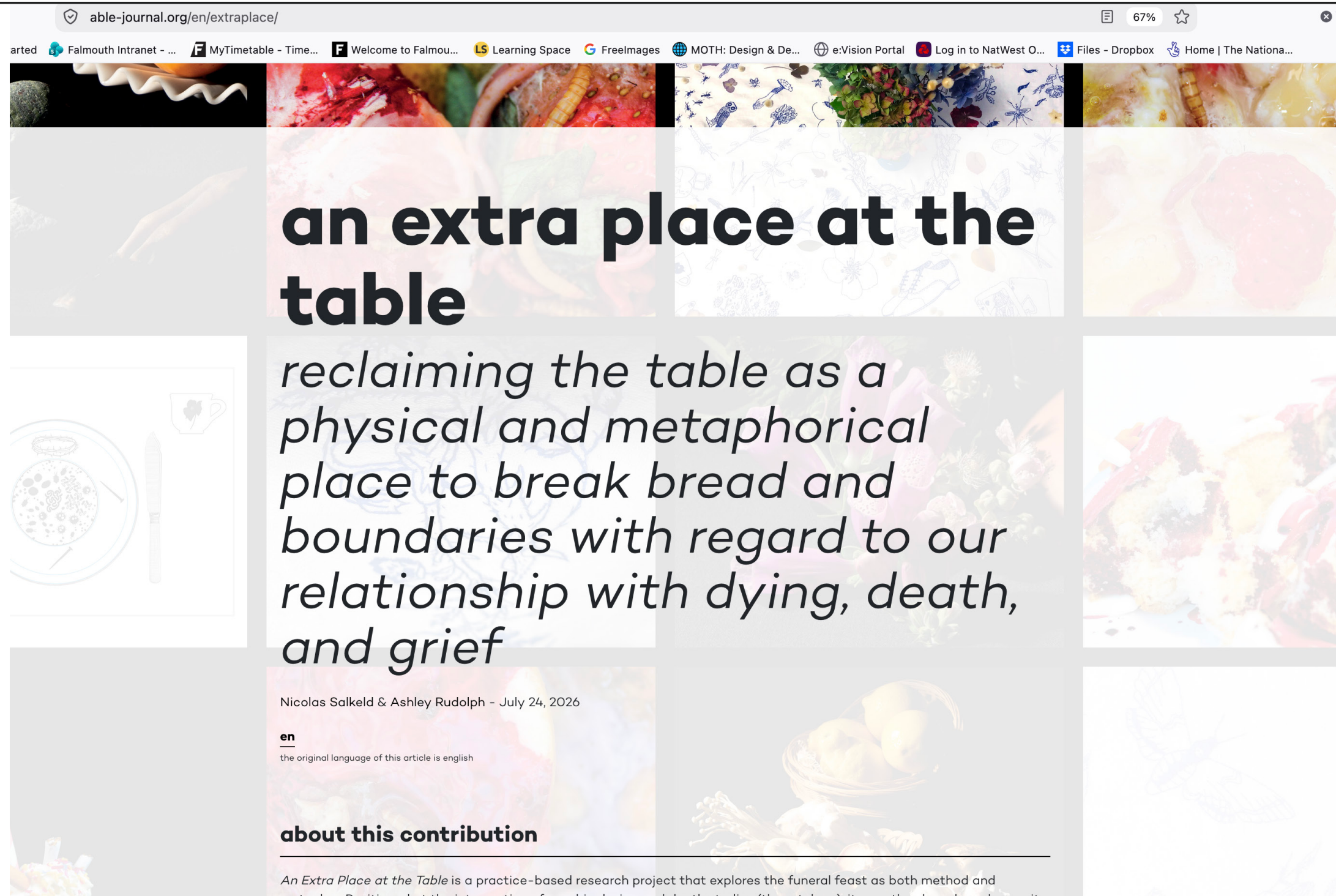




able visual essay. Peer Review. *An Extra Place at the Table: Reclaiming the table as a physical and metaphorical place to break bread and boundaries with regard to our relationship with dying, death and grief.*

