

Department of Fine Art

Master of Fine Art

Attempting the Embrace

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art**

Claire Paugam

Spring 2016

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Abstract

To my eyes, when I look at a stone, a visual analogy occurs. I see similarities with the texture of flesh, raw flesh. I can't explain it, it just happens, I recognize an in-between texture. My favorite definition of analogy is by Michel Foucault, it is «a tension never calmed between the two sides of an abyssal valley» which provides «a wonderful fight of ressemblances». Since I started to see analogies between flesh and stones I never cease to find a way to make the two textures merge together, to create a world of my own based on reality. By transgressing differences, being able to extrapolate, I find a coherency. The body as a landscape and the landscape as a body.

It is all about poetry.

Inside our bodies there is no light, everything lives in darkness. For me, getting inside the human body is just the same as entering into an unknown cave, you need to have the same desire, the same courage and determination. You might get lost, all your landmarks are confused, you don't know if your body is going to be hurt ... you become an explorer.

Inside your body you discover your organs, all slimy and colourful, shapeless. They are all very disgusting right ? They are abject, the very sight of them makes you feel nauseated. Let's not even talk about your intestines and the making of our excrements ... Abject objects are repulsive and there is no way we want them to be part of our lives even though we can't escape from them. Abjection is denying the very process of living.

A stone or a mountain is not abject, they are shapeless indeed but beautiful, respectable, not like a spit or a pancreas.

Both organic and mineral objects are natural.

I confront these two natural kinds of objects and at the same time they tend to merge together.

Let's go on a great journey through our mouth, expressive volcano, deep inside the inner kingdom to the outer encompassing landscape. Let's enter in the ABJECT we are made of, let's merge with shapelessness, let's dive into the flow of the blood river and get carried away.

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INTRODUCTION

"L'homme n'est pas au centre de l'univers mais l'univers est au centre de l'homme."
"Humans are not at the center of the universe but the universe is at the center of humans."

This quotation was written on the wall beside my bed by me as a teenager, when coming back from the retrospective exhibition *Yves Klein* at the Centre Pompidou museum in Paris in 2007. Since then this sentence is always in my mind.

Humans are overwhelmed by the greatness of the universe, infinite and therefore unthinkable, we are not able to imagine or apprehend infinity. We are limited beings, limited by our bodies but the universe is not. We can feel our world only through our body, it is the only thing we possess.

Only through our senses can we perceive the environment outside of us, therefore we have this tendency to think that we are the center of our lives. That we are indeed at the very center of the whole universe. It is so enormous and we are so small, it is all around us.

Klein is reversing scales and puts the whole universe inside the human body, the infinitely small can be just the same as the infinitely big. The poetry of this statement is based on this analogy between the inside (physical and spiritual) of human body and the infinite universe. Humans being just as infinite as the universe, just as complete as the universe. The universe is complete in the sense that it is one whole and we are part of it.

To me, art reflects universal human questions, whether the artist wants it or not. Artists constantly question things that societies don't question anymore or add their point of view to current questionings. If you go further with these questionings, you always get to existential questions. I think it is the very aim of the artist.

My existential question is, can the microcosm be as complete as the macrocosm and vice versa ? Now this question can be turned into a statement thanks to my theoretical research which I will present throughout this thesis.

In my researches I have discovered that surprisingly science, poetry and spirituality can go together and state the same ideas, even though they are formulated differently. According to me, art is meant to blend different elements together and therefore offer new viewpoints. Regarding my artwork, my aim is to create poetic perspectives on natural objects of our lives. Natural objects are commonplace, we all have been confronted with ; body parts, stones or landscapes. But the more I learn about these objects the more I discover new ones such as bacterias or comets, which help me to extend and broaden my perception of the world.

The development in my artwork from my first year of studying in an art school in 2012 until

now the year 2016 is clearly visible. When I step back and look at what I have created, I realize that my work is always based on intuitions. For me an intuition is an unconscious idea trying to exist outside of the mind. Following an intuition is following oneself to the unknown. There is no insecurity about it, you trust yourself when you genuinely trust your intuition and vice versa. When I make art I have first the urge to make something that I've been thinking of but I don't really know where it is leading me, I cannot really describe or analyze my intentions. Once the artwork is materialized I can take some distance from it and put words on it and therefore start to analyze it. Moreover, even if I am not very conscious of what I am making while I am creating a work, in the end all my artworks are deeply connected. The development follows a continuous path I am constantly discovering. The more I create the more I get to know what I am dealing with and can articulate better my own thoughts.

In my artistic research there are three stages, three main points of interest: the mouth together with other orifices of the human body, shapeless forms and analogy as a creative process.

THE MOUTH

I am nineteen years old, I am in the bathroom and no-one is in the apartment. I examine myself in the mirror, checking the quality of my skin, the number of little spots, if I don't have any bogies trying to get out of my nostrils, some dirt at the corners of my eyes. I smile, an exaggerated smile to check my teeth. They are white in a pink frame. I open my mouth wider and wider, make my tongue move, dance. I am playing with my mouth, making faces. The colours displayed in this cavity are various, beautiful but at the same time I am disgusted by the slimy aspect of it, the glottis being so soft, shaking at every move, makes me shut my mouth.

*

The starting point of my artwork is my fascination with the mouth, the human mouth. I spent hours observing the inside of my mouth, because it visually provides a good preview of textures and colours that are present deeper inside our bodies, like a diversity of pinks, light grey-blue (veins underneath the tongue), reds. It is to me, the most interesting entry into the human body, the most reachable, the most diversified in its textures, colours and functionalities. It enables us to speak, laugh, which are cultural functions as they allow us to communicate; but also to eat and kiss which are more organic functions because they are instinctive and driven by desire we cannot really control. It is also, in my opinion, the most expressive part of our face: our lips, jaws and cheeks move a lot when we speak. The mouth activates the whole face into movement and therefore expression. Inside the mouth there is a muscle, the tongue - the main character - which can move on its own, being totally flexible. Teeth are interesting because they are utterly different from the rest of the mouth cavity, they have a different colour, they are sharp, hard. They are offensive. The mouth shines in light with saliva, which gives a slimy aspect to the whole picture. It is warm, humid and sticky unlike other orifices. The mouth is a mucosa.

Mucosas are in-between areas that facilitate the absorption of outside elements or their rejection, consequently they are slimy, soft, sticky and warm. They are transit points between the outside and the inside of our body. A good example is the act of eating, where we prepare the food to be digested. Nostrils get air in and out of our lungs constantly, thanks to the hair inside of them, the air is filtered but not transformed as food is by the mouth. Indeed, the mouth is the only orifice to act on outer elements, to modify them. After they have been in your mouth, it is impossible to recognize a chewed apple from a chewed pear. In my opinion, the mouth is between the inside and the outside of the body. As I wrote earlier it is a transit point, but it has also a lower temperature than our insides. It is such an expressive orifice, so open to the world that it cannot be inside, thus hidden from view. It is visually part of our lives.

