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# The Night Garden

Pet memorialisation through the application of skilled craft

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**Abstract**

Pet owners will experience the loss of their beloved pet. Unlike human loss, pet loss can be compounded by its repeated experience throughout a person's life. Pets contribute precious moments and facilitate emotional connections, but unlike our human family, they leave little behind by way of tangible objects, limiting our opportunity for memory provocation through physical reminders of their lives.

My creative practice investigates how memories attributed to objects can offer an evocative mode of connection between emotional experiences and tangible souvenirs of our pets' lives. The final design, a playful sculptural reliquary, incorporates visual and tactile storytelling mechanisms; it explores optical effects to enhance the physical engagement with the object and its associative memory. Drawing on my background as a toy maker together with pop surrealist aesthetics, the research explores skilled craft as a strategy for deepening memorialisation. The design investigates the relationship between the care taken in fashioning highly crafted objects as an amplification of the importance that we place on our pets as a non-human family.

The design process adopts a personal introspective methodology, whereby outcomes are driven by contextual, research-led reflective practice, through iterative methods of drawing and physical prototyping. I argue that by creating memorial objects that 'eulogise' our pet grief as personal touchstones, an acceptance of pet mourning as a growing social evolution is better understood.

The resolved design is a storytelling device that reveals through ritual engagement, exploring mnemonic objects that enshrine memories of deceased pets, and the role of such objects as memory devices in the maintenance of their memory.

**Keywords:**

reliquary, souvenir, non-human family, memorialisation, memorial objects, mnemonic objects, pet grievability, pet mourning, pop surrealism, skilled craft, object making, collecting

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This work is dedicated to my cats Roma and Onyx, who brighten up our lives. And to Moo Moo, Haida and Aster, our lost family.

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## 1.0 Introduction

This research explores the role of objects as mnemonic strategies for memory provocation in pet memorialisation. The aim is to answer the following questions:

“Can thoughtfully crafted artisanal design help form deeper memorial connections associated with pet mourning ?”

“Can participation in skilled craft as a ritual of care and respect, amplify this connection ?”

This project aims to understand how the design of highly crafted artisanal objects is a mechanism for mnemonic relationships, allowing for greater expressions of devotional sentiment as a response of loss. I investigate this through a sculptural design, the *Night Garden*, a mnemonic device that celebrates the significance of my cat Moo Moo, through the lens of one specific memory. <sup>1</sup>

I investigate how intangible emotions influence a tangible design outcome, and I position my design within contextualising pet loss and the associated personalised rituals of mourning. This project is a merging of two personal interests: a long-held fascination for reliquaries along with the “things” that memorialise those who have lived their lives, and the profound affection for my cats and their memory after their deaths. The continuing connection between myself and my deceased cats is maintained by the presence of things that provide mnemonic reflection, supporting the process of grief acceptance, through rituals of my own mourning practices.

My collections of fur and whiskers are central to the design as signifiers of remembrance and loss and their synthesis within the final outcome is a vehicle for memory provocation through allegorical storytelling. Engaging with craft is an integral part of my ritual, expressing loss through playful design. I explore the interplay of the audience with the design as a ritual, sharing my own memory connections while inviting others to form their own interpretation of the design through playful engagement. This is a consequence of my background as a toy designer. The integration of my cats’ whiskers directly into the design, in the form of a mnemonic carved likeness of Moo Moo, is significant.

My design, embodied with memory connection, is a form of “reliquary” that aims to recognise pet grief outside of societal “grievable” spaces. I understand reliquaries as systems for the display and veneration of sacred artefacts or relics and implement this analysis into the work. Through rituals of collecting my cats’ fur and whiskers, I explored principles within the design that celebrate these tangible reminders of their lives. These mundane relics are connected with sentimental nostalgia. Reliquaries as display systems amplify the importance of the relic held within, providing a comparison with my own collected keepsakes and their importance. They are imbued with hidden meaning, allegorical storytelling and ritual provocation. I make comparisons between this and the influence of Pop Surrealism through ‘Pop Toys’ as contemporary examples of allegorical storytelling, providing my work with

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<sup>1</sup> We sat in the garden together, Moo Moo and I. It was a clear bright night, stars arching across the sky, our surroundings lit by a full moon. She was an older cat now, her garden time more sedate, laying in leaves and watching. We were there in the dead of night, as she had been unwell and I had needed to accompany her outside while she did her ‘business’. After, is when we paused, and sat. Taking in the peaceful night, together, she sat by my side and waited. It was only 10 minutes before we headed back inside to bed. But the peacefulness of that memory with her, is my most vivid.

an aesthetic positioning. I analyse research, linking reliquaries, as sacred objects of ritual, to the rituals of pet mourning through a lens of Pop Surrealism. A playful transmedia movement, encompassing painting, illustration and toys I am influenced by the associated artists of, who employ their own skilled craft to celebrate the memory of a lost pet.

When crafting a memorial object, the cathartic experience can strengthen the connection of mourning ritual and object. The care and respect we place in our craft reflects a reciprocity of care that we share with our animals, illuminating the importance of maintaining their memory as part of our own identity. My final design, the *Night Garden*, synthesises craft into the design process, connecting me with the mourning process through physical making. I argue for the slow practice of artisanal hand-craft in the process of mourning loss, comparing both as bodily experiences.

I explore craft through my experience as a toy designer and maker, combining playful, toy-like mechanisms and design knowledge with traditional craftsmanship through skilled model-making to engage audience participation. I employ multidisciplinary strategies, implementing iterative design through model-making, drawing, sketching and sculpting. Drawing on this combined knowledge to explore design as a physical act, I link the process to mourning rituals, as a means to explore concepts through visual problem-solving synthesised through my craft.

Although my final design is a completed output, it opens up further opportunities for memory dissemination. Making, like the process of mourning, is never static, it continues to evolve.

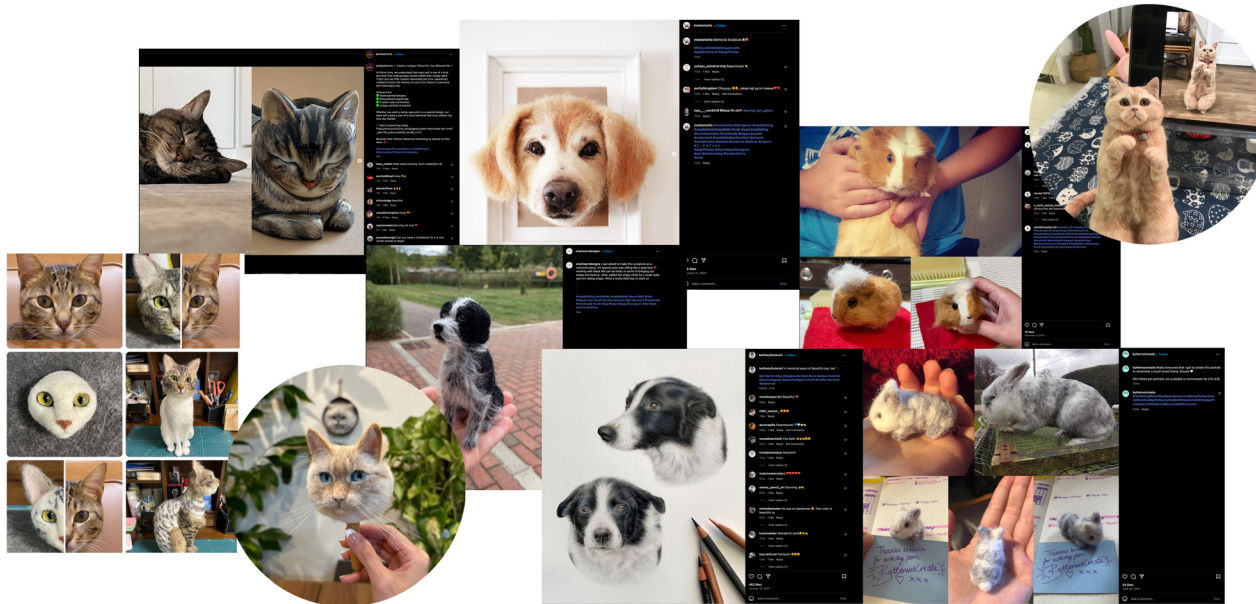
## 2.0 Literature Review

Numerous academic papers discuss the emotional support benefits of companion animals (Stone; Crossley et al; Schuurman; Hawkins), with space needed to mourn their loss at the conclusion of their comparably much shorter lives. The study corresponds with the significant rise in pet ownership over the past three decades, reflected through global studies.<sup>2</sup>

Animals). With this growth in pet ownership and an evident consideration for them being part of the human family, it should come as no surprise that an industry has grown to support the memorialisation of our pets.

### 2.1 Pet Memorialisation

This mourning can take the form of personal keepsakes and objects of memorialisation as shown in Figure 1. There are numerous ways in which pet owners can choose to memorialise their pets through commercially available products. Internet searches on the subject offer many services, from mass-produced jewelry such as pendants featuring cartoonish paw designs along with the pets name, to more bespoke wearables that encapsulate a small lock of fur. Pet owners can send small samples of their pet's fur to have it crafted into a highly realistic replica. Although beautiful to look at, they are lacking a playful metaphor of the memory of the pet. More discerning shoppers in the mall of pet remembrance might opt for something more discreet.



(Fig. 1) A compilation of hand crafted pet memorial objects.

<sup>2</sup> In the USA, Forbes survey reflects this as follows. "As of 2024, 66% of U.S. households (86.9 million homes) own a pet. That's up from 56% in 1988, pet ownership statistics show. From companionship to emotional support, pets are a vital part of their owners' lives. In fact, 97% of pet owners consider their pets to be a part of their family" (Megna).

A survey of UK pet ownership (The PAW Report) shows that nearly a quarter of adults in the United Kingdom own a cat, and here in Aotearoa, Companion Animals NZ has found that New Zealanders are amongst the world's biggest cat lovers with almost 40% of households having at least one cat (Companion

Returniti offers a service for both people and pets, valuing the significance of pets as family members (Fig. 2). Developed in New Zealand, their service incorporates the ashes of the deceased into simple, oval-shaped pebbles, offered in stylish wooden boxes designed to complement the aesthetic tastes of the hypothetically discerning. Their natural materiality, wood and a type of compacted stone made from ash, offers a more considered approach to the memorial moment, with each stone serving as an individually unique memorial, offered as literal touchstones.

## 2.2 Skilled Craft Memorials

Things hold boundless significance beyond the surface signifiers of shape, colour, material or texture. “Things” can evoke an emotional response and be instrumental in maintaining memory. This aspect of memory maintenance is what interests me when considering the things that we surround ourselves with when a loved one dies. Gibson suggests; “...For those who outlive a loved one, the objects that remain are significant memory traces and offer a point of connection with the absent body of the deceased” (2).

Tangible things are more than just dimensional objects. Therefore, considering “things” encourages us to recognise other mechanisms for maintaining memory, such as tattoos, illustrations or paintings, not commonly understood as tangible. Here, my work can be positioned within a broader context of the expression of pet memorialisation through personal touchstones.

Considering the use of design and skilled craft being used in creating pet memorials, academic research on the topic is limited, despite the presence of contemporary craftspeople and artisans within the space. There are papers that discuss tattoos and visual imagery in relation to pet memorialisation, but there is little research on skilled, craft-based object making within the same context.



(Fig. 2) Pet memorial by Returniti.

There has also been a growing acceptance of pet grievability within online communities and social media, providing pet owners with platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to express their grief over lost non-human family members and connect with others experiencing similar loss. Online communities mourn their animals through their own varying levels of craft, from naive sculptures to skilled personalised, felted pet plushies. Everyone has access to bespoke, crafted objects, whatever their budget, whatever the level of skill.



(Fig. 3) Memorial brooch for a horse; pressed silver, glass and horse hair, by Vaune Mason.

As a maker, my approach to memorialising my own loved pets comes from a place of love for them and a love of personal craft. It's my care of craft that establishes the degree of importance of my remembering. I am not unique in this approach. Renowned artist Gary Baseman shares his creative life with his cat(s) muse, while publicly commemorating their loss and the grief he feels through his unique work (See Baseman, also on Instagram, Facebook). Locally, artisans such as Vaune Mason (see Mason, also on Instagram), a successful jeweller, and lowbrow artist and tattooist Anna Johnstone (See Johnstone) have both employed their own skilled craft in creating meaningful artisan objects and depictions of people's pets as memorial pieces.

Mason, a lover of animals and her own non-human family, has created carefully handcrafted memorial objects using precious metals and fragments of the deceased pet, such as fur. A poignant example is a sterling silver brooch (Fig. 3) set with a heavy glass lens, the simple puck-like design showcases a small lock of horsehair. The same hair, used in the fabrication process, was rolled with sheet silver, imprinting its image into the surface to add textural interest and metaphor.

Johnstone, known for her evocative, stylised pencil and ink depictions of wild animals, turned to tattooing as an extension of her craft. Her meticulous style and sensitivity to emotional nuance led to her becoming a popular artist for those wanting to express the loss of a loved animal in perhaps the most intimate way: through a tattoo.

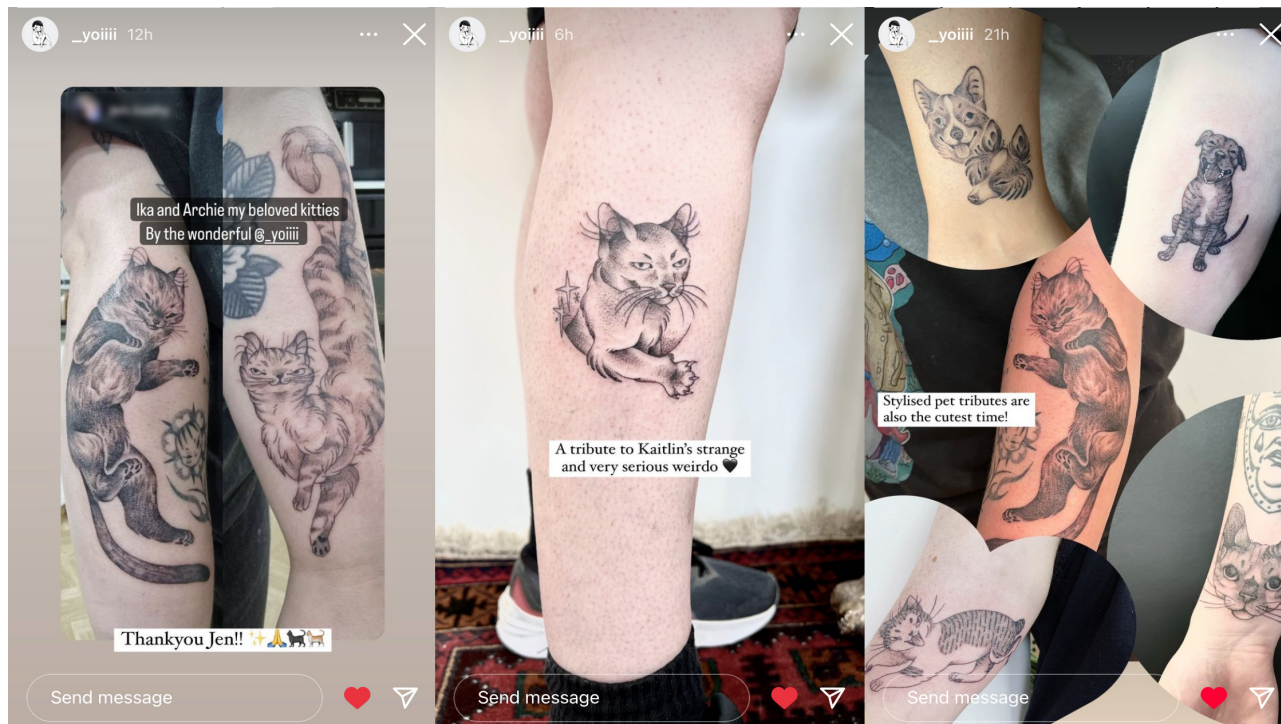
The normalisation of pet grief through pictorial embodiments of our pets is already evident in tattoo art (Fig. 4). Commonly, seemingly innocuous tattoos of domesticated animals on people's flesh turn out to be a memorial to a deceased pet. Tattoos are a favourable mode of remembrance in this instance, as they offer deep personal connections through becoming part of the body. Pain associated with getting a tattoo, is directly relatable to the pain of grief and with that a tattoo provides a permanency of reflection that can be accessed at any time. Deeply personal, they can be important touchstones in the ritual of mourning. "The

process of getting a memorial tattoo assists in the grief ritual on several levels, and in many instances, makes the public process of grieving the pet more socially acceptable" (Harris 122).

