**Why Remember?**

**Ruins, Remains and Reconstructions in Times of War and Its Aftermath**

***Imagining Sarajevo and other distant places.***

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In this illustrated paper I will discuss how collections, texts and stories have providing catalysts for me in the making of bodies of work, which have invariably centered on conflict and notions of absence and memory. This has included work with the Freud Museums in both Vienna and London, taking Freud’s exile in 1938 as a starting point and Captain Scott’s fatal journey to the South Pole in 1912, following research in the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge. I will also discuss a project which began in 1998 in response to the final broadcast from Bosnia by Martin Bell, the then BBC War Correspondent in which I attempted to imagine the siege of Sarajevo, through an installation of abandoned objects and a bookwork. Twenty years later, having visited Sarajevo and researched in the History Museum, I have revisited this theme and have made new work, which responds to my experience of the city and the residue traces of the conflict.

In **Durer’s etching of St Jerome,** the Saint is pictured in his study in the act of contemplation. He is immersed in his work while around him are numerous objects that suggest the portals for studying the world and indeed beyond. The light streams in from the window, a timer hangs on the wall, a skull in on the window shelf, a sleeping dog symbolizes loyalty while books reference knowledge. The study, for this saint is a place to withdraw from the world in order to reflect upon it. This feels very much like the artist’s studio a place where the artist goes to try to imagine and come to some understanding of the world. ( add reference to meanings in durers print)

As an artist I operate between the polarities of what is present and what is absent, often using simple day-to-day objects as touchstones for more speculative thoughts. Furthermore, while St. Jerome is pictured with a range of references, in recent years I to have situated my practice within collections, infiltrating these spaces and drawing inspiration from the objects they contain in order to tell new stories and bring contemporary references to bear upon historical material.

While a key facet of my work over the last twenty years has been using museums and collections as starting points, the first example I want to discuss is how a chance hearing of a broadcast on the radio, led to me visiting Sarajevo twenty years later and making some new work for this current exhibition in the History Museum.

In 1996, I was in my studio, a little like St Jerome in his study, with the radio on. Each week on the BBC there is a broadcast entitled *From our own correspondent* in which reporters present a short broadcast about something topical. On this occasion, Martin Bell, the then BBC war correspondent used the occasion to sign off as a war correspondent and reflected on his most recent experience in Bosnia. He spoke of ‘**the abiding memory I shall take away with me is not of any particular massacre or atrocity or ruin or traitor or front line, but of hundreds of refugees fleeing on foot down a mined country road all wearing their Sunday Best, formal black suits for the men, ample black dresses for the women. For if all you can take is what you can walk away with then you walk away in the best clothes that you have and, in the pockets, you carry the family photographs.’**

What struck me was how through objects, in this case family photographs and clothes, a connection with memory and culture is made manifest. The best clothes carry with them a sense of personal dignity and the photographs an implicit sense of identity.

I experienced the Bosnia War like so many, through the media and the daily news reports of atrocities and Sarajevo under siege, but from the safe distance of London, Sarajevo seemed far away. It wasn’t until I visited in Ljubljana for a biennial and saw a road sign pointing to Sarajevo that I had the realization that this war was happening in the middle of Europe, literally in our back yard. This provided a trigger, and remembering the broadcast, I wrote to the BBC asking for a transcript and then to Martin Bell who was then an independent MP, to ask permission to use his text. The radio broadcast had made a great impression on me, why and how, out of all the thousands of reports did this one get under my defenses? but I felt compelled to respond to the broadcast and try to shape these ideas in artworks. I also wanted to give a degree of permance to what was otherwise a fleeting radio broadcast, a temporary moment on the information highway.

I began working on two pieces of work, one an artist’s book, the other an installation of bronze objects as if abandoned objects, left behind under the threat of snipers. The objects are all common-place, books, bottles, children’s toys and I wanted to make them as if they had been discarded in a hurry, the residue of conflict, that which can’t be carried, has to be left behind.

The artists book took as its title, *with the melting of the snows* a phrase used by Bell to describe how following the winter thaw, the full horror of the atrocities was revealed, a perverse coming of spring. The book consists of three visual chapters, with all the images extensively worked on the computer. Mid-day images of lybijana in sunshine in colour were transformed into black and white re-imaginings of Sarajevo, **dusk falling under curfew**.

