

Cavaliero Finn presents

# BRAIN TUMOUR BOOK

Exhibition by Leah Jensen

“I swapped clay for textiles, something I could do from bed. It became an absolute necessity for me, and genuinely aided my recovery. I often found myself wondering, what do people who don't make things do with their time? How do they cope?” I felt so fortunate. It occurred to me recently that ever since I was a young child I have turned to making for escapism from difficult situations.” **Leah Jensen**

The exhibition features artwork that chronicles the artist's journey through her recent brain tumour diagnosis and treatment. Through intricate embroidered stitch-work and layered imagery, Leah transforms her vulnerability into visual poetry, offering visitors to the exhibition a window into her process of fear, resilience, acceptance, and hope. In September 2020 Leah was unable to focus and lost her ability to speak at work. She was rushed to hospital where they discovered an aggressive brain tumour. During her long stay in hospital, Leah faced her fears and

started to reflect on life and death. Being largely bedridden, she was unable to work with clay, a medium for which she is critically acclaimed. Instead, she turned to embroidery, or drawing with thread to help her process the complex emotions she was experiencing. Every emotion, thought, memory and feeling has been captured in her deeply personal Brain Tumour Book, still ongoing, as she deals with a potentially uncertain future. Each check-up and brain scan brings a sense of dread, but Leah has such a calm sense of acceptance

and positivity that shines through her work which articulates the ups and downs of her life-changing diagnosis.

“We are delighted to welcome Leah Jensen's exhibition to the Fitzrovia Chapel, the chapel for the former Middlesex Hospital. 2026 celebrates ten years of the Fitzrovia Chapel Foundation and a rich history of providing a space for people in times of illness, distress and needing quiet sanctuary.”

**Madeleine Boomgaarden –  
Director of the Fitzrovia Chapel.**

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## RESPONSES TO THE ARTWORK OF LEAH JENSEN THROUGH AN ART THERAPY LENS.

**BY MIA CAVALIERO**  
Art Therapist and Artist

Leah Jensen's work that she made, and is continuing to make, while confronting her diagnosis of a life-threatening illness and going through hospitalisation and treatment evokes a reflection on the therapeutic aspects of her creative response. My first feeling was that the work is a hugely powerful means of communicating her experience as well as a courageous confrontation of the illness itself. It is also a very beautiful and moving body of work. It shows how, while in hospital, she actively engaged with the full

experience. As a ceramicist she works physically with her body, her hands and clay, now she must stay in bed. But her hands need to work, to express and process what is happening; through the haptic perception that is part of her artist self, she is not passive in the treatment. Without her art making she may have felt she had no control or part in her recovery. Choosing a needle and thread, she starts to make repetitive stitches. Looking at the work makes me think of how stitching might be a meditative process, where there is less judgement, where thoughts and feelings, memories and emotions can float up, observed gently. The repetitive action of making the stitches also makes me think of the pulse, the insistence of the life force. In her ceramic pieces, Leah Jensen

creates dazzling surface patterns on her pots. In some of the pieces in this exhibition these patterns are stitched onto cloth where, almost hidden inside the patterning, some of her fearful thoughts emerge, stitched into words. They are built into the whole, surrounded and bolstered by the familiar forms of her artistry, but given voice in an extremely moving and meaningful way. By stitching with her own hair as thread, I feel the artist is using her agency to take control of this experience that is happening to her, so important especially when in hospital. The use of her own fallen hair, while so poignant, might also be thought of as the creation of something new and vital and sacred. This beautiful chapel seems an ideal setting for this inspiring exhibition.

## BOOK PAGES (CLOCKWISE)

### 1. That Morning 1

**From my hospital bed in the morning I watch the parakeets**

While still in hospital, on the morning of finding out she likely had a brain tumour, Leah started to do what felt natural to her at in difficult times, create something. She thought of the Louise Bourgeois quote, 'Sewing is an act of emotional repair' and thought that is what she must do. To capture what was happening in this moment Leah wrote these words down in the sketchbook that she carries with her everywhere, to later be sewn and become the first page of the book.

### 2. That Morning 2

This page is a partner to the first, capturing that morning in hospital. This is the view from Leah's hospital bed as she looked out of the window and watched the parakeets.

### 3. The Things You Can't Say Out Loud 1

**Why am I not afraid to die?**

The first in a series within the book titled, 'The Things You Can't Say Out Loud'. This series started in the form of hand-stitched patterns encircling a diary entry, at the time it was not made with any consideration of how it might look, but to facilitate some repetitive stitching to do that was calming. A distraction while contemplating the thing that Leah couldn't say out loud.

### 4. Time to Go

Even when coming to terms with the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness, Leah still had to deal with all the other parts of life. The domestic, the personal the mundane.

### 5. Shame 1

In the MRI as they scan my brain and in endometriosis agony I feel an intense wave of shame for all the years I hated my body.

