

Unintended (Refrains:)





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Less pathological than the idee fixe, not quite the leitmotif...

Unintended (Refrains) looks at those recurring motifs we attempt to rid ourselves of but cannot escape.

In this exhibition Sandra Bridie asks numerous artists, writers and others to identify and find visual form for the unintended refrains of their art or lives.

Unintended (Refrains:)

Catherine Evans

Raafat Ishak

Amanda Johnson

Angela Bailey

Sallie Muirden

Penelope Davis

Dena Kahan

James Morrison

Cynthia Troup

Sandra Bridie

Sean Peoples

Sophie Knezic

Martina Copley

Aaron Christopher Rees

Caitlin Cummane

Olivia Koh

Andrew Seward

Curated by Sandra Bridie

GEORGE PATON GALLERY

16-25 September 2015

Second floor, Union House, The University of Melbourne

Catherine Evans



Catherine Evans

Untitled

2015

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

A small composition of objects that have followed me over time and place: a volcanic rock I collected while traveling last year, a drinking straw found in the gutter of my street a few months ago and a photograph of my own back, printed in negative. The abstracted body has recurred in my work for many years. For a while I couldn't let go of the shape of the swan's neck, but now it has slipped lower, pulled by gravity perhaps, to the back. No doubt my focus will continue to slowly shift, but for now the back remains unfinished.

Catherine Evans, response to interview questions

What do you take 'unintended refrains' to be or to mean?

I took an unintended refrain to mean an unconscious motif, arrangement or simply a *thing* that keeps recurring in my artwork. It's unconscious because it happens without my being aware of it until I look back at the works I've made over time. Only then can I see some things reappearing again and again in different ways.

What was your process in selecting your piece for the exhibition? Did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be displayed in the show?

I recently moved overseas and only a small selection of objects from my Melbourne studio followed me. At first I thought the clue to my recurring refrain would lay somehow in this ad-hoc bundle of materials, forms and ideas that for one reason or another I thought important enough at the time to carry with me. I wrote a list:

glass pencil holder

various small rocks collected from different places

jawbone

dolphin ear bones

pink metal pole

broken violin bow (I still don't know why I packed this)

old photographic paper

two large format black and white negatives: one of a back, the other of an armpit

horse tooth

human teeth

small lead kenzan

spirit level

It wasn't until a conversation with Sandie that I started to go through some of the recurring motifs in past artworks and things that I feel are unfinished. These also happen to be the things I am working on currently, drawing on the small collection of objects I brought with me, while also slowly beginning to add to them. Some of the things that came up in our conversation were working between the positive and negative image, abstracted body parts, found rocks, the push and pull between monumental and precarious, and always inevitably for me, death – but not brutally – always with some sense of the poetic (I hope at least).

What is the work or piece you have selected to show and how does this piece represent an Unintended Refrain?

I decided to make a new work for the exhibition, a small arrangement or composition of new and old objects, including a silver gelatin print from one of the large format negatives I brought from Melbourne. It's a photograph of my own back, but printed in the negative it becomes an abstracted constellation of light markings, like stars, across a darker space. Leaning against it is a small volcanic rock balanced on a pink drinking straw. The rock is one of many I collected while travelling last year and the straw I found in the gutter of my street just a few months ago.

It clearly contains many of the materials and motifs that I've already mentioned, but for me, now, the key unintended refrain is the image of the back.

Only after making this selection did I realise that the back first occurred in my work in 2010 in a small print I included in my first solo show, *Swan Song* (which by coincidence was also at George Paton Gallery). It was a photo taken from a family photo album of my father and brother walking away from the camera hand in hand, through the shallow surf of a beach. At the time I had become obsessed with the shape of the swan's neck, which I only realise now while writing is actually an extension of the back, or the other way around, depending on which way you look at it.

It next occurred in 2013 when I appropriated another photo from my family albums, this time a close up photo of my brother's back before he had surgery to remove a large and unusual mole. It was also the first time I consciously juxtaposed the markings of the body against those of a small rock, calling the work *Blemish*.

It wasn't until I made the work *Standing Stone* (2014) that I used the image of my own back, but I never showed the original image, just used it as a map or blue print for the final sculptural installation. This is the first time I've shown the original image.

What does this Unintended Refrain mean to you?

This is a hard question to answer. It's difficult I think for the simple reason that it's unintended, it's *unconscious*. If I take only the back, the most central part of the human body, the part that links all other parts, the part we can't see ourselves without an aid, the part we turn to look the other way, and try to think what it means the first readings feel too simple, too one-dimensional. I think to delve deeper I need to dip more into my unconscious and childhood memories and it starts to feel a bit Freudian. That's not something I think I can do here and now for this public text, for you, the reader, whom I might know or not. Or maybe this is just an excuse because, really, I don't know where the genesis of the back in my work lays at all.

One thing I can say though is that I know these recurring refrains come from the material of life, they are deeply personal. The abstracted body has recurred in my work for many years. For a while I couldn't let go of the shape of the swan's neck, but now it has slipped lower, pulled by gravity perhaps, to the back. No doubt it will continue to slowly shift, but for now the back remains unfinished.

How interesting, useful, perplexing or irritating has this exercise been for you?

The process of identifying a recurring motif in my work and then really examining it through conversation, and writing this text, has been the perfect reason I needed to sit down and look at my practice from a different perspective. Usually one work or project bleeds into the next and it's not often I revisit earlier works in such detail. It feels a bit like I've written an idea inventory, like someone might make a list of things before travelling.

It's been 10 months since I moved overseas and I'm starting to realise that I brought a lot more than this mismatched list of objects with me. These are only the small keys to much larger histories and events that cross the personal to the collective, and dare I say, even the human to the geologic.



Raafat Ishak
Off Season
2015

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

Off Season considers the act of making as an unintended refrain, a habitual enterprise and a specifically prescribed exercise, which addresses and speculates on its programmatic sense of rupture and mourning. Cultural implications aside, the compulsion to make and present are the pervasive traits of a primordial duty of gift and exchange. *Off Season* is derived from the narcissistic structure of its properties. It elucidates its chronological position and addiction to nicotine, an embedded vagary of language, a disposition towards historical lineage and an unmitigated incarceration in symbols of time and place.

Interview with Raafat Ishak by Sandra Bridie, 25 August 2015

Sandie Bridie: What do you take 'unintended refrains' to mean?

Raafat Ishak: I suppose I took it to mean things that one uses, whether in an art practice or just in general – sometimes it is vocabulary, sometimes it is food – but it is a thing, one particular thing that one can't get away from and one doesn't really realise that it is there to begin with until one stops to think about it.

And so, what was your process in selecting a piece for the exhibition, did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be in the show?

Not really, I just happened to be in the process of trying to stop using a particular material that has really been quite present in my practice for a while. I feel like I have been going through that process for a long time as well, but I haven't managed to stop using it. That material is MDF.

It's slightly toxic as a material isn't it?

It is slightly toxic. It is not really nice to cut. I have used it extensively. It does certain things that I am very comfortable with. It has certain personal references that I think are important, but I don't really want the material to control what I make, so I have been very conscious of trying to stop using it or cutting down using it. Though the fact is that every time I set out to doing this I tend to fail to stop using it, so it keeps coming back.

It is like a signature material for you though, isn't it? The actual surface of MDF, I would associate with your work, even though I do have an early canvas work of yours at home.

I think that is partly the problem – I don't want it to be a signature material and I don't want it to be a way to identify my work. All the references there are in MDF in my practice are not about signature and not about identifying a style and a way of working that is unique to me, so I think that is my problem with it. Having said that, I am about to start a couple of really major works in MDF, thinking that maybe this will be the last time.

What would you use instead?

Again it depends on the work, the MDF has been suitable, but not the only appropriate material for certain projects. I think if I were to continue painting I would probably go back to canvas, I would go back to very traditional materials.

Then the works read as paintings more than modules. My sense is that you have sometimes used the MDF panels as sculptural modules.

Yes, but often they are paintings as well, they are just paintings on the wall.

What is your chosen piece?

The three things that came to mind, trying to work out how to use the MDF were; addiction to something, in this case an addiction to tobacco, which I am not addicted to any more because I don't smoke; I make a reference to 'Cigars of the Pharaohs', which is a Tintin book. I think the pharaohs part means being stuck to a certain heritage, and using the MDF means being stuck to a certain material, so it's a certain physical primordial addiction, a physical addiction and also a heritage addiction – combining the three. I am using a painting that I have drawn up but I have not started on MDF, using the reverse side of it, which has a hanging system I have created for the MDF, with the title 'Cigars of the Pharaohs' written backwards. That's my idea at this stage; it's the material and reference to the two types of addiction.

It's interesting, there are a number of people who read the Unintended Refrain as a default; it's not necessarily something that is hidden from them or unconscious that is inserted into their practice over time, it's something they are wanting to desist from but they are finding it difficult. Actually they may find that they accept the default, realising that by identifying the thing they return to out of habit, they can make a choice about whether this is desired or not. 'Refrain' can be the repeat of something, but it can also be desisting from, 'refrain from doing this'. It almost seems contradictory the two meanings, 'stop it' or 'return to it'.

Yeah, and I feel like I am stuck in between, because I do want to stop for two sets of reasons and they are contradictory reasons, which is problematic, but at the same time it's actually a good thing because I don't have to make that decision. I am in a conundrum and I am enjoying that.

But I think that maybe one thing that this project does is that it makes you conscious of those choices and conscious of these things that repeat themselves. It allows you to stand back a little bit from your practice and then you can work out, do I want this thing, or don't I? However useful that is.

So, the next question is: how interesting, useful, irritating or perplexing has this project been for you?

The thing that I found most interesting about this project is, as you just mentioned, it makes you acknowledge certain things that have been quite present in a practice itself that don't get highlighted or acknowledged specifically. I think it is good to step back and make a point to oneself, at least, that this is what you are doing – that when you turn a piece of MDF around and sign it, it takes a certain persona, you attach a certain persona to that material. I suppose I am more interested now in an awareness of what kind of meaning or agency, I suppose, that material is implying.

I just want to ask a final question, with MDF, what is your attachment to it outside of your art practice? As a material, what history does it have for you?

I started using it accidentally, because it was a material that was available at hand. It also coincided with me working in conservation a long, long time ago at the archive.

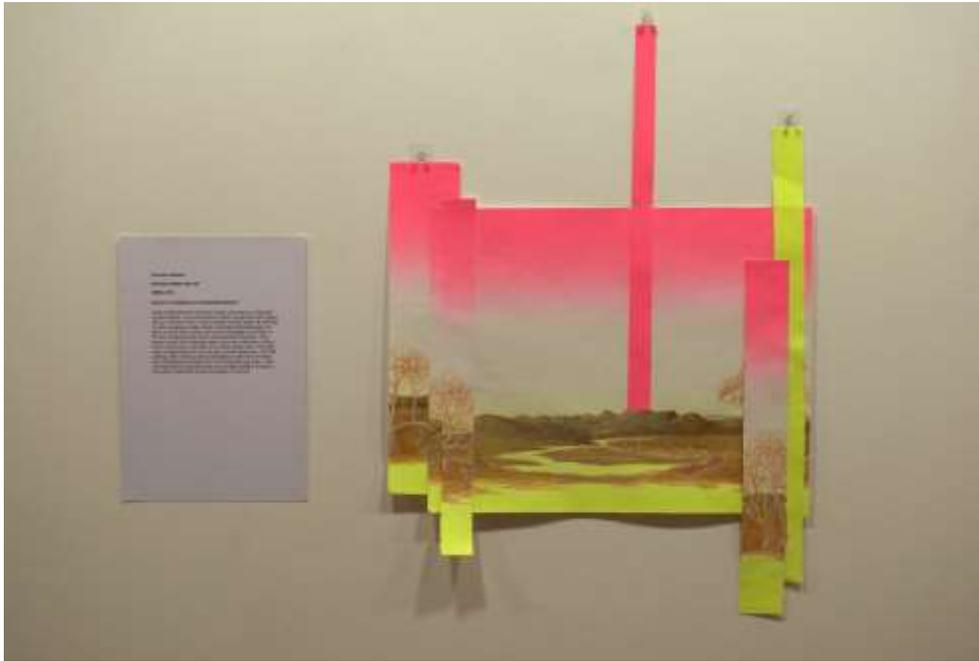
And you used it in art conservation in backing?

No. Conservators stay away from it, so I was trying to utilise materials that were absolute no-nos in conservation. So it was a kind of perversity. The other thing is it became a holistic type of material; it refers to me, it refers to the desert, it refers to sand and it has that coloration that I grew up with.

That's why I think MDF does seem signatred by you and also because it is a writing surface, it's a beautiful surface to write on, as you have done.

Yes. Apart from those references, it is actually a really nice material to work on; it's smooth, it's even, it's hardy and it's also really cheap.

Amanda Johnson



Amanda Johnson

Doorway strips: view out

2009, 2015

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

Strips of landscape and fluorescent strips have been an unintended 'process refrain' in my work since art school, though they don't always end up in the final work. I have hundreds of these strips. My old folios of work in progress contain strips of deconstructed landscapes and strips of colour that I would use to work out/collage visual ideas on the way to making some kind of deromanticised landscape. They always remind me of coloured plastic strips over a doorway, be they over a house entry, a tent flap, or a caravan annex entry. The strips imply a fragmented view out, but also, an interrupted view. The final paintings often ended up being interrupted by some kind of retinal haze (fluorescence overlays) even if the strips get cast away. I have retrieved some of these old strips and put them together to make a new work in which the horizon line wavers, is not sure.

Amanda Johnson response to interview questions

Sandra Bridie: What do you take 'unintended refrains' to be or to mean?

Amanda Johnson: As you say, Sandie, it is not quite a *leitmotif* but something that seems to me to be outwardly born of chance or intuition at a level of process, yet something which maps across consecutive processes/ideas, almost unwittingly. If you look closely at ideas for a show or work (and with the benefit of hindsight) you can see that there are things you may not have included or noticed in the obvious conceptual, material blueprint intended for a work. Yet these 'refrains', be they material or conceptual nuances, are nonetheless often present at a level of process and product.

What was your process in selecting your piece for the exhibition? Did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be displayed in the show?

At first I thought about it in my head. A big mistake! Luckily the interview tape accidentally dissolved (this was 'unintended') so I had a chance to think more deeply and less cerebrally about this theme again. Then I scoured some old folios and looked at remnant process drawings, painted samples to divine what I might have not admitted to my final artists' statements over time. If there were things I left out when describing ideas, process and materiality, etc. why was this so? Simple editorial or an unwillingness to fit things in which didn't neatly fit the overt blueprint of the work? I gathered up bits and pieces of work in progress, which had something in common over time but which were not referred to overtly in any statements of mine.

What is the work or piece you have selected to show and how does this piece represent an Unintended Refrain?

Strips of landscape and fluorescent strips have been an unintended 'process refrain' in my work since art school, though they don't always end up in the final work. I have hundreds of these strips. My old folios of work in progress contain strips of deconstructed landscapes and strips of colour that I would use to work out/collage visual ideas on the way to making some kind of deromanticised landscape. They always remind me of coloured plastic stripes over a doorway, be they over a house entry, a tent flap, or a caravan annexe entry. The strips imply a fragmented view out, but also, an interrupted view. The final paintings often ended up being interrupted by some kind of retinal haze (fluorescence overlays) even if the strips get cast away. I have retrieved some of these old strips and put them together to make a new work in which the horizon line wavers, is not sure. It is a very Australian thing in terms of the landscape quotation usually, but maybe these colours, these broken landscapes feed into some intended themes, helping to suggest subtle warnings about

ecological problems and pull the curtain back on certain cultural, social and political mystifications present in even the loveliest colonial landscapes.

