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*Letter to an Archaeologist*

Stranger! move carefully through our carrion:  
what seems carrion to you is freedom to our cells.  
Leave our names alone. Don't reconstruct those vowels,  
consonants, and so forth: they won't resemble larks  
but a demented bloodhound whose maw devours  
its own traces, faeces, and barks, and barks.

Joseph Brodsky



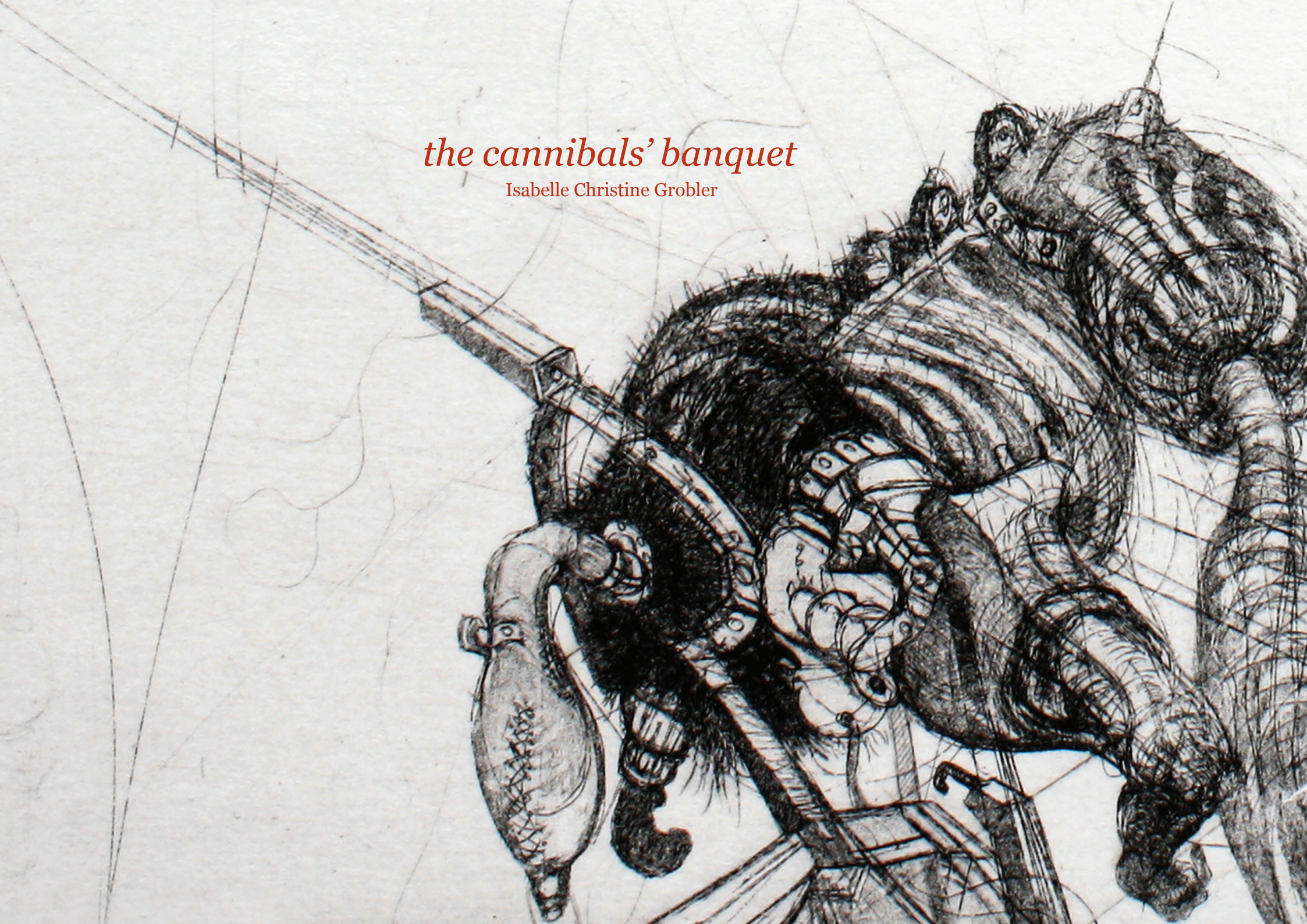


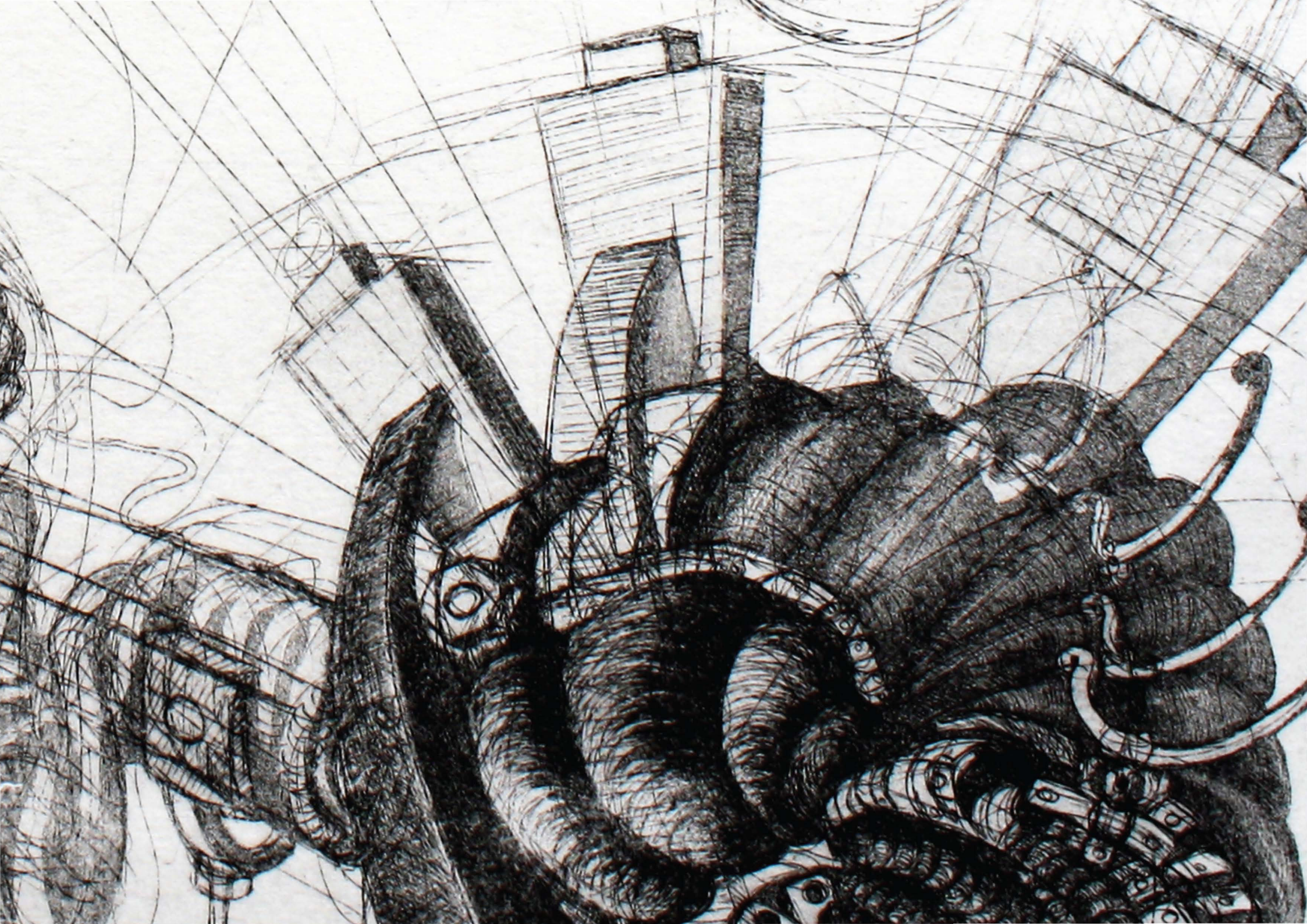
University of Cape Town

*the cannibals' banquet*

*the cannibals' banquet*

Isabelle Christine Grobler





Dissertation submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Master in Fine Art at the  
University of Cape Town, 2012

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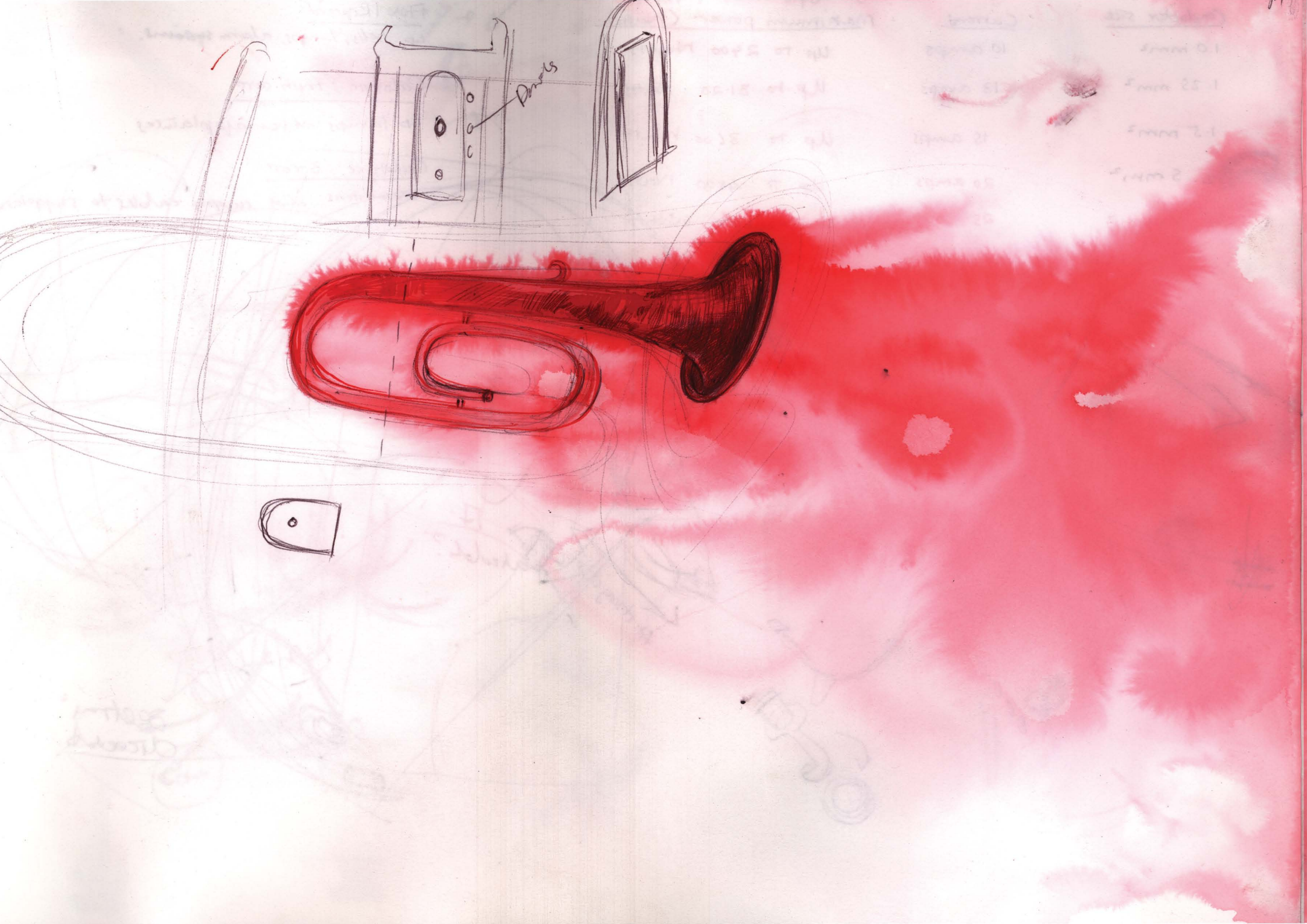
## *Acknowledgements*

I gratefully acknowledge the generous assistance of the following: The University of Cape Town Scholarships Committee for the McIver Scholarship, Jules Kramer Travel Grant and the financial assistance of the National Research Foundation. (Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not to be attributed to the NRF or the University of Cape Town).

I wish to thank my supervisors Associate Professor Fritha Langerman and Professor Jane Alexander, and to acknowledge the assistance provided by my friends Charlie, Shannon, Charlayn, Dominique, Jan-Phillip, Jill, Peter, Nicola and Dirk.

Lastly, I thank my family for their enduring support and financial assistance.

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## ***Introduction***

“Assemblage and Unmonumentality ... is the result of the excess of choice and the new paradigms that have arisen to deal with it. If every loose object on earth, alone or in combination, is at least theoretically available as an element of sculpture, then a large part of the art of making sculpture lies with the mechanisms of filtering, selecting and assembling” (Hoptman 2007: 128).

In this project I have attempted to determine and analyse my own “mechanisms of filtering, selecting and assembling” (Hoptman 2007: 128). *The cannibals’ banquet* consists of a practical body of work and an artist’s book. The function of the artist’s book is to contextualise my creative practice within a theoretical and historical context.

My area of interest is assemblage and its relation to consumption. A primary attribute of consumption is that it is premised upon the creation of a constant desire for new things. The corollary of this process is a mass of obsolete or ‘dead’ objects, which are discarded to make room for these recent acquisitions, ending up in scrap yards, second hand shops and flea markets. My interest is in what I perceive as an integral relationship between the origins and development of assemblage and that of a consumer society, since both function within object relations. With object relations I mean the interaction between people and objects as although objects themselves are lifeless, the relationship between an object and a person is animated through the assignment of meaning to an object by a person. In this sense the object stands in relation to the person who projects certain attributes

onto it as the carrier of such meanings. The same object could conceivably hold completely different meanings assigned to it by different individuals at the same time.

In the first section of the document I will provide an historical overview of the development of assemblage practice starting with collage. This section will specifically focus on the development of the ideas surrounding the object of assemblage, the found object, the ready-made and junk. Notions of the consumer object and how it is used in an assemblage, form a core part of this project, while the ironic dichotomy of the two seemingly similar yet contradictory words, 'cannibal' and 'cannibalise', will play a key thematic role.

The second part of the document describes my practice, focussing on the following approaches: collection of objects, their re-appraisal and transformation in the studio by means of drawing, printmaking and the construction of complex assemblages, and the exhibition of these in an installation format. My thinking on this topic was guided by the history of the development of assemblage and the various shifts in how a consumer culture perceives objects. The ideas of theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, Deborah Root and Jacques Derrida proved useful in articulating my own understanding of how and why I

select, collect, and alter objects for drawing and sculptural purposes.

The image of the monster pervades this project. As a composite being, the monster serves as a useful analogy for the assembled artwork. However, as Root emphasises, consumerism exhibits attributes long ascribed to the monstrous and in particular the cannibal (1996). While Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is generally interpreted as referring to the excesses of science, I use the image of the grave robbing doctor, his laboratory and the monster he produces as analogous to my own collection of 'dead' objects and their transformation within my studio into assemblages.





The background of the entire image is a close-up of a light-colored wood surface, likely pine or a similar softwood. The wood grain is oriented horizontally and shows a clear pattern of growth rings. There are several prominent knots visible, particularly in the lower half of the image. The lighting is even, highlighting the natural texture and color variations of the wood.

**Part One:**

*Theoretical Framework*



In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and a staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation: my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the detail of my employment. The dissecting room and the slaughter house furnished many of my materials; and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I brought my work near to completion.

(Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*)

## **1. Theoretical Framework**

“Monsters are variously characterized by accident, indetermination, formlessness; by material incompleteness, categorical ambiguity, ontological instability. One may create monsters through hybridization, hypertrophy, or hypotrophy; through lack, excess, or multiplication; through the substitution of elements, the conflation of species, or the conflation of genders and genres.”

