

Navigating grief through contemporary commemorative art practice in the form of graphic tapestries

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I discuss my artistic praxis following the production of two artworks, *DVR* (2023) and *NVR* (2023), exhibited for the themed exhibition, *Stairways and Ruins*, held at the North-West University (NWU) Gallery in 2023. These artworks function as a diptych – documenting, celebrating, and sharing information about my late parents. The significance of this practice-led research is found in the rhizomatic approach as a means to pay homage to them by creating “graphic tapestries”, which consist of printed paper weavings that portray visual timelines, comprising many photographs and blocks of personal information in each artwork. These are compared with works by Christina Thompson (*Burial shroud* 2019) and Lynette Diergaardt (*Distraction* 2015) to situate my works as contemporary commemorative art, drawing parallels and highlighting contrasts in the use of weaving in grief-based work. My artworks and research provide a unique perspective in contemporary commemorative art, through a rhizomatic and novel approach to combining mixed media in weaving.

Keywords: commemorative art, memorialisation, personal archive, weaving, rhizomes.

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Stairways and Ruins

Introduction

In this article, I explore my artistic practice through two artworks created for the exhibition *Stairways and Ruins: DVR (2023)* and *NVR (2023)* (see Figures 1 and 2), which pay tribute to my deceased parents. In the subsequent discussions, I argue that these artworks present a unique perspective in contemporary commemorative art. Through a rhizomatic approach, I selected, digitised, combined, and printed archival memorabilia (family photographs, greeting cards, and documents). I also referenced Clare Harner's poem *Immortality* (1934), as well as various symbols, to weave strips of printed designs, thread, and fabric together to create two representative visual timelines as *graphic tapestries*. These depict moments from my parents' lives that combine to form a whole, echoing elements of the rhizome.



FIGURE **Nº 1**



Lindi Cameron, *DVR*, 2023. Mixed media: Weaving, mixed media. Printed photo collage, fabric, thread. 1080 mm x 570 mm. Courtesy of Lindi Cameron.



FIGURE N° 2



Lindi Cameron, *NVR*, 2023. Mixed media: Weaving, mixed media. Printed photo collage, fabric, thread. 1080 mm x 570 mm. Courtesy of Lindi Cameron.

In terms of my manner of making, following the methods of weaving and my rhizomatic approach, I argue that my artworks bring a unique dimension to art that deals with grief. I explore my works with reference to Christina Thompson's *The burial shroud* (2019) and Lynette Diergaardt's *Disruption* (2015) – see Figures 3 and 4 below. *The burial shroud*

reflects on grief and ambiguous loss (Thompson's brother disappeared in a landslide and his body was never found) by using unravelled yarn from her missing brother's clothing to weave a five-metre shroud.

In contrast to Thompson's work but sharing elements with mine, *Disruption* also features family snapshots and symbols to address remembrance through cloth, in a digitised weaving (Diergaardt 2015:2). These artworks feature aspects that are relatable to my artworks; however, they differ considerably from each other in execution, most notably through processes and media used. I elaborate on this in the article.



FIGURE N° 3



Christina Thompson, *The burial shroud*, 2023. Yarn weaving. 5000 mm. Screenshot by author.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1987) concept of the rhizome provides a theoretical framework for my artistic approach. The framework allows for exploration of connecting ideas that support the creation of new possibilities in commemorative art, as seen in my artwork, and also with reference to examples mentioned here. Following the heterogeneous property of rhizome theory (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:7), I made physical connections between a range of elements, to result in a dynamic whole (as two artworks and as a diptych). In line with Deleuze and Guattari's thinking, the nature of interconnectivity and collaborative networks is seen in weaving as a metaphor and a method, because it connects various bits of information about my parents, most notably through photographs and memorabilia. I also refer to rhizomes in this article as a metaphor and a method in my artistic practice when I relate my work to that of Thompson and Diergaardt.



FIGURE N° 4



Lynette Diergaardt, *Disruption*, 2023. 889 mm x 660 mm. Digitally designed, hand woven on TC1 digital Jacquard Loom. 10/2 Cotton Perle warp, hand painted with MX Reactive Dyes. 5/2 Cotton Astra weft. Screenshot by author.

In line with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987:12) conceptualisation of rhizomes, my artworks and processes also have mappable properties. The approach, method, and process of my artworks can provide a repeatable map for other artists, in keeping with the rhizomatic principle of cartography and decalcomania (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:12), which suggests that the rhizome cannot be traced or reproduced, but promotes connections between fields and is open to modification.

In the following sections of the article, I (i) discuss the method used, (ii) engage with my artworks *NVR* and *DVR* (and influences), and contextualise them within contemporary commemorative art, and (iii) relate my artworks to those of Thompson and Diergaardt.

