

THE SPACES BETWEEN US

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HELEN SEIVER
DR MACE FRANCIS
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CURATED BY
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Eva Fernandez
Cloth Bundle, 2016
Digital archival print
60cm x 60cm



INTRODUCTION

Everywhere I go in Western Australia, I am conscious of the ghosts of colonial babies. Unbuckle the settler myth to slip under the skin of the State, and streetscapes become disposal grounds. I see secrets floating in our sparkling rivers, cast up by our clear oceans. I sense bones, buried just beneath the surface of our sunlit, eucalyptus-fringed backyards.

When people are dead, all that remains of them is narrative. The long-dead can only live if someone speaks of them again. The past imprints its secrets on the present: and what each of these little, silenced phantoms evokes for me, is the spectre of their desperate mother.

When I first began to unearth the extent of infanticide, neonaticide and concealment of birth in colonial Western Australia, I did not know what to do with all the pain I found.

Infanticide is the killing of a baby younger than one year of age by her/his genetic mother.

Neonaticide refers to the murder of a baby by her/his genetic mother or father within twenty-four hours of their birth.

Concealment of birth refers to the crime of hiding the dead body of a child after her/his birth, in order to conceal the fact that they were born.

In the course of my research I uncovered 55 cases of infanticide, neonaticide and/or concealment of birth that had occurred between the years of non-Aboriginal colonisation of Western Australia in 1829, and Federation in 1901. The number overwhelmed me. As a feminist researcher interested in the embodied experience of colonial women, I found the similarities between these women's stories - some over 60 years apart - to be striking. I found the desperation inherent in their actions deeply distressing. The hypocrisy implicit in the treatment they received left me angry.

The stories I uncovered in Western Australia were similar to those found by researchers in other Australian states. In WA, pregnancies and labour were storied as cancer, abscess or vomited-up tumour; headache, stomach ache, tooth ache or eye ache; sore throat, bad dreams or heavy menstruation. Dead infants were discovered in sacks, parcels, candle boxes or tea boxes, kerosene tins, packages and water closets. They

were wrapped in the intimate female domesticity of flannel, chemise, skirt, jacket and petticoat, or bound by the harshness of cord, rope, string, brown paper or newspaper. Tiny bodies were dug up and sometimes eaten by dogs or pigs; were drowned, strangled, smothered, cut and stabbed. Babies bled to death because their umbilical cord was not tied, or because it was tied only on the side of the placenta. Some babies remained anonymous because their gestations were so successfully hidden that when they were born, died and disposed of, their parents were never found.

Threaded through each case were themes of silencing and abandonment, concealment and collusion, aching loneliness and fear, isolation and punishment. There persisted a strangely resolute denial by both society at large and the mother herself regarding the physical fact of her pregnancy and the birth, death and disposal of her child. With striking repetitiveness, the lived experience of the women concerned seems to have been ignored or suppressed until a baby was dead, a mother was traumatised, and a corpse was waiting to be found.

This denial persists within present day Western Australia.

The suffering of these women - their blood, their shame, their pain; the palpable distress implicit within their actions and behaviour - and the societal response to the death of their babies seemed clearly linked to the roles and positions available to unmarried women in colonial Western Australia. Their fragmented stories raised questions about the power that single women held, or did not hold, and the opportunities and rights that were available to them and their children. Crucially, these crimes - the clues that can be gleaned from them and the punishments meted out in response to their occurrence - spoke to the value that colonial society placed on both these children and their mothers.

There seemed to be no place in Western Australian history for these women; their actions, their bodies and those of their babies had been suppressed. I came to see that the silenced narrative of colonial Western Australian child murder was a symptom: the link between the dead babies appeared to be 'illegitimacy'. These children were *unlicensed*.

The women whose crimes I uncovered gave birth within a society that did not allocate them 'permission' to be mothers, something that the unescapable reality of pregnancy made it impossible for them not to be. It was an unsolvable conflict. Their bodies - and the bodies of the babies growing inside them - betrayed them. Their children were considered sinful and inferior to children who had married parents simply because they had been born. As it appeared that the babies killed through infanticide or neonaticide were almost exclusively the result of sex outside marriage, I began to contemplate who (or what) within nineteenth-century Western Australia these complex levels of erasure were protecting. I began to wonder how unlicensed mothers knew that their silence would help them to survive.

