

# **Jacob's Ladder:**

Seeing the invisible through the archaeological imagination

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Thesis submitted in part-fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
PhD

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## DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: (candidate)

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> April 2023

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This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

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# ***Jacob's Ladder: seeing the invisible through the archaeological imagination***

## **ABSTRACT**

The first aim of this thesis was to investigate whether the making of artwork specifically influenced by the discipline of archaeology allows the expression and investigation of human spirituality. Having established this initial aim through the development of creative practice, my second aim was to consolidate a research methodology that could become a platform for further investigations in the future. I adopted an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together art, archaeology and theology, as my basis for exploring the concept of the archaeological imagination, articulated through a studio practice in visual art based on abstraction.

Subsidiary aims revolved around forming a definition of archaeological imagination that could be relevant to visual art, and to explore whether archaeological methods, processes, materials, and concepts could help or hinder the development of a studio practice, and if so, could such a practice offer new knowledge and understanding to the current contemporary discourse that exists between art and archaeology. While testing and articulating my investigations, a further subsidiary aim emerged: I began to investigate whether a meditative space, one in which the viewer may experience a kind of inner archaeological excavation, could facilitate an encounter with the archaeological narrative of human experience.

In order to achieve these aims the following objectives were pursued:

1. To find a visual language and vocabulary that could reference archaeological materials, processes and concepts;
2. To produce portfolios of work that consistently and intentionally evoke a sense of the discipline of archaeology;
3. To explore how fruitful the interface between art and archaeology might be in terms of making visual images that express human spirituality;

4. To produce artworks that also give opportunity for the viewer to experience an inner, spiritual, archaeology.

I took two pieces of writing about the nature of archaeology, one by Michael Shanks and one by Jennifer Wallace, as a springboard for developing a studio practice that takes its impetus from archaeology. In this thesis I have not sought to provide a comprehensive and exhaustive list of references to archaeology, but rather, to investigate the usefulness of applying principles of archaeology to the development of an art practice. For example, I have set out to question whether the tools, materials, processes, and practices inherent to archaeology can be applied to the making of artwork, specifically artwork that expresses spiritual realities. I questioned whether the process of excavating below a surface and constructing a whole from a remnant could also be applied. I explored whether site and artefact, and as importantly, the conceptual implications that come from them, could be appropriate to the development of my art practice, and lastly whether practices of recording, archiving, and experiencing a sense of connectivity with human lives of the past, could parallel art methodologies and processes. I then went on to question whether many of the principles common to art and archaeology could also be applied to theology.

The resulting artworks echo the practices of archaeology while referencing theological concepts, articulating common ground that exists between them. Each discipline allows for a focus on materiality, seeking to create narratives that encapsulate human existence. Each has its roots in the material world, and each makes leaps into what cannot be substantiated by scientific data, but rather informed by knowledge and experience. In archaeology, this knowledge comes from what has already been uncovered and understood. In art, this knowledge comes from understanding materials, processes, and the way that both have developed through Western art history. In theology, this knowledge comes from tradition, scripture, reason and experience. As these three areas of knowledge and practical methodologies come together, the result, in my opinion, is an art practice that blends the material with the spiritual.

In 2018 and 2019, I undertook two trips to Bardsey Island as artist in residence with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales. Ynys Enlli,

as it is known in Welsh, lies two miles off the Llyn peninsula, and is the final destination of the North Wales Pilgrims' Way. My Final Exhibition, titled *Jacob's Ladder*, featured pieces inspired by being in this particular 'thin place', a place where it is thought that this world and the 'other' are separated by the finest of films. Mediaeval remains of an Augustinian abbey, and an awareness of a fifth century monastery founded in the same spot by Celtic Christians under St Cadfan in 516AD, led me to dwell on ideas of worship, contemplation, and prayer, the principal expressions of the monastic life. In pursuit of this I restricted myself to the use of the most instinctive and universal of marks made by human hands from earliest times, the vertical line and the circle, and through this articulation, I have sought to find visual form that renders the invisible visible.

Art, archaeology, and theology together demonstrate an interdisciplinarian emphasis that seeks to build and develop a concept of the archaeological imagination that goes beyond the solely archaeological. Reference is made to the additional touchstones of geography, history, deep time and interpretive studies which were merely hinted at in this research, but signposted as a possible direction for fruitful development in the future.

## Section 1: The Artist-Researcher

The idea of the archaeological imagination resonated with me the moment I first read those words on the cover of Jennifer Wallace's (b.1966) book *Digging the Dirt* in 2011. I knew then that I wanted to investigate 'the archaeological imagination' further, to understand what it was, and how I as a visual artist could make work that would demonstrate and develop the concept. I was aware that my imagination for archaeological things was sparked into being at that point. And that was because I linked Wallace's book title with recent archaeological experiences.

A few months earlier, during the summer of 2010, a trip had been arranged informally amongst my cohort of students, (B. A. Hons Fine Art, University of Hull, Yorkshire Coast College, Scarborough) to meet with a local archaeologist for a guided tour of a small section of Fylingdales Moor, just north of Scarborough. There had been severe fires on the moors earlier that summer, with the result that an abundance of Neolithic rock art had been exposed for the first time. It had been anticipated that there could well be ancient carved rocks in the area, but up to this point very few had been located. The fire changed that. So we set off, following the archaeologist on a walk across Fylingdales Moor to see them. As with all art, the photographs I had seen in books could not describe the experience of seeing and touching the real thing. Placing my fingers into the grooves on the ancient stones that had been etched out in cup and ring designs five or six thousand years before, a connectivity with ancient people and a sense of awe at the material remains of our human past began to stir in me.

This expanded beyond all bounds when shortly afterwards I visited the Mesolithic site of Star Carr, a few miles to the south of Scarborough. I saw the beautifully constructed wooden platform worked with Mesolithic tools that offered a landing place on the edge of what would have been a great palaeolake, an ancient lake no longer in existence, known to archaeologists as Lake Flixton. I saw examples of the ancient headdresses made from deer skulls for which the site is internationally famous. I was on site the day that evidence was uncovered of a hearth within what would have been a round temporary dwelling, apparently one of the first indications of Mesolithic temporary dwellings found in the UK. I began to learn more about the

ancient people who occupied this place ten thousand years ago, and as I did so, got to know the excavating team members from the University of York. That summer, I invited the leader to come to my final degree show. She was unable to, but invited me instead to transport the exhibition over to York University and give an illustrated talk to the archaeology department, which I did. It was an exhilarating experience, and one which convinced me that there is a rich interface between the two academic disciplines that I could explore in my art practice in the future.

A few months later, I was invited to visit the newly excavated site of Flixton Island, not far from the Star Carr site, where a very exciting discovery had been made of the presence of ancient horses on the island. I saw the pattern of tiny hooves in the red earth and I was mesmerised. My imagination was stirred and I was captured by a deep resonance with the ancient past. I focused on this following graduation (First Class Honours) in my solo exhibition of pencil drawings, *Excavations 1* (2013), and *The Archaeologist's Dance* (part of Scarborough's "Coastival" event, 2014).

Reflecting back on my early work, it becomes clear that I have always had an instinctive desire to combine different disciplines. The main piece for my B.A. final exhibition consisted of a free-standing curved wall called *Baldur and the Ice Stars*, 2 metres high and 5 metres long, painted in oils, with an original narrative projected onto a small section of the painting, accompanied by a soundtrack of original music. This was developed further in *The Archaeologist's Dance* when a second original soundtrack, accompanied by choreography, was performed by a local dance school in the space formed by a circular arrangement of five free standing canvases, each 1.5metres by 1.2metres. My experience of using music, literature, and dance in with art and archaeology indicates a naturally interdisciplinary mode of thinking that has been a part of my studio practice from the beginning.

My own lack of roots as an individual probably lies at the bottom of my sensitivity to archaeological experiences in particular. My mother was Spanish, and all her documents were destroyed in the Spanish Civil War. Consequently, she knew little of her own family, having grown up as an orphan, cared for by an aunt, and I grew up knowing only my British relatives. I am conscious of being cut off from half of the family to which I belong, and as Maslow (1908-1970) points out in his hierarchy of needs, such emotional and formational deprivation has its effects on the developing

individual (Maslow, 1943, *A Theory of Human Motivation*). I now understand this as foundational to my interest in archaeology. This was made clear to me by my interest in those questions which archaeologists typically ask: Who am I? Where do I come from? How do I fit into the world? These are the questions about personal identity that affect me most. Then I came into contact with Barbara Hepworth's work (1903 – 1975). This experience stirred me and I responded by applying to study Fine Art in 2006 (Yorkshire Coast College, University of Hull) although I had never studied art before.

I first came into contact with Hepworth's work on a holiday in St Ives where I visited her studio and gardens. When I started a foundation course in art and design a couple of months afterwards (Yorkshire Coast College, Scarborough), it was her work which inspired me. At the time I put this down to the way in which her sculptures inhabit the landscape and come to life in it. I realize now that there was more to it than that. For a long time I wrestled with how to describe my relationship to the landscape, which was already a significant part of my studio practice. I knew that I was not a landscape painter, or even an abstract painter working from or with landscape. Yet it was clear to me that as I built pictorial space with what I identified early on as an archaeological narrative, these drawings and paintings were not primarily about place. I was conscious that my work had roots in the land, yet did not portray the land. Hepworth had the same feelings about her own practice. Her words "Landscape is strong – it has bones and flesh and skin and hair. It has age and history and a principle behind its evolution" were prominent in my mind and filtered through to my studio practice (Hepworth 1966 cited in Bowness 2017, p.194). I wonder now if my awareness of her understanding of landscape, expressed in those words, was the starting point for me to engage with something much deeper, and that unconsciously, I perceived a way forward when I considered Hepworth's sculptures.

At this point, I had been a committed Christian for over thirty years and this feature of my life began to make an impact on my practice when I visited Ynys Enlli/Bardsey Island as part of my PhD research in May 2018 and May 2019. There I found myself engaging with an intensely spiritual atmosphere. Such a perception of a place leads to it being described as a 'thin place', where the veil separating the visible world from the invisible is thought to be particularly transparent. I associated my



phenomenological experience with the presence of the monks who had first inhabited the island in the fifth century. Tracy Balzer, Director of Christian Formation at John Brown University in Arkansas, notes that early Celtic Christians had a clear sense of the presence of God in nature and the everyday, a reality felt by “the intensely spiritual Christian Celts whose legacy of poetry and art confirm their sense of ‘the image of the natural world as a doorway to the sacred’” (2007, p.34).

At the same time that this was happening, I went forward for ordination into the Church in Wales denomination, which itself is built on the faith brought over to Wales by those fifth century Celtic Christians. Now ordained an Anglican priest, my personal spirituality joins with the focus on archaeology in my studio practice, to bring a three-fold sensibility to bear on the idea which has been with me through all my art training, that of the archaeological imagination. Art, archaeology and theology are the factors I blend together as I move forward into this area of research.

## Section 2: The Context

My aim in this section is to acknowledge those elements that formed the background to my research, beginning with the artist who had the most impact on me as I began to study and practice art. As explained in Section 1, it was the work of Barbara Hepworth that inspired me to study Fine Art.

### Barbara Hepworth (1903 – 1975)

Barbara Hepworth's crowning achievement, the group piece *The Family of Man* (1970) stands proudly on the sloping ground of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park at Wakefield in West Yorkshire. From the bottom of the rise, nine bronze figures stretch out across the uneven green in clusters, incorporating the natural vegetation and trees of the park. Despite being alien yet familiar, the viewer is drawn in for closer contact with these totemic presences. At once austere and yet offering a conspiratorial warmth, these figures sit confidently within the landscape. Envisaged as groups called by Hepworth *Ancestors*, *Parents* and *Children*, the work brings together the indispensability of landscape to human beings, and the acknowledgement that roots go back through time and experience, as well as through the physicality of place. Hepworth sees these connections as essential:

There is no landscape without the human figure: it is impossible for me to contemplate prehistory in abstraction. A sculpture might, and sculptures do, reside in emptiness but nothing happens until the living human encounters the image (Hepworth 1960, cited in Hammacher 1998, p.202).

Ancient landscape only makes sense when seen in relation to the human figure, she posits, indicating the human vertical presence that rises from the ground and escapes the confines of the earthbound to stretch up towards the heavens. So the sculpted pieces, as individual presences in the landscape, yet gathered into groups, echo the social nature of humankind, in amongst the grass and trees of the natural world that surrounds both work and viewer. And as the viewer draws near, a communication sparks between the living and the sculpted, a stirring of a sensibility that links in with the backward movement of time, connecting the experience of being the child, back to that of the parent, and further still, to that of the ancestor. I believe

this is a stirring of the archaeological imagination, for it is an asking of the questions that archaeology investigates: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where do I fit in?

These questions find their origins in the pierced nature of the sculpted pieces of this group. This is because the holes are a way of seeing 'out of' and 'into', of connecting us with our environment. Rather than being merely blank negative spaces, these sculpted holes are positive, enabling the immediacy of landscape to be drawn into the viewer's aesthetic experience, and by doing so, bind the viewer into the work. The viewer is no longer a disengaged figure but a vital part of the encounter, as the piercing breaks into the world as we see it. Place and time coincide:

Hepworth's holes are also tunnels or worm-holes making a route through time. Art connects us to the past, not only by reminding us of where we have been, individually and collectively, but by renewing in us the creative energy that all humans share, across time. The hole is a way back and a way forward (Winterson 2003, cited in Stephens 2003, p.19).

Yet the hole is even more powerful, by capturing a more primeval essence of our experience in the world, and evoking a wholeness that is integral to the wonder of being human, a wholeness that brings the spiritual as well as the material together:

Hepworth made an astonishing discovery the day she pierced one of her sculptures. She allowed us to see nothing – a privilege previously enjoyed only by God. By surrounding space with form, form can make visible the invisible. . . . Look into a Hepworth hole and you are looking at what matter normally conceals – everything that matter cannot express. A Hepworth hole is not only a connection between different kinds of form, or a way of giving space its own form – it is a relationship with the invisible (ibid., p.20).

Through introducing the pierced form into her work, Hepworth succeeded in forging a connectivity with the human spirit that infinitely enriches our interaction with her work. Through Hepworth, I found that there is a way to open up space in which the archaeological imagination can roam and flourish. And as indicated in Section 1, art is one of the three strands which, woven together with archaeology and spirituality, will dig down into the territory of the archaeological imagination.

It has to be said that Hepworth is not the only artist to venture into the realm of the archaeological. Painters Paul Nash (1889 – 1946) and John Piper (1903 – 1992) are often credited with this perspective in their work, although it does not characterize the whole of their practice. Contemporary artists Daniel Arsham (b.1980) and Joey

Holder (b.1986), Kate Whiteford (b.1952) and Simon Callery (b.1960), amongst others, also play very effectively with archaeological ideas. However, Hepworth is the artist I credit with influencing me to concentrate on the archaeological in my own practice. It is her work that encourages me to slim down my visual vocabulary to its indispensable elements. Now, with *The Family of Man* playing its part in the background, I have purposefully refined my focus down to the potency of the vertical line and the circle, echoing Hepworth's vertical figures and piercings.

## **B.A. (Hons) and M.A.**

Thinking about Hepworth's work, I was struck by her use of abstract form to convey notions of landscape, as well as the natural yet complex interrelation between landscape and human beings that this provokes. In particular, her work allowed me to develop a visual vocabulary of my own, using the vertical line and the circle. Verticality symbolised for her human presence in the landscape. Yet far from being confined to an idea of position, she saw that the vertical form need not be confined to articulate the present: it also had the power to resonate with time, and to link the present with the ancient past. It was this stratification of time that initially drew me to experiment with a simple yet powerful vocabulary from those same elements in my own practice. And this began in the second year of my B.A. (Hons), (Yorkshire Coast College, University of Hull) when I developed work which used a visual vocabulary confined to the three elements of the vertical line, the circle and the contour line. At the time my work referenced maps, and the contour line was a prominent part of the work. It has only featured briefly in this research, specifically, in one set of *Forgotten* canvases. However it is an element that may recur in future artworks.

As my M.A. work progressed (2013 – 2015, Aberystwyth University), I concentrated more on the marks I was making and began a return to the simplicity and strength of the drawn vertical line. Beginning PhD work, I continued with this practice.

## Michael Shanks

During the first year of my PhD, a book was published by archaeologist and Stanford University Professor Michael Shanks (b.1959) called *The Archaeological Imagination* (2016). This is still the only book that I am aware of (as of 2024) that takes the archaeological imagination as its subject matter. As I read this work by an archaeologist interested in creative expressions of his own discipline, I realized that his enquiry left room for a contribution from within the discipline of Fine Art. His questions and observations became the starting point for my own investigations.

As Shanks begins to unravel his thoughts on the subject of the archaeological imagination in his book of that title, he is struck by the element of creativity that he sees as being at the core of any definition. His thoughts are that firstly, it is a way to work creatively on the remains of the past, a way which is rooted in a particular sensibility and cultural reception of the past (2016, p.15). He goes on to say that it is “a bridging field”, connecting different ways of working on the past (Ibid., p.17), enabling us to have a creative understanding of life today (ibid., p.17). It involves the creative and the constitutive. It is an intervention which makes and connects different perceptions of the past (ibid., p.18).

Although he begins by considering something of the function of the archaeological imagination, he goes on to suggest that it has its roots in the imagination of the individual: it is a part of the perception of the individual: a disposition, a faculty or sensibility with its own underlying practices and procedures (ibid., p.41), and is in the end a personal standpoint (ibid., p.38). He also addresses the question of response to evidence of the past. The archaeological imagination loves to recreate the world behind the ruin (ibid., p.25). It is a faculty that pleases the minds of those who are passionate collectors of antiquities (ibid., p.25), as well as one that ascribes value for what remains (ibid., p.26).

Shanks finds that paradox has a large part to play in the discipline of archaeology, and pinpoints the ultimate paradox, that of connecting material things with immaterial cultural value. Through these paradoxes, new engagements can be forged between past and present (ibid., p.27). He acknowledges the complementarity of science and the humanities (ibid., p.27) as they work together. He notes that this at the same time involves a degree of risk as it means taking leave of the past (ibid., p.34),

creating a new dynamic between presence and absence (ibid., p.35). He suggests that some archaeological practices are actually part of the definition, and that this could involve memory practices, such as the making of archives and collections (ibid., p.32). He moves on to state that it is the liminal, the margins and edges of archaeology which is particularly open to the exercise of the archaeological imagination (ibid., p.38).

All these points listed above are useful markers in the attempt to reach a comprehensive definition of the archaeological imagination, and were very much in mind as I sought a way forward from the perspective of my own discipline. This meant acknowledging that not only are there many things in common, but there are also essential differences between the archaeologist and the artist: the archaeologist being the one who finds, uncovers, defines, analyses, and categorises culture, and the artist being the one who makes, questions, appropriates and intervenes in culture.

So, challenged to leave the centrality of archaeology in the search for a definition of the archaeological imagination and develop a perspective from my own discipline, I began to explore the archaeological imagination in terms of the approach I would take as I developed my practice. I saw this as necessitating the reduction of visual elements in my mark-making.

## **Five Concentric Circles**

I began to see the archaeological imagination in terms of a diagram of five concentric circles, considering them like a map in order to move my research forward.

Focusing on taking archaeology as a metaphor for my practice, I thought of the first, outer, ring in terms of an initial definition. It embraces basic principles of the practice of archaeology, factors that had cropped up in my conversations with archaeologists as part of the interface between our two disciplines, such as digging below the surface; working through layers, and capturing the invisible. This did not involve the direct subject matter of archaeology, such as archaeological sites, or artefacts.

The second of the five circles dealt with seeking out the elements that bring ideas of archaeology into art. To develop this, I made two trips to York University's

Archaeology Department (2016) to discuss with archaeologists the existence of an interface between our disciplines. This included exploring such ideas as the importance of narrative, the role of mystery, the emotions involved in discovery, the phenomenological nature of “presence”, and other ideas which we had identified as common to both disciplines during the course of our conversations. I also included a visual culture of archaeology, seeking out maps, diagrams and drawings along with drawing protocols used by archaeologists. Along with these, I included the use of materials and processes specific to archaeology.

The third circle was about experiencing the practice of archaeology by which I mean the activities usually undertaken by archaeologists such as excavation, identifying context, recording, analysis.

The fourth circle involved establishing analogous methods, practices and processes in my own practice, which would have a more nuanced effect on the work that would be made as a result.

The final, central circle was focused on my own identity and sensibilities, as the individual making the work. And so the vertical line occupied the heart of this series of circles, representing both myself as an individual, the mark I would make to signify my own existence in time, and referencing Hepworth’s vertical structures symbolizing humankind in the landscape. In my research practice the vertical line speaks evocatively of the spiritual nature of human existence, rooted as we are in the earth yet simultaneously reaching up towards the heavens . As my practice developed, the vertical line and the circle came together and became the sole components from which new compositions were created. This established a framework from which to proceed.

## **RCAHMW**

At this time, with the above framework in place, an opportunity to be artist in residence arose with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW), whose offices are based in Aberystwyth. Towards the end of my M.A. studies (2015) I volunteered to help with a drawing workshop that was part

of an event opening the RCAHMW archives to the public. I began to volunteer on a weekly basis to help with cataloguing the Commission's library.

Being artist in residence meant that I could have access to all the material held by the Commission, as well as access to the wealth of expertise of the staff. I was given a space in the Commission's offices in which I could show the images I was working on, and I was promised an exhibition in the National Library (which houses the Commission) at the end of my residency. In the event, the Covid pandemic intervened and it was not possible to exhibit, nor to take part in a series of illustrated lectures that I had been invited to contribute to.

At that time, two major new projects were just getting off the ground at RCAHMW. The first one, the U-boat project, was to locate and identify the many undocumented wrecks lying off the coast of Wales, largely in Cardigan Bay, which were specifically casualties of World War 1. I spent the first year of my residency working with this material. This involved displaying my ongoing studio practice at the Commission's offices at regular intervals, and culminated in a one day pop-up exhibition hosted at the Aberystwyth Arts Centre as part of an RCAHMW Open Day. I was also invited to give an illustrated talk on the work I was making in response to the project as part of a public lecture in Pembroke Dock (2018).

Then, as that project closed, I was invited to consider a much larger second project titled CHERISH (Climate, Heritage and Environments of Reefs, Islands and Headlands). This project was commissioned to study coastal erosion and the effects of climate change on sea levels both along the coast of Wales and the South Eastern coast of Ireland. It involved RCAHMW, Aberystwyth University, The Discovery Programme: Centre for Archaeology and Innovation, Ireland, and Geological Survey Ireland in collaboration.

There were two visual artists apart from myself involved in the project and we began plans to exhibit our work in the autumn of 2020, possibly at Dublin Castle, when the project was scheduled to end. In the event we were prevented from doing so by the emergence of the Coronavirus pandemic, and the first Covid lockdown. However, the prospect of taking part in such an exhibition allowed me to consider how my own research might fit. One of the other artists, Julian Ruddock, had prepared an artist statement and I quote from his writing. He summarised his own objectives as: "to



encourage understanding of landscape change and its relationship with human narratives". From my perspective, I was particularly interested in RCAHMW's trips to Bardsey Island as I knew it had been a place of Christian pilgrimage for centuries. I wondered if there was a way in which landscape changes, erosion, and storm frequency might affect the human narrative of pilgrimage to the island. I also wondered how the landscape might affect Bardsey Island's current perceived status as a "thin place", a place where "God is so very near that in some of his creation there is barely a film between him and us" (Balzer 2007, p. 38).

Ruddock continued expressing his aim as: "examining both the landscape itself and the scientific findings of the archaeological remnants of human habitation". This helped me to pinpoint my particular interest, which, rather than moving in line with scientific findings, was to work in conjunction with scientific findings by allowing that which cannot be empirically proven, but nonetheless exists, to have a visible presence. It confirmed to me that my interest lay in giving visual form to that which is true of a place but which cannot be verified by scientific methods.

Thirdly he mentioned: "a sense of the land as seemingly immutable and constant, against the realities of natural flux and the transient nature of human perception of time and experience". By picking up on the seemingly transient, the presence of spirituality in that location, I wanted to point towards the immaterial as being an indispensable part of the place itself, and in a way just as subject to erosion and flux.

Ruddock's intentions helped to clarify my own aim in this project, which was to highlight pilgrimage, introduce the idea of the island being a 'thin place', and consider the first documented inhabitants of the island, the fifth century Celtic Christian monks, and their practices of meditation, contemplation, and prayer. Encompassing all my thinking was the umbrella question: How does all this affect my understanding of the archaeological imagination?

Meanwhile, my links with RCAHMW meant that the opportunity arose to consider the possibility of organising a conference, to be called *Braving the Dragons: Art and the Archaeological Imagination* which would specifically tackle the archaeological imagination as a subject of enquiry. The RCAHMW provided me with help of various sorts, and allowed me to publicize with their backing and the use of their logo. I also had a great deal of support from Aberystwyth University, the host of the conference.

So, encouraged, I went ahead and invited speakers who would have different perspectives and ideas. This included Shanks and Wallace, the only two writers to date who had specifically written about the archaeological imagination (2019). British archaeologist Professor Lord Renfrew agreed to be a main speaker. Land artist Kate Whiteford and Welsh abstract painter Mary Lloyd Jones (b.1934), were also amongst those who were prepared to speak on the subject. I believed that through guest lectures and opportunities to debate opposing positions, this would spark new thinking and widen interest in this new potential field of research. Sadly, the conference did not take place in the end due to the lack of numbers prepared to book in time, but the experience of bringing the conference together convinced me that there is a lively interest in the idea of the archaeological imagination amongst archaeologists, artists and those in the heritage industry.

## **An Archaeological Imagination**

Beginning with Shanks' thoughts that the archaeological imagination is "part of the perception of the individual: a disposition, faculty, sensibility with underlying practices and procedures" (2016, p.41), my own definition of how an artist demonstrates archaeological imagination begins with this: it is a sensibility that makes use of archaeological processes, materials, concepts and procedures, in an intentional way, in order to make new images and narratives that have not been seen before. It is not based on any ideas of reconstruction, or even necessarily representation with regard to image-making, but produces images which, through using the preoccupations and practices of archaeology, evokes invisible realities. As Shanks says in an earlier work:

What is the purpose of archaeology? Is it a quest for objectivity; to acquire facts; to understand or even explain the truth of the past? Is it even to provide justification for an epistemology which holds that truth is to correspond with the facts of the past? Might it not be to foster an open reason, an acceptance of fallibility. In doing archaeology we might not just gather more facts, approaches, explanations, but also acquire the ability to engage in understanding, a learning of tact and judgement in a dialogue with the past (1992, p.46).

This comment about "acquiring the ability to engage in understanding ... in a dialogue with the past" provided the entry point for my own investigation into what

might constitute an archaeological sensibility. I suggest a combination of the following three characteristics:

Firstly, a sensibility that values the past as being relevant to the present and the future, such as an archaeologist might have. It is foundational to the personality of the individual, irrespective of whether one is an artist or an archaeologist. However, like a muscle, it is enhanced by constant use, so archaeologists and artists (in the broadest sense to include writers, composers, musicians, actors) and those who work in the heritage sector, tend to have a more developed sensibility towards the importance and significance of time.

Secondly, it includes an intention to, “re-imagine the remains”, not intended as a direct reconstruction but rather, the creation of something new. This may include imaginative, archaeologically informed conjecture concerning what has been lost, and ought to include a compatibility with the concepts and ideas of archaeology. The result is that an archaeological reality, such as a ruin, a site or an artefact, and the informed conjecture that comes with them, becomes a springboard for new visual ideas. These ideas are not dependent on having either a complete picture of the original, such as the rest of the shards that make up the broken vessel to accompany the shard that has been found, or a comprehensive understanding of the original significance of the ruin, site or artefact.

