

TCB

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Secrets Don't Make Friends

Sarah Brasier & Matthew Harris

28th January - 21st February, 2021



Sarah Brasier

Justice, acrylic on wood, 24ct gold wood frame, 34.2 x 26.8 cm, 2021

Exhibition Text by Natalie Thomas

Secrets don't make friends

Sarah Brasier and Matthew Harris

An initial google search of 'secrets' spat me out a sponsored link for a jewellery shop. 'Secrets sshhhh' are in the business of selling 'high end' cubic zirconia to a customer base that's broke but still want to show they care. Exploring fiscal austerity is a growth industry. Poor people can commemorate life's special occasions with diamonds so fake, you won't know the difference. 'Secrets sshhhh' trades on the idea that secrets are exciting, exhilarating and fun. The difference between 'fake' and 'real' depends on who you're talking to. It's not just objects that can be fake: people, situations, scenarios, many things are seldom how they seem.

I refined the search. 'Secrets' are a form of social currency. We typically share our secrets with people we trust, 'friends', in situations in which we feel comfortable, like the pub. To 'confide' in someone is to show you are reasonably assured they will hold your confidence. That is, they won't go blathering your deepest darkest secrets to every Tom, Dick or Harry that crosses their path. Which is in fact tempting, because when secrets are shared, brownie points are earned. Bizarrely, mostly because people are fucked, the darker the secret, the more heinous its details, the more brownie points earned.

'Expert Researchers' reckon it's around age 6 we first learn the value and power of secrecy. A multitude of books and learning resources aim to teach children the difference between 'good secrets', say a surprise birthday party, or a big present, and 'bad secrets', say, something that's happened or continues to happen that shouldn't be happening. Because it's illegal. Perpetrators of illegality, also known as predators, criminals or paedophiles, obfuscate ideas around what is a 'safe' secret, and what is an 'unsafe' secret.

'Cancel Culture' is a phenomenon that fully utilizes the internet's reach potential. Cancel culture happens when victims of injustice get sick of waiting for systemic change and take matters into their own hands. And share it with their followers. Parallel to this phenomenon, increasing numbers of employee's are now required to sign legally binding 'confidentiality clauses'. Workers holding workplace secrets becomes part of their job. Secrets stand at the centre of culture. Secrets speak to the stories that are told, the stories that aren't told. Who's telling the story and who's not telling the story, and how the story is told.

Whistle blowers shine light on the dark recesses of religion, government, the military industrial complex and big tech. Whistle-blowers might make the FBI's 'Most Wanted' lists whilst also being lauded as revolutionary cultural warriors. Whistleblowers are either heroes or criminals, depending on who you're talking to. Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange and Edward Snowden have each shared secret's in data dumps that speak truth to power but at great personal cost.

Speaking of personal costs, on the surface of it, Secrets don't make friends is an exhibition in which 2 emerging artists, Sarah and Matthew indulge in a dose of regression therapy reminiscent of a Saturday morning cartoon binge. Each has produced, with what could appear to be carefree, childlike creative abandon, a joint exhibition we can all seemingly enjoy. Closer inspection and a regional horror-show story emerges. It is in the ideas surrounding secrets and their friends that we can begin to think about who has power and who is powerless. Power imbalances have the gross potential to affect the rights of all people to live peaceful and happy lives.

Matthew Harris didn't like school so he stopped going at 15. It was the easiest way to avoid the bullies plus he was too busy doing other things. Like learning how not to get beat up. Walking round town he learned how to take off fast. He learned how to hide so he couldn't be found.

Matthew has always liked playing with dolls with artistic intention. For this exhibition a pre-loved charity shop Frankenstein figurine substitutes for the artist, his arms crowded with friends. Sure, he's got scars, but there's a defiant strength there. The bad guy within this cluster(fuck) of assembled sculptures is cowboy: pathetically small, reduced to cliché, lasso forever at the ready. Wooden, carved cowboy boots stand in a pool of blood (the artists own, mixed with paint), lecherous intent concealed and welcomed into the home. Evil hiding in plain sight. Clasped, spermatozoa filled hands frozen low on the floor. A gifted sheep, a beloved pet companion, later served up as dinner.

The artist became a vegetarian: 'I don't want to eat anything that used to have a head or a face' he says. And you know he never will. The family home a doll's house, pink-knitted-love-heart escaping from the chimney.

