

AN IMAGINABLE REMEDY FOR
AN INTANGIBLE MALADY

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*If I whisper to these walls will they silently
absorb the words?*

*While omnipresent ears strain to hear my every
thought*

*I am shielded in this safety net, free to say what
I like*

- welcome to my parlour

Sheltered in this chamber I can while away some time

Unburdened by the insistence of distraction

Held close in the maw of my head locked mind

- I listen to myself

*Under a mantle of thoughts my body rebuilds
its armour*

*harvesting all the help that is offered from
the shorn*

I will spin a new skin of steely wool

- and take my leave



Abstract

The embodiment of psychological experience and the nature of somatic response is the underlying theme in this work. It addresses issues concerning how the body absorbs, holds and disguises illness.

In psychological terms this may be referred to as body armouring, a way of absorbing a threat to counter its influence. How we acknowledge this self-protective purpose and address the inherent side-effects is where the agency is to be found.

Keywords: Somatics, Introspectroscopy, Armouring, Ethics, Empathy

S o m a t i c s



Introduction

Societal disconnection is linked to an increasing preoccupation with ever-expanding digital interface options. It is a contributory factor in the rise of paranoia, feelings of inadequacy, isolation and a sense of constant surveillance.

It is associated with a loss of empathy and increased selfishness with an over emphasis on personal gratification and self-importance.

The scope of this research is to reinforce empathic thinking through a mediated experience, the measurement of which remains indeterminable.

Method

Comprising three human-scale single occupancy shelters which may provide an opportunity in which to shed anxiety, to detach from divisive discourse, to reboot energy levels and to contemplate ones own physicality.

These shelters straddle a serious clinical domain and a playful holistic experience reminiscent of quackery and shamanistic ritual.

That each has a different purpose is significant but what matters most is that inside you may find solace for the senses.

