

Research: Walk 1 and 2

I chose to base my walks at Tower Hamlets cemetery. The location was close to where I live and having visited several times before, I felt there was a lot of interesting visual and historical material to work from.



drawing with
rusty
rainwater

My first walk was primarily to get a feel of the things which interested me and how I would go about researching the cemetery. On reflection, I think my first walk taught me more about what not to draw; I now knew to focus my drawings around the visual research of the cemetery, and found experiences of sound, emotions, temperature, etc better to record by other means, such as voice recordings and writing.



man in the park
who likes the painting
of the girl with the
pearl earring



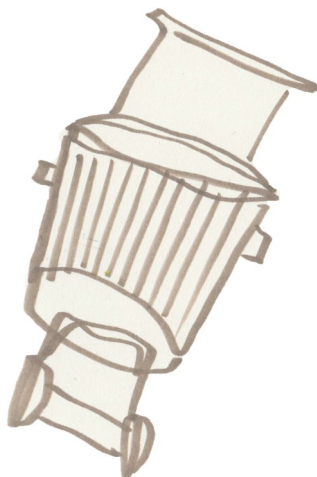
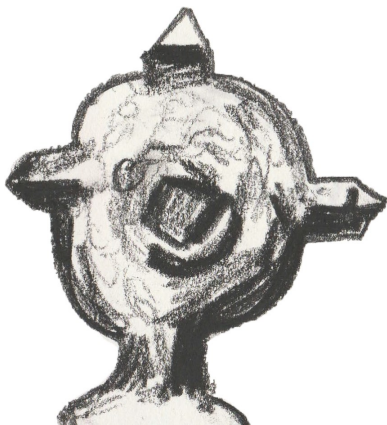
My second walk was a lot more thorough and investigative; I tried to capture both still and moving activity whilst experimenting with different types of drawing materials to express the texture and movement of my subjects. I found brush markers really fluid to capture moving objects, such as the wheelie bin, whilst a fine liner worked well to create detail and explore the shapes and lines of the tree bark. My focus was on articulating the diversity of the cemetery whilst still allowing my sketches to be driven by my curiosity.



"Oi oi Blue
Blue, hey"



"I'm just
watching ya"

