



CIRCLES OF FOCUS





Type of output:
Exhibition

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SUMMARY

Circles of Focus was an exploratory practice-based research project investigating individual and societal attitudes towards the dead body. It envisaged the prospective use of the anatomised body as a site of artistic research through the lens of body donation to medical science.

The research aimed to;

- Use socially engaged, performative sculptural practice as the means to develop a speculative proposal to participants to employ their donated human bodies for artistic, as well as scientific research.
- Understand, influence and expand the cultural impact of anatomical practices through cross-disciplinary partnerships and social engaged practice.
- Develop an understanding of the corporeal living and dead body in order to propose a less human-centred relationship with intersecting botanical and earthly materialities.

Exploratory practice-based work took place with prospective donors, anatomy students and staff in the context of the Department of Anatomy, University of Glasgow. Extending the value of the enquiry across disciplinary fields, Borland and Condon engaged with colleagues in networks researching policy, ethics, death and society and employed the existing Body Donation Register as a procedural and ethical framework to locate the research.

Methods used were developed for their cross-disciplinary relevance and experimental nature, they included; Live Action Role Play in the anatomy dissection laboratory and intimate workshops with participants developed from Gestalt Therapy. The employment of both archaic and contemporary sculptural materials and processes introduced a historical perspective on rituals associated with death and burial.

Research was disseminated in an extensive programme of public events, with an emphasis on the performative construction of knowledge through sculptural making. The resulting exhibition at CCA, Glasgow was realised in the form of a speculative proposal to two participating body donors, hypothesising the official incorporation of artistic research as an option within the Body Donation Register. A small publication and documentary film accompanied it.

INTRODUCTION

The collaboration between Borland and artist Brody Condon (USA/Berlin) was initiated in 2011 on receipt of Creative Scotland's 'Vital Spark' Award. The outcome of their first period of collaboration was *Daughters of Decayed Tradesmen*, a sculpture installed in the watchtower at New Calton Burial Ground, Edinburgh in August 2013

In early 2014 they began working together as *Circles of Focus* in response to a term used to describe successful team working amongst theatre teams during operations. They initiated a collaborative partnership with Dr Quentin Fogg, Department of Anatomy, Glasgow University, CCA Glasgow and Cove Park Residency Centre, Argyll, Scotland.

Contextual research into burial traditions led to explorations in a wider cultural context and included visits to Naju National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and the National Museum for research into jar coffins, kilns and tombs in Korea. As part of the Anyang Biennale, Korea, 2014 the artists extended their research to organising a Symposium, *Death Animations*, with the aim of exploring traditions and rituals around death and society in Korean culture.

Initially working with Dr Fogg to explore live action role play (LARP) in the context of anatomy teaching practice, the artists met two prospective body donors and began the participatory practice-based work which resulted in the *Circles of Focus* exhibition at the CCA Glasgow.

All research with prospective donors, anatomy students and staff adhered to the directives of the Anatomy Act 1984, as amended by the Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006 with Dr Fogg directly liaising with Her Majesty's Inspector of Anatomy, Scotland for clarity when uncertainty arose regarding the ethics of the research or its' dissemination.

The research was disseminated in the *Circles of Focus* exhibition at CCA Glasgow in the form of a 'proposal' to two the participating body donors, to explore the donation of their bodies for the purpose of artistic (as well as scientific) research.

Perhaps it is this profound absence of bodies that creates the space for imagination at all, as we are asked to think about an artwork enacted with two donated cadavers, whilst being aware that we will never directly, visibly, experience it.

Alexander Storey Gordon, This is Tomorrow Review

TIMELINE

2014	2014 MAR	2015 JAN-MAR	2015 APR-MAY
<p>JAN 2014 - DEC 2015 Practice based research with Dr Quentin Fogg, Department of Anatomy, Glasgow & with participating Body Donors, January 2014-December 2015.</p>	<p><i>Symposium.</i> <i>Death Animations,</i> Kimchungup Museum, Anyang Visit to Naju National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and the National Museum for research into jar coffins, kilns and tombs in Korea.</p>	<p>Studio based working with Orkney Clay, Cove Park, Argyll.</p> <p>MARCH Public Open Air Turf Kiln Firing, Cove Park, Argyll, with presentations by the artists and experimental Archaeologist Andrew Appleby. 21 March 2015. Exhibition.</p>	<p><i>Exhibition.</i> <i>Circles of Focus</i> Exhibition, CCA Glasgow. 3 April-17 May 2015.</p>

RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Aims

- To explore, through artistic practice-based research, whether body donation (utilising the framework of the Body Donation Register) could be a vehicle for artistic as well as scientific research.
- To understand, influence and expand the cultural impact of anatomical practices.
- Develop an understanding of the corporeal living and dead body in order to propose a less human centred relationship with intersecting botanical and earthly materialities.

