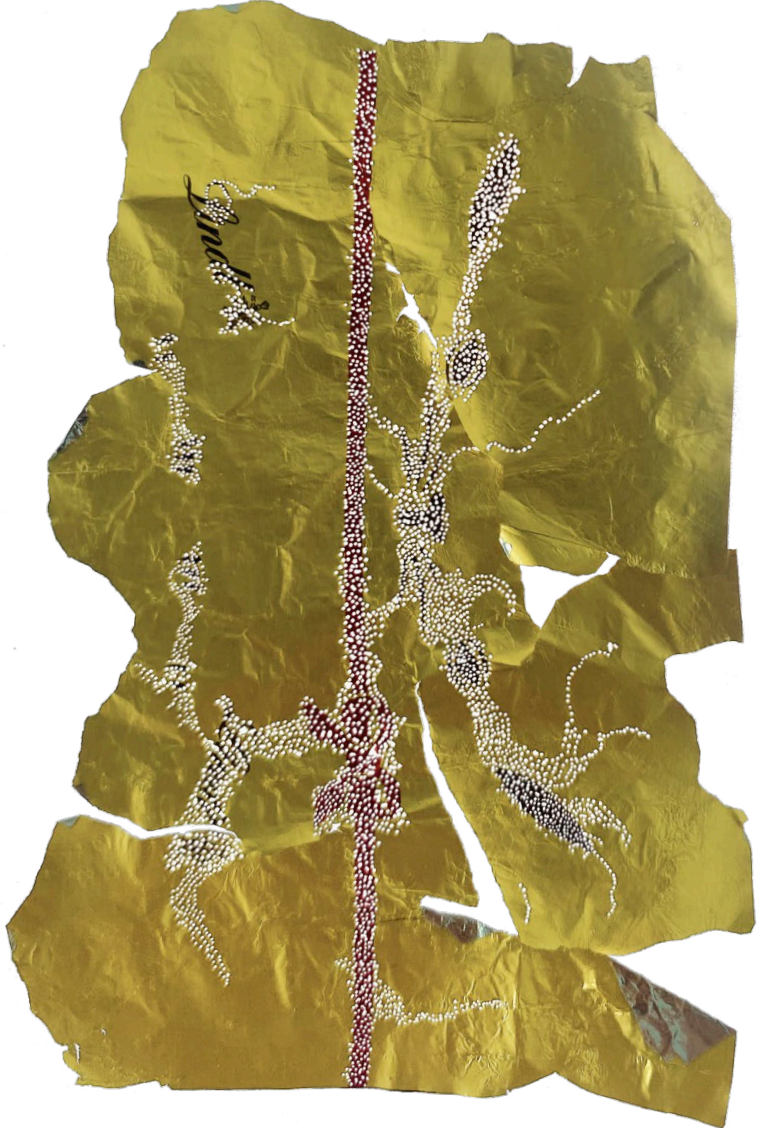


Caroline Wilkinson
empresion

MOCA London
12 November - 9 December 2023



There is a history, a trajectory in this work which it is important to acknowledge.

No work appears magically, as though from nothing, with no context and no sedimentary layers, but we're often unaware of its beginnings and certainly unaware of all aspects of its meaning. So later in this book is a text describing the origin of my first pricking holes in something, in 1998. It also coincides with knowing Michael Petry then, at an earlier stage of our lives, and I'm touched by the circularity of this contact, being invited by him to show work now.

The Gold Bunnies

Fake gold clothing for an edible treat, usually ripped apart, scrunched up and chucked. I was first drawn to the Lindt chocolate Christmas Reindeer. The opened out wrapper represents a schematic body: face and antlers, truncated legs, tip of tail and the trademark Lindt printed red ribbon and bow. Plus, they're smiling. The Easter Bunnies have no discernible expression even though they're predominantly face. But I respond to their poignant blankness.

