The Wavering Image:
Time, Materiality and Shifting States

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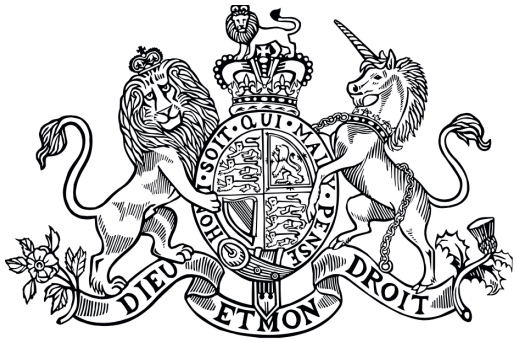

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14 February 2026

THE WAVERING IMAGE

TIME, MATERIALITY AND SHIFTING STATES

FLORA BOWDEN

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A supporting portfolio of my studio practice is included in this submission in a separate pdf file. My work, *Digital Copy*, is included as an additional pdf.

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ABSTRACT

This project is interested in the instability of images and how they are affected by the passage of time. It draws on a diverse body of material, including the theory of deep time, the study of Bronze Age rock carvings and the digitisation of a library book, and examines how these images are situated in and changed by the course of time, and shaped by social and cultural contexts. In a moment when we regularly consider the speed and manipulation of images in society, this project – in its research and practice – asks how questions of temporality and shifting states can be explored through the image.

The project's title quotes the work of the philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who wrote that his memory of his first day at school was 'doubtless an incomplete and wavering image and certainly a reconstructed one'.[1] This project considers Halbwachs' work, as well as that of other thinkers including Georges Didi-Huberman, Donna Haraway, Aleida Assmann and W.J.T. Mitchell, to interrogate the temporal possibilities of the image and it draws on Ursula K. Le Guin's essay, 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' (1989) to inform the methodology of the research. The examples that structure this project—spanning scientific history, academia, and technology—could be described as part of what Pierre Nora calls our 'institutions of memory': bodies that shape the images we hold of the past, and of ourselves, as well as how and what we see.[2] Concerned with questions of time and points of view in the space of the image, the project proceeds to seek alternative perspectives and turns to artworks and writing, often by women,

[1] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. by Francis J. Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (Harper & Row, 1980), p. 71.a

[2] Pierre Nora, 'Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire', *Representations* 26 (1989), pp. 7-24 (p. 14).

including Mariana Castillo Deball, Camille Henrot, Elizabeth Price and Rebecca Solnit, to explore spaces, ideas and images shaped through different lenses.

Matters of voice, nonlinearity, and erasure come to the fore over the course of this project and wavering is interrogated as an image in flux: vulnerable, malleable, impressionable, yet also resilient. The practice explores new visualities made possible by this approach. This line of enquiry has led to a focus on poured painting processes, and ideas of movement, restlessness, precarity and overspilling to be explored through the materiality of the image. Here, the research engages further with the work of contemporary women artists and writers including Lynda Benglis and Genieve Figgis, who develop related themes through their practice and question forms of representation and the materiality of the artwork. Drawing on broader discussions, it also explores ideas of 'slippery' and 'sticky images', drawn from the work of Mieke Bal,[3] as well as the Hayward Gallery exhibition, 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today' (2021).[4] Through this, the research seeks to contribute to discourses around viscosity and materiality in contemporary art, it asks who we can hold space for in the space of the image and what new visual languages the wavering image can offer for this investigation.

[3] Mieke Bal, 'Sticky Images: The Foreshortening of Time in an Art of Duration', in *Time and the Image*, ed. by Carolyn Bailey Gill (Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 79-99 (p. 80).

[4] 'Slippery Images' was the title of a panel discussion held between artists Allison Katz, Caragh Thuring, Issy Wood and Vivien Zhang and moderated by Hayward Gallery Director, Ralph Rugoff, 11 November 2021. It was held during the exhibition 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today' at the Hayward Gallery, London, 2021.

INTRODUCTION

This project is about instability, variability and change through time in the image.

My research began by exploring the work of Scottish geologist James Hutton (1726-1797) and the development of ideas of deep time which posed questions about slowness, perspective and material transformation.[1] It connects human relationships to time to questions of vulnerability and materiality, and this sense of precarious endurance has remained a central concern of my research and practice.

The project focuses on images from different areas of visual culture and works with examples including a study of Bronze Age rock carvings and the images of a digitised library book to consider a broad scope of visuality, and different ways that images are affected by changing times and conditions. I suggest that these are wavering images and, through them, I explore ideas of movement, change and precarity in the image. In my practice, I ask how this can be further developed through the artwork.

Exploring these wavering images has raised questions about how images are shaped and influenced. I am interested in their cultural context as well as their temporal significance. While at the outset my research was concerned with time and chronology in the image, the research process has led to more entangled and human concerns, connected to materiality and experience, and how these impress themselves upon the image. As my research progressed, these wider contexts have also informed developments in my practice.

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[1] James Hutton, 'Theory of the Earth; or an Investigation of the Laws Observable in the Composition, Dissolution, and Restoration of Land upon the Globe', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh,* 1. 2 (1788), pp. 209–304.

It is also important to acknowledge the changes in my personal circumstances over the course of this research. It has taken place over a long time, during which I have been extremely fortunate to have my two children. Having my family has shaped my thinking regarding the research and my relationship to time. Through the research, more feminist concerns have emerged as important to it, and these are explored in the writing as well as in the practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines the key works that informed my research, from ideas of deep time and recent scholarship on temporality to contemporary artworks, to explore and inform the concept of the wavering image.

Central to the development of this thesis is Maurice Halbwachs' *The Collective Memory* (1950), in which he describes an early childhood memory as 'a wavering image', shaped by time and social context.[2] Halbwachs' work connects the image to provisionality, instability, and to time. 'Wavering' is therefore a key term for my research and offers a framing in which the image is explored as vulnerable, malleable, affected by time and circumstance but nonetheless resilient. Halbwachs' insight on the workings of memory and the image is foundational to the project and is supplemented by other works that enable me to develop related ideas of time and mutability in the image, in both my research and practice.

Also foundational to this project is W.J.T's Mitchell's expanded definition of the image from *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (1986). Mitchell examines the diverse range of things (statues,

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[2] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. by Francis J. Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (Harper & Row, 1980), p. 71.

spectacles, memories, ideas, among others) that we call an image. This is an important development to Halbwachs' insight in this research as Mitchell's work interrogates what qualifies as an image. Mitchell acknowledges that the things we call images do not necessarily have something in common and suggests that the image is 'something like an actor on the historical stage'.[3] As with Halbwachs, there is an explicit engagement with temporality in Mitchell's insight. Together, Halbwachs and Mitchell present a means of interrogating the image as engaged with time, as social, personal, changing and enduring—circumstances and conditions encapsulated in the term 'wavering'. Similarly, the examples I cite in the thesis span a broad scope of visuality. They are unified by their status as 'wavering images' which, in the context of this research, means they are engaged with time, participate in the production of ideas about time, and enable me to examine questions of vulnerability and change in the space of the image.

The first wavering image I consider is drawn from the work of the naturalist, James Hutton (1726-1797). Hutton's study of geological formations in Scotland, published in his *Theory of the Earth* (1788), led him to assert that 'we find no vestige of a beginning, – no prospect of an end', regarding the age of the Earth.[4] Hutton is now considered to be one of the founders of modern geology and his work shaped the development of the theory of deep time.[5] I work with imagery from Hutton's investigation and understand his work as a wavering image as it addresses material transformation and changed the image of time.[6]

My research also considers the legacies of Hutton's work through Katherine Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018). Yusoff challenges the assumed objectivity in contemporary

[3] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconoology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago University Press, 1986), p. 9.
[4] James Hutton, 'Theory of the Earth; or an investigation of the laws observable in the composition, dissolution, and restoration of land upon the Globe' in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh,* (vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 209–304. 1788), p. 304.
[5] 'James Hutton: The Founder of Modern Geology', American Museum of Natural History, https://www.amnh.org/learn-teach/curriculum-collections/earth-inside-and-out/james-hutton [accessed 16 January 2026].
[6] James Hutton, *Theory of the Earth, with Proofs and Illustrations*, (Edinburgh, 1795).

discourses of geology and the Anthropocene and interrogates the pasts on which the discipline of geology is built.[7] Yusoff's work is valuable for my research as it draws out social and racial elements in the history of geology and ideas of time and unpicks aspects of their political entanglements.

Yusoff examines, for example, the work of Charles Lyell (1797-1875), a later geologist influenced by Hutton, and addresses the 'racialization' within it.[8] Her work makes a vital contribution in the manner in which it critically engages with narratives of geological time and the Anthropocene in contemporary culture and provides a means of situating the contemporary meanings of deep time in my own research.

I also draw on contemporary scholarship on temporality to think further about changeability and nonlinearity and to draw out their cultural significance. For example, François Hartog's *Regimes of Historicity* (2003) is valuable for my research for its exploration of how societies think about themselves historically,[9] while Aleida Assmann's theory of 'cultural time regimes' (2013) is important for its assertion that time regimes provide a foundation for the values a culture holds.[10] Hartog and Assmann's works identify how ideas about time speak of cultural values, which is important for considering our own context and perspective.

Both my research and practice are interested in the image in relation to time and to materiality. Georges Didi-Huberman's text, 'Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of

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[7] Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), p. 33.

[8] Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None,* p. 29 and p. 81.

[9] Francois Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. by Saskia Brown (Columbia University Press, 2016), p. xv.

[10] Aleida Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime,* trans. by Sarah Clift (Cornell University Press, 2020), p. 5.

Anachronism' (2003), is a key work in this area, as I explore further in Chapter One.[11] Cultural historians Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier also address time in relation to materiality.[12] Like Assmann, they contend that ideas of temporality have changed in contemporary culture, and in *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism* (2019) cite the archaeologist, Bjørnar J. Olsen, who argues that the past 'accumulates in every corner and crevasse', and is therefore intermingled with the now.[13] Donna Haraway's writing is also a key conceptualisation of the materiality of time.[14]

Developing questions of physicality and nonlinearity in relation to time, I also reflect on Yusoff's use of the word 'entangled'[15] and work by Karen Barad and Suzanne Simard on related subjects.[16] I proceed to study and Eva Hesse's sculpture *Right After* (1969) in which latex-dipped fibreglass cords are entangled and suspended in space. These works, all by women, enable me to think about entwined existences, nonlinearity, physicality and time. I connect this to Ursula K. Le Guin's essay, 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' (1989), which informs the methodology for my research, as explored below, and advocates for nonlinearity and exploring relationships between diverse entities.

Christopher Tilley's book, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (2004), is, like Hutton's work, concerned with the materiality of landscape and provides another wavering image in the research. Tilley offers an account of Bronze Age rock carvings in Sweden, and

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[11] Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism', in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and out of History*, ed. by Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg, trans. by Peter Mason (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 31-44 (p. 33).

[12] Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier, 'Introduction' in *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism*, ed. by Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 1 and p. 2.

[13] Bjørnar J. Olsen, 'Reclaiming Things: An Archaeology of Matter', in P. L. Carlile, D. Nicolini, A. Langley and H. Tsoukas (eds), *How Matter Matters: Objects, Artifacts and Materiality in Organization Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 171–96 (p. 182).

[14] See for instance, Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), p. 206.

[15] Yusoff, *Billion Black Anthropocenes*, p. 106.

[16] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007) and Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Uncovering the Wisdom and Intelligence of the Forest* (Allen Lane, 2021).

images made of them through different archaeological studies and image-making processes between 1945 and 1999. His study is valuable for my research as it describes the variability of images in a single site through time and demonstrates the importance of image-making and the hand in shaping knowledge.

These themes are expanded and brought into dialogue with contemporary artistic practice through Mariana Castillo Deball's 2020-21 exhibition 'Between making and knowing something',[17] and Liza Lou's sculpture, *Kitchen* (1991-96), in the Whitney Museum of American Art's exhibition 'Making Knowing: Craft in Art 1950-2019' (2019-22).[18] Like Tilley's text, the work of Deball and Lou is significant because of the manner in which it brings together interest in materiality, what is known through making by hand and areas of work traditionally associated with women. As I explain, Lou's use of the word 'tenacity' is important for my research due to the way it generates ideas of endurance, time and the hand in relation to making.[19] Through these works, my research engages with traditionally female forms of making, time and perspective.

To further develop questions of vulnerability in the image in relation to materiality, I draw on Alice Oswald's lecture, 'The Art of Erosion' (2019),[20] and Brian Dillon's essay 'The Revelation of Erasure' (2006), in which he writes that 'excess is a form of erasure too.'[21] These are important for my work because of the way they engage with questions of presence, absence and material

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[17] Mariana Castillo Deball, 'Between making and knowing something', 2 October 2020 – 17 January 2021, Modern Art Oxford, Oxford.

[18] Lou, Liza, *Kitchen* (1991-1996), sculpture, Whitney Museum of American Art, https://whitney.org/collection/works/34855 [accessed 03 May 2025] and 'Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950-2019', 22 November 2019 – 20 February 2022, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

[19] Glenn Adamson, 'Why the Art World Is Embracing Craft', *Artsy*, 13 January 2020 https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-art-embracing-craft [accessed 15 September 2020].

[20] Alice Oswald, 'The Art of Erosion' [podcast], Professor of Poetry, University of Oxford Podcasts, 9 December 2019, <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/art-erosion> [accessed 4 Jan 2025].

[21] Brian Dillon, 'The Revelation of Erasure', *Tate Etc.*, 8 (Autumn 2006), <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-8-autumn-2006/revelation-erasure> [accessed 02 May 2025].

vulnerability. Rebecca Solnit's memoir, *Recollections of my Non-Existence* (2020) develops this line of thought as she writes of the close relationship between erasure and feminist politics.[22]

As this suggests, ideas of presence, absence, stability, instability, change and endurance are central to my research. Mieke Bal's essay 'Sticky Images: The Foreshortening of Time in an Art of Duration' (2000), provides a means of exploring these ideas in relation to contemporary art.[23] Additionally, I work with the term 'Slippery Images' from the title of a panel discussion during the Hayward Gallery's 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today' (2021) exhibition to develop ideas within it. 'Sticky' and 'slippery' become key terms for my research, connecting the image to viscosity, movement and to time. These are also important for engaging with the ideas of tenacity and precarity that I develop in the later figurative work in my practice and begin to offer new visual language in my work to develop these themes.

Lauren Elkin's *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (2023) explores questions of materiality from a feminist perspective, studying the work of 1970s feminist artists and connections they forged between the body and the medium of their work. Citing the art historian, Linda Nochlin, for example, Elkin introduces Lynda Benglis' 'solidified "pours"', how these works rejected ideas of fixity and connected them to feminist politics.[24] This became a key idea and method in my work. Elkin also discusses work by Genieve Figgis, whose work speaks eloquently to my interests, and these concerns inform developments in the later part of my practice.

Through the thesis I chart the development of my research from its beginnings exploring questions of time and its expansion to consider how images are affected by the passage of time

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22 Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of My Non-Existence* (Granta, 2020), p. 85.

23 Mieke Bal, 'Sticky Images: The Foreshortening of Time in an Art of Duration', in *Time and the Image*, ed. by Carolyn Bailey Gill, (Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 79-99 (p. 80).

24 Lauren Elkin, *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (Vintage, 2023), p. 62.

and changing contexts, incorporating questions of materiality, forms of making and feminist perspectives. The range of visuality I have drawn on has enabled me to think about questions of instability and change in the image across many forms and this has led to new ways of making in my practice that seek to embody senses of wavering, variability and time in the image. In the next section, I will explore how I developed the methodology that shaped my research and practice.

METHODOLOGY

As I explain above, in this research, I work with Halbwachs' concept of wavering images to think about precarious endurance in the image and to think about the image as susceptible, impressionable, and engaged with time.

I therefore present the idea of the wavering image as an image that is interested in complexities of time, that participates in the production of ideas about time, and that enables us to examine questions of vulnerability, provisionality and change through it. Through the practice and thesis, the research asks how the image can be a space for this investigation and what new visualities in contemporary artistic practice are possible through it. I examine these questions through studio experimentation, through examples of wavering images that I select from across disciplines, and through the study of contemporary artworks and theory that speak to these concerns.

I cite the development of the theory of deep time, archaeological studies of Bronze Age rock carvings, and the digitisation of an 18th Century book and suggest these are wavering images. I work with W.J.T. Mitchell's expanded definition of the image and therefore consider each of these examples an image in the research.[25] They are each important for the research because of

[25] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconoology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago University Press, 1986), p. 9.

the ways they enable me to explore questions of change through time, ideas about time, ways in which the image is impressionable and malleable, informed by its wider context, yet, resilient. The process of conducting this research has been one of gathering, collecting and holding. This project is interested in what happens when ideas and images are placed side by side, and in what meanings are produced through this process. The science fiction novelist, Ursula K. Le Guin's essay 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' (1989), discussed in Chapter One, not only became a key reference within the research, but also provided a method for my approach to it.

Le Guin's essay makes the case for a feminist approach to writing fiction. It rejects the linearity and dominance of the masculine 'hero' narrative in favour of the less celebrated, but arguably more sustaining activity of gathering. Le Guin writes: 'So long as culture was explained as originating from and elaborating upon the use of long, hard objects for sticking, bashing, and killing, I never thought that I had, or wanted, any particular share in it'.[26] She continues: 'If it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful, into a bag […] if to do that is human, if that's what it takes, then I am a human being after all. Fully, freely, gladly, for the first time'.[27]

Le Guin advocates for a process of holding, of keeping close, of working intuitively, and of relating diverse objects to each other in a shared space. This has deeply informed my own methodology. For Le Guin, and for me, that process of holding reveals new connections and shared interests and produces new forms of knowledge. I therefore see each chapter of this thesis as its own container in which images, texts and ideas are gathered, and in which relationships between them are explored and developed and, in the process, produce new forms

[26] Ursula Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (Grove Press, 1989), p. 167.
[27] Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p. 168.

of knowledge and ways of knowing. The research process is interested in the diversity of these elements, and in recognising their differences even as they establish relations.

This methodology is important for my research because the gathering it involves celebrates a nonlinear approach. It enables varied themes to be developed within each chapter, and for the central ideas in the research: time, materiality, and feminist perspectives in contemporary art to be woven through the thesis and explored across chapters.

Learning from Le Guin, the process of gathering, which is generous and associative, provides a form that can hold these varied images, build on them, and develop the ideas they offer. 'The Carrier Bag Theory' therefore supports connectivity between wide-ranging ideas and images, both within chapters and across them, and it is in this diversity and interaction that new knowledge in relation to the image in time, how the image wavers, and the visualities that are possible through this, are developed.

I would therefore invite the reader, when approaching this work to think about the ideas presented associatively, to be curious about the different ways they relate to each other, how they might impress upon or shape each other, what connections can be made across ideas, as well as what happens in the spaces in between them.

CHAPTER OUTLINES

While Chapter One examines questions of time that underpin much of the research, Chapters Two, Three and Four each begin with an example of a wavering image, from a broad range of disciplines and contexts. Each of these presents key themes that are developed through associated artworks or theory to develop them and consider them in the context of contemporary art. Chapter Five builds on findings from the previous chapters, focusing on

questions of materiality in the artwork to explore wavering within it, in relation to time and feminist thought. This informs the most recent developments in my practice.

In Chapter One, different ideas of time are gathered, starting with Maurice Halbwachs' reflection on the complexities of memory. The Chapter explores contemporary thinking around ideas of time and draws out and develops questions of vulnerability, change and provisionality. It explores relationships with and between times, as well as the time embedded in material objects. This establishes the continuing and connected development of questions of time and materiality through the practice and thesis.

The wavering image at the start of Chapter Two is James Hutton's work related to the theory of deep time. The Chapter explores the development of my practice in response to Hutton's imagery, and material experimentation in my practice in relation to time. It also examines contemporary thinking about deep time, geology and the Anthropocene through the work of Timothy Morton and Katherine Yusoff. Questions of entanglement derived from Yusoff are also developed and, drawing on the work of other writers and artists (including Karen Barad, Suzanne Simard, Eva Hesse, Lubaina Himid and Issy Wood), the Chapter explores how ideas of time can be productively complicated and investigated in the work of art.

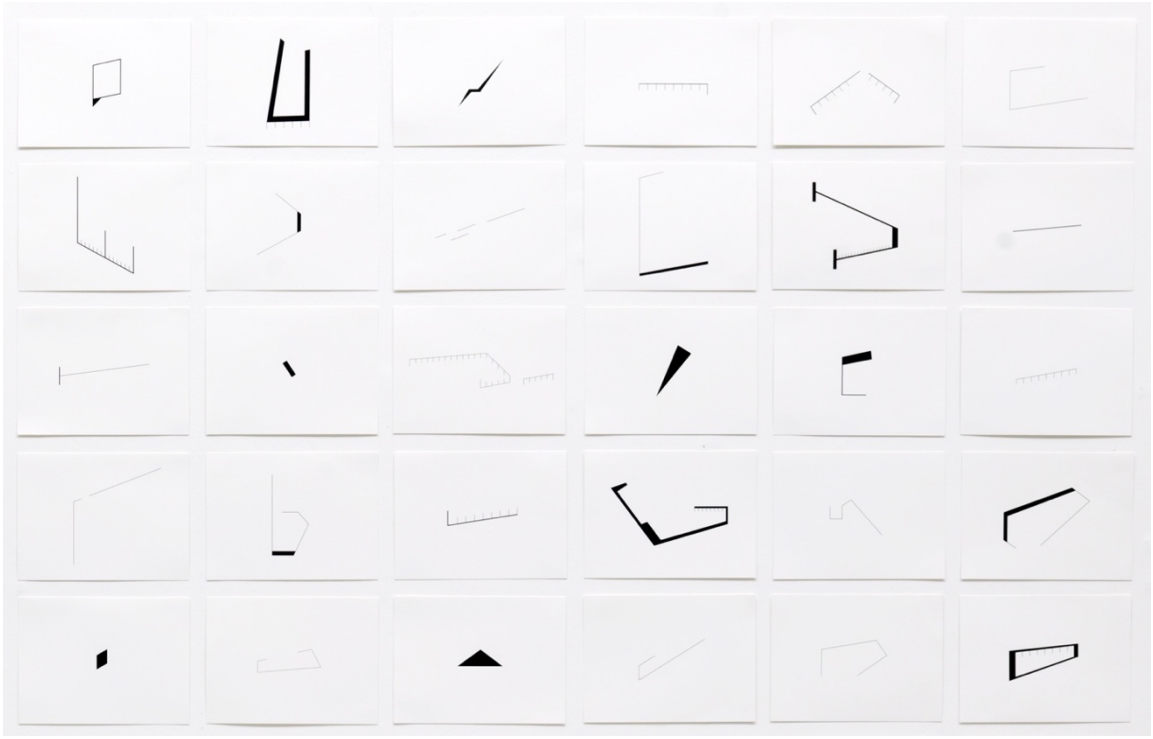

Fig. 1. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2016, screen print on Somerset paper, 162.8cm x 242.8cm.
This is one of the works produced through my research into the work of James Hutton.

Fig. 2. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2017, resin and ink, 25cm x 25cm.
An early work produced as part of my material experimentation in relation to time.

The wavering image that opens Chapter Three is Christopher Tilley's interrogation of the history of image-based archaeological studies of Bronze Age rock carvings. Like Hutton, Tilley is concerned with the materiality of landscape and discusses image-making in relation to it. This is a significant example in the context of this research because it explores the image in time in relation to questions of variability and perspective. Tilley's work raises questions about different research and image-making processes, materiality, the production of knowledge and the role of the hand in this process.[28]

These themes are then developed through discussion of Mariana Castillo Deball's exhibition, 'Between making and knowing something' (2020-21), that explored anthropological research, and Liza Lou's sculpture, *Kitchen* (1991-96), which involved close material engagement in the making process. Deball's and Lou's works build on the themes in Tilley's account in the context of contemporary art. They focus on women makers, the work women do, the time of making, the production of knowledge, and through this, the Chapter offers a meditation on relationships between the hand, making, materiality and knowing.

Chapter Four addresses digital contexts of the image, yet the presence of the hand remains central. It begins with the digitisation of a 1723 book by Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, which I present as a wavering image because of the ways it is altered in that process. I examine the glitches, blurred pages and the occasional presence of the fingers of the person digitising it. The Chapter therefore addresses questions of time and overlaid histories and reflects on how I explore similar issues in my own practice, in which I worked with the images, digitally and in printmaking, to explore questions of change, provisionality and wavering in the image.

[28] Christopher Tilley, *Material Culture and Text: The Art of Ambiguity* (Routledge, 1991).

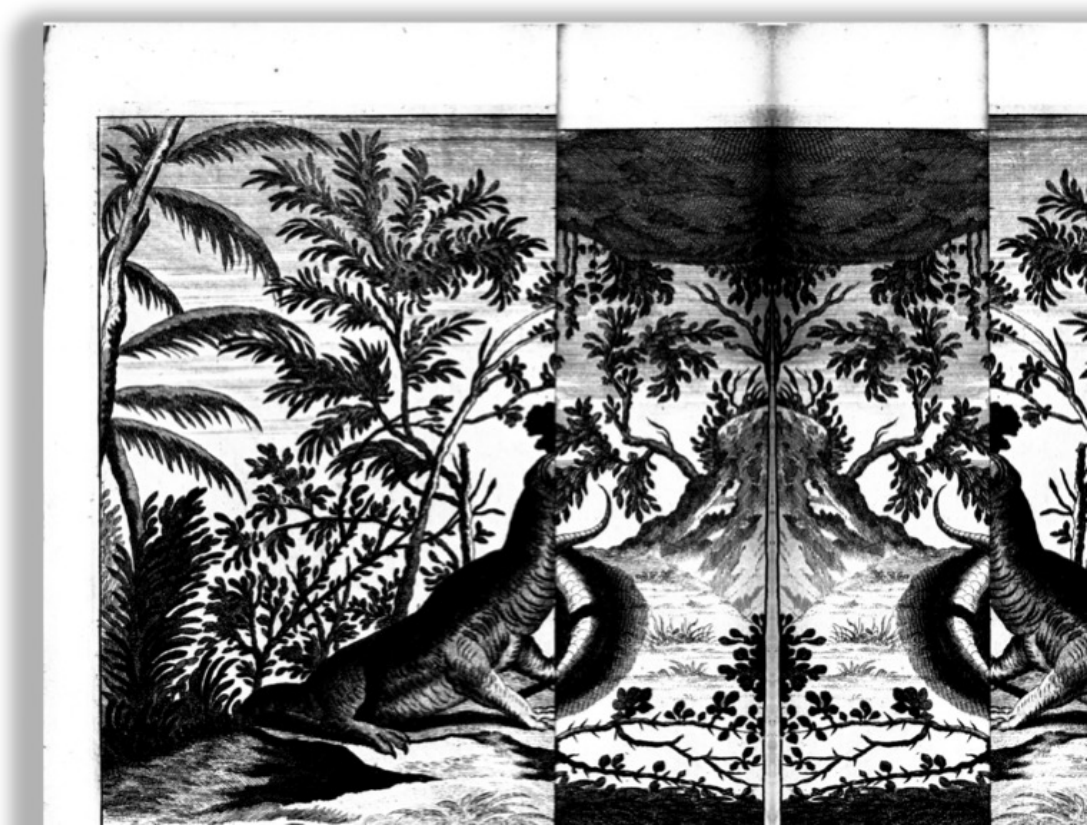

Fig. 3. Flora Bowden, page from *Digital Copy*, 2019, 56-page digital print artist book, 21cm x 29.7cm.
This is an example of an image produced through my work with Scheuchzer's digitised book.

The Chapter proceeds to study two films, Camille Henrot's *Grosse Fatigue* (2013) and Elizabeth Price's *A Restoration* (2016), that engage with museum collections and digital space, further exploring relationships between institutional holdings and digital contexts. Like the artworks studied in Chapter Three, these films explore the role of women artists and makers and develop questions around perspective, the hand and knowledge through making.

The first four Chapters examine various ways in which images are altered through time, technology and different makers and processes of making. They raise questions of materiality, the production of knowledge, uncover ways in which the image and its materials are impressionable, and how the artwork can foreground women in the making process.

Chapter Five shows how these themes developed in my practice, centring on questions of materiality. Building on how different perspectives can be known through the image, how it is affected through time and remaking, it begins by exploring questions of presence and absence through the work of Alice Oswald, Brian Dillon and Rebecca Solnit. I then explore Mieke Bal's work on 'Sticky Images' and 'Slippery Images' from the Hayward Gallery exhibition, 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today' (2021), to consider viscosity, movement and instability in the artwork. Drawing on the writing of Lauren Elkin, I discuss the work of Linda Nochlin, Lynda Benglis, Eva Hesse, Genieve Figgis, and Phyllida Barlow to think about materiality, feminism and the body in the work of art, before reflecting on my own most recent painting, which is similarly concerned with the physical behaviour of its materials, fluidity, chance, the time in this physicality, and in how this relates to the concerns of wavering within the image. To begin, however, Chapter One will set out some of the key texts and topics which prompted my research.

Fig. 4. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2021, acrylic on linen, 136.5cm x 99.5cm.
This detail view is of one of the early works I created through poured paint.

1. THE WAVERING IMAGE

This Chapter examines the questions of time that are central to the research. Beginning with the work of Maurice Halbwachs and setting out the idea of 'wavering', it proceeds to consider contemporary scholarship on time and connects this to the image and materiality to consider different relationships in and between times, as well as to explore the possibilities of different visual and material approaches to time.

Writing about his first day at school in *The Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs reflected that his memory was 'doubtless an incomplete and wavering image and certainly a reconstructed one'.[29] In the book, Halbwachs developed his thesis that an individual's memory is informed by their social context – in this instance by family remembrances – and, therefore, that a person's memories of the past are shaped beyond themselves, by a wider group in time and space. The dynamic and always-evolving nature of these social and personal circumstances means that the image of the past that they produce is susceptible to changes through time: it is affected by the later situations in which it is recalled. In other words, it wavers.

Halbwachs wrote the book in French, and the quotation above is the translation by Francis J. Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter. Halbwachs' original read: 'image flottante, incomplète, sans doute et, surtout, image reconstruite'.[30] The key word here for my purposes is 'flottante', which Ditter and Ditter translate as 'wavering'. Perhaps in English the closest word to 'flottante' is 'floating', and while this shares with 'wavering' a sense of instability, floating also suggests resisting forces, and being suspended, while wavering speaks to changeability and uncertainty.

[29] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. by Francis J. Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (Harper & Row, 1980), p. 71.
[30] Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), p. 39.

As I use it, the idea of the wavering image is bound up with time and, in the context of Halbwachs' text, raises questions of individual and collective perspective, translation and mediation, change and resistance. The wavering image is personal and social, malleable, insecure and, at the same time, resilient.

Like 'wavering', 'image' is also a richly suggestive and complex word, and one that can be employed in diverse forms and contexts. As noted in the Introduction, the art historian W.J.T. Mitchell has explored this variability, reflecting that anything from memories, statues, hallucinations, ideas, or poems to patterns can be encountered as an 'image'. He therefore suggests that an image is 'something like an actor on the historical stage, a presence or character endowed with legendary status'.[31] Mitchell's definition supports the range of subjects studied in this project, from scientific history to archaeological research, digital technology and fine art. The 'images' in this research are united by their relation to time and history. They are related to what the French historian Pierre Nora terms society's 'institutions of memory' – libraries, universities, and public archives – and my research explores the looping, discontinuous and fractured ways in which they have been reconstructed, reclaimed, or selectively erased through time.[32] In doing so I ask about the significance of these interventions: how are the images affected by them? How do they enable us to reconsider the temporalities of the image through them? What do they reveal about how agency and perspective are seen and known through these images?

Mitchell's definition also supports the idea that the image is a space in which actions or events play out, in which a range of voices and perspectives are held. It suggests that across this variability, what binds these diverse forms of the image together is their resonance through time.

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[31] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconoology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago University Press, 1986), p. 9.

[32] Pierre Nora, 'Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire', *Representations* 26 (1989), pp. 7-24 (p. 14).

The defining feature of the image, therefore, is its placement within a temporal frame and questions about its endurance and reception across time are intrinsic to engaging with and reading it. The image, whatever its form, is a temporal entity and an embodiment of relations in time.

Within my research, a wavering image is one that relates to the complexities, subjectivities, or idiosyncrasies of temporal relations. It is an image that is simultaneously concerned with vulnerability and resilience, material behaviours – such as the unexpected glitches, fluidity, or viscosity of a work – and ideas of determination and tenacity, to make space for new perspectives, and to develop and challenge ideas of time in the image.

The 'images' studied in this project embody these approaches. They generate new ideas of time, advocate for under-acknowledged experiences of time, and reveal how materiality can contribute to perceptions and experiences of time.

THE TIME OF THE IMAGE

The art historian Georges Didi-Huberman has written that: '[w]henever we are before the image, we are before time', and that the image 'often has more memory and more future than the being who contemplates it'.[33] In this essay he was discussing Fra Angelico's 1440s *Madonna of the Shadows* fresco in the convent of San Marco, Florence. In this context, it is possible to see that it is the material endurance or preservation of the image that enables it to continue speaking to us across time. It is this longevity that can connect us to times that are different from, or beyond, those to which we might otherwise have access.

[33] Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism', in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and out of History,* ed. by Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg, trans. by Peter Mason (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 31-44 (p. 31 and p. 33).

In this respect, ideas of endurance, permanence and constancy could be said to go hand-in-hand with the production of the two-dimensional work of art. But when Didi-Huberman suggests that images have memories—and long ones at that—we can also see them not as resolute, impervious, or *un*wavering, but rather, like Halbwachs, can see that they are to some degree porous, malleable, susceptible – and that they can be influenced by the times and conditions through which they pass, but remain, nevertheless, enduring.

There are of course many ways of approaching questions of the image and its mutability in time. A five-hundred-year-old fresco raises considerations of material vulnerability: the physical degradation of pigment and plaster, wearing effects of light and environmental conditions. While in a contemporary context, digital technologies present different kinds of volatility, both in artworks and wider visual culture, from touched-up images to disappearing message-images and deepfakes. While these are not the primary focus of this research, they are certainly the context in which it finds itself, creating a complex and nuanced temporal picture in relation to making and viewing images today.

Drawing on Halbwachs and Didi-Huberman, this research explores questions of the image and its social and cultural contexts, and how the image bears the marks of its journeys in time. I am interested in the multiple temporalities and the plasticity of the image, with memory at work both within the image and in changing receptions to it, with remaking images through time, and with the questions of endurance, mutability and influence that these issues raise. In my practice these ideas are explored both by working with images studied in the writing as well as material explorations. In the later stages of the research, this material investigation has led me to develop new painting processes that seek to acknowledge the time of the image and senses of movement and change within it.

TIME AND HISTORY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

To develop questions of time in the research, in this section I consider recent scholarship that speaks to different relationships across time and proposes new framings beyond traditional ideas of linearity and uniformity.

In his book *Regimes of Historicity* (2003), the historian François Hartog considers how societies think about themselves historically and says that regimes of historicity are 'a way of linking together past, present, and future, or of mixing the three categories'.[34] A decade later, the German cultural studies professor Aleida Assmann put forward the notion of 'cultural time regimes', writing that 'all time regimes provide a groundwork for unspoken values, interpretations of history and meaningful activity'. Assmann identifies significant connections between structures of time and cultural activity, when time itself is so often thought of as a backdrop to, and removed from, culture.

