



Debra Werblud

# LIMBO

2005 | video installation



## INTRODUCTION

In 2000, a court in Rome found two Argentine generals guilty 'in absentia' for the kidnap and murder of eight Italian citizens during the military dictatorship (1976-83); in 2003, an appellate court confirmed their sentence. The case, by bearing the still open wounds of the "dirty war" outside Argentina's borders, was another global reminder that until there is accountability there can be no healing.

**Limbo** is an attempt to broach the fate of some 2000 of the 10,000 Argentine desaparecidos (disappeared) over the two-year period of 1977-1978 first revealed in a Navy officer's detailed confession to the journalist, Horacio Verbitsky, in 1995. The victims were sedated, loaded onto planes, stripped naked and dropped live, initially over Rio de la Plata, then the Atlantic. The latter was preferred so that bodies would be lost at sea rather than flushed onto shores to be recovered. These flights, planned and overseen by the Navy, are known as 'vuelos de la muerte'.\* Among the victims were pregnant women kept alive in prison long enough to give birth, their infants harvested in a scheme that the military deemed part of their counterinsurgency campaign, the suppression of a new generation of subversives.

\*Death flights did not originate in Argentina. The French military practiced it in Madagascar, then during the occupation of Algeria according to counterinsurgency doctrine and methods. These same were transmitted to the United States and Latin American militaries in the early 60s.



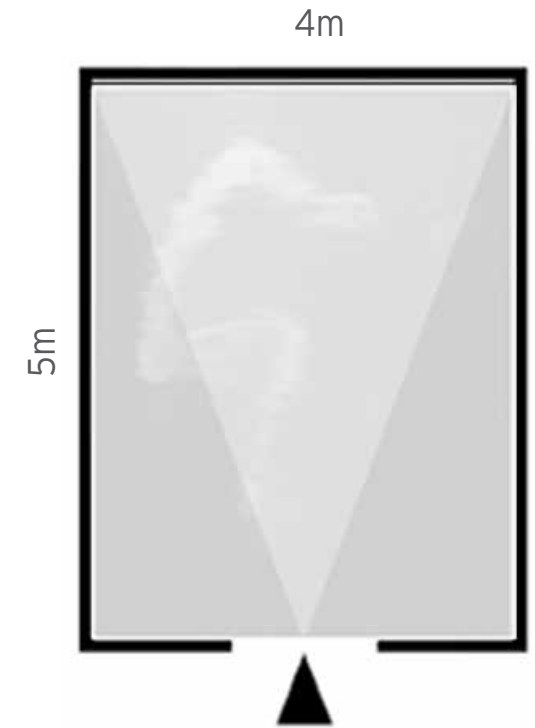




**Limbo** is a silent 5-minute black-and-white animated sequence of 165 stills from digitized drawings of a crouching female figure's trunk and limbs. In its original conception, it was one part of a three-part installation; only the projection room is proposed here.

The video zooms into the fall of the body - headless, stripped of identity - as it revolves through dark space in clockwork-like motion, tumbling in and out of abstraction without ever completing its fall.

The projection is reflected on the polished rough surface of a venue's floor where the figure appears submerged in a body of murky water. The viewer stands on the water's surface, dwarfed by, at times engulfed in, the moving image.



year 2005  
at Studio d'arte contemporaneo Pino Casagrande, Rome, Italy

drawings Debra Werblud  
editing Stefano Mariotti and Debra Werblud  
installation photographs Donald Dietz


original format uncompressed animation 1440x1080  
copies available in mpeg2 for DVD standard definition  
time 5'00", in a continuous loop  
space 5,00m (16.5') x 4,00m (13') x 3,00m (10') minimum

For the purposes of an installation, the room in which **Limbo** is viewed must have a polished rough surface on which the video is reflected, such as a rough concrete base sealed with gloss finish or a mobile resin-based floor covering.



