

Meeting and Merging:

Painting Animal/Human Encounters with Medicine

University of Cape Town

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

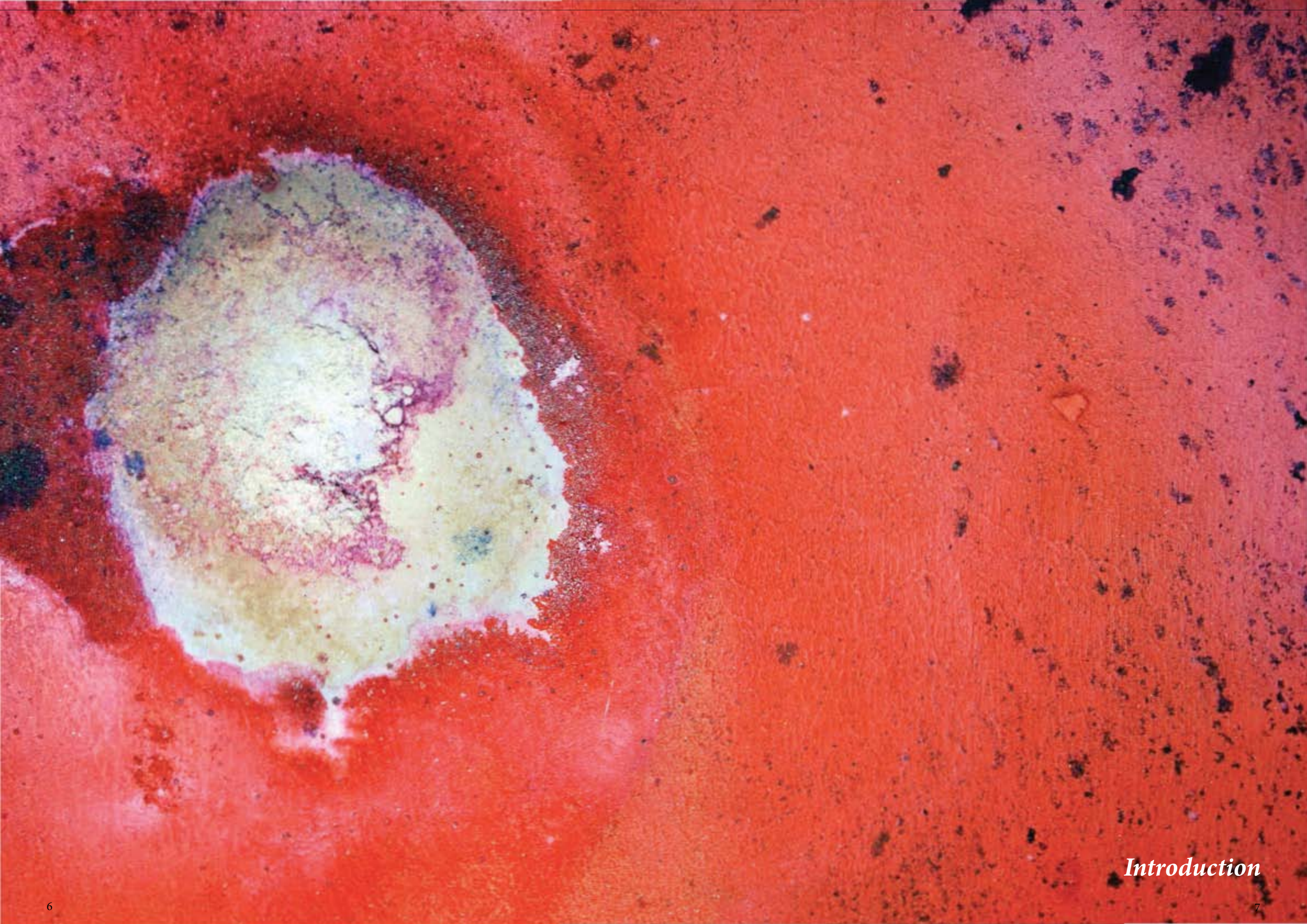
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My work focuses on the expressive potential of medicinal remedies as a medium for painting. My exploration is concentrated on aspects of the human relationship to animals¹ in captivity and stems from a relationship I had with a caged bear when I was living in Georgia, Eastern Europe in 2011. The story of my encounter with the bear is important in this respect and I begin my text with that narrative, written in the third person so that the story has a wider resonance. My time with the bear affected me profoundly and prompted me to think more deeply about human relationships with animals and how they are expressed in contemporary art.

I started using medicine as my medium for painting during my undergraduate studies. At the time I was working with ideas of hurt, loss and healing that related to my experience of the sudden and traumatic deaths of my three uncles, who died in quick succession over a very short period of time. I wanted a medium that could function symbolically and formally and that could evoke the human bodies that I did not want to depict naturalistically. Medicine offered the perfect medium and continues to function analogically with loss and healing in my work, but I now use it to portray my encounter with another animal family – that of the bear.

I approached my writing in a way that registers the personal and emotional dimensions of my art practice and reflects how these dimensions manifest through a convergence of figurative and abstract forms. I draw attention to the role that medicine played in this process: the unpredictable nature of liquid medicine flowing across the surface and sinking into it is central to my work because it evokes the organic nature of bodies both human and animal.

Each chapter is presented as an emblem that serves as a symbol of a particular quality or concept I have engaged in my work. 'Creature' explores the 'figure of the bear and his context in relation to abstract

¹ In this dissertation I use the word animals to refer to non-human animals not forgetting that, by definition, humans are also animals.

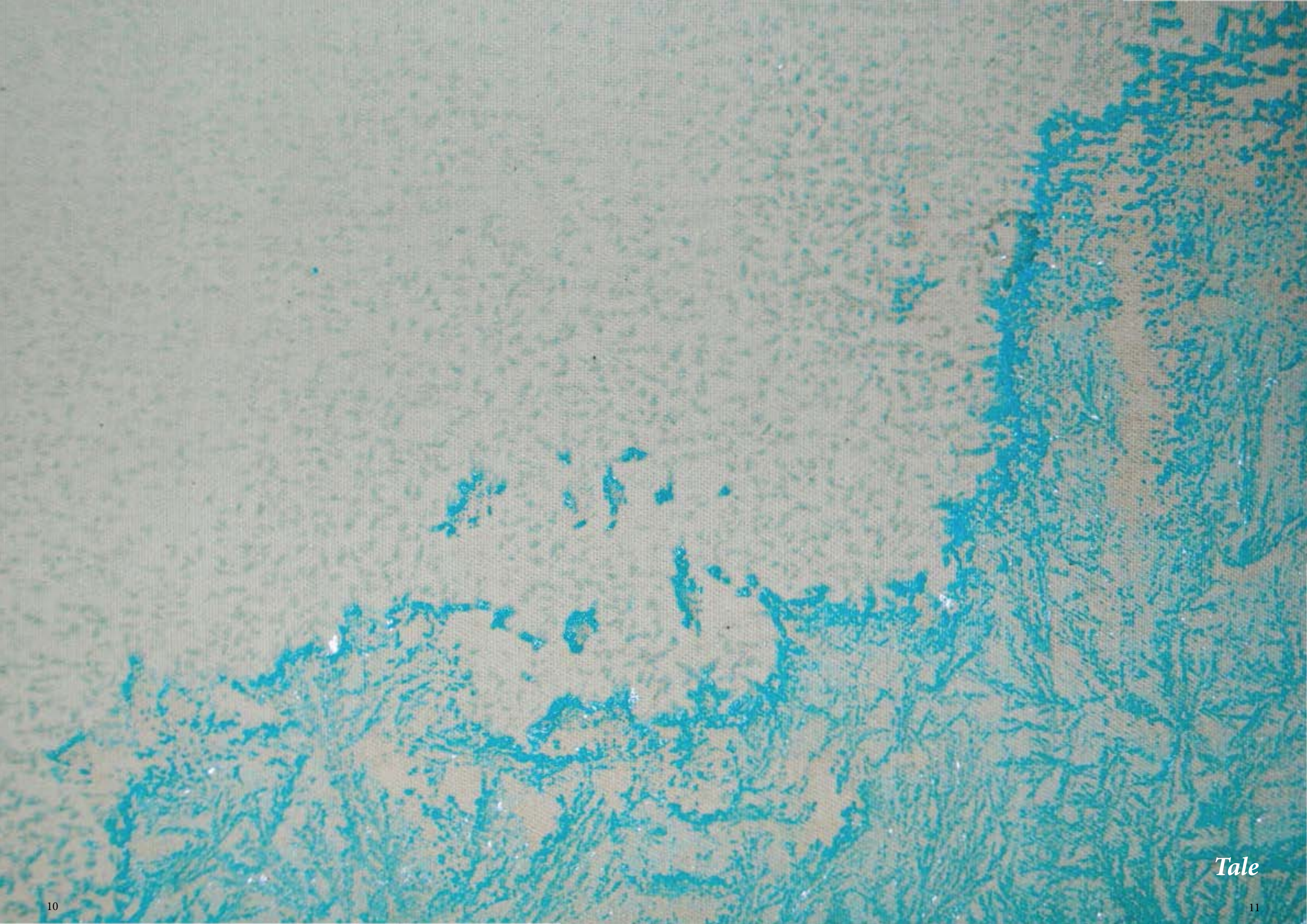
form; 'Remedy' speaks of the healing potential of medicine as a painting medium with which to image animals in captivity; in 'Pool' I explore my own physical act of painting and how this act is driven by my unconventional medium; in 'Hue' I investigate the sensation of colour; finally, 'Den' covers ideas of human interaction with animals in captivity.

