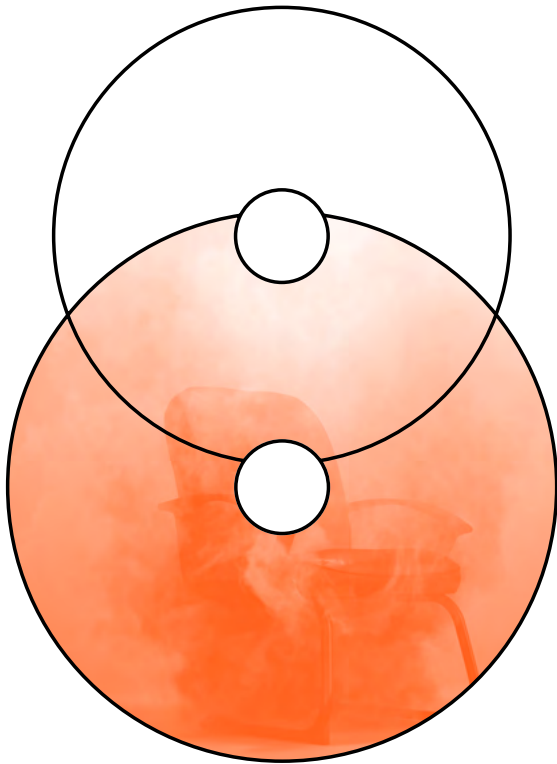


#1
Open



&

**CASTLEFIELD
GALLERY**

Table

In partnership with Corridor8, Castlefield Gallery is hosting a series of Open Table events, evenings of conversation, writing and performance devised in response to the gallery's exhibition programme. For each Open Table a bursary is made available for a Castlefield Gallery Associate Member to develop a text based, visual or performative reflection on the given exhibition. The resulting reflection is shared at the event alongside a commissioned response by a practitioner based in the North West. As such the Open Tables are an opportunity for Castlefield Gallery Associate Members to draw upon their own practice, creatively respond to a given exhibition, and present their work at a public event alongside other creatives in the region.

For the first Open Table event in July 2022 Castlefield Gallery Associate Member **Bryony Dawson** and Manchester-based writer and curator **Elysia Lukoszevieze** developed literary responses to the exhibition *PIVOT: Editions*.

PIVOT: Editions presents artwork for sale by the artists Pat Flynn, Garth Gratrix, Bridget O'Gorman, Salma Noor and Chester Tenneson. The artists are part of *PIVOT*, a development programme delivered in partnership by Bluecoat and Castlefield Gallery. *PIVOT* was devised as a means to test new methodologies to support contemporary visual artists at a mid-career stage in the North West region, supporting their practices through a tailored programme over an eighteen-month period. The exhibition *PIVOT: Editions* presents the mid-point within the wider programme. A show of wide ranging practices, Dawson and Lukoszevieze found shared associations throughout the works. Their individual texts tease out references to gender, the body, the performance of identity, social media and a longing or desire embedded within the mundanity of everyday routine.