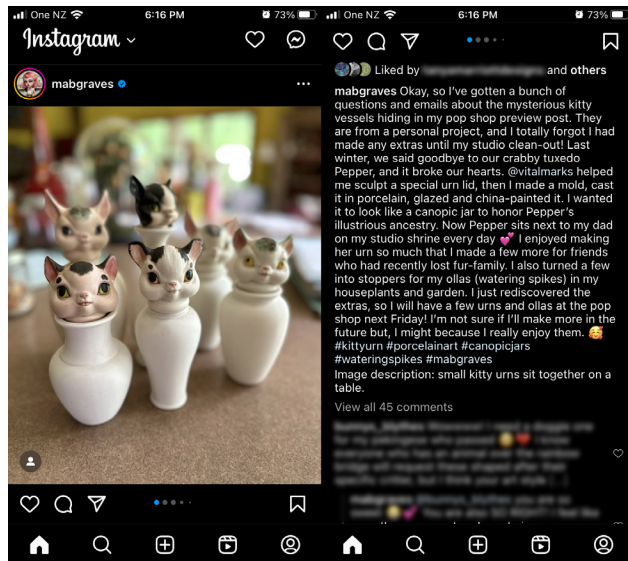
Through her own experience, Johnstone identifies with those who approach her to create an image of their lost pet. As a craftsperson, this experiential tie helps her better understand the significance of the act and connect with her client. After the sudden loss of her own beloved dog, Johnstone had her likeness tattooed onto the palm of her right hand. She states, "putting her on my palm in a way, was a way of trying to have her in my skin, so that every time I looked at my hand I would remember her and not forget" (Johnstone).

Internationally renowned pop surrealist Mab Graves engaged her own craft to create evocative, personal memory connections to her lost studio companion, her cat Pepper (See Graves, also on Instagram). Graves' crafted Canopic jars offer a personal resting place for her cat (Fig. 5).

She describes the joy experienced through making as well as how meaningful it is to have Pepper with her still in her studio. I find peace in having my lost studio companion, Moo Moo, resting in my studio, still occupying the spot on my desk where she once lay. These simple clay pots, with their carefully sculpted heads and delicately painted designs, speak to a care in Graves's craft embodying the value of her cat as far more than just a 'pet'.



(Fig. 4) Pet memorial tattoo designs by Anna Johnstone.



(Fig. 5) Personal pet memorial Canopic jars by Mab Graves.

It is not just creatives for whom this is an essential aspect of the mourning ritual. Stone recognises the importance that grief rituals play through the behavioural responses of those who have experienced the loss of a companion animal. Sleeping with their pets' toys or comforters or holding onto their pets' possessions as tangible connections to their grief are examples of attachment to mourning objects. Planning funerals, incorporating ashes into jewellery or keeping mementos are all expressed as part of the grief response, similar to the loss of a human companion (13).

As a creative practitioner who has honed my craft through professional practice, I feel a sense of duty to use my skills through thoughtful and careful execution, to honour the lives of my past pets. But, regardless of the level of skilled craft employed, the true measure is in performing the craft itself. I believe it is this ritual of care and the investment of time in the process of crafting that allows us to form the most significant connection.

### 2.3 Reliquaries

Reliquaries have long held a fascination for my practice as fantastic objects that glorify mundane relics. Keepsakes are elevated by the reliquary housing that surrounds them. Through their numerous forms (Fig. 6), they employ allegory and storytelling to connect the relic to 'other worldly' beliefs and provoke interaction through rituals of faith.

In this project I looked to reliquaries to explore these same principles, tying allegory and object to rituals of mourning. I linked this back to pet memorials, through how I use visual representation of a memory within my design, exploring the *Night Garden* as a set of narrative and allegorical components. Investigating reliquaries to find common language and attributes such as story and personification through the object, I made comparisons between reliquaries and pet memorial objects. Both endeavour to make a connection between a keepsake and memory through a physical device.

Krueger et al. explains the function of the reliquary in antiquity as a material testimony to a complementary arrangement of religious practices and rituals that focus our attention on fragmented bodies or decaying cloth (5). He goes on to define a relic; "The word 'relics' ... indicates things 'left behind' "(Krueger 5).

I use this fundamental idea of celebrating material testimony in my own design. A relic's metaphoric strength is attributed partly to its narrative and partly to the power of the reliquary that encloses it. This is part of the artefact that fascinates me. As a frame, the enclosure that a reliquary offers provides an elevated understanding of a sacred space, as it is the space that enshrines (Hahn 12). A transformation of the mundane occurs, a fragmented bone or a piece of cloth, through the weaving of a story is arguably the core condition of the reliquary. I have collected things left behind by my cats during their everyday lives,



(Fig. 6) Various examples of reliquaries.

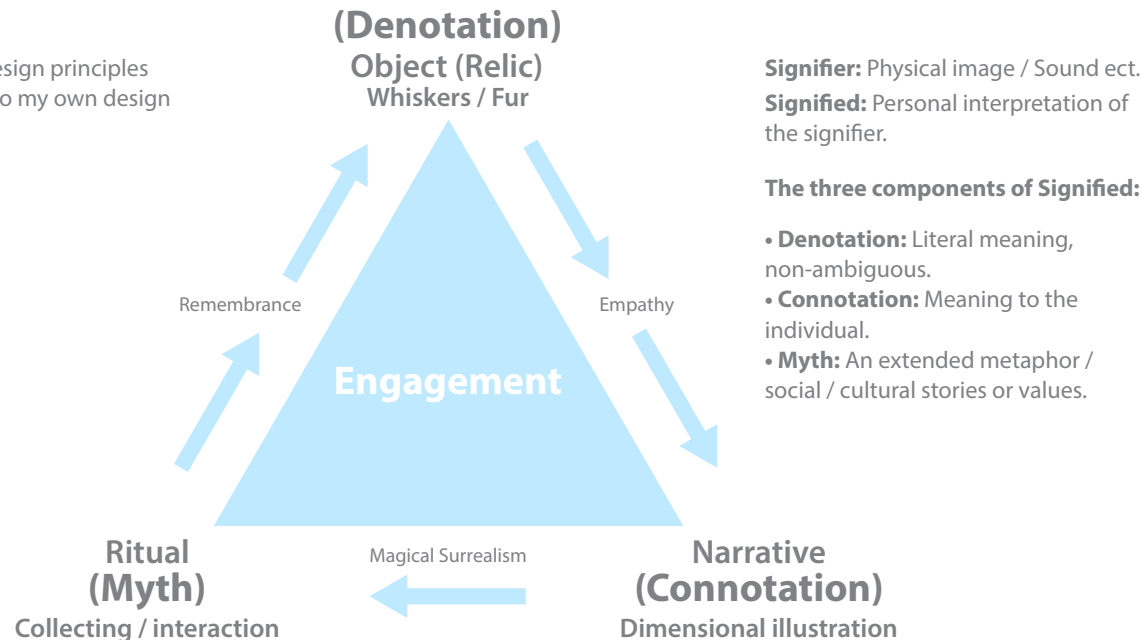
such as their whiskers and fur, and connect these with stories. These stories are imbued with memories and meaningful allegory to create a valuable souvenir of their life. Hahn identifies ritual, storytelling and collecting as key components of a reliquary mode (20), which are also important to my design strategy. They are what knit my design components together to provoke engagement (Fig. 7).

Hahn illustrates the power of the reliquary for communicating abstract narratives, proposing that "...reliquaries offer a relic more than spatial delimitation and enframement. A reliquary's enshrinement constitutes a temporal act, and implicates an array of practices such as ritual, storytelling and collecting" (20).

This idea of a temporal act is an integral part of my design, explored through ritual engagement with the design object. My interpretation involves examining how objects can illustrate an ephemeral nature and how this quality can evolve over time, comparing this to the concept of spleen (Fig. 8). The relic, a tangible artefact reimagined from the medieval context, becomes a souvenir of kitsch culture. Grounded in late Victorian obsessions of death, memento and memory, and enabled by social dynamics brought about through industrialisation, the work of social critic Walter Benjamin aligns with this changing social epoch. Benjamin agonized over the influence of a mechanised world, discussing its consequences on memory and our experience of time, exploring unconscious and conscious memory, defined as nostalgic kitsch and melancholic kitsch, respectively (Olalquiaga 68). Central to these modes is the moment of Spleen, outlined by Benjamin as "... An existential state of pure present devoid of all past (history and mythical time) and future (hope and potential for change)..." (Olalquiaga, 75).

### Design | Semiotic Principles | Signifier / Signified

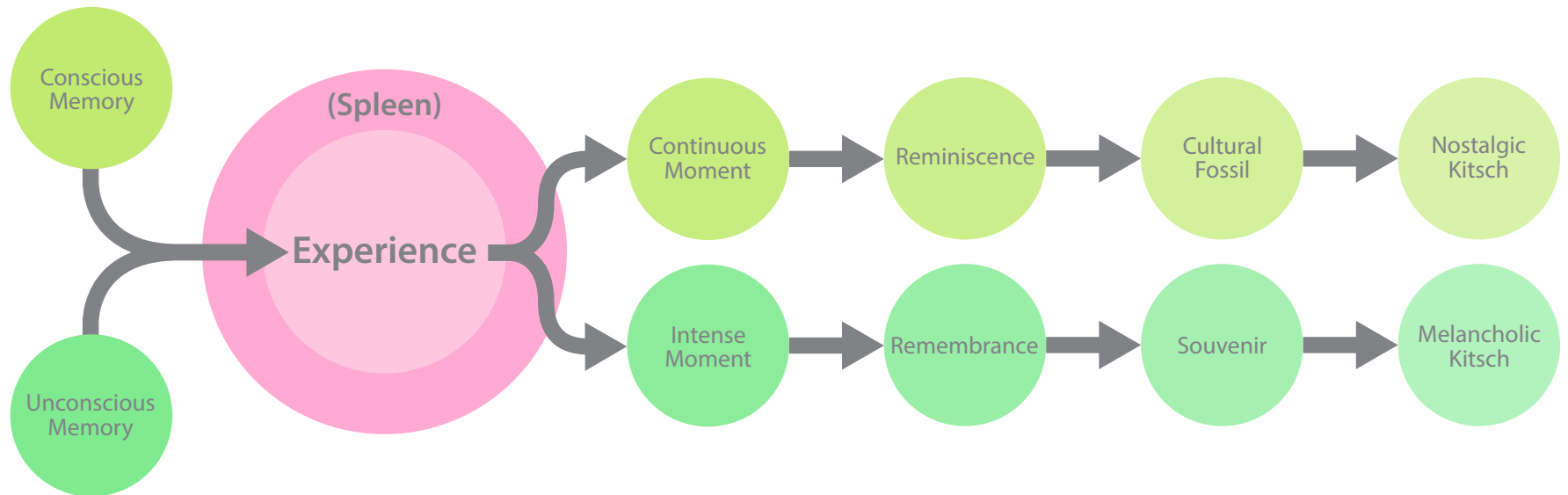
Semiotic design principles  
in relation to my own design  
Strategy



Based on information sourced from; Dunstone, Jason. "What Is Semiotic Analysis?" Square Holes, 2019

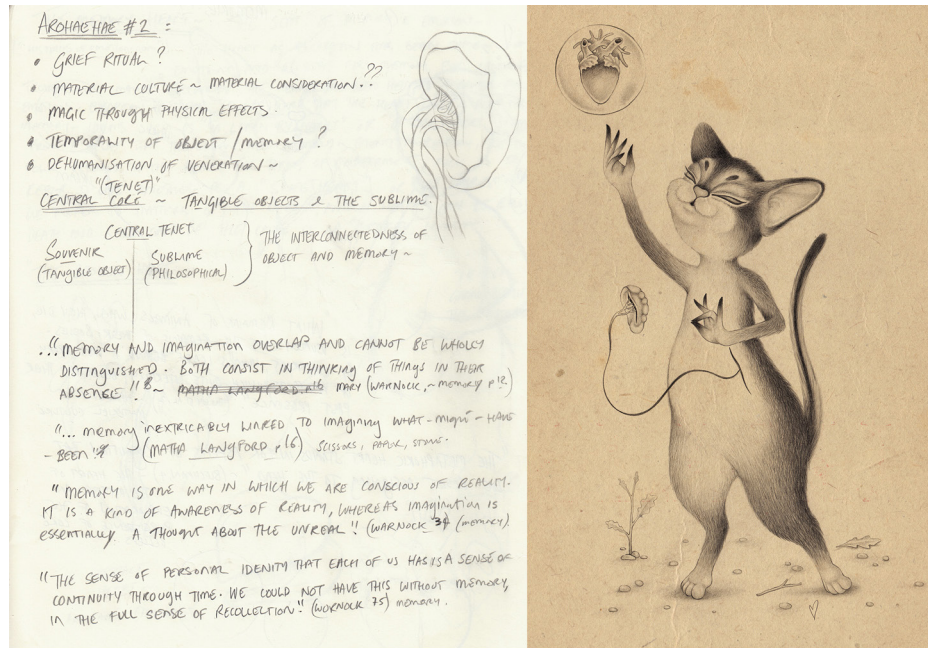
(Fig. 7) Diagram of how storytelling, ritual and collecting are broken down through my design.

## Spleen | Conscious and unconscious memory



(Olalquiaga, 75)

(Fig. 8) Diagram of Spleen, conscious and unconscious memory.



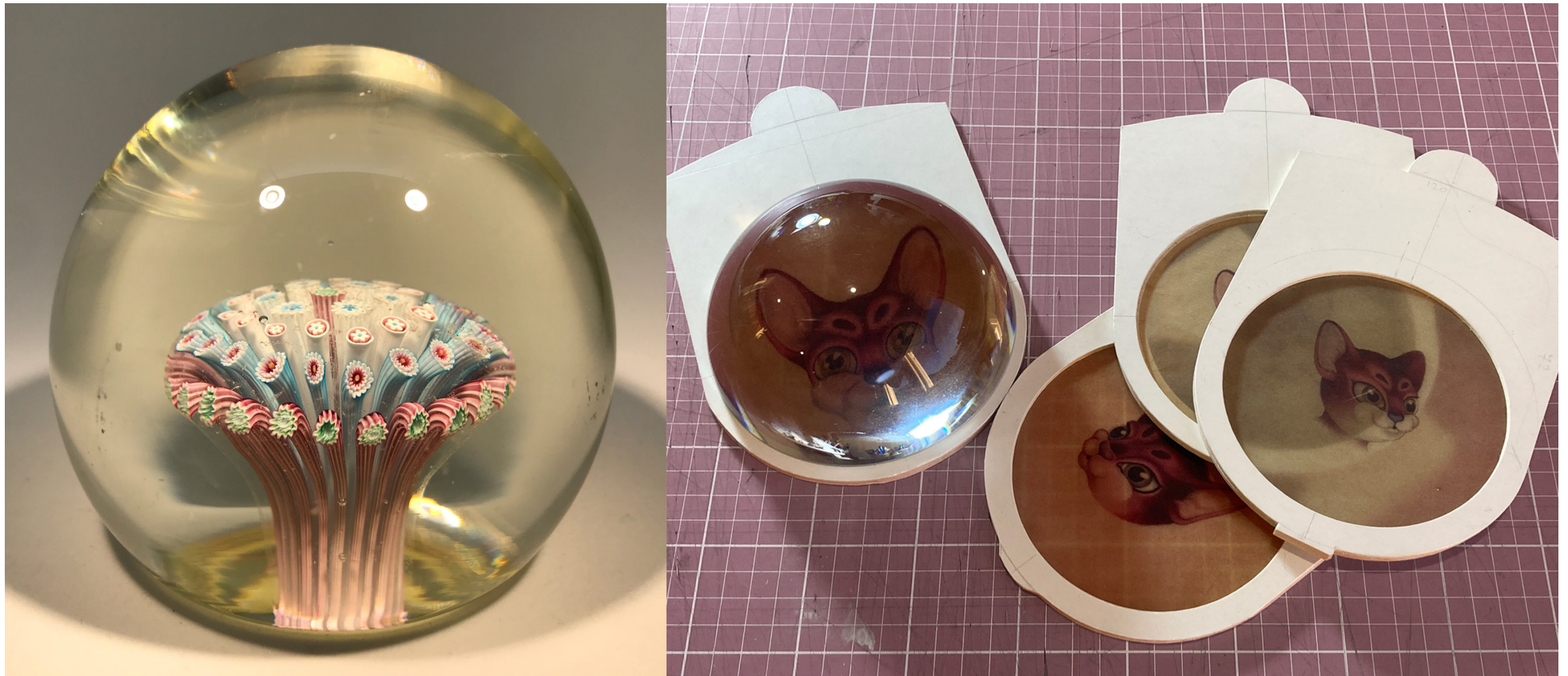
A phenomenon that is a key motif in my final work (Fig. 9). I explore this through my design, identifying ritual, storytelling and collecting as being important while incorporating anatomical illustration of the spleen allegory to this abstract construct of time influencing memories.

Olalquiaga employs the lens of kitsch to examine Benjamin's constructs of memory. The focus is the concept of the 'dream sphere', a term coined by Ludwig II of Bavaria, referring to glass spheres that encapsulated objects of enchantment, sealing them forever in a bubble of paralysed time. These glass wonders, enacting the function of the humble paperweight, were forerunners of the modern souvenir, a reminiscence, tangibly held for posterity (Olalquiaga 57).



The enchantment of the dream sphere is arguably the glass sphere's greatest quality; the orb encasing the artefact of interest is commensurable to the reliquary encasing the holy relic. It offers more than just mere preservation. The souvenir, captured within glass, is, through its association with dreams, asked to take on the possibility of becoming something more. As the observer, we become tantalised to imagine something beyond the materiality of the object. I link this phenomenon to my design through the use of a lens. As an ocular device, the lens, like the dream sphere, invites the viewer to imagine new, untold stories, while focusing on a tangible thing through which I maintain my own memory connections (Fig. 10).

(Fig. 9) Spleen as a motif for time and memory.



(Fig. 10) Dream sphere; Glass millefiori paperweight; Glass hemispherical lens and memory slides.



(Fig. 11) Collected whiskers and fur from my cats.



(Fig. 12) Moo Moo's Ashes and collar. A shrine to her memory on my studio desk.

