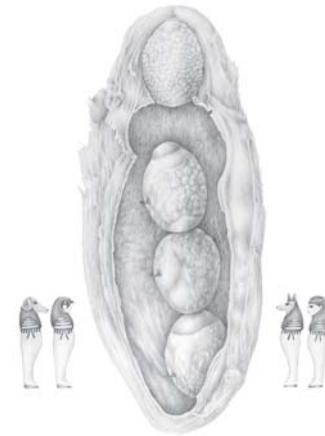


MEMENTO MORI

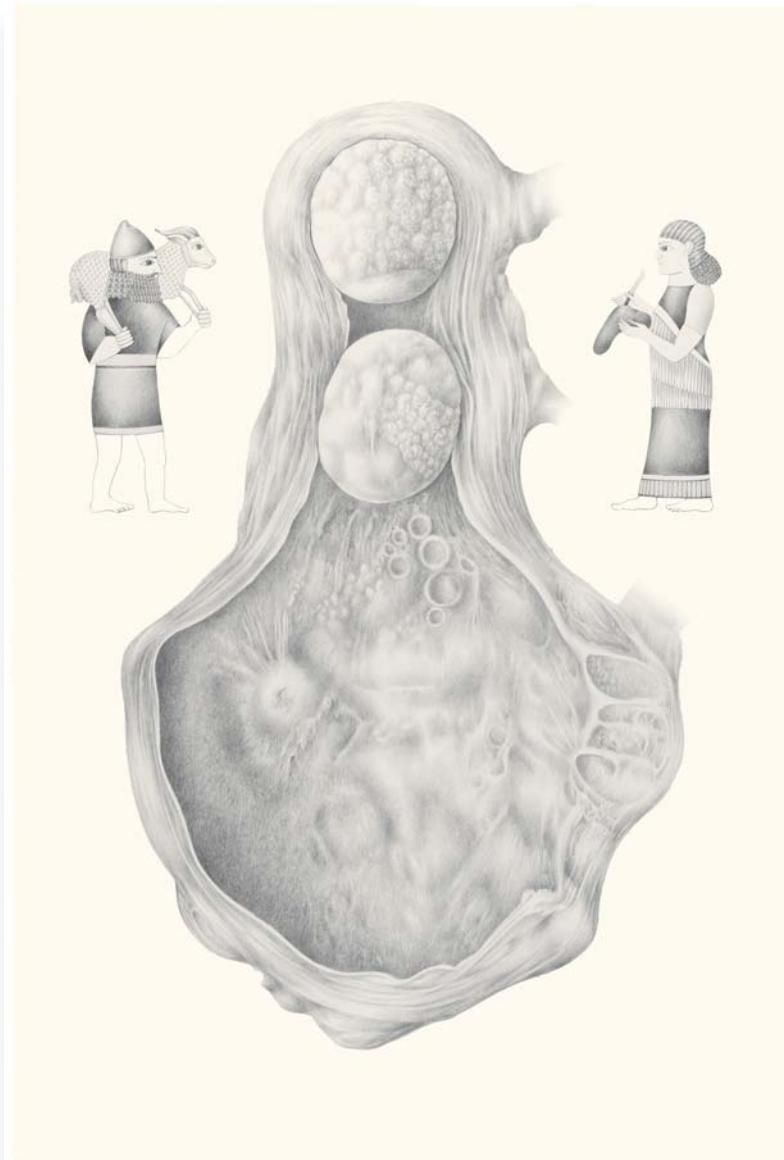


MEMENTO MORI

ART, MEDICINE & THE BODY



LAUREN BLACK



DISEASE AND DEITY

2013

A visit to the R. A. Rodda Museum of Pathology can be confronting. Perhaps it's just as well this hoard of little horrors (part of the University of Tasmania's Faculty of Medicine) is not normally open to the public. Brains, lungs and intestines, and a whole menagerie of parasites, float passively in alcohol: here a selection of ovarian and testicular cancers, there a comprehensive survey of the various kinds of gallstone. Miners' lungs are ossified by coal dust and a foot is blackened by gangrene. Almost everything that can go wrong with our bodily organs is here, in all its visceral squishiness.

If we are reminded uncomfortably of the *Alien* movies, it is because the very thought of living organisms invading us to slowly consume us from within is powerfully repellent. These specimens confirm not only that death is inevitable (which at some level we already know) but also that it might be protracted and grisly (which we are less inclined to acknowledge).