Method used in my research enquiry

During the planning for *NVR* (2023) and *DVR* (2023), I engaged in an 'exploratory creative process' (Gauntlett 2021) within the ambit of practice-led research to unpack the creative research challenge, which was to create visual art homages to my deceased parents, situated in the field of commemorative art.

Andrew McNamara (2012:2) hails the usefulness of practice-led research, particularly in explicating the practice and placing it within a broader context. He explains that 'practice-

led research is complicated', requiring a 'complex, back-and-forth interaction between practice and its conceptual framework or articulation' (McNamara 2012:8). 'No theory, history or context' applies directly to a 'particular creative' (McNamara 2012:9), so historical practices, conventions, changing material conditions, and cultural dynamics can help to provide context in a rhizome-like manner.

Grounded in Stephen Scrivener and Peter Chapman's (2004:9) claim that theory and artefact share an interdependent relationship, Chapman asserts that engaging in theory 'through reflection on action and practice' allows for work that is more 'critically informed' due to self-interrogation. The practitioner can better 'articulate the ancestry of their work and something of the seemingly intuitive process via which it emerges' (Scrivener & Chapman 2004:9), presenting a body of knowledge based on the process and artefact. The artefact is not in any way separate from the process, and therefore, theory and artefact are closely linked in their creative production model.

This creative production model enabled me to explore my initial ideas, which specifically focused on funerary or commemorative art, the creation process of the artworks, and reflection by drawing comparisons with established commemorative art practices such as those by Thompson (2019) and Diergaardt (2015).

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987:7) conceptualisation of the rhizome as a theoretical point of departure presents an antithesis to an arboreal root system. It follows non-linear threads of ideas, as an actual rhizome would behave, featuring a horizontal stem system with nodes able to form appendages (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:15). It can seem "chaotic", "arbitrary", and without structure. Still, it mimics a creative process, in this instance weaving, and allows for new possibilities, in connecting disparate information, as connection points are formed (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:7).

Properties of the rhizome metaphor include its capacity to make non-hierarchical (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:21) connections. Furthermore, its heterogeneous nature (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:10) and multiplicitous identity (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:5) can intensify or form something such as a stem system (or a bulb or tuber). This stem system suggests a trajectory that is mappable but not traceable (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:12) (the latter referring to transferable properties which can be described as "embroidery" upon another thing, or as decalcomania: the transfer of a design onto glass or porcelain) (see Waller 2018).

Multiple entryways and possibilities arise as a rhizome develops, allowing for variation, offshoots and expansion (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:8, 20). The rhizome is free, progressive, efficient, random, and relies on chance (Waller 2018).

Contextualising *DVR* (2023) and *NVR* (2023) as contemporary commemorative art

Because a rhizome is synonymous with growth, interconnectedness, transformation, resilience, and adaptability, it can also serve as a metaphor for life. In order to create a tapestry of life that honours the time spent between birth and death, I utilised personal memorabilia in the creation of my artworks. Items were included from my parents' possessions – such as family photos, keepsakes, documents, and greeting cards, which in themselves can be seen as rhizomatic, as threads of ideas form connections in a non-linear manner. A rhizome's multiplicitous properties are mirrored by digitising the elements, and so the mapping of images is negotiated. In their new form, they can be recontextualised, but my aim is to retain the integrity of memories and events. The digitised archival materials are “debris” or remnants (or, in this instance, rhizomes). In the context of my artworks,



FIGURE **N° 4**



Lindi Cameron, *DVR*, 2023. Exploration of weaving techniques with archival content. Mixed media: Weaving, mixed media. Printed photo collage, fabric, thread. 1080 mm x 570 mm. Courtesy of Lindi Cameron.

rhizomes as a metaphor have become a method – a way of drawing memorabilia together into artworks. The arrangement of personal photographs and information in square visuals forms a somewhat chronological timeline of my deceased parents. This may seem contrary to the non-linear, non-hierarchical formation of the rhizome. Still, a structure was called for to contain the rhizomatic multitude of photographs and memorabilia that connect to form a whole.

The resulting artworks resemble a modern graphic “rhizomatic” tapestry – although some of the personal information used for these tapestries is connected, it also forms a rhizome between disparate details. When observed closely, the tapestry unveils intricate imagery, including small photographs, documents, genealogical details, fabric pieces, symbols, and embroidery threads, all printed on paper, cut into strips, and woven together. I used two weaving techniques to combine each artwork’s visual elements, threads, and fabrics: one, a traditional weaving on a loom with thread (and printed paper), and the other with printed paper in a basket weave, as seen in Figure 5.

The conceptual framework behind my artworks allowed me to explore the remembrance and grieving processes, because I used rhizomes as a metaphor and method, weaving together various media and information in a graphic tapestry assemblage in a manner that speaks of loving commemoration.