INNER KINGDOM

I am in a quiet place, I close my eyes, I concentrate, I can feel my heart beat. The little pulse beating on my wrist. I breathe without having to think about it, without making any effort. Most of the time, I am not aware that I am breathing, I don't think about it. The same goes with digesting, regulating my hormones, growing my hair and finger nails ... I am subjected to my body.

So many things are happening inside of me that I'm not even aware of. My body remains a mystery, I have no access to this inner kingdom of mine. Sometimes, I have headaches and I don't know why. It just happens. Without asking me, without letting me know beforehand. There's me and my body. The immanence of myself is divided. It is the state I am in and there's no way to change it.

*

We have no access to our inner kingdom, most of us (unless we have a surgical operation maybe) will never know what our heart, liver or intestines look like. The insides of our bodies belong to science, indeed only surgeons have a precise idea of our inner colours, shapes and textures. Which probably differ from one person to another.

In my opinion, the most common representations of our insides are anatomical drawings for children. In primary school we discovered how the body works by studying drawings explaining digestion and learned the names of all these organs and their functions (fig. 3). These schematic drawings are not realistic, they explain body functions without detailing and give a toned down view on the human body. Then there are anatomical drawings for medical students that are more precise, more accurate. I particularly like the drawings and miniatures by surgeons like Ambroise Paré or Vesalius from the Renaissance period, they started to open up dead bodies to study them (fig. 4); even though the drawings are mannered in style they suggest the violence of opening up a body to look inside of it.

For me, the miniature female models of anatomy (fig. 5) are like statues from that time, their earthly body is beautiful, respecting the aesthetic ideals in the proportions and the attitude of the body. But even though the outer envelope is nice, even though the organs are not very realistic, it strikes me as an ambivalent object, being soft and violent at the same time. Because these women are stuck in time, half open, half beautiful half horrible. Last year, I was looking for a book with photographs from our inner kingdom, in order to know the real colours we are made of. I found one book in a library specialized in medical studies, a book dedicated to surgeon students, which explores all of our body parts. But still, just as Ambroise Paré and Vesalius, the authors chose to

take pictures of corpses. There is no doubt that the colours have changed because the blood is not flowing through the body anymore.

I understand why children do not study photographs of dead bodies at school or drawings from the Renaissance, they are violent. In my opinion, it is a difficult experience for many reasons: first because opening up a body refers to being hurt, a situation that scares us instinctively. Our instinct wants us to survive, so we have to avoid and defend ourselves from being hurt. A good example of this instinctive reaction is when people give their blood. I used to do it regularly and every time I was still afraid and nervous when the nurse would give me an injection. Once I asked a nurse why after all this times when I gave blood I was still nervous: "It's a natural reaction of the body, she answered, you are about to have a foreign object in your arm and even if you know that there is no danger, your instinct warns you that it is no good."¹ Secondly, I have to admit that after looking for a while at my book of anatomy for surgeons I feel nauseated, our organs are profoundly disgusting. Just as my fear of the wound, the rejection of these images is a reaction I cannot control.

Once I saw the real colours of the human body, it was with *Corps étranger* (foreign body) (fig. 2), an artwork by Mona Hatoum which reveals images of the inside of the artist's body. The viewer is invited in a circular dark structure where a video of a circular form is projected on the floor. The video has been shot with an endoscopic camera, a camera created specially to film the inside of human bodies and commonly used in surgery. The artist makes the camera travel in and out of her body, it goes into her mouth and digestive track, then on her skin to get to her vagina and finally her anus. Because the video is on the floor, the viewer dives into Mona Hatoum's body. When the camera moves forward into her, for me it feels like I am getting lost, there are no landmarks, it is scary. The camera has a light so we can see, but the end of the tube is always black. I don't know where it is leading me. I saw this art piece many times and noticed that most viewers are fascinated by it at the same time as they are disgusted by it. I noticed many parents telling their children that they shouldn't watch this video. A prudishness I guess ... But this piece is not violent to me, the body of the artist is not damaged by the action. I think that when revealed to light, our inner organs fall into the category of what I would refer to as abjection.

¹ This dialogue happened during an event organized by the French blood establishment EFS in the city Nantes, France, 2014.

ABJECTION

I eat. I pick up some berries in my grandmother's garden, I put them in my mouth, I chew them, they taste so good ! I swallow them in order to have some others in my mouth again. I make them disappear. I make them mine because I am hungry, because they are so tasteful. Then I have to go to the toilet, I have to defecate. My excrement has nothing to do with food anymore, it smells bad, it is dirty, it is profoundly DISGUSTING. I don't want to see it, I don't want other people to see it, I flush quickly and go away from the toilet. I am ashamed of my body to produce such an object.

But at some point I get curious, I try to touch it, I need to be brave and take it upon myself, I close my eyes, I am shaking. I am almost there when suddenly I have a hick-up and vomit almost instantly.

I cannot keep the berry inside of me, I have to give it back, transformed. And I cannot prevent this from happening ...

*

Unless we kiss, saliva is absolutely disgusting. If saliva gets out of the mouth to be on the floor, a table, a piece of cloth then it's a domestic drama, it doesn't belong there ! It is abject and has to be eliminated.

The mouth can be very seductive but also very disgusting (don't look the inside of it when it is in the process of eating or your own digested food will come back to where it got in). The anus doesn't have this ambivalence, even though it can be sexual, it is generally speaking disgusting and not seductive. We eat, every day we absorb food, we chew it, digest it, transform it. We make it ours, we possess it inside of us, we make it disappear and reappear as an excrement. Everything that comes out of us is termed as disgusting: spits, excrements, vomit, glanders (...); but there is a hierarchy in this list: tears and sperm are not disgusting. Tears are beautiful, they look like water and sperm is the fruit of sexual delight, white as milk.

I was very surprised when I realized that people's aggressive reactions towards my artworks were connected to the fact that I am dealing with abjection. My watercolours of anuses (fig. 1) are not realistic representations, in my opinion they are not as threatening as reality. I used the word threatening because faced with an abject object we react as if we were physically sick (feeling nauseated, vomiting, fainting) or as if we were threatened by the object (by wanting to escape the situation or by dealing with it but not being secure and confident about it). When I present these watercolours, I install them next to my watercolours of mouths in order to make a connection, how one hole is different from another. They are the two ends of a long tube of transformation.

The anus has less functions than the mouth, it is hidden, it is very simple whereas the mouth has a diversity of functions and it is the most expressive part of our face. But mainly, I was visually fascinated by these two orifices. My experiments taught me that the anus, compared to the mouth, is taboo.

