after a long and protracted

¹ Browne, Sir Thomas, Religio Medici (Religion of a Doctor), 1643.
³ Aries, Phillipe, Western Attitudes Towards Death, p.87.
illness it is sometimes difficult to determine exactly when a patient is dying. 4 Something fell through the cracks—between the optimism provided by medical intervention and the reluctance to face hard truths. The hospital scenario in a way provides the ideal venue to wall away confronting reality.

Advancements in medicine provide enormous benefits, a salvation from the prospect of physical suffering and the potential to prolong life. However, a negative implication is that such emphasis is placed on prolonging life that doing so becomes paramount in importance, even when death could quite possibly be the best outcome. As consequence, important discussions that should take place as part of patient care may be avoided and death denying may occur even at this fundamentally important level.

In his book, Being Mortal, the surgeon Atul Gawande explores the over-medicalisation of aged care and the dying process. He asserts that in his medical training, there was alarmingly little preparation for how to approach the death of a patient. 5 Gawande asserts that even in the industry that deals with death on a daily basis, too little discussion about death takes place. The implications of this means that the dying and the bereaved may be robbed of a good death; one in which the dying and the bereaved feel empowered to make decisions about care and a sense of peace when death occurs. He explains, "Our reluctance to honestly examine the experience of aging and dying has increased the harm we inflict on people and denied them the basic comforts they most need." 6 In order to try and achieve a good death, we must reclaim some of the dying process from the over-medicalised model.

Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Olsen further support the view that science has altered the way we view and deal with death in the text, Life and Death. When the scientific model of preserving life is paramount in importance, it may come at the cost of other valuable experiences relating to death. When lesser value is placed on experiences that lie outside of scientific reasoning, the dying and the bereaved may be left wanting. Lifton and Olsen explain; “The scientific world view has generally been limited to questions of the “means” of life, rather than confronting problems of ultimate value." 7 They support the notion that the unfettered hope we place in science as our salvation can prevent exploring other avenues that reduce psychological suffering.

Post-industrialism has also significantly affected the way in which Western society approaches death. Humans are not bound to live in a village due to the ease with which we can traverse the globe. Families are dispersed and cultural customs can change significantly over a short period of time. Along with a greater belief in Science and a departure from organized religion the

bereaved are often without ritualized customs through which to process experiences of grief. As such, the dying and the bereaved are laid bare to the overwhelming enormity of death. Lifton and Olsen explain the ramifications of this phenomenon. “All of the institutions which throughout history have organized and given meaning to life—family, religion, government, work—are now in crisis.” ⁸ Again, those in the western society are bereft of means through which to process their grief.

In Western society it is considered the norm for the bereaved to return to life as normal once the funeral has taken place; a funeral that quite often the family has largely handed to professionals to organize. The ideal experience of death seems to be one that people should aim to ‘get over’ as quickly as possible. However, if as a society we are to remain connected to one another, we need to acknowledge the importance of accepting death and not denying its existence. Tony Walter discusses the importance of integrating the dead into our lives in order for society to properly function. “How bereaved people integrate the dead into their own lives is central to how society itself perpetuates itself, for if the dead are not integrated then society disconnects from its own past and ultimately from itself.” ⁹

A lack of exposure to death due to it’s medicalisation, along with post-industrialism and the comforts this affords us and a departure from organized religion, further heightens our fear of death and establishes a pernicious cycle of avoidance and denial. Through denying death, we fail to explore the potential of a good death. But what if a better alternative exists? How can our society better cater for this experience that affects all humans? How can we simultaneously harness the positive aspects of the medicalised model and those that focus more so on the individual experience of dying and death? How can we do our best to try to achieve a good death—one that supports both those who are dying and the bereaved?

If current Western attitudes towards death are informed by its medicalisation, belief in science as our salvation and a departure from organised religion, referring to the attitudes of non-Western countries may act as a useful point of contrast.

Travel to Mexico during the Masters program allowed for some insight into funeral practices within Mexican culture. Upon observation of a funeral that took place in Oaxaca, differences in attitudes towards death could be observed with the funeral procession. Funeral attendees were seen wearing colourful clothing, brass instruments played uplifting tunes, but the most significant difference between this funeral and those I had attended in Australia was the way in which the public observed the funeral and the apparent acceptance of this from the bereaved. Heads were not bowed and people spoke and laughed. It was as though, this occasion was not

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⁸ Lifton and Olsen, Living and Dying, p.9.
something that made people assume a way of being particular to the situation, thereby making it appear not particularly separate from everyday life. One explanation for this could be the Mexican belief that the dead are not separated from the living. This means that loved ones never truly die and the funeral denotes a new relationship with the deceased, not a final goodbye. In her book, ‘Days of Death, Days of Life, Ritual in the popular culture of Oaxaca,’ Kristen Norget explains how the bereaved cultivate a relationship with the deceased through incorporating them into their lives.

“In Oaxaca, biological death is not coincident with the extinction of someone’s life as a social actor: the dead continue to exist in the lives of their surviving relatives, and the world of the dead and that of the living are tightly linked in every bit as much as the living-despite the physical disappearance and dissolution of their physical, bodily selves. People do not cease to relate to others after death, but continue to exist somewhere in the social universe-even if no one could say exactly where, geographically speaking.”

Through returning the dead to social actor, Oaxacans find means through which to face the enormity of death. Consequently death does not become a pathological fear and something that should be avoided and thus denied. There presents an opportunity in Mexican culture to maintain a connection with the dead, which then strengthens social ties with the living. Rather than death causing dissolution of community (which can so often occur in the West), Mexican culture allows death to reinforce both collective and individual identity. The notion of returning the dead to social actor is the fundamental axis of rituals surrounding death in Mexican culture. It is this notion that is primary to my concerns and the motivation in my current practice.

Despite the dominant Western view that the dead cease to exist as social actor, examples do exist to suggest the contrary. We can look to the work of psychologist Dr Lorraine Hedtke for example. In her interview, ‘Re-membering Conversations: a Postmodern Approach to Death-Grief,’ Hedtke suggests ways in which the bereaved may find solace in maintaining a relationship with the deceased. Through a series of guided questions, Hedtke, encourages patients to continue a dialogue with deceased loved ones through remembering and re-inserting memories of loved ones into their lives. This act re-establishes the deceased as social actor. She explains:

“And so, if we want to reference Michael White’s article, “Saying Hello Again,” it’s about looking at what’s the other side of the story. Rather than saying goodbye we want to create those stories that are about where do I refresh the relationship with a person who has died, and in

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10 Norget, Kristen, Days of Death, Days of Life, Ritual in the popular culture of Oaxaca, p. 115.
what ways with that relationship continue to be shaped, continue to change, um, continue to become alive, um, even in the face of death. "

Another individual challenging attitudes of death denial is Zenith Virago, who established The Natural Death Centre in Byron Bay and co-wrote the book 'The Intimacy of Death and Dying.' Virago is concerned with how one can aim for a good death. She facilitates experiences with the dying and their loved ones that allow them to confront the fear of death. In doing so, people are more receptive to the positive aspects of dying and death. The legacy of which is grief that does not evolve into trauma and an experience that can be positively transformative.

