

# DISAPPEARING MOON

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# SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

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The Singapore International Foundation (SIF) is delighted to continue our partnership with the British Council in bridging and strengthening friendships between the people of Singapore and the United Kingdom. An artist residency offers insights into another country's art making practice, providing opportunities for the artist to experiment with new techniques as well as explore fresh concepts and ideas. Importantly, art is a powerful medium for sharing insights and perspectives, as well as a catalyst for collaborations. We seek to harness this to enhance understanding across cultures and build enduring relationships among communities.

*Disappearing Moon* exemplifies how individuals can be inspired and enlightened through interaction and better appreciation of others, and different environments. It is testament to the value of art and culture in bringing world communities together.

The accompanying publication captures the enriching experience the artists Singaporean Genevieve Chua and Briton Emma Critchley shared on this exchange; they have created not one but three collaborative series, in addition to new solo works.

We are also happy to have partners who believe in and have supported the programme for two years running. This collective effort is key to the success of this artist residency exchange.

We hope you will appreciate this spirit of collaboration through the exhibition, as well as the anecdotes and essays featured in the ensuing pages.

Jean Tan  
Executive Director  
Singapore International Foundation

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# BRITISH COUNCIL

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The Artists in Residence Exchange (AiRx) programme is a testimony to art as a means of expressing ideas across language and borders offering a platform for communicating and connecting across cultures. The AiRx programme similarly celebrates the friendship between the UK and Singapore through the collaboration of UK and Singaporean artists.

This year the talented artists Emma Critchley (UK) and Genevieve Chua (Singapore) have participated in an on-going sharing of perspectives and artistic practices resulting in the creation of new solo and collaborative works for *Disappearing Moon*. This exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art Singapore reflects the strength of the artists' creative dialogue, exploring different facets of light and shadow, reality and reflection, and movement and stillness.

Tolla Sloane of Give Art Space's excellent curatorship has ensured a successful pairing of artists both professionally and personally which has manifested strongly throughout the programme in the meaningful and enthusiastic interchange of knowledge and inspiration.

The British Council is the UK's leading cultural relations organisation that creates opportunities for the people from the UK and other countries and builds trust between them worldwide. The arts and creative industries are at the heart of many of British Council's international projects due to the power of the arts to encourage understanding.

The British Council is delighted to be continuing its second year of partnership with the Singapore International Foundation. AiRx 2012 has fulfilled our common objectives by reinforcing its value as a programme of enrichment and bringing people together via cultural exchange. We look forward to continuing the programme in 2013 and to future collaboration with the SIF.

Sarah Meisch, PhD  
Director of Arts  
British Council Singapore

# FROM ALTERED PERCEPTIONS TO DISAPPEARING MOON

by Tolla Sloane

Programme Manager and Curator AiRx

Founder, Give Art Space

*Language exerts hidden power, like the moon on the tides.*

– Rita Mae Brown<sup>1</sup>

*We must build dikes of courage to hold back the flood of fear.*

– Martin Luther King<sup>2</sup>

Just as water shifts and distorts our senses, necessitating a physical and mental realignment, so does darkness. Perceptions and fears are heightened in both situations and familiar people and objects take on new forms. The works of each artist let us dwell on the ambiguities of the nocturnal and underwater worlds in truth and myth, focusing on the unfocused, and the barely visible and in-between states.

## AiRx

AiRx is a year-long programme featuring two visual artists from the UK and Singapore. It comprises a variety of formats: residencies in London and Singapore at the Royal College of Art and LASALLE College of the Arts, presentations, collaborative experiments, research and development of new solo work, short essays, a publication and finally a documentary exhibition in Singapore and London. AiRx 2012 features visual artists Genevieve Chua (SG) and Emma Critchley (UK).

It is a great privilege to have developed AiRx from the original concept by Give Art Space, with Kay Vasey (former Director of Arts, British Council (BC)) and subsequently, Sarah Meisch of BC and Soh Lai Yee and her team at Singapore International Foundation (SIF). AiRx's unique character comes from the length and depth of engagement between two artists and the curators; the collaborative element, the two-city exhibition and documentary publication.

AiRx is a true collaboration between the UK and Singapore where artists, curators, institutions, writers, designers and our supporters in both countries work together to sustain and develop its strength and depth. We are immensely grateful for their faith and cooperation.

AiRx is in its second year and it is therefore timely to explore cultural meanings common to Singaporeans and Britons. For many years Singaporean artists have studied art at the Royal College of Art, the Royal Academy, Goldsmiths and other institutions in the UK. The influences can often be seen in their work, so it makes sense to delve into this existing cultural discourse. As we move into 2013, more artists from the UK are coming to Singapore to study, set up studios and work with the local art community. It is not about the West and the East or post-colonial practices; it is about two countries engaging with each other in cultural and social discourse through the prism of talented, visionary contemporary artists.

## The artists

To act as an interesting counterpoint and continuation of the story of AiRx 2011 (featuring Michael Lee and Bob Matthews), two female artists at a similar stage in their careers were selected for 2012. Artists are selected on the basis that they will work well together conceptually, technically and on a personal level to create a dialogue, develop their practices, push work-related boundaries and forge relationships within the arts community of their host country.

Both artists use photography and film within their practices to capture in-between states and environments. Each has addressed the power of the natural environment (nocturnal, dusk, underwater) to alter our perceptions and assuage or heighten our senses and fears. The methods employed by each artist for capturing natural ele-

ments are controlled and planned. The quality of light they require is very specific. As a result, the timing of shoots and invitations to actors, divers and models to participate in the process requires extensive advance preparation. The subject-matter and the method face this paradox: chaos versus control.

The work is immersive, drawing the subject (often the viewer, but rarely the artists themselves prior to 2012) into mesmerising natural or mythical worlds, evoking a contemplative space to consider sub-conscious fears, discomfiture and one's place in the wider universe. Perceptions are altered and confused. By examining and upending in-between physical and mental states and attempting to communicate them, the work becomes philosophical, almost metaphysical, in its purview. In fact, the work may find a place in Meskin and Cohen's analysis of photography as a special means of extending human perception, a kind of "visual prostheses".<sup>3</sup>

**Genevieve Chua (GC):** *Looking at Emma's work and mine I see persons trying to communicate within their own realms of understanding. However, these persons don't seem to have proper language faculties.*

Critchley is an underwater photographer and videographer often working with free-divers<sup>4</sup> to create unique studies of human interactions with the underwater environment. Her interest lies in the way immersion shifts our senses and forces a return to a more primal engagement with the natural environment. As part of her on-going research she has qualified as a commercial diver, started free-diving training, meditated in water, spent time in a flotation tank, researched linguistic theory and contemplated the ability of water to capture memory. Underwater, usual modes of communication via speech are lost, and speech becomes its essence—breath and a series of rhythms and vibrations.