Throughout my paper I speak of the obscuring of boundaries between humans and animals. In acknowledging this I reflect that the lives of the two are becoming increasingly intertwined and the dividing line between what is distinguished as animal and what as human is becoming incredibly thin (Thompson 2006). In this instance I see this ever-softening dividing line as a metaphor for our love for animals, as well as our contradictory ability to treat animals with disregard or to simply abandon them.

Many writings inform my project. The French cultural theorist Gilles Deleuze's observations on the work of British painter Francis Bacon are particularly illuminating. Deleuze's book *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2003) connects animal imagery and painted form through discussions of sensation, colour and materiality, which Kim Dovey observes as 'a kind of condition strongly linked to desire'. She continues that, 'in the human world it is the initial impact of a work of art ... that "passes through the body" prior to meaning or cognition' (Conley 2005: 244-245) (Dovey 2010: 15).

Deleuze's idea of sensation is 'a kind of animal condition strongly linked to desire; in the human world it is the initial impact of a work of art, spectacle, building or landscape that "passes over and through the body" (Conley 2005: 244-245) prior to meaning or cognition' (in Dovey 2010: 15).

Through these writings and my own experiences I hope to capture the essence of sensation, colour and materiality in my work and in the relationship between animal and humankind.



She remembers the day they met. She was walking through the park when a dark shadow caught her eye. There he was, pacing around his cage, his head swaying low to the ground the way only a bear's does. This is their story.

The Bear and the Girl

A big brown bear lived in a small yellow cage on the edge of a park. He was sad and lonely. He spent his afternoons staring out at the big trees that filled the park around him, listening to the river that flowed nearby. His cage was small, cold and dirty. It felt uncomfortable. The only feature similar to his natural home was a small pool of water at the back of the enclosure. On warm days he sat in the tiny pool, trying to keep clean.

He was a very shy bear. He did not enjoy being visited every day by the people who came to point and stare at him. They teased him, shouted rude remarks and banged his cage with sticks.

One day a small girl from a faraway land was walking in the park when she stumbled upon the bear's cage. She was heartbroken by what she saw and knew that she must do something to help this beautiful beast. The bear noticed the girl too and was instantly drawn to her; he could feel that she was different.

The girl came back the next day and every day after that. She introduced herself as Jo and explained that, as she did not know his name, she would call him Angelo. One day it started to snow and all the other visitors stopped coming. The girl had never seen snow before. She did not care that it was the coldest she had ever been in her life. She put on ten layers of clothing and went to see the bear, very excited to share this time with him.

Jo loved listening to the sound of Angelo's padded feet and big claws on the ground, and his deep, strong breathing as he came close to her. She would take off her gloves and rub his ears and back. He had a rough coat that tickled the palm of her hand. He made her feel calm and safe. He was a good friend.

For many months Jo visited Angelo, but then she got word that she would have to return home shortly. She was devastated at the thought of saying goodbye to Angelo and brought him lots of treats. She tried her best to hide her tears and the crack in her voice. Eventually, however, she said her farewell and walked away. She looked back only once and saw Angelo pacing up and down his cage.



Images of animals and human-animal relationships thrive in cultural representations. 'We come to life surrounded by animals,' Giovanni Aloï observes (2012: xv). Animal forms are often among the first things we encounter as babies, as they 'hover over our cots in the shape of colourful toys; as stuffed teddies they spend the night with us, making us feel safe and warm' (ibid). As we grow up, 'they are ever-present through illustrated books, photographs, wildlife documentaries, films, as pets and pest, at the zoo, in the city, in the countryside, as entertainers or sports partners' (ibid). Animals are our emotional companions, but they are also independent, sentient beings. According to Wendy Woodward writing on animal subjectivities in Southern African narratives, it is only recently that philosophers have started to engage this issue of sentience in animals. She cites activist philosopher Peter Singer, who observes that 'throughout [w]estern civilization philosophers thought of nonhuman animals as "beings of no ethical significance, or at best, of very minor significance"' (in Woodward 2001: 1). The sentience of non-human animals is the focus of a new field of interdisciplinary studies – Animal Studies. I became interested in this field after attending the conference 'Figuring the Animal II' earlier this year. This discipline includes the study of how animals suffer, why humans are violent to animals, how intimacy between animals and humans can be expressed and how empathy between species might be experienced. It is this latter aspect that interested me in my bear paintings.

My strong feelings for the bear, especially after witnessing his suffering in his confined surroundings, triggered a desire in me to make paintings of my experience. The fact that bears are associated with powers of physical and emotional healing, and that, as anthropologist Megan Kassabaum notes, 'humans learnt traditional medicine from watching bears self-medicate,' (2012: online) resonates with the way I use medicine as a medium.

However, I did not know whether naturalistic figuration would be possible given the relatively uncontrollable nature of my medium and my own ambivalence about depicting the bear in such a way. I moved towards abstraction because it felt more

emotive and dream-like, similar to my memory of Angelo. Because I wanted to express something of our inter-subjective relationship rather than simply making a portrait of the bear, my instinct was to work with forms that suggested the figure of the bear without defining the animal too clearly. I found that this tension between figuration and abstraction in my work related to broader ideas that I was responding to about the relationship between humans and animals. Painters such as British artist Francis Bacon, German artist Gerhard Richter and South African artists Penny Siopis and David Koloane offered insight in this respect, as they have all explored the complex relationship between humans and animals through a form of painting that mixes abstraction and figuration.

One of the reasons I work with medicine as my medium is that its direct signification of the attempt to heal obviates the need to figuratively describe it. However, it remains important to reflect the image of the bear in some way, as I wanted to capture the particularity of his bodily textures and gestures to embody his character. Sometimes the figure merges with the abstract shapes made by the medicine saturating the surface of the canvas, at other times the figure appears as a splodge of medicine on a field of unsaturated, raw canvas. I am interested in the point at which the viewer is able to distinguish/discern the figurative image of the animal within the play between figuration and abstraction. Figuration arguably directs the viewer to a specific interpretation, whereas abstraction allows the viewer to respond more instinctively. The very nature of the medicinal concoctions that flood the painted field engulfs the forms, whose porous edges distort definition. At other times the blurry edge distinguishes the bear's form from its surroundings.

One of the bodies of work explores the more clearly defined bear forms, looking more at the gestures of the animal. In *Curious Creature* I used two medical substances, Mercurochrome and potassium permanganate, to figure the bear as a single image in each of 35 small canvases that comprise the work. Each painting consists of a slightly different ratio of those medicinal substances. When mixed with water, both medicines tend to bleed out of the



Curious Creature (detail). 2013. Mercurochrome, potassium permanganate, iodine tincture and Friar's balsam on canvas. Dimensions variable.



figural structure, giving the form little, 'hairy' edges. These porous edges also suggest the larger concerns of boundaries between human and animal. In relation to this idea and the notion of the bear/animal as my subject, I turned to the works of Gerhard Richter and Francis Bacon. Both artists create a sense of immediacy in their work through gestural marks and use this way of working to allow for a sense of movement, blurring and erasure.

Certain paintings by Richter stimulate powerful feelings associated with human/ animal relations. I am specifically interested in his *Tourist* series. The three paintings in this series, *Tourist (with 2 Lions)* (1975) and two accounts of *Tourist (with 1 Lion)* (1975), one that is monochromatic and one in colour, are based on photographs taken from the German newspaper *Stern*, in which a tourist is attacked by a lion in a Spanish safari park. Through his signature blurring of paint he makes a set of indistinct images that rely greatly on their titles for their meaning (Brill 2011).