Yet they are not, of course, intended to frighten. Quite the contrary. The museum is at pains to present them as objects of dispassionate study. In fact, given that they were once functioning parts of living individuals, they come across as coldly impersonal. This is scientific enquiry at its most objective and, you might say, its most materialistic.

Lauren Black, who is well known as a botanical artist, became fascinated by the R. A. Rodda Museum following a chance meeting with its curator, Dr Sorrel Standish-White, and a fruitful collaboration has ensued. Lauren's delicate renderings respect the science while broadening our appreciation of it in a way that only an observant artist with a sense of history can.



MINER'S LAMENT III

2016

From a scientific viewpoint, they have had at least one surprising and quite unforeseen consequence. When Dr Standish-White saw Lauren's first drawing of a gall bladder, for instance, she was amazed to find cholesterosis she had never noticed before. 'This is a specimen I thought I knew really well. After all, I'd been teaching with it for close to thirty years. It took the artist to show the pathologist what was really there.' Those of us who have no idea what cholesterosis is, however, will make some very different kinds of discoveries.

If medical study tends to isolate the diseased organs, both literally and metaphorically, stripping them of cultural context, the effect of Lauren's art is to restore that context, making them mysterious, allusive and wondrous again. She leads us from an introverted view of diseases and infections as potential threats to our own bodily health towards an appreciation of them as complex social and cultural phenomena.

And, oddly enough, as objects of aesthetic delight. Lauren chooses her subjects purely on the basis of their visual interest. There is something almost mischievous about making medical conditions so ethereally beautiful, like exotic flowers. Then, to broaden that initial response, she adds what can perhaps best be described as icons, like those you press on a website page, which, if you are attentive, will prompt some informative historical connections.

Look, for example, at the three *Disease and Deity* drawings, where detailed studies of gallstones are accompanied by Egyptian, Babylonian and Greek figures: a reminder that medical interest in this painful condition has a surprisingly long history. Or the marbled-like patterning in *Miner's Lament III* - in fact, the damaged lung tissue of an African miner - which hints at the horror of this anonymous individual's life by means of a silhouette and a skeleton.

"MUSIC PRODUCES A KIND OF PLEASURE WHICH HUMAN NATURE CANNOT DO WITHOUT" - CONFUCIUS

"IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE, PLAY ON" - SHAKESPEARE

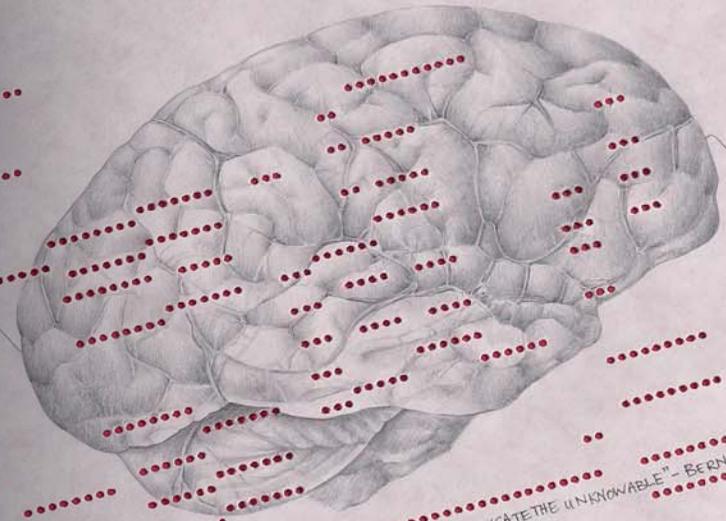
"YOU ARE THE MUSIC WHILE THE MUSIC LASTS" - T.S. ELIOT

"IN MUSIC THE PASSIONS ENJOY THEMSELVES" - NIETZCHE

"THE ONLY ESCAPE FROM THE MISERIES OF LIFE ARE MUSIC + CATS" - ALBERT SCHWEITZER

"WITHOUT MUSIC, LIFE WOULD BE A MISTAKE"

"MUSIC IS THE POETRY OF THE AIR"



