The 7th International Symposium for the Arts in Palliative Care

Encountering the arts in life, death and grief

Friday 20th November 2026

#StColumbasArts # PalliativeArts

St Columba's Hospice Care

Queen Margaret University
EDINBURGH



Programme

9.30 **Welcome**
Eric Mackay & Richard Butt

10.00 **Encountering the arts in life, death and grief**
Giorgos Tsiris

10.15 **Bringing death back into life – how engagement with the arts nurtures dialogue about existential themes**
Wolfgang Schmid, Jill Halstead, Christiaan Rhodius & Lin Stafne-Pfisterer

11.30 Break

12.00 **Everything we love we will lose**
YARA + DAVINA

12.30 **Bringing young musicians into a hospice environment: Insights from a school-hospice partnership**
Robert Baxter, Bruce Armstrong & Giorgos Tsiris

Music performance
by St Mary's Music School

13.00 Lunch break

13.30 **Poster presentations & Exhibitions**

14.00 Parallel workshops

Workshop 1 (in-person)
Visualising care networks in palliative care – who's missing from the picture?
Puck Hoitinga

Workshop 2 (in-person)
Portraits of the self
Willy Gilder

Workshop 3 (in-person)
Creative encounters with finitude
Zoi Simopoulou

Workshop 4 (online)
"Love You - Bye"
Georgia Apsion

Workshop 5 (in-person)
Encounters and endings in group music improvisation
Bruce Armstrong

Workshop 6 (in-person)
An embodied encounter with life, death and grief
Sally McRae & Sara Coffey

Workshop 7 (online)
Exploring life and death with Edvard Munch – an improvised dialogue
Christiaan Rhodius & Wolfgang Schmid

15.00 Break

15.20 **Responsiveness to grief and loss through creative arts therapies and integrative modalities in a paediatric medical/surgical hospital**
Todd O'Connor

15.50 **The importance of outdoor spaces at a children's hospice: An arts and therapeutic play perspective**
Rachel Drury & Donna Nicoll

16.30 **Closing reflections**

Welcome



Eric Mackay

Eric Mackay spent his career in the civil service, working primarily on the development of government strategies in the public health sector, with a particular focus on tackling drug misuse in Scotland. Following his retirement, he took on a range of appointments, including serving on the Scottish Medical Research and Ethics Committee.

Eric joined the Hospice Board of Governors in 2025. He is also a Trustee of the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop, reflecting his continued interest in the arts. In his spare time, he pursues long-standing passions for golf and painting, and has recently published his first novel.



Richard Butt

Professor Richard Butt is Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, where he leads institutional strategy and academic policy. His academic work has long engaged with film and visual culture, particularly the ways in which storytelling helps us interpret and give meaning to human experience.

Alongside his university leadership, Richard has been actively engaged in the arts. He is a current Trustee of The Brunton Theatre Trust and a former Trustee of the Edinburgh Filmhouse. His personal engagement with the arts includes previously singing with The Rolling Hills Chorus, a men's barbershop group, and he plays alto saxophone with the Shunpike Social Club, an Edinburgh street band collective.

Encountering the arts in life, death and grief

Welcome to this year's symposium. Over the years, this gathering has become an annual landmark event for our field. Our shared commitment to practice, interdisciplinary dialogue, and creative collaboration drives the coming together of a dedicated international community of arts therapists, socially engaged arts practitioners, researchers, healthcare professionals, policy makers, and community partners.

This year's focus is on *"Encountering the arts in life, death and grief"*. Embracing the rich diversity that characterises the arts in palliative care, we seek to foster meaningful exchange across distinct professional, social, and cultural contexts. Through a curated programme of presentations, creative workshops, panel discussions, exhibitions and project case studies, we will explore how creative encounters profoundly shape human experiences of death, loss, and change.

The arts – including music, drama, painting, sculpture, creative writing and filmmaking – offer a vital space for making sense of living, dying and grieving. Within clinical and community practices alike, the arts act as a catalyst and container for expressing and processing intense emotions. They also offer powerful means not only for creating legacies but also for generating safe spaces for open conversations about mortality in society.

Thank you for bringing your expertise and insights to this year's event. We hope the symposium inspires your practice, deepens your professional connections and sparks new collaborations.



Professor Giorgos Tsiris
Director of Education, Research & Creative Arts, St Columba's Hospice Care
Professor of Music Therapy, Queen Margaret University

St Columba's Hospice Care

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"It Takes Two" (gel plate print)
By Fee Maclean

Bringing death back into life – how engagement with the arts nurtures dialogue about existential themes

Wolfgang Schmid, Jill Halstead, Christiaan Rhodius &
Lin Stafne-Pfisterer

This panel explores how engagement with arts across hospice, community, and museum settings in Norway can help bring conversations about life and death back into everyday life. Using storytelling as its core approach, the interdisciplinary panel brings together perspectives from end-of-life care, education, curatorial practice, and music therapy, to discuss how the arts can open spaces for reflection, connection, and meaning-making. Drawing on exhibitions such as Modern Gothic and Don't Be Afraid! at the National Museum in Oslo, Lin shares stories about how audiences engage creatively and critically with themes of death and vulnerability. Christiaan shares insights from the programme Explore Life and Death with Munch at the Munch Museum, where encounters with art prompt participants to reflect on their own experiences of mortality. Jill and Wolfgang present their audiovisual essay Last(ing) Music – An Essay on Music Therapy at the End of Life, telling the story of Kari and how a meaningful song supported relationships, memory, and identity as she approached death. Through these diverse narratives, the panel shows how intimate encounters with the arts can create safe spaces for dialogue, learning and ethical reflection, encouraging more open conversations about the existential questions we share.






Wolfgang Schmid is Professor of Music Therapy and Head of Research and Deputy Leader of the Grieg Academy, University of Bergen. In his practice-based research, he critically examines how individuals and communities use music to care for themselves and others when facing terminal illness, loss and bereavement. He integrates qualitative inquiry, artistic research and autoethnography to co-develop questions and insights with the people he encounters. Recent projects include Care for Music, an international ethnography funded by the AHRC (UK), and IMAGINE, a community-engaged, arts-based initiative examining how music-engagement fosters compassionate, relational attitudes to care in societies at large and in health-care education.

