

# Part I

## Visual Images of Death, Dying and Disposal

Death is universal and concerns everybody, but the way it is understood changes across time and space. Ideas about death can be expressed in different ways, and some of these different forms of expression can be seen in the collection of pieces within this anthology. Part I begins by offering a selection of visual images of death, dying and disposal. These images range from representations of death and dying in fine art to (amongst others) documentary and more contemporary photography.

Visual representations of death, dying and disposal can be challenging, as well as evocative. For example, death can be represented in the news media as something shocking or sensational; in literature as something dramatic or romantic; in films as tragic or violent; and, in art, all of these meanings can be found.

Some of the images presented here have been reproduced with kind permission, whereas others are printed for the first time. The viewer is left to engage with, and interpret, the images, some of which will inevitably resonate with personal meanings. It is this mixture of private emotions and public image that makes representations both powerfully symbolic and emotionally stirring. More than this, however, the images of death and dying in contemporary society both reflect and shape the relationship that its citizens have with death and dying.

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*Afghanistan Woman*

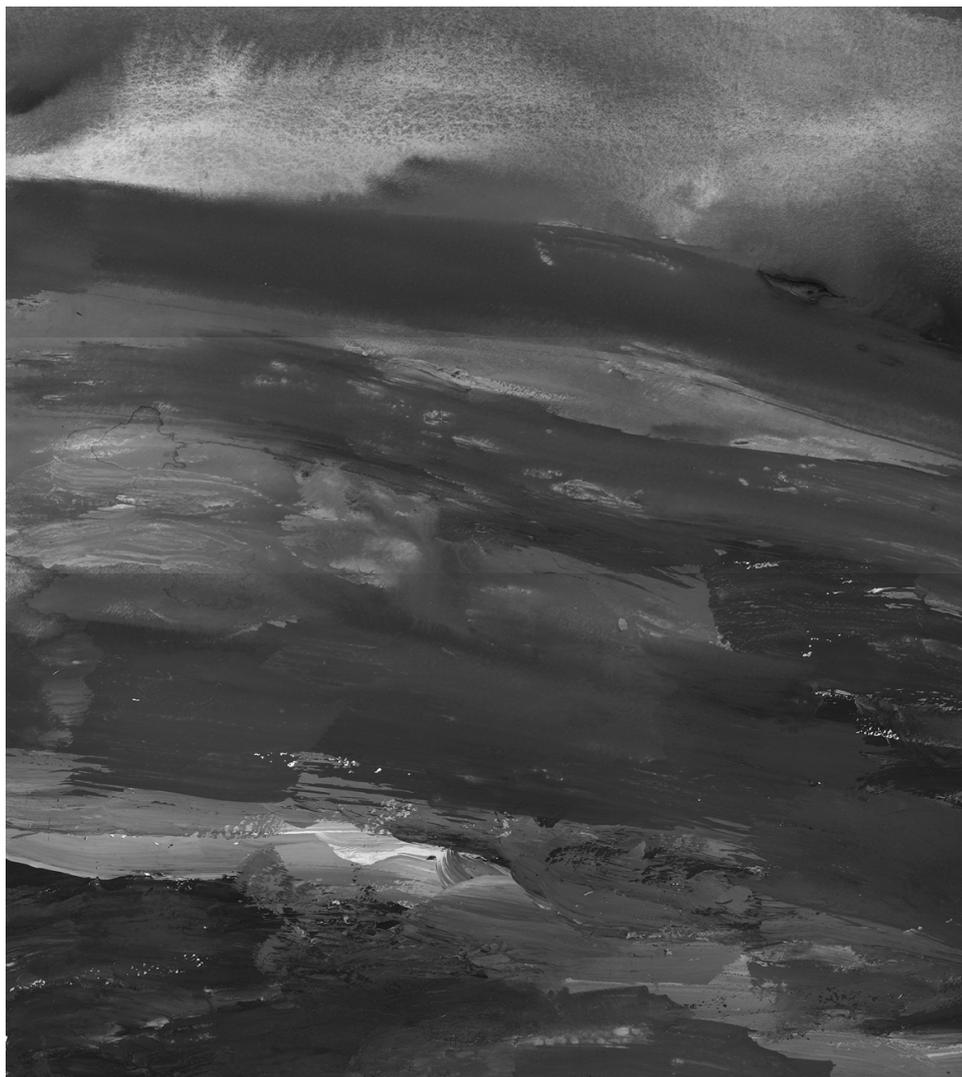
**A painting created as part of an 'Arts for Life' project, enabling people coming to the end of life to tell their story. Courtesy of St Christopher's Hospice, Sydenham, Kent.**



