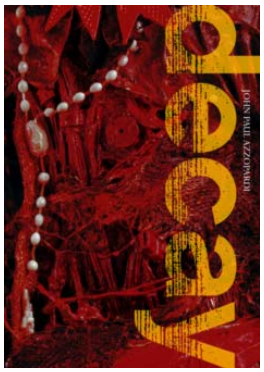

decay



Decay

Supported by the Malta Arts Fund

Artworks by John Paul Azzopardi

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FOREWORD

The *Creative Principle* in man reaches out into the unknown darkness of *decay,* its very own antithetical and contradictory phenomenon. *Decay* is a critical speculation, an examination and a reflection on the contemporary social condition as it manifests so particularly in western culture...but also everywhere else, as the tragically human *all-too-human* situations that prevail, now globally.

This sculpture cycle of John Paul Azzopardi does not mean to merely postulate on issues that are already interwoven with our own daily lives; it also strives to explore dissonances, the (ab)surd(ities)[1] that generate(s) that deep suspicion, that profoundly dark delusion, that leads to the further disintegration and degradation of our socio-philosophical fabric, its root notions and their deepest meanings.

In Richard Seaford's book of 2004, *Money and the Early Greek Mind*[2] we discover how a crucial factor in the Ancient Greeks' pivotal position in global history is the fact that the sixth century *polis* was (with the exception of China) the earliest known society to become pervaded by *money*. Coinage, invented towards the end of the seventh century B.C., spreads rapidly in the ancient Greek city states immediately from the beginning of the sixth. Seaford argues that this important phenomenon of money was a determining factor in the development of the two perhaps greatest contributions that the sixth century Greek *polis* makes to human welfare, viz. *Philosophy* and *Tragedy*. By radically transforming the dynamic of social relations, monetisation contributes two potent ideas: On the one hand that of *the universe as an impersonal system* leading to Pre-Socratic Philosophy, *physics*; on the other the eventful notion of *the individual alienated* even from his own, his kin, the gods and indeed his self, the crude stuff of Tragedy.

As money carves its position, its status in the social fabric, and funded social power in turn becomes projected onto cosmological considerations, Seaford notes how the following description applies to both:

Universal power resides not in a person but in an impersonal, all-underlying, semi-abstract substance.[3]

Pre-monetary forms of social relations that contribute effectively to social cohesion; reciprocity, redistribution, kinship, ritual etc., are rendered unnecessary especially since money allows you in principle to fulfil all your needs, besides the capability it carries in itself to increase and propagate. This promotes the attitude of *predatory isolation* that so quickly leads to disintegration, the decay not merely of the traditional structures but of their foundational matrix of values (*arête*). Seaford further claims that it is this horrifying possibility that in turn becomes embodied in the figure of the tyrant (*turannos*).

Money is so desirable and powerful that some people will do anything for it. Moreover, there is no limit to its accumulation and to the desire to accumulate it...(I)n Aristophanes' Wealth, ... (is) described the homogenising effects of money (everything happens for its sake) and its omnipotence; and a rapid dialogue reveals that whereas one can have enough of sex, or loaves or music, or dessert, or honour, or cakes, or manliness and so on, money is different[4]*...*

Money stands-in for the limitless, and the auto-destructive culture of the unlimited that it promotes is borne in the twenty-first century by the rampant forms of mass consumerism, with its society of afflicted humans, with their dulled sensibilities even as they (we) become homogenised and succumb to the unconditional dissolution and the dismantling of whole edifices (sic. 10/11) of meaning.

The shifting sand dune makes a rich metaphor for the emergent global culture of mass consumerism that mimics life and simulates mechanised characteristics creating a hyper-reality for the contemporary individual to (oftentimes unconsciously) dwell within. Forever-new needs and interests are churned and being continuously created and recycled systematically, they strive to leave the dreamer to remain asleep.

Such perpetual and perpetuated necessity does not merely negate or neutralise (indeed tranquilize) profound universal ideals, excellence and mythical relevance (a psychology to help fuse one's *Being* to the *Other* and indeed the *Cosmos*) but irreverently mass produces galvanised relics that are purchased, worshiped and finally set aside even as garbage, debasing fundamental tradition and its archetypal *meaning* structures.

