

# PROFESSOR SUZIE HANNA

Known Unto God

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# **PROFESSOR SUZIE HANNA**

## Known Unto God

### **CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION**

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# 1. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

Output title	Known Unto God
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*Fierce Light*, a project between 14-18 NOW (WW1 Centenary Art Commissions), Norfolk & Norwich Festival and The National Centre for Writing, commissioned seven poets to create new works to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme from a contemporary perspective. The poets were: Simon Armitage, Yrsa Daley-Ward, Jackie Kay, Bill Manhire, Paul Muldoon, Daljit Nagra, Jo Shapcott. Suzie Hanna was selected as one of five commissioned film makers to produce a short film made in response to the poems and their themes.

Hanna's animated film was developed in response to the New Zealand poet Bill Manhire's poem *Known Unto God*, written as a series of epitaphs for unknown soldiers. Hannah and Manhire corresponded about the background and development of the poem. The project represents a development of Hannah's process of poetry animation, which she has analysed in articles and conference papers, including [Animating Poetry: Whose line Is It anyway? Creation and critique of shared language in poetry animation](#), International Journal of Film and Media arts, 4:2, pp8-23 (2019) doi: [10.24140/ijfma.v4.n2.01](#) which details elements of her work on this project.

Research sources included the photographic archive of battlefields at the Imperial War Museum, specific geographical references in the poem, the work of WW1 artists, the experience of New Zealand soldiers during the War, particularly Maori soldiers, and family records of a grandfather who fought in the Battle of the Somme. Hannah drew in mud and raw pigment under the camera to express aspects of Manhire's poem, using techniques of direct tactile animation developed from the work of Caroline Leaf and Ferenc Cakó.

*Known Unto God* premiered at the Norfolk & Norwich Festival in May 2016 and has been selected for screening at numerous festivals worldwide. The film was long-listed for a BAFTA British Short Animation Award in 2016.

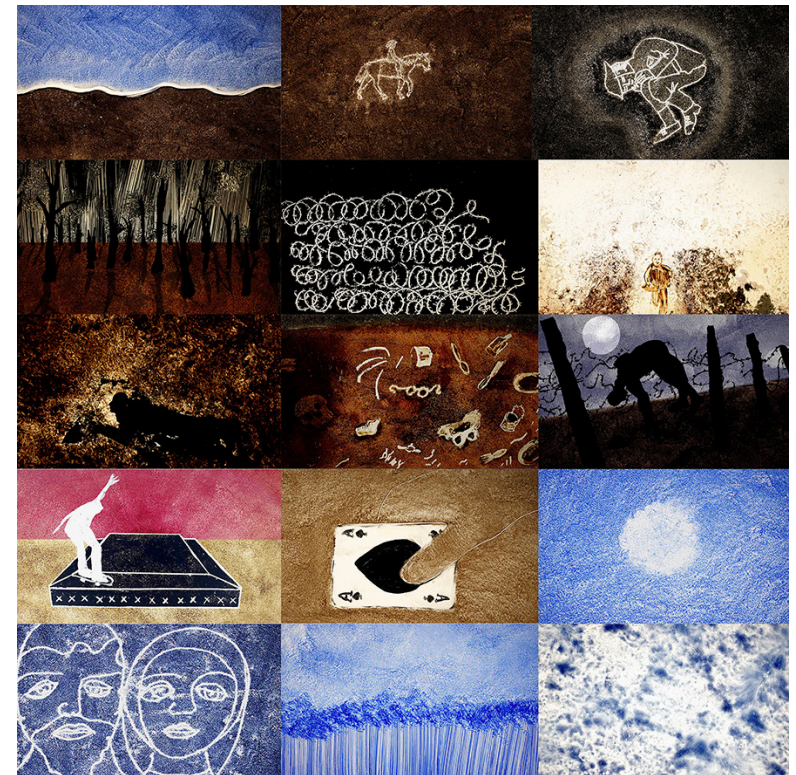


Fig.1 Images from the animated film

## 2. RESEARCH PROCESS

As part of the commission, the Imperial War Museum allowed Hanna access to photographs of battlefields and trench warfare during WW1. Hannah also used accounts of the War from Daniel Todman's *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (2005), Jay Winter's *Remembering War: The Great War between History and Memory in the 20th Century* (2006), Jessica Meyer, *Men at War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (2008) and family records of a grandfather who fought in the Battle of the Somme. The drawing style was influenced by Otto Dix's series of prints *Der Krieg*, particularly *Dead Horse*, and John and Paul Nash's images of soldiers at rest and on the front line.

