

Two years ago, in September, I travelled to Anchorage, Alaska with the help of a Scottish arts grant to visit sled-dog training kennels in the off-season. Things didn't work out. When I arrived, the dog trainer I had been in contact with, was nowhere to be found. His kennels were locked up and the dogs were gone. No one in the town was willing to tell me where he might be or how I might contact him. The only husky I saw was a stray eating from a broken bin bag behind the low-rise Econotel where I stayed.

I travelled from there to Buenos Aires to take part in an artist residency. As Alaska was entering winter Argentina was in late spring. I wanted to meet people who worked with animals for a living. Buenos Aires has one of the densest domestic dog populations in the world. One day I was visiting a pet shop to buy leashes. I'd spent a week walking the city nervously cradling my camera, treading in dog poo but failing to encounter any dogs being walked anywhere. In desperation I decided to make a still life arrangement of leads tangled around a broom handle. As I pushed open the pet shop door, I saw a handwritten notice in the window advertising professional dog-walking services locally. I took the number down and texted G. He worked the residential area in the north of the city, walking the irrigated parks and leisure areas around the river delta. We arranged to meet one afternoon on the corner of Av. Victoria and Maschwiz. G emerged from the sheet metal gate of one of the heavily fortified residences swinging a huge bunch of keys and leading a trotting Shih Tzu to a group of ten or twelve dogs waiting patiently, attentively for him, tethered to a railing in the shade of an overhanging tree.

I had offered 'high-quality photographs for his business profile' in exchange for some pictures I could use as the basis of an art project. I set about directing him in a kind of amateur promotional photoshoot, it was clumsy, and we laughed about it. He posed with the dogs and we staged action shots as he walked down the centre of the street. After this, I followed him for a while and photographed the leashes and dogs around him as he worked. We were together for about fifteen minutes. I held the camera low, trying to match the perspective of the dogs, I shot continuously on 'batch capture' as he coupled the leads to his belt and walked down the riverbank. The sun was hot. I sent him the promotional photographs by email when I got back to the small apartment where I was staying. When I looked at the photographs I had taken for my project, because of the low angle, none of them showed his face. The dogs were cropped too, mostly just their heads, upper bodies and tail tips visible at the bottom of the frame. The images centred on the space between them; The system of clips, leads and chains that connected him to the dogs. His hands, hips, crotch, and buttocks became the centre of the drawings, the origin of motion. The dogs move constantly, centrifugally, their power transferred to him at the point of their connection, their movements traced by the coloured lines of the leashes.

For this exhibition, I chose a sequence of images from the 60 plus that I have from that day. They represent about three minutes; the time it took for G to unclip the dogs from the railing, attach them to his belt, cross the road, check his phone and walk past.

The construction lines of the grid and under-drawing are made in non-photo blue pencil, a pre-inking medium used by animators and comic book artists. It doesn't reproduce in photography or copying. I worked on top of this in a soft type of coloured pencil. In the drawings, the dogs themselves are omitted. The space in the image where their bodies interrupt his is left blank. Initially, when I took the photographs, I was struck by the power relation between G and the large group of dogs. His quiet domination of them. The images felt slightly violent, G standing over the crawling dogs, their throats cinched by choke chains and straps. By removing the bodies of the dogs from the images, I wanted to release them from our gaze as subjects of pity or sympathy. I wanted to describe the human as also bound by less visible forces, tied up, dominated.

The title of the show 'Life is not a walk across an open field' is a Russian proverb. It makes me think about enclosure and domestication. Property and relationships. Living is to become entangled in the lives of others, in structures and institutions. To have them pull you in different

directions. I think about my entanglement with G, the inequality between hemispheres, something that photography is linked with, originates out of. Photographs of animals, and then people in motion. Accelerating, progressing, developing across the surface of the earth. These images try to describe this kind of entanglement, the forces that have driven them to become entwined are no longer clear, no longer visible. Unwinding part of them, the others knot together more tightly.

'Bloodlines' is a word that came up frequently in my conversations with an Argentine Irish Wolfhound breeder. I first met her in Frankfurt travelling from a dog fair. She tucked a small black and chrome flight-case of chilled dog semen under the metal table where our coffees were wobbling. She explained that her dogs were so desirable (and valuable) because they came from a 200 year old dynasty of dogs that originated in the Scottish highlands in the early 19th century. 'When you are buying this sperm,' she knocked her Capybara skin Cowboy boot against the case, 'you are not just buying one dog, you are buying part of all of the dogs in that lineage'.

She reminded me of something that I had read in the 1977 essay 'Why Look at Animals' by John Berger: 'Animals came from over the horizon. They belonged to *there* and *here*. Likewise they were mortal and immortal. An animal's blood flowed like human blood, but its species was undying and each lion was Lion [each dog was Dog]. This – maybe the first existential dualism – was reflected in the treatment of animals. They were subjected *and* worshiped, bred *and* sacrificed. Today the vestiges of this dualism remain among those who live intimately with, and depend upon, animals'.

Domestication is a process of entanglement, on a genetic level. Something that is believed to have come about through proximity and 'invitation'. The difference between taming and domestication is that taming is conditioned behavioural modification, whereas a domesticated species' genetics have been changed permanently to make them more amenable to human contact and command. Through selective breeding certain traits have been refined until the dog becomes the perfect tool. TV dog whisperer César Milan says, 'fish need to swim, birds need to fly, dogs need to walk,' dogs need to have a purpose; 'a dog without a job is like an unemployed university graduate,' César says. He has developed a backpack for dogs – it gives them a job, they have something to carry. Symbolically animals already have a lot to carry. As images of morality in films and stories, figuratively in language, religion and myth, emotionally as pets and companions. In art, like in breeding, their images are carefully refined, mastered. They are used as representations of the natural – to stand apart and show us how far we have moved away from ourselves.

When you draw, you don't move anywhere, you sit still until your bum hurts. Through this process the quarter-second that each photograph took to capture and the fifteen minutes that G and I spent together has stretched into a much longer time. Time has passed around me, but it's also stuck, invisibly inside me. Sitting drawing I replay encounters, conversations in my head, endlessly, maddeningly. Occupied in this way there is no telling where the mind can go, back to an awkward moment considered forgotten from years before, lodged in there forever.

I remember a dog that I walked once through Brockwell Park, in South London in the dawn hours of a weekday morning. He was a slender dog, a whippet-border-collie-cross and chaotic, overflowing with nervous energy. I let him off the lead and he immediately ran down a terrified jogger, her hi-viz yellow bobble-hat fell off as she sprinted away from him. He skidded to a halt and wolfed down the thick knit as I ran to catch up with him shouting 'No! No!' For the rest of the day I was devastated, sure of certain death as the polyester wound invisibly around the ribbons of his digestive tract, strangling the organs inside him. He was fine. The hat never appeared, or at least if it did, I never saw it.