

Lugosi's Children



**CURATED
BY BRONWYN LLOYD
27 AUG —
01 OCT 2011**

BRONWYNNE CORNISH
JULIA DEVILLE
JANE DODD
KATHARINA JAEGER
STEPH LUSTED
ROSEMARY MCLEOD

TIM MAIN
SHELLEY NORTON
BEN PEARCE
PAUL RAYNER
TANYA WILKINSON

FOREWORD

JACK ROSS

TOD BROWNING'S 1931 MOVIE DRACULA MAY BE A CLASSIC, BUT IT'S FAR FROM A MASTERPIECE. WHEN YOU COMPARE ITS STAGEY SETS AND STATIC CAMERAWORK WITH THE CREEPY INTENSITY OF MURNAU'S NOSFERATU (1922), OR EVEN JAMES WHALE'S STYLISHLY CAMP FRANKENSTEIN, ALSO RELEASED IN 1931, THE WHOLE THING SEEMS DISTINCTLY UNDERCOOKED.

The one thing it really has going for it can be summed up in two words: Bela Lugosi. One might even go further, and ascribe the film's undoubted success (then and later) to two immortal lines of dialogue:

[as Renfield arrives at the Count's castle in Transylvania, to the accompaniment of a pack of howling wolves]:

Count Dracula: Listen to them. Children of the night! What music they make!

[later, at dinner]:

Count Dracula: This is very old wine. I hope you will like it.

Renfield: Aren't you drinking?

Count Dracula: I never drink ... wine!

It's alleged that Lugosi's English was so poor that he was forced to memorise his lines like a musician, purely as a collection of sounds. Accent,



TIM MAIN
Morning Glory: there are things we can't recall, blind as night that finds us all
(detail) 2011
wood, ceramic, gesso, oils
100 x 160 x 16 cm
Courtesy of the artist

emphasis, pitch – everything had to be written out for him in advance. The absurdly over-the-top phrasing of those two lines (“*Vot Myoo-zeek they mehk!*” & “*Ay neffer dreenk - vayn!*”) has therefore nothing to do with “acting” in the normal sense of the term. Lugosi was not carefully setting out to craft a character by the way he spoke the lines. They must have become familiar to him through the innumerable times he performed the part of Bram Stoker's Count – first on stage, then in the Browning film, and then in the long melancholy series of parodies and sequels

which provided his main source of income for the rest of his life. Perhaps he should be regarded as more of an opera singer than a screen actor in this, his greatest role.

One might ask why this second-rate Hungarian actor has become an immortal god of the silver screen when other, far more talented actors have gone to the dust to which they belong. What *is* it about vampire movies, with their dark shadows, lurking dangers, sharp sting of canine teeth and telltale trickles of blood on white nighties which absorbs and perturbs us still?

They are ridiculous. So much is obvious. Why, then, do they keep on being produced? Why does *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have a worldwide cult following rivalled only by the cult following of the various stars of the *Twilight* movies, with new contenders – *Underworld*, *The Lost Boys*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *Let the Right One In* – constantly lurking in the wings, ready to assert their right to a place in the sun (or out of the sun, perhaps).

Pure escapism is the most obvious explanation. There's something comforting about so thoroughly comprehensible and controllable a terror as a vampire. Vampires may be evil, but they do obey certain laws. Their status as supernatural beings does not exempt them from having to bow to other supernatural forces, such as crosses and churches and even folkloric superstitions such as garlic and that prohibition against crossing a threshold unbidden. They don't so much call into question the laws of nature as confirm them on another level: "As above, so below." Just as matter should always obey the laws of physics, so must occult beings obey the laws of their own shadowy world.

In terms of human psychology, though, the role of such beings, and of the realms of the imagination they inhabit, may be even more vital than that. After all, the inability to find a language for the expression of grief, of terror, is one of the principal causes of psychosis and breakdown in ordinary people who've had to endure extraordinary events.

How adequate is our everyday lexicon for the experience of war, of massacre, of torture, of natural disaster? And yet these things happen all the time, to vast numbers of people – not just in foreign parts, not just in Transylvania or Nazi Germany, but in the humdrum streets of our own towns and cities.

We have no language for such things because we hope so profoundly not to experience them

ourselves. To empathise truly with those people who've had to see the benign face of their universe stripped away involves acknowledging that all of us live in fear of one ultimate, unknowable terror: our own physical death. Hence Gothic, hence vampire movies, hence Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker, Francisco Goya ... If we lived in some happy, rational kingdom of love and harmony we wouldn't need them. That's not going to happen anytime soon, though.

The idea of Lugosi's offspring, his children of the night, and the music that they might make, is the concept that underpins the thematic group exhibition *Lugosi's Children* at Objectspace, but the work of the eleven artists is not simply an evocation of the darkness that is an ever-present part of our lives. On the contrary, each of the works deals, in some sense, with the ways in which we cope with, understand, and confront the darkness through humour and parody; through observations of the beauty and symmetry of the natural world; through rites, superstitions and spiritual beliefs; through myth and story; and through history and memory.