It took me some time to fully understand that in our everyday life, we constantly try to escape from abjection. By representing an abject thing I force people around me, at school, to look at it, to spend time with it and to think about it. Though other artists went a lot further with the abject such as *Cloaca* by Wim Delvoye (fig. 6), a machine that copies the process of digesting and therefore produces excrements. Or for example *133. action* (fig. 7) a performance by Hermann Nitsch, reproducing the last torment of the Christ in which people opened up dead animal bodies to spread the insides on persons attached to christian crosses. They went further with abjection because they used concrete materials, Wim Delvoye created a machine that produces excrements extremely similar to human ones. Even though they are not made from a human being and come out from a big machinery they are still perceived as disgusting. Also Hermann Nitsch didn't open up human bodies but animals, the visual effect is still very violent and very disgusting, we see people manipulating the flesh and organs with their hands, confronting their bodies with a dead one. These artworks deal with powerful emotions: disgust and fear. The profound disgust for excrements for the living sculpture and the fear of dying for the performance.

According to Julia Kristeva in her book *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (powers of horror), the abject object has to be outside of the body, even if it is inside of us, we have to reject it. Abjection leads us to where meaning disappears, we have been trying so hard for so many centuries to build limited and comfortable cultural worlds where the unknown is banned. The abject object relies on the unknown, which is profoundly scary, uncomfortable and close to the fear of dying. This is why faced with an abject object our bodies react, we feel the need to vomit, to run away, to faint even, our superego as a critical agent refuses us to like, to accept, to be friendly with this kind of things. We violate ourselves to forget about the loss, to feel alive: "From these limits my body appears, alive. Trash falls in so I can live, until, from a loss to another, nothing remains, my whole body falls over the limit, cadere, corpse."² (cadere is a latin word for corpse but also fall). Confronted with the abject we produce (excrements, saliva ...), we are made of (inner organs), comes the awareness of our body breaking the cultural boundaries of our Western societies by being itself abjection. We have to endure the fact that we are abject beings in many ways. If we could prevent ourselves from defecating we would. We get rid of our excrements, we loose them. They fall in the unknown, they disappear from our sight, they are abandoned, outside of us they don't exist anymore, they die.

² Sentence translated by me. "Des ces limites se dégage mon corps comme vivant. Ces déchets chutent pour que je vive, jusqu'à ce que, de perte en perte, il ne m'en reste rien, et que mon corps tombe tout entier au-delà de la limite, cadere, cadavre.", Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur, essai sur l'abjection*. (Paris, Seuil. 1980) p.11

The abject cannot be an object, cannot fully exist, it has to disappear in order to keep us alive. As the philosopher Georges Bataille wrote: "Abjection is simply the incapacity to strongly and sufficiently assume the imperative act of excluding abject things (which constitutes the foundation of collective existence)."³ This is why *Cloaca* is at the height of provocation, because it produces excrements as a concrete object. The machine is industrial and excrements are packed in a plastic bag with the logo of the machine. Wim Delvoye makes an object of abjection with all the cultural, industrial, clean codes that our Western society loves. Art is a field where abjection can fully exist.

Another example is *Goldlicks (Wantegchi Mutu)* (fig. 9), a photograph by the artist Marilyn Minter which shows how impossible it is to escape from the abject aspect of the orifice, even though it is transformed. Indeed, the photograph presents a mouth sticking its tongue out, covered with a golden texture. The combination of the tongue and the golden texture is paradoxical. The tongue is not a nice and attractive body part when it is not put in a sexual context (erotic images for example) ; whereas the golden texture captivates the view, gold represents wealth, the ultimate symbol of human culture (present in all the highest places of society: palaces, places of worship ...). But in the photograph, the saliva makes the golden texture drip from the mouth, it remains very sticky and slimy, therefore disgusting. It reveals even more the ambivalence of the mouth, being at the same time sexy and abject, appealing and repulsive. The inside of the mouth even covered with gold remains abject.

We are substantially abject beings and we cannot escape it. In other words, we are animals, and there is nothing we can do about it. Abjection is denying the very process of living.

³ Sentence translated by me. "L'abjection est simplement l'incapacité d'assumer avec une force suffisante, l'acte impératif d'exclusion des choses abjectes (qui constitue le fondement de l'existence collective).", Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, t. II. (Paris, Collection Blanche, Gallimard. 1973) p. 85

SHAPELESSNESS

"shapeless: lacking a definite shape

I spit on the asphalt and my saliva lying slackly there is disgusting, it looks like nothing. I can't take it in my hand it is too slimy and the slimy is repugnant. But even if I take it with my hands I will not be able to keep it as it was on the floor. It will spread all over my hands.

What if I spit on a chair ? No one will sit on it and I will have to "clean" it.
What if I spit in a forest ? No one will notice it, animals and humans will walk on it without seeing it.

What if the whole universe is like a spit: shapeless, with no precise colour, made of a weird and disgusting texture ?

What if we all come from spit ?"⁴

*

Visually, I noticed that all abject things have something in common, they are shapeless and slimy, their shape can always change form and they are not easily recognizable. Shapeless, shape less, without a shape, is a tricky word in English because what we define as shapeless has in itself a form. Everything has a form, so what is shapeless ? A spit doesn't fit in our cultural world, its shape is not precise (it has undefined outlines), it can be changed, it is constantly changing, it has no precise colour, it is hard to define, to remember, it is thus abject. The spit becomes a threat for us because we cannot capture it visually. For example, since Freud discovered the unconscious, Surrealists artists and writers visually imagined it as being shapeless because it is unpredictable, because we cannot control it (according to the book *Formless: a user's guide*⁵).

Georges Bataille wrote: "{...} formless is not only an adjective with a particular meaning but a

⁴ Text written by me to present some of my artworks exhibited at the Kaffistofa student gallery in Reykjavik for the exhibition named "CLAIRE MATHILDE ZUZANA", May 2015.

⁵ Bois Yves-Alain and Krauss Rosalind E. *Formless: a user's guide*. (Paris, Zone Books. 1997)

term used to unclassify, where each thing has to have a form. What it designates has no rights in any way and gets smashed everywhere like a spider or an earthworm. What should happen indeed, so academic men be happy, is that the universe gets a form. Philosophy has no other goal, it is about giving a redingote to whatever exists, a mathematical redingote. But affirming that the universe looks like nothing and is shapeless means that the universe is something like a spider or a spit."⁶ This statement points out that intellectual people don't accept the formless. Because in Western philosophy the world is approached by giving it a shape and placing into a certain context. It requires objects to be classified and put away in boxes. The box dedicated to what is formless is taboo, it is avoided. Because we cannot control formless things, we are afraid of them. The universe, is infinite, and thus has no shape and therefore we are afraid of it. It is impossible to imagine infinity. Rosalind E. Krauss wrote in *Formless: a user's guide*: "The formless, however, is not just an erasure of form but an operation to undo form, and thus a process of generating "bad form". And the matrix figure displays this in its own paradoxical condition. For a while it is made up totally unstable and changing parts, it is the vehicle of compulsive repetition and thus must be able to secure its own identity, its own sameness over time. To do this it must have a form, yet the difficulty of thinking of this producer of disorder and disruption as a form is obvious."⁷ Our culture presents shapeless as a threatening, chaotic figure but it is not. This is how abjection enters in the frame, through cultural perception.

