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IS IT TO FEEL EACH LIMB GROW STIFFER, IS IT TO FEEL THE FULL POTENTIAL OF A LIFE?

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A drawing practice based on conversation with others is, by its very nature, a constantly evolving one and one that follows the changing nature of conversations as they unfold. At the time of the original 'Drawing Matters' symposium, conversations about migration, immigration, and related stories were central to the author's practice, these issues of course still continue and drawings completed by the author continue to reflect on these difficult global events. In fact, one of the artist's animations that responds to these issues was selected for the 2018 Trinity Buoy Wharf Drawing Prize.

However, as an individual, the artist is getting older and, as this very natural process becomes more noticeable — more aches and pains, a growing awareness of mortality and, of course, more conversations with people of a similar age — their drawings, artwork, and community engagements have reflected these things. In particular, their recent work has begun to embody issues that have emerged from their research into aging and memory, both as practice-based drawing research and as research undertaken as part of a community group that has been looking at how to manage the aging process.

As an artist, I have a drawing practice that embraces community activism as well as personal expression. At the core of this practice is a desire to discover images of relevance by using observational drawings produced alongside the conversations I have with people. For several years, I have been developing a body of work that has used drawing as a resource gathering tool to both help develop imaginative landscapes within which allegorical actions may take place and to support community activities using various visualisation techniques. These drawings have been used to support a growing awareness of community problems, such as poor street lighting or issues related to drug misuse or fly tipping, and as part of a 'design out crime' initiative. My visualisations have also been used to help plan and shape changes in my local street's appearance and to raise an awareness of how a street's visual grain can be related to social well-being. Alongside these community focused activities, I have developed allegories in my large-scale drawings and animations based on the situations and stories that I have come across as I talk to people. The details of how the various elements of this practice fit together have been documented in the book, 'Collective and Collaborative Drawing in Contemporary Practice' (Journeaux and Gorrill 2018: 192–215), and I have also written about how a 'community voice' can be found in a more text based, poetic conversation with local street graffiti (Barker 2018: 75–85). The skills related to this ongoing project have developed over the years; listening in particular has become increasingly important and I have recently become much more aware that I need to listen to my own body as well as the voices of others.

I am now over 65 and I am, as Arnold (2006) points out, growing stiffer and my every function is becoming less exact. Age becomes very important when having conversations. Younger people see you as old and they therefore suspect that you will not understand the world in the same way that they do, and so you are tempted to behave as if you are not as old as you are (Jones 2004). Older people begin to be more open in conversation because they can see an affinity with someone who, from an outward appearance, is more like themselves, as well as the fact that enjoying fellowship with other people always leads to an increased sense of well-being (Svensson and Mårtensson 2012).

Stories told by older people were always an important part of a community's empowerment and identity (Rappaport 1995); they operate as a shared sense-making resource (Stapleton and Wilson 2016) and often have mythic, healing, and poetic possibilities but, as Field and Fenton (2014) state, there may not be anybody there to record them, even though the issues that affect older people are powerful and pertinent to the picture that we all have of the world. I have recently joined a self-identified group of people who are also interested in preparing themselves for the final part of their lives: 'Life Hacks for a Limited Future'. On joining, each person was asked to contribute research that would help the group think through the problems that they would have to collectively and individually face as they became older. As part of my own research contribution, I decided that I would develop a new body of artwork that took my increasing awareness of growing older as its focus and that I would also embed this into wider research through the Leeds Aging Network and conversations with others about the main issues that people have to face when getting older. I was particularly interested in what it feels like to become more aware of a body's aging process; I wanted to learn how to articulate this and to find out whether the results were even communicable to others. An awareness of how memory becomes central to the developing identity of being older was also important to my research and this opportunity allowed me test out ideas in relation to this. Above all, the fact that the people that I know are also getting older and will continue to make up stories about their own life changes is very important. The conversations I have already had about aging, memory, and how life changes, both informally as part of everyday life and

formally as part of ‘Life Hacks for a Limited Future’, suggested that this was a vital project to undertake and one that would profitably build on experiences of previous working practices.

One conversation in particular caused me to reflect that it was time to make work on the theme of aging; it illustrates how personal histories and memories are essential to the wellbeing of those growing older and that the reality of world events will always have a direct impact on individuals.

Recently, one of our more elderly neighbours came over to sit with my wife and me in the garden and began to tell us of her latest dream. She is very religious and so she asked her local priest what these dreams might mean and what she should do about them. His response was to tell her to forget about them, as they are just dreams and do not mean anything. However, she is convinced that they are important and, because she knows that we have always leant a sympathetic ear to her stories, she has decided that she will tell us about her dreams in as much detail as she can remember.

She began by describing how she always finds herself in a large bleak office type space in her dreams. The office is busy and everyone has a job to do; she walks slowly around the office, but they are too busy to notice her. When she looks to see if she can spot any sympathetic faces, she realises that they are all white people and she is black. She is disorientated for a while but soon remembers what she is doing in this office. She has turned up to make a complaint to God; her life has been affected by tragic events and she wants to know, why her? In particular, she wants to know why her charisma was stolen and why she has not got any qualifications. She wants to see God and she believes that, if she can get someone to answer her question about his whereabouts, she will be able to confront him and demand an explanation because, she reasons in her dream, that it must be God who is behind all of the things that have happened to her.