(Weiss 2004: 124-125)

This section aims to provide a brief historical overview of the development of assemblage from Cubism to the present. A consideration of how objects of assemblage may be viewed in relation to consumption will follow. This section will conclude with an examination of some analogies for assemblage as an artistic practice. The discussion will focus on ideas pertinent to sculptural assemblage, such as collage, anti-art, the *objet trouvé* (found object), the ready-made object, and collage-environments. References to Dada, Marcel Duchamp and Surrealism, Neo-Dada, and Pop Art will be included. Jean Baudrillard’s *System of Objects* and Deborah Root’s concept of the *fat eater* will be used to reflect on the status, meaning and variable value of the consumer object vs. the discarded object, while the concept of the *bricoleur* as described by Claude Levi-Strauss and extended by Derrida, will be considered as a possible analogy for my creative practice.

### 1.1. An Historical Overview of Assemblage

Although the word 'assemblage' was first used by Jean Dubuffet in the 1950s in a discussion on collage (Seitz 1961:93), assemblage as an artistic strategy was only fully considered by William Seitz, with his exhibition and catalogue *The Art of Assemblage*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1961. Seitz and Dubuffet both agreed in their definition of assemblage as a period- and time specific 'mood', 'spirit' or 'attitude' that developed in the service of the early 20th century European and American avant-garde.

For the 1961 exhibition, Seitz emphasized his restriction of his definition of assemblage. According to his application, the term applied only to artworks that juxtaposed two or more different materials; artworks in which those materials had been restricted to "discarded or purloined" materials and objects; and artworks in which those heterogeneous objects remained identifiable (Dezeuze 2008: 31). Seitz therefore defined the practice of assemblage as "the need of certain artists to defy and obliterate accepted categories, to fabricate aggressive objects, to present subjects tabooed by accepted standards, to undermine the striving for permanency by using soiled, valueless, and fragile materials and even to present ordinary objects for examination unaltered" (Kelly 2008: 24; Seitz 1961: 92).

The collage experiments of the cubists - specifically Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris and George Braque - were considered to have given rise to three-dimensional assemblage (Seitz 1961: 22) as the fragmentation and multiple viewpoints created by two-dimensional collage emphasised the surface of the pictorial plane, and rejected the long-standing western tradition of pictorial perspective (single-point and atmospheric perspective). The reassessment of the African object<sup>1</sup> proved equally influential by presenting artists such as Picasso with the notion of the assembled mass. In other

1. The primary influence on the development of collage was the move towards a neoprimitivism in Western art, specifically European art. In the context of cubism, neoprimitivism is the specific term used to describe the conscious adoption of formal elements from African, South Sea Polynesian Islanders and Pre Columbian American objects by European and American artists (Fleming 1995: 588). These objects were on display in museums and were also collected by various artist and individuals at that time.



Guitar, 1912. Pablo Picasso

2. The word *Merz* is a nonsense fragment derived from Commerzbank, a financial institution in Germany. Schwitters' *Merz* assemblages were composed of urban detritus (Diaz 2007: 207). *Merz* was a response to the devastation after World War I (1914–1919), on which Schwitters wrote that “[e]verything has broken down” and “new things had to be made out of fragments” (Russell 1991: 187).

3. Assemblage emphasises lived experiences and a lived environment (specifically the city and urban environment), bridging the ‘gap’ between life and art. Seitz suggests that this significantly supplants tradition with personal needs and desires (1961: 70–74).

4. Anti-art in this context is a term applied to artworks that question the concept of art by trying to “undermine all preoccupations about art” (Davies 1990: 19).

words, the African object generated a new notion of a sculptural object that had not been produced by the subtractive methods, which until that point had defined western sculptural practice (Arnason & Prather 1998:171-216). Picasso's *Guitar* (1912) for example, exemplified this new awareness as it is neither carved nor modelled, but constructed from sheet metal and wire. Its challenge to tradition was not limited to its method of production but also in its theme, as it neither represents figures or animals, nor alludes to allegory (Duby & Daval 2002: 973). It simply represents an object.

In challenging categories defining traditional western art and art practices, collage served to destabilise the borders between sculpture and painting. Artists such as Kurt Schwitters explored this new freedom in his *Merz* collages<sup>2</sup> of which the most infamous was an entire collage environment, the *Merzbau* (1933). In *Merzbau*, Schwitters transformed entire sections of his home by building and constructing numerous ‘grottos’, nooks and crannies in which he placed found objects (*objet trouvés*). Eva Diaz asserts that unlike many of his artistic generation's works, Schwitters' *Merzbau* was not explicitly a socio-political commentary, but instead a deeply personal work that collapsed not only the boundaries between painting and sculpture, but also directly challenged the distinction between art and life (2007: 207). Seitz (1961: 23) agrees that constructing images and sculptures by literally incorporating real objects into artworks, changes the relationship between the artwork and the viewer. Instead of representing an imitation of the world and its objects, collage constructs a metaphorical reference to the world by means of its objects<sup>3</sup>. Seitz equally considers assemblage a form of artistic subordination, which is a function specific to the notion of anti-art<sup>4</sup>. With its roots in the work of Marcel Duchamp and the Dadaists' preoccupation with nihilism, the notion of anti-art influenced the organization of various prototypes of avant-garde practices such as café-theatre, mixed media happenings, concrete poetry, automatic writing and experiments in typography (Russell 1991: 179). Tristan Tzara, the so-called ‘daddy of

Dada' summarized Dada's nihilistic approach in proclaiming, "the beginnings of Dada were not the beginning of an art, but of a disgust"<sup>5</sup> (Chipp 1984: 388).

It was within this context of Dada and its spirit of anti-art, that Marcel Duchamp introduced the concept of the ready-made, of which the first *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) consisted of a bicycle wheel mounted on a stool. The notion of the ready-made effectively describes the commodity object's transformation into an art object by means of the artist's nominative act (Diaz 2007:206).

Dada's experimentation with found objects, ready-mades, collages and collage environments paved the way for Surrealisms' embrace of individual creativity, the imagination and subconscious, as a practice of pure psychic automatism<sup>6</sup> (Seitz 1961: 39). Freud's theories on the mind and specifically on dreams had a direct influence on the Surrealist project, evident in their use of games such as the *exquisite corpse*<sup>7</sup> and automatic-writing and drawing to explore the subconscious. But most significant to the Surrealists' interest in the subconscious was the object of chance, also called the found object (*objet trouvé*). Caws suggests that as representatives of everyday life, *objet trouvés* enabled Surrealists to express the magnificence of the everyday with unlimited freedom, desire and psychic imagination (2004: 237). The flea market proved a fertile resource, as it not only offered chance encounters with *objet trouvés*, but was also conceived of as a space filled with repressed desires ready for the picking<sup>8</sup>.

The Neo-Dada and Pop Art movements of the 1950s and 1960s developed against the backdrop of the early twentieth century avant-garde, in direct reaction to the explosion of mass media and commodity production after the second World War II (1939–1945). These movements were also a refutation of the heroic sentiments and grand gestures of American abstract expressionism. Neo-Dada and Pop artists looked predominantly towards their everyday environment for subject matter and material. As Rauschenberg's commentary on his combine paintings pointed out: "Painting relates to

5. This 'disgust' was a response to the state of art and society in the grips of a capitalist bourgeoisie, illuminated by the horrors of the First World War (1914–1919). The disillusioned artists responded with irrationality and nihilism. As Hugo Ball proclaimed; "The Dadaist fights against the death-throes and death-drunkenness of his time...he knows that the world of systems has gone to pieces and that the age which demanded cash has organized a bargain sale of godless philosophies" (Stangos 1990:111).

6. In the *First Surrealist Manifesto* (1924) Breton, considered the founder of Surrealism, defined psychic automatism as the actual functioning of thought absent of any control exercised by reason (Danchev 2011: 247). Max Ernst defined it as an encounter between two or more completely incompatible realities/ ideas/objects on an inappropriate surface. The following phrase by Lautréamont, who was considered a proto surrealist writer, was appropriated by the surrealists as the encapsulation of their ideals: "as beautiful as the chance meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table" (Danchev 2011: 241-242).

7. The *exquisite corpse* is a game where words and images are assembled by two or more players. In sequence each player, depending on the type of game, will contribute either to a drawing or a sentence without knowing what the previous player contributed, as the paper is folded over in order to cover the previous player's contribution. In the case of the word game the following rule applies: adjective, then noun, then adverb, then verb. In the drawing composition

game, the player next in line will respond only to a small section of the drawing done by the previous player.

8. Hedges states that due to “the endless profusion of manufactured objects that washed up in the Flea Market...Almost anything could be had at the Flea market for virtually nothing. It was like the unconscious mind of Capitalism itself: it contained the rejected or repressed surplus of objects, the losers, the outcast thoughts” (1981: 243).

9. Rauschenberg incorporated an angora goat, an automobile tyre and a painting in his most famous combine *Monograph* (1959). In the work, he placed the goat in a vertically placed automobile tyre and located it on top of a horizontal painting covered with paint and collage elements. He used expressive brush strokes to unify the composition. The equally arbitrary title and collection of objects do not convey any unifying meaning, message or narrative; echoing the Dadaists senseless experiments and promotion of nihilism, anti-art (Arnason & Prather 1998: 512).

10. Laura Hoptman cites Leo Steinberg’s analysis of Rauschenberg work where he argued that Rauschenberg’s “empathetic engagement with the stuff of daily life introduced other criteria to the discourse of contemporary art, such as content (not narrative), the infinite variation of objects that catches the eye of a *flanêur* and epitomizes experience in the mid-twentieth century” (2007: 129-132).

11. The term ‘combine’ was coined by Rauschenberg and is an artwork that incorporates both painting and sculpture equally.

both art and life. Neither can be made. I try to act in the gap between the two”<sup>9</sup> (Arnason & Prather 1998: 512). In contrast to his Dada forbears, Rauschenberg’s goals were not informed by the notion of anti-art, but by the expansion of the definition of art and art practice itself (Duby & Duval 2002: 1078-1079). To Rauschenberg, assemblage served as a means to critique the irrationality of consumer society as driven by information advertising and media. Rauschenberg developed a process in which random objects with no logical relationship between them were placed in juxtaposition to one another, and he used this as a means to critique the constant drive for consumption of new products as an irrational force that simultaneously “immersed and assaulted the individual on all perceptual levels” (Duby & Duval 2002: 1078-1079). This form of assemblage is concerned with content<sup>10</sup> and establishing relationships between unrelated objects (Hoptman 2007:132). Rauschenberg’s mentor, John Cage, noted the similarity between a combine<sup>11</sup> and a newspaper’s layout: “There is no more subject in a combine than there is in a page of a newspaper. Each thing that is there is a subject” (Hoptman 2007:132).

Informed by this understanding of consumption as an all-invasive and even brutal force, some late twentieth-century artists expanded on Schwitters’ notion of an environmental assemblage. In *Ruckus Manhattan* (1975-76) for example, Red Grooms created a city within a city<sup>12</sup>. Lawrence Alloway emphasizes this correlation between assemblage and the urban environment as an extension of junk culture. In this context, “junk culture is city art. Its source is obsolescence, the throw away material of cities, as it collects in drawers, cupboards, attics, dustbins, gutters, waste lots, and city dumps” (Seitz 1961:73).

Massimiliano Gioni describes contemporary artists’ continued relationship to junk as comparable to “suffocating under the weight of toxic waste” (2007: 66). He points out that there is a shift from the artificiality of 20th century works such as *39 cents art* (1961) by Claes Oldenburg and *Junkspace* (2001) by Rem Koolhaas to more organic sculptural

forms that “grow and expand, like twisted branches and tortured trees” (2007: 66). He observes a return to the tradition of assemblage with a specific awareness of collage in contemporary sculptural practice. Gioni argues further in reference to Iza Genzken, Lara Schnitger, Sam Duran, Rachel Harrison, Sarah Lucas, Urs Fisher, Nate Lowman and Claire Fontaine, that although the work at first glance seems impromptu, it is often the product of meticulous planning and careful organization, and that “the effect is quite brutal” (2007: 65-67). Laura Hoptman supports this idea and adds that the emphasis on organization in contemporary sculptural assemblage stems from contemporary artists’ rejection of the traditional Dadaist and Surrealist fondness for chance. She notes further, that chance encounters with objects stressed content, an infinite variation of objects and arbitrariness, whereas many contemporary assemblage artists focus on composition and emphasise narrative<sup>13</sup> (2007: 129-133). This approach diverges sharply from Rauchenberg’s *Monograph*, which creates ambivalence and nonsense, setting up the viewer for disillusionment and alienation. In contemporary assemblage sculpture the capacity for creating narrative, considered composition and use of banal materials contributes to a greater ‘sociability’ and ‘accessibility’, but embodies a latent violence, that Gioni describes in the following forensic terms: “One comes across these works as though stumbling onto the scene of a freshly committed crime” (2007: 67).



Hanover Merzbau, 1925. Kurt Schwitters

It could also be described as an extension of collage (Davies 1990:72).

12. Consisting of a vast representation of lower Manhattan, *Ruckus Manhattan* was originally built in the lobby of a New York office building. Using slapstick humour to represent the manic energy of the city Grooms created a microcosm within a macrocosm (Arnason & Prather 1998: 517).

13. “Compositionally then, these new sculptures are holistic, in the sense that discrete objects coalesce into a single form, a narrative told with clarity. Despite the fact that they look like they are about everything, these contemporary assemblages are each about something specific” (Hoptman 2007: 129-133).

## 1.2. *The Object and Consumption*

“Objects have a history: first they are brand new goods; then they are possessions, accessible to few, subjected, often, to intimate and repeated use; then as waste, they are scarred by use but available again ... Assemblages of such material come at the spectator as bits of life, bits of the environment.” (Seitz 1961:73)

“As far as I am concerned, a mind’s arrangement with regard to certain objects is even more important than its regard for certain arrangements of objects, these two kinds of arrangement controlling between them all forms of sensibility. The patterning of objects rests not only with the things themselves but with the disposition of the mind of the observer.” (Southwood 2011: 38)

In *The System of Objects* (1968) Jean Baudrillard proposes a semiological model as a means to investigate the status of the post-World War II commodity - constructing a theory of consumption as a supplement to the Marxian trope of production used to critique Capitalism. His basic theory defines consumption as a systematic act of manipulating signs, more likely to be motivated by the consumer’s psyche than by his material needs (Baudrillard 2005: 199-200). He therefore conceptualises the commodity as a sign that “embodies a communication structure” and argues that the ‘power’ of a commodity lies not in its use value or utility, but its ability to engage the consumer on the level of desire (Poster 2001: 1). As his discourse of consumption is premised on a metaphorical ‘hyper-reality’ that includes all objects and ‘messages’ that they communicate, he proposes that consumption is a “global response on which our whole



*Bicycle Wheel*, 1913. Marcel Duchamp

cultural system is founded” (Poster 2001: 24-25).

Baudrillard specifically describes consumption from the perspective of the commodity, a new, and usually mass produced object. By contrast, the history of assemblage reveals a continuous interest in found and second-hand objects. Fortunately, Baudrillard’s notion of the ‘collection’ provides a means of describing the object in relation to its owner, and by extension, the status of the discarded object, which plays such a seminal role in the production of assemblage art. He defines the collection as a marginal system of objects organized according to a personal discourse. Within this system, to possess an object is to be its collector. Abstracted from its function upon its incorporation into a collection, the object assumes a personal sign value that the collector alone assigns it (Baudrillard 2005: 91-95). In addition, this sign system allows the collector to construct a private reality that transcends the external world from where the objects originally came. This ‘possessed object’ is transformed into the ‘*objet*,’ the ‘loved object’ as the cause or subject of the collector’s passion (2005: 91-144).

Michael Landy explored the relationship between the possessed object and its owner in his installation-performance *Break Down* (2002)<sup>14</sup>. As Landy expressed a specific interest in how people and things are judged, evaluated, assembled, produced and integrated into consumer society (Molon 2011: 170-171), his elimination of his recorded identity in possessions served as commentary on the all-consuming nature of consumer culture. By questioning consumption’s presumed virtues, he aimed to highlight the extent to which global consumer capitalism’s processes are “inevitable, unstoppable and absolute” (Harvie 2006: 62). This corresponds to Deborah Root’s notion of *Cannibal Culture* in which she uses the metaphor of the cannibal to refer to the fundamental power of consumption as “the cannibal [which] seeks human bodies to eat, and the desire for flesh generates escalating desire. This hunger for flesh is generalised into society as a whole when consumption is treated as a virtue and seen as a source



*Monogram*, 1955-59. Robert Rauschenberg

14. In *Break Down* Landy set out to destroy every object he possessed including his birth certificate and identity document. However, this was not an emotional nihilism or senseless obliteration of his material existence, but rather a calculated and meticulously planned operation, an attempt to disassemble the system of objects that define him as a subject in relation to a consumer society. First he catalogued all his life possessions of 7 227 items in ten categories and listed them in databases (Harvie 2006: 64). This took him over a year to compile and publish. He then moved and installed his project in the C&A, a vacated department store in Oxford Street (“the consumerist ‘Mecca’ in London”) (Collins 2007: 435). The installation consisted of a conveyer belt that leads into the mouth of a large pulverizing machine. In the span of 14 days, Landy and a group of hired assistants, all dressed in the same uniform, disassembled his possessions. They then organized the objects into the categories that Landy had established. He ultimately shredded and powdered all the previously catalogued objects (Harvie 2006: 64).



