

Part 3: ABJECTION

DRAWING-OUT THE UNCONSCIOUS

Working through these themes of loss and trauma in research and practice, and studying the art work of others, inspired me to experiment further to find a visual vocabulary where form, materiel and process communicate dynamically. I wanted to find the essential qualities of the felt experience and express this in my next work.

As my Mother's memories drift into the confusion of Alzheimer's disease, I am trying to piece things together from stories and impressions that I remember. I knew my Great-Grandfather Josef Meyer and Great-Grandmother Berta Meyer had been murdered, shot in a forest, at some point on their transportation to Auschwitz from Theresienstadt in 1943, but finding their photos and documents in the online archive of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre in Jerusalem, shook me to the core. It was all too real. (Fig. 133 - 134)



Figure 133. *Josef Meyer, 1879 -1943*



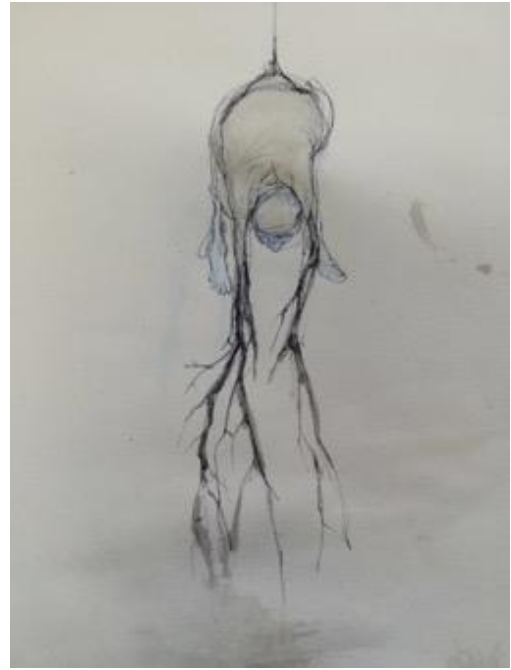
Figure 134. *Berta Meyer, 1879 -1943*

I started drawing, to re-engage with the thoughts behind the *Wild Woman*, linking images from dreams and memories that have become part of my visual vocabulary. I improvised with details I'd used before; bed clothes, mattresses, burnt branches, furniture, characters and landscapes. (Fig. 135 - 142)



Figures 135 - 6. Ali Darke, *Untitled*, 2019
(pen, ink, watercolour)

The figures started to transform into more amorphous forms - bulges, fissures, bundles, stitched and knotted, weighty hanging things, spilling out of the cabinets. From the records I discovered that my Great Grandfather's family had been linen merchants in Bielefeld, North Germany. Continuing the *Wild Woman*'s association with a dream-world, I started constructing these bulges from old linen sheets and pillow cases. Like my Rabbit toy, I used a mixture of sawdust and fine gravel to stuff and give the forms weight.



Figures 137 - 140. Ali Darke, *Untitled*, 2019
(pen, ink, watercolour)



Figures 141 - 142. Ali Darke, *Untitled*, 2019

The content of the drawings revealed things that I hadn't expected. 'The nature of drawing appears to inhabit an area that facilitates a level of ambiguity and a dynamic that promotes non-definition and the non-conclusive.' (Tracey, 2007, p.xx) Like dreaming, as drawings evolve from one to the next, seemingly incongruent elements come together, and lead me to the unexpected yet significant detail. Freud tells us;

It not infrequently happens that during the narration of a dream or during its analysis a fragment of the dream-content which had seemed to be forgotten re-emerges. This fragment which has been rescued from oblivion invariably affords us the best and most direct access to the meaning of the dream. (Freud, 1995, p.166).

This observation made me reconsider how I interpret my drawings - and understand that when I take them too literally I miss the subtle details that are the essential part. The processes of the mind when drawing seem to bypass more conscious thought, and allows an unearthing of unconscious matter. In her study of dream theory, Flanders (1993, p. 23) concludes, that the dream always retains an essential mystery,

and confronts our limits of knowable and 'the ambiguity which the project of a psychoanalysis attempts to frame and to fathom.'

THE ABJECT BODY

What has emerged from my drawing-dreaming are images and forms that could be described as abject. The shapes that bulge beyond the borders of the cabinets are in excess - spilling out. I have avoided abject content - which makes perfect sense as the defining feature of all that is abject is our instinct to distance ourselves. There are feelings of disgust, shame, and the fear of contamination and exposure surrounding the abject. It lurks on the borders of all my work - but in these drawings is taking centre stage. In contemporary use the word suggests debasement, describing things that come from the lowest depths of depravity, but misses its original definition of things cast off or rejected. Julia Kristeva returns this interpretation to the word. Her opening paragraph of *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. (1982). powerfully introduces the concept.

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable the thinkable.
(Kristeva, 1982, p.1)

Kristeva brings to psychoanalytical theory, the process of abjection at the very first moments of an infant's psychic life - individuation from the primal maternal connection. The process of estrangement is assisted through the body's senses and functions; feeding, breathing, elimination, an ebb and flow of sensory exchange, that discovers and maps a border between self and other. 'It is a provisional, transitory sense of differentiation from the maternal: fragile, unbecoming and unknowing sense of self' (Arya and Chare, 2016, p. 2)

What is ingested into the body, and excreted to the outside, trouble any sense of secure physical and psychic borders. Thus, abject material becomes threatening to our being. One can see in the separation and primal rejection by the Mother, that desire of the other gets conflated with the abjection of things outside the body. Things

expelled from the body may bring about revulsion, but the abject can also inspire an emptiness, the dull ache and shame of the forbidden desire to merge. Kristeva (1982) describes the body's border - as between all that is alive and all that is deadly. The process of elimination is what keeps the body alive. 'There I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border.' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3). There is fascination, revulsion, and phobia for the 'abjected' objects, which, recognised as parts of the self, become objects of shame - the very essence of one's self is cast as abject.

As a psychological 'condition' abjection forms a different schema within the psyche than repression or rejection, it is 'articulated by negation and its modalities, transgression, denial, and repudiation.' (Kristeva 1982, p. 6) There is a severance of the self, a splitting - an exclusion. Kristeva's language is poetic but tragic in its description of the abject, or the *deject* or *stray* as she describes the subject in the grip of abjection. A subject forever separating himself out, experiences his boundaries as fluid, and fractured, questioning his solidity, the deject-self is never felt as homogenous, 'but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic.' (p. 8)

I can see aspects of the abject in all of the artist's work I have discussed. In Louise Bourgeois the abject is present, in the wounded bodies, fractured into parts, represented in forms and structures that encase or leak. In my understanding of those artists working with post-memory, the trauma they are haunted by is 'abjected' - separated from the self yet constituent of it. 'The abject is the violence of mourning for an "object" that has always already been lost.' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 15) Doris Salcedo's concrete filled furniture reflects the memory of violence that has defiled the subject - a part of the self is 'abjected' - the internal space is overwhelmed with trauma - these blocked, tomb-stoned-bodies, demand we stop and confront the unbearable horror that has been cast out. The abject, 'is a kind of arrested or abeyant signification: it occupies the gap between matter and meaning'. (Arya and Chare, 2016, p. 6).