Richter's own thoughts on his blurring technique are informative. He states:

The only paradoxical thing is that I always set out with the intention of getting a closed picture, with a proper, composed motif – and then go to great lengths to destroy that intention, bit by bit, almost against my own will. Until the picture is finished and has nothing left but openness. (In Buchloh 1986: 27)

The openness Richter refers to is captured in his monochromatic painting *Tourist (with 1 Lion)*. A large, dark, indistinct form emerges from the right hand side of the painting. This shadow-like form is the only suggestion of animal or human in the painting. However, because of the title we project an expectation onto the painted surface and will figuration into being.

In much the same way Francis Bacon's painting, *Study of a Dog* (1952), presents an example of Bacon's attempt to depict an animal form that lies somewhere between figuration and abstraction. In this instance he uses an abstract form, a green circular shape, to isolate a white dog from a small beachfront street scene in the background. The smeared paint used to depict the dog indicates the dog's movement and is also suggestive of the dog's aggression and vulnerability. Although the dog is not clearly depicted, there is enough to indicate its stance is borrowed from one of Eadward Muybridge's time-lapse photographs of animals in motion.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s David Koloane used the figuration of the dog as a metaphor for the brutality of life in townships in South Africa (Gordimer 2002; Richards 2011), utilising the tension between figuration and abstraction to do so. His drawing, *Fighting Dogs* (1993), in which two dogs are facing each other, snarling, is not a naturalistic representation. The dogs' eyes, whitish in tone, are slanted, beady shapes; their location within the image does not make it easy to gauge where their figures end and begin in relation to their surroundings. They are presented as agitated,



Francis Bacon. *Study of a Dog*. 1952. Oil on canvas, 198 x 137 cm.

abstract marks. The bodies of the dogs are cropped by the edge of the paper, leaving only their heads and necks visible. Drawn with a quick gestural action, the figure and the ground are made up of very similar marks that disallow precise definition other than that of the dogs' sharp teeth, which help the viewer situate the rest of the dogs' heads and necks. The gestural mark utilised to evoke the dogs suggests a chaotic state of frenzy in the subject, but also in the maker himself, in his emotional relationship to the situation he has depicted.

In each of these painters' works the evocation of an animal through both figuration and abstraction indicates a violence of relationship – one that Moleleki Frank Ledimo's description of the stray dogs sums up succinctly:

Although such animals are in reality largely scavengers, they are vulnerable to the vagaries of cars and people in the townships. Their life is that of mere survival. The dogs also serve as a symbol of resilience, in the way they take over public spaces, roaming freely. Their survival, however, is dependent on aggression amongst themselves and towards humans. (2004: 186)



Gerhard Richter. *Tourist (with 1 Lion)*. 1975. Oil on canvas, 200 x 170 cm.



Gerhard Richter. *Tourist (with 2 Lions)*. 1975. Oil on canvas, 230 x 190 cm.



Gerhard Richter. *Tourist (with 1 Lion)*. 1975. Oil on canvas, 230 x 190 cm.



David Koloane. *Fighting Dogs*. 1993. Graphite on paper, 91 x 63 cm.

Where Koloane uses the dog as a metaphor for the brutality of life in South African townships, Njabulo Ndebele writes about the torturing of dogs as a metaphor in relation to the political situation in South Africa in his essay, *The Year of the Dog: A Journey of the Imagination* (2007). This essay is so vividly violent that it is difficult to read in parts. However, through his description of the beating of a dog he manages to capture the essence of the brutality that Koloane portrays in his drawings. Ndebele writes,

The surrounded dog is terrified, helpless. There is no escape. Its eyes wide open, it watches the crowd inevitably closing in... Finally, its spine broken, the dog lies on its side, a bloody mess, still trying to raise its head, until a well-aimed knobkerrie blow smashes its skull. This silences the dog forever. The crowd continues, without a sound, to pound the dead dog's body. You hear only the dull thud of blows on the marshy body. (2007: online)

If Koloane's dogs speak about alienation (Tadjo 2002), Penny Siopis' *Beast* (2009) speaks of intimacy.

A painting made from ink and glue, it shows a woman dancing with a dark creature. This animal stands on its hind legs, level with its female dance partner, as they take part in what seems to be 'a type of forced two-step' (Snyman 2009: online). The flooded surfaces of Siopis' painting literally blur the division between the woman and the beast, the human and animal. The darkness of the animal grows over the lightness of the woman, blurring the boundaries of where her body starts and the animal's ends. Cara Snyman, writing about *Beast* (2009), explores this:

Siopis's amorphous shapes and fluid borders, ever open to suggestion or negotiation, perfectly describe fearsome abject spaces, with no skin to contain and define the beginning and end, at once reflecting on the malleability, or constant renegotiation, of identity and notions of self. The medium of ink and glue on canvas perfectly suits the idea, creating thick, opaque, wax-like surfaces where definition slips, and line is characteristically buried and uncovered by the artist's process. (Snyman 2009: online)

In reference to an earlier body of work, *Feral Fables*, which explores human-animal relations, Siopis herself comments:

There is a tension between form and formlessness suggesting an image in the process of becoming. This – and the idea of chance in working the medium – reflects the concept of some liminal state of human consciousness as much as the iconography does. (2007: online)



Penny Siopis. *Feral Fables: Prey*. 2007. Ink and glue on canvas, 27.5 x 18.2 cm.

Deleuze and Guattari's theorizations of 'becoming' in their exploration of human/animal connection are invoked here. Their *Becoming Animal* (1980) has been a key influence on the work of many contemporary artists, Siopis included, and the inspiration for a seminal international exhibition (2005) of the same title.



Penny Siopis. *Beast*. 2009. Ink and glue on canvas, 69.5 x 60 cm

Returning to my own work I want to comment on the sources I have used. I am always conscious of how the image of the bear figures. I use photographs, videos and textual records I made of my encounter with the Georgian bear to inform my work even in its most abstract form. These sources have since conditioned my way of looking at bears in general and affected how I observe and record other bears, such as one I visited in the Berlin Zoo earlier this year.

In Berlin the image of the bear is the symbol of the city and is found everywhere, so I was constantly reminded of Angelo. When I decided to visit the bear at the Berlin Zoo, it was a warm day and the Berlin bear behaved much like Angelo on warm

days, spending the entire morning in the pool. I took some video footage of this behaviour and used it as a reference in my work.

My fascination with Angelo and the Berlin bear's interactions with the water inspired the work *Angelo's Pool*. In these works the image of a bear is placed in a green and blue visual field. Because of the nature of the medicine, the brown of the bear and the green/blue of the water merge, creating a sense that the bear is under the water. It also distorts the definition of the bear. The flooded surfaces of the canvas allow for an openness and fluidity in the work as well as literally bodying the process.

In contrast to these works I made three large



Photographs taken of bear references by the artist while visiting Berlin in April 2013.

paintings that reflect the structure of a cage. The bars of the cage are not physically painted in, but the bare canvas suggests their presence, and the physical structure of the cage behind the bars is painted in, with the bears inside it. At first glance these works appear to have less, if any, blurring of definition, but on closer inspection there is a blurring of the lines in all the areas of figuration.

For example, when looked at closely it becomes clear that the line that divides the floor from the wall is full of 'hairy' edges and that the two different coloured medicines have bled into each other. At times even the bare canvas bars are disturbed by the edges of rogue pools and splotches.

In one of these paintings the cage stands empty, but the medium's fluidity 'crawls' across the canvas in a way that suggests the bear's presence and makes his absence tangible.



Den. 2013. Med-Lemon, copper sulphate, Flowers of sulphur, potassium permanganate, charcoal tablets and Sedacur tablets on canvas. 170 x 170 cm.

Giovanni Aloï noted the role animals play in shaping our worlds and comments that we must now unlearn our preconceptions of how to image animals:

Unlearning the animal means effectively to suspend one's knowledge of nature in order to reconfigure it, or perhaps to let it reconfigure itself; it means to deconstruct the certainties offered by nature, in order to acquire a critical awareness of the relational modes we establish with animals and ecosystems, and simultaneously to find the courage to envision new ones. (2012: xvi)

My medium, which seems in itself quite uncertain in many of its material effects, offers me a means, along with the play between figuration and abstraction, to explore new ways of relating to and imagining animals.



Angelo's Pool. 2013. Med-Lemon, copper sulphate, potassium permanganate, iodine tincture and Friar's balsam on canvas, 150 x 100 cm.



Remedy

The act of painting offers me a form of healing, an experience that is enhanced by the kinds of medicine I use – mostly over-the-counter, self-medicating pharmaceutical products – and the way these products shape my painting. Painting with medicine has often felt like alchemy, as the contents of the nondescript looking small bottles I procure from mundane medicine cabinets or pharmacy shelves is transformed into vast, vibrantly coloured expanses of ‘painted’ surface as I have experimented with the rich array of the medicine’s physical properties.