The city capital with its mitigating and over-inflated aesthetical spheres and luxuries, defines the perpetual comfort zones that do not just unconsciously and subliminally raise an obscure wall of blinding white noise but also dampen the human vision, our philosophy, as critical thinking slips into mere criticism...and as *becoming* violates the very springs of *being* that nourish it.

The dark side of Capitalism has further reduced and transformed the nature of wholesome cultures, communities and families, turning them into singular units, competitive, narcissistic individuals. Despite being self-absorbed and creating individuality, it is still hermeneutically funded and carefully tended within the bounds of mass production. The emergence of the individual is therefore counterpoised by the necessity of her finding herself (a simulated satisfaction) and realizing her highly charged consumerist identity.

This individualist simulacra generated by *so called* advanced societies appears to liberate the individual creating a seeming golden age of freedom...but although this freedom can be exercised and appears to belong to one's own self and even (often) allowed a voice to speak with in the capitalist democratic milieu, the *consumer-cum-human being's* real and deepest liberties are nonetheless conditionally controlled, often violated. Where does freedom really manifest? What is it? and what are the quests that call for an overhaul...a neo-renaissance?

It will be an examination, an investigation into the values built into some ancient culture, like possibly the Sanskrit one that calls from beyond and yet is not exclusive of the familiar Euro-Hellenic (sic.) one, that will forge the opportunity that might allow us to form a clear picture of the oddity, the historical contingency of the blinding limiting *unlimited(ness)* in our economy, social mores and theory and practice of life. Although one needs approach ancient Sanskrit culture cautiously, it is certainly one of a number of precious resources (understanding, perceiving, but also a way of being) that can help keep at bay, perhaps even dispel the auto-destructive effects of embracing the *seemingly* unlimited rather than the *really* limitless...

[1] Latin *ab,* from; *surdus,* deaf (to reason), inaudible, harsh, also dim.

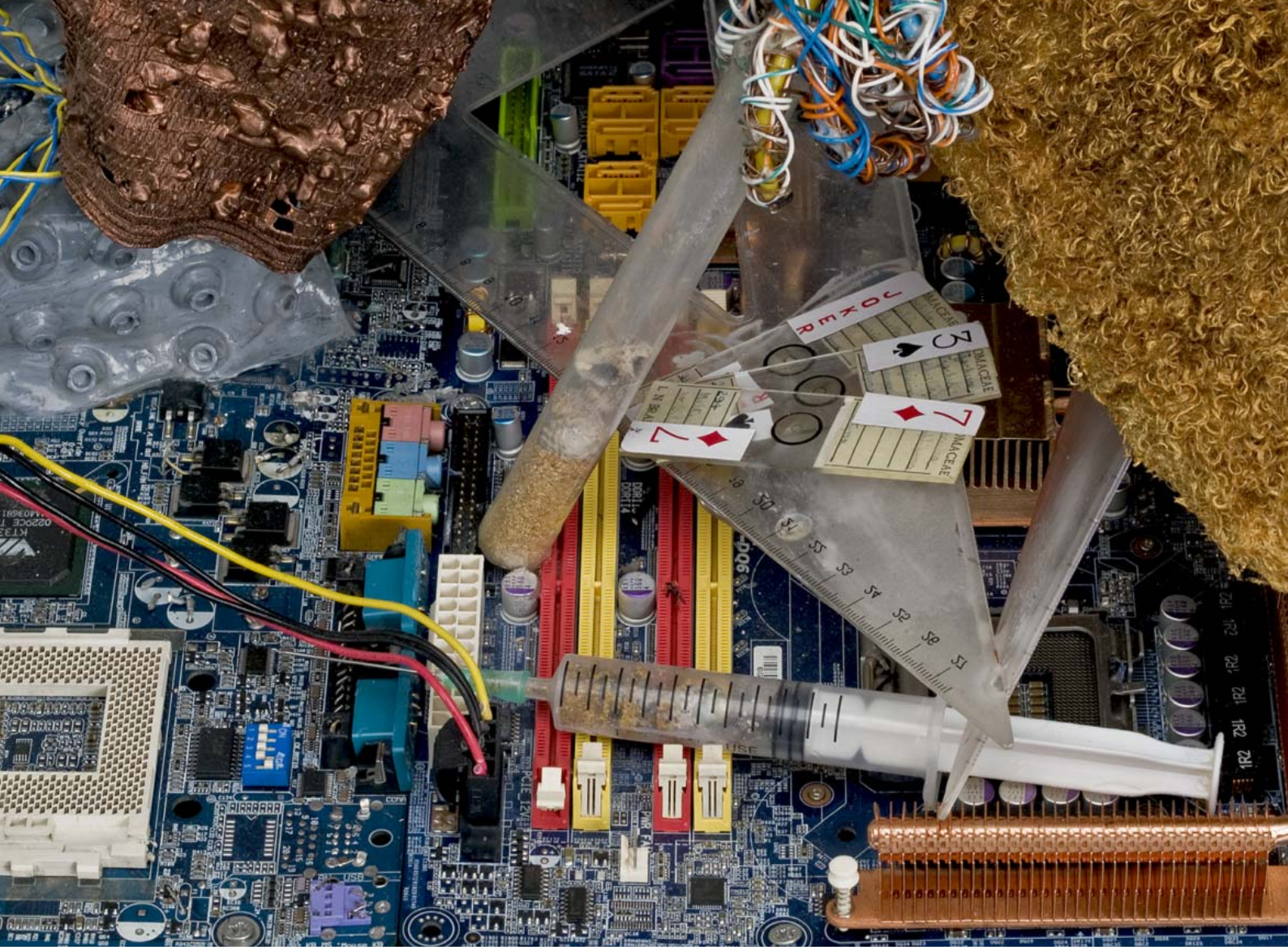
[2] Seaford R., *Money and the Early Greek Mind*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2004

