

'BIG' solo exhibition by Crow Dillon-Parkin  
Stryx, Minerva Works, Birmingham  
1-10 March 2024



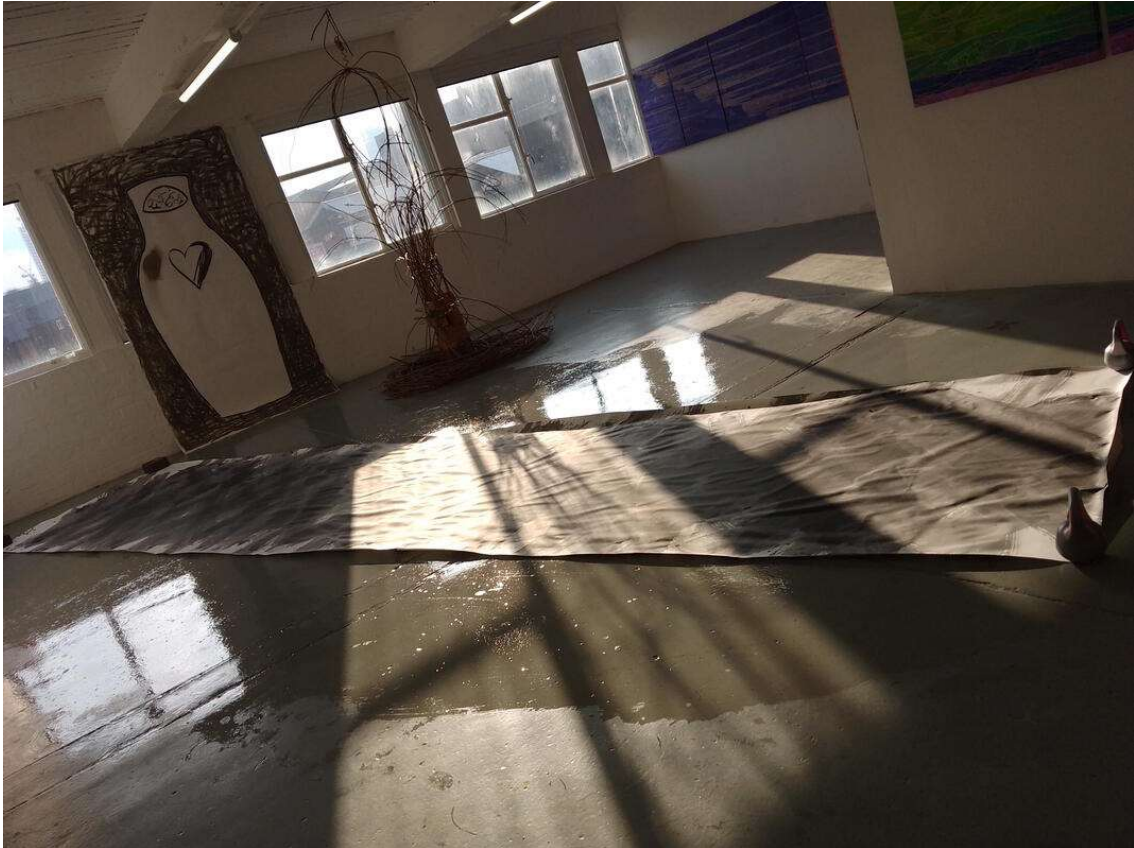
Foreground: 'House/Wife' durational performance for International Women's Day 8 March 2024, (Fabriano paper, poster paint, string mop, aluminium bucket, rags, cleaning solution, dustpan and brush, rubber gloves, bin bags, broom) photograph by Vicky Roden

Background: 'I Had a Vision in a Dream'

'House/Wife' was a new durational performance for International Women's Day 2024, which explored the lived experience of making art while looking after a house, inspired by kana shodo, the Japanese calligraphy tradition. Before I started, I swept the gallery floor and emptied the bin. The paper is held down by bricks at the top end and kettlebells from one of my 'Judith Butler...' performances at the bottom. I was wearing the oversized T-shirt and printed pyjama trousers that I wore when performing 'Kleidungsaffe' for Melati Suryodarmo at Ikon last year. I like to recycle bits and pieces from older works, even if nobody else notices.

