

# THE FIGURINE IN DIORAMA



JASMINE VORLEY

The miniature animal figurine exists uneasily in the contemporary home. Although enduringly popular in many households, these icons of kitsch have become unfashionable and low-brow, even embarrassingly sentimental. This project aims to take these odd little characters and give them a new domain beyond the domestic realm, into a world of their own: a lush, surreal diorama of ceramic. By subverting our expectations of the animal figurine, I aim to elevate them above their current social standing, bringing new appeal to a contemporary audience.



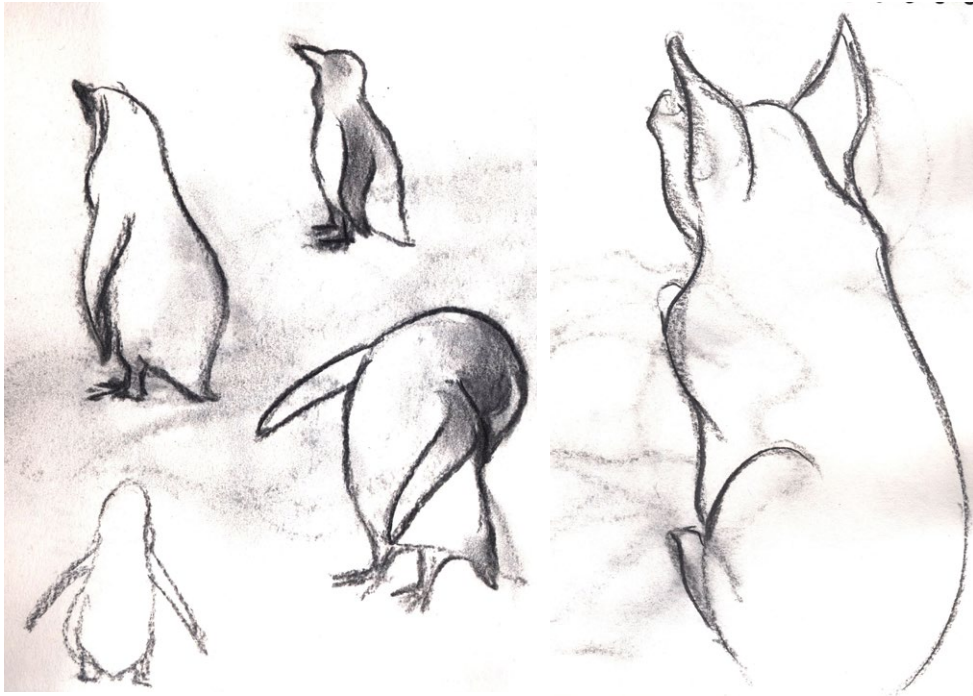
# INITIAL RESEARCH



# THE ANIMAL FORM

Animal figurines are so ubiquitous as objects, it is easy to forget how strange they are in relation to the creatures they represent.

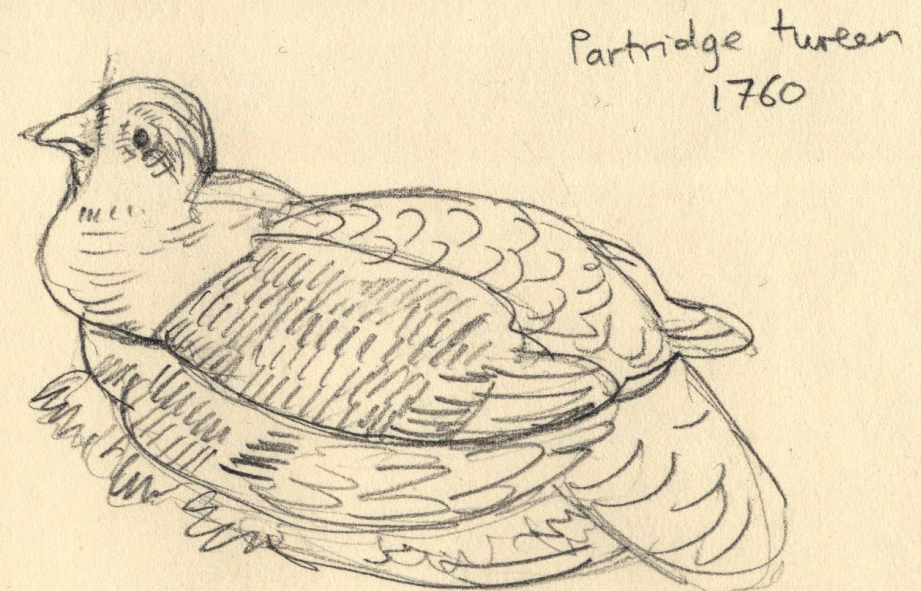
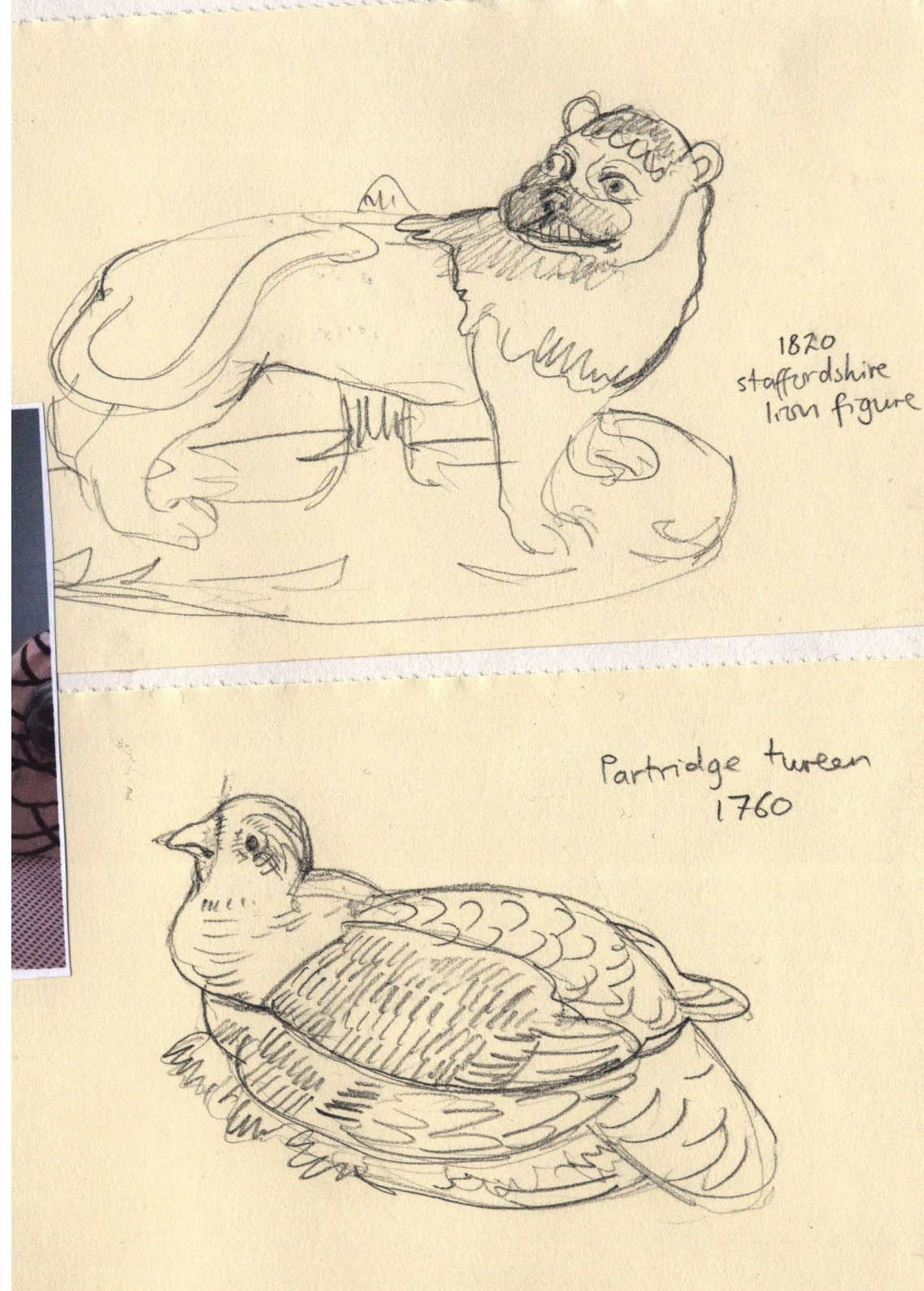
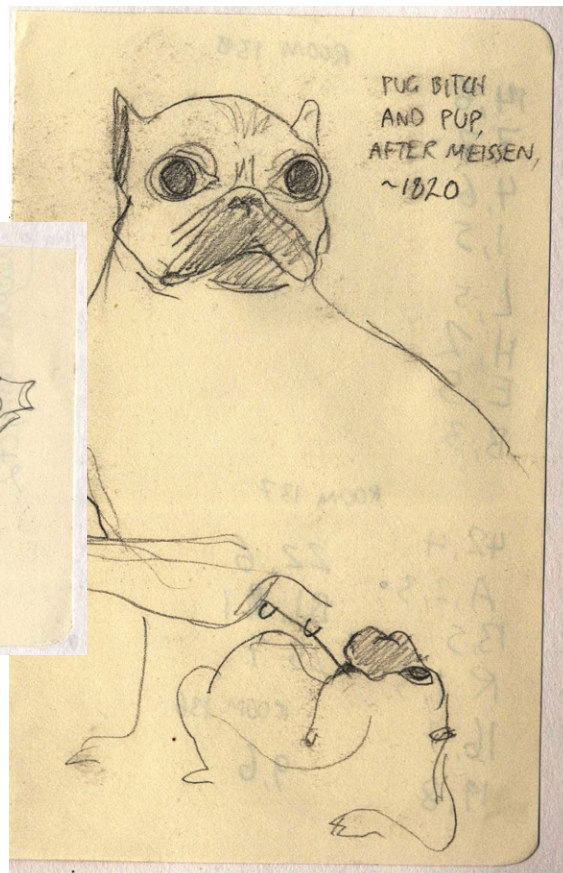
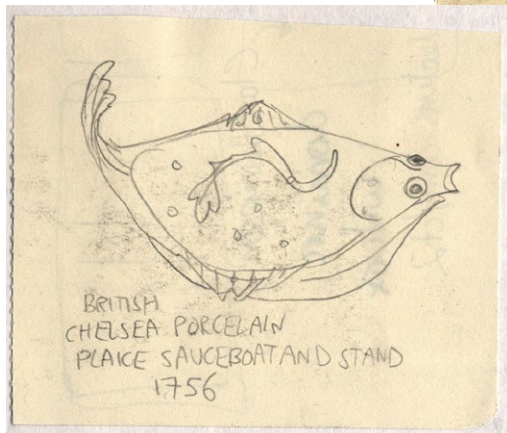
Before looking at figurines, I wanted to get a feeling for the presence and vitality of a living creature, to put the miniature ceramic beast into perspective. These quick charcoal sketches were made at ZSL London Zoo. It was a challenge to capture something that was moving as I drew, but the act of drawing gave me a new appreciation of the stature and form of animals in life-size.





# CERAMIC ANIMALS

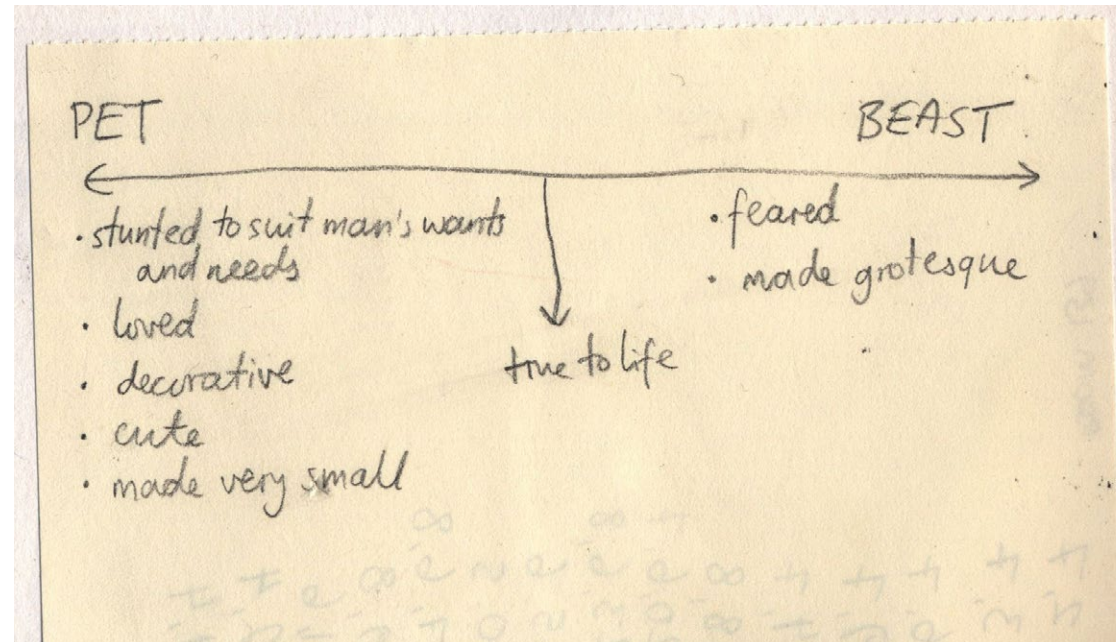
Holding the figure of the live animal in my mind, I visited the ceramics collections of the V&A and Brighton Museum, sketching the animals I saw there. I started to notice patterns in their design, for instance, the smaller and dinkier the figurine, generally the more cutesy the animal itself. Furthermore, animal figures became far more stylised, sweet and cartoonish in the mid 20th century in the west, with the advent of 'Disneyfication'.





