

Heart, at the Noosa Regional Gallery, is a collection of Greer Townshend's most recent works. The large-scale origami hearts are an extension of Townshend's former enquiry into the complexity and fragility of the human condition. In her past work, *With You*, 2015, Townshend focused her enquiry on the "exploration of the metamorphic nature of the soul and the impact that we have on each other's lives"¹. From that enquiry Townshend developed a visual dialogue using portraiture and flowers to express her subject's individual nature and sensibilities. Her collection of most recent work leads on from that enquiry with a focus on memories. She folds 300 x 300mm sheets of paper into origami hearts before unfolding them, drawing with charcoal and cutting her imagery into the crisp whiteness of the paper. Townshend describes her work as "depicting the moments in life we fold-up to keep and unfold to re-live"².

In this new body of work, Townshend continues to use flowers to signify the ephemeral and frail quality of human life. Townshend alternates her representation of flowers, sometimes drawing in detail with charcoal, sometimes a contour line and in other cases the flowers are directly cut into the paper, kirigami style. By cutting into the paper Townshend renews a delicate quality to the paper that is otherwise lost due to its large scale. The overall effect of these combined techniques suggests the transient and complex manifestation of thoughts and memories that move freely in and out of one's mind. In addition, the fold lines left from the origami hearts are symbolic of memory and the changing human condition.

On entering the exhibition, one must navigate past the one and only folded origami heart (Fig 1). This is a subtle reminder that at any time the other works can be folded

¹ Greer Townshend, *With You – Thoughts on the Soul* (exhibition catalogue), 18 March – 4 April 2015, The Hold Artspace, Brisbane, Queensland, 2015, p 2.

² Greer Townshend, *Heart* (postcard), 28 April – 11 June 2017, Noosa Regional Gallery, Noosa, Queensland, 2017.

up and their secrets once again concealed. Renowned kirigami artist, Nicola Moss has said that in these works there is a “lovely resonance with our most precious relationships and communication with others – there is an exchange - that as we give and share something of ourselves, the space within, the relationship between - grows stronger”³. This notion of exchange and the works ability to transform from a three-dimensional origami heart to a two-dimensional work makes for interesting contemplation and gives the works multiple dimensions of meaning. With this in mind, the hearts, therefore, signify an individual’s ability to connect with others and transform relationships through the act of giving and receiving.



Fig 1

Similar to kirigami, Townshend’s drawing technique demonstrates a process of subtraction. Within her drawings, there are visible shadows where the charcoal has been laid down, then erased, thus leaving a ghost image on the page. This ghost image signifies the recollection of a memory and the individual’s ability to recall memories and retell their stories. The idea of retelling a story, links back to language and communication, and it is evident that this is an important aspect of Townshend’s work.

³ Nicola Moss, Greer Townshend (website), ABOUT, 2017, <https://www.greertownshend.com/about>. Viewed on 9 June 2017

Previously her work has featured portraits of New Zealand modernist writer Katherine Mansfield and English modernist writer Virginia Woolf. Townshend is clearly inspired by Mansfield's literary work and describes Mansfield as a "fascinating woman and so gifted", she says that she wishes her "drawings to be the visual equivalent [of Mansfield's work]; elegant, mysterious, flittered with nature"⁴. Like Townshend, these modernist writers were concerned with human sensibilities and wrote in a stream of consciousness, emphasising a person's internal world over the external representations that had previously exemplified the genre of realism.

Butterfly, 2017, (Fig 2 and Fig 3), is an example of how Townshend is inspired by the ideals of the modernist writers and their focus on internal thoughts and nostalgia for nature. This piece occupies the centre of the exhibition and allows for the viewer to walk around all sides of the drawing. The effect is that the kirigami wings of the butterfly cast a shadow on the gallery floor which transforms the two-dimensional piece into an installation that incorporates the space it occupies. In fact, many of the pieces possess this quality as they are hung several inches from the gallery wall, utilising the gallery lighting to cast a shadow, perhaps it could be considered a ghost image and thus a memory, on the wall behind them. Within the centre of the kirigami wings are two people entwined by a bouquet of flowers. The butterfly is a metaphor for transformation, while the bouquet of flowers signifies the non-verbal relationship shared by the couple. Only a woman's face can be seen, the identity of the other person remains a mystery, however, their close embrace signifies an intimate moment. Like all of Townshend's drawings the couple have been pressed into the paper through layers of charcoal, giving the drawing a sense of realism that is quickly disrupted by the surrealist

⁴ Greer Townshend, *With You – Thoughts on the Soul* (exhibition catalogue), 18 March – 4 April 2015, The Hold Artspace, Brisbane, Queensland, 2015, p 3.

quality of the flowers that encapsulate them and the kirigami wings that emerge from their combined bodies.



