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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

2012

RESEARCH PAPER

Θ

The Organic Grotesque in the Visual arts: *The visual representation of abnormal organic growth found in nature, the graphic arts, painting, assemblage and the human body*

By

Emily Hunt

2013

Statement:

This volume is presented as a record of the work undertaken for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts.

Table of Contents:

- Acknowledgements
- Summary and Abstract
- List of Illustrations
- Page: 1 – Introduction
- Page: 7 – Chapter One: The Porosity of the Grotesque Surface: *Cutaneous Conditions reflected in the Grotto*
- Page: 17 – Chapter Two: The topography of the skin: *Cauliflower muscles and ballooning goiters.*
- Page: 33 – Chapter Three: At the Cellular Level: *Visual representations of the Organic Grotesque in Macroscopic and Microscopic detail.*
- Page: 46 – Conclusion: *Evolution of the Organic Grotesque*
- Bibliography

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Summary of Practical Work:

The experience of a student exchange to Gent, Belgium in 2011 provided me with the opportunity of space and time to create the artwork discussed in this dissertation. The influence of Flemish medieval architecture, Netherlandish art as well as travel, greatly influenced the watercolour paintings, etchings and sculptural objects I produced for the Masters examination. The body of work was exhibited under the title, 'The Entangled Bank': a reference to Charles Darwin's narrative on the variety of life forms found in a country garden hedge. Six portraits in mirrored box frames, a series of six facial studies, over twenty sculpture objects were exhibited in the Masters Graduation show, December 2011.

Abstract of Research Dissertation:

The dissertation takes the porosity of human skin as a starting point for a series of investigations into an aesthetic category that I have termed, the 'organic grotesque'. The neologism was devised as an orienting device to describe pictorial attributes of surface, in particular, abnormal, biological growth. The research divides the subject into the following areas: the grotesque surface, the topography of the skin, the macro/microscopic grotesque and uses these as armatures to discuss aspects of biology, art, ornamental grotesque, topography of the human body, scale, evolution and disease. Each chapter also attempts to make clear the relationships that exist between the scholarly and historical research and the operation of the 'grotesque' in my own artwork. The research has been undertaken as an inquiry into the relationship between the aesthetic and psychological responses of disgust that inform my own compulsion to create work.

List of Illustrations:

Chapter One:

Illustration 1.1 – Detail of mural in the *Domus Aurea Nerois* (room 100, lower end of wall decoration) Source: Luciani, Roberto & Sperduti, Leandro. *Domus Aurea Neronis, Roma* Roma : Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato : Libreria dello Stato, 1993.

Illustration 1.2 – Detail of wall mural in Rome, Villa Madama (Particolare delle grottesche della Loggia. Source: Luciani, Roberto & Sperduti, Leandro. *Domus Aurea Neronis, Roma* Roma : Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato : Libreria dello Stato, 1993.

Illustration 1.3 – Giuliano da Sangallo: Drawing after Roman Grotesques in the Domus Aurea. c.1505. Source: E.H Gombrich. *The Sense of Order - A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art.* London & New York: Phaidon Press, 2006

Illustration 1.4 – *A Grotesque* by Nicoletto da Modena. Engraving Italian, 1525-50. Source: Snodin, Micheal. *The V&A Book of Western Ornament.* London: V & A Publications, 2006 p.69

Illustration 1.5 - Close up of lichens on Avebury stones. Source: O'Neil, Polly *Surfaces and textures : a visual sourcebook* London : A&C Black, 2008.

Illustration 1.6 – Yellow lichen on a monolith at Avebury. Source: O'Neil, Polly *Surfaces and textures : a visual sourcebook* London : A&C Black, 2008.

Illustration 1.7 - Mr Dede Koswara with the skin disease *Epidermodysplasia verru.ciformis.* Source: *http://weirdnews.about.com/od/globalmadness/ss/Indonesian-Tree-Man.htm*

Illustration 1.8 – Plate LXVIII – *Elephantiasis.* "This hideous disease is fortunately never seen in this country, except in a few individuals, natives or residents of southern climates. The engraving here given in an exact portrait of that individual, after the tubercles had been rendered a little smoother than they originally appeared by the application of poultices"

Illustration 1.9 – Plate LXVII – *Lupus, noli me tangere.* "This representation of the extensive ulceration of the face, occasioned by the severe and unmanageable disease. It produces even more deformity than Elepantiasis, with which it is sometimes confounded; but from which it differs essentially in its character and progress"

Illustration 1.10 – Plate LVII – *Eczema rubrum* "This form of Eczema varies somewhat in different cases; but always appears under the form of minute vesicles, accompanied by a diffuse redness, which the roughness and elevation of vesicles distinguish from simple Erythema.

Illustration 1.11 – *Skin Portrait #3 (Hag).* Emily Hunt. Watercolour on paper (60 x 55cm) 2011

Chapter 2:

Illustration 2.1 – *The Great Hercules.* Goltzius, Hendrick. Engraving (561x 402mm) 1589 Source: *http://www.metmuseum.org.* A3 Foldout

Illustration 2.2 & 2.3 – *Skin Helmets (Wet & Dry)* Emily Hunt. Fired glazed ceramic (approx.17cm diameter) 2011. A3 Foldout

Illustration 2.4 – *Winebag and Wheelbarrow.* Hans Weiditz. Woodcut (292 x 198mm) c.1521. Source: Geisberg, Max; rev. and edited by Walter L. Strauss. *The German single-leaf woodcut, 1500-1550.* New York : Hacker Art Books, 1974

Illustration 2.5 – *The Nose Dance at Fools' Town.* Sebald Beham, woodcut 1500-1550. Source: Moxey, Keith. *Peasants, Warriors and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989

Illustration 2.6 - *Physician and Assistant.* Hans Weiditz. Woodcut (300 x 230mm) c.1521. Source: Geisberg, Max; rev. and edited by Walter L. Strauss. *The German single-leaf woodcut, 1500-1550.* New York : Hacker Art Books, 1974

Illustration 2.7 - *Dance Partners.* Hans Weiditz. Woodcut (324mm x 197mm) c. 1521. Source: Geisberg, Max; rev. and edited by Walter L. Strauss. *The German single-leaf woodcut, 1500-1550.* New York : Hacker Art Books, 1974

Illustration 2.8 – *Violets.* Hans Weiditz. Woodcut form *Brunfel's Herbarum vivae eicones*, Straussburg, 1530 Source: Ivins, Jr, W.M. *Prints and Visual Communication.* Cambridge, London: The M.I.T Press, 1985

Illustration 2.9 – *The Procession of Gluttony.* Peter Flötner, Woodcut (254 x 276mm) 1540 Source: *http://www.britishmuseum.org*

Illustration 2.10 – *Food Dude.* Emily Hunt. Soft ground Etching (400 x 300mm) 2010. A3 Foldout

Illustration 2.11 – *Marriage Mate.* Emily Hunt. Soft ground Etching (250 x 240mm) 2010

Illustration 2.12 & 2.13 – Jake, Dinos Chapman. *Insult to Injury.* (Göttingen : SteidlMACK, 2003)

Illustration 2.14 - *The Human Sundial,* (After) Peter Flötner, woodcut (200mm x 313 mm) 1540-1560 (circa)

Illustration 2.15 – *Kostuumdrama (Wasted).* Emily Hunt. Watercolour and soft ground etching on paper (835 mm x 590mm) 2012

Illustration 2.16 – *Entangled Bank Object.* Emily Hunt. Found Goblet, air-drying clay, gold paint, licken, fabric, gold leaf,. Approximately 33cm tall, 2011

Illustration 2.17 - *Entangled Bank Object.* Emily Hunt. Found pottery vase, air-drying clay,copper sheet, lacquer. Approximately 40cm tall, 2011

Illustration 2.18 - *Entangled Bank Object.* Emily Hunt. Found pottery goblet air-drying clay, enamel paint, lacquer., wig hair. Approximately 40cm tall, 2011

Illustration 2.19 - *Entangled Bank Object.* Emily Hunt. Found pottery flask, air-drying clay, enamel paint, lacquer., fur. Approximately 50cm tall, 2011

Chapter 3:

Illustration 3.1 – "A tower-like casting, probably ejected by a species of Perichaeta from the Botanic Garden, Calcutta: of natural size, engraved from a photograph" Source: Darwin, Charles. *The formation of vegetable mould through the action of worms : with observations on their habits.* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945)

Illustration 3.2 – "Tower-like casting from near Nice, constructed of earth, voided probably by a species of Pericheata: of natural size, copied from a photograph" Source: Darwin, Charles. *The formation of vegetable mould through the action of worms : with observations on their habits.* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945)

Illustration 3.3 – *Nuclear Man.* Emily Hunt. Watercolour on paper & collage (61x46cm) 2011. A3 Foldout

Illustration 3.4 – Detail: *Nuclear Man.* Emily Hunt. Watercolour on paper & collage (61x46cm) 2011

Illustration 3.5 - *A History of Robotics.* James Morrison, oil on canvas (102 x 168 cm) 2011. A3 Foldout

Illustration 3.6 – Spooner's Transformations No.2: 'The Microscope'. William Spooner. Colour Lithograph. England c.1830. Source: Mannoni, Laurent & Werner Nekes & Marina Warner. *Eyes, lies and illusions : the art of deception.* London: Hayward Gallery in association with Lund Humphries, c2004.

Illustration 3.7 – Illuminated from behind. - Spooner's Transformations No.2: 'The Microscope'. William Spooner. Colour Lithograph. England c.1830 Source: Mannoni, Werner Nekes & Marina Warner. *Eyes, lies and illusions : the art of deception.* London: Hayward Gallery in association with Lund Humphries, c2004.

Illustration 3.8 – *Nudibranchia: Sea Slugs.* Ernst Haeckel. Colour lithograph from Kunstformen der Natur. c.1902 Source: *http://caliban.mpiz-koeln.mpg.de/haeckel/kunstformen/Tafel_043.html.* A3 Foldout

Illustration 3.9 – *Siphonophorae: Jellyfish.* Ernst Haeckel. Colour lithograph from Kunstformen der Natur c.1902 Source: *http://caliban.mpiz-koeln.mpg.de/haeckel/kunstformen/Tafel_017.html.* A3 Foldout

Illustration 3.10 – *Skin Portrait #3.* Emily Hunt. Watercolour on paper (60 x 55cm) 2011

Illustration 3.11.1 & 3.11.2 – Jim Woodring's graphic panel from *Manhog beyond the Face* p.9 (*Jim* Volume two, Number One 1993) compared to detail from Ernst Hackel's *Siphonophorae: Jellyfish.*

Illustration 3.12 *Manhog,* Jim Woodring. Source: Panel from *Weathercraft; A Frank Comic*, Fantagraphic Books, 2010

Illustration 3.13 & 3.14 - *De Humani corporis fabrica*, Andrea Vesalius. Engraving. Basle 1543. Source: *The Waking Dream : fantasy and the surreal in graphic art, 1450-1900 /* introd. and commentaries by Edward Lucie-Smith ; notes on the plates by Aline Jacquiot ; [translated from the French by Nicholas Fry] (New York : Knopf ; London : Thames and Hudson) 1975.

Illustration 3.15 – *TWA,* Sue Williams. Oil and acrylic on canvas (183 x 213 cm) 1997

Illustration 3.16 – *Sunbathers in Buttsville*, N.J. Sue Williams. Oil and acrylic on canvas (183 x 213 cm) 1997

The Organic Grotesque in the Visual arts:

The visual representation of abnormal organic growth found in nature, the graphic arts, painting, assemblage and the human body.

Introduction:

Throughout this dissertation I address a specific form of aesthetic category known as 'the grotesque', which is visually identifiable in the graphic arts, painting and sculpture. This dissertation explores one aspect of 'the grotesque' namely the 'organic grotesque.' The basis for the invented term 'organic grotesque' is comprised of historical, biological and geological origins, and visually, the 'organic grotesque' has botanical, dermatological and exsanguinous characteristics. Put simply, the 'organic grotesque' can be regarded as a visual representation of abnormal skin growth on the surface of an organism. Throughout this thesis, the term 'organic grotesque' has served as a personal neologism, an orienting device, which I have used to explain a recurring visual language that can be discerned in the work of the artists I have researched, as well within my own art practice. Throughout this dissertation I discuss graphic forms of art, in particular engraving, woodcut, drawing and etching. These specific forms of monochrome art were chosen, because monochrome linearity is a feature of the grotesque aesthetic I will be examining. Besides the graphic examples, painting and sculptural artworks reveal a density of figuration and personality, adding definition to the term the 'organic grotesque' and revealing types of grotesque human behaviour.

In this dissertation, I connect the historical exploration of the expression the 'grotesque' to my own response of disgust towards cutaneous conditions (warts, scales, boils). The introductory subject matter connects to the second issue of the topography of the human form. To conclude the research, scale is introduced as an important concept in negotiating the structure of the organic grotesque. Throughout the dissertation I will draw conclusions of the visual and conceptual definition of the neologism of the 'organic grotesque' to my current art practice. I will visually anaylse the artworks that have informed my practice, from the period of the sixteenth century up to the contemporary age. I discuss my idiosyncratic technique, which uses the linear outline to create the

grotesque form, then a decorative colour-fill to portray the grotesque surface as an analogy to human skin. I will scrutinize the surface of my work, which strives to create movement and delineate growth using decorative pattern and flattened perspective.

In Chapter One, the historical origin of the word 'grotesque' is elaborated and discussed, in relation to the environment of the cave and the skin. The first chapter describes the root definitions of the organic and grotesque, in context of the parallels shared between human and plant surfaces. The chapter endeavors to provide a graphic explanation of the concept of the organic grotesque using a visual method. I intertwine the discussion of the historical origins of the word 'grotesque' with an evaluation of the significance of the human emotion of disgust: the supplement to the concept of the organic grotesque. Examples of chromolithographic plates of skin disease are compared in relation to the aberrant surfaces found in a subterranean cave such as lichen and fungus. Furthermore, my portraits of Netherlandish peasants are reflected in the visual conventions of medical illustration. I discuss my methodology in painting representations of skin disease, using the outline of the flatten face as a container for patterned skin conditions. I compare the composition of the chromolithographic plates to the framing device in my own portraits.

In the second chapter, my research looks towards the topography of the human body as a site of the organic grotesque. The chapter focuses on representations of abnormal human form and its visual articulation occurring during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Within the area of bodily deformities, freakish protuberances such as muscles and goiters are analysed as being biologically grotesque. The second chapter continues to elaborate the history of the meaning of the grotesque through investigating Renaissance print-making. The evolution of the ornamental grotesque, and its spread from Italy to Northern Europe, climaxing in countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, reached extreme levels of complexity and intricate design known as the Netherlandish Grotesque style.[1] Printmedia played a significant role in the distribution of the imagery of the grotesque and its further development[2] because the inexpensive paper medium of woodcut and engraving enabled the transmission and reproduction of images of the

[1] Lewis, Philippa., and Gillian, Darley. *Dictionary of Ornament.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) p.155
[2] Trilling, James. *The Language of Ornament.* (London: Thames & Hudson World of Art, 2001) p. 58

grotesque to the general population.

The second chapter focuses on two extreme artistic personalities who produced printed matter in the sixteenth century. I examine the hyperbolical art form and its peculiar aesthetic. I will describe and compare the work of two print makers, the German woodcut master Hans Weiditz (c. 1500-1536) and the Dutch master engraver Hendricks Goltzius (1558 - 1617). Hans Weiditz was a German Renaissance printmaker and although an obscure character, his woodcuts produced during the sixteenth century express a unique sense of humour not found in other printmakers of his time. The portraits of peasants and townsfolk in Northern Germany are relevant to the 'organic grotesque' due to Weiditz's gratuitous distortion of their physical form. Abnormalities such as goiters, engorged stomachs and signs of gout are Weiditz's frequent motifs. Hendrick Goltzius developed a distinctive engraving style called *knollenstil* or 'bulbous style'. The significance of Goltzius's engraving 'The Great Hercules', is attributed to the nodule body topography. The visual analysis is considered via Goltzius's unique technique in creating movement and growth *under* the skin. Concluding each interpretation of the artist's work, my practice is examined in relation to the graphic and conceptual concerns of their visual language. My practice of appropriating medieval woodcuts, in particular the work of German Renaissance woodcut artist Peter Flötner, is revealed as a means to re-invigorate and pinpoint historical examples of the grotesque and caricatures of drunkenness and gluttony. The scatological elements and the buffoonery of the figures are removed from the context of the sixteenth century and dropped into a contemporary age, thus changing the visual language and meaning of the woodcut, and reflecting my misanthropic attitude towards humankind. The chapter analyses my visual approach in attempting to re-evaluate the examples of woodcuts and reveal aspects of the human condition in relation to seductive and intoxicating qualities of alcohol. The work of the contemporary artists Jake and Dinos Chapman are discussed in relation their modification of both Francisco de Goya's *Disaster of War* etching. The Chapman brothers paint over authentic, original prints of Goya's, adding clownish, cartoonish faces to the disemboweled figures, thus rectifying and 'improving' the original etchings. Their practice of taking historical etchings, created by a Master printmaker, and inserting their reworked artwork into the

dialogue of contemporary art can be viewed as a similar methodology within my own practice of appropriating sixteenth century German Renaissance woodcuts. Their focus is on the horrors of war, which has been a continuous human condition since the beginning of civilisation. My focus is discussed in relation to the human condition of alcoholism and gluttony. Here, I discuss my painting based on Peter Flötner's *Human Sundial.*

The droll caricatures drinking to excess in the prints by Weiditz, Flötner and The Beham Brothers were used as a basis to create assemblage sculptures. The statue-like sculptures I produced reference the culture of indulgent alcohol drinking through incorporating found objects such as goblets and other drinking vessels as a basis or stand for the figurative characters. The characters sprout from the mouth hole of the vessels. Their bodies and facial features are droopy and extended, because they are intoxicated themselves. Using a variety of materials such as lichen, gold paint and copper, the characters are intuitively related to the figures found throughout the Netherlandish Grotesque style. The concept and visual medium of the *Wunderkammern* (wonder cabinets, or cabinets of curiosities) is a starting point for the display and construction of the characters steins and tableau vivant layout. The *Wunderkammern* can be seen as the forerunner of modern natural science museums and similar to a miniature museum of the bizarre and freakish natural wonders of the world, however in my construction, it is collection of eccentric personalities. My objective was to simulate a similar atmosphere to the *Wunderkammern* wherein the characters had been, "removed from their original context, (therefore) seem to tell senseless or incongruous stories."[3].

Chapter three leaves the location of the body as site for the organic grotesque, by addressing the concept of scale and measurement in biological proliferation. The conceptual visualisation of scale is utilised as a lens in articulating disgust at the two extremes of viewing. Elements in my practice such as pictorial depictions of magnified skin pores are identified through the dual lens of the macroscopic and microscopic. The scientific theory of evolution and the advent of the microscope are incorporated into the lens when looking at Charles Darwin's conception of the 'entangled bank' and Ernst

[3] Eco, Umberto. *The Infinity of Lists* (London : MacLehose, 2009)

Haeckel's lithographs of microscopic biological growth that are akin to alien grotesqueries. The research will follow the influence of Darwin's concept of evolution on the Victorian idea of the grotesque. A formal visual analysis of his graphic descriptions of worm castings will be compared to his ability to raise the grotesque to a level that could be considered noble. Both Darwin and Haeckel used biological forms to convey to audiences of the time the hidden microbes working away on biological surfaces. Chapter Three is concerned with examining the visualised horror of these magnified entities and the impact of knowing their secret grotesque alien-like forms. I will be paying particular attention to the corresponding relationship between their disgust provoking features and the design of ornament in excess.

The third chapter discusses the work of three contemporary artists. James Morrison is an Australian painter who has influenced my practice through a shared obsession with detail on surface. His paintings are aligned with the visualised concept of the *horror vacui* (horror of a vacuum)[4] and an embodied pictorial model of Darwin's entangled bank. My current paintings are focused on ornamental excess, because they share a similar process and expression, although with a flattened perspective. The ink drawings by Jim Woodring, a prominent graphic artist, are examined in relation to both his extreme 'inside-out' characters and phantasmagoric pictorial narrative. Woodring often draws his characters in extreme violent forms, flayed with gaping wounds. This recurring motif of atrophy can be reflected back to Italian Renaissance medical engravings wherein artists depicted the eternal organs of humans in cold, grotesque hyper-detail. Also surprisingly, Woodring's creations of floating Jivas are appropriated (possibly unconsciously) from Haeckel's sealife creatures. The research will focus on the individual characters, which describe the 'organic grotesque' in particular, the *Jivas* and *Manhog. Manhog* is a character that is thoroughly repulsive and illustrates decay and violence on the skin's surface. The *Manhog* illustrates a figure that is disgusting, both in his physicality and personality. The contemporary paintings of female artist Sue Williams are of interest to the discussion because her work represents the usually unseen world of human orifices. Her paintings can be seen as an obscene wallpaper in which ornamental and gestural markings of

[4] New Oxford American dictionary 2nd Edition 2005

human anuses float in pattern formation. The balance of disgust and attraction is noticeable in William's oeuvre.

