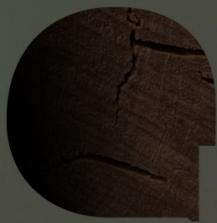




ANNE WHILES

*in conversation with
Cathie Pilkington*



Annie can you tell me a bit about your first encounter with a piece of wood?

When I started art college there had been a massive storm the year before and the sculpture yard was stocked with these huge logs like bodies laid out after a disaster. I chose one of these logs and started work with the grand ambition of making a carving of a painting I had seen ...but weeks passed and I ended up with a big orange monkey.

How do you select the next piece of wood you want to work with?

From that first lesson, I now choose a bit of wood for the work in mind. I've heard people refer to carving like finding a sculpture in a log and likening it to archaeology: to bring the work out or for it to reveal itself. It's not like that for me, it's a bit more of a wrestle. The wood keeps on moving after it becomes a work. Cracks might appear and close with the seasons but over the years I have learnt to detect early signs when choosing a log that keep this to a minimum. If I see a shake in the middle core of rings, I ask the woodsman to slice off salami like pieces to see if it continues through and it helps me decide. A log is like a big long onion, if you take out the middle core bit, the rings won't have anything to push out against and it becomes more stable. I like oak, chestnut, beech and lime.

Do you believe in magic?

Yes.

Why is it important to spend so much time in the making of these 'sculpted pictures'?

I am like a dog with a bone and just have to keep going until the image and feeling I want is in front of me. I start out knowing that I really want to see this 'thing' and no one else is going to make it for me. I prepare like a warrior and pace around the wood for weeks before I start and make the first cut. This journey is peppered with a kind of comedy that I think comes with making stuff. For me it's always wrong, wrong, wrong until it's right. Along the way, it might look like fifty different sculptures. Like a penguin wading through a large colony looking for her chick, I know when I see it. It's kind of a private activity, anti-social and a bit ugly. It takes far too long and becomes obsessive but it's my method and the terms I set for the process.

And why do you choose to physically 'make' your pictures in thread?

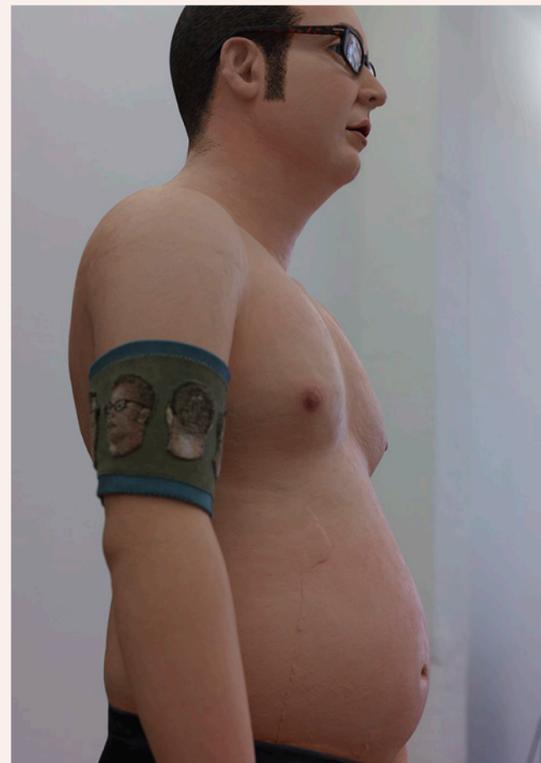
I have developed an interest in and a collection of embroidered badges and emblems over the years, related to anything from bowling clubs to a mustard factory, NASA emblems to earthly travel badges. I love the language of them as it is fairly absurd and economic in its symbolism but has a kind of logic that we understand. I have been playing with this form for a while, making giant sized badges but also ceremonial objects that might play a role in a ritualistic act, often worn by the carved object, as a coat or armband or headpiece. I could get these made digitally but just think there is a difference in the handmade sewn object that I like because of its sculptural properties or a lumpiness that allows for a conversation about why this thing in this particular context is not mass produced.



