

For Mairead O'Raghallaigh  
who always came to my openings



Sarah Lewtas  
Hunter



Writing this out of Australia, I am searching, in vain, in the pastoral landscapes of western Victoria, in the bewildering symbolism of inner city Melbourne – in Oz with all its glorious strangeness - for any sign of Sarah Lewtas.

I'm finding it particularly difficult to write about Lewtas' artworks, tangible objects that I cannot see firsthand, cannot pick up, put down, open and close. Now I realise that there is little division between the work of writing and the act of seeing. For no word can find its way onto the page without having first been seen. To experience it as a physical presence that one has lived with in the same way one lives with one's heart, one's stomach, and one's mind. It is an act of memory.

Sarah Lewtas' art shares this sense of memory. It is memory, not so much as the past contained within us, but as proof of our life in the present. If we are to be truly present in our surroundings, we must be thinking not simply of ourselves, but of what we see and from these, we form little scraps of wisdom which slowly reveal our inner depths. If it were not so, we would be left with nothing but death, the irreducible fact of our own mortality.

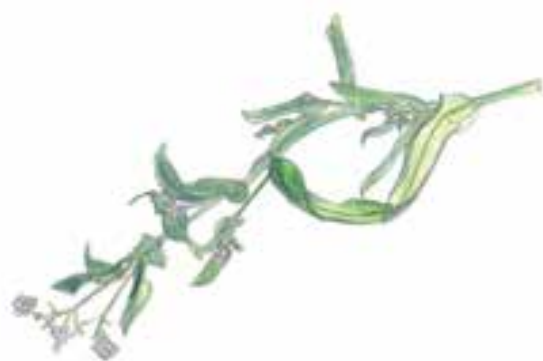
Lewtas' brings us so close to this invisible boundary between life and death that we no longer know which side we are on. Life becomes death - as death has owned life all along – and yet in her hands death is not inert. When a life ends, the thing changes, and still it says something to us, standing there not only as an object, but as a remnant of thought, an echo of yearning.

It is the process of the mind at work, filled with stray thoughts, its affinities and enthusiasms. A mind led by curiosity, haunted by its own past, from which it tries to extract itself. For sure, Lewtas' art can have confrontational qualities which work on the viewer in a physical, tactile way, but they are never "in your face", they are far more seductive. This is art as a dimension of life, not just a sanitised version of it.

In 'Hunter' Sarah Lewtas has inhaled the spirit of our age and breathes it into being.

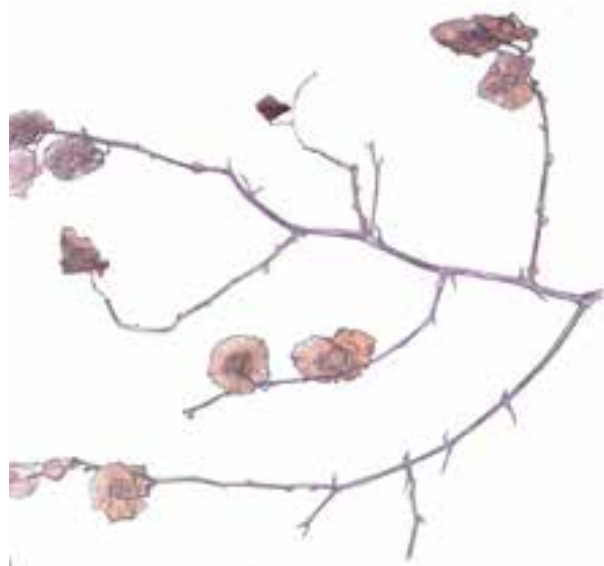
John M. Cunningham  
Warrnambool, Victoria