Detail *Ruckus Manhattan*, 1975-6. Red Grooms



Jo. 2002. Noboko Tsuchiya

of pleasure and excitement in itself. Consumption is power and the ability to consume excessively and wilfully becomes the most desirable aspect of power” (1996: 9).

This cannibalistic consumption is expressed by means of the image of the *fat eater* (also *The White Cannibal*), a term which the native *Lakota* people in America used to describe the gold fever of the Europeans who invaded their territory during the Black Hills gold rush in the 1880s. Root defines the *fat eater* as follows:

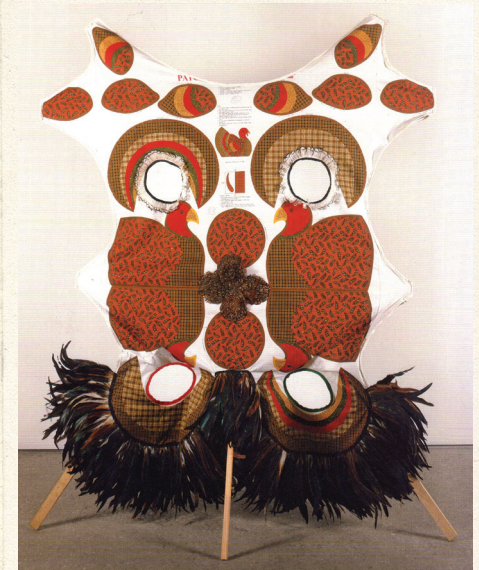
“the cravings of the fat eater have an atemporal quality and must be satisfied regardless of the eventual consequences for future generations or the community as a whole... [it is] a real phenomena, an endless hunger that results in the literal consumption of land and bodies, a hunger that can only be temporarily satisfied and then breaks out anew. The hunger grows and grows, and the provisions required to feed it can only increase as the desire to control and organize people and culture intensifies. Lust for the fat continues to careen unchecked across the earth” (1996: 10).

Root views Western society as caught in a cycle of constant consumption and ruin, as it is both a predatory cannibal and “something horribly confused and ill” (1996: 201). She argues that cannibalistic consumption creates a void that cannot be filled as the system is premised on alienating the individual and the commodification of cultures. Despite the implied benefits of “all the lovely commodities,” consumers in Western societies cannot escape the effects of this limitless consumption in which the individual is also ultimately ‘consumed’ (1996:198). In *Break Down*, Landy therefore questions the extent to which a consumer can retain their individuality within a system of commodities.

The object as desired commodity is ‘the fat’ that in a consumer society is constantly craved. It promises a false sense of pleasure, excitement and satisfaction, but once possessed, this promise is short lived as the hunger for another object returns. The

continuous production and consumption of new objects, results in an ever-growing mass of objects that are no longer considered valuable. This cannibalistic fat-eating machine therefore leaves behind billions of obsolete or 'orphaned' objects.

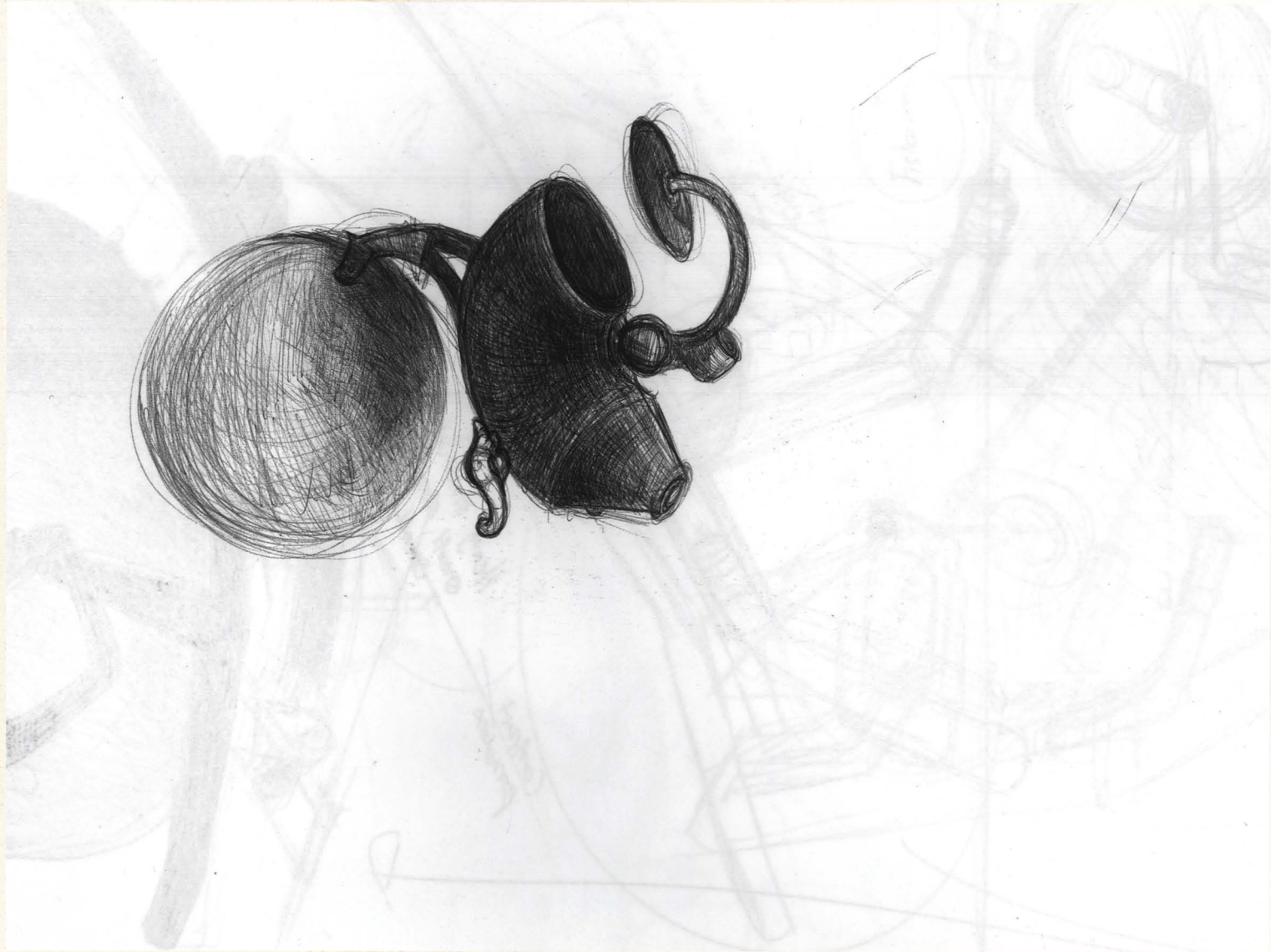
In contrast to the commodity, found and second-hand objects are essentially unwanted. Previously owned but now discarded, they nonetheless retain traces of their former owners. Once re-appropriated within an assemblage, the found object (once the loved *objet*) activates charged aspects of its past history in its present context (Diaz 2007: 207). By collecting objects at flea markets, second hand shops and scrap yards, the artist is permitted to a certain degree to 'recover' a mundane and banal history of everyday life. This 'mundane history' however is capable of describing the socio-political space within which these second-hand objects were first manufactured, desired, owned and have now been discarded.



*Wild Pilgrim*, 2006. Lara Schnittger



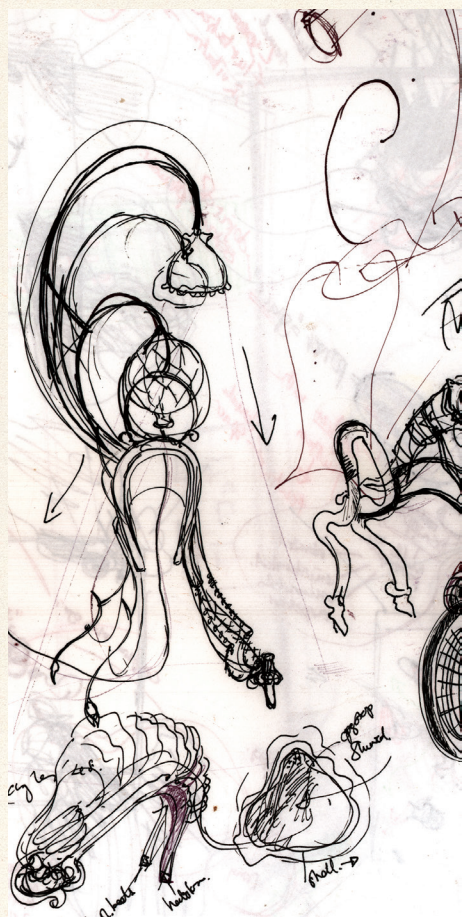
*Break Down*, 2001. Michael Landy



### *1.3. Thinking about Assemblage*

Assemblage is frequently described in terms of disposition. In Dada it was defined as a mentality, in Surrealism as a way of life, and in Pop Art as a politics of the everyday. Unfortunately, these attitudes are equally applicable to any artistic practice today and as such do not provide a specific means of thinking about assemblage. It is significant, however, to consider assemblage as definable in terms of its materiality and how the assemblage artist appropriates objects and transforms them into artworks. In much of contemporary assemblage, planning, organization and a detailed consideration of composition and narrative play a considerably larger role than has historically been the norm. This section will explore some ideas that may prove helpful in constructing a deeper understanding of assemblage and its various functions and strategies.

The term 'junk culture' that Lawrence Alloway applied to assemblage echoes the phenomenon of rag-picking which originated in 19th and 20th century industrial societies. Rag-pickers made their living by combing through, collecting and recycling the useful detritus that made up the ever-increasing mounds of junk produced by industrial societies. It is still prevalent in developing countries and shows the uneven development of capitalism in urban cities (Diaz 2007:209). Walter Benjamin noted that rag-picking had an historical value, in that extracting a final value from the junk object the rag-picker recovers an overlooked and alternative form of history (Diaz 2007: 209). Superficially, the concept of the rag-picker appears to provide an appropriate analogy for assemblage as a junk culture. However, rag-picking is more than a form of recycling. It signals the widespread poverty that results from a scarcity of resources brought on by consumer societies' over-consumption, so to use the rag-picker as an analogy for the assemblage artist is to risk fetishising poverty (Diaz 2007: 209). In addition, while all forms of assemblage entail some form of an object's material or conceptual 'recycling'



not all forms of assemblage entail the use of objects defined as 'junk.'

The concept of the *bricoleur* also suggests a useful analogy for assemblage as an artistic practice. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, in *The Science of the Concrete*, conceived of two complementary ideas: the engineer and the *bricoleur* (1976: 1-35). While the engineer creates everything that is needed from raw materials, the *bricoleur* uses only the materials in the form of objects, or parts of objects, at hand to create things. Although pre-existing and formerly used, these materials still allow for the creation of something "brilliant and unforeseen" (Rodenbeck 2008: 5). Working with found materials, the *bricoleur* recycles signs from an infinite heterogeneous repertoire and can be regarded as similar to the assemblage artist (Kelly 2008: 28; Rodenbeck 2008:5; Strauss 1976: 20). In the *Anthropology of Assemblage*, Julia Kelly points out how for Lévi-Strauss, even a single ready-made object functions as *bricolage*. Referring to Duchamp's *Bottlerack*, Lévi-Strauss argues that by removing the bottle rack from its original context and placing it in a new context, a semantic fission is created. It is in the act/method that the single object becomes an assemblage. Lévi-Strauss thereby argues that the single object alone cannot hold any meaning and that meaning is created only when objects are assembled (Kelly 2008:28). The notion of the *bricoleur* certainly appears to provide an appropriate analogy for thinking about assemblage. However, Lévi-Strauss' definition of the *bricoleur* is not sufficient when thinking about assemblage practice, as it establishes a binary opposition between the *bricoleur* and the engineer. As a product of structuralism, binary oppositions hinder a layered and complex understanding, as one of the terms is invariably preferred over the other. For example: in the case of Duchamp, Lévi-Strauss insisted that Duchamp's practice was *bricolage* as it is centred on the manipulation of signs (Kelly 2008:29). A more integrated and complex reading is possible by situating Duchamp outside the engineer and scientist's

'world' of concepts and innovations (Kelly 2008:29).

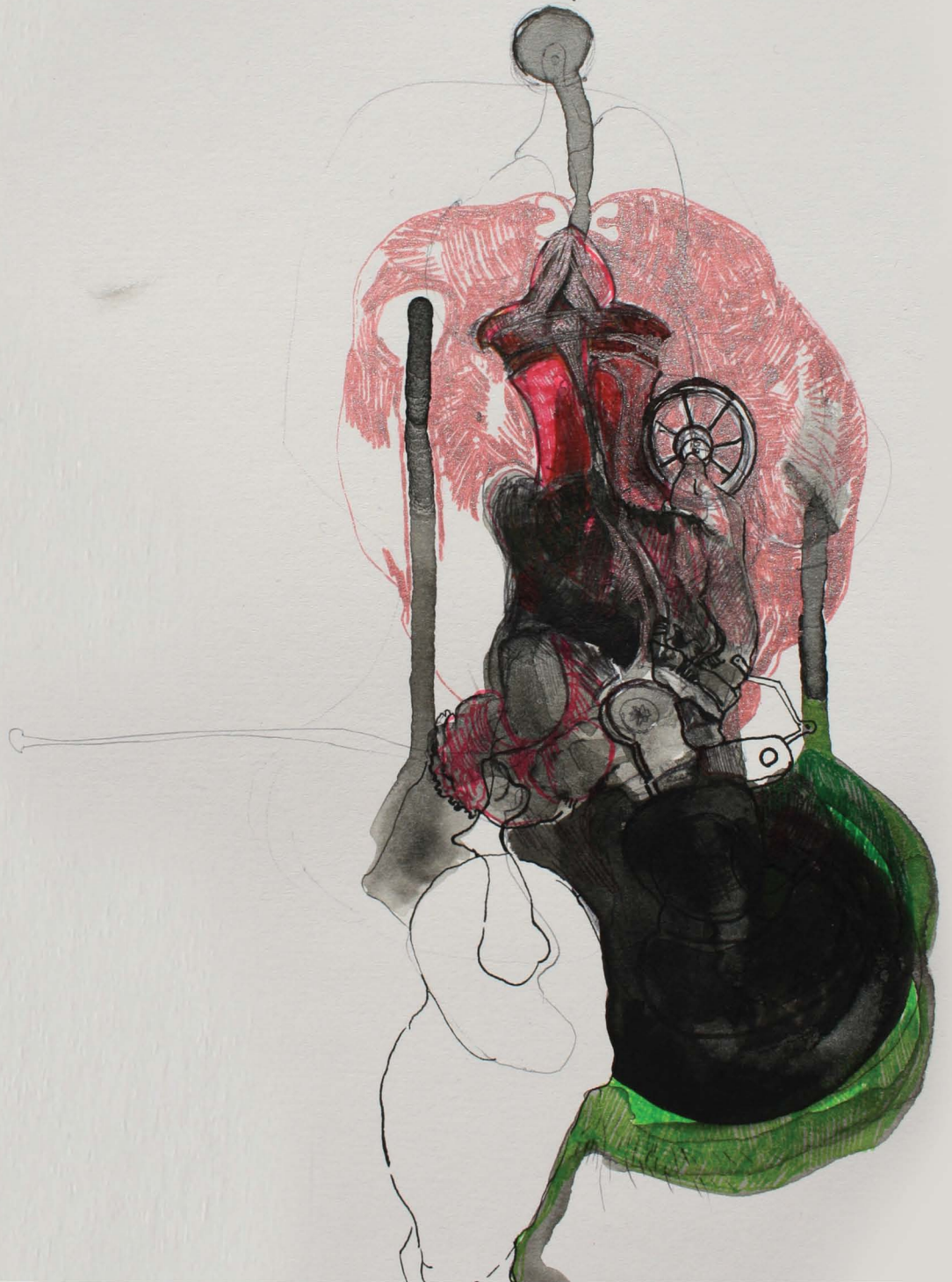
Derrida extended Levi-Strauss' concept of bricolage by arguing that every form of discourse is a *bricoleur* (1978: 284). Deconstructing the binary opposition between *bricoleur* and engineer by breaking down the difference that constructs its meaning, he argued that the engineer and the scientist can also be considered species of *bricoleurs* (1978: 285). In other words, the *bricoleur* and engineer cannot be separated and coexist within the same language. Thus the *bricoleur* cannot define the engineer without using the language of the engineer. Similarly the language available to critique consumption is the language of incorporation. Since assemblage has developed alongside consumerism - and arguably because of it - assemblage provides the language of incorporation with which to speak about consumption. This is evident in the materials used for assemblage sculpture as these already form part of the vocabulary of consumption: echoing the idea of the *fat eater* born from its own eternal hunger. Derrida admits that *bricolage* (deconstruction) could only give birth "under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity" (1978: 293).