How interesting, useful, perplexing or irritating has this exercise been for you?

It made me think harder about the nuances of process. How they escape us often, even when they are staring you in the face. At first, I think I looked too literally for the unintended. I may have even deceived myself as to what was unintended! Then the accident of having my taped interview deleted gave me a welcome opportunity to think again! To search out some more subtle aspects of creative process over time, which had eluded me or been summarily put to bed. Perhaps I will be a bit kinder to the intuitive side of art making as a result of this process. Thank you Sandie!

Angela Bailey



Angela Bailey
Capture & Pocket
2015

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

I realized in the transition from analogue to digital that increasingly as I take photographs on my phone – immediately and perhaps subconsciously I have developed a habit of ‘collecting’ images – pathways, lines of desire, lines of light for no particular reason or intended further use other than collecting the capture. This perhaps is my unintended refrain...collecting – the capture, the forage, habitually pocketing bits and pieces that serve no particular purpose, creating an archive never to be used...just to flip randomly thru. The stack of photographs here are the most recent in this ‘compulsiveness’. The bits and pieces, a pocketful collection.

Interview with Angela Bailey, 27 August 2015

Sandra Bridie: What do you take 'unintended refrains' to be or to mean?

Angela Bailey: Well I think the first thing that I did when I looked at this blurb properly was that I looked up what the terms meant in the blurb you sent us.

The definitions for idee fixe and leitmotif?

Yes, just to familiarise myself with them so that I wasn't working at a completely different angle. Then I was fixated on the creative, not pathological!

I love the term 'idee fixe' and I use it a lot and I thought that I would use it as a term in the title of this exhibition, but then when I actually looked it up, it defined a type of obsession that I didn't want to link with the work shown, obsessions seen in criminal behaviours, such as stalker or a murderer.

Yes, so that immediately made me think about obsessiveness and that led to something that is recurring. So I was looking at something that is recurring, but is obsessive, that we don't have control over. Is that something that you had imagined?

Everyone has a different approach to it. I was thinking about artists that I had interviewed who may repeatedly use a material, or repeatedly use a motif and when I had asked them about this repetition and what connection it had to them they didn't know what I was talking about. They didn't recognise the thing that reappeared in their work. It was something that they hadn't even thought about, but it was something that was clearly recurring and evident. So then I thought about my own practice and how this un-thought-out recurrence might work in my own practice and it was less evident to me what that thing might be. So then I thought it would be interesting to interrogate other artists regarding this question, what are the repetitions that you don't think the work is about, but somehow they find themselves in there. And here, possibly another observer can actually see these repetitions more clearly than the artist can. So, for some people in the show, I have suggested that they ask someone else to look at their work to see if there was anything they could glean across their body of work to see any patterns there.

Yes, because I was looking back over my work also in relation to some of the projects I was working on, for example. A lot of those bigger commissions were working around housing estates that were in the process of being demolished and the tenants were being relocated. There was that theme of dispossession and demolition, but also that thing of capturing – as well as the stories and the narrative of having lived there and made their home – but also the actual marking on the physical surface that shows life and where someone had been.

It's almost like the markings on a prison wall or a cubby house.

Yes, exactly. So that was something in that work, that I linked with 'pathological' which made me think of as obsessive, which made me think about what I really do like to photograph.

You often forget to think about what you like, actually.

Yes. And made me think about what I like was the ease of taking photographs on my mobile phone. I have almost gone to collecting those images, rather than necessarily featuring them as part of a project or exhibition. It's almost like a transfer of collecting – it's like I see markings or I see a trace and I think 'Ooh, I will take a photo of that!' Then it is in the system, I have got it.

So you don't need to make a work of it?

No, not necessarily – it's a bit odd!

So the next question is what was your process in selecting your piece for the exhibition and did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be in the show?

I have been thinking around the idea of two of those things; traces and collecting. The collecting one, I think is something that unfortunately I have inherited from family background.

So you have lots of collections?

Lots of things that turn into collections; weird things that you just put in a jar and feature that way, things that you have just sort of kept.

So a digital archive takes up much less space, doesn't it?

Exactly, so with digital, taking photos with a phone, I will take shots of those little tracks; 'lines of desire' that you find on the landscape where people have made their own pathways to get somewhere and not followed the landscaped, concrete path. That's something I love, when I come across one of those I will take a photo. In the urban environment now, everything is landscaped; you are always told which way to walk, which way to navigate your way through somewhere, but people still find their own way to side-track and cut paths and things.

I notice that even in the new landscaping outside the new Architecture and Design building on campus here. It is so clear what you should and shouldn't do, but students still make new paths.

Did you find any of that on the Camino?

There were often different tracks and you could get lost pretty easily if you took your own tracks. But some of these tracks that have been walked on over at least a

millennium were so narrow, so it was kind of the opposite, I was thinking, how can this be when so many thousands – millions have walked along here?

Were they sunken?

Some of them were, but it was more as you made your way to Santiago, where there were the really old original tracks through woodland and so forth, it was leafy underfoot and you could walk as if in a dream, like you were floating. I think someone who wrote on it talks about desire lines, that you have some otherly volition when walking along these paths to Santiago, as if you were drawn along. So, anyway, that's beside the point of this interview!

Yes, so that's where I am leading at the minute – how to potentially show some of these digital traces, or showing some of a collection.

A physical collection, or both? Are they two different things – do you see them as something to choose between?

Potentially. The collection idea is not necessarily a 'collection'; it is like things. It's like piles of things that should be categorised into something, but they are not.

And they are just waiting for their moment...

They are just waiting.

So, did you go through a process to arrive at this? Did you worry about the question or start off thinking –

No, I guess I was thinking about it being in relation to the visual form or dimension there in the initial blurb. So I was thinking about how best to visualise what exists rather than making a new work – going back through a digital archive, drawing out some of those images that show that fixation. So I guess I have looked at it as a fixation of what I continue to take photographs of.

That without having been asked the question and without going back and looking at what you do take photos of you wouldn't have been quite so aware of.

Essentially. I have become aware of the way that I collect images – it is not necessarily collecting and collating. I am collecting them without knowing if I am going to show them as such, or ever do anything with them.

So it's a way of noting things.

Yeah. Like there's this photograph of this tree that this guy would decorate each Christmas in his front yard and before everything started becoming all very electrical as far as decorating. He would just do these really simple decorations and tinsel in the tree, every single year exactly the same. I would photograph this every Christmas and I did it for about fifteen years.

We have seen photos of this haven't we?

Yeah, so with that sort of collecting.

And recording it because maybe he hasn't. I think the fun is in the doing of it.

Yeah, and I think that attitude stems from – this is what this project made me think about – like some of the housing estate projects where essentially that might have started – other people's ways of marking the environment and also what people leave behind. When they left the flats and were relocated they didn't need to move out everything, it was not like there was a bond or anything it was all going to be demolished so it was just seeing what people left.

So what is the work or piece that you will show – it sounds like you haven't determined that? I think you have answered how this might represent an unintended refrain, but if you were to show the photos, what kind of format would that be? Would it be a digital format or would it be prints?

I have thought about that in terms of potentially creating one print, but if you imagine that you pulled out a drawer in a collecting institution, that had little boxes and things and then you push back the drawer again. So I have looked at the idea of a print that looks like you imagine if you pulled out a drawer and the pictures were in there. I have also looked at the idea of doing the prints small and you could just shuffle through them like swap cards. Like a physical version of how you shuffle through things on a phone. Or else one of my fabulous heaps of things – I just thought of bringing in a whole pile of things.

Things of a certain category of a kind of likeness to one another?

Yeah, in a box or in a little bowl. So they are the three options I have thought of.

And the final question is, how interesting, useful, perplexing and/or irritating has this exercise been for you?

Not irritating, Sandie! What is interesting about it has been reflecting, you don't always ask yourself why, sometimes when you end up with a body of work. Or you know why you might have started something, but then when you look back you see a lot of threads that you were not aware of. I have been conscious of the photograph collecting, which is nothing new, but for me it has become more apparent in the last few years.

Since you got an iPhone with a certain amount of storage on it?

Yeah, potentially. I know that with the software and the digital you do get lazy, you get really lazy.

You take many more photos than you need and you don't edit them.

Yeah, though on a photographic job or something I will edit them, but still the time that you spend on the computer far outweighs the time that you shoot. The separation from that initial technique and craft of photography has changed and so that mindset eventually goes.

So the project helped you to reflect on that difference?

Yeah, and also I think that maybe the idea that I like about collecting is I don't feel the pressure of every photograph needs to speak, or something.

You can make sense of that later.

Yeah, because it is probably more calming that way than knowing that I have to choose something down the track in front of the computer. I am not going to go all analogue, but I do miss that nice calmness of being in the darkroom.

And having a proof sheet and circling the ones that you will use, the physical process that is involved.

Sallie Muirden



Sallie Muirden

The Cloth, the Wimple, the Scarf

Reason these works constitute an Unintended Refrain

Each of the central characters in my three novels is depicted in the cover images below. What do those images have in common?

Yes, you noticed. The female in each cover is clutching at a piece of fabric: a cloth, a wimple or a scarf. Why the repetition? Is this a stylistic convention of the historical romance genre? Does it indicate the book designer lacked imagination? Can we assume anything about each of the female characters by their attachment to cloth? When I realised the evident pattern my heart sank. The superb cover of *A Woman of Seville* (2009) featured another heroine tugging on fabric, another deferral to feminine wiles or apparel. And with the scarf in *A Woman of Seville* one thought immediately of the tragic Isadora Duncan.

A repetitive tic was apparent, yes, but was it intended or unintended? After all I spent about twelve years thinking up narratives for the very different heroines — Maria Teresa, Marie-France and Paula — to act out in their roles as unhappy princess, nun and courtesan.

You'd assume I knew what I was doing.

As a creator of historical fiction the inhibited, closeted protagonist has been my domain, along with their struggle or part metamorphosis. Yet I have increasingly yearned to construct post-feminist, contemporary women who have modern sensibilities and greater control over their destinies. My favourite fictional characters are the well-earthed, sagacious, independent women/girls who walk unimpeded, though not unscathed, through the novels of Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing and Carson McCullers. Suffice to say the virginal cloth, the suffocating wimple, the seductive scarf have been expunged from their wardrobes for good!

Interview with Sallie Muirden

What do you take 'unintended refrains' to be or to mean?

Something that you repeat over and over...a refrain...without consciously setting out to do so...for example a person who always ends up writing in the voice of a child when they wanted to write in an adult voice...conscious versus unconscious drives are at work.

What was your process in selecting your piece for the exhibition? Did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be shown in the show?

I came to this idea pretty quickly, however I did consider another related Unintended Refrain being my tendency to write in the historical past, after I've started out trying to write a more contemporary novel. That is also true of the example I've chosen, but I wanted to use the visual images in the covers to illustrate what I meant.

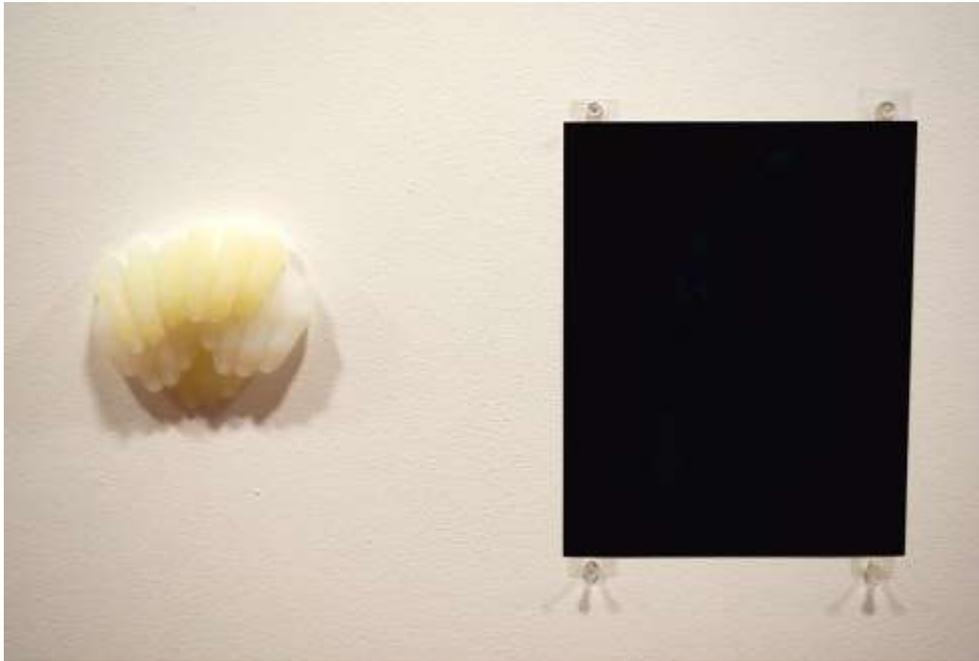
How does your chosen piece represent an Unintended Refrain?

One can see that there is a bit of a pattern operating in the covers with the female characters grabbing at a piece of cloth. And as a novelist one doesn't want to repeat oneself; one wants each book to do new things. It is a visual repetition primarily. My concern is that it suggests that my novels are operating at the level of genre romance...whereas I wanted my history to be postmodern and postfeminist and questioning some of the feminine roles that are foregrounded in the stories. Covers always simplify a novel's sprawling meaning, so that is partly to be expected. I agreed to all the covers, as I felt they captured the essence of each novel.

How interesting, useful or perplexing has this exercise been for you?

The interesting question that has arisen for me is why do I keep writing unliberated, naïve, trapped female characters when I'd like to write liberated knowing contemporary characters, and how much do the compromised restricted females reflect who I am as a person? Obviously there's a loose relationship between each character and myself. However it may just be that I like to write about the past, that I need some imaginative distance between myself and my artistic reality in order to express myself freely. Degas loved to paint ballet dancers...it was his passion...so we should let artists follow their whims even if they keep repeating themselves.

Penelope Davis



Penelope Davis

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

As an artist, I have a default button that consistently resets itself to 'haptic' processes. Photography can instantly record due to its largely mechanical and automated production. Yet in spite of all attempts to streamline or hasten things towards an outcome, I find myself (often against my better judgement) getting caught up in slow, hand-made techniques that make the whole process ridiculously inefficient. I arrest those aspects of photography's immediacy and transform them into something quite contrary to their nature, the haptic rather than the distant and visual. Perhaps I don't have the confidence to commit to any singular expert sweeping gesture, or maybe I just find it comforting to pick away at something endlessly through a number of time-consuming (often inexpert) steps. Or maybe, making things simply requires detailed, procedural engagement with the materiality of the world.

Interview with Penelope Davis, 18 August 2015

Sandie Bridie: Penny, what sort of process did you go through to decide what you would choose to exhibit in 'Unintended Refrains'?

Penelope Davis: Now I started thinking, when I read your email, what you might mean by 'Unintended Refrains', what sort of image you might have, in terms of an exhibition outcome? I wasn't quite sure, so I thought; I will see where this takes me, what it means for me. I started to think of processes or techniques that I might default to in my art practice for better or worse or against my better judgement.

Processes you unconsciously return to?

Yes. I started to think about various things that I do and I tried to work out what I thought were considered actions in my practice and ones that were less considered and were more fall-back or default processes. The one that I kept on going back to in my mind and that I keep coming back to all the time in my practice is what I call my 'haptic process'.

