



# Morgan Cassidy

*That's Why They Call it a Ribcage*

Honours Creative and Professional Practice

Portfolio

Digital Assessment

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## Statement of Practice

Suffering from Anxiety and Depression for many years, I became frustrated with the condition. I often wish there were a way to escape this state of mind. I started working with the motif of a ribcage as a metaphor for the containment and restriction I felt within my body. Using a different range of materials, I settled with ceramics as it gave me more freedom to play with the shape. Each has been made the same way but throughout the cutting and drying process, they bend and fall in different ways. Some are cracked, chipped and scratched. This gives character to each ribcage, symbolising the different levels of mental illness'.

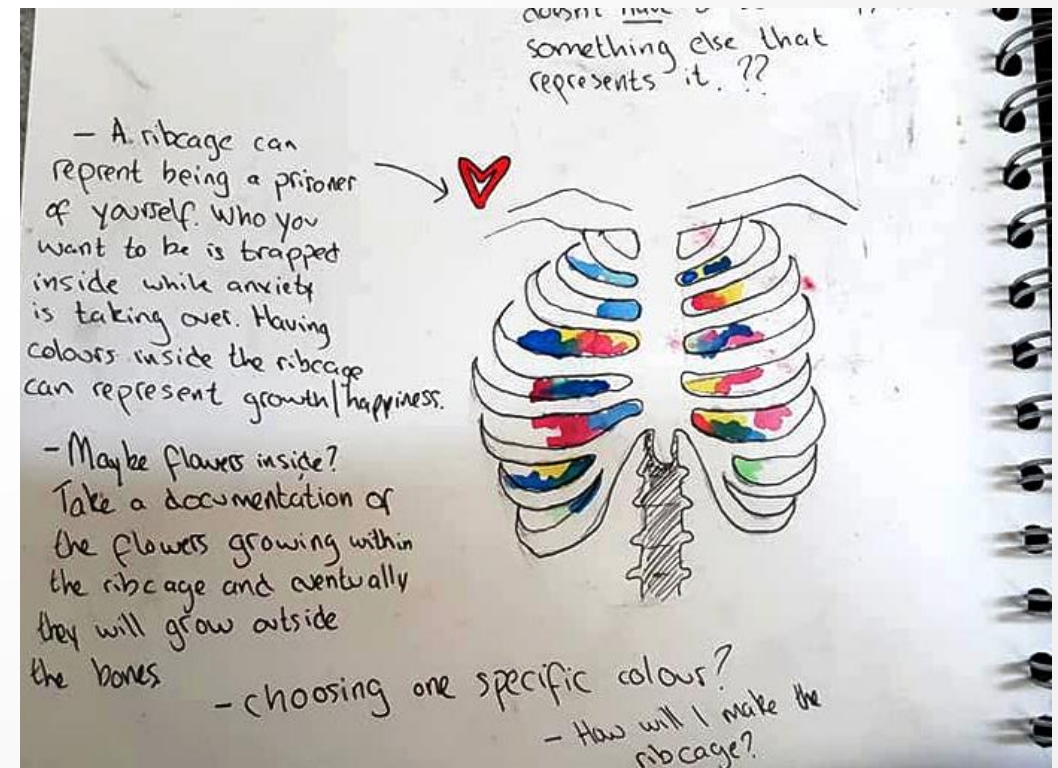
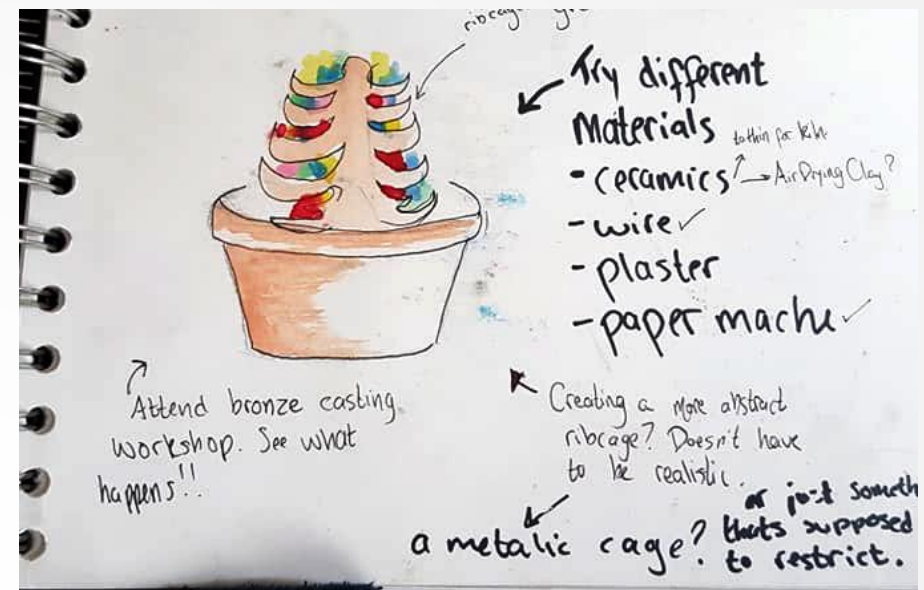
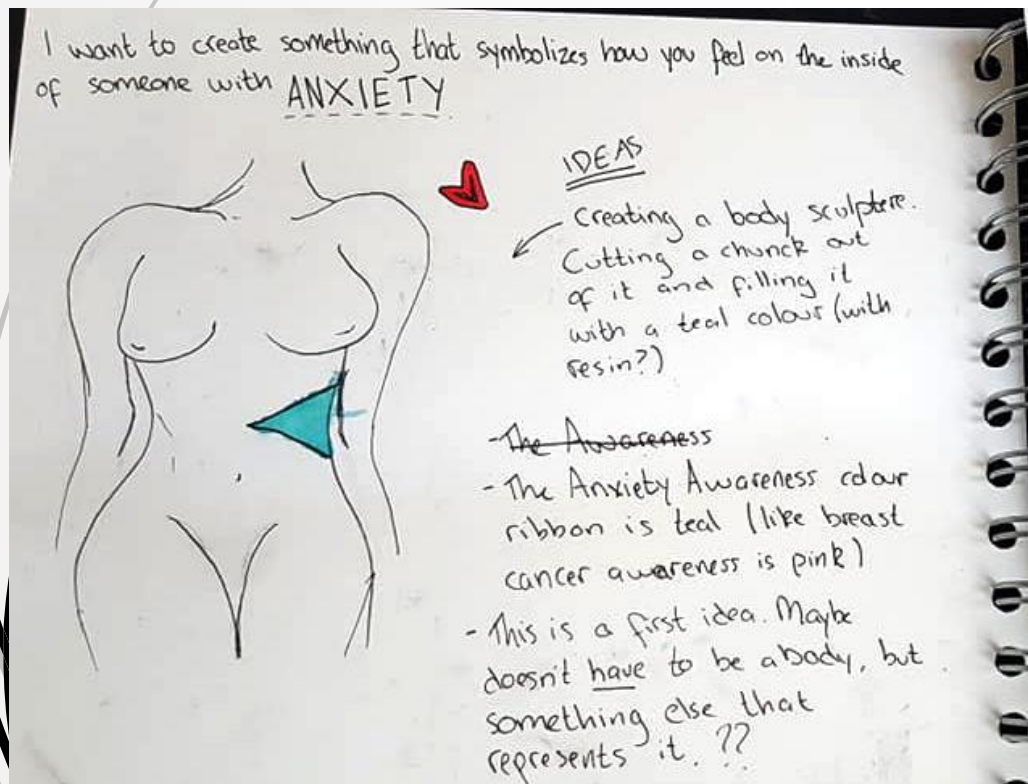
The plant is important within the piece; the ivy is known for being resilient. Ivy escapes through the gaps defeating the purpose of the cage of self-imprisonment and giving a form of hope. As the ceramics became functional as vessels for the plant, the design became more abstract. I retained the materials of bone by leaving the ceramics unglazed.