Throughout the dissertation, I connect my historical exploration of the expression 'the grotesque' to my own response of disgust, reflecting on the contemporary meanings of 'disgust', then onwards to other artists who have produced artworks that are relational to my own. I question my methodology in my printmaking, painting and sculptural practice, which is inspired by my feelings of disgust towards aberrant surfaces on the human body and biological growth. These include the visual reminders of warts, scales, boils, lichen, mould and slime, in my mind's eye. I reflect how these surfaces are portrayed in so many of my various artworks. In painting, through using decorative fill, in sculpture through creating repulsive characters and in etching through appropriating the Netherlandish master printmakers in over etched, blackened plates.

Chapter One-

The Porosity of the Grotesque Surface: *Cutaneous Conditions reflected in the Grotto*

This chapter explores the history of the concept of 'the grotesque.' By providing an historical basis of 'the grotesque' the foundation is laid for the elaboration of the notion of the 'organic grotesque,' which lies at the heart of this thesis. The 'organic grotesque' must be understood in both visual and conceptual terms. The foundation of the 'organic grotesque' is centred around the discussion of two reflecting surfaces: the cave and the cutaneous skin condition. The porosity of surface, the pitted, penetrable membrane in biological growth on cave and skin provides the central motif for exploring the historical genesis of the concept of the grotesque, and further, provides reason for my elaboration of the concept of the 'organic grotesque.' Variations of grotesque forms sprouting from the 'pores' construct the pattern of visual language inherent in the organic grotesque. Visions of the grotesque result in the human emotion of disgust and this process is embodied in my art practice. A personal, subjective feeling of disgust towards the porous surface is an essential factor to the analysis. Throughout this dissertation, I integrate an individualistic methodology, which aims to visually investigate the physicality of the human skin, its abnormalities and magnified peculiarities, as an analogy, to the concept of the 'organic grotesque'. The research method intends to resolve the comparisons present in historical studies of the term the grotesque, and my contemporary interpretation of disgust within the concepts of surface, ornament in excess and the graphic portrayal of skin in the visual arts.

When one conjures visions of the term 'the grotesque', ugly, repulsive, deformed shapes appear in the mind. Due to the abundant visual references the word grotesque can imply, I have endeavored to find the explicit meaning in my own work. From a personal point of view, the visions I see are related to the surface, because this is the location where the grotesque is born and proliferates. From an aesthetic point of view, the definition of the grotesque is complicated and deviates frequently throughout history. Essentially, the main

prerogative of 'the grotesque' is to, "present the inverse of beauty and rationality".[5] To arrive at one strict explanation has its difficulties because, "weighing against the grotesque is its extreme variability, its extravagance and hyperbole, and its resistance to rules or fixed categories."[6] Furthermore, "Beginning with a visual description, there are at least three types of figures that typify the grotesque: the misshapen or deformed, the mixed or combinatory, and the metamorphic ... the metamorphic grotesque describes figures that appear to be in the process of transmuting from one form or substance to another."[7] The definition then brings in account the constructions of classical, fantastical beasts, such as centaurs, minotaurs and mermaids, which share animal and human characteristics. My research is not concerned with this aspect of the metamorphic, however, I apply its meaning in terms of 'metamorphosis' in relation to real, organic growth generated in living things. This aspect is essential in clarifying the neologism of the 'organic grotesque', for it describes the changing, shifting qualities of the cave and human skin surface.

Breaking down the Oxford dictionary reference meaning of 'organic' from a scientific perspective suggests three interrelated concepts. First of all, as an adjective, the word describes any living matter, alive presently or in the past.[8] The second meaning, 'Physiology: relating to a bodily organ or organs' relates to the actual bodily form of a human.[9] In particular for this analysis, the organ of human skin, is an important reference point when discussing the term the 'organic grotesque'. Finally, the third meaning, 'denoting or characterized by a harmonious relationship between the elements of a whole: For example, the organic unity of the integral work of art.'[10] This last definition is critical in my studio practice, for it describes the unity of grotesque ornament to that of the actual physical nature of the 'grotto'. Within this body of research, the intention is to utilise this concept of organic unity: the structure of the cave, the surface of human skin, and the shared visual language they both share, with the abstract qualities of my pattern making.

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[5] Kelly, Michael. *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 338
[6] Ibid
[7] Ibid
[8] New Oxford American dictionary 2nd Edition 2005
[9] Ibid
[10] Ibid

The Grotesque and the Grotto

The cave is an underground chamber found in the natural world and a 'grotto' can be either man-made or natural. I will be discussing the invention of the man-made grotto, which is a simulation of a cave, and most importantly the art that adorned its walls. Defining the 'grotto' in classical terms, demonstrates its intrinsic association to the natural cave.

> The English 'grotto' is derived from the Latin *crypta* (from the Greek - vault or to hide. Italian *grotta.* French *grotte*), meaning a concealed subterranean passage, a vault, a cavern, cave or pit.[11]

The historical organic unity between the grotesque and nature can be understood as the integral theme of my conceptual practice. It is in my opinion, that the architectural features of the cave, the Roman bath and the grotto share a significant relationship to the actual creation of the original ornamental forms of the grotesque. This can be evaluated through investigating the archaeological discovery of the Emperor Nero's Roman baths. The foundation of the term, 'grotesque', grew from this discovery.

At the end the fifteenth century, in approximately 1488, the infamous Golden House of Nero (also frequently referred to as the *Domus Aurea)* was uncovered on the Esquiline Hill in Rome, Italy.[12] The ancient baths had for centuries been buried under the growth and urbanisation of the city, and for the population at the time was all but completely forgotten. Having been built on the destruction of a city caused by the legendary fire of Rome in A.D 64, Nero took this opportunity to indulge his whims and fantasies. Nero's egotism and obsessive attention for the creative arts drove this colossus project and lead to the visual origins of the grotesque.[13] In numerous accounts of these palaces and baths, the Golden House of Nero is frequently described as a lavish opulence wherein the walls were encrusted in precious jewels and mother of pearl.[14] Of most importance were the wall decorations. Here, found in the murals adorning the wall, are the first graphic representations of ornamental 'grotesques'. Comparing a photograph of a classical mural

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[11] Miller, Naomi. *Heavenly Caves: Reflections on the Garden Grotto.* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1982) p.7
[12] Bunson, Matthew. *Encyclopaedia of the Roman Empire.* Rev.ed. (New York: Facts On File Inc, 2002) p.245
[13] Jones, Peter & Sidwell, Keith. *The World of Rome: an introduction to Roman Culture.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 307
[14] Ibid. p.308

taken inside the Golden House [Illustrations 1.1 & 1.2] to that of an engravings copied from the walls of same location by Giuliano da Sangallo and Nicoletto da Modena [Illustrations 1.3 & 1.4] demonstrates the inventive ability of Renaissance artists to appropriated the discovered forms and how their new compacted style spread quickly throughout Europe in the early 16th century.[15]

> Human figures transformed into stylised plants from the waist down were a Roman specialty. We often find them incorporated into patterns known as grotesques, which combine human, animal, floral and architectural forms in open and whimsical defiance of reality.[16]

Did the architecture of the grotto influence the invention of actual, visual grotesque ornamentation? It appears that the inner world of the grotto allowed for the production of such bizarre forms. The merging of human and plant forms could have arisen from the close psychological relationship man had to the archetype of the cave and its unusual growing surface. The graphic paintings inside the Roman grotto exhibit these characteristics, the bizarre blending of animal, plant and human forms.

> The manner is based on a taste for the marvelous, that imperious need of man's nature to leave the human sphere and launch into a fairytale world of the imagination. It is a universal need, innate in man the same way as poetry and thought, but it evolves more powerfully among people whose civilization is made up of heterogeneous elements of different origins.[17]

When looking back to the historical root of the word 'grotesque', and in context to my contemporary evaluation, I see the notion of the cave still functioning in the definition of the grotesque. In the 'organic grotesque' of my visual practice, the merging of the cave surface to that of existing human skin, and the psychological disgust created from this fusion, produces a pictorial logic in my pattern-making.

The organic physicality of the natural cave grotto is a place teaming with aqueous growth and unfamiliar, bizarre forms. Stalactites and stalagmites often grow in such conditions, which create an alien-like subterranean world. Moisture veils every surface, and the

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[15] Snodin, Micheal. *The V& A Book of Western Ornament.* (London: V & A Publications, 2006) p. 69
[16] Trilling, James. *The Language of Ornament.* (London: Thames & Hudson World of Art, 2001) p. 155
[17] Batterham, David. *Auguste Racinet: The World of Ornament* (New York: Taschen 2006) p. 277

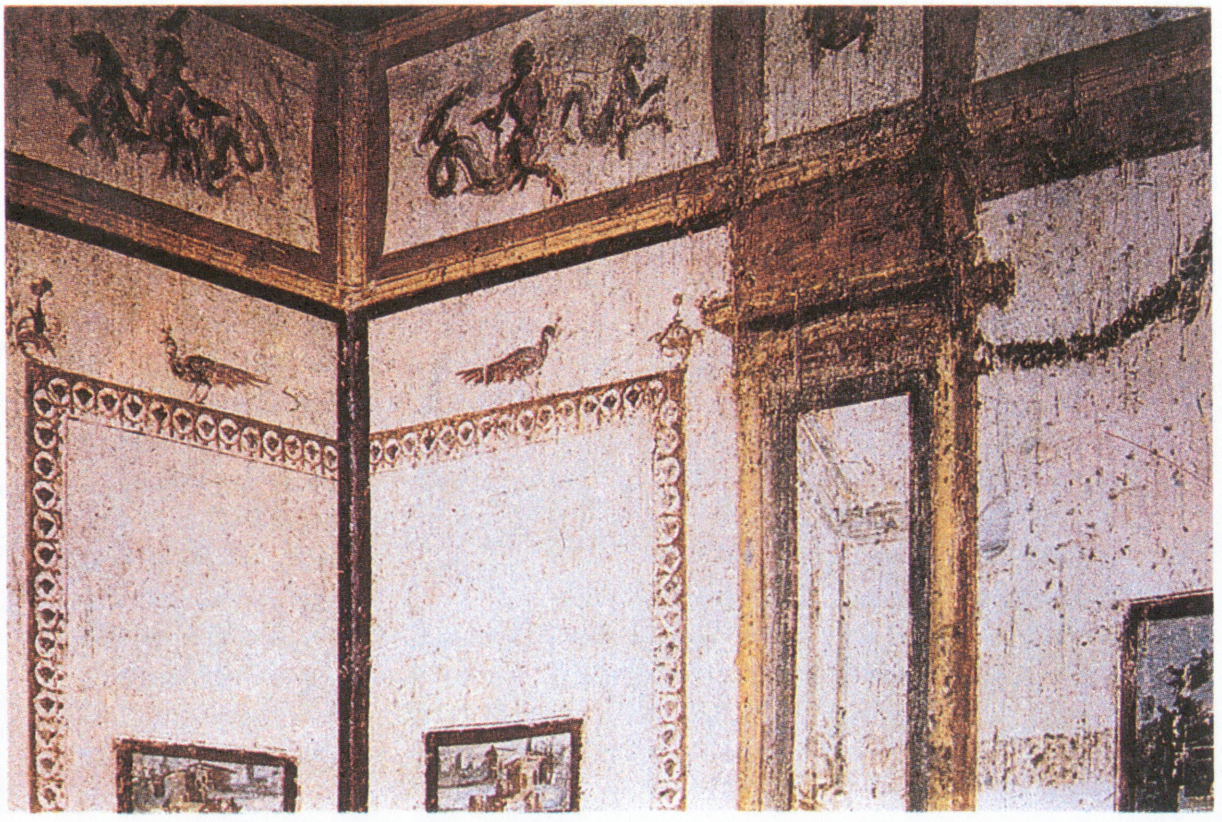


Illustration 1.1 - Detail of mural in the *Domus Aurea Nerois* (room 100, lower end of wall decoration)
Source: Luciani, Roberto & Sperduti, Leandro. *Domus Aurea Neronis, Roma* Roma : Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato : Libreria dello Stato, 1993.



Illustration 1.2 - Detail of wall mural in Rome, *Villa Madama* (Detail of the grotesques of the Lodge)
Source: Luciani, Roberto & Sperduti, Leandro. Domus Aurea Neronis, Roma Roma : Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato : Libreria dello Stato, 1993.

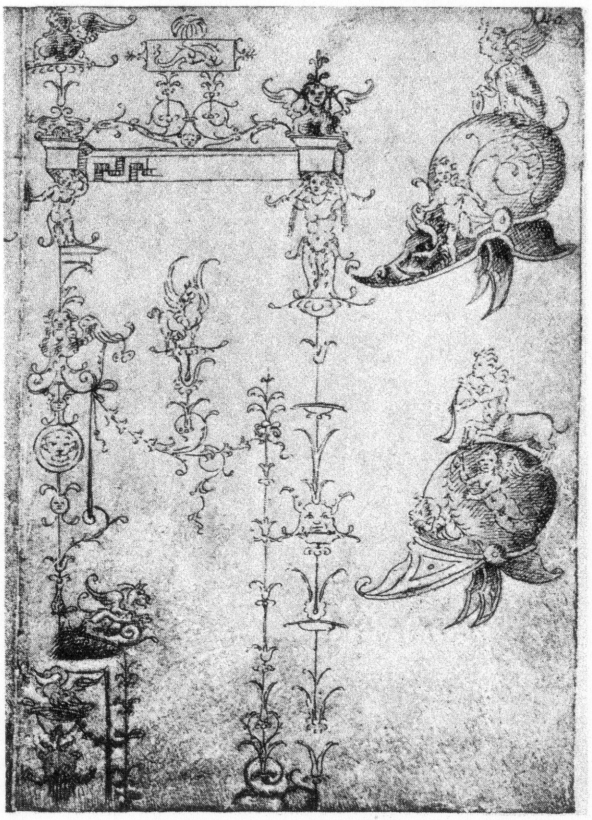


Illustration 1.3 - Giuliano da Sangallo: Drawing after Roman Grotesques in the *Domus Aurea*. c.1505
Source: E.H Gombrich. *The Sense of Order - A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art.* London & New York: Phaidon Press, 2006

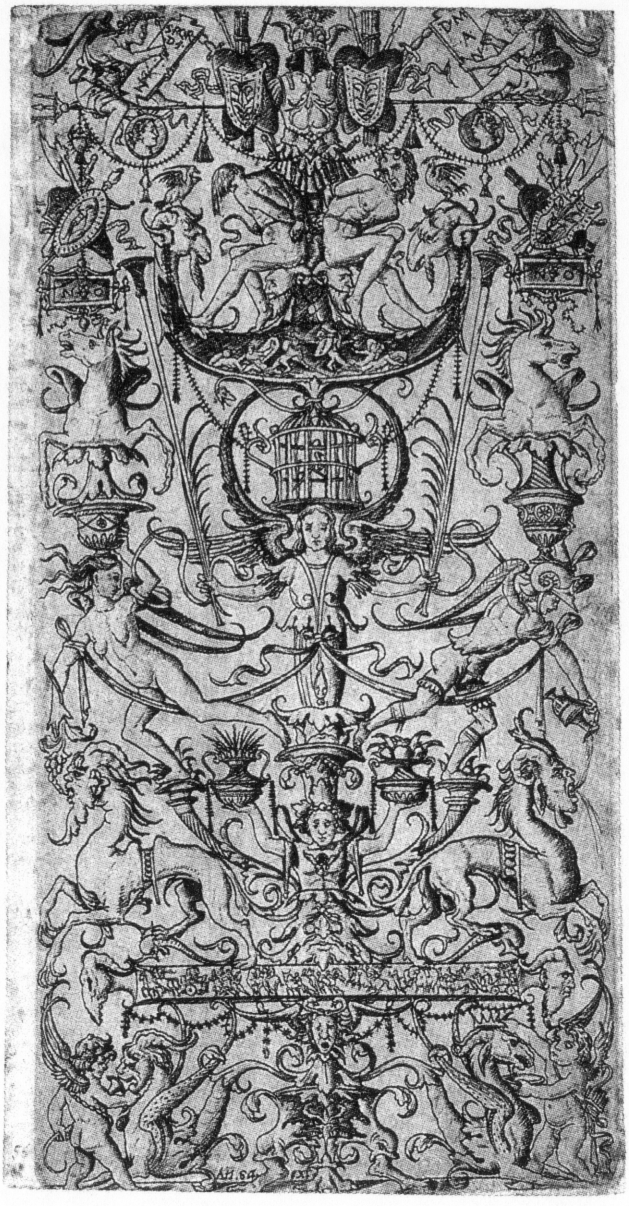


Illustration 1.4 - *A Grotesque* by Nicoletto da Modena. Italian Engraving, 1525-50
Source: Snodin, Micheal. *The V&A Book of Western Ornament.* London: V & A Publications, 2006

surface is in constant flux, for there is organic growth thriving on this particular layer. This proliferation of organic life might be considered as alien, for these types of life forms are in conflict with the familiar, natural forms found growing in the fresh air on the surface of Earth. In the cave, the growth is buried, flourishing in the dim, unknown light. It is an environment comparable to life in the deep-sea trenches of the Earth, such as the Mariana Trench. In such places, where the environment is extreme, extraordinary life forms are created. Intensely evolved grotesqueries are capable of enlightening human beings to the fact that life deviates into the most extreme forms.

Visualising the interior of the cave botanical flora such as moss, algae, lichen, mold and fungi, thrive in the damp atmosphere. The pilose, dewy surface covers the moist stones and rocks, acting as a form of abnormal, and in my mind, a grotesque skin that grows in an unruly, uncontrollable and unfathomable nature. Simple life forms construct layers of dense growth, which display homologous characteristics to the outer layer of human skin.

Analysing the image of lichen on stone [Illustration 1.5] the photographic reality of the growth produces an effect of a ruptured surface. Irregular pustules are seen from a direct downward view, showing larger cavities that contain green vegetation. Overall the vision is one of the cycle of growth: pushing, sprouting, spreading, cracking and drying on the margins. The blackened parts appear as eyes that are contained in a non-stop generating entity. Joining this specimen in analysis is yellow lichen growing on a stone [Illustration 1.6]. Seaweed-like in appearance, the lichen displays crusty foliage growth, spraying out from a recess. It is interesting to note the family of lichen can spawn new excrescences around existing growths, therefore creating a diseased surface which is capable of 'taking over' a host in an unstoppable manner.

The Grotesque and the Skin

To grow such a visually repulsive growth on your own person, like fungus or lichen, blends the earthly organic and the human organic, is a process that is frighteningly grotesque. To 'own' such a growth on your body can create a feeling of unease and repulsion. In the case of a lesion or rash erupting 'in' the skin, one is reminded that the



Illustration 1.5 – Close up of lichens on Avebury stones.
Source: O'Neil, Polly. *Surfaces and textures : a visual sourcebook.* London: A&C Black, 2008.



Illustration 1.6 – Yellow lichen on a monolith at Avebury
Source: O'Neil, Polly. *Surfaces and textures : a visual sourcebook.* London: A&C Black, 2008.

skin is contiguous with all the viscera, which lies underneath it. For skin to grow fungus, scientifically it would be a case of mycosis. A bodily dysfunction, it is psychologically unpleasant for the possessor. Diseased skin, or cutaneous conditions, is where the epidermis has been affected by a malady caused by a fungus or a foreign body. Lesions, cysts, flaking, fissures and scales can appear. There is a striking resemblance between individual forms of moss and lichen and the physical features of skin maladies. The skin is a growing surface, living and breathing with pores connecting to the outside world. It is the body's first layer of 'clothing' so to speak, stretching across the human skeleton, connected and differentiated in every component. The surface of diseased skin is dynamic and out of control, therefore it can create a psychological unease in the viewer.

The early roots of my engagement with the grotesqueries of the skin and the concept of disgust can be traced back to seeing a documentary[18] about an individual called, 'Tree man' [Illustration 1.7] The film followed an Indonesian man who suffered from an thick carpet of warts' over his body that has clumped together to resemble tree bark, a skin disorder known as *Epidermodysplasia verruciformis.* On re-viewing images of Mr Dede Koswara, my response was terror, because another fellow human was sprouting warts so severe that they looked like roots. Scrutinising the photographic details produces a strong repulsed feeling and a lingering feeling of discontent.

However, it is worth noting the conflicting emotional responses that one has when viewing the grotesque: disgust can be an emotion that one can enjoy and savour. Throughout conducting the visual research for my practice and research, I have been influenced and inspired by such strong repulsive emotions and images. The rare publication of Thomas Bateman's *Delineations of Cutaneous Diseases: exhibiting the characteristic appearances of the principal genera and species*, printed in 1840, is an exceptional example of the push/pull attraction of closely viewing illustrations of skin disease. Because the drawings are rendered in a beautiful, now lost, printing technique called chromo-lithography, the images can invoke both rational feelings of disgust, but also irrational notions of beauty.