Right: *Circles of Focus* Process, Anatomy
Laboratory, University of Glasgow with
Dr Quentin Fogg

Photo credit: Christine Borland



Objectives

- Alongside collaborating partner, the Department of Anatomy, Glasgow University, to make creative interventions in anatomical procedures and processes using the Body Donation Register as a framework.
- To explore socially engaged, performative sculptural practice, as a means to develop a speculative proposal to participants to employ their donated human bodies for artistic as well as scientific research.
- To utilise archaic methods of sourcing and hand-processing elemental sculptural materials complemented by contemporary 3-D and computer-controlled technology.

Right: Detail *Circles of Focus*
Process, Example of Hypostasis
in Cadaver, Anatomy Laboratory,
University of Glasgow
Photo credit: Brody Condon



CONTEXT

Consistent with Borland's practice *Circles of Focus* is in the context of cross-disciplinary work which engages with expert cultures across science, technology and medicine. It is closely aligned with Northumbria University Cultural Negotiation of Science research group.

The project expands the limits of participatory and socially-engaged art practice (Bourriaud 2002, Bishop 2006) engaging at a fundamental level with 2 human body donor participants, developing Borland's previous explorations of identity in relation to the medical and scientific institutions of life and death.

The project also extends explorations in the cross-disciplinary field of *New Materialism* to consider the dead body in the re-examination of matter and material and the falling away of distinctions between the conventionally regarded 'living' and 'non-living' domains (Haraway 2016, Bennett 2010, Morton 2013).

This exploration acknowledges artists who work with human remains in both a contemporary and historical context (Margolles 2009, Czanecki 2012, Quinn 1991).

Borland/Condon engaged with colleagues in networks researching death and society (Centre for Death & Society, University of Bath, '*Death in Scotland*', Centre for Life and Death Studies, Durham University).

Research into burial traditions extended the research to engagements with Archaeologists and in particular with experimental Archaeologist and potter Andrew Appleby. This led to explorations in a wider cultural context and included visits to Naju National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and the National Museum for research into jar coffins, kilns and tombs in Korea.

Below: Reconstructed Jar Coffin Kiln,
Naju National Research Institute of
Cultural Heritage, Korea

Photo credit: Christine Borland



At the invitation of the Anyang Biennale, Korea, 2014 the artists extended their practice based research to organising a Symposium; *Death Animations* with the aim of exploring traditions and rituals around death and society in Korean culture.

Invited Speakers

- SiDug Kim – Curator National Korean Museum of Contemporary History
- Nak-Eun Chung – Chief Medical Examiner of National Forensic Services
- Park Changkyong – Film Director & Critic



Left: *Death Animations* Symposium, Kimchungup Museum, Anyang, Korea
Photo credit: Christine Borland

METHODS & PROCESSES

1. Research in the context of the anatomy dissection laboratory in Glasgow University began with observation and information gathering and extended into a discreet role-playing performance, which included the artists, a Nordic, Live Action Role Play (LARP) researcher, final year anatomy students, and donor cadavers. This was documented in drawing by a recorder who also participated in the LARP; the use of drawing, rather than photography or video better allowed for engagement on an imaginative level.



Right: *Circles of Focus* Process,
Drawing of LARP, Anatomy
Laboratory, University of Glasgow
Photo credit: Christine Borland

2. Private participatory performances and meetings were held regularly with the prospective donors in a variety of locations selected to contribute to the dynamic of the meetings. Initial encounters included the participation of a Gestalt therapist and subsequent meetings incorporated some of the principles of Gestalt therapy but focused on projecting onto a non-human object, rather than an examination of the self.



