



University of Brighton

JULES FINDLEY

FRAGMENTATION

Autoethnographic research into the symbolic and haptic value of paper crafting in understanding grief

RESEARCH OUTPUT



...without a Body
Installation view of the 286
bodies individually made from
paper-based clay

***Fragmentation* was a set of three experimental paper-based artworks developed through autoethnographic practice. Exhibited in the UK and abroad, the individual installations were titled '...without a Body', 'Fragmented Portrait Series' and 'Edge of Grief 1, 2 and 3'.**

The artwork '...without a Body' was the creation and installation of 286 four-inch, hand-formed clay figures laid out on the floor in rows of seven bodies. The genderless figures were shaped into sleeping positions. Made from unfired paper clay, they were rendered fragile and certain to gradually disintegrate with time, and were first exhibited at *Transgender, Gender & and Psychoanalysis, An Exhibition* between 5 - 12 March 2017 at the Drapers Hall, London.

'Fragmented Portrait Series' experimented with sewing fragments of handmade paper fragments together and then painting on this surface in watercolour, rendering a fragile surface and a picture likely to fade. These were first exhibited at the Dyson Gallery Royal College of Art, Battersea, London, between 11 - 13 April 2018.

'Edge of Grief 1, 2 and 3' was an installation of hanging paper fragments created in a space to be walked around and explored in varying light. The final version was exhibited at the International Paper Biennale in Shanghai (10 September - 10 November 2019).

Fragmentation responded to complicated grief, a term for acute grief which can become a chronic, debilitating mental health condition that worsens over time. Using experimental handmade papers developed in the domestic environment, the work drew on the symbolic and haptic value of paper to reference fragility and fragmented being.

Findley undertook exhibitions during the development of the experimental autoethnographic practice, bringing preliminary versions of these works to group work-in-progress exhibitions at the Dyson Gallery, Royal College of Art, Battersea, in 2015 and 2016.

Fragmentation



...without a Body
Close up of one of the four-inch
figures, handmade out of
paper-based clay

Fragmentation



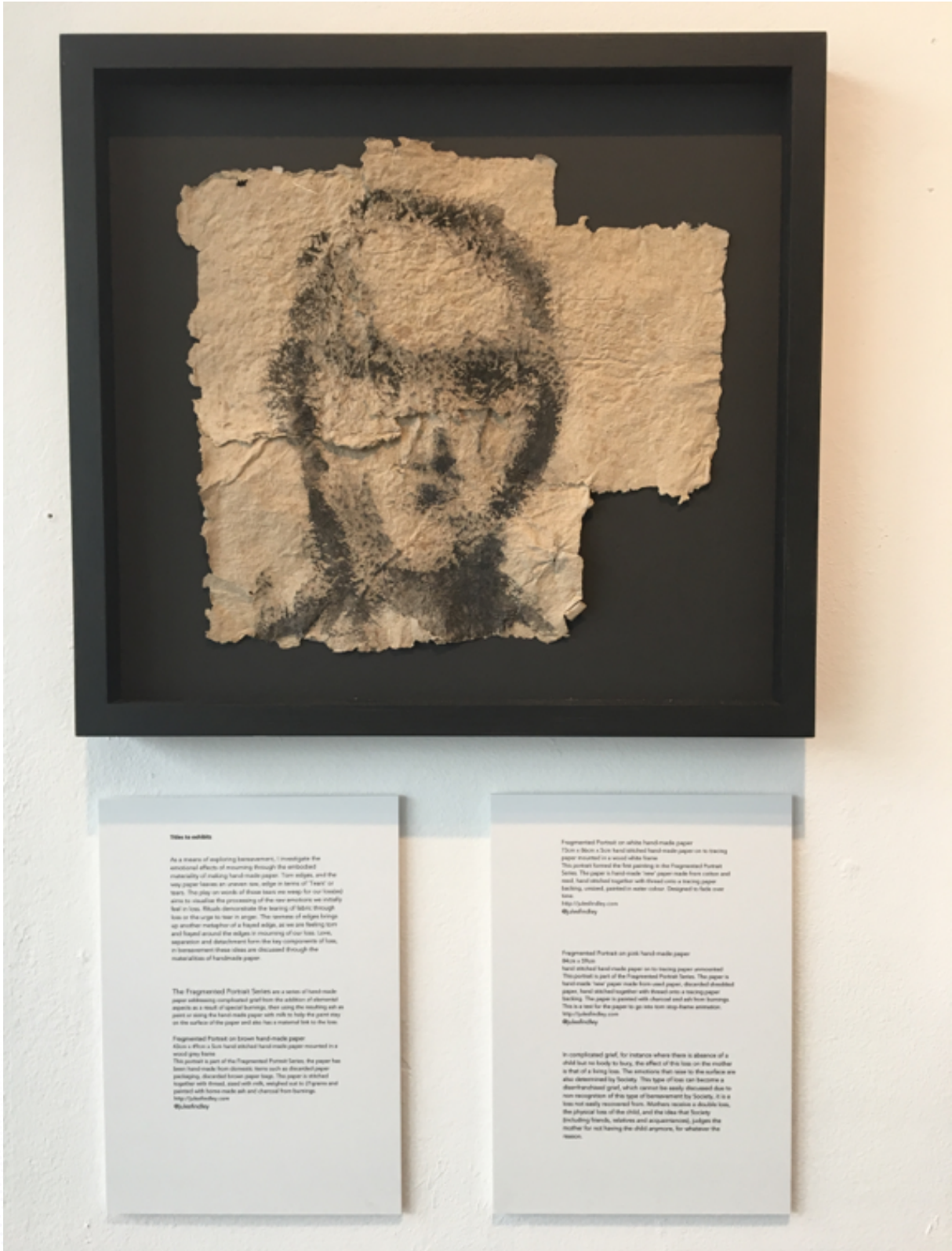
Fragmented Portrait Series
Stitched fragments of handmade,
unsized paper fragments
and watercolour
Framed in wood without glass