"MUSIC... CAN NAME THE UNNAMESABLE + COMMUNICATE THE UNKNOWNABLE" - BERNSTEIN



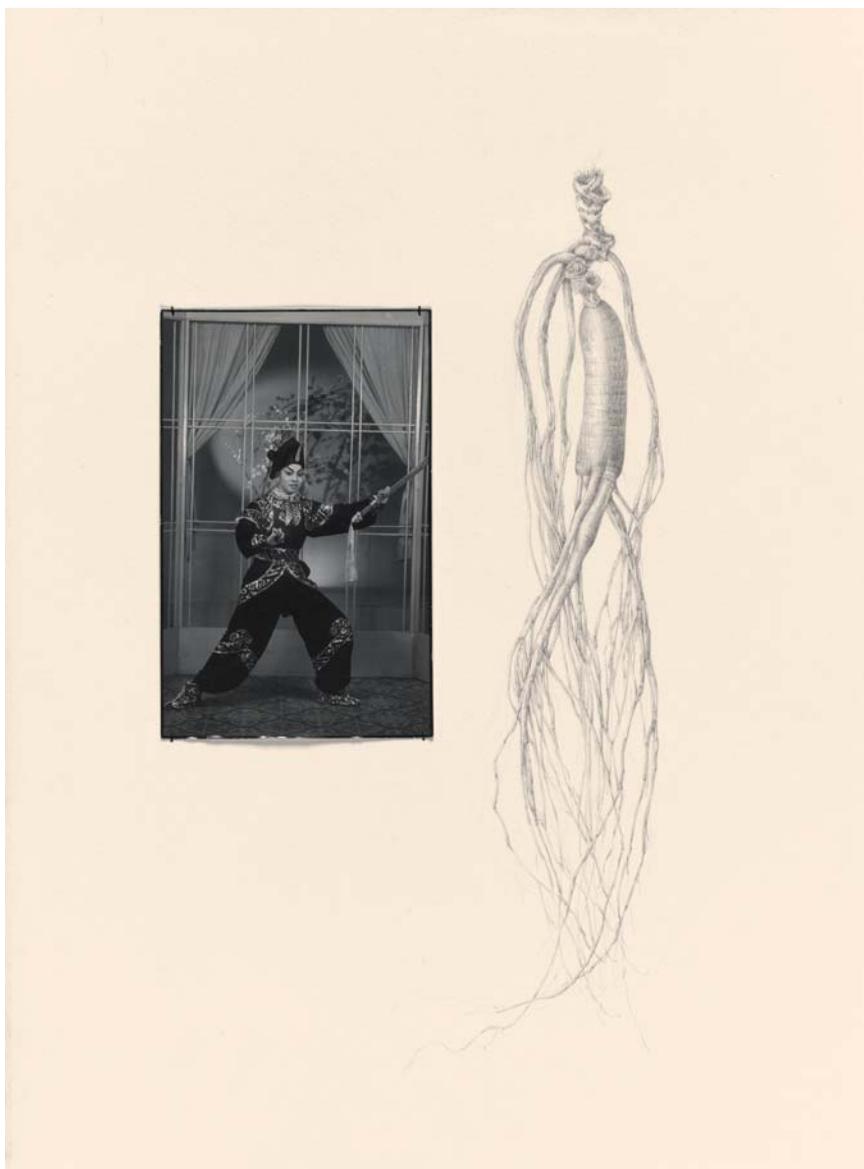
THE CAREFUL ART OF HAIR

2014

However, close inspection will reveal some clues - the naming of medicinal plants in English, Latin and Chinese can suggest something about cultural interactions; the medical figures (or dolls) with yin/yang meridians inscribed on their bodies evoke another era and other ways of understanding. It is clear that *The Careful Art of Hair*, for example - which includes an inventory of herbal treatments, an old photograph of a beauty with luxuriant tresses, and some wispy strands of silk - refers to hair care. It helps to know, also, that the coloured stains in the paper were made with the specific herbal mixtures referred to in the drawings, which Lauren made from the original recipes: a case of metaphor and matter interweaving.

Thus, Lauren presents us with two enigmatic medical world views, one distressingly close and immediate, one comfortably distant and benign. Her achievement is to show us where those two seemingly irreconcilable realms intersect, thereby enhancing our understanding of both.

Peter Timms



REN SHEN – THE DIVINE ROOT

2014

Like a snake that continually sheds its skin, Georgetown, Penang reveals itself in layers. Peeling walls shed a colourful history and I am captivated as I pass them by. The shop-houses that line the streets are dark and ornately screened. I can't quite see into the places that I want to, and wonder what they hold inside. All locked up they seem to be protecting something precious and unattainable. Lost in the network of tiny oven-baked streets, it feels like the heat is consuming me. This town is sucking and pulling me into its core. I sit, watch, and begin to imagine. Stories begin to unravel.