Virago supports the notion that one of the reasons for which we find death so confronting is that we have very little control over it. Those living in Western society go to great lengths in order to try and control our bodies; it is evident with the fervency that we try and maintain our youth. However, when it is apparent that death is unavoidable, Virago explains ways in which the experience of death can be embraced. She states that in order to try and achieve a good death and a good funeral, the bereaved must aim to be open to the experience. "Preparation, consideration and open dialogue with family and friends are essential elements of both, and they go a long way in making the entire experience one that is easier to bear, more meaningful and appropriate, and even one that offers us useful and sometimes deeply rewarding insights."

There are positive aspects to the dying process. To solely fear death and thus avoid it, robs the individual of the unexpected gifts death may offer. With this in mind, how does image making facilitate and embrace some of the positive experiences that result from death?

"Our lack of meaningful rituals and beliefs makes dying the more desperate and fearsome, and impoverishes life as well."

I propose that image making is a powerful means through which the individual can process experiences of grief and partially reclaim death from it's highly medicated model. Art making can be a form of ritual that honours the dead, bolsters the bereaved and provides opportunity to discuss death.

Again, we can refer to Mexican culture in which preparations for the Day of the Dead ensure depictions of the human skull are displayed widely. So extensive is this imagery, that for the foreigner, the caricature of the human skull is synonymous with Mexico. Death is collectively

12 Leimbach, Claire and McShane, Trypheyena and Virago, Zenith, The Intimacy of Death and Dying, (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2009.), p.1
13 Leimbach and McShane and Virago, The Intimacy of Death and Dying, p.1
embraced and its image brought into the public domain. As Norget explains, “In the days that lead up to the festival, death becomes an omnipresent and oddly celebrated theme; it or, more properly speaking, its icons make appearances in shop window displays, at discos, at parties, in catering establishments and food displays, and in the market.”  
The imagery surrounding death in Mexican culture is evidence of a rich mythology; the legacy of story telling that has been passed from generation to generation. The symbolism of death is indication of an attitude of death acceptance rather than denial.

Mythologies provide comfort for both the dying and the bereaved and provide focus through which people can process their grief and face their fear of death.

Pictured are images from Dia de Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrations in Oaxaca. Death is depicted not in a fearsome foreboding manner, but instead in caricaturised form. Smiling skeletons are adorned with hats and jewellery. Even as a representation of death, the skeleton as depicted in Mexico, is full of life. The location of these smiling representations of death is important, they are positioned in the zocalo or townsquare; the whole community is exposed to death.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’ work with grieving children showed the innateness of processing grief with image making. Working with bereaved children across the world, demonstrated to her the universal need for image making when faced with grief. Visual language is a ready and available vehicle that expresses difficult to discuss concepts, “little children, show in their

16 Lifton and Olson, *Living and Dying*, p.57
pictures that they know they are going to die, and they share their concepts of life and death and unfinished business in their pictures.” 17 Having creative means to process grief and tangible reference point to discuss death, means children are less vulnerable to overwhelming fear of death.

Pictured is a seven year olds collage that depicts her grief for her brother who died age nine months.

![Figure 2](image.png)

The ready means of image making allowed Mary Kate to express her sadness at the loss of her brother; her visual expression giving keen and important insight into her feelings about his death. Having tangible reference to her experience, then presented opportunities to discuss her grief.

Over medicalization of death, a departure from religion and post-industrialism have meant those living in a secularized western society are laid bare to the fear of death. If we are to be present in the face of death, we must develop strategies to do so. Image making provides opportunity for the individual to create personal mythologies, return the dead to social actor and symbolically immortalize the deceased. This act benefits the individual through positively transforming grief. By contributing to the discourse surrounding death, one can subvert the dominant Western tendency to death deny.

Chapter Two – Art Making In The Face Of Fear

To a degree, any form of dying is perceived as absurd, but to live in the face of inevitable death, man requires a sense that his life has continuity and significance. 18

Through the development of works of art, visual artists have opportunity to transform personal grief. This act allows the artist to face their fear of death through giving their lives a sense of ‘continuity and significance.’

Visual artists can play an important role in subverting the dominant western tendency to deny death. Through making tangible their experiences of grief and the exhibition of their works, artists contribute to the discourse surrounding death and bring to the fore the universal experience of grief. This act subverts the over-medicalization of death and has the ability to empower the bereaved and the dying.

The benefit of developing individual expressions of grief through works of art is that they are not strictly tied to a particular tradition. Even when expressions of grief are informed by a particular tradition, the relationship of art making to culture is symbiotic. This means that artistic expressions of grief are forever evolving and forever pertinent to the time in which they are made.

This chapter shall focus on both international and Australian artists whose work contributes to the discourse surrounding death through the following themes;

- Birth, death and life as a continuum
- Art as a tool to assist in the grieving process
- Legacy through memorialization
- Symbolic immortality
- Returning the dead to social actor

The artists have been researched through the lens of Professor Kirsten Norget’s text, Days of Death, Days of Life: Ritual in the Popular Culture of Oaxaca and Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Olsen’s text, Life and Death.

Specifically this chapter draws from Norget’s research on Mexican cultural practices that return the dead to social actor. I propose that artists may return ancestors to social actor through their practice and through the dialogue that ensues. I concur with Norget’s observations of Mexican culture that through maintaining the memory of our late loved ones, society may strengthen

18 Lifton and Olson, Living and Dying, p.9
relationships of the living and through the memorialization of late loved ones, the living, reinforce their sense of identity.\textsuperscript{19}

“Of course, to give such voice or presence to the dead is, in a sense, to return them to life - to bring them from offstage, from the margins of social existence, to centre stage, into the current social life, not as ancestral ghosts of spirits but as persons who linger as present memories and feelings, influencing people’s actions, contributing to their sense of identity and connection. Unsurprisingly, the rites of death are quite important in such context. They are what authorize and cement an understanding of death as social relation; they make manifest some of the ways that relations between the ancestors and those who are not dead respect a logic other than that which imagines that this body is all there is to living.”\textsuperscript{20}

Lifton and Olson’s text, Living and Dying, explores the human need to symbolically immortalize in order to live without an overwhelming fear of death. They assert that there are five “modes” through which this may be achieved. They are, biological (procreation), creative, theological, natural, and experiential.\textsuperscript{21} They emphasise the importance of “historical connection beyond individual life.” as a means of dealing with the anxiety of death.\textsuperscript{22} Through the pursuit of symbolic immortality, the individual may feel connected to their fellow man and part of human flow. “When people believe in such cultural projects and expressions, they feel a sense of attachment to human flow, to both their biology and their history. They feel a sense of immortality which enables active, vital life to go on.”\textsuperscript{23} Artists can achieve this through contributing to the significant history of art making that precedes them and through the sense that they are creating a legacy that will continue once they die.

