

# FALLING ASLEEP WITH A PIG

*At some point the pig and artist will fall asleep. The work addresses the ethics of human and animal interaction, acknowledging the implicit ambivalences and violence in the appropriation of animals as a resource. Kira and Deliah carried out the performance at Interspecies in Manchester earlier in the year and now undertake the work for a longer period in London. Artis duo Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, interviewed Kira on Inthewrongplaceness and Falling Asleep With a Pig.*

*Questions by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson*



**Kira O'Reilly**

*Falling asleep with a pig, 2009, Cornerhouse, London © Kira O'Reilly*

## **C**an you describe your performances with pigs *inthewrongplaceness* and *Falling sleeping with a pig*?

I have now made 6 versions of *inthewrongplaceness*, all somewhat different depending on the space and context. It is incredibly simple. The work is made with a female pig cadaver weighing approximately 48 kgs that has been slaughtered for food consumption, so the internal organs have been removed. There is a ten-minute encounter with my body and the pig's body with one 'audience' member at a time (an exception was in Mexico where 3 people at a time came in).

The audience or viewers, or in this case perhaps participants, are given a written invitation before entering the piece that they can touch the human animal and the non-human animal. They are also given latex or vinyl gloves with which to do this and are told that they must spray ethanol on their gloves upon entering the room where I am.

*Inthewrongplaceness* was originally commission by HOME, a live art space in London that is also a domestic space lived in by the curator Laura Godfrey Issacs and her family.

The work has evolved over the various versions in regard to my actions but generally speaking over the course of the piece, 4 – 6 hours, I move the pigs body, I lie on her, I hold her, I insert parts of me inside her through the abattoir cuts and cavities, I try and fail to mimic the positions of her. I reposition our bodies again and again in relation to one another. The people who come into the work touch, look, move and sometimes they speak to me. Of course they are all individual and so they frequently push the encounter into various and unexpected directions.

*Falling asleep with a pig* creates a situation where a human animal (myself) and a non human animal (a pig, specifically Deliah, a Vietnamese Potbellied pig) share a specially designed and constructed dwelling for 36 hours (this first version was in one of the galleries at Cornerhouse, Manchester, January 2009) or 72 hours (this second version was outdoors at the A Foundation, London, October 2009). The dwelling mimics the white, clinical, modernist vocabulary of the art gallery, the gallery as laboratory. It tries to appropriate and deploy the obvious construction and conceit of this 'neutrality', impartiality and objectivity and to play with it as a mechanism and structuring device in which to arrange and to think about these two bodies in situ together. The duration of the work allows for Deliah and myself to enter into periods of sleep together, and for the positioning of us, two entirely similar mammals, to be considered in this most basic and fundamental of states common to mammals.

I find myself wondering about how 'other' and mysterious humans are in slumber in near proximities, how they appear to depart and be utterly in unreachable places within sleep states, states that point to dreams, transience, alterities. This commonality

between mammals of spending so much time in sleep modes makes me wonder about dreams, about difference, about metamorphosis, about slippage, what do piggies and piggy girls dream about? Luke aged 4 reckons Deliah is dreaming about rockets. He doesn't think that there is much difference between human animal and non-human animal dreams, he dreams about rockets. I think to tell him about HAM and other space monkeys and forget. I have been teasing Nicola Triscott about pigs in space, who knows.

The two versions of *Falling asleep with a pig* set up two very different scenarios in terms of the pigpen architecture and its placement inside and outside. These differences governed entirely other behaviours for both myself and Deliah and the viewers' interactions. The gallery construct created a very gentle and private scenario: it was warm; slumber and proximity were very available. Outside was far more exposed to both the elements and the public; the focus was more diffused; the enclosure was a slight border that seemed to invite conversation and direct engagement, breaking the ready withdrawal into relaxation and sleep, for me at least. Deliah frequently and delightfully obscured the audience's view of herself, seeking warmth under the hay bedding.

