

the revery alone will do, if bees are few *

Emily Dickinson, *To make a prairie*

(di)

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RESHMA RUIA

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Cover image

Natalie Christensen, *Parking Lot*, 2017

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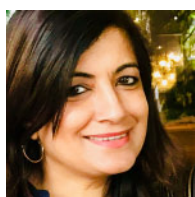
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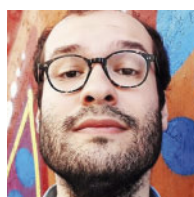
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The Day After



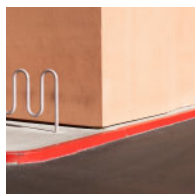
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Bologna



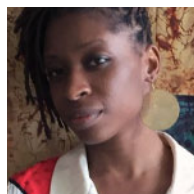
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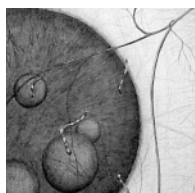
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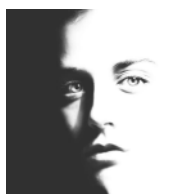
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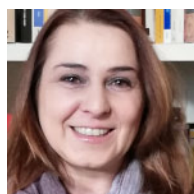
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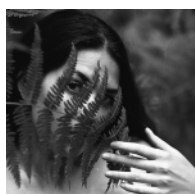
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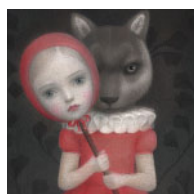
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The Day After

RESHMA RUIA

The caterers are gone. The teacups and plates rinsed and put away. Even the red wine spilled on the Turkish rug is blotted dry. The florist places the white lilies on the coffee table, wipes her hands on a tea towel and shuts the kitchen door behind her.

It is the family's turn to leave. The daughter is a mother hen, bending down to smooth his wispy flyaway hair. 'You will look after yourself Dad, won't you? Remember to take the warfarin with water,' she says. He sees the lines running down the side of her nose and her thin lips moving as she goes through the instructions. *I am the father of an old woman.* The thought hits him like a blow. His son shuffles up next, a limp sweaty handshake, then another, and then another, until he feels his arm being wrenched free from its socket. '*Leave me alone,*' he wants to shout, slamming the door on their faces. Instead, he pats their hands and says they do not have to worry. Mildred, their mum has left the house in tiptop shape.

He stands on the front step waving them off and goes back in. The house does not seem like his anymore. It feels bare-boned, stripped of flesh. He is cold and dark even after he walks through the rooms, switching on the lights, shutting the windows and swivelling the round plastic circle of the thermostat to max. Sitting on the edge of his armchair, he grabs the television remote. The screen jumps to life. It's Mildred's favourite channel. A group of women in bright frocks sit chatting on a sofa. It is all a babble of sound and colour. He puts the radio on. Jeremy Vine is going on about mortgages and PPIs.

The silence is an animal prowling through the rooms.

It is the day after.

Lifting his coat from the hook by the porch, he sets out. The first person he bumps into is Mark, the postman.

‘Ah, there you are, Mr. Jones,’ Mark says as his hand dives into his bag. He squints at the address before handing him three letters: one from the bank, another from Specsavers and the last, a circular for an Easter egg hunt at the St. John’s Unitarian Church.

‘I hear she went quickly. No suffering at all,’ Mark says as he gives the letters.

‘You have a kind face, Mark. The right type of face for a postman,’ Mr Jones replies.

Mark nods. He clears his throat. ‘Well thank you. Thank you Sir. She was a good lady.’

A slight cough and shuffling of feet and he continues. ‘She gave me a lovely bottle last Christmas.’

‘Yes, yes... Mildred was daft like that. Giving away my fine sherry. Say, do you want to pop in and I’ll put the kettle on?’ Mr Jones asks, moving the letters from one hand to the other. He gives them back to the Mark.

‘I’ll save these for later. So, what will you have English Breakfast or Darjeeling?’

The postman still has his round to finish. He mumbles something about fresh air and a dog and carries on, Mr Jones’s letters back in his bag.

Mr Jones continues to the newsagent. He wants a word with Mr Patel about cancelling a subscription. There is no need now for *Knitting and Crochet Made Simple*. Mildred never was a knitter, even though she liked to imagine herself as one. Sitting there by the window, her knitting needles going clackty clack evening after evening. And what came out at the end- a measly scarf, knit one purl two, the wool already unravelling by the time he’d wrapped it around his neck. The following week she had gone and ruined the scarf in the washing machine. Shouldn’t such things be hand washed anyway? But she persisted like a dog with a bone.

He shakes his head. There would be no more knitting no more.

There is Omar the rabbit. He can’t remember whether he has fed him before leaving the house. Mildred had the routine written in red felt on the kitchen calendar, ticking off each task with the precision of an engineer. Omar was another one of her impulse purchases. Driving to Morrison’s one Tuesday for their weekly shop, she swerved the car sharply to the right towards Ridgeway nursery that along with selling plants also ran OAP coffee mornings and boasted a pet shop on the side.

‘Are you trying to kill us? No indicator or horn, just turning like that,’

he screamed at her. 'And we don't need any more geraniums, thank you very much.'

'We need a pet not a plant,' she announced grandly, parking the car on a double yellow and marching inside. He had no choice but to follow her.

An hour later, they were pushing their shopping trolley through Morrison's, the rabbit or 'Omar' as she christened him, curled up inside one of the carrier bags. Couldn't she have been more conventional, called him Ollie or Pirate? Pirate would have suited the animal, what with that fuzzy black patch around his left eye.

'Oh, but he is so handsome. Just look at those eyes. They are pure Omar Sharif. He can't be any other name,' Mildred said when he challenged her. Her hands flew up to her cheeks and she squeezed her eyes shut, trying to drag out another name. People milled around them staring as they stood arguing in front of the chilled food cabinet.

'It will just have to be Omar,' she said, tucking the rabbit under her arm and striding towards the checkout.

That is how she was. Stubborn like a mule. It was the same with her illness. He knew she flushed the pills down the loo at night. 'They can't bloody help me, I'm too far gone,' she shouted when he waved the bottle in front of her. No sound of rattling pills. Just silence hitting the plastic. She became so good at giving up on herself.

'Mr Jones. Mr Jones, can I help you?' It is Patel the newsagent, who has come out from behind the till. He stands there stroking his arm as though he is some kind of cat.

Mr Jones brushes his hand away. 'I need to cancel the magazine. The knitting magazine for my wife.' His voice comes out, high pitched and shrill. He picks up a packet of jellybeans from the shelf and puts it down again. Spotting the magazine on the second shelf, he rummages around in his pocket for his wallet. He has left it at home. He blames Mildred. Always nosing around his stuff, turning his trousers inside out, fishing out the loose coins and unfolding his twenty-pound bills. She would lay them flat on the table and count them out slowly. 'That's three twenties, dear. Mind you don't blow them on some floozy.' There would be a chuckle and a wink.

Mr Jones shakes his head.

'I've come for the magazine but I've left my wallet at home.'

'Don't worry about it, Mr Jones,' Patel says. 'You can pay next time.' He presses the *Knitting and Crochet Made Simple* into his hand.

Patel has kind eyes too. The world is full of kind eyed men going about their business with a smile.

'You are a gentleman Patel. Won't you come home and have some tea with me?' Mr Jones hears himself say. That is a first. Inviting a stranger into his home. What would Mildred say?

Patel's mouth opens round like a circle and then folds into a u-shaped smile. He has strong white teeth. 'Thank you, Mr Jones. Thank you. Maybe another time.' His eyelids lowered, he tilts his chin towards the cash register. 'The shop needs me.'

Mr Jones is already shuffling towards the door, the magazine safely tucked inside his armpit. He stops outside the shop and steadies himself on the front step, holding the railing. His shoelaces are undone, but he can't be bothered to bend down and tie them.

'Mr Jones. Wait!'

Somebody is running after him. It is the little man Patel again, wringing his hands, eyes cloudy and shiny with tears.

'Is it about Mildred?' Mr Jones asks.

'I heard the news. So sorry for your loss. She was a true lady.' Mr Patel bows his head.

'It is what it is young man. With those kind eyes you can conquer the world.' Mr Jones comforts Patel, jabbing him on the shoulder with his index finger.

Out on the street he looks at the sky. It is turning out to be a fine day. He decides to go to a park and eat his sandwich. Mildred will go mad, but he does not give a damn. The sun is out and he refuses to spend the afternoon hunched over the kitchen table, spooning her defrosted potato leek soup into his mouth, the Archers blaring from the radio. The soup will be too watery and salty. God, she was a lousy cook. She had admitted as much on their wedding day.

'I promise to boil you an egg, every day of my life.' That was her wedding day promise. Her minty breath fanning his cheek as they stood hand in hand at the Bayswater Registry. And the Registrar, Smith or was it Anderson... he can't place the name, pale fellow with a big double chin had beamed while he grinned from ear to ear, weak with laughter and love.

'A boiled egg!' Mr Jones snorts at the memory. He remembers it all. The early days. They had gone to Blackpool for their honeymoon. She wanted Verona. 'To walk in the footsteps of Romeo and Juliet and eat gelato,' she had whispered with dreamy eyes. 'We'll go one day when

there's money,' he promised her, his voice gruff with disappointment. They spent the week huddled in love inside the bedsit. Sneaking out in the evening, avoiding the landlady's watchful eyes, he bought a portion of fish and chips and smuggled it in. They ate in bed, licking the salty grease off each other's fingers. Mildred's long dark hair speckled with golden breadcrumbs the next morning. Afterwards she had pouted and said, 'You never even showed me the Pier.'

Mr Jones smiles at the memory.

'Oy, get a move on. You can't just stand in the middle of the road.' A cyclist glowers at him from beneath his helmet, his yellow Lycra body quivering in rage.

The park is lovely this time of day, Mr Jones observes crossing into the park. He feels the tremor of spring in the trees. The tremble of branches breaking into bud. Nodding approval at the flowerbeds packed tight with chrysanthemum, he walks to a bench near the pond. It is occupied, but he does not mind. The girls sitting there shift closer to give him room. They are taking photos of each other on their mobiles, pouting lips, tongues sticking out, but all he sees are their round cheeks flushed pink in the cold air and the healthy shine of their hair that spills like a waterfall on their maroon school blazers.

'You have beautiful faces,' Mr Jones tells them. 'My daughter was like you.' He sighs and stares at the pond before continuing. 'Look at her now. Full of worry. Can't remember the last time she laughed.' He turns to the girl sitting nearest to him and tweaks her cheek.

'Don't ever lose the bloom.'

They get up and walk away. Except for one. The prettiest one. She stands over him, hands on her hip and spits out gum at his shoes. 'Sick old perv. Go die,' she hisses and snatches his magazine, rolls it into a tube and flings it into the pond.

He watches it arc through the air, hears the soft plop as it hits the water. Instead of yelling at them, he shakes his head. He will just have to buy Mildred another.

'Don't ever lose the bloom,' he murmurs, watching the girl as she runs off to join her friends.

Mildred was never the mothering kind. Anna and James they just grew by themselves. Like trees in a forest. Took themselves off to school and then university. It was her constitution. Always feeble. She caught cold just putting the wheelie bins out on a Tuesday. She blamed her Irish childhood.

‘Mam only fed us potatoes and bread,’ she used to say when they first began courting. ‘My insides just curled up and died. I am no good for the daily grind.’

He was not upset. He wanted her just the way she was. The day he first saw her, standing at the traffic lights in her tight green paisley skirt, hesitating to cross the road. He ran up to her, unfurling his umbrella to cover her.

‘Miss, Miss,’ he called out. ‘You don’t want to spoil that lovely hair in the rain.’

She had thrown him her special look, blue eyes twinkling behind the dark fringe of her lashes. He made up his mind. She was the one.

His stomach rumbles. He has forgotten to buy a sandwich. He looks around him. The park is almost empty and the lights have come on. He cannot see the schoolgirls. He wants to have a word with them about their manners, but they are nowhere. A breeze sets up and he starts to shiver.

It is time to go home.

He spots his house a mile off. All lit up like the Blackpool illuminations. The front door wide open. A huddle of people stand in the porch. He spots the rabbit scurrying down the driveway.