### 6. Tally, 256

The days counted from brain tumour diagnosis to surgery.

### 7. MRI Scan

This is a stitched copy of one of Leah's MRI scans before surgery.

### 8. The Chair

**This is the chair he made for me while he was in rehab**

Leah had a lot of complicated thoughts and feelings about some of the people in her life during this time.

### 9. The Things You Can't Say Out Loud 2

**What if I become like him?**

### 10. Boredom is a Gift

After years of juggling multiple jobs alongside her creative practice, Leah found positivity in the rest that came along with her illness. For some time, she had not had adequate time for creative daydreaming and experimentation. With all this free time and space to think, Leah's mind became flooded with inspiration, a feeling that she had been desperately missing.

### 11. Will

**I wrote my will today**

Some things within the diary are especially hard to read because, at the time, Leah was concerned a loved one would see them.

### 12. Terror

The night before surgery after the surgeon came to discuss what would happen tomorrow.

### 13. Operation Day

**In this moment she is working out on the field in the mud and the rain and the thorns and she is crying. I am in the waiting room and there is nothing I can do**

As all Leah's treatment happened in the midst of Covid, she was not able to have loved ones present for support. Counties of distance between her and her family was especially difficult. Leah's Mum had sent her some roses from the farm in which she worked at the time. For this page about her Mum, Leah dried them and used the stems among her stitched thoughts.

### 14. UNFINISHED 'Day 4'

The first of a series of self-portraits made from selfies of Leah's face post-surgery. The series catalogues the evolving swelling, bruising, and scarring she experienced and is created in micro cross stitch; this 5 x 6.5cm rectangle contains 4740 cross stitches.

### 15. Romance

**When I came home after surgery you washed and cut my hair. When you are not here I wear your clothes**

When Leah got home from surgery, her partner Michael washed the blood and plaster residue out of her hair, before cutting it to make her more comfortable. For Leah this moment of love and care is something that is meaningful in a way that she struggles to put into words.

### 16. Craniotomy

**As the pressure inside my skull adjusts, it causes the bone flat made by the surgeons during my craniotomy to move. It makes a clicking sound with the regularity of the second hand on a clock, ticking. Click, click, click. I hear it inside my head for months.**

Recovering from brain surgery brought with it a set of strange sensations. Understanding that a part of her skull had moved, Leah couldn't help recalling science textbooks from school discussing tectonic plates.

### 17. MRI Sounds

Leah had many MRI scans throughout her treatment, this was a place that she was able to find a real sense of peace. After each scan she would make a note of all the things she thought she could recognise in the sounds the MRI machine makes.

### 18. Anaplastic Astrocytoma

Around a week after surgery Leah found out that her tumour was in fact cancer and she would need to have further treatment, she made this flag in part to try and remember the type of tumour she had.

### 19. The Things You Can't Say Out Loud 3

**Mum I've got brain cancer**

### 20. The Things You Can't Say Out Loud 4 (Stay Away from Google)

**Everything is fine, as long as you don't read the statistics.**

### 21. Award

**The Queen of losing needles in bed while sewing**

After surgery Leah realised she had mistakenly brought her hospital gown home in her suitcase. A piece of fabric that had been with her through so much would have to become a part of the book. It took a while to work out how, adding a badge enabled it to stay as an item of clothing while still a page in the book.

### 22. Rust

**The worst part of having brain cancer is being an unemployed disabled working class renter**

This page uses lace to reference domestic homely decoration, and rust to reference the poor quality housing that renters often put up with. During Leah's illness the worst stress she experienced was finding housing, made worse by her circumstances.

### 23. 'Fertility Weave 5 – Suprecur'

Before starting radiotherapy and chemo Leah underwent egg collection, this involved many hormone injections in different stages. She used paraphernalia from this time in a series of weaves.

### 24. Egg Collection

**I've got my eggs on ice - but can I afford to use them?**

At many points during Leah's treatment and since, the entire event felt completely bizarre to her. Having her eggs harvested was one of them, the humour within this page reflects that.

### 25. Radiotherapy Mask

Wanting to have a visual reminder in the diary of a Radiotherapy mask, Leah used a printed image for this page. Looking back through poor memory she doesn't believe she used weaving to lock the picture in place symbolically, but she feels it was a curious decision that was perhaps created out of a subconscious feeling caused by wearing the mask during Radiotherapy.

### 26. Out

**I am a piece of furniture in this room**

In treatment, resting in bed with exhaustion, Leah watched the world happen around her.

### 27. Dress

**I used to wear this outfit to parties**

As she considered how her life might change, Leah re-purposed a well worn party outfit into a book page.

