
CHRIS BOND
TORMENTOR

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LUMA | La Trobe University Museum of Art, Melbourne

5 October to 9 December 2016

Curated by Michael Brennan

CONTENTS

TOR: DNA LIVED DUAL

I first became aware of *Tor* Rasmussen's art practice through Chris Bond. It was in an early conversation with Bond about his forthcoming solo exhibition at LUMA that he told me how he had started to document the strange and *deviant* practice of an artist – in residence at Bond's own house – who was working out of his backyard. The story goes that Bond responded to an international call out for people interested in hosting an artist in residence in their home – a domestic and, I guess, supposedly more authentic version of the types of residency programs that get rolled out all over the world. So, Bond forwards his expression of interest for this program, the usual bureaucratic process ensues, and five months later, Rasmussen – a dark and confronting Norwegian performance artist – is camped out in Bond's lounge room and is making stuff out in the yard – *scratching soil* and scrub and bundling twigs and branches to make objects and undertake work of uncertain purpose. Bond has a collection of emails that explains it better than I can here in this short space (*66* and a bit pages of them in fact), but that's how I gather the circumstance arose.

As if the proposition for a domestically based residency wasn't odd enough, a peculiar thing about Rasmussen (well, one among many) – who also refers to himself as *Kraken* – is his *nocturnal* working habits. It's not *unknown* for an artist to work at *night*. In fact, it's quite common. But with Kraken, this seems to be the only time he creates – the only time he is awake, for that matter. As Bond tells it, there is something more urgent – more *primal* – about his activities and his compulsion to *toil* after *sunshine's gone*. Each evening, Kraken would skulk around the backyard – labouring obsessively, punctuated by seemingly random and violent outbursts. His *night ritual* at Bond's place appeared to be as much *bestial ceremony* and *dark obsession* as it was art making.

Rasmussen's residency with Bond seems to have started out *calm* enough, if not ordinarily. Perhaps his abrupt and unannounced appearance following weeks of email *silence* should have functioned as a warning for Bond – the *graven sign* of things to come. But some kind of strange rapport – a kinship or intertwining of interest – made the coming together perhaps inevitable. There was a shared interest in Black Metal to start with – a confluence that Bond, himself, points out as something that drew him to Kraken (or vice versa). And reading Bond's correspondence with the *arts* residency program administrators, it seems that he developed his own anthropological fascination with his international guest. Unable to come to a civil and mutual accord with Kraken from the beginning, the relationship developed into an *art noir* project of Bond's own making – perhaps brought about by psychological necessity or *born from fear*. No doubt playing a part in the spiralling *demise* of the neatly balanced quiet domesticity that was Bond's pre-Kraken world, Bond started to *shadow* the artist, observing and documenting his *nocturnal art* practice, inescapable occasions of confrontation interspersed with and underlining a narrative that is, even now, difficult to draw conclusion from. Bit by bit, Kraken transformed Bond's ordered and docile domestic space into a frightful whirlwind of *deep fear*, brought about through a *combat*-like atmosphere and a pervasive *state of aggression – chaos ascending* in this suburban patch of Melbourne. It must have seemed altogether surreal – or horrifying. Probably both.

Oh, and I almost *forgot* the *coffin*… well art transportation crate, really. This utilitarian box took the form of that used for freighting art, however

was conveniently proportioned to contain a prone body, packed out *inside* when *empty* to make the shape of a *human void.* It was used by Kraken as a space to lay in *slumber* during daylight hours. Imposingly placed in Bond's lounge room, even when Kraken wasn't visibly active, his *umbral* presence must have always been felt.

Of course, none of it is true. Tor Rasmussen doesn't really exist – sort of.

Rasmussen – Kraken – is a creation of Bond's imagination. He is Bond. An *avatar*, *perhaps*. For the purpose of this project, Bond assumed the identity of this fictional character. In appearance, in action, even in art making – Bond put on the clothes, the hair and the face of this Scandinavian *ghoul* and lived his personification as part performance and part strategy to make new art. A *dark art* different from his own.