It is fascinating then to address the work of Berlinde De Bruyckere. (Figs. 143 - 147) The emptied, hollowed out corpses, are figures from a liminal place between life and death. Nothing remains to define a self. Bodily fluids appear to have been drained out. This absence is a powerful reminder that the abject is not visible, yet threatens to

return, lurking in the corner of our eye. 'The corpse is the ultimate abject thing: the negation that is contained within the body and its ultimate destiny.' (Arya, 2016, p.107) The flesh here in its rawness is perhaps a disruption of the division between outer and inner, a body turned inside out - the abject made flesh. She takes the human, animal or hybrid body and shows us life with all its suffering and cruelty. The mutating bodies look suffering in the face and meet it with compassion. I find her work achingly beautiful.

The corpse seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. (Kristeva, 1982, p.4)

Her figures are headless forms, twisted in agony, on the point of collapse. Their pale translucent skin, created from layers of wax and fabric and pigment, show veins, bruising, sores and gaping wounds, reminiscent of the Martyrs, Saints and Pietas of the early Renaissance. But these bodies have no heads – no means of taking in breath or sensing their environment.

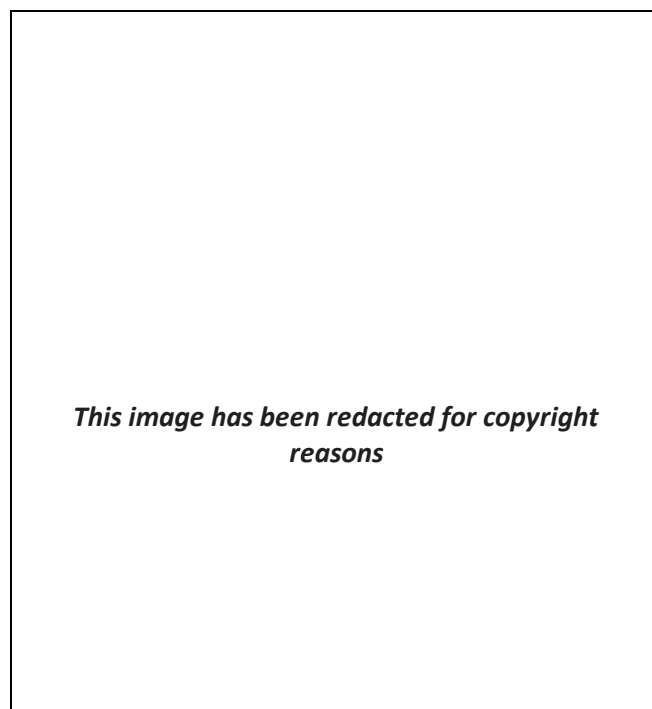


Figure 143. Berlinde de Bruyckere, *The Wound II*, 2011 (mixed media)

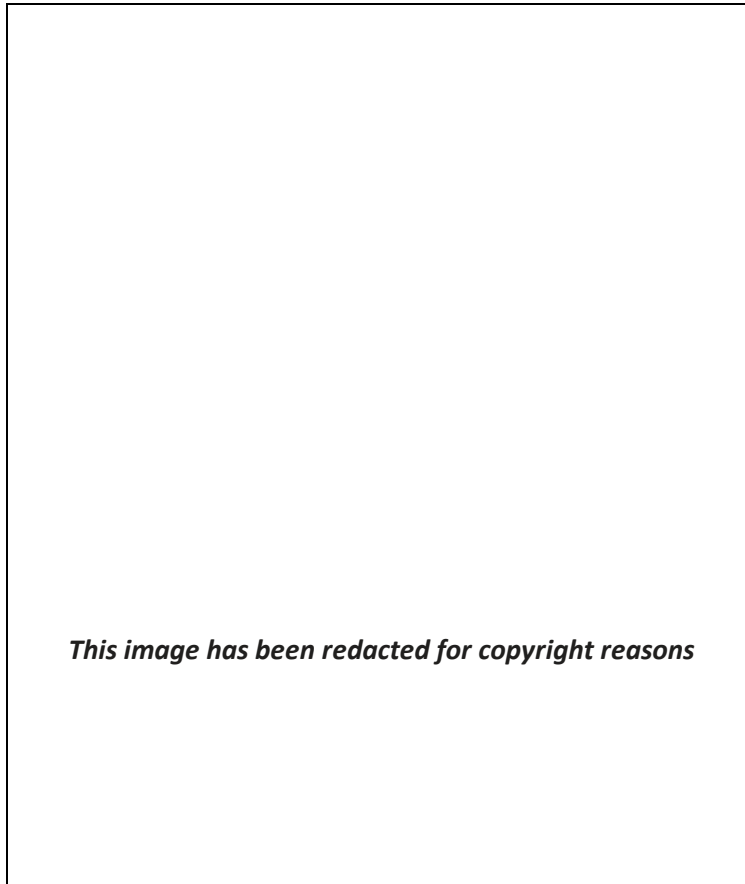


Figure 144. Berlinda de Bruyckere, *Marthe*, 2008 (mixed media)

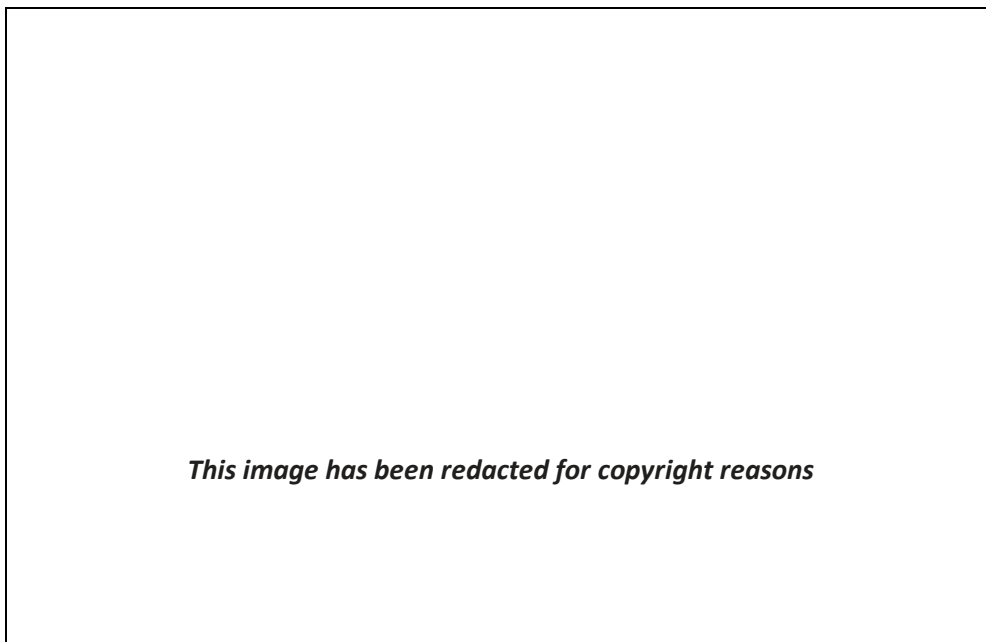


Figure 145. Berlinda de Bruyckere, *Kreupelhout*, 2012-13 (mixed media)