Influences on my work: Symbols

In early research and planning for *NVR* and *DVR*, I explored symbols¹ as metaphors for life concepts and constructs, as explained later in this article. Patricia Williams (2000:385) cites John Deely (1990) as stating that the ‘whole of human experience ... is an interpretive structure mediated and sustained by signs’. Furthermore, while ‘a sign is a mark, emblem or pictogram that conveys specific information in a direct and unambiguous manner’, a ‘symbol is a sign, device or image that represents one thing but means something else’ – deriving meaning from its users (Williams 2000:385) so that it takes on a shared understanding. Since I used symbols conveying family, faith, eternity, spirit/heaven, the passage of time, fate, and time-related symbols that relate to a year, the sun, life, suffering, death, or zodiac signs, I provided a key (see Figure 6) to understand the symbols used in my artworks, so that viewers could decipher meaning within them. Signs and symbols allow one to represent complex ideas (such as “life”) in a simple way. Indeed, symbolic inquiry provides a paradigm that draws upon ‘signs and symbols connected to all phases of human activity’ since, in Clifford Geertz’s view, people are seen as ‘meaning-seeking, symbol-using animals’ (Geertz 1973 cited by Williams 2000:386). This illustrates the prevalence of using symbols, reiterated by Geertz – a ‘principal architect’ (Williams

2000:386) of the concept of Symbolic Anthropology, dealing with how people 'give meaning to their world and their actions in it' (Applebaum 1987 cited by Williams 2000:385).

Influences on my work: Funerary art

In my aim to make my late parents' lives visible, I initially deliberated on using tapestry as a storytelling artform to create an object that could be used in the home and act as a reminder of lost loved ones. This could take the form of a tablecloth or wall-hanging tapestry (inspired by an inherited Dutch heirloom). The latter is a section of a plushly woven tablecloth tapestry that was shared between three sisters – one of whom was my father's grandmother. It was displayed as a wall hanging in my childhood home, and forms part of why I am interested in nostalgic items, family keepsakes, and genealogy – and also in weaving and funerary art.

The practice of funerary art spans various ages, cultures, and objects, as seen in collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the British Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum. The bountiful examples of art and relics in this field, created over centuries, reinforce the idea of the significance and relevance of creating commemorative art; it seems to be a universal practice through the ages, taking many forms. For example, a cache of funerary goods, such as 'stelae, shabtis, canopic jars, Osiris statuettes, garlands and wreaths of flowers, coffins and smaller funerary objects' was found in the Tomb of the Priests of Amun at Thebes (Al-Gaoudi & Aly 2021:118). These examples support my view that people have been interested in and engaged in funerary and memorial artmaking for a very long time.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art regards funerary art as a cultural practice (closely connected to religious belief), as observed in ancient civilisations, celebrating and memorialising the deceased through monuments. In this vein, Jan Assmann (1989:136) notes the tendency of Egyptian funerary literature to illustrate 'the passage from this world into the next', highlighting the *Book of the Dead* as the primary example, featuring 'spells' found in tombs to guide the deceased through the underworld to the afterlife (see St.Clair 1904:53; Carelli 2011: 86). In addition, funerary stelae were connected to the journey of the underworld, serving as 'false' doors in what would be a temple, likened by Assmann as a path corresponding to 'the path of the priest on his way to the innermost sanctuary of the god(s) ... explained as an ascent to the heavens' (Assmann 1989:149). The Egyptians' assumption of an afterlife corresponded with my family's Christian views and supported the idea of creating a (richly decorated and content-laden) metaphorical stairway (to the heavens). The inclusion of Clare Harner's poem, *Immortality* (Allpoetry [sa]; Mottram 2022), in my works reiterates the notion of transcendence. Harner's poem

is physically included in the artwork and alludes to the deceased's presence in nature after their passing.

Influences on my work: Weaving and squares

By incorporating photography, symbols, and mixed media, weaving proved a way for me to amalgamate large amounts of memorial information and incorporate two-dimensional images. Because of the underlying geometric structure of weaving, and considering the weft and warp design, I explored the idea of a modular grid and how the parts of a weaving make a whole. Tapestry Art Designs' (2022) states that one square of a design represents a stitch on a modern cartoon (which is a design used as template for a tapestry (Steege 2024)). This imitates the idea of a pixel in a digital design or image, and the idea of many pixels making up an image echoes my decision to use many images making up a new artwork.