# SEASPAWN

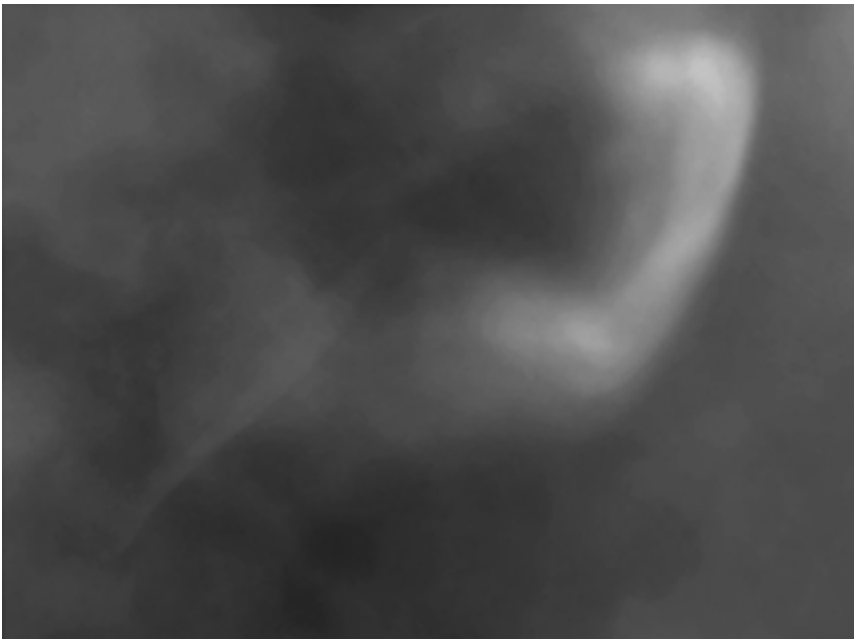
2010 | two-channel video



Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane. But he adds: in bodies. (...). Why in? Diaphane, adiaphane. If you can put your five fingers through it, it is a gate, if not a door. Shut your eyes and see.

James Joyce, *Ulysses* (I, 3, Proteus)

**Seaspawn** was commissioned by the Facoltà di Arte e Design dell'Università Iuav di Venezia, the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa and the Laboratorio Internazionale di Semiotica in Venice in 2010 for the interdisciplinary conference entitled 'Diafano: Vedere attraverso' / 'Diaphanous: See Through'.



The video is watched on a set of monitors. In the upper frame, the figure drops in a violent spin until swallowed by cloud cover; choppy and uncertain, like the replay of an ad hoc recording of a celestial event or feed from a surveillance camera. In the lower frame, the submerged figure slowly resurfaces, drifts, morphs with the movement of water - imaging tantamount to a sonogram visualization.

The viewer's role shifts between observer and witness. 'Diaphane, adiaphane' are the elements that reveal and conceal; diaphanous is the life of the body. It is there; it is not there. It has happened; it is in the course of becoming.





Both video sequences use composite stills from **Limbo**: the upper frame's figure is based on the original video drawings; the lower frame overlays photographs of the figure's reflections on the gallery floor\*.

drawings and composites Debra Werblud  
special effects Federica De Rocca  
editing Federica De Rocca and Debra Werblud

original format two-channel uncompressed animation 720x576  
in QTFF (.mov)  
time 2'28", in a loop  
viewing 2 monitors

\*from photographs of **Limbo**'s floor reflections by Donald Dietz  
also available

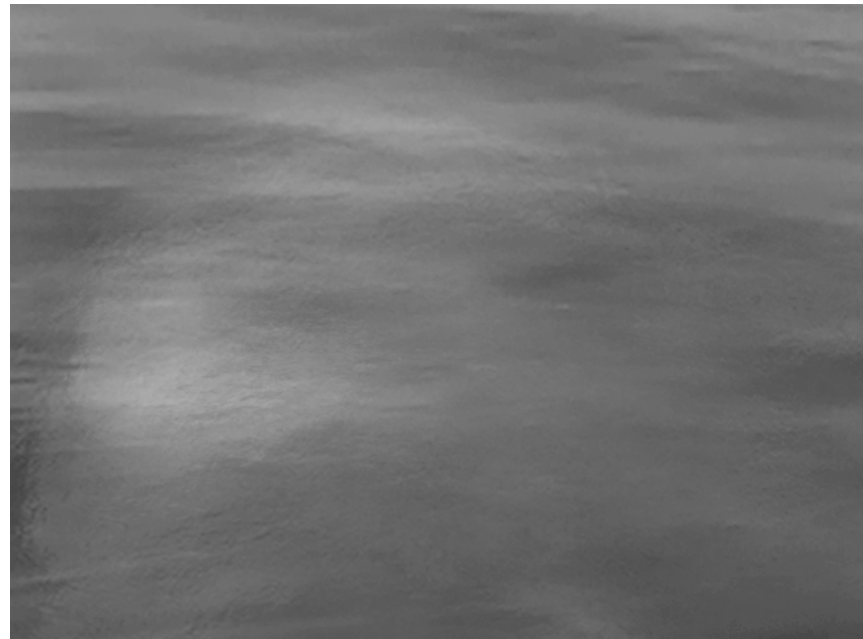
a single-channel uncompressed animation, 720 x 576  
time 3':19", in a loop  
viewing one monitor

4 working clips of morphing figure  
single-channel uncompressed animation, 720 x 576, DVC-PAL  
time 2':30"









## DEBRA WERBLUD

Debra's work ranges from installation to social practice art. The themes she broaches reflect a study of persistent social and moral issues.

Early studies in sculpture, archaeology, anthropology and environmental design as well as experience in participatory design also underpin a practice that includes concept design and development for institutions and industries in collaboration with technicians, scientists, scholars, poets, planners and architects.

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