Multiple pieces within the space demonstrate the various types of mental illness. By hanging them, the audience are able to move around the space freely. It also gives some breathing space without any objects, such as plinths. Some are in small groups so the ivy can intertwine with one another, some grow just fine on their own.

# Sketchbook Development

For the past few years, I have taken an interest in how mental health effects us and wanted to take it further. I wanted to use the body as a prison of one self and decided a ribcage would best resemble this as it doesn't need to relate to a particular gender.

These images have been selected from the core idea of the ribcage design. My original idea was to create pot with a ribcage growing from the base of it, with colourful flowers inside.



## Sketchbook Development continued

I researched through what plants I could use. Lavender is a plant that is best used for anxiety, but needs a specific environment and constant care that I was not able to give within the studio. I experimented with climber plants such as the Clematis, which would add some colour to the sculpture, but it struggled to grow indoors and needed extra care. The ivy best suited the part as being easy to care for, which means I could leave it within the studio over weekends. It is also known to grow very well which is what I was looking for.



Watercolour sketches on paper



After seeing Travares Strachan's 'Robert' at the Venice Biennale (see artist research) I liked how he made the body glow with lights. I wanted to test this effect. In this drawing, I used pastel to try that glow effect. I also experimented wrapping LED battery powered lights around my wire ribcage, but felt as if it was losing its prison-like message. I abandoned the light idea and carried on with the original concept.

White pastel on black A3 paper



Clematis, climber plant. Reference - [www.daviddomoney.com](http://www.daviddomoney.com)



Lavender. Reference- [www.hedgesdirect.co.uk](http://www.hedgesdirect.co.uk)



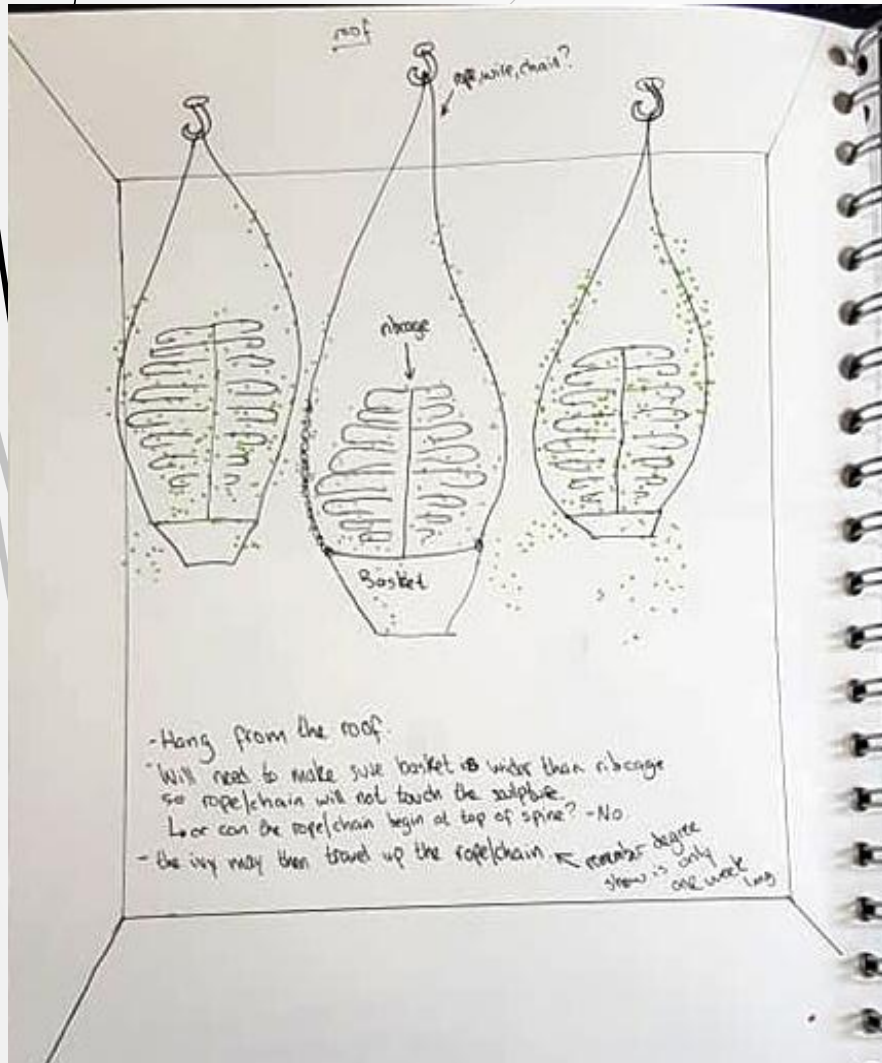
Hedera Helix Green Ripple  
Ivy Reference - <https://www.dobbies.com>



English Hedera Helix indoor.  
Reference - [www.dobbies.com](http://www.dobbies.com)