This is where it gets complicated. Bond's embodiment of Kraken might be considered performance art in and of itself. In fact, Bond has embodied this *creature* and inhabited his space as performance in the lead up to this show. Yet the character, Kraken, can also be thought of as enacting his own performance practice – a kind of 'life as *misanthropic art'* – sleeping in a faux f*unerary box* and scratching around in a *garden of turbulence,* killing birds and defiling the suburban *dream,* but also potentially something more sinister, as Joe Raglin's bloodsport fairy tale later in this publication illustrates. As an extension of that enactment, Kraken makes his own objects. These are real. One such *artefact* even appears in this exhibition – a branch ripped from Bond's backyard, bearing the scars of some blunt object as it has repeatedly impacted the bark of a *tree.* These creations of Kraken's are different from what Bond makes in his own practice – somewhat crude and raw as opposed to Bond's more meticulously crafted paintings loaded with poetry and pun. But wait a minute – Kraken is Bond. I mean Bond is Kraken… See what I mean – the boundaries and distinctions start to dissolve. Thankfully Bond thought to put a bit of his own practice into the residency and documented Kraken going about his nightly *pagan ritual.* Otherwise, we'd have nothing but the narrative that plays out in Bond's gmail inbox as evidence of Kraken's unnerving stay – itself a compelling read.

And so this is the exhibition.

Scattered across the wall in a dimly lit corner of the gallery, Bond gives us a series of photographs that capture his fleeting encounters with Kraken, playing out among the *torrent* of his *aggressive evil.* The image's irregular arrangement adds to the sense of unpredictability that framed these *angst*-ridden interactions. It is here that we see Kraken in his natural state of aggression. Cautious and with a degree of trepidation, Bond documents Kraken emerging from his *casket,* shot from across his *slumber room.* There are also moments that focus in on his animalistic behaviour as he scratches around on all fours in the yard – doing what, exactly, isn't entirely clear. There are frightening images of confrontation – Bond obviously gathering the courage to let his own presence be known to his *barbaric* guest. With both Bond's and Kraken's forms appearing in these photos, we are provided an unnerving glimpse of the possibility that this Kraken character really did, or does, exist. If, as we know to be the case, we accept this as an untruth, the fact that they are both caught in the camera's frame might lead us to ask, is there a further character with its own agency that Bond is playing here. The answer is not fully revealed.

The veracity of these photographs is reiterated through a lo-fi video work jumping out from the wall in another corner of the gallery. The imagery is difficult to grasp. There is Kraken. There is his box. And then there is his cane – or more correctly, Bond's cane, which Kraken decided to take for his own. It is this cane that is most jarring in the barely perceptible footage. Kraken strikes it violently against a hard surface, not unlike that of the Art Museum floor. It's smacking sound fills the space – both that of LUMA's and of Bond's home and even though you know it is coming, each successive crash causes a reflexive jump.

Disconcertingly, the cane also appears as an object in the exhibition, jammed into the gallery wall at the opposite end of the space. Stabbing into the plaster at just *above* waist height, it parallels the tree-derived object of Kraken's creation, which also protrudes from the wall. The *eerie* casting of shadows heightens the sinister history of these linear forms, striking the wall like lightning and *begging* the question of why they were thrust so violently into the otherwise *subdued* space of the gallery. Like Kraken's imposition into Bond's relatively sedate domestic space, they leave more questions than answers.

