

"I am a Princess" Foster care, Therapy, Art

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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, I explore different ways art can be used as a form of expression and the ways in which personal experiences and general views can contribute to this and also what it means to use art as part of a healing process. I discuss the artwork I made for my exhibition where I used different media such as text, symbols, projection and sound to create an installation which suggests, amongst other things, a child's eye view of my experience of foster care in the UK. I discuss artists, ideas and exhibitions which influenced my work. Finally I consider responses and reactions to my work and draw some conclusions about how effectively I carried out the objectives I set myself and how this sets the scene for future work.

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I am also thankful to my family and friends for their guidance and help throughout my time at Writtle University College.

Lastly I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my husband Marcus, for providing moral support and encouragement.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to anyone who feels like they *cannot*, because you can.

Chloe Hodges: A biographical sketch

Love

A poem about 'Love'. Written by Author, age 11. Southend 2002.

Love is something that never ends;

It is always in your heart.

It is in there,

Somewhere, that will never fall apart.

Even when you're cross,

It is always in your heart.

It is in there, somewhere that will never fall apart.

I am an MA student and a freelance set dresser where I have learnt new skills of dressing sets working in environments from retail to television sets. I have a Bachelors degree in Interior Architecture as well as a City and Guilds qualification in Interior Design. My research interest focuses on how my personal experiences and history, particularly of the foster care system, have impacted on my art work.

At the age of 24, I was diagnosed with ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) as well as other learning difficulties. Instead of seeing the diagnosis as a disadvantage, I saw this as an opportunity to express myself through art. I was told at a young age that I would find it very difficult to achieve good grades in school; however I was determined to complete my college course and to achieve a degree level qualification. I make no apology for the close intertwining of my personal experience and subjective response to this with a more academic approach in what follows.

In the future I would like to help others express their emotions, thoughts and feelings through art as well as through music and design. Theatre has always been a passion of mine and is something I would like to explore in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Study Background

During my time as an Interior Architect student, there was a lot of emphasis on 'space' and how you can explore and change the use of space by adding different installations. This included using all of your senses and scale. Space was vital to my final year project and it made me ponder the sheer size of space, what was possible to do with it and how the installations affected people around them, how they would connect with each other and what impact would it have in its surrounding areas and people around them. The purpose of the study is to aid in my understanding as to what space is and furthers my knowledge as to how I can create something that could generate and change people's moods and emotions; to help create a space to start conversation and for people to connect.

Study Area

The relationship of natural materials in art and the importance of horses in art. The relationship between natural objects, horses and humans.

Dissertation Structure

The dissertation will be looking at the ways as to which I have grown as an artist and the methods I have explored throughout my studies not only as an MA art student but as an artist. I have looked back at my childhood and my experience as a foster care child and wanted to explore ways in which I could bring to light my experiences of being in care by using natural materials. Horses were a huge part of my childhood, and I then explored the relationship between horses and man, horses in art and this helped me realise what relationship I had with horses as an artist. To explore ways I could express my emotions and feelings by being a foster care child.

Research Aims and Objectives

My aim and objective is to discover different ways to explore emotions and feelings, thought process in art by using natural materials. To express my experience in foster care through creating an exhibition space.

PERSONAL WORK

"I am seeking. I am striving. I am in it with all my heart." Vincent van Gogh (van Gogh in Roskill, 1990: 148).

I have always been drawn to natural materials. The delicacy of the materials made working with them enjoyable and I found the more I worked with them, the more I found I could express emotion. Happiness and sadness. Anger and contentment. This was the start of me being an artist.

I have always found expressing my emotions difficult. To understand emotion was a task for me. I would often over-think my feelings. I found I did not have a voice, so turning to my surroundings became part of my comfort zone. I felt comfortable playing around with natural materials as if they were part of my everyday routine. As I was walking around, I saw raw natural materials abandoned on the floor and I felt it was my duty to transform something that too many people, was deemed unfit for any purpose but to me was treasure.

I had found my voice.

Collecting my treasure, it was fair to say I felt in control of what I was making. To become one with nature, I felt inspired to do it justice and to help others see the beauty that I did. The markings on the bark, the soft delicate subtle holes in the leaves. As time passed, it became apparent that these treasures were not just objects that I had found abandoned on the floor, but these objects somehow represented me and my past. Lost and alone, they had no meaning yet they were destined for greatness. Every piece of artwork made in this way was a symbol of my own process personally. This was therapy for me.

Creating sculptures was something I really enjoyed. I found that without thinking I was able to channel my emotions and feelings into a creation that many people felt they could relate to. As well as sculpture, I turned to symbols and text. These were something very new to me and something I felt very excited about. I had escaped from my comfort zone.

FOSTER CARE SYSTEM, UK

“The sound of sirens used to be my lullaby” – Author, 1997

In my experience, no two stories of any children who have been in the foster care system are the same. The reasons are varied but include abuse, harm and neglect (Craft, 2018). Some of the many stories I have encountered have had happy endings whilst others sometimes are not so happy. It is the stories that do not have a happy ending which made me want to make my exhibition piece in the way I did. Having a positive attitude towards the foster care system was something I did struggle with at first, not only because of my own personal experience with the system, but because of the struggles others had faced with getting the help and support needed. This was something I knew and witnessed. The challenge of living in a foster care home can be daunting for any young child. Not knowing what is round the corner or what is to happen next is something many children find difficult. Some would be sent to an adoptive family, but others will go from one temporary foster family to another with the chance of possibly going back to their original home, depending on the family's circumstances (Elvin, 2017).