Influences on my work: "Snakes and Ladders"

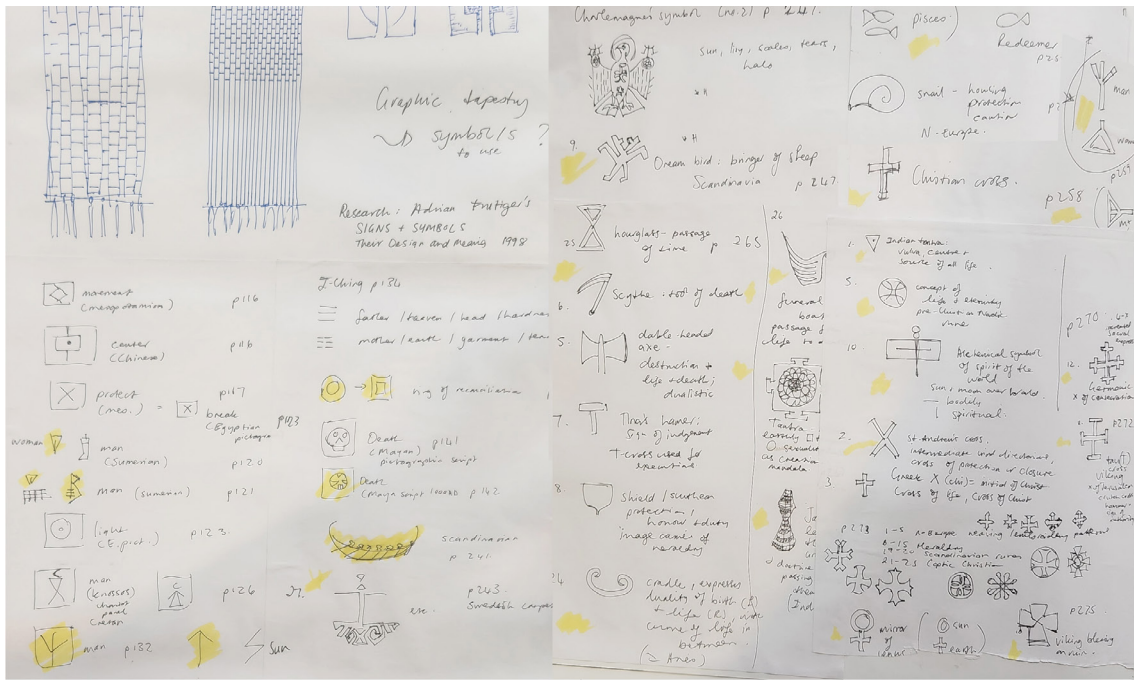
The prevalence of squares in tapestry cartoons (as described above) provided a design idea to use an underlying grid, and the checkerboard game of "Snakes and Ladders" provided an analogy for the trials and tribulations in life, the fallibility of human nature, and the notion of luck or randomness that life entails. The game was initially used to impart moral instruction (Venkata Rao 2008). Furthermore, the purpose of the "Snakes and Ladders" game serves as a metaphor and "stairway" of spiritual growth in life. RK Dewan (2023:1) explains that the game board 'depicted a path from the bottom to the top', with the goal being to reach the top of the board, representing the 'attainment of enlightenment' (the path to which is referred to as "Moksha Patam", the original name of "Snakes and Ladders"). Indeed, the 'the [originally] umbrella-shaped region at the topmost point' of the board (or 'universe'), represents 'the abode of perfected souls who enjoy the eternal bliss of liberation' (Topsfield 1985:207) – also described as 'the ladder to salvation'² (Topsfield 2006:178). The game is intended to encourage players to consider the consequences of their actions while navigating the "ups and downs" in life represented by the snakes and ladders on the game board. Additionally, the game teaches that both failure and success are part of the journey, and stresses the importance and reward of virtues and good deeds. However, it is a game of luck, and this element often rings true for life on earth, as events happen beyond our control.

Creating the artworks: Using symbols and thread
















Related to this idea of luck (or chance), thread³ was incorporated symbolically in the works, *DVR* and *NVR*, to outline featured symbols in each artwork that pertain to life, and where they point to the possible origin of illness in each parent through the use of embroidery. In the case of my mother's Mesothelioma cancer caused by asbestos exposure, she had pondered where she could have been exposed. Considering the amount of time this disease can take to manifest, it could have been as a young teaching student in prefabricated classrooms. Red thread subtly tracks that in a sewn line through the timeline/stairway of her life, depicted as a weaving. This concern became more prominent towards the end of her life (as suggested at the top of the artwork *DVR*), resulting in a blanket stitch (see Figure 9). My father started smoking at a young age, which could have led to his compromised lungs and atherosclerosis, and I suggested this by means of black thread maps that are visible as a starting point. Symbols as major shapes (see Figures 6 and 7) were used for each work: for *DVR*, a symbol meaning 'between birth and death is life' (cf. Frutiger 1989:288), which is represented by two "ships" of life and death joined by a stroke of life, and for *NVR*, I used a symbol representing the 'soul's pilgrimage through life' (see Macchiarini Creative Design 2022), relevant to the rhizome.