[18] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/indonesia/tree-man/5048980/Tree-Man-Documentary-film-to-highlight-plight.html



Illustration 1.7 - Mr Dede Koswara with the skin disease *Epidermodysplasia verru.ciformis*
Source: *http://weirdnews.about.com/od/globalmadness/ss/Indonesian-Tree-Man.htm*

Analysing a plate depicting a man with the disease called *Elephantiasis* [Illustration 1.8] the bulbous, lumping surface hides an unknown entity, the disease, which is threatening to rupture the surface, as it has on the nose where the skin is broken and flesh is exposed. The aspects that contribute to the strange beauty of the image can be attributed to the impassive expression and attitude of the subject, who is enveloped by the monstrous skin disease. The disease has more *character* than the face. Coupled with this position is the aesthetic property of chromo-lithography that displays visual characteristics of cleanliness and enhanced line work. Gone is the visual roughage found in photographic studies of skin disease. In the detail of the plate depicting a subject with severe Lupus, [Illustration 1.9] the shedding skin is literally eating away the nose. If pattern work of abstract forms was removed from the context of the disease, it could be viewed as ornamental and decorative. Likewise, in the detail of Eczema [Illustration 1.10] the decorative pustules are a common repetitive motif I incorporate into my pattern logic. Seen up close, in linear form, there is a certain attractiveness to the form. The attractive nature of the pattern could be ascribed to familiarity of pimples, which all human beings at one point experience.

The formal qualities of the chromo-lithographic portraits share a visual comparison to my recent portraits of Flemish peasants. The portrait busts sit against a white background, therefore focusing attention on the detail in the face. In a similar mode to medical illustrations, the face is the outline and container for the various patterned substances. My portraits and the medical illustrations share a mood of composure. However, even though the medical illustrations contain fine detail, there is no narrative or sense of personality of the characters. In my portrait of a hag [Illustration 1.11] she is portrayed as devious witch, her eyes are darting and her cloak contains smaller 'growths' of faces and eyes. When I embarked on the series, I was not consciously aware of appropriating the visual method of authentic medical illustration. However, in hindsight, the work resolved itself pictorially to the medical coldness of the illustrations. However, my portraits are studies of disfigurement, inspired by the background faces occupying Pieter Brueghel paintings.



Illustration 1.8 – *Plate LXVIII – Elephantiasis.* "This hideous disease is fortunately never seen in this country, except in a few individuals, natives or residents of southern climates. The engraving here given in an exact portrait of that individual, after the tubercles had been rendered a little smoother than they originally appeared by the application of poultices"

Source: Bateman, Thomas. *Delineations of cutaneous diseases : exhibiting the characteristic appearances of the principal genera and species comprised in the classification of the late Dr. Willan and completing the series of engravings begun by that author.* New ed. London : Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden, 1840

Digital photograph taken by Emily Hunt

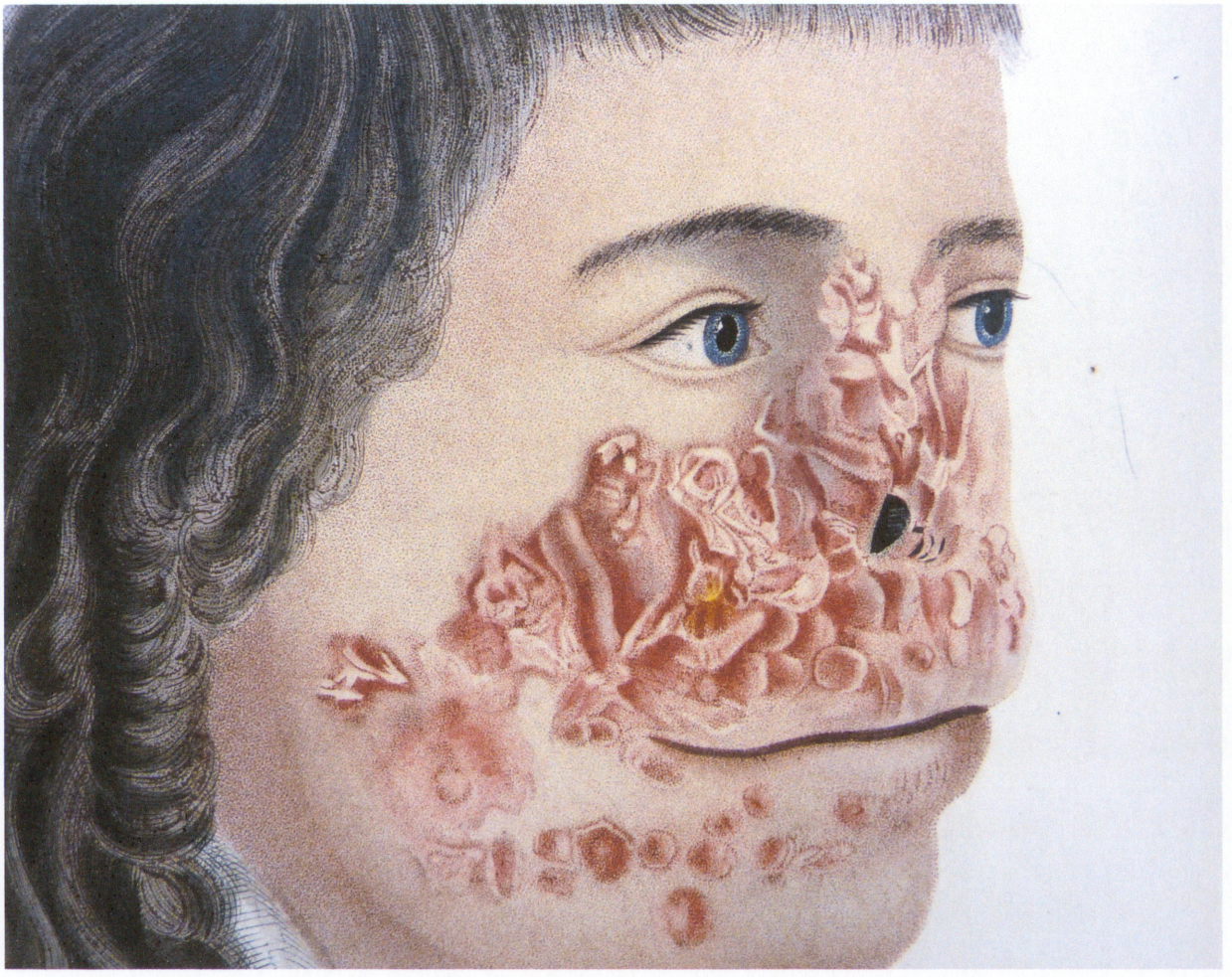


Illustration 1.9 – *Plate LXVII – Lupus, noli me tangere.* "This representation of the extensive ulceration of the face, occasioned by the severe and unmanageable disease. It produces even more deformity than Elepantiasis, with which it is sometimes confounded; but from which it differs essentially in its character and progress"
Source: Bateman, Thomas. *Delineations of cutaneous diseases : exhibiting the characteristic appearances of the principal genera and species comprised in the classification of the late Dr. Willan and completing the series of engravings begun by that author.* New ed. London : Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden, 1840
Digital photograph taken by Emily Hunt

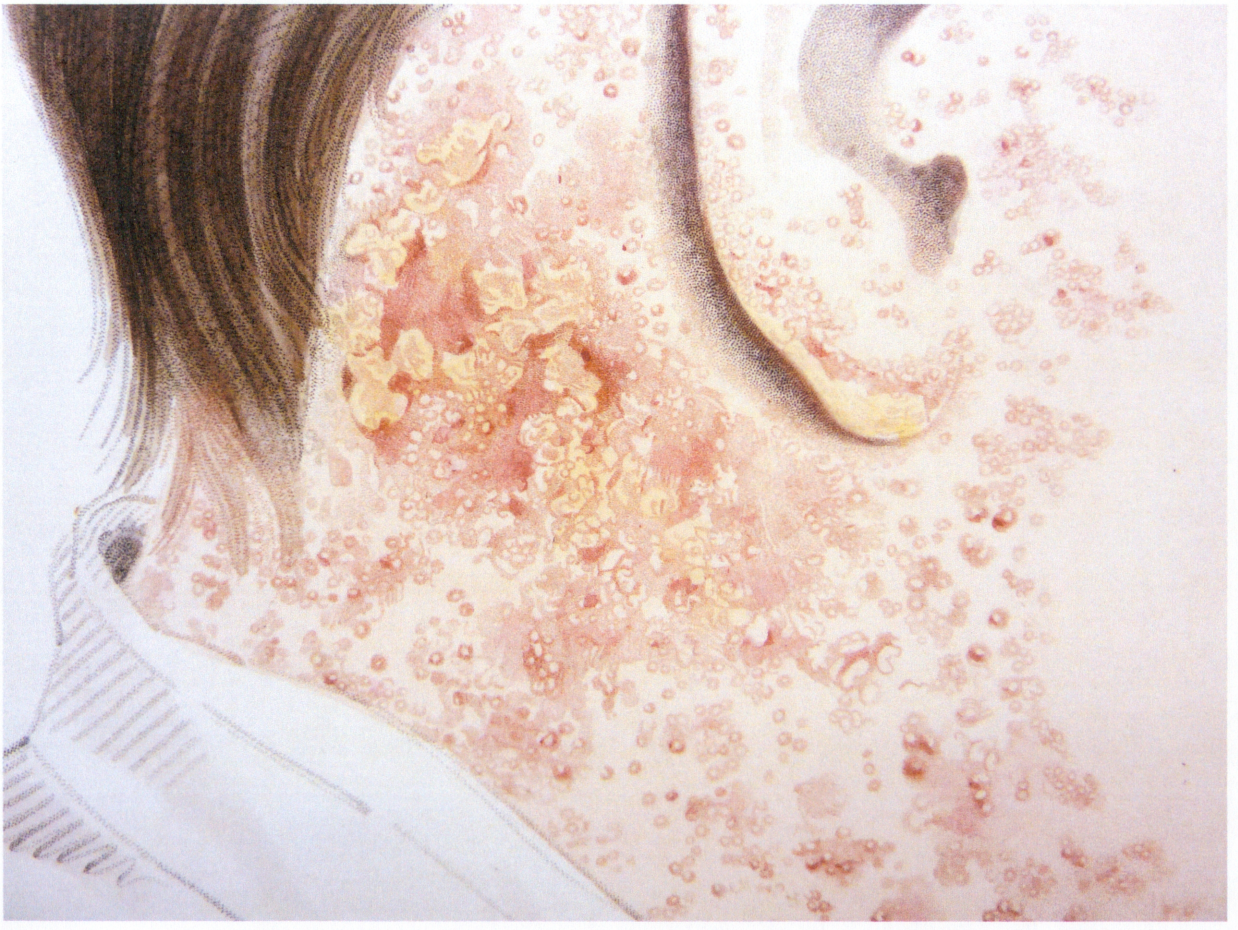


Illustration 1.10 – *Plate LVII – Eczema rubrum* "This form of Eczema varies somewhat in different cases; but always appears under the form of minute vesicles, accompanied by a diffuse redness, which the roughness and elevation of vesicles distinguish from simple Erythema.
Source: Bateman, Thomas. *Delineations of cutaneous diseases : exhibiting the characteristic appearances of the principal genera and species comprised in the classification of the late Dr. Willan and completing the series of engravings begun by that author.* New ed. London : Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden, 1840
Digital photograph taken by Emily Hunt



Illustration 1.11 – *Skin Portrait #1 (Hag).* Emily Hunt. Watercolour on paper (60 x 55cm) 2011

Through the process of research, certain texts on the issue of human disgust were investigated and were useful in formulating the aspects of meaning of the term, the 'organic grotesque'. Colin McGinn's *The Meaning of Disgust* opens with a concise statement on the boundaries of disgust:

> Disgust is an aesthetic emotion in that its primary focus is the *appearance* of its object, not what that object can do or has done in the way of harm. You can be disgusted at something you neither fear or hate - that you don't think will do you any harm and don't think has wronged you. Its natural expression is neither defensive nor aggressive; it is rather, a response of *avoidance*. To be disgusted by something is, crucially, to want to avoid contact with it - either by sight or touch or smell or taste.[19]

Of most importance in his description is the response of avoidance. I myself want to avoid contact with warts because I fear contamination with my body. There is no escaping a cutaneous condition on the body. Also, you cannot evade the psychological impact of seeing extreme forms of skin disease. As an artist, this is a meditation I return to as a means of articulating the logic in my pattern-making. I do not try to "avoid certain states of consciousness".[20] Instead, I return to this feeling of disgust as a facilitator in embodying the visual codes of the 'organic grotesque'. A further analysis of my production of pattern and ornamentation is discussed in Chapter Two and Three.

The porous skin as a zone for disgust is examined as an 'elicitor of disgust'. McGinn understands that we are "offended by things that grow on (or with) the body - things that decorate its smooth surface or shape its contours".[21] Included in his long list of 'elicitors' are pimples, acne, boils, warts, wounds, misplaced hair, obesity, disproportion, varicose veins, discolourations and lumps.[22] Interestingly, he states a similar position on scale that I reached while researching, that the microscopic can play a devious role in revealing such *disgusting* sites on the porous surface. "Things take on an even more vicious hue when the skin is viewed up close - say, through a microscope - when the smoothest and loveliest

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[19] McGinn, Colin *The Meaning of Disgust* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 6
[20] Ibid McGinn p.10
[21] Ibid p.20
[22] Ibid

skin is seen as dimpled and glandular, rough and greasy, home to nasty little creature".[23]

Continuing this train of thought on scale, a narrative excerpt from Jonathan Swift's adventure story *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is useful in imagining a bizarre encounter with the porous skin surface, enlarged to the size of a human being.

> "I remember, when I was at Lilliput, the complexions of those diminutive people appeared to me the fairest in the world...when I took him up in my hand, and brought him close, which he confessed at first a very shocking sight. He said he could discover great holes in my skin; that the stumps of my beard were ten times stronger than the bristles of a boar, and my complexion made up of several colours altogether disagreeable."[24]

The story recounts the visit to a land where Gulliver is the size of a giant compared to the population around him. The protagonist is describing the horrified experience of the tiny Lilliput people on viewing the skin pores on his face in macro-size. His body is *figuratively* living under a microscope because it is so large, and the diminutive Lilliputians are seeing him through the lens. The narrative demonstrates the subjective response of humans to the physicality of skin and how scale can change the psychological impact of perception. Swift's passage encompasses the essence of the push/pull attraction of repulsive biological actions. From a personal perspective, the idea of standing next to a pore of skin the size of a knoll would be a zone of fantastical experience, where repellent biological processes take place. Such imagined possibilities include sweat droplets sporadically bursting out of pores, pimple volcanoes full of suppressed custard-like pus and the scabby surface of a cauliflower-like wart. The picture, in the minds-eye of these organic processes in close physical proximity, is an anxious, disturbing thought. It is an unsettling alien feeling because it is coupled with intimate familiarity with the process of being human.

The visual impression of the narrative tract creates an important context for the conclusion of this chapter. Although the abject site of a Brobdingnagian skin pore might invoke a response of disgust in a viewer or myself, it is also a sensation that one might

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[23] Ibid

[24] Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's travells : travels into several remote nations of the world by Lemuel Gulliver, first a surgeon, and then a captain of several ships / with numerous coloured and black and white illus. by Saville Lumley.* London : Grawthorn, [n.d.].

savour. Having discussed this fantasy of coming into contact with a giant pimple, people have responded with varying positions. Some people said they would run from such a revolting possibility, while others spoke of living out a dream of 'popping' the head, the pleasure of releasing the pent-up pressure and then running away quickly so as to not get in the way of the pus fallout. Essentially, the human desire to 'get up close' to the surface to see what is going sprouting on own body is an activity humans share, although commonly in private.

My fascination with the grotesque and its morphing into the neologism of the 'organic grotesque' has visual boundaries, however also new areas of discovery. Throughout researching the topic of disgust, the blending of organic growth (plants, lichen, mold) and the human skin has not been discussed at length as a source for disgust. I find this interesting, for it elicits in me a definite disgust, that then leads to my desire to produce pattern and character in painting, printmedia and sculpture. This chapter has explored some historical occurrences of the grotesque as a way of grounding my discussion and elaboration of the concept of the 'organic grotesque'. In the following chapter I extend the analysis towards the outline of the human body, pushed to extremes from underlying subcutaneous fat. Costume as skin and skin as ornament are visually analysed in relation to historical perimeters of the medium of woodcut and engraving.

Chapter Two -

The topography of the skin: *Cauliflower muscles and ballooning goiters.*

Throughout the following chapter, the topology of the skin of a human being is examined via its representation in woodcuts and engravings. Multifarious shapes join together to create protrusions, mounds, cracks and holes in the skin by which the viewer is made aware of the peculiarities and variations of human appendages. The mounds of the body, specifically bare muscles and distended stomachs, will take precedence in this chapter, over the other areas of the physical body, such as the minutiae of the pores and decaying flesh. The skin of the human body acts as an elastic surface, which is under the constant tension and threat of rupture. Subterranean, subcutaneous matter stretches the elastic skin to distort bodily boundaries, creating an unusual topography, which corresponds to the visual codes of the grotesque. The subcutaneous fat glands and overt muscles augment the skin to form the body and costume in both the work of the artists discussed and within my own art practice. The 'organic grotesque', an integral term to this dissertation, is a visual reference to articulate the unruly and uncontrolled nature of abnormal, organic growth. In this chapter, the notion of the organic grotesque is used as a visual filter to identify motifs in the facial features, bodily extremities and costume.

The artworks discussed herein are prints that translate the aberrant surface of skin into linear, tonal and pattern design. Representations of costume play a significant role as a form of 'skin' that reveals an impression of the body, and alludes to the hidden growth underneath. Costume acts as an ornament to the body, as do depictions of muscles, which imply structures of organic armour. The dissolution of the boundaries between skin and clothing will be investigated as an apparatus in my picture/pattern making. In my visual process I interpret the construction of costume and armour as though it is a living organic layer on the human body, that is, not separated from the skin of the figure, but blended together.

Beside the pictorial content of the printmakers, the following chapter will consider image-making in the context of reproductive printmaking, which was becoming established

during the period of the sixteenth century. The method of reproductive printmaking can be seen from the vantage point of modern times, as involving an early form of appropriation and copying. This strategy for learning how to draw and produce prints has been present in my etching, painting practices, and object-making. This chapter evaluates the way I reproduce Renaissance prints, incorporating a similar model as that used by reproductive engravers of the past. The area of research of this paper centres on northern European Renaissance printmaking. I identify two significant artists, Hans Weiditz and Hendrick Goltzius, who align cogently with my practice and the concept of the 'organic grotesque'. Hans Weiditz (c. 1500-1536) was a German printmaker who specialised in woodcut and produced editions of secular, humorous caricatures of local townsfolk during the year of 1521. Hendrick Goltzius, who was active between 1558 to 1617, was a 'virtuoso' engraver of classical bodies such as Hercules, as well as religious subjects. Both artists share a tendency to create hyperbolic and overt corporeal depictions of human bodies. Hans Weiditz and Hendrick Goltzius are regarded in terms of the 'organic grotesque' for their representations of growing mounds inside and outside the human body using linear form and tonal swelling lines.

The presence of imagery from the northern European Renaissance period has played a significant role in my art practice over the last 5 years, and my research has focused on the time frame between 1520 to 1620. This specific period in the history of printmaking has attracted my attention due to its intense visual language, which can also be considered as having an affinity with contemporary attributes in art production. Perceivable traits such as exaggeration, virtuosity, grace, willfulness, sophistication, preciosity, affectation, and caprice were dominant during this one hundred year time frame.[25]

Without outlining too much historical debate, this period in art history is frequently referred to as Mannerism. The aesthetic style evolved in Italy roughly between 1530 to 1590 and its influence spread to the Northern Europe late into the century.[26] There is a contention over exactly how Mannerism can be defined; however, in most

[25] Danto, Arthur C. *Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays & Aesthetic Meditations.* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1994) p. 244
[26] Osborne, Harold. *The Oxford companion to Art.* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1970) p.686-688

classifications it suggests a visual eccentricity. Befitting Goltzius's method, it has been, "equated with a concentration on the nude, often in bizarre and convoluted poses, and with exaggerated muscular development. Figures serving as excuses for displays of virtuosity in figure painting; with extremes of perspective, distorted proportions or scale."[27] These features are at the forefront of my concept of the organic grotesque, and share similarities with my visual language and interests.

Hendrick Goltzius (1558 - 1617)

In opposition to the carnivalesque subjects of Weiditz, Hendrick Goltzius' primary subjects were classical and mythological. Goltzius was, in contemporary terms, an 'art star' in his time. He was a virtuoso and inventor in the field of line engraving. As a young child, Goltzius fell into a fire, his hand suffered severe burns and as a result was permanently clamped shut.[28] Due to this limited flexibility in his hand, Goltzius developed a drawing technique that utilised his arm and shoulder muscles, "the way the Chinese and Japanese control their brushes"[29] producing "a commanding swing of line."[30] The distinctive linear practice Goltzius developed was known as the 'swelling line' technique. The engraved line was precisely inscribed with a burin into metal in varying intervals of concentric lines. The combination and alternation of thicknesses of line created a unique optical illusion of depth and tone.[31] Goltzius was able to accomplish a "moiré-like iridescence"[32] like that of silk fabric in his prints. He employed the 'swelling line' to represent muscular forms and a particular term was coined, *knollenstil*[33] or 'bulbous style' to describe the particular way Goltzius drew popping muscles on the body.