**Emma Critchley (EC):** *I am interested in the more subtle corporeal forms of contact like the heartbeat and the breath and how language has lost its sensual foundations that previously allowed a more reciprocal human relationship with nature.*

**Tolla Sloane (TS):** Emma, people can enter your work from so many directions. Aesthetically and conceptually it resonates with the 19th century Romantics such as Caspar David Friedrich; technically, from a photographic, video and diving perspective it is challenging and conceptually it touches on psychological and physical challenges. There is something for the everyman without losing the strength of the work as pure fine art characterised by beauty. Is this a conscious decision and do you see a resurgent Romantics movement?

**EC:** *Another artist asked me if I was part of a resurgent Romantics movement in the UK. I don't know. If you are in something you don't know about it until afterwards. Most "movements" are identified*

*once the moment has passed. I came across Friedrich's work in an RCA lecture and the reconnection with the environment around me appealed. There were two or three other students on the MA with a similar interest in the 19th century Romantics and we continue to stay in touch. Monk by the Sea<sup>5</sup> really resonates with me as it gives the sense that the environment is bigger and more powerful than the individual and we should be reminded of that and respect it.*

In Critchley's photographic work we see the transformation of subjects suspended underwater. Faintly illuminated naked bodies and faces are suspended in the dark, creating slightly distorted portraits where the body merges with the surrounding water. In *Surface*, the result is almost impressionistic, bringing to mind the painted bodies of Francis Bacon<sup>6</sup>. The works transport the viewer to the depthless ocean. This dark, underwater void can feel as claustrophobic as the nocturnal forests in Chua's work. Conversely, depending on one's viewpoint, it can create a sublime sense of calm as it captures the harmony between the body and a body of water.

Chua combines her analogue photographic practice with watercolour, ink and print to create new narratives arising from Southeast Asian horror narratives and mythologies. She imagines tragic scenarios often associated with natural disasters such as flooding (*After the Flood and Ultrasound*), then stands back and observes their effect on the starkly divided forest and city environments in Singapore. By positing herself at the edge of danger—real, imagined or mythologised—Chua seemingly invites the viewer to re-visit their own fears and superstitions. Chua prefers not to prescribe one particular reading of her work; which, on reflection, is vital to its impact given that it engages with each individual's sub-conscious.

**GC:** *Looking at Emma's work and mine I see persons trying to communicate within their own realms of understanding. However, these persons don't seem to have proper language faculties.*

Chua's largely photographic series—*Full Moon and Foxes*, *Raised as a Pack of Wolves*, *Adinandra Belukar*, and *Black Varieties*—are non-linear narratives placed in a nocturnal setting. The Belukar is type of secondary forest in Singapore that grows in very poor soil conditions. This forest was reduced to its most basic form in the *Adinandra Belukar* series. Imagine a moon-less, star-less night where the darkness wraps itself around you like a cloak, except for the occasional glimmer of silver leaves in the wind. Chua re-creates the claustrophobia of the forest after dark; the void left by the blackness is filled with our own fears of the invisible or the imaginary.

Critchley's video works show a very gentle, subtle movement of air as free-divers share breath (*Single Shared Breath*). Critchley focuses on the state the body enters during the suspended breath-hold between breaths. It is a meditative state. Similarly, Chua's *Adinandra Belukar* video captures gently revolving trees. Both videos are soundless, with small degrees of movement, yet utterly captivating.

<sup>3</sup> Cohen, Jonathan and Meskin, Aaron, "Photographs as Evidence" in *Photography and Philosophy: Essays on the Pencil of Nature (New Directions in Aesthetics)*, ed. Scott Walden. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Free-diving is a form of underwater diving that does not involve the use of scuba gear or other external breathing devices, but rather relies on a diver's ability to hold his or her breath until resurfacing.

<sup>5</sup> *Monk by the Sea*, Caspar David Friedrich 1808-1810

<sup>6</sup> "I would like my pictures to look as if a human being had passed between them, like a snail, leaving a trail of the human presence and memory trace of past events as the snail leaves its slime. You see all art has become a game by which man distracts himself. What is fascinating is that it's going to become much more difficult for the artist, because he must really deepen the game to be any good at all, that he can make life a bit more exciting"

Bacon, Francis, *Art of the 20th Century*, ed. Jean-Louis Ferrier. Chene-Hachette, 1999, 679. [1999]

<sup>1</sup> Brown, Rita Mae, *Starting From Scratch*. Putnam, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> King, Martin Luther Junior, "Antidotes for Fear" in *Strength to Love*. Fortress Press, 2010.

They also challenge perceptions about the relationship between the still and moving image.

At the time the artists were being selected, Chua had just shown *Adinandra Belukar* at Singapore Biennale. It resonated with Critchley’s videos in *Show RCA 2011*, *Reflection* and *Single Shared Breath* in which the movement is slight and the effect compelling. My sense at this early stage was that a video collaboration might result from a dialogue between Chua and Critchley. Now, 18 months later, we see a quite different result in terms of the media harnessed for the work: photo-montage, print and installation.

### The solo work developed during AiRx

The artists’ essays and the contributing writers eruditely explore their solo work later in this publication, leaving me to mention the trajectories of the works briefly here.

Critchley’s new body of work explores the physicality of speech and forms a progressive and prolific series, introducing sound for the first time. Starting with *Figures of Speech*, she asked her subjects to communicate a prescribed phrase whilst underwater and captured the water’s physical response to that speech. The works encase traces of language, emotion and memory. In this way, she makes the invisible visible. The works progressed through various iterations and developments, becoming increasingly minimalist and abstract, concluding with *Mimesis*.<sup>7</sup>

EC: *Yes, my work is becoming more performative for me and experiential for the viewer. Less about 2D art work or objects and more about engaging the senses on many levels. Sound has come into my work organically as a result of working with moving images. I started off recording the sound of water. It didn’t interest me. Recording the breath and the heartbeat was more interesting. This disconnect between the sound and the visual image was interesting as it created another alternative perception. It confused us a little.*

Chua’s work moves forward from the representation of non-linear narratives about fear of the unknown, to the belief systems and superstitious practices that may alleviate these fears, by providing a device for understanding. She examines geomancy<sup>8</sup>, the ancient practice of divination, often closely tied to the Chinese Lunar calendar and astrology. In her new series, 72, she creates her own system of divination using eroded dice. The series is rendered as 42 small, card-like UV ink prints which act as a manual for the interpretation of these erroneously weighted dice. She posits herself as the Reader of these fortunes and the viewer as Client, thereby placing herself in her solo work for the first time.