[3] Seaford R., *Ancient Greece and Global Warming* in *Classics Association Presidential Address*, C.A., UK., 2009

[4] *ibid., p.6*

JOHN PAUL AZZOPARDI

decay

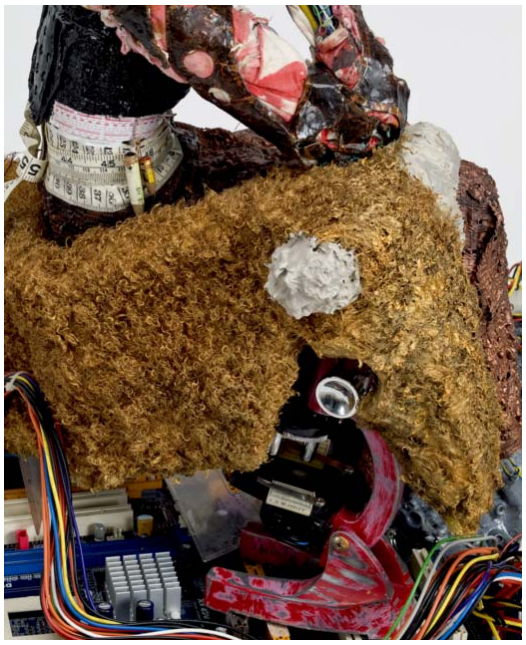


Bored Calculator

The Pre-Socratics, around 600 BC in the Mediterranean basin are well known for their searching questions, a curiosity that delves into the nature of existence. They called themselves Physicists, and their style of doing philosophy was more akin to Poetry. Their poetic idiom addresses the reader both intellectually as well as emotionally arousing one's whole self to a refined level of understanding the creation. Concepts such as that of an Atom (from the Greek *atomein: that which cannot be broken up any further*) were stunningly already being presented.

This idiom was laid aside and information replaced the formative drive behind these Cosmologists' endeavours once Aristotle's logical approach got the upper hand. Information feeds whereas formation allows for growth and development. Mythology and these ancient texts were only revisited during the Renaissance period when it was realized that *understanding* is a function of the unity of both intellect and emotion. However this wholesome attitude was short lived only to be replaced once more by the merely intellectual stance of the Enlightenment with the birth of technology, and the anguished disenchantment that came with it.

The *Bored Calculator* asks whether contemporary technology enhances the phenomenon of boredom born from our dependence on quick-fix ways for achieving and doing things. Does technology with its scientific perspective cause our disenchanted experience of the world born from mere calculative information as different from *formative understanding*?