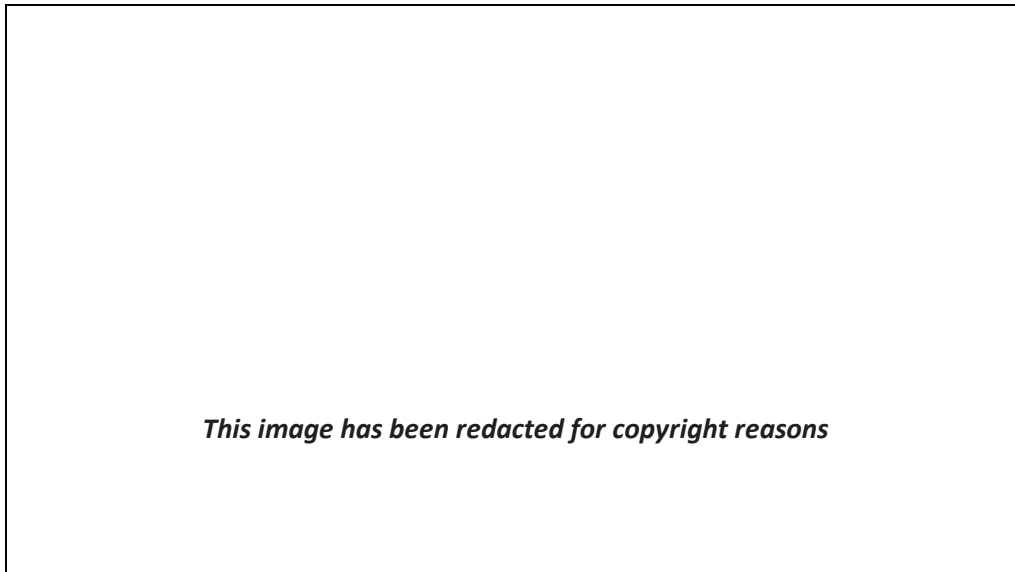


Figure 146. Berlinda de Bruyckere, *Quan*, 2009-10
(mixed media)

In a letter to the artist, Philippe Van Cauteren writes;

Your sculptures are bodies that function like prostheses, compensating for the existential human shortcoming. They are intimate, vulnerable protagonists, which set out from a sensual cruelty to give tangible form to what makes a human being human. (Mengoni, 2001, p.11)

Her figures might be encased in cabinets, as if being preserved, or laid on a table awaiting examination, or hung from butcher's hooks – slaughter of the object is never far from the viewers mind. 'She unerringly explores the limits of the visual representation of physical and emotional pain'. (Devriendt, 2015)

Bruyckere presents us with the transitional porous flesh of the body that mediates self and other. I am reminded of Grosz's theory of 'infantile transitivity', an oscillation between object and subject, and the body's capacity to 'fold in on itself'. (Grosz, 1994 p.100) Bruyckere's forms reveal this paradox and we become hypersensitive to our bodies, and to what is in excess of human bodies and our mortality. We are faced with the existential questions of the nature of the body and soul. As Kennedy (2014) asks, is the body a prison, to which the soul is tied to pleasure and pain, with death the only release, or is there a possibility of something else, where subjectivity and an organising psychic structure provides the 'home for the soul'?

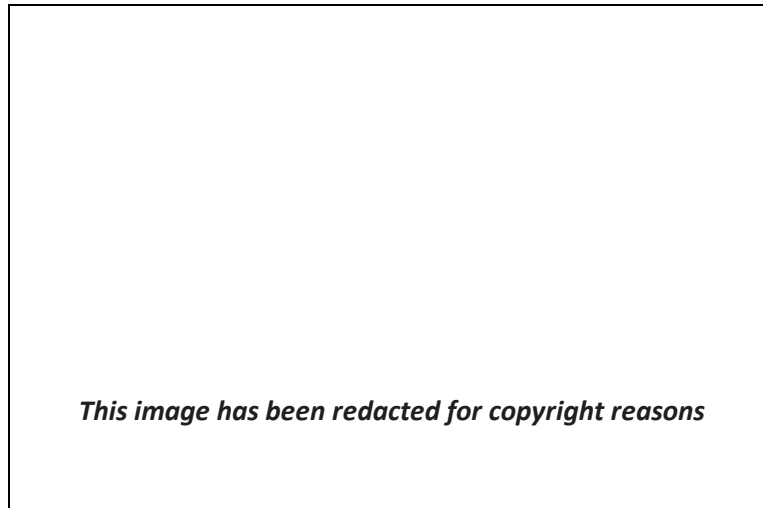


Figure 147. Berlinde de Bruyckere, *The Pillow*, 2010
(mixed media)

Discussion during a work-in-progress seminar suggested that my work was most powerful when the tension between the domestic and the body was implicated. So, in taking on Kristeva's conception of the psychic and physical body-limits defined by what enters and leaves the body, I thought about the exchange of fresh and contaminated water, through the body, and filtered and directed by taps, drains, pipes, sinks, and plug holes through the home. I scavenged from builders' skips and flea markets discarded plumbing, along with doors, shutters, hooks, hangers, nails and broken tools - things that once serviced life in the home.

THE DEGENERATES, developed from this debris, into a collection of sculptural pieces. Degenerate Art (translated from the German: Entartete Kunst) was a label given by the Germany Nazi Party to any modern painting or sculpture considered morally suspect and therefore an insult to German sensibility. Such art was described as mentally depraved and monstrous - and viewed as a Jewish or Communist threat and contaminant. Artists deemed degenerate were sanctioned, forbidden to teach, or practice. Traditional art was promoted that valued cultural purity and exalted the ideals of Germanic myth, nature, noble valour and ancient wisdom. The Nazis control of art for propaganda, promoted the theory of degeneracy as abject to cleanse the culture of Jewish depravity.

I showed four of the sculptures at 'Deptford Does Art', a small gallery in South London, curating the exhibition with Suzi Morris, and Yaroslaff Soltan. We titled the show *Bring to Light*, stating that, to 'bring something to light implies not only exposing a truth by an unearthing, a dredging up, or an uprooting from the depths, but also the possibility of making apparent, bringing into the mind and materialising that which is intangible and resists representation, defies being and is possibly uncomfortable to behold'. It was a very successful show, not only artistically, but particularly as a working trio and we resolved to continue the collaboration.