In *DVR* and *NVR*, I wove images together in complex collages reflecting pictorial history, and used thread symbolically to illustrate concepts of life, illness and death, by using different coloured threads denoting meaning in my artworks. Red or black ponder origins of illness later in life (as discussed earlier), and gold thread is stitched around the central symbols described above, chosen for each parent.

The documents, including curriculum vitae, notes by – and to – my parents, medical information, and those pertaining to charity events, hobbies, celebrations, travel, holidays, and family gatherings, left behind by both parents, evidenced milestones in their lives, and provided a wealth of material to work with. To accommodate the various memorabilia that I wanted to incorporate, and the size of the frame I had, creating tapestries made sense, as they tell stories through pictures (see Bek-Pedersen 2009:33). Weaving is also connected to commemorative art (as elaborated on previously), and I created a "graphic tapestry" that featured primary shapes or symbols from afar, but that revealed minute-detail up close. I combined materials, layered symbols, and interwove photographs, thread, and other visual items in a collaged homage to each parent. Words from Harner's poem, *Immortality* (Mottram 2022), as well as photography inspired by it (such as sun-ripened fields and birds in the sky), suited the tone for both works, and I based the underlying grid on the "Snakes and Ladders" game as indicated previously. Figures 1 and 2 show the birds in *DVR*, in the top section, and the fields in *NVR* at the bottom of the piece.



DVR

-  Between birth and death is life. The ships of life And death are joined by the stroke of life.
-  Circle is sign of eternity. There is no beginning, no end
-  Symbol of faith
-  Omega variation; symbolizing becoming, being and passing.
-  Loop / womb; variant of serpent sign, regarded as sign of fate
-  Year
-  Suffering
-  Upper fork: expectant soul; lower: spirit descending from above
-  A traditional representation of the sun with rays, also interpreted as life-giving womb.
-  Latin cross, crux, god's mark. Most exalted emblem of christian faith, the sign of all signs
-  Lady
-  Hourglass
-  Symbolizing the passage of time
-  Family: man, wife, 2 children
-  Woman
-  Woman
-  Water carrier
-  Nigerian weaving pattern
-  Aquarius

NVR

















-  Symbol of the soul's pilgrimage through life
-  Spirit, heaven
-  Death
-  Suffering
-  Sign of the cross unites God and earth
-  Garden
-  Water
-  Double-headed axe Destruction but also both life and death in a dualistic sense
-  Spirit of the world
-  Precision
-  Family: man, wife, 2 children
-  Man
-  Man
-  Pisces
-  Viking blessing on ruin stone
-  Fixing

FIGURE N^o 6



Lindi Cameron, *Graphic and symbolic process work*, and *Key to symbols*, 2023. Pen, markers, print. 420 mm x 297 mm and 297 mm x 210 mm. Courtesy of Lindi Cameron.



FIGURE N^o 7



Lindi Cameron, *DVR*, 2023. Detail of symbols, mixed media, printed photo collage, fabric, and thread. 1080 mm x 570mm. Courtesy of Lindi Cameron.

For *DVR*, the first work, I constructed a loom on a frame to set the format and dimensions. I created a structure in the works by designing a digital grid based on the format of the wooden frame that I had. In Adobe Illustrator, I set up a digital design to fit the inside of the frame, dividing the format lengthways into rows of 74, to depict the number of years my mother lived, and then into columns to create squares. Each square was a centimetre big, so I used three at a time for images to be placed into (and thus they would represent three years instead of one). The symbol for a year is shown in Figure 6, and the squares can be seen in Figures 5, 8 and 9. In *DVR*, the warped thread vertically divides each square photograph (the weft paper) into three.

I set up a historical timeline based on personal data and my mother's curriculum vitae to ensure I could capture her life's salient moments. I filed, ordered, and dated scanned photographs chronologically, editing them where necessary, thus creating a digital archive of my parents' lives. I began by placing selected photographs according to the number of squares available, and in keeping with the timeline.

I shaped the main body of photographs into a chosen symbol, as discussed previously, as seen in Figures 1 and 2. *NVR* featured 78 lines and followed a similar design process. The symbols chosen and digitised for each parent also correlated with each other, while the grid design of squares making up a whole also created a different (mosaic-like) effect from a distance. The idea would be for the pieces to provide visual interest as a graphic design (of some kind of “stairway”), and as viewers drew closer, they could see more detail.

