Navigating the Arteries of Loss
A figurative ceramic exploration of the human condition in situations of loss

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Navigating the Arteries of Loss
Abstract

Navigating the Arteries of Loss is a vision of small haemorrhages of the self which chart emotional progress through life. The research has concentrated on the ways in which loss is expressed through body language – the corporeality of the human condition. The chosen material is clay, built into sculptural forms using coil and slab work. The task has been to find ways in which internal loss might be manifest as a physical expression of the body. The early part of the project has been to investigate loss of life, loss of reason and loss of control which have led to the subject of dualities implicit in the subject of loss: absence and presence, internal and external, secrecy and revelation, darkness and light. The Hare has been used as an Everyman during this series of work. The subject of loss requires a clearly defined palette to achieve a strong visual tension, so the palette has been limited to black and white. Black and white imagine the dualities of absence and presence, light and dark, life and death. The making process has led to an installation that includes found objects; six dining chairs and an iron bed provide a theatrical locale for an installation. The palette, the form and the theme interweave. Process and thinking conjoin, giving a focus and constraint within which to create the tension and anxiety around a situation of loss.
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Table of Contents

Background 7

Navigating the Arteries of Loss 8
   Introduction 8
   Positioning the Project 9

Loss 9
   Loss of Reason 9
   Loss of Life 19
   Loss of Control 22

Dualities 27
   Introduction 28
   Absence and Presence 28
   Internal and External 30
   Unconscious and Conscious. The Lost Object and Abandonment 35

Void 41

Process 45
   Influences 47
   Decoration/Surface/Colour 52
   Scale 53
   Materiality 55
   Site/installation 57

Final Exhibition: 61

Summary 63

Technical 64

List of Illustrations 66

Sources of Illustrations 70

Works cited 72
Background

My background as a practitioner was formalised as a graduate of Otago Polytech’s Advanced Diploma in Ceramic Art. I make figurative sculptural ceramics and my practice involves building by coil and slab. From within the wide tradition of ceramics I have looked closely at clay narratives and have chosen to take a figurative path. Within this tradition I have chosen to identify with the work of Georges Jeanclos, Meissen animal forms, Wallace Martin’s bird forms, Sergei Isupov, Grayson Perry, Margaret Keelan, Beth Caverner Stichter and Kate MacDowell. As a practitioner, motivation is often derived from literary, theatrical and historical sources as well as from art history and the ceramic traditions. Meaning and intention in my making are important.

In a sculptural sense the first narratives which had resonance as a young woman were the misericords carved on the back of kneelers in churches in Britain and Europe depicting life in medieval times. Also the stonework gargoyles and chimera used as forms of spouting on the gutters of cathedrals. This Gothic preoccupation began early with exposure to architectural ornamentation.

I have a broad interest in mythology and folk tales. A preoccupation with the formation of identity has led to research of West African tribal sculpture and the symbolic narratives derived from mask making, fetishes, divining trays and tribal reliquaries that contribute to spirituality and to ancestor worship in particular. West African tribal art is functional. It actively contributes to the formation of cultural identity. The rituals practised at birth, during rites of passage, and at death are always manifest through symbolic art forms. The meaning of the word fetish in this context refers to a magical object with the power to act as an intermediary between the living and the dead.

Researching tribal art was a way of narrowing the focus on what really matters in life. How do New Zealand’s cosmopolitan and disparate cultures deal with spiritual disunity? In October 2008 I exhibited at The Upstairs Gallery in Lopdell House, Titirangi in a show entitled “Appetites”. This was a figurative exhibition examining the morphology of human appetite. This research led to a consideration of addiction and its relationship with depression. Humans rely on cultural opiates to settle their sense of disconnection from their culture and family. This research laid the foundation for the Master of Design (by Project).
Navigating the Arteries of Loss

Introduction

A figurative ceramic exploration of the human condition in situations of loss.

The phrase “arteries of loss” conjures up a vision of small haemorrhages of the self which chart an individual’s emotional progress through life. The focus of this research has been to investigate the ways in which people express loss through body language – the corporeality of the human condition. This project has become an interwoven fabric; the warp of which has been to examine a series of losses which feed one another – loss of identity, loss of reason, loss of control, loss of the freedom of speech and loss of life. The weft has been a series of subliminal interwoven undercurrents which can loosely be described as dualities. These help to define the nature of loss. Therefore, rather than being a chronological document, the chapters have been divided thematically into critical, formative insights on the nature of Loss, Dualities and the Void, followed by a discussion of Process and Technical Issues.

The research will be discussed within this context, looking at artists who are contextually relevant in this area of enquiry. There are three references central to the project: Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith and Rachel Whiteread. It is their philosophies which resonate, although their materials and practises differ.

Mortality is the central premise in this research. The temporal engenders duality. It hangs like a ball and chain as we stare into the void. The skull has been a very important presence in the project (Fig 1). In some ways it has become the observer. The skull represents the most permanent material evidence of human existence. However it is the manifestation of an absence because it is no longer animate.

Fig. 1: Skull and Void, Annie McIver, 2010
Positioning the Project

The first year of this project was dominated by active experimentation on a number of broad fronts that charted the focus of enquiry. These involved technical tests on clay and the use of slip, issues regarding scale and firing, and developing a cohesive body of work. There are four significant decisions that defined the direction of this project. First, was making an active choice to construct animal rather than human forms; in particular to embody the Hare with human emotions and regard it as a doll, or an Everyman. My maiden name is Coney, which refers to a rock rabbit, hence the choice of the Hare. This loosened the approach and technique. Second, was the decision to create an installation, rather than a ceramic exhibition of individual works. Third, through research on Dualities, to find a theoretical framework where the “lost object” and the “pivot” were integral to the installation. Fourth, was the resolve to only construct work about situations of loss with which there was a personal connection and was, therefore, able to honestly embed something of myself. This moved the construction of the work from the viewpoint of an observer to works that embody some sense of ownership. These changes narrowed the focus enough to move into a productive making process. Important practical lessons were to dispose of unnecessary detail that would particularise pieces and instead to concentrate on the universal, giving the viewer more space in which to bring their own experiences.

Loss

Loss of Reason

Historically, there are three well known series of work in art history that, in a contextual sense, fit loosely around loss of reason. One series is ‘The Seven Deadly Sins’ which are sins of excess and loss of control. They are the sins of pride, envy, gluttony, lust, greed, sloth and wrath. These were rendered by Hieronymus Bosch in the thirteenth century (Silver 313) and then by Pieter Bruegel the elder in 1557. They were followed by William Blake’s “Seven Sins of the Soul” (Damon 104) and more recently Otto Dix’s painting The Seven Cardinal Sins (Karcher 180) and contemporarily Morality Dolls – The Seven Deadly Sins by Fiona Hall (Queensland Art Gallery.; Art Gallery of South Australia. and Ewington) All of these images refer to a loss of control and, sometimes, a loss of reason and are, therefore, contextually relevant.

The second historical context that relates to loss of reason is The Rake’s Progress painted in 1754 by William Hogarth and The Rake’s Progress painted by Jorg Immendorff in 1994 (Barbican Art Gallery. and Immendorff, 57). Hogarth’s series of eight paintings trace the decline of Tom Rakewell, good for nothing son of a wealthy merchant family, who goes to London to seek his fortune, loses it on his appetite for prostitution and gambling and ends up in Bedlam (Musée du Louvre (Paris).; Tate Britain (Londres). and Hallett, 256). These images all refer to a loss of control and serve as a parable for ne’er do wells. The third series associated with disunity in the psyche is The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters, a phrase coined by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes in the late sixteenth century and early
seventeenth centuries with his *Los Caprichos* series (Brown and Galassi 242). These were dark, macabre visions of the human condition printed as aquatint etchings. A reinterpretation of these themes has been revisited frequently throughout the twentieth century and in recent times by Yinko Shonibare who has created a photographic tableau with scenes representing *The Sleep Of Reason* (Kent and Hobbs 109). There are a sequence of five prints, each one featuring one of the continents of Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Australia. These are pertinent to the loss of reason because, historically, hedonism was believed to create monsters, or at least people who fall outside the accepted norms of behaviour.

These norms have changed radically in the last century. People in Victorian times were committed to mental institutions because they did not fit the cultural norms in that society. In retrospect many mental conditions had no physical basis, but were more cultural constructs of the time. The subject of madness and the medical fraternity’s lack of scientific knowledge about the mind in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century made the treatment of patients seem draconian from a contemporary perspective. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* Foucault discusses the power structures of prisons and the control exercised by the professionals in judging the length of incarceration. He uses Jeremy Bentham’s *Panopticon* design for prisons as a metaphor for our society. The Panoptican was a design that allowed a prison guard to view all prisoners from a central tower and remain unseen. This notion of constant surveillance can also be applied to mental institutions where patients had no control over any part of their lives. What the professionals deemed to be abnormal encompassed a wide range of behaviours because normality had a very narrow, repressed framework in Victorian times. (Foucault)

‘Normal’ was a social construct, for the most part developed by medical men. If one were not ‘normal’ in Victorian times one ran the risk of being labelled mad, or at least deviant (Appignanesi 7). Elaine Showalter in her book *Hystories, Hysteria and Modern Culture* comments that hysteria, known as the “female malady”, was diagnosed as a female reproductive disease (Showalter 9). Hysteria grew out of a milieu where women had no rights. It was suggested that in a cultural context our gender influences how we define and treat mental illness (Showalter 2). Historically, Showalter suggests that hysteria was an “unconscious form of feminist protest”. (Showalter 3). Appignanesi in *Mad, Bad and Sad* backs this up, saying that our cultural view of the world is closely interwoven with our changing biological knowledge. (Appignanesi 5). An example of hysteria can be seen in Louise Bourgeois’ *Arch of Hysteria* (Fig. 33, p24). Hysteria is a physical manifestation of an internal loss of control.