I filled the bucket with poster paint and watered it down enough to make an inky consistency, then I used the mop to write the kanji for 'woman' over and over again.

The repetition of the kanji for woman adds extra meaning, but not in a positive way. The more often the kanji appears, the more the meaning becomes derogatory. Multiple 'woman' kanjis mean things like gossiping, or nagging, and the reinforcement of femininity is seen as a bad thing. Repeating the kanji for man has the opposite effect. This isn't a linguistic feature that is unique to Japan, of course, most languages portray woman and man as opposing concepts, with the woman always being seen as weaker or inferior. And yet women do 80% of the world's work, despite being so weak... And women artists generally have to clean up their own mess.



Foreground: 'House/Wife' floor drawing and mopped gallery floor at the end of the performance (paper size approx. 700cm x 150cm)

Background (left to right): Untitled (Giant OestroDoll) 2023; Untitled (Willow Grandmother) 2024; Half Life (Five by Five) (polyptych) (2022); just seen Promises, Promises, Promises (triptych) (2021)

The mopping of the floor to remove ink splashes was something I had intended to do when I planned the performance, and then on the day I wavered a bit because the splashes were very aesthetically pleasing. I had some interesting discussions about this question with my visitors (especially Vicky Roden and Alex Billingham), and in the end decided to stick with the original plan. In hindsight this was the right decision, because I ended up having to go hospital on 10 March, and cleaning the floor was one less thing for my helpers to have to deal with while they worried about me. (I am healthy again now.)

My next challenge is to find somewhere tall enough to display the calligraphy piece vertically.



'I Had a Vision in a Dream' (2015-2017), Graffiti marker on Fabriano paper, 280cm high (approx) x 150cm wide (each)

These drawings are based on a series of sketchbook drawings I made from a dream I had in 1986. The dream was a huge black and white cartoon that I was swallowed up by. I started this series in 2015, for a group show in April 2016, but the work was interrupted by emergency spinal fusion surgery for cauda equina syndrome in December 2015. I finished the series in 2017. I have made several different works based on the original dream and drawings, including ceramic pieces, wall drawings, and Vision 2.0, the video installation in this exhibition. The next version will be a series of fabric hangings or perhaps quilts that are even bigger than these drawings. I just need to find an even bigger space to show them.





Left to right: 'I Had a Vision in a Dream', 'Untitled (Willow Grandmother)', 'Untitled (Giant OestroDoll)' (just seen)

This loosely connected figure is made from some of the willow I used to make the 'Wicker Nan' figure at Eastside Projects' Summer Camp micro-residency in July 2023. I have been trying to make my art practice more sustainable over the last few years, and willow is a fantastic renewable (and compostable) material. The 'Wicker Nan' was too big to get up the stairs here, but her dismantled components have got a new life in this work, during this exhibition. I added little bits and pieces to her during the exhibition, but didn't get as far as I wanted due to being taken ill on the final weekend. I have all the pieces, so she can be reconfigured whenever I get the space.



Left to right: 'Untitled (Giant OestroDoll)', 'Untitled (Willow Grandmother)', 'Half Life (Five by Five)'

I put this piece of paper up on my studio wall on 8 June 2023, ready for when I was ready to draw something big. An hour later I had drawn most of this figure... The drawing has been added to by the scraping of willow branches over the charcoal during the last few months as I've moved things around in the studio, and I've added little charcoal touches here and there. She's made mostly of willow charcoal, which feels appropriate. I added a little more to her during the exhibition, but she still hasn't got a proper title.



Previous page: 'Half Life (Five by Five)' (polyptych) (2022) Collage, tissue and gold ink on cotton duck on reclaimed stretchers Nominally 400cm w x 100 cm h  
There are currently five parts to this polyptych, measuring 100 x 400cm in total. They can be hung close together, as they are here, or any distance apart. I had a very productive summer in 2022, when I worked out a notation system to represent the half-lives of all the medications I have to take for my various invisible medical conditions and disabilities. The 'Half Life' series uses mostly scavenged and rescued materials, though I did have to buy more gold marker pens.