The second chapter were **images of the bronze objects (X2 SLIDES)** on my studio floor whilst the third chapter took the backroom stores of a gentleman’s outfitters, Moss **Bros with suits and coat waiting to be hired, acting as surrogates for the** unnamed**.(X2 SLIDES)**

The second piece was an installation of bronze objects **Abandoned Landscape** in which I imagined the siege of Sarajevo as evidenced by skeletal objects, left behind, dropped while fleeing or simply discarded. I wanted these objects to reference the everyday aspects of life, a child’s doll, an iron, a bicycle seat, a bottle and together begin to conjure the idea of the life of a city. **(INSTALLATION\_ BRADFORD)** Conflict begins by disrupting the simple activities, the daily rituals of shopping, working and playing. For me it is poignant to see this work now in Sarajevo 20 years after I made it and to see how it might work in this context. Joanna Moora in her book Inside the Freud Museum, talks about site-responsive art, that being art that is temporaralily installed within a space not primarily meant for contemporary art, which I feel certainly feel locates my practice. p2 **(INSTALLATION IN SARAJEVO- NOTE TANKS OUT OF THE WINDOW)**

When I finally visited Sarajevo earlier this year, it was an uncanny experience, and despite the amazing transformation of the city, the scars and reminders of the conflict were still self-evident. The History museum itself, carries the trace of the conflict on its façade and environs while inside an exhibition focusing on the siege including many personal objects that vividly expressed the day to day life under conflict.

I spent a lot of time in the museum with the collection but one item above all resonated with me and seemed to represent the tragedy of civilians involved in a war zone. That object was a sweater worn by **Nermin Divović** given to the museum by his family and a photograph of him playing, wearing the same sweater a year before a sniper’s bullet killed him, 100 yards from the entrance to the museum. The bullet we are told, passed through his mother before killing Nermin. As an image this is a terrible inversion of the mother and child, where it is the mother’s milk that sustains the child’s life, here what has come through the mother, has brought death.

One of the important aspects of collections is the way in which objects are presented as portals into stories and events. They are the physical connection, touchstones for the imagination. As an artist, I try to intensify experience through the making of objects and prints in the hope that through art, ideas can find a visual equivalent and become part of the collective memory, while as a humanist in the context of Sarajevo, I have to believe it might be just be possible to enter the mind and the heart of a would be killer and pause the trigger. I am aware how vain this may sound but artists make work in order to effect a change in the mind and hearts of the viewer, otherwise, it’s merely a decorative side show.

Nemin’s story is made poignant for the fact that his life was so suddenly cut short at just 7 years old, when, having survived the natural risks of birth and the early years, he would have expected a long life, school, playing football, a job, falling in love, a family of his own and even beyond as a grandparent. I wanted to capture this loss of both a life and its potential through memorializes his life through a series of sweaters, one for each year of his life. T.S.Elliot in his famous poem The **Love Song of J**. **Alfred Prufrock**

talks of measuring out a life in coffee spoons

For I have known them all already, known them all:

Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;

I know the voices dying with a dying fall

Beneath the music from a farther room.

               So how should I presume?

I in turn wanted to memorialize Nemin by measuring out his life in woolen sweaters. I took a number of **photographs of the sweater** and along with some drawings and measurements, set about trying to find someone to knit duplicates. A very close friend, Ann Jones, a curator from the Arts Council England, who lives in rural Wales took the project to heart and found a lady, Carol McDavid in her nearby village, who offered to knit the sweaters, working back from one to fit a 7-year-old to a tiny sweater for a baby 0-1-year-old.

She did some tests, and we tried to get as good a colour match as possible for the wool. Carol was also able to use the photographs in place of knitting patterns and adapt her knitting to the different sizes. **1-2Years OLD**

I printed and sewed into each sweater a label indicating its size by year, so 0-1 yrs, 1-2, yrs etc. The sweaters are displayed in a line, showing his growth, and through this I hoped that the tragedy of a life cut short would be made poignant. **(DESIGN FOR DISPLAY)** As with the original sweater, **my set of sweaters** have been hand knitted, carrying with them that intense investment of time, care, craft skill and pride on behalf of the maker. My own mother knitted so I know from first hand experience, the pride she took in ensuring we looked smart and warm as we went off to school. But I also wanted the softness of the wool to provide a contrast to the hardness of the majority of the collection, including the metal of the **guns, shells,** hardware etc. and in the colour, a contrast to the military greys, greens and blacks. Here was something colourful, soft and warm. Wars are invariably waged by men but it is the women and children that are too often the innocent victims. I wanted to give space to those feminine qualities of nurture and resilience in a museum whose architecture and collection invariable testify to the masculine idea of strength and power.

