



Dawn Cole

My work for the NUNO exhibition responds to the loss and trauma caused by war and conflict through 3 generations of women in my family and the inherited trauma still evident today.

My Nanna, Edith was born in Margate in 1896. From a large working-class family, she sadly lost her brother William when he was killed in action in 1916 during the First World War. Edith married Joseph Jackson and had a son William (Bill) who she named after the brother she lost, and a daughter, Eileen, my Mum. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Bill enlisted in the Royal Artillery; against his mother's best efforts to persuade him to be a conscientious objector.

Sadly, I never knew my grandfather Joseph. He developed lung cancer in 1943 and was nursed at home by Edith and Eileen until he died in October 1944. Bill was given compassionate leave to attend his father's funeral. This was to be the last time Edith and Eileen were to see him as he was killed in action on November 27, 1944.

Eileen, then just a teenager, recalls this time, remembering her father's pain, her mother's loss and then the dreadful news of Bill's death. So many wounds. Many, for Eileen, remain barely healed, ripping open at the slightest thing, tearing her apart. Wounds she has lived with all her adult life. Wounds that have caused anxiety and depression and phobias but also a strength and determination to speak about her past to ensure it never remains buried. So much sadness through three generations of women; my Great-Grandmother losing her son and my Nanna her brother; William, my Nanna; her husband and her son and my Mum her father and brother; Bill.

When I was invited to take part in the NUNO project I saw it as an opportunity to make work in response to my collection of empty clocks. I have been buying empty clocks for many years. Each one bought because it reminded me of something else or someone. These empty clocks, hollow and missing what most would see as the vital component that makes them clocks and yet to me they are still keepers of time. Their design, construction, workmanship and materials all recall the fashion and craft of another time, the wear and tear evidence their time worn use

and the fact that they have now been discarded and disposed of, separated from their original owners most significantly suggests the ultimate moment in time – death. For NUNO I decided to use a broken, black slate mantel clock, bought because it reminded me of one that my Nanna had and which I have since learnt was passed down to her from my Great Grandmother; a perfect connection.

My first ideas were to mend the broken slate clock with paper containing words, however as I began to work with the clock, photographing it and making rubbings of the damaged parts I began to experiment with the notion of replicating the clock somehow.

Lead and textiles are materials I use regularly.

Lead for its contradictions; toxic if ingested, used to make bullets and shrapnel shells, used for protective aprons in x-ray rooms, to line nuclear bunkers and to line coffins to slow down the body's natural decaying process. A heavy metal that has a very low melting point and a fragility and instability that seems at odds with both its ability to harm and protect.

Textiles, and particularly hand embroidered or embellished pillowcases and handkerchiefs, for their associations with women's work, home making, and their ability to contain the traces of those who use them through the hand decoration and DNA from bodily fluids.

It seemed logical that these materials were appropriate to use to make the other clocks, replicas of the original made with materials that to me spoke of conflict, anxiety and fragility

On 28th July 2014; the centenary of the start of the First World War, I began to collect my own hair, hair that ended up tangled in my hairbrush. I stopped collecting it on November 11th, 2018, the centenary of the end of the war. I wanted to explore the idea of 'tearing one's hair out' as a metaphor for the anxiety experienced during conflict and on a personal level when my Mum had her first break down she lost most of her hair. My research in the past has included the material culture surrounding death and bereavement and amongst my archive I have a memento mori; a brooch made from woven hair as a reminder of a lost loved one and also of one's own mortality. Using my own hair is quite literally a physical manifestation (through the DNA present in the hair follicles) of my connection with the people that my work for NUNO symbolises.

From initial ideas and the proposal, I submitted my work for this project has expanded and changed significantly. This is no surprise as it is what always happens once I get into my studio and begin making. The making process becomes a form of research and helps to channel thoughts and ideas. The creative process takes me by the hand and leads me where I need to go.

Time is a Healer

A triptych of clocks placed side by side on a mantel shelf.

made from lead

made from hand embroidered handkerchiefs, lead and stitched with lead thread

the original black slate clock, repaired with lead and containing human hair