The idea of the two species, two bodies, and two individuals, entirely other, being discursive bodies, continually being bound and moving in relation to the multitude and manifest governing and orchestrations was of immense importance to my thinking toward this work and also the reality and practicalities of how it was developed and produced. This includes everything from ideas of display, exhibition, living bodies as art works, power imbalances, consent, ethics to animal welfare, DEFRA rulings on the movement of animal live stock around the country, practices of containment and contagions, hazards and waste.

*The work inthewrongplaceness has been performed in many locations, one being within the context of a church in the side chapel at Ex Teresa Arte Actual in Mexico. The ecclesiastical space invokes notions of the sacred and conversely, the profane. Can you tell us something about your instincts and/or rationale regarding this site for this work?*

All the variations of *inthewrongplaceness*, including Ex Teresa Arte Actual have been the result of an invitation, so really I didn't select the sites although I had a say in whether I did wish to use them. Much of my work happens this way in regard to non-art spaces and sites. The site is like a contextual envelope that the performative processes can interlace with to varying degrees of intricacy and because I am not always the person initiating where the performance occurs, it allows a collaborative and frequently unexpected factor to enter into my process, moving the performance into modes and areas that I could not have anticipated or created by myself.

In the case of *Ex Teresa*, the performance



**Kira O'Reilly**

*intewrongplaceness*, 2005, Commissioned by Home, London, photography by Manuel Vason © Kira O'Reilly

space was a side chapel. Initially I was responding to the idea of the exhibitions rationale, my work being seeing alongside artists like Polona Tratnik, Paul Vanouse, and Adam Zaretsky, who work with varieties of living materials, technologies and emerging media. As the work had its origins in animal research facilities and the discourses of the technoscientific body, that made a lot of sense to me. *Intewrongplaceness* came out of an intense period of research whilst I was an artist in resident at *SymbioticA*, the arts and science research laboratory at University of Western Australia, where I had been learning basic tissue culture techniques including creating primary cell culture of pig skin.

For me the utilisation of touch (touché), the tactile dimension, intersects with the visual, and cannot be emphasised enough. The senses mix to create an altogether other interface and encounter, a sensuous feedback of flesh, albeit through the latex or vinyl glove, of temperature, weight and texture. I have a childhood memory of putting a digit into the velvet lined hole in a statue of Christ – the wound in his side – my intrepid Doubting Thomas moment; and of touching the cold, stony hands of a small, dead nun laid out in a side chapel at the convent I went to school at for a while – a dare I daresay. And the folds of skin encircling another Doubting Thomas's finger, in Caravaggio's painting. These are heady and fleshy tropes that cascade through these actions.

*On your website you say that an email from someone in response to *intewrongplaceness* prompted you to perform a work with a living animal as opposed to the dead one. To what extent, for you, did the second work function as a redemptive act in relation to the first?*

No not at all. The notion of staging a redemptive act seems somehow trite and unconsidered, as if these were acts of finality rather than experiential processes that are highly considered and thoughtful. In my mind notions of redemption would come from a Judeo Christian paradigm and organisation of morals, which I do not think my work or process does at all. Of course people engaging with the works might wish to make those readings but they would not accord with my doings and thinking.

Actually I had been thinking about this work for a long time. The notion of living with pigs came from observing pigs and their living conditions in the large animal research facility at University of Western Australia. I was curious about their life and the obvious care that was involved in their wellbeing, as well as the complexity of the issue of animal experimentation. I thought about living with the pigs for a while. Of course this was not an option, however this was the seed for this work. It became the beginning of a conversation with *The Arts Catalyst* commissioning and producing body, shortly after my return to the UK from Australia,



and we developed the idea of how it would work for Interspecies. The email was written in response to a media storm of misinformation that surrounded the Tract version of *inthewrongplaceness* in Penzance. The story replicated in viral media fashion from the local to the international, incorporating statements from *PETA* and right-wing blog commentaries on a work that none of the commentators or reporters had witnessed or seen. Hence a very different kind of work was speculated on and the opportunities to create a meaningful public discussion on ethics, care and relation was lost for quick newspaper selling and a knee-jerk reaction. It meant that I received a huge amount of highly aggressive emails to which I didn't respond. The one I did respond to was a really gracious and highly critical email from someone in the USA who runs a pig sanctuary. I corresponded back and they were surprised by my take and withdrew much of their anger, but also made the suggestion that I work with live pigs. I found this really encouraging, especially considering where the conversation was coming from and how invested this emailer was. These works are not in any way meant to make ultimate statements. but are provocations to attempt to reframe and therefore cultivate other possibilities of perspective, consideration and conceptual spaces.

