

FINAL REPORT

The Collection

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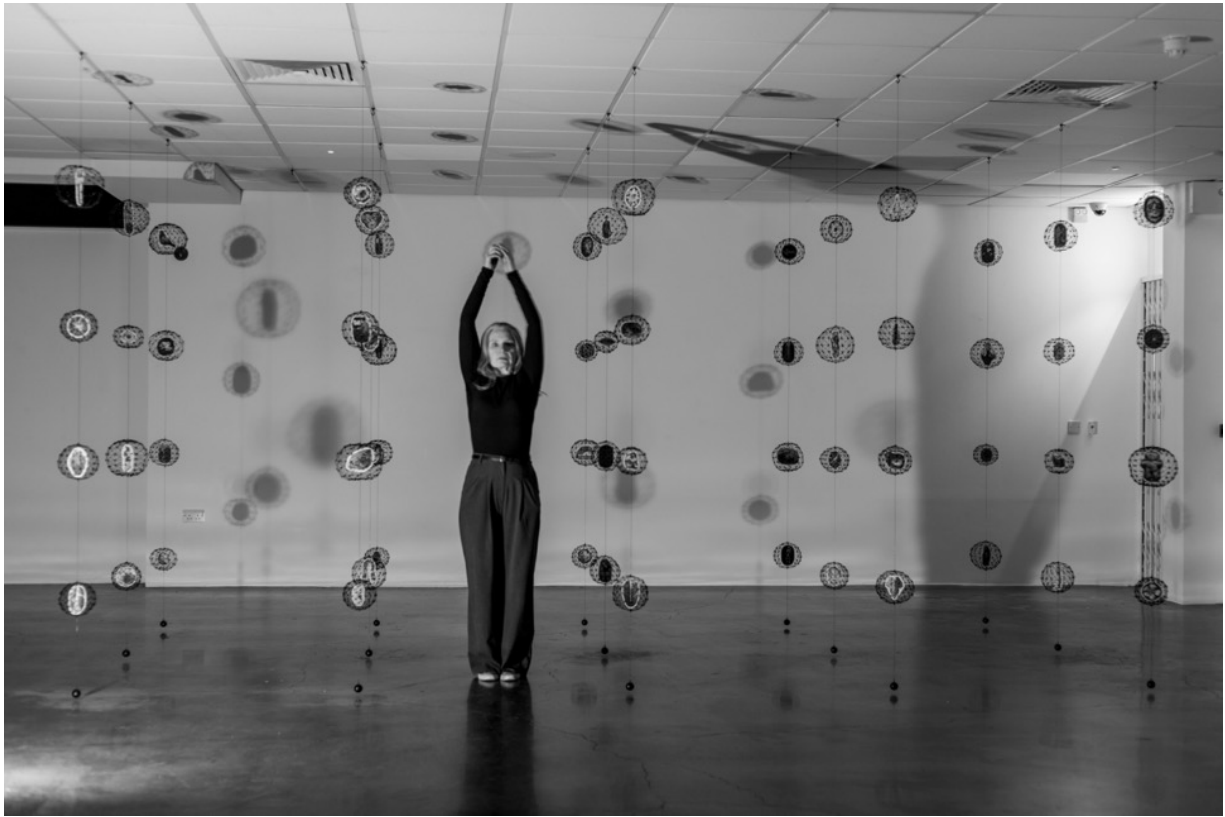
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(Fig 1. Performance in *The Collection*, 2024 Stiwdio Griffith, Swansea)

The Collection

Photographers, operating within the terms of the Surrealist sensibility, suggest the vanity of even trying to understand the World and instead propose that we collect it.

(Sontag, 1978, p82)

Introduction

Counting from 1751 to 2010, half of all CO2 emissions from the combustion of fossil fuels occurred after 1986, in just twenty-five years, when one of the greatest research efforts in history produced the science of climate change.