Harner’s poem was divided into two, with lines assigned to *DVR* and *NVR*. Additional imagery I photographed was used to evoke the sense of transcendence into the skies and ripened fields that Harner mentions in her poem. I photographed geese flying at dusk, and mielie fields on a farm. I grew up on a farm, and these particular sights in Harner’s poem were familiar and seemed fitting for my artworks.



FIGURE **N^o 8**



Lindi Cameron, *DVR & NVR*, 2023. Photo collage, fabric, thread. 1080 mm x 570 mm. Courtesy of Lindi Cameron.



FIGURE **Nº 9**



Lindi Cameron, *DVR*, 2023. Detail of thread, mixed media, and printed photo collage. Mixed media: Weaving, mixed media. Printed photo collage, fabric, thread. 1080 mm x 570 mm. Courtesy of Lindi Cameron.

For the bottom of each artwork, I printed family tree information that I had been gathering using MyHeritage.com⁴ for two years, onto calico – a natural, non-stretch and sustainably biodegradable fabric (Korabayev 2021) and a type of fabric that I knew I could print on. I cut the printed material bearing ancestral information into strips to represent the traditional fringe or tassels on a weaving (see Figure 10). The biodegradability of the fabric is an interesting metaphor for natural decay and impermanence, as is the fragility of paper, but that is now preserved in a glass box frame. This, in turn, may be construed as an analogy for preserving memory.

In reflecting on the use of cloth, as described above, I looked to other examples of materiality.⁵ Beverley Ayling-Smith (2016:53) refers to ‘functional materiality’ as the ‘physical properties of cloth’, and ‘materiality’ as the ‘ability to contain within it layers of meaning to convey complex ideas and emotional states’. Ayling-Smith (2016:79) notes that cloth in textile art has an intrinsic ability to ‘carry the metaphor of memory and healing through mending’, and is a way to connect with ‘traumatic life events such as bereavement and mourning’.



FIGURE N° 10



Lindi Cameron, *DVR & NVR*, 2023. Detail of ancestral information as fringe. Mixed media: Weaving, mixed media. Printed photo collage, fabric, thread. 1080 mm x 570 mm. Courtesy of Lindi Cameron.

Furthermore, Ayling-Smith (2016:12-14) investigates the materiality of cloth and its use as a metaphor for mourning, grief and loss – and as substrate for emotion and the generation of response from a viewer: ‘After someone dies, clothes are often kept to remind the bereaved of the deceased and to comfort them’ (Ayling-Smith 2016:14). This rings true for me, as I had included bits of fabric from my father’s shirts into *NVR*.

In response to grief that is processed and shown through the use of weaving, Joanna van Zyl (2023) transforms pregnancy loss into tangible meaning in *Triptych* (2022) through a ‘combination of narrative, artmaking and textile-weaving’, including a plastic and yarn-woven womb and unborn baby, while Lynette Diergaardt’s novel combination of photography and collage materialises in a pictorial jacquard weaving for *Disruption* (2015).

In keeping with the examples above, Birgitta Nordström and Camilla Groth (2022:311) purport that ‘the textile is fundamental and essential as an object through which to tell the big life story of beginning and ending’ and that ‘craft practice allows for deep and prolonged reflection’, which was my experience in creating *DVR* and *NVR*. Through

weaving, I could revisit memories, appreciate achievements and experiences, and meditate on priorities and legacies while examining material items. In *DVR* and *NVR*, I attempted to construct a visual narrative from everyday “detritus” – memories captured in hundreds of photographs. These were reflected in my work to contribute to a diaristic picture-world to make memory visible.

Nordström and Groth (2022:312) note that, ‘weaving a fabric and cutting it off the loom is a grand human narrative about life and death’. While cutting the textile from the loom symbolises an ending, it also represents rebirth and renewal, as an object is created in the process. This becomes a metaphor for the earthly end of life and a new spiritual afterlife. As seen in my artworks, the use of thread as well as the symbols used (and discussed previously), symbolises this.

Relating my artworks to those of Thompson and Diergaardt

Since this article uses the understanding of rhizomes as a theoretical framework elaborated on above, I refer to two specific international and South African contemporary commemorative artworks: *The burial shroud* (Thompson 2019) and *Disruption* (Diergaardt 2015), as seen in Figures 3 and 4. I examine the artists’ approaches, media, and the materiality they connect to grieving processes, and how my approach is novel in comparison to these two artworks.