I have felt a particular resonance with Kiki Smith whose work embodies “...a personal sense of isolation and longing for connection ” that defines loss for me (Posner 14). Her human figures express the abject which she uses to emphasize
the temporal nature of our lives (Fig 33, p24). She has used body fluids to allude to AIDS, domestic violence, dysentery and the abortion controversy, all of which relate in some form to loss. Smith makes forms which leak and stain “They may be seen as archetypes of human despair...stripped of personal or social context and represented as disturbing symbols of social breakdown”(21). This enquiry involves people who have suffered loss – unwanted outpourings of emotion, a loss of reason and control. Weeping Boy (Fig. 2, p10) was constructed as an exercise in body language to describe grief.

Initially the enquiry into loss of reason was influenced by the knowledge that the tertiary institution Unitec was previously Carrington Mental Hospital, built in 1865. Reading *Faces in the Water*, Janet Frame’s account of her time spent in both Seacliff Mental Hospital, Dunedin and Carrington, Auckland was undertaken. Her descriptions of patients leave images etched in one’s mind. What resonated after reading Frame’s book was the overwhelming sense of incarceration - no control whatsoever over any area of your life. To bring a leaf or a blade of grass from exercise time and manage to take it to bed constituted a triumph – something that you alone owned. The work *Derelict, 2010* (Fig 3) was a direct response to reading *Faces in the Water*.

Frame’s description of her fellow patients, their previous lives and how their stories accounted for their individual eccentricities and behaviour, were simply explained. There was an immediate comprehension of their situation and their motives. Inconsolable grief was one that stood out.
The description of “…the total alienation of Esme, her sitting alone in a puddle in the corner, her striped dress over her head, no pants on, her feet bare, her black eyes gleaming in her pale face through the slits in the front of her dress; the animal cries, the bird speech” made me fearful of the depth of misery that human beings encounter (Frame 244). Derelict, 2010 and Esme, 2010 were both exercises in removing facial expression and relying on body language and the universal to convey a sense of loss (Fig 3 and 4. p11).

A visit to Dunedin in 2010 coincided with a tour of Seacliff Mental Hospital. Walking through empty, dilapidated, old buildings with Frame’s descriptions still ringing in my ears was very moving (Fig 5-15, pp 13-14). The solitary confinement quarters were pitiful. According to the present day owner, one man was incarcerated for 22 years and was then released into the community when the hospital closed – 22 years without a view of the outside world, without companionship. There was a sense that large numbers of patients had inhabited this piece of land - 1000 at a time. Scuffed, worn concrete bore testimony to Frame’s descriptions of terrible overcrowding and the serious lack of staff available. The worst affected patients were incontinent, making the general conditions nightmarish.

For privacy reasons it was difficult to access pictures of patients, but the Hocken Library had a great many photos taken by the Dunedin City Council of the hospital as it fell into a serious state of disrepair. Seacliff was built on a Victorian model of the English mental institutions. The bricks were made of local clay, lime and sea sand fired on site. As the hospital grew, some patient labour was employed and these combined factors, inadequate materials and unskilled labour, perhaps contributed to the disintegration of the buildings, some of which were condemned in the late 60’s and early 70’s when it closed. It was ironic that the flimsy medical knowledge of mental illness should be mirrored by flimsy, poorly executed building practice. The Auckland Museum research library has countless staff photos from Carrington Hospital, and Porirua Hospital has an historical museum with various written staff accounts of life there. In his book Wrestling with the Angel: A Life of Janet Frame Michael King writes touchingly about a night Janet frame spent in Park House, Avondale Hospital. “On that occasion, sleeping among the howls of the demented and the stench of urine, she came as close as she ever would to losing belief in her own identity... She rolled on her straw mattress to face the darkened wall and recited the Twenty Third Psalm” (King, 71) and “I peered into a room that stank of urine and was full of children lying in cots, strange children, some of them babies, making strange noises; their faces wet with tears and snot ... I saw people with their eyes staring like the eyes of hurricanes surrounded by whirling unseen and unheard commotion contrasting strangely with stillness” (74)
The concern, during construction of the human figures, was to ask questions about how the physical and emotional effects of being a patient in an institution are expressed. What does relinquishing, albeit unwillingly, control over your life do to your corporeal and mental state? How would you conduct yourself, protect yourself from both the internal and external demons forced on you? The criteria for becoming a patient in the mid 20th century seemed random and punitive. Husbands unhappy with their wives could commit them with excuses of hysteria and these women could languish there for the rest of their lives, unless they escaped. A woman who lived in Point Chevalier in the mid 20th century was known to accommodate runaway women from Carrington, whose husbands had committed them to the asylum because they were surplus to requirements. She would then try to find them alternative accommodation.

A former Devonport ferry skipper said that they had found the body of a female inmate from Carrington who had jumped off the Auckland Harbour Bridge. The inmate was identified as someone who had been committed by her husband. Some 6 months later, he too jumped off the bridge. After his death evidence emerged that he had been abusing their two children and, when his wife found out, he had her committed to bury the story. Another story was of a twelve year old boy, committed in 1907, who had a frontal lobotomy in the 1940’s, was incarcerated for life at Carrington because his mother had caught him masturbating at home. The initial impulses to take photos of abandoned buildings - Seaciff Hospital 1884, McGill’s Milton Flour Mill 1857, McSkimmings Hoffman Kiln 1884, and of my studio in Unitec Building 76 (frontispiece) have all been driven by an awareness that all these places were empty vessels that once held large numbers of people.
Fig. 19: McSkimmings Kiln, Benhar, 2010

Fig. 20: Rusting Pipes, McGills Flour Mill, Milton 2010
The walls of Seacliff and Carrington are suffused with misery and loss. Building 76 of Unitec, previously the building allotted for the criminally insane, and the stream below, continue to offer up vestiges of former lives. Patients carved their names, and sometimes their misery, on the bricks outside. In Euan McLeod’s book, *The Painter and the Painting*, Grigson writes “Our feeling flows into places and an accumulation of feeling, historical, cultural and personal, flows back from places into our consciousness” (MacLeod 30).

*Wolfman*, 2010 was the initial construction of a hybrid animal/human where the delineation is tentative (Fig 23). Children are commonly instructed that reason is what separates humans from animals. The corollary to that might be that loss of reason may trigger a return to animal instinct. Baying at the moon is a primeval response that could be construed as an external expression of an internal loss.

*Contorted Man*, 2010 assumes an upright foetal position (Fig 24). He attempts to protect the body’s major organs from both internal and external onslaught. Suffering from a loss of reason in a mental institution means that both internally and externally the patient may feel cut adrift from any self control. Douglas Wright, in his book *Black Milk*, says “The body is a device to calculate the astronomy of the spirit” (26). The focus of this project has been underscored by this statement. These figures have been placed in poses that offer a barometer reading of their spirit. The stance is considered, the intention being to exaggerate a sense of imbalance that contributes to the disorder and disunity of the figure.
**Loss of Life**

Examining individual loss of life came about in an oblique way, fuelled by an obsession with Icarus figures falling through space, where instead of the positional being the internal expressed physically, it is the figure’s position in space (Fig 25, 26, 27, 28). The verticality of the human is inverted. The movement is from life to death. Herbert Draper made a preparatory drawing before he painted the fallen Icarus. I am drawn towards the languid droop of figures painted in the style of the Pre-Raphaelites. A derivative three dimensional version of the drawing was made. Hanging the piece from the ceiling gives it a sense of floating. The wings were constructed using white plastic bags cut up as feathers that are ethereal because they are almost transparent.

Fig. 25: The Lament of Icarus, Herbert Draper, 1898

Fig. 26: Icarus Marquette Detail, unfinished, Annie McIver, 2010

Fig. 27: Icarus Marquette, Annie McIver, 2010

Fig. 28: Icarus, Annie McIver, 2011
Counter Monuments as Memorials of Loss

An area pertaining to loss of life which presents a diversity of approaches, is the subject of the Jewish Holocaust during World War II. Many counter monuments have been created as a reminder of the horror of that Holocaust and to prevent “historical amnesia” from settling in. (Barton, Chris) There are numerous examples of Jewish Memorials, but reference will be made to four that demonstrate four different approaches to the notion of absence. The first is Judenplatz 2000, (Fig 39, p 26).

Rachel Whiteread’s Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial is a large library with double doors. The external walls are covered in shelved books that have their pages facing out and their spines on the inside, so we are not party to what they are about. “...this fictional library can only be accessed through the mind. It can be both personal and collective, the lack of titles allowing access to anyone – any individual life could be on the spine of any given book. It is a memorial to lives lost, designed sympathetically while retaining brutal rigour befitting a memorial to unspeakable loss” (Mullins 65).