Assmann further argues that 'something of a continental shift is taking place in the structure of Western temporality' – which we could also read as a cultural shift – and says that while the future is losing its appeal, the pull of the past is ever greater. She contends that the modern regime of time (that emerged in Western societies during the Enlightenment, privileging rationality, and objectivity), is now in decline. For numerous reasons, perhaps most notably climate change, Assmann says we are collectively no longer optimistic about the future, but are anxious about what might happen.[35] She suggests that this, combined with the increasingly

[34] Francois Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. by Saskia Brown (Columbia University Press, 2016), p. xv.
[35] Aleida Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime,* trans. by Sarah Clift (Cornell University Press, 2020), p. 5.

important role memory has played in Western culture since the 1980s, is leading us to turn towards the past and to do so through the lens of memory.[36]

Assmann's conceptualisation speaks to ideas of wavering and offers ways of thinking that are broader, more inclusive, and open to holding different views simultaneously. To think more about the past through memory enables us to embrace views of the present and future that are also more complex and diverse. This space for different perspectives is something the work of art can offer, and something I am interested in exploring through the materiality of my practice.

Assmann makes a case for more diverse views and perspectives on time that embrace and hold space for multivocality, and histories and experiences that have been overlooked. Such an approach potentially disrupts the linearity of time and therefore enables more breadth, diversity, and plurality in our images of the past and in whose memories and experiences are seen and heard.

To consider the possibilities this approach offers, I suggest it is important to investigate this idea of multivocality further. This recalls political philosopher Victoria Browne's suggestion that feminist historiography requires us to challenge the notion that there is "'one" historical time'.[37] Challenging dominant narratives, unearthing histories that have been overlooked, and thereby expanding our understanding of different experiences also extends what is possible in the future. Making space for greater difference and more varied perspectives in the images and narratives we hold now increases the possibility of a diverse future. Or, as the feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz has said '[i]t is about the production of conceivable futures'.[38]

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[36] See Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) in which Assmann discusses the increasingly important role of memory in Western culture.

[37] Victoria Browne, *Feminism, Time, and Nonlinear History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 6.

[38] Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely* (Duke University Press, 2004), p. 255.

THE MATTER OF TIME

The cultural historians Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier's book *Rethinking Historical Time* provides a means to engage artistic practice with contemporary debates on temporality, history and memory. They echo Assmann's and Hartog's writing, noting that 'something has changed in our vision of temporality which we now perceive as more variable, less monolithic – something that affects our way of thinking about the transformation of past phenomena over time'.

Images contain their own space of time, and the wavering of an image is necessarily a time-based event. In this project, 'wavering' therefore addresses the image's capacity to engage with and reflect upon experiences of time. It is the play of time within the image and the way that the image plays with time. It is how an image engages with anachronisms, affects the sense of time, collapses boundaries between tenses, elongates a moment or how it allows us to dwell in a space of time. I am interested in this plasticity and pliability of time within the image and the practice explores this through its material experimentation.

Tamm and Olivier suggest that it is becoming increasingly clear 'that the material environment of human societies has always been composite',[39] and, quoting the archaeologist Bjørnar J. Olsen, write that '[t]he past endures, it accumulates in every corner and crevasse of existence becoming "now", making these presents chronological hybrids by definition and thus objecting to the common conception of time (and history) as the succession of instants'.[40]

[39] Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier, 'Introduction' in *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism*, ed. by Marek Tamm, and Laurent Olivier (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 1.

[40] Tamm and Olivier, 'Introduction' in *Rethinking Historical Time*, p. 2; Bjørnar J. Olsen, 'Reclaiming Things: An Archaeology of Matter', in P. L. Carlile, D. Nicolini, A. Langley, and H. Tsoukas (eds), *How Matter Matters: Objects, Artifacts and Materiality in Organization Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 171–96 (p. 182).

In this view, time in material culture is always multiple, and it is not linear. Instead, numerous histories and temporalities exist in any given instant, and time can therefore be understood as interwoven – and tangled, even – in complex, always-unfolding ways with many different pasts and presents. In *Staying with the Trouble*, the feminist philosopher Donna Haraway discusses what she calls 'the temporality of the thick, fibrous, and lumpy "now" which is ancient and not': offering a model of time that is physical, embodied and experiential – anything but the invisible, a-cultural backdrop of the time regime of Modernity that Assmann described. [41]

Thinking more specifically about the work of art, in his lecture 'Constructing Duration', Georges Didi-Huberman quoted the philosopher Gilles Deleuze as follows: '"[i]t seems clear to me that the image is not in the present. The image itself is a set of temporal relations from which the present simply flows […] Images make palpable and visible temporal relations that cannot be reduced to the present."'[42] Deleuze's language here brings together many of the strands of discussion encountered in this chapter, and suggests that the image might be a uniquely productive means of navigating the multiple temporalities that structure the human experience of time. Indeed, the material discussed in this chapter invites a mode of enquiry that considers not only questions of time but, further, examines what role the image or the materiality of the artwork can play in shaping ideas and experiences of time.

The ideas discussed in this Chapter demonstrate how the image can engage with complexities of time, participate in the production of ideas about time and enable us to examine questions of vulnerability, provisonality and change through it. It also shows how the concept of the wavering image can be a tool to understand time and the image and generate new forms of knowledge.

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[41] Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), p. 206.

[42] Gilles Deleuze, quoted by Georges Didi-Huberman in 'Constructing Duration', lecture at the Architectural Association, London, 20 January 2006, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZrhYrZAqmc [accessed 19 August 2020]. G. Deleuze, 'Le cerveau, c'est l'écran' (1986), in *Deux Régimes de fous. Textes et entretiens*, 1975-1995, ed. D. Lapoujade (Minuit, 2003), p. 270.

Using the work of Tamm and Olivier, Olsen, and Haraway, this Chapter has connected these approaches and thinking about time to materiality and, drawing on Didi-Huberman and Deleuze, explored the time of the image. Through this, the research has investigated temporality in contexts related to artistic practice, ideas which inform approaches and developments in my practice in the later stages of the project.

In the next Chapter this thinking is developed through the work of James Hutton, and contemporary scholarship on deep time, geology and the Anthropocene. It also discussed how my practice engaged with imagery from Hutton's work to explore questions of time and, informed by the research in this Chapter, proceeded to experiment with new material approaches to explore different forms of engagement with time in the artwork.

2. TIME AND THE IMAGE

This Chapter explores ideas of deep time through the work of James Hutton, and contemporary scholarship on geology and the Anthropocene through the work of Timothy Morton and Katherine Yusoff. It proceeds to ask how artwork can address the complex temporalities generated and engaged by this work. This Chapter also reflects on developments in my artistic practice to explore questions of time, firstly in response to imagery from Hutton's work and, subsequently, through material experimentation in my research.

The scientific discovery of deep time is attributed to James Hutton (1726-1797), a naturalist who lived and worked in Edinburgh during the Enlightenment, and studied landforms, rocks and minerals to investigate the processes of their formation. In 1788, Hutton visited Siccar Point, a site on the east coast of Scotland, approximately 60 kilometres from Edinburgh, where he saw what became known as 'Hutton's Unconformity': two distinct types of rock—Silurian greywacke in vertical strata and Devonian Old Red Sandstone in tilted, nearly horizontal strata, that are sixty-five million years apart in age—creating a single solid mass that is in some places smoothly sloped, and in others jagged and on edge. In geology, an 'unconformity' is a hiatus—a period of non-deposition or active erosion that creates a gap in the geological record.[1] 'Unconformity' therefore describes both a place where regular, orderly rock-making is disrupted, and a temporal disturbance.

At Siccar Point, these two rocks, formed far apart in time, seem to have collided together. Through their very material and physical forms, we see different moments of time or history – side by side, out of sync, but also closely aligned. They provided the evidence for Hutton's

[1] Francis Jones and Louise Longridge, 'Various Types of Geological Unconformities', University of British Columbia, Department of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences, 'Stratigraphy' EOSC 326 Active Reading, 2014-2016. https://www.eoas.ubc.ca/courses/eosc326/resources/Stratigraphy/unconformities-v2.htm [accessed 02 July 2024].

theory that extremely slow processes of sedimentation and erosion are constantly at work, and that the Earth consists of a 'succession of worlds' which are always in formation. While Hutton did not estimate the age of the Earth, he wrote that '[t]he result, therefore, of this physical enquiry is, that we find no vestige of a beginning, – no prospect of an end'.[2]

Hutton's work placed geology in a timeframe much broader than the six thousand years popularly believed to be the age of the Earth. In 1650, for example, Archbishop James Ussher attempted to date the Earth through biblical readings, concluding that 22 October, 4004 BC was the moment of origin.[3] Hutton's observations at Siccar Point enabled geology to become a science in its own right, with Hutton as its founder.[4]

The theory of deep time reshaped ideas of temporality, and we could say that it expanded the past. It introduced the scale, sense of distance and unknowability that we recognise today. As Stephen Jay Gould has acknowledged, it also had significant implications for the position of humans within the frame of time.[5] It invited consideration of the deep time of the future and suggested that new senses of time were needed.

It is useful to connect the questions of time in Hutton's work to other conceptualisations of time, such as Henri Bergson's ideas on duration, in which both the past and present are contained 'as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another', considering ways in which different times are connected or composite in lived experience.[6] In

[2] James Hutton, 'Theory of the Earth; or an investigation of the laws observable in the composition, dissolution, and restoration of land upon the Globe' in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh,* (vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 209–304. 1788)', p. 304.
[3] James Ussher, *Annals of the World* (Printed by E. Tyler, for F. Crook, and G. Bedell, 1658), p. 11, https://archive.org/details/AnnalsOfTheWorld [accessed 05 April 2025].
[4] 'James Hutton (1726-1797)', Edinburgh Geological Society, <https://www.edinburghgeolsoc.org/edinburghs-geology/geological-pioneers/james-hutton/> [accessed 03 July 2024].
[5] Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Harvard University Press, 1987).
[6] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness,* trans. by F. L. Pogson (George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1950) p. 100.

the context of Hutton's work, where different geological times are very much in touch, it is interesting to consider this suggestion of 'melting into one another' and the material implications it might have.

Further, in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, when discussing the relationship between audio and visual, Gilles Deleuze writes '[t]he visual image becomes *archaeological, stratigraphic, tectonic*'.[7] Deleuze invites us to ask how layers of time and history can be considered with and through the image. Like Bergson's work, this is an important contribution to contemporary understandings of temporality which has, directly and indirectly, exerted an influence on the directions of my own thinking in both my research and practice. The work of my supervisor, Dr. Tim O'Riley, also influenced my thought in this project. O'Riley's book, *Endlessness* (2020), for example, reflects on the Antarctic Expedition of 1910-1913 led by Captain Robert Falcon Scott.[8] Within its pages are printed the image of a set of skis used in the expedition at full-scale, thereby inviting the reader to encounter them 1:1, over multiple pages, while considering the vastness implied by the book's title. As I have experimented in my own practice, I have considered the manner in which O'Riley's project brought together the image and time as a model to test my ideas against.

REFLECTIONS ON MY PRACTICE

My own engagement with time in my practice began with Hutton's work. To pursue my interest in how ideas of time are represented and affected through images, I initially worked with the imagery of Hutton's own investigation. Specifically, I focused on one image in his *Theory of the Earth* (1795) which is a study of a seemingly small section of Scottish granite with feldspar (a type of mineral) deposits.

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[7] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Caleta (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 243.

[8] Tim O'Riley, *Endlessness* (Peter Foolen Editions, 2020).

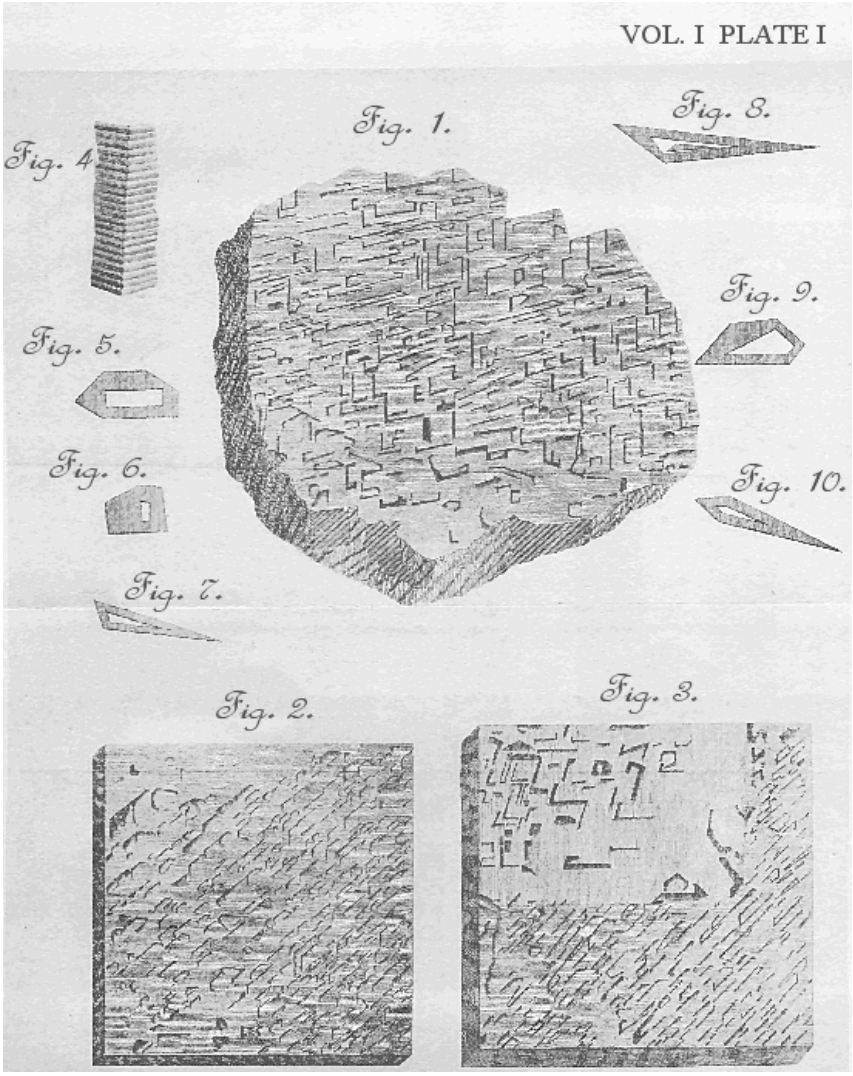


Fig. 5. James Hutton, *The Theory of the Earth with Proofs and Illustrations*, Vol. I, Plate I, (Edinburgh, 1795).
This image, an illustration from Hutton's book, is a study of samples of Scottish granite with feldspar deposits.

The formations in the image are geometric, angular, and striking, making it, in a sense, a challenging image. Hutton refers to this image in his text, writing that its shapes 'have not only separately the forms of certain typographic characters, but collectively give the regular lineal appearance of types set in writing'.[9]

[9] James Hutton, *Theory of the Earth with Proofs and Illustrations*, Vol. 1, Section II (Edinburgh, 1795), <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/12861/pg12861-images.html> [accessed 15 February 2026].

Early in the research I became interested in this association of geology with typography, the connected ideas of language and communication and wondered how this could be explored further. Prior to starting the PhD, I had visited Siccar Point and became interested in the physicality and materiality of rock forms. I had also worked with the shapes from Hutton's image in my practice, but at the beginning of this research decided to work with them through printmaking to develop ideas of language and the reproduction of the image. I created a set of screen-prints on Somerset paper of seventy-two shapes from Hutton's image that aimed to establish them as both individual entities and as parts of a larger set of elements, to develop and test how the forms could relate to ideas of language and typography. Following the screen prints, in the next stage of work, I created the images again through printing and cutting the shapes in vinyl to be installed site-specifically in an exhibition. I wanted to test different materials in this body of work to explore different forms of engagement with the imagery.

The screen-printing on paper enabled me to further explore connections to printmaking from the original book, while the work with vinyl offered a more contemporary medium and one that could engage directly with the surfaces of the walls in the exhibition. I therefore created two bodies of work in this area of practice. It was important for the research to test the forms in this way to expand on the relationship to writing Hutton suggested, and to explore how they could operate independently from it, as images in the contemporary context. With both bodies of work, I intended to create wall-based images, and in the context of developing Hutton's suggestion of language, this led me to think about my practice in relation to signage. I therefore thought about the format and prominence of the images in this context, considering both the individual images as well as the entire set of seventy-two. I therefore tested the scale and format of the images. The screen-prints on Somerset paper are each 18.6cm x 25.2cm and the overall

piece is 162.8cm x 242.8cm, while in the vinyl images the individual forms range from 12.1cm to 26.8cm and can be rearranged in different formations, as is shown in the images below. The result of this testing of scale, format and materials in the works was that I found that they enabled viewers to engage with both individual forms and with them collectively. Further, I found that working with different materials enabled different dialogues (such as those related to printing on paper or the context of the walls of a building) to be a significant aspect of the work.

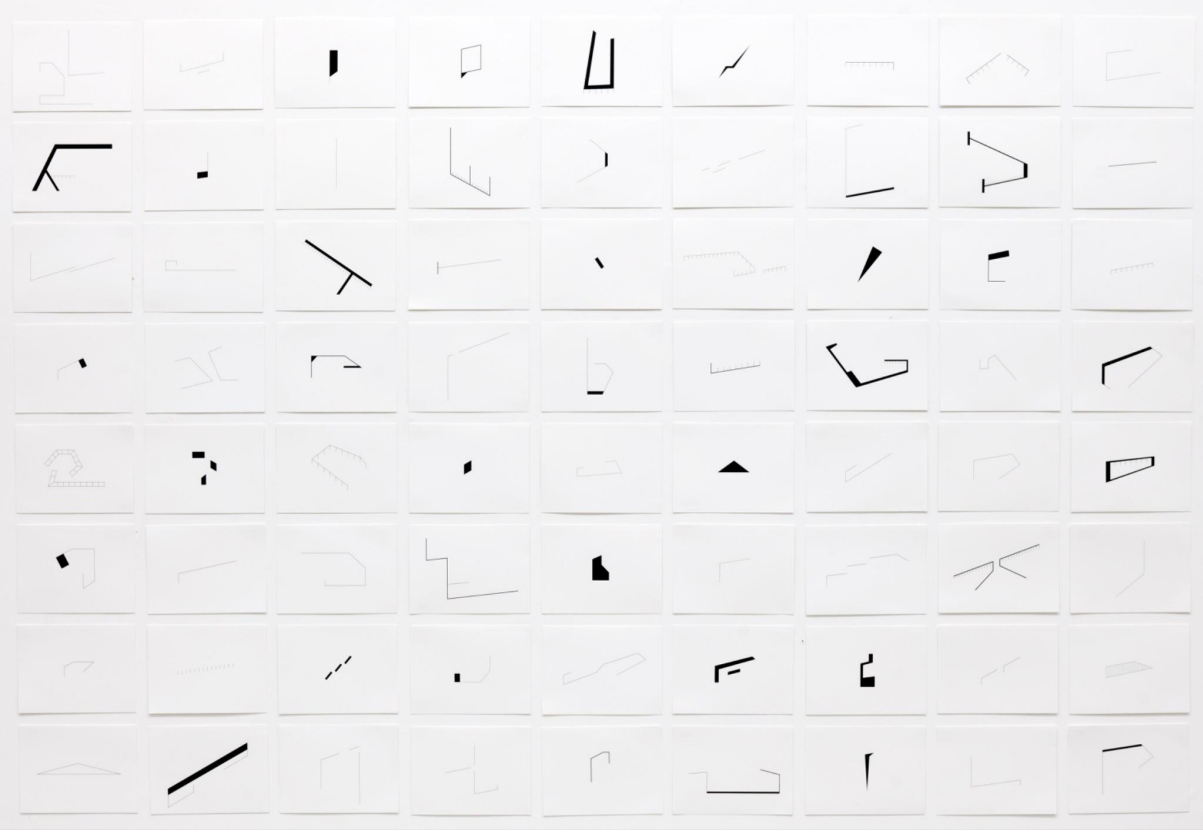


Fig. 6. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2016, screen print on Somerset paper, 162.8cm x 242.8cm.

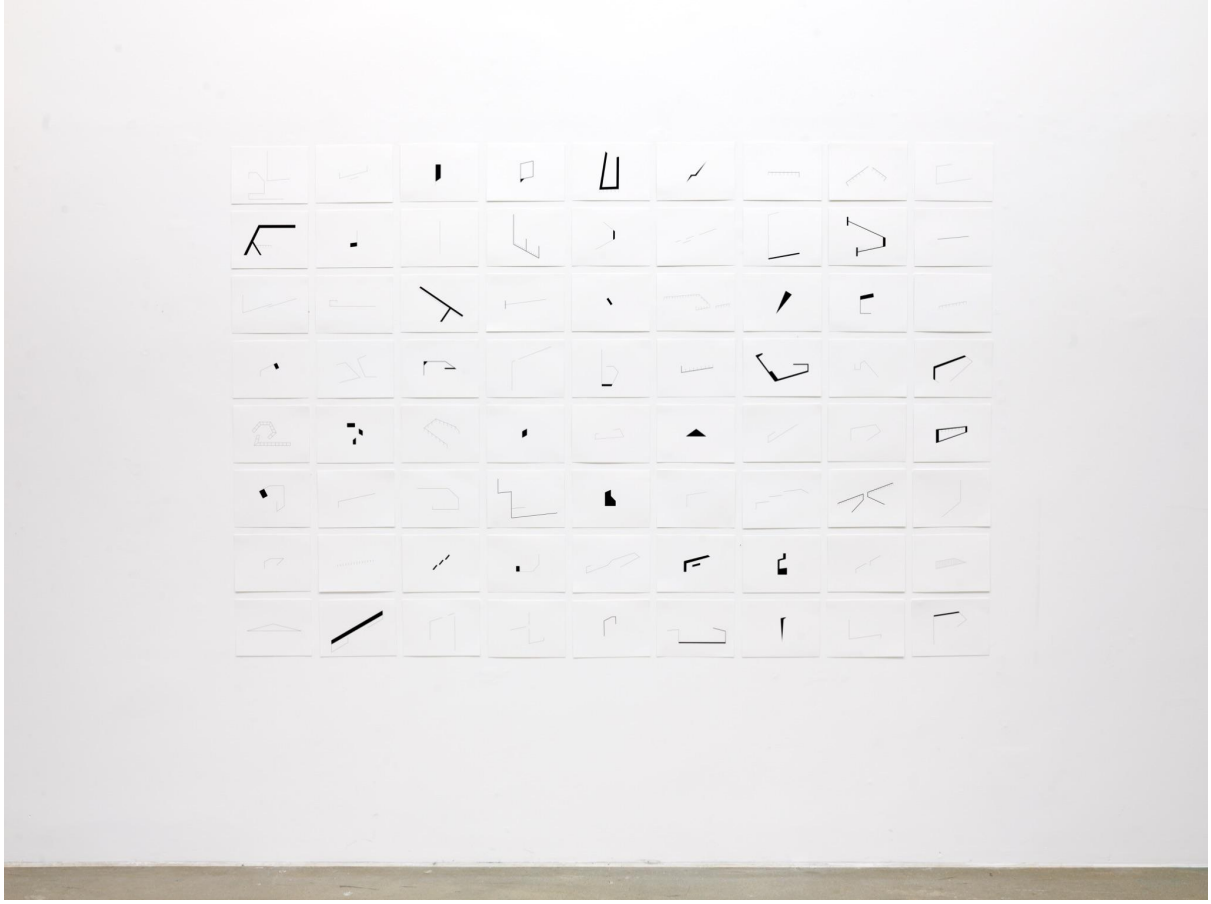


Fig. 7. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, (2016), screen print on Somerset paper, 162.8cm x 242.8cm.

Working with these images through printmaking enabled a closer relationship to language. The black ink on white paper emphasised the relationship to typography and printing them as individual images established the possibility of their rearrangement, of assembling in different formations, as also happens with typography, and therefore suggested a kind of mobility. While the scale of my work overall is large, and therefore has a considerable presence, the individual images often comprise fine lines, raising questions about presence and prominence in the work. Further, I found working with the images through printmaking and thereby developing their association with typography interesting because they resist clear communication, also raising questions about it.

I found that the separate prints on paper conveyed the possibility of rearrangement, which gave the work a sense of mobility and variability, however, printed ink on paper is closely associated with fixity, which is counter to the themes of changeability in the research yet raises further consideration of it.

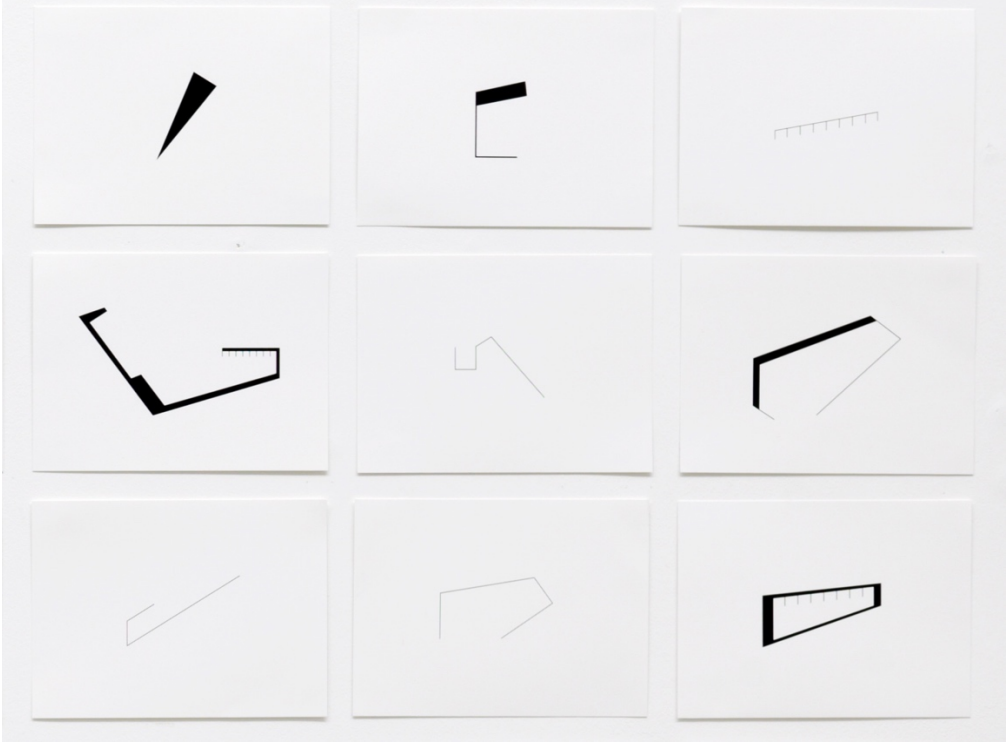


Fig. 8. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2016, screen print on Somerset paper, 162.8cm x 242.8cm.

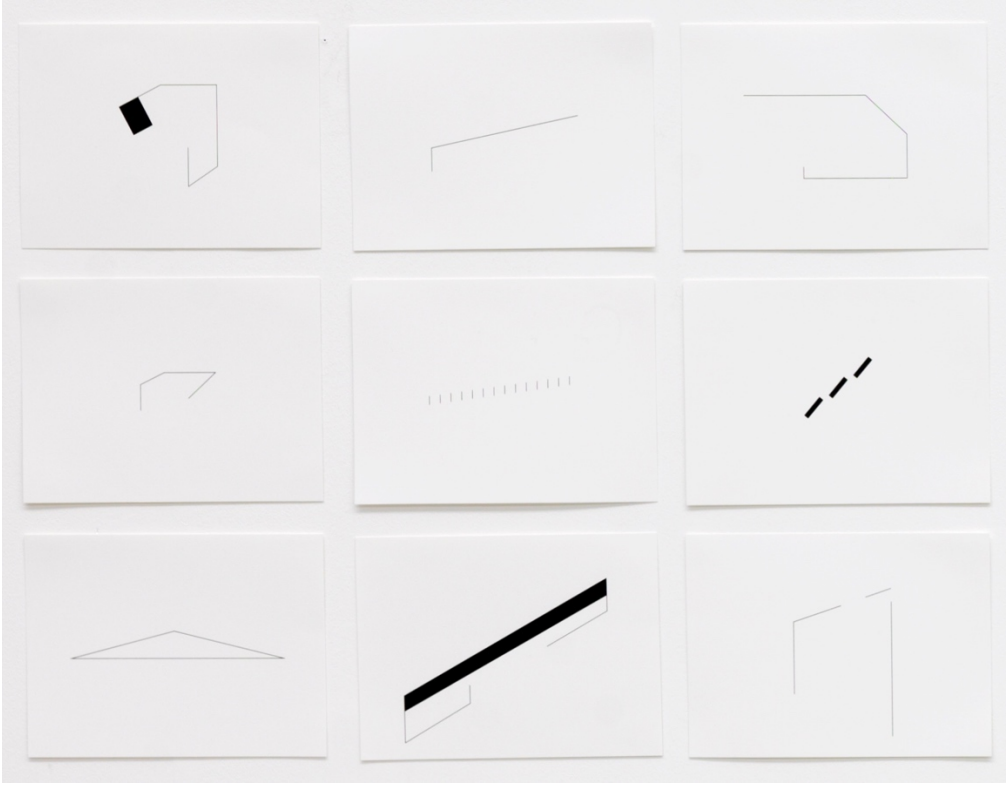


Fig. 9. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2016, screen print on Somerset paper, 162.8cm x 242.8cm.

Through this work, I found that printmaking enabled me to develop questions of language from the original image, but in remaking the forms, and at a larger scale, the work allowed them to exist in new contexts. Printmaking offered interesting possibilities for repurposing and resituating the images, for exploring how new meanings could be generated through them, and how relationships between times might also be developed.

To continue to develop this work, and to explore different questions of printmaking, materiality, and context, I created the forms again, working at a similar scale, but in vinyl, and using colour.

These pieces were installed on the walls of the Royal College of Art, within a student exhibition titled 'S:Future' (2016). My work was shown in eight different locations around the entrance of

the building (Figs. 10-19). On one wall forty shapes were shown in a grid formation over an entire concrete wall in the entrance. Others, as individual shapes or in smaller formations, were shown near seating areas, on the stairway, and on a structural column.

The differences in size and prominence of the installations enabled me to further explore questions of presence in the work, as well as to test ideas of communication and the relationship between language and image. Further, in being printed in vinyl, which were removed from the walls after the exhibition, these prints did not contain the same sense of fixity as those on paper.

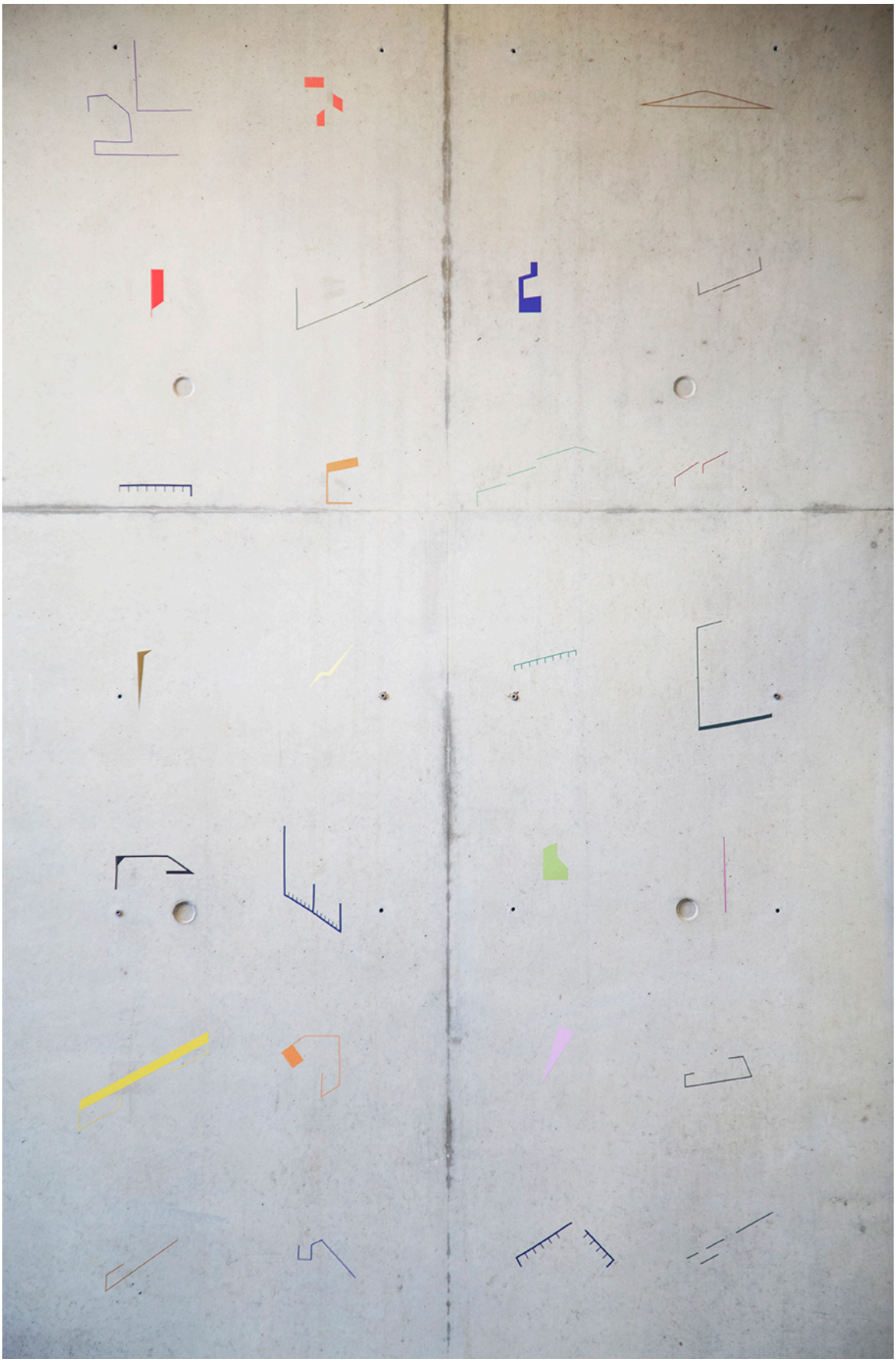
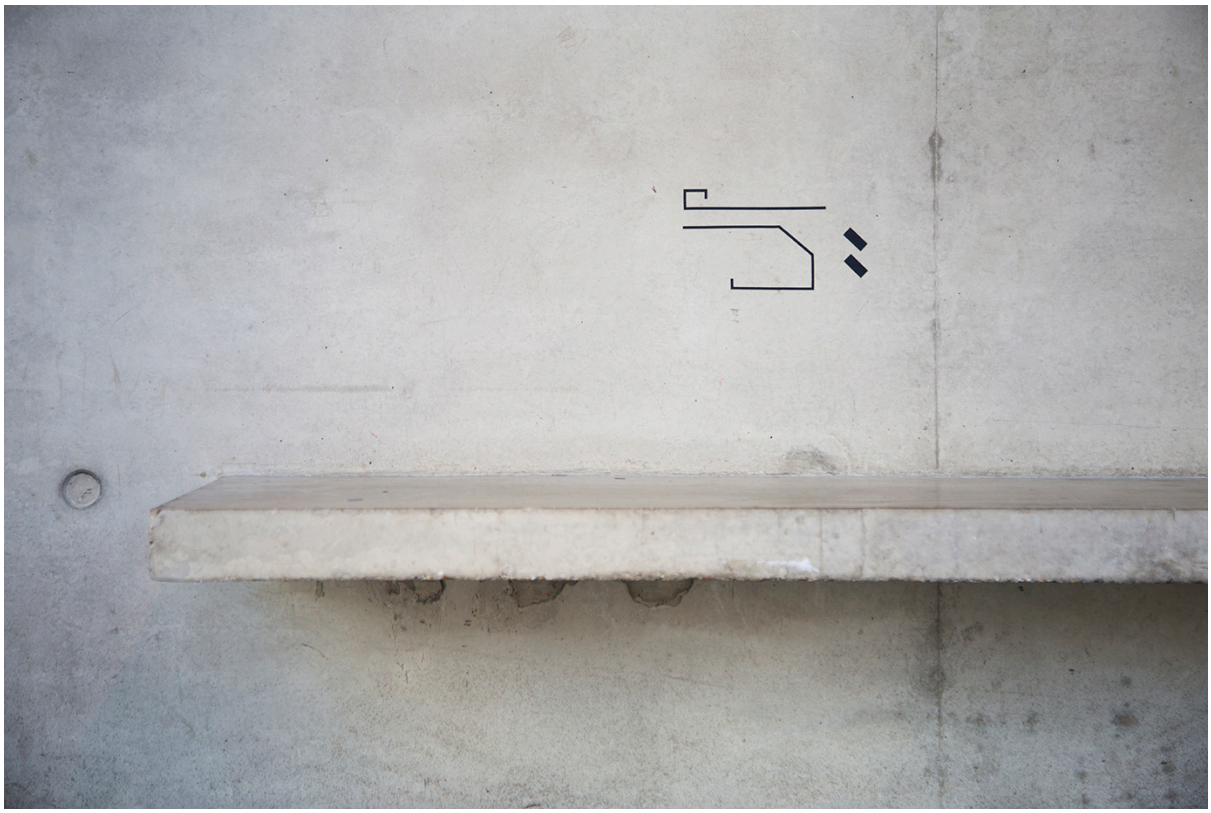


Fig. 10. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2016, vinyl print, 425cm x 141cm, installation view, 'S:Future' exhibition, Royal College of Art, London.