GC: *Slight differences in the interpretation of the dice in geomancy can result in rampant paranoia. There is something tragic in people’s need to know their futures and how they grapple with predictions of apocalypse or smaller tragedies, whether true or false, in the past, present or future. I tend to want to breakdown the causes and effects of fear or a generally “fearful” or overwhelming event.*

The impact of the series of 42 works reflects *Ultrasound* in style and tone whilst, when conjuring up a large scale, random constellation against black silhouette paper, is almost an extension of *Sterno*.

Audiences respond to both artists’ work with similar adjectives: calming, serene, contemplative, still, reflective, immersive, introspective, therapeutic and melancholy. This does not necessarily mirror the artist’s intent, but it is the visceral response to immersion in their work. Artists may lean towards the introspective end of the introvert-extrovert scale. This allows them the necessary time and space to think and to put into being fleeting thoughts that the wider audience does not always give itself time to pin down and philosophise. As a result, in experiencing their work, the artists pass onto the viewer the essence of their introspective contemplation. This is the unique talent of philosophical artists such as Chua and Critchley. Their work takes us to a place that we may not reach on our own.

### Collaboration in a contemporary art context

Cross-cultural collaborations have become more viable as a result of technology and de-specialisation of art practices. Collaborations, such as those encouraged by AiRx, do not aim to remove local differences and create globalised homogeneity. Instead they allow artists to forge a path through their differences, finding areas of common cause or interest.

Collaboration can be challenging and requires respect, trust and humility from all participants. Each artist must view the other as a co-producer of a cultural meaning which goes beyond and outside their solo practice. To know when to compromise, when to push forward and when to move on are all necessary practicalities of taking part.

This collaboration has been prolific and successful. The quantity of work created resulted from an accelerated pace of production for both artists. For example, instead of the usual extensive research and preparation, *Sterno*, occurred on a more random spurt. The lack of negotiation seemed to liberate both artists, allowing them to experiment with preoccupations not “of” their core practice. Experiences like this can unlock creativity and are dubbed “accelerated serendipity” by collaboration advocates.

TS: Culturally and from a secondary/tertiary educational standpoint we are not taught to collaborate. The traditional educational model praises individual effort over collaborative endeavour. Do you think artists make good collaborators?

EC: *This work with Gen is my third big collaborative project with another artist. It is challenging as every decision must be run past your collaborator, however, it also pushes you. Whilst you may be satisfied with where something has got to, your collaborator is not and pushes you both to develop it further.*

*I would be interested in collaborating with someone who has a completely different specialism, for example a musician. I have recently begun to incorporate sound into my work and would be interested in a musician’s response.*

GC: *I think we’re taught to be too agreeable and polite. Artists can collaborate so long as they trust each other to a point where the individual artist can be left to destroy the piece, so that they can build it up again if the work is not up to par. If we can do that, then we display a commitment and resignation to each other as Siamese twins.*

*At times I felt like this collaboration impaired me (and maybe her also) because we live in a different time-zones and we are not used to waiting for someone else this way.*

*They need to acknowledge that the end result cannot always result in one singular standpoint—that would be highly unrealistic and counterproductive. It’s okay, for example, to agree to disagree and leave it as that since every story needs a conflict.*

*I’m not sure about traditional educational models or what happens in schools today. For the past eight years, my learning has been facilitated by Google and YouTube. This certainly encourages solitary and obsessive behaviour worth interrupting.*

### The collaborative works

*There is no dark side of the moon really. Matter of fact it’s all dark.*  
–Pink Floyd

The effects of moonlight can confuse, create illusions, inspire superstitious beliefs, religions, poets and artists. Its half-light alters perceptions and our ability to rationalise and puts the natural environment in one of its most elusive lights. The loss of stimulus experienced brings our awareness and perception into the present moment.

TS: The illusion or reality of moonlight and its effect on objects, communication, representation and perception has surfaced as the strongest magnet for your two practices. Can you expand on the significance of the moon to the collaborative series?

EC: *The moon was the thing that Gen and I initially talked about, which brought our practices together and it is how we have referred to the collaborative work from the start. For me, the moon is about the unknown, the presence of something that has a different time, the primal quality of the moonlight (referring to a time before language) and not having the senses we usually rely on. The quality of moonlight shifts our perceptions a little, in this way it is similar to being underwater.*

GC: *Agreeing with Emma. When we first spoke about the similarities of our practices, one of the obvious formal qualities was the sense of “moonlight” we both favoured. The moon does not really emit light as we know it, but buffers and diffuses the hours between moonrise/moonset. Then, when we discussed the moon compass, we were using it to “tell time” or location but this was at odds with the figurative speech—that the moon is inconstant or elusive. Among other concerns, we were trying to make this delicate balance between Myth-making and Truth, especially with our individual practices.*

GC: *There is this salient difference between our collaborative and individual works. Emma and I put ourselves inside our collaborative work as performers, but in the individual works, we pull out and away from it. I am not one of my characters, for example.*

The collaborative works find an interstitial place between their two practices; as Chua puts it “a third schizoid personality”. They were developed before either of the solo works and became increasingly

collaborative over the course of the three series.

### Glistening Twigs Undersea

The collaboration began as an examination of each other’s photographic archive, paying particular attention to scenes with a sense of diffused light, appropriately water for Critchley and the forest for Chua. The selected images formed the installation titled *Glistening Twigs Undersea*. As a mode of collaboration it is curatorial. The periscope-like display of the work speaks of a science museum, a cabinet of moonlit curiosities, allowing questions to be posed about the usual moonlight associations in Eastern and Western cultures.

EC: These ways of looking could be either into the future in a mystical way, or ways of seeing things that may normally go unnoticed, but we are for some reason drawn to.