'The nearer I approached to your habitation, the more deeply did I feel the spirit of revenge enkindled in my heart.' Mary Shelley, Frankenstein

Sarah Brasier paints butterflies, meticulous, National geographic styled paintings. A 'social butterfly' is a showy or frivolous person who loves to party. To 'have butterflies' is to experience a nauseous sensation in the stomach when you're nervous. 'To Butterfly' is to split, almost in two, and be spread out flat.

Sarah paints spiders. In art and mythology spiders represent patience and cruelty. In nature spiders use a range of strategies to capture prey: spinnerets set webs and wait, trapping the prey in sticky webs. Spiders lasso prey with sticky bolas, mimicking them to avoid detection, or they run prey down. Most detect prey mainly by sensing vibrations and active hunters have acute vision and an ability to change tactics and develop new ones. Fuck.

'I was a daisy fresh girl and look what you did to me.' Vladimir Nabokov, Lolita

Sarah Brasier paints dandelions. Dandelions (a member of the daisy family) can exist even in the most treacherous conditions and symbolise healing from emotional and physical pain and injury.

Butterflies don't usually give spider's blow jobs. They don't usually decapitate spiders, his bloody head splattered on a rock. Butterfly has taken matters into her own hands. Off with his head butterfly commands. Lady Justice is Butterfly-like too, with a hint of schlong. Lady Justice stands in judgement, the allegorical personification of the moral force in judicial systems.

Justice means different things to different people. Definitions of Justice will include concepts of 'moral rightness' based on ethics, rationality, law, natural law, religion and equity. Justice is the act of being just and/or fair. The 'Justice System', the police, the courts, continue to best represent powerful, patriarchal interests.

To seek revenge is to inflict retribution. Revenge is a retaliation for an injury or wrong suffered at the hands of another. Revenge is one of those intense feelings that never goes out of fashion because people continue to sometimes be complete assholes to each other.

In Secrets Don't Make Friends the revenge is in the act of sharing a secret, first between artists, then between artist and audience. To keep dark secrets can be to be held captive by them. In How to Spot a Fascist, Umberto Eco notes that 'The memory of those terrible years ought to be repressed. But repression causes neurosis.' Fuck neurosis, the creative potential of art to be a cure and an act of defiant re-empowerment has been realised in this body of work. Secrets don't make friends. Good people make friends.

We might hope for a Disneyesque, happy, 'isn't life wonderful how it all works out to some fine and terrific pattern' life outcomes. But monsters lurk amongst us, often in freakily close proximity. The suffering they inflict has not been romanticised but alchemised and intuited in this exhibition. We sense too, that without the friendship shared between Sarah and Matthew, the personal strength needed to depict such dark personal histories could not have happened at all.

All hail friendship.
Fuck off Monsters.



Secrets Don't Make Friends, installation view



Sarah Brasier

Revenge, acrylic on wood, 24ct gold wood frame, 94.6 x 64.8 cm, 2021



Secrets Don't Make Friends, installation view



Matthew Harris

Sunset, sheepskin on wood with glass eyes, acrylic and 24ct gold on ceramic, wool embroidery on plastic mesh with plastic pearls, stuffed knitted heart, plastic and faux fleece Pet Steps, dimensions variable 2021





Sarah Brasier

Dreams, acrylic on wood, 24ct gold wood frame, 94.6 x 64.8 cm, 2021



Matthew Harris

Sunset, sheepskin on wood with glass eyes, acrylic and 24ct gold on ceramic, wool embroidery on plastic mesh with plastic pearls, stuffed knitted heart, plastic and faux fleece Pet Steps, dimensions variable 2021









Secrets Don't Make Friends, installation view



Matthew Harris

Bloodbath, carved wood cowboy boots, 24ct gold, blood and acrylic on linen, blood and acrylic on chainsaw carved wood pig, dimensions variable, 2021