The second memorial is Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe by Peter Eisenman 2004 (Fig 38, p26) This memorial stands in the centre of Berlin. It is an enormous expanse of 2711 concrete monoliths covering 13000 square metres. In 1937 the area housed Joseph Goebbels’ office. It is a counter monument against assembly. “Paths 95cm wide force single file through the stones. No holding hands, no mass mourning, no rallies here...narrowness makes one walk alone” Peter Eisenmann the architect comments “the same way my mother felt when Mengele took her mother from her” (Fig 37, p 26). (Barton, 12)

The third monument, Absent Monument, 2010 not built at the time of writing, is planned for a Jewish monument in Frankfurt. Niels Lund Petersen is an architect with OP, a Danish architectural practice. Their plan is to create a void outside Grobmarkthalle, which was the assembly place for the Jews before they were deported to the concentration camps. (Fig 36, p 25). The void is to be created in the adjoining river, by the placement of a concrete open-topped box, hidden beneath the water on the river bed. It will have “…an adjustable steel superstructure to allow for the river’s ever changing water levels; the water will be continuously pumped from the structure back into the river” to maintain the void (Pockson, 35). Niels Lund Petersen, says “The void will ask visitors to confront in a very direct way, the meaning of deportation and segregation of the Jews, and yet the river has a great symbolic value as a symbol of life and a symbol of time passing.” (35)
The fourth work is an installation about the Romani Holocaust, called *Rain of Tears 2007* and was designed by Tibor Balogh. Between fifty and sixty thousand Hungarian Roma were persecuted or exterminated in concentration camps in Hungary and Germany. The first installation, *Hidden Holocaust* was in Budapest in 2004. Visitors were ushered into tall white boxes 2 metres high by 1 metre square and shut inside. “Inside, a bare bulb hung from the ceiling, and the four walls, ceiling and floor were wallpapered with coverage of the Romani Holocaust... Upon entering each visitor received a test tube for collecting their tears and which they could return through a window on one side of the booth.” (Szeman 54)

These test tubes were then used as an installation entitled *Rain of Tears* in Venice in 2007 in the Paloma Pavilion (Fig 35, p25). They were hung from the ceiling of the Palazzo Pisani. *Rain of Tears* references the resistance by the Hungarian government to acknowledging the fact of the Romani Holocaust, then and now. The survivors were marginalised and forgotten by the communities to which they returned. Szeman says “Mourning in the sense of working through, is both an individual and a collective act. The test tubes made the link from the individual to the collective and created a double memorial; of the Holocaust and the Budapest participants’ commemoration.” (59)

This final work in particular, is an example of a forced witnessing of an absence, or a secret, the community knows about, but has failed to acknowledge. The test tubes forced both the community and the Hungarian government to acknowledge the misery and the suffering of the Romani, therefore externalising what had previously been an internal loss. Failure to acknowledge, or be accountable, casts a permanent stain that resists removal. This is relevant to the subject of child abuse within New Zealand. The community knows, but fails to acknowledge or be accountable. *Stained Hare, 2011* references the internalizing of a physical event (Fig 29). Contemporary New Zealand society fails to act on the knowledge that child abuse happens every day in all strata of society.
Loss of Control

Although it is an internalizing of a physical loss of control and a loss of innocence, the long reaching effects of abuse, sooner or later, are once again physically expressed through ensuing generations. A perpetrator of abuse may have experienced situations that have hard-wired aberrant behaviour in childhood.

Abused children may have a raised pulse and an anxiety born of a loss of control. Years later this raised pulse rate may express itself through a variety of physiological issues—heart problems, high anxiety, depression, poor self esteem and issues of trust.

The children of these victims may suffer from broken homes. Victims, as parents, may not possess coping strategies to deal with their own loss of control. The children of victims can physically exhibit an array of addictive behaviours representing internal loss—anorexia, bulimia, morbid obesity, self harm, attachment disorders and suicide. It is like an insidious worm radiating out in a spiral through several generations. The figures I eat therefore I am, 2011 and I starve therefore I am, 2011 were significant in the making process because, by their physicality, they inform the essence of the project, which has been to use figurative ceramics to express corporeally an internal loss (Fig 30)(Fig.31 and Fig. 32, p23).

Fig. 30: I eat therefore I am, I starve therefore I am, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 31: I starve therefore I am (detail) Annie McIver 2011

Fig. 32: I eat therefore I am, I starve therefore I am (verso) Annie McIver 2011
Fig. 33: Arch of Hysteria, Louise Bourgeois 1993

Fig. 34: Untitled, Kiki Smith, 1990
Fig. 35: Rain of Tears, Venice Biennale, Tibor Balogh, 2007

Fig. 36: The proposed Absent Monument, Frankfurt, Niels Petersen, 2010
Fig. 37: Detail

Fig. 38: The Memorial of the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, Peter Eisenmann, 2004

Fig. 39: Judenplatz, Vienna, Rachel Whiteread, 2000
Dualities

The Sick Rose

O Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy

-William Blake

Fig. 40: The Sick Rose, William Blake, 1789
Introduction

The central premise in the subject of loss is that humans exist within a space/time continuum where mortality hovers, where proof of the Fall resides. Within the frame of Christian orthodoxy, Man has been banished from the Garden of Eden. Paradise has been lost. Partaking of an apple from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil served as an introduction to the dualities of our existence. There is a beginning and an end, darkness and light, good and evil inhabit the world. Tragedy and comedy exist side by side. The search for transcendence is blighted by Man’s mortality. Man carries the seed of his own destruction. Blake’s poem *The Sick Rose* eloquently expresses this sense of decay.

At the outset of this discussion the project was alluded to as being a fabric, consisting of a warp and a weft. The warp encompassed the losses. Dualities are the weft, the ephemeral undercurrents which can be transparent and difficult to grasp, but thematically they broaden and inform the notion of loss. Each duality has two opposing endpoints and in the middle is the pivot, the point of balance. The endpoints of each duality will be discussed and then be followed by an exploration of the significance of the pivot within the final body of work of this project.

Absence and Presence

Conceptually the question has been how to represent loss of reason and loss of life. The first area of investigation was to look at the notion of absence and presence which seem to be implicit in any form of loss. The inheritance for descendants can be a material or a cerebral presence. Both rely on memories to vitalize absence. Below are five different instances where art practitioners have attempted to visually describe absence.

Absence 1

Before photography, artists would be employed to paint lifelike images of the dying or the dead for family to remember them by. The other means of recording an image would be to cast a life or death mask. Fiona Pardington’s 2010 exhibition *Ahuā: A Beautiful Hesitation* at Two Rooms Galleries, Auckland, consisted of photographs of life casts made by Dumont D’Urville between 1837-1840 of Maori faces which were part of ethnographic studies he was undertaking during his voyage through the Pacific (Fig 57-58). In the same way the impression left on a mattress, or a bed, footprints or handprints indicate the absence of a person who once was there.

Absence 2

This moves into the realm of spirituality. Humans internalize the absence of their predecessors by making a physical/magical object to commemorate an absence, be it a headstone, a reliquary or a mausoleum. Some West African tribes make fetishes and reliquaries to honour the dead and to revitalise their sense of spirituality.
The artwork of the Yoruba people in West Africa functions to enhance their spiritual lives. *The African Bakongo Two Headed Dog Fetish* has an important supernatural function. (Fig 63, p39). Villagers see dogs in their everyday village life, but because the dogs wander into the forest and return, the villagers attribute magical powers to them. They believe the forest is inhabited by the spirit life of their ancestors. The two heads of the dog, one facing the village and the other facing the forest, make it an intermediary magical object, a fetish that can be woken up to the spirit world by driving nails into its body. The number of nails indicates the frequency of spiritual connection with the ancestors (Mack 121–2).

**Absence 3**

In a similar vein T.R. Ericsson, an American artist, was asked to make a *memento mori* of a man named John Crew. Ericsson went to visit the deceased man’s office to find out more about him and found a plastic blow up deer’s head which, according to office staff, Crew had inflated before he died. Ericsson transferred the breath of the dead man out of the deer’s head into a sealed glass urn thus making an encapsulated *memento mori* of a dead man’s breath entitled *All Shall be Well*, 2007. (Lushetich, 82) (Fig 59, p39).

**Absence 4**

Rachel Whiteread had a show called *Shedding Life 1993* in which she inverted mould making of positive space by casting around the negative space of an object, for example the internal space of a 3-storied house. (Fig 61, p39). Her work has been a recording of the negative. They are works that monumentalize absence in space. Whiteread has also made domestic moulds of the internal space of a mattress, of an old bath, and of a mortuary slab. (Fig 62 p39) The bath monumentalizes the domestic and carries on its external surface a layer of human scum. What is fascinating is that it causes a “...deep rooted tension. Baths are associated with cleanliness and comfort, yet these works bring to mind sarcophagi and death; stains are all that remain of the liquefied bodies that seem to have trickled away.” (Mullins 26).

**Absence 5**

Louise Bourgeois’ *La Maison Vide – the empty house* – is based on the notion that, empty as it may be, it has been witness to the lives and actions of its previous inhabitants. She painted *Femmes Maison 1945-47* (Fig 60, p39). Bachelard says “the house is body and soul. It is the human being’s first world... A house is imagined as a vertical being. It rises upward. Verticality is ensured by the polarity of cellar and attic”. (Bernadac 23)
**Internal and External**

“Perhaps that’s what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that’s what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I’m neither one side nor the other, I’m in the middle, I’m the partition, I’ve two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that’s what I feel, myself vibrating, I’m the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world…” (Beckett 134)

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**A Divine Image**

Cruelty has a Human Heart
And Jealousy a Human Face;
Terror the Human Form Divine
And Secrecy the Human Dress

The Human Dress is forged Iron
The Human Form. a fiery Forge
The Human Face. a Furnace seal’d
The Human Heart. its hungry Gorge.

