

fragility

fragility



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Cover image by Francisco Bravo



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Response

XXII

Fragility

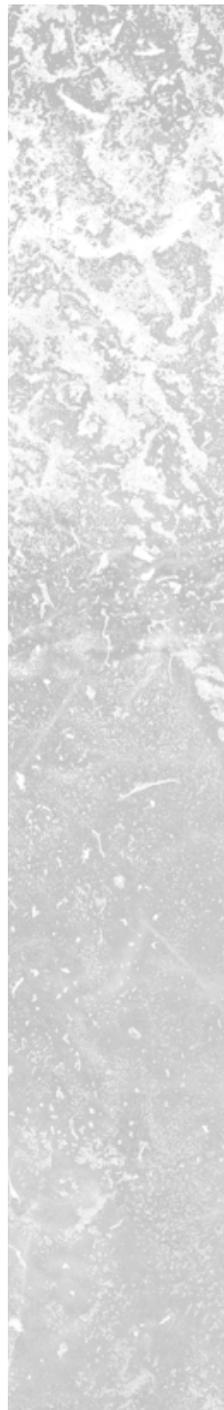
Welcome to issue twenty two of The Response, a magazine designed and created by Fabrica volunteers since 2007. Since print is dead, it now finds its home online, having transcended its physical form. A single copy is still present in the gallery, in memoriam.

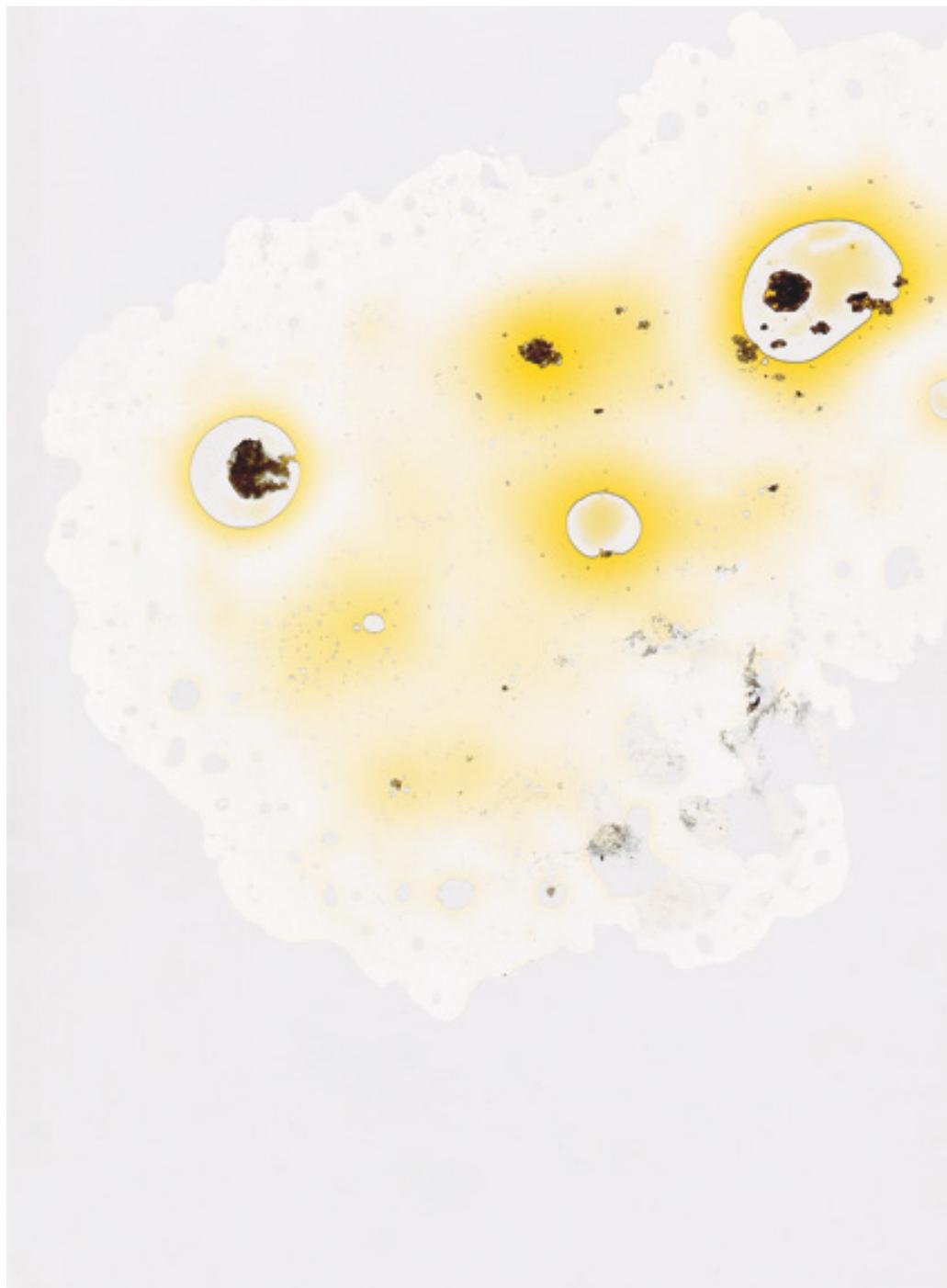
Of course, there could be no Response at all without something to respond to. In this instance, our inspiration was Fragility, a new site specific installation by Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva. The work is made almost entirely from the caul fat of pigs, a membrane which surrounds the animal's intestines and a by-product of the meat industry.