Sarah Brasier

Off with his head, acrylic on wood, 24ct gold wood frame, 23.9 x 19 cm, 2021



Matthew Harris

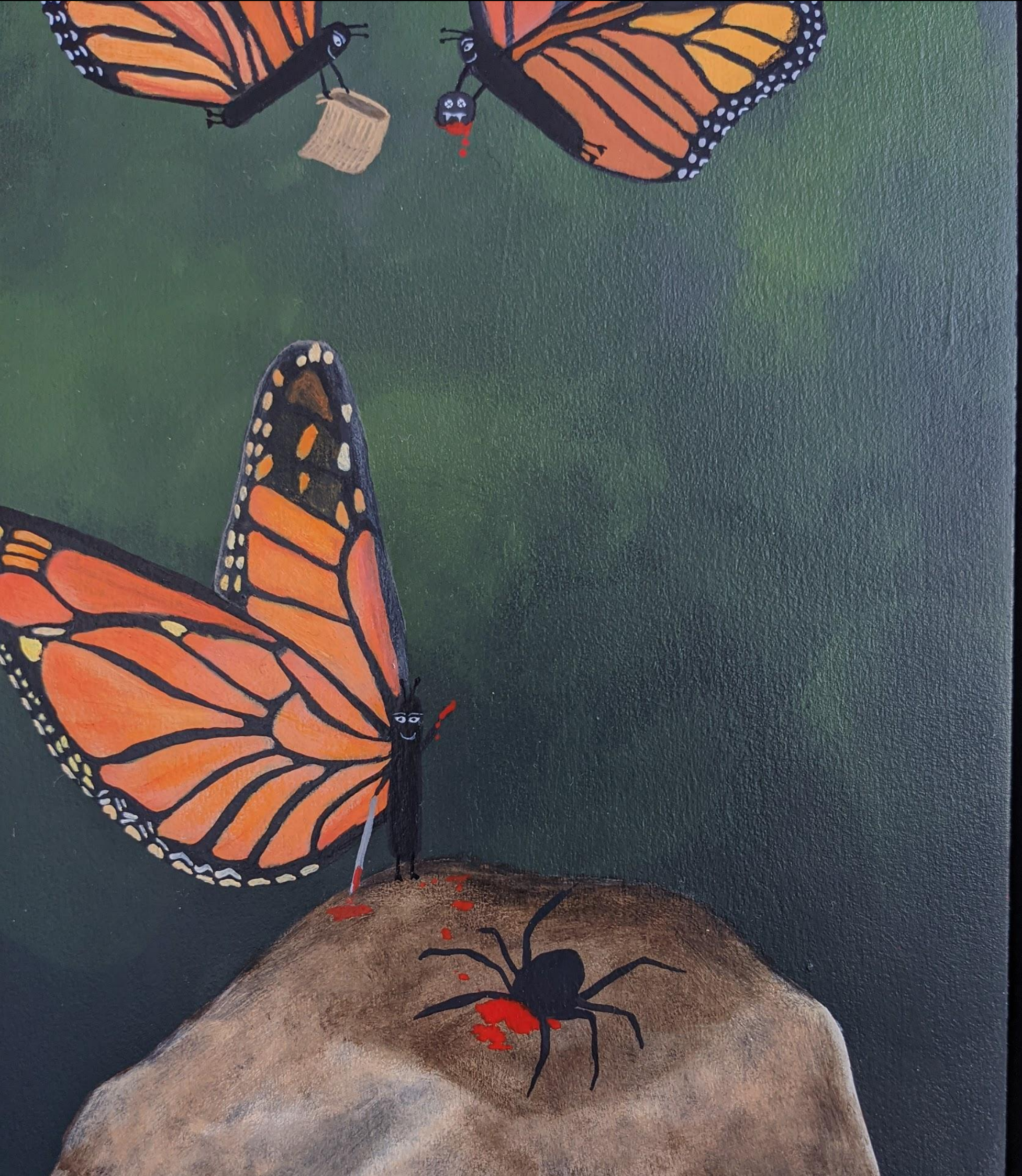
Bloodbath, carved wood cowboy boots, 24ct gold, blood and acrylic on linen, blood and acrylic on chainsaw carved wood pig, dimensions variable, 2021



Secrets Don't Make Friends, installation view



Sarah Brasier
Punishment, acrylic on wood, 24ct gold wood
frame, 34.2 x 26.8 cm, 2021





Sarah Brasier

Fuck Buddies, acrylic on wood, 24ct gold wood
frame, 34.2 x 26.8 cm, 2021





Matthew Harris

Grooming, carved wood figure, plastic bed, fabrics, welded horseshoe figure, 24ct gold, mini silicone dildo, straw bale, dimensions variable, 2021





Matthew Harris
Daddy, found concrete hand sculpture, plastic sperm confetti in resin, dimensions
variable, 2021



Sarah Brasier
Justice, acrylic on wood, 24ct gold wood frame,
34.2 x 26.8 cm, 2021

Documentation courtesy of Jordan Halsall and Spencer Lai

*TCB acknowledges the people of the Kulin Nations
as the traditional custodians of the land, recognising
their connection to land, waters and community.
We pay our respects to their Elders; past, present and future.*

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