The ambiguity of Thompson’s (2019:1) brother’s death and her attachment to objects that had belonged to him, formed the basis of her research and artmaking through weaving. Thompson’s (2019:1) investigation ‘used an art-based process to explore grief theory that supports an active process of meaning making from loss and continuous bonds with the deceased as ways of increasing resilience and adjusting to life after loss’.⁶ She employed heuristic inquiry to explore mementoes as transitional objects in creative therapy, and (Thompson 2019:2) cites ‘humanitarian child psychiatrist’, Lynne Jones (2017:225) when asserting that ‘mementoes appear to help focus grief because there’s something solid to touch, around which to tell a story’. Margaret Gibson (2008:14) is quoted as saying that ‘[o]bjects that remain are significant memory traces and offer a point of connection with the absent body of the deceased’ (Thompson 2019:12). Thompson (2019:12) was initially struck by how unfair it seemed that her brother’s belongings had survived his death, but she became grateful for those remaining objects to remember him by and commune with him, keeping his presence alive in the life of her family. In much the same way, my artworks serve as reminders of my parents and provide a space to reflect on lives lost.

Thompson (2019:13) wove a blanket, *The burial shroud*, from mementoes – symbolising a shroud for her brother, an object that provides comfort to her. Thompson (2019:17) quotes Magdelana Abakanowicz: ‘Fabric is our covering and our attire. Made with our hands, it is a record of our souls.’ As Thompson (2019:17) unravelled threads of her brother’s clothes, she felt prepared to alter mementoes to make new meaning, much as the rhizome does. Her experience with the ‘chaotic mess’ of kinked yarn, bearing memory of its path, provided an analogy of the notion that ‘grief is messy’ (Thompson 2019:18). She reflects that ‘life is full of continual ruptures and repairs’, and grief has ‘much to teach us’ (Thompson 2019:19). In realising two balls of yarn are part of the same one, she hesitantly decides to cut them, signifying a ‘moment of connection and letting go’ (Thompson 2019:19). She felt her narrative expand through the process, and the process of making helped to give meaning to her story of grief through meaning making.

Thompson (2019:19, 20) considers notions of attachment and detachment, connection and separation, and quotes Herman Melville in this regard: ‘We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibres connect us with our fellow man.’ This statement speaks profoundly to the idea of the rhizome and suggests a metaphor of connection to humanity. Seen in the array of commemorative artworks mentioned in this article, it is seemingly not unusual for people to want to pay tribute to their loved ones through art. Due to the prevalence thereof, others might find a connection with that. Thompson (2019:9) muses that grief is a universal experience, although responses to it vary greatly.

For instance, physically and mentally, the mindful presence and rhythmic movements required of weaving offered Thompson (2019:22) ‘containment for the emotional chaos’ following her brother’s disappearance. Thompson (2019:23) included her grandmother’s hand-spun wool in her artwork, commenting that ‘generations are present in this process’. Loose individual threads were transformed into a utilitarian but beautiful, symbolically rich new object (Thompson 2019:25). Similarly, my woven works represent something new created from old items and include the generations that came before me, in the printed fringe.

Thompson (2019: 27) expresses the insight that ‘grief does not just end, but rather has the potential to teach and guide us throughout the course of a lifetime, in turn, potentially offering wisdom and increasing empathy and compassion for others navigating difficult losses.’ Thompson (2019:31) was able to physically alter her mementoes (almost twenty-four years after her brother’s disappearance), creating a new narrative that acknowledges her past, with the potential to comfort in future. ‘Making an externalised physical offering’ from her mementoes ‘through a creative therapeutic process,’ helped Thompson (2019: 33) to ‘represent and honour’ her ambiguous loss.

While Thompson made her own yarn from her brother's clothing, using traditional methods, my artworks were made with paper. Her approach was to work through grief in making, whereas mine was more about preserving memories and making lost lives visible. Similarities exist in the reverence and use of mementoes, although she adapted the original fibres. I scanned in images to use, working non-destructively and preserving mementoes, but so too creating something new.

While weaving was also used to process the grief of her brother's death, Diergaardt used snapshots and collage in digital compositions for a jacquard weave in *Disruption* (2015). She notes, 'snapshots serve as markers of time and place. They record people and places as a way to preserve memories of significant events or landmarks' (Diergaardt 2015:1). Working digitally allowed Diergaardt (2015:2) to 'crop, layer, reconfigure and ultimately collage' new visually engaging, symbolic compositions for a digital jacquard loom.

In her culture, 'cloth holds significant meaning and is often associated with funerals and memory' (Diergaardt 2015:3). Diergaardt contrasts the methodical, progressive method of weaving with the digital design process, which 'allows for more haphazard connections' (much like the rhizome). Diergaardt's (2015:3) replicated images became embedded in the cloth, 'turning memory into a concrete object'. Both Thompson and Diergaardt wove cloth items, but my artworks are made of paper, framed and hanging on the wall, to be viewed intentionally.

