The Ageing of Little Red

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Abstract

Photographs of an infant in a red hooded dress and red shoes with a rocking horse are the origin and inspiration for this project, and from this four areas of related research emerged. These were: toys, fairy tales, fear, and human/equine relationships. These concepts became embodied in three re-occurring toy-inspired characters, the Equine Companion, the Big Bad/ Evil Old and Little Red.

The enduring significance of toys is acknowledged through an examination of the history and cultural commonality of toys, from ancient clay toys to the many and enduring uses of toys up to present times. The concepts of Donald Winnicott and Lois Rostow Kuznet link toys to the sub-conscious and the liminal and these links are important to the development of this body of work. The sculptures of contemporary artists Christina Bothwell and Undine Brod are considered with regard to their exploration of toys in their sculptural work, and these artists were influential in the project’s development.

The red hooded dress and red shoes paved the way into the realm of fairy tale. Drawing on the research of Kate Bernheimer, Michelle Aldridge, Maria Tatar, Marina Warner and Francesc Vas de Silva, the project focused on fairy tales as expressions of the subconscious through their ‘fever dream’ type narrative. Jack Zipe’s theories are essential to an understanding of where this project sits within the modern context of fairy tale art. Contemporary artists Kiki Smith and Christina Bothwell, and their Red Riding Hood influenced sculptures, are compared, concerning the relevance of fairy tale in contemporary art practices.

When exploring the realm of fairy tale an essential character emerged, that of the ‘Big Bad/Evil Old’. Consideration of this character developed into an examination of the monstrous and the fearful. Marina Warner and Maria Tatar link the Big Bad of fairy tales with both ancient and modern human expressions of fear and anxiety. This paved the way for the exploration of Big Bad/Evil Old as symbol of mortality, the most ancient of Evil Olds.
Fairy tales have the ability to present societal norms in a manner which challenge societal preconceptions. The depiction of equines in fairy tales reveal humanity’s contradictory and nonsensical attitude toward them. The shod horse, in both fairy tale and history, paved the way for a consideration of the significance of shoes, especially those coloured red and those created in glass.

Decision processes behind the use of saggar firing and the links to ‘sympathetic magic’ are examined, drawing upon Susan Stewart, James George Frazer and Richard Andree for both a contemporary and historical perspective. Smoked ceramic works and glass art are compared and contrasted in theme and technique with regard to the artist’s own works.

*The Aging of Little Red* exhibits toy-like objects within a fairy tale narrative which provide the means for the artist to subconsciously and intuitively explore personal realities. These impart insight into inter-species, societal and historical norms. This project begins with a photo and utilizes toy and fairy tale type narrative to concretize expressions of the unconscious fever dream and a consideration of mortality.
In Memory of Pepper
1986 - 2021

Dedication

Thanks to Toad without who I could never have done this.
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The Aging of Little Red

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Introduction

Once Upon a Time

fig. 1

On Rocking Horse
Personal childhood photo
1970, Te Aroha
© Mohring family

In the project The Aging of Little Red I embrace toy-like objects and fairy tale narrative as a means to subconsciously and intuitively explore personal realities. Through the ubiquitous nature inherent in toys and fairy tales, my sculptural clay and glass constructs allow me to transition from authentic personal contemplation towards a relevant discourse with a contemporary audience, providing insight into inter-species, societal and historical norms.

Photographs of myself as an infant with a rocking horse (figs 1 & 2) are the origin and inspiration for this project. The ceramic and glass pieces created for this body of work are inspired by toys and the notion of what toys represent. My connection with the rocking horse as a nostalgic childhood toy inspired me to review my life-long relationships with equines, from childhood toy to adult paddock companion. Both rocking horse and paddock companion have become the anchors for this project.
Because my clay and glass forms are foremost inspired by toys, I have become a toy maker. My toy-like creations invite speculation and emotional interaction and, although they are artefacts, they still speak about the nature of imagination and play. Susan Stewart (b.1952) states that toys provide, “…a point of beginning for narrative. The toy opens an interior world, lending itself to fantasy and privacy ...”¹ My toy-like forms are presented in scenarios which also provide the elements of narrative in an oblique and fantastical manner allowing the viewer a safe way to contemplate more challenging personal issues.

fig. 2
Infant in Red Hooded Dress & Red Shoes with Rocking Horse
Personal childhood photograph
1969, Te Aroha
© Mohring family

A girl in a red hooded dress and red shoes stands alongside a rocking horse in the second photograph (fig 2). The iconic red clothing in this photograph, which is inextricably bound to the Red Riding Hood fairy tale as well as the many fairy tales which focus on red shoes, meant that I was compelled to investigate the fairy tale phenomenon. When exploring the realm of fairy tale another essential character emerged, that is the ‘Big Bad’ or the ‘Evil Old’. This ominous character in so many fairy tales embodies fear and adversity. My three re-occurring characters, the Equine Companion, the Big Bad/Evil Old and Little Red, became vehicles for examining the nature of fear and its evolution from childhood monsters through the changing face of fear in maturity.

adulthood and old age. The synergy between the surreal nature of fairy tales with their iconic but one-dimensional characters, combined with toys and the access toys provide to the liminal space of play and memory, created a fertile structure to explore my subconscious.

Fairy tales provide recognisable structures and iconic images but also demand the absence of logic, they embrace non-reality akin to a fever dream. As this project evolved from the captured historical reality of a photograph towards the realm of fairy tale there was a shift from perceived ‘fact’ towards intentional ‘fiction’. This movement provided means for the unconscious to emerge and reveal new insights. Exploring reality through fiction creates an augmented narrative. In practical terms this means that this body of work has become a series of forms with different material realities which provide new insights and challenge previous assumptions. This change in the structure of reality also plays with the perceived linear nature of time, which is an unnatural structure in the nature of remembering. The immediacy of the tactile photograph contains the memory that it depicts. Memory leaps from moment to moment; it is recurring, re-imagined and evolving or devolving, and this nature has more in common with the fairy tale world than the mundane one.
The rocking horse in the photographs (figs 1&2) and the present equine reality (fig 3) have provided the anchor for the organic development of ideas developed in this body of work and this supporting dissertation. In the first chapter, *The Attraction of Toys*, I acknowledge the history and cultural commonality of toys, from ancient clay toys to the many and enduring uses of toys throughout the ages. I link toys and the notion of play to the liminal world and the subconscious, drawing on Donald Winnicott’s (1896-1971) ideas of the ‘transitional object’.\(^2\) Lois Rostow Kuznet links the exploration of human anxieties and fears through play and toys within literature in *When Toys come Alive* (1994).\(^3\) She also provides a contemporary expression of the understanding and importance of toys while expanding aspects of the transitional object to those which reconcile childhood and adult longings.

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Toys as a conduit for unconscious exploration of inner selves can be seen in both the works of Christina Bothwell (b.1960) and Undine Brod (b.1974). In my work, embracing the toy theme allows my creations to continue to evolve beyond their initial intention. My subject and methodology acknowledge the importance of play in society and personal creativity and also allow me to experiment further with the notion of what a toy is.

The photo *Infant with Red Hooded Dress and Rocking Horse* (fig 2), revealed associations which evolved into the second chapter, *Insidious Fairy Tales*. Here I acknowledge the history of the fairy tale and consolidate the essential aspects of fairy tale which are reflected in my own work. There is a dream nature to fairy tales that requires spontaneous unconscious decision-making to fill in narrative gaps as the logic of causality remains elusive. Kate Bernheimer refers to this as ‘intuitive logic’. Through their dream and sometimes nightmare nature, fairy tales, like toys, can provide access to a personal and societal subconscious.

I draw on literary researchers such as Michelle Aldridge, Maria Tatar (b.1945), Marina Warner (b.1946) and Francisco Vas de Silva when exploring conceptual fairy tale analysis. Jack Zipes (b.1937) sees two distinct tendencies in the way contemporary artists have expressed their fairy tale-inspired art. One he calls ‘conflicted mosaics’ and this is the classification to which I feel most affiliated. Contemporary artists have embraced the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood*. I consider Kiki Smith’s (b.1954) sculpture *Daughter* (1999) and compare Christina Bothwell’s sculpture *Little Red Riding Hood* (2016) regarding how both artists interpret and visualize the monstrous.

