

**Royal College of Art**

**N° 110**

# **Drawing Narratives in Time**

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**Royal College of Art**  
Postgraduate Art & Design

# Table of Contents

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## The Output

Page 4

## Research Enquiry and Methods

Page 6

## Findings and Insights

Page 8

## Dissemination

Page 14

## Appendices

Page 16

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### Submission details

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**Researcher(s)**  
Anne Howeson

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**Title**  
Drawing Narratives in Time

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**Output Type**  
Artefacts

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**Output Components**  
Artefacts (drawings in response to archive prints)

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**Dates**  
2015–2017

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Collyer Bristow Gallery, London; presentations and talks; book section; reviews (please see full list provided in the dissemination section).

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## The Output

This research investigated 18th- and 19th-century engravings from the Museum of London print archive. Urban figurative narratives depicting ghosts, graveyards, death, leisure activities, health spas, founding children, immigration and the built environment were the starting points for collaborative new drawings which evoked and compressed the passing of time through visual exchanges with the historic prints and engravings.

The Museum of London invited Howeson to collaborate with their print archive.

Drawing was used as a poetic language to re-interpret the original prints, by working on top of them – erasing, redrawing and adding new elements that represent time past, present and future. This method interrogated the layering and mapping of everyday temporal life in ways not previously seen.

Working intuitively with the print archives, Howeson chose images containing fragments of stories from the past which featured figurative elements, light and weather conditions or specific times of day. In the redrawn images, a visual

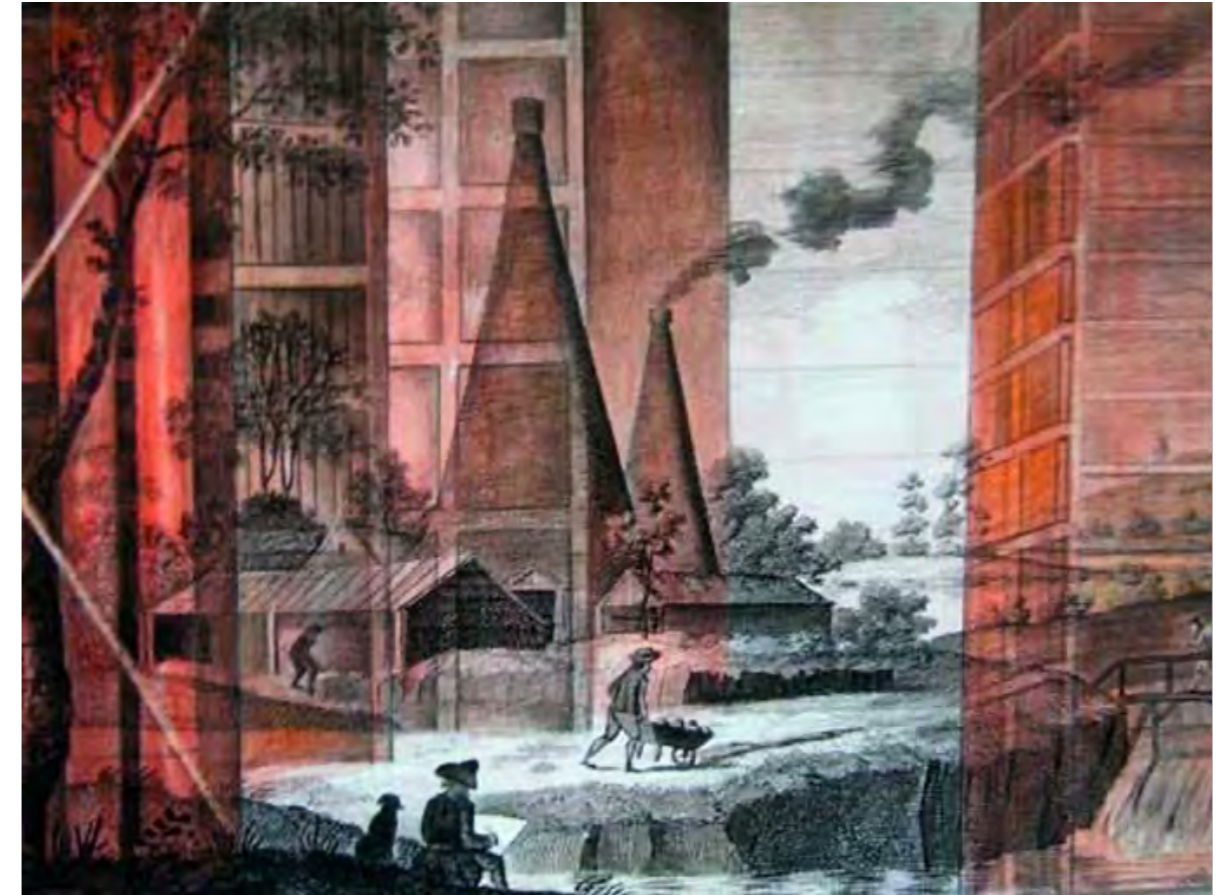
'conversation' with the original artists emerged – a feeling of walking in their footsteps to invent new narratives or subvert and develop stories already told, a collision between the old and the new.