A further element that attracted me in the collection was the importance of plastic bottles for collecting water in the siege. These were evidenced in During my visit to Sarajevo in January, in the company of Dr Paul Lowe, I visited the artist Edin Numankadic’s studio on the top floor of one of the social housing projects. Edin told me how he made the journey each day along *Sniper’s alley* to go to his studio and have a space to think. He told me a joke, that a man was crossing sniper’s alley with plastic bottles to collect water when a sniper shot his bottle, so the water poured out. The man screamed at the sniper, ‘don’t shoot the bottles, shoot me!’ Here in the black recesses of humor, lies a sad truth that without water you would be dead anyway. **In this installation of Edin’s the plastic water** bottle is clearly evidenced.

In response to this, I made three small **sculptures first in wax** , and then **cast in bronze and painted** of damaged plastic bottles on landscapes of fingerprints. **(INSTALLATION SARAJEVO)** I had been struck by the poignancy of the **Sarajevo roses,** the resins stains marking where mortar shells exploded and also the presence of the EU flag on tins of beef and other things in the museum’s collection. In one of the sculptures I have the stars from the EU flag like an ironic halo, since for all their authority and influence, it seemed so little was done to resolve the conflict. I also realised that my sculptures have a passing resemblance to the **tomb stones** that I had photographed in Sarajevo.

It is interesting how the image of the plastic water bottle can oscillate between a representation of life as a container for water, to more recent representations of pollution and the contamination of the oceans. We have to be vigilant with symbols. They are slippery things, their meaning always changing.

Collections are like a pack of cards, each hand dealt becomes a different story and whilst museums/collections can, often for practical reasons, try to put across a single logical reading of history, one of the roles I see myself having as an artist is to disrupt this attempt and propose alternatives. This invariable draws attention to what is absent as well as what is present since all collections are incomplete.

In 2016, I embarked on a project with the **Freud museums in Vienna and London**, the first occasion that the two museums had collaborated. The contrast between the two museums couldn’t be greater. In Vienna, the museum is relatively empty, occupying the apartments that Freud lived and worked over a period from1891 until 1938 before fleeing to London. The museum in London by contrast houses a large collection of his objects and antiquities along with his furniture including the couch, and his desk despite the fact that he only lived there for the last year of his life. Here conflict is represented by upheaval, and the need for an old man, dying of cancer to uproot, to travel across Europe to ‘ die in freedom’.

My work centred on this idea of journey, (the exhibition itself travelled to both venues) so the motifs associated with travel permeated the project. The museum in London has the **coat that Freud purchased for his** migration to London in 1938. I wanted to send a manifestation of the coat back to Vienna; a kind of reverse journey to make apparent what Vienna had lost in forcing Freud into exile.I was also reminded of these two images, one of **Giacometti crossing the road with his coat as protection and the way Bob** Dylan huddles within his short jacket to keep out the new York winter. I persuaded the National Gallery in London, to put aside its work on old masters for a day and x-ray the coat as if it was a relic or cultural object. **The whole process was documented by the photographer Peter Abrahams and from his photographs I made an artist book, overlaying these images to reconstruct a narrative of the event as the coat was taken from the display in the museum, packed, transported to the national gallery, x rayed and returned.**

**The x-rays were digitally stitched together and a full-size print made. (X5 IMAGES)** For me the print referenced the **Turin shroud**, with its mystical absence but I also wanted to both reference the nature of phycoanlanalis itself, with its unveiling of layers as well as the medical associations of an x-ray, with Freud as both a doctor and patient, having had frequent x-rays to monitor his cancer of the jaw. Of course there is also the connection with the miraculous Turin Shroud and the way it evokes the presence of a figure. **Here are some other installation photographs of the exhibition. (X 3 Images**

A further reverse journey was implied in another piece for the exhibition, *A ghostly return*, in which every object on **Freud’s desk** was scanned and then 3d printed 2/3 actual size in white nylon. **(IMAGES X 5 )** The **desk objects** now stripped of colour, texture and reduced in scale when seen in Vienna appeared like an apparition, a ghost of what was since parted.

**(GHOSTLY RETURN DESK**

The final project I want to discuss ‘ **Re-imagining Scott- objects and journeys** was the result of research in the collection of the Scott Polar research institute Cambridge to provide the inspiration for new works addressing Scott’s ill-fated journey to the South Pole in 1912. Here conflict is represented by the challenge of nature and how to survive in an alien environment as well as the conflict of meeting the challenge of expectations and codes of conduct. As with other projects, it was objects in the collection that gave me an immediate feeling for the stories; here are the **hand made googles** used by Scott to prevent snow blindness, while here is a tin of soup as part of their supplies for the expedition and most importantly a **timmorogory bag**, the kind used by sailors with needle, thread, laces, pencils etc, basically things for emergencies and for repairing. I responded to this by making my own bags, each containing glass objects, the kind of which one might take on a journey, so for example **one contained**, toothbrush, razor, toothpaste, comb, soap, while another, items for a party. **Each of the six bags referenced an aspect of the story**.