Reflections on the nature of fairy tales led to the concept of the Big Bad or Evil Old and so to my third chapter, *Fear and Fearful*. Trying to understand the place of the monster in fairy tale meant exploring the nature of fear and anxiety and how my perception of fear has changed with age; from external monsters to internal demons. Marina Warner and Maria Tatar were important in my understanding of the links between the Big Bad/Evil Old of fairy tale and human expressions of fear and anxiety.

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In trying to put form to fears, I delved into the origins of the Jack-in-the-Box toy as an appropriate choice in which to depict the Big Bad/Evil Old in my work.

The role of the unconscious in fairy tales combined with artistic expressions of existential angst led me to consider the work of Leonora Carrington (1917-2011), specifically as expressed in her painting *Surgeon* (1978). The link between surrealism and existentialism is examined and clarified with the help of Clarise Samuel’s comparative writing. I compare Leonora Carrington’s work with my own depictions of age and mortality. When exploring the nature of anxiety and mortality through the parallel hollowness of clay vessels and fairy tale characters I began to see parallels with the Jungian concept of the shadow. The toy forms and the fairy tale structure have provided recognised narrative means to explore these fears and anxiety. Some of this angst has been explicitly and intentionally explored, while other fears have subconsciously emerged through the creation process.

The fourth chapter Poor Dumb Beasts turns from the emphasis on Little Red and towards her equine companion; that is, I consider the place of equines within the contexts of previously chapters. I begin by reflecting on depictions of equines as rocking horses and review how the iconic rocking horse has been employed by collaborative artists Michal Elmgrenn (b.1961) and Ingar Dragset (b.1969). I then examine the equine in the context of fairy tales and the paradoxical way they are portrayed. Personal history and societal depictions made me ponder how the equine would perceive the Big Bad/Evil Old. Finally, the ageing of myself and my horse meant that I face issues of mortality and grief. I reference *Mourning Animals: Rituals and Practices Surrounding Animal Death* edited by Margo de Mello, and *Vigor Mortis* by Kate Berridge.

In this project, I focus on human equine interactions and dependencies which directly arise from personal experience. These experiences provide a small window into larger human/non-human relationships. The importance of my repeated depiction of shoes in examining historical and contemporary human equine relationships is examined with reference to Isabel Cardigos. The representation of equines in this project developed from initial toy-like and generic portrayals, toward depictions of an equine as an individual. Alongside this growth in equine understanding, my developing Little Red character is forced to question whether it is she who is the Big Bad/Evil Old.
This new understanding paves the way to an examination of a new and shared Big Bad/Evil Old which is mortality, the most ancient of Evil Olds.

In the fifth Chapter, Naked Clay, Glass Shards, I concentrate on the decision processes behind my use of saggar firing and the inclusion of cast glass. I examine the parallels between ‘Sympathetic Magic’ and my saggar firing process. Once again I refer to Susan Stewart but also draw upon James George Frazer (1854-1941) for a historical perspective. I compare and contrast the smoked ceramic works of Etta Zuritsky Winigrad (b.1936) with my own smoke-marked pieces. I then contemplate my decision to include cast glass pieces within this project, referring to glass-artist Christine Bothwell who has also embraced toy symbolism. The relevance of shoes is again considered regarding the medium of glass. In conclusion, it is ultimately my chosen mediums which bind the threads of this project’s story, beginning with a photo and utilizing toy and fairy tale type narrative, into concretized expressions of the unconscious fever dream and the consideration of mortality.
The Enduring Significance of Toys

When comparing ancient toys with their modern counterparts the commonality of form and function provides touching awareness of a shared human experience, still palpable despite the difference of ages. This human intimacy with toys and play exists as a mutual familiarity outside time and place. Maria and Dion Sommer, in their survey of ancient Athenian toys, note the cross-cultural importance of toys when they write, “…Toys join a short list of earliest human artefacts, and play – with or without toys – seems to be universal among ancient humans.”

Anthony Burton asserts that toys only became the focus for serious study in European history from 1900 when the Child Study Movement began a significant academic interest in child development.

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However, the importance of play and games as a social and cultural phenomenon was recorded in theoretical writings in the West dating back to the 18th century. Philosophers Immanuel Kant (1776-77) and Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) wrote about the importance of games, and French anthropologist and philosopher Charles Brougere (b.1955) wrote; “Toys deserve to be studied for themselves since they are important objects for what they reveal of a culture.”

7 Charles Brougere, *Binquedo e Cultura*/Games and Culture, (Sao Paulo Cortez, 2010), 44.

Historically toys and toy-like objects have had, and continue to have, other uses beyond the initial contemporary understanding of use in children’s play. Toy-like creations have also been utilised in rituals of fertility, worship, funeral customs, the veneration of ancestors, and as objects believed to have magical powers to protect or aid. However, ultimately it is through interaction that toys allow access to the liminal world of play. Play provides direct access to an inner life which can provide insights into our sense of self and what we hold as dear. The toy’s identity is incorporeal although the object itself is material, and the act of play is to immerse the player in the liminal world. Here we can draw on the ideas of Donald Winnicott and his ideas of the transitional object. The term transitional object refers to an object, such as a toy, which has the quality to be both real and imaginary at the same time.

fig. 6
*Abandoned boy holding a stuffed toy animal amid ruins following German aerial bombing of London*

Toni Frissell
1940
Photograph

In this project, toys are used as both personal means to access the unconscious mind and to provide a commonality with which to invite conversation with the audience. The access toys offer to the unconscious realm is apparent both in the creation of the individual toys and the changing relationships between the completed clay and glass toys. These relationships reveal themselves continuously: from when the ideas are created on paper, formed in clay, unloaded from kilns, stored together, rearranged on shelves, and presented as scenarios within the gallery space.

The act of play enables us to act out scenarios where we are the one ultimately in control of a situation whereas outside play life, we are defenceless. By abstracting fears and dangers and reducing them in size to toy form, these fears can be manipulated in such a way that power is claimed back from the authoritative and untouchable other.

Lois Rostow Kuznets states that toys used in play mirror and reveal, “…the relatively powerless relationship of human beings to known or unseen forces: their dreadful vulnerability.”

Memories of childhood toys provide a shared history and commonalities, where focus is on the toy and only indirectly on the people, which provides a safe platform for sharing personal memories. In this way, toys provide a safe means to acknowledge not only personal experiences but also social bias which when approached directly can seem bleak and insurmountable.

This body of toy-like characters has given me method and medium to expose personal and societal anxieties and fears. Through the creation of clay and glass images, and with an intention to explore the developing relationship between the child/human and the equine, an underlying current of disquiet has emerged. My project explores this space of disquiet, the space Lois Rostow refers to as the “…marginal, liminal, potentially carnival world,”¹⁰ of toys.

IMAGE REDACTED

https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/full-length-portrait-of-a-young-girl-standing-by-a-news-photo/3224270

fig 7
Portrait of a young girl standing beside a Christmas tree with toys including rocking horse and Jack-in-the-box
Historic Photo Archive Getty Images. Harney County. Oregon, USA 1905

Toys in Contemporary Art Practice

Toys provide a universal ancient and contemporary base from which artists draw inspiration. The role of toys as a conduit for the unconscious exploration of vulnerable inner selves can be seen in the works of Christina Bothwell. Her toy-like sculptures concretize the liminal connection between human and animal evoked in the act of play. Christina Bothwell describes her toy-inspired pieces as “… lost souls come to life; unanchored in time.”11 Her piece, Centaur, captures the moment when toy and child are united, a moment outside time and place, a unifying human experience which is bound to childhood yet remains powerful in memory as we age.

Undine Brod creates sculptures which challenge “…ideas about and relationships with the familiar.”  

