

Unnamed (Work In Progress) *Paradata*

Creator: Alison Atkin

Medium: Pencil and liquid gold gilding on paper, digital illustration on JPEG

Introduction: This piece is a work in progress. It is a two panelled artwork, presented on opposite pages of a notebook, with this being similar to the final presentation style intended – both panels should be viewed simultaneously, rather than separately. The final presentation will see the image shown inked in shades of black and brown and either displayed in-person or captured using a different digital method in order to better represent the feature gilding. This work in progress presents one double panelled image, further paired panels are planned.

The left panel imagines an open burial of an individual, clothed in and accompanied by organic objects that will decompose after burial. A network of fine gold threads have been woven together, extending from a central flat-beaten golden form, roughly circular in shape. This gold lattice has been laid over the left abdomen with thinner threads extending up the left arm and hand, and down the left leg and foot. The only other non-organic objects are three golden wrist bangles, a gold ring, and small gold hoop earrings, as well as a stone pillow beneath the head of the deceased. The right panel presents the same open grave, post-excavation.

This image is semi-autobiographical and aims to explore ways to acknowledge and address the 'osteological paradox' whereby individuals who present with no skeletal trauma or pathology will appear healthy and able-bodied in the archaeological record, both in the past and in the future. The image presented here has envisioned a golden lattice covering areas of the body affected by chronic neuropathic pain, throughout the deceased individual's life.

Further paired panels will present examples of other aspects of individual identity that may or may not classically fall within the remit of the 'osteological paradox' but are all notable by their absence in the archaeological record: illness, disability, deafness and Deaf individuals, gender identity, neurodiversity, and more. These aspects of ourselves can be incredibly significant in life and many may feel disappointed by their lack of visibility in death.

Use and Audience:

The finished presentation would be displayed ideally in a gallery or similar setting, but where viewers could engage directly with the piece by turning pages to view the paired panel images. This could also be achieved digitally with a touch screen if necessary. Hopefully it would be useful for both archaeologists and non-archaeologists, both in a reflective form to consider the existing archaeological record, but also contemplatively to consider their own death and burial – or those of other individuals. From my own experience of creating this piece (below) it might also be useful as an example for an exercise that could be carried out by individuals who feel (aspects of) their own identity may not be represented archaeologically without deliberate consideration. It proved to be particularly therapeutic for me.

Production, Approach, Method:

This work in progress was sketched in stages while on a train, over multiple days. I started with the left panel and began with a basic form before adding detail, in pencil on paper. Following this, the right panel was drawn using the same method, to represent the same burial position, post-decomposition. For this second panel some reference photographs and illustrations from archaeologically excavated burials were used to illustrate the concept realistically. Once both panels

were complete liquid gold gilding was applied to the jewellery and envisioned lattice, using a fountain pen. This should not be done on a train. Therefore once a photograph of the open notebook was taken (after a scan proved disappointing) the JPEG was edited digitally using an illustration programme (Sketchable; stylus) to edit the gilding for a better level of detail.

Representation of Ambiguity and Inspiration:

While the image presented is unfinished, a work in progress, it still represents an open and excavated burial of the same individual relatively clearly. However, as a standalone double panel the inspiration behind the piece may not be obvious, as the theme of 'unseen identities' cannot be inferred from a connection between gilded features across images. Therefore it may be that viewers take something away from this piece that is different to what was aimed, which is of course, all okay in the world of art.