Bored Calculator

2010

mixed media

64 x 48 x 48 cm

Roman Pig (Back to Front)

There were many reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire but the predominant factor seems to have been its drunken abuse of power and corruption by its political class that governed during the last centuries of its declining supremacy. This empire lasted for centuries yet despite its historical advancements in civilization, education and technology, it still crumbled. Its social hierarchy is similar to ours with a few variations. The Emperor had ultimate power and control, and he ruled and decided accordingly. The members of the Senate, the Praetorian Guard (bodyguards of the emperor, policing the state and other sectors outside Rome, serving also as intelligence units and interrogators) and the Upper Class aristocrats who were ultimately wealthy, owned land and also served as patrons.

"*Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*"

"*Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it*"

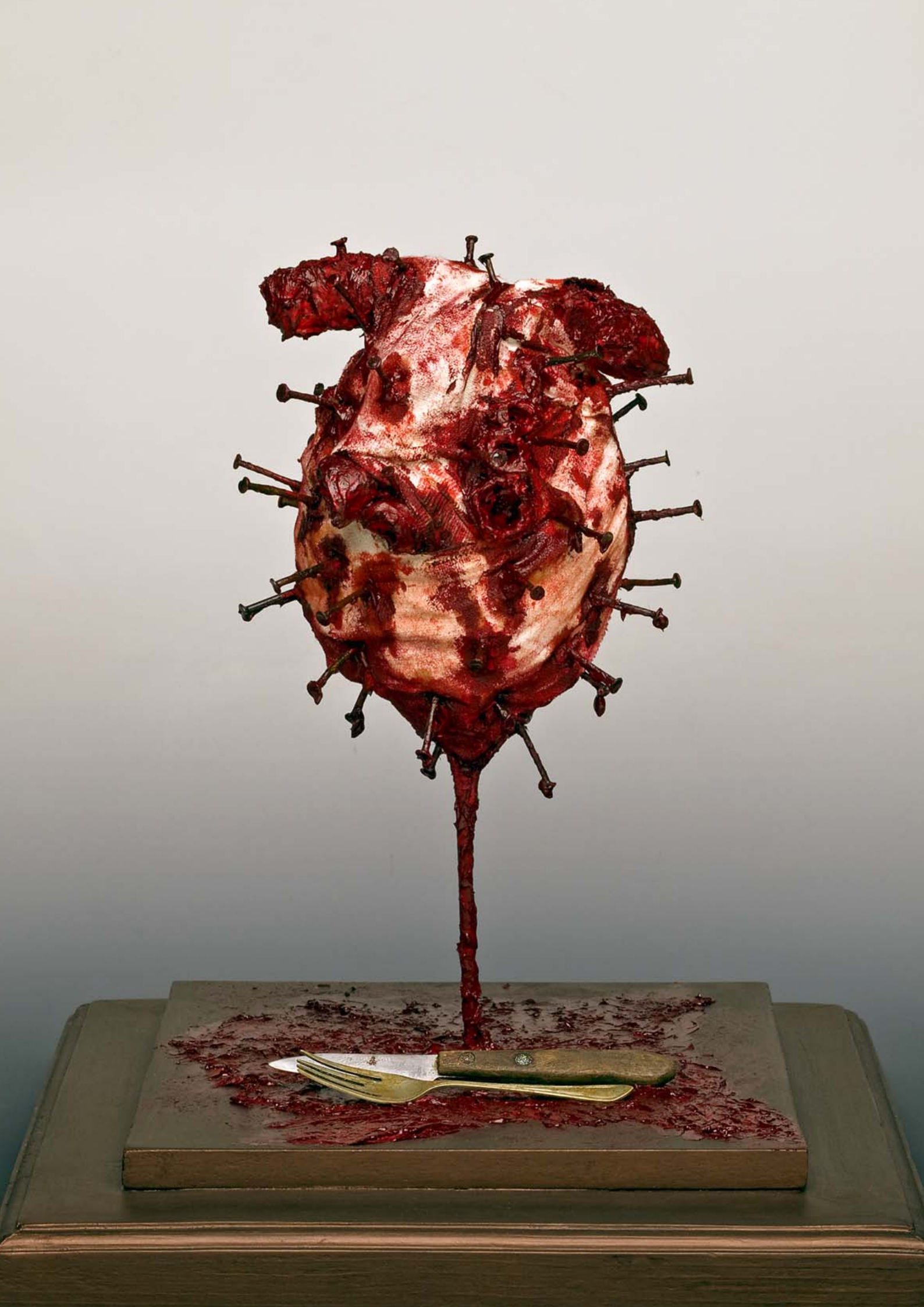
Many of the elite members therefore abused their social position, morality broke down, and rules were bent according to personal desire and expediency. Excessive taxation as ordered by the government harassed the populace. The elite also abused taxation and treaties between them and the lower classes for their own personal interests, even sometimes resorting to screened, hidden alliances; but also the aristocracy's evasion to governmental tax agreements became abusive finally challenging even the status quo. This also influenced in turn the continuous threat of Governmental bankruptcy. The sharp division between lower and higher class created continuous tension, especially with the unemployed resulting obviously in terrible riots, bloodshed and cruelty.

