

## Interviews

[The Guardian](#)

### My best shot **Torbjørn Rødland** 'I hung it in a dentist's waiting room - but they had to take it down. It was terrorising the patients'

I'm not afraid of dentists, but I did go to one for several years who was probably a sadist. He seemed to relax when I was put through pain. I know that some people have tooth dreams. Everything that's part of the vocabulary of the unconscious has some depth to it - people are interested.

As part of the Manifesta exhibition in Zurich last year, each artist was paired up with a professional who would become our host while we were in the city. I asked to work with a dental technician or a dentist.

They found me Danielle Heller Fontana, who does a lot of surgery and implants. The surgery is pretty dramatic: to correct an overbite or underbite they cut open the jaw. I photographed a couple of her patients during lighter procedures. But I was also interested in the teeth models and implants, so I borrowed a selection.

The next morning I was having breakfast in

my room. I can't digest wheat but I don't like to let things go to waste so I thought, fine, I'll just have to use the cake they've brought me in some photographs. I put up my large-format camera, with the morning sun coming in. Then I started messing up this beautiful moist cupcake, adding implants, crowns and teeth to it. Gradually I found the right balance. The sun was moving the whole time - the universe isn't ever still.

I added a cork. Opening a bottle with your teeth that can be quite evocative. There's also a rotten tooth. I framed it pretty tight and put objects all around the plate to tighten it up. The spoon was always there - to evoke the feeling of metal against teeth but it's good to have this longer element in the picture. It's a connection between the viewer

and the meal. I also added the cashew because I liked its visual dialogue with the teeth.

I only know if the image is right once I see the results. I had the film processed in Zurich and then had some old-school analogue contact sheets

made to see which exposure I wanted. Sometimes I don't decide on the final image until I have to print one for an exhibition, but in this case it was pretty clear: it was the one with the least number of teeth in it.

The plan was for some pieces to go to the workplaces of our hosts. I thought that some of my examination pictures looked too harsh for a dentist's waiting room, but this one could work. When I came back after installing it, however, the picture was gone. Even though the dentist was really positive, she started getting feedback from patients. We didn't mean to terrorise the patients - and she has to make a living - so they took it down.

I spoke to a guy recently who really wanted to talk about his tooth dreams. He asked me what they meant. I had to tell him, quite ruthlessly, that they're about insecurity, ageing or impotence.

**i** Interview by Nell Frizzell. Torbjørn Rødland: The Touch That Made You is at Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London, until 19 November