Looking at the line engraving, "The Great Hercules" (1589), the naked male figure looms over the scenery, [Illustration 2.1]. Slung over his skull is the flayed skin of a lion, and in his hands a horn and knobby club. The form of man/demigod has been exaggerated to

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[27] Murray, Linda. *The Late Renaissance and Mannerism.* 9London: Thames & Hudson, 1967) p.30
[28] Mayor, A. Hyatt. *Prints and People: a social history of printed pictures.* New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art & New York Graphic Society, 1971 (from Northern Mannerist Chapter)
[29] Ibid Hyatt
[30] Ibid
[31] Hind, Arthur. M. (Late keeper of prints and drawings in the British Museum) *A History of Engraving & Etching: From the 15th century to the year 1914.* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963) p. 120
[32] Hults, Linda C. *The Print in the Western World: An Introductory History.* Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996 p. 266
[33] See Rijksmuseum Amsterdam Museum online: *http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/*



Illustration 2.1 – *The Great Hercules.* Hendrick Goltzius. Engraving (561mm x 402mm) 1589
Source: *http://www.metmuseum.org*

an extreme level of abnormality and irrationality. Hercules' body contains 'fantasy' muscles, which exist in fecundity and grow in impossible places, such as his knees, collar-bone and all over his torso. Hercules' stance and pose, as well as the proliferation of muscles, is not far from an actual depiction of a contemporary body builder. Hercules is portrayed as super-human, and can be viewed as a hyper-normal man, because his once normal body has been pumped up to proclaim its extreme strength. Strength is a frequent and positive characteristic in the male form and normal in most circumstances, however, Goltzius has taken the myth of Hercules' body further, through accentuating mounds on the body. Goltzius' aim was to convey the immense strength of Hercules, and though illogical in human physiognomic terms, Hercules muscles appear to *also* have muscles. Of significance in this visual analysis, are the corporeal mounds and popping growths on his body that exaggerate movement taking place under the skin. Hercules' skin is taut and pulled to such a degree that one can imagine the sound of tough leather being stretched when Hercules is flexing his body. Although Hercules does not express the same level of disgust as Weiditz's characters in this viewer, his naked body swells in abnormal places, which invites fascination in the viewer and a closer inspection of the detail achieved by Goltzius' engraving.

The concept of the 'organic grotesque' can be initially observed through the relationship of the term *knollenstil.* "The Great Hercules" was also known as the *knollenman,* literally meaning 'the knobby man.' The surface of his body shares similarities with vegetable forms, such as cauliflower, which sprout mounds in a uniformed fashion. Implied by Goltzius' depiction, living inside Hercules, is an uncontrolled powerful growth, revealing itself as tumid sprouts. The elastic skin surface contains the fecund growths, in tight packages like an 'organic armour'. A layer of organic skin growth is penetrable, unlike armour, which is traditionally constructed to avoid penetration.

However, the concept of the skin as armour is contradictory, because the armour is opposed to the physical attributes of actual human skin, for the reason that it is made of inorganic matter such as metal. Human skin is a sieve with holes to the outside world that allows the body underneath to respire and perspire. Hercules' armour is living, inscribed

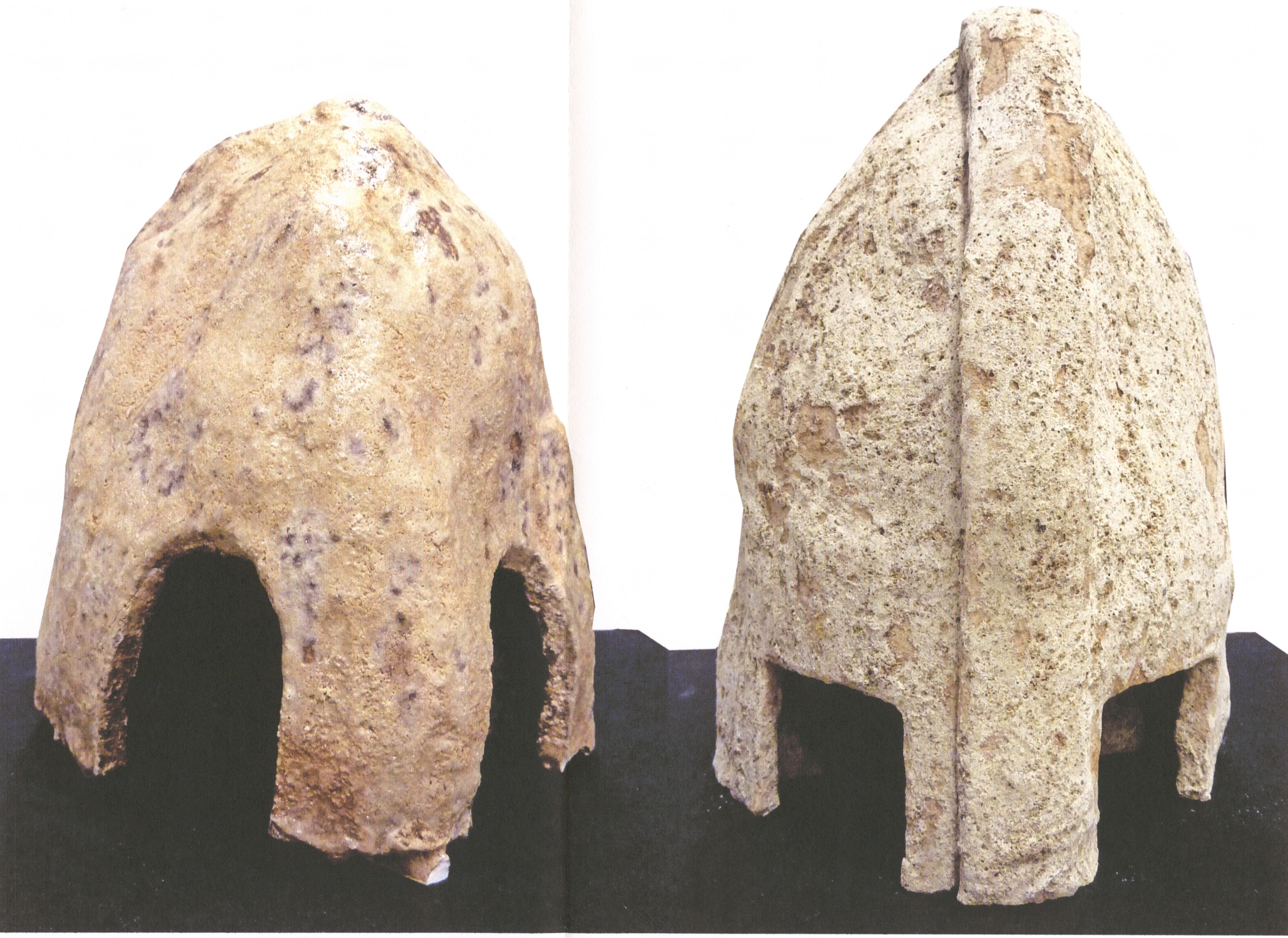


Illustration 2.2 & 2.3 – *Skin Helmets (Wet & Dry)* Emily Hunt. Fired glazed ceramic (approx.17cm diameter) 2011

with the motifs of robustness and force. Visually, the concept of organic armour is repulsive, an armour covered in many, tiny holes, that are breathing. It is a disgusting concept to think of an inorganic surface such as metal, that is not alive, as something that secretly contains a living force, and tiny openings that the naked eye cannot see. My intention has been to re-create that focus of disgust in my object-making.

My object making in the context of Goltizus and Organic Armour

During my Erasmus exchange to Gent, in Belgium, I introduced myself to a new medium of clay sculpture. I discovered the effects of glazing to be contiguous with my concept of the grotesque surface. The glaze on the surface of an artwork was able to depict an organic layer. During my experimentation with clay, I produced four sculptures, two that were successful in my opinion, [Illustrations 2.2 & 2.3]. The objects I created are simplified versions of medieval helmet armour. The helmets were devoid of ornamentation, and the eye-holes sit close to the bottom, as if the helmet has been sheared off. They share a visual comparison to miniature citadels, and also archaeological artifacts. Of importance to my concept of the organic grotesque, was my experimentation with glazing techniques. I was drawn to the colours of ugly browns and greens, and both to the dry cracked surface and the oily, wet appearing surface. My aim was to match and describe visual associations of the glazed surface to that of skin growth. Looking at first helmet, the shorter of the two, the mound is lumpy and the glaze is unevenly shiny with what appears to be fungus eating away at the surface. The surface of helmet two is desiccated, which carries with it visual association with eczema and skin dermatitis. Of course, the audience may not directly read this surface as being "alive" as I have intended it, but the hues of colour reflect a surface which perhaps has been dug up out of the ground like a lost artifact, and the metal has corroded to such a degree that the exterior is no longer metallic, but organic. Like Hercules' body, the helmet is "breathing" with many tiny holes, indiscernible to the naked eye.

Hans Weiditz (c. 1500-1536)

It has been difficult to obtain information on Weiditz's secular woodcuts; however, two resources I have found valuable are the print historians William M. Ivins Jr and A. Hyatt

Mayor. Both were curators of the department of prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Hans Weiditz's 1521 woodcut print titled, *Winebag and Wheelbarrow*, [Illustration 2.4] depicts a visceral ugliness of a local man's engorged stomach and chin, coupled with a prosaic, peasant charm that can be considered satirical. Weiditz was not aiming to denigrate his fellow neighbours, contrarily as a Weiditz admirer, William M. Ivins Jr states:

> His work is thus, like that of all but very few of the social caricaturists, largely devoid of sharp emotional values and rarely conduces to day-dreaming upon the part of those who behold his prints. He was, however, gifted with an unusual and most delightful sense of humor, which shows itself in his translation into black and white of the common metaphors of daily speech.[34]

In Ivins' view, Weiditz had a substantial cultural and social impact on the local communities where his prints were distributed and sold. He asserts that Weiditz was the most versatile and engaged woodcut producer of his time, and although he does not allude to the grotesque nature of some of the portraits, he does declare that Weiditz was an astute observer of German life. The surviving prints allow the contemporary viewer an insight into the morals, humor and customs of sixteenth century Germany.[35] Weiditz was hugely popular in his time, and I agree with Jeroen Stumpel's suggestion that his portraits were "true forerunners in spirit and in style, of the modern cartoon."[36] It was a habit to paste woodcut prints into books as keepsakes, which as a consequence preserved many that have survived to contemporary times. Hyatt Mayor stated that "the commonest print always becomes the scarcest"[37] and observed that although woodblocks did print large editions, most impressions have been nearly all destroyed. Due to the mass appeal of woodcut prints, they were treated casually, like most popular consumerist items, and therefore not valued as high art or collectable.[38]

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[34] Ivins, Jr William.M. *Hans Weiditz: A Study in Personality.* The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, Volume 17, Issue 7, (July, 1922) p. 156 – 161
[35] Ibid. p.160
[36] Stumpel, Jeroen. "Dance and Distinction: spotting a motif in Weiditz, Dürer and van Meckenem". *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2006), pp. 4-16
[37] Mayor, A. Hyatt. *Prints and People: a social history of printed pictures.* New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art & New York Graphic Society, 1971 (chapter: Oldest European woodcuts)
[38] Ibid. (Chapter: Oldest European Woodcuts)

The popular subject of representations of bucolic peasants occupies a number of familiar positions in historical studies of northern European Renaissance broadsheets and painting. The subject of the loose, immoral character seduced by wine or alcohol was frequent in both Weiditz's caricatures and those of Sebald Beham and Pieter Brueghel the Elder. [Illustration 2.5] The representation of the dancing peasant was a favourite theme during this time. In Keith Moxey's research on depictions of peasants during the Reformation he states, "The image of the peasant as gross or indecent became fixed, and he was satirised in life, on the stage, and in the visual arts".[39] The critique of the peasant has a secular rather than religious overtone. This social aspect of peasants is interesting from a contemporary viewpoint because is reveals that there is continuation of human folly, our weaknesses, and group enjoyment in modern society.[40]

> The multiple meanings attached to fools and their kin - and to their physical features - may be due in part to the fact that fools are the changing images of ourselves: they parade the funny, but also the tragic, consequences of our human lives.[41]

The common allegory present in most of Weiditz's caricatures of local townsfolk and peasants, communicates a satirical, although sympathetic, disapproval of their immoral, and 'wicked' activities. Activities such as gluttony, drunkenness and intemperance are frequently depicted. Weiditz uses the deformities and exaggerations of bodies as his tool to criticize their behaviour. The motifs present in Weiditz's woodcut of an obese fool, signal to laziness and greed, common attributes in the modern man. [Illustration 2.4] The character's obesity is exaggerated into a gross deformity: his potbelly is so large that it must be carried in front by a wheelbarrow. Weiditz was describing extremities that he saw around him, consequences of an excess of appetite. In reflection to our current times, this desire to gorge has not abated. To add to the effect of the character's lax attitude, he is shown to be chewing on a long piece of wheat straw, or perhaps, throwing out a large saliva spittle, depending on how the viewer wants to perceive the strange, elongated,

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[39] Moxey, Keith. *Peasants, Warriors and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation.* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989) p.45

[40] Ibid Stumpel, Jeroen.

[41] Mellinkoff, Ruth. *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages.* Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, 1993. p. 136

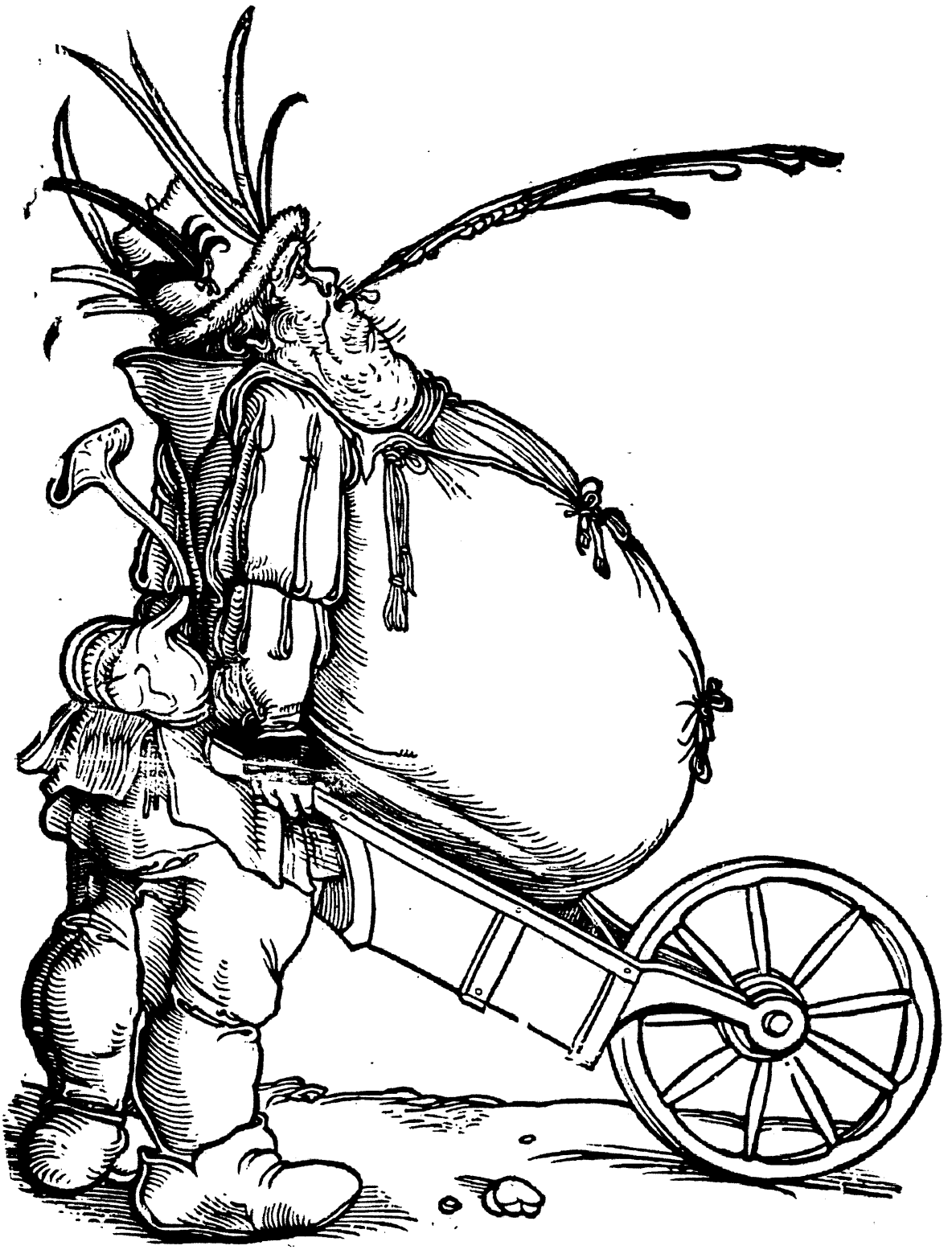


Illustration 2.4 – *Winebag and Wheelbarrow.* Hans Weiditz. Woodcut (292mm x 198mm) c.1521
Source: Geisberg, Max; rev. and edited by Walter L. Strauss. *The German single-leaf woodcut, 1500-1550.* New York : Hacker Art Books, 1974



Illustration 2.5 –*The Nose Dance at Fools' Town.* Sebald Beham. Woodcut 1500-1550
Source: Moxey, Keith. *Peasants, Warriors and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989

dripping object. Either way, whether he is spitting or chewing, the action intensifies his ugliness, and reminds the viewer of his mouth, the entry hole for food, which has produced such a disgusting effect on his body. Weiditz has created a joke by exaggerating the stomach into hyperbolic form: the fat man now has the unfortunate circumstance of carrying his belly ahead of him like a gross version of a food cart. Behind 'Winebag', balancing on his rump, is a recurring object of a organically-shaped vessel. I would make an assumption that it is a hollowed-out gourd, for carrying wine on the go. Weiditz was fond of placing the object in similar positions on his characters, perhaps to accentuate their rear-ends for comic effect. This could of also been Weiditz commenting on their relationship to booze, which is always ready at hand, although symbolically balanced precariously on heads or bums.

The fact that his costume, which includes an elaborate hat embellished with fur trim and long feathers, leads me to believe he was not a common peasant, but rather a local merchant. From the same series, Weiditz caricatures the local quack doctor, extenuating his rubbery neck to ridiculous proportions. [Illustration 2.6] In another, a local wench represents a common carnival act of balancing wine carafe on her head[42] [Illustration 2.7]. Her male partner, like 'Winebag', is balancing a massive paunch while kicking up his heels in a jig. In his particular German vernacular, Weiditz does not portray any of his peasants suffering. Most are more than well-fed and seem to be enjoying themselves, either dancing or playing balancing acts with alcohol. The grotesque in Weiditz's woodcuts is articulated as an excess of character. Even when illustrating botanical specimens in *Brunfel's Herbal* (1530) Weiditz cannot help but add his own flair to the character of the plant. [Illustration 2.8] His botanical woodcuts were criticised by Invins because they showed, "not only their personal forms and characters but the very accidents of their growth, such as wilted leaves and broken stems."[43] Weiditz was not interested in producing a polished example, but wanted to portray an example of a living thing with all its flaws and decay. The humour and character in his line work does not lend itself easily to the task of describing the banal, because Weiditz focuses on the

[42] Stumpel, Jeroen. "Dance and Distinction: spotting a motif in Weiditz, Dürer and van Meckenem". *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2006), p. 4-16

[43] Ivins, Jr, W.M. *Prints and Visual Communication.* (Cambridge, London: The M.I.T Press, 1985) p.43-44



Illustration 2.6 – *Physician and Assistant.* Hans Weiditz. Woodcut (300mm x 230mm) c. 1521
Source: Geisberg, Max; rev. and edited by Walter L. Strauss. *The German single-leaf woodcut, 1500-1550.* New York : Hacker Art Books, 1974



Illustration 2.7 – *Dance Partners.* Hans Weiditz. Woodcut (324mm x 197mm) c. 1521
Source: Geisberg, Max; rev. and edited by Walter L. Strauss. *The German single-leaf woodcut, 1500-1550.* New York : Hacker Art Books, 1974



Illustration 2.8 – *Violets.* Hans Weiditz. Woodcut form Brunfel's *Herbarum vivae eicones,* Straussburg, 1530
Source: Ivins, Jr, W.M. *Prints and Visual Communication.* Cambridge, London: The M.I.T Press, 1985

depiction of the extreme and the weird in life.

Weiditz's characters, and the time period they inhabit, are comparable to the concept of the 'grotesque body', conceived by Mikhail Bakhtin in his text *Rabelais and his World* (1935). According to Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, Bakhtin asserts that the use of folkloric, grotesque language and imagery, such as scatological humour, is an attempt to rebel against the high culture of the period. In opposition to Classicism, Rabelais' *Pantagruel and Gargantua* is a narrative that displays "popular propensity toward repulsive physicality."[44] Weiditz's people are certainly grotesque, and the unique place in popular culture they filled in the German vernacular of the sixteenth century shows that the carnival culture at the time celebrated the ugly and the profane. When viewing Weiditz's oeuvre today, there is a visual connection to the need to explore the ugly and grotesque nature in man. Although his woodcuts are over 400 years old, they remain consonant with contemporary tastes.