In her series of sculptures, *Reinventing Childhood* (1997 – 2009), she embraces the nature of childhood play; where rules of play are liable to spontaneous change. Undine Brod believes this continual change creates friction and disquiet, and that toys can become discarded or re-imagined in unpredictable ways as roles are changed and new characters emerge in the developing children’s narrative. Combining recycled toys with the aged nature of the metal additions give them an air of overly loved, but ultimately discarded play things. She has described her sculptures as “…worn down and on the edge of existence.”

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Like Undine Brod, my body of work balances the familiar (that is toy and fairy tale), with the unsettling eccentric. Initially offering the recognisable and gentle my scenarios intend to create disquiet through unexpected mediums, relationships, precarious placement, and the portrayal of frailty and age. This disruption of the soothing norm is to create tension which mirrors the angst of contemporary life and invites a re-evaluation of the familiar. Lois Rostow Kuznets recognizes that toys, in combination with narrative, are able to transcend the mundane world “…in significant ways, representing not only human hopes, needs, and desires but human anxieties and terrors as well.”

My ceramic toy-inspired objects have precedence in the ancient clay toys which have been excavated throughout the world. The ancient medium of my contemporary works, along with their toy-like nature, allows them to become ahistorical objects which transcend the mundane world and linear time and so links them to the ‘other’ world of the fairy tale. I recognise the fragmentary nature of narrative my sculptures offer and fairy tales contain the same inviting and disjointed narrative. As Susan Stewart states, fairy tales are “… the beginning of an entirely new temporal world, parallel to … the world of everyday reality.”

Chapter Two:
Insidious Fairy Tales

In Search of Ever After

“…fairy tales survived, irrepresibly, and I have become even more drawn to them as I have grown older, because they began to represent childhood, that vividness of experience in the midst of inexperience, the capacity for daydreaming and wonder. I have since discovered that there is nothing in the least childlike about fairy tales…” 16

Marina Warner

fig. 13
Little Red Riding Hood On Wolf
German pull toy
1910
33 x 33 cm

The infant in red seen in the photograph (fig 1, Chapter 1) drew me to the realm of fairy tale. The child in the red hooded dress immediately alludes to the aged but never forgotten tale of Little Red Riding Hood and so opens up a narrative into the vast world of the fairy tale. From their oral origins to their literary heirs, fairy tales are filled with intentional and unconscious social bias and disturbing malice. The oral folk history from which the literary fairy tale sprang evoked a world of bawdy and subversive escapism. These oral tales which came to be known as fairy tales were recorded and adapted by notable collectors such as Marie-Catherine Baronne d’Aulnoy (1650/51-1705) who coined the name ‘fairy tale’, Charles Perrault (1628-1703)17 and Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859).18

16 Marina Warner, From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers, (Great Britain: Chatto & Windus Ltd, 1994), xiv.
18 Jacob & Wilhelm Grimm, Die Kinder und Hausmarchen/Children and Household Tales, (1812-1857).
There is a similarity in many fairy tales from various cultures alluding to a shared human condition and a commonality of the societal need for these tales. Paradoxically, another important defining characteristic of fairy tale is variation, “…each folk story exists in the universe of its variants, and no single variant ever represents a tale.” 19 Each re-editing, retelling or re-imagining of a fairy tale sheds light on the culture of the time of publication, but the sense of wonderment in these tales is essential to each retelling. When Western fairy tales became nursery tales they were rewritten and reinterpreted as morality tales. Their writers unconsciously revealed layers of societal norms and the partialities of their age. However, these morals always sit rather uncomfortably over tales whose origins are far from the nursery and whose untameable nature cannot be suppressed.

Rooted in dream-like incongruity, the essential magical nature of the fairy tale world paradoxically disconcerts and soothes with its familiarity and absurdity. The fairy tale narrative defies mundane logic, leaving empty spaces which create the necessity for wild flights of subconscious associations. Kate Bernheimer refers to this as “…intuitive logic, a kind of nonsensical sense.” 20 The incomprehensibility of the otherness of the fairy tale realm provides a safe platform to express real-world fears. Magic and the fantastical, dress fairy tales up as nonsense tales of no consequence, but they reveal much of the culture from which they have arisen. The acceptance of fairy tale magic, with its strangely powerful and unreasonable nature, is an acceptance of the unconscious. Marina Warner perceives the trappings of fairy tale as “…a form of camouflage, making it possible to utter harsh truths, to say what you dare.” 21


Fairy Tale Elements

There are repeating elements within the fairy tale realm which have resonated with my project. One of these elements Kate Bernheimer refers to in her article *Fairy Tale is Form, Form is Fairy Tale*, as flatness.\(^{22}\) By flatness she is referring to the shallowness of the protagonists, the main characters are given simple emotions and the supporting cast live simply as props. The survivors of the catastrophe and cruelty dished up in fairy tales do not go on to suffer further neurosis and emotional scarring. They are instead abstractions; princes and princesses, lost children, repentant wives, penniless tricksters and stoic wanderers. Kate Bernheimer likens fairy tale characters to silhouettes. A.S. Bryant describes fairy tale characters as ‘types’ that slot into fairy tale circumstances interchangeably.\(^{23}\) These shallow protagonists allow the reader to insert their own understandings into the hollow shell provided and accept fairy tales’ nightmarish inconsistencies. I use the term hollow rather than flat because it is a synonym which relates so well to the methodologies of working within the clay medium where hollow forms are a fact of the creation process.

Whether it is Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White or Hansel and Gretel, nothing is gained without first encountering the ‘Dark Woods’. Sara Maitland in her book *Gossip from the Forest* celebrates the essential nature of the forest in fairy tales, the place of adversity, terror and wonder, magical escape, adventure, and transformation. In true fairy tale paradox, although forests are a source of primal anxiety they also provide a place to hide and be safe. The fear of the forest is the fear of being alone and the fear of the hidden proximity of the Big Bad/Evil Old. My embracing of the Dark Woods is also a symbol of transformation and is expressed through carved illustrations, tree-like appendages and tree morphing characteristics of my sculptural narratives, (see figs 20 & 23). The tree motive is also part of the hidden process of making, where my support constructs are in the form of trees which are essentially crutches for the pieces through firings and then appear as forest pieces.

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In this body of work, the blackness caused by the saggar firing technique is predominant and describes not only the process through which these pieces were created but also the shadow of the forest in which they walk. The significance of saggar firing is discussed further in Chapter Five.

Another essential quality of the fairy tale world is the use of an extremely limited colour palate. This means when colours are mentioned they are of particular significance. The colours which can be described as fairy tale’s primary colours are white, black and red. Max Lüthi attests to this codified colouration in fairy tales but also includes the importance of the metals steel, silver and gold.\(^{24}\) In the realm of fairy tale, red is associated with shoes, blood, roses, apples, lips and, of course, Little Red Riding Hood. I have embraced the significance of red through my limited and controlled use of it, intending to making red more expressive when contrasted with the organic smoked ceramic forms.\(^{25}\)

Arguably the most essential character in the fairy tale realm is that of the antagonist; the Monster, the Big Bad, the Evil Old. Chapter 3 explores the nature of the fairy tale antagonist and how this archetype influences this body of work.

**Conceptual Fairy Tales Analysis**

Since the 19th Century, scholars, historians and psychologists have shown interest in the literary fairy tale form and a range of conceptual viewpoints have emerged. The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales lists the main concepts in fairy tale analysis as: “folklorist, structuralist, literary, psychoanalytic, historicist, Marxist, and feminist”.\(^{26}\) In this ability to be interpreted in countless ways lies the essence of the fairy tale and a reason for our lasting fascination with them.


In my project, toys and fairy tale inspire imagery which provide nebulous recognitions on which the viewer can wind their own narrative. My pieces lie within a recognisable format which allows me to extrapolate societal relevance through personal experiences. I remain fascinated less by searching for truth and understanding in fairy tales, but instead by their ability to reflect and maintain a relevant narrative for so many for so long.