And thirdly, this is also an instinct that wants to dig down to discover the foundation of something, that wants to know where things came from, what are the roots of something, including personal roots as an individual, as agreed with the archaeologists I visited at York University. The work of Maslow in 1943 sheds light on this, as mentioned in the previous section. Those who lack stability in their childhood, such as the adopted, the abused, the orphaned, the refugee, the victim of war, often experience this by finding that the need to find out where they came from, where they belong, affects their perceptions and behaviours. It becomes a preoccupation in their lives. So this instinct is something that comes from within the artist’s own personality and personal experiences of life, informed by the disciplines of both archaeology and art.

These three elements, I suggest, make up what can be described as an archaeological sensibility. This sensibility shows itself in the work of the artist by use

of the archaeological in an intentional way, including the archaeological methods, practices, materials, tools, and concepts, as a basis for art practice. This is in contrast to finding that the artist's work has an archaeological feel to it when the maker's intention was different. This can happen, for example, during experimentation to see how different materials respond to each other in the making of a piece of work. The result may seem to reference the mystery and hiddenness of objects in time, but this was not what the artist was seeking to achieve but a by-product. The lack of intentionality excludes such work.

It also involves an ability and predisposition to make new images and narratives from a mere fragment or trace of something else. The starting point for this may be a physical object, such as an artefact, a piece of human bone. Or it may be more phenomenological, such as the feelings, emotions and connectivity with the past frequently experienced at archaeological sites. These may become the starting point for new work, yet not be identifiable as such in the finished work. It is a "dialogue with the past" which results in the making of new images.

In his earlier book *Experiencing the Past* (1992), Shanks raises the issue of how to assess the theories and conclusions that may arise from within his discipline because of the archaeological imagination at work in the minds of archaeologists. Will this opening of the door to imagination undermine the integrity of archaeology itself? Shanks summarises his fears that data will be overwhelmed by conjecture: "Are archaeologists, with the authority of objective source material gone, to be on an equal footing with novelists and mystics?" (1992 p.36).

At this point let me develop what I as a fine artist consider to be included in the term archaeological imagination. In the first place, it involves the use of archaeological materials, processes, methodologies and experiences. It is about the hands-on element of the discipline, the physical and material realities of it.

Secondly, the archaeological imagination is about the expression of an archaeological sensibility in relation to the artist as an individual. It is a governing of responses from principles such as the urge to explore, and the desire to preserve and make sense of, the fragments which lie on the surface of our existence as individuals. It shows itself in digging deeper into perceived human experience. It is a framing of narratives, a capturing of the invisible, as a whole is brought into being

from discovered remnants. It is a careful building of possibilities, taking as a starting point the unseen realities involved in being a complex multi-dimensional human being living in a visible, physical world.

As I developed my practice, I came to appreciate that an image demonstrates archaeological imagination when:

1. It results in the giving of form to that which has no form. In a sense this is the aim of all abstract art, but the crucial element for the expression of archaeological imagination is the intentionality of the artist;

2. It results in an image which produces a visual archaeological experience for the viewer, by which I mean an awareness of the significance of stratigraphy; a desire to see what lies beneath, to excavate; a desire to understand something in its context, and in so doing, uncover something new. Examples of what I mean might include work by Anselm Kiefer (b.1945) and Kate Whiteford OBE (b.1952);

3. It results in creating space where the viewer may exercise an archaeology of their own, in other words, where the viewer is encouraged to delve below the visual surface of the work where a non-material reality can emerge from an encounter with the material. In such artwork the physical, visible work encourages a lifting of the viewer's perception away from the physical piece displayed to the invisible, non-material, more generally spiritual, realities that come from an encounter with it. Mark Rothko's (1903 – 1970) colour field paintings have this effect. Sitting in front of his colour field paintings, viewers often report a feeling of being transported away from the gallery and the painting itself to a psychologically new range of feelings and impressions. However the artist had no intention of allying his work specifically with archaeology, and so his work is not one of the archaeological imagination.

### **Imagination: its place in archaeology**

But what of this term 'imagination' as it relates to archaeology? Whereas this is natural in the realm of art, is there a role for the imagination in archaeology? What of Shanks' fears of being "on an equal footing with novelists and mystics" (1992, p.36)? Imagination, defined as the capacity to create in the mind what does not necessarily exist in the physical world, is the mainstay of the artist. For the archaeologist,

however, the standpoint is less clear. For example, the bestowal of significance upon an artefact calls into play the use of imagination, a reconstructive imagination, which nonetheless often runs contrary to the objectives pursued by archaeologists from the very formation of archaeology as a discipline. On the one hand, it was recognized from the beginning that there was a commonality that linked present civilization with previous ones. Sir Leonard Woolley (1880 – 1960) wrote in 1930 that people of the ancient past are “very like ourselves”, seeing past civilizations as being “bound up with that of today” (1930, p.15). Without imagination, and in this case a reconstructive one, there would be no acknowledgement that visualizing a culture from the past was even possible. However that imagination must be held firmly in check. As he explains, “There must be imagination if life is to be breathed in to the dry bones of a dead civilization, but imagination has not been allowed to run riot” in order to preserve the ultimate priority of archaeology, that “accurate observation and faithful record are preliminary to any reconstruction” (1930, p.135). Woolley defends the use of imagination, but warns against the overuse of it, seeing it as a potential cause of undermining the value of the material evidence upon which that exercise of the imagination is built.

Sixty years later, the advice given to those studying archaeology as an academic discipline is wider. “Archaeology is partly the discovery of the treasures of the past, partly the meticulous work of the scientific analyst, partly the exercise of the creative imagination” (Renfrew and Bahn, 1998, p.11). There is a formally acknowledged space for the imagination after all, one which takes the facts and data of the archaeological situation and from them recreates that which no longer exists, within the boundaries that the physical evidence will allow. Renfrew and Bahn take this a step further. Imagination is undeniably involved, but it still must not be allowed to “run riot”. It is still seen in terms of reconstruction, only now the reconstruction extends to more elusive areas, such as how ancient people thought (ibid., p.13).

And this is because of art. As Denis Dutton (1944 – 2010) explains, every piece of ancient art whether portable or parietal, brings an essential element into the archaeological reconstruction of the past because “works of art are also windows into the mind of another human being” (Dutton 2010, p.192). He affirms “artistic experience takes place in the theatre of the imagination” (ibid., p.58), and states that archaeological material that is recognized as artistic across cultures “suggest that

they derive from a natural, innate source: a universal human psychology (ibid., p.30)".

Art, and therefore imagination, has been a part of being human for as far back as archaeology can take us. Which in turn seems to suggest that those expressions of art, which can be defined as exercises of human imagination, convey in their own way, information equally valid in spite of being immaterial and invisible. This is the situation that Renfrew and Bahn are allowing for (1998, p.13) as noted above.

To what extent, then, can the interpretation put upon an artefact or a site by archaeologists be factual? This is a new kind of problem which contemporary archaeology readily acknowledges. Far from merely giving us the facts, as Sir Leonard Woolley aspired to, modern archaeologists are much more sensitive about the layers of meaning they themselves might be adding inadvertently to the puzzle. Ian Hodder mentions this problem in his book *The Archaeological Process* (1999) arguing that "To some extent we 'observe' what we want to or are trained to observe" and suggesting that instead of using the term 'testing', "it is better to describe the archaeological process as based on 'fitting'. Archaeologists seem to work by fitting theory and data together until a coherent whole is reached" (1999, p.62).

It is this awareness of the problem caused by the fact that archaeologists are themselves contributing to the interpretation of data, bringing their own twenty first century sensibilities, and therefore possibly skewing the resulting understanding of that site or artefact, that has encouraged the thought within a section of the discipline that the past no longer exists, and is unrecoverable. Imagination, once discouraged, then allowed within certain boundaries, no longer has a place at all as far as some contemporary archaeologists are concerned. Perhaps it lies more appropriately, then, in the domain of the arts that a bond can be effectively forged with the lives of others in the past, for it is not facts alone that are required to make sense of the irretrievable past, but truth, and truth encompasses the invisible as well as the visible, the 'here' as well as the 'other'.

Lucy Lippard (b.1937) picks up on this. "What interests me most about prehistory is precisely what cannot be known about it" (1983, p.3), she declares, staking interest in the things that archaeology leaves out because they cannot be factually known. It is the lure of the undefined, the attraction of the invisible which entices an

imaginative response. Lippard sees this as an attraction that arises from the disjointed nature of our modern lives, saying that “Our lack of shared beliefs and values contributes to our fascination with ancient images and monuments. They are often attractive precisely because their meaning cannot be deciphered.” Pointing to the paradox of modern living, she adds: “We are caught between too little information and too much” (ibid., p.11).

So there is a reality that we still have to find an acceptable way to express, and I would argue that artists have a vital role to play in that venture. However it is possible to argue that our modern lives may in fact only be magnifying an innate sense in humankind that has existed for thousands of years, a sense that is expressed by archaeology as religion and ritual, and expressed in our contemporary world as spirituality and faith. It may be that aspect of human experience that gives rise to an archaeologically informed imagination rather than necessarily social fracture. Examples of this go back thousands of years.

For example the Book of Joshua in the Hebrew Bible describes in some detail the ascribing of value to future generations, itself an invisible reality, to a physical monument in chapter 4. The Israelites, having escaped from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, are on the point of entering the Promised Land under the command of Joshua. This involved the crossing of the Jordan, which stopped flowing to allow the people to cross. Once everyone was over, and only the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant remained standing on the river bed, Joshua commanded that twelve stones be brought up from the river bed and gave them the following instructions:

He said to the Israelites, “In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground. For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and that you might always fear the Lord your God.’” (Joshua 4: 21 - 24).

This ancient custom of giving meaning to the land, of building monuments in order to preserve the narrative of the past, is for the benefit of future generations, a sort of archaeology in reverse. Joshua was preparing for the time when people living



hundreds, if not thousands, of years later would understand the importance of what had happened in that location, and how it featured in the belief system of the people originally involved. A spiritual as well as a historical purpose is being fulfilled. This presupposes that ancient peoples were aware of the power of the archaeological, and used it for cultural and religious purposes. The stones are merely rocks from the river bed but they are now imbued with significance and meaning, preserved as such for all time. There has always been scope for the archaeological imagination in human experience, and thus an area of human consciousness that also embraces religion and spirituality. For it is quite a feature of modern life that we like to separate and compartmentalise what at one time was woven together (Lippard, 1983 p.4). For Lippard the role of the artist is not contradictory to that of the archaeologist, but one that approaches archaeology from a different direction. Artists do not purport to be specialists in archaeology: "Yet at the same time, artists of all kinds might be seen as the keepers of human racial memory – natural archaeologists" (ibid., p.8).

### **Imagination: its place in spirituality**

To the surprise of many, it is a mistake to think that contemporary art and faith or religion are opposed to one another. Aaron Rosen, Professor of Religion and Visual Culture, and Director of the Henry Luce III Centre for the Arts and Religion at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C. explains that while modern art does not focus on religious subjects in the same way that earlier Western art did, "yet, since its birth in the nineteenth century, modern art has continued to draw extensively upon religious themes and images" (2017, p.8).

This was helped by the support of such churchmen as the Bishop of Chichester who in 1930 argued that there should be a reconnection between artists and the Church (Powers cited in Llewellyn and Liss (eds), 2019, p.11). Artist John Napper (1916-2001), interviewed in 1991, described his own background of familiarity with Christianity, being concerned "with the eternal truths that exist in the imagination" (ibid., p.24). Then in 1999 a communication came from Pope John Paul II addressed to artists "affirming their special spiritual vocation and inviting them into a 'renewed dialogue' with the Catholic Church", which consequently led to the Vatican making its first contribution to the Venice Biennale in 2013 (Rosen, 2017, p.17).

In conclusion, what of this term 'imagination'? is there a role for the use of the imagination in archaeology? Or does it remain a source of anxiety for archaeologists? What of Shanks' fears of being "on an equal footing with novelists and mystics"? Renfrew and Bahn consider the matter and conclude that it is practically impossible to eradicate all imagination from the discipline of archaeology. "Even the archaeological data are 'theory laden', and as many 'readings' are possible as there are research workers", they admit, noting that all decisions "involve choices which depend less on an objective assessment of the data than on the feelings and opinions of the researchers and of the clients whom they aim to please" (1998, p.42).

In the light of this honest appraisal, it can be argued that it is virtually unavoidable to exclude all exercise of the imagination in the consideration of archaeological subject matter. For the archaeologist, there is almost a note of apology that accompanies this conclusion. By contrast, for the artist, there is the opening of a door.

## **Section 3: The Investigation**

As a starting point, I decided to focus on the practical and subsidiary aim of establishing a definition of the archaeological imagination, as identified in the Abstract. To facilitate this, I visited the archaeologists I had met on site at Star Carr in North Yorkshire at the University of York (2016). I made two trips to York University (March 2016 and May 2016), and held conversations with the Postglacial Team at the Department of Archaeology, headed by Professor Nicky Milner. Professor Milner had also led York University's excavation team at Star Carr.

### **An Art and Archaeology Interface**

As a result of our discussions, it became clear that both Fine Art and Archaeology involve the same basic activities, mindsets and approaches. The sheer materiality of both disciplines creates common ground. Here I am not attempting to describe the working aims and processes of all visual artists, but specifically visual abstract artists such as myself who use a variety of 'hand-of-the-artist' media, avoiding the use of technology where possible, with a minimal visual vocabulary to express abstract concepts. It is common practice for such artists to find ways of digging below the surface; discovering the hidden; searching for and finding narrative, as is the case for archaeologists. We both attempt to capture the invisible in visible form; put together the pieces of a puzzle; construct a whole from a remnant; and reconstruct a reality from evidence that has been left behind. The experience of working through layers was also discussed as a commonality, along with more psychological suggestions such as the personal search for identity and a sense of place in the world, present in both archaeologists and such artists alike. Along with all this came the subject of time, time as an element which simultaneously links us with, and alienates us from, the past. All these aspects were agreed as points that abstract visual artists and archaeologists hold in common.

Those conversations brought me on to consider the visual culture of archaeology. This was about referencing the way archaeological recording is done, and looking at the conventions they comply with. It was an attempt to gather together the official ways in which archaeological data looks, and indicate the conventions that form the

framework for how these should be made and communicated from within the discipline of archaeology. The material referenced included site drawings, site maps, sketches, drawings of artefacts, diagrams, photographs, aerial photography, plans, records, graphs, diaries, letters, articles, books and other publications, lectures, 3D visual reconstructions, presentations to others within the discipline, and presentations to the public, a rich pool of resources for the artist.

The use of archaeological subject matter inevitably came under scrutiny, as this also comes under the wider umbrella definition of archaeological imagination. Excavation sites, ruins, artefacts, archaeological tools and equipment, industrial archaeology and its impact on the landscape, are all included. So I came across artists from the past who spent time with archaeological interests, such as John Piper and Paul Nash, as already mentioned in Section 2, along with Graham Sutherland (1903 – 1980). However, the effect of this was to help me realise that within my own practice of working with abstract form rather than the abstracted or the representational, the challenge would be to achieve a similar level of connectivity with archaeological realities without direct visual reference to physical archaeological material.

With this in mind, I considered exploring the nuances between the two disciplines, nuances that come from the teasing out of the relationship between them. I realised that territory could be explored within the designated area in which permutations of the disciplines exist, that sees archaeology in art, archaeology as art, the archaeology of art, art in archaeology, art as archaeology, the art of archaeology, and the archaeology of art. Colin Renfrew sets this process off in his book *Figuring it Out* (2003), but it has not yet been pursued in any depth by any contemporary artist as far as I am aware.

An archaeological imagination could also find a useful starting point by building on the work of other contemporary artists who are intentionally archaeological, if only occasionally, in their practice. This would include Anne Desmet (b.1964), Mary Lloyd Jones (b.1934), and Julie Mehretu (b.1970), along with those artists mentioned above. Having said that, many of these current artists would not describe themselves as investing in the archaeological imagination, either because they had not considered their work in that light, or because their interest in archaeology was a temporary one that no longer continues through their practice. My research so far

has not revealed any artists that currently confine themselves to discovering more about the role of archaeology in their making, and none that have pinpointed the specific theme of the archaeological imagination as the intended vehicle of their expression.

As archaeology for the archaeologist, art for the visual artist is very often primarily a physical experience. Therefore it makes sense to see a definition of the archaeological imagination from a Fine Art perspective which includes the use of archaeological methods, processes, and materials, such as are involved in the usual practice of archaeology. This would necessarily cover processes such as excavation; stratification; gridding; mapping; categorising; aerial work; ground-based work, along with the equipment needed to make them possible. It would also include the use of archaeological materials such as Permatrace; and archaeological tools ranging from sonic sounding equipment to fine excavation hand tools. It would involve the consideration of such practices as recording, preserving, and archiving.

However the artist is not restricted to the material accoutrements of archaeology. This may only be a starting point. Art which exhibits an archaeological imagination may be of a different order altogether. Rather than referencing or making use of the physical realities of the practice of archaeology, it may instead focus on the intangible, the mysterious and the enigmatic, as well as the ambiguous, features which characterise archaeology in spite of its determined material frames of reference. This would encompass concepts such as the fragment, the transitory, the incomplete and unfinished, the broken, the residue. It would include what once was, but no longer physically exists. The mysterious and enigmatic would need to be realised through evocation and re-imagining, rather than reconstruction, in order to enrich the findings of the archaeologist. In a sense this produces a kind of archaeology which searches upwards through the stratification of physical existence into the more ethereal realms of what can be broadly described as spiritual, rather than delving further down into the physical strata as the archaeologist would do.

The archaeological imagination can also show itself through removal as well as addition, by which I mean the creative removal of information, not to dwell on what is absent in this case, but in order to form new possibilities. This would necessarily involve a concept of freedom, freedom from constraint and convention, the freedom

to take a small amount of data and use it as the basis for a new world that has never existed before. This is natural territory for the artist.

Such an approach would also have repercussions for the viewer, giving them incentive and encouragement to add a further dimension to what they already know as fact. The work would need to expand as the viewer experienced it, so that the experience of the work becomes something bigger than expected, something surprising, such as would occur in that moment of realisation when the fragment that has just been uncovered is recognised as a part of something much bigger and more archaeologically important than originally anticipated. Capturing that experience for both maker and viewer is an archaeological quest for the artist.

In the end, this is about taking an archaeological starting point and then moving in a new direction, untrammelled by conventions of physical archaeology. By doing so, the artist takes over the framework provided by the archaeologist and seeks to breathe life into the new visual forms that arises from it. Yet at the same time, evoking a sense that relates to archaeology.

## **Back to the Beginning**

I thought about Wallace's book, realising that she identified a significant intangible in the experience of archaeology. What was this unexpected stirring of wonder and emotion that many people are affected by when brought into contact with the distant past? Where does this yearning to know, to reach back, to uncover, come from? And how can images be made that capture those feelings?

A Cambridge Professor of English Literature, Wallace made her exploration of the archaeological imagination through literary excavation into the poetry of William Wordsworth. At about the same time, Shanks began to develop the concept of the archaeological imagination as a discrete area of academic scrutiny within the discipline of archaeology. Shanks invited Wallace to speak at a conference he had organised to bring together current thinking on the subject. This began a slow-burning dialogue that, more than a decade later, continues to smoulder on, although few have risen to the challenge of taking this as an area of study. Further, as far as I know, no visual artist has yet developed this area as the focus of their studio

practice. Shanks, however, continues to make the archaeological imagination a cornerstone of his own research and practice, seeing it as “a bridging field, connecting the different ways of working on remains of the past” (2012, p.17).

Wallace, the first person to use the phrase ‘the archaeological imagination’, sets the tone for the start of the discussion with an explanation of her own purpose in writing, to investigate the imagination’s ability to “turn stones into words and the barest bones of our existence into something meaningful and lasting”. Yet she reveals that this imagination carries its own fragility (2004, p.12). Her tone is one of modulated mourning, one of melancholy over the experience of loss, whether felt or merely imagined, set out clearly in her conviction that:

the archaeological imagination responds to what is missing rather than to what is there. It snatches objects from the ground only to try to restore some sense of their original context in the earth so as to understand them properly. It substitutes a story or an interpretation in place of what actually lies before it or in compensation for what has been lost or still lies buried. It attempts to transfigure the bleakness of the material with which it has to deal and find something of significance in what can only be imagined, in the fancied depths, in what has disappeared (ibid., p.24).

In this way she gave substance to Shanks’ thoughts, described as “an archaeological agenda rooted in discovery, collection, senses of place and a contemporary romanticism” (2012, p.10).

For Wallace, the valued past has disappeared, leaving only hints of itself deep in the ground, ground which ironically must be disturbed, or even removed, in order to seek the missing. Narrative is a speculative substitute for “the bleakness of the material”, a filler of space, a stretching out of metaphorical fingers to scabble in the dirt for that which can no longer be found. Yet the paucity of what is unearthed is an indicator of what once was possibly of great importance. A fragment of pottery, a shard of whitened bone, evidence of a charcoal deposit in the soil, all speaking of far more than their limited physical realities would communicate by themselves. At this point it is no longer relevant that the pot or the source of the bone were valued in their original circumstances. The present confers value, however commonplace the original, as a different perspective is brought into play by the archaeological concern to investigate the mystery it offers to the contemporary world.

In tackling the subject, Wallace is searching for a correlation between the connectivity she herself experienced while working on archaeological sites in her youth, and her modern twenty first century existence.

Renfrew expresses the same awareness when writing about his visits to the prehistoric sites on Orkney:

When it was first described in detail a century and a half ago, the Ring of Brodgar was very little understood. The methods were not then available to date it to the Neolithic period, the time of the first farmers of Orkney, nor was its relationship to the great wealth of other prehistoric monuments in Orkney recognized. Today, as a result of subsequent research, we know a great deal more. But as a monument, its presence somehow still transcends our knowledge or understanding. There is more to say, although we do not yet know how to say it (2006, p.18).

Loss, fragility, melancholy, and a general recognition of the indefinable is summarised by him with honesty. There is something, described by Renfrew as “presence”, which escapes the practices of archaeology as a discipline.

Measurements may have been taken, data collected, explanations extrapolated, anomalies examined, and a plethora of facts and figures, charts and diagrams collated, but still there is something about the site which remains unexplained, something which has slipped away from the mesh of methods and procedures that the discipline of archaeology employs, lifting away from the inquisitor and back into the ether, like a butterfly evading the collector’s net. Renfrew acknowledges that the brief of the archaeologist often leaves the unseen unrecorded and ignored, yet the experience of being on the site should not be overlooked (ibid., p.42).

And such experiences can be extreme. This is the account academic and nature writer Robert Macfarlane gives of his encounter with ancient dancing red figures, Bronze Age rock art, in the sea caves of Lofotens, Norway, in his book *Underland*:

Suddenly, unexpectedly, my head begins to tingle and then my back and chest start to shake, and I find myself crying, sobs shuddering my body in the tear-drop shaped rift, far from another human and so close to these generous figures. The dangers of the journey to reach the dancers ebb from me, the joy of their movement ebbs into me and I cry there, surprised and helpless, deep in granite and darkness, weeping for feelings I cannot name (2019, p.278).

As Macfarlane discovered, encountering the figures in the cave produced quite a different response from merely knowing that they existed. The physical proximity to



those ancient markings in the rock introduced a new ingredient into his experience of them which cannot adequately be described by an acquaintance with facts. In a sense, facts arising from archaeological sites and artefacts only amplify the mystery. They delineate the empty space for which no empirical data can be gathered. Rather than provide an explanation, they indicate the presence of the 'other' in terms of 'immediate sense impressions', the felt, the unquantifiable. And although the phenomenological cannot be treated in the same way as objective fact, it is a mistake to discount it altogether, as Renfrew readily admits. It is the search for this capture of the phenomenological that makes the territory of the archaeological imagination one that invites artists to enquire and experiment.

## **A skeleton of questions**

I reminded myself of the questions which Michael Shanks introduces into the debate (Shanks, 2016) which explore the archaeological imagination from the point of view of the archaeologist. By using these as a skeleton to be fleshed out, a useful starting point, I decided to explore a potential dialogue between Fine Art and Archaeology as to where art can be placed within this field of research. Accepting his contribution to the debate as an archaeologist raises a secondary order of subsidiary questions for the artist that I would need to be aware of:

Firstly, if the archaeological imagination is “a bridging field, connecting different ways of working on remains of the past” (ibid., p.17), how does Fine Art connect? As Archaeology begins to build links with other disciplines, what can Fine Art contribute to the field? How might this contribution enhance the field as a whole? And what role might narrative play in that as the archaeological imagination is expressed through image?

Secondly, if archaeology “encompasses passion for collection and fascination with senses of place rooted in the histories of people, and in evocation – past events associated with a particular site or building and still present in their traces” along with “the sheer sense of mystery of ancient societies deep in an abyss of time and lit only dimly through their remains”; (ibid., p.9), in other words, if archaeology is about collection, sense of place, evocation and mystery (ibid., p.22), how can a visual artist

begin to build up these links? What methodologies, materials, processes, are effective in pursuit of these aims? What part do art-specific concerns such as formal elements of composition, the language of pictorial space, and the input of colour play in creating a sense of archaeology as defined above? How can the archaeological imagination be expressed through abstract rather than representational ways, in the pursuit of evocation and mystery?

Thirdly, if the archaeological imagination is about “how archaeological themes are at the heart of our contemporary relationship with the past and its remains”, and how that in turn “resonates so well with broader cultural energies” (ibid., p.12), where does the attractiveness of the archaeological imagination lie for me as a Fine Artist? How does the art I make manifest “broader cultural energies”? How does the interplay of the contemporary with the ancient work out visually in my work? How can I, a visual artist, respond in a new way to artefacts, ruins and a sense of place in a way that is contemporary? How do the inevitable paradoxes and polarities that come from bringing together the ancient and the contemporary play out through visual discourse?

Fourthly, if the archaeological imagination counts memory practices as its primary feature, (ibid., p.32), how is such a phenomenological quest relevant to my studio practice? And does my personal archaeology as the artist have a part to play in this?

Lastly, if the archaeological imagination has a forward-looking dimension, (ibid., p.149), how does the development of a visual language fit in? Are there changes, innovations, which can be opened up by my research practice which could contribute to the archaeological imagination as a concept? And how might this impact on the way in which archaeological materials are dealt with by archaeologists? What repercussions might there be for the way in which items of archaeological interest are displayed and communicated to a wider audience? And is there any way in which the archaeological imagination can encourage an ethos of concern for our contemporary world?

Over the research as a whole is the intention to explore how human spirituality reveals itself through the art/archaeology interface, raising questions such as: Can humankind’s search for God, for the ‘Other’, be enhanced through the making of art

that relates to the archaeological imagination? Can such visual images contribute to progress in this search as they contribute knowledge of a different order?

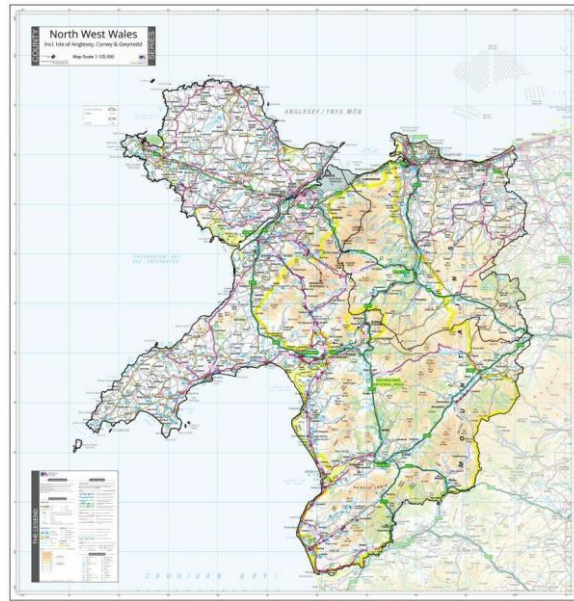
## **A Spirituality of Place**

The contemporary world, such a primary frame of reference for both art and theology, is also of interest to the archaeological imagination with its perspective based in the mysteries of the past. Reflecting on Celtic spirituality, writer on philosophical theology Noel Dermot O'Donoghue (1920 – 2006) suggests that this requires a certain spirituality of perception:

But to look truly at the past in its full significance and meaning, in its dimensions of spirit (and the spirit of prayer) is to look not primarily to the past but to the future (2001, p.22).