In my research, I found out that there is one type of shapeless object that is not abject (thus not rejected) and that is minerals. The abject objects I was interested in above in the text are all organic. But when I went further thinking about shapelessness I realized that a raw stone is as shapeless as a spit. I made a series of black and shapeless ceramics (fig. 10) lying slackly on the floor of a gallery space. They were perceived by many viewers as lava flowing from a warm volcano but also as bile (the liver produces bile which helps digest fats). These pieces were referring to organic and mineral objects.

⁶ Text translated by me. "{...} informe n'est pas seulement un adjectif ayant tel sens mais un terme servant à déclasser, exigeant généralement que chaque chose ait sa forme. Ce qu'il désigne n'a ses droits dans aucun sens et se fait craser partout comme une araignée ou un verre de terre. Il faudrait en effet, pour que les hommes académiques soient contents, que l'univers prenne forme. La philosophie entière n'a pas d'autre but : il s'agit de donner une redingote à ce qui est, une redingote mathématique. Par contre affirmer que l'univers ne ressemble à rien et n'est qu'informe revient à dire que l'univers est quelque chose comme une araignée ou un crachat." Georges Bataille quoted p. 5 in Bois Yves-Alain and Krauss Rosalind E.'s book *Formless : a user's guide*. (Paris, Zone Books. 1997)

⁷ Bois Yves-Alain and Krauss Rosalind E. *Formless : a user's guide*. (Paris, Zone Books. 1997) p. 108

VISUAL ANALOGIES

My mouth, main entrance of my body,
my open-to-the-world cave
full of precious stones shining with sunlight.
I will never get to know all the colours of my hidden world,
this ocean I cannot dive into and discover the richness of
its underwater flora.
And suddenly the cycle repeats itself,
everything which was outside becomes a part of me
but just for a moment.
What is taken from the outter place to your inner kingdom
has to be given back.
The inland of mine I can touch and see is this wide opened mouth
yearning for the outside world.⁸

Inside our bodies there is no light, everything lives in darkness. What we cannot see we imagine and when it is leading to the unknown it is even more terrifying. For me, getting inside the human body is just the same as entering into an unknown cave, you need to have the same desire, the same courage and determination. You might get lost, all your landmarks are confused, you don't know if your body is going to be hurt ... you become an explorer.

*

Analogy is a poetic principle of writing composition (according to *Poétique de l'analogie*⁹ by Christian Michel) it is present in poetry and literature in general. According to the French dictionary *Robert*, analogy is defined as "the ressemblance established by our imagination {...} between two or more objects of thought essentially different"¹⁰. It is a view of the mind, it creates a link between form, meaning and reference. It is also a transgression, because analogy goes

⁸ Poem written by me, 2015

⁹ Christian Michel, *Poétique de l'analogie*. (Paris, Classiques Garnier. 2013)

¹⁰ Sentence translated by me. "la ressemblance établie par notre imagination {...} entre deux ou plusieurs figures de pensée essentiellement différentes." Dictionnaire Robert. Le Robert. 2015

beyond borders established by nature, logic; for example Aristotle in his text *History of animals*¹¹ states that the wing of the bird is functionally just as the fin of the fish, both these organs make them able to move forward. In my opinion, Michel Foucault wrote the most beautiful definition of analogy: "a tension never calmed between the two sides of an abyssal valley", which provides "a wonderful fight of resemblances"¹².

I started to work with analogy when I got interested in wounds after exploring the human orifices. By contrast with the orifices, wounds are ephemeral entries to the inside of the body. I was approaching wounds by embroidering them from pictures. Embroidery is soft, nice to look at, whereas real wounds are abject and repugnant and have to be hidden whilst being cured. To represent them as an embroidery was a way to make them stay open. I liked the connection to the needle which in medicine is used to repair wounds, to close them up, and which in embroidery is creating a new form (fig. 8). As embroideries, the wounds stay open. At that time, I saw very clearly visual similarities between the texture of wounds and the texture of stones. It is difficult for me to explain exactly how they look like each other, it is difficult for me to describe how I visually perceive things, I assume it is different for everyone, but I will try. Firstly stones and most wounds are shapeless, they have no sharp forms, they are not easily recognizable. To my eyes the rough appearance of stones (I was at the time referencing granite because it was the kind of stone I encountered in my close environment), presenting many details that looked like millions of little waves, was very similar to the texture of wounds. The obvious difference is that wounds are slimy torn flesh, their humidity enables the light to reflect on them.

Since I started to see analogies between flesh and stones I never cease to find a way to make the two textures merge together, to create a world of my own based on reality. I also came to realize that analogy is a process of thinking: "the word analogy doesn't only nominate a form, it also describes a process. {...} And we saw that this form could be rigorously defined as relations of relations, or in a looser way, as a resemblance. This hesitation, this kind of ambivalence, is like reasoning and figure of thought to the principle of analogy."¹³ Each artist working with analogy creates, builds up his/her own process of creating analogies, the rules have to be different for each person because analogy is personal, it is about feeling things around us through our

¹¹ Text found on the internet, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/history_anim.html, accessed January 2016

¹² Sentence translated by me. "tension jamais apaisée entre les deux versants d'une vallée abyssale" {...} "merveilleux affrontement des ressemblances" Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses*. Gallimard. 1999 quoted in Christian Michel *Poétique de l'analogie*, p. 116.

¹³ Text translated by me. " Le mot analogie ne désigne pas seulement une forme, il décrit aussi un processus. {...} Et nous avons vu que cette forme pouvait être définie de façon rigoureuse, comme rapport de rapports, ou plus lâche, comme ressemblance. Cette hésitation, cette ambivalence presque, sont aussi au principe de l'analogie comme raisonnement et figure de pensée. " Christian Michel *Poétique de l'analogie*. (Paris, Classiques Garnier. 2013) p. 120

sensations, our imagination. By transgressing differences, being able to extrapolate, we find coherency. I decided to call my art pieces made out of this process "visual analogies", because the word analogy refers to text and I am a visual artist.

From this poetic reality I drift to an imaginary world with its own rules that I am constantly discovering. I feel very close to the artist David Altmejd, a contemporary American sculptor who also works with his intuition, without knowing or expecting a precise result: "As I make the sculpture, it makes its own choices; it takes directions I didn't expect {...}, even though I am able to explain what I am dealing with in my artworks, everything I create still is based on intuitions and I don't know where they're going to lead me next. There is the intuition, the context and the material I choose that defines and takes control of my work."¹⁴ I particularly like his artwork *Untilted (Rabbit Holes)* (fig. 12) a series of sculptures representing human heads without faces, instead, there is a hole filled with coloured stones. Dead heads being small mineral caves, the inside of the head being revealed as precious, delicate and beautiful. But still, just as the miniatures from the Renaissance, they are repulsive and beautiful at the same time, these heads have been removed from the rest of the body, moreover they have been opened up, their faces removed. They are not representations of persons, they are representations of the inside of heads. Even though what is inside of these heads are appealing minerals, the very act of opening up a body, even a fragment of the body, is repulsive.