As I grew up in care, I noticed vast differences in how other foster care children acted. Some children were seen and not heard and others were heard but not seen. Others expressed emotion irrationally and found it hard to control their feelings whilst other children simply did not speak. What moved me more was the fact that no one noticed the children that did not speak. People thought it was simply 'normal' in their circumstances for them not to show emotion. No crying, no happiness, no speaking. I often wondered if being in foster care made these children like this or if it was their prior experiences.

I would observe on a daily basis the children that had been forgotten and I found I would often try to help them. Although they did not talk, I understood them and learnt from them. I found playing with toys became more important than words, a way of understanding how they felt. A toy would represent an emotion. I had patience that I felt the system did not have. When talking to fellow students about the care system in the country, I am amazed how many people ask me “What is a care

leaver?" This was something I was shocked by. Many people in this country know a great deal about adoption; however the foster care system is something that felt like it has been abandoned.

The reason for a child or young person to go into foster care is because the social workers do not feel that the child's basic needs are met, and sadly the number of children going into such care is slowly increasing each year (Tickle, 2016):

"Government statistics show that local authority applications to take children into care are rocketing to record levels. Augusts' figures showed a total of 1,258 care applications – a 34% increase on August last year. The annual rate of increase is also rising: in March 2014 it was 4% up on the year before; March 2015 was 5% up, and it was 15% up again in March this year. The latest figures show that there were a total of 70,440 looked-after children in England in March this year." (Tickle, 2016).

When I tell people these figures, the reactions I get vary from being shocked to feeling angry. These figures are not pointed out in the news or social media and the whole issue is becoming more of a problem as the family court system struggles to cope. With the cost of looking after a child an estimated £35,000 per year (Bulman, 2017), it is no wonder with all the cuts and breakdowns with the local authorities that it is a struggle. Yet hardly anyone seems to know this is going on in this country.

ART AS THERAPY

The term 'art therapy' as we know today is relatively young, first being used by British artist Adrian Hill in 1942 (Bush, 2018).

Art therapy is a form of therapy that focuses on the creative aspect of making art to boost one's physical, emotional and mental well-being. The process involves expressing oneself artistically which in turn can help resolve issues one may have as well as aid in stress reduction and improve self-esteem. One does not need to be a particularly talented artist in order to receive the benefits of this form of therapy, as each piece of art that is created has underlying messages. With the help of a professional, these can be understood, which aids in the healing process (Good, 2009).

For me, art has always been an escape. An escape from the bad times in my life, the stresses I sometimes feel. Throughout my life, I have suffered with OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). My OCD revolves around checking locks. There have been particular periods of my life where I struggled to leave the house and throughout these difficult times, I have turned to art. It becomes a coping method that lets my mind relax from the stress and anxiety of continuously checking the locks. When receiving counselling, I was told my lock checking was most probably a way of my mind feeling in control and this led me back to my childhood and the experience of being in care. When I was in care, I had no control of where I was or what I was doing. I had very little say in what was going to happen and felt completely out of control. Checking the locks gave me control. When I was told this, I learnt how to address it, and using art was a therapy for me. I was able to express my emotions and have one aspect of my life where I had full control. This, at times, replaced my anxiety for checking locks which was almost life changing. I became free. For me, creating art has been a great tool for expressing emotions and feelings. As such it can be a great therapeutic tool for self-expression and healing. I have used many media, practices and styles to express myself but often I found the use of simple text to be just as effective. Things can be difficult to express in spoken word and this is something I have always struggled with. By creating something in the form of written text I am more comfortable pointing to what the text meant than to actually saying the words.

Vincent Van Gogh is possibly one of the most famous artists who used art as therapy. It is common knowledge that he suffered terribly from mental health issues and over recent years, studies have shown that Van Gogh likely suffered from bipolar disorder. Though colourful, his artwork often reflected the emotional sadness and pain he was feeling. Often he coped with his bouts of depression through art, drawing and painting the people and places that had influenced him throughout his life. To Van Gogh, painting was a way of maintaining his sanity. The artwork 'Irises' was painted whilst he was at the Saint Paul de-Mausole psychiatric hospital in 1889. A joyous painting full of violet coloured flowers with the backdrop of yellow– Van Gogh's favourite colour- marigolds. Each individual flower appears to have its own personality, standing tall and proud on its stem. Amongst the meadow of violet and yellow stands one white flower. Although he never wrote this himself, many art historians believe that this one flower symbolised Van Gogh (First Art Gallery, 2017).

Whilst researching deeper into art therapy, one artist's name kept appearing. Tracey Emin. I had not been previously particularly aware or interested in this artist's work but as I delved deeper into both her work and her personality, I began to feel as if I almost knew her, and in fact I later discovered that Emin had an unconventional childhood, too. In particular the works shown in "My Photo Album" (Emin, Murray and Sorrell, 2013) inspired me. Through art, Emin is an open book; each piece she makes allows the viewer into her most personal thoughts and feelings around a particular time or sequence of events in her life. This was the aspect of Emin's work I felt I could relate to.

Making a piece in an exhibition for everyone to see does in itself make a statement. However it is the pieces that make you question 'why' that have always interested me the most. The obvious has always been too obvious. In creating art you are sending a message. Whatever it may be, it is a message that deserves to be understood. Whether or not you have experienced a similar situation, it is there for you to see, to understand that this piece exists because this experience has happened. This is something that I have only recently understood.