## 2.4 Rituals of Mourning

Considering the display mechanism as having equal importance to the relic raises interesting questions when considering the role of relics. Where does meaningful connection to the object lie? Is the display mechanism necessary to elevate meaningful connection with the relic, or is it able to necessitate this on its own merits?

Looking through the small bags of cat fur or a box of whiskers that I have collected, their preciousness becomes explicit. These are my last tangible, authentic connection to my cats, the part of them that can still be held, cherished and cared for (Fig. 11). It is difficult not to perceive these simple artefacts with the same reverence owed to much grander things, especially when they are all you have left. A direct connection to loss.

The things that have become tangible souvenirs — appreciations of my cats' lives, their fur and whiskers — play out as mnemonic affirmations; these are the material animal bridge between their lives and experiences and my own memories of them. These artefacts are not alone in this duty. Moo Moo's collar, which sits with quiet poignancy on top of the small wooden box that holds her ashes, also has this function of memory maintenance (Fig. 12).

Whincup proposes that our connection to those who have passed on and the things they leave behind is indelibly linked to our own sense of self-identity. When we lose a loved one, a significant other, a tension is created

in that there is a disconnection through death in our significant relationships. This sudden disconnect threatens our sense of self. Reinforcing this argument is that memory and self-identity are inextricably linked (59). For example, he realised that upon his father's death, he no longer thought of himself as a son. His father's death had threatened this identity; he had moved up the familial ranking, becoming the family patriarch (63).

This feeling of loss of self was something that I too felt with the deaths of Haida and then Moo Moo. My own identity was challenged; I was no longer their "Cat Dad" in tangible authenticity, and this relationship was now one of memory. In my own moment of identity crisis, I was abruptly reminded of everything that they had been to me. "It is when we lose a pet that we understand how the creature has made us who we are" (Schoorman 32).

Objects can become mnemonics for maintaining memory, an abstract device that helps recall associations, and perhaps represents a direct acknowledgment of the significance of the relationship we shared with the deceased. The deeper the bond, the greater the poignancy of the thing as a way of maintaining their memory (Whincup 63). Time and ritual also play their part. Immediately following loss, the undertaking of mourning through ritual and how we pay our respects to the relationship is largely attributed to the significance of the relationship with the deceased (Whincup 59). As time passes and our memories are preserved through the

rituals we observe, the meaningful connection between these memories, through their attendance, shifts to become more significant as a reflection of our self-identity. The ritual of remembering is now a relationship of our own identity (Whincup 62).

## 2.5 Non-Human Grievability

I grew up with family pets. Their place in our home was an important aspect of my childhood. I loved the companionship that they offered, and their presence was hugely beneficial to my own development, informing a compassionate consideration for other species that share our homes, neighbourhoods and the wider environment. Hawkins suggests that "...Caring for pet animals provides children with the experience of taking responsibility for another living being, may support the development of empathy, and has been shown to relate to more humane attitudes later in life..." (1.2).

As an adult I have continued to include pets in my life. For my wife and I, cats are treasured members of our family, whose loss upon their passing provokes an intense emotional response and a deep need for a tangible remembrance connection. It is perhaps a familiar and unfamiliar space that we find ourselves in when a treasured family pet dies. Our non-human family members exist as extensions of our nuclear family, while also belonging to the wild nature. As non-human animals, pets share our homes and lives, and we consider them as separate from other,

more wild, more objectified animal distinctions (Schuurman 32).

The loss of both Haida and Moo Moo, our first beloved "fur children," encouraged me to reflect on the importance they held in our hearts and lives. These non-humans had a filial relationship to us, with my wife and I observing our maternal and paternal roles. Haida and Moo Moo were as important to me as any significant member of my human family, equally loved in life and grieved in their deaths.

My grief for my cats, however, was both familiar and unfamiliar in its expression. Familiar through the emotions that were experienced, yet unfamiliar through the diminished social acceptance of this grief. It felt as though grieving for a pet was considered overly emotional. Schuurman explains that grieving for a "human significant other" is far more culturally accepted than grieving for a non-human animal, even when they are accepted as a deeply loved member of the human family system (33).

Although offering sympathy for the loss of my pet, some of my acquaintances simply asked if I would get another one. A pet, it would seem, is replaceable. It is here that our pets fall into a strange cultural space; they are considered both family and objectified through the perception of ownership. This perception elicits a cultural response, one that removes the agency of the pet as a non-grievable objectification.

Our grief for pets is shaped by the same rituals and cultural practices with which we grieve our own human companions, yet, socially, our



(Fig. 13) Rituals of collecting relics of my cats lives.

pets are thought to be publicly “ungrievable” (Schuurman 33). As Schuurman states “It would, for example, be unthinkable to demand a day off work to grieve a deceased pet, while doing so to grieve a human being is not only accepted but expected” (33).

Pet grief can be characterised as different from human grief, in that pets live significantly shorter lives, which means our experience of loss is multiplied, leading to repeated grief experiences (Testoni 2). Over the past few decades, acknowledging the death of a pet through creative modes has become more socially accepted, where the rituals of death and grief for a family pet can be observed without prejudice, or indeed celebrated. As discussed earlier, social media is abundant with examples. Grief over a pet is an affliction that can be subdued with the help of mourning rituals (Arora 1). Testoni, also attests to a distinction between grief and mourning, attributing grief to our emotional response while referring to the act of mourning as “...behaviour that social groups expect following bereavement when a family member has died” (2). This distinction is important to recognising the act of memorialising through objects as part of a mourning process; our grief is the emotional response to loss, while mourning is the ritual response.

## 2.6 A Bodily Experience

Ever since our cats were kittens, I have collected their fur and whiskers. Fur from our regular grooming sessions, moments of intimate connection, and whiskers discovered hidden in dusty corners of the house during a much-needed vacuuming. The search for the elusive whisker has become something of a weekly hunt, part of a personal ritual, and once discovered are carefully scrutinised and placed in the appropriate safe place. While they were alive, I collected their whiskers for the interest that they held as ‘things’. Once discovered I would place them in an old ring box with very little afterthought (Fig. 13).

After their deaths these same whiskers took on new meaning, and there was an intense desire to distinguish individual whiskers and to be able to categorically say, “yes, this one is Moo Moo”. Within this box, both Haida and Moo Moo remain an amalgam of one another, their whiskers a confusing jumble of memories. I have come to appreciate how crucial it is to know who is who amongst the relics of their bodies. This serves in my maintenance of their memories.

As with the relics of Christian devotion, which offer tangible connection to deeply held belief systems, the assembled relics of my cats become compelling tangible artefacts that connect me to emotions and memories long after they have passed away. In our hierarchical human-centric world, we leave behind a journal of our existence, told through the possessions,

artefacts and material objects that objectify our lives. This is crucially opposite to that of animal existence, as discussed by Tilley, arguing that “What remains of animals, when they die, is usually just the remains of their bodies. By contrast humans leave behind a vast array of artefacts which, quite literally, objectify their past presence” (2).



(Fig. 14) Minnie, a taxidermied pet. 19th Century, Tunbridge Wells Museum, UK.

Many cultures reverently collect animal parts for various symbolic or religious reasons. The Victorians, for example, were great collectors of animal “parts”. An interest in science and new theories on evolution sparked a fascination with taxidermy, and by extension, using this method to memorialise famous animals and beloved pets alike (Courtney 21). The fur, whiskers, and even the cremated remains of my cats become souvenirs that offer an appreciable connection, evoking memories and provoking an opportunity for storytelling moments of lives that were and could have been, similar to Minnie (Fig. 14) the taxidermied Terrier. A 19th-century pet from Tunbridge Wells Museum so mourned in her passing, Minnie was immortalised and enshrined in a display cabinet of exquisite craft. Although very little is known of the circumstances of Minnie's life and how she came to be taxidermied, what is clear is how much she must have been loved to have been afforded such a prestigious rest as the memento of someone's deep affection. These remnants of our pets' bodies, more so than the other things that they leave behind, remind us of our own mortality, conjoining our own approaching death with their own, “... a grievable loss is always embodied; loss and grief draws the attention of grieving persons to themselves and their lost ones as precarious bodies, and loss is therefore always a bodily experience.” (Redmalm 23).



(Fig. 15) Diagram mapping visual precedents & influences.

### 3.0 Design Influences

While grief and reliquaries may at first seem at odds with imaginative Pop Surrealism it is by uniquely intertwining these influences that makes for novel contributions (Fig. 15).

#### 3.1 Pop Surrealism

Pop Surrealism is a playful art movement that transcends media. Foundational members of the Pop surrealist movement such as Mark Ryden, Jeff Soto and Tara McPherson have formal art training and established their practice in commercial illustration before moving into the art world (Fig. 16). Pop Surrealism introduced educated craft, applying classical training to create sophisticated beauty, and “...managed to blur the line between low and high art, giving way to a new subclass of pieces that could be defined as Pop Surrealism” (Widewalls).

Their art often responds to the culture of their childhood and nostalgia. Ryden, inspired by the unusual things found amongst the flea markets of Los Angeles and carefully curated collections of objects in museums and ordered systems of belief, works beyond the painted canvas, incorporating his allegorical themes into the frames that function as both the display system and as a continuation of the work. His work is also representative of the reliquary in composition and religious thematics, often using dolls and toys as icons within his paintings. Ryden seeks the representation of narrative and ritual of religion, rather than its doctrine.



(Fig. 16) Mark Ryden, Rosie's Tea Party, (2005) Jeff Soto, Cactus Garden, (2020) Tara McPherson, Storm Queen, (2016).



In *The Parlor* (2012) (Fig. 17), a painting from his show *The Gay 90's*, Ryden assembles his curated vision. Drawing upon scientific discovery, pseudo science and myriad religious systems of belief, Ryden transports us into the world of the Victorian parlour where magic, mysticism and imaginary creatures come together in a semiotic masterpiece. Throughout this work, semiotics and pictorial signifiers not only inhabit the image, but the surrounding frame also. Tesner explains of Ryden; "The frame reinforces the idea that his painting is an object, equal and opposite to the flat surface image, and that the frame is essentially the reliquary encasing a holy relic" (Tesner). Through this, allegory is used to manifest his own social commentary.



(Fig. 17) *The Parlor*, Mark Ryden, 2012. Storytelling through the frame.



(Fig. 18) The Buckingham Warrior, art toy, Garry Baseman, 2012.

### 3.2 Allegorical storytelling

A key element in my design is allegory. A visual storytelling device that uses layers of meaning to represent moral or cultural narratives, in art is used to explore hidden meaning through visual cues that require the audience to decode meaning in order to understand its deeper message. Allegory can be used to suggest a link between two seemingly unrelated constructs, a visual observation and its signified meaning (Pappa 9).

*The Buckingham Warrior* by Gary Baseman (Fig. 18) is a vinyl art toy. A 'living' tree made of multiple heads, presented in his distinctive style, the toy is an allegory for resistance to Nazi atrocities during the Second World War and the fragility of our own ecology. It depicts Gary's father, a partisan who, with others, fought and survived in the forests. The forest itself takes on the character of his father as a symbol of defiance; as one head is chopped off, another grows in its place. Its child-like visual style as a toy is counter to the deeper meaning associated with its story. This humorous, playful object conceals a darker message of the fight to survive.



(Fig. 19) The Last Days of Autumn, art toy, Amanda Visell, 2014.

In Amanda Visell's work, Last Days of Autumn (Fig. 19), another art toy, selfish overconsumption of natural resources is explored as an anthropomorphic tree stump implores dead eyed children to spare it from the fate of their axes.

### 3.3 Pervasive Practice

As previously introduced, Gary Baseman is another founding artist of the pop surreal movement and is as famous for his love for his cat(s) as he is for his art, describing Blackie the cat in interviews, as his "...friend and collaborator" (Manning), and one of the most important relationships in his life. Baseman defined the term 'Pervasive Art', describing his multidisciplinary approach to creative exploration. Baseman explores narratives of loss and memorial, both through the lens of human experience, evident in his diverse outputs that encompass painting, toys, animation, installation and consumer products.

Baseman's first muse, Blackie, a rugged street cat whom he adopted from the streets of Los Angeles, became a regular feature in his work, interacting with the numerous original characters that Baseman plucks from his capacious imagination. Baseman's love for Blackie was one that was measured in myriad drawings, imaginings and paintings, toys, sculptures and celebrity endorsements (Fig. 20). Baseman shared countless hours of footage detailing their daily rituals and interactions, a life bond that was celebrated through art.



(Fig. 20) Gary Baseman & Blackie the Cat.

In *The Purr Room* (2018), an installation shown at The Other Art Fair, Los Angeles, Baseman reflects on the healing power of the purr (Fig. 21). With his larger than life plush effigy of Blackie the cat he invites visitors to contemplate “...what hurts, what matters and what heals” (*The Purr Room, Baseman*). Baseman embraces ideas of ritual; his installations invite the viewer to engage with the space, his characters or mementos offered as keepsakes or souvenirs of the experience. For the Purr Room, visitors were invited to contemplate love, to imagine a hug and then illustrate their treasured pet before being invited to enter, to experience the “Power of the Purr” (*The Purr Room, Baseman*). The participatory installation asks us to reflect on our own compassion to animals and their magical ability to heal. I reflect on this throughout my own design, consolidating a personal memory through the shared experience of ritual interaction.



(Fig. 21) The Purr Room, art instalation, Gary Baseman, 2018.

## 4.0 Reflective Methodologies

As someone who has been working intuitively for many years, it can be difficult to qualify this gained knowledge, however this intuitive method aligns to Donald Schön's model of reflective practice, and methods outlined by Nigel Cross.

Schön acknowledges a perceived disconnect between academic knowledge and that gained from the experience of improvised learning through professional discipline, describing this as academic knowledge versus “competence valued in professional practice” (vii). However, he proposes that there might well be benefits from a closer relationship forged between the two, and that for design to succeed, it must come from a place of contextual research. Through my practice, my contextual discourse enriches my professional competence, providing symbolic context which I synthesise through my final design. Schön acknowledges this connection through contributions within his own research, suggesting that “...research functions not as a distraction from practice but as a development of it...” (Schön ix).

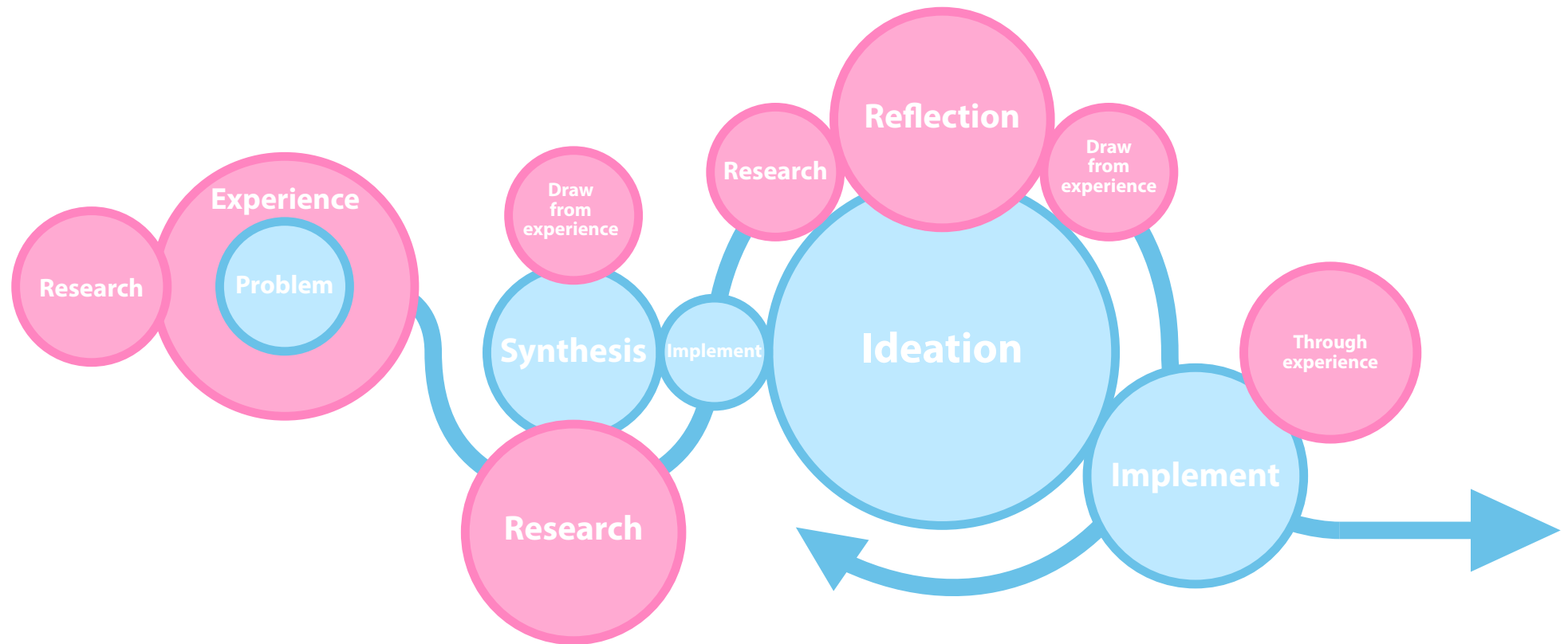
My own experience and intuitive practice through making fuels contextual research. It is important that every design decision can answer the question “why?”. Research feeds into my process, influencing my ideas and proposing answers to questions raised through the design development. It also encourages new inquiry inviting design to feed back into the research. This amalgamates a relationship of contextual knowledge and my own skilled craft through structures of design knowledge learnt

through my professional practice (Fig. 22).