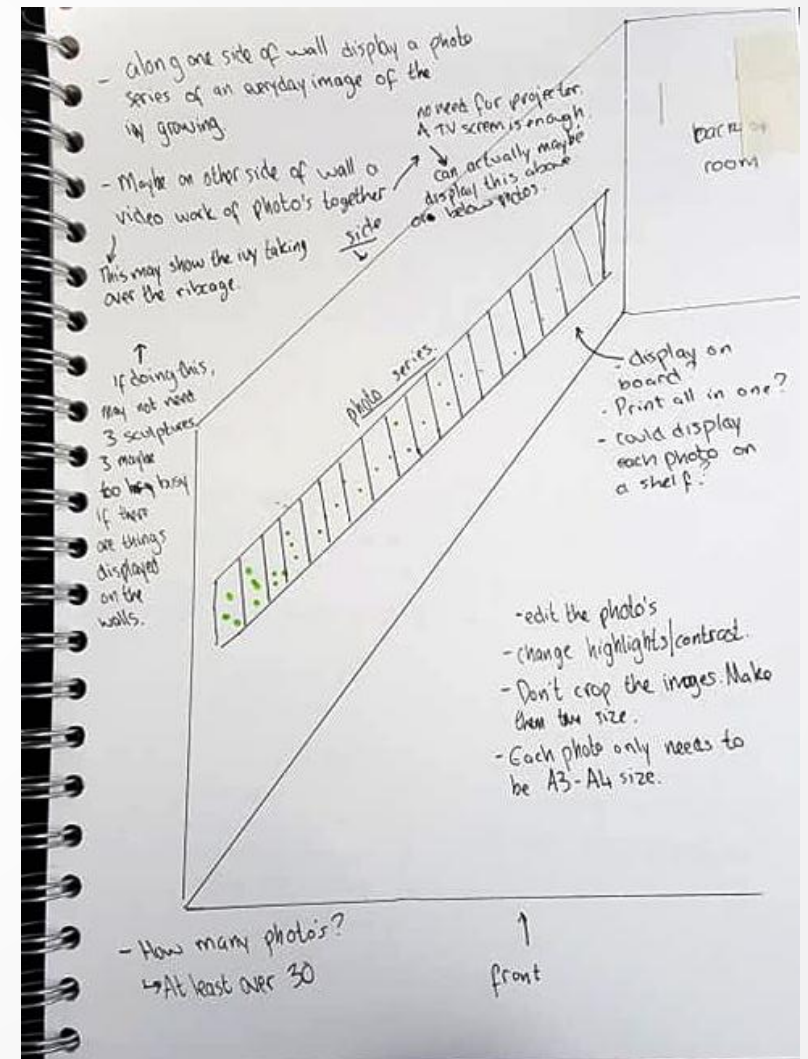
# Sketchbook Development continued

Early sketches of possible degree show proposal

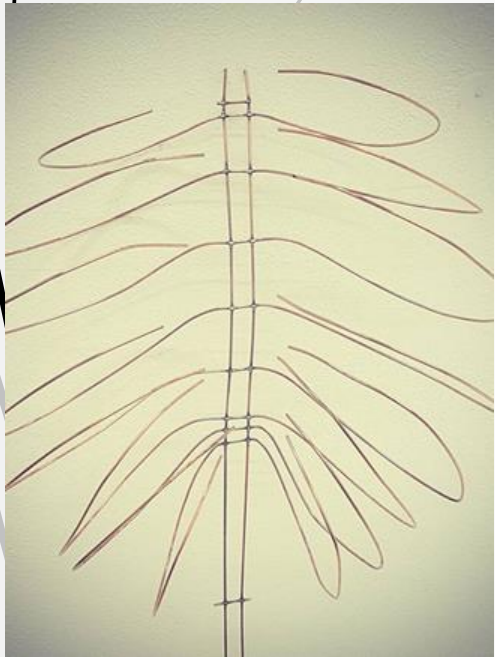


I liked the idea of the piece hanging (as seen in the sketch to the left) as it gives the ivy freedom to grow. By having them hanging from the roof I am free to play with the height.

I also wanted to try a photo series of the ivy growing within the cage and showcasing it alongside the sculptures, but after researching I would have to interfere with ivy to train it around the wire (or whatever material I choose to use). I wanted the photo series to show the ivy independently growing, so this would not work if I had to help it. Therefore, abandoning the idea.



## Practical Development



This is an early idea of using wire to create a ribcage. I liked the shape it was creating, and it was very quick and simple to put together; however it didn't feel restricting enough. The wire almost disappears within the leaves as it is so thin. The wire was also quite fragile as well which I did not want. I wanted something with a stronger structure.



To bring viewers in closer to the sculptures, I wanted to try writing what my definition of freedom meant on the leaves; Beauty, Wisdom, Strength, Unity and Harmony. Using a silver gel pen really made the leaves shimmer. After some feedback from tutors and peers, there was criticism about how the ink damages the ivy, which is not what I intended, therefore I decided not to go ahead with this idea. The sculpture itself was enough to bring the idea of freedom across without interfering with the ivy. I felt the writing was overcrowding

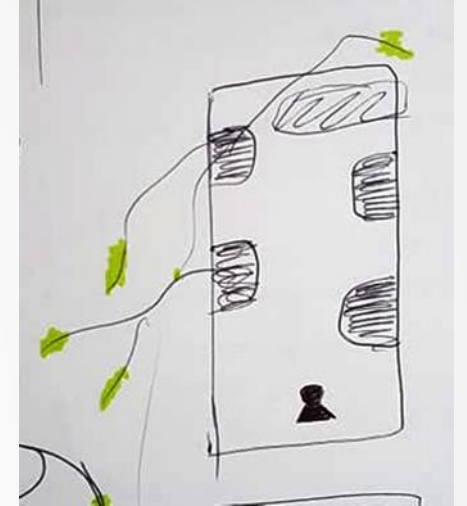
## Practical Development continued



Developing material ideas with papier mache and ceramics. As I was making these, I discovered artist Jamie North, who uses plants with harsh materials (see artist research.) With the papier mache sculpture, it takes a long time to create and felt unfinished, which I did not like. For the ceramics, it almost seemed unnatural for the leaves to grow from, yet still a beauty to look at. From this point, I continued to develop the ceramics idea.