The artist has said that 'A lot of my work involves using materials that might be thought of as disgusting, but my intention is to create something beautiful through transformation.' That theme of transformation runs through this issue - the unpleasant, the worthless and the mundane are refashioned and recontextualised into something beautiful, or precious, or poignant. The work is dissected and disentangled, affording us new perspectives and interpretations.

Dead tissue is transformed into a work of art, which sparks an idea, which is translated into an image, or a film, or a piece of prose, and their sum total form this magazine. Elpida has started a conversation and this is our response. We hope, in turn, it might inspire you too.

The Response team
July 2015





Fragile, Delicate, Gross

On first sight, Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva's new work, *Fragility*, is intriguingly beautiful: delicate veils of a lacelike material descend from the ceiling, falling seamlessly from above, hugging the arched roof of the church. On a still day, they hang innocent and unmoving. However, as a draught moves through the gallery, they begin to sway slightly with a quiet determination. There is something arresting and unnerving about this movement, suggestive of some agency currently lying dormant. Upon closer inspection, the viewer will find that the 'lace' appears to have veins and its creamy milkiness is perhaps unsettling. S/he may be surprised to learn that, rather than linen or silk, the work is actually made from caul fat, a membrane from the inside of a pig.

Hadzi-Vasileva's work probes and explores the abject, confronting the viewer with a representation of that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules' (Julia Kristeva, 1982). *Fragility* presents the viewer with a very literal border – the caul fat's primary role was once to keep con-



tained the organs of the pig. When she relieved the material of its original role and repurposed it for the gallery, Hadzi-Vasileva distinctly disturbed the system of the animal's insides.

The manipulation of the caul fat (its image edited, reshaped, and now situated in the gallery space) demands that the material be reconsidered. The transformation of the object is a long and painstaking process, designed to protect that which used to protect: the membrane is embalmed and then stretched, wafer-thin over fine sheets of plastic. At some point during this process, of taking the inside and turning it out, making it visible, the object is fashioned into art. Kristeva describes this process in her essay, stating 'the various means of purifying the object ... end up with that catharsis par excellence called art'. As the image begins to adhere to a more standardised idea of beauty - it has become delicate and lacelike - it moves away aesthetically from the image of the animal or the abattoir.

The layout of the gallery has a lot to answer for in terms of the viewer's experience of the work. A nave is created out of hanging veils, increasing incrementally in length, that lead towards a semi-enclosed space. While in the main body of the gallery the veils have a somewhat alien effect - the caul fat looks oddly skin-like - this enclosed space reminds us of the

fact that this material once served to enclose and protect. The veils form a structured space that engulfs the viewer; and what seemed so repulsive just paces before, now seems safe and dreamlike. On a bright day, light streams through the walls of the arched space, feeling sacred and quiet: it feels like entering the belly of a whale and the atmosphere is womb-like, as sound and light become distorted and take on a far away effect. The viewer experiences the push-pull of simultaneous desire and revulsion. Distorting and elevating the object, transfiguring it into fine art, the work demands that the viewer reconsider their understanding of purpose. How collectively respectful we are of the body – how we choose to look at purposeful materials and objects – and how we have come to consider beauty. By stripping something of its purpose, by making it still, through preserving and embalming, the revolting is made palatable. It is made beautiful.

Kate Wood





Charlotte Eliza King

A State of Matter

(photographed food mould/bacterial growth)

charlotte-eliza-king.com

Siobhan Thompson
Untitled (buried photographic negative)