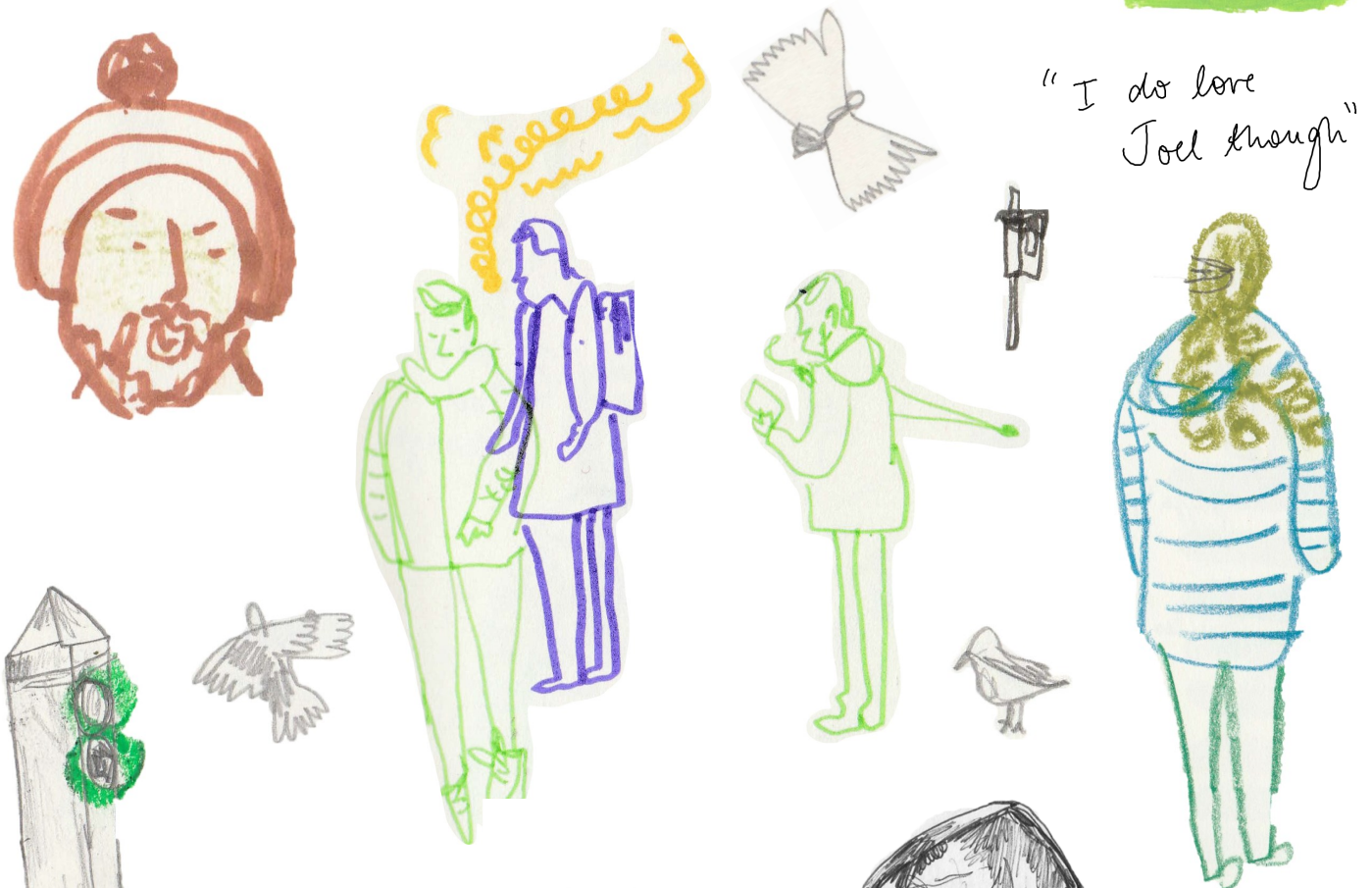
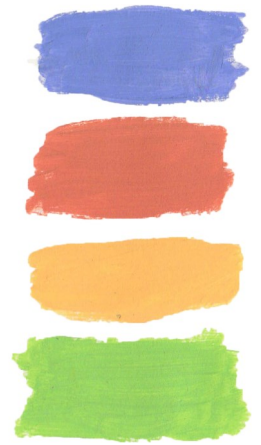


I also made note of phrases and snippets of the conversations of passers by. There was something about the colloquial tongue captioning my illustrations which I really loved; seeing these words written down when they are ordinarily heard was an interesting juxtaposition.

Research: Walk 3 and 4

Using photos from my previous walk, I made some colour palettes to consider different drawing materials to take with me.

On my walk I used the colours of the entry sign to primarily focus on the people. I stayed in the front area of the cemetery for most of the time— this is where there are benches and a field of grass where lots of dog walkers gather. Using these colours to draw with combined a collective and personal experience of the cemetery, an idea I enjoyed. This also challenged me to think beyond the immediate visual colours of my subject.



"I do love
Joel though"



"Why is there so
many crows?"

For walk 4 my aim was to focus on the headstones of the graves. I enjoyed being able to explore their differences, condition, tonal qualities and positions amongst the greenery. Whilst drawing I was on the phone to my brother and I think this really helped to engage my visual focus and capture more detail. I also considered the movement, pace and mood of what I saw, which I depicted in a more abstract way.





"be careful"



mood of...



family walking home from school

~ curious



runner

~ stressed



grave wildlife

~ sad



me couple cycling

~ busy



friends walking

~ calm

~ content



~ happy



Research: Walk 5

For my last walk I explored the art sculpture and continued to pick out interesting features of the gravestones and memorials. I experimented with using coloured pens and oil pastels, particularly enjoying the waxy texture of the pastels which mirrored the texture of the moss. Whilst this was my last walk drawing on location, I did visit a couple more times to gather voice recordings and remind myself of the atmosphere of the cemetery from a broader perspective.

"in a sense, this is
much nicer because people
don't come here as much as
the park"



"She's right, to
be honest"



"I got to see my sister,
so it wasn't a complete
waste of a day."