‘Omar, Omar come back.’ He whistles but it disappears under the garden hedge before he can catch it.

‘Dad, dad... where have you been?’ His daughter runs towards him. The postman and Mr Patel, the newsagent are right behind her, shaking their heads. ‘We were so worried about you,’ they say, taking hold of his elbow and guiding him gently, so gently into the house.

He stares at them. ‘Have you dropped in for tea?’

‘You need to sit down. Take it easy,’ his daughter says, seating him at the kitchen table and pushing a bowl of defrosted leek soup towards him.

‘It’s been a long day,’ Mr Jones murmurs, taking off his jacket. Outside, through the open window, he spots a scatter of stars in the sky and one is spiralling out of control, blinking brighter than the rest.

He gets up to take a closer look, craning his head out the window to have a better view. There she is. Sparkling like a diamond.

‘I’ll be alright, Mildred,’ he shouts out.



Reshma Ruia is the author of *Something Black in the Lentil Soup*. It was described in the Sunday Times as ‘a gem of straight-faced comedy.’ The manuscript of her second novel, *A Mouthful of Silence*, was shortlisted for the 2014 SI Leeds Literary Prize. Her short stories and poems have appeared in various International anthologies and magazines and commissioned for Radio 4.

She has a PhD and Masters with Distinction in Creative Writing from Manchester University and post graduate and undergraduate degrees from the London School of Economics. She is the co-founder of The Whole Kahani, a writers’ collective of British South Asian writers.

Born in India, but brought up in Italy, her narrative portrays the inherent preoccupations of those who possess multiple senses of belonging.

Bologna

GIORGIO GHIOTTI

Ora io ho per tetto il cielo
e per casa due o tre piazze
qui dove tutto era scritto
in visioni e ferocia,
dove abbandoni non sono stati
mai più che un viatico un segno
un passare di lingua sulle labbra.

7.11.2017

Bologna is an excerpt from a forthcoming poetry collection, *Alfabeto primitivo*.

.

Da qui non sembra possibile che sia
ancora di luglio la luce che ti insegue
e che ti insegna il lascito del sole:
non ferito da lingua umana o mano,
mai del tutto in salvo, mai lontano
da ogni falsa nuvola fabulare
separato dall'ombra che ti scruta
come bestia scolpita nel segreto
navigante in modulari temporali.
Bambino cavalleresco, eroe rodato,
nome che sei, nome che sei stato,
tenero dubbio al quale mi consolo
d'essere solo uno che ti ha

.

Eri tu il mio regno che scompare,
né lo trattengono ora i pensieri
e le parole ormai ridotte all'osso.
C'è da star vivi per una notte intera,
imparare la lingua della foresta,
c'è da tornare animali primitivi
essere poco meno dell'azzurro
slabbrato dall'abbaiare dei cani,
custode di ben altri, più lontani
regni a me da sempre interdetti.

Tu eri una fonte dalle acque chiare
io mi accostavo con la paura del caso
per non assistere al rovinare degli angeli
affogati nel tuo grande flusso.
Una leggenda ti portava sulle bocche
tra la gente che non sapeva di te
l'intima voce insondabile, colomba
volata tra le dita da un'infanzia
gentile senza tempo.

Se ricominciassi dagli occhi
sbalordirei nel trovarteli mutati
in un grigiazzurro di pozzanghera
lontani dalle trasparenze sospensioni
del tempo, incastro miracoloso
neanche so come fu che accadde
all'incrocio tra la mia solitudine
e il tuo troppo amore, eterne
proporzioni originarie. Dolorosi
ieri, nostre attitudini. Somiglianze
del caso, non c'è mistero nel sasso
che cade sopra un prato al mattino
qui dove le rocce aspirano
a diventare prato. Sbaglieresti
se pensassi d'avermi visto al
limite del campo baciare l'acqua,
le sue rotondità terrestri, la sfera
dove hai lasciato il cuore.

Quando avrò finito di seppellirti
non avrò più nulla da scrivere.
È ancora per te che di notte
mi alzo e traffico col buio
fino al metallo freddo della penna,
ho una pancia troppo gonfia
la mente così piena, un'invasione,
deve andarsene questo pensiero
che m'ingombra la stanza di radici
darmi la tregua di una ricreazione
posarsi sul tavolo in cucina
guardarmi che lo guardo e sbalordire
davanti ai tuoi occhi così strani
due pozzi in cui lanciai la monetina
poi dirò solo ciao, addio
mia cura primaria, mia ossessione
mio tanghero amore ragazzino.
Il cerchio si chiude solo nella luce
una tenda sbiadita, persiane chiuse al sole.
Segna il luogo dove una storia
finisce e si comincia a vivere.

Sei tu che mi insegui nel buio
e a ogni angolo lasci tracce
possibili, odore della tua carne
nel ricordo dolcissima.
Ma ora mostrami gli artigli,
non ingannare di parole
e sussurri uno che ti cerca
nella notte tra i perduti
che si gonfiano le vene
come un fiore, divora
il tempo chiudimi
in un ultimo agguato,
la prima volta che ho creduto
ai cieli ho visto il sole farsi
chiaro sul tuo viso, e tu
passavi come un sole
nei miei giorni, tu che
se existi l'alba al passato
si declina, tu che hai reso
desiderabile anche il buio
lo spazio un luogo abitato.

Io ti osservo da lontananze compiute
e non è bene per la mia solitudine.
Da che esiste il mondo s'inchinano
i pianeti al loro sole, il cielo ancora
lo riempie il buio di stelle, entità
astratte nella loro appartenenza
elementare a un misterioso farsi
di nulla, ma talmente belle se
tengono un pensiero, una paura.
Meraviglioso essere eterno, pura
sostanza universale, amore che
ti so ma non mi vedi, ci vorrebbe
del tempo per spiegare il male
che si accetta come un dono e
rinverdisce anche l'albero
maestoso, miracolo vegetale
– è in te che trovo il mio riposo.

Ti prego, caro, verso rovesciato
che ancora oggi parli degli assenti
che ombra o bosco tutti li comandi
gli elementi naturali e le ferite
che ci siamo dati per quel troppo
cresciuto in poca terra, vieni a dirci
che nel sogno ci aspettano altri baci
e notturni tragitti nelle camere
d'infanzia per quegli insegnamenti
elementari e illusioni che, direbbe
qualcuno, ci hanno spezzato il cuore:
ma tu, in tua sovraespota creazione
ricorda lo spettacolo del vento
dal mare, e altrove ostinato ricerca
un amore lungo come il sempre.



Giorgio Ghiotti was born in Rome in 1994. His first work was published in 2013 and it was a collection of short stories called *Dio giocava a pallone*. He then published a novel, *Rondini per formiche* (2016), two books of poetry, *Estinzione dell'uomo bambino* (2016) and *La città che ti abita* (2017), and two narrative essays, *Mesdemoiselles. Le nuove signore della scrittura* (2016) and *Via degli Angeli* (2016).

He collaborates with the publishing house Bompiani and many literary reviews.



The Deconstructed Self

NATALIE CHRISTENSEN

“

MY CAREER AS A PSYCHOTHERAPIST inspired this ongoing series that explores the Jungian approach of “Active Imagination” and dream analysis, techniques intended to bridge the gap between the conscious and unconscious mind. These psychological symbols are a conversation with myself about emotions connected to loss, shifting identities and reinvention of self.

”

























Natalie Christensen is a photographer based in Santa Fe, New Mexico and has shown work in the U.S. and internationally including London, Dusseldorf, New York, and Los Angeles. She was one of five invited photographers for the exhibition *The National 2018: Best of Contemporary Photography* at the Fort Wayne Museum of Art and has recently been named one of “Ten Photographers to Watch” by the Los Angeles Center of Digital Art. Her photographs are in the permanent collections of the Fort Wayne Museum of Art and the University of Texas at Tyler.

In addition to pursuing her interests in art and design, Natalie has worked as a psychotherapist for over 25 years and has been particularly influenced by the work of depth psychologist Carl Jung. This influence is evidenced in her photographs, as shadows and psychological metaphors are favored subjects.

Natalie is represented by Turner Carroll Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico and Susan Spiritus Gallery in Newport Beach, California.

Kookaburra Sweet

IRENOSEN OKOJIE

Several factors contributed to Kara's series of self collisions. Several pale, pin pricked airbags shrank between two victims each time; herself and herself. The airbags wouldn't have been necessary if she hadn't missed her original flight at Sydney Airport because her mobile died which meant no alarm to wake her up. If there hadn't been an issue settling her hostel bill since the front desk clerk claimed there was a problem with her Barclay card which meant pretending to enter one of the empty pool rooms to call Barclays but slipping into the toilets instead. Then out through the window without injuring her legs or alarming the few street kids passing on skateboards, chatting and smoking in clusters. She jumped out into parched Sydney streets that had become concrete enemies, exiting into the blazing heat, wonky, small silver suitcase in tow, wheels squeaking like a distorted instrument for the unlucky. A suitcase full of broken Sydney dreams folded mockingly between bright clothes, her black bar tending uniform. And she rushing through traffic to hail a cab, cast out from a bloodshot vision like a split thirteenth apostle sewn back together. By the time she reached the airport, made it to the check in area breathing heavily as though about to birth something tiny and unrecognisable through her mouth, an offering to the gaunt faced flight attendant in exchange for good news, it felt too late. The attendant sported a tight brunette bun that made her look severe. Her name badge read Christina. Calmly she said "I'm afraid you've missed your flight love. It left ten minutes ago; you'll have to book another one. You don't have any insurance, there's nothing else I can do." It was delivered unsympathetically, coldly. Kara got the impression she'd said this many times before in autopilot mode. She ran a hand through her shoulder length braids, felt her armpits producing sweat beads to water unfulfilled half formed women that grew on runways. Bodies swirled around her,

flashes of colour on a broad never ending canvass of travellers who would drink from the periphery while their fingers moulded plane engine noise into surprising shapes. The din of the airport rose in the afternoon heat. Her pretty face crumbled. Her heart sank. Her mouth went dry. This was the problem with being late often. It actually changed outcomes when it mattered.

She booked another flight to London which left her with only £100 for the rest of the month. Jesus Pontius Pilate Christ! She'd have to eat Rice Crispies for breakfast and lunch and scrambled eggs with sardines and hard dough bread for dinner for at least two weeks. Pontius ras clat Pilate. Kara wandered through the airport shops thinking of home in Forest Hill; the wooden floors, the high white ceilings and large windows. The stumpy cactus on her cracked kitchen window sill she'd bled on after cutting her finger accidentally while slicing plantain. She was convinced it was dead, that her bulbs of blood only temporarily sated it. She had a way of killing things unwittingly. She pictured the shrivelled cactus, its thirsty soil, the desires she'd hoped would come to fruition in Sydney wearing dead, prickly cactus skin, sitting still on plane seats to be flown to various destinations. She thought of women who didn't know what to do with the sea inside them. Who didn't know how to let it line their paths or flush out neon signs forming in the blood to misdirect them in gloriously foreign countries.

After wandering around for about an hour, she settled into the seating area opposite an Espresso coffee house. She looked up at the screen for an update on her flight. The man to her right watched her curiously. He was Aborigine, dressed in blue jeans, a warm coloured Aztec style shirt and a black cowboy hat. His long hair curled past his shoulders. He held a dark brown leather bag. He smiled warmly at her. His broad features stretched. It was a beautiful, welcoming smile. He offered her his hand, shook hers enthusiastically. "You look like you could do with some good fortune eh? I'm Kizzy."

She adjusted in her seat, pulling her shoulders up so she didn't slouch. "Kara. Probably not the best company right now, spent more money today than I have in the last month." She grumbled.

He chuckled, in a way that was infectious not rude. Not as if he was laughing at her misfortune.

"A good distraction is to talk to a stranger and eat sweets." His eyes

were alert, persuasive, the gold in them darkening intermittently.

“That’s your solution to my problems?” She retorted, unconvinced, stretching long restless legs out.

“Well its one solution eh missy?” His lips curled. He opened his leather bag.

Sure enough, it was choc full of sweets, bright red packets of Liquorice begging to be ripped open. The brand name was Kookaburra. Kookaburra Liquorice.