Research was informed by the poet T.S. Eliot, who demonstrated (specifically in 'Burnt Norton', *Four Quartets*, 1936) the essentially abstract nature of time: 'If all time is eternally present / All time is unredeemable'; and by cultural geographer Doreen Massey's links between narrative and time: 'I want to see space as a cut through the myriad stories in which we are all living at any one moment. Space and time become intimately connected' (from *Social Science Bites* podcast).

The images were presented in the exhibition 'Present in the Past' held at the Collyer Bristow Gallery, London, 5–25 February 2015. This exhibition preceded and informed a later exhibition 'Imagining Kings Cross', which featured a separate collection of images created from archive photographs. This body of research has been submitted as a separate REF output 'Imagining Kings Cross'.



[fig. 1] *Tile Kilns* (original print).



[fig. 2] *Tile Kilns* (32 × 45 cm). Longwich Lane, the main road north out of London, was opened to travellers in 1300. In the 19th century it was lined with tile kilns and dairy fields. Redevelopment in the 21st century has covered the land in investment penthouse apartments. The artist and his dog remain suspended in time to capture the scene.

# Research Enquiry and Methods

## Research Questions

- Can the abstract nature of time be expressed through the language of drawing?
- How can narratives from everyday life act as a channel to connect past, present and future?
- Can a 'conversation' between archival prints and drawing be used to describe and transcend the passing of time?

## Research Methods

Prints and engravings were identified by Howeson in the Museum of London prints and drawings archive, then photographed, significantly enlarged in scale and digitally printed on 290gms Hahnemühle watercolour paper. Sections from the original prints were sometimes chosen to work with, rather than whole images.

A repeated redrawing and erasing of the original prints followed, using mixed media materials



[fig. 3] *Dust Heap* (original print). This man-made mountain of dust was dismantled in 1848. Charles Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend* described the area as 'a tract of suburban Sahara, where tiles and bricks were burnt, bones were boiled, carpets were beat, rubbish was shot, dogs were fought, and dust was heaped by contractors'.

such as Conté, pencils, crayons, gouache and a specialist Faber Castell pencil eraser: Perfection 7058. These methods altered and subverted the context and content of the prints, overlaying and substituting the crowded images of workers, gravediggers, builders, children, horses and carriages with contrasting stories from the modern world in an evocation and suspension of time.

The necessity of responding creatively to the museum's collection, initially a constraint, became an incentive for invention. Different and unexpected stories, triggered by the subject matter of the prints, emerged while Howeson modified and penetrated their meaning [see figs. 9–10].

During the development of the final drawings, detailed research was also carried out through drawing, writing and personal photographic documentation [see figs. 7, 13–15]. Found images from contemporary newspaper articles [see fig. 4], in addition to written excerpts from the articles themselves, were used as further material for conversations between the past and the present.



[fig. 4] Tsunami survivor. Newspaper clipping from article about the March 2011 tsunami in Japan.



[fig. 5] *Dust Heap* (39 × 52 cm). A narrative of chaos and displacement: the aftermath of an earthquake or the desolation and migration that follows war.

## Findings and Insights

New ways of connecting past and present narratives were identified. While other artists (for example, Mimmo Paladino in his etching series 'Flores Seraphici') have worked with found prints to develop new images, the drawings in the 'Present in the Past' exhibit take archival collaboration further, transforming second-hand images into new stories across time.