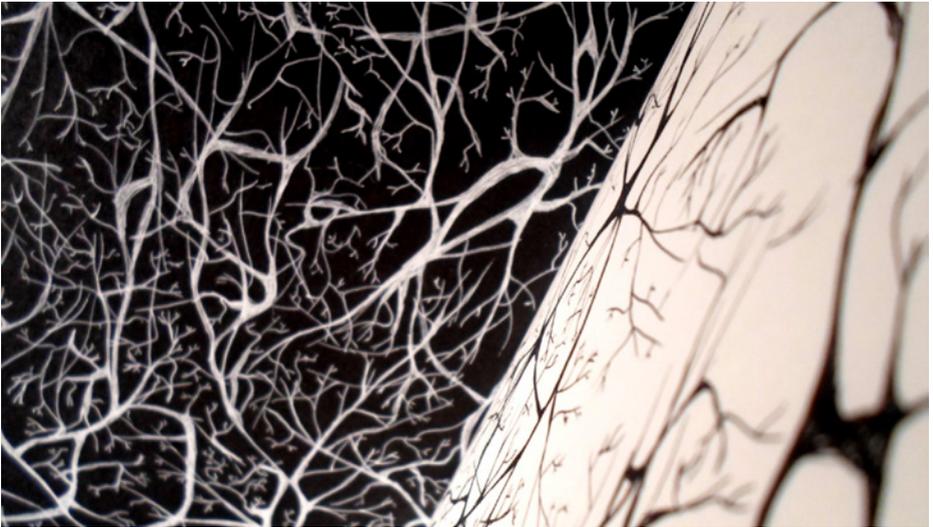


Karen Piddington

Untitled (taxidermy and mixed media)

karenpiddington.co.uk





Veronika Podlasova

Life veins (black and white pen drawing, photographed from different edges)