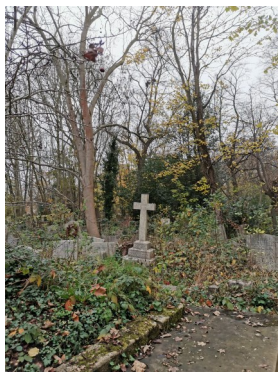
Historical research

Using the internet I researched the history of Tower Hamlets Cemetery to think about the underlying narrative of my sketches and the ways in which I could create more depth and understanding into my final outcome.



Map of the 'Magnificent Seven'

Only 55 years after it was opened it was reported to be in a neglected state. During the Second World War the cemetery was bombed five times during raids on the City of London. Both cemetery chapels were damaged and shrapnel damage can be seen on the graves by the 1994 Soanes Centre in the north-west corner of the park.



Ownership was given to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets council.

In May 2000 it was declared a Local Nature Reserve and has also been designated as Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation and a Conservation area.



- 1841

An Act of Parliament was passed which allowed joint-stock companies to purchase land and set up large cemeteries outside the boundaries of the City of London; these were known as the 'Magnificent Seven'. In 1841 Tower Hamlets Cemetery opened.



1896 -

In 1966 the cemetery became a public park and closed for burials, with over 350,000 people buried here. Amongst the park there was private graves, public graves and catacombs, however the catacombs were filled in 1966 when the cemetery was purchased by the Greater London Council. Eighty percent of people buried here are interred in a public grave and allegedly some graves were dug 40 feet deep and contained up to 30 bodies. Over time gravestones and memorials became missing, damaged, or illegible.

- 1966

1986 -

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park is an independent charity established in 1990 because there were concerns over the increasing neglect by successive owners. The charity's main objective is to encourage greater use of this inner urban green space as a sanctuary for people and a place of biodiversity, and currently provides almost all the care and maintenance of the area.

- 1990

2000 -

- 2020

The cemetery is free to visit by anyone and always remains open.

Something which struck me about the history of the cemetery was how each event built upon the next. I was interested by how distinctly these layers of time were embedded into the physical structure of the park. I decided to structure my final outcome in a similar way to a terrarium in order to demonstrate this idea.