My individual etchings in context with Hans Weiditz and reproductive printmaking.

While I have been producing etchings during my Masters candidature, I have not intended to make obvious connections to Weiditz's oeuvre. Nevertheless, a certain repulsive aesthetic has been imbued in all the plates, which can be read in the physiognomy of the characters, and also the heavy linear quality of the prints. I have not directly appropriated the work of Weiditz but have looked to the work of other, lesser known artists from this particular period, which accounts for a likeness to the woodcuts of Weiditz. As an influence, his woodcuts have affected the way I exaggerate human form, because my focus tends to go straight towards the gut, the double chin, and folds of fat on extremities, such as fingers and knees.

My practice has been drawn to the aesthetic of sixteenth-century German and Flemish printmaking because I find the characters to be inherently contemporary. The grotesque, visual satire of this period resembles social aspects found in our contemporary society, in

[44]Nelson, Robert S., and Richard. Shiff. *Critical Terms for Art History*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) p.284

relation to the topic of intemperance and drunkenness.

Likewise, human disgust towards the fellow man, and the greedy and selfish nature of human beings is a ubiquitous subject in sixteenth century art images. Four hundred years later, alcohol and revolting behaviour is ever more extreme in contemporary society. My remarks on this subject are not judgmental or critical, it is just stating the obvious. Alcohol is a strange drug, and the intoxicated characters it creates are deranged and uncontrollable figures of disgust. Through reproducing and reinterpreting sixteenth-century secular prints and populist objects, my practice aims to reveal the similarities of the two time periods, associating the historical context and enlightening a contemporary audience to an historic, figurative aesthetic. The visibility of disgusting subjects in modern society, in particular human folly and vice, mirrors the aesthetic of the German grotesque of the sixteenth century. The same horror of gluttony and greediness of character can be seen in the modern human, be that at the local pub or shopping mall. Modern humans can be compared and reduced down to the characterisations of the archetypes found in sixteenth century populist media, e.g. the slob, the wench, the drunkard, the glutton. Revolting characters are omnipresent in contemporary society, in the news, the internet and on the street. By looking towards the past, I am commenting on the fact that people have not changed their character behaviourally, it has perhaps become worse, and worse still humans have multiplied considerably. Again, it is difficult to be judgmental, because I am part of the modern society, but through reflecting on the imagery of the German grotesque, I am able to balance my ambivalence of being human.

Due to overwhelming content of religious propaganda prints produced during the sixteenth century and because of my interest in the drinking culture of the time, I chose to focus entirely on prints that depicted secular subjects. Even though the secular subjects contain religious satire, aimed at opponents during the Reformation, I am not at this point interested in the dense history of Church and religious rivalry. My concentration is on the fascinating details of the skin, limbs and costume found in the portraits. I return and amplify the most disgusting human features that concern me. The notion of the 'organic grotesque' is always present during the process of art making, be that when I

delineate warts, dry scabs, or runny eyes in linear form. I enjoy the act of repulsive line making.

An untitled etching plate I created in December 2010, reinterprets a woodcut by a German master, Peter Flötner called *Procession of Gluttony* (1540). In the original, [Illustration 2.9] a squat colonel raises a flag with representations of food placed on it, such as a wine barrel, roast chicken, sausages and boar head. He has a uniform consisting of ornate drapes and a fur kerchief. He is proud of his flag that is rounding up the local bedraggled townsfolk, perhaps leading them into carnival celebrations. The standard bearer was a popular subject seen in broadsheet of this period.[45] The standard bearer announced the beginnings of wars in the military. In regards to the meaning of the composition, I would suggest an allegory about the worship to a false leader; food and a sentiment against the gluttony of man. The plate corresponds to contemporary aspects of over consumption and excretion. Instead of a flag that incites patriotism, it is seducing the local people into gorging and drinking.

In the reinterpreted composition, [Illustration 2.10] I kept the two bowed figures, the man with the long feather and the female wench, in order to frame the obese colonel. In regards to the Colonel, I clothed him in more ruffles, and his expression on his face changed slightly. Still proud, his pride has turned to arrogance now. His facial skin is crusty with boils and pimples and he has a new, strange codpiece that is furry on the outside and contains two eyeballs and a mouth. The representation of an eyeball is a frequent motif throughout my practice. In this print, I use the eyeball in the costume detail, as a way of depicting 'life' in the fabric that is not separated from the face or limbs of the character. The detail in the fabric of the "feather bearer" contains these eyeballs in the folds of cloth on his sleeve and trousers. His hunchback has been accentuated to a massive boil, which is stretching the shirt like a balloon. He has no neck and his face is locked into his torso. The hunchback wench on the left appears downcast and unhappy with her lot. The eye-bags reflect the droopy chin and her nipples form hypnotic circles, thus personifying her body into an absurd face

[45] British Museum catalogue online: *http://www.britishmuseum.org/research*



Illustration 2.9 – *The Procession of Gluttony. Peter* Flötner. Woodcut (254 x 276mm) 1540
Source: *http://www.britishmuseum.org*



Illustration 2.10 – *Food Dude.* Emily. Hunt. Soft ground etching (400mm x 300mm) 2010



Illustration 2.11 – *Marriage Mate.* Emily Hunt. Soft ground etching (250 x 240mm) 2010

In the medium of zinc plate etching, I often use a soft ground and leave the plate to 'bite' for an extended time. When creating etchings I try not to be pedantic about perfecting the print, instead, I prefer to leave the acid to work away unattended and produce unknown consequences. The plate etches in spontaneous ways and yields scratches that add depth of tone to the background. The effect of over-biting the plate can be seen in another etching more clearly, in particular around the facial features. [Illustration 2.11]

Reproductive printmaking was the basis of a thriving industry from the sixteenth through to the nineteenth century. Due to new technologies, many printmakers were able to replicate famous prints with such a high level of craftsmanship that their names become famous too.[46] The practice of students imitating master printmakers, such as Albrecht Dürer, was useful as a learning exercise. It resulted in individual quirks left in the second impression.

> Reproductive prints, though they too take existing compositions as a starting point, may render them in full or only in part; the reproductive printmaker can choose which elements to retain, which to suppress and which to alter. Moreover, in the adaptation of an original composition, the printmaker finds some latitude for the imposition of a personal style..."[47]

In a similar fashion, I take past master's work and appropriate and reinterpret certain elements, to generate new life from old ideas. I have developed a personal system of motifs that represent models of organic growth. From my point of view, my method is an attempt to re-invigorate the characters and transpose the print into contemporary life.

"Los Desastres de la Guerra" and the Chapman Brothers

English contemporary artists, Jake and Dinos Chapman have consistently produced extreme grotesque artworks since the early 1990s, using mannequins and dioramas to depict graphic sexual and violent scenes. In this discussion, it is their etchings that relate to the method of reproductive printmaking. In their work, *Insult to Injury* (2003) the

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[46] Zorach, Rebecca, and Elizabeth. Rodini. *Paper Museums : The Reproductive Print in Europe, 1500-1800.* (Chicago, Ill.: David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 2005) p. 31
[47] Ibid. p. 32

Chapman brothers painted directly over an authentic set of etchings of the *Disasters of War* by Francisco de Goya (1746-1828). Goya created his famous series of etchings during the Napoleonic occupation of Spain (1808-1814). As an eyewitness of the war, he details in over eighty etchings the horrors of war – torture, rape, executions, tribunals and the desecration of corpses. Goya's etchings are perfect illustrations of a world in which man can perform the most violent, and grotesque acts. The Chapman brothers bought a complete edition of the *Disasters of War* in 2003 and "reworked and improved" on the original prints, thus breaking "the taboo of the inviolable original"[48]. In a way they brought Goya's etchings back to life and exposed them to a contemporary audience, although in the crudest fashion. Their "improvements" of coloured mask clown heads, cartoonish mouse ears and popping eyes create characters that belong in our time, because of their stupidity and ugliness. [Illustration 2.12 and 2.13] The action of the Chapman brothers defacing Goya's work also reflects a modern trait of human beings, that is, that 'progress' is a positive action. The Chapman brothers produce two-fold monsters, working from where Goya left off and bringing the "disasters" up to date with the present age. The Chapmans' "interference heightens the scenes of cruelty"[49], through the sheer arrogance of defiling Goya's originals and through the juxtaposition of the pastel, pretty watercolour portraits on blackened etchings.

In a similar vein, I use the aesthetic of the Netherlandish Grotesque style as a contemporary vernacular to explain my personal misanthropic attitudes towards fellow human beings. My method of appropriating woodcuts that expose human folly and stupidity is obvious in my reworking of a Peter Flötner print, *The Human Sundial* (circa 1540-60) In the original, (which is an actual copy of original by Flötner) is held at the British museum and the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin. [Illustration 2.14] It stands out as an anomaly because of its graphic scatological depiction. A man is splayed naked with no pants on, his legs resting on two opposing sand timers, and a gnomon runs from his

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[48] Sagmeister, Rudolf. "Sex" and "Death" The Body as Battlefield between Heaven and Hell. *Jake and Dinos Chapman* (Bregenz [Austria] : Kunsthaus Bregenz ; Köln : Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2005)

[49] Cotter, Suzanne. 'The Unbearable Lightness of Meaning.' *Jake & Dinos Chapman : The Rape of Creativity.* (Oxford : Museum of Modern Art, 2003)



Illustration 2.12 - Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Insult to Injury,* 2003. Watercolour on original set of Goya's *The Disasters of War* etching series originally 1808-1814.



Illustration 2.13 - Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Insult to Injury,* 2003. Watercolour on original set of Goya's *The Disasters of War* etching series originally 1808-1814.

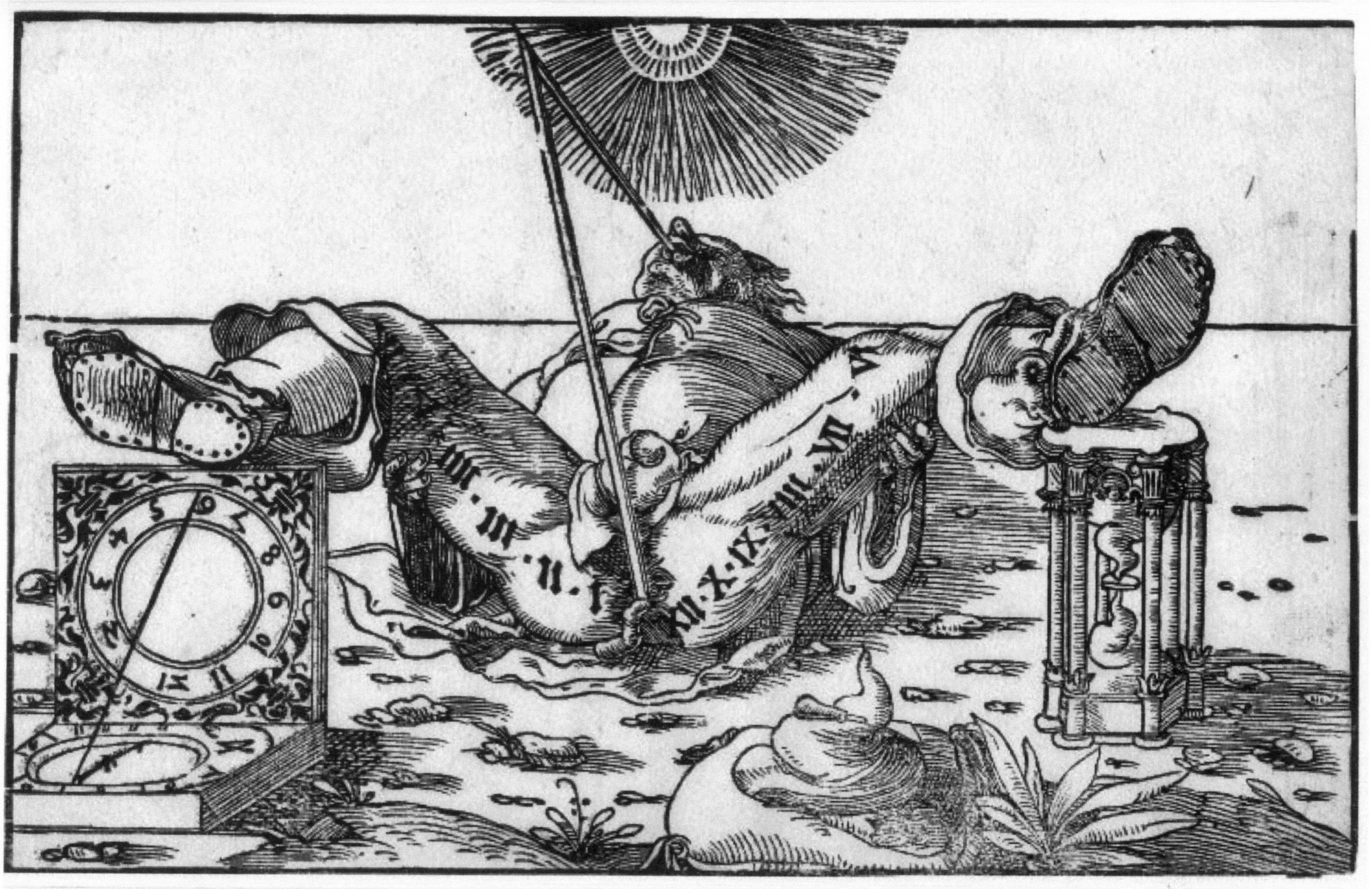


Illustration 2.14 – *Human Sundial,* Peter Flötner. Woodcut (200mm H x 313 mm W). 1540-1560 (circa) Reverse copy after Flötner (Hollstein 40) **Source:** *http://www.britishmuseum.org*



Illustration 2.15 – *kostuumdrama (Wasted)* Emily Hunt. Watercolour on paper (55 x 54.5cm) 2012

mouth to his anus. Shit has been placed on a cushion in front of him. The print encapsulates the particularities of the sixteenth century German grotesque aesthetic, and that is a reason I chose to reveal it back to a contemporary audience. The action of shocking an audience is here, in the Flötner's *Human Sundial* through using such scatological terms, and it is interesting to compare it back to the Chapman brothers oeuvre. My rendition of the human sundial [Illustration 2.15] in colour, I take the black and white and fill it in with gaudy pleasure. The spreadeagled man is mirrored back onto himself, creating a kind of repetitive circle hole. The word "Wasted" (taken from Flötner's *Human Alphabet*) has been used to describe two major themes of my work and how they are essentially interconnected, that is, human waste (e.g. feces) and the waste of human energy from gluttony and greed.

The Peasant Carnival and my bricolage sculptures

Bricolage is a term that describes using found objects as a basis to build sculptures and assemblages. In much the same way collage uses multifarious sources to create paper works, I have used various found objects to create characters and personalities. Through curating my choices of objects I consciously decided to choose goblets, pottery urns and glasses that demonstrated the action of drinking and an intemperate social occasion. Air-drying clay was used, because it enabled me to work intuitively and fast. The gold gentleman with buck teeth, [Illustration 2.16] sprouts out from a 1970's kitsch goblet. His eyeballs are distended, which is common shape I twist the character eyes into. The droopy eyes are a metaphor for complete stupidity and addiction. He has lichen for hair, another trope than lends itself to the 'organic grotesque'. The honeycomb pottery urn holds the head of an over-wrinkled fool. [Illustration 2.17] He has a copper jester headpiece and his 'skin' is sweaty, because I lacquered the clay three times over. A pottery goblet in spotted hues [Illustration 2.18] was used the stand for a dark-skinned character that also has over-extended eyeballs with white pupils. His hair was taken from a wig and it been teased up like a bouffant. The hysterical green man with flurry warts [Illustration 2.19] has an elongated neck due to wine carafe shape. He has a deranged smile of gold teeth and numerous eyeballs protruding out of his sockets. The hair on his head was taken from an old fur stole.



Illustration 2.16 – *Entangled Bank Object.* Emily Hunt. Found Goblet, air-drying clay, gold paint, licken, fabric, gold leaf,. Approximately 33cm tall, 2011



Illustration 2.17 – *Entangled Bank Object.* Emily Hunt. Found pottery vase, air-drying clay,copper sheet, lacquer. Approximately 40cm tall, 2011



Illustration 2.18 – *Entangled Bank Object.* Emily Hunt. Found pottery goblet air-drying clay, enamel paint, lacquer., wig hair. Approximately 40cm tall, 2011



Illustration 2.19 – *Entangled Bank Object.* Emily Hunt. Found pottery flask, air-drying clay, enamel paint, lacquer., fur. Approximately 50cm tall, 2011

More than twenty-five objects were created for the Masters exhibition, however I have chosen to explain just four that encapsulate the attitude of the 'peasant carnival' and the atmosphere of a shared drinking culture. All the characters are deranged, half awake, fools that leer with their worm-like eyeballs. The assemblages contain many elements and motifs of the 'organic grotesque', through the use of materials such as hair, lichen, and Renaissance gold hues. Furthermore, the 'organic grotesque' can be seen their attitudes, which were created intuitively as a response to my own personal attribute of intemperance. My versions of 'character steins' have been hugely influenced by the German grotesque aesthetic and but also they act as extensions of my personality.

Conclusion: In regards to the topography and living surface of the body, reproductive printmaking and it's influence on my etchings and bricolage sculptures.

Both the artists discussed amplify the forms of the human body. Weiditz pushes the body into uncomfortable zones, while Goltzius, armours his male forms. Goltizus' topology of the body is tight and bulbous, portraying powerful strength, which is in polarity to Weiditz's sloppy, obese characters. In terms of the organic grotesque, Weiditz's bodily growth is expansive, unruly and controlled by the layer of skin that holds back the corporeal, oleaginous substance threatening to disgorge itself. Goltzius uses muscles to control growth in sections. This method I have generated actively looks to and uses the disgusting growths of nature to vivify characters and objects, and at the same moment, to repel me away from them. It is a personal repulsion, which generates the push and pull of the process of creation and the relish I find in my disgust of warts, fungus, fat folds, pimples, cauliflower muscles and more.

Furthermore, the influence of the aesthetic of Renaissance printmaking is felt throughout my whole practice, in particular etching and object-making. Looking at the practice of the Chapman brothers and their defacement of Francisco de Goya's *Disasters of War* etchings, the relationship artists have to old master printmakers is powerful and influential. In many ways the Chapman brothers created a 'double original' through

added on their horrific mask embellishments. Weiditz's and Goltzius' bodies have been represented in my practice in my idiosyncratic method. The satirical work of Peter Flötner and Hans Weiditz and their revolting, lazy and drunk characters have evolved into my work, as means of discussing the vices and attitudes of the modern human. Bricolage sculptures were built to reflect the languid and intoxicated emotions inherent in the German grotesque aesthetic and in my own personality. They were also displayed in form of an 'entangled bank', taking the display and symbolism of the *wunderkammer*, the objects are personalities 'growing' from the mouth holes of drinking vessels.

Chapter Three -

At the Cellular Level: *Visual representations of the Organic Grotesque in Macroscopic and Microscopic detail.*

The concept of scale as a visual concern is the unifying theme throughout this chapter. The ideas inherent in the term the 'organic grotesque' are analysed in relation to the notion of scale through the theories of Charles Darwin, the illustrations of Ernst Haeckel, and within my own art practice. The title of this chapter gives form to the scientific and subjective ideas present in my art practice, specifically the heavy ornamentation in my painting. I refer to the cellular level as a means of explaining the taxonomy of motifs present in my painting. The visual framework in my picture making contains both microscopic and macroscopic details of the 'organic grotesque' which are built up to create a multicellular structure that results in a complete painting. The 'organic grotesque' is understood in the context of the research as a visual term describing the grotesque nature of organic growth: unruly, abnormal, cutaneous, biological, gnarled and fertile. Throughout the chapter I consider my manipulation of these dual lenses: the macro-lens and micro-lens, as a technique in combining biological outlines that contain enlarged and minute surface detail. In this chapter the 'lens' of the organic grotesque is articulated through the scientific idea of Darwin's theory of evolution. Utilising mediums such as paintings, sculpture and etchings, my practice aims to embody an idiosyncratic response to the idea of evolution and my visual relationship to scale. Alongside looking through the lens, the concept of *horror vacui* and its correspondence to the visual ideas of Darwin's 'entangled bank' are considered as a facilitator in my art practice. In collaboration with Darwin's macro-lens are the scientific illustrations of Ernst Haeckel (1834 – 1919). The third aspect of scale at the microscopic level. Robert Hooke (1635 - 1703) a Royal Society member and close friend of Darwin's published a blockbuster book called *Micrographia* (1665). In the engravings of *Micrographia,* Hooke revealed his scientific drawings of a flea's eye, a plant cell and many other microscopic entities and insects, all described in hyper detail for the first time. The availability of the microscope in the Victorian period as well as improvements and discoveries in glass lenses helped visualise the complexity and strangeness of a teeming life, beyond human vision. Ernst Haeckel's

illustrations are figurations of the micro-lens that disclose a biological world of swarming all around us. Haeckel's fine lithographs magnify the hidden and unknown life forms, revealing an alien world full of dangerously grotesque forms. His lithographs are in stark contrast to Hooke's because they lend themselves to flamboyance and flourish found in the tiniest of life forms.

