

Finding Family

17 March –
27 August 2023

Preface

Finding Family is the first exhibition to be created jointly by the Foundling Museum's curatorial team and graduates of our award-winning, paid training programme for care-experienced young adults. Since 2017, Tracing Our Tales has enabled trainees to gain the skills and confidence needed to help deliver our Family Programme, to return to education and to secure apprenticeships and jobs. Trainees also develop a deep sense of connection to our historic story and to objects on display. Their lived experience of care brings a unique perspective, which over the years has enriched the experience of families taking part in creative workshops. *Finding Family* is an opportunity for many more people to benefit from this special understanding and see familiar works with fresh eyes.

Finding Family has been made possible thanks to the vision and commitment of some remarkable people and organisations.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge our curator, Emma Middleton and artist, Albert Potrony, who have built Tracing Our Tales into the sector-leading programme it is today, and to thank poet, Deanna Rodger, for her thoughtful work with the creative writing trainees, Oak Foundation for its visionary early support, and ICAP and the Baring Foundation.

We are delighted to be working in partnership with the National Gallery and thrilled to have this opportunity to place three jewels from the Gallery's Collection within the context of our creative story. We are grateful to all the lenders who have been so generous with their works and to artists Helen Barff, Annabel Dover, Tamsin van Essen, Harold Offeh and Mark Titchner, for their wonderful new works. In our mission to transform lives through creative action, we depend on the support of individuals and organisations, none more so than the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, delivered by the Museums

Association, Kusuma Trust UK and members of the 1739 Club, who enabled us to realise this ambitious exhibition. Finally and most importantly, I would like to pay tribute to all the remarkable young people who have been a part of Tracing Our Tales. In particular, I would like to thank Bez, Charlotte, Ikari, Indika, Monica, Vee, Whitney and Xiola, whose thoughtful contributions have shaped not only this exhibition, but also our approach to exhibition-making in the future. We are immensely proud of them and of this show.

Caro Howell, MBE
Director



The Graham Children, 1742
William Hogarth
Courtesy The National Gallery, London

Introduction

One word, many meanings, 'family' lies at the heart of all our lives. Whether that's the families we are born into, families we have inherited or families we have chosen, each of us knows who we consider to be family and what form these fundamental and sometimes fragile relationships take, as they shift and change through childhood, into adulthood and beyond.

Long considered to be one of the most important units of society, *Finding Family* looks at the many ways in which artists have represented and responded to evolving ideas of family, from the seventeenth century to the present day. Exploring blood lines, social bonds, personal connections and love, this exhibition questions the often idealised idea of the 'nuclear family', offering a broader, more inclusive sense of where our connections and identities come from.

Finding Family encompasses a broad spectrum of family

structures and dynamics, portrayed from the perspectives of children, parents, extended family and networks of care. Highlighting the complex nature of human relationships, the works of art navigate the delicate balance between love and loss, intimacy and separation, care and neglect, joy and pain, stigma and respect, identity and belonging, conflict and reconciliation. Often reflecting on their own experiences and relationships, the artists reveal poignant and unexpected insights into the biological and social threads that are deeply woven into the fabric of our lives.

Finding Family challenges us to look afresh at works of art from the past and present and to question our assumptions of what family really means.

Tracing our Tales: Poems

Tracing our Tales is a training and mentorship programme run by the Foundling Museum for care-experienced young adults, with a focus on art, creative writing, confidence building, employment and life skills.

As part of the latest Tracing Our Tales programme, participants have produced a series of

creative written responses to the themes explored in *Finding Family* from the context of their own experience, with challenging, moving and thought-provoking results. Their poems are presented alongside the works of art, providing powerful reflections on the ties that bind us, from DNA to trust, memory, care and love.

Tracing our Tales graduates 2022-2023:

Bez

Charlotte

Ikari

Indika

Monica

Vee

Whitney

Xiola

Is it Blood?

Is blood really 'thicker than water'? As children we often learn about our family tree and which features we've inherited from our parents and grandparents. Shared DNA is one way to define family, but for some people, who they are and where they've come from has more to do with circumstance than blood relations. Families that are born together don't always stay together and relationships between family members – parents and children, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles and grandparents – change as we grow up. So what does it mean to be kin? Is it ever as simple as having the same blood flowing through our veins, or is it a more complex web of genetic threads and lived experience that shapes our identity and sense of belonging?



