

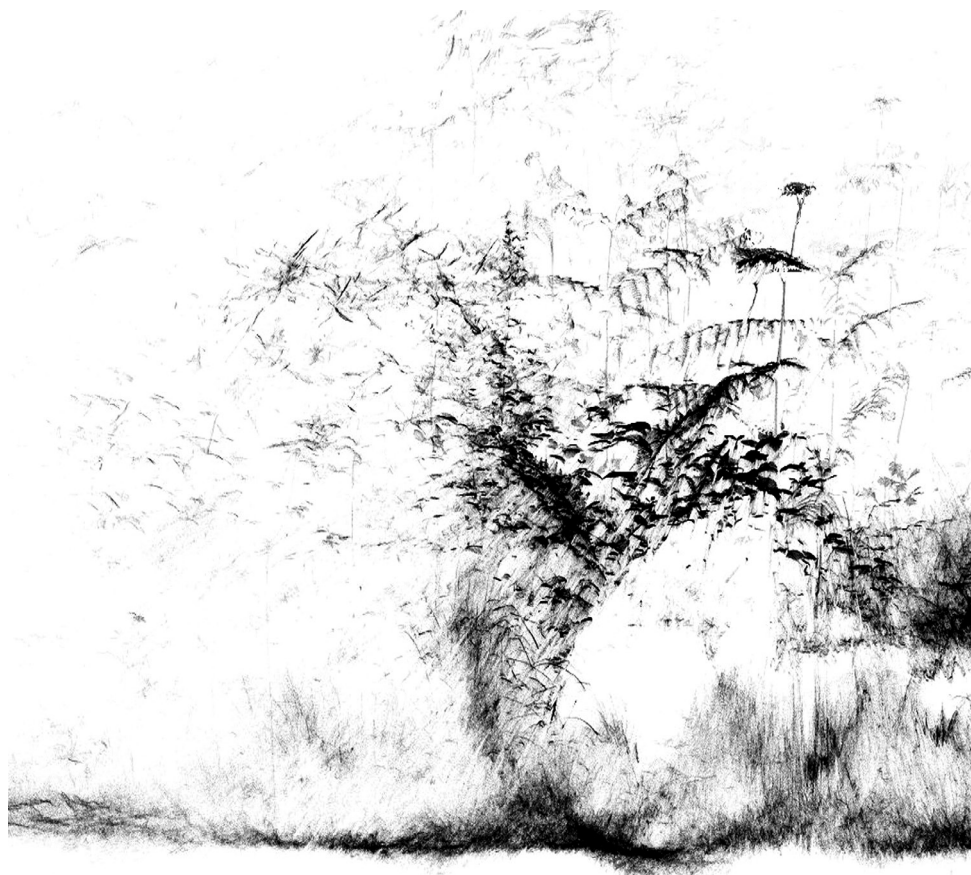
The intersection between our digital and aesthetic worlds is where I situate my work: a hybrid space where technological controls meet the emotion and memory of the human experience. By accepting the hybridity of this space I allow myself to weave technological capabilities into images of liminal landscapes. My work is not a description of what is seen but a visualisation of the possibility to explore and the potential of what might be. My work is an attempt to go beyond the static moment and create an opportunity to explore what is beyond the image presented and bring to it a new set of experiences and memories.

I offer a link between the senses, thinking and seeing - elemental components of what is to be human.