A face is a metaphor of a border between the inside and the outside of the body, the eyes, the nostrils, the mouth being its doors. With *Untilted (Rabbit Holes)*, there is no face, no doors, the viewer is directly confronted with the inside. This artwork deals with the same analogy written by Yves Klein ("Humans are not at the center of the universe but the universe is at the center of humans."¹⁵), as David Altmejd explained in the interview he gave for the magazine *Border Crossings* about the work *Untilted (Rabbit Holes)*: "I really like this relationship between the inside and the outside and the recognition that the infinity inside is the same as the infinity outside"¹⁴. To me, analogy is about borders, it is fascinating to think that everything is connected and that borders we put on between the organic world and the mineral world for instance can be taken over.

I am currently working with two analogies that are at the core of every art project I start. The first one is that the texture of stones and the texture of flesh and inner organs are similar, the second one is to consider the landscape as a body and the body as a landscape.

¹⁴ Robert Enright "Seductive Repulsions, An Interview with David Altmejd", *Border Crossings* (volume 34), 2015 p. 45 and 48

¹⁵ Sentence translated by me. Yves Klein quoted p. 66 by Camille Morineau in *Yves Klein. Corps, couleur, immatériel*, Paris, Centre Pompidou, 2007

I have been very inspired by the book *Art in Action*, presenting artists exhibited together in 2007. The main theme connecting these artists was the relationship between art and science. The curator Randy Jane Rosenberg wrote: "In the environmental realm, science and art are inextricably linked. While science determines how we measure the health of our planet {...} art allows us to visualize our relationship to the natural world. Art has a rich set of tools to represent our world, from irony to allegory, metaphor to humor. In short, science provides the facts while art tells the stories."¹⁶ It became important to me to read popular science books or to watch documentaries about biology in order to go deeper into my analogies. Indeed, I am convinced that by a better understanding of how the earth or the human body function, I can create a broader scope for my analogies. My scientific knowledge is superficial, indeed, I am aware that if I know too much details there will be no space left for my creativity.

I was very pleased to read the French scientist (micropaleontologist precisely, in other words a scientist specialized in microfossils, fossils that can be studied only through the use of the microscope) Georges Deflandre, who doubts the fact that minerals evolve differently from organic elements such as plants or animals. He wrote a popular science book, *La vie créatrice des roches*¹⁷ (Life creator of rocks) where he explains that the only difference would be temporality, minerals lives are built up over millions of years, which is not the case for the rest of the elements residing on earth. This is why we don't see that minerals are alive, because we don't have enough time to acknowledge it.

The analogy of making microcosm and macrocosm the same thing, stating that everything is connected, appeared first in the twelfth century in a series of books attributed to Hermes Trismegistus (god of the arts and messages in Ancient Greece). One of them is *The Emerald tablet* which states in the beginning: "What is below is like what is above, and what is above is like what is below, in order to accomplish miracles from one thing."¹⁸ This is the doctrine of cosmic unity, based on analogies and relationships between all the parts of the divine creation. This belief was not related to a particular religion, it was more a spiritual concept. Over the time it appears to be more and more realistic thanks to science. Indeed, I found out, watching a video of scientific popularisation¹⁹, that our bodies are ecosystems in themselves. According to the Dictionary.com, the definition of the word ecosystem is: "a system, or a group of interconnected elements, formed by the interaction of a community of organisms with their environment"²⁰. This definition can be applied to any kind of living form, from the ecosystem of

¹⁶ Rosenberg Randy Jane. *Art in Action, nature, creativity and our collective future*. (USA, Earth Aware Edition. 2007) p. 6

¹⁷ Deflandre Georges, *La vie créatrices des roches*. Que sais-je ? (Paris, collection Presses Universitaires de France. 1961)

¹⁸ Hutin Serge, *L'alchimie*. Que sais-je ? (Paris, collection Presses Universitaires de France 1951, republished in 1999)

¹⁹ The video *5 choses qui font de vous une CHIMÈRE - DBY #21* (5 things that make you a chimera) from the youtube channel "Dirtybiology" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqWvZSZBTy8>, accessed January 2015

²⁰ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ecosystem?s=t>, accessed January 2016

the entire earth to the one of an island, a forest, a part of the ocean, an animal body. In our human bodies we carry billions of bacterias that live inside of us and help us for instance to digest. These bacterias were not inside of us when we were born, they don't have our DNA, they are foreigners. They happened to find our digestive track a good place to live in. Just as us, humans, found out that some places on earth are better places to live than others.

When microcosm and macrocosm are the same thing (as Hermes Trismegistus wrote in *The Emerald tablet* quoted above), therefore everything is one thing, one whole. Which leads me to think that everything that exists participates equally to the greatness of the universe, to the continuous flow of life. A concept that Hermann de Vries explains very well to Jean-Hubert Martin about his art piece *Drinking from the stream* (fig. 15): "The water is in us, I drink it, I piss it out again, it streams through me and it's participating in a stream. When I take it from the source, it comes from the origin of the stream, which goes through me. "Stream" can also be used for the great process in which we are participating."²¹ I am deeply moved by this analogy stating that the metaphorical stream of life is in everything that exists on earth. It travels through everything and everything lives through it.

²¹ De Booer Cees De Booer, Colin Huizing, Jean-Hubert Martin. *To Be All Ways To Be*. (Amsterdam, Valiz. 2015) p. 78

MA PROJECT

About my visual analogies, first, by drawing or making ceramics such as *Attempting the Embrace n° 9* (fig.13), I applied myself to copy both textures of flesh and stones together in order to have ambiguous artworks. Then, I looked for photographs from inside the human body and I also went to Natural History Museums to take pictures of precious stones. I combined these photographs in the work *Attempting the Embrace n° 22* (fig. 11) by cutting them and placing them between sheets of glass in order to make a 3D volume out of them. The result is interesting, by overlaying the images of flesh and stones they tend to merge together but not completely because the viewer can see that they are substantially different. This is how I realized that in order to really get this common texture between these two materials, I had to confront myself directly with them. I had to manipulate real flesh and real stones.

I went to Eldfell the volcano on the Heimaey island where the stones, fresh from a recent eruption, are red, pink, yellow, white, orange. There I brought with me several hearts from lambs and pig muscles and placed them on the ground to create a flesh-like landscape. The result is *Attempting the Embrace n° 25* (fig. 14) a series of five one meter high photographs of various widths. At this time I am considering this work in relation to the final exhibition. The plan is for these images to be quite big in order to create a bodily relationship to the viewer. By losing the real scale of the picture, the natural elements are perceived differently, they create a new vocabulary of forms and textures. It is a way to demonstrate a new perspective on a visual reality that I have created.

I also want to create another large scale piece, a sculpture, probably made out of ceramics. This project is still very vague. I plan to make a connection between the outside and the inside of the museum by digging a hole in the grass in the very front of the museum. In this hole I would place in it ceramics representing the insides of earth but inside the museum there would be a pile of the soil which has been taken out from the same ground.