“Help yourself.” He instructed. An announcement for an abandoned dog was made on the tannoy. He opened a packet, popped a short stick of liquorice in his mouth, chewing slowly, savouring the taste.

Kara grabbed a handful she’d save for later, stuffing them into her rucksack like a magician stowing tricks she’d use in time.

Kizzy smelled like spicy incense. His dark, velvety brown skin glowed. Kara imagined the pulse in his neck had a silvery wing flickering beside it, as if it too had attempted a flight journey which went wrong. A leather watch in his pocket matched his bag, showing the incorrect time of 11am. He began to hum then. A quiet rumbling that got into her bones slowly, a drug transported through song. She didn’t think to ask how he’d known she’d suffered a misfortune because the air was charged with something indefinable, molten, till she heard the wing beside his pulse changing direction.

“What does the song mean?” she asked, resisting the urge to reach out to touch whatever had been released in the space between them.

He took his hat off, turning it slowly to a distant rhythm. “Maybe it’s about becoming what we consume, a song for a woman in translation.”

Back in London, Kara emerged from Forest Hill overground station dishevelled, starving. Plane food had been paltry, inadequate. She remembered the strips of liquorice in her rucksack, followed by Kizzy’s potent smile, the confession that he was of no fixed abode, that he liked to fly god’s class rather than first, he’d quipped drinking juice from Banksia plants instead of alcohol that tasted like kangaroo piss. Her stomach rumbled, punctuating her pattern of thoughts. It was Saturday, the start of Open House week when people in Forest Hill received strangers into their homes to share artwork, conversation, music. Anything. The streets hummed with activity. In the station forecourt, she passed tables of free edible plants. Hordes of people gathered around them were resistant to an orderly queue, grabbing plants like Okra, Winter

Luxury Pumpkin, Dill, Rosemary. Some children left their parents' sides, rushing to the ticket machines, pressing their hands against the screens as if gathering evidence of the day's journeys so far. They ran to the bikes under the shelter, leaning against each other in a false sense of stability. They circled the brightly painted piano, thrashing the keys in barely contained musical chaos before threading their way through the rest of the forecourt. Kara reached inside her rucksack with tired hands, grabbing a packet of liquorice. She ripped it open, bit into one, momentarily closing her eyes in delight as the sweet bitter taste flooded her tongue. On the Dartmouth Road where her flat was situated, she passed a mural of a giant white haired woman in the clouds, surrounded by a fleet of red birds. The strip of liquorice melted into her blood. She popped another one in her mouth. They were so moreish, she finished the packet right there on the street. In her suitcase, the bar outfit spilled a small electric horizon from the black shirt collar into a zip, an insect dead from shock in the right light.

At the flat, she fell asleep in the bedroom. When she woke up, her body felt supple, soft, bendy, unfamiliar. She spotted a dark stain on the blue bed sheet. She looked at it with suspicion, rubbed the spot. Her fingers were black, liquorice coloured, stretchy. Her heart rate tripled. She leapt off the bed somewhat unsteadily. Rushed to the mauve coloured bathroom, skin care products lined the edges of the tub, crowded the sink. She accidentally knocked over a bottle of Palmers Cocoa Butter Crème in her haste. Her toothbrush went flying. She switched on the light. The 60 watt bulb stuttered in anticipation as she rushed to the mirror, light flickering sporadically as though arguing with itself. Chest heaving, she stared at her reflection, her breath pale magician's smoke. Sure enough she was not herself. Or, she was herself but something different. Something skewed and accidental, something tainted with the margin particles of an incense smelling man who could mimic the curves of a sidewinder. Her bathroom had become a circus balancing on two hinges, rocking unsteadily in the ether. She took tentative steps closer to the mirror. Sure enough she had transformed into liquorice; a black, sweet liquorice woman, a liquorice sweet black woman; bendy, stretchy, adaptable in harsh conditions, resplendent and irrepressible. Reconfigured heart oozing liquid midnight, necessary external jaggedness flung out like day traps, moist turning tongue set anti-clockwise to catch soft light, soft memory, soft landing. She turned

the taps on for the sound of the sea to fill the sink and tub. All that came through was bursting, rushing water. She placed her hand under the cold tap, the weight of water bending her fingers slightly. She used her right hand to adjust them back, then raised both hands to water her head with night dew. She turned the cold tap off. The blast of hot water meant the pipes started whistling. Slowly, then speedily, panicked by the possibilities of changes tumbling through their lengthy, corroded bodies. She pressed her fingers into her head, feeling her way around for a crack. Steam misted the mirror. She didn't want to melt. Melting meant not existing. She turned the hot water tap off, waiting for the whistling to stop. She started screaming.

The fading sounds of the chugging pipes mutated into an alarm ringing in her head. Anxiety spread from the very heart of her, a burning sensation in her new body. Sydney had been a disaster. She was broken by it. Almost. She stepped back away from the mirror, trying to weigh the ache within, the losses she'd left on Sydney harbour turning to twisted currencies glowing in the dark, the octopus shaped critter that had tried to gain entry into her suitcase to find a corner to possess. She pressed her mouth against that corner to breathe, to steady herself; loss of confidence, loss of income, loss of heart, loss of lover. The ache inside her grew into a kite shaped slipstream spotted with silver. She started to cry, heaving sobs threatening to become accomplices in the cramped bathroom. She needed to fill the ache, to do something. It was open house week after all. She grabbed a black bin bag from the top of the cabinet.

Around 1am she wandered the streets, bin bag in tow. Squishy sounds of her new limbs kept her company. She walked to the sprawling Horniman Museum gardens, found nothing to catch except the reflection of her old self in the café's glass doors and windows. That Kara had gone to Australia chasing a story; a dreadlocked molasses hued man who believed his lost mother appeared to him during volcano eruptions, who took tender photographs that captured her silhouette exiting those eruptions. Kara had wanted to write his story but the man gave her heart to a volcano for his mother to eat. On the steep London Road, she entered the white houses through windows left open. She gathered from the inhabitants things most people would never take during open house; the post office clerk's fear of failure, the sweet shop assistant's

paranoia he'd die before doing half the items on his bucket list, the glint from the blade the kebab shop owner used to carve scenes for three stillborn babies trapped in a revolving winter, the deli owner's conversations to the gremlin he'd transplanted into his chest, that kept trying to break ceilings with a long, slimy tentacle. She wandered through houses while people slept, humming the tune Kizzy sang at the airport, leaving a trail of deep, warm sweetness, stuffing her bag until it was fit to burst. When she arrived back home, the bin liner split on her bed, on the crumpled tulip patterned duvet. The things she'd caught had charred wings and were flapping towards possible exits frenetically. White airbags sprung from the corners of her bed, shrieking incessantly before the air left them twisted into mean, sunken expressions. And the sharp pain exploding in Kara's chest before liquefying was unbearable.

After discovering that a last self collision resulted in change you couldn't foresee, Kara limped out onto the Dartmouth road the next morning, having caught her left foot in a trap she'd flung from herself. She clutched her plane ticket to Sydney, a sacrificial woman in the heat hollering Kizzy's song about becoming what you eat. It was bright out. The day was alcoholic. As she sang, her body began to separate. Her head went first, tossed into the blind spot of a sputtering drunk holding a Guinness can like a lover. Her head shrank rapidly. Her legs came off, tumbling backwards into an argument between the off license owner and a woman holding a leash without a dog she claimed she'd lost at Heathrow airport. Kara's golden eyes uprooted into the traffic, speedily rolling between lanes, between tires, frantically blinking away images of a life that were discarded receipts for gutted angels with streaks of black tears on their faces, reduced to husks on the bent skyline. Her arms were dark boomerangs confused by an unplanned separation, the dizziness of slow traffic in the sky, attempting to embrace satellite dishes, antennas, and items that found their way to rooftops while the road swelled with resignation of a split, of a break somewhere that saw small creatures from accidents with Kara's last heartbeats mutating in their chests as they scurried onto the pavements on either side, leaving patches of unleaded fuel and kaleidoscopic red in their attempts to talk. Residents from cafes and the boutique, village like stores and eateries including The Hill Lounge and Kitchen and Bird In Hand spilled out onto the street watching. Two assistants from Sugar Mountain sweet shop abandoned its light, tantalising atmosphere of deep booths, board games

and seductive retro sweets in large jars. They rushed out carrying a jar each to catch bits of Kara's body. People from Forest Hill Pools filed out barefoot onto the pavement still in their costumes, dripping translucent daydreams doubling as swimming strokes beneath the sun. The locals were chess pieces held still by a human combustion on a glimmering day. Kara's thighs spun. One slid down a lamppost, leaving a dark, honey like trail before becoming stuck at the bottom. The other slid across the window display of Il Mirto's Italian deli and Ice Cream store. Her head now reduced to pulp was being lapped up by the drunk on all fours in abandon. His tongue darting greedily, the Guinness can forgotten, squashed under his knee, pennies spilling from his pocket like a marauding coppery fountain. Kara's mouth was sylph like, chased by an aboriginal cowboy's hat into the distance before it melted onto the rim in the shape of an atom bursting, an accidental decoration. Her scattered teeth were white jewels for the afternoon. A stuntman man in a diving costume caught her vagina, sucking on it like the nectar of a goddess. Her hands were clasped together, prayer like while bits of clouds morphed into the shapes of temporary pale clothing for the inhabitants of Forest Hill to wear as the uniform of witnesses. After their naïve prayer, her hands eventually melted on the wheel of a dented blue Ford Cortina that would run out of fuel later. And all that was left was the morning to come. All that was left was her torso on the edge; black, gleaming, edible, sweet. Liquorice sweet. Full of warped, rhapsodic song in the traffic.



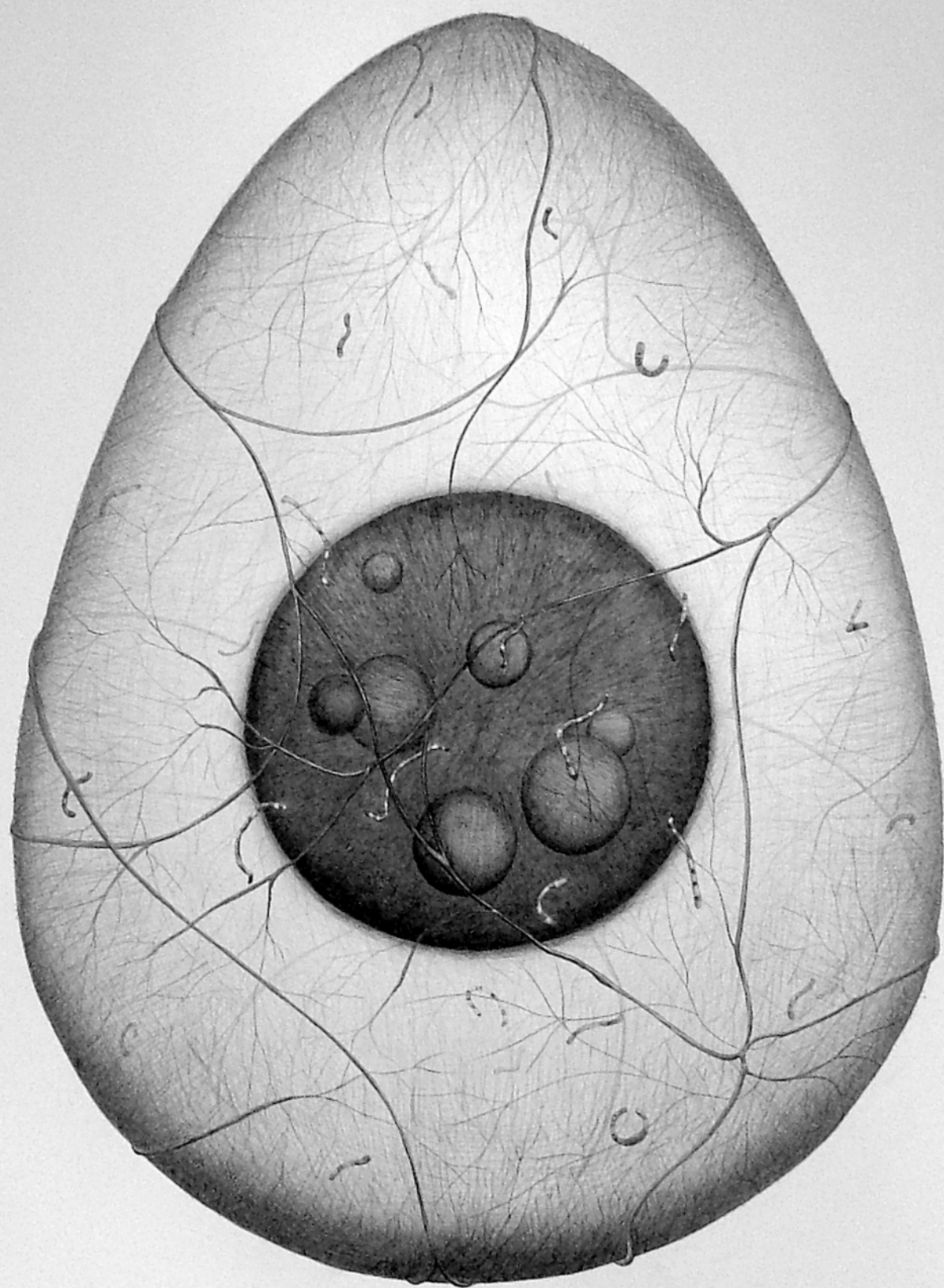
Irenosen Okojie was born in Nigeria and moved to England aged eight. She is a writer and arts project manager. She studied Communications and Visual Culture at London Metropolitan University.

