

Women's Writing Conference Falmouth, 2026

Abstract

Ku Pamięci!! - In Memory of!!

This object-led provocation centres on Eugenia Toporowska's *sztambuch* / *pamiętnik*, an illustrated autograph book of remembrance created in 1943 during forced wartime displacement. A rare first-hand account and object of survival, Eugenia, a Polish teenage girl multi-authored this book with friends as refugees in the remote settlement of Nyabyeya, Masindi, then part of British colonial Uganda. The small glossy green book is a keeper of friendship and memorialisation. Innocuous on the outside, hidden within is a handwritten and colour illustrated collection of verses by thirty Polish schoolgirls. A collective memory recounting resilience and life in their new African home. It demonstrates immense patriotism, Roman Catholic faith and an upholding of cultural form through language and floral motifs miles away from a lost homeland. Discovered 83 years later in Eugenia's UK home, a house she lived in for 67 years, the book contributes to new knowledge on women's writing, wartime diasporic identity formation and how matrilineal heritage is passed down through diasporic generations. Images of the book, including drawings and text in Polish and English translation will be shared as a thinking-object to sit with, an extension of the researcher's methodology of walked and prolonged observation. The 20 minute object-led provocation will ask the audience to consider and openly share responses to the questions 'What forms of women's/girls' writing survive displacement both historically and today?', 'How does collective inscription produce identity and memory?' and 'What kinds of archives are overlooked when refugee histories are told?'. These young women's lives in poetic communication and creative account transition arrival and departure. Polish cultural forms show resistance to Soviet campaign of cultural erasure and forced displacement. Without study and recognition there is an absent gap in women's writing, refugee archives and postcolonial memory. This will also be the book's public debut.

Bio

Caroline L.A. Wheeler (Linka Nowell) is a practice-based PhD researcher at Falmouth University and an interdisciplinary artist based in the UK. She holds degrees from the Royal College of Art (MA Jewellery and Metal), City & Guilds of London Art School (MA Art and Material History) and Bath Spa University (BA Media Communication and Cultural Studies). Her artistic practice examines migration, displacement and the movement of people, materials and environmental ecologies. Producing work in a variety of media including installation, sculpture, photography and film, her materiality-led, research-driven practice traces systems of provision, value, border and control. Her current doctoral research examines dress and adornment as visual sites of diasporic identity negotiation, focusing on portrait photography archives of Polish refugees hosted in 1940s Uganda under British colonial rule. She works from a third generation auto-ethnographic position using a multi-method bricolage approach.