Jill Halstead is Professor of Music at the Grieg Academy, University of Bergen, where she leads the Grieg Research School in Interdisciplinary Music Studies, a four-university consortium on Norway's west coast. Her work combines creative practice and research within feminist traditions, examining how musical participation is shaped by social, cultural, and institutional contexts. She has led participatory projects with marginalised communities, including older adults, and composes for film and dance theatre addressing ageing, disability, and loss. Recent projects include Social Acoustics and the EU-funded Music4Change initiative (2022–2025), exploring listening as a social and relational practice and advancing sustainability in music.

Christiaan Rhodius is a Dutch medical doctor, specialized in elderly care and palliative medicine. Together with his wife and four children he lives and works in Oslo, Norway. In collaboration with MUNCH (the Munch Museum, Oslo) and the University of Oslo he initiated an experiential learning program, called 'Explore life and death with Munch'. This program helps to unlock 'the secret' of death by engaging with art. Christiaan is examiner in the specialist course for palliative care (a two-year course for medical specialists) in the Netherlands. He is the author of the book *'Omdat we leven'* and several articles. His writing and (contributions to) podcasts tend to circle around topics like humanities mortality, 'the palliative paradox' – the importance of connection while having to let go, improvisation, communication and art.

Lin Stafne-Pfisterer, Cand.phil. Art History, University of Oslo and Senior Curator Learning at the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo, Norway, where she has been since 2013. Curating exhibitions and mediation programs, lectures and research represent main tasks. She is dedicated to exploring audience participation and art encounters in museums. Exhibitions may function as a third solemn, social and experimental space where people meet and interact through perception, participation, reflection and dialogue. Lin will discuss the work on the exhibition "Gothic Modern. From Darkness to Light" at the National Museum in Oslo in 2025, which gave a new understanding of art history and the modernists' view of the Middle Ages in general and Gothic art in particular. The modernists were concerned with existential questions about life and death and the human being as part of nature's life cycle. In Gothic art, they found strong emotional expressions meant to touch the viewer. Emotional images confronted viewers with universal human questions, such as the fear of suffering, hunger, pain, and death, but also forgiveness, love and sex. Around the turn of the 20th century, Arnold Böcklin, Edvard Munch, Marianne Stokes and Käthe Kollwitz, among others, were inspired by older art and existential questions. Drawing on theories of acceleration, resonance, emotional communities and meaning making, Lins work is part of a research project at the National Museum: Art Resonance and existential Experiences. Artists and Audiences as modern Pilgrims.









Everything we love we will lose

YARA + DAVINA

Artist Duo YARA + DAVINA will talk about their recent exhibition Everything We Love We Will Lose, which was commissioned by National Trust Clandon Park and Lightbox Gallery and Museum.

This exhibition responded to shared narratives of loss and explored the contemporary and historic art of grieving. Working closely with women who have experienced pregnancy and baby loss, experiences the artists have had themselves, YARA + DAVINA shaped the exhibition through poetry, conversation and the healing power of shared making. The artists drew inspiration from local stories and objects from the Lightbox and Clandon collections, including mourning lace, and ceramic fragments that serve as poetic reminders of breakage, resilience and what it means to be remade.

The exhibition featured newly made artworks, including a tattoo design inspired by considering a contemporary take on wearing grief. A floral tribute collectively made by YARA + DAVINA and local florists represented the tools we use to grieve and support ourselves and each other through loss.

The commission also includes two new epitaph benches, each engraved with participants' reflections on how they wish to be remembered, revealing how we want to live now. The benches will be installed at Lightbox Gallery & Museum and in the garden at Clandon Park.

YARA + DAVINA are a social practice artist duo, who began their job share whilst in the throws of early motherhood. They create ambitious public artworks that respond to site, context and audience. Unfailingly inventive, they use formats from within popular culture to make works which are accessible and playful. From turning manhole covers into WOMAN WHOLE covers to creating football scarves inspiring unity over division, they root their works in the everyday, using a lightness of touch and humour to make works that are both poetic and universal. Recent commissions include Yorkshire Sculpture Park, National Trust, Dulwich Picture Gallery, Somerset House, Old Diorama Art Center with Camden Council, and Policy Lab. Their exhibition Everything We Love We Will Lose at Lightbox Gallery, Woking, co-commissioned by the National Trust explores grief and loss, with a focus on pregnancy loss.

Studio YARA + DAVINA
https://www.yaraanddavina.com



Bringing young musicians into a hospice environment: Insights from a school-hospice partnership

Robert Baxter, Bruce Armstrong & Giorgos Tsiris

What can young musicians bring to a hospice environment? How does their musical performance contribute to the musical care and broader organisational wellbeing of the hospice? What is the impact of such work on the young musicians themselves and on their school community? Drawing on the partnership between St Mary's Music School and St Columba's Hospice Care, this presentation will attempt to address these questions. The presentation will be followed by a musical performance by pupils from St Mary's Music School.







Robert Baxter is a regular guest conductor with Scottish Ballet and has conducted productions of Cinderella, Nutcracker, Swan Lake, The Scandal at Mayerling, Dextera, Streetcar Named Desire, Snow Queen, Mary Queen of Scots, Crucible and Starstruck in theatres across the UK and abroad. Graduating as a trumpet player he has performed, recorded and toured with every orchestra in Scotland and many abroad. He conducts regularly for the RSNO and has recorded numerous film sound tracks for Netflix including the soundtrack for Life on Our Planet. He has been Musical Director for diverse groups including Belle and Sebastian, Colours Classical and Celtic Connection concerts. Robert is founder of Kessington Hall, a rehearsal and performance space in Glasgow and is chair of the Scottish Schools Orchestra Trust. He was appointed as Artistic Director for St Mary's Music School in 2024 having previously taught at RCS Junior department and the Music School of Douglas Academy. Upon graduating he was delighted that a brass quintet that he played in worked regularly for the Council for Music in Hospitals. This work led to performances throughout Scotland where he and his colleagues saw first-hand the benefits of live music in these settings.

