

Ruby Wheeldon
Becoming a World

Artist Statement

Becoming a World is my experiment in world-building and changing perception. Its aim is to open the viewer up to an understanding of the interconnectedness of the world. Through this sense of connection, I am hoping to inspire care for the earth – and everything within it – that will result in a more compassionate, understanding and environmentally conscious way of being.

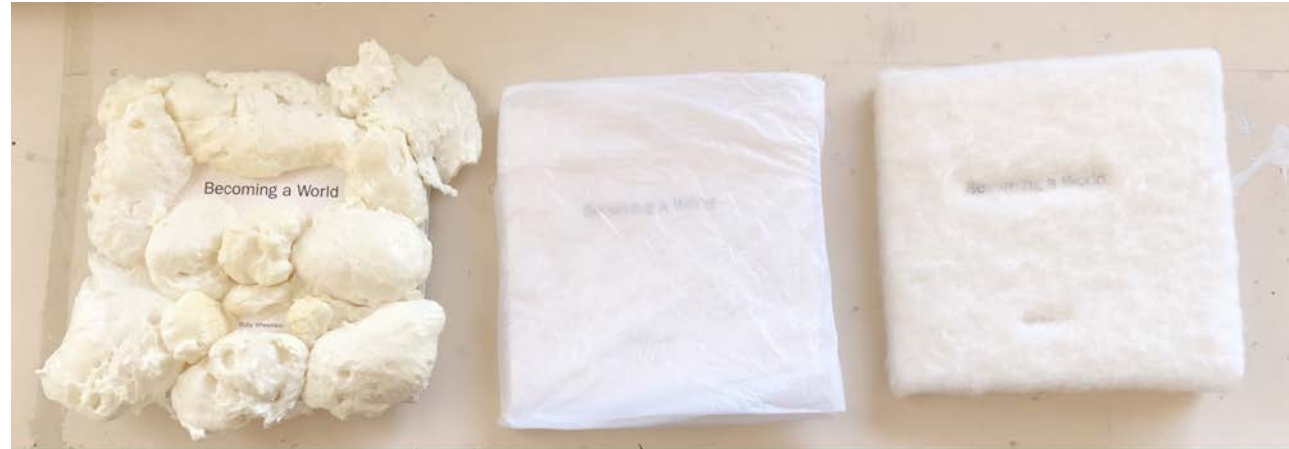
This is also a personal exercise in self-compassion. It is an attempt at learning and practising self-care in a way that is sustainable and not self-centred or arrogant. I have struggled with anxiety for as long as I can remember and it has caused me to feel very disconnected from myself and the world. *Becoming a World* is exploring how, where and why I fit into this world and how, where and why this world fits into me.

My practice is grounded in the concept of an assemblage. We (everything) are all wholes containing multitudes of smaller wholes and making up multitudes of larger wholes. Everything is its own individual self but it is also a piece that contributes to something larger. *Becoming a World* echoes this idea. It is a room within a room. It is a world within a world.

Every little piece in this world is explaining, understanding, becoming and connecting to everything else. *Becoming a World* “is an act of unfolding the self onto the world, while enfolding the world within”¹.

¹ Braidotti, R. 2016. Posthuman Critical Theory. In *Critical Posthumanism and Planetary Futures*. D. Banerji, M.R. Paranjape, Eds. India: Springer. 13-32. DOI:10.1007/978-81-322-3637-5_2

Catalogue



Photographs of bound catalogues

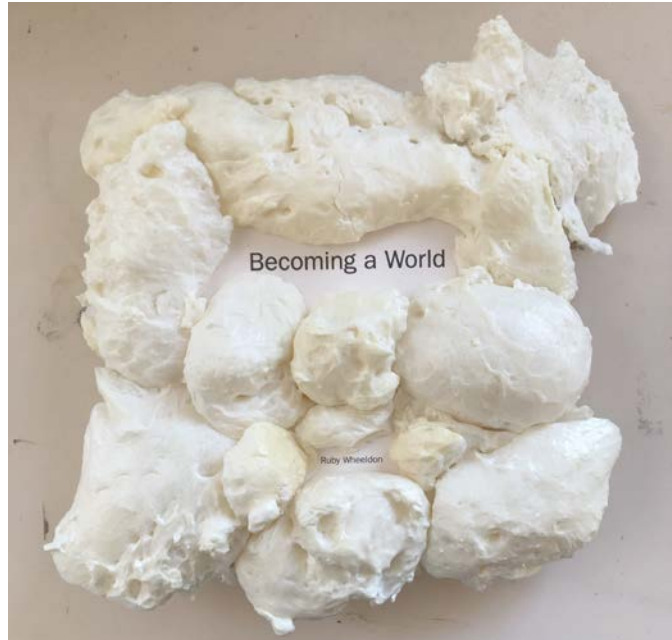


Catalogue covered in old plastic packets



Catalogue covered in wool batting

Catalogue starts on next page



Catalogue covered in expanding foam off cuts
(front)