In Nigel Cross's commentary *Designerly Ways of Knowing*, he argues that designers rely on intuition and visual thinking to solve creative problems, through ‘gut feeling’ (53). This is important, as it references design as a bodily experience, something which is crucial to my craft as a mechanism for memorialisation.

The notion of creative problem solving through “gut feeling” refers compellingly to my previous considerations of bodily organs that have some sense of enactment on our cognitive functions. Spleen gives us our sense of time, while the *Memory Heart* not only refers to an emotional attachment, but also describes the function of recording that emotion; all became important aspects of my creative exploration. Design is, after all, a bodily experience. This manifests also within the act of skilled craft itself.

My design is explored through skilled contemporary craft. Its power through skill, lies not in nostalgia for seemingly diminishing skills of old, but from continued and adapted application. Charney observes skill as being acquired through a persistence of time “... Objects that relate not to the quick invention of conceptual art, but to the slow perfection of skill; the constant endeavour that allowed someone to become better and better at what they can do with materials.” (20). This recognition of craft acknowledges the care and dedication taken in acquiring skill. However, this is not to ignore modern technology, as craft has evolved over time to encompass its use. How technology is used is the purview of the craftsperson.

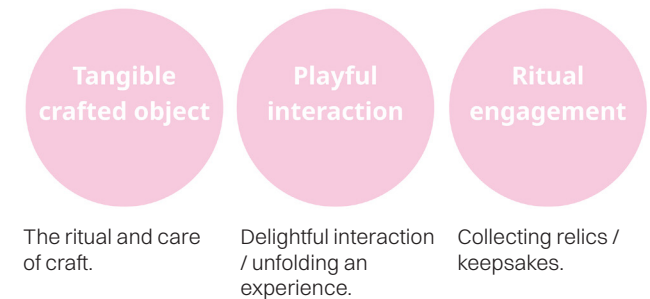
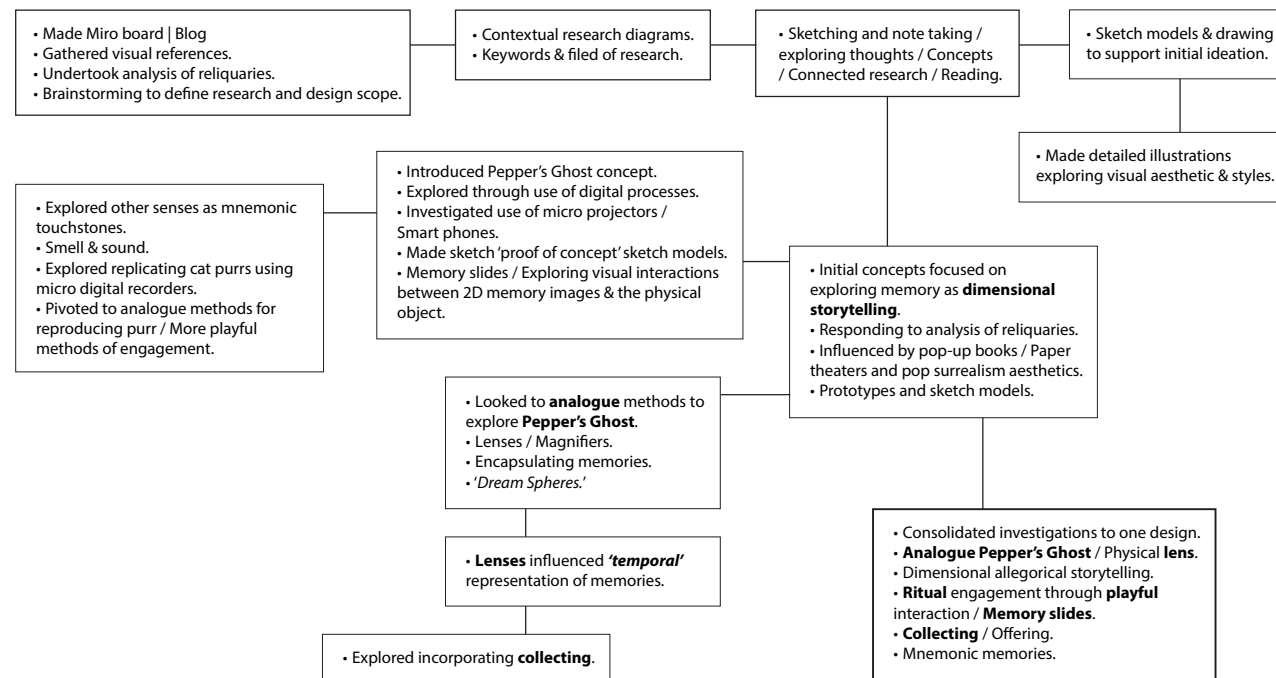


(Fig. 22) Diagram illustrating a reflective methodology.

## 5.0 Design Process

Figure 23 provides a brief overview of my design journey and strategies employed in realising the *Night Garden* design. I considered the role of the reliquary as a foundation for the display of precious objects. Referring to Hahn's examination of the reliquary as a temporal act, these foundational values provided me with a foundation for my core design pillars (Fig. 24).<sup>3</sup>

Design Process Map.



(Fig. 24) Design pillars.

(Fig. 23) Diagram of my design journey.

<sup>3</sup> Design pillars are a foundation for concept design processes where designers choose three core design values that define the project. This enables the designer to stay true to the core values of the project through the design process..

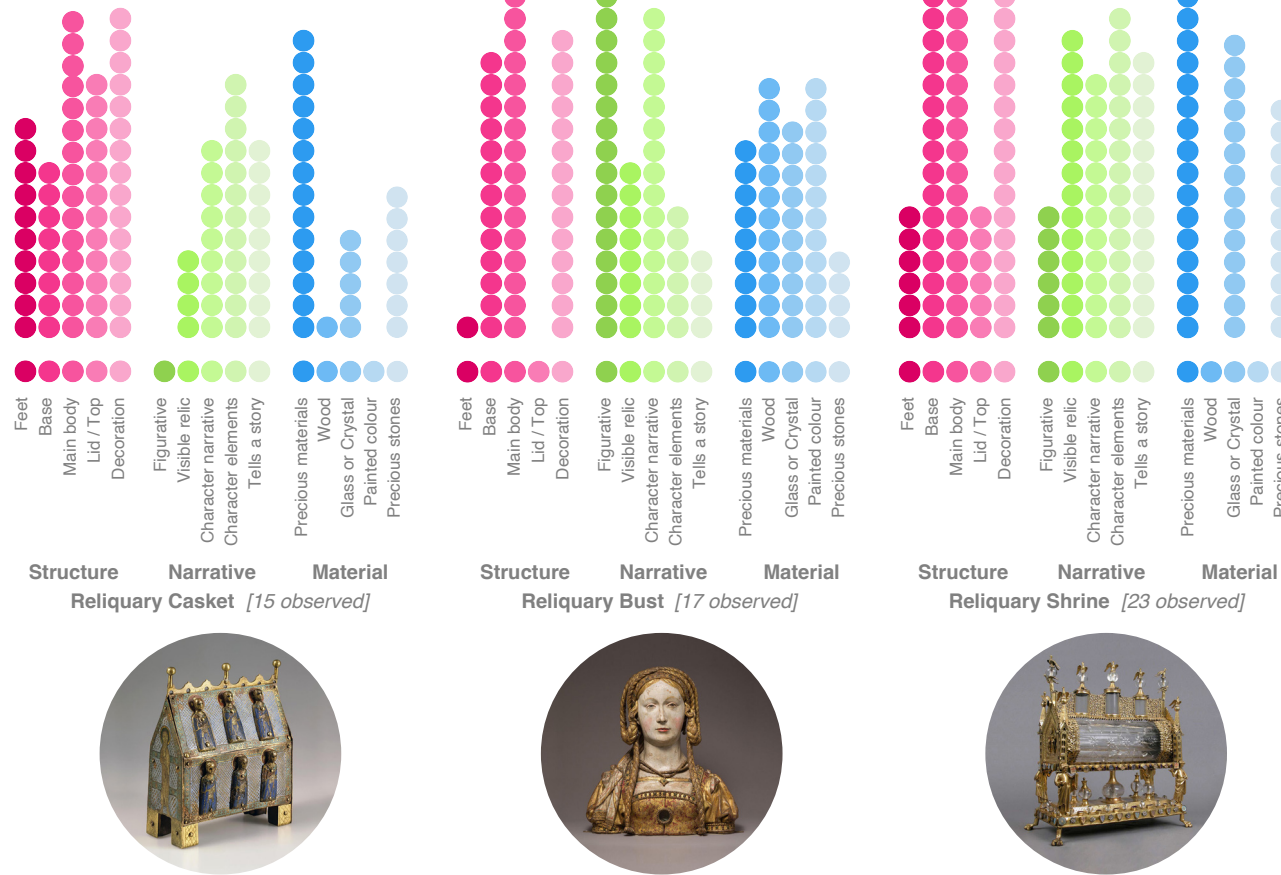
## 5.1 Brainstorming | Organising

To position the project in a broader research context, I made diagrams to contextualise my theoretical investigation alongside preferred modes of design, to map the possible methods that I might engage in during the design process.

Preliminary research focused my design brief, Miro board was then used as a mapping tool, to diagram design scope, assist research analysis and identify keywords (Appendix). Design iterations were developed through sketch books, sketch models and prototypes. I documented the fabrication process as an overview which helped refine my intentions and thoughts.

## 5.2 Reliquary Analysis

In **Figure 25** analysis of the core visual language that constitutes a reliquary helped me unpack their visual language to understand connections between materiality, form language, colour, and their perception of preciousness.



(Fig. 25) Reliquary analysis.

### 5.3 Context (The Death of Moo Moo)

I chose my cat Moo Moo (Fig. 26) as a subject for this project for two reasons -

- I have a collection of her fur and whiskers collected in life and after her death.
- Memories of her provided stories to explore, and due to the circumstances in which she died, I never really got to say goodbye (appendix).

I had many wonderful memories of her to explore, my favourite of which was the night garden.

Moo Moo also liked to nest, insisting on curling up on your lap. When gardening, she would be present sitting and watching, her favorite place between two small shrubs sitting in a “nest” of dried leaves and sticks, (Fig. 27). These motifs became narrative signifiers through the design to share my memory through multiple modes within the design.

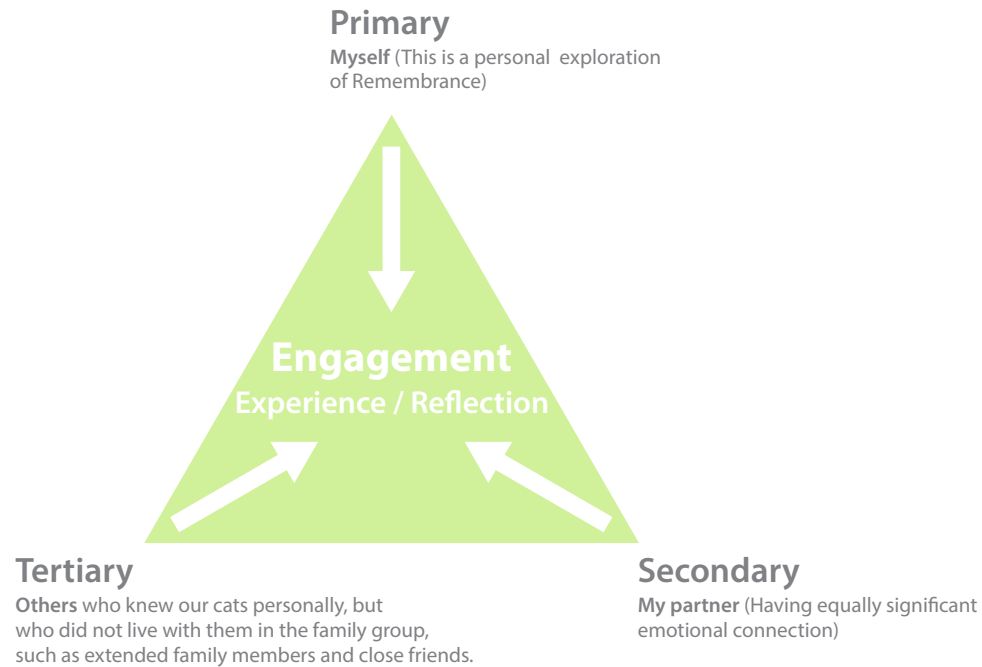


(Fig. 26) Young Moo Moo, memory slide (early version).



(Fig. 27) Inspiration for Moo Moo nesting in the ground litter of the garden.

## Design | Audience Hierarchy



(Fig. 28) Hierarchy of audience engagement.

## 5.4 Audience

The design responds to broader audiences than just myself as the primary, the maker who has a direct personal relationship (Fig. 28). The secondary audience is my partner and family members, those who also interacted with my cats, but may not share the distinct memory rituals that I have. The tertiary audience is the most interesting. Their interaction relies purely on their curiosity of the object and the playful interaction with its constituent parts.

The design is not a sombre memorial. Physical engagement with the memory form is integral as is the unfolding of the experience. It is a playful, delightful storytelling device that reveals through ritual engagement, and plays on the nostalgia of childhood toys. It is not just about Moo Moo, but a reflection of me as a maker and the care and craft of making something that shows deep affection for my primary memory and remembrance.

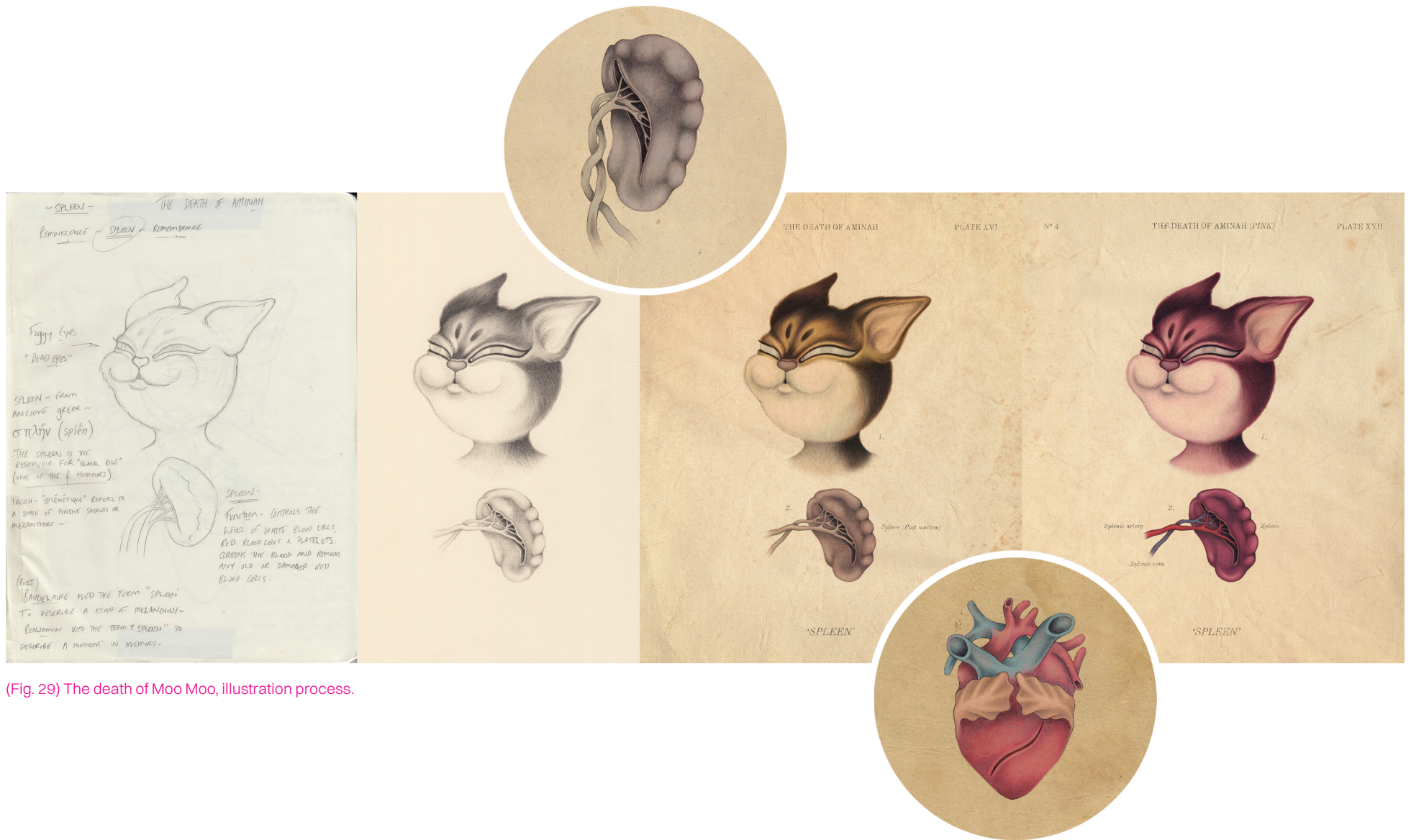
## 6.0 Design Exploration

I made a series of small illustrations exploring my aesthetic tone. Through change of colour the same image is presented as two distinct versions of time, the true moment of Moo Moo's death proper in *spleen*, to the abstracted colour palette of a vintage scientific diagram, a remembrance of what was.