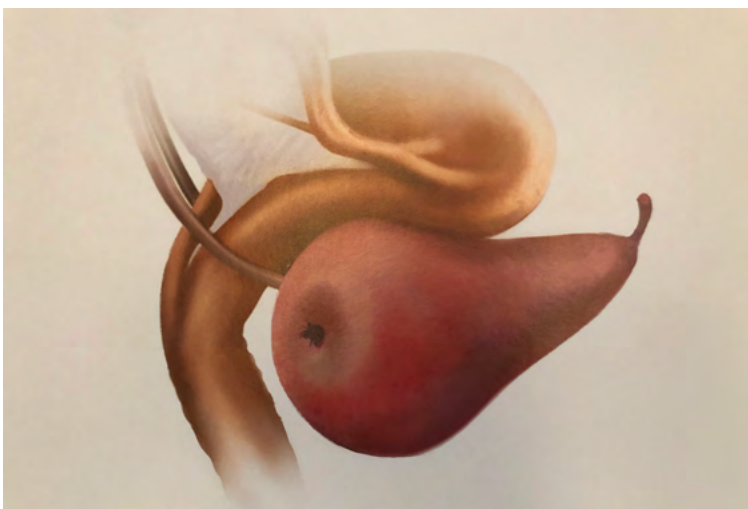


Image: Bridget O'Gorman,
Non-Verbal 1, 2022

Tiny Dancer

Elysia Lukoszevieze

Optimism
Patience
Confidence
Petulance

The mirror asks me what I'm already worrying about. I check my phone and realise that it's only 8.46 in the morning, there is nothing to worry about at this time of day. The impending dread that will start low in my stomach and gradually crawl its way up my throat until settling on the very top of my brain, like a frog on a lily pad, doesn't seem to wake up until around 10.30am. Dread concerns himself with banalities such as job security and whether or not I should have a baby one day. He is so insipid. I brush and floss my teeth then grin maniacally at the mirror, blood grouting my gum line.

Afterwards, I try on Intelligence. Like changing hats I rotate through Optimism, Patience, Confidence, Petulance. I settle on Ambivalence and leave the house.

I walk to Sainsbury's and approach a dog tied up outside. I crouch down to stroke his mottled fur which is softer than it looks. As we make eye contact I get the sense that this dog respects me. I press my forehead against his. A lump rises in my throat and I let out a low moan uhhhh.

Inside the supermarket I stroll through the aisles as Tiny Dancer by Elton John bleeds tinnily out of the speakers. I picture a tiny tap dancer in the palm of my hand. He is tapping out a jingle for anti-dandruff shampoo in morse code. My fist closes around the dancer and he is killed instantly. He had no family or close friends and will not be missed, people who work in advertising rarely are.

Ambivalence

The air holds a faint aroma of artificial sweetness mixed with the metallic tang of pesticides that hits the back of your throat as you peruse the fruit and vegetables. I am staring at the strawberries. These big juicy berries have been flown in from Morocco, over 1,600 miles away, a place that I have never been to. A man obstructs me with his trolley, the berries are now out of my reach. I lean in and whisper to him, 'Describe the heat to me, radiating from the ground. Blow on my ear and let me feel it'. Under the fluorescent lighting his under-eye bags are more prominent, his exhaustion palpable. I imagine him picking me up and rotating me in his hand, inspecting me for bruises and imperfections. A gentle squeeze to test for ripeness. I have not grown under the watchful eye of the sun so I suspect I am flavourless. Softly, almost imperceptibly, he shakes his head and nestles me back amongst the mangos.

I continue my food shop and internally bemoan my incompetence as I have once again not written a list. I stare at the wall of meat in front of me, paralysed by options and simultaneous repulsion. A structure of slippery, fleshy bricks. Minced meat lattices, mashed and woven into waves of pink and red, some faded to an ashen grey colour. You don't buy those packs because they're past their best. I become very aware of my tongue, a dusty pillow sat fat and stupid in my mouth. The average tongue is about three inches long. I run it along the inside of my teeth and think about pushing it into someone else's mouth, licking their teeth, tasting their saliva as it mingles with mine. A placatory game of give and take, pressure and submission. A memory of being aged twelve and snogging a boy at a school disco who kept his eyes open the entire time and spun his tongue around the inside of my mouth with such determination I thought he was trying to make me dizzy. My mouth fills with saliva, a Pavlovian response, whilst still staring at the display. I close my eyes briefly as moisture beads across my forehead and then walk to the freezer section. With some effort I open the large freezer door to inspect the array of ice lollies, inviting the cool air to wash over my body.

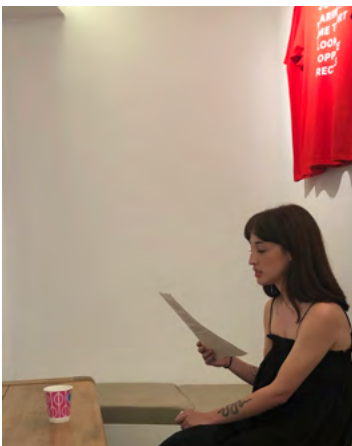
In Season 9 Episode 17 of The Simpsons, Jasper (Grandpa Simpson's best friend but general bearded background character) empties the ice cream freezer of the Kwik E Mart in order to freeze himself with the intention of defrosting sometime in the distant future. However, once frozen he is instead exploited by Apu and turned into an exhibit for paying tourists, only liberated once the store's cooling system fails.