What do you mean by 'haptic process'? It sounds like it is quite a large or overriding aspect of your practice.

It's not large; it's quite small actually. Haptic is 'of the hand' – hand made, and I always fall back on those sort of hand made processes, compared to mechanical processes or using new technologies or outsourcing aspects of my work to skilled technicians.

And utilising these other modes is a consideration you are aware of that you have had for making work?

I often think; gosh, why am I doing this incredibly labour intensive studio practice? It just seems to build and build and build. I will start with something and then think; what if I try that? Which is always some sort of handmade process. It's labour intensive, it takes an awfully long time and I know that I quite enjoy doing it, but I also feel trapped by it.

But you wouldn't be able to think through the process if you weren't actually making it yourself.

Probably not, but I don't know if this makes sense, but sometimes I think if I just thought large or thought grand or strategically and I thought; ok, how might I achieve this?

If you worked back mentally from the end point?

Yes, rather than start and work from that. It really is a default – when I was thinking about this, I thought often I find that I frustrate myself with it, but I think actually

that I have probably been doing this for long enough, that this is just the way that I work.

And so was the question useful for you, to stand back from your practice and look at something that is overriding in it that you might want to cerebrally wish to resist or change? Or wasn't this necessarily a new insight?

I have probably always been conscious of it, but I actually had to think about it critically.

It is just your native way of working.

At the moment I am making more of these jellyfish objects – they are getting more and more elaborate and bigger and bigger. The sewing involved, honestly, I often have people giving me suggestions about what I should do in terms of using 3D printers and outsourcing jobs to other people. As soon as they start talking to me about this stuff I have, like, a bristling resistance to it.

It's like someone asking to help you in the kitchen and you have to stand back from your process to be able to instruct them – it required standing outside of your work to instruct others, which can take its own time.

Yeah, and I think the whole haptic, crafted thing is possibly not that fashionable at the moment.

Oh, if you are using latex - that brings it up to the present doesn't it?

Moulding and casting and all of that sort of stuff, which is what I have always done; it's really old fashioned and, dare I say it, a bit daggy, but it is where I find myself. It is my default and I was also thinking about this further Sandie, I don't want this to sound sentimental, but my father used his hands all the time in his work.

That was my instant connection as well; there is a sculpting tradition in your family. What kind of object are you thinking you will show to represent this idea – or did you want to say anything further on the default of the handmade?

No, no, I don't want to say anything further or I think I will tie myself up in knots, that this haptic thing is more considered than it is! I guess it is considered now, because I have particular skills. So the object; I was thinking what could it be? A needle and thread, that's too clichéd, and not one of my objects.

So you are thinking of showing an object rather than a work?

I have brought it along actually; I need to assemble it and it's really silly. Quite a few years ago I cast in silicone some of my fingers and they have just been hanging about my studios and home. They are quite creepy, nasty looking things but I thought, oh well, I would just put my fingers in the show. (Penelope brings out the cast fingers from their wrapping). They are not art objects really... I look at them and I think,

yeah, they are my fingers, I recognise my hands. So I think I will stick some of them together and attach them to the wall with a pin or a hook on the wall. They can just sit on the white wall.

Dena Kahan



Dena Kahan

Unintended refrains presented a real challenge: how to identify a motif that you don't even know is present in your work? I found this very difficult. The solution was to ask other people. However, the ideas/themes they suggested were ones of which I was already aware and had intended.

This is what I came up with:

- Looking over many years work, the unintended refrain was that of mortality. It is latent in images of fragility and of nature, which have been conscious themes.
- My mark – the way I draw and paint are the true unconscious element in my work. I aim for my images to look a certain way, but the actual application of the media shows a personal handwriting that is invisible to me when I am working, and often for a considerable time after the making of the work. I think this personal handwriting is most evident in my drawings.

Interview with Dena Kahan, 27 August 2015

Sandra Bridie: What do you take 'unintended refrains' to be or to mean?

Dena Kahan: I take it to mean ideas or images or patterns in my work that I have not consciously intended.

What was your process in selecting your piece for the exhibition and did you go through a series of options to arrive at what will be in the show?

I did go through a few options, I rethought things after meeting with you, but I ended up coming back to the same idea that I had at the beginning.

Can you talk about the ideas that you eliminated?

I guess I've come to two ideas, which I had early on and there was a third that I eliminated. I did think about the idea of style and handwriting of the artist; that the mark that you make is, at a very basic level, something that you do not have control over. Your style is something that you can't see, it's invisible to you but is visible to other viewers. I remember at art school that I used to think that all the images I did were very different, but my friends would say, 'Oh no, they are obviously all yours'. I couldn't see the connecting thread, which probably was style in my handwriting as a painter, or as a drawer. I think drawing is the most naked medium, it's so immediate, it's probably where your handwriting is most visible.

Could you say what is distinctive about your drawing, what are features that you can recognise in it?

The thing is, I couldn't actually describe it because I think it is almost indescribable, sometimes I can see it and sometimes I can't. It is just something about my personality that is in there – I don't know how I would describe it, I don't think it is particularly stylised - if I try to draw something representational from life it still has my mark making, so it is something that is really intangible, for me.

So, was there a series of objects that you thought about for the exhibition during this process of thinking about what the unintended refrain was?

I thought about, when you first proposed the idea I was going away for an art residency and on that residency I did a lot of drawing, something I normally don't have a lot of time to do just for its own sake. I was drawing things that were in the environment around me and I noticed I was drawing a lot of dead things. I was in the countryside, so a lot of dead plants and dead birds. It was the height of summer and everything was very dry, because the other idea I had about an unintended refrain was that in all my work, and something that I did not necessarily aim for, but really you could see the idea of mortality, as a kind of latent theme, it wasn't at the top of my mind when I made the work. So the two ideas of the drawing and the dead things

came together! Usually the things that I paint are not dead things, but the idea of death is in the work and these drawings brought up this idea about mortality – I had thought that I could put in a broken glass because I paint glass a lot and it's a very fragile thing and so you could see it as symbol of mortality. So I thought it could be a glass vessel or it could be one of these drawings of something dead.

So what is the piece that you are putting in the show and how would you say it represents an unintended refrain?

I tried to pick something that encompassed both those ideas of the handwriting and the mortality, it may be too obvious; it's a drawing of a dead bird.

Simple is good if it encapsulates your ideas. The next question is how useful, interesting, perplexing or irritating has this exercise been for you? Was it a new idea, the idea of mortality and the mark?

I think I have always been conscious of that, perhaps because I teach art as well, the idea of style and how it is something that happens in spite of yourself. It is not something that my work is about but I have always been conscious that style is something unintentional at the deepest level.

Something that you can't get away from.

Exactly, and so I tell my students, 'Style is something you do in spite of yourself', when they say that they are trying to make their own style. It's an unintended refrain in everybody's work perhaps, except if your work is manufactured by somebody and then your handwriting is not there anymore. I hadn't really thought about that in relation to my work, but obviously if you have themes of transience and fragility; if you look at the images someone could easily interpret that into the work but it wasn't conscious. The things I was more interested in were desire and the impossibility of perfection, not as melancholic as that but perfection is something that's unobtainable. Control and things like that are things we all strive for and they are completely impossible. Looking at the images, I could see that although it was something that was not intended it was something that almost as an outsider I could read into that work if I wanted to.

Especially as it was recent and you haven't drawn for a while, so I imagine that could have been interesting to look at the recent work.

Yes, it made something obvious that was perhaps less obvious than the paintings I have been making that are based on glass models, botanical models of plants.

So your paintings are representations of representations.

They are, but they are also about preserving something, permanence and impermanence and they are symbols of both mortality and of immortality.

I find them elusive as well, your eyes slip across the surface and you are creating a confusing space, but in fact your drawings are very intact, simple and concrete. Have you thought that?

No, I didn't think about that. When I paint, the drawing is the underdrawing, just a stepping-stone to map out the painting.

It's schematic.

Whereas when I draw from life – plus the initial drawing for the paintings is straight onto the canvas and is done from a photograph. It's something that is blown up from something very tiny to very big.

You are creating perplexing space.

I am creating an unreal space. When I draw from life – in a way it is not typical of my work, the drawing, so I don't know if it is an appropriate thing to put in, but it is symbolic rather than typical. When I draw from life the tension between style and subject, because you are trying to represent something that is actual, as it looks, but your style is still your style. In a way there is more tension between the subject and the technique. When I am creating a more imaginative work, perhaps there is not that tension because the drawing is a servant to a style that is more dominant. Does that make sense?

I think you are talking about the surface with your paintings whereas you are talking about the object in the two small instances of drawings that you sent me.

James Morrison



James Morrison

Upego

2015

Reason these objects constitute an Unintended Refrain

This drawing is an intended refrain continuing on from a long unintended refrain of using images of my father in my work. Ever since I was fifteen and started wanting to be an artist I have either used a copy from photographs or included him in another guise. I started to draw or paint him from memory and then he has taken on a new guise but in my mind still my father. In most of my work I operate with a cast of characters, either based on people around me, friends or someone I have read about. In amongst this, my father has generally operated, I think, as a kind of moral compass, to balance out the other characters in the work. Because the photos are of a time the image can look wooden, like a relic that is the likenesses of him taken from photos, whereas when he has new guises and I am using a memory, his character is still living.

Interview with James Morrison, 20 August 2015

Sandie Bridie: Now James, what do you take 'unintended refrains' to be or to mean?

James Morrison: Well I must admit that I had never really thought about it until I heard from you, so it was a completely unknown quantity.

I made it up (laughs). It is not a phenomenon!

It will be from now on, I will be very conscious of it.

What did you understand me to mean by 'Unintended Refrains'?

I guess aspects that keep popping up – not in every work you do – but that keep popping up without you realising it, or something that you keep falling back on, something that you use very unconsciously.

And that you are not aware of yourself doing and that you are not aware of being there in your work, in a way.

Of course you are conscious of using it, but it's not uppermost in your mind – it is not part of the conscious content.

What was the process for you to select something for the exhibition, were there a number of options that you went through?

Yeah, I did go through quite a few options and most of them were things that just kept popping up that were kind of obvious and not particularly interesting. They are 'crutches'; I suppose you could call them.

What kinds of things?

Botanical things; such things that recur in my work.

So things that a viewer would observe if they saw two exhibitions of yours, they might think, 'this is James's style', the kind of subject matter that he uses a lot.

What then is the piece that you have chosen to exhibit?

It's funny I used to consciously use images of my father in my work, for a long time. I think he still does appear, but it is almost diluted now.

Because your father died when you were younger didn't he? What age were you?

Eleven. Even when I was at the VCA I used to manage to paint him into paintings and do drawings with him in them.

So it was a way of remembering him?

I guess so, I am not really sure. I haven't really analysed it as such, but I guess it was.

And so you have not put him into your work for a while?

Well, funnily enough about a year ago, somebody in the family was visiting my home, she was talking about my dad and said, 'Oh, have you got a photograph of

your dad?' And I said 'Yeah, I have got a few, but they are just packed away in a drawer somewhere', but I couldn't find them.

They were well packed away.

Then she started saying, 'Well you should have them out. You should have a photo of your dad around the house, for your daughter.' Then I started thinking how I used to actually use them in my work. Then I did get a photo out and I thought now, well, I will bring him back into the work more as an actual image.

So you probably consciously first and then less consciously used his image earlier on in your work and now you are wanting to revisit that and consciously insert him into your work as a kind of 'intended refrain'.

Sort of to pick up the thread, I guess.

So how interesting, useful or perplexing has the process been for you?

It's fantastically useful; I was really thrilled to get the invitation. It took me awhile to get my head around what an unintended refrain was.

Good. I like to ask difficult questions.

I tried to Google it and then it just hit me.

Yep, it is not there.

I thought, 'wow! That is it, it is an Unintended Refrain.'

Yes, it is of itself. I may even have coined the phrase, who knows?

I am wondering whether the reviewing of your work went from a superficial level to something a little deeper. Or looking at content or motifs that are more evident on the surface and used over a long period of time to requiring you to sift through and go back in time to find something that had a bit of gravitas, or was useful and meaningful to you rather than just an easy solution. Or in fact, did you quickly decide what you wanted to focus on?

I did quickly come to it; it was almost something that was on the tip of my tongue. It just slotted in very quickly.

So, aside from this project, you had been thinking about reinserting an image of your father into your work. And so this is an opportunity to talk about it.

Yeah.

And how is the image of your father inserting itself into your work now?

At the moment? It hasn't really happened as yet. It probably will go back to how I used to do it with just a figure somewhere, quite literally.

Based on a photograph?

Cynthia Troup



Cynthia Troup

Child's hand-painted china tea set

... new in the early 1970s

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

This china tea set was my toy during the first six or seven years of childhood. With its tiny milk jug, matching saucers and cake plates, the set has miraculously remained almost complete, surviving now many changes of address and circumstance. For this exhibition it represents the unintended refrain of the female child—a figure that surfaces variously but insistently in my creative writing of the past twelve years. She can be unruly. She can be elusive. Yet I notice that she's usually evoked with compassion.

Certainly I feel a tenderness when contemplating the tea set and the strictures of feminine propriety that it can be said to reflect—in its material, in the delicacy of floral decoration, in its domestic, relational function Sometimes the girl-child appears in my works as part of a dyad; as a sister, a daughter. She's in attendance, implicitly, wherever fairy tale and rhyme are at play. In my most recently completed work, the script *Undercoat: A Parafoxical Tale*, she seems most present in the question, 'How is it possible not to love that which has saved your life?'

Interview with Cynthia Troup, 24 August 2015

Sandie Bridie: What do you take 'unintended refrains' to mean?

Cynthia Troup: I take it to mean some kind of recurrency in the creative work that is quite clear upon reflection or upon investigation but in amidst the creative process isn't necessarily conscious as a chosen theme or motif. In a sense, the opportunity you have created through your curatorial vision for this show has been that of alerting me to the value of reflecting on a body of creative work from quite a deeply personal perspective and tuning in to what I can see are quite a number of unintended refrains.

What was your process in selecting a piece for this exhibition and did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be in the show?

To answer the second part of your question first, I really just settled upon the second idea that I had for selecting the piece to represent the unintended refrain that I have chosen to share as part of the exhibition. I guess to come back to the question of the process, it didn't really take me long to choose the unintended refrain that I wanted to address.

So it was quite easy for you to step back from your process and projects and glean across them to decide?

When you sent around the email of invitation I had been reflecting on something, not connected with my creative work but something more broadly in life, and it just entered my mind straight away as something I would look at as a possible unintended refrain. The fact that it was so spontaneously there in connection with your proposal meant that I haven't left that idea behind. So for me, the unintended refrain is the figure of a child, in some way, through many, many different works of creative writing.

Is it the fleeting glimpse of a child or the fact that often the child is the subject of the work, the protagonist?

That's very interesting, because I was going to say, in the libretto of the chamber opera called 'Turbulence', my strong decision about the work, in the spirit of being clear about the nature of chamber opera writing and its small scale aspiration to operatic intensity, was to choose and foreground the dynamic of the relationship between a mother and a daughter. In the libretto it is quite clear that the daughter is entering adulthood, so she is at that spikey age, somewhere between seventeen and nineteen, or so. But within the opera overall, there is this strong sonic motif of a small baby and the musicological and dramatic climax, in some senses, of the whole opera itself, focuses on imagery of the baby as sung and evoked by the mother

figure. So it would seem to an outsider - having decided to foreground the dynamic of the relationship between a mother and a daughter - it is quite clear there is a child there, but I was so consciously focussed on having a sense of that dynamic, the dyad, that I wasn't really as clear and appreciative of the importance of the figure of the child itself.

