

This text is the written reflection of *The Face Between Us: Abjection, the Gaze, and the Body at the Border of Self and Other in Authorial Illustration*, a PhD project in Artistic Research by Thilde Louise Dalager, at the University of Bergen, Faculty of Fine Arts, Music and Design, Department of Design.

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Note to reader:

This text is written to resemble a human. It has an outside and an inside.

The 'outside' text is written in this font and explains the project from an outside gaze.

The 'inside' text is written in this font and talks in a poetic voice that senses the project from an inside gaze

Introduction

In this introduction, I will present the project's main themes and the intended aims of my artistic research project *The Face Between Us: Abjection, the Gaze, and the Body at the Border of Self and Other in Authorial Illustration (FBU)*. I will present the umbrella research project *Illuminating the Non-Representable (IN-R)*—its themes, aims and sub-projects. I will also present the research questions and the three sub-projects: *Duchenne's Smile, Defining You, Finding You* and *The Face Between Us* of the artistic research project *FBU*.

The Inside and the Outside:

I am surrounded by Others; I am entangled in other people's lives. In some cases this is only for a second, when we pass each other by; perhaps we give each other a quick look before we continue on with our own lives. With others, like my children, I can hardly see where I stop, and where they start. My family and friends' moods and well-being affect me, even when I cannot see them. Sometimes, even strangers' moods affect me. Other people's decisions and lives affect me all the time. People in powerful positions can decide upon and control my life circumstances. I am a body, visible on the outside, and engaging directly in other people's lives.

I am constantly alone; no one can ever know me fully. Sometimes, for a brief moment, I get the feeling that someone can see me on the inside, what I really am about, but it never lasts long. There is a look, a word, an almost invisible gesture, and then I realise they did not understand it anyway—the place where I see the world can never be fully shared. I exist on the inside—an invisible place that no one can enter. The inside is where I experience sentiments, which do not fully translate to the outside by language, facial gestures, or body language. When trying to communicate the inside, I often feel I have betrayed the feeling or experience, because my attempts were insufficient. One of the hardest aspects of being human is relating to other people. It is also one of the most beautiful and essential aspects; it is vital.

I am a close family member of people who previously had or are living with mental health disabilities such as schizophrenia, eating disorders and neurological conditions, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and dementia. This has made me aware of, and interested in, the contradictions between what we encounter on the outside, and what goes on in the inside of a person. Certain types of mental health conditions, such as psychosis, can seem almost to blur the border of the inside and the outside, and show the complex inside world on the outside. These expressions of emotions, often removed from the meaning we are familiar with and have

language for, can seem distressing or frightening, leading to vulnerabilities. At the same time, this blurring of the inside/outside border can also feel as if we are losing the person once known. The face between us, the border, is what makes us able to be seen and connect with Others. This disconnect between the inside and the outside has often frustrated me because I could not help, be a part of, nor share some of my family members' worlds. It is lonely when we cannot reach each other, even though we want to. Seeing people that I love being discriminated against, patronised, and at times dehumanised has made me often angry. Sometimes this has been inflicted by individuals, but more commonly by social structures and cultural norms.

As humans, we are not only our inside or our outside, we are both simultaneously. While we use our bodies as canvases for our insides, the face can and often does come short. Sometimes, like a ghost, the inside transgresses its boundary and seeps out onto the exterior of the body, even entering the inside of another person. Perhaps this border is more of a membrane, letting some things pass and stopping others.

The tensions and relations between the inside and the outside, the mind and the body, have always occupied me. In reading French-Bulgarian philosopher Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) it has become evident to me that the border between our inside and our outside is significant for how we identify, differentiate between, and relate to 'Others'. Kristeva helps us to understand how the Other—that is, everyone outside of us—is a possible disturbance to the subject. This has influenced and informed *FBU*'s take on Otherness.

The Gaze—Dehumanising the Other:

This PhD project began in January 2022. Since then, horrible images have been produced in Ukraine, Sudan and Gaza, among many other less-exposed conflict zones. While having been affected by the current state of the world, this project is not focused on these complex, tragic and deadly conflicts, nor does it claim to have an answer in response to them. In a similar way to how the war in Vietnam was the first to be televised, the genocide in Gaza is the first to be livestreamed on social media. Most of us have seen horrendous images we cannot erase from our minds. These tragedies remind us how powerful images can be, but also how selective and biased the gaze is. While a rational expectation would be for everyone to oppose civilians being murdered, reality shows us that the gaze sees and interprets an image how it has been conditioned to. Our given position constructs our particular image of the world. Sometimes we dehumanise with our gaze, and at other times we become indifferent. It is crucial that we always ask: Whose story are we encountering? And through which gaze are we seeing it? The gaze might be our biggest barrier and our most fortified defence for protecting ourselves and what we feel threatened by.

At times, it is easier to look away from that which challenges and disturbs us. Sometimes, we can look only from a distance. As a medium, illustration offers a distanced or mediated way of seeing, compared to the stark realism of photography. Because illustration does not have to base itself directly on reality, I find that illustration has a potential to expose both sides of the border between the inside and the outside.

This project tries to scale down the opposition between what we can think of as an 'us' and a 'them'; it attempts to talk about the simultaneous existence of being two different entities—an 'I' and an 'Other'—each occupying its own microcosm while inevitably sharing the same air and being a part of another person's gaze.

Weak and Fluid Borders:

In Eszter Szép's book *Comics and the Body: Drawing, Reading, and Vulnerability* (2020), she writes about the act of reading comics as an embodied, participatory act, and in particular the body as a mean to encounter this vulnerability. Szép reflects on the need for moments of reflection for what she refers to as processes of "embodied dialogue of vulnerability" to take place:

When our bodily performance is defamiliarized, for example, by strategies of foregrounding the materiality of the comic, by building on an element of surprise, or by disturbing the flow of reading... our bodily performance and the consequences of our embodied consciousness can be reflected upon. The moment of reflection, I argue, is essential for engagement with one's own and the Other's vulnerability.²

Szép mentions that this vulnerability can emerge when the flow is disturbed. I will argue that this disturbance can also arise from the visual style by the use of 'weakness' in lines and materials, as well as a communicative strategy to create a space of reflection and complexity.

'Weakness' is a word with negative connotations. In the dictionary, among many definitions, are: "liable to break or give way under pressure; easily damaged"; "not convincing or logically forceful"; "lacking power or influence"; and "(of a liquid or solution) heavily diluted."³

In architectural theory, the term 'weak architecture' is associated with the Spanish architect Ignasi de Solà-Morales. In challenging the idea of architecture as a dominant and imposing force, Solà-Morales stressed the importance of embracing adaptable, flexible and context-sensitive design. This approach has inspired my project in emphasising fluidity and transformation over rigid forms—what we could in turn call 'weak illustration'. This project asserts a feminist position in reclaiming the weak as a force of adaptability and feminised power. At the heart of our patriarchal society—with its ideals steeped in the age of the Enlightenment—the subjective, the personal, the weak and the non-measurable are qualities we see being under appreciated and problematised. The 'feminine' is a sensibility we understand as being about introspection and navel-gazing; we are taught that it is concerned with non-important issues specific to being female, instead of a condition that is universal and relevant. To think of the feminine as analogous to fluidity, we find that it can change shape and transform when breaking apart; it does not lose strength and can be reintegrated anew. Weakness can be a force for strength because it allows intrusion and adapbility; it allows for the influence of the Other.

Where do 'it' and 'I' begin and end? When are we an 'us'?

How do we cross borders?

How do we transcend ourselves in a meeting with the Other?

Maybe the borders are not lines but are in fact fluid.

Maybe the borders are like thin wet paint floating freely and uncontrollably

-mixing, washing out and becoming something entirely new.

The frayed line, the uneven line, and the fluid line

are each vulnerable,

and their borders are weak.

They are open for intruding, erasure, and transformation.

Paint, as a material, mimics the body.

Paint covers and protects surfaces, like skin.

Paint is liquid and floats freely, like blood.

Paint is like a membrane—a selective barrier that allows some things to pass through but stops others.

When wet and not dry, paint is in transition; it is transforming.

It moves or changes if you touch it.

Wet is now. Wet is acute.

Something liquid has a non-retainable core; I cannot hold onto it.

Touching it, it becomes me; it transforms me, sinks into the skin, into my inside.

Illuminating the Non-Representable:

My PhD project *The Face Between Us: Abjection, the Gaze, and the Body at the Border of Self and Other in Authorial Illustration (FBU)* is one of three sub-projects under the artistic research project *Illuminating the Non-Representable (IN-R)*. The project is coordinated and led by former professor of illustration, Hilde Kramer, from the Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen, and is funded by the Norwegian Artistic Research Program (NARP).

IN-R asks: "How may illustration communicate profound human issues considered unrepresented or non-representable?" This research gathers cross-disciplinary projects to explore the transformative role of illustration and different aspects of communication challenges within contemporary society. *IN-R* has unfolded through three symposiums held in Norway as well as international digital events: *Transposition as Artistic Practice* (2020), *Materiality, Space and Embodiment* (2021) and *Illustration and the Non-Representable* (2023). In addition to these events, four artistic research projects were created, with *FBU* being one of them.

Below is a brief overview of the three other projects that make up *IN-R*:

• This is a Human Being is a collaboration between Kramer and Sebastian Klein, pedagogical leader at Falstadsenteret, which "explores new methods in teaching and relating Holocaust education to prevent racism and antisemitism among young people."⁷

- B-O-O-K (Book, Object, Object, Knowledge), is a collaboration between Kramer and artist Imi Maufe "exploring experimental artist books and 3D illustration to challenge our expectations of what illustration can be."
- Sound as Illustration is a collaboration between Kramer, illustrator Fredrik Rysjedal and designer Thanee Andino. It explores sound as a non-visual element, as illustration, asking: "May the transposition [from visual to auditory] lead to a new understanding of the field of illustration?" 9

While FBU differs from the Holocaust-related themes of the other three IN-R projects, all four aim to confront themes of representation in looking at how to narrate the stories of ourselves and others through a lens of illustration. IN-R broadly gathers this research to ask questions about how we define terms of worth when it comes to the treatment of human beings.

Research Questions:

How can the use of liquid, transformative materials, blended and muddy colours, and fluid transitions in visual storytelling be used to challenge the existing narrative about rigid borders between the inside and outside, as well as the Self and The Other, to explore themes of otherness and identity through the lens of abjection?

Can breaking conventional book and screen formats create embodied, sensory experiences to actively engage viewers, thereby confronting them with the subjectivity of their gaze and possible bias of what is on the outside of themselves, through a lens of abjection?

How can the authorial illustrator's subjectivity become evident in the process of the handmade work, where an autoethnographic approach breaks the borders between the artwork and the creator—thereby also addressing ethical dilemmas of representation—as well as supporting awareness of agency, positionality, and the dynamics of the gaze?

Sub-projects:

Below is an overview of the *FBU* covering its three projects and their respective issues and aims, with each investigating stories of the Self and the Other from various points of view. These projects will be elaborated upon in the separate chapters: Border, Gaze and Body.

Duchenne's Smile:

The work *Duchenne's Smile* began with a focus on neurodiverse challenges and the ways in which differences in expressing and interpreting empathy can lead to the discrimination of Others. My research led me to the work of French neurologist Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne (Duchenne) and his medical studies on facial expressions of emotion. Initially captivated by the idea of facial gestures as a universal form of communication, my focus gradually shifted toward the ethical dimensions of such research—particularly how so-called objective facts are shaped by subjective viewpoints. *Duchenne's Smile* investigates whether emotions can truly be mapped as universal expressions and questions how scientific research

often claims neutrality, while in fact projecting a singular gaze onto its subjects. This critical exploration of Duchenne's historical framing of the face as a mirror to the soul challenges notions of normality, standardisation, and what is the 'truth'. The project turns away from uniformity as a scientific ideal and instead redirects the gaze toward individuality and subjectivity in how emotions are seen, represented, and interpreted. In this work I have used unique handmade objects and optical lenses as illustrative tools.

Defining You, Finding You:

While *Duchenne's Smile* examined the tensions between the universal and the individual, the work *Defining You*, *Finding You* takes a more intimate and subjective approach by zooming in on a single individual through autoethnographic methods. The work uses my brother's official ASD diagnosis, the personality tests conducted on him, and his childhood drawings as source material. *Defining You*, *Finding You* is a piece of speculative design that questions how diagnosis is constructed and conveyed: What if, instead of a medical practitioner, it was a sister who interpreted and presented the diagnosis? What if the diagnosis was not printed on an anonymous A4 sheet, but instead emerged through tactile, sensorial materials?

Receiving a medical diagnosis can influence how you see and understand yourself but also how Others perceive you. This project rejects the standardised and often impersonal nature of diagnostic frameworks and instead proposes a more embodied and nuanced perspective. It shifts the focus from categorising a group to one specific, known human.

By shifting the gaze—from a professional to personal, from clinical to familial—the work challenges how we define and represent Others—in this case, a neurodiverse individual. *Defining You, Finding You* offers a new gaze, grounded in embodiment and senses, to reimagine the identity of an Other beyond institutional structures. The work uses remediation from A4 into textiles, multimodality, and darkness as illustrative means.

The Face Between Us:

The work *The Face Between Us* is an expanded animation installation consisting of a short animated film projected onto water—manifesting the film as a physical, embodied experience. While *Defining You*, *Finding You* focused on the Other—portraying my brother and questioning the majority's empathy—*The Face Between Us* redirect the gaze towards the Self. Inspired by Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, the project investigates how Otherness exists within the Self, and is not only located externally. Kristeva describes how the boundaries between Self and Other are vital for providing meaning, but are also constantly challenged by the abject: things that cross from the inside to the outside. Drawing on this, the film reinterprets the myth of Medusa, using her body as a symbol of a feminised subject and exploring what it means to exist in one's own body. The film is narrated from a personal, feminised perspective and reflects on my own subjectivity, rather than on an externalised Other.

The Face Between Us explores the universal human condition of being a subject—of having both an inside and an outside. Through the materiality of paint and the fluidity of projection onto water, it examines the blurred, messy borders of identity. Taking a discursive design approach, the work asks: What if we investigated Otherness within ourselves? How do we exist in our own

body? It turns the gaze from Other to Self, offering a deeply personal and embodied reflection on Otherness from within.









Fluid borders and weak lines. Examples from the process.

Endnotes. Introduction

1 Szép, Eszter, Comics and the Body: Drawing, Reading, and Vulnerability (The Ohio State University, 2020) accessed May 15, 2025, p. 137.

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2 Szép, Eszter, Comics and the Body: Drawing, Reading, and Vulnerability (The Ohio State University, 2020) accessed May 15, 2025, p. 138-139.

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4 Kularit, Prerit, "The Strength of Weakness", *Substack*, October 26, 2024. https://preritect.substack.com/p/the-strength-of-weakness?utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web

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6 "Illuminating the Non-Representable: About" accessed February 10, 2025. https://illuminating.no/about

7 "Illuminating the Non-Representable: This is a human being", accessed February 10, 2025. https://illuminating.no/projects/this-is-a-human-being

8 "Illuminating the Non-Representable: B-0-0-K", accessed February 10, 2025. https://illuminating.no/projects/b-o-o-k

9 "Illuminating the Non-Representable: Sound as illustration", illuminating.no, accessed February 10, 2025. https://illuminating.no/projects/sound-as-illustration

Contextualisation

In this chapter I will elaborate on my professional background, and where I position myself in the fields of authorial illustration and artistic research.

Illustration's eagerness to communicate is also its shortcoming, where it risks becoming a practice that standardises, simplifies and falsely presents a fragment as if it were the whole story. I am positioning myself in opposition to this. My interest in illustration stems from trying to understand something that I am either uncertain about, or in expressing something I cannot communicate using other forms. In this way I understand illustration as more than visual communication, it is a necessity. For me, illustrating is a means of connecting to an issue by inhabiting it.

I take it in with my mind,
I sense it with my body,
where it transforms and exudes through my hands.
I ingest, digest, and regurgitate matter in a new form
as illustration.

As someone experiencing illustration, some of the same happens. Where there are different approaches to learning (through visual, auditory, kinesthetic et al. modes), illustration is my way of taking something in. According to a study conducted by Swedish neuroscientist Pontus Wasling, humans remember emotionally-charged pictures better than we do words. I am able to understand and remember things I see illustrated far better than in other mediums because I connect with them. It is not only because illustration is most often visual, but it is the ability illustration has to tell a story—often in an intimate, personal and relevant way—that grasps me and interconnects me. It is the story that is the core of illustration; the world that engages you with the subject until you *become* it, then separate yourself from it again, so you can see it both from the inside and the outside.

Both as a form of expression and interaction, there is an action of absorption, a transformation and a repulsion associated with encounters with illustration. In this action I often come closer to understanding myself and Others, which is often the same thing. Illustration is an engaging action that has the ability to connect us all.

To me, illustration is a crash.

The collisions of worlds.

The clash of an image and a text.²

The melting of an image and a text.

The melting of worlds.

The in-between of the collision and the melting.

The gap and the overlaps.

Illustration is
interpretation, adaption, and translation.
A transition.
What occurs, emerges, and gets lost
in the transition of two worlds?

Illustration is trying to visualise complexity, a place that is not either or maybe not even both and but exactly in the borderland.

Professional Background:

During my studies in visual communication at The Royal Danish Academy (2009–215), I explored how illustrative practices could tell narratives across multiple media and materials. My master's project, Blind Passager. Udveje og vildveje³ was a film installation showing three screens consisting of two animation films: one video footage and one shared soundtrack. In it I told the story of a female Guatemalan illegal immigrant who is a personal friend of mine. With hindsight, I now see that this project was occupied by many of the same issues that this PhD engages with: namely, that in using auto-ethnographic methods, the focus is on the personal story. In Blind Passager. Udveje og vildveje (2015) I was trying to challenge the gaze of the dominant story of immigration as it exists in mainstream media, by creating three versions of the same story. To symbolise three points of view, the two animated films used representations of utopian and dystopian narratives, with the video footage revealing the documentation of "real" life. While relying on animation as the primary mode of visual expression, and by incorporating multiple gazes (represented through distinct visual languages), the idea of one "truth" was challenged. Looking back, themes of "illegal" immigration explored in this work have a direct connection with my interest in straddling various borders—such as the inside and outside, the symbolic and the real.

During my master's studies, I took on all the opportunities I could find to participate in exchanges and internships abroad, which had a significant impact on me and my work. Two meetings that especially stand out in relation to my subsequent PhD research, are detailed below.

On exchange at Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW) in Germany, I encountered a department that specialises in illustration. Here, I studied painting and printmaking. I also took a book illustration class with German professor Anke Feuchtenberger. Her classes became a turning point for me, with her approach being to draw the story *through* instead of illustrating a fixed storyboard. Feuchtenberger's approach was to start drawing, and then the drawings would reveal the story she wanted to tell and direct you to, not the other way around. Her emphasis on letting the material and the act of drawing help you channel your inner voice and let the story emerge freely was very inspiring.

On my other exchange at Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCAD U) in Canada, I took an experimental animation class with Canadian animator Amy Lockhart. She introduced me to paint-on-glass animation, which was a defining moment for me. The fact that I could combine the materiality of painting with time-based storytelling was a revelation, and I was immediately obsessed. I spent nights and days producing my first paint-on-glass film, *The Body is a Battlefield* (2013). Lockhart's class revealed many examples of how experimental animation could be a form of expression beyond the traditional circles of children's animations and big commercial productions.

Between graduating and starting the PhD, making zines (self-published, low-production books) has been another focus of mine. My interest has been in opposing the traditional format of graphic novels (panels with a border), and in prioritising a circular process when making text and image, wherein both modes change and direct each other. An example of this is an all-monotype illustrated book I produced, *Alt er tabt* (2022), that draws on a personal story. The international zine community has inspired me, where the desire or need to tell stories that are often personal or quirky overshadows the associated cost and/or platform opportunities of publishing.

Authorial Illustration Field:

I place myself in the authorial illustration field. Where illustration is a varied and open term, I will start by defining how I use and understand illustration.

Historically speaking, illustration has been based on a system of signs that people can 'read' and understand, and the format has been synonymous with a drawing on paper that accompanies text, often mass produced. Illustration has been mainly described as bound to its materiality, by colour, form, and composition.

A shift has been going on in the illustration field as British illustrators and educators Rachel Gannon and Mireille Fachon point out:

Illustration has come to not only describe a practice of creative making but also one of cognition, thinking and reasoning, capable of bearing significant theoretical weight. The illustrator's knowledge is not only contained in the hands or in the manipulation of materials, it is also present in their canny perception, acute questioning and empathetic, intersubjective rapport.⁴

This means illustration these days is defined moreso as a verb (*to illustrate*) rather than as a noun (*illustration*). Canadian illustration historian Jaleen Grove believes that

pictures in your head for instance is a form of illustration, watching a performance that describes something is illustrating, listening to music may illustrate, a descriptive text can be considered an illustration ... we can see that almost everything in the world can be said to illustrate something.⁵

This shift in illustration, when moving away from a standardised visual vocabulary, from *illustration* to *illustrating*, has opened many more possibilities for expression and variations in means, approaches, and materials. The way I have chosen to work in the FBU project moves away from the necessity of mass production and traditional materials, to communicate meaning through a more embodied understanding. In FBU's various sub-projects I have worked with various mediums, include animation, ceramics, textiles, text, and installation.

In Julia Kristeva's book *Powers of Horror*. *An Essay on Abjection* she writes about abjection being the reaction to horror when things pass the border from the inside to the outside. When these borders vanish, our meanings of life collapse and we cannot distinguish between the subject and the object, the Self and the Other.

All humans have transitioned from the inside to the outside of another's body, and therefore the abject (what crosses the border) reminds us of this primal state before we became subjects—what we could call a borderless state. The child must reject what Kristeva terms the 'semiotic' world—the maternal, the abject—and instead enter into the 'symbolic' world—the rational, the one where we have language. This rationality is what Kristeva refers to as the father's world—the world of shared cultural understanding and meaning. To give sense to the meaningful symbolic world we live in, we must maintain these borders.⁶

According to Kristeva, art and especially literature, is a place where one can explore "the place of the abject, a place where boundaries begin to breakdown, where we are confronted with an archaic space before such linguistic binaries as self/other or subject/object." I find that illustration offers such a place to explore this dissolving of borders, precisely because it exists in the overlaps of the symbolic and the semiotic worlds, having the possibility of using image and language, abstract expressions and referential images as well as cognitive and sensorial knowledge. The meaning illustrators are now able to communicate is not limited bystandard visual vocabularies, but expands to cover complex areas, the Non-Representable, and in the case of *FBU*, illustrating what exists on the border between the inside and the outside, when our common language falls short.

When illustrators illustrate, and not necessarily with pen and paper, some might say that this definition of illustration is so broad that it loses its meaning. While it is mainly in research circles where a shift in the definition of illustration has been defined, it is a shift that is still ongoing. The field of illustration is in a time where it must incorporate both its traditional professionalism and the new challenges of artificial intelligence programs in order to stay relevant.

Gannon and Fauchon's book *Illustration Research Methods* (2020)⁸ has been useful in the development of this project, with its thorough and contemporary definitions of illustration and its methods. The messaging around illustration research methods is that there is not one, but multiple methods that encompass how we speak through images. Gannon and Fauchon's book enlists different approaches to illustration that include modes of the authorial, reportage, crafting, activism and education.

Gannon and Fauchon wrote the book when they saw a general lack of identity in the illustration field; many people were hesitant to call themselves illustrators, instead referring to themselves

as artist, visual storytellers, communicators, or using other titles. I believe this is a result of the traditional design terminology that illustrators have had to use to define their work. Design terminology often falls short when describing illustrative practices and methods, and in my opinion, instead of expressing and supporting a structure, it often feels constraining and limiting.

Authorial illustration is a term to describe the uses and exploits of the illustrator's personal voice. To be honest, I had never heard the term authorial illustration before entering this PhD, but I immediately felt seen. I see my profession as being "a visual writer," a term that Romanian-born American artist and illustrator Saul Steinberg used. My methods always felt more accurately described when looking into film or literature, from the position of someone making stories. The French film critic Alexandre Astruc has stated that the role of a (cinematic) auteur can be described when a director writes with the camera as if it were a pen. To me, it makes sense that you can write with images as if they are a pen, also.

While illustration embodies complexity, in general (though not always), you can largely define illustration as an image that operates alongside a text. ¹² An image most often functions to illustrate a piece of writing, and what is communicated is something more than its parts—something new arises through the acts of an illustrator who makes the work their own. Likewise, something new occurs in the reception of a work from an audience or a reader, who, with their gaze activated, are enabled to interpret and makes a story their own. The meaning of an illustration thus lives its own life—it can be abused and misunderstood; people can transform or extend upon its purpose.

Artistic Research Field:

My PhD project in artistic research has taken place through the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme (NARP) platform. During my fellowship, I attended five mandatory seminars with an introduction to artistic research, which included topics such as methodology, ethics, documentation, and presenting your process and results. This education has been valuable and provided relevant information about many interesting theoretical issues. These seminars have also been a place to meet with fellow artistic researchers from different fields and universities across Norway. In each seminar, we presented and discussed our processes, challenges and thoughts, with everyone engaged in a deeper understanding of each project's methods and motivations. To have been invited into others' artistic processes has been an inexplicably privileged and rewarding experience. NARP also organise Artistic Research Forums across Norway, where I have attended various and diverse artistic research presentations as well as presenting my own project three times, receiving valuable feedback during the process.

In 1993, the British director of the Royal College of Art, Christopher Frayling, presented on the distinction between 'art research', 'research for art', and 'research through art'. Where the first phrasing refers to theoretical research and the second concerns finding tools for practical use, the third equates to artistic practice using theory, creating a dynamic where the two modalities are deeply connected, integrated, and co-dependent on each other. Researching *through* art is an essential way of understanding my working methodology. I see the written research and the artworks as two equally strong lines, which are sometimes parallel and sometimes entangled. I

have no interest in thinking without my hands, and I have no interest in not giving my thoughts a body.

Entering the artistic research field has meant a lot to me and my understanding of myself as an illustrator in the design field. For a long time, I felt limited by the boundaries and expectations of the illustrator title in my professional life. Within artistic research and illustration research circles, I have learned that researchers already had, for some time, pushed and expanded the circles of what illustration can be defined as. Being in these circles has given me the language, tools, and confidence to claim my position as an authorial illustrator and an experimental animator.

