**Charms and other Anxious Objects**

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This work began with research in the Archives and Museum at the

Bethlem Royal Hospital where I was able to view their online collection and see objects and material in actuality. I have been drawn to archives as starting points for previous bodies of work, *Freud’s Coat,* an installation and bookwork in 1996, the result of many hours in the Freud Museum exploring the collection, *I called while you were out* 2008*,* a year long project supported by the AHRC in the house at Kettle’s Yard and most recently *Re-Imaging Scott; Objects and Journeys* the result of foraging in the archives of the Scott Polar research Institute, also in Cambridge in 2013.

In the Bethlem archives I was drawn to often simple objects such as a comb or a drinking vessel and some sets of photographs showing patients upon entry and after treatment. What I saw in the photographs was an investment of dignity, (whether real or a construct of the photographer), the patient no longer disheveled, but presented to the camera, in a reordered state. In response, I made *Ghosts and Empties*, which presents simple objects that we use in order to present an image of ourselves to the world. These include, a razor, comb, shaving mirror each cast in white resin, the resin taking the form of the absence of the object in the mould. The title comes from a line in *Gracelands* the song by Paul Simon and attempts to speak about the relationship we have with objects and how in some cases they outlive us.

In *Charms I & II*, I have tried to make a connection between the charm bracelet and restraints used on some of the patients that I saw in the archives. Charms carry wishes and desires as well as magical beliefs or faith in the power of these objects to influence our future destiny. My bracelets, now enlarged, have become burdensome, more akin to the ball and chain than a simple silver trinket. Anxieties are only problematic when the person feels that they are disproportionate, here what was previously manageable becoming literally something that prevents the person moving forward.

While in *Charms I&II* I evoke weight and the hardness of metal as qualities through which to interpret the objects, in *Glass Charms*, I wanted the material of glass to bring a sense of immateriality and preciousness. If *Glass Charms* can be seen as a representation of a life, then I would hope that what follows is an understanding of just how fragile each individual life is.

Anxiety is a condition that we all share, we need it to function but it only becomes a concern when a point is tipped. While working on the project, I would often have the radio playing in the studio and I began to notice how many songs seemed to speak of anxieties, and how popular music can therefore provides a soundtrack to an inner life. My soundtrack, *A Soundtrack to an Anxious Life,* consists of15 titles each suggesting hope, fear or aspiration. These were printed as postcards, a way of sending out coded messages to the world and here they are distributed amongst the objects at the Freud Museum as accents or exclamations.

All together, in the context of the Freud Museum, my intention is that this work should resonate with the museum as a whole, Freud’s own collection of objects and also specifically to his writing on the theory of the uncanny.

Paul Coldwell

Paul Coldwell is Professor of Fine Art at the University of the Arts London.

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.

His recent exhibitions include *A Layered Practice Graphic Work 1993-2012* a retrospective staged by University of Kent and *Re-Imagining Scott: Objects & Journeys* at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge 2013. He writes regularly for Art in Print, Print Quarterly & Printmaking Today and his book *Printmaking; A Contemporary Perspective* was published by Black Dog Publishing in 2010.

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