Left to right: (just seen 'Untitled (Giant OestroDoll)', 'Half Life (Five by Five)', 'Untitled (Willow Grandmother)', 'Holy Trinity II', 'Promises, Promises, Promises'  
These works are all discussed individually later, I wanted to show you this view of them all at once.





'Holy Trinity II: Gestation, Parturition, Lactation' (triptych) (2017) Stretched canvas, collage, tissue, satin varnish and gold ink, 183 x 280cm (each panel H 183 x W 91cm)

This is the second incarnation of the major piece for my BA Art and Design degree show in 1990. I still had a lot of the original source material, but this is not an exact replica (sisters, not twins). I made this version at Euroart Studios in Tottenham, shortly after taking the nerve-racking decision to move into a larger studio by myself. Different spaces help you to think differently, and to make differently, and I had so much space in which to make this version. The first version was mostly made at home between my baby's first and second morning feeds, in our bedroom in a one-up, one-down, stone cottage. The collage layers incorporate photographs from performances I did during and after pregnancy, as well as medical and religious imagery about birth and motherhood. This was the first work that I made in this collage-with-overlays style. It's a way of making that I enjoy because there's a nice combination of control and chance to it. It started out as a stained-glass analogue, I don't think I was consciously aware of kintsugi in 1990, but it has that feel too and I have happily embraced it in later works.