HORSES IN ART

Horses in art throughout history

I have always felt connected to animals. Emotionally, as a child I found animals understood me more than humans. Though animals could not speak, this did not matter to me. By spending time with these creatures, I felt a sense of comfort and understanding but more importantly I felt safe. Feeling safe was always something that was crucial to me. As a child I did not have a stable childhood and safety seemed at times something of a privilege denied to me.

The fact that horses were tall and strong almost felt that they could not be defeated; that if I was in trouble they would protect me. This was why I felt comforted by them. Horse riding was a sport I had always enjoyed. On a weekly basis I would spend time riding horses and this was when I would feel a sense of freedom. When you ride on a horse it is important to feel connected to them. They have to trust you and you have to trust them. When spending time with the horses, instead of feeling vulnerable, I felt they understood me. I spent more time with horses than I did with children of my own age.

When I was young I also loved making art. When I opened my mind about making art, horses were close in my mind. I found myself painting and making horse sculptures and this was something I found I understood and this was part of my development as an artist.

Horses have been connected through the centuries alongside mankind. From sport to a partner in work, they have always been greatly valued by humans. From prehistoric times up to the modern day, the illustration of the horse in art is one constant throughout every major period in art history. In Roman period, statues were used to celebrate important men on horseback. Only one now survives; the bronze statue of Marcus Aurelius (Plate 1).



Plate 1. Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius, ca. 175 AD (Source: Historians, 2018).

After the Roman era had ended and the middle ages had begun, the images of powerful men on horses were not often represented and were mainly used in art to highlight the animal's military and agricultural roles in society. Throughout the Renaissance period, the tradition of horse sculptures was reintroduced on a large scale for the first time since the Roman era. This was also the period of the rise of animals being represented in their own right in art (Visual Arts Cork, n.d.).

Artwork

One of the most influential horse painters was 18th century artist George Stubbs whose most famous piece is called 'Whistlejacket' (Plate 2). It is oil on canvas and features a prancing horse rearing up on a plain background. One key feature of the painting is Stubbs attention to detail to the horse's features.



Plate 2. Whistlejacket. Stubbs, 1762 (Source: Wikipedia, n.d.).

A 20th century artist whose work around horses I have found most interesting is Lucy Kemp – Welch. She was a British painter and teacher and specialised in paintings of working horses. Her most famous pieces involved the paintings of military horses, particularly throughout the era of the First World War (National Army Museum, n.d.). A painting which moved me was ‘Forward the Guns! (Plate 3)’ I feel she catches the emotion within the horses both through the animal’s eyes and the particular posture she gives each individual horse during the gallop. The picture was painted from studies made at manoeuvres in England. According to *The Times Obituary*, 28 November 1958: ‘For this picture she sat with her easel on Salisbury Plain while eight batteries of horse artillery were driven towards her so that she could sketch the general outline of their movement.’ (Tate, n.d.¹).



Plate 3. Forward the Guns! Kemp-Welch, 1917 (Source: Tate, n.d.¹).

Animals in cave paintings

Cave paintings go as far back as prehistoric times and are one of the least understood forms of art. A variety of methods were used to create paintings in caves – one which I found most intriguing was to blow paint onto the walls such as in the Pettakere cave, Indonesia. When researching cave art and cave sculptures, I realised that these paintings tell the story of the very beginning of human intelligence as we know it today. A time before literate societies existed (Price, 2008).

Academics and researchers continue to debate as to what the meanings are behind these paintings (Humphrey, 1998). Some draw a comparison to the native peoples/tribes in countries such as Australia who still produce cave paintings today, but many disagree that different cultures thousands of years apart can be compared. Animals were the main focus of these creations. Large wild animals are the most common theme in cave paintings, largely deer, bison and horses. Drawings of a human are rare and when seen, are simple rather than the more detailed depictions commonly found throughout history (Price, 2008; Ancient Cave Painting, 2013).

I wondered why early humans used animals so much in their work. Was it purely for fun, for pleasure? Or maybe they drew these animals after particular expeditions they had been on, almost as we now write a diary of events in our lives, or were they created mainly by shamans as part of magic, ritual or religious practices? Whatever the explanation is, it is clear that animals were very important to humans from the very beginning.

The Cueva de El Castillo is an archaeological site situated within the Caves of Monte Castillo in the province of Cantabria, Spain. It holds some of the oldest and most well known pieces of cave art throughout Europe with some dating back to at least 40,800 years. The site was discovered by Spanish archaeologist Hermilio Alcalde del Río in 1903 with over 150 different depictions to date. These markings vary from the Lower Paleolithic age through the Bronze Age and up to the Middle ages (Gobierno de Cantabria, n.d.).

Lascaux is world famous for its caves in the Dordogne region of France. Unlike many cave paintings, they are of extremely high quality, large in size and incredibly detailed compared to many other sites over the world. Of the almost 2000 different figures, most have been painted onto the cave walls and ceilings rather than etched into the stone. Horses (Plate4) are the predominant animal throughout the caves but there are also a number of felines, bison, cattle, a feline, a rhino, a bear, a bird and a human (Coye, 2011).



Plate 4.–Red Cow & First Chinese Horse, Lascaux, 40,800 BC (Source: Bradshaw Foundation, n.d.).

As I continued researching this topic, I realised that it will be incredibly difficult to ever be able to know to the reasons why cave paintings exist but I strongly believe that cave paintings were a vital way for humans to communicate. They may have been used to tell stories of particular events that happened throughout their life or simply to keep memories as we do nowadays with a photo album or a diary. This made me think of my own work and how I felt I could connect to the reasons as to why I create the art I do.