# PET-BEAST SCALE

Taking inspiration from Matt Smith's 'Butch - Camp' scale of ceramic figurines in the V&A (below), I decided to put together a 'Pet - Beast' scale of animal figurines I had seen in the same ceramics gallery. I lined up twelve figurines I had seen across the scale, which at the pet end contained a tiny pug on a pillow and a Bambi-esque fawn, and at the beast end, a primitive horned cow and fearsome, roughly-textured bear.





# BEAST

ENGLAND 1755  
very small  
'accessory' pet animal on cushion  
decorative



ENGLAND 1960  
'Disneyfied'  
cute, infantilised  
sentimental  
stylised  
baby animal  
small



ENGLAND 1760-5  
stiff pose,  
strange-looking  
pet animal  
small

ENGLAND 1927  
small  
simplified animal form



ENGLAND 1730-4  
wild animal  
decorative



IRAN OR IRAQ 12-13<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURY  
relatively large  
simple form express  
mass of body  
horns emphasized  
strange face  
somewhat disturbing



ENGLAND 1930  
baby animals, infantilised,  
sentimental  
small, cute



ENGLAND 1750-60  
pet animal  
decorated,  
unrealistic  
ornamental



ENGLAND 1954-8  
small  
realistic  
delicate +  
decorative  
pretty



ENGLAND ~1850  
true to nature  
wildly decorative  
somewhat grotesque



ENGLAND 1800-30  
animal large + powerful  
somewhat comical  
small



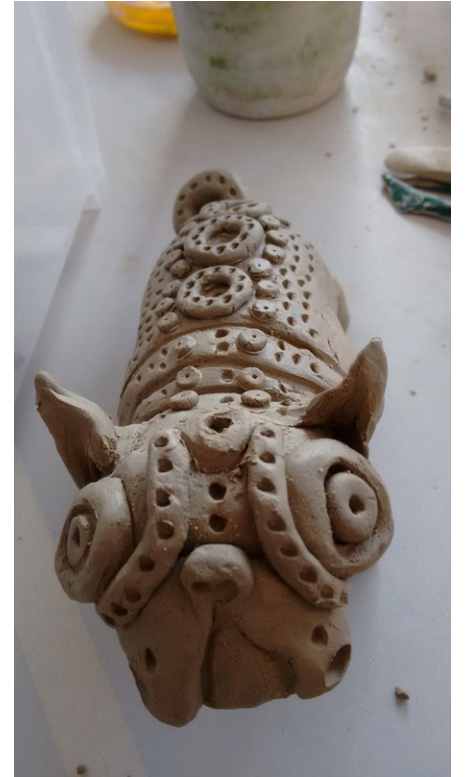
ENGLAND 1750  
relatively large  
primitive  
frightening face  
teeth + claws  
emphasized



# PET

# PRIMITIVE PUG

Having observed that one of the objects I placed towards the end of the beast scale – a large middle-eastern cow from the 12th-13th century – was depicted in an unusual style with simple relief decoration, I decided to create a response to this. I took the pug (the ultimate ‘pet’ animal) and tried to create a more bestial version of it, drawing inspiration from the decorative features of the cow and its round, simplified body. This did not quite manage to make the form of a pug any less twee, however.



# NEOLITHIC FIGURES

Whilst conducting research for my dissertation I chanced upon an article about Neolithic animal figurines, by archaeologist Lynn Meskell. Because modern researchers can only speculate as to the true purpose of these ancient figurines, Meskell investigates the inherent properties of the objects, discussing the effect of the miniature animal and how they might represent dominion over wild beasts.



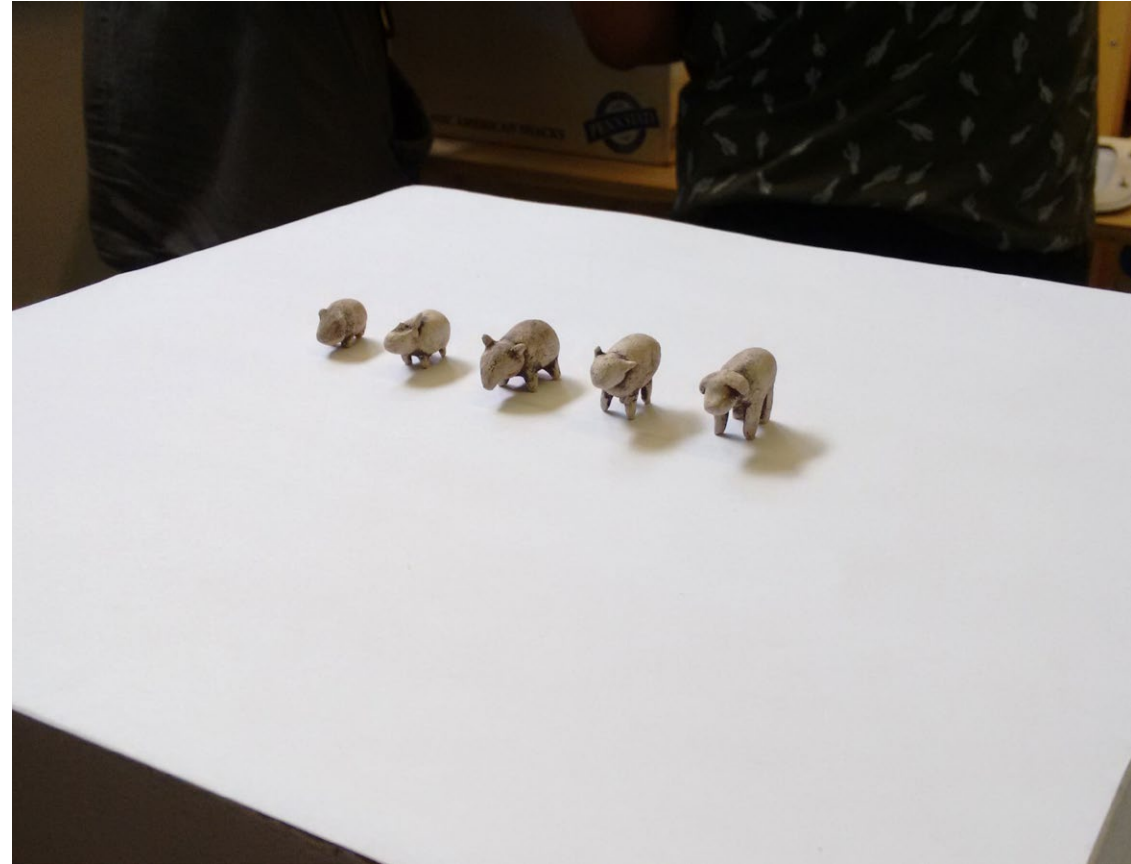
I decided to create copies of these figures to bring what I had read back into the 3D realm, and experience how it felt to handle these figurines. Although it did not bring me closer to prehistoric man, holding these tiny animals got me thinking about why possessing miniature animals is so appealing to people.

# DIMINUTIVE ANIMALS

A direct follow-up to the thought process inspired by the Neolithic animal figurines, my piece for the Propositions exhibition was a selection of tiny animals about 1cm tall, named Diminutive Animals. My accompanying statement was as follows:

*‘The ‘Diminutive Animals’ series explores the theme of miniaturisation and its psychological effect upon the viewer. When applied to these simple animal figurines, smallness provokes a sentimental emotional response, particularly at this tiny – but importantly, still visible – scale. These miniature animals also aim to raise questions about anthropomorphism, ownership and control.’*

Diminutive means ‘unusually small’, but it can also mean ‘less-than’; to be made little and unimportant. This reflects our views towards objects that are miniaturised, in particular animals: smallness heightens our sentimental response and belittles the beast.





# ANIMALS OF THE CAR BOOT SALE

At this point I decided to move on to looking at the contemporary animal figurine, which is my main area of interest. As a frequent visitor of Brighton Racecourse car boot sale, I knew there would be plenty of figurines there to see. I decided to create a photo series of animals I saw there, which ranged from a broad spectrum of ceramic figurines, to toys, textiles and actual dogs.









# PRESTON MANOR LIONS

Reflecting upon the sentimental response cutesy animal figurines aim to elicit, it occurred to me that these objects have been mass produced on a huge scale. I wondered if the emotional anthropomorphising of a loved figurine would withstand facing the reality of mass production, placing the object next to hundreds of carbon copies. This huge cabinet in Preston Manor is filled with 70 Chinese lion figures, collected by Lady Ellen Stanford. She actually thought the lions were Pekinese dogs, her beloved breed of choice. As expected, when you see a mass of identical creatures in front of you, you see them less as personalities and more like objects. However, the effect is lessened somewhat by having the lions displayed at different angles, so that they don't look so identical.



# CAT MULTIPLES

Reflecting upon my thoughts concerning mass production of the animal figure, I decided to create some replicas of a figurine. I created a silicone block mold of this little cat figurine and created some jesmonite casts. I also tried modelling the cat in different sizes out of clay. Although the clay pieces were less successful, the jesmonite casts did have the effect of depersonalising the cat. Although it had a face unlike its clones, it became a part of a series instead of an individual.



# FRISKY

'Frisky' is a small 1960s posy vase depicting a tree trunk with a small fawn at its base. It was part of Hornsea Pottery's hugely popular 'Fauna Royal' collection, and is the subject of my dissertation; it came to my interest when I spotted it in the V&A ceramics gallery, as it seemed almost too tacky to be there. The dissertation examines themes including kitsch and sentimentality, Bambi and romanticised visions of nature, miniaturisation and the 1960s heyday of figurines. Opposite is a large A2 drawing of Frisky, exploring large-scale depictions of figurines as a method of subversion.



Appendix 3





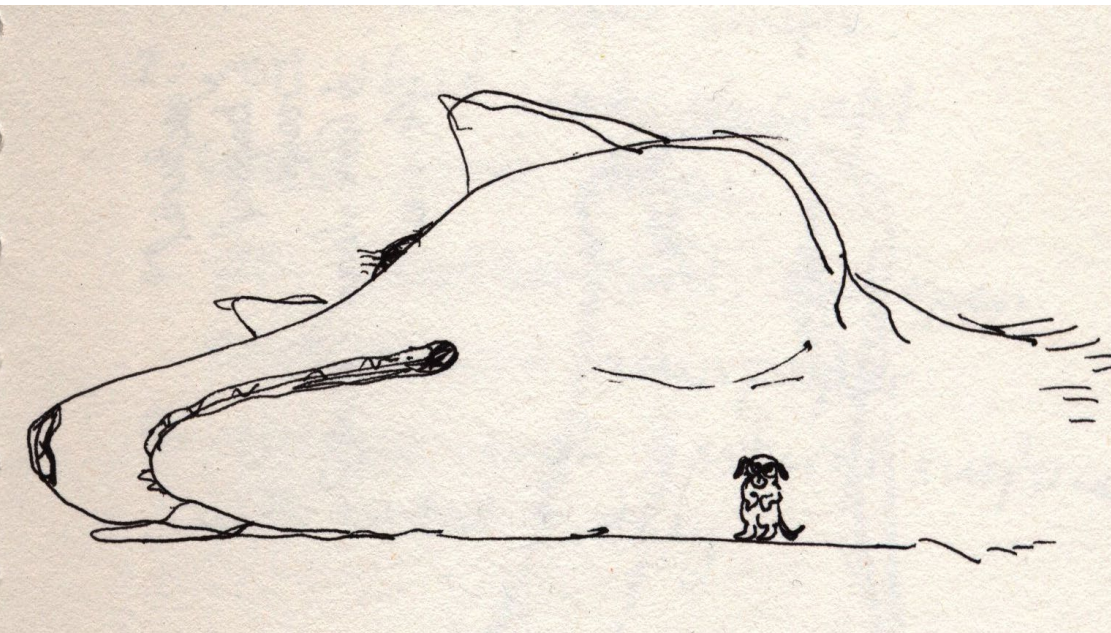
Practising hand-modelling animals in small scale, mimicking babyish, Disney-esque style of figurines like Frisky

Creating small cow forms in rougher, more gestural style (which was slightly lost under a tin white glaze, below)



# THE BESTIAL VS THE FIGURINE

My research up to this point lead me up to the idea of juxtaposing a cutesy miniature figurine with a rough, bestial animal part in life-size (the head). This would serve to highlight the tiny, mutated vision of nature which the figurine offers. Though I sketched the idea with a dog and a wolf head (below), in the end I settled on a cow. To me, the cow is a startlingly massive, bestial creature - something which was strongly reconfirmed to me when I photographed them near my home (right).





# BESTIAL COW HEAD

The first part of the piece was to make the life-size cow head. I worked from images of actual severed cows' heads (sketch below), and I liked the idea that the piece seemed like a dismembered body part. I used craft crank - a very heavily grogged red clay - for ease of hand building and a rough surface texture. I built the head around a newspaper form, which I removed when the piece was leatherhard. To accentuate the rough texture, I scraped into the surface with a metal kidney. I fired the piece unglazed to stoneware temperature, which turned the piece a yellow-tan colour. I feel like I achieved the effect that I wanted to with this piece, however I feel like it could have been even bigger and rougher (it is not life-size, as I intended), and the sculpting could also have been a better figurative depiction of a cow head.







# KITSCH COW

To contrast with the cow's head, I made a small, cartoonish, idealised cow figurine. I made sketches of existing cow figurines, noticing the exaggeration of certain features such as the head and eyes, ears, tail and, strangely, the udder. I modelled my own kitsch cow, and after giving it a tin white glaze, decorated it with enamels (bottom right). This is the enamel before firing - the orange faded a lot in the kiln. I believe this had something to do with mixing colours, particularly with yellow.