Lifton and Olsen also recognize the importance of modes of representation changing in order to maintain relevance. They explain, “The struggle is to maintain the meaningfulness of particular expressions of the sense of immortality, or to find new expressions, as historical conditions change.”\textsuperscript{24} Visual artists create means through which to be present with death, this is particularly important due to the departure from religion.

The international artists whose work I focus on are Song Dong, Christian Boltankski, Myako Ishiuchi and the makers of The Names Project, also known as the AIDS Memorial Quilt. The term artist is flexible, as some of the participants may not identify as such. This is particularly the case for Song Dong’s mother, Zhao Xiangyuan, who was vital in the creation of the work Waste Not. It is also the case for the contributors to The Names Project. For me, this

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\textsuperscript{19} Norget, Days of Death, Days of Life, p.116.
\textsuperscript{20} Norget, Days of Death, Days of Life, p.116.
\textsuperscript{21} Lifton and Olson, Living and Dying, p.32
\textsuperscript{22} Lifton and Olson, Living and Dying, p.79
\textsuperscript{23} Lifton and Olson, Living and Dying, p.32
\textsuperscript{24} Lifton and Olson, Living and Dying, p.79
\end{flushleft}
further attests the human need to symbolically immortalise loved ones when faced with overwhelming grief. The urge to make when consumed by grief can be pivotal to the survival of the bereaved and may surpass prior notions of self.

Whilst writing this thesis I had the opportunity to interview contemporary Australian artists whose work has evolved from grief. The following artists generously donated their time and provided valuable insight into the making of their work; Emily O'Brien, Shoufay Derz, Barbara Campbell and Kath Fries. The interview format was important, as by its nature it encouraged discussion about death and in such an exchange, the interviewed artists and I subverted the tendency in Western society to deny death. Each artist has created a visual language by which to discuss death and is actively contributing to the discourse surrounding death.

Connections can be made between the work of Song Dong, Shoufay Derz and Myako Ishiuchi. Each artist places particular importance on using materials imbued with meaning. In Song Dong and Myako Ishiuchi’s work, we see materials that bear the essence of late loved ones and in Derz’s work, we see materials loaded with symbolism. Each artist is concerned with how art making can assist in the grieving process, creating legacy through memorialisation and returning the dead to social actor.

Chinese artist Song Dong’s work, Waste Not is comprised of objects his mother collected and stored in their family home as inspired by the practice of wu jin qi yong, which translates to, waste not. The collection includes neatly bundled fabric scraps, hundreds of shoes, dried bars of used soap, fast food containers, toys, birdcages, flower pots in which the plant has long ago died but the soil remains and furniture that bears the marks of a lifetime of use. The work is also comprised of a section of the wooden frame from Song Dong’s family’s home; this device makes apparent the vastness of the collection and the impact its presence would have had on his family.

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25 Survival in the sense that it may actually save the bereaved life, and/or in the sense that it helps preserves the bereaving individual’s identity.

26 Hung, Wu. Waste Not, Zhao Xiangyuan and Song Dong, p.11
Prior to the inception of the work, Song Dong viewed the mass of objects a nuisance that caused a sense of anxiety. However, through the making of *Waste Not* he came to recognize the evocative nature of the objects as they were imbued with traces of his father. 27 Through transforming the objects from their utilitarian use into artwork, Song Dong transformed the agency of the objects and created a memorial for his father. It could also be seen that Song Dong’s father posthumously contributed in the creation of his legacy.

The making of *Waste Not* had enormous benefit for his mother, who prior to the process had been almost incapacitated by the grief that resulted from her husband’s death. 28 Through the act of making, Song Dong’s mother, Zhao Xiangyuan, found purpose and a means through which she could survive her grief. She and her son devised a way to return her husband to social actor, the act of which strengthened the relationship between the bereaved, as Song Dong’s siblings also contributed to the construct of the work in a variety of ways. 29 In doing so, the family symbolically immortalised the late Song Shiping.

“Through such symbolic communication, historical knowledge was transmitted, moral principles rectified, and social relationships strengthened. One way to see understand *Waste Not*, in fact,

28 Hung, Wu. *Waste Not, Zhao Xiangyuan and Song Dong*, p.17
29 Hung, Wu. *Waste Not, Zhao Xiangyuan and Song Dong*, p.17
is to see it as an artistic/ritual project serving two similar purposes: to preserve historical memory and to enhance social relationships.  

The poignancy of the work is further heightened because Song Dong’s mother has since passed away. Song Dong and his siblings now have opportunity to honour their mother and practice ancestral worship through maintaining *Waste Not.*

Song Dong’s work *Touch My Father,* in which he projects his father’s image from television screen to pot of water, was born out of desire to connect with his father through touch; something cultural custom discouraged when his father was alive. The work is poignant in its ability to both create a sense of his father and concurrently create an illusion. Also in this body of work is a piece in which Song Dong layers projected images of his parents and his daughter. Song Dong has devised a language through which he can introduce his late father to his daughter and foster a relationship between them. As such, Song Dong has memorialized his father and created a legacy that is vibrant and evolving.

![Figure 4](http://www.4a.com.au/dad-and-mum-dont-worry-about-us/)

Sydney based artist, Shoufay Derz has long dealt with death through her practice. During our interview, Derz revealed she too made work and researched death from an academic perspective.

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30 Hung, Wu. *Waste Not, Zhao Xiangyuan and Song Dong,* p.5
31 Hung, Wu. *Waste Not, Zhao Xiangyuan and Song Dong,* p.59
perspective as to try to prepare for her father’s death. Without religious beliefs through which she could process her grief, Derz sought examples to help her do so. In her words, “not coming from a religious upbringing where maybe there is some sort of teaching surrounding death, I was doing my own research, to see how other cultures or societies may approach this difficult topic.”