Her work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Observer*, *The Guardian*, the BBC and the Huffington Post amongst other publications. Her short stories have been published internationally.

She was presented at the London Short Story Festival by Ben Okri as a dynamic writing talent to watch and was featured in the *Evening Standard Magazine* as one of London's exciting new authors.

Her debut novel, *Butterfly Fish*, published by Jacaranda Books won a Betty Trask Award and was shortlisted for the Edinburgh First Book Award. Her short story collection, *Speak Gigantular* was shortlisted for the Edgehill Short Story Prize, the Jhalak Prize, the Saboteur Awards and nominated for a Shirley Jackson Award. It was selected by film director Carol Morley as an *Observer Summer Read*. Irenosen has been a judge for The Society of Authors, The London Short Story Prize, The Royal Society Of Literature and Henley Literary Festival. She lives in east London. She was recently made a fellow of The Royal Society Of Literature as part of their 40 Under 40 initiative.

Her next two books, *Nudibranch* and *Curandera* have been signed by Little Brown's Dialogue Books.



The Anatomic Garden

EVA GERD

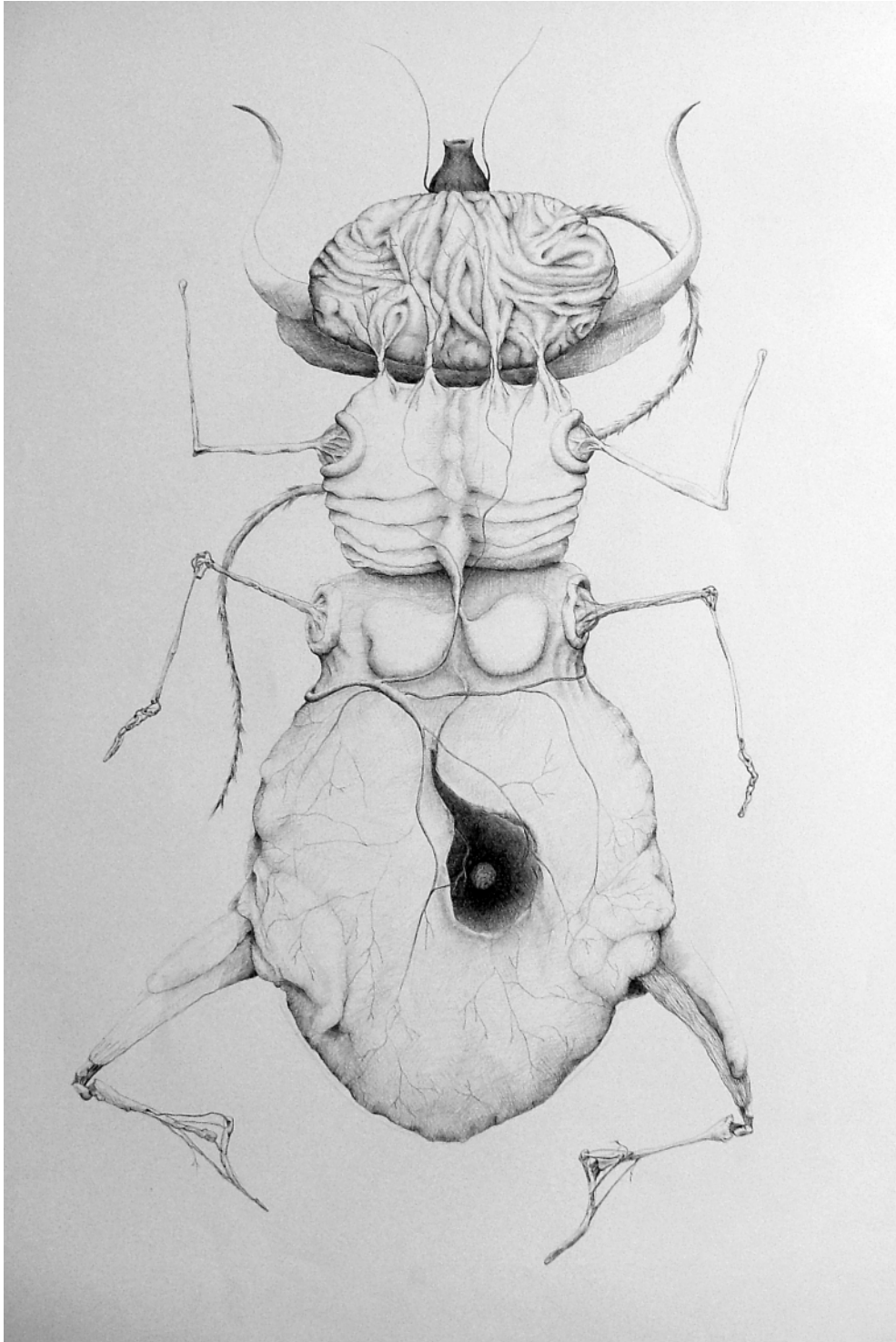
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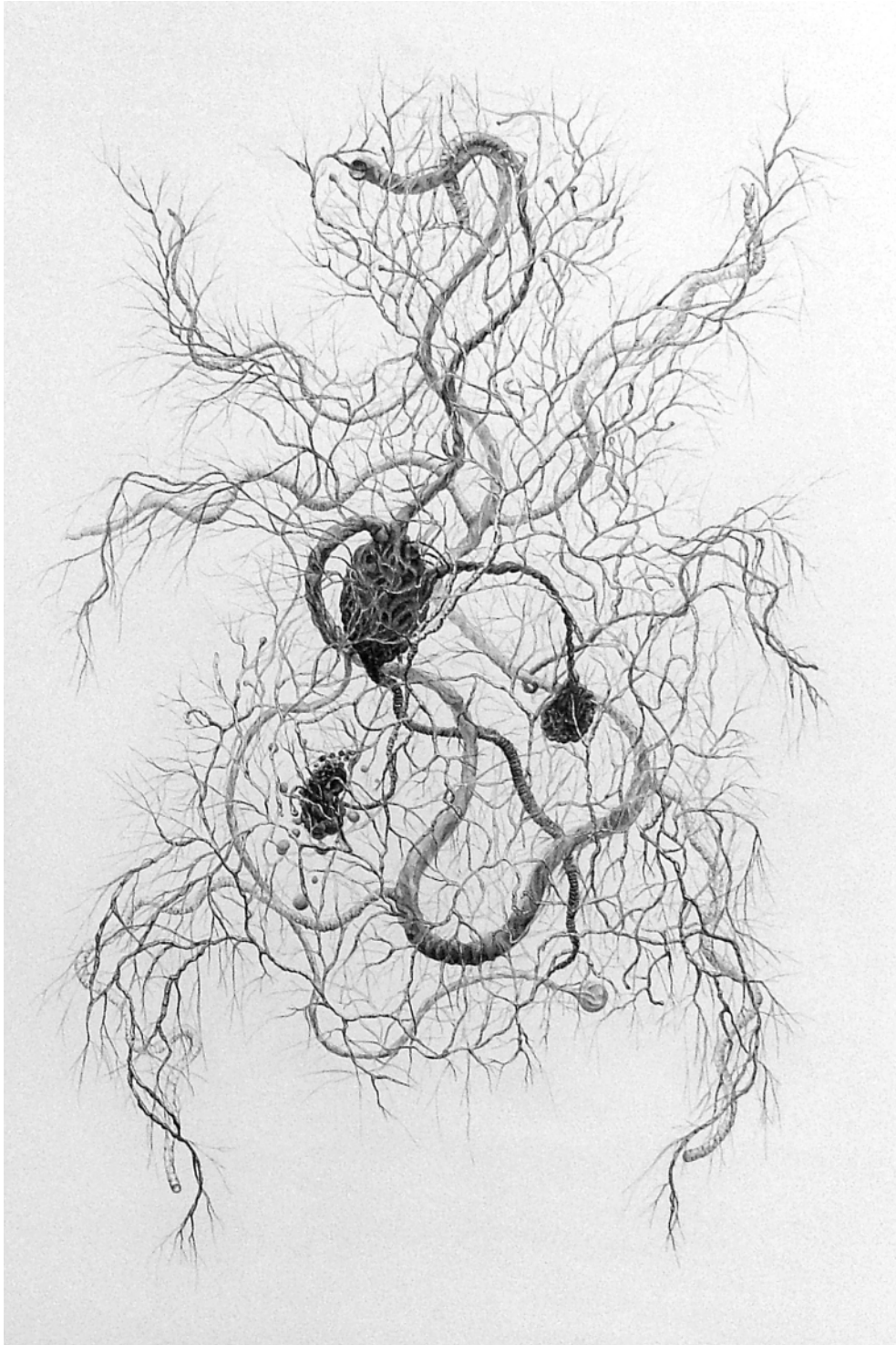
I COMBINE MY PASSION for drawing with my interest in the anatomy of the human body, of plants and animals. My works are born out of my observing of the natural world; they refer to this organic world in continual transformation.