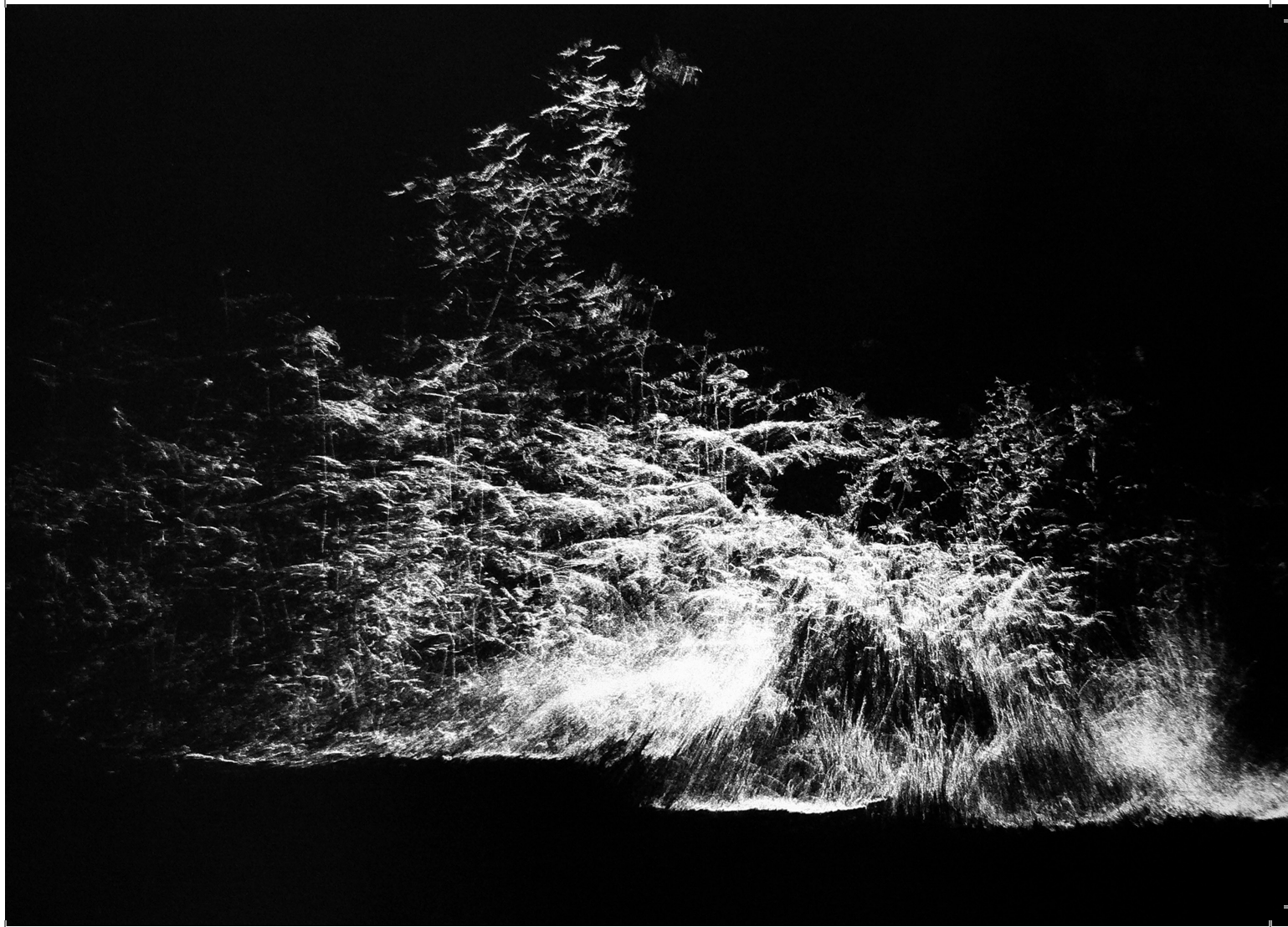
Tracy Hill





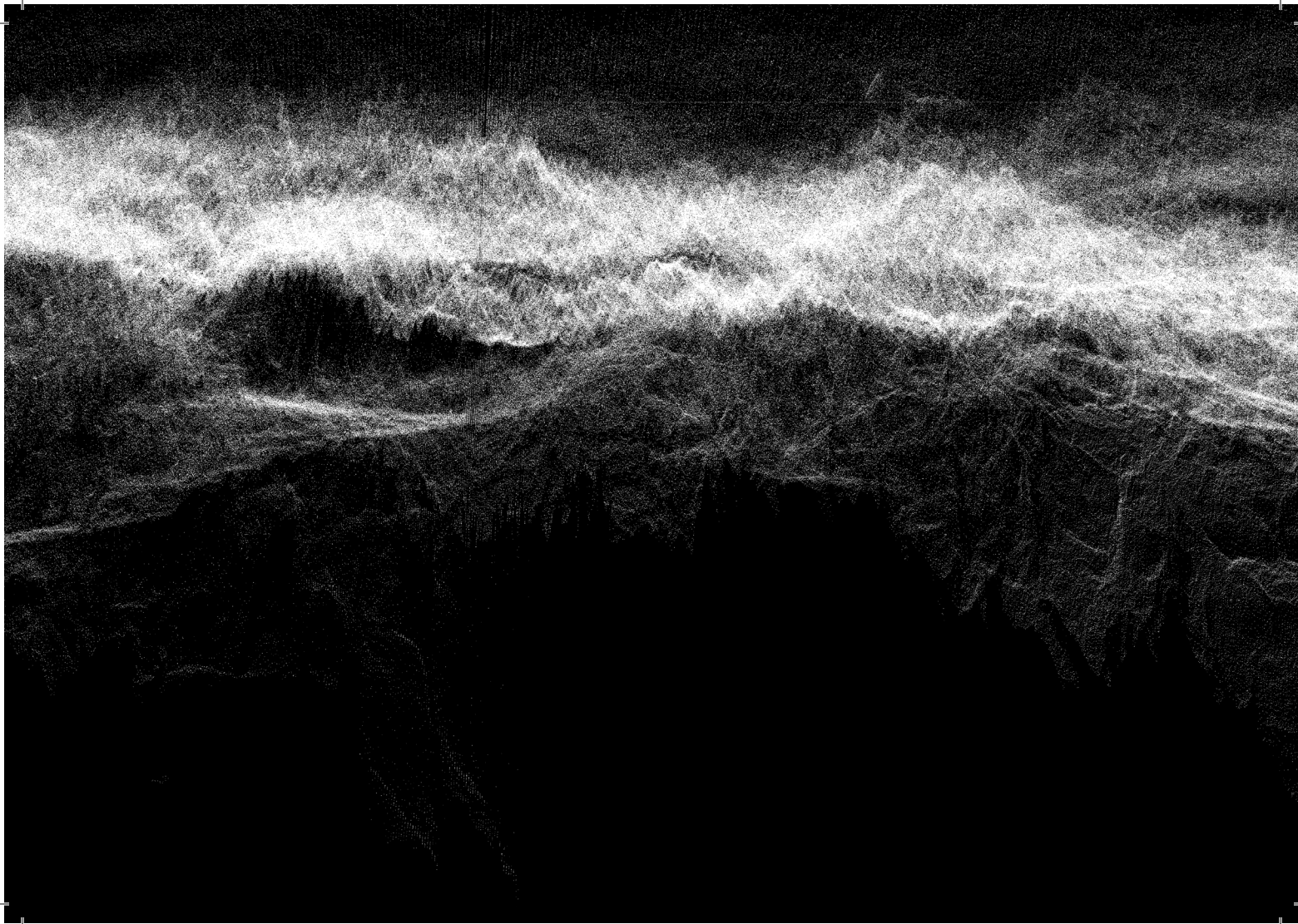


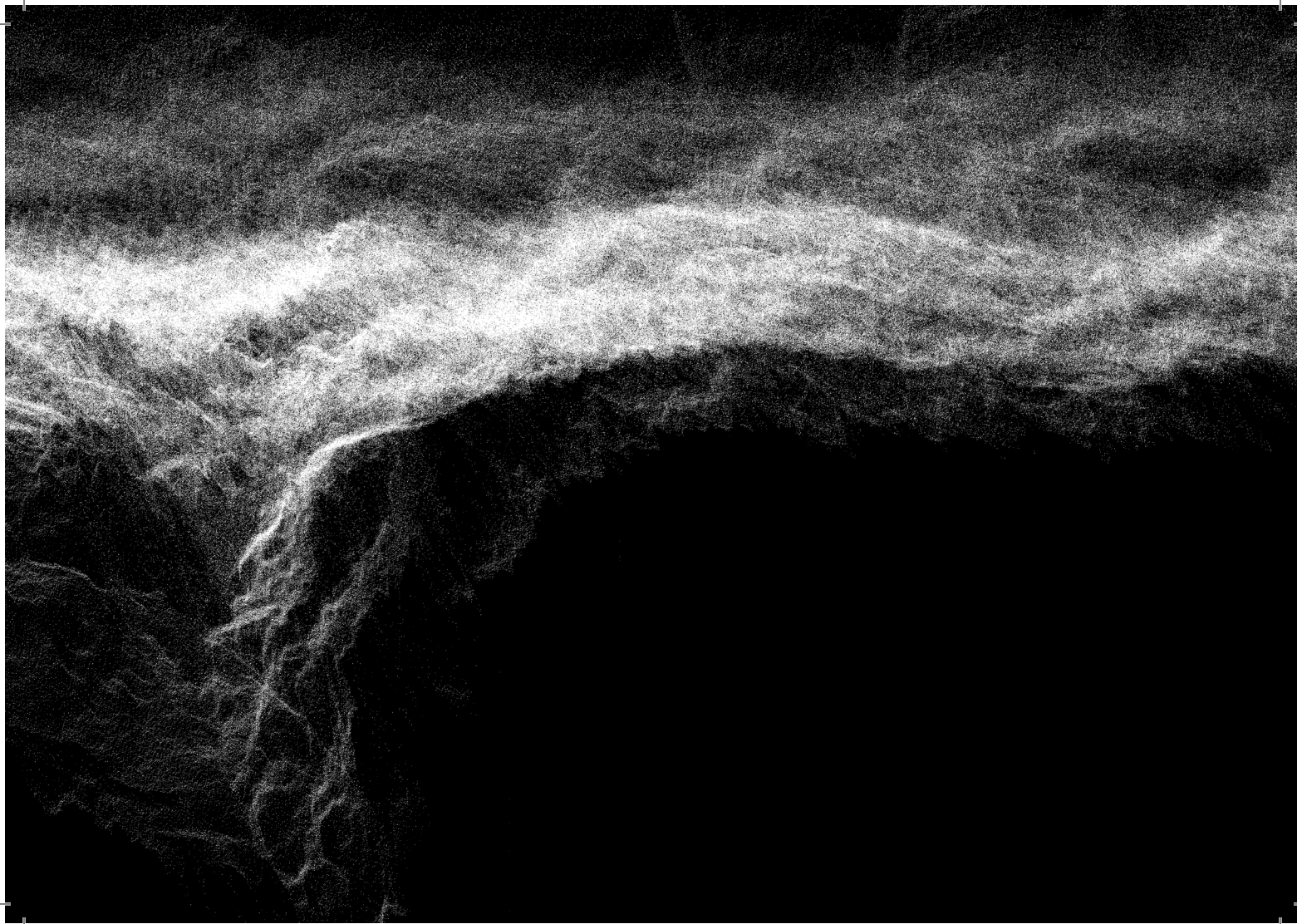




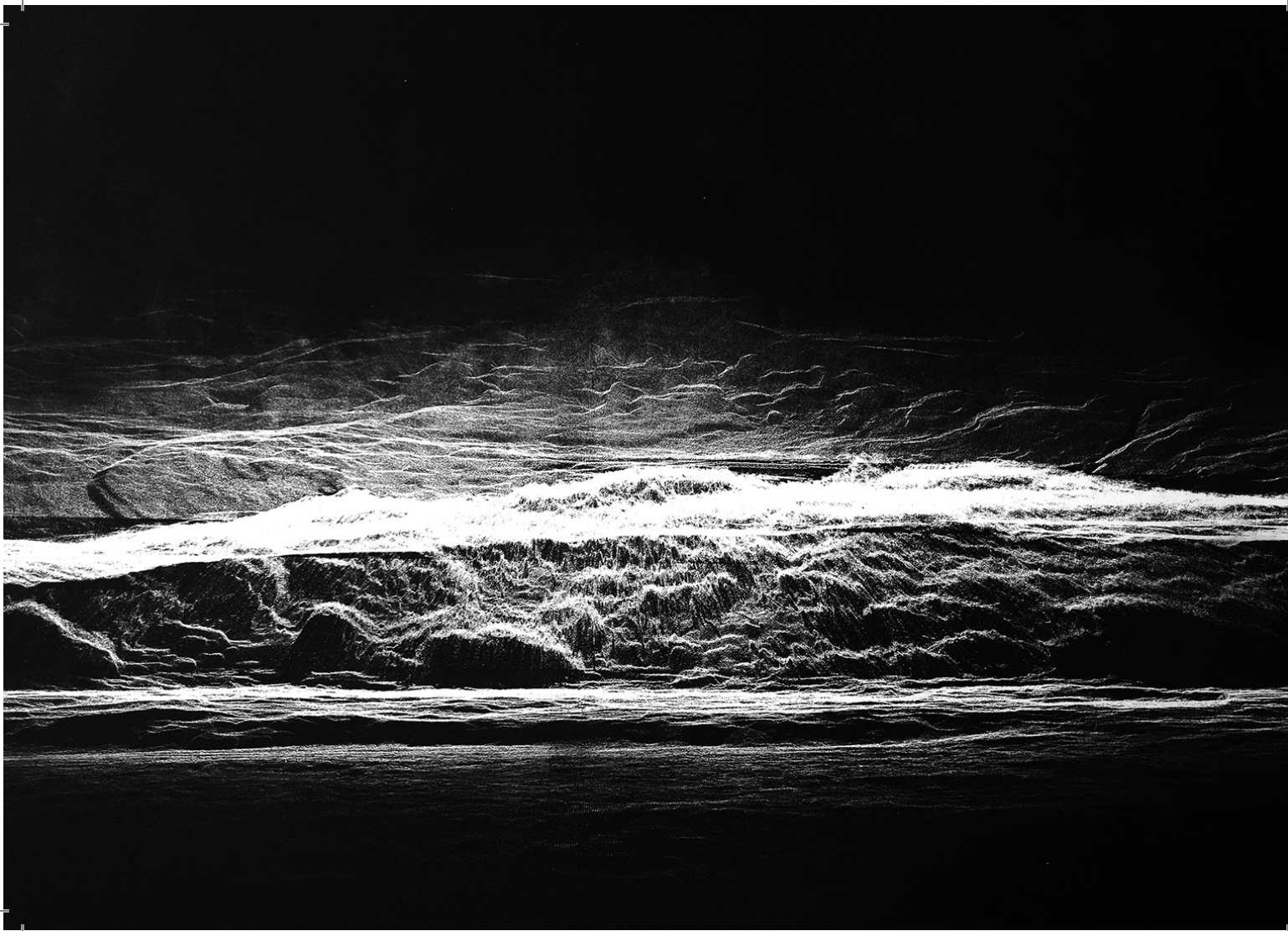


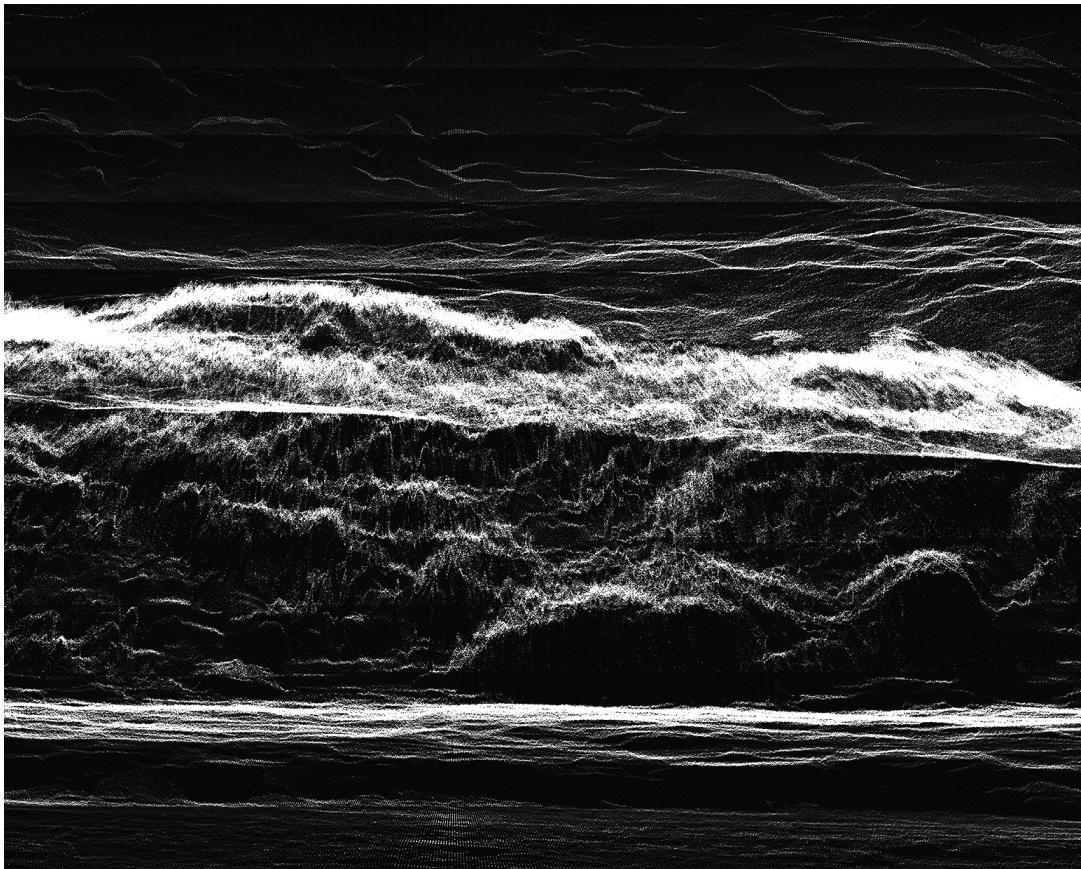
















*Memories, then, are generated along the paths of movement  
that each person lays down in the course of his or her life. <sup>1</sup>*

Tim Ingold

## **Deciduous Drawings | Insoluble Ink**

[Walking in Wetlands with Tracy Hill]

An essay by Deborah Stevenson

In response to

## **Sensorium and Matrix of Movement**

Projects by Tracy Hill 2014 – 2017

## ELEMENTAL UNCERTAINTY

*No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he is not the same man.*

Heraclitus (panta rhei) in Plato's Cratylus

Mutability is at the core of Tracy Hill's practice. From a pale floor strewn with powdered fragments of crow-black charcoal, remnants of the artist's labour, the eye is drawn up and across the gallery wall from which a vast and dynamic grayscale mural, vibrating with motes of carbon dust, threatens to engulf the viewer.

Hill's explosive wall drawings are forceful in their impact, animating otherwise tranquil spaces, suggestive of a temporary lull following an outburst of bustling activity. The works are poised, charging the atmosphere with a sensation that the artist, although absent, might return at any moment, gather up her charcoal and continue her purposeful task.

Closer inspection reveals an organic, sinuous tapestry rendered of tightly controlled tonal marks, intricately drawn by hand. There has been no feverish activity; the

work is measured and meticulous yet palpably friable and ultimately transient. No fixative holds the image: a careless movement, gust of air or the sweeping brush of a thoughtless cleaner will obliterate days or weeks of painstaking industry. These are deciduous drawings and their extinction is part of Hill's plan.

On another wall, vast, enigmatic prints, each a metre wide, describe a horizon across the gallery space. Velvet-dark ink draws the viewer through the paper's soft, mossy surface and deep into its viscous chambers. Time spent with these images produces the curious sensation of two dimensions becoming three or four, suggesting the possibility of walking through each picture plane and into a wild hinterland of indeterminate spatiotemporal location.

Compellingly elemental yet ambiguous in subject matter, the works ignite a tense uncertainty in the room. Where are these places, what are they? Imagination conjures dark mountain landscapes rising from mist-pooled valleys which melt and shift into vaporous cloud formations, advancing tornados, dust storms and tidal waves.

A sense of displacement occurs readily in the presence of Hill's otherworldly panoramas; equilibrium is challenged. The viewer is provoked to suspend disbelief and enter into a dialogue with the works not just as representations of geological or meteorological phenomena but as post-apocalyptic landscapes or sites of supernatural haunting. These images are perplexing, uncanny; their meaning is fugitive. This is precisely Hill's intention.

Place, landscape is not reducible to co-ordinates on a map or a digital data set. It is a complex hybrid of myth and memory, an amalgam of all we have ever known, can never find out and of long abandoned ways of living. Landscape is an aggregation of shadows, reflections, tremors and textures; it contains traces of our ancestors, lost narratives and unimaginable futures.

It is the unseen, untold, undocumented aspect of landscape that occupies Hill's imagination and this is what she seeks out as she walks the inhospitable edge lands of England and far beyond. Despite the ethereal