Fragmentation



Fragmented Portrait Series
Stitched fragments of handmade,
unsized paper fragments
and watercolour
Framed in wood without glass

Fragmentation



Fragmented Portrait Series
Installation view, framed in wood
without glass

Fragmentation



Edge of Grief 1, 2 and 3
Installation view of top-lit
hanging paper fragments
offering an invitation to
touch and interact

Fragmentation



Edge of Grief 1, 2 and 3
Installation view of top-lit
hanging paper fragments
offering an invitation to
touch and interact

RESEARCH QUESTIONS



...without a Body
Detail of handmade, unfired,
four-inch figures made out of
paper-based clay

The research asked an open question as to the nature of complicated grief and the factors of time that increase rather than decrease that grief.

It specifically referenced grief for those lost without accessible physical remains. In this context the research sought to understand the importance of both ritual and the emotional replacement of the absent body.

The exhibitions invited an audience to help formulate responses that would bring understanding to the complexities of grief and offer insights into the following questions:

- How can the expression of complicated grief through creative, embodied encounters provide a ritual which contributes to the healing process?
- To what extent does an exhibition of works made through an autoethnographic process offer the opportunity to broaden societal understanding of grief and mourning?

RESEARCH CONTEXT



**Edge of Grief 1, 2 and 3
(detail)**

International Paper Biennale
New Fengxian Museum
Shanghai, China

10 September - 10 November 2019

Findley's mixed-media practice emerges through autoethnographic explorations; she considers loss and bereavement and the emotions that contribute to this life-changing event, recognising personal feeling in a context of global and historic ritual.

Underpinning this research was an investigation of public attitudes and cultural dialogues around death and loss. Findley particularly focused on two of the least talked about deaths in England and Wales: the death of a child, and young (usually male) suicide. In these types of bereavement, complicated grief can subsume parents; the grieving process becomes debilitating and ongoing.

Findley built on an established connection between paper and mourning ceremonies, investigating, for example, the paper offerings that are burned at Taoist funerals. This contributed to the evolution of a process of making as, in part, a ceremony of mourning. It also evidences that paper has a symbolic status in bereavement and mourning.

Context is also provided through the traditions of craft and the importance of repetition in learning and in making. Findley developed the repetitive practice of handmaking and sculpting paper, discovering that it at once embodied this perpetuation of grief and provided a channel for it.

Findley's work takes into account recent developments in reflective practice and autoethnography (Pink, 2009) and the emergence of feminist thinking on affect and the domestic environment (Briganti and Mezei, 2002; 2011). Her experimental papermaking also drew on recent understanding of the value and potential of play, through which judgment is suspended (Sicart, 2014).

RESEARCH PROCESS

Findley's work drew on autoethnographic explorations, working as an artist and maker through the experience of grief. Using the historic and symbolic values inherent in paper, she developed routines of making within an experimental framework, evaluating a series of mixed methods including: heurism, autoethnography, repetition, play and the suspension of judgement, reflective practice, prototyping, affect and empathy.

Her experiments in handmade paper were predicated on the domestic environment as a site and source of grief. She made the paper using kitchen implements and, for example, milk as an experimental sizing agent, reinforcing a specifically maternal grief and response. The unfired clay used in '...without a Body' is also paper-based. Experimental making from paper meant production with low success rates as well as the inherent fragility of the material produced. Crafting with this method also meant Findley was imprinting her DNA into the materials.

Findley's particular focus was on grieving for the death of a child where there is no body, and consequently no possibility of closure. Over a period of three years, Findley made 286 clay figures, considering the symbolic value of producing objects through the grieving process and the psychological weight of absence. Hanging installations of ragged and distressed paper and fragmented portraits were also found to be symbolically loaded, expressing the connections lost through bereavement as well as fragility.

