

*shaan bevan with owen pratt*

*zaza'*

*THE FLESH OF THE WORLD CRYING OUT IN A  
LANGUAGE MADE OF OUR OWN WASTE*

*opening November 4th 2022 6-9 pm  
04/11 - 20/01*

*via Privata Leopoldo Gasparotto 4*

*Milano*

*@zaza\_\_milano*

*zaza' is happy to present an exhibition of new paintings from Shaan Bevan in an installation conceived with musician and artist Owen Pratt and writer Sharifa Petersen.*

*Shaan's painting practice moves on two axes: on the one hand there's a metaphoric world-making level where the artist constructs her vocabulary of abstract signs as an adaptive form of "imaginative escapism". Meanwhile her work can be seen as a material poetics where figuration is absorbed by a dense layer of conceptual and narrative sea, originating from the material palette the artist works with. It is in this complex interplay between material poetics and performative figuration that the artist's practice finds its unique strength.*

*Owen's practice engages with a similar questioning - using field recordings as a starting point to develop evolving sonic landscapes, worlds that in this exhibition provides context for the visual works. His use of prepared electroacoustic systems functions as a simulation of natural processes, calling into question the relationship between the human body and its environment.*

*Shaan and Owen live and work together in the Montagne Noire, France.*

## *Sea, Holding space*

*At first the SEA aided as an adaptive form of imaginative escapism, a way to leave the painful landscape of my sick interior body. I imagined huge watery worlds, both internal and external, infinite, chaotic, fugitive, primordial, eternal, and made from all the matter which I am made up of and what makes up the world. A womb, a wound, a surrogate mother.*

*“Illness vivifies the magnitude of the body’s parts and systems. In the sickbed, the sick disassemble and this disassembly crowds a cosmos, organs and nerves and parts and aspects announcing themselves as unfurling particulars: a malfunctioning left tear duct - a new universe; a dying hair follicle - a solar system; that nerve ending in the fourth toe of the right foot - now eviscerating under chemotherapy drugs - a star about to collapse.”*

*(From Anne Boyer, The Undying)*

*I would sit and draw these strange amorphous watery universes for days, allowing the soft gentle touch of my pencil to paper ground me into a parasympathetic state, flowing in and out of sleep and consciousness. My primary artery of connection to the outside world in those early sick days were through the world I was inventing in my drawings. They represented a fluid permeability between inner and outer geographies.*

*As I have passed through different stages of my recovery, my physical practice of drawing has evolved with a flexibility that can serve an adaptive bodily function. In these recent iron works, I must complete the drawings before the tree sap (gum arabic) dries. The drawings need to be completed in about 30 minutes - I work quickly (frantically scratching), imagining the movement of the sea and calligraphy. I believe the temporal shift between the different ways of working has been a subconscious response to my physiological shift from a chronic illness that is largely physically limiting, to one that is neurodivergent. With PTSD, my nervous system feels like a storm, a build up of pressure systems, and I’ve found a way to use the physicality of drawing as a way of expressing an energy that needs to be released - it’s a somatic practice. Trauma is fluid in its transformations and I’m always exploring how drawing can evolve in its therapeutic functions.*

## *Transference, Permeability.*

*Adriamycin is one of the four chemotherapy drugs I was treated with for 6 months in 2018. It’s ruby red, cardio-toxic, and it can burn through tissue so therefore has to be hand administered intravenously by a nurse protected with PPE. Its nickname is the red devil. It turns your urine red for a few days, and is rumored to be able to burn a hole through a linoleum floor. I have a long dark scar on my forearm where it perforated my vein and burned the lower layers dermis above. The doctors advise me to flush twice after using the bathroom - during that time my urine was a bio-hazard.*

*In the 1950s, an Italian research company, Farmitalia Research Laboratories, began an organized effort to isolate anticancer compounds from soil-based microbes. A soil sample was isolated from the area surrounding the Castel del Monte, a 13th-century castle in Apulia. A new strain of *Streptomyces peucetius* which produced a red pigment was isolated, and an antibiotic was produced from this bacterium that was found to have good activity against murine tumors. Clinical trials began in the 1960s, and the drug saw success in treating acute leukemia and lymphoma. However, by 1967, it was recognized that the drug could produce fatal cardiac toxicity.*

*Researchers at Farmitalia soon discovered that changes in biological activity could be made by minor changes in the structure of the compound. A strain of *Streptomyces* was mutated using *N*-nitroso-*N*-methyl urethane, and this new strain produced a different, red-colored antibiotic. They named this new compound Adriamycin, after the Adriatic Sea.*

*(From Doxorubicin, Anthracycline § History, Daunorubicin § History, and History of cancer chemotherapy Wiki pages)*

## *The Interior Sea*

*From ‘Hypersea’ (McMenamin, M. A., McMenamin:*

*In the earliest part of Earth history, before the development of an oxygenated atmosphere, native iron could exist at the surface of the earth without rusting. Iron would however dissolve, because unoxidized (native) iron is soluble in water. Early streams and rivers carried into the sea tons upon tons of dissolved iron (derived from rock weathering). So for hundreds of millions of years, whenever a molecule of oxygen was given off by a cyanobacterium or photosynthetic protocist, that oxygen immediately combined with marine iron.*