# CAR BOOT SALE INTERVIEWS

It was at this point that I realised I was merely hypothesising as to why people enjoy animal figurines, and that I should speak to people who actually have them. I knew that it was possible that people like small, cute things on a semi-conscious level, but I thought it would be interesting to see what kind of language ordinary people use to talk about these figurines.

Because I don't personally know anyone who collects these objects, I decided to go back to the car boot sale to find out from sellers why they came to acquire figurines, what their appeal is and why they are now being discarded. I bought an item of interest from most of the people I interviewed.

It never occurred to anyone that a tiny ceramic animal is a slightly strange thing to have; they are totally ubiquitous. It appeared they are often used as gift objects, and were never really described in decorative terms. Collecting animal figurines was sometimes said to be something to 'grow out of'. These are also highly gendered objects, usually (but not exclusively) belonging to women.

A middle-aged woman and her mother ran this stall, and this grandma bunny used to belong to the generation above (the daughter's grandmother). The grandchildren used to buy her figurines as gifts; this figure is about eighteen years old. The grandmother has been dead for eight years, and the women were having a clearout.

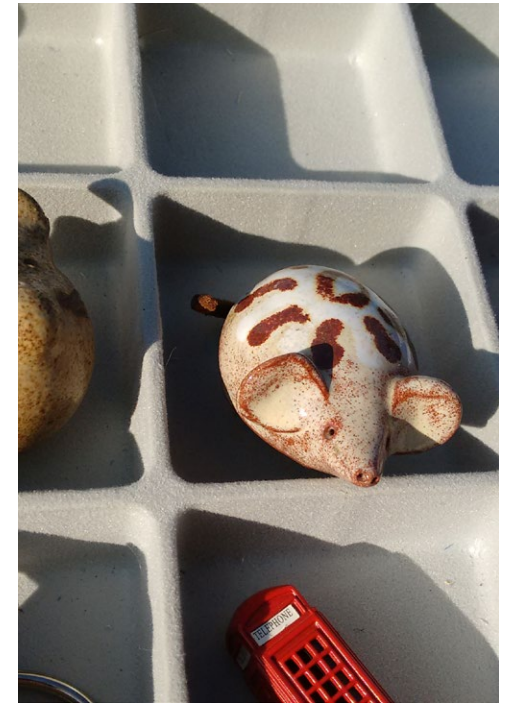


This couple owned cats, so naturally people would buy cat figurines for the wife as presents. They were also sometimes given owls, on account of living in 'Owletts House'. They didn't have the space for everything, and were having a clearout.

This was the stall owner's sister's collection - she has always 'just liked little things'. People knew this about her and bought them for her too. She used to keep them on a little shelf, and was fascinated with miniature things, particularly animals. She has since grown out of it.



This man collects mice, and has over 70 at home. He is selling some because he has duplicates. He said he picked mice because 'they're hard to find at car boot sales' (I wasn't sure if he was joking). He gave me this mouse for free, and said he felt 'sorry for him' and asked me to 'give him a good home'.



This woman wanted to collect something as a child, and she decided that seals would do. She has since grown out of it, and is no longer bothered about collecting - she doesn't even remember where this furry seal is from.



This woman is an animal lover, and buys and sells animal figures to raise money for a tiger charity. She said that she thinks they are like 'little works of art'. She felt fond of them, but said she couldn't afford to be sentimental because they must be sold.

# MAKE-YOUR-OWN FIGURINE SURVEY

To further investigate ideas of ownership in miniature animals, I designed a questionnaire to accompany balls of clay which I left in the canteen, inviting participants to make their own animal and talk about their feelings towards it. Unfortunately the responses I received were generally low in quality; it appeared that people had gotten quickly bored with the exercise or didn't take it seriously. However, I did gain some interesting responses where people expressed feelings of fondness and attachment, personifying what had recently been a formless ball into a being to be loved.



Please use the clay to make one form which is an 'animal'.

Once you have done this, answer the 3 questions below:

1. Describe your animal.

He is a Llama, The car of the Andes. He has lovely wool and a big heart.

2. What emotions did you feel when making the animal, and now when looking at it?

Focus. Kind of caring I guess. Now I feel affection towards it.

3. Do you feel a sense of ownership over the animal?

Yeah I reckon.

Please put your responses back in the envelope, and leave it and your creation in one of the labelled cardboard boxes at the back of the canteen.

If you'd like to hear about what's happening to your clay animal during the research, leave your email here:

.....@gmail.com.

Thank you!



# FIGURINE-NATURE COLLAGES

Thinking back to ideas I had explored in my dissertation such as miniaturisation and nature, and the concept of the figurine vs. the beast, I had the idea of inserting figurines into wild environments. Is the domestic figure so at odds with a natural surrounding? I collaged photos of figurines with pages from an RSPB wildlife magazine, playing around with scale and narrative.





# Join us at the RSPB Weekend 2017

Friday 21–Sunday 23 April  
East Midlands Conference Centre, Nottingham



**INSIDE THE ROBIN MIND**  
Dominic Couzens looks at the habits of one of the UK's favourite birds.



**NATURE SKILLS**  
How to photograph swirling roosts and spot the first bees.



**WATCHING TOGETHER**  
Gather your family around you for a cosy Big Garden Birdwatch



# 'FAUNA' PHOTO SERIES

The collages naturally progressed onto a photo series which I named 'Fauna', in which I placed figures directly into wild habitats. I tried to make them look large and animated, with varying success. It occurred to me that animal figurines in the home are always placed facing the viewer. Simply turning the figurine around, so that it does not look back at its owner, was very effective for making certain shots work.



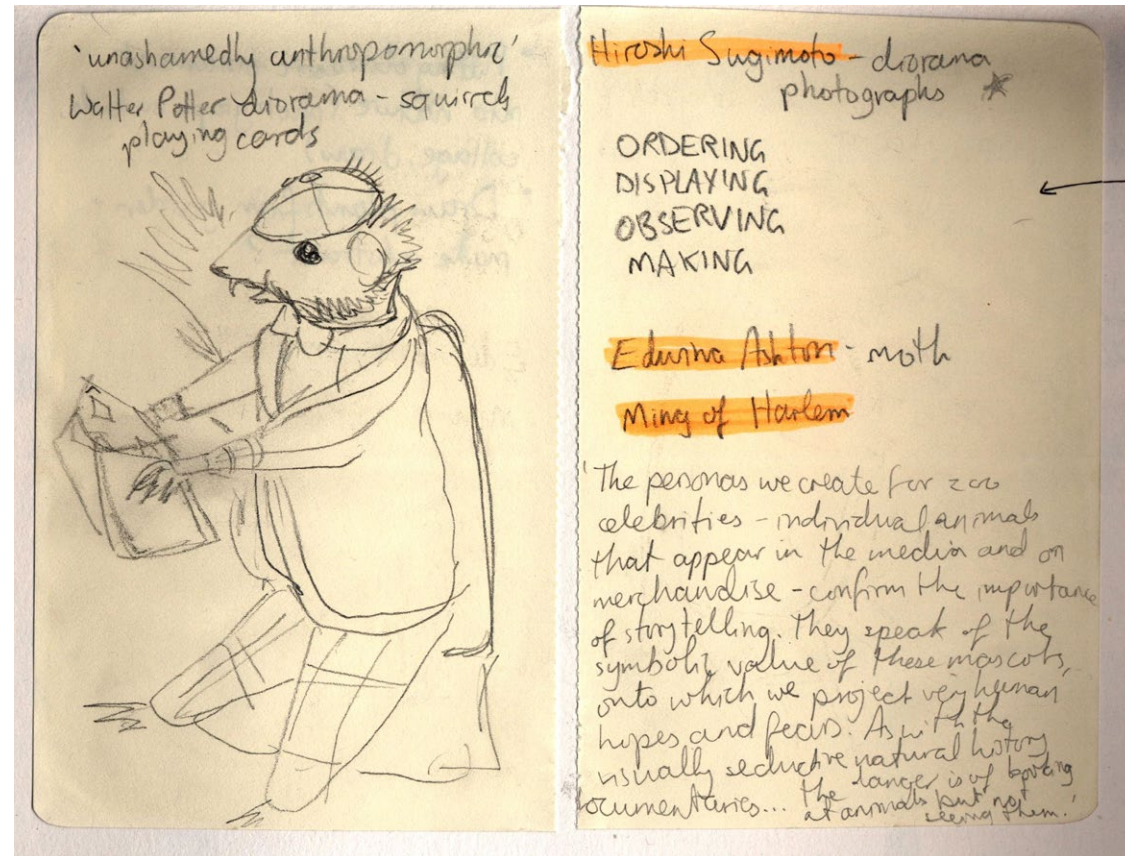




# MAKING NATURE

## AT THE WELLCOME COLLECTION

'Making Nature' was an exhibition exploring our relationship with nature, examining how we construct the natural world and the consequences this has upon it. It was divided into four themes: ordering, displaying, observing and making. The main message I took away from it was that whilst we may think we have a very scientific, objective understanding of animals, the symbolic, poetic value of the animal world remains deeply embedded in culture. Whilst today we search for an authentic experience with nature, we are still in danger of 'looking at animals, but not seeing them'.



Appendix 5



Appendix 6

# HIROSHI SUGIMOTO DIORAMAS

One part of the Making Nature exhibition which I found to be particularly memorable was a photograph by Hiroshi Sugimoto. What appeared to be a stunning sildlife shot in greyscale was in fact a picture of a taxidermy diorama at the New York Natural History Museum. Sugimoto presents these photos as an insight into how the camera can make something more real than real life. To me, these cinematic, staged images are a rather ironic reflection of our romanticised ideals of nature.



Appendix 8



Appendix 7



Appendix 9

# BOOTH MUSEUM DIORAMAS

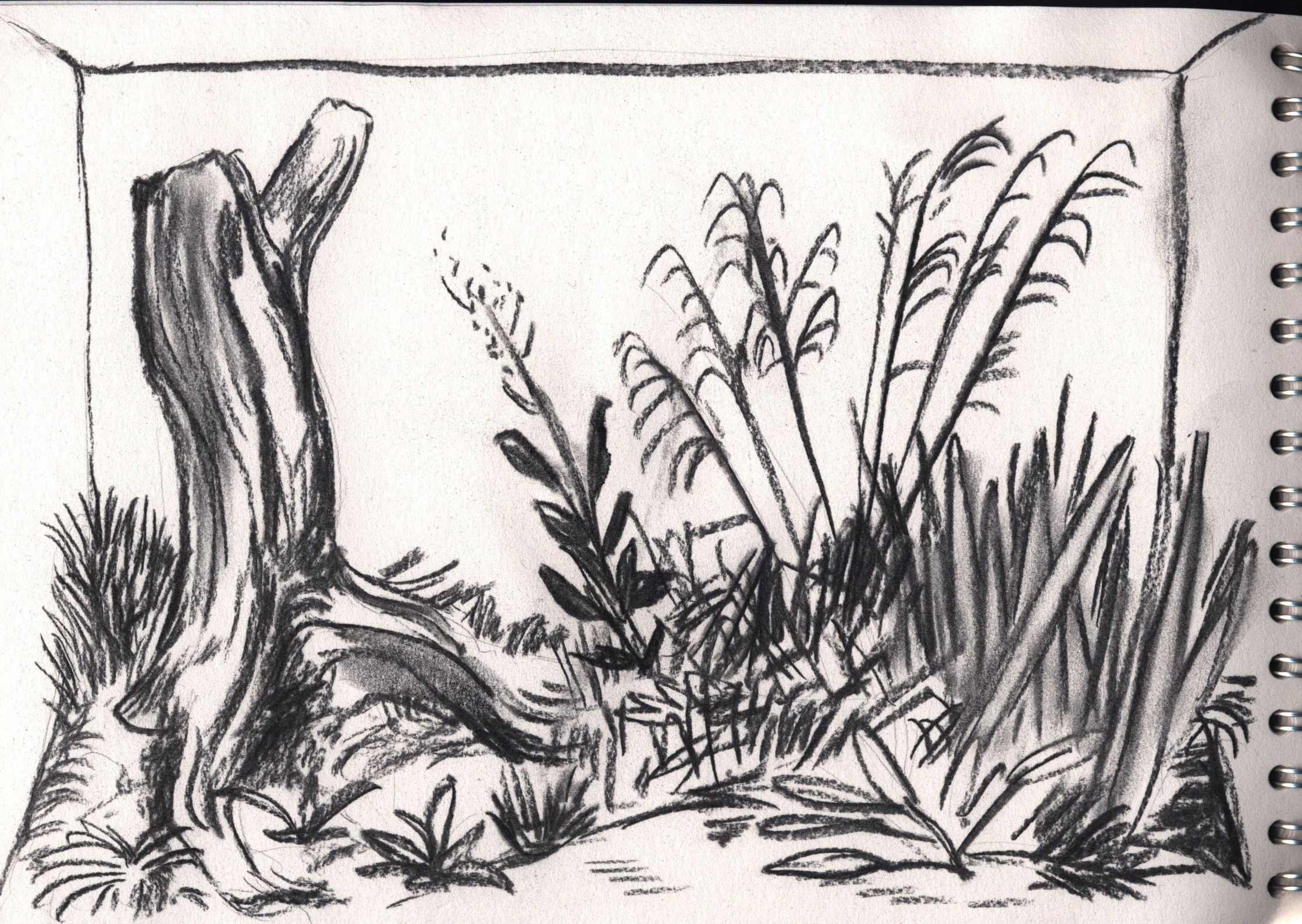
Sugimoto's photographs inspired me to investigate further the medium of the diorama. I visited the Booth Museum of Natural History in Brighton to take a look at some of Edward Thomas Booth's naturalistic, Victorian style dioramas of birds. These are extremely detailed, containing many species of plants in each scene, each dry leaf carefully painted green. In my sketches I 'blacked out' or completely omitted the taxidermy figures, so that the diorama itself became the focus.