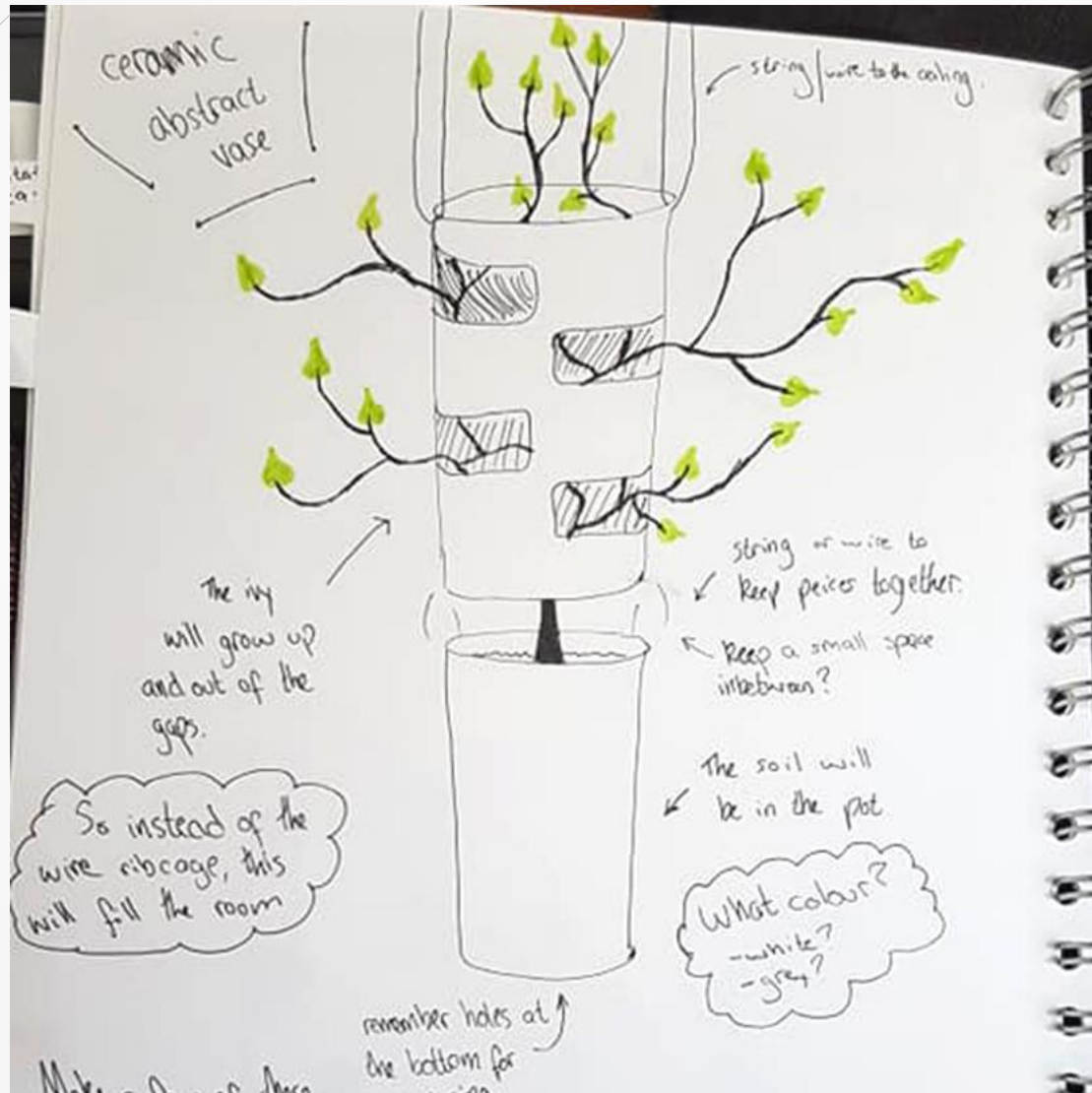
## Practical Development continued

I wanted to try experimenting with an abstract design instead of realistic, so began drawing up ideas. Throughout my years of university, I have always naturally gone realistic with my work, and wanted to step away from that path. Experimenting with design was opening new possibilities. I liked where it was going and started experimenting with the design in the ceramics workshop





## Practical Development continued



After the drawing experiments, I decided this design would work. I originally just wanted the top part of the design, but had to make some compromises for the ivy. It needed space for the roots to grow. I would also find it difficult to install the plant if the two pieces were mended together. Therefore, it made sense to place the top half of the piece over the plant once it had settled into the bottom.

## Experiments in the Ceramics workshop

**Image 1** shows how I began with a series of experiments working with a vessel shape, bending the clay into a ribcage form and carving out the spaces between the ribs. The result became sinister and it's skeletal natures, referencing death which seemed at odds against my intentions of a growing and healing work. This particular form was also inspired by **Andra Ursuta's *Divorce Dump***. She had a true form of a ribcage which worked effectively for her work (see Artist research for more info.)

In **image 2** I have started to use a cylindrical shape to make with formal tubes with cut out shapes. While still cage like, these are less bodily. The abstract form that can be easily more replicated works better here. The forms are beginning to lean into ceramic design objects, this simplification of the form is an exciting development.



Image 1, [white earth clay], unfired.



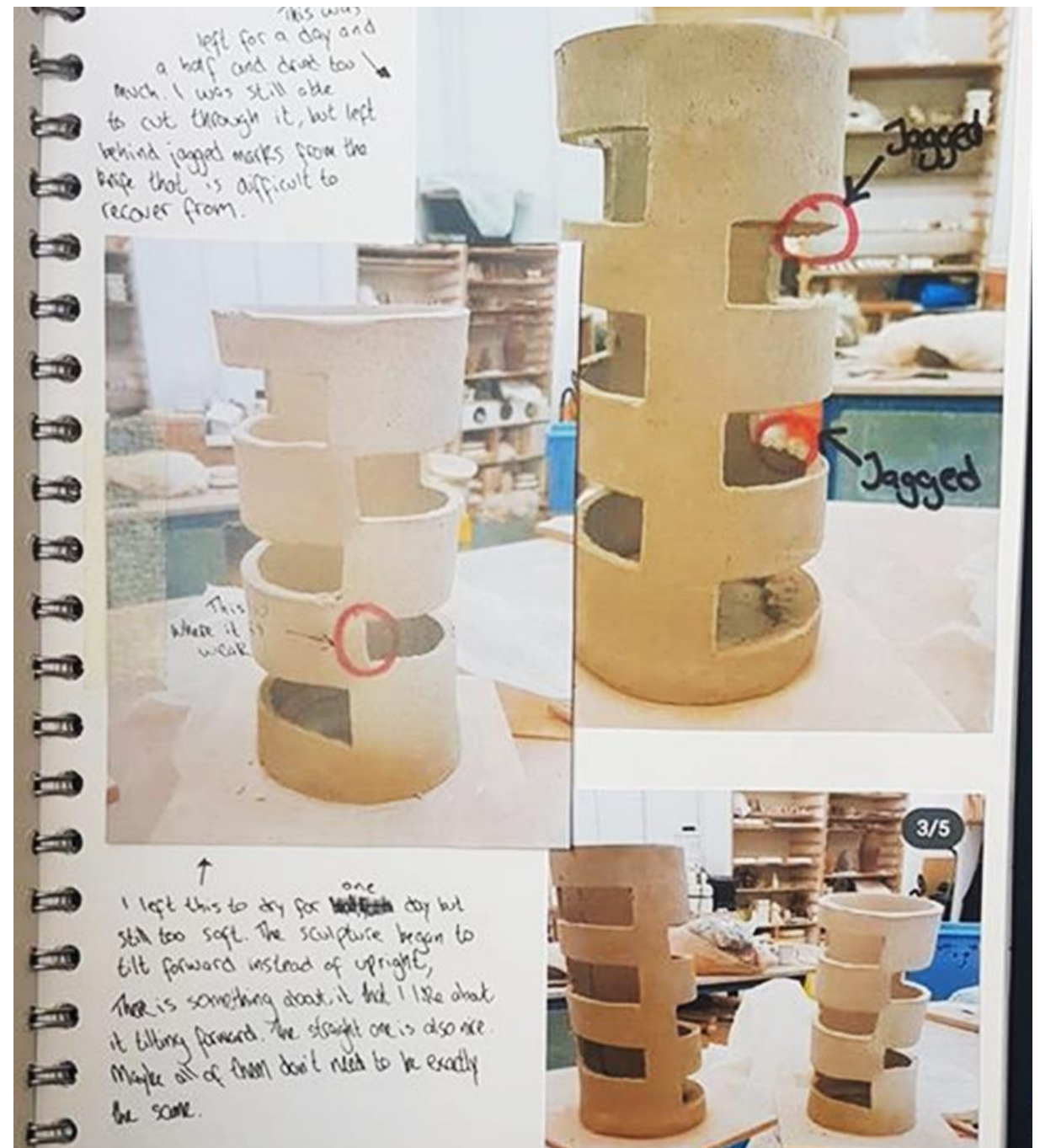
Image 2, [white earth clay], unfired.

## Experiments in the Ceramics Workshop continued

After speaking with the ceramics tutor, he best advised me to create the cylindrical shape and waiting for it to dry for a day or two before cutting the gaps out. This way, the shape won't lose form, however I liked that it bent a little. This way, it gave each and every ribcage its own character.

I was originally working with a 12cm diameter, but soon came to realise that the ivy needed at least a 15cm diameter. I preferred the smaller versions, but it would not work, therefore having to choose the larger designs. There are also different variations of height to, again, give the ribcages character. It is also representing the different forms of mental illness and levels of anxiety in people.

Due to the lockdown, I was forced to abandon the project. I have about 10 sculptures completed still within the studio, but was unable to continue due to no access to materials and the kiln.