For many contemporary painters the physical properties of the medium are core to the meaning of their work. As Sue Williamson (2009) notes in her discussion of South African painting, ‘[t]he surface the paint creates, its materiality, is held by the artists to be as important as the image itself’ (2009: 218). Indeed, artists are increasingly interested in the significance of the medium in and of itself as idea, and have explored a range of materials other than those traditionally associated with art. This aspect has been a strong part of the definition of contemporary painting (Schwabsky 2002; Siopis 2005). In the late 1970s Andy Warhol, for example, was working with the corrosive effects of urine on copper paint.

What follows is a discussion of how certain artists use unconventional mediums as a part of their subject matter. Lisa Brice’s use of bleach as her painting medium is noteworthy. Brice rubs bleach into the surface of stretched frames of blue denim and erases the dye from the fabric in order to produce her imagery. Though her method of erasure differs from my more additive approach, that she works with the medium as an active agent in shaping her imagery is important for me. Her use of denim, ‘the universal fabric of youth’ (Williamson 2009: 234), with bleach – associated with activities such as the whitening or lightening of fabric, paper or hair through a chemical process – is not dissimilar to the associative way in which I use medicine. In its extremes bleach is affiliated with radical cleansing, eliminating organic matter and bodily traces. As an active agent, the bleach as medium cannot always be contained.



Lisa Brice. *Suckface (The Kinks)*. 2007. Bleach and dye on denim, 122 x 76 cm.

Here Tavish McIntosh’s (2007: online) comment is pertinent:

Brice creates clear graphic lines by brushing the bleach through stencils in order to delineate the forms.... Despite this apparently mechanical technique, the unstable reaction of bleach on denim produces beautifully shaded creases and unforeseen splotches. A product less of the artist’s hand than of the unconventional medium.

Gerhard Marx also uses an unconventional medium – dried plant matter. Writing about his images of human skulls that are made from weeds and roots, Elizabeth Burroughs (2011: 57) observes that Marx evokes ‘networks of associations’ through the medium. She also notes how, in his process of working, ‘[h]e recognised there was something powerful to be learned from this subversive energy of pulling up the weeds (ibid: 53).

The roots, from which he shook the reddish dirt, filled space like miniature branches. He fell in love with the repeated architecture of stem, twig and twiglet, the same patterns again and again on a different scale. Interest piqued, he knew there was something here that was precious enough to work with, though it was not yet clear how. (Burroughs 2011: 53)

Driven by the urge to preserve the roots and weeds, he spent time drying them out and now works with them in very specific ways, each new work calling for a new technique. Marx describes how, once he has resolved that creative process, he uses the weeds in such a way that 'they become a potent source of new perception, not just of themselves, but of ideas that connect, that serve to re-represent the world' (in Burroughs 2011: 54). I find that Marx's interest in perception speaks to the bodily-ness of his medium.



Gerhard Marx. *Weeds IV*. 2008. Plant material, watercolour and glue on cotton paper, 65 x 47 cm. (Detail below)



I want to turn now to the first work I made on my return from Georgia. Whilst the bear features in the imagery of the work, the main focus is on the head and flesh of a slaughtered ram. About two weeks into my stay in Georgia I went on a walk up the hill that houses the head church of Gori. The church was situated on the hill so that it looked over the town and protected it. On my way up to the church I came across a man who had just slaughtered a ram at the side of the path where I was walking. I was immediately struck by the sight of the headless sheep dangling from its back hooves on a tree trunk. The Georgian man noticed my fascination and invited me to stay and watch as he skinned and gutted the ram. The pool of blood that congealed underneath the carcass's neck captivated me. Having been a vegetarian since the age of eleven I was surprised by my instinctive curiosity, but could not help but be drawn in by the beautifully delicate manner in which the man dealt with each area of the body. I was mesmerised by the different colours each layer of flesh produced and the sound of the leg bones as they snapped.

This experience connects, for me, to the works of Francis Bacon, in particular his *Painting* (1946). In this painting a large carcass, sliced in half, hangs taut from its legs. A man stands inside the rib cage beneath a black umbrella, which casts a dark shadow on the flesh. Deleuze writes about this work that:

Meat is not dead flesh; it retains all the sufferings and assumes all the colours of living flesh. It manifests such convulsive pain and vulnerability, but also such delightful invention, colour, and acrobatics ... Meat is the common zone of man and the beast, their zone of indiscernibility; it is a 'fact', a state where the painter identifies with the objects of his horror and his compassion. (2003: 17)

I appreciate Deleuze's words in relation to my own fascination with the Georgian carcass. I attempted to manifest this fascination in a piece comprised of 33 paintings, which resolved into an installation. The format of the paintings is strongly vertical, with each work constituting a section of a larger visual field in which I intermingle imagery of the ram and the bear. Each painting is the same height, but varies in width. In configuring each unit I paid special attention to the associations of colour, materiality and aspects of figuration that connect and fragment them. They are positioned in such a way that a physical space separates each unit, the verticality of the space suggesting the bars of a cage.



Photograph taken by the artist while living in Georgia in 2011.



Francis Bacon. *Painting*. 1946. Oil and tempura on canvas, each panel 198 x 128 cm.

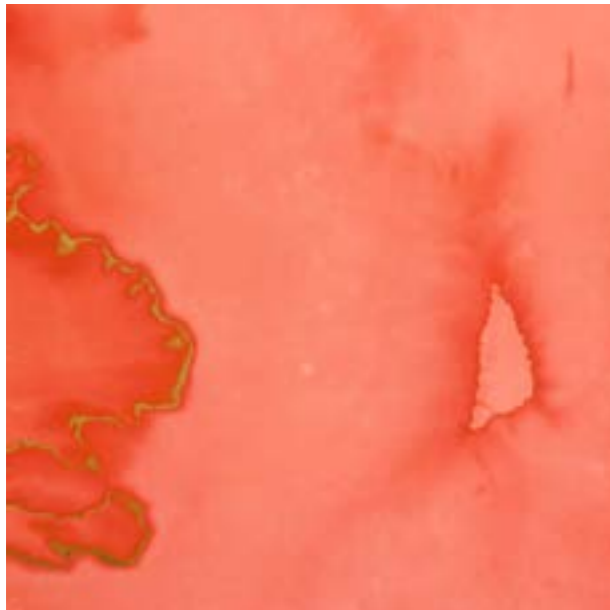
Particular characteristics of particular medicines are important and occupy specific panels. The associative aspects of medicine as painting medium are aided by an emphasis on these characteristics. As an example, Mercurochrome is a solution² used as a topical antiseptic for cuts and scrapes. When used extensively, it forms pools that dry at different times. This drying process produces different effects that create shifts in tonal values and offer associations such as the palpable sensation of flesh suggested by Mercurochrome's distinctive red colour.

In later works other medicines function in a similar way. Panado Paediatric Syrup is a green cough mixture especially formulated for children who are experiencing 'moderate pain and fever'. When exposed to air and left on the surface to dry, it develops a lumpy, gooey texture. The tactile quality of this substance evokes many things. Depending on how it dries, it can suggest mould, fungi, slime or grime and the lumpy surface can give the impression of something growing on the painting. Its green colour is suggestive of algae, moss or murky water and reminds me of the mouldy surfaces on the walls that surround the pool in the bear's cage, and the colour of the pool itself.

In order to record the different 'effects' of medicines throughout my process of experimentation I keep a logbook, in which I place a splodge of each substance on paper to track the specific properties of each medicine. It is important to know what medicine looks like because its visual effects become opportunities for exploring ideas of body, tactility and healing. In this respect, however, a key consideration in my choice of medicine is not only the look of it, but also its function. It is important to me, for example, whether the medicine I use in a particular part of a painting is for ingestion or for treatment of the surface of the body, as this helps shape the meaning of the work.

My use of calamine lotion is a case in point. This suspension traditionally functions as a treatment for skin aggravation. It is pale pink in colour and dries in a way that suggests cracked and flaking skin that is inflamed or dry. The tangible effect of this medicine suggests a sensation of scratchiness and itchiness, and of something submerged trying to break through.

² All medicinal terms and descriptions are taken from conversations I had with my grandfather, Dr Walter Loening.



Mercurochrome on board (detail).



Gastropect and calamine solution on board (detail).



Panado Paediatric Syrup on canvas (detail).



Med-Lemon, copper sulphate and potassium permanganate on canvas (detail).