And the child is always a female, in your mind?

Yes, indeed through all of the iterations of the unintended refrain that I have managed to identify in my creative work.

In fact all of your characters would be female, without exception.

Without exception, thinking on my feet, I think you are correct.

Another unintended refrain!

Erring on the side of the feminine or female. It is interesting, because one might imagine that an unintended refrain might be deeply subterranean, but in this case, for me, it is still interesting to look at something that is quite obviously on the surface, but not something that I was placing there in conversation with previous works. I do have a strong sense now, as a result of this process that the child figure is constantly in conversation across my oeuvre.

Would you say that they are versions of you?

A wonderful question that you actually put to me the other day while we were speaking about this project - they are inevitably versions of myself as remembered or as brought into relationship with my evolving adult self, but again, consciously I would say that often there is a naming of the child as a sister figure and/or as a fairy tale figure. There is a very blurred line between that evolving sense of my adult self in relation to my personal past and the way in which I work with the vast narrative heritage connected with childhood, because I would say a connected unintended refrain is often my recourse into the world of fairy tales and nursery rhymes and so on. You can see that very clearly in 'A Quarrelling Pair' that is part of that triptych 'And then they were good', but even indeed in the most recent work, 'Undercoat' there is a really self-conscious recourse to the whole literary and fairy tale heritage of the fox there and an adult knowing or half knowing playfulness around that language.

And the other three characters are in fact male in 'Undercoat,' as I read it at least.

I think I have left it ambiguous in terms of the prescriptive aspects of the introduction to the performance, but actually in its first iteration, which will take place at 'Explorations' later this year, we will have an all female cast. Mind you, I

have certainly thought of aspects of 'Undercoat' in the spirit of pantomime in the very old fashioned sense.

What is your chosen piece and how does this represent an unintended refrain?

Just to bring to conclusion my response to your last question, I had thought originally of a photograph of myself as a child – that was an obvious thing, but in a way, I thought that was too literal and too obvious and also too self-referential. I like to think that this motif or this unintended refrain of the child is always shape-shifting as my imaginative and emotional relationship with her transforms and that felt too literal.

In responses by participants to this question, a familial figure often seems to be at the root of what they are looking at, sometimes it is more conscious than others, but at one point I was thinking that the exhibition might comprise a series of photographs of figures from people's families.

I had an image of the gallery and the text on the wall and then a photograph on the wall, and then I thought; there needs to be more texture, something that has more symbolic and evocative power. As I mentioned, what I have offered to the exhibition is this very, very beautiful, very fine children's china tea set that in spite of my having moved many times in my adult life and downsized many times to divest myself of many, many possessions, many, many vestiges of childhood, miraculously this nearly intact doll's china tea set has remained with me and is nestling lovingly wrapped in paper in a shoebox tied with a little ribbon. When I confront that with the few boxes that remain with me from my possessions from previous existences, there's a kind of poignancy about it. As you said, the mere fact the tea set even survived my childhood almost intact definitely betrays something about my childhood self as one who was extremely earnest to please, morally fixated on behaving well and learning correctness, learning etiquette. Whilst I can't actually remember any doll's tea party per se, I can never recollect playing in a really chaotic way.

Did you play with your sister with it?

I played with my younger sister with it.

There's a sense of it being something that you would play with with friends and it is very feminine, the sense that the giver is prescribing an image of what a girl should be.

Yes. Look, it's got pink flowers hand painted on it; it's such a beautiful thing. Funnily enough, I have a residual loathing of anything ballet pink in my adult life. So yes, it is very feminine and the imagined behaviours around that sort of toy are very feminine. I think it's about an education in a certain set of drawing room values. So

there is something quite poignant about recollecting the way in which I know I would have tried to meet the task, what I was internalising about the tea set and how to play properly with it.

Cynthia, you are ten years younger than I am, but I would never have been given something like this tea set, because my brothers would probably break it, but I doubt I would have played with it, either. It is an interesting projection of femininity onto a child. I am sure those projections were cast onto me but not in that way, nor to presume that degree of delicacy of behaviour.

The only footnote I would add to our conversation, which is such a lovely little foray into this whole Pandora's box, is because I was the middle child living at home with my two parents, whenever we did play a game between the three of us, and that was only for a short period before my older sister stepped back from the three part dynamic quite early, but when I recollect the games that we played as a threesome, it always fell to me to play the part of the boy. My boy's name in those games, which we played in a cubby house, the rules of the game were always set by my sister, but the boy's name that I took was Charles, so I had a sort of flaky alter ego within that three part dynamic of girlish play as Charles and I would wear trousers and I would try and meet that role by being tough and boyish, as distinct from my younger sister, who would play the baby and my older sister would play the mother figure. It's a kind of interesting tension between myself as owner and protector of this precious tea set and what we have now inferred it to represent and what, in practice, I was trying to role-play.

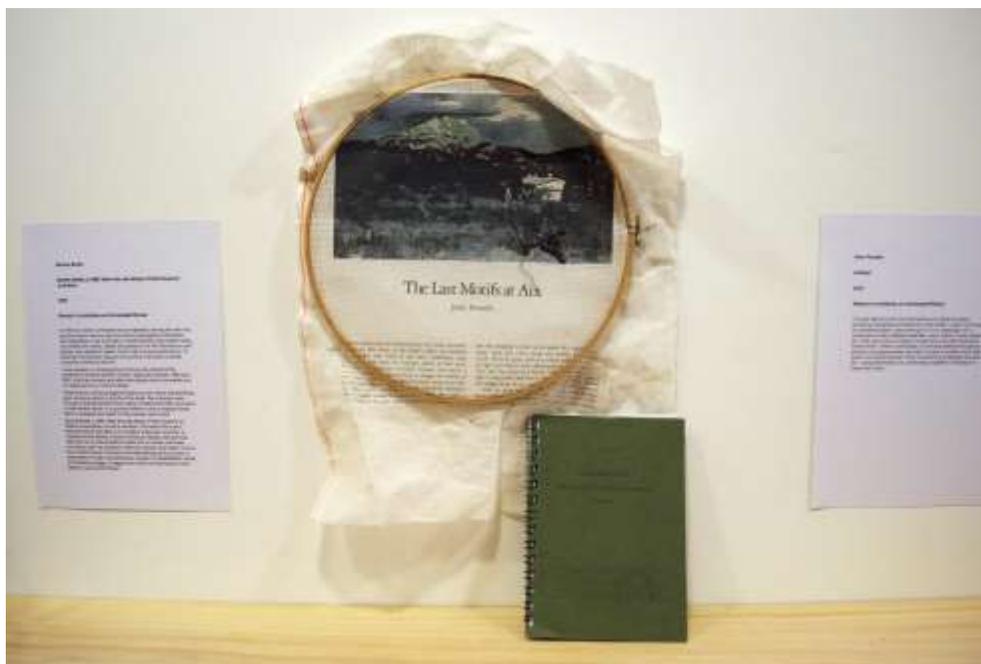
The final question asks about the value of this project – how interesting, useful, perplexing or annoying has this exercise been for you?

It has been deeply interesting and useful. I think you have given a beautiful name-phrase to something that is wonderfully revealing to attune oneself to as feeling a connection – a growthful connection to with one's creative practice, as I mentioned and probably what you have heard from nearly everyone involved in *Unintended Refrains*. Once there is an attunement toward an unintended refrain and once there is an interest, there are many possible ways into that from the more obvious to the much subtler. I think it is a hugely valuable process, I think it is a wonderful proposition for an exhibition. I think it is slightly dangerous, in my experience and scary, in the sense that if I think too much about that and start to create rules around rejecting the unintended refrain that might continue to serve you, it has got that danger around it of turning into a means of self-censorship, which is important to be aware of at any stage of the creative process.

You could also suspect there is a touch of pop psychology operating there –

- And making, in my case, all of my written work some kind of more or less obvious expression of some unresolved self-referential narrative relating past to present, which I strongly like to think that imagination and creative practice transform one's own experience also, to oneself and for oneself, they are a means of reinventing our present and our future selves. So, I wouldn't want to get too attached to looking for the unintended refrain as a way of cultivating a relationship with my oeuvre, but I guess what mostly surprised me when I spontaneously hit upon this figure of the child was just how present she is and also varied she is. The final thing I would say is that mostly with all the iterations that I have noted, there is a tenderness around that image and I guess that, in principle, I find that quite positive.

Sandra Bridie



Sandra Bridie

Sandra Bridie, b.1965 'After the Late Works of Paul Cezanne' (a fiction)

1999

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

In 1990 my mother contracted viral encephalitis, leaving her with long and short-term memory loss and without geographical orientation. Her rehabilitation was a process of relearning daily and creative tasks, and indeed the events, places and people in her life. Formerly an avid painter, she needed to relearn how to use oils and watercolours. To reconnect emotionally required re-inputting memories via others accounts of events in her life.

I have realised, on reviewing the structure and content of the narratives of fictional artists I created, especially between 1996 and 2007, that they formally and often thematically mirror the events and my response to my mother's illness.

These fictions, whose protagonist bears my own name, Sandra Bridie, each involve a rupture in the life of the artist. The character goes through a striking transition from being confident and often successful in their artistic career, to a juncture where a crisis or malaise forces them to reassess their belief in their vocation as an artist.

Sandra Bridie, b.1965 'After the Late Works of Paul Cezanne' (a fiction) is exemplary of such a narrative. The artist's life is split between before and after a car accident where she, as driver, is culpable for the deaths of three individuals. Ridden with guilt and deprived her of manual ability to paint due to injuries, she loses connection with her vocation's meaning. Sandra must relearn how to be an artist through the painful and painstakingly slow process of embroidery through a physiotherapy program in rehabilitation; slowly embroidering images of pages from a book on Paul Cezanne onto tapestry canvas with thread.

Interview with Sandra Bridie by Cynthia Troup, 27 August 2015

Cynthia Troup: What do you take 'unintended refrains' to be or to mean?

Sandra Bridie: For myself, I took it to mean motifs that are present in an artist's practice – my practice, that are repeated, but that I am not aware that I am inserting into the practice. Things that I think the work is not about, but on reflection I see that is what the work may be about. Things that I think maybe I sought out in some other realm of my existence, such as personal relationships, interests, etc. that art is not privy to, I find manifest through a repetition or a pervasiveness in my practice.

And when you are reflecting on your practice, is that over the last thirty years, or the past decade?

I am thinking over the last twenty-five years and of observing recurrences that you can only see retrospectively. I always think that I am pretty aware of the subtext of my work within the fictions that I create, my personal subtext that I am not making available to the viewer, even the subtext within the fictions – there is a reason why I am making these works, then within the fiction the viewer can see things that the fictional protagonist/the artist is unconscious of, if you see what I mean. There are two levels of meaning.

So you are talking about layers of intentionality and then a retrospective discovery of something unintentionally present, as well.

There is something that I was unaware that I was making known.

What was your process in selecting a piece for the exhibition, and connected with that, did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be displayed in the show?

Not necessarily that I went through this process of selecting, but there was an object related to a physiological effect that is manifest in my work that would have been a nice obvious thing to talk about, that would be a pair of glasses. This would link into the idea of my fictional walking artists who walk in the shape of infinity. This connection goes back to the eye exercises I did as a small child where I was instructed to follow with my eyes a hand Sooty puppet held by the ophthalmologist, who was treating me for a squint in my eyes. I had these eye operations from the age of two to correct a crooked eye and wore glasses from that age. Therefore the form of the frame of glasses, two joined ellipses, has been something I am very interested in. In a way, I am more interested in the frame itself to what is inside it.

Just so some of us can understand, what is a Sooty puppet?

Sooty was on the television when I was a child in the sixties. I think it was a British program that had a little glove puppet bear, so the reference is completely of my

generation and clearly not transferable. So the frame was something that would have been a nice on-the-surface thing for me to talk about, then the second object I thought of showing, is probably too personal and then the third choice articulates what the second object is about without it being an emotional object. So I had a choice of two objects to depict how an unintended refrain might manifest itself.

So, just to recap, your first idea was the glasses, then you had another idea that, in considering it, it made you feel a bit vulnerable, and now you have come up with a third idea which you are going to contribute to the exhibition.

So that takes us directly to our third question, how does your chosen piece represent an unintended refrain?

OK, so my unintended refrain is looking over the formal structure of my fictions ever since I started using my own name for my fictional artists and using the interview as the narrative device, since 1996. The form of the fiction has always involved a rupture taking place; the fictional artist Sandra Bridie begins pretty much knowing what she is doing and has her path laid out for her. Something happens which completely disrupts this neat trajectory. There is usually some form of dramatic juncture in fiction in a general sense, but mine usually involve an event that utterly disturbs a sense of future progression and ease with the protagonist's practice; throws it into disarray, often this is followed by a malaise setting in. Finally the pieces are picked up and the fictional Sandra's practice continues tentatively, though it is not certain that the artist will continue. There is a pervasive sense of doubt, which is overcome only to a degree.

In the particular piece I have selected, *Sandra Bridie b.1965, 'After the late works of Paul Cezanne (a fiction)*, this is a story of a woman, Sandra Bridie who is doing fairly banal, romantic, paintings and pastel drawings in the style of certain 1980s artists in Melbourne and has made a bit of a name for herself. She is driving a car on holidays on the east coast of Victoria, has an accident and is responsible for the deaths of three people; two people in the car she hits and one person in her own car. There is a court case and she is absolved from culpability for the deaths, but physically she is a mess and emotionally she is a mess. After the accident, Sandra is unable to physically continue with her art practice from where she left it due to injuries she sustained to her hands and needs physiotherapy, but she still needs to somehow maintain her conception of herself or identity as an artist. She devises with her physiotherapist a project to embroider some tapestries, where she will be able to rebuild some fine motor skills. To create the images to embroider, Sandra photocopy transfers onto tapestry canvas reproductions from a book called 'The Late Works of Paul Cezanne'. The canvasses are images of the actual pages from the book including

the white space around the reproduced images. Of course, she is unable to finish any of the canvasses, which are of fine weave using 3-ply embroidery cotton to do petit point, due to the difficulty of handling the tapestry thread and needle.

For the exhibition, I am going to show one canvas, 'The Last Motifs at Aix', alongside the small catalogue/publication containing an interview with the artist and reproductions of all of the tapestries from the series.

How this work represents an unintended refrain – what it is echoing – is essentially what happened to my mother when she contracted encephalitis in 1990 and as an echo to that, what happened to me as far as my own sense of confidence in my practice went, when that happened. Also, the story includes the process of physiotherapy my mother went through during rehabilitation after the encephalitis where she suffered some brain damage. Prior to this she had been a hobbyist as an artist, painting in a style of painterly abstraction. With the encephalitis, her former self ceased to exist and we didn't know what the new self would be, except she survived the trauma, just. She had to re-input memories, and physically relearn how to do everything, including how to paint. It was all step-by-step.

It was only after creating a number of works and looking at the form that my fictions seem to take – they seem to need this crisis, this happily going along and then bang - that I realised that, in fact, the thing that I thought I was coping well against, was being iterated over and over again in the form, and the content I would say, of my fictions. The Cezanne work is the most traumatic and tragic of my fictions.

When does that particular work date to?

It was 1997, the embroidery works were shown at an exhibition at First Floor Artist's and Writer's Space. So I am showing one of the tapestries, which I still love. It was the strangest work, the oddest artistic outcome.

