



University of Brighton

JANE FOX

MOURNING STONE

Using drawing to investigate the internal and relational changes prompted by grief

RESEARCH OUTPUT



Wind Drawing
Crowlink, East Sussex

Mourning Stone is a body of drawings, photographs and notebooks first exhibited 21-25 January 2019 at the *Kunstnerisk forskningsuke* [Artistic Research Week], Gallery Seilduken, Oslo National Academy of the Arts <https://khio.no/en/events/755>.

The drawings were the output from a programme of autoethnographic research aiming to understand processes of grief. They were created over several years, grouped into a three-part series, 'Wind Drawings', 'Distance Drawings' and 'Scrub Drawings'.

At the *Kunstnerisk forskningsuke* exhibition, the research joined work by artist Duncan Bullen and theorist Philippa Lyon under the title 'Touching the World Lightly', and was accompanied by a talk, 23 January 2019.

The process of development included a number of landmark iterations including presentation, publication and exhibition of aspects of the research. These included a conference paper (Falmouth University, 2015), artist talks (in Brighton galleries in 2018 and 2019), a collaborative peer-reviewed journal article (Bullen, Fox and Lyon, 2016) and a co-authored book chapter published in 2019 (Fox and Moriarty, 2019).

Mourning Stone



Wind Drawings

Wind drawing and text ball layers
Witterings, West Sussex
August 2016

See detail of surface overleaf

Mourning Stone



Wind Drawings
(above)

Wind drawing and text ball layers
(detail of surface)
Witterings, West Sussex
22 August 2016

(right) Wind drawing with
text ball, 6.4 mph west
(detail)
Cuckmere Valley, East Sussex
23 September 2015