<https://able-journal.org/en/>

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Project overview

MOTH Article Published in .able Journal

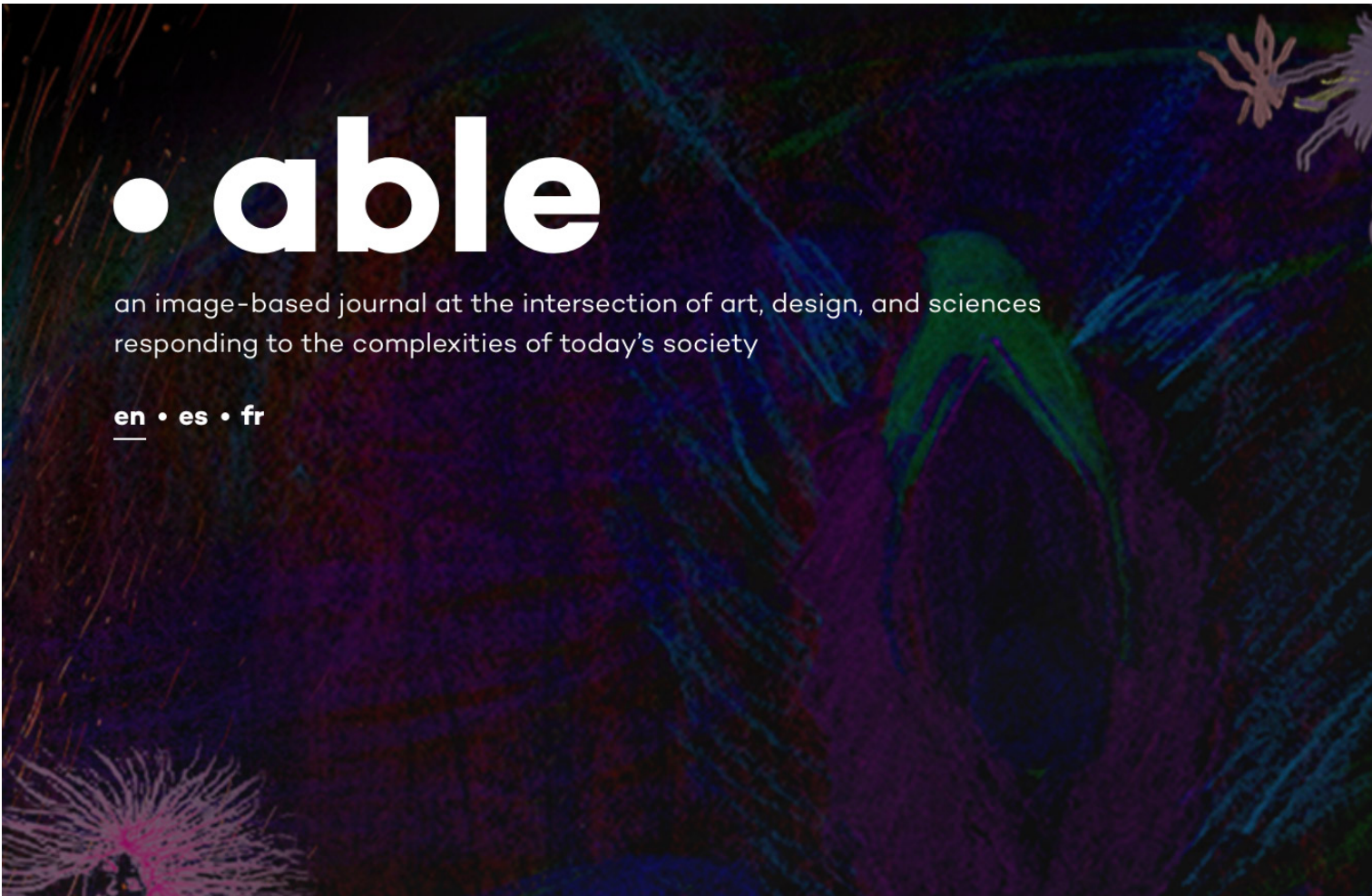
.able visual essay. An Extra Place at the Table: Reclaiming the table as a physical and metaphorical place to break bread and boundaries with regard to our relationship with dying, death and grief.