Fig. 11. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2016, vinyl print, 425cm x 141cm, installation view, 'S:Future' exhibition, Royal College of Art, London.



Figs. 12 & 13. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, vinyl print, 22.4cm x 12.1cm, installation view, 'S:Future' exhibition, Royal College of Art, London.

Fig. 14. Flora Bowden, *Untitled,* 2016, vinyl print, 14.6cm x 25.6cm, installation view, 'S:Future' exhibition, Royal College of Art, London.

Fig. 15. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2016, vinyl print, 13.9cm x 25.8cm, installation view, 'S:Future' exhibition, Royal College of Art, London.

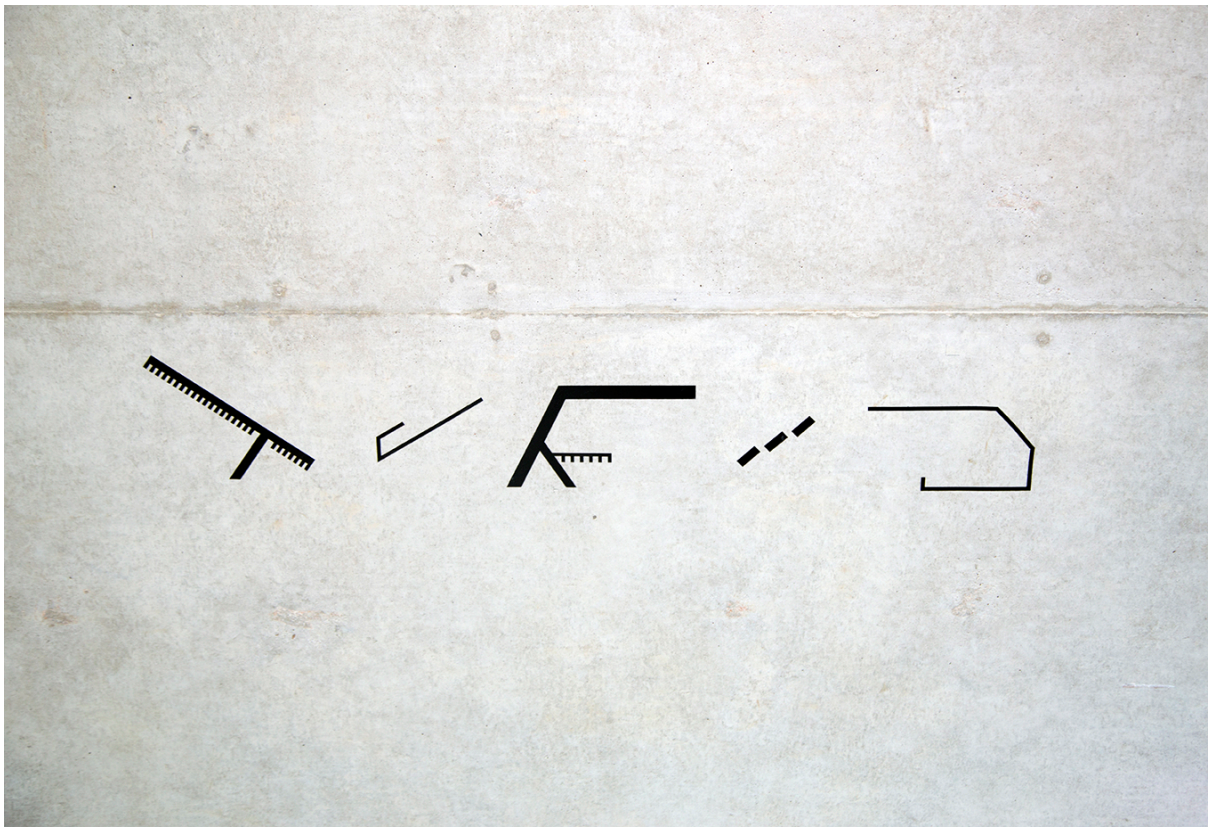


Fig. 16. Flora Bowden, *Untitled,* 2016, vinyl print, 12.8cm x 63.8cm, installation view, 'S:Future' exhibition, Royal College of Art, London.

Fig. 17. Flora Bowden, *Untitled,* 2016, vinyl print, 10.4cm x 38cm, installation view, 'S:Future' exhibition, Royal College of Art, London.

Fig. 18. Flora Bowden, *Untitled,* 2016, vinyl print, 14.6cm x 26.8cm, installation view, 'S:Future' exhibition, Royal College of Art, London.

Fig. 19. Flora Bowden, *Untitled,* 2016, vinyl print, 17.6cm x 9.1cm, installation view, 'S:Future' exhibition, Royal College of Art, London.

In exhibiting this work, I was conscious of how people inhabit these spaces and in the relationship to signage and wanted to engage with these possibilities. These are public spaces, transitional spaces, institutional spaces, and are heavily used. The walls are concrete, and I was interested the connection to an idea of stone created through their positioning on the walls. They were able to enter a dialogue with the space, and their setting in the entrance to a university also developed a relationship to language through their association with forms of signage, which are common in many of these areas.

Figure 15 was installed on a column inside the building but facing a window onto the street, making it visible to passers-by. I was interested in the connection this created to the outside and the contemporary moment. The public positioning of the images suggested an idea of language, meaning or communication, while simultaneously remaining resistant to it. I also found that this work was rooted in ideas or images of deep time but did not openly suggest the landscape or geology from which it emerged, enabling it to readily engage with different contexts in the contemporary moment.

In this exhibition, I found that the images contained ideas of communication and miscommunication, which contributed to ideas of wavering they presented. Questions of scale and presence were also significant because of the form of encounter a viewer has with the images, which is particularly significant in the context of university spaces, where signage and communication materials are common.

The work with these images also enabled me to develop my thinking around ideas of narrative in relation to time, its vulnerability and potential for senses of flux and change. I was interested in ideas of remaking in the work, questions of authorship and voice, and the different perspectives that were possible through this process of remaking and resituating the forms in a new, contemporary context. It was important to investigate the significance these questions hold in the context of deep time and how we can relate to it now, as well as in the future.

Through this area of research and practice, and as I also said in a talk I gave on this area of the research in 2020, I began to understand that Hutton's work presents an invitation 'to examine ideas of slowness', but it also relates to 'perspective, vantage point, the encounter, translation, estrangement, nonlinearity, and the possibility of material transformation.' It prompted me to ask: 'what happens when we think about time in these ways? What are the possibilities of engagement with the frame of time when we think of it as "unconforming"?'[10]

Through this phase of research, I found that although it enabled me to closely engage with the ideas of time in Hutton's work, I wanted to explore broader questions about time in the practice. Having aimed to work with Hutton's images in the contemporary context, I was interested in asking further questions about experiences of time in and through the work of art. Informed by ideas of materiality and change through my research into deep time and scholarship on temporality, I was prompted to investigate time in new ways in my own practice. This led to an increasing interest in material experimentation and the ways in which time might be malleable, formed and affected through the material of a work of art. I began to wonder how time itself might be made manifest in my practice.

[10] Flora Bowden, Faith in Strangers and Super/Collider, 'Deep Time' event at Margate Science Festival, 5 December, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SmG3yYF0zo [accessed 28 January 2026].

To develop this, I began experimenting with resin as a material that can preserve and create stasis in the objects it envelops and therefore lend itself to an exploration of temporal properties through its materiality.

I began pouring resin in thin, rectangular slabs that suggested the form of a picture plane. I decided to work with this format to explore resin and its layers in relation to the image, and to think about its materiality and depth in relation to time in the image. As I poured it, the liquid resin had a viscosity and slowness that I thought conveyed senses of time in the material. To create the pieces, I worked in thin layers, and it was interesting that the material necessitated a considerable investment of time in this process: pouring the work, allowing time for it to set, and repeating the process. I thought that the work therefore embodied the time of its making, and I was interested in the slowness it held. I worked on three pieces with resin. One was 40 x 30cm and two were 25 x 25cm. I tested the scale by working across these sizes and considering the viewer's engagement with them. I was interested in the intimacy the scale offered and thought it would allow close consideration of the layers.

When I began working with resin, I explored adding materials, such as small stones, to it, to connect the work back to geology and the time of the rocks (Fig. 20). I also tinted the resin with pigment, building the piece up and adding more colour through painting and printmaking on both the solid and still-liquid surfaces of the work. I was very interested in the opportunities this offered to work with materials across states from liquid to solid, and the ways in which the colours and forms of the mark-making could change in the process. This lent itself in an interesting way to the investigation of time and is closely associated with the notion of stratification. I worked with translucent pigments, so that the layers and sense of depth remained

visible in the work. This led to me showing one of my resin works in a Royal College of Art student exhibition, *Daybreak* at Safehouse, London in 2017 (Figure 23).

I found that exhibiting the work offered a valuable means of testing the scale and format, how it could operate as an image, viewers' encounter with it, as well as the significance of its layers and translucency.

Through the exhibition, I found that viewers could approach the piece closely to engage with its scale. I found that its thickness and transparency, as well as its rectangular format meant it could be viewed as an image as well as an object: its solidity meant I was able to install it on a shelf, leaning against a wall, which drew focus to its three-dimensionality and the layers it contains. The wall behind it has many marks on its surface, presumably created through time, and as the resin piece is translucent, it was possible to view marks on the wall through the work. This further contributed to the consideration of its layers, and the translucency enables the piece to interact with its context: the mark making in the piece engaged with the marks on the wall visible through it. I found that the ideas of time that I was interested in in the making engaged with the time of the marks on the wall behind the work and that together these elements enabled different considerations of time in the installation.

Fig. 20. Flora Bowden, *Untitled,* 2017, resin and marble studio experimentation, 25cm x 25cm.

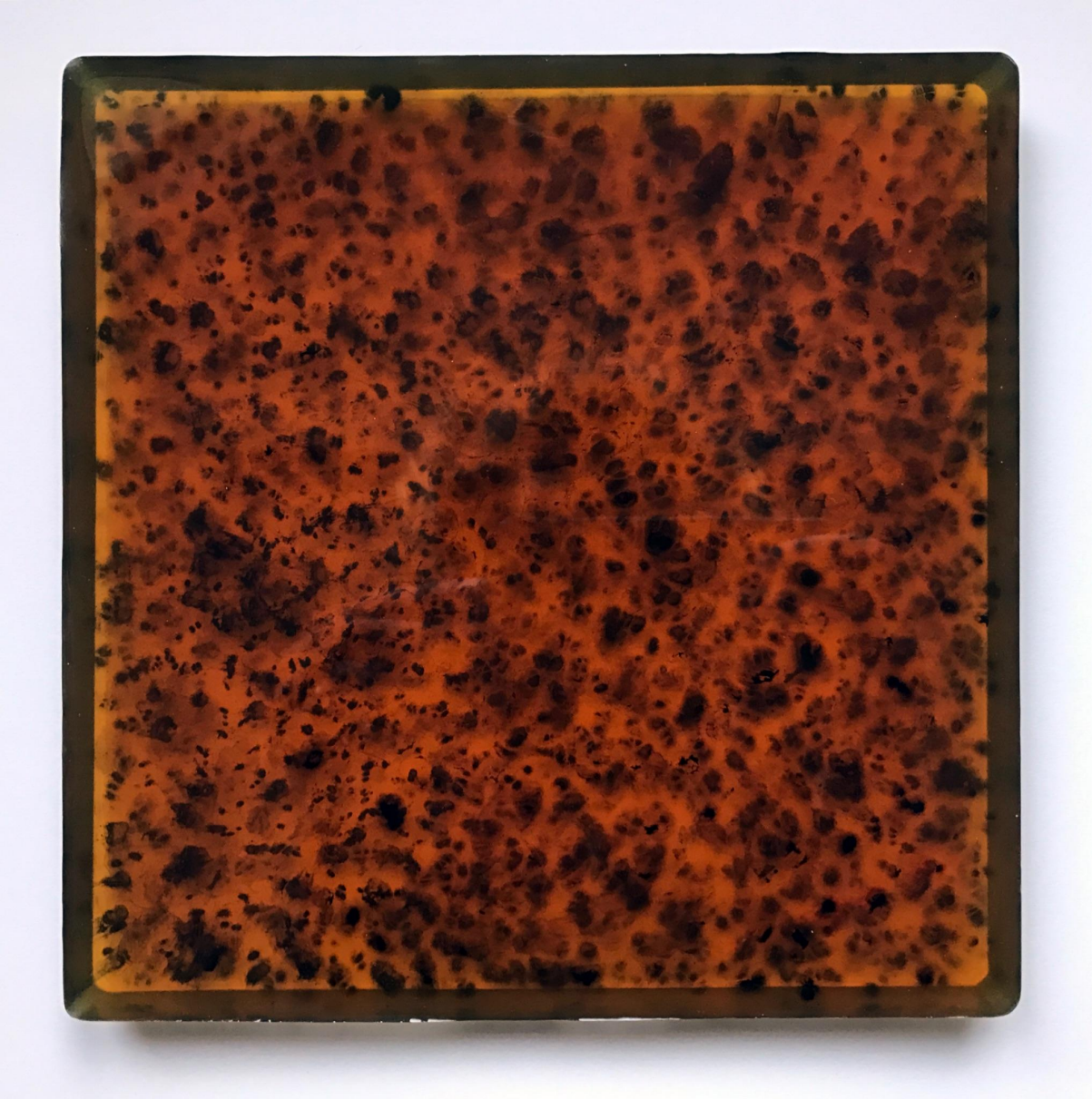


Fig. 21. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2017, resin and ink, 25cm x 25cm,

Fig. 22. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2017, resin and ink, 40cm x 30cm.

Fig. 23. Flora Bowden, *Untitled,* 2017, resin and ink, 40cm x 30cm installation view, *Daybreak: RCA Research Exhibition,* Safehouse, London.

Through all of the resin pieces and the making processes, I was able to develop my thinking about the behaviour of materials and the possibility of investigating questions of time through the depth and materiality of a work of art.

I found that working in a slow process, where the making requires returning to the work, adding to it again and again, enabled me to create works that embody a sense of time. This was evident in the way the translucent colours built up in the image with each layer. It was also apparent in the mark-making in the still-liquid resin, as this sense of fluid pigment was held in the work even after it had solidified. In this way, another sense of time was held in the piece because it contained the time of a previous state (before it had set), which revealed the formation of the work itself and enabled the viewer to consider the time of the materials. I found that the sense of movement of the pigment in the work contributed to the sense of changeability in the piece and that this was a way in which the work participated in the production of ideas about time. I also thought that working with translucent layers and with shifting pigments in the work was a way to create new visualities in the image in relation to this investigation of time and materials. Collectively, these created a sense of wavering in the work.

I think that the work with resin enabled me to investigate relationships between time and materials in the practice. However, I had concerns about the toxicity of resin and the environmental impact of working with it. I explored the use of bio resin but decided not to continue with this material.

Despite changing the material I worked with, my interest in materiality remained, and I considered how I could develop material experimentation in my work in other ways. I next explored working with coarse marble dust on canvas, to further relate the materiality of stone to painting and the picture plane. I created two works, each 40cm x 30cm. In them, the dust was

laid on the surface of the canvas in distinct, demarcated sections. These are in vertical lines in one piece and horizontal in the other. This linearity relates to stratification, and to dialogues and ideas about time, yet they contain an orderliness that I was interested in critiquing and challenging in my research.

Fig. 24. Both works: Flora Bowden, *Untitled,* 2017, marble dust on canvas, 40cm x 30cm.

Fig. 25. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2017, marble dust on canvas, 40cm x 30cm.

I was interested here in the juxtaposition of the bare canvas with the marble, and through this process found that it emphasised the materiality in the work. The process of shaping and containing the marble dust in the making of the work related it to questions of form and imagery in the picture plane and enabled me to foreground the importance of materials in the piece. These works were shown in a research student exhibition at the Royal College of Art in 2017.

I was interested in these explorations in the practice and how they began to offer new ways of working with some of the ideas I was developing in my research into Hutton's work. I was also interested in continuing with forms of material experimentation, and as the research developed

to encompass other topics of study, I wanted to find ways of working that could address and respond to these. This will be further investigated in Chapter Five.

REFLECTIONS ON DEEP TIME

While Hutton's work is certainly concerned with vastness and slowness, the ideas he presents, and the materiality of the landforms he studied, also suggest ideas of making and unmaking, unfolding, shifting boundaries and decentring. His ideas relate to sketching out what are unknown and inaccessible spaces but also seek to explore how we might make meaning of, and through, them. Because while the idea of deep time or the geological timescale might seem to imply an unerring, singular, and linear trajectory from the distant past, through the now and into the future, Hutton's Unconformity also offers another view: as a geological event, it relates to ideas of anachronism, loss, discontinuity, the ways in which material forms can reveal multiplicities or tangled and colliding senses of time, as well as the closeness that can be found in our engagement with the past. Siccar Point offers an opportunity to think about different relationships in and between times, and to complicate ideas of time. To consider the relationship of the contemporary human viewer with this formation, for example, introduces further temporal, social, and cultural contexts into the frame: when I stand at Siccar Point, I am in contact with that geological past and the ideas of time involved are not only academic, and distant, but are also everyday, present, personal, physical and contingent.

I was able to reflect on and develop my perspective on these ideas and consider how to present them to a broad audience, when I had the opportunity to present my work in public at the 2020 Margate Science Festival at an event on Deep Time organised by Faith in Strangers and

Super/Collider.[11] I took part in two sessions, alongside the philosopher Timothy Morton and the writer Robert MacFarlane.

In the first session, I presented my PhD research into ideas of deep time, the work I had developed in relation to James Hutton's, and showed my work in practice, including the vinyl prints installed at the Royal College of Art (above). This was followed by a presentation, 'Science Feel', by Morton. Later, I was in conversation with Robert MacFarlane, discussing his book *Underland: A Deep Time Journey*, and his reflections on deep time in this work.[12]

In 'Science Feel,' Morton considered both the closeness and 'nowness' of the geological time scale. They described how PhD students in geology experienced a sense of vertigo when they held a stone and realised that 'I'm holding a billion years in my hand!'[13] In this encounter, the linearity and distance of vast time scales seem to collapse. It renders the past not as remote or removed, but as material, tactile, a part of the present and very much within the students' here and now. Morton's 'Science Feel', as the title suggests, is therefore concerned with proximity, humanity, knowability, and experience, perhaps more than the lengths and depths of thinking about deep time. This differentiation relates to the two Ancient Greek definitions of time: *kairos*, the more qualitative experiences of time, such as the moments, events, or periods of our lives, and *chronos*, the quantifiable measure of time, like clock time. It is significant that in contemporary English we do not have such distinct definitions of time, but conflate different meanings within one term, blurring everything from precise measurement to individual experience.

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[11] Faith in Strangers and Super Collider, *Margate Science Festival*, 'Deep Time' event, 5 December 2020, https://faithinstrangers.co.uk/events/margate-science-festival-deep-time, [accessed 05 May 2025].

[12] Robert MacFarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (Penguin, 2020).

[13] Timothy Morton, 'Science Feel', lecture at Margate Science Festival, 5 December 2020 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SmG3yYF0zo [accessed 28 April 2025]. Before the event, Morton's work had already exerted a strong influence on my project, particularly *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

In their description of the students' experience, Morton asked our audience to consider ideas of tangibility, contact and connection in relation to deep time, and to acknowledge that by being able to hold a stone in our hands, the past is very much a part of our present, rather than something that is far away, elsewhere, and over. This was a significant for me because it acknowledges the material presence of the past and how we are in contact with it in the now. That means that individual perspective and experience is important in this conversation and brings variability, complexity, and difference into the image and narratives of time, enabling diverse moments, histories, trajectories, and events to share space, affect each other and be seen.

In the current moment, when the climate crisis and the Anthropocene mean that geological timescales are an urgent cultural and environmental concern, it is important to work with this complexity, as well as with these different temporal registers and vantage points, in order to critique the way in which ideas of time are conveyed, to investigate whose images and experiences of time, perspectives and voices are represented, and whose are not. In this context (as I also said in my presentation at Margate Science Festival), it is also possible to ask how the image can offer new ways of thinking about and engaging with different ideas of time. How can it complicate ideas of time? How can it bring different voices into the frame and ask what is possible when we approach questions of time as 'associative and relational, as impressionable: and concerned with closeness and contact, as well as with distance and depth?'[14]

To develop this enquiry into the complexity of time and the image, I realised I needed to develop my understanding of the legacies and broader political and cultural contexts of Hutton's work. His ideas were later taken up by the geologist Charles Lyell (1797-1875). Like Hutton, Lyell also argued for the existence of slow, constant cycles of deposition and erosion, and in his *Principles of*

[14] Flora Bowden, Faith in Strangers and Super/Collider, 'Deep Time' event at Margate Science Festival, 5 December, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SmG3yYF0zo [accessed 28 January 2026].

Geology (1830-33) famously suggested that 'the present is key to the past'.[15] Lyell's *Principles* has been recognised as an influence on Charles Darwin, and informed his thinking, which is just one marker of its significance in the history of science.[16]

In her 2018 book *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, the geographer Kathryn Yusoff draws out previously under-studied contexts of Lyell's work to critique current narratives of the Anthropocene. Yusoff identifies the anti-Black and colonial structures which, she argues, constitute the origin stories of the Anthropocene. She calls for greater acknowledgment of the role that enslavement and subjugation play in the histories on which these ideas are built. Looking at the historical evidence, Yusoff refers to Charles Lyell's geological surveying in North America in 1845 and 1849, in which he discusses race as well as geology.[17] Yusoff says these writings 'are firmly underpinned by the language he has forged for geology.' She continues:

> he defines the problems of the races and their respective (as he understands them) positions in relation to time, in much the same way as his descriptions of geology define the stratification of rock formations and species in time. That is, the Negro is understood by Lyell as a different species in time than "the White."[18]

Yusoff argues that what we currently have is a 'White Geology' and Anthropocene.[19] 'Deep-time and near-time geologic questions' she contends, 'are entangled with hard political questions about decolonizing and the possibility of futures.'[20] What Yusoff makes clear is that the

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[15] Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology* [1830-33] (Penguin Books, 2005).

[16] See 'Charles Lyell', Darwin Correspondence Project, University of Cambridge, https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/charles-lyell [accessed 05 July 2024] and Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), p. 81.

[17] Charles Lyell, *Travels in North America, with Geological Observations on the United States, Canada, and Nova Scotia*, 2 vols. (John Murray, 1845); Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America* (Harper and Brothers; John Murray, 1849).

[18] Yusoff, *Billion Black Anthropocenes,* p. 81.

[19] Yusoff, *Billion Black Anthropocenes*, p. 16 and p. 108.

[20] Yusoff, *Billion Black Anthropocenes*, p. 106.

language and temporalities of geology are not neutral, and to speak of them as 'entangled' is to reject ideas of simplicity and to suggest that their complexity and problematic histories require images and approaches that acknowledge and reflect the knotted, interconnected and contingent contexts in which they operate.

Yusoff makes a powerful case for rejecting geology's *'givenness'*, its assumed objectivity, and for more fully interrogating the pasts on which the discipline is built.[21] From this we can consider how, in the contemporary moment, when engaging in dialogues, frameworks, languages, or images of time, it is vital to recognise, and to complicate the picture with an understanding of the power relations, positionality, and complicity embedded within.

ENTANGLEMENT

Yusoff's work speaks to the political histories of deep time and identifies the importance of acknowledging these in contemporary contexts. In this section, I consider questions of entanglement in order to recognise complexities in relation to ideas of time and to think through these using the work of other writers.

The feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad addresses ideas of entanglement in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007). Barad's work is useful because of the ways in which it acknowledges interdependence. For Barad, '[t]o be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence'. Barad continues to suggest that '[e]xistence is not an individual affair' – an idea that she also applies to time and space, thereby suggesting the enmeshed, inextricable, and mutually constitutive nature of ideas, moments, and histories in time

[21] Yusoff, *Billion Black Anthropocenes*, p. 20.

– a theory that seems to support the collective making and remaking of memory in Halbwachs' text, and embrace the interconnectedness it puts forward.[22]

This kind of enmeshing and entangling also resonates with the work of the ecologist Suzanne Simard, whose research into forest ecosystems revealed that trees 'are in a web of interdependence, linked by a system of underground channels, where they perceive and connect and relate with an ancient intricacy and wisdom'. She identified a network, a 'jungle of threads', in which older trees connect to and support saplings, outlined in a theory that she called 'Mother Tree'.[23] Simard's work makes a case for ideas of mutual support, connectivity, community, and enmeshed existences. It is again a rejection of singularity, and instead an embrace of entangled, knotted interdependence and multiplicity.

As I noted in the Introduction, Ursula K. Le Guin, thirty-two years before Simard, was also interested in new explorations of connectivity, influence, interrelation, and time, in her case, in fiction. In her 1989 essay 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction', Le Guin calls for a rethinking of the linearity that she says has for too long dominated the shape of stories, with their focus on sticks, spears and other long, hard things pressed into the service of He, the Hero. Le Guin felt that if the 'sticking' and 'bashing' celebrated in this 'linear, progressive, time's-(killing)-arrow' form of narrative is what is what it is to be human, then she wasn't.[24] But, she suggests, there is another way to shape a story. An older way, even. As Le Guin explores, the first cultural artefact was probably not a stick for hunting, but a container for gathering. And in that container, objects, food, odds and ends, this and that, of whatever shape and size, could sit side by side, roll around, bump into each other, mix, intermingle, become entangled, split apart. What if this was

[22] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), p. ix.
[23] Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Uncovering the Wisdom and Intelligence of the Forest* (Allen Lane, 2021), p. 4 and p. 5.
[24] Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p. 167.

the shape of the story to tell? No clear trajectory, conquest, or victor. No obvious hierarchies, even, but relationships. A story of gathering, rather than of hunting. Here, Le Guin felt at home.

Fiction in the form of a carrier bag, she thought, could be 'full of beginnings without ends, of initiations, of losses, of transformations and translations'.[25] People, events and actions could engage with and influence each other in myriad and divergent ways, but in the collectedness and togetherness of the carrier bag there would be space for commonality and the potential for interaction, contact and connection.

In this model, which as I explained in my Introduction, became an important element of my method, Le Guin finds an alternative to the linear shape of storytelling that is inclusive and reflective. In privileging the gatherer-shaped story over the hunter-shaped one, she makes the case for a feminist approach. But the diversity of what is inside Le Guin's 'carrier bag' also suggests that she is making space for a wide array of voices and perspectives, and is concerned with questions of discordance, disaggregation, entanglement, quietness, and closeness. Like the other examples in this section, Le Guin's work demonstrates an interest in relationships, interconnections and complexity, in multiple influences and voices sharing space in the present, and in what is possible through them.

Yusoff, Barad, Simard, and Le Guin advocate for more complicated pictures of time, for greater recognition of how the past can continue to be an active agent in the present (Morton), for the ways in which ideas of time are deeply political, and for the importance of acknowledging underrepresented histories (Yusoff); and for the power of entanglement and for the complexity of relationships this can reveal (Barad, Simard, Le Guin). Throughout, in embracing multiplicity

[25] Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p. 169.

and the knotted nature of times, histories, and interactions, they make space for more diverse and inclusive images – ones that are fuller, and more representative. Similarly, we need images that can tell complex stories of time, that can speak to interwoven existences and relationships, make space for under-acknowledged experiences, that can recognise power dynamics and changing states through time. And through this, we can ask how the artwork can be a space for this exploration, for working with different temporalities, with ambiguity, and for making space for complexity, problematics, and entanglement. These are questions for my practice, developed later in the project, in Chapters Four and Five.

Elizabeth Grosz has written that what is important is being 'out-of-step' with the present, as this is what allows to us place ourselves outside its 'limitations'.[26] I contend that the artwork can be a means of doing just that. In creating a space in which the viewer is invited to see an image instantly, while also being able to take the time for it to slowly unfold, where the viewer can encounter the art object in the physical space in front of them while also entering the illusory space of the picture plane, the artwork enables different forms of engagement, and different times, references, ideas, and encounters, to commingle.

TIME IN ARTISTIC PRACTICE

I now consider how some of these ideas take shape and are developed in the work of contemporary artists. Many artists, of course, engage with ideas of time in their work. The works I consider in this text are ones that I think engage with complexity in their approach to questions of time, in relation to history, memory, lived experience, or through the artwork's materiality. They challenge accepted ideas or offer new considerations of time, which can make established ones waver.

[26] Elizabeth Grosz, *In The Nick of Time* (Duke University Press, 2004), p. 117.

In considering the ideas of entanglement, knottedness, and connection explored in this chapter, I was reminded of Eva Hesse's sculpture *Right After* (1969).[27] In this work, lengths of fine fibreglass cord, dipped in latex, are suspended from the ceiling in what could, like Simard's underground forest network, be described as a 'jungle of threads', and, like Le Guin's carrier bag, seems to focus less on a trajectory or hierarchy, but instead is deeply invested in interconnections.[28] The piece appears delicate and fragile and, lit from above, seems to catch that light, drawing attention to its materiality. In this way, it is reminiscent of a spider's web when it too, is caught in the light, yet without the flatness or regularity of that construction. Similarly, though, Hesse's work seems to have the potential to occupy space in any direction, without set boundaries, therefore conveying a sense of unfixity and ambiguity.

Entangled threads of varied materials were not new in Hesse's practice when she created this piece: she had explored related forms and themes in works such as *Metronomic Irregularity I* (1966), in which wires are connected across different wall-mounted panels.[29] While the wires are attached to the base in an orderly grid, they become heavily entwined in the intervening space, offering a disruption to the grid, so significant to twentieth-century Western art.[30]

So, while such ideas were already present in Hesse's work, it is the title, *Right After*, that offers new connections to the subject of time. Hesse completed *Right After* the year before her death at only thirty-four, upon returning home from an operation.[31] The title suggests a concern with

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[27] Eva Hesse, *Right After* (1969), The Estate of Eva Hesse.

[28] Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Uncovering the Wisdom and Intelligence of the Forest* (Allen Lane, 2021), p. 5.

[29] Eva Hesse, *Metronomic Irregularity I*, 1966, The Estate of Eva Hesse.

[30] Briony Fer, 'Bordering on Blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism', *Art History*, 17.3 (September 1994), pp. 424-449 (p 425). See further, for example, Rosalind E. Krauss, 'Grids', in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press, 1985), pp. 8-22.

[31] Tess Thackara, 'The Brief, Transformative Career of Eva Hesse', *Artsy*, 3 September 2019 < https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-transformative-career-eva-hesse> [accessed 2 September 2024].

time, and while this is not elaborated upon, it may be a very personal reflection on time in her life, her illness, and her mortality, making the piece a poignant marker of a moment in time.

Right After has been described by Tess Thackara as 'a structure made from liquid plastic that has set into fixed matter', highlighting the temporality of the work's materials and the importance of the behaviour of materials in Hesse's practice. The slightness of the cord seems to ask the viewer to continually consider its presence, creating a renewed engagement with time in experiencing the work and the entanglements Hesse constructed appear intuitive and instinctive, leading to a work that could have emerged rapidly, rather than evolving slowly. Thackara also cites an entry in Hesse's journal, written five years earlier, in which she reflects: 'I wonder how much I must impose my preconceived ideas and to what degree I must be alert and willing to go along with what happens at the moment on canvas'.[32] This makes clear that questions of time and impulse, or acknowledging the significance of *this* very moment in time, were indeed at play in Hesse's practice, even in those earlier years in which she was creating paintings.

The work of Robert Pincus-Witten allows us to unpack the matters at stake in Hesse's work further. Pincus-Witten identifies 'limpness' as a central concern in her practice, something we can certainly see in *Right After*.[33] He further observes that as Hesse grew more self-aware, she began to produce work that was resistant to the 'sculptural ambitions of Minimalism', and that the limpness she employed was 'bound and held with unanticipated methods of seaming and joining – sewing, for example, or lacing'.[34] Sewing and lacing, even today, continue to be associated with traditional forms of women's work and domestic space. That these were 'unanticipated methods' in the artwork or gallery demonstrates the context in which women

[32] Thackara, 'Brief, Transformative Career of Eva Hesse.'
[33] Robert Pincus-Witten, 'Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime', *Art Forum*, 10.3 (November 1971), https://www.artforum.com/features/eva-hesse-post-minimalism-into-sublime-213197/ [accessed 28 April 2025].
[34] Pincus-Witten, 'Eva Hesse.'

artists were operating. Such processes could therefore be understood as a rebuttal, or an antidote, to many of the hard, industrial materials common in Minimalist sculpture at that time (for example, Carl Andre's *144 Magnesium Square* or Richard Serra's *1-1-1-1*, both 1969). Hesse's use of these materials offers a feminist reading, as well as humour, possibly at the expense of the prevailing masculinity in the studios and galleries around her.

What is particularly striking about *Right After*, therefore, is that, as with Le Guin and Simard, Hesse's entanglement not only challenges accepted shapes and accounts of time but was also simultaneously a means of advocating for a feminist perspective and creating spaces for different voices to be heard through materials, forms, and methods.

Questions of time—and, importantly, whose time—remain an active current in much contemporary artistic discourse and different approaches to time could be seen in the work of artists featured in 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today', at the Hayward Gallery, London, in 2021, curated by Ralph Rugoff.