I also made a David Attenborough-style nature documentary about the wildlife to be seen at the Booth Museum. The video is a take on how Victorian naturalists would often draw incorrect conclusions about animals from studying stuffed specimens.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdKM79vxRDY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdKM79vxRDY)





# TONY HAYWARD

Tony Hayward splices together ceramic figurines to create humorous, incongruous frankenstein figures. This piece titled 'Loving Couple' could be interpreted as a satirisation of kitsch, subverting the romantic sentimentality of the original figurine.



Appendix 10

Hayward has also created a series of three-dimensional tableaux sculptures, in which picturesque, kitsch paintings are brought into semi-reality through forced perspective. This relates to my investigation into dioramas. Perhaps this odd, romanticised scene would be an appropriate diorama for a figurine?



Appendix 11

# RICHARD SLEE

Richard Slee has created a series of work in which factory-made figurines are given a home of their own. In the piece pictured below ('Hippo with Landscape'), the figure of a hippo is inserted into a strange domain of colourful rolling hills. These pieces are 'sentimental shrines' which reflect the importance of ornaments in the lives of ordinary people. I like how the figure is placed in a world of ceramic, where it appears simultaneously incongruous and at home.



Appendix 12

# WINDOWSILL DISPLAYS

Although perhaps less of a common sight than it used to be, it could be said that the natural habitat of the ceramic animal figurine is a windowsill. I imagine curators of these displays to be sentimental old grannies, revealing my own preconceptions about 'kitsch'. I am fascinated by this strange decorative display to the outside world: are these objects simply signifiers of taste, or are they there in greeting? Is this a sort of hyper-domestic diorama, starring the animal figure and framed in net curtains?



# BOTANICAL ILLUSTRATION

At this point I started to think about making my own ceramic dioramas for my figurines, and was thinking up plant forms that could surround them. I gained a lot of inspiration from botanical illustration, which I have always found to be more interesting than photos of plants - they showcase the whole plant, and manage to look quite strange and alien despite being a scientific representation.



Appendix 14

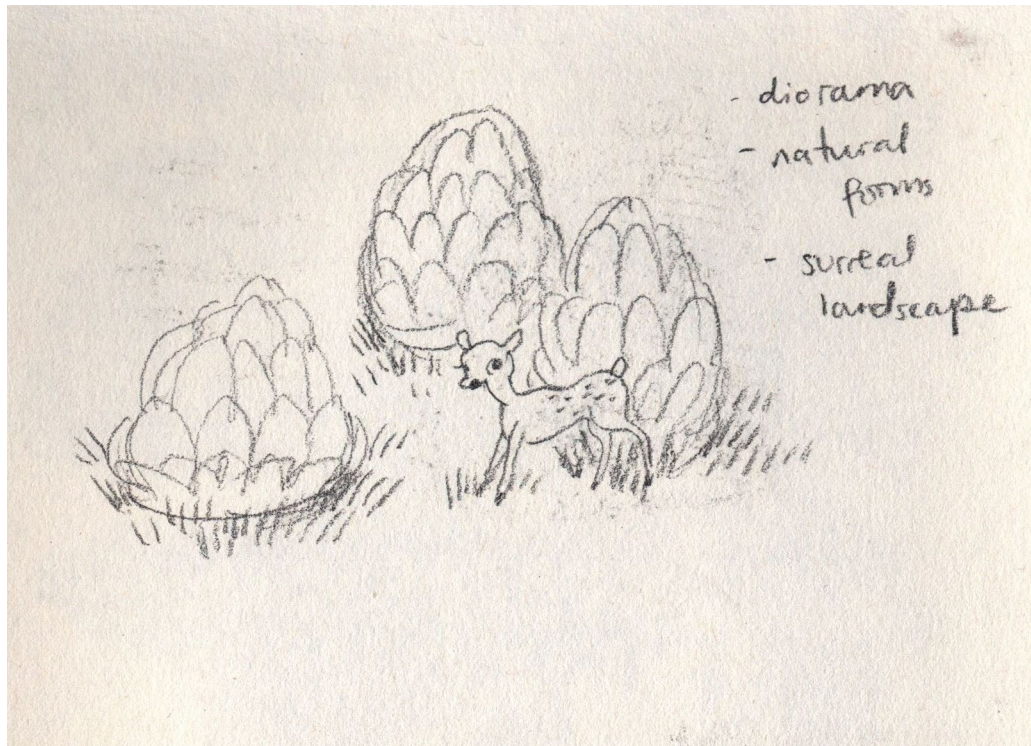
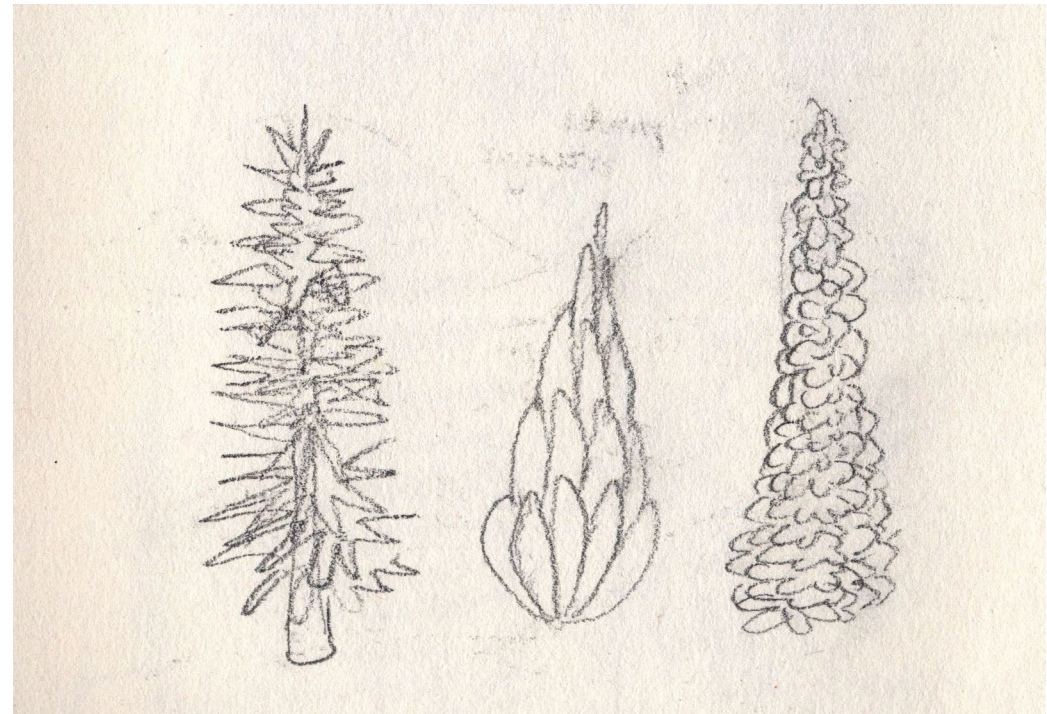


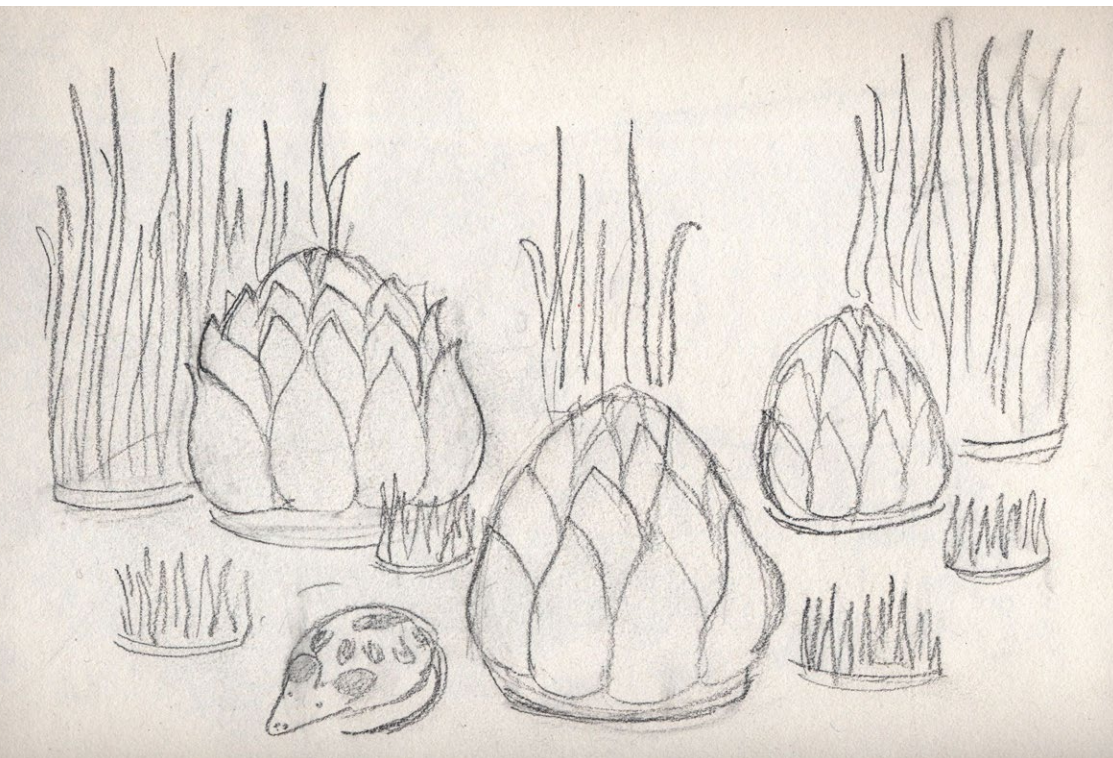
Appendix 15



# SCENERY PROPS

Here are some sketches and early models of plant forms I tried out, in order to place the figurine inside a scene. I liked the intricate, spiky forms in particular which showcased the delicateness of the ceramic, especially in the porcelain. Overleaf are some drawings which show how I started to think about a whole scene within a landscape: not just a few props, but an atmospheric alien world.







PORCELAIN  
CLOCHE PIECES

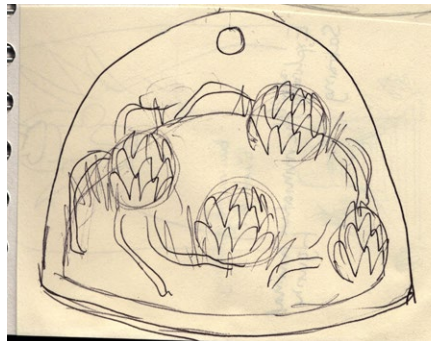


# TAXIDERMY DOME

Glass dome cloches are a classic way in which to display taxidermy. I think the shiny glass has a special allure, and the notion of a sealed dome is reminiscent of a miniature world or terrarium. The fact that it is viewable from all sides is also particularly interesting. I acquired three glass cloches in different sizes to create dioramas for, to mimic (and satirise) traditional taxidermy. I thought the appearance of lush ceramic pieces under glass would be extremely compelling. Pictured bottom right is one of my early arrangements, with some artichoke forms I made out of paper porcelain clay.