*The oxidation of marine iron was a two-step process over time. In the first stage, oxygen combined with native iron to form ferrous iron (FeO). In the presence of more oxygen, ferrous iron combined with oxygen to form ferric iron (Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>), which is fully oxidized. Ferric iron, as it is insoluble; it precipitated and sank to the bottom of the sea where it lithified into the geologically famous (and never to be repeated) banded iron formations, which today are the primary commercial sources of iron ore. The Oxygen Revolution caused the oceans literally to rust. Water is sometimes called the universal solvent because it dissolves more different types of compounds, and in greater quantities, than does any other common liquid. Water is also an inert solvent, meaning it does not chemically change under the effect of the substances it dissolves. This trait is invaluable for living organisms, it allows an organism to use a single water molecule repeatedly. As a chemical catalyst, water never wears out. The sap of plants and the blood of land animals has an evolutionary connection with seawater. Living fluids are not a mere remnant or analog of the sea; they are actually a new type of sea or marine environment. The appearance of complex life on land was a major event in which a kind of mutant sea invaded the land surface. It was as if the nimble offspring of the old sea had learned how to slosh and sloop up onto land, with the tissues and vascular systems of land organisms acting as a complex, water retaining sponge. Cuticle and skin took the functional place of the surface tension of water where sea meets air. The land biota represents not simply life from the sea, but a variation of the sea itself. Acting over evolutionary time as a rising tide, the land biota literally carries the sea and its distinctive solutes over the surface of the land, into some of the driest environments on Earth.*

### *Iron Paintings*

*The iron painting installations are a simulation of the Oxygen Revolution - the rusting of the primordial seas at the end of the Archaean eon. The misters are ran through a timer which represents the age of the Earth (the Earth is approximately 4.5 billion years old), scaled down to a temporal system that we can comprehend more easily. The timer is on a 45 hour circuit, each hour representing 100 million years. The misters will pulse on and off between the 18th and 24th hour, relating to the time the oxygen revolution occurred, 2.45 - 1.8 billion years ago. I like the idea that the circuit will be activated at times that are unpredictable to the viewer, as the circuit is not aligned to our 24 hour clock. With this simulation I am questioning transformations (in bodies, ecologies, societies etc) that we know that are happening but cannot quite capture / predict, or the tension of experiencing something that we know is coming but we don't know when.*

*My decision to spray the iron with seawater references the important relationship between marine iron and oxygen, in the context of deep time and Earth's history. These materials also reference our own blood, and the vital role of iron and oxygen to nourishment of our cells. These paintings are about the history of blood and its connection to seawater, offering a meditation on the way minerals are exchanged through systems, connecting our bodily materiality to the entire history of the earth and the evolution all life forms.*

### *Collaborations: Owen Pratt*

*Two modified record players drag metal needles across the surface of stone slates, producing micro sounds which are amplified by a speaker. This topographical mapping of the material attempts to describe geologic processes and timescales, condensed to the temporal framework of the exhibition. The scratches and uneven surfaces of the two 'records' produces asynchronous rhythms which slowly evolve as new paths are etched in the stone and moisture settles on the surface. The room's humidity alters as the misting circuits are activated, altering the friction and speed of the mechanics.*

*These repetitive rhythms and drones have the ability to transform the firings of the nervous system and can shift us closer to a parasympathetic state. By allowing the viewer to experience the surface of stone with a new sensory awareness, we hope to point to connections between the materiality of the earth and the body*

*The slates used come from Labastide-Rouairoux, a French village in the Montagne Noire. Labastide is valley*

*with extreme weather, caused by the meeting of the Atlantic and Mediterranean climate systems. In the valley, the slates are traditionally used as architectural cladding, protecting the stone buildings from the dynamic weather. The stones themselves are creating a protective membrane between interior and exterior environments. Their process of breaking down over the course of the exhibition says something about the impossibility of a totally closed system, the permeability of membranes, and the breakdown of boundaries.*

*Collaborations: Sharifa Petersen*

*Sharifa has been working on her novel, 'There are Tides in the Body' for the last few years, during which she lived with me (Shaan), providing a major pillar of support to me in my recovery from Hodgkin's Lymphoma. She was also going through a painful divorce, while working as a carer, and we shared hundreds of conversations about care, love, trauma, recovery, women's bodies, and greater socio-political ecologies. We understand our friendship as a form of 'symbiotic healing'. When I shared my research with Sharifa after agreeing to commission a text for the exhibition, we were both shocked about how many crossovers there were between her novel and my research. We decided to use excerpts from the novel instead of writing a new piece, because the work that we wanted to write had already been written. We understand this as a testimony to how deeply we influence each other when we engage in friendship and mutual care, and how profoundly these relationships nourish art making. This is true in Owen + my relationship also, the world we have built together, the care we've engaged in, the landscape we inhabit together, and how our art practice seems to be merging in themes and questionings. This reminds me of how nutrients and trauma are exchanged across systems and boundaries, and the deep respect we need to embody when considering our relatedness to the world. Collaborating with the people I have symbiotically healed with, exploring how our three practices (writing, sound, and visual art) intersect through our relationships of care, seems like the perfect metaphor for the exhibition.*

*shaan bevan, november 2022*