Derz spoke of prayer being a “form of paying attention” and that for her, art making acted in a similar way. Through making, Derz has developed a “vehicle” which allows her to discuss death and be present in the face of it.

Derz is masterful in imbuing materials with meaning and creating personally derived symbolism that speaks of death and the cyclical quality of life. She uses the colour indigo and the process of its creation for the way it ferments, blooms and transforms colour once it oxidizes. Domesticated silk moths that are blind and have no mouths are representative of darkness and death. In the work, I am death destroyer of words, from the series, Depart Without Return, Derz places the blind moths upon her painted indigo coloured face. She embodies the absence of light and the infinite.33

Figure 5

On the other hand is a sculptural work in which Derz transcribed writing from her late father’s letters to form the word silence. Silence was then carved into a slab of black granite; its heft asserts a physical and psychological presence. Suspended above the slab are two almost human sized fountain pens. The nibs drip indigo coloured ink onto the slab, in the process both revealing and concealing silence.

This work memorialized her father and returned him to social actor, as she explained during our interview; “It was a beautiful kind of materiality to his presence because his handwriting really for me embodied his personality because it’s a unique gesture of that person. In some ways it was a conversion not just of his handwriting but me interacting with that.”

![Figure 6](image)

This work resonates as Derz has captured her father’s unique gesture and suspended it through the chosen materials. By doing so, Derz symbolically immortalizes her father and creates an opportunity through which to continue a relationship with him.

When asked whether her work has stimulated a response or discussion around the topic of bereavement, Derz responds, “I think it has a lot to do with things that we don’t understand, in some way points us in a direction towards understanding it.” The sentiment that art can help facilitate an understanding of bereavement through providing tangible example of these concerns is also a primary driver of my practice.
Japanese artist, Myako Ishiuchi’s photographs have acted as both an intimate memorial to her mother and a memorial for Japan after the atrocity of Hiroshima. Photographing her late mother’s possessions for the series *Mother*, allowed Ishiuchi to return her mother to social actor. The photographed possessions are intimate in nature and show traces of her deceased mother; the most palpable of which is lipstick that has been smoothed into shape, it is evidence of her mother’s touch, and a trace that endures.

The series also includes photographs of Ishiuchi’s mother’s clothing, including lingerie that Ishiuchi has likened to that of a second skin. Ishiuchi has captured her mother’s essence through holding still the image of her earthly remains. This act is particularly poignant as Ishiuchi acknowledged she and her mother shared a troubled past; it was through the act of memorialising her mother that their relationship positively transformed.

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35 [http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2006/10/05/arts/a-daughters-conversation/#.Vb7NJO7Eqqk](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2006/10/05/arts/a-daughters-conversation/#.Vb7NJO7Eqqk)
The objects and people Ishiuchi has photographed in the series *Hiroshima* bear the scars of nuclear disaster. The images include threadbare clothing, singed and transparent when held to the light and lipstick cases that hold the very nearly obliterated ashy remains of lipstick; the last vestiges clinging to a golden case.

Ishiuchi describes the process of making, in which she unfurled a woman’s clothes and evoked a sense of her;

“Gently pressing out the creases on a blouse long folded up, I bring it into the light of the sun shining through a window. For an instant, the polka dots and floral patterns shimmer and the woman who once wore it rises.”

Ishiuchi’s work is powerful for the way materials embody the human form and represent the fragility of life. The act of recording, both people and object, symbolically immortalises them and thus a relationship with these most precious and fragile of things can continue.

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Christian Boltanski and Kath Fries make work that is concerned with the cyclical quality of life and explore this through the themes of birth, death and life as a continuum.

French artist, Christian Boltanski makes work that is concerned with notions of memory, loss, birth, death, momento-mori, legacy and symbolic immortality. His work is often large scale and immersive in nature and this is particularly true of his work, Chance. The work is a machine, comprised of intersecting, kinetic conveyer belts. Depicted on the belts are images of babies as extracted from newspapers; this method of presenting the photos creates a sense of a ‘baby factory.’ The audience has the option of pausing the machine, which draws focus to a single baby; a device representative of the role chance plays in the realisation of each individual’s life.
Either end of the baby conveyer belt are two clocks that count the number of babies born per minute and on the opposite side of the conveyer belt, the number of people who die. This work may be read in a number of ways, and may appear quite bleak in nature, however Boltanski’s intention is an optimistic one. He has stated that comfort can be derived from the notion that ‘things go on’ and life continues despite the death that surrounds us. Boltanski is also interested in notions of symbolic immortality, he explains “The only way to fight dying is through legacy.” Through the act of making, one may aspire to render ones self, immortal. With the aim of the work outliving the artist, the artist aspires to create a legacy.

Sydney based artist, Kath Fries makes work concerned with natural cycles, growth, birth and death, ageing and decline. When her father died suddenly these concerns were heightened and her practice reflected this. During our interview, Fries expressed the significant impact the loss of her father has on her and that art making allows for expression of her grief. As with the other artists researched, Fries

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37 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zJjoLoXdS0 7:25mins
38 http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/10/arts/design/10boltanski.html?_r=0
developed a personal set of symbols that allowed her to express her sense of loss. She spoke of her compulsion to make works of art when faced with grief. She also spoke of the important role art making can play in the grieving process, for it gives opportunity to convey concerns that might be otherwise difficult to express. She explained, “Also it’s just such a powerful life event that does change how you look at life and everything that’s going on around you. (Art) Can express things that are hard to say in words…”

Through her practice, Fries developed symbols that signify loss. For Fries, the magnolia branch is imbued with personal significance as it is linked to familial history. Through the act of making, she transforms the agency of the branch to something that is emblematic of cycles—growth, birth and death, ageing and decline.

In 2010, Fries took part in the Rookwood Sculpture project. The act of making site-specific work in the cemetery transformed the space from one that is potentially foreboding to that which is reinvigorated and enlivened. Again, Fries used the symbolism of the branch to represent her grief. “I tied netting to a tree branch that was burnt on the end. This work was about loss or trying to cling on to things that have passed.”
During her 2015 artist residency in Finland, Fries made sculptures from snow and ash. The forms seem to stand in or be representative of the ephemeral nature of the human body. Fries spoke of her attraction to ash as a medium. “I quite liked how the ash scatters in the wind or even if you just scatter it yourself, it’s quite uncontrollable; it won’t go the way you want.” I was drawn to this statement as it spoke of the dissolution of the human body and the comfort that can be derived from accepting the impermanence of our flesh. For me, it also speaks of death and despite best attempts to control it, we are unable to do so.