These illustrations evolved into slides in the final design, exploring memories and depicting visual representations of time through spleen and loss through the memory heart.<sup>4</sup> The heart as metaphor for memory and emotion is discussed by Blechman as it "...stands in for aspects of cognition that we resist assigning to the head..." (4). Love, passion, intrigue and sorrow are emotional states that are objectified through the imagery of the heart, along with memory. Numerous idioms express this, such as; "I love you with all my heart", "heartfelt condolences", and "to remember by heart". These idioms speak to an abstraction, without considering the heart proper, its physicality as an organic pump. Illustrations are an allegorical record, memories transposed to visual language. While the Memory Heart speaks to the physical acknowledgement of a recorded memory, Spleen addresses the unreliability of memories. With passing time, they can diminish, change and distort; they suffer from misinterpretation. This is explored through changes of light and projection to capture Moo Moo's moment of transformation, from beloved pet, to cherished memory (Fig. 29).

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<sup>4</sup> The Online Etymology Dictionary characterises the word 'record' as originating from the Latin *recordari*, to remember. *Re*, contributing an awareness of restoration and *Cor*, (genitive *Cordis*) meaning heart. To record is to restore to "heart", the metaphoric seat of memory and emotion. (Record | Etymology of Record by Etymonline).



(Fig. 29) The death of Moo Moo, illustration process.

## 6.1 Dimensional Illustration

As a maker my process is not linear, ideating simultaneously through dimensional models and sketches is an important step for understanding how a concept might “play out” in a physical space. Making simple models and form studies, helps to flesh out an idea. Photographing and recording the process allowed me to reimagine the concept from two dimensions, working between sketch and sketch model (Fig. 30).

## 6.2 Design Experimentation

During my iterative process I explored the following modes of memory communication and provocation.

- Pepper's ghost
- Lenses
- Purr machine
- Mnemonic object
- Narrative Diorama
- Collecting
- Materiality / craft
- Tech - digital / analogue



(Fig. 30) Initial sketch models exploring interchangeable parts.



(Fig. 31) Prototype #2, Pepper's Ghost - digital projection concept.

### 6.3 Pepper's Ghost

Initial concepts explored digital projection in glass domes (Fig. 31). I considered using micro screens and electronics to project still images and simple animations. For proof of concept, I used a phone as a way of using personally accessible technology. This concept presented challenges of compatibility between phone sizes, ease of changing the images and technological redundancy.

### 6.4 Lenses

Early concepts explored glass domes as methods of containment, protecting the memory. I explored lenses to amplify meaning in my relic, contained in the base or captured behind the lens itself.

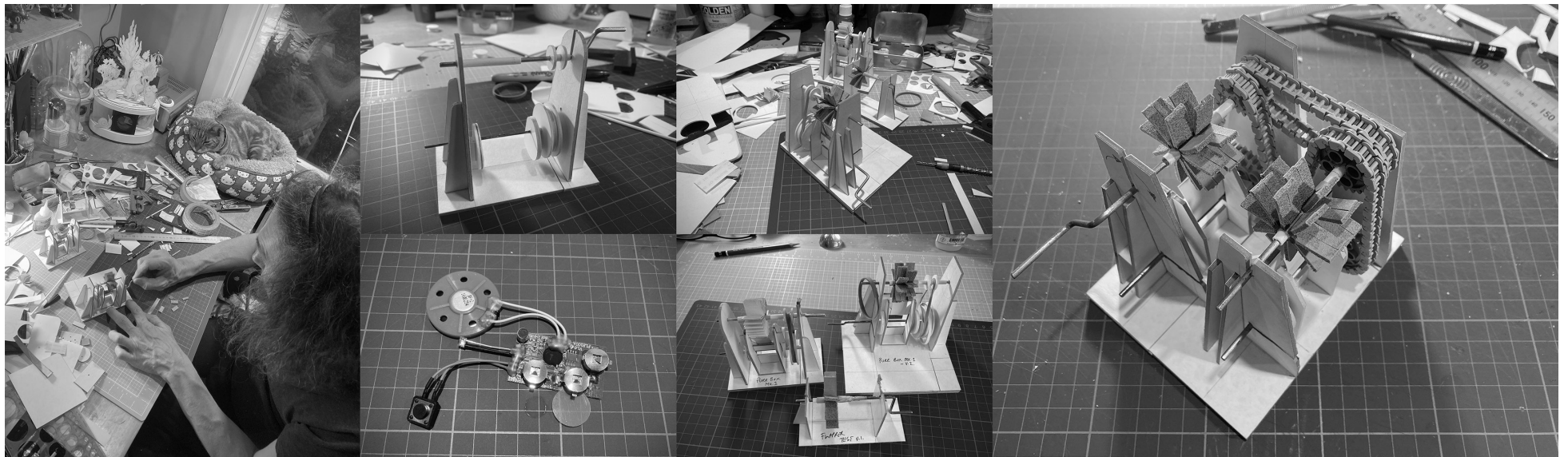
Exploring the movement of natural light, introduced time as a consequence of memories. Distortion of images, overlaying the relic reflecting memory as temporal, changing and morphing, offered a playful analogue mode to consider (Fig. 32). This inspired me to rethink Pepper's ghost as analogue, using natural light to replicate the essence of memory as temporal, interacting naturally, without our intervention.



(Fig. 32) Playing with lenses. Analogue projection of memories as a temporal act.

## 6.5 Purr Machine

I explored other senses [sound] as memory provocations, designing a concept of mimicking Moo Moo's purr. I investigated using micro digital recorders, but reflecting on my previous investigations of digital technology, I wanted to find a more playful way of replicating a purr which was more toy-like. Prototyping a mechanical mechanism, though less authentic in sound, was more delightful to interact with (Fig. 33). The experience of the interaction was more important than the resulting sound, for forming curious attachment. This exercise, though never implemented into the final design, helped me to understand the importance of curious tactile interaction through toy-like mechanisms.



(Fig. 33) Exploring memory through other senses. Mechanical Purr machine prototype using cardboard, Lego and Leather.

## 6.6 Memory Diorama

My early diorama concepts explored memories of Moo Moo and imagined animals in the night garden through anthropomorphic character scenes reminiscent of childhood paper-dolls and nostalgia (Fig. 34).



(Fig. 34) Anthropomorphic character design reminiscent of childhood paper-dolls and nostalgia.

This design shifted to a personified representation within the final reliquary. Dimensional illustration (Fig. 35) enabled me to play with layered memories, incorporating analogue effects that interact with the relic.



(Fig. 35) Diorama concept, dimensional illustration development.

The concept followed a visual hierarchy, established to provide balance, both visually and narratively. Memory narrative was explored throughout the top half, while ritual collection and mnemonic reflection were incorporated into the base (Fig. 36).



(Fig. 36) Diorama concept, incorporating all of my previous concept investigations into a single design.

### Semiotics of memorial | Unpacking the object | The three acts of remembrance

Boundary of the imagined frame containing the active memory space

#### Memory : Act 2 | **Collecting**

Collections of fur and whiskers are able to be collected and stored within the main body. The act of collecting forms part of the ritual of remembrance, of past moments and the chance to prepare future remembrances through continued participation in collecting.

#### Remembrance and empathy

#### Memory : Act 3 | **Ritual**

The mnemonic object, the sacred relic that offers ritual through the invitation to hold and handle direct memory connections through artifacts.



#### Memory : Act 1 | **Narrative**

Past memories celebrated through dimensional illustration. The illustrated moment is whimsical, a memory as a dream.

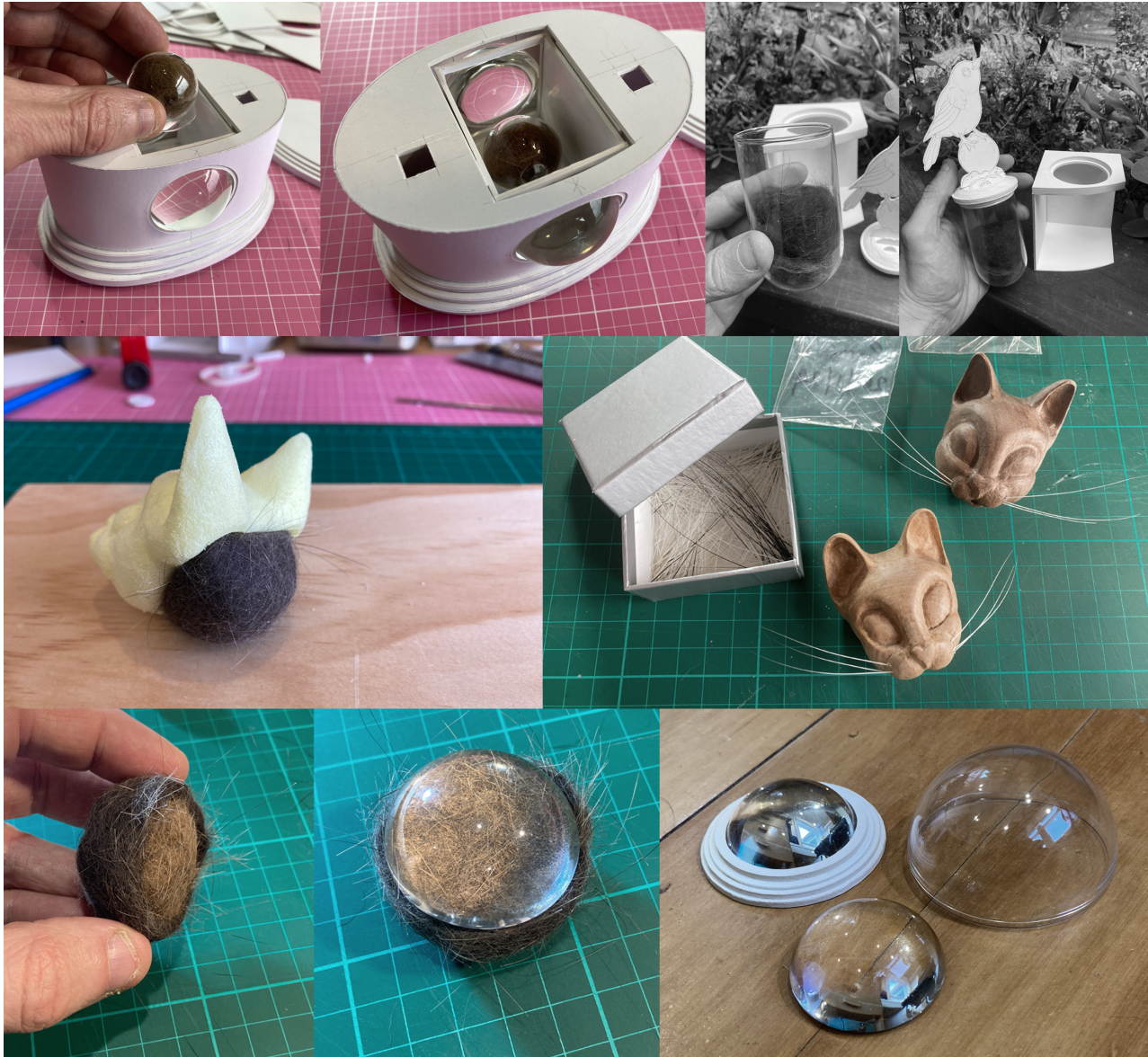
The illustrated memory comprises a compositional pyramid arrangement using a classical principle of composition. Favored as a compositional method among old masters such as Michelangelo and Leonardo De Vinci, the arrangement focuses attention on the central character and creates visual balance and metaphoric hierarchy. Here I use the principle to suggest the importance of Moo Moo as central to the narrative. This structure affords compositional hierarchy to the illustration as a whole.

#### **Magic**

The use of "Peppers Ghost" as a method for representing further nostalgic memories interacts with the mnemonic object to establish relationships between memory and objects, and to suggest memory as a temporal act.

### 6.7 Collecting

Collecting and offering relics is an integral part of my project. I first focused on static collections — incorporated directly into the design, following my observations of reliquaries. Using small hollow glass spheres, I was influenced by the notion of dream spheres, discussed by Olalquiaga. This limited the experience of interacting with the design. So I explored how to incorporate ritual collecting, through interacting with the memorial object more regularly, exploring removable glass jars integrated into the night garden narrative. I also explored the collected material, fur and whiskers being incorporated into mnemonic objects such as the cat head. I concluded that ritual participation and repetitive offering gave opportunity for continued interaction with the design (Fig. 37).



(Fig. 37) Ritual collecting. How fur and whiskers are considered in the design process.

## 6.8 Summary

From these explorations the design pivoted to a more hybrid sculptural work which embodied the narratives within the entirety of the object, rather than a diorama on a base. The original prototypes felt more like furniture, heavy, static. Taking the essence of Moo Moo and infusing her spirit into the object itself felt personified. Not being on a base changes the reliquary from a static object to a character that invites audience participation.

I also made the decision to move to an analogue, craft-focused output, where all components are handcrafted without the aid of digital enhancement or digital fabrication techniques such as CNC machining. I wanted the work to be a bodily experience. When you are crafting directly with your hands you are intimately connected to the object.

## 7.0 Night Garden Design Analysis

For the final iteration of the *Night Garden*, the reliquary form takes on the spirit of Moo Moo through a sculptural work that embodies personal memory narrative. Divided into two parts that assemble into the one object, the design brings together key aspects explored through previous design iterations, influenced by my research, seen in [Figure 38](#). Through Pepper's ghost and personified character, this final design explores storytelling memories through natural materiality that begins with the lens.



(Fig. 38) Final resolved design, the *Night Garden*.

## 7.1 Lenses and Leaves

Figure 39 illustrates the lens sitting within carved details of leaves and twigs, the detritus of the garden, providing narrative hints of the night garden scene.



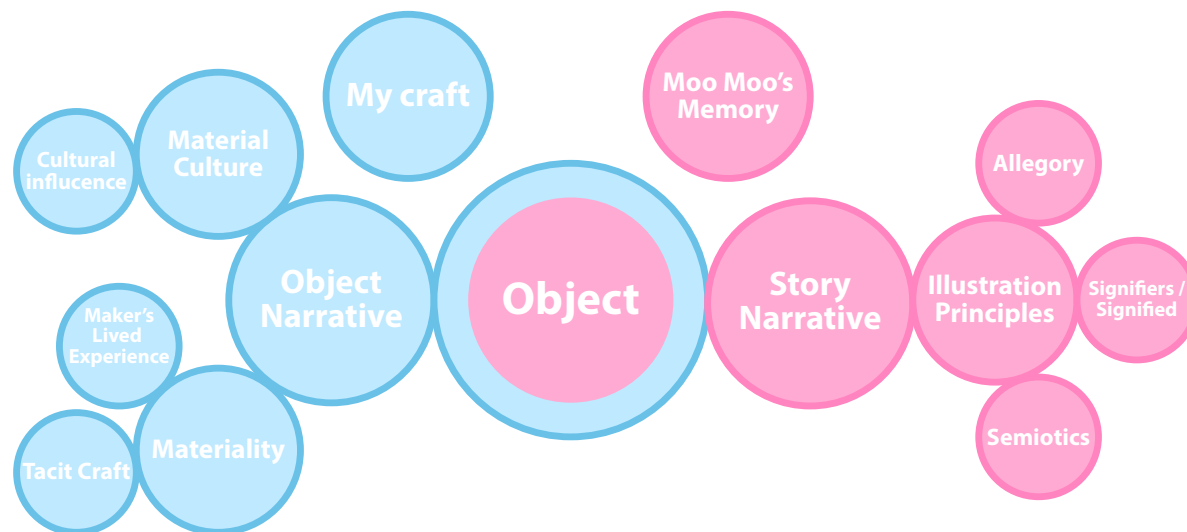
(Fig. 39) *Night Garden*, garden nest allegory.

Symbolic of the nest in which Moo Moo used to enjoy relaxing, I designed the ground litter to encircle the lens acting as both allegory for the night garden and to secure the lens within its rebated housing, similar to a claw setting used in jewellery to hold a stone (Fig. 40). Leaf details suggest this as the top-down view looking through the leaf litter into the strata of the earth below.



(Fig. 40) Leaf litter design, organisation and setting.

### The Narrative of Objects



(Fig. 41) Narrative principles used in the *Night Garden*.