Dr Bruce Armstrong is a Music Therapist with St Columba's Hospice Care. Following a career in academic Sociology, including research on the history of racism in Scotland, he found his way into the world of support work, counselling, and therapy. Since then, he has worked for over thirty-five years in various health and social care settings, including HIV/AIDS, Sexual Health, Learning Disability, Mental Health, and Palliative and End of Life Care. Throughout this time, he has been involved in community music and asset-based community development work, with a particular interest in ways in which music can enable personal and collective reflection. His role at St Columba's Hospice Care brings together many of these strands of experience.

Professor Giorgos Tsiris is Director of Education, Research and Creative Arts at St Columba's Hospice Care, and Professor of Music Therapy at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, UK. He has co-led award-winning death education initiatives promoting intergenerational connections through music and the arts.

St Mary's Music School is Scotland's specialist music school, located in Edinburgh. The School provides world-class music training and an outstanding academic education to around 75 talented young musicians aged 9–19 from across Scotland, the UK and overseas.

Admission to the School is based solely on musical ability and potential. Pupils study with internationally renowned teachers, performing regularly in leading concert venues around Scotland, embracing a rich and varied musical programme. Through their outreach programmes, public performances and partnerships, the School extends their impact far beyond the School grounds, inspiring future generations of musicians and audiences alike.

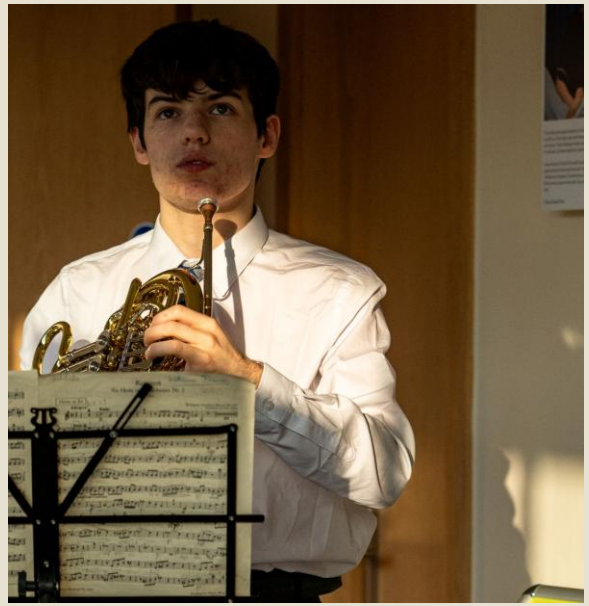
Over the past two years, the school has partnered with St Columba's Hospice Care. Bridging exceptional music education with community care creates a powerful, mutually beneficial relationship. It provides patients and the wider Hospice community with the therapeutic benefits of live music while helping young musicians develop deep empathy, adaptability, and a relational understanding of their art.





St Mary's Music School
EDINBURGH

St Columba's Hospice Care



Parallel Workshops

Workshop 1 (in-person)
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Puck Hoitinga

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Willy Gilder

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Christiaan Rhodius & Wolfgang Schmid

Workshop (in-person)

Visualising care networks in palliative care - who's missing from the picture?

Puck Hoitinga

Understanding continuity of care in palliative care requires insight into the complex network of healthcare professionals, family members, and organisations involved in a patient's care. As part of a longitudinal qualitative interview study on continuity of care at the end of life, we developed a simple visual mapping exercise using paper-based pictograms representing care settings, healthcare professionals, patients, and relatives. At the start of each interview, participants are invited to create a visual overview of the people involved in their care and how they relate to one another.

Originally designed as an interview icebreaker and conversation starter, the method proved valuable in its own right. The resulting care-network maps help participants reflect on their care arrangements, reveal who is perceived as central or peripheral, and make changes over time visible across repeated interviews.

In this interactive workshop, participants will learn about the development and use of pictogram-based care-network mapping and will have the opportunity to create and discuss maps themselves. Together, we will explore how simple visual methods can enrich qualitative research, facilitate conversations about continuity of care, and make otherwise invisible aspects of care networks visible.

Puck Hoitinga is a general practice trainee and PhD candidate at Amsterdam University Medical Center, The Netherlands, where she studies continuity of care at the end of life. The first phase of her PhD consists of a longitudinal qualitative interview study with palliative patients and focuses on how they experience the organisation of their care, the relationships they have with healthcare professionals, and how care is coordinated across settings and providers.



Portraits of the self

Willy Gilder

Self-portraits can be powerful means of exploring identify and emotions. Throughout history artists have drawn their own self-portraits often creating a visual diary and leaving a long-lasting legacy. In this workshop, you will learn how to create a portrait for yourself – a picture that looks like you, and one that says something about how you feel. No previous art experience necessary.

Willy Gilder is a retired radio journalist and an artist who lives with neurodivergence. He has shown his series of self-portraits at the Hospice's gallery. He lives in Edinburgh.



Workshop (in-person)

Creative encounters with finitude

Zoi Simopoulou

This workshop offers the space to sit with questions that emerge in the face of life's finitude and to creatively reflect on them. Confrontations with the boundaries and limitations of human existence can break down the perceived coherence and continuity of our personal biographies, bringing up existential and spiritual questions around meaning and belonging.

We will use collage-making as a creative means to attend to the power of the pieces and the life in/of the fragments. This process will facilitate a creative contemplation of such questions by means of working intuitively with images and words by choosing, cutting out, piecing and placing together, and gluing. Participants will be invited to engage in individual collage-making as a means of associating on finitude and share their reflections on the artistic process with the group.

Zoi Simopoulou is a Lecturer in Counselling, Psychotherapy and Applied Social Sciences at the University of Edinburgh and an Art Therapist. She is currently an Honorary Research Fellow at St Columba's Hospice Care exploring existential-spiritual encounters in palliative care.