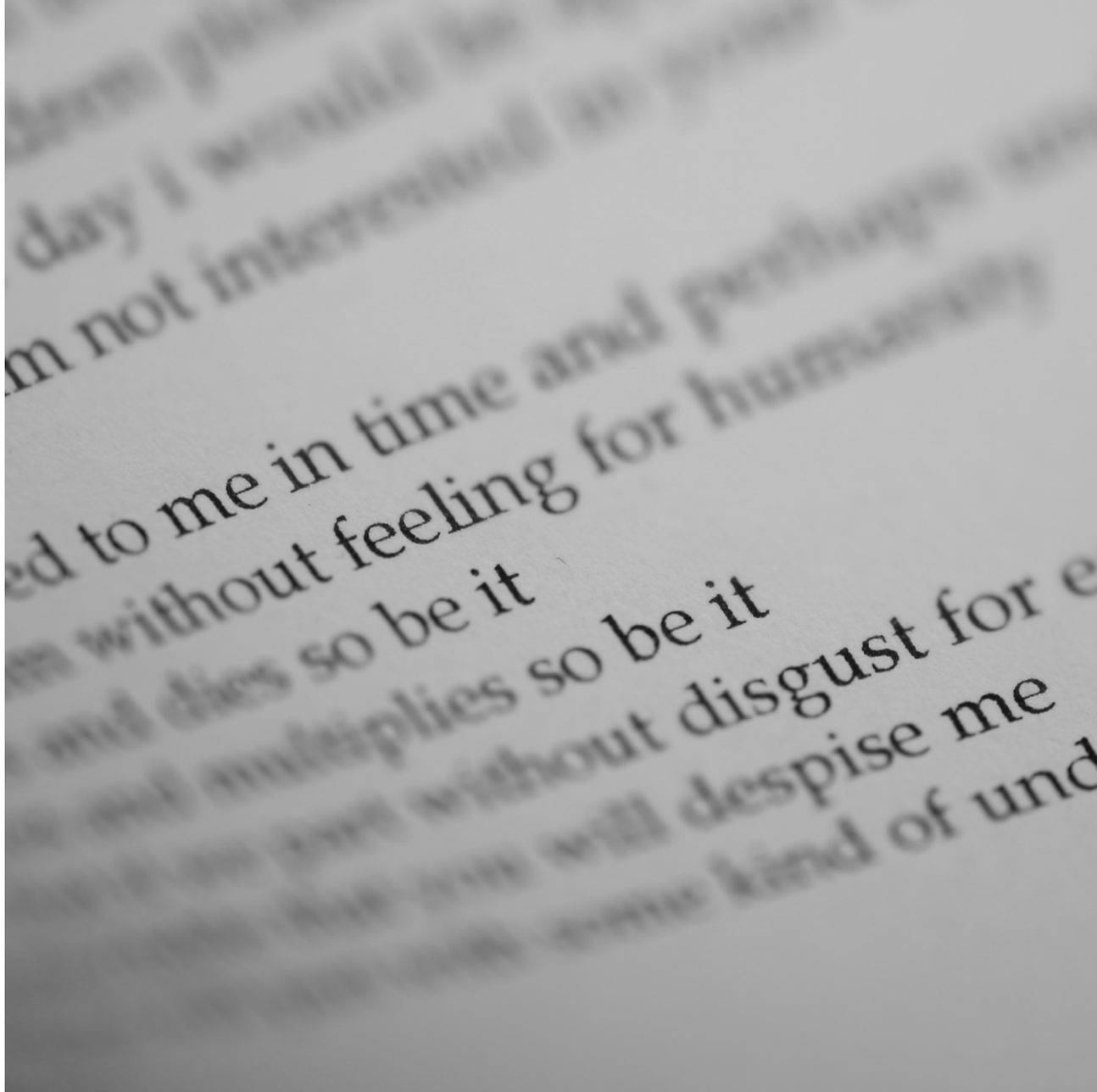
An item that rewards the time that it demands is the bound collection of Bond's email correspondence during this episode – first with Julie Redfern, the administrator of the ARTSTAY residency program through which Bond was introduced to Kraken and eventually with Kraken himself. It is difficult to keep in mind that all three are, in fact, Bond. The narrative that unfolds – *an open letter* in serial form – is so convincing and compelling that you get the sense that even Bond might have forgotten who he was. Perhaps that was part of the point. I am certainly not promising that all will be explained by the end of this text, but there is a level of satisfaction in knowing the context of the images and objects that we bear witness to in the gallery space.

Perhaps the most perplexing of these objects is Kraken's crate. This container – itself providing evidence of the *haunting presence* of Kraken with strands of hair and stains of dirt and sweat marking its internal lining – at first glance suggests that the exhibition is unfinished – that the installation crew are yet to remove that box that the exhibition came in. In some respects, this is true. It's not easy to pin point what is the art is this exhibition. In some way, of course, it all is. But in another, these physical things are simply remnants of Bond's embodiment of a character of his invention and the project that both gave rise to this character as well as subsequently rising from it. Kraken did arrive in this box. Perhaps not physically, but certainly conceptually.