REFLECTION ON THE EXHIBITION

For the MA graduation show I exhibited two art pieces, a photograph part of the series *Attempting the Embrace n°25* (197 x 100 cm) (figure 14) and *Attempting the Embrace n°26* (figure 16), a lump of soil with ceramics (around 450 x 250 cm).

Attempting the Embrace n°26 was conceived for the exhibition, as I wanted to create a dialogue between the inside and the outside of the museum. The architecture of Gerðarsafn is quite dominant, the rooms upstairs are big with one huge round window in each of them, one of these two windows offers a beautiful view of a mountaineous landscape. As my artwork deals with natural elements, I was very attracted to the window revealing this landscape. I also wanted my artwork to be able to fully exist in this architecture, to compete with it somehow.

This is how, after a long process of research and discussions with my supervisor Ragnheiður Gestsdóttir and the director of the museum Kristín Dagmar Jóhannesdóttir, I ended up building a little mountain of soil inside the museum, in front of the window, in front of the actual mountains outside. I brought an inner part of the landscape, as the soil was dug from the ground, inside Gerðarsafn in order to create a relationship with the far away mountains outside. The ceramics are ambiguous objects, being half organs half stones, glittering with light, having various sizes, shapes and colours. They are part of the whole ; they appear from the soil as if they were found in it, inside the earth. As if they were organs of the earth. I wanted the viewer to come to this room and believe for a short moment that the ceramics were real natural objects, part of nature.

Attempting the Embrace n°26 is an art piece, a cultural object, inside of an institution, contemplating nature. During my defence, I was asked if this work would qualify as a land art piece, which is a very good question considering its direct relationship with the landscape. This art piece is composed of two materials, soil (natural element, initially part of the landscape) and ceramics (manufactured objects), one natural, one cultural. The ceramics definitely make it a fictional artwork because even if you have a doubt, these objects cannot be trusted as being natural ones. This piece relates to land art but does not belong to it. To me it relates more to mythology, especially to the Chinese myth of the god PanGu²² who created earth with all his body parts (one of his eyes being the moon, the other being the sun, his breath the wind ect ...). The ceramics are the organs of the earth, therefore they reveal the earth as a body.

Attempting the Embrace n°25 was exhibited in another room, it would have been too much to have the two works in the same room. I am convinced that they could not have been able to "breathe" next to each other. *Attempting the Embrace n°26* was so big already that it needed

²² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pangu>, accessed May 2016

space, some emptiness around it.

This is why the photograph was exhibited on its own on a wall, simply taped with velcro. I didn't want to frame it nor put a sheet of glass in front of it because I wanted, as much as possible, a direct contact between the viewer and the image. A frame, a sheet of glass are layers between the eyes of the viewer and the photograph. To me, *Attempting the Embrace n°25* also connected to the works of my classmates, especially *Becoming Animal* by Inga Maria Brynjarsdottir dealing with dead animals emptied of their insides and *Alterations* by Veronika Geiger presenting photographs of close-ups of lava stones.

Moreover, *Attempting the Embrace n°25* is a visual analogy as it is the confrontation and at the same time a merger between the stones and the piece of flesh, whereas *Attempting the Embrace n°26* is different. To me the ceramics are visual analogies since they tend to reproduce the structures, colours and patterns of both stones and organs. But placing them into soil, gave them a context, making the soil part of the art piece which is essentially different. Also the ceramics are artificial objects that I made whereas the photograph shows composed natural objects. It was important to exhibit the two artworks in the MA exhibition because even if they are different they derive from the same research of the merging of the mineral and the organic worlds.

A few days after the opening of the exhibition, something unexpected happened, plants started to grow within the soil. *Attempting the Embrace n°26* was alive. The conditions were perfect for these hidden seeds to appear and develop. Nature was fully expressing itself within the cultural structure of the institution. *Attempting the Embrace n°26* has a different purpose than *Attempting the Embrace n°25* since it welcomes life in itself (plants) and therefore embodies the landscape as alive. It is in itself part of the process of life. The soil is a base for vegetal life, it is a matrix, half mineral and half organic. The fact that this matrix was able to produce life within the museum was extremely interesting. It added a new dimension to the art piece. It gave it an ephemeral aspect because the plants are constantly growing, the piece is continuously changing from one day to another. This process will stop when the exhibition comes to an end. I cannot keep this artwork as it is, because it is simply too huge. Everyone is aware of it, everyone genuinely knows that the artwork is ephemeral. And this makes the artwork even more precious somehow, because it will exist during a precise period of time, afterwards it will not be possible to see it ever. It will disappear, the plants will be released outside and continue their lives for sure, but everything composing the artwork will be apart. Actually I still don't know what will exactly happen to the ceramics. I will give some of them to friends who will probably put them in their gardens, but I am also considering to leave them with the soil and the plants in nature. So in the end they will be actually part of the landscape without being natural objects. This new aspect of my work reminded me of the art piece *Zoodram 4* (figure 17) by the French artist Pierre Huygue, which is an aquarium where life develops in its own pace. It contains a hermit crab whose shell is a reproduction of the *Sleeping Muse* by the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi. Life is

happening in front of the viewers, the ecosystem which enables the hermit crab to live has been created in a cultural space but still there is one sign of culture within, the shell the animal carries in the aquarium. Just like *Attempting the Embrace n°26*, an ecosystem has been created with manufactured objects in it. For *Zoodram 4*, the cultural element transforms the aquarium into a surreal space. According to Pierre Huygue, this piece can "reflect a particular state of being, mental or emotional"²³.

Another surprise was the reaction of some viewers about *Attempting the Embrace n° 25*, many people didn't see the piece of flesh, they saw only stones. The merger totally worked for them, from my perspective, it would have been the same if they had seen only flesh and organs. They just recognized for a moment this similar texture that made of this two elements one same thing. Which is extremely beautiful to me, indeed the flesh which rots, changes of aspect and disappears quickly is equal to the stones which remain the same for thousands of years. The difference of temporality doesn't appear, therefore the magic of analogy carries us to a new world, but just for a moment. Because there is always a time when we realize that the two elements are essentially different.

To conclude, the main experience I had working on the graduation show was creating and making a technically challenging piece, *Attempting the Embrace n°26*, in relation to a specific space. It was a new way for me to create, in which one of my main concerns was proportions as well as the relationship that the artwork would establish with the viewer. The work was specific to Gerðarsafn, if I would make it again in a different kind of space the outcome would be different. Whereas *Attempting the Embrace n° 25* will remain the same wherever it will be presented, indeed, to me this type of work doesn't care about its environment, no need to print it smaller or bigger for another exhibition space. Also, it is important to mention that the soil and the plants provided a specific energy ; although *Attempting the Embrace n°26* didn't smell, it conferred an atmosphere that I couldn't have imagined beforehand. At this point I cannot really explain this phenomenon, but I believe that any natural object would have had the same impact in an exhibition space.