beauty of her renderings, it is not the sublime or the picturesque that draws Hill's attention, rather she is concerned with the liminal: endangered wetlands, tidal river estuaries, ancient pathways and plundered mosses. Her interest lies in communicating the forgotten possibility of a deeper and more intuitive connection with the earth beneath our feet and she offers us her artwork as a thought-provoking, sensory response to the places she encounters through walking.

## A BALANCE BETWEEN BEING AND DOING

*Like the Stations of the Cross, the labyrinth and maze offer up stories we can walk into to inhabit bodily, stories we trace with our feet as well as our eyes.* <sup>2</sup>

Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust*

Tracy Hill's research takes her on slow journeys through untamed places, from the Hunter River wetlands of New South Wales to the saltmarshes of the Mersey Estuary and its nearby peat bogs.

Volunteer work with Lancashire Wildlife Trust on the protected remnants of historic Chat Moss has imbued Hill with a fierce respect for the treacherous mires of North West England. She has come to know their geological and social histories <sup>3</sup>, their wild beauty and the perils of navigating their hazardous terrain. A solitary gleaner, Hill roams the mosses, their wide expanses of flat, boggy ground devoid of way-markers, hedgerows or visible pathways and bordered by vague margins of distant woodland. Divided only by unseen drainage ditches, vast fields of black peat and swathes of unyielding, sabre-sharp sedges conceal dark pools of

acidic water, home to burrowing tics and stinging horse-flies. Mists and fogs gather over these eerie landscapes in winter months. They are places of mystery, dread and folklore, watery tombs for the embalmed remains of the soulless and the slaughtered. <sup>4</sup>

In a letter describing the "County of Lancaster" in his record of "A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain" between 1724 and 1726, Daniel Defoe wrote of Chat Moss:

*The surface, at a distance, looks black and dirty, and is indeed frightful to think of; for it will bear neither horse nor man, unless in an exceeding dry season, and then so as not to be travelled over with safety... What nature meant by such a useless production, is hard to imagine; but the land is entirely waste, except... for the poor cottager's fuel, and the quantity used for that is very small.* <sup>5</sup>

Yet the same land described by Defoe as ‘entirely waste’ can be tranquil and soothing to the senses, muffled, as it has been for ten thousand summers, by pillowy folds of soft, green sphagnum moss and lulled by the murmur of swishing, downy cotton grass. A place where the glaucous leaves of sweet bog myrtle send a heady scent into air flecked with the luminous blue of rare marsh gentian and opalescent flashes of damsel fly wings and where yielding groundcover quivers with darting lizards and slow toads.

In a landscape of contradictions, Hill is mindful that a carelessly placed foot can disappear into the sucking bog with devastating consequences, so she moves deftly, reading subtle shifts in the sodden earth, discerning the scant maze of safe tracks from sightlines pegged off distant landmarks, looking for obscure signifiers and always alert to ‘what shouldn’t be there.’<sup>6</sup>

Hill is a seeker of stories; she searches the landscape with the penetrating gaze of an artist and the tenacity of one who plunders an archive, absorbing the earth and its history by walking. It is, as Rebecca Solnit

intuits, “a delicate balance between being and doing, a bodily labour that produces nothing but thoughts, experiences and arrivals.”<sup>7</sup> With each walk, Hill “moves through space like a thread through fabric, sewing it together into a continuous experience,”<sup>8</sup> the profound depth of which is revealed to us in her hauntingly beautiful prints and drawings. She pours hours and weeks of intensive, meditative labour into her artworks and each one serves as a testament to her sensitivity and perseverance.