The turn of the millennium marked another crossing. Widespread awareness of the catastrophic implications of global warming essentially belongs to the twenty-first century, and since the year 2000, the rate of growth in CO2 emissions has been triple that of the 1990s. .. We may legitimately speak of a post-2000 emissions explosion. (Malm, 2016)

I live on a One Planet Development, off grid, in a zero-carbon house I built with my partner. I have always lived ecologically, growing my own food and talking to people about ecological lifestyles. In 2025, living an eco-life is still on the privileged margins and, as Malm states, things have got substantially worse, not better.

I came to eco living through my political beliefs and politics is at the forefront of my art practice too. I don't believe, as individuals, we can do anything about living under a hierarchical system, which is the main cause of our societal and environmental problems. But I do believe that rebuilding communities can empower individuals on a local scale. My art practice looks at this, from varying angles, in varying ways, from the intimate to the global.

My practice is prolific and for my final module I have created three bodies of work, all of which were exhibited in separate exhibitions in Stiwdio Griffith between October and January.

For this essay I shall concentrate on one work, *The Collection*. As this work was the most successful in its outcome and is the work I am planning on taking forward for exhibition after finishing my MA.

But all my work stems from my foundation in far-left politics and environmentalism. So, I shall begin by looking at the three main themes to my practice, Society, Environment and Feminism.

Society

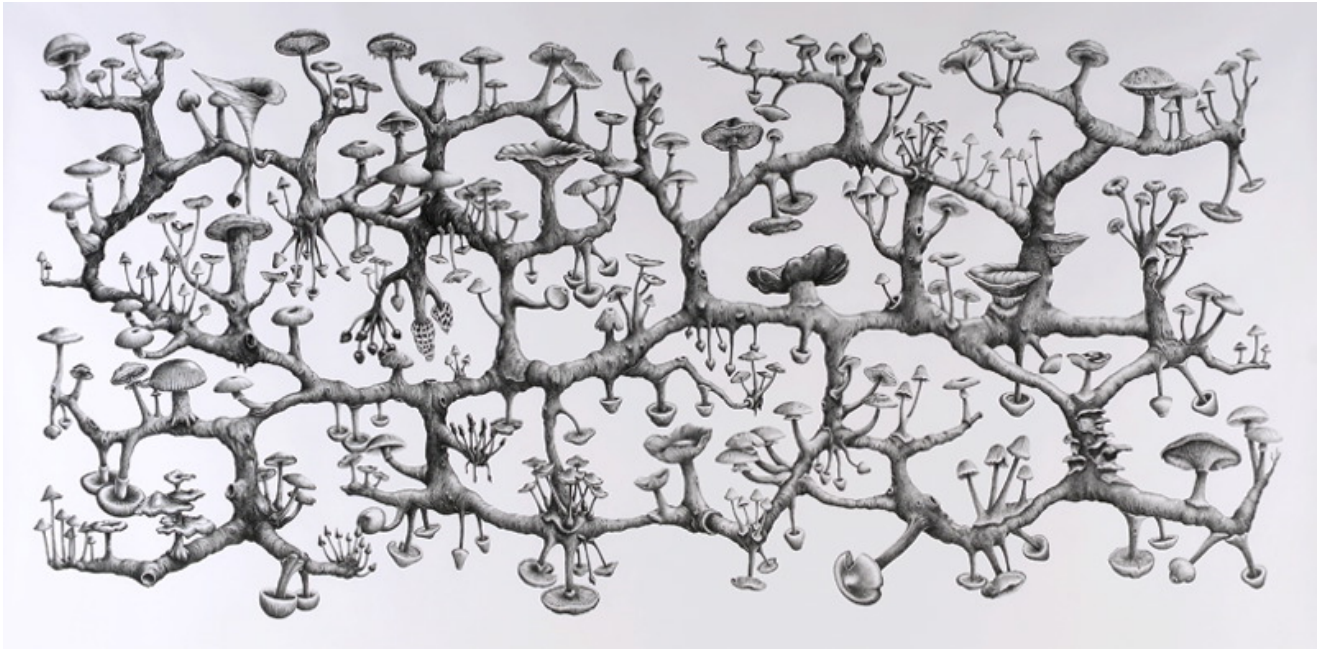
Without changing the most molecular relationships in society – notably, those between men and women, adults and children, whites and other ethnic groups, heterosexuals and gays (the list, in fact, is considerable) – society will be riddled by domination even in a socialistic 'classless' and 'non-exploitative' form. It would be infused by hierarchy even as it celebrated the dubious virtues of 'people's democracies,' 'socialism' and the 'public ownership' of 'natural resources.' And as long as hierarchy persists, as long as domination organises humanity around a system of elites, the project of dominating nature will continue to exist and inevitably lead our planet to ecological extinction. (Murray Bookchin, 1980)