O'Donoghue's argument revolves around the essential spiritual reality of prayer: Prayers that are "valid" play a part in God's eternal purpose and continue to exist, whether answered already or not answered yet, in the space of God's omnipresence. Such a sense of the 'other', of presence, was the ultimate purpose of monastic life and the conscious aim of its adherents (Brother Lawrence, 2015, p8). Far from seeing the past as dead and gone, O'Donoghue ascribes to those following this spiritual quest an acceptance of the awareness of a "world beyond time", based on the nature of God who exists both within, and outside of, time, "a world far more deeply interfused with divine presence"(ibid., p.15). For him, it leads to a stirring of the imagination in the sense of becoming aware of a reality that is not part of the surface details with which we are familiar, but one which lies behind physical evidence. It is a place where God makes his presence felt, or as he puts it, "from the world of observation and physical measurement to the world of intimation and unmeasurable and 'unprovable' spiritual experience" (ibid., p.23). This was very much the perspective of the Celtic Christians who came over to Wales and Ireland in the fifth century, who are known as embracing a cosmic as well as a triune and an incarnational dimension to their faith.

## Visiting Bardsey Island



Bardsey Island is situated off the northernmost tip of the Llyn peninsula, North Wales, as seen on the map above.



Image 3.1: The seal colony on Bardsey Island. Photograph by the artist

O'Donoghue's writing has in mind the time of the ancient Welsh saints, including the patron saint of Wales, Saint David. Gwynfor Evans, Welsh historian, describes the emerging Church as it existed at this point as monastic and missionary (1974, p.90). As for Bardsey Island itself, such a background is what characterises its history (Allchin, 1991, p.3). So it is reasonable to think that the characteristics and activities associated with the Celtic Church were also present in the monastic community on Bardsey Island.

This was very much my experience of being on Bardsey Island (May 2018 and May 2019). Both visits took place in warm, sunny conditions under bright clear skies. Perhaps it was the light blue of the spring sky mingling with the silver blue of the sea stretching out into the distance that gave the impression of an indefinable horizon. It was difficult to see the demarcation line, if in fact there was one, separating sea from sky, promoting the thought that heaven and earth were not so far apart at this particular geographical location. Perhaps this was enhanced by the otherworldly sounds coming from the grey seal colony as they sunbathed amongst the rocks busy with pippets and oystercatchers. Or perhaps it had nothing to do with the meteorological conditions or the island's wildlife soundtrack. Perhaps, as with other sites of archaeological interest, it is an awareness of the telescoping of time between the present and the past that gives the island such distinctive characteristics.



Image 3.2: In the shadow of the ruined Abbey, looking West. Photograph by the artist

As Allchin points out, “others have spoken of such places as ‘liminal places’, threshold places, where it seems possible to step through a doorway from one world to another”, and such realities exist as much today as in days gone by. He

concludes that “however much things in our society may have changed, people who come to Bardsey feel themselves very close to eternal realities “(ibid., p.2,3).



Image 3.3: On Bardsey Island. Photograph by the artist

The island is relatively easy but uncomfortable to get to. The journey from the tip of the Llyn Peninsula to the island is taken in a small boat, and may only take place when the conditions crossing the turbulent Bardsey Sound, the stretch of water between the mainland and the island notorious for its unpredictable energy, allow. It is twenty minutes of being tossed and shaken between troughs and swells of water until the smooth calm of the landing bay is finally approached. It is a place where few people live, particularly through the winter months. There are no shops, no cottage industries, no permanent occupants and no food production apart from the grazing of a few sheep. It has no means of securing supplies other than by the courier service provided by the small boat. It is a place of calm, quiet, and solitude, a perfect place for the RSPB bird sanctuary. It is a place where the distant smudge of horizon can be studied from a variety of vantage points, all inviting that step to be taken between the daily realities of mainland life and the call of the imagination towards something other, something more, something that remains invisible and in

too gentle a whisper to intrude into the fabric of everyday preoccupations. As O'Donoghue would put it, "In speaking thus I am passing from the world of the physical senses to the world of the 'spiritual' senses" (2001, p23). As in Iona, the experience of spending time on Bardsey takes the visitor into a different realm, where a private spiritual landscape snags at the edges of consciousness and asks to be taken into account. This is a particularly personal experience because as Balzer explains, "the answer lies in our own internal landscape" and "the first and best thin place must be our own souls" (2007, p.38).

My intention was to focus my research on my experiences of "thin" places in Wales. I intended to spend 2019 making work focused on Bardsey Island, and then extend my experience of "thin" places by working at the abbey ruins of Strata Florida, not far from Aberystwyth. I would also have liked to investigate a section of the ancient Cistercian Way, which runs close to Aberystwyth, and possibly consider re-enacting a pilgrimage walk to St David's Cathedral. However, it was not to be. The Coronavirus pandemic emerged in the UK in March 2020, and that cut off this particular avenue of research. So it was from the body of work that resulted from my visits to Bardsey Island that I selected images for the Final Exhibition.

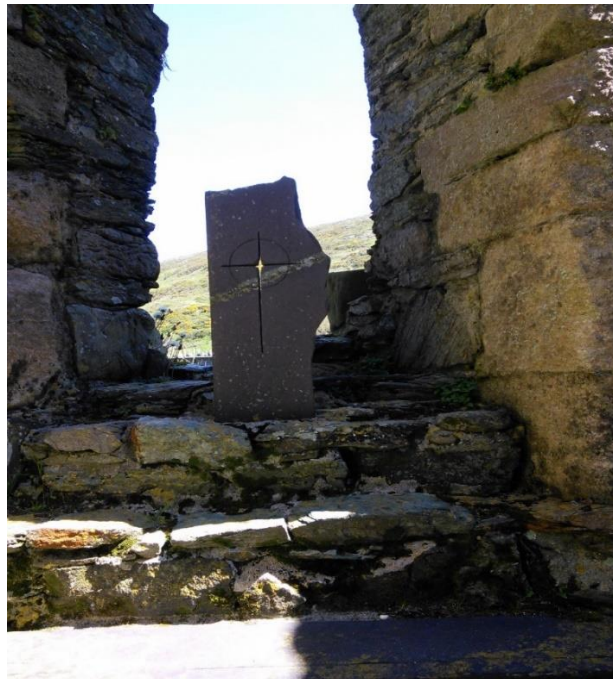


Image 3.4: In the ruins of the Augustinian Abbey, with the memorial to the Celtic Monastery.

Photograph by the artist

## A Summary

To summarise: I began my research by

- compiling a definition of the term archaeological imagination through identifying an art and archaeology interface;
- investigating the visual culture of archaeology;
- visiting sites and artefacts;
- considering how art practice could incorporate archaeological practice;
- seeking out work made by other contemporary artists with archaeological themes, processes and materials;
- coming to the decision to evoke rather than reconstruct, by taking any or all of the above as starting points for the making of new work.

I then went on to consider the intangibles that are commonly experienced at archaeological sites by focusing on the literature I was considering: Wallace's book, asking, can I make images that would produce comparable responses of wonder, connectivity and a sense of loss; Shanks' questions, in particular those surrounding the idea of the archaeological imagination being a bridging field, involving a passion for collection, resonating with broader cultural energies, and having a forward-looking dimension; and O'Donoghue's contribution about spirituality of place, specifically relevant to my subject, the archaeological site of Bardsey Island. All this became the substance of my practice, and the portfolios from which the culminating exhibition was curated.

In addition, during the middle years of this research period I continued to develop an interdisciplinarian approach, intentionally building archaeology, theology and art into my studio practice. I experimented with turning drawings into sound, but left that avenue to focus more on the visual. As part of my collage groundwork I began to work with collage poetry. I then went further with involving literature by writing a novel, but this too was laid to one side.

I also attempted to develop the enquiry in a broader, more challenging, way by putting together the two-day conference, *Braving the Dragons*, mentioned above in Section 2. The aim was to provoke discussion and entice others to enter this area of research. The list of speakers for that event included artists; archaeologists; representatives from museums and the heritage industry, along with an expert in



artificial intelligence research; a representative from a charity working to abolish modern slavery; the then Welsh minister for Culture, Sport and the Arts, and the then Welsh Commissioner with responsibility for promoting the Welsh language. Events were to include a visit to the local Iron Age site of Pen Dinas, a visit to the archives department of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, and an art exhibition featuring work by land artist Kate Whiteford and abstract painter Mary Lloyd Jones, who would be there as speakers. The hope was that by bringing together diverse delegates, new investigations would be sparked into being and new ideas discovered.

As I came to the final couple of years of this research, I took the decision to resist a wider interdisciplinary base and concentrate on setting a strong foundation for future exploration of the archaeological imagination, confining myself to art, archaeology and theology. I concentrated on the main aims I had set myself, as expressed in the Abstract. I felt that further investigation into growing academic interest in interdisciplinarianism at that time would have taken me away from my designated focus. However, it would provide a fruitful way forward for my studio practice in the future, post PhD.

## The Exhibition



Image 3.5: Setting up exhibition room (right). Photograph by the artist

In January 2022, after considering other options for the focus of the Final Exhibition, I decided to draw together the pieces made in response to my time on Bardsey Island. By then I had established a rhythm of working that built on the practices of repetition, contemplation and prayer, inspired by the practice of the monks. I made this clear in my Exhibition artist statement.

The Exhibition was given the title *Jacob's Ladder: seeing the invisible through the archaeological imagination*, a title which refers to both a physical place and a spiritual encounter. In the Book of Genesis chapter 28, where the phrase originates, the patriarch Jacob (son of Isaac, grandson of Abraham), is travelling from his home in Beersheba to relatives in Harran and stops overnight. During the night, he dreams of angels ascending and descending on a ladder reaching from earth into heaven. God speaks to Jacob, declaring that he will inherit the land he is lying on, and Jacob takes the stone that had been his pillow that night to set up as a memorial of his encounter with God and the promise that was made (Genesis 28: 10 – 14).

Not only is this both a physical place and a spiritual encounter, but there is also an element of 'reverse archaeology' involved. Just as in the passage already quoted from the Book of Joshua, a stone is taken and set aside to bear witness to a particular event, so that in the future the spiritual significance of the physical place would not be lost. Jacob made his encounter with God visible through the anointing and setting up of the stone as a pillar, the physical and the metaphysical coming together in one metaphysical incident and one physical place. It seemed to me a wholly appropriate title for the Exhibition.

The exhibition space was comprised of one large room divided into two sections. This provided the opportunity to have one overall show but with the possibility of dividing the selected material into two discrete groups. I chose to put the lighter-toned work in the first room (left) and the darker-toned work in the second (right). The first room contained three pieces spaced across the centre of the room: *Canticle* in the centre of the far wall displayed as an artefact on a chest of drawers, *Prayers Ascending* suspended from the ceiling at the entrance to the room, and *Kneelers* occupying the floor space between them. On the walls hung nine canvases from the *Incense* series, and a glass cabinet by the doorway displaying framed drawings from

both the *Incense* and the *Prayers Ascending* series under enlarged maps of Bardsey Island, produced by RCAHMW from the material in its archives.



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The first room was dominated by the grid, a visual device which speaks in the first instance of archaeology, as sites are routinely marked out in grids for ease of referencing, and many site drawings are done on squared paper. These archaeological practices were marked out throughout the room by all the work exhibited. Drawings on squared paper occupied the glass case at the entrance. The grid motif was expanded through the canvases on the walls. The artefact *Canticle's* gridded face was reflected in *Kneelers*. Only *Prayers Ascending* held a more nuanced form of grid, with nonetheless a strong vertical and horizontal presence.

But the grid is also a look back at modernism where the grid as an artistic device in its own right first gained prominence, as seen in the work of Carl Andre (1935 – 2024) and Sol Le Witt (1928 – 2007). In this context, the grid introduces an element of ambiguity. Firstly, from its beginnings in modern art the grid has been used to demonstrate “its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse” (Krauss, 1979). It is “what art looks like when it turns its back on nature” (Krauss, 1979). As Ad Reinhardt, a major exponent of the values of modern art expressed it, the grid stood for the “non-objective, non-representational, non-figurative, non-imagist, non-expressionist, non-subjective” (MoMA, 2017)

Yet this same artist encounters, perhaps unintentionally, a different, hidden aspect of the grid:

we could think about Ad Reinhardt who, despite his repeated insistence that “Art is art,” ended up by painting a series of black nine-square grids in which the motif that inescapably emerges is a Greek cross. There is no painter in the West who can be unaware of the symbolic power of the cruciform shape and the Pandora’s box of spiritual reference that is opened once one uses it (Krauss, 1979).

Krauss in her essay on the grid acknowledges that contrary to the intentions of the modernist abstract artist, the grid does have the surprising capacity to evoke the ethereal as well as the concrete, allowing “a contradiction between the values of

science and those of spiritualism” (Krauss, 1979). This makes the grid capable of concealing while yet revealing (Krauss, 1979), a characteristic which reinforced the other art works on show. Consequently, in Room 1 of the Exhibition, the use of the grid enhanced the intentional emphasis on the spiritual rather than on the material, despite the predominance and association of the use of the grid in physical, down-to-earth archaeological activities. The result is that the grid is no longer being used as a device to negate the subjective, but as a device which in some hard-to-define way, allows a more nuanced interpretation.

Room 1 was strikingly light. It had a fresh, uncluttered, minimalist aesthetic that invited closer inspection and further investigation. Again, similarly to an archaeological site, not everyone took the time to linger and investigate further, because of a deceptively simple uniformity of palette and tone. But for those who did, more was revealed than appeared on the surface. Revealing yet concealing, the room conveyed a sense of confidence and purpose yet articulated the presence of something inscrutable. A further archaeological motif was articulated through the contrast of work firmly anchored to the ground (*Canticle; Kneelers*) accompanied by work that rose up towards the ceiling (*Incense and Prayers Ascending*). Rooted in the physical reality of a geographical location, yet the practice of archaeology still requires an exercise of the imagination to give the site and its contents sense and significance. The overall effect was one of simplicity, giving the space a pared-down look, spare, and uncluttered, consistent with the archaeological digs I had visited at Star Carr (2010, 2011) and Streethouses, north of Whitby (2012), while also hinting at the ascetic nature of fifth century monastic life. There was also a sense of meditative calm, imbued from the constant use of repetition throughout the room and therefore the predictable nature of each piece as they worked to reinforce each other.



Image 3.6: Setting up exhibition room (left). Photograph by the artist

In contrast to this, the second, right hand, room offered a moody atmosphere where the mystery of the unknown was the dominant tone. This room contained all monochrome collage work. The possible austerity of this palette was modulated by the lighting. Each canvas had its individual spotlight, with no additional gallery lighting. The installation consisted of seven canvases from the *Forgotten* series and two from the *Bardsey Island* series, and six A4 images from the first white on black *Archive* series. I also included a set of black and white paleolandscapes – collages from the *Archive* portfolio, which were projected onto the near wall. The dim lighting helped with the presentation of the projected images, enabling a cohesive body of work-

For this room, with its emphasis on landscape, I produced a sound-track from recordings I had made during my visits to Bardsey island. This audial collage was installed to work alongside the visual collages. The track was made up of the sounds of sea birds and sheep, wild birds and wind, characteristic of the island. It included the sound of a harp being played by the wind, providing a reference to Welsh history and culture. A recording of the seals colonizing the rocks on the south side of the island completed the track, by lifting the attention away from the “down-to earth”-ness of the physical place to the ethereal and the realms of the mysterious through the shrieking and sighing of the seals heard through the wind. This second room added to the archaeological features of the first through the combination of image, lighting and sound.

My intentions for the Exhibition via an artist statement was placed at the entrance to the Exhibition, describing the work as being a series of responses to my two trips to Bardsey Island, and explaining that I offered “an opportunity in which to consider a personal, ‘spiritual archaeology’” through meditation on artworks which carried a sense of prehistory into our modern world (Mills, March 2022).

## **Research trajectory**

The first aim of this research, as stated in the Abstract, was to investigate whether the making of artwork that is specifically influenced by the discipline of archaeology allows the expression and investigation of human spirituality through the medium of art. Then, having established this aim through creative practice, my second aim was to consolidate this research methodology so that it can possibly become a platform to allow further investigations in the future. In order to do this, I brought to the research an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together art, archaeology and theology. This was my basis for exploring the concept of the archaeological imagination, through a studio practice based on abstraction, articulated mainly through drawing.

The results of this is described in the sections that follow in which the artworks on show in the Exhibition are dealt with as expressions of archaeological imagination. So Sections 4 – 8 give the details of pieces exhibited and describes each artwork from the perspective of a particular archaeological activity. Each section includes a short discussion of the work in relation to the intangible realities of archaeology as expressed by Wallace, Shanks and O’Donoghue. They will all also take as their framework the following six questions:

1. What does the definition of the archaeological term used in the section title mean?
2. How is this archaeological term relevant to the portfolio highlighted?
3. Why was the portfolio given that particular title?
4. What aspects of visual art are highlighted by the exhibited work?
5. Why were these images selected for the Exhibition?
6. How does this work apply, develop or expand the concept of archaeological imagination?

The thesis draws to a close by summarising the progress of the investigation and indicating a way forward beyond the PhD.

## Section 4: Remote Sensing (*Canticle*)

### Definition of Remote Sensing

Remote sensing in archaeology is the science of gathering information about the surface of the Earth without having direct contact with the ground. It is an unintrusive reconnaissance which collects radiation from the landscape (Google, 2024). It can involve hand-held devices, aerial photography from planes or drones, or data collected by satellites. It is a very valuable method, used by archaeology along with other disciplines, to gain information from the ground without disturbing it (Renfrew, 2008, p.118). It can reveal features not visible from the surface. It is an effective and relatively inexpensive way of locating new sites. It is a means of testing out theories without having to take the time and trouble to excavate (Gamble, 2008, p.51), and it is useful in helping to make sense of partially excavated sites. Essentially, it introduces the duality of both revealing and concealing. Remote sensing is both about features in the geography that have already been uncovered and features under the ground which technology alone can see (Grant, 2005, p.25): it can reveal what continues to be concealed.

### How the idea of remote sensing applies to *Canticle*

*Canticle* is an artwork that tries out methods and materials to see if they could be pursued further as part of this research. In this case, the methods under review were drawing (rather than painting), the concentration on the vertical, and the use of black and white rather than colour. Making the work confirmed that these methodologies were appropriate and, importantly, could be taken forward into work yet to come.

*Canticle* also utilised remote sensing in its overall visual outcome, bringing the hiding and conserving of drawings within a gridded structure. The grid both proclaims the presence of the drawings, yet at the same time conceals them from view. The drawings have to be 'excavated' from their hiding places in the cabinet drawers in order to be seen (see Appendix).



The *Canticle* portfolio also includes a series of 60 drawings made on blue graphite paper with graphite pencil and gouache, a dozen or so of which were shown in a glass case in room 1 of the Exhibition.



Image 4.2: *Canticle* drawings in the displayed in the exhibition. Photograph by the artist

### **Why the work was given the title *Canticle***

A 'Canticle', is the word used for a short song or hymn (originally from the Latin 'canticulum' meaning 'little song'). It is a word used even today in Anglican liturgy, and so is a word that conveys a sense of the worship of God. Therefore in keeping with this, each drawing has five rows of lines, referencing the modern musical staff that features in written music, and implying the simple, probably unaccompanied, music that would have punctuated the daily routines of the monks in the original monastery. As part of my studio practice, I emulated the sung worship of the monks by playing Christian worship music during the drawing process, for example, music by John Taverner (1490 – 1545), Arvo Part (born 1935), Handel (1685 – 1759), Bach (1685 – 1750), Gregorian chants of the Russian Orthodox Church (including those by Arvo Part), and contemporary worship songs from Charismatic churches available on YouTube. By doing so, a connection was being established through time, by the

medium of drawing, from the 21<sup>st</sup> century artist in her studio in Old College, Aberystwyth, to the 5<sup>th</sup> Century monks in the monastery on Bardsey Island.

## Features highlighted by the exhibited work

### a) Drawing

*Canticle* had a major role in setting the direction (by which I mean the continued use of vertical lines) and methodology for my practice (focusing on drawing) as I investigated the concept of the archaeological imagination. It helped me to decide to concentrate on drawing rather than continue with painting (see Section 3: The Inventory). Through drawing, a more personal, intimate and sensitive outcome could be achieved. As the editors write in the preface to *Vitamin D3* (Morrill 2021, p.1):

drawing is arguably the most direct and immediate of all art processes – humankind’s instinctive way of representing the world and externalising thoughts and emotions into visual expression. Our distant ancestors made sketches on cave walls, and while subsequent advances in knowledge, science and technology have endlessly changed how we live, the appeal of this simple mode of expression endures (Lovat, in Morrill).

Drawing, with its ability to highlight rather than deny the hand of the artist, provides the emphasis on the nature of being human that I was looking for, and so I discontinued my painting practice in favour of other media. Drawing became for me “an intense, sensitive, compelling, personal and utterly direct art form, one with its own concepts, characteristics, and techniques” (Davidson, 2011, p.8).

Drawing, however, is not confined to the making of marks with a drawing tool on a paper support. William Kentridge thinks of the many different media he uses as part of the diversity of the practice of drawing:

... animation, theatre, puppetry, tapestry and even earthworks. All of these he would loosely group together as forms of drawing. Drawing captures the thought of the artist in all its freshness. Drawing drives the mind towards content: making comes before meaning ... a testing of ideas. A slow motion version of thought. Drawing is thinking aloud (William Kentridge cited in McCrickard, 2012, p.8).

This idea of the diversity presented by the practice of drawing is evident in *Canticle*, as well as in the artworks made after this point. In *Canticle*, what first confronts the

viewer is an upright structure of small drawers, and yet in effect, the work is a series of drawings, or it can even be seen as one particularly large diffuse drawing. I tend to see it as one composite drawing, as the individual parts, by which I mean all the drawings contained in the drawers, all obey the same set of rules and belong together as one unit. Later on in the research, rolls of paper take on the role of the drawing tool, as described in Section 8: *Prayers Ascending*.

## b) Verticality

The *Canticle* drawings gave me an understanding of the relevance of the vertical line in my research. My interest in verticality began with an appreciation of Barbara **Hepworth's** sculptures, (see Section 2: The Context), particularly *Figure for landscape* in Trewyn Garden, the site of her Cornwall studio, the *Dag Hammarskjold Memorial* next to the United Nations building in New York, and the *Family of Man* (completed 1970) currently at Yorkshire Sculpture Park in West Yorkshire. From Hepworth I absorbed the idea of a vertical line articulating human presence in the landscape, and it became one of three forms I included in my visual vocabulary for the making of abstract art (2007) described in Section 2.

Then from a spiritual perspective, the vertical line assumes greater significance, reflecting the earthbound solidity of a human existence which nonetheless is capable of reaching up beyond the confines of the strictly physical towards the intangible heights of the invisible: the philosophical; the intellectual, and the spiritual. Rowan Williams suggests that this is an understanding of what it is to be human that would be perilous to discard:

a loss of the sense of the sacred, a loss of the sense of being answerable to an intelligible gift, from beyond ourselves, in the long run entails more than simply the loss of God; it may entail the loss of the distinctively human. And if there is one great intellectual challenge for our day, it is the pervasive sense that we are in danger of losing our sense of the human (2018, p.25)

With this in mind, verticality is for me a form of personal shorthand for the expression of what it means to be human on the earth. It is my code for being human with the emphasis on the non-material aspects of human life. Hence the desire to continue with the direction of my studio practice at that time, which was to concentrate on the use of verticality, expressed mainly through the vertical line.

The sheer repetitive nature of endless vertical lines, the rhythm of the making of those lines, the meditative quality of the time spent making those lines, and the time spent looking at those lines, is a spiritual experience of some value in its own right. The connecting of earth with heaven is in more than just the direction of the hand of the artist, which moves from heaven down to earth: it is in the direction of the attention of the soul in that time, which is from earth up to heaven.

Vertical lines also have the resonance of palaeolithic cave art, a consciousness of ancient spirituality, an atmosphere of monoliths that make up a stone circle. They speak of meditation and a preoccupation with the metaphysical, a time and space allotted for dealing with realities of a spiritual nature. At the same time the simple vertical line in the contemporary world records the passing of time, as in marks on a prison wall, or counting down the days to a special event. The mystery inherent in time is such that these marks both record a present moment, and illustrate a past one, mindful of St Augustine's comments on this in Book XI of his 'Confessions' (1976, p.264). And vertical lines needn't be as precisely constructed. Verticality, rather than specific single marks, is the over-riding emphasis. This is where the idea of the human figure in the landscape finds effective expression.

The primacy of the connection between the human figure and the landscape was reinforced for me by a temporary exhibition I visited at the British Museum in 2015 entitled *Larrakitj: Aboriginal Memorial Poles* by Australian artist Wukun Wanambi, (12/03/2015 – 25/05/2015). On display was a group of carved and meticulously painted vertical posts, examples of Aboriginal burial trees. These specifically referenced the trees used as human burial pods in Aboriginal culture. Here was verticality in 3D form, reinforcing the idea of the state of human existence on Earth. Vertical reminders of lives that had been lived, they articulated a present comment on a past reality, and were a powerful reminder of the paradox of human existence.

Such verticality succeeds in capturing a sense of the ethereal and therefore a kind of 'remote sensing' for the way ahead. Verticality contained within it a strong articulation of humanness, and therefore became a highly appropriate form to use in establishing a vocabulary for the expression of archaeological imagination.

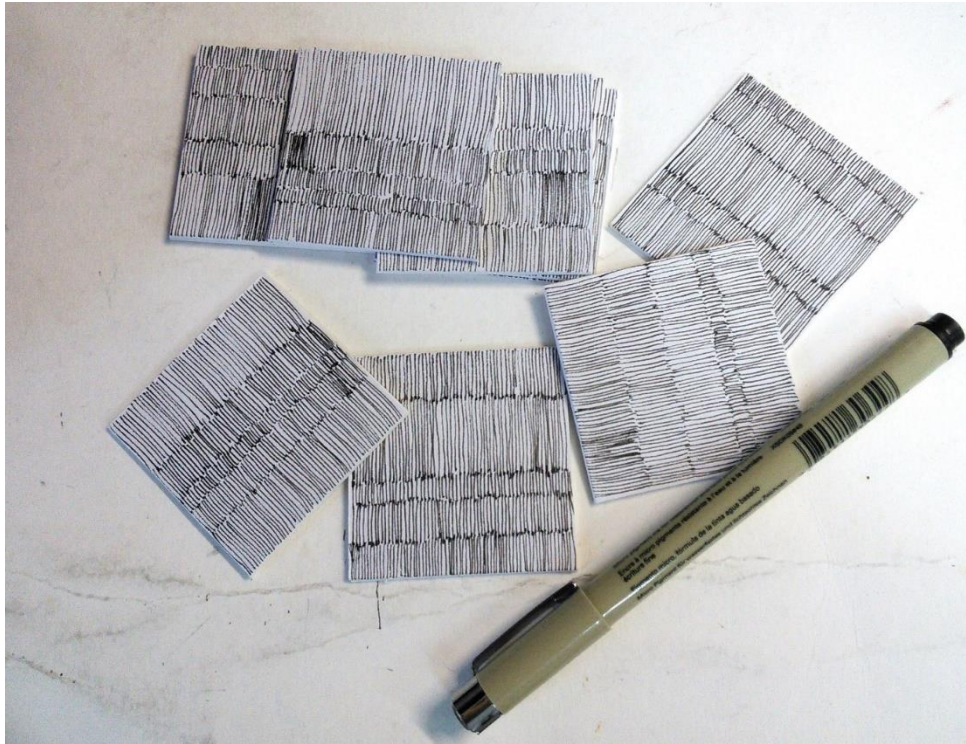


Image 4.3: Drawings from *Canticle*. Photograph by the artist

### c) Black and White

But would drawing in black and white have the same emotional power as a different colour palette? Was such restriction a mistake? Paul Moorhouse writing about John Virtue's (b.1947) mature work, explained the artist's determination to work with only black and white in terms of his realization that "using colour was confusing and obscured the more direct and radical means of expression he was seeking" (Moorhouse, 2019, p.23). Instead, Virtue discovered that "a reliance on black and white rather than colour gave an edge to his way of seeing" (ibid., p.24). Referring to Samuel Palmer, Rembrandt and Seurat, he found that by using black and white he was providing access to an alternative world of seeing and representation. Not only that, "their work revealed that monochrome would actually rival colour in its resonant power" (ibid., p.25).