Figure 12

Fries acknowledges there are elements of ritual to her practice, even if she does not necessarily see her practice as ritualistic. The process of making allows for a “methodical, physical nature of dealing with materials in a slow contemplative way.” I am particularly drawn to this aspect of Fries work, for working methodically with materials provides opportunity to be present with ideas of loss and present in the face of death.

Boltanski and Fries provide example of the comfort that can be derived through accepting life as a continuum. The dissolution of the body does not always signify an end. Each life affects and informs others and through this a legacy is created.
Barbara Campbell and Emily O’Brien have both used art making as a tool to assist in the grieving process. Both artists are actively contributing to the discourse surrounding death; their desire to do so, apparent through their use of the Internet to disseminate their work.

During an intense period of grieving, Sydney based artist, Barbara Campbell, curated the exhibition *Waiting For the Perfect Fit: the collected materials of Neil Roberts*. The work is comprised of her late husband’s objects and includes his collection of leather aprons, spatulas, trowels and paintbrushes that bear the marks of their use, leather footballs taken apart at the seams and glass objects illuminated in their display box, they evoke a sense of who her husband might have been and in part tell his story.

Campbell’s intervention with the objects is tribute to the artistic partnership she shared with her husband. “…it’s a way for me to have a conversation with Neil about his choices, his materials, his processes and his ideas. It’s a level of engagement that I am very privileged to have.”

Through the collation of her late husband’s possessions, Campbell continued a conversation with him and thus returned him to social actor.

Three years after the death by accident of her husband, the sculptor Neil Roberts (1954-2002), Barbara Campbell began her durational performance project *1001 nights cast*, in which certain aspects of the original 1001 Nights (The Arabian Nights) were rewritten according to the artist’s needs.

personal experience within the wider context of the 2nd Gulf War. Campbell recast herself as a “contemporary Scheherazade who rather than keeps herself from the husband-king’s vengeful knife by telling stories every night, keeps herself from following her husband into death by stories donated by the living.”

Campbell is reluctant to describe her performance as a ritual, because of the term’s loaded history. However, the performance could serve the purpose that a ritual might. This can be seen in the way Campbell used methodical daily practices to bring to mind her late husband; and through this process she created meaning and purpose through which she could survive her grief.

The process of the work would proceed as such. Every morning for 1001 days, Campbell would scour newspapers seeking articles relating to the Middle East and from these she would extract key words that she would translate into small water colour paintings.

She would cast the story into the “ether of the internet” and within only a few hours, writers would respond with a story with word limit of 1001 words.

At sunset, Campbell would begin the live web stream. She would reveal to the camera a numbered tongue stud, the number signifying the start of her performance and chronologically tracking each day during this period; Campbell carried with her physical proof of the number of

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40 http://1001.net.au/about/
days she had been suffering her loss. She would then recite the story the stranger had provided for her.

Available on the site, was the following passage that Campbell described as a “frame story”, its purpose to “contextualize all the subsequent nights’ stories.”

*In a faraway land a gentle man dies.*
*His bride is bereft. She travels across continents*
*Looking for a reason to keep living.*

*Every night at sunset she is greeted by a stranger who gives her a story to heal her heart and continue her journey.*

*She does so for 1001 nights.*

Campbell methodically used stories given to her by strangers, the collaborative process gave focus to her grief and “collectively kept her in the land of the living.”

Melbourne based artist, Emily O’Brien, has used art making as a means to assist in her grieving process, continue a conversation with her late mother and as an instrument through which to discuss grief. These concerns are particularly apparent in her short black and white film titled, *Wash Me and I Shall be Purer than Snow*, for which she was the recipient of the 2012 Cancer Council of Victoria award.
The work depicts O'Brien smearing her torso and face with a black substance. As more of her body is subsumed by blackness, a moving galaxy emerges from within her. The imagery is incredibly evocative of the experience of grief and the sense it can completely consume the bereaved.

O'Brien's grief is clearly evident in the video. To gain insight into such a personal and intimate expression in a vastly public forum is a privilege to behold. O'Brien's willingness to share her experience through her work, speaks of her real desire to bring experiences of grief and death into the public forum. This concern is further supported by the fact the film is readily accessible on the Internet for a wide audience to view.

O'Brien has talked about how her beliefs differ greatly to the Catholic beliefs she was raised with and how the making of the film was an incredibly important part of coming to terms with the loss of her mother. The act of making allowed her to devise a language through which she could process her grief and continue a relationship with her mother. “I never really spoke to her about being an atheist and so my film wash me and I shall be purer than snow was really me trying to have a conversation with her and being able to connect with all my confusion and grief.”

![Figure 16](image-url)
articulate it clearly was through my practice.” Again, we see example of how art making may provide opportunity to face the fear of death, particularly as substitute for religious practices.

O’Brien has stressed her desire for art to act as a means to discuss the oft-avoided topic of death and grief. Through her practice, she has found opportunity to bring to the fore, her personal experience of grief and subvert death-denying tendencies; her tangible expression of grief facilitating conversations about death. “Talking to everyone about their suffering, it was quite special - a life-changing event. People don't talk enough about death and suffering in our community, and that makes it harder to deal with it. Going through this experience has made me more in tune with how much people try to hide, to get on with the day-to-day. Grief is different for everyone; that's one of the reasons we don't talk about it, but it's such an important part of life.”

Campbell and O'Brien have used art of as a means of processing personal grief and in doing so have brought death into the public forum. In Campbell’s case, through a collaborative practice of story telling over a period of time and in O'Brien’s, through her highly personally video work, readily available for a wide audience to see.

Figure 17

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The Names Project also known as the AIDS Memorial Quilt, is a powerful example of memorialization assisting in the grieving process. I felt it important to include this example, for it demonstrates that physical expression of grief is not exclusive to the artist. I am also interested in how individual and intimate expressions of grief may collectively create political statement. En masse the quilts bring death into public domain and offer palpable demonstration of the vast loss of life the AIDS has caused.  

Significantly the AIDS quilts publically acknowledge the lives of people who were and are maligned for the disease they suffered. The power of this expression is two fold; it brings death and particularly death due to a stigmatized disease into view.

Importantly The Names Project is a memorial that is aimed at enacting social change. “Not only did the Quilt serve as a memorial to the dead and a site for ritual mourning, but it also provided an opportunity for protesting the nation’s mismanagement of the AIDS epidemic and rallying more research and support.” This highlights the power the image may have on the conscious and its ability to influence society.

