



Shape Me Into Your Idea Of Home



I FEEL LIKE I
HAVE RETURNED
AFTER YEARS OF
TRAVELING AND
YOUR MOUTH IS MY

RED FRONTDOOR
WELCOMING
ME HOME

The work in this exhibition, *Shape Me Into Your Idea Of Home*, reflects in many ways on my intimate relationships with both humans and animals over the past years*. It is important to note that the work carries a message to the person or animal involved. Most events that led to the artistic responses also involved a termination of all forms of communication with the involved party. In this catalogue I will briefly explain the events leading up to each work, and how it shaped my artistic responses and ideas around home, home-sickness and home-coming.

My work can be seen as a visual exploration of the vestiges of the relationships, and an inquiry into how I have been shaped, and how my perceptions have been altered by the relationships and events. I have often felt that experiencing an intimate relationship is similar to establishing a home space, somewhere to belong.

When the relationship is ended, that space is lost and responses and emotions regarding this loss can be placed into two categories: coming home to oneself (re-establishing a home space within one's own perimeters as an emotional and physical being), and a home-sickness (longing for the comfort felt while being intimate with the party involved, which extends beyond the perimeters of one's emotional and physical being).

My photographic process echoes the ephemeral nature of my intimate relationships. I use a camera phone with a 2 megapixel camera and a flash to capture most of my video and photographic raw material. I am intrigued by the "ready at hand" characteristic of the camera phone, and am pleased with the way that I can have use it creatively before the moment that I intend on capturing passes. I also use a standard 35mm film camera, whereby I develop the film, scan the negatives in and convert them to positives in Photoshop. Slight pixilation becomes visible in these works, as digital meets manual. While editing video, I used a technique which I call *removing***, and I removed the image up to ten times from the original. The removal technique is a visual metaphor of how I feel at the time, a faint digital memory, removed from the rest of the world. Depending on the intensity of this isolation, the removing increases.

*For the sake of this exhibition I will define *Intimate relationships* as a close interpersonal relationship that has characteristics of interdependence, need fulfilling, repeated interaction and emotional attachment and investment.

**Removing: The original digital video is captured on PC and written to DVD. The video piece is then played on DVD player and TV and filmed again. Filming a Television screen creates a blue/green distortion on the video piece. For this specific piece I repeated the method of removing 10 times. In other words, next the distorted image would be written to DVD and recorded with Digital video camera off the Television to further "remove" the image from the viewer and enhance the distortion of the image.

Show me Yours is a collective project that I have been working on since 2005. Initially the work focused on photographing intimate spaces/ things of unknown neighbours in a neighbourhood I had moved to in 2005. I acquainted myself with the street I moved to by introducing myself to my new neighbours and requesting to use their bathroom. I then took a photograph of their bathroom hand basins with a Polaroid camera. The collection and interest in bathrooms that are not my own continued until 2010 when I started a group on facebook and requested that all members of the group send me a photograph of their own hand basin. The work was inspired by my incurable curiosity as to the way in which people, mostly strangers, keep their bathroom. This fascination has its origins from childhood where my mother believed that you could judge a persons' character from the condition of their bathrooms, specifically their hand basins. The character judgement evolved more into a sense of intrigue and curiosity as I grew older. I would take note of every hand basin I came across as I entered friends and acquaintances' (sometimes strangers too) houses. I felt as though it gave insight to minor preferences (soap, toothpaste, paraphernalia, and hygiene) often overlooked which can give an opening to decoding aspects of the identity of the owner or frequent user of the hand basin.



Show Me Yours, 2005/ 2009/ 2010
Photographic series

All this fucking trouble (just to get a response from you.) was filmed inside an empty and abandoned warehouse where people have occupied the spaces/ rooms. The warehouse became their home.