Fairy Tales in Creative Practice

Fairy Tale and Fine Arts

Author and researcher Jack Zipes sees two distinct tendencies in the way contemporary artists have expressed their fairy tale-inspired art. The first he calls ‘re-making’ and ‘re-creating’ classic tales. These are works which explicitly reference the fairy tale genre. The second he calls ‘conflicted mosaics’ by which he refers to art which portrays fragments of recognizable imagery from fairy tales. These conflicted mosaics rearrange recognizable and iconic fairy tale fragments in ways which disconcert as the recognisable is presented in an unfamiliar landscape. These works do not attempt to re-tell a single fairy tale but instead create something new which is still recognized as fairy tale. This is the classification in which I feel most affiliated and in which my works sit most comfortably.

fig. 14
Little Red Riding Hood
J.W. Smith
published in Italian Folktales
17th century
Public domain

Embracing Little Red

Jack Zipes has dedicated an entire book to the girl in red, entitled *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, in which he presents a collection of versions of the tale. These span 300 years and illustrate the resilience of the tale. Jack Zipes delights in the ways the tale has been re-invented and re-formed. He embraces the tale for its core ambiguity, its constant re-imaginings, and its determination to remain relevant, and so do I.

IMAGE REDACTED

https://i.pinimg.com/564x/0c/89/18/0c89189d836ea38a3f7040bce985f243.jpg

fig. 15
*Daughter*
Kiki Smith
1999
122cm

Kiki Smith embraces the fairy tale in her untitled sculpture, *Daughter* (1999). The cape immediately identifies this sculpture as *Little Red*, but her furry face evokes fables of werewolves or the terrors and sadness of the Victorian freak show. The twist of the furry-faced beast-child dressed in red asks many questions about the labelling of human and beast. Who is the father of this child, who is innocent and who is villain, if anyone? This sculpture offers a disturbing duality where distinctions between villains and heroines have become irrelevant.

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Christina Bothwell’s clay and glass sculptures often question, and sometimes disturb, and she is unafraid to explore vulnerability, in this case on behalf of the wolf. Her sculpture *Little Red Riding Hood* asks many questions; has the wolf eaten the child, or is she simply letting her wolf nature free while her inner child remains safe? The whole of the figure’s body is the substantial red dress, as if their entire identity is entrapped within the title of *Little Red* and both the wolf and the child are unable to escape the inevitability of the iconic fairy tale. This questions who is the true monster and what it is to be monstrous. The nature of the monstrous is deeply relevant in my own body of work and is examined further in Chapter Three.

My collection of *Little Reds* depict her in different stages of her life; from an infant, (before her red hood), and into maturity and old age. I refer to each of these stages chronologically as *Infant Red, Hooded Red, Grown Red* and *Aging Red.* I depict each stage of *Little Red’s* life through the symbology of toys. Toys create a fissure in our mundane world and invite daydream and speculation. They are by nature both ancient and modern, partly tangible and partly from the realm of other, and provide ideal means to explore the notions of fear and the otherness presented in fairy tale.
In this project as *Little Red* ages, her hollowness becomes more obvious. Her bird-like features which begin depicting the vulnerability of a hatchling develop into a mask akin to the historic plague doctors, both protective and frightening and which have once again become relevant to our times. Her defining red hood becomes smaller as her character develops beyond the constraints of the iconic fairy tale trope and she can no longer hide behind the ‘ever after’ of the children’s tale. My re-imagined Little Red is not the victim, but realises she is herself the perpetrator of the violence; she carries a history of violence on her back and seems unable to untangle herself from its grip. She emerges from her childhood dream of herself and her imaginary friend into a reality of half-truths and unease where self-realisation offers little serenity.

fig. 17
Developing Little Red
Bronwyn Mohring
2021-2022
Saggar fired clay & found objects
© The author
Jungian Scholar Marie-Louise von Franz understands fairy tales as “…the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes.”

In my own work, by freeing fairy tale tropes from their literary confines they become containers which allowed my subconscious processes to emerge. Further, by forming these fairy tale fragments into the guise of toys, this sub-conscious licence continues after the physical creation process and into the arranging and assembling of scenarios, when new relationships emerge.

I don’t think fairy tales can be manipulated quite as we initially intend, as their basic nature is that of a fever dream and to manipulate them too fully is to tame their wild and disturbing nature. But when working with fairy tales new insights emerge unconsciously in other mysterious and unsettling ways. Fairy tales wait quietly, ready to bite when we mistake them for tame. They bite and say no, I am not your tame house cat, I am the Big Bad, the Evil Old, the ultimately unknowable.

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Chapter Three:

Fear and Fearful

“To court fear and dread, to dwell on their catalysts with greedy intensity, represents a quest for catharsis through sensation…” 30 Marina Warner

Searching for the Big Bad/Evil Old

As discussed in the previous chapter, one essential character of the world of fairy tale is the antagonist which I have labelled the Big Bad or Evil Old. This essay uses the terminology of Big Bad and Evil Old because their historical and repeated use in fairy tales has given the terms authenticity without any gender bias. This Big Bad/Evil Old provides an easily identifiable but ill-defined vessel in which the participant, (reader, listener or viewer) can embroider details of their own vision of the monstrous. This character has also become an important and re-occurring source of inspiration in this body of work and has led me to examine what it is to be fearful and how the nature of our fears changes with age.

fig. 18
Gruß vom Krampus
Artist Unknown
Postcard, early 20th C
Public domain

Fear creates a rush, a natural high of adrenaline and so, paradoxically, fear can behave like an anaesthetic against what it is we fear. Fashions throughout fairy tale history have brought us a plethora of terrifying yet seductive Big Bads and Evil Olds. These fairy tale fears and monsters have mirrored personal and social phobias throughout history while providing the means to imagine their defeat. The Evil Old/Big Bad characters in fairy tales are creatures of shadow and smoke, made into stories by adults, imagined by children and depicted by illustrators. They are cannibals and cravers and irrational and insatiable and eternal. As Maria Tatar states, “Fairy tales are up close and personal, mixing fact with fantasy to tell us about our deepest anxieties and desires.”  

IMAGE REDACTED

i.pinimg.com/564x/b4/d0/ab/b4d0ab7a2d5675d8eadc067cf6abebe71.jpg

fig. 19
Toy
Christina Bothwell
Corning Museum of Glass
cast glass, smoked clay & found objects

The faces of the Monster or Big Bad lie in our private imaginings, but they are not just personal demons, they are also integral to shared cultural imagination. Our understanding of the fairy tale Big Bad/Evil Old is rooted in our instinctive wariness of the unknown. These fears and projections stem from our sense of vulnerability; the knowledge of our precarious and finite state of being. Coping with angst by creating objects in the form of toys as symbols and containers for these fears is a method to contain the intangible nature of fear. The intangible becomes tangible, the elusive is concretized. My intention is to contain the subtle nature of angst in toy-like vessels which invite speculation and manipulation rather than inspiring dread.

Fascination with and examination of the monstrous may seem odd in a time of genuine fear, but as Marina Warner asserts in her book *No Go the Bogey Man*, it is a lasting method of facing down true menace. She goes on to state the possibility that “…investing ourselves with the face and features of the bogeyman … may have become the most favoured way of confronting fear in times of anxiety and disarray.”  

fig. 20  
*Mock Horse & Jack Carriage, pieces from Grown Red*  
Bronwyn Mohring  
2021-2022  
Saggar fired clay, cast glass & found objects  
30 x 45 x 15cm approx.  
© The author  

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The Faces of the Evil Old in Toy and Tale

The ‘toyness’ explored in this project to portray the Big Bad/Evil Old is inspired by the Jack-in-the-box. There is a popular myth that the expression Jack-in-the-box comes from the 12th century pious Christian, Sir John Schorne. He was said to have captured the Devil in his boot and this has been claimed as the origin of the toy. This is unlikely, but it does show the historic links people have perceived between the Jack-in-the-Box character and devilish characters. In France these boxes are called *diable en boîte*, that is, *devil-in-a-box*.