*Sunrise*

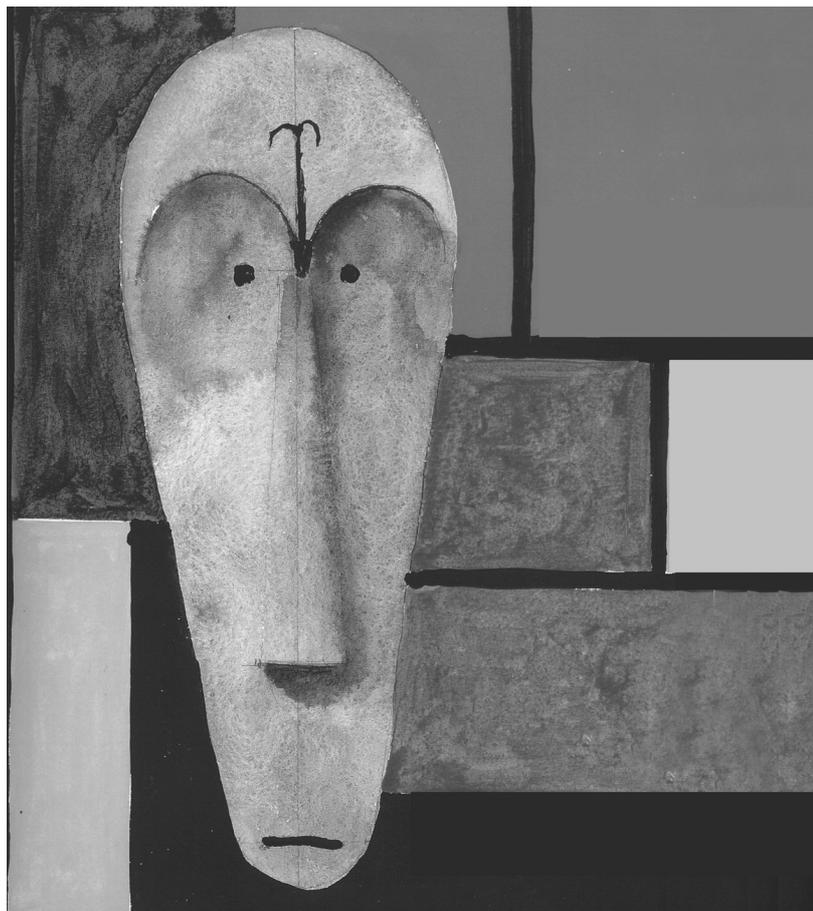
**A painting created as part of an 'Arts for Life' project, enabling people coming to the end of life to tell their story. Courtesy of St Christopher's Hospice.**

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*Purple Planet*

**A painting created as part of an 'Arts for Life' project, enabling people coming to the end of life to tell their story. Courtesy of St Christopher's Hospice.**



*Mask*

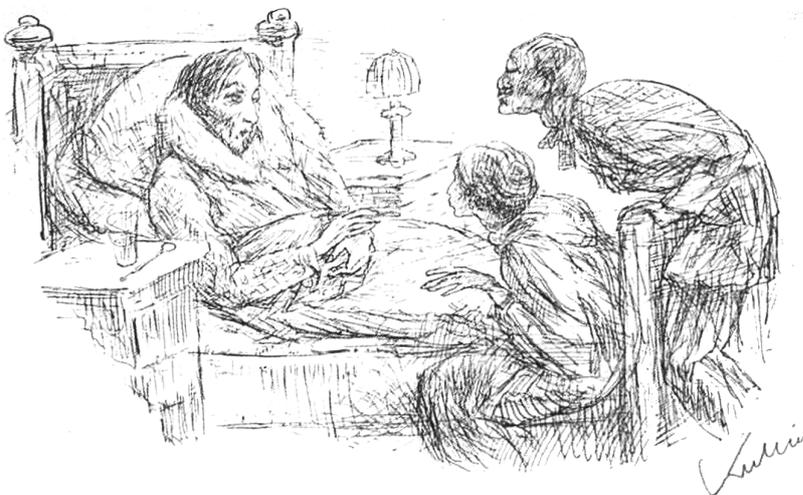
**A painting created as part of an 'Arts for Life' project, enabling people coming to the end of life to tell their story. Courtesy of St Christopher's Hospice.**

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*A woman and a boy visiting a man in hospital, woodcut by Käthe Kollwitz*

Throughout the twentieth century, hospitals became an increasingly common place for death. Kollwitz's woodcut reflects this trend as well as the nineteenth-century artistic use of 'death art' to explore family relationships.