²³ <http://mediation.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-huyghe/>, accessed May 2016

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Visual appendix



Figure 1. *Mouths and anuses*, Claire Paugam, series of 8 watercolours, 12 x 5 cm, 2011

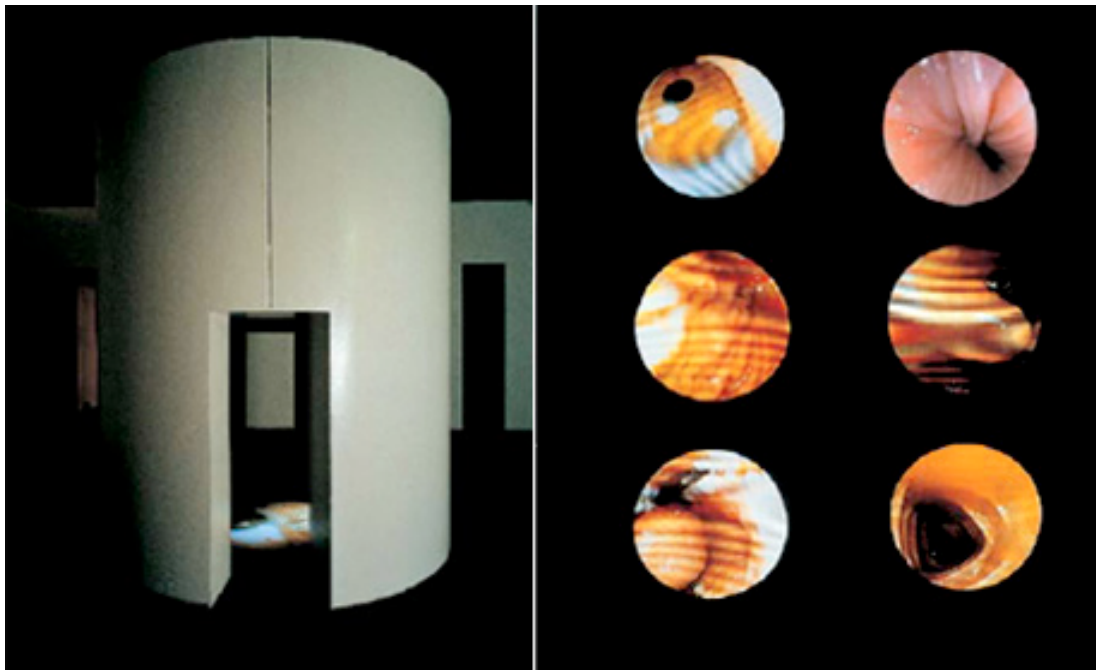


Figure 2. *Corps étranger*, Mona Hatoum, cylindrical structure, video projector, four speakers, one colour video of 30 minutes, 1994



Figure 3. *The golden book of biology, an introduction to the science of life*, illustrations by Charley Harper, published by Golden Press, 1969

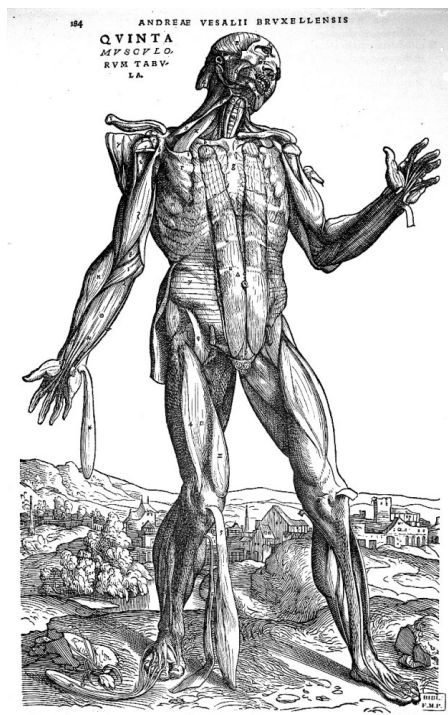


Figure 4. *écorché de face*, from Vesalius' book *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem*, wooden engraving, Johannes Oporinus publisher, Bâle, 1543



Figure 5. Anatomical venus, wax figure of reclining woman, Clemente Susini, Florence, Italy, 18th century



Figure 6. *Cloaca Original*, Wim Wenders, mixed media, 1157 x 78 x 270 cm, 2000



Figure 7. *133. Action*, Hermann Nitsch, performance of 12 hours, 12.6.2011

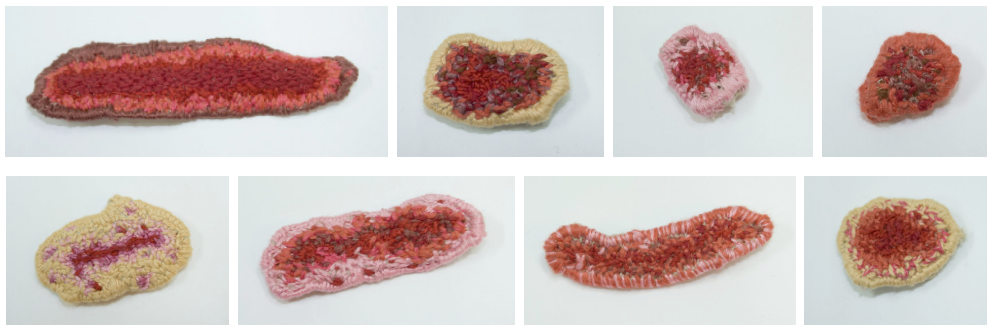


Figure 8. *Wounds*, Claire Paugam, photograph and embroideries, various sizes, 2013



Figure 9. *Goldlicks (Wangechi Mutu)*, Marilyn Minter, enamel on metal, 96 x 60 cm, 2009



Figure 10. *Untitled*, Claire Paugam, ensemble of ceramics, various sizes, 2015



Figure 11. *Attempting the Embrace n°22*, Claire Paugam, photographs and sheets of glass, 40 x 40 cm, 2015



Figure 12. *Untitled 6 (Rabbit Holes)*, David Altmedj, resin, foam, epoxy clay, plastic beads, quartz crystal, synthetic hair, acrylic paint, 46 x 24 x 14 cm, 2015



Figure 13. *Attempting the Embrace n°9*, Claire Paugam, ceramic, 37 x 40 cm, 2013





Figure 14. *Attempting the Embrace n°25*, Claire Paugam, series of 5 photographs, 100 cm of height, various widths, 2015

