



A lens on sustainability

Series 2

0:00

Episode 4: Mortality

Can photography help process mortality? Throughout history, humans have been obsessed with eternal life. But death is inevitable, a natural part of life. Photography helps us process our own mortality and remember those who are gone. It reminds us of the natural cycles of life, which we must sustain for future generations.

Host



Rosario Lebrija Rassvetaieff is Group New Media and Sponsoring Manager at the Pictet Group, where she hosts and produces the podcasts 'Found in Conversation' and 'Prix Pictet: A lens on sustainability'. Born and raised in Mexico City, she holds a combined honours BA in Literature and International Relations (First Class) from the University of Southampton and an MSc in Communication and Media Studies (Distinction) from the London School of Economics. For more information, watch her TEDx talk 'The Future of the Image: Discover the Sublime'.

Photographers



Joana Choumali, born in 1974, lives and works in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. She studied graphic arts in Casablanca, Morocco, and worked as an art director in an advertising agency before embarking on her photography career. Her work concentrates on conceptual portraits, mixed media and documentary photography with a particular focus on Africa. In her latest work, Choumali embroiders directly onto her images, completing the act of creating the photograph image with a slow and meditative gesture. Choumali has exhibited her work at the Museum of Civilisations, Abidjan; Vitra Design Museum, Basel; Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden, Marrakech; Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam; Bamako Encounters Photography Biennial; Photoquai Biennial, Paris; Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, Cape Town among others. In 2014, Choumali won the CAP Prize for Contemporary African Photography and the 2014 LensCulture Emerging Talents Award. In 2016, she received the Magnum Foundation Emergency Grant and the Fourthwall Books Photobook Award in South Africa. In 2017, she exhibited her series Translation and Adorn at the Pavilion of Côte d'Ivoire during the Venice Biennale. Her work has been published in the international press including CNN; The New York Times; Le Monde; The Guardian; The Huffington Post; La Stampa among others. Her book Hââbré was published in Johannesburg in 2016.

Interview



Esther Freud was born in London in 1963. As a young child she travelled through Morocco with her mother and sister, returning to England aged six where she attended a Rudolf Steiner school in Sussex. In 1979 she moved to London to study Drama, going on to work as an actress, both in theatre and television.

Her first novel Hideous Kinky, was published in 1992 and was shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and made into a film starring Kate Winslet. In 1993, after the publication of her second novel, Peerless Flats, she was named by Granta as one of the Best of Young Novelists under 40.

She has since written seven novels, including The Sea House, Love Falls, Lucky Break and most recently Mr Mac & Me. She also writes stories, articles and travel pieces for newspapers and magazines, and teaches creative writing, in her own local group and at the Faber Academy.



Julia Hobsbawm is a writer, speaker, entrepreneur, and strategist who focuses on social health and simplicity in a complex age. Focused on solutions to complexity, she the founder Editorial Intelligence, a network and content creation company, and author of multiple books, including The Simplicity Principle. She was awarded an OBE for Services to Business in 2015 and writes and teaches on workplace social health.

Panel



Kirsty Lang, born July 1962, is a British journalist and broadcaster who works for BBC Radio and Television. Earlier in her career, she was on the staff of The Sunday Times and Channel 4 News, working as a presenter and reporter. Lang was a visiting professor at Columbia University in New York. She chairs the Board of the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Arts in Gateshead and since 2014 has been on the board of the British Council.



Professor Iain Hutchison treats patients with diseases, deformity and injuries affecting the most socially important part of our bodies – the face. He leads groundbreaking national and international research on facial disease and injury prevention and treatment through the charity Saving Faces (www.savingfaces.co.uk) and its research partner, the world's only National Facial, Oral and Oculoplastic Research Centre (www.nforc.co.uk). He created and funded the Saving Faces Art Project, with the artist Mark Gilbert, charting the physical and emotional journey of facial surgery patients. It has had a dramatic effect on the public and been cathartic for patients. The paintings tour galleries worldwide and have been seen by over 2 million people.