An image of my frozen body amongst the Twisters and Magnums flashes before my eyes, limbs stiff and lips blue. What happens to your eyeballs when you're frozen? Do they frost over like a car windscreen in December?

The urine inside of my bladder is solidifying. My blood is thickening, crystallising in my veins. My lungs are gradually ceasing their constant inflation/deflation, fixed mid breath. The trillions of synapses in my brain are no longer fizzing and whirring, their conversation is drowsy, laboured. My pain receptors slumber into an icy coma of comfort. The sound of glacial creaking splinters through my ears until there is silence.

**I grab a box of Calippos and walk out
of the supermarket without paying.
Nobody stops me.**



**Elysia Lukoszevieze is a writer and
curator based in Manchester.**

Image: Open Table 19 July 2022.
Courtesy Castlefield Gallery.



Image: Chester Tenneson,
Dance with me, don't dance with me, 2022



Image: Garth Gratrix, *Shy Girl, Comfy Jeans, Gobstopper, Nice Tan*, 2022 and *Shy Girl, Wink Wink, Cheeky Felicia*, 2021

Like a Trapped Nerve in an Eyelid

Bryony Dawson

Late at night she'd stay up playing Geoguessr and not even really look for clues, just click and lurch, click and lurch past airless cornfields and foreign billboards until this rhythm souped into a kind of comfort, where the occasional apparition of a truck, warped and shredded into glinting strips under wide sky, prompted a feeling of almost unbearable tenderness. In a fantasy life she'd be a leggy, androgynous painter taking screenshots of these scenes to make huge, moody paintings with the glossy precision and hyper-realism of luxury tech adverts. She'd post Instagram stories of a dusk-lit studio scattered with paint-smeared socks, stacks of books and used matches, rarely photographing either the paintings themselves or her own face, but accruing nonetheless a large following of similarly androgynous painters painting similarly banal imagery with the same half-ironic devotion.

G is much better at Geoguessr than she is. They slouch parallel against the cafe counter above the MacBook Air while his fingertips brush softly at the touchpad. *Japan, Kenya, Estonia, Brazil. Because of those road markings, because they're driving on that side, because of the accents on the letters in that shop sign.* It only takes him about a minute to guess each time. His voice is even in pitch and affect; it barely rises or falls. His eyelashes maintain their long, slow curve. *Argentina. Myanmar. Sweden.* She feels a little ashamed at her comparative ignorance, but it's okay, because he isn't testing her. At each of his successful guesses, she finds herself emitting a high-pitched, frilly enthusiasm. It is a tone that skips readily out of her, without effort or conscious intent, but one that she does not associate with her 'true' self.

There is a vague want. A faint but urgent fluttering like a trapped nerve in an eyelid. Like a trapped nerve in an eyelid, you're never quite sure whether the want is perceptible to others. When you try to close in on a clearer impression of the want's object, the sensation softens to a loose shrug.

At the bus stop you thumb patiently through the carousel of last night's parties, gallery openings, political infographics, adverts for period-absorbing underwear. You type in the name of an artist you like. There are no new posts, but you scroll anyway. It is something like soothing, to return to this account over and over, like a template or scaffold, a structure you could pour yourself into. There is a sense of understated or incidental glamour; a slinky irony in the banality of her stories, which tend to feature close-ups of tacky shop windows, bruised fruit, strangers' hands on the chrome rails of public transport. Sometimes you wonder about the life surrounding the images, but mostly you feel a sort of glum longing towards the images *themselves*: the velvety grain of zoomed-in pixels, the way they sit in the smudgy glow of your screen—the immutability and availability of their surfaces. A friend once told you that in long distance relationships, the phone often replaces the lover as the object of desire. You become aware that one of the reasons you like this artist so much is because you once read that the artist didn't start making artwork until her thirties. You turn this thought in your mind, hoping it will sharpen into a direction for *today*.