The chapter separates the relationships between the macroscopic and microscopic visual detail and introduces three contemporary artists, which manifest signs of the organic grotesque and who share comparable aesthetics to my practice. The Australian painter James Morrison is discussed in relation to Darwin's concept of the 'entangled bank', due to the hyper-fecundity of his paintings. Jim Woodring, an American graphic artist is analysed in reference to his emulation of Ernst Haeckel's biological illustrations and the medical portraits of sixteenth century Italian engraver Andrea Vesalius. Woodring's motifs of hybrid organic entities share homogeneous traits to Haeckel's depictions of bizarre and threatening specimens. Furthermore, the engravings of flayed, open anatomies represented by Vesalius are remarkably similar to Woodring's violent ruptures in his characters. Sue Williams is an American feminist painter who came to prominence during the nineteen eighties. She paints cartoon-like enlarged motifs of orifices, such as assholes and the creases of fat folds, which are then fragmented into a kind of corporeal wallpaper. Orifices are usually hidden from view, being small and ugly and also confronting. In William's paintings scale is used effectively to reveal such unappreciated body parts.

The Macroscopic Lens: Evolution, the Entangled Bank, Horror Vacui *and Worm Castings*

Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882) produced a number of essays and arguments on varying biological systems. His minor works focused on subjects ranging from the sexual reproduction of barnacles to the castings of worms. Darwin's language and literature greatly impacted on the popular consciousness of Victorian culture. His research revealed mutations of nature. Most importantly, his theory of Natural Selection removed the notion of a 'divine hand' in human creation and revealed instead, that the human race

shares genetic lineage to all living things. *The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms* (1881) is significant in the context of the Victorian grotesque. The small number of engravings of worm castings are rendered in such as way that the micro-level is raised to that of a macro-level. The castings appear to be larger-than-life towers, irregular in shape and scatological in nature. [Illustrations 3.1 & 3.2]. The engravings of castings are representations of the disgusting versus beautiful refuse of worm bodies.

> Darwin's, "fundamental concern throughout the book is with worms' "excrescences and orifices": the way worms ingest soil and organic material, process it in their alimentary canals, and expel what they do not absorb as castings. So thoroughly do worms break down the division between their bodies, over and over again. This fact, in Darwin's view, is cause for wonder and celebration, for worms thus help to create and aerate the soil, converting the products of death and decay into a source of regeneration and life."[50]

Smith reads Darwin's text as a passionate treatise on the brilliant exertion of the lowly worm. The worm can change the constituents of 'dead' soil by eating and discharging waste, creating fresh life-producing soil. This point is essential to the visual idea of the organic/biological grotesque, for all the parts of the cycle display characteristically grotesque elements, ending in new organic life. Visually analysing one of Darwin's specimens, the steeple of casting is protuberant in shape, the excreta clumping together produces an unusual silhouette that in my opinion has anthropomorphic outlines, although it is quite cartoon-like. It can be discerned as a claymation mound of human heads pushed together to create a multi-headed abstract beast. It is an engraving of a sculptural form that can be viewed as a three dimensional pile of 'poo' convolutions forming a tower. It contains new vegetation such as grass stems springing out, that "testify to the fertility of the castings."[51] Shown here is the action of taking an organic grotesque entity and making it the centre of attention. In the same way Darwin's worm feces can be seen as repulsive, the engravings present in Darwin's study raise them to be monumental statues of aerated and fertile sites. There is a balance present in the representation of organic growth that straddles the line between disgust and beauty in both the decorative pattern work of my paintings and the unusual life-giving, gnarled sculptures of worm

[50] Smith, Jonathan *Charles Darwin and Victorian Culture.* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press 2006) p.250
[51] Ibid Smith p.250

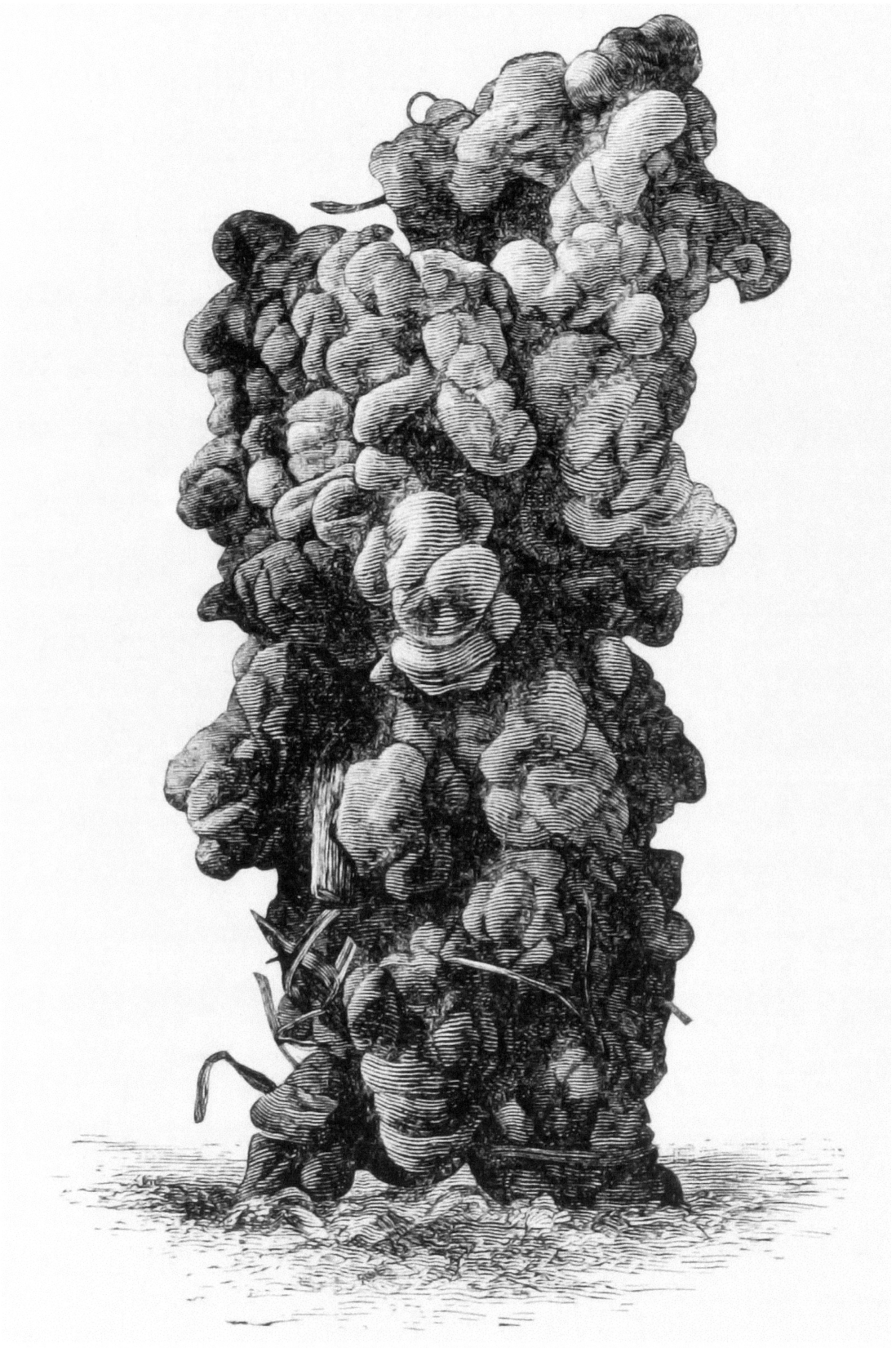


Illustration 3.1 – "A tower-like casting, probably ejected by a species of Perichaeta from the Botanic Garden, Calcutta: of natural size, engraved from a photograph"
Source: Darwin, Charles. *The formation of vegetable mould through the action of worms : with observations on their habits.* (London : Faber and Faber, 1945)

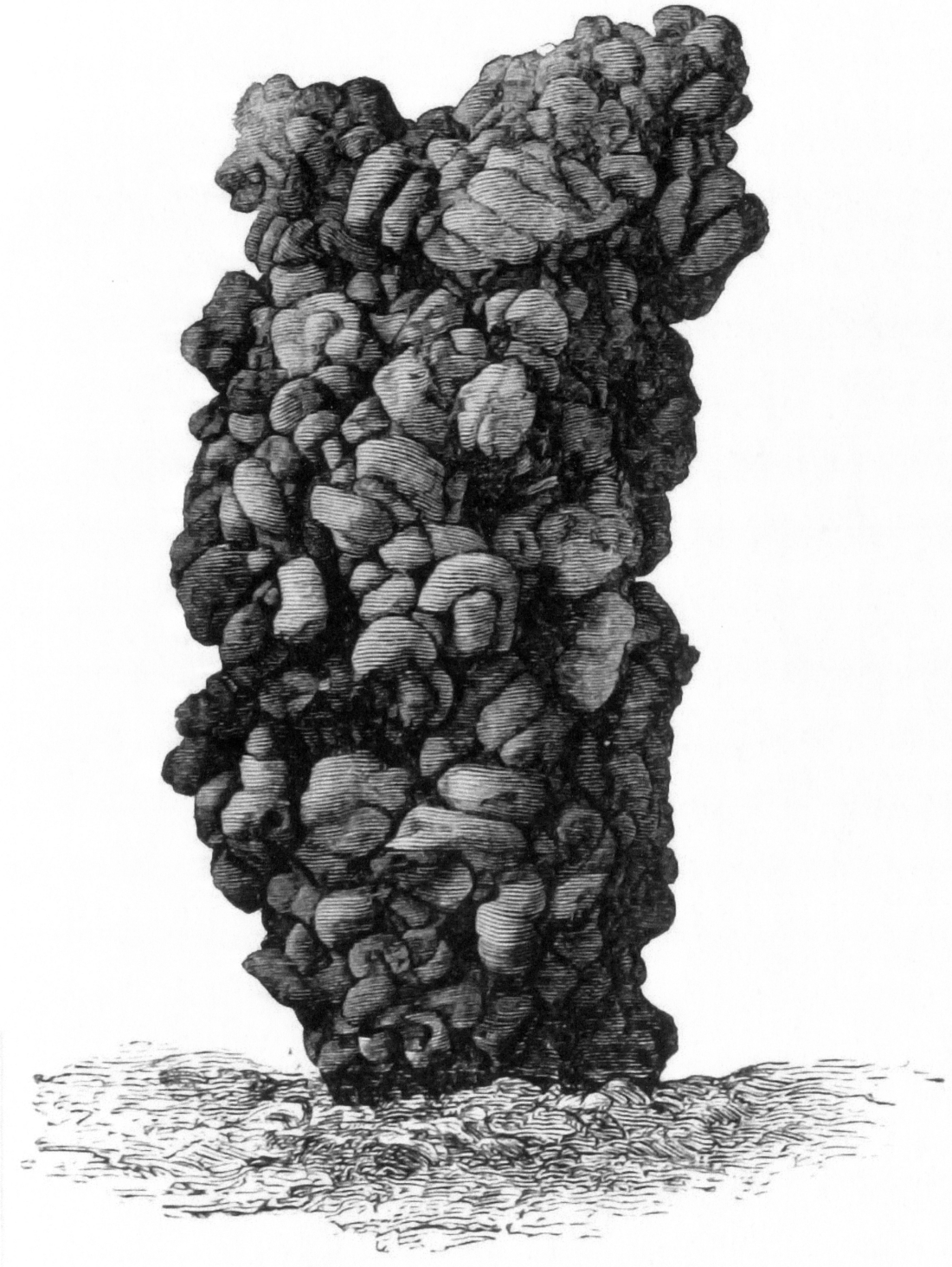


Illustration 3.2 – "Tower-like casting from near Nice, constructed of earth, voided probably by a species of Pericheata: of natural size, copied from a photograph"
Source: Darwin, Charles. *The formation of vegetable mould through the action of worms : with observations on their habits.* (London : Faber and Faber, 1945)

castings. The wet, viscous exterior of the worm; the process of indigestion; the discharge of waste; the waste drying into tiny sculptures that share a grotesque legacy with cutaneous growth, such as human warts. Also the notion that the 'division of their (worm) bodies' is in constant flux with organic matter, introduces an important new element in the discussion because it opens up, again, the fluid connection humans have with the lowliness life forms. It also brings to mind the fecund surface of human skin which containing millions of minute organisms eating the dead skin flakes and defecating their waste on our exterior. The layer of epidermis covering the human, in this context, is an allegory to the soil on the earth. Although, we cannot see with the naked eye the horror of fecundity happening in real time on the human skin.

In the mind's eye, projecting the knowledge that there are tiny creatures (bacteria, parasites) living on the surface of your skin, inside your gut, on your eyelashes, can remind oneself of the fact of fecundity of biological growth. Organisms grow everywhere, no surface is not consumed. It is the never-ceasing circle of generation of cells, the death of cells, and the regeneration of cells. The human being is reminded that we are as lowly an organic growth as that of a worm, capable of the same grotesque biological natures. Within the psychology of my own art practice, the unifying notion of scale is drawn upon frequently as a means to communicate my feelings towards collapsing the hierarchy of living things. Through collapsing the picture plane and focusing on the shared characteristics of all living entities, in particular the abnormal growth structures inherent on the outside of them, I intend to describe my abhorrence and disgust of being human and the intimate relationship I have to my own bodily functions.

The publication of the Darwin's *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) had overarching social, psychological and religious implications. Darwin asserted that, "plants and animals were created not by a divine designer but by natural selection and that man had not been made in God's image but had descended from an ape."[52] The relevance of Darwin's theory to the concept of the organic grotesque lies in its emphasis on biological continuity. Darwin's theories describe the long, winding biological connection a human

[52] Gamwell, Lynn. *Exploring the Invisible: Art, Science, and the Spiritual.* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002) p.33

being has to the tiniest living form of bacteria. Jonathan Smith, in his book, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture*, presents a clear argument that Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution is inherently grotesque.

> "Darwinism, with its blurring of boundaries and blending of categories, its focus on variation, eccentricity and irregularity, and its interest in bodies and their functions, especially sexual reproduction, digestion, defecation, and death, thus had many of the hallmarks of the grotesque. While Darwin and his allies clearly reveled in nature's grotesqueries, and took delight in their celebration of them, those who regarded nature as complete, ordered, stable, and hierarchical looked upon Darwin's vision with horror."[53]

By unpicking the boundaries that had traditionally separated life into a hierarchy of divine forms, Darwinism conceives of life as unruly excess, that covers every surface. Be that a surface of an inanimate or animate object, microscopically organisms animate *all* surfaces, when you view the surface close enough. The hierarchy of developed organisms, with humans at the top, is in a sense collapsed when looking through the lens of Darwinism and the organic grotesque. Humans are brought into complicity with the lowliness organism. Darwinism elevates the function of the worm, or barnacle, to the same level as the human being because the process of natural selection displaces the human form as ideal. Through the theory of evolution every form has its particular function as a consequence of natural selection. However, the concept of intelligence in organisms is a subject for a very different dissertation: instead simple biological growth is the focus of this discussion. The pyramid of hierarchy is flattened because all life is made up of the same constituents.

The visual flattening of perspective, in relation to the collapsed pyramid, resembles a process underlying my art practice: all organic entities exist on the same plane; no one is raised higher than the other. My practice aims to achieve this idea through the use of linear outlines, which contain a network of inter-dependent entities that are then animated with organic growth. Breaking down the colourful, linear forms present in my watercolour painting, 'Nuclear Man' [Illustration 3.3], reveals an abundance of outlines

[53] Smith, Jonathan *Charles Darwin and Victorian Culture.* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press 2006) p. 249



Illustration 3.3 – *Nuclear Man.* Emily Hunt. Watercolour on paper & collage (61x46cm) 2011



Illustration 3.4 – Detail: *Nuclear Man.* Emily Hunt. Watercolour on paper & collage (61x46cm) 2011

containing anthropomorphic features. Colourful shapes and forms that resemble biological growth live on a flattened plane, where every 'cell' is at the same time autonomous and linked to every other part of the painting. Concentrating on the silvery abstract faces sitting around the brim of a blue aqueous disc, each loose 'blob' of a face shares commonalities, although there is large variation in characters [Illustration 3.4]. The faces comprise wobbly features that are painted in an intuitive and quick fashion, resulting in cartoon versions of a face. These are used as a motif of disparate personalities, reduced down into the simplest linear outlines, with no depth or volume. The addition of smaller personalities painted as if they 'lived' alongside the central character in the middle of the painting, aims to represent an irrepressible *generation* of life. Although these heterogeneous entities are contained by outlines, they essentially live on the same plane as every other entity. Because my paintings contain no perspective, all shapes are flattened to exist on the same plane and this can cause confusion in the eye of the viewer because the main character is lost in the fecundity of the background. The primary aim of construction is to make every form as important as each other.

The central figure of the aptly named, 'Nuclear Man', (because his hair is aflame) is framed by amoebic mushroom forms that are then surrounded by silhouettes of heads with beady red eyes. The colours were influenced by Japanese tsunami in 2011, as were the mushroom-like clouds, referencing nuclear power-plants. Involuntary influences invade the construction of pattern making by the act of just existing in the modern age. My feeling of abhorrence to the horror of generation is the recurring concern: the constant growth of vegetation that never stands still, sprouting from and rupturing surfaces. This concern is portrayed in the painting of 'Nuclear Man' through the action of covering in pattern the entire frame of the painting. In a sense the painting is never finished, because further pattern is always able to grow in the available spaces. My dread for unruly procreation is expressed in a concept called the *horror vacui*, "a fear or dislike of leaving empty spaces"[54]. As a visual technique, I react to the *horror vacui* by using it as a facilitator to amplify the painting and as a means of acting out in paint my personal experience of disgust, repulsion and dread of uncontrolled biological growth. The process

[54] New Oxford American dictionary 2nd Edition 2005

deals with two horrors: the vacuum and the dread of contagion that might infect the vacuum. My visual process takes back a measure of control by filling the vacuum with material of my own imagination. This action satisfies three discontents: the fear of the breeding happening inside the empty space; the control I take in producing such generation; and finally, the act fulfilling the creative need to produce material. *Horror Vacui,* as a visual concern, is reflected in the Darwinian aesthetic and his poetic description of the 'entangled bank'. In the final paragraph of *On the Origin of Species,* Darwin writes of a multitude of living creatures coexisting in a countryside hedge. "These elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us."[55] Every creature; worm, bird, spider is tightly surrounded by curling tendrils. There is limited space in this fertile zone. Representations of organic growth jostle for space, existing on the same plane and where no form is elevated over the other.

Hyper-fecundity & James Morrison

James Morrison's (b. 1959) most recent oil painting, *A History of Robotics* (2011) [Illustration 3.5] epitomises Darwin's description of the 'entangled bank'. Morrison's former home of Papua New Guinea is the landscape setting for the multifarious life forms, indigenous objects and a wooden shelter. Although the trees and mountains are represented with volume, the perspective of the landscape is flattened. Excessive surface detail causes the shortened perspective and loss of depth of field. In Amanda Rowell's essay on Morrison's epic series, *Great Tasmanian Wars* (2004) she describes how Morrison's plants and animals "do not behave in a naturalistic way, engaging with other things in the composition. Instead, they present themselves as portraits of their biological specificity, as products of nature's ever-evolving figuration."[56] Each grass blade of the spinifex plant is painted clearly and the viscous, motley skin of a green toad is effectively realistic. His focus on each diminutive detail of a specimen's peculiarity allocates boundaries around the form and makes them pop away from each other. Also, Morrison uses opposing energetic colour combinations against each other. Individual biological specimens "seem

[55] Trodd, Colin, Paul Barlow, and David. Amigoni. *Victorian Culture and the Idea of the Grotesque.* (Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1999) p.120

[56] Rowell, Amanda, "James Morrison: a contemporary epic of natural history". *Art and Australia,* v.43, no.1, Spring 2005: p. 84

Illustration 3.5 - *A History of Robotics.* James Morrison, oil on canvas (102 x 168 cm) 2011

readymade creative expressions in themselves"[57]. The diversity of biological identites, coupled with the excessive ornamentation of biological surface, produces a *hyper-fecundity* of generation inside his paintings. The frame of the painting contains a superfluidity of growth, thus producing a warm 'entangled' landscape. Although Morrison does not share the same conceptual concerns as my practice, with the organic grotesque, the obsessive desire to cover ever centimetre with growth corresponds with a similar interest to mine. Furthermore, it appears that Morrison's paintings display a response to concept of the *horror vacui* and the psychological response to the uncontrolled temperament of the natural world.