The chemical reaction of certain medicines on the canvas paradoxically suggests the destructive force of a medicine, which would otherwise represent a healing force. In certain instances the reaction is so powerful that it breaks through the canvas' surface. In its diluted form, for example, potassium permanganate is used to prevent fungus from spreading on the surface of the body, but spread undiluted on the canvas it burns right through. It is a reminder of the strength, potency and potentially damaging elements of the substances we use to heal our bodies.

This conflict is made clear to me on the package insert found inside most medicinal boxes, where a small piece of paper provides all the vital information about a specific medicine. The section that interests me most is entitled 'Indications and Contra-indications'. The recommended reason for taking a specific medicine (the 'Indications') is often a short, simple instruction, but the Contra-indications are generally quite the opposite. For example, the indication for Med-Lemon reads as

follows: 'MED-LEMON HOT MEDICATION - LEMON MENTHOL WITH VITAMIN C is recommended for the symptomatic treatment of pain and fever associated with the common cold and influenza.' (Taken from the package insert published in February 1995.) However, the Contra-indications lists 13 conditions under which Med-Lemon should not be taken: Med-Lemon 'Should not be taken by patients with liver damage, with active or a history of recurrent ulcer/haemorrhage/perforations, gout, haemophilia, severe kidney damage, by patients who are allergic to aspirin, by patients with heart failure or children under 12 years of age.'

This pamphlet reflects that in certain contexts medicine's ability to heal is also marked by its ability to harm. Whilst I am not necessarily asserting the harmful elements of medicine in my work, I do acknowledge its power to negatively affect our bodies. I believe this binary stands as a metaphor for our ability to love animals as well as to perpetuate violence towards them.



Catalyst. 2012. Installation view.



When I arrived in Georgia the autumn weather was a lot warmer than expected for that time of year and I often found Angelo sitting in his pool, cooling off. One day I found him standing with his front legs in the pool and his back legs balanced on the outer edge as he used one of his front legs to splash water up and through his hind legs.

This memory of Angelo led me to the emblem of the pool. In this chapter a pool is indexed as a place of succour and cleansing for the bear, as well as signalling the action of pooling that creates many of the chance visual effects in my paintings. These pools often manifest as little lines or fissures that suggest the tactile organic form of skin, flesh and hair, but also suggest the grimy surfaces that characterised the pool in the bear's cage. The pooling, and the smudging of edges between the forms that the pooling creates, echoes the blurring of boundaries that I experienced between animal and human in my contact with the bear.



Angelo splashing in his pool. Photograph taken while the artist was living in Georgia in 2011.

What follows is a description of how I work in relation to particular works by artists whose approach resonates in different ways with my own. The medicines I use are generally in liquid form. At times I use powders, granules and tablets dissolved in boiling water. The fluidity of the medium demands an absorbent support.



My First Bear. 2012. Mercurochrome and gentian violet on board. 40 x 31 cm.

After much experimentation I found raw, un-primed canvas to be the most effective support in this respect. The fabric allows for the medicine to dry slowly in layers, a process that creates shapes suggestive of bodily forms. The raw canvas itself becomes a feature of my painting process, and I often leave parts of un-primed surface visible as an aspect of the image construction. The liquid nature of the medium is a determining factor in my process. I do not have much control of the medium and therefore tend to work in an instinctive way with it. I also work instinctively in my approach to my subject. My first painting of the bear, for example, came about as a result of the strong feelings I had had in seeing him in captivity. I wanted to create a type of tribute to him and did not think about how the works would fit into the bigger body of my practice.

The transient nature of the medium dictates that considered preparation is important. It is imperative that I plot (in my mind) which medicines – considering texture, colour, malleability and



Olly and Suzi at work in the shark cage (i). 1997. Photograph: Greg Williams.



Olly and Suzi at work in the shark cage (ii). 1997. Photograph: Greg Williams.



Olly and Suzi. *Shark Bite*. 1997. Acrylic and blood on paper. Photograph: Greg Williams.

function – I should be using and where, although unexpected reactions or effects in the process will still disrupt this.

I do not want the medicine to run or drip at this point so I work with the canvas on the floor. This is necessary for the medium to pool, sitting in stasis, and subsequently to dry. In certain instances I try to roughly direct some of these pools with masking agents, but masking does not guarantee full blockage and is often breached, leaving a faded blur or stain of medicine. The medium also continues to bleed out while drying. These porous edges speak to the very act of breaking down the known or expected boundary between a girl and a wild bear kept in captivity.

In relation to these boundaries I looked at the works of British artists Olly and Suzi, who comment on the indistinct division between humans and animals throughout their work. In their process they reflect on 'their immediate encounters and interactions with animals in the wild' (Baker 2000: 11). Placing themselves in the animal's natural habitat, the two artists often find themselves in dangerous situations as they wait for an animal to appear. As soon as they sight the animal they attempt to depict it simultaneously, either by painting or drawing, on the same piece of paper. The artwork is then left, passively, in the presence of the animal and the animals sometimes interact spontaneously with the works, often leaving marks of their own. 'This may take the form of bears or elephants leaving prints or urine stains on the image, or of chunks bitten off a piece by a wolf or a shark' (Baker 2000).

For Olly and Suzi the work exists as an indicator of 'what they perceive as the interdependence of humans and animals in the contemporary world' (Baker 2000: 16). On one specific occasion Olly and Suzi reversed 'the usual movement and direction of cagedness, to put the artist in the place of the animal, the place habitually occupied by the animal' (ibid: 130). In September 1997, eight kilometres off the shore of Cape Town, the artists went shark cage diving, working together underwater in a cramped cage that measured only 1.2 meters in diameter.

They describe their process as follows:

We mounted our handmade papers onto polystyrene boards and used non-toxic water based paints, graphite and oil sticks to paint and draw underwater. We found that the papers would tolerate submersion for up to 2 hours and would remain absorbent and intact throughout this time. Our work was complicated by the constant surge and extreme cold of these unpredictable waters combined with the obvious distress we both felt working so close to these intimidating creatures. (Olly & Suzi: online)

Baker writes that the paintings' attempt 'to take away all fussiness' was a necessary response to the artists themselves being 'in this brutal world, this hostile place, and finding themselves unexpectedly scared' (2000: 132). By placing themselves in the water and in the cage while the sharks swam freely around them, the stereotypical role of humans roaming freely around captive animals was switched.

Along with Olly and Suzi's attempt to challenge the peripheries between species in their work I am also interested in the work's rich performative value. I feel that their immediate and pressured painting of the shark mirrors my movement around the canvas while I try to manage the medicine.

I now wish to acknowledge the physical act of painting in relation to the work of contemporary artists. Earlier I spoke of how I work on the floor in order to allow the medicines to pool and dry. This sometimes also involves placing objects in different areas under the canvas to provide trajectories along which the medicines could creep. This process of interaction and movement around the canvas gives a performative dimension to my painting, and in this respect I find Marlene Dumas' words compelling:

A painting is not a picture in the first place, but it is a performance. One reacts to what happens on the canvas at the moment of execution, not by making preliminary sketches or knowing the end result beforehand or trying to illustrate an idea. (In MacKenny 2008: 50)

My performative process is driven by the fact that the medium will run if I am not quick enough. This sometimes generated a frantic state of making, adrenaline-filled and sometimes nerve-racking, for



Painting propped on objects. Artist's studio.



Floor. Artist's Studio.



Artist's collection of used medicine bottles.

in that moment anything could happen. The fine line between having control and having none is both scary and liberating for me. The fast forward process is then replaced by a long, slow motion one, where I wait for days, sometimes weeks, for certain parts of the work to dry.

Sue Williamson writes of the animated process adopted by many South African contemporary painters today. Each painter, although vastly different, has a very specific way of working. The process is controlled by the chosen medium, which, inevitably, contributes to the work. As an example, Dumas lays her watercolour paper on the floor, throwing water onto it, letting it pool and then working on her hands and knees to add detail. This laborious act is carried through to her oil paintings, which 'die' when she uses too much paint. The 'death' of the work enables Dumas to scrub down the troublesome areas with turpentine, restarting her process as often as she sees necessary.

