***Temporarily Accessioned-The role of Printmaking within my recent Freud Museum Installations. Setting Memory-Sigmund Freud Museum Vienna – Temporarily Accessioned-Freud’s Coat Revisited-Freud Museum London***

In 1996, I made what was my first artist’s book, a hand printed lithographic volume entitled *Freud’s Coat* which was also my first project with the Freud Museum in London. The museum, then under the directorship of Erica Davies had begun a programme to invite contemporary artists to make works in response to the museum, Susan Hiller being amongst the first in her installation *The Reading Room* (1994) and I was invited to follow. Since then, the Freud Museum has become a prominent space for contemporary artists and a testing ground for a wide range of practice, set as ever against the backdrop of Sigmund and Anna Freud and the birth of psychoanalysis. These have been well documented, most notably in Dr Danny Birchall’s PhD thesis entitled *Institution and Intervention: Artists’ projects in object based museums*, in which he takes the Freud Museum as a case study and exemplar[[1]](#endnote-1) and the recent study by Dr Joanna Morra which records the history of artists’ engagement with the museum and further explores how this small venue has provided rich inspiration for a wide range of art practice.[[2]](#endnote-2)

My bookwork in 1996 took as its central motive, the coat that Sigmund Freud had purchased for his migration from Vienna to London in 1938 in order to ‘die in freedom’. In 1996 his coat was stored and it was only from a chance conversation that led to viewing the coat and photographing it. Now over 20 years later, the coat is displayed in the hallway, in a cabinet alongside other personal items including his boots, glasses, calling card etc. It has joined the rich environment of the museum which features his consulting room, complete with couch, desk and a great number of artefacts. In stark contrast, the Sigmund Freud Museum in Vienna is relatively empty. Located in the apartment that Freud lived and practiced for over 45 years, it was repossessed by the Nazis in 1938 and what Freud wasn’t able to take with him is now lost. So when I was invited to work towards a new exhibition in 2016, the sense of absence and presence in both venues and the idea of journey were the leitmotifs that ran through all my thinking as I began to develop the project. Printmaking seems an appropriate medium to explore ideas of journey. While painting speaks of permanence and exclusivity, printmaking alongside the printed book, has favoured the cheap multiple as the survival mechanism for preserving and distributing ideas.

The work I made for the exhibition[[3]](#endnote-3) was both about the journey of Freud, fleeing Vienna to settle in London, but it was also about staging work in two distinct locations and the mechanics of transporting the work, so the idea of travel was embedded from the outset in every aspect. Furthermore, the exhibition marked the first occasion that the museums in London and Vienna had collaborated and was set against the UK’s vote to leave the European union and the growing antagonism towards the plight of refugees and asylum seekers.

Freud’s coat was the motif I returned to as being central to the ideas I wanted to explore and over a period of a number of weeks I became drawn to the idea of having the coat x-rayed and to make a print from the results. Having decided this, the next phase was to persuade the National Gallery in London to clear a day from their busy schedule of x-raying old masters to help me and was delighted when they finally agreed. I had three clear reasons for x-raying the coat and specifically, to do this at the National Gallery. Firstly, I wanted to cement the change of the coats status from an ordinary woollen coat, to a cultural artefact. As part of the process of x-raying the coat, it received a temporary accession number to the National Gallery and so its transition and change of status was marked. Secondly, I wanted to return the coat to Vienna from where it originated, in such a way that its presence was revealed by its absence. And thirdly to make a representation of psychoanalysis, how it posits the idea of layers and the exploration of what is below the surface as being fundamental to its method. Of course the x-ray process further linked to Freud, as both a medical doctor and a patient, being regularly x-rayed as part of his treatment of cancer of the jaw.

I engaged a photographer Peter Abrahams for the day of the x-raying to record all the salient moments, from the removal of the coat from its cupboard, it being packed, its arrival at the National Gallery and the x-raying. From these photographs I constructed a series of composite images in an artist’s book *Temporarily Accessioned,* that both served as documentation but also an exploration of the uncanny. Looking back over these photographs, it was noticeable how the coat became synonymous with the body and how our handling took on the sensibilities of a doctor, a carer or indeed undertaker.

The x-rays were ‘sewn’ together and a full size composite print was printed digitally. [[4]](#endnote-4) When exhibited in Vienna, the x ray spoke of what was lost, in London it took its place amongst all the other traces of Freud and as Morra wrote ‘ *continues the artist’s haunting engagement with objects of everyday life that evoke troubling memories from the past.*’[[5]](#endnote-5) The artists book was printed commercially, in an edition of 100 signed and numbered copies and included a facsimile of the completed x-ray.