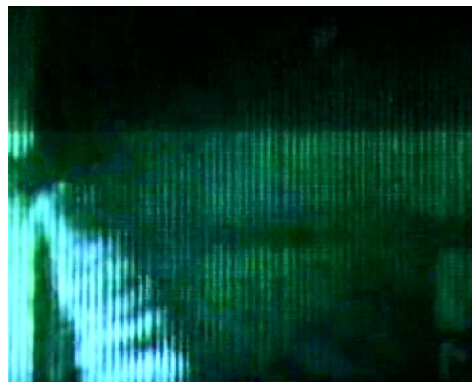
There was a distinct awkwardness about the space; a warehouse designed without considering human habituation, now inhabited by people calling it home. The sheer industrial undertone echoing through everything from the dusty windows with x's marked in masking tape, to the raw cement floors and the unfinished walls. Everything smelled like construction site, and it was impersonal and overexposed. The inhabitants of the B2 building decided to host an art exhibition/ happening in August 2006 called *B2 Collective*, after which the building would be demolished and an apartment building erected. I was invited to participate in the exhibition, and this video piece was created for the event.

It was filmed in one of the rooms, and the footage is me dancing (to Dolly Parton and Kenny Rodgers' 1983 hit country and pop single, *Islands in the stream.*) While editing the video, I used a technique which I call *removing*, and I removed the image 10 times. The removal technique is a visual metaphor of how I felt at the time, a faint digital memory, removed from the rest of the world. Experiences in my life around the time of the exhibition made it clear that most of my frustration was a result of unsatisfying responses from certain people in my life. I was tired of not getting a response, and I fabricated a lie in order to see what responses I would receive .

A week before the exhibition I told everyone that I was moving to another country, the details are not important anymore, but the point that I was trying to prove was that people only tend to want to resolve unresolved issues either when you are leaving, or dying. I thought that telling everyone I knew that I was dying would just be inappropriate, so I opted for leaving. Relocating to UK, permanently I even had a surprise "going away" party the night before I was supposed to board the airplane, courtesy of my unsuspecting friends. I went to the Airport and waited for three hours at the hypothetical time that I was supposed to board the airplane, but no-one showed. I had received my response, and even though it was not the response I was hoping for, it was a response.

After the opening night of the exhibition, the video piece stood as explanation for the lie that I had fabricated. The work is also a response to disparaging treatment received from a person with whom I had established an intimate relationship. The sound is an edited version of the 2002 Johnny Cash cover of *Hurt* (Trent Reznor, 1994 from the album *Downwards spiral*, Nothing Records Interscope.) where certain phrases are repeated.

Everyone I know goes away in the end.



All this fucking trouble just to get a response from you, 2006
Digital video and sound

THIS HOUSE IS NOT OUR HOME ANYMORE, ITS JUST AN EMPTY BUILDING.

(GODDAMN YOU, GODDAMN YOU, I CURSE THE FUCKING DAY YOU WERE BORN. I CURSE IT.)

(Lines from the film ***Road to Perdition***, Directed by Sam Mendes, Produced by Sam Mendes, Dean Zanuck and Richard D. Zanuck, distributed by DreamWorks/ 20th Century Fox 2002).

The video piece *The Curse*, 2006 is filmed from inside my home, looking out through the glass door at the traffic moving in the street below. It speaks of alienation and loneliness within the home. Home as a prison that one becomes trapped in, looking outwards yearning to be part of the traffic because at least then you won't feel so alone.



The Curse, 2006
Digital Video and sound

CAPE TIMES WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2010

Digital dumping is the way to go

LONDON: Digital dumping is on the rise, according to a survey, with growing numbers of people preferring to use e-mail and social networking websites to break up with their partners.

Over one third of 2 000 people polled (34 percent) said they had ended a relationship by email, 13 percent had changed their status on Facebook without telling their partners and 6 percent had released the news unilaterally on Twitter.

By contrast, only 2 percent had

broken up via a cellphone text.

The rest had split up the old-fashioned way by face-to-face conversation (38 percent) and by telephone (8 percent).

“Digital Dumping will soon take over when it comes to ending a relationship,” said Sean Wood, the marketing manager for DateTheUk.

The survey was carried out for the dating service.