In the book *Gothic NZ: The Darker Side of Kiwi Culture* (2006), Ian Wedde suggests that if we accept that the gothic is a mode of displacement then we might also recognise that this is 'what jolts us, through laughter or horror or both at once, into the kind of cultural confidence that lives in its histories, not in spite of them. That chooses to be haunted as a necessary condition of consciousness.'^[1]

Lugosi's Children, then, are the antithesis of escapists. They examine their own inner space for clues to the true nature of our experience of the world – in all its majesty and horror. A trio of oracles, a ceramic cross-dresser, a set of sutured goblets, a stuffed aunty, a vinyl curse, a plastic bag Olympia, a Freudian thought forest, a jewelled gosling, a group of predator/prey brooches, boxed addictions and charms, a floral *memento mori*, and a display of inedible cakes are all clues, potential maps of this numinous area where we confront our deepest hopes, memories, desires and fears.

When you examine the works of Lugosi's Children you will see that their wisdom may be intuitive; their 'music' a response to the logic of darkness rather than that of the daylight world, but sometimes those can be the only answers one can bear to listen to.

'Listen to them. Children of the night!
What music they make!'

1

Ian Wedde, Afterword,
*Gothic NZ: The Darker
Side of Kiwi Culture*,
Eds., Misha Kavka,
Jennifer Lawn and Mary
Paul, Dunedin: Otago
UP, 2006: 159.



STEPH LUSTED
The Green Fairy 2011
Silver, glass; display case: oak, glass
cabinet: 28 x 22.5 x 13 cm
Courtesy of the artist

SILT CASTLES AND BURIED SAFETY PINS

BRONWYN LLOYD

SHORTLY AFTER THE FIRST OF CHRISTCHURCH'S MAJOR EARTHQUAKES IN SEPTEMBER 2010, I INVITED LYTTELTON-BASED TEXTILE ARTIST KATHARINA JAEGER TO TAKE PART IN THE LUGOSI'S CHILDREN EXHIBITION AT OBJECTSPACE, WHICH MATT BLOMELEY AND I HAD ORIGINALLY CONCEIVED AS SOMETHING LIKE A NEO-GOTHIC CRAFT SHOW FULL OF SINISTER AND CREEPY OBJECTS.



The idea of a collapsed monstrosity was abandoned by Katharina when the magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck Christchurch on 22 February 2011, claiming the lives of 181 people. I received intermittent reports from Katharina in the months that followed. One email described the only salvage mission permitted by the local authorities to recover items from her damaged studio in the heart of the Red Zone, and another provided an account of the makeshift studio she had set up in the corner of a bedroom in her 'caged house' which was awaiting a new roof. Two subsequent emails described progress on the new work that she was making for *Lugosi's Children*:

In a phone conversation with Katharina she talked about the pathos of the broken buildings around the city and how she had come up with an idea for a 'collapsed monstrosity' that was a natural development from her recent works; disquieting anthropomorphic forms with furniture fragments connected to fabric slings, sleeves and densely stuffed textile protuberances. 'Imagine,' she wrote on 7 February 2011, 'a work that feels sort of discarded, but not sentimental, or "oh you poor lonely thing with all your body gone, just a shell". No. It won't take itself too seriously, but it won't be a fun thing either. I'm not aiming at making a senselessly scary or macabre thing, but I doubt it will make sense.'

KATHARINA JAEGER
New skin thickens on my skull (detail) 2011
textiles, metal, thread
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

19 June 2011

Just wanted to let you know that I'm not making a collapsed monstrosity. I just can't do it with all the current events. I'm working with a collection of silver goblets I rescued from our studio in the Red Zone. I'm building them up with cloth and making small standing monsters. There will be a little city of them ... They are much more intimate than I had planned. I needed to work in a different way. You never know when you have to

pack up here. It was important to make something portable, something I can pack up in a bag anytime. The small scale is a challenge but it really suits the situation here.

28 June 2011

I think I'm making progress with these strange, still lumps. Bought some cashmere suit pants down at Toff's in Ferrymead. They have everything for \$2 and this provides me with the right material for a lump or two. Went there on Sunday - wasn't sure if their warehouse survived the last quake, but they were open. There were large cracks inside on the concrete floor and you had to watch your step while going along the very long clothing racks. Bored children played in the seams of the concrete slab floor where you could see the silt coming through. The kids scooped the stuff out to make little castles or buried safety pins they collected from underneath the racks.

The earth moves and a city collapses. This much we know. But Katharina Jaeger's correspondence over the past ten months details the ways in which she has adapted to the restrictions imposed upon her by the earthquakes and aftershocks in order to continue making art and retain some vestige of order and normality in her life. Katharina's resilience is manifested in the title she has given her protean assembly of goblet creatures; 'New skin thickens on my skull,' an excerpt from Carol Ann Duffy's poem 'Dies Natalis' (meaning 'birthday'). What Katharina has created is a ceremonial group to celebrate the building of something new over something lost, and to lock in the memories of the past while preparing for the future.

It was not until I read the account of Katharina's excursion to Toff's where she witnessed the children happily building silt castles on a ruined foundation and burying safety pins in the cracks for luck, that I realised that *Lugosi's Children* would be much more than a moody, neo-Gothic craft show. What it has become is an environment filled with silt castles and safety pins of every kind; a space in which the works of the eleven artists are linked together by their disparate responses to the subject of mutability and change.