## Historical Research of Sculpture



Ewer with three feet,  
China, Shandong province  
about 2500 BC

Unglazed earthenware

Reference- <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/m/masterpieces-of-ceramics-timeline>

This early design of a ceramic vase is inspiring. The vase has a very abstract design at a very early stage of time. With it been left unglazed gives it a natural feature and the imperfect finish it gives that hand-made feel which I really like to see within artworks and present within my own. There is also no carvings or design on the ceramic, giving the same texture at the vessels I have created.

Vessel with two spouts, Peru, Nasca culture

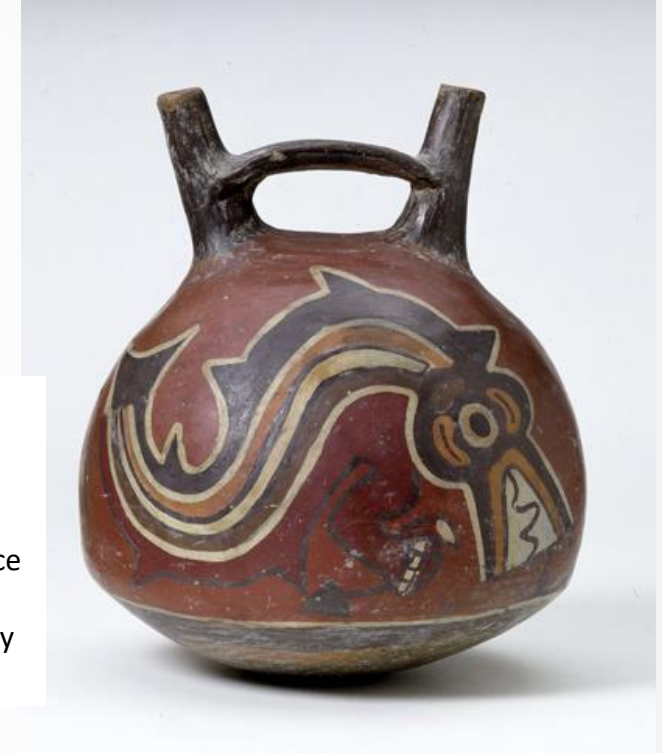
AD 100-400

Unglazed earthenware, painted and burnished before firing

Reference -

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/m/masterpieces-of-ceramics-timeline>

Design is introduced here, yet still no glaze. Although the artist has used mythical creatures as inspiration, it is also a practical piece used in its time. I have not used illustrations within my pieces as I feel like once a print is on a ceramic, it gives a particular story. I would like my viewers to look upon my work and take their own experience from it.



Although there are many different forms of ceramic design since the beginning of time, I have chosen these two to best showcase my thought process.

## Historical Research Continued...



**Michelangelo, David, 1501-1504**

Reference -

<https://www.timeout.com/newyork/art/top-famous-sculptures-of-all-time>

This is a very powerful sculpture using just the human body. Although not using marble, I hoped to give off a similar texture with white clay for my vessels. My sculpture is not of the complete human body, but a small part of it. Clearly throughout history, not just within sculpture, the human figure has been admired from artists to tell a story and to represent many things like strength and power, but also fragility and weakness. Materials and form are key to what emotion they want to enhance.



**The Terracotta Army, 210-209 BC**

Reference - <https://www.timeout.com/newyork/art/top-famous-sculptures-of-all-time>

The use of the human body has been a great importance of strength. With the use of repeated figures helps create a sense of life and movement. As my ribcage design is representing a prison, I aim to have it at this standard; even though the idea is for the ivy to break out of it, giving the ivy a challenge that it will successfully achieve.

# Contemporary Artist Research

Jamie North

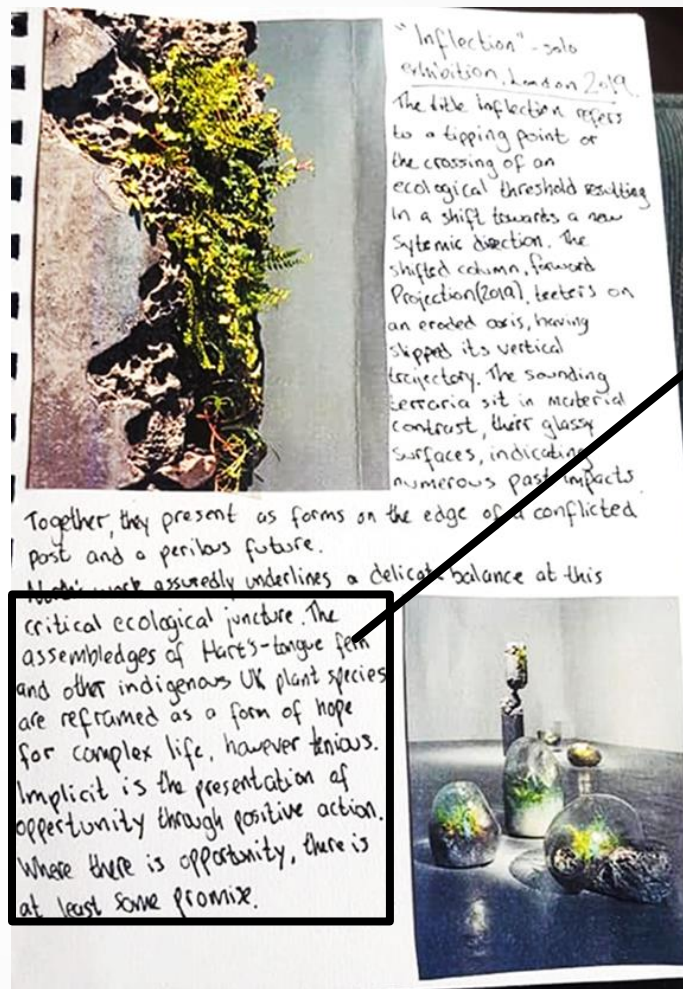
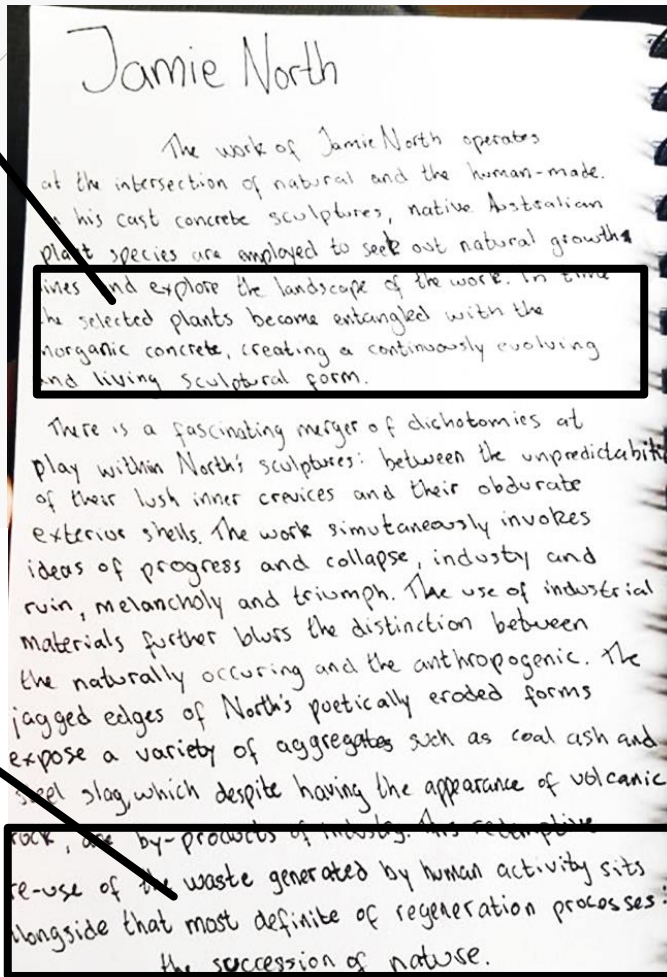
Reference - <https://jamienorth.com/>