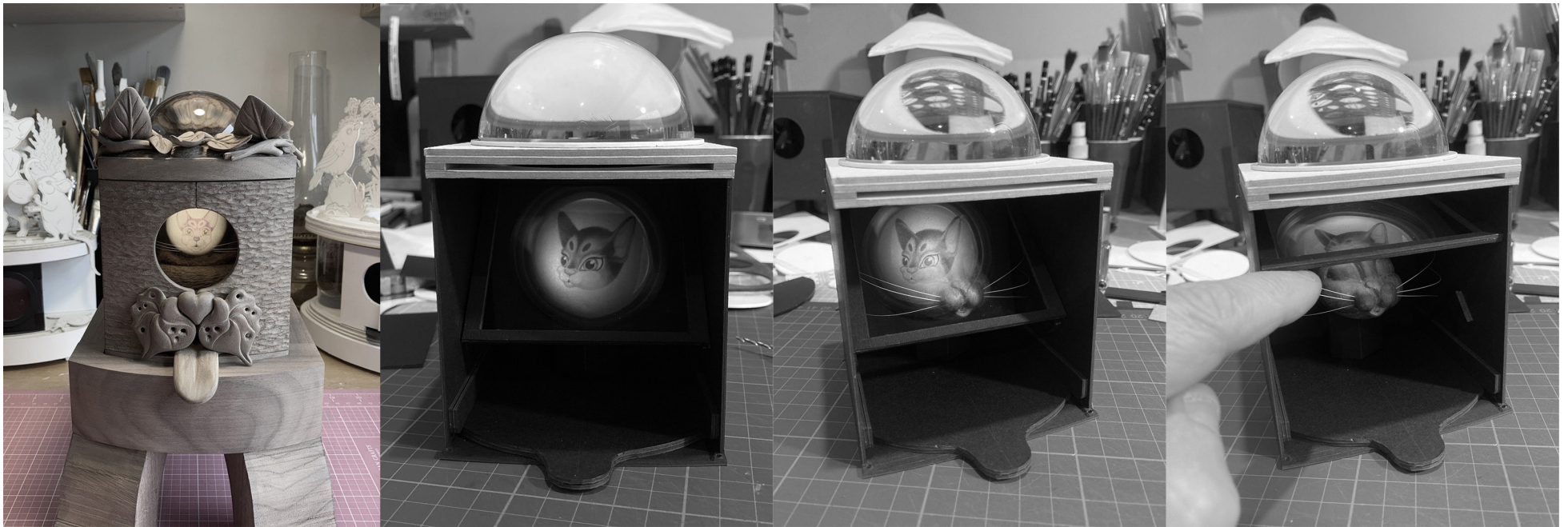
I explored sculpting and carving to interpret the suggestion of character features through the design, but this felt antagonistic and counter to the object's rationale as part creature, part environment. Considering this, leaves were a subtle way of combining my two narratives. Primarily the object is characterised through subtle hints of cat-like features, connecting Moo Moo to the night garden memory, and exploring allegory through carved details. While a secondary narrative is explored through the material craft itself, linking me as craftsman to the broader story of nostalgic remembrance. **Figure 41** explains this duality.

The lens has two functions; it acts as a metaphor for Moo Moo's presence through the appearance of memories, reflecting images that are placed beneath it in the form of the memory slides. It amplifies memory images through natural light, making them appear larger, while also distorting. This play characterises memories, coming in and out of focus, altering, sometimes appearing with vibrant clarity, at other times diminished and faint (**Fig. 42**).



(Fig. 42) Lens distortion, allegory of the fragility of memories.

The second function of the lens is the practical role of allowing light to enter the reliquary box allowing for the slides' images to be projected as part of the Pepper's ghost optical effect. **Figure 43** demonstrates the memory traces of Moo Moo left behind.



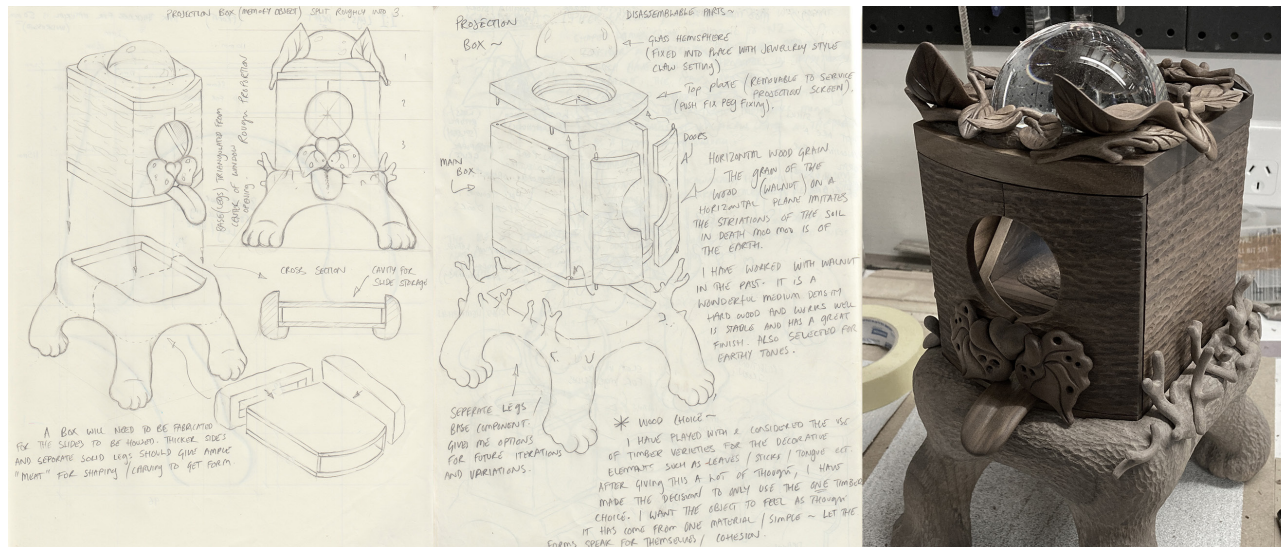
(Fig. 43) Memory traces, observed through the reliquary box component.

## 7.2 Relic Box

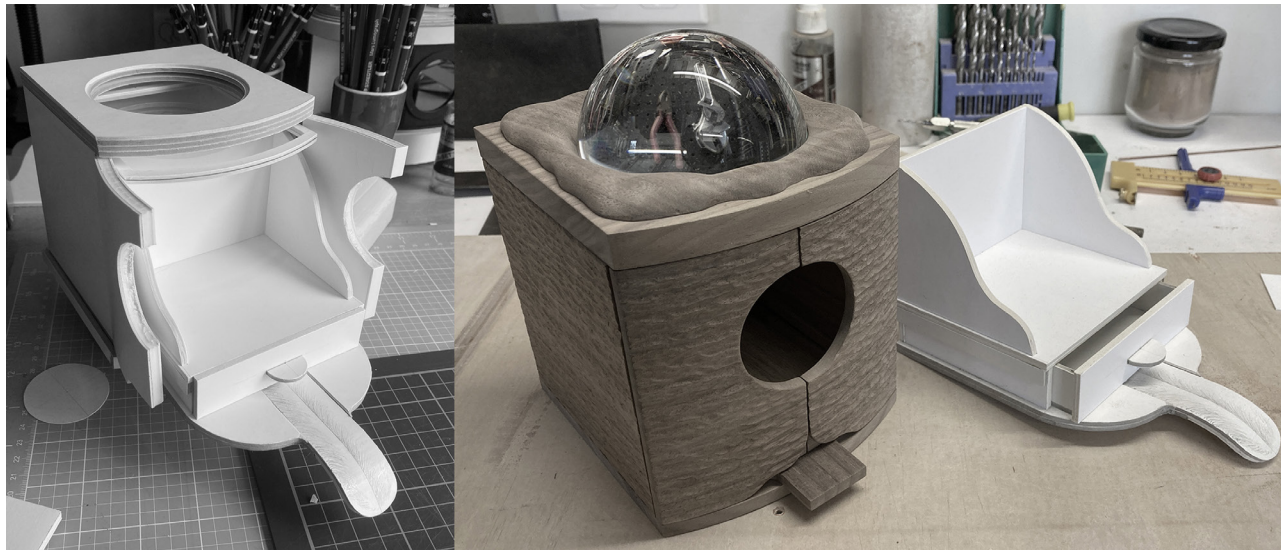
The reliquary box forms the main body of the object. It is home for the carved likeness of Moo Moo, and is where the traces of her life are arranged as a collection of curious things (Fig. 44).

Its components are integral to the interplay as a whimsical storytelling device. They are; the box itself with its doors as a key feature defining its character; the drawer sled, with its distinctive cat tongue handle; the collection drawer, and the resting platform for Moo Moo's likeness (Fig. 45).

I carefully acknowledged the details. In Figure 46, I consider the hierarchy of details to allow clarity through separation. I was cognisant that the allegory details would need space to be read, while also needing to appear consolidated through the personification of the character. Details read through horizontal slices, each an allegory, while visually cohesive throughout the design.



(Fig. 44) Relic box, container for traces left behind.



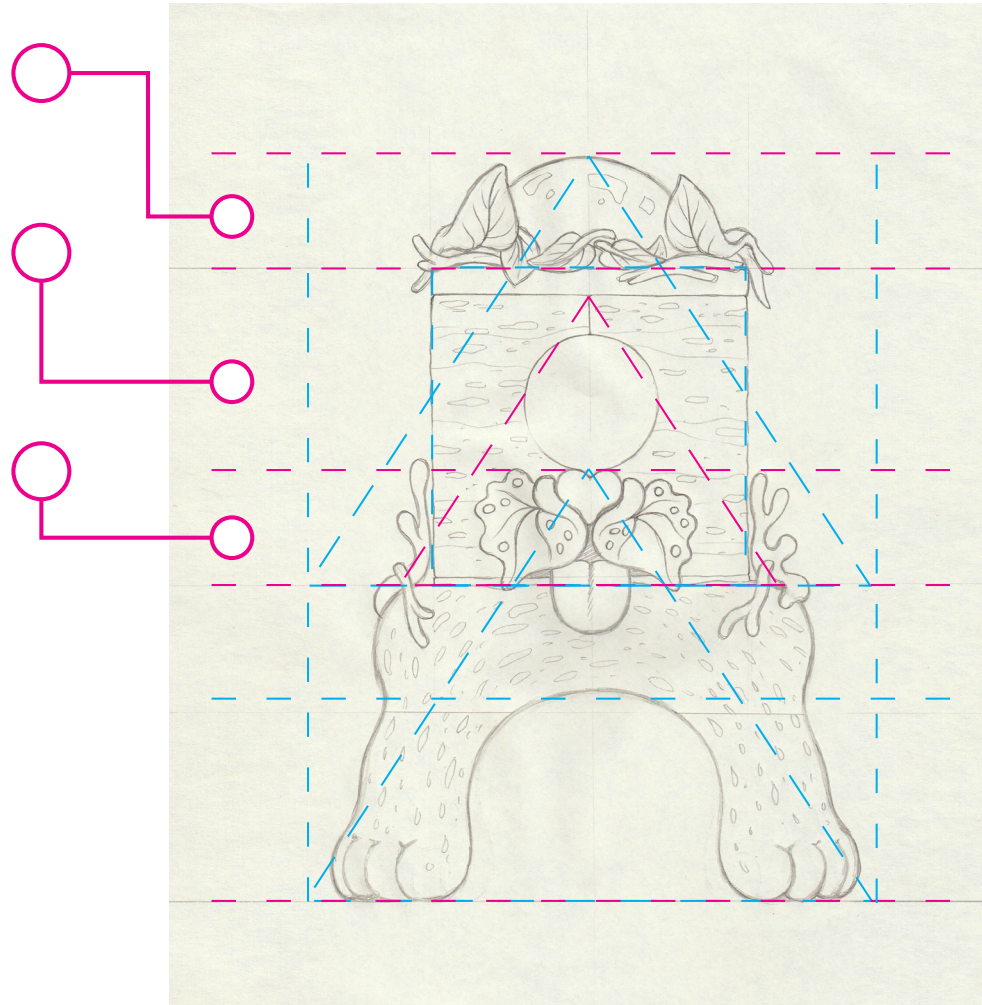
(Fig. 45) Relic box, design prototype process.

## Allegory of memorial | Unpacking the Night Garden object | Visual hierarchy

**Top slice:** Allegory for the night garden memory. Moo Moo is remembered laying amongst the leaves at rest. A metaphor for the fragility of memories depicted through the distortion of the images in the lens. The lens hints at the gathering of moonlight.

**Mid slice:** Space is afforded between the Allegorical details. However horizontal wood grain and surface texture hints to the narrative of earth strata, representing a cross section of the garden, a metaphor for rest and becoming one with the earth after death.

**Bottom slice:** Bottom slice: These details represent two metaphors. Roots further describe a vertical slice of the ground, while also suggesting coral in the shape language. The symbolism of coral is used to hint that this is a mourning object. Coral has wide use throughout many cultures representing rebirth and protection. In Christian symbolism it is used as a metaphor for blood and the resurrection and as protector of the dead, which ties through with the Kawakawa leaves as recognised for their healing properties and connections to grief and memorial rituals in Māori culture. Root details visually connect the two main components of Night Garden box with the keg base, helping homogenise the object as a whole, while allowing for them to remain as separate components.



**Three levels of visual storytelling:** The Night Garden reliquary can be decoded through three levels of visual storytelling that incorporate narrative, metaphor and memory provocation.

The most apparent visual narrative reference is the personified animal form.

Secondly, The metaphor as an allegory for the Night Garden memory as told through the details used to adorn the object.

Lastly, interaction is invited through the interaction of memory slides. As metaphors for memories and loss and mourning, slide images are observed through the lens and as projected overlays onto the relic likeness of Moo Moo and her whiskers.

**Object animal personification:** The obvious visual narrative that is represented throughout the Night Garden, is the personification of Moo Moo through animism constructs. Leaves and attributes of natural debris of the garden, hint of cat like features, embodying her as part of the object. Use of Animism ensouls the memorial object, restoring it as a living object, reflecting that it is a continuation of Moo Moo and my remembrance of her.

(Fig. 46) The *Night Garden*, diagram of the visual hierarchy and allegory.

Working with limited materials was important to allow details within the *Night Garden* narrative to have breathing room. Wood was an obvious choice for this. Its warmth as a material is testament to its once living nature, a soulful versatile material that requires care and understanding while working with it.

The investment of time through careful craft endeavour, as a process to mourning a loss, amplifies its meaning. I care enough about my pets to immerse myself in the full extent of my craft, investing hundreds of hours of physical engagement as testament to the significance of their loss. It is a bodily experience, physical labour invested through the transaction of the body. Blood, sweat and tears are quite literally absorbed into the material surface, directly connecting the maker with the object. As I worked by hand to reduce raw timber to carefully crafted elements, through blisters, cuts and grazes, my blood and sweat became part of the object that possesses Moo Moo's whiskers, reconnecting us through the crafted moment shown in [Figure 47](#).

I chose walnut for its grain makeup and colour offering, deep rich tones to pale hues. Throughout my prototyping, I had considered the use of colour, explored primarily through my illustration. However, in the final design I wanted materiality to give cohesion through its colour and texture. The natural colours of walnut interplay with the narrative, creating cohesion throughout, in turn allowing the vibrant colours of the illustrations a more significant voice. Colour is used to define memory as



(Fig. 47) Labour of craft is testament to the significance of the loss.



(Fig. 48) Carved texture as a storytelling device.

both nostalgic (through the memory slides) and melancholic, through the materiality of the object.

I chose cuts that had straight, linear grain with a variety of hues, allowing the material to signify the story of the *Night Garden* without the need for further embellishment.

Figure 48 demonstrates how using horizontal grain, and carving into the surface emulates the strata of the earth, similar to a vertical slice through the ground.

I wanted to use the material to further evoke the idea of the earth, while maintaining a degree of plainness from which the carved details could stand out (Fig. 49).



(Fig. 49) Using carved texture to visually separate detail elements.

Exploring further references of the character, my intention was that these personified elements would not only enhance the design's curious nature, but have a practical use. The nose, further reference to the memory heart, acts as a doorstop, covering the gap to disguise the doors, helping make the reveal more magical and unexpected (Fig. 50).



(Fig. 50) Details serving practical functions within the design.

### 7.3 Mnemonic Relic

As a device to carry Moo Moo's whiskers, a small, wooden likeness of her as a reductive essence of her cat-ness is the tangible link between her physical souvenir and projected memories through the Pepper's ghost effect (Fig. 51).

This small object invites the audience to participate and connect with her mortal remains. She lends her whiskers and I lend my craft, in this we are forever entwined. Others can form their own curiosity, prompting questions around the stories that the whiskers insinuate. This object is distinctly different through my choice of wood, black maire. A far denser timber, it is ideal for detailed carving, however, it also has the most wonderful smell, earthy and rich. A considered choice, linking the object back to the earthly realm, through our sense of smell (Fig. 52).

The nest mnemonic represents Moo Moo's obsession with nesting, represented through leaf litter, and in nesting her likeness on a bed of her fur.

