

# The Museum of Monotropism Museum Guide



Please note that this is a short guide to the museum exhibits. If you want to know more about a specific object, please see the Museum Catalogue.



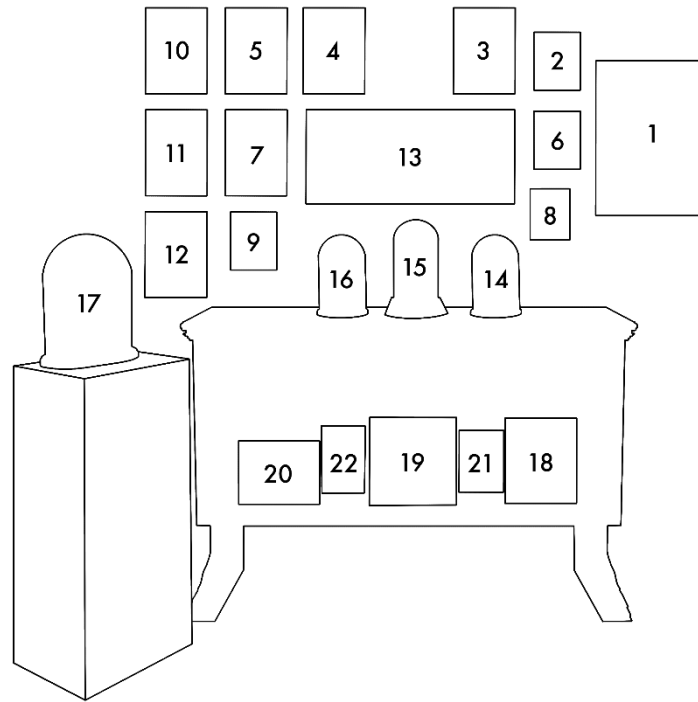
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# Wall 1: Amulets & Charms



1. Information board

2. A Communion of Saint Christophers

Patron saint of travellers in the western Christian tradition

3. Pilgrimage Badges

Items brought from pilgrimages. Items acquired on pilgrimage often acquire some of the sanctity and efficacy of the shrine they come from.

4. Safe travels

Amulets to ensure a safe journey

## 5. Securing a livelihood

Charms and amulets to draw money and prosperity

## 6. Good luck in your exams

Helping hands for academic success.

## 7. Lucky coins

Coins considered lucky, from around the world.

## 8. Lucky Pigs

Pigs have a strong association with luck and particularly with prosperity in cultures around the world.

## 9. Sacred bees

Bees frequently have an association with industry and success.

## 10. Prognosticatory Cakes

Objects placed in food, mostly cakes, that tell your fortune for the coming year. Countries represented: France, Spain, Portugal, USA (New Orleans), Finland, Greece, Ireland, UK.

## 11. Magic Beans (and Seeds)

Beans and seeds considered lucky, sacred or auspicious.

## 12. Natural Oddities

Natural curiosities and rarities were often considered semi-magical and kept as talismans, or ground up and eaten for their supposed curative powers.

## 13. Eyes

A cabinet of eye amulets from across the world.

## 14-16. Amulets Against Eye Contact

### Amulet Against Eye Contact (Plum) (2019)

Thread-painting embroidery in a goldwork embroidery surround, glass cloche

### Amulet Against Eye Contact (Green) (2019)

Thread-painting embroidery in a goldwork embroidery surround, glass cloche

### Amulet Against Eye Contact (Blue) (2019)

Thread-painting embroidery in a goldwork embroidery surround, pearls from a childhood necklace, glass cloche

The Amulet Against Eye Contact series is a response to the difficulty of living in a world designed for neurotypical (or non-autistic) people. Like many other autistic people, I struggle with social communication. Most noticeably, I find it difficult to make eye contact, particularly with people I don't know well. However we live in a world where a lack of eye contact is distrusted, and 'soft', social skills are demanded. The amulets express a frustration with being told to 'just try harder', to 'just be less anxious', to endure the noise and light and most of all the people who insist on staring, staring into my eyeballs. Unable to meet people's eyes, others often respond with frustration and even aggression, insisting, forcing me to look at them even though it's painful. I have created an eye outside of myself to draw the hostility away. For once it is the neurotypical viewer who is unsettled, trapped in a circle of my making – looking at the eye looking at them looking at the eye.