Murray Bookchin, was an American political philosopher who came up with the concept of Social Ecology in his book *The Ecology of Freedom*, published in 1982. Social Ecology tells us that all our ecological problems stem from more fundamental, societal problems. He argued that how our planet is looked after is impacted by how our society is structured and how humans look after each other. Only by addressing societal inequalities, such as class division, racism and sexism, can we have any hope of addressing our climate crisis. Everything is connected and how we treat each other is echoed in how we treat the Earth and all life on it. (Bookchin, 1982)

'...the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2023, p26)

This idea of interconnectedness is not a new one. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari talk of the Rhizome. Rhizomatic thinking is nonlinear and non-hierarchical. It is a network of nodes that can grow and spread in any direction, from any point. Any point can join to any other point, which allows for free, flowing thinking with an emphasis of multiplicity.

Deleuze and Guattari talk about natural systems that show rhizomatic connections like bees and flowers. And they tell us how this way of thinking can be applied to everything, including our society. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2023)



(Fig.2 Mycelium Rhizome, 2009, by Richard Giblett)

I find Deleuzian concepts very visual and much easier to explain to others through visuals rather than words. I see the Rhizomatic connections, I see the Body without organs, and I can see myself, becoming animal. This is why I keep returning to rhizomatic connections in my work, my practice is rhizomatic. Individual works can be viewed separately, but if you zoom out and look at my practice, it is all linked and bounces off of each other. I have found writing this essay about my practice very difficult. I can't really talk about one work, my work is everything I make and do, even how I live and interact with people.

Environment

In *Anthropocene Poetics*, David Farrier looks at how artists face the challenge of addressing the Anthropocene. How can one talk about such an immense subject through art?

...it remains vital to approach the Anthropocene not as the homogenization of an abstract 'humanity' but as a reappraisal of what it means to be human in a time of political, ethical and ecological crisis. (Farrier, 2019, p17)

To talk about the big things, we must talk about the small things in our work, share our thoughts and emotions about our times. To conceptualise the politics of Climate Change, he tells us, we must look at everything at once, the inner and the outer, on multiple scales, from the atomic to the cosmic.

'Climate change disrupts the scale at which one must think, skews categories of internal and external...' (Farrier, 2019, p34)

He talks a lot about entanglement, between organic and nonorganic and again, the rhizomatic connections everything has with each other and what this means for us in the Anthropocene.

Deep time is such a big thing to talk about, there is no way to truly show that humanity's actions now will impoverish our descendants for all time to come. You can't just tell people that, you must make people feel it. A lot of my practice is this: intense moments of emotions that I capture through impromptu performances in my home.

In *One Place or Another*, Miwon Kwon talks about Locational Identity and how it is no longer anchored to an actual place, due to our modern nomadic lifestyles. But we can become attached to an idea, a way of living, a culture. Community art practice is a very nice idea, but the tendency is for institutions to bring in privileged, middle-class artists to talk for communities. What is needed is communities empowered to have their own voice, express their own feelings. (Kwon, 2004) I am very clear now that I cannot talk for anyone but myself and my experiences, my attachments in life, are being a mother and living on the land.



(Fig. 3. *Bell Cage*, 2024 by Sarah Grounds)

I have lived in some extremely isolating and wild places, where nature and the weather have been very important in my day-to-day life. Most western people don't experience that connection to nature anymore.