I guess I have been thinking, while you have been candidly sharing your reflections on this unintended refrain that, yes, there is the motif of the trauma, but another way of considering it is that there is the motif of survival as a creative individual.

Just, yeah, but it's never with the same sense of conviction, it's always with the question mark. It's like doubt in a religious vocation, doubt has set in.

So I am wondering, as a fourth question, how interesting, useful or perplexing has this exercise been for you?

For myself, it's been a known quantity; I knew what my unintended refrain was. It struck me awhile ago in my interviewing of artists that sometimes the thing – the motif, the material, the content of their work, that seems most obvious about their work to me as the interviewer, is the thing that the artist does not see themselves,

even though this trope, motif or technique is brought to the fore continually. As far as the curation of this exhibition goes, it has been wonderful for me to see the pick-up from artists, to see how relevant and interesting it is for participants, and annoying too. It is great to see the life of an idea, how it can be carried forth in so many interesting and vital ways.

So do you think that curating the show, in a sense, was a way of you honouring the insight that you had about your own practice?

Possibly, yeah, I thought it was an interesting idea, but it is problematic because it brings biography into it, and that was something that people have resisted. Of course, I always use biography in my work with the artist as the protagonist in my fictions. So I am interested in all the different versions of the artist's life and how they are depicted, and how that plays with ideas of truth and verity and mythology and falsehood, I love the questions that the form of biography brings up.

My impression is that you are also fundamentally interested in narrative and in an art practice that is always experimenting with new interventions in relation to narrative – even the idea of the tapestries, none of them being finished – there seems to be this motif as well, connected with the larger one of uncertainty being expressed by stray threads, unfinishedness in some way.

Yeah, and an interest in the lesser artist, the hobbyist; those levels in the art world hierarchy. I am not so interested in success; I am more interested in the use of art in the life of the everyperson, a democratising of the artist.

Or indeed, the idea of art as essential to a lived life in the broadest sense, which is very profound.

Thank you very much Sandra Bridie, I am going to now add a further question that you have not asked the artists in this show, but perhaps your own reflections on this recording will help you introduce the show in some way or just gain some further clarity. Curatorially, how did you convert your insight about your own oeuvre or the arc of your own work over the last thirty years, let's say. It's no doubt one amongst many, many cumulative insights. How did you convert the one that you have described in connection with the unintended refrain in your practice to a sense of the possibilities for that rubric to serve as the basis for a curated exhibition at the George Paton Gallery?

Alice, who I work with, and I had been talking about presenting a series of artist's talks at the GPG and I thought it would be interesting for different artists to come and talk about their 'idée fixe'. 'Idée fixe' is a term that I have long-loved and I like to refer to a lot of my fictional artists as obsessed with a certain motif. When it came to Alice and me agreeing to curate an exhibition each and cohabiting in the space of the

George Paton, I thought, what about making this idea into an exhibition? Because I had observed this in artists and found that sometimes they could not recognise what was manifest to others, I thought, well, I would love to have a show based on the idea of the artist and the *idée fixe*. But when I Googled the term, it came across as a pathology, like a stalker or a murderer's fixation – lots of grisly crimes have been committed by people who have an '*idée fixe*'. So I tried to look for other words and definitions that might suit this idea that I had of a recurring motif that you can't see. I came across the term '*leitmotif*' for music, which is more of a conscious recurring motif. The *leitmotif*, allowed my concept for the show to include a gentler, rhythmical circularity, but I particularly wanted to talk about something that was not conscious, that was unintended. That's why I lit on '*unintended refrains*,' which I thought was quite an awkward phrase, but it was the only choice of words that would sit together that held my intentions. I think the awkwardness allows for the consciousness in which people have engaged in the project, because the two words don't necessarily sit together naturally, and so it required participants to think: what is this and how do I apply it to my work? I think the term is actually self-explanatory in some ways, but you still have to grapple with the seeming inbuilt conundrum with it. Do you think?

How interesting to hear you speak about it. Because I think the phrase has a lovely musicality and I guess, in my own experience, it wasn't so much a conundrum as a proposition. It does give the sense, one might say of a Foucaultian sense of there being some archaeological work to be done in order to be able to contribute to the exhibition, going through the layer of intentionality to search, so a little bit of digging. I think I recollect correctly that you were mentioning the other day that people have actually responded on many different levels and not all with respect to a biographical narrative with their art practice.

But they are all beholden to the term; '*refrain*' has been interpreted as '*desist*' as well as '*repeat*', and '*unintended*' has also been turned into '*intended*'; people have looked at what is unintentional and recurs in their practice and now they find that they choose, or now intend to keep these qualities, materials, habits of practice or processes in their work. It has been interesting people talking about how useful that term has been, to look at rhythms of themes, motifs, materials, processes – it is going to be manifest in all of the ways that an artist will practice, from the conceptualising to the physical making of work.

So in a way, it has been a proposition that worked as something quite open for a variety of people, which is wonderful – that's the best kind of proposition. I am just thinking in relation to something you said a moment ago, that maybe by virtue of

people being involved with this show, and having had the opportunity not to just consider the proposition but also then discuss it with you through the interview part of the project that for some people it's a future-oriented proposition, because if something has become conscious or something has become articulate in relation to their practice then it's like they have shone a torch on this refrain and now they would like to grapple with it directly, name it, own it, see what happens when it is dug up from the archaeological layering of their work and their history with their work.

Yes, we have spoken about that. It is a choice whether to or not to, but it leaves the option open. It is like a skill learnt; you can apply it when it might be useful, or leave it when there is no need to apply it.

I was thinking at that level, you have given people a gift, in a way.

Actually seeing the works in the gallery will seem like Christmas, I think. Seeing all the different curious objects, that's what I like in an exhibition, not excellence, but objects to be curious about.

Sean Peoples



Sean Peoples

Untitled

2010

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

I thought about it a lot, but I still feel like my refrain is elusive. Squishing, squashing and flattening is the closest I came. I've chosen an unfinished object I was working on 5 or so years ago. It's a composite of many different materials; wood, plaster, resins, plastics etc. If the work were complete it would have a smooth multicolour marble finish. I think it symbolises a continued attempt throughout my practice to arrange diverse and often numerous content into a logic (even if somewhat absurd). There is something scrapbook-like about it too - laying information out, connecting it together, arranging it in meaningful ways.

Interview with Sean Peoples, 21 August 2015

Sandie Bridie: We have already met up once to broadly discuss Unintended Refrains and I presented my ideas about what I would do as a participant in Unintended Refrains, but Sean, what you take 'unintended refrains' to be or to mean?

Sean Peoples: I have an idea of what it means to me, but I think that has been largely informed by conversations that I have had with you; looking for that theme in your practice that is recurring, that you are not necessarily aware of. It has been interesting for me to think about this idea, because I can feel these wildly different shifts with my practice over the years. Of course, I also have my collaborative practice with Veronica Kent, so there is this other dimension and it feels like there is a pressure to reconcile all these different aspects. So, there is my practice that has different parts in my past and also this collaborative practice and I need to work out ways that they all fit together.

And you would be interested in hybridity of practice, I would imagine – keeping it moving in various directions rather than just moving incrementally around a still centre.

Yes, I think some people have that focus, really exploring something really minute and pushing it and pulling it in all sorts of little directions. For me, I can come to some kind of resolution of something that I feel is a little different than what I have done before. In a sense, when I am making it I could take it this way or that way and all these sorts of different ways, but then when the work is actually done and is installed, I am already thinking about something almost the opposite, something really different again.

As a kind of counterpoint – you have set up that problem, you have found a resolution and now it is time to move on to something else.

I suppose it has something to do with whether you have more of a studio-based practice or a project-based practice, because when you have a studio-based practice you are making things all the time regardless of the fact that you may have an exhibition or show coming up.

You engage in the process of making more?

Yeah, and I feel that particularly the work that I do with Veronica and the work that I do for my solo stuff, it is always for a project or something in mind, you are developing something particular to that.

So then, what was your process in selecting a piece for the exhibition and did you go through a number of options to arrive at what you have chosen to be in the show?

OK, I had a go myself first without necessarily looking at my past work, past projects or anything like that, just thinking in my head what those things were, seeing if I myself could work out any of those connections or themes that were running through them. That was when I had that chat with you and Veronica came up – we thought that Veronica would be a good person to ask, as she is one of the few people familiar with my practice all the way from art school till now. We just had a brief conversation over email, basically.

So, she didn't actually physically look at your work.

Yeah, and I kind of did the same, too. I can remember a lot of my past projects but I don't necessarily have documentation of all of those things, they just exist as memories now. The same is true for Veronica; she can just remember some of those projects. And so, what was interesting with Veronica, was what she mentioned, which was about screens and flattening out. I hadn't really thought about that in relation to my own work before and so I spent a few weeks thinking upon that idea – the idea of flattening out, but even that idea of squishing and squashing had more resonance the more that I thought about it.

So you mean taking something away from its original form by compression or manipulation of some sort?

Yeah, in a material sense and a conceptual sense as well. Can I talk about the object? I have made some objects that are actually composed of hundreds and hundreds of other different materials. I did this rather large sphere for a show at Neon Parc something like seven years ago, for a show called *Canadian Pharmacy*. I basically made this big sphere that was a whole bunch of different little objects suspended in resin – and then they were all stuck together and then I slowly sanded it down layer by layer until it was this perfectly smooth sphere. It almost had this marbled appearance, so that even though it's this three-dimensional object, there is a flattening out or smoothing out of this surface of lots of different things. There's this squishing and squashing of these things that aren't necessarily meant to be next to each other or work together as materials.

So you are denying their form and function.

Yes, and then pushing those together. I am also noticing parallels in the work I have been doing more recently, which are big, elaborate, 3D printed pipe constructions and the pipes connect almost like an elaborate Lego system – different food stuffs and cans and all sorts of objects and I pull them all together into a single object. I think that is something that I have been able to see materially in a lot of the work that I have done over quite a bit of time, but also in a conceptual sense – the idea of flattening out. Particularly with the work that I have just done now; I have started to

think of my work as more of a scrapbook where I am developing a collection of ideas, trying to work out how they all fit together, layer them all out, so that you can see it all in one go.

I think then as you explain it, your work seems quite consistent and your approach is quite incremental, you apply the same approach each time similar to someone who paints the same subject matter each time – the still life or landscape painter.

But it has never seemed obvious to me, it looked so wildly different, even though there is something about the process, it links them all together.

And you need to see each work as different.

I was talking before that, for me, there is this frustration, I feel like I want to jump off and move away from the thing that I just did, but at the same time I am doing the same things that I just did but in a different way.

I think we have covered how the work you wish to show represents an unintended refrain, but beyond the conceptual or process-based approach, what do you think this might mean?

Can you say that again? What do you mean?

Well, there is a flattening out, so I am asking why might you need to flatten things out, or why might you need to amalgamate objects so that they become part of a seamless mass and unrecognisable?

I actually was thinking about that on the way in.

This is the hard question, I guess.

The way that I was thinking about it was that maybe it fits in with some kind of personality trait, because the way that I go about things is fairly democratic and even. I suppose being a teacher there's a fairness, but it is something that I am very aware of in myself because it can be very difficult to differentiate between things that aren't necessarily very good or bad or appropriate or inappropriate because nothing is particularly black and white.

So it is a kind of a fairness, but also it's a kind of denying of the integrity of each aspect or component. So it's a principle that perhaps doesn't take in the individual or the difference of each individual part.

Yes.

Was there a critical wondering on your part about that?

That is my worry, that it is not a critical way to be, it just evens out everything and assumes that everything has an even foothold. Even when terrible things happen, I

think, oh but from some perspective for somebody else, this is the right thing that needs to happen. I find it very difficult to navigate in amongst that.

So you need to create a sense of homeostasis all the time.

I think I can see parallels between that, I think it fits nicely within an idea of an unintended refrain because it is not something that I actively want to do, but I do it even when I don't want to do it.

So is it that you are amenable but you are not responding to specificities?

Yeah, I think so. I think even the work that I have done with Henri Christo, who is this Brazilian guy who claims to be Jesus Christ reincarnated; I think that also fits into this idea. Again, he is like some other way of understanding the world, by how 'out there' he is to many people.

It might be an egotism that you are drawn to in him.

Maybe, I don't know, that's a tricky one. The flip side of that is having strong opinions on things, which can be a really difficult thing, I suppose, sharing strong opinions with others. I am always in the process of doubting whether I feel strongly about something, but I admire that in other people and in some ways I want that for myself but it is very hard to do.

The final question is how interesting, useful or perplexing has this exercise been for you?

I think it has been useful, because I get the sense that there is always pressure in trying to make some sort of link between what you have done in the past and what you are doing now. I don't know where that comes from, maybe artist's talks or something. It has been useful in that sense.

It could be seen as 'biographising' your practice.

Yeah, which is a really weird way to think about what you do, but yes, I was thinking about that trajectory.

Well, I suppose I am the culprit here because in some ways I see art as symbolic play, in part at least. For me, we've grown up obviously, but I still think there is a residue where we still make things in the same way a child uses making as a way to express things, to make sense of the world. I think the artist is a person who is able to continue that. Even though as an artist you may believe you are grown up and past that, I still think that art does function in a symbolic way, or it can.

That just made me think, because my parents were quite good at keeping things that I did as a kid and we have these little albums of my and my sister's drawings that we did as children. I suppose my unintended refrain when I was a kid was that I was obsessed with 'Where's Wally'. So almost all the drawings that I did were these

illustrations of all these different characters all existing in this one world. You saying what you did just now, I can see that same democratic – all these things existing in the same space.

And the objects have this look of a ball of squashed together; different coloured pieces of plasticine, it's a way of packing it up and putting it aside after you have constructed something out of the distinct coloured pieces.

Yes, the child-like thing plasticine – mixing the sand and the sticks all stuck together.

Has it been annoying for you at all?

Yes, yep, it has been annoying; because it is a really difficult thing to do and I think it is something you can only really do in conversation with others. It is really hard to identify yourself, it is like a 'talking cure' or something – you are in the chair and you've got the analyst or whatever and it's only with that other person where they can pick up on things that are taken for granted. It is like tacit knowledge or whatever – you know how to ride a bike, but it is very hard to describe or talk to somebody else about how you do that riding of the bike. I think there is something really similar where there is this really ingrained knowledge that directs you, but it is very hard to access what that thing is. I am not saying that this is 'the' thing, I don't know that it is, it is just that I have decided to come with at this moment in time.

Of course, another day, another week, having resolved or selected this 'unintended refrain' you might look back at your work and pick something else. I think that you have engaged quite actively in the process, whereas you could quite easily have found a fairly simple or pat answer and not delved into it. I think from talking to you in this interview and in the preparatory meeting that we had that you have entered into it in a curious way even if it has in fact been annoying or if you reject it you have wholeheartedly engaged in the project.

I am glad that you think that Sandra. For somebody who invited me into the project, I am glad that you think that.

Sophie Knezic



Sophie Knezic

James Hall Nasmyth, *Back of Hand and Wrinkled Apple to Illustrate the Origin of Certain Mountain Ranges Resulting from Shrinking of the Interior*

1874

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

What forces account for the peculiar topography of a geological form? This question impelled the 19th century inventor and amateur astronomer, James Hall Nasmyth to see in the aging of organic objects like an apple or even a hand, parallel processes of geological transformation. Nasmyth identified the temperature differential between a molten interior and an external surface of a planet to spur the contraction that caused the process of shrivelling, of which this dual image is a metaphor. Yet the image also tells us something about the operation of time; that it leaves its material trace as an effect on *skin*. For the psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu the skin is psychically significant. Skin, as our protective covering, mediates our relations with the external world but also stages our defences and desires, our wounds. If Anzieu conceives subjectivity in skin, philosophy has shown that selfhood does not exist independently of time. As human subjects we are indissociably linked to the movements of time, Being unfolding through temporal process.