Image; Kate Bowe O'Brien

I n t r o s p e c t r o s c o p y



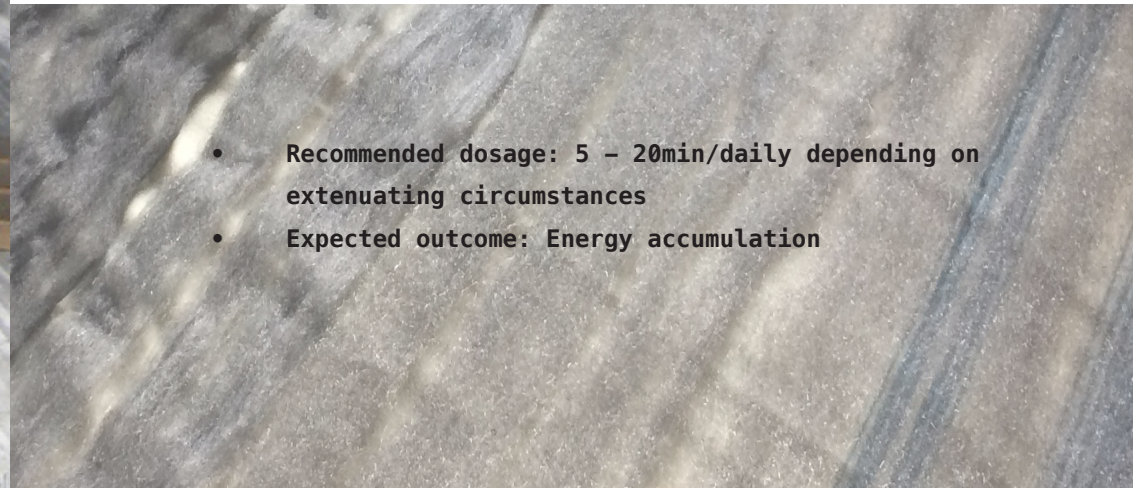
Hold Still

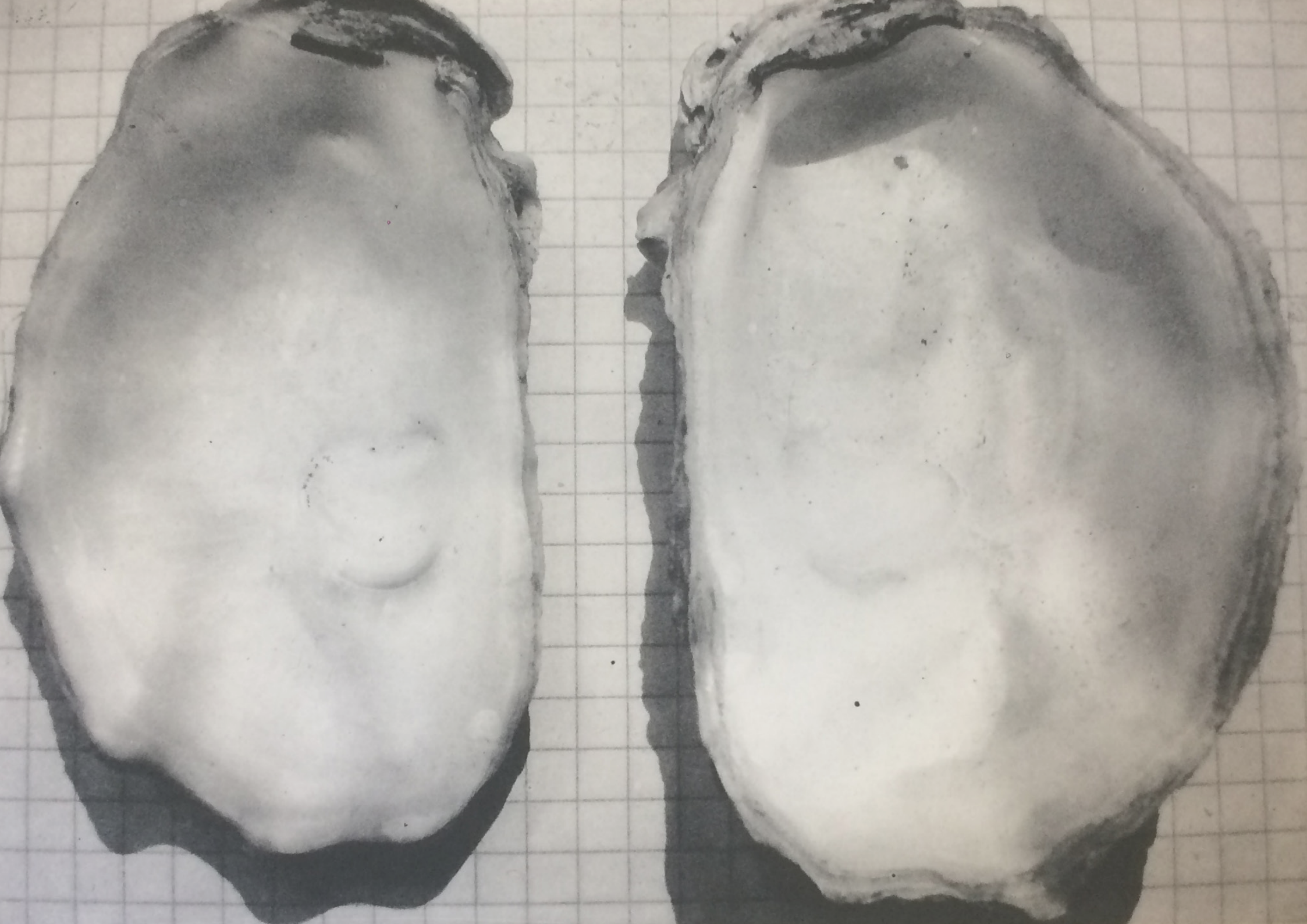
220cm x 70cm x 75cm

Steel, glass, wool, polyester, swing, film

This shelter adopts the aesthetic of 1950s medical apparatus with particular reference to Wilhelm Reich's Orgone Accumulator. In the form of a cabinet, it was designed to absorb and conduct biological energy through alternating layers of wool and steel onto a concentrated inner surface where this energy could then be passed to an occupying body. This raised energy level was capable of unblocking a trauma or attacking an illness. Although imprisoned for making fraudulent claims, Reich's contribution was honest, accessible and perhaps at odds with the then burgeoning predilection with pills and medication. Elements of this research have been adapted to construct *Hold Still* in which such an energy transfer is possible, not to necessarily treat an illness but to act as a catalyst.