ANIMALITY

Animality: A Fairy Story by Jens Hoffmann, was situated in Marian Goodman Gallery, London in December 2016.

An exhibition about the representation of animals in art.

Animality was a group exhibition exploring the connection between humans and animals, our empathy for them and our ethical positions about them and our fear and love of beasts (Parsons, 2016). The presentation was minimal, to give the viewer the chance to explore and appreciate the details of each of the works. The curators were sensitive to the different scales of the pieces and created a sympathetic layout that helped the viewer to systematically explore all the art works. It was pleasing to walk through all the different rooms, all the art works were very different and the layout kept you wanting to explore more and observe it all. Many works were in a wide range of audio-visual media including video, sound and animation. Most of these works were in separate rooms so they were not disruptive to the experience of other pieces. Other artists used sculptures as a way of expressing emotion.

The exhibition was filled with over 70 pieces of works all inspired by animals, some of which had been inspired by myth or fairy tale and ranged from horses to octopuses to birds with human heads (Parsons, 2016). The exhibition made one's mind open up about animals, what they mean to us and the relationship between them and us. The simplicity of the exhibition meant each piece stood out to the viewer, to me this worked very well and made the experience both pleasurable and memorable making one value each piece. Each engaged the viewer in different ways and each moved me as an artist in a different way. The different pieces of work made the viewer think about the relationship between humans and animals, but from different perspectives, raising the question how are animals both like us and different from us?

The exhibition made me feel that humans seem in general to be very unaware of how significant animals, and the portrayal of animals within our history, are.

The works varied in the way they suggested the expression of ideas and emotions. Some felt happy whilst others were sad or confused.

Sensing a piece's emotion through expression can invoke a similar emotion in its viewer.

To use different type of animals symbolically to express emotion was something I could relate to. My own work had always involved an animal or a symbol of an animal. To see other artists use this form to express a need or uncertainty or journey delighted me.

I also felt the exhibition was about awareness not just of the animals but of today's society and how the world is evolving. The feeling of fantasy and make believe in using both human and animal body parts was something I felt connected to. The mix of these two together made me stay at the exhibition longer than anticipated. I wanted to understand and get the feeling of each piece before I left. I felt I needed to know why each artist had displayed their work in the way they had and to understand what the meaning was behind each piece of work.



Plate 5– *Running Thunder* by Steve McQueen, 2007 (Source: Author, 2016).

One piece that stood out to me the most was one of the most simple. It was the very simplicity of the piece that made one want to explore its meaning. The simplicity was something I valued as an artist. Steve McQueen's *Running Thunder* (Plate5) was presented in a separate darkened room. As you entered, you were led down a short narrow corridor as the sound of a repetitive ticking noise drew you in. As you turned the corner, in the distance was a projection of a horse laying in a meadow. The film was on repeat, every few seconds it 'ticked'. There was no movement, no blinking. The horse was dead.

As I stood there watching, I realised just how important the continuous film was. The film itself did not move, it was simply a repeated running film noise and to me it symbolised the whole piece. The continuous noise of the film was important to the piece, as it made one want to know what had happened before. The film does not show how the horse dies; it simply just shows you the horse dead on the floor and the not knowing how the horse died moved me. To show an animal of such beauty dead on the floor without knowing how makes you think: is killing animals really worth it?

It makes you question why us humans do such terrible things to animals and if it is necessary. This beautiful creature is left dead and alone and no one knows why.

What moved me the most was that the horse's eyes were open. I felt you could see the hurt inside the animal's eyes, and the fact that they were open, leaving its last expression. When I walked out of the room, that piece left a long lasting impression on me. *Why* did this happen? The eyes spoke to me as I felt the horse's pain. The horse left a lasting impression on me through its eyes, and I believe that those eyes leave a lasting impression with all viewers.

What also moved me was the name of the piece. *'Running Thunder'*. When hearing the name, you immediately think of something strong, tough and unbreakable. Running as if someone is chasing you, thunder as in quick and immediate. However, what you are faced with is something completely opposite. Frail and weak, lifeless. The name of the piece does not reflect what you see. Was this what McQueen wanted?

The horse could have been running from danger and instead died alone. What leads up to this moment was something McQueen wanted the viewer to imagine.

I found this work inspiring. A piece of work does not have to be obvious. Sometimes it's up to the viewer to tell the story in their own words. This piece gave me much encouragement for my own personal work. It made me realise that sometimes the simple and delicate pieces can have huge vast meaning which does not have to be obvious, but which we can trust the viewer to find.



Plate 6–*Octopus* by Carsten Holler, 2014 (Source: Author, 2016).

Another piece that stood out to me was *Octopus* (Plate6) by Carsten Holler. Holler was the maker of the tubular metal slides at Tate Modern a few years ago. His work is fun and creative. One quote I found quite amusing was “It is impossible to travel down a slide without smiling”. He has also said in an interview, “Why do we forget childhood?” This made me consider once again what it was I wanted to achieve as an artist. Was it to remember my childhood and for me to express my feelings as a child when I wanted others to understand or was it a process that I must uncover for myself—some sort of therapy. Looking back on my notes I realised it was a bit of both, and Holler’s work helped me understand that.