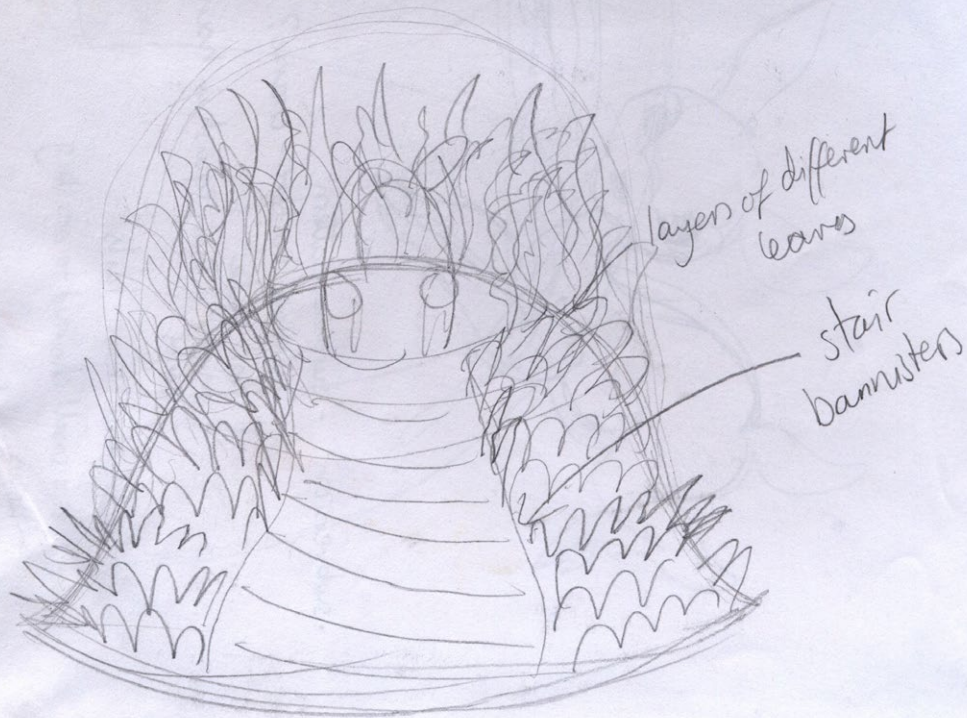
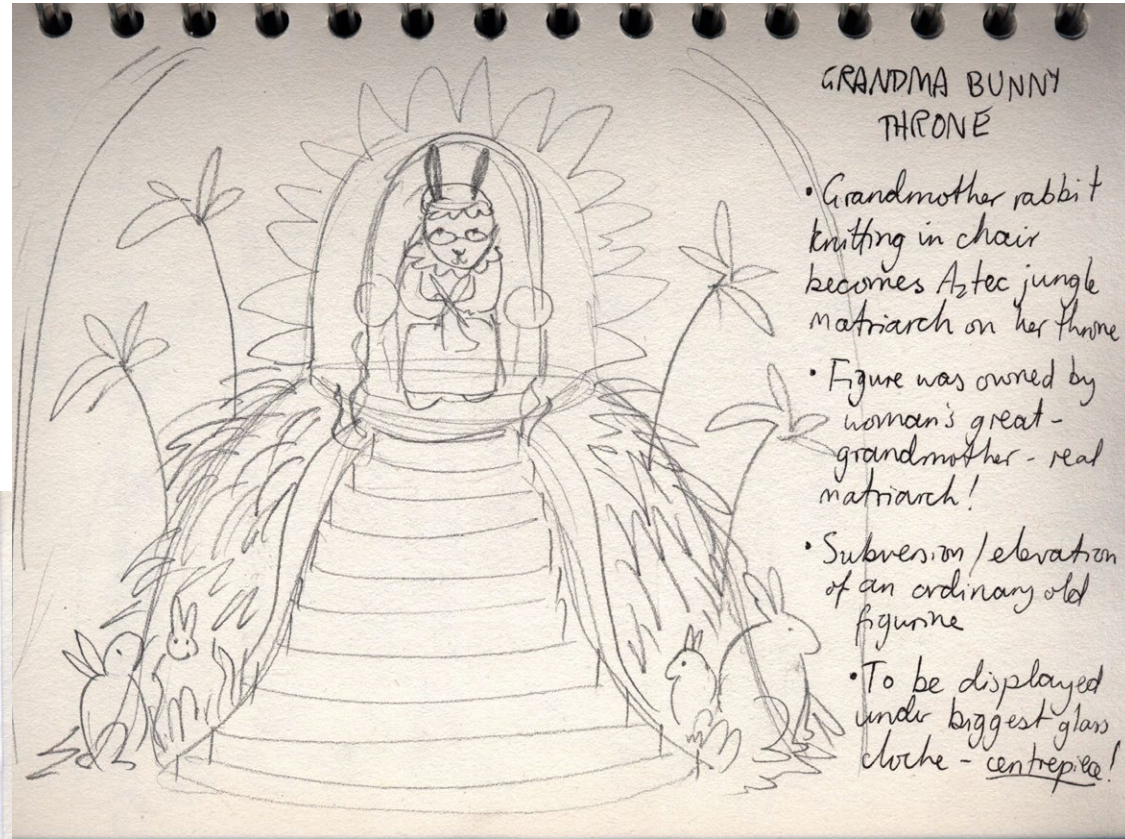
Appendix 16



# 'THE MATRIARCH'

## SKETCHES

'The Matriarch' is a piece I designed around the grandma bunny figure which belonged to an actual grandma (see 'Car Boot Sale Interviews') - who I imagined to be a real-life matriarch, embodied in this figure. As one of the more anthropomorphic figurines in my growing collection, I had struggled to photograph her in the wild outdoors and place her amongst my natural scenery props. However, it occurred to me that she looks like she is sitting in a throne, and I got the idea of an Aztec queen atop a lush jungle throne platform, surrounded by bunny subjects.



# ‘THE MATRIARCH’ V1

I had always planned to make this piece out of porcelain, but I thought it would be wise to create a test piece first from cheaper modelling clay. I worked closely with the large glass cloche I wanted it to sit under, calculating the shrinkage so that I knew it would fit. V1 of ‘The Matriarch’ was the form that I wanted and had imagined. However, I had visions of lushness and intricacy that I wasn’t getting from this somewhat cartoonish style. I didn’t want the style of making to reflect that of the figurine; on the contrary, I wanted the figurine to stand out.



# CERAMIC ARTISTS

I researched more ceramic artists to try and pinpoint the kind of aesthetic I wanted to achieve. I particularly liked the work of Hitomi Hosono (below), who uses press molds of leaves to create frothy, impossibly delicate forms. Zemer Peled (top right) is a sculptor who glues countless individual ceramic pieces onto forms to create an impression of movement. Alberto Bustos (bottom right) has a style which mimics blades of grass, in strands of delicate, paper-like porcelain.



Appendix 20



Appendix 21



Appendix 22



# PRESS MOLDS

Drawing inspiration from Hitomi Hosono's work, I created some plaster press molds of leaves I collected. Not all of the leaves worked well - the best ones were leaves which could sit very flat during casts, and were highly textured. I experimented with rolling porcelain very thinly over the molds and building them up to create forms, which was really successful. I particularly liked ripping a torn edge around the paper porcelain, which was facilitated by the fibres in the clay.



# ‘THE MATRIARCH’ V2

After experimenting with the paper porcelain and the press molds, I created ‘The Matriarch’ V2, trying to achieve a more busy, intricate aesthetic with the thin, textured clay. I was very pleased with the final outcome - the combination of the different leaf textures looked really effective. The style was less figurative than in V1, as instead of a jungle and palm trees, the dome is just covered in a froth of leaves. At this point I was unsure what finish I wanted on the piece, but I liked how the figurine stood out on the bright white porcelain.



# SHRINES AND RELIGIOUS KITSCH

I occurred to me whilst I was making 'The Matriarch' that it very much seems like a shrine. I was reminded of Grayson Perry's elaborate shrines to his old teddy bear, Alan Measles (below), and also thought of nativity figurines (top right) and religious kitsch (bottom right). These themes all relate in their aspirations of reverence and divinity, juxtaposed with irreverent kitschness and tweeness. I wanted to capture some of this feeling in my pieces: an air of divinity, which the animal figurines make almost blasphemously tacky.



Appendix 18



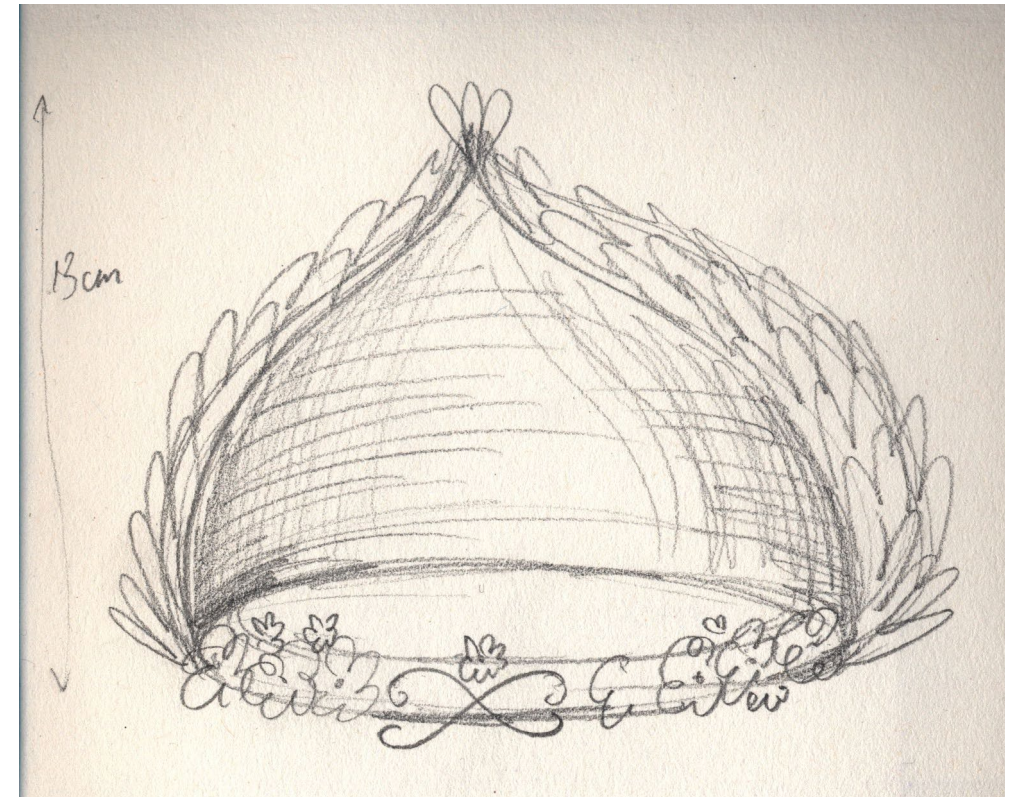
Appendix 17



Appendix 19

# FAWN HUT SKETCHES

For the smallest of the three glass domes I had, I toyed with the idea of creating a round nest (below), but decided I wanted something a little more shriney. I had the idea of a protective 'love nest' for a figurine of two fawns I had, with a baby one. I wanted it to be quite organic, using the busy press-molded leaves of 'The Matriarch'. I liked the idea that this piece could be a kind of Bambi nativity: an immaculate conception in which two fawns create an even smaller fawn.



# 'NO ROOM AT THE INN'

Because most of the leaf molds I had made were a too big for this project, I created another press mold with lots of little leaves and flowers I could use. Having done this, the fawn hut was relatively simple to make, and I am very pleased with the outcome. It reflects the feeling of an enshrined figurine that I get from 'The Matriarch'. I named this piece 'No Room at the Inn', to suggest the nativity narrative to the viewer.



# 'THE PROPHET' SKETCHES

I based my final cloche piece around an arrangement I had come up with featuring a large white cat which wears an expression of total serenity, facing a small crowd of little forest creatures (Wade Whimsy figures). I wanted to create an impression of a forest clearing, elevating the cat to the position of a fabled prophet addressing the masses. This turned out to be a very difficult piece to finalise, and I messed around with many different forms before settling on the final design.





# FINAL DESIGN

When I was trying to decide on the final design for 'The Prophet', I got very fixated on the idea that it had to heavily incorporate the press-molded leaves of the previous two pieces. As soon as I let go of this, the final design materialised fairly quickly. I think the long, thin spindles work really effectively in the porcelain, and it still gives the impression of a forest clearing, but in a less obvious way. I played with the idea of fixing a halo behind the cat's head, but decided it would be more true to my original concept to keep the figurines themselves untouched.





# PORCELAIN FINISH

I did a lot of experiments to figure out how to finish these porcelain pieces. I really liked the unglazed porcelain taken up to stoneware temperature (below). It gains a smooth, almost crystalline texture, like cake icing, and isn't dusty at all. However, I did feel like leaving them white was a bit of a cop-out, and conducted glaze tests on some spare leaves I had (top right). I particularly liked the very pale colours such as the pinks and greens which were only barely pigmented, though I was worried a thick glaze would mask the detail of the leaves. I also created some test pieces which mimicked a slice of the throne platform (bottom right) in order to test what effect glazes would have upon the sagging of the clay in the final firing (porcelain is very prone to drooping).



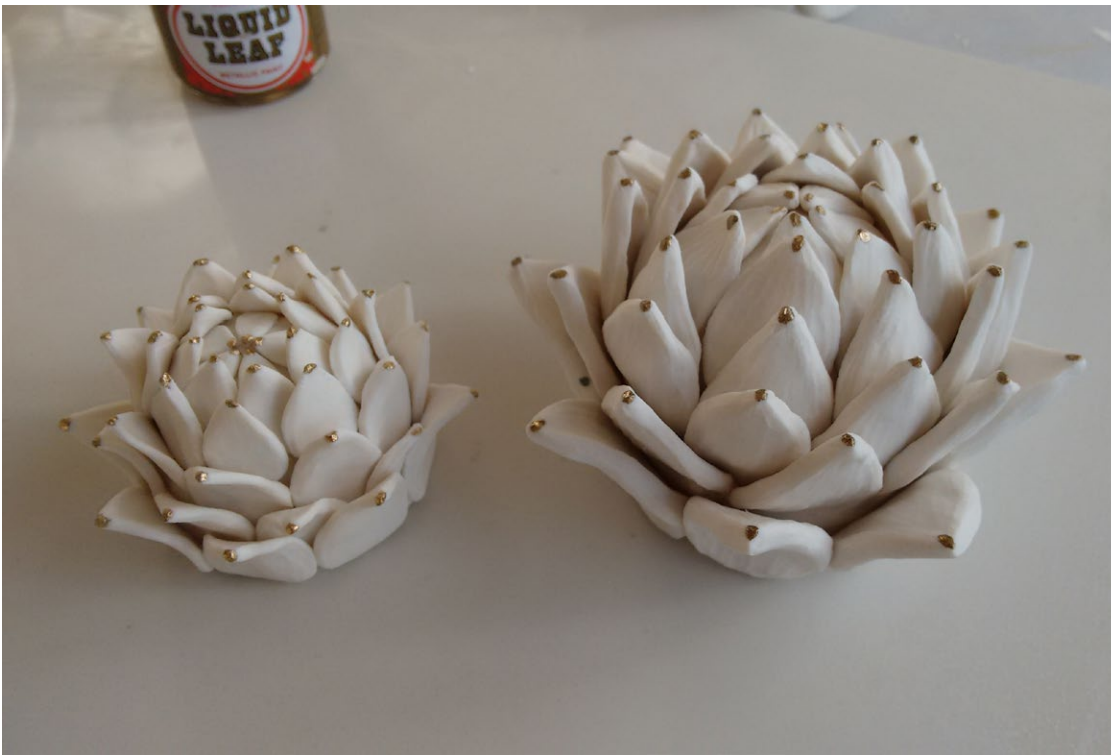
# COLOUR IDEAS

These are some images showing how I superimposed colour onto images of 'The Matriarch' to see if I could figure out what I wanted; below is a coloured-in printout of a photo and opposite are some photoshopped images. These colour tests ranged from subtle, muted colours to over-the-top and super-kitsch.