*The Second Coming*

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.  
Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

W. B. Yeats





The background of the entire image is a close-up of a light-colored wood surface, showing a prominent horizontal grain pattern. Several dark, circular knots are visible, particularly in the lower half of the frame. The lighting is even, highlighting the natural texture and color variations of the wood.

**Part Two:**

*Creative Practice*

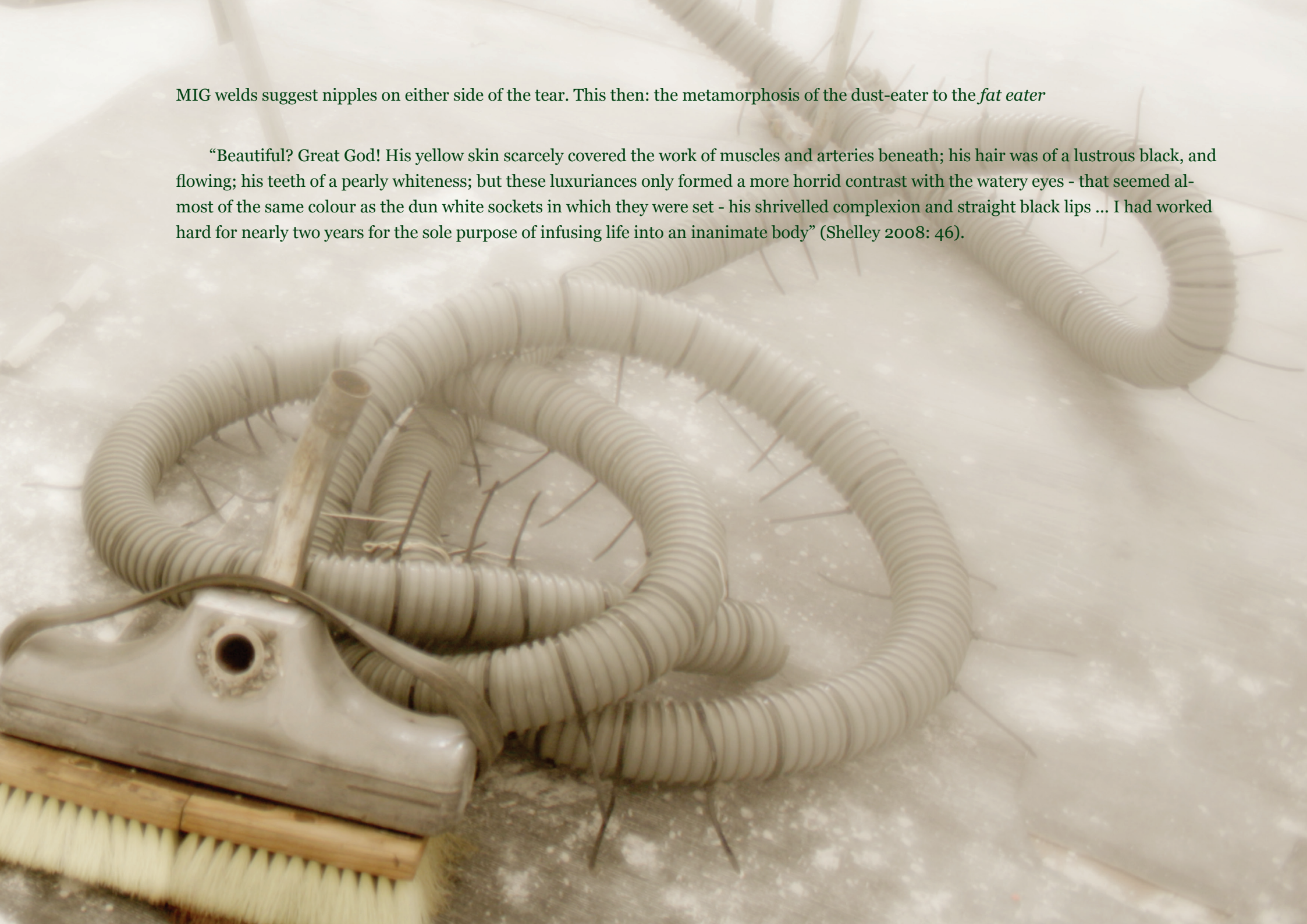
“I had returned to my old habits. I collected bones from charnel houses, and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame” (Shelley 2008, 44).

In a second-hand shop in Parow I found a vacuum cleaner. It held my attention as its situation in relation to the other vacuum cleaners in the shop seemed grim. It was the oldest model of the group on display and was standing right at the back of the shop, isolated from the others of its kind. I immediately responded to its remoteness. Was it because of its age? Or perhaps it was no longer functional? Since the shop assistant assured me that the latter was not the case, I became intensely invested in this unloved object. I imagined that its situation was due to its lack of sophistication compared to the newer models. Although it was produced from more durable materials, it was old-fashioned compared to the gleaming newer plastic models that crowded the display in the shop-window. Thinking of its function as an eater of dust, I imagined it to be starving, hungry for any old scrap of dirt with no prospect of ever tasting another. It had no spark of life. Its electrical cord lay curled up beside it like a faithful dog next to its owner. It stared at me hopelessly with a single blind eye. I felt intensely sad for this hungry old beggar. So I bought it.

Once ensconced in my collection, the desire to know this object fully overrode the care I had felt towards it in the shop. So I cut its life cord and removed the three-point plug. Then, trapped between the jaws of a workbench vice, I broke its neck, tore open its mouth and slowly started disassembling it piece by piece: an upper jaw, a hairy tongue, two small plastic wheels, a single eye, a short throat and a small red gut.

“With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet ... His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful” (Shelley 2008: 46).

... from a large black stomach a long flexible throat extends and terminates in a grotesque mouth. The stomach is stitched together onto a large plastic and metal skeleton. The front of its body is supported by a contorted frame of a shopping trolley. Assembled from a vacuum-cleaner head and supported by a green trolley wheel, the mouth houses a green spotlight, representing a single large eye. Attached to the base of the vacuum cleaner is a moustache made up of three small broom heads with pale yellow bristles. A rusted rake head protrudes from the mouth to represent a skeletal jaw and sharp teeth. From the mouth above the green wheel, extends a vertical arch constructed from a found exhaust pipe and water duct joints. Painted green, the assembly creates a unified tube that holds up a gizzard represented by the vacuum cleaner's red dust bag. The connection between the neck and the gizzard is covered with coarse black hair made from plastic mesh cut into strips. The elongated throat is represented by a flexible light-grey air-conditioning duct. The throat slots over a metal cylinder that is joined with a bracket to the frame of the shopping trolley. The metal cylinder terminates in a metal assemblage reminiscent of a diaphragm. The diaphragm is assembled from an exhaust cylinder and a dented top of a gas bottle. All of it painted black. A strip of metal mesh is welded over a tear in the diaphragm to suggest a laced-up corset. Further detailing on the surface, made by



MIG welds suggest nipples on either side of the tear. This then: the metamorphosis of the dust-eater to the *fat eater*

“Beautiful? Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with the watery eyes - that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set - his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips ... I had worked hard for nearly two years for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body” (Shelley 2008: 46).



## 2. Creative Practice

“The history of the world, my sweet, ...  
Is who gets eaten and who gets to eat, ...  
How comforting for just once to know, ...  
That those above will serve those below.”

(Stephen Sondheim, *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*<sup>18</sup>)

In my practice I explore the ideas offered by the dichotomy of two seemingly similar yet opposing terms ‘cannibal’ (as used by Root in the figure of the *fat eater*) and cannibalisation. Although the terms sound the same and have the same etymology, their implications are diametrically opposed. According to Root, the eternal hunger of ‘the *fat eater*’ or *The White Cannibal* describes the all-consuming power of consumption in Western societies (see section 1.2. *The Object and Consumption*). By contrast, cannibalisation is a technical term, which according to the *New Collins Concise Dictionary* is the process whereby serviceable parts from one machine or vehicle are used to repair another.

In Root’s metaphor, the cannibal describes the void generated by an eternal hunger for new things. By contrast cannibalisation is a specific form of recycling in which the aim is to repair one non-functional object by taking parts from another. While both terms refer to a specific type of consumption, they co-exist as cannibalisation feeds of the obsolete objects generated by the cannibal’s continuous cycle of production and waste.

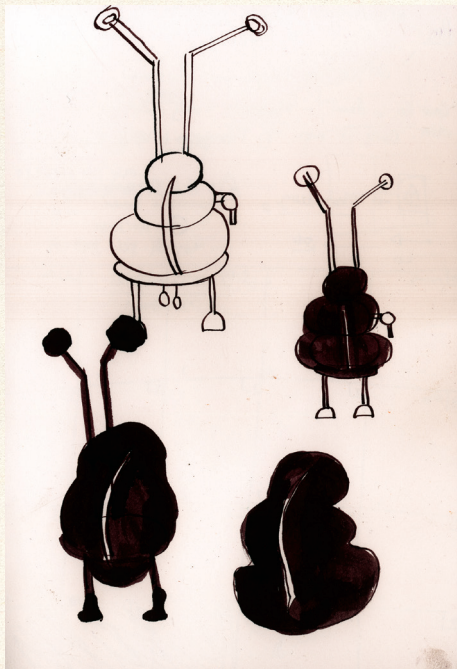
I use the one to speak of the other by means of assemblage, which serves to link the metaphoric cannibal with cannibalisation. By using as my material obsolete objects and waste as representative of the excess generated by consumer society, I attempt to highlight the violence imbedded in this particular ‘system of objects.’ In using recycling by means of cannibalisation, a process motivated by a desire to repair broken things, my sculptural process mimics the processes of consumption and an attempt to ‘mend’ it.

18. Kilgour 1990: 226

However, as Derrida warns, this cycle of deconstructive violence can only produce more cannibalistic monsters (1978: 293).

A collection of found and second-hand objects sourced from flea markets, scrap yards and second hand shops serves as the material source for this body of work. A central aspect of my process is what I describe as a dialogue between myself as collector, and my collection of objects, similar to the *bricoleur* that “speaks not only with things... but through things” (Dezeuze 2008: 31). The collection grew from an absurd tendency to project ‘empathy’ onto discarded objects, a process informed by an unwillingness to accept the obsolescence of objects. Once collected, the ‘orphaned’ object is once again bonded to an owner and the meaning of the object, as part of a new collection, is re-established. In a sense then, the object is for the moment ‘saved’ from becoming obsolete. However, the image of the collector is contradictory as incorporation into a private collection removes the object from its present context and renders it the ‘victim’ of the collector who will do with it as they please. The collector may choose to preserve the object by preventing its use, or conversely the object or parts of it may be used for purposes it was not meant to serve. This ambiguity is similar to the manner in which John Fowles in *The Collector* describes his collector’s moment of acquisition: “It began where she was attacked by a man and I ran up and rescued her. Then somehow I was the man that attacked her, only I didn’t hurt her; I captured her and drove her off in the van and there I kept her captive, in a nice way” (1989: 18-19).

So, in my studio I cannibalise the objects I collect and reconstruct them through various processes of assemblage, which include the production of charcoal and mixed media drawings, delicate etchings and large sculptural assemblages. During the assemblage process I invert the meanings I assigned to the objects at the outset, to create monstrous characters. So the ‘hungry’ vacuum cleaner comes to represent the insatiable desire of the cannibalistic *fat eater* in *the glutton* (see *Catalogue of Monsters*). In this



process, the agencies<sup>19</sup> of the objects are entangled in an act of cruelty. In 'liberating' the object-orphans they are destroyed. Echoing the Dadaists, the intention of this project is to raise "a mirror in which the absurdities of the social world [are] reflected. By ridicule and inversion, Dada demonstrated that the true determinants of many ritualized public acts and professed social goals are fortuitous or base" (Seitz 1961: 34). In reflecting on an irony associated with one of the invariable outcomes of victimization, my victims gain agency by becoming monsters.

19. Laura Ahearn (2001: 109-112) defines agency as "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" and does not restrict the definition to humans only but includes objects, machines and signs. In agreement with Ahearn, Janet Hoskins argues that "things can, in certain conditions, be or act like persons: they can be said to have a personality, to show volition, to accept certain locations and reject others, and thus to have agency." She links this idea to the process of anthropomorphosis and points out that although objects are themselves not alive, their relations are definitely animated (Hoskins 2006:80-81).



***The Mermaid***

**A mermaid found a swimming lad,  
Picked him for her own,  
Pressed her body to his body,  
Laughed; and plunging down  
Forgot in cruel happiness  
That even lovers drown.**

W.B. Yeats

***Babe, You Turn Me On***

**Everything is collapsing, dear  
All moral sense has gone  
It's just history repeating itself  
And babe, you turn me on**

**Like an idea  
Like an Atom Bomb**

Nick Cave



## 2.1. Collecting

“A burnt matchstick’s residue, a myopic  
naked statue, a pergola looming wanly  
are excessively real, excessively stereoscopic  
since there’s nothing they can turn themselves into. Only  
horizontal properties, in their fusion, can spawn a monster.”  
(Brodsky, *Centaurs I*<sup>20</sup>)

The majority of the objects used to produce this body of work were sourced at Milnerton Market a local flea market<sup>21</sup> in Cape Town. Wedged between the railway line and the R27, Milnerton Market operates on a narrow stretch of reclaimed land in Paardeneiland over weekends and public holidays. Initiated in 1990 it currently consists of approximately 200 traders. The majority of the products available are second hand items, but collectors have occasionally found valuable antiques among the bric-a-brac. David Southwood argues that Milnerton market is “a border zone” functioning “between a place of relative comfort and a place of uncertainty” (Southwood 2011: 16)<sup>22</sup>. It is a paradoxical site, which reveals the periphery of South Africa’s semi-industrial society: a place where socio-economical liberty, for some, is a repetitive struggle. This cycle is emphasized in Southwood’s description of the market in *Die plek van verligting* (*The place of relief*): “Milnerton Market lies parallel to the ocean on a slim shoulder of barren land, and it could just as well be a second high-water mark. At weekends, when the place wells up again into full activity, it seems as if yet another massive wave of jumble has risen from the sea and its dark channels, rushed up over the beach, jumped the railway tracks, and emptied itself in the market grounds” (Southwood 2011: 16).

20. Brodsky 1998: 27

21. In the surrealist novel *Nadja*, by André Breton, the book is structured as if the author is wandering through Paris guided only by chance encounters with banal objects, people, acquaintances and places (Breton 1960: 21). This strategy is characteristic of Surrealist creative production as they would wander the flea markets outside Paris waiting for an encounter with *objets trouvés* (Weiss 1991: 21). By intermingling his subjective experiences with objective ‘documentary’ reports, Breton attempts to explore his own subjectivity while at the same time also ‘mystifying’ the banal (Spector 1997: 172). In *Nadja*, Breton notes of Saint-Quen, a flea market outside of Paris, that - “I go there often, searching for objects that can be found nowhere else: old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible, even perverse” (Breton 1994: 52).

