

Vivienne Cutbush

These words take seed from Lydia Davis' The Fish

She's in the kitchen with the fish before her, its scales are scattered on wax paper, like confetti faded from sun. How quick the tide turns she thinks. How this fish – now quite dead and still on her bench – tipped the balance and turned the scales.

To scale it
remove it
cut it away
to hack at it
to break it down
gut it and core it
drop it
let it go
until it becomes
shards and fragments
to dis-member
to shed it
until it is shed
until it is shell
collapse
hollow
until
hole

Like flakes of salt, the scales remind her of the home she grew to be in. A place crusted with rust and wind and named after a shell, insignificant and pink. Kurranulla. In the shed out the back of the house hung a print of Bruegel's Icarus. Her father told her the story of the boy who flew too close to the sun. Wax melted. Wings fell away. The boy's last breath was salt water. She slips the tip of the knife into the fish. A body of matter. Slices along the belly towards the gills. But not a body that mattered to the Gods.

She has noticed over the years, when this story is told, some parts of it fall away. Like the boy into the sea. Like how his father Daedalus was a craftsman and should have known what sentence he glued together for his son. Like how he told his son not to fly too close to water. An important distinction she thinks, from the sun that fell away. To fell. Her mother always told her never to turn her back on the sea. Fell she remembers, another skin or hide. Bodies matter. Nonetheless, she thinks, there are more ways than one to tell a story and for this fish the story was upside down, feathers soak.

Now when she thinks of this dusty print in the shed all she sees is the puffy sleeve of the ploughman. Bright coral red, and billowing. She tries to recall a sentence from Auden about it not being an important fail –

She bought the fish this morning at the market. It is for her but now she does not want it. After all, to scale and gut a fish is a craft. And crafts take years of discipline, correction and criticism. And, she is alone. She has spent the better part of a morning with this fish and now it seems the process is inseparable from the form. In other words, scales and guts are entangled with skin and flesh. She is not on top of anything. Yet, it is easy to set intentions. It is easy to write things on a list and tick them off. A grocery list. A bucket list. Every day she writes a list before she begins. Complete the cut at the base of the jaw. She ranks numerically the tasks from the most important to the least. Don't plunge knife in too deep. Once completed, she crosses out the task. Remove guts. This always feels good, crossing things out. The fish's eye looks back at her, beat. What is a lesser failure?

Before the fish in the kitchen, early morning, the woman swims in the river. It is king tide, as the fisherman call it – predictable and ancient, washed up when the moon is full and new. Afterwards, all sorts of things are left behind. In the water, she thinks of how everything turns away. The ploughman, the ship. Still now. Everything turns away. Tides, sleeves, the whites of eyes.

This is what she knows of matter. There are some elementary particles that exist in a constant flux, vibrating and fluctuating between being and non-being, even in nothingness these cosmic histories swarm. There is possibility within every unsettled matter. These particles come together to form the crack in your bowl, dusty webs, billowing sleeves, dog barks, heaving hearts, the death of stars, wax on faulty wings, your father's hands, mountains, sounds of the sea inside spiralling shells, your gums, gummy fish, bubble gum, scones and cream, the autumn sky, tar on the road, rock beneath tar, granite, wild flowers, the withered body of your father's mother, eyes the colour of grief, foam and sea cliffs.

Bodies, water, clay and silt. She cannot eat this fish. What she did was a brutal thing. Is it fate or ourselves who become disappointed with the choices we make. Bodies matter. The bodies of our ancestors matter. Tangled up in the dismembering and re-membling, the blunt side of the knife connects her to the fish as she was not bound before. Their bodies rub up against one another in a sort of dance. Lurch, pivot, twist and flounder. She breaks its skin and it hers too.

This was not the important failure she willed it be
fish
now shed of scales
luminous sheath
now constellation of salty platelets across kitchen sink
fish
now minor gesture fried in butter and salt and tasting of sea.



Sinsa Mansell

Instinct: Australian Ceramic Triennale 2019

This project is a live performance work.
A body captured by particles and minerals.

photo by Angus Donald



Georgie Vozar + Julia Drouhin

kýklōsis

2019

photo by Remi Chauvin.



Jay Song

shed (verb) (GET RID OF), 2019

(detail)

Lumina porcelain, antique door, dual-channel video,
cabinet, linear actuator.

image courtesy of the artist.



Luke Aleksandrow

The Break Collection: Australian Ceramic Triennale 2019

Documentation of The Break Collection: Volume One (2017)

image courtesy of the artist.

c o n s t e l l a t i o n s

u n d e r g r o u n d

CONSTANCE acknowledges and respects the palawa people as the traditional and ongoing owners and custodians of lutruwita.

We pay our respects to elders past, present and future, and acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.



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