Eventually someone notices her and she is directed to a huge desk that is so big she cannot see over it; it is like a high wall and, although she cannot see who is sitting behind it, she can feel a presence and she believes this presence is God. "Why" she demands, “did you steal my charisma?” “Because” replies the voice of God, “when you were a girl in Saint Kitts, you were as beautiful as an angel; you were so virtuous and had such a wonderful character that if you had charisma alongside all your other talents no boy on the island would have been safe from you, as you would have broken all their hearts and I could not allow that”. She now remembers the time when she was the fastest girl in the area: she would run everywhere and won all of her school races. One day she was picked to run in a regional race; this was a special occasion because she was the youngest person to be picked and the only one from her village. Because she was quietly reserved, beautiful, and could run quickly over short distances, as well as being able to achieve long distances and accelerate whenever she wanted to, she was called ‘three speed grey dove’ by everyone who knew her. At the time, she also had a special boyfriend, who loved to watch her run and who always expected her to win, and she prided herself on the fact that she would always win for him. However, on the morning of this special race, she began to feel unwell. She tried to hide this and lined up with all the other girls, determined to win as she always had done before. But she was feeling dizzy and, as soon as the race started, she fell over and cut her knee. It began to bleed heavily and she lost her nerve; she had no confidence in herself any more. The race was lost, and so was her boyfriend and her inner confidence. She still remembers the shame of that day: the shame of letting everyone down. And, above everything else, she remembers a feeling that she had for the first time in her life: she didn’t deserve to win and she was not worthy. It was the moment when God took away her charisma and she now knows why. She is angry with God, who still hides behind his huge desk, and she has not

finished with him yet. She now wants to know why she has not received any qualifications for her schoolwork. She remembers how hard she worked and the praise that she used to receive from her teachers. She had no proof of her worth and was demanding that God put this right, but God was no longer replying. His presence somehow was gone and, instead of the voice of God, there is another voice in her head, that of a very elegant white woman who is now standing directly in front of her and telling her that she must go. Our neighbour then tells us that she then walked out of a door that had suddenly appeared and, as she did, everywhere surrounding the office became a 'nothingness' and then she steps forward into a white mist, dropping into this nothingness. It is at this point that she wakes up frightened and distressed.

Windrush stories were in the news at this time, which told how the Home Office had destroyed the landing cards of people who had come over to England from the West Indies; this made it very difficult for them to prove that they were in the UK legally, even if they had lived here for most of their lives. I realised at this point that my neighbour's dream was based on the fact that she had no proof of citizenship. Times were hard again: her husband was very ill and her grandson had been finding it hard to get work. Her priest had been telling the congregation not to worry and that they should trust in the Lord's will but she did not really believe him. Her son eventually comes over to see us and, after apologising for his mother's dreams, tells us a long story of how difficult it has been over the years to get things done as a family because of the lack of certain proofs of identity.

Two days after she told us her story, her son told us that she had been taken into hospital as she had suffered a stroke.

There is a shape to all stories, and my neighbour's is the flight of a 'three speed grey dove'. Even though she is now an old white haired woman in her late 70s, she has a presence and a grace of movement that belies her age: her skin glows, she wears her carefully chosen clothes with grace, and carries herself with pride.

All communities are full of stories, but without someone to listen to them and to shape them into images, they fade away with people's lives.

If this story is to have any meaning beyond what it means to the person that told it, it needs to find a shape outside of the immediate community and this is also true for a community's collected stories. This story is one of many stories that I have heard over the years, and each one has helped shape a continually reformed practice. This story, however, has further convinced me that dreams enable the mythic form of individual experience to become part of a collective experience, and that what I need to do is to develop images that might feed into that collective experience and which can inhabit the dreamtime that everyone must touch at some point in their lives.

Visualising the aging mind and body

I am developing a body of work that responds to two aspects of getting older: how to accept and represent the aging body, and how to visualise the activities of a mind that has less work-related things to think about. This is a mind that will begin to reminisce or discover new areas of engagement, and which is driven by interests other than money.

However, during the evolution of the visualisation process, an unexpected area of practice was developed by chance, which can only be described as a rediscovery of the power of sympathetic magic.

Due to the fact that this area has evolved out of my work with ceramics, I think it needs to be reflected upon separately, even though it grew directly out of my research into representing an aging mind/body.

The first area of investigation was heavily influenced by my neighbour's story of running, which became a catalyst for several aspects of the work I was undertaking. When I had been a boy I also ran, but I had forgotten how important running had been to me, particularly the feeling of running as fast as you can go with arms outstretched like a bird or plane; how exciting it was to have the air rushing past my face and how in those moments nothing mattered but the thrill of movement (Fig. 1). At that time, the body was something totally accepted and the excitement of the experience was totally embodied, which is why my neighbour's story of losing that acceptance was so important. Running is also tightly related to location because it has to take place somewhere. There was a particular hill in the landscape that had grown around the map of my childhood. This landscape exists in my mind in a form that still moulds the landscapes I have been drawing ever since. The older 1950s landscape was in effect a mythic form: one that is still driving my visual interests 60 years into the future.

FIGURE 1: GARRY BARKER STUDY: BODY/HILL WITH RUNNING FIGURE (2018) WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER

In listening to my neighbour's story about a dream, it was very apparent that the dream was also taking place in a landscape of the past, but the concerns arising were ones that were important to the present. The awareness that the present is in many ways being shaped by the past has been clearly articulated by Bergson. For Bergson, memory involves the co-existence of past and present, as it 'interweaves the past into the present, such that memory is practically inseparable from perception' (2011: 73). Bergson argues that memory orientates the present by using selected recollections to ground new experiences within already understood patterns of behaviour. His observations seem to be very relevant to a world where continuously changing technology means that older people have to constantly keep updating skills in order to remain in touch with an increasingly computer literate society. The audience for artworks attempting to deal with the past, although increasingly computer literate, is still connected to an analogue past; therefore, I reasoned that one aspect of it should be obviously handmade in order to effectively communicate with that demographic.