36 drawings each measuring 20.5 h x 19.5 w aquarelle on paper

Easter Weeds

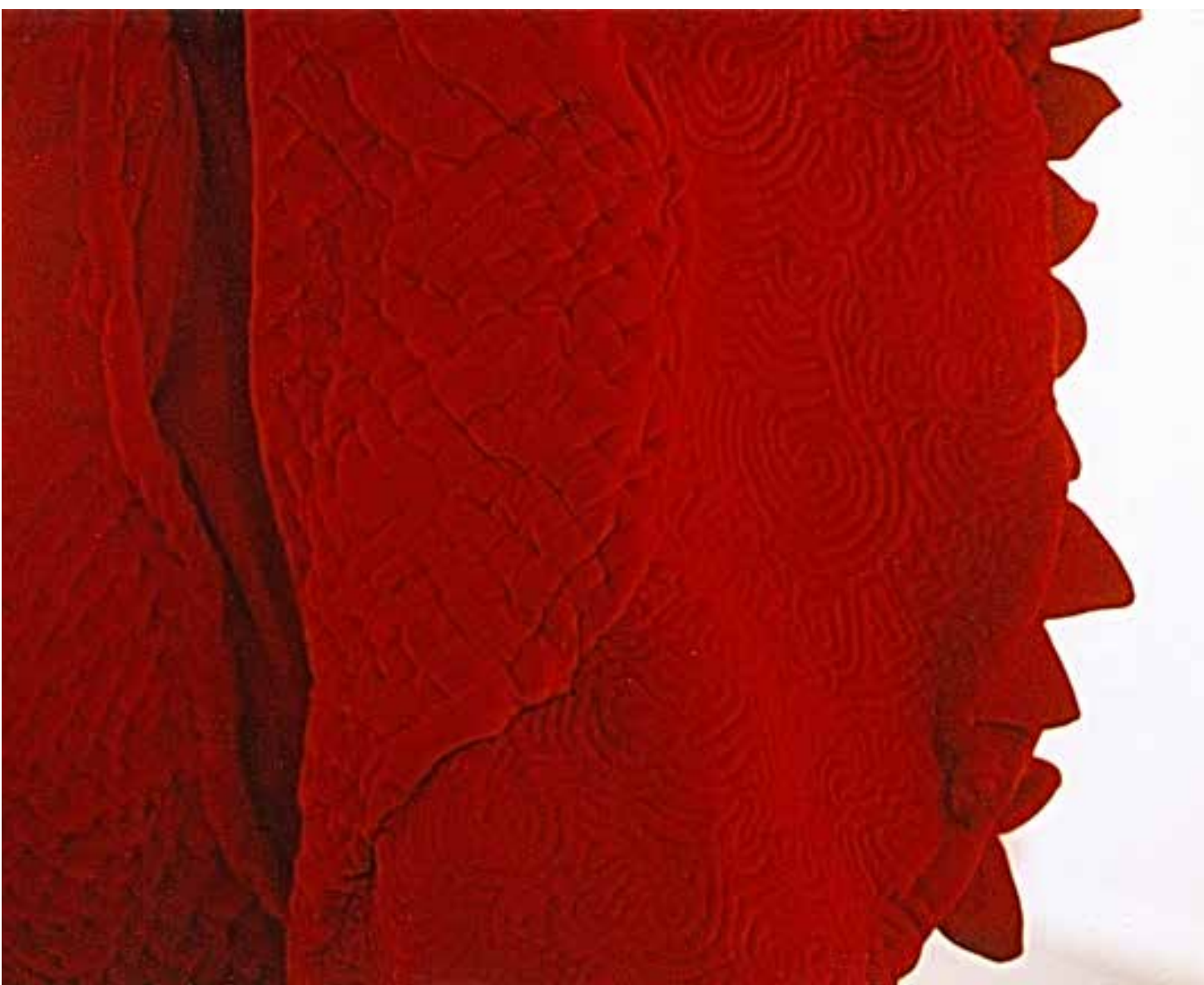














Them

3 suspended forms each 2 metres x 1 metre x 60cms.









Recovery Cabinet 77 cms high x 60 cms wide x 10 cms deep.