Skin is the mirror of time.

Interview with Sophie Knezic, 3 September 2015

Sandra Bridie: Sophie, what do you take 'unintended refrains' to be or to mean?

Sophie Knezic: Well I guess I took it as your quite poetic title for the show that I knew you were curating, inviting a number of artists to consider a leitmotif in their practice that recurred over a period of time, over their career possibly, that may have been conscious or unconscious. I really liked that idea, that it represented some kind of narrative thread. I did go off after our meeting back in April or May and thought, what recurs in my practice that I haven't necessarily identified? I feel like whenever I have done a show it has always been very thematically articulated and has a degree of cogency specific to that show – especially site specific works that I have done over the last few years.

And in some ways you are quite cerebral in the way that you go about your work rather than leaving things up for grabs. You often have your rationale and you can talk about your work at length.

I feel like there is always a rationale, it's a hook or it's an edge or it's some kind of bounding point. I think that the convention in the twenty first century or late twentieth century is that artists do need to have these pithy statements on their practices and also the whole infrastructure of exhibitions, it requires that – in galleries through the application process and grants, etcetera, one does have to construct this little statement, or profile and one has to be quite explicit about what the work is and why the work is what it is. I think it is just an overarching condition for the contemporary artist. I think we are all under the obligation in some way to conform to that, even if some artists don't necessarily have the inclination towards that – there is a certain freedom in not having to articulate things, to allow them to emerge through the process of making or through a long apprenticeship in the studio – a non-verbal relationship to ideas and methods and materials and so on.

Then your rationale might be about materials or about processes rather than concepts or themes.

That's right and ideally it is a retrospective summation of a practice and I don't mean that conclusively, I mean that for a period of time, a body of work for example, as opposed to it being a prescriptive constraint that one has to articulate in advance and then match the practice to it so that it is seamless. I wouldn't describe myself as representative of that at all. I think there is always something unknown in any iteration of works that I do, especially at the install moment, that space of making ultimate decisions that are never necessarily known in advance. There is always some little element that changes or some unforeseen dimension that concretises at

that time that is absolutely crucial. That's the longwinded answer to the idea of the Unintended Refrains.

So, my unintended refrain, I realised is something very profoundly to do with the nature of surface or skin, epidermis or interface; some kind of membrane that adjudicates the space between an interior and an exterior.

So what was your process in selecting a piece for the exhibition and did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be displayed in the show? Did you look at a number of your works to see if there was something that was overriding in them, or conceptually that you could see or you knew?

It wasn't a reacquaintanceship with the works physically, but I did mentally review them and attempt to distil from across the spread of practice some thematic that I could identify as this leitmotif or unintended refrain. I don't think that I ever really thought that I would present a work of my own, I thought I would find something that works as a metonym or a synecdoche for my work, so that it, very laterally and through another person's voice manages to convey this concern.

I felt like I found it, quite serendipitously, when I was doing some research on a contemporary photographer – I don't need to go into that – and there was a reference to this image by James Hall Nasmyth that we are looking at now in this space, which is an image of the back of a hand and a wrinkled apple and it is stated as such that it was done in 1874 and published in a book that he wrote, published in 1885, on the moon. He was a Scottish inventor and engineer – he was quite famous for his development of the steam hammer and diecast engineering inventions, but he retired in his late forties and pursued his two passions of astronomy and photography. Apart from his engineering prowess, he is now most known as having created this incredibly interesting set of photographs of the moon in the 1850s and 60s before it was actually possible to photograph the moon. He built his own telescope and was able to view the moon, he had a strong interest in geology and this book on the moon was a speculative geological account of the moon, this cosmic entity and its various forms of natural forces and the physics that would operate in his understanding of surface, such as heat and various kinds of atmospheric forces, etc.

So it was conjectural rather than based on fact?

Yes, it was conjectural, but he did have photographs of the moon. What he did to create these photographs of the moon was he made these plaster sculptures and plaster casts of craters and various forms of surface and took photos of them and then he called them the moon. So it was this fabricated account of lunar geology and these falsified images of the moon in advance of the actual ones.

So did people think these were authentic photos of the moon, they thought that they were of the actual moon?

Presumably! I don't know about the reception of the text in scientific terms, whether it was given credit initially, but he certainly presented it as such – I found that really fascinating. This image in particular is one where he is attempting to explain through visual terms, because it is a quite simple metaphor of the hand and the apple, of the difference between a geological spherical entity that is in the process of cooling, so it has a molten interior and as the heat is being radiated through the surface and is expelled through that surface, the surface contracts. It's a kind of thesis on contraction and expansion and on the level of surface, what happens. Essentially, it is just that that surface contracts as the heat escapes through and hence we have the formation of things like mountain ridges and wrinkles on the back of a hand and the apple, which becomes quite shrunken and shrivelled. It's a sign of age. It's kind of really obvious and elemental in one way, but I find it a really compelling image and it really captures my interest in the idea of age or the markers of time and this leitmotif of skin - so the two of them combined – the indexicality of time on the skin, I thought was really captured by both of those. I did pull out a couple of artist's statements I had made on earlier exhibitions and I see these references to time and to skin and to flux and mutability coming through in all of them.

You hadn't realised how persistent this was.

Yes, exactly, it is persistence. I guess my practice over the last five years as guided by a strong interest in transparency, the effects of light, opticality, etc. and before that, very process-based, a cutting practice, and interest in abstraction and even before that Japanese gardens. So, there are all these different upper conscious layers to it, but I think the unconscious layer, is this thing about surface and membrane and porosity and time – that's the crucial thing. In fact, the exhibition I did at Kings in 2009 called Zen Jubes, where I had these biomorphic forms that I cut - they were paper, but I cut and coloured them, essentially they were very fine tracings of lines and I modified the images on Photoshop so I had these perfect replications expanding in size of the circular lines and I described them as a kind of echoing effect and that when I painted them they started to curl and behave differently to when they were flat. I remember thinking the curling was like a kind of flaking of skin or like the lines that happen on the back of a hand, it was this sign of wear and tear, like a responsiveness to an environment. It's skin, it's surface, it's the ability of that to take the indentation of some force like time, or in the case of Nager, it was contraction of heat; what happens when there is a differential between the heat of a

molten interior – of the process of something becoming igneous and the external boundary or border. So I am really interested in that, time and borders and skin.

The final question is your response to the process of identifying an unintended refrain, so how interesting, useful, perplexing, or irritating has the exercise been for you?

I can tell you in one word, it was delightful, because it was such a tangential and unusual way of approaching an exhibition or contributing a work to an exhibition by virtue of the fact that I designated my own response by this decision not to present something I had made. So it was like I set up my own kinds of bounds in relation to your response, but I found that really exciting and really liberating. It also allowed me to show something that I have loved, that I haven't seen for such a long time. Before encountering this image back in April or whenever it was, I haven't seen this work for fifteen years and I remember loving it years ago, so it was this reacquaintance with something that I find very compelling and relevant – thematically, unexpectedly, serendipitously relevant. So it was really nice to have that opportunity, Sandie.

Martina Copley



Martina Copley

(M)

The mind is a series of many activities
and the doings of the mind are subtle.

(R) *daylight and candle light played over their faces,
and their voices intertwined as in a resplendency. 763*

Patterns are ways of attending, of learning to be in the world.

They link closely to usages that are so familiar we are hardly aware we inhabit them.
They colour our view.

I do not want rid of them.

(R) *the pattern of refusal is to disregard*

Only to be aware of them so I am not in their thrall.

Noticing the refrain - and the aspect of its changing -
the ~~asymmetric, asynchronous times of each~~ -
allows a foothold or vantage (that is not a hold at all)

(R) I think of photocopies of hands and pages holding images

An opening of the body, a breath, perhaps a word.

The tracing of pressure in a line.

The passage from one sound to another.

(R) the aside's address directly to audience is
meta-linguistic; awareness of the fiction you are
creating is inherent in the work

In the relinquishment of views, movement
particularity. Not repetition or reprise.

(R) Annotation of this whole process marks entry and exit points,
folding the work into the work

Interview with Martina Copley, 14 August 2015

Sandie Bridie: Martina, what did you take 'unintended refrains' to mean?

Martina Copley: In the initial text I read 'attempt to rid ourselves of' and I used that to interpret Unintended Refrains. So I guess I took it as some lumpen thing that for some reason I carried around unconsciously; a hindrance that someone might want to lighten their load by getting rid of it or at least disidentifying themselves from it.

And what was the process in finding an object that might match your ideas?

Those are not my ideas; I gave those ideas to you. My first response was interested because I noticed that my first response was 'No'. And I thought, how often my response to things is that, and I thought this is a really good opportunity to say 'yes' to this notion. So, yes to that and think on that, so that's what I did. I don't have an object, so this is a preliminary to answering that question about the object. I thought and I wrote – I've written like six pages or something – but I can't find an object, I don't have an object. I know Freud would be throwing his hands in the air, however it brought me to an understanding of ...

Would the six pages be an object?

Oh well, I have an object as a useless prop, I have many of those I could offer; I could offer text, I could offer an intertitle, if you like, so I could have a narrative, I could have a text piece and a kind of kernel or something and they could sit together. I feel like no object is a negation and I don't want to do that; I am talking about affirmation here, so I do have options, but my first focus is this open space, to open up a space for conjecture, I suppose. So my question wasn't, what are the things that I want to move; what are the things that I want to disidentify from, because it wasn't bringing me to anywhere interesting, it wasn't bringing me to any new understanding. So my questions then started to be, well how often do I say no to things? How do I say yes to what is presented? Then I started thinking about vantage and I thought about how in certain situations it is hard to say yes, and the way that I do that and I am writing on the aside and I do that, is this stepping back? Is this being able to step back and see something for what it is? And then you have actually got the space to say no, if you want to say no. So I think about it that way and I think about the situations in which unconsciously I don't give myself that opportunity, how my attitudes and my presupposition coloured my experience. Then that then shifts into this notion that is, I suppose, space/time understanding when I think about refrain. I think about two aspects of a refrain, noticing the refrain, which is like a pattern that is a recurrent pattern, a circling kind of pattern, it give a sense of time as continuity and noticing at the same time the aspects of that changing, the refrain changing, because it is never an eternal recurrence or a perfect return. That is the

story that is concocted by the eye and the self. So I am interested in refraining those two aspects. It's very unclear, but it is unclear still, it is still formative.

Did you have a more concrete look at your artwork to see if there was anything that repeated itself? Taking a critical distance from your artwork to see if there was anything that was inserting itself in there that you hadn't observed, that you hadn't been conscious of when you were making it? That looking at the work now, it told you something new back to yourself?

I guess I haven't – I have thought about my work as that which I do; it's the way that I think and the way that I live and the way that I do, so I didn't look at it that way, however I am looking at my patterns, if you like, that way. So I can identify things like patterns of holding my body when I sit in meditation, for example. The tendency is to want to be free of those patterns; the useful, skilful behaviour which is not about changing a situation necessarily, because I feel like that's figured in the question, this idea of getting rid of something, changing the situation, changing understanding itself, but being able to sit with that discomfort, if you like, the physical discomfort. That's a really nice one to visualise because it is locatable in the body, but I think about ways of behaving, attitudes that are held in the same way but almost as a colour filter that you might put over a lens, so everything is orange from here. Everything is going to be orange, it doesn't matter where I am looking, it is going to be orange – that's in my work a lot, the idea of filter or in framing or this sort of strategy of pointing to the frame, if you like. The held attitude is to engender a shift or to allow the possibility of a shift is more in the understanding of what I do. So that's how it relates to the work. That is one of the objects I love, a glass filter or something like that, it would be kind of nice thing to be involved somewhere as well.

So, if you went through a process of thinking about what you might select and then deciding no, what were the things that you thought about that were not suitable?

Oh, well, this is the thing; I didn't come up with any. The object, it doesn't seem right. I don't want to create a lumpen thing, to present an object as a representation of a thing I want to get rid of because I don't think that way and I don't work that way. I work through a process of attempting to give attention to things as they are, which is not acceptance and it is not just saying yes to everything. But it does allow me not to just instantly negate if you take just a singular, static viewpoint. So this idea of something shifting through; so for example, things that I thought about would be chalk marks on a wall, for example, so a gestural object I guess, or performance, I don't know what you would call it an object that exists only in relationship, so there is some elemental vantage involved in the way that you receive or engage with the object. So then, options come and I haven't thought

through to that point. I thought it would be really interesting to come to the interview, and useful and helpful to talk before having actually pinpointed the object. That's the process of interest.

Having an absence in an exhibition where my request as a curator is pretty specific and there is a kind of implied obligation to come up with an object, not being able to do that could be an interesting response. It creates a physical pause in the exhibition but also that creates a space for conjecture for the viewer as well.

I find that a very binary space, for me that's a plain negation and it's very obvious; it's like a semantic game playing. I am not interested in that, I am interested in doing this to learn about how I figure. The refrain is important to me, this idea of time as continuity is central, but then how to manifest that as an object is another question. So that was my first response was this empty space, but no, I am interested to play in that space and not just stop there.

I don't know, I wrote some notes; things that I found problematic in the premise/proposal; to be rid of is problematic-interesting – I like thinking about it, to be rid of, we have talked about that, that idea of aversion and that there is some point at which you are – it's like an anticipatory time, like living not in the present but always in an anticipatory time so that at some point you will be right, you will be OK and the world will be OK and we will all be rid of the things that –

Like a progress narrative.

Yes. And it ties in very much with art practice, I think, with history and stories and film and how we construct selves, how we understand this idea of self. So that was the other idea that I find assumed in the premise; this idea of ourselves, our artist selves and I have been thinking about that and my understanding of self. So far I have thought about understandings of self, in any way that I might identify myself; doubts, fears, capacities – however I might – is already old, is already no, is already an orange colour over everything and so if there was something that I would like to be free of, and that is not the phrase I would use, or get rid of or be free, but if there was something that I would really like to see clearly, it would be that orange filter. Those notions of self that I have, because of the stories that I have told, because of my understanding of space/time as being some kind of life lived and continuous, a thread, when in fact my experience can be open to what exactly is now, what I find now, but a lot of things that hold me back from that –

Are you looking for this orange filter rather than wanting to see things through another filter?

Yeah, well and I suppose the Zen way of understanding is clarity of mind, if you like. But for me it is about processes of attention, where do you direct your attention. So I

could focus endlessly on what is the object going to be. So about this idea of filter or vantage, I think being able to be attentive to what is creating the vantage is sort of asking questions around how, and they are really useful questions for me for making.

So the project has been useful for you to work out what you want.

The project has been challenging in one way, but useful in that it did make me think about how I do approach things with a certain fixed view and I have very strong views, which is not to say that I deny my feelings and thoughts about things because they are considered, however the need that I seem to have when I started attending to conversations when people would propose to me they are; 'hmmm, I think this', or 'No, I like that' and this I, I, I. For me it is a very interesting and useful thing to be able to consider and through this project I seem to be considering this notion of views held and how they are held.

So in that way, I suppose the idea for me was to set up a way of looking at what you do and observing those habits and asking yourself how useful they are, or not.