To face fear of death, life needs sense of continuity and significance. Art making can act as ritual or fulfill the role that ritual might in order for the bereaved to present in the face of death. Through returning the dead to social actor, the artist can maintain a relationship with late loved ones. Because artistic expressions of grief are directly informed by the time in which they were made, they maintain relevance. Through making tangible personal expressions of grief, the individual may enact social change by bringing death into the public realm.

42 Pictured is an iconic image of the quilts in which they sprawl the expanse of Washington Square Garden.

Chapter Three - Magical Particle

Like the posthumous soul in ancient Chinese thought, memory disperses if it is no longer attached to something tangible. To keep the soul from disintegrating people consistently evoked it, bringing it back into direct contact with the living world. Thus the central component of ancestral worship—the backbone of traditional Chinese religion—was to make routine offerings to departed family members. It was believed that this practice would provide the living with structured occasions to refresh their memories of the dead, while the invisible soul of the dead would be lured back to its old abode, be it an ancestral temple or a mortuary shrine. Through such symbolic communication, historical knowledge was transmitted, moral principles rectified, and social relationships strengthened.44

Grieving for my father began upon his diagnosis. Without belief in organized religion, or cultural customs through which I could process my grief, I was exposed to the enormity of a fear, which I knew not what to do with. I almost immediately started painting. Painting allowed me to develop language that provided focus for my grief and a tangible expression that spurred questions about death.

Early work (2009-2010) exploring this theme was concerned with quelling my fear of the vast unknown that death presented. The method used was a gentle exposure to these concerns. I took a series of photographic self-portraits and photographs of friends and family as we ‘played dead’. In retrospect, this process was aimed at rehearsing for death. Through imagining and depicting the possibilities of death, I felt as though I could protect myself from my fear.

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44 Hung, Wu. Waste Not, Zhao Xiangyuan and Song Dong, p.5
The photographic portraits would then act as source material for paintings. This practice was concerned with symbolic immortality; painting gave sense that I could hold still the image of loved ones and thus immortalise them.

This process was also concerned with the practice momento-mori, the Latin term, ‘remember that you have to die’ and vanitas. It was a means of engaging with death through tradition and helping one recognize that the experience of death was not unique to our family. For as absurd as it may seem, though having lost friends and family through death in the past, I held stubborn disbelief that my father was mortal.

During this time my work was also concerned with gathering overt portrayals of death. From a supermarket I purchased temporary tattoos that depicted skulls with snakes slithering through eye sockets that lay on a bed of roses. They portrayed death in an absurd, cartoon-like fashion, similar to expressions of death that may be seen in Mexican culture. Despite the absurdity of these depictions they were valuable to my concerns in that they showed ‘death’ in the public domain. I layered the tattoos on Perspex to create a pastiche of death imagery. Along with the tattoos, the pastel and fluorescent colour scheme of these paintings was aimed at adding a sense of brevity to this most fearful experience. Through mocking death I aimed to rest myself from my fear.
I had also chosen these materials for they were very much materials available to the contemporary artist and through this materiality made apparent that image making inspired by death and grief was still occurring despite broader societal attitudes to death.

Figure 22

In 2011, my husband and I drove through the darkness in a desperate attempt to see my father alive, one last time. My father died before we had the chance to see him. As we drove into the night, closer to my sister and mother who had been with my dad when he died, a vision struck me. The vision was of tiny colourful specks of light emanating from my father’s body that were then subsumed by my own. The vision was at once transcendent and exceptionally comforting. At that moment, I sensed that my father as I knew him, a living, breathing human, continued to live but in a different form. In my mind, he was deemed omnipresent and thus he had been immortalised.

The following day my sister shared with me that she too had experienced a vision soon after my father had died, again one of tiny light particles emanating from our father and becoming a part of her. Having shared such a similarly profound experience, despite being separated by one hundred kilometres at the time, further validated what I had seen.
It is not known why this phenomena occurred, there may exist a scientific explanation which would rationalize the experience, however rational notions are not relevant to my concerns. For it is the act of attempting to record this experience that is paramount in importance. Recording this experience ritually honours my father, symbolically immortalises him and allows me to continue a relationship with him.
By the time my husband and I reached my mother and sister, my father’s body had been placed in the morgue. We were discouraged from seeing him in this state as it was deemed too upsetting. Professionals prepared my father’s body for viewing. He was dressed, makeup was applied to his face and he was placed in an open coffin over which stretched a piece of white gauze. The gauze created a barrier so as to prevent us from truly touching dad. And yet again, we were protected from a true representation of death. Despite this censored version of death, seeing dad’s body was an incredibly important part of grieving for him. Upon staring into the coffin it became absolutely apparent that my father was not his body, that whoever my father truly was, he was elsewhere. I spoke to my father’s body as he lay in a coffin in that darkened funeral parlour room. Doing so further cemented to me that he was truly gone, for as much as I tried to evoke my dad through this interaction, his essence had left his body.

This experience grew my desire to capture the transcendent image my sister and I had coined, Magical Particle Transference.
This image largely brought about a departure from the figure to convey my concerns. I had previously used the figure to portray a narrative of the experience, however, it became more than apparent that my depiction of the figure was not successfully portraying my concerns. Prior to my father’s death my work was speculative; I aimed to ease my fear of death intellectually. Only when my father had died was I truly aware of the irrevocable nature of death. I was transformed by this experience; my grief embodied by Magical Particle Transference.

In February of 2014 I gave birth to my son. The thirty-hour long labour was an awe-inspiring experience. Plunged into an unknown for which there is no real rehearsal, I felt a wonderful sense of life’s continuum. That death and birth are inextricably linked, rather than polar opposites. Lifton and Olsen define this experience as experiential transcendence; which occurs when the individual may experience a sense of timelessness. During labour I sensed the possibility of my father’s presence, he was evoked through the mystery presented to me. In response to this experience, I painted the works titled Life Continuum 1 and 2. Exploring both life and death through my work, spurred ideas about legacy.

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45 Lifton and Olsen, *Living and Dying*, p.66
During interview with artist, Shoufay Derz, I discussed how my mother was faced with the decision as to what to do with my father’s clothes due to changed living arrangements. Up until this point, my mother had kept all of my father’s clothing in the cupboard next to hers, just as they had been when he was alive. En mass dad’s clothes took on solid form and when visiting, I would hug them, desperately trying to glean a sense of him. In the process of deciding what to do with dad’s clothes, it was painfully apparent just how important they were. As Isiuchi discusses, clothing can be viewed as a second skin, they are imbued with the essence of the person, and are powerfully evocative. Zenith Virago also discusses the difficulty letting go of late one’s clothes for “they hold the scent of a person and are often the most tangible reminder of their presence.”  