*Can you describe for us your experience of sleeping with a pig?*

Soft, sleepy, warm, cosy, two bodies at their most basic. Dreams and touch, cold and warmth. The falling, watching as an eye feels the pull of sleep gravity and is unable to resist that tumble into sleep state, as my eye also makes that tumble. The pig eye of Deliah becomes altogether familiar from the strange and the other. There is continually a flickering between known and recognised, identifying with and non-recognition.

*What is the role of surrogacy in both the performance works inthewrongplaceness and falling asleep with a pig?*

My research at *SymbioticA* was concerned with investigating creating a tissue-cultured fabric of living alce from my own skin cells. There were quite a few complex steps to take toward this, from applying for ethical approval, to working from my own skin cells and of course learning the actual techné of tissue culture myself. As a biopsy was going to be taken from me from which a culture of skin cells was to be cultivated, I needed to practice the process of biopsy and cell harvesting. This I did from pigs who were being sacrificed for asthma research. The lungs would be removed and then I would cut skin from the still warm pig's body, take it back to the lab and harvest cells from it. Both *inthewrongplaceness* and falling asleep with a pig emerged as responses to these animal research and lab processes on my return to the UK.

*Tissue Culture and Art Project* have referred themselves as scavengers when they have, on occasion,

worked with primary cells' cultures (cells harvested directly from bodies as opposed to cell lines that are being used primarily for other purposes). However, I was curious about articulating another relationship to the pigs I worked from. I felt more that I was operating closer to the scientific animal model, where the pig was physiologically similar and therefore useful to develop my cell cultivating skills. However, my relationship was also one of identification. This excerpt of text describes the doubling:

performing or rather rehearsing that scenario four times with a pigs cadaver; using the pig as dummy, stand in, double, twin, other self, doll, imaginary self; making fiercely tender and ferocious identifications with the pig, imaginings of mergence with the pig, co-cultured selves, and to cultivate and nurture pig bits for months. Taking a cutting of 'something' that feel like someone dying and keeping a little bit of it living and proliferating for months - like a plant.

You stupid, stupid cow! [1]

*Was it ever a question of what animal you might involve, or was a pig always right for these works? If so, what drew you specifically to a pig?*

For both of those works it had to be a pig for the reasons previously described. And pigs have such currency. At the time there was a public consultation whilst I was in Australia about xenotransplantation, and of course pigs are and would be one of the primary animals that would be utilised. So pigs and their presence, consumed and enmeshing with increased and more complexity with humans was and continues to be key. Their obvious intelligence, physiological similarity, embodiment of so many conflicting cultural values, and to a great extent my tissue culture heart break and wonder, were main drivers in the works.

After falling asleep with a pig you and the pig both left the enclosure, but the staged environment was left in the gallery with the addition of a video documentation of the performance. This is how the work was experienced for those visiting the gallery for the remainder of the show. This was obviously a very different experience to that of witnessing the actual performance – what are your thoughts on that shift? Yes, it was entirely different. In many ways it was very valuable for me to have the opportunity to make a work that could extend beyond the live but it is



**Kira O'Reilly**

*Inthewrongplaceness*, 2009, 13th International Festival of Performance Art. "Accidentes Controlados", Ex Teresa Arte Actual, Mexico City.  
Photography Antonio Juárez © Kira O'Reilly