The ‘*Octopus*’ piece is from his Gartenkinder work which is part of an exhibition intended to encourage play (Holmes, 2014). The exhibition is made up of large play toys for both children and adults. This particular piece is made from a rubber like material and although it was made for play, I did not witness anyone playing with this piece at the Animality exhibition. I suppose this was because it was presented together with other sculptures and pieces that you were not allowed to play with, so one presumed one was not allowed to touch it.

This interested me as I found myself wanting to touch the sculpture, which I did. It seemed to be made from a material with which I was not familiar and the fascination to know more as to what it was made from excited me. Curiosity got the better of me, but that was what Holler wanted, for viewers to explore and play.

His work makes me think, are toys art? Is play a way of expressing with emotion?

Reflecting back over the years, I came to the conclusion that playing is a form of expression. Whilst playing with my nephews, I began to realise that play is vital not only to their way of expressing but to their development. Using different words, sounds and textures, they begin to create stories and develop their imaginations and personalities. This insight was vital not just to my research but to my personal work. I wanted to create a space that uses a form of expression without using a voice. I wanted to create a story. To hear, see and imagine what it is trying to say did not mean it had to be obvious, the viewer simply had to use their imagination as a form of play as a way of understanding my voice.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MY CONCEPTS AND MY APPROACH TO MATERIALS

I wanted to feel connected to nature and to create images with a more natural feel, perhaps with more natural means. It was important to me to think outside of the box and to open up my mind into different ways of creating images. I wanted to work with materials physically. To feel the material whilst I worked with it was important to me. In connection with this I came upon the artist Brice Marden.

'You are observing nature and yet you are just trying to respond to it. When you draw a tree you get a certain kind of energy just by drawing the way it grows.'—Brice Marden (Tate, n.d.²)

This statement from Marden I felt I could particularly connect to, and I strongly agree with it. It brought back memories of when I was a young child at school and we would draw trees in the playground. As I drew trees, I found I would mimic the movement of the pencil flowing from side to side, almost as if it is dancing on the paper. It was as if the tree was growing on my paper from the root all the way to the top branch. I felt connected to the tree and I felt at one with nature. Some may say that I was indeed connected to nature as I was in fact drawing a tree and further point out that for me to draw this tree; I had to use paper that in fact meant a tree somewhere in the world had to be cut. However, looking back at that time and those drawings, I felt it was the hand movements I was making on the paper that connected me to the tree and nature more so than the fact of the paper's origin. I realised that not only was it the connection to nature and its beauty Marden was passionate about but also the positioning of the arm and hand whilst painting. This made me think about how I could position myself when painting using similar tools to Marden, and would it differ depending on what mood I was in? I started thinking about the different positions I could paint, to experiment with different levels and heights. Not only would I see an object from a different view but it would also make me more aware of the position that I was in at the time and how it might reflect on my painting. Close to the canvas, I would have more control over the final piece of artwork but was this I wanted?

The not knowing inspired me to go ahead.



Plate 7– *Brice Marden in the Studio* (Source: Hargreaves, 2014).

This photo to me is particularly powerful. I cannot decide as to whether it is because the photo is in black and white which added to the dramatic intensity of the image – but it seems to me the manner in which Marden is holding the stick and how he is leaning towards this piece speaks to me as an artist of how much he feels connected to the image.

The stick itself seems to be quite large and anyone would think that science would prove that putting a large amount of pressure on a long thin stick that it would snap, but this does not seem to be the case. Marden is holding the stick almost very delicately and in a position where he seems to be in full control of his piece. The look on his face along with his posture of bending down and leaning on one of his knees gives the impression of connectivity with his drawing. This made me realise how much I wanted to experiment with this technique.

Marden's work is something that has inspired me to try different techniques and not to be afraid of making something that is out of my comfort zone. Referring back to his statement, I appreciate his love of feeling connected to nature and the reason behind it. To me as an artist I feel the same way.

Inspired by the image of Marden in the gallery, I decided to use his stick technique. I would use the wood as a base to create an image using ink but I wanted to use a stick instead of a paintbrush as this seemed more fitting with what I had researched. By mimicking his methods of using a stick as a paint brush, I began to appreciate how delicate you have to be when handling it. I found I had to try several times and different sizes of stick to achieve the outcome that I wanted. By using a variety of sizes of stick and different wood surfaces, I began to become more creative in assembling my imagery.



Plate 8. *Brush of a Horse* (Source: Author, 2017).

Having used a stick instead of a brush, I was now interested as to what else I could use as a paint brush instead of using just an ordinary brush – I wanted to experiment and have fun whilst doing this too. However I still very much wanted to feel connected with nature so I decided to only use natural objects. This then led me back to my previous work and what I had learnt from cave paintings. At this point it hit me that there was a deep connection. This really excited me and only encouraged me to learn and experiment more.

After many hours of experimenting, I began to draw a 'horse shaped' painting. This was not done on purpose but I simply found my way to it. This led me to believe that the horse was a very important feature in my understanding of myself as an artist.

My horse symbol was very simple, yet one could easily identify it as a horse. I did not want to interfere with what I had made, I wanted to leave it just as it was, as if it was made thousands of years ago in the prehistoric times I had been thinking about.

What did my horse symbolise? This was something I did not know, did not yet think about. I went with the flow and that was something I wanted to appreciate, as my work had always previously been scripted and planned out. This particular style of work was something completely new to me, something that did scare me at first. Importantly, though, I felt I was quickly developing as an artist.

THE HORSE BREAKTHROUGH

Naturally, it was going to be a horse



Plate 9. *Horse Sculpture* (Source: Author, 2017).