### 28. Dinner

Before Leah had cancer, she imagined that if she did, she would buy a juicer and stop eating crisps. The reality was that she didn't have the drive and wanted comfort food. Later on, when Leah started chemo, everything makes her feel so ill she has to eat what she can stomach. She became extremely sensitive to salt so mainly ate unseasoned mash potato, toast and kale.

### 29. Untitled 1

**Today hanging up the washing is Everest**

### 30. Clay

**I just want to make something out of clay but I can't get out of bed today**

### 31. Window in Fallen Hair

During the Radiotherapy Leah began to lose a large section of hair, she collected it, at the time she was not sure why. In isolation because of a weakened immune system during the pandemic, a lot of time was spent looking out of windows at the world, in her bedroom, on the train to the hospital. In hindsight it is clear to Leah why she made this work using her hair as thread, although she can't remember how exactly the idea came to her.

### 32. Chemo Arms

**I take my medicine and close my eyes. My arms feel 20 feet long, my hands like cars**

Taking chemo made Leah feel an odd sensation that she wanted to get into the diary.

### 33. Comfort/Confinement

This was the pillow that held Leah's recovering skull through months full of physical discomfort, pain and emotional exhaustion. Leah doesn't have this pillow anymore.

### 34. Fairweather Fathers

Leah was having a lot of complicated thoughts and feelings about people in her life, so she condensed it as much as possible down to two words, definitely not literal, but you get the idea.

### 35. Guilt 1

**What is my chemo piss doing to the environment?**

### 36. The Things You Can't Say Out Loud 5

**Without you I think I might have died**

### 37. Bedruthan Steps

**I am told I'm so brave but I feel like a fraud, is it resilience, denial or maybe indifference, a mouse in the forced swim test, maybe it's sisu, probably it's Sertraline**

This is another work that features a window – though not as plainly as the earlier one in the diary.

### 38. Food Shopping

With a brain injury, fatigue, confusion and poor memory, at the time it was difficult for Leah to understand the enormity of what she had been through. Food shopping was an event that brought things crashing into perspective. An essential activity, which likely because of its regularity she remembered and knew to be easy and mindless. It was a devastating shock for her to realise how impossible this task was to her now with her brain injury. In an environment that attacks the senses and requires you to remember and make decisions, Leah felt an emotion that she was not used to feeling, panic.

### 39. 5 Years

**How do you plan a life when you know the statistics?**

How do you decide how to most wisely spend your time when you learn that only 13% of people with a high grade brain tumour live more than 5 years after diagnosis? Everything felt so pointless but so urgent to Leah all at the same time.

### 40. Say It Again

**Sorry I can't remember, sorry I can't remember, sorry I can't remember...**

One of the most painful and frustrating things for Leah has been, and continues to be her loss of memory. Day to day it makes things harder in a practical way, but worse is the fact that she can't remember many of the times she shared with loved ones.

### 41. Burnt Quilt

**The confidence gained was fleeting, the feelings that returned now compounded by cognitive difficulties and fatigue**

### 42. Untitled 2

**I'm so confused and I just can't remember. I feel I'm losing my grasp on reality. I don't understand. I can't relate. I'm scared. Why is recovery taking so long. Is this me now then?**

For Leah the hardest part of recovery has been following her treatment. The intense confusion at times made her feel like she was mentally very unwell and like she did not understand who she was or what she had done. This is something she still really struggles with, it really scares her. This page and the following two pages are about this.

### 43. Cassavetes Film Still

**I'm struggling to ascertain fact from fiction.**

**Who was/am I? What have I done?**

### 44. Disintegration

**Now that I can't trust my memory I know nothing for certain**

## WORK

### Three Quilts

#### 'Your Body Will Betray You'

Cotton and steel - £7,000 +VAT

#### 'When the algorithm discovers that you have cancer'

Cotton - £7,000 +VAT

#### 'Small Quilt'

**'Is a chemo body a safe place to grow a child?'**

Cotton - £7,000 +VAT

### Pillows

#### 'That Morning 3'

**'I lie awake in the dead silence of 3am a nurse enters my cubicle on the ward to deliver the results' the pillow in front continues with the text 'after, I tell her that I'm scared not because I am, but because that's the sort of thing people say isn't it? She gives me a cautionary breast exam and helps me to get dressed. Your socks are so soft - thank you they're my favourite'. £3,800 +VAT**

### Hand Carved Vessels

#### The First Pot (Saint Helena with the Cross) 2023

Porcelain - NFS - private collection

The first pot Leah made after her cancer treatment, felt and still feels for her like a monumental achievement. The recovery after treatment and trying to get her life back on track was the hardest part for Leah.