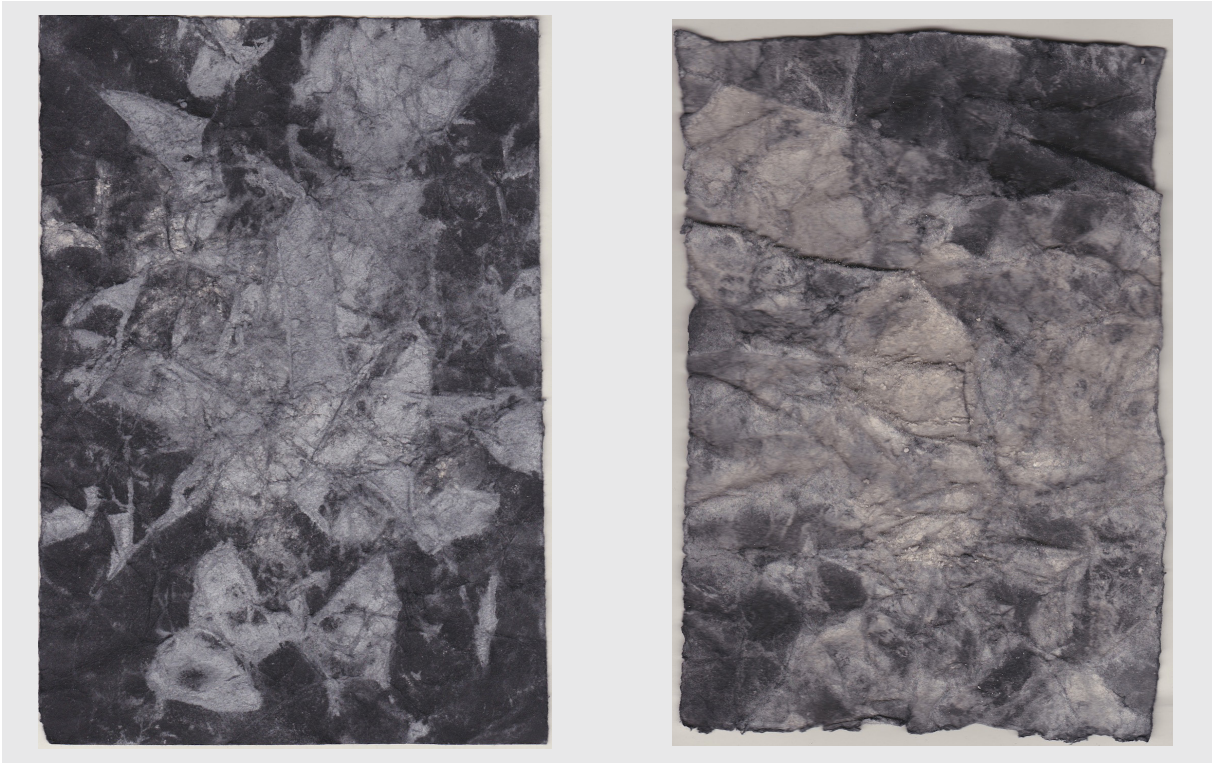
Mourning Stone



Distance Drawings

A distance drawing from
Oxtedde Bottom looking back to
Mount Caburn, 27 March 2015

Mourning Stone



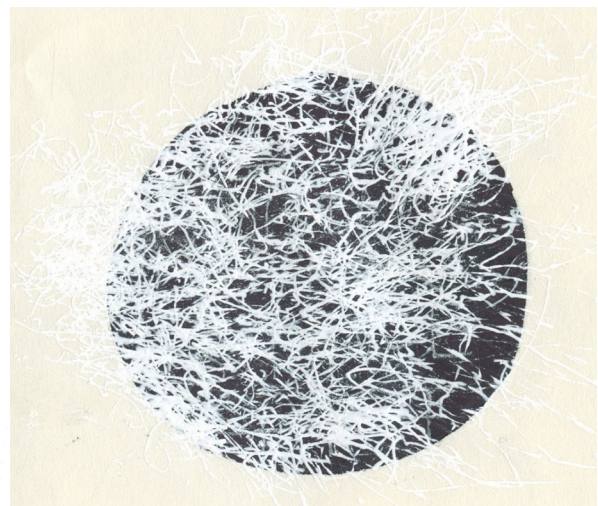
Scrub Drawings

Drawings 1 and 2 from
16 scrub drawings (2016-17)
Made on chalk footpaths Kingston
Ridge, Cuckmere Valley and
Mount Caburn, Sussex