The practice of violence even for the sake of amusement increased rampantly across the whole expanse of the empire: man versus man, or man versus beast. Gladiator tournaments and chariot races were especially popular; and voyeurism and gambling not only excited the elites, but also became an important source of income for the Government.

Sexual degradation such as paedophilia, castration, adultery, bestiality, forced prostitution and sadomasochism increased excessively among the ruling classes.

The human ethic sank in abuse, alcohol, bloodshed and cruelty.

The empire's civil practice and ideology disintegrated and it fell.



Roman Pig (Back to Front)
2009
mixed media
44 x 37 x 37 cm

Severing the Quadruple (W)hole

"The child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always drunk. Nothing more resembles what we call inspiration than the delight with which a small child absorbs form and colour. I am prepared to go even further and assert that inspiration has something in common with a convulsion, and that every sublime thought is accompanied by a more or less violent nervous shock which has its repercussion in the very core of the brain. The man of genius has sound nerves, while those of a child are weak. With the one, Reason has taken up a considerable position; with the other, Sensibility is almost the whole being. But genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will –a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood's capacities and a power of analysis which enables it to order the mass of raw material which it has involuntarily accumulated."

Baudelaire, Charles: *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays.* 1964

Severing the Quadruple (W)hole

2009

mixed media

32 x 40 x 40 cm

Dream Weapon

Career (n.) 1530s, "a running, course" (especially of the sun, etc., across the sky), from M.Fr. carriere "road, racecourse" (16c.), from O.Prov. carriera, from V.L. *(via) cararia "carriage (road), track for wheeled vehicles," from L. carrus "chariot" (see car). Sense of "course of a working life" first attested 1803. The verb is first attested 1590s, from the notion of a horse "passing a career" on the jousting field, etc. (www.etymonline.com).

Contemporary culture rates highly the phenomenon of careerism and although this draws profound positive qualities; such as the desire for continuous study and the need to expand one's knowledge and to enhance and empower the potent individuality of man as professional being; there also lurks the dark aspect inherent in our basic animal genealogy; survival, selfishness, competition and superiority. Within our nature as self-conscious beings we rationally acknowledge these basic instincts. In our present day and age career advancement and continuous education are encouraged, and indeed may lead to a healthier disciplined professionalism. Many consciously or unconsciously are culturally encouraged to compete for superiority. This is the level of behaviour that makes manifest the prostitute archetype; one's willingness to be used/abused and one's stance, promoting itself as the healthiest product. One may become sadistic, pushing others intentionally (consciously or unconsciously) as also masochistic, transgressing ones' health. The interplay of prostitution, sadomasochism, and supremacy leads many to experience a form of psychosis, delusion. As man chases the golden key of success and achieves; reaches goals, acquires assets, promotion and reward, he tends to distance himself further from his intrinsic basic humanity.

The Ancient Greek sages reacted with trepidation as they realized how the use of money, as opposed to the previous system of bartering, empowered the human being with a perceived ability to project their dearest ideal of infinity into the mere physical/objective form (number), thus rendering it seemingly accountable. With the emergence of money the fulfilment of Infinity paradoxically seems to suddenly gain the possibility to be acquired, an object of purchase. On the other hand the true notion of Infinity was too dear to these truly special individuals (the sages) who would embrace it as their pregnant spiritual source for reason, creativity and silent meditative nothingness, a wealthy and significant dark space which once captured in the soul's reflection creates light and indeed logos, reasoning.