It is a bold project that Bond embarks on here. It is realised with the precision and attention to detail – the space for *disruption* and the poetry of the indistinct – for which Bond is known and which has been celebrated in his painting practice. As Bond said to me in recent email correspondence (actual email correspondence, not fictional), "I like to work to rules and boundaries and it seemed appropriate given Tor's slippery identity." It is in the setting of these rules and boundaries where Bond's true mastery lies.[1]

Michael Brennan
Curator

[1] Encyclopaedia Metallum: the Metal Archives. Source for the 66 (and two thirds) Black Metal band names that appear in this text (italicised). http://www.metal-archives.com/lists/black


m not interested in
ed to me in time and perhaps
m without feeling for humanity
and dies so be it
and multiplies so be it
without disgust for e
will despise me
kind of und

Kraken (makeup), 2015

Kraken (emerging from crate), 2015

Kraken (soil), 2015

Kraken (confrontation, movement), 2015

Kraken (wood pile), 2015

Kraken (what), 2015

Kraken (breakdown), 2015

To:

Subject:

Chris

it has been a while since our last co

i must assume that you are upset w

i should apologise

the spit bites as it lands

it is the way i am and has land

shall we move on to a differe

rest assured you will come t

in six weeks i will arrive w

i trust the sun still shines

you will learn to unders

for your benefit af

Tor

On a windy Sunday afternoon inside a tiny Collingwood backstreet café, cradling an espresso and with not a hipster in sight, I sat listening to what I thought was madness.

Sitting opposite was a pale, thin and decidedly nervous looking young man by the name of Chris Bond. I'd known of his work since his 2004 exhibition at ACCA, which I didn't like. Much of his work since then has left me equally cold, and I haven't made much of an effort to hide my feelings – or lack of them. A short review I posted back in 2008 about the worst art I'd seen in the last six months had his entire 'White' series as a frontrunner. But I'm primarily a music journo, and we're a funny bunch. We don't have to like everything.

So it seemed strange that he'd insisted on meeting me. Not one, not two, but three separate emails that I didn't bother replying to. You need to understand that I get these all the time, from all sorts of cooks. I've become, quite proudly, a master ignorer. On the fourth I caved in and agreed to meet, after he'd given me a little more information on his current 'project', and managed to get my attention, with a single word.

'Tor.'

It's a dreadful little word that I first came to know of in 2002. It's a word that almost killed me.

I'd been posted to Scandinavia to cover the growing commercial success of the extreme heavy metal scene, which from my perspective had been overrun by hordes of poseurs churning out digestible crap plagued by synthesised keyboards and ridiculous vocalisations. I didn't want to go but I was being paid (remember those days!?) so I thought I could at least have a bit of fun ripping it to pieces.

A fortnight into the Swedish leg of the trip, in a somewhat depressed state, I found myself in a bar in Gothenburg, waiting for the headlining melodic death metal band *Inact Visi* to hit the stage. A serious band. Finally.

I was guzzling down a glass of local ale in a bit of a daze when I felt a light hand on my shoulder. I turned around and was more than a little taken aback by what was in front of me- a tiny bald anaemic man with a fork hanging out of what remained of his left eyeball.

Why he picked me out of the crowd is still something of a mystery. I'll never know for certain. He died in my arms, half collapsed on the beer soaked carpet, blood gushing from his chest, surrounded by gawkers with bad hair. What a way to go.

In a limp display of humanity I'd pulled up his shirt in an attempt to figure out where all the blood was coming from. Across his scrawny chest someone had slashed out some letters with a knife.

'TOR.'

It could have ended there. I could have signed my witness statement and walked away. But I was bored, so bored. And this was interesting.

So I decided to do some poking around. The police, as it turned out, had no idea what to do or where to start. They didn't know who he was. They didn't know where he'd come from. They knew he was dead, and that was about it.

After speaking to some Swedish friends about the possible meaning of 'TOR' a couple of things came to light. Tor is a relatively common first name in Sweden and Norway, and is the shortened form of Thor, the god of thunder, war and a lot of other nonsense in Norse mythology. In German, it translates to gate, door, or portal, which made the next bit of information seem worth following up. 'Tor', I was told, was a sign strung above the entrance to a very peculiar club in the outskirts of Gothenburg.

Club Tor is a special place for special people. I was sitting in an internet café (stop laughing) a few days later looking at the Tor club's English language website. There wasn't much on it, a couple of blurry pictures of rows of skinheads and blond-haired women looking sternly at the camera, all in black, like Church of Satan members sitting in a… well, sitting in a church I guess. There was a bit of text with contact details and opening times, but not much else. I'd been assured it was some sort of S&M club, but the website didn't make it very clear.