Mourning Stone

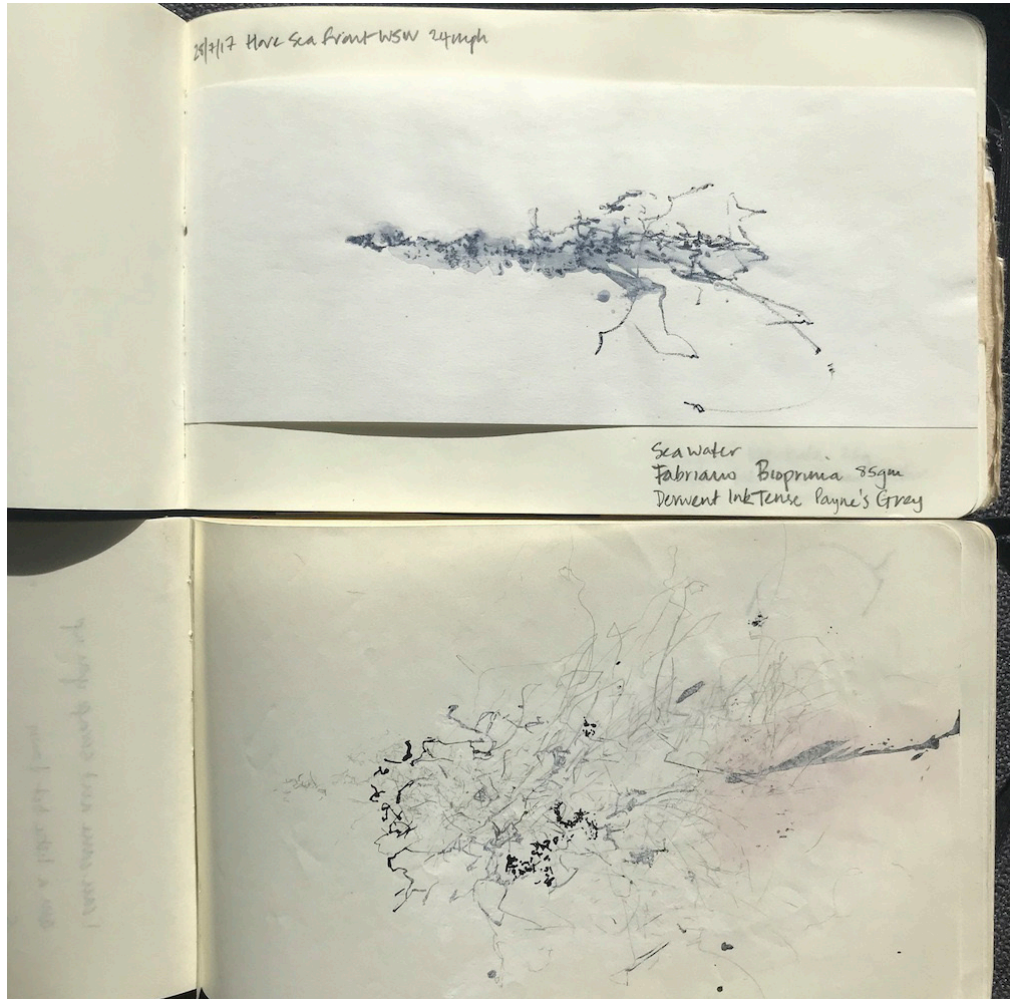


Wind Drawings
Drawing 1 from
series of 8 wind drawings
made in August 2013
22.5 x 22.5cm



Wind Drawings
Drawings 1 and 2 from
series of 8 wind drawings
made in August 2013
22.5 x 22.5cm

Mourning Stone