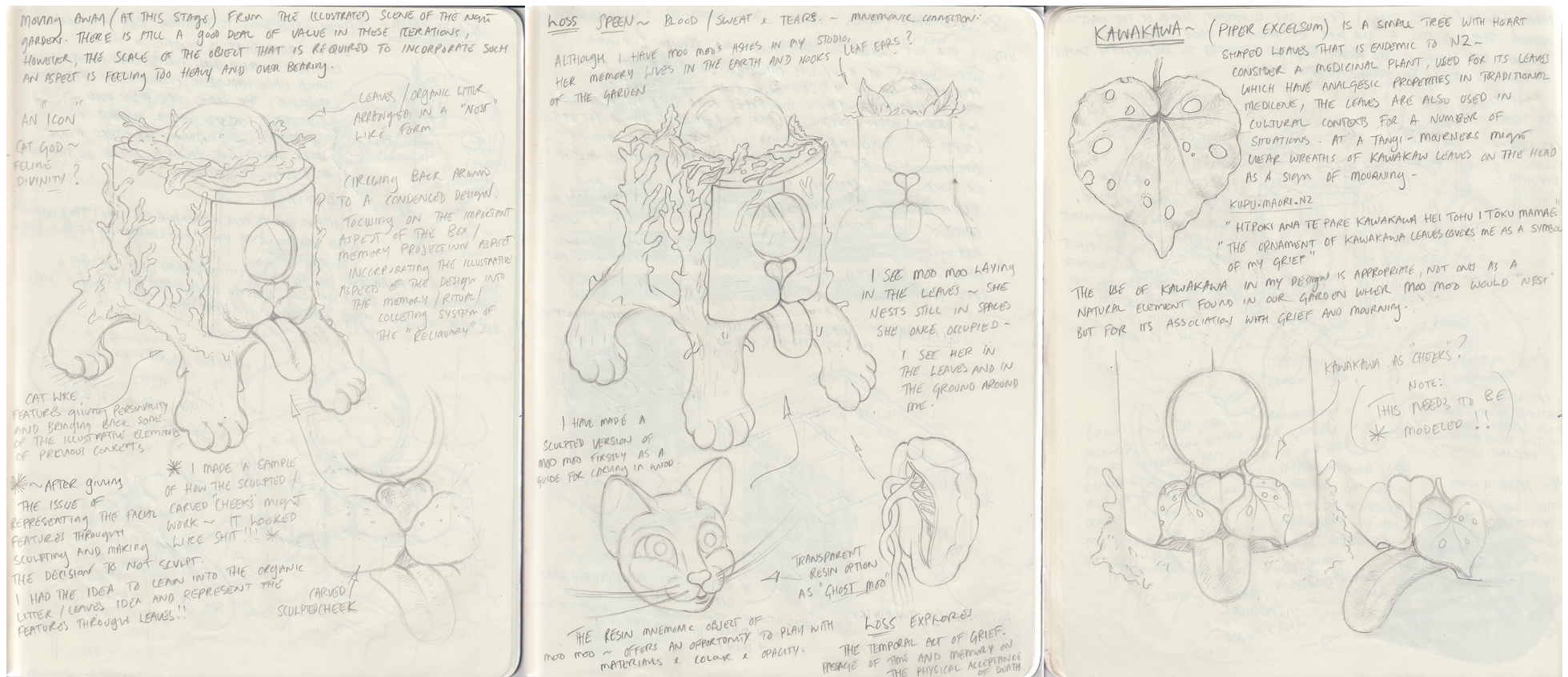


(Fig. 51) Interactions of imagined memory and the souvenir.

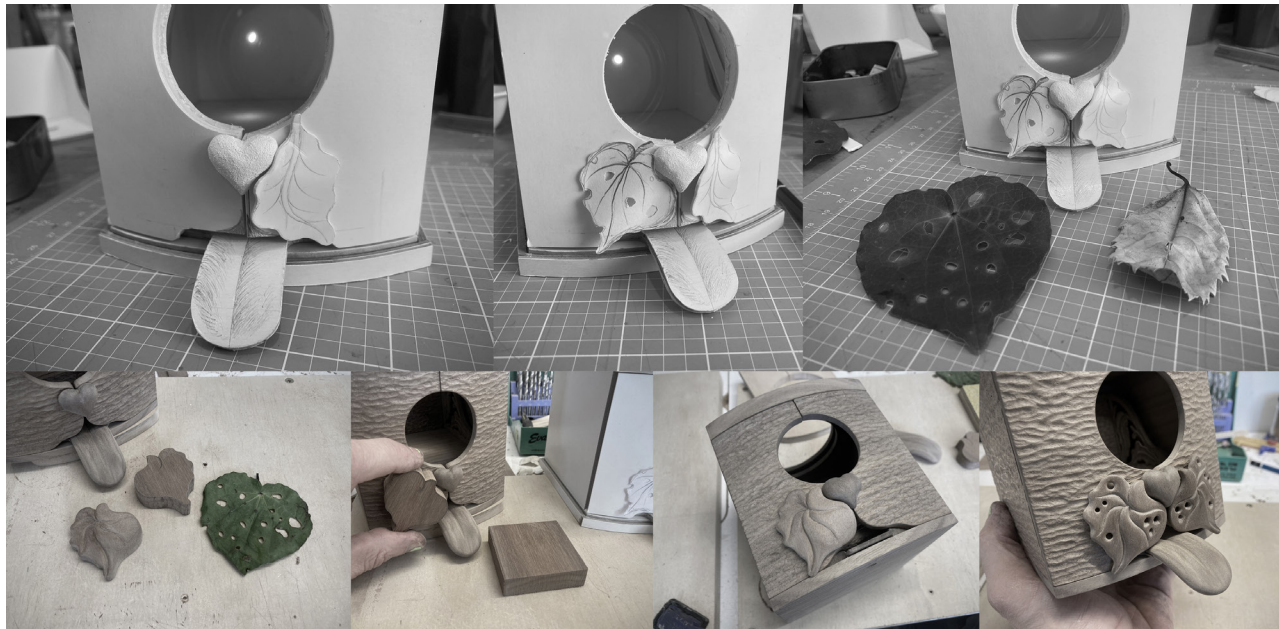


(Fig. 52) A memory provocation, carved wood depiction of Moo Moo, with real whiskers.

Figure 53 demonstrates my process for personifying Moo Moo within the design. The cheeks, initially imagined as carved directly into the doors themselves, made more sense to continue with the aesthetic language that I had developed through the narrative of the leaves representing facial characteristics.



(Fig. 53) Design process, personifying character into the object.



(Fig. 54) Dual meaning through allegory and character details.

These were carefully considered, and hand-carved to mimic not only a cat's cheeks, but also be identifiable as a kawakawa leaf. These are the only leaves that I chose to be recognisable. Elsewhere in the design leaf details are fairly illustrative. The kawakawa leaf, chosen for its healing properties and cultural significance in death rituals in New Zealand, (See [kawakawa](#)), works both as a metaphor for loss and to suggest the cheeks of a cat. The naturally formed holes of the leaf, mimic the follicle roots of a cat's whiskers, extending the imagined character represented by the leaves (Fig. 54).

#### 7.4 Tongue Sled

A protruding handle is the most provocative invitation for engagement within the design. Peeking playfully from below the cheeks through an imagined mouth, its form mimics a cat's tongue, ready to lick or perhaps cheekily poking out at us (Fig. 55).

Although part of a personified semblance, it is clear that this is a handle. An invitation to engage, to unfold the secrets within, to explore the ghost-like images that confront us when we peek inside. Pulling on the tongue not only offers further exploration of the contents, it reveals through delightful movement. This reveal is the core mechanic of the design that perhaps implies nostalgia for the toys of our past. In toy design, action mechanisms are often considered vital for a toy's success, and this tacit understanding formed the basis of my intention in this part of the design.



(Fig. 55) Designing a playful reveal.

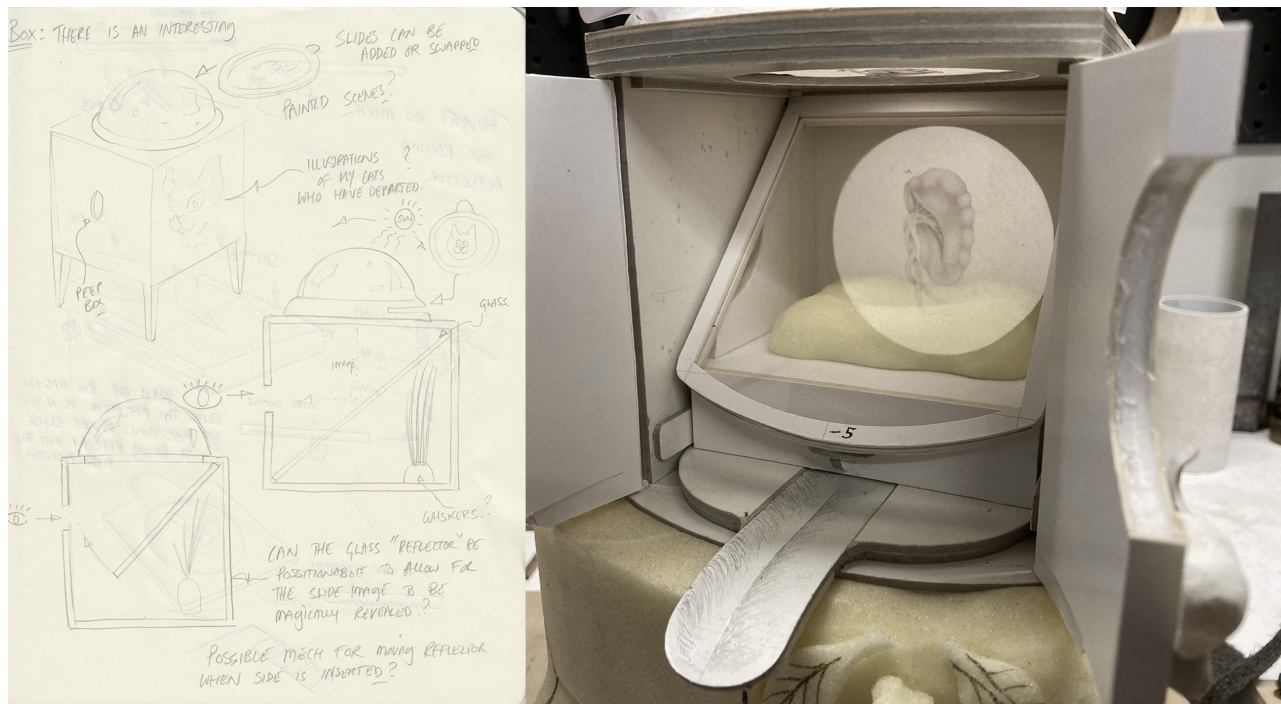
Pulling the tongue, opens the doors as if by magic revealing a physical likeness of Moo Moo, that until that moment was part of a superimposed memoryscape (Fig. 56).



(Fig. 56) Unwrapping the experience through playful engagement.

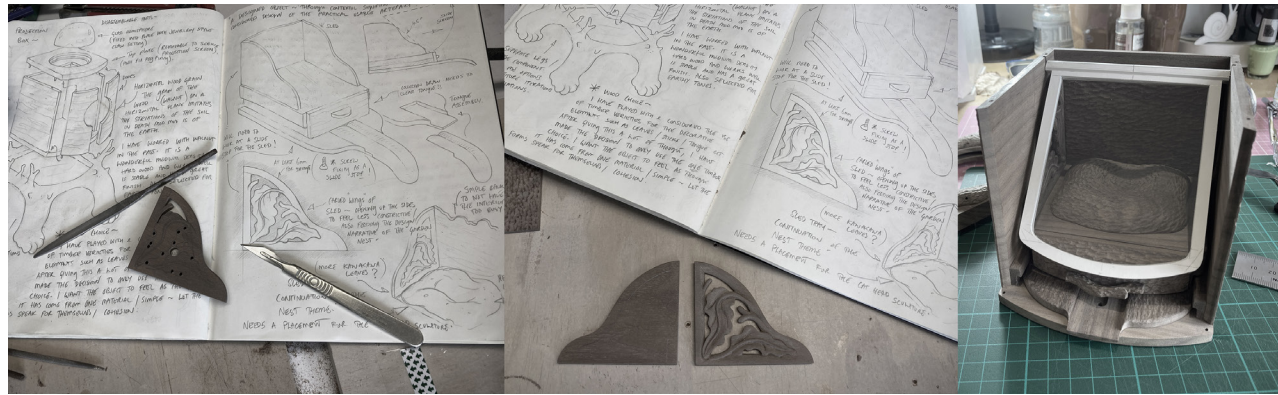
Through numerous cardboard iterations I refined this reveal. Testing, refining and tweaking the geometry of the doors and sled so that the opening of both doors and the lifting of the screen work synchronously without hindrance. This was an important action to get right. Both practically and as a delightfully curious reveal. For the screen to work effectively as a reflector it needs to sit at 45 degrees, which means it needs to be longer to fill the diagonal space to be effective. The consequence of which means that the doors need to open a fraction early so that they allow the screen to protrude out as they open (Fig. 57).

Figure 58 shows how the decorative wings that provide enclosure for Moo Moo's likeness also serve to guide the reflector to open at just the right moment as the doors open. The sled is governed by a small stop screw that prevents the operator from removing it entirely, while also positioning it to easily reset the mechanism when returned. Refined through iterations of test models, it is intended to appear magical, to work without the user needing to consider how. As with the Pepper's ghost effect, its delight is in its ability to present as magical, not as a mechanism.



(Fig. 57) Refining the reflector geometry through drawing and prototyping.

Through prototyping, I found that Moo Moo's likeness would need to be elevated so that it sat squarely in the centre of the peephole. This relationship was carefully considered with that of the reflector screen, leaving just the right space for the carving to nest without interference with the mechanism. Elevating the memory object provided an opportunity for a further reveal. Having a place to keep my collection of whiskers was important. The compartmentalised drawer invites users to further unfold its contents and explore the relics of the whiskers and fur kept within, while presenting an opportunity for repeated interaction through the placing of newly discovered 'things' (Fig. 59).



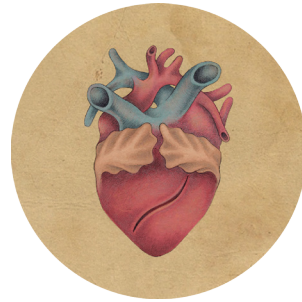
(Fig. 58) Refining the sled design through prototyping.



(Fig. 59) A place to keep collected relics.

### 7.5 Pepper's Ghost Reflector

The mechanism which allows a *memory* image to appear superimposed over the carved likeness of Moo Moo is integral to both the representation of memories and as a provocation to be curious. Developed through experiments, I had originally intended for the reflector to be glass; however, early tests revealed that even with very thin glass, it was impossible to produce a sharp image as both surfaces of the glass would produce a reflection. The thicker the glass the more apparent the aberration in the image resulting in a double image that appeared blurred. Placing more importance on the fidelity of the reflection, I swapped to exploring clear acetate. Using this material, at around 100 microns, I was able to achieve a much sharper reflection.



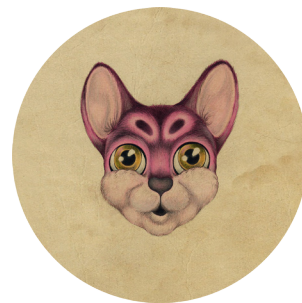
**Memory Heart.**

The *Memory Heart* slide illustration is an allegory for memory itself. As a visual signifier for our most sacred memories, this diagrammatic illustration depicts memory as fragmented through cross contamination of the imagined world. Memories are recorded, but become ours through the stories and experiences that we associate with them.



**Spleen.**

The *Spleen* slide is an allegory for time and memory as a temporal moment. *Spleen*, a concept discussed by Walter Benjamin, represents melancholic and nostalgic memory. Here *Spleen*, is used to signify the affect of time on memory, Our memories change, muddled by the passing of time. As a projection of this concept, this slide connects us to the memory object to remind us that memories can be fragile.



**Moo Moo.**

The *Moo Moo* slide was designed to project onto the carved likeness of her. A front on portrait, it projects colour onto the mnemonic likeness, representing her life lived, blending with the carving as a ghost of what one was. The physical whiskers superimpose to make the memory whole again, two and three dimensional representations combine to flesh out her whole personification.

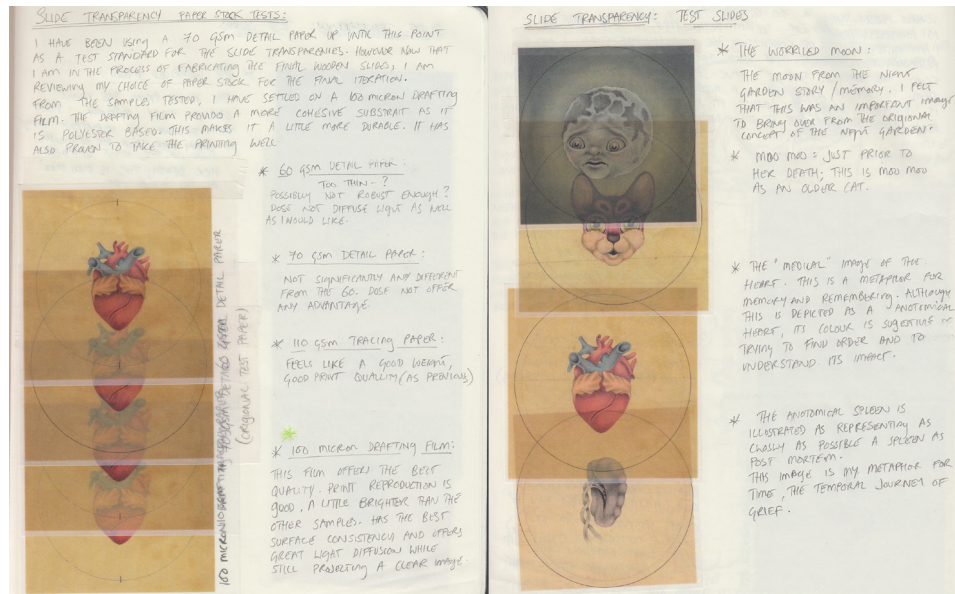


**Worried Moon.**

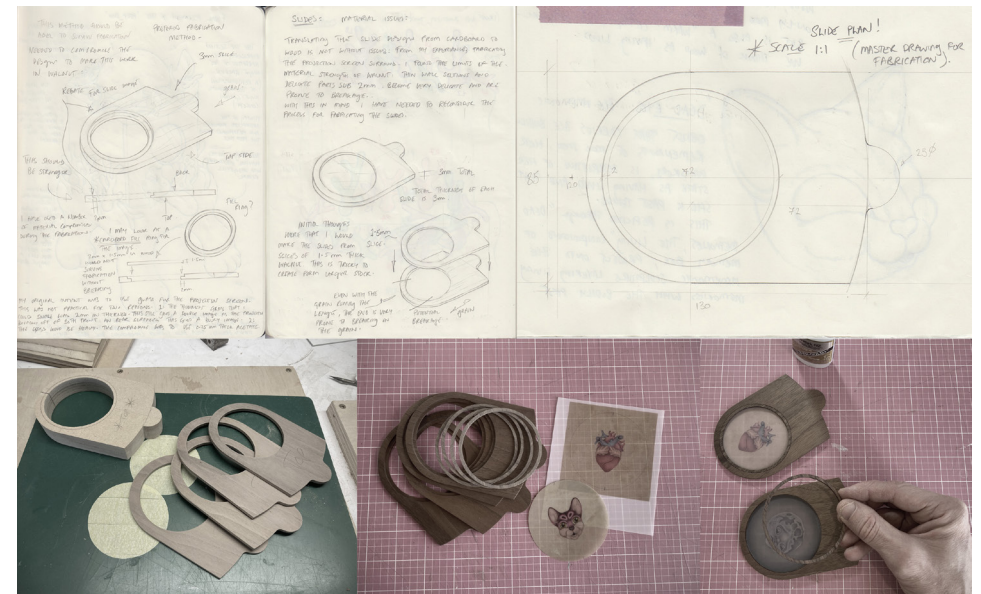
The *Worried Moon* slide connects into the night garden narrative. This slide indicates the specific memory that the object depicts, identifying the scene as night. The moon looks down with pity upon Moo Moo's physical likeness, as a signifier that this is a memorial, a recognition of what has passed.