They are also known as Punch boxes, after the violent vintage puppet show. The Jack-in-the-box is perhaps the first fright toy, and both as a child’s toy and as an original Big Bad, Jack has impressive credentials.\(^{33}\)

\[\text{fig. 21}\]

*Christmas Dream*

Jules Travernier

1872

Public domain

\(^{33}\) The earliest documented creator of this mechanical toy was a German clockmaker in the 1500s. His original wooden box contained a comical devil and produced a simple melody. In 2005 the toy Jack-in-the-box was recognised as iconic and inducted to the American National Toy Hall of Fame, which was established in 1998, and is housed in the Strong National Museum of Play, NY.

Paula Swenson, *History of the Jack-in-the Box Toy*.

https://www.ehow.co.uk/info_8550355_ancient-roman-kites.html
In this project, although Jack’s face is never seen his broken box is a constant reminder in each narrative scenario. The ever-present empty box and the inability to separate the monster from the self is the heavy burden of the Aging Red character and so the ageing self. My perception and depictions of the Big Bad evolve from the juxtaposition between fear and fascination toward representations of inner anxiety and dread. This can be seen in my initial scenario where the Big Bad/Evil Old in the form of a glass Jack-in-the-box fascinates Infant Red. Whereas in the Aging Red scenario, Little Red has become entwined with her Big Bad/Evil Old in the form of a hollow darkness within her and the broken Jack-less-box appears more like a coffin.

Existential Angst and the Monstrous

Whether our fears are based upon the amalgam of destruction we are capable of, or the internal deterioration of our fragile bodies, contemporary Big Bads and Evil Olds are overwhelming, real and inevitable. In the inescapable psychological angst of our age, the realm of fairy tale allows us to revel in the defeat of the insurmountable. Fairy tales may offer hope for the poor and downtrodden but they are one-eyed and their harsh realities mirror and mock our own cultural flaws and biases. Michelle Aldredge suggests the fairy tale collections should “…come with warning labels: Individual results may vary.”

Existential philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre approach angst as a human experience which is deeper than fear. They propose that fear is a response to a definite, identifiable threat, whereas angst is a response to an indefinite threat, one that is nowhere in particular, but everywhere. This angst is also associated with fear from within, the indeterminate threat of our inevitable mortality. Heidegger’s angst is an “ineffable emotion of metaphysical proportions,” which can be compared to attempts to articulate

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36 The use of the term angst was first attributed to Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). Later the term reappeared in works by Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre & Martin Heidegger.

oblique and irrational subjective yet universally sympathetic experiences. Anxiety turns away from depictions of the monster towards a more metaphysical depression which is born of pondering life’s briefness and comparative absurdity. Umberto Eco suggests that depictions of the monstrous in art attempt to “… remind us that, despite the optimism of certain metaphysicians, there is something implacably and sadly malign about this world.”

It is commonly understood that fairy tale characters go through many nightmare trials. It is just as commonly accepted that, at the end of the tale, good will triumph as these trials melt away. However, there are lesser-known fairy tales which offer no such respite. In the Grimm Brothers’ tale, *The Knapsack, the Hat and the Horn*, the main character, whom we believe is the hero (as is the normal shape of things), uses his magical horn to destroy everything in sight until he stands as the lone observer of this devastation and pronounces himself King. In a particularly bleak version of the tale quoted in Maria Tatar’s book, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, the tale ends, “… then he was King all by himself, and he blew on his horn until he died.” The dreamscape of the fairy tale form is unable to contain the bleakness in this tale. The magic portrayed is a thin curtain which fails to conceal the worst of humanity’s perverse nature. This bleak portrayal of humanity stands as a warning which is perhaps even more relevant now than it was when it was first published. Popular modern renditions of fairy tales predominantly end with victory for the protagonist and retribution against the Evil Old/Big Bad. However, some bleak tales seem to subvert this pattern and slip through the cracks as if to remind us that the untrustworthy nature of our existence cannot be fully exorcised, even in the fairy tale world.

Fairy tales speak the language not only of the unconscious but the fear and irrationality of the fever dream. They are unstable entities. Sometimes we strive to form meaning in their metaphors and symbols, when what they truly offer us is the truth of the random and chaotic nature of mortal life.

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The Mantle of Angst in Creative Practice

A consideration of the role of the unconscious in fairy tales as well as an interest in artistic expressions of existential angst has led me to consider the work of the surrealist artist Leonora Carrington (1917-2011). As a surrealist, she rejected a purely rational vision of life and instead valued the truths emerging from the unconscious and the dream state. Leonora Carrington often portrays issues of ageing, transformation and ephemerality in her intensely personal visions.

fig. 22
*Surgeon*
Leonora Carrington
1978
oil & tempura on canvas
91.4 x 45.7cm
Post-war Leonora referred to herself as an old lady although she was only approaching thirty, and her work often portrays her understanding of the world through this lens. “I seek to understand death in order to have less fear.” Leonora embraced universal fear and later in her life she labelled her condition that of “honourable decrepitude” claiming this a vocation rather than a powerless surrender. She utilized dream and nightmare imagery to put features to her fears and escape the mundane in her quest for personal truths. Clarise Samuels, in her comparison of surrealism and existentialism, says “... the most significant relationship between the two systems is the individual’s creative experience of anguish.”

In Leonora Carrington’s painting Surgeon, a mummy-like physician, albeit a blind one, prepares for imminent surgery. Her fascination with observances of death, beliefs in other realities and respect for the dream realm have continually inspired her. In this painting, the mummy/bird’s tail-like appendage is reminiscent of an umbilical cord and a hospital drip line, but it drops disconnected to the floor. This bird person, whether it be a blind surgeon or enshrouded mummy who refuses to play dead, is a perturbing play on sickness, anxiety and loss of control.

My work explores the open narrative of the fairy tale through toys to examine the changing relationship we have with fear as we age. When the identity of a perceived threat remains hidden, its nature remains ambiguous and this uncertainty creates anxiety. In these works, the relationship between the threat and the threatened is also ambiguous, their physical nearness creating tension. The bird-like unformed Infant Red has the features of an underdeveloped hatchling. Yet later in the narrative, Aging Red wears a bird-like mask reminiscent of a plague doctor’s mask and, like Leonora Carrington’s painting, her portrayal alludes to hospital trappings and the anxiety they invoke (see fig 23).

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41 “I am an old lady who has lived through a lot...I no longer have any of my teeth.” Leonora Carrington, letter to Henri Parisot, En Bas, (Paris: Eric Losfield, 1973). 
43 Leonora Carrington, Leonora Carrington and the International Avant Garde, 141.
When exploring the nature of anxiety through the parallel hollowness of clay vessels and fairy tale characters, I began to see parallels with the Jungian concept of the shadow. The charcoal-coloured hollow creations in this collection seem in their darkness to be formed partially of shadow. Relationships emerged between metaphysical existential angst and the literal empty vessel, and perhaps also between the physical shadow within the vessels and the notion of the psychological shadow. Jung has defined the shadow to be the whole of the unconscious.\textsuperscript{45} The understanding of the shadow as a conduit to the individual unconscious is the most relevant to this body of work. Marie Louise von Franz also begins her analysis of fairy tales with the assumption that “…fairy tales mirror collective unconscious psychic processes.” \textsuperscript{46}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{fig_23.png}
\caption{I.V Lines \newline Part of the Ageing Red Triptych \newline Bronwyn Mohring \newline 2021-2022 \newline 43 x 32 x 21cm approx. \newline © The author}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{46} Marie-Louise von Franz, \textit{The Interpretation of Fairy Tales}, 137.
If there is a collective unconscious thought revealed in fairy tales, then it is a mutable one. The predominant theme emerging throughout fairy tales past and present is their persistent contradictory nature. They emerge as ethically disparate and illustrate the futility of attempting to assert concrete order and meaning into such an ancient elusive landscape. Common renderings of these tales through their tired tropes create a safer space in which outcomes are foreseen and the tension therein is necessarily brief. But in lesser known and older, less ‘tamed’ tales there is little such security. This danger and unpredictability alternately attract and repels us, offering more questions than answers and challenging our complacency and social norms. Their unresolved and uncomfortable nature is their strength. The fairy tale mix of comfort and discomfort is embraced in this body of work. The sculpture’s beauty is not the beauty of perfection, it is scarred and it is charred. The characters are recognisable but the parts they play in the sculptural narrative are unclear and relationships are uncomfortable.
Chapter Four:
Poor Dumb Beasts

The Recurring Equine

In this project alongside the Red Riding Hood character stands her steadfast Equine Companion. This companion has developed from a broad understanding of the generic equine family and emerged as a distinct individual. In this chapter I begin by revisiting the focus of the previous chapters through the eyes of the equine: The Equine as Toy, The Equine in Fairy Tale, and the Monster Emerging, referring to the human/equine encounter and where this has led me. But before this, I need to touch on the place of the equine in humanity’s history as well as the place of an individual horse in my own. Gloria Austin, the president of the Equine Heritage Institute, summarizes the importance of the horse/human relationship when she says: “We have had 6,000 years of history with the horse and only 100 with the automobile.”