ORACLES, OPIATES, AND A PLASTIC CURSE

When sculptor Bronwynne Cornish consulted the travel diary she kept during a trip to India in 2007, she was reminded of the incident that had first motivated her to create a group of clay Oracles. Pasted into her diary was an article cut from the *Delhi Times* with the provocative title, 'Deity's curse destroyed our village.' The article told the story of a village razed to the ground by a vengeful Oracle who was consulted by the citizens with regard to proposed structural changes to the town. The Oracle deemed that the changes would constitute a breach of the ancient code of ethics governing the town, and predicted a catastrophe should they go ahead with the work. The villagers chose to ignore the Oracle's advice and thus the wrath of the Deity was incurred.



**BRONWYNNE
CORNISH**
Screech (detail) 2011
ceramic earthenware
63 x 22 x 34 cm
Courtesy of the artist

As Cornish discovered, India is awash with such signs, portents and wonders. She was told about, but never managed to visit, a library of leaves in a small town in Tamil Nadu where visitors receive an astrological reading based on a palm leaf text that is supposed to have your current life story written on it as well as the stories of your past lives.

So charmed was Cornish by the idea of a past, present and

future life transcribed on the surface of a single leaf that she incorporated a gilded leaf into the design of one of her first Oracle figures as a power object held by the bird-headed Oracle, *Screech*. A small black dog, perhaps a jackal, is the power object cradled in the arms of the mirror-headed Oracle, *Sigh*, a benevolent Deity despite her reptilian legs and very large claws. The dual species of *Screech* and *Sigh* demonstrate Cornish's ongoing interest in 'trans-animal' figures inspired by mythology, such as the plumed serpents found in ancient Mayan myths.

It is Bronwynne Cornish's customary practice to allow certain special objects in her possession to reveal their intended purpose in their own time, sometimes after a period of many years. The punctured volcanic rock imprisoned within a wooden cage that sits at the feet of the black dog Oracle, *Howl*, is a case in point. It was made by Daniel Clasby, one of the founding members of the Fingers Jewellery collective. After decades in Cornish's ownership the piece takes on a new

function as a talisman for her dog Oracle, the sculpted clay figure inspired by the baying dogs that she heard throughout the night during her stay in Delhi.

The vintage oval hand-mirror that stands in for the head in *Sigh* is another example of a pre-existing object repurposed in Cornish's art so that it takes on new significance and meaning. The mirror was a gift from a sculptor friend who knew of Cornish's interest in mirrors from antiquity such as the metal mirrors of the Etruscan civilisation and the mirrors of polished obsidian used by the Mayans. The role of the mirror in *Sigh* is to reflect the supplicant's face as they approach the Oracle to seek an answer to their question.

It is important to note that Bronwynne Cornish does not produce ritual objects for their own sake. If she creates an Oracle, for instance, her intention is that it should perform its function as prophet, guide and as a predictor of change. Therefore, the three Oracles included in *Lugosi's Children* invite our written questions, and have agreed to offer responses:

- For questions about love and relationships, seek advice from the Mirror Oracle, *Sigh*.
- For questions about fate and destiny, consult the Black Dog, *Howl*.
- For material concerns of health, wealth and prosperity, visit the Bird Oracle, *Screech*.

It is the mind-altering kind of change, fuelled by opiates and alcohol, that links the two box-sets produced by jeweller Steph Lusted for *Lugosi's Children*. Like Bronwynne Cornish, Lusted is another artist fascinated by the rituals associated with particular objects and the part that they play in specific ceremonies.



STEPH LUSTED
The Green Fairy
 (detail) 2011
 Silver, glass; display
 case: oak, glass
 cabinet:
 28 x 22.5 x 13 cm
 Courtesy of the artist

The preparation of absinthe is the subject of the work *The Green Fairy*, a newly completed piece in Lusted's ongoing series of 'Special Collector Sets', in which a number of individual items of jewellery are displayed inside a specially designed wall-mounted cabinet, so that the jewels can be viewed as sculptural pieces when they are not being worn.

The Green Fairy is the name by which absinthe is commonly known, on account of the trance-like state that it induces, often transporting the imbibor

to dark and mysterious realms. Lusted's box-set contains an ornately decorated absinthe glass and silver spoon displayed in a cabinet with a skull and dagger closure. The repetition of a bat motif in the design on both the glass and spoon hints at the inspiration for the piece, the much lauded absinthe scene in the 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola.

"Absinthe is the aphrodisiac of the self," whispers the Count as he prepares Mina a glass of the potent liqueur. "The Green Fairy who lives in the absinthe wants your soul, but you are safe with me." The innocent young woman sucks on the absinthe soaked sugar-cube that Dracula offers to her on a silver spoon and is transported to a distant time and place where she was once his Princess.

Atmospheric scenes such as this set the creative process in motion for Steph Lusted. The homes, fashion, decorative objects and parlour etiquette of polite Victorian England provide the historical backdrop for the second of Lusted's box-sets, *Bittersweet*. Again, however, she shows us the darker, hidden face of polite society. In this case the work refers to the backstreet opium dens where well-heeled gentlemen could find a temporary escape from their cares; shadowy, steam-filled dens such as those featured in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, or in Charles Dickens' last unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

Lusted's cabinet includes a decorative poppy necklace and a syringe brooch. Her use of red coral in the necklace is a deliberate allusion to the folklore and superstition associated with this material. Red coral is sometimes referred to as the Medusa stone. According to the Ancient Greek myth, when the hero Perseus cut off the head of Medusa, whose look turned men to stone, the monster's blood gushed out into the sea where it transformed the seaweed on the ocean floor into red coral. A necklace of red coral is believed to provide the wearer with a defence against enchantment, to ward off turbulent dreams, and to protect an individual from the evil eye.