Friday night rolled around and I chucked on a black t-shirt, black pants and shoes, and made my way over to Club Tor in a taxi. For some reason I'd figured I'd just walk right in, but it didn't seem to work that way. Well, not for me at least. A bald headed goliath of a man kept pushing his enormous palm in my chest, shaking his head, as group after group was let in. I went and stood on the opposite side of the street trying to figure out what made me so different. It took me a while to figure it out. And when I did, it seemed fairly obvious. Everyone was sickeningly thin.

I was looking down at the sloppy stomach hanging over my belt wondering what the hell to do next when I heard a voice from the shadows behind me.

"Vad letar du efter?"

"Huh?" I spun around to see where the voice was coming from. A gaunt, corspe-painted shirtless man with long stringy hair emerged from a doorway. He paused for a moment, staring at me unblinking, before continuing in crisp English,

"I said, what are you looking for?"

His hand darted out and caught me by the throat.

"I, um–" I spluttered.

"You want to come in I expect". His lips turned into a half smile, half snarl, and he relaxed his grip, before slapping me on the shoulder. "Come on then."

Before I had a chance to reply his arm had swung me around and propelled me across the road. He was immensely strong, all sinew.

As I was hustled onto the footpath the waiting lines of emaciated clubbers parted and I could hear some of them murmuring and pointing at us. The goliath immediately stood to attention and threw open the door.

My new friend grabbed me by the back of the belt and lifted me off the ground as I was hoisted inside through the darkness. In the dim light I could make out the sunken eyes of row after row of seated clubbers, who turned to stare at us.

Soft murmurs filled the air, quickly coalescing into a whispered chant, 'tor, tor, tor, tor.'

I was dropped into a seat at the front. "Don't move," he said. His breath reeked of something like petrol.

I was shit-scared but I pulled off an eye-roll, just to let him know how unfased I was. He grabbed me by the throat again, and squeezed hard.

"Relax."

I did as I was told. My friend dissapeared somewhere off to the left as my eyes gradually adjusted to the dim light. I could just make out the wall next to me, marked with black spots and horizontal painted lines. Looking behind me I seemed to be sitting in the last of a series of small interconnecting rooms with crudely demolished internal walls. And then it hit me. I was sitting in a converted squash court complex.

As I pondered the load bearing capacity of the remaining internal walls and possible building code violations, a weak beam of light emerged ahead, revealing a small stage set into a cavity. The crowd hushed as a loan man, draped in an oversized, ill-fitting mask and cape, made his way between the rows of chairs, dragging a painfully thin wretch of a man behind him on a chain.

The man was on all fours and didn't seem displeased. He giggled and thrashed around like an overstimulated toddler. For some reason this made me feel a whole lot better. It shouldn't have.

On reaching the front the man was picked up and tossed onto the stage, and shackled to a hook. The leader removed his mask and cape. It was my new friend. He raised his left arm into the air, the light catching a gleaming blade in his hand. A thunderous roar of 'Tor' came from the crowd.

His arm swung down towards the man's chest, slicing across his left nipple, from which blood immediately sprayed, then straight back up to an accompanying call of 'Tor' from the willing crowd. Up and down the arm arced, carving out T, O and R. Some of the cuts must have sliced through his lungs, as the man appeared to be choking on the blood that had started to gush out of his mouth. From his back pocket my friend pulled out a fork, and deftly scooped out one of the man's eyeballs, popped it into his mouth, chewing and spitting out the gristle. Then he helped himself to the other. By this time the poor wretch was on his last few breaths, collapsing on his side to cries of 'Tor' from all sides.

It had all happened so quickly that I was only half aware of what was going on. Then I felt two powerful hands on my shoulders, and the stink of petrol. Two black eyes blazed in front of me.

"Tor needs you"

I was lifted out of the seat by his pincer grip and thrown onto the stage next to the lifeless man like last week's laundry. My hands slipped around in the sticky puddles of warm blood as I received a kick to the stomach. He grabbed a hunk of my hair and drew my head up. I heard the roar of 'Tor' as the knife ripped across my chest. Two slashes followed before I decided that enough was enough. I grabbed at his ankle and caught him off balance, causing him to tumble off the stage, knocking him out. I picked myself up and raced back down the centre aisle, clutching at my chest, expecting to be set upon by the congregation. But they didn't move, they just stared.