47 Gloria Austin, Equine Heritage Institute.
The interlocked history of humans and horses dates from pre-history, recorded in prehistoric burial sites, cave drawings and sculptures, and continues to the present day.

Australian artist and writer Madeleine Boyd understands uses Karen Barad’s term ‘intra-action’ to describe multispecies entanglements as “mutual emergence and transformation”. A horse who is humanized and an equestrian are different from an undomesticated horse and an un-equined human. Both must adapt their nature/culture and adjust their ways of being to communicate successfully with each other. With a 6,000-year history between us, the equine is instrumental in who we have become, not only through human/equine collision but through thousands of individual intimacies. My relationship with equines may have started with a toy rocker but it is now centred around my horses; the most influential being Pepper, a very old standardbred. Whether intentional or not, all my depictions of equines are influenced by my relationship with her and all interactions and responses I have to equine art are influenced by what I have learned and continue to learn from her.

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fig. 25
*My Wish*
Undine Brod
2012
Brick Clay, wood, wax
38 x 18 x 48 cm
© Undine Brod Arts
The initial and essential Equine Companion to my Red Riding Hood character in this project is the rocking horse (see fig 1). The earliest rocking horse known to still exist is an elm wood horse which is said to have belonged to King Charles the 1st and dates from 1610. Initially, the owning of a rocking horse was limited to the wealthy and elite. Later it became a universal play toy and is still a common children’s toy, although its horse nature has expanded to many and varied forms and materials. This led to my study of many rocking horse images from around the globe. They are seen in modest forms in children’s bedrooms, as ornaments on Etsy, as elite decorations in the houses of the wealthy, in antique stores and museums, and as contemporary works of art.
I began my research into the historic rocking horse and other equine ride-on toys by questioning how the equines were, and often still are, portrayed. What became apparent in images of so many contemporary and historic rocking horses is the elaborate metal wear in these play-horses’ mouths, and the normalisation of metal contrivances to control horses this illustrates. I began my thinking of the Big Bad/Evil Old from the point of view of our equine companions. When rocking horses and carousel horses are depicted with huge metal bits and the mouths agape in pain, or necks frozen in hyperflexion, then these elements become normalised. If our toy horses are depicted in pain and fear these images become part of our subconscious acceptance of what is normal.

IMAGE REDACTED

fig. 27
Untitled
*Toys of Early New Zealand.*
Peggy Armstrong &
Denise Jackson
Contemporary artists have recognised the iconic rocking horse as a means to question societal norms. One such public sculpture is *Powerless Structures* by Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset. On a London plinth initially intended for an equestrian monument and surrounded by historical military sculpture, a child on a rocking horse both acknowledges and challenges the perceptions of history and commemoration. *Powerless Structures*, instead of romanticising military male leaders, celebrates childhood while challenging whether these military male role models are relevant in contemporary lives.\(^{49}\)

One of the statues in Trafalgar square with which *Powerless Structures* is intended to be directly compared is an equestrian statue of Charles I. King Charles sits on a horse with a hyper-flexed neck and gaping mouth with large extravagant metal bits.

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The Fairy Tale Equine

In the Brothers Grimm tale, *The Goose Girl*, the heroine is a princess who is gifted a talking horse. This horse is unique in the realm of fairy tale in that he is given a name, Falada. Alas, this horse is killed and his head is cut off for fear of him revealing the deceit of the antagonist in the tale. However, the horse's head still speaks although it is mounted on a wall. At the tale’s conclusion, the antagonist is revealed to be deceitful and meets their end, and the heroine is finally rescued and revealed as the true princess. These are, of course, all expected fairy tale tropes. There is no mention of the fate of the be-headed Falada.

In *The Refusal*, Falada is depicted as a saddled and bridled white horse. The chosen advisor to the heroine princess is still ridden with a bit and reins.
These accoutrements have become so normalised it has become inconceivable that humans could communicate with horses without them, even in the magical world of the fairy tale. In this illustration, the second horse is seen mouth agape with elaborate metal mouthpieces illustrating the normalization of the depiction of a horse in pain at the hands of a rider.

Fairy tales have become a gateway for my understanding of the present and historical human/equine relationship as well as a means to re-evaluate these relationships. In my work, the Equine Companion, which in the world of fairy tale is ever-present but seldom acknowledged, is brought forward and becomes an essential character. Further fairy tale imagery is utilized to present the conflicting nature of the human/equine relationship and I will address this later in this chapter.

The Monster Emerging

Throughout this project’s depictions of Little Red, her steadfast cohort morphs like an equine Pinocchio from a generic child’s toy into a depiction of an individual creature, that of her Equine Companion. The equine in toy and fairy tale has become a vehicle to explore perceived realities within the human/equine relationship. These perceived realities are coloured by historical precedents and individual experiences. Alexander Nevzorov states: “By any stretch of the imagination, it is very difficult to find a subject more steeped in deception than the relationship of man and horse.” 50 My creative journey has revealed inconvenient truths not only about my personal equine relationship but also about the greater human/non-human divide. The focus of this project is not as a broad multispecies overview but a personal reconsideration with expansive implications. My developing Little Red character is forced to challenge her accepted human/non-human relationships and so begins to question whether it is she who is the Big Bad/Evil Old. As this reality settles within their relationship, another mutual Big Bad/Evil Old asserts itself as both human and equine are both dealing with the signs of ageing and mortality.

Mortality, the Most Ancient of Evil Olds

Because of her age, my horse’s mortality has become an issue I must face. Through the sheer size of a horse, equine death demands considerable attention and forward planning. The visceral nature of a horse dying and being buried is confrontational and must be faced despite the demands of personal grief. In these times is impossible not to be confronted with questions of our mutual mortality and all this entails; how we face the Evil Old which is death, who we grieve, and how we grieve. John Berger in *Why Look at Animals* says of the animal/human relationship, “… only in death do the two parallel lines converge.”

In the process of grieving, (whether for others, or for our own diminishing lives), memory functions as a container for past truths. In grief, whether accurate or not, memory is a retaining vessel for something or someone who is lost. Forming these memories into a narrative is an essential tool in the grieving process and whether these tales are truly accurate isn’t relevant to their validity. Memories can also form a softening buffer from the actuality and immediacy of death. Looking back and coming forward slowly again to the moment of loss we reinterpret small things, imagine scenes and understand memories differently. Somehow, when we can wrap the loss within a narrative, we can comprehend more completely and the shock becomes couched within this new modified memory. My scenarios provide a narrative with much the same intent.

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The Conclusion lies in the Equine Shoe

Humanity has a history of hiding behind the cultural normalisation of brutality towards non-humans. In the equine world, humanity as individuals or as complicit in the agencies which create fear and anxiety is the obvious choice for the fear behind the equine Big Bad. Creating shape for the equine equivalent of the Big Bad/Evil Old has directed my research again towards fairy tale for an expression of the dark side of the complex human/horse relationship.