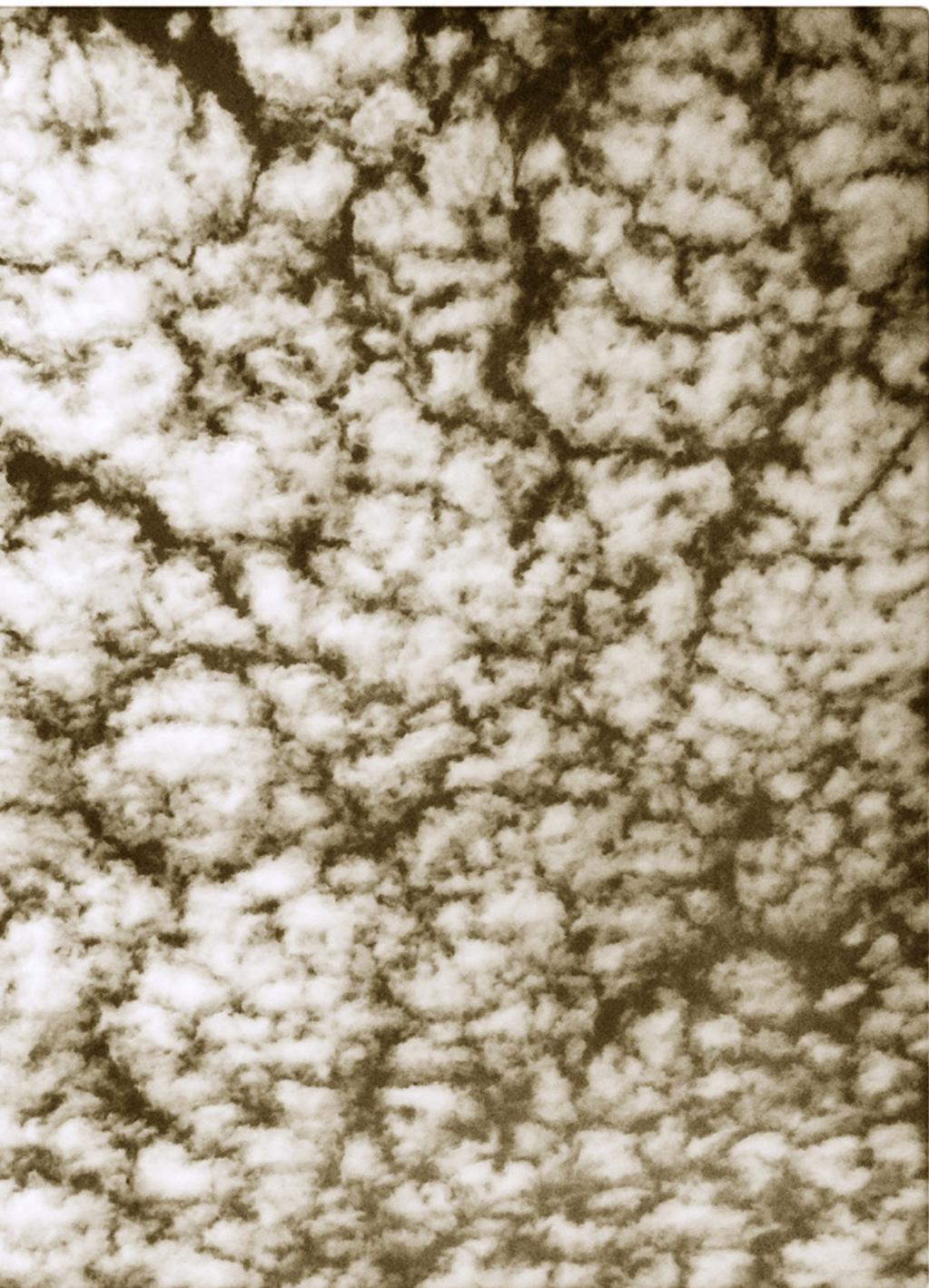
veronikapodlasova.wordpress.com

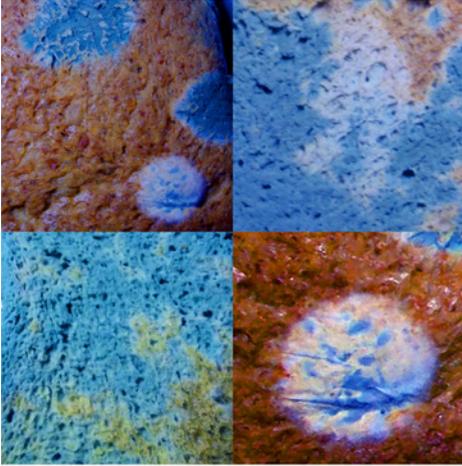
Eva Kalpadaki

Hove 4:12pm 10/7/2015 (photograph)

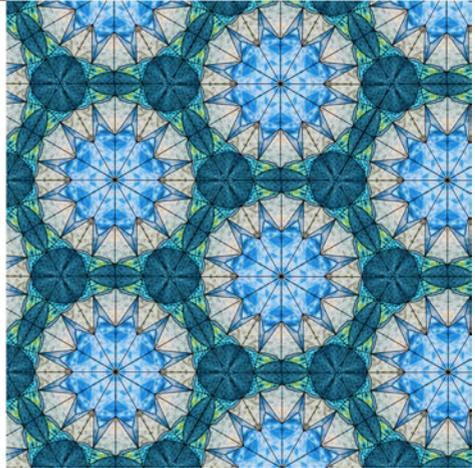
evakalpadaki.com







transformation



Su Jin Kim
Transformation

cargocollective.com/sujinkim0421

My Journey to Eternal Life

I was born in the countryside. I grew up on a farm, the fifth of nine in my family. My dad wasn't around much, he was always off doing something else, but Mum devoted herself to us. She tried to provide equally for all of us, especially when we were little. I have wonderful memories of playing around with my brothers and sisters. There was a lovely muddy patch outside that we used to muck about in, getting ourselves covered, and Mum never minded. But I always wanted something more, something else. I longed to be part of something bigger.

Once I ran away down the rough farm road and into the woods, but not for long, they came after me with dogs and brought me back.

One day some of our older cousins disappeared, they just weren't there any more. I asked my brother, he said they'd gone off somewhere where there was plenty of great food and somewhere really comfy to sleep at night, and open fields to play in during the day, and I'd probably get the chance to go there too.

I was really keen to discover the world outside our farm. It was hard leaving Mum, and she had a dark and sad look in her eye when I left with my brothers. We were all packed tight into the back of a lorry with our cousins. I was so excited I wasn't scared by the noise of the cars and all the traffic whizzing past, or hungry even though the journey seemed to go on forever.

Eventually we got off the lorry at a new farm, and it was amazing as my cousin had said. Loads of delicious food, wonderful cosy places to sleep, beautiful grassy fields surrounded by oak trees and apple trees in bloom.

But there were strange stories passing amongst us. Some of us suddenly disappeared, overnight, never came back. There was a really dark rumour that they had been taken to be killed, because the humans who gave us our food were in the habit of eating us! I couldn't believe it. The humans on our farm had always been kind and thoughtful. I still wanted to know more, to have new experiences, to be part of something bigger, for my life to have more meaning. So when

one day they chose me, looking at me carefully, saying how beautifully I had filled out, how rounded my shoulders were, I thought yes! I can go somewhere too! And I enjoyed the journey in the lorry. I was excited at the prospect of going somewhere new, spending more time with new humans, to see what I could learn.

The following day I met a tall muscular man with a funny white apron on. He seemed calm as he held my neck firmly but gently with his left hand. In his right hand he held a strange curved double stick. He arranged the double stick across my head, and suddenly an extraordinary sensation shot through my whole body.

Coralie Watson

Chio Arenillas
Untitled (photograph)