It may happen that to live a purely competitive, careerist lifestyle the notion of the infinite unfortunately transforms into an inflated sort of 'condensed' mirage. A person's advancement controlled by the interests of multinational, worldwide, co-operative individuals.

Dream Weapon

2010

mixed media

77 x 47 x 47 cm

Dead Clock

The meaning of The Sacred Heart of Jesus: In this Icon Jesus points towards his Heart, his hands a display of the nail wounds; the nails that fix his human (all too human) Nature to the Cross. An image that transcends the Cross; the right hand index crucially pointing to his centre; and sitting astride of t/his heart, cruel nature's thorns. Above and beyond this nature soars the flame of transformation; a transcendence. The Icon portrays the Buddha's approach to Nirvana, a seeming presence of Heaven, the golden immediate silent Nothingness within.

In some Icons, His sympathetic expression becomes confused, even mournful, creating room for different readings and interpretations, such as the moral notion of melancholic sacrifice. It is commonly understood that this feat means to conduct an action that is contrary to one's will. The etymology of the term *sacrifice* stems from the 12th century Latin term *sacra*, sacred rites and the root of *facere* "to do, to perform".

A misinterpretation of sacrifice therefore can create anxiety; overwhelming the individual from within, very deeply and profoundly. When one performs *sacrifice* (the transformation of the profane into the sacred), anxiety can overwhelm one without even knowing where it is coming from. Heidegger (in *Being and Time*) believes that anxiety comes into being because we are temporal, striving to fulfil our authentic nature.

Since temporality is the key for understanding the authentic existence of Dasein (the self: Being-in-the-world) Heidegger states that it is the only "anticipatory resoluteness" which can be grounded as a foundation for understanding Dasein (Heidegger, M: 1926, pg. 351). Thus for him re-solution is death, the unavoidable end of Dasein. This concept also implies the unavoidable sense of guilt due to the fact that since Dasein tries to live her life authentically, guilt becomes manifest.

Death is not shared, it is totally and completely one's own. The awareness of one's mortality contributes to a pure (limitless) resolve vis-à-vis one's very existence. My death, my mortality is specifically mine, and cannot be shared. Therefore, death itself is crucial, and commands that Dasein must live life to its utmost.

Dasein must resolve to make choices for one's life while concurrently keeping in view a clear recognition of limitations. It is then that Dasein can take authentic and clear-sighted stances and actions. *Anticipatory resoluteness* therefore implies a certain kind of care that Dasein chooses in order that it may conduct life authentically.

"Dasein itself…is time"

Dead Clock

2009

mixed media

75 x 37 x 37cm

We have found Happiness

Prologue 5

When Zarathustra had spoken these words, he again looked at the people, and was silent. "There they stand," said he to his heart; "there they laugh: they understand me not; I am not the mouth for these ears.

Must one first batter their ears that they may learn to hear with their eyes? Must one clatter like kettledrums and penitential preachers? Or do they only believe the stammerer?

They have something whereof they are proud. What do they call it, that which maketh them proud? Culture, they call it; it distinguisheth them from the goatherds.

They dislike, therefore, to hear of 'contempt' of themselves. So I will appeal to their pride.

I will speak unto them of the most contemptible thing: that, however, is the last man!"

And thus spake Zarathustra unto the people:

It is time for man to fix his goal. It is time for man to plant the germ of his highest hope.

Still is his soil rich enough for it. But that soil will one day be poor and exhausted, and no lofty tree will any longer be able to grow thereon.

Alas! there cometh the time when man will no longer launch the arrow of his longing beyond man—and the string of his bow will have unlearned to whizz!

I tell you: one must still have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star. I tell you: ye have still chaos in you.