22. David Southwood has been observing and recording the Milnerton Market since 1996, which he claims to have become “addicted” to. His work comments on the redundancy evoked by the market as a site of consumption outside of mainstream consumerism. Southwood explains that as the project was drawing to a close, he handed a copy of the book to the Milnerton Market committee with the invitation that the members should provide captions for the images. A black and white image in the publication captures this paradox poetically: an austere image of the market site, unoccupied and covered in mist, with the most striking of captions written “in a heavy pencil” - ‘*Die plek van verligting*’ or *The place of relief* (Southwood 2011: 16-17).

My approach to acquiring objects when visiting the market is similar to the “strategy of attention” described by assemblage artist Michael Schulze (1990: 372). This is also comparable to what Caws sees as “participating in [a] state of anticipation” (1997: 207) where surrealist artists would wander the streets, bookstores, and flea markets of Paris and New York City for a chance encounter with an object, the “object of chance” (Pfeiffer & Hollein 2010: 27). Pierre Martineau asserts that “[a]ny buying process is an interaction between the personality of the individual and the so called ‘personality’ of the product itself” (Baudrillard 2001: 17). My selection process equally depends on the extent of the ‘empathy’ an object can evoke in me, or the ‘consciousness’ I can project onto them.

To feel for, or empathise with an inanimate object is largely an act of imagination. The Surrealist infatuation with found objects, which Breton described as “the crisis of the object” is a state where the expected and traditional conception and functions of objects, things, texts, and ideas are constantly challenged, disrupted, distorted and extended (Caws 1997:201). The Surrealist imagination was stimulated by desire, specifically sexual desire<sup>23</sup>. An example of this Surrealist object is the *Fur Tea-Cup (Le Déjeuner en Fourrure)* 1936 by Méret Oppenheim in which she covered a tea cup, saucer and spoon with fur. Unlike the Surrealists, my imaginative response to the found object is not fuelled by desire, but by the potential obsolescence of the object.

In *Empathy with Inanimate Objects and the Uncanny Valley*, Misselhorn considers empathy for inanimate objects from a philosophical point of view and proposes a theory of ‘imaginative perception’ to explain the ability to empathize with inanimate objects. She proposes that ‘perception based empathy’ is the ability to simultaneously see a thing and imaginatively perceive something else. Simply stated it is “the idea that a subject can imagine a perceptual experience of one thing that it is also the perceptual experience of something else” (2009: 352-353). Thus, the possibility or impossibility to empathise

23. “Three dimensional and composed mostly of ‘found’ materials, the Surrealist Object offered in its tangible character the most cogent and immediate form of poetic activity ... As a concretized expression of elusive sensations related to perversion, it occupied a central position in surrealist sexual politics as an agent of sexual subversion. In its blatantly anti-aesthetic stance, it may also be viewed ... as serving meaningful social action by undermining the status of the bourgeois commodity object” (Finkelstein 1993:115).

with objects depends on the imaginative capability of the subject.

Places such as Milnerton Market, second-hand shops, scrap yards and dumps exist on the periphery of commerce, serving as repositories for the absurd and the banal. Situated outside of mainstream consumerism and advertising, the flea market offers an interesting site with various opportunities to explore creative production. As Torkild Thanem points out “Peripheral borderlands are often cold, dark and lonely places far away from the enlightened core, but they can also be fertile terrains of creativity where one can experiment with embodiment and thought” (2006: 163).



*Fur Tea-Cup, 1936. Mériet Oppenheim*

A large red buoy at the Milnerton Market Cape Town, like a fish out of water. No longer buoyant in the ocean, it has collapsed under its own weight. Tilted to one side, its soft red stomach now scorching in the sun. The exposed flank has discoloured and the surface shows small cracks. On closer inspection, it rather resembles dry elephant skin, but to the touch it is wet and sticky, and melting. At the tip of the large red bloated stomach is a single eye socket, torn, the eye has spilt out.

Two small orange buoys hidden in the shadow of the large red buoy. Huddled together they have hard plastic shells, which become brittle as the sun moves west. On their fading orange surfaces are deep lacerations. As the wind disturbs the two balls they rock back and forth groaning against the tarmac surface.

A scorched dining chair on the Michaelis School of Fine Art dumpsite on Hiddingh campus. Perched on three legs, it timidly supports itself against a black rubbish bin.

A small enema at Milnerton Market, hiding - quite dead - behind a green enamel milk jug.  
Two toilet plungers at Milnerton Market line up like soldiers on the frontline.

A small bicycle rear-view mirror in a second-hand shop in Main Road Cape Town, lying helpless and face-down on a pile of old brackets.

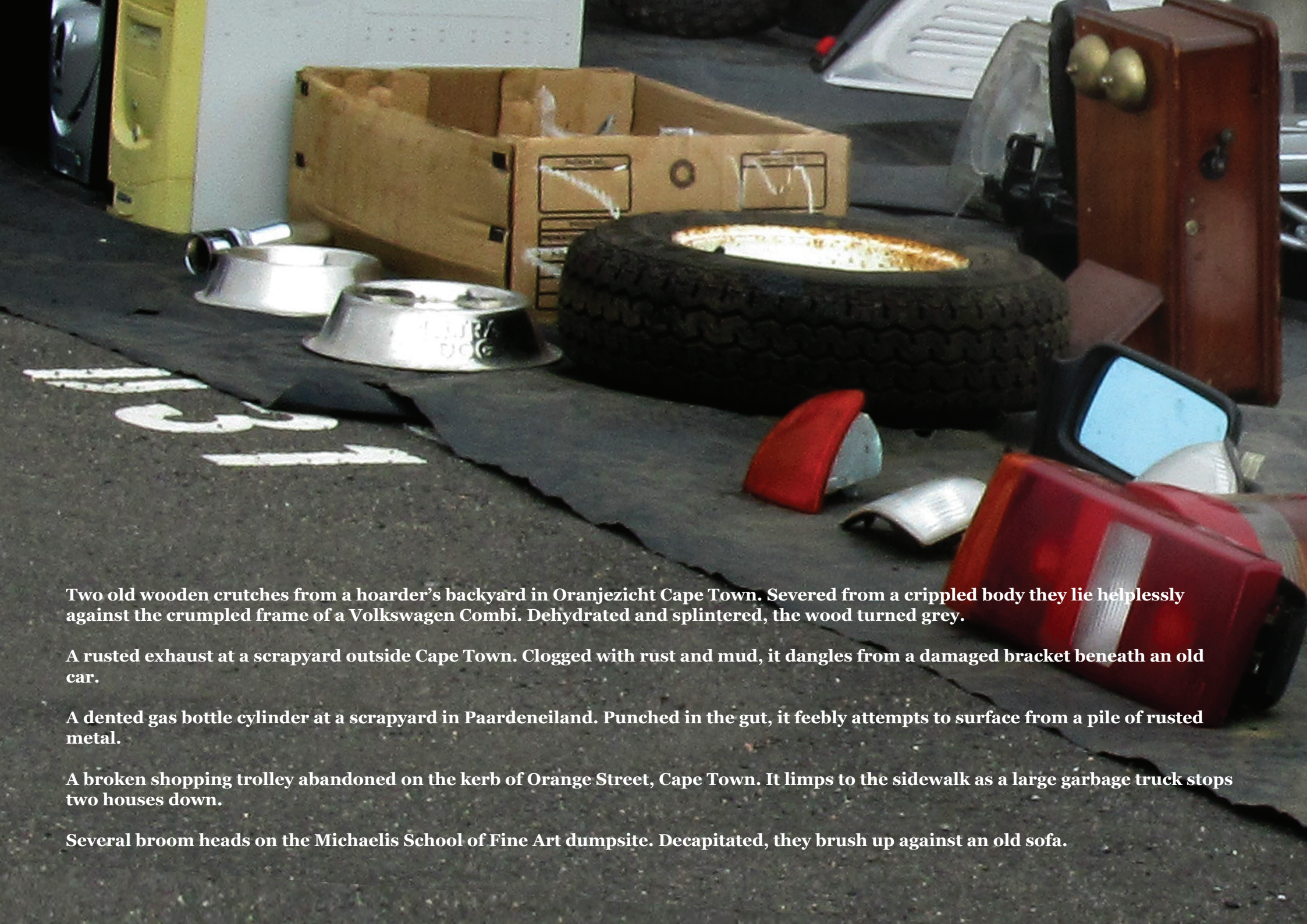
A large glass ball in a burnt-out chemistry lab at the University of the Free State. Curiously it balances on a window-sill, three stories high.

An office chair's wheeled base at Milnerton Market, desperately trying to hide under half opened beach umbrella.  
Some old rusted bicycle frames at the metal scrapyards outside Bloemfontein. Entangled in barbed wire, they motionlessly await the claw of a large construction vehicle. A black plastic horn at Milnerton Market. Gleaming in the morning sun it hangs motionless from a rusted metal fence.

A broken wheelbarrow at a metal scrapyards in Paardeneiland, Cape Town. Gutted, it reclines against a pile of broken dishwashers.

A red trumpet at Milnerton Market. Coming up for air in the boot of an old Toyota Corolla hatchback. Its missing mouthpiece gasping it mutely floats to the surface, and climbs over an old cassette player.

A small round mirror-tool at the metal scrapyards outside Bloemfontein. Buried underneath mud, its round little face shatters as I step on it.



**Two old wooden crutches from a hoarder's backyard in Oranjezicht Cape Town. Severed from a crippled body they lie helplessly against the crumpled frame of a Volkswagen Combi. Dehydrated and splintered, the wood turned grey.**

**A rusted exhaust at a scrapyard outside Cape Town. Clogged with rust and mud, it dangles from a damaged bracket beneath an old car.**

**A dented gas bottle cylinder at a scrapyard in Paardeneiland. Punched in the gut, it feebly attempts to surface from a pile of rusted metal.**

**A broken shopping trolley abandoned on the kerb of Orange Street, Cape Town. It limps to the sidewalk as a large garbage truck stops two houses down.**

**Several broom heads on the Michaelis School of Fine Art dumpsite. Decapitated, they brush up against an old sofa.**



## 2.2. Studio

“So one day I took a bicycle seat and the handlebar and put the one on top of the other, making them into the head of a bull. It was strong. But what I did later was to throw the bull’s head away. I threw it away – into the rain gutter or somewhere – but far away from me. Then a worker came along and picked it out of the gutter and decided that maybe he could make a bicycle seat and a handle bar out of this bull’s head. And he would have done it [...] it would have been a magnificent thing. That’s the art of transformation.” (Pablo Picasso, *Bull’s Head*<sup>24</sup>)

“The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and man to pig, and from pig to man again: but already it was impossible to say which was which.” (George Orwell, *Animal Farm*<sup>25</sup>)

My studio is primarily a place of transformation. Here the ‘possessed’ objects are organised, cannibalised, re-organised and re-assembled. The studio is where the shift from empathy with objects to their cannibalisation occurs. It functions simultaneously as an ‘eating machine’ and a ‘Frankensteinian laboratory.’

The notion of an eating machine describes the studio as the place in which a continuous stream of objects are constantly introduced, sorted, arranged and cannibalised. It does not however, exhibit the sequential predictability of the mechanical repetition of an industrial assembly line. Rather it is a space of chaos with fragmented objects scattered across the floor, workbenches and other surfaces. This disorder enables a continuous flow of new materials and ideas.

Baudrillard (2005: 114) describes the process of collection as a “discourse addressed to oneself” in the form of a “private totality.” The studio therefore functions as a type of ‘private economy’ that echoes Shelley’s description of Victor Frankenstein’s

24. Vergine 2007: 122.

25. Orwell 2008: 95.

laboratory as a secluded chamber/cell in which he addresses the facets of his labour. Like Frankenstein I cannibalise and transform dead things and parts of dead things into monstrous beings. These cannibalised parts are constantly organised and analysed according to sets of ideas, formulas and experiments in a kind of laboratory with different work-stations and categories of objects. Through this process a mental transformation occurs and the objects and fragments become metaphors for body parts. The studio is filled with containers labelled: 'stomachs', 'mouths', 'spines', 'ribs', 'feet', 'joints', 'genitals', etc.

Drawing is another activity that occurs in the studio and serves a crucial role in the process of transforming objects. By drawing the whole or disassembled objects in my collection, I mentally relocate them to an imaginary space. Sketches in a variety of media are usually made in drawing books. These books are constructed from various materials such as an old photo-album cover, a calendar and a Bible sleeve. My drawing activities also include the production of large charcoal drawings and etchings. Some drawings are temporary and occur on non-permanent surfaces such as the white chalk sketches drawn on the floor of the metal workshop. The immediacy of drawing helps me to resolve things and ideas much quicker than sculpture. Henry Moore noted that "[d]rawing is a means of finding your way about things, and a way of experiencing, more quickly than sculpture allows, certain tryouts and attempts" (Dexter 2011: 8).

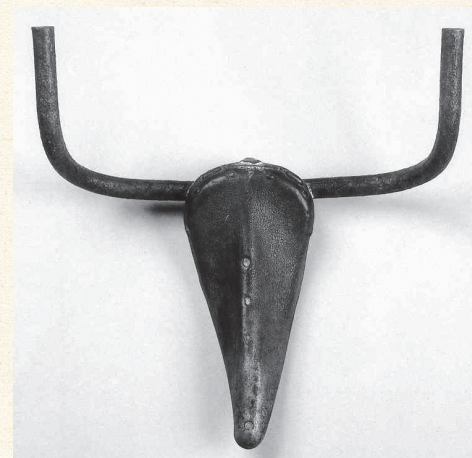
Michael Landy explored his relationship with his father through drawing objects. In *Welcome to My World* (2004) Landy meditates on his father's possessions and fragments of the father's body in order to represent his relationship with his father. Although *Welcome to My World* is remarkably different from *Break Down* (see 2.1. *The Object and Consumption*) in approach and representation, both works address the transformative power in object relations<sup>26</sup>. While *Break Down* explores the relationship between people and their objects by means of destruction, in *Welcome to My World*,

26. See footnote 19, on the agency of objects.

the drawing of the object results in the creation of a new object (the drawing), and establishes a new object economy (Molen 2011: 170-171).

Drawing also serves a critical function. In drawing a completed or near-completed artwork, I visually dissect it in a process of a formal and conceptual analysis. These drawings frequently result in the re-cannibalisation of the sculpture, either to use the cannibalised piece for another work, to replace one part with another, or just simply to edit the overall composition of work.