No such protection can be guaranteed for viewers of Ben Pearce's work in *Lugosi's Children*. The adhesive vinyl-cut drawing stuck directly to the gallery wall takes a novel approach to the subject of change. *Loss Study 2* is an act of translation. More specifically, it is the translation of a curse across three material media.

The mechanisms that govern the mind are a major preoccupation in Pearce's work. Repressed or forgotten childhood memories resurface, and he houses them, even the nightmares and traumas, in wall-mounted shelters, caverns and ramshackle structures. Pearce describes these built sanctuaries in terms of his desire to 'make visible the quirks and tragedies of our mind's recording machinations, to materialise the emotional states that can cripple our bodies and which often distort the way we record time and memory.'^[2]



BEN PEARCE
Loss Study 2 2011
vinyl
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

The parasitical nature of a curse is a subject that interests Pearce. The plastic drawing affixed to the wall at Objectspace began life as the small sculpture *Curse* (2009), a brain-like form with a trailing stem composed of blocks of polymer clay and black walnut and pierced by nails and sticks like a voodoo doll. The sculpture reveals the terrifying way that a curse latches onto the brain and seizes hold of an individual until they are so afflicted that they either die of fear, or are released from its grip by some even more powerful physical or spiritual agent.

Curse was displayed in a sealed vitrine when it was exhibited at the Paul Nache Gallery in Gisborne in 2010, as if the clinical container offered viewers protection against its contaminating power. In its second incarnation in the same exhibition, a two-dimensional version of *Curse* appeared in two gouache and ink drawings on paper, one titled *Feeling* and the other *Loss*. The titles of the drawings indicate that the translation of the curse from a sculptural form to a drawing somehow diluted and diminished its potency.

The vinyl version of Pearce's *Curse* is a further study of *Loss*, as the title suggests, but in this case the work will quite literally be lost for good when it is peeled from the wall at the end of the exhibition, balled into a sticky mound and discarded. Thus the curse will finally be lifted.

Or will it?

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES AND DEATHS

To celebrate your birthday, your coming of age, your release from this safe, immature little world, we have made you a cake.

A wooden cake with wooden icing and wooden pegs for candles.

Please do not take it with you when you leave, but you may take the plastic yoghurt container filled with dry macaroni. Insert your own candle here.^[3]

This stanza from a poem written by my sister Thérèse Lloyd was inspired by a story I told her about a childhood memory of my last day at kindergarten. My teacher presented me with a wooden cake with a pretend candle in it, a ritual repeated for every child turning five and about to go off to Primary School. I recall waiting with great anticipation for my big day to arrive, but then being struck by how dull this rite of passage proved to be when my turn finally came to blow out the faux candle on the fake cake.



TANYA WILKINSON
Cake 2011
glazed ceramic
22 x 20 x 20 cm
Courtesy Private
Collection, Auckland

I was reminded of the wooden cake when I visited Karl Chitham's home earlier this year and saw a large, multi-tiered ceramic cake with white glazed icing sitting on his sideboard. When I asked about it he said that it had been made by Tanya Wilkinson. She had made seven such cakes, Karl told me, and given them as presents to friends before she left New Zealand earlier this year to join the Volunteer Services Abroad programme.

In the twelve or so months prior to her departure, Wilkinson enrolled in a pottery class at Auckland Studio Potters. Her desire to make

things with clay seemed entirely natural after years spent amassing a substantial collection of New Zealand ceramics, as well as championing the work of a number of potters in her former role as Director of the Corban Estate Arts Centre in Henderson. During her time at CEAC Wilkinson staged exhibitions of the work of celebrated ceramists such as Briar Gardner, as well as the work of pioneering but lesser known potters Jovan Rancich and Wally Silva. In her subsequent role as an independent curator, she developed a major touring exhibition of Len Castle's pottery.

I witnessed Wilkinson's transformation from a collector into a maker first-hand when she visited me one day after she had retrieved her first batch of bowls from a firing. She gave me a little moss green bowl that fits perfectly into my cupped palm. I was more than a little surprised to later

2

Information sourced from
Ben Pearce's website
<<http://www.benpearce.co.nz/writing/>>

3

Thérèse Lloyd, extract
from the poem
'Feathers Disks Horns',
from the unpublished
poetry portfolio, 'Caution
Moving Parts'
International Institute
of Modern Letters,
Victoria University,
Wellington, 2006.

learn that the imposing terracotta cake on Karl's sideboard had been made by the same hand.

Wilkinson explained to me recently that the cakes were an experiment and that she had no idea from which hidden recess of her brain they had emerged. The likely source became a little clearer, however, when she added that her grandfather had been a baker and that she had used his old cake decorating tools to pipe the decorative elements onto her cakes, noting that clay has a very similar consistency to icing.

In response to my query about her motivation to make ceramic cakes, Wilkinson continued:

I love the idea of turning the 'art' of cake making into something permanent rather than something that gets eaten and lost. Often I think people enjoy looking at [wedding] cakes more than actually eating them. I didn't want them to be at all perfect – in fact the looser and wackier the better.