One powerful example was the British artist Lubaina Himid's painting *The Captain and the Mate* (2017-18). Himid draws on the history of the slave ship *Le Rodeur*: while sailing from West Africa to the Caribbean in 1819, there was an outbreak of disease that led to many losing their sight, and thirty-six enslaved people were thrown overboard.[35] By addressing it in contemporary painting, Himid ensures that this horrific history is not forgotten. But Himid does not posit the possibility of a singular all-encompassing and unchanging memory of the event.

[35] 'Lubaina Himid', in Alice Acland, et al., *Mixing It Up: Painting Today* (Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2021), p. 28.

The work's title and composition refer to James Tissot's 1873 painting of the same name. In Tissot's work the captain occupies the central space of the canvas, standing on the deck of the ship and uneasily embraced by his mate, while two women hold each other uncomfortably in the bottom left corner. In Himid's painting, all four characters are Black, and all are casting sideways glances, creating a sense of unease in the image that refers to the disease on board, while in Tissot's work all the characters are white, their expression and stance notably more relaxed. In Himid's work only the captain is in nineteenth-century dress: the other figures are in contemporary clothing. Rugoff says that Himid 'transforms painting into a kind of time machine'. Himid intermingles multiple times in her work: the history of the slave ship and its passengers, the later nineteenth-century historical period of Tissot's painting, and the twenty-first-century context of her own work. As this suggests, Himid's interest is not solely in engaging with the historical event, but also in reflecting on its significance today – what she has called 'the shudder in the room'.[36]

Also exhibited in 'Mixing It Up' were *Important Timepiece* (2018) and *Study for Nothing but Time* (2020) by Issy Wood, whose paintings address themes of memory and challenge ideas of time in ways that are interesting for this research. *Important Timepiece* shows the numbers and hands of a timepiece occupying the full space of the painting, as though it were a clock face itself, with a female figure in the background, one eye directly meeting the viewer's. *Study for Nothing but Time*, meanwhile, features an array of clocks in the background, while the head of a somewhat damaged female statue floats in front of them.

In his catalogue essay, Ralph Rugoff addresses the questions of temporality in Wood's work:

[36] Ralph Rugoff, 'Mixing It Up', in Alice Acland, et al., *Mixing It Up: Painting Today* (Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2021) p. 9.

> "I lay the foundations for something that hints at the early twentieth century and throw in a mobile phone or a manicure, as a sort of temporal gaslighting", notes Issy Wood. Because their historical coordinates seem perplexingly indeterminate, paintings like these can destabilise our sense of their "contemporary" character. In its place, they advance a notion of a heterogenous or unstable contemporaneity, a multilayered present that unfolds in conversation with a confluence of various trajectories and influences from the past.[37]

Here, Wood describes her interest in disrupting senses of time, or perhaps the location of her works in time or in art history. Rugoff reflects that this can scramble, play with, or 'mix up' senses of the present for the viewer, and that the artist draws on multiple times in creating a work of art in the present. Perhaps, further, it asks the viewer to question what comprises the contemporary, or invites critical reflection on the multiple times, histories, memories, and materials that co-exist in the now. I see a direct connection to Morton's exploration of how the past remains active in the present (whether as in their example, through rocks, or in Wood's work through clocks, statues, or other objects). It also relates to questions of how objects and images shape, or even make, time, as discussed in Chapter One, and in Wood's work we can therefore see painting as a site in which notions of time are questioned, and a space that calls attention to different ideas of time, and what is at stake in them.

Developing this project's enquiry into how the image can engage with complexities of time, participate in the production of ideas about time, and enable us to examine questions of vulnerability, provisionality and change through it, the research in this chapter into Hutton's work explored variability in the image of time through the development of the theory of deep time. Through Hutton's work ideas of time itself were altered, and through Siccar Point, geological formations brought different periods of time into physical contact, speaking to and

[37] Ralph Rugoff, 'Mixing It Up', in Alice Acland, et al., *Mixing It Up: Painting Today* (Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2021), p. 8.

developing the visual and material concerns related to time addressed in Chapter One. This was further explored through the work of Morton, connecting questions of deep time and contemporary scholarship related to the Anthropocene to the investigation of this research.

Yusoff's work in this chapter has been important for engaging with the complexities and problematics of time, and building on this, the artworks studied in this chapter demonstrate that the work of art can create spaces in which different ideas and senses of time can be explored, and in which viewers are invited to consider different perspectives in relation to time.

In my practice, the work with imagery from Hutton's investigation enabled me to further explore questions of time in the image. I found that while the images suggested ideas of language and communication, they also resisted them, and that this space of ambiguity suggested an idea of wavering within and through the image.

The subsequent material experimentation in the practice enabled me to engage with time through the materiality of the artwork. The slowness and material transformation in this work enabled a focus on the time of the materials and making processes to be contained in the work, which opened new possibilities for engagements with time in my practice. This is further developed in the later stages of the practice, documented in Chapter Five.

Chapter Three develops my investigation into the significance of materiality in the work of art in relation to time. Beginning with another wavering image, which, like Hutton's work is also concerned with the materiality of landscape, it asks about how the image changes through time, materiality, knowledge and working by hand.

3. ON MAKING AND KNOWING

The first two chapters of this writing have considered the complex interplay of time and memory in science, artwork, and my own practice. This chapter extends the discussion by taking knowledge production and tactility into account. Developing the significance of the lithic in this project, it begins with a study of marks made on stone, and images produced of them in academic research through time. It proceeds to study works by contemporary women artists that also explore research processes, tactility, and materiality, and considers time in relation to making, work by women, materiality, and knowledge.

Christopher Tilley (1955-2024) was a British archaeologist and anthropologist whose work focused on material culture and the subjective nature of archaeology. In his 2004 book *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*, Tilley discusses Bronze Age rock carvings in southern Sweden, on a site 25km long by 14km wide, featuring images of horse-riders, boats, feet, animals, weapons, spirals, and cups. He describes the site as the 'largest and most elaborate' carving surface in the country.[1]

As the title of his book suggests, Tilley's research at this location is grounded in phenomenology. Informed by the writing of the phenomenologist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, he is concerned with an approach to archaeology that is embodied and firmly rooted in place. Much of Tilley's own interpretation of the rock carvings therefore concerns the different rock formations into which they are made, their coastal context, the ancient marks of waves left on the stone surface, the many nearby barrows and cairns, and the importance of all of these in contributing to the meaning of the rock carvings, both then and now.

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[1] Christopher Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Berg Publishers, 2004), p. 147.

To develop his argument, Tilley first addresses the work of several earlier archaeological studies of the same site and details how they were focused principally on the carvings, without considering the wider location in their interpretations. 'The rock surfaces have been regarded as a kind of blank slate,' he writes, 'and their qualities effectively ignored'.[2] Three of these studies, from 1945 to 1999, document the rock carvings through different painting and printmaking methods, resulting in works on paper that record them, as well as photography. Tilley says that all these studies were intended to be 'objective' accounts of the carving sites, and they are discussed in his text as a 'survey', 'documentation', or 'inventory' of the carvings.[3]

What was particularly significant to me about the works Tilley cites is that, first, as scientific studies, undertaken to support interpretation, inform the development and production of knowledge, and contribute to academic discourse, these images were created as data, and not intended to be viewed as artworks. In relation to my own interests, I found it productive to consider the methods used and the variability of the interpretations they led to, to think about material engagement and the vulnerability of the image and to consider the relationship between image-making, knowing and ambiguity that these works address.

Althin's (1945) 'representations' of the carvings are 'water colour painted drawings in which the rock surface becomes reduced to a white two-dimensional background'.[4] In this description, it seems that only the carvings themselves were recorded: their surroundings are entirely absent. Later, Burenhult's (1973) approach physically engaged with the rock surface in interesting ways: this study employed a method in which the rock was covered with water-soluble white paint that

[2] Tilley, *Materiality of Stone*, p. 152.
[3] Tilley, *Materiality of Stone*, p. 151.
[4] Tilley, *Materiality of Stone,* p. 152.

could run into the carvings, as well as other cracks on the surface. The surface was then wiped clean and subsequently rubbed with black oxide, which presumably created a striking contrast between the white pigment left in the depressions of the carved images and cracks and the surrounding black rock surfaces. The carvings were then traced and photographed with superimposed one-metre grid lines to map the space, leading to 'precise two-dimensional diagrams', that Tilley says nevertheless 'give no indication of the textures and qualities of the stones, their cracks, colour and surface morphology', and that seem far removed from the very tactile engagement with the stone in the first steps of the process.[5] Last, Coles' (1999) study was 'based upon paper rubbings', which suggests a frottage method that, like Burenhult's, is haptic and involves physical contact with the stone surface. Unlike the other two studies, however, this method did incorporate the cracks in the rock surface into the documentation, which for Tilley marks an important shift in contextualising the carvings in the wider landscape.

In these accounts, Tilley highlights that for Burenhult, Althin's documentation was too 'impressionistic', and that both Burenhult's and Coles' work included some carvings that Althin had omitted, determining that as surveys or inventories they in fact produced different data.[6] Tilley's own phenomenological approach led to differences in interpretation again: in one notable example, Tilley suggests that a human figure that Burenhult had described as a dancer is instead a swimmer as it is positioned in the ancient marks the waves had left on the rock surface.[7] Tilley's account of the studies of these rock carvings made at different times conveys the ways in which both the ideas and images of the carvings change according to the maker, methodology, and interpretation. They are therefore not fixed or stable, but rather are impressionable, mutable images, affected by context and perspective. They waver. Through

[5] Tilley, *Materiality of Stone*, p. 154.
[6] Tilley, *Materiality of Stone*, p. 151 and p. 154.
[7] Tilley, *Materiality of Stone*, p 166.

Tilley's analysis, the idiosyncrasies and subjectivity of the processes they employ are revealed and, collectively they speak to the variability of interpretations of the site and its histories. Tilley's analysis brings the rock carvings into the space of the image, subject to interpretation and resistant of interpretation, to rework Mitchell's language encountered in the Introduction to the present writing, actors on the historical stage.

Reflecting on the various image-making processes employed by his predecessors, Tilley writes: 'In a sense the goal of attempting to document these carvings "as they really are" will always be a delusion. Choices always have to be made about what to include or exclude'.[8] And so, as perhaps with any form of image-making and any set of data, there is scope for variability, divergence and ambiguity. The images waver.

What is also interesting to me in the examples Tilley presents, which I develop here, is the role of the hand, tactility, and material connection in the image-making process and in relation to both knowing and ambiguity and questioning in the space of the image. Tilley observes of archaeological fieldwork that '[o]ften in the field to "see" a design is to simultaneously feel it, to trace its outlines with the fingers', emphasising the importance for him of a phenomenological approach, and drawing an equivalence between touching and seeing in pursuit of knowing.[9]

Tilley's insights can be connected to the work of Georges Didi-Huberman. In his 1997 essay 'Contact Images', Didi-Huberman addressed questions of both touch and knowledge in and through the image:

[8] Tilley, *Materiality of Stone,* p. 154.
[9] Christopher Tilley, *Material Culture and Text: The Art of Ambiguity* (Routledge, 1991), p. 179.

> Contact images? Images that touch something and then someone. Images that cut to the quick of a question: *touching to see* or, on the contrary, *touching to no longer see; seeing to no longer touch* or, on the contrary, *seeing to touch*. Images that are too close. Adherent images. Image-obstacles, but obstacles that make things *appear*. Images coupled to each other, indeed even to the things of which they are the image. Contiguous images, images backing each other. Weighty images. Or very light images that surface and skim, graze us and touch us again. Caressing images. Groping or already palpable images. Images sculpted by developer, modeled by shadow, molded by light, carved by exposure time. Images that catch up with us, that manipulate us, perhaps. Images that can ruffle or chafe us. Images that grasp us. Penetrating, devouring images.
>
> Images that move our hand.[10]

For Didi-Huberman, as for Tilley, images can speak of bodily relationships. They can also be considered in material terms – for the physicality of their connection, for the way they feel, their weight, what they do to those they are in contact with, and to the hand – rather than just what the hand does to them. As such, there is a sense of interaction and intimacy. Through this dialogue can unfold in the act of contact with the image, or through contact in the making of an image, and that in this space, or this moment, there is the opportunity for probing, uncovering, for ambiguity, as well as understanding; and for new questions to emerge.

'Contact images' became a significant idea for my practice as it raises questions about how the image is formed through material engagement, process, touch, the hands, whose hands; and what all of this means for what we know through the image.

[10] Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Contact Images', trans. by Alisa Hartz (1997), <http://underconstruction.wdfiles.com/local--files/imprint-reading/contact_images.pdf [accessed 7 April 2025].

I found it useful to connect this idea of questioning and enquiring through the image to Didi-Huberman's later lecture, 'Glimpses' (2015), which focuses on the matter of knowledge in the image:

> Since Plato images have been accused of bearing or producing error or illusion. Let us simply admit that images are very often the vehicle of something like a non-knowledge. But non-knowledge is not to knowledge what total darkness would be to full light. Non-knowledge is imagined, thought, and written […] It is, rather, a relationship to point of view. [11]

I found it very productive to think of the ambiguity and multiple meanings presented in Tilley's examples in relation to this lens of 'non-knowledge', which, as Didi-Huberman describes, is not simply a lack of knowledge, but instead is concerned with different positions and shifting perspectives. A space for multiple voices, perhaps. An image that might waver. We might add to this the question of making those images, and of the hand: we can think of that close contact and touch in image-making – in articulating perspectives, sharing, voicing, presenting, and communicating experience.

We often talk of knowing as grasping something, to have it in hand, clasped, or within our control. Knowledge is something we 'get'. It is therefore also possession, territory, something kept close, near to the body, or an object owned. If knowledge is a thing to be gripped, then that thing is known through the hand and that hand becomes both a site and a means of knowing. And in relation to the question of contact images, we can think of making through the hand as a process imbued with history and experience, presenting and voicing perspectives.

[11] Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Glimpses', Lecture at the European Graduate School, Saas-Fee, Switzerland, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60GdzcKKdwE> [accessed 12 April 2021].

In the work of both Tilley and Didi-Huberman I found new ways to think about relationships between image, touch and knowing that spoke to Halbwachs' conceptualisation of wavering. Their accounts also offered me a means of further questioning of the role of making in all of these. In the next section, I develop this enquiry further in the context of contemporary art by looking at works that are directly concerned with the relationship between making and knowing, and that focus on work by women, to examine the space for women's voices and perspectives through making. I should note here that as both the exhibitions I consider were held during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to visit them, so am writing about them at a distance, without first-hand contact.

Mariana Castillo Deball (b.1975) is a Mexican artist whose work engages with science and archaeology to explore 'the way in which these disciplines describe the world'.[12] Her 2020-21 exhibition 'Between making and knowing something' at Modern Art Oxford examined the work of early anthropology through the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford and the Smithsonian Museum National Collections in Washington DC.

In this exhibition, Deball studied two forms of making traditionally carried out by women: the ceramics of the Zuni people, a Native American Pueblo people native to the Zuni River valley, held at the Smithsonian Institution, and *rebozos*, ikat dyed fabrics worn on the body, whose making is documented in photographs at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. Deball's work considered the problematics of making and methodology in both these contexts. By situating Deball's work in relation to Tilley and Didi-Huberman I am both giving an account of the progress and development of my own project, and pursuing the insights offered by Tilley and Didi-Huberman regarding the significance of the relationship between forms of making and

[12] 'About', Mariana Castillo Deball, https://castillodeball.org/about/ [accessed 26 January 2026].

forms of knowing in the context of contemporary artwork. Deball's work also pursues questions of the handmade in relation to knowing which are important to my thinking and situates traditionally marginalised groups at the centre of her project.

The Zuni ceramics in Deball's research were specifically created by one person, We'wha (1849-96), who was an *lhamana*, a male-bodied person that undertook women's tasks, and whose work was studied in the 1880s by an early American woman anthropologist, Matilda Coxe Stevenson (1849-1915).[13] According to Deball's research, and to the work of Uncomfortable Oxford (an organisation invited by Modern Art Oxford to undertake research in response to Deball's exhibition), Stevenson documented We'wha's processes photographically, even though this was not permitted in Zuni culture, which makes it a problematic image-making process, and raises questions about what lens is offered by these images, and what can be known through them.[14]

Deball and Uncomfortable Oxford also found that in 1886, We'wha was invited by Stevenson to travel as part of a delegation to Washington DC, and during that visit produced pottery and textiles on site at the Smithsonian. This process was also documented by Stevenson through photographs, and the items We'wha created were accessioned into the Museum's collection, raising questions about the meaning and significance of the objects produced and as identified by Uncomfortable Oxford, also questioning the value of the objects for anthropological study.[15]

Further, once accessioned, the objects were no longer attributed to We'wha, but were instead recorded anonymously as artifacts produced by 'the Zuni tribe' (named photographs of We'wha

[13] 'Modern Art Oxford Exhibition Tour' [YouTube video], Modern Art Oxford, 7 October 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Usr6k0pSBtc [accessed 02 May 2025].
[14] 'Modern Art Oxford Exhibition Tour' and 'Unsettling Narratives, Exploring Marianna Castillo Deball with Uncomfortable Oxford' [YouTube video], Modern Art Oxford, 25 November 2020 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNRXTP50tvo [accessed 30 September 2024].
[15] 'Modern Art Oxford Exhibition Tour'.

are held by the Smithsonian Institution, and six ceramic vessels are now attributed to We'wha in the collection).[16] Uncomfortable Oxford also noted that traditional Western, colonial processes of collecting items from across the world, then keeping and cataloguing them with scientific labels in Western languages, is a process of 'solidifying' by the discipline of anthropology. This suggests a means of becoming a record, holding firm, locking down, setting in stone, or historicising, in a Western, academic tradition. And when, as in this example, the maker's identity is removed as part of this process, this kind of solidifying is also a problematic act of erasure.

The *rebozos* and ikat dyeing process that Deball explored in her exhibition are featured in photographs by another early Western woman anthropologist, Elsie McDougall, who undertook research in Mexico and Guatemala, and who was particularly interested in the dyeing and weaving techniques carried out there. McDougall's photographs were accessioned into the Pitt Rivers Museum and are known as the McDougall Collection, again with no specific reference to the makers who are featured.

There are many challenging issues to address in these examples: the loss of identifiable individual contribution, the question of spectacle in the making of objects in and for the museum – production for the camera, potentially, and for a Western audience, the problematic use of photography in anthropological research, as well as wider issues such as, what benefit, if any, did the Mexican communities gain from the research they participated in? [17] These histories, and Deball's research into them, raise questions about whose perspective and voice is seen and heard in these making processes, and whose is not. Further, they draw attention to the forms of

[16] 'Unsettling Narratives'. See further 'We-wha, or Whe-wa, weaving,' Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History https://www.si.edu/object/archives/components/sova-naa-photolot-176-ref13386 and 'We-wha, or Whe-wa, spinning,' Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, https://www.si.edu/object/archives/components/sova-naa-photolot-176-ref13382?destination=collection/search%3Fpage%3D85%26edan_q%3D%252A%253A%252A%26edan_fq%255B0%255D%3Donline_visual_material%253Atrue%26edan_fq%255B1%255D%3Dobject_type%253A%2522Photographs%2522%26edan_local%3D1 [accessed 16 February 2026].

[17] 'Unsettling Narratives' and 'Modern Art Oxford Exhibition Tour'.

knowledge that are produced through this making, as well as what knowledge is lost, and make clear the need to interrogate the contexts of making as well, and how this affects what is known.

To address the questions raised in her research, Deball engaged with these making processes and methodologies in her own practice: She notes that reproduction was also used as a technique in early anthropology, where researchers sought to learn through doing, and she therefore produced and exhibited twenty-two ceramic objects in red stoneware, painted with designs informed by We'wha's work in the Smithsonian Museum.[18] Deball's vessels, of different shapes, are punctured with a hole that she calls a 'kill hole', meaning they cannot hold liquid and are arguably therefore no longer functional objects. At Modern Art Oxford, the vessels were threaded on black rope and suspended in mid-air, at different heights and in different directions, across the gallery. Alongside these ceramics, Deball also exhibited *rebozos* created by contemporary Mexican makers. These are eight metres in length (*rebozos* are traditionally two metres long) are partially unwoven, and still attached to the wooden frame of the loom. The *rebozos* also reach across the height of the gallery, and collectively the works give a sense of an installation that is intended to fully take up the available space.

The kill holes in the ceramics were produced in the gallery, suggesting that Deball's work explored ideas of performance in a way that also resonates with the questions of performance in her research. While the holes remove the normal functionality of the vessels, they simultaneously enable them to be realised as artworks in Deball's installation, and allow the viewer to see them from all angles (Deball and the exhibition's curator, Amy Budd, note that it is interesting that they can be seen from underneath, which would not typically be the case in museum displays). Deball has said: 'I think it's also a fantasy to give them some freedom and to create a fiction out

[18] 'Modern Art Oxford Exhibition Tour'.

of these objects', which can be seen as challenging the kind of solidifying that happens in the museum record: unfixing them in some way, making space for ambiguity, which could also be a way of making the works and histories in the research available for new questioning and interpretation.[19]

Deball's making and installation processes offer a critical lens on the ways in which early anthropologists worked. She reflects that in the late nineteenth century, when Stevenson and McDougall were undertaking their work, 'it was the beginning of anthropology as a discipline', fieldwork processes were 'quite blurry' and 'the borders between learning something and making something were not so clear'.[20] Deball has also described her work in this exhibition as a 'surrealist take' and her installation can be seen as a productively blurred space, in which apparently incomplete textiles and soaring ceramics are removed from, or have stepped outside, their intended functions, or in which their intentions can be looked at afresh, enabling the viewer to critique them – to see them in new ways, both physically and conceptually, and to probe the nature of display, interaction and meaning through making.

In different ways, Tilley's and Deball's work, both rooted in material and cultural histories and scientific studies – and therefore concerned with issues of knowledge, fact, and objectivity – simultaneously raise questions about destabilising knowledge, ambiguity and who shapes what a work means. Looking at their work together, it is also possible to consider the way that the processes of seeking to learn about and become familiar with the histories and material cultures on which they focus involved different kinds of bodily closeness and touch, and this, even in the context of scientific study, involves subjectivity and perspective. Their work therefore also focuses on the idiosyncrasies of making by hand: who, with what materials, and in what context;

[19] 'Modern Art Oxford Exhibition Tour'.
[20] 'Modern Art Oxford Exhibition Tour'.

and how all of this also affects the production of knowledge and meaning in a work. It is these qualities that connect their work to the idea of wavering.

At the same time as Deball's exhibition, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York exhibited 'Making Knowing: Craft in Art 1950-2019' (2019-22), curated by Jennie Goldstein and Elisabeth Sherman, with Ambika Trasi. It showed works by sixty-eight artists who have explored materials or processes associated with craft, seeking to 'reclaim visual languages that have typically been coded as feminine, domestic, or vernacular'.[21] Works in the exhibition included the Gee's Bend quiltmaker Rosie Lee Tompkins' piece *Three Sixes* (1986), in which brightly coloured squares of different sizes create a somewhat wavering grid across the surface, as well as Jeffrey Gibson's *Birds of a Feather* (2017), a one-metre-tall faceless figure created from glass beads, artificial sinew, wood, acrylic felt, druzy crystals, copper jingles, metal cones, nylon fringe, and steel, with the title beaded in capitalised bright yellow letters across the figure's torso. Also shown were works by Simone Leigh, Jordan Nassar, Elaine Reichek, and Betty Woodman, among others. 'Making Knowing' therefore represented artists from a range of backgrounds and generations, who work across diverse media.

While the examples of Tilley's and Deball's work and the Whitney exhibition discussed in this chapter are markedly different, there are also interesting, related concerns that can be explored through them. In their distinct ways, each examines the kinds of knowledge produced through making, often by hand, as well as the different meanings and perspectives that such works can communicate, and how this is entangled in the process of making itself. In the case of the two exhibitions, this is with a particular focus on art, craft and research by women, or ways of working that are traditionally considered to be women's; and the overlapping timing of these

[21] Whitney Museum of American Art, 'Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950-2019', 22 November 2019 – 20 February 2022, <https://whitney.org/exhibitions/making-knowing> [accessed 15 September 2020].

exhibitions is also relevant in terms of contemporary artistic discourse. Further, these examples raise questions about how artistic practice can productively disrupt knowledge, creating new meaning, and enabling different voices to be expressed and heard.

One work that successfully poses questions about knowledge production, agency and visibility is one of the largest works in 'Making Knowing'. Liza Lou's *Kitchen* (1991-96) is a full-scale domestic kitchen, complete with a just-baked pie on the oven shelf, cereal boxes on the table and dishes in the sink, produced entirely in beadwork. The work is 243.8cm x 335.3cm x 426.7cm and includes millions of beads.[22] Unsurprisingly, *Kitchen* took five years to complete. In the piece, Lou not only focuses on processes and techniques that have historically been understood as 'women's work', but also addresses domestic space, which is so strongly associated with the labour disproportionately undertaken by women. (The piece was first shown in the 1996 group exhibition 'A Labor of Love', at the New Museum, New York, organised by Marcia Tucker).[23] Lou has said this is a work about ignored women, and as well as powerfully addressing this, *Kitchen* also engages with many other issues and invites a multitude of considerations.[24]

The shiny, gleaming materiality of the piece and the intricacy of its construction speak to a commitment to making, and celebrate these practices, spaces, and women's contribution to art history, as well as to the home. Lou has said that she believes an artwork can 'stand for […] a certain kind of tenacity that can radiate'.[25] That is certainly evident here. *Kitchen* speaks simultaneously of time, endurance, graft, materiality, relentlessness, interiority, the everyday,

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[22] See Liza Lou, 'Kitchen' (1991-1996), https://whitney.org/collection/works/34855 and Julie Schneider, 'The Journey Behind Liza Lou's *Kitchen*', *Hyperallergenic*, 6 June 2021 https://hyperallergic.com/650685/journey-behind-liza-lou-behemoth-beaded-kitchen/ [accessed 02 May 2025].

[23] 'A Labor of Love Exhibition' New Museum, New York, https://archive.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/257# [accessed 02 May 2025].

[24] Liza Lou, 'Kitchen' (1991-1996), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York <https://whitney.org/collection/works/34855> [accessed 02 May 2025].

[25] Glenn Adamson, 'Why the Art World Is Embracing Craft', *Artsy*, 13 January 2020 <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-art-embracing-craft> [accessed 15 September 2020].

vision, beauty, and spectacle. It wavers. The grit and determination evident in the piece reframe ideas of 'women's work', to demand that it be noticed – that the viewer be in awe of it, even. And it therefore also insists on acknowledging that the time, dedication, and labour involved in this work and, more broadly, the work that women do, are acknowledged, in ways that are both joyful and reflective.

In considering the power of the artwork, the word Lou uses is 'tenacity'. From the Latin *tenere*, meaning 'to hold', tenacity again returns us to the hand, to closeness or touch, and through this it also connects to our engagement with materials while referring to determination, perseverance, and willpower. Tenacity suggests a sense of not letting go, of gripping, to be in it for the long haul, and therefore connects touch and the physicality of contact, with time. Tenacity implies an entangled relationship between the hand, making, endurance and attitude that can come together in a work of art, and suggests how the work can therefore be a place in which the connections between these ideas are considered.

Tenacity can of course refer to the artist's attitude, but also, perhaps, to the willpower of materials: their determination to hold fast, to insist, to be seen, and remain present. This is all interesting in the context of my research on wavering images, and suggests ways in which materials seek to remain, even while external contexts, actors and agents might unsteady them.

To consider the significance of these questions of materiality, making and temporality in the contemporary context, it is helpful to turn to the writer and curator Glenn Adamson's review of 'Making Knowing'. In his text, Adamson reflects on the power of craft that the exhibition displays and pointedly asks why it matters. Lou's work, he suggests, offers us an answer: not only does it address important feminist concerns, but it also possesses 'a quality of wonder'. He continues: 'At a time when our collective attention is dangerously adrift, trapped in the freefall of

our social-media feeds and snared in a pit of fake facts, handwork provides a firm anchor. It cannot be spun. It gives us something to believe in.'[26]

Adamson speaks of solidity. Of immutability. A confidence in materiality and the quality of dependability, veracity, and sureness through it.

The contemporary moment is often characterised by its relationship to speed: the quantity of information continually appearing in the palm of our hand, the pace at which still more arrives. The shortening of our attention spans. Our appetite for the instantaneous. The digital 'feed' that feeds us. We tend to think that today is the fastest moment in time. And what of images in this context? Through digitisation we have become accustomed to the mobility of images, even those we still describe as 'still': images that we swipe, tap and pinch. That rotate according to our point of view, accommodating and adjusting to the viewer. This speaks to images that seem subservient (to be in the palm of one's hand of course also means to be controlled by). Images that are intended to adapt to fit what a viewer wants them to be, rather than to challenge – which is what the work of art can, and does, do.

Writing this in 2026, I feel acutely aware of how naïve this commentary might seem when it is read at some point in the very near future, when images, their attributes and wider digital culture will no doubt have changed again. But at a time when our relationship with images is evolving rapidly, it is important for us to reflect on our visual culture, and to examine how digitisation affects how we relate to all images, not just digital ones, as well as to consider the artwork, materiality and making in this context.

[26] Glenn Adamson, 'Why the Art World Is Embracing Craft', *Artsy*, 13 January 2020 <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-art-embracing-craft> [accessed 15 September 2020].

It is also important then, that Adamson describes Lou's work as having 'a quality of wonder'. As a noun, 'wonder' implies a sense of awe, overwhelm, inspiration, raptness, being subsumed by something. We might give ourselves over to the artwork, then, or it overtakes us (maybe we are in the palm of *its* hand). As a verb, 'to wonder' could mean asking without necessarily arriving at an answer. Taking time over something. Sitting with something. A space of undirected enquiry, maybe. Being hazy. Perhaps enjoyably so. Getting comfortable with ambiguity. Not knowing.

Each of these descriptions – wonder as a thing and as an action – stands in stark contrast to the role and speed of digital technology and images. Each has a different relationship to time, to knowing, to meaning, and to the body. And it is interesting to consider the artwork and materiality in this light.

In *Kitchen*, the work seems to ask the viewer to meet it on its own terms: its scale, the overwhelm of its materiality, its powerful sense of endeavour and singular vision demand the consideration of the time it took to make it, the 'right-here-and-now' in this kitchen, the often-overlooked histories it implies, and the signification of its materials. And it also enables the viewer to reflect on their own personal history. Perhaps it is these considerations that contribute to the wonder that Adamson describes. However, they are also ways of engaging with the multiple temporalities of the work, in taking on, and being open to, the complexity it offers. Returning to the exhibition's title, 'Making Knowing', I contend that it is this engagement with different histories, processes, and experiences that are central to making meaning, and what can be known through the work.

Building on the research in the previous chapters, the research in Chapter Three developed the close material engagement with landscape in Hutton's research through Tilley's work. It offered another example of how the image alters through time, as well as through the hands of different

makers, further exploring how the image can engage with complexities of time and examining questions of vulnerability, provisionality and change through it.

Through Tilley's work the role of the hand, tactility, material contact, as well as the production of knowledge and ambiguity have become significant, and this is developed through the work of Deball and Lou, whose artworks also address close material engagement. Developing the exploration of feminist theory (such as Browne and Grosz) and the work of women artists discussed in earlier chapters (Hesse, Himid, Wood), Deball and Lou's works consider women in the making process, as well as the significance of materiality in exploring questions of time in the artwork.

From the study of Lou's work, and Adamson's critical reflections on it, a key finding in this chapter has been the question of tenacity in the making process and how this connects the time of making to materiality, the hand, and endurance. This expands the considerations of time in the research and informs the development of my practice through these themes, which are further explored in Chapter Five.

Building on this research, Chapter Four explores a further example of a wavering image that is altered through time, this time in a digital context. Like the research in this chapter, it is similarly concerned with questions of knowledge production, and it examines further works by contemporary women artists that also engage with the image and digital space, as well as how I pursued these questions in my own practice.

4. DIGITAL IMAGES AND THE ALTERING ARCHIVE

This chapter explores the idea of wavering in relation to physical and digital images. Beginning with the digitisation of an eighteenth-century book by Johann Jakob Scheuchzer and the way its images were altered in that process, the chapter reflects on work in my practice in response to this and proceeds to study digital films by two women artists, Elizabeth Price and Camille Henrot, that each engage with museum collections and digital space. As with the artworks studied in Chapter Three, this Chapter is interested in questions of making through time, how women's perspectives are known through the artwork, as well as ideas of reframing connected to this.

To consider the wider contexts of James Hutton's investigation, I explored other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing related to the study of environments and landscapes. Through this I discovered a digital version of a 1723 book by the Swiss naturalist Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672-1733). Scheuchzer is best known for his *Physica Sacra* (1731), a study of natural theology that addressed both religion and scientific processes. The work I encountered, however, was an earlier publication, titled *Ouresiphoites Helveticus, sive, Itinera per Helvetiae Alpinas regiones facta annis MDCCII, MDCCIII, MDCCIV, MDCCV, MDCCVI, MDCCVII, MDCCIX, MDCCX, MDCCXI*, or in (my own) translation, *Itineraries through the Swiss Alpine regions in the years 1702, 1703, 1704, 1705, 1706, 1707, 1709, and 1710*.[1] As the title suggests, the book records a series of journeys through the Alps, and documents the plants, animals and ways of life Scheuchzer encountered there, as well as the dragons and other fantastical creatures that were rumoured to

[1] Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, *Ouresiphoites Helveticus, sive, Itinera per Helvetiae Alpinas regiones facta annis MDCCII, MDCCIII, MDCCIV, MDCCV, MDCCVI, MDCCVII, MDCCIX, MDCCX, MDCCXI*, 1723, Lugduni Batavorum, P. vander Aa, University of Michigan Library Catalogue https://search.lib.umich.edu/catalog/record/990018600190106381 [accessed 05 May 2025].

inhabit the area. It is therefore a work caught between the rationality of modern science and the world of myth and superstition. The book is written in Latin, and I have not identified an English translation, meaning that the text itself is currently unavailable to me. My own reading of it, therefore, and my discussion of it here, centres on its many pages of images, as well as the evolving history of the document. This is because, as I will explore, the digitised images record the different times of the book overlaid within the image and are thus relevant to my investigation of time in the image. Developing the questions of knowledge production addressed in Chapter Three, I found the way in which the book remained closed off to me very productive. I could not 'know' the book. I found that silence suggestive of the nonhuman temporalities of geology, and that experience of unknowability informed my work with it. This chapter is therefore a text of images and their afterlives, and an exploration of the afterimages of the text.

What I found especially notable about the digital version of Scheuchzer's book is not only its subject matter, but also the ways in which many of the images and text have been affected and altered by the process of digitisation, leading to new kinds of images, ones that reveal the process of their making and create a sense of slippage and the overlaying of times within them.

Rare books are of course, being increasingly digitised, simultaneously preserving artefacts and increasing access to them, and it is therefore important that we think critically about this work: what it means for the documents as well as for what they themselves mean. The research for this chapter was conducted in the earlier stages of the PhD, but it is important to note that since then I have worked in the digital department of the Victoria and Albert Museum and currently, at the Wellcome Trust, where I work within Wellcome Collection. In this role, I conduct research into

people's needs in relation to using the website and accessing digital materials through it, giving me a particular and privileged connection to this subject.

A printed version of Scheuchzer's book is held in the Special Collections Library at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. My contact with it, however, has been entirely digital, mediated through a screen. I have neither visited the library nor handled the pages, so my contact with the book has been entirely non-physical. My knowledge of it therefore remains remote. It has been a virtual encounter, or virtually an encounter: immaterial, impressionistic, flattened, and superficial, while at the same time rich in detail and layers of history.