Anne Whiles
Cathie Pilkington



MY FIRST EXPERIENCE OF WHAT I THOUGHT OF AS ART AS A CHILD WAS THE LITTLE BOY WITH A SLOT FOR MONEY IN HIS HEAD OUTSIDE THE NEWSAGENTS, ICONOGRAPHY IN CHURCH, SHIPS FIGUREHEADS OR FIBREGLASS ANIMALS ON FAIRGROUND RIDES.



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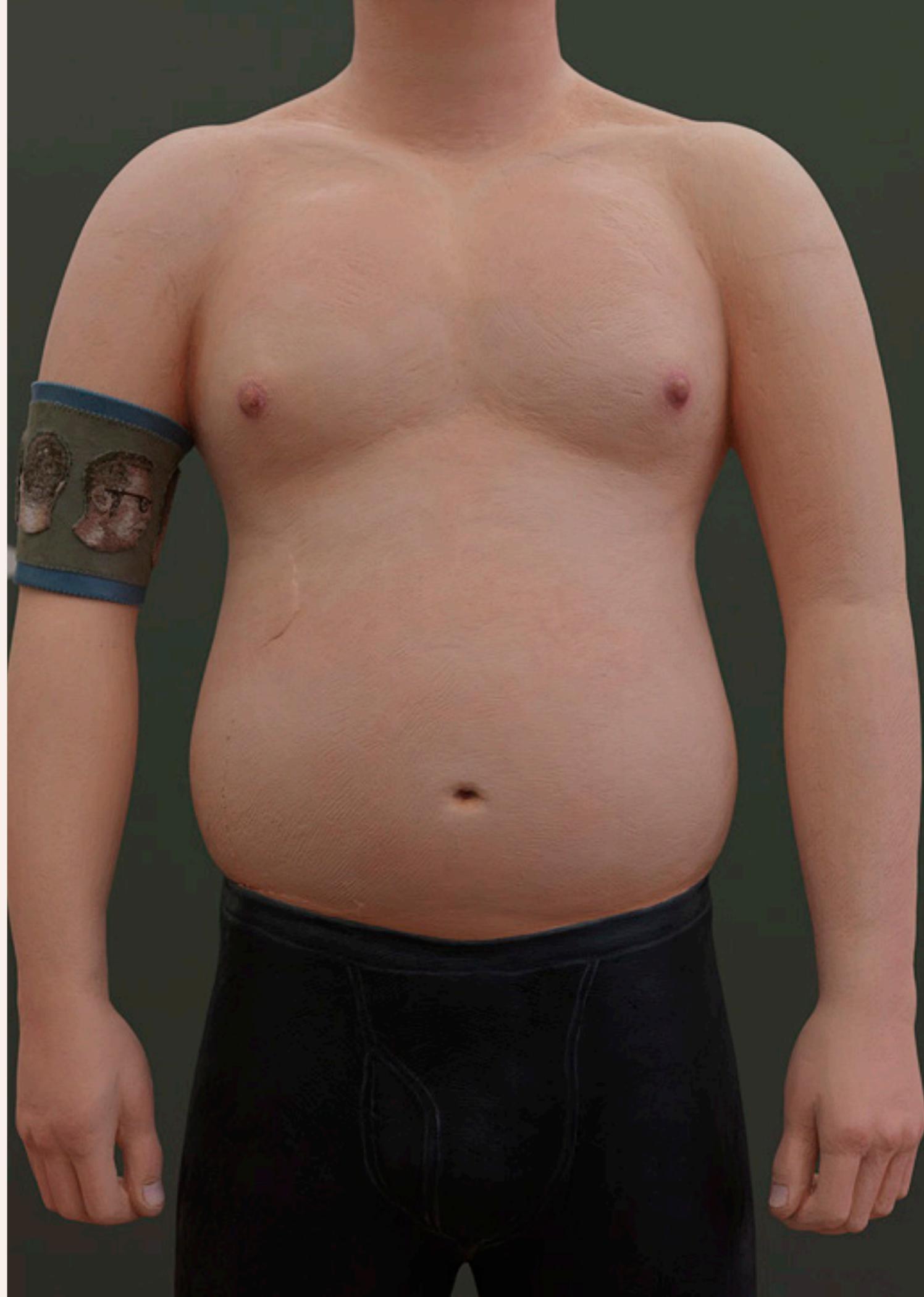
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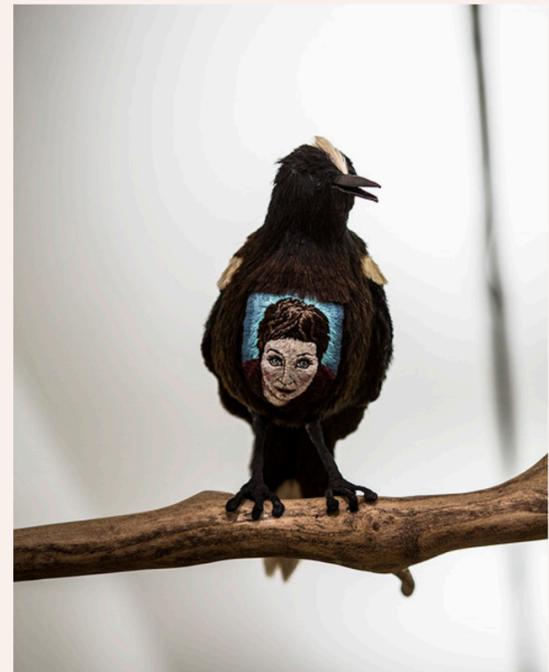
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I'M REALLY INTERESTED IN THE TRADITION OF RELIGIOUS WOODCARVINGS, WHERE THE CARVING AND PAINTING WERE DONE BY DIFFERENT PEOPLE. THE IDEA THAT YOU CAN BUILD AN ILLUSION ON TOP OF FORM FASCINATES ME.