First to be discarded is the real, cheery red ribbon and bell round the neck. The damage has already begun when the wrapping is ripped off, making an arbitrary disfigurement depending on urgency (Quick!...Chocolate!) and which takes no heed of facial features.

Once flattened, the wrinkles eased, apart from the damage already done some tiny holes have invariably appeared in the foil. It's not engineered to withstand the first onslaught and then the subsequent smoothing out by me. What random attack has started, I continue with more holes, making them intentionally, cancelling all the printed features and textual branding. It's a cancellation which doesn't remove them; they remain hovering, more or less visible depending on the fall of light.

The holes are my deliberate desecration, prompted by accident, but becoming my intentional adornment. Rewriting Klee, I'm taking holes 'for a walk' (or joining the dots?) with no preconceived idea what configuration will result, allowing the perforations to proliferate. Absurdly fragile, almost falling apart, elegant in their decrepitude, made by an obsessive, these impassive rabbit wrappers - although bloodless, sexless and ungendered - are ineluctably anthropomorphised. Blankly animal. Bereft.

All the same face but each made individual with their insignia of piercings, more or less transmuted into a map of something or somewhere: demented heraldic animals; nonsensical rococo curlicues and flourishes; dream lochs and waterways;

previously unobserved histologies or tendrilling mycorrhizae.

Tattooed with my mood, how I was, how the day was, how I pricked on every occasion.

With the bunnies there is a recto and verso, each side is an image. The silver back is the mirror-image of the gold face, devoid of features, punctured identically in reverse.

The Watercolours

The watercolours are resolutely one sided, wall based. They are concurrent with working on the bunnies and are ostensibly very different, but the indeterminate forms within them have a kinship with the pierced shapes even though their coming into being is so fundamentally materially other.