Omega Chokra, 2023
Hetain Patel
Courtesy the artist

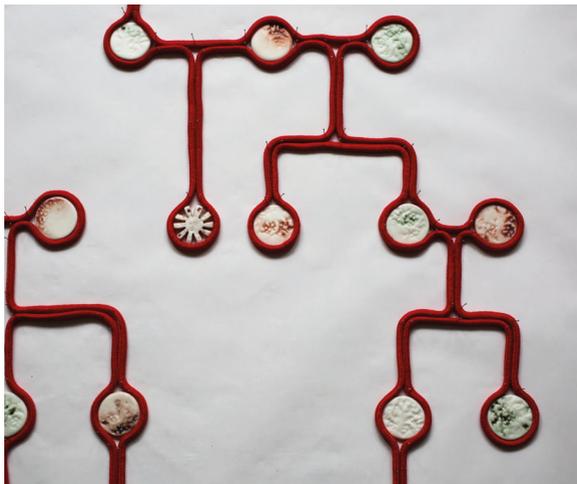
Don't think about it just do

1. Our ancestors have paved the way for more creation
2. Follow the crowd, try to show your passion for life
3. You can live alone, find a partner
4. Spread your genes ... get it on!
5. Be thoughtful or careless, it doesn't matter! Adoption and divorce is still an option
6. Just make blood. Feed society with more blank slates, more power to use
7. Procreate, reproduce, duplicate!
8. The beginning of life starts with this kind of love.
A motivation to not be alone.
9. Even through the pain and joy of your own life, to be a parent is sometimes a mistake.
10. Nonetheless, don't reverse your actions. Don't betray your blood.
11. Do what you know will give you purpose. Use your blood for someone else's life.
12. Look around you! The media of all your dreams! Don't forget to romanticise your life.

Charlotte, Tracing Our Tales graduate



Self Portrait as My Mother Jean Gregory, 2003
Gillian Wearing
© Gillian Wearing,
courtesy Maureen Paley, London



Entangled roots, 2023 (detail)
Tamsin van Essen
Courtesy the artist

[Untitled]

13. DNA is what we share.
12. Legacy through start to finish.
11. A sister, a brother, a friend.
10. Mothers can't be best friends, so enemies?
9. Following the rules of two, to make it perfect but what's perfect?
8. Smile for the camera but when was the last time I smiled for you?
7. Secrets of half of this DNA are missing.
6. My other DNA is either running around heartless or deceased.
5. Are you really my mom?
4. All I know is that when I start my DNA, it will not be like this.
3. The only blood I know is the blood that runs down my arm after school,
2. for your attention.
1. What's blood?

Xiola, Tracing Our Tales graduate

Who is my Blood?

But you are not my blood
Not my own bone and flesh.
Every day I wake up and wish you were different,
Wish I never knew you,
Got kidnapped by your foreign hands.
And now I have lost my history
And now I will find them again.
Hugs and kisses.
Warmth and love.
Met with cold hands that gave me up.
Met with the love that never loved me.
But you are my blood
And you are not my blood.
Yet I run back to your warm hugs.
And long for your kisses.

You are not my blood.
You are not my dad.
You are not my mum.
I will go to find the blood that let me flow far from theirs,
The blood which seared across lands and collected in a lake
Drying in my loss,
I will go and carve a river into my heart
So it flows again.

Bez, Tracing Our Tales graduate

[Untitled]

I am Strong, I am a woman.
I have created life with my complicated but unique body.
I am Strong, I carried the gentle body of my son for a full 40 weeks.
I am Strong as I cried and begged for them not to cut me but went through with it.
I am Strong and I am a woman who struggled and suffered.
But I am still here today for the beautiful life my body was able to give my son.

Whitney, Tracing Our Tales graduate



A Foundling Restored to its Mother, 1858
Emma Brownlow
The Foundling Museum, London

Is it Connection?

Blended, single-parent, adopted, foster, soulmates and kindred spirits, family structures can be as varied as the meanings associated with family, for different people and different cultures. Since the word family came into the English language in the fifteenth century, it has been most closely linked to the idea of a 'household' – a group of people living under one roof, either as blood relations, companions or sharing a home. Today this would include roommates, flat-shares, hostels and care homes. The closely related word familiar, from the same Latin origin, meant 'intimate, very friendly, on a family footing'. So is family the connection we have from being united by shared everyday experiences – eating, sleeping, working, relaxing, laughing and crying together – as much as

it is about having a roof over our heads? From dull moments, silence and stillness, to drama, excitement and celebration, the time we spend with others and the memories we make together, create deep bonds that can grow stronger or break over time.



Holding, 2023 (detail)
Helen Barff
Courtesy the artist

[Untitled]

- o. How do we find connection?
1. Soul mates
2. How do we connect?
3. Bluetooth
4. What connects us to...
5. WiFi?
6. Bondage
7. What are the different ways to connect?
8. Death
9. What is connection?
10. Connection
11. Sex
12. Lust
13. Ideas
14. How do we disconnect to connect with something or someone from someone or something else?
15. Connected
16. Connect
17. Connect 4 what? To play games?

