

## Psychiatry in pictures

CHOSEN BY ROBERT HOWARD



Olivia Gillow (b. 1972), *Insistent Rub* (2001)

Trained at art schools in Brighton, Glasgow and Munich, Olivia Gillow is a professional artist whose current work focuses on paintings of landscapes and the experience of mental illness. Over the past 10 years, despite initial compliance with mood-stabilising drugs, she has had five in-patient admissions for bipolar disorder and, at the time of writing, has chosen to maintain herself with fish oil, homoeopathic medication and regular contact with the Manic Depression Fellowship. During one of her admissions she shared a room with a woman with obsessive-compulsive disorder and *Insistent Rub* is based upon the distressing hand-washing rituals of her fellow patient. The image of the hands and stream of water were carved in low relief and then painted in to give the picture a striking and distinctive visual impact. Obsessive-compulsive disorder has been the theme of other works by Gillow, in particular an installation involving a door. When turned, the door handle just goes round and round without any action. Carved around the doorframe are the words: 'If you were suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder you would have to turn the door handle again . . . and again . . . and again . . . and again before you could enter the room'. The picture is in the collection of the Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives and Museum (telephone 020 8776 4307). With thanks to Patricia Allderidge, archivist and curator, and to Olivia Gillow for giving permission to reproduce her picture.