Occurrences Saturday October 12th 1895

DATE.

NAME.

PARTICULARS.

Report

Wm A. Arthur Steamster camped near the Cor Bone reports at 4.15 p.m. that there was stolen from his tent between 9 p.m. 11/95 & 12 noon 8/10/95 the following:
1 cheque dated October 8th 11/95 made payable to M^{rs} ~~W. A. Arthur~~ 335 or bearer signed by W. J. Bagshaw drawn on Bank of ~~Western Australia~~ Coolgardie amount of cheque £3-3-6.
Mr Arthur ascertained that the cheque had been cashed at The Miners Arms Hotel and paid into the W.A. Bank to the credit of J. J. Brewer licensee of The Miners Arms Hotel. Brewer stated he did not know the name of the man who cashed the cheque but thinks he could recognize him. Police Making Inquiries S.O. notified.

Telegram from Corp^l M^r Cuthy to Lieut Stokes
(14) Connelli's effects not yet arrived. Instruct Suggan whether he will wait Bourabbin or not.

P.C. Pearce

" Anderson

brought to str at 8.45 p.m. James O'Leary free bur Chr R. & W. minor age 40 yrs Charge ~~assault~~ conduct indecent exposure in Hunt str properly 3rd + Sundries

Occurrences Sunday October 13th

DATE.

NAME.

PARTICULARS.

Telegram

(10)

from Lieut Stokes to Corp^l Suggan go on Bourabbin if not there await arrival

Report

Wm Greenhalgh Twitener reports at str at 11 a.m. that 4 a.m. 11.10.95 there was stolen his waggon eight miles from Southern + 1 roan mare, 14 1/2 hands high, near hind foot saddle marked on offside, by 4 near shoulder, brushes on hind leg, hogged main. Idem Police Making Inquiries S.O. notified.
Mr Wilkinson of Coolgardie Company stated that he saw mare tied up at a condenser this side of Menzies 11.10.95

Report

Arnold Dean reported str at 7.20 p.m. Mr D^r Cauliff M.A. required the Corp^l at ~~Police~~ Hotel. Lieut Stokes + 9 C.B. left at once for ~~Station~~ Mine Salom + D^r Cauliff in one of the back rooms saw a young woman named Lottie was shown the body lying in bed was shown the dead body of a fully formed male child which was rolled up in a blanket took possession of it at 1/2 found a pocket underneath the mattress on the floor stained with blood. Examined the body of the

Copy



Sarah Mills
Serving It Up, 2016
Mixed media installation
Approx 100cm x 100cm



THE SPACES

The work for *The Spaces Between Us* is grounded in this initial research and has emerged from a richly detailed historical and contemporary investigation process.

Six artists, Helen Seiver, Sarah Mills, Simon Gilby, Mace Francis, Eva Fernandez & Sarah Elson, were invited to explore a range of locations, sites and historical material to facilitate an engagement that would inform and nourish their imaginative and creative responses.

The taboo nature of mothers who kill their children can be overwhelming. The weight of this type of historical information can potentially burden the creative response with pre-conceptions, the suffering and death leading to simple articulation of the case studies. By allowing the artists space for immersion in the understanding of a colonial woman's life, *The Spaces Between Us* seeks to transcend historical narrative, and to breathe life into the spaces between what is known and unknown about women who committed infanticide in colonial Western Australia.

Because there is so little 'actual' evidence to help us understand the motivations behind these crimes, *The Spaces Between Us* uses historical research and creative practice to 'fill in the gaps', in turn developing both narratives and creative works that facilitate a nuanced and empathetic response to, and understanding of, the fear and desperation that underlay these unspeakable actions. By thinking about, and feeling their way into these stories, going to colonial locations, reading documents, and engaging with these feelings of trauma, the artists were able to access the silence and the grief behind the behaviours.

Each artist was invited to engage with colonial court case documentation, artworks, artefacts (including clothing, domestic furniture, jewellery, medical instruments and ephemera), newspaper articles, diaries, correspondence and also visit sites (extant and ruined) to re-contextualise such cases of infanticide.