## PERCEPTION IS (NOT ALWAYS) REALITY 9

*Somewhere in the hollows and spaces between our carefully managed wilderness areas and the creeping, flattening effects of global capitalism there are still places where an overlooked England truly exists.* <sup>10</sup>

Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts

Walking in wetlands is undoubtedly a point of departure for Hill's artwork as she conflates past and present by retracing the ancient steps of those who eeked a perilous existence from their gaunt landscapes, but it is also a deliberately political act staged with the intention of challenging popular assumption.

In Western culture, wetlands have long been represented as "black waters:" places of darkness, disease and death. They insinuate horror, the uncanny and are inextricably linked with melancholy and the monstrous. <sup>11</sup> This perception has been reinforced since the 19th century reimagining of wild landscapes as 'sublime' and can be seen in Charles Dickens' evocation of the "dark, flat wilderness" of the Thames

marshes in the opening scenes of *Great Expectations* <sup>12</sup> and in C.S. Forester's rendering of *The African Queen's* wretched and tortuous journey through the seething mud flats of the Bora Delta. <sup>13</sup> We encounter "all the rottenness of a thousand years...festering under the stagnant water" in the dystopian visions "of the metropolis reclaimed by the swamp" conjured by Richard Jefferies in *After London* <sup>14</sup> and J.G Ballard in *The Drowned World*. Cinema, too, immerses us in the sinister and brooding landscapes of the Southern Gothic portrayed in films by directors including Jean Renoir (*Swamp Water* 1941) J. Lee Thompson and Martin Scorsese (*Cape Fear* 1962 and 1991)

In his 1996 cultural critique, *Postmodern Wetlands*, <sup>15</sup> Rod Giblett explores the "western vilification and destruction of wetlands which are seen as a "threat to health and sanity." <sup>16</sup> He suggests that "the patriarchal hierarchy with its dryland agriculture and its misogynistic denigration of the wetland as the environmental *femme fatale*" <sup>17</sup> has fostered a horror of wetlands predicated upon their negative feminisation, "the typical response to (which) has



been simple and decisive: dredge, drain or fill and so 'reclaim' them." <sup>18</sup> Giblett, just as Henry David Thoreau before him, argues for a recalibration of our perception of wetlands as "biologically rich and fertile places, vital for life on earth" <sup>19</sup> and representative of the "variety and capacity of that nature which is our common dwelling." <sup>20</sup>

A jaundiced view of estuarine and mossland landscapes continues to pervade, however, and is supported by media generated fear in sensational reports of 'nuisance' mosquito populations thriving in wetlands close to our towns and cities and also by the carefully managed publicity machines of the political establishment and capitalist enterprise seeking to profit from the 'reclamation' or extinction of these areas. <sup>21</sup>

Despite providing natural flood barriers for hinterland communities, coastal saltmarshes have historically been valued less favourably than inland areas. Treated as 'sacrificial', these edge lands play host to nuclear power facilities and military training grounds. They have become exclusion zones. <sup>22</sup> Perceived as 'expendable', mossland has been plundered over time

for its surface peat and deeper coal deposits and drained and 'reclaimed' for agricultural and industrial purposes. <sup>23</sup> But wetlands are 'sinks' of greenhouse gasses, their destruction causes significant CO<sub>2</sub> emission and ultimately environmental harm. <sup>24</sup> They cannot be destroyed without themselves destroying. <sup>25</sup>

The positive benefits of maintaining the integrity of such landscapes receives comparatively little publicity. Intact lowland raised bogs are one of the scarcest and most threatened habitats in Europe for rarefied species of flora and fauna. The ancient mosses of North West England were the largest of these habitats, home to birds including the nightjar, curlew and snipe and insects such as the downy emerald dragonfly and the large heath butterfly. As a consequence of man's relentless pillaging over the last two centuries, this precious land area has diminished by ninety four percent. <sup>26</sup>

Less strident than steadfast in her politics, Hill is nonetheless determined to challenge the popularised view of coastal marshes as 'lesser' places and therefore ripe for exploitation. In her compelling artwork she

confers a rare beauty on terrain otherwise defined as repellent and, in doing so, holds up a mirror asking her audience to consider whether, through ignorance or inaction, we have been complicit in the incremental loss of vital landscapes whose aesthetic appeal might not be immediately apparent.

By walking, working and sharing her research and her art, she persists in a quiet activism aimed at causing shifts in our perception of wetland landscapes. She shows us that they are of historic and future value: places of tranquillity, fecundity and mutable permanence; places that can never entirely be bent to the will of developers without their fighting back. Through her drawings and prints, Hill urges us to see that she “walks among elementals, and elementals are not governable.” <sup>27</sup>

## THE TRUTH ABOUT MAPS

*It is not down in any map; true places never are.* <sup>28</sup>

Herman Melville Moby Dick

For many creative practitioners, including The Situationists, Francis Alÿs and the Italian collective, Stalker, the walk is their art form. This is also true of Hill for whom “the walking is the constant (and) the art medium is the variable.” <sup>29</sup>

As a walking artist, maps are indisputably a tool of Hill’s trade; however, in common with many thinkers and writers whose passion is landscape, she remains deeply sceptical of printed maps and the ubiquitous digital mapping media presented to us as accurate and reliable.

“It can take time and effort to forget the prejudice induced by a powerful map,” writes Robert Macfarlane, “And few maps exercise a more distortive pressure upon the imagination than the road atlas... Considering the road atlas, an absence also becomes

visible. The wild places are no longer marked. The fells, the caves, the tors, the woods, the river valleys and the marshes have all but disappeared.”<sup>30</sup> Macfarlane warns us to be aware that “maps organise information about landscape in a profoundly influential way. They carry out a triage of its aspects, selecting and ranking those aspects in an order of importance, and so they create forceful biases in the ways a landscape is perceived and treated.”<sup>31</sup>

As a result of their omission from ‘official’ maps, the precarious, misunderstood and transitional places in our landscape: the liminal spaces, have fallen prey to exploitation by industry and governments. One of the measures by which we gauge the status of a landscape as liminal, observes Dr Les Roberts of Liverpool University, is its capacity to “invite and accommodate oblivion.” Referring to the wartime decoy sites of the Dee estuary, rigged by film makers to resemble Garston Docks in South Liverpool and so fool the Luftwaffe, he explains how they were transformed into ‘fields of deception’, “littoral spaces of performance and illusion.” Despite the obvious interest of such sites to historians and archaeologists, Roberts claims it is in

fact “the performative attributes of these landscapes – their material and symbolic architectures of oblivion and memory; the heterotopic invocation of other worlds: other spaces and times – that makes them so compelling.”<sup>32</sup>

It is a similar awareness of the inherent narrative sensibility in landscape that seizes Hill’s imagination. With the same curiosity that motivated Roberts in his navigation of the Dee estuary, “as a space of performance – a liminal zone of myth, ritual and practice,”<sup>33</sup> Hill sets out to record the marginalised wetlands of her home county and beyond. It is the marginal nature of such places, says Roberts, that provides “the possibility of a strategic amnesia by which, paradoxically, an archaeology of deep memory may be performed.”<sup>34</sup>

The ‘performance’ of deep memory is evident in Hill’s Mersey Estuary works. Her images entitled ‘Harmonious Constituents’ and ‘Temporal Wandering’ consider the shifting sandbanks and tidal nature of the Mersey at the point where its inhabitants historically crossed the river on foot or on horseback. Situating

herself at this crossing place, just as the river dwellers before her, Hill is present within her images but invisible to us, lost in the vanishing point of the scanner as it turns on its 360 degree axis. The encompassing images she presents to us have been altered by stealth. Whilst read from digitally accurate visual topographies, Hill's finished works represent subtle reinterpretations of the scanner's point cloud data. Each of her landscapes is invested with the patina of time and distance and alloyed with memory. Her images also hint at the traces of journeys made by those who lived alongside the river and navigated its channels daily. Hill's prints and drawings are an amalgam of all of these facets and reveal something of "the latent energies that reside at these confluence points."<sup>35</sup>

It is in this way that each of Hill's artworks represents a "deep map" of sorts: an intuitive, atmospheric and temporal rendering of a landscape vibrating with a history in which she has immersed herself and which she now 'remembers.' Hers is a "cartography that aspires to yield what a conventional map or guide cannot even come close to conveying."<sup>36</sup>

## MERCURIAL PROCESS

*Printmaking involves processes. And where there are processes there are always inventors.*<sup>37</sup>

Friedhard Kiekeben, *The Contemporary Printmaker*

Calm determination and a steady nerve are necessary attributes for an artist whose working processes hover at the threshold of alchemy and are fraught with unpredictability. At every stage of her work, disruption and failure are possible and Hill embraces this lack of control with rigor, discipline and the playfully open mind of an inventor.

In her recent bodies of work, *Sensorium* and *Matrix of Movement*, she uses portable 3-D terrestrial laser scanners as her means of data capture. These are heavy, valuable, precision instruments capable of infinitesimally accurate measurement and panoramic representation, more commonly used in the field of forensic analysis by architects, archaeologists and crime scene investigators. Sensitively balanced and highly susceptible to moisture, they must be kept level and dry.

Determined to question the veracity of ultimately logical, digital ‘facts,’ however, Hill employs considerable ingenuity, physical effort and measured care to transport this bulky equipment into wet, spongy mossland and across soft, estuarine sand in order to collect her source data. Then, in deliberate defiance of the laws of mathematics and geometry, she wilfully ‘misrepresents’ and manipulates the scans in order to produce her intuitive, analogue drawings which more accurately represent her memories of those places as she experienced them - at that time, on that day, in that light and with that particular frame of mind.

