

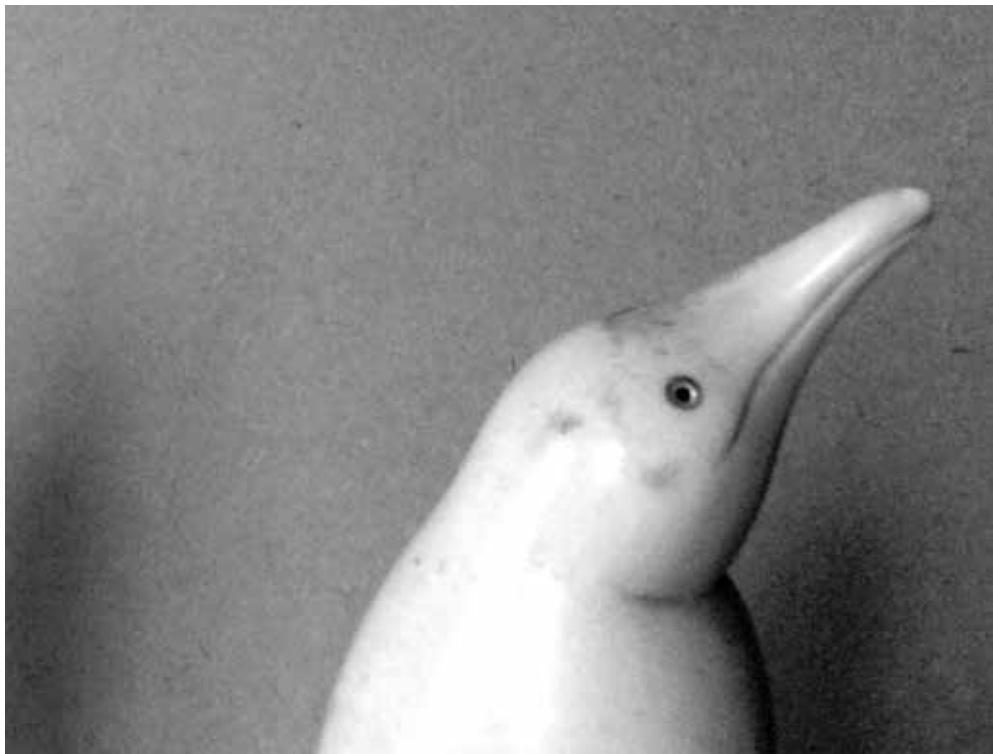


# A Collection of Kinship

Ethnographic drawing in Shetland

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# A Collection Of Kinship

A gentle suite of subjective works mainly in watercolour and pencil, the results of a winter's residency at the Ould Haa\* on the island of Yell, Shetland. The pieces were conceived between September 2015 and March 2016. Most were produced in situ at the museum, but some came also from memory and photographs. They were exhibited at the Ould Haa Gallery during September and October 2016.

• Cover:  
• Left - Detail: Ripper, flensing  
• knife and Magellan Daisy  
• Right - Detail: Gibbie  
• Hoseason's Penguins,  
• photographer: B Carrington

• Portrait of carved penguin,  
• 2015, 76 x 56 cm



Within its collection, either under glass, in cabinets or propped up in the corner of a room the Owld Haa displays whales' teeth, a hair watch chain and a flensing blade. The drawings explore

the provenance of these objects by contrasting them against kindred articles from my personal background: a carved penguin from whaling days, a 1913 bayonet and sheath and a paper bag

containing the bobbed hair of a young woman from circa 1920.

• *Whale's teeth, Sooth\* Georgia:  
Leith, 2016, 46 x 51 cm*



Although they appear to be simple compositions, the drawings are necessarily highly detailed and arranged to set up a pictorial notion of the provenance of the subjects. This open-ended approach is predicated on the idea that there is more to the relations between things than the

seemingly self-evident; beneath their commonplace purpose and meaning there may lie another perspective. The inclusion of local flowers and mosses in some of the pieces is more than an exercise in association. While a depiction of a Magellan daisy alongside a flensing knife has

its basis in the prosaic, a Forget-me-not (*Myosotis*) drawn on the same plane as a hair watch chain presents a pair of objects symbolic of enduring affection or love.