In thinking about painting in a broader context and in relation to animal imagery, I now return to the writing of Gilles Deleuze. In his writing Deleuze cites Bacon's awareness of the 'instinctive pull' that draws the painter to both subject and painted surface – strong colour and assertive materiality being primary aspects of this 'instinctive pull'. Bacon reflects on this instinctive pull when he discusses slaughterhouses and mortality:

I've always been very moved by pictures about slaughterhouses and meat, and to me they belong very much to the whole thing of the crucifixion.... Of course, we are meat, we are potential carcasses. If I go into a butcher shop I always think it's surprising that I wasn't there instead of the animal. (In Deleuze 2003: 17)

This mirrors Deleuze's own sense, mentioned earlier, that 'the painter identifies with the objects of his horror and his compassion' (2003: 17). The 'instinctive pull' in my process is guided by the unpredictability of the medicine. I enjoy the fact that the medicines I use react to the atmosphere and to each other in ways that cannot be controlled (some dry quickly, others change colour when exposed to the air and light); I enjoy how the medicine flows and moves across the surface, and I enjoy dealing with chance. I find Penny Siopis' comment on the role that chance plays in her process of painting with ink and glue similar to my concerns.



An example of medicinal bottle when used as painting medium.

Siopis discusses her process and the level of chance her medium demands:

It's really difficult to predict how the medium might 'behave'. The glue is opaque white when I work, gradually becoming transparent as it dries. So I can't really see what I am doing.... Working horizontally, I try to direct the flow of the medium, dripping, splashing pigment and water and tilting the canvas at different angles. The play of gravity also operates in how the canvas itself dips in sections where thick deposits of glue pool. (In Miller 2011: 47)

In essence this process, while directed by an urge to communicate something about my relationship to the bear, is also about not knowing the outcome. As Gerhard Richter says in an interview with Sabine Schütz in relation to chance, 'I just want to get something more interesting out of it than those things that I can think out for myself' (1995: 216). The ideas of openness to chance happenings in painting, especially with materials that are unpredictable and change as they interact with other substances, reminds me of the notion of assemblage that Jane Bennett invokes in her writing on the vibrancy and relationality of matter. Bennett describes this relationality as assemblages, and speaks to the idea of chance and how it allows for something exciting to happen on the surface.

She writes;

Assemblages are *ad hoc* groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within.... The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen (a newly inflected materialism, a blackout, a hurricane, a war on terror) is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone. (2009: 24)

I am instinctively drawn to the idea of enabling something out of my control to occur in the painting, be it the blurred edges created by the medicine as it crawls across the canvas, or the change in colour that takes place while the medicine pools in stasis, waiting to dry.





I have been fascinated by colour throughout my practice as a painter. My first experiments with medicine intrigued me with the range of colours they produced on the painted surface. I started by using four topical antiseptics: Mercurochrome, gentian violet, Merthiolate and Betadine ointment. Each of these medicines have a very distinct colour, which was equally distinctive in its ability to change. Many artists have worked with process and change in their practice, a feature that is often about the nature of the materials rather than about the colour itself. However, colour is of course a physical property of the medium. In this chapter I consider the idea of changeability with reference to Swiss artist Dieter Roth's *Kleinen Inseln* (1967) and Andy Warhol's *Oxidation Painting* (1977-78) and draw attention to the notion of colour as sensation.

Deleuze sees painters as 'colourists' who use the pure relations of colour to render form, shadow, light and time – colour is the variable relation upon which everything else depends. Deleuze recognizes that our sensation of colour is subjective and changeable. In looking at the relationships we as individuals have with colour and the changeability of both colour and our experience of it, John Gage's writing on the ancient Greek world's approach to colour is compelling:

From Aristotle onwards, they were also very aware that the surface appearance of colours is very deceptive: 'We do not see colours as they are', wrote the Peripatetic author of the only surviving early Greek treatise, *On Colour*, who knew that the surface appearance of colour is not to be trusted. (2006: 7)

As I reflect on my own work I am always interested to see how people react as they walk into my studio – they often seem taken aback by the colour that confronts them. The colour that developed a real presence in my work and is most frequently asked about, however, is green. My desire to incorporate this colour was prompted by the mouldy green walls and algae-infested water in Angelo's cage. The green that I use in my paintings is made up of a combination of Med-Lemon, copper sulphate and Panado Paediatric Syrup and provides a variety

of surfaces and textures. This colour also suggests through association vegetation, nature and growth and, more personally, it alludes to my desire to see Angelo in his natural habitat.

Turning now to the medium's ability to change colour I relate this changeability to ideas of physical transformation that are often associated with healing. The colour changes that occur in the medicines are not always immediately obvious and I was initially intrigued by the way the colour of some medicines shifted from the time they were placed onto the surface of a painting to their point of dryness. Over time I have become aware of the long-term transformations that take place and am able to incorporate them into my practice.

The colours of some medicines inside their bottles are very different from the colours that end up on the surface of a painting. For example, as I pour potassium permanganate granules onto a canvas and add water, their appearance changes from little pieces of metallic brown matter to a flowing bed of electric-violet colour, and within a few minutes this had dried into a variety of brown tones, dependent on the quantity of granules in one specific place.



Mercurochrome and gentian violet on board (detail).



Mercurochrome on canvas (detail).

Certain medicines, such as Mercurochrome and gentian violet, have very distinctive and recognisable colours on first sight, but both may change colour when exposed to light and/or other medicinal concoctions, often in contrast to the normal associations with a particular medicine. Mercurochrome's well-known bright rusty orange-red colour – similar to its appearance on our skin – is easily identified on the canvas surface, but when pooled in large quantities the orange-red colour transforms to a deep, metallic green. When used in such quantities the fine traces of mercury become visible.

Interestingly, although no cases of mercury poisoning or damage have been reported, Mercurochrome was banned in America in 1998 as a preventative measure. The Food and Drug administration stated that it was no longer considered to be a GRAS (Generally Recognised As Safe) over-the-counter product. It was also banned because its orange-red stain covers up the natural colour of the skin around the wound, making it difficult to detect early signs of infection. Skin that is red and irritated is difficult to see under a coating of Mercurochrome and signs of infection can be overlooked (www.wisegeek.com).

This idea of the colour of the medicine obscuring the location of the actual wound is interesting in relation to my work. Visually this relates to the medicine's ability to suggest the body that is not literally depicted on the canvas. The lack of distinction between wound and skin brings to

mind Mercurochrome's ability to bleed out of the designated area while drying.

In discussing notions of colour and change it is important to note that not only do the colours change, but some fade over time or when exposed to a lot of light. For example, Betadine ointment changes colour from an orange-brown inside the tube to a pale purple on the canvas. The longer it is exposed to light the more faded it becomes, until eventually it vanishes.

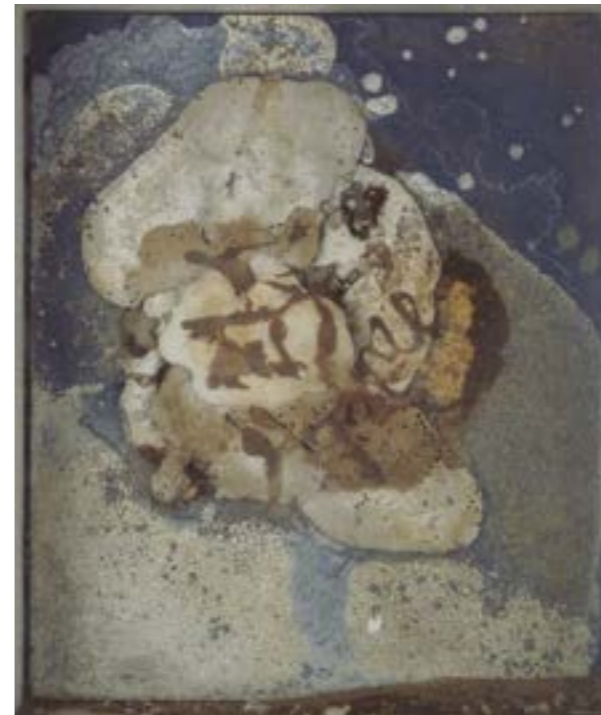
Swiss artist Dieter Roth addresses the idea of change in his *Kleinen Inseln* ('Small Islands', 1967). In 1967 he was commissioned by the renowned Basel advertising agency, GGK, to create works for each of their 120 employees as Christmas gifts (Dobke 2003). Instead of creating the small drawings envisioned by the client, Roth applied to a blue painted panel, 'various edibles with nails, screws and wire, arranging his materials like islands in an ocean' (Dobke 2002: 48). Finally, Roth poured sour milk or yoghurt over the compositions and then a layer of liquid plaster as a fixative. The works were displayed without any protection, allowing decay to run its expected course.

Dirk Dobke observes the changeability and impermanence of Roth's *Kleine Inseln*:

Roth's vocabulary initiated an extremely topical discourse about the dialectics of becoming and fading away, exploding and decaying, exultation and despair. Through the metamorphosis of his uncommon materials, for example, he created an entirely new way to represent landscapes and nature. (2003: 14)

Within contemporary painting discourse the deliberate use of changeability of colour is often seen as a means to challenge assumptions about the medium. Andy Warhol's *Oxidation Paintings* (1977-78) is an excellent case in point. Warhol invited friends and acquaintances to urinate onto canvases that were covered in metallic copper paint, in order to cause oxidation. The uric acid reacted with the copper in the paint, removing components of the pure metal to form mineral salts.