At the start of my work towards my exhibition, I found it difficult to start my process as an artist, difficult to refine what I wanted to say and achieve. It was not until I decided to spend time simply sitting in my back garden that I remembered what I loved doing, and that was to be at one with nature; the sound of the trees swaying in the wind, the leaves dancing along the floor. I sat outside for hours. My area was peaceful and remote. I sat next to a river and the sound of the water helped me to concentrate. This became a regular occurrence and something I found helped me develop.



Plate 10. *Horse Sculpture* (Source: Author, 2017).

As the days grew darker and the nights became longer, I noticed I soon was joined by a small red robin. It was still very young and it would start singing to me. It would sit on an area just behind me, not too far from where I was sitting. It wasn't until I grew the courage to go up to it one evening that I had noticed it was sitting on a piece of bark which looked as if it had been placed on the floor for me to find. I picked it up and to my surprise it looked like the face of a horse.

This was my big breakthrough.

I immersed myself into the area. On my hands and knees, I began collecting leaves and further pieces of wood. I soon noticed I was collecting from the floor rather than picking the items from the trees or on a higher level. Digging through layers of undergrowth as if they had fallen and would be forgotten unnoticed, I realised this related back to my time as a child when I collected objects I had found which seemed to me to have been unloved. Time passed and I noticed I had a large collection of natural materials. The delicate, subtle textures of the overgrown moss, to the fine naturally carved indentations on the wood. Softly, I carefully put some of my most treasured pieces of wood together. Their natural markings were beautiful, almost as if they had been hand carved by a human although I knew they had not. It was nature.

I was proud of my creation and the more I looked at it, the more beautiful it became. Moments earlier, this sculpture was pieces of old unloved wood scattered on the ground. Now it had an identity which I had given it.

This helped me to realise I needed that time as an artist to forget what I used to create and it was part of my journey to discover what I had forgotten. I had to go through the process to understand what I did want to achieve. The connection with the horses would have not happened if I had not taken time to be one with nature, to think and to remember.



Plate 11. *Horse Sculpture* (Source: Author, 2017).

Although the horse structure was not structurally stable, to me this did not matter. I wanted it to symbolise strength, but having the horse imperfect and broken was something I could accept and more. Before I had always striven to make art that was perfect, so this acceptance took me out of my comfort zone but this also excited me as I felt it was part of my process of developing as an artist. To me having something perfect did not mean it was stronger than something that was imperfect. After just hours of creating the horse, it showed signs of decaying.



Plate 12. *Horse Sculpture* (Source: Author, 2017).

The moss was dying and with every movement the structure was becoming more unstable. However I realised that not only could I accept this but that it was something I wanted. This process represented what I had gone through as a child. Feeling broken did not define me as a person. In fact, going through what I had has made me who I am today, and by having this structure was something that represented the past, the thoughts and feelings of my experiences, and to me the object was beautiful.



Plate 13. *Horse Sculpture* (Source: Author, 2017).

This was the start of my understanding of what I wanted to, and could, achieve at my final exhibition. New ideas and creations came to me at a much faster pace and I found that this tested me. For the

first time, I was creating many different varieties of art work. Nevertheless every new element related to my original horse sculpture.

I also decided to create a record of how the horse was decaying, information helpful to my research and a reminder to myself why I was doing what I was doing. Shockingly I found the horse was decaying far more rapidly inside the house than when it was outside in the garden. I believe this was because in the house, the horse was moved from one room to another whereas outside it was left alone. After a couple of weeks I decided to keep it outside. I was interested in how nature would affect it. After just a couple of days, the moss was starting to come away and the legs became detached. The structure no longer looked like a horse; however to me this did not matter. The process had taught me that not every piece of my art work had to be perfect.

MY EXHIBITION “I am a Princess”, Writtle University College – May 2017



Plate 14. “I am a Princess” exhibition (Source: Author, 2017).

I identified three initial aims for myself in connection with my exhibition

- Has my work raised awareness about the care children receive in this country?
- How do the reactions to my work differ from person to person?
- Does my guiding concept come across in the work?



Plate 15. “I am a Princess” exhibition (Source: Author, 2017).

I found I wanted to do a piece about my childhood to fill a gap that I did not know existed. I wanted to create a scene similar to that of a shop window; a scene where a story is told and the viewer has the opportunity to look into my experience of being a child. By creating a scene like area, I wanted it

to reflect my emotions and struggles of being in foster care but also the positivity and courage that I had learnt along the way.

The words 'I am a Princess' stood out to me at the very beginning and ones that I did want to use to 'sum up' my experience. When I was in care, I remember telling another foster care child that I was a Princess and that I knew I would be going home soon. Those words meant an awful lot to me personally and had great meaning to myself plucking up the courage to deal with the emotional effects of being in care. It got me through the difficult days, so these words had to be used as one of the main focuses of the exhibition. The way in which I laid out the words too was very important as they were going to be such a central part of my installation. They had to be highly visible.

This is when I decided that cutting the letters out of wood and placing them on the ground connected to my childhood actions of picking up natural materials off the ground and keeping them. The words 'I am a Princess' connected to the pieces of the unloved materials on the floor as collecting them and making art was therapy for me.

I found a soft teddy bear when I was at a local boot sale. It had been left on the muddy grass and was the last thing the seller was going to place in the back of his car. I remember looking at it as if I had seen him before, or one that was similar when I was a child. The seller didn't seem to want him and only asked £1 for him, I felt I could not say no and I bought him. I knew instantly I wanted to use him in my exhibition.