Hanna experimented with direct drawing and animation with mud, clay and raw pigment. She used sponges to add oil, water or vinegar to clay and pigment powder so that the animation process was tactile and visceral. Images were scratched out with sticks on a backlit glass plate and trees shapes were drawn with wet clay with shapes taken from a photograph of Delville Wood after bombardment,

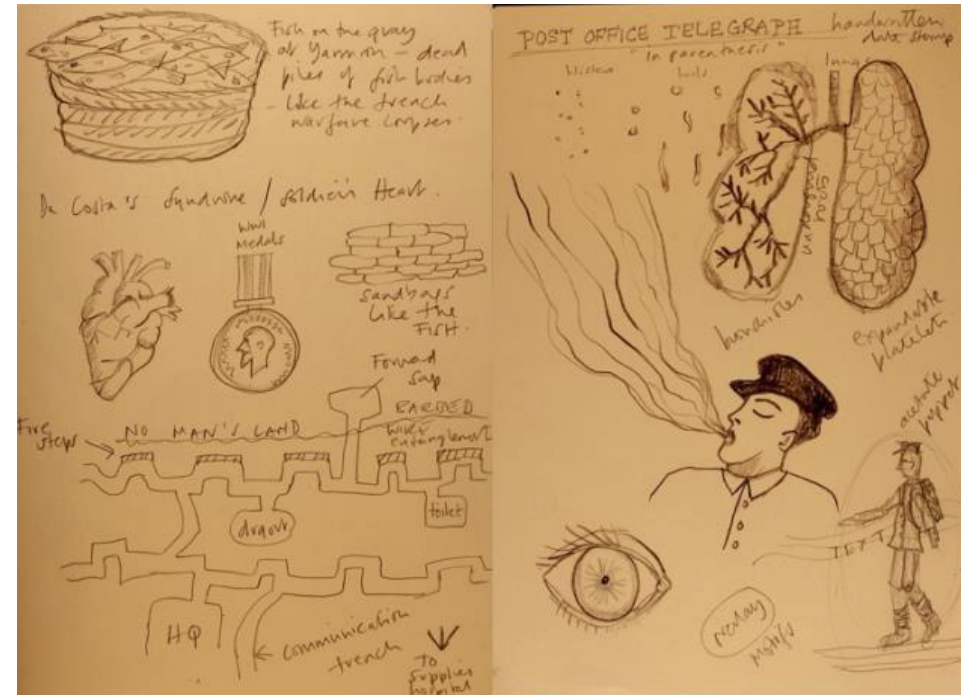


Fig.2 Sketchbook page





Fig.3 Jack Chambers, Hanna's maternal grandfather

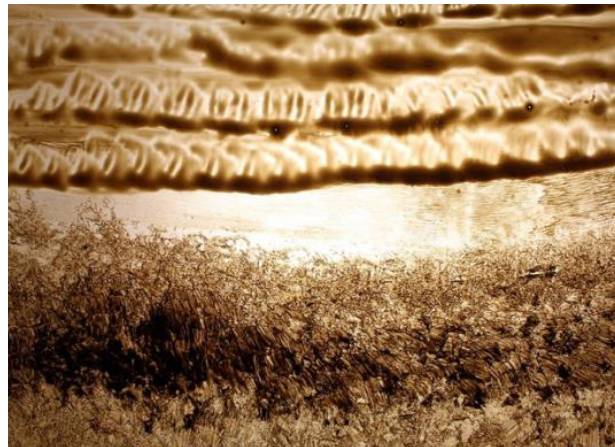


Fig.4 Mud drawings test

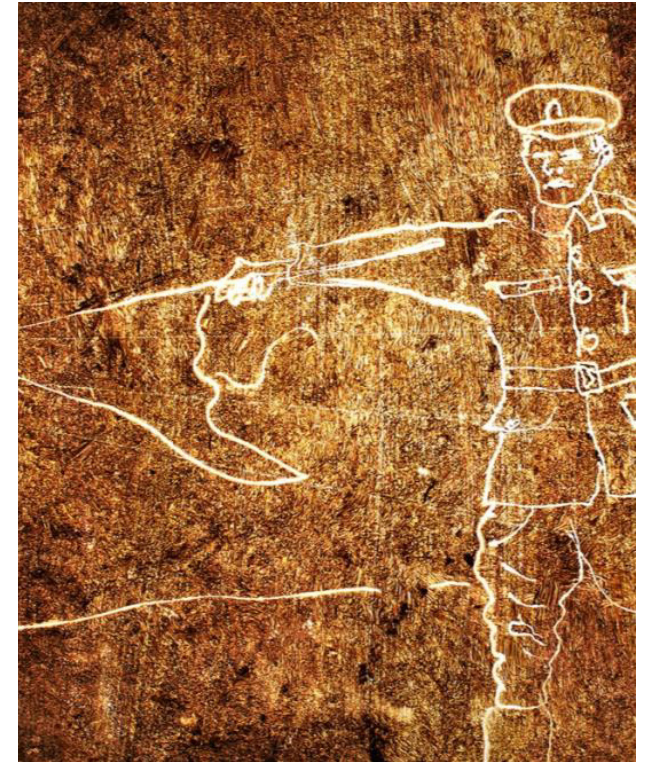


Fig.5 Mud Drawing

### 3. RESEARCH INSIGHTS

*Known Unto God* is a further development of Suzie Hanna's poetry animation, creative responses to the lives and works of poets, and collaborations with scholars and sound designers: *The Girl Who Would be God* (Silvia Plath) 2007, *Proem- To Brooklyn Bridge* (Hart Crane), 2013; *In Other Motes of Other Myths* (Emily Dickinson) 2017, *The Blue from Heaven* (Stevie Smith) 2019 and collaborations with contemporary poets *The Lines* (Andrew Motion) 2001, *Landing Under Water I See Roots* (Annie Finch) 2013.

Hanna writes: 'In creating animated poetry films there is an initial *expansion* or *decompression* of the poem as close reading of the text reveals the "pattern of resolved stresses". Transferring those revelations into equivalent non-literal temporal visual and sonic experience requires *recompression* for which the art of animation is particularly suited. As a dynamic tool for reframing and representing the poem, animation can challenge, educate and inspire specialist and non-specialist audiences.'

*Known Unto God* combines documentary and academic research with personal knowledge and stories about victims of war in a collaborative engagement that spans written, visual and sonic experiment to create an interpretation that is an expression of Werner Herzog's notion of *Ecstatic Truth*, a poetic reality that can capture more faithfully the nuances and depths of human experiences. The work also helps to bring Manhire's work to new audiences.

The outcome of Hanna's research and response to Manhire's poem is the animated film *Known Unto God* (3' 11") and the journal article *Animating Poetry: Whose line Is It anyway? Creation and critique of shared language in poetry animation*, *International Journal of Film and Media Arts*, 4:2, pp 8-23 (2019)  
<https://nua.repository.guildhe.ac.uk/id/eprint/17327/>

Animation by Suzie Hanna  
Poem by Bill Manhire  
Read by Stella Duffy  
Sound design by Dr Phil Archer