I think the other key word in the project for me is 'intention' – this idea of intention and an understanding of just what is intention? In a way, my understanding of intention is that it does go to attention, where you choose to attend and how you choose to attend, because unintended is really unaware, however it also links into that area of actually being in the world and I don't know what words you like to use, but happenstance – just allowing things to come, of being with things instead of directing things, that's also involved in that word. That is key to processes of thinking and making, also understanding the sense of time in making, unexpected things happen and yet it is still me moving the work, moving with the work. So there is this lovely continuity but that is cut. I think about – the empty space that you were talking about before if I did have no object, I think more in terms of a lapse or a misstep or a transitional space or a cross dissolve in a film. I think about that space and it is very interesting to think about exhibition space in that way; it's a nominal space. I was curious about the fact that you chose object and text, that you asked for both and I am interested in the relationships that could occur there, I am very interested in that. The reader like the watcher, if you like.

Whether they are equal or unequal, equal or cancelling one another out.

So again, it is kind of a literary space and I tend to work in a literary space.

I kind of like that it has set up a conundrum for people and it is not about an excellent artwork, it can be anything.

That's true and I suppose I hadn't really thought about the project that way; that's another outside, if you like; another façade or another vantage, which is this idea

that artists make art, art makes meaning, that equation that is frightful! But yes, the whole project as a kind of figuring from the curator's perspective.

Yes, you can't guess at what the result will be. It's nice to set up a conundrum, which is ungainly for people to deal with and then the result is the result.

I wouldn't have called it ungainly, because there are so many relationships; there is the inner voice and the presentation of work – the conundrum could be in that space as well. So there are lots of spaces of translation in this project. So I don't think that's ungainly, I think that's really open and rich.

I guess it's ungainly in that the people I have spoken to, they need to have conversation with me to work out what this thing is, or how to think about it. They want to know what my intentions are and so it is something that has required a first conversation or meeting before the interview. This is what curating is about, it's engaging with people, that, for me, it is the pleasure of curating; the exhibition is one outcome, the other is these engagements, these conversations about this nebulous thing that is clear to me but not clear to them.

The thinking in the work is interesting, but I do think artists can be lazy, I know I shouldn't say that, but I notice a tendency in working with artists where they need to understand what you mean, but I don't feel that that is necessary for me, I don't need to understand what you intend. I am happy to read the text that you sent, it is a considered text, I am happy to take it and turn it around and find key words for myself and find my interest and find my point of intersection. In fact, as a curator, I love it if artists do that because it means that I get a prismatic approach, which is really what it is about. And I think it is a lot about power relations between curators and artists, and a habitual pattern as well. So you set the guidelines and then I am free. But actually you are free at the beginning.

You are, but I think guidelines make it easier to be free.

Yeah, they do. So that is how I take the proposition, it is something to be turned over and considered. I suppose the key to my approach would be noticing refrain and the pattern of its changing.

Aaron Christopher Rees



Aaron Christopher Rees
Untitled Transient
2012

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

I chose the print 'Untitled Transient' (2012) as it not only articulates my Unintended Refrain perfectly, but it also represents what I consider to be a lightning bolt moment within my art practise which, of course, I unintentionally realised in hindsight. The clarity was that photographs frustrated me, like my eyes had been deceived me, or maybe it was all the advertising, all the images geared at manufacturing ideas of how things are. So I create these disruptions and punctures through what I'd call a kind of, forced error processing to construct a void, or a bridge for contemplation.

It's both an act of defiance against the mediated landscape, the world as presented by technical images, but also a representation of my constant refrain of tweaking perspective to offer perspective.

Interview with Aaron Rees, 27 August 2015

Sandie Bridie: What do you take 'unintended refrains' to mean?

Aaron Rees: Before I actually looked it up, the first thing that came to mind was something that unintentionally always comes about or comes through. In relation to art practice, something that is always just there under the surface or in the work somehow, that maybe, is almost subconscious, if we're to use such a word.

And you looked it up as if it was a term?

Just the two words together - I often do that to see what the Standard English definition of the word is, and it was something that you are trying to get away from, with the added piece that you keep on returning to it.

What was your process in selecting your piece for the exhibition and did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be displayed in the show?

I thought of two things straight away, but to clarify, I spoke to Caitlin –

Who has been with you since first year in Photography?

And I also spoke to Olivia Koh, who has also been with me since first year, who is also in the show. But I particularly spoke to Caitlin because she is in my Honours year. They said the same things that I instinctively knew, which were reflective surfaces and the other was a puncture, which I almost take as the same thing. It's almost the opposite of the reflection, it's an inversion; a sucking in point as opposed to reflecting.

This is something that you don't consciously make the work about, or you don't consciously repeat; it is ever present without you consciously making the work about that?

I think that is why I dropped reflection, because I generally consciously use that one, that's why I realised the inversion of it is the thing that is always left. When I was thinking about this question, I found that way more fascinating to my own psyche – it's in everything, nearly.

OK, so that's pretty persistent.

So what is the work or the piece that will be in the show and how does this represent an unintended refrain?

It's my favourite print that I have ever done, called 'Untitled Transient'. It started when I was just purely looking through the photographic process of concrete compositions, because I was always interested in Brutalism and architecture and space.

So, concrete as a material?

Yeah, and then the flattening process through photography, so how it takes all dimensions near and far and turns them into a flat surface. I am loosely interested in this metaphysical realm of flattening through technology. And then just through this process of continually deconstructing things, I ended up ripping it apart and cutting part of it and revealing behind the paper. I believe you have seen this work; it has been at the George Paton before.

Yes, so it is coming back home.

It's coming back! It's my favourite and it sits in my lounge room at home and I always look at it and I remember that it was completely unintended that it did this revealing thing and I am doing it all the time and it is a very important part of who I am, I think.

So, what do you think it might mean? This is the harder question.

This is going to sound very naff, like pseudo spiritual, but it is definitely me trying to pierce through some layer of whatever we take as reality. You could say it is looking for a sublime or something, but it is definitely trying to puncture a hole through some kind of constructed understanding. I think there is a limit to these structures of science and whatnot that we make, where we are just creating our own language to build and build, but there is something totally beyond our understanding here. I don't know what it is, but I have this tendency to turn things upside down, altering of perception and for me, I am always putting holes in things, puncturing them to create this breathing space through. I think it comes out of frustration, actually, a lot of the time.

Well, it is like punching the wall, it's not anger?

No, a lot of it is a combination of curiosity and maybe frustration with the pictures themselves, because I find them really problematic, but I am fascinated by them, as well. Since I can remember, I was looking at National Geographic upside down; I used to watch television upside down as well.

So it's similar to a writer getting frustrated at the limits of language.

Yeah, understanding through vision, but mostly curiosity, I think.

And the final question is, how interesting, useful, perplexing, and/or irritating has this exercise been for you?

I haven't found it irritating at all; I have really enjoyed it. When you first told me about it, I have been really busy in this small patch of time, but this has been a really good reflective exercise on, at first it's your work, but your work is your psychology or your mental landscape or whatever. So it's going back and surveying or pulling a string through your work. I am always open to delve into these things.

Caitlin Cummane



Caitlin Cummane
Conversation with Nancy
2013

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

Conversation with Nancy is the impulse I have to record my everyday interaction. With cameras, I seek to examine and transform. This process/desire connects to the large archive of home video footage my grandparents and parents have created/accumulated. These movements of light formed my introduction to the space between experiencing and capturing; the inherently lingering longing to represent; and the tensions between having, keeping and letting go. The prominence of these 'documents' in/as my memories is a comfort and discomfort, something which I both treasure and question.

Interview with Caitlin Cummane, 1 September 2015

Sandie Bridie: What do you take 'unintended refrains' to mean?

Caitlin Cummane: Well after our initial conversation, I think I have reconciled it to have something to do with past experiences and very instinctive, intuitive behaviours, things that you keep on repeating or that are very much a part of your consciousness without you choosing them, or even wanting them to be. So, operating very much like desires and fears, in a way.

What was your process in selecting your piece for the exhibition and did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be displayed in the show?

I reflected for quite a while and initially I was thinking of something object-based. I am very much attached to objects and was thinking I have got several video cameras that I thought I'd include. To me they have emotive qualities, but then I realised that they probably don't for other people without my explanations of them, and so I settled on a piece of video footage.

So, if you were showing the video cameras, how would they have been unintended refrains?

I wanted something that would show time and they do that in the sense of the progression of the technology; one is the one that my parents used to film me when I was younger and then there's the camera that they got after that, which ended up being mine when they, not that they got sick of filming us, but when we got older and weren't as cute and weren't doing our first things any more. So that camera became mine, and then there is the one that I bought for myself.

So, but still an 'unintended refrain' – is the unintended refrain the fact that recording your actions is a kind of default and that there is enough footage on record for that to be a kind of default way for you of remembering things.

Exactly, a lot to do with memory and I think I resent that fact that there is a lot of recorded memories of me when I was younger and of my family, but also they are cherished. Often my work is to negotiate criticality and sincerity, so being very aware of the uncertainty of photography as a medium, but then also feeling very sincere and nostalgic when it comes to these documents.

Reliant on them to prove something existed?

Exactly.

What is the piece you will show and how does this represent an unintended refrain?

The piece is footage of my mother, they are quite spontaneous clips that I shot all in sequence, they are unedited except that they have been put together – the takes, they were just of a candid conversation we were having – actually it was at the time

that she gave me the video camera, it is quite a few years ago now. I think it illuminates the unintended refrain for me, which is this capturing and recording of my everyday experiences and interactions and relationships, because it is quite telling some of the things she says, to me they are quite poignant and there's a looseness to it that speaks of a kind of unravelling to me that I like. Also, the first time I showed this piece of work I felt like I had expressed something successfully and made a connection.

And is the recording of things habitual? Do you bring your camera with you, or use your phone or whatever recording device fairly regularly to record experiences or to record happenstance?

Hmm, everyday. Not all of it I end up showing, but I do probably have a habit of always having a camera with me and I have tried to relax that –

So that your life is not a document.

I very much want to be present because I value relationships with people but I also like the criticality of a mediation device.

How interesting, useful, perplexing or annoying has this exercise been for you?

Very interesting, I think, in making me remember, or be slightly more aware of the fact, as an artist, often I am of the mindset that I am shaping the world, whereas I think more often the world is shaping me! To be reminded of that was very useful and to constantly develop a better understanding of what you do and why you do it, to be critical of it.

Olivia Koh



Olivia Koh
Humayun's garden
2015

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

- A film script in five scenes by Arseney and Andrei Tarkovsky

Establishing shot. Aerial view of a garden; summer. Slow zoom into a cypress tree standing by the high rubble walls of the compound. Close shot. Low angle shot, zoom into grass, red sandstone, and water channel. Shot in close-up to give the effect of a landscape. In the first shot bird noises can be heard- harsh and insistent – these die away completely by the end of second shot.

Close shot. The camera tilts for a low angle shot the father standing by a cypress tree and looking at the water. The shot widens a broad landscape of the manicured lawn. The sky is overcast. He turns, straightens up, turns, and walks away from the camera over the paved walkway. Slow zoom from behind to medium shot. The father walks on. All the time the zoom lens shows him the same size. The father vanishes into the trees.

From out of the trees, and continuing along the father's path, appears the son. *Gradual zoom into the son's face, which by the end of the shot is just in front of the camera. From the point of view of the son. Elevation shot and zoom in: a feather falls, circling down into the grass.*

Close up. The son looks at the feather, and then up at the sky. He bends, then straightens up and walks out of frame. Pull focus to long shot the father picks up the feather and walks on. He vanishes into the trees, from which, walking in the same direction, appears the granddaughter. In her hand a feather. Dusk is falling. The granddaughter walks over the garden.

Zoom in to close-up, in profile; she suddenly notices something out of frame and stops. Pan in the direction of her gaze. Long shot an angel standing at the edge of the darkening trees. Dusk is falling. Darkness descends as the focus blurs. A flash consumes the end of the roll.

Interview with Olivia Koh

What do you take 'unintended refrains' to be or to mean?

A compulsive action or a concern re-occurring.

What was your process in selecting your piece for the exhibition? Did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be shown in the show?

I went over which of my previous works to consider for the show before remembering the images that I'd taken in Delhi in India last year. I hadn't made work about that experience directly in terms of using source material from the trip although I had compiled a swath of photographs.

How does your chosen piece represent an Unintended Refrain?

In this instance the 'unintended refrain' is the image itself. I am pretty much self-taught at using an analog SLR camera, but inculcated at the same time through being exposed to the different languages of images on the streets, at home and school... For me the initial attraction to the subject of an image is intuitive but the framing is often considered more carefully.

In this instance the content of this image bears the process of capturing I've just described. The image itself is of a detail of the grounds of a garden Persian design, one of the largest of such interpretations outside of Iran. I'm standing on a platform made of red sandstone raised about seven metres, it supports a mausoleum that holds the cenotaph (an empty tomb) of a Mughal emperor named Humayan. His first wife was named Hamida Bahn Begum and had this garden made after his death. It's intricately composed in terms of irrigation and architecture. It is apparently conceived of in relation to the paradise garden in the Quran. The symmetry of the garden attests to this mathematical association with divinity: it is a quadrilateral formation's called "Charbagh", with water-channels or walkways that further divide the grounds into 36 parts. The water channels seem to disappear under the mausoleum and reappear on the other side in a straight line, while Humayun's real grave is on the basement floor.

How interesting, useful or perplexing has this exercise been for you?

Having time to reconsider the image has been important in terms of reflecting on an intuitive process. The decision to print the image on a towel (polyester/viscose fabric) was made after I realised I had exposed the roll twice erasing about a third of the image in the frame. I like how the content of the image has re-surfaced - the capturing of an imprint of light in one place has been transported to another. The magenta tones of the image and its materiality could now appear as luxurious or at least pleasing; but that essence is one different from the experience of the place it

was taken from. I've been reading some writings by Andrei Tarkovsky under the title 'Sculpting in Time'. He had a sensitivity to approaching composing and editing a shot, which allowed for that thing to dictate its own duration onto film. He was also influenced by his father Arseney's poetry and I've included a slightly bastardised version of a script he wrote based on one. I think the exercise has become a kind of meditation upon the experience for the spectator of a film through the conflation of different time zones and sources in the work.

Andrew Seward



Andrew Seward
Study for a Drawing
2015

Reason it constitutes an Unintended Refrain

My contribution to this exhibition was suggested by a comment from a friend.

When I asked her about refrains in my work she observed a relationship between parts and wholes. 'Just like that weird Pollock jigsaw you've got', she said 'if you were to shred or tear up a drawing of yours into tiny pieces, any randomly chosen piece of the paper would have the spirit of the whole in it.'

This artwork is a model and a complication of something she noticed that I think is true.

Interview with Andrew Seward, 2 September 2015

Sandie Bridie: Andrew, what do you take 'unintended refrains' to be or to mean?

Andrew Seward: I think that an unintended refrain is those things that you are unaware of as an artist or a maker when you are producing your work and that you can't necessarily control or speak to or about, but are there nonetheless. I hadn't considered the term before and you mentioned it, I had never heard it before.

No, I came to the term by rejecting others.

Part of the thing is, I am trying to understand what you mean by the term, in order to decide whether I can use that term for something that I have always thought is there in art work, which are the things that are not spoken about and can't necessarily be spoken about by the people that make their works. Artists, in my experience, by and large are the worst people to talk about their work because I think that they don't necessarily make the works to be spoken about, because why would you do that if you could speak about it? Maybe there is a person who makes art that is not necessarily interested in expressing those ideas or their thoughts in any other kind of form, or maybe takes relief from having to express them in any other kind of way. Artist's statements are notoriously awful things to read and to write and artist's descriptions of their projects are usually pretty waffly, or turgid, or excruciating.

