

## **‘You Matter - we are more than the sum of our parts’**

My proposal, for this project, aimed to celebrate the uniqueness and value of each individual, inspired by microscopic imagery of body cells, DNA and fingerprints. I collaborated with the forensic department at ARU to create images of my own fingerprint and DNA for use in my work, and spent time researching genetics.

Controversially, Professor Lightman states “our consciousness creates an illusion that we have some kind of “I-ness”, some unique existence. But in fact, we are nothing but bones, tissues, gelatinous membrane, electrical impulses and chemicals.”(The Veritas Forum, 2011)

However, I am inclined to agree with Dr Lewis arguing “human uniqueness is not an illusion: we really are different from every person who is living now, who lived in the past, or who will live in the future. This is something to wonder at...genes contribute to the differences between us in a way that makes us unique to an almost unbelievable extent.”(Lewis, R., 2011) I agree that this is something to wonder at, and aim to do this through my art.

### Site Choice

As my work is focussed on the belief that each person matters, my proposal sought to take art out of the 'white cube' of a gallery space and make it more accessible. By taking art to the people I aim to value the viewer over the art itself. “The [gallery] space offers the thought that while eyes and minds are welcome, space occupying bodies are not.”(O’Doherty, B., 1999)

I admit that this ambition came with challenges for me. To take my art out of a gallery setting, purposefully created for displaying art well, into the less than pristine aesthetics of a community space, felt a real conflict of interests. Artist Ittai Bar-Joseph would sympathise, saying, “I personally find the idea of exhibiting my work in a ‘soft’, ‘comfy’ space quite intimidating. Every artist wants their work exhibited in a way that the presentation serves the work and not the other way around.”(Graham, B., Cook, S., 2010)

I desired to share my art with those lacking in their sense of self worth and identity, communicating that they matter, aiming to increase their positivity and hope. I was excited to read of initiatives such as the National Gallery’s Artemisia visit to HMP Send Prison: “Taking our star painting to places a painting would never normally go to. The message of this project is really clear - art is for all.”(<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/whats-on/artemisia-visits>)

I visited a charity for prison reform in London but decided to work more locally. I interviewed Cambridge refugee and youth support charities, but it was after talking to one of the team at Women’s Aid (working with domestic abuse survivors) that I felt I had found the right site for this project.

In my research into the issues that survivors of domestic abuse face, I read “The creative process can offer a means of strengthening the Self.”(Kaplan, F., 2007) That “the primary aim ...is to provide a safe and secure therapeutic space in which to rebuild self-identity through identifying and reawakening dormant needs, beliefs, values, desires and interests.”(Sanderson, C., 2008) The themes of my art seemed a good fit, and a women’s refuge would give my art an appropriately intimate and vulnerable setting. The secret nature of a refuge, protecting residents from discovery, also brings a notable contrast to a publicised gallery space.

### Art Progression

In my practice I first explored 2 dimensions using screen printed fingerprints and DNA in collage. I then moved into the unfamiliar territory of 3 dimensions, experimenting with ceramics and textile techniques, negotiating and exploring the limitations and potential of these new mediums, and developing skills. I created microscopic body matter which I covered with fingerprints and DNA as a nod to the 'nature vs nurture' debate I was researching. I selected a bright colour palette, bringing an intentionally cartoon-like feel to my work, seeking to inject an element of fun and playfulness into the fundamentally serious issues I was addressing. Through dialogue with fellow artists I realised that each medium had elements that worked well but also ingredients that were lacking. The ceramic pieces had a fragile nature, people wanted to pick them up and 'take care of them', which seemed very fitting for sharing with people who are vulnerable. The textile pieces provided a sense of invitation and comfort, which I felt was also needed in this setting. I decided that I required the combination and contrast of both in my final piece, and an experiential component would also be beneficial. I moved away from my initial ideas of a sculpture and started designing an installation space that embraced these elements.

### Contemporary Fine Art Research

Investigating installation art I agreed with artist Florentijn Hofman: "The audience becomes part of the installation, its reaction integral to the piece." (Moussa Spring, J., 2015) Also that "the main actor in the installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer." (Bishop, C., 2005)

Of the many exhibitions I visited, whilst developing this body of work, I was most impacted by 'The Biosphere Project' by Joaquin Fargas at ARU (ecosystems), 'Moving off the Land' by Joan Jonas in Madrid (video) and 'Paint Park' by Alison Goodyear at MK Gallery (virtual reality video). Each of these included several mixed and multi media elements that enabled one to enter into, be surrounded by and engage with the art. I was encouraged to transform the women's refuge, their safe and familiar space, into a piece of art they could feel enveloped by, welcoming, fun, and gently helping them consider their value and uniqueness.