A selection of Tanya Wilkinson's wacky ceramic cakes adorn the long table in the exhibition, on loan from the various recipients, including *Lugosi's Children* exhibition designer Karl Chitham. In the context of an exhibition about mutability and change they might be viewed as symbols of permanence, unlike ordinary, edible cakes, but celebratory cakes also symbolise change and the passage of time, made to mark significant moments and turning points in our lives such as birthdays and weddings. Tanya Wilkinson's cakes have certainly given me a fresh perspective on the importance of the wooden cake with the wooden candle that marked the beginning of my own journey from kindergarten to school.

When Karl Chitham began visualising the layout and design for *Lugosi's Children*, the first item of purpose-built exhibition furniture he decided upon was a five metre long, fabric-draped table that would play host to a number of the objects in the show. Wilkinson's cakes were the first pieces to grace the table in the planned layout, and as soon as I imagined them in place, I couldn't shake the image of Miss Havisham's cobweb covered table, laden with her decomposing wedding banquet, despite Karl's protestations that that was not the 'look' he had in mind.

I remained adamant that the 'scene' we were creating needed to have a stand-in for Dickens'

mad, lovelorn character, and as if the fates conspired on my behalf, the perfect candidate appeared in the form of Rosemary McLeod's textile *Aunt II* from her recent solo exhibition *Thinking of Aunts* at Wellington's Bowen Galleries.



ROSEMARY MCLEOD
***Aunt II* 2011**
blanket and vintage
textiles
aunt: 47 x 38 x 27 cm;
suitcase: 7.5 x 40 x 28 cm
Courtesy of the artist
and Bowen Galleries,
Wellington

The first description we have of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* is recounted to us by the novel's young protagonist Pip. Initially he perceives the aunt of his playmate Estella, in the dim light of her boudoir, as a woman richly attired in silk, satin and lace. This first impression, however, quickly gives way to another far more ghoulish one, as Pip realises that the ornate wedding dress she wears is faded, withered and dishevelled, and that whereas 'the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman...the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone.'^[4]

Rosemary McLeod's *Aunt II* fits the part of Miss Havisham well, even though she is rounder, younger and more robust. The tightly stuffed calico bride is embellished with mother-of-pearl button eyes, and she wears an antique, faux orange-blossom wreath and veil and a beaded tulle bodice from an early 20th century evening gown. Her neck is adorned with strings of faux pearl and ivory beads, and a late Victorian brooch containing a baby's photograph is pinned to her breast.

According to McLeod, *Aunt II*, one of six *Aunts* 'represents nameless aunts who appear in forgotten albums and framed photographs in junk shops, whose images will be thrown away when the frames are recycled.' As a self-confessed 'collector of the ephemera of other peoples' lives,' McLeod also regards herself as a 'collector/imaginer of their unknown stories.' 'The aunts,' she explains, 'are an attempt to reconcile memory with found or created objects [...]. Almost all of the materials used are vintage, dating from around 1900 to the 1960s. Old suitcases seemed to be suitable plinths for these identities, discovered from imaginary time travel.'^[5]

I vaguely remember meeting the three unmarried Great Aunts from my father's side of the family: Nell, Maud and Ita. It is regrettable that stale biscuits and sweet tea in a small musty dining room forms the sum total of my recollection, along with the gift of a doll dressed in Greek National Costume from Auntie Ita after she returned home from an overseas trip. The doll

4
Charles Dickens. *Great Expectations*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1907: 60.

5
Information sourced from Rosemary McLeod's exhibition statement published on the Bowen Galleries website <<http://www.bowengalleries.co.nz/artists/mcleod.php>>

I remember more clearly than my stern, conservatively attired aunt, mainly because I ruined it soon after I received it while attempting to change its clothes, realising too late that the costume had been glued to her papier-mâché body.

It saddens me that I know so little about the lives of Nell, Maud and Ita, now long gone and largely unremembered. Rosemary McLeod's *Aunts*, therefore, serve a valuable purpose in rekindling fragmentary memories such as these, which would otherwise go the way of all flesh.



JULIA DEVILLE
Golden Gosling
(detail) 2010
gosling, 19ct diamond
beads approx. 0.70ct
antique rose cut
diamond, 18ct white
gold, 2.4ct white
sapphires, black
diamonds, sterling silver,
black keshi pearl
33 x 49 x 21 cm
Courtesy of the artist
and Sophie Gannon
Gallery, Melbourne

Julia deVille is not so much interested in inventing narratives using the ephemera of a person's life as she is in creating mementoes of mortality. Inspired by Victorian methods of sentimentalising death through objects of remembrance and articles of adornment, deVille uses traditional gold and silversmithing techniques in her work, and she adheres closely to the specific range of materials employed historically in the manufacture of Victorian mourning jewellery such as jet; a petrified wood suitable for carving, human hair and taxidermy. The use of materials that were once living operates as an important symbolic element in the contemporary *memento mori* that deVille creates, reminding us of the mortality of all living things.^[6]

Although some might regard taxidermy as a somewhat macabre and gratuitous artform, the inclusion of deVille's *Golden Gosling* in *Lugosi's Children* is intended to allay such misconceptions. The artist is dedicated to the humane treatment of animals, and as such, she only uses creatures in her work that have died of natural causes.