The crown was something I created whilst experimenting with barbed wire and ivy in the garden. I enjoyed playing with both materials, and I enjoyed weaving the ivy through the wire. After many hours, I realised I had created a 'crown like' sculpture. I had now created two focal points for my exhibition, the words 'I am a Princess' and a crown. I knew my exhibition was about strength and courage and this were the emotions I felt whilst making the exhibition.

As I had decided that the scene was going to be from a child's perspective, I started playing around with scale. That was when I saw my husband's 18th century child's chair from his collection of antiques. The chair was simple and hand crafted. I instantly fell in love with it.

I wanted to experiment with the bear but at first did not know how to incorporate it into the installation. Looking closely at the teddy bear, it struck me that it had no mouth. It looked neither happy nor sad. I felt I could connect to this and that is why I wanted to 'give' the teddy bear emotion. Drawing a 'smile' on a white piece of paper and holding it up to the bear's face, instantly changed the way one him. I knew instantly I wanted to have this on video, so I asked my four year old nephew for his help and used his hand holding a piece of paper, so in keeping with the idea of the child's perspective. To me, this had a deeper meaning than I originally thought. The smile indicated happiness but it was on a piece of paper meaning that the bear was hiding the fact he did not actually have a smile. This was something I felt as a child I had to do. I had to hide my real emotions, thoughts and feeling in order to live a more peaceful life. Once I understood this, I wanted to make the bear a crown of its own. This was spontaneous and I made one that very same day which then led to me re-recording my nephew holding the piece of paper. I wanted to make the crown for the bear as a symbol of strength as I felt the bear was representing me. The bear deserved a crown, and to become a princess.

Once I had painted my area for the exhibition, I was then able to 'place' my exhibition pieces in a way that I found fitting. The small old chair and large crown acted as if it was a throne area. The chair however was knocked over as a way of expressing my experience of struggles.

Although the work did not have to be perfect, the way the artwork was shown had to be. It did not matter about the quality of the work; it mattered about how it was presented.

Appealing to all senses was important as the space had to draw people in. Using different levels inside the space, using light and sound, was essential to the piece's success as it had to take the viewers away from the consciousness of them being in an exhibition space to them being in *my space*. They had to get lost in their thoughts. Although my work changed throughout, the process of the exhibition and planning my concept did not and this was something at first I struggled with.

As I started laying out my exhibition space, I found the space was too structured at the start. My need to make items 'lined up' asserted itself and I had to fight against this—the space had to be scattered. It could not be perfect, as it being perfect would make the exhibition too easy to read and I did not

want that. The exhibition had to make one think 'Was this supposed to mean this?' It had to make the viewer use her imagination. Of course, whether or not the viewer would want to use their imagination was simply up to them but it was important to me to create something that would give them that option. The leaves were to be scattered as if they had fallen, I wanted the sense that this was not a human created space but that nature had simply taken over. An old unloved child's chair was knocked over to represent 'I do not care'. The decline of my horse structure represented me letting go of my past.

These representations did have a powerful meaning to me, but as time went on and I created my space I found not everyone understood this in the same way. This did not matter to me. As my research suggests, not every piece of artwork is obvious – if it were to be obvious there would leave no room for the imagination.

Art can have different effects on different people. One person will look at art in a different way to the next. What the 'Animality' exhibition had shown me was that artwork can encourage imagination and play, and I wanted to create a space that inspired viewers to stop and look. I wanted the viewers to spend time exploring my work, I wanted my exhibition to not have a start, middle or end. I wanted them to use their imagination. My inspiration for this was McQueen's *Running Thunder*. For the exhibition to exist was enough for me, if the viewers wanted to understand then they had to stop and take in and process what they were experiencing.

The objectives I gave myself at the start of my exhibition were something that I had set myself and wanted to achieve, though as time passed, I needed to ask myself if those exact objectives were not met did that mean my work was unsuccessful? This was a question I asked myself numerous times and something I spoke to my fellow students about. As time passed and I gathered thoughts and impressions it soon became clear that other students related to my installation in different ways. Some felt they could relate to my piece in a more personal way as they had gone through similar thoughts and feelings emotionally and physically. By combining different materials such as sound, video and low level lighting along with staging the elements in a certain way, it gave the impression

that a story was told. It was set out like a scene, a window of thought one was looking into part of a story. This meant a lot to me not just as an artist but as a person. As I grew in confidence in asking about reactions to my installations I noticed other people referred my space as a 'window' into my life, and that they could relate to it even though they had not gone through the same experiences as me.

I a m a P r i n c e s s

Chloe Hodges

September 2016 - May 2017

'I am a Princess' is about strength, courage and *determination*.

It is estimated that only 1% of care leavers go to university compared to 37% of all young people.



It is when you have nothing you realise you have everything.

Every little girl deserves to be a Princess.

Plate 16. "I am a Princess" exhibition leaflet (Source: Author, 2017).

I felt that my exhibition was successful for many different reasons. By setting my objectives early, I had created a checklist for myself that I didn't necessarily want or need.

I felt I had to process my work in a certain way and set my work out in a way with which I felt comfortable. When considering whether or not my exhibition was successful, I found it difficult to come to a definite conclusion, but this did not matter to me. What mattered was for people to use their imagination to interpret it. Neither did it matter whether they felt the same connection to the space that I did. What mattered was that each person felt some connection, whether or not it resembled my connection or not. Realising this was a huge step for me as I was very eager to have the exhibition raise awareness about the foster care system in this country. I came to feel, however, that it did not matter whether people understood this explicitly or not – what is clear is that the piece is fuelled by early experiences and this is what people felt connected to.