I'm influenced by Sontag who states "A work of art encountered as a work of art is an experience, not a statement or an answer to a question. Art is not only about something: it is something." (Filiovic, E., 2013) Claire Bishop talks about installation art having "A concern to activate the viewer...immersive, interactive experiences." (Bishop, C., 2005) It's also helpful to consider that "viewers enter into a more complicated relationship with this art form - a dynamic conversation taking place between the artists and audience." (De Oliveira, N., Petry, M., Oxley, N., Crary, J., 2003)

Artists that especially inspired my work are Yayoi Kusama who explains "Every time I have had a problem, I have confronted it with the ax of art" (<https://www.inspiringquotes.us/author/3188-yayoi-kusama>) and Pipilotti Rist who says "I want to discover new ways of configuring the world, both the world outside and the world within." (<https://www.inspiringquotes.us/author/3543-pipilotti-rist>)

### Final Piece

While preparing my installation I worked on several versions of vessels for the women to pick up and hold - each one unique, trialling papier-mâché and fabric as mediums before choosing ceramic pots created on the wheel, as I felt it was important for the audience to physically engage with something delicate and vulnerable. I introduced a projection of a fingerprint, angled to shine across faces as people approached mirror tiles. I created giant textile body cells to hang from the ceiling and to populate the floor as a seating area. I obtained spherical lamps for low lighting to aid projection and bring an intimacy to the space, and sourced the sound of a heart beat. The combination of these elements are meant to point the viewer to their own intrinsic

uniqueness and value, a deep and challenging topic for these individuals that I aim to introduce gently through a playful and inviting setting.

My initial plan was to splat paint across half of my ceramic tile, to underline that we are MORE than the sum of our parts, representing our personality and spirit. I explored this with my collaged pieces, but when I tried splashing paint on some of my ceramic work it didn't have the impact I was hoping for, it served as a distraction and made the pieces too busy. My solution was to paint a splat on the wall behind the ceramic tile, to look like it was making a big splash. This splash shape would be created in vinyl for the women's refuge.

### Site-Specific

Due to the Corona Virus I have not been able to visit this site, so I created the installation in my studio and made a mock up of the site in Photoshop using a photograph of the refuge online. In the future, I hope to be able to arrange to construct this installation for the people it is designed for.

It is important that I honour this space and do a full risk assessment. The ceramic tile and vinyl splash could be presented on the floor or a table if hanging wasn't possible. I'm also aware that my interaction with these vulnerable ladies would need handling sensitively and need supervision; the forensic connections in my work could even have negative associations for some.

I would look to partner this installation with a 'thumb pot making' workshop, where we could discuss our unique fingerprints in the clay, making reference to us all being unique, precious vessels that deserve to be taken care of. This could flow into numerous activities on these themes within the work of the charity.

### Evaluation

I invited my daughters to engage with the installation in my studio, which helped me review the results. They said it was a welcoming space and enjoyed hugging the giant fabric body cells. The ceramic tile needed spotlighting, but this and the projector, created harsh lighting at eye level. The heartbeat was said to be menacing, making them feel anxious, the opposite to my intension, this needs rethinking. Elements of the installation needed explaining - I had to encourage them to pick up the vessels, had to point out the mirror tiles and the projection, and to reassure them they could sit on the body cell cushions. I would like to create a space that didn't need explanation. The projection didn't have the impact I had envisaged, it would need to be suspended higher (a challenge in the community space), maybe this is one element too many for this proposed site. The space would be too crowded with more than 2 people, however smaller numbers make it more intimate and personal. The contents of the pots couldn't be seen in the low light, some UV paint and lighting could maybe add interest here.

### Group Exhibition

In considering how I might adapt this installation for a group show, responding to the limitations of space, lighting options and lack of intimacy, I decided it needs to be paired back significantly. I would position my work in the doorway to attract attention and be inviting. The hanging elements, floor pieces and bright colours are intended to be welcoming and fun. In this setting there would be less focus on experience and more emphasis on detail. The viewer could engage on a different level with the intricate delicacy of the ceramic, contrasted with the playful textile components.

Next I plan to research art installation further, looking into using video and sound. I want to experiment with multi sensory elements and virtual reality.

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