Hill’s work fuses art, invention and chance. Her materials-in-trade are intrinsically volatile: ductile metals and friable charcoal; photosensitive polymers borne on frail mylar membrane; inconsistent sources of ultraviolet light; corrosive chemicals; inks, oils and pigments of variable viscosity and 19th century printing presses prone to mechanical glitches. Any artwork she makes is not influenced by her alone but by unstable materials and environmental fluctuation. Making a print on a warm, dry day is an appreciably different endeavour than that of taking a print from

the very same plate on a cool, damp day. Hill’s metre wide etching plates from which she creates her monochrome landscape prints are vast by the standards of most etching plates. To ink each one, from which only a limited number of impressions can be taken before degradation occurs, and to pass it through the press, takes more than an hour of concentrated effort, stamina and considerable skill.

It is also true that her artwork is subject to the vagaries of other people’s behaviours. A cleaning contractor using a mechanical floor polisher, oblivious to the weeks of work invested in one of Hill’s monumental wall drawings, obliterated an important section of the piece in a matter of seconds.

Such is the precarious nature of Tracy Hill’s work. Its intrinsic material vulnerability stands firmly as a metaphor for the threatened, fragile environments she strives to represent. Hill does not deal in certainty; mercuriality is at the heart of the landscapes and thweather in which she walks and inherent in the conditions, materials and equipment with which she works.

## WAYFINDING

*Knowledge is grown along the myriad paths we take, it is an improvisatory movement-of 'going along' or wayfaring- that is open-ended and knows no final destination.*

Tim Ingold Footprints through the weather-world: walking, breathing, knowing.

Tracy Hill's practice is about 'wayfinding', it represents her constant striving for a deeper understanding of the places she encounters through walking and her search for ways to communicate this understanding. Like Karen O'Rourke, she believes that "we begin by making sense of our surroundings so that we can go somewhere." <sup>38</sup>

By 'making sense' of the wetlands portrayed in her artwork, Hill's aim is to communicate their precarious existence and so engage cross-disciplinary conversation surrounding the environmental dangers posed by their reclamation. Hill is not only an artist but an activist, an advocate and a committed environmentalist. As she walks the common access

routes to the mosses near her home, she stops to collect discarded plastic bags, bottles and other detritus, aware that this small act of public responsibility is having little impact.

Much is written about the "lurid debris" that pollutes our land and seas. Robert Macfarlane recalls the scene from a day of beachcombing on Skye: "blue milk-bottle crates, pitted cubical chunks of furniture foam, cigarette butts, bottle caps, aerosol canisters and Tetrapak cartons, printed with faded lettering in dozens of languages. "Even here", he laments, "on this remote Atlantic -facing bay, evidence of damage was unmistakable, pollution inescapable and the autonomy of the land under threat." <sup>39</sup>

As we stand on the threshold of the Anthropocene Era and glimpse the scale of environmental damage wrought in the name of post-industrial 'progress', the enormity of what we face is not easy either to comprehend or to respond to.

Timothy Morton, our foremost 'prophet' of the Anthropocene, describes the dawning realisation of

the horror we have helped to author as “ecognosis.” He suggests that the moment of ecognosis is akin to seeing ourselves implicated in an environmental film noir, trapped in the loop of a Möbius strip as “Deckard in Blade Runner when he learns that he might be the enemy he has been ordered to pursue.”<sup>40</sup>

Morton further argues that our initial confrontation with the Anthropocene is precipitated through an encounter with the shocking reality of ‘hyperobjects’. This is the term he has coined to address concepts we tend to think of only in the abstract; phenomena so gigantic, so “massively distributed in time and space” that we can barely assimilate them, despite being caught up inside them. It is only through confronting hyperobjects: those ‘things’ that will outlast civilisation, such as global warming, Styrofoam and plutonium, says Morton, that we become aware that we have not only caused the Anthropocene but that we can’t control it and are now trapped by it.<sup>41</sup> In the face of questions too big to answer, artists do what they can to draw attention to uncomfortable truths. John Akomfrah’s recent six-screen film montage, *Purple*, represents his monumental response to the

‘hyper object’ of global warming. Rather than present an alarmist eco-documentary, however, Akomfrah offers us a thoughtful and deeply affecting meditation on the inevitability of the Anthropocene; a sublime lament of profound melancholy and resigned sorrow.<sup>42</sup> We see a similarly elegiac response to the unthinkable in Hill’s work.

In earlier research, Hill explored philosophies inherent in cultures pursuing a more immersive, intuitive connection with the earth and our paths within it. It has been demonstrated that nomadic peoples inhabiting spaces devoid of tangible visual signs develop a broader range of senses in order attune to the rhythms of their surroundings, such as the Inuit in Arctic snows and Polynesian navigators in the Pacific Ocean.<sup>43</sup> In this way, the traveller becomes a “wayfinder,” a teller of stories; one who does not necessarily understand her surroundings through the co-ordinates on a map but by textures, atmospheres and histories. This, observes Tim Ingold, is mapping through knowing.<sup>44</sup>



Knowing as opposed to mapping therefore is a method of wayfinding prevalent in non-western cultures. The 'songlines' of Aboriginal Australian people are a set of oral traditions in the form of ancestral songs which

enable each succeeding generation to navigate the landscape. Rather than a tract of land enclosed within borders, "Aboriginal territories are an interlocking network of 'lines' or 'ways through.' Each clan has a responsibility for its own totemic ancestor's "footprints" ... and through exchange, negotiation, singing and storytelling, the paths of the different families are linked." <sup>45</sup> When Aboriginal Australian people describe a place, they recount its myths as well as detailing its topography. Their map is their story and their story is their map

The ravage of global warming, brought about through a disconnection with our surroundings, calls for a way back to the elemental and a renewed awareness of the feel of the earth. Tracy Hill has learned to navigate the wetlands as a 'wayfinder.' Listening, watching and walking, she draws out stories kept in silence by the mosses. Always alive to their dangerous beauty,

adapting her gait to accommodate their yielding, disingenuous terrain, her feet remember the paths she must not take as she searches for distant visual clues. Conscious of the imminent dangers threatening this fragile environment which has become her element, she responds with delicate and powerful artworks, soft with velvet ink, dancing with cotton grass but freighted with foreboding. Her map is their story and her story is their map.

## SPACE AND TIME

*It is impossible to suppose...that men have derived those forms of their intuition or perception which we call space and time from any conceivable source other than the environment in which they have evolved for thousands of years.* <sup>46</sup>

Marie Bonaparte Time and the Unconscious

The edge lands walked by Tracy Hill are as timeless and as contradictory as her multi-faceted practice. These apparently featureless ancient landscapes, possessed of no obvious beauty, are revealed for us as compellingly spectral places in her commanding drawings and prints. She is determined to continue her work of changing our perception of estuarine and wetland landscapes, long vilified as deviant, said to produce aberrant ‘humour’, psychosomatic states of melancholy <sup>47</sup> and derided as ‘anomalous’ “in a classificatory order predicated on a hard and fast distinction between land and water, time and space.” <sup>48</sup>

The “timelessness of maps and the spacelessness of history,” writes Rob Giblett, “do not lend themselves

to the changing nature of wetlands. What is needed instead are temporal maps” that show a “spatial history... and quantum ecology that construes the natural environment, especially wetlands, on a space/time continuum.” <sup>49</sup>

Tracy Hill has responded by capturing both time and space in her wall drawings and intaglio prints. These are durational works of art that evolve slowly in the here and now but they speak of time past and suggest futuristic imaginings. Her approach to making work is simultaneously poetic and practical. With the insight of one who grew up surrounded by nautical maps, she walks hazardous terrain not with the unalloyed caution of a navigator but with the curiosity of storyteller, a ‘wayfinder’, who sees that “every place holds within it memories of previous arrivals and departures, as well as expectations of how one may reach it, or reach other places from it.” <sup>50</sup> And just as her artwork maps a narrative continuum, so the landscapes in which she walks “enfold the passage of time: they are neither of the past, present or future but all three rolled into one.” <sup>51</sup>

Hill travels slowly on foot through mosslands to meditate on their primitive beauty, “to be reminded of the narrow limits of human perception.”<sup>52</sup> She walks, not to escape, but to enable her thinking, seeing and imagining. She chooses her paths with care, because they are more than simply a safe “means of traversing space” they are “also ways of feeling, being and knowing.”<sup>53</sup> “To make an impression,” writes Robert Macfarlane, “is also to receive one, and the soles of our feet, shaped by the surfaces they press upon, are landscapes themselves...”<sup>54</sup> Hill gives us some of this ‘knowing’ in her art work, reminding us what the world feels like, showing us that “place is a protean and fundamental aspect of what it is to be human.”<sup>55</sup>