Tove Jansson the creator of the Moomins wrote about this connection with nature whilst she was living on *The Island*. Jansson was a lesbian in Helsinki in the 1960's but it was not socially acceptable for lesbian couples to live together. In 1961 Jansson bought Klovharun, a small rocky island with no electricity or running water where her partner, Tuulikki Pietilä and her would spend long summers. Jansson wrote often about her experiences of living simply on the island, which I deeply relate to. Her writing has greatly influenced my work around nature and our connection to it. (Clapp, 2021)

After being alone for a very long time, one starts to see the world differently, to perceive the organic and the unexpected all around, to brush against all the incomprehensible beauty of the World. (Jansson, 1961)

Anthropocene Poetics has been the most important book for my practice this year. Farrier's emphasis on the importance of entanglements and kin-making, showing people the importance of rebuilding multispecies relationships in an era of breaking biodiversity, is a fundamental part of my practice. Also allowing oneself to mourn for something that has not yet passed is crucially important. as we hurtle towards a potential future that is deeply impoverished.

I have looked at connections ever since I have started university but what Farrier has also shown me is the oneness of everything. The self, expanding out to fill the world and enfolding in to encompass the world. I like this idea very much, with this, there are no links, just one, everything as one.

'... we encounter the body enfolded in deep time across multiple scales.' (Farrier, 2019, p34)

This has given me a vision of everything layered, every feeling, everything that has been and will be. Layering like this is non-hierarchical, nothing is more important than anything else.

I have spent a lot of this year experimenting with trying to represent this oneness through photography, by creating multiple exposures with my Olympus OM1.



(Fig. 4. *Synergy*, 2024 by Sarah Grounds)

I shoot a roll of self-portraits, rewind the film and then shoot a roll of plant images. I have been amazed at how well the two shots work together, despite the pairings being so random. The randomness of the pairings also pleases me, showing the multiplicity of life and its interconnectedness.

Feminism

In most of my work I am not representing woman. But I am finding that creating work as a woman, I will never be free of my womanhood. Lauren Elkin talks of this in her book *Art Monsters*.

One of the pitfalls of self-presentation was looking boastful - you didn't want to come across as having too high an opinion of yourself or your work; an excess of self-regard would scan as a moral failing. (Elkin, 2024, p96)

Elkin talks of how the art world only seems to accept women depicting themselves as disgusting, or distorted. Females who represent themselves otherwise, come up against a lot of anger, even from other feminists. These artists Elkin has given the name 'Art Monsters' and I happily realise that I am an art monster too.

My work talks about freedom, including bodily freedom, and this makes people feel uncomfortable. A lot of my recent reading has been around female artists expressing broader subjects, other than their bodies, using their bodies.

One of the main artists Elkin talks about is Helen Chadwick, an artist I had never come across before, our practices are unbelievably similar. Chadwick also used her body to express larger concepts than just herself, she made up images out of multiple printouts and she would also perform within her installations, creating multi layered work. (Chadwick, 2004)

Chadwick's most famous work, *Of Mutability*, shown in the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, in 1986, was made up of two rooms. The first room being The Oval Court and the second Carcass. Carcass was a living sculpture, it was made up of a giant glass vat sat in the middle of the room, filled with rotting compost. Chadwick would come in every day and add her and neighbour's kitchen waste to the pile. Apparently, the stench of the rotting compost became so strong, one could smell it down the street of the gallery. The other room, The Oval

Court, was a collection of twelve collages laid on the floor, incorporating Chadwick's nude body contorted into different shapes and merged with other animals and food. The collages were made using a photocopier which Chadwick used to scan and print parts of her body and other things. She then cut and stuck the images carefully together creating a pool of life in the middle of the room. Amongst this pool were five large gold spheres which Chadwick used to represent the divine hand. Upon the walls Chadwick made paper columns topped with her own heads, weeping swathes of tears.



(Fig. 5. Detail of *The Oval Court*, 1986 by Helen Chadwick)

The whole work was extremely sensual, depicting an 'unrepenting Eve' and created a great deal of heated debate. Chadwick's use of nudity in the work, received a lot of negative reactions, especially from old fashioned feminists still trapped in the iconoclastic, anti-nude tirade of the 1980s. This made Chadwick rethink how she used her body in her work.

"I made a conscious decision in 1988 not to represent my body. It immediately declares female gender and I wanted to be more deft." (Chadwick 2004. P20)

From then on Chadwick turned her gaze to inside her body, exploring the self through the interior.