Colonial research locations included Rottnest Island, King Cottage and the old prison in Bunbury, a special tour of the Duyfken replica and an archaeological dig at Peel Town (near Fremantle) with the support of archaeologist Dr Shane Burke from The University of Notre Dame. The group were also invited

BETWEEN US

to visit colonial sites in York, New Norcia, Dongara, Greenough, Busselton, Perth and Fremantle.

The currency of secrets is shame. Through scrutinising the power relations implicit in intimate, interpersonal encounters, and explicit in wider social movements, *The Spaces Between Us* demonstrates how the structural forces according power to privileged individuals in colonial Western Australia were experienced and played out on the bodies of these women and their children. As a result, it teases out a deeper understanding of how these discourses and their attendant behaviours could lead a woman to kill her newborn baby.

This exhibition allows us all to witness and hold these mothers and babies; to let them know they have not been forgotten and that we seek to find and evoke wisdom, compassion, and social change through their trauma and suffering.

It breathes the bare bones of these women's stories into life and raises the following questions:

What did these women lose?

What were they frightened of?

Who were they frightened of?

Do we see infanticide as a crime? If so, whose crime?

How were these women and their children victims of society/patriarchy?

Where are the fathers of these children? Who were they?

The exquisite and deeply moving work has emerged both as a form of historical witnessing, and as a nuanced invitation for audiences to engage with topics of violence and trauma with empathy, recognition and respect.

Dr Amanda Gardiner

S A R A H E L S O N

For this project I have made 55 works that are talismans of thought on my life as a mother. Cast from the remnants of life, each pays homage to the lives lost in the cases of infanticide that Amanda has shared with us.

The labellum is a feature of many of my works and a powerful signifier for me. It is the medial orchid petal - its soul purpose is to attract a pollinator. The labellum (also known as the lips) is the landing pad for fertilization; it is a point of attraction, connection and the continuation of life.

In *The Lament of the Labellum - Transgression* I have removed the labellum from the phalenopsis orchid, sometimes still with it's column. This orchid is not from here and it is commonly used as a decorative plant for the fecundity of its very sensual, soft flowers.

Each flower is encased in plaster, burnt out, and poured under vacuum with molten copper and/or silver - the remnants of old jewellery or scraps.

Rapidly quenched, the copper produces enticing crimson reds, and the silver turns a soft white.

The combination of both silver and copper known as *shibu-ishi* produces earthly shades of pink. Both metals in their oxidized state go from brown to black. These cast forms are then worked - cut, sanded, filed and drilled.

By pulling away the individual labellum I am in effect, pulling away the potential of each new flower, sacrificing its potential for life yet at the same time immortalizing it as an enduring symbol of flesh that is sharp and hard to the touch.

The stringing together of a collection of these parts is an attempt to gain a little backbone, a spine with a flexibility that is stronger as a whole.

The space between us can be as close and fathomless in distance as a species. My work and thoughts during this project have been contentious and life changing for me. It has brought into even greater focus the little things that are cherished or have not been cherished equally.

Sarah Elson

The lament of the labellum - transgression, 2016

Silver and copper alloys with beading thread

250 x 40 x 40 mm



SARAH MILLS

Nursing it up, Serving it up Tales of Repression, Secrecy, and Unconditional Love

My work delves into the real and graphically showcases what lies under the floorboards, beautifying the damaged and filling empty spaces. Through my work I aim to challenge the way my audience looks at history. Every layer, every stroke and every drip of turps tells a story. Adopting a feminist approach, I hope my work entices people to empathise with the women in this project, listen to their babies who never had a voice, and know that there is always more than one side to a story; there is always a context behind a crime.

The reflexive nature of my work is an example of how my hand responded to intuitive pulls within me. As a young woman, I often imagined myself as one of these women; unmarried, pregnant, and concealing every aspect of my baby's existence. Under a corset, my belly couldn't grow and I found it hard to breathe. As I gave birth on the cold floorboards, my hand collected some charcoal and sketched the scene. Many of the mediums and techniques I used were either taken from, or inspired by, elements of the 55 case studies I read as part of *The Spaces Between Us* project. Charcoal for the burnt baby whose blackened frame gently blew away in the wind. Chiaroscuro to accentuate the isolation and secrecy of the women who had just given birth. Resin for the layers and preservation of our unknown history.