It was Yin Oi Tong, the oldest Chinese medical hall in south east Asia that initially captured my imagination, and brought me to the tiny island of Penang. Established in 1796 by a Hakka medicine seller, it sits prominently on a busy corner block in the heart of Little India. Above the entrance the Chinese

characters read *Hall of Benevolence*. Inside cases line the walls with tonics, tools, and objects. Baskets of herbal medicines overflow onto ornately tiled floors, while monkeys stare out from glass jars, their delicate hands clawing at the impenetrable surface. A history was worn into the foundations of this place.

On the doorstep, Indian fortune-tellers settle their saris. They read palms, look into people's eyes, find the past, the future and tell them their stories. I wondered if I could do the same. Holding onto one of the objects from a case, I closed my eyes. The touch of it against my skin, its small shape, fragility and cracks - it was trying to give me something. Taking a sheet of paper I decided to wrap it up. As I carefully unwrapped the object, I marvelled at what had been given. Ingrained in to the

REVEALING LAYERS

川芎 白朮 當歸 防党
 黄芪 茯苓 炙甘草
 水煎碗半 送服
 汕頭街陳東蓮先生送

Bai Zhu	Spleen, stomach
Chuan Xiong	liver, perspiration
Dang Gui	heart, liver
Dang Shen	lung, spleen
San Qi Huang	kidney, liver
Shen Cao	heart, lung, spleen
Wang Qi	lung, spleen
Tu Ling	heart, spleen, kidney
Zu Bao	spleen, stomach, heart

Chinese longroot



sweet
 moist, soft
 light, fluid
 slightly warm

Poria



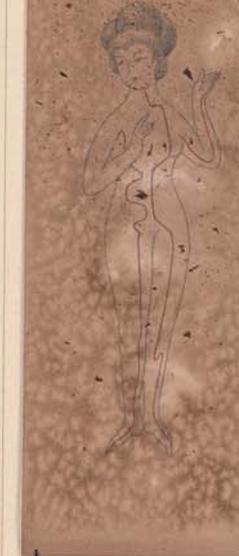
neutral
 bland
 neutral
 light, elastic

Poor man's ginseng



sweet
 neutral
 fragrant
 soft, moist

Chinese date



sweet
 warm
 slightly warm
 bland, moist

Milk vetch root



slightly warm
 bland
 warm
 yellow, elastic

Chinese leopards root



fragrant
 bitter
 bitter
 warm

Chinese angelica root



neutral, warm
 slightly bitter
 fragrant
 fragrant

Madagascar root



neutral, mild
 slightly pungent
 bitter
 warm

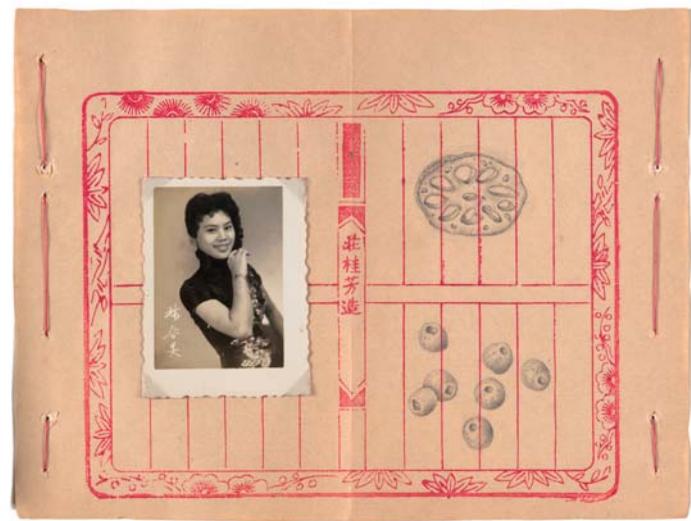
Honey lignonia



neutral, mild
 very sweet
 slightly cold
 heavy, baked

paper was the trace of the object, forever present. As I looked around the shelves I saw objects shedding their disintegrating wrappings, I saw the Chinese herbalists bundling up their herbs in paper, on the streets I remembered passing baskets of roots drying in the creases of sun-creaked paper. The paper held stories. Today on my way to Yin Oi Tong I found a wonderful box of photos in one of my favourite antique shops. Carefully tucked away under the counter, Chinese opera singers, mothers, children and unknown families. Too precious to lose, almost forgotten. Holding on to them I succumbed to their gaze. 'I'm going to bring them back' I thought, 'find stories for them'. In the studio I placed them next to the wrappings and wondered if they had also been to Yin Oi Tong, whether they had walked the same path, stood on the same floor. As I thought, I wrote. The smell of boiling medicines permeated the room. Roots, flowers, seeds and fruits, I wanted those captured by the paper too.

