AT SEA AGAIN: CREATIVE BEREAVEMENT PROJECT 16th July – 23rd July 2018

Summary

The one-year project At Sea Again investigates the role that contemporary art practice has to play in negotiating grief and encouraging a space for active communication to take place between the dead and the living. Can creative practice aid in easing the dead out of this life and settled in memory? Death can generate a creative response in artists, writers and the individual through memorializing and making visible the space it occupies. Central to At Sea Again project is the idea that creative practice allows for important bonds to continue with the deceased. The core purpose of the project was to introduce new audiences to contemporary art practice using artworks as a provocation to discuss memorial sites and where we go to remember the dead. The dead have two lives one in nature, one in culture. Social death takes time.

Underpinning research

Through a series of events supported through FEAST funding At Sea Again provided a space for conversations to take place with members of the community as a research tool focusing on bereavement narratives. Conversations took place that explored ways in which bonds are continued with the dead to promote a sense of health and wellbeing through shared story telling. Working with current research on continuing bond theories (Steffen 2017) the project explored how we communicate with the dead as a healthy response to bereavement and grief. The project focused on the often complex and deep relationship we have with the dead.

1. Exhibition: At Sea Again, Lamorna Village Hall (July 20,21,22 2018)

The short film depicting a sea burial off the coast of Cornwall was presented as an installation in Lamorna Village Hall for three days in July 2018. The exhibition consisted of a short film, a video projection and a number of small paintings. During the 3- day period 89 visitors engaged with the exhibition. Feedback following an exhibition demonstrated the ability that visual art practice has to move and provoke an audience- especially when encountered in unexpected places. The context of the village hall allowed audience members to be surprised by something unexpected and to respond to the site as well as the work.

*Dear Lucy I want to tell you we were moved by your exhibition and drove back to our campsite mostly in silence.  My husband David and I met you briefly in Lamorna on Friday. We thought your exhibition was beautiful and courageous: A truly moving and potent experience. I awoke the next morning with images, feelings and thoughts evoked by your exhibition.                                       I hope we meet again.                 With good wishes from A. J*

A number of the visitors were on holiday and visiting the exhibition as they were passing. The local residents also visited the exhibition and gave positive feedback in terms of how the village hall was being used. Members of a local bereavement group also visited the exhibition as well as public who were interested in contemporary art practice.

2. Creative Bereavement workshops, Clarence House Therapy Centre, Penzance

Caroline Lloyd (bereavement academic Trinity College Dublin) and Lucy Willow worked in partnership to deliver two creative bereavement workshops in July 2018. The workshops were part of a project, *At Sea Again* by Lucy Willow a memorial artwork being show in Lamorna village Hall in July 2018. Together they used their skills and expertise to guide participants through some creative activities exploring grief. This was a way to open up conversation and explore difficult and confusing emotions as well as offer support through being in a space with other bereaved people. Creative writing can be a particularly powerful tool in expressing the ongoing love for family or friends who have died in our lives. The focus of the workshops was on the continuing and vital relationships we share with our loved ones and ways we keep them present.

3. Café Morte (creative death café) Dog and Rabbit, café St.Just, Cornwall

As part of *At Sea Again* bereavement project, Café Morte (creative Death Café) invited participants to engage in a conversation relating to memorial ground and where we go to remember the dead. Using the memorial artwork as a starting point to explore how and where ashes are scattered, burial rites and our attachment to the body post death. The session was open and inclusive and allowed for people to join the conversation who were visiting the café at that time.

*Cafe Morte looks at the way in which visual and textual cultures represent death and dying, mourning and grieving through art, dreams, desires, imagery and poetry.*

CAFE MORTE is a pop up research group established at Falmouth University School of Art in 2014 by Mercedes Kemp and Lucy Willow. Its central focus is to discuss the rich and varied themes of death found in art and literature. As a group we have met regularly adopting the model of the recently popular Death Cafes, which have arisen worldwide as a meeting place in which to discuss death over a cup of tea.