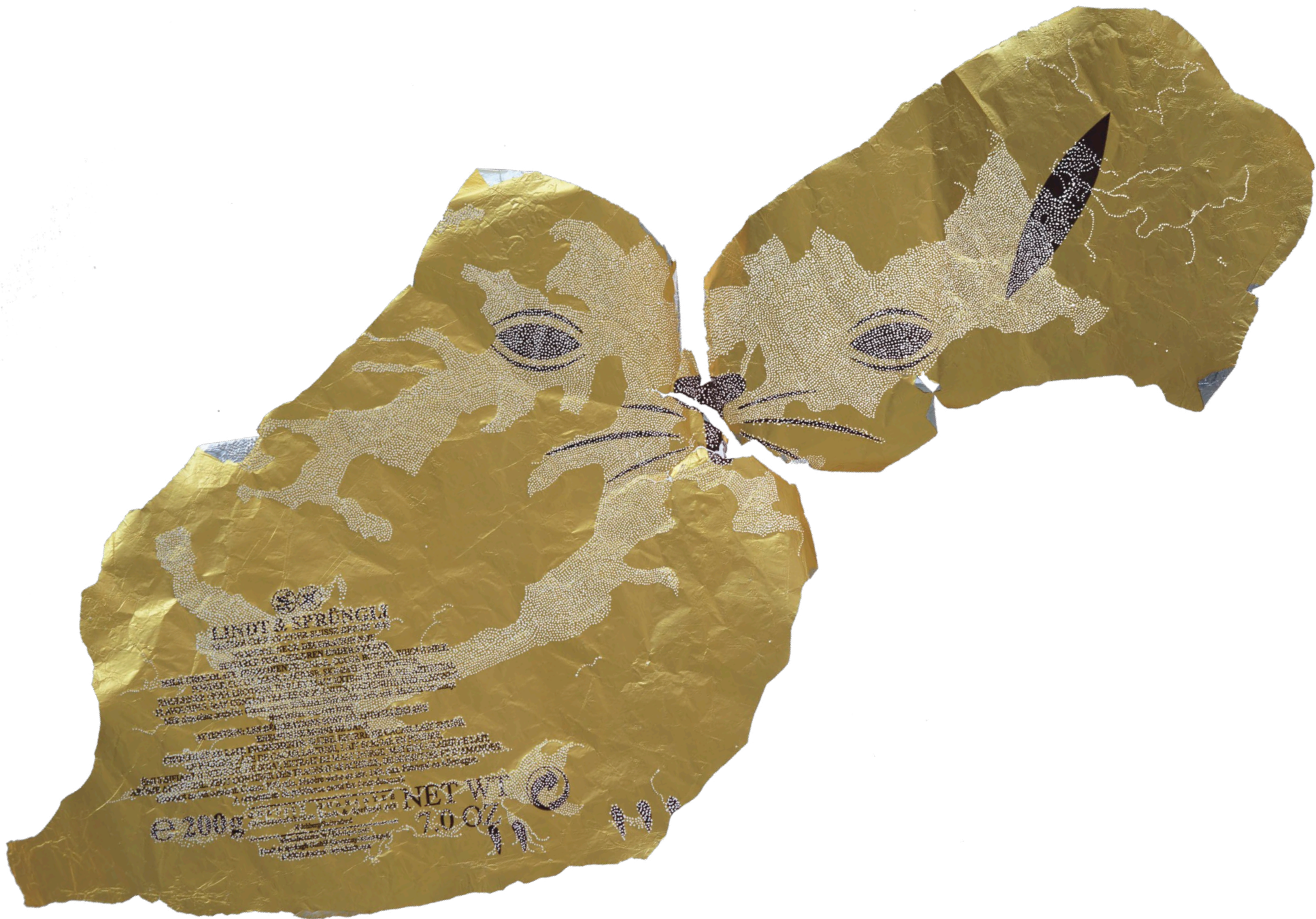
There is a combination of control and flux with both. My deliberate pinpricks follow no scheme once I have embarked on them, the meanders are random, provoked by existing holes and tiny rips. Correspondingly I make decisions on paint colours but the wash largely determines its own way. This watery medium melds and fuses, colours pool and run and make a form outlined by where the paint comes to rest, echoing the inscrutable inscriptions on the bunnies. There is no clear or consistent direct equivalence and no intentional connection made by me. The touch involved with each is so different too: regularity and narrow focus for the holes with a needle fixed in my hand, unmoving apart from the piercing motion, and the rest of me invariably hunched over a magnifying glass trying to remember to breathe; arm and hand and brush together sweeping and expansive, attentive to the contact of liquid medium and paper surface for the painting. Unlike the point of a needle the paint has its own volatility. I can misjudge the granulation and opacity of some pigments when they're superimposed or others evanesce through my over-dilution. There is no possible reversal to the muddying of the colour or the killing of the luminosity, so if I'm not happy with the result I have to start afresh.

The bunnies are mute, obviously, but they also refuse any wider bodily connection. The paintings, by contrast, are visceral, internal.

Let them contemplate each other.







LINDT & SPRÜNGLI

SWISS MILK CHOCOLATE
NET WT 1.0 OZ (28.35g)
LINDT & SPRÜNGLI
SWITZERLAND

NET WT 1.0 OZ (28.35g)
LINDT & SPRÜNGLI





In 1998 I was invited by the Museum of Installation to work with a cardboard box which was sent to me and a number of other artists and to write a statement about what I had done. What follows is an excerpt.

'A perfectly reasonable, smallish manilla cardboard box. It made me angry. It was boring, banal. I wanted to wreck it (too easy).

But when I undid it, dislocated and unpinned its 'wings', it was dislodged from its previous state, poised now between delineation in two dimensions and its possible construction in three. Undone, both tray and lid had parity. This tender rather than brutal dismemberment seemed more appropriate but I still then had to violate its implacability of surface. Punctured with a darning needle. Riddled with holes. (How I felt).