The fragments were made by shredding handmade paper and hanging each fragment individually with monofilament. As with the sculpting of clay figures, Findley took on a process which investigated the repetitive motion of making, recognising ritual motion and the use of natural materials as aids in recovery from grief, processes which focus the mind on the intricate, and offer healing through repetitive action.

Examining the process of making and dealing with the display of these manifestations of grief provided an invitation to discuss bereavement and an opportunity to grieve reflectively. Audiences were given the opportunity to respond to the artworks in the context of different exhibition spaces.



(top) **Making paper in the domestic environment**

(bottom) **Sample handmade paper**
Findley lost many efforts to the process of experimentation.

(overleaf) **The studio in the domestic environment**
Using milk as a size in order to be able to paint on the paper.

Fragmentation



Fragmentation

**University of Brighton
School of Art and Design**
Findley held papermaking workshops for second year undergraduates in 2015 and 2016. Sharing the experiential craft with student groups brought important feedback on the understanding of the hand in making, the hand cerebral connection, biomimicry and using embodied materiality.



Handmaking paper in a domestic environment



Fragmentation



(left) Handmade figures are transported from the site of making using domestically sourced packaging

(below) Experimenting with alternative settings
Letting the bodies go and considering natural disintegration
Chichester, August 2016



Fragmentation



'...without a Body'

Preparatory installation view,
laying out the figures for work-in-
progress delivery of paper-clay
figures at *Gender Generation: The
Creative Process in Art and Design*
Dyson Gallery, Royal College of Art,
Battersea, 8 - 9 September 2016

Fragmentation



Detail of handmade paper used for Fragmented Portrait Series
This was then drawn upon using handmade charcoal and paint
made from ash from domestic burning

RESEARCH INSIGHTS



Fragmented Portrait Series
Dyson Gallery, Royal College of
Art, Battersea, London
April 2018

The practice in *Fragmentation* provided insights into the experience of complicated grief and bereavement and the means through which craft or making can help manage the grieving process.

Findley underwent an examination of personal suffering, considering as an experienced craftsperson where the experience could be better understood in a context of creative activity and product. She reinvested routine actions in grief with new meaning, highlighting the relevance of repetitious actions as a means of focus and mindful easing. Her work also demonstrated the resonance of symbolism and the physical properties of materials prepared and used, reflecting upon and developing cultural and historical traditions of grieving.

Fragmentation demonstrated the ways in which craft can communicate fragility, particularly through specific choices in the early stages. Findley's experiments with papermaking in the domestic environment and the resonance of maternal experience revealed the importance of detailed and specific material histories in the evolution of emotionally-grounded craftwork.

Fragmentation



By creating an exhibition of artistic autoethnography, Findley was able to examine how the feeling of complex grief might be communicated to new audiences, and by breaking the silence surrounding complex mourning, she enabled discussion of the differing patterns of complicated grief and the effects of less well-known aspects of mourning.

Feedback was invited from visitors to the public exhibition at the Royal College of Art and provided insights into the way in which public art is able to unlock feelings of grief which other ways of communicating are unable to do, by allowing the viewer to first abstract their own feelings and examine them in relation to the work they are observing.

The following instructions accompanied the *Edge of Grief* exhibition, and below are a number of the responses from visitors, given anonymously, and demonstrating the ways in which viewing this work enabled them to confront their own feelings of grief:

Absent

New figures, modelled with knowledge based on
'...without a Body'
Displayed online when Findley was artist in Residence at Digital Artist Residency DAR

Edge of Grief 1, 2 and 3

Looking at torn edges of paper in the exhibition reminds us of the raw feelings we have for our loved ones and the fragility of our relationships in life. It is intended by the artist and researcher these art pieces be interactive and you are invited to comment on how the making affects your feelings and expressions of loss.

The comments below are a selection of those collected:

'The flakes of torn paper like falling words flutter helplessly like me 'undone by grief'. As my mother falls, I cry, and then know that we are all falling, gently downwards, throughout living. Your beautiful, delicate piece gives space and time to allow me to revisit this memory and these thoughts, usually locked, hidden away from harm of daily life.'

'There is an initial feeling of shock or trauma but then the rawness seems to seep in and engulf you. I have found that the 'grief journey' takes its own path and you have to go with it. It can be surprising and not what you expect.'

'For my grandmother, I remember her last moment, how protective of me she was right at the end. How her memory, or my memory of her, strikes hard at different moments. Edges touching each other or seeming to touch. The movement of the piece is very interesting.'

'I worry about the Yes/No. I would share my grief, but not widely. My grief is mine. Not all conversation or sharing is good. Art is only good in the abstract, not in the particular.'