*A deathbed scene, etching by Alfred Kubin*

The nineteenth century witnessed a shift in social trends from the custom of visiting the dying to that of viewing the person after death, with the former being reserved predominantly for close family.



*Mila (Banjica, Bosnia & Herzegovina)*

From the Clothes for Death series, © Margareta Kern 2007



*Liza (Donja Vrba, Croatia)*

From the Clothes for Death series, © Margareta Kern 2007

## Margareta Kern: Clothes for Death\*

Clothes for Death (Odjeca za Smrt) is a research-based art project documenting women in Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina who prepare the clothes in which they wish to be buried (see photos 7 and 8). I started the project with an initial journey in Autumn 2006, and my current journey started on the 15 March 2007. The project is funded by Arts Council England.

### Saturday, 31 March 2007

I always leave to the women to arrange how they want to present the clothes; it is their personal choice how they spread it out and nearly everyone immediately has their own notion of how they like it to be arranged for photographing.

### Tuesday, 3 April 2007

I am struck by the way women keep their pieces of clothing: wrapped in a sheet, or in travel bags, plastic bags, suitcases ... One of the women, Jovana, who is 97 years old, pulled out a dusty old suitcase from underneath the bed and inside it was a floral dress, long woolen socks (which she probably knitted), petticoat and many family photographs. It was as though she was preparing for a journey and needed to be ready at any moment ...

The Orthodox priest told me that in his view, the custom of preparing clothes for death (or funeral, as some also say) comes from the tradition of preparing one's best suit or a dress for the Sunday mass and preparing for the meeting with God. A person needed to be ready and in 'Sunday's best' when meeting God ...

This stayed with me and I think he has definitely touched on some of the religious background to this still mysterious custom. It has also made me think about the connection between fashion and religion ...

\*This is an edited extract of Margareta Kern's blog on [www.a-n.co.uk/projects](http://www.a-n.co.uk/projects) unedited.

D. Cert.  
R.B.D.



CAUTION—It is an offence to falsify a certificate or to make or knowingly use a false certificate or a copy of a false certificate intending it to be accepted as genuine to the prejudice of any person, or to possess a certificate knowing it to be false without lawful authority.

**CERTIFIED COPY  
Pursuant to the Births and  
Deaths Registration Act 1953**

DEATH		Entry No. <b>231</b>
Registration district <b>Hove,</b> Sub-district <b>Hove,</b>		Administrative area <b>County of East Sussex.</b>
1. Date and place of death <b>Eleventh February, 1988</b> <b>39, Wilbury Villas,</b>		
2. Name and surname <b>Minnie WALSOM</b>		3. Sex <b>Female</b> 4. Maiden surname of woman who has married <b>FIELD</b>
5. Date and place of birth <b>5th December, 1911</b> <b>Tottenham, Haringey, London.</b>		
6. Occupation and usual address <b>Widow of Charles Walsom</b> <b>Accountant</b> <b>39 Wilbury Villas, Hove, East Sussex.</b>		
7. (a) Name and surname of informant <b>Ann Brodie SHARP</b>		(b) Qualification <b>Daughter</b>
(c) Usual address <b>Pigwidge Cottage, Bourne Road, Hove, East Sussex.</b>		
8. Cause of death <b>(a) Myocardial Infarction.</b> <b>(b) Ischaemic Heart Disease.</b> <b>(c) Diabetes Mellitus.</b> <b>Certified by Paul Daly, M.B.</b>		
9. I certify that the particulars above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. <b>A. Brodie</b> Signature of informant		
10. Date of registration <b>20th February 1988</b>		11. Signature of registrar <b>J. Walsom</b> Registrar

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody.