It arrives folded in a reused Tesco bag, bound with brown plastic tape which skids in her teeth as she tries to tear it open. The listing had described it as a *super cute corset style top with funky iridescent colour. A unique vintage piece. A subversive basic.*

It is not technically a corset—no whalebone structure or lace-up back—just soft panels tapered to follow the inward slope of her ribs; a neat, concealed zip. Its iridescent colour slips around a little in the light but doesn't split or falter—it is resolutely monochrome: a deep, self-certain navy. There is a tiny v-shaped cut-out in the centre of its square neckline, like a single, reluctant concession to femininity. She ignores the flood of sickly, girlish perfume from its previous owner. When she folds an arm back to zip it up, it fits close to her skin without squeezing it. Her body feels contained, organised, unanimous, portable. She faces the mirror with a sense of purpose.

The cafe is thick with faces which turn as you clamber through chair legs to a free table. D speaks loudly and confidently as if you're alone. You bind your thighs under the table in a tight, narrow X. He asks what kind of work you make, and you watch yourself fumbling, meandering, sentences softening into themselves like old fruit. You tell him you've tried various bits, you're still figuring it out, you're keen to learn. He starts talking about his new film.

You rub at the back of your neck while he speaks, nodding and humming in agreement and curiosity at his ruthless assessments of film-world names mostly revered by you. You encounter a small scab at the finely furred base of your nape, and pick compulsively at it until a thin disc of skin comes loose. Manoeuvring your fingernail free from the hairline, you're careful not to crush the disc but to slot it gently under the nail so it may be snugly transported over your shoulder, down into your lap and deposited discreetly under the table. But as D is describing the climactic reunion of his film's father-son protagonists, the disc escapes and glitters across your chest; pale translucence framed by dark navy. His eyes follow its descent, then rise to meet yours. He starts talking about his new novel.

You think of the artist you like on Instagram, trying to picture what she is doing at this exact moment. When D goes to the bathroom, you take out your phone and search the artist's name, but nothing comes up. You reel through the list of accounts you follow, but it simply isn't there anymore. As he reapproaches, you straighten, unclench your jaw, take a sip of water. Light in the glass spalls at this disturbance.

She is at the gallerist's dinner
She is wearing black angora
She is reapplying a lipstick named
'blushing fawn' or 'dusk rose' or 'naughty plum'
without a mirror
She is taking a photo of the langoustines

The more she tells people that her memory blacked out, the more those gaps solidify around their edges. There is a drop of amber licked from the top of her hand, pipetted in the back of an Uber, the driver's pressed silence. Then grit and dust and white clean flashes of light—liquid leaping against her—plastic softening in loose fist—glittering beads on mohair cuff. Had she stumbled or was she stumbled into? Soft flicks of ash and hair, and then, the sudden fact of a mouth against hers in the centre of a crowded room.

But these are only images; a series of neat, short clips: she can't get behind their surfaces. It's like watching CCTV: all she can do is infer meaning from the gestures she observes. She can't recall the content of their late-night dialogue, though she hears distinctly the husky sound of her own voice, wandering around outside of her like a separate person. In the café, at breakfast, it had felt good to be seen with him, but when he left for his train she realised she could not picture his face.

She had, on more than one occasion, imagined, or discovered herself imagining, the images she would post from a hospital bed after being hit by a car. Bruised and stitched but endearingly so—a muddy violet under the eyes, dotted gown crumpled asymmetrically around her collarbones. Half-grinning, a little macabre—messages of love and shock would pour. There wasn't any denial about the lonely vanity of this daydream, in fact she walked around with it gladly—like a stolen sweet enclosed in a palm, curled in its pocket, glowing a little.

You can sit wherever you want—says the woman to the girl. Girl is about nine, floppy hair, red knee socks, a school blazer, boyish still. Pale eyes scan the room. *Where would you like to sit?* Her question makes you think about the ways adults forfeit their own desires for their kids'. *What kind of pizza shall we have? What shall we do next?* Choosing as a learning exercise. Being taught how to want.