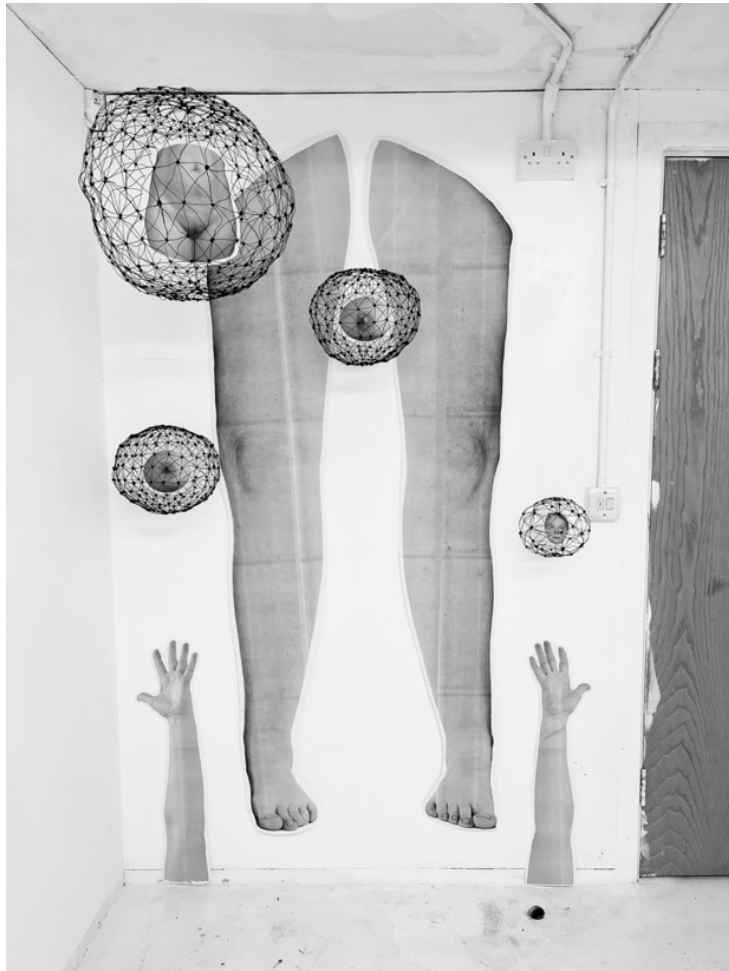
Chadwick's work was a desire to move beyond the usual boundaries of self, to look past gender and likeness, to go beneath the skin. She explored the self through different conceptual frameworks, of self and society, male and female, flesh and spirit. And what she ultimately was trying to say is that self is not some separate entity, self is understood through its relationships with everything. (Chadwick 2004. P13)

Her vision was beautiful and the fact she was disempowered by her gender, is very sad.

In *Glitch Feminism*, Legacy Russell talks about the 'bagging and tagging' of bodies and how the internet has empowered us to explore the fluidity of gender. The binary has been one of the most powerful tools that hierarchy has used to control society. Legacy tells us how artists have used an internet presence to sabotage this binary control, creating a glitch. The internet is a potential sea of bodily experimentation, especially for ethnic minorities, the disabled and woman. All of whom have suffered the most control and body domination in our society. The internet gives these people a voice that they have never had before, gaining confidence and support through the web, then taking this empowerment AFK. (Russell, 2020)

I have a very supportive, online community of artists which has encouraged me to express myself artistically. But I have been distancing myself from this community during my time at university. Reading *Glitch Feminism* has made me reassess the importance of this online community and I am excited to explore further the removal of labels through the anonymity of the web. In my work I already try to un-gender myself, representing *Body as Human*, *Body as Animal* and *Body as World*. Mainly based around Deleuze's thoughts on abandoning ordained order and fixed identities in favour of a more fluid, multiple becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 2023). Trying to move beyond the obvious composition of my body, I have taken this concept

even further this year by completely taking my body apart and putting it back together again, in different compositions. By doing this, I remove any sexualisation of the body and any preconceived ideas of what the body means about a person. By breaking up the body, the body just becomes body.



