

BIRTHING POOL

A solo exhibition by Alice Channer //

Opening night 25 July 5-9pm //

Open 26 July - 31 Aug, Wed-Sat 11-5pm //

Turf Projects, Whitgift Centre, Croydon CR01UQ //

CONTAMINATED, IMPLICATED

// Text by Jes Fernie

How shall we play this? There are a number of options. We can walk through the door, make some small talk, take a leaflet and look at the work. Worry about whether we're allowed to get into that pool. Or we can put our hands up to the window and maintain a safe distance. No need for conversation or interaction. I do this, but am not satisfied. The glare is too bright and my viewpoint restricted.

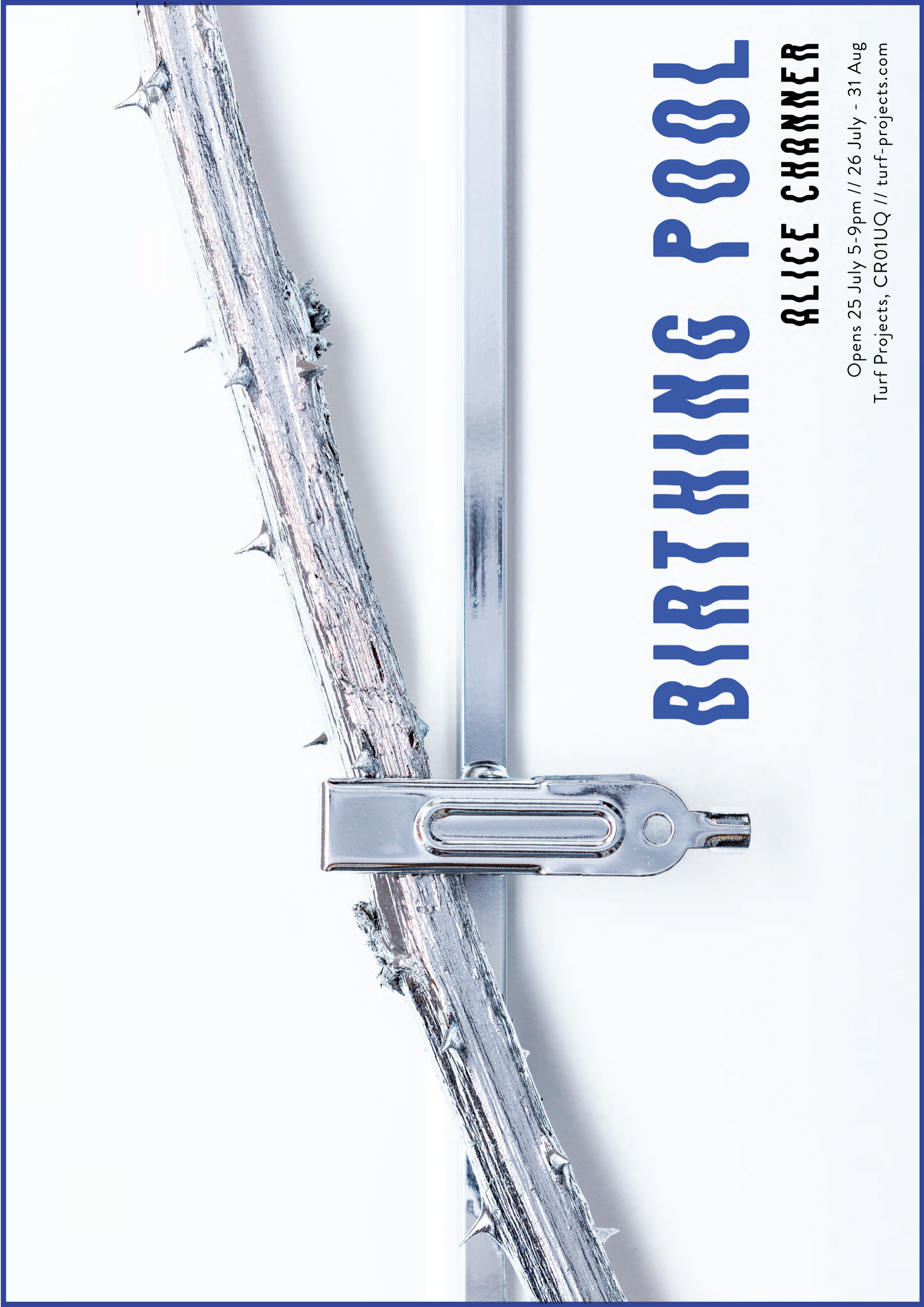
There aren't many people around. By the escalators outside I drop down onto my belly, forearms supporting my torso. My new stance affords me a refreshingly different vantage point. Legs and feet brush past me; my nose hovers above the highly polished granite floor. I begin to edge my way towards Turf's window, adopting a reptilian swagger as each elbow heaves my weight forward. I nudge my nose up against the base of the window frame and locate a vulnerable spot, slithering through from the outside in, gasping slightly as I make my entrance.

I blink and take a moment to adjust to the light, temperature, and mood in the room. Nobody seems particularly shocked by my mode of entry. My route to the pool is blocked by a spikey, low-lying object. As I shunt past it, I realise it echoes the form of my body – two hind legs, a spine and cross-sectional skeletal elements. Laying my cheek down on the cool concrete floor, I begin to hum an unrecognisable tune, understanding intuitively that words won't wash here – this is an alien form from millennia past and future, with uncertain pedigree and almost certainly no language. There is no response. Frustrated, I lodge my head between the translucent blue resin and steel frame in an attempt to obliterate the shadows – to limit their impact on the world. It works and I smile to myself.

I become anxious that time is running out, that soon things will no longer be viable. With a renewed sense of urgency, I enter the pool, bashing my arms and legs on the threshold as I do so, oblivious to the damage I might cause. What I thought was liquid turns out to be little black pellets that are painful to lean on – my elbows assume the ghostly shape of their form. I sniff them – they smell of plastic, they are entirely artificial and small enough to enter the tiniest of cavities. Ahead of me, there are tightly coiled, pleated bits of fabric, swimming on this sea of pellets. Sliced brain or elegant CT scans – each one takes on a fraught, co-dependent relationship with its neighbour and the surrounding steel frame. I am seduced by their splendour and the evident care with which they have been constructed.

In an attempt to alleviate the weight from my arms, I turn onto my side and assume a foetal position, burrowing deep into the pellets until I can no longer see or be seen. I hear the sound of muffled voices above me, the pressure of feet on my hips. "I'm here, underneath you! Tread softly!" I yell. No response. The feet move on.

Overwhelmed by tiredness, I fall into a deep sleep and dream of suffocation and darkness, my body floating in a constricted space, a heavy throb in my temples. I am a mutant form sliding between this world and the next, made up of endocrine-disrupting chemicals, toxic waste and wilful carelessness. Contaminated, implicated, edging towards a place where humans, animals and inanimate objects are indistinguishable, I wait for evolution to catch up with my constituent parts. A fossil of unknown origin, I shall be unearthed in millennia to come, prized for my exquisite strangeness and heralded as the first of my kind.



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Turf Projects, CR01UQ // turf-projects.com