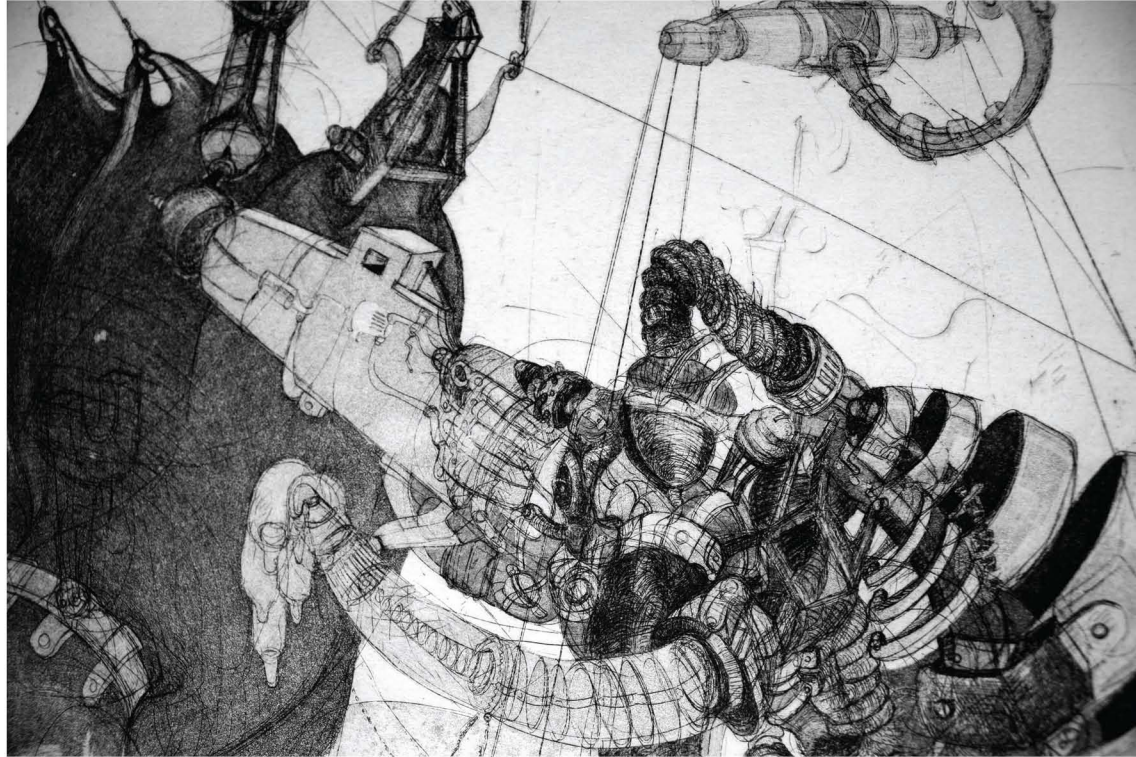
Pablo Picasso described the thought process behind the *Bull's Head* in terms of the mutability of the object in the mind of the viewer: "I went over to a bicycle seat and handle bar abandoned along the road and said to myself: 'Look, there's a bull.' I immediately put them together and anyone who saw them said: 'Look a seat for a bicycle!' and he turned it back into a bicycle seat and handle bar. And this could go on *ad infinitum*, depending on the mental and corporeal requisites" (Vergine 2007: 122). My studio is a place of corporeal and mental transformation, of both the objects as things, and how I conceive of them. In this sense, the 'orphaned' object is consumed or 'eaten' when it enters this space and is then 'digested' – organized, visually analyzed and physically altered – in order to extract from it what is needed to produce the 'monsters'.

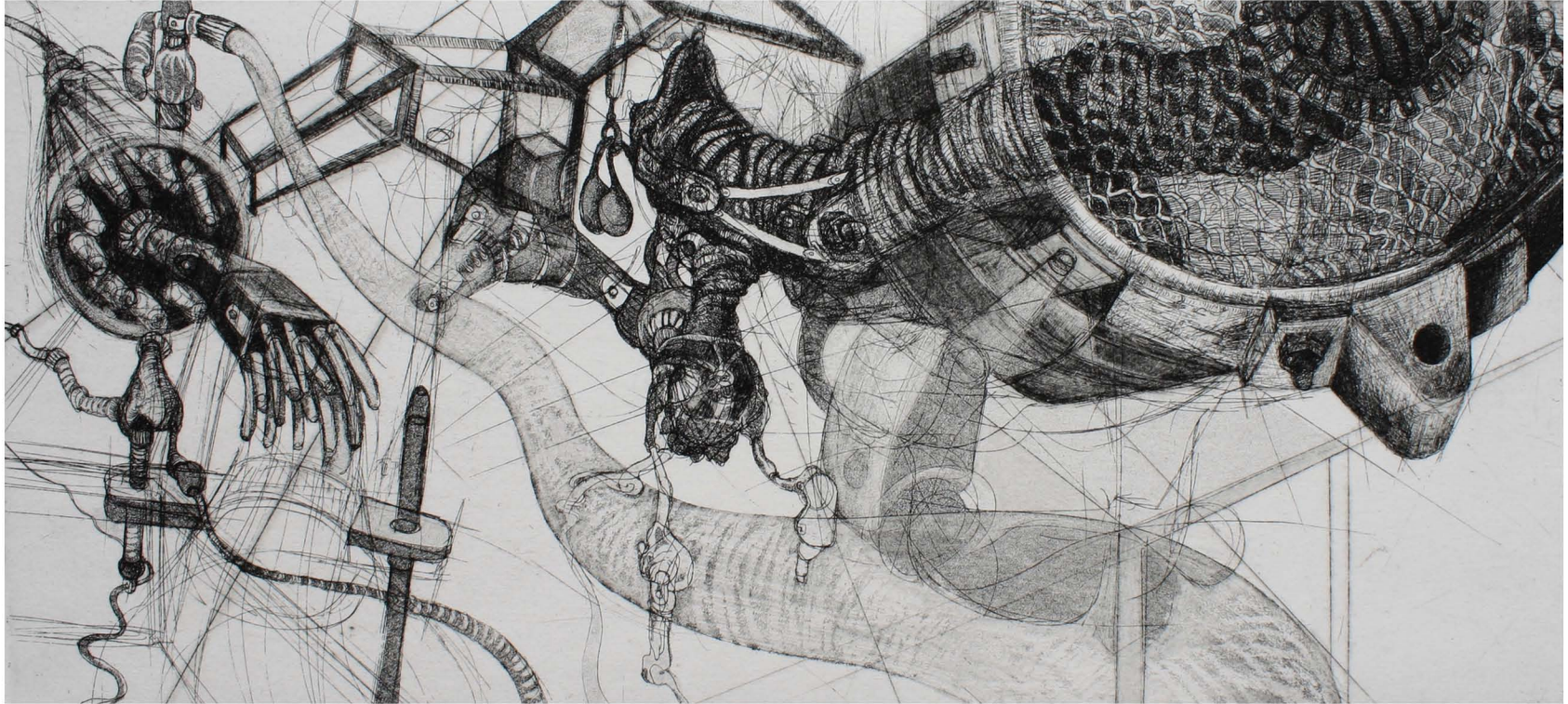


*Bull's Head*, 1943. Pablo Picasso









### 2.3. Assembling

“But if you’re gonna dine with them cannibals  
Sooner or later, darling you’re gonna get eaten.”  
(Nick Cave, *Cannibal’s Hymn*<sup>27</sup>)

“The paterfamilias and the creation of the Moral of the Stork [=] ignorance of things + lack of imagination + sentiment of authority towards the curious progeny.”  
(Oswald de Andrade, *Cannibalist Manifesto*<sup>28</sup>)

In *the cannibals’ banquet* I attempted to explore the inner dynamics of a consumer society and in particular its hierarchies and power relations. The monsters that populate my imaginary society were created from ‘orphaned’ objects, and were informed by the ideas of the cannibal/*fat eater* and assemblage as a process of cannibalisation. Each of these monsters exhibits specific attributes characteristic of this society: *the chairman* as patriarch, *the hostess* as bride, *the glutton* as force, *the veteran* as outcast, *the pervert* as infection, and *Pan* as observer<sup>29</sup>.

With the exception of *Pan*, each work is fitted with a spotlight. These spotlights function as a means to visually and conceptually bind the assemblages together in an attempt to evoke relations between the different characters. All the light in the space is controlled, which creates a theatrical effect evocative of the notion of the ‘theatre of the absurd.’ Martin Esslin describes the intentions of the theatre of the absurd as having “renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being, that is in concrete stage images” (1982: 25). In conjunction with the spotlights fitted on the sculptures, there are small spotlights installed on the walls. These spotlights

27. Lyrics by Nick Cave, 2004, Mute Records Limited

28. Danchev 2011:265

29. Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony* functioned as a paradigm for the conceptual and structural relations between *Pan* as an observer/witness to my violent society of creatures. The narrative, which is set in a nameless colony, describes an execution procedure in detail, revealing the dehumanisation of the people in the colony

serve to create ambient light to allow the details and surfaces of the sculptures to be seen. The shadows cast by *the glutton* and *the pervert* emanate from spotlights on the floor. The shadows these create include the viewer's full-length shadow accompanied by the shadows of the monsters on two opposing walls. As the viewer moves around in the space he/she can manipulate his/her shadow to either dominate the monstrous shadows or to be dominated by them.

*Pan* is the only sculpture with a familiar name and functions as the 'observer', a self-conscious element of art history. *Pan* observes itself in the making, in contrast to the complex layered and obscured meanings of the other assemblages that evoke psychological types rather than specific art-historical references. As an assemblage of specific objects and a direct reference to Seitz's classical definition of assemblage (see *Historical Overview of Assemblage*), *Pan's* constituent elements remain distinct, recognisable and stand in juxtaposition to one another. In this form of assemblage, content is important and the relationship between its elements dominates. The front section of this sculpture therefore serves as a direct reference to Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913). *Pan* functions as a kind of antithesis to the rest of the sculptural group to 'observe' and 'critique' the assembled monsters in the language of 'traditional' assemblage.

In contrast to *Pan*, the sculptures that make up the group were constructed using a much greater variety of approaches and strategies. For example, some components of the sculptures remain recognisable and have been used for their original form and function. This includes the red trumpet used for the voice of *the chairman* and the vacuum cleaner used for the mouth of *the glutton*. However, other objects used have become completely unrecognizable within the completed sculpture. These objects were chosen for one or more of their formal qualities such as material, texture, line etc. and an example would be the black inner tubing used for the material of the 'stomach' in *the glutton*

as victims of an absurdly cruel authority. The 'colony' consists of four characters and an execution machine. The characters are all nameless and referred to as *the traveller*, *the officer*, *the condemned man* and *the soldier*; and all references to them are in lower-case. This renders them visually difficult to distinguish from the text, which predominates with the description and operation of the machine during execution. Each character is defined as a function and only in relation to the function and operation of the execution machine. So, *the officer* operates the machine; the *condemned man* is scheduled for execution by the machine, *the soldier* is responsible for guarding the *condemned man*, and *the traveller* observes and researches both the procedure and site of the execution.

and *the pervert*; the large wooden garden benches used to construct the wooden 'spinal' structures of *the chairman* and *the veteran*; and the black plastic mesh cut in strips to represent the 'hair' on the elongated 'neck' of *the glutton*. Other objects were selected for purely structural purposes such as the metal ring supporting the stomach of *the pervert*. However, most objects were chosen for a combination of the reasons listed above, such as the cable ties that serve a functional and an expressive purpose. The tiebacks provide a linear element that relates directly to my drawings. The shopping trolley used in *the glutton* also serves a variety of visual, functional and conceptual purposes: it provides a reference to consumerism in the guise of the retail grocery shop. It serves as part of the structure supporting *the glutton's* 'stomach', and the pale grey of its metal rods results in a linear element in contrast to the dark rubber of the 'stomach'.

Composition and narrative were the primary concerns guiding the construction of the works that make up the main group. This means that in these works the component objects, fragments, and parts were specifically selected, altered and used to achieve a coherent whole, as opposed to the retention of individual identifiable objects (as in *Pan*). The objects' functions are mostly used associatively when constructing the composition. As in a consumer society in which the individual is lost within the whole and identity is constructed through the consumption of commodities, these monsters represent the consumption of the various objects that went into their construction. They have therefore 'eaten' these objects in order to come into being. They really are what they eat.

The act of eating affords a useful metaphor for my creative process. To eat is to incorporate something from outside the body into the body. Food is always a thing, something other and something substantial (Kass 1999: 25). Paradoxically eating is simultaneously the fulfilment of a need and an act of desire. As a need, it is a basic function of life and is performed by all people, regardless of race, age, gender. Mikhail Bakhtin observed that eating "is the most material need yet is invested with a great

deal of significance, an act that involves both desire and aggression, as it creates a total identity between eater and eaten while insisting on the total control - the literal consumption - of the latter by the former” (in Kilgour 1990: 7). Similarly Root constructs the concept of cannibalistic consumption around the organization and aesthetisation of violence (1996: 8-12). The manner of eating also serves to distinguish the animal from the human, as animals feed by taking their mouths to their food while humans eat by bringing their food to their mouths (Kass 1999: 25, 141). In this sense, the dehumanisation of *the glutton* as most consumed by the insatiable ‘hunger’ of consumerism is expressed by locating his ‘mouth’ at floor level.

The art form of assemblage is concerned with objects. Consumer societies exhibit complex relationships with objects in that objects serve a central role in the construction and definition of a social identity. Consumerism is concerned with maintaining a constant hunger for new objects to re-affirm or improve these object-dependent identities. I use the detritus, which results from this cycle of continuous renewal and disposal, that is, the life cycle of objects, to reflect on the violent intricacies of a consumer society.









**Part Three:**

*the cannibals' banquet*







### 3. the cannibals' banquet

*the cannibals' banquet* is a collection of six large-scale sculptures consisting of *the chairman*, *the hostess*, *the glutton*, *the veteran*, *the pervert* and an outsider which I have named *Pan*.

#### 3.1 The Installation

The sculptural group *the cannibals' banquet* is exhibited in an installation format in which light and shadow play a crucial role. The layout of this installation is as follows: *the veteran* is located at the entrance of the exhibition and casts a dim light directly onto the approaching viewer. Beyond the veteran, the space opens up into a large square high-ceilinged room, where the walls are covered in shadows created by the spotlights. Of these, two opposing walls are significant as the shadows cast upon them are particularly pronounced.

On the one wall, *the pervert*, *the hostess* and *the chairman* are cast in shadow by a green spotlight located low on the 'mouth' of *the glutton*. *The glutton* forms a large obstructive mass in the far corner in front of an open door. On the wall behind *the glutton*, both *the glutton* and *Pan* are cast in shadow by lights emanating from the mirror below *the pervert* and the spotlight in the 'mouth' of *the chairman's* trumpet. In the opposite corner against the other (closed) door is *the pervert* whose shadows on the door, across the wall and ceiling above him are produced by his own lights. *The chairman* and *the hostess* are centrally located with *the chairman* facing the 'mouth' of *the glutton*. The chairman is the tallest structure in the group and casts a spotlight towards *the glutton* from above. *The hostess* stands with her 'spine' facing the 'spine' of *the chairman* and is illuminated from within. *Pan* is located in the centre of a triangular composition formed by *the pervert*, *the glutton* and *the chairman*.

1. Function.
2. material
3. Relationship
4. character
5. action.
6. Space relation





eye of 16  
stemmed.

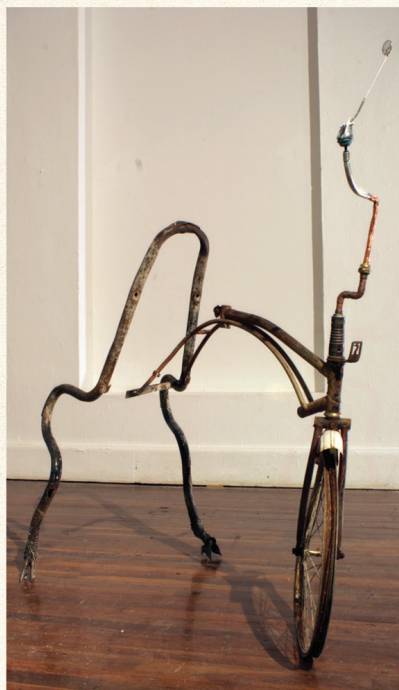
Clara  
= MSHKIVIT  
L'hiolaw  
eye.