My practice over the preceding ten years had been centred on walks where I would collect initial visual information by observational drawing and further contextual information by speaking to the various people I met as I was making the drawings (Journeaux and Gorrill 2018). These visual and verbal encounters formed the core research, which led to a variety of further approaches to image making, including drawing as community visualisation, allegory, play, and image generation. The difference in this case was that the initial research would not be able to use observational drawing, but would have to rely on drawings that were centred on imaginative explorations of what it was like to inhabit a body. The initial responses were centred on the fact that I primarily thought about my body when there was something 'wrong' with it. For instance, as I have become older, I have become more prone to eczema. Eczema makes you much more aware of your skin and is accompanied by a constant need to scratch. Therefore, the first drawings were about this desire to scratch (Fig. 2).

FIGURE 2: GARRY BARKER STUDY: BODY ITCHING (2018) WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER

I am also aware of other problems: arthritis that particularly affects my fingers, which often makes drawing a very painful activity; a frozen shoulder that for a while threatened to make it impossible to create the images that were needed; asthma that made me very aware of my own breathing; and toothache that often made it difficult to concentrate. This is not the place to list every malady that I may have had, and none of these issues are debilitating or causing constant discomfort, but each ailment had a way of redirecting the focus of my image making. The exploration of the two-dimensional surface was initially driven by thinking about eczema, which put the focus on paper as a metaphor for skin. A growing awareness of asthma and breathing issues eventually led to a three-dimensional exploration in clay because my shortness of breath created an awareness of volume.

FIGURE 3: GARRY BARKER SOLID BREATH (2018) CERAMIC

These 'feeling tones' represented information coming from a fractured body; there was no wholeness and, instead, simply a period of focused sensations that centred on toothache or itching skin. However, what could be seen as a representational problem became, as Dewey observed, a positive factor because the ‘objects of most of our ordinary perception lack completeness’ (2005: 184). The problem he saw was that as soon as an observer realised what an object was, the observer stopped looking and relied on language to complete the picture: i.e., once the amount of information perceived adds up to an awareness of ‘human body’ then all the stereotypical images stored in the mind’s memory banks come into operation. In order to go beyond this, he called for an ‘esthetic perception’ and this ‘full perception’ leads to the making of images that take their rhythm from life experience and which become alive in an almost animistic sense (Ibid.: 184). By not illustrating what we expect the body to look like, we can ‘evoke the energy appropriate to a realisation of the full energy of the object’ (Ibid.: 185). Working from the fragments of difficult to realise perceptions that rely on an internal feeling tone and a heightened haptic sensibility would hopefully avoid creating what Dewey called a ‘simulated esthetic experience' (Ibid.: 185)

Visualising the Body

The initial visual exploration of body images was mainly completed in sketchbooks and consisted of images of the body as a landscape. The fact that I was inside a body became a metaphor for a place I inhabited and this led to a more topological exploration of the body’s surfaces.