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*Inthewrongplaceness*, 2009, sk-interfaces, Casino Luxembourg, photography, Axel Heise © Kira O'Reilly

of course difficult. Similarly, in sk-interfaces in Casino Luxembourg, the site of the most recent and perhaps last version of *Inthewrongplaceness*, there is now an installation of taxidermied animals, natural history samples, freshly cut flowers and photographic prints taken of the live performance. It's hard. I want the work to extend the short life span of the performance and I find the slide into representation, trace and residue interesting, because of course these things cannot convey the event and its eventfulness. But with falling asleep with a pig I felt that the dwelling construct, the gallery created for us, was also important. Its shell was like a governing system of display and behaviours for both of us (Deliah and I) and the public. I found it an intriguing set up that I was interested to leave. The shortness of the live performance also commented on the wrong "placeness" of the gallery for life and living, that it really is a place for dead or inanimate things. I think George Gessart writes about this in relation to his art works that are live flowers. The 21<sup>st</sup> century gallery is severely limited in its possibilities and it imposes its own discursive mode for bodies be they human, non-human animal or across both animal kingdoms and interkingdoms.

*When looking at the environment created for falling asleep with a pig one noticed an implicit hierarchy between human and animal in that a raised platform, accessible by ladder, had been provided for you but the pig was left beneath, without access to the raised platform. Why was this and what effect did this have conceptually on the work in your estimation?*

There was a platform, but it did not have a ladder. It was low enough that I could get onto it easily but high enough that it could give Deliah a space to be under. The original vision for the work was two bodies lying beside one another on the same level and indeed that was realised much of the time in both versions. The designers had included a platform in the design and I thought it a good idea as it allowed some clear space if Deliah was stressed or unhappy and visually suggested the idea of a bed. What didn't occur to me and what should have was that a hierarchy was then suggested. This was really counter to what the piece was trying to do. Therefore I was really pleased when this was addressed in the second version by the addition of a ramp that allowed Deliah access to the platform area. Donna Haraway initially suggested the ramp so we





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*Falling asleep with a pig*, 2009, Cornerhouse, London © Kira O'Reilly

called it the Haraway ramp. But I felt very embarrassed and frustrated about my blind spot. I had spent so much time sleeping on the ground with Deliah under the platform that somehow the hierarchical readings had escaped me.

*Your work explores amongst other things the merging of human animal through the contact of human and non-human animal skin – the pig's skin and your own. The audience are however denied that same experience as they are made to wear latex gloves and provided with ethanol spray for their hands.*

*Can you explain your thoughts behind this decision?*

The latex and vinyl gloves are a reference to lab work and behaviours, rituals of containment and contagion, practices of aseptic technique. They are also asked to spray the gloves with 70% ethanol as in a tissue culture lab. Sometimes these practices are necessary and founded on principle and function of protocols in the laboratory setting, but not always. Sometimes they are behaviours that preserve an environment or attitude but are not strictly necessary. Within the work the gloves function like a residue, as the environment is never explicitly that of a science setting (although that would be great to do). It also suggests protection, sex, condoms, the one on one situation of the piece... our nakedness sometimes means that an audience will