Ikari, Tracing Our Tales graduate

Disconnected

Why does it feel that connection is a lie?
We are told that we are connected.
We are told that we've never been more connected
by the latest million dollar tech company.
Yet I've never felt more disconnected from others.
I know it's impossible to be the only one.

But I'm disconnected from the disconnected.
Please don't try to compute.
It's an isolated feeling easily misunderstood;
The impossibility of connecting to others
When you're disconnected from yourself.

Monica, Tracing Our Tales graduate

[Untitled]

“Ouch!” I yell as I’ve grabbed the remote from my mother.
I felt a slight spark on my fingertips. I don’t know where it came from.
I feel so sad.
I feel like a bother.
I know it’s not my fault and my mother always soothes my mind and
kisses my cheek with her lips.
She cares for me, I care for her.
But we never knew the same roots.
But we never know the truth.
I care for her, she cares for me.
I know it’s not her fault and my mother always soothes me.
It’s my turn now, I need to stroke her head, kiss her cheeks.
She feels like a bother.
I felt an immediate spark in my chest.
We don’t know how it started.
We don’t know where it came from.
“Oh” we say as we’re sitting in the doctor’s room,
after hearing the results.

Charlotte, Tracing Our Tales graduate

[Untitled]

I’m trying to be more open,
friendly like a pack of organic cookies.
I have nothing in me but I’m not afraid to call.
I want to preserve my energy.
Will our eyes stay if I’m not smiling?
I’d rather not.
I have nothing in me.
And I’d rather keep that private.

Indika, Tracing Our Tales graduate



The Owens, 2019
Sikelela Owen
Courtesy the artist

[Untitled]

Cream, brown, orange, black
The palette recalls an ethnic household
Burning incense smoke, the smell of seasoned cooking,
Colours of turmeric and curry powder,
The atmosphere warm and energetic.
A distant memory with tea-stained colours,
Family members with faces blurred;
A vague image of a family portrait.

Vee, Tracing Our Tales graduate

Is it Bond?

Attachment theory suggests that we are born with the instinct to make emotional bonds with caregivers and that these early bonds can affect how we create attachments in later life. But who decides who we are bonded to – parents, society, the law? What happens when these bonds break down and trust is lost or abused? The familiar phrase; ‘You can choose your friends but you can’t choose your family’, reminds us that family can be complicated and at times filled with tension, trauma and unresolved issues. Sometimes this leads to rejection or abandonment. The human need to be cared for, loved and

emotionally supported isn’t just met by people we’re related or married to, it is also found in friendships, social networks and communities of care. ‘Chosen’ or ‘Found’ families are an alternative form of kinship - committed relationships between people who have chosen to be in each other’s lives, whether this has a legal status or not. From friends and neighbours to co-workers, building the family we need, in the absence of or alongside the family we are born into or inherit, is as important to the fabric of our lives as the more established institution of family.



*I belong
with you.*

*Will you be
there for me?*

[Untitled]

Fathered for a second
Because that's all it takes
For a promise to mean nothing
And for hearts to break
He isn't in the picture
absence, suffering with shame
He feels abandoned
She's going insane
Eldest daughters have duties
It's the only way
When your family falls apart
at such a young age.

Indika, Tracing Our Tales graduate



The Pinch of Poverty, 1891
Thomas-Benjamin Kennington
Courtesy Coram in the care of the
Foundling Museum, London

Bonding over Bond

Bond, they say, not the spy James
Although bonding over Bond could be as deadly as it is ironic.
Could it be that bond is that feeling of two, completely?
Opposite characteristics finding
A commonality, almost a truce,
An agreement of understanding.
Sometimes unspeakable and spiritual,
Yet bond can be fleeting and fatal.

Monica, Tracing Our Tales graduate

Do you love me?

I need help finding me, what about you?
I need you as much as you need me.
I'm craving attention, I'm a Leo.
We argue, we fight, we smile.
We're not ready.
Just do friends with benefits.

We argue, we fight, we smile.
Remember that we're young and hurt.
How can we be together if we bring each other down?
You never once called out my name.
But you make it seem like I'd do the same.

I'm like the sad character from *Inside Out*.
Since I hide what's inside and face what's out.
Do you love me? Am I the problem?
We argue, we fight, we smile.
Don't expect flowers and rainbows.