### Venus Eye Trap (2), 2023

Embroidery floss, wire, silk gauze, interfacing, glass cloche

The Venus Eye Traps are two soft sculptures made using stumpwork embroidery, mounted in glass cloches. They are part of an ongoing series of works about eye contact and my discomfort with it. The eyes are at once beautiful and unsettling, mirroring the mixture of fascination and aversion I feel about eyes.

## Large Cabinet

14. **Sacred Equines**  
Lucky and/or sacred horses (and a couple of donkeys).
  
15. **Scottish Folk Magic**  
Objects used in Scottish folk healing and personal protection.
  
16. **Fish**  
Display of fish amulets and talismans. Fish generally stand for increase and plenty.
  
17. **Turtles All The Way Down**  
Sacred tortoises, turtles and terrapins.
  
18. **Cats Still Remember That They Once Were Gods**  
Tributes to our feline overlords.

## Wall 2

Tables, going from right to left:

### Amulet Table

A collection of lucky or protective signs and symbols, arranged by type. Like a Museum of Monotropism in miniature.

### Amulets of Childhood

A selection of amulets, charms and icons related to fertility and protecting children from illness or misfortune. Inside this cabinet is also my piece in response to the collection – Amulet for an Anthropocene Child.



## Amulet for an Anthropocene Child (2024)

Embroidery thread, metal purl, linen, silk, and paper.

In an era marred by climate change, pollution, societal divides, and growing inequality, I feel profoundly pessimistic about the future. It feels like the world is in terminal decline. Yet, my friends choose to bring children into this world— an extraordinary gesture of hope and faith that the future still holds promise; that humanity has the capacity to solve its problems. As much as I admire their optimism, the condition of the world these children will inherit weighs heavily on my mind. This pectoral amulet, inspired by protective amulets for children throughout history, is an expression of both my hopes and fears for them. Inside the amulet bag is a textual amulet with verses from the Torah, including from Psalm 91: “You will not fear the terrors of night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the plague that roams in the dark, or the destruction that lays waste at noon.”

## Hands and Separation Amulets

This cabinet mainly contains amulets, charms, icons and images in the shape of hands. There are examples from across the globe. It also contains a small number of charms dealing with separation anxiety and longing, and my piece responding to this theme (Amulet Against Estrangement, below).

## Amulet Against Estrangement (2019)

Stumpwork embroidery, mounted in a cardboard box

I lived abroad for a number of years and made some very close friendships. They were a surrogate family to me, and it felt like exile when I left. I worry that as the years go on and our lives diverge, it will become harder and harder to keep that emotional connection. I worry that we'll ultimately lose touch, just from the lack of that constant daily contact. That time in my life is already starting to feel like a dream. This piece is a response to that fear. In folk Judaism, red strings have a kind of protective power. They were tied round the wrists of children to help keep away the evil eye. Women struggling to conceive wind a red thread around the tomb of the matriarch Rachel and then wear it, in the hope their prayers will be answered. I would like to think there's an invisible red thread anchoring me to my loved ones, dispelling anxiety, maintaining our bond, and protecting us both.

## Lower Line – Red Thread

Red strings, ribbons and fabrics from across the world.

## Upper Line - Magic Plants

A selection of trees and plants considered magical or amuletic in parts of the UK.

# Wall 3

## Venus Eye Trap (1), 2023

Embroidery floss, wire, silk gauze, interfacing, glass cloche

Please see description for Venus Eye Trap 2, above.