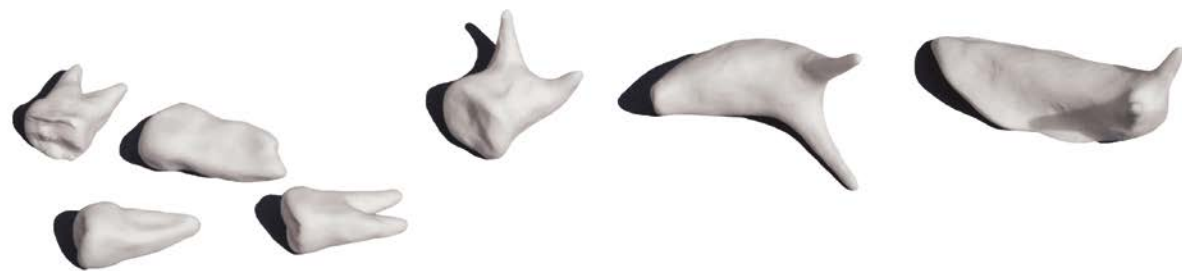


Catalogue covered in expanding foam off cuts
(back)

Becoming a World

Some of the parts that make up the whole

Ruby Wheeldon





Becoming a World is my experiment in world-building and changing perception. Its aim is to open the viewer up to an understanding of the interconnectedness of the world. Through this sense of connection, I am hoping to inspire care for the Earth – and everything within it – that will result in a more compassionate, understanding and environmentally conscious way of being.

This is also a personal exercise in self-compassion. It is an attempt at learning and practising self-care in a way that is sustainable and not self-centred or arrogant. I have struggled with anxiety for as long as I can remember and it has caused me to feel very disconnected from myself and the world. *Becoming a World* is exploring how, where and why I fit into this world and how, where and why this world fits into me.



My practice is grounded in the posthumanist concept of the assemblage¹. We (everything) are all wholes containing multitudes of smaller wholes and making up multitudes of larger wholes. Everything is its own individual self but it is also a piece that contributes to something larger. *Becoming a World* echoes this idea. It is a room within a room. It is a world within a world.



The outer room has blank white walls and is almost empty until the inner world contaminates it, bleeds and spills and crawls into it, confirming that separation is an illusion and that connection flows between everything.





The inner room is filled. This space – this world – is bursting with porcelain sculptures, stone lithographic prints, photographs and an assemblage of other found objects, foamy bits and plasticky pieces. They float, suspended in mid-air, and appear from the walls and floor, merging, meshing, connecting and disorienting.



This world is both overwhelming and comforting. My anxiety makes me feel overwhelmed, overstimulated and stuck. I have difficulty processing stimuli, especially when in an unfamiliar space. I am trying to challenge that, to be able to find comfort and connection in everything, whether I am comfortable or not. Posthumanism encourages a “leap out of the familiar”² in order to discover and understand new ways of being. I am taking these every-day, recognisable

objects and making them unfamiliar, alien and almost unrecognisable. I am forced to look closely, to see for the first time, to re-evaluate what is in front of me, and to open myself up to new ways of perceiving and understanding the world around me. I am challenging my perceptions of things that I have always taken for granted, so that I can learn that my current perception of what the future will be is in fact not set in stone, and that there are multiple ways of creating a far more hopeful future.