This curatorial collaboration allowed each artist to explore the others’ practice and pursue the best scenario of creative collaboration; ideas they could not develop further on their own acquired new life in the company of each other.

### Disappearing Moon

Subsequently, they discussed at length their interest in moonlight and decided to create an almost performative work titled *Disappearing Moon*. Neatly circumventing the vast physical distance between them, they used a Moonseeker App<sup>9</sup> to calculate when they could both capture a full moon on their respective shorelines. They took observatory images of the time that passed on the coastline of Singapore and the UK from moonrise to moonset during a full moon on the same night in May 2012. The work captures time on opposite sides of the equator, a concept explored by the master of light, time and film, Anthony McCall<sup>10</sup>. Subsequently, turning the concept on its head, the images were merged to create an unspecified other place with no time and no fixed space.

The work’s premise is relatively scientific in the observation of the moon’s phases, the calculation of the appropriate date and time and the “rules of engagement” for each artist. However, the outcome is ambivalent and illusionary. Our perception is confused and altered by the scale of the rock in *Disappearing Moon* #1 and the strength of colour in *Disappearing Moon* #3. By capturing the shifting qualities of light and time, the artists reflect on in-between states and their ability to affect communication and representation.

*Disappearing Moon* was intended to complete their collaborative effort, but during Critchley’s residency in Singapore, they continued to discuss randomness versus order in terms of the natural world, the human world and the communication between the two. Another series of work, titled *Sterno*, a series of star maps, was developed. The artists created their own constellations using entirely random acts of dispersal by sneezing coffee onto paper.

*Sterno* represented a final step in the collaborative process—working together in person on theorising, developing and producing a new work. As curator and audience this is an interesting development

<sup>7</sup> Mimesis in the Aristotelian sense is defined as the perfection and imitation of nature.

<sup>8</sup> Known as Feng Shui in Chinese

<sup>9</sup> Pg 54–55

<sup>10</sup> McCall, Anthony. Useful further reading on www.luxonline.org.uk

<sup>11</sup> Pg 84–85



and end-point; for the artists this work is the furthest removed from their solo practices, thus, in many ways hardest to contextualise.

**The exhibition**

The exhibition includes a selection of work conceptualised during the AiRx cycle from March 2012 to January 2013. In addition to the exhibited work, Chua also developed *Ultrasound*<sup>12</sup> for a solo show in November 2012. These works can be neatly placed in the chronology and development of her work from *It Eludes Me, but I am Trying to Describe it to You* to 72. Critchley developed a series of work titled *In Conversation*<sup>13</sup>, a prelude to *Figures of Speech* and recorded early interactions with her subjects in Singapore.

The exhibition and accompanying publication serve as important documentation of the process and dialogue throughout the year. The artists are not given a theme as the aim of the programme is to support the development of their practices through engagement with another artist and a different culture. We do not wish to prescribe responses.

However, through the close working relationship between the two artists and the curators, the exhibition organically presents a cohesive body of work.

Aesthetically, black has become the harmonising tone of the exhi-

bition. Of course, black is not a colour; rather, it is arrived at when any colour is brought to its darkest value. Similarly, the moon does not emit light, it is lit by reflected light from the sun. Both paradoxes play with our perceptions, reminding us to rethink assumptions and entrenched viewpoints about our interactions with others, our subconscious and our environment.

Psychologically, black is on the one hand often associated with primal fears of darkness and of being under (ground or water); and on the other, conversely and more positively, with outer-space, infinite space and mysticism.

Different cultures have attached different meanings to black since ancient times<sup>14</sup>. Black in ancient Chinese and Japanese culture signifies water and nobility respectively. It is a neutral or positive colour. In European cultural histories, black is associated with mourning and evil. The 19th century Romantics saw black as the colour of melancholy, their dominant theme. Critchley's use of black seems quite closely aligned to Chinese cultural associations, whilst Chua's more closely relates to the negative and fearful connotations found in European culture.

Mastery of black in an artwork is seen by some as the pinnacle of achievement—Henri Matisse quoted the French Impressionist, Pissaro telling him, "*Manet is stronger than all of us—he made light with black*". The artists, in these new works, create a similar feat.

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# IRREAL ASSEMBLAGES:

## THE COLLABORATIVE WORK OF GENEVIEVE CHUA & EMMA CRITCHLEY

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*by Sam I-shan*

*Co-curator AiRx 2012*

As part of their requirements for the residency, Genevieve Chua and Emma Critchley created three collaborative works: *Disappearing Moon*, *Glistening Twigs Undersea*, and *Sterno*. Befitting collaborative works made by two artists brought together by a residency, the three works are premised on provisionality and found situations. At the same time, the artists' experience of negotiating through and making them becomes very important, as their respective preoccupations and working techniques assert themselves, coming to the fore in process where commonalities are concerned, while creating tension at other points, most noticeably in the search for a structurally and conceptually coherent way to present the work. Curious outcomes with perhaps unintended consequences resulted. The three collaborative works can be described as exercises about ways of looking, but they are just as much about parleying possibilities for representation. Starting out with observational and documentary studies, Chua and Critchley's collaborative process wended its intuitive way and found its final form in managed and layered investigations into the relationship between inner and outer worlds, in a way that remained somewhat true to both their practices.

The concerns that the two artists share were a natural starting point for the collaborative works. Three common areas were apparent: the photographic medium they both employ in their practice, the controlled ways that both source and work with locations and subjects, and their interest in elements that have changeable or multiform qualities, such as the light of the moon, underwater conditions, marginal sites or games of chance. The latter two became the most important in the making of *Glistening Twigs Undersea* and *Disappearing Moon*, which are on view in the exhibition in Singapore.

Of the collaborative works, *Glistening Twigs Undersea* was the first to be conceived, and their discussions in the course of making this work led to the creation of *Disappearing Moon*. In a kind of exquisite corpse of image exchange, they showed each other photographs from their archives, and this eventually resulted in two sets of images: the first made by Chua during her London residency in April 2012 when she photographed organic material found on the grounds of Kensington Gardens, and the second made by Critchley in the Mediterranean sea in May 2012. For both artists, these imag-

es had no set place in their œuvres, being somewhat like orphaned pictures, or test shots like the first few frames expensed in film cameras as a way to establish light conditions. On their own, each set was not entirely persuasive, but when placed together, took on qualities of great suggestion through their points of contrast and similarity. One set shows the surface of the land and the other describes the undersea. Both depict highly charged atmospheres, and convey the textural qualities and variable gleam of natural elements like light, land and air.