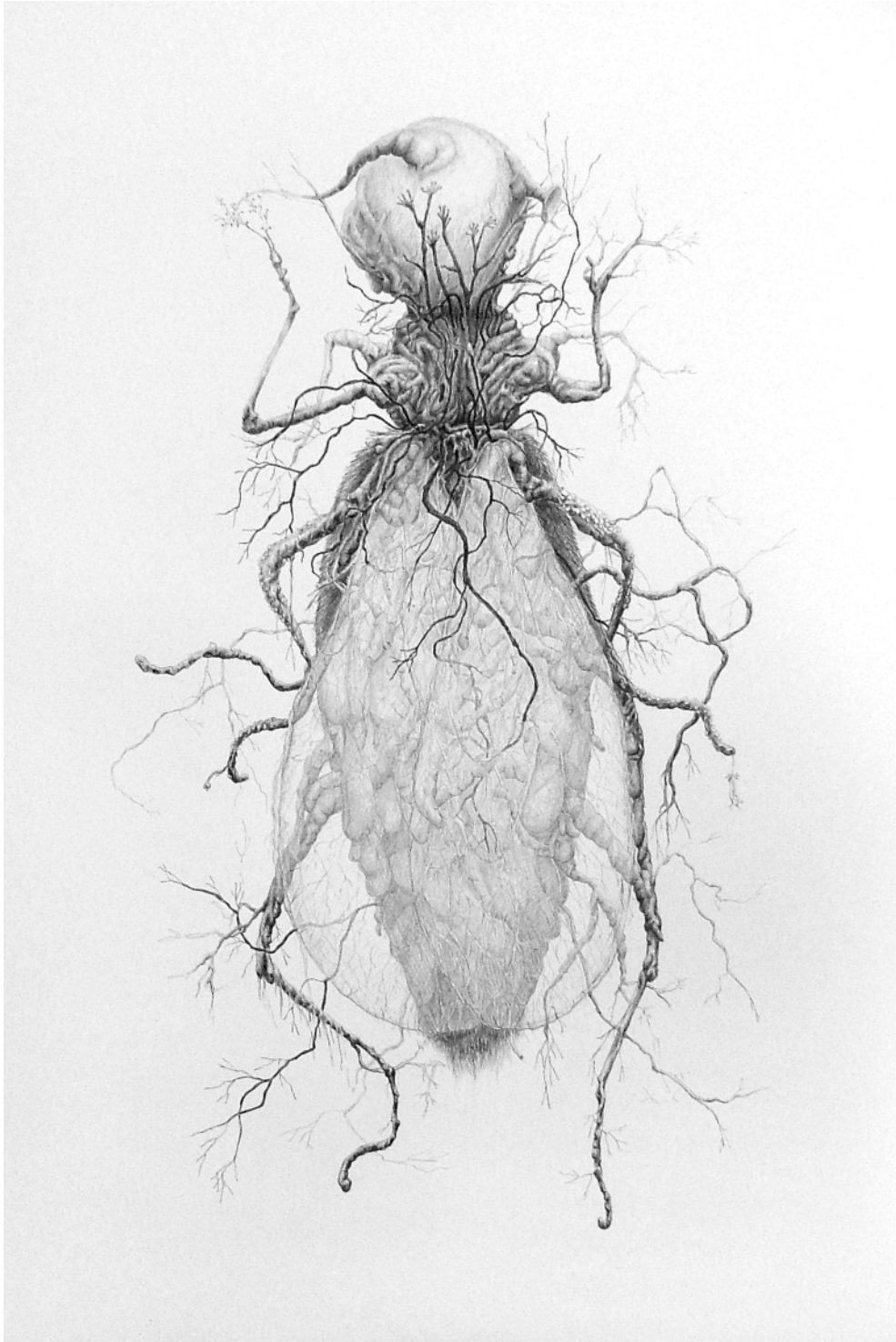
To some of my drawings of hybrids I gave the title *The Anatomic Garden*. They are individual works but I find that the serial numbering is important since I feel like a researcher collecting and cataloging materials which I then study in my imaginative place, my Anatomic Garden, imagined and created by me.

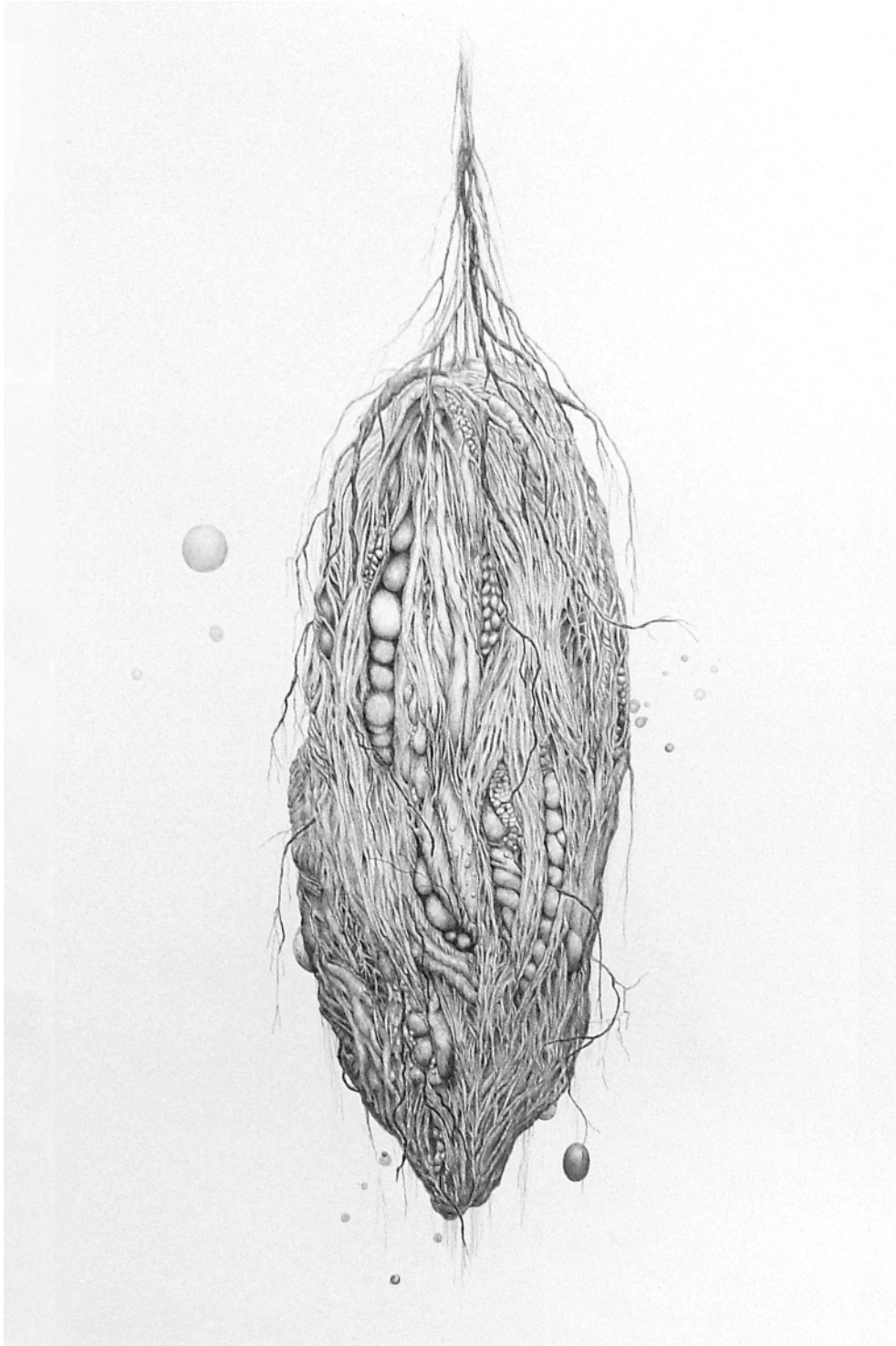
When I am beginning a drawing I have only a vague idea of what will eventually emerge. I use a thin pencil. With its tiny lines I can enter the little growing world of the drawing. Occasionally of course I will move back from it a little in order to get a wider vision. Then I come back to it once more in order to arrive intuitively at where it brings me.

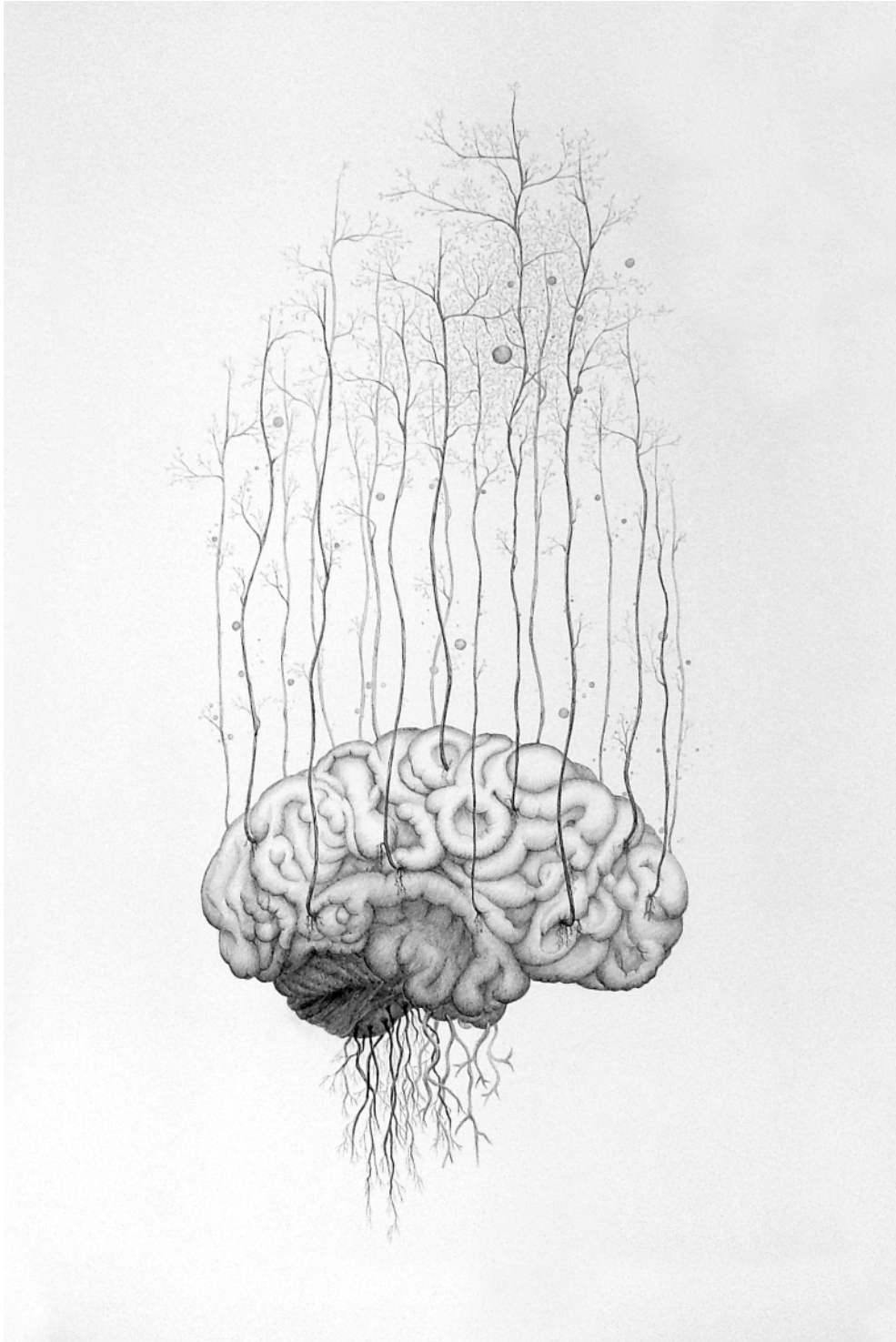
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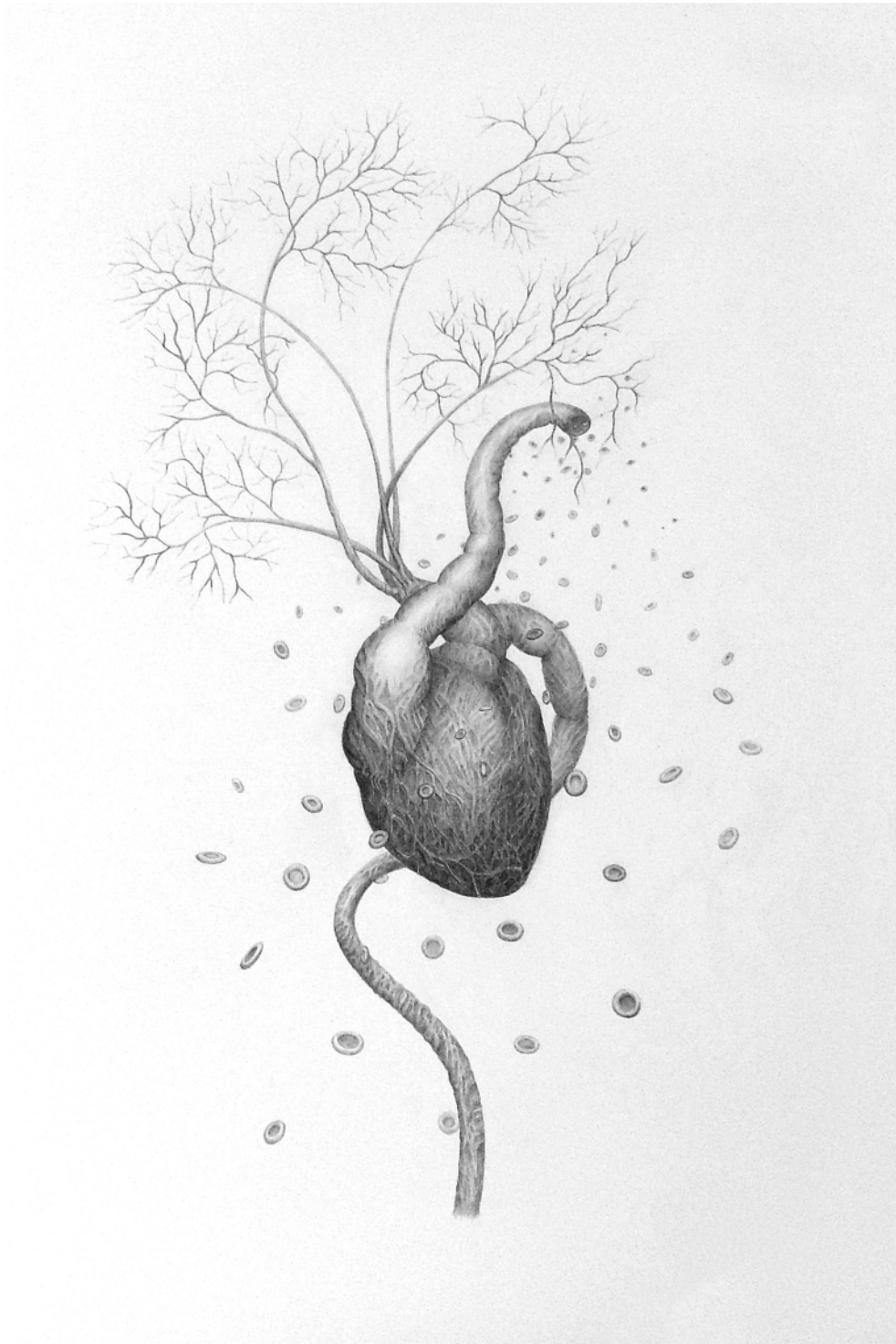