Xiola, Tracing Our Tales graduate

Louise and William, too scared to move from
the series *Thrown Away Paintings, 2017*
Louise Allen
Courtesy the artist



I call you
my love though
you are not my
love and it
breaks my
heart to tell you



Untitled #1 from the series 'Pretended' Family Relationships, 1988
Sunil Gupta Courtesy the artist and Hales London and New York
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[Untitled]

Bond is like a jug of water
Being poured into one's hand
Shaped like a cup expecting it
To all remain, bond is oxygenated
By connection as its life blood
Connection is the spine that helps
The structure of bond stand.
Love is the breastbone that protects
What it loves allowing life to blossom
Through the passages of our ribcage
Bond is our reason, love is our
Understanding of why we connect
For you to bleed for the other
Even if we are not related
I love you like my mother.

Ikari, Tracing Our Tales graduate

Is it Love?

How does it feel to be part of a family – safe, protected, cared for, appreciated? Is love the vital ingredient for a really deep sense of security and belonging? Love is a basic human emotion that takes many forms, including physical, emotional and intellectual. The first love we know often comes from a mother and close family. This unconditional love expects nothing in return. However, love can also be unpredictable, selfish, consuming or even dangerous. What happens when love, care and support are absent in childhood? Do we look for other people to fill that need? 'The path of true love never runs smooth' and relationships are never free of problems. But as we go through life making and breaking many different relationships, is love enough to see us through?



Night Change, 2022
Caroline Walker
Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman
Gallery, London

How to Pronounce Love

Luh...

Flick your tongue forwards as you use your breath, to allow the first syllable of your heart. Allow yourself to feel, peel, seal and reveal all your tools of communication. Accompany the sound of your emotions with the quenching language of eye contact. Do not rush, please be patient.

Flow the air out of your lips whilst simultaneously covering your bottom lip with your teeth. Think about how free it feels to find a word that **THROWS** your thoughts, feelings and fantasies into your loved ones face through vibrations in the air.

Charlotte, Tracing Our Tales graduate

How to: Love

L is for life. You create life during pregnancy and smile through the pain. You know your child before you see them and feel their energy move.

Opening your heart out to people to show them how much you care. **V**isualising life in a closed form, the huge burden you carry around. **E**motion that makes you find hope in life, even though you are crumbling slowly.

That's how you spell love.

Xiola, Tracing Our Tales graduate

Love? And a Theory

Is it love?
They say, they say.
But when I pass a new car
I remember that nobody knows our game.
Is it love?
I think you really loved me.
You flew me out to Jamaica
to meet your family from country.
Is it love?
Were you trying to protect me?
Eventually you had to protect yourself
and for that I'm sorry.

Indika, Tracing Our Tales graduate



Love is more than just a feeling, 2023
Harold Offeh
Courtesy the artist

Adults always say

'I always mean what I say'

8. Your hair is picky, you should use a comb.
 7. Make it tidy like your white friend.
 6. Knead it, boil it and make it pretty.
 4. You eat dumpling not nice.
 5. It's thick but you need to cover, find things that fit.
 3. Yuh too spoil and you too fass.
 2. Whammm to you? Them nuhhh match. You need to go and change.
 1. I always have something to say.
- 'Now listen and understand.'

Indika, Tracing Our Tales graduate

[Untitled]

Love.

Hello my love, greet love, welcome love
for my love, to my love, for her to him
for they love, we all love, I love them
they love me, swiftly but beautifully
swept off my feet carried to eternity
love yours internally
love breaths honesty
love is life, live is love,
love is a knife
will you cut for blood?
blood is thick, love is water
peaks and valleys but as abundant
as the power of sunlight
Love.

Ikari, Tracing Our Tales graduate



Uncle: Self portrait in the mirror and framed image as a school boy with my uncle in his favourite chair, 1991

Matthew Finn

Courtesy the artist

A Man's Love

Extend your arm as the dispossessed
Reach out, and hold them tightly.
Every whisper begs for her.
Everything you do is to protect and keep
Hoping you meet all their demands
Hoping you meet a mountain of support.
Slowly you are no longer yourself;
A whisper begging for their attention
As the day crooks your smile,
May it return with their presence
Hide your feelings,
Do not let them know you are hurt,
No longer loved or respected
In your pursuit to get their love;
Forgotten how to love yourself.

Bez, Tracing Our Tales graduate

Special Event

7 June, 7-9pm

Love is more than just a feeling, join us for a live performance
by Harold Offeh

Credits

Curators: Kathleen Palmer & Lucy Shanahan
Exhibition Designers: Plan B Creative Studio

Finding Family has been produced in partnership with the National Gallery, London.

With thanks to all of the participating artists and lenders, and the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund and Kusuma Trust UK who have helped to fund this exhibition.



Esmée Fairbairn
Collections Fund



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