**J. Walsom** Registrar **12 February** Date **1Z 181505**  
**1988**

**A death certificate**

**Certificate of death for Minnie Walsom who died on 11 February 1988. Courtesy of Ann Brodie.**

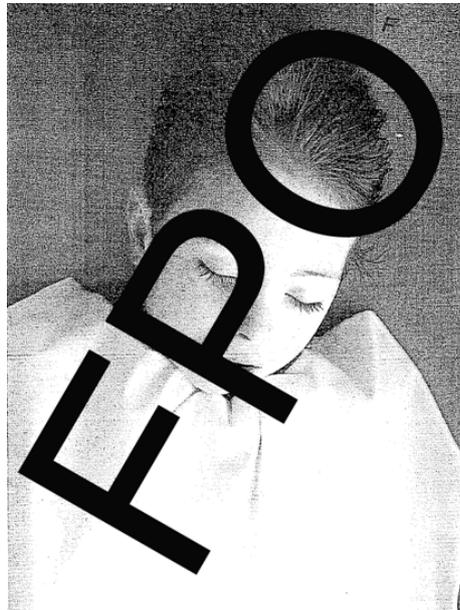
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***The Death of Chatterton, oil on canvas***

**A painting by Henry Wallis of the Romantic English poet Thomas Chatterton, who died at the age of 17.**

*Source:* Wallis, H. (1856) *Chatterton*, oil on canvas, The Tate Gallery, London.



***Dead face of a girl***

**A post-mortem photograph taken in the pathological Institute of Charité, Berlin.**

*Source:* Schäfer, R. (1989) Dead faces in *Granta (Death)*, 27, Summer, pp. 193–210.



***Dead face of a man***

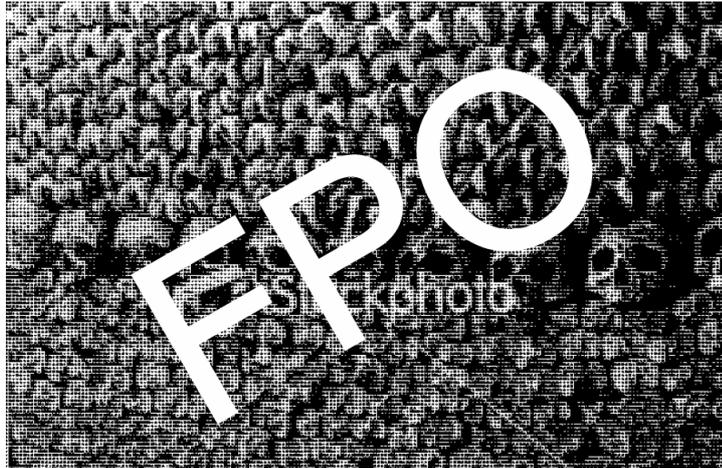
**A post-mortem photograph taken in the Pathological Institute of Charité, Berlin.**

*Source:* Schäfer, R. (1989) Dead faces in *Granta (Death)*, 27, Summer, pp. 193–210.



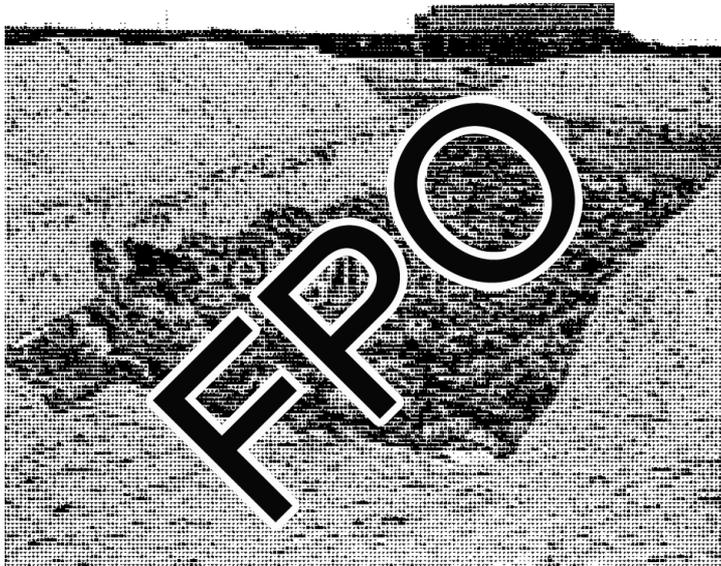
*The Dissection of a Beautiful Young Woman Directed by J.Ch.G. Lucae (1814–1885),  
chalk drawing by J.H. Hasselhorst, 1864*

The drawing depicts the dissection of an 18-year-old suicide victim, selected for her 'attractive proportions'. The object of the dissection was to determine the 'ideal proportions' of the female body. During the nineteenth century, young dead bodies were celebrated as objects of desire (see also A. Davidsson Bremborg in Part III, pp. xxx).



*Human bones in Paris catacombs*

In 1785, human remains were exhumed from the overflowing cemeteries in Paris and the bones relocated in the tunnels of disused quarries. Parts of the catacombs are open to the public.