I would like to be engaged in the work of expanding this understanding of what an illustrator is to the broader community. Through my interpretation, to be an illustrator is to tell stories and uncover meaning to make sense of the world. By interpreting and expressing yourself through (mostly) visual means, you are able to engage with the world.



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Methodology

The primary methodology applied throughout this project has been reinterpretation, which has unfolded through artistic practice and discursive design thinking. I will also present my *Unlearning Manifesto*, which has infused the *FBU* project.

Reinterpretation:

- I have reinterpreted the clinical photographs of French neurologist Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne (Duchenne's) scientific study of facial expressions of emotions;
- I have reinterpreted a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the illustrated cards of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT);
- I have reinterpreted the myth of Medusa.

I see reinterpretation as a way of conversing and engaging with humanity's shared history, society, culture, and nature as well as a process of taking an existing subject and working with it in a way that adds meaning, but relies on the original to create that meaning. Reinterpretation—which could also be described as reimagination or re-seeing—is a process of speculation offering/presenting alternative scenarios by offering a new gaze. When I reinterpret, I often use scales of reference as a tool, for example where I scale up a minor detail or vice versa. This process often leads to illustrating literal things in abstract ways, and/or interpreting abstract things in literal ways. Reinterpretation is about finding an opening within a defined subject and altering it by means of distorting its existing border/s.

Rikke Villadsen is a Danish illustrator whose methods of reinterpretation I am inspired by, where she often uses herself and her own story as a common thread in her work. Her most recent work, *En samtale med Käthe Kollwitz* (2024),¹ was made at a time when she was grieving her mother's death. Through a process of digging into the imagery of German artist Käthe Kollwitz, Villadsen has mixed imagery of herself into the artist's work as well as the addition of speculative conversation. In the work, Villadsen says to Kollwitz: "I want to get to know you. Learn from your self-portrait. Put my line on top of yours and maybe recognise something."²

During the COVID Pandemic, Villadsen made the graphic novel *Tuberculosis 2020* (2020). Drawing it in a hut in forced isolation during the pandemic, using children's markers—the only materials available to her—she drew (from memory) a story based on Norwegian artist Edvard Munch's famous painting *Det Syke Barn* (1885–86.) The graphic novel is bridging the unknown fear of her current time with a history of former epidemics. Villadsen's work are often based on cultural or historical references, which she reinterprets in a surreal way. Earlier she worked with the genre of the 'Western' from the America Old West with the icon of the sailor and other motifs from art history.

Villadsen states that "my work is centered on wearing the masks fed to me through my culture. But I still allow myself to be foolish with them." While Villadsen is a skilled drawer, she is not afraid of showing the faults in her process—the crossed out sections and the half-erased pencil strokes—which create a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty in the final image. I find this approach to be an example of the strength of the weak, showing elements that can transform and are in process as well as asking 'what if' I used it in this way?

Reinterpretation also refers to the 'weak arquitecture' approach by Solà-Morales. One example of weak architecture is 'adaptive reuse,' which focuses on repurposing existing structures rather than demolishing them for something completely new. It builds on existing matters, being sustainable, circular, and not overly concerned with having to invent new forms in a linear manner.⁴

Unfolding—Artistic Research Methodology:

Former director of Arne Nordheim Centre for Artistic Research and vice rector for Research and Artistic Development at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo, Darla Crispin, uses the word 'unfolding' to describe artistic research practices. I like this description because it indicates that one is not only uncovering something, but by doing so, also expanding upon it. In using the unfolding metaphor, Crispin suggests a different take on research and what it means to obtain knowledge. She says of unfolding that:

It carries the notion of a knowledge that is always close to us: within reach and already an intimate part of our everyday experience, yet somehow enigmatic and wrapped in upon itself until [it has] skillfully opened out to our direct gaze.⁵

Crispin explains three common definitions of the word unfolding as:

- 1) Related to the meaning of expansion and extending out;
- 2) About uncovering or unveiling something, or bringing it into the realm of the visible (such as with 'illustration' which means 'illuminating, to shine light on');
- 3) A procedural event, whereby something already existing through its own process and pace is unfolding and is being understood.

Crispin's approach also critiques the post-colonial and post-Enlightenment Western understanding of research and knowledge, where we see researchers venturing "into uncharted territory from whose alien wastes nuggets of valuable knowledge can be retrieved and heroically brought back for the benefit of civilization."

One day I returned home, very excited and exclaimed something like: "I found it." I had been working on the storyline of the film *The Face Between Us*, and I had a sense that something had been revealed to me. My partner laughed and said: "It's funny how you describe it, like you found it by coincidence, but you're the one who made it up, who built it word by word." To which I realised that this is not how I see it: I see it as if I have discovered something that already exists; something that my eyes could not see before, but suddenly it manifests.

Generally I feel that the materials I use and my body are more clever than my conscious mind. Sometimes I feel like I am a vessel or an instrument, the materials playing with me more than I control them. Maybe this is what others call 'intuition'. Previously I have tried to describe this phenomenon as a process of uncovering or unmasking something which has come before, so when I read Crispin's take on artistic research, her ideas of unfolding resonated strongly with me.

'What if?'—A Discursive Design Methodology:

Illustration is a form that draws from many other fields of storytelling such as literature and film, as well as visual and conceptual fields like art. Illustration is most often placed together with communication design as graphic design in educational settings, and for traditionally incorporating human-centred approaches. I place my practice within a discursive design context, where problem solving is not the primary goal, but where the aim is rather to evoke questions. Discursive design is an umbrella term that contains various movements like 'critical design' and 'speculative design'. All three of these terms have in common that they are centred around asking the question: 'What if?' Within a discursive design framework, the aim is not to find answers, optimise a function, or solve a problem. You could say, however, that the aim is to create a problem or to question what we thought we knew, at least in the ways it has traditionally been approached.

As American designers Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby explain:

Critical Design uses speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumptions, preconceptions and givens about the role products play in everyday life. It is more of an attitude than anything else, a position rather than a method.⁷

FBU follows this design approach by questioning our assumptions to Otherness—not by offering information about a minority or marginalised group, or even pretending we know them, but through modes of reflecting on the nature of our own selves. As American discursive designers Bruce and Stephanie Tharpe elaborate, discursive design aims to create reflections and change existing patterns of thinking.⁸

It is important to remember that working from a position where we can ask 'What if?' and 'Why are we accepting this?' for example, is a privilege. Being a PhD fellow in artistic research is a very privileged position that provides one with a salary and time to be immerse in and investigate methods, theories, and experiments—things that are not always possible in the freelance world. Even so, this privilege comes with a responsibility and a necessity to explore critical conversations and power structures, precisely when you are given such a privileged platform.

In-Between:

FBU is an artistic research project that works interdisciplinarily and at the intersection of many fields. In general, I see illustration as a field that exists and feeds from design, art, craft,

psychology and anthropology, and which is highly related to literature and film. When working at the edge of different fields and techniques, defined borders can feel more limiting than enhancing.

Indian architect Prerit Kularia forwards this definition of 'weak architecture'—what I see as relevant in illustration and especially for the *FBU* project—which deals with the theme of identity:

"To define is to limit"—echoes through the principles of weak architecture, which strives for multiplicity, adaptability, and openness to new interpretations. By resisting rigid definitions, architecture, like identity, remains in a state of becoming.⁹

Unlearning:

Being concerned with rigid definitions and imperatives, this next claim might seem like a contradiction in context to this project, that: some kind of structure can be useful when working in the borderland. Effectively, borders are structures, for example the skeletons that keep all the soft tissues of the body contained. In a paradoxical fashion, I have been working on a manifesto for how I have set out to conduct my work for this project—paradoxically because the research project aims to explore the fluid borders, and a manifesto is an imperative text, often offering a rigid view. While I do not see this working methodology as a manifesto to anyone other than myself, the hope is that it can inspire others to define their own borders and ask: What if I moved them, or erased them? In this process I have been attempting to peel off the layers of my own professional persona—the ones placed there from the outside, by education, norms and traditions, as well as my internalised borders.

The act of drawing is a simple one; it is one we do intuitively as children. Unfortunately, many people stop drawing at a certain point, while others study it and become skilled. Then sometimes again, what happens with skills and experience, tradition and praise is that you get so good that you lose something along the way: the 'why', the search, the magic, the 'what if'. With its methodology in discursive design, this project aims to centre the questions of the 'what if'.

While education and experience have taught me valuable things, they have also blurred my visions, as well as self-confidence and intuition to some extent. Unfortunately, part of studying also inevitably causes a level of homogeneity, where one is required to adopt approaches that do not necessarily suit one's working methods, goals, or style. One thing that design school left me with was a view that my processes and methods were 'wrong'. Mostly, the result of my work was accepted and even at times praised, but I always had this underlying feeling of having to fake the work's development, including timelines and methods. The question I found myself asking was: Is there really one sequence I should expect the ideas to follow, and only one way in which the finished results should be presented? Since graduating ten years ago, I have been asking myself: Is it possible to have a wrong method and process?

Canadian-American animator Caroline Leaf has said:

All my animating life I did not know how to make an edited cut, and found my way around the problem by making morphed scene changes. Some would say my animation is noteworthy for its moving camera and morphing scene changes. I credit my particular animation trajectory to the animation class, where we were left alone for the most part and found our own solutions.¹⁰

The process of having done a PhD project in artistic research has given me some of the most essential things for developing an artistic voice and project; money (to live), time (to develop and experiment) and trust (in me and the process.)

Unlearning Manifesto:

1. Do stuff you are not an expert in:

Unlearn your power position by taking risks and working with new skills and materials. Try actively to utilise your failures. Try new things, even though they may be complicated and may take a long time.

Animation, textiles, and ceramics are out of my comfort zone; I am not a trained expert, but they are in my interest zone. In craft-based arts, there are always experts saying "this won't work." Do not listen to them. Maybe they are wrong, perhaps they are right, but maybe you discover an aesthetic pleasure in the fault line or discover a new working method along the way. Researcher and artist Camille Norment says that by empowering and using the 'unwanted', you can embrace your failures.¹¹

My non-professional animation skills resulted in me making something that an animator would not. Doing my six-month residence at The Animation Workshop in Denmark, I was being surrounded by professional animators. I felt inferior to the trained animators, even though it was a very caring and encouraging environment. The time in Viborg was essential for discussing, getting inspiration, sharing, and receiving supervision. I also saw how most of the others aimed for projects in the industry, which requires a whole package of pitching, commercial interest, and production.

One of my fellow residents, Costa Rican animator Julian Gallese, told me that I should see my position as a non-trained animator as my strength, not a flaw. Despite being a trained animator, Gallese makes experimental animations where he does everything you are not 'supposed' to do. As Edwin Rostron says, he

gently disrupts the illusion of his animation. Figures vanish and music abruptly stops, scribbles, marks and hand-written text hang about the place alongside all the other beings, constantly reminding us these are all drawings assembled in time.¹²

During the residency I realised how different my approach, methods and style were—that they were coming from a different background—but also as to how eager I was to 'do it right' and to be accepted as a 'real' animator.

It was an eyeopener into settling into my own practice, and in asking 'what if' I did it my own way by being disobedient to the 'rules'.

2. Set up rules:

There can be freedom in limitations: skills, technology, money, help, materials.

I often make up certain rules for myself. This is a method inspired by the Danish avant-garde filmmaking movement Dogme 95 and the film *De Fem Benspænd (The Five Obstructions* (2003) by Danish filmmaker Lars Von Trier. Not having a tradition or your 'usual business' to lean on can be so frightening that often you cannot begin to make. In this case you need a rule.

These rules might include: only work with a certain colour; make a collage from a certain pile of materials; draw an object without looking; set a time limit for yourself. Time limitations are good for not overworking a piece. When I made the ceramic sculptures for *Duchenne's Smile*, I put a timer on so I could only work on each head for 15 minutes.

3. Do not try to solve anything:

The position of the problem solver is one of power. For me, there are a lot of ethical challenges in problem-solving: What is a problem? Who defined it? Who gave you the

authority to define and solve problems? When is it solved? For whom did you solve it, and for whom did you not? Here, it could also be important to think of non-humans.

Generally, designers are talked about as great problem solvers. This is probably my most hated phrase, and the one I needed to unlearn in order to continue creating. When you are looking for solutions, your gaze tries to direct its focus: But what did you miss when looking for a solution? What did you miss in perfecting the function? What did all the blurriness in the borders of your gaze try to tell you?

In *Defining You, Finding You*, Damian Milton's theory of the 'double empathy problem' made me turn the gaze away from marginalised groups, instead directing the gaze on a single known individual, as well as including myself in the process. By this I wanted to avoid talking from a position that suggested that I and the majority knew 'better' or were the 'standard'. In *The Face Between Us* I completely redirected the gaze to my own position.

4. Working from inside the frog's perspective:

Embrace the fact that when making and researching, you are not a bird, but a frog. You cannot have the overview or the final result in clear sight because if you know what you are going to find, you are not doing research.

Adopting the 'frog's perspective' in your work is key. It is about accepting that your process may be shrouded in darkness, and that you will be reaching for the ideas that pique your interest, even if their ultimate utility or meaning is unclear.

I work in fragments, in a non-linear way. As earlier mentioned, illustrator Anke Feuchtenberg's method of creating the story through drawing, not the opposite, has been an inspiration. I often use a collage/patchwork approach, meaning I make stuff, put it together and find meaning in the end results. This approach is why I chose to animate on a green screen for the work *The Face Between Us*, so I can layer and combine the final scenes after creating them.

I equally want to be part of all the processes in the film, from script, animation, and sound (although I did collaborate with a

sound designer in *The Face Between Us*). I do not see it as the need to be in control or not collaborating; I collaborate with the materials, with the technique, with the story and with the unconscious. Making is not a linear process but a back-and-forth, constantly transforming and effecting each other. Nothing is done before everything is done, making me the wrinkled paper's unfolder, or the glue to all the pieces.

5. Be vulnerable, kill the patriarchy, both within and outside:

Do not feel shame in being vulnerable, subjective, or expressive. If you feel shame, guilt, doubt, or fear, it is a sign to go on, because you have something at stake. But how do you use your doubts and insecurities? Do not hide them, use them.

I could have easily replaced 'the patriarchy' with 'the Enlightenment' or 'capitalism'—they each have in common that they problematise the personal and the subjective as feminine and as less worthy than what is measurable, rational, masculine. ¹³ This is evident of the design approach both in *Defining You, Finding You* and *The Face Between Us.* Both projects are based on personal issues, a familiar relation and my own experience.

For me, working in fragments is also an attitude against the idea of the male art genius sitting undisturbed in a room for months. This is not how a human life is organised, nor a researcher or an illustrator for that fact. If the working structures favour this as the 'right' way to produce work, it excludes many voices who cannot commit to these premises for various reasons. The reality of being an illustrator or any other creative is that you often have to work in a fragmented way across multiple low-paid jobs. ¹⁴ On top of that, you are also a human being with personal responsibilities that will distract you from your work at times, some more than others. ¹⁵

Animation is very time-consuming, so I needed a place where I could animate at all times of the day without being absent for months in my personal life as a mother to small children. I wanted to set up a structure that made the work possible instead of bending to the industry structures. Instead of being annoyed by disruptions and obstacles, I try to embrace them

and see them as opportunities, which is easier when working in a collage/patchwork approach than insisting on a linear working process.

6. Be more punk!

Have high ambitions and big dreams but keep your production as small-scale and low-cost as possible.

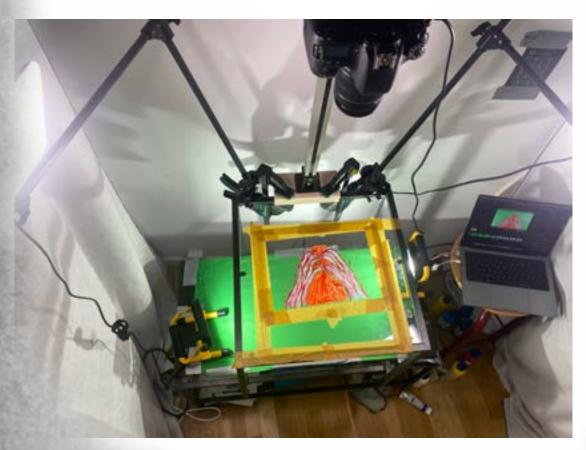
In this way you can try again and fail better—as Samuel Beckett's mantra goes¹⁶—without having to wait for authorities or money to give you platforms or permission. Punk is full of DIY energy. Zine activism is a great example of the empowerment that comes with DIY energy.

The Face Between Us was made mostly in my home studio, which has a glass table, two over lights, two under lights, and a column with a camera pointing down. Canadian-American animator Caroline Leaf worked solo on her films, primarily because the techniques she uses (paint-on-glass and sand animation) did not allow for teamwork in the same way as traditional animation studio production. For this reason, Leaf was part of all the stages in her animations. She was "the director and animator for all of her films, as well as designer, story adaptor, and/or scriptwriter, and she worked closely on the soundtracks and editing of her films."17 As Edwin Rostron from the experimental animation blog Edge of Frame defines experimental animators: "These artists often work alone with relatively limited means, undertaking almost every aspect of the process themselves. This relationship to the means of production stands in contrast to that of animation studios, and has more in common with that of a painter."18

Do something material instead of only overthinking (thinking is ok; thinking is good). Do not let a lack of support or networks silence you. Get your work out and make a deadline for yourself. Your work will most likely never be complete, perfect, or finished. Think of it as history and truth: they are not fixed elements but are constantly being rewritten and need to be critically addressed forever. The way that you work is one piece in a larger process; one contribution to an ongoing conversation. Keep going! Maybe some people will criticise, or not understand, but at least you engaged in the conversation.



- 1. Studio
- 2. Homestudio, animation set-up.



Other Methods:

Acquiring Data and Knowledge:

• Literature: I have read books, mainly non-fiction, but also fiction as well as academic papers, articles and other relevant material. I have listened to podcasts, seen films and viewed video material. I have tried to have a constant feed from multiple and various sources to be absorbed in the topics of relevance, and the current state of knowledge surrounding the themes I have been working with.

Data Collection:

- Interviews: Over the previous three years, I have conducted and participated in multiple in-depth interview situations with my brother;
- I have engaged in active observation and participation in Autscape;
- I have collected the diagnosis papers of my brother, his childhood drawings as well as the Thematic Apperception Test cards used in his investigation.

Documentation and Sharing:

- I have documented a range of interviews using notes, recordings and photographic documentation;
- I have participated in the Norwegian Artistic Research Program (NARP). This has included five seminars, five artistic research forums, where I have presented three times and participated in all five;
- I have presented at the IN-R Symposium at the Falstad Centre, Ekne, Norway, 2023;
- I have given a talk at Kingston University College in London, 2023;
- I have been on residence at The Animation Workshop in Viborg, Denmark, from March to September 2024, sharing my development for 'Big Meetings' every month during the duration of the residency;
- I have shared my progress with supervisors, colleagues, students, and other relevant stakeholders as part of the IN-R network;
- I have written a contribution to the Journal of Illustration, Volume 11 (2024).

Courses:

- Art book workshop with British Artist Imi Maufe, Faculty of Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen;
- Sound course, Faculty of Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen;
- After Effects course, Qross Kurssenter, Norway, 2023;
- Academic writing course with Nicole Gallicchio, 2022.

Symposiums:

- Illustration research symposium *Transitus: Illustration as Crossing Ground*, 2022 (attending);
- Ways of (Un)learning: On Decolonization—Theories and Practices, 2023 (attending).

Residencies and Workshops:

• Residency at The Animation Workshop (March 23–September 23, 2024);

 Workshops at Autscape, UK and Faculty of Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen, 2022 (facilitating).

Mapping and Analysing:

• Mind Maps: Detecting, adding and connecting the project, or elements within the project, to topics, actors, fields, ethical issues and power structures.

Experimental Material Study:

- Tufting;
- Ceramics;
- Collages;
- Watercolor, pencil, pastel and painting;
- Monotype printing;
- Animation, including paint-on-glass and cut out After Effects composition.

Field Trips:

- Travel to the following locations has connected the project nationally and internationally:
- Drawing Now Fair, Paris, 2023 (attendance);
- Pictoplasma conference, Berlin, 2023 (attendance);
- Kingston College of Art, London, 2023 (speaking);
- Crack Festival, Rome, 2024 (attendance);
- Various trips in Norway and Denmark, 2022–25.

Collaboration:

• I collaborated with Danish sound designer Anne Jeppesen, who has recorded the voiceover and produced the sound for the film *The Face Between Us*.

Exhibitions:

- Midway exhibition at Rom 61, KMD, 2022;
- The IN-R exhibition and symposium at Falstad, Trondheim, 2023;
- Unfortunately, the final exhibition for IN-R at Grafill in Oslo, 2024 was cancelled due to illness;
- Visningsrommet, USF Verftet, Bergen, 2025 (The artistic outcome of this research).

Digital Documentation:

• This written reflection together with photographic documentation from the project's artistic outcome will be presented and archived on the project's Research Catalogue site, https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1844203/1844204.

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Borders

Development of *Duchenne's Smile*:

The Inside Expresses Itself on the Outside:

Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne (1806–75) was a French neurologist who mapped how the muscles in the human face produce facial expressions, and posited how these are directly linked to human emotions. In his studies, he used tools with electricity to stimulate and trigger the muscles in participants' faces to stimulate facial expressions. Visual media, or illustration, was an essential tool in Duchenne's research, where he was one of the first scientists to use photographs as part of his data collection and results. Duchenne's illustrations are black-and-white photographs that depict people realistically, although with exaggerated facial expression. This also means that they are recognisable, not protected by anonymity. Duchenne's research and photographs were published in the book, *The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression*, originally published in 1862.

Through his research, Duchenne revealed what he believed to be God creating facial expressions to make a universal language for human emotions.¹ In this way, his vision of humankind was a humanitarian one in which people could understand, relate, and communicate with each other by showing their inner state on their outside. Duchenne's belief in a universal, emotional language gave the face the status of a canvas revealing our inner life.

Duchenne's focus was the face and its expressions. The face is also a common field of study when researching ASD. Face scans show that people with ASD often focus on different areas of the face when interpreting other people's faces compared to the control group (neurotypicals). The ASD group mostly avoid looking at other people's eyes and focuses instead on the mouth and forehead.²

Duchenne's belief in a universal language for humanity is true, but only to a degree. Humans use their facial gestures to show emotions, which can often exceed language and cultural barriers. In this way, people cross borders. Our styles of communication via the affect of display—facial expressions, gestures, body language, voice, and tone—are a sophisticated system that can still exclude some people. This is either because of functional challenges such as ASD, or because cultures can have different codes,³ and we can hide our emotions and lie.

Duchenne's idea of a universal language for all of humankind is both lovely and idealistic, as well as scary and dystopian. In my mind, I see harmonious pictures of humanity as one big family showing compassion and empathy for one another, as well as scary pictures of people in uniform, wearing the same things, thinking the same, and excluding those on the margins.

Masking:

In ASD communities 'masking' is a term used for hiding your true self and personality, to appear more acceptable in a society dominated by neurotypical behaviour and norms.⁴ In this regard, people with ASD are wearing 'masks' and are constantly at work to conform to behaviour that does not feel natural to them. This shows that a conflict can arise between how the inside feels and how the outside behaves and is presented.

I reinterpreted Duchenne's illustrations (his research photographs) into five ceramic objects finished with glazes. In my reinterpretation, these photographs transformed from two- to three-dimensional objects, from black-and-white into colour, and from recognisable to anonymous forms. These forms are modelled to depict faces, as with the original material, but not complete heads so that, when seen from the side and back, they are hollow and open like a mask. The head is incomplete, with the purpose being to highlight that when representing a person, it is never the full picture. As an illustrator viewing from the outside, I can only see so much. The open backside breaks their border, both understating how little we can see of their inside, as well as inviting us to think and maybe awaken our interest in getting to know them.

The surface of our skin is around
2 square meters.
It's like a door.
The skin is a door.
Knock, knock
Can I come in?

In his 2017 book *Face and Mask: A Double History*, German art historian Hans Belting writes about the complex relationship between faces and masks. But it is not merely an outside and an inside. Belting sees the face as the surface, where the subject meets the gaze of Others. In this way, the face *is* the border, a complex borderland where the Subjects and the Other meet, because the face is the stage where identity is performed in front of the audience of the Other's gaze.

Belting attributes three meanings to the face: a) a sign of identity, b) a vehicle of expression, and c) a site of representation.⁵ He proposes that portrait painting is the mask of European culture, where our mask *looks* like our face, but it is not us. In this regard, it is problematic to equate portraiture with authenticity. The premise of the portrait is momentary; it is impossible to reproduce a living human being, because in the next second, the person portrayed has already transformed into something else. In his writing on faces, masks and portraiture, Belting says about the face: "It does not truly become a face until it interacts with other faces [in] seeing or being seen by them."

The aim of the work of *Duchenne's Smile* is that, by way of their open and incomplete shape, they will awaken a curiosity in people, prompting them to take a longer glimpse and try to see

the subjects of Duchenne's study as real people, not just scientific objects. The faces, representing Duchenne's test persons, cannot look back, but in this being seen, they may get closer to being acknowledged.

The ceramic faces are finished with various glazes, giving the effect of different colours being visible from various angles. I prepared the faces by pouring and/or dipping them in glaze; in this process I gave up control over where the liquid glaze would go, instead letting it find its way onto the uneven surfaces. Sometimes the glaze would follow the arc of a lip, drip into the cave of the ear, or be stopped short by a nostril. This fluid material can surpass the border of a body part, covering the ear but also flowing onto the cheeks and mixing with another glaze. I let it find its own borders.

The Boxes:

Each ceramic face will be enclosed in a wooden box. Each box will have, on three of its sides, concave and convex optical lenses, which the viewer can look through. The optical lenses will distort the sight, making them appear either very close or far away; they will blur the vision at times, forcing the viewer to change their position in order to get a good view. The boxes function to perform a border between the viewers and the objects. From the outside, the white-painted boxes appear neutral; it is only by looking through the lenses to the inside, that the one-off ceramic faces are revealed. In encountering the work, viewers move from the plain box exterior to the individuated and shifting faces on the inside. There are borders, but the lenses break them. The lenses carry a paradox: they offer a view, but not access. This viewing in a limited manner might result in frustration, where the faces occupy the role of the ungraspable Other.