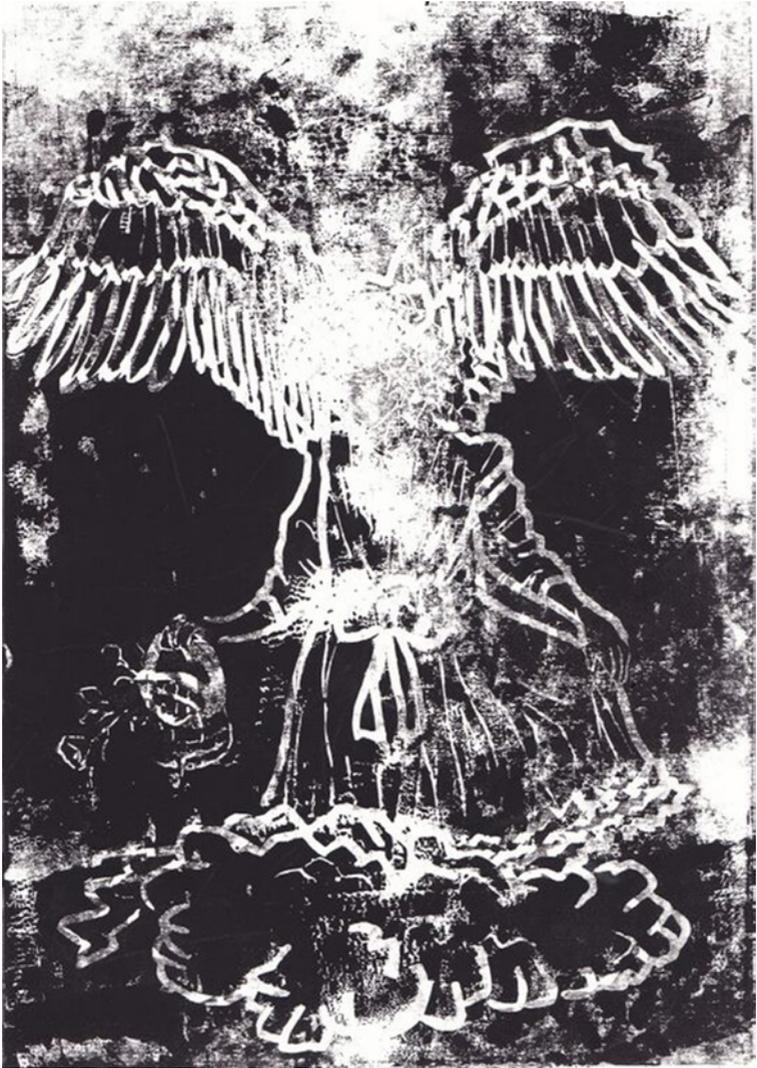


Thomas Nicholson
Untitled (mixed media/digital)

thomasnicholsonart.co.uk







Rima Stankute
Untitled

Interruption

When Jessica arrived home she felt invigoratingly exhausted, if such a thing was possible. She was about to relax for the rest of the evening, but was interrupted by the doorbell.

It was PC Wilson and PC Khan.

‘Hello officers.’

‘Evening, Miss Green,’ said Wilson. ‘We’d like you to accompany us to the police station again.’

‘Again? I thought we covered all this last week? What is it you want to talk about?’

‘This has to be at the station.’

Jessica thought the only way to end this was to go along with the officers’ request. The advantage she had this time was that she no longer felt intimidated by them. Like before,

they’d ask a few questions, then let her go.

She put her jacket back on and accompanied the two officers to the station.

Once they arrived, she was ushered to the same interview room she’d been in the previous week.

‘Miss Green, I’d like to keep this simple.’ said PC Wilson. ‘Have you been stalking anyone, anywhere?’

‘No, I told you last week, that was a misunderstanding on your part.’

‘OK Miss Green, I’ll make it easier for you. Have you been stalking anyone in Ventnor Villas, Hove?’

Jessica froze.

‘There are witnesses. You did stalk someone. You followed him

to his workplace, his boat club, and his home, and you used a different car each time. You also took photographs of him and had him investigated!’

Jessica could not believe her ears.

‘Do you realise how serious this is?’

Wilson’s voice had gone up several notches. ‘Perhaps you’d like to personally explain it to the man himself? He’s right here, in the next room!’

He signalled to PC Khan, who walked towards the door and gestured someone to come in.

And there he was. The man she’d been researching for months had just walked into the room; six-foot plus, dark brown hair and silver streaks along his temples.

For a brief moment, she wondered if this was the right person, or if she’d just wasted her time and energies.

But just one look at him and all her apprehensions disappeared. His brown eyes, cheekbones, jawline... everything she needed to know was etched all over his face. There was no doubting his identity.

A wave of emotions flooded over her. She felt like a six-year-old again, peeking out of the window and looking at someone she wasn’t allowed to speak to. Except this time, she was in trouble for it.

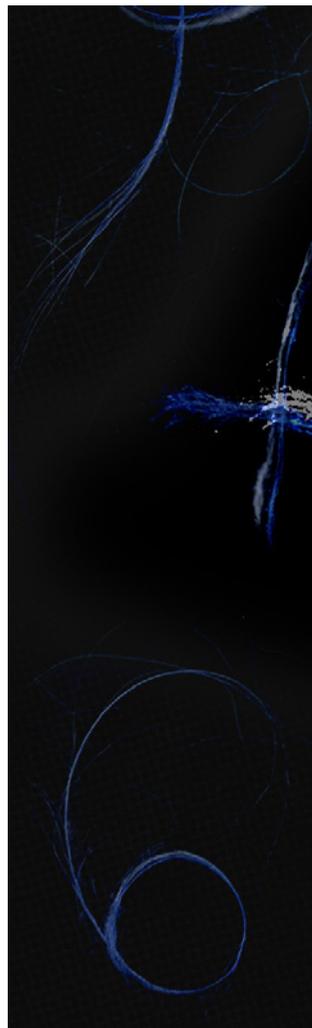
Her eyes were filled with tears, and her breathing became heavier. Struggling, she managed to say in a low voice,