Left: *Circles of Focus, Methods & Processes, Session with Donor Participants, University of Glasgow*
Photo credit: Brody Condon

3. Ancient techniques involving hand-working clay; its sourcing, processing and shaping, were utilised with the intention of producing large-scale sculpture work. Exploratory tests determined the extent to which the rough material could be worked against its' natural tendencies, into relatively accurate geometric forms. These incorporated computer simulations, utilising the polygonal formations common to modelling figures. Laser printing and other forms of mark making utilising new technological methods, were tested.

4. The use of polygons was extended into a further large scale sculpture using laser-sintered ceramics and engineered to bear the weight of a performer's body. During the exhibition this manifested in the regular, unannounced activation of the sculpture by a performer lying unclothed parts of her body directly onto laser-sintered polygons, then standing while the impressed marks faded and the performance could be repeated. Video documentation at a macro level explored this processes incorporating time-codes to accurately measure the marks fading. These works were an indicator of the post-mortem process of Hypostasis.



Right: Detail, performer and
laser-sintered polygons

Photo credit: Brody Condon



Above and Below:
Detail *Circles of Focus* Methods &
Process Experiments with Orkney Clay
Photo credit: Borland & Condon

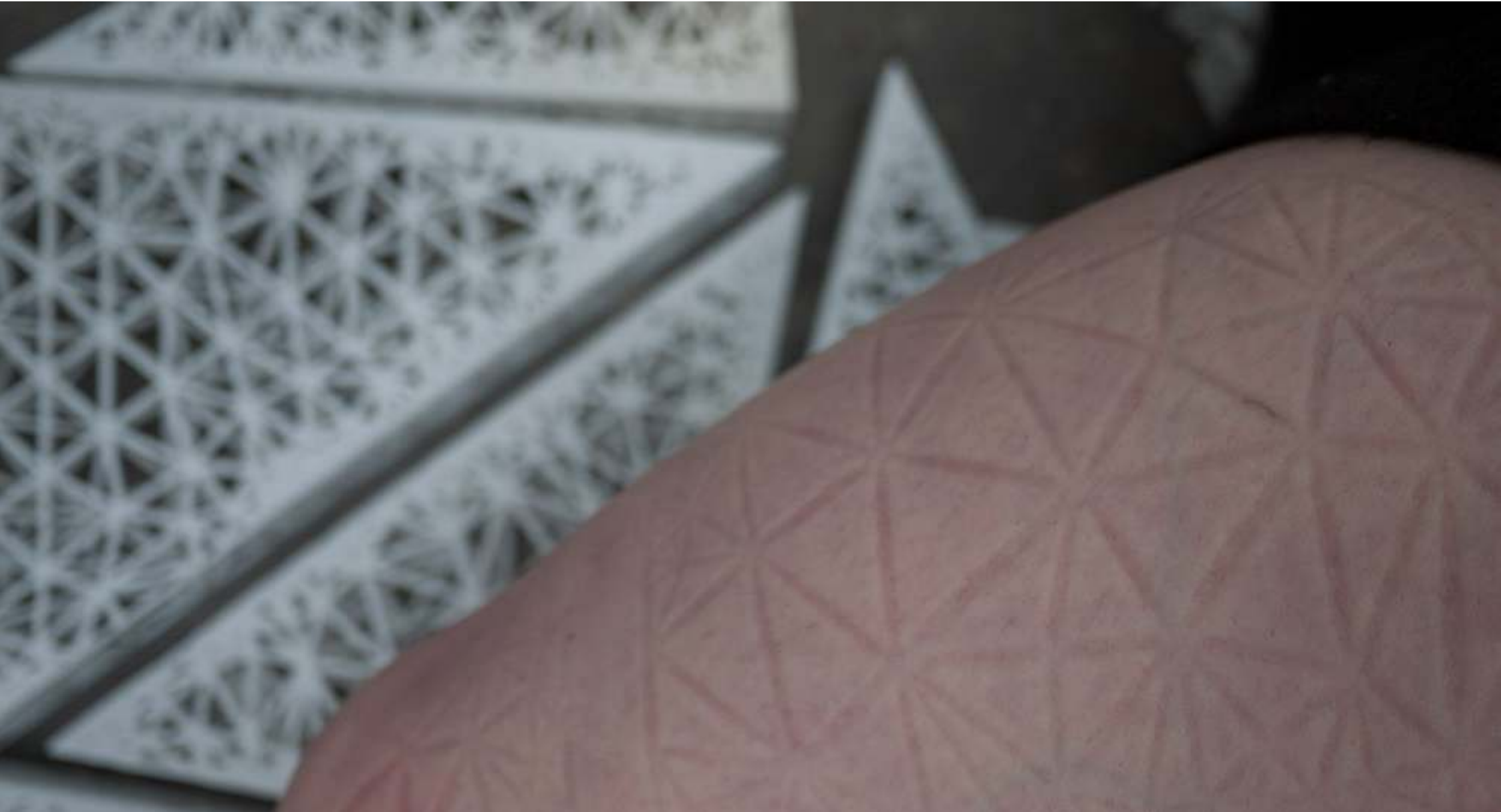




Above and Below:
Detail *Circles of Focus* Methods &
Process Experiments with Orkney Clay
Photo credit: Borland & Condon



Below:
Detail *Circles of Focus* Process, Detail
Performer and Laser sintered polygons
Photo credit: Brody Condon



5. The processes described 1 - 4 were often made with the participation of small invited groups, the activity acting as a catalyst for conversation and informal information gathering around public responses to body donation. This was scaled up during a public, open-air turf kiln, firing which drew heavily on expertise from the field of experimental archaeology to suggest a performative construction of knowledge through ritualised making.



Right: *Circles of Focus* Process, Turf Kiln
Clay Firing, Cove Park
Photo credit: Ruth Clark

Below:
Circles of Focus Process, Turf Kiln Clay
Firing, Cove Park
Photo credit: Ruth Clark



6. Textual research on the history of body donation, in particular the various Anatomy Acts which have been amended since introduction in 1832, was gathered and published alongside anonymised correspondence between artists and prospective donors, which explored the procedural aspects of the project in relation to Anatomical Bequest. This information was published in a newspaper format and was free to take away during the exhibition.