![fig 31](Grown Red & Equine Friend with Glass Ballet Shoe Bronwyn Mohring 2021-2022 30 x 15 x 53cm approx. © The author)

The faded red glass shoe links together the toy, the fairy tale, the Big Bad/Evil Old and the equine encounter and provides a coalescence of thought throughout this project. My use of human shoes alongside equine imagery parodies the meaning of the shod horse and brings the acceptable unseen into question. I use faded red glass ballet shoes to parody the way horses are seen, portrayed and controlled by people. This body of work embraces the absurdity of horses in inappropriate shoes as a metaphor for all human/equine interactions and calls them into question.
The imagery of shoes in the realm of fairy tale is repeated and significant; they are an essential plot device in the Grimm’s *Cinderella* and *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*, Hans Christian Anderson’s *The Red Shoes*, L. Frank Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz*, and Giovanni Francesco Straparola’s *Puss in Boots*. The fairy tale portrayal of magical shoes is inconsistent; Hans Christian Anderson presents red shoes as sinister and seductive, whereas L. Frank Baum presents beneficent magical red slippers. Fairy tale shoes offer the wearer not just a means to escape their harsh lives but to transform them into lives of comfort and decadence. Contrarily, they are also used as the harshest punishment. Fairy tale shoes can bewitch the wearer to uncontrollable dancing or, as iron shoes, condemn the wearer to roam the world as penance.

Shoes for both humans and horses are paradoxical, they offer freedom of movement through protection yet they also contain and control. This balance and unease between protection and control are profound both to cultural sensibilities of the feminine ideal and the means of creating the equine ideal. Shoes contain and control feet, dictating how we walk, how fast we can walk, how we are perceived by others and ultimately influencing how feet will form and grow both for people and equines. Extreme fashion in the movement of horses and women enabled the creation of shoes more akin to torture devices than protective footwear.

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Well-worn shoes retain the shape of the wearer and this vessel-like ability to retain what could be perceived as some essence of the wearer, has given shoes a supernatural agency in many cultures. These beliefs are reflected in folklore, fairy tale and superstition. Shoes tread the path of the mundane and the uncanny. The Jack-in-the-box origin myth where the devil is caught in a boot (referred to in Chapter 3, The Monstrous), illustrates this.

Ultimately I chose the symbol of the faded red ballet shoes because of the conflicted emotive response they invoke. Historically in fairy tales, dance, shoes and death have been linked, most relevantly in Hans Christian Anderson’s tale The Red Shoes. This tale has been transposed into plays, films and ballets. Ballet shoes encapsulate female endeavours to push beyond the reasonable in striving to present an escape from the mundane for an audience. They represent a private short life of endurance and pain in an attempt to produce public moments of unrivalled athleticism and ethereal beauty. My empty faded red ballet shoes, posed on point, become an invitation to ‘dance’ a mile in the shoes of another, but they are not a comfortable invitation. They haunt each scenario before engaging more directly with Ageing Red and her failing Equine Companion.

fig 32
_Grown Red & Equine Friend with Glass Ballet Shoe II_
Bronwyn Mohring
2021-2022
30 x 15 x 53cm, approx.
© The author
Chapter Five:
Naked Clay, Captured Glass

Burnt Earth

Naked clay,\textsuperscript{58} that is unglazed clay, offers a distinct visual and tactile sensation. Fired clay without the covering of glaze, evokes a different response to that of traditional glazed ceramic. It speaks directly about the clay medium and the firing process, and there is an immediacy between the hand builder as maker and the clay. There is also a sense of vulnerability between the viewer and the object, which is without the barrier of a glaze.

The saggar firing technique developed in this project is an amalgam of historical and contemporary experimental techniques. Traditionally this firing process involved placing a clay item in a saggar (clay container), which provided an internal atmosphere protected from the flame in the kiln. In contrast, contemporary saggars often contain combustibles which are intended to flash smoke and colour on the item inside. My saggar containers are formed by layers of slip, cardboard and paper. They are finished with layers of fairy tale book pages. The process of forming the saggar boxes and wrapping the sculptures in combustibles has become as important as creating the sculptures they contain.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{saggar_fired_container.png}
\caption{Saggar fired container & Equine Sculpture \nwritetext{Bronwyn Mohring}\nwritetext{40cm x 45cm approx.}\nwritetext{© The author}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{58} A term I have gleaned from Jane Perryman, notably her book \textit{Naked Clay: Ceramics without Glaze}. (A&C Black, 2004).
The combustibles chosen for my firing include horse dung, horse hair and waste hay. These speak directly of the horse reality, not the beauty of the horse lovers’ calendar but instead the result of caring for real rather than imagined horses. In this way, the saggar process also places value on the mundane and the discarded. The equine contributions to the saggar firing process such as dung may leave their mark through the interaction between clay and fuming combustibles. However other flammables, such as hair collected from grooming, provide soft secure nests with which the fragile clay piece inside may be transported safely to the kiln but provide no long-term visual presence on the fired piece.

My saggar firing process has developed from a physical method of firing clay into a contemplative ritual. My toy-inspired equines are created with consideration of the notion of ‘Sympathetic Magic’.59 Sympathetic Magic is the belief that an image created in the deliberate and considered likeness of another creates a connection between the two. This is known as the ‘Law of Similarity’.

59 James George Frazer coined the term ‘sympathetic magic’ in *The Golden Bough* (1889); sympathetic magic: magic based on the assumption that a person or thing can be supernaturally affected through its name or an object representing it. James George Frazer subcategorised sympathetic magic into two varieties: those which relying on similarity, and those which relying on contact or ‘contagion’.

The other method of Sympathetic Magic involves the use of a physical substance which was once part of the individual in which a connection is desired. This is the ‘Law of Contagion’. In this project, the equine forms follow the Law of Similarity and the horse hair and dung follow the Law of Contagion. The saggar containers themselves are wrapped in pages of fairy tale storybooks not just to acknowledge their inspiration but in an alchemical attempt to bind the creations they contain to the realm of fairy tale and perhaps to the realm of ever after.

Susan Stewart also refers to sympathetic magic, but in relation to the miniature object, when she states: “When the miniature exists simply as a representation, it functions as sympathetic magic; when it is enclosed with a lock of hair, a piece of ribbon, or some other object that is ‘part’ of the other, it functions as contagious magic.” 60 Although she refers to miniatures, the representation need not be a miniature for the notions expressed to remain relevant. Susan Stewart refers to imitation through representation with the historical magical notion that this imitation can influence or bind. This influence is strengthened by the addition of things which are taken from that which the creator wishes to influence or bond. My hollow fairy tale characters, fired within pages of a storybook, wrapped in horse hair and partially buried in horse dung become true vessels of Contagious Magic.

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In so doing they not only chronicle their firing history through their surface but encapsulate the Law of Similarity and the Law of Contagion which are the essence of sympathetic magic.

Modern concepts and explorations of sympathetic magic are derived from ancient beliefs which emerge in many cultures. In times when people feel they have little or no control, sympathetic and contagious magic is most often turned to.\(^{61}\) The anxiety emerging in *The Aging of Little Red* not only finds expression in these pieces but provides means to deal with the anxiety reflection creates. My fairy tale saggar containers bind personal equine tales of a growing distant past and an uncertain future with historical fairy tales, giving personal tales a shared history and a mode of expression.

Etta Zuritsky Winigrad’s sculptures also embrace the patination smoke creates. The narrative of her ceramic pieces would lie comfortably within the pages of fairy tale. The relationship between her figures and the toy-like mounts pose open-ended questions on rider/ridden, human/animal distinctions and their smoked patina is sympathetic to their ephemeral, dreamlike qualities. My chosen firing technique, individually wrapped saggar, also celebrates the uncontrolled marks left by smoke and flame. In this project, by seeing the marks of the firing process the audience is drawn into the making process, the finished piece is no longer clean and distant but immediate and apparent; colour has happened to the pieces through the process, rather than being carefully applied as a glaze mask.

IMAGE REDACTED

61 Professor D.S. Popowich states “According to theories of anxiety relief and control, people turn to magical beliefs when there exists a sense of uncertainty and potential danger.”