*"In time the selected plants become entangles within the inorganic concrete, creating a continuously evolving and living sculptured form."*

I have been interested in the idea of plants becoming entangled with the materials. I am concerned with my work that the ivy plant can grow out and around the form while also being partially restricted.

*"This redemption re-use of the waste generated by human activity sits alongside that of most definite of regeneration processes: the succession of nature."*

I have been interested in the growth of plants for the past few years after seeing ones like moss from on the roof of bus shelters. Where it should be impossible for life to grow, it persists. Although, this is not particularly what my project is, rather trying to restrict the growth.



"The assemblages of Hart's-tongue fern and other indigenous UK plant species are reframed as a form of hope for complex life, however tenuous. Implicitly is the presentation of opportunity through positive action. Where there is opportunity, there is at least some promise."

This is similar to what I would like to achieve with my project. I want there to be a sense of hope with the ivy reaching out of the gaps of the vessel. North brilliantly explains this idea. Where there is opportunity, take the chance to grow and become who you want to be. Do not restrict yourself.

# Contemporary Artist Research continued

## Jamie North

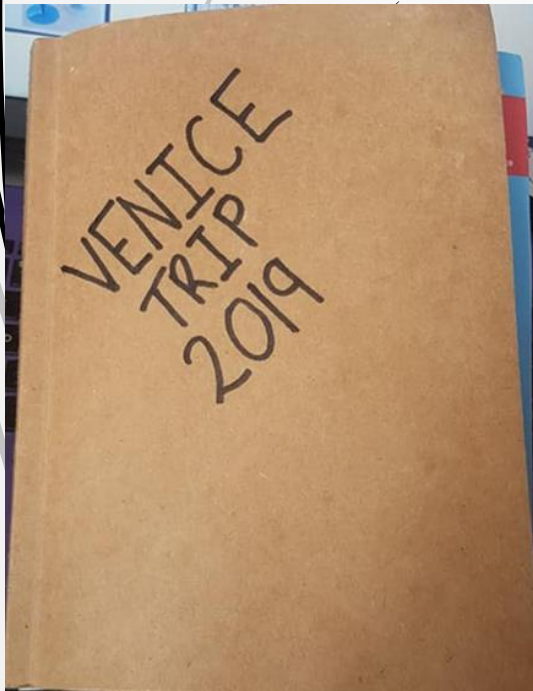
I found Jamie North throughout this project, and I noticed how similarly we work. Where mines are more delicate, he works with harsher materials such as glass and concrete. He cleverly emphasises the sense of growth and freedom in a such a subtle way, in which I would like to achieve. Even during an exhibition, his work is continuing to change as his plants grow. Degree show only last a week, so not much growth will happen with my ivy, but it is something I would like to achieve.



# Contemporary Artist Research continued

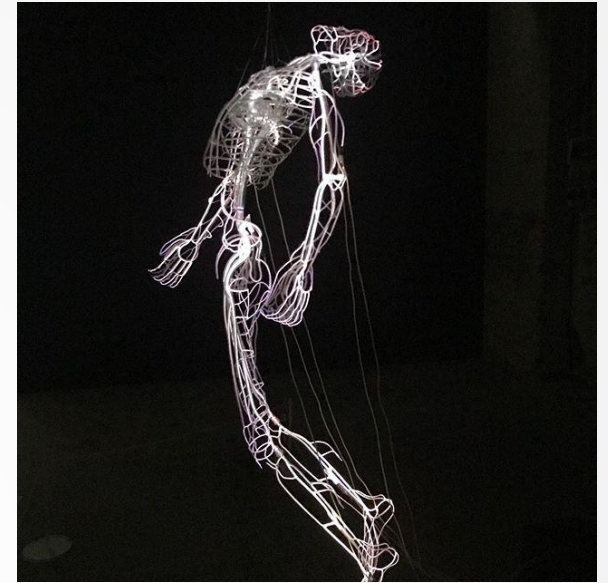
## Venice Study Trip

I was also very fortunate to take part on the Venice Study trip to the Venice Biennale to discover many artists that have helped inspire me to continue with my project. Within the next few slides, I will present how some artists have influenced my studies this year.



**Shilpa Gupta, *For your Tongue I cannot fit*. Sound installation  
Reference – Artist Statement displayed beside the installation at  
the 2019 Venice Biennale**

Although unrelated to my topic, I was inspired how this artist managed to perfectly capture a tense atmosphere with such simple materials. 100 microphones suspended over 100 spikes pieced through a piece of paper with a 14<sup>th</sup> century poem on them. The microphones speak the poem in surround sound to create the illusion of being within a crowd. The voices shift across the space. It was an exhibit I will always remember.



**Tavares Strachan, *Robert*, light and sculpture installation**

Reference:

<https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2019/partecipants/tavares-strachan>

Robert Henry Lawrence Jr. was an astronaut who dies while instructing a flight test trainee learning the steep-descent glide technique. On December 8<sup>th</sup> 1967, he was ejected out of the back seat, horizontally and died on impact. It was 11 years before another African-American was chosen to undergo astronaut training. Mrs Lawrence apparently received many hateful letters after his death saying things like “glad he was dead because now there will be no coons on the moon.”

Although different topics, I was inspired the way he created his bodily sculpture. As stated previous I took this inspiration into my work did not carry on with it.