*William Blake*
The duality of the internal/external is part of the the aim of this project. To express human internal loss through physical, external body language. The Möbius strip as a motif encapsulates the notion that inside can also be outside and something of the movement between the two. Initial experimentations and figurative explorations led to the construction of two terracotta hollow men. Sections were cut out of their bodies. One was terracotta wrapped in muslin like an Egyptian mummy and stuffed with straw the other was terracotta. These had some visual appeal. (fig 42-43). A form from chicken wire and calico was constructed with the intention of allowing it to crumble, exposing a broken external form and an internal absence. The form was covered with porcelain slip using a papier-mâché method, and then fired high. There was no fragmentation and, consequently the interior was not visible (Fig 44).

However, it was a worthwhile experiment in gauging the strength of the porcelain slip.

Man behind Glass 2010, was another experiment concerning the duality of internal/external (Fig 45, p32). The intention was to place this figure behind glass to question whether the figure’s viewpoint is an external or internal one. This was a move forward from the internal/external body, to internal/external spatial environments. The notion of the outsider, the emotionally ill, watching society from the outside, or being inside and poorly equipped to make the transition to rejoin society. John Donne expressed the sentiment that the body is a vessel of incarceration and that this imprisonment continues throughout life because humans are mortal. In his 1619 Easter Sermon XXVII. He said “Wee are all conceived in close prison: in our mothers wombes, we are close Prisoners all; When we are borne, we are borne but to the liberty of the house; Prisoners still, though within larger walls; and then all our life is but a going out to the place of Execution, to death...” (Donne 615)
Bourgeois elucidates the ephemeral nature of duality; the movement between internal losses and the external expressions of them. She said “The subject of pain is the business that I am in. To give meaning and shape to frustration and suffering... The Cells [a series of work] represent different types of pain: the physical, the emotional and psychological, and the mental and the intellectual. When does physical become emotional? When does the emotional become physical? It’s a circle going round and round.” (Bourgeois, 205) 

The losses are intertwined, loss of reason with loss of control, with loss of dignity, with loss of life. Kiki Smith made internal body parts - excretory organs, the uterus, the ribcage as single entities exposing their vulnerability. (Fig 64, p40). By journeying to the external, complete body forms offer a view of the balance between the internal and the external. In Kiki Smith: All Creatures Great and Small Carsten Ahrens says: “The vulnerability of the body, its wounds, scars and lacerations, become metaphors for the fragile nature of our consciousness... She tattooed the soul’s injuries of our time on the figure’s bodies and presented them as the embodiment of spiritual processes.” (Kestner-Gesellschaft and Ahrens 12). We see the abject - internal body fluids leaking from orifices as physical manifestations of loss (Fig 65, p40).

Ritual could be construed, in some cases, as a physical manifestation of a loss. Religious rituals - a funeral, a mass, a reliquary - are all actions put in place to commemorate loss, to remember what is now absent in life. The Catholic faith has featured in Kiki Smith’s work in a meditative sense. It represents the host as the transubstantiation of the body of Christ and the wine his blood which is consumed, therein internalising the loss Christ suffered. By the act of Holy Communion we gain all the virtues inherent in the body of Christ including his access to paradise. A bid has been made for eternity. The void has been avoided, conquered. Temporal existence, the physical nature of mortality defines what it is to be human. Begetting and dying are acts of duality from nothing comes something and from something the return to being nothing. This is absence and presence.

Conception is an internalisation and birth is an externalisation (Fig 46).
Secrecy and Revelation

Another duality concerns secrecy and revelation, the power inherent in withholding knowledge from others. A secret which has no audience and is never told, is a useless construct. Knowledge is power and if the secret is told to all, its power is diminished. Its power lies in limiting the sharing of it.

In ritual and magic, secrecy is fundamental as it constitutes heightened spirituality in many world religions. Revelation is only available to the chosen, often the initiates who have reached puberty. The secrets are frequently to do with acquiring knowledge embedded in cultural structures that maintain the survival of the group; also to enable communication with the dead and to be able to placate the necessary, life-sustaining gods.

The dynamics and the power of the secret can be seen in the repression of appetite, the secrecy of addiction. Through secrecy several degrees of separation can be achieved. Somehow separation makes the appetite, or addiction, more acceptable, more the norm. The idea of revelation and mind altering through addiction is evident in a wide variety of cultural opiates. Child abuse and pornography are both secret addictions.

Ask Me No Questions 2011 was constructed as a response to the concept of the unwanted secret. (Fig 47). Secrecy, or lack of knowledge, can dispossess a person of their self, their sense of identity. If you do not know where you come from, how can you know who you are, or where you are going? The secret is a powerful tool that is bound to memory. Not being party to a secret engenders a loss. Inversely being party to an unwanted secret can also cause a sense of loss – the loss of the freedom of speech. Big Shoes to Fill 2011 was the first of the Hare series and also an experiment in scale. The chair being too large for the Hare brought childhood and responsibility into focus (Fig 48).
Remembering what you want to forget, and forgetting what is too painful to remember are both internal losses that allude to absence and presence in memories. Thomas A. Clarke wrote “The longest shadows reach back into childhood.” (MacLeod 53).

Addictions help to control disunity, by transporting the sufferer away from the loss. That loss, often relates to a poor sense of identity and a lack of support within the culture we inhabit. Eating disorders, alcoholism, sexual abuse, self harm, suicide all harbour an element of secrecy. Sooner or later the internal loss becomes manifest.

In the cases of suicide, anorexia and bulimia, which are all physical expressions of internal loss, there is an absence of knowledge on the part of the community, of an individual’s intention. Perhaps a secret could be construed as an absence and, therefore, a loss to those who are not included (Fig 49).

Fig. 49: Detail, I starve therefore I am, Annie Mclver 2011
Unconscious and Conscious. The Lost Object and Abandonment

The unconscious is a way to come to terms with loss and to remember. Traditionally, memory and dream maintain a link between the deceased and the bereaved. Memory can only be about connections with the past, but dreaming allows us to envision some form of communication in the present, with the departed (Fig 50-53). As the West Africans use fetishes as a pivot, the dream can be the pivot, or lost object, which connects past lives with the present. In this project the wolf represents the maternal and the unconscious, not dissimilar to the dog fetish. The sleeping figure connects with someone who has died and remains inaccessible in our conscious life.

Ignês Sodré paraphrases Freud’s Mourning and Melancholia in her description of mourning as a “painful and lengthy process...giving up of the object, accepting its death, thus locating it in the “past” region of the mind so that it can remain in our inner world as a symbolic presence that informs our life as a memory, both consciously and unconsciously. Failure to mourn creates an internal situation by which the lost object is excessively identified with and the self lives in the shadow of an internal death leading to pathological depression” (Sodre 43).
Louise Bourgeois, as a child, felt emotionally abandoned by her father. That “internal death,” that sense of abandonment and melancholy, pervaded her entire life. She made sculpture, to work through her sense of loss. I suspect my own Gothic, melancholic bent has had similar roots in my childhood. Nick Bantock writes “for many collectors – to pile up treasures is to stave off childhood feelings of abandonment, to erect a tangible hedge against ancient anxiety” (Robertson, 80).

In Negotiating with the Dead Margaret Atwood suggests that all narrative writing is a negotiation with the dead (140). “To go to the land of the dead, to bring back to the land of the living someone who has gone there – It’s a very deep human desire, and thought to be very deeply forbidden. But life of a sort can be bestowed by writing.” (154). Demeter and Persephone, Orpheus and Eurydice, and Dante’s Divine Comedy all entail journeys to the Underworld to meet with the beloved.

In Terra Incognita Douglas Wright writes that “Death is a jewel you swallow in the womb. It sits in a secret place inside your whole life until the walls of your body fall down. Then it catches the light, hatches like a bird and flies off to a sparkling nest in the tree of heaven. Or else death is a dark place where nothing lives except a monstrous spider waiting to eat you. It has black milk. Or maybe death is nothing; just a hole aching for the thing that filled it. The sleep that never wakes.” (138).

Monique Redmond, a critic from within the programme structure, said “there is something interesting about the ‘lost object’, as a signifier of abandonment.” She suggested that “In some ways the space between objects could be the lost object”. Given that death is the ultimate abandonment, the “lost object” might be construed as the spatial intersection, or relationship, of gaze and body language between pieces in an exhibition of loss; and between figure and viewer. (Fig: 54). The “lost object” has been seized on because in subsequent reading the lost object reveals itself under another guise.

J.M. Coetzee in his novel Age of Iron talks about a photo found showing the character’s family when he was a child, all dressed in their Sunday best. In the background there is a vegetable garden, beautifully tended. He suggests that the African servants who tended the garden and ironed their clothes are ghostly presences. “Dies ira, dies illa when the absent shall be present and the present absent... they[ the photos] have become negatives again, a new kind of negative in which we begin to see what used to lie outside the frame, occulted” (111–2).

Francis Bacon used tracery and erasure in his paintings. He would paint an image from a photograph, then remove and smudge the image to a state where the likeness had been removed, but the essence he felt was still there to see.
T.S. Eliot in *The Hollow Men* writes *Between the desire/And the spasm/Between the potency/And existence/Between the essence/And the descent/Falls the shadow* (85). In a similar sense the shadow is the lost object and the ghostly presence in Coetzee’s photograph. They are shadows of implication – paradise lost. Thomas A. Clarke wrote “A shadow can be one fact among many or a gap, a tear, a fissure, in the continuity of things” (McLeod, 53).

There are distinct similarities in the notion of Eliot’s “shadow” and Clarke’s “shadow”, Freud’s “lost object” and the “ghostly presences” in Coetzee’s photograph. These all refer to the same thing: the pivot, Beckett’s tympanum between outside and inside, absence and presence.