Encouraged by Virtue's approach, I still asked if the use of black and white would encourage a 'visual excavation' as the work was viewed. Here I was surprised to find that the black and white worked together, even in such small drawings, to create a portal into a different mindset, undistracted or undiluted by colour. The mind of the contemporary viewer who is not an expert in art is more attuned to the movement of

colour, sound and the fast presence of a world marked by technology. The starkness, the insistent voice, of black and white forces the viewer to see drawings as they are, unadorned by other distractions.

Black and white (in the context of Bardsey island) also seemed to be an appropriate way to refer to the monastic, hinting at the habits that would have been worn at the time. and the relatively austere ordered daily pattern of life of both the monastery and the Augustinian abbey that was built on the ruins of the monastery in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Black and white helped to point to earlier times, to the monastic and to the Mediaeval. It helped the viewer to straddle the centuries.

#### d) The Grid

Although *Canticle* focused on the importance of drawing, the flexibility and expressive nature of the vertical line, and on the evocative energy of the monochromatic, the fourth major contribution this work made to the exhibition as a whole was in terms of the grid.

As has already been noted, revealing and simultaneously concealing, referencing only the surface of the artwork but nonetheless giving a sense of the immaterial and spiritual, is part of the unexpected mystery of the grid (Krauss, 1979), an entirely appropriate format for the presentation of the 2,000 plus drawings contained within *Canticle*.

Describing the grid as “bivalent” and “schizophrenic”, Krauss goes on to suggest that its structure could be either “centripetal” or “centrifugal”. Of the two alternatives, centrifugal captures the essential archaeological nature of the work by hinting at the partial nature of it. Rather than being one complete, entire piece of work, the implication of the grid is that this is merely one small section of what is possible (Krauss, 1979). Along with her assertion that the grid “is a mode of repetition”, *Canticle* by the endless repetition of both grid and drawn line, contributes to the coherence of Room 1.

Whereas the drawings themselves were not based on the grid, the vertical lines hint at it. However, the cabinet containing the drawings augmented the presence of the grid in the room. It was one of three pieces which occupied the central space, with

*Canticle* on the far wall opposite the entrance, *Kneelers* as a floor piece directly in front, and *Prayers Ascending* hanging from the ceiling in front of that, so that it took the viewer's attention as they entered the room. Each piece was clearly marked by the grid theme, each reinforcing the other with an echoing of form in widely differing articulations. It wasn't until *Canticle* was put next to *Kneelers* that the grid formation came to the fore, and reinforced the more subtle grid structure of *Prayers Ascending*. Looking around the walls of that room, *Incense* canvases were clearly composed around the grid, as were the drawings on graph paper exhibited in the glass cabinet. In this visual articulation of the grid *Canticle* played a vital part.

### **Why *Canticle* was selected for the Exhibition**

I selected *Canticle* for the Exhibition because it is relevant to the Bardsey Island theme of 'thin place' (described in Section 3). The visualisation of revealing yet concealing seemed particularly appropriate for the making of images which would point to the spiritual, the invisible, the immateriality of the complexity of what it is to be human. It indicates that for all that is measurable about being human, there is still the mysterious existence in all human life of that which can be experienced but cannot be measured, as the experience of Renfrew at a place of archaeological importance alluded to above (Section 2).

*Canticle* was also appropriate for the Exhibition because of the way that the repetition of vertical lines creates a new kind of space, one that through the methodology of drawing becomes personal and intimate, expressive yet private, and importantly, a space that involves the element of time. Looking at Rebecca Salter's black and white drawings of the 1990s and early 2000s, Anna Moszynska remarks:

In later instances where one might expect to encounter frenetic energy from what appears to be an almost endless repetition of vital linear marks – whether in the form of cursive jots, serried rills, or vertical or horizontal groupings – time instead is slowed down and, as in the work of Agnes Martin, creates a space for thought (2015, p.4).

Creating this "space for thought" was my aim for the whole of the *Jacob's Ladder* Exhibition, and was evident in the *Canticle* drawings. By means of creating such a space, the viewer is invited to turn inward and "excavate" these artworks, and find

through them an evocation of the passage of time” (Mills, 2022, exhibition statement).

The marks themselves, repeated vertical lines, have contemporary resonance, which also made the work relevant. They bring to mind counting off the days, as a child might anticipating a special event, or an office worker, marking off the days on the calendar leading up to a holiday, or a prisoner might make on the walls of their cell in the hope of release: white chalk on a grey wall; the grey of graphite on white paper, the black of charcoal on a white wall. These marks convey human life at its simplest and most uncluttered, a paring back of structure to reveal what it means to feel human. Such marks, going back to the ‘stick men’ found in cave paintings tens of thousands of years ago, capture a whole spectrum of time, and at the same time maintain the identity of specifically human behaviour. Made in reference to the passing of time, these marks nonetheless articulate hope, despair, longing, frustration, patience - a whole range of human emotion. Far from being mechanistic, hand-drawn lines conceal and yet reveal deeper levels of existence other than the purely biological. The human hand made these marks. The action of the human hand articulates a wide spectrum of how it feels to be human. It is an action that has been in existence from the earliest of times. In this sense these marks carry archaeological content.

Anna Moszynska, writing about Rebecca Salter’s 2015 exhibition at the Beardmore Gallery *Along these lines*, pinpoints the versatility of the use of such lines. Salter studied in both Britain and Japan, and her delicate evocative mark-making conveys ideas from both cultures, bringing together the organising principle of the grid with the uncontrolled element of serendipity (2015, p.2).

In Salter’s work, the rhythm of repetition is the scaffolding for the unrestricted. Her methodology evokes elements of two different worlds. In a similar way, the repetition of lines in the *Canticle* drawings brings two different worlds together. In *Canticle* there is not just the paradox of revealing and concealing, but a sense of the presence of the ancient coming into the contemporary, the simplicity of both line and tone creating a different kind of space where time spills out like the folds of a concertina.



Another set of paradoxes is indicated by Anna Lovatt in her introductory essay to *Vitamin D3* in which she states that “Drawing’s capacity to pivot between particularity and abstraction – from the most introspective gesture to the diagramming of immeasurable forces – makes it responsive to the volatile temporalities of contemporary life” (Lovatt, in Morrill, 2021, p16).

Drawing has a flexibility that allows investigation into both the representational and the abstract, and is a powerful mode of expressing and investigating thought. As Lovatt continues, “Drawing has long been understood as a conceptual process that elides definition in material terms” (ibid., p10). Such a means for creating visual imagery for that which had no previous visible existence was a potentially powerful tool in the investigation of such a concept as the archaeological imagination.

## **How this work applies and develops ideas of archaeological imagination**

*Canticle* shows in visual terms that there is a way of expressing the archaeological imagination by evoking what we consider to be the simplicity of our earliest human ancestors. As with many archaeological subject areas, there is no possibility of certainty as to the sophistication or otherwise of the earliest human communities, but a certain stereotype exists in the public mind believing that lack of sophistication is an element of earlier times. *Canticle* demonstrates a way of bringing archaeology into art, both through the marks made and the collection of those marks into their own archive, itself an archaeological process.

During the course of making these pieces I realized that what I was at pains to communicate was not so much a feeling for the ancient but the presence, through an evocation of the ancient, of the mysterious element of spiritual life that is part of being human and that I believe has been since earliest times. *Canticle* articulates the idea of going beyond the surface to reach substance only found through a process of excavation: in the first place by a physical retrieving of the drawings from the cabinet itself, and secondly, by an increasing sense of personal excavation as the viewer immerses themselves in the drawings. It takes time for the drawings to be seen for what they are, and for the simple sets of lines to introduce the possibility

of transcendence. Gradually, as the drawers are opened and the drawings are exposed, small variations come to light in them. This is shown in the tiny adjustments made in the lines drawn, in their thinness or thickness; in the varying lengths of the lines; in the spacing between the lines; in the spacing of each row of lines; in the tonal range produced by all the above. Comparing drawings from different cabinets, *Canticle* demonstrates a wide variety of options. Through the narrow entrance of the restrictive practice of black vertical lines on white card, the viewer eventually becomes aware that a far wider space eventually opens up, an indication of possibilities not considered before, the route of a journey into an unexpected place demonstrating that this marking of time can have unexpected consequences. In this, Shanks' idea of the archaeological imagination as a "bridging field" takes on substance as the physical, material aspects of the work nonetheless touch on the philosophical (through the allusion to St Augustine's thoughts about time), and the wonder of unexpected discoveries, hinted at by Wallace. The work, particularly when seen as one drawing, points to the spirituality that I experience as a characteristic that is essential to being human.

*Canticle* has a plain, simple outer appearance, but its contents deal in a delicate and nuanced way with the repeated use of vertical lines by using a range of subtle strategies in the drawing. It reveals and yet conceals at the same time, an observation put forward by philosopher Jacques Derrida describing the function of the archive in his book *Archive Fever* (1998, p.2,3). *Canticle* is an embodiment of the notion of archive. The archaeological concept of archive is specifically investigated in the following Section 5.

## Section 5: Test Pit (*Archive*)

### Definition of Test Pit

Once the process of remote sensing has identified an area to be investigated, the sinking of test pits is often the next step that the archaeologist will take.

Test pits or sondages are essentially square trenches, usually 1 metre square. Trenches and test pits are used either to evaluate the stratigraphy of a site before a decision is made on whether or not to excavate or as part of an excavation sampling strategy. By digging down either to bedrock or the top of the archaeological deposits the vertical profile of part of the site can be examined. This provides information about depth of deposits and complexity of contexts (Grant, 2005, p.38)

A test pit reveals what has hitherto been concealed, and more specifically, the stratigraphy of the chosen place. A vertical slice through the designated spot is a doorway into an understanding of what makes up its past as layers are identified and revealed.

### How the idea of test pit applies to the *Archive* portfolio

In archaeology it is the physical context that helps to make sense of what has been found. In this way the portfolio of work called *Archive* is a sounding out of possibilities, and an identification of what might move the work forward. It indicates which might be the more fruitful paths to explore. Initially, this was to do with materials, methods and processes. For example, work was made with archaeologist's equipment, and then work made with that of the artist, in order to discover what the most effective options might be. Collage was developed as a medium. It also involved other avenues that were later discarded, such as working with collage poetry and turning the images of *Archive 4* into sound (see Appendix).

## **Why the work was given the title *Archive***

I called this body of work *Archive* firstly because all the work in this portfolio was generated from the physical archive I had seen and made drawings in response to, and secondly, because archiving as an activity is an important aspect of archaeology. It is about identifying, categorising, valuing, and redeeming fragments from the material past by putting them in a secure place, in libraries, both physical and digital, in museums, in public and private repositories. For this reason I decided to treat this portfolio as an archive of my own.

Archives are an incredible resource. They are the documentary by-product of human activity and as such are an irreplaceable witness to past events, underpinning democracy, the identity of individuals and communities, and human rights” (International Council on Archives, 2019). It is surprising to find that archives are credited with the far-reaching benefits of “underpinning democracy” and having a bearing on human rights. However, those aspects are a final consequence of having an approach to the past that values the people of the past and their achievements. This is the opposite stance to much of contemporary throw-away culture in which we live, and the urge by some to hurtle towards the future as fast as possible, leaving the past behind as irrelevant baggage. So an emphasis on the importance of archive means taking time and literally space to think, to consider, to reflect, to be taken back into a former equally valuable world, and to learn from the past for the benefit of the future. At the time that I was pondering on the value of archiving, the Islamic State were stamping their presence on Syria and Iraq (2018, 2019), purposely destroying and looting the ancient cultural heritage of the Middle East. This confirmed to me how essential an archaeological activity the practice of archiving is for the preservation of culture.

## **Features highlighted by the exhibited work.**

Out of this large portfolio of work (see Appendix: The Inventory) I made two selections for the Exhibition: firstly, a set of six A4 drawings made with white chalk on black card, taken from a series of twenty or so, and secondly, a selection of ten

images taken from the Paleolandscape collages on canvas, taken from a series of fifty, presented as a projection onto the gallery wall in the Exhibition.

### ***Archive 1B***



Image 5.2: From the series *Archive 1 B*. Photograph by the artist

During the course of making *Archive I* began by using tools, materials and methods relevant to archaeology and then moved on to using tools, methods and materials relevant to art practice. *Archive 1b*, made in September 2016, falls into the first category. With its strong verticals interrupted by groups of short horizontal lines the implications of a grid are clearly visible. Rather than marking time, as in *Canticle*, these drawings take into account the visual culture of archaeology as a discipline by referencing the importance of black and white photography as a means of recording site information in the practice of archaeology, along with the making of monochromatic drawings on gridded paper which work in parallel with photography.

There is also a reference to the Harris matrix in the use of the strong vertical line with horizontal boxes down its length. Archaeologists use this pictorial method, developed in 1973 by Edward Harris to express through drawing the stratigraphy of an excavated site, for contexts, as Gamble reminds us, can be vertical as well as horizontal (2008, p.125). Contexts uncovered through digging down into the soil provide a vertical picture for the archaeologist of what has happened in that place through time. “Thus several hundred, or even thousands, of years of continuous occupation in one place is built up as a record of intersecting contexts” (ibid., p.126). Harris formulated a way of analysing the variations of soils visible by pioneering a system of drawing based around the recording of horizontal boxes along a vertical stem. This system “records the stratigraphic relationship” between what has been identified in the ground, and therefore “unravels the sequence of the creative process of living in the landscape over periods of time” (ibid., p.61). It is a tool to help understand whatever is found within the layers, and by visually referencing this archaeological device, the *Archive* portfolio strengthens archaeological links with its own drawings.

#### a) Paradox

Attention has been drawn to a paradox already, in terms of simultaneously revealing and concealing. Jacques Derrida (1930 – 2004) in his book *Archive Fever* (1996) identifies further paradoxes which surround the practice of placing material into archives. Derrida cites “the archontic principle of the archive” (1998, p.3). It is a gathering together. Yet “archontic” means, ‘relating to an archon’ which in turn is a Greek word indicating one who rules in public office, having at its root the word from which we derive ‘monarch’ and ‘hierarchy’. So Derrida seems to be saying that the archive rules. It is no longer an anonymous set of interrelated pieces of data. As a collection of items, it becomes a composite individual monolith that exerts an authority of its own.

Then, as Derrida records, there is an unexpected transition from the private to the public (ibid. p.2). Diaries, personal letters and confidential records are usually kept in private places away from prying eyes while the owner is alive. Yet in order to preserve them once the owner has died, they become part of a collection, the

purpose being to allow anyone access to those hitherto private documents. What was once intensely private can now be viewed freely by anyone, and once all the information has been digitised, viewed freely by anyone anywhere in the world.

However the material in the archive is at one and the same time visible and yet invisible (ibid. p.3). Although open to the public, vast swathes of the contents of an archive may remain unseen purely because no one is following up on the subject matter that the material contains. Sometimes we don't know exactly the contents of an archive until we have a thorough look. In the meantime, items can rest undisturbed. Treasures of the past can remain hidden while in plain sight.

Derrida suggests that the archive has a basic contradiction built into its very nature. This must stem from the fact that the individual items in an archive lose their individual identity and instead become a constituent part of a greater whole. It is then both institutive and conservative, both revolutionary and traditional (ibid. p.7).

Finally, Derrida holds that the concept of archive brings together the contradiction of the outside and the inside (ibid. p.8), "at once visible and invisible" (ibid. p.3). It is at once personal to the archive originator, and personal to the archive researcher though that may be in different ways. It is also related to the 'revealing yet concealing' theme that had already been established with the making of *Canticle*. So considering the views of Derrida, it is possible to simplify and summarise that the archive is a place of safety, a refuge for the past, and a type of guardian which will protect the past from loss, deterioration and oblivion. *Canticle*, and *Archive* as a portfolio, dwell on these paradoxes.

## b) Mystery

The *Archive 1b* drawings worked as intended in the subdued light. Being difficult to decipher from the room's entrance, they drew the viewer into the room to investigate further. Then, they added another dimension to the sense of mystery created by the subdued lighting, because on closer inspection, they appeared to be black and white photographs taken of lines incised on rock, such as one imagines might be found on the surface of the moon. This extra-terrestrial element brings an enigmatic quality to the work, provoking questions such as: Where did those marks come from? And

who made them? All of which brings to mind the mysterious but powerful presence of the smooth black monolith in Stanley Kubrick's film of 1968: *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The film provides no answers, but by leaving the conundrum unresolved, the viewer is drawn into a new space where "imagination augments the values of reality" (Bachelard, 2014, p.25), where the edges of the known universe are challenged. The impact of *Archive 1b* is similar in its enigmatic and unresolved questioning of known boundaries. It articulates yet another paradox, that the simple mark making required of the artist to make these particular images results in a multi-layered and complex reading of them by the viewer.

This in turn leads to a further questioning of the images. Is the viewer looking at something which is ancient, or something that is modern? Are they human-made marks upon rock, part of an ancient landscape? Yet if they are, the fact that we have these images implies photography, which in turn makes them modern. As with the signature paradox of an archive, there is a revealing and yet a concealing at the same time. There is a level of understanding in the mind of the viewer, which is then undermined on further reflection. Resulting in an instability, a disjunction between image and meaning, is this in itself a very post-modern response, making these images even more in line with contemporary thought and experience. Could this be an example of what Shanks means by his phrase "resonating with broader cultural energies" (2016, p.12)? Following the thought further, the perception that the image is a photograph makes it open to visual manipulation, as we are all aware of the impact of Photoshop on photography as a medium. This in turn effectively collapses the meaning originally assigned to the image in the mind of the viewer. Both paradox and mystery are at play. There is also a veiled sense of loss in these images. The surface of the unnamed planet is not earth, it is not home, but infers a loss of the familiar. And the marks made upon it remain inscrutable, distanced from everyday experience and meaning. An archaeologist might pick up a hint of the Harris matrix, but for the non-archaeologist, non-science fiction fan, the images remain a challenge to engage with.



## **Why *Archive 1b* was selected for the Exhibition**

These images were included in the Exhibition for a variety of reasons. Firstly, because they were on a black support, they contributed to the darker ambience of the right side of the gallery, coordinating with the two Bardsey Island canvases which flanked them. Unlike the left side of the gallery which was characterised by light, the left side had subdued lighting, partly to facilitate the showing of the projected images, partly to create a contrast to the other side, and in doing so, to enhance a sense of mystery and the unknown.

### ***Archive 4***



Image 5.3: From the series *Archive 4*. Photograph by the artist

This second selection of images from *Archive* was used as a loop of projections taking up one of the walls in the right hand side of the gallery space. These twelve images from the series of paleolandscape collages, made in January 2017 on canvas, range in size from A4 to A3, and include one collage made up of three A4 sections, and one triangular canvas 0.9 metres x 0.2 metres. Projecting the images meant that they were shown at a similar size and at a much bigger scale, being seen at roughly 1.8 metres x 1.2 metres. The scale of the images meant that ancient landscape was brought into the room, reminding many viewers of the landscape seen in North Wales by the slate mines of Blaenau Ffestiniog in its stark dominance of black and its sense of the unearthing of the ancient (see Appendix). At this scale each canvas made an impact on the entire room, out of proportion to the original compositions. This was partly a matter of scale, and partly because of the curious flickering that took place in the perception of the viewer, flitting between being images clearly made of the prosaic (torn pieces of paper), yet suddenly becoming dominating, insistent and mysterious landscapes, landscapes which were somehow familiar but inescapably “other”.

#### a) Collage

The effect of collage as a medium, when working with images of ancient mysterious landscapes from the prehistoric past works in a similar way to that described by Gregory Curtis in his book *The Cave Painters* (2007). In the case of cave painting, he explains that only in the physical presence of these paintings is it possible to see the effect the artist was seeking to achieve. What seems like a jumble of elements from one angle becomes a painting where, incredibly, the animals are in motion (2007, p.6,7). In Curtis' example the apparent fragmentation of the image as one entity is brought into a meaningful narrative by the perspective of the viewer. Seen from one angle, the separate parts of the overall image seem to have little to do with one another, but seen from another, the viewer brings all the visual clues together to read a coherent narrative that makes sense. This is in effect what happens with collage, and particularly with the paleolandscape collages of *Archive 4*, both for the artist and the viewer. Memories of the slate mountains of North Wales become a resource to draw upon as shreds of black and white paper become facilitators for the

imagination to begin to explore the unknown and the mysterious against the background of the known. These powerful black and white images recall the thoughts of William Kentridge (b.1955), who recognises that it is a basic human instinct when faced with ambiguity to try to put together a coherent narrative (William Kentridge, cited in McCrickard, 2012, p.100).

This is demonstrated very clearly in Kentridge's piece *Shadow Procession* (1992), a film made of collaged figures formed from torn pieces of black paper. The work featured in the Istanbul Biennial of 1999. In his lecture *In Praise of Shadows*, the artist explains that tearing shapes out of black paper he maintains an openness of mind, which leads to "an oscillation between openness and recognition" (William Kentridge cited in McCrickard, 2012, p.48).

Following the same process I tore up photocopies of my own earlier collages, in order to increase the volume of black on the white paper, and therefore have the ragged edges of the tearing more prominent. As McCrickard says, by adopting tearing a measure of unpredictability is introduced which results in "indirect vision, flickering between seeing and knowing (2012, p.45).

There was the same effect when seeing these *Archive 4* images projected onto the gallery wall, as sight oscillated between what made sense to memory and experience, and the fragmentation caused by that which did not.

## b) Dreaming

Facing the unknown and the mysterious in this context can lead to a freeing of the imagination. Gaston Bachelard (1884 – 1962) in his book *The Poetics of Space* (1958) expresses a similar idea in chapter eight with an exploration of "the mark of infinity", taking as his background the work of various French poets. With this approach he is able to gain insight into human experience as it relates to the interplay of the memory and the imagination, which he understands as a kind of dreaming.

One might say that immensity is a philosophical category of daydream. Daydream undoubtedly feeds on all kinds of sights, but through a sort of natural inclination, it contemplates grandeur. And this contemplation produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any

other, that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity. . . . We do not see it start, and yet it always starts the same way, that is, it flees the object nearby and right away it is far off, elsewhere, in the space of elsewhere (2014, p.183,184).

Seen as a form of daydream, it is possible to think of the archaeological imagination as a faculty that begins in the sensibility of the “dreamer” from contact with archaeological subject matter, but which then “flees the object” and becomes transformed into a different visual reality.

This is clearly seen in the work of Brian Graham (b.1945) who specialises in making paintings in response to archaeological sites, engaging us “with another narrative that explores our experience of the land as earth across time” (Ratuszniak, 2014, p.1). His paintings have an earthiness which connects to what archaeologists have uncovered about the prehistoric featured site, yet bring in the presence of a great unknown, as in *Composition. Boxgrove* (2010). Here, the unknown is expressed as the bulk of the canvas, with the sense that there is an unveiling, seen in the clearer elements at the top right of the painting, yet that so much remains out of reach. Yet it is not alien. Lack of archaeological data does not prevent a human warmth, a connectivity between Graham and his subject matter. Through this “dreaming”, Graham’s canvases bring about a resonance with ancient and essentially unknowable life experiences and conditions that continue to attract and intrigue. As Ratuszniak puts it: “His work is grounded in the earth, yet it has an ambiguity that allows us to sense the mystery of human existence” (ibid., p.1).

Compared to Graham’s dreamy, evocative paleolandscape paintings featured in his 2014 exhibition *At the Edge of our Vision*, the *Archive* paleolandscape collages in my *Jacob’s Ladder* Exhibition are crisp and sharp-edged. Yet there is nonetheless mystery in the escarpments, plateaux and valleys, caves, pools and mountain ranges of these landscapes that tease the viewer. For these are landscapes that are at once familiar, as guests viewing the *Jacob’s Ladder* Exhibition expressed, declaring their delight in identifying the slate mines of North Wales, yet powerfully ancient and indecipherable in their presence, the almost-known forging a path into the unknown.

### c) Working in Series

Having begun with the series of small drawings for *Canticle*, the idea of working in sets continued. I agreed with abstract painter Ian McKeever (b.1946) that this would help to make sense of the images emerging and be effective in identifying the visual vocabulary required by them (McKeever, cited in Allthorpe-Guyton, Tucker and Lampert, 2009, p.10). In the *Archive* collages, I was experimenting with a medium that I had no experience of, and that also lent itself to making work in series. As I investigated different forms of mark making, with different supports, and brought in phototransfer options, it helped to bring together groups or sets of work so that differences could be identified and their efficacy assessed. Art historian Briony Fer, writing about seriality in the work of Lucio Fontana, identifies the need of the artist to be able to distinguish differences within the repeating patterns, to identify a “different mode of repetition” and therefore to find that “difference could play *within* repetition” (Fer, 2004, p.33). This is a preoccupation that becomes more prominent in my later work (see Section 7).

### **Why *Archive 4* was selected for the Exhibition**

These images were selected because of their enigmatic quality as ancient paleolandscapes, by their very nature they are both unknown and unknowable. They encapsulate the acknowledged difficulties encountered by archaeologists in making interpretations of sites and artefacts from a twenty first century sensibility. However knowledgeable about the past archaeologists may be, there is still the intractability of this problem to be wrestled with. Tony Robinson develops the nature of this problem in his book *Archaeology is Rubbish* by writing a humorous fictional report of an alien landing on the site of a former supermarket (2002, p.171). The projected images were intended to work with the soundtrack being played in the same room, which was made from recordings of sounds taken on my two visits to Bardsey Island (May 2018 and May 2019). The sound of sheep along with that of the Welsh harp, were complementary to the landscape structure of the paleolandscapes, speaking of ancient Welsh landscape. However the wailing of the seals introduced an alien, enigmatic quality enhancing the mysterious nature of the images. It was a partnership of image and sound.

## **How this work applies and develops ideas of archaeological imagination**

The physical down-to-earth nature of the images, practices and processes associated with archaeology allies with the imponderable issues of immense tracts of time and the unfathomably rich depths of ancient human experience, until the viewer is affected by the “immediate immensity of depth” (Bachelard, 2014, p.184). This phenomenological awareness of the transcendent, of “hidden grandeur”, results in the desire to weave an imagery which will evoke, express and continue both the daydream and the insights that can be gained from it. They reveal something of their inner life, their thoughts, their aspirations. *Archive* is, in effect, a preserving of dreams and ideals.

Looking at both sets of *Archive* images, what impresses is the power of the mark to express the ancient. It is as powerful, if not more so, than the use of symbol as unprescribed marks allow more freedom for the individual imagination to work. The collages of this set of work demonstrate unequivocally that mark making can be enough in and of itself. There is no need for symbolism, or colour, to give them resonance. Marks are sufficient in themselves. They have a powerful, primitive, atavistic voice of their own.

