Out of Hours
‘Stitched drawings’ and caring for our older people

‘In the UK, 3.8 older people live alone ... Depression affects 22% of men and 28% of women aged 65 or over.’

Monmouth is an 8000-strong community on the borders of Wales and England. Geography and history funnel you from your wooded drive along the Wye across a solid stone bridge beneath the 1067 Norman fortress, its stones familiar with the ever fluid times and politics in the lives and community nestled at this confluence of water.

Through 20 stitched portraits of older people, and a 13-minute film Thursday Afternoons, Georgie Meadows and Monmouth open their hearts, and rekindle yours, to the stories and vitality that still live beneath the dulled wrinkles and fraying minds of the older population we can struggle to know how to engage with, or care for with local care pathways.

Over recent years so much shame and blame, pointing and pain, has spilled through my radio speakers and over the airwaves in the UK, 3.8 older people live alone ... Depression affects 22% of men and 28% of women aged 65 or over.1

In the Royal United Hospital, Bath, at a pace appropriate for a busy mind whirring with radiology requests and another patient in the emergency department. They slowed me, even if momentarily, as is appropriate for the intense momentary, as is appropriate for the intense study that has gone into creating such a fine set of portraits. The simplicity of the lines helps you to strip away the distracting smell of urine wafting from the residential home chairs, the noisy neighbour, or pressure to have a ‘package answer’ to the concern they are more confused. The majority of patients that inspired Georgie’s art are aging with depression or dementia. The faces are familiar; skilfully carved by creating texture through layered wadding, adding colour to their contours as you would make-up, with dangling threads creating thinning, unkept hair. Some of the pieces create a sense of space and place, such as the lady in her winged chair huddled in the corner.

These pieces of art allow you to look and then touch, in the way you may your sleeping child, or older parent, and then with the next caricature, further down the corridor, letting you look and reach out again. Gradually you notice that within and beside each sketch is a simple story:

‘This woman got a name for being a difficult resident because she wouldn’t join in with the social activities. She had always been ward round the next day his body no longer seemed so stooped. Instead he was sitting proudly as though taking the General’s salute, and as his hand held the throttle of that plane, I held his hand, looking searchingly from above for a tell-tale river, or vein.

Throughout our lives, professional or otherwise, we are vulnerable to closing off to ourselves, and therefore others, in our fight to survive. Unfortunately for our isolated, depressed older population, closing down our imagination and beliefs can leave us feeling that creating or supporting living community systems is naïve idealism or for those in England now legally charged to commission such systems from April 2013, political utopia. Happily, artists such as Georgie, through their ability to stay alive, and communicate to us all through stitch, as Georgie, through their ability to stay alive, and communicate to us all through stitch, or music as demonstrated in Thursday Afternoons, can re-oxygenate our tiredness and innate vision.

Over the Spring of 2013 I scuttled past the pieces that made up Stitched Drawings in the radiology corridor of the Royal United Hospital, Bath, at a pace appropriate for a busy mind whirring with radiology requests and another patient in the emergency department. They slowed me, even if momentarily, as is appropriate for the intense study that has gone into creating such a fine set of portraits. The simplicity of the lines helps you to strip away the distracting smell of urine wafting from the residential home chairs, the noisy neighbour, or pressure to have a ‘package answer’ to the concern they are more confused. The majority of patients that inspired Georgie’s art are aging with depression or dementia. The faces are familiar; skilfully carved by creating texture through layered wadding, adding colour to their contours as you would make-up, with dangling threads creating thinning, unkept hair. Some of the pieces create a sense of space and place, such as the lady in her winged chair huddled in the corner.

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REFERENCES