A visual essay in a peer-reviewed international journal, .able for interdisciplinary teams developing innovative approaches to practice-based research. Moth was invited to produce image-based exploration, analyzing elements such as the forms, methods, processes, results, and instruments we collaboratively bring into play our design [and scientific] research.

An image-based multi-platform journal at the intersection of art, design, and sciences

Today, research in art and design is flourishing. Firmly rooted in practice, this new approach is positioned at the intersections of art, design, and the sciences, responding to the complexities of contemporary society and environmental concerns.

Sensory perception is at the center of practice-based research, and thus at the heart of .able. A peer-reviewed journal exploring the full potential of multimedia and multi-platform publishing, .able’s aim is to deliver visual essays to the academic sphere and beyond, to bring this research and creation to as wide an audience as possible.



Question

*An Extra Place at the Table:
How can we reclaiming
the table as a physical and
metaphorical place to break
bread and boundaries with
regard to our relationship with
dying, death and grief?*

Aims and objectives

Research aims:

To publish visual research practice. .able provides a peer reviewed platform for art, design, and the sciences,

To disseminate outcomes and provoke discussion on how personalized rites of passage can be reconciled with the collective needs of the bereaved, connecting the living and the dead through bereavement rituals and memorialisation.

The project forms part of Moth, an initiative exploring the roles graphic designers can play in shaping end-of-life experiences.

Predicated on the idea that confidently expressing “negative” emotions helps us navigate grief and sadness and communicate empathy and loss.

Research objectives:

1. A peer reviewed published article to disseminate and share project
2. Connecting with partners and build network.
3. Focused on the visual, in .able text is ancillary, used only to ensure links with other academic publishing platforms (metadata) and citations of individual contributions to research.

Research design

Research methodology:

The work advocates design as an activity and a way of thinking that can be used to explore ideas, conduct critical research and catalyse new social situations.

Moth's methodology combines visual and material culture, phenomenology, semiotics, and iterative testing through curated events, designed artifacts, and audience feedback. It examines how creative practice can expand the cultural and emotional language around dying, grief, and remembrance, and how design methods might open space for conversations typically avoided in public life.

Research method[s]:

Semiotic analysis, Iterative testing, interviews, ethnographic research and audience feedback.

.able Visual Essay. Peer reviewed essay.



Image above Visual Essay images [Questions reveal interactive] .able Storyable format. [Content appears as a storyboard with optional captions]

An Extra Place at the Table is a practice-based research project that explores the funeral feast as both method and metaphor. Positioned at the intersection of graphic design and death studies (thanatology), it uses the shared meal as a site of commemoration and communion—one that can also hold moments of celebration. The project asks how personal experiences of loss sit within collective rituals of mourning, connecting the living and the dead through practices of remembrance. Food plays a central role in these processes: it “affirms identity, strengthens kinship bonds, and provides comfortable and familiar emotional support during periods of stress,” while familiar dishes evoke memories and gestures toward the continuation of life (Thursby 2015).

Drawing on discursive design, the project uses the dinner table as a structured encounter that both expresses and elicits meaning. Discursive design foregrounds reflection rather than resolution, using artifacts and prompts to open questions rather than close them (Tharp and Tharp 2018). Guests gather around a table set with specifically designed textiles, symbolic objects, speculative questions, and curated images that help bring reflections on death, grief, and end-of-life decisions to the surface. These elements act as subtle provocations that shift the dinner from everyday commensality into a more symbolic, ritualized experience.

able Visual Essay. Peer reviewed essay.

A menu of questions choreographs the evening, allowing conversations often avoided in daily life, to emerge within a familiar domestic setting.

The gesture of laying an “extra place” acknowledges absence while keeping memory active in the present. Continuing Bonds Theory suggests that grief persists, that ongoing relationships with the dead are sustained through shared stories and practice (Walter 1996). Here, the table becomes a site for biographical work, where the presence of the absent is created through ritual, dialogue, and material cues.