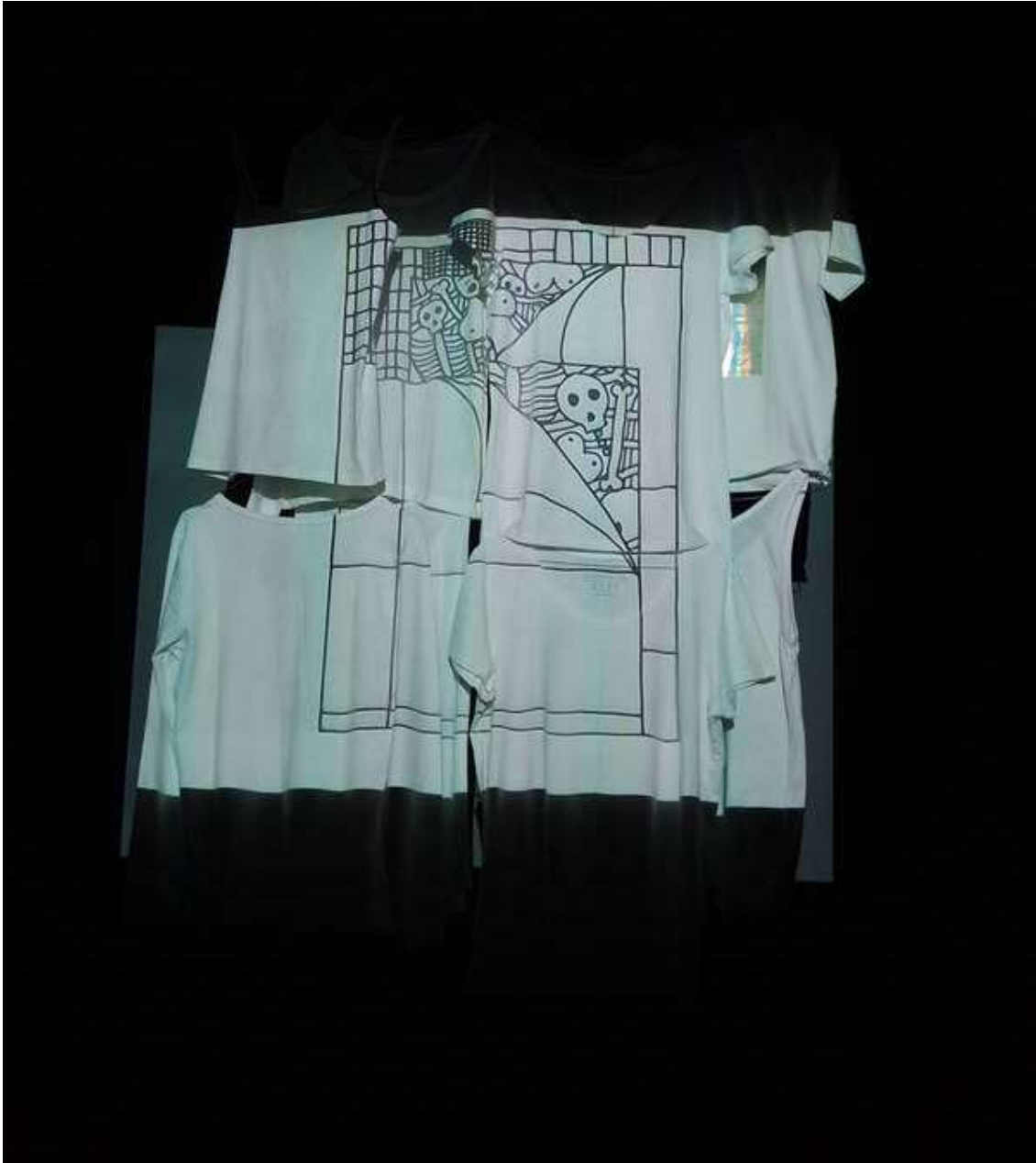


'Promises, Promises, Promises' (triptych) (2021) Collaged GB election manifestoes from 2015, 2017 and 2019, tissue and gold ink on cotton duck and reclaimed stretchers, 100 x 100cm each (3.4m wide x 1m high installed)

This work was originally planned for an Anthropocene-focused group exhibition in May 2020. It was going to be a diptych, with data from 2015 and 2017, but then there was a snap election in December 2019, so I had to add a third panel. The Covid lockdown in 2020 meant that the exhibition was cancelled, and I didn't complete the work until 2021 because I didn't have enough space to make it at home. I carried out qualitative and quantitative analysis of the election manifestoes of the main GB political parties, to establish how much of their word count was related to environmental concerns. I used relevant text from each of the manifestoes as the under layer for each coloured band. The colours are based on the branding for each of the political parties, so you can see how much each of the parties talked about the local and global environment.

The narrow blue line near the bottom represents the Conservative party's comparative interest in environmental policy over the last three election campaigns. Even UKIP (purple) had more to say on the topic - not all of that was in the best interests of the planet, but they were at least raising concerns about animal welfare. When David Cameron said he was going to 'cut all the green crap', he wasn't joking (and it wasn't 'crap' that he cut). By 2023 the planet Earth experienced its first year of 1.5°C of global warming (not entirely due to UK.gov actions but they haven't helped).





'Vision 2.0: That Thing That Keeps Happening Keeps Happening Again' (2024) Hand-drawn animation (MP4 file), Primark T-shirts, wire coat hangers, approx 240cm w x 250cm h x 100cm d  
The original animated version of 'Vision' was made for a site-responsive group show at the Rag Factory gallery in Brick Lane, London in 2016. The hand-drawn animation was my response to the disaster at the Rana Plaza garment factory in 2013. I knew that I was going to show this piece in a dark room for 'BIG' rather than out in the open, so I commissioned a soundtrack and edited the video to give it some changes of pace.

Whenever I have shown a variant of this work, people have asked me if it is about the Holocaust, or about the war in former Yugoslavia, or Rwanda, or about exploitative industries that rely on work done by women. The 2024 version opens the scope up to wider injustices perpetrated on the bodies of women through history and in the present day. Today it could equally be about Syria, or Congo, or Gaza. It is about all of those things.



'Top: Half Life (All the Meds)' (2022) Collage, tissue and gold ink on rescued canvas, 152w x 76h cm

Bottom: 'Half Life (Amitriptyline)' (diptych) (2022) Collage, mulberry paper and gold ink on rescued canvas, 76w x 102h cm (each), installed size 152w x 102h cm

The work at the top is about me trying to find a point in the day or in the week when I am optimally medicated. I'm not sure there is one. Something is always out of balance.

The work at the bottom was the first work I made using my half-life notation system for my medications. In this work I used the data from the drug amitriptyline, which has a half-life of 25 hours.

By sheer coincidence (because the materials were reclaimed separately) these two works fit together as a larger composite piece, although the colours don't match because they are different types of paper.