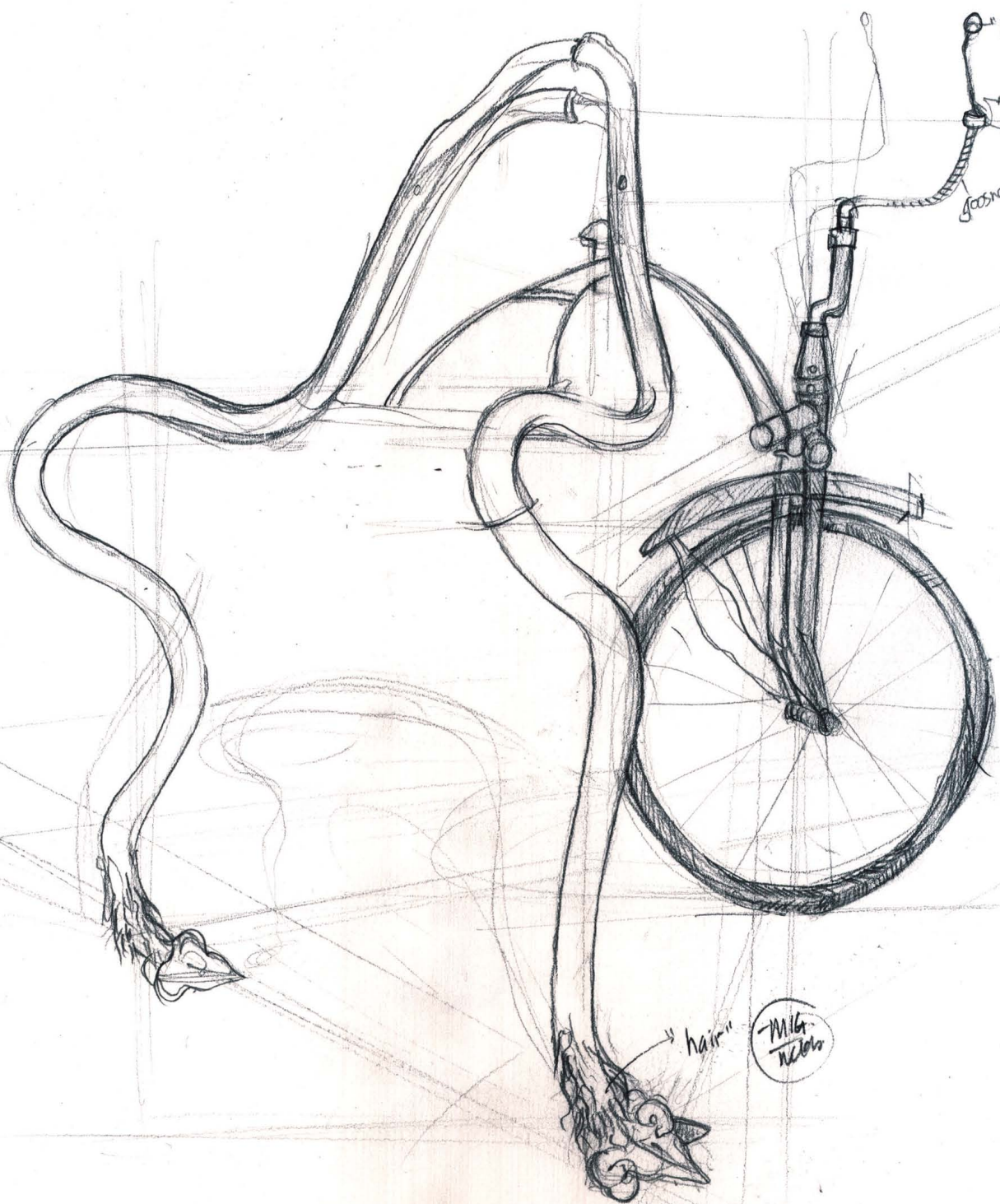




### 3.2. Catalogue of Monsters

Pan: The sculpture was assembled from a wheelbarrow frame and the front half of an old bicycle frame that had been cut off just behind the seat. Both seat and handlebars were removed, leaving only the arched frame and front wheel. Joined to the bicycle frame - where the handlebars used to be - is a delicate construction of found brass fittings and ribbed copper pipe fitted together with an epoxy. This terminates in a green trolley caster from which extends a small round mirror-tool. The handlebars of the wheelbarrow frame form two rear 'legs,' onto which are welded two cast iron burglar-proofing spikes in a decorative *Fleur d' lis* design. As these spikes occur at the 'foot' of the wheelbarrow 'legs,' they represent the split 'hoof' of an animal. To accentuate this reference to an animal, MIG welds were applied above the 'hoofs' to create an organic line, evocative of 'hair'. With the exception of a small painted detail on the castor, the majority of the surface detail of the material used has been left as it was found.





"Small" Blobby Observing - view - see all?  
 ↳ don't miss anything  
 ↳ vary degree in my ability to see but  
 ↳ Pan - price  
 ↳ observe  
 ↳ to observe see gain of fun  
 ↳ All things

Popul. colony  
 ↳ Koffins - Travel  
 ↳ glass, Pan, observation  
 ↳ Colony of - creature  
 ↳ mounts  
 ↳ rock

Keep wheel in group  
 Mobility.  
 ↳ small/much ability  
 ↳ Agility + hours. } animal life  
 ↳ Rap around  
 ↳ invertebrates inside

↳ hair  
 ↳ Mig. below

*the pervert*: the sculpture consists of a large black mass lodged in a circular metal tube supported on two short 'legs' at its rear. It faces a wall against which it leans by means of elongated 'arms' terminating in two toilet-plungers. A mechanistic device and two blue light-bulbs protrude below the arms. Beneath the black 'stomach' a round mirror reflects the light of small spotlight that produces the shadows cast by *Pan* and *the glutton* on the wall behind *the glutton*. The metal frame is rusted and the large black mass is constructed from three inner tubes stitched on top of each other in an ascending order from large at the bottom to small at the top. The blue light bulbs hanging between the wall and the sculpture casts the sculpture in a strong silhouette while the light source underneath throws a strong shadow against the ceiling and wall against which the structure is leaning.





mirror  
large handle  
looker  
looker  
in reality.

also use to  
"look" person  
other.  
in shadows.  
look @ husk

bicycle  
side mirror  
mirror  
reflect

Mechanism

double side  
make up  
mirror

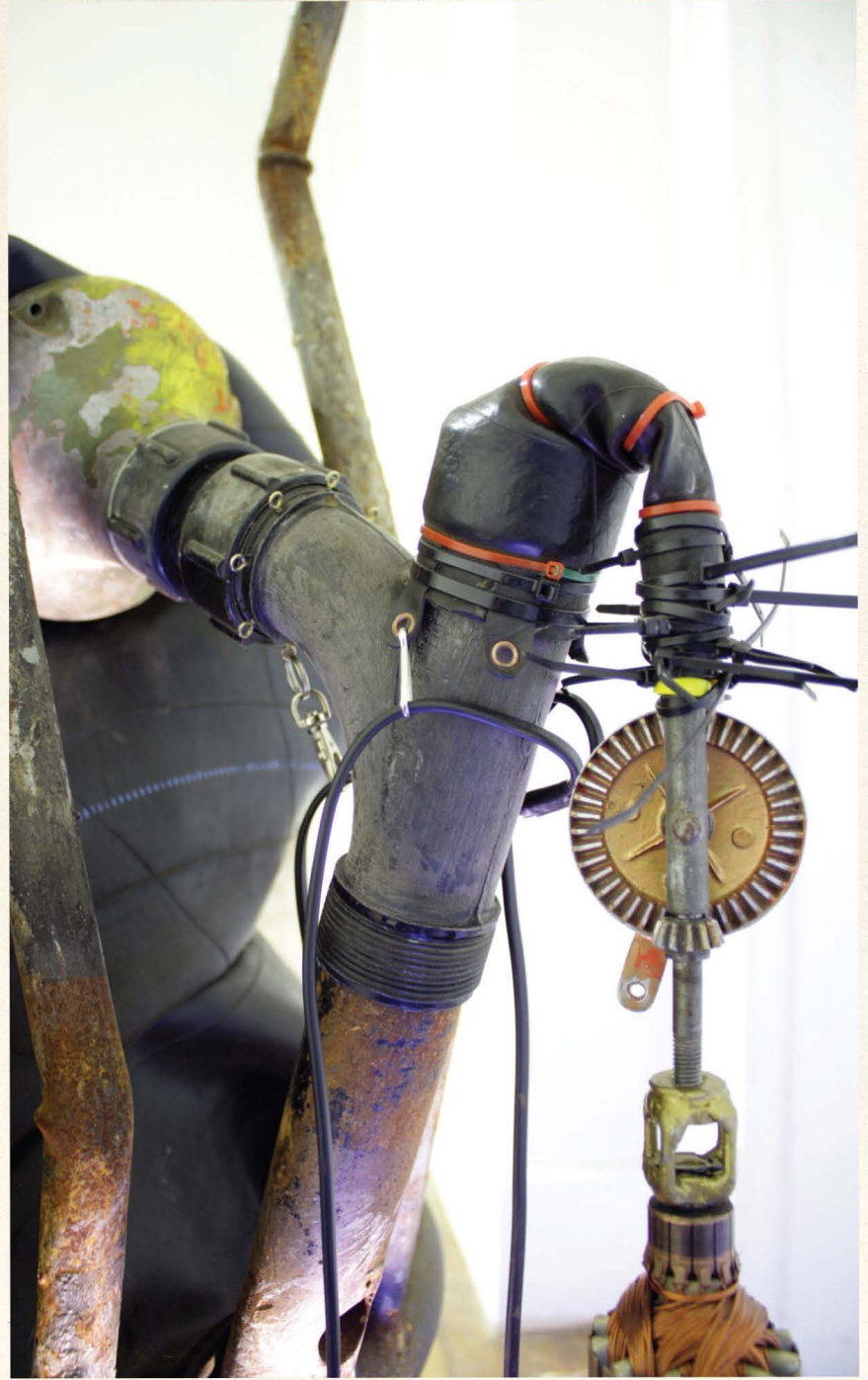
reflects light  
light comes from his  
mechanism to opposite

ab  
pin  
glue

blue handle - small

spring





*the chairman:* The lower part of the sculpture consists of a cylinder mounted on a wheeled office-chair's wheeled base. The cylinder is connected to a thick threaded rod attached to a trolley caster that holds an elongated and slightly curved spine. The spine is braced with a metal structure. As it curves upwards it terminates in a 'head', which consists of a dining-chair backrest and a red trumpet. The trumpet has been inserted through the upholstery of the backrest and in the 'mouth' of the trumpet is a spotlight. The black electrical cord serving the light bulb runs through a small hole in the trumpet down the back of the 'spine' and forms 'entrails' on the ground leading to an electric socket. To balance the weight of the 'head' on top of the 'spine' two large 'testicles', two orange buoys, are suspended in flesh coloured stockings and dangle above the office chair-base.



Chair  
Sport  
Joy

Silver  
Chair

10.  
A  
B  
C  
D  
E  
F  
G  
H  
I  
J  
K  
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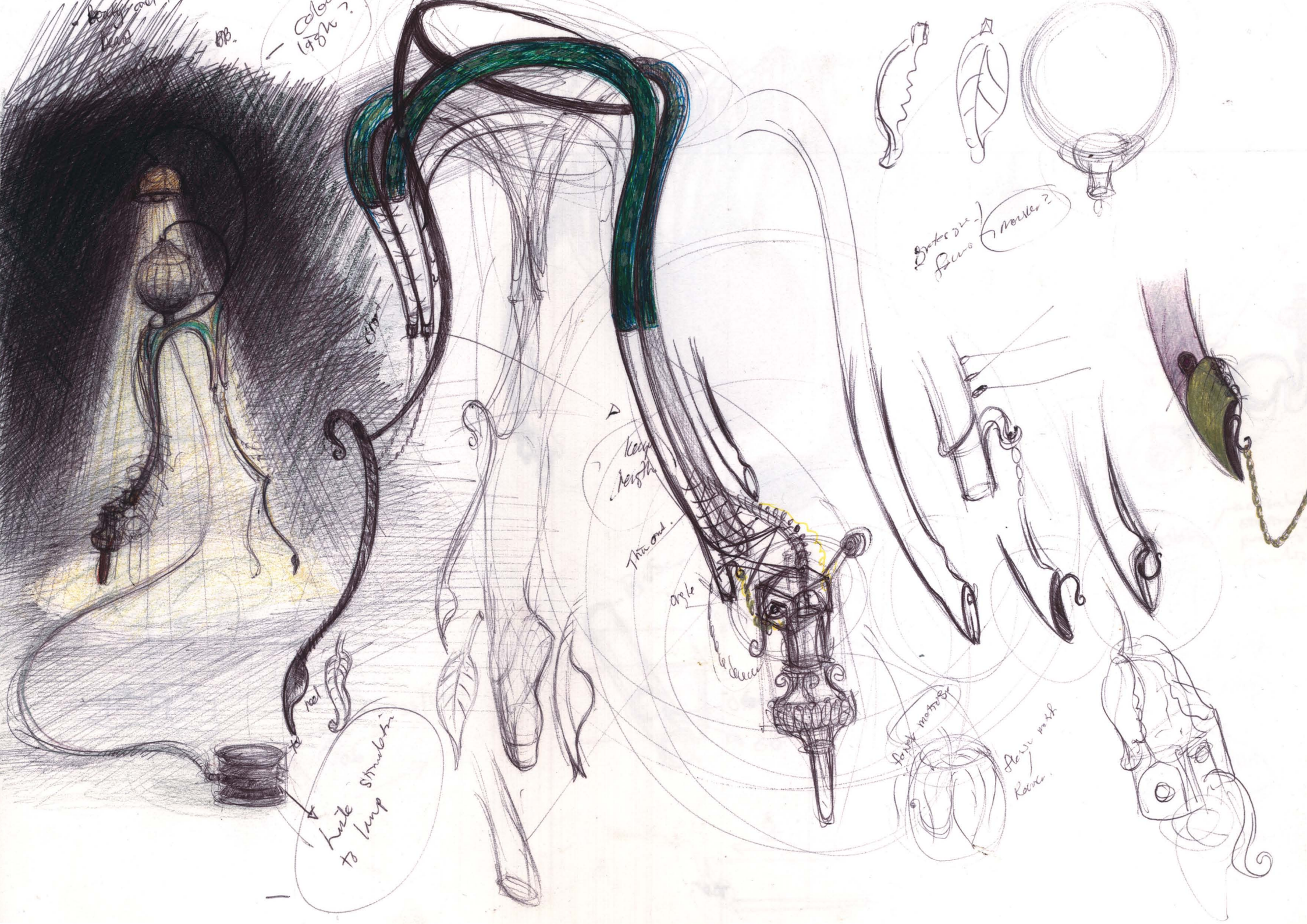
swing balls  
hugon balls



Chair ring

*the hostess*: The sculpture consists of a forged-metal frame in an arabesque design. At its apex a glass ball is suspended from its curving 'spine'. Below the ball, brightly painted segments of bentwood chairs form a corset, from which three 'legs' descend. Of these, two are similar, while the third and front leg is bound to the corset with black rubber strips and ends in a large grotesque foot of heavy cast-iron which has been painted red.





Colo  
1982?

Get over -  
form -> matter?