The Title:

Duchenne identified the "genuine" smile—a smile for which muscles around the eyes and mouth are all used—which to this day is still called the 'Duchenne smile'. The title of this artwork, *Duchenne's Smile*, refers to this smile. While a Duchenne smile is considered a genuine and honest one, can people not also hide behind this? How can we ever know what is really going on for someone on the inside? Duchenne tried to map how the inside of a person could be transferred to the outside—the face. But the people he portrayed were are so much more than Duchenne and us could ever see.

Recalling Belting's notion of the face and mask, the face is not simply projecting the inside on the outside, as Duchenne's study intended. Nor is it just an outside mask completely isolated from our emotional state, but rather it is the messy, clouded in-between. The border *is* the Subject, but it is the *performing Subject*. The ability of this 'face-border' to perform also shifts in relation to neurotypical norms, for example people with ASD having a different system and/or range for expressing and interpreting these performances.

In titling the artwork with reference to the term for a "genuine" smile—despite none of the ceramic faces actually smiling—I aimed to create a juxtaposition that questions the ethics of the psychological study, where human subjects are "used" as participants for the benefit of the study.



Duchenne's Smile:

- 1: Duchenne's original photographic studies.
- 2: Glazes.
- 3. Glaze test.







Duchenne's Smile:
1-2: Examples of the mask-structure and the hollow face.



Development of Defining You, Finding You:

Breaking the Format:

Defining You, Finding You is my attempt at a graphic novel that breaks with the format and medium of the graphic novel with its defined pages, reading sequence and panels. Comparing Defining You, Finding You with a graphic novel perhaps does not make sense at first sight, where the graphic novel refers to a format and not a genre. Here the format is traditionally defined as a sequential combination of images and text, often using what are called 'panels' for the images and text; at times it uses speech bubbles to accompany these image-panels and at other times, text and image can be divided on each side of a page.

In the general landscape of commercial and experimental comics the format is being experimented with, for examples in American Chris Ware's innovative use of the size and composition of the panels. Ware uses scale as a tool, often incorporating panels with small and very detailed drawings, into a large illustration that covers a whole page or spread. In this way, the reader simultaneously gets an intimate view into various characters' stories and an overview of the surrounding universe, which often both connects and separates them. This use of multiple panels on one page makes it possible to present various perspectives within one illustration. Because of the differing sizes of the panel, Ware can also emphasise their importance, often giving emotional depictions more space than the more descriptive ones. The pages of Ware's cartoons often resemble a map or a technical drawing with lines connecting the panels. These compositional traits, of scale and multiperspectives within his stories, leave me with a feeling of the simultaneous interconnectedness and loneliness of human beings.

German-American Nora Krug's grahpic novel *Heimat*(2018) uses a mixed collage approach of old photographs and different drawing techniques. Krug also uses photographs of found objects, like train tickets, which has the effect that the past becomes very present and 'real'. In combination with personal documentation in the form of old family photographs, the story gets a stamp of authenticity that corresponds and verifies the Holocaust story it tells. At the same time, this collage form underscores how fragmented and subjective memory and history are. Krug's book also resembles a scrapbook, which gives it a very personal, almost diary-like presence. Reading it becomes an almost embodied sensation; because of the hand-drawing and photographs of physical objects, the pages appear tactile (despite all being printed on the same paper).

Polish Gosia Machon's books often dedicate a whole page to each image. They can be described as artist's books moreso than a graphic novel or comic, but the sequential order of the illustrations still evokes a rhythm, whether through use of colours or composition. They tell nonlinear stories that resemble a visual poem, and are often made with paint or ink. In this way, it seems the readers get a private glimpse into the artist's sketchbook, since the painted drawings are expressive and tactile in their materiality. When words appear, they are often fragmented and not full narratives, which suggests a dream-like atmosphere moreso than a narrative to be understood.

Despite this break with convention, I see *Defining You*, *Finding You* in connection with this genre through many shared elements. *Defining You*, *Finding You* uses multiple images and text to tell a story to be experienced sequentially (albeit in a non-linear way) as the audience encounters it

Subjectivity is considered the illustrator's tool, and personal stories are often a theme in authorial illustration in graphic novels. Some of the most well known examples in the genre—American Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980–91), Iranian Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000–03), and recent Nordic award winner Swedish Joanna Rubin Drangers *Ihågkom oss till liv* (2022)—depict historic events from a personal view point. My interest in graphic novels began when I discovered the graphic novels of female illustrators who often drew from their own personal lives. Of course, the work of female illustrators is as varied as any, but a tendency emerged, especially in the nordic countries. Some examples include the works of Swedish Nina Hemmingson, Norwegian Anja Dahle Øverbye, Finnish Amanda Vähämäki, Danish Rikke Villadsen, German Anke Feuchtenberger, and Danish-born, Berlin-based Karla Paloma. While each illustrator creates work that is visually different, they each use their personal stories, often combined with social criticism, to humorous and heartbreaking effect.

Something also shifted with the visual style in the turn to a feminine perspective in graphic novel production. Generally speaking, these examples are not as polished and perfected as others but are more scribbly in the ways they are drawn. For example, Feuchtenberger uses this style where the pencil is smudged and leaves traces of the erased sketch that was visible before. This hand-drawn aesthetic and the expressive linework add her subjective presence to the work. Often, these works from female illustrators also challenge the grid format and the delineated panels that typically define the traditional comic and graphic novel genre. Feuchtenberger's graphic novels are often made in a much larger format than other graphic novels, and she also usually works with large panels, which allows the illustrations to take up much more space, thereby suggesting to the reader to invest more time in reading. Her imagery is highly symbolic, and the story takes place in surreal settings, which she underscores in the compositions that use a lot of depth, also reinforced by the use of light and darkness and her signature black-and-white style.

In hindsight, I realise that what drew me in was precisely this certain kind of imagery and storytelling, which I now refer to as 'weak illustration'. As an illustrator and a book lover, I have often been frustrated that the borders of the panel format have felt so limiting to me, since I have an urge to tell stories through images and text. As a reader, I often feel overstimulated reading graphic novels. Compared to reading text-only novels, my pace slows significantly when I have to take in both drawings and text—something also experienced by others, as discussed in Barbara Gregorich's 2020 blog post "Graphic Novels: Panels vs. Paragraphs." In the case of graphic novels, the symmetry of text and image disturbs my attention. Even the most wordless examples seem distancing to me because of the small scale of the individual images. I recall seeing the animated film adaptation of Satrapi's *Persepolis* before I read the graphic novel. Where I was swept away in the film, the graphic novel, however, did not immerse me in the same way.

Defining You, Finding You consists of 24 illustrations digitally printed onto 140 x 90 cm panels of chiffon; they will be presented in a dark room in which the viewer walks around and views

them with a hand-held torch. The textiles will hang from the ceiling, forming flowing, semi-transparent walls that resemble membranes. The textiles are solid and yet so thin that you can sense what is on the other side by looking through them. The borders they create are weakened by their materiality. Because of this, the motifs they are displaying can be seen from both sides, and they overlap with the elements of the room, dissolving the work with the other side of the border—the spatial, physical context of the exhibition. A hanging textile raises associations with flags, and a flag can be interpreted as a signal, a warning, or a sign of surrender. A flag is also a symbol of celebration or simply an identity marker. Likewise, receiving a diagnosis can be seen similarly in our society.

The audience will experience these hanging works by walking between them and finding a way through the labyrinth. In this way, they offer both a sequential manner of reading and experiencing them, as well as a more non-linear narrative where there is an implied openness in how one walks around and encounters them. The size of each of the 24 works is to a scale which makes them seem almost equal to that of a human body. When you enter the space, you are surrounded and immersed in the story of these works, and can feel the soft, flowing, moving textiles brush against your skin. This sensorial experience contradicts the fixed format of the original reference source of the diagnosis, which usually comes in an A4 format.

Reinterpretating through the lens of remediation means translating something into a new format. This proces does not reject what existed before, though; the memory and meaning of the old format, which here is the A4 format, remain present and add meaning to how the new version is interpreted. In this way, the A4 format of the diagnosis shapes how the textile installation of *Defining You*, *Finding You* is seen, where it still playfully refers to the original format.

A shift in mediation can also change the viewer's experience in both simple and profound ways. The act of remediation changed the sensation I experienced when watching the animated version of Satrapi's *Persepolis*, where the scale of the drawings went from small panels in the graphic novel to taking up the entire screen. Together with the ability of the animated media to use sound, these features changed the experience to that of a much more engaging one for me.

The Motifs:

The imagery printed onto the chiffon consist of compositions of various illustrations based on the following source material:

- 1) Mark-making and visual shapes generated from my brother's diagnosis papers;
- 2) Cut-up lyrics generated from the diagnosis papers;
- 3) Visual interpretations of TAT cards using negative/postive spacing, watercolour and pastel drawing, and collage;
- 4) My brother's childhood drawings;
- 5) Portraits made of my brother, including painting on canvas and paper and mixed media;
- 6) Original texts made from the interview with my brother as well as cut-up lyrics from the diagnosis papers.

Mark-making:

I dissected my brother's diagnosis documentation which, in its original form was two computer-typed sheets of text. Meticulously, as a surgeon, I crossed out and cut the text up into word classes: nouns and verbs; active and passive adjectives; and positive- and negatively-charged pronouns and negations. I marked all the words according to their different groups and gave them each a colour. In this process the diagnosis paper became a colourful, secret code. By marking the original paper, and depending on how much these categories dominated the text, the resulting shapes appeared to be fragile or solid. I then connected the groups, with the lines converting the shapes into relational figures.

In removing the words from their original context, then extracting these words into a new list, these markings gave the text an almost Dadaist quality of a raving meaninglessness. At the same time, the content appeared even more clearly, as if the underlying core of the text was left naked after being removed from its context. With Kristeva's distinction between the semiotic and symbolic world in mind, it was like the text appeared in its semiotic 'inside' form after removing the symbolic overlay of the 'outside' construction.

Language reveals a lot about which qualities we attribute values to and which we do not. The charged and descriptive adjectives stood out to me the most. The passive paraphrases of situations and actions, the pattern of the negatively constructed sentences—cannot, cannot.... cannot....will not...will not et al.—also revealed that the gaze looking upon him was predominantly concerned with what he could *not* do, not what he *could* do.

The doctors wrote about you:

The gaze is...

Not interested

It addresses rarely

It rejects

It struggles

The gaze can't

The gaze is not receptive

It doesn't understand

doesn't

doesn't

It doesn't

It's difficult.

When I encountered the language in the diagnosis, I was reading the values of a neurotypical, majoritarian society speaking to their ideas of what is and is not "normal," in turn Othering the ones that fall beyond such a defined category.

Cut-up Lyrics:

From the deconstruction of the text, I now had a new set of wordlists, which I reassembled into new constellations. For ethical reasons, and to avoid disclosing private information, I turned my attention to pronouns and adverbs instead of descriptive adjectives. By way of their neutrality, these words can refer to everyone and relate more directly to all of us, being so personal and so deeply *impersonal* at the same time. These words—'his', 'self', 'no one', 'alone', 'together' et al.—revealed relations and positions both within and outside yourself. Such words are so small, and yet they say something about the Self and its relationship to the world at large, weaving in and out of each other as reference point.

From here I cut out the words and recomposed them in new ways, similarily to the cut-up technique of the Dadaists, hence I refer to it as the 'cut-up lyric'. Through this process I hoped to reinterpret my brother's diagnosis by deconstructing the source material and reassembling the words into a reinterpretation of how he could be defined and understood. This technique mimics that of a 'détournement' approach, a concept central to the avant-garde group the Situationist International (1957–72).³ As a process, détournement transforms existing cultural elements by creatively disfiguring them, often making a new and subversive meaning in opposition to the original. Often it has been used politically to alter a polical image by placing it in a new context, or alongside a new text. For détournement to be successful, however, it requires a target audience to be familiar with the original text, or to at least understand the original context, in order to appreciate the alterations and the renewed message/s.

Danish artist Johanne Helga Heiberg has used this technique in three of her graphic novels: *Dear Frida* (2015), *En Pakke Cigaretter* (2017), and *I Have My Heart in My Mouth* (2018). In them, Heiberg creates speculative conversations with artists Frida Kahlo and Louise Bourgeois, and writer Tove Ditlevsen, in which answers to Heiberg's questions are generated using cut-outs from Kahlo's original letters and the texts of Bourgeois and Ditlevsen. In using this method, Heiberg reaches out to her idols through conversation that dismisses the context of the original material, reinterpreting these texts and placing them within her own time and setting. In this way, deconstruction becomes a means of opening the gaze up through practices of 're-seeing', by swapping out elements of the original. It is also a way of engaging with something, by inhabitating and reinventing it.

Reinterpretations of TAT Cards:

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) cards are a widely used projective test invented in the 1930s, designed to reveal an individual's emotional response to, and perception of, interpersonal relationships. The TAT cards contain 31 illustrations depicting ambiguous situations with one or more people. The test person is asked to describe a dramatic story involving what happened before, during, and after this particular image. Using this technique, psychologists can reveal parts of an individual's personality, motivation, and emotional response based on the story they have told. The TAT is still a widely used personality test, despite being criticised for its lack of standardisation, and in how it relies on the psychologist's subjective interpretation of data.⁴ The original TAT cards consist of 31 black-and-white illustrations. For this work I made new

versions of some of the TAT card motifs using pastels and watercolour paints, emphasising the gaps, borders and overlaps between people depicted in the images, in order to illustrate their relationships.

The doctors said:

Look at the images and tell us

A story about the people.

You looked at them.

But they were locked inside their houses.

The skin is the body's outer border
The skin is a cover that protects the inside
The skin is a defence
And you are not a burglar.

Negative/Positive Space and Context:

One way I achieved this was by depicting the negative and/or positive space within an image, using a single colour. By attributing the positive spaces with one colour, irrespective of how many figures that image contained, these figures were newly rendered as one entity set against the white emptiness. I also experimented with how much the textual context changes the image by making simple tests, adding a 'yes or a 'NO!'. In adding these textual prompts, an illustration of two people, for example, would shift away from the appearance of a loving embrace into a violent gesture of coercion.

Watercolour, Pastel and Monoprints:

While I always work with analogue drawing and painting techniques, I used pastels and watercolour paints as materials for two reasons:

- 1) I wanted the colours to be uneven and textural; to be imperfect in contrast to digital colours which often appear uniform, flat and smooth, without variation in tone or texture. Reflecting the time in which they were made, the illustrations of the original TAT cards are pencil-based, handmade drawings with variations in line and tone. However, being black-and-white, they create two quite stark, opposing poles. By reinterpreting them in colour, I wanted to emphasise the space in-between these two poles. Colours are rich, varied and have innumerable shades and tones, representing subjective memories. A green colour, for example, can conjure memories of love in spring and/or the negative associations of a hangover represented by a beer bottle;
- 2) I wanted to engage a process that could connect the material, my hand, and the brain when working—something that the analogue materials help to facilitate. Pastels are messy and dusty; they show your fingerprints and make a scratching sound when drawing. The watercolour paint is liquid; it drips and is uncontrollable;

3) I also used monoprint as a technique. I painted the motif on a glass plate, which I then printed in a press on paper. The results of this process were very unpredictable, depending on the wetness/dryness of the print paper, and how much the painted motif had dryed. The beauty of the technique is that it appears to have its own will, choosing which colours and strokes to transfer and which to omit. Sometimes it smeared large parts. Generally, monotyping is very good at making 'weak', porous lines and colours; it is like the image lives a whole life in the process and shows its lived, ghostlike life in the print.

Multiple Perspectives:

I reworked my original TAT illustrations (both in printed copies and originals) into collages inspired by British artist David Hockney's multi-perspective, photographic collages. Hockney's technique is based on the principles of deconstruction and reassembling, similar to how I approached the cut-up lyric. Hockney's collages reveal multiple perspectives in one image simultaneously by assembling numerous photographs taken from slightly different angles and placing them alongside one another. Where the photographs have been taken over some time (perhaps just a matter of minutes), Hockney animates them to make the collage non-static, with the possibility of grasping more than a frozen moment for an eternally transforming identity.

Childhood Drawings:

My brother drew excessively as a child, therefore I had a large collection of drawings available to be analysed and interpreted. In her book *Drawing Autism* (2009), American psychologist Jill Mullin⁵ collected and categorised the drawings of her clients with ASD. Despite their very different cognitive states and histories, she found that these drawings shared some common themes. In carrying out the same process with my brother's childhood drawings, I noticed something: under the category that Mullin calls 'repetition', my brother portrayed people as abstractions, signs and symbols, like a dot or a cross. In one drawing that depicted a crowd of soldiers at war, the individual was marked with a different colour—a red cross to represent a dead soldier. Generally, across all his drawings, there was an extreme sense and patience for detail. Observing the world through attention to details instead of as an entity is a typical characteristic of people with ASD. From a neurodiverse point of view, the face is just another fragment, no more critical than the wallpaper behind you, or the freckle on your earlobe.

They say you miss the important
What's in front of you
Because you see from above:
You see everything as a dot in a pattern.
A face, a forest duck.
A blade of grass, a gigabyte
A machine, a man.
Every little dot is important and has a role.

They don't understand:
You don't see the haystack, you see the needle.
You can't see the forest for the ecosystems.
I want Others to see the ability of your gaze;
to care
for the smallest
and the infinite.

Two of the textiles on display in *Defining You*, *Finding You* are of my brother's drawings: one is a non-edited version. I wanted to highlight the beauty and ability of his gaze: seeing and valuing every little detail; seeing an overall pattern *because of* the details. His gaze values and empathises with tiny details, not only human agents—something that is common of neurodiverse people. In the worldview of someone with ASD, the human is not superior to other species or objects; they are raw versions directly seen through his particular gaze. In parallel to the non-edited drawing, I made a collage of his various drawings in combination with a figure from the mark-marking process, combining his intricate world view with 'the stamp' of his diagnosis.

In the end, many of the textile flags have been assembled using many different scans of drawings and photographs of paintings, all put together in Photoshop. In making these digital collages, I have used the eraser and magic wand tools to free motifs from their backgrounds. Sometimes, small parts of the former backgrounds are left in place, thereby revealing the former context of the motif. Initially this was mostly done unintentionally, however later in the process, when I noticed it, I left these traces. In this way, a digital tool like Photoshop—which is often so good at smoothing over—can provide traces of the process and the imperfections of the hand's work.

Portraits of My Brother:

How can you reproduce and/or represent a person's intangible essence? The portraits I made of my brother follow an Expressionist aim in portraying the 'inside' on the 'outside'; they do not aim for a realistic likeness—something which also keeps them anonymous—but rather they strive for an atmosphere or feeling created from colours, strokes and mood.

For this project I made three paintings on canvas using acrylic paint and pastels. In them I painted my brother a) alongside his things in his home, from a vantage of far-away, b) a full-length portrait of him together with me and our other two siblings; and c) via a close-up of his face. By altering the scales through which he is presented, the distance between my brother and the viewer also shifts. Despite this, no matter how close you get, eye contact is never made. In one of the paintings, he has his back turned towards the viewer's gaze; in another, his face has no features; and in the third, he is looking down, to the side.

The colours in these paintings are vibrant and surrealistic; they are there to set the mood. I use exaggeration to depict the shadows, as real as other elements in the room. Through this treatment my brother has also become a line and a contour in his own space, looking unreal and ghostly. In

the sibling portrait, the borders between the characters are hard to define. The two siblings in the middle share the same dress, becoming one. The figures and the bench they are sitting on have the same reddish contour line, making it hard to see where the background, object and subjects start and stop. The four characters have weird, surreal, pink shadows surrounding them, suggesting ghosts or souls. The close-up portrait resembles a mask, revealing two sides painted with different colours, suggesting a tension within the Subject's identity, or a double layer.

In each of these portraits I have worked with both solid and very diluted layers of paint. Often I would paint and then spray water on top, moving the canvas so that the now-liquid paint could run down it. At times I would stop it with some paper towels; at other times I would let the pooling liquid dry out until the next morning. I also used pastel colours to draw on top of the painted canvases. Sometimes it would be used to add texture where it is thick and dusty; at other times I used it to hightlight a contour or line, most often to have a dry line tool to contrast with the painted surface, which is shiny and smooth when dry.

I worked from photographs to create these portraits, which is, again, a kind of adaption of reality. Where the first adaption is the gaze, now the photograph makes another filter/lens with its composition. I prefer to paint from photographs because it creates a space in which I do not have to rush, but can be fully invested in the making process, without having to worry if the sitters are bored, uncomfortable or uneasy. Photographs also allow me to interpret something and someone in conditions that suit my work best, which for me is to be alone. It also makes it possible to go back in time and recreate something that once was.

Inspired by my brother's gaze, I also wanted to make some symbolic representations of him that equaled non-human entities as much as the human figure. One of the textile flags depicts a photograph of a yellow mustard flower, fitted into a plastic pocket, which is a symbolic portrait of him. In his diagnosis paper it mentions that one of my brother's obsessions and special interests as a child was the yellow mustard plant. I chose to source a flower that resembled the yellow mustard, fitting it into a plastic pocket. I placed it into the photocopy machine and got a photocopy of the organic wild flower restricted by the limited space formed by the plastic container. In this way the illustration—the symbolic portrait—was made using tools that I also imagine psychiatrist to use: photocopies and plastic pockets.

The Texts:

Incorporated into the final textile work are four texts I handwrote based on the interviews between my brother and I, his diagnosis, and my own experiences. Initially I experimented with writing these texts using ink and pastel; although the expressive qualities aligned with the concept of porous borders and fluidity, the legibility of the writing was far too compromised. I chose to write them with a solid dark pencil instead, which still has some qualities of variation in line and tone. The text is written in Danish, my family's mother tongue. I chose not to translate these out of Danish, since I wanted to retain a certain intimacy with the original source—something which felt more authentic. As the artistic result is shown in Norway and directed to a Scandinavian audience, I felt confident knowing most people will still be able to read and understand the content, and an English translation will also be made available for the

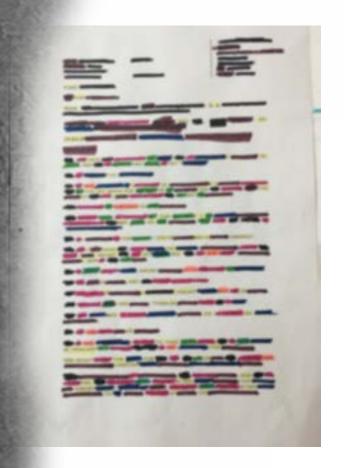
exhibition. The four texts have been titled *Hus (House)*, *Grænse (Border)*, *Blind (Blind)* and *Statue (Statue)*, the meaning of which all centred around a container with an inside/outside, the border, and the gaze. These texts use combinations of first-, second- and third-person pronouns: 'du' (you), 'jeg' (I), 'vi' (we), and 'de' (they). They also incorporate information gathered from internet searches to create a tension and connection between knowledge from different positions, and from inside and outside the relationship. Rachel Gannon and Mireille Fauchon write that:

Illustrators write from the vantage point of being able to inform a visual imaging in the readers mind. While the material outcome is not in the most direct sense visual, the treatments of content, structure and delivery perform as they would in an illustrative image. . . Illustrative writing, like all forms of illustration, does not merely describe or translate information, it performs with affect.⁶

The Title:

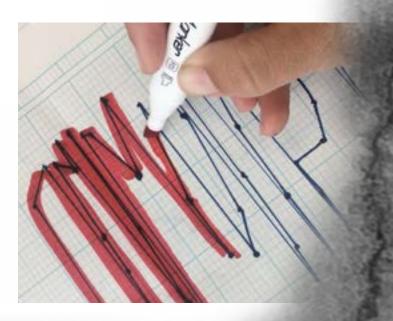
When someone is undergoing diagnosis, they also receive a new social identity, perhaps even a new self-identity. For some, this may be a clarification that is empowering, while for others it might feel like a box that is limiting—a restraint. When I read my brother's diagnosis for the first time, I felt it was a one-dimensional image of his identity. A diagnosis is there to 'classify' you, but it says nothing about the resources you are or are not equipped with, nor the challenges that you experience. The declaration that my brother and others with ASD do not experience empathy did not align with my experience of him. The format of black typeface on a standard-size sheet of paper also seemed like a poor and *cold* way for someone to offer a definition of you.

Defining You, Finding You is an attempt to make a portrait of an 'Othered' person, from the vantage point of an *intimate* and not an official, *medical* gaze. By disrupting my brother's official diagnosis, I wanted to challenge the position of the gaze. In the definitions and categorisations used, I could not recognise him; by disrupting the gaze of the diagnosis, I would try to find him, hence the title of this work—Defining You, Finding You.





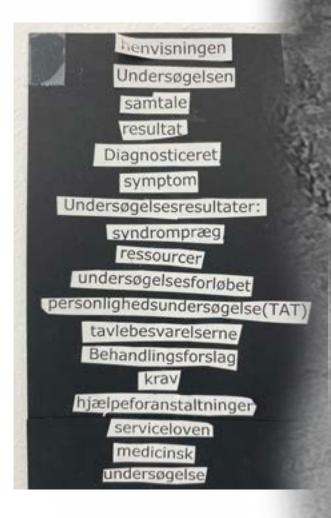
Defining You, Finding You: 1-4: Process of markmaking of the diagnosis.

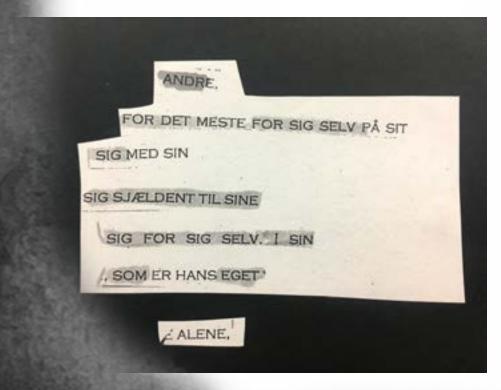


Defining You, Finding You:

1-4: Examples from the cut-up lyric process:





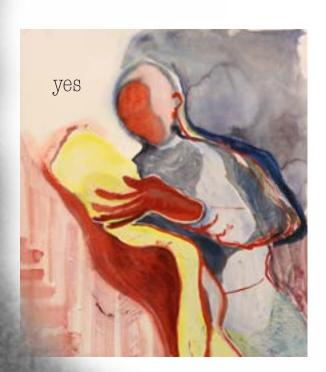




Defining You, Finding You:
1-3: The original TAT cards.
4-5: Examples of reinterpretation of TAT card, how a simple 'yes' or 'no' can change the context.