Another commonality in this research has been the concept of sight in all its manifest forms. Jung talks about *lumen naturae* – the light of darkness. In this project the crow represents darkness and forewarning /illumination (Fig 56). He said there are “two images of light: the great light and the inner light of nature, an innerness that is also an outerness” (Marlan and Rosen 101) and here we have the dualities that have pervaded this whole topic. John Mack in *The Art of Small Things* writes “If seeing, is believing, then not seeing may be even more so... Where our eyes can no longer penetrate or can barely distinguish the outlines of something – sight gives way to insight.” (208).

The pivot between absence and presence is also the pivot between sight and insight. Dream functions as a pivot between the past and the present, between a conscious and unconscious state (Fig 55). This duality was fundamental to Mark Rothko’s paintings. Rothko said that his paintings are “neither synthesized nor neutralized...but held in a confronted unity, which is a momentary stasis” (Stanton 84). It is the pivot in a precarious state of balance. Where they coalesce is where we perhaps begin to gaze into the void – a state of nothing and everything. There is a term “sol niger” used by the alchemists and later by Jungians referring to “the simultaneity of blackness and luminescence” (87) which is what Rothko was achieving by the skilful use of colours in opposition. Samuel Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* writes "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps” (90). This is a literary summation of black luminescence and an apt description of mortality. Loss begins at birth.
Fig. 57: Lifecast, Dumont Durville, photograph, Fiona Pardington, 2010

Fig. 58: Lifecast, RHS, Dumont Durville, photograph, Fiona Pardington, 2010
Fig. 59: All Shall be well, T.R. Ericsson, 2007

Fig. 60: Femmes maison, Louise Bourgeois, 1945-47

Fig. 61: House, Rachel Whiteread, 1993

Fig. 62: Untitled (Yellow Bath), Rachel Whiteread, 1996

Fig. 63: African Bakongo Two Headed Dog, West African Tribal Art
Fig. 64: Ribcage, Louise Bourgeois, 1987

Fig. 65: Peebody, Kiki Smith, 1992
“The bed sees us add ourselves to the world, then subtract ourselves from it; perhaps that explains its talent for mathematical subversion. A man alone in bed so often feels half a human, a man and a woman one – or two plus a gap so inspissated it becomes a third. And though its white book opens innocently enough each night, within an hour the sheets have multiplied a thousand faces, known and unknown. Yet the bed remains our kindest friend, breaking our first fall, providing our love with its intimate theatre, dissolving our grief in sleep – and finally lowering us under with all the gentleness it can muster, the gentleness of nothing” (Paterson 47).
There are very close associations of thought between Mark Rothko, Ralph Hotere and Kiki Smith. Smith used her Catholicism to give her “Silvered Glass Water Bottles” a meditational aspect (Fig 69, p44). They were inspired by the Book of Hours – something to contemplate each hour of the waking day. Each bottle is engraved with the name of a body fluid found within a human body; one to represent tears, one blood and so on. They are all set on an altar-like plinth for consideration. “Smith found physical substitutes for the intangibles of religious belief” (Moma Highlights ARTBOOK | D.A.P. Catalog The Museum of Modern Art, New York 2005 | Updated Online Title Availability 330). These abject fluids express all the disunities and internal losses from within the body. In the late 20th and early 21st century they are visual cues, or pivots, for political debate about conditions of health, sex, war and natural disaster, all leading back to a host of losses.

Hotere called on his Catholic background when he produced a series of work based on the Tenebrae Cycle, which are prayers said in the hours of darkness on the last three days of Holy Week. The tenebrae are an example of a cultural structure employed within the Catholic faith to deal with a metaphorical loss. Tenebrae means darkneses. They are prayers of cleansing and contemplation which take place in the pre dawn hours as a preparation for the looming darkness of Christ’s crucifixion on Good Friday. The pre dawn hours are considered to be the time when the body, mind and soul are most responsive and Hotere’s blackness in his paintings offers the viewer a similar opportunity for uninterrupted contemplation about suffering and loss of life. Gregory O’Brien in his essay Tenebrae – Transfigured Night comments that “whilst it is a descent into – and immersion in – darkness, like the Holy Week ritual it draws us through that blackness towards a state of illumination and what Saint John of the Cross called “lyrical ecstasy” or rapture” (Hotere et al. 30).

In this installation, the black mirror forms the base of the bed. Its depth of blackness and its reflective surface are intended as a reference to black luminescence. In Donald Kuspit’s chapter The Only Immortal in Signs of the Psyche in Post Modern Art called he suggests that our waning belief in immortality has made contemporary, secular culture more death obsessed. There is no hope of another, better life beyond the grave. Nothingness filters into emotional life and, as a result, entropy filters into art making. Emptiness has de-sanctified the sublime and replaced it with nothingness and death “And the bed of life, the bed in which one was conceived, bears an uncanny resemblance to the deathbed...one involves the wish to witness the moment when we separated from nothingness and became something – separated from death to become alive. The other involves the wish to watch our return to nothingness from being something” (Kuspit 170). Again we see the duality of something and nothing. The bed of absence in the installation has become an agent of transformation. (Fig 66)
As a final summation of Dualities, this research has kindled an interest in the void and the nature of black light which may be a direction for the future. (Fig. 67, Fig. 68) *(Untitled) Bath and Ladder, 2010.* One small piece inspired by Rachel Whiteread’s monumental baths, has been made which may lead to a series using the bath as a metaphor for the void in conjunction with further research into mirrors and reflection. I watch my grandson recoil from his bath in case I pull the plug on him. His native wit suggests he too might leak out with the bathwater.

*Fig. 67: Untitled, (Bath and Ladder), Annie McIver, 2011*

*Fig. 68: Untitled, (Bath and Ladder) Annie McIver, 2011*
Fig. 69: Untitled (Silvered glass water bottles) Kiki Smith, 1987-89
Five poems for Dolls

1
Behind the glass in Mexico
this clay doll draws
its lips back in a snarl
despite its beautiful dusty shawl,
it wishes to be dangerous.

2
See how the dolls resent us.
With their bulging foreheads
and minimal chins, their flat bodies
never allowed to bulb and swell.
their faces of little thugs
This is not a smile
this glossy mouth, two stunted teeth;
the dolls gaze at us
with the filmed eyes of killers.

3
There have always been dolls
as long as there have been people.
In the trash heaps and abandoned temples
the dolls pile up;
the sea is filling with them.

What causes them?
Or are they gods, causeless,
something to talk to
when you have to talk.
Something to throw against the wall?
A doll is a witness
who cannot die,
with a doll you are never alone

On the long journey under the earth
in the boat with two prows,
there are always dolls.

Fig. 70: Flow, Margaret Keelan, 2005
Or did we make them
because we needed to love someone
and could not love each other?

It was love, after all,
that rubbed the skins from their grey cheeks,
crippled their fingers,
snarled their hair, brown or dull gold.
Hate would merely have smashed them.

You change but the doll
I made of you lives on,
a white body leaning
in a sunlit window, the features
wearing away with time,
frozen in the gaunt pose
of a single day,
holding in its plaster hand
your doll of me.

Or: all dolls come
from the land of the unborn,
the almost-born; each
doll is a future
dead at the roots,
a voice heard only
on breathless nights,
a desolate white memento.

Or: these are the lost children,
those who have died or thickened
to full growth and gone away.
The dolls are their souls or cast skins
which line the shelves of our bedrooms
museums, disguised as outmoded toys
images of our sorrows,
shedding around themselves
five inches of limbo

Margaret Atwood.

Fig. 71: The girl with the strawberries and the snake,
Margaret Keelan, 2008
Influences

When I read Margaret Atwood’s *Five poems for Dolls* these extracts are resonant for me in my own life. A doll is a witness who cannot die...you change but the doll I made of you lives on...dolls come from the land of the unborn/the almost born; each doll is a future/dead at the roots/a voice heard only on breathless nights/a desolate white memento...these are the lost children/those who have thickened to full growth and gone away/The dolls are their souls or cast skins/which line the bedroom shelves (Atwood, *Eating Fire* 201–202). *Stillbirth* 2011 was the only figure made that referenced the abject. In a full term stillbirth, the baby dies but the production of milk continues (Fig 72-73). Unwanted human milk spilling out of the body has a terrible poignancy.

I have interests in embodiment, doll-making, the tradition of netsuke, tile making and painting graphics onto ceramic surfaces. The *Hares* are dolls by another name, invested with human emotion. In a contemporary context there are ceramic artists whose interests intersect on both a practical and intellectual level. Ceramic artist Margaret Keelan’s dolls intersect on several levels. Cheryl Coon in her essay says they have “...a certain integrity, as if they have undergone a rite of passage” (80) Keelan views dolls as vessels for contemplation. “They can carry memories for the viewer. Traditionally they have been playthings which could be nurtured or be subjected to destructive impulses. Old dolls are plaintive creatures carrying the scars and wounds of life. Children use them to embody the theatre of their lives and those embodiments in childhood contribute to their equilibrium or disunity in adulthood” (200) (Fig 70, p45), (Fig 71, p46).

The idea of embodying human emotion in animal form has provided a wealth of material on which to focus. Three artists who have specialised in making hares are the late Barry Flanagan, John Morton and Beth Caverner Stichter. It is the attention of these artists to gesture, expression and vulnerability that has been valuable. Stichter is a ceramicist who embodies human emotion in animals and invests them with feelings of loss and inadequacy. The facial composition of the brow and jawline of her hares has been informative. Stichter builds life size animals sculpting the clay in solid form, taking the piece apart when it is suitably rigid, hollowing it out and reconnecting it (Fig 95-96, p60). Barry Flanagan’s pieces are enormous bronzes (Fig 93, p59). Regarding embodiment of emotion in *Hares*, his remarks about expression were noteworthy “In a human figure the range of expression is, in fact far more limited, than investing – a *Hare* especially- with the attributes of a human being. The ears, for instance, are
really able to convey a lot more than a squint in the eye of a figure or a grimace on the face of a model” (Levy 2). John Morton in his show Unbecoming 2010 made moulds of skinned hares which he accessed from the local taxidermist (Fig 92, p59). The realisation that a hairless hare’s body is so finely delineated and so vulnerable was a factor taken into account and used when building I starve therefore I am, 2011.