Workshop (in-person)

“Love you - bye”

Georgia Apsion

Starting the conversation. An introduction to using creativity, art and play to talk about death in a way that celebrates life.

I’d always wanted to make a film, so I enrolled on a screen writing course. Advised to write about what I know, I drew on my experiences of caring for elderly parents, and the inevitable family dynamics of who does what.

What started out as me fulfilling a creative ambition, became a personal healing process, showing me how I could feel grief and joy together.

The feedback from the film has surprised, humbled and inspired me: people watch the film and then want to talk about the story, to talk about what they might want, to think about the end of life in a different way, to start the conversations.

This workshop will start with the short film “Love You - Bye” starring actress Annabelle Apsion (Call The Midwife, Shameless, Soldier Soldier) followed by group discussion and an opportunity to share ideas, experiences and get creative. Although this is not a grief support group or a counselling session, there will be an open, group-directed discussion aimed at breaking the taboo surrounding mortality, with the invitation to play, to process sensitive, difficult and inevitable things.

Georgia Apsion is a stand up Comic, Film maker and Rosen Method Somatic Therapy Practitioner based in Brighton UK. Her first short film "Love You - Bye" is a playful and tender exploration of Love, Loss and Control.





Workshop (online)

Encounters and endings in group music improvisation

Bruce Armstrong

Improvising music together in a group can provide a way of exploring feelings about relationship and loss. In this workshop, we will play music together using a range of easy-to-play instruments, our bodies and/or voices. Through an embodied approach to improvisation will explore and reflect together on how we –as individuals and as a group– find way to endings, musically and interpersonally.

There is no need to have previous experience of playing an instrument in order to take part.

Dr Bruce Armstrong is a Music Therapist with St Columba's Hospice Care. Following a career in academic Sociology, including research on the history of racism in Scotland, he found his way into the world of support work, counselling, and therapy. Since then, he has worked for over thirty-five years in various health and social care settings, including HIV/AIDS, Sexual Health, Learning Disability, Mental Health, and Palliative and End of Life Care. Throughout this time, he has been involved in community music and asset-based community development work, with a particular interest in ways in which music can enable personal and collective reflection. His role at St Columba's Hospice Care brings together many of these strands of experience.



Workshop (in-person)

Workshop (in-person)

An embodied encounter with life, death and grief

Sally McRae & Sara Coffey

In this accessible experiential dramatherapy session, we will explore life, death and grief through creative and embodied encounter, we will engage with what can be difficult to name, staying close to experience rather than explanation. We will attend to what emerges in the moment, both individually and in relation to others.

Working in a contained and projective way, there is no expectation of personal disclosure. Instead, we will focus on creative process and what it becomes possible to notice when we meet life, death and grief through the arts.

Open to all symposium participants. No previous arts experience needed.

Sally McRae is the dramatherapist at St Columba's Hospice Care. Her interdisciplinary background includes work in theatre, television, live event production, and the teaching of yoga and meditation, providing a broad foundation for her therapy work. Her research interests centre on the application of dramatherapy in palliative and end-of-life care.

Sara Coffey is a dramatherapist based in London with a specialist interest in palliative and end-of-life care, supporting people affected by terminal or life-limiting conditions and working with grief and loss. She holds roles at North London Hospice and Chai Cancer Care, the Jewish community's national cancer support organisation. She is also a Creative Arts Supervisor and has a small private practice. When not working, she can usually be found doing yoga, at the theatre or dashing around London on her bright pink folding bicycle!





Workshop (online)

Exploring life and death with Edvard Munch – an improvised dialogue

Christiaan Rhodius & Wolfgang Schmid

All of us are mortal, making death a universal topic. At the same time, one's own death is highly personal and unique. In this online arts-based workshop, we invite participants to encounter paintings by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch and explore life and death as intimate yet collective phenomenon that are common to all.

Edvard Munch himself experienced ill health and lost his mother and sister at an early age. Much of his work therefore centres on illness, death, and dying. He was criticised for this thematic focus and for the intensity of the emotions conveyed in his paintings. Munch however saw his art as something 'to learn from and live after'.

As we meet Munch's art in this workshop, share personal observations and engage together in an improvised dialogue, we co-create a new, unique experience.

The workshop is co-lead by Christiaan Rhodius and Wolfgang Schmid, both of whom bring longstanding experience in palliative care and a shared interest in how arts engagement can stimulate everyday conversations about life and death while supporting more holistic approaches to end-of-life care education.

Christiaan Rhodius is a Dutch medical doctor, specialized in elderly care and palliative medicine. Together with his wife and four children he lives and works in Oslo, Norway. In collaboration with MUNCH (the Munch Museum, Oslo) and the University of Oslo he initiated an experiential learning program, called 'Explore life and death with Munch'. This program helps to unlock 'the secret' of death by engaging with art. Christiaan is examinator in the specialist course for palliative care (a two year course for medical specialists) in the Netherlands. He is the author of the book 'Omdat we leven' and several articles. His writing and (contributions to) podcasts tend to circle around topics like humanities mortality, 'the palliative paradox' – the importance of connection while having to let go, improvisation, communication and art.

Wolfgang Schmid is Professor of Music Therapy and Head of Research and Deputy Leader of the Grieg Academy, University of Bergen. In his practice-based research, he critically examines how individuals and communities use music to care for themselves and others when facing terminal illness, loss and bereavement. He integrates qualitative inquiry, artistic research and autoethnography to co-develop questions and insights with the people he encounters. Recent projects include Care for Music, an international ethnography funded by the AHRC (UK), and IMAGINE, a community-engaged, arts-based initiative examining how music-engagement fosters compassionate, relational attitudes to care in societies at large and in health-care education.