#### The Last Pot (Saint Sebastian), 2020

Porcelain - price on application

This vessel was built and carved in 2020 as Jensen waited for a craniotomy to remove her brain tumour. This procedure held a risk of paralysis, while carving she wondered if this would be the last pot she would ever make. It remains forever unfinished as she ran out of time before the operation date arrived. It stayed unfired for the three years she spent in treatment and recovery and during this time it was carefully transported through two house moves. Areas of the carving were damaged by the moving and damp conditions of the flats in which Jensen lived. When she was able to move back into a studio, finally it was fired. She did not imagine that it would survive due to all the upheaval, but it did with the damage preserved.

#### The Mystery Pot, 2019 or 2020

Stoneware - price on application

After the completion of her treatment and a bit of recovery time, Leah regained some strength and slowly moved back into a studio to recommence making. Whilst unpacking she discovered a large carved vessel that she had no memory of making, this was a massive shock and triggered a crushing realisation of just how unwell she had been.

Undergoing intensive treatments to the brain can result in a range of strange symptoms, including memory loss. Although it is certain that this piece was made by Jensen, she has no recollection of making it, or even where it was made. She was unable to find any evidence of the making process that is usually well documented. Alongside Jensen's signature at the base is the clue 'St. Catherine', even so she is unable to identify which painting was used to inform the carving.

To this day she does not remember, she believes this is the best pot she has ever made.

### Votive

Throughout treatment, Leah found examining the various scans of her brain fascinating, the shape of her tumour was really interesting to her, from one angle it had the appearance of a cloud. Though the scans held a lot of great information she really wanted to understand it in 3D, so she made it in ceramic.

Upon a visit to the Wellcome Collection some years ago she had recalled seeing a beautiful collection of anatomical votives. In Greco-Roman times miniature body parts were sculpted and offered to the gods for healing and protection.

Leah began to make a votive before each MRI scan, discarding them around London as offerings.

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## Limited edition print and handkerchiefs

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Cavaliero Finn has produced a limited edition print with Leah from the Pillow page to raise funds for this exhibition and The Brain Tumour Charity. Leah has also created a series of hand-embroidered handkerchief artworks available for sale. The Pillow represents both comfort and confinement to Leah, as she formed an uneasy attachment to it being confined to bed for so long. Pillows hold deep symbolism in art, being mementos of some of our most private and vulnerable moments. Albrecht Dürer's sketches of pillows, most notably the Six Studies of Pillows (1493), are considered a masterpiece of Renaissance draftsmanship that elevate a mundane, personal object into a subject of profound artistic and intimate study. While often viewed as a simple exercise in rendering fabric folds and textures, the pillows hold several layers of meaning, the contorted shapes indicate the fitful sleep between the waking world and the stuff of dreams.

### Leah Jensen

#### Comfort/Confinement, 2026

Velin Arches Creme, 250gsm  
33 x 36 cm  
Limited edition of 80 plus APs  
Printed by Warner Road Studios  
**£250 unframed**

#### Boredom is a Gift

Hand stitched antique cotton handkerchiefs from Leah Jensen's Finnish family archive  
25 x 25 cm  
1 of 25 unique handkerchiefs  
**£300 unframed**

## Brain Tumour Book Film

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We will be screening a new film at the exhibition produced with Elastic Pie Films about Leah's experience making this book.

## Supported by

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With additional support from

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CHAPEL**

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## With Thanks

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Chris Bennett  
Crafts Council  
Cockpit Arts  
Elastic Pie Films  
Hawkins Framing  
Lichen Music  
Warner Road Studios

## Cavaliero Finn

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Cavaliero Finn is proud to support and present this exhibition with Leah Jensen, developed over two years and curated by Juliana Cavaliero and Debra Finn. Part of the goal was to find the perfect venue to host this exhibition and we were over the moon when Fitzrovia Chapel agreed. This beautiful gem of a chapel has strong links to health, healing and contemplation making it the most fitting venue for this exhibition.

While researching and talking about this project with Leah, we've been struck by a stark reality: brain tumours kill more children and adults under 40 than any other cancer in the UK, yet it receives just 3% of national cancer research funding. It is for this reason we are raising money for The Brain Tumour Charity. It is the world's leading brain tumour charity and the largest dedicated funder of research into the disease. Their work spans pioneering research, awareness of symptoms, and critical support for those affected. We would be incredibly grateful for any donation you're able to make, no matter the size, to support this project and the life-saving research of The Brain Tumour Charity.

  @cavalierofinn.com

## Donate

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Net proceeds of the sales from this exhibition will go to The Brain Tumour Charity, you can also donate to our crowdfunder page using the QR code below:



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## Opening Hours

Friday 17th April – Sunday 26th April 2026  
Open daily from 11am – 6pm  
Monday – Friday (Sunday 12 noon – 5pm)  
Late Thursday 11am – 8pm

## Artists Tours

Saturday 18th April 2pm  
Thursday 23rd April 1pm  
Friday 24th April 1pm  
Saturday 25th April 2pm

## Location

Fitzrovia Chapel  
Fitzroy Place  
2 Pearson Square  
London W1T 3BF