**Imagery**

**Transformation.** The project began with the construction of human figures who suffer from a loss of reason. This was followed by making animals interacting with humans and using their characteristics to inform each other’s loss of control. (Fig.74). Transforming from man to a howling wolf symbolised a move from reason to instinct. (Fig 23, p18). It was also a worthwhile experiment visualising in three dimensions. What determines the limits of looking like a wolf? The outcome in this practice was that the head form, the trunk and the extremities can be mixed and matched using the head to determine the essential distinguishing characteristic. So the Hare/Everyman is distinguished by the head and embodied with human emotion by the human trunk and the finger-like extremities. In It's the Truth, 2011, overlaying this transformation of form is the use of universal human body language as the primary medium of expression. (Fig 75, p49) It is easier to be expressive and spontaneous using an animal whose features lend themselves to the grotesque. Building only Hares improved the knowledge of combining that anatomy with human anatomy while simultaneously creating a cohesive body of work. Each of these hybrid human/Hares carries the memory of a particular loss. The sleeping woman and the wolf were a journey into dream and the unconscious; juxtaposing ferocity and the maternal presence within the wolf with the unguarded, vulnerability of a sleeping woman. Using domestic furniture serves to anthropomorphize the Hares. The degrees of separation between human and Hare are reduced, making them more believable.

The bed is a fundamental agent in this installation that is open to a number of different interpretations (Fig 76, p49). It could be construed as a theatre of absence and presence, it could function as a void and it also is an agent of transformation. The black mirror becomes the pivot between presence and absence, sight and insight, secrecy and revelation. It is the lost object, reflecting the viewers and Hares around the periphery of the bed, as ghostly figures of loss on the surface of a bed of absence; as an intersection of gaze. (Fig 77, p50). It offers up a surface of black luminescence. It provides the theoretical framework for the installation. The bear, the wolf, the crow and the hare accompany the grotesque and abject in the aesthetic of this project. Death, decay, distortion, anxiety and skeletal proportions inhabit the work (Fig. 78-79, p 52). Donald Kuspit says “Art in fact strips ugliness of the social and metaphysical overlay that obscurcs and sanitizes its insanity.” (186). Comprehending the beautiful is relative to a comprehension of ugliness. It is a duality.
Fig. 75: It’s the Truth, Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 76: Reflection 1, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 77: Reflection 2, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 78: Untitled (Skeletal pose 1) Annie McIver, 1993

Fig. 79: Untitled (Skeletal pose 2) Annie McIver, 1993
Decoration/Surface/Colour

Decoration  In the initial works there was some experimentation using surface decoration as a means of implying an internal state. The bear was placed beside a human, looking for some commonality in pose (fig80). The intention was that by juxtaposing the derelict woman, who has also lost freedom and control over her life, beside a captive bear, wearing a muzzle and collar, their individual distress would serve to inform each other. A crackle glaze was used on the woman to imply dilapidation and spiritual aridity in the figure.

Surface  The decision to make Hares coincided with the undertaking to simplify colour and form. The majority of the forms are simple with clean lines uncomplicated by a myriad of glazes. Keeping a stark white to juxtapose with black has been essential to the visual tension of this installation. The pieces are low fired to maintain that stark white, but also to avoid any initial cracks opening out in a high temperature firing. There was some experimentation with terrasigillata. It has been applied to some, but not all, the Hares. Abbott’s white clay has proved to be the most reliable to use when making terrasigillata from the clay body. Any unsuccessful terrasigillata surfaces have been colour matched and sprayed using Dulux acrylic paint.

There is an expectation for the resolution of problems to always be ceramic solutions. Being purist, ceramically speaking, is not a viable stance to take when dealing with larger sculptural works. When a great deal of time has been invested in constructing them it seems that if the work is worthy of repair, then the best solution should be sought to repair it, be it ceramic or an alternative adhesive.

Colour  The palette of this exploration has been limited to black and white, because it is integral to the themes of duality. (Fig81, p53) It imagines the dualities of absence and presence, light and dark, life and death. It serves to make the exhibition cohesive and unified. White is a challenging colour to work with, but given the research topic its vulnerable surface

Fig. 80: Untitled (Woman and Bear) Annie McIver, 2010
contributes to the aesthetic.

The works are fragile, they are unique, they are teetering on the brink emotionally. This is part of my aesthetic. They are never replicated by mould.

Black and white accentuate form. The snow white of the Hares contrasts sharply with the hard, reflective black and helps to make clear delineated reflections in the empty bed (Fig 81). The length of the bed was shortened. Then the bed and the bentwood chairs were sprayed with black lacquer to maintain their reflective characteristics, which are essential to the theoretical framework of the installation. Reflection and intersection of gaze are the lynchpins of this installation.

**Scale**

The size of figures was a deliberate attempt to develop large scale making and, certainly, it presented a new set of parameters in which to operate. Size had to be considered in terms of firing. The initial large human figures needed to be made in two pieces with a flange on one half to slot into the other half, in order to fit into the kiln. The ears of the Hares and some of the limbs were modular, and connected after firing to avoid sagging in the heat. Making larger than life-size Hares also meant that domestic furniture could be employed to accommodate them. Experimentation with scale of figure to chair revealed that a small Hare in a large throne-like chair could also be used to consider the role of responsibility placed on the young. In this body of work the form of the paws/hands, feet, head and the ears are accentuated (Fig 83-84, p54). During the construction of the Hares, it was increasingly possible to shape the ears and angle them quite flamboyantly as external antennae which, like Beckett’s “tympanum” and Wright’s “barometer”, gauge the internal state of the human condition. The hands, more often than not, were made to look tentative and vulnerable by lengthening them. The feet were scrunched up or crossed over with anxiety. The relationship of the position of the head to the body and the angle of the gaze up or down dictate to a large extent the mood of the piece.
Materiality

Clay Types and sample tests

Coiling requires a stiff clay which maintains its shape both vertically and horizontally. The best clay for the work is Feeneys Raku Red Terracotta. However, it is notoriously difficult to coat with slip or glaze that will adhere. The first task was to devise a white slip to apply at bisque stage which adhered well and retained its whiteness. Sample tiles were made and dipped in a variety of black and white slips and glazes at both green and bisque stages to ascertain which could be used (Fig. 85). The slip that proved most successful was Annie’s Slip which had been a concoction using ingredients from other slips to improve whiteness, adherence to clay body and hardness of the fired slip. Clear glazes appeared to work well on Feeneys Red Raku, and most of the black glazes that were tried, appeared to be successful. This led initially to creating mainly black figures.

The method of building used during this project was coiling, so the pieces are all hollow from the outset. Every piece is an empty vessel, or house, if you will. Initially nothing larger than a quarter size human figure had been built and the intention was to explore what the technical demands might be in building something bigger. The type of clay required enough strength to build figures initially to ½ size humans. Making large figures was a challenge, especially maintaining balance for standing figures. Bracing them internally helped to distribute the load and using metal stands with steel bracing improved the longevity. The larger pieces had to be built in two halves as the large kiln could not accommodate it as one. This required making templates and accurate flanges at midriff level in order that they fit together neatly (Fig. 86-87, p56). These have all been new challenges. Managing an even heat from the top to the bottom of the large kiln during a glaze firing of the black pieces has been problematic because the kilns are frontloading and lose heat. Works that emerge unevenly glazed have been spray painted with satin matte acrylic paint. The intention is to use what works.
White Clays. For the Hares, issues involved in using white clays were explored. Making larger pieces in white clay required finding a clay that was strong and would maintain its stark white. Various grades of white clay were tried.

1 Primo Production White Clay. Initially this clay body was used to which paper was added. This was to strengthen the body of clay enough to support the weight of larger pieces, but the paper clay turned cream very quickly if the kiln temperature went beyond 1060 degrees.

2 Feeney’s Stoneware White, which was reasonably stiff to build, but high temperature coloured the clay and it was difficult to find a regular supplier.

3 Walker’s JB1 Porcelain is very strong in its green state and builds well. There is still a colour issue at 1160 degrees and it was difficult to find a regular supplier.

It has been a project-long quest to maintain a snow white finish at bisque that can also be enhanced by applying a reliable terrasigillata to the raw clay. This gives a soft sheen that contrasts well with lacquer black. Abbott’s White Clay was found to be reliable in this project when making terrasigillata.

Repairs Any gravity-defying limbs or appendages are made modular, they are fired as separate pieces and connected afterwards. Any cracks arising at bisque are filled and finished as a further firing will open the existing crack. Large pieces are repaired if a considerable time has been invested in the making of the piece. Learning to use a variety of glues and fill pieces has been a very valuable and important part of this project.
Site/installation

The aim of the installation has been to encourage viewers to engage with the bed, where nothing became something and later something reverted back to being nothing. In researching the ways in which we express loss through the corporeality of the human condition, the struggle has been to hint at what physicalities in the figure might offer a fleeting glimpse of the “lost object”; a glance of recognition between two figures, the incline of two heads towards each other. Stance, gaze and reflection are important (Fig 89). Discourse and reading led to creating an installation that included found objects. Six dining chairs and an iron bed provided a theatrical locale for the installation and enabled a visual tension necessary around notions of loss (Fig. 88).