I completed the full collection of *The Degenerates* to present in the Professional Doctorate Showcase, 2019, using the wonderful Light-Well space at UEL. The white walls, concrete floor, metal induction pipes and bright light invited thoughts of something clinical, scientific - things laid out awaiting examination. (Fig. 148 - 161)

I worked on *The Degenerates* in an intuitive way - trusting a process in response to the materials and objects I had gathered. I created hybrid bodies - animals, birds and human forms, collapsed, laid out or hung up like corpses. Each piece had a simple title, in keeping with their mode of presentation. I was pleased with the results, and surprised by my work. The general feedback noted their evocative, cold and mournful quality; and that the narrative was obscure and therefore intriguing. Their weightiness and heavy gravitational pull seemed to be an important element - especially as it was in conflict with the notion of flight present in the birdlike forms. I hadn't been conscious of this and it was exciting to hear interpretation beyond my intension that had drawn the viewer's emotional engagement with the work. However, I felt frustrated that some of the domestic elements were not transformed to reveal a quality beyond their appearance, something I still wanted to achieve. I was most pleased with *Draped*. A stuffed form folded over a hook on a shutter door with dangling stair spindles. It had resonances of the body and yet did not really resemble anything familiar. I noted that it was the last piece I made in the collection, in a hurry, and out of something else that had gone wrong. Maybe, as I didn't have anything in particular in mind as I worked something was created more intuitively.



Figure 148. Ali Darke, *The Degenerates*, 2019



Figure 149. Ali Darke, *Plugged*, 2019
(wooden cabinet, linen, stuffing, tap, plug, plugholes)



Figures 150 - 151. Ali Darke, *Plugged*, 2019 (detail)



Figure 152. Ali Darke, *Stuffed*, 2019
(cotton, linen, china plates, wooden spindle fragments, marble)



Figure 153. Ali Darke, *Pinned*, 2019
(wooden table, hammerhead, nails, linen pillowcase, stuffing,)



Figures 154 -155. Ali Darke, *Strung*, 2019
(wooden door, taps, linen pillowcase, string, stuffing, wooden spindle fragments)



Figure 156 - 157. Ali Darke, *Draped*, 2019
(wooden window shutter, spindle fragments, linen pillowcase, metal shelf bracket, stuffing)



Figure 158. Ali Darke, *Laid*, 2019
(linen pillowcase, surgical instruments, salt, marble, steel stand)

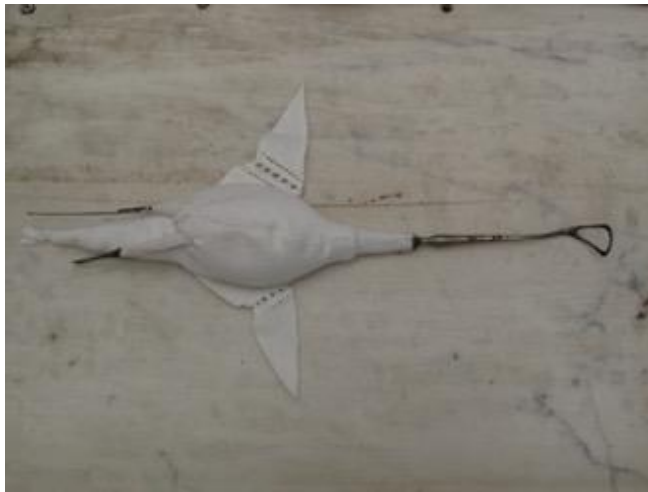


Figure 159 -161. Ali Darke, *Laid*, 2019

THE ABJECT PSYCHE

The exhibition at UEL and seminar after afforded me the chance to reflect. I was becoming aware that these forms were attempting to express something beyond the body, in excess of the subject; abject, intrusive, disturbing.

An essay, analysing the paintings of Francis Bacon, *Bacon and the Body*, by the psychoanalyst Darian Leader resonated with what I had been trying to comprehend and make apparent in my work. (Figs. 162 - 163) He sees in Bacon's various painted figures, beyond their reflections, shadows and doubles 'the antinomy between the body image and something else that is present in the body yet which defies ready subsumption in the image.' - smudged bulges, blurs, and opaque masses; 'the glutinous residues - a series which is showing us how the body is the container of something more than itself, something which, in a sense, has no home, a cry which is exiled from the body and which searches, in Bacon's art, for a place.' (Leader, p. 95)



Figure 162. Frances Bacon, *Three Studies for a Self-Portrait*, 1981
(oil on canvas)

This image has been redacted for copyright reasons

Figure 163. Frances Bacon, *Three Studies for a Self-Portrait*, 1944
(oil on canvas)

I wanted to explore these notions of that which is *outside* and yet constituent of the self, that is felt in excess of the body and defies easy representation. Looking deeper into trauma and the psychoanalytical theory of abjection, repression and splitting, I came across a paper by the psychosocial academic and psychoanalyst, Dr Racula Soreanu, that touched a nerve. At the same time, I was noticing a shift in my response to psychoanalytic theory, that rather than employing it to justify or explain completed work, which closed down new thought, I was following a more intuitive process, that reflected a freer association of thoughts. 'Free-association happens in the form of linking across levels of sensoriality and signification, rather than merely in the form of linking several linguistic signifiers in a series.' (Soreanu, 2019, p.17) A symbiosis between theory and practice was emerging. In doing this, I found I didn't necessarily relate to the whole premise of an academic argument, but was giving myself permission, that when something in passing inspired an emotional or visceral response I could take it out of context and use it for my own ends! This has grown out of an increased confidence in my practice and understanding, and therefore a deeper engagement with the theory I was reading.

The paper in question; 'The Psychic Life of Fragments: Splitting from Ferenczi to Klein' (Soreanu, 2018) elaborates on the crucial psychoanalytic theory surrounding psychic splitting. Ferenczi, a close associate of Freud, was a Hungarian psychoanalyst who lived from 1873-1933. Contrary to Freud, he advocated an empathic response by the

analyst during therapy, developing notions of intersubjectivity. His ideas are being re-appraised and credited for their originality and foresight. Klein's theory of object relations, in which the polarised good and bad objects are split off through the processes of projection, introjection and projective-identification, build on Ferenczi's notions of the actual processes of intersubjectivity, both positive and pathological.

Soreanu reconsiders Ferenczi's radical descriptions of the process of splitting and the subsequent psychic life of these split off fragments. She questions;

What is the "stuff" that the psyche is splitting? Is it the ego? Is it the psyche on the whole (including the ego, but also other agencies)? Is it a part of the ego where a particular introjection happened? Or is it even a part of the ego that an-other has successfully projected something onto? (Soreanu, 2018, p.422)

She explains the Ferenczian concept that considers the young ego's unbearable fear of disintegration, that leads to splitting off parts of the psyche as a means of self-preservation. Ferenczi was 'curious about how subjects survive in fragments through the action of intrapsychic forces, rather than how they are held together by the environment.' (p.422) This curiosity reveals a suspicion that some of the split off fragments, unavailable for projection onto the other, remain lodged in the psyche as dissociated deadened parts or parasitic elements; the Orpha, teratoma and other monsters of Ferenczian theory.