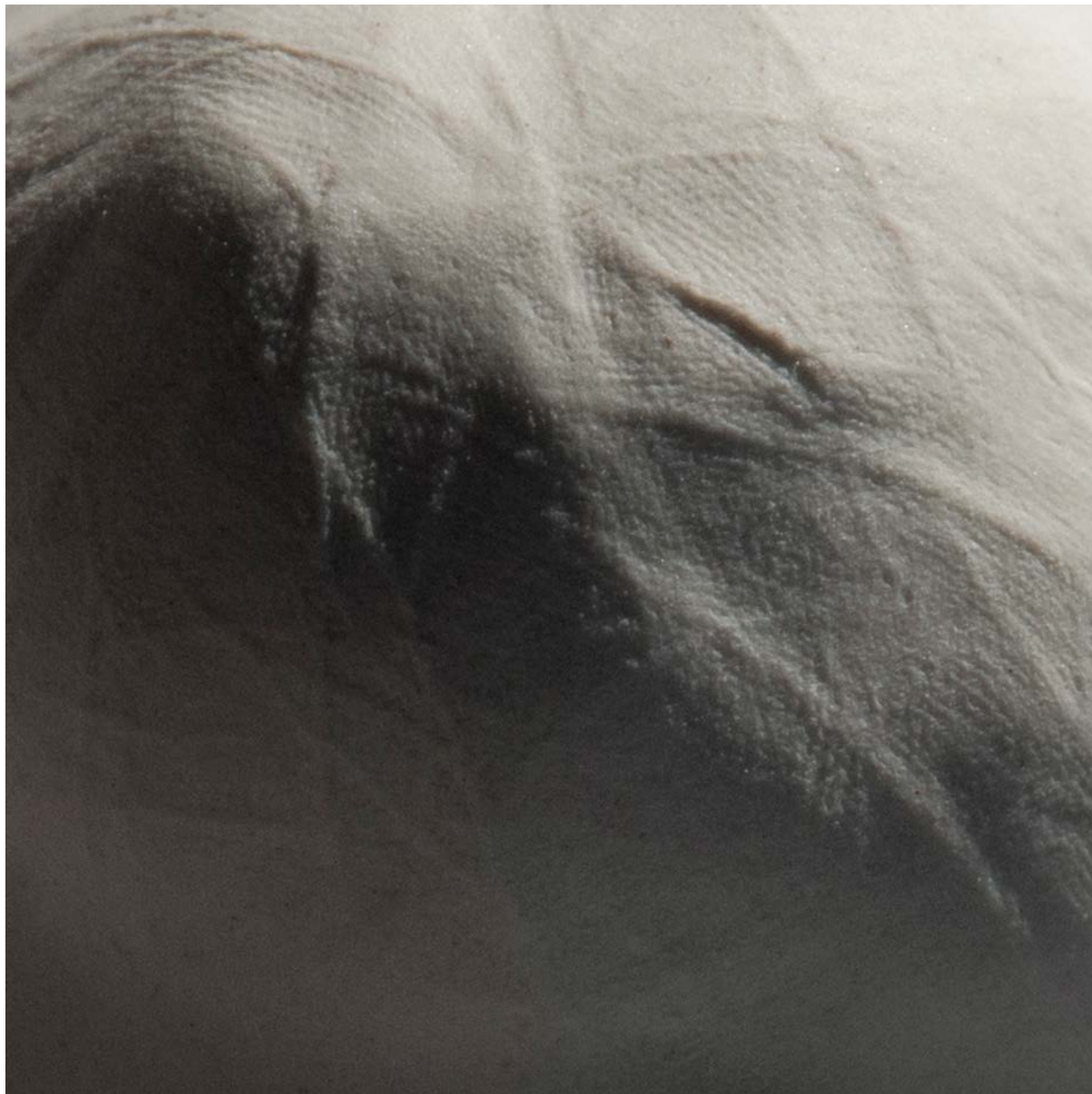


I work a lot with clay in *Becoming a World*. Squishing my body into the clay and the clay into my body just feels right, like something from an ancient ritual. It makes me feel connected to the Earth, the plants that grow from it and the animals and humans throughout history who have felt earth and clay and dirt against their bodies. Before I even start creating something with the clay, I begin to feel the connection I have been longing for.

My references for the sculptures come from my own body, images of cells, organs and things inside the human body, as well as different aspects of nature and objects that I'm exposed to in my daily life. These sculptures then become my references, as I make more sculptures of things that the original sculptures remind me of visually. Each sculpture is repeated and in these repetitions the sculptures slowly transform into each other – jellyfish become flatter and flatter until they are satellite dishes, toadstools merge together to become a cloud, coral mutates into chicken feet. Highlighting these visual connections is a way of representing the multitudes of intangible connections between all matter.