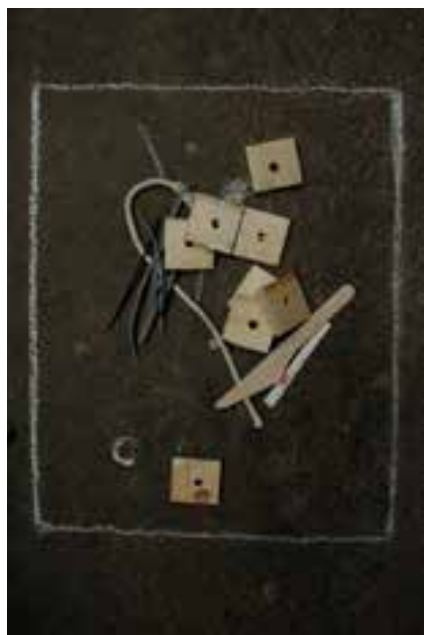




















various dimensions

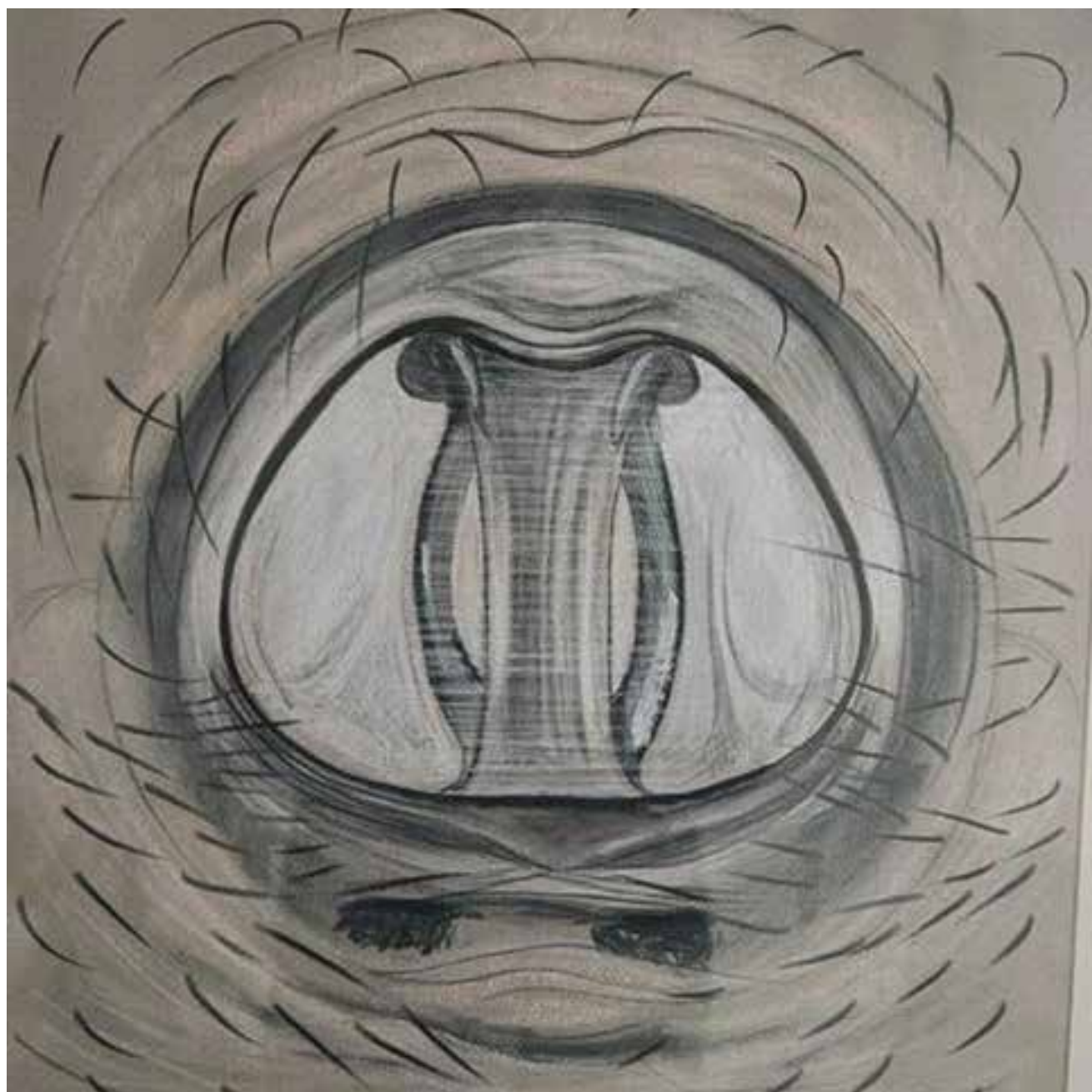
## Detritus Dialogue

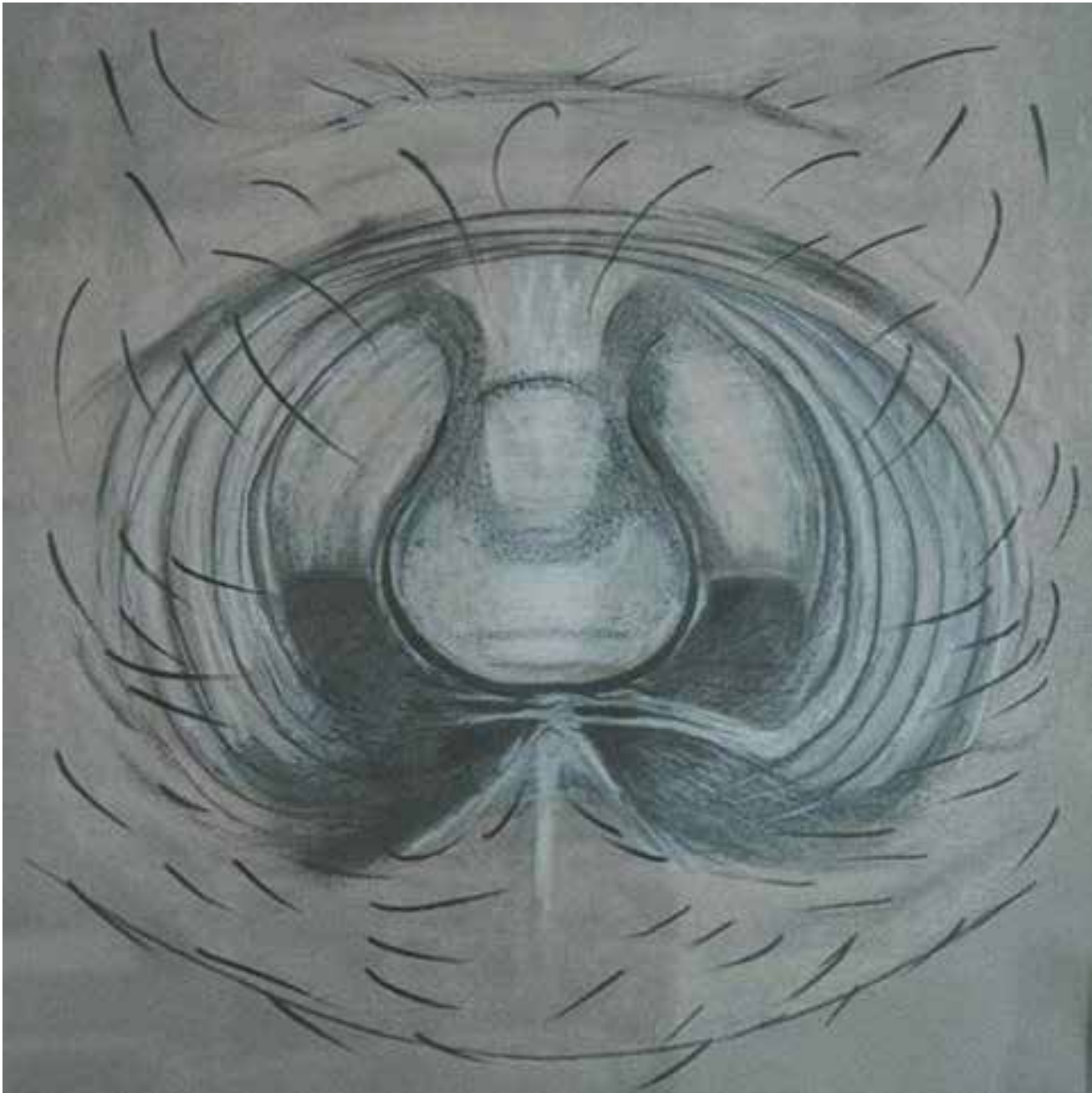


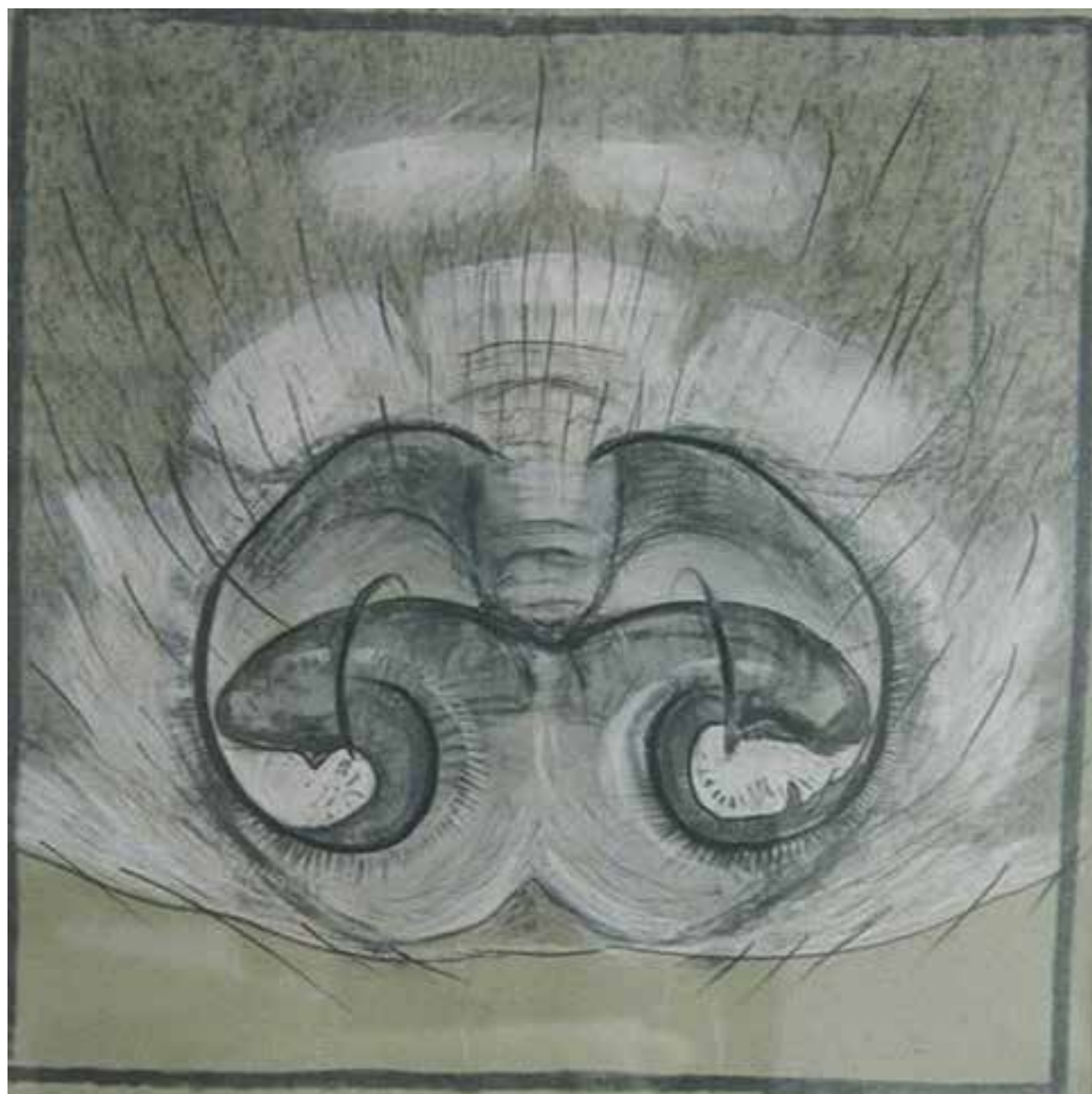
Préachán 117 cms high x 88 cms wide





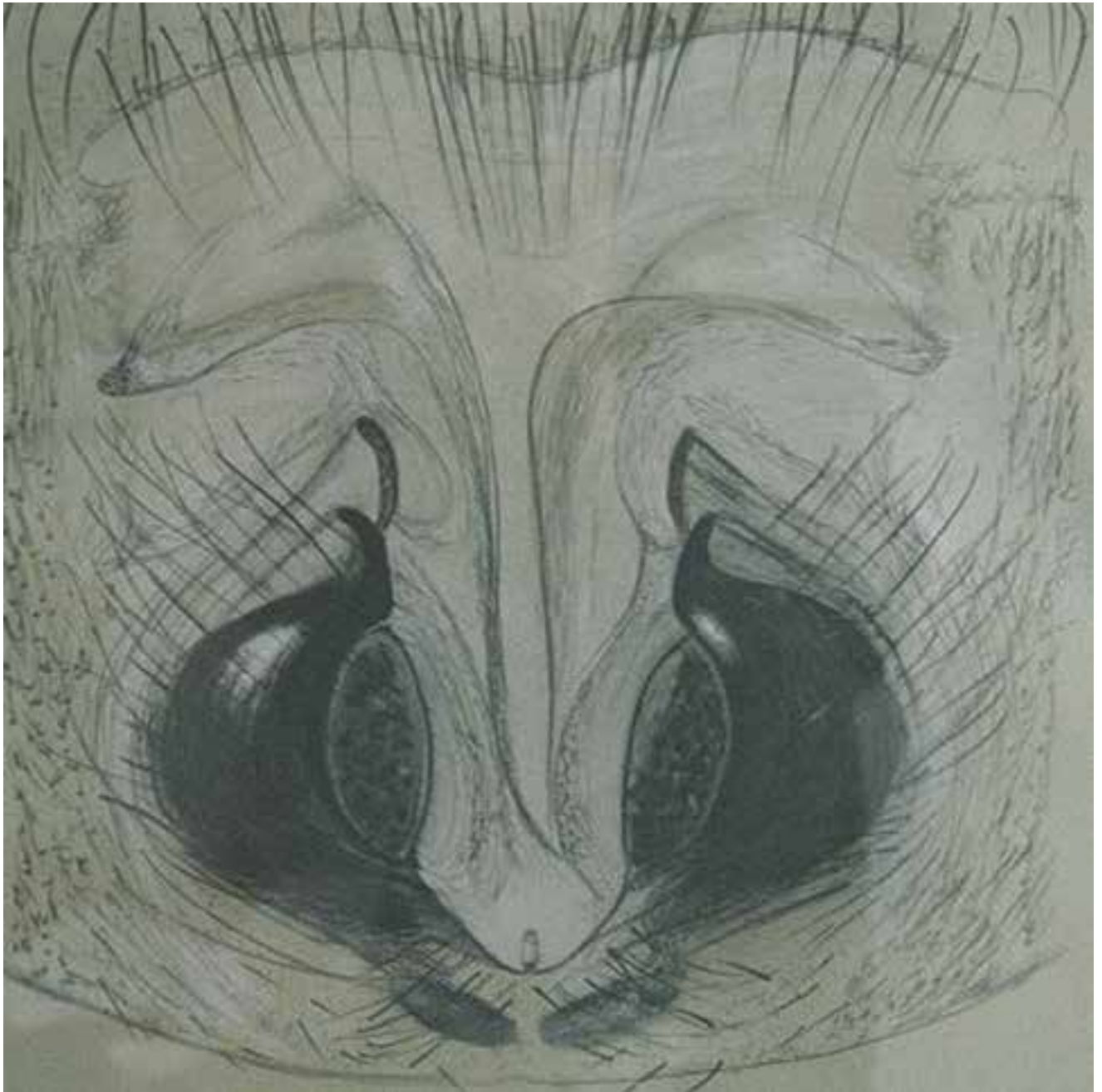


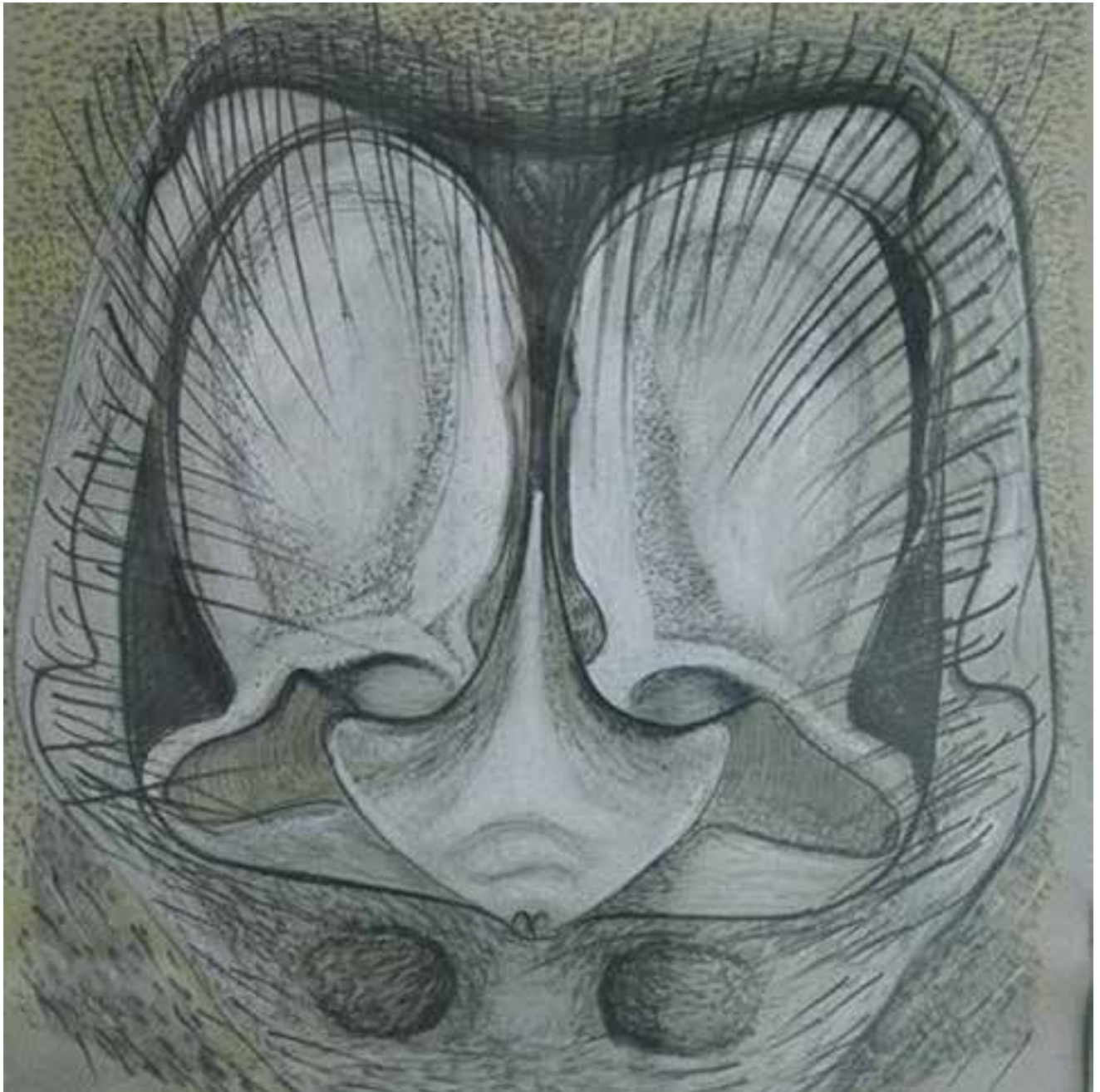




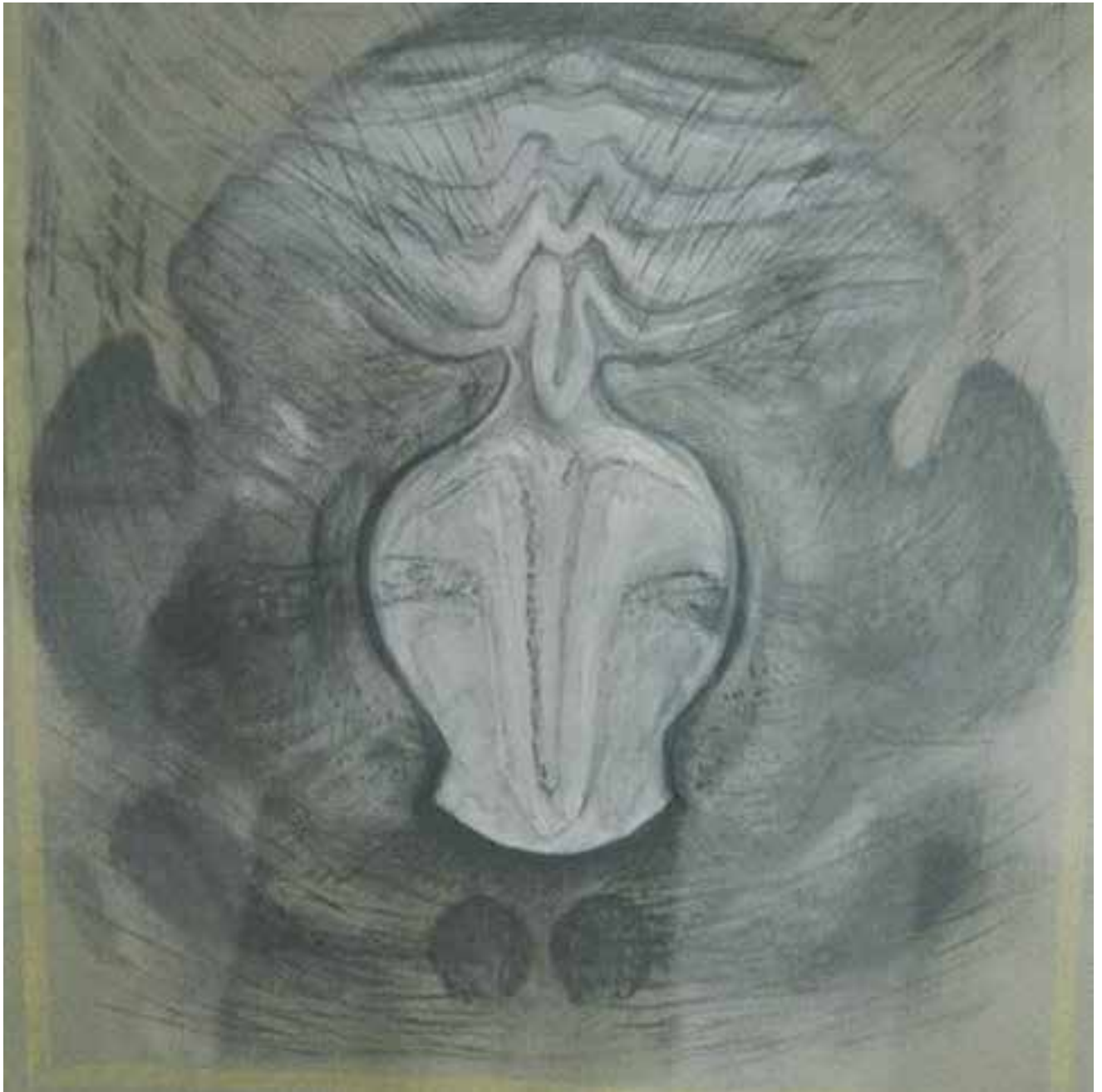
















77 cms. high x 72 cms wide charcoal and chalk on paper

Epigynes



I have a creative process that comes from a variety of influences; beginning with my childhood memories of my parents and grandmothers. My maternal grandmother was a seamstress and embroiderer who possessed limitless patience. I spent hours watching and copying her work and even now when I use any form of needlework I mentally refer to her advice. I admired Mary Kelly who's work 'Post Partum Document' I saw at the ICA in London in 1975 when I was attending St. Martins, it comprised of rinsed nappy