The idea of investigating time and narrative was inspired by the writings of T.S. Eliot, the cultural geographer Doreen Massey and Saint Augustine of Hippo, who wrote in Book 11 of the *Confessions*: 'My childhood, which is no longer, still exists in time past, which does not now exist. But when I call to mind its image and speak of it, I see it in the present because it is still in my memory'. Contemporary works which cross-reference the old and new include Jonathan Glazer's film *Under the Skin* – where naked figures immersed in liquid call to mind the Renaissance artist Masaccio's Adam and Eve in *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* – and James Turrell's skylight series, reminiscent of the Pantheon temple in Rome. Howeson's work is distinctive in its discussion and investigation of time using only the language of drawing.

Another reference were the films of artist William Kentridge – 'Drawings for Projection' – with their seemingly unplanned narratives conveying social, political or personal themes.

In W.G. Sebald's documentary novel *Austerlitz*, the narrator says: 'I feel more and more as if time did not exist at all, only various spaces interlocking according to the rules of a higher form of stereometry, between which the living and the dead can move back and forth as they like, and the longer I think about it the more it seems to me that we who are still alive are unreal in the eyes of the dead' [see figs. 6–8]. Sebald's books offer surprising juxtapositions of written and visual imagery, spinning narratives in a dynamic stream of consciousness.

Howeson's 'Drawing Narratives in Time' project builds on this idea, striving to create stillness and timelessness. The narratives transform the

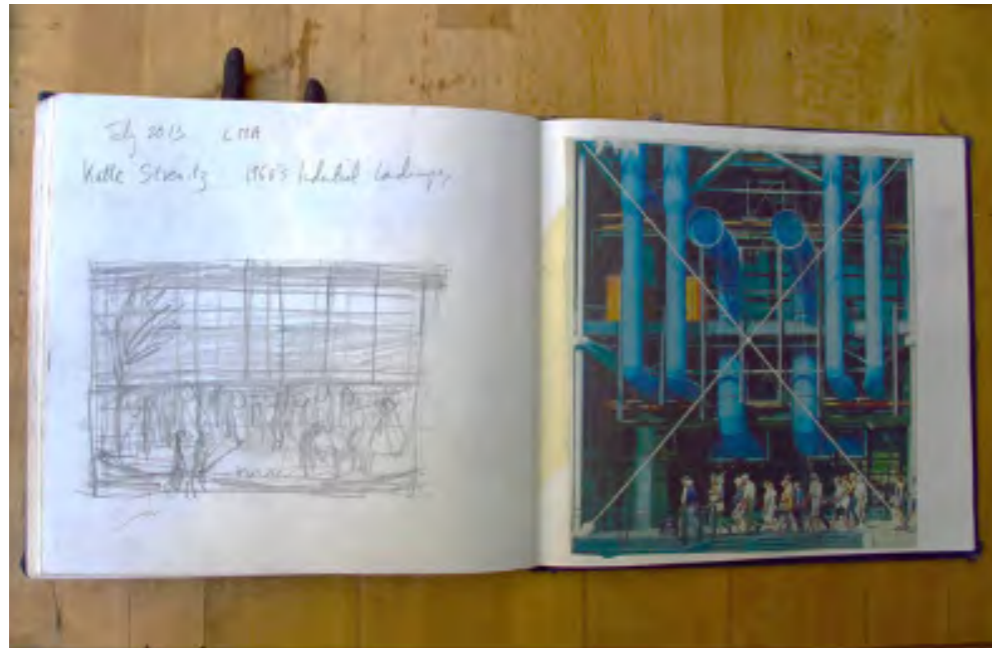
everyday into the unpredictable, using drawing as a language to tell stories about passing time, chance encounters, life after death, dystopic futures and ghosts.

### Portfolio References

- Augustine. 2002. *Confessions*. Translated by Pine-Coffin, R.S. London: Penguin.
- 'Doreen Massey on Space'. 2013. *Social Science Space*. Available at: [socialsciencespace.com/2013/02/podcastdoreen-massey-on-space/](https://socialsciencespace.com/2013/02/podcastdoreen-massey-on-space/) (accessed 15 December 2020).
- Eliot, T. S. 1971 [1943]. *Four Quartets*. New York: Harvest-Hartcourt.
- Sebald, W.G. 2017. *Austerlitz*. Arles: Éditions Actes Sud.