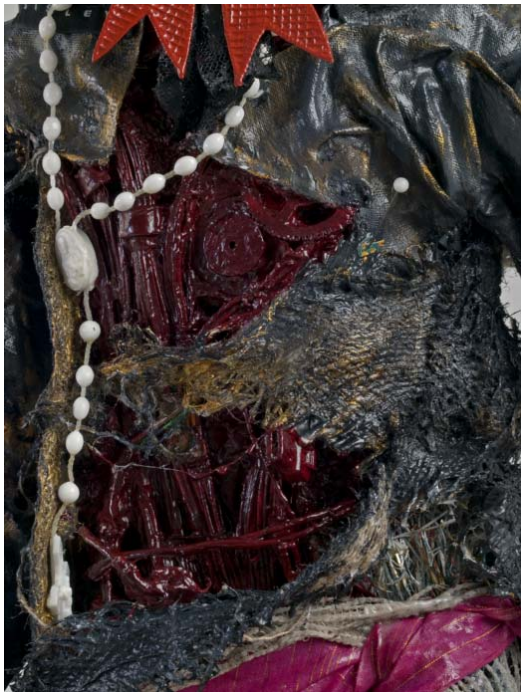
Alas! There cometh the time when man will no longer give birth to any star. Alas! There cometh the time of the most despicable man, who can no longer despise himself.

Lo! I show you the last man.

"What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?"—so asketh the last man and blinketh.

The earth hath then become small, and on it there hoppeth the last man who maketh everything small. His species is ineradicable like that of the ground-flea; the last man liveth longest.

"We have discovered happiness"—say the last men, and blink thereby.