During the research process, I focused my attention on the disposals of the children, as this brought into focus themes in my work. Careful disposals suggested ideas of preciousness and love. Despite the conditions of the time, I couldn't help but wonder how each mother would have felt about the death of their babies, whom their bodies housed and fed. If times were different, would the babies have survived? The disposals that struck a chord with me were of the babies who were delicately wrapped in their mother's dress and placed in a tea chest - the only place she would have had to store her belongings - and were either buried or placed by a cross in the cemetery. Unlike legitimate babies of the era, these unlicensed babies would not have received a proper burial. Despite their fear and desperation, it seems that these mothers did all they could to care for these infants and to ensure their babies were not trapped in limbo.

The use of a tea chest in particular cases inspired me to investigate the idea of tea. As part of their employment, these servant girls would have served tea to their employers on a daily basis. *Serving It Up*

explores themes of repression and secrecy, and ‘serves up’ to the aristocrats the product of the secrets these women had to keep from them. Internationally, tea is a widely popular beverage with strong medicinal and healing properties. These babies, however, metaphorically, were not receiving the tea – or the ‘medicine’ – they desperately needed. In one particular case where a nurse was present at the death of a baby, I observed that the baby could have easily received the help it needed to survive. Unfortunately, because of the baby’s ‘illegitimacy’ the child had no value and was apparently better off deceased.

Although each case inspired my work, this story in particular encapsulated all of them and the ideas that I was exploring: repression, secrecy and unconditional love. The woman involved was just 17 years old when a colleague ordered her to murder her baby. The child failed to die and its fowl-like cries were heard afar. The young mother asked if she could hold her baby. The nurse handed her the child and she ‘nursed it up’ through the night, holding her baby close to her as it died. The next morning, the two were discovered, still together, until the baby was removed from her arms and taken away. The silence of the mother throughout the night haunted me, and as an image in my head, I saw the face of a teenage girl with no rights, a look of despair and her only love dying in her arms, which developed into the work, *Nursing It Up*.

In all of the cases I studied for this project, there was an absence of context. The cold hard facts were quick to blame the mother for concealing her pregnancy, murdering her child, disposing of the body, and concealing the death. This posed many questions that remained unanswered by the court documents: Why were so many colonial women in the region I live concealing their pregnancies? Why were they giving birth clandestinely, ending their child’s life before it had begun? And why were they alone in the darkness, hiding the innocent little bodies in peculiar places, staining this landscape with undisclosed stories?

The many research field trips in which we participated gave us a greater understanding of the ideals of the time and re-placed unwed, pregnant women within a new space where there were no choices, no rights, and where full blame on the mother seemed absurd. This contextual knowledge allowed me to become embedded within these women’s lives and, in turn, aided my creative process tenfold.

Sarah Mills
Serving It Up, 2016
Mixed Media Installation
Approx 100cm X 100cm





HELEN SEIVER

adding absence (how to find 55 voices)

There are three deaths. The first is when the body ceases to function. The second is when the body is consigned to the grave. The third is that moment, sometime in the future, when your name is spoken for the last time.

Eagleman, D. Sum, *Forty Tales of the Afterlives*. Random House Inc, 2010

If the final form of death is when no one speaks your name, what then if you never had a name, or a voice? How then are you remembered?

This question positions my purpose. It is the driving force to find the voices of, and bear witness to, the fifty-five newborn babies and their mothers.

My work discusses the substance and the matter, the complications and the weight - that which has bearing and is relevant to finding voice.

The fifty-five bonnets are each describing and are made from the significant substances of culture, religion, politics, gender, geography and economics of the era. And of the place: this new colony. These materials of substance include historical text, noted wrappings and fabrics, natural elements describing culture and geography, and found objects of time and place.

They stand tall, each swaying under the weight of opinion, while wearing and revealing the grief with their hollow spaces. We, the observers, are the watchers. Evincing the fall from grace while authenticating the loss: giving voice to the absent and beholding the discarded.

Helen Seiver
Adding Absence, 2016
Mixed media installation
Photography by Lloyd Smith Photographics



MACE FRANCIS

This work is in response to Dr Amanda Gardiner's research into young women who committed infanticide in colonial Western Australia between 1829 and 1901. I found it very difficult to respond literally to this subject, so the music grew from emotional trigger points and reoccurring themes in the written documentation. This conceptual and abstract interpretation is just a small way to bring these voices to your ears.