Fig 2



Fig 3

Like *Butterfly*, Townshend's drawing *The Woods*, 2017, (Fig 4 and Fig 5), possesses a surrealist quality. The layering of text and imagery suggest remnants of a dream or perhaps, elements of a fairy tale. Central to the image is the silhouette of a man, with an axe, entering the woods. He is surrounded by text that references a "song for the sacred trees". To his left is a ghost image of a girl's face, the silhouette of a fawn, and the contour of iris flowers; the text explains that the girl turned into the fawn. Above the girl is the image of a fox, its head turned away averting the viewer's gaze and an iris flower floating above the fox's shoulder. To the right of the fox is a darkened shape, that when observed closely, contains a tangle of flowers. All of these images float on the white background of the paper, signifying an innate connection between humans and nature. At the base of the drawing is a kirigami pattern of flowers. They are disjointed from the rest of the drawing, however, knowing that the drawing folds up into an origami heart informs us that they are, in fact, a piece of the whole memory even if seemingly unrelated in the present two-dimensional state of the art work.

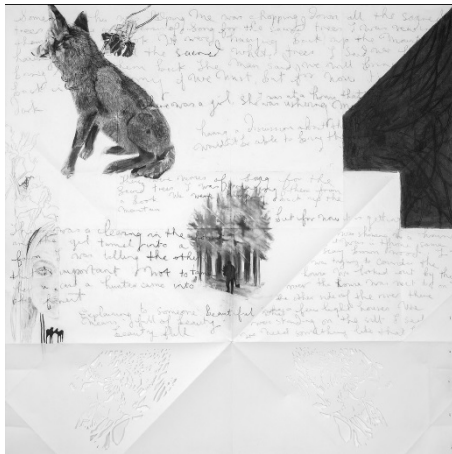


Fig 4



Fig 5

Similar to *The Woods, Letter*, 2017, (Fig 6 and Fig 7), displays the same disconnection between the upper and lower portions of the work. The lower portion displays kirigami, while the upper portion is almost completely blacked out with charcoal. In this way, it is unlike the surrounding works in the exhibition that illustrate figures suspended in the emptiness of the white page. The treatment of the page suggests a heavier, and perhaps more negative memory than what is portrayed in the pieces that have been previously described. Layered beneath the heavy working of charcoal, are the words, “This may be the only letter I ever write you”, written over and over, line after line. It is reminiscent of the punishment of writing out lines at school, thus signifying a negative experience. In this piece, Townshend’s intuitive and restrained use of charcoal is abandoned for a more expressive and blatantly emotional gesture. The unruly treatment of the upper portion is made to appear even more out of control in contrast to the delicate and exact cuts that make up the kirigami at the bottom of the page. Imagining this piece folded into its three-dimensional form, it becomes obvious that the expressive and emotional combination of tone and text would be discreetly hidden by the delicate kirigami, however, what is inside still exists even though it remains hidden.



Fig 6



Fig 7

This sense of exposure and concealment that is evident in Townshend's work is a personal reminder to those who view the work, that we all possess our own stories and memories that can be unfolded when we choose to share them, and folded up again, when we choose to keep them private. Through the use of cutting, folding and drawing, Townshend has successfully conveyed the notion of exposure and concealment and in the process shared an intimate moment with her viewers. Through her use of flowers and wildlife creatures, Townshend represents the undeniable connection between humanity and nature and the perceived symbolism that those figures convey to our inner language. By linking this aspect of her work to that of modernist writers, Townshend informs the viewer that the inquiry into the subtleties of the human condition is one that is significant throughout history and is still a valid enquiry in contemporary society.

References

Townshend, G, Greer Townshend (website), ABOUT, 2017, <https://www.greertownshend.com/about>. Viewed on 9 June 2017

Townshend, G, *Heart* (postcard), 28 April – 11 June 2017, Noosa Regional Gallery, Noosa, Queensland, 2017.

Townshend, G, *With You – Thoughts on the Soul* (exhibition catalogue), 18 March – 4 April 2015, The Hold Artspace, Brisbane, Queensland, 2015.

Image List

Figure 1, Greer Townshend, *Heart*, 2017

Figure 2, Greer Townshend, *Butterfly*, 2017

Figure 3, Greer Townshend, Butterfly (detail), 2017

Figure 4, Greer Townshend, The Woods, 2017

Figure 5, Greer Townshend, The Woods (detail), 2017

Figure 6, Greer Townshend, Letter, 2017

Figure 7, Greer Townshend, Letter (detail), 2017