Ferenczi developed a metapsychology with which to explain his ideas - and it is this that intrigued and inspired my next iteration of work. He describes these psychic fragments with vivid medical analogies and poetic language to explain how they torment and become manifest in adult pathology as a result of trauma. I initially focused on one aspect of splitting that Soreanu describes as a 'terrifying fragment', conceived as an internal 'badness' - an over identification with an aggressor. Self-destructive pain is experienced as releasing some anxiety, in preference to suffering in silence. He uses a vivid medical analogy and one that 'is yet to reveal all its richness for understanding trauma and splitting.' (p.422)

Ferenczi compares the psychic place harbouring this parasitic entity to a “teratoma” - a truly horrific image. Teratoma are tumours made up of several different types of human embryonic tissue, such as hair, muscle, teeth, or bone; and can resemble a malformed internalised twin. The psychic equivalent,

...results from a splitting-off, in the form of a “doubling” of the ego but also from a deadening of the split-off fragment. This fragment is also susceptible of constituting a new psychic agency, which cannot be assimilated to the primary superego, but rather results from the “rendering unconscious” of a part of the ego. It is the “double” of the ego, which is “buried” in the unconscious. (Soreanu, p. 439)

I found the concept of a parasitic ego double secreted into the depths of the unconscious truly evocative and although I don't understand the full implications for the clinical encounter, this disturbing psychic schema has set off a train of thought and feeling I was compelled to explore through visual expression.

This work began at my second art residency at Nottingham Trent University - the Summer Lodge 2019. Equipped with minimal tools and materials, and no set theme, I took this paper as my starting point.

My application to the residency stated my intention; ‘I can get caught up in old habits of meticulous finish, working things out too soon, closing off the questions and shutting down experimentation. I would hope at the Summer Lodge, to challenge any assumptions of what might happen. It is unsettling to test the tipping point, allowing the work to remain ambiguous, not knowing what it is ‘about’, enduring loose ends; just asking questions without looking for answers, and welcoming feedback from others. When I dare the unpredictable is always exciting’. Darke (2019)

I began by drawing as a way of engaging with these psychic fragments and psychic space. (Fig. 164 - 167) Materially, I used debris from the fabric of a home - and to suggest the body, used stockings as a membrane to contain the fragments. I rummaged in builder's skips for bricks, drain pipes, plaster, dust, sand and old furniture stuffing, and proceeded to experiment with this limited palette.



Figures 164 - 167. Ali Darke, *Studies for The Psychic Fragments*, 2019
(pen, ink, watercolour)

It surprised me how much the body and its parts became apparent in the objects. Viewers saw severed and distorted limbs, organs and intestines, fetuses, and the brain. (Fig. 168 - 183) At the end of the two weeks, the objects proved hard to move without destroying them, so rather rashly, I decided not to bring them back to London. I broke them up and returned the debris to the skips. I wasn't sure what to make of the work, how to value the objects - were they worth preserving? They were essentially frail, only just holding together. I had made them in the spirit of experimentation and possibly touched that 'tipping point' I had set out to achieve - that gave space to ambiguity and loose ends. I knew what I had created was authentic and deeply personal and maybe was feeling the associated shame of revealing abject content - it was easier to dispose of the evidence than own it. I came to regret my decision.



Figures 168 - 171. Ali Darke, *The Psychic Fragments*, 2019
(brick, sand, stocking)



Figures 172 - 174. Ali Darke, *The Psychic Fragments*, 2019
(brick, sand, stocking, furniture stuffing)



Figures 175 - 177. Ali Darke, *The Psychic Fragments*, 2019
(brick, sand, drain pipe, stocking, furniture stuffing)



Figures 178 - 179. Ali Darke, *The Psychic Fragments*, 2019
(brick, sand, sink, stocking, furniture stuffing)



Figures 180 - 183. Ali Darke, *The Psychic Fragments*, 2019
(brick, sand, sink, stocking, furniture stuffing, plastic bag)

In the Autumn I had another group exhibition with Suzi Morris and Yaroslaff Soltan at the Belfry and North Gallery at St John's, Bethnal Green which gave me the chance to recreate the ideas of *Psychic Fragments*. The gallery occupies one side of the balcony, and belfry tower of a working but very dilapidated and cavenous church. It was a challenge to create a cohesive exhibition in these two spaces, that was not overwhelmed by the atmosphere. (Fig. 184 - 197)

I made pieces from a combination of debris as before - bricks, plaster, plug holes, stockings, linen pillows, sheets, furniture stuffing, sand and salt. They took on almost creature like qualities, and anthropomorphic emotion. These objects were less flimsy but lacked the dynamic quality of the previous work. Possibly, in trying to reproduce the sculptures I had lost the ambiguity of the originals. Working towards public display brings a self imposed pressure to make things 'finished and complete'.

I introduced another scotched cabinet with linen bulbous shapes emerging from between a pile of sheets and falling out onto the floor. This was a development of the original work rather than replication and had more presence and intrigue.



Figure 184. Ali Darke, *Study*, 2019
(pen, ink, watercolour)



Figure 185. Ali Darke, *The Psychic Life of Fragments*, 2019



Figure 186. Ali Darke, *The Psychic Life of Fragments*, 2019
(wooden cabinet, linen, sand, salt)



Figures 187 -188. Ali Darke, *Psychic Fragments*, 2019
(stocking, sand, horsehair stuffing, tile fragment, plaster, steel table)



Figures 189 -191. Ali Darke, *Psychic Fragments*, 2019
(stocking, sand, porcelain fragments)



Figures 192 -193. Ali Darke, *Psychic Fragments*, 2019
(stocking, sand, horsehair stuffing, metal clamps, ceramic fragments, plaster)



Figures 194 -195. Ali Darke, *Psychic Fragments*, 2019
(stocking, sand, horsehair stuffing, metal clamps, ceramic fragments, plaster)



Figures 196 -197. Ali Darke, *Psychic Fragments*, 2019
(stocking, sand, horsehair stuffing, metal clamps, ceramic fragments, plaster)

My creative challenge is always to find the balance, the subtle and elusive tipping point, between precision and spontaneity. The 'symbolic' is grounded in the stage of the 'gesture-language', (Soreanu, 2018, p.19) when intimate connections are established, with enduring effects throughout life, between the body and that which lies beyond it. It is the sensitive transitional space and source of creative thought and action.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE: 2014 - 2021

1. PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

- **Exhibitions**

2020: Safe House, Maverick Projects, London.

Beyond Walls.

Exhibited: *Beastly I, Strange Fruit and The Nonsense of Things.*

2020: hARTs Lane Gallery, London.

Passagiatina 2019: Atina Art Residency.

Exhibited: *The leaves have lost their trees.*

2019: The Research Space, AVA Gallery, UEL.

Professional Doctorate Group exhibition: Work in Progress as Research:

Exhibited: *Psychic Fragments.*

2019: The Belfry and North Gallery, St John's Church, Bethnal Green, London.

Beyond the Body: with Suzie Morris and Yaroslaff Soltan.