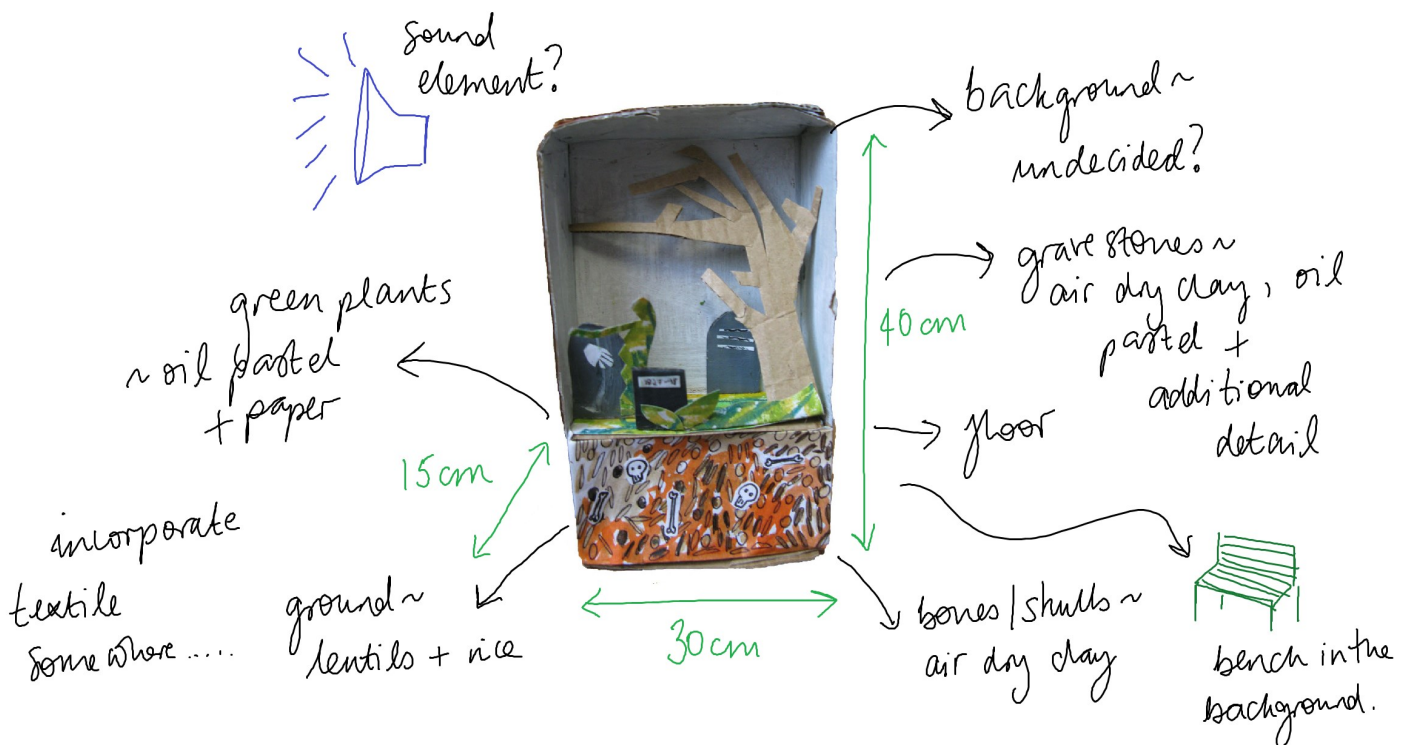
Initial idea

Before creating my initial idea I went for one final walk (without drawing) to help build a larger picture of the cemetery in my head. This visit helped me to relate the history of the cemetery to my surroundings, and I began to form a clearer image of how I would illustrate this.

Prominent features of my experience at the cemetery:

- I didn't miss anything; in a time where everything feels so disconnected and no experience feels whole, this one did. It was something I could do without having to compromise anything and this direct engagement with my surroundings felt so therapeutic when distancing and separation has become the norm. As a result, I wanted my choice of media to express texture and tactility.
- The chaos. There was so little order, structure, or organisation in the cemetery, and this was something I loved. Every place you looked was different to the next, making it easy to get lost. The ability to navigate the area using your own curiosity gave me a sense of comfort and freedom.
- The contrast to the city. As you enter the cemetery the sound of rattling tubes and cars is quickly silenced by the peace of nature and chirp of the birds. The conversations of passers by become distinct and your feet step off the harsh concrete onto a cushion of muddy grass and leaves. The towering buildings become overarching trees, making the space feel safe and contained. This contrast made the cemetery feel invaluable, to the people, nature and wildlife.
- The care and autonomy given back to nature. The work of *Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park* is a beautiful demonstration of humans giving back control to nature and trusting its instinct, creating a space where nature can thrive.

Maquette of final piece



Ground

Developing the first section of my sculpture; illustrating the history and depth of nature within the cemetery.

Initially I considered using actual soil for the ground, however since it took up a third of the piece I wanted to use a material with more intricacy and detail. Using dried grains and beans both replicated the colours and textures of soil whilst drawing upon the idea that the ground nourished and connected the past and present histories of the cemetery.

Exploring different textures and colours



I chose to use red rice and mixed beans because of their muddy colours and diversity of shapes, sizes and textures which further enhanced the feeling of chaos.



I began by sketching images of bones in order to have a greater understanding of their structure before I sculpted them. I chose to use air-dry clay for its dry, chalky texture, however I faced issues with the choice of material when putting the final piece together. Their 3D structure made it difficult to lie them flat against the Perspex and when I used glue to solve this issue, a scratchy, blurry mark was left on the surface. In the end, I decided to draw the bones on card and this material worked a lot better in terms of their positioning against the plastic and within the grains. The black outline also added more definition and clarity to the drawings when the piece was viewed from a distance.



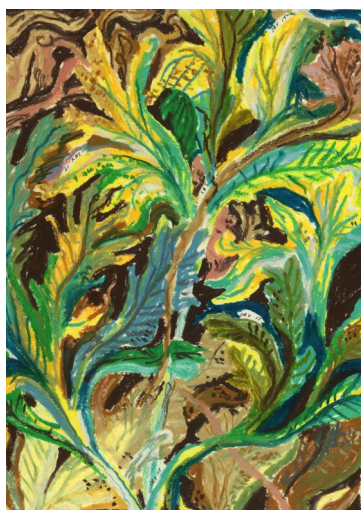
Plants

Exploring the texture, shape and form of the plants in the cemetery. Finding ways to articulate their chaotic and consuming growth, and sense of fragility by being surrounded by a city.