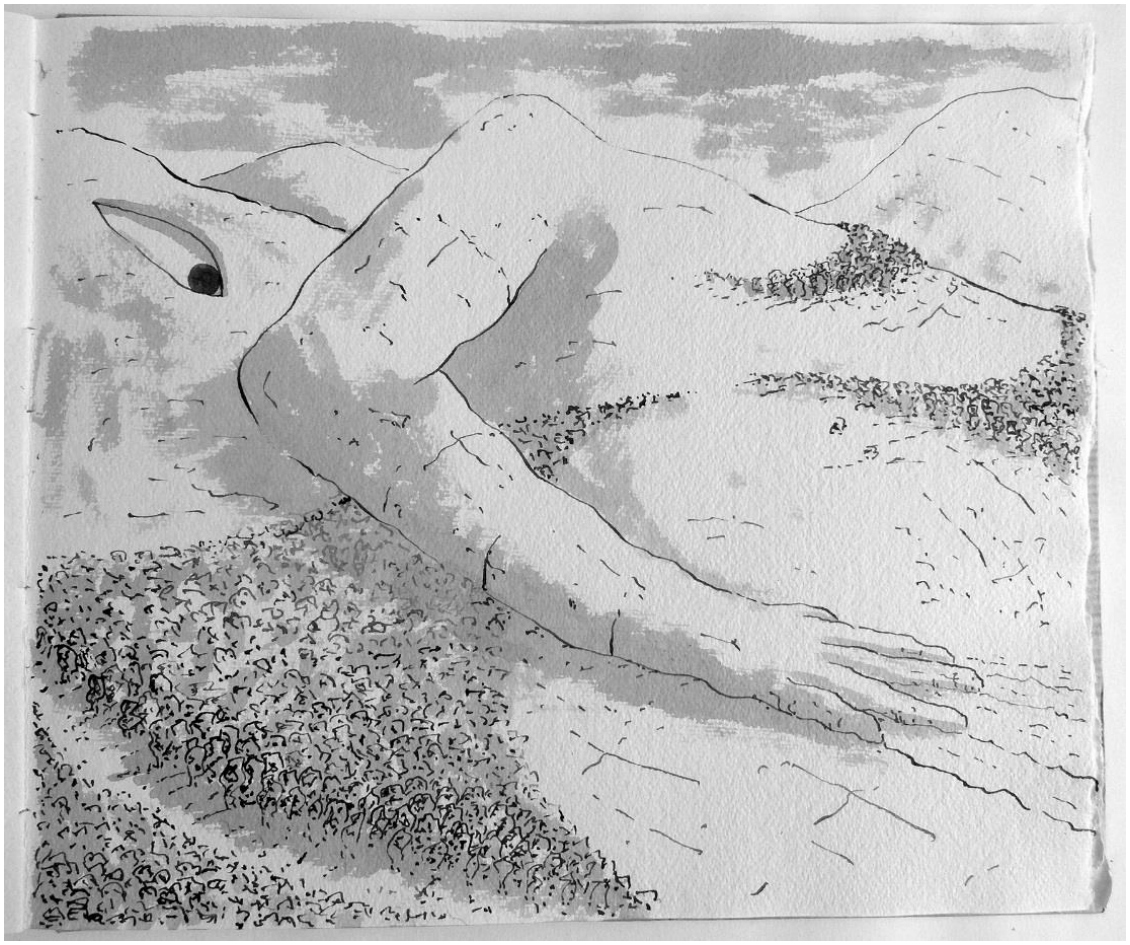

FIGURE 4: GARRY BARKER SKETCHBOOK PAGE (2018)

The implications of Simondon's thoughts on the body and topology (discussed in Lambert 2014) were of particular importance to my practice because they allowed me to articulate ideas in relation to the skin as a permeable surface that could allow other things into and out of the body. The ideas associated with Simondon's 1964 book, *The Individual and its Physical-Biological Genesis*, include the contrast between what he terms a hylomorphic scheme and an allagmatic body scheme. The hylomorphic scheme is problematic because it suggests that there is a distinction between form and matter, which is a distinction that, on a social level, could easily become similar to 'masters' and 'slaves'. However, Simondon's manifesto for the allagmatic scheme suggests that form should always be arrived at through a deep understanding of the intrinsic characteristics of matter. The body image that was emerging stemmed from the possibilities of several different liquids being moved around simultaneously over a large area of thick watercolour paper, which would expand as it became wet, and then fold and force the liquids to pool before they dried. This membrane of paper was now being regarded in my mind as skin and the solids dissolved in liquids, which would, as they settled, become both the rock strata of a new landscape and the worn skin of an old body. As the drawings developed, they had to capture what an itch might be like, what the weight of a body is like as you carry it and then rest it, what stiffness feels like, and how what was once a clearly defined shape has now become much less clear and more akin to a carcass than 'an incarnation of energy' (Clark 1993: 154). Watching materials flow and feeling how edges defined themselves was key to the development of these images. Dewey's observation that 'sensitivity to a medium as a medium is the very heart of all artistic creation and esthetic perception', (Dewey 2005: 207) was key, as I watched the inks and other water-carried substances deposit themselves in various ways. The more I pushed these inks, acrylics, and watercolours across the surface of wet paper and the more I added dustings of powdered pigment, the more the process became analogous to thinking about the various substance flows that consist of the bag of seawater that we are mostly formed from. The artist was also very aware that this surface, this series of forms, was being carried by a certain visual quality that was emerging from his various manipulations of media and that this would effectively be the 'go between of artist and perceiver' (ibid.).