The work of *Archive* reveals the archaeological imagination to be at least in part a form of expression that manifests “the psychological transcendent”. The archaeological imagination brings into being images which have the capacity to transport the viewer down through a complex mesh of time, experience and imagination to a depth of response not otherwise experienced in daily life. The abstract nature of these images facilitates such a response because there are no visual boundaries placed on the interpretation of the marks for the viewer, who is then free to range over whatever mental landscapes she wishes. There is also the nature of the subject matter which plays a part, referencing the mysteries of time and deep time, with the drawing power of that which speaks of archaeology. This has the effect of encouraging the kind of dreaming mentioned by Bachelard, and in doing so, the image becomes much more than the sum of its parts. The viewer has access to a poetic reality experienced through the eyes.

I suggest that this poetic quality is the product of four component factors working together. In the first place the way in which the work was made allows for deeper interpretation. The assembling together of fragments, the very process of collage, invites the viewer to speculate. There are spaces, there are gaps, there is a flowing together and at the same time there is disruption. All of this appeals to our predisposition to make sense of the fragments presented, to create narratives that satisfy, and therefore leads to a filling in of the gaps involuntarily by the viewer.

Secondly there is the intentionality of the artist. The avoidance of specific reference points means that the response of the viewer is limited by nothing but the extent of the viewer's own imaginative capacity to respond. Reconstruction or representation presents the viewer with a finite range of possibilities to conjure with, but work that is abstract in essence brings no such restrictions. This is where Bachelard's "objective expression" shows the limitations he was talking about. So instead, evocation steps in and brings to life a handful of fragments with no real life of their own, making clear that visual images too are an aspect of the poetic function.

Thirdly the formal values of the work make it possible. Line, tone, colour, texture all work together to contribute to an interpretation of the work which is directed by the artist. The lyrical nature of the whole brings a sense of rhythm, and therefore time, into the composition, allying it with the poetic.

Lastly the freedom given to the viewer and the lack of pressure placed upon her enables her to form her own narratives in response to the visual stimulus presented by the artist. For this involves an interplay between the sensibility of the artist and the imaginative response of the viewer, as is true of poetry. It brings together the ideas of "hidden grandeur" and "intimate immensity", as Bachelard suggests, and "transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity" (2014, p.201).

Once again, as with the use of vertical line, a new space for thought opens up. All this is made possible by the use of collage.

## Progress so far

The aim of this research was to investigate whether the making of artwork specifically influenced by the discipline of archaeology allows the expression and investigation of human spirituality. My intention was to incorporate an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together art, archaeology and theology, exploring the concept of the archaeological imagination, articulated through a studio practice based largely on abstract drawing techniques. These aims have been explored through the creative research described in the previous two sections.

Considering the artwork *Canticle*, as described in Section 4, it is clear that the simplicity and sensitivity of the drawn vertical line becomes an articulation of time, promoting a sense of the contemporary and the ancient, and a practical outworking of the archaeological theme of simultaneously concealing and revealing. *Canticle* also introduces the idea that it is up to the viewer to excavate and so unearth for themselves the mystery of the grid which both engages curiosity while simultaneously maintaining objectivity. Through this a starting point has been established from which to work towards a definition of archaeological imagination that is useful to the visual artist. *Canticle* also establishes the possibility of finding positive methods to incorporate archaeological methods, processes, materials, and concepts in the development of fine art studio practice.

Section 5 shows that studio practice has now moved from pared-back mark-making, to collage that uses pared-down mark-making as source material. The contribution of the *Archive* portfolio enquires into the possibility that the use of fragments evoke as well as echo the experience of practical archaeology where paradox and mystery become the dominant elements. The resulting poetic quality that these elements bring emerges in a sense of rhythm and time, a kind of daydream, in which every day restrictions dissolve away and new possibilities unfold. Contributing to the ongoing contemporary critical discourse on the nature and benefits of an interdisciplinary approach to research, the experiments completed so far confirm that a weaving together of art with archaeology does indeed converge two disciplines successfully.

The research for both the *Canticle* and *Archive* portfolios indicates that the archaeological imagination can indeed be defined and accessed through the practice



of Fine Art. By considering the contribution of Michael Shanks as noted in Section 2, progress was made and his “skeleton of questions”, broached in Section 3, provided a useful starting point. In short, repeating the objectives laid down in the Abstract, it can be seen that progress has been made in the four main areas highlighted:

1. To find a visual language and vocabulary that will articulate the archaeological;
2. To produce portfolios of work that consistently and intentionally evoke a sense of the discipline of archaeology;
3. To demonstrate how fruitful the interface between art and archaeology is in terms of the making of visual images that express human spirituality;
4. To produce artworks that give opportunity for the viewer to experience inner, personal archaeology.

In the following section, Section 6, there is a development away from a dependency on the framework provided by Shanks. The *Forgotten* portfolio moves the investigation on from ‘if’ the archaeological imagination can facilitate a fine art enquiry through creative practice to ‘how’ that might be achieved. *Forgotten* examines the efficacy of collage as a vehicle for digging down into issues of human identity and experience, an excavation of a more demanding and mysterious nature than that undertaken so far. Along with this development comes a greater emphasis on human spirituality as an expression of human experience of life.

## Section 6: Excavation (*Forgotten*)

### Definition of Excavation

Excavation is probably the first practice of archaeology that comes to most people's minds in connection with archaeology. It is where the search begins, from the point of view of the non-archaeologist, and such revealing of what has hitherto been concealed understandably excites the imagination. However, it is surprising for the non-archaeologist to discover that there is both a horizontal and a vertical dimension to the process, as Renfrew and Bahn explain:

Excavation retains its central role in fieldwork because it yields the most reliable evidence for the two main kinds of information archaeologists are interested in: 1) human activities at a particular period in the past; and 2) changes in those activities from period to period. Very broadly we can say that contemporary activities take place horizontally in space, whereas changes in those activities occur vertically through time. It is this distinction between horizontal "slices of time" and vertical sequences through time that forms the basis of most excavation methodology (1998, p.97).

This grid-like approach to the process of excavation is echoed by the physical grid which is constructed on the site surface in order to facilitate accurate record keeping, for "a dig is only as good as its methods of recovery and recording" (ibid., p.103).

A factor that makes excavation a continuing practice in spite of the potential damage involved is its propensity to be able to answer outstanding questions. An excavation (begun in 2021) that focused on Fonmon Castle estate near Cardiff, thought to be 12<sup>th</sup>-century, uncovered an early medieval cemetery dated 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century, raising a series of unexpected supplementary questions. It is hoped that further excavation, to take place in summer 2024, will provide many of the answers (Current Archaeology, 2024, p.8).

Archaeologists are interested in the answers to a range of questions, not limited to the more material questions related to 'what' and 'how', but including the immaterial, non-physical question 'why'. Clive Gamble sees this in terms of an incentive for archaeologists themselves, where "our capacity to think well beyond everyday

experience and to incorporate into our lives the activities and artefacts of former people is riches indeed” (2008, p.2)

Excavation involves the use of the imagination, a capacity that Gamble describes as one that humans have always possessed. As he points out, the process of excavation appeals in such a fundamental way that the language of archaeology is regularly adopted into our personal, non-material investigations into who we are in our inner selves (2008, p.1). Excavation and identity become interconnected.

Archaeologist Alice Roberts concurs:

We reach back in time to touch those lives, to better understand ourselves. . . . Archaeology provides us with that tangible, physical connection to those past lives. We unearth objects that were last touched by human hands hundreds and thousands of years ago. We can walk through landscapes that have been inhabited through the ages (2021, p.14)

Excavation therefore not only uncovers objects. It is a process which uncovers our love of mystery and encourages connectivity with other human beings, no matter how long ago they lived. Our human curiosity is sparked by material remains linked to humans in the past, and the desire to link with them needs not just the empirical data that is unearthed through excavation but the accompanying activity of the imagination, because it is through narrative and story-telling that we connect (ibid., 2021, p.158).

### **How the idea of excavation applies to *Forgotten***

Excavation as an archaeological activity is methodical, ordered and analytical, but it is also the opportunity to create stories with and from that which is uncovered. As such, it is a useful metaphor for the theme of remembering and forgetting, a digging down into personal memory and identity which often involves the fragmented, the chaotic, and the loss of desired connection. It challenges our preconceptions about memory, upon which our identity depends. We assume that we have equal access to all our memories, but “some things it produces immediately”, observes St Augustine, whereas “some are forthcoming only after a delay, as though they were being brought out from some inner hiding place” (1976, p.214). We believe that we will remember everything as it happened because we were there, but our actual

experience of remembering is far more unsatisfactory and fragmentary than we would like. In addition, it may be that we order our memories, so that which has been more significant has been remembered, but the less significant is lost. Carl Jung (1875 – 1961), writing in his 80's, affirms that some memories have "largely faded or disappeared" but that "my encounters with the 'other' reality, my bouts with the unconscious, are indelibly engraved upon my memory" (1989, p.18).

*Forgotten* is an attempt to create images that dig below the surface of human existence and to invite the viewer to do likewise. Excavation is both a material and an immaterial activity, an attempt to find out what might be there, especially in the context of the search for meaning, and therefore both a physical and a metaphysical activity. It is both an external, material, visible purposeful action and a psychologically internal, invisible one. It is an activity which is particularly human in the endless search to understand, whether in terms of the physical aspects of life as a whole, or the psychological aspects of personal life. All this makes the term excavation a particularly pertinent one in reference to the *Forgotten* portfolio as a whole, and to the exhibited pieces in particular. The canvases selected for the Exhibition were F 9 and 10 (part of *Forgotten: What?*); F 19 and 20 (part of *Forgotten: Where?*); F28, 29 and 30 (part of *Forgotten: Who?*). See Appendix.

### **Why the work was titled *Forgotten***

I was already experimenting with collagraphs, making marks from that which was hidden from view when I was invited to see the research being undertaken for the U-boat project at the RCAHMW, mentioned in Section 2. Very little work had been done up to that point by marine archaeologists to investigate the wrecks on the seabed that the Project concerned itself with. It was a forgotten part of the narrative of World War One.

Starting with collagraphs, I made a series of drawings whose marks indicate the presence of things while they are out of sight, so preserving the mystery surrounding them. This is another variation on the theme of revealing yet concealing that characterized the previous two portfolios *Canticle* and *Archive*. Then as I moved into applying these ideas to working with collage, it was the piecing together of

memories, or the visualizing of the struggle to make the pieces become a comprehensible image that was my aim. The idea of events or people from the past always being in the background of our personal identities, but recalled with that indeterminacy of detail, also played a part. This led to considering the issue of dementia, the subject of the RCAHMW *Archives* day conference that I attended, investigating how dementia sufferers might benefit from having better access to the archives. The information given by medical professionals about the fragmentation of memory seemed very relevant to thinking about archaeological experiences within everyday life.

### **Features highlighted by the exhibited work:**

#### **F9 and 10**

F9 and 10 were exhibited in the right-hand room of the exhibition space, in Exhibition 1, flanking the far end wall, each with its own spotlight. These two canvases with their map-like compositions are made up of fragmented photocopied collagraph drawings enhanced by a subtle use of charcoal. They both also reference the U-boat project by including in the collaged papers lists of vessels sunk around the coasts of Britain during the course of the first World War.



Image 6.2: *F10*. Photograph by the artist

#### a) Collage

These collaged canvases still convey the notion of drawing, communicated through the gradations of grey which reference graphite. The process of making them acts like the casting of a net, much as a butterfly collector might do. The sense of expectation yet unpredictability of the action is similar. In other words, I might know what the net is like in that I know what materials or techniques I am using to make up the net, but I have no idea what it might capture. This useful illustration is a fairly complete commentary on the making of the work, which involves rendering the invisible visible. There is a scrutiny, an examination of the result, with the hope that something has been caught that could not have been caught any other way, going on to asking the questions that are often asked beforehand such as, what am I trying to say? What do I think and feel? What is the focus of my attention? In common with

poets, artists rarely know what they want to say until they can see what they've said, and in the making of these canvases something similar is at work.

The analogy of the butterfly collector's net is useful because it allows for the idea that the net is also important: it needs to be appropriate for that which it intends to catch. The better adapted the net, the better the chance of catching the elusive subject. It also works well in relation to collage which is built up stage by stage, without knowing what the final piece will look like. The building of the piece is the flourishing of the net, until something is captured, when the building stops. Then come the questions: what have I captured? Is it relevant to what I'm looking for? Does it teach me more?

This is quite a different approach from that of Picasso (1881 – 1973), who was responding to French philosopher Henri Bergson's (1859 – 1941) ideas about multiple viewpoints when he made the first collages recorded in the history of Western art. This way of thinking influenced the experimentation with Cubism, begun by Picasso in 1907, marked by the seminal painting 'Les Femmes d'Alger' completed that year. It put to one side the emphasis on realism and analytical observation, and instead introduced a visual language for the ideas that Henri Bergson (1859 – 1941) had presented. Developing these visual ideas further, the technique of collage, or the use of 'papier collé', came into being, investigated by both Picasso and Georges Braque (1882 – 1963) from 1912 – 1915, although Picasso claimed to have started it earlier, at the end of 1911. The use of collage seems to have been a natural consequence of their previous experimentations. It was a new way to demonstrate different but simultaneous realities, a fine example being Picasso's 'Violin' made in 1913-14, and labelled "papiers collés and charcoal on paper", now held in the Pompidou Centre in Paris. It was the beginnings of a new visual language, touching on the daily experiences of life, but introducing a nuanced interplay of personal internal thought not seen before.

Today, artists such Hajra Waheed (b.1980) have expanded the conceptual content of this methodology. She uses archival material in her work to challenge the official version of events given by the state, and thereby "opening up spaces for new imaginaries and interpretations" (Lu, 2021, p.276). In a similar way, *Forgotten* plays with the idea of making an official version of events from within itself. The finished

canvases demonstrate the incomplete nature of the activity of memory, which nonetheless remains the 'truth' in the mind. In other words, the person with that fragmentary memory holds it to be a true record – a mis-memory. There is scope here for experimenting with making a series of canvases, all relating to exactly the same memory, so that when they are put together, the memory retrieved is much closer to the 'truth' of the original event. This is a possible avenue for future research.

### F19 and 20

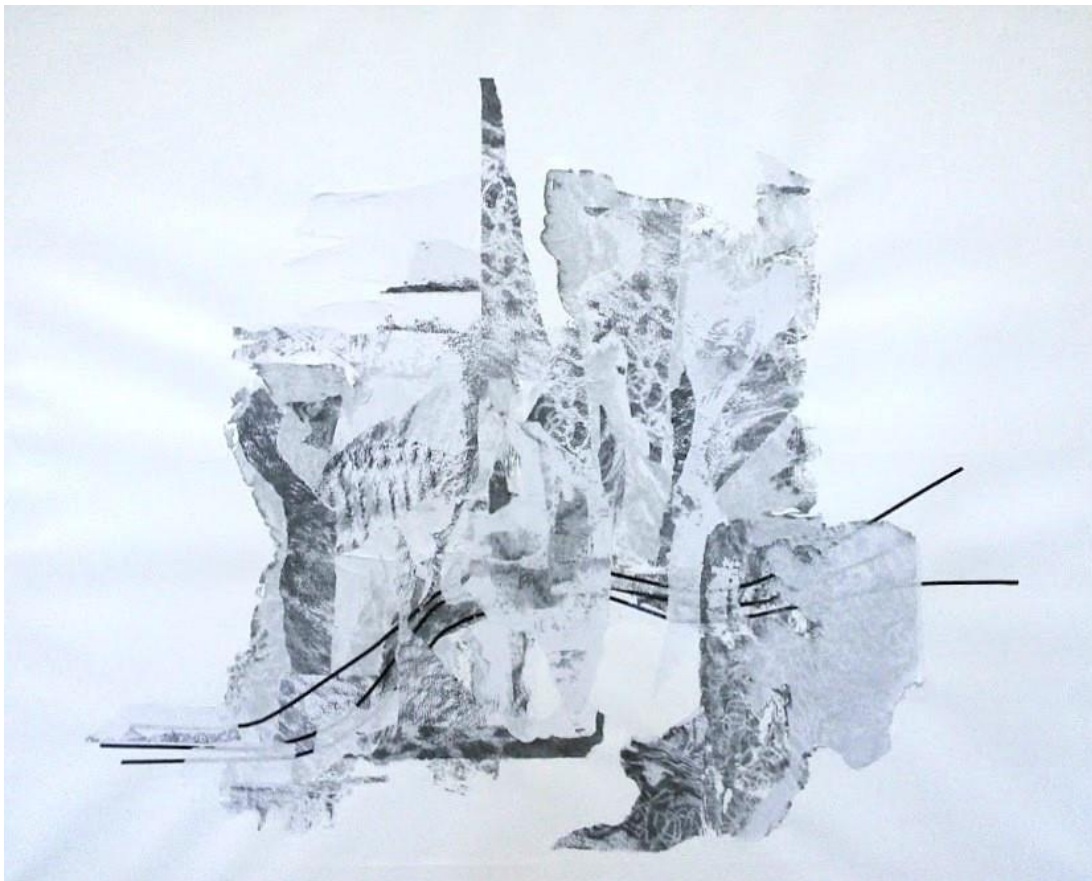


Image 6.3: F19. Photograph by the artist

#### b) Audio Cassette Tape

F19 and 20 from *Forgotten: Where?* are distinguished by their use of audio tape (taken from music cassettes) as a drawing tool. Its use is a means of expressing the



personal, individual experience, rather than the collective, even though the collective is implied. Some of these tapes had been personally pre-recorded, evidence of preference and individual taste. Some tapes were commercially pre-recorded, but having been chosen and bought, also spoke of personal choice and preference. The addition of tape turns the spotlight onto the personal while at the same time referencing the ordinary, common experience of a particular time in living memory, when cassette tapes filled every home before being replaced by the CD and then digital technologies.

### c) Blank Canvas

This set of images is also characterized by larger areas of blank canvas than the rest of the portfolio, an evocation of the blank spaces that so often appear in the effort to remember. With it comes a feeling of isolation, an awareness that the subject exists in a kind of vacuum, disconnected from the rest of the world.

Blank areas also raise the question: is the 'where' of a memory as important as a 'who' or a 'why'? There is less detail in the layering and greater areas of what appears to be neglect. There is the possibility of a direction, but how important is it in the end? There is a sense of fading, of a struggle to complete and become a whole. And in being placed in the Exhibition as a pair that belong together on the wall, a dialogue is created between them.

## F 28, 29 and 30



Image 6.4: F29. Photograph by the artist

### d) Stratigraphy

In contrast, F28, 29 and 30 are more overtly about ideas of stratigraphy. In archaeology, strata have a particular importance:

All excavation is based on the fundamental principle of the succession of levels, which assumes that layers of soil (or any other material) were deposited in chronological order, with the oldest at the bottom (Greene, 1996, p.67).

It is within the layers that artefactual, environmental and dating evidence is located. Layers are a time capsule. ... The layer holds the clues to the immediate context of finds and structures (Grant, 2005, p. 36).

Picking up on the idea of a “time capsule”, the whole canvas is covered in the initial layer and there are no blank spaces. Layer after layer of paper lies on top of

charcoal drawing, tissue paper and charcoal rubbing, giving a much darker presence than previous canvases. They were placed at the darker end of the gallery space, linking them with the paleolandscapes projected next to them, from which they gained an enhanced sense of mystery and a narrative that is at once complex and harder to resolve. The tonal range contributes to the paradox that the darker, more substantial images, by which I mean more substantial than F19 and 20, are nonetheless enigmatic and undefined.

In some ways this group of canvases brings to mind the work of Julie Mehretu, described on The Art Story website, 2022. Anchored to particular places, her paintings are built up through an accumulation of layers, and an expression of a particular visual vocabulary, in which she “invites viewers to think about the past, present and future of various locations in ephemeral, cultural, emotional and physical ways.” Her paintings are “time capsules”. “That’s what I’m interested in,” she is quoted as saying on the same website, “the space in between, the moment of imagining what is possible and yet not knowing what that is.” This is a definition of mystery that is appropriate for *Forgotten* as well.

Mehretu’s drawings and monoprints exhibited at Kettle’s Yard in 2019, are described by Amy Tobin as presenting a modern day take on Leonardo’s famous smoky ‘sfumato’ technique. Considering the exhibition, Tobin describes the layering, a notable feature of Mehretu’s paintings, now being “registered across the series, rather than deep into the surface” of individual works (2019, p.66). She notes of the monoprints that “these transparent and semi-transparent parts read as traces of the artist’s actual act of erasing, yet their contingency, frozen in the imprint, is suggestive of their imminent departure or tentative arrival” (2019, p.66). A similar sense of blurred and tentative layers characterises canvases F28, F29 and F30. This is enhanced by charcoal preparatory drawings made straight onto the canvas and the addition of tissue paper over the top as a support supplying a measure of texture for the collage papers to layer on to. The audio tape emerges through layers into the foreground. Seen as a group together, this triptych of canvases reinforces the concept of a memory being out of reach, and so is evocative of the experience of forgetting and the patchy nature of remembering.

New ideas on the nature of memory continue to surface. The New Scientist ran an issue in 2018 that focused on the mind, and included an article on memory. The conclusion was that “thinking of memory as either accurate or fallible is a mistake”, as scientists now hypothesise that the same memory can be reconstituted in different ways according to the reason for the recall. However, this is now considered to have a positive implication, “because memory, it turns out, is an illusion – one we create every time we recall the past” (New Scientist, 2018). According to the New Scientist, current thinking attributes an innate creativity to the way in which we bring our memories about. No longer are we encouraged to think of them in terms of the fixed, but rather as a source of recreation. In fact, the brain as a whole is now considered to function within a plasticity that enables it to recreate parts of itself when required, as neuroscientist Susan Greenfield documents (2014, p.58). This sense of flexibility prevents a static understanding of both remembering and forgetting. The hazy quality of these *Forgotten* canvases allow that flexibility to be intimated.

#### e) Fragments

Building these images layer upon layer from fragments is not only archaeological in methodology but also highlights the difficulty that there is in assembling images which focus on issues of personal identity such as memory. It is in relation to this that English literature took a great step forward in the work of James Joyce (1882 – 1941) and Virginia Woolf (1882 – 1941), as they experimented with the accumulation of fragments in an attempt to capture the difficulty of defining, with any authority, what personality is, and the part that memory plays in that. As David Dowling observes in his study of Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) mapping streams of consciousness involves the complication of paradox: “the universal along with the particular? . . . public history along with private experience? . . . the heat of the sun along with the flickering moment?” (1991, p.10)

“Oppositions and contradictions” (ibid. p.10) indeed seem to make up how we experience not only the world around us, but how we introspect our own characters. Through an archaeology of being, Woolf takes her readers through the present moment in the mind to reveal the interweavings and interruptions of the

consciousness with both past and present. Her first successful novel, *Mrs Dalloway* deals with this concept through an original style of writing which she developed for the purpose.

Similarly to Picasso, Woolf was influenced by Henri Bergson, who coined the phrase “stream of consciousness”. To her mind, the problem for the artist was hinged on how to express the thoughts, observations, opinions, reactions, memories, flowing endlessly through an individual consciousness, and what part that very flow plays in the forming of the individual personality. Woolf fills the narrative with many varied shades of grey, leaving just one flash of black and white in the action to pierce the narrative as Septimus, veteran soldier of the terrible Great War, meets his end abruptly as he falls out of the window and onto the railings below. But this moment of black and white is subsumed by the greys once more. The privileged world of the well-heeled in London continues around his impaled body, his act of desperation and death unremarked by the privileged world of Mrs Dalloway. Woolf portrays protagonist Clarissa Dalloway with an unusual lack of definition, so unlike the fully formed character traits of so many previous literary heroines. With these ribbons of mist she conjures up the apparently superficial character of her main protagonist:

She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxicabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fraulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language; no history; she scarcely read a book now except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that (Woolf, 1996, p.10,11).

As Dowling explains “The process of reading ‘Mrs Dalloway’ has been one of fragmentation and dislocation” (1991, p125). There is a certain flow, a running together of thought and sight in one carefully braided stream. Virginia Woolf’s technical style could be described as a form of literary collage, as a way of literary image transfer, where disconnected and incomplete marks are woven into a mysterious whole yet with the sfumato of indistinct edges.

From a distinctly more positive perspective, Japanese-American artist Makoto Fujimura (b.1960) considers fragments of a different kind in his book *Art + Faith*. In the chapter on Kintsugi, the Japanese art of rebuilding broken ceramics and using gold to mark the joins, he explains that “*kin* stands for gold, ‘tsugi’ means ‘to reconnect’, but ‘tsugi’ also has, significantly, connotations of ‘connecting to the next generation’”, introducing the element of time and the passing of generations into the work (2020, p.44). Fujimura goes on to point out that the result is one where the broken vessel is improved because the technique used makes the broken pottery even more remarkable than the original (2020, p.44).

Here, the dislocation inherent in assembling fragments becomes a force for the positive as the restored vessel is considered more beautiful and more valuable at this stage of its life than it had ever been. Fujimura takes lessons from this ancient art form to inform his life of Christian faith, taking a reconstructed teacup as the focus of his meditations and seeing the new whole as a collage (ibid., p.49). The newly formed vessel then assumes an extra dimension as it creates a physical meeting point with the hands that made the original hundreds, possibly thousands, of years before. Fujimura finds himself responding with a similar intensity to that experienced by Robert MacFarlane (ibid., p.50), noted above in Section 3 (MacFarlane, 2019, p.278)..

With this methodology, Fujimura moves through re-inventing the pot to become one even more beautiful and valuable than the original, to the mended pot as an object of contemplation, to a complete change of mind and purpose and sensibility, as the pot brings an enhanced connectivity with its ancient past into the present, a connectivity that brings art and archaeology intentionally together.

#### f) Grey

Grey is a stronger element in this trio of canvases than black and white. Usually considered to be the most dramatic of palettes, black and white allows the use of grey, which then creates subtleties and nuances not usually associated with the monochromatic. This contrast has a particularly important part to play in the pieces which make up *Forgotten*. It is part of the visualisation of the complex business that is memory, and the processes of remembering and forgetting. We can often say

yes, that event did happen, or no, I've never met this person. These are the blacks and whites. But when it comes to details, was my mother there when it happened? Did he have blue eyes? Then things become fuzzy and unresolved, and greys in their great variety take over and become the dominant feature of the overall picture.

### **Why *Forgotten* canvases were selected for the Exhibition**

All the selected canvases described above were hung in the right hand side of the gallery space, with dimmed lighting and accompanied by the ambient soundtrack that I recorded on my visit to Bardsey Island. They were selected because they were made in response to the U-boat project, and therefore geographically linked to the coast of West Wales, in the region of Bardsey Island. They continued the themes of the ethereal and mysterious evoked by the left hand gallery space, and made a connection visually with the projected images from the *Archive* portfolio.

### **How this work applies and develops ideas of archaeological imagination**

The canvases from the *Forgotten* portfolio firstly, define the archaeological imagination in terms of archaeological purpose, in this case, building a whole from fragments. Secondly, I considered construction and composition, to introduce the possibility of narrative, maintain a sense of mystery, and allude to the visual culture of archaeology. Thirdly there is the exercising of archaeological practices such as excavation and interpretation. Fourthly I sought to develop processes and methods analogous to archaeology. Finally, I maintained a vertical aspect to my work

The *Forgotten* drawings on paper grew out of a focus on the contour line and the all-important vertical line. Working with both *Archive* and *Forgotten* revealed that the apparently simple line can effectively convey complex ideas, not just in the sense of being used in a way which taps into the power of symbol, but in the uncluttered nature of line and how it encourages the viewer to devise narratives of their own, to form connections with the image that they may not otherwise have made. The

image, in the end, is as complex as the viewer wants to see it. It is an invitation to the viewer to invest in the image more deeply.

There is an additional aspect to this. When vertical lines grouped together vary in distance and thickness, more symbolic readings emerge. This was apparent with the addition of 'barcode' lines which I added onto some of the canvases and drawings in the *Forgotten* series. Indicating the practice of reading and displaying technologically mechanised identity as part of common retail vocabulary, these particular articulations of simple lines bring in references to various issues that affect modern society: ranging from the individual's identity; to stolen and fake identities; to artificial intelligence and the use of robots; to international global economics, and all the connected ethical questions. It seems that vertical lines can be either simple or complex, personal or wide-ranging.