- Recommended dosage: 5 – 20min/daily depending on extenuating circumstances
- Expected outcome: Energy accumulation





Press Pause

180cm x 80cm x 80cm, Steel

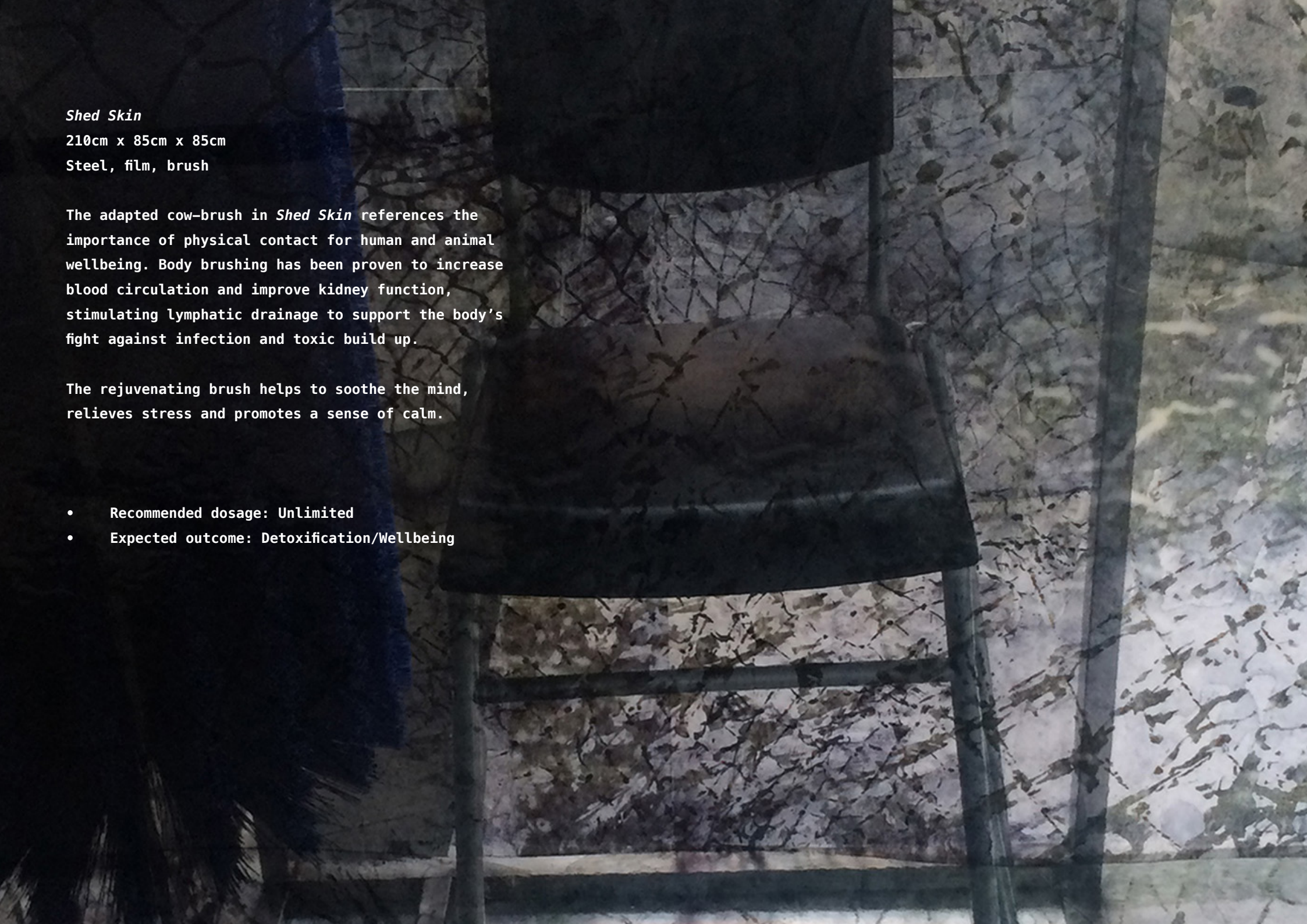
Working as a Faraday cage, electromagnetic fields are blocked preventing mobile communication. Once inside, the atmosphere is comforting. We are encouraged to quieten the senses in the altered environment. From this vantage point we can observe the bustle of life outside knowing that we are obscured behind the metal grille and have paused in our participation. It is not a sensory deprivation space but a place to escape from sensory overload.