Responsiveness to grief and loss through creative arts therapies and integrative modalities in a pediatric medical/surgical hospital

Todd O'Connor

This presentation explores how grief and loss are addressed through multiple approaches in a pediatric medical/surgical setting. It will examine key factors that shape how families experience and cope with grief in acute intensive care. You will learn about the development of a diverse, flexible, and impactful multimodal program at the Kravis Children's Hospital designed to meet the unique needs of children and their families. Emphasizing the importance of community formation and identity in healing, the presentation will also highlight the crucial role of creative arts therapies and other specialties in building, sustaining, and revitalizing community connections during times of loss.

Todd O'Connor is a Program Coordinator and the Creative Arts Therapy Supervisor in the Child Life and Creative Arts Therapy Department in the Mount Sinai Kravis Children's Hospital in New York City. In his role, he nurtures partnerships across disciplines that support the development and implementation of creative arts therapy programming in both inpatient and outpatient areas of the hospital; oversees a graduate music therapy internship program; and develops clinical research protocols, which explore the impact and efficacy of medical music therapy in partnership with physicians and other interdisciplinary specialists in pediatrics. In his clinical work, he provides support to pediatric patients and their families in contexts that include general ICU care, post-surgical support, chronic illness, pain management, procedural support and end-of-life care. Todd earned his master's degree in music therapy from New York University in 2006 and completed post-master's certification as a Level I Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapist.



The importance of outdoor spaces at a children's hospice: an arts and therapeutic play perspective

Rachel Drury & Donna Nicoll

The concepts of childhood and play often go hand-in-hand. As such, it should come as no surprise that the outdoor spaces in children's hospices are a significant consideration in the care of the babies, children and young people it caters for. Despite this, most studies to date exploring outdoor spaces in hospice care focus on adult hospices, and even those with a focus on paediatric care rarely seek the voices of the children themselves, instead relying on staff and family perspectives. Rachel House Children's Hospice is about to undergo a significant rebuild and this talk will explore the intersections between art, creative play and nature. From a rights-based approach we will reflect on how the arts and play therapies integrate with outdoor spaces, how children's voices are listened to and what they tell us about the kind of outdoor space they want and need, and how their voices have shaped the redesign of their hospice.

Dr Rachel Drury (she/her) is a researcher and creative artist working in the field of music psychology and therapeutic arts. She is Co-Programme Lead for the MA Music Psychology programme at the RCS and the music specialist for Rachel House Children's Hospice in Kinross (CHAS). As a creative artist, Rachel's work has been performed at major festivals both nationally and internationally, and she regularly works with national arts companies in the UK as a consultant on creative projects and training opportunities for artists. Rachel's research interests include rights-based approaches in the arts, particularly within paediatric palliative care.

Donna Nicoll is the Play Service Coordinator at CHAS, managing the Therapeutic Play Team. Donna is a Healthcare Play Specialist with over 25 years' experience working in the hospice setting, supporting children with life limiting conditions and their families. Donna has provided a wide range of play experiences and activities for children of all ages and abilities as well as memory making opportunities. Donna now supports practitioners and uses therapeutic play techniques to support children to process trauma, manage behavioural challenges and improve well-being. Her work takes place in the hospice, or community. Her team organise sibling events throughout the year and a sibling residential yearly.





Poster presentations

Symbolizing ambiguous grief through drawing: An arts-based autoethnography
Kyle Karen

'You might be sick' – The abject and abjection in medical art therapy
Anna Magnowska

Beautifully broken: A scar, a healing
Arunima Mathew

Connecting practice, growing knowledge: Establishing an international community of practice for dramatherapists in palliative care
Sally McRae & Sara Coffey

Soundtrack of my life: Legacy project
Rebekah Price

Listening for what remains: creative practice at the threshold of life and death
Sydelle Ross

A biophilic therapeutic framework for ageing well in hospice care settings
Carolyn Thomas & Yan Xing

Symbolizing ambiguous grief through drawing: An arts-based autoethnography

Kyle Karen

Ambiguous grief is a complex emotional state in which one is mourning the loss of a person prior to their death. In this arts-based auto-ethnographic study, I analysed my own experience of resolving ambiguous grief that developed as my father was transformed by dementia while my mother died of cancer. I am an artist and occupational therapist. This is my story of caregiving, grieving and drawing a father-daughter portrait based on an old family photo of my father and me taken by my mother in my infancy. The photo recorded loving family relationships; the drawing depicted re-ordered but no less loving family relationships and expressed my sense of a disordered world as I adapted to new realities. Methods: Auto ethnographic analysis of personal narrative, drawing process, and visual symbols. The theory of Aesthetic Engagement was applied to analysis of drawing process. Research questions: How did I experience this drawing as similar to and different from other drawings? What was the impact of the sociocultural context? What mechanisms contributed to the psychological change experienced after completing the drawing? Conclusion: This study contributes to understanding the process of creating art as for resolving ambiguous grief through the theorized action of aesthetic engagement.

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Poster

Dr. Kyle Karen is an Assistant Professor at the New York Institute of Technology. Holding a PhD in Occupational Therapy, a certification in Public Health, and a BFA in painting, her research examines how everyday aesthetics influence wellbeing. Her scholarly portfolio includes publications in the *Journal of Occupational Science* and textbook contributions. Recently, she secured grants for AI simulations and community-based repair programs. Dr. Karen’s multidisciplinary expertise uniquely advances occupational science through the study of aesthetic emotion and community-centred practice.



‘You might be sick’ – The abject and abjection in medical art therapy

Anna Magnowska

Art therapists working within medical settings often work with people undergoing invasive treatments and facing death. This proximity can place art therapists in precarious positions within organisations and put patients at risk of depersonalised care.

Using Kristeva’s (1982) interpretation of the abject and abjection as being the threat to identity that is rooted in the separation from the maternal body, as well as theories of social abjection, I examine my work as an art therapist alongside previous experiences as a nurse to explore the abject and abjection in an NHS hospital. I suggest that art therapists, nurses and patients can be subject to organisational defences where ‘messy’ caregiving roles are considered maternal, and the need for care is contrary to neoliberal ideology. Using a case study of my inpatient work I suggest that artmaking can be a powerful disruptive force that can expose these unconscious defences as well as give voice to abject experiences of cancer treatment.