The simple strategy of employing basic marks speaks about a non-reliance on advancing technology, and evokes a time when in our daily lives we were more in touch with the physical world around us. As an artistic device, it has raises questions about our relationship with our environment. It has the capacity to ask the viewer to consider why we have the daily experiences that we do, and suggests that life need not be as complicated, as unrelentingly busy and action-orientated, as it currently is. This is not to say that technological advances are unnecessary or unwelcome. But there has obviously not been a chance for our current generation to think through how to negotiate the profound and increasingly frequent changes that have been made to daily life as a result of these advances. As journalist Robert Colvile says: "The toxic combination of more information and less time to process it is another of the feedback loops with which the great acceleration is rife" (2016, p.51).

Contemporary society is taking us further and further away from the experience of being physical beings with an important role to play in the material world. Our disengagement then feeds a reluctance to take responsibility for the environmental health of our planet. The consequences of this are already in evidence in the world around us and demonstrated by the reactions from many nations to the devastating nature of the information disclosed by COP 26. Hence the value of a new movement, the Slow Movement, which encourages us to slow down, to take time to make note of the world around us, to breath in our current circumstances.



The next Section, Section 7, concentrates on the *Incense* portfolio, where the emphasis on slowing down is carried forward and becomes a dominant feature of the work.

## **Section 7: Spoil Heap (*Incense*)**

### **Definition of Spoil Heap**

The spoil heap is what has been brought away from the site as a result of excavation. It is that which has been designated as unimportant to the project, the soil that has been cleared away from the area of interest and heaped up a short distance away in order to facilitate a detailed examination of the cleared space.

### **How the idea of the spoil heap applies to *Incense***

Firstly, this applies to the portfolio *Incense* in that these canvases emphasis negative space. Just as the spoil is the negative space around the points of archaeological interest at the site, it is this aspect, the negative space, that is an important feature of these canvases. At the same time, *Incense* subverts the idea that what has been removed is inconsequential. Contrary to what happens at an archaeological dig, where this soil is left until the investigations have been completed and then used to backfill the trenches and pits that have been made, here the 'spoil heaps' are themselves gridded, bringing value to that which has been discarded. In the context of Bardsey Island, 'negative space' may be viewed as the lives of the humble peasants, farmers and monks who lived there in contrast to the 'positive space' presented in history books by kings, popes and other worthies.

### **Why the work was given the title *Incense***

This portfolio was given the title *Incense* because of the method of making each canvas, echoing the painstaking efforts of the monks to copy and illustrate biblical texts (in the days before the printing press). Each canvas comprises rising columns of circles, which echoes the praise being offered to God by the monks as they pursued the work of illuminating texts. "May my prayer be set before you like incense" (Ps 141 v 2; Rev 5v8), is a standard expression within the Christian church. In this context the use of circles signifies life, and the eternal nature of the Triune

Godhead, particularly within the Celtic expression of Christianity. In many monasteries, every task was seen as an opportunity and a reason to worship God. In Grove Book 45 'What is Celtic Christianity?', Elizabeth Culling describes the Celts as having a sense of "the nearness of eternity" that is largely lost in the experience of modern life. They saw material existence as an invitation to consider "deeper, spiritual things", to such an extent that every day activities held eternal resonance (1994, p.15).

This portfolio produced the first artworks of the research that were site-specific. Centring on the particular geographical location of the ancient monastery on Bardsey Island, for me, necessarily involved investigating the archaeological and theological aspects of the site. My intention was that by adding visual expression of non-material aspects of the island to the physical scientific data collated by the CHERISH team, a fuller understanding of the site itself might emerge. In this way I hoped to make a contribution to the contemporary critical discourse on the nature and function of interdisciplinarity through creative practice. Further research might well have led to a more specifically geopoetic expression of the 'Other', as I perceived it in that particular place, but the emergence of the Covid pandemic caused circumstances to change and it was not possible to pursue this further.

The Celtic Christians who first occupied Bardsey Island allowed prayers to rise as incense while they worked, and I followed a similar work pattern. These canvases were made in a Celtic Christian frame of mind, often with incense literally burning in the studio as the work was being made. Modern day Christianity follows the same principles of viewing and exercising worship as not only an action accompanied by sacramental ritual and liturgy, but something that is to be a normal part of everyday life for the believer. As the present bishop of Oxford puts it:

Worship is the supreme expression of our humanity because it reminds us who we are in relation to who God is. The Westminster Confession says that 'the purpose of man is to worship God and enjoy him forever.' Worship is therefore a defining human activity. It's as basic to our being as thinking and working, reading and singing, laughing and playing. I worship therefore I am (Pritchard, 2007, p.12)

The effect of this is to connect the worship of the fifth century with worship of the twenty first century, representing a constant stream of worship through time, offered to God through the ordinary daily lives of believing people. Worship seen from the

perspective of the everyday both reveals and conceals. As a private affair of the heart, worship may be concealed from others. Mediaeval monk Brother Lawrence discovered this as he worshipped while washing up in the monastery kitchens (Lawrence, 2015, p.28-29) Yet what is concealed from fellow humans is revealed to God.

## **Features highlighted by the exhibited work**

*Incense* continues to develop the practice of seriality initially developed in the previous portfolio *Forgotten*. This is augmented by a series of twenty - six graphite and gouache drawings that accompany the canvases, drawn on A4 blue or yellow graph paper, and white squared paper. A dozen or so of these drawings were on show in the Exhibition *Jacob's Ladder*.

### a) Negative Space

Negative space is the predominant identifier of this portfolio. The grid is drawn onto the canvas, the circles are drawn into the spaces produced by the grid, and the circles are then delineated by the ink that surrounds them. Although these works are on canvas, these are predominantly drawings rather than paintings. In this I agree with Agnes Martin (1912 – 2004). As Briony Fer puts it: "It is striking that Martin does not draw a distinction between drawing and painting. On the contrary, she collapses it" (Fer, 2004, p.56).

The use of negative space in this series of canvases introduces the idea of ceasing from busyness, resting from restlessness, and contributes to an articulation of quietness and peace. Contrary to the constant rush of contemporary life, this is a call to be still, for a respite from the incessant demands of the twenty-first century everyday experience of stress. "Stress, in short, is the new pandemic" declares journalist Robert Colvile, conscious that such an increase in pressure and activity is met by us "not with excitement, but with fear and alarm" (2016, p.62).

In contrast to this, the focused intentionality of the monks in their worship/work on Bardsey Island establishes a space of calm, a rhythm of life combining quotidian tasks with the spiritual discipline of "practising the presence of God".

Agnes Martin also had room in her thinking for the spiritual practices of calmness and meditation. Her interest in Buddhism lead to a preference for stillness and silence, as well as an acknowledging of “stillness and void as active and creative forces, . . . all reflected in her quietly animated work” (Princenthal, 2018, p.104).

“Stillness and void” take on the promise of revelation as attention is brought to rest on the “spoil heap” of our days rather than on the dizzying activity of them. This sense of calm grows as attention is focused on the *Incense* canvases, a feature reminiscent of Martin’s work. Quoting writer and friend Jill Johnston in 1965, Martin’s paintings communicate “the quiet intensity of a perfectly contained image”, being “as the artist says, like tranquilizers” (ibid., p.129).

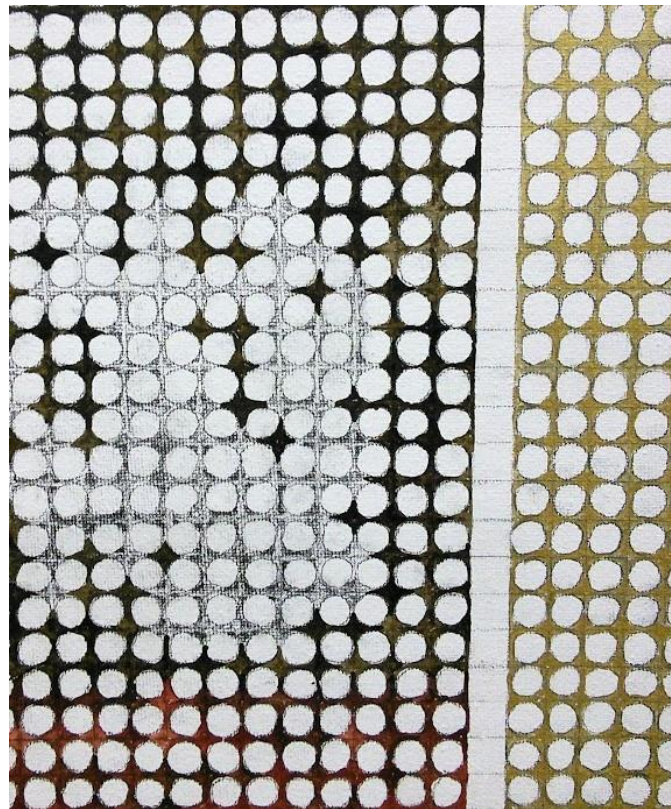


Image 7.2: detail of *Incense 8*.

The negative space emphasised by the *Incense* canvases encompass a wide border of plain white unpainted canvas surrounding each image to introduce the theme of spirituality as a visible presence into the Exhibition. Dominating three walls of room 1, they reject a conventional requirement to express movement with a focused

breathing space of light and calm, a space in which to confront stillness and quiet, where there is opportunity for the viewer to dig deeper into their inner self.

These canvases recall the later paintings of Mondrian (1872 – 1944), where white dominated his grid-like compositions, and small flashes of bright colour were confined to a very small number of rectangles in each painting. These paintings were made utilizing particular restrictions: the horizontal and vertical lines which dominated the compositions were always to be black, the colour (red, yellow, blue) had to fill a rectangle rather than any line (Deicher, 2010, p.75). As Deicher points out, these later canvases are particularly open to the charge of design rather than art, yet they signal a return to “his long-cherished aim of painting a picture with a uniformly patterned surface, without a centre or an ordering structure”. By keeping to this format he succeeded in his aim and so “abandoned the link with tradition and opened up a new dimension in painting” (Deicher, 2010, p.78).

#### b) Slowing Down

It seems from a distance as if the *Incense* canvases are very quiet and much alike, but on closer examination the viewer would become aware of the glint of gold, pockets of peacock blue and splashes of scarlet. A close study of each canvas rewards the viewer with tiny gems of colour details that could easily be missed.

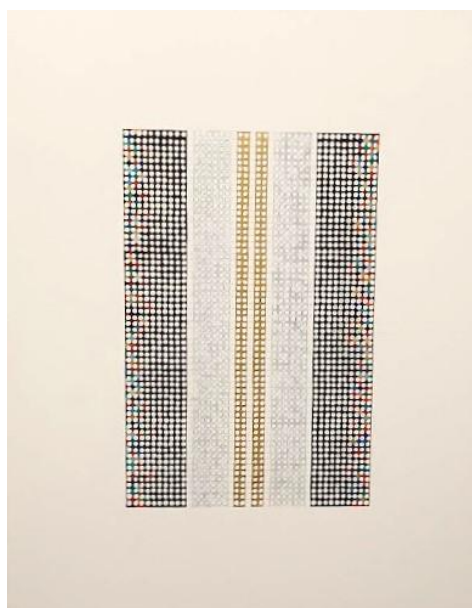


Image 7.3: *Incense 5*. Photograph by the artist

Some viewers accessed room 1 from the doorway and were drawn in by the works in the centre of the room. I observed that few spent time with the canvases on the wall, which demanded more time. Could this be a reflection of our need as a society to understand that we are being driven more and more by our need for speed? Is this what feeds an impatience with the kind of visual image that demands an investment of time in order to come to grips with it? Journalist and writer Robert Colvile expresses the balance required for the future as society is hurried along this particular trajectory. “In the aggregate, the great acceleration is an extraordinarily good thing for humanity” he affirms, adding “but its benefits are distributed unevenly, and its dangers are almost as great as its opportunities”. Decisions yet to be taken will determine “whether we become the slaves of the great acceleration, or its masters” (Colvile, 2017, p.10).

Former US Vice President Al Gore (b.1948) expresses his own apprehension of the speed and direction in which progress is unfolding throughout the world, explaining that although human history is basically shaped around great changes, in comparison with the contemporary world, there have been “none as powerful or as pregnant with the fraternal twins – peril and opportunity – as the ones that are beginning to unfold”(Gore, 2014, p.xv). For Gore, the effects of the changes he identifies in the body of the book have the potential for far-reaching consequences. “Some of them are degrading self-governance, the fabric of life, the species with which we share the Earth, and the physical, mental and spiritual nature of humanity” (ibid., p.368) he alleges.

Gore’s book *The Future* (2014) is a warning. The very nature of what it means to be human is on the brink of what could be irreversible change. The future, if it is an unadulterated extension of the present, will be unsustainable, and will in the end bring into question the definitions we hold about who we are as human beings. This profoundly affects the notion of art, itself an activity which expresses the ‘spiritual’ (in the broadest sense of the word), even if it only refers to issues of identity, a central subject for many artists.

Yet not all commentators agree. Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari (b.1976) expresses his views of contemporary life with a surprising measure of optimism, not because his perspective is necessarily different, but because he throws out as

outdated issues which affect us all. For him, the main problem revolves around the question of life and death, claiming that scientists “don’t think of death as a metaphysical mystery, and they certainly don’t view death as the source of life’s meaning” (2017, p.25), concluding “We don’t need to wait for the Second Coming in order to overcome death. A couple of geeks in a lab can do it” (ibid., p.26).

Harari goes on to demonstrate the effect that this line of thinking can have, which in effect amounts to a relinquishing of a large part of life:

A large part of our artistic creativity, our political commitment and our religious piety is fuelled by the fear of death. . . . Once people think (with or without good reason) that they have a serious chance of escaping death, the desire for life will refuse to go on pulling the rickety wagon of art, ideology and religion, and will sweep forward like an avalanche (ibid., p.33).

He introduces a polarity between art and life. Interestingly, art and religion are bracketed together in a way which acknowledges that there is a spiritual compatibility between the two, but the two are excluded from what is considered essential for human life. Of course that brings into the debate the place of the soul in human experience. Harari’s view is that humankind is not distinct in any meaningful way from the rest of the animal kingdom and that notions of soul and spirit, from which the spiritual arises, is itself old fashioned, claiming that “life has no script, no playwright, no director, no producer – and no meaning” leading to the grim conclusion that “the universe is a blind and purposeless process, full of sound and fury but signifying nothing” (ibid.7, p.234). From his perspective, such a view is the premise of science, for “the life sciences doubt the existence of soul not just due to lack of evidence, but rather because the very idea of soul contradicts the most fundamental principles of evolution” (ibid., p.119). Far from seeing this as a bleak description, he perceives an exciting if stressful future. His is not a view to which many would subscribe.

Meanwhile, for some there remains significance in the concepts of the spiritual, especially as they relate to art. Arthur Danto affirms, “especially in the late twentieth century, art had begun to reveal its inner truth” going on to commend “Hegel’s masterpiece, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* because “Art, in his philosophy, is a component of Spirit together with philosophy and religion” (Danto, 2013, p.23). To him, art would be impossible without some form of spirituality.



In the meantime, many visual artists continue to explore the mystery of what it is to be a human being, with or without specific faith persuasions. Those with faith tend to see it as an integral part of their practice. Visual Japanese American artist Makoto Fujimura explains the value of slowing down, and applies this to all aspects of his studio practice, deliberately using materials that require time to make before using them (2020, p.38).

The deliberate use of methods and materials that require a slowing down allows the artist to regard creative practice as a meditative process, one that allows time for the inner being of the maker to be drawn into the work. In relation to *Incense*, the making of the canvases requires the same willingness to slow down.

Taking time to view allows the viewer to see subtleties and nuances that are easily overlooked. As a result, it encourages the principle that has been become a focus of this research, that of revealing and yet concealing. To the viewer in a hurry, they may grasp the sense of calm, light, repetition as a calming influence, and an appreciation of the canvases as a group. But for the viewer who takes time, a sense of curiosity as to what might be going on in the background is allowed to grow. Apart from a perception of small areas of colour, the black itself holds variations that evoke movement and the possibility of vital presence behind the still calm façade of the image.

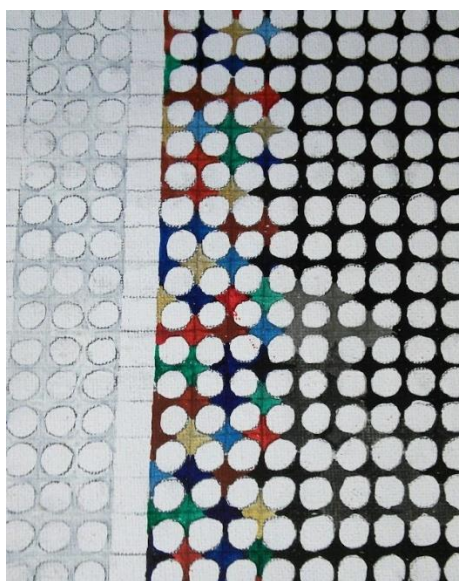


Image 7.4: detail of Incense 6

### c) Circles

Unlike the circles of Gabriel Orozco that make up his black and white canvas *The Eye of GO* (2005), there is no attempt with *Incense* to make the circles perfectly formed.

Rather, they are organic, evidence of the hand of the artist, and the slightest hint of movement. Orozco too enables movement in his circles but from a very different perspective. He believes that gravity, erosion and friction have a role to play (Orozco cited in Fer, 2013, p.47). Scanning Orozco's circles, Fer notes that "simple geometric shapes are tantamount to 'exercises' actively setting in train meditative processes that expand into a vast cosmology. Understood like this", she asserts, "a simple circle might become an instrument that mediated between different realms" (ibid., p.53).

*Incense* also uses the predisposition of the circle to become a mediator "between different realms" in order to evoke a sense of movement from the visible to the invisible, from earth to heaven, rising from the base to the top of the 'ladder' formed by the grid on which the composition rests.

Yet Orozco also uses the restriction of rules, as did Mondrian, to drive his work. In his 'diagrams', 2004 onwards, he confined himself to four colours, and took the decision-making element out of making his compositions by echoing the way a Knight moves in the game of chess (ibid., p.16).

The *Incense* portfolio, in the ordering of the circles within a grid, brings to mind the drawings of Eva Hesse made mostly in 1967. As with the *Incense* drawings, these are made on graph paper with black ink. Briony Fer describes them as having intensity in spite of their simple, doodle-like nature, "the kind of doodle that fills in time and finds a nice symmetry in the process. It fills in space and it fills in time" (2004, p.122). Fer points out that Hesse's circles permeate many other pieces of work, and she considers the thought that the circle for Hesse functions as a "kind of 'binder', linking otherwise very different kinds of making" (ibid., p.124). In a similar progression, the repetitive use of circles in *Incense* led on to the exploration of a more three-dimensional approach, of which the following *Prayers Ascending* portfolio is the result. This is discussed further in Section 8.

#### d) Repetition

Both in the making of these canvases, through the rhythm and solace of repetition so characteristic of Anglican liturgy, and in the viewing of them, small details begin to excite curiosity and expand the boundaries of what can be seen.

“We are lost without repetition,” declares Briony Fer in the introduction to her book *The Infinite Line* (2004). She goes on to say that this can be both a negative and a positive thing, a means of ordering and disordering (2004, p.2).

Yet, referring to Deleuze’s book *Difference and Repetition*, she takes up his ideas of many “registers of repetition” to see this approach as marking “a significant shift from the way in which repetition has been seen to work within modernism, indeed to be generative in the very formation of new aesthetic strategies (ibid., p3).

Kirk Varnedoe (1946 – 2003) expands on this in his thoughts about the work of Eva Hesse and her ability to work with “what minimalism can do *for* an artist” (2006, p.181). For Varnedoe, the discarding of all but the essential means thinking of minimalism not just as “stripped down” but as “pent up” (ibid., p.123). Varnedoe considers Hesse as implementing a regime of strictures upon her working methods in order to pursue the opposite. Repetition, rather than curtailing, forces unexpected ways of problem-solving in the making. This then leads to openings and development both in thought and in execution that could not have been anticipated. Fer takes up this stance, appreciating that “new ground for art” is a positive consequence of repetition, stating that she wants her writing to constitute a book that is “a book not about what art has lost but what it has gained through repetition, even in the process of repeating itself” (Fer, 2004, p.3). Therefore, seen from this very positive perspective, she concludes that far from deadening experience, the process of repetition enhances it (ibid., p.57).

Interestingly, this idea cuts across art critic Lucy Lippard (1937). Lippard’s-response to the same issue of repetition seen in the work of Agnes Martin, she describes as “legendary examples of an unreplicative use of a repetitive medium” (ibid. p.58).

Instead Fer states:

On the contrary, I would want to claim the necessity of repetition to Martin, to create maximum difference, but also to demonstrate the interminable work of the work... This is the crux of it: the contemplative gaze as an infinite

extension or unfolding of memory, yet promising a moment of completeness in unpropitious circumstances. What Martin does is to isolate something precarious – like the infinite differences of her grids – and make of them something temporarily cohesive in a way that enables the loss of oneself in the infinite fabric of surface (Fer, 2004, p.58).

Compared with this description of Martin's work, the *Incense* portfolio keeps to a different balance. Rather than promoting an "infinite fabric of surface", they are bounded by a wide margin of empty canvas, limiting the effect of grid extension, and underlining instead a sense of stillness and silence. The empty frame around the image sets the composition in a meditative yet condensed space and invites closer inspection of its closely similar but varied details.

Comparing the work of Minimalist artists Kenneth Noland (1924 – 2010) and Carl Andre (b.1935), Varnedoe notes that repetition within a composition often leads to a geometrically leaning work, because "they wanted geometry for its graphic power; they wanted it for its visual power" and inevitably, "as a means to reduce the sense of the human gesture and to get a clean anonymous edge to their work" (2006, p.97). He then goes on to compare the work of Richard Serra (b.1938) with that of Jackie Winsor (b.1941), noting that there is a difference between the aims and methods of male Minimalist artists and female Minimalist artists, describing Serra's as "industrial and demonstrative" whereas Winsor's work by contrast is "personal and private" (ibid., p.179).

In other words, Minimalism itself becomes home to a wide range of artistic practices, some contradictory to the work of others, yet part of the same general direction of travel (The Art Story, 2023). As Minimalist ideas continue to influence artists in the twenty first century, there is a broadening of its original concepts. No longer is repetition something to be seen from a mechanistic or industrial viewpoint. Instead, repetition can seek to focus on the hand of the artist, rather than obliterate it. It can articulate human experience, rather than be divorced from it altogether. *Incense*, with its simple grids of hand-drawn circles, introduces a further dimension into the mix, consciously referencing the spirituality of religious life and meditative practices.

## Why *Incense* canvases were selected for the Exhibition

The presence of these canvases in room 1 underlined the purpose of this section of the Exhibition to feature light and lightness, an aim shared with painters.

Of course, by definition all painters deal with light, but some have wanted to hold onto it and have valued it more wholeheartedly than others. In the tradition of the Byzantine icon, the icon lives in a world of light, an absolute light. This is paradoxical, in that the icon knows or acknowledges no source of light, either internal or external, yet there is light (McKeever, 2009, p.177).

As McKeever points out, light is a feature of that notably spiritual artefact of art, the religious icon. By referencing these Byzantine paintings, *Incense* itself becomes an icon, or a series of icons, in other words, they become visual devices which enable the viewer to enter into a deeper encounter with spiritual and theocentric ideas. This is enhanced by the flashes of colour that emerge on closer inspection, gold, red, blue, the traditional colours of the icon.

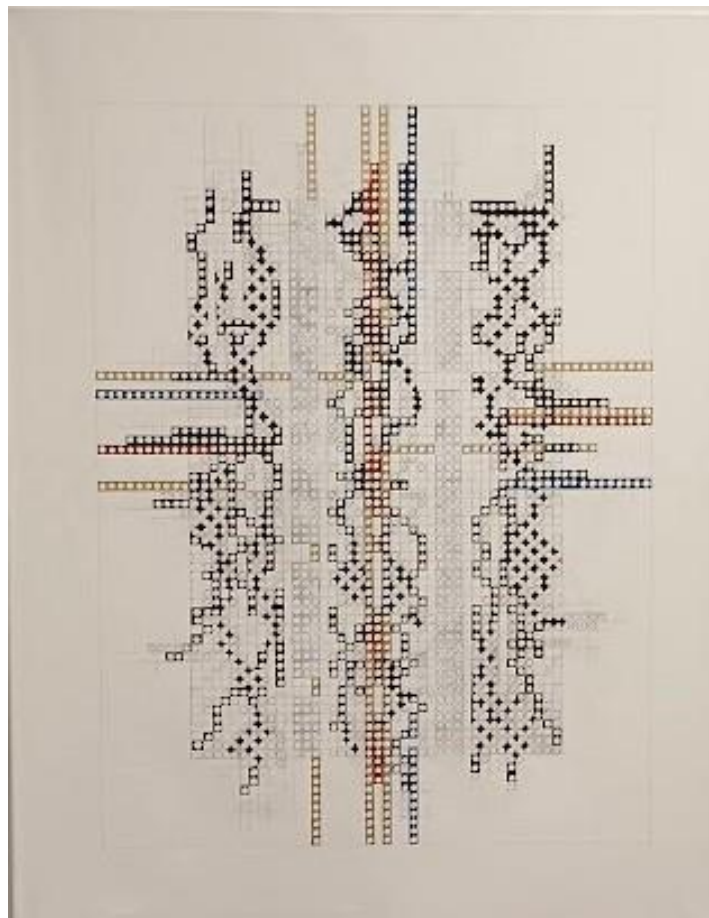


Image 7.5: *Incense 10*

## How this work applies and develops the idea of the archaeological imagination

Up to this point, work from three portfolios have been considered: *Canticle*, *Archive* and *Forgotten*. Both *Canticle* and *Archive* concentrated on focusing on a definition of archaeological imagination which took into account the points made in Section 3: The Investigation, resulting in a visual manifestation of the interface between the disciplines of Archaeology and Fine Art. Taking it from the viewpoint of the artist, rather than the archaeologist, my research up to this point demonstrates that it is certainly possible to take up the starting points offered by archaeology to create visual images which evoke characteristics of archaeology, while at the same time developing art practice. In the end, this is the challenge from the artist's point of view. The question is always: can having a prescriptive undergirding for my work enable that practice to develop and flourish, or will such a restriction cause it to dry up? In a sense, this is a similar point to that made by Briony Fer about the creative outcomes of using a narrow set of rules in the making of work, as quoted above. The narrow entrance of particular requirements, the "minimalist box" (Varnedoe), can lead to an unexpected opening up of possibilities not likely to have been envisaged any other way.

The *Forgotten* portfolio, building on the work of *Archive*, introduces visual language for the more intangible realities which are a part of the practice of archaeology. As Wallace suggests in *Digging the Dirt* (2004), wonder, connectivity and a sense of loss are part of the experience of archaeology. So the work produced in response to the U-Boat Project, for example, work not included in the Exhibition, develops these ideas. The canvases which were exhibited bring with them another way of exploring the "revealing yet concealing" characteristic noted earlier. Yet they also point towards another feature of archive mentioned by Derrida in *Archive Fever* (1998), that of the private yet public. The effect of layers of collage, the stratigraphy of levels of grey, cause the ambivalence between what is on public display, and the personal patina with which the viewer interprets the images. The partially seen and partially defined allow this swing from concealing to revealing, from public to private, from general to personal.

The *Incense* canvases introduce a further aspect, as they are specifically related to a particular location, and in that location, connecting with a spirituality of place.

Through the use of repetition and therefore a predictable rhythm, the viewer is invited to consider the life rhythms of the ancient monks to whom this work refers.

