

BEARmOTHER (touch me tender)

2021

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Fantasies of fur coats, fur carpets, furry walls and furry hands. Magical bestiaries, dreams and nightmares. Catholic beasts and tamed priests. They call them the lovers.

The bear kissed the girl

The girl kissed the bear

We kiss

We kiss

We kiss

The woman and the animal dance together.

The sickle moon suspended above them weaves time in silvery webs.

Never was there a lovelier sight!

“Let’s live together!”

This worried the clergy a lot.

(The church-sponsored war against the bear enforced since the middle ages, which ran in tandem with the burning of women as witches, had otherwise been largely successful.)



For centuries, demonised by the church for her likeness to humans and former god-like position to the ancient peoples of northern Europe, the bear had been locked away, banished to the devils bestiary, to the circus, to the realm of ridicule, *oh dancing bear*. Slippery, she slipped between the rigid categories imposed by those men who designed the taxonomies of knowledge. BEARmOTHER is a storytelling and a dialogue between two mothers in an enchanted castle and natural history archive where a cruel colonial heritage is hidden. It calls into question the spaces between fiction and the anthropocentric ‘natural’ world. It is a series of tapestries, sculptures and texts which combine together the mythologies and cultural histories surrounding the bear, weaving together the delicate intimacies and loopy materialities between teddies and taxidermy, female and ursine bodies in order to rethink the relationship between them.



BEARmOTHER, which forms part of 'Touch Me Tender', a wider project exploring the figure of the teddy bear in all its vicissitudes, began at Can Serrat in Summer 2021. The research began with a visit to the natural history archives at Castell de los Tres Dragons in Barcelona, where I met with five taxidermic bears and biologists working in the leaky spaces between art and science. Other visits important to my investigation included the Centre de Documentació i Museu Tèxtil of Terrassa and the Museum of Natural Sciences in Barcelona. I also worked on learning about the rich bear traditions of the Pyrenees, through conversations with local experts in the field in order to understand the symbolic significance of this animal and the stories which have made it. Texts which accompanied my process at Can Serrat included *The Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden* by Donna Haraway, *The Bear, History of a Fallen King* by Michel Pastoreau; *Animals & Women*, edited by Carol J. Adams y Josephine Donovan and the feminist fairytales of Angela Carter. These, along with the writing workshops and exercises with fellow resident Agustina Gurevich were important to the creation of the texts which were made in dialogue with the textiles I worked on throughout my stay.

The work which resulted is a series of objects which could be an installation, a set for storytelling, a chapel. A triptych of tapestries spin the stories which underly the various mythologies that construct the bear in the popular imagination. Taxidermied teddy bears sewn together with yarn and stuffed with straw from the fields of El Bruc. Loose fabrics and furry carcasses. A text in six fragments where natural history, ecofeminism, fairy tales and fantasy touch. A *reweaving* of the teddy bear patriarchy.