Throughout these initial investigations, it was the quality of light that most interested Chua and Critchley, such as the unexpected moments when light draws focus onto objects, or deflects attention away from them. From here they started to discuss what it meant for an object to reflect light, as opposed to emitting it. Moonlight became of interest: as nomenclature, it suggests the conventional understanding of the moon as a light-emitting object, when in fact it is a celestial body that reflects a small percentage of the light that radiates from the sun, doing so with an intensity that is not even or equal across its phases. This reflective light is also variable in the way that it is received by the human eye: it appears silvery as low light reduces the eye's ability to perceive colour, which bleaches or grays out one's environment, and creates for beholders the effect of monochromatic vision.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the moon might be described as a cipher as well as an agent: its reflective attributes mean that it undergoes continual transformation but at the same time, the quality of its light can alter the appearance of settings and subjects it falls upon. As a satellite of the earth, the moon casts back light from the stronger source of the sun, a process which changes not only the light in question, but also its own appearance from the earth, as well as the appearance of the world by night due to the way that the eye sees and reacts to moonlight. The moon is thus a trickster and transmogriker, characterised by action as well as passivity, absence as well as presence, and affecting as much as it is affected.

These tantalising and elusive qualities of the moon and its light offered a variety of representational and symbolic possibilities that sparked off the process of making *Disappearing Moon*. Chua and Critchley commenced with the simple premise that on the full moon

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<sup>12</sup> Pg 18–23

<sup>13</sup> Flam, Jack. *Matisse on Art*, University of California Press, 1995. 166.

<sup>1</sup> British Astronomical Association, *Guide to Observing the Moon*. London: Enslow Publishers Inc, 1986.

night of 8 May 2012, they would each go out to photograph in a place where they could see the edge of the land over the sea. This combination of sky, sea and land was already a part of the *Glistening Twigs Undersea* collaboration, but additionally one might read into their plan a continuation of the ancient human impulse to move toward the horizon as a place where the classical elements of earth, air and water appear to meet. The gravitational pull of a full moon would also add another element of drama as the tides would be at their highest. The moon has historically been used by sailors to find bearings, but as a navigational device, possesses shortcomings that need to be overcome with relational celestial observation, calculations and instruments, which lent an additional quixotic appeal to their project.

Chua and Critchley, were, however, less interested in tracking locations by the moon than in obtaining the bearings of the moon itself, and this formed the basis of their next working parameter. Bearing in mind the aforementioned unpredictable qualities of the moonlight as well as their different geographical locations, they decided to use a moon compass that indicated moonrise and moonset times, the lunar path at hourly intervals, and the moon's altitude and azimuth. In part, the compass would serve as visualisation of how the entity that is the moon would appear from their respective situations. In astronomical terms, a full moon should behave as follows: rise at sunset, set at sunrise and be completely overhead in the middle of the night. However, Critchley's moon as seen from northerly Brighton, UK, described a rising angle of about thirty degrees in relation to the horizon, while Chua's moon as seen from equatorial Singapore moved ninety degrees directly overhead. These variations in the witnessed positions of the moon, as corroborated by the calculations of the moon compass, provided them with speculative possibilities: what kind of images would result from photographing with the respective types of light created by these "different" moons?

Where *Glistening Twigs Undersea* was incidental, *Disappearing Moon* thus became performative. These working parameters were negotiated based on their mutual preoccupations and shared speculations about what they would see: the next step would be to document it, which was where they would be tested by real world conditions. From this point forward, the project started to take on unexpected permutations. The idyllic images they both had in mind of black skies and silvery moonlight tracks over sea were not in evidence, nor was it so easy for them to fulfill the intention to position themselves on the edge of the land and look out over the sea to photograph. The light of the moon had always been one of the key aspects of their project, yet now, they now had to deal with various types of light pollution. For Chua, the glow of the ubiquitous oil tankers and commercial ships lining the southern horizon of Singapore meant that prospect photographs became challenging. As a result, she photographed objects that available light fell upon rather than the horizon as intended, and her set of images are characterised by a gaslight orange that conveys a sense of the urban even at ocean's side. Chua's progress was further stymied by a tropical thunderstorm, which is visible in the images as a fug of mist over tree and wave. Meanwhile, Critchley encountered car lights and street lamps, but was able to document the horizon, making images of a stern and romantic quality suggesting the darkling plains of Matthew Arnold. In both Chua and Critchley's images, a certain sense of the sublime or whimsical can be read, and while this type of work might have appealed to them on certain levels, it was not necessarily what they wanted to be making. As such, their documentation process became characterised by what might be termed the quality of accident. While the collaborative process was most cohesive at

the point of conception due to the structural framework provided by the moon compass and the working parameters they had negotiated, the actual process of documentation, and later, the creation and presentation of the final work evolved to a point where tensions were created between intention and outcome, or process and result. The question thus arose: what do with these tensions, and was there a necessity to resolve them?

One of the reasons these tensions arose is that the types of images resulting from their documentation are departures from the kind of work that the two artists usually make. For Critchley, who frequently works underwater, highly managed shoots are necessary, while Chua prefers light conditions between four and six p.m. and is often extremely calculated about the choice of her natural settings. Also, while natural elements such as water and the land play essential roles for both artists, they rarely portray them in a straightforward manner. For instance, it is not always immediately evident from Critchley's portraits that they are made underwater, and the landscape in Chua's photographs sometimes appears in entirely abstracted form, or can come across as more threatening and transformative rather than transformed or beautiful.

Thus, while the project unfolded from the hypothesis that nature and natural entities viewed from geographically different places would manifest and be expressed differently in images, it was eventually not possible to determine the source of these differences. Following their performative act of documentation, replete as it was with the unanticipated, the two artists moved back toward a more managed approach—a method more true to their way of working—in the process of putting the work together. They each selected three images from their respective sets and combined them in montage into three larger c-prints, showing the moon, a rock, trees, water and the sky in relational positions within and across each photograph. This act of photomontage might on one level be described as a simple combinational gesture. For Chua and Critchley, who had to overcome the difficulty of presenting two sets of images that had the potential to be divergent in their substance or implication, such an assemblage was one of the most logical ways to present the work. It was in a sense, a way for them to "agree to disagree" and express difference within a framework that had to be necessarily shared.