Ten hours later I was onboard a flight back to Australia, having hastily bandaged my wounds back at the hotel room with torn up lengths of pillow case. I hadn't gone to the police. Or the hospital. As I explained to my girlfriend when I got off the plane, I just did what I thought was best. And that was to leave.

She of course called the police and drove me straight to hospital. The detective who came to my bedside for a chat didn't believe a word of it, and I could hardly blame her, it sounded so ridiculous. I don't know whether she bothered to follow up on the story, but that was the last I heard of it. A week or so later I looked up Club Tor on the web again, but it had gone. I couldn't find a mention of it anywhere. Not even a news story about the poor guy I tried to save in the bar, or the chained chump who got slain on the stage before me. I asked Carl, one of my Swedish contacts, to go and see if the club was still running. But it had already gone, sign and all.

So I'm sitting in this cafe listening to Chris Bond talk about a character he invented back in 2014. A crazed Norwegian performance artist by the name of Tor Rasmussen, who came over to stay with his family as part of a fictional residency program. Cooky stuff, mostly involving dress-ups and role-playing. It's Chris, under the make-up and wig, clearly.

But, of course, there's more going on, so much more.

His invented Tor, the one he shows me in his photographs, is identical to my Tor. The chin, the eyes, the hair, everything. He shows me a grainy video of him performing as Tor. It's my Tor, no doubt about it. He shows me fictional emails he's written as Tor, and as I read, it seems almost impossible to believe that he's entirely invented. I ask him if he's sure that his Tor is fictitious, and he gives me a funny look, like I'm the crazy one here.

Chris is Tor, and Tor is Chris. They are one and the same, I'm sure of it. His work is no fiction.

I just need Chris to admit it, and I think he wants to tell me. After all, why get in touch? So I ask him to say something in Swedish. He says he can't, says he doesn't know the language. Says he's never set foot in the country. He's adamant about it.

So I try something else. I ask for something in Norwegian. No problem he says. He leans forward, and something changes in his eyes. He opens his mouth, and I catch a faint whiff of petrol. What comes out sounds like gibberish to me, but the voice, that voice...

Joe Raglin

Hi Julie,

You're not going to believe this —

Tor rang me from Melbourne airport a few hours a

I'm a bit shaken up — I can't comprehend why Tor's

the last month? He claims he was off taking Trans-Siberia

him was on September 5th and engineered to make sure

and until I spoke to him in Perth, [illegible]

[illegible]