“It is often easier, quicker and avoids any misunderstandings,” Wood added. – Reuters

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2010



Gilad Hockman, 2006
Digital video and sound

Together (TO GET HER), 2006 was created in response to a domestic violence situation. The video consist of two images superimposed upon one another. The one video was taken by me, and the other video by the person I was intimately involved with at the time of the incident and who was responsible for the assault (from here on referred to as the offender). The two videos serve as a representation of me before and after the assault, and the sound as a means of transgression between the two.

The first image is a depiction of me dancing in ballet Pointe shoes, it is filmed by the offender. The Pointe shoe is a reference to pain and endurance, but also to beauty and femininity. In ballet they have a term called *breaking in*, where a new Pointe shoe is beaten, burned and deformed in order to fit the dancer's feet and increase comfort and minimize pain. The Pointe shoe also makes reference to the sexual fetish shoe type called the "ballet boot", or Viennese fetish boot, which in turn speaks of bondage and submission. All these references serve as metaphor to the nature of the relationship between me and the offender.

The second video shows how I remove a broken key from the security gate at my front door. I had all the locks to my front door and security gates changed after the assault. The broken key is an indication of the offender's attempt to force his way into my house.

The sound is a recording of the offender's voice and that of my own singing a lullaby. The recordings were made on the same day, but 12 hours apart.



Together (TO GET HER), 2006
Digital video and sound

For most of my childhood I spent the windy seasons inside, hiding behind the windows. I would stare out the window at the wind moving in the trees for hours, and even though I was home I felt homesick.

My mother use to call this ^{inexplicable} nostalgia 'Heimwee'. Heimwee, translated into English means 'a longing' for something, a 'Homesickness', or 'nostalgia'. She typically characterised the symptoms of Heimwee as staring out the window (particularly on windy days) and longing for something, but not being sure what exactly it is that you are longing for.

Growing up I would get Heimwee often, and it was during these times that my mother kept me close to her. Perhaps she was scared that my reactions to this feeling would be similar to hers: The only cure for Heimwee is to run away; or perhaps she used me as a means to console her own Heimwee. Nonetheless, we never found what we were longing for, and as the anxiousness grew she would play her favourite music (usually some form of country) and encourage me to draw until the feeling had passed. This method of distraction lead me to associate my creativity with my Heimwee, my nostalgia. I do not like this feeling but as the seasons change, Heimwee comes with the wind in the trees.



Heimwee comes with the wind, 2006
Digital video and sound

That year, you weren't the only one that left me.

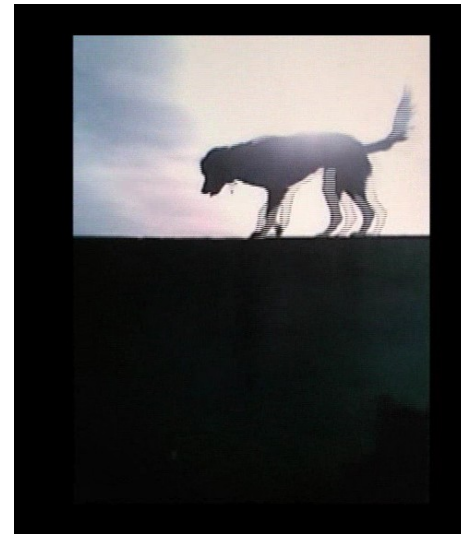
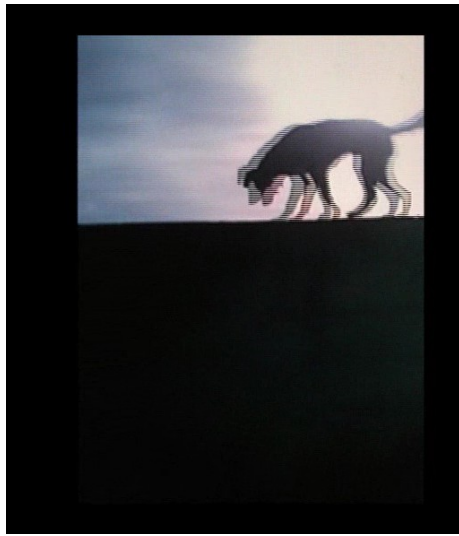


Even the birds (are leaving), 2006
Digital video and sound

The digital video *The black dog (that bit me) 2009* is an extension of the work *Hair of the dog (that bit me) 2009*. The video shows my dog, Keila, walking on the wall that enclosed the premises of my previous home. Keila would sit on the wall and wait for people to walk past just to jump off and chase them (aggressively) down the road with the intention of biting them. The only way I could coax Keila off the wall was by offering her a bowl of milk. The sound is a recording of her lapping up the milk.