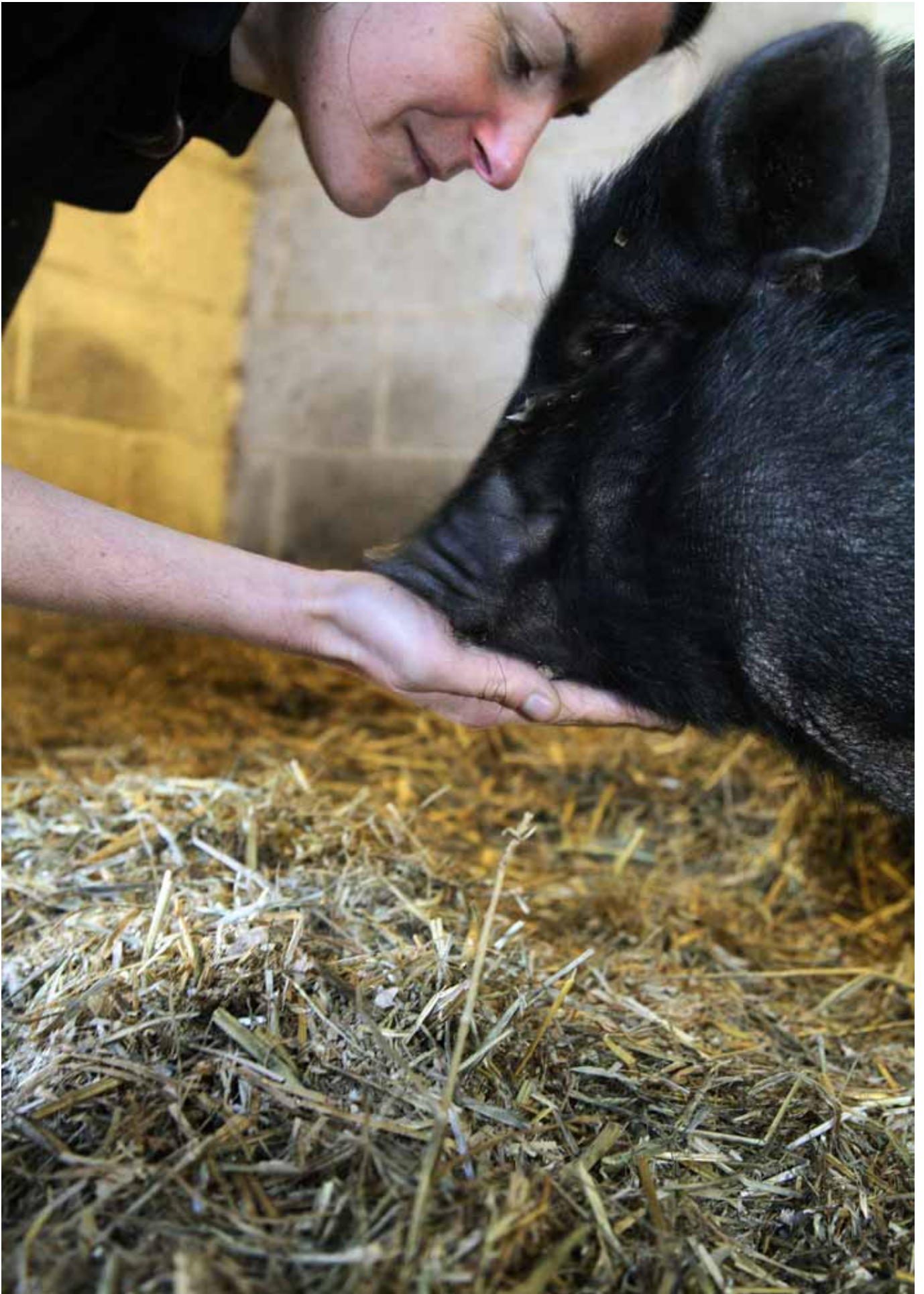
gravitate more toward a sexualised encounter or reading. The work will enter slightly into sex scenarios or sex work scenarios. There is the easy awkwardness of a supposed intimacy.

*In inthewrongplaceness you manipulate the corpse of the pig – is this sense of control behind the decision that you should offer yourself to be manipulated by your audience?*

I didn't offer myself to manipulate but the person coming into the room, they are invited to touch the human animal and the non-human animal. It is also made clear to them that they do not have to do that, and indeed that they do not have to do anything that they do not want to do. But of course control and power are at issue here. Coercion and manipulation of bodies, but also tender and soft actions of embrace and thoughtfulness, care and caring, are played out by myself and the individuals who enter into the work.

I do not think of the moving of the body of the pig as manipulation – of course it is but I embrace, hold, carry, and lie on, under and in the body.

