

Beverly Ayling-Smith

My work examines the emotional states of mourning and melancholia. I use materials associated with burial to encourage a focus on the emotional dimensions in the words grief, loss and absence. The way I work is informed by my work as a microbiologist and uses an iterative approach to experimenting with outcomes in cloth and stitch. Current work uses a child's dress as a vehicle for expressing loss – both the loss of childhood and loss of the inner child within ones-self. Even when the immediate feelings of grief and mourning are passed, we are changed forever; the emotions embedded in the fabric of our lives emerge at different times to stain our emotional states. The way the image of a child's dress can seep through the smoothed-over surface echoes the way in which feelings of loss can rise to the surface at different moments in our lives. Previous work has included an investigation into the Japanese Kesa, the Buddhist robe of mourning, which is made from rags in remembrance of a deceased person to honour their memory.

Melancholia has been described by Julia Kristeva as 'an abyss of sorrow'. My work questions whether there is a space between the states of mourning and melancholia which encourages a productive creativity. By exploring the expression of melancholia through the representation of loss in cloth my work seeks to question whether it is possible to re-evaluate the term 'melancholia' in the light of contemporary ritual and practice using textiles as a metaphor for grief and loss within rituals of mourning.

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