(above) **Two pages from
Three Notebooks**
2016-19

(below) **Distance Drawings**
Made on the pathways between Mount Caburn,
Lewes and Kingston Ridge, Sussex. 2015-2017

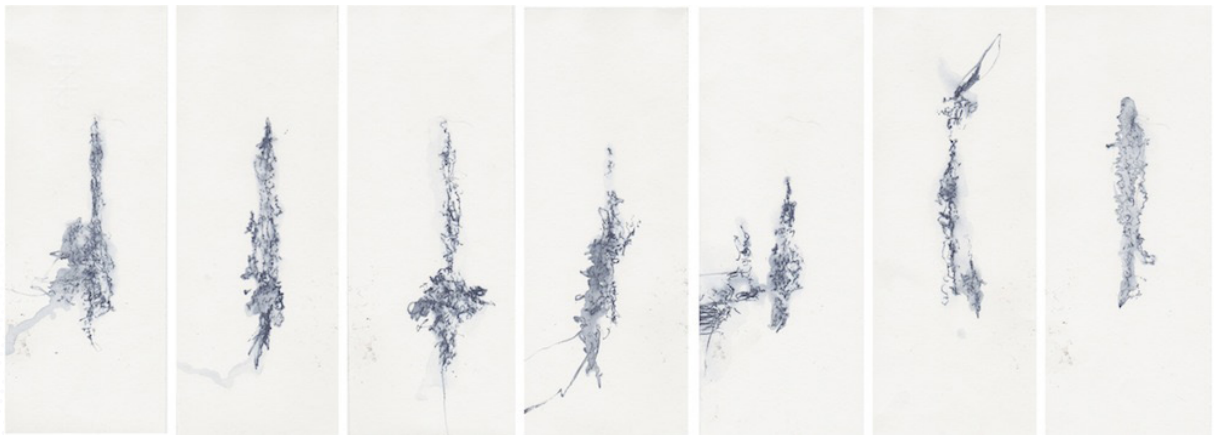
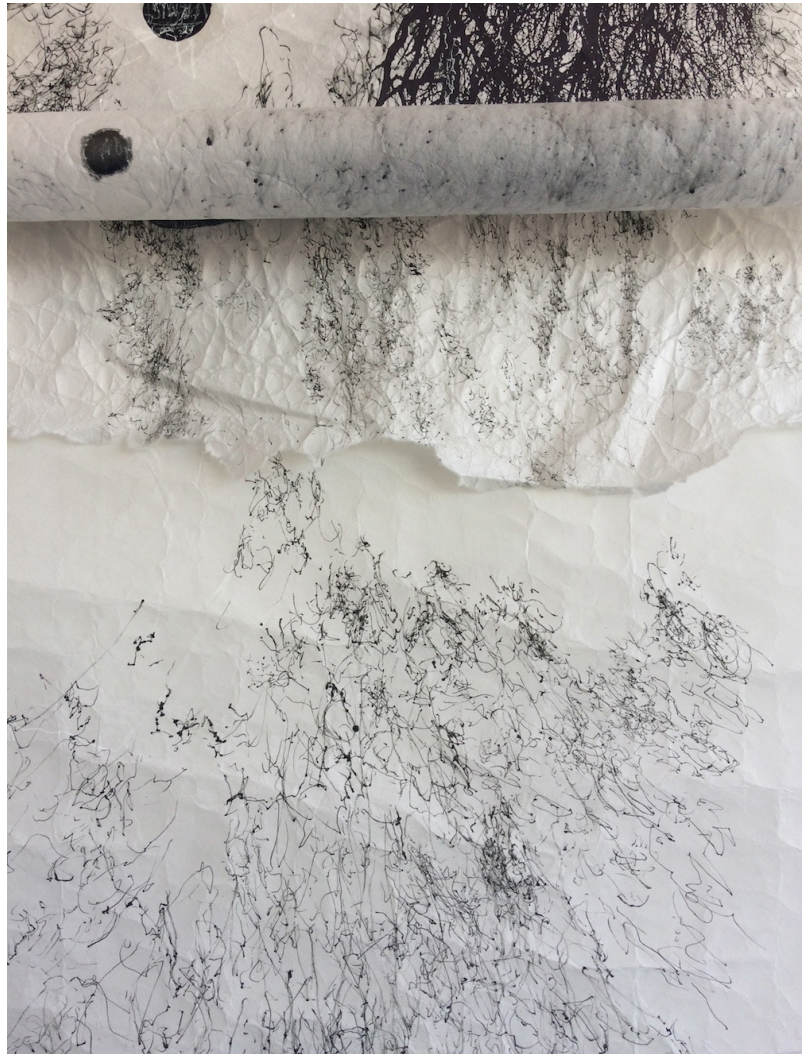