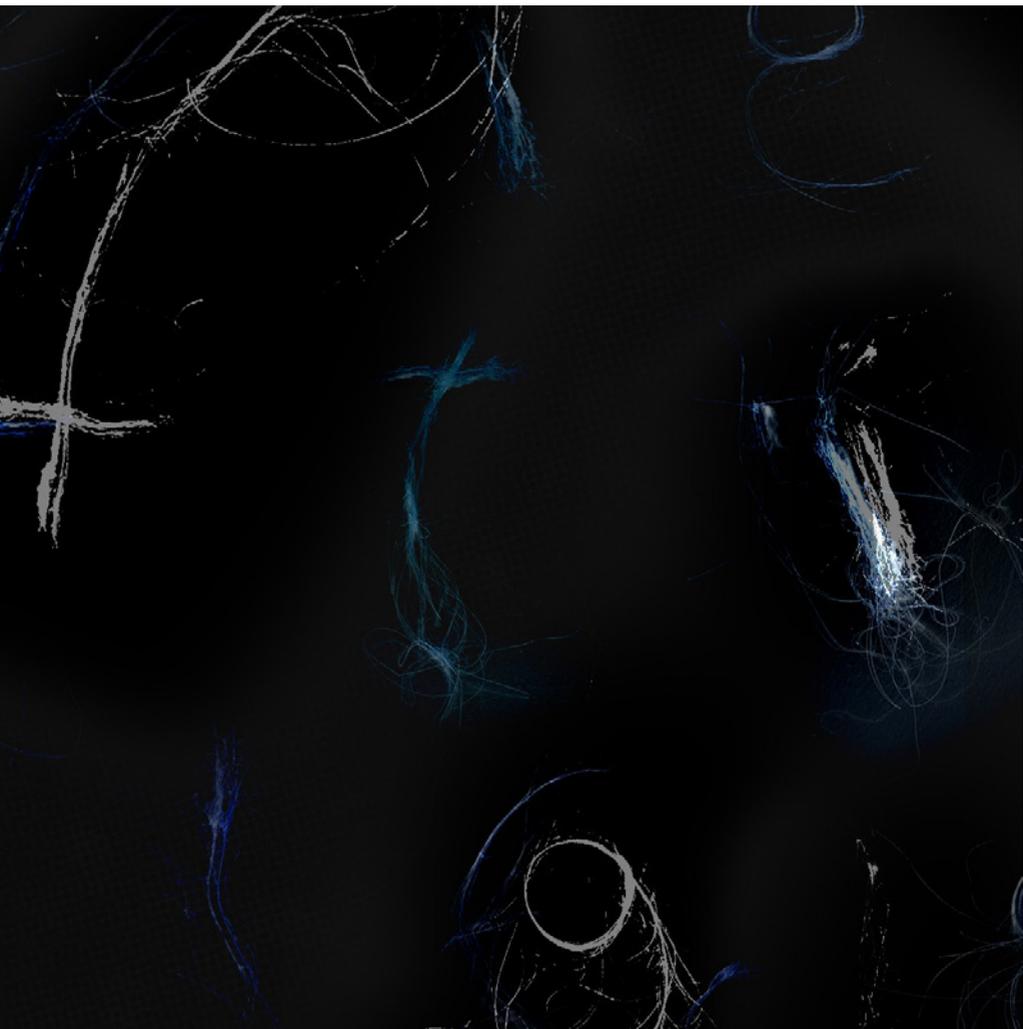
‘Dad... It’s Jessica’