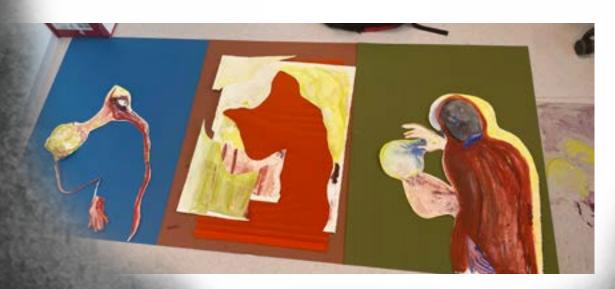




Defining You, Finding You:
1-2: Process; negative and positive space.
3: Collage tests; the contour line, negative space, and the positive figure.







Defining You, Finding You: Examples of TAT card reinterpretations.



- Examples from the process:
 1-2: The original glass plate and the monoprint result.
 3-4:Pouring water onto a watercolour painting and the result the next day.









1-3: Examples of the painting process.













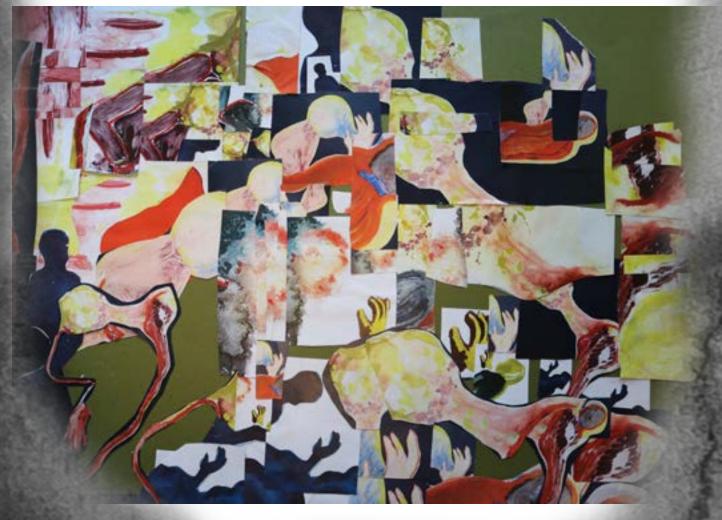




Defining You, Finding You: 1-3: Examples of testing out the Hockney-style collage method.









Defining You, Finding You:
1-2: My brother's
childhood drawings.
3: My illustration, which is a
digital collage, is put
together with my brother's
childhood drawings and an
symbol from the markmaking
process.





- Defining You, Finding You:
 1: Painting of my brother alone in his room using contour line.
 2: Painting of my brother in a group portrait together with me and our two other siblings.





- Defining You, Finding You:
 1: Painting of my brother as a close up.
 2: Symbolic portrait of my brother in the symbol of photocopies of flowers in plastic-pockets.





The Development of *The Face Between Us:*

Crossing Borders in Formats, Lines and Colour:

While I see animation as a natural part of my illustrative practice, the experimental animation field is not easy to categorise. While some define experimental animation as abstract, non-linear, and non-narrative stories, often played to music, others define it as almost anything differing from traditional cartoons and/or productions beyond a major national industry.¹

Director of the Animation Academy Paul Wells defines experimental animation as:

tending toward the abstract over the figurative, non-continuity, creative interpretation over traditional storytelling, exposure of the materials used to make the animation, multiple styles applied in the same film [where] the artist who produced the work feels present and the film will be driven by music instead of dialogue.²

Where I work independently with animation, I place my work within the field of experimental animation. My personal style of animation combines referential elements, creative interpretation, exposure to the materials used to make the animation, and I assert my authorial presence. I also use spoken word and some variation of a continuous narrative. Since animation is a time-based medium, it allows for more than one image to evolve. Swedish animator Nathalie Djurberg started her artistic career as a painter but became unsatisfied with images that could only show a single scene.³ Compared to static images, multiples and moving images add complexity, nuance and contradiction to a scene, where it is in constant transformation. The order of an image sequence, together with the presence of sound, can create paradoxes and dramatically change a narrative from being funny, sad, profound or absurd. As Edwin Rostron points out in *Edge of Frame*, animation gathers many disciplines. Experimental animation sits in the borderland, or perhaps in the overlaps of many other artforms. Rostron writes, "experimental animation exists at the intersection of other forms, and so the discussion will overlap into drawing, collage, writing, painting, comics, filmmaking, sound and any number of other disciplines."

I chose animation as the medium for *The Face Between Us*, referring to Julia Kristeva's description of the position and understanding of the Self as a transformational Subject compared to inanimate objects. Identity, the Self and the Other are always in transformation, with the abject being "located in a liminal state that is on the margins of two positions," as Samantha Pentony states in her essay "How Kristeva's Theory of Abjection Works in Relation to the Fairy Tale and Post Colonial Novel: Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, and Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*.⁵

Crossing Borders—The Transgressing of the Abject:

In her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* Kristeva makes the distinction that when something is on the inside of our bodies—be it blood, spit, food, tears, or shit—it is acceptable;

when these substances cross the border from the inside to the outside, however, they become repugnant. More than sheer distaste, this transgression becomes a threat to us; the abject becomes an Other. As professor of English at Purdue University, Dino Felluga states, according to Kristeva:

the abject refers to the human reaction (horror, vomit) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other.⁶

What we encounter in Kristeva's own words is:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.⁷

Maintaining these borders is an essential element in defining our identity and protecting the Self. In setting up these borders, however, we find that what is beyond ourselves becomes problematised, creating a conflict around the Other. In her blog "Medusa's Body" Chigago-based writer Emily Daniel writes:

Water the sobbing/vomiting reaction down a bit and we can see how abjecting the other can be interpreted as the root of oppression: *To be sure of what I am, I must despise what I am not.*⁸

The Face Between Us takes up the ancient Greek mythical figure of Medusa. In the original myth, Medusa is a creature who has live snakes as hair; she is so hideous that anyone who looks at her turns to stone. In The Face Between Us, Medusa is not a monster but a misunderstood being who longs to be seen. Here, Medusa is depicted as scratching her skin; she is trying to open and eliminate the borders between herself and the outside in order that we can see who she really is.

But I am not you
I am here dissolving into water
I scratch my skin
I scratch I scratch I scratch
I have a bone to pick
With myself
I am eliminating my outside
to show my inside.

The Face Between Us uses liquid, blended colours, weak lines and fluid transitions to depict Medusa opening up to her insides. Where we see what appear to be bodily fluids like blood and tears cross and mix, the material treatment renders the abjection as literal and disturbing. The

Face Between Us tells the story of the tensions that exist between the blurred borders of human loneliness, and our entanglements with each other.

Fluid Transitions:

Another way to break the borders of the book format with its panels and pages, is the timeline employed in animation. Animation makes it possible to tell a sequential narrative, where the images blur into and transform one other. As with everything that is plotted on a timeline, as the director I have chosen a sequential order through which the images are being viewed and processed. While the film ascribes to a non-narrative form—being played in a continuous loop—the question of where the work begins and ends is not clear.

Animator Caroline Leaf is credited for her fluid transitions, where figures and objects morph into each other. ¹⁰ Leaf is known for using both paint-on-glass and sand animation in a graphic, expressive style. These fluid transitions morph from one image into another, moving in time and setting.

Similarly, *The Face Between Us* uses fluid transitions—both metamorphosis and fading techniques—to move seamlessly from internal to external perspectives, maintaining a continuous, organic flow with no abrupt cuts. A central concept was established early for *The Face Between Us*; the animation consists of a series of movements—from over the water to under the water, from outside the body to inside the body, from two elements to one, and vice versa.

Blurred Borders:

All three sub-projects of FBU have in common that they reject the 'official' and systemic standardised formats to create something more in-between. In Defining You, Finding You, I tried to expand the constraints of the A4 sheet of paper, which contained the diagnosis and the reinterpreted TAT cards. Similarly, a film also has borders—that of the frame of the screen or the parameters of a projection. To soften this border The Face Between Us has a dark, subtly animated edge that surrounds the film, meaning that the borderline between the film and the physical reality surrounding it blurs. There are no clear borders between the moving images of the film itself, nor in the water of the pool upon which the images are projected. Sometimes, the movements in the film try to escape the film's borders; the scene where the blue hand reaches out of the frame gives the impression of expanding the scene beyond the film's borders.

You are afraid of me Because I Dissolve you Into context Like A drop in the ocean.

Wet and Muddy:

The animation technique used in *The Face Between Us* is paint-on-glass. When you use paint-on-glass, you paint each frame (image) on glass, then take a picture, wipe it off, and paint the next one. In using the program Dragonframe in the production of the film, one beneficial tool is the 'onion skin' that enables you to see the previous image made, rendering it as a transparent layer over the top of your new frame-in-making on a screen that is positioned next to your working area.

The Face Between Us not only uses paint, but specifically wet paint. Because of its liquid nature, paint can be smeared and mixed to blend the colours into one another. I used gouache mixed with glycerin to keep the paint wet and the liquid viable for longer, so that it would not dry out before I took a picture of it. This also meant I could sometimes reuse parts of the painting and erase and move some of the paint around when making the new frame. Sometime the paint mixture was in such a fluid state that it animated itself. The second time we see a close-up of the blue hand scraping at a surface, the cracks and slits are painted in a very watery liquid. In this instance I poured water on the painted glass plate, creating a flowing watery essence that moved autonomously; being so liquid, it allowed me to take photographs as if a timelapse.

I used brushes, q-tips, cotton pads and my hands and fingertips to paint with. In this way, producing the film has been a very tactile experience. As an animator, I leave brushmarks and sometimes fingerprints. Traces of fingertips are present in the final work, where they have also left their mark; such wet expression adds urgency and places us in the present, in the moment.

In Leaf's film *The Street* (1976), the use of the paint-on-glass technique captures the mood and feeling of childhood memories, rather than attempting to depict reality literally. Most often Leaf's films are made in black-and-white, creating an emotional intensity, with the materials (paint or sand) adding to the film's sensorial presence.

With the liquid paint and mixed colours, I have tried to access the borderless area between the Self and the Other; I have attempted to access the 'both and neither,' as places in which the visual style and materials do not make clear where the borders and/or lines of the Self begin or end.

Belonging or Alienated? Building the Image Up with Layers:

The scenes in *The Face Between Us* are built up through multiple layers, meaning that the background and individual characters are made separately on a green screen—an element which can be removed in post-production.

In animation, a traditional process would entail: making a script, storyboard, animatic, animation, colouring, composition, sound and then editing. Going into this project I had a rough storyboard in mind; I changed some parts during the process of animating, letting the material and new ideas emerge and change its direction. This was aligned with the methods and processes

of illustrator Anke Feuchtenberger, where she makes her work by drawing the story *through*, and not the other way around.

My decision to work on green screens and in layers allowed me the freedom of working in a non-linear way, where I did not necessarily need to know how the work was going to begin or end, nor did I need to know each of the elements in a scene before creating it. Part of this process incorporated the analogue-digital feedback. After having animated an image sequence by painting it on glass, I imported the image sequence into After Effects, removing the green screen and building the scene up in layers, through backgrounds and visual effects. This way I could see how it looked; if another element needed to be added, I went back to animate it by hand and then superimposed it digitally.

In some scenes I used rotoscoping—a technique that allows you to trace movements from pre-existing material—using photographs of myself doing the movements. In other scenes I painted certain movements freehand, from memory. In general I used rotoscoping in literal regards to the human body, such as with the blue dancing hands. More abstracted objects like the eyeballs are animated freely from imagination and memory. The frame rate used—8 frames per second, which is far from the standard 24 frames per second applied in films—creates a halting movement that adds to the non-realism of the work.

This approach of building the work up in layers is fundamentally different from that of New York based artist Matt Bollinger, who is both a painter and an animator. Most of Bollinger's animations are made from original paintings using acrylics on canvas. One of Bollinger's canvases equates to one scene of his animations. The process of animating reveals the canvas being repainted and altered, making the process evident in the film since the wet, newer paint has a different colour than the dry, older one. In this way, the scenes evolve not just through their particular storylines, but through use of materials and technique. As Bollinger remarks:

The physicality of paint is so central to what I do...I like that characters and objects are inseparable from their context. There is no passive background before which someone moves. Instead, this viscous context fills in all of the gaps and a body has to trudge and sludge through it.¹¹

Where different animation techniques have different advantages, I chose to work in layers because that process suited the loose nature of my script. I could build the scenes up gradually, adding more elements organically without having to know the outcome prior, which avoidedbeing boxed in to having to do one take.

One thing that I lost in the material process, which contrasts with Bollinger's method, is the traces of the previous image being incorporated into the new frame. I find Bollinger's style and its expression—where time, process, and the relational realm are evident—fascinating and beautiful. Bollinger's expression breaks down the borders between time and current/previous frames, as well as the borders between subject and object and its context. In comparison, the technique I used in *The Face Between Us* makes the figures seem flat and superimposed, which they are. While this creates an uncanny feeling that suits the film's narrative—of not being seen and the alienation it entails in not belonging to something—the layering also refers to

psychoanalysis and the idea of identity being composed of multiple layers that you can 'peel' off. The figures and the background do not co-exist in the same world due to the way they have been made, which underscores a point about Medusa's distress regarding her inside and her outside having different levels of accessibility. In terms of illustrating the Non-Representable, Canadian born Suzanne Buchan, head of MA Animation at Royal College of Art in London, states that:

Some forms of animation can assuage individual alienation with its figurative and symbolic depiction of a vast range of subjective, physically impossible figures, situations and "worlds" that visually express the often inexpressible: thought, experience and imagination.¹²

The Master of Art program in animation at the Royal College of Art is somewhere I have turned to for inspiration in recent years. The student projects that come out of this program are highly artistic and infused with a personal style. One of the college graduates, Swedish animator Amanda Eliasson uses a technique whereby each frame is hand painted on paper and then digitally scanned. Eliasson's use of fluid transition is remarkable for being highly spatial and constantly undergoing changes of perspective. As Eliasson says, "I've developed a deep interest in making flat images transport the viewer into a three dimensional space." 13

In some scenes produced for *The Face Between Us* I used a three-dimensional effect on certain layers, giving a sense of depth in the unreal landscape, and suggesting that something may exist behind the surface also. In this way, we sense and glimpse a whole world behind the facade of the Other that we cannot access. Even when applying this technique, the space and depth are always a bit strange, odd and inaccurate, indicating an uncertainty of what is on the other side of the border.

The Face Between Us takes advantage of the flatness of the space and the separation between background and character to underscore the paradox that layers and three-dimensional effects give an illusion of a space that can be entered. Still, the reality is that it is all flat. Animation is a practice that builds up illusions, as well as spatial illusions, but ends up being experienced two-dimensionally. The Face Between Us, however, is an expanded animation piece, and it will regain depth because it is being projected onto the water.

In one of the repeated scenes, a hand is seen scratching at a surface to reveal a new scene in a peel-back effect. Where the hand never finishes crossing to the other side, there is always another layer to scratch off when aiming for the deepest realms inside a person.

The skin is a gate Keeping me on the inside.

The Weak Line:

I have always admired people who can draw something with a pen, in a precise line, without hesitating—people who somehow already know where to end the line when they start out. When

I was younger, I had a feeling that my line was too weak, my lines were mostly searching and unsure of themselves. I tried so hard to do one-line work in a graphic, comic style. The self-imposed goal was to make the work look geometric, graphic, modern, precise and hard, like a punch. I remember being taught how to make my drawings look perfect, smooth and appetising, using the levels tool in Photoshop. It was like magic; all my gritty drawings suddenly seemed professional and perfect.

The stop animations of South African artist William Kentridge are made by repeatedly erasing and reworking original charcoal drawings. With this technique, you see the last frame in the new frame—as in Bollinger's work—creating a kind of ghost-image of the past that carries into the present. As Director of the Harvard Film Archive Haden Guest says:

Refusing any kind of computerized special effects, Kentridge instead works and reworks his drawings as he films them, making the act of erasure as important as his drawings, keeping the trace as alive as the figure.¹⁴

When I encountered Kentridge's animation style for the first time, I saw someone using line with curiosity—someone not hiding the process or the doubt, but incorporating it. Kentridge's lines are evidence of his hand, the material and time; in witnessing their process and development, these lines carry their whole life within them. Kentridge's work is an eye-opener in embracing the giddy line and asking myself: Why is weak 'bad'?

As a child of the 90s, I remember using Paint: a computerised drawing/painting program. After making a line drawing in the software, you could take the paintbrush tool and click on an area, which sometimes resulted in the whole background turning that colour if there was even the tiniest breach in the line drawing. This example gives a good picture of a weak border. In opposition to the digital realm, physical paint flows out to breach its borders, blending with other colours, but not overriding them altogether. The force of weak borders and lines when explored using paint and watercolour results in borderlands of mixtures and new, generative colours.

The Face Between Us opens with a dreamlike, barren landscape populated only by stone faces; a figure made with a blue, solid line (Medusa) appears. Drawn with a contour line, she encompasses an empty void that we as viewers are asked to fill in—an identity that is not yet fixed, and which is open for our interpretation. Further on in the work, this line becomes frail and fragmented as Medusa's body becomes a pure nervous system, at which point we observe her scratching herself. Here, her inside is painted as if her outside, fragile and frayed.

I am your mountain An adventure An obsession Conquerable But impenetrable. The human being is a paradox of containing an ungraspable inside, existing within a fleshy, porous body with weak borders; by the simple act of breathing, the borders of the Self open. The 'weak' line's strenght can be understood as its ability to be unclear and porous and to incorporate its surroundings, thereby adding complexity to a given narrative.

In American artist Barbara Bernstein's essay "Drawing a Breath," she talks about 'immersive drawing'. Bernstein considers both drawing and looking at drawing an immersive experiences and states that an immersive drawing "shifts the response- ability of creator and viewer, towards an interfaced, simultaneous, and symbolic relationship of observation and participation." The use of weak, frayed lines can underscore this point. The lines create an immersive universe that includes us, not only as viewers but simply by existing among Others.

The pure line is a symbol of force, of decisiveness, of knowing.

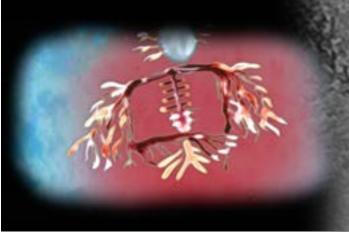
The frayed line, the uneven line is vulnerable, and its borders are weak.

It is open for intruding, erasure, and transformation.

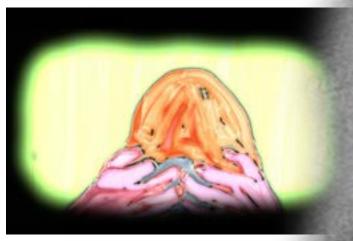
The Face Between Us:

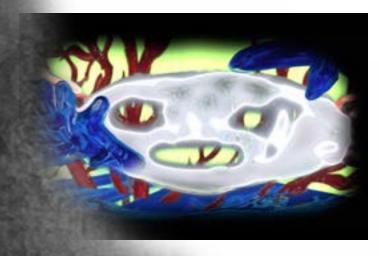
- 1: Example of the abject bodily fluid.
 2: Medusa scrathces herself
 3: Fluid transition using fade.
 4: The blurred edge softening the film format's borders.
 5. Hands escaping the film format's borders.
- 6. Liquid water.

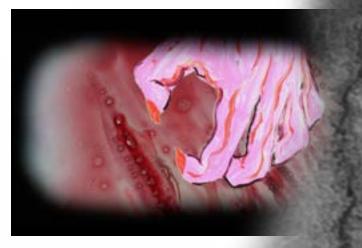








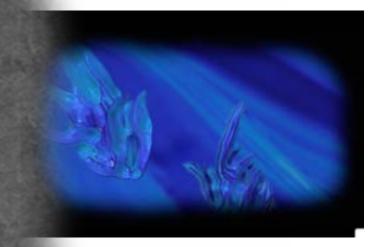


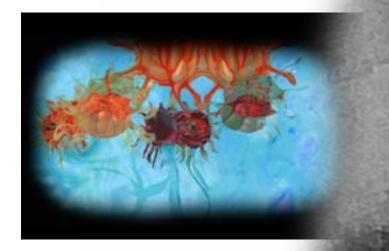




The Face Between Us:

- 1: Material used to rotoscope
 2: Hands animated by rotoscoping
 3: Animated without rotoscoping.
 4: Painting on glass with an image reference(rotoscoping)

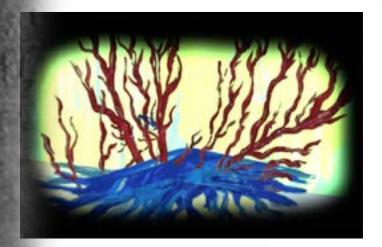


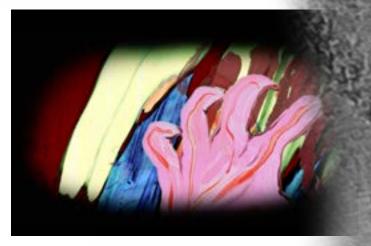


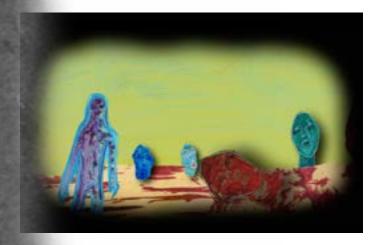


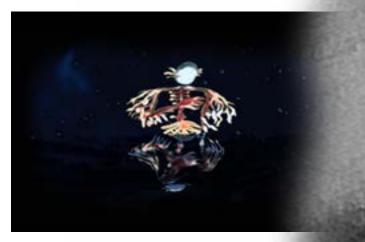
The Face Between Us:

- Here a 3D layer is used to suggest depth.
 The hand scratching new layers.
 Medusa as a solid figure with a strong contour line.
 Medusa as a nervous system made in a frayed line.









Summary of Border:

Duchenne's Smile explores the relationship between the researcher's and viewer's outside position and the subject's object's position on the inside, to question how this border can be acknowledged ethically. While Duchenne's original study aimed to categorise human facial expressions as universal traits, documenting them as reproducible photographs, Duchenne's Smile challenges this generality by creating unique objects. Instead of realistic black-and-white photographs—often associated with documented 'truths'—the work transforms them into expressive, colourful, handmade interpretations. It also functions to add a filter of abstraction to protect the anonymity of the subjects, in turn emphasising that these reinterpretations are products of one person's subjective gaze. The work presents the faces as hollow-backed sculptures, indicating that when viewing a person from the outside, we only see a facade. Enclosed in boxes, these ungraspable faces symbolise the visible yet impenetrable border between the Self and the Other. The optical lenses, placed inside the small peepholes, break down the borders of the boxes. When looking through them, the viewer will get a glimpse of the faces on the inside; the viewer is able to see, but it is a distorted view and the viewer and the object are still separated. This obstruction of sight may result in curiosity, leading the viewer to spend more time engaging with the work,

Defining You, Finding You tells an autoetnographical story through images and text which disrupts the traditional format of a graphic novel. By breaking the usual format, scale and panel borders, the emphasis is instead on creating a borderless, sensorial and embodied experience. The textile illustrations form a universe the viewer steps into, thereby dissolving the borders between the artwork and the viewer. The illustrations printed on textile are created using materials such as watercolour, paint and pastels, which allow for soft blending of colours. A focus point is for the motifs to depict the relationship between the Self and the Other. The illustrations use blending of colour, porous, weak lines, and the positive and negative space to emphasise the Non-Representable nature of this relationship. Many of the illustrated textiles are assembled as digital collages, merging multiple individual drawings, thereby erasing the borders between the original work while still keeping traces of them, as an acknowledgment of their past existence. The illustrations are based on various sources, among other things TAT cards, an A4 sheet of an ASD diagnosis, and my brother's childhood drawings, which are all combined with the illustrations and text based on my own personal experiences. The story is being told from multiple perspectives by combining and including data from various positions. This approach is aimed at forming a narrative that acknowledges the existence of these gazes from different perspectives, while at the same time questioning the border between the "official" outside story and the subjective, inner perspective.

The Face Between Us is an expanded animation. It uses a timeline to break the borders of sequential images as separate images with fixed borders. Instead, it uses fluid transitions and fading to create a narrative that constantly transforms and overlaps with pre-existing images. The multimodal, time-based animation media allows for the addition of sound to carry the images. This can be a source of both connection and/or disconnection of sensation, adding complexity to the narrative. The film's non-linear structure and layered composition reflect the complexity of Medusa's persona and the impossibility of fully understanding a person's inner

Self from the outside. The film is inspired by Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Kristeva argues that the borders between the Self and the Other help create meaning and protect our identity, yet these borders are constantly challenged by the abject—things that cross from the inside to the outside. *The Face Between Us* explores this notion of abjection both visually and thematically. The animation uses wet, liquid paint to mimic bodily fluids as well as symbolic imagery showing elements emerging from various body parts. Medusa is depicted as a human nervous system with frayed lines and semi-transparent edges. This underscores that she is both exposed to, and open for, intrusion. Medusa is painted in a wet, fluid line—a materiality that means she can adapt and transform. *The Face Between Us* takes the mythical figure of Medusa and approaches her through a speculative reimagining. The animation media crosses the borders of reality and speculation, offering a look into a liminal space between the inside and the outside.