liners accompanied by menus of what had been eaten, Judy Chicago, Meret Oppenheim, Leonora Carrington, among many others also influenced and suggested ways for me to work.

My practice is rather solitary; I walk a lot and use the time to think over ideas, also prior to and during the time I was working on 'Them' I had a habit of collecting things I came upon on these walks to use in my work. I don't do this so much now partly due to the sheer volume of material I collected at that time and partly as a reaction to a later period when my obsession with 'things' turned into a landscape of madness. Detritus dialogue came about as a method of processing all this material.

Different methods interest me as a means of creating work and suggesting particular feelings or allegorical connections; Préachán is a case in point where the process of bookbinding turns the wings of crows into reliquaries of themselves. I also use casting and printing which I find fascinating in their similarity to each other although their products are so different.

I have a preoccupation with chance and synchronistic events; I used to look for the right item or information to present itself in relation to an idea for work. The most dramatic realization of this method was finding a chest freezer full of crows when I wanted crows to make the third figure in 'Them'. This led to the question "Am I looking for them or are they looking for me?"

As a reaction to this period of meeting with chance and the remains of the dead, I find myself craving pristine materials and the immaterial qualities of sound and film. I'm also attracted to the strange relationship that 'cut and paste' has created with the material world. I have tried to remove myself from synchronicity. I find that it always re-emerges in some way, perhaps the suggestion of a sequence of items or the correlation of statements. Lately I use simple forms in nature or writing in a foreign language or alphabet and just place them one after the other. I call this accidental calligraphy and try not to decipher it. I can of course but I don't look.