Drawings on location



Untitled, 2020, Molley May



A prominent feature of the cemetery was how the plants took over the space and grew in such an uncontrolled way. In the midst of a city where nature has been replaced by large, structured, manmade buildings, there was something very powerful about this. The way Molley May's illustrations filled the page felt reflective of how the plants consumed the space in the cemetery. I experimented with this idea myself, both by taking inspiration from or directly following the shapes, lines, and colours of my original drawings.





I transformed this idea into a three-dimensional structure by cutting up the paper and threading it together. The use of paper and thread articulated the delicacy and vulnerability of the plants, especially when growing in the centre of a city. The process itself of sewing these shattered pieces of paper back together also made me think of the work of *Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park*, and how they created a thriving space from neglected pieces of history.



Experimentation with thread colour



Graves

A main feature of the graves was how different they all were. The condition and appearance of each one communicated the history of the cemetery, drawing you closer to the past and further away from the speed and immediacy of the surrounding city. Through my choice of materials and use of text, I wanted to illustrate both the collective and personal experience of the cemetery.

Drawing on location



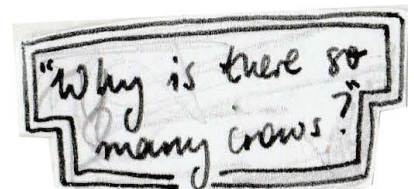
Initial idea



Experimentation with media

I liked the chalky texture created using oil pastel over air dry clay, however found the details engraved in the clay became less clear. As a result I experimented with green oil pastel and ink pen to create a mossy effect and draw attention to the details. Here I used black card for the placard on the grave, but disliked the contrast against the pale grey.

I chose to write the verbatim phrases in my own handwriting to draw upon my personal experience of the cemetery and highlight the conversational tone of the words.



bins

oil pastel



pencil
promarker
ink

Whilst I liked the effect of the oil pastel, I wanted some variation between the headstones. I particularly liked the tonal qualities of the pencil, and found the Promarker useful for additional detail since it was bold and stuck well to the clay.

Experimentation with text and images



In the end I decided to overlay white paper for the text and images on the grave; I found this gave the most clarity to the drawings and complimented the paper plants.

Final outcome



The last decision was how to create a ruined effect on the paper. I firstly tried crumpling it up however found this made the writing difficult to read. Using pencil and oil pastels I created a similar effect whilst also keeping the text legible.

Adding tones of green and black to the headstones also incorporated them better amongst the rest of the scene.

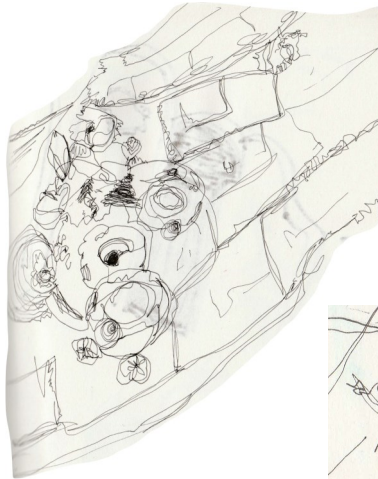
Background

I chose to incorporate illustrations of movement, mood and pace into the background of the miniature scene to convey the significance and all-encompassing nature of these ideas. Inspired by the artist El Anatsui, I used textiles to communicate this.

Drawing from location



Cold hands drawing
free bark



peaceful



growing

cold



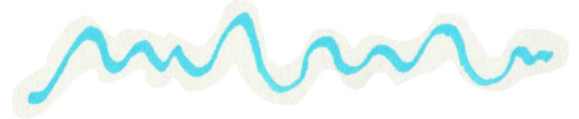
Sage,
enclosed
space



movement of a runner



movement of a walker



movement of someone sitting



movement of a cyclist



'Stressed World', 2011, El Anatsui



'[I am interested in textile because it is] Always in motion. Anytime you touch something, there is bound to be a change. The idea of a sheet that you can shape and reshape. It can be on the floor, it can be up on the ceiling, it can be up on the wall, all that fluidity is behind the concept.'

This quote heavily inspired my work for the background of the cemetery. With people always passing and the scene constantly changing, movement was a prominent feature of my walks.