Shanks' claim that the archaeological imagination should be thought of in terms of a "bridging field" now becomes relevant, for such work brings together the visual with the archaeological, the theological and the spiritual.

All these features come together more markedly in the pieces from the final portfolio included in the Exhibition, *Prayers Ascending*, which will be covered in the following section.

Sadly, the loss of my university studio space in March 2020 (because of the first covid lockdown, and the School of Art's consequent decision to move all studio spaces out of the Old College) meant that this series of *Incense* canvases came to an abrupt, unscheduled end, with lines of enquiry truncated. This may be the starting point for future research. Or will it prove more pertinent to develop the features of the final portfolio, *Prayers Ascending*, described in Section 8?

## **Section 8: Finds Tray (*Prayers Ascending*)**

### **Definition of Finds Tray**

Finds trays are where items that have been uncovered during excavation, directly or through a sieving process, are laid out. Finds are grouped in such a way that they can be traced back to the context in which they were found, each find (or group of finds) is numbered so that it can be related to all the other information gathered from the site (Grant et al, 2005, p.46). Finds have to be treated carefully in a thorough cleaning process that removes debris and reveals the true identity of the find so that it can be properly scrutinised by the relevant expert (Peterborough Archaeology, (2022))

### **How the idea of the finds tray applies to *Prayers Ascending***

This work encapsulates the idea of the find on the finds tray: it is what is left when the irrelevant has been washed away. It is a kind of unveiling, a revealing. As my research has progressed so ideas have been refined and practical methodologies focused, (see Section 3), until the final artwork brings the trajectory to a resolution, revealing and yet concealing what has been at the heart of the research all along. As proposed in Section 1, in this artwork, art, archaeology and spirituality have been woven together to make a piece that in some measure summarises and substantiates conceptually what has gone before but in a more overt form.

### **Why the work was given the title *Prayers Ascending***

This portfolio is fully described in Appendix 1. The *Jacob's Ladder* Exhibition featured the hanging piece *Prayers Ascending*, made up of four 0.7 metres diameter collaged metal hoops with two additional 0.7 metres metal hoops each containing a 0.3 metres collaged metal hoop, arranged to hang from the gallery ceiling in the form of a freely moving cross. The hoops were attached to each other with magnets.



Beginning at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, I recorded in three A4 visual diaries the news headlines and stories from national newspapers, from Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the day that restrictions were first introduced in the UK and I was made to leave my studio in Old College, Aberystwyth, until Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020, when the restrictions of the first lockdown were beginning to ease. During that time, I was an ordinand and therefore aware that the Church in Wales issued prayers to be prayed for the nation. So my approach was to include the pandemic situation in my personal devotions. For each day's news items taken from a national newspaper, a prayer was made, connected to the date on which it was offered. As well as a prayer, this recording of time passing references On Kawara's *Today* paintings. These prayers were then written down onto coloured paper and folded up before adding them to the journal. The presence of each prayer is revealed by the use of colour and a distinctive triangular shape, yet each prayer is concealed within the paper parcel. From there came the idea of rolling up the paper on which prayers were written and using them in the form of vertical lines and circles to form compositions. This final piece is the culmination (so far) of that process. Without a studio to work in from March 2020 to April 2021 it was too difficult to develop these ideas further, but this venture into 3D work will be a point of development for the future once the current research is complete.

## **Features highlighted by the exhibited work**

### a) Light

Painter Ian McKeever in his essay *Light* neatly summarises the dualities present not only in the mind of the painter along with many other visual artists, but which also lie at the heart of archaeology, and at the heart of the historic Christian faith. It is a duality which brings together the ethereal 'inner' with the material 'outer', thereby encapsulating the human condition. This is expressed in McKeever's desire to "free the spirit" by applying informed intuition to data (McKeever cited in Allthorpe-Guyton, Tucker and Lampert 2009, p.180). McKeever seeks to communicate this in his work by his treatment of light.

Light is the predominant feature of *Prayers Ascending*, expressed in the different whites used to make the paper rolls on the collaged surfaces, and the gold paper

flecking through the collages. The collages themselves are mounted on tracing paper, allowing light to come through, and therefore enabling the composition to be viewed from both sides of the hanging hoops. The hoops are white, embracing the whole in light. The emphasis on light enhances the concept of the vertical so that lightness of tone and lightness of weight contribute to a sense of lifting up. This in turn underlines the dependence of the Christian faith on not only the death of Christ, as symbolized by the cross which brings him down into the earth for his burial, but also on his resurrection, followed by his ascension into heaven, as recorded by Saint Luke in chapter one of the Acts of the Apostles. With the focus on light and lightness, it complemented the *Incense* canvases. It also provided the context for *Canticle*, which is a visual expression of sung worship, and *Kneelers*, which emphasised the posture and position of those taking part in worship.

Emphasis on light can also be read as a necessary part of the archaeological experience, denoting at once a lack of data but also a freedom in which to exercise imagination. For, as discovered above, imagination cannot be excluded from archaeology altogether. Writing about the 'Red Lady' of Paviland, archaeologist Alice Roberts agrees that an act of imagination is often required as so many facts are no longer recoverable (2022, p.74).

It is this space, these gaps in our knowledge of material data, that allows for the exercise of imagination and conjecture, and ultimately for the flourishing of philosophy, theology and faith as well as art. It is this common space between archaeology and religion that drew archaeologists and priests together in the early days of archaeology, and explains how priests as well as scientists were both involved. However, this is not an easy relationship, and has its own fundamental tensions. Yet, as Roberts goes on to imply, the association of priests with the practice of archaeology had a positive effect overall:

Who are we? Where do we come from? – that had previously been the exclusive preserve of religion. Perhaps the tension between science and religion would have been even greater if clerics like Buckland and Breuil hadn't engaged with this sphere of enquiry (ibid., p.49)

As she sees it, the initial misinterpretation of the data made by a cleric about the identity of the 'Red Lady', who through further investigation reveals that the lady is a young man and not a lady at all, hinges on the readiness with which religion adopts

the imaginative at the expense of verifiable data. And this of course causes problems as far as the discipline of archaeology is concerned. Yet it is this same space, the interval between fact and conjecture, that gives the visual artist room to explore territory with grace notes of archaeological subtext, as in the space between formal notes in a piece of music where there is room for those extra notes that do not affect the melodic line at all but add character to the whole, as when trills are sung or played.

Eva Hesse's (1936 – 1970) practice dwells on the earthy and yet often generates a sense of the ethereal. Somehow her work seems to emanate from just such a space where the physical and non-physical co-exist. This can be seen in the comparison of two similar pieces. *Untitled (Rope Piece)*, 1967 is a web-like construction of string and rope covered in brown Latex, suspended in the corner of a room from metal hooks. Writing about this particular piece, Varnedoe explains:

Hesse's uncertain references are to things not merely flaccid but repellent – yielding to gravity in an unpleasant way. Few artists of this period use the vocabulary that Hesse's work requires: sag, distend, pucker, crease, flap. But it is the minimalist inflection, the repetition, the industrial materials of Hesse's work that save this bodily reference, this organicism, from being a merely corny, merely sloppy expressionism (2006, p.184).

This is followed by *Right After* (1969). A similar piece of work, this web-like structure of fibreglass and white Latex is displayed against a white wall in the Milwaukee Art Museum with focused lighting, so that the visual contribution of nuance and shadow to the whole piece is enhanced. I mention the circumstances of the making of this piece because it was one of the last pieces she made, it may possibly have been unfinished, and because of that it can be said to have its own 'archaeological' context, being amongst the better known 'material remains' left by this young artist.

As with *Untitled (Rope Piece)*, *Right After* ignores many of the ideas of what was then part of the established (specifically male, as Varnedoe observes) Minimalism. Neither piece has the smooth industrialized finish often associated with Minimalism. Neither are static and solid. There are no sharp, clean lines. Instead both convey complexity along with a hint of movement, in spite of being simple with regard to singularity of materials used and the simple non-industrialised device of hanging, allowing gravity to participate as it will. Both pieces are completely handmade, another difference brought in by Hesse. The earlier piece has a more negative

impact, with its unfinished droops and bunched strands, the ones sagging to the floor evoking an inability to defy gravity. The later work combines complexity, fragility, and a certain elegance. The organic nature of its loops invite the possibility of movement, and therefore of change. There is something industrial and impersonal yet intensely private about it. Although very modern (at the time) in its use of Latex as a material for art, nonetheless it provokes a dialogue between the nature of webs produced in the natural world and man-made webs created in the studio. It leads the viewer to consider the complexity of thought and the web of response the viewer experiences while in the presence of the work. In the end, it achieves more than could be anticipated from the basic simplicity of its materials and construction. With such innovations, Minimalism expands into Post Minimalism. As The Art Story website defines it,

Some Post-Minimalists shared the Minimalists' interest in abstraction and materiality, yet rejected their preoccupation with industrial materials. They also rejected the movement's mood and rhetoric, often perceived as cold, over-intellectual and even authoritarian, responding with sculptures of more expressive qualities, often evoking the body and aspects of sexuality (The Art Story, 2023).



Image 8.2: Detail from *Prayers Ascending*

In a similar way, *Prayers Ascending*, as an active part of the show seen in that first room of the *Jacob's Ladder* Exhibition, speaks of a way forward. It demonstrates a way of taking the simple materials of hoop and paper, and moving the circle and the vertical line into a new dimension, yet in a way which avoids the clinical expulsion of the humanly subjective. Unlike the work of Eva Hesse, *Prayers Ascending* evokes the complexity of mysteries revolving around specifically spiritual, rather than sexual, concerns. Instead of the visceral, *Prayers Ascending* creates space for meditations of resurrection and ascension, for worship and prayer. Referring back to Bardsey Island and responding to the archaeological site of the ancient monastery, the cross-shaped structure is a reminder of that which formed the foundation of the lives of those who lived there. The cross, however, is not the heavy wooden structure of historical event, firmly embedded in the earth, but a symbol for the soaring of the spirit upwards in a freedom characterised by worship.

#### b)3D Kinetic

*Prayers Ascending* is the only piece in the Exhibition in which a subtle dominance of sculpted surface is a prominent feature. Its collaged hoops bear vertical columns of horizontal rolls of paper in a variety of dimensions. There is also variety in the colour of the rolls and circles used, as some are black, some are gold. But the majority of the collage is made up of white papers which are nuanced as the hoops ascend to the ceiling, being more yellow toned in the bottom two hoops, progressing through a rose tone to a blueish tone hoop at the top. The three-dimensionality of the piece attracts light and shadow, and importantly, can be viewed from both sides. It is at once solid but ephemeral as the shape is constantly in movement and the support for the rolls of paper is transparent. The loose hanging of the hoops allows them to move independently as viewers move past into the gallery space beyond. As it does so, the hoops become at once circles and then vertical lines as they slowly turn, complementing the rising columns of circles in the *Incense* canvases which surround it in the Exhibition. There is also the use of negative space, mimicking the surrounding canvases, as collaged surfaces come together into a rising column which leaves empty space at either side of each hoop, and in the side two hoops which make up the arms of the cross. Through these spaces, there is an interplay

with the other exhibition pieces as they are literally seen through the cross. This is a reference to the Celtic Christian emphasis on the incarnational, bringing the presence of God into every part of physical life.

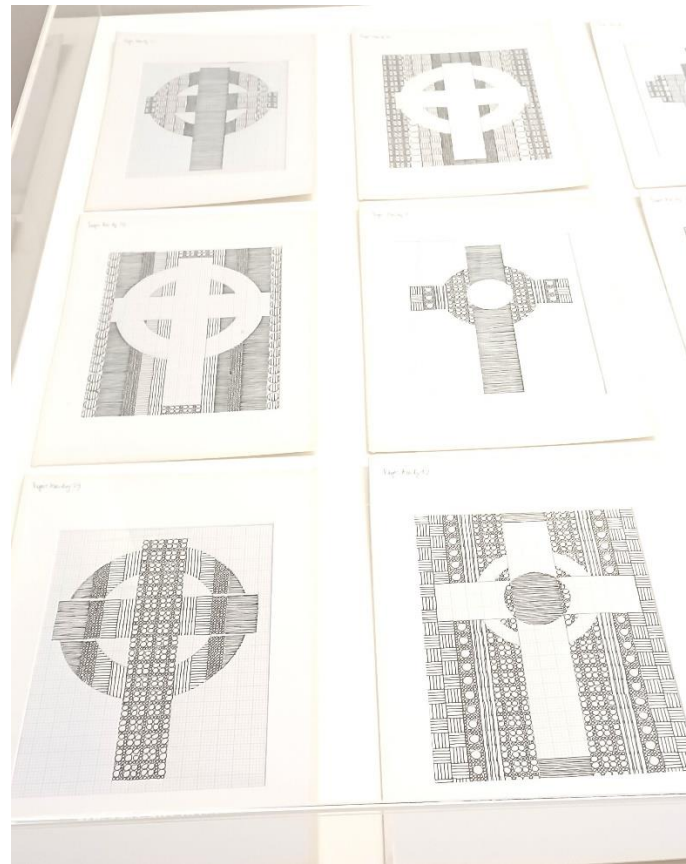


Image 8.3: Prayers Ascending drawings in glass case

The 3D nature and physicality of this delicate piece creates a new emphasis which I might explore in subsequent pieces in the future. The 2D drawing gives way to a 3D articulation of earlier preoccupations with repetition, but in a way which has increased physicality. The work's tactile nature invites touch. The piece is an example of how the narrow perimeters of the task lead to an avenue that could not have been anticipated without the previous works that explored repetition, a theme established in the previous section. As Fer continues in her thoughts on repetition, she acknowledges that such a methodology could bring about the new and the unexpected (2004, p4).

Her idea that there is “a margin of freedom *within* repetition”(ibid., p.4) applies not only to the visual reiteration of forms, but to the verbal reiteration of forms, such as

those found in the daily exercises of Anglican liturgy and worship. In Anglican forms of Morning Prayer, for example, the same words are read each day, and yet there is something new in the experience of doing so which cannot be easily defined, but can be sensed as part of the personal encounter with God that the spiritual discipline of Morning Prayer is meant to achieve. As the same words and phrases are used each day, the spirit engages with their familiarity resulting in a strengthening of personal faith. Art is indeed “one of the very few places in culture that allows a margin of freedom within repetition” (ibid., p.4), and the meditative and repetitive practices of the Church both ancient and modern is another. *Prayers Ascending* comes out of the fifty six A4 drawings which preceded it, while evoking the ritualistic repetitions of the Christian tradition to which it alludes by its very form.

The 3D nature of the piece *Prayers Ascending* gives a nod to two other artworks: the first by Japanese artist Shiho Fujiwara (b.1971). In November 2013, Walter Wickiser Gallery in New York produced an exhibition by Fujiwara entitled *Prayers for Peace*. The exhibition focused on Fujiwara’s large scale paper works using the materials of Sumi Ink and the handmade paper, Washi. The collection of works included an installation of six four-sided pillars, a work that interested me because of the vertical, monochromatic structures it consisted of. These, along with smaller 2D drawings, can be viewed from either side of the paper. This idea of strength coupled with transparency was something that influenced me when constructing *Prayers Ascending*.

Seeing this work online reminded me of the exhibition *Larrakitj* I had seen on a visit to the British Museum in 2015, as described in Section 4 above. This time it was the hollowness of the structures rather than their verticality which caught my attention.

As a reminder, the exhibition consisted of an installation of burial poles made by Aboriginal artist Wukun Wunambi, a group of hollowed out tree trunks displayed as vertical structures and embellished with the markings of indigenous Aboriginal tribes. These poles represented the hollow trees used as burial pods on tribal sacred grounds and referenced the ritual of the hollow log ceremony, unique to Arnhem Land, “the purpose of which is to ensure the safe arrival of the spirit of the deceased on its perilous journey from the earth to the land of the dead” (National Gallery of Australia, 2022).

Seeing a vertical expression of archaeology teamed with such an overt emphasis on the spiritual nature of human experience influenced my decision to develop the 2D pieces I had been making and seek to construct them in a 3D format. This led to my first 3D hanging piece, also called *Prayers Ascending*. In my hanging piece, archaeology, spirituality and art are woven together, and as with the other work exhibited in the same room, kept within the constraints of the theme of revealing yet concealing.

### **Why *Prayers Ascending* was selected for the Exhibition**

*Prayers Ascending*, with its delicate construction and use of transparency, contributed to the emphasis on light in the room. It complemented the emphasis on the Celtic Christianity symbolised by Bardsey Island's fifth-century monastery. The hanging form also articulated an idea of communication with God, as *Jacob's Ladder*, the title of the Exhibition, itself conveys. At the same time, it introduced a different dimension as it used paper as a drawing device as well as a support. The idea of prayers being written down and then rolled up references the original format of the writings of the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament scriptures, which were made on scrolls so that they are read vertically but stored horizontally.



Image 8.4: *Prayers Ascending* awaiting assembly



## **How this work applies and develops the idea of archaeological imagination**

Moving on from the meditative canvases of *Incense* which articulate spiritual disciplines of meditation and worship, *Prayers Ascending* moves the research project on with an overt reference to Christian spirituality, expressed in a 3D format. This is communicated through its basic cross shape; the rolls of paper recalling the scrolls of Old Testament writings; and the connection between the constituent parts being held together by an invisible force. This invisible source of power characterises the Christian tradition where prayer is considered to take place with the help of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, the invisible source of God's power who bears our prayers up to heaven (Romans 8 v 26; John 16v13 -15). The piece was hung from the ceiling with fishing line, another appropriate material, as Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, called fishermen to be the first of his disciples, promising that they would become "fishers of men" (Matthew 4v15-22).

These features indicate an underlying theology of the indispensable nature of the Holy Spirit who, in Christian tradition, is the moving power of God, yet without form or substance. As viewers walk past the piece, it moves in response to them and becomes a part of their context. This is a characteristic emphasis of Celtic Christianity that sees all of our interactions with each other and our natural world as involving the presence of God. The deliberately loose hanging of the piece, which allows all the hoops to move independently of each other, also has a theological background in that it indicates that God is not static and confined to theological thinking, but active and moving within the world he has made.

It is Makoto Fujimura who articulates the experience of the contemporary artist who is conscious of the presence of God as they develop their studio practice:

I now consider what I do in the studio to be theological work as much as aesthetic work. I experience God, my Maker, in the studio. I am immersed in the art of creating, and I have come to understand this dimension of life as the most profound way of grasping human experience and the nature of our existence in the world (2020, p.3).

In *Prayers Ascending*, the combination of art with both archaeology and a spirituality that proffers a consciousness of God, begins to take on a slightly different blend from the practice of previous portfolios, where the spiritual aspect in the mix was less

specifically Christian. I think this demonstrates that there is a huge variety of work that could be made after this piece, probing different ways of combining the three strands of this practice, and varying their relationship to each other. The elasticity of this approach could be an implication of what Shanks had in mind when he described the archaeological imagination as a ‘bridging field’, with the capacity to bring other fields into play along with archaeology. It also relates to his conviction that the archaeological imagination, expressed through literature, shares in the “broader cultural energies” of the world around us (see Section 3). While the recent census results show that membership of the state church is declining, the experience of living through days of pandemic demonstrates that people are interested in thinking about the spiritual dimension to life. *Prayers Ascending* puts forward the case that visual art is as communicative of the sharing of broader cultural energies as literature, but delivers it in quite a different way.

## **Progress so far**

As research has progressed, and a better acquaintance with the basic requirements of archaeology have been grasped, the questions posed from the perspective of the archaeologist have receded from the centre of these investigations and become instead like the calyx of an emerging flower, the structure that provides the initial stability for growth and blossoming while not being the bloom itself. Therefore no further research into the discipline of archaeology was required.

In Section 2, I gave a summary of Shanks’ book *The Archaeological Imagination* (2016) by listing all the points that arose of particular interest to the visual artist. I saw these points as “useful markers in the attempt to reach a comprehensive definition of the archaeological imagination”. The outworking of these markers are recorded above in Sections 4 and 5.

In Section 3, I gave a detailed list of relevant questions based on Shanks’ book, which I described as a “skeleton of questions”. Having established a platform of definition for the term archaeological imagination through the *Canticle* and *Archive* portfolios, my studio practice moved on to demonstrate that conceptual features related to archaeology, such as narrative, paradox and mystery, could be visually

articulated, as shown in the *Forgotten* portfolio, described in Section 6. During these investigations, the need to rely on archaeology was beginning to recede.

Sections 7 and 8, however, move into territory beyond that indicated by Shanks. Having established workable parameters for the making of artwork from the framework of questions provoked by his book, my studio practice began to move away from that framework. I began to explore the articulation of spirituality in a more conscious way, having the site-specific focus of Bardsey Island as the driver. Consequently, the *Incense* portfolio references the Christian nature of the archaeological past of the site. Although this portfolio came to a premature end because of the Coronavirus pandemic, the crisis itself fed into the following *Prayers Ascending* portfolio, articulating personal spirituality in a time of national and global chaos. Such an overview of the material presented in Sections 4 to 8 demonstrates a progression of emphasis. A workable toolkit of methods, processes and concepts, derived from archaeological imagination, came together to make the final two portfolios possible, which argues that creative practice is grown out of interdisciplinarity.

It would have been tempting to spend time investigating different notions of interdisciplinarity at this point, but fearing that this would take me away from my main aims as expressed in the Abstract above, I purposely chose to put that aside until after the PhD was completed. Instead I focused on investigating whether the making of artwork, that is specifically influenced by the discipline of archaeology, allows the expression and exploration of human spirituality through the medium of art. Having come to a conclusion on the matter, i.e., having established at least the beginnings of a foundation, I believe I have facilitated a platform upon which others may build further.

## Section 9: A Dig into the Future

### The Past

I began this thesis with the intention of recording how investigations undertaken in my studio practice developed as I focused on an exploration of the archaeological imagination from the perspective of Fine Art. I developed my studio practice by “investigating whether the making of artwork that is specifically influenced by the discipline of archaeology allows the expression and exploration of human spirituality through the medium of Fine Art” (see Section 8) and then seeking to establish at least the beginnings of a foundation which can then be built upon by others. I also stated means by which I would pursue these ends, including working on a practice-based definition of archaeological imagination and exploring whether the incorporation of archaeological methods, processes, materials, and concepts helps or hinders the development of studio practice. During the course of this, I envisaged that it would become clearer whether art as a discipline has a part to play in the developing practice of working in collaboration with other disciplines.

The trajectory of this research was expressed through the Exhibition *Jacob's Ladder*, and so an explanation of those artworks has been the content of Sections 4 – 8 above: they articulate the progress and development of my thinking and art practice. From these experiments I draw the following conclusions.

Firstly, the paradox of revealing yet concealing, both materially and conceptually, was found to be an entirely appropriate expression of the archaeological imagination. Archaeology reveals what has been concealed, yet the revealed still conceals that which can no longer be verified. Even through modern technology a material presence can be detected, unseen to the human eye. However, technology cannot reveal exactly what has been detected without human intervention. Then without adequate informed interpretation of data and artefacts, what has been revealed remains largely an enigma. Archaeology uncovers, but a portion of the original meaning of what has been uncovered remains out of sight. These hidden aspects often indicate areas of knowledge that are no longer retrievable.

Secondly, the archaeological practice of interpreting a site intends to reveal to the modern mind some of the answers to the questions above, but can lead to a total misunderstanding of the truth, brought out by Tony Robinson in *Archaeology is Rubbish* (2002, p.171) as mentioned above. However, it is precisely the space between what can be known and what can never be known that is so fruitful in art practice, especially for one that is focused on the use of archaeological imagination.

Archaeological imagination need not confine itself to one particular set of permanent forms, but can cope with a fluidity, a capacity to metamorphose, to embrace metamorphosis in the subject being examined. It can equally be expressed by a 3D artwork of wooden cabinets fixed into one unit as well as in a series of hoops suspended from the ceiling. The former is very solid and anchored to the ground, bound by gravity. The other is ethereal, suspended in space above the ground, pointing to the intangible. Both are expressions of the same sensibility. Both make use of tools offered by the archaeological imagination. Both seen together may become a visual articulation of archaeology itself. Through all the variety of visual form that may spring from archaeological imagination, there remains an acknowledgement of the importance of time. The maker of such work is conscious of the mysterious nature of the new, as Fujimura expresses (2020, p.4).

This raises the question: is it the mystery of archaeology that is so appealing to the artist? Knowing yet not knowing? Seeing but with so much left unseen? Or is it the combination of the two parts of the paradox that intrigues? The revealed along with the concealed; the seen along with the unseen, the known along with the unknown? For the artist, holding opposites together can spark the birth of new visual ideas, for form is now required to encapsulate that which up till now has not existed in any visible form. Yet giving something form in itself indicates a measure of knowledge about the subject. Rebecca Solnit pinpoints the dilemma: "How will you go about finding that thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you?" (2017, p.4). She concludes:

Certainly for artists of all stripes, the unknown, the idea or the form or the tale that has not yet arrived, is what must be found. It is the job of artists to open doors and invite in prophecies, the unknown, the unfamiliar; its where their work comes from, although its arrival signals the beginning of the long disciplined process of making it their own. Scientists too, as J Robert

Oppenheimer once remarked, 'live always at the edge of mystery – the boundary of the unknown'. But they transform the unknown into the known, haul it in like fishermen; artists get you out into the dark sea" (ibid., p.5).

It is "the dark sea" that has been braved in this exploration of the archaeological imagination, an exploration that has offered progress into the unknown.

Digging down into the images in order to make sense of them satisfies a human need to acknowledge that life often does not make sense, not necessarily because it is absurd in nature, but because we lack the ability, knowledge, or perception, to see the whole picture. This emphasis on fragments and the partial results in an element of inscrutability even when familiar forms are used. For example, we are all familiar with circles, but the effect of an accumulation of circles is more than the sum of its parts. Perhaps this is where *Prayers Ascending* differs from *Incense* although working in very similar areas. The inscrutability of rising columns of circles bring inscrutability to the fore, whereas with *Prayers Ascending*, the mystery and inscrutable nature of the image lies more in the symbolism of its theological conceptual background.

Yet both portfolios hint at the idea of an excavation that works in an upward direction. The archaeologist must inevitably dig down, going deeper into stratigraphy that takes her back through time while the artist may go in the opposite direction. As I have concentrated on the archaeological imagination as a means for expressing the spiritual aspect of human experience, such a focus inevitably involves an upward trajectory. As spiritual beings bound for heaven, human activity may from time to time be concentrated on exploring non-physical realms, so as we go deeper into ourselves, we are in fact excavating in an upward direction, away from the earth, seeking to gain spiritual treasure that may be as effectively buried as any physical treasure sought by orthodox archaeology. The process of taking enquiry up through layers to the ethereal and the spiritual, may be viewed as the ascending of a ladder, hence the title of the exhibition and this thesis. The archaeological imagination can be credited with having the characteristic of employing movement in both directions, doing two contradictory things at the same time. It is an archaeological investigation that includes the upward as well as the downward, a movement associated with many religions, such as that exhibited by the Whirling Dervish of Sufism.

## The Future

There is no doubt that archaeological imagination has the capacity to act as a “bridging field” as Shanks has suggested, and as my research concludes. The prospect therefore of exercising a studio practice which brings together a variety of disciplines is an exciting one, and one which promises to “generate expertise, confidence, understanding and new orientations to issues, problems, concerns and opportunities” (Modeen and Biggs 2021, p.3). Taking on the mode of “mutual accompaniment” rather than “possessive individualism” (ibid., p.9), the way is open to consider “a ‘joined-up’ thinking that understands the environmental, social and personal as part of a constellation of connectivity” (ibid., p.5). Such a way forward brings with it the promise of a deeper understanding of the world and our place in it.