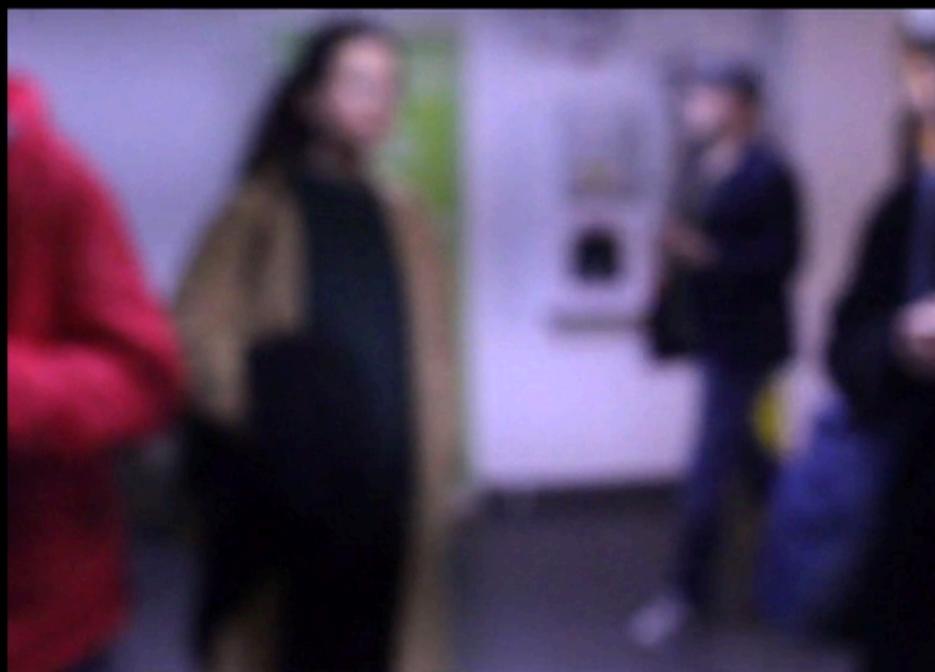
Sabiha Choudhury

Nina Cornwall
Fragility (hair/digital)

ninacornwall.com









Emma Strauss
Video still from I think/I feel

emmastrauss.com

The Flooded Slaughterhouse

Fragility as Watery Palimpsest

Step into the space. What does it remind you of?

The material of Fragility originated in an abattoir, but the boiling stench and industrial clang of the slaughterhouse is completely absent from the gallery space. Even when you step close to one of the delicately-latticed sheets in order to examine the individual blood vessels, thick and bulging with stilled life, the overall sense is still far removed from the brutal and the fleshy.

Instead, the overall gestalt is one of water. There is an aquatic quality to the exhibit that perhaps owes something to the pellucid quality of the light that streams in through the high windows, or the coral-like effect of the piece seen as a whole, or the way the individual

plastic strips waft in the breeze like tattered sails at sea. Many visitors have remarked on how the architecture of the space is reminiscent of being in the overturned hull of a ship, or, upon stepping into the inner chamber, that it makes them think of being in the belly of a whale. It is as if the slaughterhouse has been flooded, drenching the visitor with alternate associations.

I step inside the inner chamber, surrounding myself with the sheets of translucent caul fat. The slight breeze from the open door causes a slow inhale-exhale of the shimmering walls. It feels alive and it feels cetacean and I think of the following passage in Moby Dick: 'But let us hold on here by this tooth, and look about us where we are. What a really beautiful and chaste-looking mouth! From floor to ceiling, lined, or rather papered with a glistening

white membrane, glossy as bridal satins.'

And with this mention of the bridal I am tugged along in the current to think about Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*, horribly resplendent in her own faded bridal satins. Pip's initial description of her as 'dressed in rich materials,—satins, and lace, and silks,—all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair' swiftly gives way to a sense of horror; 'I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes.' Here, wonderment and disgust co-mingle at this sense of suspended life, much like the artwork I've immersed myself in.

The horrible brightness of Miss Havisham's sunken eyes now drags me helplessly into *The Tempest*:

'Full fathom five thy father lies
Of his bones are coral made
Those are pearls that were his eyes
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange'

I consider a single sheet of organic filigree – rich and strange indeed – and follow the ragged tributaries of blood vessels, interlinking thoughts and quotations. Waste and plenitude, water and flesh, the slow erosion of bones in water. I think about the body of Phlebas the Phoenician in *The Waste Land*, the waves stripping his bones, the deep sea swelling around him. There is a curious calmness to this image of the body of the drowned man, rising and falling.

In the nineteenth-century, a baby born with a caul – a remnant of amniotic membrane covering the face – was supposed to be protected from drowning. These birth cauls are a different substance to the material used by Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva in this work, but they share an uncanny valance: the sense that

something internal to the body has now been cast out into the open.

And with this thought, another Dickens character steps into the chamber to join me. It's David Copperfield, one of those blessed babies born with a caul. His caul is later sold at auction, a disconcerting experience for young David, who watches the transaction with a fascinated horror: 'ten years afterwards, the caul was put up in a raffle down in our part of the country...I was present myself, and I remember to have felt quite uncomfortable and confused, at a part of myself being disposed of in that way.'

Discomfort and confusion at the re-appropriation of animal viscera: this describes one possible reaction to Fragility as a piece. It's a testament to the work's power that so many conflicting and over-lacing reactions and readings are possible.

Because, of course, Fragility is not 'about' water, in any concrete way. But this is one of the powerful responses art can have on the

viewer. Looking at something with intent and focus reminds us of other things. Associations trickle onwards to other associations. I think, once again, of Pip in Great Expectations, reflecting on this very phenomenon: 'It was pleasant and quiet, out there with the sails on the river passing beyond the earthwork, and sometimes, when the tide was low, looking as if they belonged to sunken ships that were still sailing on at the bottom of the water. Whenever I watched the vessels standing out to sea with their white sails spread, I somehow thought of Miss Havisham.'