# GILDING

I never liked any of my glaze ideas enough to go through with them, and a while later I discovered 'liquid leaf', a paint-on solvent which in small amounts looks just like fired-on gold lustre. I was really impressed with the tests I carried out, and after trying it on 'The Matriarch' V1 (which I glazed white), I took all my final pieces up to stoneware and decorated them with gold highlights. The gold ties in with my research into religious kitsch and shrines, and helps to add a divine aspect to the pieces.





# 'THE MATRIARCH' V3

When I took 'The Matriarch' V2 up to stoneware temperature, I was unsurprised to find that it had shrunk and drooped too much, and my beloved grandma bunny figure could no longer fit inside. At this point it was the summer term, and I had just enough time to create V3, which was much bigger. Unfortunately, the piece cracked during drying, and despite my best efforts to paste it up (and again after low bisc), it cracked totally unsalvageably in the stoneware firing, rendering it unuseable.



# REARRANGING FIGURES

When I realised I would have use to use 'The Matriarch' V2 without the original grandma bunny, I tried several rearrangements. I loved the appearance of the fawn couple sitting on the throne platform instead (below). I also had a family of owls who could sit comfortably in the Bambi nest, however I ended up deciding that they were just too twee and not quite weird enough. This would also change all of the concepts for these pieces. Luckily I had another grandma (or mother?) bunny which was just small enough to fit on the platform, and a couple of more appropriate figurines to accompany her.

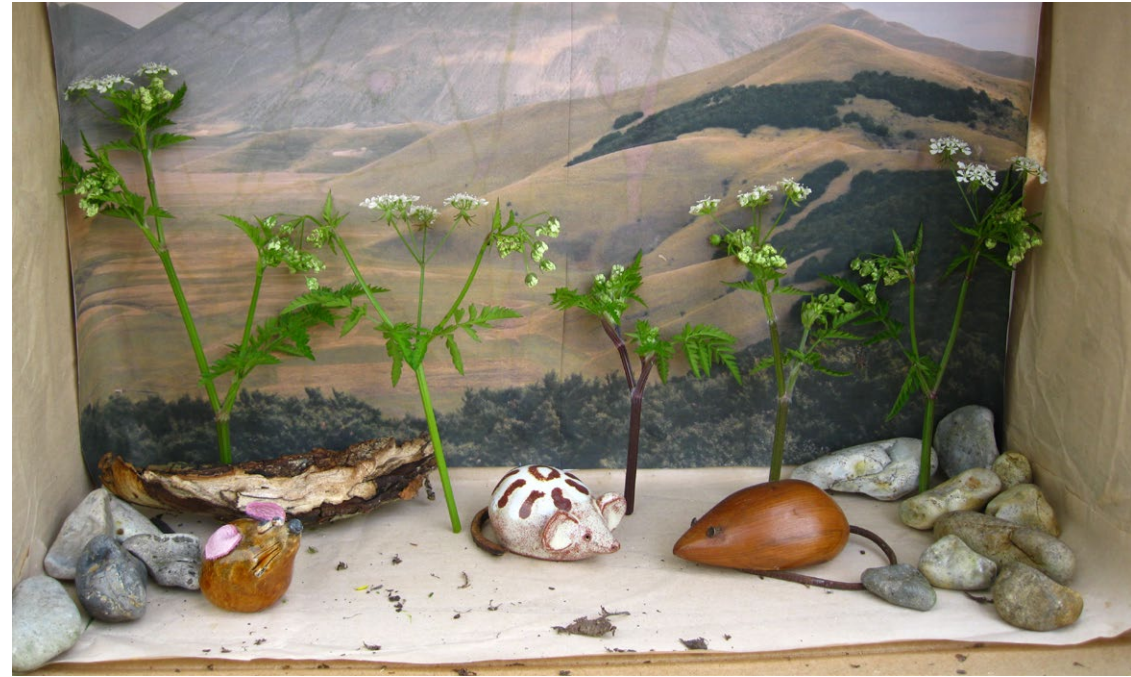


# DIORAMA SCENE PIECES



# SHOEBOX DIORAMA

Whilst I was making the porcelain cloche pieces, I knew that I wanted to bring the project towards another direction and form another body of work which linked back to my research into the traditional diorama. In a return to the museum diorama concept, I created this little shoebox diorama by sticking a printed photo onto the back of the box, and arranging figurines inside with plants and rocks. Placing the wolves on some concrete slabs created different levels, and a more pleasing composition. This made clear to me how dioramas are not snapshots of life but carefully composed artworks (reminding me of Hiroshi Sugimoto).



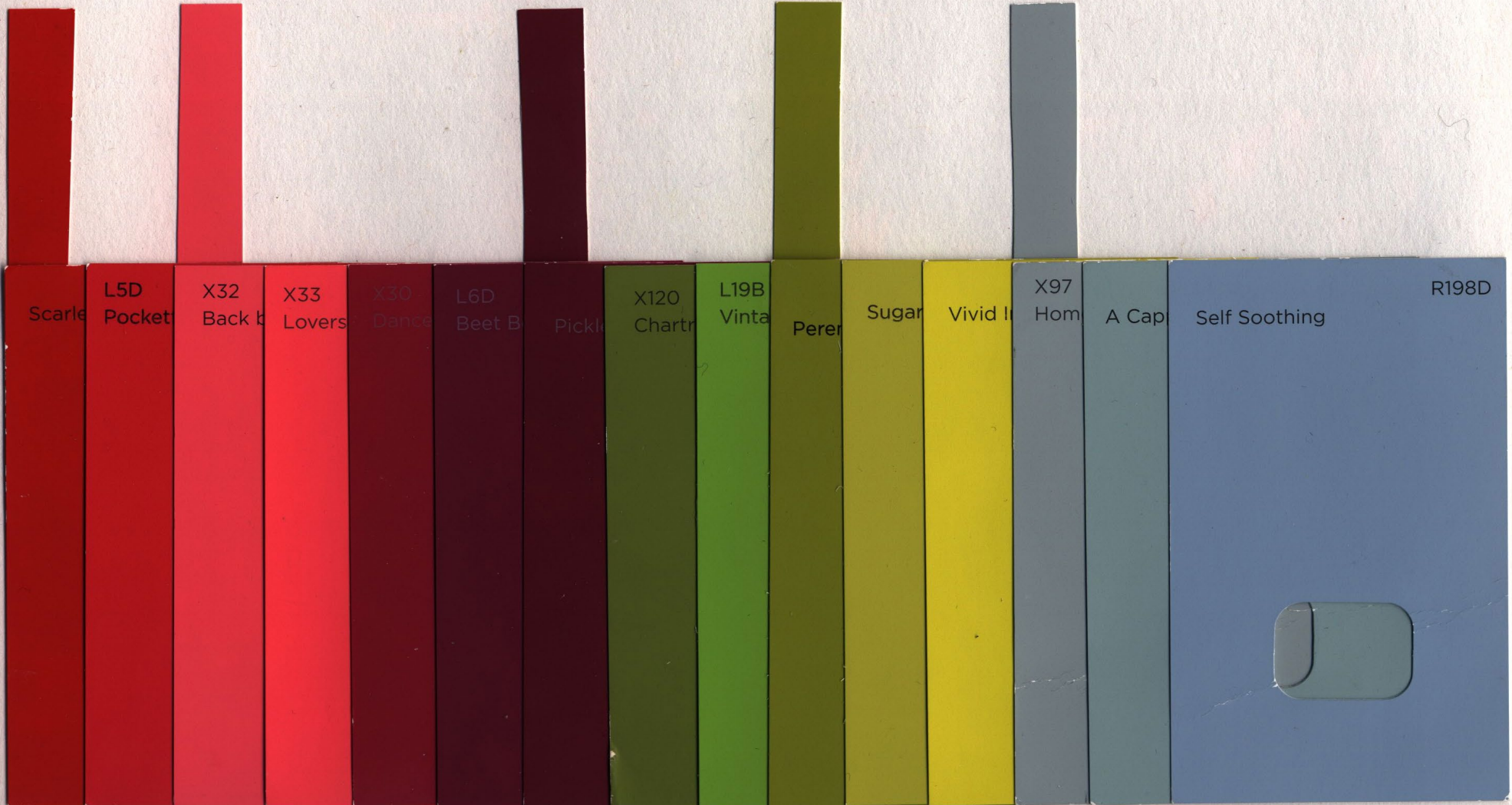




# MUM'S GARDEN

Because I had decided my porcelain pieces should stay white, I wanted to create a bold colour palette inspired by nature for the next body of work. Whilst visiting home I did some sketches of my mum's spectacular garden, and was inspired by some of the colour combinations she frequently uses. I loved the bold reds and deep maroon combined with bright chartreuse green. I created a chart of colour swatches to work from (overleaf) to help me stick to my original colour ideas when developing glazes.





Scarlet

L5D  
Pocket

X32  
Back b

X33  
Lovers

X30  
Dance

L6D  
Beet B

Pickl

X120  
Chartr

L19B  
Vinta

Perer

Sugar

Vivid I

X97  
Hom

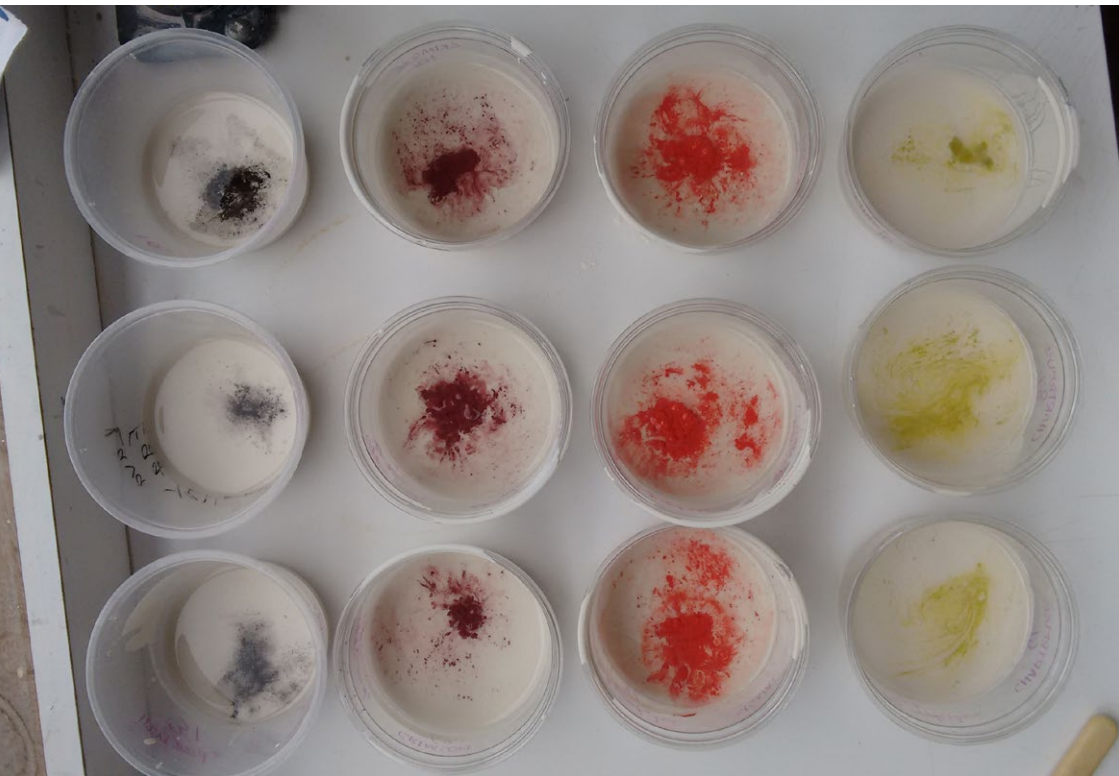
A Cap

Self Soothing

R198D

# GLAZE TESTS

Getting the glazes right for my work was not an extremely arduous process, but was not without its hiccups. I wanted a combination of matt and shiny textures, and carried out matt stoneware, matt earthenware and shiny earthenware tests. The main issue I had was with the crimson maroon stain, as it burned out completely in stoneware and turned a pale grey lilac in the earthenware matt glaze (though I actually really liked this colour). I was really pleased with the shiny chartreuse glaze, which turned out really bright and juicy and brought all the other colours together.