The Microscopic Lens: *Ernst Haeckel's Alien Grotesqueries, Ornamental Boils and Woodring's Jivas*

During the mid- to late- nineteenth century, innovations in high-powered optical lens and the invention of the achromatic microscopes introduced scientists into "invisible realms .. that captured the new evolutionary concept of life on the cellular level."[58] Scientific illustrations proliferated in popular, cheap magazines. Most levels of society at the time was enthusiastic to the visual ideas of evolution and disease, whether or not they agreed with them at the time. Converging with Darwin's theory of evolution was Louis Pasteur's germ theory of disease. The microscope had disclosed the hidden bacteria that caused sickness. The visual material shifted people consciousness into thinking in a completely new psychological scale, "A realm that was both fascinating and potentially deadly, a achromatic microscope provided a clear view of the previously invisible."[59] Two illustrations that comically depict this experience for the populace at the time [Illustration 3.6 & 3.7] show an old woman horrified by the creatures that swim in a droplet of water. The many creatures living inside just one drop of water display scary sharp teeth and share similarities with the Lochness Monster and insect-like ghouls. Ernst Haeckel was accused for taking artistic license with his scientific data,[60] however his lithographs come very close to describing the elaborate world teeming around us. Although his depictions

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[57] Ibid Rowell p.86
[58] Gamwell, Lynn. *Exploring the Invisible: Art, Science, and the Spiritual.* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002) p.9
[59] ibid Gamwell p.48
[60] ibid p.93



Illustration 3.6 – *Spooner's Transformations No.2*: 'The Microscope'. William Spooner. Colour Lithograph. England c.1830
Source: Mannoni, Laurent & Nekes, Werner & Warner, Marina. *Eyes, lies and illusions : the art of deception.* London : Hayward Gallery in association with Lund Humphries, c2004.



Illustration 3.7 – Illuminated from behind. *Spooner's Transformations No.2*: 'The Microscope'. William Spooner. Colour Lithograph. England c.1830
Source: Mannoni, Laurent & Nekes, Werner & Warner, Marina. *Eyes, lies and illusions : the art of deception.* London : Hayward Gallery in association with Lund Humphries, c2004.

of bizarre minutiae are skillful accomplishments executed in fine detail, there is a large imaginative gap between what is viewed through the eyepiece of a microscope (photographic representation) and the shape and form of drawings produced by Haeckel.

Haeckel's precise illustrations were a product of the popular culture of the Victorian era, providing visual examples of evolution and a perceivable description of "the continuity of all life."[61] Haeckel's illustrations manifest characteristics of the organic grotesque through a combination of regularity and bizarre baroque-like forms and alien textures. Haeckel's visual language displays signs of excessiveness: bizarre outlines, ornate protuberances, sucking holes, hard crusts and pilose coverings. This combination of mysterious cavities and sucker-pads overlaid with elaborate decoration generates a visual contradiction of beauty and disgust. A recurring issue in the visual representation of the organic grotesque is the binary quality of the ornamental and the repulsive. Haeckel's unusual lithographs of sea slugs and horny coral reveal attributes common to the concept of the organic grotesque, because his illustrations are at once incredibly alien and at the same time uncannily familiar. I personally understand the psychological response in myself as a human being, as a combination of fascination of the unknown quality of these entities and parallel to this, a feeling of horror knowing they exist on my body and in the larger landscape. This response is not to be confused with the fear of germs, but with the re-introduction of knowing that the human body is inherently linked with all biological life forms.

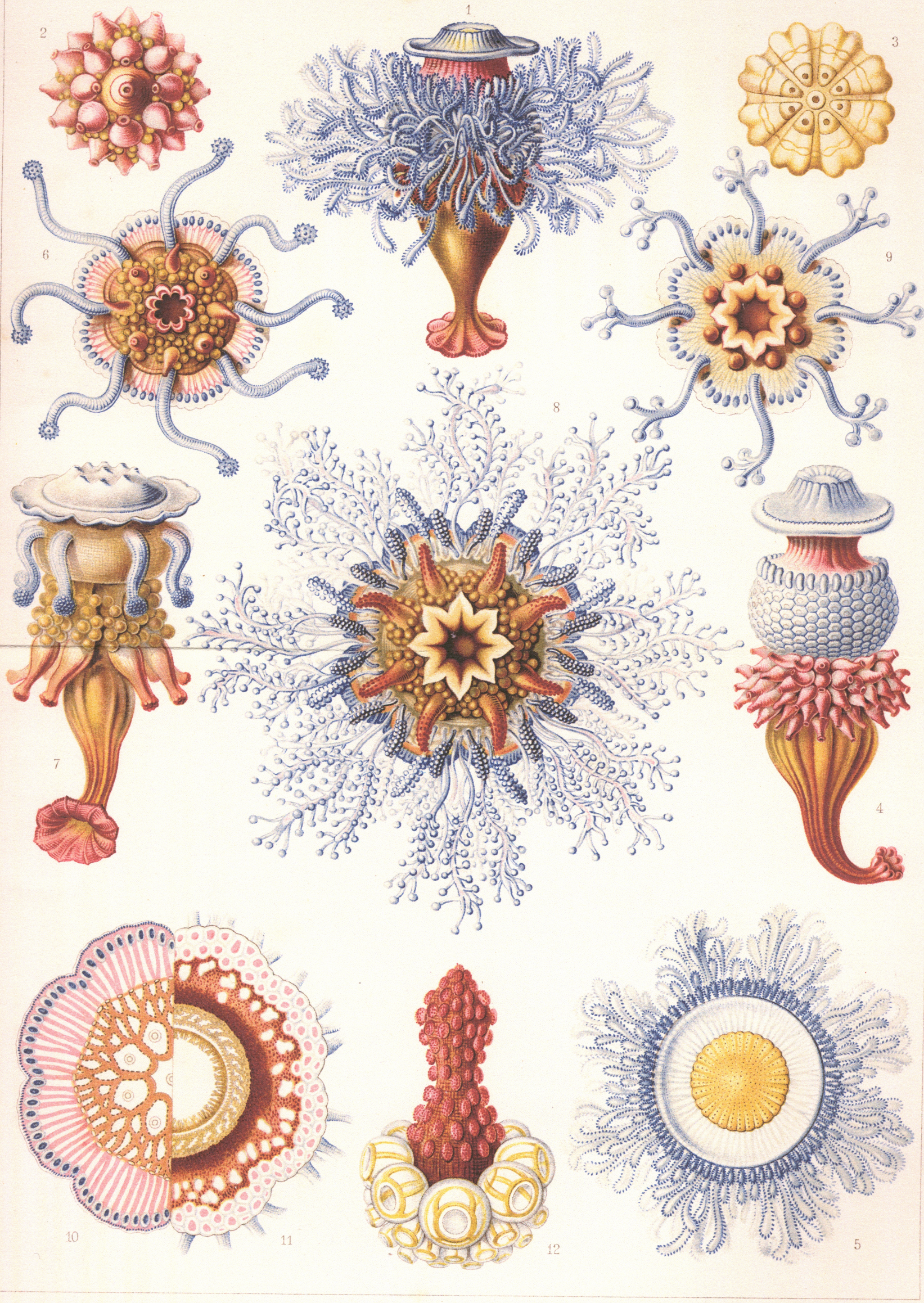
There is difficulty in choosing a few examples of Haeckel's illustrations because all exhibit intriguing characteristics. Therefore, emphasis will be placed on those entities that exhibit skin-like foliage and their organs on the outside. Visually dissecting the assembly of the specimens on the sea slug plate, [Illustration 3.8] there are seven creatures that display amazingly different properties. The largest central figure of a slug exposes its root-like foliage in an almost perverse expression. To the right of this biological personality is another unveiling its organs as sac-like feelers. This slug is displaying a gross indiscretion with an excess of nipple-like protuberances. The illustrations are, in a sense, perverting

[61] Breidbach, Olaf, Hartmann, Richard. *Art Forms in Nature: The Prints of Ernst Haeckel.* (Munich & London: Prestel-Verlag. 1998) p.8



Nudibranchia. — Nacktkiemen-Schnecken.

Illustration 3.8 – *Nudibranchia: Sea Slugs.* Ernst Haeckel. Colour lithograph from *Kunstformen der Natur.* c.1902
Source: *http://caliban.mpiz-koeln.mpg.de/haeckel/kunstformen/Tafel_043.html*



Siphonophorae. — Staatsquallen.

Illustration 3.9 – *Siphonophorae: Jellyfish.* Ernst Haeckel. Colour lithograph from *Kunstformen der Natur* c.1902
Source: *http://caliban.mpiz-koeln.mpg.de/haeckel/kunstformen/Tafel_017.html*

the function of the skin as a container to hold in such organs and hide them from view. There is no container lining in the slug's body except a thin membrane that barely contains the life bursting forth. The visual notion of the *foliage of skin* is manifested in another extraordinary plate called *Siphonophorae: studies of sea jellyfish* [Illustration 3.9]. In the contemporary age, it is possible to watch these remarkable creatures float in water in real time on websites such as youtube.com. Their extensions, sucker-pads and immanent danger are pronounced on screen. Their 'skin' folds seem to reach out to the viewer with a threatening character.

In opposition to Haeckel's mathematically balanced, literal depictions of nature, my practice involves asymmetrical, intuitive pattern making. The bizarre qualities of 'growth' found in nature have figurative influence on my motif assemblages. Throughout my recent portraits, a process of *gestalt* is involved. In relation to the compartmentalised castings, the portrait of a face can be seen as a complex, organised whole, which is made up of a sum of its parts.

When viewing *Skin Portrait #3*, [Illustration 3.10] the larger outlines constructing the portrait are the face, the hair, cap and skivvy. He is a man that loosely resembles a peasant living in one of Brueghel's paintings, a connotation present in all six portraits which refers back to the theme of medieval drunkenness and debauchery present in my etchings and object making. The cap on his head is covered in a recurring motif of the eyeball that lies in cracks that loosely represent veins or roots. The skin of his face is covered in hairy bacteria amplified to a size that the viewer can see. There are lines of blackheads coursing from his mouth, implying wrinkles. The psychological space from which the organic grotesque forms spring is linked to my previous statement concerning the consciousness of fecundity, which is happening at all times on the surface of my skin and fellow humans. My fantasy of viewing the magnified surface erupting like a mini volcano, encapsulates the emotion of disgust, and is distilled in the graphic symbology of my portraits. The symbols are simultaneously disgusting and decorative. The colours I employ to depict boils, warts and scabs are removed from photographic reality through the flattening of perspective and the reduction of form into two-dimensional pattern. The



Illustration 3.10 – *Skin Portrait #3.* Emily Hunt. Watercolour on paper (60 x 55cm) 2011

revolting intimacy shared between human beings and nature becomes explicit through an understanding that all living things exist in a close bind. This forced intimacy might explain a feeling of abhorrence and disgust toward certain forms of growth including fungus, jellyfish, and peeling epidermis. What was once small and insignificant is magnified in the mind, as a ruptured, threatening surface that is connected to the body. Focusing on this intimacy with the biological minutiae, my visual practice interprets the surface of living things as a zone where abnormal life proliferates. The surface is expanded in my practice: the tiny is magnified to the centre of attention.

The Flayed Corpse & Jim Woodring

Jim Woodring is a contemporary graphic novelist who uses an inked version of the swelling line. The technique of the swelling line is present in the engravings of Hendrik Goltizus, however Woodring uses this swelling line to make his drawings appear to have woodcut tendencies. Through researching the visual language inside Haeckel's oeuvre I was struck with the similarities of form of Woodring's *Jiwas* and Haeckel's alien structures, [Illustrations 3.11.1 & 3.11.2]. A visual comparison is apparent when viewing Haeckel's jellyfish next to Woodring's panel depicting a *Jiwa* forking out of a fish. After researching this visual comparison, I found an interview where Woodring states that he "borrows motifs from (Haeckel book) all the time, sometimes transmuted, sometimes directly. Haeckel's illustrations (of sea-life) always looked to me like a natural warning sign: danger, it seems to say, or keep out, or approach at own risk."[62] A scenario taken from a panel in the comic, "Manhog beyond the Face" a *Jiwa* sprouts out of a fish, enlarging to the size of a man size to frighten a naked, bleeding Manhog. The sequence could be read allegorically with Manhog as a bacterially contaminated being, terrified by the immaculate, knowing *Jiwa*. Woodring creates a hallucinatory world that tightly controls his wild excessive imagination. It is a clean, ordered world, where an underlying logic controls the motile, ambivalent, menacing organic forms. Woodring frequently draws a sequence of events where organic forms expand, turning themselves inside out. Present is a divine power, *Jiwa*, an organ without skin: an analogous entity to Haeckel's illustrations. The "turning out" of skin and body is taken to an almost vulgar level in the next panel of

[62]Jim Woodring interview with David Mc Daniels March 2005 - School of Art, Institute of Chicago. - *http://fnewsmagazine.com/2005-mar/current/pages/5.shtml*



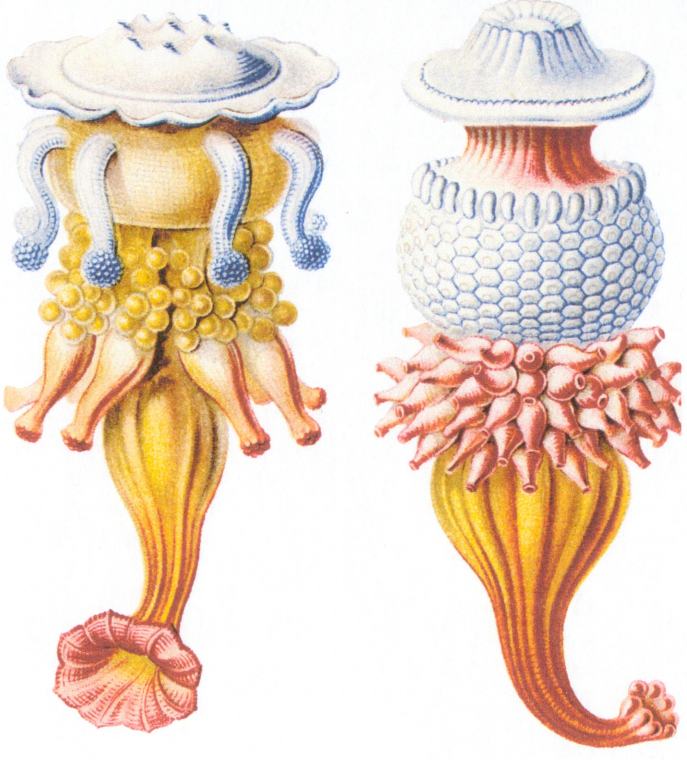


Illustration 3.11.1 & 3.11.2
– Above: Jim Woodring's graphic panel from *Manhog beyond the Face* p.9 (*Jim* Volume two, Number One 1993) compared with left: detail from Ernst Hackel's *Siphonophorae: Jellyfish*

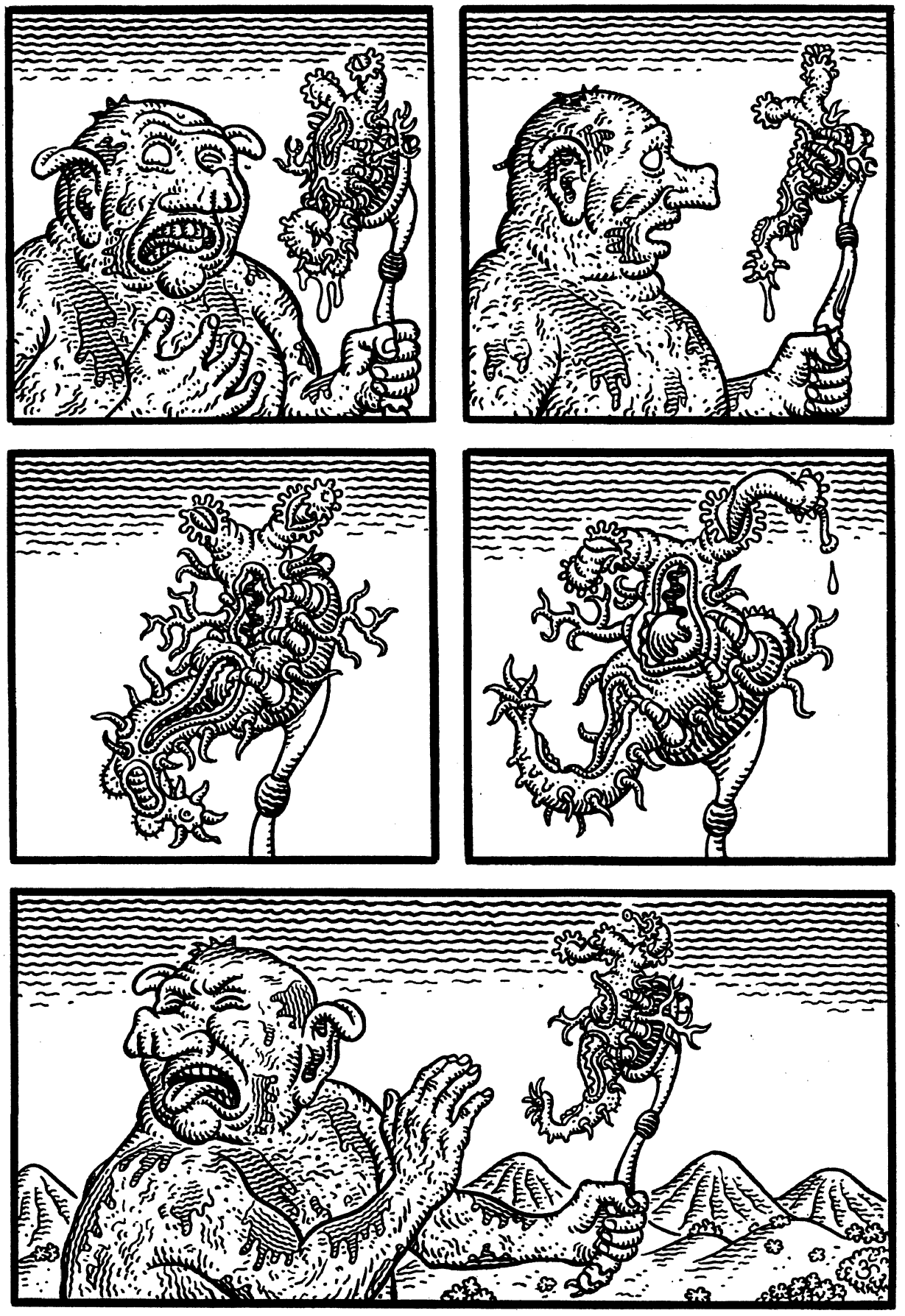


Illustration 3.12 - Manhog, Jim Woodring. Source: Panel from *Weathercraft; A Frank Comic,* Fantagraphic Books, 2010

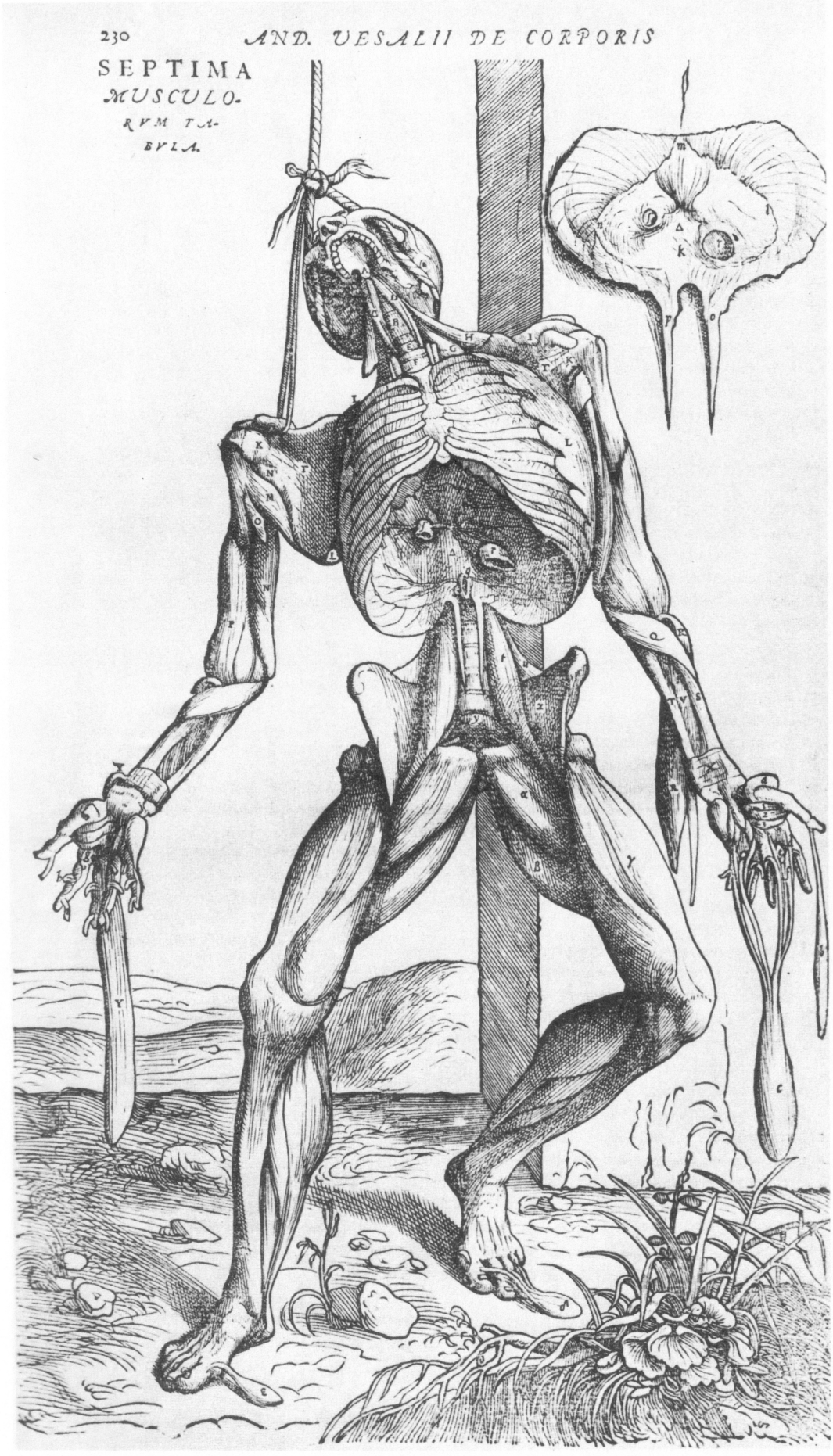


Illustration 3.13 - *De Humani corporis fabrica*, Andrea Vesalius. Engraving. Basle 1543. Source: *The Waking Dream : fantasy and the surreal in graphic art, 1450-1900 /* introd. and commentaries by Edward Lucie-Smith ; notes on the plates by Aline Jacquiot ; [translated from the French by Nicholas Fry] New York : Knopf ; London : Thames and Hudson, 1975.

