

Fragility: Fabrica Gallery, Brighton

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This looks to be a memorable exhibition... It has been showing for nearly a month now, but continues until 23rd Aug, and so there is still a few weeks left to make the visit.

[Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva](#) has long been a favourite artist of mine. Her work articulates the most profound existential themes with awe-inspiring beauty: themes of life and death, that are generally unvoiced, even taboo – and that need to be brought to light.

On receipt of Fabrica's email last month promoting the exhibition, I was instantly attracted by the accompanying image (see below), revealing a glimpse of a most powerful installation that was at the same time delicate, fragile, and dissolving into light.



Fragility image by Tom Thistlethwaite, courtesy of Fabrica.

I was attracted by the beauty of the installation long before I discovered the depth of its resonances, and the nature of the material being used – for like many of us in this age of the internet, I skim my emails quickly. Some, like this one, I mark for 'proper' reading later on. What I found later on, in the words of [Fabrica's](#) promotional message, was that *Fragility* fills the gallery with:

"... a series of delicate veils made from the animal material, caul fat. These fragile veils fall from the ceiling to the floor, drawing you in and immersing you in its centre. Here, light filters down through the material into the central dome, and for a moment, surrounded by the work, you are given the chance to reflect..."

I longed to experience the work at first hand, but that is not possible for me. Thankfully, [Fabrica](#) has provided a superb video, which covers the development of the work from start to finish.



There seems to be a growing move towards exploring and talking more about the subject of death and dying. It is gradually becoming less of a taboo subject, and Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva is a foremost proponent of the movement.

Near the beginning of the video, Hadzi-Vasileva asserts that she would like viewers to think about 'the light at the end of the tunnel', extensively reported by those who have had what we call a near-death experience. I did slightly question this statement when I first heard it, partly because having had such an experience myself fairly recently, I can assure her that it bore no resemblance to this installation.

And I am not sure how much of a good idea it is for an artist to suggest how people should think about a work. *Fragility* is well strong enough to speak for itself. The fragile veils are designed to manipulate the light, and draw people ever inwards to a central dome that invites inner stillness and contemplation. People will think what they think and feel what they feel.

The [Fabrica Gallery](#) is actually not far from where I lived for many years, and Brighton is where I took my degree in Sculpture. Does the association with place make a difference to one's reading of the work? Well yes, of course it does – it is impossible to perceive anything without reference to one's own store of memories, whether consciously or unconsciously. This leads me to ponder... Does my familiarity with Fabrica and Brighton make the work more personal to me? Does it touch me all the more deeply? Does it matter?

However, the site-specific nature of this work really does make a particular difference to me. The Fabrica building is, of course, a former church, and *Fragility* carries strong overtones of the Christian tradition, both from this country and Hadzi-Vasileva's own background in Macedonia. The more I looked and thought about the exhibition, the more I shifted from my initial delight at the fragility and sheer beauty of the installation, through revulsion about the material, to a feeling of heaviness and oppression – the weight of history. Others will see it differently, it is so dense with resonances.

Whether or not we agree with any particular idea or concept, [Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva](#) has absolutely succeeded in evoking the most profound thoughts, feelings and memories concerning death – causing us to reflect upon our own mortality, vulnerability and beauty.

You might like to take a look at an earlier post I wrote here – about [Resuscitare](#), another of Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva's works.

And for more information, here's a link to Fabrica, about this [Fragility exhibition](#):