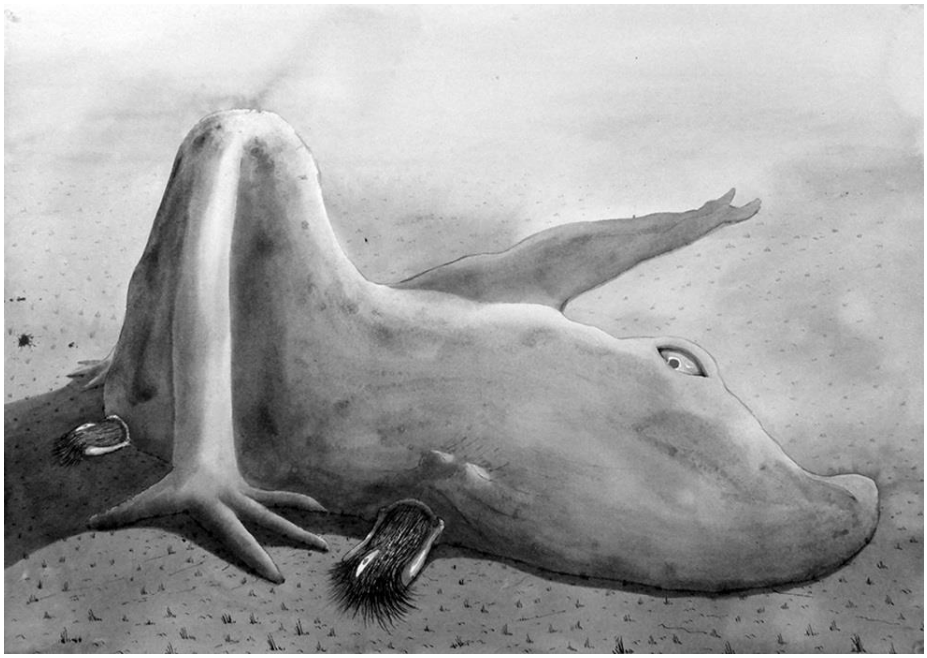

FIGURE 5: GARRY BARKER STUDY: *A BODY ENTERED BY OTHERS* (2018) WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER

The landscape of childhood

Sebba argues that adults use the landscapes of childhood to develop their own concepts of growing up, landscapes that becomes inseparable from 'the physical features of the surroundings to which they were exposed in childhood' (1991: 405). She goes on to state that, 'children experience the natural environment in a deep and direct manner, not as a background for events, but, rather, as a factor and stimulator' (Ibid.: 406) and that sensory perceptions remain in adult memories because their relative importance reaches a peak in childhood. Sebba's observations encouraged me to make a series of drawings whereby I tried to visualise the place that had been most important to myself as a child: the place that I realised was still shaping my approach to landscape. I realised that there was one key moment: the day that I, at the age of nine, was to move from one house to another. On that day, just before my father had to lock up the house and leave it forever, I stood looking through the window of my bedroom and, as I realised that this would be the last time I would ever be able to do this, I decided to remember everything I could see from that window. I looked at each element of the rough urban landscape that lay before me and tried to recall all of the things I had done in this landscape of my childhood. Even now, sixty years on, I can relive that moment, can go back into that nine-year-old boy's head and see each element of that landscape as it was put into memory. Going back to those memories, I have made new drawings about the position of the house I lived in and its relationship to a post-industrial landscape of slag heaps and an overgrown wilderness that is now a housing estate. These drawings which emerged from my 'landscapes of childhood' are what needed to be fitted into the images of an aging body (Fig. 6). Two forms of visual research needed to find spaces for themselves within new image structures. One element of the drawing process was effectively becoming the ground on which the second element would be realised.

Because of my readings in object orientated ontology and material culture, I was becoming more and more concerned to move beyond maintaining the illusion that human beings are in some way independent, or in control, of Nature. Part of my coming to terms with this meant that I had to revisit my own understanding of Cézanne's work. Cézanne was the first artist that I had encountered as a youngster and it made me aware of the importance of perceptual struggle. Only three years after looking through a window and trying to remember a landscape, I was attempting to make transcriptions of Cézanne's paintings. No matter how bad these attempts were, they made me aware that looking was not the same as copying. As Martel states, Cézanne 'in the heat of creation omits the line between himself and the object he observes, the line between the mental and the physical, spirit and matter' (2015: 54). This 'dissolving back into Nature' (Ibid.) seemed to be very important and the more I researched basic things, such as how ink sticks to paper, and the more I began to see the chemistry of life as being just as important to the development of these drawings as any research into similar art forms. In making images that confronted bodily feelings and how I was myself establishing an identity of being older, as an artist I also acknowledged that I would also have to, as Deleuze and Guattari explained, deal with 'the consciousness or thought of the matter flow' (2004: 454). In this case, I was making a very conscious connection between an awareness of the 'matter flow' of the human body and the 'matter flow' of the art materials that I was using to visualise these concepts. As Ingold put it, 'As the artisan thinks from materials, so the dancer thinks from the body'; in this case, I am both thinking through my materials and through an awareness of my own body (2013: 94).