The project forms part of Moth, an initiative exploring the roles graphic designers can play in shaping end-of-life experiences. Predicated on the idea that confidently expressing “negative” emotions helps us navigate grief and sadness and communicate empathy and loss.

Moth’s methodology combines visual and material culture, phenomenology, semiotics, and iterative testing through curated events, designed artifacts, and audience feedback. It examines how creative practice can expand the cultural and emotional language around dying, grief, and remembrance, and how design methods might open space for conversations typically avoided in public life.

For this story.able edition, An Extra Place at the Table is reimagined as a visual narrative composed of curated images from the Moth archive. These photographs act as a conceptual time-lapse, capturing fragmentary moments from previous dinners while forming a new, hybrid composition that mirrors the layered, looping ways grief is felt and revisited. A hand-embroidered tablecloth anchors many of the images, its motifs drawn from sets of religious, historical, and domestic symbols

associated with death. Stitched in cobalt blue, the imagery references traditions of blue-and-white tableware—such as Staffordshire Willow Pattern—placing the cloth within a familiar visual language of shared meals.

Although all of the motifs relate to death, their meanings are not fixed. Signs acquire meaning through shared agreements within a community (Crow 2010), so guests bring their own interpretations to the cloth. The tablecloth becomes a semiotic field: a material prompt that encourages meaning-making rather than prescribing it. Through this quiet, tactile surface, death becomes a welcome presence at the table. After the feast, the table becomes a disordered landscape—its crumbs, stains, and displaced objects offering traces of the conversations and relationships that unfolded there. This unsettled surface mirrors how death is experienced not as a single event but as a series of emotional, social, and temporal fragments.

Guests are invited to question the macro; the collective vastness of the universality of death, alongside the micro; the intimate uniqueness of a single life, that is lived and lost. A place to learn from others, engage with personal values, and develop a death-positive attitude, for when the inevitable event that we plan for least comes to visit us.

able Visual Essay. Peer reviewed essay.