It does not need to be explicitly stated why gazing at these ships reminds Pip of Miss Havisham, nor do I feel the need to fully interrogate why Fragility reminds me so much of water. I am content to linger with the piece, letting these fluvial quotations inscribe themselves around me like Keats' epigraph, 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water.'

Catherine O'Sullivan

James Gasston
On A Pig's Head

jgasston.com



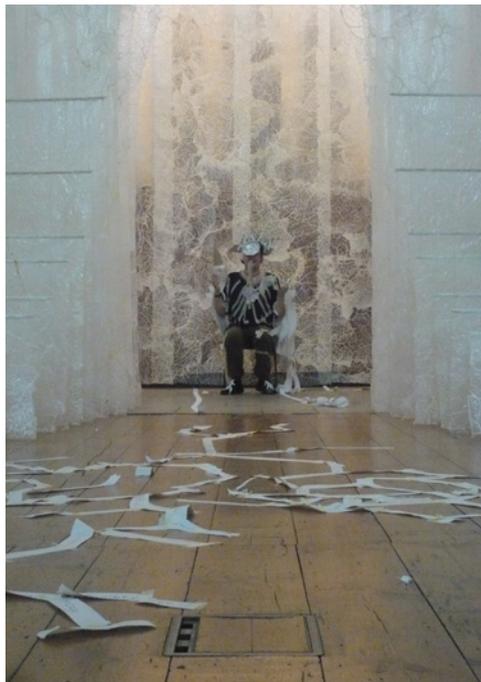
Live and Learn

The following pieces were created by Fabrica volunteers during the Live and Learn workshop run by Fabrica's artist in residence Jane Fordham. The workshops aim to create a space for the volunteers to explore the themes surrounding the exhibition through conversation and collaboration.

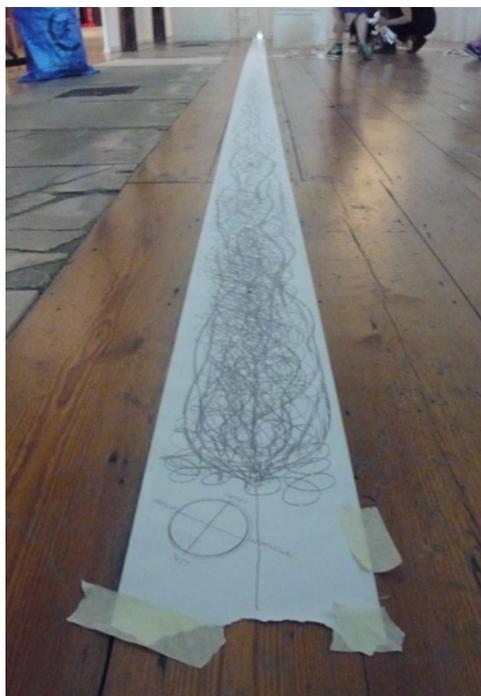
Stanley Watcham
Elin Karlsson
Stan Portus
Chio Arenillas



**Yvonne Roberts
Jason Eade
Rebekka Turner
Sally Connellan
Valerie Furnham
Ross Hammond
Karen Hirst**



**Catherine O' Sullivan
June Nelson
Joanna Elloway
James Gasston**





**Esin Koc
Warren Sharp
Ashlee Balnave**



**Aluiza Garabedian
Bridget Stockdale
Nadya Derungs
Siobhan Thompson**



Two weeks into the exhibition, and with the help of Fabrica's artist in residence Jane Fordham, a group of front of house volunteers ran a drop in workshop for visitors to Fragility. A variety of art materials containing animal products were available, and members of the public were invited to learn about them and use them to make marks on paper in any way they liked. Those who chose not to participate were able to add a blank piece of paper to the wall instead.

The materials used were:

- Ox Gall - bile from the gallbladders of cattle
- Carmine (or cochineal) - a red pigment derived from the cochineal bug
- Shellac - a resin secreted by the female lac bug.
- Bone char - a porous, black, granular material produced by charring animal bones.
- Rabbit skin glue which is made from collagen from rabbit hides.





With thanks to all contributors

Francisco Bravo	Catherine O'Sullivan
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Siobhan Thompson	Stan Portus
Karen Piddington	June Nelson
Veronika Podlasova	Joanna Elloway
Eva Kalpadaki	Yvonne Roberts
Coralie Watson	Jason Eade
Thomas Nicholson	Rebekka Turner
Rima Stankute	Valerie Furnham
Sabiha Choudhury	Ross Hammond
Emma Strauss	Stanley Watcham
Elin Karlsson	
Karen Hirst	
Bridget Stockdale	
Nadya Derungs	
Philip Clark-Lowes	
Belén del Castillo-Olivares	
Josie Scott	
Jenni Cresswell	
Natacha Halpin	
Jane Fordham	
Stacey Richards	

And Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva

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FABRICA

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