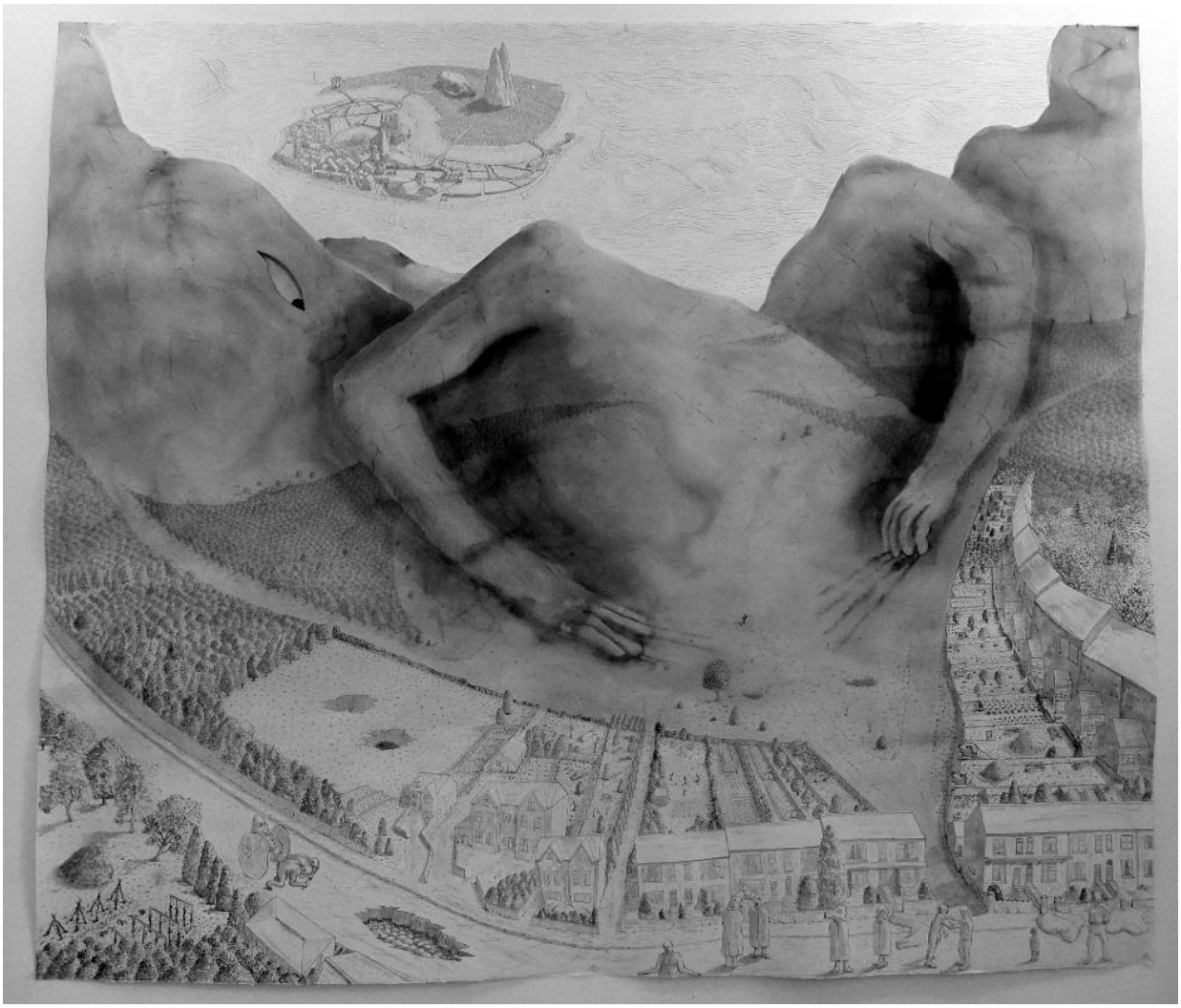

FIGURE 6: GARRY BARKER *BODY, LANDSCAPE, AND MEMORY* (2018) WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER

Trying to visualise the body from within is a process that depends on a particular type of inner awareness, what I have called an eye for touch; therefore, a much more haptic approach to image making needs to be foregrounded. In the opening scene of *The English Patient* (Anthony Minghella 1996), the camera moves lovingly over what you think is a close-up of human skin but, as it pulls away from the surface, it becomes apparent that this is watercolour paper. Marks uses this image to point to the 'tactile qualities' of film and video, particularly pointing to the choice to use 'haptic' close ups, like Minghella's, when they want to 'make viewers unsure of their relationship to the image and the knowledge it implies' (2000: 177). Several contemporary artists have looked at the aging body as something objectified. Sometimes, they have used photographic documentation, including close-ups of the aging skin, such as John Coplans' (2002) images of his own aging body and Anastasia Pottinger's photographs of centenarians (Smithson 2011), or they have painted it in to emphasise the surface appearance of aging, such as Joan Semmel's paintings of herself (2015) and Lucian Freud's paintings of his mother (Blau 2011). I was interested in finding a way to discover images that are less precise and more unsure of themselves that carry a knowledge of the interior body/mind and which were, therefore, acknowledged as subjective, but which might point towards a way of avoiding stereotypes. As Kampmann (2015) states, I was aware that, 'Pictures of age and aging are not only symptoms of general

ideas about age, but also play an important part in producing ideational images and models of age.' When looked at from the standpoint of art historical models, there are many gender specific clichés, which mostly no longer help us define what it is to be old. An ascetic lifetime perhaps represented by a bent and crocked body of an aging male hermit; however, a lifetime of depravity may well be portrayed as an image of a woman's body treated in almost exactly the same way. As Susan Sontag (1977) pointed out, there are different standards set out in society for the way that male and female aging is measured.

I was trying to use drawing to capture several things at once both as a memory and as an experiential body for memories to inhabit. Mingella's close up filming of watercolour paper reminds us of how similar to skin a paper's surface can be. Our skin can, of course, be stripped off, flayed, and stretched out as a flat sheet but, above all, it acts as a boundary for the body, a membrane that separates the inside from the outside. However, this membrane is also part of the world and things are constantly passing through it, back and forth, into and out of the world – food, sweat, inhaled particles, blood, mucus, germs – all passing backwards and forwards, prefiguring the slow dissolving of the body back, eventually, into the world from which it came. It is in perpetual interaction with the environment and the only thing that prevents it from dissolving into its surroundings is life itself (Lambert 2014). The fact that other things can pass into the body also leaves it open to contamination. Simondon's hylomorphic worries which, as he pointed out, could, on a social level, lead to a master/slave dichotomy becoming mirrored by how we think about the body as being either separate from or continuous with the rest of the world. As Simondon states, 'All the content of the interior space is topologically in contact with the content of the exterior space on the limits of the living being; there is no distance in topology' (in Lambert 2014).

It could be argued that this fear of contamination lies behind many of our social ostracisms. As Lambert puts it, I fear that your matter will deteriorate the membrane that is my body' (2014). This principle of abjection or 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 2002, p160.) became, at one point in the process of image development, very important and openings in the body form, as well as other bodies entering and exiting, became essential to the feeling tone, which included anthropomorphic visions of fears of contamination.

There is an interesting distinction between the way we use the words 'flesh' and 'skin'. 'Flesh' suggests thickness and substance which is better suggested by paint, and 'skin' the thinness and surface quality that has a much closer affinity to drawing. When looked at closely, handmade drawings are just a field of marks. But the nature of a mark field is essential to an understanding of the drawing as a whole. Not only does the mark quality and handling tell a story, but also the concept of a mark field as something that comes together as an identifiable entity when you see it from a distance is itself fascinating. You can think of this situation as being like what happens when you begin to examine something with various powers of magnification. This allows us to think about how things 'look' and how appearance is a relative concept that depends on moving our conceptual framework beyond our 'normal' sense of scale, which is based on a particular understanding of ourselves. Once that framework is questioned, such as when we see our skin under an electron microscope, we can begin to accept all manner of possibilities as to what might constitute the 'reality' of appearance. My research into what might stand for skin or become an equivalent metaphoric surface, therefore, went beyond the idea of mimesis and I began to search for more geologic qualities (Fig. 7).