*Both inthewrongplaceness and Falling asleep with a pig can be said to reference another two seminal works in the history of performance art – Meat Joy by Carolee Schneemann (1964) and Joseph Beuys' I Like American and America Likes Me (1974). Was this a conscious*



**Kira O'Reilly**

*Falling asleep with a pig*, 2009, Kira and Deliah meet, commissioned and produced by The Arts Catalyst, photography by Kristian Bus  
© Kira O'Reilly





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*Falling asleep with a pig*, 2009, Cornerhouse, London © Kira O'Reilly

*decision at the outset and either way, what became possible for you by this association?*

Both works are lodged as major works in my own cultural legacy as early influential works from when I first read about them as a foundation student. The references were not conscious but that is not to deny their profound and enduring influence. Since making my works I have been revisiting both these works and my position within a lineage that emerges from these practices. However, the works that I was thinking more consciously about were *Embracing Animal* by Kathy High and *Workhorse Zoo* by Adam Zaretsky. Also Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales* was of immense importance to me. Anthony Howell, who was a lecturer and artist when I studied made a work creating sculptures for a pig. Also key were works by artists such as *Tissue Culture and Art Project* and their *Semi Living Worry Dolls*, and the highly dynamic environment of *SymbioticA*. Within this milieu ethics and the play of power across bodies, their appropriation and manipulation in the life sciences were always being discussed and contested. All these works and this context were incredibly inspiring and enabled a

continuation of my working as I had before with *The Body* and my own experiential lived in body, but to be more explicit relation to other bodies – non human animal bodies and therefore other resultant emerging bodies.

*Pig Tales* allowed me to think through some of the ideas of shifts and transitions, especially in regard to gender and sexuality. At the time of reading I was beginning to write, and the linkage of fleshy metamorphosis and text, the idea of text and flesh mixture(ing) was key. Zaretsky's *Workhorse Zoo* so clearly allowed the references to the laboratory and specific ecologies that are cultivated and facilitated within life science research culture to be examined with a huge degree of risk and intelligence. Just knowing about this work was essential to my being able to begin to approach making both of my works. *inthewrongplaceness* was also born of a most awful feeling of failure and the traumatic transgressions of taking biopsies from freshly sacrificed pigs (again as I type, Deliah's gentle snores move again into my hearing consciousness and I become reminded that I am sitting on hay under the heat lamp within in our extravagant pig pen here in the heartland of the East End, strange

almost baby like snuffles, the baby that turns into a pig in the arms of the Duchess in Alice in Wonderland). Creating primary cell cultures from a freshly killed pig that I was able to sustain and keep in a dividing and thriving state for some time was astonishing and difficult in the most visceral and bodily way. It held a sway of emotions and realisation that mere knowing couldn't convey. *In the wrong placeness* came from this as did the subsequent falling asleep with a pig. It came from the wretched and curious, passionate and perverse questioning of: how do I begin to address this knowledge, this power? How and where do I position myself in relation to these power chains, and how do I being to navigate and negotiate them in relation to these animals I am working from/on/with/about? How do I articulate desire and curiosity that takes me into these situations and their embrace? How do I create poetic and conceptual spaces that allow an/other, you, the audience/viewer/reader/participant/paramour/collaborator/spectator/toucher, to also engage, encounter and trouble this fraying? And – where do we stand?

*On your website you make a reference to I Like American and America Likes Me referring to the dead pig arriving on a trolley as Beuys arrived for his 'cohabitational' performance, with a coyote, at the René Block gallery on an ambulance trolley: two very different beings – a dead female pig and a male artist-shaman-hero. Can you say something about the respective roles of gender and domesticity in your 'cohabitational' work falling sleep with a pig?*

For some reason I'm finding your question about gender very difficult to answer. I'm not sure why this is, as issues of gender have always been at stake and at play in my work. This is curious but I have often described my art works as occupying spaces where I am 'lost for words'. Of course this domain of absence of words is not absolute and words are at play continually, be it at the edges or interlacing after the event.

I didn't think of falling asleep with a pig as cohabitation or occupying a domestic register. It was more to do with placement. In many ways it is disarmingly simple and clumsy to feel for a kind of poetic language; two bodies sleeping next to one another and the possibility of dreams, both materiality and metaphorically; where words are at the tips of tongues and language and material meet and enmesh across bodies and the most ancient narratives of metamorphosis can come into play in a contemporary context. Somehow I am trying to find that language – a poetic one perhaps that is not reductive in the art work or my commentaries that can facilitate another kind of spaciousness.