Joana Choumali is announced the winner of Prix Pictet 'Hope' at the Victoria and Albert Museum (left to right: Isabelle von Ribbentrop, Joana Choumali, Ivan Pictet, Tristram Hunt, Rosario Lebrija Rassvetaieff, Stephen Barber).

"I think it was the most powerful moment of my professional life. I still cannot express how I felt in that moment." **Joana Choumali**

5:13



Joana Choumali, *Ça va aller*, 2019 © Joana Choumali

“Most of my work is linked to the idea of identity. I am very interested in how humans interact with each other, how cultures collide and complement each other. What makes us human?” **Joana Choumali**

6:17



Joana Choumali, *Ça va aller*, 2019 © Joana Choumali

“Ça va aller translates to ‘its going to be ok’ in French. It’s a very common expression in Cote d’Ivoire that is used when you don’t know what to say or don’t want to say anymore.” **Joana Choumali**

7:28



Joana Choumali, *Albahian*, 2019 © Joana Choumali

“I could feel in my soul that this was a wounded city, a mourning one, and I could feel the invisibility of death.” **Joana Choumali**

9:08



Joana Choumali, *Albahian*, 2020 © Joana Choumali

“I certainly believe that both sides, light and dark, coexist. Most of the time people want to pick to always be happy and to always feel good, but actually it takes being in a very dark place, or a very difficult and painful place, to really experience what it is to be happy and feel good.” **Joana Choumali**

10:55



Mark Gilbert, Mazeeda B. (before operation), *Saving Faces*, 1999 ©
Courtesy of Saving Faces



Mark Gilbert, Mazeeda B. (after operation), *Saving Faces*, 1999 ©
Courtesy of Saving Faces

Mazeeda was born in 1995 with a small tumour on the right-side of her face. This was originally thought to be a benign tumour but over the course of the first two years of her life it grew rapidly in size to cause an horrendous swelling on the right-side of her face, which progressed up behind her right eye, pushing it out (proptosis) and compressing the nerve at the back, making her permanently blind in this eye. This was found to be a malignant yolk-sac tumour and she was initially treated with chemotherapy. The first painting shows Mazeeda after chemotherapy but before surgery. You can see that at the age of nearly 3 she is unable to close her mouth and is dribbling because of the swelling not only on the outside but also on the inside. She is also unable to swallow so she's being fed through the nasogastric tube. This swelling will soon affect her ability to breathe. The only possibility for saving her life is surgery.

Following this state, she underwent surgery through an incision just in front of her right ear and into her right neck. The malignant tumour was removed from her right eye socket, right upper jaw and right lower jaw in 1998. The facial nerve running next to the tumour had to be preserved so that she could still move her facial muscles and smile and frown and close her eyes. The chemotherapy before surgery helped because it shrunk the tumour from little cells spread out throughout her face to a single lump which could be seen and felt and removed in its entirety. This improved the chances of curing her.

After her operation her parents dressed her for the portrait sitting wearing this beautiful green dress. It was the first full-length portrait that Mark Gilbert made because he felt that this format captured Mazeeda much better than a simple head and shoulders pose. He has placed her at the bottom right of the painting with her feet barely touching the ground capturing her smallness and frailty. Yet he has also captured a subtle smile around her mouth and a confidence in her eyes.

Mazeeda and her parents always attended the launches of the exhibition at public galleries around the UK. Mazeeda is alive and well working as a teacher.

13:09

“Just as all great art deals with what it means to be human, all great art deals with death in some way, even if very obliquely, because from the moment we become conscious, as small children, that we are going to die, we have that shadow hanging over us.” **Kirsty Lang**

13:09

“All art is an attempt at immortality, to leave something behind when you are gone; be it a painting, a play a book. To leave your mark on this earth while at the same time trying to make sense of one of the great mysteries of this earth which is death. What happens when we die?” **Kirsty Lang**

16:16



Mark Gilbert, Henry de L., *Saving Faces*, 1999
© Courtesy of Saving Faces



Mark Gilbert, Henry de L., *Saving Faces*, 1999 © Courtesy of Saving Faces

"We've walked through the valley of death together. All of these people live on in our memories and they stay on." **Iain Hutchison**

Henry was a barrister specialising in personal injury (accidents at work or car crashes) and medical negligence.