'These pieces of paper hanging on a line as if like ourselves, hanging on - not knowing what is coming next -will we die in 1-2 years or in 10 years?'

'It seems that there is still unity amongst the fragments. When I first saw this piece, I came at it from the side of two flat lines of fragments and it seemed like I was blocked - hit a wall. When I walked through and encountered the diagonal piece, it was like I was within the space - it did not conjure up grief but despair.'

'My loss is what fear of the future loss causes in the present.'

'I was able to use the piece to think of my Mum - like flakes of paper rising from a fire.'

'There is a sense of space, still being filled by the one you lost. It's gone but still present, in fragments perhaps. Or we are left in fragments not knowing how to put the pieces back together because we are left so vulnerable and lost?'

'We all have to deal with them and can feel lost about it, so it is a good thing to share/express. Like any other feeling expressed in art.'



Edge of Grief 1, 2 and 3
Work-in-progress exhibition with
visitor feedback
Dyson Gallery
Royal College of Art
Battersea, April 2015

DISSEMINATION

The artworks in Fragmentation were exhibited as follows:

Developmental and work-in-progress

Work in Progress show. (January 2015) Gulbenkian Hall, Royal College of Art, Kensington.

Royal College of Art interdisciplinary competitive biannual exhibition 2015. (18 - 25 April 2015) Dyson Gallery, Royal College of Art, Battersea, London. <http://lie.rca.ac.uk/exhibition/>

Gender Generation: The Creative Process in Art & Design. (September 2016) Dyson Gallery, Royal College of Art, Battersea, London. <https://www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/gender-generation-explored-rca-fine-art-conference-and-exhibition/>

Research presentation

Transgender, Gender & and Psychoanalysis, An Exhibition. (5 -12 March 2017) Drapers Hall, London. <https://www.artlyst.com/whats-on-archive/transgender-gender-psychoanalysis-exhibition/>

Jules Findley, Artist in Residence at Digital Artist Residency (1 -30 September 2017) working with Linda Duvall in a project called 'Conversation Overseas', which considered maternal loss and the unresolved grief of distraught mothers who lost their children in the Child Migration Programme between England, Canada and Singapore. <https://digitalartistresidency.org/artists/jules-findley/>

'Fragmented Portrait Series', (11 - 13 April 2018) Dyson Gallery, Royal College of Art, Battersea, London. Embodied Materiality Symposium 12 April 2018 <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/embodied-materiality-symposium-rcaffect-tickets-44907919797>

International Paper Biennale (10 September - 10 November 2019). New Fengxian Museum, Shanghai, China. <https://culture360.asef.org/news-events/shanghai-international-paper-art-biennale-2019/>



Edge of Grief 1, 2 and 3

Installation view with visitor interaction
International Paper Biennale
New Fengxian Museum, Shanghai, China
10 September - 10 November 2019

(overleaf)

Publicity for *International Paper Biennale*
New Fengxian Museum, Shanghai, China
10 September - 10 November 2019

Fragmentation



Fragmentation

TRANSGENDER, GENDER & PSYCHOANALYSIS

AN EXHIBITION



Invitation to the Private View

Sunday 5th March 2017 4pm - 6.30pm

(exhibition will run 6th March until 12th March 11am - 6pm)

Draper Hall Hampton Street London SE17 3AN

a short walk from Elephant and Castle underground and mainline train station

This exhibition is part of the conference fringe week
The Site for Contemporary Psychoanalysis www.the-site.org.uk

Susu Laroche | Rosemary Cronin | Gili Avissar | Kika Nicolela | Jade Chorkularb | Olga Guse | Celia Dearden-Briggs
Susan Plover | Hattie Salisbury | Sally Jones | Jenny Meehan | David Westwood | Charlotte Bill | George Blair
Chloe Chow | Rachel Ara | Mars Gomes | Dave Lem | Richard Ansett | Daisy Pooley-Tolkien | Diane Eagles | Aziza Mills
Jules Findley | Lorna Giezot | Cecilia Bullo | Katherine Sullivan | Mandy Wax | Spencer Rowell | Laura Chernaik

Publicity for *Transgender, Gender & Psychoanalysis, An Exhibition*

Exhibition in conjunction with the Freud Museum and the *International Conference into Transgender, Gender and Psychoanalysis*
Drapers Hall, London, 5-12 March 2017

REFERENCES

Briganti, C. and Mezei, K. (2002) 'Reading the House: A Literary Perspective'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 27(3), pp. 837-846.

Briganti, C. and Mezei, K. (2011) 'Designs for Living: Female Designers, the Designing Female, Modernism and the Middlebrow'. *Modernist Cultures*, 6(1), pp.155-177.

Pink, S. (2009) *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. Newbury Park CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Sicart, M. (2014) *Play Matters*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

(overleaf)
Edge of Grief 1, 2 and 3 (detail)

Fragmentation