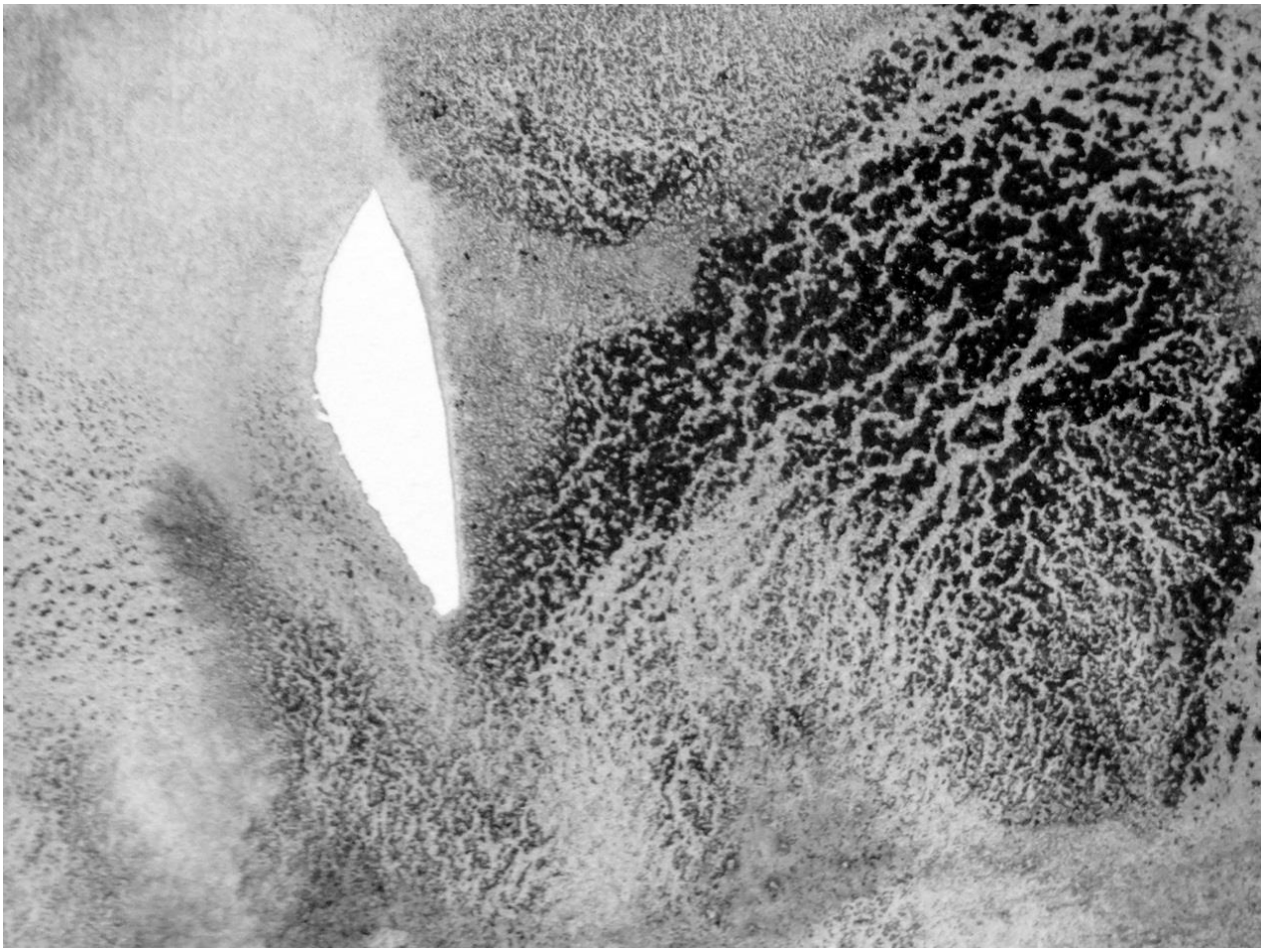

FIGURE 7: GARRY BARKER *SURFACE DETAIL OF METAPHORIC SURFACE* (2018)

Making votives for a non-religious community

The living body needs constant attention if it is to maintain itself and, as Ingold points out, 'left to themselves materials can run riot' (2013: 94). Constant attention is needed if we are to make sure things are held together in a proper manner. This maintaining of the body is something I have only tended to do when confronted by illness or accident, and so responses to these issues have been developed more by happenstance than design but, even so, they have been extremely important to the generation of this recent body of work.

Toothache has been an ongoing problem over this last year and so I decided to confront it. At the time, I was engaged in a ceramic project and, because there were small lumps of clay left around in the studio, I decided to make some model teeth and mouths. I decided to 'deposit' or transfer my tooth pain into these models and it seemed to work, if only as a distraction. After making several drawings of ideas, I decided on a medallion-like mouth form and made several out of clay. These were glazed and fired, and then used as votive-like objects, designed to carry the pain away. Strangely it seemed to work, or perhaps the making of these objects coincided with the dentist getting down to the root of the problem but, in the process of making them, other people became aware of their existence and a few asked to have one. They quickly came back and said that they thought these things had relieved their own pain. This made me think that perhaps other types of pain could be relieved or released in this way. Didi Huberman (2007) argues that the use of votives goes back to the Upper Palaeolithic era. One of the first

uses human beings found for images of the body were as effigies of bodily parts that needed to be cured or healed. They are regarded by Schlosser as 'Bildmagie' (Rampley 2013: 49) – magical objects that worked because the split between symbol and symbolic referent had not yet occurred. They were, in effect, not just substitutes for arms, legs, or whatever else needed fixing, as they acted in some way as if they were actual parts of a body, rather than representations. Because votives have been used for thousands of years and that people who were not particularly religious also seemed to find a use for them, I decided to make more, but this time focusing on other ailments, until a range had been produced, including both two and three dimensional versions. A frozen shoulder was followed by a nose bleed, a stiff neck, and then a sore leg. An operation was represented as a scar and, as these objects were made, associated rituals were developed as ways of transferring pain into the objects. Prints were burnt in a specially made ceramic vessel and the ashes kept in ceramic containers. Other votives were made to be broken or hung on walls; some were made to simply be held tightly in the hand. People seemed to be interested in what was going on, usually with a great sense of humour, because they believed they would not work and it was just a 'bit of fun'. People that discussed the votives were very aware of psychosomatic illnesses, and have suggested that they might function in a similar way to the placebo effect. This aspect of the project was totally unintentional and it emerged as an unexpected accident. Interestingly, as my awareness of votives has grown, I have found that their aesthetic mediocrity coupled with their formulaic and stereotypical character has meant that they have, to some extent, disappeared from the history of art.