The work speaks of boundaries and enclosures, and my dog's ability to protect *inside* from *outside*, *private* from *public*, perpetuating those boundaries. The work *The Black Dog (That Bit Me) 2009* also makes reference to the expression *Black Dog*, which is used to signify a melancholy, or depression. The fact that Keila is hovering on the perimeters of inside and outside suggests that she might leave, which, given my intense emotional attachment to her, evokes a fierce separation anxiety. A tension is created because the clip only shows the dog on the wall, and any further action is omitted, which leaves the viewer wondering whether she chose to leave or stay.

In both works there is a suggestion that being bitten by a beast (dog) makes one a slave to it, casts a spell on one. It is an indication of the belief that if one is bitten by a werewolf, one becomes a werewolf oneself. Apart from the anxiety I feel towards the imagined departure of Keila, I am also reminded that she is temporary, and she will probably die before I do. This leaves me with the knowledge that I will have to mourn her death, and the video serves a means to capture her in a timeless depiction where death is non-existent.



Black Dog, 2009
Digital video and sound

I am aware of the fact that I do not own you. It is your choice to stay with me.



Hark the dogs do bark, 2010
Digital video and sound

Travelogue, 2010 is a video/ performance depicting the metaphorical approach that I have towards establishing relationships. The phases move from dressing and undressing to running away, to settling and being comfortable. All the videos are filmed from the other party's (involved in the relationship) point of view. The title *Travelogue* is referential to the journey of (travelling through) relationships and the notes of the traveller on the experience. We are temporary arrangements, and the video emphasises the ephemeral nature of intimacy.

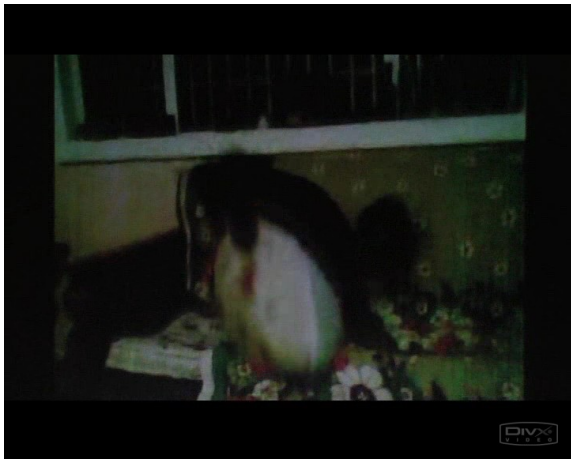


Travelogue, 2010
Digital video and sound

If you are not with me tomorrow, that will be the worst. (Lyrics from the song *Nomadic Revery* by Bonnie prince Billy, off the album *I see a darkness*, 1999 Palace records.)

The video *If you are not with me tomorrow*, 2009 deals with my dog Keila's behavioral problem, humping pillows.

According to my vet, the reason why Keila exhibits behavior where she is intent on humping pillows is usually as a result of feeling unconfident and unsure in her environment. Her humping is an expression of dominance towards the pillow in order for her to acquire some sense of confidence and belonging, clarity on where she belongs in the hierarchy of the home. I noticed that she would only hump the pillows when I have an argument with my partner, or when people are speaking with their voices raised. This video was filmed during a particularly heated argument between my current partner and I. We were discussing the future of our relationship.