The woman is explaining to the girl something about Steve Bannon. *Bad man*, she says. *Really bad*. The woman's sentences are simplified, though not dumbed down. The girl considers, nods, and clarifies a few details with short, precise questions. They don't smile at each other, but there is a warmth and ease between them. The woman is possibly the girl's grandmother. The woman asks questions about the girl's school—questions she probably already knows the answers to—because she wants to hear the girl answer them. The girl is playing a game on an old phone, something like snake or brick, deeply absorbed by the little screen, her hair falling in blunt strands over it. There are long pauses before she answers, sometimes no hint she'll reply at all. She's not ashamed to ignore her grandmother like this, isn't performing politeness. And the woman allows her this space; doesn't perform offence or impatience.

Later, having been invited to the curator's girlfriend's apartment, she will happily accept the offer of a beer from the fridge, even though she has several bottles with her in her bag. She packed them to drink during the performance, but was too self-conscious to open one there, in the quiet intensity; an endless looping hum, the sparse day-light, eyes of others swivelling critically towards each disturbant noise. Her bag is noticeably stuffed fat and heavy, propped against the leg of a wicker armchair. She is afraid that the bag will give out a glassy sound, a sound undeniably like bottles, and someone will ask: what's in the bag? The beers in her bag are exactly the same kind as the bottle she has just been offered from the curator's girlfriend's fridge. She's not sure why she didn't mention the beers in her bag before, didn't offer them out as a gift, like a good guest—but she decides that this clumsy explanation will not be part of her introduction to the room. She is in their home, she accepts their hospitality, they like to host, to be generous; this will draw everyone closer. She finds herself laughing easily, warmly, making the others laugh too, slipping into the role of charming newcomer with a fluency that surprises her. Everyone is relaxed, bodies held softly by the furniture, cheeks propped against palms, conversation drifting easily and evenly between them, their heads turning smoothly back and forth.

**What is expected of me,
what I offer,
and what is taken regardless —
are slipping moodily across each other
with a soft but undeniable friction**

She meets a friend for a drink. She describes to him a part of a book she likes. He says he likes the sound of it. She asks him if he has ever read anything by this author. 'Oh probably' he says, 'but I can't be sure. Last summer I decided to read loads of women writers so they all kinda blended into one. I get them mixed up'.

You have a recurring daydream in which there is the image or sensation (hard to distinguish) of a hand, your hand, crashing through a table loaded with crockery: tea-cups, saucers, cutlery, glass, the sound of this ringing through you over and over. You cannot stop yourself doing it—the daydream—your arm crashing through all this stuff on the table—porcelain smashing, pools spreading, flicks of sauce, a fork glittering to the floor, this awful sound, always precisely at the moment you are beginning to speak.

When you sit down, you receive a text from D saying he won't make it. He is just having breakfast, he has reading he wants to do. There is barely any feeling in his words. You think about how much you don't like him; picture him in Café Ritter the previous afternoon, eating his pear so delicately, cleanly, unselfconsciously, the silver knife moving through moist white flesh. He speaks almost only about himself. You want to throw yourself at something. You are ashamed of how quickly you have begun to shape yourself around his attention.

After almost three weeks of nothing, the artist's account is back. Updates arrive slowly at first, then quicken to an almost hourly stream. The content is much the same as before: murky skylines, wine-stained tablecloths, two tanned hands around an iPhone raised to a scuffed U-Bahn window.

You cannot move. Propped up in your narrow bed, the surfaces and textiles of your room feel close and watchful. Your fingertips navigate carefully, moving systematically through the grid, pausing for a long time on each image. Their familiarity is sometimes so total it unnerves you. You are overcome by a shapeless urgency. Your body starts to hurt with cold from being so still. You're not sure whether the stillness comes from within—whether it is something you are *doing*—or if it is an external force that you are submitting to. The distinction becomes unimportant. You hear the train coming towards the house again; its bruise cadence shuttling over a break in the tracks, and wait for it to pass through you.



Bryony Dawson is an artist, writer and curator based in Manchester. Her research is interested in language and gestures of self-representation as well as questions around authenticity and performativity.

Image: Open Table
19 July 2022. Courtesy
Castlefield Gallery.



Cover image: Pat Flynn,
Chair, 2022. Courtesy
Castlefield Gallery

Published by Corridor8, August 2022
Edited by Lara Eggleton & Laura Mansfield
Design by Ashleigh Armitage

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