Mourning Stone

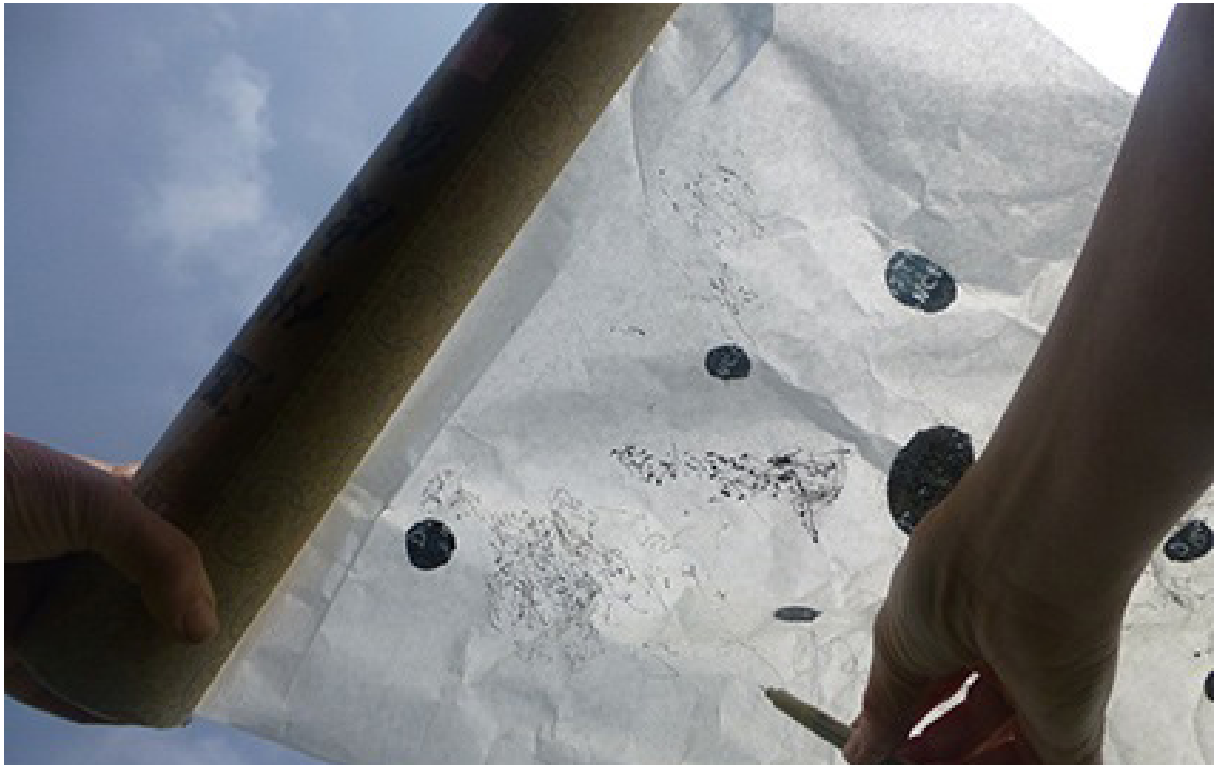
Wind Drawings

(top) Two large wind drawings
46 x 100cm
Made at Witterings, West Sussex
2016

(bottom) Examples from series of
30 one-minute wind drawings
21 x 9cm
Made over 30 minutes in different
locations 2017-2018



RESEARCH QUESTIONS



Fox undertaking a
wind drawing

The overarching motivation for the research was to unravel new and 'intuitive' ways of applying artful skills in the making of a 'territory' within which to acknowledge, explore and articulate the internal and relational shifts and changes prompted by grief.

This was rooted in the experience of and engagement with a specific landscape, leading to the research questions:

- In what ways do artists use the materials around them to improvise with purpose in the face of life-changing events?
- How can walking in a particular landscape and the development of a visceral and touch-based drawing practice connect with and articulate grief?

RESEARCH CONTEXT



Photograph taken by Fox during autoethnographic drawing research

Drawn to walking in the South Downs chalk landscape after bereavement, and carrying a small flint stone picked up on the day of her father's death, Fox developed and employed new arts-based strategies both to 'steady' herself and to explore feelings of loss.

The research process involved a phenomenological attention to lived experience through walking and drawing in selected settings, including a theorisation of and collaboration with wind, processes of attrition and accumulation within the landscape, and use of flint, chalk and sound as 'materials'. It also involved an aspect of performance and a process of developing the reflective practice methodology through dialogue with collaborators.

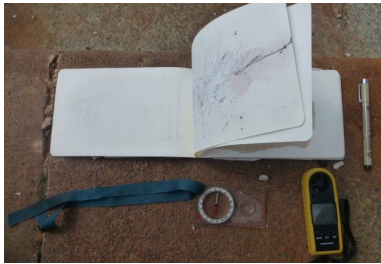
Fox situates the Mourning Stone research within a tradition of artists who engage with an ephemeral and time-based experience of landscape, and who see the potential for the materials and forces within particular landscapes as active agents in the production of drawings as, for example, in the work of painter Ian McKeever. Ideas and processes for drawings come directly from what's at hand as Fox traverses the environment. It further connects with a tradition of artists such as Jane Grisewood, William Anastasi and Tang Chenghua, who work with time-based, performative and collaborative approaches to mark making and who have moved away from naturalistic 'recording'. Conceptually, the research also draws on anthropology, specifically Tim Ingold's ideas of lines being in continuous operation by way of interchanging 'threads' and 'traces' (Ingold, 2011). 'Threads' are invisible and travel across space, transforming into 'traces' on collision with surface in a continuous line of switch. In this transaction the 'traces' element of lines become apparent and coalesce on both the surface of the land - by way of footpaths, animal tracks, soil creep and erosion - as well as on the surface of the paper when drawing in situ.

The materials and forces in flux within the landscape are integral to the kinds of drawings made and provide a geographical context to the work: Sussex Chalk Downland - flint, haw, chalk, wind, salt air, pathways, boundaries and sight lines, sound, a sense of scale. The research also uses walking as inherently bound to the passing of time and a way of marking distance or 'to and fro'.

A further contextual layer is provided by grief, drawing upon personal histories, memory and cultural behaviours in relation to death: 'Bereavement shatters ways of being in the world that were once sustaining. It deprives us of the presence of loved ones and disrupts daily rhythms, roles, and routines that shape daily life, a sense of self, and structures of meaning' (Thompson and Berger 2011).