This form of encountering a text that has left its physical body behind is, obviously, no longer new. However, the immateriality of printed matter is not what is at issue here, but rather the context and modes of production of the virtual version, and its relationship with, as well as its similarities and differences to, the original. This involves thinking about transformation and transfiguration, charting, and questioning the changeability of the image through time and media, and what this does to the records of the past and our knowledge of them. In this sense, it speaks to the concerns of my research as it embodies change through time and demonstrates pliability in the image and how it is affected by external contexts and modes of engagement. The digitised version of this book is therefore a wavering image, one that collapses different times within it, demonstrates relations between times, and exhibits both vulnerability and resilience.

I found out that PDF versions of the book are available through the University of Michigan's website.[2] Some of these versions bear watermarks that tell us that some were digitised by Google and others by the Internet Archive. I found they could be accessed in a variety of digital file formats, including image files such as .jpgs and .tiffs, suggesting a way in which this text can already be read as an image.

In these formats, the records of this text are, by definition, portable. They are intended to be mobile, to travel, to fit the reader's needs and to be wherever they are, whenever they want them, while a physical document held in a Special Collections library would normally involve an appointment, arranged in advance. In the shift from physical artefact to virtual reproduction the book now comes to the reader, rather than vice versa.

This distinction in storage and access articulates the disparities in each document's reach. The pages of a PDF have none of the preciousness of their source material: they don't need to be handled with care or locked away for safekeeping. They are therefore arguably much more democratic in terms of access to them: dissemination has always been one of the great strengths of printed material, and this increases exponentially when the material is digitised. The object's shift from the space of the university library to the website transforms the physical space in which it can be viewed, and with this, the cultural context of its presentation becomes broader as it reaches beyond the physical space of the library.

[2] Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, *Ouresiphoites Helveticus, sive, Itinera per Helvetiae Alpinas regiones facta annis MDCCII, MDCCIII, MDCCIV, MDCCV, MDCCVI, MDCCVII, MDCCIX, MDCCX, MDCCXI*, 1723, Lugduni Batavorum, P. vander Aa, University of Michigan Library Catalogue https://search.lib.umich.edu/catalog/record/990018600190106381 [accessed 05 May 2025].

The process of digitising Scheuchzer's book is one of duplication, and of creating immaterial images that are more ubiquitous and easier to access than their physical ancestors ever could be. When these copies are markedly altered in the process, it is essential to ask how the narratives they convey and the fields of knowledge they engage with are also affected. How do we consider the process of digitisation as one of image-making? And how do we approach the lens that these images present?

The nature of this process suggests that it is one that aims to bring the past closer to the present: regardless of the age or format of the document, the digital images generate a PDF like any other. Their forms no longer vary: each book is homogenised and synchronised with contemporary technology. In this sense, timelines disappear – each artefact is unified around the present moment, collapsing temporal boundaries and the distances and differences between them. As I found engaging with the text, however, they remain thoroughly entangled with other times, systems and ways of knowing the world.

What is striking about the digitised copy of Scheuchzer's book are the alterations the pages have undergone in the process of digital reproduction and how it has changed the book's content.

What is most immediately noticeable are the omissions, the cuts, the glitches, the blanks, and the distortions that the book presents. On many pages we see glimpses and partial views rather than the full content. Slivers of buildings in landscape, creased plants and decapitated trees appear, but can be difficult to discern. The images present aerial views of mountains that seem to have been chopped in half, cut off by the sliced edge of a page. Buildings are split into two or three and spliced together again in new formations. In places we see strings of letters not forming

words, running in not quite straight lines down the side of the page, while elsewhere speckled marks from flecks of dust create 'noise' on the page and recall the space in which the book was stored or the marks and wear of a scanner bed or camera lens.

Often the foldouts remain folded up, slippages that tell us there is more still to see. This begs further questions about the context of the digitisation and the physicality of this making. Are the pages too fragile to open? Were these formats not accommodated in the digitisation process? The creation of copies different from their original is striking in the context of a project concerned with the production of knowledge.

The fantastical, the mythical and the imaginary are also clearly an important feature of Scheuchzer's book. Otherworldly creatures that were reported to live in the Alps—giant muscular claw-footed cats and flying, fire-breathing snakes—were included by Scheuchzer in his account and create a sense in which the images depict a place that is unknown and unknowable, one that is perhaps a space of fantasy, before the digitisation has even begun. The contemporary geologist David Bressan has written that 'Scheuchzer, like many other naturalists of his time, did not really see a contradiction in publishing both his own, exact observations along with rumours in the book'.[3] Scheuchzer's methodology, therefore, rather than being restricted to the grounded, empirical study we might expect of a naturalist, instead accommodated and sought to make space for the alien, the unproven and the inexplicable.

[3] David Bressan, 'In The Alps, Myths About Dragons May Be Rooted In Geology', in *Forbes*, 29 October 2015, https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidbressan/2015/10/29/in-the-alps-myths-about-dragons-may-be-rooted-in-geology/#, [accessed 05 May 2025].

When, centuries later, the work was digitally cut, cropped, and reformed, it further stretched the relatability and the credibility of the territory the book describes. The loss of material and the construction of glimpses through the digitisation process seem designed to keep the terrain out of reach. These not only confound the viewer, but are also teasing contortions, enticing but also refusing them, these glimpses seem to maintain a sense of myth and distance even as they transport these mountains to the viewer's desktop.

Through this digitisation, the images are reframed. In those pages where images are altered, the context of viewing the work shifts. We no longer see the page as only concerned with Scheuchzer's work but also think of the contemporary context of its digitisation, the setting it is in, and how this shapes it. The different times of the work are overlaid in the space of the image, and the question of reproduction of the image is raised in viewing it.

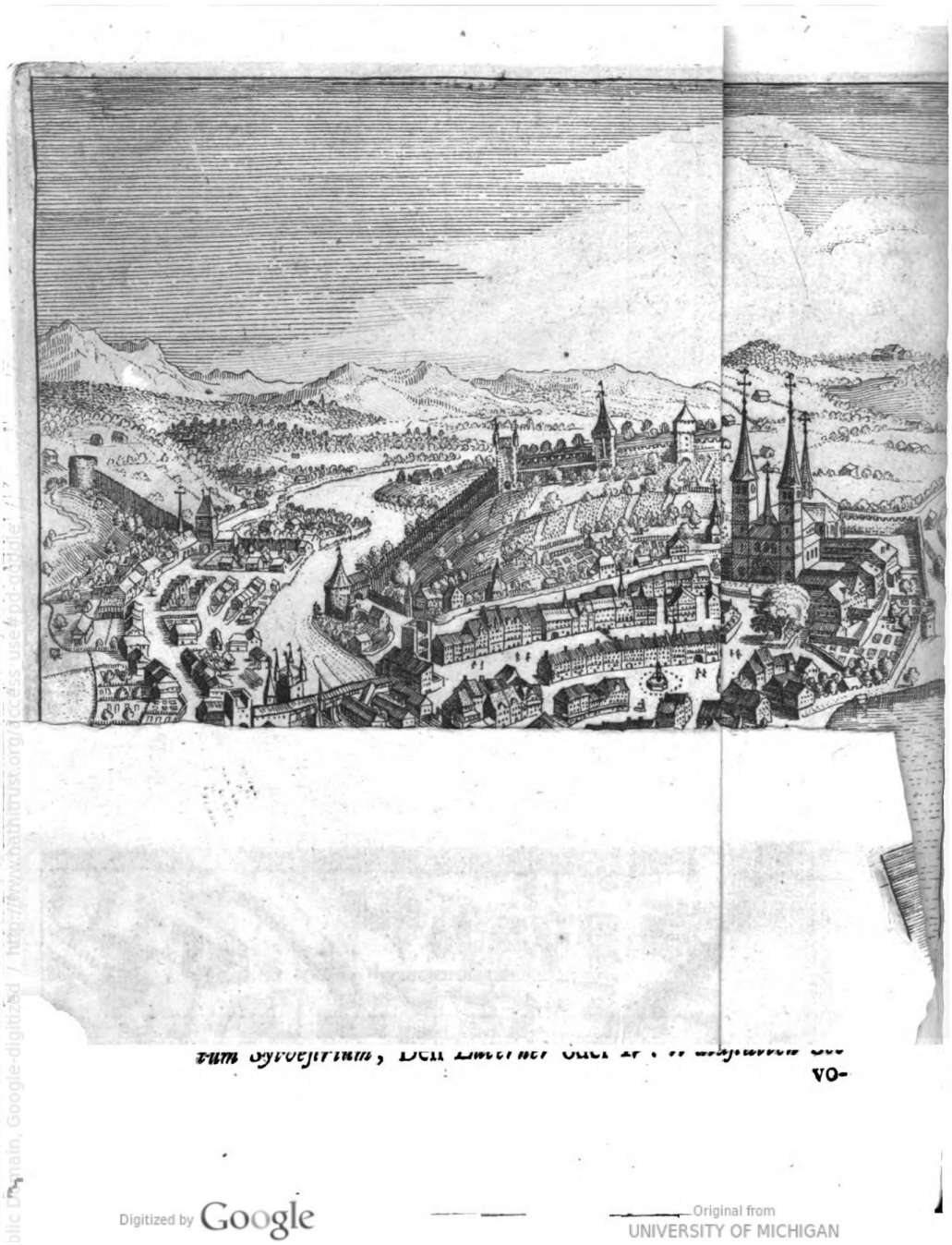


Fig. 26. Digitised image from Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, *Ouresiphoites Helveticus, sive, Itinera per Helvetiae Alpinas regiones facta annis MDCCII, MDCCIII, MDCCIV, MDCCV, MDCCVI, MDCCVII, MDCCIX, MDCCX, MDCCXI*, 1723, University of Michigan Library Catalogue.

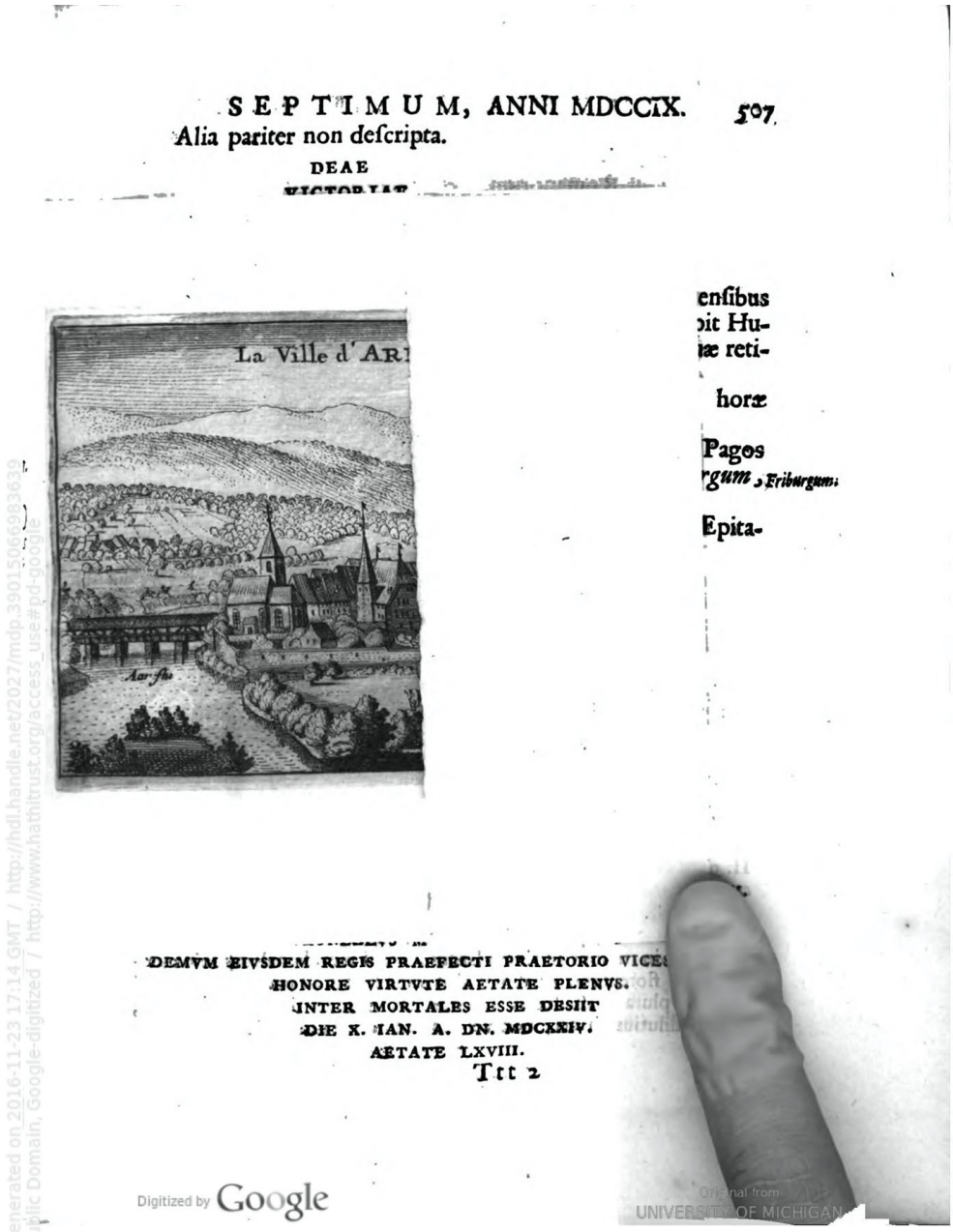


Fig. 27. Digitised image from Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, *Ouresiphoites Helveticus, sive, Itinera per Helvetiae Alpinas regiones facta annis MDCCII, MDCCIII, MDCCIV, MDCCV, MDCCVI, MDCCVII, MDCCIX, MDCCX, MDCCXI*, 1723, University of Michigan Library Catalogue.

Fig. 28. Digitised image from Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, *Ouresiphoites Helveticus, sive, Itinera per Helvetiae Alpinas regiones facta annis MDCCII, MDCCIII, MDCCIV, MDCCV, MDCCVI, MDCCVII, MDCCIX, MDCCX, MDCCXI*, 1723, University of Michigan Library Catalogue.

I see the folds, creases, and layers of pages as speaking directly of time accumulated, stratified and folded back on itself, and as suggesting a terrain that might instead be explored and understood through its contours and material form. The literary theorist Steven Connor says that topology is concerned 'with spatial relations, such as continuity, neighbourhood, insideness and outsideness, disjunction and connection'.[4] The questions that arise in attempting to read the topology of these pages, then, are ones of proximity, association, cohesion or disunity, and the relationships between image fragments. This is a work that comes to us already collaged; one that presents disturbances and seems to relish unlikely conjunctions. It creates incongruous new associations and unexpected connections between some of its subjects. It is a document that is fractured and already rearranged, inviting us to make sense, or to make what we will, of a collection of breakages, rather than a continuous and unfolding narrative form.

What the document presents is multiple records, layered through time. In the first instance, Scheuchzer's intention was to document the environment and culture of the Alps, and that document—the book—has been recorded again through digitisation. The philosopher Jacques Derrida notes that 'the technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event'.[5] The documentation and recording, which in this instance is aligned with both printmaking and the reproduction of the image, should not be considered a passive process. It has both agency and influence, and it is

[4] Steven Connor, 'Topologies: Michel Serres and the Shapes of Thought', *Anglistik*, 15 (2004), pp. 105-17 (p. 105).
[5] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 17. On the relationship between artwork, archive and reproduction see Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn [1936] (London, 2015), pp. 211-244.

therefore an active ingredient in image-making and in the evolution and progression of this book in time.

The folds and omissions, the slippages and departures, are hidden pasts—or perhaps possible futures. They are opportunities for invention, spaces charged with tension and potential, for the imagination to fill. These are moments in which new narratives can be fabricated, in which the history and landscapes that were initially recorded can be altered, and through which re-associated elements of the image can forge new content and meaning in the future. This digitised document raises questions of how the historical record is formed and reformed—whether intentionally or otherwise—through time. It interrogates the creative power of preservation and of efforts and pressures to contend and comply with emerging technology.

The scans have created new images, using the pages of the printed book as their source material. In this mode of remaking, the digital copy has generated new information for contemporary readers: it has newly fabricated matter, and it creates opportunities in the images for unexpected, alternative paths. In this context, the reproduction of the image offers a new and surprising tangent in the direction of the document's travel. It is evidence of transformation and of mutation through time, and through the hands of different makers.

To speak explicitly to this point, another incongruous, but important, feature of some of the digitised pages is the presence, or at least the shadow, of the fingers of the person digitising the book. They can usually be seen at one of the bottom corners of the page, sometimes obscuring both text and image. Their presence occasionally appears accidental, and at other times, when the fingers are clothed in rubber and apparently point to the paper, seems deliberate. This introduces

a visible element of the process of making in the image, an indicator of the different times of its making overlaid within it.

These images suggest the notion of indexicality, of signalling and directing the attention and focus of the viewer. Layered over the pages yet flattened and compressed by the technology of the PDF, the images suggest a struggle to coalesce the past and present in the shared space of the image. They present a clear reminder of the context of the work's reproduction, of the human labour involved and of the very literal overlaying of the contemporary moment in its remaking.

Their presence brings new meaning to the idea of a hand-made image, and in the case of this project, a hand-made history. One dictionary definition of 'digital' is 'a whole number less than ten.'[6] Etymologically it relates to the word digit – pertaining to the fingers or toes. The use of the term in technology emerged from computing systems whose data was represented as a series of digits; but to digitise a document, which we commonly understand as making it virtual, removed from physical space, could equally suggest making it a hand-held entity, to be 'for the fingers', 'for a person', or simply, touchable.[7] Nowhere does this idea resonate more clearly than in these pages where we see the work of the person digitising the book in action, through their fingers. At the same time, however, the act of digitising books conversely makes them immaterial, and uncontactable in this physical sense, to their intended readers, who view them on a screen.

[6] S.v. 'Digital', *Oxford English Dictionary* <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/52611> [accessed 03 April 2019].
[7] Richard Holden, 'Digital', *Oxford English Dictionary* <http://public.oed.com/aspects-of-english/word-stories/digital/> [accessed 03 April 2019].

The scans are, of course, hand-made images, and in seeing the fingers in the frame we are witnessing the images' construction. The fingers' presence in the images is unsettling, and a jolt for the viewer. They punctuate the frame and seem to have let the mask slip, revealing the apparatus and the work behind the scenes that is not intended to be seen. In some instances, only an outline of a finger remains, where it has been erased from the image in an effort to correct it and cover up its presence. Heidegger says that 'the hand's gestures run everywhere through language, in their most perfect purity precisely when man speaks by being silent'.[8] Where the hand indicates, showing its work, guiding the viewer's gaze and laying bare the process of the image's production, it speaks clearly, articulating and announcing the layers of time in the image, the transformations it has undergone, the politics at play in the work and the context in which we view it now.

The hands in the images have agency. They help to unveil the images for us, they lift the lid on them and often direct our looking. They draw attention to the multiplicity of times on the page and to the duality of making that is inherent in the scans. The dissonance between the fingers and the ageing pages recalls not only the document's travel through time, but also the change in its environment and how its concerns have shifted from Alpine landscapes to library spaces, to photography and digital space – this is relevant to my research in relation to the ways in which different times and places are brought together in the shared space of the image. The layering of each of these times and places in a single image, now often held in place by the finger of the maker, reminds us of how histories have been collapsed, compressed, or overlaid through the digitisation process, flattened and distilled into a single frame – yet despite this, the contents of

[8] Martin Heidegger, 'What Calls for Thinking?', in *Basic Writings* (Harper and Row, 1977), p. 381.

the images still often feel restless and uncomfortable, as though they need to stretch, unfold and move some more.

What I found in the digitised version of the book is a collection of frail, tentative and uneasy images – ones that decline to reveal themselves fully, yet at the same time produce insights into the processes and contexts of their production and, arguably, leave space for new trajectories and ideas to take shape. That is to say, they are wavering images. The new relationships between times that these images offer enable us to think in different ways about ideas of time, how it is recorded, and in the words of Elizabeth Grosz, quoted earlier, to question 'conceivable futures' through them.[9]

ON THE PRACTICE: TESTING WAYS OF WORKING AND FORMATS

I worked with these images in my own practice. I wanted to explore how the historical image was remade through the process of digitisation, so my practice sought to focus on the idea of the reproduction of the image, as well as how this document exists in a digital space and how this affects its temporality. I attempted to capture and reanimate the sense of wavering I detected in the digitised images. Through this area of the practice, I created a set of twenty-eight digital collages, in which I worked visually with the images in the context of my computer desktop, or with drop-shadows on white backgrounds. I further worked with some of the most richly detailed images in Scheuchzer's book to create a set of nine giclée print on Somerset paper, each 30cm x 40cm, in which the images are mirrored (Figs 33-41). Later, I printed the works I had produced in a 56-page, digital print artist book, 21cm x 29.7cm, to be able to explore the images printed in a book form once more, yet one overlaid with the digital context.

[9] Grosz, *Nick of Time*.

I began this work by creating digital images in which the images from Scheuchzer's book were viewed in the context of my computer desktop. I explored this because as I thought about the journeys and changes of context the book had undergone over time, I decided it was important for the research to engage, develop and make visible this aspect of its history. I also decided it was important that I explore its existence in the space of my computer desktop, enabling me to investigate its contemporary context and my own engagement with it. I found that this process allowed me to continue to explore the wavering and layering of time and context in the work: the layering of the different histories of the book and the processes of making were added to with the layer of the computer desktop. Viewing the images as open files in the context of the computer desktop gave them a sense of provisionality: their positioning could be changed momentarily. Rather than a fixed composition, as viewers, we are reminded that these images can be dragged around this digital space, collapsed, opened on top of other images. It created a sense that the image we are viewing might only last for a short while, which was interesting to me in the context of considering time in the work, as well as shifting states in the image.

Viewing the works in the space of the computer desktop also reframed them. As the changes through the digitisation process had introduced the context of that making into the viewing of the images, viewing them through the lens of the computer reframed them further, creating the perspective of the viewer of the works within the space of the image.

When I later proceeded to work further with nine images from Scheuchzer's book, I selected intricate images of animals and landscapes that were some of the most detailed in the publication. I wanted to engage with the full richness of the book's imagery. Working digitally, I created mirrored, symmetrical versions of the source images. As one of the tensions in this work is the shift from physical printed document to digitised one, it was important for the research to

investigate this further. I therefore printed these mirrored images as giclée prints on Somerset paper, each 40cm x 30cm.

I worked this way for two key reasons: firstly, as I thought about the history of the book and its reproduction, I thought about the duplication of the image. Mirroring the image in my own work was a way to directly explore this question of duplication. Secondly, I thought about printmaking processes and the moment when a handmade print is produced. I think that when the paper is peeled away from the plate a kind of mirroring momentarily takes place between them. Working with mirroring within the image therefore also enabled me to explore this moment of physical printmaking.

I worked in landscape format, which was a shift from the portrait orientation of the book, as I wanted to re-present the images in the context of landscape imagery, to waver the visual language from one of putative academic study to artwork. The images were larger than the size of my computer screen, but comparable in scale, which enabled the works to relate to this, even as they came to exist as prints on paper. I found that this process of printing the works enabled a different engagement with them and different means of thinking about the history of reproduction of the image.

I also gathered the range of images I had produced through my engagement with Scheuchzer's book and printed them again in a book form. This was important to the research process as it enabled me to explore a new history of the document, as a printed object once more.

In remaking these digitised images in printed form, I was able to explore ideas about the continued development of the shifting states of this document, as well as to further examine how ideas of print and digitisation are overlaid in the space of the image. I printed this in landscape

format at 21cm x 29.7cm to also shift the view of the work from its original orientation. This process enabled a viewing of the work that considered its original print and journey through digitisation simultaneously, and to think about how these different moments in time are both flattened and seen in the space of the image. It added another layer of time to the work and compressed it in the space of the print, also inviting the viewer to consider the context of digitally viewing works, yet through a physical document. Printing works that explore digitisation offered an effective means of stepping outside of the digital context to reflect upon it.

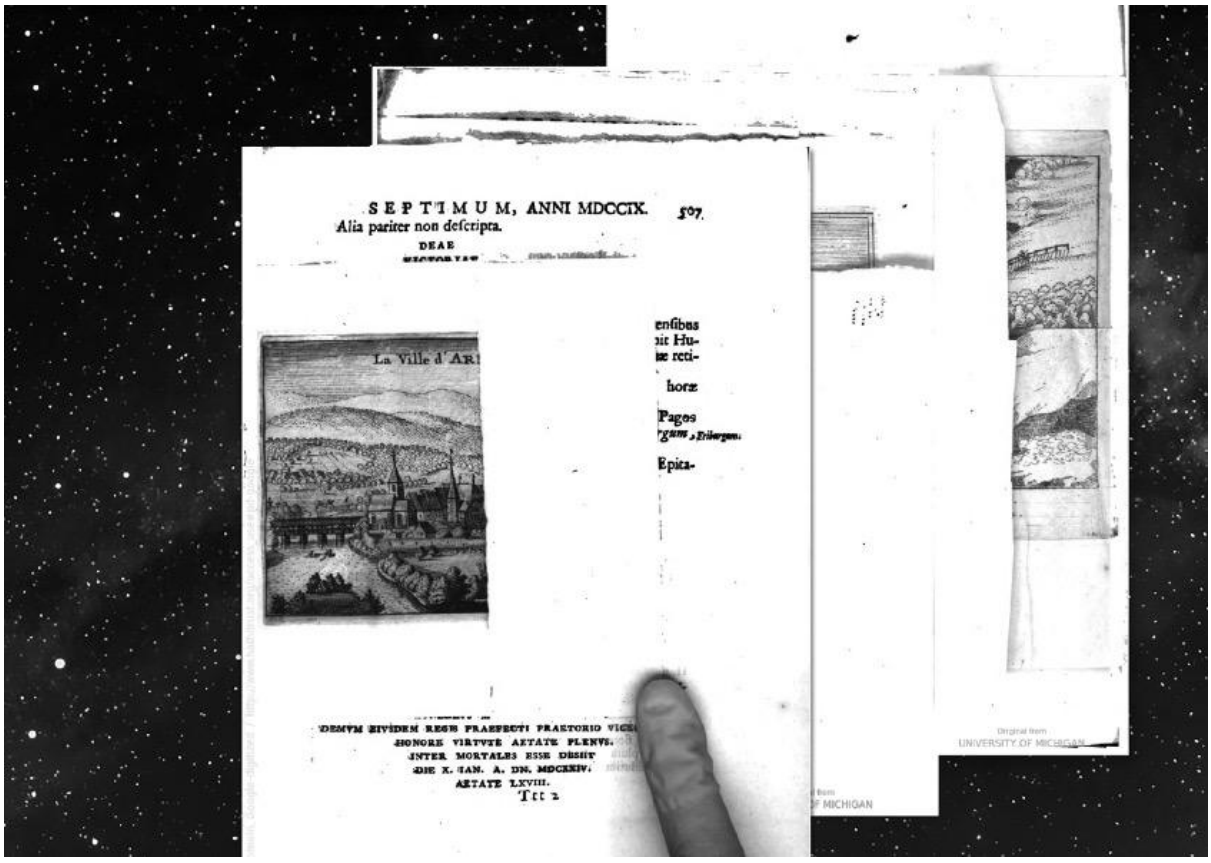


Fig. 29. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2017, digital collage, 21cm x 29.7cm.

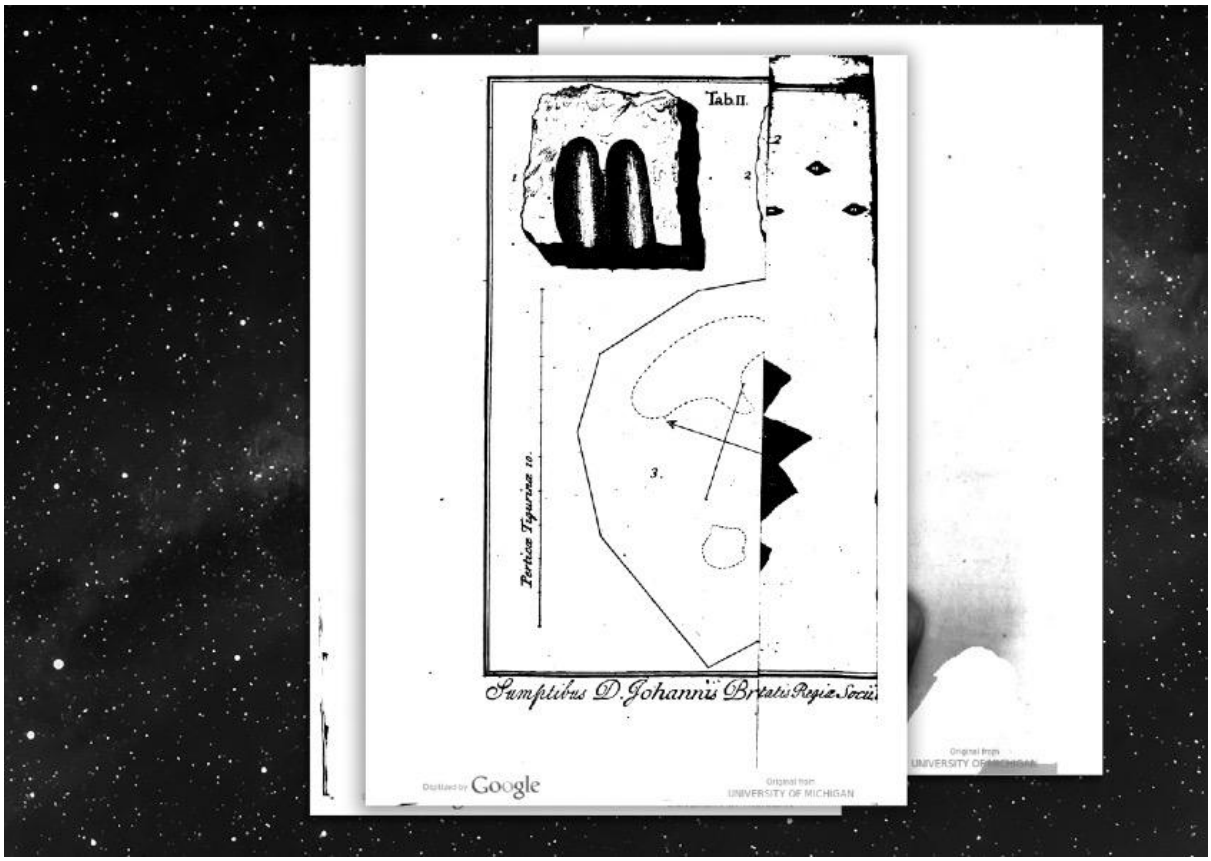


Fig. 30. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2017, digital collage, 21cm x 29.7cm.

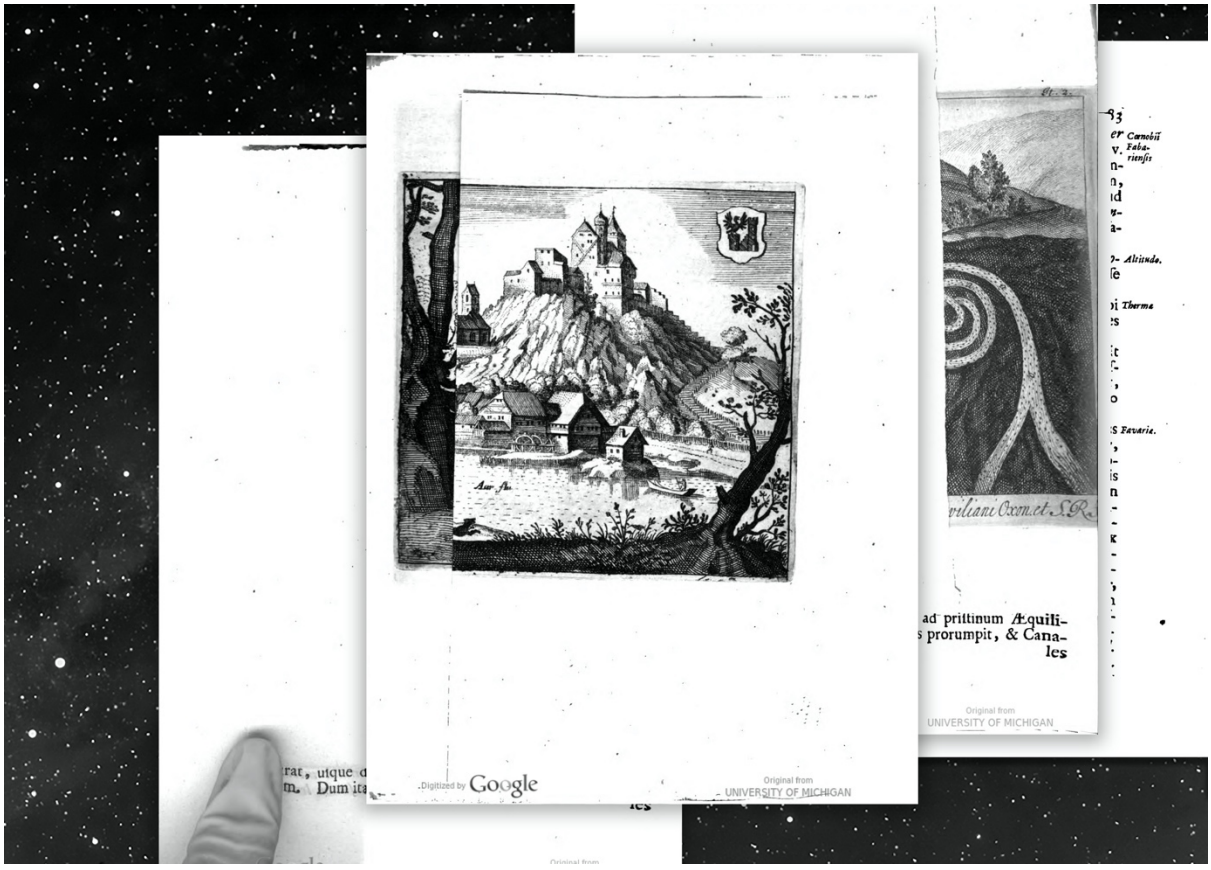


Fig. 31. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2017, digital collage, 21cm x 29.7cm.