Indeed, the genre of photomontage is one that tolerates a great range of contradictory intentions and manifestations. In its earlier iteration as combination printing, photomontage as practiced in the 19th century involved the making of a photographic image with two or more negatives with different exposures, which were subsequently combined into a single print. This technique was historically used to overcome limitations of existing technology, as the sky and the land required different exposure times in landscape photography so as to approximate as closely as possible what the world looked like to the naked eye. This compensated for the limitations of photographic medium during that period and created the visual effect of a unity of one space in time.

As a form of photomontage, combination printing is intriguing when thought about in relation to Chua and Critchley's project, anachronistic as it may be to draw this connection. While users of this early technique sought to represent a space as singular despite differences in the way light could be captured, Chua and Critchley's original premise was to *emphasise* differences in light across two different spaces and chronological times. However, an unexpected result of combining their separate images is that it is hard to tell in the final

set of photographs which images were made by Chua and which were made by Critchley. Indeed, as they put their work together, each instinctively selected images that showed a variety of aspects of the sea and sky by night: where Critchley chose a photograph of clouds in the sky, for instance, Chua would choose one of waves on the shore. In combination, the montaged images drew out semblances from each other, and can be read as suggestive of one space and time. Without any knowledge of the artists' discussion, their respective moon compasses and the details of their performative project, can the extent of their differences and the complications of the exploratory process be discerned from the final set of photographs? While the initial parameters and the actual process of documentation were premised on difference and emphasised variance, the actual presentation of the work might be said to have exorcised this somewhat.

This is where the capaciousness of the genre of photomontage becomes relevant. At once documentary, polemical, banal and fantastical, it is on a basic level, an illusionistic technique that can depict fictional scenarios as if they were real. Thus might 19th century landscapes appear singularly lit even though they could not be captured that way, and space-time coherence interpreted from congruences in Chua and Critchley's photographs of different spaces. The creation of incongruous juxtapositions furthermore becomes a transformative gesture that pulls their work into the realm of the unreal or fantastical. This is described as much in Franz Roh's gloss on photomontage as a "combin[nation of] collage, painting and photography to create images that abandon the assumed representational truth of photography without fully rejecting its aesthetic".<sup>2</sup> Work that is at once rooted in a world of objective reality, yet is at the same time not completely of it, might be described as having qualities of "magical realism". Coined by Roh to describe a style of painting in 1920s Weimar Germany, this term refers to depictions of the external realistic world that simultaneously hint at or draw out inexplicable elements of interiority. This term found traction

later in literary contexts, especially when applied to categories of writing from Latin and South America. However, the "magical" qualities it refers to can be elaborated in multifold ways, as describing the uncanny or monstrous effects of mingling elements that do not necessarily belong together, or the strangeness of being in a modern world that is at once dark yet marvellous.

Thus, the process of Chua and Critchley's collaborative project, which started from casual questions about the mystery behind the surface of ordinary things, and their subsequent specified attempts to explore and document different qualities of light, later found transfiguration when they created new scenes in the final presentation of their collaborative work. In *Glistening Twigs Undersea*, the subtle glow of small branches and curvilinear waves can be faintly discerned from the stainless steel plates they are printed on, which are positioned within a low plinth, and appear as if suspended in or emerging from an inky sea of black. The result is a play on how to look, as the viewer is made aware of the oddity of viewing these photographs whose subjects are drawn from nature, yet are presented with a kind of abstracted artificiality, and in combined isolation. Meanwhile, in *Disappearing Moon* the "comingling of the improbable and the mundane"<sup>3</sup> is in evidence, and the object of representation itself becomes transformed through several changes in the artists' means of representation. The moon fulfils the prophecy in the title of their project, and eventually "disappears" as subject. In this sense, Chua and Critchley have gone full circle from their first discussion that prompted *Glistening Twigs Undersea*, through to the final images of *Disappearing Moon*. From their starting point of thinking about the light or the life that can be discerned from within things, the two artists' final images might now be read as presentations of the mysterious relationship between perceiving humans and the surroundings that they are enveloped by. Through the juxtaposition of light peculiarities and scenic particularities, the spirit of things is illuminated.

<sup>2</sup> Roh, Franz "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism" (1925) in *Magical Realism*. Eds. L. P. Zamora and W. B. Faris. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. 15-32.

<sup>3</sup> Rushdie, Salman, *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage, 1995. 9.



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# DRAWN INTO THE DEEP

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*by Jonathan Miles*

*Writer, Theorist and Artist*

Sometimes looking at work makes the mind go astray. I remember a Mughal miniature of the Emperor Jahangir (1569–1627) drawn up from the ocean depth in a giant glass container. He talked of the wondrous scenes he had witnessed, as if visiting an alien world or planet for the first time, and in this, thrown outside of bounded experience. A floating chain of signifying words come to me; below, submerged, other, unconscious, before, deep, float. I need to float in these images and be with these words in order to discover their reserve without attempting to fix anything.

So we are submerged (on the plane of the imaginary), placed underwater into a world bereft of direct forms of speech and thus confined to the space of gesture. The recorded image within this space itself is subject to warping and folding, as if flickering on the edge of being without the certainty of substance. Perhaps such images do not properly coincide with reality, and as such, are closer to hallucinations or reveries. We are not only asked to re-orientate sense but to give ourselves over to the difference implied in this (a being under or the under of being).

Everything is transformed below the surface. History is normally secured because of the certainty of time and place, which gives it ground (indexical certainty), so in the midst of the disappearance of those indices, history vanishes. History has a beat to it, like a quickstep of humanity on the march, without time to lose. Human beings never really catch up with their history, maybe because history is never quite of their making. Below the surface time drifts and meanders—there is no quick step—even if in moments the heart beats faster and the body pulses. The space that exists below language in its written form is rhythmical, musical and pulsational. It is the sensual reserve of what is called language, a-signifying as opposed to signifying. We are being asked to consider the space below the surface of water next to the space seemingly below language (in turn we are confronted by a disordering of the image, body, space and language). There is of course always something below or beneath all entities. Maurice Blanchot says that beneath each and every image there is a cadaverous presence and that the image comes out of nothing and is marked by this condition. Is this also a way of indicating the depth of an a-temporal reserve? Thus we are given over both to questions that arise from within these works but also to the pleasures that can be discovered from without as well.