Endnotes. Development of Duchenne's Smile

- 1 Arbuckle, Alex Q., "1862. 'The Mechanism of Human Facial Expression'", *Mashable*, accessed February 11, 2025. https://mashable.com/feature/mechanism-of-human-facial-expression
- 2 Campoli, Jessica and Pelphrey, Kevin, "8.1 Autism: Insights from the study of the social brain", (College of Southern Idaho, 2020). https://csi.pressbooks.pub/introtopsychdisorders/chapter/8-1-autism-insights-from-the-study-of-the-social-brain-2/
- 3 Barrett, Lisa Feldman, "Facial Expressions Do Not Reveal Emotions", *Scientific American*, April 27, 2022. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/darwin-was-wrong-your-facial-expressions-do-not-reveal-your-emotions/
- 4 Bennie, Maureen, "What is autistic masking?", *Autism Awareness Center Inc.*, January 11, 2022. https://autismawarenesscentre.com/what-is-autistic-masking/
- 5 Belting, Hans, Face and Mask. A Double History (Princeton University Press, 2017),p.1.
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Endnotes. Development of Defining You, Finding You

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Gazes

Development of Duchenne's Smile:

Visual Depictions as Truth:

Images have the power to overrule a person and a situation. Visual representation is a powerful way to assign or undermine identity, and awareness of the ethical questions surrounding representation is essential when working in the field of illustration. When you tell a story, especially about another person, you can offer a space for empowerment or its opposite, for example in exposing, victimising or demonising a person, or by reducing a complex matter to an over simplification.

Photographic media can be very confrontational when it is perceived to depict reality in an 'objective' way. When photography was invented, it was seen as a 'true' medium that could depict the world in an objective, realistic, and truthful manner, especially compared to the subjective nature of other media such as painting. "Only photography," Duchenne wrote, "as truthful as a mirror, could attain such desirable perfection." History has taught us that photography is more complex than this; even documentary photography, for example, is highly subjective, with the power to alter reality. Today, in digital societies, our knowledge increasingly stems from secondhand visual sources. In this way we lose the bodily experience of first hand encounters, because we see and experience the world predominantly through images mediated to us, as Swedish illustrator and former professor of illustration at Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design Joanna Rubin Dranger emphasises in her research about visual power. Dranger offers her research through a lecture series titled "Visual Power" and in a website which catalogues the findings.²

French illustrator Marguerite Carnec made an illustrative reportage work from a refugee camp (nicknamed 'the Jungle') in Calais, France in 2016. Her aim was to "give an alternative representation to the mainstream photographic journalistic media's black-and-white coverage of the Jungle that often dehumanised refugees." Carnec chose to volunteer in the camp instead of merely reporting, a fact which changed the nature of her drawings. With their intentional political focus, her drawings—which she later reworked into expressive monotypes—addressed the everyday lives of these refugees. She would include small personal details of peoples' clothing and everyday actions, giving a different, more intimate insight into her reportage than that of the mainstream media who rely on photography alone, thereby being an example of the 'humanising effect' of illustration.⁴ Another factor to consider is the time taken to produce a work of illustration. While photography still requires post-production before being published, illustration by nature often requires more time to produce. Spending time, both with the subjects being illustrated and in the act of illustrating itself, has the potential to change the outcome significantly.

Carnec's approach can also be seen as a way of reinterpreting, in this case, the mainstream media's style of reportage. By reworking her sketches into monotypes, Carnec chooses a

technique where you ink up a plate, and then create a drawing by removing the ink with tools or hands. The finished outcome, at least in my experience, will always have the artist present in the print, by leaving brushstrokes or fingerprints. Carnec's reportage from Calais becomes a very subjective eyewitness account that is more touching because of it.

Duchenne's own black-and-white photographs depict peoples' faces, showing strange and exaggerated expressions. His photographs are carefully composed of people who are staged and often shown in costumes or with props. Duchenne also poses in them as the researcher holding his electric tools. I was immediately intrigued by these photographs—by their theatrical nature and the absurd expressions they capture, but especially by the stories of these people and how they ended up in Duchenne's chair. What was their relation to Duchenne? And how did their frozen smiles and screams relate to me, 165 years later? Duchenne mostly used his former patients as test subjects for these photographs. This role is said to have been voluntary, and the electric stimuli non-painful.⁵ Still, seeing Duchenne's studies raises a lot of questions about the ethics of research, in this case informed by voluntarily consent.

Observing and Participating—Thoughts about Otherness:

The original call out for this PhD was to represent marginalised groups through new ways of illustrating. Despite its good intentions, this approach increased my discomfort around my own position as a researcher. I myself do not belong to a minority group: I was born in a rich Scandinavian country, my skin is white, and I am able-bodied, cisgender, and straight. I am still relatively young and have a high education. The question I had to ask at the outset of this project was: Am I entitled to make work about Otherness and discrimination? Even the word 'Otherness' can lead to unwanted, discriminating behaviour. Vietnamese artist Trinh T. Minh-ha challenges the binary understanding of minority and majority, calling these categories false. In her view, we should rather see these categories in terms of differences *within* and *between* entities.⁶

Simultaneous to reading and researching Duchenne, I participated in Autscape, a conference about, for, and by neurodiverse people. Although not neurodivergent myself, I was permitted to contribute and participate by organising a drawing workshop. The exercises included drawing portraits, a blind drawing (where you do not look at the paper, only at the person), and then drawing the same person from memory (without looking at the person). This was a demanding task for some, as many neurodiverse people experience challenges with social interactions, specifically maintaining eye contact. I therefore offered the participants the opportunity to draw me standing at a proper distance to avoid us making eye contact, if they were not comfortable drawing their sidekick. About 60 people participated in the workshop—an event which I see as the making of a community that recognises the Other through drawing, without using words and/or eye contact.

Besides this contribution, I was also participating as a guest in the five-day conference. On arrival, all participants received signs we could wear around our necks to show our ability and need for social interaction. A red sign meant "I do not want to interact," yellow meant "seek permission before you start conversations with me," green meant "please talk to me, I would like

to interact but do not know how to initiate," and white meant "I can regulate my own interactions." These colour codes thus became substitutes for reading facial expressions and body language.

Participating in the Autscape conference was a method of gaining insight into an environment that benefits neurodiverse traits, rather than neurotypical ones. In this way I was able to experience being the minority for once. I took part in the program on the same terms as everyone else, sharing meals, participating in the Autscape choir workshop and performing in the final performance. On departure from the conference, I was sitting in a minibus listening to other participants joking about having to enter the scary, weird, and small-talking society of neurotypicals again.

This method of self-participation, where I became an active and participating observer, was benefitial in many ways. I was able to hear many people criticising researchers who are engaging research *about* and *on* them, instead of *with* them or through *listening* to them. The justifiable criticism of outsiders portraying communities they do not belong to themselves has been the subject of a necessary discussion in both arts and science. It has started to change the premise of how the majority is enabled to talk, research, and/or make projects about minority or marginalised groups, whether on the basis of race, sexuality, health, or social class. We can see a shift occurring, where the majority is asked to share their platform, sometimes even asked to step away altogether as a means of listening.

The Power of the Image, and the Risk of Stereotypes:

In Dranger's lecture series "Visual Power" she makes the point that the problem does not rest with single images that may portray someone stereotypically, rather it is in the recurring pattern of these images being represented as 'truth', when they become the dominant mode of representation. Dranger discusses the origin of the word 'stereotype', which originated in the printing profession to describe a cast printing plate, enabling the mechanical reproduction of any number of visual impressions. A stereotype is thus a 'locked' image—a simplification without much variation. When these generalisations and repetitions take over a narrative and perception of a specific identity it can become highly problematic.⁷

In spreading stereotypes, in particular a locked image, the illustration field has a great responsibility; since illustration is traditionally mass-produced and made for reproductions, it becomes not only possible but probable that an image is circulated endlessly. The individual works in *Duchenne's Smile* are unique ceramic objects that cannot be reproduced, but have to be experienced first-hand in their installation display.

Duchenne used his knowledge of the body's physiology and the photographic media to find and categorise human facial expressions by electrically stimulating facial muscles. He aimed to produce photographs revealing the 'truth' of emotions. His photographic material shows a standard in how human emotions—such as sadness, happiness, anger etc.—*look*, but when something is labelled universal, natural or normal, there is increased risk of people not 'fitting

in'. When we paint a general picture, it often becomes a generalisation: a stereotype, a locked image as Dranger says.

Aspects of the 'general' and the 'average' are considerations within the design field, where the industry often tries to communicate to and reach a large group in the best way possible, and to stay relevant for many. When you design a chair, for example, you take standard measures that will accommodate an average spectrum. In illustration, when you get a job to illustrate an informative folder about diversity, the focus would often be on general angles, not personal ones, as a way of embracing the larger group. Infographics and pictograms usually use vector-based illustrations with flat colours, meaning little to no tones or variations are incorporated. This helps an image in being easily decipherable in order to be as relevant as possible for many different people. While I see the point in making a chair an average size so more people will find the chair comfortable, and easily decipherable pictograms to find an exit or a public toilet, images are made in the mind, and the mind is plastic.

I am critical of this kind of design thinking in illustration, where the aim is for the general and the neutral. The core of authorial illustration is its ability to convey stories that trigger something in the person engaging with it—be it identification or the opposite—exactly because its core is subjective and specific.

The Intimate and Distanced Gaze—A Reinterpretation of Duchenne's Photographs:

Duchenne's Smile consist of ceramic faces displayed in enclosed wooden boxes. The boxes are fitted on three sides with different lenses functioning as peepholes, which brings you into a more intimate view of the faces. These lenses are in fact optical lenses, concave and convex, and they function to distort your view of the objects.

In making this work, I used Duchenne's photographs of his studies as reference material, sculpting a selection of these images in clay. I used my *Unlearning Manifesto* to establish a rule: that I would work on sculpting each head for 15 minutes only as a way of mimicking the first impression we have of seeing someone. Usually, within a tenth of a second, we have decided on the character of the faces we encounter.⁸ I wanted these sculpted faces to transmit a sense of this first, fleeting impression by revealing the expressive facial gestures of the objects as if frozen in time. The 15-minute rule also meant that the faces were sculpted roughly and intuitively. My aim was not to portray these characters realistically, but rather to express their essence—their inside on the outside. I wanted to follow an Expressionistic tradition, where the access to someones inside is not by realistical likeness, but by expression in colours, distorted forms and a subjective lens.⁹ As mentioned earlier, this method allowed for the persons portrayed to be kept anonymous.

Breaking the Fixed Point in Perspective:

Swedish-British artist, researcher and director of the Animation Research Centre, UCA Farnham, Birgitta Hosea writes that the concept of perspective is a Western notion based on one focal point. This very idea of a single vantage point is a construction, since we see from two moving

eyes and not one fixed eye. ¹⁰ The perspective is one main difference in making a three-dimensional object compared to a two-dimensional illustration on paper. The viewer can move around and change their position, angle and perspective in viewing a three-dimensional work. Viewers encountering *Duchenne's Smile* have the opportunity to look at the ceramic faces through three different lens-holes, offering three distinct perspectives. By not offering one fixed point, viewers of *Duchenne's Smile* need to physically engage with the work in order to see actively, moving their bodies to get a glimpse. Where the optical lenses are concave and convex, they distort how you see the ceramic faces accordingly, as well as their scale and proportions. Levels of visibility will also differ depending on your distance from the lens.

Subjective Lenses:

These lenses in the boxes aim to emphasise the point that the gaze is not neutral or objective, but rather, is subjective. Seeing is an active act, meaning that your sight actively chooses what to look at, focus on and how to interpret it. It is constantly affected and filtered by our past experiences, biases, and personal states. Being aware of processes of seeing, from the initial act to the resulting perception, is crucial. Where most people are drawn to faces, it is almost impossible not to fix one's gaze on a face encountered in a room. This act of noticing has a magnetic effect in the process of searching for meaning and recognition. In this way, the face dominates and controls our gaze. By hiding these constructed faces inside boxes, the viewer is confronted with the fascination of the face—voyeuristically wanting to get a closer look—while being materially separated from it.

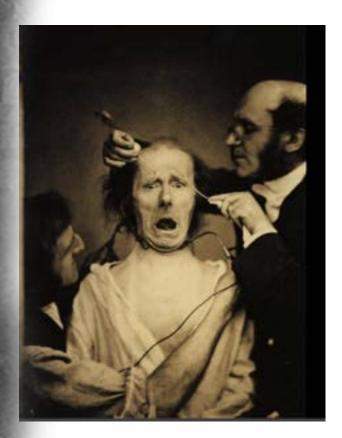
The Voyeur:

Someone who has worked with peepholes and voyerism in their work is Hosea. In both her expanded animation installations *Out There in the Dark* (2008)¹¹ and *Holes* (2020–24), Hosea creates an environment in which the viewer must actively move and adjust their bodies to engage with the work. In her work *Out There in the Dark*, the viewer will, when looking through a peephole, see the artist perform in real time, while wearing a bag over her head, onto which animation is projected. The artist performs a gesture with her hands, where she is simulating looking through binoculars. In this way the artist, who is also the object being looked upon, confronts the viewer by looking back. The installation *Out There in the Dark* is public and will be shown for multiple audience at the same time. So while the viewer looks into the peephole, the rest of the audience is also engaged in the act of looking, in observing the viewer.

In contrast to the private setting of reading a book or watching a film where the darkness hides the viewer, both *Out There in the Dark* and *Duchenne's Smile* are installations displayed in a public setting, where the viewer is visible. The viewer cannot hide, and their presence and choices in navigating the space and the text become visible for Others and maybe also for themselves.

In her notable 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," British film theorist Laura Mulvey introduced the concept of the 'male gaze'. In it she writes that "voyuerism is a way of

seeing that is active; it distances and objectifies what is looked at. It is controlling and even sadistic." When looking into a peephole or through the lenses in the box of *Duchenne's Smile*, the voyeurism of this act becomes apparent; this looking forces the viewer to place themsself in context to the subject/object, thereby being open to noticing the inherent power relations of such an act.









Duchenne's Smile:

- 1. One of Duchenne's original photographs.
- 2: The room where the drawing workshop were held at Autscape, 2022.
- 3: Signs to wear from Autscape Conference, 2022.
- 4: Outcome from the drawing workshop.

Duchenne's Smile:

- 1: The Drawing workshop held at KMD, 2022.
- 2-3: Results from the drawing workshops.







- Duchenne's Smile:
 1-2: Examples from the process of sculpting.
 3-5: Making and testing the boxes.











Development of Defining You, Finding You:

Transitional Greyzones—A Turning Point:

After attending the Autscape conference, I realised I had to change my research direction for specifically two reasons.

The first reason was ethical: I did not feel right in my position as researcher, as someone who *could* but perhaps *should not* talk about the ASD community—their challenges and unique skills and strengths. It is essential, and high time, that discussions and questions around who gets to represent and speak on behalf of Others are finally emerging, including in the illustration field.

Ethical questions concerning who has the right to represent whom, and who is offered the time and platforms through which to speak, paralysed my artistic ability for a period of time, because I became afraid of doing something wrong. 'Map ethics' was a tool presented to me and the other artistic research fellowers in seminar three. Described as a method helpful in "identifying and addressing ethical dimensions of artistic research projects," I used this to map the power relations implicit in this project. In that same seminar, as part of one of the discussions, the Norwegian artistic researcher and designer Linda Lien noted that it could also be unethical to *not* proceed with an idea just because it exists within an ethical grey zone, since new questions will undoubtedly arise. Some of these questions might include: Will someone else represent or tell the story? Can you somehow constructively reframe your position or privilege? What happens if you do not proceed with the idea?

Research is much like truth and history: our concepts and understandings of them change over time. Artistic research is a complex field with many nuances, and the borders of what is ethically appropriate are blurred and must be critically looked at in each case. I will sometimes overstep the borders and get lost in the mist. Hopefully, I will also evolve, and things that are hidden from me now will, at a future time, unfold and change my mind about something I write or do. After Autscape I realised that if I wanted to pursue the project in this way, I needed to assure there was agency afforded to the people in question. This meant withdrawing myself from the position of creator and instead taking up the role of project facilitator.

The second reason for changing the direction of this project was noticing how much my artistic drive depends on being present in the conceptual thinking and the hands-on creation process. The facilitator role I was approaching as the position I could ethically claim did not in fact align with my working method; I cannot separate thinking and making, and so I understood I would feel deeply dissatisfied by only being present in one of these modes. More than the feelings of dissatisfaction, there was also a feeling of impossibility in executing this project, since the creation process is not a linear but a circular one for me, where each component occurs and exposes its workings in an intertwined way.

I realised that I was following a pattern of what I *thought* was expected of me: that is, of a proper way of doing design research, with a large participant group and relying on surveys and questionnaires, which would only led to general and averaged data. As outlined in my

Unlearning Manifesto, I realised it was okay to delve into my creative methods, those being subjective and personal; I wanted to work deeply and not broadly, personally and not generally.

Scaling Down—Micro Participant Group:

In this project I decided to scale the focus group down; I chose the smallest participant group possible: one known person, my brother. The number of people I engaged with was an essential element in understanding how much I could ethically manage and be responsible for. My brother and my relationship with him was not simply one of a researcher and a subject, but that of two siblings, equal in their familial relationship. An important aspect of this choice was that our relationship would continue after the project finished; it was not something I only committed to in a defined period set by my research. I chose to work with my youngest brother who has an ASD diagnosis: a neurological and developmental disability which, while not a mental condition, can lead to poor mental health outcomes.²

My brother's Otherness is invisible and therefor non-representable, a fact which aligned with the aims of the umbrella artistic research project *IN-R*. I decided to work with him because of the nature of his diagnosis, which I do not see as an unfortunate or sad one; my brother's brain is programmed different to mine and so he experiences certain things differently to me. He is an adult who is high functioning, meaning he lives by himself, has a job and can consent. I knew and trusted that in this process, he had agency in telling me what his borders were. Working with a personal relation of course does not *remove* questions of power dynamics, and in fact it creates other ethical concerns. These questions include: Do they only participate because they want to please you? And how might this work affect your relationship after the project is finished?

Anonymity/Collaboration:

When collaborating and/or working with participants, it is a set requirement that your participant(s) must give voluntary, informed consent. My brother permitted me to work with him as a subject in an anonymous capacity, and I was to refer to him as my brother only; he gave me access to his official diagnosis documents and childhood drawings, and he participated in several interviews. Besides this, he withdrew from the idea of contributing visually as a co-collaborator, and in being the 'face' of a project. I wanted to give my brother a voice, and of course also respect his borders.

The Double Empathy Problem:

The 'double empathy problem' is described by British sociologist Damian Milton³ as the interaction difficulties that arise in encounters between neurodiverse and neurotypical people as mutual problems. A lack of empathy and understanding is found in both parties, and this shows that humans have difficulty understanding how other people perceive the world, not only people with ASD.

In the process of working with my brother, I realised a set of issues that came up through our interaction: I had to turn my gaze away from only looking at my brother and instead look at our relationship, which included looking at myself. My brother and I had several sessions of interviewing each other over a two-year period. Each time we took turns at interviewing, he asked me the same questions I asked him. I was trying to make as equal a situation as possible, because even though we are siblings, all relations are complex. There is power in all relations, also in family relations; questioning him seemed unfair if I did not also disclose information myself.

Multimedia artist and former Prorector of Research at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Camille Norment, reflects on bringing yourself into the work, that it is both a vulnerable and powerful act.⁴ A reason you might see many authorial illustrators working with autoethnography and telling stories from a personal angle is because the most powerful way to tell a story is the personal one. It is efficient but it can also be risky. In other words, it is vulnerable because it matters.

Some of the questions we used were based on questionnaires from a psychological study that examined empathy and the ability to imagine what the other party would answer, from both perspectives of people with ASD and their non-ASD relatives.⁵ The questionnaire revealed that, in general, neurotypical relatives overestimated their capacity for empathy, whereas neurodiverse participants had more realistic expectations and awareness of their abilities. This assured my decision to change my position from the outsider researcher investigating the empathy of Others', to a position of a participating researcher and a subject for critical investigation.

I say:
I think I understand, but I understand nothing
You don't understand me, but you know that.

Portrait as Caring:

A portrait is an attempt to represent a person's identity, traditionally referencing that person's societal status. Artists working in the Expressionist tradition attempted to show the inner identity of the people they portrayed, revealing what was behind the mask.

The privilege of having your portrait taken—either by way of photography, sculpture or painting—is still mainly reserved for the rich and famous. Regardless of how or why a portrait is made, it is about taking the time and effort to see and understand someone as an act of caring. As the French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil said, "attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity." Seeing someone sounds simple, but it is a rare and unique experience. The act of really looking at someone in moments of face-to-face encounter rarely happens, which is why Serbian-born artist Marina Abramowitz's performance *The Artist is Present* (2010) had such a significant impact on its participants and spectators.

Taking the time to illustrate someone is an act of generosity, compassion and rebellion against the tendency to label or represent them based on first impressions. In *Defining You*, *Finding You* I wanted to offer an alternative representation of my brother, rather than perpetuate the definition of him presented within his diagnosis papers. In this regard, 'time spent' is also an important circumstance, where portraying is an act of caring and an essential part of the final artistic work.

During the earlier development and research of this project I experimented with time-consuming techniques, which was evident in the work I showed at the project's midway exhibition in June 2023. I had worked with the very time-consuming technique of hand tufting to explore the value of time and care put into a piece of work.

The midway exhibition consisted of three works and was held at KMD in Rom 61. The exhibition showed a work consisting of three textiles applicated with tufted enlarged DNA strands on satin. One displayed multiple illustrations of faces, shown in fast repetition, one after the other, so that the viewer would struggle to get a complete overview of the details of each face, but enough time to categorise them as human faces. Another one projected the words from my brother's diagnosis, flickering like neon lights, appearing either inside or outside the border of the tuft, playing with acts of being included or excluded. The third one displayed masks scaling up and appearing to escape the tufted formation but inevitably diminishing in scale, being pulled back and encapsulated in the tuft again. Another work was a fully tufted tapestry, displaying a human nervous system the size of a full-grown adult merged with an emoji-style smiley face entangled in it. The last work was a mirrored object with facial parts, made in ceramic, applied. When looking at it, the viewer's reflection would blend or be disrupted by these applied facial features.

One of the main focuses of the midway exhibition was the exploration of time: both the time of the works' production and how that is communicated as an act of care, together with a focus on the brief nature of my brother's and my face-to-face encounters.

The FBU project later incorporated this research into a paint-on-glass animation (The Face Between Us) as well as through handpainted illustrations and analogue collages. These artistic approaches, combined with storytelling from a personal angle, helped me to form the question: Can portraying someone through illustration be considered an act of compassion? Can the process carry value in and of itself?

The animated films of artist William Kentridge often depict abuse and violence centred around the raw reality of apartheid South Africa. As Kentridge says of his process:

In the activity of making work, there's a sense that if you spend a day or two days drawing an object or an image there's a sympathy towards that object, embodied in the human labour of making the drawing, and for me theres something in the dedication to the image ... theres something about the hours of physically studying those heads and painting them, that becomes a compassionate act for me.⁸

Getting to know someone takes time and effort, and at times it requires a lot of patience. Both illustrating and caring require empathy in getting in touch with another person's situation. But

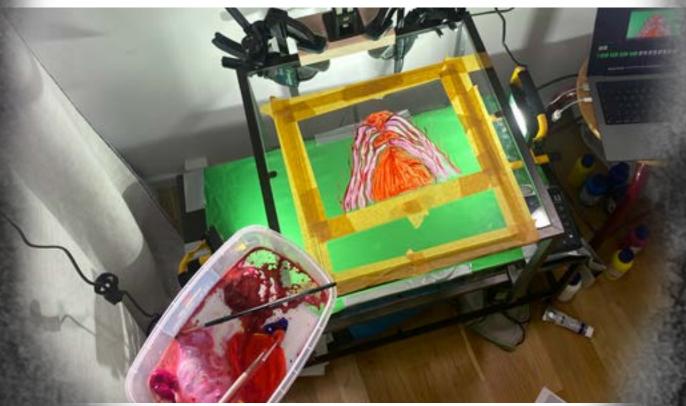
empathy can also be problematic. Danish antropologists Rane Willerslev and Nils Bubandt state in their 2015 article "The Dark Side of Empathy: Mimesis, Deception, and the Magic of Alterity" that empathy is precisely our ability to manipulate and hurt someone psychologically, because we know how that would feel. Caring for someone almost always includes an imbalanced power dynamic. Illustrators have an enormous responsibility in the power they wield in the work they create, particularly through the choice of visual means used to tell someone's story.

According to Rachel Gannon and Mireille Fauchon in their book *Illustration Research Methods*, the illustration process is two-pronged, where it has "the ability to engage with those people and places being documented through its process, and with an audience through its output." In response, it is my hope to be able to offer a caring portrait that does not exploit the trust of the person being portrayed; one that is honest without being revealing. As Kentridge makes the point:

There is also something in the activity of both contemplating, depicting and spending the time with [your own or other people's pain], which I hope, as an artist, redeems the activity from one of simply exploitation and abuse.¹¹

- 1:Timeconsuming techniques. Tufting.2: Timeconsuming techniques. Paint-on- glass -animation.





Midway exhibition June 2023 at Rom 61, KMD. Wall with drawings etc. from the process.



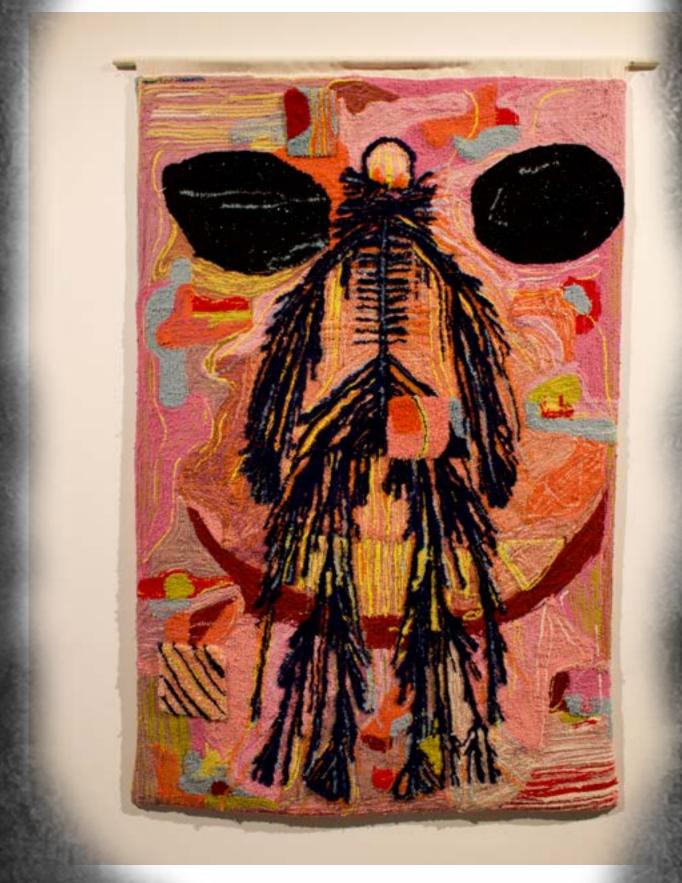
Midway exhibition June 2023 at Rom 61, KMD. 1-3: Animated projections on textiles.