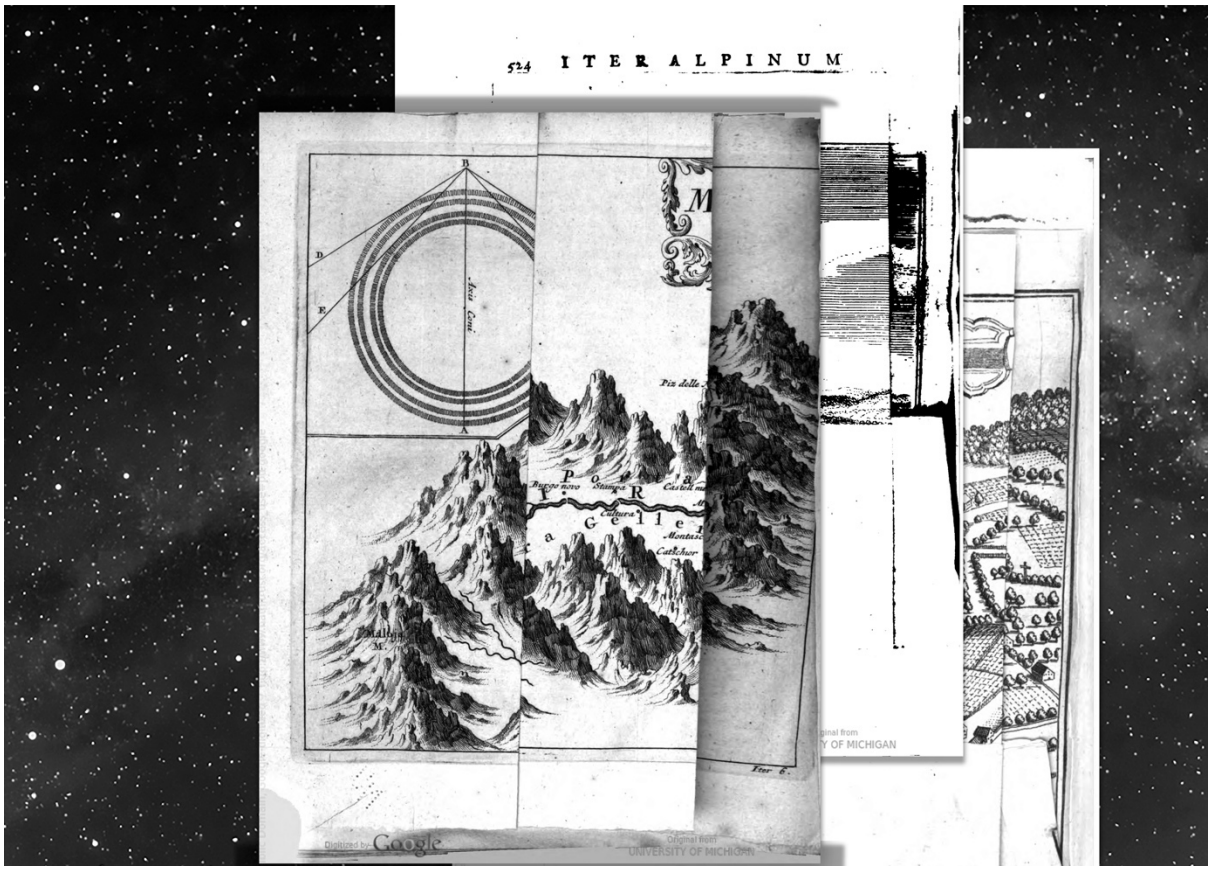


Fig. 32. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2017, digital collage, 21cm x 29.7cm.

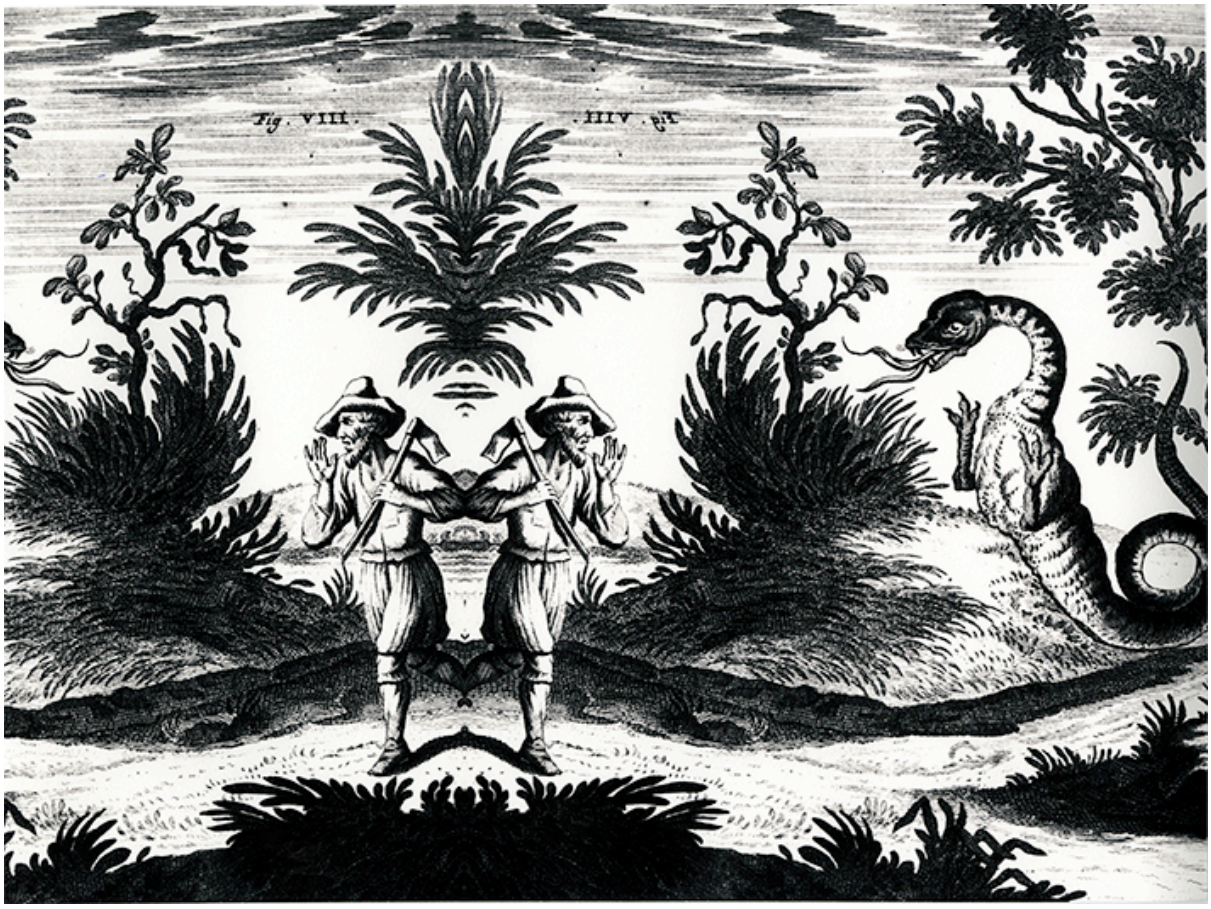


Fig. 33. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2018, giclée print on Somerset paper, 30cm x 40cm.

Fig. 34. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2018, giclée print on Somerset paper, 30cm x 40cm.

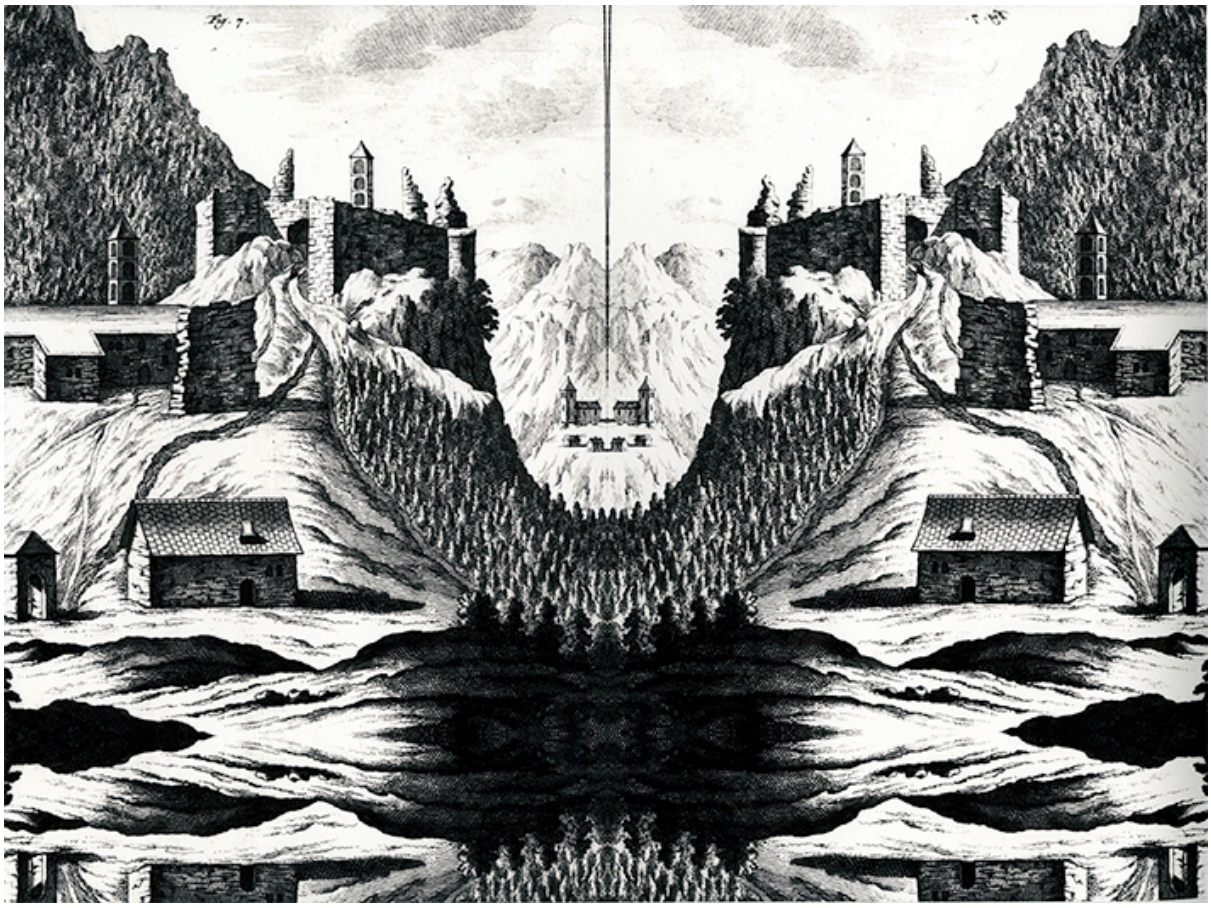


Fig. 35. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2018, giclée print on Somerset paper, 30cm x 40cm.

Fig. 36. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2018, giclée print on Somerset paper, 30cm x 40cm.

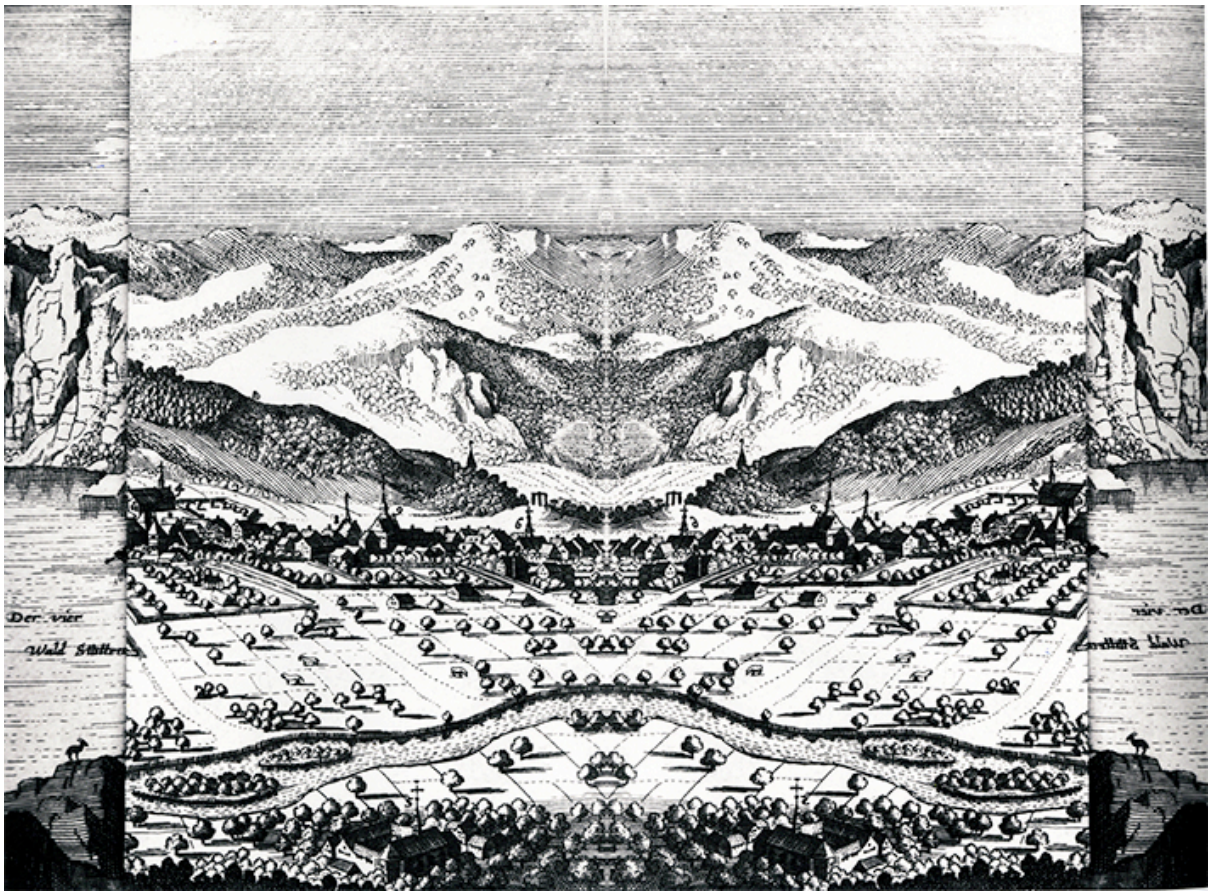


Fig. 37. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2018, giclée print on Somerset paper, 30cm x 40cm.

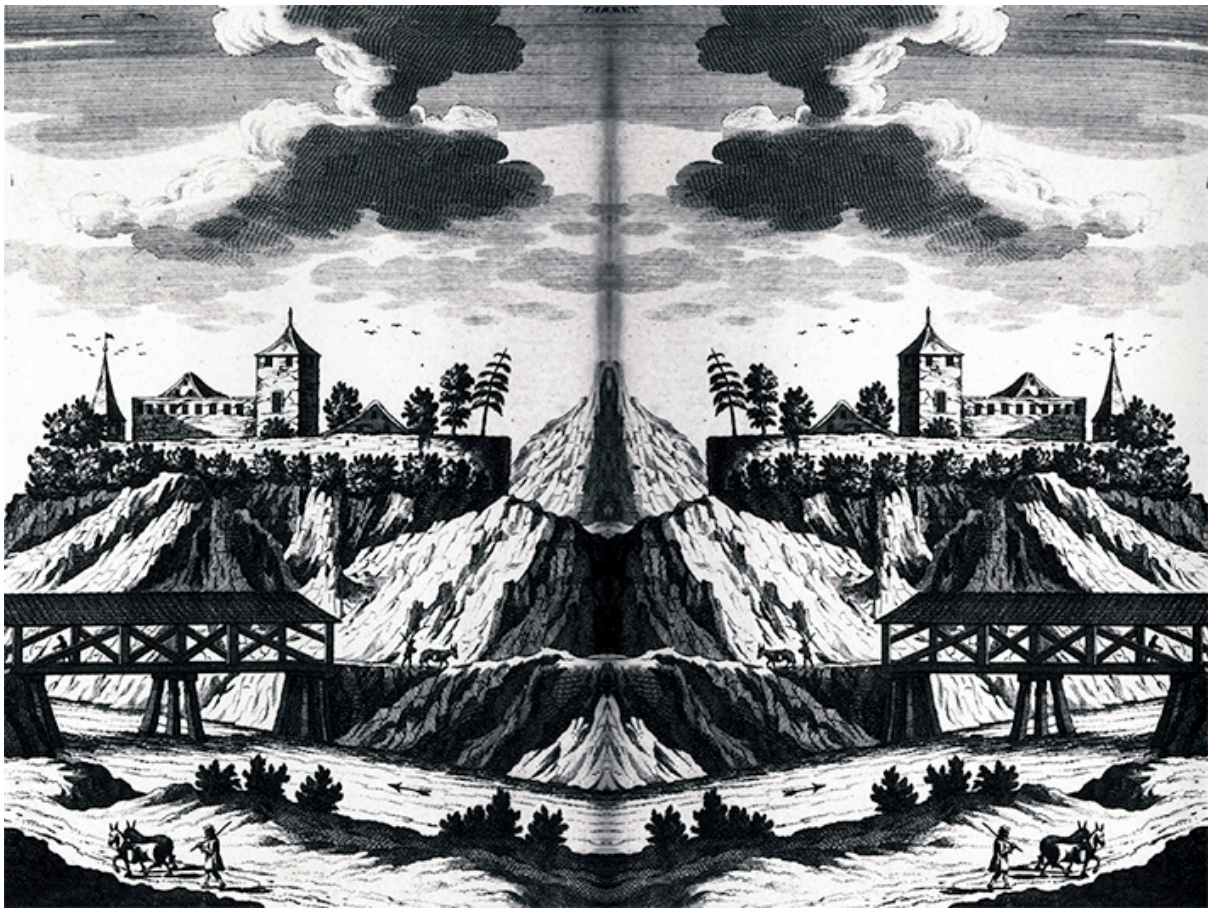


Fig. 38. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2018, giclée print on Somerset paper, 30cm x 40cm.

Fig. 39. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2018, giclée print on Somerset paper, 30cm x 40cm.

Fig. 40. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2018, giclée print on Somerset paper, 30cm x 40cm.

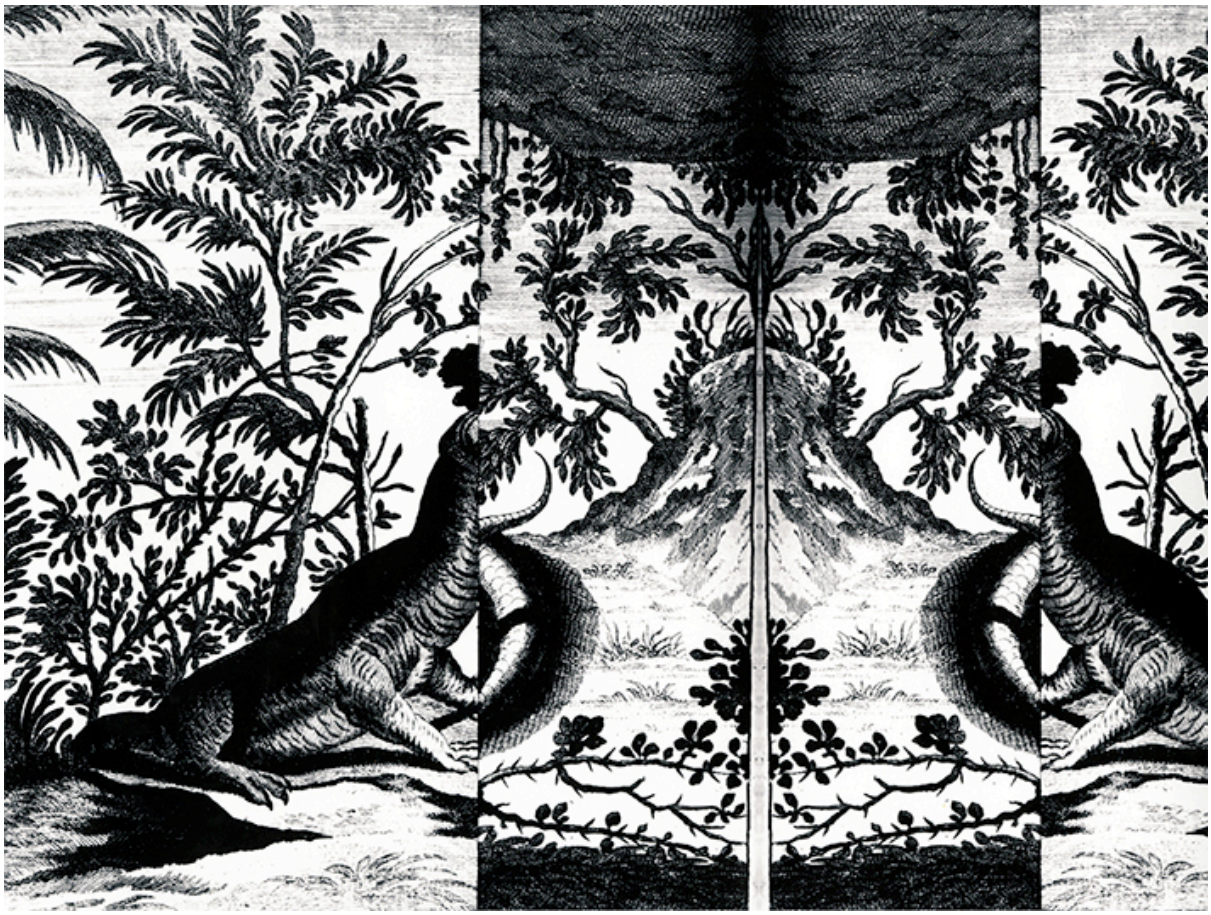
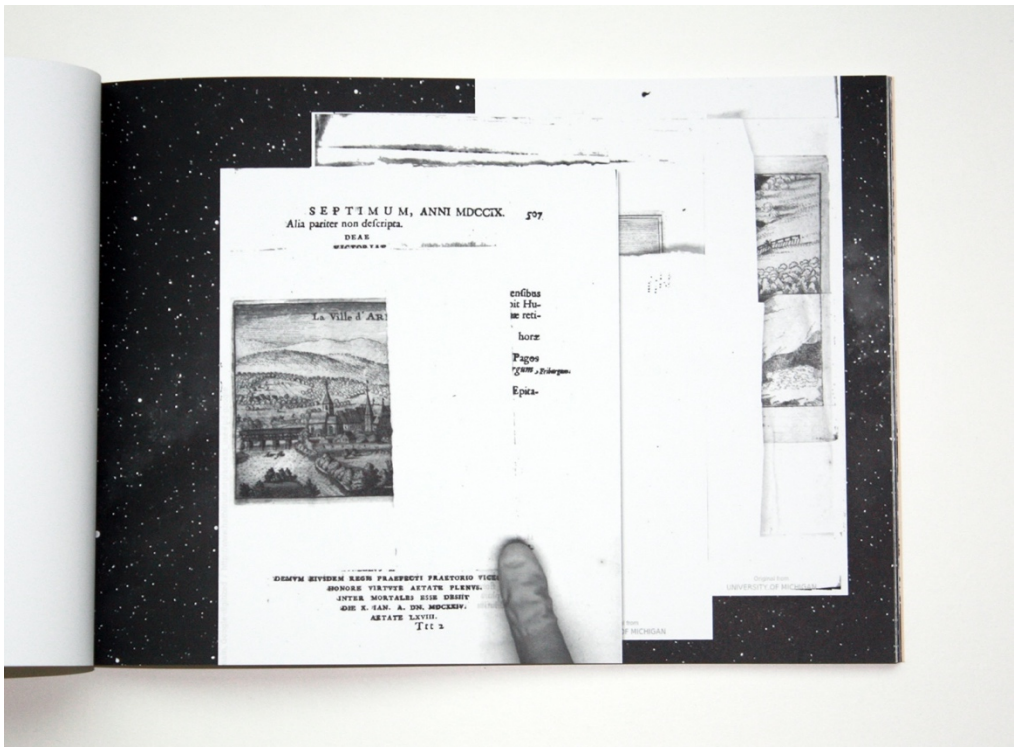


Fig. 41. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2018, giclée print on Somerset paper, 30cm x 40cm.

Figs. 42 & 43. Flora Bowden, pages from *Digital Copy*, 2019, 56-page digital print artist book, 21cm x 29.7cm.

Figs. 44 & 45. Flora Bowden, pages from *Digital Copy*, 2019, 56-page digital print artist book, 21cm x 29.7cm.



Figs. 46 & 47. Flora Bowden, pages from *Digital Copy*, 2019, 56-page digital print artist book, 21cm x 29.7cm.

In producing this work, I sought to recreate the images in another printed, physical form and, in including elements of the computer desktop and digital context, to draw attention to the relationship between the physical and digital, the process of viewing printed matter in a virtual space, and the transformation the work has undergone in the process of digitisation. That is to say, I sought to capture the wavering image. Moreover, creating prints that focus on these altered elements of the book showed the malleability of the printed form when it was remade through different means. The line of an image or the text of the document was no longer fixed or stable, but material, pliable and open to remaking. Working with these digitised images enabled the research to explore ideas of changeability in the material form of the image, and in time.

Please note a full copy of the book can be seen in attached pdf, titled *Digital Copy*, 2019, 56-page digital print artist book, 21cm x 29.7cm.

INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTIONS AND TEMPORALITIES: PRICE AND HENROT

My work with the digital images of Scheuchzer's book was also informed by Elizabeth Price's *A Restoration* (2016), a fifteen-minute two-screen digital video installation, created through her work with the photographic and printed collections and archives at the Ashmolean Museum and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. *A Restoration* works with the documents and photographs associated with Arthur Evans' excavation of Knossos, in Crete, in 1900. In Price's film, which employs both the archive material as well as digital animation, music and narration, a cast of fictional museum administrators 'figuratively reconstruct the Knossos Labyrinth within the museum's computer server', playfully subverting the records to create new kinds of meaning. Price has said that

> in my film I have tried to reflect upon the objects that the two museums hold and exhibit, through the history of their repeated depiction in photographs, prints and

> drawings. In this history of images and interpretations we see the objects change – and this is the basis for the story I have imagined.[10]

Price recognises that images in the archive are not stable. In their use, interpretation, and repeated representation through time, they have changed, and they waver. This instability and susceptibility are therefore at the heart of Price's work—the ways in which images can be affected, who is able to influence them, how, and to what ends. *A Restoration* therefore asks about the varying processes of restoration: about the ways that images pass through different hands over time, and the new messages and ideas that can be produced in that process.

Camille Henrot's *Grosse Fatigue* (2013) also engages with museum holdings—in this instance, those of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC. Henrot's images in the film—footage from the museum's offices and collections stores, as well as material produced by the artist and found online—explore the human desire to explain our origins. Henrot is interested in oral histories, by their immaterial nature these are likely to be more susceptible to change and adaptation through time. Like Price's work, Henrot's film is concerned with digital space and 'uses the familiar setting of a computer desktop to narrate the origins of the universe, and to question how such narratives have been constructed'.[11]

Produced by artists with access to museum collections, the films demonstrate new forms of engagement and storytelling through objects. Unlike the intentions of much museological practice—which might seek to focus on accuracy and veracity in relation to the historical record—the artists' work with the museums' holdings are joyfully playful, full of personal

[10] Ashmolean, 'Elizabeth Price: A Restoration', 2016, https://www.ashmolean.org/sites/default/files/ashmolean/documents/media/ashmolean_press_release_-_elizabeth_price_14.03.2016.pdf [accessed 03 May 2025].

[11] Camille Henrot, '*Grosse Fatigue*, 2013', MoMA, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/175938 [accessed 02 May 2025].

choices, opinion, and mischief. Objects from the collections become material for artistic exploration, experimentation and expression and are put to work in the creation of new narratives and ideas.

Price's film is proud to be a fiction. Its protagonists (heard but never seen) are a 'chorus' of female museum administrators (synthesised, digital voices), who narrate the ways in which they disrupt the histories held in the collections. In Henrot's film, the character guiding the visual material and orchestrating the action of the film are the hands (presumably) of the artist herself, with ever-changing colours of nail polish. We see them holding small objects, painting, drawing, or turning the pages of a book, which offers a striking resonance with Scheuzcher's digitised book. In all three works, the protagonist/s are never seen in full and are instead represented through just one bodily characteristic: in Henrot's film, we know her only through the work her hands do (just as we do in the digitised Scheuzcher book), while Price's administrators are known only through their voices, in which they describe their work. In all three examples, the bodies, and even the identities, of these characters are connected to their work. Being both faceless and represented in such singular ways, their presence is in some ways minimised, while at the same time the effects of their labour are the central concern of the piece. Across these examples, and through the work that they do, the characters speak of the largely invisible labour of administration, repetitive tasks, searching on the Internet, while simultaneously creating intricate, deeply layered, skilful and provocative artworks and images.

A Restoration, *Grosse Fatigue* and Scheuzcher's digitised book create new images in and from archives or historical collections. They look at what individuals, women and workers can do when they quite literally get their hands on that material. They explore the possibilities and potential of what they can make, how they can disrupt narratives, divert, or focus attention on new concerns; and can create compelling and challenging new images that ask us to think

differently about the treatment of historical materials, from the point of view of those whose voices are less often heard.

Three minutes into *A Restoration* (when much of their interventions into the collections are already underway) the administrators introduce their position and their strategy:

> We are presently employed to organise the photographic archival records of several related museums in a single digital database. In itself this work is not particularly engaging, it mainly involves the duplication and labelling of image files. But through conscientious attention to its repetitive procedures, we have developed a dexterous facility at the keyboard, with the mouse, and this has permitted a slight, but expressive variation in the flows of our work.[12]

The administrators, whose role it is to remain unseen and to work with and on the collection materials without trace, have found a way to express themselves. In what is a deliberate yet subtle subversion of their task they have come together, operating collectively to tell new stories with the material at hand. In *A Restoration*, the photographic records are siphoned off into a different set of files, which turn from static files on a desktop to 3D elements with perspective and motion, flinging open and allowing the photos to fly through digital space. What we see in this work is that through the slippages, the deviations and the wilful manipulation that Price's administrators engage in, new images and ideas emerge. This is the space in which new artworks and retellings of history become possible. In being unfaithful to the original, or perhaps to the structures of museum cataloguing – a rebellion that the administrators covertly but enthusiastically engage in – new voices can be heard, through which new ideas can surface and be tested.

[12] Elizabeth Price*, A Restoration*, 2016, Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology University of Oxford.

In Price's work, the museum administrators find that Evans' restoration had its own subjectivity. In speaking of the paintings of plants recorded in the collection, they say:

> Many have already been partially restored. A graphic foliation has put forth bold new leaves on the stem's ancient design. Sycamore grows like this, and ivy, maple and yarrow. Flowers too, bloom again, by these means. A stroke of gouache has swiftly elongated the broken stalks, and revived the radiance of each petal. Other gestures have pressed the contours of archaic blooms, into bright and novel form.

And then, in bold, red capital letters across the full screen of the film: 'VIGOROUS' 'STYLISTIC' 'VARIATION'. [13]

As Price described, the restoration or reproduction of these materials and images through time have led to shifts in what they convey, the stories they tell and the meanings they hold. The museum administrators seem to ask: if Arthur Evans (who was Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at the time of the excavation), can intervene in this way, why can't we? The work therefore poses an important question about who is permitted to shape these histories, and who is not. This is because the work that the administrators undertake in Price's film is subversive, and must be conducted slyly and subtly, under cover of proceeding with their ordinary duties, while, even in 2023, Evans' work was described as a 'creative restoration of the site [that] still lets visitors imagine the past'.[14]

But what new images do the administrators create? When the photographic records start to fly through digital space, what is noticeable is the emphasis on the female form: a range of carved

[13] Elizabeth Price, *A Restoration*, 2016.

[14] Vanessa Thorpe, 'Half-Bull, Half-Truth: How English Archaeologist Claimed Credit for Discovering Home of the Minotaur', *Guardian*, 4 February 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/04/knossos-palace-crete-minotaur-arthur-evans [accessed 02 May 2025].

female statues of apparently different shapes and sizes are prominent. Later, we see vessels: photos of glasses and jugs are layered one over another, showing the multitude of these items uncovered in the excavation. What is striking here is how these objects seem to speak to Le Guin's ideas of containers in 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction'. As she identifies, the carrier bag may not have been the tool or implement of the dramatic and daring (male) hero's story, but what it offers is a space in which a diverse array of things can be gathered, held, and known, and through which different interactions and relationships are possible.

What Price and her administrators offer, therefore, is a decidedly feminist reading of what new narratives, ideas, images, and histories become possible when women, administrators and artists work in, and with, the institutional archive.

Like the methods of Price's administrators, Henrot's approach to the museum collection is similarly associative. Like objects that might by chance find themselves side by side in a carrier bag, Henrot explores what new relationships are formed and what new meaning is forged when footage of shells, bird specimens, magazines, Wikipedia pages, coral or Google searches find themselves next to each other in the shared space of the computer desktop.

For these artists, the digital space is therefore not only a space of work, but also a space in which images have mobility, in which they can change and be changed. It is a fluid space, where images not only have movement but can also be flexible and adaptable in how they connect and relate to other images and times. In these works, the digital can therefore be understood as a space in which the artists (or their protagonists) can generate new meaning through images, and in which new forms of making through gathering and association become possible.

Through this research, I found the digitised version of Scheuchzer's book to be a wavering image as, like Tilley's work in Chapter Three, it documents how the image has been changed through time. It invites consideration of different moments in the work's history and overlays these within the space of the image. In the context of the research questions, this therefore demonstrates how the image can engage with complexities of time, participate in the production of ideas about time, and enables us to examine questions of vulnerability, provisionality and change through it.

I found these images invited questions about the production of knowledge and the relationship between the physical and digital. When I explored these in my practice, working in the context of a computer desktop, I worked with mirroring to examine duplication, and returned them to a physical form. Through this I found that it was possible to critically examine the changing contexts of the work, address questions of remaking, and the relationship between physical and digital in the image, exploring these shifting states, and new visualities possible through them.

To develop this area of research, as I examined both Price's and Henrot's work, I found that in both works digital space becomes one in which the images can be altered, or in which they can engage with other objects and contexts. In these works, this space becomes a space of making, one in which images can waver.

I also found that the representation of the women engaging with the materials in Price's and Henrot's films to be significant. Their importance in the making process is clear, while their presence (through hands or voice) is limited. In this way, both works have carefully considered the role of women makers (building on Deball and Lou), while also exploring questions of presence and absence. These are important considerations for my research and will be addressed in Chapter Five.

In the next chapter I also develop the considerations around the mobility and pliability of the image encountered here but return to more physical processes in my own practice, to examine questions of materiality in relation to time explored earlier in the research.

5. STICKING AND SLIPPING IN THE IMAGE

Building on key themes from the previous chapters, including those of changeability in the image through time and the perspective of different makers, this Chapter develops related questions of presence and absence, and focuses on how wavering can be investigated through materiality in the artwork. It considers questions of erasure, viscosity, movement, and instability through the work of women artists and writers and reflects on significant recent developments in my own painting practice that also explore these themes. Experimenting with scale, material and image, I further develop the language of wavering in my practice.

Early in this research, my thinking about questions of temporality, vulnerability, and change in relation to the image led me to further consider how these are connected to issues of power dynamics and influence in, and over, the image: who is able to shape and affect it, and how? With this, ideas of perspective, representation, presence, and absence also became more central to the investigation. This seemed to speak to matters of who is represented and whose perspectives are known through the artwork, as well as to questions of materiality: its physicality, how it occupies space, imposes itself, or otherwise, how its materials might also be susceptible to time and change; and what this means for the perspectives and representations the work offers.

The poet Alice Oswald's writing helped me think through these ideas. In her inaugural lecture as Oxford Professor of Poetry, 'The Art of Erosion' (2019), Oswald writes:

> Among those who write poetry, there are some who believe that poems have to be built up thought by thought and there are others who believe that poems […] are implicit in the air and need only be uncovered. I am going to speak today about this second kind of poet. I call those poets poets of erosion

> because their task is not so much to fortify or decorate the language, as to wear some holes in it.

Oswald addresses an issue she calls 'the lastingness of poetry' and asks the listener to trust 'that a poem isn't always what happens in the words but is the trace that the poem leaves inside you as it vanishes.' She thus makes the already immaterial work of spoken poetry a physical as well as an ephemeral entity.

