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THE DAVIS STREET DRAWING ROOM  
JORELLA ANDREWS – 20 APRIL 2023

1 ASSUMPTIONS  
I knew that the  
Drawing Room had  
a large collection of  
lace [\[more\]](#)

2 MEMORIES  
As I listened to the  
histories of the Drawing  
Room and its contents  
[\[more\]](#)

3 REALISATION  
Now came a decisive  
moment. On another  
table [\[more\]](#)

4 PERCEPTUAL  
SHIFTS  
Then came an  
unexpected alteration  
to how I would study  
and think in this place  
[\[more\]](#)

5 A SERIES OF  
STUDIES  
[\[more\]](#)



I knew that the Drawing Room had a large collection of lace. I'd always regarded lacemaking as magical, whether by machine or by hand. (My Trinidadian grandmother and aunt had been skilled at tatting.) As I entered, my plan was to work with the most intricate piece of lace I could find, ideally one that also showed wear and tear. [\[Back\]](#)

As I listened to the histories of the Drawing Room and its contents, I was drawn to a table covered with pristine rolls of conserved 'service textiles' — towels, tablecloths, and handkerchiefs, for instance — that had been passed down the generations. In times past, these humble items would normally have changed use as they degraded. Eventually, rag-pickers would have taken their remains to be pulped for papermaking. But here, they lay more-or-less intact and at rest.

Suddenly, I realised that the exactitude with which these rolled cloths had been arranged — not captured or constrained but each given its own space of display and self-expression (a "room" of its own) — were provoking everyday textile memories of my own: my father's handkerchiefs crisply ironed into perfect squares; the hand-sewn bedspreads and curtains that accumulated over the years; once-colourful sheets faded from years of laundering piled up in a cupboard; tea towels, damp, and somewhat stained, drying after the debris of another large family meal had been cleared away. There were also the mid-century tea towels with the slogans "Max und Moritz als Küchenjungen" and "Zu viele Köche verderben den Brei" that decorated our kitchen walls. Where they had come from or why they were so enduringly on show I don't know — after all, my mother was Dutch and, growing up, I knew that she carried scars from her experiences of the German wartime occupation of the low-countries. The towels have been handed down to me and I wonder whether they might bear further investigation. [\[Back\]](#)

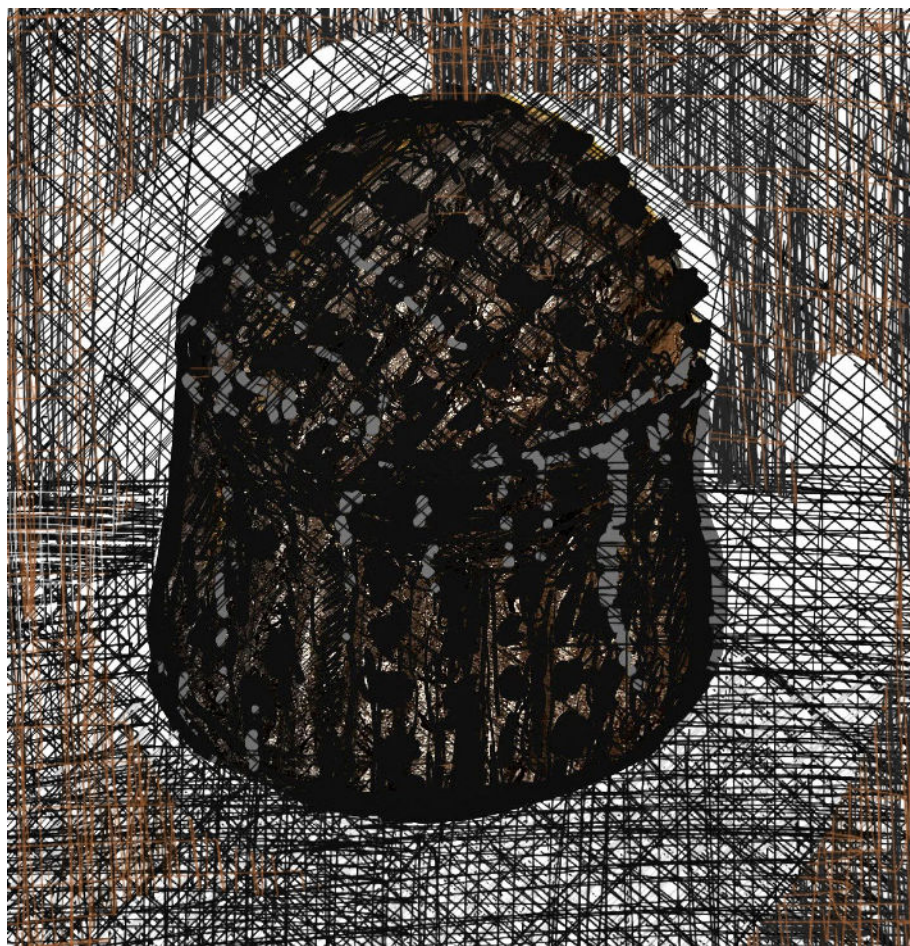
Now came a decisive moment. On another table, near windows framing spring foliage, a pile of large boards displayed still more samples of delicate cloth. I watched as the uppermost board was lifted away and set aside to reveal the layer hidden underneath.

I had recently lost both parents and, with that movement of lifting and laying aside, the generational shift that had occurred in my family suddenly became visceral. My parents were gone, and my siblings and I were now that upper layer. As such, we had been brought into a new quality of light and were also, perhaps, being brought to light in unfamiliar ways. [\[Back\]](#)

Then came an unexpected alteration to how I would study and think in this place. When that uppermost display board was removed, something else was uncovered: a scattering of spacing devices that supported the structure of display while also keeping the samples within it safe. They were small, black, crochet-covered pattern weights that had been reassigned to carry out this task. I'd never seen such objects before. I picked one up and sat down to look and draw, realising that it too was a service textile, and an exquisite one.

As I drew (not as skilfully as I would have liked), I thought again about my parents but this time about *their* decades of service, trying to keep us supported, safe, and as open to life as possible. I continued to hold, turn, and scrutinise the at-first seemingly insignificant, loadbearing, metal-and-textile object that had absorbed my attention – a tiny caryatid. Rays of illumination, some from outside and some artificial, aided by magnification, helped clarify its minutely textured surface – machine-made, surely? – of miniscule, closely interwoven, meticulously repeated squares.

My thoughts then widened to all those I did not know but on whose repeated, ordered, hard, and specific labour the possibilities of my own life surely depended. The faithful work of the inconspicuous pattern weight to which I had turned, and of the Drawing Room itself, reminded me more often to seek out and applaud the intricate networks of consistency, the quiet fixed points — perhaps small or brief but born of intention — that continuously interweave to hold and to create space. [\[Back\]](#)



[Back]