Chr

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Tor is h

Tormentor (detail), installation photograph

Tormentor (detail), installation photograph

Tormentor, installation photograph

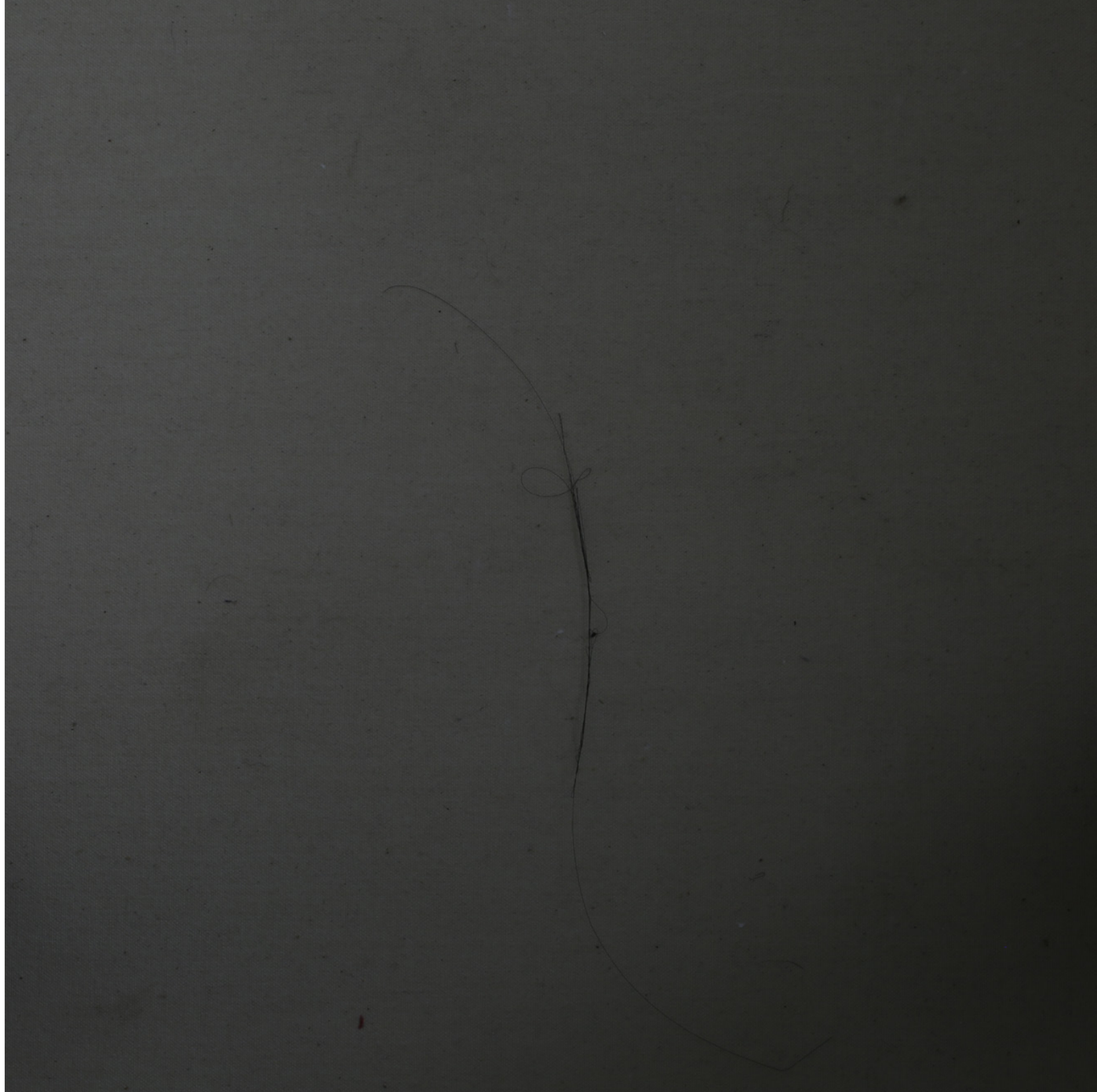
Tormentor, installation photograph

Tormentor, installation photograph

Tormentor, installation photograph

Tormentor (detail), installation photograph

Tormentor (detail), installation photograph



Tormentor (detail), installation photograph

Tormentor, installation photograph

List of Works

Measurements: height precedes width and depth in centimetres

All works courtesy of Chris Bond

Crate, 2014
Ply, pine, canvas
201 x 73 x 50 cm

Kraken, Rise, 2015
Digital video, 6:24, monitor
40 x 30 x 20 cm

Kraken: text, 2015
Ink on archival paper, bound
31 x 22 x 1 cm, 3 copies

The Devil's Spit (cane), 2015
Oil, acrylic and soil on timber
114 cm

Carving, 2015
Timber
150 cm

Kraken (emerging from crate), 2015
Ink print on archival paper
41 x 61cm

Kraken (breakdown), 2015
Ink print on archival paper
41 x 61cm

Kraken (confrontation, movement), 2015
Ink print on archival paper
41 x 61cm

Kraken (makeup), 2015
Ink print on archival paper
41 x 61cm

Kraken (soil), 2015
Ink print on archival paper
41 x 61cm

Kraken (what), 2015
Ink print on archival paper
41 x 61cm

Kraken (wood pile), 2015
Ink print on archival paper
41 x 61cm

Kraken, 2015
Ink print on archival paper
41 x 41cm

CHRIS BOND:
TORMENTOR

A LUMA | La Trobe University Museum of Art Exhibition

5 October to 9 December 2016
LUMA | La Trobe University Museum of Art
La Trobe University Melbourne Campus,
Bundoora, Victoria.

Curator: Michael Brennan
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Essay: Joe Raglin aka Chris Bond
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Cover image
Kraken, 2015
Ink print on archival paper
41 x 41cm

Image courtesy the artist

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