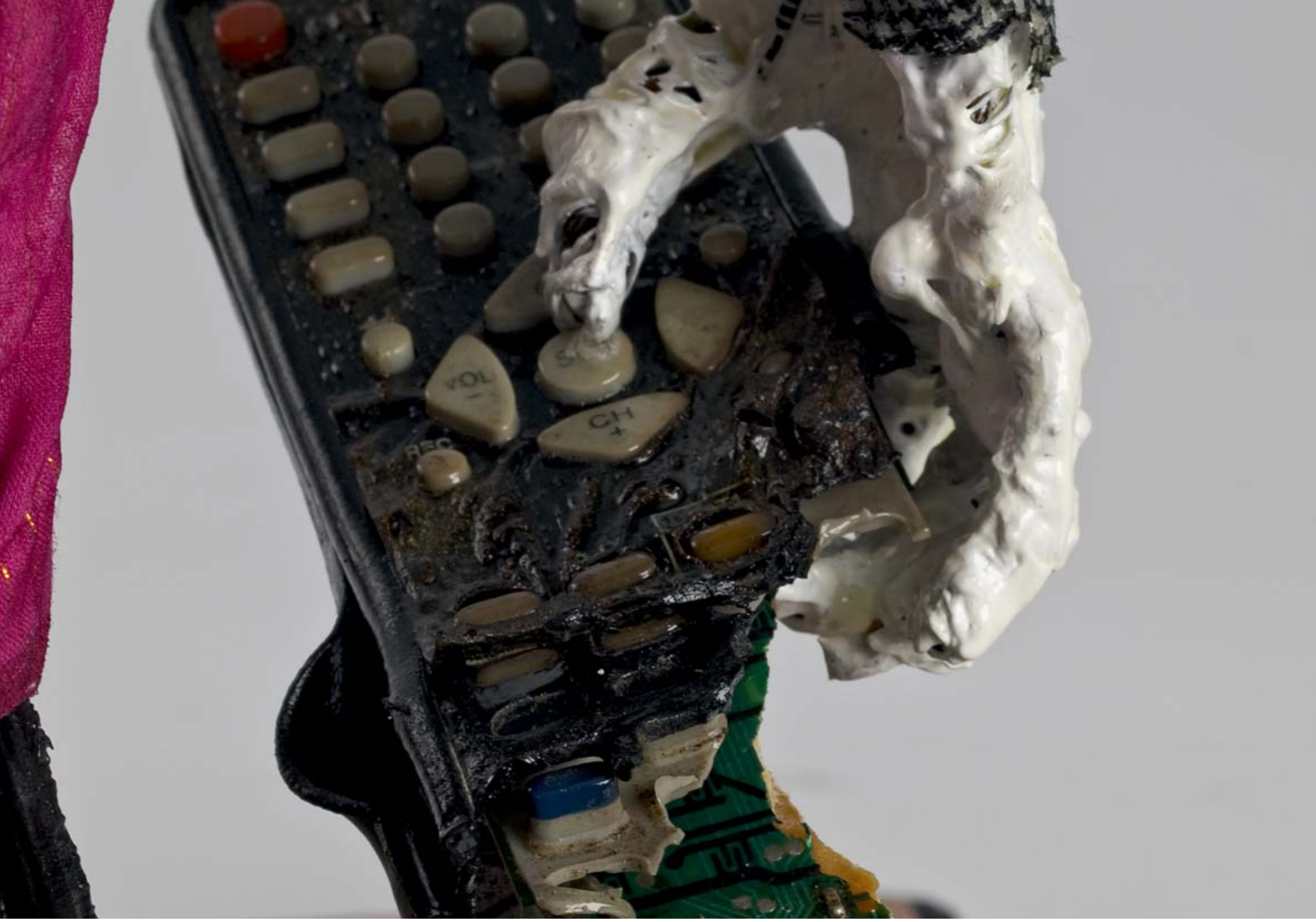


We Have Found Happiness

2010

mixed media

74 x 47 x 47cm



They have left the regions where it is hard to live; for they need warmth. One still loveth one's neighbour and rubbeth against him; for one needeth warmth.

Turning ill and being distrustful, they consider sinful: they walk warily. He is a fool who still stumbleth over stones or men!

A little poison now and then: that maketh pleasant dreams. And much poison at last for a pleasant death.

One still worketh, for work is a pastime. But one is careful lest the pastime should hurt one.

One no longer becometh poor or rich; both are too burdensome. Who still wanteth to rule? Who still wanteth to obey? Both are too burdensome.

No shepherd, and one herd! Everyone wanteth the same; everyone is equal: he who hath other sentiments goeth voluntarily into the madhouse.

"Formerly all the world was insane,"—say the subtlest of them, and blink thereby.

They are clever and know all that hath happened: so there is no end to their raillery. People still fall out, but are soon reconciled—otherwise it spoileth their stomachs.

They have their little pleasures for the day, and their little pleasures for the night, but they have a regard for health.

"We have discovered happiness,"—say the last men, and blink thereby.—

And here ended the first discourse of Zarathustra, which is also called 'The Prologue', for at this point the shouting and mirth of the multitude interrupted him. "Give us this last man, O Zarathustra,"—they called out—"make us into these last men! Then will we make thee a present of the Superman!" And all the people exulted and smacked their lips. Zarathustra, however, turned sad, and said to his heart:

"They understand me not: I am not the mouth for these ears.

Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. 1885

(~~Dawkin's Fundamentalism~~) Trickster

Richard Dawkins, also referred as Darwin's Rottweiler is on a mission to root out religion and its belief in god. He describes himself as a "fairly militant atheist". *(Bass, Thomas A. (1994). Reinventing the future: Conversations with the World's Leading Scientists. Addison Wesley. p. 118.*

Archetype
1 a typical example of a certain persona or thing: a prototype: an instrument which was the archetype of the early flute
2 In Psychoanalysis (in Jungian theory) a primitive mental image inherited from the earliest human ancestors, and supposed to be present in the collective unconscious.
3 a recurrent symbol or motif in literature, art, or mythology: mythological archetypes of good and evil
www.oxforddictionaries.com

meme
introduced by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in "*The Selfish Gene*" (1976), coined by him from Gk. source, e.g. mimeisthai "to imitate," *www.dictionary.com*

Trickster
a person who cheats or deceives people.
www.oxforddictionaries.com

1.a deceiver; cheat; fraud.
2.a person who plays tricks.
3.a supernatural figure appearing in various guises and typically engaging in mischievous activities,
www.dictionary.com

Deconstruction
a method of critical analysis of philosophical and literary language which emphasizes the internal workings of language and conceptual systems, the relational quality of meaning, and the assumptions implicit in forms of expression.
www.oxforddictionaries.com

Fundamentalism
• a form of a religion, especially Islam or Protestant Christianity, that upholds belief in the strict, literal interpretation of scripture.
• strict adherence to the basic principles of any subject or discipline:.
www.oxforddictionaries.com

white noise
noise containing many frequencies with equal intensities.
www.oxforddictionaries.com

(~~Dawkin's Fundamentalism~~) Trickster

2009

mixed media

70 x 40 x 25 cm