When she was alive the gosling was named Peep and, before succumbing to an illness, she was the much-loved pet of a friend of deVille's. In my recent correspondence with the artist, she described the process of working on the piece:

The gosling was donated to me by a friend. It was her pet and had to be put down due to illness. It was quite a sentimental piece for me to work on because the gosling (Peep) thought my friend was her mother and we were both very emotional about the situation. This is why

I decided to adorn the gosling with a 'crown' of diamonds and white gold, to symbolise her preciousness. On her breast she has a silver sparrow skull, pavé set with white sapphires and with a black keshi pearl dangling beneath it.^[7]

deVilles's *Golden Gosling* was one of nine taxidermic creatures including an ostrich, two fawns, two kittens and a black raven, exhibited in the artist's solo exhibition *Night's Plutonian Shore* at Melbourne's Sophie Gannon Gallery in 2010. Reviewer Marcus Bunyan remarked on the beauty and sensitivity of deVille's approach to transforming these dead creatures into art: From the bejewelled '*Golden Gosling*', the goose that wears the gold not lays it to the cute stillborn fawn '*Lenore*', named after Edgar Allan Poe's poem of the same name that discusses "*the proper decorum in the wake of the death of a young woman, described as "the queenliest dead that ever died so young"*," there is a delicacy to these sculptures... The sleeping fawn wears a little golden bridle and is covered in golden hearts, the harness bringing in the element of control (of life, of death, of the body, of identity) into the piece... This sense of control is reinforced in other pieces in the exhibition including the three pieces '*Charon*' (2010), '*Nevermore*' (2010) and '*Kitten drawn hearse*' (2010).'^[8]

Less corporeal than Julia deVille's art, but no less technically proficient, Tim Main's recent sculptural investigations of the subject of mortality offer a variation of the *Vanitas* tradition in painting, in which still life compositions containing particular motifs such as decomposing fruit, butterflies, musical instruments and flowers are employed to symbolise the brevity of life.

Main's approach to the *Vanitas* theme focuses on botanical forms, particularly flowers, vines and grasses, and *Lugosi's Children* includes the large wall-mounted work *Morning Glory: there are things we can't recall, blind as night that finds us all*, from his 2011 exhibition *The Vines* at Christchurch's Arthouse Gallery.

Morning Glory, a flowering herbaceous vine from the *convolvulaceae* family, is so named because its flowers open and harden during the early morning hours. The elaborately carved and sculpted wooden and ceramic flowers and tendrils of Main's *Morning Glory* spread across the wall. In this respect the work is less concerned with the underlying symmetry and patterns of the natural

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Information sourced from
Julia deVille's website
<<http://www.discemori.com/>>

7

The quotation is a
lightly edited version
of an email Bronwyn
Lloyd received from
Julia deVille dated
28 June 2011.

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Marcus Bunyan, online
review of Julia deVille's
2010 exhibition, *Night's
Plutonian Shore* at Sophie
Gannon Gallery,
Melbourne <[http://
artblart.wordpress.
com/2010/08/11/review-
nights-plutonian-shore-
by-julia-deville-at-sophie-
gannon-gallery-
richmond/](http://artblart.wordpress.com/2010/08/11/review-nights-plutonian-shore-by-julia-deville-at-sophie-gannon-gallery-richmond/)>



world, which has been the artist's primary aesthetic concern in recent years. Evidence of this preoccupation can be seen in the perfect symmetry of his ornate carved Rosettes inspired by Gothic architecture, one of which, *Southern Forest I*, is included in the present exhibition.

With regard to his past series of works, Main's only requirement of his audience was that they look closely at his art and reflect upon ideas about the harmony and order of nature contained therein, whereas in his recent practice the specific plants he refers to have other symbolic dimensions. Harvested grasses such as wheat and corn, for instance, have traditionally been used as symbols of the hope of resurrection after death, and recent pieces such as *Morning Glory* demonstrate Main's desire to make more apparent the symbolic dimension of his art through the use of evocative subtitles for the works.

In the Victorian era a complex symbolic language of flowers was formulated to enable people to communicate their feelings to one another without the need for words, thus safeguarding their reputation against malicious tongues. In this symbolic botanical language *Morning Glory* meant 'love in vain'. If we follow the thought and graft 'love in vain' to *Vanitas*, from the Latin meaning 'emptiness' we are beginning to grasp the symbolic component of Tim Main's work. Furthermore, when we learn that the subtitle, '*there are things we can't recall, blind as night that finds us all*,' is a line borrowed from the Samuel Beam song 'Passing Afternoon' by Iron & Wine, a further symbolic layer presents itself.

On first hearing, the lyrics appear to describe a pleasant afternoon in early autumn with children playing in piles of fallen leaves and people

TIM MAIN
Southern Forest I
(detail) 2007-08
pine, ceramic,
gesso, oil paint
184 x 184 x 12 cm
Courtesy of Milford
Galleries Dunedin

relaxing in the grass, but the underlying subtext of the song concerns the fleeting nature of our existence, the fragility of human life, which the songwriter compares to china dolls, and the temporary nature of our connection both to people and to the earth, which he describes analogously in terms of a lost wedding ring and a misplaced jar of bougainvillea seeds.

Night, or death, will eventually find us all the song claims, and by bringing morning and night together in the title and subtitle for his work, Tim Main cleverly draws our attention to the *Vanitas* theme of the piece, revealing to us that morning and night, just like life and death, bookend our numbered days.

GOLDILOCKS AND A BEAR, GRAYSON AND CLAIRE, OLYMPIA AND FREUD.