(Fig. 6. *Body*, 2024 by Sarah Grounds)

This was the first time I chose to encircle images in spheres of wire. For this work the things encircled were things that I protect more from society, things that also, society does not want to see, see properly, as a body part. I found this process of weaving around an item very meditative. I spent time with these body parts, more time than I have ever before. This whole process, intrigued me, and this is how 'The Collection' began.

Gathering The Idea

'..note taking on, potentially, everything in the World, from every possible angle.'

(Sontag, 1978, p176)

In *On Photography* Sontag talks a lot about the desire photographers must photograph everything. She talks of us as collectors, documenting everything in the world, trying to bring order to chaos. (Sontag, 1978) I am a prolific photographer, and I realise that this is what I am doing, I am collecting the world around and within me. Trying to bring order to a chaotic world which makes no sense to me.

Through my training at university, telling myself that what I photograph must have some deeper theoretical meaning, I calmed myself down and did not allow myself to photograph everything, Whilst this is still a part of my thinking, I also now acknowledge the intense desire I feel to photograph is also legitimate.

I decided then to start a weekly practice of shooting two rolls of film, one of the land I live on, and the other of myself. I was given a macro lens for my Olympus OM1 and I mainly use this lens for the work. I search for patterns in nature that reflect the theoretical patterns I have been reading about in Anthropocene poetics and *A Thousand Plateaus*.



(Fig. 7. Macro images of nature, 2024 by Sarah Grounds)

I have gathered hundreds of these photos now and I never tire of it. No moment is ever the same, and each moment is desiring of being recorded. The majority of the photos used in the installation are from this weekly practice. But I have also included images I have made with digital cameras and on my phone. Each image represents a part of me and different cameras reveal different things.

I have been making cardboard cutouts of my images for a while now, and this seemed like a logical direction to take with this work too. I print out all my images using a laser jet printer. As a working-class reaction to the elitist expense of printing photography. Chadwick's use of a photocopier was also a statement about how modern forms of mechanical reproduction can give people a voice who have not had a voice. (Warner, 2022, p88)

By sticking the images to cardboard, I speak of the fragility of these things, as all life on Earth is so fragile. I wanted people to know the images are stuck to a cheap, throw away item, so I leave the other side uncovered and bare. But these things are precious, and we need to protect them.

After making *Body*, I thought I could experiment with enclosing the images in wire too. I wanted to create an installation that represented rhizomatic connections. I thought I could weave the wire to create interconnecting organic shapes around the images. I did some research into how other artists had used wire to create organic forms and found the work of Nettie Summer.



(Fig. 8. *Bygone*, 2023 By Nettie Summer)

Summer creates hand knitted wire sculptures that represent stories from the Australian landscape. (Summer, 2024) I have a lot of experience crocheting and thought that her works looked very much like the hats I had crocheted. She has shapes inside the works, and I thought maybe I could crochet my images inside, like my spheres. I decided to experiment by making an improvised floor to ceiling crochet sculpture, making the shapes as I felt, around the images.



(Fig. 9. Making a wire sculpture, 2024 by Sarah Grounds)

The work took me two days to make, and I learnt a lot. I was very pleased with this first experiment and thought a collection of these floor to ceiling sculptures would be very exciting in a gallery space. I decided to take the work into university to show my lecturers. It was then that I learned about Ruth Asawa. I had never heard of her work before, but as I was making the sculpture, I did feel I was making something I had seen as a child. So maybe it was lodged in my subconscious.



(Fig. 10. Ruth Asawa Installation at David Zwirner, 2017)

Ruth Asawa was a Japanese American sculptor who created amazing hanging wire sculptures. Asawa hand looped the works using a technique taught to her by Mexican basket weavers. She used a wooden tool, which dictated the size of the loop as she weaved, which is very similar to the varying sizes of crochet hooks I work with. She would create the sculptures using one continuous line of wire, weaving in and out and enveloping itself. This mobility of the wire to go anywhere was one of the things that intrigued Asawa about the process. She was also fascinated by the openness of the weave, the enclosing without enclosing of the form.