• *Bag of hair and Campion,*  
• 2016, 46 x 51 cm

The hair watch chain is described by the Owld Haa as circa 1910 and made for Johnnie Hughson from Da\* Kitchen in Cuppaster. The hair was from Elizabeth Bruce, Sunnylea Hamnavoe. Both houses are still lived in on Yell. The couple were never married. Johnnie died aged 25 and the chain passed to

his nephew who loaned it to the museum. This story persuaded me to look again at an anomalous brown paper bag of copper hair recovered from my late aunt's estate. The hair turned out to belong to my grandmother, Anne Bromelow, who had a bob cut in the 1920s. Throughout my time

at the Owld Haa I was reminded that museum exhibits can have a capacity to influence us in our personal lives and I allowed that process to capture my attention.

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*Hair watch chain and Myosotis,*  
2016, 46 x 51 cm





The Owld Haa collection appears to be entirely constituted from items donated by people who have an association with Yell, distinguishing it from larger regional and national museums where exhibits are often

accompanied, unavoidably, by less personal references. There is a compelling intimacy about the Owld Haa's approach.

• *Bayonet and peat forming mosses,*  
• 2016, 46 x 51 cm



*Bayonet over Ness a Soond\**,  
2016, 46 x 51 cm

When the provenance of an artefact can be ascertained, we are led inevitably to another story. The sperm whale's teeth donated by Ronnie Manson of Basta are rendered in watercolour in the foreground of a charcoal drawing

of Leith harbour, South Georgia. Those teeth suggest the raw material that Gibbie Hoseason of Aywick worked with to carve the penguin that appears in *Portrait of carved penguin*. Both of these men from Yell were 'at the whaling'.



Flensing knives (like the one donated to the Ould Haa by Peter Walker from North-A-Voe) were used to strip the blubber and flesh from a whale. By the time whaling was banned in the 1960s, men from Shetland had returned from South Georgia with flensing

knives which were adapted to be used as 'rippers' for opening up peat banks. Yell is an island of peat and its harvesting as a fuel, over hundreds of years, has shaped the social and topographic nature of the place.



I had heard a story about a bayonet from 1913 that was, similarly to the flensing knives, adapted to be used with peats. Peat banks can be easily seen beside the road and on the hill ground throughout Yell.





At the Ness a Soond in West Yell are the long and elegant banks that were flawed by Johnnie Tulloch's bayonet ripper. The ripper is a



tool used to cut a slit the length of a peat bank as the first stage in removing the top turf (*fael\**), a process that bears a striking

visual resemblance to the archive photographs of whalers opening up whale carcasses.

- *Left - Detail: John R Tulloch's peat bank, Ness a Soond, 2016, 21 x 29 cm, lino print*
- *Centre - Peat bank, Ness a Soond, 2016, photographer: B Carrington*
- *Right - Detail, Whaler flensing, circa 1957, photographer: unknown*



As the artworks evolved, the natural history of Yell became an increasingly important influence and flowers and mosses assumed essential places in the compositions. The studies of the ripper and bayonet acknowledge the importance of the tiny mosses that are the building blocks of peat and the Yell hill landscape. During

the painting of Anne Bromelow's hair my mother remarked on how the beautiful red campions of Yell were as prolific as those in Lancashire where she and Anne came from. An idea of kinship in objects originated, for me, with the drawing *Turtles all the way down*. This is art representative of a different culture in another

hemisphere from a different time. But only through my experience with the Ould Haa have I been able to bring this concept to fruition.

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*Turtles all the way down,*  
2010, 68 x 96 cm,  
photographer, Michal Kluvanek