Sarah Lewtas  
2015







Feíscint

76 cms wide by 55 cms high synthetic satin and ribbon







9 drawings each measuring 20.5 h x 19.5 w aquarelle on paper

Olives





































Armoury <sup>various dimensions</sup>





**Easter Weeds** a series of 36 drawings and a film made on a residency in Tbilisi in Georgia in April 2009. There was a lot of tension around at the time due to conflicts with Russia and the threat of invasion. I walked on a hill at the edge of town where I saw these fragile wild flowers and oddments. It was as if they embodied everything as we approached Palm Sunday.

**Them** originally shown at the Context gallery in Derry in September 2002 began with the pelvis bones of sheep, they are always in half when one comes across them strewn over the bog. I liked their shape reminiscent of a plastic kitchen utensil and always picked them up. I had no idea what I was going to do with them or that I was embarking on a major project that took years to complete.

**Recovery Cabinet** is a seasonal piece populated by living snails; I draw and write on paper thoughts and concerns usually connecting with the work and also myself. The snails eat the paper, which hangs in layers so that there's the possibility of different things being revealed or destroyed. Snails are hermaphrodite and extremely calm without judgment; so the cabinet is a curative resolution for anything one cares to put in it.

**Detritus Dialogue** is an ongoing project begun in 2003; it records within a chalk rectangle of 35x40 cms. all those objects and sentimental items that, for one reason or another continue to occupy my world but have no useful function. All these pieces of detritus however precious they may once have been; are either destroyed or given away once they have been photographed.

