

Practitioner's Statement

Fish Bowl

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“Was there ever any domination that did not appear natural to those who possessed it?”

This is a phrase found in Peter Singer's ground breaking philosophising, *Animal Liberation*. The words stood out to me, addressing my uneasiness about the conventional fishbowl – I am restless because the object, which most dismiss as something innocuous, is indeed what I see as an instrument for the mistreatment of animals. My unorthodox view was the driver of this work; I needed to communicate the concept to appease my inner sense of injustice; the injustice I continue to feel as a result of fish-keeping remaining unquestioned.

This work is directly influenced by contemporary artist's Ex De Medici's approach—luxuriant detail and beauty is a façade within which quite repulsive ideas are immersed. Her opulent but grotesque 'vanitas' style paintings are the perfect parallel to my subject matter – the purpose is to show the viewer that the superficially beautiful fishbowl is actually a sickening, needless imprisonment.

The desire is for the audience to be drawn in by the apparent beauty, only to then look deeper and see the disturbing symbols included in the piece; symbols evocative of imprisonment and particularly the concept that the fishbowl is a coffin. The nightmare of being buried alive, trapped, is the reality of the common goldfish – it is waiting to die. The flowers that disguise the chains, coffin, and barbed wire are all oriental exotics, connecting with the origin of the goldfish. Cut flowers illustrate how most view a fish – all they care to see is a vessel holding an ornament.

High contrast of black and white and minimal negative space (respite) in the work makes for slightly challenging viewing – the onlooker has to actively search the print. Compounded by the overlapping imagery, these factors provide pause before the viewer can decode the work – full understanding is momentarily blocked due to overstimulation. It is designed to mimic how on the surface the fishbowl appears agreeable (we have been conditioned as such), but really closer inspection reveals an opposing view. Contrast between flowers and barbed wire, a decoration piece and something abhorrent, flourishing and perishing.

Use of lino printing was born from interest with Gyotaku – Japanese fish printing. This art form emulates the idea that a dead fish's beauty is a display piece and trophy – which promotes my beliefs that keeping fish is essentially the glorified display of a lifeless body. It is important that the print bares areas where ink has been inadvertently picked up by the grooves of the carving – testament to the physical printing process equivalent to Gyotaku. Is there any reason to the practice of fish-keeping aside from the fishbowl being a pseudo artwork – a furnishing?

The print is consciously presented behind glass. Viewed through glass, just like a goldfish is, completes my suggestion that a fish is treated as an object. Considered a piece of artwork – a decoration, and nothing more.