I carried that box around with me. I punched holes as I waited outside my daughter's nursery to collect her, for four or five minutes when she was in the bath, as she slept or napped, then late at night (as usual, so much is late at night), my eyes going weird with strain. A ridiculous parody of the seamstress working by candlelight, ruining her eyes to finish something, pricking her fingers through sheer exhaustion (how did they clear up the blood?) Rage, rage, rage. For me, pointless (with a point) activity, each hole a measure of a breath taken then expired, a moment which registers that activity alone, making a void, over and over again.

I offer no guidance on how to display this thing. It's something slightly wild, a dried-out, stretched flayed pelt, beautiful in its obsessive pain. Something of my skin, my body, almost a textile these flattened layers, but I feel like this sometimes, just several layers deep, compressed, punctured. Is my body a kind of box? So hard to believe I'm 95% water. It's not just the openings where runny stuff comes out. Where does permeability begin and end?

It still wants to be a box but can't quite make it, wants to keep things in but can't succeed. Not quite disintegrated, not quite transformed, not able entirely to transcend itself. Even in this opened, vulnerable, absurd state where the wind could blow through (or a breath) and water would only just be held through its own tension not the box's impregnability, it insists on keeping a certain dignity.

'It' is me as much as it. Trying to map somewhere, someone, where a taxonomic map doesn't apply and isn't appropriate. Life lived moment to moment. Holding on'.

Coda

Very recently, in a pile of unsorted papers I came across preliminary notes which were the basis for my Box statement. They were written along the length of a used, opened out white envelope (clearly it's a habit of mine to open things up for further use). The postage date on the stamp is 9 March 1998, five days after my mother's birthday. To the left of this, faint franking declares:

'Mother's Day 22 March...What Will You Send?' My mother had died 4 years before.

On the envelope I wrote many thoughts about boxes which made it into my statement, but then also the following

'What is a hole? How does it disturb, alter, redistribute the molecules? Nothing goes. Something gets pushed (aside and through). Anger pointlessness dedication perseverance. Art is useless but transforming'