Instead of hearing voices, we see the morphing of oxygen bubbles that trace the articulation of the word, a delay that can be understood as being equivalent to an echo. We are pulled into a relationship of the word as imagined form, and can within this, marvel at its potentiality of manifestation, but like the judgement of the beautiful, we are left in a state of pure suspension in regard to a cognition of meaning.

Cartesian philosophy is an upright (uptight) philosophy, it proscribed optical ordering of the horizon that surrounds or places it as its own constituted centre, which is in turn, a philosophy of presence. In this respect it is a philosophy that is stiff because everything in its scope is placed within a geometrical grid. Clarity, precision, reduction and order are all part of its syntax, so all that is in-between, fuzzy, or merely sensible is discharged from its device of “enframing” (a word used by Martin Heidegger to indicate a revealing through ordering and blocking). These works remix our circulations, perhaps they even turn our sense into circulation, as op-



posed to set-ups. Thus the relationship between the image and the circulation of breath is posited; perhaps breath is placed before thought, which is itself subject to withdrawal. Something else is in circulation; sense, gesture, affects, but in ways that are freed from inscriptive indexes. The image is a mere slice of breath and space, exhibiting itself before and behind the subject.

Why are we lead to associate water with that aspect of the psyche we name the unconscious? Is it that they are both under and seemingly a-temporal?

When we look at a Sugimoto photograph of one of his ocean series we might wonder if this is before or after historical time or alternatively pre- or post-human. It is not so much an image of this or that moment of manifestation but rather, a consideration of how time's potentiality becomes exposed. It is neither the stilling of motion nor the motion of stilling, rather the presentation of the erasure of such differences. As opposed to being a picture or a frame of reality, we are drawn into the illusion fostered by the power that imagines that the world might offer itself to such a view. (Sugimoto removes the view from the viewpoint). If such a thing exists then we might be tempted to say that this is a mode of philosophical photography. Likewise the nuances of Emma Critchley's work draw us both into concerns with the presentation of the image but also the play between image, language and things. Rather than representing ideas, this work submerges us in the sense of things, the passage from one order to the next; the infinity of relations undermine the gravity of knowing and describing as if known.

Is the body subject to the force of gravity orientated to the horizon that suggests that the finite limit of the body itself finds its opening with the infinite extension that the horizon suggests? To be a figure assumes the fidelity of this sense. Submerged below water this sense of the body is not only displaced, but subject to dissolution of habitual orientation. If the body itself is primarily constituted out of water then it might be a case of the body discovering its own element or nature when submerged, thus in turn becoming fluid like water itself. As opposed to a morphing shaped by gravity, the body is pushed and pulled within the fluidity of a volume that commands of the body another behaviour outside of the laws given by earthly dwelling.

Presence and absence are not in opposition, but are instead an unfolding co-extensivity. It is not that one becomes fish-like, even though something of such a possibility is of course proximate, but rather orientation is transformed in ways which would predicate such a becoming-other (fish-like, spectral, imaginary).

These works stage the elsewhere of being but also the elsewhere of being in relationship to the formation of image. They both record the image in formation—but the opposite case, that is, as deformation.

I wonder what these images do. Are they seductive and beautiful, or do they perform a condition, inform or scrutinise and thus give rise to insight? Perhaps both of these, but without the certainty that it is either case, or in combination, fully the case, so this leads us to the feeling that there is something that evades or escapes the more obvious conditions of representation. Perhaps this arises out of a condition of surprise because the figures represented cannot really align themselves with their expected depiction. Thus there is an element of being thrown and that the discrete boundaries that keep representational semblance in place have themselves become fluid. Rather than simulating surprise, the images are the type of surprise that normally require simulation. Therefore the images are not surprising, but instead tease with the sensation of surprise because they evade such obvious techniques of presentation. It is like staring into a Chinese monochrome dish in which the light endlessly reflects and refracts in ways that never quite allow the viewer to settle on a static essence of the thing. What I am pointing towards is a condition in between appearance and essence, or put in another way, the play of difference between the two.

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# FIGURES OF SPEECH I AND II, BEFORE LANGUAGE, THERE IS NOTHING IN LANGUAGE THAT DOES NOT COME FROM THE SENSES

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*by Emma Critchley*

This work explores the reciprocal exchange continually taking place between the body and its surrounding environment; a relationship that becomes heightened when immersed within the thick liquidity of water. The writer David Abram describes the way language has lost its sensual foundations, which previously allowed for a more reciprocal human relationship with nature. Through working underwater, a space where the intricacy of speech is broken down into one of tones, rhythms and vibrations, this work investigates ways in which communication, or its attempt, becomes the physical interplay between body and environment.