Expanding upon these theories can enable art therapists to redefine organisational defences, as well as harnessing the power of the abject within artmaking to reveal what is hidden - thus resisting abjection. I conclude by inviting other professionals to incorporate this thinking into practice.

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Anna Magnowska is an art psychotherapist currently working within NHS Cancer Psychological Services at Barts NHS Trust in London. Anna works with both outpatients and inpatients and has introduced art therapy to palliative patients under the hospital palliative care team at the Royal London. Anna also works as an art psychotherapist with Bart’s Heart Centre Psychological Services - a pioneering service which offers art therapy to cardiac patients. Prior to qualifying as an art psychotherapist, Anna worked as a nurse within the NHS for 15 years where she held roles in oncology, accident and emergency, sexual health and as a palliative care clinical nurse specialist. Anna’s poster abstract is taken from her article “*‘You might be sick’ the abject and abjection in medical art therapy”* published in the *International Journal of Art Therapy* in March 2026. Anna is also an illustrator, artist and photographer.



Poster

Beautifully broken: A scar, a healing

Arunima Mathew

Cancer and its treatment often leave survivors with a sense of incompleteness or brokenness, especially post-surgery. Beautifully Broken: A Scar, A Healing, explores how scars can be encountered, held, and transformed through visual narratives and creative processes including ceramics, photography, and poetry.

Drawing on kintsugi - the Japanese art of mending broken ceramics with gold - this body of work celebrates the imperfections and the scars left by life and diseases, reframing them as marks of strength, courage, and resilience. Building a ceramic sculpture, breaking it, and mending the pieces together, became a physical and symbolic enactment of pain and repair. This process was documented in photographs, alongside a second series of introspective images tracing transformation from solitude and darkness toward healing and light. An original poem, inspired by reflections on healing and courage from China Miéville and Tori Amos, weaves these strands into a cohesive story of moving from adversity to renewal. The meditative quality of the work invites viewers to pause, reflect, and find hope and beauty in the process of healing.

Exhibited at *Confluence* (Lifespace, University of Dundee, 2024), the work resonated deeply with visitors; several of whom shared their own experiences of recovery in response (part of an MFA Thesis exploring the role of art cancer communication and wellbeing).

Arunima Mathew is a creative science communicator, interdisciplinary artist, and researcher with a dual background in biological sciences and fine art. She holds a BS-MS in Biology from IISER Thiruvananthapuram and an MFA in Art, Science and Visual Thinking (Distinction) from DJCAD, University of Dundee. Her work makes complex scientific and medical concepts accessible, engaging, and impactful through multimedia art, visual storytelling, and interdisciplinary collaboration - spanning ceramics, photography, applied comics, design, and installation.



Poster

Poster

Connecting practice, growing knowledge: Establishing an international community of practice for dramatherapists in palliative care

Sally McRae & Sara Coffey

Dramatherapy within specialist palliative care settings appears to be an underrepresented area of practice, with limited published literature. While dramatherapists work with people experiencing life-limiting illness and bereavement, their presence within specialist palliative care services remains relatively undocumented. In response, an international Community of Practice (CoP) was established through a collaboration between St Columba's Hospice Care, Edinburgh, and North London Hospice. Bringing together dramatherapists working across adult and paediatric settings, the CoP provides a space for reflective dialogue, shared learning and professional connection. Beyond supporting practitioners, a founding ambition is to encourage collaborative writing, research and publication, contributing to the development and visibility of dramatherapy within palliative care. Drawing on Communities of Practice theory, this poster explores the rationale for establishing the initiative and considers how collective professional engagement might support the generation and dissemination of practice-based knowledge. It reflects on the CoP's early development and examines opportunities and challenges in sustaining a collaborative professional community, with implications for strengthening the evidence base, service development and supporting the future growth of this specialist field.

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Sally McRae is the dramatherapist at St Columba's Hospice Care. Her interdisciplinary background includes work in theatre, television, live event production, and the teaching of yoga and meditation, providing a broad foundation for her therapy work. Her research interests centre on the application of dramatherapy in palliative and end-of-life care.

Sara Coffey is a dramatherapist based in London with a specialist interest in palliative and end-of-life care, supporting people affected by terminal or life-limiting conditions and working with grief and loss. She holds roles at North London Hospice and Chai Cancer Care, the Jewish community's national cancer support organisation. She is also a Creative Arts Supervisor and has a small private practice. When not working, she can usually be found doing yoga, at the theatre or dashing around London on her bright pink folding bicycle!





Soundtrack of my life: Legacy project

Rebekah Price

Legacy projects in hospice care help patients preserve their life stories, values, and personal memories to leave behind for loved ones. The aim of the legacy project series was to engage people in the community who had a terminal diagnosis to explore their stories through different art mediums.

The “Soundtrack of my life” project focused on life review work through personalised playlist creation. This project encouraged participants to reflect on their lives by identifying music that evoked memories of people, places and events. Creating a musical timeline of their lives that highlighted music that had been important to them. It was conducted in a group setting which meant participants could share music with one another and have meaningful discussions about their life experiences. By the end of the project each participant had created a 20-song playlist that encapsulated their individual narratives. The majority of participants reported that they had begun listening to music again and had incorporated the playlist into their daily lives. The project enabled them to reconnect with themselves through music.

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Rebekah Price is an HCPC-registered Neurologic Music Therapist. She graduated from the University of South Wales in 2024. In January 2025 she set up her private practice called *Music For Joy - Music Therapy* and provides individual and group sessions to people across the lifespan. The name *Music For Joy* reflects her dedication to bringing joy to people through the transformative power of music and also pays tribute to her Nanny Joy, who significantly influenced her musical journey from a young age and passed away whilst receiving hospice care. As part of her work, Rebekah has conducted two group music therapy projects in collaboration with Marie Curie Hospice in Wales. Focusing on creating a lasting legacy through playlist creation, songwriting and poetry.