A reading of 'Bereavement: An Incomplete Rite of Passage' (Hunter, 2008) enabled Fox to identify and further articulate her actions on the Mourning Stone Project as an instinctive necessity to create a 'post - funeral ritual' to operate within.

RESEARCH PROCESS



(top) **Drawing materials**
taken into the field

(bottom) **Wind Drawings**
Wind drawing made at
Crowlink, East Sussex

The research process employed intuitive methods through the use of arts-based strategies.

These included an impetus to walk in open downland, the use of found objects and ritual to create boundaries for action, a 'kit' (flask, flint, notebook, graphite, anemometer, compass, paper, bulldog clip), collaborative processes and responding to the landscape. Fox's approach was further guided and informed by the key relevant theories that she had absorbed and expanded as the research took shape.

The intellect can give you the misconception that you understand something simply by thinking about it analytically, so that we forget that these are not questions to be answered through discursive logic, not problems to be solved but, rather, areas to be inhabited, to be encountered through Being.

Bill Viola (1995)

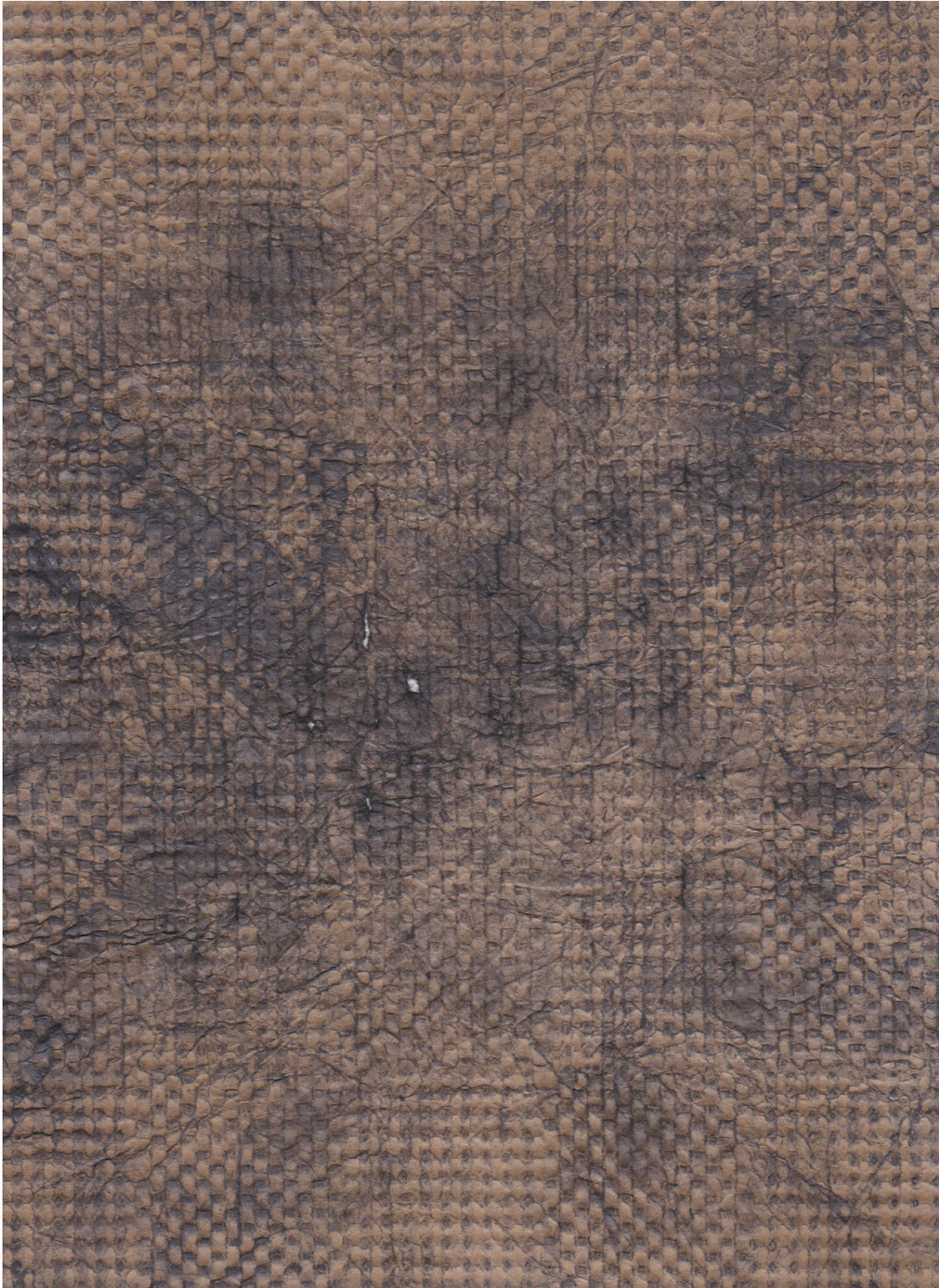
Stage one of the process involved using drawing, where the wind is allowed to move the paper and generate a network of marks, in order to contemplate the notion of line as 'threads' and 'traces' (Ingold, 2007). The relinquishing of autographic agency within these drawings, where the contact of pen with paper is intermittent, made the intangible 'threads' visible in front of the work for the duration of the drawing process. This created an intensely focused arena located around paper, pen, wind, space and sound.