Samsara is the ongoing cycles of life - birth - death - rebirth - these cycles continue until we learn all our lessons. Some souls learn their lessons before others and leave Samsara.

When reading the court transcript of a woman named Mary Anne Stone who was accused of concealment of birth in 1881, I was struck by the persistent reoccurring subjects of *Brandy & Blood*. This fluid theme is represented by the flow playing in and out of time. The four instruments all tell the same story in their own way and from their perspective.

All these cases happened when God Save the Queen was the national anthem. Throughout the court documents 'Our Lady the Queen' is referenced to confirm and legitimise the proceedings. *Sod Gave The Queen* is a middle finger to this institution and portrays the dark dissonance which underlies this noble song.

A *Delicate* pretty melody is corrupted and broken by the harmonic institution beneath it.

While some find *Walking in the Rain* an unpleasant experience, it is often a beautiful thing to wash away your sins and give in to what has already happened.

The Space Between



All voice effects are
and such

The same story / theme
from different perspectives



SIMON GILBY

My work for this project is an impressionistic response to the bank of histories sent to me by Dr Amanda Gardiner.

Though I read the cases unflinching, fascinated in an historical sense, the process of making the work was one of unzipping a deeper response. The physical and metaphorical exhumation that is the stuff of archaeology also added itself to the process and had echoes in its production.

I've tried to respond to the emotional weight of these stories through my choice of materials. Substances commonly used in the era; lead, wax, stone, copperplate text and muslin, provided ways to explore how we remember the dead.

Lead in particular seemed appropriate. The heaviest stable element on earth and as poisonous as the toxic grief that these women carried. A grief that was then inherited by following generations.

That these stories form part of the foundation of my state, possibly including my own family, made me think of these events - and these tiny corpses physically punctuating the land - as part of the process of colonisation. Yet another unnecessary violence to accompany the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and broad scale environmental destruction.

The transplantation of religious and social mores that could create such shame in women as to murder or conceal still born children perhaps continue to lurk behind the doors of our foundation.

Like ever-dormant seeds, these memories emanate buried in the land. Stories from our gold rush when frenzied desperate people exhumed tonnes of golden metal tumours made me think of them as still there, replacement lead nuggets hidden and unregarded.