[fig. 6] Lord Mansfield's House (original print).



[fig. 7] Sketch and research for *Hampstead Horses*.



[fig. 9] *St Pancras Church, 1752*, original print.



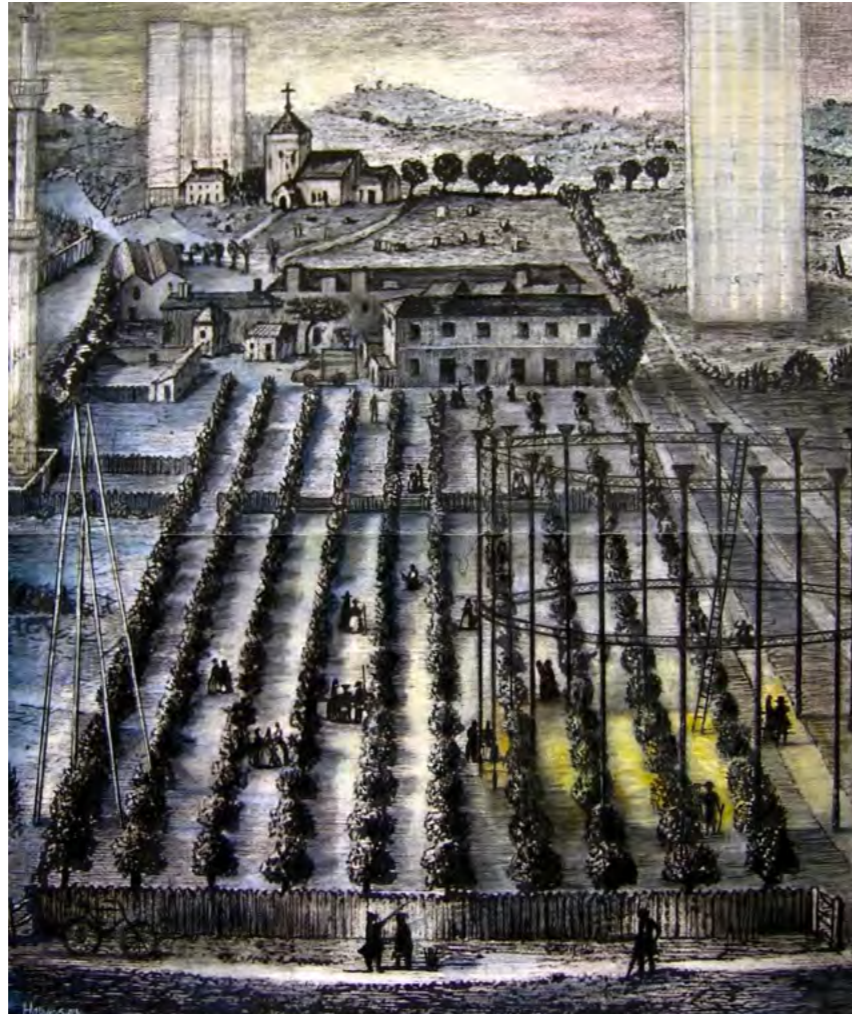
[fig. 8] *Hampstead Horses* (28 × 46 cm). The historic Figs in the foreground are more 'real' than the contemporary people in the background, who have turned into 'ghosts'.