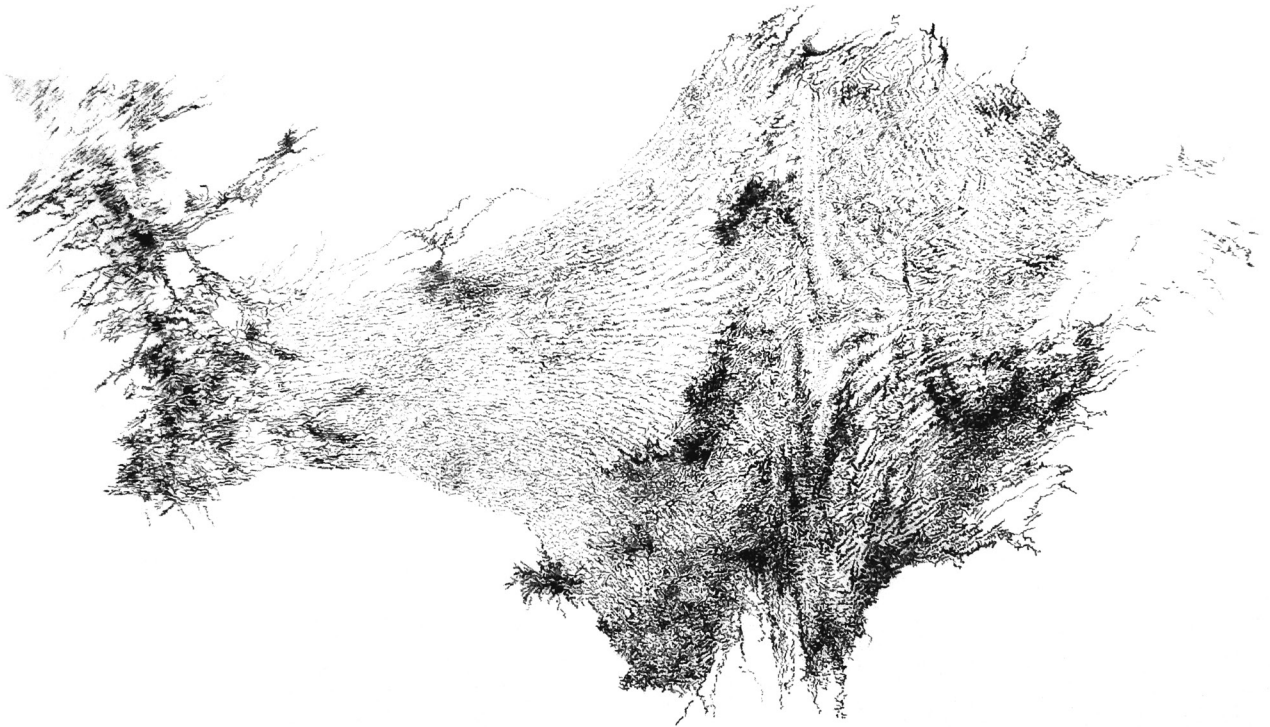
Her practice presents a robust challenge to lingering establishment denigration of these landscapes as miasmal, poisonous, deathly black waters; as the environmental ‘spider woman’ to be ‘conquered’ and reclaimed in the name of capitalism. Instead, she has found a way to articulate a more holistic and positively feminised global view of wetlands as places of fascination rather than horror, as biologically rich and fertile terrain where life and death, light and dark

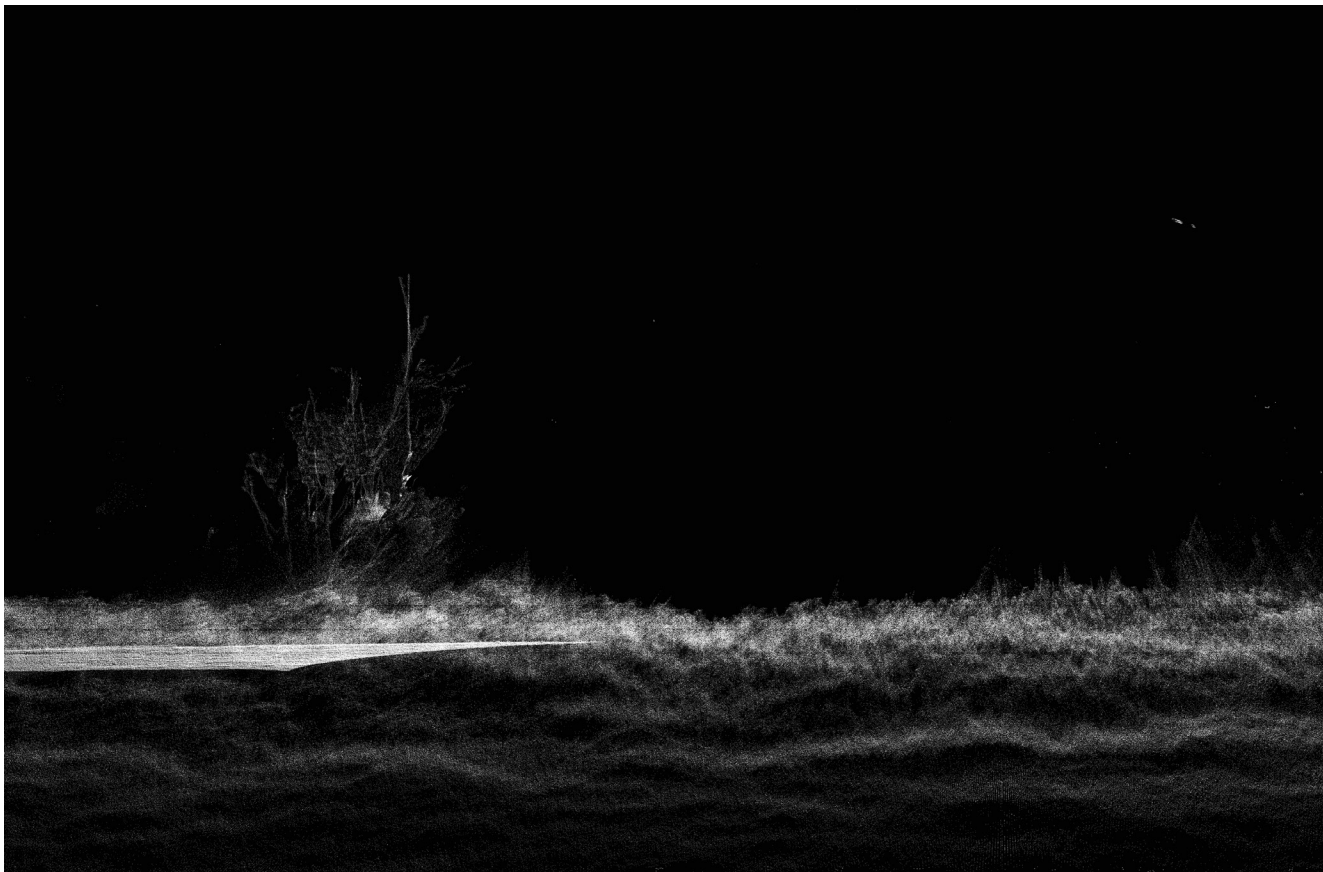
co-exist as living black waters.<sup>56</sup>

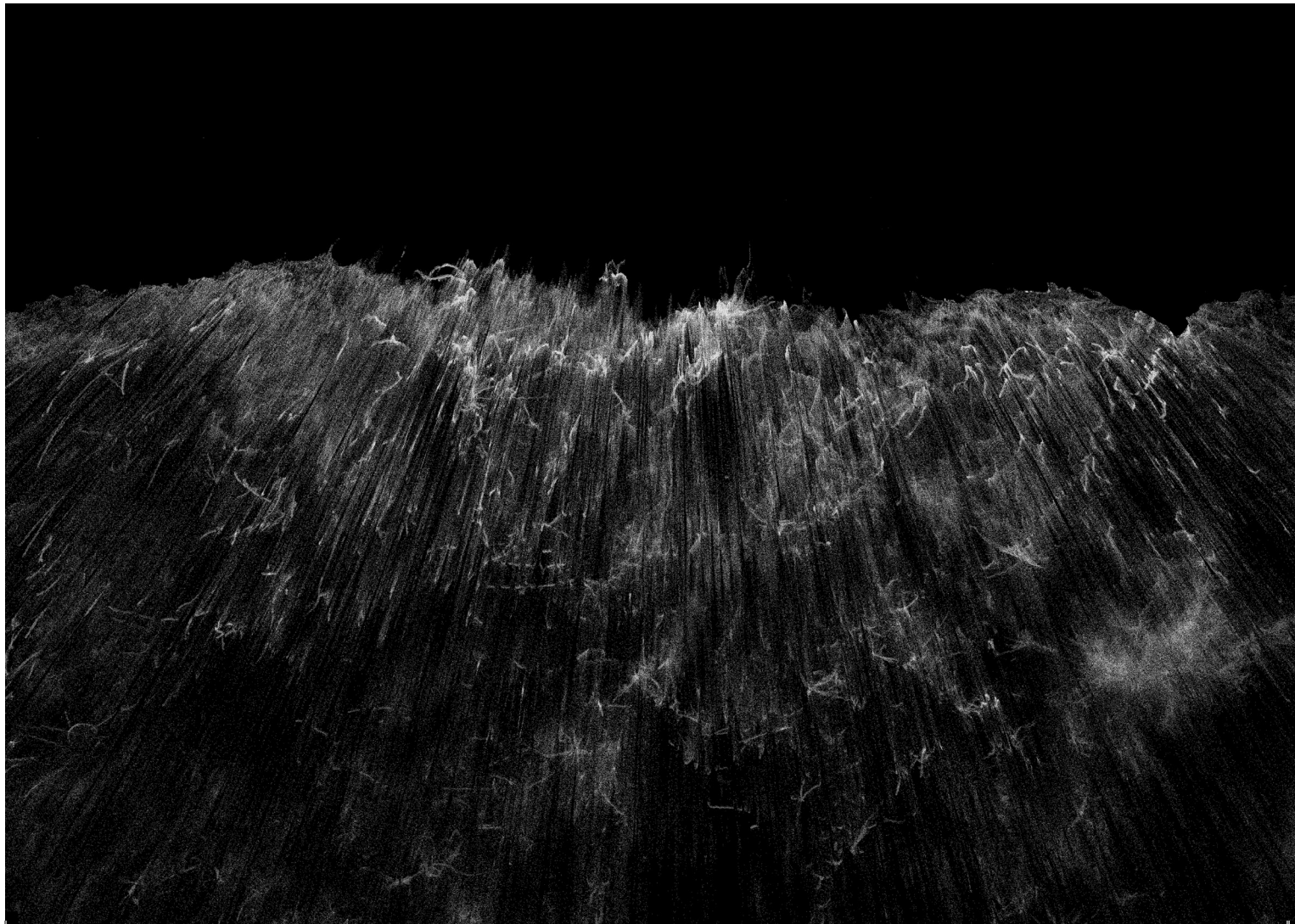
Hill’s aim is for us to see the beauty in wilderness, to question our interpretation of official intelligence and to be aware that the digital data sources on which we increasingly rely are not beyond corruption. When her work is done, when she collects her charcoal remnants from the floor, hangs her prints and withdraws from the gallery, what remains are ‘hyperobjects’: vast wall drawings which can only be apprehended gradually, dense prints which reveal their meanings slowly. She leaves us with her immersive, unfathomable landscapes which encapsulate the frailty of our stressed physical environment and confront us with our culpability in the malevolent chain of events now set in motion through our relentless consumerism, with consequences so immense we can perceive them only in the abstract.