There are restrictions of working within collections that the artist has to embrace. Objects need to be handled with care and there are limitations for the purpose of conservation and preservation for future generations. Freud’s objects include a world class collection of antiquities, figurines, sculptures and I was particularly drawn to the configuration of objects on his desk, regiments of statues that faced him as he worked. Ro Spankie had written a study of all the objects on the desk and this proved very helpful as well as informative. [[6]](#endnote-6) These objects had been transported to London at great expense and effort and I wanted to complete a reverse journey, to resend them back to in Vienna. But of course, this was impossible and I had to think how I could make an equivalent without damaging any of the objects. I settled on 3D scanning and working closely with Holly Shaw (3D imaging specialist at the London College of Fashion), we set up a mobile scanning platform and over the course of 3-4 days scanned each object. From this data, the objects were 3D printed in white nylon, 2/3 actual size. The finished work entitled *A ghostly return* featured all the objects arranged as they were in London, but now stripped of colour, reduced in size, given a uniform texture. I wanted the result to be like an apparition helped by the translucent nature of the nylon. The reduction in size was in part reference to Gaston Bachelard’s observation ‘the cleverer I am at miniaturising the world, the better I possess it.’[[7]](#endnote-7) I felt that by reducing the scale, it would draw the objects back as if remembered.

In Vienna, A *ghostly return* was placed in a relatively empty room where the desk would have been. In London it was placed at the opposite end of the consulting room where the actual desk is set. I made a large travelling case that appeared to be for all the individual objects on the desk, a means to transport the work but also to function as an artwork itself to be exhibited, once again re-enforcing the idea of journey.

As mentioned previously, the project was made against the backdrop of the migrant crisis and as a further dimension, I worked with teenagers from refugee families in Vienna to produce a series of postcards which juxtaposed images of their most precious objects with objects from Freud’s desk. 100 of these postcards where then released from white helium filled balloons from Sigmund Freud Park in Vienna with the message, that if found, to be returned to me in London, and in return, I would send them a gift of a set of all the postcards. In the gallery, I presented a letter rack to exhibit those that returned and in the end, only two completed the journey, a reminder of the risks in migration. The postcard is a form I have used on a number of occasions. It is a multiple print, commercially produced. I like the way that postcards combine text and image and make journeys on our behalf, carrying simple messages across time and space and in so doing, bear the scars of the journey.[[8]](#endnote-8)

The final printed works for the exhibition were more conventional in terms of fine art printmaking, a series of relief prints from laser cut woodblocks. In these works, taking the image of the suitcase as a metaphor for journey and a vase of flowers, suggesting commemoration, I wanted to reference Freud’s notion of the uncanny as an unsettling concept. The prints were all developed on the computer and then laser cut woodblocks made from which I printed directly. Here, through the half tone dot I tried to subvert the stability of the objects, wanting them to be caught in a moment of flux.

Looking back at the project, through each of the printed pieces, the x-ray, bookwork, the 3D printed desk and in these relief prints, I have tried to destabilise a static reading of place and history. Museums and collections have a tendency to become fixed, both physically in a reluctance to rearrange things but also to address more contemporary issues and debates ‘It is not that they find these things hard to say *per se*, but that they sometimes find them hard to say through existing strategies for the curation of displays and objects. [[9]](#endnote-9)

Writing in the catalogue for the *Graphic Unconscious*, Caitlin Perkins comments about working within collections ‘For anyone with an interest in history, piecing together precious fragments and ephemera constitutes a special kind of adventure that leads one to hidden, oft forgotten narratives’[[10]](#endnote-10). For my project, the empty apartment, (white cube) in Vienna was in contrast to the full resonate space of the museum in London and each provided a particular space for me to add my narrative. In one instance I was trying to evoke absences, in the other, elbow some space so that my work could set up conversations with the existing collection.

1. <https://museumcultures.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/dannybirchall_institutionandintervention.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Morra, J (2018). Inside the Freud Museums: History, Memory and Site-Responsive Art, London [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Setting Memory*- a two-person exhibition curated by Monika Pessler & Daniela Frinzi Sigmund Freud Museum Vienna 7/10/16- 21/1/17

*Temporarily Accessioned-Freud’s Coat* Revisited solo exhibition Freud Museum London 23/2/17-7/5/17 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Printed in an edition of 5 at the Centre for Fine Print Research by Dr Paul Laidler [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Joanne Morra in Coldwell, P (2017) *Temporarily Accessioned-Freud’s Coat Revisited,* London, Freud Museum, [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Spankie, J (2015). *Sigmund Freud’s Desk, An Anecdoted Guide.* London: Freud Museum. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Bachelard, G,.(1994) *The poetics of space* Boston,,Beacon Press [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Previous postcard projects include *South*-Scott Polar Research Institute and S*oundtrack of an Anxious life*- Anxiety Festival London.

See Susan Steinberg film ‘The Hope’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzsQ3fQFQ5c> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Birchall,D. <https://museumcultures.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/dannybirchall_institutionandintervention.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Perkins, C,. in Roca (2010). *Philagrafika 2010: The Graphic Unconscious*. Philadelphia: [↑](#endnote-ref-10)