*In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari talk about the function of aging as the first step of understanding the process of becoming animal. [2] You have talked about*

*forcing your 40-year-old body into the unfamiliar and difficult contortions of dance. Do you see a relationship between the issues of gender and aging and becoming animal?*

To clarify the dance reference, it was more to do with being untrained as a dancer, making movement work and how daft that is at such a late age, and yet how freeing that is. I will never be able to be an accomplished dancer and of course that is not what I am interested in. It is the "inexpertise" and yet claiming a ground with mastery and applying the same diligence and hard work to that area that I do to others. However mine is not a trained dance technique, although it is highly informed by a serious yoga practice.

I did read this question with a panic in that I have not yet read Deleuze and Guattari's *Becoming Animal*, and so, here in the pig pen, within the parameters of falling asleep with a pig, I have begun to dip into it and the referenced paper *Following The Rats* by Lawler as I sit beneath the heating lamp that has been provided for Deliah and I. However it is important for me to acknowledge other modes of developing knowledge that are not always in reference to theory and philosophy, but that find their way via the body, actions, doings, materiality, but also film, literature and other art works. Gender and aging, I don't know, the status and shape of gender is transitory. I always feel I am becoming something else, that gender slips and slides, becomes somewhat undone and redone as I move and as physicality and it's tremendous permeability revolve in relation to without. This malleability is subtle and inexact; these art works are perhaps brief framings of it for an imprecise encounter.

The incremental, tiny consistencies of body shifts, skin textures altering from smooth to infinitesimally wrinkling, strata of fatty deposits shifting, lumping into areas of cellulite, drying, bulging, sagging, stiffening, many, many moments of startlingness. As I performed *Stair Falling*, 17 days of daily four hour backward and achingly slow fallings down a Victorian stone staircase naked, the caress of stone and skin, the effect of gravity and gaze burdened and unburdened my body. It was as much a dancing of becomings and molecular shifts as anything. It was upside-down hangings and slidings, flashings of pink bits and eye holdings, feelings and touching of irons and stone through soft leather skin gloves, hairs catching and muscles softening. Tits and arse askew. (As I write this Deliah the pig snores softly, she goes to bed earlier than I, I feel I am baby sitting, a quiet solitude of working late but in quiet companionship, see saw between the alone not alone, minding, caring).

These miniscule transitions of physicality are similar if not exactly the same as the interpenetrations of borders, membranes and selves that falling asleep with a pig frames, being within the pigpen as part of it's ecology, a tinkering with kingdoms and interkingdoms of mammals, insects, bacteria. The inter is not just between the discrete entities of Deliah and myself but



also the vast movements of our 'selves' as interior and exterior attendant micro organism congregations, not to mention the hay and whatever it was hosting that were brought into proximity and relation with one another.

*In the context of contemporary art are there particular, even unique things that you believe working with an animal can reveal?*

Absolutely, but I am cautious right now of saying with any certainty what they are. In some respects this is because these art works I make are in communication with another, you, the audience, viewer etc. So I am curious about how someone else might answer that question with regard to my work and how it sits within this given context. I would say that working with an animal always reveals limits and limitations – of human animal, of myself. However when I consider works by the other artists in Interspecies or those I've mentioned who so informed this work, then I am convinced of a kind of alternative to that position that suggests a more interesting set of possibilities and potentials.

## Notes

[1] O'Reilly, K, *Marsyas - Beside Myself*, *Sk-Interfaces: Exploding Borders - Creating Membranes in Art, Technology and Society*, ed., Jens Hauser, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008.

[2] Lawlor, L. *Following the Rats: Becoming Animal in Deleuze and Guattari*, *SubStance* # 117, Vol.37, no.3, 2008 pg. 169-189

*Kira O'Reilly is a UK based artist; her practice employs performance, biotechnical practices and writing with which to consider speculative reconfigurations around The Body. Her work has been exhibited widely throughout the UK and Europe, Australia and China and featured in the recently published in Sk-interfaces: Exploding Borders - Creating Membranes in Art, Technology and Society, edited by Jens Hauser, Liverpool University Press, 2008.*

*Kira O'Reilly was interviewed by Antennae in October 2009 © Antennae*