Warhol experimented with different participants and different eating habits and the chemical reactions occurred in unpredictable ways. Some colours developed immediately while others, such as the blues and greens, formed later on top of the



Dieter Roth. *Insel* (Island). 1968. Foodstuffs, pigment, plaster, nails, and wire on pressboard, 38.5 x 34 x 12 cm.



Dieter Roth. *Insel* (Island). 1968. Foodstuffs, pigment, plaster, nails and wire on pressboard, 35 x 30 cm.

red or brown copper oxides. The green liquid-like impressions settled on the surface in a way that paint could not. The surface changes in the light, as the un-oxidized copper reflects light and the green absorbs. It has been said that Warhol dived into the beauty and mood of colour and texture in a way that he had not before (Bourdon 1993).

In much the same way, while aware that the colour will change over time, my initial selections when starting a painting are based on my knowledge of the medium's colour or the surface sensations it may

evoke. In so doing my aim is for the initial impact of the painting to 'pass over and through the body' of the viewer before thought and meaning (Conley 2005: 244-245) creating a sensation that may engulf the viewer.



Andy Warhol. *Oxidation Painting*. 1977-78. Copper metallic paint and urine on canvas, 573 x 198 cm.



Spending time with Angelo reminded me of all the times I had visited the zoo when I was a little girl. My godmother, Mary, worked there as a display artist and I would often help her draw species signs for the animal enclosures and make zoo maps. Mary also managed the bio-facts museum at the zoo and ran educational holiday programs. I loved looking at the specimens in all their different jars in the museum and enjoyed being part of the holiday workshops. My fondest memories are of watching Mary and her fellow zoo workers prepare food for the animals, tend to their injuries and heal their illnesses.

As I have mulled over my time in Georgia I have come to realise that my initial fascination with the bear stemmed from simple curiosity. Coming from a country with no indigenous bears, my unfamiliarity with this species was a big part of my obsession with him. In our first moment I was stunned by the sheer size of the bear in comparison to his cage.

The cage was at ground level, enabling the viewer to gauge the bear's size, look him in the eye and hear his every breath and footstep. In my experience, enclosures are normally placed so that the viewer looks down into them, maintaining a safe distance between the animal(s) and the viewer. The lack of distance between the viewer and the bear in the park in Georgia allowed for intimacy to develop.



Photograph of the bear's cage taken from a distance by the artist while living in Georgia in 2011.



Photograph of Angelo in his cage.

The cage, a very small concrete structure, was made up of three walls with bars in the front. The walls were painted pale yellow. Two wooden beams hung from the roof for the bear to play with and there was a small 'pool' in the corner. At the back of the cage was a small sleeping den, quite difficult to see from outside of the cage. The cage was located in such a way that the bear was visible most of the time, and this direct visual access heightened my sensitivity to his plight. The sensitivity I felt did not seem to be shared by his other visitors, however; on a number of occasions men hit the bars of the cage with sticks and shouted names at the bear. On one occasion I saw a young man try to give Angelo a cigarette. When Angelo turned his head away the man shouted aggressively at the bear.



Still from video recorded by the artist while living in Georgia in 2011.

That Angelo did not respond or retaliate draws attention to human expectations of animals in captivity. Nigel Rothfels writes of this expectation and reflects on the experience most of us have of looking at animals in zoos, circuses and pet shops, and how this experience is ultimately dissatisfying. He states:

For most of us, most of the time, there is something usually unsatisfactory about this experience. Pointing to the constant questions of children about why the animals at the zoo don't move, don't do anything; don't seem to care about anything. (2002: 10)

I remember visiting the Pretoria zoo as a child, and my younger sister, disappointed by the lack of movement amongst the small monkeys we were looking at, stuck her finger through the fence to poke a monkey. She quickly withdrew her hand with a chunk missing from the tip of her index finger! The grown-up men who attempted to poke and prod Angelo were disappointed in a very different way, as Angelo was not goaded into any kind of aggressive response. It was the men themselves who became more aggressive and continued to shout at the bear as they walked away from his cage.

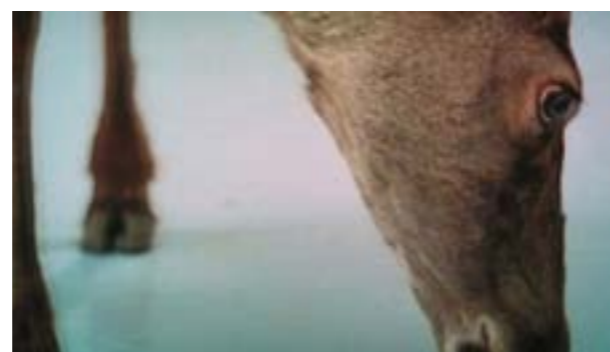


Margaret Tarrant feeding the hippopotamus at the London Zoo. From Harry Golding, *Zoo Days* (1919).

Romanian artist Mircea Cantor is known for video and new media installations. At times Cantor uses animals as his subject matter to explore a wider range of concerns such as 'the notions of displacement, uncertainty, fragility of convictions

and uneasy confrontations of ideologies' (Ting 2010: online).

These works evoke a sense of tension amongst the viewers as they watch animals that the artist has deliberately placed in captivity. In his much acclaimed video piece *Deeparture* (2005) Cantor confined a deer and a wolf in a white-walled gallery space and filmed the result. The video starts with a close up shot of the wolf lying on a concrete floor. Its panting shows the viewer that it is alive and perhaps anxious. The video follows the wolf as it gets up and moves around the space, emphasising its fast breaths and wandering eyes. The video cuts to an image of four buck-like legs standing on a similar concrete floor. The camera quickly moves up the legs to the body, neck and head of the animal and we see that it is a deer. The focus remains on the deer's face as it moves around with pricked ears, smelling its surroundings.



Mircea Cantor. *Deeparture*. 2005. Stills from video.

The video cuts from the wolf to the deer for the first 40 seconds until the two animals are seen within the same frame. It is in these frames, when the deer and the wolf are seen together, that a sense of expectation develops and the viewer really starts to anticipate the wolf's attack. However, the video does not end in that way and the fact that no blood is shed heightens the intensity and tension of the situation. In an interview with *The Washington Post*, Cantor explained that the piece was never about seeing blood, but rather about the tension inherent in the image. He says,

We all know that deer and wolves never live together. So what is beautiful is to keep this tension – as though you had a bow, and you kept bending it. For this reason, the piece has no sound. When you enter the room, you can hear your breathing, your heartbeat. (In Beizer 2007: online)

Cantor speaks of the tension in both the animals and in the viewers. Similarly, in my own work I attempt to create a tension between the viewer and the subject – in this case Angelo the bear.

I had one experience in particular with Angelo that reflected the tension between two animals forced into the same space. I arrived one day at Angelo's cage to find him missing, and another bear in his place. This new bear was much smaller and looked older than Angelo, with many scars across his face. I was confused, but as I walked around the cage I spotted Angelo hiding in the little room at the back. Although I was relieved to see him, I was also very concerned for him. I sensed a tension between the two bears that made me anxious.

On my return a few days later it was Angelo who was pacing around the cage again, and the other bear appeared to be missing. A teenage boy approached and tried to explain what had happened. Through his gesticulations and my limited Georgian I understood that there had been a fight and that Angelo had, in fact, killed the other bear. The flesh of the dead bear was fed to the griffin vulture in the cage next door. Seeing the bear's rib cage on the floor of the neighbouring cage contributed significantly to my sense of unease and discomfort and this incident became a pivotal subject in my work.



From the left: *Two Georgian Bears, Den, One Georgian Bear*. 2013. Mercurochrome, Med-Lemon, copper sulphate, Flowers of sulphur, potassium permanganate, charcoal tablets and Sedacur tablets on canvas, 170 x 170 cm.



From the left: *One Georgian Bear, Den, Two Georgian Bears*. 2013. Mercurochrome, Med-Lemon, copper sulphate, Flowers of sulphur, potassium permanganate, charcoal tablets and Sedacur tablet on canvas, 170 x 170 cm.

My aim was to create a work that manifested the tension I felt at the time, within the work and within the viewer. The three large paintings exist as a kind of storyboard depicting the above-mentioned experience. I wanted to capture the essence of the cage and the notion of the two bears being forced into a confined space together. In so doing I wished to generate a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety in the viewer.