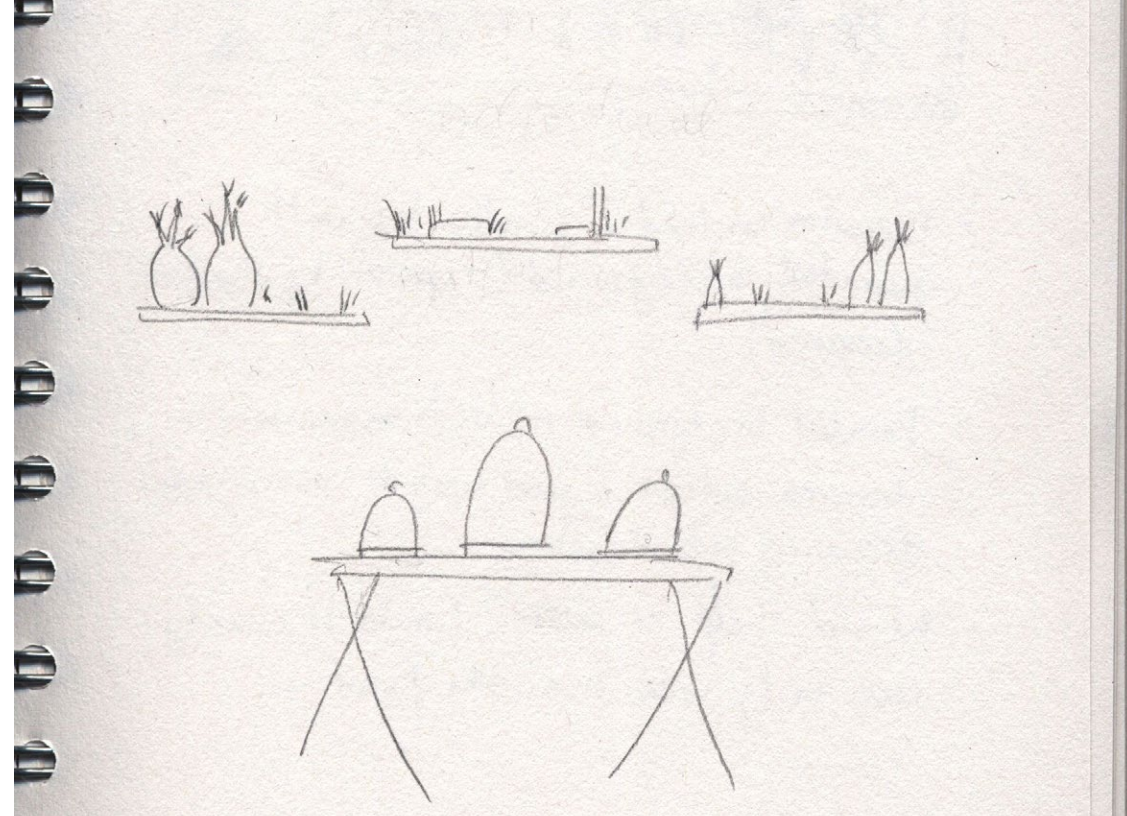
# COLOURED CLAY TESTS

Whilst I was conducting glaze tests I also carried out rigorous testing with coloured clays, for another interesting texture. After developing a very successful pink, I also tried the crimson maroon and chartreuse. I tested different percentages (6, 8 and 10%), two different clays (porcelain and modelling clay) and two different temperatures (earthenware and stoneware). Unfortunately, none of these tests turned out quite how I wanted them to. The maroon porcelain became a very pleasing pale blue-grey at stoneware when it burned out, and the same test with chartreuse was a nice green. I decided to just use the pink clay, which I really liked, and insert some of these test pieces into the composition if I felt they added to it.



# DIORAMA COMPOSITIONS

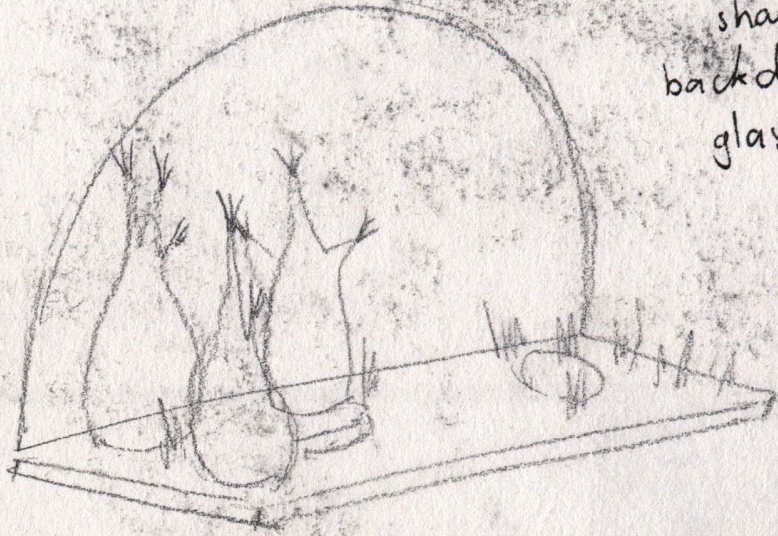
I had so far been thinking that I would compose a range of plant pieces into one big diorama arrangement, featuring lots of different animal figurines in an entire ecosystem. However, there was a point when I realised that the range of colours and styles in the figurines I had was just too eclectic, and combined with a vibrant and varied colour scheme of glazes, it could all look like a jumble sale. I decided to instead divide up my ideas into three separate dioramas that each had their own narrative and colour scheme. I also had the idea of displaying each one in a box (bottom right), but settled on an open shelf display with a painted background, in a semicircle shape to reflect the shape of the glass domes.



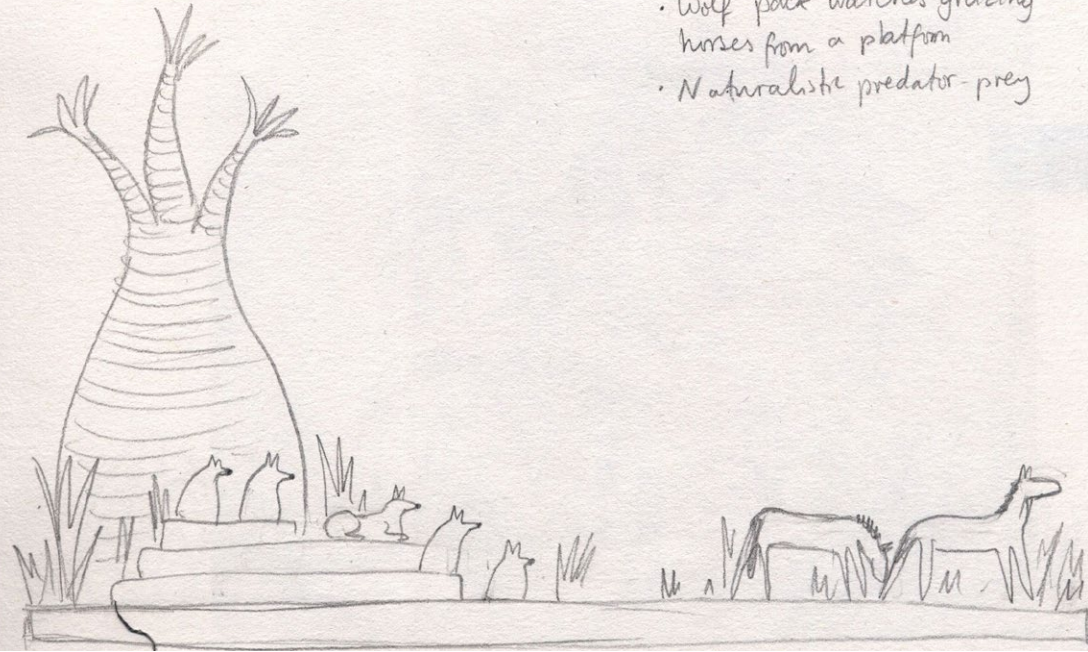
DIORAMA BOX



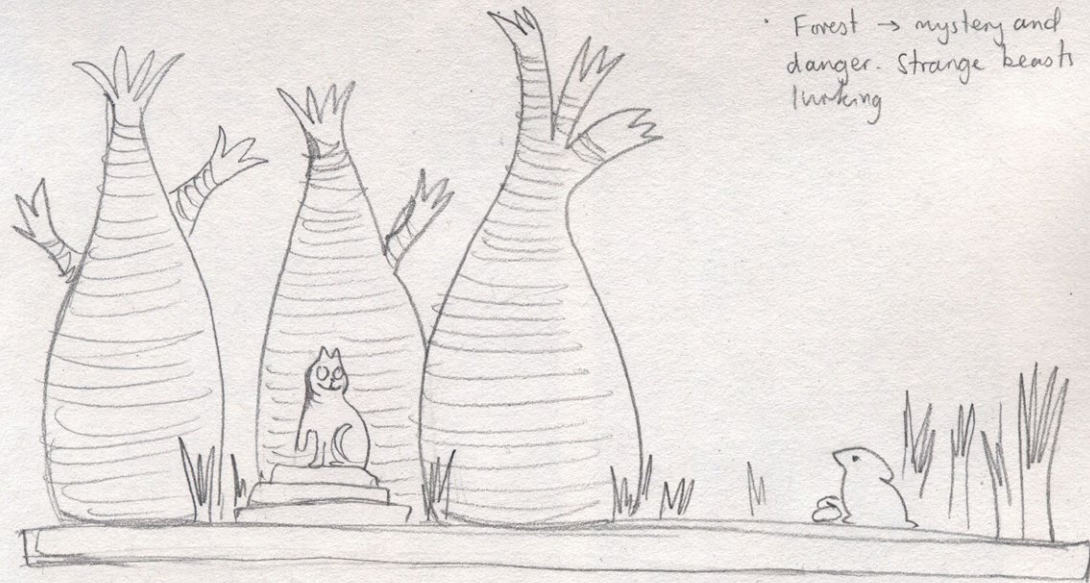
- round dome shape backdrop - mirror glass domes



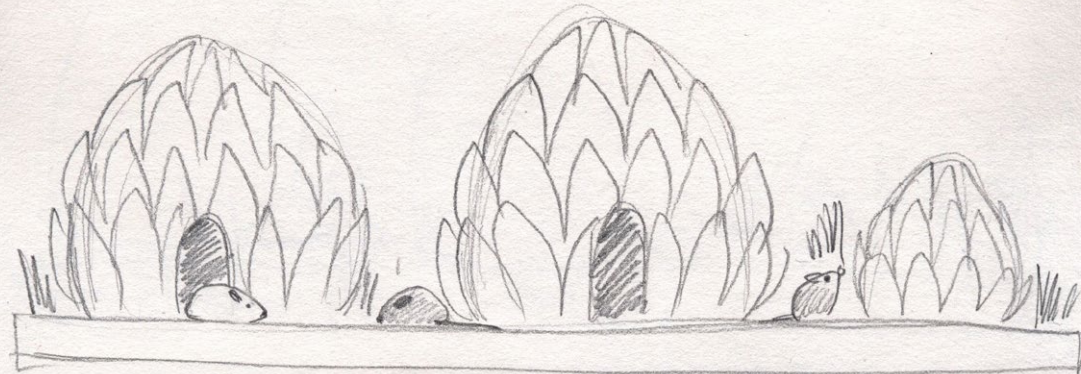
- Wolf pack watches grazing horses from a platform
- Naturalistic predator-prey



- Evil pink cat watches rabbit with her babies
- Forest → mystery and danger. Strange beasts lurking



- Mice living inside artichokes
- Peaceful utopia
- Small artichoke without door (still growing)







# GLAZE COMBINATIONS

Having designed each composition for the three shelves, I created a colour palette for each one, with the main colours being pink/lilac (cat), green (mice) and red (wolves). This was to be reflected in the background. Because this had all stemmed from the idea of one big composition, all the colours are complimentary, and I knew that if necessary, it would be possible to switch around objects between the three shelves at the end.



# GLAZE RESULTS

Considering that glazing is not my forte, I was extremely pleased with the results of the final firings, particularly with the large main pieces such as the baobab trees. Some of the glazes on the grasses were very patchy and thin - I think this was because there was very little clay to absorb the water, and they would have gotten particularly vitrified at the very tips during bisc. I was also unsure about the lipstick red of the wolves' platform, which seemed too plastic (and with the spikes, somewhat evil), to go with the natural scene. However, I decided I could make it work using the colours of the background.



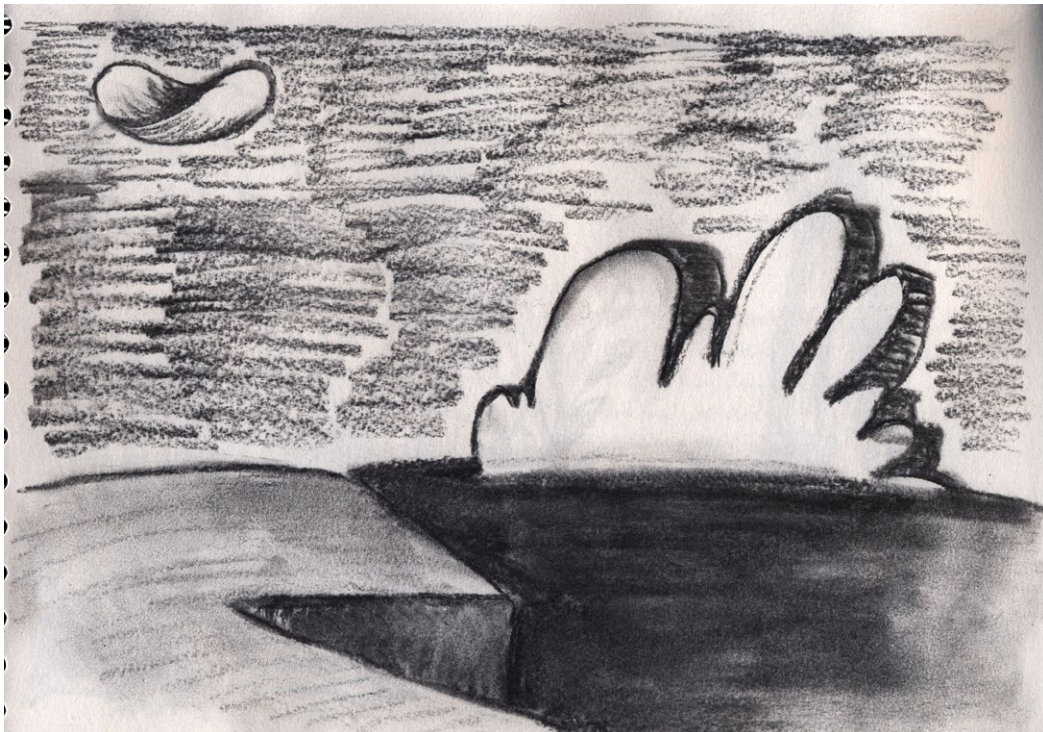
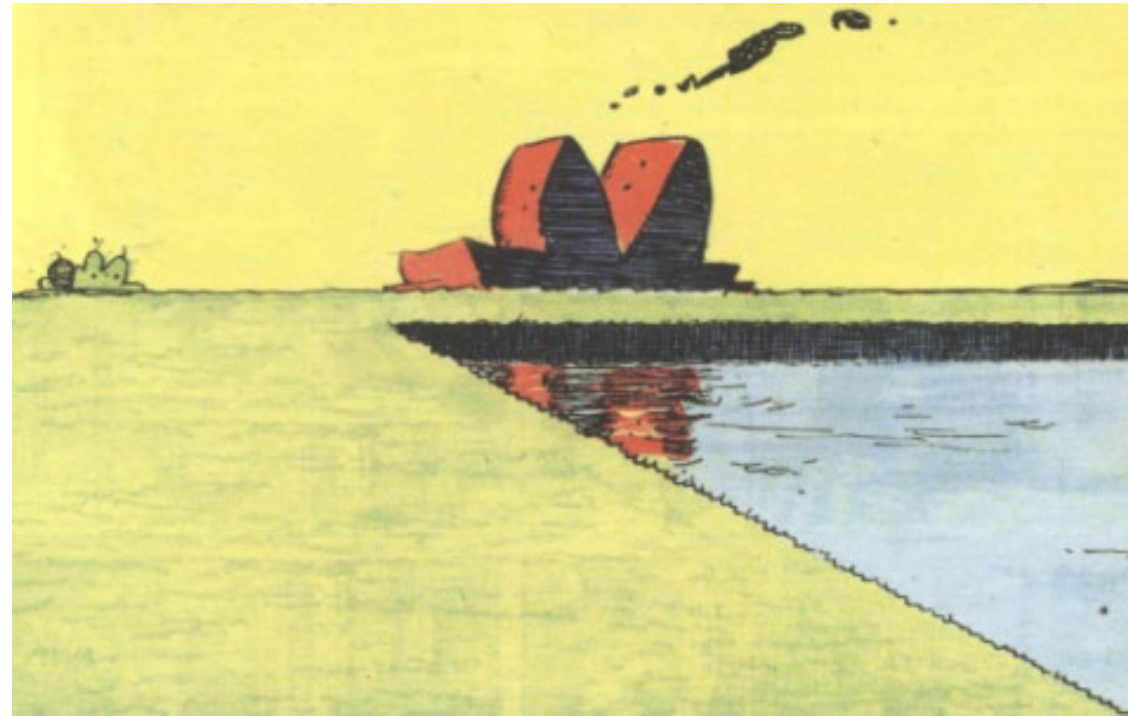
# FINAL ARRANGEMENTS