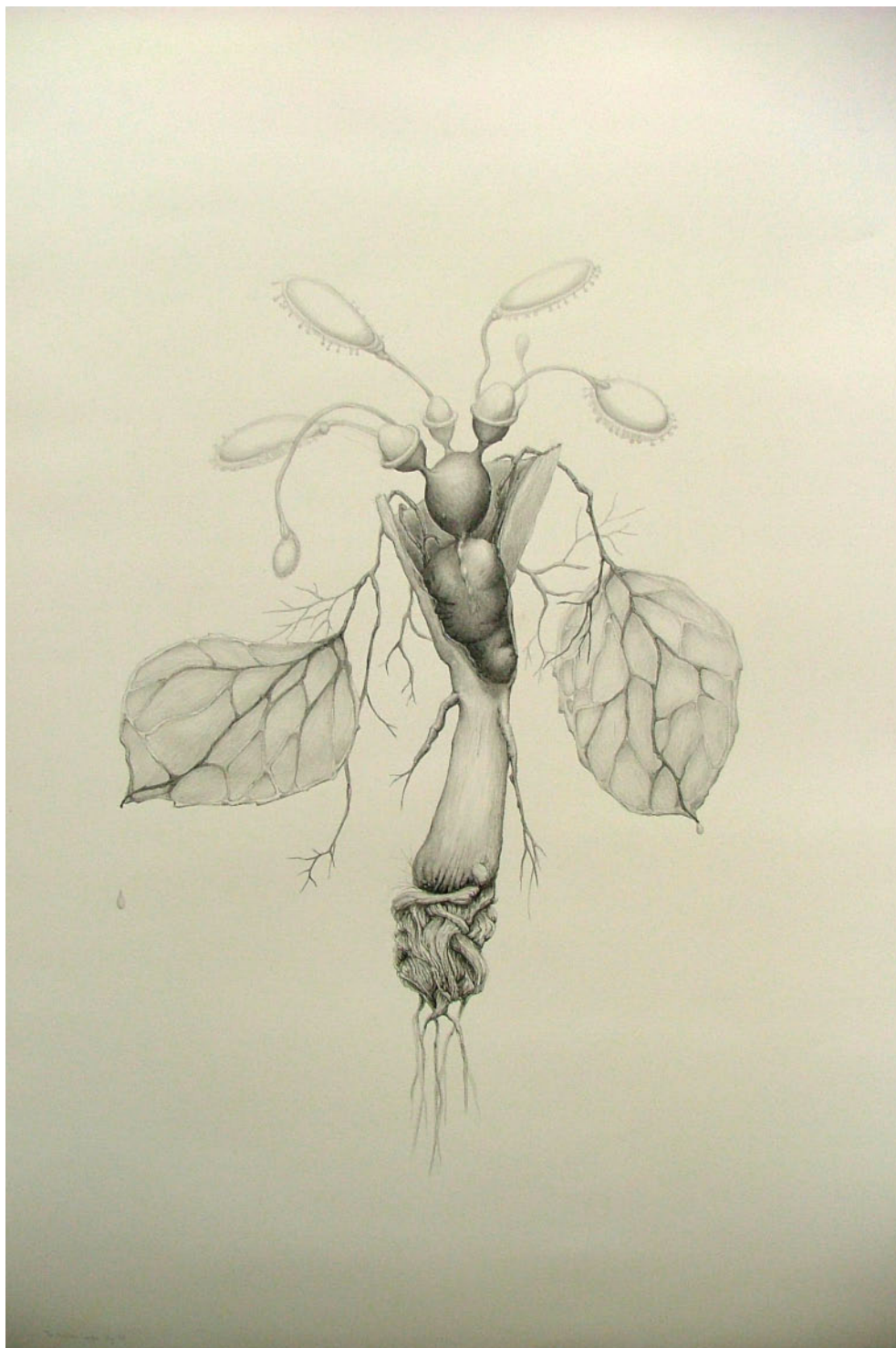


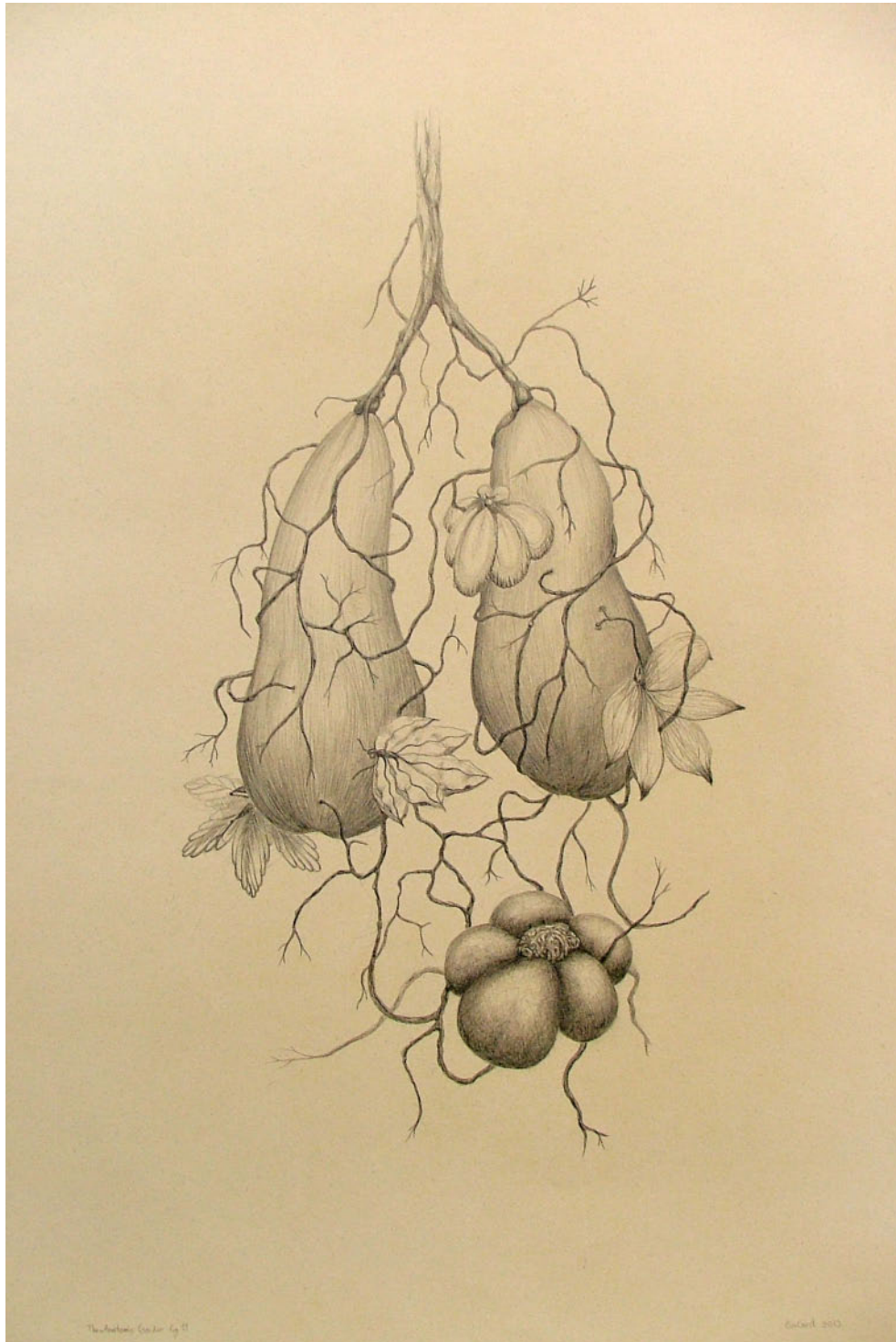






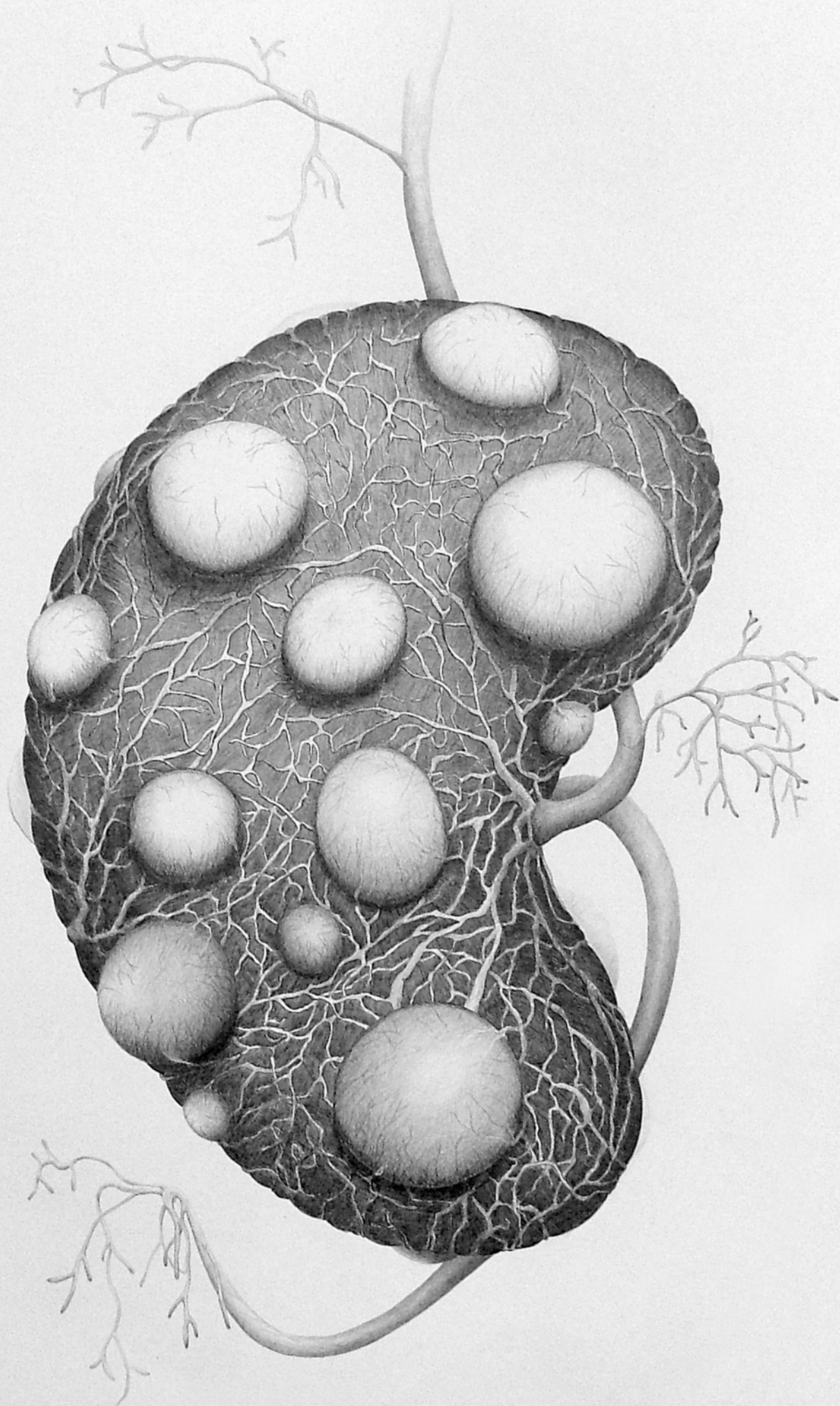






The Anatomic Garden 17

Engraved 1810.