**Preáchán** is an installation of books made from the wings of crows and jackdaws killed on the road. For several years whenever I saw a dead crow by the road I rescued it and turned it into a memorial of itself using poetic and historical tales.

**Epigynes** are drawings made to accompany 'Them'; epigynes are the reproductive organs of female spiders.

**Feíscínt** is an Irish word that roughly translates as 'Insight'. These outsize knickers are a tribute to the caring actions of a friend who laundered my underwear in a time of need.

**Olives** was drawn in Portugal on a residency in November 2011 during the olive harvest and had a completely different feel to the previous 'Easter Weeds'. There was a warm breeze that is named after St. Martin and always

comes around his feast day on the 11th of November; plus a bumper olive harvest and the birth of my granddaughter Sofia.

**Armoury** is another ongoing project begun in 1996 consisting of staffs or wands or call them what you will; of various dimensions and materials. Sometimes they are considered pieces that reference concepts or events and sometimes they just make themselves.

# From Before : Stuff and Stuff

Atavism is a word often used – but what does it really mean and more importantly what does it mean in relation to artist Sarah Lewtas and her work?

The definition states “suggesting the characteristics of a remote ancestor or primitive type”. The artist herself is atavistic – distant, content in her own world, watching, gathering. She, and her work are of no time but all time and of no particular culture but all cultures. Many artists now work with ‘found objects’ whereas Sarah’s practice has always centred around gathering, reassigning and reconfiguring ‘stuff’ she has happened upon and hoarded.

Her recent reappraisal of her practice of hoarding has synchronistically coincided with a disaster in her studio – it will have to be tumbled and rebuilt and at the same time all her ‘stuff’ needs serious attention. The artist is at a critical point now, a demarcation line has been drawn, so much now is in the past. In this sense then this retrospective exhibition presents the audience with a rearward view of her work, an occasion to mark a clearing out, a conclusion of sorts.

As part of the preparation for this show Sarah has begun the huge task of working through her ‘stuff’. Detritus Dialogue demonstrates how she has chosen to process it and some of her Crows have been turned into poetry books. The new Armoury work is a classic Lewtas piece. Again, many of the components have been in her possession for some time but only recently reassigned and re-placed to make this work. The 12 staffs contain elements that denote tribal emblems or signifiers that reference a global perspective. You would be forgiven if you thought you were viewing a Bronze Age artefact or indeed an Aboriginal tribal piece – here is the atavism again. On second glance ancient and modern sit together in resolved juxtaposition.

Sarah has participated in numerous local and foreign residency schemes. She travels light on these occasions with a preference to drawing on these retreats. The Olives and Easter Weeds may seem innocuous accomplished drawings but there is a depth of knowledge that informs what the artist is creating, these works are loaded with religious and political meaning.

The works in this exhibition demonstrate a prescient urge to claim the artists own faith, own vision, own world. What will unfold after the artist completes processing her ‘stuff’ and she embarks in her new studio – we’ll just have to wait.

Úna Campbell  
April 2015

# Resume

Born : London, England

Education : Eastbourne College of Art, Fine Art.

B.A. St. Martins College of Art , London.

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## Solo Shows

April 2011 : 'Easter Weeds' Art Works Letterkenny. Co. Donegal.

March 2008 : T3 – T4, Ionad Culturtha, Ballyvourney, Co. Cork.

September 2002 : 'Them' The Context Gallery, Derry

March 2002 : Passional, An Gaileari Falcarragh, Co. Donegal.

Aug. Sept.2000 : Spirit of Place, St. Patricks Trian, Armagh.

November 1998 : Another Language, The Clear Spot, Belfast.

## Group Shows

November 2013 : 11th Wexford Artists Book Exhibition.  
The Denis Collins Gallery, Wexford.  
Group Exhibitions

February 2015 : Artists' Collections , Regional Cultural Centre  
Letterkenny, Donegal.

November 2014 : Artisterium 7 , Georgian National Museum.  
Tbilisi History Museum.



- November 2013 : 11th Wexford Artists Book Exhibition.  
The Denis Collins Gallery, Wexford.
- October 2012 : Samkura Greek Museum of Contemporary Art  
Thesaloniki
- August 2012 : Hybrid, Redline Gallery, Denver , Colorado.
- July 2012 : The Wilds of Donegal, Glebe Gallery, Donegal.
- October 2009 : Artisterium '09 2nd Tbilisi International  
Contemporary Art Exhibition. Georgia.
- July 2009 : 'An Cosan Glas 'Sculpture Trail, Errigail Arts Festival  
Co. Donegal.
- April 2009 : Artist's Residency, Tbilisi Georgia.
- Sept 2008 : 6th Biennale of Contemporary Art, Gyumri,  
Armenia.
- December 2007 : Dunlewey Far. A8, Albany, Piccadilly, London.
- June 2007 : A Month of Sundays, Annual Show Real,  
Queen St. Studios, Belfast.

## Collections

National Irish Visual Arts Library

Clo Ceardlann na gCnoc

MOMA, artist's book archive

James Dixon Gallery, Tory Island

Greek Museum of Contemporary Art, Thesaloniki.