Exhibited: *Psychic Fragments.*

2019: Il Cantinone, Atina.

Passagiatina 2019: Atina Art Residency.

Exhibited: *The leaves have lost their trees.*

2019: Lefkadio Centre, Greece. Supported by the Japanese Embassy in Greece.

Yakumo Koizumi: Where Clouds are Born

Exhibited: *Dead Time, Dead Weight, and In-sight.*

2019: Bow Arts, London. *Open Studios*

2019: AVA Gallery UEL, London.

East London Artists: Professional Doctorate Showcase

Exhibited: *The Degenerates*

2019: Deptford Does Art, London.

Bring to Light with Suzie Morris and Yaroslaff Soltan.

Exhibited: *The Degenerates*

2019: The Biscuit Factory, Bermondsey, London.

Exhibited - *Was Ist Diese Arbeit?*

2018: International Art Fair, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Yakumo Koizumi: Where Clouds are Born

Exhibited: *Dead Time, Dead Weight, and In-sight.*

2018: Bow Arts, London. *Open Studios*

2018: AVA Gallery UEL, London.

East London Artists: Professional Doctorate Showcase

Exhibited: *Was Ist Diese Arbeit?*

2018 Container Space, UEL, London.

Exhibited: *The Glimpses*

2017: The Crypt Gallery, St Pancras Church, Euston, London.

Echoes from the Cave; Dialogues with a Time and a Place

Co-curated with Carmen Aleman

Exhibited: *Blue Shoes from Psarades.*

2016: The Old School, Psarades, Greece.

Kokkalis Cave Project - Directional Forces Art Residency.

Exhibited: *Blue Shoes from Psarades.*

2016: AVA Gallery UEL, London

East London Artists: Professional Doctorate Showcase

Exhibited: *The Tears of Things.*

2016: Safehouse I, Asylum, London

Time and Again

Joint exhibition and co-curated with Richard Sharples.

Exhibited: *The Tears of Things*.

2016: AVA Gallery, UEL, London.

Interior

Exhibited: *Corridor*.

2015: Old Truman Brewery, Brick Lane, London

Art Masters

Exhibited: *Spilt Milk* and *Slipped Out*.

2015: The Canning Factory, Psarades, Greece

Open Museum: Directional Forces Art Residency.

Exhibited: *The Uncanny Works, On End* and *Washer Woman*.

2015: Platform 1, Wandsworth Common Station, London.

Virus

Exhibited: *Spilt Milk* and *Shame*

2015 AVA Gallery UEL, London

East London Artists: Fine Art Professional Doctorate Show Case

Exhibited: *Still Life* and *Split Milk*

- **Artist Residencies**

2019 Passagiatina, Atina, Italy.

2019 Summer Lodge: Fine Art Department, Nottingham Trent University.

2016 Kokkalis Cave Project, Directional Forces. Psarades, Greece.

2016 Summer Lodge: Fine Art Department, Nottingham Trent University.

2015 The Open Museum, Directional Forces. Psarades, Greece.

- **Commissions**

2019: *Wandering*.

Private Commission, UK

2019: *The Sibling Matrix*.

Image for book cover.

A Group-Analytic Exploration of the Sibling Matrix: How Siblings Shape our Lives.

By Val Parker. Published by Routledge.

2019: Website images.

Val Parker: Psychotherapist.

2018: *By Itself*.

12 photographic images in response to Music by Jasper Tygner.

- **Continued Professional Development : conferences and courses.**

October 2020 - June 2021: *Introductory Course in Lacanian Psychoanalysis*.

CFAR, (Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research)

July 2020 (Postponed to July 2021): *The Psycho Social Body Conference*,

Association of Psychosocial Studies. University of Essex.

Presenting paper: *Between Here and There*.

November 2019: *Psychoanalysis and the Uncanny*, Darian Leader.

Talk at the Freud Museum, London.

April 2019: *Hidden Persuaders*.

Symposium, at the Freud Museum, London.

March 2019: *Disgust*.

Forum for Philosophy, LSE, London.

October 2018 - June 2019: *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*.

SITE for Contemporary Psychoanalysis, London.

January 2019: *Surrealism and Psychoanalysis: Conquest of the Irrational*.

Conference attended at the Freud Museum, London.

December 2018: *Ghostly hauntings: Subliminal and unconscious messages from our ancestors*.

Conference attended at Confer, London.

December 2018: *Reading, Writing, Listening: A Symposium with Adam Phillips* - with Josh Cohen, Howard Cooper and Laura Marcus.

Conference attended at Confer, London.

September 2018: *Psychoanalysis and Exile: 1938 - 2018*

Conference attended at the Freud Museum, London.

May 2018: *Making Connections*:

ADI Post Graduate Conference, UEL. 10 minutes Presentation.

Between Here and There: Scenographies of a liminal world.

January 2018: *Thinking With and Without the Mother*

Symposium with Vincent van Gervan Oei.

Goldsmith's University, London.

November 2017: *Doing Day: Body/Brain/Archive*

Siobhan Davies Dance, London.

Experiential workshop with dance artists - Siobhan Davies, Helka Kaski and Matthias Sperling in dialogue with Manos Tsakiris Professor of Neuroscience at the Warburg Institute.

October 2016: *Siobhan Davies Dance Moving Conversations: Matthias Sperling and Guido Orgs: Now That we Know*.

Wellcome Collection, London.

September 2016: *The Eternal Recurrence; The Question of Fate in Psychoanalysis*.
Conference attended at the Freud Museum, London.

September - December 2016: *The Body in Space*.
10-week life drawing course.
Princes Drawing School, London.

September - December 2016: *Projections: Psychoanalytical Investigation of women in horror films*.
Six-week evening course, Freud Museum, London

July 2016: *The Wild*:
Symposium as part of The Summer Lodge
Nottingham Trent University.

February 2016: *Avoiding the Object (On Purpose): Cornelia Parker in conversation with Darian Leader*.
Talk and discussion - Freud Museum, London

February 2016: *Intimacy Unguarded: Gender, the Unconscious and Contemporary Art*:
Conference attended at the Freud Museum, London.

October 2015: *The Effectiveness of Symbols: Why do Symbols Have such a Powerful Influence on Human Beings?*
Conference attended at the Freud Museum, London.

September 2015: *The Unconscious Today*:
Conference attended at the Freud Museum.

February 2015: *Freud and Eros: Love Lust and Longing*
Conference attended at the Freud Museum.

2. CRITICAL REFLECTION ON PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

I started the Professional Doctorate having worked as a Designer for Performance, and teacher of Theatre Design. My original intention had been to support my teaching career with academic research. I was not expecting the transformation of my creative and professional practice that has occurred during these years of study.

When designing set and costumes for performance my role was to align my visual ideas with the Director's interpretation, in conjunction with lighting and sound designers. I would then oversee their realization by costume makers and set builders in negotiation with the production and stage managers and within the budget constraints. Costumes and sets are then inhabited by actors and there is a letting-go of one's work to the life of the performance and the audience.