These sculptures make me very aware of the inextricable connections between myself and everything around me. By treating the pieces inspired by my body in the same way that I'm treating everything else, I am encouraging the same care for myself as I have for the other. I am holding, touching, feeling and making my body in the same way that I am holding, touching, feeling and making a piece of bone, a packet, or a slug. It feels very personal, like each object contains a trace of my body. When moulding the clay, I was restricted by the size and shape of my hands. I left fingerprints and other bodily impressions on the surface of the clay. These impressions affirm the idea that these sculptures are an extension of my body. I am a part of them and they are a part of me. Looking after the fragile bits of porcelain is an act of self-compassion.



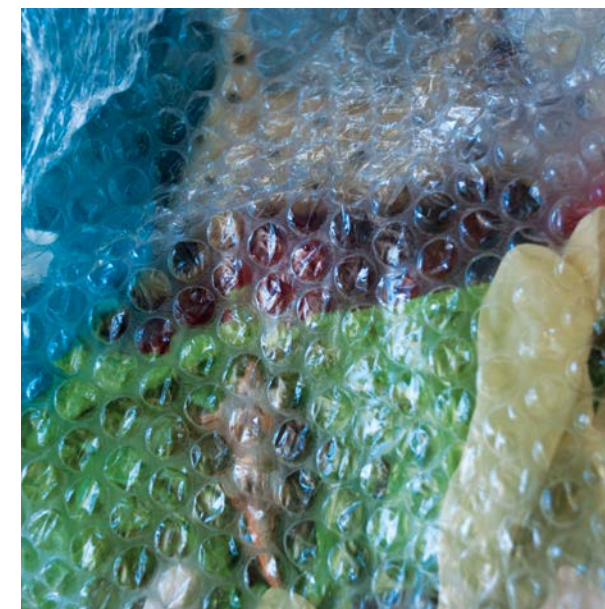


The traces I leave on the surface of the clay echo the traces humanity is leaving on the earth. These imprints evoke both the marks left behind by caring, healing and building acts, as well as the traces of destructive exploits. Both types of trace are integral aspects of our relationship with the Earth. It would be wrong for me to suggest that I am only emulating the positive trace. I am creating a world that I hope will inspire connection, care and empathy, but I am not creating a perfect world. This world is not void of any of the bad, ugly, destructive aspects present in our lives. Oppression, prejudice, climate change, capitalism, disease, violence, etc. are all a part of our world. I cannot create my world through ignoring the negative and only focusing on positive things. I am not advocating for these things – I believe it is important to fight against oppression, prejudice, climate change, etc. – but I am not pretending they don't exist. We are confronted with good and bad and everything in between, and it is because of it all that we can find the connection and care between ourselves and the world.





Becoming a World is made up of a multitude of materials. There are found objects, embedded in the clay and materialising throughout the space. These objects are things from my bedroom, from my home, from the spaces I experience in my little world. These manmade plasticky bits are swallowed by the clay as the earth swallows rubbish in a landfill. The contaminants become embedded in the world they are contaminating – they become immersed in, one and the same as, the world they are contaminating – and they begin to contaminate themselves. There is no separation between the contaminant and the contaminated. In destroying the planet, we are destroying ourselves.





There are stone lithograph prints, both concealed in and emerging from this world. These prints express the idea of zooming in and zooming out, and the connection between the multitudes of smaller wholes that work together to form multitudes of bigger wholes. They are based on pairings and collages of

vast satellite photos of the Earth and microscopic photos of bits inside the human body. I chose images with similar patterns and textures and connected them to create a new whole. The visual similarities in these large landscapes and tiny bits inside our bodies make me feel very connected to the world around me.