The film can be viewed at: <https://vimeo.com/483088291/ba2537cbaa>



Fig.6 Still from the animated film

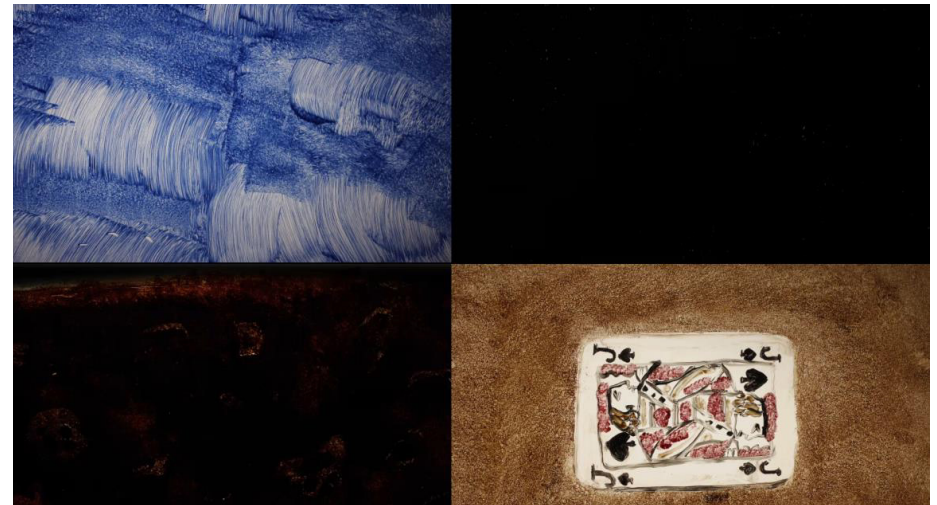


Fig.7 Still from the animated film



## 4. DISSEMINATION

*Known Unto God* premiered at the East Gallery, Norwich in the presentation of *Fierce Light* works as part of the Norfolk & Norwich Festival from May - June 2016.

The film has been selected for screening at the following festivals:

### 2016

Aesthetica Short Film Festival

O Bhéal Poetry Film Festival

Zebra Poetry Film Festival

Interfilm 32nd International Short Film Festival, Berlin

### 2017

14th London Short Film Festival

First Annual New York City Poetry Film Festival

Finalist in AltFF Alternative Film Festival, Toronto

Short Waves Festival, Poland

### 2018

Kinodrome at Folk East Festival

### 2019

Lyrical Visions Festival New Zealand

The film was long-listed for a BAFTA British Short Animation Award in 2016.

### Conference presentations

#### 2016

'Tripwire: War Wounds, Survival and Memory in the Twentieth Century', co-presented with Dr Alisa Miller for *First World War Network: First World War Commemoration and Memory*, Imperial War Museum, Manchester, 27 February 2016

#### 2019

'Animating Poetry: Whose line is it Anyway? Creation and Critique of shared language in poetry animation', *Ecstatic Truth IV Symposium*, Westminster University, 16 May 2019

A major national co-commission by 14-18 NOW,  
Norfolk & Norwich Festival and Writers' Centre Norwich

# FIERCE LIGHT

We have great pleasure in inviting you to the Private View of *Fierce Light* at  
Norwich University of the Arts on Friday 13 May, 5.15pm - 7pm (speeches 5.45pm).

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This World Premiere brings together outstanding international poets to reflect on the legacy of the First World War. Part of 14-18 NOW, the UK's art programme for the First World War centenary, these new works have been visually interpreted by celebrated film artists and are shown here at East Gallery<sup>NUA</sup> for the first time.

Alongside these films and poems will be Simon Armitage's collection of new poems 'Still', strikingly engraved on aerial photographs of WWI battlefields. Seemingly idyllic landscapes and tranquil meadows conceal ghost towns and macabre detail and a rarely-seen visual perspective on conflict. The haunting, abstract artworks will also be published as a new book.

Commissioned poets: Simon Armitage, Yrsa Daley-Ward, Jackie Kay, Bill Manhire, Paul Muldoon, Daijit Nagra and Jo Shapcott.

Commissioned film artists: George Bellfield, Tim Davies, Matthew Kay, Joshua Carver and Suzie Hanna.

Reverse image: The German Army on the Western Front, 1914 - 1918 © IWM

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**East Gallery<sup>NUA</sup>**  
Exhibition open  
Tuesday 10 May - Saturday 4 June  
Open 12-7pm

East Gallery<sup>NUA</sup>  
Cavendish House  
St Andrews Hill  
Norwich NR2 4AE

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RSVP by Monday 18 April  
Email: [rspv@nua.ac.uk](mailto:rspv@nua.ac.uk)  
Call: 01603 756237

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For further information please  
visit [www.nua.ac.uk/thegallery](http://www.nua.ac.uk/thegallery)

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**NORFOLK & NORWICH FESTIVAL**

**WRITERS' CENTRE NORWICH**

**NORWICH UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS**

LOTTERY FUNDED

Department for Culture, Media & Sport

Fig.8 Flyer for the FIERCE LIGHT launch event



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