

FOCUS

For ART'S Sake



Pam Foley on finding solace for her sadness in art – through her project Routes of Sorrow at the Ark T Centre in Cowley

IN 2005 my mother died and the sorrow of losing the person who had brought me into the world turned to numbness. Shortly after my father died, and then my brother, who was severely autistic.

I tried turning to visual art for solace but there was nothing that seemed to help. Reading about the stages of grief was frustrating, I kept wondering what stage I was on.

So I turned to what I do best, which is to make art that produces a tangible object at the end of the process.

I have been a practicing sculptor in the UK since 1999, and in the US before that. But I responded to this sorrow with the creation of a work of art that was multi-disciplinary. Over several months I found myself creating paintings and images as well as sculptures around the subject of sorrow.

This became the first iteration of my Routes of Sorrow, which is on display at the church adjacent to the Ark T Centre until October 31.

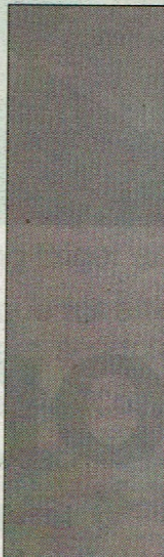
It was first shown at Inter-Action Community Arts Centre in Milton Keynes in 2013, then at St Andrew's Healthcare facilities in Northampton and Birmingham as a therapy tool, followed by Oxford's Kicking the Bucket Festival in 2014 and 2015, and the When Death Comes exhibition in Bristol. It has grown and adapted as I have learnt more about the subject of sorrow. This exhibit, Routes of Sorrow: Floating, included a performance element on October 13, from string quartet OXUS and dancers Kay Lynn and Marcarena Ortuzar.

Although it is an exploration of sorrow, Routes of Sorrow: Floating is uplifting, focusing on the healing process and creating a dialogue between people about this often-ignored subject. Through the use of art, silent communication is facilitated. For example, one of the pieces within the exhibition, called The Outsider, reminds us there is someone or something that recognises what you have been through and helps you gain understanding and acceptance of your experiences.

The Outsider is a face made of ceramic and cracked glazed raku with acrylic tears outlined in sepia ink and dried roses where the eyes would be. I also wanted it to be used by mental health professionals, as it has been with St Andrew's Healthcare, and at art centres such as Ark T, so that others too can use visual art as an outlet for sorrow as I have done.

I tried to turn to visual art for some solace but none of it seemed to help me

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Acts to watch on

Continued from
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March.

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