Lauren Black



YIN OI TONG - LOTUS
2014

古文觀止 卷四 明文 豫讓論
定要後代的沒有危險滅亡，這是理上所必無的，就難道是天道麼？

★ 豫讓論

方孝孺

古 文 觀 止 卷 四 明 文 豫 讓 論

二 一 〇

士君子立身事主，既名知己，則當竭盡智謀，忠告善道，銷患於未形，保治於未然，俾身全而主安。生為名臣，死為上鬼，垂光百世，照耀簡策，斯為美也。就正意苟遇知己，不能扶危於未亂之先，而乃捐軀殞命於既敗之後，釣名沽譽，眩世炫俗，由君子觀之，皆所不取也。暗取豫讓一流蓋嘗因而論之，豫讓臣事智伯，及趙襄子殺智伯，讓為之報讎。謂襄子約韓魏大敗智伯單遂殺之，盡滅智氏之族，智伯之臣讓欲為之報讎。聲名烈烈，雖愚夫愚婦，莫不知其為忠臣義士也。嗚呼！讓之死，固忠矣；惜乎處死之道有未忠者存焉。二句為一何也觀其漆身吞炭，謂其友曰：「凡吾所為者極難，將以愧天下後世之為人臣而懷二心者也。」謂非忠可乎？初豫讓入襄子宮中，日既已委質為臣而又求殺之，是二心也。凡吾所為者極難耳。然所以為此者，將以愧天下後世之為人臣懷二心者也。申讓及觀斬衣三躍，襄子責以不死於中行，杭氏而獨死於智伯，讓應曰：「中行氏以眾人待我，我故以眾人報之；智伯以國士待我，我故以國士報之。」即此而論，讓有餘憾矣。襄子出讓讓伏於橋下，獲之，襄子曰：「不嘗仕范中行氏乎？智伯滅范中行氏，而子不為報讎，反委質仕智伯，智伯已死，子獨何為報讎之深也？」讓曰：「范中行氏以眾人遇我，我故以眾人報之；智伯以國士遇我，我故以國士報之。」子義之持衣與讓讓拔劍三躍，呼天擊之，遂伏劍死。申處死之道有未忠句段規之事韓康，任章之事魏獻，未聞以國士待之也，而規也，章也，力勸其主從智伯之請，與之地以驕其志，而速其

Paper

Used, used again, folded, crushed, pegged and torn

Weathered in the damp heat of the sun

Taking on all the dirtiness of this town

I guess you were once smooth and clean

What do you hold?