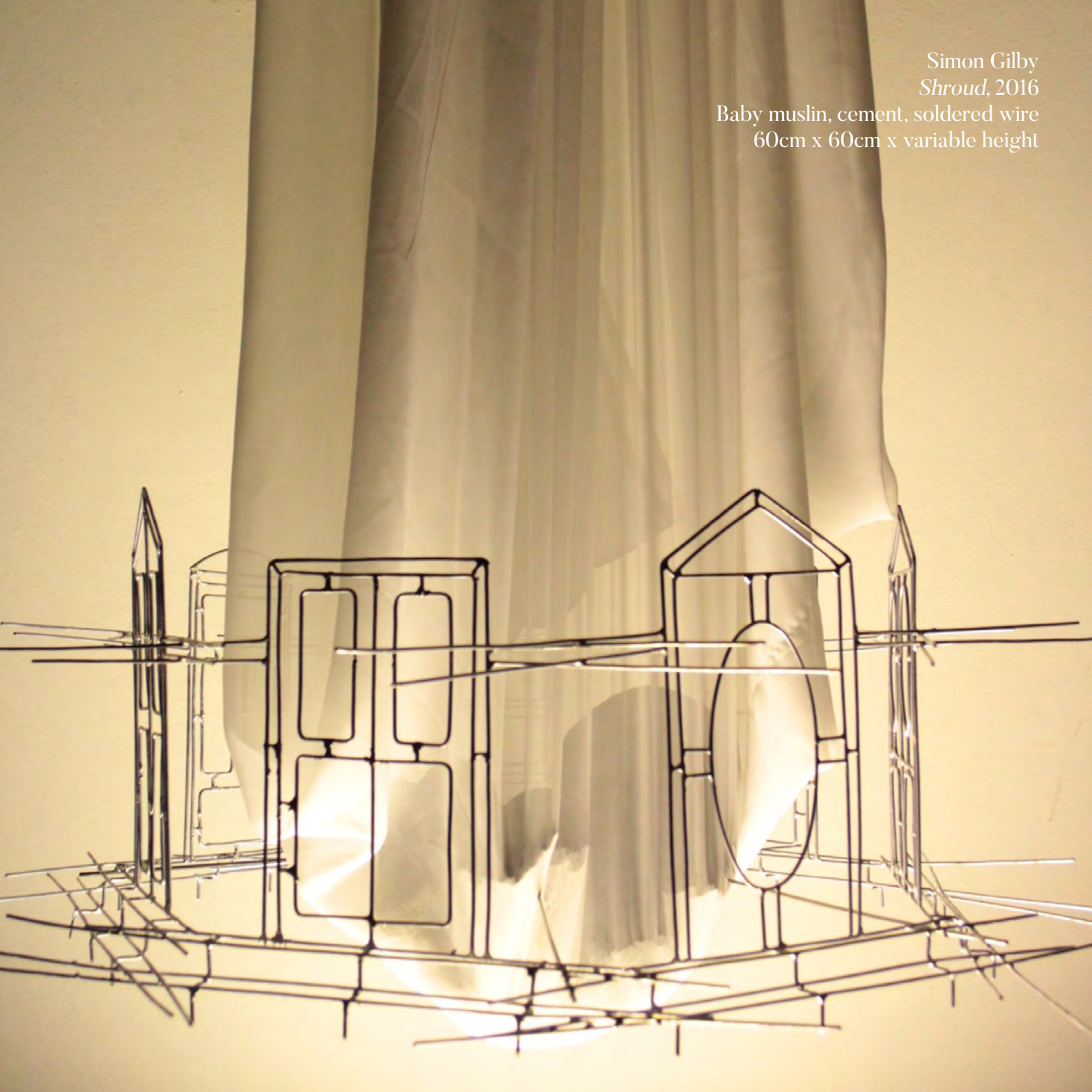
At the other end of the material scale is muslin, its delicateness representing the buoyancy of hallowed memory, the lightness with which we suspend memories of the departed. The kind of psychological cloaking where we happily remember someone divorced from the fact of their death.

In this I conjured the rituals of séance often led by women such as Madame Blavatsky frisking gossamer muslin around dark tables lit by candlelight to summon spirits for grieving relatives.

Ectoplasm it was called, or 'inner substance' and though the fabric was used for this deception, it's more usual facility was with swaddling newborns.

Simon Gilby
Shroud, 2016

Baby muslin, cement, soldered wire
60cm x 60cm x variable height





Simon Gilby
Rhizanthella (work in progress), 2016
Braised stainless steel, lime and text
25cm x 20cm x 20cm approx



EVA FERNANDEZ

As I read through more than 50 cases of infanticide, I am overwhelmed by the horrors as they reveal themselves from the pages. As the details of the narratives overcome, my mind strays in an act of self preservation, to the methods and materials of concealment, rather than the horrific images of tiny, lifeless, pale and bloodied bodies. What could be more horrendous than the killing of an innocent infant? Perhaps finding the remains of such an insidious act.

The paper, string, cloth, boxes, leaves and stones compel me. While some frail bodies are lovingly packaged in handmade boxes, wrapped in cloth and placed on consecrated grounds, others are hardly considered, abandoned and discarded in excrement.

Many of us share hidden secrets of traumatized past or disremembered spaces which we use a variety of guises to conceal. The perils of revealing these spaces, memories or packages could be said to be courageous or reckless, as what is exposed, may never again be forgotten. The mysterious packages I have created in my images intend to seduce and intrigue but also concern the viewer of what may be revealed.

Drawing from these cases, I carefully delve into the disremembered spaces, slowly metaphorically, unearthing the narratives in order to evoke images to piece together fragments of a shattered, emotional and forgotten past. Drawing on fragments, these works embody traces and voices from the past that are blended and embedded in my own interpretations.

Eva Fernandez
Hessian Sack, 2016
Archival digital print
60cm x 60cm



Eva Fernandez
Brown Case, 2016
Archival digital print
60cm x 60cm



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