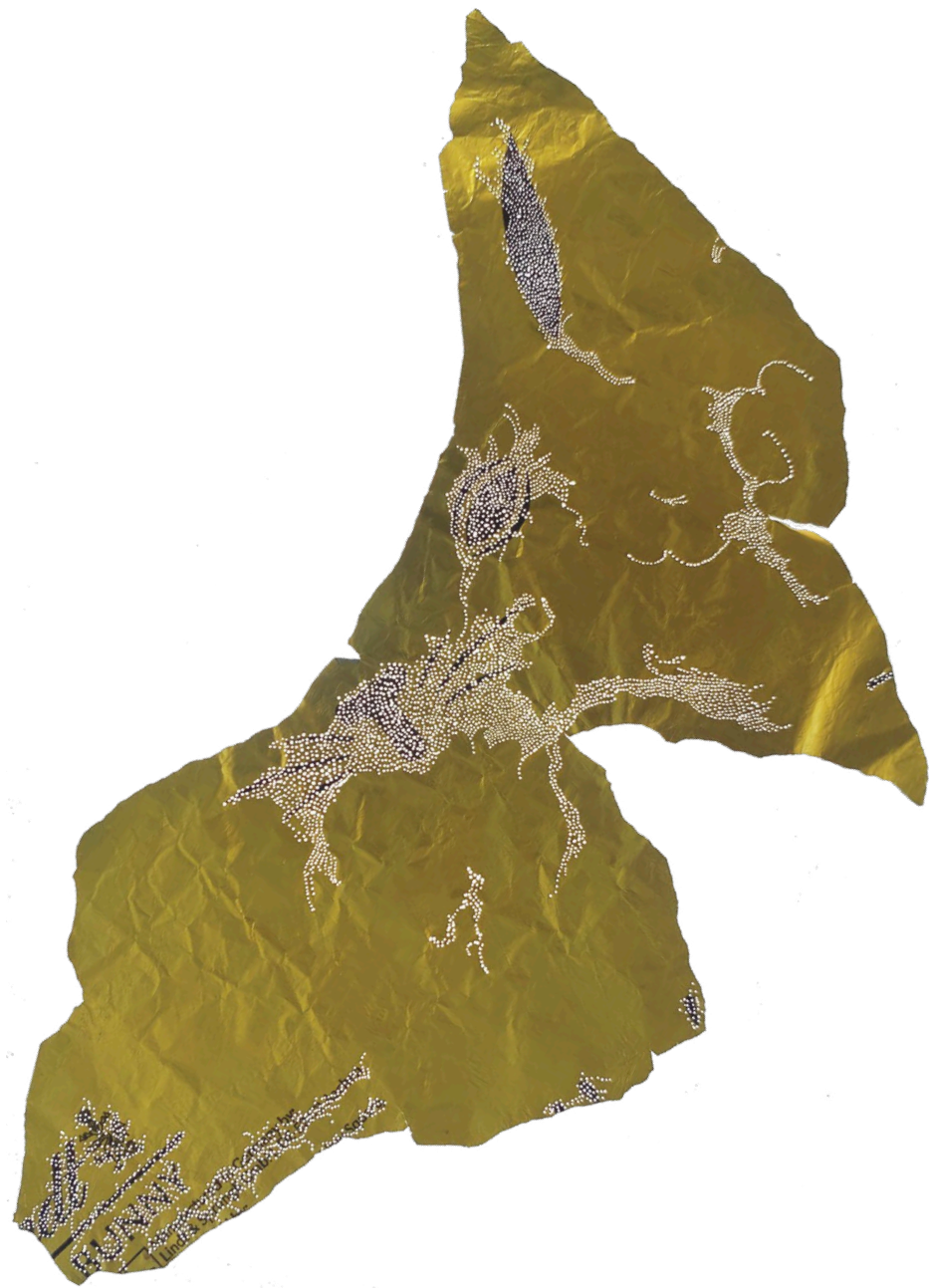
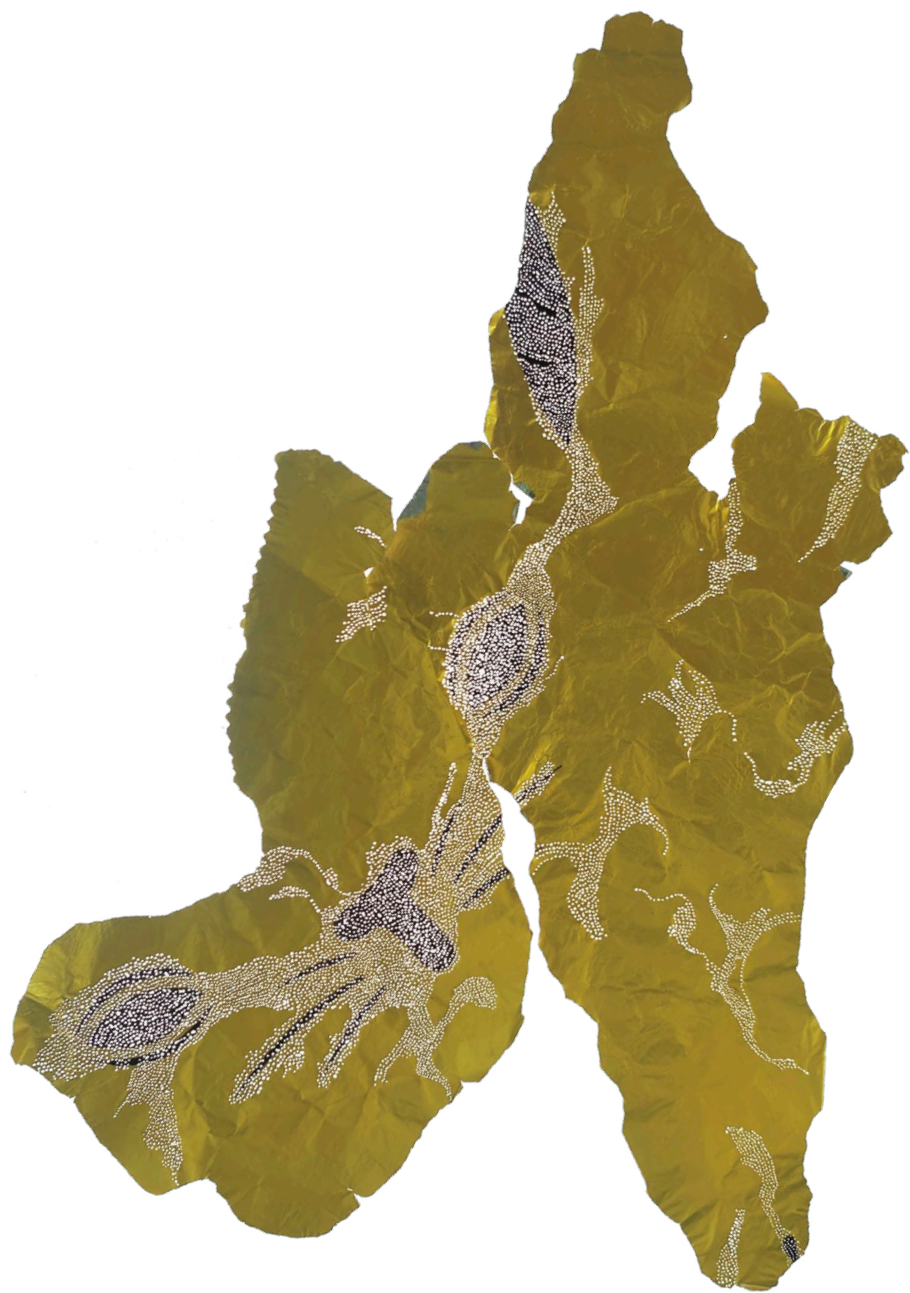
My understanding of this now is that each time, in making an absence visible when I made a hole, I was wanting to register that precise moment, and paradoxically every piercing was not merely a nullification but an attempt at impressing onto, fixing into the box surface in this apparently contradictory act, the range of my feelings which I couldn't represent in any other way.