Fig. 88: Preliminary Installation Drawing, Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 89: Drawing of Gaze, Annie McIver, 2011
As a ceramicist moving away from the conventional use of plinths and “one off” ceramic works towards an installation with multiple elements and functions, was a huge move in terms of scale and approach to the nature of the work. All elements of the installation contribute to the intention. They require an equal visual consideration and a determination of their function. The bed functions as a theatre of absence and presence and as an agent of transformation. This is heightened by the audience of figures clustered around it. The chairs anthropomorphize the Hares.

The exhibition at Lopdell House was a trial iteration. To achieve reflections, focussed spotlights on the Hare’s faces were used. The Hares were placed in chairs close to the bed so that reflections were evident in the black mirror. The black reflective surface provided a sharp contrast to the matte surface of the white Hares (Fig 90). The bed was raised slightly off the ground to create a sense of the uncanny, a theatre of unease. Subsequently, this present site has been secured and work has been undertaken to reconfigure the works in a larger space and a more appropriate setting.

Reflections are still a primary focus and so I have considered de-constructing the bed, hanging the black mirror surface reasonably high and at an angle that will reflect, not only the works, but the figures of the viewers and their perceptions of loss (Fig 91). The bed ends may also remain, one being hung horizontally and another propped up against one of the figures to give the figure a sense of incarceration as it peers through the upright struts of the bed. This is all contingent upon the opportunities that the site invites once all the pieces are there.
Fig. 92: Lucky Lepirocide, John Morton, 2010

Fig. 93: Thinker on a rock, Barry Flanagan, 1997
Fig. 94: Husk, Beth Caverner Stichter, 2009

Fig. 95: Is it me? Beth Caverner Stichter, 2009
Final Exhibition:
The final exhibition was titled *Small Haemorrhages of the Self* and was held in St Michael's Church situated in the grounds of Corban Estate in Henderson. The site was chosen because, as an historic church, it was imbued with a sense of ritual – it had been built to deal with the various rites of passage during a human life including loss. It commanded respect and solemnity. Reflective clear perspex shapes were placed vertically on stands to reflect the ceramic works and also the viewers as they moved about. They separated groups of ceramic figures but also reminded one of the Corinthian quote “seeing through a glass darkly,” as a mortal hinting at transcendence and the search for the lost object. In this exhibition the central focus was a deconstructed bed and a black box both with highly reflective surfaces.

The bed was deconstructed and the chair upturned as an attempt to capture the moment of rupture thereby acting as a metaphor for death of the occupant, and a reflection of disunity within the self. The black box offered up a variety of visual cues. It could be a coffin, it could be the ferryman’s boat across the River Styx, it could be a void or it could be a toppled wardrobe. The bed and the box at the end of this project, have become crucial centrepieces of this installation and the ceramic figures have been players in an arena - small planets orbiting black suns of darkness and illumination.

Fig 96: Internal View of St Michael’s Church, March 12, 2012.

Fig 98: Black Box, Final Exhibition, March 14, 2012.

Fig 97: *Small Haemorrhages of the Self, March 14, 2012*

Fig 99: Detail of final exhibition, 14 March, 2012.
Fig 100: Final Exhibition, 14 March, 2012
Summary

Increasingly this project has, like a waterfall, slid over the edge of loss and teeters on the brink of the void. The bed has moved on from reflecting situations of loss to becoming an agent of transformation, where nothing became something and later something reverted back to being nothing. The palette, the form and the theme interweave. Process and thinking conjoin to achieve a focus and constraint within which to create the tension and anxiety around a situation of loss.

Traditional ceramic practice provides all the craftsmanship needed to work with the malleable, transformative, nature of clay. As a material it has a versatile surface which can mimic almost any texture. Figurative sculpture can be found amongst relics of the ancient world. Human figures were made for religious and fertility rituals as far back as 5500 BC, well before domestic vessels appeared. Clay is an ancient sculptural material that can still be used to express relevant, current conflict as it has done throughout human history.

This project continues to reflect on the human condition. Clay has been the primary medium chosen to convey a visual language driven by meaning. It has been chosen for its properties cited above. It is not necessarily the only medium. The material that best conveys the intrinsic visual cues within the object is the material that should be used. The use of an old, iron, hospital bed in this installation, is an example.

This body of work is contemporary. In terms of content, the subject of loss comes with all the addictions prevalent in the second millennium. Within modern, secular society, the media have brought anorexia, morbid obesity, self harm, child abuse, depression and suicide into sharp focus. The emotional health of people is challenging and confrontational because it harbours the presence of a dark side with which we identify. Fragmentation and entropy are of the self and of the spirit within modern culture.

What Kuspit calls “the new Old Masters”, people like Vincent Desiderio, Odd Nerdrum, Lucien Freud, and Paula Rego manage to bring together “...the spirituality and humanism of the Old Masters and the innovation and criticality of the modern masters... The new Old Masters show that unless the concept is embodied in the object – is brought to life and lives through its material – there is no art.” (Kuspit 182).
### Technical

#### Glazes and Slips:

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<tr>
<th>Lex's White slip on Bisque:</th>
<th>Helen’s White Slip on Bisque:</th>
<th>Molochite Slip: (50% less shrinkage)</th>
<th>Annie’s Slip on Bisque:</th>
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<td>China Clay</td>
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<td>Zirconium Silicate</td>
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<th>Black Satin Matte 1160</th>
<th>Brendan’s Satin Matte Black 1194</th>
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### Materials used for repairs:

- **Knead It** for internal surfaces and internal fills.
- **Norstik Epoxy Glue** as a central strong adhesive.
- **Selley’s No Nails** clear along any visual edges.
- Filler to get a smooth edge.
- Acrylic paint to make repair invisible.
- Sanding to reproduce the desired texture.
Fig. 101: Icarus, Annie McIver, 2011
List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: Skull and Void, White earthenware, metal chain and ring, 60x20x34 cm Annie McIver, 2010 8
Fig. 2: Weeping Boy, terracotta earthenware, wooden chair, black acrylic paint, 70x40x40cm, Annie McIver, 2010 10
Fig. 3: Derelict, white earthenware, brass base, glass dome, 35x18x18 cm, Annie McIver, 2010 11
Fig. 4: Esme, (clay drawing) white earthenware, strontium glaze, 10x7x7cm, Annie McIver, 2010 11
Fig. 6: Solitary Confinement Quarters, Seacliff Hospital, black and white photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 13
Fig. 5: Door to Solitary Confinement, Seacliff Hospital, black and white photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 13
Fig. 7: Steps, black and white photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 13
Fig. 8: Window, black and white photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 13
Fig. 9: Interior, Solitary Quarters, black and white photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 13
Fig. 10: Seacliff Hospital, copy of a black and white photograph, unknown photographer, 1930s. 14
Fig. 11: Ward looking out through Nurses Station, Seacliff Hospital, black and white photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 14
Fig. 12: Morgue Interior, Seacliff Hospital, black and white photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 14
Fig. 13: Old Dining Room, Seacliff Hospital, black and white photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 14
Fig. 14: Steps (ii) black and white photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 14
Fig. 15: Seacliff Morgue, black and white photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 14
Fig. 16: Abandoned House, McGill's Flour Mill, photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 15
Fig. 17: Detail of Abandoned House, Milton, photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 15
Fig. 18: McSkimmings, Hoffman Kiln, Benhar, photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 16
Fig. 19: McSkimmings Hoffman Kiln Benhar, photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 16
Fig. 20: Rusting Pipes, McGills Flour Mill, Milton, photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 16
Fig. 21: Boiler Room, McGills Flour Mill, Milton, black and white photograph, Annie McIver, 2010 17
Fig. 22: Old Machinery, McSkimmings, Benhar, black and white photograph, 2010 17
Fig. 23: Wolfman, earthenware, paint, 65x30x45cm, Annie McIver, 2010 18
Fig. 24: Untitled (Contorted Man) earthenware, black glaze, 48x45x50 cm, Annie McIver, 2010 18
Fig. 25: Lament for Icarus, study, Herbert Draper, 1898. 19
Fig. 26: Icarus Marquette, white earthenware, green state, 40x10x5cm, Annie McIver, 2011.

Fig. 27: Icarus Marquette, white earthenware, Annie McIver, 2010.

Fig. 28: Icarus, porcelain, plastic bags, 115x45x20 cm., 40x10x5cm, Annie McIver, 2011.

Fig. 29: Stain, white earthenware paperclay, wooden chair, black acrylic paint, 95x55x55 cm, Annie McIver, 2011.

Fig. 30: I eat therefore I am, I starve therefore I am, white stoneware, terrasigillata, 75x40x40cm, and porcelain, mirror, black acrylic paint, 55x30x35cm Annie McIver, 2011.

Fig. 31: Detail, I starve therefore I am, Annie McIver, 2011.

Fig. 32: I eat therefore I am, I starve therefore I am, (Verso) Annie McIver, 2011.

Fig. 33: Arch of Hysteria, polished bronze, 84x102x58 cm, Louise Bourgeois, 1993.

Fig. 34: Untitled, Beeswax, microcrystalline wax, metal stands, Kiki Smith, 1990 Posner, H,87. Kiki Smith,1990.

Fig. 35: Rain of Tears, Paloma Pavilion, Venice Biennale, Tibor Balogh, 2007.