Stage two was the application of the wind drawing techniques as a means of anchoring the process within selected geographical sites. This promoted concentration whilst at the same time enabling a peripheral view of the sensations of grief. Through walking and observing, further material based responses emerged: 'Distance Drawings', 'Scrub Drawings' and a series of photographs and notebook entries.

Here the research questions emerged, along with an analysis of practice – including testing the precise function of the small flint stone in the work.

Stage three involved collaboration with two other practitioners, Duncan Bullen and Philippa Lyon, as part of the 'Touching The World Lightly' project to further develop the theoretical and methodological dimensions of the work. This group identified and prioritised the emergent interests in concepts of presence and touch. Insights from these collaborative investigations were then further tested through drawing on location, to determine whether they resonated deeply with the drawing practice rather than being imposed by the intellect. Reflections and insights were then collected and synthesised for dissemination in talks, exhibitions and a co-authored article.

Mourning Stone



Scrub Drawings
Scrub drawing 1 (back)
13 September 2016

RESEARCH INSIGHTS



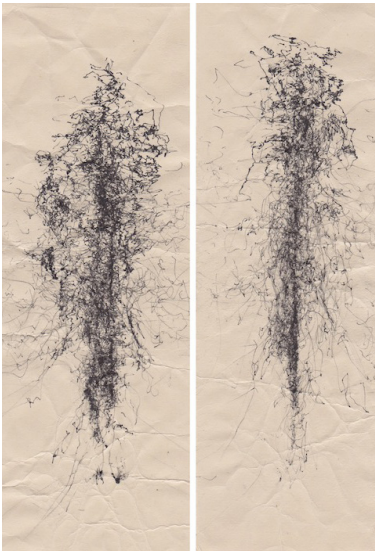
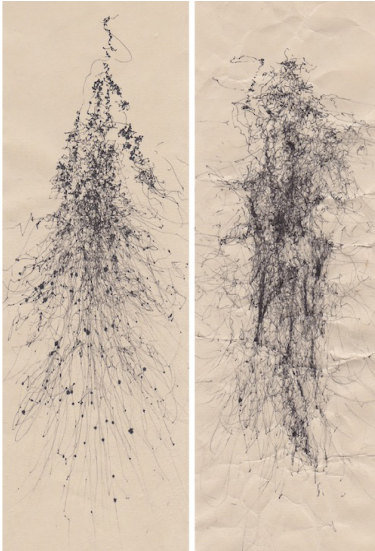
(top) **Fox undertaking a wind drawing**

(bottom) **The mourning stone at rest**

Research insights fall into two categories:

1. The intuitive making of an agile structure from which grief can be articulated:
 - Artists usually direct their skills towards the making of objects and artifacts. However, embodied versions of these skills can be employed in the construction of agile 'frameworks' or 'fields of operation' for practitioners to operate within when necessary. Often these frameworks are made intuitively using skills transferred from the studio, and are highly functional, complex and adaptable.
 - Processes of relinquished agency and collaborative working promoted a focus that acted as a further mechanism to 'hold' and 'make present' the artist researcher to the challenging realm of grief in ways that felt both attentive and manageable.
 - In making these arenas for action the artist practitioner drew upon the qualities of the materials of both landscape and drawing, allowing the artist researcher to connect the intangible qualities within the landscape to an articulation of the elusive and unfamiliar sensations of grief.
2. A new approach to methodology for drawing in, and with a particular landscape:
 - Reflecting on Ingold's theory of line as interchangeable 'threads' and 'traces' whilst making drawings in open locations, where the wind moves paper rapidly in and out of contact with a pencil, opened up ideas of connectivity and 'presence'. Clusters of lines and dots made in collaboration with the wind became ways of capturing something carried over distance - with the paper and pencil acting as a kind of listening post. In this way the act of drawing sensitised the artist practitioner to the intangible elements of landscape, providing the materials and focus for further creative action.
 - These materials: wind, trace, track, a sense of 'to and fro', erosion, weathering, chalk, flint and wind-bent haw resonated with and provided the impetus for drawing as a state of flux, and an extension of the experience of 'moving though'. This connectivity between the processes of drawing and the materials to hand combined to open up a territory where ideas such as distance could be noticed within the landscape and simultaneously explored as a complex sensation connected to grief.
 - The small flint or Mourning Stone is identified in a series of inter-changing roles: Anchor (and 'thread') back to the day of Fox's father's death - and a marker of time back and forth, a companion, collaborator and a tool for the making of ritual and boundary in the further 'holding' of a space for mourning.

DISSEMINATION



Mourning Stone was exhibited in January 2019 as part of 'Touching the World Lightly', at the Kunstnerisk forskningsuke [Artistic Research Week], Gallery Seilduken, Oslo National Academy of the Arts. The trajectory of the research was marked by publications and presentations of work-in-progress including stages of theoretical development. Since January 2019, further publications and exhibitions have disseminated the work.

Exhibitions, presentations and publications

Fox, J. and Moriarty, J. (2019) 'The Mourning Stone and What Am I Grieving For?' Moriarty, J. ed. *Autoethnographies from the Neoliberal Academy: Rewilding, Writing and Resistance in Higher Education*. London: Routledge. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781351247573-3>

Jolley, E., Fox, J., Staff, J. Rutland, T. and Twinam-Cauchy, A (2019) *A Walk around Cissbury*. Invited group exhibition. Worthing Museum. 22 June - 7 September. <https://wtam.uk/event/a-walk-around-cissbury/>

Fox, J. (2019) 'Wind Drawings'. *Movement Makes Marks: Etchings by Elaine Foster Gandey*. ONCA gallery, Brighton, May 2019. <https://onca.org.uk/event/movement-makes-marks-artist-talk-private-view/>

Bullen, D., Fox, J. and Lyon, P. (2019) 'Touching the World Lightly'. Kunstnerisk forskningsuke [Artistic Research Week]. Exhibition and oral presentation. Gallery Seilduken, Oslo National Academy of the Arts. 21-25 January 2019. <https://khio.no/en/events/755>.

Fox, J. (2018) 'Jack (Fox) of all Trades, Mistress of No(o)ne'. Artist Talk, Phoenix Artspace, Brighton. November.

Day, L. (2017) *Present Tense*. Exhibition selected and curated by Lucy Day, Phoenix, Brighton. 6 May - 4 June. http://lucyday.co.uk/uploads/7/5/9/7/75975419/present_tense_phoenix_pr_updated.pdf

Bullen, D., Fox, J., and Lyon, P. (2016) 'Practice-infused drawing research: "being present" and "making present"'. *Drawing: Research, Theory, Practice* 2(1), pp.129-142. https://doi.org/10.1386/drtpr.2.1.129_1

Fox, J. (2015) 'Mourning Stone'. Oral presentation. *Towards the Future of Walking*. Arts International Symposium, Falmouth University. 16 April.

Wind Drawings

Examples from series of
30 one-minute wind drawings
21 x 9cm
Made over 30 minutes in the
same location, 2017

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Mourning Stone