Midway exhibition June 2023 at Rom 61, KMD. Hand-tufted piece.



Midway exhibition June 2023 at Rom 61, KMD. 1-2: The mirror object with ceramic parts applied. 2-3: Close-op of the textiles and projections.









Development of The Face Between Us:

The Subjective, Biased Gaze:

The Face Between Us interprets the myth of Medusa, adding a plot twist in her face being a mirror. In this new interpretation, those who gaze upon her are not turned to stone because of her hideous looks, but rather due to their own reflection, suggesting that our interpretation of the Other ultimately reflects how we see and think of ourselves. If we expect to see a monster, we see a monster. What turns people into stone is not Medusa, but the power of their own demeaning and biased gaze. By making Medusa's face a mirror, she reveals the power of the Subject's own gaze.

I'm lost
without you
My eye is a thief
stealing a glimpse
My eye is shy,
running away
My eye is angry,
pushing you away
With a blink.

In psychoanalysis, the theory of the gaze is often associated with the work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. In psychoanalysis, 'to see' does not equal 'to know'. While the Lacanian gaze is a multifaceted and complex term, Lacan is generally less interested in how the subject *sees*, and more interested in how the subject is *seen*. One of Lacan's crucial ideas is that the gaze pre-exists the individual subject; we are all born into a culturally constituted gaze, which we then adopt as our own. Lacan and Laura Mulvey share the idea that we learn to see in particular ways, and that what is essential is that the gaze is not neutral.

Throughout the course of the work, the point of view adopted in *The Face Between Us* changes—from a third- to first-person perspective. In the beginning, the viewer is looking at Medusa while hearing her voice; in the last scene, the film returns to the start—to the scene when Medusa was seen as a half-figure in the water. In the last scene the viewer sees a close-up of her eyes sitting just above the surface of the water, her eyes reflected back in it. Suddenly, the eyes blink, and the screen turns dark; Medusa's voiceover in the film sums it up with a quote from Lacan: "You never see me from where I see you." Her eyes open once more, but now they serve as a mask with eye-holes that we look through. Suddenly, we are looking at the landscape with the stone heads from the opening scene, indicating that we now see it from Medusa's point of view, in the first-person.

There's no escape from the inside You never see me From where I see you. The face is between us.

Where the spectator's position changes—from looking at Medusa, the Other, to taking her position—this shift serves as a plot twist that aims to make the audience aware of their position as spectators, who see and interpret the film through their active and subjective gaze.

Another way of reminding the viewer of their position is through the blurring of the edge of the film: where this technique is sometimes used to darken the entire image, it functions as a human eye that must blink. This method is directly inspired by artist Nathalie Djurberg's film *How to Slay a Demon* (2019).³ This film is interrupted by an iris that blinks every few seconds, in turn darkening the image. This touch transforms the surface of the screen into a part of our own eyes, making viewers aware of their physical presence and position as voyeurs.

Your eyes are leeches intruding and demanding sucking me out of myself spitting me out as tears.

The Medusa Figure—Specific or Universal?

The figure of Medusa is a multidimensional one. Since her origins in ancient Greece, she has been portrayed to varying, conflicting degrees: as a beautiful girl on the one hand, and a horrible woman on the other. Medusa is associated with abused women, justified female rage, monstrosity and fatal seduction.⁴ As an 'open' image, Medusa exists in contrast to Joanna Rubin Dranger's idea of the 'locked' image; even while she is an archetype, she is transformative. In choosing Medusa as the main character for *The Face Between Us*—being that I am also, myself, female—I am able to tell a story from a feminised position: one that engages with existing narratives about Medusa, and the global and historical discrimination of women and the feminised position more broadly.

The Abject as a Feminised Position:

Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection is situated specifically from a feminised position. In regards to the relation between abjection and animation, Suzanne Buchan says that "since the abject is almost always located in women, the animated body is a central performative locus for cultural taboos and their transgressions." 5

Kristeva aligns the mother's world with something primal. A birth is wild and uncontrollable; it is the "immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be." As Dino Felluga says in paraphrasing Kristeva: "The abject marks the moment when we separated ourselves from the mother when we began to recognize a boundary between 'me' and others, between 'me' and '(m)other'."

This chaotic, immoral order, the one that is nature, is what Kristeva calls the 'semiotic' world. The child must reject the semiotic world and instead enter the 'symbolic' one. The symbolic world, which Kristeva refers to as the domain of the father, is a rational world of shared cultural understandings and meanings in which we have language.⁸

In *The Face Between Us*, Medusa is portrayed using pink hues; her body, the nervous system, resembles delicate frills, often referencing something feminine. In one scene we see her eyes, mouth and nose floating freely, away from the face—a scene which has her resembling an illustration of a uterus and ovaries. In childbirth, a woman experiences her body transforming into two; what was once inside her and created by her, is now outside her, becoming its own. In this way, the entire concept of the film—scenes that reveal the inside transforming into the outside, from two to one—takes its origin in my own lived experiences as a woman.

Medusa as a Universal Subject:

At the same time, *The Face Between Us* is a story about being a Subject—a general condition for *all* humans. In that she is a symbol, Medusa acknowledges the experience of existential loneliness and the human desire to be seen and understood by others.

All human beings became abject the moment they left the mother's womb and transitioned from the inside to the outside. The abject therefore reminds us of this primal state, before we became subjects; of a time when we did not experience borders between ourselves and others. Where the tensions between the inside and the outside and the abject are relevant to all of us, this borderless state between the semiotic and the symbolic world is as relevant for a masculine position as it is for a feminine one.

Often, works made by women are interpreted through the lens of their subjective body and considered to represent a specifically 'female' experience or creation. In contrast, works made by men are considered 'universal' and thereby relevant for all humans. This double-standard is also evident for artists with minority backgrounds, whose works are often interpreted from their specific, given position, and not taken as generalised, universal experience.⁹

Using the double-sided character of Medusa as a character, the film aims to narrate a story from both a specific 'feminised' as well as a more general 'universal' position. While this might be seen as an unclear position, I believe this cloudiness and complexity is the force of authorial illustration, and in the least, entirely necessary in our complex world. Kristeva herself saw art as precisely a place that could purify the abject.¹⁰

Authorial Illustration:

Authorial illustration is by nature 'muddy'; its role is to tell stories from the clouded landscape positioned between the Self and the Other. Being an authorial illustrator is a way for me to continue to push the rallying cry from the 1960s and 70s— "the personal is political"—that was so synonymous in women's liberation manifestos and demonstrations.¹¹

I actively try to remove ideas and associations of the patriarchy from within my work, both the internal and external value systems of what is considered significant and relevant across subjects, materials and methods (see the *Unlearning Manifesto*). Furthermore, I oppose the idea that the feminised position is a less relevant human experience than the supposedly generalised male position. Throughout my tertiary education, I have been advised not to write and/or illustrate my own stories, since this would blur the lines between myself and the work. When I disregarded this advice, I found that the experience was shameful because the work was considered too subjective and not 'pure' enough.

I try to unlearn these notions every day: that the feminine is irrelevant. That it is small.

The male is universal. It is grand.

No.

It is the tension between the pure and the muddy. The weak lines and the blended colours; the borders and the in-betweens are not less, they are complex.

Masking Behind an Avatar:

Illustration and animation allow for the use of alter egos and avatars—figures you can mask yourself with, even when making work from a personal position. The physical mask, 'masking' as a neurodiverse coping strategy, and as a concept generally are all intertwined in how they cover for something else, like a surrogate that takes the role of someone else. As a strategy, this masking can help protect and keep some things private; it can help maintain a distance from traumatic content as well as adding something surprising or humorous to a narrative, so that it might be more accessible to others.

Art Spiegelman's graphic novel series *Maus* uses mice and rats to tell a personal story about his father surviving the Holocaust. In the book *MetaMAUS*, Spiegelman talks about his process and artistic choices in making *Maus*. He explains how the idea of using animals as metaphors first originated from an earlier attempt to create a cartoon about racism in the USA, from a play with words of Ku Klux Katz; at the same time, he felt uneasy about how to portray the African American plight ethically. While Spiegelman decided not to pursue that idea, he instead chose to apply the metaphor in an autoethnographical way, in order to tell the story of his father's experiences during the Holocaust. He says of this: "I had to put on a mouse head to enter into my father's story." In researching *Maus*, Spiegelman came upon a lot of anti-semitic material from

the 1930s, which compared Jews with rodents, often rats, which makes Spiegelman's approach one of reinterpretation as well. In *Maus*, he depicted the Jews as mice, not wanting and also being afraid to endorse any Nazi ideology. Here Spiegelman explains how masking and its protective abstractness helped to tell the story of his father's traumatic experience:

Paradoxically, while the mice allowed for a distancing from the horrors described, they simultaneously allowed me and others to get further inside the material in a way that would have been difficult with more realistic representation.¹³

Spiegelman refers to the disadvantages of masked avatars in an anecdote where he says he wanted to add to the complexity of the story, not only making it about cats and mice (Nazis and Jews) but also about other groups involved, specifically those who were sometimes on both sides of the border as victim and victimiser:

If I'd evaded the issue, one could still take comfort as a non-Jew reading *Maus* that it ain't you. One of the disadvantages of using these masked figures at all is that it creates a kind of empathetic response by despecifying the faces—it allows one to identify, and then get stuck with having to embrace one's own and flawed humanity.¹⁴

The American animated television series *Animals* (2016–18) is another example of using animals to tell stories well known from human life. In *Animals*, birds, rats and other animals are used to tell stories about people with midlife crises or love-related challenges. *BoJack Horseman* (2014–20) is another animated television series, depicting a tragicomical, anthropomorphic horse.

Reinterpreting a Mythical Figure:

While *The Face Between Us* does not use animals—but rather an existing, mythical figure—it was a decision rooted in a similar methodology of reinterpretation, which takes existing elements and uses them within a new narrative telling. A myth is a genre that uses narratives to perform a fundamental role in a given society; ¹⁵ a myth is a template that has been, and continues to be, investigated and turned like a kaleidoscope, transforming into new shapes to enable new perspectives. By applying mythology, one is engaging in a thousands' year old never-ending conversation.

In this film I have used Medusa as an avatar; here she becomes an embodiment of myself. Using a mythical figure connects the dots from the individual story to the commonly shared narrative, inviting others to take the position of Medusa themselves. Viewers know it is Medusa because she introduces herself in the voice-over with "I am Medusa." While "I am Medusa," Medusa can be both you and me; Medusa is a mask that we can all wear.

What do you see when you see me? What do you see in me? You see a body I see a fence
You see a face
I see a lie
You see an outline
I see a void.

As an authorial illustrator, my stories always take their origin from a personal 'inside'—while not necessarily from my own physical life— meaning that I am emotionally invested in it, either because I identify with it or am intrigued because I do not understand it. Keeping a distance from the origin story, however, works as a protection and a way of keeping the narrative open for others to access. Medusa is faceless because I want her face to resemble a mirror: an empty slate onto which everyone can project themselves. Medusa says my words in my voice, but instead of assuming my face, I use an avatar to keep something in the dark—as Swedish filmmaker Mia Engberg says, using the darkness of a viewer's imagination to fill out the role. 16

Becoming an Image:

A mask is not ourselves. As German art historian Hans Belting would say: A mask is the frozen image of ourselves. ¹⁷ The opening scene of *The Face Between Us* shows a landscape with heads that Medusa has turned into stone. In the voiceover we hear Medusa declare that she will "spit you as a frozen picture." When representing someone visually, the attempt is to encapsulate someone and/or something in a form—in an *image*. Even when working with moving images, which allow for considerably more nuance and transformation, the representation will always fall short of the actual subject.

Look at me!
But watch out—
My eyes are hungry,
They will swallow you;
And spit you out
As a frozen picture.

According to Lacan's mirror stage theory, seeing ourselves as an image creates both identification and alienation. When a baby first recognises itself in the mirror, it realises it is an object that others can see from the outside. From this point on, the Self starts seeing itself with an internal gaze as well as an outsider's gaze. This revelation can affect our sense of Self; where individuals often seek approval and affirmation from an Other, the gaze of the Other can simultaneously be a source of anxiety and a desire for recognition. The Other, being other individuals in your life, can also be the cultural structure/s you live within, such as language and societal norms. 19

In *The Face Between Us*, Medusa is illustrated as a nervous system, and therefore can be seen to resemble a corpse. Kristeva uses the corpse as an example of something that disturbs us, because we see a subject now turned object:

The corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. The border has become an object. How can I be without border?²⁰

This tension—of seeing yourself depicted as an object, an image—creates an uncanny feeling; it is familiar and alienating at the same time. As an illustrator, whenever you attempt to represent someone, the image has the risk of turning into the 'locked' image that Dranger describes—something you cannot escape; something people can misunderstand and misuse.

According to the theory of abjection, investigating the position of the Self is essential when investigating Otherness; where the focus is most often on problematising the Other, however, this position is often neglected. While such investigation can be done subtly or without ill intent, it is almost always because the gaze has blind spots. One example of this is the Disney animated film *Pocahontas* (1995), a production which faced criticism for its romanticised portrayal of European colonisation. As Native American woman Kenzie Allen explains:

I've struggled with Disney's *Pocahontas* as a source of pain and stereotype. Both Pocahontas and Sacagawea are often held up as heroines in the Western perspective, their stories reduced to kinder details rather than serving the interest of the dominant culture. Yes, there is visibility in telling their stories, but it is a tainted visibility, a false reality rendered through the dominant culture, which seeks to ameliorate, always, the horrific methods by which they came to occupy an entire nation's worth of landmass.²¹

Unrealistic Speculations:

The Surreal, The Uncanny and The Abject:

Animation developed from the tradition of French filmmaker and magican George Méliès and his fantastical universe. Where live action fiction film and documentaries stem from the realistic films of the French Lumière Brothers,²² animation has a lot in common with trickfilm and the work of illusionists. As London based writer and programmer Matt Turner explains: "Traditional filmmaking has a fundamental limitation. It must start with reality.... Animation begins from nothing and can become anything; the only limitations present are those that artists impose upon themselves."²³

In telling stories about the Non-Representable and Otherness, I find animation to be a highly suitable art form because it offers an advantage, as Suzanne Buchan writes: "in that it permits a moving-image representation of otherwise invisible personal experience and subjectivity."²⁴

Animation exists within—and crosses in and out of—the symbolic and semiotic worlds. Referring to commercial theatrics, Buchan explains that "animation films mostly do not want to

draw attention to the 'otherness' of the world they create."²⁵ In contrast to this, experimental animation has, from the beginning, been occupied with showing what is on the inside, in exploring new avenues for self-representation and expression. According to British animators John Halas and Joy Batchelor, "animated film is concerned with metaphysical reality—not how things look, but what they mean."²⁶

There is a tradition of the surreal and the uncanny in experimental animation film, both of which have their origins in psychoanalysis and animated films. Much of the content of *The Face Between Us* is built on a central composition, sometimes with a central axis that reflects its mirror image on the other side of the screen. This compositional method references the Rorschach (inkblot) test invented by Hermann Rorschach, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst.

The word 'animation' comes from the Latin 'animare', meaning "soul" and "the breath of life." This definition becomes particularly evident in the films of Czech animator Jan Švankmajer. These surreal films combine dolls, puppets, and taxidermied animals in unorthodox combinations, coming alive through their activation. Švankmajer's collage technique of assembling various objects into new settings works to distort scale and context, playing with our preconceptions. According to Švankmajer:

Real poetry begins when we take reality out of its natural surroundings and put it into an inadequate context. Only then does it excel in its forced/constrained/unnatural beauty, which Surrealists love so much.²⁸

Neither illustration nor animation are bound by the constraints of realism—a fact which widens the space for interpretation. Similar to the work of Švankmajer, *The Face Between Us* plays with scale and the combining of various elements, moving into a surreal body-landscape where nerve strands come alive as if trees.

American animator Suzan Pitt's 1979 film *Asparagus*²⁹ is another example of a surrealist animation. Made from handpainted celluloid, the film explores themes of, for example, gender, identity and sexuality from a female perspective. Abjection is also a key theme in *Asparagus*; the theme of abjection is realised through a narrative which aims to disrupt the exising system and restraints of female identity so prevalent during the 1970s.

The film begins with the female protagonist going to the toilet and defecating; rather than defecating feces however, it is aspargus. This corresponds with Kristeva's thinking, that once something (such as faeces) leaves the body it becomes abject. Themes of abjection—and those of inside versus outside generally—are seen throughout *Asparagus*; they are symbolised through the depiction of a dollhouse and a faceless woman who moves from the domestic interior of a house to the outside world of society and nature.³⁰

Much like *Asparagus*, *The Face Between Us* uses elements of the faceless woman. Here, Medusa's face is smooth and blank like a mirror, allowing the audience to fill it in with their own reflected image. The gestureless face is also a mask that hides Medusa's personality, instead of revealing it.

I am Medusa

What do you see when you see me? I can be anything you want me to be What do you see when you see me? I can be anything you want me to be

What do you see when you see me? I can be anything you want me to be What do you see when you see me? I can be anything you want me to be.

With roots in the fantastical, animation makes room for speculation and imagination. When we see something impossible happening—a woman defecating asparaguses, or as in *The Face Between Us*, blue hands protruding from eye-holes—our borders governing the "normal" fade away, creating the possibility to expand our imagination. In these instances, we accept the terms of pretending, much like kids do when playing. In animation, we play along, we surrender—perhaps this is the trait that enables the thresholds between the inside and the outside to weaken and open.

Djurberg's animated films are horror-fairytales, often adding violence and sex to their dreamlike nature. Djurberg's material and animating choices add to the uncanny feelings her films produce: her expressive dolls are made out of 'childish' materials like playdough, and they are animated crudely. Animation is still seen by many as a medium for children and not a medium for art.³¹ Using dolls and playdough, Djurberg embraces and exploits this idea, using it to her advantage. It can be argued that her films are even more powerful as art *because* they play with this ambiguity between familiar elements and their unexpected actions.

The Face Between Us uses a naïve line combined with disturbing actions, such as rolling the skin of your face up and down. Here, the viewer is placed in a borderland between something that is familiar and 'safe', alongside something that is alienating and troubling—the very essence of the uncanny.³² In The Face Between Us there are many uncanny scenes: of hands trying to escape through eye-holes; the landscape mimicking the body seen as from the inside through unrealistic and disproportionate scale; red nerve strands moving as if trees; and nerve cells becoming blinking eyes, turning back into the nervous system and drifting on into blood lakes.

You're stuck on the outside Looking for a handhold In my open wounds. The colours used in *The Face Between Us* are bright, hyperrealistic and intense, referring to fauvism, an early 20th century subset of the Expressionist art movement. The characteristic trait of Expressionism was a desire to distort reality by equating the inner realities of the outer worlds, often by using hyperrealistic colours. Fauvism in particular is defined by its use of naïve figures, bold colours and wild brushstrokes, as if a wild beast had produced the imagery. Fauvism also held a fascination with folkloric elements such as masks³³—something which the stone heads in the beginning of the film intentionally reference. Together, this combination of intense, hyperrealistic colours and familiar body parts performing unfamiliar actions creates a dreamlike universe where everything and anything can happen—this world is not bound by the rules of reality, but is rather open to utopian and/or dystopian speculation.

Despite their differing styles, the works of Pitt, Švankmejer and Djurberg reveal how the animation field is a space for showcasing inner visions inspired by dreams, the unconscious and narratives concerned with the psychology of humans. These artists each use reinterpretation by placing objects, materials and imagery into new and surprising contexts, allowing us to see them in a new light. All art—perhaps, and even *especially* animation because of its obvious artificiality—exists on two planes. Russian-Estonian literary scholar Yuri Lotman has said that "Art requires a *twofold* experience—simultaneously forgetting that you are confronted by an imaginary event and not forgetting it."³⁴

The Face Between Us follows in a tradition of visual and narrative surrealism to create a speculative scenario that is most aligned with magical realism—the style and genre which most readily blurs the lines between realism and the magical. The force of these uncertain transitions—between the real and the imaginary, the specific and the abstract—expands the borders of our knowledge to ask: What if these borders could be questioned?

When I first discovered animation as a medium, I had finally found a format where my desire to tell stories through words and images combined in the ways I had always wanted. Paradoxically, because of the obvious artificiality and non-realism of animation, I find that it possesses honesty and sincerity, making it a perfect arena for exploring complex issues and the Non-Representable. In animation, the imaginary, the weird, the surreal and the absurd are all given space to coexist with the "real." Animation is a form of surrender to the unknown and the mysterious—an ambiguity which presents as a messy, wonderful borderland.

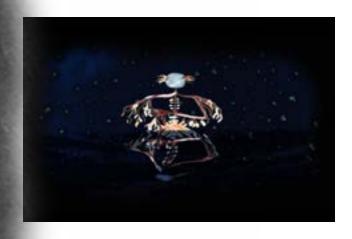
The Face Between Us. 1-4: Stills from the end of the film.

The Face Between Us.

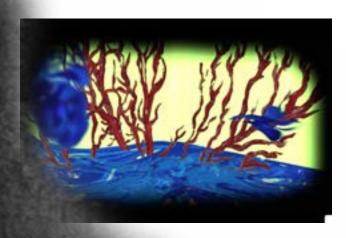
- 1: Resembling uterus and ovaries.
- Resemblign a corpse.
 Examples of mirror composition that refers to Rorschach tests.
- 5: Nervestrands becoming trees in a landscape, playing with scale.
- 6. Medusa as a faceless woman with a mirror face.









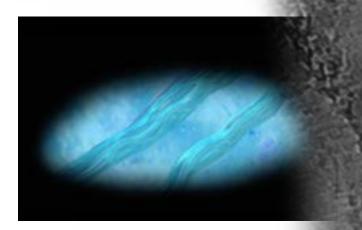


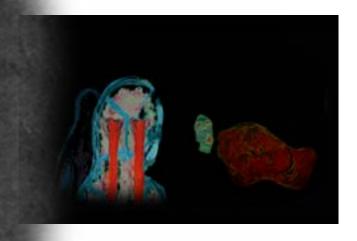


The Face Between Us.

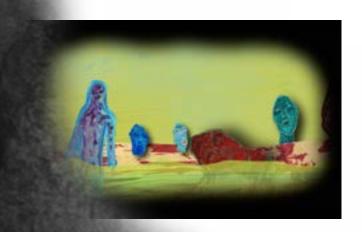
- 1: Hands emerging from the eye-holes, example of the uncanny and the abject.
- 2: The edge of the darkens the whole screen at times, like a blinking iris.
- 3: Example of the uncanny and the abject.
 4: Example of the uncanny and the abject.
- 5. Example of stone faces inspired by fauvism and exaggeration of scale.
- 6: Example of the uncanny and the abject.













Summary of Gazes:

While this project reinterprets Duchenne's original study, it taking a different approach and aim. Rather than maintaining the fixed, singular perspective from the original black-and-white photographs, it depicts the test persons as handmade objects—as ceramic faces—in a three-dimensional space with multiple viewpoints and perspectives. *Duchenne's Smile* invites viewers to engage actively with the work by displaying the faces in enclosed boxes. Optical lenses distort the vision, emphasising the subjectivity of our gaze and questioning how much is accessible to us through it. A key aspect of this project is in making unique, handmade objects that cannot be reproduced. This counterpoints Duchenne's belief in universality and the traditional design principle of simplification and reproducibility for broad accessibility. By challenging this idea, the project raises critical questions about the ethics of representation, particularly in how images of people are spread and the potential for reinforcing stereotypes. *Duchenne's Smile* embraces the visible presence of being a creation made by a subject. The traces of the artist's hand and process remain in the work, which adds transparency and honesty to the work instead of suggesting objectivity. *Duchenne's Smile* values this transparency as an ethical approach to acknowledging that it results from someone's particular subjective gaze.

Where *Duchenne's Smile* reinterprets a historical representation of a group of people, *Defining You, Finding You* takes an autoethnographic approach and scales down to a micro group. It shifts focus to an individual person, leaning into a pre-existing, familiar connection. The artistic work *Defining You, Finding You* is a speculative design piece that reimagines a diagnosis by shifting the gaze and format from an A4 diagnosis sheet and TAT cards—viewed not from a medical standpoint, but through the intimate lens of a sister. During the course of this project, many ethical questions emerged regarding research practices and my own position of power as both a researcher and illustrator. This reflection has deepened my understanding of my artistic role—not as a neutral facilitator, but as a creator. *Defining You, Finding You* also explores the idea that illustrating someone can be an act of empathy, because of the time spent with the subject and through the creative process and production.

Inspired by Damian Milton's theory of the 'double empathy problem' as well as Kristeva's theory of abjection, *The Face Between Us* shifts the gaze from the Other to the Self. Instead of defining Otherness externally, this project asks: What if we examined Otherness within ourselves? How do we exist in our own bodies? *The Face Between Us* reinterprets the mythical figure of Medusa, using her body to tell a narrative that speaks both from a feminised subject's perspective and from a universal human condition. This piece of authorial illustration merges my own subjective story with a universal myth, aiming to create a narrative that is both personal and widely relatable. By blending themes of human existence in general and female experience specifically, and in shifting between third- and first-person perspectives, the work embraces a blurriness, ambiguity, and complexity rather than a fixed narrative. Animation as a medium offers a speculative space where the borders between real and unreal blur. This makes it a suitable platform to explore the Non-Representable borderland between the relations of Self and Other. Medusa is intentionally left faceless to prevent her from becoming defined as a specific person, allowing others to project themselves onto her. This openness prevents her character from becoming a 'locked' image.

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Body

Development of Duchenne's Smile:

The Body as a Bridge Between the Inside and the Outside:

Seeing is a visual sense; a sense is a biological system that gathers information about the surrounding environment through stimuli. Sensing is a way for the body to perceive external stimuli through the faculties of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch. Often, we do not think of our sense of sight as an active agent, besides the fact that we can open or close our eyes, look directly, or look away. If we compare it with another sense, such as touch, we see that not only do we have the ability to touch someone or not, we can also do it with consent or not; we can do it violently or gently.

Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy that offers insight into sensorial perception and knowledge, focusing on subjective experiences. It seeks to understand and describe how things appear and are experienced by people and other conscious beings. Phenomenology explores various topics, one of them being embodiment: the lived experience of having a body.

In his book *Phenomenology of Perception* from 1945, French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasised the connections between the body and perception, proposing that the body is not merely an object in the world, but the means through which we engage with and make sense of the world. He rejected the traditional, dualistic view of Cartesian philosophy, which regards the mind and body as separated, highlighting instead the lived experience of the body as an active agent in perception and understanding. In considering the inside and outside as inseparable, Merleau-Ponty stated that:

The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself ... this is because my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world.¹

Another interesting aspect of his philosophy, is where Merleau-Ponty saw our bodily experiences as intertwined with our relationships with others. He believed that we "perceive others directly as pre-personal and embodied living beings engaged with a world that we share in common."² When we use our bodies, interactions, senses and perceptions to gain understandings of other people and their experiences, we are actively forming a shared understanding of the world in which we live.

I Google: Facts about the skin. We lose 40,000 skin cells every minute That is 18 kilos of skin in a lifetime Every 35 days, the outer skin restores itself Over a lifetime, you will change your skin around 9,000 times That is a million dead skin cells of dust in the atmosphere

> That means You're my air

We are floating
We exhale each other in and out
We're the skin dust surrounding each other
We absorb and emit old versions
Of the Other.

Touching with the Gaze and the Illustration Object:

Working with materials like clay and glazes in the making of the ceramic heads for *Duchenne's Smile* stimulates a sense of touch. Where I was working with the abstract themes of the Self and the Other, I wanted to present a material counterpoise that gave these works physicality and tactility. Something that gave the Non-Representable a body, so to speak.

Rachel Gannon and Mireille Fauchon raise a question about the nature of illustration objects, asking: Are these objects to be viewed, touched or used?³ Illustrations as three-dimensional objects opens up to a further question: Do we always need to touch to experience an embodied sensation, or can we 'touch' with the gaze? Our senses ground us in a shared reality; in using materials familiar to us, the body will be able to recall certain memories and sensations without requiring touch per se. Looking can activate memories of touch—for example, perhaps you remember a beloved childhood blanket or the clay ashtray you made for your late grandfather. You can recall how these objects felt and are able to access the memories associated with them, along with a range of sensations—wet, soft, scratchy, cold, slimy, warm, comforting. Memories evoke our senses, because we have lived them with our bodies.

Making *Through* My Body:

The process of making the ceramic faces is part of the expression and story of the final work. First I would build the face up as a block. The clay softens the more I touch it and the more I change it with my hands. In the sculpting process I use wooden tools, but mostly my fingers, to add and subtract material. I smooth over and make the clay even with my fingertips; I scratch and make textures with my nails. Sometimes the clay becomes too soft or too thin and it collapses or makes a hole. Maybe I will leave the clay in this state, or else stretch the expandable clay so it covers the hole. On other occasions I will add more clay to blend it into the already existing material. In the end I hollow it out, removing the clay from the backside of the face, so there is only a facade left. Now it is ready to dry and be fired.

It is possible to see my hands in the result of the ceramic heads; these marks, made by my fingers, explicitly tell you that they are handmade by a person. This fact suggests that the outcome is one person's subjective gaze rendering the people portrayed, and not a neutral one.

We see the same We look at it differently.

These characters are perceived with my eyes and created with my hands—they are portraits that have gone *through* me. The touch of the hand marks the subject's presence in the object; my hands have imprinted marks affected by my physical strength and my emotional state at the time of making. A finger has left a fingerprint. Hand sculpting also makes the work one of a kind, thereby avoiding the 'locked' effect of mass-produced images with one gaze being read as the truth.

Distance:

Artists Natalie Djurberg and Allison Schulnik each make claymation films in which the characters are sculpted in a similarly expressive and crude manner. Their characters represent human creatures that are absurd, grotesque, and far removed from reality. In each of their respective works, there are visible traces of the hands that have made them and the processes of their creation—an effect which generates an uncanny feeling of alienation and familiarity. When I see Djurberg and Schulnik's characters in clay or plasticine, I see an emotional vulnerability that the artists may only be able to express because of the distance their unnatural figures provide.

The distance that illustration and non-realistic representations offer their subjects and objects expands the borders of what can be expressed. This distance makes intimacy and honesty possible. The rejection of realism creates an opening into portraying the Non-Representable and the inner state; distance offers the possibility of depicting things that cannot be looked at directly because they are too painful, confrontational or beyond the realm of our comprehension.⁴

Duchenne's smile:

- Example from the handsculpting process.
 The glazed masks.





Development of *Defining You*, *Finding You*:

Light:

Defining You, Finding You will be experienced in a dark room, into which the audience will enter and encounter the work using a hand-held torch. By blacking out the exhibition space, the audience must rely on their own ability to light the work in order to experience it. Seeing is one of our dominant senses as human beings. Our vision is a complex system, with our eyes considered the most complex organ in our body, aside from the brain; most of our learnt experiences come from our visual sense.¹

The eye has a blind spot, called a scotoma
Here, the eye can't see but must create
I imagine how things look in your mind
Where I can never enter
I see and blend
Myself with you
In a meeting
In a confusion

The blind spot we share.

The power of illustration is that it has predominantly been seen as a field that can be used to highlight something hidden. Where the definition of illustration is 'illumination', it refers to being 'enlightened'. Illustration historian Jaleen Grove explains the etymological root of the word illustration, stating that it is connected to light, acts of revealing, looking and being enlightening. However, illustration has another etymological root associated with gold and glimmer. As the aphorism goes, 'all that glitters is not gold'—the moral being that while it might seduce you, gold can lead to falseness, and not always truth.² For visual communicators, it is easy to fall in love with light, which can mean over-illustrating and not leaving anything in the darkness for a spectator to uncover. This can result in an illustrated version of a beloved story being disappointing, in being completely different from what we imagined; worse still, it can leave us feeling robbed of our own imagined version of a story. While also feeding it, images can and often do kill imagination. This is where 'weak illustration' offers a counterpoint to something being overillustrated, as it leaves something in the dark for the audience to inhabit and make their own.

For this installation, the torch becomes a symbol of the gaze—detached and roaming. Here the torch will follow the directions of viewers' hands, highlighting the illustrations with individuated actions. When and where do you look at the work, and when do you look away? If you get too close to the image, you might see nothing, just a circle of light illuminating the transparent chiffon. The light makes us see, but it can also blind us.

Darkness:

Darkness as material is what Swedish filmmaker Mia Engberg investigated in her 2023 artistic research project *Darkness as Material*. Here she explored

darkness in the image, darkness in the cinema theatre, darkness in the spectator where films are received, and the darkness in the filmmaker where the world is reflected, and ideas are born.³

Engberg's artistic result is a film that is all dark, with almost no representational image. This darkness provides room for the spectator's imagination, together with the film's soundtrack. Inspired by Engberg's research into darkness as material, I wanted to create a space in which you must see with your whole body, not only your eyes. Darkness can provide intimacy, a room for reflection, and embodied vision; darkness creates an intimate atmosphere that awakens your senses and asks if the darkness might paradoxically make us see clearer?

Darkness is a lack of light.

Darkness is not necessarily a void.

A void is a lack of anything.

Darkness is rich.

American art historian Anita N. Bateman states that "anti-visibility is not the same as being invisible, rather it's the power to operate against systems of imperial domination, including the gaze." Darkness functions to diminish the illustrator's power position and undermine their ability to control outcomes by leaving something in the dark—something unexplored and undefined. The result of an illustration is what happens in the mind of a viewer; it is personal and it differs for each individual, which resonates with Engberg's point about film being received in the darkness of the spectator.

Defining You, Finding You: 1-2: Test of darkness and light. Seeing the world through a torch.





Development of The Face Between Us:

Seeing on the Inside:

Animation is an illusion; the moving images only *seem* to be moving because your brain makes up what is happening in-between the still images. In this way, an animation consists of both real and non-existing images. This also means that you could call animation an 'abject' format, because animation is all about the in-between. It is born in the borderland between a physical function (sight) and the inside wilderness of our imagination; it crosses the borders between the symbolic and semiotic worlds in its making, and often its themes too. In *The Face Between Us*, the darkness that is created by the effect of a blinking iris offers the viewer some seconds in which to create their own mental pictures, with the continuation of the sound and voiceover.

The Immersive:

Traditionally, films are confined to a screen; in the 21st century this mostly occurs through digital formats. A film that is shown outside a screen would be defined as expanded animation. Recalling Kristeva's notion of that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules," the expanded animation fits well into abjection as a theme.

While new technologies like virtual reality (VR) can create immersive experiences, I wanted to investigate an immersive, embodied experience within a physical setting, not a digital one. I wanted to make an experience grounded in embodied knowledge that seeks different ways to engage the spectator in ways other than purely cognitive ones. By showing a film beyond a screen setting—bringing it into a *physical* setting—the experience can be transformed from purely visual to embodied and sensorial. In this way, the physical elements and the presence of the audience become part of the storytelling.

Artist and researcher Birgitta Hosea works with expanded animation. In her text "Siting Animation: The Affect of Place" (2018), Hosea explores how installations affect a spectator's viewing. When showing a film in a setting such as an installation, the spatial context, history and sensorial elements in the room become part of the work. The mobility in the spatial sphere is an essential point in Hosea's reflections on expanded animation, which exists in a three-dimensional space where the viewer has to move, using the whole body, not only the eyes.

As Merleau-Ponty asserted, it is through the body and the senses that we understand the world. Professor of film and media at UC-Berkeley Mary Ann Doane believes that the making of an expanded animation is one way to "re-engage the body of the viewer as a measure of scale, distance, and material." When our bodies are engaged we are able to better access memories of lived experiences, even the ones we do not have language for, including those we had before conscious thought, as infants.³

Just be next to me Let's braid us into a chain.

Perspective:

One example of what an expanded animation can achieve that a traditional cinematic experience cannot is that it breaks with a fixed seating position, and therefor also with a singular, fixed perspective of the world.⁴ Hosea brings this back to the idea of a Western perspective, which is based on one fixed, central viewpoint. The development of this system—which originates in the Renaissance period—implies that the world is measurable, and that the entity positioned at the centre of a given viewpoint is a static human subject with only one eye.⁵

Immersion is Presence:

What installation and expanded animation practices can also achieve is the ability to place a spectator in the present, in the *now*. Paradoxically, an immersive experience can also create feelings of distance in the act of being completely absorbed in a work. The darkened spaces of cinema can produce the feeling of forgetting yourself and of being completely invested in an illusion. The passive position of your body when watching a film or reading a book makes this escapism possible. The active viewpoint of an installation in which you move your body, on the other hand, places you in a moment where it is hard to forget yourself.

In her book *Installation and The Moving Image* (2015), British artist, critic and expert in early moving image culture, Catherine Elwes, criticises the simultaneously fragmented act of viewing an installation with multiple images. In Elwes' opinion, this produces a "superficial attention span" in viewers. I find Elwes has a point; I think that lengthy and concentrated viewing of one image or film, compared to fragmented viewing, provides a different sensation in the viewer. It is one in which viewers can become so absorbed and strongly identify with the story or characters that they forget themselves. In my opinion, this escapism has its own entitlement—the feeling of wanting to be someone else for an hour and get a break from reality.

One of the main focuses of this research project, however, has been to investigate an ethical approach to viewing, with one of its aims being to investigate ways of creating awareness around the gaze and the spectator's unique position. The aim of embracing expanded animation has been to invite reflection upon the very act of seeing, which one can do in placing emphasis on bodily awareness.

Multisensorial:

The Face Between Us is multisensorial since it operates through combinations of sound and image, and is also tactile since it takes up a physical space in a room through its projection onto water. Having multiple sensorial elements opens up the possibility of playing with contradictions and reinforcing juxtapositions between sound and image, site and theme.

In 1970, Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema* was the first book to consider video as an art form, with many of its claims made with regards to expanded animation. Youngblood's aim was utopian: he suggested that the expansion of consciousness could be reached through the expansion of cinematic technology. In *Expanded Cinema*, Youngblood laid claims for "a synaesthetic cinema that would move away from realism and utilise multiple sensory stimuli to leave space for the individual's own free association and thus expand their consciousness." *The Face Between Us* builds on this tradition as well as that of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' ('total work of art'): a term from the 19th century that is especially associated with the German composer Richard Wagner. Wagner's ideas were also idealistic—he wanted to reject the self-sufficiency of the individual disciplines and unite them into one grand, all-encompassing artwork.

Projection and Touching:

Projection can both refer to the presentation of an image on a surface as well as the unconscious transfer of one's desires and/or emotions onto another person.¹⁰

When you look at me
You see an empty vase
You need to fill
With flowers from your own garden.

American-Japanese animator Miwa Matreyek is an expanded animation artist who uses projection on her body, with the body becoming both a canvas and a character. She bridges the physical and the virtual worlds by disturbing and/or blending animated parts with her body. This seamless process of moving between and bridging these two worlds eliminates the borders between the inside and outside, the lines between the real and unreal.¹¹

For the work's final installation, *The Face Between Us* will be projected onto milky white-water contained in a low-lying pool—a technique that will render the image as visible on the surface of the water rather than on the bottom of the pool. A pump will be used to make the movements of the water stir into the film, with the low placement of the pool making it possible for the audience to touch the water. In touching the water, your hand will blend with the image so that you become an extension of the canvas—much like in Matryek's work—but you cannot hold onto the image. The nature of the animated projection works to illustrate French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's idea of the Other as someone mysterious and outside ourselves: "If one could possess, grasp, and know the other, it would not be the other." ¹²

Taste:

As part of this installation, there will be a small table standing next to the pool with some glasses on it, inviting the audience to take a drink with the same white substance as in the pool. The

ingesting of the water is an invitation to become Medusa, to become the Other. This gesture might evoke feelings of repulsion and uneasiness for many. Kristeva uses milk as an example to explain abjection; how the body reacts with stomach cramps and gags when it sees the skin that can form on a glass of milk after exposure to oxygen, explaining that the abject is a natural reflex that protects us against diseases from rotten foods and dead animals.¹³ In Denmark, there is a name that children use when you pour water into a glass that previously had milk in it—ghost water. The water becomes cloudy as if carrying the ghost-like presence of the Other.

Sound:

The sound in *The Face Between Us* consists of a voiceover spoken by me with additional sound effects. Sound designer Anne Jeppesen has produced the additional sounds based on my ideas, making the sound after the visual elements had already been completed. Jeppesen and I had multiple meetings in which I explained what kind of atmosphere and mood I wanted to create. It was a back-and-forth process. After Jeppesen made initial tests, we would then discuss, alter and try new things. My idea for the soundscape was that the sound editing should reflect the work's core concepts of the inside and the outside, the over and the under, by shifting from clear to muffled sounds, and by adding reverberations to the voiceover. These shifts also relate to the key concept of moving from two entities to one and back. Sometimes the voiceover approaches in stereo from two discrete directions; at other times it creates an echo or a choir.

Another concept for the sound I wanted to experiment with was to have all the sound sources refer both *to* but also stem *from* the body. Jeppesen recorded me gurgling water, making scratching sounds, breathing heavily, spitting, whistling, blowing and chewing loudly—all 'wet' sounds used in an attempt to make the sounds more abject. By combining familiar sounds stemming from the body with a surreal landscape, the combination of the familiar and the unknown creates a disturbing, uncanny air of ambiguity.

Script/Voiceover:

The manuscript for the voiceover in the film was made using a speculative conversation technique inspired by one of my fellow PhD residents from the University of Bergen, Sidsel Christensen. In her PhD project *INTERDIMENSIONAL ARTISTIC REFLECTION*: *Speculative Movements Through Spatial, Digital and Narrative Media*, ¹⁴ Christensen uses this speculative conversation technique to interview non-human entities such as buildings and lakes.

The manuscript developed out of speculative interviews conducted between Medusa and myself, and between Medusa and another Greek mythical figure, Argus Panoptes—an all-seeing giant with 100 eyes (a character present in the initial manuscript but later removed). I also tested using the artificial intelligence tool ChatGPT, asking how it would imagine a speculative conversation between Medusa and Argus. The final manuscript and text draw on these speculative interviews—for which I have acted in all the roles—as well as my lived experiences being a human with an inside sensing my body's borders on the outside, in always being affected by Others.

While the first version of the voiceover monologue was much longer, what finally made its way into the film considers what is told in the visuals and what is not. Working with a sound designer who usually works with sound without visual accompaniment was very revealing of the differences in our desired outcomes. Jeppesen attempted to make me use an expressive voice because she usually uses sound as the main expressive characteristic, whereas I am used to having visuals be the central expressive component. During the first takes, Jeppesen suggested that I dramatise the voiceover so that the tone and rhythm supported the emotional message. However, the expressive visual side combined with an expressive voice speaking an expressive text, created an outcome that seemed dominant and manipulative. Together with the visual scenery, the work quickly became over-expressive. For this reason, the voiceover has been kept to a rather neutral tone, allowing the viewer to imagine the tone and/or the accompanying emotions stimulated by the words.

At one point, the voiceover refers to the ABBA song *Knowing Me, Knowing You* from 1977. Despite adapting the original wording from "there is no way through" to "this time we're through," the words will still evoke resemblances for many people. The background sound also uses a part of the original song, altered and slowed down by Jeppesen, to create a darker and heartfelt atmosphere. The juxtaposition of a kitsch pop song and the film's uncanny imagery adds an element of humour, which I welcome. Where animation produces a sense of playfulness and openness through its connotations, so do pop-cultural references. While the allusion to the song lyrics will evoke associations that differ from person to person, they will still likely bring a sense of something familiar to the viewer, making the discussed matter less threatening.

Knowing me, knowing you,
There is nothing we can do.
Knowing me, knowing you,
There is nothing we can do.
We just have to face it,
There is
no way through.

The Face Between Us:1: Painting with my hands.2-3: Projection test on the body.



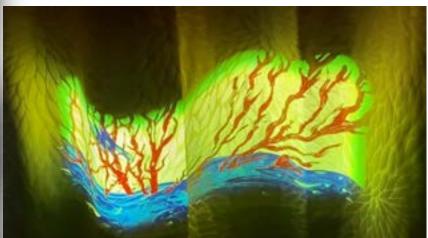


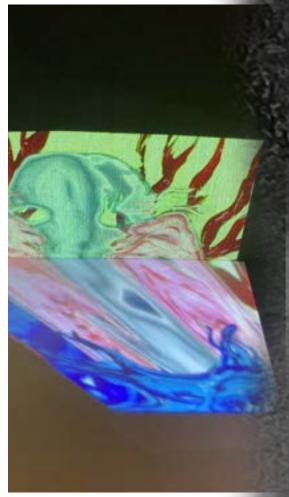


The Face Between Us:

1-4: Projection test on milk, fabric and plexiglas and mirrors.









Summary of Body:

The ceramic objects in *Duchenne's Smile* reveal their handmade nature through their rough surfaces which emphasises that a living person created them. In this way, their form and materiality reflect both subjective interpretation and bodily knowledge. This work embraces non-objectivity as a form of honesty, breaking the border between the artwork and the maker's body by showing the illustrator's subjective presence. *Duchenne's Smile* draws on Merleau-Ponty's ideas of phenomenology and embodiment to understand the world through our senses. It follows Merleau-Ponty's notion that bodies and senses allow us to cross the border between the inside and the outside, creating a connection between us rather than acting as a border. The project also challenges the idea that material objects perceived only through sight, without touch, lack an embodied experience. Instead, it argues that such objects can evoke memories and, by the absence of touch, a longing for sensory engagement, demonstrating the powerful connection between perception and feeling.

Defining You, Finding You takes a speculative approach by exploring what happens when a representation of someone is mediated through sensory materials rather than printed on an anonymous white A4 page, such as my brother's diagnosis, which serves as the original source for this reinterpretation. Darkness is used to awaken senses beyond the visual and create a deeply personal, intimate and immersive experience. The textiles hanging and surrounding the viewer will create the sensation of entering an intimate space inside someone else's experience. A torch serves as a metaphor and a physical manifestation for the gaze, evoking an awareness of what we choose to look at, for how long, and when we look away. By utilising darkness, the work suggests that the "true" illustration is not what is physically seen, but the image being formed in the viewer's mind. Darkness is used in the installation to symbolise the Non-Representable nature of another person's inner world, thereby symbolising the limits of representational illustration.

The Face Between Us is an expanded animation installation that combines film and physical materiality. It features a short animated film projected onto water, transforming the act of viewing into an embodied, immersive experience. By projecting onto water—a fluid material that is constantly moving—the material becomes part of the storytelling, emphasising that the identity of Self is constantly transforming. This expanded animation setting disrupts the fixed perspective of traditional cinema, allows for viewing from multiple positions, even inviting viewers to actively engage with the story by drinking the water. The Face Between Us uses a speculative storyline with an image-world that is based in the abstract and the magical to address a space of critical reflection and open-mindedness. The film also uses darkness—moments in the film with no images, made by a blinking iris—which blackens the screen entirely. In these moments of darkness, the viewer has time to reflect and form mental images in their mind.

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The Artistic Outcome

The Works:

- Duchenne's Smile consists of five white, enclosed wooden boxes. Each box contains a ceramic face on the inside, illustrating some of Duchenne's subjects. Fitted on three sides of each of the boxes are concave and convex optical lenses, which the viewer must look through in order to see the faces. These lenses will distort what is seen inside.
- *Defining You, Finding You* consists of 24 illustrations that have been digitally printed onto chiffon and installed in a dark room. The viewer must move through these textiles—which hang from the ceiling—to navigate the works with a torch.
- The Face Between Us is a short film (5 min, 32 sec.) telling a story based on the Ancient Greek myth of Medusa. It is projected onto white water presented in a low basin on the gallery floor.

The Exhibition:

Public and Reproducible—Private and Close to the Body:

Whether an illustration is printed in a magazine or displayed on a screen, it is public in the sense that it has been made for an audience beyond the illustrator. A central aspect of the illustration discipline is that it intends to reach a broad audience through reproduction across various forms and media. This usually results in a more accessible platform than art that is shown in galleries, which can often appear as highly formal and/or elitist. An earlier definition of illustration has therefore meant that it is a discipline that is largely mediated into new contexts. What this also indicates is that 'real' illustration is the one in its printed context—and not the original drawing—with all the possible visual alterations that can come in the printing proces.¹

Today, in our digital world, even narrow fields of production become accessible through the internet. For instance, experimental animations are no longer only shown at festivals but "are passed from user to user through mass audiences on the internet." Like other artistic works that are not mass-produced, experimental animations or photographs from exhibitions can live a digital life as second-hand source imagery, on social media and the like.

At the same time, the arena of illustration can be considered 'private' in the sense of it being domestically available. This is due to factors of material, format, mass-produced editions and cost, especially when compared to artworks in a gallery which you cannot bring home or touch. Another important difference is that, although you can experiencing art digitally, it is not the same as being in the gallery. With illustration on the other hand, the 'reproduced' version is the real object, for example the book you can read in your bed or the images and film you can water

on your phone—a device which is closest to our intimate sphere, with some people never leaving it out of sight or touch. An illustration is made for being used and consumed together with your body, with the arena of the body being an informal arena. Illustration, therefore, aspires to being intimate, personal and close to a viewer's body.

A New Reality:

The products of this artistic research project take a different approach to that of reproducible illustration, since these works can only be experienced in a specific setting and are not disseminated in a traditional sense. As illustration researchers Rachel Gannon and Mireille Fauchon describe of this approach:

The production of unique objects by illustrators transforms this dynamic. Such illustrative objects are no longer experienced in mediated form, instead the audience is asked to engage directly with the original artefact. In this case, the public reach of the work is limited, and the intended placement of the works (e.g., gallery, domestic, etc.) has more significance as a place of encounter.³

Finding spaces in which to show these non-reproducible illustrations can be something of a challenge. Another option is therfore site-specific spaces, which can offer new and unexpected platforms for encounters within daily life or in faraway, vast spaces. By using new sites, experience-based illustration can therefore break not only formats, but also the expected borders of those spaces we usually enter to see exhibitions. On the other hand, a gallery or other form of enclosed space is practical and might offer a neutral space for reflection and immersion—qualities which other places cannot.

The Transmission:

The aim for the exhibition of artistic outcomes is to be public while still offering an atmosphere of the private, 'close-to-the-body' feel of illustration. In attempting to break with the atmosphere of the white, cold cube, the exhibition embraces elements of darkness and everyday materials like soft textiles and water.

Unlike traditional printing, where the images would be reproduced physically with ink on paper, these works are being reproduced by a Non-Representable and invisible transmission—imprinting. The unique nature of each artwork that features in my exhibition will be reproduced in the mind of its audience, creating a different imprint for each viewer.

It is helpful to recall from earlier in this discussion the illustration historian Jaleen Grove's thoughts about one of the core principles of illustration, where she identifies the "real" illustration as the image popping into the viewer's head, meaning that the illustration is not finished until this transmission has been completed. Where the exhibition will be reproduced through multiple embodied results, one benefit will be that its imagery cannot spread and become a stereotype or a 'locked' image in the same way that something mass-produced can.

The Venue:

The exhibition will be held at the Visningsrommet USF at USF Verftet in Bergen. Visningsrommet USF opened in 1993 as an artist-run space and is housed within USF Verftet, a cultural arena for art, design, film, music, literature and theatre. USF Verftet is run by the Stiftelsen Kulturhuset USF foundation, supported by Bergen Kommune (Bergen Council) and private funding.⁵

I chose to apply to show at Visningsrommet USF since I wanted to exhibit my project in an interdisciplinary space where people interested in various fields would naturally gravitate. Where USF Verftet has the atmosphere of a public culture house with many guests of all ages interested in film, art, design, music and literature, the gallery Visningsrommet USF appears to be more approachable than other more specific design and/or art galleries.

The Concept of the Layout:

The exhibition space consists of two rooms, where an exhibition invigilator will be present to explain the route for audiences to take in order to experience the exhibition. The first room one enters has plenty of natural light, with a wall of windows facing the public square outside. Handpainted text will be written directly onto the wall in this room, introducing the exhibition. These handpainted letters will be uneven, with weak and nuanced lines and tones; this is chosen as a contrast to a straight and aligned digital text print-out with fixed borders.