To some extent, a crossing of disciplinary boundaries has already been seen and documented in collaborations, for example, between art and geography. Harriet Hawkins summarises her experience of such collaborations, where:

art was no longer merely a data point, playing second fiddle to scientific methods within geographical scholarship. Instead, shedding its function as either mimetically illustrative of people and places, or as an instrumentalized force for enrolling followers into the geographical cause, art was understood to proffer a sophisticated empirical entry point in the development of central geographical concerns: namely landscape, and later, questions of urban space and politics (2014, p.6).

In fact, her enthusiasm for art to work alongside other disciplines goes further:

art encounters emerge as thoroughly creative encounters, obliging us to be aware of the possibilities they present for experiencing and thinking the world differently. Art in all these cases is a material being, less about meaning or sensation than creative of it ... art holds within it the potential to enable ‘new’ forms of experience. As such, it provokes questions, offers moments of engagement, inspiration and enthusiasm, and can challenge teleological and/or overlooked epistemological assumptions. In doing so art has the potential to transform the field on which it is working, creating the possibilities for different kinds of subjects, knowledge, and worlds (ibid., p.12).

Through mutual respect, collaboration between disciplines is already signalling an expansion of understanding as well as interconnectedness.

Such a conviction that art “creates possibilities for different kinds of subjects, knowledge, and worlds”, underlay the exhibition *Thin Place*, curated by Ciara Healy

at the Oriel Myrddin Gallery in Carmarthen in 2015. In the exhibition monograph Healy declares her curatorial aim to be to demonstrate how “art, archaeology, literature, science and theology are interconnected, especially when considering far-reaching questions such as the nature of reality, the concept of an Otherworld and the prospect of an afterlife” (2015, p.7).

This theme of interconnectedness was in order to “stir our languid imaginations back into remembering how cloaked the world is in multiple perspectives” (ibid., p.8). This in itself would be a rich seam to explore further. Healy then goes on to suggest an additional possibility, that far from being confined to particular places, “thin places today can be created whenever connection and invocation occur” (ibid., p.7) as we are capable of inhabiting more than one world-view at the same time.

This resonates with the perspective given by Noel Dermot O’Donoghue, who believes that “the imaginal world is a ‘realm’”, able to give access to “the totality of human experience” (2001, p.27). Rather than expecting our human experience to follow a linear trajectory, he is conscious of the inherent discontinuity of much of human life. He goes on to expand by emphasising the importance of creatively exercised imagination which he envisages as revealing “a new field of reality” to “every truly dedicated and consecrated artist” (ibid., p.28). Here the ‘imaginal’ world is not the same as the imaginary world, although the imagination is involved in both. The imaginal has a sense in which it pre-exists. It is not the result of imagination, but accessed by imagination. This layering of world upon world which makes up human experience creates new ground for investigation. As both Healy and O’Donoghue indicate, there is so much more territory to be explored as the panorama of the archaeological imagination begins to unfold.

The research undertaken in this study has been one of the first formal trips into this particular interior, and the spaces discovered can readily be extended, whether in relation to a particular faith pathway or a pathway of no faith at all. My own particular pathway became one of faith. *Canticle* and *Incense* both took a specific feature of monastic life as their subjects, but this could easily be expanded to consider many other features. *Archive* sprang from one particular articulation of one particular archaeological activity, that of preserving, valuing and protecting material from the past. This category of activity alone could well produce many new streams of visual



articulations. And then archiving is only one archaeological activity of many. *Forgotten* touched on both a far-reaching backward-looking perspective to the ancient landscapes of prehistory, and then forward into an intimate individual recapturing of personal memory. Further investigations into how images could be made to articulate other areas of human psychology could be pursued. *Prayers Ascending* took as its primary interest the most powerful of all Christian symbols, that of the cross of Christ, but there are many other Christian symbols, and many other mysterious abstract theological concepts within many faiths, which could form the starting point for yet more art practice.

Archaeological imagination, in conclusion, is free to roam the substantial interface between art and archaeology in which faith and spirituality is merely one discrete area. By expanding into more areas of interest to the artist, the visual arts would be contributing to the sum of human knowledge about who we are, and where we come from, the most archaeological of artist concerns. For “the deepest realm of knowing is in Making, and, conversely, Making is the deepest integrated realm of knowing” (Fujimura, 2020, p.19). It is through making art with an archaeological imagination that our own understanding of what it is to be human can be expanded and enriched. As Modeen and Biggs put it, the way forward will be characterised by “a loose weaving-together of related and mutually informing strands of material, rather than a linear argument designed to deliver a particular conclusion or an authoritative overview” (ibid., p.13).

Through this research I have accessed archaeological imagination as a personal sensibility, as a set of tools, and as an arena in which to develop studio practice. I have found that it is an effective way in which to explore and express issues of human spirituality. Fittingly, it requires faith, as art historian Varnedoe suggests, to move things forward:

Abstract art is a symbolic game, and it is akin to all human games: you have to get into it, risk and all, and this takes a certain act of faith. But what kind of faith? Not faith in absolutes, not a religious kind of faith. A faith in possibility, a faith not that we will know something finally, but a faith in not knowing, a faith in our ignorance, a faith in our being confounded and dumbfounded, a faith fertile with possible meaning and growth (2006, p.271).

Perhaps it is through the exercise of such a faith, one that is “fertile with possible meaning and growth” that progress will be made through the cooperation between

disciplines in the articulation of that within archaeology for which there are not yet archaeological terms. Returning to the comment made by Renfrew about the incompleteness of scientific enquiry in relation to archaeological sites, it is clear that “there is more to say, although we do not yet know how to say it” (Renfrew, 2006, p.18). My research has merely scratched the surface by making visible a field of research that could be explored much further. As a result, continuing this research into the archaeological imagination may well yield new methodologies by which to say the new.

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## Appendix 1: inventory of PhD work (January 2016 – December 2021)

This is a list of all the work made during the course of this research, with details of methods, materials and processes attached to those portfolios which were exhibited as part of the Final Exhibition, *Jacob's Ladder: seeing the invisible through the archaeological imagination*, held in Aberystwyth University's School of Art, 21<sup>st</sup> March – 29<sup>th</sup> April 2022. Works included in the Exhibition are highlighted in turquoise.

### Summary

2016 began with painting in oils on 90cms x120cms canvases, making “prehistoric” abstract paintings, and paintings of white vertical stripes. I also continued to make drawings of vertical lines, carrying on from where my MA work had left off. I experimented with exposing shredded paper to the elements for a month at a time to see if the resulting stratigraphy demonstrated the passing of time, over the course of a year, which it did. I made an image fourteen panels long (A3) based on Silbury Hill, using vertical lines, but I decided that the oil painting, the shredded paper ideas and Silbury Hill were not the way forward. They spoke effectively about the issue of time, but did not evoke satisfactorily what I was intending to communicate. These avenues were discontinued.

In August 2016 new work developed after I went on a tour of the archives of the RCAHMW. I was struck by the strong, clear, uncluttered verticals and horizontals that made up the system, and I made an A6 notebook full of simple graphite drawings using only a vertical main line, and different combinations of smaller horizontal lines. From that notebook, work was generated ranging from drawings etched onto the surface of paper with an archaeological excavation tool which was then rubbed with graphite, bringing the “artefact” up to the surface, to making series of drawings on A2 paper with black electrical tape, and huge drawings with black gaffer tape. Most importantly, this was when I began to experiment with collage, a method I had never used before. All this work I thought of as *Archive*.

After experimentation with different types and colours of paper, I decided to use only black and white, and only paper that I had generated myself. To do this I used a photocopier, enlarging, printing, ripping up drawings I had already made from the A6 sketchbook, and photocopying the first collages to be used as collage materials for further collages. The use of acrylic medium allowed photo transfer techniques to play a part in the compositions. As I continued to work in series, I made work on canvases as well as paper. I later spent some time turning these into sound, but decided not to pursue this avenue any further, fascinating though it was, as it was taking me further away from the visual. I experimented with collage poetry but this also was not the right path to explore. I began to make collage pieces which were three, five or even seven, sections long on canvas or canvas board, and tried out black supports as well as white. These became paleolandscapes, at once solid but

mysterious. I deliberately avoided using earth pigments as I felt this was too literal, too tied to the earth, and not able to lift the viewer away from the material, something that I felt that the enigmatic quality of black and white imagery could do.

In the summers of 2017 and 2018, I worked on a novel, using as a base a novel I had written many years before. Eventually, I decided that this too was taking me too far away from my original intention to make visible the invisible. However, the process helped to clarify ideas about the archaeological imagination, and I went on to make work that might not have been made without this experience.

In 2018, I started work with the U-boat project based at RCAHMW. I began by concentrating on the simplest of black lines on white support, and white lines on black support. This was effective in evoking the presence of something under the surface, which was how I thought of the buried U-boats on the seabed. This led to experimenting with collagraph techniques and the *Lost and Found* series of drawings. But I laid these aside in order to go back to collage. I discovered that audio tape could be used very effectively on canvas and began to use that to draw with instead of black pen. Vertical lines made with this tape seemed to reference the idea of bar codes. This did appeal as it was a clear statement about identity. However this was another idea I shelved for the time being.

2018 was the year in which I worked on putting together a two-day conference on the subject of the archaeological imagination which I titled '*Braving the Dragons*', the dragons referring both to the fact that this was happening in Wales and that, as in ancient maps, the terrain ahead was unknown, mysterious and unpredictable. Alongside this I continued with the *Forgotten* series of canvases using collage, again only black and white, to make images indicating memory, remembering, and the fragmentary nature of our remembering and forgetting. I prepared to experiment with fog screen projection, as part of an exhibition I was planning to include within the conference, but time did not allow the proper pursuit of this. It may be an idea I take up in the future.

My two trips to Bardsey Island, in May 2018 and then again in May 2019, became the focus of the work I made from mid-2019 till the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, I had to leave my studio in March 2020. This portfolio included book folding, erased text and obscured text work, drawings on graph paper (part of *Hidden*), painting on graph paper with gouache (*Icon*), and the beginnings of a series of 3'x4' canvases using collage, phototransfer techniques and charcoal.

## **Work made, as recorded in Studio Journals written at the time**

### **Key**

Blue font – year

Turquoise highlighter– marks when the main portfolios (featured in the Exhibition) began. These are described in detail.

Red font – when the novel was written

Green highlighter – trips to Bardsey Island

January 2016

Work recorded in **Studio Journal 1**

Dutch Vanitas painting (discontinued)

Vertical lines drawing, continuing from MA work.

Pre-history oil paintings (discontinued)

White stripe oil painting (discontinued)

The beginning of *CANTICLE*:

*Canticle* was a direct development from my MA piece, *St Augustine's Clock*, a series of twenty-four small white wood panels, on which were drawn sets of vertical lines with black fineliner. For *Canticle*, I continued making rows of vertical lines, conscious of the focus on the passing of time that the marks conveyed. I used 5cms x 5cms squares of white mounting board and, again, black fineliner. I made one such drawing for every day of the PhD to mark my presence in time and to visually record the moments, each mark a testimony to my engagement with the study. So the completed work comprises 2,134 drawings, marking the days from 25<sup>th</sup> January 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021, and is housed in a block of sixteen small cabinets, each with nine drawers. Each drawing is dated to mark the passing of the days, and to substantiate a section of time.

*Canticle's* cabinets are arranged in four columns of four cabinets, and made a secure structure by a board attached to the back of the work, keeping all the cabinets in one place. The cabinets in each corner have been waxed with a darker colour, while all the other cabinets retain the natural wood look. This change of tone creates the shape of a cross, specifically the 'square' cross, where the downward stroke of the form is the same length as the top section and the two arms.

The portfolio *Canticle* also includes a series of 60 drawings made on blue and yellow graph paper with graphite and gouache.

Tales of Avalonia drawings (discontinued)

Slate drawings (discontinued)

Cave map drawings (discontinued)

Canvas board scraping through oils (discontinued)

Silbury Hill: 14 panels A3 drawing (discontinued)

Work recorded in **Studio Journal 2**

Shredded paper experiments (discontinued)

Half tree drawings verticals (discontinued)

Charcoal drawing

Charcoal floor drawing 12 canvas boards (discontinued)

Vertical lines painting canvas boards (discontinued)

The beginning of *ARCHIVE*:

A3 drawings using a 'ghosting' technique

Archive drawings A6 notebook – the work on which the rest of the portfolio is based.

A3 Archive drawings

The portfolio: I began work on *Archive* in August 2016, and completed it in May 2017. The work comprises: an A6 sketchbook of drawings based on the archival storage system as seen in August 2016; a set of exploratory drawings incised onto Permatrace (a waterproofed tracing paper used by archaeologists in the field) with archaeological excavation tools; a set of drawings made with white chalk on black card; a set of black and white collage drawings on paper; large drawings using gaffer tape; a set of A3 drawings using black electrical tape as the drawing tool; a set of Palaeolandscape collages on paper; a set of Palaeolandscape collages on canvas; a set of Palaeolandscape collages each comprising more than one canvas; a set of Palaeolandscape collages which combine collage with archive drawings from the very first set; Palaeolandscape sound experiments; three A4 sketch books of Archive collage poetry, and some initial attempts at Palaeocore collage drawings on paper. This large body of work of over a hundred pieces experimented with diversity, but also found its emphasis to be overwhelmingly on drawing and collage, using only black and white.

### Work recorded in **Studio Journal 3**

White canvases 6&7 (discontinued)

Vertical lines through oil paint canvas boards (discontinued)

Archive drawings white on black card

This selection of six A4 drawings from the series made on black card with white chalk was made using archaeological materials and methods. Taking drawings I had made on Permatrace taken from the A6 sketchbook, I used an excavation tool to impress the drawing onto the black card before lightly taking white chalk over the top to pick out the composition.

A2 Archive drawings (discontinued)

Harris matrix (discontinued, may be revisited))

Collage experiments

Collage 'drawings'

A4 collages

A3 collages

A4 canvas collages

A1 drawings with gaffer tape (discontinued)

January 2017

A3 drawings black tape (discontinued)

Fabriano A1 drawings with black gaffer tape (discontinued)

Fabriano Unica A2 tape drawings (discontinued)

Paleolandscapes collages

The experience of making the collages was enhanced by a pleasure in the physical handling of paper, medium and canvas directly, without the intervention of brushes or other tools. I was drawn by the experience of taking something simple, reassembling with my own hands, and bringing about a result which is complex, intriguing and mysterious, surprising to me even though I had made it. For the collage base material, I used the drawings that I had made from the drawings originally put in the A6 sketchbook. I photocopied these larger A4 drawings as A4 and A3 and ripped these up as my material. So the process of working this way meant that the work was literally growing out of the work itself. No additional material was introduced. Instead, there was an expansion and rearrangement of the original marks, often resulting in surprisingly resonant metamorphoses

Work recorded in **Studio Journal 4**

A2 canvas board drawings with electrical tape (discontinued)

A4 collages with insulating tape (discontinued)

Fragment artefact with acrylic medium (discontinued but may experiment later)

Canvas board collage drawings

Paleolandscape projections

5 piece paleolandscape

7 piece paleolandscape

Sound experiments with palaeolandscapes (discontinued)

Collages

Collage poetry (3xA4 drawing books, discontinued)

A3 collages on black paper

A3 collages on black mountboard

Novel: first version: *The Archaeopteryx* (June – August 2017)

Work recorded in **Studio Journal 5**

Daniel in Exile 8'x8' canvas in oils, for PhD Group Exhibition *In a New Light*.

8"x8" canvases with pins (cuneiform)

## January 2018

Two more Daniel canvases in oils (discontinued)

Collagraph experiments

*Hidden* portfolio. It was a natural progression to develop from preserving the past, as with Archive, to considering the past as neglected, ignored, or forgotten, rather than preserved. With this intention I began a series of drawings in an A4 sketchbook using a collagraph technique, hiding material under the support paper and taking a simple rubbing across the top with graphite.

The beginning of *FORGOTTEN* portfolio. This body of work comprises:

- A4 sketchbook of collagraph drawings *Lost and Found*
- A4 drawings, three to a page, with fineliner
- A4 drawings, three to a page, with fineliner and pencil
- A4 drawings, three to a page, white ink on black card
- Drawings on canvas with audiotape
- Canvases F1 - F3: – tape, verticals and circles on collage and acrylic paint
- Canvases F4 – F7:- tape on collage, barcode idea
- Canvases F11-F16: *Forgotten: What*
- Canvases F17-20: *Forgotten: Where*
- Canvases F9,10, 21-25: *Forgotten: When*
- Canvases F26 – F30: *Forgotten: Who*

Forgotten: black on white drawings

This was focussed on the U-boat Project, one of the projects being undertaken by the RCAHMW where I had just begun a residency (January 2018). This Project was to investigate the 71 U-boats currently lying on the seabed between Wales and Ireland, about which little research has yet been done.

*Lost and Found* A4 drawings

*Forgotten*: white pencil on black card

*Forgotten*: white ink on black card

To make the initial drawings in this series, I began with black fineliner pen on white 120gm fine grain paper. The idea was to compose these drawings solely from horizontal lines, and was prompted by images I saw being produced with sonar equipment picking out the ghost of a shape of a sunken vessel on the sea bed. To these, A3 size paper with three elongated drawings on each sheet, I added three circles, emphasising the idea of horizon, and that therefore the forms being picked out were not simply below the surface of the sea, but under the sand on the sea bed as well. I started thinking of these as 'beneath the surface.' Then I went on to make seven more A3 sheets of these drawings, three on each sheet as the previous set,

but with only the horizontal lines, really concentrating on developing the form being hinted at. I moved on to making the same images but with white pencil on black card. I was surprised at how evocative the softness of the pencil was. I made six A3 sheets of three drawings each. Carrying this a little further, I used A2 paper split lengthwise and drew the same idea but using a combination of white pencil and white ink. This turned out to be another surprise, as although the drawing was the same, this time the effect was distinctly to do with landscape, and what might be beneath the surface of the soil. These drawings run the whole length of the card and are not boxed in like all the other drawings. Going back to the original idea, I then developed a set of ten drawings using the contour lines, and incorporating a circle and three vertical lines in each drawing. The contour lines I made with a black pen, then added in the circle and lines with a soft 3B pencil, giving them rather a ghostly presence. The circles that I made with ink were interesting but too heavy. And it made the drawings allude to outer space or a science fiction theme. However, the insubstantial feel of the soft graphite was appropriate for what was being evoked here, which was on the theme of the instability of memory.

Throughout this work, I confined myself to working only in black and white. As I moved from working on paper and card to working on canvas, I tried a pale wash of colour as the base to draw on but eventually rejected the idea after the fifth canvas and went back to solely black and white. From my point of view, the addition of colour drew the attention away from the stark simplicity of the monochrome, which rendered it less effective. At that point I thought about the fragmentary nature of memory, and therefore our capacity to discover our own personal identity, and decided to try collage on canvas as a metaphor for this experience of recovering personal memory. I made photocopies of the 'Lost and Found' collagraph drawings I had already prepared, and used only these as my torn material. I also used these in an image transfer technique, which then increased the range of greys available. Adding the paper onto the canvas extended the range of whites, making enough variety of tone and mark to develop individual sets of canvases without resorting to the use of colour, each exploring from a slightly different angle.

In A New Light Exhibition, Forum Group, Aberystwyth University) 26<sup>th</sup> March– 4<sup>th</sup> May 2018

Year of the Sea one day exhibition, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018

Postgraduate Conference (Aberystwyth University), 4 June 2018

Audio tape drawings (discontinued but may experiment later)

Novel: second version: *Excavations 8911* (July – August 2018)

#### Work recorded in **Studio Journal 6**

*Braving the Dragons* conference: organising all aspects, to be held on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> February 2019 – cancelled 5<sup>th</sup> February 2019 due to lack of bookings

*Forgotten* drawings with cassette tape:

I began to use audiotape in vertical lines as well as in organic horizontal lines, copying the last series of pen drawings previously made on paper. I found as I



varied the thickness of the taped lines that a sense of a declaration of identity was coming across. The 'barcode' look brought a sense of the individual into the compositions. What we forget is just as significant a part of makes our identity as what we remember

*Forgotten* on acetate (discontinued)

*Forgotten* series of 30 90cms x 120cms canvases collage

The first group of three canvases have an underpainting, a thin wash of acrylic. On top of this I laid collage and image transfer marks, using photocopied drawings from the *Lost and Found* sketchbook. Then I continued on the top in line with the last drawings I made on paper, only using audio tape to draw with. With the tape I made the wavy horizontal lines, which indicate the presence of something under the surface, and also used the tape to add circles and vertical lines. The tape worked well, but the composition was becoming too representational, so I ditched the "sun in the sky" idea, and aimed at being much more evocative.

The second group, canvases 4 and 5, tried to develop this change in emphasis. There are no circles involved. The vertical lines developed into clumps of vertical lines in a variety of widths. These then became a barcode-like device. At this point I was thinking about one's own personal identity, resting on a past we're not altogether clear about. The 'barcode' device strengthens the idea of individual, as opposed to a corporate, identity.

Canvases 6 to 8 leave out the acrylic wash altogether as it didn't really seem to add anything to the whole, and in fact could become quite distracting. This time the 'barcode' element was woven through the collage and transfer marks. Here there is a closer link between identity and the processes of remembering and forgetting, and the suggestion that identity is made up of an interplay between all these factors.

At this point I was aware that the physical, hands-on process of working with collage, was an important element of my practice. My practice is largely characterised by using what is apparently simple to express the complex. The emphasis then is not on demonstrating the traditional skillset of the artist based on painting, but on evoking a sense of reality in the image which goes beyond what the image portrays, using whatever vehicle is appropriate at the time. On the one hand I am making use of a range of nuanced symbols, such as the vertical line, and the circle, which are as ancient as humankind, as Neolithic rock art and prehistoric cave paintings demonstrate. This necessarily brings with it references to the archaeological. On the other, the emphasis on direct contact with the materiality of the project strengthens this link.

Canvases 9 and 10, especially 9, represent a breakthrough. I carried on with the use of collage and image transfer on untreated canvas, the sort of canvas that is pre-packaged and already primed and gessoed. Previously adding gesso to the canvases, I decided to leave it out and go with the sharper, whiter surface of bought canvases, the stark white of the canvas becoming a container for the image. The image is map-like, at once specific and vague. It is tonally very close. For the first time I have included text, in this instance, details taken from the list of ships sunk

around the British coast line during World War One. These details are becoming part of the memory, that which is being remembered and forgotten about the aspects of the war represented by the sunken U-boats on the sea bed. There is a specificity, but also vagueness and loss of detail. I saw that these two canvases opened up more possibilities for me to develop.

Moving onto canvases 11 to 16, I introduced the addition of charcoal. These collages have had charcoal rubbed over them and then erased, increasing tonal complexity. Still the image is held in place by the stark white of the original canvas. These images began to assume a distinct presence, and I thought of them as artefacts, as objects which were not really recognised and in need of further interpretation. They became *Forgotten – what?*

Canvases 17 to 20 developed an idea of 'where?' rather than 'what?' These images are the last group of canvases that use photocopies of the *Lost and Found* collagraph drawings as their base material. The collage and image transfer marks have become more architectural. This group of canvases introduces audio tape as a drawing tool, conveying the idea of journey. Sections of the tape are deliberately obscured.

In canvases 21 to 24, I used photocopies of previous canvases as my collage material. I began to see forgetting as an active rather than a passive thing. These images are made of collage and image transfer, with charcoal rubbed on and then rubbed off the image. I found this technique created a wider range of greys, and picked out all the almost-invisible edges of where paper had once been before it was ripped off. This added to a sense of vagueness, and interestingly, of absence. Some distinct black and white passages were included, but there are quite a few vague unspecified areas as well. I soon began to think of these as *Forgotten – when?*

The final group of canvases, 26 to 30, were made by concentrating on building up the layers. Using charcoal as a base, I drew onto the canvas, rubbed out the drawing, and then worked over the top of this palimpsest with collage and image transfer. Introducing tissue paper over the whole canvas, I then worked across the whole with charcoal, taking off most of what was put on. This unified the whole composition. Then collage was added over the top, rubbed in with charcoal. A final addition of collage was left with the original white of the paper, accentuating the darker layers below.

Trip to Bardsey Island 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2018

Putting Canticle together

U-Boat Project Conference presentation 4<sup>th</sup> November 2018

*Forgotten* canvases 40cms x 50cms

Ogham experiments (discontinued)

Work recorded in **Studio Journal 7**

Fog screen projection (discontinued but may experiment later)

Floor drawings A1 (discontinued)

Forgotten canvases 90cms x 120cms collage and charcoal

## January 2019

The beginning of Bardsey Island portfolio (including *Incense* series)

Bardsey Island drawings A2

Bardsey canvases 1 and 2, 3 120cms x 90cms collage and charcoal

Erased text – using pages from archaeology text books as palimpsests

Book folding, using old Welsh hymn books

Altered/ obscured text – using pages from an antiquarian magazine

Second trip to Bardsey Island 21<sup>st</sup> May 2019

Bardsey Island squared paper drawings

*Hidden*: graph paper drawings

*Incense* drawings –26 x A4 on blue and yellow graph paper or white squared paper made with graphite pencil and gouache.

## January 2020

*Incense* canvases, 90cms x 120cms, graphite and ink

These canvases arose as a result of the *Incense* drawings, of pencil or fineliner on graph paper. Each canvas was made by constructing a grid in the centre of the unpainted canvas and drawing circles into each of the resulting squares in pencil. Thinking about the monastery on Bardsey Island, the negative space around each circle was rendered with ink, rather than paint, referencing the work of the monks in the task of copying out scripture. Some canvases include a little bright colour, hinting at the creation of illuminated manuscripts. The canvases were made while burning incense in the room, but the perfume was not caught up by the canvas. I also crushed incense granules to go into the ink, but it made the ink too difficult to manipulate in such small spaces and was discontinued. The making of each canvas was a calm, meditative activity, hinting at the regular, repetitive rhythms experienced within monastery life.

*Icon* paintings, paper, gouache

*Kneelers*. This was composed of 64 red leatherette covered kneelers which were no longer needed in St Michael's Church, Aberystwyth, where I was a member and ordinand. These were assembled in such a way that a cross shape was formed on the ground using darker red for the four corners of the rectangle, and thus mimicking the cross shape of *Canticle* which was displayed in close proximity to it.

PANDEMIC: which caused loss of studio; no access to Library; and moving house.

Work recorded in **Studio Journal 8**

Beginning of *PRAYERS ASCENDING* portfolio

Rolled paper experiments

3 A4 visual prayer diaries

3 50cms x 40cms collaged canvases

56 x A4 drawings on blue graph paper with black fineliner

### **January 2021**

*Prayers Ascending*: 2 x 35cms diameter collaged metal hoops

I began to make *Prayers Ascending* pieces after compiling three A4 sketchbooks as 'visual prayer diaries'. This involved taking headlines and articles from current daily newspapers, to record the impact of the coronavirus on life around us in the early days. I then wrote prayers to accompany each article and included them on folded paper into the diaries. This led to taking the idea of prayers written on paper, to rolling up paper to represent the prayers that had been prayed. These fine rolls of paper then became the vertical and horizontal lines of each composition, and circles were formed from cutting across the rolls made. At first, I used the reverse of ready-made canvases, in which to rest the paper rolls, as the support for the work. Then I noted that the composition worked when seen from in front and from behind, so I began to experiment with a more transparent support, initially using Permatrace. Then I began to use metal hoops (made for lamp shade making) to which to attach the support, and found a way of connecting hoops together using magnets.

The resulting structure of the final large hanging piece also called '*Prayers Ascending*' was suspended from the ceiling using fishing line, being roughly 274cms long and 120cms wide. It was made up of four 70cms diameter collaged metal hoops with two additional 70cms metal hoops each containing a 35cms collaged metal hoop inside it, arranged to hang from the gallery ceiling in the form of a freely moving cross.

### **January 2022**

Preparations for **Final Exhibition**

Final Exhibition *Jacob's Ladder: seeing the invisible through the archaeological imagination*, 21<sup>st</sup> March – 29<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Novel: third version: *Jacob's Ladder* (August 2022)