'Destroy something without destroying it irreparably. (Shadow of its former self)'

It's an aggressive act to puncture, to stab, to pierce. No blood was shed on that occasion, but in the process some despair might have been. I can't say it was simply cathartic but my transformation of something inert to a modified version of itself signified a very basic step towards believing there would be change.

I also can't entirely tell you what it means today to be making holes in foil sweet wrappers, but there is certainly less sorrow.

Caroline Wilkinson 2023



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emprecision

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emprecision v.t.

1. To make precious.

2. n. An impression aimed at making s.th. precious with precision.

Above all, huge thanks to MOCA London for inviting me and to both Michael Petry and Roberto Ekholm for their patience, tolerance and openness.

Also very many thanks to Moira Tigue for table discussions and her superlative construction; Jane Wilkinson for invaluable technical advice; Nicole Polonsky for her voice of sanity and superb proof-reading; Patricia Kempson for generous emergency computer help; Brian Boylan at B&B Glaziers; Steve Noon, Wayne Kelly, George Sheeky and Freddie at Glass Designs; Fiona Templeton for originating 'emprecisioning'; all the children and adults who devoured the chocolate and left the debris.

Outside cover: Watercolour detail.

Inside cover: Gold Bunny, 11 x 8 cm.

All watercolours 43 x 61 cm, except page 10, 30 x 42 cm.

Page 2: Gold Bunny, 11 x 8 cm.

Page 3: Gold Bunny, 12 x 7 cm.

Pages 8 - 9: Gold Bunny, 28 x 14 cm.

Page 14: Gold Bunny, 16 x 11 cm.

Page 15: Gold Bunny, 16 x 11 cm.

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