*Mass grave, Belsen*

April 1945: View of emaciated bodies heaped on top of one another in one of the mass graves at the Belsen concentration camp, after the camp was liberated during the advance of the British 2nd Army in World War II, Belsen, Germany (see also C. Komaromy in Part VI, pp. xxx).

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*Abandoned grave*

Inscription reads: 'Vicente Perez Ruiz, 30 September 1994, 70 years, your wife, children, grandchildren and family will not forget you', Cementerio de San José, La Línca de la Concepción, Spain. © Joe Earle



*Roadside memorial, Avenida España, Cadiz, Spain*

Roadside memorial commemorates the life of a young woman. © Joe Earle



*Roadside memorial, Groveway, Milton Keynes, UK*

**Memorial to a motor cyclist killed at a road junction. © Caroline Bartholomew**



#### *Roadside memorials and the public health*

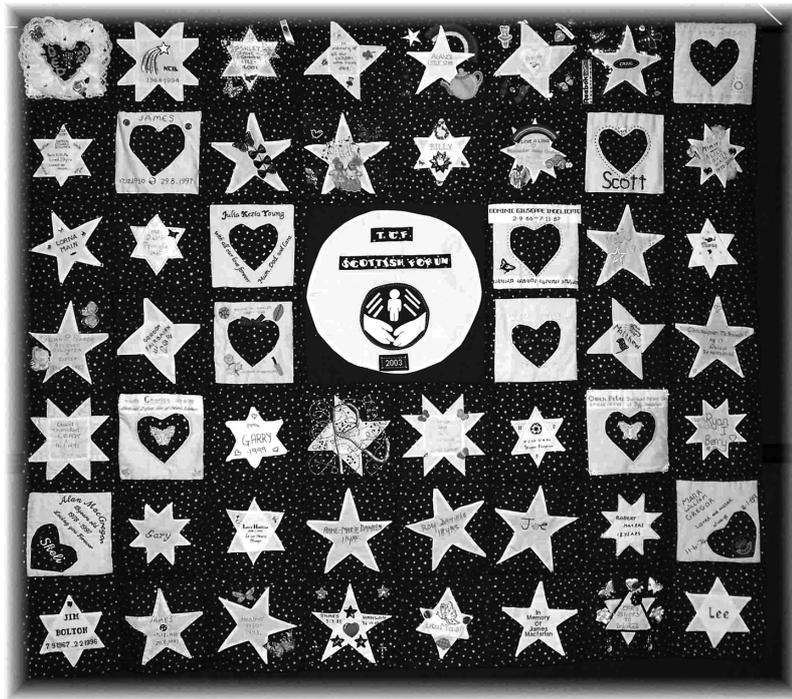
**In New Mexico the state has embraced the practice of roadside memorialisation, using it in official drink-driving messages. © Bob Bednar 2004**

### Making Space on the Side of the Road

The first few times I stopped at memorials, I felt horribly self-conscious, almost shameful. If you have ever stopped at a stranger's memorial, you'll know what I mean. If you haven't, I hope some day you will. You feel as though you have been suddenly transported into a stranger's bedroom, and there are people watching you look through other people's stuff. There I am on the side of the road looking at, photographing, and sometimes touching the intimately symbolic objects of a person's life, and I don't know who they are or how they lived or how they died.

Any yet, these are not bedrooms, or even living rooms, but spaces on the side of the road visible to all who drive by.

Whatever else we might see communicated by the memorials, one thing rings through clearly: that the people who attach crosses and flowers to fences and trees and guardrails and build grottoes and shrines along the right of way think that they have the right to do so – think that there is room for them (or at least *should* be room for them) in public space. In some states – Texas, for instance – it is illegal to construct and maintain a roadside memorial, but in New Mexico the state has embraced the practice, using it in billboards and other official public media DWI (driving whilst intoxicated) messages (see also A. Árnarson, Part V, pp. xxx).



*Memorial Quilt, Scotland 2004*

**A few years ago, Ruby Henderson and Gilly Thomson decided it would be good to produce a Scottish TCF quilt which was different from the 'butterfly' quilts of the UK. Inspiration came from the Eskimo legend of the stars: "Perhaps they are not the stars. But rather openings in the heavens where the love of our lost ones pours through. And shines down upon us to let us know they are happy". We were both touched by the way each square was individualised for their child, just as each of our children is different.' – Gilly and Ruby. Courtesy of The Compassionate Friends(TCF), an organisation of bereaved parents and their families.**