In this first room, *Duchenne's Smile* will be showcased. There will be a black curtain hung in the doorway opening to the second room—this room will be dark, without any lights. The audience will first move through *Defining You*, *Finding You* and end up experiencing *The Face Between Us* at the other end of the space. From here, one can exit the room through a second door, also fitted with a black curtain.

The installation is a multimodal illustration that aims to place the audience inside the illustration, creating an embodied experience and an awareness of the potential and power of their own gaze. All three works aim to challenge viewers' ways of seeing, with the central concept of the inside and the outside being maintained throughout the exhibition's design.

Duchennes's Smile will be displayed in the first room, together with the introductory text. From the outset, Duchenne's Smile is displayed in a fairly unspecified way, consisting of five fairly plain appearing boxes presented on top of neutral white plints. It is not until you step closer to the objects and move your eyes over the optical lenses on the exterior of the boxes that the work reveals itself from the inside.

Audiences must enter the darkened second room to experience *Defining You*, *Finding You* and *The Face Between Us*. Where *Defining You*, *Finding You* will be displayed in a room that requires the use of a hand-held torch (provided), audiences will have to move around the textile labyrinth with their entire body, using the torch as an extension of their eyes. The textile works printed on chiffon will be hung in a way that means audiences will likely touch them at times.

People encountering this work will inevitably take on the role of someone passing through a body of thin, immersive membranes, in crossing the borders of Self and Other, and in seeing the textiles from both sides.

Once a viewer is out of the labyrinth, they will be asked to turn off the torch. At the end of the labyrinth, the film installation *The Face Between Us* will be projected onto the milky pool to be installed at the other end of the room. The film will be programmed on a loop, meaning audiences will be free to enter randomly. To exit the dark room—the inside of the body—audiences will have to pass through another border in the form of another black curtain fitted into the second and final doorway. In leaving this room, audiences will be returned to the first room—the outside room—where they will be met by the light. The light might be somewhat blinding, and so adjusting one's eyesight might take a few moments. The last element of the exhibition is a mirror—an overt reference to Jacques Lacan's mirror stage theory. The mirror is placed to confront viewers with their own gaze, position and power, as a final stage in interpreting the illustrations encountered. This mirror will also function to place the viewer as an image within the context of the exhibition, focusing the theme back onto the viewer as subject. The mirror—which refers to Medusa's face in the film just witnessed—will function as a way of further breaking down the border between the viewer and the work, placing them within the same context.

When you look at me I feel like a spy Or am I a Mirror?

The Artistic Reflection:

For a long time, I wondered how I could present the text in an embodied, tactile format that would break with the standardised and general format. I rejected the idea in favour of making a zine inspired booklet. I wanted the artistic research reflection to be easy and cheap to reproduce so that it could be given out for free to people it may interest, in that way being democratic, and with the aim to scale down the 'elitist' or 'academic' notion that an Artistic PhD might otherwise evoke. The volume of the many final pages, however, has required it to be glued instead of the folded and stapled booklet I had imagined.

I have still kept a simple format and design for the artistic reflection which will be presented as a printed booklet with text and images in the hope it will still evoke these notions. It will also be accessible on the digital platform of the Research Catalogue as a printable PDF.

The format is A4, which is a result of the proposal put forth by the *Unlearning Manifesto*— to set up rules. Each of the projects as part of *FBU* have rejected standardised forms, particularly the white A4 format in *Defining You*, *Finding You*. As a result of my original idea to produce a zine using accessible and low-cost materials and techniques, I chose to give myself the productive limitation that the outcome *had* to embrace the common, accessible A4 format. The challenge

was then to look at how I could modify one of the most standardised formats in the world, so that it would still support the overarching ideas of the project.

The pages will have a border, similar to the blurred edge in *The Face Between Us*. This framing will conjure the borders of your eyes—your subjective gaze—at the same time as functioning to bridge the border between the text andthe paper's edge. This border will be a gradient, moving from light to dark pigment, symbolising your moving from the outside to the inside of the project the more you read. This will de achieved by grading the output colour of the border from white, through several greytones, to black.

The page layout is based on a concept of reading text from the inside and the outside. The 'outside' text will be written in a regular font, and is the main text that explains the project from a more objective and analytical point of view; the 'inside' text on the other hand will be written in a cursive font and will contain a more poetically-styled text—more a sensing the project than analysing it. The inside content incorporates text that has been used as the voiceover in the film *The Face Between Us* as well as the English translation of the text that appears on the textiles in *Defining You, Finding You.* The outside text is right aligned, where the inside text is centre aligned, giving the lines of differing lengths a more organic and unstructured appearance, in turnbreaking with the borders of a fixed column.





Duchenne's Smile.
Five ceramic mask.
Will be displayed in enclosed boxed with optical lenses as peepholes.







Duchenne's Smile.
Five ceramic mask.
Will be displayed in enclosed boxed with optical lenses as peepholes.

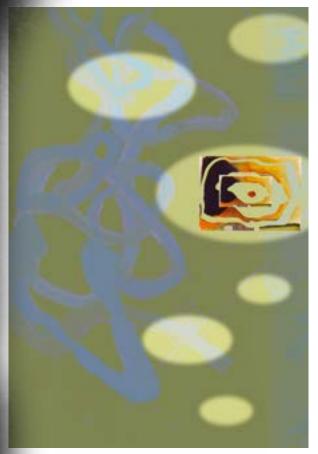


Defining You, Finding You:
The final illustrations for the textile labyrinth. Will be digitally printed on chiffon.



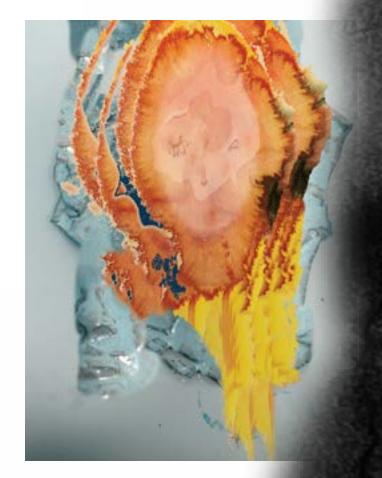


Defining You, Finding You: The final illustrations for the textile labyrinth. Will be digitally printed on chiffon.







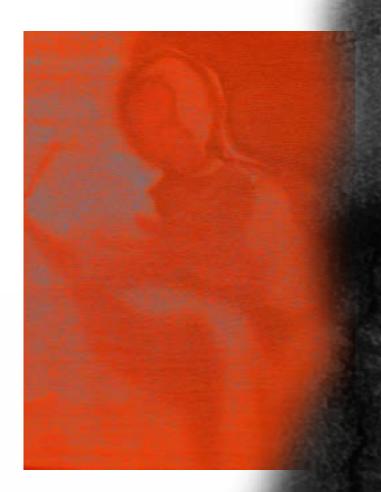


Defining You, Finding You: The final illustrations for the textile labyrinth. Will be digitally printed on chiffon.



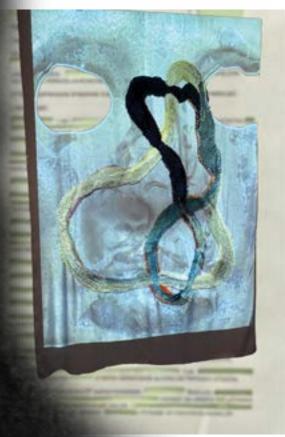




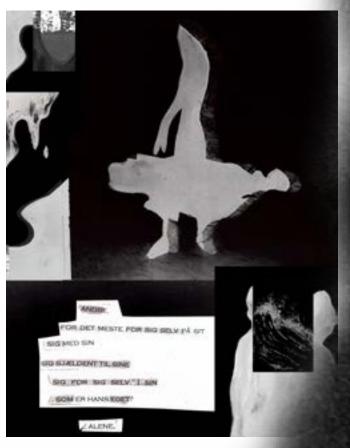


Defining You, Finding You: The final illustrations for the textile labyrinth. Will be digitally printed on chiffon.



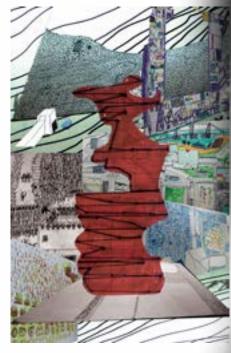


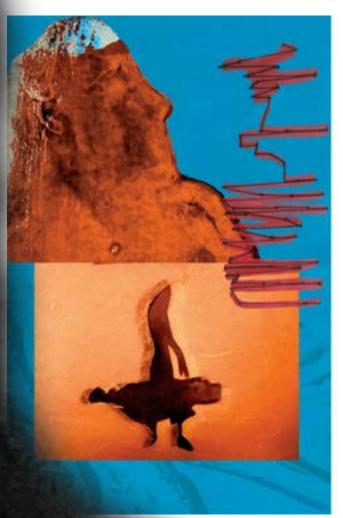


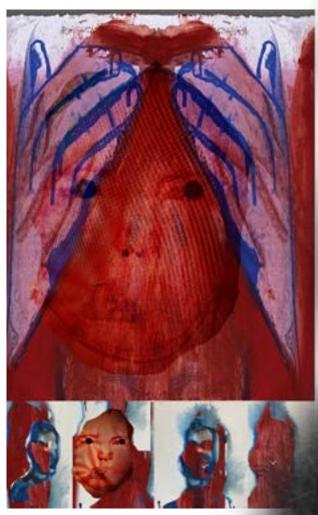


Defining You, Finding You:
The final illustrations for the textile labyrinth.
Will be digitally printed on chiffon.
The first one(green) is my brother's drawing, second one is a digital collage of his and mine drawings)









Defining You, Finding You: The final illustrations for the textile labyrinth. Will be digitally printed on chiffon. The 4 texts Hus, Grænse, Blind, Statue.

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Endnotes: The Artistic Outcome

- 1 Gannon, Rachel, Fauchon, Mireille. Illustration Research Methods (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), p. 122.
- 2 Hosea, Birgitta. "Siting Animation: The Affect of Place," in *Experimental and Expanded animation*, ed. Nicky Hamlyn and Vicky Smith (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) p. 258.
- 3 Gannon, Rachel, Fauchon, Mireille. Illustration Research Methods (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), p. 122.
- 4 Grove, Jaleen. "Transposition as Artistic Practice", Youtube, [01:52: 29min]19 October, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0BcVPdbUkY&ab_channel=AVCLUBKMD.
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Findings and Contribution

A central aim of this artistic research has been to contribute new knowledge, insight, and experience to the field of illustration and design.

Through the development of the artistic research project *The Face Between Us: Abjection, the Gaze, and the Body at the Border of Self and Other in Authorial Illustration (FBU)* the focus has been on developing an ethical illustration practice concerning representations of the Other. Through the lens of abjection as well as three intertwined themes—borders, the gaze and embodiment—this research has investigated and I have gained insight and experience into various processes, formats and materials.

In what follows I elaborate on the findings of *FBU*. I do so with special consideration for how an illustration practice—its format, materials and displays—can encourage engagement with, and reflection on, the complex and Non-Representable relationship between Self and Others, as understood through the lens of abjection.

Otherness:

The FBU takes up Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection to explore the relationship between Self and Other as a space of tension, rather than opposition. To my knowledge, Kristeva's theory of abjection has not been used in an artistic research project about illustrative practice before.

When talking about Otherness, emphasis is often focused on the Other; FBU redirects this emphasis to ask us to consider the Self as well. In addition to this, FBU crucially focuses on how the border *between* them can be acknowledged, respected, expanded and transgressed through particular attention to the abject. Through this project I have found that switching the gaze and the focus of the research from Other to Self in order to better understand Otherness, has created a work that offers a space for reflection and critical thinking—one that might result in curiosity and deeper acceptance of the Other because the Self realises itself is an Other in the gaze of Others.

A key finding of the project has been that working with the abject as a motif within illustration is a meaningful tool for engaging critical thinking and reflection around how human beings see and connect in a respectful manner. Although abjection is often manifested through aesthetics of horror and the uncanny, its premise is the ever-present reminder of our shared existence. Most of all, the abject provides the potential and possibility of transgressing borders and escaping feelings of existential human loneliness, even if only for a moment.

Materiality:

The FBU project offers insight into how fluid materials, such as liquid paint, watercolour, and glaze have qualities of adapting by merging, mixing and blending with each other. It also

provides insight into how soft materials like pastels and clay can retain the imprint of an illustrator's hand. FBU applies these analogue qualities of materials, which become storytellers and symbols of entities that can transgress, coexist and entangle with one another. The borders separating colours and mediums are not static and fixed but can reshape and expand, not necessarily leaving them unchanged but sometimes transforming them into a clouded, muddy substance. Mixed colours or other substances offer material manifestations which reveal ambiguities and complexities similar to the human reality of existing, being that we are entangled, relational beings often sitting in existential loneliness.

The project shows how you can move from standardised formats—such as the photographic categorisations of French neurologist Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne, an A4-documented autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis, and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) cards—into more softer, sensorial and flexible materials like textiles, clay and projection onto water.

FBU shows how the use of 'weak' lines in drawing and painting can suggest that our bodies also have a Non-Representable border, which is more porous and open for overlapping with Others than the visible borders between our bodies. This choice of visual effect underscores to reveal, rather than *tell*, something crucial: that even though we all experience the world from a masked inside, the border between us does not have to symbolise opposition and division, it can also act as a liminal grey zone where we can connect through practices of *overlapping*.

Positioning and Seeing:

The FBU project has investigated the gaze—not simply as a physical act, but as a lens which is never objective but always infiltrated by cultural codes and subjective experiences. FBU finds that insisting on being aware of and respecting the border between the researcher/illustrator and the subject of interest can be a more ethical ground for the work. This approach helps to make the subjectivity and vulnerability of the illustrator more visible, which works to undermine certain aspects of power and hierarchy regarding the position of the person in charge of representing Others. My experience through this project has been that using an autoethnographic approach in the work, and by putting the illustrator at stake, one can transform the narrative from speaking on behalf of Others into one of active witnessing and personal investment.

FBU offers insight into how authorial illustration is a source of ethical representation. It is not focused on, or concerned with, being objective or communicating the "truth," but rather about providing a subjective and fragmented reflection. In order to be transparent, FBU finds that by insisting on making the borders between a viewer and an illustration explicit, you can integrate an increased level of honesty and awareness of positionality into the work and its overall experience. These elements create and invite one into a space of reflection and critical thinking, for both maker and viewer. This research project shows how you can reveal the gaze using tools such as optical distortion, darkness and torchlight, and by embracing shifting perspectives in the use of media, from static to moving images. These tools expose acts of seeing, bring attention to the viewer and actively engage them in the ethics of representation and seeing. In this way, the

viewer is removed from passive spectatorship and repositioned as a subject who must reckon with their own seeing body.

FBU also reveals how a shift—from the existing paradigm of illustration as illumination and enlightenment, into a mode that embraces darkness, obscurity and the 'clouded'—can in fact provoke deeper seeing and understanding. Within these works, the viewer is not shown anything per se, rather they are placed in relation to it. FBU also claims that even though the illustration is shown in a gallery setting, rather than being mass-produced, the end result is still a reproducible image- the image that is produced in each viewer's mind. Thus FBU also claims that imprinting images and experiences is a way of communicating in a new format.

Formats and Embodiement:

FBU has given me insight into how dissolving the traditional format of the illustration field can break the singular, fixed perspective of the experience of encounter, whether via book, screen or other format. By deliberately moving from two- to three-dimensional forms, and from static to moving images to enable multiple perspectives and positions to flourish, the borders of illustration formats can expand, and as a result, break down the boundaries between the work and the viewer. This outcome can also be understood as one result of the abject at play, revealing how substances can crossborders, namely from the symbolic to the semiotic world.

This research project respects that some aspects of being—especially those related to identity—largely resist translation into text or image. In this way, FBU reveals how reclaiming the body as both a site and a method for knowledge production, can be used in an illustration experience to mediate the Non-Representable. FBU proposes that seeing is required through the engagement of the whole body which is rooted in the body's lived experience, hence the multisensory and experience-based nature of the illustrations. The works of the FBU require the viewer to navigate space through physical, bodily engagement—one result of showing works as immersive, spatial installations. In one work, viewers are prompted to move through a space of sheer illustrated textiles, thereby becoming participants in the creation of the image. In another, viewers are intentionally separated from three-dimensional objects through the imposing of physical borders of boxes and optical distortion lenses. In the third work, an expanded animation installation is projected onto water, creating a shared physical presence with the viewer.

In a digital, hyper-visual image culture, vast amounts of information travel to us through second-hand sources. One finding of FBU is that a focus on unique objects and firsthand experiences become a successful counterpoise to the mass-spreading of images. Especially in cases involving the representation of Others, or in the case of sensitive content that can easily be misused or taken out of context, this approach provides the project with an ethical basis.

Experiences of embodiment are not only present through the outcomes and perceptions of the work, but also in the processes and visual methodologies applied. *FBU* shows how illustrating using analogue, handmade processes is another way of maintaining a subjective presence. Additionally, through embracing the roughness, irregularity and trace of the maker's hand, we find essential markers of the care that is put into creating these objects—a proposition that

reveals that they are products of subjective interpretation —the objects are representations of the inner workings of the mind but also retain a trace of the outside, the body. FBU uses this approach as an active form of resistance to the aesthetics of 'smoothness', namely of the homogenisation of digital tools and materials.

The Speculative and the Abstract:

FBU uses abstraction, magical elements, and uncanniness in speculative scenarios to tell Non-Representable stories from the inside. What the research project finds is that the speculative and fictional are not tactics of escape from ethics, but can in fact deepen our ethical stance. These modes can offer protection and anonymity for those participants involved in research. Moreover, they can provide connection and identification across differences in the realistic sphere, because they take place in the borderland of various worlds—the inside and the outside, the symbolic and the semiotic—which are encountered as magical spaces where playfulness and imagination prevail.

The project shows how using expressive, hyperrealistic colours, as well as exaggeration of scale and physical characteristics can expand the borders of narrative by way of entering the liminal zones of what we think we know. This zone or borderland is not bound by visible limitations and reality, but is open to the imaginative and the unresolved. *FBU* finds that illustrating the speculative using unrealistic imagery develops the illustration into a space for reflecting on the borders we surround ourselves with. The project's aim is for the viewers to ask themselves: Are the borders definitive or questionable? Are they meaningful to us? Could they be crossable or expandable?

Weak Illustration:

The project contributes to the field of illustration by offering up a new term: 'weak illustration'. This terminology has emerged from a wish to integrate an ethical paradigm and expand illustration as a critical practice to ensure the field's continued relevance. While weak illustration is an approach made explicitly for the authorial illustration field, the hope is that this approach might also benefit, influence and contribute to the future of the design field generally.

The conceptual framework of weak illustration is based on the insights, knowledge, and findings achieved through the artistic research project *FBU*, and in dialogue with architect Ignasi de Solà-Morales' notion of 'weak architecture'. Drawing on and adapting several of Solà-Morales' principles, I have extended them while also adding new ones grounded in the specific demands of authorial illustration and ethical practice.

The term weak illustration is a response to the disciplinary ambiguity of the illustration field. As a practice, illustration sits at the intersection of multiple fields and traditions: its communicative and material nature ties it to design; its narrativity—rooted in the intimate and subjective—resonates with literature and filmmaking; and its conceptual and affective complexity aligns it with the visual arts.

From my experience, authorial illustration is constrained by utilitarian expectations of clarity, function and replication within design discourse. Discursive design thinking offers a counterbalance to this ethos; this thinking highly influences the underpinnings of weak illustration, which is based in the discursive design field with its reliance on critical and speculative scenarios. The approach proposes that to illustrate is not to *define* but to *question*. Weak illustration invites us to make space for that which is uncertain.

Weak illustration challenges the existing paradigm of illustration as illumination and its traditional role as merely a communicative tool employed towards clarity, explanation and persuasion, based in the factual. Instead it reframes illustration as a space for complexity, emotionality, speculative practice and ethical reflection. Weak illustration challenges dominant design paradigms rooted in certainty, control and commercialism, introducing instead an ethics of representation that is rooted in openness, vulnerability and independent practice. Weak illustration practices a commitment to transparency, care and respect for the relations intertwined in it.

While grounded in the discursive design tradition, weak illustration also recognises its position at the margins—where disciplines blur, overlap, and change. Weak illustration is an 'abject' discipline that resists the idea of fixed boundaries between fields, instead viewing them as fluid, expandable, and overlapping. Weak illustration understands and values the need for some level of structure—a skeleton to hold its watery body—but it also urges a continual questioning of the borders we encounter. It encourages all practitioners to make a personal *Unlearning Manifesto*, not as a declaration of certainty, but rather as a tool for navigating and reshaping one's own practice, in order for each practitioner to maintain a meaningful and flexible working approach.

Weak illustration proposes a reorientation of visual language, away from polished perfection and towards a form of making that values process and the presence of subjectivity. It favours the trace, the imperfect, and the unresolved, which it achieves by integrating the markings of the illustrator's body, temporality and gaze that is explicit in the work.

Like a living being, weak illustration is fallible and in constant transformation—it is entangled and yet also the centre of its own microcosmos. It resists fixed forms and predetermined narratives, instead embracing a fluid, subjective and context-sensitive practice in which ambiguity, not clarity, becomes a source of meaning. At its heart, weak illustration embraces resonance not resolution; expression not perfection; connection not objectivity.

A Set of Characteristics Defining Weak Illustration:

Transformative:

'Weak' can conjure something that is faint or heavily diluted, but even as it reshapes or merges, it does not have to disappear. The weak line is a curious and porous one that is searching and open to interruption from the Other. Fluid paint—one expression of the weak illustration—can

mix and change, transforming with the Other. Weak illustration prefers transformative and organic over fixed and static media in its aim to represent, move or offer up multiple, shifting perspectives. It underscores the fact that the illustrative work is not a static result, but part of a transmission through which a viewer is an active and entangled participant.

Adaptable but Resilient:

The adaptability of weak illustration is not considered a lack but a strength. Because it is adaptable, it can co-exist with Other agents—whether materials, participants, or viewers—without the ultimate outcome of breaking down. Because it is fluid, weak illustration can reshape and maintain its essence, even when affected by external interference and/or contribution.

Weak illustration embraces doubt, disruption and change as inevitable to the act of making; it wants to show the evolved existence of illustration, rather than as merely finished products. This approach values and does not hide the traces, revisions and inconsistencies it produces. Weak illustration does not see imperfection as a low standard or a marker of performing poorly, rather it considers roughness, emotionality and incompleteness as powerful tools for meaning making. It celebrates imperfection and lived experience as a marker of a work's temporal, shifting and entangled character by weaving these characteristic into its outcome. The essence of an illustrative work—the story that wants to be told—is always central and can be achieved through both low-budget and small-scale production if necessary, especially if larger-scale production would compromise the process and/or outcome.

Contextsensitive:

One fact about the weak is that it becomes stronger when multiplied with Others. Weak illustration is grounded in relational ethics and is context-sensitive; it is aware of itself as an entity in a given context, and that illustrative work—specifically of a representational nature—can affect Others, whether participants, collaborators or people it addresses. Weal illustration can affect the environment in which it occurs or is placed, or by way of the materials used in the process. Weak illustration sees strength in handmade and analogue processes, and it honours the time put into a work, wherethe act of illustration is understood as one of care. It prefers first-hand visual encounters and experiences to show the work. In doing so, weak illustration repositions the viewer as a co-creator rather than a consumer. Further, it is critical of the decontextualisation and simplification that is so often tied to digital dissemination and/or mass production.

Circular and Overlapping:

The weak can easily break under pressure. Weak illustration see holes, gaps and fragile points as spaces of potential, never as definitive endpoints; it welcomes processes and techniques that are fragmented and layered. Weak illustration rejects linear notions of progress and works in a circular fashion; it knows that materials, bodies, minds, environments and participants, the digital

and the analogue, each affect and evolve the Other in an ongoing interplay. For this reason it prefers materials that can bridge gaps when they emerge, carry the fragile, and/or emphasise the hole as a value of the in-between. Weak illustration often reinterprets, remediates, reuses and transforms existing material across time and space, merging the speculative with the real, the internal with the external, and the visible with the invisible. In doing so, it opens up conversations that extend and link outer realities with inner realities across temporal and spatial realms, and between entities.

Subjectively Honest:

The weak are not afraid of vulnerability and of showing their insecurities. By association, weak illustration refuses claims to neutrality or objectivity, or of knowing the "truth." Instead, it embraces the illustrator's subjective presence and gaze as a powerful tool. It prefers to tell stories by autoethnographic methods, telling the 'big' story from an intimate angle. It always considers the illustrator's position and aims for transparency. It does not attempt to erase the gaze but to make it more visible, often integrating it explicitly into the work and thereby acknowledging the positions, perspectives and power dynamics embedded in the act of seeing.

Suggesting, not Persuading:

Weak can mean lacking in force. As such, weak illustration does not believe in, and does not seek to persuade or resolve, by means of force. Instead, it embraces ambiguity, invites interpretation, and presents a visual language that is rooted in complexity. Weak illustration respects and honours the complexity of Non-Representable stories of the inside that resist straightforward representation. For this reason it offers a mode of storytelling that is emotional and subjective; makes one aware of the borders instead of pretending they are not there.

Weak illustration sees the potential of darkness, uncertainty and the muddy. It is critical of illumination for purposes of clarity, prefering to obstruct the clear and awake bodily knowledge. Weak illustration is often multisensorial and acknowledges embodied experiences as a source for engaging with a work of illustration on a deeper level.

Final Reflections:

In positioning the term 'weak illustration', the FBU project contributes to a broader framework of ethical approaches to illustration that value ambiguity, and which resist the pressures towards resolution, instead emphasising the value of transformative processes and resonance. Weak illustration values presence over clarity and tenderness over control, both in the making that occurs between illustrator and work, and in the perception that occurs between viewer and illustration.

The artistic research project The Face Between Us: Abjection, the Gaze, and the Body

at the Border of Self and Other in Authorial Illustration illustrates the clouded borderland between Self and Other, where materials, formats and meanings blur. In this shared inbetweenness where the tension and uncertainty of our existence is revealed, we can find new ways to connect and allow new ways of seeing to emerge.

The border between us can blur.
The gaze between us can soften.
The body between us can include.
The face between us
can be crossed.

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