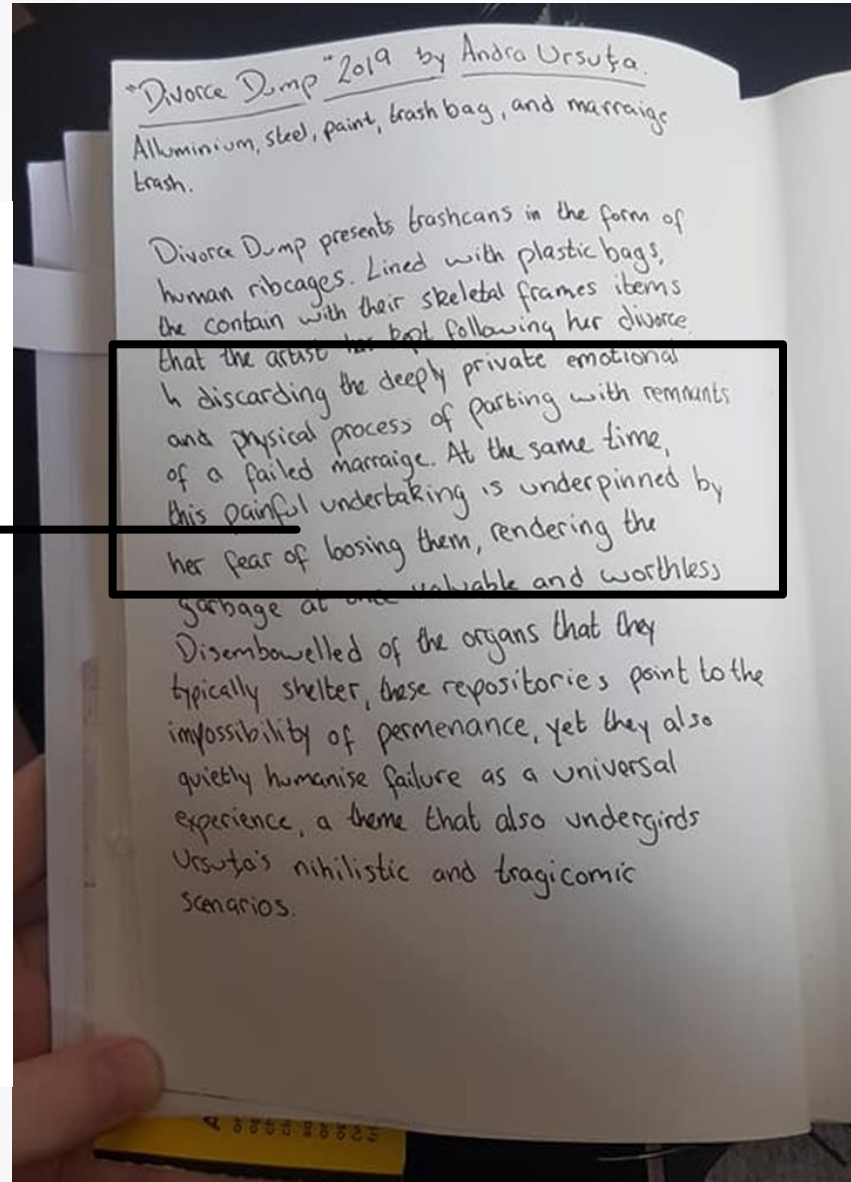
# Contemporary Artist Research continued

## Venice Study Trip

Andra Ursuta, *Divorce Dump*, 2019  
Reference – Artist statement displayed beside the work at the 2019 Venice Biennale

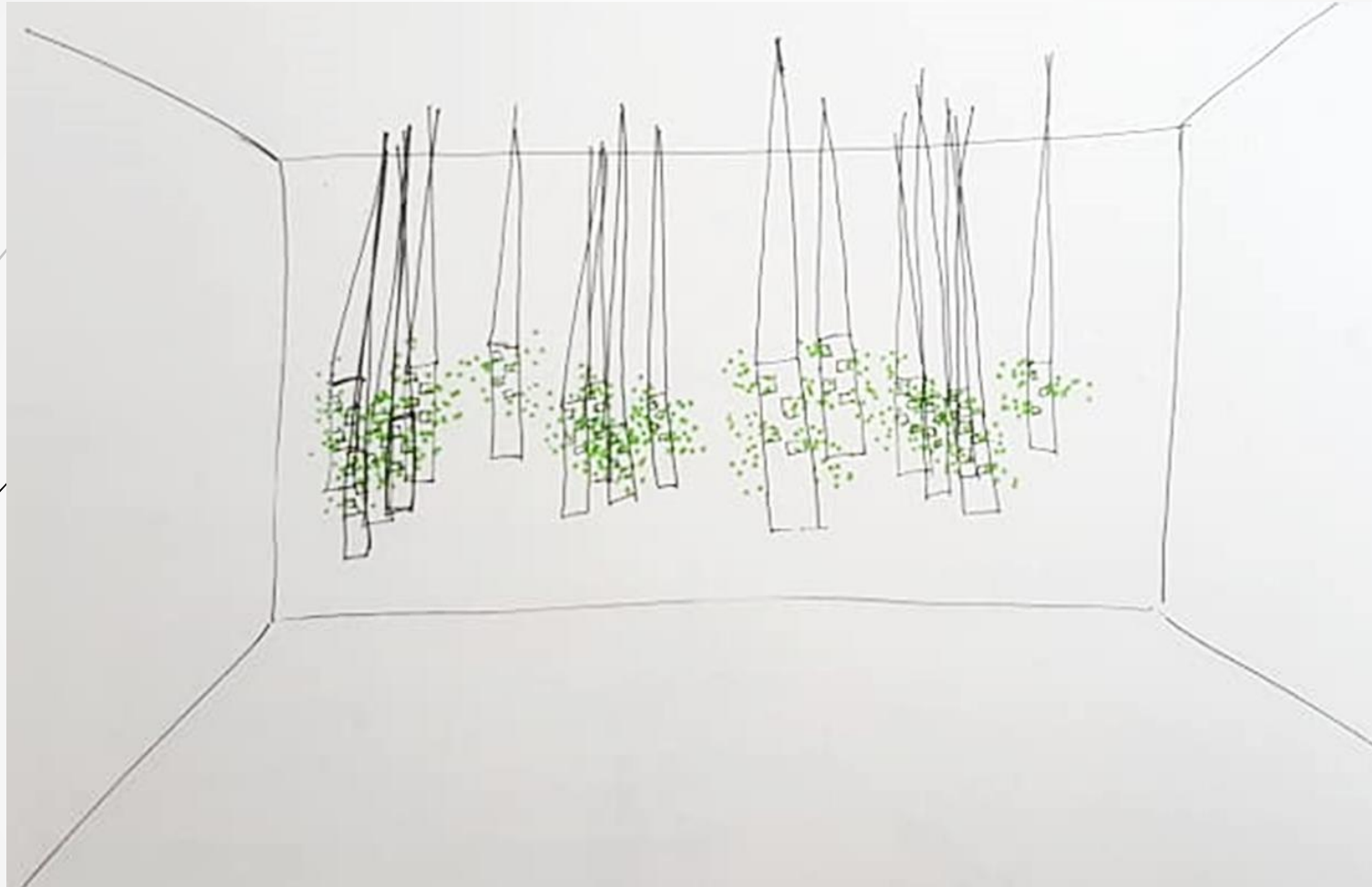
*“In discarding the deeply private emotional and physical process of parting with her remnants of a failed marriage. At the same time, this painful undertaking is underpinned by her fear of losing them...”*

She has used the ribcage as a confinement for her memories and to restrict the items from disappearing from her life, much to the idea of my ribcage. Although I do not wish for the idea to be about the grief of a divorce, the idea of caging items is relevant. She uses her ribcages for a permanence, the opposite of my idea of breaking out. However, I did admire the realistic ribcage, hence I experimented with the form (as mentioned before.)



Ursuta and I have completely different topics, yet still similar. This was concerning as I was worried about what the audience would think of my project. Would they see it as a mental health art project, or something completely different?