My mother had discussed the possibility of creating a rag rug with both her own and my father’s clothes. The process involves tying and plaiting together strips of fabric to form strands that are then sewn into a rug form. She would then intend to use the rug as one would any other, albeit one, which held great personal significance. I mentioned mum’s project to Shoufay Derz whose reaction to it made me realize the potency of this idea.

This conversation inspired a significant shift in the materials that would best convey my concerns. I began to think about the poignancy of clothing that belonged to our late loved ones.

46 Leimbach, McShane, Virago, *The Intimacy of Death and Dying*, p.203
In my cupboard I held a large plastic bag full of my late mother-in-law’s scarves and saris. They were but a few precious items we had kept after donating and disposing of almost an entire household of my late parent in law’s possessions. As I drew out the collection of clothes, they pressed upon me the presence of my late mother in law, a woman whom I had never met, but very much felt I knew through the telling of her story. This spurred the idea of how I could aim to memorialize our late parents and return them to social actor, particularly for the sake of my son. This work draws similarities to The Shroud of Turin, with a trace of a person evident but not overtly so. In future I intend to further explore the possibilities of this connection.

I began to embroider on black velvet with metallic threads. Black velvet’s texture creates an amazing sense of depth. Embroidering metallic light refractive threads onto the black velvet offered a striking contrast that lent the study a cosmic quality.

The intention was to use threads from my late father, late mother-in-law’s and late father-in-law’s clothing, but through experimentation I realized the importance of using materials that more obviously conveyed my concerns.
Again, I drew from my cupboard my mother-in-law’s clothes and chose a scarf with dimensions similar to that of a human body. It was upon this scarf that I found traces of my mother in law, strands of her long black hair contrasting starkly with the cream woolen scarf. I began embroidering directly onto the scarf; its materiality imbued with my mother in law and painfully her absence.

For a number of months before my Master’s examination I embroidered on this scarf as an almost daily occurrence. Sewing requires methodical practice. In doing so, I bring to mind our late parents, on occasion the experience visceral. Through this practice I may be present in the face of death. To bring clothes into the light, those formerly placed in a cupboard, presents opportunities to discuss our parents. Sewing on my late parents clothing provides tangible means through which I can evoke their spirits. My now 17th month old son is drawn to the materiality of this work. He touches it and I tell him about whom the materials belonged to, it is a way of continuing our late parents story; their legacy ongoing.
Sewing has informed my painting practice and allowed for a shift in the language used. It liberated me from using hardedge geometric abstraction in an attempt to convey the transcendent image I had experienced. The glitter emulsion can be painted onto Perspex freehand and I no longer depend on masking in the creation of the work. I am drawn to working in this more direct fashion, for I feel I can immerse myself more so in the process of making. Again, this is due to experiential transcendence and the “illumination or rapture attained as time seems to disappear.”  

47 In this sense, the making of the work and the vision that inspired it are inextricably linked.

Figure 31

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47 Lifton and Olson, *Living and Dying*, p.66
The kinetic quality of the materials is important as it gives a sense of the painting being animated and lifelike. This kinetic quality is heightened as the viewer moves in front of the work and affects the way light hits the surface; the viewer evokes life in the painting.

I have increased the scale of the work and made the format vertical. This is to emulate the format of the embroidered scarf and for the shape to relate more closely to the human figure. The reflective quality of the Perspex along with the glitter and black background means the viewer’s image is reflected in the artwork. They appear to fragment across the picture plane as the painting subsumes them; they too appear to be comprised of Magical Particles.

Upon seeing my more recent work, my supervisor Lindy Lee, directed me to the Hiroshima shadow photographs. The incredibly sad photos show the aftermath of nuclear disaster, with human bodies reduced to ashy silhouettes. In this sense, the people who fell victim to this atrocity have been immortalized through the photographs, despite their image being tragically abstracted. This resonated strongly with me for the way an image can convey a sense of a person even when not expressed through representational devices.

The pairing of the embroidered scarf and the paintings is concerned with expressing the connectedness of all life. That everything is comprised of matter and in this sense everything in the universe is inextricably linked. Through this notion, we may view all life as omnipresent and immortal. The embroidery portrays an intimate domestic expression of these concerns and the paintings a more cosmic sensibility; cosmic as defined as being immeasurably extended in time.

In May of 2015 my work was exhibited in, Death at Casula Powerhouse. At the exhibition opening, a woman approached me and enquired about the inspiration behind my work. She
cried as I told her about the vision I had experienced. She too had experienced a similar vision after her partner died six months prior. In this moment, the woman and I were able to talk openly about her grief. It has long been my desire for my art to strengthen social ties. The tangible expression of my grief facilitated this meaningful exchange for which I am incredibly grateful. On a number of occasions my work has given opportunity to discuss grief with my immediate family, extended family, artists and people in the broader community. The sharing of these stories has been invaluable, as on occasion, I have found the experience of losing a loved one to be very isolating. Upon sharing my story, I have learned others have felt similarly isolated. It seems the unfathomable hugeness of death, can strike impotence in the bystander and I too have certainly not been immune. I speculate feelings of inadequacy at being able to offer comfort through mere words, leaves some speechless; I too having, regrettably, assumed that silence was preferable to saying the wrong thing. Having tangible means through which to discuss the enormity of death provides opportunity to face the fear of death. Art provides a channel through which meaningful dialogue about death can be shared, this act honours the dead and sustains the living.
Conclusion

Over-medicalisation of death has unwittingly alienated those in Western Society against the process of dying. A departure from organised religion and the affects of post-industrialism on cultural practices, mean those living in the west are bereft of ways to process death. This has established an expectation that death is entirely fearsome, leading to a pernicious cycle of denial and avoidance.

We need strategies to help us be present in the face of death. Through this presence we create the possibility of a good death and may be receptive to the gifts death brings. Art making is one such strategy that allows us to be present in our grief.

The researched artists have demonstrated how art making can positively affect grieving through processes that honour the dead and strengthen social ties between the living. Through their practice, the artists familiarise themselves with death and accept rather than deny death.

Through using materials imbued with the essence of late loved ones, Song Dong and Ishiuchi Myako return the deceased to social actor and create legacy through memorialization. In doing so, they heal and foster relationships between the living.

Shoufay Derz uses materials loaded with personal symbolism to speak of death and grief. Through making tangible expressions of grief, she brings the oft-avoided topics of grief and death into the public domain.

Barbara Campbell used her late husband’s possessions to return him to social actor and in doing so ensured she stayed in the land of the living. Campbell also established a practice that may stand in for ritual, in doing so she found means to survive her grief.