Eva Gerd was born in Denmark. Between 1983 and 1986, she attended courses in drawing at the Glyptothek in Copenhagen, and from 1986 to 1993 she studied at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. In 1994, 2006 and 2007 she obtained scholarships from the Danish Academy in Rome.

She has lived in Rome, Catania and Mexico City. By staying more and more distant from her origins she has got closer to something in herself that she finds essential for expressing herself truly through her art.

Since 2012 she lives in Viterbo, Italy. In Tuscia she has found balance in the contact and the observation of the continuous change of nature. Her artistic research is expressed in drawings, elaborations of found objects and performance. The pencil drawing is the basis of her art and the drawings of plants, insects, and organs or often hybrids of them are collected from real or imaginary gardens and woods.

The idea of fragility as a force is central to her practice also in the realization of the works, using materials, in addition to the found objects, such as fabrics and threads, pencils and paper in a slow, silent, meditative manual process.

Moonlighter

GISELLE LEEB

It is midnight crisp. He sits in a deckchair near the gates in the keeper's blue uniform and hat and smokes a leftover cigarette. Relaxing by the gilded bars, which he can walk through at any time if he chooses to, makes up for the tedium of his day job and the keeper is grateful for some time off.

He knows he will not go beyond the gates, and so does the keeper, and because of this he is free to watch the blue smoke swirling up and over the old elephant cages.

These days there is more space: the elephants left years before he arrived. He imagines them returning to Africa, strolling back into the long grass. Yes, these days they assign ample room per animal, using a complex equation to measure size and space versus activity.

The keeper had explained it all to him one night when they swapped the watch. They'd sat for a while side by side, blowing smoke rings. The ape had done a visitor-ape impression and they'd laughed together while he mimed running up and at the bars and away again, pulling faces at the cheering crowds.

'A job's a job,' said the keeper.

He is unable to tell the keeper that he has occasional nightmares about the elephants being chopped up at the knacker's, like the horses he saw in the keeper's newspaper, but he's sure that this wouldn't happen, not these days; the keeper has told him more than once that the elephants went home.

During the daytime performances, he gives a conspiratorial wink as the keeper walks by the cage - a subtle wink, the night watch is their secret — and he immediately feels better, thinking of the evening to come.

He bases his performances on close observation; so far, he's learnt that the English especially love the funny faces, the Americans like

everything, and he has to pull out all the stops to amuse the Russians. The day after a nightmare, he cannot help modelling his expression on weeping children, with tragic accompanying gestures. Afterwards, he is bitterly ashamed and sorry for failing so abysmally at his job.

He is proud of the fact that, when he'd first arrived, the keeper chose him from the whole troop of new apes. What was even more satisfying was that he'd been the wildest one, shoving at the bars of the cage.

'You've really come on,' the keeper often says.

Retrospectively, he guesses that the keeper is experienced with rebels. One night, very late, the keeper had let him out of the cage and led him to the gates. Then he'd opened them. The ape had stared at him, wide-eyed.

'I've arranged for you to visit across the road,' said the keeper.

It was a hot night, rare in England, with a full moon; warm air soothed his fur and it almost felt like home. The bars on the gates gleamed gold, reflecting light from the petrol station shop across the road.

He'd looked at the keeper for reassurance and the keeper had pointed through the gates.

The ape felt a deep dread, like being on the edges of the troop after dark, as he crept over the pungent tarmac into the soft blue night.

'Keep going,' shouted the keeper behind him and for a moment he hadn't seemed like a friend; he had seemed like the leopard from the big cat cages and the ape had to fight the urge to run.

'Look out for cars,' the keeper had warned him before the crossing and the ape had nodded.

The ape knew about cars; after they'd docked at the harbor, they were transported to the zoo in the back of a truck. Even then, despite the overwhelming smell of fear, he was learning. He'd peeked through the little square of window in his crate and observed the flashing white lines and the vehicles passing at incomprehensible speeds.

He'd trembled and shivered crossing the road to the shop, the stalking shadows forcing him down onto all fours, but he'd known that he must get over.

Illuminating the oil-soaked forecourt, the light from the shop glowed underwater-green, intersected with a violet stripe, and as he'd crept forward the green had fused with the lushness of the grass after the first summer rains. The roar of a car on the road behind him startled him awake and it was a relief to dart into the open shop door.

The man behind the counter looked nervous. 'Easy, tiger,' he whispered.

The rows and rows of colourful objects made the ape feel faint and he tried to compose himself by smiling, but this seemed to make the man even more nervous.

Then the ape remembered the performance. He took a few steps back, before somersaulting forwards into a sitting position and placing one hand over his heart. This always worked with the weeping kids at the zoo.

The man smiled. 'Not going to bite are you?' he said and the ape, feeling small sitting in the pool of light in front of the counter, slowly stood, shook his head and extended a paw.

The man did not offer his hand in return. 'Just wait till I get home,' he said, as if in an aside to an invisible third being.

The ape felt a pang, wishing that he could speak. His courage returned and he gestured to the shelves.

The man moved cautiously round the counter and held up a Mars bar. 'This one?' he asked.

The ape shook his head.

'He understands!' said the man to his invisible friend.

The ape pointed to a Milkybar. The man slid the chocolate across the floor and watched him carefully unwrap it, his mouth falling open when the ape held it out to him, offering it to him first.

'Thank you, my friend,' he said, breaking off a piece and handing it back.

The ape was so pleased to be called 'friend'. He nodded sadly as the urge to converse welled up in him. The keeper had explained that this was a difference between humans and apes: apes lacked the right voice box for human speech.

The ape gestured towards the warm blue outside the door, meaning 'nice evening'. The man mistook this for a wish to go outside and he went to the door.

The ape thought that perhaps it was a good time to leave. He shook the man's hand warmly on his way out. Nice to meet you, he said in his head.

'Come again, come again,' the man shouted as the ape looked right, then left and walked across the road and back through the gates. The keeper waved to the shop man and closed them with a clang.

As he'd entered the gates, the ape had felt like he was returning

home. He'd contemplated running in the opposite direction, but he lived at the zoo. The bigger picture, where he'd come from, where he was now, was dawning on him. He'd examined the maps stuck up at the visitor hut and seen the shapes called 'Africa' and 'England'. He was beginning to understand how hard it would be to return. And besides, he did not want to betray the keeper's trust.

Only much later, when he and the keeper were better friends, did he guess that the keeper must have known that there wasn't any danger when he'd let him cross the road. By then the ape realized that he was quite valuable.

He sits in his deckchair, cap pushed back off his prominent brow, sipping from the bottle of beer the keeper has hidden for him under his newspaper. 'A perk' the keeper calls it, although he isn't supposed to drink on the job.

The ape can't read but he enjoys browsing through the pictures. They have a curious stillness. Are these animals alive? he'd thought, before the keeper had explained. The ape finds himself making up entire stories from a single frozen frame. They are always about his life before the zoo.

'Midnight blues,' the keeper says when he catches the ape in these reveries.

Once an hour, the ape gets up to do the rounds, careful to stay in the shadows, out of the range of smell of the big cats, even though they are safely behind bars. Often the moon is shining through cracks in the clouds as he walks silently past the slumbering animals, knowing that he can probably get to Africa if he chooses; but he doesn't choose to, not now he has responsibilities and new friends, the keeper and the shop man. He reminds himself that the keeper trusts him and returns to his deckchair with a feeling of deep satisfaction.

Sometimes the shop man comes to his door and waves and the ape pulls his cap down low so that he looks like the keeper. There is no danger of the man finding out their secret: unlike the ape, the man is not allowed to go further than the shop door.

The ape works hard at his day job, pushing himself to new athletic heights; it is important to stay fit should he ever decide to leave. And the keeper notices his diligence — that's why he'd singled him out from his fellow apes in the first place.

The keeper does not lump him with the human immigrants he is so angry about. The keeper is proud of how he has come along and the ape

guesses that he is not worried about him taking his job. Although the ape dreams about it, he knows it is unlikely he will ever be promoted.

Yet it is enough. No little window like in the truck but, for the daytime performances, a big cage front with bars spread its length and height. Limited, true, but a whole world plays out in front of them, the audience laughing and cheering and throwing gifts. A job, that is very much what it is, and tired, hungry, happy or sad, they go at it every day together, and it cheers the ape up, reminding him of his old home, how there is safety in numbers.

It is the late night openings at the zoo he dislikes. That is when everything feels wrong and he longs to be in the deckchair on the other side of the bars.

'Moonlighting'. The keeper says that it means having two jobs at once, but the ape likes to think of it as those nights when the moon is lighting things up.

Maybe he will never completely belong. He knows that membership of the Zoological Society is out of the question. Even the keeper isn't allowed in. But just to sit here alone. That is something.

The thing is, on moonlit nights, he often thinks of those left behind. In a way he envies them their simpler life; but he has started to imagine that the harbour is the biggest gate of all and that he had been behind it his entire life before travelling to the zoo.



Giselle Leeb grew up in South Africa and lives in Nottingham (UK). Her short stories have appeared in Best British Short Stories 2017 (Salt), Ambit, Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet, The Lonely Crowd, Mslexia, Litro, and other places.

She has placed third in the Ambit, Elbow Room and Aurora (Writing East Midlands) competitions and been shortlisted for the Bridport and Mslexia prizes.

She is an assistant editor at Reckoning Journal.



Lost Photographs

SILVIA GRAV

“

THIS IS A SELECTION of independent pieces I've been slowly working on over the last five years.

I'm still unaware of the intention behind them, but every single photo here has the name of someone I've known, loved or missed before.

”

























Silvia Grav is a Spanish artist and director based in Los Angeles. Born in Vizcaya, Spain, in 1993. Being 18 and after dropping out Fine Arts the first year, her work became known after being published in Juxtapoz and many other blogs and cultural magazines. A year after Flickr chose her as one of the “20 Under 20”, an award given to the best young photographers around the world under that age. That opportunity took her to United States for the first time. Since then, she’s based in Los Angeles and has been exhibiting and working worldwide on many different projects for companies like HBO, Droga5, Elastic, Lexus, Concord Music, Ninja Tune, etc, also giving workshops and conferences around the world talking about her experience as a young artist.

She teaches at Domestika.org since 2013, having by now more than 4k students.

Autofinzione e iperbole nel linguaggio trap

CLAUDIA BOSCOLO

L'autofinzione narrativa (o *autofiction*) è un tipo di auto-narrazione praticata in modo piuttosto esteso e significativo nella narrativa italiana, in particolare da autori uomini. Casi molto studiati, soprattutto in ambito accademico, sono quello di Water Siti, Roberto Saviano, Giuseppe Genna. Nella narrativa femminile un esempio che ha suscitato dibattito è quello di Babsi Jones, autrice di una sola opera, *Sappiano le mie parole di sangue*, magistrale esempio di ibridazione narrativa (si può leggerne un'ottima recensione sulla rivista online Carmilla, a firma di Rosella Simonari ¹). Se nella narrativa italiana contemporanea l'autofinzione è ormai pratica narrativa diffusa, anche se ancora fraintesa dal grande pubblico, un esercizio particolarmente esasperato di questa pratica lo ritroviamo nella trap.