In a fast-paced world where speed is expected and extolled, Hill’s anachronistic practice persuades us to think in geological time. Using topographical information generated by data systems at the vanguard of digital technology combined with working methods

rooted deeply in the past, she renders ancient, dead  
and dying wetlands in vital and affective works of  
contemporary art. She filters the indisputable through  
the fine mesh of intuition and offers us a new way of  
looking at things we have forgotten to see.

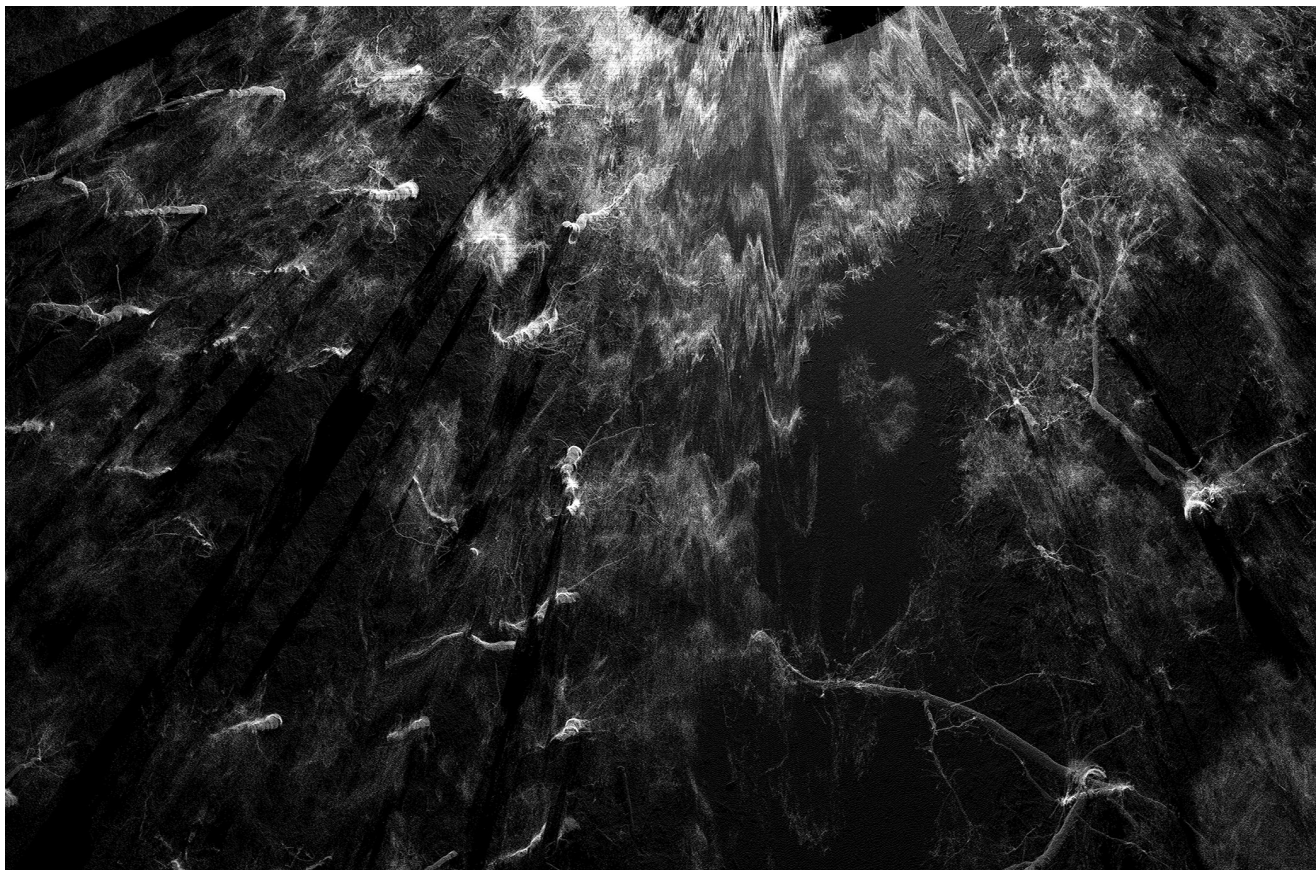


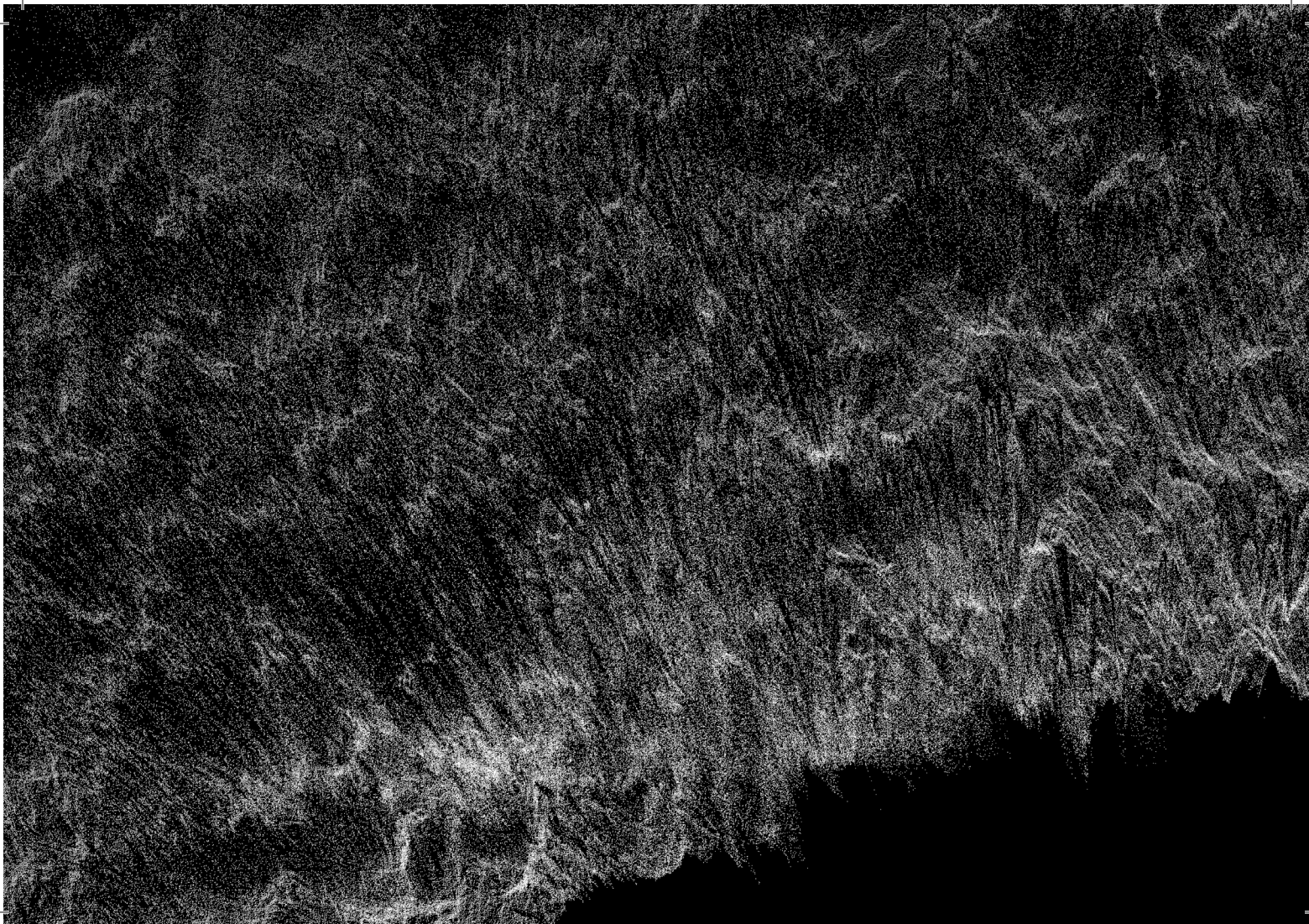


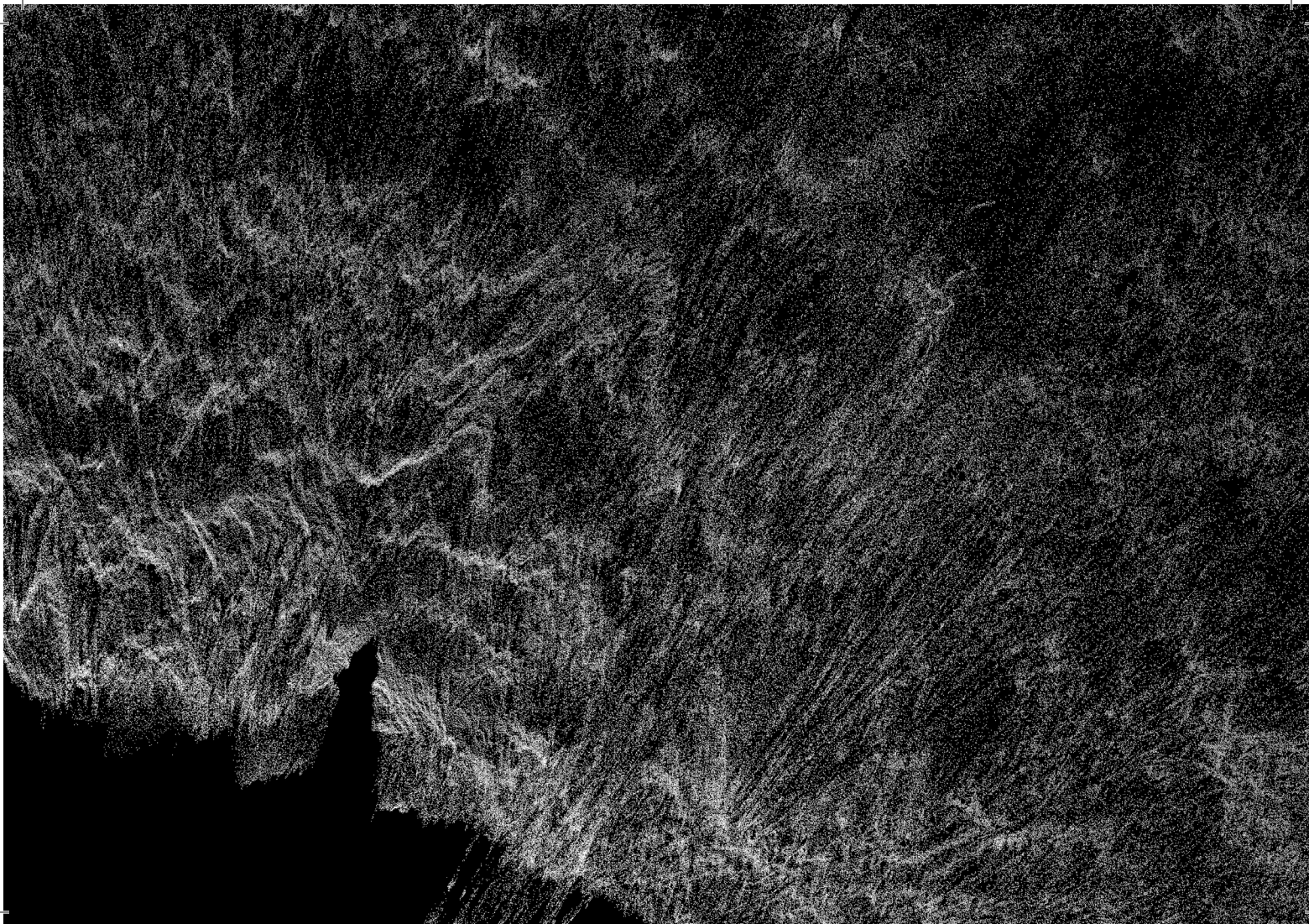












- <sup>1</sup> Ingold, T (2000) *The Perception of the Environment Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*, London, Routledge p.148 <http://nomadicartsfestival.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/the-perception-of-the-environment.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> Solnit, R. (2014). *Wanderlust*. London: Granta, p.71.
- <sup>3</sup> See Lancashire Wildlife Trust <https://www.lancswt.org.uk/about-our-mosslands> accessed 9.10.2017
- <sup>4</sup> See <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Docs/PDF/Resident/Planning-and-Building-Control/Mossland.pdf> accessed 9.10.2017
- <sup>5</sup> [https://archive.org/details/gri\\_33125010870554](https://archive.org/details/gri_33125010870554) accessed 9.1.2018
- <sup>6</sup> Robert Macfarlane
- <sup>7</sup> Solnit, R (2014) p.5
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid
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- <sup>11</sup> Giblett, R. (1996) *Postmodern Wetlands Culture, History, Ecology*, Edinburgh University Press
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- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.81
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid
- <sup>16</sup> Giblett, R. (1996) pp.3-4
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid p.xi
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid



<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.236 quoting Thoreau, H.D. (1982) *The Portable Thoreau* (ed. C. Bode), New York: Penguin

<sup>21</sup> See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-14613140>; <http://www.salfordstar.com/article.asp?id=3531>; <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/the-biggest-company-youve-never-heard-of-lifting-the-lid-on-peel-group-the-property-firm-owned-by-8890201.html>

<sup>22</sup> See the research of Dr Les Roberts of Liverpool University, especially see: [http://www.liminoids.com/2012%20Roberts\\_TheSandsofDee.pdf](http://www.liminoids.com/2012%20Roberts_TheSandsofDee.pdf) accessed 8.1.2018

<sup>23</sup> See: <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Council/Strategies-Plans-and-Policies/Planning/Local-plan/Background/Key-Local-Studies/WiganLandscapeCharacterAssessment.aspx> accessed 19.1.2018

<sup>24</sup> See: Stephanie Miles, Heath Malcolm, Gwen Buys, Janet Moxley (30th May 2014) *Emissions and Removals of Greenhouse Gases from Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: 1990-2012* Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Bush Estate, Penicuik, Midlothian, EH26 0QB [lulucf@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:lulucf@ceh.ac.uk); See: *Wetlands, Carbon and Climate Change Landscape Ecol* DOI 10.1007/s10980-012-9758-8

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<sup>25</sup> See Morton, T. (2010) *The Ecological Thought*, Harvard University Press, p.130.

<sup>26</sup> See: <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Council/Strategies-Plans-and-Policies/Planning/Local-plan/Background/Key-Local-Studies/WiganLandscapeCharacterAssessment.aspxn> accessed 19.1.2018