- **Recommended dosage: Up to 20min/daily**
- **Expected outcome: Mental detoxification**



A r m o u r i n g





Shed Skin

210cm x 85cm x 85cm

Steel, film, brush

The adapted cow-brush in *Shed Skin* references the importance of physical contact for human and animal wellbeing. Body brushing has been proven to increase blood circulation and improve kidney function, stimulating lymphatic drainage to support the body's fight against infection and toxic build up.

The rejuvenating brush helps to soothe the mind, relieves stress and promotes a sense of calm.

- Recommended dosage: Unlimited
- Expected outcome: Detoxification/Wellbeing

Observations

Positioned as a triumvirate, *The Shell/ters* represent stations in a secular pilgrimage or ritual, the purpose of which is at the discretion of each individual participant's narrative.

Presented as a quasi-therapeutic experience they facilitate engagement through the perceived solemnity and gadgetry of their constructions. That they can be interpreted as sanctuary or prison is a point of contention and within this ambiguity lies their power.

This work aims to introduce a pro-active expectation of a cure for some complaint we may not be aware of harbouring. The tension that exists between what is anticipated and what is experienced is paramount. It is the ambiguity and indefinability that exists in something both alluring and forbidding that excites, especially when there is a potential for the unexpected.

E t h i c s



Image; The U.S. Food and Drug Administration

The work requires an element of physical and/or mental participation from the viewer. That each chamber has a different purpose is significant but what matters most is that you may find solace in the quiet, in the motion or for the senses.

Associated Risk

Aesthetically the boxes are both forbidding and compelling, inviting the viewer to step inside while warning that they may not be released. They may require an effort to leave, unyielding to a gentle push. This may lead to an initial panic. Individuals suffering from claustrophobia or prone to panic attacks are not advised to participate without company present. Individuals with a pre-existing heart condition should limit their time spent in *Hold Still*.

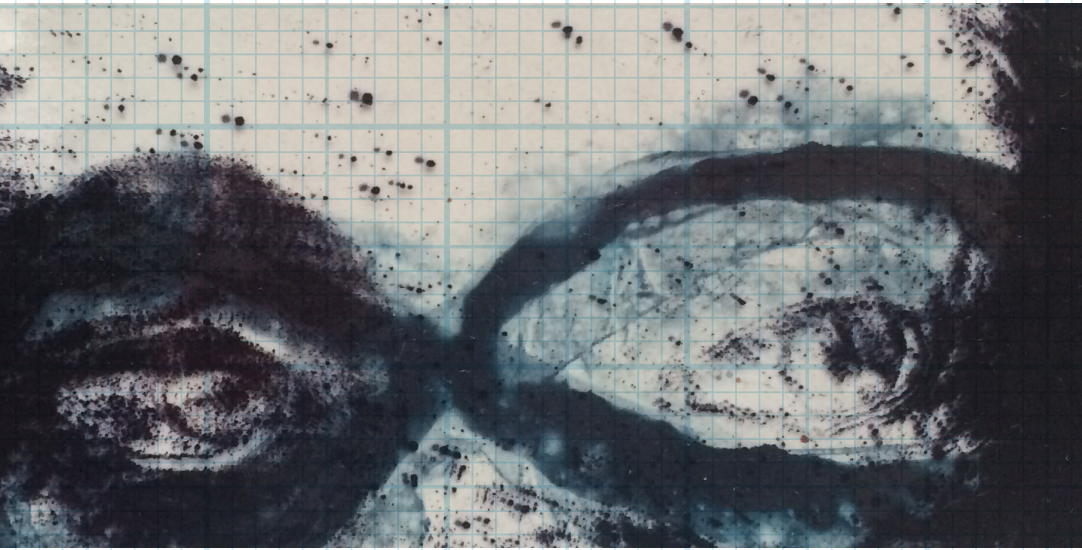


Apparatus

Incorporating print on film, paper, textile and metal these analogue constructions offer a deeper level of participation to the viewer. Pattern and light is utilised to reinforce the spatial and psychological boundaries between exterior and interior, public and private, the observer and the observed.

Media: Steel, Aluminium, Wool, Polyester,
Glass, Wood, Polypropylene.

Methods: Screenprint, transfer print,
metal fabrication.



E m p a t h y

Appendix 1

Technical background

Empathy is difficult to measure, the main methods being the Empathetic Experience scale, Empathy Quotient scale or the Interpersonal Reactivity Index which are based on a score determined by the response to certain questions. In addition to these indices, somatic responses can be measured but as in the above, all of these methods are subjective.



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2020

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