I am able to take a wire and go into the air and define the air without stealing it from anyone. A line can enclose and define space while letting the air remain air. You can see right through most of my sculptures.

(Schenkenberg, 2019, p46)

Photographer Imogen Cunningham was good friends with Asawa and would often photograph her with her work. She captured Asawa weaving her works in her home with her children playing as she worked.



(Fig. 11. Ruth Asawa working whilst her children play, 1956 by Imogen Cunningham)

In Post World War America, Asawa's work was largely dismissed by the Contemporary art world. The reviews of Asawa's 1956 solo show were complimentary of her skill and the aesthetics of the work but, as ArtNews put it, 'These are 'domestic' sculptures in a feminine handiwork mode' Later people would try to connect her work to Asawa as a wife and Mother from Japanese origin. Again, her work was found lacking in expressing anything about her heritage or her role as a mother. Asawa was yet another female artist who had her work judged by her gender, and it is only very recently that Asawa's work is being relooked at with a contemporary eye. Seeing Asawa's clever theoretical play with solid and void, tension and weight, empty and full. (Schenkenberg, 2019, p38)

I also liked the continuation of the line when I made my sculpture. When I make crochet hats, the continuous line of the wool is one of the things that is most important to me in the making.

I made another, more refined crochet wire sculpture, enclosing a fishing weight at the bottom to keep the work taut. But felt that the work was just too much like Asawa's to continue exploring this method of presenting my images.

Whilst making the crochet sculptures I also made another self-portrait work using spheres. This time I presented the spheres hung in one line from the ceiling.



(Fig. 12/13. *Self Portrait* and *First column sculpture*, 2024, by Sarah Grounds)

I decided to try presenting my other images like this too and was very happy with the outcome.

In Anthropocene poetics, Farrier tells us how the word environment stems from the verb 'to environ', which is to 'encircle, encompass, envelope or to enclose' (Farrier, 2019, p32)

By weaving each image into a ball, each sphere becomes like a planet or an atom, creating a cosmic and atomic, rhizomatic visualisation of my World. This work has many steps, and I view it as an ongoing performance, with the process repeated over and over again.

Repetition is something I return to a lot in my work. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze explains that...

Repetition, is represented outside the concept, as though it were a difference without concept. Thus, repetition occurs when things are distinguished in numero, in space and time, while their concept remains the same. In the same movement, therefore, the identity of the concept in representation includes difference and is extended to repetition. (Deleuze, 2020, p355)

Change is the only constant. I am compelled to continually photograph things repeatedly and present them all in the same way. The world I am making in my work will never be repeated and this is an important concept to get across with my work.

Instigating The Idea

The next step was to see how the columns of spheres interacted with each other in a gallery like space. I had done some research into different installations using geometric shapes in a minimalist way and found this work by Mona Hatoum.



(Fig. 14. *Remains to be Seen*, 2019 by Mona Hatoum)

I could immediately see my spheres replacing the concrete of her work and so took 20 spheres into university to see if I could present my work in a similar fashion.

I made the first column just by eye and then measured the following columns to match it exactly.

I found that the distance between each sphere in the first column was the same, which

delighted the control freak in me. I positioned the columns in a grid pattern, far enough away

from each other to allow a person to walk through the work.



(Fig. 15. Performance in Installation experiment, 2024 by Sarah Grounds)

It was very important to me to have people be able to walk through the work. The opacity of the balls means that the sculptures overlap and separate as the viewer walks around them. And through the action of walking through the installation, the viewer also becomes a part of the installation, being seen in and through the works. This shows the viewer the fluid, multiplicity of our rhizomatic connections.

I then did a performance with the work using long exposures, merging myself with the spheres making myself opaque too.

Now I knew that my idea was going to work it was time to think about how I would present the columns in a large space. I thought that the ultimate decision about the number of spheres in each column and the exact lay out of the grid, should be made on the first day of installation. I concentrated on making spheres, as I wanted to have at least sixty, before the installation date.

My work was profoundly affected by family tragedy. Both of my older brothers had died during the Summer. My family asked me to restore a lot of photos for the service and also make Order of Service books. This meant I was thinking a lot about my family and my childhood, whilst making the spheres. Which led me to decide to use a few of the archival images I had been restoring in this work. I have used five archival images that I did not shoot myself, but I feel represent my family members and my relationships with them.