Quoting the sixteenth-century poet Thomas Wyatt, Oswald continues:

> Process of time worketh such wonder
> That water which is of kind so soft,
> Doth pierce the marble stone asunder
> By little drops falling from aloft.

Oswald comments that '[t]hose four lines by Wyatt fall on the listener with a lovely weakness. The vowels get shorter, the beats get softer. The image breaks up into little drops'.[1] For Oswald, weakness is a strength of this poem. And the phrase 'lovely weakness' is striking, as it seems so rare that we hear frailty discussed in positive terms. The poem describes an act of erosion, and, as Oswald identifies, does so through a kind of lessening through language and sound, disintegrating the image, an effect that makes the image waver.

The writer Brian Dillon has also explored questions of erasure and absence in art. His 2006 essay 'The Revelation of Erasure' unpacks modes of erasure in artistic practice and addresses, among other topics, the materiality of paint in art and literary history, but through the addition of materials, rather than Oswald's 'wear[ing]' away.

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[1] Alice Oswald, 'The Art of Erosion' [podcast], Professor of Poetry, University of Oxford Podcasts, 9 December 2019, < https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/art-erosion> [accessed 4 Jan 2025].

On the hidden, kneeling figure in Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin of the Rocks* (1483–6?), Dillon says: 'such cases of images overpainted into oblivion remind us that a painting is both thick and thin at the same time' and notes that when a painting becomes 'too deep' it 'risks becoming a glutinous mess, erasing itself by its very urge to completion'.

Reflecting on Honoré de Balzac's story 'Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu' (The Unknown Masterpiece, 1837), Dillon also writes:

> the great painter Frenhofer labours for years at a picture of a young woman, until she disappears, leaving only a tiny, perfect foot looming out of the surrounding chaos: 'Colours daubed one on top of the other and contained by a mass of strange lines forming a wall of paint.' By unintentionally erasing his painting, Frenhofer has in effect produced the first Modernist monochrome, but he has done it by larding his canvas with too much significance, not too little: excess is a form of erasure too.[2]

Through these examples, both of which relate to the figure in painting, Dillon speaks simultaneously to materiality, abundance, mass, and layering, as well as to absence, erasure, and representation; and seems to forge connections between the materiality of the artwork and what is known of the individuals it addresses.

In this chapter I will develop the connections between these topics in the contemporary context and my own artistic practice. To do so, it seems important, first, to acknowledge that during this research, 'The Right to Erasure', also known as 'The Right to be Forgotten' (Article 17 of the General Data Protection Regulation) came into effect in the UK, through which 'individuals have the right to have personal data erased'; and which therefore suggests that erasure can be a

[2] Brian Dillon, 'The Revelation of Erasure', *Tate Etc.*, 8 (Autumn 2006), https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-8-autumn-2006/revelation-erasure [accessed 02 May 2025].

tool to empower individuals in contemporary society, giving them greater control over how they are represented.[3] This also speaks to the notion of wavering and draws attention to the different ways in which images are affected.

The writer Rebecca Solnit has engaged closely with ideas of erasure, often in relation to her own lived experience. In her memoir, *Recollections of my Non-Existence*, which could be described as a self-portrait of a female artist pushing against the non-existence that is expected of her, Solnit returns frequently to questions of presence and absence and the tensions between them. In the opening of the book, speaking of her early adulthood, she powerfully describes a moment when she passed out at home in front of a mirror, and her own image therefore seemed to disappear: 'In those days, I was trying to disappear and to appear, trying to be safe and be someone, and those agendas were often at odds with each other'.[4] And later: 'Femininity, at its most brutally conventional, is a perpetual disappearing act, an erasure and a silencing to make more room for men, one in which your existence is considered an aggression and your nonexistence a form of gracious compliance'.[5]

Solnit makes erasure, or the risk of it, a distinctly female concern and speaks of the sense of wavering between women's presence and their absence.

There are of course, many artists who have advocated for female perspectives and challenged traditional forms of representation. Nancy Spero's work, for example, drew widely from art history, working across cultures and periods, incorporating images of women from Ancient Greece and Ancient Egypt (see, for example, *The Goddess Nut II*, 1990), alongside contemporary

[3] 'Right to Erasure', Independent Commissioner's Office, https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/uk-gdpr-guidance-and-resources/individual-rights/individual-rights/right-to-erasure/#:~:text=The%20right%20to%20erasure%20is,to%20respond%20to%20a%20request [accessed 03 May 2025].
[4] Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of My Non-Existence* (Granta, 2020), p. 3.
[5] Solnit, *Recollections*, p. 85.

imagery. This enabled her work to speak to diverse lineages of times and cultures, bringing these histories into dialogue with each other, making them present, and inviting viewers to reflect upon both the shifts and constancies they contain. The women in Spero's prints are often in motion: dancing, possibly stretching out, reaching in some way, appearing to push or challenge themselves. This gives the work not only an attitude, an alertness, and a determination, but also reveals its temporality, as though the image, while drawing from and across long histories, it seems to have captured a moment of action that will be over in an instant. The mobility of this figuration suggests a kind of wavering in its senses of instability, which are nevertheless emphatic and can also seem joyful.

Contemplating this work, I keep in mind Didi-Huberman's reflection that images can have both 'more memory and more future' than their viewer, which of course is to acknowledge that one of the powers of art is its endurance, its ability to persist and to continue to convey its ideas through time, history, and different ages of viewers.[6] I see a productive juxtaposition between this longevity and the sense of vulnerability and situatedness such works can contain. The temporal dimensions of these, again, speak to an idea of wavering.

I am interested in connecting these questions of temporality and the politics and position of the work of art in relation to its materiality, to consider more fully what role the physicality and the behaviour of a work's materials bring to these conversations around time and representation. To do this I look at two examples that work with the language of viscosity in relation to time and the artwork: 'Sticky Images: The Foreshortening of Time in an Art of Duration' (2000), an essay by the artist and scholar Mieke Bal and the 2021 exhibition 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today'.

[6] Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism', in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art In and Out of History,* ed. by Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg, trans. by Peter Mason (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 31-44 (p. 33).

In 'Sticky Images,' Bal explores the idea of an image's stickiness to address questions of the temporality and duration of the work of art. Bal is interested in paintings and sculptures that reject the temporal fixity usually ascribed to them, rather than works of 'time-based media'. This resonates with my own painting practice, in which I investigate ideas of wavering, change, instability and doubt through what is often understood as the constancy (and therefore arguably, the timelessness) of the picture plane. I think this approach offers a valuable lens through which to explore questions of time, as it can throw the ideas of assurance, steadiness, and certainty we might expect from the image into sharp relief.

For Bal, sticky images are ones 'that hold the viewer, enforcing an experience of temporal variation. They enforce a slowing down as well as an intensification of the experience of time.'[7] This description is interesting because it suggests that 'sticky' images are ones that can treat time materially: they hold the viewer, they vary time, slow it, intensify it, and the viewer's experience of it. In all these ways, time can be considered as one of the materials in operation in the artwork, acting on the viewer and their experience.

Bal's idea of stickiness therefore addresses the way in which time can be gluey, elastic, stretched, contorted, knotted. Her examples draw attention to the 'performativity' of looking: how they engage the viewer in time, asking the eye to move in different directions across a surface, or the body around an object, taking time, and sometimes action, to appreciate the work. Bal also says that sticky images are those that 'stick to you', images that continue to resonate for us, that lodge in our minds and that that we return to again and again, sometimes for years after the viewing is over.

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[7] Mieke Bal, 'Sticky Images: The Foreshortening of Time in an Art of Duration', in *Time and the Image*, ed. by Carolyn Bailey Gill (Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 79-99 (p. 80).

Bal describes various ways in which images endure in, or alter, an experience of time. It is important to note that while her interest is in stickiness, these images are not 'stuck': they can, and do, change over time. In her examples, this is when they are re-contextualised through the work of later artists, but it might also be when they are reconsidered by the viewer through their repeated viewing.[8] Bal describes, in various ways, the different temporalities in which artworks can operate: she is concerned with the prolonged engagement that a work of art can offer, and her essay enables us to think about how art can be a space of slowness, consideration and reflection, an antidote to the speed of media imagery that otherwise occupy our fields of vision.

I am interested in thinking about sticky images for the temporalities that Bal imbues them with, and in the idea that an artwork can slow down our looking and affect our sense of time. But I am also interested in sticky images for their sense of viscosity, for the physical and material behaviours that stickiness suggests, and what this might mean for the work of art, particularly in relation to my own practice.

To expand on this, I return to the 2021 exhibition 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today'. To open a dialogue about the works in the show, a panel discussion was held between four of its female artists: Allison Katz, Caragh Thuring, Issy Wood and Vivien Zhang. It was moderated by the Hayward Gallery's director, Ralph Rugoff, and was titled 'Slippery Images'.[9]

I must note here that I could not attend this event. It was held in the evening during a period when I had one small child at home and was pregnant with my second. Others before me have commented on the challenges of parenthood in relation to artistic practice, but there is much

[8] Bal, 'Sticky Images', p. 99.

[9] 'Slippery Images' was the title of a panel discussion held between artists Allison Katz, Caragh Thuring, Issy Wood and Vivien Zhang and moderated by Hayward Gallery Director, Ralph Rugoff, 11 November 2021. It was held during the exhibition 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today' at the Hayward Gallery, London, 2021.

more to be said and done.[10] It was also not recorded, which is a kind of slipperiness we see less and less, thanks to digital technology and social media. All of this means that my engagement with, and understanding of, this event has been entirely digital (through texts published online), and asynchronous.

From this I learned that the discussion posed questions about 'painting's capacity to incorporate different elements from diverse genres and traditions, and to suggest connections between things we might never normally link, make it an ideal medium for reflecting on the currency of pictures in our image-saturated age?'[11] My response to this would be 'yes', although I suggest that this description could also apply to Spero's prints made thirty-five years ago, indicating a longevity in this approach, and one that reaches across media.

In his introduction to the exhibition, Rugoff says that the artists featured are concerned with 'our connection to the past and how we relate that to our present in different ways'. He sees the artists' work as, among other things, 'a conversation with history', possibly suggesting that slipperiness could possess its own distinct temporal agendas.

Framing these agendas in the context of 'connection to the past' means that the temporality of this slipperiness is not simply a question of speed or motion.[12] Rather, slipperiness seems to refer to historical engagement and the change in perception, interpretation, and collective memory that the work of art can also produce. As previously discussed, Lubaina Himid's painting in this exhibition, *The Captain and the Mate* (2017-18), relates to this in its bringing together of different histories and moments, offering a new perspective on them, opening a conversation, putting

[10] See for example Hettie Judah, *How not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other Parents)* (Lund Humphries, 2022).

[11] Mixing It Up: Slippery Images Panel Discussion', Royal Festival Hall, 2021, Southbank Centre <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/talks-debates/mixing-it-slippery-images-panel-discussion> [accessed 28 April 2022].

[12] 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today, a Curator Tour with Ralph Rugoff' [video], Southbank Centre 20 Oct 2021, https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/blog/videos/mixing-it-up-introduction-ralph-rugoff [accessed 10 April 2025].

forward a position, and inviting reflection not only on history, but also on how it is understood today, and how its legacies continue to persist now.[13]

What we find in both Bal's and Rugoff's words is an interest in the endurance and the physical, material behaviours of images, in history, time, engagement, affect, relationships between the past and the present, and the foregrounding or reframing of histories. Their language speaks of the role of viscosity, fluidity, tackiness, and indelibility, among other physical properties, as essential to the communication and questioning of time through the artwork.

To develop this, I turn to Lauren Elkin's book *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (2023), in which viscosity and material behaviours are also important concerns. Elkin's work is useful here because it develops these concerns for materiality in the artwork specifically in relation to feminism and the body in art.

Elkin says of the work of feminist artists in the 1970s that they 'made the body their medium, made the body matter.' Their work, she continues, 'reckoned with the very nature of materiality itself', and she reflects that the question this work raises is: 'how can the image point away from what we know, towards something we may not even know how to name?'.[14] The kinds of questioning that can come through materiality, this suggests, might enable us to move towards and into unknown spaces, different territories, and therefore, new ideas, relationships and meanings.

Elkin discusses a sculpture by Lynda Benglis, *For and Against (For Klaus)*, (1971), whose title alone speaks to different positions, an idea of movement and unsettledness. The work was made of

[13] 'Lubaina Himid', in Alice Acland, et al., *Mixing It Up: Painting Today* (Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2021), p 28.
[14] Lauren Elkin, *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (Vintage, 2023), p. 60.

black polyurethane, seemingly frozen in mid-pour, with five liquid-shaped forms apparently gushing from the wall (on which they were mounted) towards the ground, without ever reaching it. Elkin cites the view of the art historian Linda Nochlin, who said that Benglis' work is 'a total rejection of sculptural work as permanent, stable, firmly based on the ground, and monumental'.[15] This suggests that the temporality in Benglis' practice is not only the implied movement in the work and the sense in which liquid has been frozen in time but may also be in its senses of restlessness and resisting.

Nochlin continues: 'At a crucial moment within the burgeoning feminist movement, these solidified "pours", as they came to be called, literally flowed with the sheer energy of women's liberation'. Nochlin connects the materiality of the artwork, its sense of movement and the occupation of space, with feminist politics. For Elkin, Benglis' sculpture also reads as a feminist work 'in its quest for texture, weight, even timbre; in its attempt to evoke an experience of being a body, not necessarily a female one.' Both Nochlin and Elkin find in Benglis' work an idea about politics and the body, explored through the behaviour of the sculpture's materials: how they operate in space, engage with the space of the viewer, make their presence known and felt, and offer an encounter with ideas and properties that for both writers speak to feminist concerns of the body in space, but also relate to the materiality of the work and its engagement with time.

Elkin also discusses Benglis' work in relation to Hesse's, acknowledging that both artists introduced materials in their practice that had not previously been a part of the fine art canon.[16] To return to Hesse's *Right After* (1969), a work made of latex-dipped fibreglass cord, it is possible to suggest that Hesse is also concerned with the behaviour of her work in space, how the

[15] Elkin, *Art Monsters*, p. 61.
[16] Elkin, *Art Monsters*, p. 62.

materials are visibly affected and shaped by gravity, and are therefore impressionable, and in dialogue with their context.

Much more recently, in 2019, Phyllida Barlow discussed related concerns in her own practice, demonstrating how ideas of material restlessness remain significant in the context of contemporary art:

> I think in the way I work, it's purposefully courting a kind of unsettledness. It's battling with the way the materials want to settle. They want to set, or they want to be fixed in some way, and I'm quite interested in their restlessness and maybe the fact that they fall over, they burst, they don't stick, they're difficult to fix; and exploring those qualities. And not just as a visual experience, but as a very tactile, sentient experience.[17]

The works of Benglis, Hesse and Barlow evidence a concern for engaging with materials on their own terms: focusing on how they move, behave, comply, or refuse to. They offer a way to consider the vulnerability of their materials, how they take up space, and what they do in it. As Nochlin observed, there is a focus on challenging ideas of stability and permanence, yet all the while insisting on being in space and being acknowledged, as well as thinking about the sense of time and movement that the materials offer, and, through this, considering questions of bodily experience and encounter with the materials of the artwork.

In addressing the possibilities of material behaviours, temporalities, and ways of occupying space, these works speak to Elkin's question about how the image can point towards an unknown – interrogating materiality, properties, plasticity, boundaries, edges, time, speed and being in space, and inviting us to consider what else might be possible.[18]

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[17] Robert Diament and Russell Tovey, 'Phyllida Barlow CBE' [podcast], Talk Art, May 2019 [accessed 10 April 2025].
[18] Elkin, *Art Monsters,* p. 60.

These ideas feel particularly potent in relation to the body and lived experience. Returning to Solnit and her exploration of non-existence, while the artists discussed here may reject traditions of monumentality (as Nochlin commented), they are nevertheless concerned with presence, while acknowledging its complexities. The kinds of taking up space in these pieces might be quiet, questioning, unsettled, fragile, sometimes unassuming, and may even seem fleeting. Bound up in the behaviour and temporality of their materials, these works productively complicate ideas of presence: being in space becomes something that is layered and faceted; relationships are complicated and need to be navigated, just as they are in bodies.

The work of contemporary Irish painter Genieve Figgis is relevant here for a further examination of relationships between materiality, viscosity, the body and lived experience in the artwork. Her work focuses on the figure or their social setting, and, like that of Benglis, Hesse and Barlow, is concerned with the behaviour of materials: in her case, the physicality and mobility of paint. The curator Elisa De Wyngaert writes of Figgis's work:

> Genieve Figgis trusts paint to run unpredictably over the canvas, allowing an unconscious and rebellious process to occur. She embraces deformations, fluidity, and innocence, the exciting thrill of possible failure. As her figures are rendered freely in paint, she sets them free, revealing their unrestrained, unconventional and fantastical nature.[19]

For Figgis, the behaviour of the paint articulates what is possible for her figures and seems to subvert any notions of solidity, coherence, and stability that we might want to attribute to them.

[19] Elisa De Wyngaert, 'Genieve Figgis: Unearthly Pursuits', Almine Rech, September 2024 https://www.alminerech.com/exhibitions/10058-genieve-figgis-unearthly-pursuits [accessed 10 April 2025].

Lauren Elkin also reflects on Figgis' work in *Art Monsters*, discussing her painting *Blue Eyeliner* (2020), which also appears on the cover of Elkin's book. Elkin describes the painting as one in which a woman is smearing her make-up, but in such a drastic way that her skin is coming off with it. 'Make-up', Elkin writes, 'is not made to last; it comes off the moment you put it on. It conceals and alters, smears and defaces. Destructive, getting on everything, ruining everything. A make-up artist is an artist of ephemerality'.[20] The sense of movement and fluidity in Figgis's painting refers to action in the painting, and to the implication of time in the image, in the transience of the make-up depicted, but also to the sense of wholeness and togetherness of the figure herself.

In the work of all the artists discussed in this chapter we can see how ideas of time are explored, not as clock time, or chronos, but in the behaviours of materials, as embodied concerns of lived experience and feminist politics, where matters of erasure and non-existence are contested, and presence, even in complex, mobile and restless forms, is insisted upon.

In her work on the modern regime of time Aleida Assmann also wrote about caesuras in relation to time, saying that 'caesuras can be hard or soft'.[21] Hard caesuras 'generate firm boundaries in relation to which it is impossible to go back', while soft caesuras 'offer an indispensable means of structuring the stream of time with markers and making it rhythmic.'[22] The material pliancy of the artworks discussed in this chapter could represent this second form of caesura in their sense of continuity, connection, changeability, and relationship (between times and bodies), rather than the clean break of the hard caesura. Their weight, viscosity and suppleness suggest endurance, a stickiness of time, the persistence of memory, notions of responding and reshaping and

[20] Elkin, *Art Monsters,* p. 39.
[21] Aleida Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime*, trans. by Sarah Clift (Cornell University Press, 2020), p. 276.
[22] Assmann, *Time Out of Joint*, p. 277.

impressionability: they are each affected and literally moved by their environment and the process of their making. The mobility and pliancy of the materials in the work create a way for these artworks to operate as, and to be, wavering images.

The idea of movement in these works speaks not only to how materials might occupy space, but also to temporality and the time of the artwork. And in their seeming instability they also refer to other concepts: unsteadiness, insecurity, vulnerability, the ways in which they are impressionable. As Elkin describes, their materiality itself can relate to ideas of the body: the lived experience of what it is like to be a body. And so, with this material unpredictability we can also read an aspect of the work that speaks to lived experience.

ON THE PRACTICE: POURING PAINT

Reflecting on notions of material instability and the senses of movement and unfixity in the work of other contemporary artists has led me to explore new approaches in my practice and led to a new direction in my work. My most recent work is with acrylic paint, which I use in a pouring process on unstretched canvas and linen.

This approach originated in the earlier material experiments with resin. I was interested in the resin's viscosity and that as I added pigment to its layers, it retained a sense of the movement, even once set, speaking to its material transformation, and creating a focus on the material behaviours in the work.

While I took the decision to stop working with resin, I was interested in continuing to focus on materiality. As throughout the research I have engaged with changeability in the image (for example, in the digitisation of Scheuchzer's book where images are distorted) and have

considered materiality in geology, and the work of other women artists discussed earlier in this chapter, it felt important to develop ways of working in my practice that engage with fluidity in the image and materials on my own terms and create my own visual language of wavering.

After working with resin, I looked at other examples of artworks that engaged with material change to broaden my thinking around this. The works cited above by Hesse, Benglis and Figgis are significant in this research for their connections between materiality and feminism. Beyond this, I was also fortunate to view two Deccan works that also feature sections of marbled imagery, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Morgan Library in 2018, which show marbled horses on paper.[23] Additionally, I have looked at ancient Egyptian glassware depicting images of faces or animals, which through the melting of the glass creates what feels like a sense of movement held in the final image, that seems to capture a sense of time and hold it still.[24] I have also been informed by the work of Professor Jo Stockham, Head of Print at the Royal College of Art, whose practice engages with paper marbling, its histories and how the process of dipping paper affects or interrupts the movement of the ink, identifying relationships to time in this work, that also echo the ideas of movement in the formation of stone.[25]

Furthermore, my supervisor, Bob Matthews' work has been important for my thinking throughout the research, and in this area of the practice, I have been informed by his work with light-sensitive pigment on canvas and the ways in which this suggests changeability, questions of time and the work's relationship to wider contexts, through its materiality.[26]

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[23] *Emaciated Horse and Rider*, ca. 1625, Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; marbleized paper, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and *Emaciated Horse and Rider*, first half of the seventeenth century, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York.

[24] *Fragment of a mosaic glass with the right half of a female mask*, Ptolemaic Period to Roman Period, 100 BCE-10 CE, Glass, Freer Gallery of Art Collection, Smithsonian Institution, https://asia-archive.si.edu/object/F1909.492/, [accessed 05 May 2025].

[25] *Meet the artists: Jo Stockham* (2022), https://bsr.ac.uk/meet-the-artists-jo-stockham/ [accessed 09 February 2026] (para. 4-5 of 12).

[26] Bob Matthews, 'Studio Tan', Gregory Lind Gallery, 2 March – 15 April 2017 <http://gregorylindgallery.com/exhibitions/2017/matthews/> [accessed 12 February 2026].

I began painting for several reasons. While approaches in my practice have varied, my work centres on the 2D image. It was important to me to continue working with the flatness and stillness of the image, which are counter to many of the themes in the research. I think this offers a way to step outside questions of time and wavering and is therefore a valuable means of reflecting upon them. I also wanted to engage with the long history of painting, as well as with the speed and fluidity of the material itself, and the permanence of the image it creates (recalling Didi-Huberman's reflections on the depths of time and memory in the image).[27] I was interested in working with and across these states from malleable to fixed, with the opportunities and constraints they offer, and in questioning how this materiality could enable new visualities in relation to time and wavering in the image.

Based on this, I began pouring acrylic paint—to work with its most mobile form—and I found that this liquid state introduced chance and unpredictability, which spoke to questions of time and wavering. When I poured different colours together, the wavering of the paint became recorded in the image. I was interested in how the mark making was informed by the behaviour of the material, different consistencies of the paint and how the colours interacted, rather than being directly controlled by my hand. This foregrounded the paint's materiality, and the significance of its liquid state was retained, similar to the resin works.

[27] Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism', in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art in and out of History,* ed. by Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg, trans. by Peter Mason (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 31-44 (p. 33).

Fig. 48. Flora Bowden, studio experimentation, 2021, acrylic on paper, 6.4cm x 5.6cm.

In my first experiments with pouring paint, I noted the thickness of it when it solidified. This gave the paint a material depth and responding to this, I wondered if I could treat the paint as a solid material that could be shaped. I began cutting into it to further explore this materiality and found that I could continue working with it in this state. I proceeded to pour more paint into the gaps between the cuts, which introduced different visual forms into the work. As in Figure 48, at times it took the shape of a wave, while it was also possible to generate a sense of layers akin to geological strata. I began to find a visual language of wavering.

Fig. 50. Flora Bowden, *Untitled,* 2021, acrylic on linen on board, 30cm x 30cm, work in progress photo.

The thickness of the paint means the weave of the support is not always visible, and the surface has both the texture of paint and clear breaks between its sections, like seams, suggesting ideas of patchwork. I found this effective because it spoke to forms, materials and processes separate to painting, which offered connection to other dialogues important to the research and a way to reflect on the medium and processes of painting in the work. I therefore wanted to continue to develop this approach.

TESTING SCALES AND FORMATS IN THE PAINTINGS

Throughout the research, I have created eight works through pouring paint. These are across different sizes and formats. In this section I will discuss the process that led to my decision making around this.

The first poured painting was a small grid of 10 x 10, 3cm x 3cm squares, on 30cm x 30cm linen on board (Fig. 51), which I considered a test of the process. I worked with seven colours in different combinations across the sections to create different coloured squares within the piece. I wanted to explore relationships between colours so that while there was distinction between sections of paint, there were also connections across them. I thought this use of colour could challenge the cuts (or 'caesuras' to recall Assmann's text in relation to time), between sections, offering a way to test the boundaries in the work, and continuing with Assmann's ideas, may explore 'hard' and 'soft caesuras'.[28] I thought that creating boundaries between sections (through cuts) and linkages (through colour) introduced questions of porosity and blurring, duration (recalling ideas of deep time) and fragmentation (bringing to mind archaeology). These elements operated alongside distinct edges, which offered an idea of wavering. I think this approach to colour was successful in creating both differentiations and correlations across the work, and I have therefore continued with this approach throughout the later pieces.

[28] Aleida Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime*, trans. by Sarah Clift (Cornell University Press, 2020), p. 276.

Fig. 51. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2021, acrylic on linen on board, 30cm x 30cm.

Reflecting on this first piece (Fig. 51), I thought that the weight of the paint and its thickness might be able to be considered in different ways and create further suggestions of wavering if the canvas was unstretched, and had slightly more mobility, so I proceeded to work in this way in the subsequent pieces.

After this and with the interest in working on an unstretched surface, I created a much larger work using the same scale of grid: 3cm x 3cm squares (Fig. 53).

Fig. 52. *Untitled*, 2021, acrylic on linen, 136.5cm x 99.5cm, work in progress detail photo.

I thought it was important to work at a larger scale for multiple reasons. I considered it would allow the looseness of the unstretched linen to be more prominent in the work, allowing for more undulations or movement, and more focus on the tactility and materiality of the textile. I also thought that the larger scale would create a different kind of encounter for the viewer, more closely related to the scale of the body, and that considering the encounter was an important temporal aspect of the work. I also thought that the larger scale would enable me to create works with more detail and complexity, which I felt enabled deeper engagements with time in the work: both in the making (recalling the intricacies and commitment evident in Lou's *Kitchen*) as well as potentially, in the viewing.[29]

[29] Liza Lou, *Kitchen,* 1991-1996, Whitney Museum <https://whitney.org/collection/works/34855> [accessed 02 May 2025].

I found that working at a larger scale did allow for more closely exploring the role of the textile in the work, that it created more movement in the linen, that the scale changed the work's relationship to the body, and that it enabled me to create more complexity in the piece.

Following this work, my next piece (Fig. 61) introduced the figure to explore poured paint in relation to the body. This piece was even larger: 118.5cm x 154.5cm, and in landscape format. Here, I was thinking about the viewer's encounter with the figure in the work and again, thought it was important to work at a scale that enabled this to be explored. I also wanted to continue my investigation with detail and complexity in the image (as well as different scales within it). I found that the scale did enable a focus on the figure in viewing the work and that it enabled me to work in detailed sections, as well as to test different scales of imagery within the piece, which also contributes to senses of wavering.

After this painting, I undertook further pieces at a smaller scale, creating four works that are each 50cm x 38cm. I wanted to work across scales to create a body of poured paintings that moved across sizes and formats, as I thought that this also contributed to ideas of wavering and shifting states in the practice. Having explored more complexity and detail in the larger works, I wanted to test whether applying this to smaller scales could enable density in the image, by holding different forms and colours more closely. I first explored this with *Untitled* (Fig. 64), featuring faces in close proximity across the work. I then explored this scale (50cm x 38cm) with more abstract pieces, (Figs. 55, 57 and 59) and tested different densities and scales of form in the work, from more complex, closely related forms, shown in Fig. 55, to wider, more spacious forms in Figs. 57 and 59.

Through this, I found that it was possible to create density in the works at smaller scale (seen in Figs. 64 and 59), as well as to explore ranges of complexity within it.

In the most recent piece, *Untitled* (Fig. 65) I returned to working with the figure, and to a larger scale. This painting is in portrait format and the archer featured is a similar scale to the horse rider in the earlier work, as I wanted to develop shared concerns between them. This work, too, engages with different scales within the image (through tattoos). This enabled further exploration of complexity and of how changing scales also creates shifting states within the image.

I found that working with the figure at similar scales across the two larger figurative paintings did create more shared languages and connections between the works. Similarly, I think that working across scales within the painting also allows it to explore shifting states within the forms of the image.

WAVERING IN THE PAINTINGS

I think that the poured painting process has enabled me to develop work that engages with time on its own terms. I find this material engagement with time a valuable approach in the project because it brings the temporality of the making into the image. I also believe that working with other subjects and imagery (e.g. figures) offers the possibility of incorporating different registers and experiences of time into the work, which is what I have sought to develop in the most recent paintings. This has felt like a departure from my earlier work in the project and has opened new conversations about materiality in the practice.

In the earlier stages of the research my practice was closely connected to the subjects that I was approaching in the writing. For example, I began by working with imagery produced by James Hutton, discussed in Chapter Two. Later, I worked with a digitised version of Scheuchzer's

book, discussed in Chapter Four, within my practice. While I found that this approach enabled me to respond to questions of time, authorship, and narratives of history that these examples raised, I felt that the practice was limited by not having a form beyond it. It was this interest in finding new visualities, connected to materiality and distinct from the examples in the research that led to my initial work with resin, and eventually to my work pouring acrylic paint. I think this approach enables questions and explorations of time to be raised through the materials and processes, as well as through the imagery that has become part of the approach in the later works.

When I begin this work the paint is fluid, meaning it can move loosely and unpredictably across the surface. I think this is a space of possibility and creates a sense of wavering within the work. Fluidity has therefore become an important part of my working process and a key term within my practice. It has come to mean a form of painting in which even once it has solidified, the image of the paint's liquid state—its movement and the behaviour of the materials—is held and focus is drawn to it. The solidified paint retains a history, the time of making, and the movement of the paint. This is a fundamental aspect of the work's visuality and contributes to wavering within the practice.

I think that the cuts in the solidified paint create further focus on the fluidity in the work as they interrupt the image of the paint's movement, both disrupting the viewing and drawing attention to it.

Working with unstretched canvas or linen has also become a significant element of the practice and a part of creating wavering in the images. The looseness of the support enables it to be affected by gravity and the weight of the paint. It undulates, or wavers, inviting the viewer to consider its materiality and to encounter it as an object in space as well as picture plane. This

suggests different ways of engaging with the work and offers the possibility of shifting between them.

REFLECTIONS ON THE ABSTRACT WORKS

As outlined above, the first large-scale work on unstretched linen was *Untitled* (Fig. 53), in which paint is poured in small squares across the surface, which can suggest a patchwork. Unstretched, the linen retains the sense of a textile (and the paint alludes to fabric and to ways of working with it). This is a useful context in which to situate the work, as it is connected to traditions of women's labour and forms of making, but as the pieces are painted they operate outside of those traditions, although I think offer a reflection on them. I think this work resonates with working with textiles, and therefore speaks to this context in contemporary art—I am reminded of the work of Hannah Ryggen, and Mariana Castillo Deball (the latter discussed in Chapter Three)—as well as contemporary painting; and I am interested in continuing to develop work that can engage in dialogue with both contexts.[30]

I had the opportunity to show this work at Beaconsfield Gallery, London in 2024 as part of the Royal College of Art research exhibition, 'Chasma'. Showing the work in this space revealed a different way in which light reflects off the work, highlighting a different aspect to its materials.

[30] 'Hannah Ryggen', Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustri-Museum, exhibition, https://nkim.no/en/hannah-ryggen, [accessed 05 May 2025].

Fig. 53. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2021, acrylic on linen, 136.5cm x 99.5cm.

Fig. 54. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2021, acrylic on linen, 136.5cm x 99.5cm.

Through this piece I found that this approach offers a new engagement with notions of time that can come from outside the topics addressed in the thesis, but that sit in a meaningful relationship to it. I think that the different colours and forms of paint recall the concerns of geology and deep time in the research. This could be viewed as a kind of 'unconformity' (which as discussed in Chapter Two, speak to temporal disruptions in geological strata, and is a significant aspect of

Hutton's work at Siccar Point).[31] In this context, the piece speaks to questions of deep time that were important to the early stages of the research and finds new ways to develop them in the practice.

I therefore think this work captures the key themes of time, movement, change and instability that have been present throughout the project. It speaks geologically, suggests stone, strata and layers of time, accumulated or contorted, as well as to ways of shaping images and narratives of time, and therefore additionally refers to the work of Le Guin and other writers cited who are interested in nonlinear or alternative shapes of time. With this approach, I can therefore engage with questions of time in the practice from my own perspective, informed by the theoretical research I have undertaken.

I think these different themes in the work create a complex relationship to time within it. Through the poured paint it is possible to think about the time embedded in the material, the process of making, as well as its relationship to geology explored in the research.

Working with the paint as both liquid and solid also speaks to different states and is a return engagement with the material. While as a liquid there is chance and the unknown in the behaviour of the material, working with it once solidified is much more controlled and allows precise forms and angles to be cut that can contradict the behaviour of the liquid paint. As explored in the first test of the process, these patterns can be visually jarring or seem antagonistic to the shape cut. I think this becomes more notable on a larger scale of work. It also shows the imposition of my own intention for the image on the material and speaks to the layers of work that have taken place, suggesting the time of the work and the processes within it.

[31] Jones and Longridge, 'Various Types.'

Cutting into the paint shifts it from a pigment applied to the surface to a physical material that that holds its form. This process suggests collage or sculpture, but may also relate to ideas of inlay, in which thin but solid forms are cut and combined on a flat surface, (as well as patchwork, discussed above), and I think working on unstretched linen emphasised this for me in the process. My own process is significantly different as I am working with paint, it is applied wet, and the paint adheres directly to the canvas, which I think means it reads primarily as a painting, but I find the associations with other ways of working significant, and these were foregrounded for me in making this work. In the scale and detail of this piece, it felt possible to bring my voice to questions of time and making and connect themes across the research: the time and physicality of the making recalled the notion of handwork that I explore in Chapter Three, particularly in Liza Lou's work. I also found that the glossy surface of the paint, which can reflect light around it, seen in Fig. 54, interesting as I explored this way of working, as I thought this drew further focus on the materiality of the work, as well as its contemporary context.

I found the grid an interesting form in the context of an investigation of time. It offers a rhythmic, balanced structure and it demonstrates an idea of organising principles, as do the structures of time. However, after making this work, I was keen to explore and test other forms of imagery through this process.

In continuing to think about questions of time, I developed a piece that shows looping, meandering lines, swirling across the canvas, moving in different directions (Fig. 55). There is a literal linearity to this work, but it does not contain the ordered regularity of the grid in the earlier piece, and is therefore a departure from this structure, engaging with lines that are not constrained by a rigid formation. There are various directions in the piece: the different movements of the lines I have imposed on the work through the composition, as well as the

different and visually colliding lines created in the paint. I think this speaks to an idea of entangling explored earlier in the research, and further, that the multiple directions and forms within this image create a sense of density, and that different kinds of visuality can find themselves side-by-side in the work, which I think is interesting in the context of gathering. I therefore think it is possible to consider this painting process a means of gathering and seeking to hold different elements together in the shared space of the image, and to ask about relationships between them.