The absence of subtlety coupled with a defiant attitude characterises the works of the three artists in the third section of *Lugosi's Children*. The sense of fickleness that is part and parcel of the subject of mutability is manifested in the work of Jane Dodd, Paul Rayner and Shelley Norton through the different ways that each of them turn some of our preconceptions on their heads, reverse the so-called 'natural order' of things, and leave viewers questioning the validity of the rules that govern our lives.



JANE DODD
Panthera Pardus 2011
Ebony, sterling silver,
stainless steel, Mother
of Pearl shell
3.5 x 1.5 x 3.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Photograph: Studio
La Gonda

Jane Dodd literally upends the eleventh Law of the Jungle, which, in Rudyard Kipling's classic story reads: Ye may kill for yourselves, and your mates, and your cubs as they need, and ye can; But kill not for pleasure of killing, and *seven times never kill Man*.^[9]

In the brooch *Ursus Arctos* a braided length of a child's hair dangles limply from the sharp claws of a bear's paw, the ribbon still neatly fastened to the end of the golden plait. In *Panthera Pardus* the sleek ebony head of a panther with steely blue eyes holds a disembodied human hand in its mouth. In *Coluber Constrictor* an ebony snake with a forked silver tongue curls menacingly around a human bone, the smooth surface of the bone stripped clean of flesh.

Although Dodd claims that the group of brooches 'are informed by the environment of fairy stories, but not directly linked to any particular one', it is

difficult not to 'read' a work like *Ursus Arctos* as a Goldilocks gone wrong tale, depicting the violent reaction on the part of the bears to their empty porridge bowls, broken chairs and slept in beds. In Dodd's revisioning of the classic fairytale trope of animal/human interaction, the wild animals definitely have the upper hand.

Dodd maintains that that is indeed the purpose of these new pieces, which aim to 'reposition our species to an unfamiliar and uncomfortable place in predator/prey relationships,' and she does not shy from the prospect of disarming and worrying the viewer. 'I hope to upset order,' Dodd wrote about the works recently, to which she added that 'these pieces may be seen as apocalyptic images, views of 'the wild' seizing control over the humans, taking retribution for suffering, and exacting revenge over oppressors.'

The subject of Dodd's new works is topical given the recent incident in the news in which a large polar bear attacked a group of British students camping on a remote Arctic glacier as part of a high-end adventure holiday. The bear entered their camp, killed a 17-year-old boy and mauled four others before being fatally shot by another member of the party. The attack, while undoubtedly tragic and horrifying for all concerned, nevertheless raises questions about the wisdom of setting up camp on the Svalbard archipelago, which is home to about 2,400 people and 3,000 polar bears. Furthermore, one might question the fairness of a wild creature losing its life as a consequence of human beings trespassing on its own natural habitat.

There are certainly no victors in this recent scenario, no story of the wild triumphing over the civilised, and no flouting of the predator/prey paradigm, but Jane Dodd's works succeed nonetheless in positing an alternative, and making us feel less sure about the dominance of our species in the natural world.

The works by ceramist Paul Rayner in *Lugosi's Children* refer to an actual victory against the odds rather than an imagined one. Rayner's glazed earthenware pieces, the *Grayson Perry Spirit Bottle*, and the two plates, *Claire the Tranny Potter*, and *Claire as the Mother of All Battles*, are a trio of commemorative items that celebrate the work of the British potter and cross dresser who won the prestigious Turner Prize in 2003. Grayson Perry attended the awards dressed as his alter-ego Claire, and even more controversially, Rayner notes with tongue in cheek, 'won for making pottery'.



PAUL RAYNER
Claire as the Mother
of All Battles 2011
glazed earthenware
2.2 x 27.2 cm
Private Collection,
Whanganui

Rayner's trio of works are as much about about saluting Perry's defiant challenge to those within the world of Fine Art who tend to regard pottery as a lower-order artform as they are about celebrating Perry's unconventional status as a 'tranny potter'. In response to my query about the design of the *Grayson Perry Spirit Bottle*, a two-sided, hand-built ceramic, Rayner replied:

On one side Grayson appears as his alter-ego, Claire, in a typically 'girly' frock (shades of *The Vivien Girls*, outsider artist Henry Darger's anti-heroes, proud possessors of 'little boy' penises). On the reverse Grayson sports his 'Essex Man leathers' (he's an avid motor-cross fan and had his bikie gear custom-made complete with phallic motif). In addition, like Linda Blair's character in *The Exorcist*, the head swivels right round so that Claire becomes a helmet-wearing stormtrooper and the macho leather guy a Dresden doll. The piece is glazed using the centuries-old method of mixing coloured stains with liquid clay, or slip, which makes it look like a curious old Elizabethan relic (which it is I suppose!). The plates also feature slip decoration and recall 16th and 17th century commemorative wares whose subjects were typically Kings and Queens of England.

The addition of a swivelling head to the piece is a humorous way of encouraging viewers to interact with the *Grayson Perry Spirit Bottle*, and the game of mix and match cleverly draws our attention to the idea that individuals generally

have many sides to their characters and that a cross-dressing, motor-cross loving potter is just one example of this.

In addition to the English tradition of pottery that provides much of the inspiration for Rayner's work, one might also consider the significance of the Spirit Bottle form itself, which relates to the Chinese ceramic tradition of creating highly decorative Spirit Bottles as funerary objects. Placed beside the feet of a corpse they contained the spirit of the departed person. Although Grayson Perry is very much alive, Rayner's *Spirit Bottle* made in his honour, nevertheless contains and celebrates the spirit, subversiveness, integrity and talent of a much admired contemporary potter.