D.S. Popowich, Professor of Anthropology and author of two textbooks: Disease, Health, Healing, and History (Pearson Education), and It's in the Bones: Evidence of the Past (Pearson Education).
Glass Tales

In *The Aging of Little Red*, my smoked clay figures interact with glass forms. Traditional ceramics is often glazed, that is their surface is coated in a type of glass material which fuses to their surface. However, in this project, their glazed skins have been shed and become individual glass entities. These glass forms stand to one side; on the outer, but still engaged with the clay forms through narrative. Therefore, glass is no longer a protective cover for the clay and nor is clay providing strength and opacity beneath the glass. Glass stands transparent yet weighty and clay stands opaque yet hollow. They both stand, alone and vulnerable.

The indirect interaction with the method of cast glass is so different from the hands-on immediacy of clay that the glass forms emerge from their shaping process with their own identity more separate from that between the maker and the clay object. The impressions of hands left on clay are fired into the surface, whereas in the cast glass process the hand moulded wax is melted out so the glass when melted inside the mould retains an impression of touch although no direct creative touch was ever made. The intent of casting glass is to capture it in its molten form, it is akin to setting glass traps and waiting, sometimes for weeks, to find out what you have captured.

The nature and understanding of glass is complex. It is also an example of a living myth, as many continue to believe that glass is a fluid which almost imperceptibly flows over time. It is a complex creation; concrete yet transparent, and fragile yet with the ability to seriously harm, constantly changing with the available light. It is part of mundane modern life. In our buildings and vehicles, glass is created not to be seen, but instead to form an invisible barrier between those inside and those out. Yet it can also be placed in situations when the intention is purely to be seen, where glass becomes the object.

When a child reaches the age that their plastic cups are replaced by glass tumblers, it is a moment of transition and a small celebration of a growth milestone. Throughout life, handling glass remains cause for care and broken glass remains a danger, whether as an unseen splinter to the finger or a more dangerous large sharp shard. A glass toy becomes a perilous juxtaposition, an enticing invitation to play with danger, where the fragility of the glass exposes the fragility of life.
This dangerously brittle quality combined with its transparency influenced my decision to use glass to explore the transient and contradictory nature of existence. In particular, glass also emerged as a fitting material to explore the dangerous, attractive and yet repellent nature of the Big Bad/Evil Old evolving in this project. My glass casting is unrefined, leaving traces of each process through which it has passed, sometimes even revelling in its failures. The challenging interplay between idea and process in the cast glass offers a rich source of inspiration and lateral development. This resulted in an illustrated learning process which mirrored the journey of my Little Red towards some, but never total self-awareness.
Christina Bothwell uses glass, clay and found objects in her work *Kundalini* (2011). Her glass form presents the ephemeral caught in time. Its captives are the found objects which, unlike the glass, express the ageing effect of rust and patination. This piece asks questions as to whether the doll is representing a sleeping or deceased infant, while something malignant or benign, is partially obscured within her glass dress body. *Kundalini* creates the illusion of a toy that has been played with and so evokes a sense of imaginary history. The overall feel is that of a discarded toy alluding to an indefinable past, the illusion of human permanence and the fickle nature of our affections.

The most iconic connection between the medium of glass and that of the world of fairy tale is the infamous slipper made glass by Perrault for the character Cinderella. In this tale all other magic dissipates at midnight, but the glass slippers, however improbably, survive a night of dancing and running away, without breaking or causing any harm to their wearer. Something inexplicable about the magic in these glass slippers allows them to survive when all other enchantment is lost. Mundane materials replaced by the incredible are the soul of the fairy tale realm and the more incredible the more potent emotional burden they contain.

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62 Charles Perrault’s tale of Cinderella was first published in 1697. It was a retelling of a tale by Giambattista Basile but Perrault added the now iconic notion of the fairy godmother and the glass slippers.
Glass as a central element in fairy tale is not confined to Cinderella’s slippers. Glass in the form of a magical truth-telling mirror is essential to the tale of *Snow White*. A magical mirror also appears in *Beauty and The Beast*, and this mirror magic is not restricted to fairy tales, rather fairy tales adapted mirror magic from European folklore. Magical glass in *Snow White* is not confined to the infamous mirror. Later in the tale, a glass coffin was made to preserve Snow White indefinitely until the spell which made her appear dead was inadvertently broken.

*The Glass Coffin* from the Grimm brothers’ collection also contains a princess imprisoned in glass. In *The Seven Ravens*, a glass mountain imprisons seven brothers, and a princess is imprisoned on top of a glass mountain in *The Raven*.

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Also, a variety of magical creatures are imprisoned in glass bottles, including a demon in *The Spirit in the Glass Bottle*. Glass bottles, glass coffins and glass shoes all share the same paradoxical nature, that is they both entrap and expose.

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Chapter Six:

Endings

In this project I explore the nature of anxiety through the guise of toy-like objects and the narrative of fairy tale. The elusive nature of undefined dread, the fragility of spirit created in moments of fear, and the crystallization of angst matured in age, have led to my continued exploration of glass as a sculptural medium. The qualities of fragility yet potential danger are encompassed in the medium of glass, pervading cast glass objects with an air of preciousness. This is enhanced by the creative process and exploited by the size of the glass pieces amongst their smoky clay companions which is disproportionate to the focus on them.

The repetitive reference to shoes in fairy tales (whether red shoes, glass slippers, ten league boots or iron-soled shoes) motivated me to claim the shoe as relevant in my own tale. The glass shoes in this project are iconic enough to be a known and essential part of the fairy tale realm, but they are presented in a way which intends to provide ambiguity and incongruity to encourage the viewer to question the familiar. My many conflicts within the horse/human world have become embodied in the significance of shoes in these series of narrative scenarios. In Snow White, the evil stepmother’s fate is to wear red hot iron shoes and dance until she falls down dead. For me, this tale too closely imitates the fate of many domestic horses and it is especially analogous to the life of a racehorse and perhaps the broader human/non-human relationship.

My Jack-less boxes are only suggestive of what was once hidden inside. The medium of glass casts shadowy forms, and this ephemeral shadowing embodies the nature of anxiety they represent. Through their emptiness and insidious presence, they have evolved to embody the threat of the coffin; the anxiety of imminent mortality. There will be no prince to wake us from the sleep this glass box offers.
In this project, my toy-like objects are placed in scenarios with the intent to evoke a questioning unease. These creations are not pristine, nor will they wash clean; instead they are objects which have been through fire and bear the scars of their making. They are haunted by ill-defined fears which remain featureless and can never be truly subjugated. They question why they have been abandoned. Some are deliberately posed while others lay seemingly discarded and forgotten. Or have they sprung to life and are playing their own games only to be frozen in play the moment they are looked at? This alludes to the game ‘frieze-tag’ or can be likened to the primal fear that inanimate things move in the dark but become motionless and safe in the lights.

I started this project with a photo and let it take me on a journey into memory and dream. I knew this voyage would utilise the imagery of that girl in her red hooded dress and her equine friend but I didn’t know what else it would reveal. The fairy tale and the toy bring their own meaning and their ubiquitous nature is imbued with emotional resonance. I utilize them also as vehicles with which to explore ageing, at a time when life has become more reflection than future. These creations have become reflective vehicles of the liminal realm which reveal layers of fear, anxiety, and ultimately grief.
In her writing, Virginia Woolf repeatedly takes a stance in favour of the unknown. Writer Rebecca Solnit explores this in *Woolf’s Darkness: Embracing the Inexplicable*, in which she researches Virginia Woolf’s celebration of the synthesis of darkness; the impending and the unknown. Virginia Woolf embraces darkness as a way of facing the future, peering beyond the known and into the mysterious without projecting fear or desire when she writes: “The future is dark, which is the best thing the future can be.” 65

My Aging Red is being devoured by internal shadow and is lost in the darkness cast by the fairy tale forest. Her memories are questioned or failing and her future is dark which she must learn to embrace. By wandering in the fairy tale Deep Dark Woods, we leave home and its familiar objects. In the Dark Woods comfort vanishes, familiarity and continuity are replaced by the dark and the unknown. In this place of contemplation and transition, we begin to haunt ourselves. In the creative process also, sometimes there is reason not to project or interpret but to instead embrace the ambiguous. This invites mute conversation, offers only questions and opens closed boxes. As Rebecca Solnit says: “We know less when we erroneously think we know, than when we recognise that we don’t.” 66


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