As a theatre designer I was reliant on a team to produce work, but as an artist I can create my own opportunities and continue to make work alone. I have found that exhibiting regularly provides a framework and commitment to reaching a resolution in order to present work to the public. In contrast, the art residencies have encouraged more open ended, experimental work. My practice has developed through both experiences, and assisted my move into a new professional context. There seem to be as many ways of sustaining a professional life as there are contemporary artists and I am still finding new and unexpected opportunities. My professional experiences so far have been through exhibiting, curating, and artist residencies, and I have attended courses and academic conferences to support my ongoing research.

But what I have had to develop first is a professionally disciplined studio practice. I have relished following my own thoughts through new working methods and come to appreciate a different relationship to this work. It is more personal, exposing and in many ways deeply satisfying.

STUDIO PRACTICE:

An aspect of my professional activity that continues to challenge, is the experience of 'not-knowing'. I have become more at-ease with and embraced this 'not-knowing'. It seems an inherent aspect of the creative process to be tolerated and even welcomed as an opportunity. Theatre design has a structured set of questions to be resolved and a common understanding of the end product. In my current practice finding out and deciding what problems I want to solve *is* the question. In 'On Not Knowing: How Artists Think' (Fisher and Fortnum, 2013) various artists have been interviewed about their relationship to not-knowing. I found their thoughts illuminating. Fortnum, talks about 'a drive in the contemporary artist to make something that hovers on the edge of their conceptions of the possible and probable.' (2013, p.72) It seems that the optimum artistic quest is actually a process of prolonging the latent potential of 'intersubjectivity' between artist and thing, towards a time of knowing, for as long as it takes to create or conceptualize the object. Emma Cocker describes not knowing as 'a space of fleeting liberty or reprieve; a brief interlude of potentiality flanked either side by what is known or certain.' (Fisher and Fortnum, 2013, p.130)

This may be why the not-knowing phase is unsettling. Through my experience on the Doctorate I have become more confident in my ability to remain in situations that are indeterminate or newly encountered, 'it involves trusting that a response will be performed intuitively at the propitious time.' (2013 p.131) In creating *The Degenerates* (2019) I was able to work through ideas in drawing, without fixing the final form. I collected the detritus and materials and was more confident to allow the process to unfold experimentally, only knowing the finished forms in the last moments. I was not working towards any pre-designed object.

Although my studio practice permits a place of not knowing – having infinite possibilities can be overwhelming. There is a parallel here with the psychoanalytical theory of transitional phenomena, or the pre-symbolic sphere where thoughts are in the ether but have not yet been conceptualized - if the child is left for too long, the anxiety of disintegration can be intolerable. This is where in artistic endeavour, drawing can help me locate my thoughts. I am learning that these first ideas are just a beginning and not to get overly attached to them.

Gary Peters describes how,

'The unknown is not beneath, behind or secreted with in the work, the unknown "is" the work to the extent that it turned out like this rather than that - Why? This incomprehensibility is not a mystification but, rather, the very "articulation" of the work itself as it emerges out of the logic of erasure that opens the space between one possibility or another.' (Fisher and Fortnum, 2013, p.110)

I find it reassuring in 'Creative States of Mind', (2019) Patricia Townsend's study of psychoanalysis and the artist's creative process, to recognize myself in much of what she discovered. The 'professional work' occurs throughout the process. It may be less visible or public but is no less 'valid'. However, it is in presenting the work to others, especially work in progress that an artist is forced to detach, stand back and reflect, and also be open to receiving feedback.

There is also the dilemma of knowing when a work is finished. Townsend describes a process of first internalizing an aspect of the outside world, which is worked on, transformed and 'imbued with her own inner experience' (Townsend, 2019, p.107) The resulting external form, provides the possibility of recognition of an aspect of the self in the work, and there is a psychological severance of sorts, which can be painful and has left me feeling vulnerable. This is accompanied by allowing others to create meaning bringing their own response and interpretation. Because the work is deeply personal there is a sense of exposure - I experience the ambivalence of wanting to hide and yet wanting to be recognized and found! Becoming a witness to my work outside the studio within the new space of a gallery has been a revelation, filled with emotion.

I Do, I Undo, I Redo, Louise Bourgeois' installation for the Tate Modern Turbine Hall (2000) perfectly embodies the psychological processes of creativity. She describes the first steps of 'doing' - followed by the torment and destructiveness when things don't go right, which lead to the un-doing, and the repairing as the re-doing.

'One retreats into one's lair to strategize, recover, and regroup. The Redo means that a solution is found to the problem. It may not be the final answer, but there is an attempt to go forward.' (Morris, 2003, p.3)

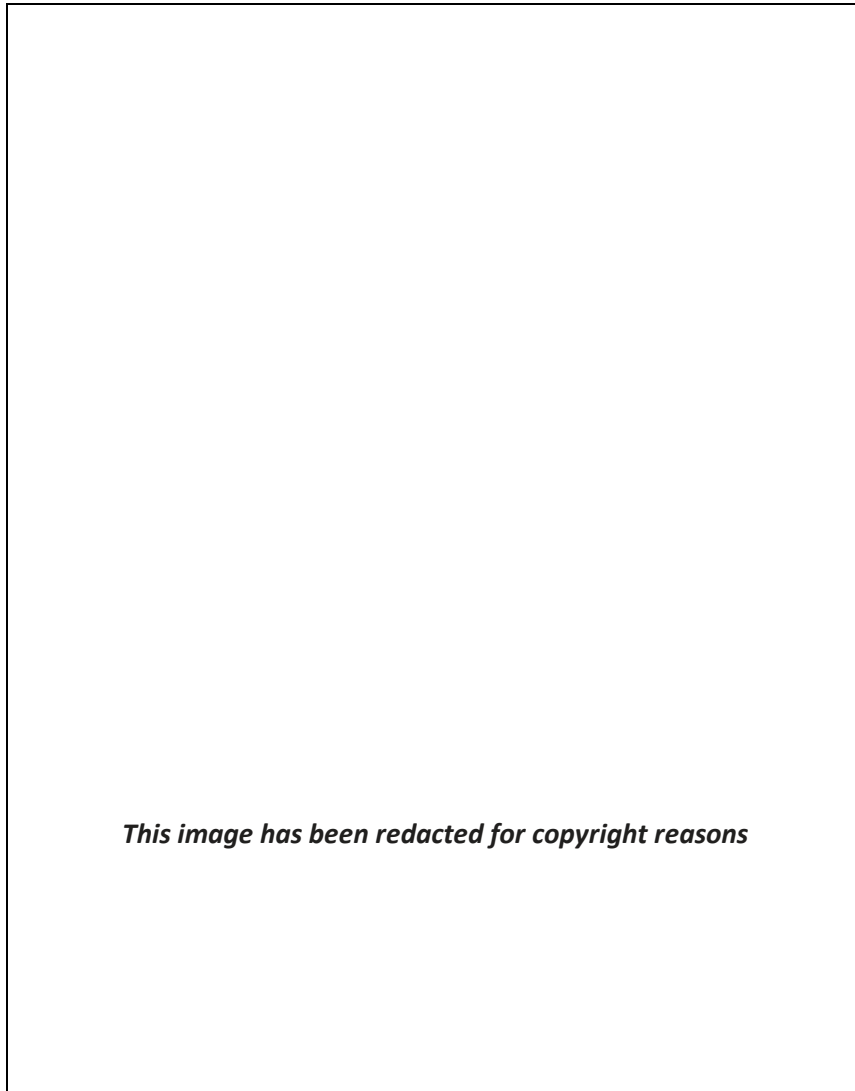


Figure 198. Louise Bourgeois, *I Do, I Undo, I Redo*, 2000
(mixed media)

