



the shit  
dreams  
are  
made  
of

david turley

Such stuff as dreams are made on <sup>1</sup>

A set of old crutches. I can't even remember where I found them. I spent weeks pulling them apart, reconfiguring them and attempting to reproduce them. I tried making a series of the black cushions. I drew a hundred scribbles of crutches turned into strange inventions and holding up objects. I turned to painting them. I had recently found a huge bag of old wrapping paper on a kerbside rubbish pile. Someone's lifetime collection of celebrations. I painted some crutches on the old paper - whatever gets you through the night.

My art practice takes on a life of it's own and I just try to keep up. I find things in places when I am not looking for them. I come across objects, ideas, phrases and histories everywhere. Unrelated pieces, acts or events somehow link together with pictures, words and conversations.

I found a Basilica in Montreal. There is a huge wall of crutches. Apparently thousands from crippled visitors who were allegedly healed. More than two million pilgrims visit every year in search of the healing power. I found this other place, the Basilica of St. Anne de Beauport in Quebec with much the same story. Pilgrims healed, a wall of crutches. I enjoyed this idea of the need for physical support and the healing of this physical ailment by replacing it with belief in a God, a mental support. I found churches and places of miracle healing spread across the globe. Italy, Mexico, Poland and even right here in Perth. Actually, in Rockingham. Our own weeping Madonna.

My religious searches led me to find out about the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. Apparently established by Saint Mark the apostle, an evangelist in the middle of the first century. The Coptic Church services are painfully long and most of the congregation remain standing but have long crutches to lean upon to ease the pain and make praying more comfortable. So many more stories of rituals and beliefs including unbaptised children that are doomed to be blind in the next life. I like all that stuff. Belief.

I travelled through Europe. I visited all sorts of cathedrals, churches and chapels. The majority of them had some sort of relic from Christ or a tomb of a Saint or some historical event that occurred there. A piece of the cross, a thorn from Christ's crown, someone's blood or tears or a piece of cloth from a holy person's underwear. I remember seeing amazing religious paintings in all of these places. One painting in Florence stuck with me. The scene was of people being dragged down a staircase by evil skeletons to a fiery hell. A priest was at the top of the stairs holding his bible gesturing knowingly and with a kind of "see I told you so" smirk on his face.

Anyway back to the art. I don't exactly know where I went next. I was making these high visibility crosses out of scraps of brightly coloured vinyl after reading tales of pilgrims journeying across Europe and their makeshift crosses. I decided to make crosses out of anything I could find. I made them out of old cloth, metal and then big wooden crosses and I used bandages and plaster as aides for healing and mending.

I used to go to church every weekend with my Mum, two brothers and sister. My Dad didn't go. He believed in something else. Sleeping in. I went to a Catholic school for ten years and was an altar boy. I got to ring a little bell sometimes during masses, which I always feared I would ring at the wrong time. The older altar boys used to nod to me signalling when to ring it and most of the time they were lying. After a few too many wrong rings and a few too many condemning looks from the priest, I refused to be the bell ringer again.

My Grandad has an old radio on his kitchenette. It is tuned to the ABC Classic station. The volume control is broken and he has this little piece of dowel propped up holding pressure between the knob and the kitchenette above. He doesn't see so well anymore and his hearing is nearly gone. His radio is always playing loud. He sits in his chair listening for most of the day and night. Nanna has been gone twenty years. A large photo of her sits on what was her dresser and Grandad always rests his hat on her pillow.

I remember the sadness of my Nanna's wake. The dim kitchen filled with family, friends, strangers and fading winter sunshine. I remember one day going to the cemetery and seeing my Grandad sitting in his parked car near Nanna's grave. He would sit in the back of his little green Corolla station wagon with a book or a newspaper. He would sit there for hours, to be with her.

I was pulling down a friend's verandah a few weeks ago. One of those Italianate mansion types. The columns with lion's faces on the pillars. I couldn't bear to throw the columns in the skip bin he had hired. They were such nice objects. They made me think of the world, constantly building upwards and onwards. They made me think of everyone striving in everyday, to own homes, to be good at their careers, to make a mark, to make a difference. Everyone longing to be remembered for something. Everyone filling their world with purpose and meaning, distracting themselves from the inevitable end. We spend our lives searching for something and dedicate every moment to the fulfilment of our dreams. We believe in all sorts of things and hold on to hope and belief because honestly, we truly have no fucking idea. Where are we going? What will the weather be like? Perhaps I should take a coat?

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act IV Scene I



Cover :  
*Supports for Inadequacy* 2010, found crutches and wrapping paper

Right:  
*On a clear day* (detail) 2010, found radio and column, plaster

Back:  
*Faded Pageantry* (detail) 2010, found streamers



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