I also wanted to conceptually remake the journey of his ship the Terra Nova from England to Antarctica. In order to do this, I made a series of postcards, studio reconstructions of imagined polar landscapes **(made from sugar cubes, flour, studio debris etc.)** and each bearing a word from Scotts journal describing **snow or weather** conditions, pack ice, blizzard etc.). I then sent a postcard to the postmaster/postmistress of seven of the ports of call of the terra nova with the request to stamp, frank the postcard and return it to me. In this way the **postcards acted as surrogates for the journey I was reluctant to take.**

This also connected to discoveries through my research that in very British style, Scott himself had to be appointed honorary postmaster general in order to have the authority to frank letters from Antarctica. I made this piece which reflects on that role. On one side are a set of rubber stamps made in glass to suggest ice, each bearing one word, **we must reach the pole this time**. On the other side, **for god’s sake look after our people**. The first was from a quote from Scott just before leaving England at the start of the expedition. The second, the last entry in his diary, found when they discovered the bodies of Scott and his companions. The postcards that I sent to the ports of call, each had on them one of the seven words so it wasn’t until they were returned that the sentence could be read. As aspect of this work was as a reminder of the interval between sending a letter and receiving it, in the case of Scott, often months in-between, a marked contrast to our age of instant communication.

A further aspect of the story was the intense sense of companionship between the adventurers. To an Edwardian society with its notions of what is was to be a gentleman and the importance above all else of personal honor, the Scott expedition came to be a glowing example and the manner of their failure became a heroic victory. I wanted in some small way to memorialize this idea of companionship and made a set of **small bronzes of objects** for sharing, cigarettes, chocolate, sardines. Each has a compass to help find their way home. I wanted them to suggest the Scott and his four colleagues that made the push to the pole, in their sleeping bags. **Heres a hot water bottle to keep them warm.**

**INSTALLATION**

In these three examples of projects, I have tried to show how museums and collections can become starting points for new work. Museum collections can very quickly become ossified and instead of opening up the opportunities for multiple interpretations, can close down avenues and unwittingly present a singular reading of history. As an artist I enjoy the challenge of ‘messing things up’ and presenting a different focus but this is not without risk. At the Freud Museum, I approached the project imagining Freud with the same trauma as any exile, while with Scott I intentionally avoided a re-evauation of history and what could be seen as the foolhardy quest for glory, rather focusing of the materiality of such an ambitious expedition and what could be learnt in terms of the value of companionship and adventure. **NERMINS SWEATER** Here in Sarajevo, I know that my work has to be resilient and compete for attention in the context of both the city itself and the museum and its collection. My work is not presented here in a neural white cube, but alongside a myriad of objects and stories that speak of man’s inhumanity to man as well as providing evidence of ingenuity, imagination and acts of bravery and self-sacrifice. My work here also has to pay respect to the inhabitants of Sarajevo for whom recent history is not a resolved past but a lived, in many cases, traumatic reality.

In terms of reconciliation, I believe that art has a powerful role to play in presenting images onto which ideas and feeling can be attached. Art has also been vital in supporting empathy, the capacity to see another’s point of view and without empathy, reconciliation is probably impossible. Reconciliation is a process and my hope is that in some small way, my work will provide means to help think about the immediate past and make a small contribution as to how we might imagine the future.

MEMORIAL STONE

Biog

Paul Coldwell is Professor of Fine Art at the University of the Arts London, based at Chelsea College of Art.

As an artist, his practice includes prints, book works, sculptures and installations, focusing on themes of journey, absence and loss, He has exhibited widely, his work included in numerous public collections, including Tate, V&A, British Museum, the Arts Council of England and Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva.

Much of his work has involved researching within collections; In 2008, he was invited to respond to the house at Kettle’s Yard Cambridge, resulting in an installed exhibition, *I called while you were out*. In 2013, following research at the Scot Polar Research Institute, Cambridge he presented *Re-Imagining Scott: Objects & Journeys* which included sculptures, glassworks, prints and postcards and recently *Setting Memory* at the Freud Museums in Vienna (Oct 2016) and *Temporarily Accessioned* at the Freud Museum London (June 2017) generously supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

In addition to his studio practice, he writes regularly on printmaking for Print Quarterly and Art in Print and has been keynote speaker at a number of international conferences.

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