Poster

Listening for what remains: Creative practice at the threshold of life and death

Sydelle Ross

Background: At the threshold of serious illness, dying, and grief, attention often turns toward what is being lost. What might we hear if we also listen for what remains? Music-making can offer a way of connecting with identity and emotion, as well as finding meaning in the context of serious illness.

Creative Practice: Sound of Dawn, an original song created and sung by Dr. Sydelle Ross, a palliative care physician and musician, emerged from listening to the heartbeat in the stillness of night. The song traces an inward journey from stillness and awakening toward emotional connection, creative expression, and the possibility of becoming—the chance to be oneself.

Reflection: This arts-based inquiry uses Sound of Dawn to explore music-making as a means of attending to what may remain present, but become less visible, in serious illness and near the end of life. Through the song's movement from stillness to awakening and becoming, music creates space for feeling, self-expression, embracing identity and honouring the self.

Conclusion: Listening for what remains may help to shift attention toward the enduring capacity for emotional connection, creativity, self-expression, and becoming, offering a way to honour the self in the face of serious illness and loss.

Dr. Sydelle Ross is a hospice and palliative medicine physician, singer-songwriter, and speaker whose work explores the intersection of music, medicine, and compassionate care. Drawing on her background in anesthesiology, pain medicine, and palliative care, she advocates for a human-centred approach to healthcare that honours the dignity and stories of people living with serious illness.

Dr. Ross has presented internationally on the role of the arts in healthcare and was featured in the acclaimed publication *Artists Remaking Medicine: The Practice of Imagination and the Power to Create a Better Healthcare Future*. She was also recently appointed to the editorial board of the journal *Perspectives on Arts in Health*.

Through clinical practice, speaking, and original music, she encourages audiences to see compassion as essential to healing. Her recently released song, "Sound of Dawn," reflects themes of resilience and renewal, expressing her belief that music and meaningful connection can bring profound comfort.



Poster

A biophilic therapeutic framework for ageing well in hospice care settings

Carolyn Thomas & Yangang Xing

People receiving hospice care may have limited opportunities to encounter nature, while arts-based and immersive experiences can offer meaningful routes to relaxation, connection and emotional expression. This six-month prefeasibility pilot developed and tested a biophilic therapeutic framework in two care environments, with relevance for hospice care settings. Immersive virtual settings used the biophilic pattern of Complexity and Order to create natural analogue experiences tailored to participants' individual nature preferences. Mixed methods combined wearable-sensor data with self-reported wellbeing measures to examine psychophysiological, emotional and cognitive responses among people aged 80 years and over. Personalised content was associated with greater engagement, relaxation and positive affect. The findings suggest that carefully designed immersive biophilic arts experiences can complement access to real nature in hospice care, offering a practical resource to support wellbeing and conversations about identity, memories and what matters most to each person.

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Poster

Dr Yangang Xing is an Associate Professor at **Nottingham Trent University**. His research focuses on intelligent and biophilic built environments, combining sensory building performance, nature-based solutions, digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and wellbeing. Dr Xing has led and collaborated on interdisciplinary projects spanning healthy ageing, dementia-friendly environments, social prescribing, intelligent workplaces, biophilic and immersive technologies, and sustainable development. His work seeks to improve quality of life through evidence-based design and the integration of smart environmental systems. He works closely with academic, healthcare, industry, and community partners across the UK and internationally, with particular interests in inclusive sensory design, creative health, and the application of intelligent and biophilic building technologies to support health, wellbeing, and social connectedness throughout the life course.

Carolyn Thomas, PhD Student, Nottingham Trent University. Carolyn's academic and professional trajectory have been shaped by an interest in biophilia and the human–nature relationship in the built environment. She explores how design can strengthen connections between people and nature, particularly within interior spaces where many individuals spend most of their time. After completing a master's degree in environmental design, Carolyn has focused on interior environmental design as part of a holistic approach which integrates spatial design, natural elements and human experiences, psychological wellbeing, and environmental awareness to improve quality of life.



Exhibitions



Trolleydarity

Scratch n Sniff Staycations for the Discerning Static Traveller

Co-created by **Shona Reppe** and **Alan Grieve**

A **National Theatre of Scotland** Project. Originated in collaboration with **NHS Lothian Charity: Tonic Arts**

Supported by:
The Weir Charitable Trust

Exhibition

Trolleydarity

Scratch n Sniff Staycations for the Discerning Static Traveller

Shona Reppe & Alan Grieve

Imagine a journey where you don't need to pack your suitcase, rush to catch a plane or even leave your bed. A journey where your senses transport you while you stay exactly where you are.

Trolleydarity presents a unique and fragrantly immersive experience that redefines the idea of travel. Combining specially curated soundscapes with the latest Scratch and Sniff technology, artists Shona Reppe and Alan Grieve invite you to embark on a sensory micro adventure unlike any other.

Created for patients at Western General Hospital, Edinburgh, this project transforms the everyday into the extraordinary, from the scent of a luxurious spa to the sound of crisp snow underfoot, all brought to life through the magic of sound and smell.

So stay where you are, close your eyes, scratch, sniff and go!

Trolleydarity, it's a breath of fresh air, brought to you by trolley.





Shona Reppe is a theatre-maker (deviser, performer and designer) best known for her highly visual, award-winning small-scale theatre shows for children and their families. Her intricate designs, quirky humour, and surreal visual storytelling have been delighting audiences all over the world since 1994 with shows including Cinderella, The Curious Scrapbook of Josephine Bean, Atlantis Banal and Potato Needs a Bath and HUFF. Recent collaborations include Co-Creator/Designer of PEKKU with Andy Manley, Director of Pickled Republic with Ruxy Cantir and Designer for Charlene Boyds June Carter Cash, the Woman, her Music and Me, for NTS in 2024. Future projects include The Point of Wasps (raising the profile of wasps through electro synth music) and Lightning Ridge (designer for touring Catherine Wheels Show). She lives in Fife with her husband and 2 daughters and a cat called Bill and a dog called Sushi.