Keep  
length

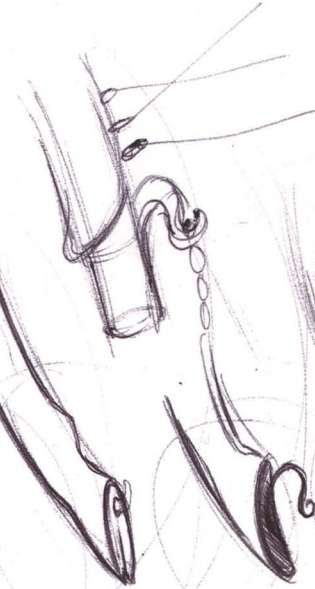
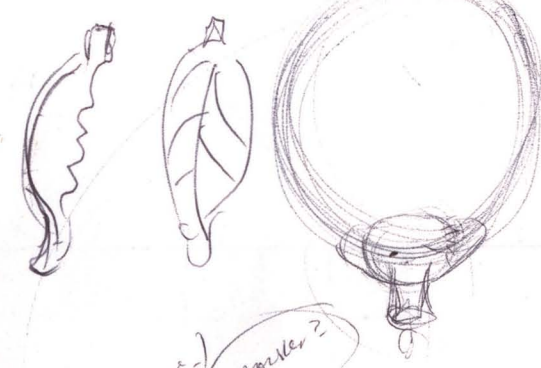
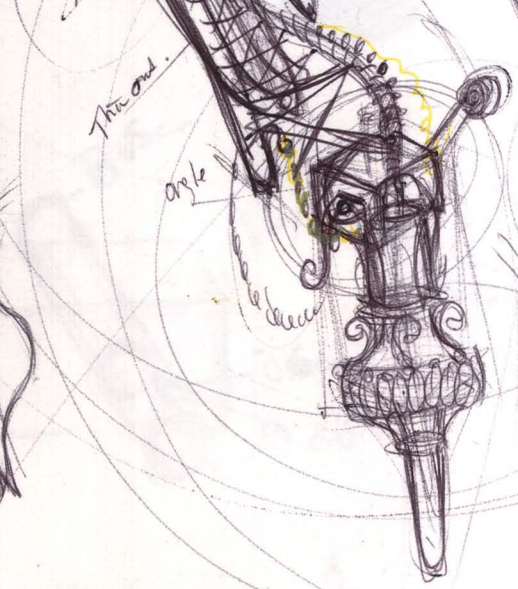
Thin out.

angle

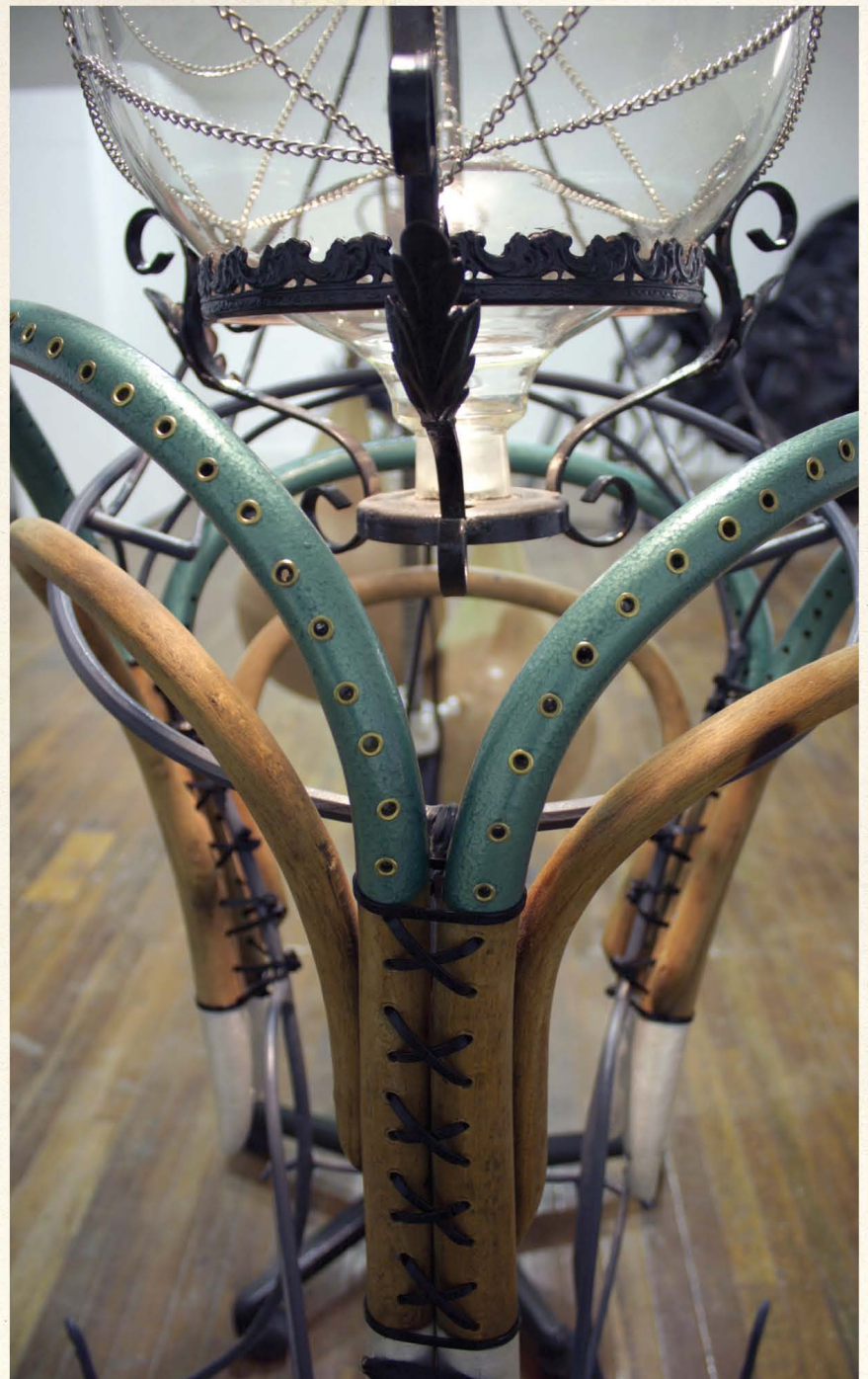
to look more like

slender with  
Kane

hide stimulus  
to keep

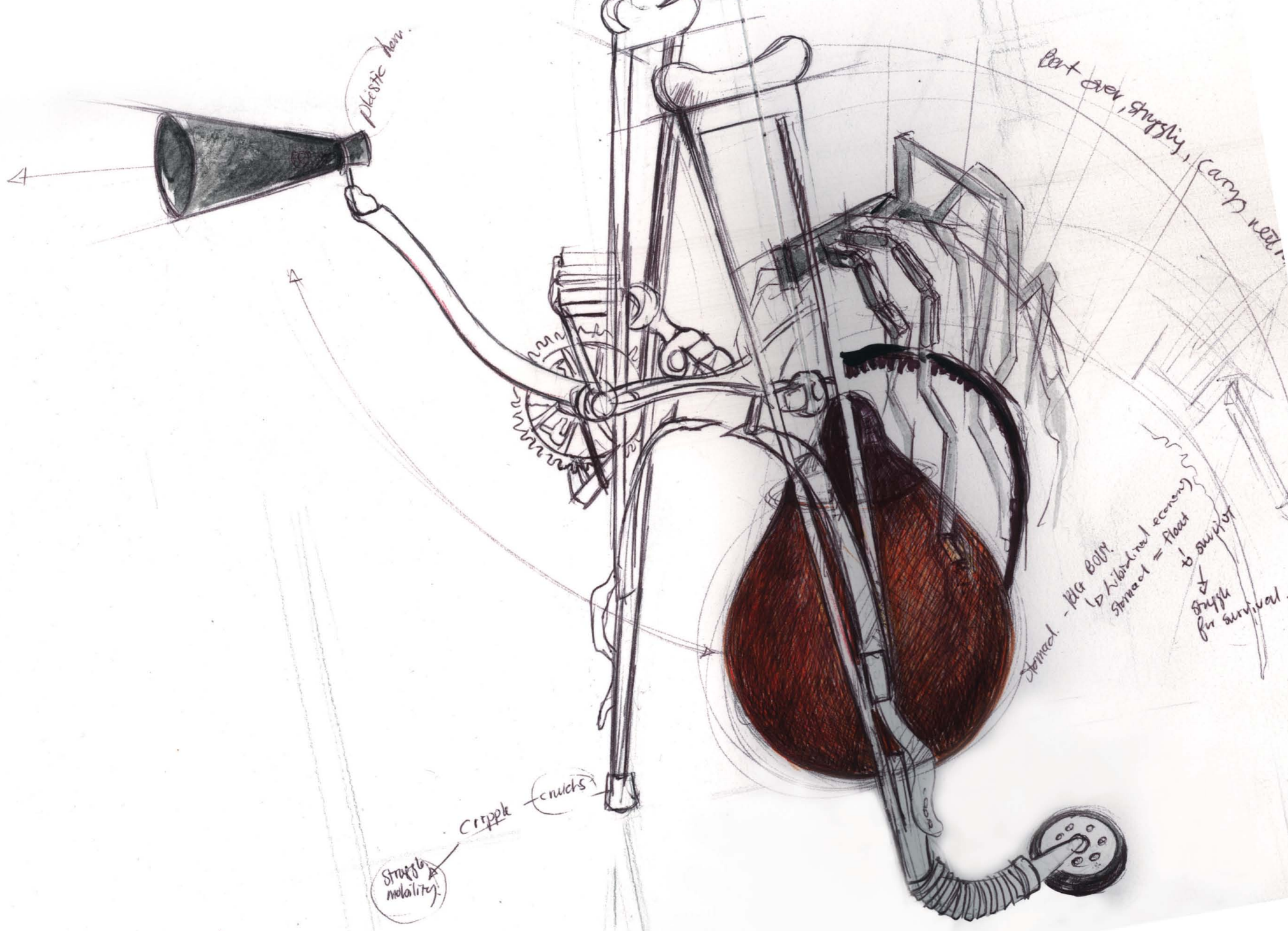






*the veteran*: The sculpture consists of an arched 'spine' and a small black 'head' supported by two old wooden crutches which forms its 'legs'. The 'spine' was produced by welding part of a bicycle frame to an arched and serrated metal T-bar. Assembled on top of the T-bar are fragmented and disjointed wooden 'ribs'. The 'ribs' protrude on either side of the 'spine' dangling over a large orange-red, sun-damaged buoy suspended from the arch. One of the crutches terminates in a 'crippled foot', represented by a trolley caster housing a green wheel. The transition between the 'leg' and the 'foot' is created by a black, ribbed rubber tube that collapses under the weight of the sculpture. The bicycle frame that forms the support for the 'spine' consists of a pair of paddles on a sprocket wheel and carries the small 'head'. The 'head' is represented by a black plastic horn and houses a small light bulb. From the opening in the back of the plastic horn comes a black electrical cord that drops to the ground and joins the structure to the nearest electrical socket. Except for sanding the plastic horn, surface detail of the material has been left as it was found.





plastic horn.

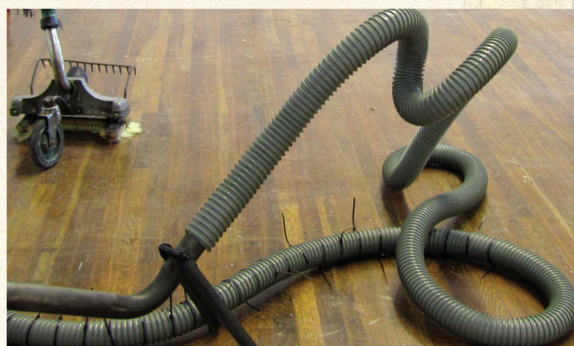
Part over, struggle, camp next.

Stomach - plea body  
to hybrid real economy  
Stomach = float  
to survive  
& struggle  
for survival.

Struggle  
mobility.

cripple crutches

*the glutton:* The sculpture consists of a large black 'stomach' from which a long flexible 'throat' extends and terminates in a grotesque 'mouth'. The 'stomach' is produced by stitching black inner tubes onto a large plastic and metal 'skeleton' of which the frontal section is supported by the contorted frame of a shopping trolley. Assembled from a vacuum cleaner head and supported by a green trolley wheel, the 'mouth' houses a green spotlight, representing a large 'eye'. Attached to the base of the vacuum cleaner are three small broom heads with pale yellow bristles. A rusted rake head protrudes from the 'mouth' to represent a 'skeletal jaw and sharp teeth'. From the 'mouth' above the green wheel, extends a vertical arch constructed from a found exhaust pipe and water duct joints. Painted green, the assembly creates a unified tube that holds up a 'gizzard' represented by a red vacuum-cleaner dust bag. The connection between the 'neck' and 'gizzard' is covered with coarse 'black hair' made from plastic mesh cut into strips. A flexible light grey air-conditioning duct represents the elongated 'throat' which slots over a metal cylinder, that is joined with a bracket to the frame of the shopping trolley. The metal cylinder terminates in a metal assemblage representational of a 'diaphragm'. The 'diaphragm' is assembled from an exhaust cylinder and dented top of a gas bottle and is painted black. A strip of metal mesh is welded over a tear in the 'diaphragm' to suggest a laced up corset. Further details on the surface, made by MIG welds, suggest nipples on either side of the tear.





















## *Song of Welcome*

Here's your Mom, here's your Dad.  
Welcome to being their flesh and blood.  
Why do you look so sad?

Here's your food, here's your drink.  
Also some thoughts, if you care to think.  
Welcome to everything.

Here's your practically clean slate.  
Welcome to it, though it's kind of late.  
Welcome at any rate.

Here's your paycheck, here's your rent.  
Money is nature's fifth element.  
Welcome to every cent.

Here's your swarm and your huge beehive.  
Welcome to that there's roughly five  
billion like you alive.

Welcome to the phone book that stars your name  
Digits are democracy's secret aim.  
Welcome to your claim to fame.

Here's your marriage, and here's divorce.  
Now that's the order you can't reverse.  
Welcome to it; up yours.

Here's your blade, here's your wrist.  
Welcome to playing your own terrorist;  
call this your Middle East.

Here's your mirror, your dental gleam.  
Here's an octopus in your dream.  
Why do you try to scream?

Here's your corn-cob, your TV set.  
Your candidate suffering an upset.  
Welcome to what he said.

Here's your porch, see the cars pass by.  
Here's your shitting dog's guilty eye.  
Welcome to its alibi.

Here are your cicadas, then a chickadee,  
the bulb's dry tear in your lemon tea.  
Welcome to infinity.

Here are your pills on the plastic tray,  
Your disappointing, crisp X-ray.  
You are welcome to pray.

Here's your cemetery, a well kept glen.  
Welcome to a voice that says, "Amen."  
The end of the rope, old man.

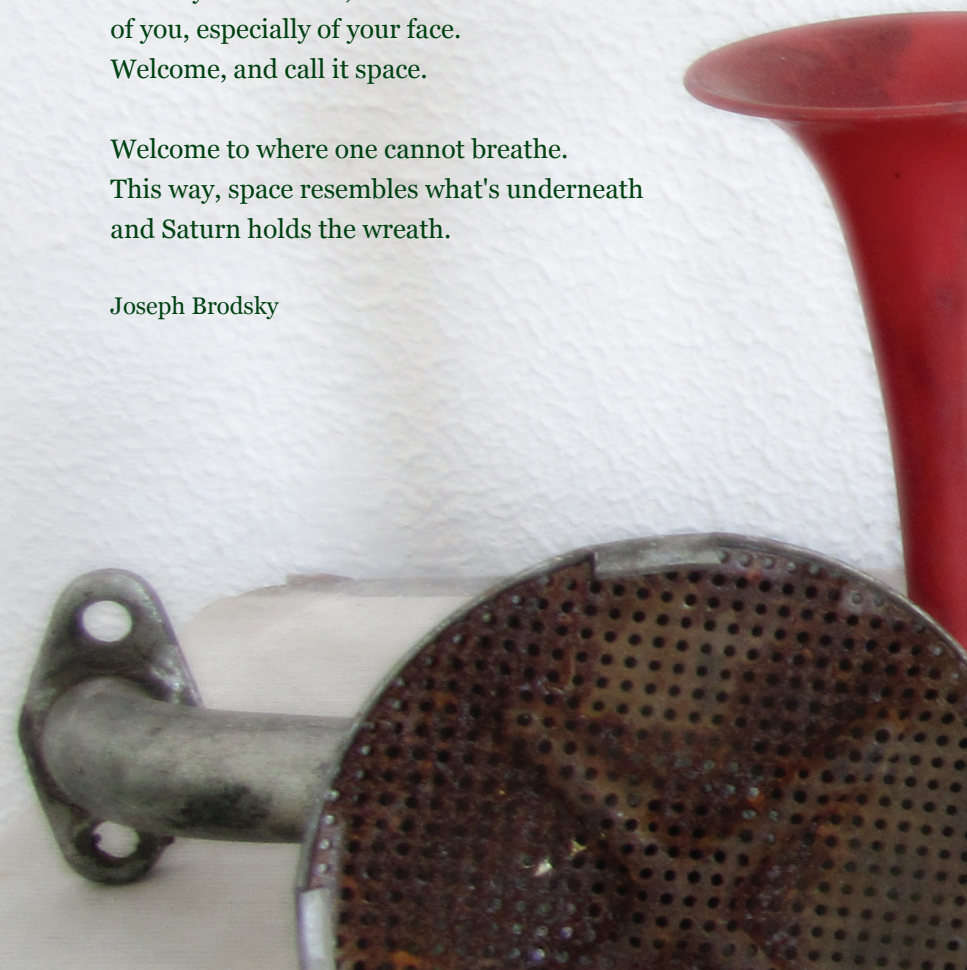
Here's your will, and here's a few  
takers. Here's an empty pew.  
Here's life after you.

And here are your stars which appear still keen  
on shining as though you had never been.  
They might have a point, old bean.

Here's your afterlife, with no trace  
of you, especially of your face.  
Welcome, and call it space.

Welcome to where one cannot breathe.  
This way, space resembles what's underneath  
and Saturn holds the wreath.

Joseph Brodsky







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University of Cape Town

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**“He who fights with monsters should look at it that he himself does not become a monster.  
And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you”**

Friedrich Nietzsche

**You race naked through the wilderness  
You torment the birds and the bees  
You leapt into the abyss, but find  
It only goes up to your knees**

Nick Cave