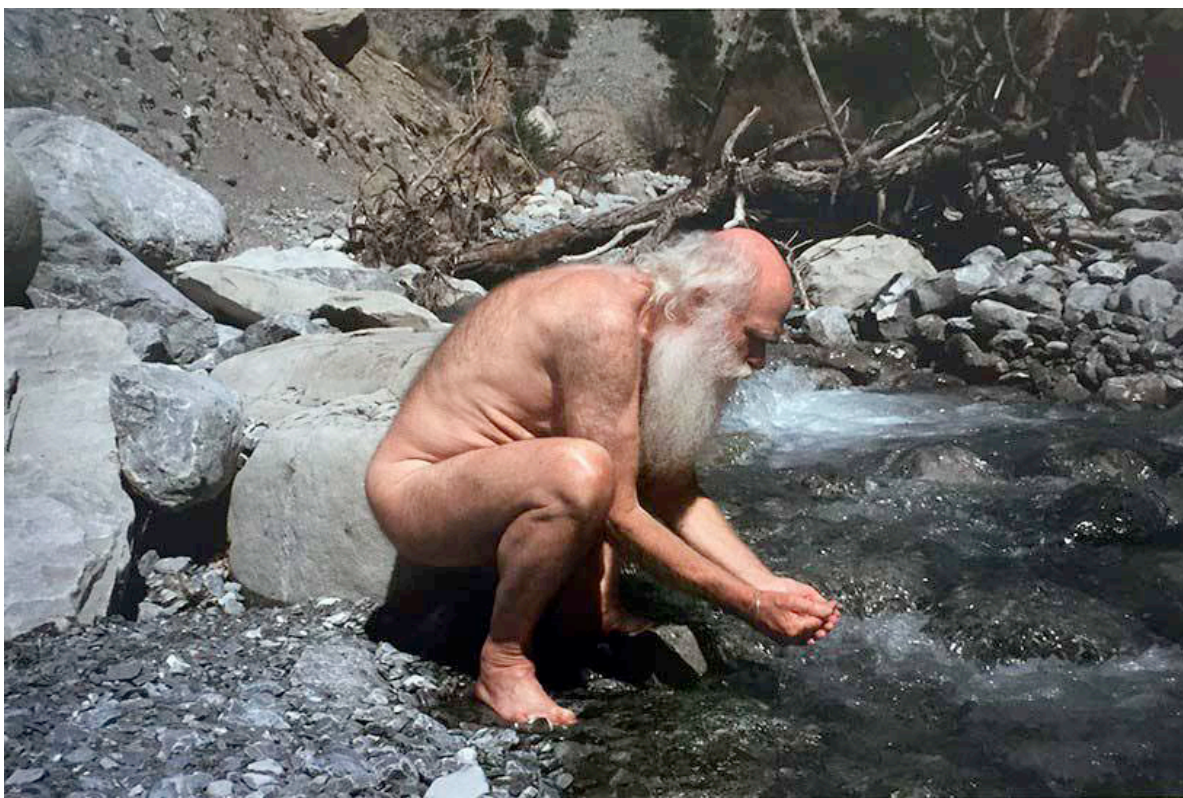


Figure 15. *Drinking from the stream*, Hermann de Vries, photograph mounted on dibond, 60 x 90 cm, 2011/15



Figure 16. *Attempting the Embrace n°26*, Claire Paugam, soil and ceramics, 250 x 450 cm, 2016



Figure 17. *Zoodram 4 (d'après La Muse endormie de Constantin Brancusi, 1910)*, Pierre Huyghe, living marine ecosystem, aquarium, resin mask from *Sleeping Muse* (1910) by Constantin Brancusi, 76 x 134,5 x 98,5 cm, 2011

Image credits

Figure 1: Paugam Claire, *Mouths and Anuses*, 2011. A series of 8 watercolours on paper. 12 x 5 cm.

Figure 2: Hatoum Mona, *Corps étranger*, 1994. Cylindrical structure, one projector, four speakers, one colour video of 30 minutes. Image from <https://artphalt.wordpress.com/2012/05/23/mona-hatoum-entrails-appeal/>. Accessed 04/01/2016.

Figure 3: Harper Charley, *The Golden Book of Biology, an introduction to the science of life*, 2011. Book published by the Golden Press, New York. Illustration found on <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/111464159501896054/>. Accessed 06/01/2016.

Figure 4: Vesalius, *écorché de face*, 1543. Wooden engraving, from Vesalius's book *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem*, Johannes Oporinus publisher, Bâle. Image from <http://www.biusante.parisdescartes.fr/histoire/images/?cote=000302>. Accessed 16/11/2015.

Figure 5: Susini Clemente, *Anatomical Venus*, 18th century. Wax figure. Image from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anatomical_Venus._Wax_figure_of_reclining_woman,_Florence._Wellcome_L0058207.jpg. Accessed 16/11/2015.

Figure 6: Delvoye Wim, *Cloaca Original*, 2000. Mixed media. 1157x78x270 cm. Image from <http://www.neatorama.com/2008/09/15/wim-delvoye-worlds-most-badass-artist/>. Accessed 16/11/2015.

Figure 7: Hermann Nitsch, *133. Action*, 12.6.2011. Performance of 12 hours. Image from <http://www.renaissanceonline.co.uk/2011/06/palazzi-parties-and-politics-at-the-venice-art-biennale/>. Accessed 16/11/2015.

Figure 8: Paugam Claire, *Wounds*, 2013. Photograph and embroideries (various sizes).

Figure 9: Minter Marilyn, *Goldlicks (Wangechi Mutu)*, 2009. Enamel on metal. 96 x 60 cm. Image from <http://www.marilynminter.net/painting/goldlicks-wangechi-mutu/> Accessed 18/01/2016.

Figure 10: Paugam Claire, *Untitled*, 2015. Ensemble of ceramics (various sizes).

Figure 11: Paugam Claire, *Attempting the Embrace n°22*, 2015. Photographs and sheets of glass (40 x 40 cm).

Figure 12: Altmejd David, *Untitled 6 (Rabbit Holes)*, 2013. Resin, foam, epoxy clay, plastic beads, quartz crystal, synthetic hair, acrylic paint. Image from <http://www.davidaltmejd.com/untitled-2013-1-1/>. Accessed 22/12/2015.

Figure 13: Paugam Claire, *Attempting the Embrace n° 9*, 2013. Ceramic, 37 x 40cm.

Figure 14: Paugam Claire, *Attempting the Embrace n° 25*, 2015. Five digital photographs, 1 m of height, various widths.

Figure 15: De Vries Hermann, *Drinking from the stream*, 2011/15. photo mounted on dibond, 60 × 90 cm. Image from <http://www.designboom.com/art/herman-de-vries-dutch-pavilion-venice-art-biennale-05-13-2015/> Accessed 18/01/2016.

Figure 16: Paugam Claire, *Attempting the Embrace n° 26*, 2016. Installation of soil and ceramics (250 x 450 cm).

Figure 17: Huygue Pierre, *Zoodram 4 (d'après La Muse endormie de Constantin Brancusi, 1910)*, 2011. living marine ecosystem, aquarium, resin mask from Sleeping Muse (1910) by Constantin Brancusi, 76 x 134,5 x 98,5 cm. Image from http://le-beau-vice.blogspot.is/2013/09/le-temps-retrouve-de-pierre-huyghe-au_30.html. Accessed 10/05/16.