<sup>27</sup> Macfarlane, R. (2007) *The Wild Places*, Granta Books, p.158.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid quoting Melville p.236.

<sup>29</sup> O'Rourke, K. (2013) *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers*, MIT Press, p.43.

<sup>30</sup> Macfarlane, R. (2007) *The Wild Places*, Granta Books, p.10.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Roberts, L. *The Sands of Dee: estuarine excursions in liminal space* in Andrews, H. and Roberts, L. eds. (2012) *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, experience and spaces in-between*, Abingdon, Routledge, pp. 103 - 117. See also the wider research of Dr Les Roberts of Liverpool University at <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/communication-and-media/staff/les-roberts>; <http://www.liminoids.com/>; <https://liverpool.academia.edu/LesRoberts>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.104.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid,p.106.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/22813879/Deep\\_Mapping\\_and\\_Spatial\\_Anthropology?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/22813879/Deep_Mapping_and_Spatial_Anthropology?auto=download) accessed 11.1.2018

<sup>37</sup> Howard, K. (2003) *The Contemporary Printmaker*, Write-Cross Press, p. x

<sup>38</sup> O'Rourke, K. (2013) *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers*, MIT Press,p.101.

<sup>39</sup> Macfarlane, R. (2007) p.51.

<sup>40</sup> Morton, T. (2016) *Dark Ecology*, New York, Columbia University Press

<sup>41</sup> See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/15/timothy-morton-anthropocene-philosopher> (accessed 13.1.2018)

<sup>42</sup> Banning, K (2017) *Tomorrow or the End of Time in Purple*, John Akomfrah, Barbican,, p.21.

<sup>43</sup> Lewis, D. (1975) *We The Navigators*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, p.15.

<sup>44</sup> Ingold, T, (2000) p.219.

<sup>45</sup> O'Rourke, K. (2013) p.118.

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- <sup>47</sup> Giblett, R. (1996) p.156.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.4.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid
- <sup>50</sup> Ingold T. (2000)p.237.
- <sup>51</sup> Ingold, T. (2000) pp.237-238.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.61.
- <sup>53</sup> Macfarlane, R. (2012) The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot, London, Penguin Books Ltd., p.24.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.161.
- <sup>55</sup> Bonnett, A (2014) Off the Map, London, Aurum Press,p.3.
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Born in Birmingham Tracy Hill studied Fine Art at Bournville School of Art, Birmingham , Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield and University of Central Lancashire, Preston.

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Deborah Stevenson is a writer and artist based at the University of Central Lancashire. She is concerned with the interconnectedness of place, memory and narrative. As a PhD student, the focus of her research is the Dock Road area of Liverpool with its architecturally disparate hinterland of working class dwellings and grand mercantile and civic buildings.

Returning to the city of her birth her work seeks to address questions of where and how, in the face of displacement and radically changing urban topographies, we can retain a notion of home through the histories and memories that define us and how the architecture of our cities functions as a repository, archive or mnemonic for such narratives.

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