He developed a painless lump on the left side of his palate which proved to be a malignant cancer of one of the minor salivary glands at this site (adenoid cystic carcinoma).

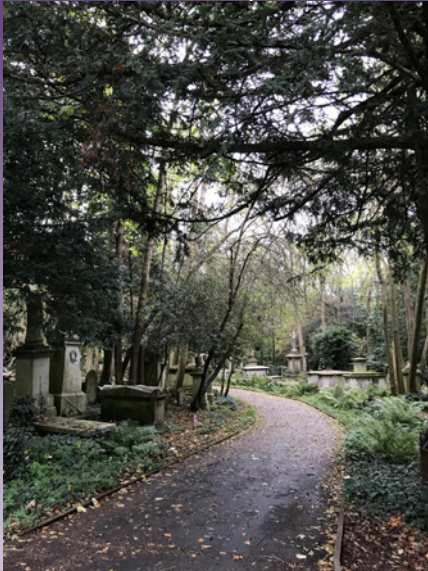
Despite surgery removing his left upper jaw and palate and extensive radiotherapy the cancer recurred 2 years after this. That's when I saw him for the first time.

The cancer had spread to the roof of the air sinus above his upper jaw (maxillary sinus) just below the eye socket. It had also spread into the area behind this between the inside of the back of the lower jaw and right up to the bone separating the brain's temporal lobe from the face below. This area is called the infratemporal fossa. It is full of important blood vessels and nerves. This infratemporal fossa is very difficult to access without removing bones in front and to the side but a surgeon devised a technique named after him called the Crockett manoeuvre. Before you do this though you have to make a cut through the skin and muscle beneath the eye across the upper part of the cheek and along the side and underneath the nose and down to the upper lip. Then you can do the manoeuvre breaking the cheekbone (Zygoma) away from the eye socket and pulling it downwards still attached to a cheek muscle called the masseter. Then splitting the upper part of the lower jaw called the coronoid process and lifting that up still attached to the muscle that you can feel in your temple when you clench your teeth (temporalis muscle). At this point you can directly see and surgically remove all the cancer in the infratemporal fossa. At the end of the operation the jaw and cheekbone that have been cut are replaced in their original position with metal plates and screws. Mark did paintings of some of these intra operative stages.

This first full face painting of Henry shows him two weeks after this first operation with me. You can see bruising around the left eye and the faint line of the cut under the eye. Even at this early stage after the operation it is difficult to see the scars down the side and under the nose and down the middle of the upper lip. The cheekbone and jaw are back in the right place and the left upper jaw and sinus are replaced by a plate so the left side of his face looks normally shaped.

However, over the succeeding 12 years, Henry had many recurrences and underwent 14 major operations, losing his left eye, upper and lower jaws, eye socket, frontal and temporal skull bones and the bones separating his brain from his mouth and nose. He was reconstructed with bone from his left shoulder blade and ribs, and skin, muscle and fat from his back and side. He continued to work as a barrister and do outdoor sports but was not able to play cricket to the level he had before because of the loss of depth perception after removal of his left eye.

17:30



Highgate cemetery

17:30



Esther and Lucian Freud © Courtesy of Esther Freud

“Once they’ve died other people will get to own them in a different way and when they are alive they are really yours. People write of them with much more intimacy than they would have when they were alive. It is as if their belonging eases out into the world.” **Esther Freud**

26:55



Joana Choumali, *Albahian*, 2020 © Joana Choumali

“Humans are the only species that are aware of their own death so its an ambivalent situation, to know that you are going to die but to act as if you are not.”
Joana Choumali

Episode 5: Tradition

As the world faces upheaval in the uprooting of statues, culture wars and industrial globalisation, we ask, what is happening to tradition in art, media and urban communities? How does photography capture all of this?