My work was successful personally for me in the fact also that I was able to let go of my personal experiences. It was therapeutic in the way I was able to share my experiences and that took a huge weight off of my shoulders. I always found talking about and explaining my experiences very hard and it had almost always led to tears; but creating an installation charged with all my feelings from those years ago helped me to let those feelings go. It was also successful in the way that it brought people with all different types of experiences together to talk about how life affected them and how their childhood experiences resembled mine. But it was no less successful in the way that it let others talk about other experiences that were also very different and in some cases opposite to my own.

The installation clearly opened up peoples' emotions and feelings but most importantly opened their minds and allowed them to use their imaginations. This was something I could tell on the night of the exhibition. Watching people stand staring at my installation and clearly engaging with it, almost zoning out from what was around them, made me feel like not only was I 'talking to them' through my work without speaking, but that I was creating a scene, a window, for people to open their minds and thought processes and this made me feel excited. Although some experiences differed to mine, I felt very humbled to know that my piece was the reason some people felt that they could share their stories with me, and that they were not alone.

This was my biggest achievement to date as an artist. My artwork was to create a space that explained my feelings and emotions by me not talking however it made other people talk about their

experiences. A number of the people I had spoken to had been in similar situations to me as a child, and one of my fellow students had even been through adoption so we had a lot to discuss. The whole thing made people open up and come together.

All of this made me rethink my initial objectives. I now understand that art can be used for all different types of things, including expressing ones feelings through installation and that such an installation may have a specific meaning for the artist who made it but for it to mean something different to the viewers does not necessarily mean that it would be a failure. The fact that the artist can get others to talk about the work is in itself a success. Art can be used to bring people together, to bring their stories to life and to share their experiences. To make art that brings people together is in fact an honour. This is something I have learnt throughout my time as an artist.

CURRENT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS, CONCLUSION

“Sometimes I feel as if I have to go back in time to go forward, is this normal? For me it is vital. I can see how far I have come.” – Author, 2018.

Throughout my studies, throughout the writing of this account, I have felt it was important to carry on creating art. Not only was it crucial to my understanding what I have learnt throughout my art programme but also for myself. By doing art I could express my thoughts, feelings and emotions in a positive way. When looking back and reflecting on what I had achieved in my exhibition, I decided to experiment with ‘type like’ medias as a way of expression.



Plate 17. *I love you* (Source: Author, 2017).

Here is an example of one piece that I created. It was a way of expressing ‘love’ by simply pointing to it every time I wanted to say it to a loved one, rather than physically saying it. It was a way of expressing myself. This is a hand-written piece simply reading the words ‘I love you’. It was a piece of work I had not thought much about when making, yet to me it is one of the most precious pieces I have created and one that I will treasure. I wanted the piece to express connectivity by connecting all the words together, for it to show rawness in the way it was hand written rather than created by any graphic design programme. The words had to flow and it had to be simple. In the photo you can see it is hanging next to part of the letter ‘H’ that I had cut out when using a laser cutter. This was something I had intended to use as part of an art experiment but had a change of mind and decided to use it for decoration in my house.

The 'H' in the background of this photo represents me and my husband, as it is the first letter of both of our last names and considering we are newly married, it seemed to connect to my writing. I continue to re-use old materials. This would include going through skips and bins to find unwanted items. In both sorts of work I wanted to reflect on what I had learnt from my studies and put it into practice.

Some photographs of objects that have interested me:



Plate 18. *Just smile* (Source: Author, 2016).

'Just Smile'- a picture I took of the back of an abandoned leather arm chair. Situated in a skip. 2016 I loved this piece, the chair was left in the skip, it was unloved and completely ruined, however it appeared to show emotion on the rips on the back of the chair showing a smile.



Plate 19. *I am Queen* (Source: Author, 2017).

A photograph I took of a bee resting in the eye of a sculpture of the young Queen Elizabeth. This made me think that the wasp was making a statement.

Poem written by Chloe Hodges Age 26

A poem to sum up my dissertation, from the perspective of my own experiences. If I were to go back in time, what would I tell my young self?

Take that crown; let your freedom begin

If I was lucky enough to meet her young face,

There are only a few words I will tell her to remember.

That one day she will have a choice that she has to make,

And that choice will be one not to surrender.

For I would tell her to speak the truth,

As the truth is the only thing to say.

To make sure that they listen to you,

As for that you will live another day.

To be grateful for the things you have in life,

Because darling, it will only get better

Take trust in what I have got to say

As one day it will all be over

You will win.

You will win.

Take that crown, let your freedom begin.

“Love many things, for therein lies the true strength, and whosoever loves much performs much, and can accomplish much, and what is done in love is done well.” –**Vincent van Gogh** (van Gogh in Roskill, 1990: 148).

My project, the exhibition and the written piece were designed to help develop myself as an artist. The study insists on the necessity of understanding art as a tool of therapy, self expression and a way of bringing people together. A quotation that has always moved me comes from Vincent Van Gogh. It is something I have kept going back to throughout my studies and one that I have felt that has captured my sense of my art work and the meaning of what I have created.

“The emotions are sometimes so strong that I work without knowing it. The strokes come like speech.”

–**Vincent Van Gogh** (van Gogh in Roskill, 1990: 148).

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