Alan Grieve is an alchemist, turning stories, artefacts, incidents and a whole range of other material mined in the most unlikely places, into gold. An exquisite draughtsman and sublime painter, Grieve is equally precision-tooled and trenchant in his use of language. Indeed, his most e@ective work exists at the nexus between the image and the word; the two mediums informing, amplifying and contradicting each other to devastating effect. His gift when applying the visual to text and vice versa is to breezily expose darkness in the everyday and to leaven the sinister with irresistible wit. Alan has exhibited widely, including SHELTER STONE – The Artist and the Mountain (2018) and REVEAL (2023) at the Royal Scottish Academy and most recently RING OF TRUTH at Blackie House Library and Museum as part of the 2025 Edinburgh Art Festival. His primary arena is the community, specifically his home city of Dunfermline which continues to be an inspiring muse. His rare genius and enthusiasm for social engagement has seen him work in prisons, tower blocks, parks, bothies, dancehalls and shopping malls, encouraging creative activity and conversations often with surprising outcomes. Since Alan graduated from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art with an MFA in 2008, he has become widely respected as and artist and creative agitator, building a loyal following both online and off as a committed community practitioner. He remains as unpretentious as he is talented and still wakes daily at dawn making sure to maintain his daily drawing regime.

The 7th International Symposium for the Arts in Palliative Care

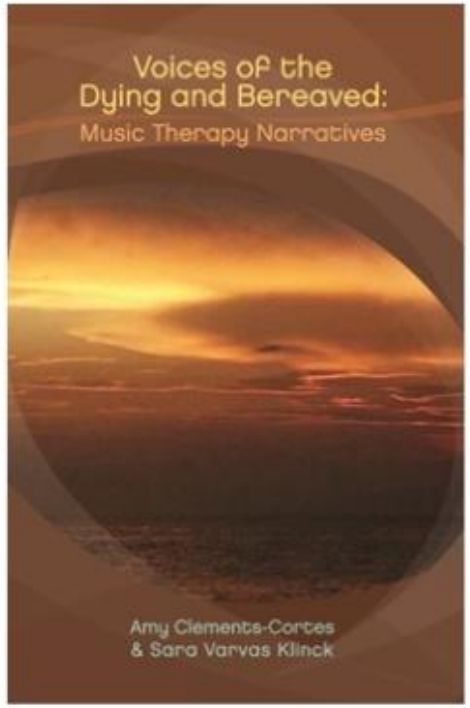
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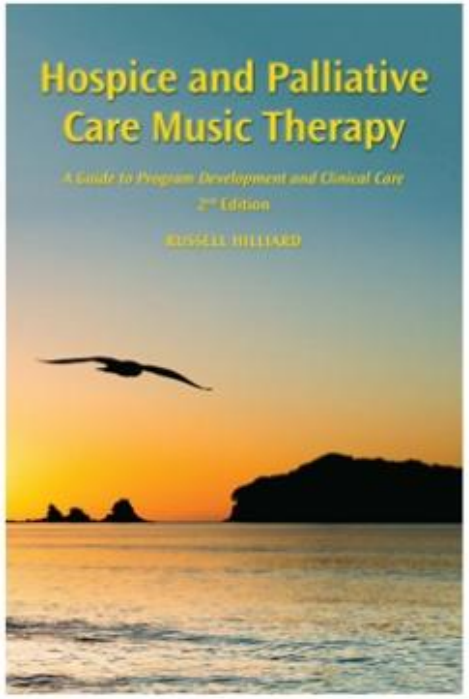
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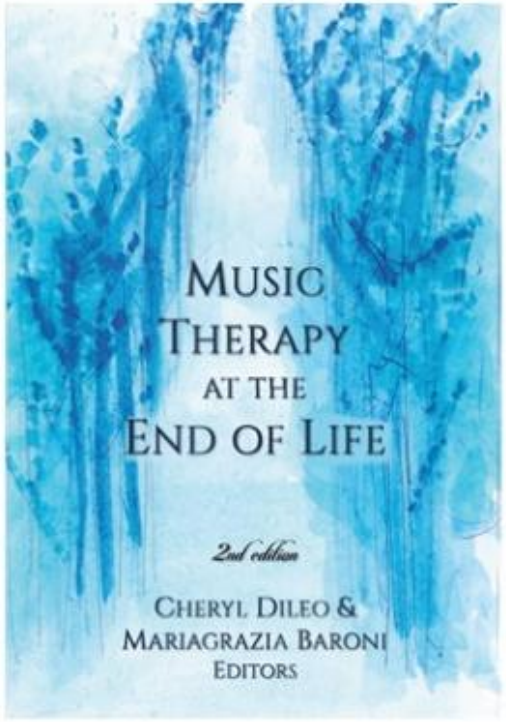
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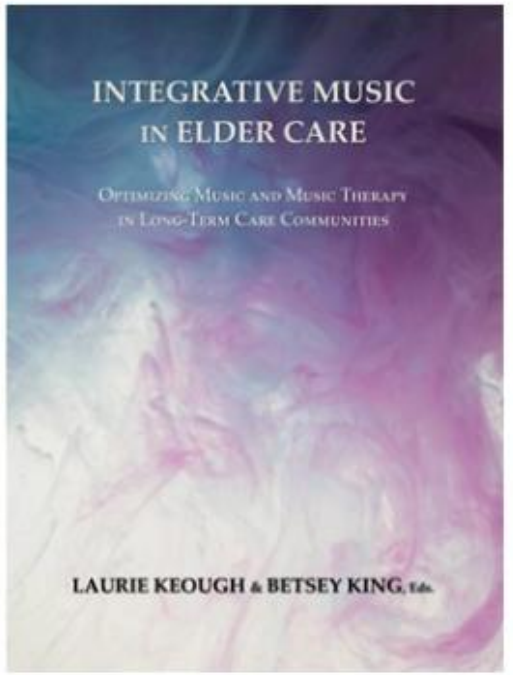
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