When I got into the gallery space with the work, the first thing I did was work out what grid pattern worked best in the space. I did this by hanging ribbons with magnetic hooks from the ceiling and tying weights to the bottom. This was very beautiful and has intrigued me to experiment with even more minimalist, whole room installations in the future.



(Fig. 16. 510 prepared dc-motors, 2142m rope, wooden sticks 20cm, 2019, by Zimoun)

I am a very big fan of Zimoun, a Swiss artist who creates minimalist, all immersive, sound installations. His work is very precise, using everyday items he creates very simple, mechanical sound works, which are then repeated all around the room. (Gualandris, 2025)

Hanging the Ribbons helped me to decide to hang the columns in a three by five grid shape, which meant putting four spheres in each column. I sorted the spheres into rough groups, of people, plants and other. I then started placing the spheres in groups of four, making groups that felt right together.



(Fig. 17. Installing *The Collection*, 2024 by Sarah Grounds)

I then hung the first column, positioning the spheres as I felt, in the same way as I did in my experiment hanging. I measured the distances and noted them down for the rest of the installation. The other fourteen columns took me a day in all to install. This was very good to

know, installing my work in spaces is a very important part of my practice. But as the work gets larger, I may end up needing help installing the work. By starting the installation like this, I would have decided all the important parts of the work, and I may then feel more comfortable to allow other people to help with the actual hanging.

Once the work was up, we had to light the space. I had envisioned the work presented with stark hard light but as I was exhibiting with two other artists, one of whom was showing a projection next to my work, this could not be. I then experimented with Ryan Moule, the head of the photography department, with different lighting. We decided to present the work with one spotlight sat on the ground.



(Fig. 18. *The Collection*, 2024 by Sarah Grounds)

This created strong shadows of the spheres on the ceiling and walls around the work. It also made shadows on the images from the wire weaves of the spheres. Even though this was not

how I had envisioned the work, I felt that the shadows still talked to the multiplicity of the rhizome, by creating yet more layers.

At the opening, people asked if it was ok to walk through the work and I emphasised that that was the whole point of the work. People then seemed to really like being in the installation and went up to individual spheres to view them, as I hoped they would. Looking up and crouching down, moving amongst the columns, creating ever changing landscapes of connections. Sadly, I was very tired whilst this work was up and did not think to photograph the public interacting with the work. But I did manage to do a short performance with the work before I deinstalled it. Writing this, I am also sad that I did not think to photograph the work with all the lights turned on, as I first envisioned the installation. The lighting of the work is obviously something that I have still not entirely settled on. Maybe the lighting will be different in different spaces. I am interested to see what I choose to do when the work is presented in a space as a solo show.

Conclusion

I am very happy with how this installation worked in exhibition and I plan to take this work forward, to become my first solo show

My practice looks at quite complex theories, but I feel the work translates these ideas in a comprehensible way. The installation works on multiple levels and complete understanding of the political implications of rhizomatic interconnectedness is not needed to appreciate the installation. The work is very radical but also very subtle, which was the balance I was hoping for.

People interacted with the installation just how I hoped they would. Different people were drawn to different images, and I have this vision that as the work grows and is shown in different places, people will look for their favourite spheres, like a contemporary art 'Where's Wally'.

The Collection is my personal apocalyptic library of my life. People left the work thinking about what they would put in their libraries of spheres. And that is the main point of the work, to get people to think about the connections they have with the world.

Poetry marks time in every possible sense of the phrase. It does not... propose to be instrumental or effective. Instead, in the rift between what is going to happen and whatever we would like to happen, poetry holds attention for space, functions not as distraction but as pure concentration, a focus where our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves.

This rift is like the Anthropocenic moment, the knot in time, not because it creates a solipsism but because, in focusing attention back on us, it asks the question, what will you do? A poetics of the Anthropocene must occupy this rift. In doing so, it can point us toward a careful retying of the knots that bind us together, in deep time, with the fate of the Earth. (Farrier, 2019, p128)

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