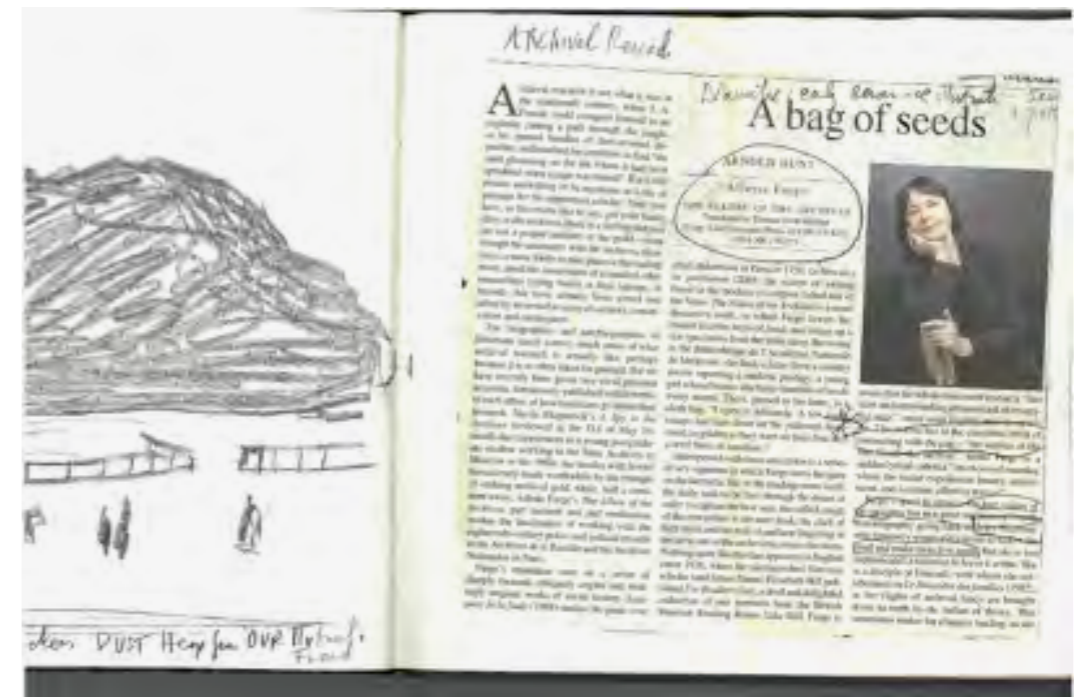
[fig. 10] *St Pancras in the Fields* (36 × 57 cm). An elegant 18th-century picnic transformed into dystopia. The twin towers and St Pancras church are marooned in a 20th-century industrial metropolis threatened by impending storms.



[fig. 11] Saint Pancras Wells and Church (original print).



[fig. 12] Saint Pancras Wells (46 × 38 cm). This was a fashionable 18th-century spa, on the banks of the River Fleet, offering remedies for all kinds of diseases. Bills issued by the proprietors claimed the quality of the water was 'surprisingly successful in curing the most obstinate cases of scurvy, king's evil, leprosy, and all other breakings out of the skin'.



[figs. 13–14] Primary research for 'Drawing Narratives in Time' – developing stories from archive prints.

## Dissemination

The research for 'Drawing Narratives in Time' was discussed in the following presentations, lectures, talks and papers:

### Exhibition

- 'Present in the Past'. Three-week solo exhibition, Collyer Bristow Gallery, London, UK, 5–25 February 2015 (audience: 1,500).

### Lectures, talks and workshops

- 'Drawing Memory and Theft'. Daniel Blau Gallery, Munich, Germany, January 2014. [Appendix 1]
- 'Practice as Research'. Presentation, School of Media and Performing Art, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, UK, January 2015.
- 'Conversations with Archives'. Discussion with LMA archivist Jeremy Smith, Collyer Bristow Gallery, London, UK, February 2015.
- 'Witness'. Documentary symposium speech, Falmouth University, Falmouth, UK, March 2015.
- 'Drawing/Memory/Theft'. Talk, Guild of Pastoral Psychology, London, UK, March 2015.
- 'Present in the Past'. Talk/workshop, London Metropolitan Archives, London, UK, May 2015.

### Publications

- Howeson, A. 2015. *Present in the Past Exhibition Catalogue*, Collyer Bristow, 5–25 February 2015. Anne Howeson in association with Collyer Bristow. [Appendix 2]

- Howeson, A. 2017. 'Case Study: Anne Howeson /Drawing and Memory'. In Minichiello, M. and Embury, G. *Reportage Illustration: Visual Journalism*. London: Bloomsbury. [Appendix 3]