Fig. 55. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2025, acrylic on linen, 50cm x 38cm.

Fig. 56. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail),
2025, acrylic on linen, 50cm x 38cm.

In another piece (Figs. 57 and 58), one line is seen to create two loops, off centre, towards the bottom of the image. In contrast to the density of the lines in the previous work, I was interested in the quietness of this composition, but which still maintains a sense of movement and fluidity from the poured paint.

I went on to create another piece in which wider, wavy lines cut across the canvas diagonally (Fig. 59). As well as exploring different scales in this work, I also drew with pencil in some sections of the canvas, rather than paint it completely. I was interested in exploring different forms of mark making and relating the poured paint to another medium.

Fig. 57. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2025, acrylic on linen, 50cm x 38cm.

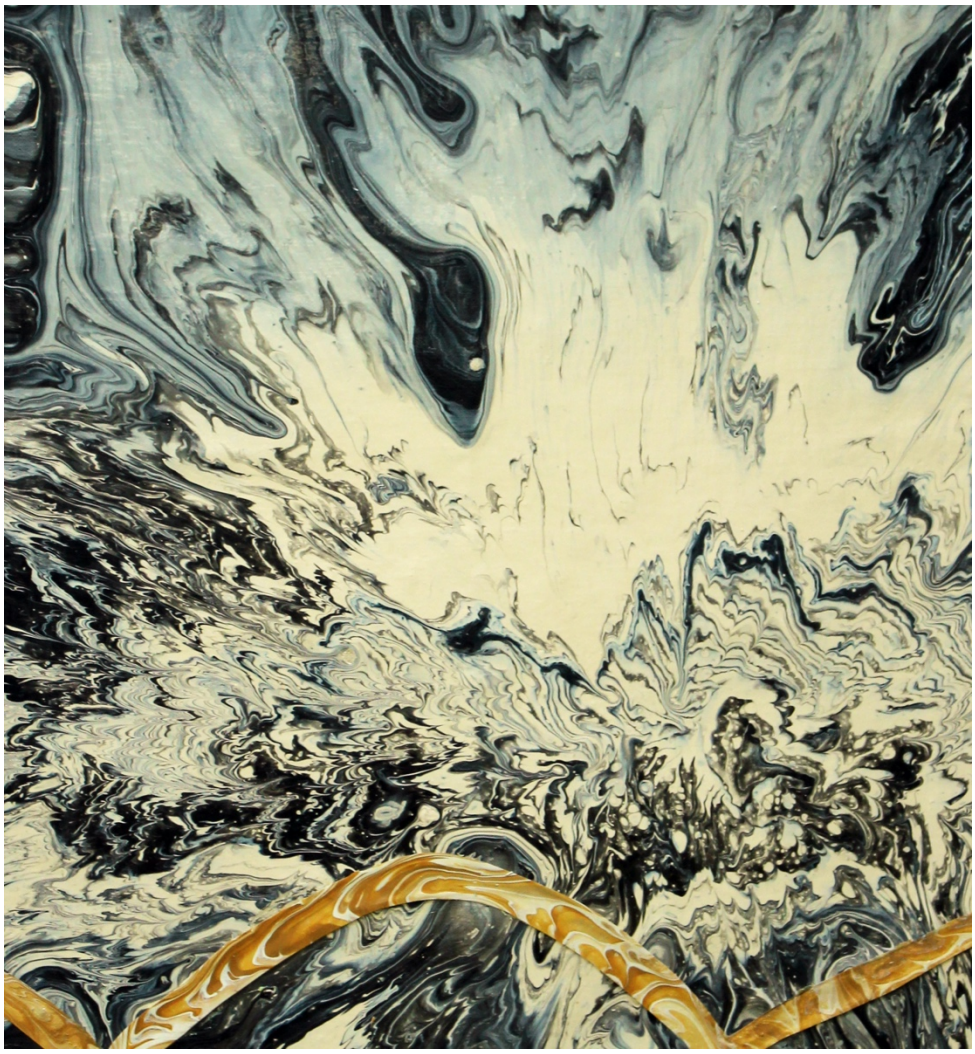

Fig. 58. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2025, acrylic on linen, 50cm x 38cm.

Fig. 59. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 50cm x 38cm.

Working across scale and density, these abstract pieces have enabled me to investigate questions of complexity, multitudes, movement, and associations between distinct elements in the work. They have offered ways of exploring instability and change through the sense of fluidity, the form of the lines, and the looseness of the unstretched canvas or linen.

EXPLORING FIGURATIVE WORKS IN THE PRACTICE

As I have considered the work of women artists through the research, I have examined how different experiences of time are explored through the work of art, how it can be a space in which different perspectives can be foregrounded and focus on the work women do. I wanted to ask how my own practice can engage with and develop these ideas. I also wanted to explore the possibilities of working with the figure through this mode of painting to investigate how it could engage representations, and what new perspectives and dialogues might be opened through it.

Given the importance of time in the research, as I began to explore working with the figure in the practice, I wanted this to also be able to connect with questions of time. As the poured painting process is concerned with the time of the materials, the speed of the movement of the paint, and the time of cutting the surface, I thought that working with longer ideas of time in the imagery would be a valuable way to investigate different frames of time in the work, bringing these into dialogue with each other. I also considered that as my research has focused on the remaking of images through time, that working with similar approaches in my practice would be a useful way to develop this. In this area of work, I therefore wanted to turn to art history, to pre-existing images of women and to work with and from these in the practice.

I also wanted to develop the work to engage with imagery that had not previously been explored in the research, to bring new visual languages and ideas into contact with the processes I was developing and explore what new questions or dialogues this might introduce. Through this area

of work, I was reminded of the diversity of imagery and representations of women in Spero's prints, how these are able to reach through time, and build connectivity across it in the space of the image. As I undertook my own investigation, I was particularly influenced by images of women I encountered on Ancient Greek ceramic vessels: those riding horses,[32] and an archer shooting an arrow with her feet.[33] The image of the horse rider that I referred to during the research is found on a 4th Century BC vessel from Apulia, detailing a woman on horseback with a weapon in her hand. While the image of the foot-archer is found on a 'pelike' (an amphora),[34] in the Gnathia style (also from the Apulia region, also 4th Century B.C).[35] In working with this imagery, I thought about the ways in which Ancient Greek art endures in contemporary culture: physically, as well as continuing to hold holding cultural significance. These are therefore images that endure, which offered another form of temporal engagement in the work.

Each of these images has informed a new painting in my practice (Figs. 60 and 65).

I was drawn to these images on vessels for their physicality. As the research has engaged with questions of instability and vulnerability, these images showed women in powerful, ambitious, vibrant, skilful, yet decidedly risky positions and pursuits that teeter and court imbalance. They can therefore be viewed as images that waver and I was interested in working with this sense of precarity to develop representations of wavering and relate it to the body and human experience.

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[32] 'Image 51', *Mythological Gallery,* https://www.maicar.com/GML/000PhotoArchive/051/slides/5113.html [accessed 8 February 2026].

[33] 'The Legacy of Acrobat Archery Across Time', Dec. 12, 2024 https://www.greecehighdefinition.com/blog/2024/12/12/the-legacy-of-acrobat-archery-across-time, [accessed 04 May 2025].

[34] 'Pelike', in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* [online], https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pelike [accessed 09 February 2026].

[35] 'Gnathian (pottery style)', in *Getty Research, Art & Architecture Thesaurus* Online, https://www.getty.edu/vow/AATFullDisplay?find=&logic=AND&note=&page=1&subjectid=300020174 [accessed 09 February 2026].

I was conscious of how this imagery on vessels often relays scenes of combat and the significance of the linearity of the arrow, which Le Guin also addresses in 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' when she discusses both the use of a spear and the 'unerring arrow'.[36] Further, it is significant that featuring on vessels, these images are also related to an act of gathering.

These contexts therefore related to concerns in the research, and I thought that working with them, focusing on the body in movement: extending, reaching, taking up space, as many of the figures in Spero's prints also do, offered a way to further develop questions of vulnerability, persistence, and precarious endurance in the image.

There is also tenacity (to refer to Lou) in what they are undertaking, both in determination and in the use of the hands (and feet). Yet, with all of this comes precarity: the possibility of imbalance and instability. The images therefore engage with different states and potentialities. They are concerned with balance while testing it and taking on risk.

I was therefore interested in how questions of instability and precarity were embodied in this imagery, and how they were simultaneously countered with positions of bravery and strength. They can be understood in all these terms simultaneously and therefore offer an idea of wavering. Through this area of the practice, the figurative in my work has come to mean representations of the body that engage with boldness and precarity at once. Bodies that can waver.

The first of the figurative pieces centres on a woman riding a horse. The scale of the figure, and the painting overall can give a sense of enveloping the viewer. This physicality felt important in

[36] Ursula Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (Grove Press, 1989), p. 166.

developing the work and creating a piece in which the viewer could relate to the figure, meeting it on their own terms.

The image of a horse and rider offered engagement with a long-established form in art history which therefore holds its own temporal dimension, and this is something I also wanted to explore in the context of the research. In my painting the rider is shown with her hair covering her face and as viewers we can see one ear and part of her nose. This firstly suggests something problematic in the image – is she is hindered by her hair when she is riding a horse? Her right arm is raised, which could be an emphatic gesture, but it is shown tangled in her hair. (Given the interest in the hand that I have developed through the research, I thought it relevant to explore the hand in the image, foregrounding it, but in a different context from other areas of the thesis.) These elements create emphasis on the hair in the image, which stands for an idea of femininity, but in this instant is obscuring her and presenting a challenge for her. Her action in the painting is therefore problematised. It presents risk, a sense of undoing, the possibility of not being in control. It offers a wavering image.

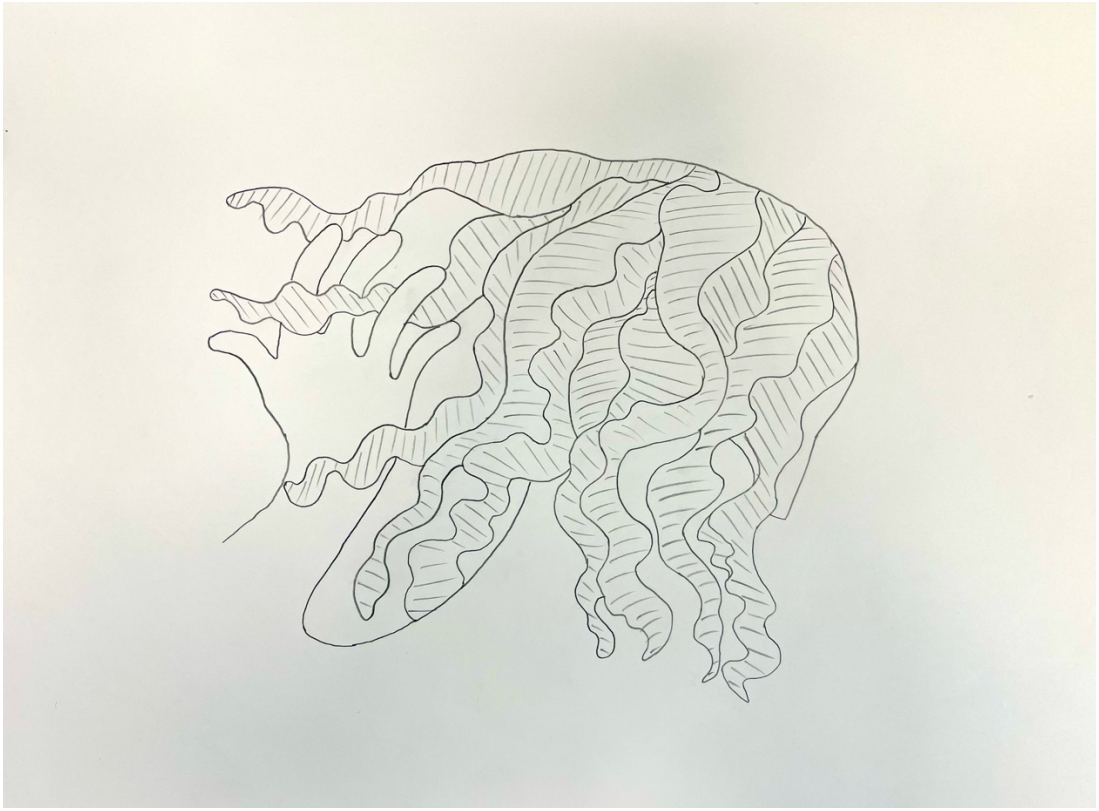

Fig. 60. Flora Bowden, sketch for *Untitled*, 2025, pencil on paper, 42cm x 59.4cm.
This sketch for *Untitled* 2025, depicting a horse rider shows the wavering of the hair in the work, how it covers most of the rider's face, as well as how her hand is tangled within the hair.

I have also sought to develop the question of animality the image holds by rendering the rider and horse in similar tones. The rider's hair, and the horse's mane and tail have the same colours, shown in wavy lines, and created through poured paint, which speaks to questions of linearity and wavering in the image. The horse's tail and mane are seen in movement, which suggests the time and possibility of speed in the image, and the tail becomes somewhat tangled. It also extends over the sides of the image that act as a border to it, introducing ideas of overspilling and being uncontained. Elsewhere, the rider's head and the horse's hoof also extend into the borders, also questioning the success of the distinct edges they present (expanding on the investigation of borders I began with connected use of colour, (see 'Testing scales and formats in the paintings').

The background consists of an array of different poured sections. These are based on a wavy grid, demonstrating a return to the grid (as developed in the earlier works), but in rejecting straight lines, the work simultaneously pushes against the grid, creating a tension in the image that causes it to waver. Recalling the earlier grid works, this juxtaposition of different poured sections similarly recalls the ideas of different strata and the geologic examined there. In this piece, this is further developed through the hair and imagery in the borders, identifying new ways in which these references that speak to deep time connect to different ideas in the painting.

Scales within the imagery also became important as the work developed. The side border images are also formed with wavy edges. These edges have alternating sections, which create a visual rhythm in the work. In these we see small motifs of a face and hair. On the left, these are upright, and on the right, (the direction of travel), they are upside down. The hair is the same colour as the horse and rider, and like the rider, there are no features on the faces. These images therefore echo the rider and can relate to her.

Scale and rhythm are again significant in the images of dogs featured on the blanket on the horse's back. Working alternately, the dogs face in different directions, and I was interested in how this asks the viewer to move and adjust in the act of looking. Further, while the dogs in the image are ostensibly an image on fabric (therefore an image within the image), some of them also appear to be jumping up at the rider, again asking about borders in the work, or registers of visuality.

Fig. 61. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 118.5cm x 154.5cm.

Fig. 62. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2025, acrylic on canvas, 118.5cm x 154.5cm.

Fig. 63. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2025, acrylic on canvas, 118.5cm x 154.5cm.

Fig. 64. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2025, acrylic on canvas, 118.5cm x 154.5cm.

The colours in the painting are all drawn from a related palette, meaning that there are similar colours to be found across the work and creates questions about the different sections of the piece, identifying edges, and the relationships between different elements. The lines and patterns within the paint add to this density and, I think, can create a sense of intensity, where questions of distinguishing, reading, and clearly demarcating become important in the work.

To continue to develop these themes in the practice, I created a smaller work (50cm x 38cm) in which poured sections of paint feature faces across the canvas. Their hair (including eyebrows) is rendered in the poured paint of the background, suggesting a way in which they are indistinguishable from their background, again asking about edges. The faces all cast sideways

glances, not meeting the viewer's eye, and seemingly looking beyond the canvas. They are all also open-mouthed, giving a sense of shock, anticipation, or heightened tension to the image.

Fig. 65. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2025, acrylic on linen, 50cm x 38cm.

I was interested in exploring new ways to connect the human form to the poured paint and in developing forms of representation through this work. I was also interested in working with multiple figures or a group in the image, again to speak to ideas of density, and how the painting can hold that.

Most recently, I have created another larger piece, in which a figure shoots a bow and arrow with her feet, also informed by my research into images on Ancient Greek vessels.[37] Like the horse-rider in my earlier work, in this work, this figure has her hair covering her face.

[37] 'The Legacy of Acrobat Archery Across Time', Dec. 12, 2024, https://www.greecehighdefinition.com/blog/2024/12/12/the-legacy-of-acrobat-archery-across-time, [accessed 04 May 2025].

Fig. 66. Flora Bowden, *Untitled*, 2025, acrylic on canvas, 141.5cm x 108.5cm.

Fig. 67. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2025, acrylic on canvas, 141.5cm x 108.5cm.

Fig. 68. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2025, acrylic on canvas, 141.5cm x 108.5cm.

Fig. 69. Flora Bowden, *Untitled* (detail), 2025, acrylic on canvas, 141.5cm x 108.5cm.
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In addition to questions of physicality and precarity, I was interested in the dexterity the archer demonstrates, and the relationship to time and linearity that the symbol of the arrow carries. It was intriguing that the figure is upside-down, disrupting the sense of order (which echoes the motifs of the head in the border images in the earlier work with the horse and rider). The emphasis placed on her hands (and feet) speak to themes of the hand explored in this research, as well as the work they do. I have also painted tattoos over her body. This was to investigate

other forms of communication in the image and through the figure. As with the horse rider, it establishes different scales within the piece, inviting the viewer to move between them, creating shifting states and wavering within the image. Different scales can also suggest a power imbalance and therefore contribute to the painting as a wavering image.

In this work I have painted the body and the background in textured, visible brush strokes that sit alongside the poured paint. This was to explore how different forms of mark making could offer different languages or voices in the image, and how they share space. While they are created in different ways, both forms of painting retain a sense of the paint's fluidity. Once solidified, the paint holds this form, still conveying a history of the behaviour of its materials.

In the figurative work I am interested in how these questions of materiality and the time they hold intersect with and contribute to the other narrative elements that the image conveys. I think the textured nature of the brushstrokes in this image, both on the figure and in the background, can suggest qualities of stone and therefore speak to materiality, as well as to the research into archaeology and deep time conducted earlier in the project. Specifically, the suggestion of stone in this work can recall the work of Tilley, discussed in Chapter Three, in which the images' relationship to the stone surfaces into which they were carved is significant. Further, the suggestion of stone here can refer to ideas of solidity, permanence or weight that are interesting to consider in relation to themes of the research and painting.

The painting processes I am employing in this area of the practice are therefore seeking to engage with questions of time and materiality in numerous forms: both in the direct and immediate materiality of the work, as well as in the connections it draws to other materials, histories, ideas, and questions of deep time.

As the practice continues, I will develop the themes that this work explores. This way of working with poured paint focuses on its materiality, a strong physical engagement from cutting it, the time involved in working with it in both liquid and solid states, the tension of chance and control within this, the importance of edges, boundaries, as well as overspilling them. And the possibility for this image-making to speak to different forms of representation, across scales, in the work. I am also keen to explore opportunities for exhibiting this work and particularly interested to think about how new developments in my practice might operate in different institutional contexts.

Additionally, in working with poured paint and visible brush strokes in my exploration of figurative imagery—paintings that investigate instability and endurance simultaneously—the work engages with different registers and questions of time, vulnerability and change. I will continue to develop these different approaches to time and wavering through the practice as I proceed.

I have found the painter Helen Johnson's reflections on her own practice to be useful as I consider the future directions of my own work. Johnson has said of her work:

> I've become interested in developing a more painterly language, or a language that deals with the materiality of paint as a way to set images up in tension with one another…By preserving some spaces of flatness and anti-gestural spaces within a composition and then juxtaposing those with much more visceral, material treatments, so there's this push and pull that goes on between what is privileged in a composition versus what's privileged in terms of texture and hopefully creates particular ways of encountering images and producing this play between the images where they can sort of compete with one another. And I find that taking the works off the wall and keeping them unstretched, it produces a kind of

> provisionality in the work. It has a little bit less authority than a stretched work on a wall, I think.'[38]

Like Johnson, I am interested in the materiality of paint in the work. I think there is also tension in my work, and in my case, from the different elements and forms of paint sitting side-by-side. I feel that these, too, create a sense of 'push and pull', which can also create a way of engaging with the image. I also contend that in my work the push and pull is a form of wavering, shifting between states or areas of focus and asking the viewer to engage with these.

Similarly, too, I am interested in what happens when my canvases are unstretched. I want this to create a 'provisionality' in the work. This has its own relationship to time. The thinness of the canvas, which becomes evident in the work, also speaks to being fragile and somewhat unstable, and as discussed above, can quite literally be seen as wavering, especially as it holds the weight of the paint. The idea of authority that Johnson raises in relation to unstretched paintings is interesting: it suggests the fixity and stillness of a stretched canvas has a different relationship to power, and it is therefore interesting to be able to interrogate this through the mobility and thinness of the work. Additionally, I think that keeping a work unstretched retains a clear connection to the work as existing on fabric and offers a different way of engaging with it as an object, as well as an image. This is also a kind of tension that I find productive in the work, and that I think enables changeable and therefore, wavering, engagements with it.

FINAL REFLECTIONS ON POURED PAINTINGS IN THE PRACTICE

This area of the practice engages with themes of wavering and questions of time in various ways. I contend that these pieces are wavering images that engage with and ask about change through

[38] 'Helen Johnson Introduces "Women's Work"', [YouTube video] Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, 26 Oct 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehLcLVbIQ0Y> [accessed 07 May 2024].

time, uncertainty, instability, and precarious endurance in the image. In the figurative works I think these themes are also explored in relation to the body and lived experience.

I think this is achieved through several forms in the work. Firstly, that they hold multiple registers of time within them and engage with different depths of time. The poured painting process captures the time of the work's making and retains an image of the paint in its liquid state, always recalling the work's own history. This sense of liquidity suggests a moment frozen in time and a suspended state in the work. The paint is acrylic and therefore dries quickly, meaning this transition from liquid to solid takes place shortly after it is poured, suggesting that the image captured in the paint is fleeting. I think this is a visualisation of wavering, of being changeable, impressionable, mobile, and restless. The different forms of mark making I have also recently introduced alongside the poured paint offer a different visual language in the work, also concerned with fluidity.

Cutting the paint once it has solidified also engages with time in various ways. As discussed above, working with the paint in both its liquid and solid states is a re-engagement with the material after a period of time. It speaks directly to shifting states in the image as the surface of the paint captures the image of its liquid form, while the cuts to it speak to its solidity. The cuts through the paint also disrupt the fluid forms in its surface, which I think create tension in the work and present a disturbance, a jolt, in the process and the time of looking. Additionally, the process of cutting the painted sections takes time and I therefore think that the work holds the time of its making and that it is possible to engage with this, and the detail of the marks in the works in viewing them.

In the two larger figurative works, the women featured are informed by my research into art historical representations of women, creating a reference to a long span of time in the work,

which sits alongside the shorter times of the movement of the paint and processes of making the work itself. I have also sought to work with figures in forms that are at once strong and vulnerable, that risk instability, to explore ideas of wavering and precarious endurance in the image. I therefore see these figures as embodying shifting states. Combined with the process of cutting sections of paint, which I think create a sense of a patchwork in the painting, I think these aspects of the work speak to histories in relation to women, can suggest forms of making traditionally carried out by women, and therefore to experiences of time and history from these perspectives.

I think this idea of patchwork in the painting, which relates the work to histories and materiality outside of painting, is a source of wavering in the image, as the viewer may consider different materials and forms of making, shifting between them in the process of looking. As discussed above, I think the movement and sense of fragility of the unstretched canvas also contribute to a sense of wavering in the piece, as it can seem tentative and less fixed than a stretched canvas might. It is also more readily encountered as an object in space, as well as a picture plane, which invites the viewer to consider it in different ways, again, with the possibility of shifting between these perspectives. This is accentuated by the glossy surface of the paint, which can reflect light and therefore also engage with the space and the immediate context of the work, even as the viewer considers the image.

I therefore think that in the processes I have developed, the work engages ideas of time and wavering in different ways, creating images that are composite, that ask the viewer to consider different registers of time, different forms of precarity, instability, and endurance. Through working with these multiple approaches in the space of a single image, I think the elements create a wavering image.

The research in this chapter has taken on themes identified in earlier areas of work—questions of presence and absence, 'sticky' and 'slippery' images—to move the research into materiality in relation to time (explored firstly through geology and scholarship on time) and focus more on questions of viscosity. Through this these questions of time have addressed the behaviours of the material in the work: its movement and change. This has informed developments in the practice, where poured painting processes are used to capture the sense of liquidity in the paint, and are then cut, which emphasises the solid state of the work and therefore, its material change. This process, which began as a means of investigating time through the material of the painting has also enabled me to explore questions connected to traditions of women's forms of making, and the time of the making itself, which have also been important themes in the research and allow the piece to engage with the time of the work, as well as different histories, ideas, or states of wavering (such as in the figure) that it references.

CONCLUSION

This research explored how the image can engage with complexities of time, participate in the production of ideas about time, and enable us to examine questions of vulnerability, provisionality and change through it. It developed the concept of the wavering image as a new means of better understanding the full richness of the interaction and interdependence between the image and time. It gathered a body of material from a broad range of contexts to refine the idea of wavering and demonstrate its critical and practice-based possibilities. This body of work shows how the concept of the wavering image enables new visualities in contemporary artistic practice. The process of gathering shaped my artistic practice, which pursued questions of shifting states, variability and materiality in the image that in this project ultimately derived from Hutton's geological investigations, but which were refined and expanded as my work progressed.

Working with Mitchell's expanded definition of the image, this research has interrogated examples of wavering images across forms and disciplines. The importance of this approach has been that it has enabled consideration of images engaged with time drawn from diverse areas. This transtemporal, multidisciplinary approach revealed valuable connections, associations and shared interests among texts and artworks rarely brought into relation. The material cited in this research, from the history of science, academia, visual culture, and technology, is unified by its interest in, or possibility of operating as, what Pierre Nora terms 'institutions of memory'.[1] That is to say that this research has identified a body of works that all recognise their position within time, their historicity, but also share an interest in producing ideas about time.

[1] Pierre Nora, 'Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire', *Representations* 26 (1989), pp. 7-24 (p. 14).

Looking at the image through time foregrounded questions of instability, provisionality and what might be known by privileging these sometimes-overlooked aspects of the image. Through this area of the research the project found the concept of the wavering image to be a tool for thinking about the image in time and for critically engaging with the wider social and cultural contexts that shape it. The concept of the wavering image therefore offers a temporal and material approach to the image, a means of looking, an invitation to think about images with and through time.

Ursula Le Guin's concept of 'gathering', developed in her theory of the 'carrier bag' provided a rationale and methodology for my work. With its associated ideas of holding and keeping close, gathering is simultaneously rooted in the work of the hand and a connection to material objects and, through Le Guin's argument, nonlinearity and feminist politics. The gathering in this research is concerned with bringing together different ideas, artworks, and texts, often although not necessarily by women, within each chapter, and in developing the relationships between them. Each work I have cited has informed my approach to my practice. Indeed, I have come to understand the diversity of the material with which I have worked as another expression of wavering – the research has moved between and among times, forms, disciplines, and institutions, seeking connections, shared interests and complimentary perspectives.

This research therefore presents three interlinked contributions. It developed a methodology for imaged-based research informed by Le Guin, shaped by current debates on the environment, time and feminism; it refined the concept of the wavering image as a tool for thinking about the relationship between the image and time, in visual and critical cultures; and it explored attendant

ideas of temporality, materiality, variability and vulnerability in the practice, which was shaped by both the methodology and the conceptual work set out in this project.

A key finding from studying wavering images in time was the significance of materiality in relation to the malleability and instability of the image. Through Hutton's work, ideas of time itself were stretched and elongated, and the material of geology showed different time periods colliding into each other. The scholarship of Tamm and Olivier and Morton likewise speaks to the materiality of deep time, and how this is a part of the present. Haraway further makes the case for thinking about time materially: 'the thick, fibrous, and lumpy "now"'.[2]

In the work of Tilley, different image-makers, and processes, at different times led to varied images of and at the same site. This is a powerful example of how cultural and critical approaches delimit the possibilities of the image, what and how they can represent, what is known of and through them. In the digitisation of Scheuchzer's book, the process of its remaking led to the images literally being altered: distorted, cropped, warped. The image was shown to be malleable and through this, it became possible to think about the mobility and pliability of pigment that, in its original printed form, would be decidedly fixed and unchanging.

Time and its perception and representation have been central concerns throughout this project, and questions of materiality and tactility, often in relation to the human hand, have emerged as important themes as my research and practice progressed. The significance of the human hand emerged in my reading of Le Guin but was transformed by the presence of the digits in the

[2] Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016), p. 206.

digital images of Scheuchzer's book. These themes of touch and material encounter have provided lenses through which I have engaged the notions of time I have studied, such as those of Aleida Assmann (time as 'out of joint') and Haraway. I have explored these insights and drawn connections between different critics, philosophers, and scientists, to bring their work into relation with artworks and establish a theoretical frame that has shaped and sustained my own practice. Questions of materiality, tactility, and contact have therefore offered means of engaging with time both qualitatively, experientially and creatively.

The image has been the fulcrum around which my research and practice has turned in this project. Recalling Didi-Huberman's quote of Deleuze cited in Chapter One that states 'the image itself is a set of temporal relations from which the present simply flows', my work has been concerned with a multiplicity of times and experiences of it, in the space of the image.[3]

My interest in time initially developed from research on the history of deep time and the work of James Hutton but transformed as my work progressed. The connection between theories of deep time and contemporary feminist artwork is that I saw relations in the way both are defined by visibility and invisibility, recognition and misrecognition, normative and non-normative social thought. The connection between James Hutton's *Theory of the Earth* and, for example, Elizabeth Price's *A Restoration* or Liza Lou's *Kitchen*, is that the artists, like Hutton, ask their viewers to reframe their perceptions of time (the time of the museum for Price, the time of the domestic world and of creating the artwork, for Lou), they ask their viewers to take account of invisible forces, to consider how what we see is shaped by historical habits or pressures we don't.

[3] Gilles Deleuze, quoted by Georges Didi-Huberman in 'Constructing Duration', lecture at the Architectural Association, London, 20 January 2006, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZrhYrZAqmc [accessed 19 August 2020]. G. Deleuze, 'Le cerveau, c'est l'écran' (1986), in *Deux Régimes de fous. Textes et entretiens*, 1975-1995, ed. D. Lapoujade (Minuit, 2003), p. 270.

The role of the hand in relation to materiality took on additional significance in Chapter Two, through Timothy Morton's description of witnessing how holding a stone prompted a sense of vertigo, and Christopher Tilley's suggestion that in archaeological fieldwork to 'to "see" a design is to simultaneously feel it, to trace its outlines with the fingers'.[4] Again, then, the seen is related to the unseen. In both these examples I was struck by the sense of materiality and tactility affecting ideas of time and offering a means of knowing and understanding.

Some of the contemporary works by women artists discussed in these chapters also engage with these questions of materiality: the droopy, tangled behaviour of Eva Hesse's latex-dipped rope in *Right After* disrupts the orderly linearity of time that might be implied by its title, while Issy Wood's paintings on velvet introduce a new kind of physicality and into the representation or refraction of time. Lou's *Kitchen*, meanwhile, refers to the significance of close and sustained material engagement. These practices thus offer an exploration of materiality while also conveying perspectives on, and experiences of, time.

As this suggests, while the early focus of the work was on Hutton, as the project progressed, the work of women artists and feminist practice became a key context of my work. I identified a body work by contemporary women artists working in a range of media, among them Lubaina Himid, Mariana Castillo Deball, Camille Henrot and Elizabeth Price, whose work was united by their interest in different temporal perspectives. The manner in which these artists engage with institutional collections and histories, work with different temporal regimes and

[4] Tilley, *Material Culture and Text,* p. 179.

institutional forms of knowing, while acknowledging the political contexts and consequences of their work, spoke eloquently to and offered a way of developing the ideas that had been generated by my research into Hutton and the history of deep time. Their work makes possible new framings of time, new ways of structuring it, often in between the personal and the social, the individual and the institutional, and offered a means of reframing my own practice.

Ideas about material experimentation in relation to time and personal perspective or lived experience that shaped the development my practice were explored further in Chapter Five, first through the ideas of 'sticky' and 'slippery' images introduced by Mieke Bal's writing and the exhibition 'Mixing It Up', both of which speak to notions of viscosity in the artwork, and how, through this, we can see time as an active agent within it. These ideas of materiality were developed through Lauren Elkin's *Art Monsters*, looking at the work of Lynda Benglis and Genieve Figgis, for whom materiality, the sense of movement and shifting states, are central concerns and are closely connected to the body, offering feminist perspectives on these questions of mobility, chance, and change in the physicality of the work. This too exerted a strong influence on the directions of my practice.

My research has revealed different perspectives on, and modes of engagement with, ideas of time in contemporary artistic practice, from challenges to linear frames of time to new ways of thinking about materiality, history, memory and lived experience. Over the course of the research, I have responded to images from both Hutton's and Scheuchzer's works in my practice and undertaken material experimentations to further my engagement with time and wavering in the image. As part of this work, I began to develop and refine my interest in the ways in which materiality can contribute to perceptions and experiences of time. Through this, in the later

stages of the research, I explored and developed my own ways of working, through pouring painting processes, that are concerned with how material behaves in the work, and the notions of change, chance and instability that they embody. All this culminated in a way of working that is increasingly concerned with matters of tenacity, endurance, instability and tensions between presence and absence, and how these ideas can be explored through the materiality of my practice.

Experimenting with form, scale, the time and behaviours of the materials in my practice enabled me to develop a visual language to engage with the complexities and variabilities of time and the material vulnerabilities of the image. Working through pouring paint allowed me to combine different senses of movement, suggest the different times of the material of the work, and offered ways to examine questions of vulnerability, provisionality and change through it. This approach connects different senses of time within a piece and offers a way to investigate this multiplicity. The time of making is made visible in the work, and it therefore preserves and presents a time that is not singular but plural, a time that is new but also holds traces of past times, allows past times to endure.

I began exploring this way of painting to engage with the ideas of time I had explored in my research. In the process of cutting the surface of the paintings, working with different sections, dealing with the looseness of the fabric, and reflecting on the time involved in the making, a connection began to emerge with some of the feminist concerns that were by that point threaded through my research.

This element of my practice began with experimenting with abstract images and proceeded to develop figurative works that draw on art historical images of women, which introduced different and longer histories into the paintings. These other histories and temporalities sit alongside, shape, and are shaped by, the time of the materials and making processes. The precarity and potential instability in the figures with which I have worked introduce an additional possibility of wavering into the pieces.

Through these approaches, this element of my practice has therefore revealed and pursued a connected set of questions about time, material behaviours, the role of the hand in making, traditions of women's work, historical representations, as well as questions of tenacity, endurance and precarity related to these. These are collectively addressed in the space of the painting, enabling these different themes to be examined, their interrelationships to be considered, and each express an idea of wavering.

Over the course of this research, I have established a practice that connects questions and complexities of time, and the variability of the image in time, to materiality, to feminist perspectives, ideas of instability, vulnerability and resilience. I have done this by working with the time and movement of poured paint and cutting into its solidified form, making the temporality of my image making visible, a temporality that is nonlinear, fluid, complex. Working with both figurative imagery and abstract forms, as well as unstretched linen and canvas to further draw focus to the materiality of the work, I have developed a visual language that speaks of and to the critical concerns that have shaped my research and driven my work.

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