

## **Critique**

### **Jo Holland**

Jo Holland was an artist in residence at Saint Saviours Church, Highbury as part of the Florence Trust's annual programme 2004-5. She set up her studio darkroom in the Lady Chapel, a closed off simple space within the ornate grade one listed interior of the church. It was hard not to think of this space as a laboratory where the artist would work as scientist amongst the industrial hardware, the chemicals, the different photographic papers and the specimens kept in the fridge. In almost secretive isolation Jo would provide the missing alchemical touch of the artist that would transform the disparate and occasionally mundane materials into the spectacular works she produced over this period of time.

Jo Holland makes large-scale sensual colour photographs of natural, small, interior spaces and does so without using a camera and film. The results are by turn, seductive and sinister, ambiguous and powerful. The series she completed at the Florence Trust 2004/5 advances this already technically audacious method and marks a clear turning point in the artist's work. Holland now uses flesh as the raw material for a number of photographs that literally got to the heart of human existence and the constant deformations and transformation that the body is heir to. Here is a glossy, almost science fiction, landscape of crimson islands with blackened shores, golden sunspots and lilac pools, yet what we are looking at was once a beating heart. Like many artists, she feels uncomfortable trying to explain the work either in terms of content or through technical process. This secrecy can be threatening: causing confusion where we are unsure if the pictures mean what they seem to suggest. It can also be liberating: when meaning arises from the meeting of the individual beholder and the works so powerfully, both in an ornate arts and crafts church and also on pristine white gallery walls. These are works that encourage the viewer on their own interior journey and arrive at the tender core of identity.

### **Paul Bayley - Director**

ACE Art in Churches Officer; Director Florence Trust  
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