## Plant Lives

Plant Lives is a series of curiosity cabinets exploring the social, cultural and ecological significance of some of our most common wild plants. Plants are the lynchpins of our environment. All animal life is dependent on them - including ours. This knowledge was once reflected in their central place in folk culture, forming the basis of everything from cures to curses, food to fashion. As we become increasingly estranged from the natural world, plants that we once prized are forgotten or denigrated as weeds – to our lasting peril. Plant Lives aims to restore plants to their rightful place in our imaginations, and to highlight both the cultural loss and existential threat represented by their decline.

For the curious, there is a separate booklet with texts to accompany each of the Plant Cabinets, explaining the significance of the objects. Each compartment of each cabinet is numbered, however the numbering system moves around wildly, so they are recorded in a diagram for each cabinet. Think

of it as a natural history advent calendar, except you don't need to wait to open all the doors, and instead of chocolate, it contains interesting facts about plants.

These cabinets go across Wall 3, above the small picture shelves. Going from right to left:

#### Plant Lives – Rowan Cabinet (2021)

Embroidery, assemblage, collage

#### Plant Lives – Dandelion (2021)

Embroidery, needle felting, mixed media, assemblage

#### Plant Lives – Nettle (2021)

Embroidery, papercutting, gouache, cordage, mixed media, assemblage

#### Plant Lives – Clover (2021)

Embroidery, assemblage

#### Plant Lives – Birds-Foot Trefoil (2021)

Embroidery, gouache, papercutting, assemblage

#### Health and Healing (on top of larger drawers)

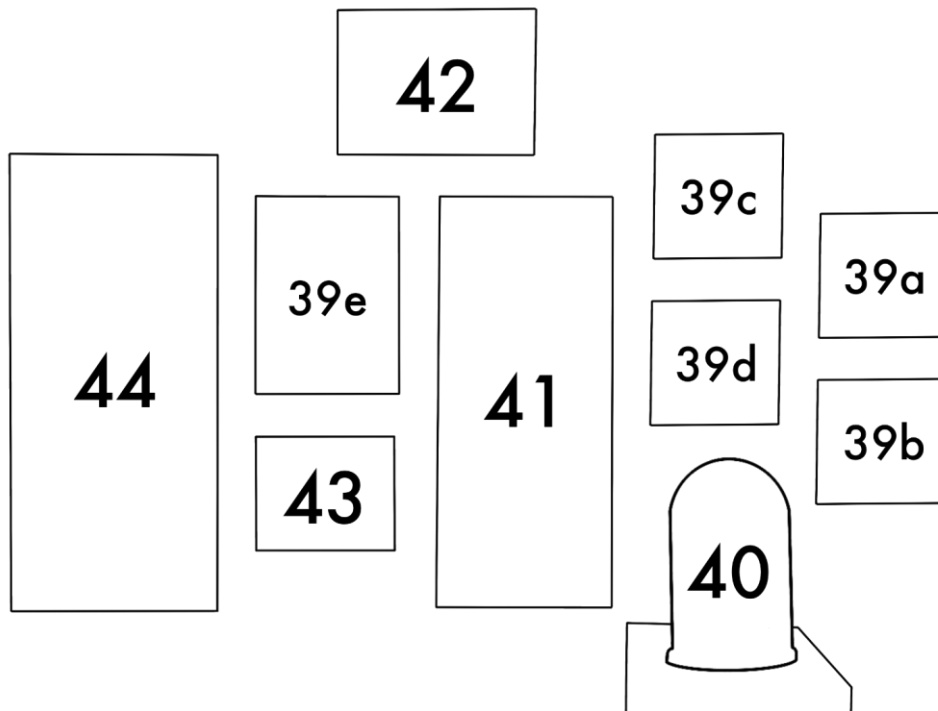
A selection of objects used in healing rituals. A number were touted as cures for or prophylactics against coronavirus, which meant being able to witness the development of folk cures in real time.

## Supernatural Helpers (on top of small drawers)

Friendly spirits and household gods. You may touch the supernatural helpers. For the avoidance of doubt I am including a photo of the objects.