Right: Detail (newspaper publication)
Circles of Focus exhibition CCA
Glasgow 2015
Photo credit: Alan Dimick

DISSEMINATION

The research was disseminated in a programme of public events in the lead-up to, and during the exhibition *Circles of Focus* CCA, Glasgow.

The exhibition comprised;

- 1 floor-based circular sculpture of clay polygons
- 1 loor-based circular sculpture of laser-sintered polygons
- Intermittent performance
- 1 looped video projection

A short documentary recording methods, processes, the development of the work and commentary by partners, was commissioned by CCA Glasgow and is available via YouTube and social networks.

Keynotes delivered about the project included *Death in Scotland*, Edinburgh University, 2016 *The Two Cultures*, Hunterian Museum as part of Glasgow International Festival 2016, *Anatomising the Museum*, Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg, *In and Around 'Circles of Focus'*, Atelier Network, Edinburgh University, 2015.



Right: Detail *Circles of Focus*
exhibition CCA Glasgow 2015

Photo credit: Alan Dimick

Below:
Detail *Circles of Focus* Clay Circle, CCA
Glasgow 2015
Photo credit: Alan Dimick



A free, take home newspaper detailed the historical and contemporary context of the Body Donation Register.

Appendix 1:

Vimeo – <https://vimeo.com/134965301>

Appendix 2: Reviews

This is Tomorrow – <http://thisistomorrow.info/articles/christine-borland-brody-condon-circles-of-focus>

Article – The Creators Project – http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/en_uk/blog/turning-the-human-corpse-into-a-work-of-art

Review – The Herald – http://www.heraldscotland.com/arts_ents/visual/13208554.Christine+Borland+Brody+Condon+Circles+of+Focus+Centre+for+Contemporary+Arts+Glasgow/



Right: Detail, Newspaper publication,
Circles of Focus exhibition CCA
Glasgow 2015
Photo credit: Alan Dimick

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Right: CCA Glasgow 2015
Photo credit: Alan Dimick

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Creative Scotland for Research & Development Funding via Vital Sparks Fund.

The exhibition at CCA was funded by the institution in partnership with Cove Park artists residency centre, who facilitated all aspects of the outdoor turf-kiln firing.

Practice-based research with students in the Anatomy Dept, Glasgow was facilitated through collaboration with Nordic LARP researcher Dr Jaakko Sternos, Tampere University, Finland.

Creative Scotland for trip to Korea undertake visits to Naju National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage/National Museum.

Special thanks is due to the two body donor participants.



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