Emily O’Brien’s urge to make art after the death of her mother gave focus to her grief. This was a vitally important process in the absence of religious belief. Through her work being readily available on the Internet for a wide audience to experience, she actively contributes to the discourse surrounding death.

Christian Boltanski and Kath Fries practices explore birth, death and life as a continuum. Boltanski’s work gives sense that each life affects and informs others. Through this notion, the individual is immortalised through the legacy one creates. Fries methodical work with materials acts as ritual to bring to mind her late father and allows her to be present in her grief. Through creating symbolism that is rich with familial history, she continues a relationship with her father.

Creative processes that return the dead to social actor allow the artist to continue a relationship with late loved ones. When the dead are returned to social actor there is opportunity for social ties to be strengthened rather than broken. Through this act, the fear death evokes is less catastrophic.

Through making tangible their experiences of grief, artists contribute to the discourse surrounding death; the difficult to breach topics of death and grief are made more accessible.
through the reference of art. Through their contribution to the discourse surrounding death, the artist may partially reclaim death from its over-medicalisation.

My artistic practice has in part provided an avenue through which to process personal grief. In a sense, it allowed rehearsal of grief. Once truly aware of the irrevocable nature of death, art making bolstered me further still. Painting and sewing have provided methodical focus to my grief and an opportunity to return late loved ones to social actor. The implications of this act have strengthened social ties within our family and there is evidence of it strengthening ties in the wider community.

It is important to continue developing expressions of grief, the language informed by the time in which it is made. Through making relevant expressions of grief, the artist has opportunity to contribute to and promote discussion about death. In this act, death is accepted rather than denied.
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| 5 | 14 |
| Shoufay Derz  
*I am death destroyer of words*  
Archival print on cotton paper, custom made cedar frame, stained natural indigo  
104 x 111 cm  
Camera work assisted by Caterina Pacialeo.  
Source: [http://www.shoufay.com/depart1a.html](http://www.shoufay.com/depart1a.html) |
| 6 | 15 |
| Shoufay Derz  
*On the other hand*  
UTS Gallery  
2013  
Indigo, blown borosilicate glass, gold plated glass, black granite, black Chinese ink  
186 x 48 x 5 cm, vertical dimensions variable.  
Photo: David Lawrey  
| 7 | 16 |
| Ishiuchi Myako  
*Mother’s #38*  
2000-2005 |
Figure 8
Ishiuchi Myako
*Mother’s #49*
2000-2005
Source:
https://www.google.com.au/search?q=miyako+ishiuchi+mother%27s&espv=2&biw=1337&bih=718&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0CAUYQ_AUWoVChMIqsj7wNWRxwIVwiymCh0Vgg SJ#imgrc=dQyxzGZBExKwkM%3A

Figure 9
Ishiuchi Myako
ひろしま/hiroshima #13
2007
Donor: Yazu, I.
Source:
https://www.google.com.au/search?q=miyako+ishiuchi+hiroshima&imgrc=Ia_nDHpra77WdM%3A

Figure 10
Christian Boltanski,
*Chance*
Installation view at Carriageworks, Sydney, 2014.
Photographer: Pedro de Almeida

Figure 11
Kath Fries
*Hold dear*
Bronze magnolia branch, nylon netting and charcoal,
dimensions 200 x 600 x 300 cm
2011

Figure 12
Kath Fries
*Palisades*
Snow and ash
Finland
2015.
Source:
https://www.google.com.au/search?q=ka+fries+artist+snow&espv=2&biw=1337&bih=718&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0CAUYQ_AUWoVChMIqsj7wNWRxwIVwiymCh0Vgg SJ#imgrc=QUSz-u41jWOQ6M%3A

Figure 13
Barbara Campbell
*Story for performance #382*
Watercolour on paper
Source: http://1001.net.au/story/382

Figure 14
Neil Roberts (curated by Barbara Campbell)
*Aprons display*
2004
Photographer: David Paterson
Collection of Brett Weinke (gifted 2004)

Figure 15
Emily O’Brien
Wash Me and I Shall be Purer than Snow (video still)
2012
Source: https://vimeo.com/35314340

Figure 16
Emily O’Brien
Wash Me and I shall be Purer Than Snow (video still)
2012
Source: http://seventhgallery.org/category/the-night-screen/

Figure 17
Photo: Names Project Foundation
Source: http://newsdesk.si.edu/photos/aids-memorial-quilt-names-project-foundation-displayed-national-mall-1987

Figure 18
Helen Shelley
Immortality Without the Assistance of God no.7,
oil on Perspex, 95x75cm, 2009.

Figure 19
Helen Shelley
Immortality Without the Assistance of God no.8,
oil on Perspex, 95x75cm, 2009.

Figure 20
Helen Shelley
Immortality Without the Assistance of God no.19,
oil and acrylic on Perspex 45x35cm, 2009.

Figure 21
Helen Shelley
Immortality Without the Assistance of God no. 18
Oil, acrylic and temporary tattoos on Perspex, 45x35cm, 2009.

Figure 22
Helen Shelley
Death Proof no. 4
Oil and acrylic on Perspex 62x62cm 2010

Figure 23
Helen Shelley
Grief, Magical Particle Transference
Glitter and acrylic on Perspex 112x112cm 2013
Figure 24
Helen Shelley
*Life Insurance no.7*
Acrylic on Perspex
112x112
2012

Figure 25
Helen Shelley
*Magical Particle*
Glitter and acrylic on Perspex,
113x68cm
2013

Figure 26
Helen Shelley
*Life Continuum no.3*
110x110cm
Mixed media on Perspex
2014

Figure 27
Helen Shelley
*Life Continuum no.2*
110x110cm
Mixed media on Perspex
2014

Figure 28
Helen Shelley
*Black velvet embroidery study*
Velvet and metallic thread
40x40cm
2014

Figure 29
Helen Shelley
*Our Parents Scarf* (detail)
Late mother in law’s scarf and hair, late father’s shirt and metallic thread
200x90cm
2015

Figure 30
Helen Shelley
*Our Parents* (detail)
Late mother in law’s scarf and hair, late father’s shirt and metallic thread
200x90cm
2015

Figure 31
Helen Shelley
*Life Continuum no.1*
40x30cm
Glitter emulsion on glass
2014

Figure 32
*Magical Particle, Life Continuum no.1*
Glitter emulsion on Perspex
160x110cm
Figure 33
Hiroshima shadow photograph
1945
Photographer unknown
Source:
http://worldwar2database.com/gallery/wwii1439
Bibliography