These are the final arrangements of all the pieces I made, which didn't deviate much from my original plans. The clusters of thin, delicate grasses contrasting with the bulbous trees work really well, and the little ceramic pebbles were also very successful props. The artichokes in the chartreuse worked brilliantly. I thought the grey baobab worked better with the artichoke piece, so I moved it over. I also used some of my coloured clay test pieces in all the arrangements, as they add extra complimenting colours and don't look out of place.



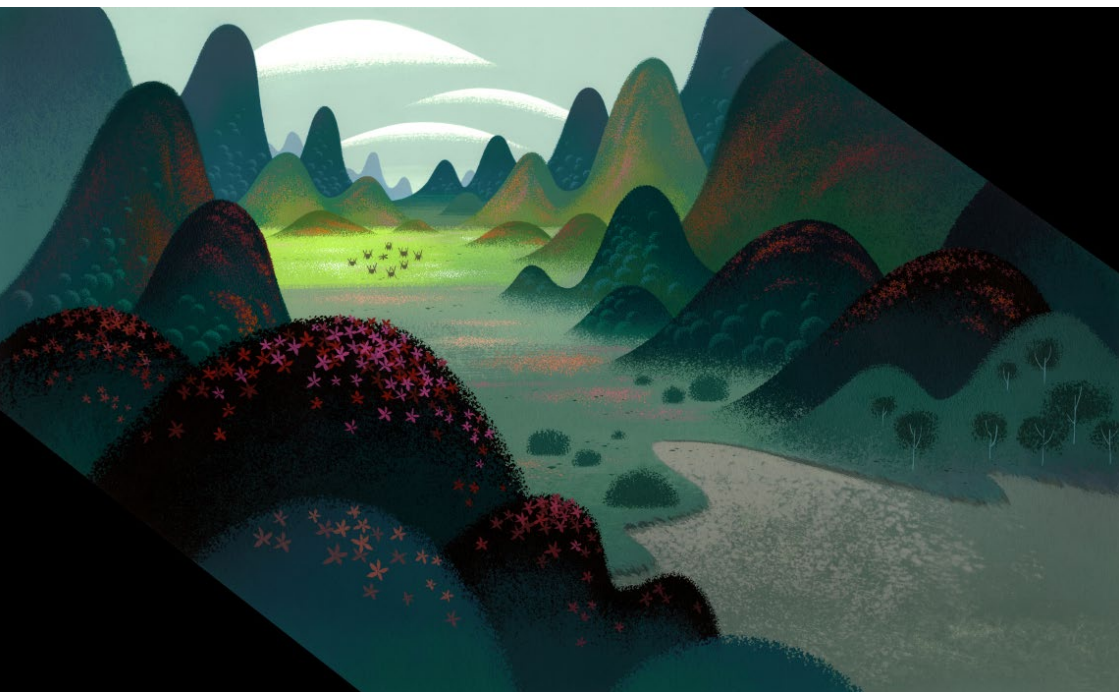
# KRAZY KAT LANDSCAPES

Having completed the ceramic pieces, it was time to create a painted scenery background for each composition. I wanted to create a somewhat surreal atmosphere, of a world like and unlike our own, and drew inspiration from various illustrators. One of the earlier things I looked at were the backgrounds of *Krazy Kat* comics by George Herriman. The comics take place in a strange, vast and lonely landscape, picked out in vibrant colours often combined with black. Pictured right are images in which I have removed the characters on Photoshop, to showcase the background art.



# SAMURAI JACK LANDSCAPES

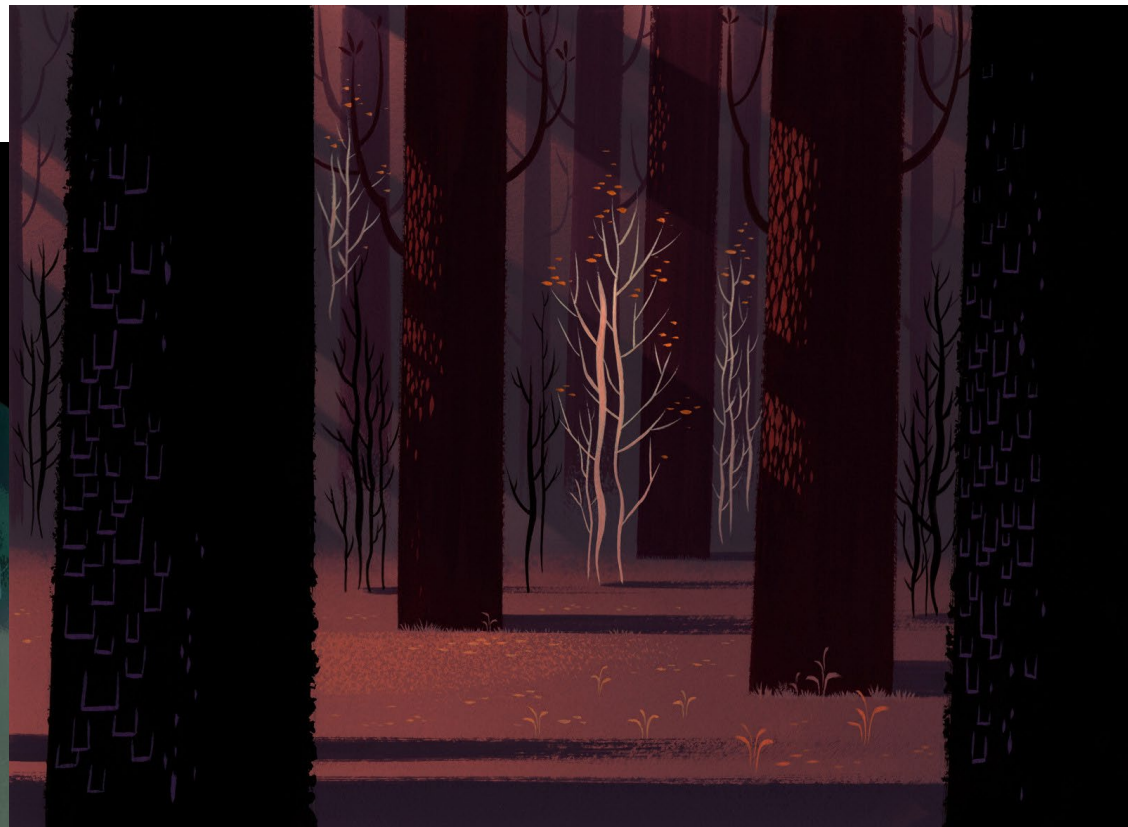
Scott Wills' background art for the cartoon *Samurai Jack* are stunning illustrations of a huge variety of landscapes, some alien, some more earthly, from dystopian cities to lush jungles. The colour schemes and restrained use of detail are particularly inspiring features. Setting the story against strange and unfamiliar worlds created a profound sense of the character's loneliness in his endless quest to return to his own world. The cartoon usually featured little dialogue, which allowed the art to take centre stage.



Appendix 23



Appendix 24



Appendix 25

# DIORAMA BACKGROUNDS

For my three diorama backgrounds I was influenced by many different sources, but Scott Wills' background art was my main source of inspiration. I used foamboard so that the material wouldn't warp and could sit flat against the wall. I am happy with the outcomes, although they turned out a little darker than I imagined. I was a little unsure whether I would like them, but having placed them with the pieces on the shelf (below), I think they work successfully. I also painted the surface of the shelves in pastel colours to reflect the overall colour scheme and blend a little with the background.



# PHOTOGRAPHY

Here are some of the final shots I took of my work in a photography studio. I decided that photographing the diorama pieces without the painted backgrounds showed off the objects (in particular their colours) more effectively. Photographing the shiny glass cloches in particular was a challenge, and I had to position the light in such a way that the bright reflection did not obstruct the image of the piece inside. I reused some of the grasses between different compositions, so there are slightly more objects photographed here than what I actually have.











# APPENDIX

1. Matt Smith, Camp Clay <http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/artists-residence-va/camp-clay>
2. Photos by Lynn Meskell, A society of things: animal figurines and material scales at Neolithic Çatalhöyük
3. Frisky, Hornsea Pottery, modelled by Alan Compton Luckham <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O170237/frisky-vase-luckham-alan-compton/>
4. Vintage Cow Bull Kitsch Figurine Gold details Hand Painted Porcelain, Etsy <https://www.etsy.com/listing/222060116/vintage-cow-bull-kitsch-figurine-gold>
5. Budgie specimens (*Melopsittacus undulatus*) illustrating color variations, 1935–1957 <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2017/02/23/our-animal-history-making-nature/>
6. Still from Ming of Harlem <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2017/02/23/our-animal-history-making-nature/>
7. Hiroshi Sugimoto: Dioramas <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Dioramas-Hiroshi-Sugimoto/dp/8862083270>
8. Hiroshi Sugimoto: Dioramas <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Dioramas-Hiroshi-Sugimoto/dp/8862083270>
9. Eerie Yet Gorgeous Scenes Make Taxidermy Spring to Life <https://www.wired.com/2015/01/hiroshi-sugimoto-dioramas/>
10. Loving Couple, Tony Hayward <https://www.rca.ac.uk/more/staff/tony-hayward/>
11. Track, Tony Hayward <http://www.tonyhayward.com/html/tonywork.html>
12. Richard Slee, Landscape with Hippo <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O145689/landscape-with-hippo-form-slee-richard/>
13. Ornamental Pot Dogs on Windowsill, Alamy Stock Photos <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/window-display-ceramics.html>
14. Le Moyne - Globe Artichoke <https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/479140847830634002/>
15. Ernst Haeckel, Liverworts (*Hepaticae*), 1899 <https://graphics.wsj.com/glider/plants-56583123-36ca-4dd5-af8a-0d7b248743cb>
16. Antique Ornamental Victorian Glass Dome, Etsy <https://www.etsy.com/listing/106466341/antique-victorian-large-oval-glass-dome>
17. Alan Measles Shrine, The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman <http://www.nannakoekoek.com/?p=2288>
18. Nativity Kitsch, Julie Anne Fidler <http://mymentalhealthday.blogspot.co.uk/2010/11/nativity-kitsch.html>
19. Vintage Madonna and Child Rare Ceramic Statue, Etsy [https://www.etsy.com/uk/listing/219087250/vintage-madonna-and-child-rare-ceramic?ga\\_order=most\\_relevant&ga\\_search\\_type=all&ga\\_view\\_type=gallery&ga\\_search\\_query=christian%20kitsch%20gold&ref=sr\\_gallery\\_6](https://www.etsy.com/uk/listing/219087250/vintage-madonna-and-child-rare-ceramic?ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=christian%20kitsch%20gold&ref=sr_gallery_6)
20. Hitomi Hosono <https://www.hitomihosono.com/>
21. Zemer Peled <http://www.zemerpeled.com/>
22. Alberto Bustos <http://www.thisiscolossal.com/2015/06/alberto-bustos-paperlike-ceramics-imitate-sprouting-blades-of-grass/>
23. Scott Wills landscape for Samurai Jack <http://floobynooby.blogspot.co.uk/2011/03/samurai-jack-background-art.html>
24. Scott Wills landscape for Samurai Jack <https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/77476056061940088/>
25. Scott Wills landscape for Samurai Jack <https://comicvine.gamespot.com/forums/battles-7/samurai-jack-vs-spawn-757002/>