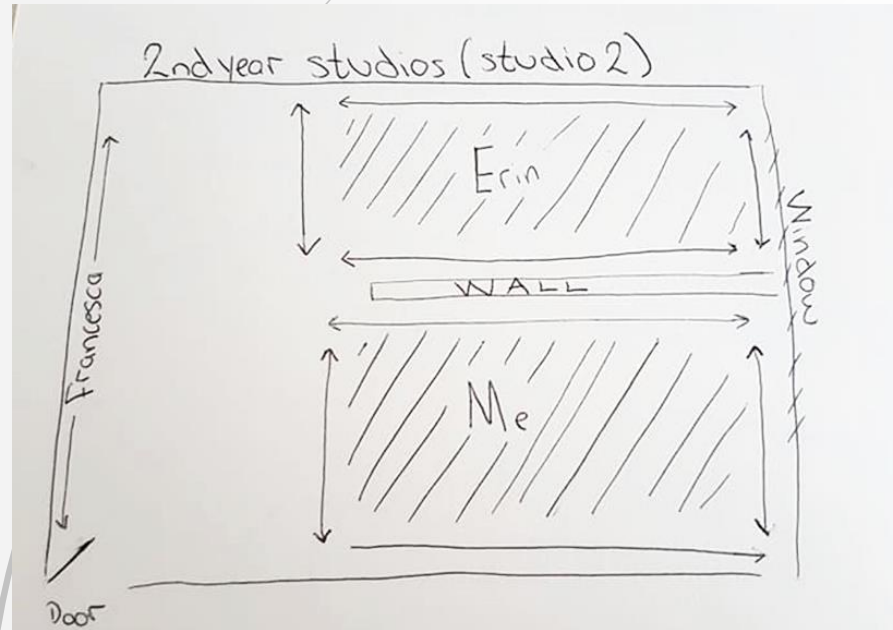
# Plans for Degree Show Exhibition



*Degree Show proposal sketch, [pen on paper], February 2020*

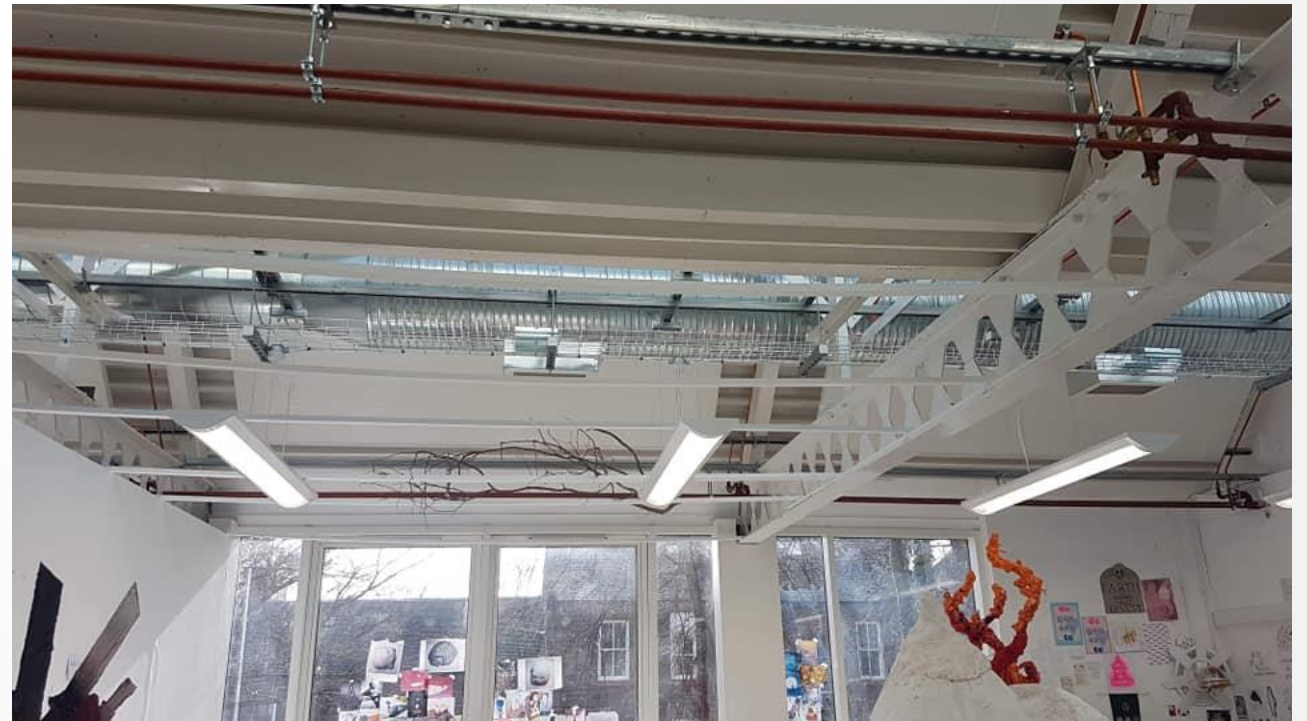
Here is a sketch of what I imagined before being given my degree show space. I wanted the vessels to be scattered across the room. Some are in groups, and some on their own so you can really see the ivy growing and intertwining with each other.

## Plans for Degree Show Exhibition continued



Myself, the DJCAD team and the other students allocated in the studio worked well as a team. Everyone was happy with their placements. After viewing the space I realised there was much more room than I had originally expected and decided more sculptures would be effective and decided to aim for 20 instead of the original 10.

For my degree show proposal, I requested a room with a window so my plants can grow healthily throughout the duration. Studio 2 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year studios was the perfect place for the pieces to hang. The roof was very industrial which I was worried would ruin the image of the ribcages, but after discussing with Alan Grieg and the team, we made plans to place timber across the roof to create a flatter surface.



## Plans for Degree Show Exhibition continued

After viewing the space, I was able to quickly sketch up my vision for the degree show. I liked the idea of the sculptures filling the area but also leaving enough space for the public to walk around them.



The window in studio 2 was south facing, perfect for the ivy to stay healthy. I would have preferred to be in the Crawford building where light shines well, but I am grateful for the full length window as I had asked.

## Plans for Degree Show continued

This was a studio experiment to test how they would suspend under the weight of the clay. For degree show, they would have been hung from the roof but as my studio space roof is high and at a slant, I installed some brackets. They successfully hung without any problems, and I was beginning to see how powerful they stand.

They are very heavy pieces. My worry is that as the ivy continues to grow, it will break under the weight, although it is possible it will act in favour. The ceramics will break from the fall, hence the ivy fully escapes its cage. This is an experiment I was never able to test due to the Covid-19 restrictions.



## Plans for Degree Show Exhibition continued

As this was taken on a mobile phone, you can't really see the little details within the clay (scratches and chips that were made during the creation process). I liked the idea of keeping the imperfections as a sign of fight. The ivy had made an effort to escape from its prison and shouldn't be clean.

I like how you can see a cluster of ivy intertwining with the left and middle. I wonder if this could be a sign of unity. Yet the vessel on the right still has minimum leaves escaping, indicating that it still has a long way to go.

With only 3 sculptures you can see the ideology beginning to come together. Imagine having almost 20 of these hanging in a room together. I can vision this being a very powerful piece about the recovery of mental illness and hope to have the audience relate to it as a positive. The diameters are 15cm, although they range from different heights around 60cm.



*That's Why They Call it a Ribcage*, [White clay and green ripple ivy], installed March 2020