Concluding your tour of *Lugosi's Children* you find yourself in a small, low-lit room at the back of the Gallery. The room was the vault in the building's former life as a bank, and inside the concrete echo-chamber in which you now stand, you will notice breathing holes in the side wall to your left, which were designed to ensure that the bank staff didn't suffocate while counting the money behind the heavy steel door. Close your eyes. Breathe deeply.

As you slowly inhale and exhale, you might think about a vault as a rarefied container in which precious things are hidden away. You might think about a vault as a metaphor for your own mind. You might think about the memories, the secrets, the big and little traumas locked away inside the vault of your mind. Open your eyes.

The process of accessing your sublimated self is necessary in order to comprehend the installation by Shelley Norton that adorns the walls of the vault, comprising a line-drawn *Olympia* and the multi-piece work, *Freud's Forest*.

You will likely recognise the figure of the reclining courtesan from Manet's famous painting *Olympia* (1863) with her attendant servant and the black cat arching its back at the foot of her bed. The theme of mutability is evidenced by Norton's bold act of subtraction, in which she co-opts the black ribbon adorning Olympia's neck in Manet's masterpiece, creates a long ribbon from shredded and knitted plastic bags, and then uses this to redraw the outline of Olympia, which she affixes to the wall of the vault using entomology pins.

Norton's fascination with the way that the ribbon around Olympia's neck in Manet's painting served to heighten the power of her gaze as well as the sexual and erotic tension of the work, led

the jeweller to reflect on the potential of simple articles of jewellery, such as a black ribbon, to underscore and magnify human action and thought, and to play a role in the manufacture of meaning.



SHELLEY NORTON
Olympia (detail) 2008
plastic bags
130.5 x 190 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Photograph:
Mark Hamilton

Norton conceived the idea of an Olympia constructed from the discarded plastic carrier bags containing the desired objects and consumables of contemporary society, in order to reflect the contradictory nature of the dialogue that Manet's painting enacts, which 'has become both smothered and heightened by today's consumable lifestyle.'

To this space in which Norton's pinned Olympia reposes, the artist has added a forest of Freudian thoughts; 69 black flower-like tendrils to be precise, that record Olympia's subliminal conversation with the viewer, discussing subjects as diverse as repressed sexual impulses and consumer driven desires. In her exhibition proposal Norton discussed the function of this plastic forest of thoughts:

The strange thought pieces that accompany this drawing discuss the unconscious conversation between Olympia and the viewer. Weird configurations reminiscent of Carl Schlemmer's bulbous geometrical ballet costumes and Rebecca Horn's finger extensions, trawl and stagger across the viewer's unconscious, dredging up half formed sensations...[and] pure, unrepressed thoughts, which may then be playfully acted out in the imagination using these odd gestural pieces as theatrical props.

Norton wrote that she regarded the vault as 'a wonderful metaphor for the birth and manufacture of thought and meaning – breaking out from a small embryonic safe box.'

Now that your mind's eye is open, and your thoughts are unleashed, turn around and step out of the vault. Pass quietly through the Gallery space, looking left and right as you go, exit the building through the glass doors, and cross the threshold into the bright light of day.

Don't look back.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PHILIP CLARKE
DIRECTOR

BRONWYN LLOYD
CURATOR

Bronwyn Lloyd has had an association with Objectspace since it opened that spans many roles. She has brought to all of those roles considerable experience, human warmth, a fine intellect and an enormous generosity from which Objectspace, and its visitors, have benefitted. All of these qualities, and many more, have been demonstrated by Bronwyn, again, as the curator of *Lugosi's Children*.

Objectspace aims to create new opportunities for practitioners, and we include curators and exhibition designers within the category of practitioners. In order for this to happen however we are reliant on practitioners who wish to 'take the stage' and Objectspace offers Bronwyn our congratulations and thanks for taking the stage as the curator of *Lugosi's Children*.

As Bronwyn comments in her fine writing the conceptualisation of this project has changed since she began researching. *Lugosi's Children* concerns itself with our quickness: that sensitive, tender and vital core that somehow, and miraculously, provides us with fortitude in the face of real and imagined adversity. The issues that *Lugosi's Children* addresses are eternal issues but particularly pertinent in 2011.

Bronwyn and I extend our joint thanks to the following;

The eleven artists who have contributed to *Lugosi's Children* and from whose works we have derived a great deal of inspiration.
Karl Chitham who has a long association with

Objectspace, for his visionary exhibition design, his humour, generosity and his infectious, can-do attitude.

Alan Deare of Area Design for engaging so enthusiastically with the exhibition concept, which is reflected to great effect in the atmospheric treatment of both the catalogue design and exhibition collateral.

Former Objectspace Programme Coordinator Matt Blomeley for early concept development and for supplying the exhibition's marvellous title, and to new Objectspace Programme Coordinator, Laura Howard, for so capably picking up the reins where Matt left off and bringing her exceptional organisational skills, support and positivity to the project.

Dr Jack Ross for writing the entertaining foreword to the catalogue, which so perfectly sets the atmosphere for the exhibition.

Dr Jenny Lawn from Massey University, School of English and Media Studies (Albany) for her contribution to the project by way of a public talk contextualising notions of the Gothic in New Zealand film, literature and art.

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