Fig. 36: The proposed Absent Monument, Frankfurt, concrete and steel, OP Architectural Practice, Niels Lund Petersen, 2010.

Fig. 37: The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Detail.

Fig. 38: The Memorial of the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, concrete and steel, 1300square metres, Height variable to 4.8m, Peter Eisenmann, 2004.

Fig. 39: Judenplatz, Vienna, steel and concrete construction, 3.8x10x7metres, Rachel Whiteread, 2000.

Fig. 40: The Sick Rose, Songs of Experience, 39th plate, William Blake 1789.

Fig. 41: A Divine Image, Songs of Innocence, Song 55, William Blake 1791.

Fig. 42: Hollow Man, terracotta, 11x9x9 cm, Annie McIver, 2010.

Fig. 43: Hollow Men, terracotta, muslin, straw, 22x9x9cm, Annie McIver, 2010.

Fig. 44: Wire Figure Progression, chicken wire, muslin, porcelain slip, 60x50x50 cm, Annie McIver, 2010.

Fig. 45: (Untitled) Man Behind Glass, terracotta, glass, metal stand, acrylic black paint, 100x35x40 cm, Annie McIver, 2010.

Fig. 46: Life Cycle, found glass, metal and white paperclay, 60x10x10cm, Annie McIver, 2009.

Fig. 47: Ask me no Questions, porcelain, 65x40x45 cm, Annie McIver, 2011.

Fig. 48: Big Shoes to Fill, white earthenware, oak chair, black acrylic paint, Annie McIver.

Fig. 49: Detail, I starve therefore I am, porcelain, mirror, 50x30x35 cm, Annie McIver 2011.

Fig. 50: Dream, marquette, Marquette, white earthenware paperclay, black glaze, 15x50x50 cm Annie McIver, 2009.

Fig. 51: Untitled, (Wolf and sleeping figure) terracotta, white earthenware paperclay, black calf skin, epoxy glue, 57x100x100 cm, Annie McIver, 2010.
Fig. 52: Untitled Drawing, Pen and ink, Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 53: Untitled (Detail of sleeping woman) Annie McIver 2011

Fig. 54: What's to Be Done? porcelain, 50x85x50 cm Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 55: Untitled, (Wolf) terracotta, black enamel paint, epoxy glue. 57x30x75 cm Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 56: Untitled, (Crow reflections) terracotta, black acrylic paint, 30x10x30 cm, Annie McIver

Fig. 57: Lifecast, Dumont Durville, between 1837-1840, black and white photograph, Ahua: A Beautiful Hesitation, Two Rooms Galleries photograph, Fiona Pardington, 2010

Fig. 58: Lifecast, RHS, Dumont Durville, photograph,

Fig. 59: All Shall be well, hand blown glass vessel containing human breath of John Crew, 60x20x34 cm, T. R. Ericsson, 2007

Fig. 60: Femmes maison, oil and ink on linen, 91.5x35.5 cm each image, Louise Bourgeois, 1945-47

Fig. 61 House, cast concrete (destroyed), London East End, Rachel Whiteread, 1993

Fig. 62: Untitled (Yellow Bath), rubber and polystyrene, 80x207x115 cm, Rachel Whiteread, 1996

Fig. 63: African Bakongo Two Headed Dog, wood, nails. West African Tribal Art

Fig. 64: Ribcage, Terracotta, ink and thread, Kiki Smith 1987, Posner, H, 62.

Fig. 65: Peebody, wax sculpture with beads, Kiki Smith, 1992

Fig. 66: Untitled, (Bed), iron, black lacquer, Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 67: Untitled, (Bath and Ladder) photograph, Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 68: Untitled, (Bath and Ladder), porcelain, black glaze 20x40x15cm, Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 69: Untitled (Silvered glass water bottles) silvered glass water bottles, each bottle 52x29 cm diameter, Museum of Modern Art, Kiki Smith, 1987-89.

Fig. 70 :Flow, 28x8x8 inches, clay, staine, mixed media, Margaret Keelan, 2005

Fig. 71: The girl with the strawberries and the snake, clay, staine, 54x36cm. Margaret Keelan, 2008

Fig. 72: Stillbirth, acrylic black paint, 21x29.7cm, Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 73: Untitled (Stillbirth) white earthenware, terrasigillata, 60x60x60 cm Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 74: Untitled (Woman and Bear) detail, terracotta earthenware, crackle glaze, black matte glaze, metal stands. Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 75: It's the Truth, porcelain, 80x45x45 cm Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 76: Reflection 1, photograph of installation, size variable Annie McIver, 2011

Fig. 77: Reflection 2, photograph of installation, size variable, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 78: Untitled (Skeletal pose 1) charcoal drawing, 42x58 cm, Annie McIver, 1993
Fig. 79: Untitled (Skeletal pose 2) charcoal drawing, 42x58 cm, Annie McIver, 1993
Fig. 80: Untitled (Woman and Bear) terracotta earthenware, crackle glaze, black matte glaze, metal stands, 100x70x35 cm Annie McIver, 2010
Fig. 81: Reflection 3, photograph of installation, size variable, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 82: Figures on Plinths, installation photograph, earthen ware and white porcelain size variable Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 83: Hare 1 Drawing, pen and ink, 21x29 cm, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 84: Hare 2 Drawing, pen and ink, 21x29 cm, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 85: Clay Sample Tests, terracotta and slip/glaze, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 86: Top Half of Man, terracotta, black acrylic paint, upper chest, 35x35x25 cm, Annie McIver, 2010
Fig. 87: Lower Half of Man, terracotta, black acrylic paint, waist down, 65x35x25 cm Annie McIver, 2010.
Fig. 88: Preliminary Installation Drawing, pencil, 21x29 cm, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 89: Drawing of Gaze, pen and ink, 21x29 cm, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 90: Crow Reflection, installation photo, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 91: Crowd reflection, installation photo, Annie McIver, 2011
Fig. 92: Lucky Lepirocide, John Morton, 2010
Fig. 93: Thinker on a rock, bronze at National Sculpture Garden, Washington, Barry Flanagan, 1997
Fig. 94: Husk, stoneware, wooden box, 34x19x13 inches, Beth Caverner Stichter, 2009
Fig. 95: Is it me? Stoneware, 36x44x12 inches, Beth Caverner Stichter, 2009
Fig. 96: Internal View of St Michael’s Church, 12 March, 2012
Fig. 97: Small Haemorrhages of the Self, 14 March, 2012
Fig. 98: Black Box, Final Exhibition, 14 March, 2012.
Fig. 99: Detail of Final Exhibition, 14 March, 2012
Fig. 100: Final Exhibition, 14 March, 2012
Fig. 101: Icarus, porcelain, plastic bags, 115x45x20 cm, Annie McIver, 2011
Sources of Illustrations

Fig. 25 Herbert Draper, *The Lament for Icarus* pencil study, 1898. [www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork? Digital Image]


Fig. 37 Peter Eisenmann, (detail) *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, Berlin, concrete and steel, 1300 square metres, Height variable to 4.8m, 2004.

Fig. 38 Peter Eisenmann, *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, Berlin, concrete and steel, 1300 square metres, Height variable to 4.8m, 2004.


Fig. 40 William Blake *The Sick Rose*, Songs of Experience, 39th plate, 1789. Hand coloured print c1826. Held by Fitzwilliam museum, London [www.wikipedia.org]. Digital Image

Fig. 41 William Blake, *The Divine Image*, Songs of Innocence, Song 55, 1791. [www.ramhornd.blogspot.com]. Digital Image

Fig. 57 Fiona Pardington, *Life Cast*, Dumont Durville between 1837-1840, black and white photograph, Ahua: A Beautiful Hesitation, Two Rooms Galleries, 2010.

Fig. 58 Fiona Pardington, *Life Cast*, Dumont Durville between 1837-1840, black and white photograph, Ahua: A Beautiful Hesitation, Two Rooms Galleries, 2010.


Fig. 60 Louise Bourgeois, *Femmes Maison*, oil and ink on linen, 91.5x35.5 cm each image, 1945-47. *Louise Bourgeois*, New York: Flammarion, 1996. Print

Fig. 62 Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Yellow bath)* rubber and polystyrene, 80x207x115 cm., 1996. Rachel Whiteread, *Shedding Life*, Liverpool: Tate Gallery, 1996. Print

Fig. 63 Artist Unknown *African Bakango Two Headed Dog Fetish*, wood, nails. West African Tribal Art. [www.randafricanart.com/Bakongo_Nkondi_figure.html](http://www.randafricanart.com/Bakongo_Nkondi_figure.html). Digital Image


Fig. 69 Kiki Smith, *Untitled, Silvered Glass Water Bottles*, each bottle 52x29 cm diameter, Museum of Modern Art., 1987-89. [www.moma.org/collection](http://www.moma.org/collection). Digital Image

Fig. 70 Margaret Keelan, *Strawberry Snake*, clay, stain, 54x36 cm., 2006. [www.margaretkeelan.com/dollo8.html](http://www.margaretkeelan.com/dollo8.html). Digital Image

Fig. 71 Margaret Keelan, *Flow*, clay stains, mixed media, 28x8x8 inches, 2005 [www.margaretkeelan.com/dollo5.html](http://www.margaretkeelan.com/dollo5.html). Digital Image


Fig. 94 Beth Caverner Stichter, *Husk*, [www.followtheblackrabbit.com/Husk.htm](http://www.followtheblackrabbit.com/Husk.htm). Digital Image

Fig. 95 Beth Caverner Stichter, *Is it me?* [www.followtheblackrabbit.com/pinup.htm](http://www.followtheblackrabbit.com/pinup.htm). Digital Image
Works cited