## Wall 4: Insectarium



## Lepidoptera Wall (2019)

Stumpwork embroidery, entomological cases

Rendered in painstaking detail and at actual size, the butterfly specimens are a study in autistic hyperfocus, as well as an attempt to freeze nature in its decline. They invite the viewer to stop for a moment and become absorbed in the wonder of the smallest thing.

The butterflies and moth are presented alongside botanical specimens of their larval food plants.

Species represented:

- a) Brimstone Butterfly
- b) Red Admiral Butterfly
- c) Adonis Blue (Male and Female), Small Heath Butterflies
- d) Silver-washed Fritillary Butterfly
- e) Butterfly Specimen Case – Swallowtail, Clouded Yellow, Small Tortoiseshell, Purple Emperor, Peacock, Painted Lady, Purple Hairstreak

## Bee Jar (2021)

Stumpwork embroidery, acrylic, brass rods, glass cloche

This piece depicts the queens of six British bumblebee species ranging from the common to the vanishingly rare: the buff-tailed bumblebee, tree bumblebee, red-shanked carder bee, moss carder bee, bilberry bumblebee, and shrill carder bee. They are slightly larger than real life, but not by much – queen bumblebees are pretty chunky.

I make these to draw attention to their beauty and vulnerability, but also to evoke the wonder I feel when I am with real bees. People love to look at and

hold the embroidered bees, and I hope that for some it might spark a broader interest in protecting the real thing.

## Bee-rometer (2021)

Stumpwork embroidery, crewel embroidery

The Bee-rometer is an attempt to illustrate species loss in a visual way. Bees are so sensitive to changes in the ecosystem, they act as a kind of long-term biodiversity barometer.

The first barometer “face” represents 1920, when we still had abundant habitat and good species diversity. The second represents 2020, by which point plant diversity has declined significantly; we have already lost two UK bumblebee species and many others are becoming extremely rare. The third circle represents 2120 as I imagine it will be if we continue to see the kind of decline in nature that the twentieth century has. The piece aims to be a wake-up call, to highlight what we may lose if we don’t take action now.

## Reverend Kirby’s Specimen Box (2022)

Stumpwork embroidery, paper, nettle fabric, and wooden box

An homage to *Osmia spinulosa*, the Spined Mason Bee, in this piece I imagine the natural history specimens that parson-naturalist the Reverend William Kirby might have collected on his walks around Suffolk chalk pits in the autumn of 1797, when he made his first observations of the Spined Mason Bee.

The bee collects pollen for itself and its larvae from Asteraceae plants such as autumn hawkbit (left). It makes its nests in empty snail shells (centre), creating cells within the spiral and sealing the entrance with mortar made from chewed-up creeping cinquefoil leaves (right). Finally, it carefully turns the shell over, hiding its young from predators and parasites.

## Black Arches Moth (2020)

Stumpwork embroidery, entomological case

Moths are often unfairly maligned, inspiring revulsion or viewed as pests. In fact, our ecosystem depends on them both as pollinators and food for other animals. Their sensitivity makes them important indicator species, warning us of environmental threats. We are also indebted to moths for many scientific discoveries, from understanding Rh disease to breaking down plastic.

By creating large-scale specimens, several times actual size, I encourage people to look again, and more favourably, at moths. Enlarged, their beauty becomes more striking, the diversity of species more evident. By kindling a sense of wonder, I hope to inspire people to value and protect these remarkable insects.

## Urban Bounty (2021)

Found objects, printers tray

Before the pandemic, I worked two days a week at my studio space in Portobello. I would get the bus with one of my support workers, and we'd get out a few stops early so that we could walk along the beach, and forage for interesting things in the sand. On other days, we went on walks in the area around my home, or in quiet parks and gardens, and I'd fill my pockets with treasures. I am unable to pass something interesting on the ground without picking it up and taking it home for my collection. These objects aren't always what others consider beautiful, but they are lovely to me. Since covid, there is a severe shortage of care workers in Edinburgh (and across the UK), and I no longer have support to work at my studio, or to wander the city. These pieces have become less a living collection, and more a museum of my former freedom.