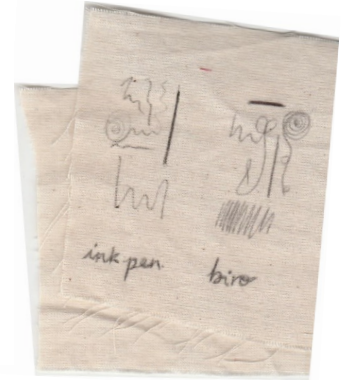
Experimentation



Sewing through textured paper



Felt cut outs



Pen on fabric



Different settings on the sewing machine

Development



Using the felt I wanted to replicate the soft ground of the cemetery. Whilst the texture was reminiscent of my experiences, using solely this material felt cliché when working with images of nature. As a result I experimented with using felt tip, oil pastel, ink and biro on cream calico and enjoyed the scratchiness and spectrum of colours created. I further developed this by combining the materials from both testers and overlaying all my ideas. My aim for the final piece was for all the shapes, lines, colours and materials to work together but for the chaos of it all to intrigue the viewer to specific details. I exhausted almost every material I had to hand and expanded the use of the colour even further. The process of making the background was probably the most enjoyable part of the project; I wanted to stop at every moment and admire each mark for itself yet also I wanted to carry on forever until there was not a new mark to be made. I took photos at different stages in order to not overwork the piece and observe the composition as a whole.

Further inspired by El Anatsui, I puckered the fabric before gluing it to the inside of the box. I felt this enhanced the feeling of movement and overarched the scene below similar to how the trees did in the cemetery.



Final Outcome

The piecing together of the final sculpture and experimenting with animation.



Originally I positioned the larger graves at the front and smaller ones behind to create a sense of depth. However, I found the larger graves obstructed the view and the layout felt too forced. The new structure was more spontaneous and gave visibility to the smaller graves; I particularly liked how they clustered together to the left. I also think the lack of consistent perspective gave light to the multiple perspectives and experiences of the cemetery.



Something which really struck me about the history of the cemetery was how prominent people were to its development, both physically and emotionally. In order to articulate this I positioned the bench in the right corner because it reminded me of where a narrator sits on a stage set.



On reflection, this project taught me about the importance of research and method. Drawing from location continuously and as a means of research was not something I had done before; I found it taught me the importance of exploring the subject first-hand, along with being a process I thoroughly enjoyed. Additionally, I think the method of creation can both articulate another layer of meaning to the piece, drawing upon the ideas which are less visually distinct. For instance, building the sculpture vertically emphasised the layers of history within the cemetery and sewing the shattered plants together reminded me of the work of *Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park*.



My final outcome felt a lot like a miniature stage set, and I was excited to see the scene come alive. Using stop-motion animation I experimented with this idea– the testers and final video can be viewed here:

Short: <https://vimeo.com/user131317591/review/500903557/dc676a4ade>, <https://vimeo.com/user131317591/review/500903433/70221e3210>

Final: <https://vimeo.com/user131317591/review/500902606/af12be0f33>



Bibliography

- Artnet.com. 2021. *El Anatsui* | *Artnet*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.artnet.com/artists/el-anatsui/>> [Accessed 28 November 2020].
- En.wikipedia.org. 2021. *Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park*. [online] Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_Hamlets_Cemetery_Park> [Accessed 6 December 2020].
- Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. 2021. *Home - Friends Of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park*. [online] Available at: <<https://fothcp.org/>> [Accessed 6 December 2020].
- May, M., 2021. *Molley May Instagram*. [online] Instagram.com. Available at: <<https://www.instagram.com/molley.may/?hl=en>> [Accessed 2 January 2021].
- Medium. 2021. *Get Creative At Home: Turning Scraps Into Sculptures With El Anatsui*. [online] Available at: <<https://medium.com/high-museum-of-art/get-creative-at-home-turning-scraps-into-sculptures-with-el-anatsui-999609913eb0>> [Accessed 28 November 2020].
- Molley May. 2021. *Molley May-Drawing*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.molleymay.com/drawing>> [Accessed 2 January 2021].
- Octobergallery.co.uk. 2021. *OCTOBER GALLERY: EL ANATSUI*. [online] Available at: <<https://octobergallery.co.uk/artists/anatsui>> [Accessed 28 November 2020].
- Tate. 2021. *Who Is El Anatsui?* | *Tate*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/el-anatsui-17306/who-is-el-anatsui>> [Accessed 28 November 2020].