If you are not with me tomorrow, 2009
Digital video and sound

Pelagial Reverence, 2008/ 2009/ 2010

Pelage (Pelagial—adjective)

the hair, fur, wool, or other soft covering of a mammal*

Reverence — noun

a feeling or attitude of deep respect tinged with awe; veneration*

In my work concerning (my pet dog) Keila, I am driven by an inescapable fear of death; not so much in the sense my own death, but the knowledge that everything around me will die. My work surrounds itself (mostly) with my anticipated longing, the longing *that is to come* when things (people/ plants/ animals/ memories) die. (Visual) imagined longings of emotional and physical displacements are the foundations of my creative process. I tend to develop a neurotic fear of losing something/ someone and I become obsessively engaged with imagining (ad nauseam) the pain and sorrow I will experience if this fear was to realize. The result is a counter obsession with the *present* and clinging desperately to the object in this imagined loss. In a culture framed by loss [of identity/ of land/ of dignity/ of nation/ of belonging/ of home], my work feeds on my immediate surroundings, and my cultural influence and nostalgia.

Every year on the day that I have found Keila, I take a self-portrait with her to mark our time spent. The title of the work is explained as follows:

This work was strongly influenced by the 1992 film *Of mice and Men*, based on John Steinbeck novel , 1937, Directed and produced in 1992 by Gary Senise and distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. I watched this film more than twenty three times when I was younger, perhaps because I associated with John Malkovich's character *Lennie Small*. In the film Lennie is a mentally challenged farm worker who has a love for "stroking soft things". This *love* lands Lennie in trouble when he accidentally kills a woman while stroking her hair. I remember being touch by this film because I understood this misunderstood character. I understood what it is like to have a love for *stroking soft things*, and loving something so much that you run the risk of smothering it to death.

*ED Sykes, J. B. 1983. *The pocket Oxford Dictionary of current English*. Oxford University Press: London



Pelagial Reverence, 2008/ 2009/ 2010

The work *Hair of the dog (that bit me)*, 2009 consists of six photographic images of my dog, Keila. (The phrase *Hair of the Dog that bit you* is a colloquial English term for a hangover cure, whereby one should ingest alcohol in order to eliminate a hangover. The origin of the term is literal, and comes from an erroneous method of treatment of a rabid dog bite by placing hair from the dog in the bite wound.) The hair is collected from both combing Keila (a daily routine) and from various corners of the house where it gathers when I don't vacuum* regularly. I parallel the rabid infection of a dog bite with falling in love with (and being lovesick for) Keila. The fact that the hair (of the dog) is behind the glass of the frame, and not in my "wound", serves as an indication that the cure has been renounced. When one pays closer attention to the image, a finger print is visible over the body of the dog. This suggests an obsessive adoration for the dog in the photograph; it has been touched, which reveals the longing for the animal body. Touching a photograph serves an indication of obsession, in popular culture the act of touching the photograph implies an act of remembrance or pondering of the object photographed. Photographs, in this manner can also serve as a time machine, where touching it would take the viewer back to the instance that the memory was captured. (Kuhn, 2002: 8)

** The emergence of desire opens a space for the authentication of the image.

*Not a daily routine.

** Kuhn, A. 2002. *Family secrets: Acts of memory and imagination*. London, New York: Verso.



Hair of the dog (that bit me), 2009

Subspace is a term generally used to describe a moderate to deep trancelike condition experienced by the persons in the submissive position of a **BDSM*** relationship or interaction. The submissive party is often said to separate their minds from their bodies in order to “float” and heighten their levels of pain endurance. In this work I draw a parallel to the BDSM dominance and submissive relationship and that of “dog ownership”. All of the images presented in this series show a dog in a passive state, a trancelike condition. Two types of D/s relationships become evident here: The more obvious *human dominant over animal*, and then the lesser noticeable *animal dominant over human*. It is however not clear whether it is the dog or me, the artist who I experiencing subspace. The images are intended to depict my own state of subspace as I think about the loss of and separation from the animal in the photographs.

***BDSM** refers to the form of consensual sexual role play where power relationships are used to create sexual tension. The acronym is derived from the terms bondage/ discipline (B&D) , dominance/ submission (D&s) and sadism/ masochism (S&M). **Subspace** is a reaction of the submissive party to the role play and can be characterised by a state of recession and incoherence.



Subspace I, 2010

corlia harmsen

Shape Me Into Your Idea Of Home

April 2010

Masters in Visual Arts Examination Exhibition