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Sculptor or painter?

Well I would like to answer this simply but I'm not sure I am either, because as yet, I don't make paintings and I don't think I am a sculptor as such. I have never wanted to make work that would make anyone worry about what a sculpture is. My first experience of what I thought of as art as a child was the little boy with a slot for money in his head outside the newsagents, iconography in church, ships figureheads or fibreglass animals on fairground rides.

I think I make things that could have already have had a life somewhere else, I hope my work starts with a trust about what it is, but not about what it does. I think I am interested in the image of that thing in my head and try and make the work seem as if it is an image, could be a painting when it is reproduced photographically. I think of it as a three dimensional picture of the encounter or memory of something, like a slightly misty vision of an object.

I'm really interested in the tradition of religious woodcarvings, where the carving and painting were done by different people. The idea that you can build an illusion on top of form fascinates me.

Can you talk to the animals?

I think they can talk to us. If I listen, I realise that they probably knew what I was thinking before I did. I am talking dogs, cats and donkeys. However once a lion at the zoo took my breath with a single look. It wasn't pity for him but because of his searing intuition and intelligence. I went to the toilet and burnt two holes in my t-shirt with a lighter to remember where I felt that heat from his eyes enter my chest.

Whiles works with art as a suspect activity. She is involved in a relationship with a representational language that aims to form a tension between what we might know intuitively and how we might conduct ourselves as contemporary artists and audiences. She works closely with pictorial devices, to allow for a humorous exchange between the quotidian and the miraculous, between soviet realism and surrealism. She is interested in who magic belongs to, as a kind of cultural lost property. Her work refers to an emblematic language, ceremonial, ritualistic and social artefacts of affiliation in the form of woodcarving, hand embroidery, drawing and film.

The work has a long-term allegiance with St Copertino, the patron saint of astronauts; renowned for his levitation skills and nicknamed The Gaper for being open-mouthed and elsewhere. She is working on a project that explores modern gapers, as a tribe of painted woodcarvings, with a capacity to travel without moving, who can excuse themselves from material presence but can't escape their own comedy.

Annie Whiles is a studio lecturer at Goldsmiths College on the B.A. Fine Art. Solo shows include 'Beggars Belief' at Danielle Arnaud 2011 and Cuckoo in 2008, touring to the Grundy Art Gallery in Blackpool. Group shows include 'No Now!', Space Station 65 in 2012, 'Pile', Chapter, Cardiff, 2011, 'The Peckham Experiment', Camberwell Art Space, 2009 and the 'Fabric of Myth', Compton Verney 2008. Two person shows include Annie Whiles and Alison Jones at York College Gallery, 2012 and 'United We Fall' Annie Whiles and Mark Pearson, at Standpoint Gallery, London. 2008.