### Reviews

- Brady, E. 2015. 'Anne Howeson: Present in the Past at Collyer Bristow Gallery'. *The Upcoming*, February. [theupcoming.co.uk/2015/02/06/anne-howeson-present-in-the-past-at-collyer-bristow-gallery-exhibition-review/](http://theupcoming.co.uk/2015/02/06/anne-howeson-present-in-the-past-at-collyer-bristow-gallery-exhibition-review/). [Appendix 4]
- Henry, L. 2015. *The Art Newspaper*, 9 February.
- Buxton, P. 2015. 'Ghost Town'. *RIBA Journal*, 29 January. [ribaj.com/culture/present-in-the-past](http://ribaj.com/culture/present-in-the-past). [Appendix 5]

### Additional Outcomes

In 2019, the Wellcome Trust in London invited Howeson to select material from their archives for a Wellcome Stories project. The project was called 'Painful Realities' and was in collaboration with the medical historian Dr Jaipreet Virdi. [wellcomecollection.org/series/XTg5pRAAACUAP5U5](http://wellcomecollection.org/series/XTg5pRAAACUAP5U5) [Appendix 6]. This project was also informed by a separate body of research submitted to REF2021 by Howeson as 'Imagining King's Cross'.

Several of the drawings have been reused on the internet. *Tile Kilns* was used on the Parker Harris and Cass Art websites to publicise the Derwent Drawing Prize, and also by *Ambit Literary Magazine* to promote their anniversary edition in 2019.

Students across UK institutions have used the material for essays and interviews.



[fig. 15] Howeson, A. 2015. *Present in the Past Exhibition Catalogue*, Collyer Bristow, 5–25 February 2015. Anne Howeson in association with Collyer Bristow. [drive.google.com/file/d/10cjgztv\\_sjwNn3qx6GTmfg5sNdXb-6x/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/10cjgztv_sjwNn3qx6GTmfg5sNdXb-6x/view)



## Appendices

- **Appendix 1** 'Drawing Memory and Theft'. Daniel Blau Gallery, Munich, Germany, January 2014.

Presentation:

[drive.google.com/file/d/1tD0K-dOTw6QZAOfX00saroIV0x3YxHy/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tD0K-dOTw6QZAOfX00saroIV0x3YxHy/view?usp=sharing)

Talk: [drive.google.com/file/d/1PotyBAUhotqYelunK\\_vS9ScKJXtzrvQZ/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PotyBAUhotqYelunK_vS9ScKJXtzrvQZ/view?usp=sharing)

Blurb: [drive.google.com/file/d/1XCeOr56gSbs6bBTHEccG1VedENKxJstw/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XCeOr56gSbs6bBTHEccG1VedENKxJstw/view?usp=sharing)

- **Appendix 2** Howeson, A. 2015. *Present in the Past Exhibition Catalogue, Collyer Bristow, 5–25 February 2015*. Anne Howeson in association with Collyer Bristow. [drive.google.com/file/d/10cigzvt\\_sjwNn3qx6GT-mfg5sNdXb-6x/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/10cigzvt_sjwNn3qx6GT-mfg5sNdXb-6x/view?usp=sharing)
- **Appendix 3** Howeson, A. 2017. 'Case Study: Anne Howeson/Drawing and Memory'. in Minichiello, M. and Embury, G. *Reportage Illustration: Visual Journalism*. London: Bloomsbury. [drive.google.com/file/d/1fLOGnUP72ll8nQ\\_W42mW2zF3Ykly-zst/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fLOGnUP72ll8nQ_W42mW2zF3Ykly-zst/view?usp=sharing)
- **Appendix 4** Brady, E. 2015. 'Anne Howeson: Present in the Past at Collyer Bristow Gallery'. *The Upcoming*, February. [theupcoming.co.uk/2015/02/06/anne-howeson-present-in-the-past-at-collyer-bristow-gallery-exhibition-review/](https://theupcoming.co.uk/2015/02/06/anne-howeson-present-in-the-past-at-collyer-bristow-gallery-exhibition-review/).
- **Appendix 5** Buxton, P. 2015. 'Ghost Town'. *RIBA Journal*, 29 January. [ribaj.com/culture/present-in-the-past](https://ribaj.com/culture/present-in-the-past)
- **Appendix 6** *Painful Realities*. 2019. Wellcome Trust Stories project. In collaboration with Dr Jaipreet Viridi. [wellcomecollection.org/series/XTg5pRAACUAP5U5](https://wellcomecollection.org/series/XTg5pRAACUAP5U5)

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