Roots, sticks, thick, thin, twisted, drying, shrinking

Layers of brown

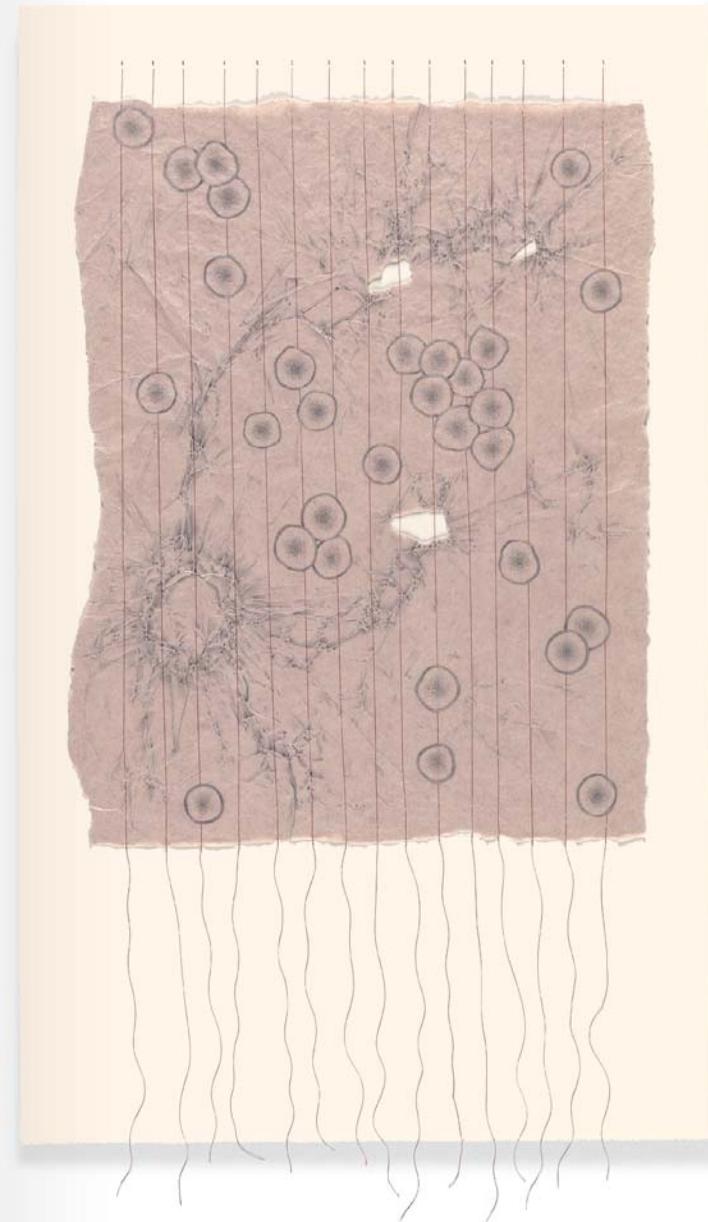
Gathered up at the end of each day

Unpegged, unwrapped, smoothed

Transient memories, traces

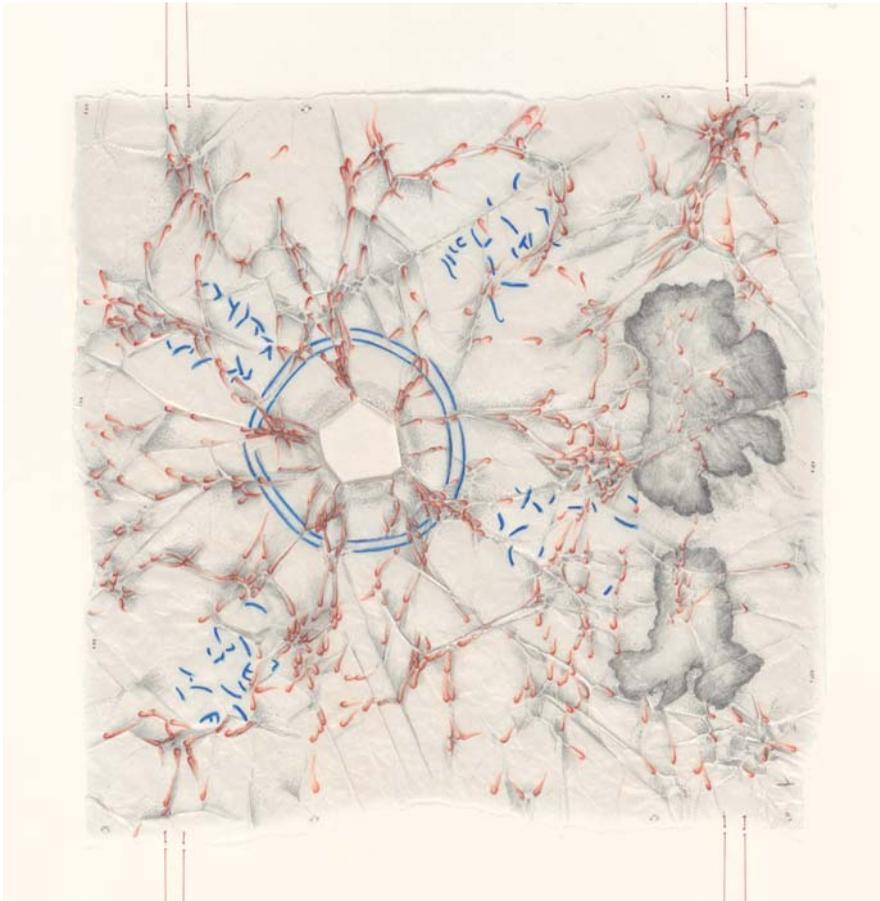
caught in your folds

L.B.