EXHIBITIONS and CURATION:

It has been very rewarding to complete a project and create an exhibition. My work in theatre has proved invaluable in having the practical skills needed for installing work and experience in project management. I have really enjoyed working with colleagues to set-up the various group shows - from the initial ideas, through planning and to the final stages of negotiating spaces and installing the work. Curating the exhibition *Time and Again*, with Richard Sharples at the Safehouse Gallery in Peckham Rye, London, was a joint effort in planning and curating the event. I learnt from this experience the importance and challenge of publicity and I also realized how much I enjoy curating. This was my largest exhibition to date and I showed the complete collection of seven cabinets, the *Tears of Things*. I used the entire ground floor of the house, responding to the venue's layout and placing each cabinet to suit the architecture of the space. We were both exploring memory and loss through our work and created a cohesive and evocative exhibition.



Figure 199. *The Tears of Things, Exhibition View, The Safehouse: 2016*

Following my second residency in Greece, the artist Carmen Alemàn and I invited the 24 participants to re-exhibit the work in London. We chose the Crypt Gallery, as the underground brick tunnels and alcoves felt in keeping with the Kokkalis cave project. Over half the artists live overseas in Greece, Poland, Germany or the USA, so organizing the event was a complex undertaking. To ensure we represented the project appropriately and with sensitivity to the subject matter, we were in constant communication with the original organizer, Harris Kondosphyris. We managed the curation, budget, printing and publicity, and practical arrangements with the venue. We were responsible for the work that was delivered, liaising with the artists to understand how they wanted it displayed. Others travelled to London with their work. The show included painting, installation, sculpture, film, live performance, sound and music, reflecting the rich diversity of the original. We arranged the work to ensure a balance and flow as the viewer navigated the spaces. The artists were pleased with the results and we received excellent feedback. I learnt to trust my instincts and organizational experience, and Carmen was a wonderful collaborator.



Figure 200. Ali Darke: *Blue Shoes from Psarades*: Crypt Gallery. 2016

More recently I have collaborated with Suzi Morris and Yaroslaff Soltan, to curate and organize two exhibitions in London. It is hard to find affordable gallery space and although not ideal the two venues we found were free. The first was a small gallery

space, Deptford-Does-Art, in which we each chose 4 pieces of work to show. We recognized common preoccupations in our work and used this to create a unifying theme. Our work reveals what usually remains hidden, psychologically, physically and spiritually. We titled the show, *Bring to Light*, to reflect these ideas. The collaboration was effortless, creative and rewarding, with a constant negotiation of ideas and organizational responsibility. We each brought different experience and skills to the project. I have learnt a lot from Suzi's mastery of social media and publicity and we were supported by the gallery's own online presence.

We organized an artist's talk with the Gallery's Director which culminated in a lively and illuminating discussion with the audience.



Figure 201. Artists Talk, Deptford-Does-Art. 2019

The second show, *Beyond the Body*, was in the Belfry and North Gallery in Bethnal Green, London. The venue is a cavernous old church and was quite overwhelming- it is probably more suitable for dramatic, site-specific work that could engage with the evocative atmosphere. I was less satisfied with the presentation of my work here, which needed a more intimate space. But, I think we made the most of the experience and the venue and were fortunate to have a very positive write up about the exhibition in Artlyst.



Figure 202. Banner design, *Beyond the Body*, 2019



Figure 203. *The North Gallery*



Figure 204. *The Belfry*

The gallery participates in 'First Thursdays' - in which over 150 galleries in east London come together to run free events, exhibitions, talks and private views on the first Thursday of each month, organized and publicized by the Whitechapel Gallery. This ensured that our opening night was very well attended.

I am beginning to plan new curating projects, exhibitions and collaborations. A group of Professional Doctorates past and present are forming a 'collective'. We hope this

will become a mutually supportive network in developing opportunities and creating group exhibitions in the future.

RESIDENCIES:

I have attended five artist residencies during the professional Doctorate, two in Greece, two at Nottingham Trent University Fine Art department , and one in Italy. Each has been a unique and extraordinary experience, with the opportunity of getting to live and know a different community and culture as well as providing space and time in which to experiment with new ideas and methods. Working alongside other artists, creating a community of practice, seeing different working methods and approaches is always inspiring. The residencies in Greece and Italy culminated in local exhibitions and performances and with only two weeks and limited resources the challenge was to work fast and spontaneously. The residency in Italy particularly encouraged the artists to engage with the local community, landscape, local history, and mythology.

At the Summer Lodge residencies at Nottingham Trent University there was no expectation of productivity or exhibition - artists could use the space and time as they wished. I found a freedom in spending this time away from my normal environment that permits more experimentation. I have created work on both occasions that was unexpected and exciting, opening up new ideas to take further.

CONFERENCES AND COURSES:

To support my research, I have attended conferences and symposium - particularly about psychoanalysis and often about art and psychoanalysis. These events have proved to be invaluable in bringing the academic theory to life. Some of the speakers and discussions have been equally challenging and inspiring, presenting me with new concepts and subjects to study. The Freud Museum encourages a cross disciplinary approach to psychoanalytical theory and the conferences and lectures often occur alongside an art exhibition in the museum, focusing on a particular theme. It has been fascinating to hear psychoanalysts discuss art, such as Darian Leader and Griselda Pollock; artists discuss psychoanalysis, such as Sharon Kivland and Cornelia Parker;

and to discover those who practice both, such as Patricia Townsend and Bracha L. Ettinger.

To deepen my understanding of psychoanalysis I undertook a year-long introductory course at the Site for Contemporary psychoanalysis. The weekly sessions were organized in three-week blocks focusing on a different theme, again using other disciplines as well as clinical examples to enhance the theory. We were a small group of eight from very diverse backgrounds and with different ambitions - the discussion was always lively and thought provoking and I learnt an incalculable amount.

Writing, researching and contextualising my work throughout the Doctorate program have supported the growth of my confidence in articulating my thoughts about my work both through speaking and writing. I can see the benefit of this already in fulfilling the task of submitting applications for professional opportunities. I have recently written applications to present papers at conferences, and applied to participate in collaborative projects with academics from other disciplines. These activities are all contributing to the ongoing development of a rich professional life.