I say that for some artists, writing, especially writing about their work is like using a second language, not the innate one that they have available to them to express themselves most clearly.

I think the way writing is like thinking and you don't necessarily think in pictures, you don't articulate ideas in pictures, you articulate them in words.

I'd like to say more about those things and some experience I have had with unintended refrains in my work, if that's what they are called. I don't know what the difference is between an unintended refrain and, say, a theme.

A theme is probably more conscious of, an unintended refrain, for me, is something that you are unaware that you are inserting into your work, except in retrospect.

And what happens to the unintended refrain then, if you are aware of it?

In a number of the interviews that I have now done with participants in the project, the unintended refrain, to the artist can be as pervasive as a mode of working that you default to, that you might be intending to move on from. By articulating what that thing is that you are trying to get away from, it brings it to the surface, and then there is a choice about either accepting this mode of making/working as your default, that it works for you, or thinking that maybe you want to move on from it. By

being conscious of the repeated thing and taking a critical distance from it, you may decide to create a new way of approaching making work. That is how it has worked for different people; for some participants it is a default method, or themes, or familial figures that are represented in some way, death, those kinds of themes, sometimes it is a mechanical process, or otherwise...

Are you suggesting it is a therapy kind of model of practice?

There can be a progress narrative attached to it for some, but it is whatever you make of it. So for some people it is useful in terms of biographising your practice, but for others that is not interesting, or is downright annoying to even approach it like that. This is an isolated exercise that will have no future use for some, for others it is useful for this single project, now, and then for others it will be a good way of reviewing, standing back, seeing what is read across their practice that they are not aware of.

I think you always interest people if you take what you do seriously, or you are interested in what you do. I – when I say you – am always interested in trying to understand a little bit more about what I am doing; most pictures are some form of discovery in terms of curiosity. I like to think whether I can make the thing I have imagined and then when I am in the work it is a whole lot of problem solving in order to get to some resolution of the ideas, but mostly, in particular, the work, because it's a physical thing actually making something and often techniques have to be invented or devised.

To keep it interesting for you, rather than just portraying the thing in your mind's eye, which can be boring if all you are doing is playing that out.

Yes, that would be awful.

It would be illustration.

Factory work or whatever it is. I probably should get this out at the outset, there's a contradiction in a sense between something that is on the one hand, subconscious and then something that is made objective and I am not ready to admit that there's a lack of agency in any of the work that I do, whereas the implication of an unintended refrain is that there is something going on that the person who is making the work has no control over. I am interested in that, but I would also dispute that when we actually determine to make something that you let everything out and go to chance or happenstance, your unconscious motivations and things like that. I've seen them in my work constantly – things that pop up that I did not recognise or see, or only saw later on; images that appear, hidden objects that I have drawn that weren't meant to be there and things like that, but I made the work and I would

always want to maintain that authority over it, rather than suggest that there was another realm of things that I don't have anything to do with.

I think time can work on the meaning of something and time can work on the reading of something, so that the retrospective clarity that you have can make a series of, say, three works done over five years makes sense in relation to one another, though each one seems to have come out of a different set of circumstances. Looking at these works from a distance of time then they can read together and say something that you weren't intending but was present, at some level, in your life or in your circumstances at that time. It can be so many things, but it is an opportunity for the artist to take a step back to gain a critical distance from their work and see if there are any surprises there for them that are useful, interesting or not even, to write off the exercise as a waste of time – that is interesting to me, as well.

Expanding on that idea, the very thought that there would be a level of awareness that is beyond an individual is not something that I want to give in to. To have the thought at all that a narrative could be structured around some sort of overarching sense of a bigger picture or something like that is something that I would resist a little bit. I resist the thought of my subconscious controlling my actions and my activities, I don't want that, because it suggests that there are other kinds of things socially or politically or whatever that will have some kind of effect on my agency.

But times can be read in a work.

Times? That's because artworks are not steady things, they are, but because they are things they are not just ideas. They can have all sorts of uses apart from being artworks; they can be decoration, they can be symbols of prestige or commodities, or what have you. Being in a culture we have no other way of preserving or transmitting aesthetic experience other than things and I find it really difficult to consider a world where you could have an aesthetic experience that was not attached to a thing and I often wonder what that world would be like. Perhaps when you start to think about that sort of thing you enter a religious or mystical experience, maybe that's the progression.

And that's what cultural objects were tied to originally.

I think in some ways it might do us a lot of good to remove the object from the experience because then there would be no doubt about what the experience was, or what the object was for. As soon as people write down something, or say it, as I am saying now, any of the words can be interpreted. It is interesting to consider that some of the people who have been extraordinarily influential who have not written books, who have not said things, possibly because they knew that once they said things the words that were written could be used in all sorts of different ways.

Next question is, what was your process for selecting your piece for the exhibition and did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be in the show?

Yes I did, because I wasn't really sure what I was looking for to begin with. I liked the idea and I was interested in having a think about it and making something for it, but I really wasn't sure that I could address it in a way that was a set of instructions, I suppose. So I phoned you, and I phoned a friend and asked my friend if they could see anything that might resemble a refrain or something that was recurring in my work. She wrote me back a message after a couple of days with a suggestions that I thought was good and, in the end, took as a challenge as a way to make a work.

So, what was her reflection?

I will try to remember; essentially what she was saying was that she felt there was in my work a relationship between parts and wholes. She said, 'something to do with parts and wholes' - she wasn't sure what it is.

Do you mean an isolating of a fragment of something?

Yeah, but then that fragment then had something to do with the thing that it was removed from in some way. And she felt there was a connection between that particular theme, refrain, concern and the technique that I used making the drawings, in particular. The way that I have learnt how to draw is by building up lots of small little hatching marks; when I was first doing lots of drawing I would use pens and biro and ink and things like that and that's a pretty typical technique that you use.

Like an etching technique.

Yes, it is and when I began using pencils, that technique became, after a few different ways of working, something I fell back into and I like working that way. Then that technique has evolved a little bit so that instead of hatching lines, sometimes I might draw a piece of wood and the lines become a series of vertical lines that then build up the grain of the wood. I did that in particular when I did a really large set of drawings of woodchips. That work in particular was something that Ebony was referring to, because she could see that the technique built up the subject and she felt from that detail of the subject she could then imagine the branch, the tree, that sort of thing, going forward. So she identified this connection between technique and the subject. I thought that was good, it was a nice observation.

It sounded true.

It was a good observation because I hadn't really made a connection between the subjects that I was working with, which are often fragments, busted up stuff, and the

technique itself. And the suggestion was that if I took one of my drawings and shredded it, or tore it up, that the drawing itself would retain some kind of element of the subject of the drawing and therefore the subject. So you could keep breaking the whole thing down but there would always be some part of it that would remain a referent to the whole thing. I think the image of a broken mirror is a good way of thinking about it, it is not exactly what she means, but you know when you break a mirror, the reflections just multiply. It is not destroyed. I don't really like that idea, but it is along those lines.

So that was useful for you to have someone look at your work and she reflected something back to you that you were not conscious of, or that is an observation about process and content.

Well it was one that I hadn't had and it was nice to have someone say that.

Do you feel it is something that is pervasive in your work?

Yes. It made sense. She is an artist too, so she looked at my work as a technician. Perhaps if I had asked someone else they might have said, you like busted things and putting them back together in some way to make a whole out of something that has been broken up.

So the reflection is always from the experience of the person looking at the work.

Probably. So the probing question might have been, why do you draw broken things all the time, or something like that.

What does the fragment mean?

What's going on there?

Do you want me to ask that question? It is like a myopic versus a longsighted propensity, focussing on the detail rather than the whole or the whole in relation to what it is surrounded by. You might need to break things down to make sense of things.

I don't know, I am just wanting to see things clearly and I think the more narrow the focus the more clearly you can look at it. All my work is about looking at things and what is going on when you look. There is a laboratory element to the work where something is isolated.

You have done botanical drawing and you are applying those skills to observing and drawing things that aren't always botanical.

Well that's right, but the reason why I wanted to make botanical drawings in the first place was because there was something about the way of seeing things and a history of looking at stuff is so beautifully represented in that field; you can see the changes in the way that people see things over time, because they are drawing the same

sorts of things. So representation changes and the reasons for those changes is fascinating. That's a really old kind of understanding of anyone who has taken an interest in looking at things.

There are styles.

Yes, but there are also modes of vision and things like that.

And a progressive proliferation of examples to compare from.

In that particular field you can actually be quite analytical in a way that you can't be in contemporary art, for example, or broader streams of western art history, it is there for sure, but in microcosm it is there in the history of scientific illustration. Quite aside from that, the challenge of making an image that way and participating in that story or that world really requires that kind of attention, in order to skill up to the level that you need to. Once you start drawing, of course, you realise just how much you don't know and how much there is to learn. I remember when I first began drawing, I thought I had better learn how to draw if I want to make this kind of work, I wanted to make beautiful watercolours and beautiful things in velum and things like that, I am still learning how to draw fifteen years later.

You are probably getting better along the way, just through perseverance.

Sometimes I think that the virtuoso kind of drawing that I wanted to get to has peaked.

There's a plateau that comes with age! Macular degeneration is setting in.

Something like that, my focus is not quite as intense.

One of my teachers at art school was Jan Nelson; she was right into this idea of synecdoche, which has stayed with me for quite a long time. It's a linguistic term; it means when a small thing stands in for a whole or a whole stands in for a small thing. A classic example is 'in Canberra they have been talking about tax cuts or budget or whatever it is'. It is not Canberra saying those things; Canberra stands in for parliamentarians in the national capital. Likewise, say 'England beat Australia at cricket.' 'England' is the English cricket team, it is not the country. And it works the other way around, let me think of another one, there is an old one – sails, they talk about sails for ships, 'you can see seven sails out there on the harbour' – that's a synecdoche. That is the relationship of parts to whole. That's an idea that has stayed with me, but not just the idea; it's the linguistic element of the idea that has become most important in terms of my practice because there is a linguistic element in everything that I do, we are talking about language in one way or another. Not pictures, but because the pictures are keyed into thinking and thinking is language, as I was saying earlier on. You think in words, well I think in words, I don't think in

pictures. There are different ways of thinking, people think with movement, but if I am having a thought about something, it's words. So, if anything, that's a source of frustration and contradiction and probably stops me from being really good at botanical drawing or really good at whatever it is at making art works because I am always thinking about what the thing is rather than just accepting it as a picture or something like that.

What is the piece that you will show and how does this talk back to the idea of the unintended refrain?

Well, I took Ebony's suggestion about tearing up drawings and seeing if you could find a reflection of the work in there as a bit of a challenge. So I considered tearing up a drawing. I have kept most of my drawings and I have never really destroyed much because I like to have things around that I can look at if I am ever wondering if I am getting any better at what I am doing – I can go, oh yeah, it's pretty crap, I am better than that! And even though I have got lots and lots of really awful drawings and pictures and things, they all have their own integrity. I made a big pile of drawings and I was going to tear up some of these, but when it came to it, I couldn't do it!

So did you make a facsimile?

What I did was, I shredded a piece of paper and then I drew that piece of paper.

So that then is reproducing not the process of your work, but a mechanical version of it. It is like the woodchips, this is the comparison I can think of in your practice, you have a pile of woodchips but here you are creating a pile of shreds of paper as your subject matter.

So, it's an inversion, I suppose.

It is not the found object, you have created these fragments.

That's not all the object, though. The thing that is missing from that is the pairing of that drawing with a jigsaw puzzle that I have of Jackson Pollock's painting 'Convergence'. And one of the reasons that that is there is that when Ebony and I were having this conversation, she made the observation 'just like that weird Jackson Pollock jigsaw puzzle. If you tore up that drawing, it would contain some essential aspect of the drawing.' So that puzzle is there next to that drawing, which has been bound in its own folio and the pieces that I drew are included in the work itself. It's a drawing of the shredded bits of paper but the shredded bits of paper are part of the work.

They will be laid out next to the drawing.

In the same way that a jigsaw puzzle is a bunch of things and often has an image of what the piece is meant to look like when it is done. But it is an absurd notion that you could put my shredded bits of paper back together again and you would get the piece of paper, but you wouldn't get the drawing.

Because even if the drawing of the shredded paper was on the piece of paper, the configuration would be different.

And it couldn't be on the piece of paper because if it was, it wouldn't be in the book – it wouldn't be the model for the drawing. So, absurdity and these kinds of contradictions is also something that I find really interesting, I guess that's another refrain or theme or something like that. Why am I drawing busted up stuff? Why am I drawing woodchips? It's absurd spending all this time doing these sorts of things.

The eccentric labour of the artist.

I don't know, I like the word absurd, I think it is ridiculous. I think that eccentric is a word that suggests frivolity or something like that in a way that absurd doesn't. There is a very serious element to absurdity, I think.

Did you go through a number of options to arrive at what will be displayed in the show?

Yeah, well I did. I played with ways of doing it and there were some ways of making this combination of things more successful than others. In the drawing I have worked the way I would normally work, but the hatching element to the style of my drawing is evident in the way that the drawing has been made and it was quite natural to do that, but the pieces themselves that have been shredded are also hatching things too, do you know what I mean? They are not long shredded strips, I deliberately used a machine that shreds and cuts, so they are like little lines. So, what I am saying is, the subject is a reflection of the way that it has been drawn as a pile of lines. I saw that there was that way of drawing in lots of earlier work, so at one point I had a bunch of drawings that I wanted to include as a way of demonstrating that something like this was going back quite a long way. But that wasn't satisfying and I went back to Ebony's response to the original question and that the jigsaw puzzle reference made sense.

It's quite a robust sort of example, I think. There is something quite clear about the connection, because the jigsaw is outside your history but it speaks to a process.

I have had this jigsaw puzzle for quite a long time and I have often wondered how I could use it; I have made collages using jigsaw puzzle pieces, but this is not something that I have ever considered destroying to make something else. It's got a nice integrity to it, it has a nice box and the poster, and it's beautiful. But used as a

kind of a readymade to put next to an artwork like this says something about the connection between the object and the subject and its representation that I really liked.

Yep, that seems clearer than something that's more coded within your own practice.

Yeah, or even more literal, like here's the subject, here's the object, isn't that interesting this difference in various representational forms? Well, it's about that, but it is also about what you are trying to propose into with the subject of this exhibition. And it's nice, the puzzle is called 'Convergence' and it's sweet that there is this convergence between the images and the ideas and these two kinds of objects put together.

Yes, I think they will be curious; they will invite conversation and admiration and then deliberate questioning about why the two objects should be together.

I hope so; I don't think it is a spectacular looking artwork in terms of spectacle; it's a meditation really. It's a study, it is not complete – I have called the work 'Study for a drawing', because that is what it is, it is not a drawing, it's a study for a drawing that might be made or that might have already been made. You can make studies for things after you have made the work.

The final question is about the quality of the experience; how interesting, useful, perplexing and/or irritating has this exercise been for you?

It's been all of those things. It was good. The thing that I am left thinking about is the absence of the object; what does it look like if you have an aesthetic experience and there is not an object to experience it with? Because even though I have made this thing, a lot of it is about what can't be shown and what's not there. Perhaps that's not actually what's in the work, but it is a thought I have had since I made the work.