Diergaardt's (2015:5) use of a family photograph in *Disruption* (2015:12) captures a happy memory as a reminder – a document of her journey through time and grief. Weaving allowed Diergaardt (2015:5-6) to reconstruct her memories in a positive way, in a personal narrative, with symbols common to viewers (such as architecture, including Liebig House in Namibia, known to her family and friends). While my artworks also reflect positive memories and a personal narrative, I provided a key to the symbols (as discussed previously) for viewers to understand their meaning within the work. However, it is not crucial to understand the meaning of the symbols to appreciate the gist of the artworks. Both Diergaardt and I used family photographs, digital design, and some form of weaving in commemorative art, yet the works are completely different in execution. While Diergaardt's weaving is a pictorial design, mine features fragments making up a whole. Hers is cloth; mine is paper. Diergaardt uses one photograph, whereas my works comprise many. Arguably, an artist can use a map yet arrive at a different destination, considering rhizomes' mappable aspect.

Differences in terms of the approaches and content of my artworks vis-à-vis those of Thompson and Diergaardt are seen in the mixed media approach, paper weaving,

rhizomatic process, the personal photographs and memorabilia, and what the viewer sees initially: a collage forming the shape of a symbol, that upon closer inspection reveals many parts of the whole.

Conclusion

In this article, I discussed the two artworks, *DVR* and *NVR* (2023), contextualising them within the genre of commemorative art, particularly within the practice of weaving. Furthermore, I situated my artworks as a making process in relation to exploratory art practice, practice-led research, and rhizome theory.

Although many artworks are based on grief processing – some of which are metaphorical, such as Thompson's, or pictorial, such as Diergaardt's, I wanted mine to be multifacetedly representational, and accessible for viewers. Mirroring the multiplicitous property of the rhizome, I worked towards intensified use of various elements, using a large number of images, collectively, to depict lives, and have thus created something new.

In reflection, I realised the universality of artmaking in response to loss, creating new pathways (as the rhizome does) in homages to the age-old need to express grief. Agency is offered in selecting images to depict history, and my responsibility was to depict two rich lives as accurately, vividly, and lovingly as possible. In sifting through, selecting, and combining archival material, I believe that I have made something new in the combination of various media (resounding with the rhizomatic property of heterogeneity), and the process and production can be repeated by others wishing to create a commemorative piece. This is aligned with the rhizomatic property of cartography. I have used photography and symbols in assembling woven paper graphic tapestries to pay tribute to my beloved late parents. As others have made funerary and commemorative art, so too have I. However, my work contains photography, memorabilia, thread, symbols, poetry, and geometry depicting a timeline and echoing a gameboard.

The originality of the research is evident in the failure to find similar commemorative artwork in existing relevant literature that combines family photography, paper weaving, symbols, mythology, and thread in a timeline grid. This interconnectivity is a rhizomatic feature, because any part of a rhizome can connect to another (Waller 2018). Even if artists were to use the same materials, the content would be different (and the intensity of difference is 'at the centre of Deleuze's philosophy', according to Waller (2018), and each tribute would be unique, allowing for interpretation and thus operational significance within the commemorative art space.

Notes

1. I studied Adrian Frutiger's *Signs and symbols - Their design and meaning* (1989) to represent concepts succinctly. I sketched those that I appraised as apropos to both my parents and to relate to others, noted their meaning, and went through a process of elimination in deciding which were the most pertinent.
2. The motif of the ladder entrenches the *Stairways* project theme.
3. Greek mythology provided a further analogy relating to luck or chance. Clotho, usually a young maiden who is often present at births, spins the thread, while Lachesis allots the thread (determining the length of life), and Atropos cuts it – deciding when and where death will happen (Angelo 1877:273). This idea was appropriated by introducing thread into the works.
4. MyHeritage.com provides historical records and assists subscribers to build their family trees online.
5. In *Entwined: A Group Exhibition of Textile and Fiber Art* (April 1 to June 4, 2023) contemporary grief-based works by artists such as Sally C. Garner, Susan Lenz and Sonya Yong James (Cullum 2023) were showcased who use both traditional and untraditional textiles and fibres, including vintage quilt fragments, bedsheets, bones, teeth, and ashes. Julie von Der Vellen's paper weaving as conceptual art for WISH Interior Architecture uses newspapers from 1906 – the start date of Winston Churchill's first appointment in the UK – to draw a connection to a historical moment for a building used for parliament (VonderVellen 2022). These examples provide an *avant-garde* counterfoil for my own artworks in their innovative use of materials, albeit stemming from a similar need to process loss through art – or, in Von Der Vellen's case, a similar technique via a different objective. My artworks arguably constitute a unique process and use of mixed media weaving in the context of commemorative art.
6. Thompson undertook Clark Moustakas' *Six Phases of Heuristic Inquiry* (Moustakas 1990) using an art-based approach as she worked with mementoes in exploring ambiguous loss in art therapy.

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