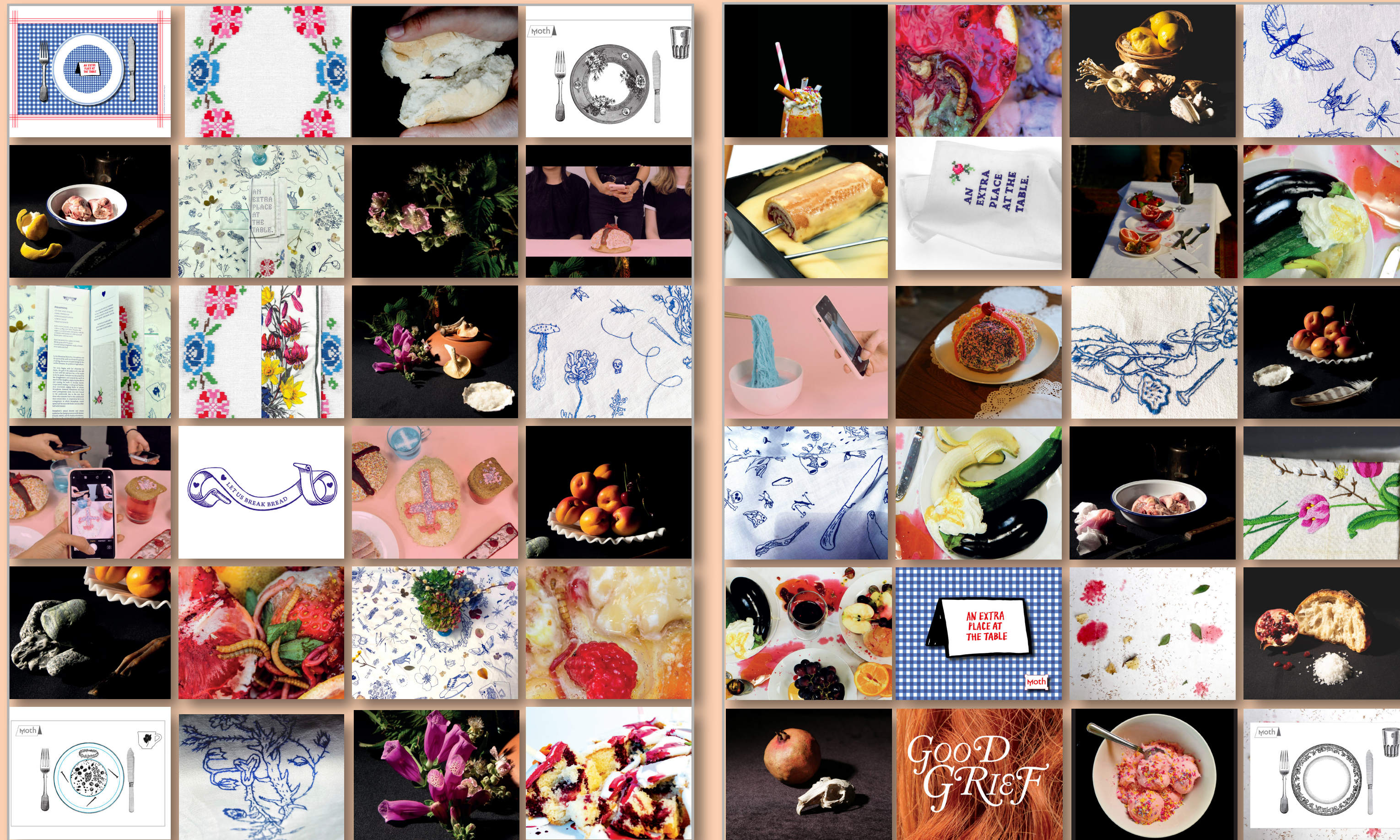


Image left: Visual Essay images [Questions reveal interactive] .able Storyable format. [Content appears as a storyboard with optional captions]

able Visual Essay. Peer reviewed essay. Credits

Authors:

Nicola Salkeld and Ashley Rudolph, co-founders of MOTH: Design for Life & Death, a research project at Falmouth University (UK)

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Dr. Tony Walter, Professor of Death Studies | Director of the University of Bath Centre for Death & Society

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Dr. Robyn Cook

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Bronwyn Mahoney

Research context

*This iteration of An Extra Place at the Table is reimagined as a visual storyboard, evoking the immersive and visceral experience—and timeline—of a dinner party. Presented in the **Story.able** format, users navigate through interactive place settings, each offering a discursive prompt in the form of questions about the end of life. These emerge across the table as a series of slow-revealing motion GIFs—images that rhythmically appear and fade, echoing the shifting nature of memory and conversation.*

A central visual feature of the presentation is a painstakingly hand-embroidered tablecloth, which functions both as a setting and a storytelling surface. Symbols of bereavement are intricately stitched into its fabric and overlaid with photographic fragments of the funeral feast. Among these are images of rotting and decaying food—an intentional memento mori. These layered visuals act as mnemonic cues, deepening the emotional resonance of the questions and anchoring them within the sensory memory of shared meals.

Rooted in discursive design, the presentation embraces a socially engaged practice that provokes reflection towards shifting thought and action [Tharp]. Prompted by six end-of-life questions that invite personal engagement, the .able user thus becomes an active participant in the storytelling process. This approach draws on reflexive methods from craft histories,

where lived experience is treated as a form of knowledge, expressed through emotion, memory, and narrative.

Research context

1. Symbols Graphic design, words, imagery and communication	Design of symbolic and visual communications.
2. Artifacts Material Culture. Designed/discursive objects, artifacts, product prototypes.	Design of material objects.
3. Experience Design, events, audience interaction & participation.	Design of activities and organised events. [Pedagogic External audience]
4. Critical design practice.	Cultural systems/values/environments for living, working, playing and learning.

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Appendix:

MLA EN Rudolph, Ashley, and Nicola Salkeld. “An Extra Place at the Table: Reclaiming the Table as a Physical and Metaphorical Place to Break Bread and Boundaries with Regard to Our Relationship with Dying, Death, and Grief.” .able journal, 2026. *https://doi.org/10.69564/able.en.26039.extraplace*.

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