Every year I open my studio and put on an exhibition of the work I am making. This allows me to get a feeling for how local people respond to it, as well as giving people with more of a fine art background to visit the studio and judge its success. I am very aware that I have two audiences and I value the feedback from both. This year I separated the votive work from the images that visualised the aging body and memory spaces. Although there was considerable conversation and dialogue about the latter, the thing that people wanted to buy was the toothache votive. If they bought one, people were asked to concentrate on their pain and then look intently and mentally make their pain enter the votive as they clasped the medallion shape tighter and tighter in their hand as the pain releases. They were to then hang the votive on their wall as a reminder of what had been done.

FIGURE 8: GARRY BARKER *TOOTH VOTIVE* (2018) CERAMIC

Reflection

Making images to allegorically visualise a future supportive community infrastructure also needs to involve an awareness of aging. The community of people that see themselves as needing to consider aging as a serious issue, as well as those coming to the end of their working lives and beginning to think about the next stage of life (the 'young old') are often identified as a primary audience for this work. The research I have done in relation to old age highlights many misconceptions about the nature of older people. In making images that confronted bodily feelings and how memories become essential to the establishment of an identity, I have begun to explore both a private inner awareness and, via working with older people, aspects of others' lives. This enables me to see if others going through a similar aging process can empathise and/or relate to the developed images. In this case, my decision to build images that fused landscape and body together in such a way that memories and other storylines could be drawn over the body/landscapes proved vital to the communication process. It explored how these

issues come together for older people and suggested that this is a constantly on-going situation applicable to everyone, no matter their time of life.

Eduardo Kohn in 'How Forests Think' states that, 'Lives and thoughts are not distinct kinds of things' (2013: 99). He describes a 'live' form of semiosis, one that is constantly being constructed and that is flowing between humans and non-human actants. The thoughts that have been generated by this project have included reflections on a neighbour's recent illness, others' illnesses, and a growing awareness of the fact that people do not plan for old age. The physical effort of making gets harder as you get older. Therefore, one of the most interesting issues that I explored was how the skills of making that take hours and hours of practice to build up, which has become recognised by a community of practitioners (Sennett 2009: 25), are eventually compromised or threatened by a body that can no longer do the things that it used to do. In particular, as an artist with a drawing led practice, I was aware of earlier precedents, such as that of Matisse who, in response to being confined to a wheelchair, worked with the limitations that his illness had placed on his mobility. As Matisse once explained, 'I have needed all that time to reach the stage where I can say what I want to say […] Only what I created after the illness constitutes my real self: free, liberated' (Carelli 2014).

Loss of kinaesthetic or sensory abilities can be assessed by looking at the various ways that an image has been made. Scale can be used to assess the degree of overall bodily movement needed to construct the work. For instance, long lines that demonstrate that control of mark making has to come from the shoulder or the waist, or the whole body has to be engaged in moving across the artwork. These indications can be coupled with a smoothness of execution that demonstrates levels of neural control over hand movements: how well blended are areas that need subtle control? how confident is the mark making? An image can suggest in many ways the extent of the artist's control of the materials. However, it is harder to assess what areas of real-world perception are embedded into art making. Sometimes, this is evidenced by an individual's ability to translate an experience into a visual idea that can be realised by art materials; for example, a map of an area that was experienced, or an ability to reproduce an aspect of the 'look' of something, such as its colour, its texture, or tone. However, perception levels can also be evidenced by how sensitive an individual is to the materials they are working with. It is interesting how these ways of assessing perceptual abilities mirror a realism/abstraction divide within art. Cognitive and symbolic applications can also be hard to assess but, by using self-reflection, it can be quickly established whether or not there is an intent to communicate emotive or intellectual ideas by assessing the narrative that will emerge from any dialogue. This could lead towards a model for evaluating the abilities of not just artists as they get older but any functioning human being.

One of the other key issues to emerge, which now requires further research, is the emergence of what I would call 'imaginative sympathy' as an aspect of metaphoric expression. How do the images made within this process begin to make sense within the community of people that are looking at them? The images made are not immediately accessible but, as connections are made and dialogues begun, imaginative and metaphoric reasoning does appear to have a role within a growing individual and community awareness of this particular time of life.

This project is only in its first year; I have yet to give my first presentation to the community group I am working with and so cannot report on their responses. Although, I am aware that the work helps to open out what Stephen Willats called 'the territory of art in society' (2000: 11). Willats' criticism that 'in

operating within the delineated territory of "art's social environment" […] art has largely restricted the area of function of art practice to its internal fabric of norms and conventions' still rings true (Ibid.).

I have deliberately not engaged with how art works with older people as a form of therapy, and I have also yet to practically explore how artwork can be used as a way to demonstrate a breakdown in functions. Instead, at the moment, I am much more interested in looking at how drawing can be a sophisticated tool that can realise the complexity of a situation. As Lusebrink (2010) observes, the focus on using drawing as therapy and as a diagnostic tool when working with older people could be seen as yet another example of not taking older people seriously.

As myself and the group of people that I am in daily contact with progress through the stages of 'middle old' and 'old old', hopefully I will be able to continue working and responding to changes in both my internal condition and external environment, as well as continuing our dialogues. As was stated in the short abstract at the beginning of this article, an art practice based on conversations with others is, by its very nature, a constantly evolving one as it follows the changing nature of people as they age.

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