Pieter Bruegel the Elder. 1562. *Two Chained Monkeys*. Oil paint on wood panel, 23 x 20 cm.

The three paintings are broken down into three scenes: a bear is walking around the cage in the first painting; there is no bear in the second painting; and two bears are depicted in the third painting. The repetition of the cage iconography, which obscures the figuration, projects a feeling of discomfort onto the viewer. When exhibited alongside each other the paintings portray the circularity of the cage that surrounds the bears, but when the two outer paintings are swapped around, the circular structure surrounds the viewer instead of the bears. This causes the viewer to share in the experience of feeling trapped.

Situating the viewer in the cage, with the bears roaming freely on the outside, is an interesting contradiction to the power and control that humans have when catching animals and placing them in captivity. Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Two Chained Monkeys* (1562) shows that human power and control over animals has been a part of our cultural language for hundreds of years. In his painting, two monkeys sit in a stone archway overlooking a harbour. They have metal rings around their waists that are attached to metal chains, which are joined in the middle by another metal ring that is in

turn fastened to the centre of the windowsill. One monkey looks towards the viewer while the other monkey sits 'crumpled and depressed', looking out in the opposite direction (Rothfels 2002: 15). The painting gives off a sense of helplessness, as if the monkeys have surrendered to their fate and given up hope of ever being free.

Another of Cantor's works, *The Need for Uncertainty* (2008), comments on this idea of control and captivity. In this artwork an elegant, circular, golden cage with a rounded top, containing a peacock and a peahen, was placed in the gallery space, filling it. The composition and colours of the birds in relation to the cage suggest elegance and serenity, but also suggest 'captivity, power and dominance and the entrapment of beauty' (Carswell 2008: online).



Mircea Cantor. *The Need for Uncertainty*. 2008. Photographic print.

Cantor's re-enactment of the control dynamics between humans and animals enhances the work's ability to communicate a sense of tension to its viewers, as my own work acknowledges issues of control through its use of the captive bears as subject matter and visual reference. In Georgia, the bears were controlled by being kept in a cage to provide human entertainment. In my paintings the bears are still controlled by my acts of representation, but by using a medium that I have little control over I hoped to poignantly manifest the tension between this control and the lack thereof.





Conclusion

My aim to produce paintings that could capture the essence of the strong feelings I had in relation to my interaction with the bear, witnessing the creature in his confined surroundings and seeing him suffer, led me to explore aspects of human relationship to captive animals. My interaction with the bear also led me to a deeper exploration of medicine as my medium, its symbolic significance for healing and the performative painterly dimension that medicine's unpredictable nature invited. Working horizontally brought me into much closer physical contact with the painted surfaces I created with my medicine, an intimacy I saw as analogous to my desire to erode the boundaries between myself and Angelo, and by extension, humans and non-human animals. I see my creative process of transforming medicine into physical evocations of my relationship with the bear as an attempt to transform my emotional upset about his captivity into a situation of emotional healing.

These transformations have led me to think about other situations and transformations of emotional healing through art. Whilst I focus on the intimacy experienced between an entrapped wild animal and a human being I am also aware of the broader emotional dimensions between humans and animals, such as animals that have been domesticated. One of the most powerful examples in this context is Jo Ractliffe's *Love's Body* (1999). This piece is very personal and shows how Ractliffe exhumed her beloved dead dog, Gus, and photographed his body 'uncovered but still lying in the grave' (Atkinson 2000: 53). Ractliffe's interest in things that are ephemeral, such as 'desire, loss and longing' (1999: online), is the larger framework of this work. A feeling of loss and a desire to make whole suggests the possibility of empathy between species.

Ractliffe's artwork reminds me of a reading I was drawn to that speaks about the oldest documented example of keeping animals in captivity – the domestication⁵ of the dog. This idea of keeping an

⁵ The process of domesticating animals resulted in certain wild animal species surviving in the company of human beings. Domesticated species are those whose breeding and living conditions were altered by human control over multiple generations.

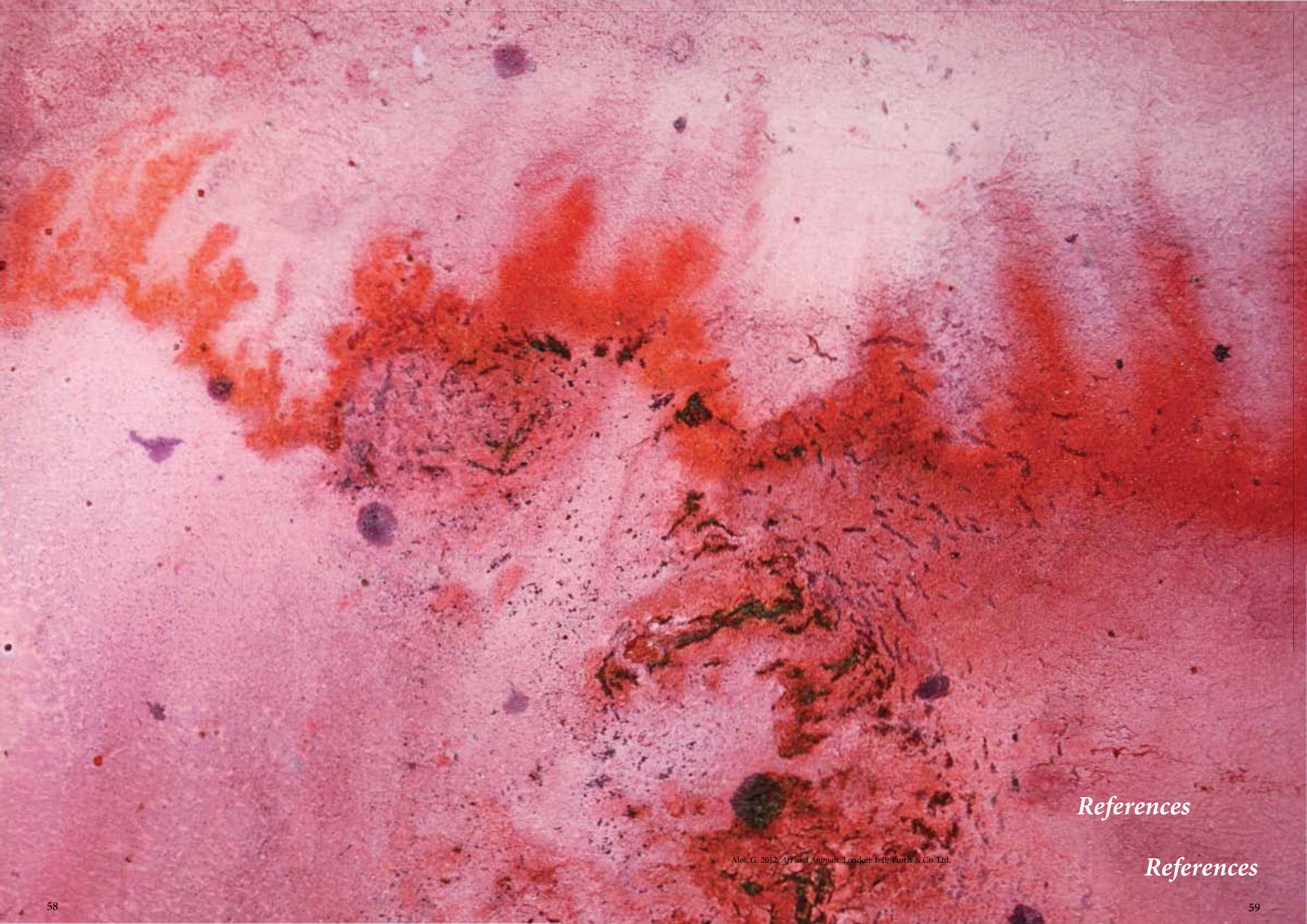


Jo Ractliffe. *Love's Body*. 1999. Light box installation, 85 x 85 cm.

animal captive dates as far back as 15 000 BC (Pruitt 2013), when hunter-gatherers used dogs to help with the hunting of other animals. According to recent research, early humans developed a bond with their domesticated dogs and developed a genuine sense of empathy and friendship. Sarah Pruitt writes that,

One dog skeleton was laid to rest in a sleeping position: others were buried with small ornaments or implements, some resembling toys. One man was buried with two dogs laid on either side of him, while another dog was placed in his grave wearing a necklace fashioned from four deer's teeth pendants. (2013: online)

Although I am aware – through the discourse of Animal Studies and other philosophies on animals – of the danger of anthropomorphism, I believe that animals have the capacity to heal us through their loyalty and friendship; this certainly happened to me and this project is intended as a form of reparation for this.



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