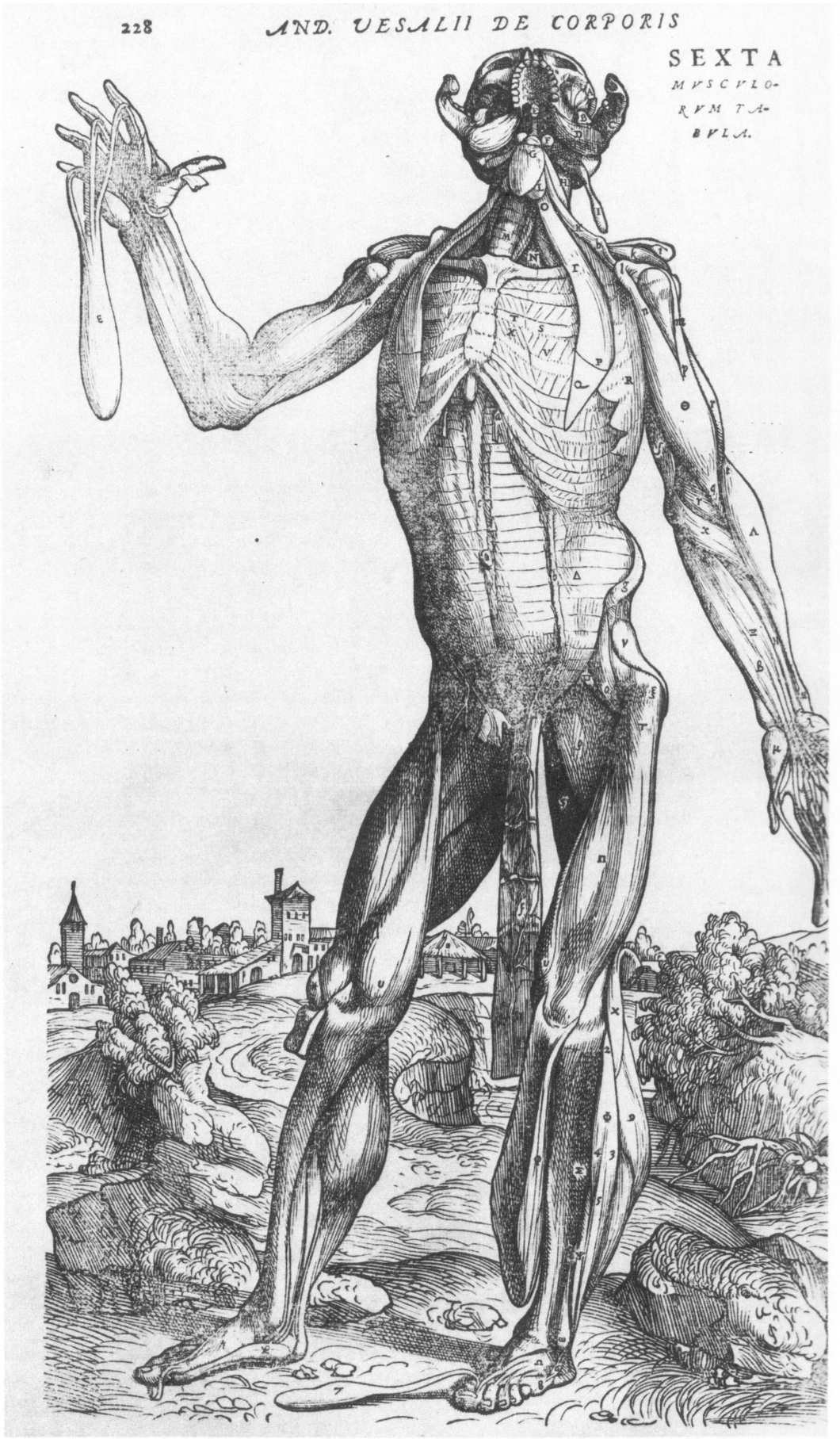


Illustration 3.14 - *De Humani corporis fabrica*, Andrea Vesalius. Engraving. Basle 1543.Source: *The Waking Dream : fantasy and the surreal in graphic art, 1450-1900 /* introd. and commentaries by Edward Lucie-Smith ; notes on the plates by Aline Jacquiot ; [translated from the French by Nicholas Fry] New York : Knopf ; London : Thames and Hudson, 1975.

Manhog, who again watches a foreign agency transform in front of his terrified eyes [Illustration 2.12]. Woodring's obsession with what lies underneath the skin, and peeling it back to see what does, is parallel to Italian Renaissance medical engravings, in particular those taken from the book *De Humani corpporis fabrica* (1543) by Andrea Vesalius. Or though Vesalius did not create the original engravings, he collected the intensely detailed anatomical studies as a means to explain the inner workings of the human body. The flayed man, [Illustration 3.13 & 3.14] the hanged man, his body arching back shows the audience the muscle structure of the human body in an exaggerated, emotional pose. In comparison to Woodring's woodcut impression of a belligerent organism, [Illustration 2.12] acting to revolt the viewer, the flayed corpses are cold and removed from life. Though they both share the characteristic of the inside-out and the ability of the seeing of unknown 'organic grotesqueness' underneath. Decay and atrophic details feature in both the flayed corpses and Woodring's wet anthropomorphic creatures. This is a frequent, shifting motif, however each time Woodring draws such a bizarre growth, it is completely different from the last. His unconscious is able to process infinite numbers of possible grotesques, and as an artist he works in similar medical fashion to the Renaissance engravings due to the fact he desperately wants to know what is living under the skin. Woodring has the ability to create an enormous variety of form, as did Ernst Haeckel. Both artists expose the awesome variety of grotesque organic forms, and thus reinforces the concept of the organic grotesque and its property of unstoppable growth.

The Loosely Drawn Orifice & Sue Williams

An American feminist painter, Sue Williams rose to attention in the 1980's in Los Angeles and New York City. Known initially for her 'joke paintings' that were naively painted, her later work focused on the physical vulgarity of the human body. Her work when discussed in relation with the 'organic grotesque' can be aligned to the notion of the macro-lens. That is, enlarging the miniscule for viewing, in this case the human orifice of the asshole. Her painting style can be characterised as a loose drawing style that floats of the surface of the painting, as kind of woven, fleshy speech bubbles. In the painting *Sunbathers in Buttsville* (1997) [Illustration 3.16], Williams has painted over the saccharine scenes of English pastoral farms. There are fat thumbs, droopy ball sacks, udders, sucked-



Illustration 3.15 – *TWA,* Sue Williams. Oil and acrylic on canvas (183 x 213 cm) 1997

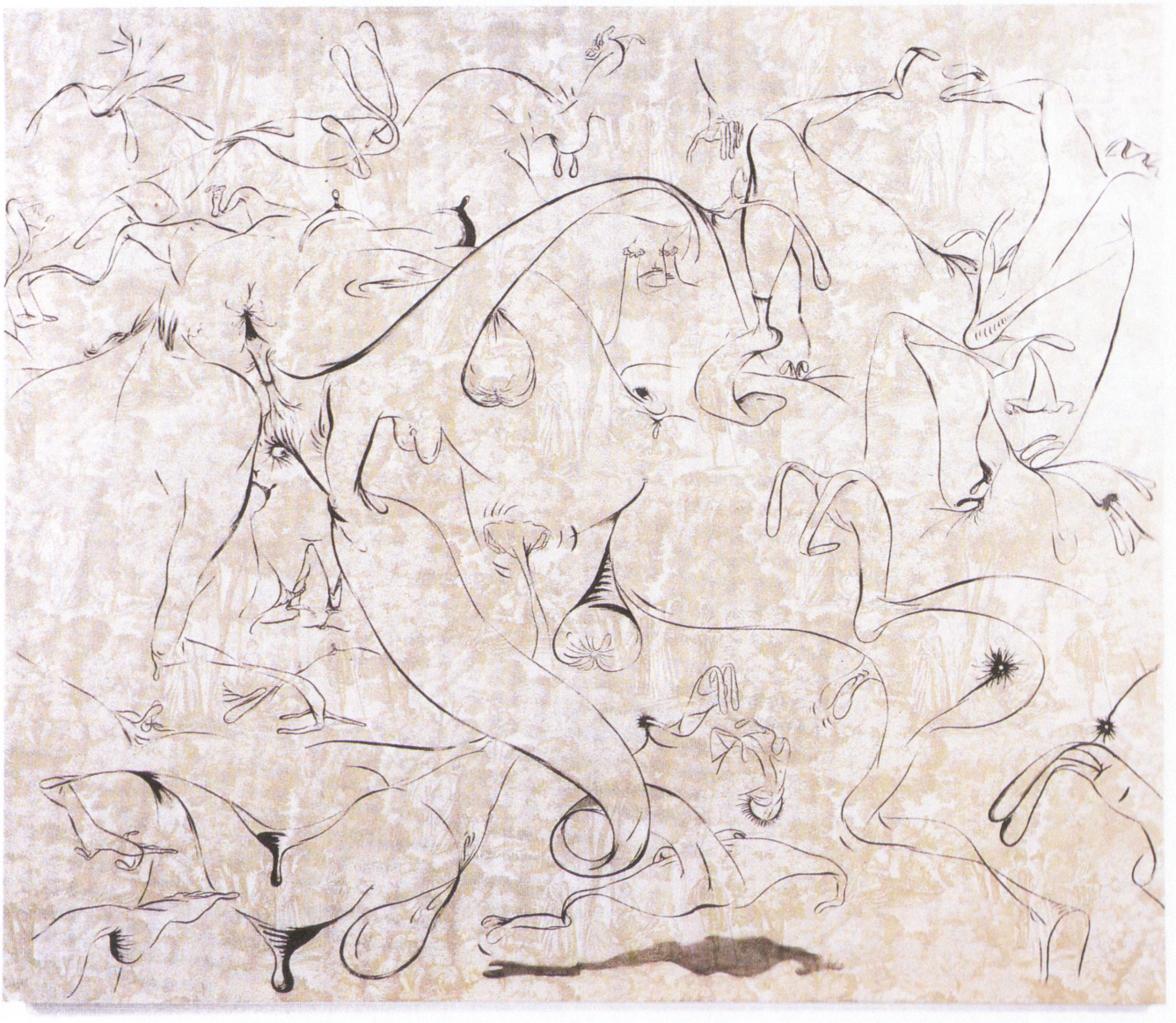


Illustration 3.16 – *Sunbathers in Buttsville, N.J.* Sue Williams. Oil and acrylic on canvas (183 x 213 cm) 1997

in holes and frills. The lines of her paintings are describe a landscape where all the odds and ends of the human body end up in a "psychosexual geography"[63] Her signature style is of interest to this topic because of intuitive line-making. It is obvious that the lines come out as her unconscious meanders over the human body, picking out parts that are the most abject and cartoonish for the audience, the voyeur, to scrutinise. In the case of *TWA* (1997) [Illustration 3.15], the whole landscape consists of a confused orgy of short skirts, splayed legs and ringed holes. As the final artist to be discussed in this dissertation, Sue Williams work reflects the most abject notion of the 'organic grotesque'. Her human bodies are without faces or personalities, just organic swarms of flesh, interconnected like biological growths and reduced to the purest, simplistically rendered forms.

Conclusion in regards to the influence of the concept of scale on the organic grotesque

To position both views in relation to the scale of life, which is an ongoing concern within my own practice, Darwin, metaphorically, points a telescope into the past and the sequence of life, back to the beginning of time. Ernst Haeckel shows the viewer, through the microscope, the evolved complexities of the smallest creatures at the tail end of evolution. Both views are tied to the neologism of the 'organic grotesque' and are visually augmented throughout my practice. My work strives to represent the two levels of scale, on the one picture plane, creating confusion in the viewer's vision. The visceral drawings of both Woodring and Williams inform my practice through the extreme corporeal language. The partnership of the *horror vacui*, emotions of disgust, and hyper-fecund landscapes play an intrinsic role in my picture making. Representations of the tiny and the gargantuan within organic life, are of equal importance, and they exist side-by side in my practice.

[63] Camhi, Leslie. "Domestic Horrors", *Parkett Verlag*, No.50/5, 1997: Page 200-3

Conclusion: *Evolution of the Organic Grotesque*

This body of research has strived to explain in visual terms, the equivocal feelings of disgust, repulsion and attraction in the area of the 'organic grotesque'. Put simply, the 'organic grotesque' contains three significant features relating to the natural world and the human body. These are: the ruptured, breathing surface of living things, the uncontrollable human body and the microscopic level of life. Following this, the dissertation is ordered into three interrelated topics, which contain two comparable ideas. These are: the layer of epidermis (the cave parallels the porosity of outer skin), the human body as outline (subcutaneous fat parallels representations of intemperate behaviour) and the visual concept of scale (micro & macro lens parallels the theory of Evolution).

Through the process of writing, I realised the relationships between the subjects generated overview of organic and biological grotesqueries, but that the human skin was the framework for shaping the dissertation. My other fascinations, the history of print (engraving & woodcut) and the discussion of the theory of Evolution, naturally linked together major themes present in my artmaking. Inventing the neologism: "the organic grotesque", gave me the opportunity to venture into areas of research that seemed new and uncharted to me, and this provided an impetus to create an original body of research that had not been written about extensively before.

Making work as an artist, the concept of the grotesque has been present in my visual practice since I can remember. The process of pinning down exactly what aspect of the grotesque is most apparent in all the mediums I embrace, took the most part of 2010 to reveal itself. The organic nature of my mark-making was obvious, as was the desire to provoke disgust in myself and also my audience. After reading extensively on the emotion of disgust I came to the conclusion that my main 'elicitor of disgust' is the visual idea of the blending of plant and human forms, i.e. the fantasy of growing plants off my own skin. This I found surprising, for it was at the root of my practice, a sore I would like to scratch, a pleasurable and disturbing thought process that produces my characters and pattern making. The grotesque and disgust are partners, one informing the other so

closely and thus allowing me to produce a new discourse on the visual language of the grotesque.

Indeed, the language of the grotesque is present, in different attitudes throughout the entire body of work I produced during the two years of undertaking Masters. In painting, it can be seen in the hyper-fecund, obsessive pattern-work, in ceramics the intuitively hand-built personalities, and in my etchings it is visualised in the over-bitten blacken plates, which also reflects the history of reproductive printmaking.

Obsessions, fascinations and new areas of research have arisen from finishing my dissertation. In particular the medium of ceramics, assemblage and collage have taken on a larger role in my art-making. I use these various sculptural forms to explain new ideas I have towards the theory of Evolution, the *wunderkammern* as proto-museum, my own ambivalence towards intoxication by alcohol, the primal arts, anthropological artifacts and the violence of man. All these subjects sprung from my learning experience of research writing. Also, the realisation of the 'organic grotesque' and its importance to my art practice, continues to inform my visual language.

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Creative Work presented for Examination –

Masters Graduation Exhibition 2011

Θ

The Entangled Bank

By Emily Hunt

Θ

The works were presented in three separate series:

Six Mirrored Portraits in landscape: watercolour & collage on paper, mirrored box frame, 64 x 49cm, all produced in 2011.

Six Skin Portraits (after Breughel:) watercolour on paper, 50. x 50 cm, all produced 2011.

The Entangled Bank Assemblages: Glazed ceramics, air-drying clay, enamel paint, hair, lichen, gold leaf, found goblets, found glasses, foil, Neapolitan terracotta busts, acrylic paint, found fake fruit and mirrors. All sizes variable. All produced in 2011

Θ

Images are attached on disk and these include installation photographs.

Artist Biography

EMILY HUNT

Born Sydney, 1981

Represented by The Commercial Gallery, Sydney

Education

2010 – 2011 Masters of Fine Arts, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney

2011 Erasmus exchange scholarship to Sint-Lucas Beeldende Kunst Gent, Belgium

2000-2003 Bachelor of Visual Arts (First Class Honours), Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney

Solo exhibitions

2007 *One Hundred Years War*, Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney

2009 *The Meister of New Holland,* Ratskeller Litchenberg, Berlin

Group exhibitions

2012 *Feminage*, Cross-Art Projects, Darlinghurst
Two/Three, The Commercial Gallery, Redfern
Ceramica 2, Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown
Westpac Redlands Art Prize, National Art School, Sydney

2011 *Post-Graduate Degree show*, Sydney College of the Arts
Pulp Tongue, SCA Graduate Galleries
Illuminations and Bad Faith, Bondi Pavilion Gallery

2010 *Ain't seen the Sunshine since I Don't know When*, Sydney College of the Arts Galleries

2009 *Unterseeboot,* Philipp Geist Project Space, Berlin Germany
Elastic Online Project, Elastic Artist group, Sydney

2008 *Year is Over*, Black & Blue Gallery, Sydney
By George Laneway Festival, Sydney of City Council, Sydney
Hoochie Choocie, Black & Blue Gallery, Sydney
Oblivion Pavilion, Gertrude Contemporary Art Space, Melbourne and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

2007 *Where to...?,* Gaffa Gallery, Sydney
New Deities - Art and the Cult of Celebrity, Devonport Regional Gallery, Tasmania

2006 *ABN AMRO 2006 Emerging Artist Award*, Sydney
Flaming Youth, Orange Regional Gallery, Orange
25/25, (curated by NOISE and Art & Australia), Sydney
Former Fellows, Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney
Broken Records, China Heights Gallery, Sydney
Scissors Paper Rock, Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney

2005 *Elastic: An Archive Project,* Cross Art Projects, Sydney
A Short Survey on Making Pictures, Phatspace Gallery, Sydney•
2004 *Hold the Pickle, Lettuce takes on a new meaning,* Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney
Barnyard show, Gallery Wren, Sydney
Raquel Welch and Emily Hunt, (Exhibition & book launch), Pigeon Ground, Sydney
2003 *Natural Selection,* Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney
Degree Show, Sydney College of the Arts, Sydney
What the World Needs Now 2, Phatspace Gallery, Sydney
The Miniature, Phatspace Gallery, Sydney
2002 *I Shot Shirley Temple,* Newspace Gallery, Sydney
What the World Needs Now, Phatspace Gallery, Sydney

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2011 "Sixteen Straws", Artist project & Cover art, *Ampersand Magazine,* Autumn 2011
2009 "Universal Translator", Futures – *Runway,* Issue 14
"Le Petite Prince", *Locksmith Magazine*, Issue 1
2008 "Oblivion Pavilion by Adam Jasper", *Time Out Sydney,* Issue 27: May 14 - 20, 2008
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"New Deities by Bec Tudor", *Art and Australia*, Vol 45 No 3 Autumn 2008
"New Deities: art and the cult of celebrity Curator: Catherine Wolfhagen Devonport Regional Art Gallery, Tasmania 30 June - 29 July 2007", *Artlink Magazine* Vol 27 No. 3
2007 "Dirty, Pretty Babies" Change - *Runway*, Issue 9
2006 'Emily Hunt', 25/25 (25 Visual Artists aged ≤ 25), published by *Noise and Art & Australia*, accompanying Winter 2006 issue Art & Australia, pp. 22-23 (illust.)
Emily Hunt & Raquel Welch, 'Swap Meet', Trash -*Runway*, Issue 8

Artist publications

Co-editor and co-founder of DUKE magazine
2009 *Duke Funf*, January 94 pages
2008 *Duke Quatro*, July 94 pages
Oblivion Pavilion, March 18 pages
2007 *Duke Trois*, December 90 pages
Duke Deux, July 84 pages
2006 *Duke Numero Uno*, December 60 pages

Awards and Residences

2012 Innovate/Curate Grant, Tinsheds Gallery Sydney
2012 First place winner, Non-acquisitive Open Art Prize, Glebe Art Prize
2010 Fauvette Loureieo Memorial Artists Exchange Scholarship, University of Sydney

2010-2011 Australian Post-Graduate Award Scholarship

2009 Kunst-Stoffe Studio Residency Program, Berlin Germany – www.kunst-stoffe-berlin.de

2009 Culturia Studio Residency program, Berlin Germany – www.culturia.de

2007 Studio Residency Program, First Draft Gallery

2003 The Zelda Steadman Scholarship, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney

Website

www.emilyhuntartist.com