

## EXTRACT: ILSE DERDEN

She occasionally comes across an image of sex, of birth, of darkness and death which, owing to the loose, wristy handling of the paint, she feels might be the same artist. Perhaps a previous director was the artist's patron? Perhaps the artist themselves were once a resident? She knows nothing of the history of the place. Does anyone?

There is one painting of a half skeleton that appears sectioned off, as though laid out on a dissector's slab in its constituent parts. Burnt out or rather issuing its own darkness from its scorched bones, its stomach a cavern, the spine within it, still burning, or smouldering, the ambers glowing brightly, lit up like red neon. Yet it also appears to image from some painterly light, some atmosphere, as though it is limbering up or dancing slowly towards the viewer. A desperate and awkward *memento mori*.

Sometimes she could sense the physical trappings of her own imagination, could hear its rattles and bustles as though it preceded her through all the rooms, could feel the jounce of its trinkets, hairdos, elaborations. She worried at its lack of physical restraint. A surreal marmite of objects, matted or clustered together: an assemblage by Eileen Agar but formed of the senses and its tangle of nerves, its skin, face, eyes and lips, pinned or glued alongside particular moods, emotional states, arguments. Then, when it might all be seen, the whole thing formulates, its disparate parts unify, gel somehow into a singular image that could be tolerated, even, perversely, seduced by.