LURONG – VELVET HORN

2014



GHOST MEDICINE

2014

*Wrapped up, I forget what you are
I feel your shape, enjoy the sense of you
Held. Small and tight. Shall I make a wish?
Quite by accident a finger breaks your surface
Eyes open. Ghost-like markings appear
What do you have to offer?
Unpackaged, look what you leave behind
Moulded and shaped into a new form
An essence of you*

L.B.



*The folds and creases of the bottle
take on the form of a cough
Small explosions in each corner — forceful and strong
Stained on the inside with spots of fog
How remarkable — reminding me of a human lung
A cough in a bottle
I thought
Under their skin
In their bones
They breathe
Wetness*

L.B.



BODY OF RAIN

2014



RICE PEBBLE ROUGE AND ROSEBUD TEA

2014

Pattern drenched and glowing
Softly in faded hues
She drank rosebud tea
For complexion
Lips like a flower
Adorning china rims
She left cherry imprints
Of perfection

L.B.



HIPPOCRATES CABINET

2015

ILLUSTRATED ARTWORK DETAILS

- p. 1 *Disease and Deity* 2013
 triptych (detail - panel 2)
 pencil on paper
 112 x 77cm (per sheet)
 Collection: R. A. Rodda
 Museum of Pathology,
 University of Tasmania
- p. 2 *Disease and Deity* 2013
 triptych (detail - panel 3)
- p. 4 *Miner's Lament III* 2016
 gouache, pencil and ink
 on digital print
 42 x 59cm
- p. 6 *The Speech of Angels* 2013
 pencil and pen on
 pianola scroll
 28.5 x 70cm
- p. 9 *Miss Yin* 2014
 paper dyed with herbs,
 pencil and ink on paper
 84 x 34cm
- p. 9 *Miss Yang* 2014
 paper dyed with herbs,
 pencil and ink on paper
 84 x 34cm
- p. 10 *The Careful Art of Hair* 2014
 plant dye, silk thread, photo,
 antique paper and pencil
 on paper
 38.5 x 56cm
- p. 12 *Ren Shen - The Divine Root*
 2014
 pencil, photograph and silk
 thread on paper
 38 x 28.5cm
- p. 14 *Medicine Dolls* 2014
 pencil, silk thread, plant dye,
 photos and fabric script
 on paper
 44 x 107.5cm
- p. 16 *Yin Oi Tong Suite - Lotus* 2014
 pencil on antique paper,
 photo, silver, linen thread
 and fabric on matt board
 26 x 39cm
- p. 18 *Lurong - Velvet Horn* 2014
 diptych
 pencil and silk thread
 on paper
 76x 45.6cm (per sheet)
- p. 20 *Ghost Medicine* 2014
 watercolour, gouache, pencil
 and silk thread on paper
 96 x 30cm
- p. 22 *Body of Rain* 2014
 pencil, gouache, silk thread,
 photos and paper
 38 x 57cm
- p. 23 *Rice Pebble Rouge and
 Rosebud Tea* 2014
 watercolour, plant dye,
 pencil, photograph and silk
 thread on paper
 57 x 76cm
- p. 25 *Hippocrates cabinet* 2014
 pencil on paper in antique
 medical cabinet
 32.5 x 33.5 x 10.5cm (d) closed
 32.5 x 70 x 10.5cm (d) opened

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The R A Rodda Museum of Pathology, University of Tasmania

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13 March - 18 July 2015

Queen Victoria
Museum and Art Gallery
Launceston Tasmania
27 May - 13 August 2017

Art Gallery of Ballarat
Ballarat Victoria
30 Sept 2017 - 28 Jan 2018

LAUREN BLACK is an acclaimed Tasmanian-based artist. Born in Ballarat, Victoria in 1971, she is well known for her detailed botanical work.

In 2012 her work began to undergo a shift when she was introduced to the R. A. Rodda Museum of Pathology, University of Tasmania. She is now involved in a creative partnership with the Museum and is researching and developing new works centred on medicine and disease. Lauren has undertaken several residencies in south east Asia, her most recent being Penang, Malaysia, where she immersed herself in the history and practice of traditional Chinese medicine.

Lauren is celebrated for her fine technical drawing skills, attention to detail and her passion and ability to combine history with her arts practice. Her work is represented in significant collections in Australia and overseas.