Nati fra il '92 e il '95, gli artisti trap sono cresciuti come fruitori di musica scaricata direttamente dagli online music store, in particolare iTunes, fenomeno che esplode nel 2001, quando questi musicisti erano alle elementari. Per loro è quindi una prassi naturale rilasciare le tracce in download e avere una presenza social che definisce la loro identità di artisti. La pratica dell'intervista e dell'apparizione in TV è per loro ampiamente superata. Si tratta di artisti che si autorappresentano senza alcuna mediazione (la regia, la fascia protetta, il target del programma-contenitore, ecc.). Questa assoluta assenza di filtro è all'origine della diffusione capillare della loro musica. Non conoscendo alcuna censura o forzatura nella distribuzione, i trapper sono liberi di rappresentare il mondo in cui sono cresciuti e vivono, praticando una forma di critica sociale che include l'iperbole come prassi costitutiva della loro identità, al punto da azzerarne il portato nella ripetizione. Uno dei segni più evidenti di questo linguaggio è la pratica del tatuaggio sulla fronte e sul viso. Se Sfera Ebbasta esibisce un kalashnikov con il pennino ta-

tuato vicino all'orecchio sinistro, il caso più estremo di questa pratica è il viso di Young Signorino, la cui fronte è tutata per quasi la metà della superficie. "Me lo tatuò in fronte" è appunto un modo di dire iperbolico, che rientra in quel linguaggio dell'oralità tipico di questo genere e che fa riferimento a qualcosa (un evento, un'idea) che non bisogna mai dimenticare. Sono molti i riferimenti dei trapper a eventi drammatici, traumi infantili e adulti che non vogliono dimenticare (*No, tu non l'hai mai visto il tuo frigo vuoto / Per questo non pensi a riempirti la pancia*, canta Sfera Ebbasta in *Tran Tran*). L'origine molto umile e l'abbandono della scuola sono le tematiche attorno a cui si gioca tutto il potenziale critico di questa forma d'arte, insieme a un'autopoiesi esasperata connessa al mito dell'uomo che si fa da solo senza avere alle spalle un padre (un dato autobiografico e non autofinzionale). Si tratta di una poetica fondata sulla costruzione di un'identità legata anche all'oggettificazione del proprio corpo. La diffusione di queste tracce attraverso gli online music store permette a questi artisti la massima libertà nell'autorappresentazione, determinata anche dalla presenza sui social, in particolare Instagram, utilizzato come canale ufficiale per ogni annuncio che li riguarda. Spesso questi annunci sono realizzati per via iconografica, pubblicando "storie" in cui vengono esibiti sia il corpo sia oggetti simbolici, con immagini spesso sfocate girate con l'iPhone negli studi di registrazione. I fan vengono lasciati a interpretare i segni disseminati in rete. La pratica dell'interpretazione libera apre al massimo grado di fruizione di questi contenuti, a cui ognuno è libero di associare un significato. Libera associazione dunque. Questa pratica naturalmente ingenera una quantità impressionante di odio in rete, su cui si fonda molto del successo di questo genere musicale (*Parole d'odio / Gente si riempie la bocca con poco* canta Sfera sempre in *Tran Tran*).

Nel processo di costruzione di questa identità forte a partire da una base esistenziale molto debole, un ruolo decisivo gioca la presenza femminile, che viene divisa in maniera piuttosto manichea in modello materno positivo/modello di fan da backstage negativo. Su questa contrapposizione è stata costruita la critica fondamentale che si muove a questo genere, e cioè di veicolare una visione sessista.

Come abbiamo visto, l'oggettificazione del corpo del maschio è portata all'estremo dall'estetica trap. Magro, tonico e tatuato, con sopracciglia modellate e piercing, il corpo è fatto per indossare abiti e accessori

di lusso. I trapper sono spesso protagonisti di sfilate alla Milano Fashion Week. Un particolare legame di amicizia li lega allo stilista Marcelo Burlon², di origine argentina, che reinterpreta l'estetica *streetwear* tipicamente trap, fatta di tute di acetato e ciabatte di gomma, portandola nell'alta moda. In sostanza, i trapper incarnano l'idea del corpo-attaccapanni/oggetto da decorare che già conosciamo bene grazie all'invasione di corpi femminili oggettificati esibiti ovunque nell'ambiente in cui viviamo.

Il corpo-oggetto svolge una funzione estetica fondamentale, quindi, in questa forma auto-narrativa, e riguarda sia quello maschile sia quello femminile. Anche nei riferimenti sessuali più espliciti si avverte lo stesso azzeramento dell'iperbole che vediamo nella pratica di tatuarsi il viso. Se Lucio Battisti nel 1970 cantava *Dieci ragazze per me [...] dieci ragazze così che dicono solo di sì*, il concetto si intensifica ed estremizza nei testi trap, in cui l'autofiction permette di rappresentare il simulacro dell'artista immerso nell'affollamento di corpi femminili. Il corpo femminile oggettificato e moltiplicato nell'iperbole svolge dunque una funzione narrativa precisa, cioè quella di fornire uno sfondo in cui si narra la rivalsa sociale, totalmente inutile in quanto non lenisce in alcun modo il trauma originario, cioè la povertà e l'abbandono del padre. Canta Ghali in *Wily Wily*:

Ndiro lhala sans pitiè / Fratello ma 3la balich / En ma vie ho visto bezaf / Quindi adesso rehma lah / Baba menchoufuch / Wily Wily, Nari Nari / 3andi dra 9addech / 3andi dra 9addesh / 3andi dra 9addech / Nari Nari, Wily Wily / W y golouly kifech / W y golouly kifech / W y golouly kifech / Wily Wily, Nari Nari

(Faccio casino senza pietà, fratello me ne frego / Nella mia vita ho visto tante cose, quindi adesso voglio riposare / Mio padre non lo vedo / Da così tanto, da così tanto, da così tanto / mi chiedo perché).

Se la presenza femminile è importante nella realizzazione del progetto creativo dei rapper (ricordiamo Martina Pastori³, *videomaker* che firma la maggior parte dei video della scena rap e trap italiana), non lo è a sufficienza nella produzione musicale. L'unica artista che ha equiparato il successo dei colleghi maschi è Elettra Lamborghini, figura

molto emblematica la cui produzione musicale non rientra nel genere trap, ma che ha collaborato a più riprese con la scena.

Ci sono molti punti che differenziano la produzione musicale di Elettra Lamborghini da quella dei trapper. Mentre il pubblico del rap è assuefatto agli eccessi di Nicki Minaj, che presenta un modello femminile esagerato e ipersessuato al limite della pornografia, in aperta polemica con la sorveglianza del corpo femminile da parte del cripto-patriarcato bianco statunitense (lo stesso che esclude i neri dalle dinamiche che portano al potere, ovvero dai percorsi educativi elitari e di conseguenza dai ruoli sociali più prestigiosi), il corpo-oggetto della Lamborghini trascende la valenza politica del rap, per entrare in una rappresentazione ironica e distaccata, in cui di nuovo si assiste all'azzerramento dell'iperbole attraverso la sua reiterazione. Proprio per la sua origine alto-borghese, Elettra usa il mezzo espressivo musicale per scherzare sugli stessi temi che nei testi di Sfera Ebbasta assumono invece una nota melodrammatica, ad esempio nella cupa *Ricchi per sempre*, in cui canta *in mezzo a qualche ragazza che non mi conosce / che non mi ama quanto ama il mio conto in banca*. Ma se nell'autofinzione di Sfera, la ricerca dell'autenticità rielabora una vicenda archetipica in chiave melodrammatica (l'uomo che si è fatto da sé e che non riesce però a raggiungere l'oggetto del desiderio, come nel *Gatsby* di Fitzgerald, ad esempio), nell'*autofiction* di Elettra si trova il tema della ricca e bella ereditiera assediata da uomini che la corteggiano per i suoi soldi e per il suo nome, e che il suo personaggio trasforma in meri oggetti sessuali. In questa prospettiva, il corpo esibito come richiamo sessuale ha la funzione di esorcizzare un tema altrettanto archetipico, cioè quello della figlia di un capo usata come strumento di ascesa sociale. Nel video del pezzo *Lamborghini*⁴ di Gué Pequeno e Sfera Ebbasta, in cui i due giocano con l'iperbole "mi compro la Lamborghini", con il significato di "sono diventato ricco": questa si azzera tuttavia nella comparsa di Elettra, che appare come oggetto sessuale cantando *non compro Lamborghini, perché io sono Lamborghini*, e quindi annullando in un gesto autoironico il tema della rivalsa sociale che è al centro di tutta la poetica trap. Il tema dei soldi che non possono comprare un'identità e neppure forzarne la ricostruzione è bene espresso nel testo di *Ricchi dentro* di Ghali, in cui emerge con forza il desiderio di non rompere il legame con le proprie radici (*Casa nuova spacca tutto / Ma sulla vecchia non ci sputo / L'unica che ho avuto anche se è un buco*).

La sostanza della poetica trap si può quindi condensare nell'impossibilità di una ricostruzione identitaria, nella fedeltà alla classe sociale di appartenenza (ampiamente significata nei testi di Tedua e Rkomi o Bresh ⁵), nel rifiuto di un'ascesa sociale che può solo snaturare gli individui.

Note:

¹) Rosella Simonari, *Sappiano le mie parole di sangue e New Italian Epic*, Carmilla, 28 settembre 2008

²) Enrico Matzeu, *Chi è Marcelo Burlon e perché si parla di lui*, Il Post, 21 luglio 2015

³) *Abbiamo parlato con Martina Pastori di Milano, rap e Mississippi*, Vice

⁴) Guè Pequeno, *Lamborghini (RMX)*, ft. Sfera Ebbasta, Elettra Lamorghini, video

⁵) Bresh, *Il bar dei miei*, video



Claudia Boscolo has a PhD in Italian Studies from Royal Holloway University of London (UK). She is an Italian and History teacher and independent researcher in Medieval and Contemporary Italian Studies.

Her most recent book is *L'Entrée d'Espagne. Context and Authorship at the Origins of the Italian Chivalric Epic* (Oxford: 2017). She co-edited, with Stefano Jossa, *Scritture di resistenza. Sguardi politici dalla narrativa italiana contemporanea* (Rome: 2014). She writes on different subjects for Italian online and paper magazines.



The Forest

SELINA MAYER

“

BEGAN IN LATE SUMMER 2015, *The Forest* is a conscious departure from masculinity and modern life, both in medium and in subject matter. The subjects are nude, but it is an unselfconscious and primordial nudity, reclaimed from the male gaze and with a softness and intimacy to the images rarely captured in a male lens. They are in nature and a part of it; they aren't conquerors of the natural world, they are skyclad witches and exultant earth goddesses in communion with nature, vulnerable yet unafraid. The distinction between the human figures and the non-human natural elements has become blurred and the artificial divide between individuals and their landscapes erased. And yet the models remain people, as unique and individual as the environments they are a part of, not anonymous figures bereft of identity.

”





























Selina Mayer is a British visual artist and photographer who lives in London, UK. She studied Fine Art at Central St Martins School of Art and Design, graduating in 2010.

At present, the primary focus of her practice is on figurative and portrait photography, specialising in using traditional analogue techniques, as well as mixed-media print and book making.



Play With Me

NICOLETTA CECCOLI

“

THIS COLLECTION FEATURES dreamlike universes made of toys, in which every perspective is turned out in a disturbing dialectic between living and inanimate, big and small. Floating worlds, inhabited by sprawled princesses and witches of the sea, among whose clutches could fall easily a naive knight. Enticing universes of candy and marzipan with echoes of surrealist suggestions dominated by dolls with porcelain skin and pink cheeks, graceful and well dressed but far from being as fragile as they seem.

”





















Nicoletta Ceccoli was born and still lives in the Republic of San Marino. She graduated in Animation from the State Institute of Art in Urbino, Italy. Ceccoli worked as an illustrator of children's book since 1995 publishing numerous books with US, UK, Italian, Swiss, and Taiwanese publishers. Among her clients: Random House, Mondadori, Simon and Shuster, Barefoot Books.

In 2001 she won the Andersen Prize as best illustrator.

In 2008 she worked as character designer for a 3D French animation project - *La mécanique du cœur* - with the direction of Mathias Melzieu and the production of Luc and Silla Besson.

Her works are shown in galleries throughout the world.

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