## 7.6 Memory Slides

Throughout various design iterations the slides have performed the function of representing memories as seen through the lens, shown in [Figure 60](#). Physical slides replaced the digital projections explored earlier, to play with properties of natural light through a lens. My design development explored numerous configurations of slides and lens, again through cardboard concepts that examined the relationship between lens and image. I also explored various material types for the slide film, considering the quality of the image versus the diffusion of light ([Fig. 61](#)). Translating this into wood proved challenging. The extremely thin and delicate nature of each half proved difficult to craft in wood, prone to breakage through the line of the grain. Not wanting to compromise my material choice, I returned to my sketchbook and revisited the design to find a solution. This came from working with the material's strengths, but also understanding how I could work around its weaknesses. I designed the slides to be full thickness with a rebate for the image film to drop into. This would then be capped with a delicate wooden ring, which in itself presented a further challenge of overcoming a tendency for wood to split when working at such delicate thicknesses ([Fig. 62](#)).



(Fig. 61) Image slide film tests.



(Fig. 62) Problem solving fabrication issues, slide design.

## 7.7 Lower Body

The lower half, developed primarily through my concept sketches as part of the visual narrative personifying Moo Moo, underpins the playful design strategy and references toy design through notions of playsets, character toys, and toy nostalgia. Its function is for storing the slides.<sup>5</sup> Figure 63 demonstrates how storing the slides at the back compels the user to engage with the object from multiple sides, offering them different experiences of the object and encouraging them to move around to engage with it.

In my initial drawings the legs and *Night Garden* box were visualised as one whole object. However, through my prototyping the design developed as two distinct components as a response to my methods of fabrication, which followed a model making approach, considering each component as its own design problem. Root details<sup>6</sup> are carefully pinned in place without the need for glue. This gave me the flexibility to make changes and resolve issues throughout the fabrication process, but also allowed me to disassemble the entire object so that it could be oiled and sealed. A process of continued care for the future.



(Fig. 63) Curious engagement through slide interaction.

<sup>5</sup> Again, a reference to nostalgic toys such as Fisher Price, makers of 'My first record player'.

<sup>6</sup> These, as with the leaves on the top of the peep box, perform a both narrative and practical function. Narratively they speak as allegories to the *Night Garden* memory, referencing both roots within the soil, adding to the aesthetic layering of the design, while also hinting at coral as an allegory for rebirth, tying my design back to its foundation in reliquaries.

## 8.0 Conclusion

The focus of the *Night Garden* was to understand the importance placed on mundane traces of our pets' lives, through things left behind, in order to celebrate their significance. The project examined two central research questions, "Can thoughtfully crafted artisanal design help form deeper memorial connections associated with pet mourning?" and "Can participation in skilled craft as a ritual of care and respect amplify this connection?" My research identified that scholarship on pet memorial objects and their importance to mourning rituals is relatively unexplored. The *Night Garden* was developed through personal introspection, weaving contextual and theoretical framing through a process of practice-led, skilled craft. Theoretical reading influenced my conceptual exploration to inform key aspects of the design synthesis. This reflective process culminated in a resolved design – The *Night Garden* that encourages audiences to engage through curiosity (Fig. 64). Touchstones such as the carved likeness of Moo Moo incorporate her whiskers and connect the memorial object directly to my own experiences, amplifying her connection through my memories.

Designed around an intimate memory of Moo Moo, incorporating allegorical narratives, the design aims to appeal to broader audiences through its playful, toy-like nostalgia. Fusing pop surrealism with a background in toy design, the memorial object is not mournful, but playful, engaging audiences in delightful curiosity to question the significance of pet remembrance. Tactile mechanisms unfold the experience,

revealing curious relics that provoke reflection and scrutiny of the reliquary itself and its associated narratives. Open to interpretation, carved details suggesting specific meaning through personal allegory amplify my experience of the *Night Garden* as deeply personal, while offering others an opportunity to contemplate their own experience of pet loss.

Intertwined stories balancing a unique memory and the personified representation of Moo Moo within the design should not devalue it for a broader audience. Interpretation of its visual language, playing on childhood nostalgia extends its attraction beyond my own relationship, offering others opportunity for their own interaction experience.

Through recurrent ritual interplay with the *Night Garden*, its significance is amplified as a function of my own collecting. Connecting material traces of my pet through participation in mourning, my relationship with the mnemonic object is ingrained. Rituals of mourning are reflected through rituals observed in the pursuit of craft.

The aim of the research was to explore the significance of skilled craft in forming deeper connections through the mourning process. Introspective methodology established a personal affiliation that aided design development through reflective personal experience. As a measure of consequence, skilled craft through the investment of time and labour, entrenched the connection of care and significance of loss throughout the entire design

process. Blood, sweat and tears exchanged through tactile engagement embody the execution of craft as testimony to the care taken in grieving a pet.

To conclude, grief response is an ongoing state of self reflection. Mourning, as a ritual of grief, offers opportunities for amplifying memory connections through tangible objects, crafted with significant care, ongoing and evolving. The *Night Garden* supports a growing acceptance of the importance of mourning close family pets through investment and care.



(Fig. 64) The Night Garden, pet memorial reliquary.

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## 10.0 Appendices

### 10.1 Ethics

#### Low-risk ethics application | Garry Buckley | Master of Design | Night Garden

##### Low-risk ethics:

The purpose of this research is to inform creative design outputs, specifically to inform insight and understanding in the production of a new body of illustration design work to fulfil the requirements of a practice-based Master's in Design.

I will undertake interviews & discussions in person or over Zoom with creative practitioners / designers who have engaged in pet memorialisation projects. Each interview will take approximately one hour.

##### Why:

- I am interviewing creative professionals and designers who have created memorial artworks for pets and who are, or who have been, pet owners.
- To gain insights into their design methods and practices when making memorial artworks.
- To understand how their own personal experience of pet ownership can guide the design process or broaden conventions of pet memorialisation.
- To gain insight into a growing popularity and cultural acceptance for publicly recognising pet memorialisation through creative expressions.

### 5. Aim of the project:

The Master of Design research explores the role that tangible objects play as mnemonic strategies for memory around pet remembrance. The aim of the project is to gain understanding into the way the design of decorative personal objects assists in the memorialisation of pets as non-human family members. This research will go some way to normalise their memory through playful connectedness. The research also aims to gain insight into the creative process that is elicited through the practice of pet memorialisation and how this influences the design outcome.

### 6. Project Summary:

This application covers the scoping interview in person or on Zoom with creative practitioners / designers who have engaged in pet memorialisation projects both personally and professionally. The aim of the research is to gain insight into the role that tangible objects play as mnemonic strategies for thoughtful pet memorialisation.

Perceiving the emergent cultural expression regarding the loss of significant relationships through death, and specifically that of a family pet, my research explores existing and new preferences for pet memorialisation. Increasingly, pet owners are seeking boutique solutions to how they are able to express the significance of the loss of a pet; with options ranging from using their ashes in the fabrication of memorial stones or creating wearable objects, like broaches and charms, to offering

to turn the remains of the pet into diamonds that can be worn in jewellery. By conducting interviews I hope to better understand creative design positions located within this current cultural expression surrounding pet memorialisation.

Data will be collected via an interview process with local and international designers and creative professionals who work within a broad scope of creative practice, but who have all undertaken work that addresses pet memorials or pet memory.

**7. Describe the peer review process that has been used to discuss and analyse the ethical issues present in this project:**

The ethical issues involved in this project have been discussed with my supervisors Associate Professor Kerry Ann Lee and Dr Marcus Moore. I have peer-reviewed the interview questions with Tanya Marriott, senior lecturer School of Design, College of Creative Arts. This is a standard format for an unstructured interview with product creative industry participants as defined in the text “Research methods for product design” by Alex Milton and Paul Rogers (2013).

**8. Summarise the ethical issues considered and explain how each has been addressed:**

1. Risk of participant consent. All participants will provide consent through a careful review of the ‘what/when/how and why’ of this research interview, followed by a written reply and acceptance to the invitation to participate.

Participants may withdraw from the research project at any time without the need for giving reason.

2. Risk of anonymity participants: Participants will be given the opportunity to remain anonymous with their identity only known to the researcher. They will be given the opportunity to review all relevant writing included in the Master’s thesis, and any subsequent publications where content is derived from this interview and appraisal process. They have the right to edit or change content to ensure correct quotes and intention. They have the right to continue to remain anonymous in all published content.

3. Risk of harm to Massey University from disreputable research: The Researcher undertakes to protect the reputation of Massey University, as outlined in the Policy on Staff Conduct and the Code of Responsible Research Conduct.

4. Risk of Psychological Safety regarding trauma and recollection arising from this activity (specifically regarding questions in section 2 of the interview questions). The Researcher undertakes to mitigate this risk through undertaking prior informal pre-screening, maintaining thematic boundaries, pausing interview, if required, careful transcription and opportunity for redaction.

All recorded data will be made available to participants to view, and any data will require their consent for any public dissemination. Data will be collected by means of electronic recording. In the event that the interviewee does not consent to the interview being electronically recorded then a note taker will be used to take

written notes of the interviewee's responses. Data will be kept on a secure drive and only be viewable to the researcher and supervisors. Once the project is complete data and transcripts will be destroyed.

### **9. With whom did you peer review the ethical aspects of your research?**

Kerry-Ann Lee, Associate Professor, School of Design, College of Creative Arts, Massey University.

Dr Marcus Moore, Senior Lecturer, School of Design, College of Creative Arts, Massey University.

Tanya Marriott, Senior Lecturer, School of Design, College of Creative Arts, Massey University.

### **Additional details - separate from the ethics application:**

#### **Interview Questions:**

I will provide each interviewee a list of key terms including definitions for the following:

**Non-human family** - a term for describing a pet that suggests a perception of a closer family connection that gives agency to a significant human-animal relationship over that of perceived ownership.

**Memorialisation** - the process of preserving memories.

**Tangible objects** - is capable of being perceived especially by the sense of touch.

**Mnemonics** - A mnemonic device is used

to remember a collection of memories, not necessarily related directly to the device.

**Reflective Memory** - reflecting on a specific set of memories or recollections.

**Rituals** - observing repeatable practices that assist in memorial practices.

I will conduct the interviews by asking the following open-ended questions to prompt a discussion.

These questions are framed into three sections that seek to elicit a response concerning the participant's relationships with pets or non-human family, how through their creative design practice they have chosen to memorialise their pets and the methods and modes in which they have explored this and finally, how their professional design practices influence the style of pet memorials within their professional client based work.

### **Section One: Relationships and memories of their pet/s:**

1. Please describe in your own words your relationship with your pet/s. (prompts; Daily rituals, individuality / personal qualities, and perceived level of sentience)

2. Can you recall a favourite memory/ies connected to your pet/s? Can you share this with me in your own words?

### **Section Two: Memorialising your pet/s:**

1. Have you experienced the loss of a pet, either your own or a family pet? Y/N

2. If so, did you do anything to memorialise your pet? Please explain. (observe important days, record memories, create tangible objects, engage in specific rituals of remembrance)

3. Have you memorialised your pet through your own creative practice, if so, please describe your design process and preferred design modes and outcomes. (Are there any rituals or actions that you perform using this work, that help you to maintain a connection to your loss? For example, does this work serve as a shrine or is it simply a reminder of the life that your pet lived.)

4. If so, was there a specific memory or memories that influenced your memorials. (Storytelling, multiple objects, modes)

5. Was materiality significant to embodying the importance that you placed on your pet? (was creating something tangible, that you could hold or touch, a consideration?)

6. Tell me about how this tangible memorial explores this connection between yourself and your Pet (How are you as a creative person embodied in your work?, Why is this important to you?, does this object work as a mnemonic connection?)

7. Can you describe any sensory memory connections with your pets? For example, can you describe the sound, smell, touch, colours, patterns, textures, and movements associated with your pet/s?

8. Do these sensory recollections feed into your work, and, if so, how?

### **Section Three: Memorialising other people's pet/s:**

1. When you are approached to create a memorial to a pet/s for a client, do they ask you to capture or represent a specific memory of them? (a favourite time, a pose, an associated object like a pet toy, a mood?)

2. What kind of object / thing does a client ask you to produce? Is it important to them that it is something that they can keep on their person, or do they want something that they can see / visit on occasions? (this could be something worn or something that is carryable, very personal, or do they only want something that is ornamental within the home?)

3. Can you tell me about your specific design process, when working with a client to memorialise their pet/s? (boundaries, rules, how do you navigate the delicate subject of grief? Do you ask them to share stories? What kinds of physical cues do you ask for? (photographs personal objects like collars or items that belonged to the pet's))

4. Do you find yourself drawing parallels between a client's experience and your own experience of pet loss?

5. When creating a memorial for a client's pet, do you seek to faithfully represent reality in your work, or do you draw upon fantasy,

imaginativeness or creative storytelling? Can you tell me a little bit about this? (does the client approach you to faithfully capture a true likeness of their pet, or do they give you licence to explore aesthetic style or playful narratives like anthropomorphising them?)

6. What is the importance of memorialisation to you? (Philosophies, values and beliefs)

7. Is this different when you memorialise your own pet/s versus a client's pet/s. (does your style or aesthetic value change, are there any restrictions that you place upon yourself or hold back creatively?)



The image shows a Miro collaborative workspace titled "Narrative Exploration" by Garry Buckley. The board is organized into several sections:

- Top Left:** A navigation bar with the Miro logo and project details. Below it are sections for "Research Questions", "Language Mapping", "Data Mapping", and "Diagram explanation".
- Top Center:** A "Design Method" section featuring a "Double Diamond" diagram, "Audience hierarchy", and "Semiotic design process" diagrams.
- Top Right:** A "Precedents & Influences" section with a "Copy of Prototype" diagram and a large grid of image references including "Anatomical Organisms", "Pop Surrealism", and "Reliquary casket".
- Middle Left:** A large section titled "Narrative Exploration" containing an "Analysis" section with sketches of figures and a "Moo Moo in the Night" section with a grid of images.
- Middle Right:** A "Sketch Book | Ideation" section consisting of a grid of numerous sketch pages.
- Bottom:** A "Moo Moo & the Offerin'" section with a grid of sketches and illustrations of figures.

The interface includes a left-hand toolbar with various tools like eraser, lasso, and text, and a bottom-right corner with a zoom level of 4%.

### 10.3 The Death of Moo Moo

I was not present when Moo Moo died, unlike with our other cats whom we held or sat with in their moment of death. Moo Moo died in a cattery, not even in her own home which was deeply sad. My first interaction with her post-mortem was collecting her from the vets where her body had been sent. They had laid her out in a back room and my wife and I had come prepared to spend our last moment with her. As with our previous pets, we gathered our keepsakes. The emotion of that moment, spending time with her, gently collecting whiskers, fur and prints from her paws stroking and talking to her saying the last goodbyes that we were not able to do in her last moments was incredibly important to us. The collected remnants of her body, taken in her death moment, became important relics. These simple tufts of fur, the plucked whiskers are tangible connections to her living body, they bring her memory forward, transforming the reminiscent memory into that of a present moment by connecting with a tangible object that can be held and cherished, much like the wool jumper or cardigan left behind by a loved one who has passed. These objects carry with them the opportunity to reconnect through other senses, touch and smell, which heighten the memory response. They are transformative, linking the real to the unreal. So we collected our own souvenirs of her body, placing them carefully in small bags, making a note of the date and their provenance. This was our last opportunity to keep part of her with us, before she would be taken away to be cremated. Together with

her collar and her favourite toy, we arranged everything we had collected into a small box, making the first step towards enshrining these otherwise mundane objects into something more precious; a mundane part of everyday life had become a souvenir, a link between the tangible world and that of the dreamscape, of memory and reminiscence; a chance to continue the loving exchange of connectedness. Moo Moo's loss was not our first, others had come before and so with her death resurfaced memories of our loss converged, amplifying our grief.



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