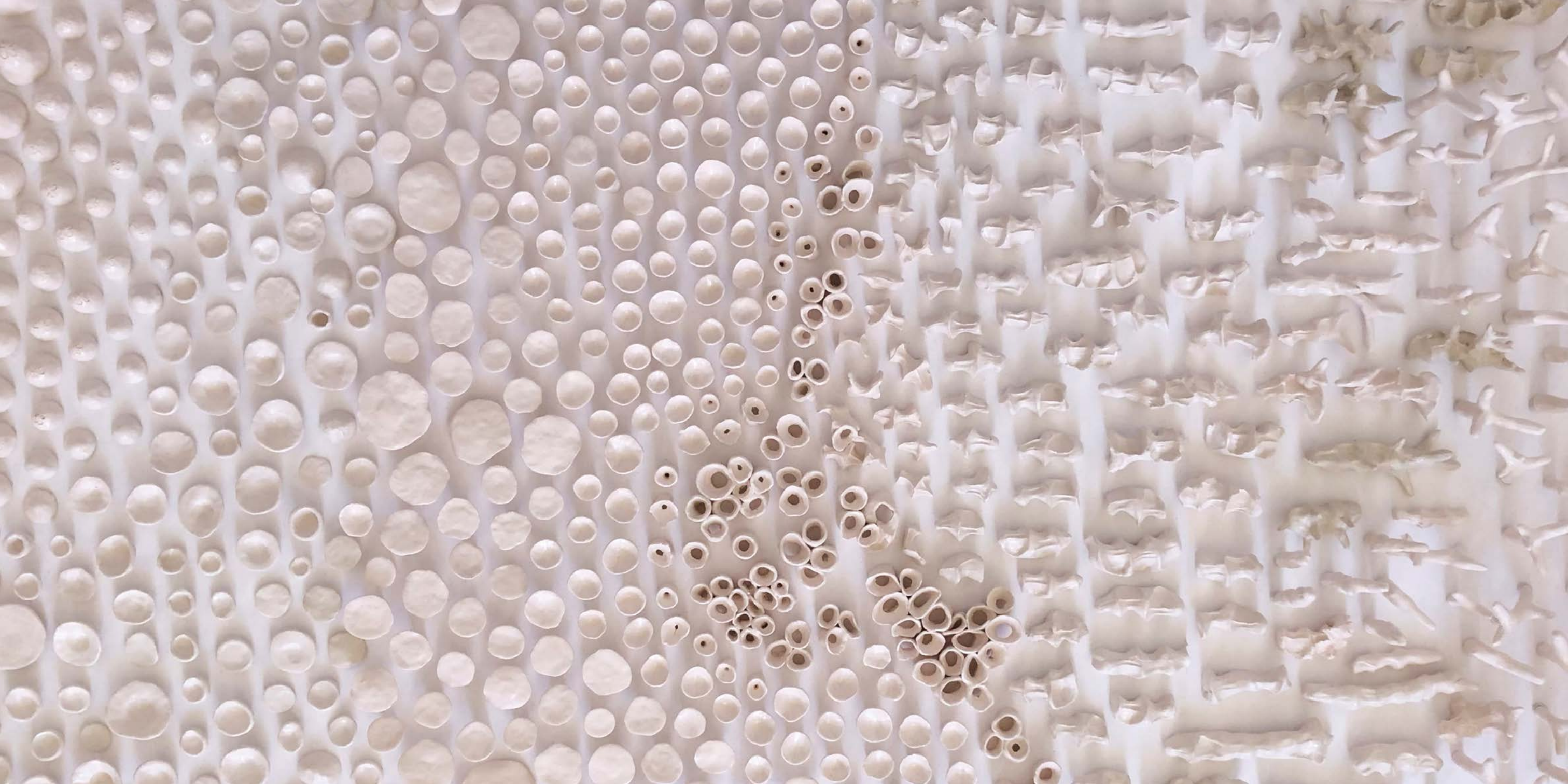


There are also photographs of the clay sculptures throughout the space. The photographs are an attempt at organising the chaotic and overwhelming mass of objects I have assembled. This organised lexicon of objects is contained within the disordered space. The photographs of the objects explain

the actual objects, just as the actual objects explain the photographs. In the photographs, I am also finding new patterns and similarities, re-mixing and re-comparing all the bits in new and different ways, to show that there are multiple different connections to be made and ways to connect.







Every little piece in this world is explaining, understanding, becoming and connecting to everything else. I hope that this world inspires an understanding of our place in the world and our connection to everything. I hope that this sense of connection inspires care and empathy for the world and everything within it, including ourselves. *Becoming a World* “is an act of unfolding the self onto the world, while enfolding the world within”³.

References

1. Braidotti, R. 2016. Posthuman Critical Theory. In *Critical Posthumanism and Planetary Futures*. D. Banerji, M.R. Paranjape, Eds. India: Springer. 13–32. DOI:10.1007/978-81-322-3637-5_2
2. Ibid., 27
3. Ibid., 26

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisors, Katherine Bull and Stephané Conradie, for their endless support, encouragement and guidance. None of this would have been possible without them.

Thank you to Madelize van der Merwe and Duncan Meyer for hours of technical assistance.

Thank you to my family for all their tireless help, encouragement and love.

Thank you to my friends (special mention to my incredible supervisory group, Katherine, Margot, Talya and Xanthe) for all the advice, ideas, inspiration, love, handholding, support, and believing in me.