**In Conversation**  
 2012  
 C-Type photographic print  
 101.6 x 76.2cm  
 Edition of 5 + 2AP



**In Conversation**

2012

C-Type photographic print

101.6 x 76.2cm

Edition of 5 + 2AP





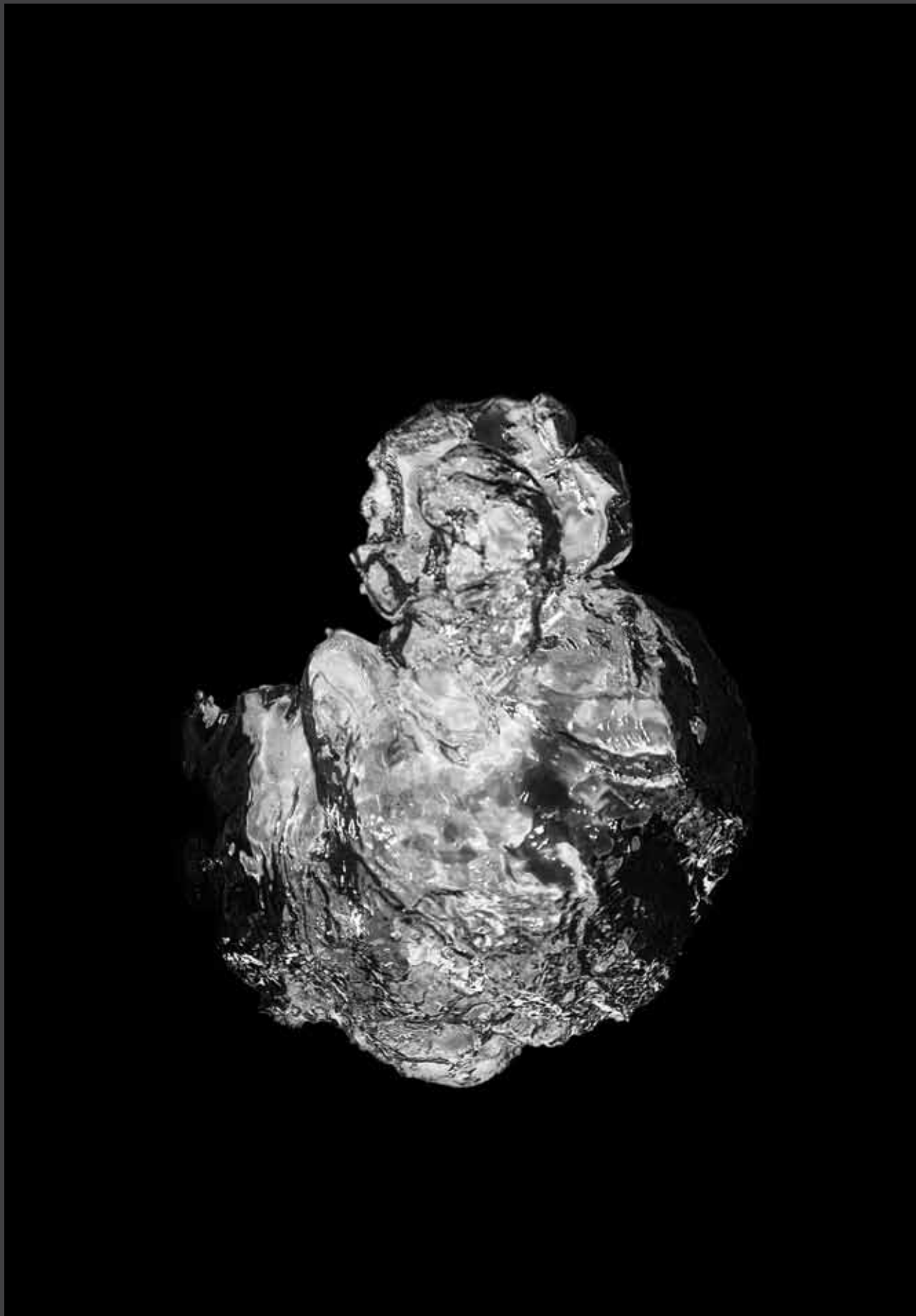
**In Conversation**

2012

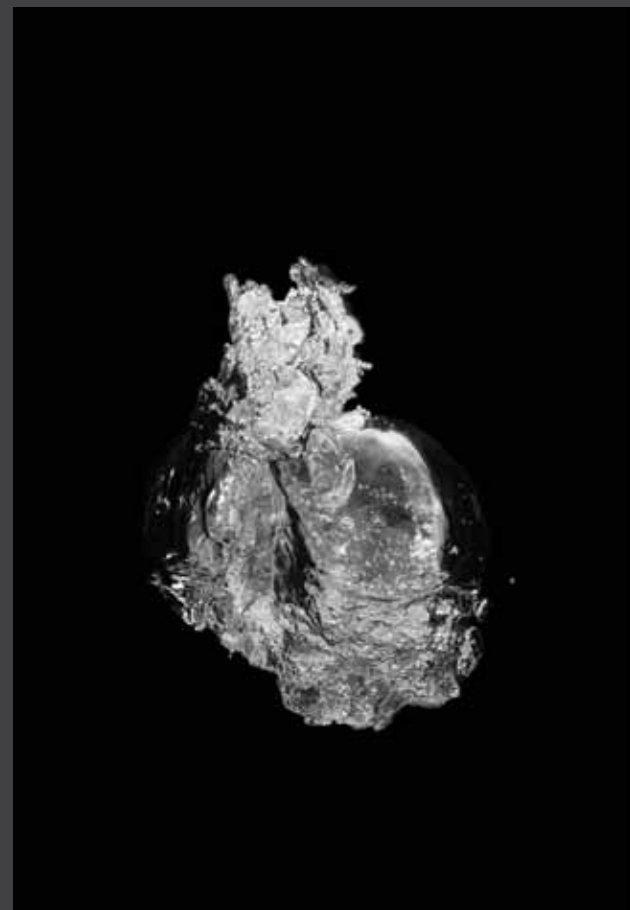
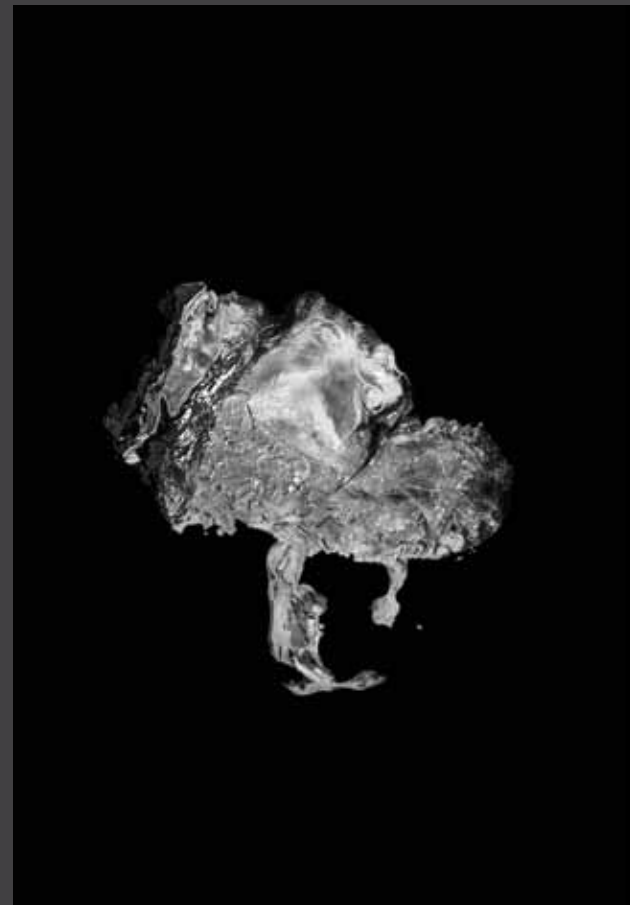
C-Type photographic print

101.6 x 76.2cm

Edition of 5 + 2AP

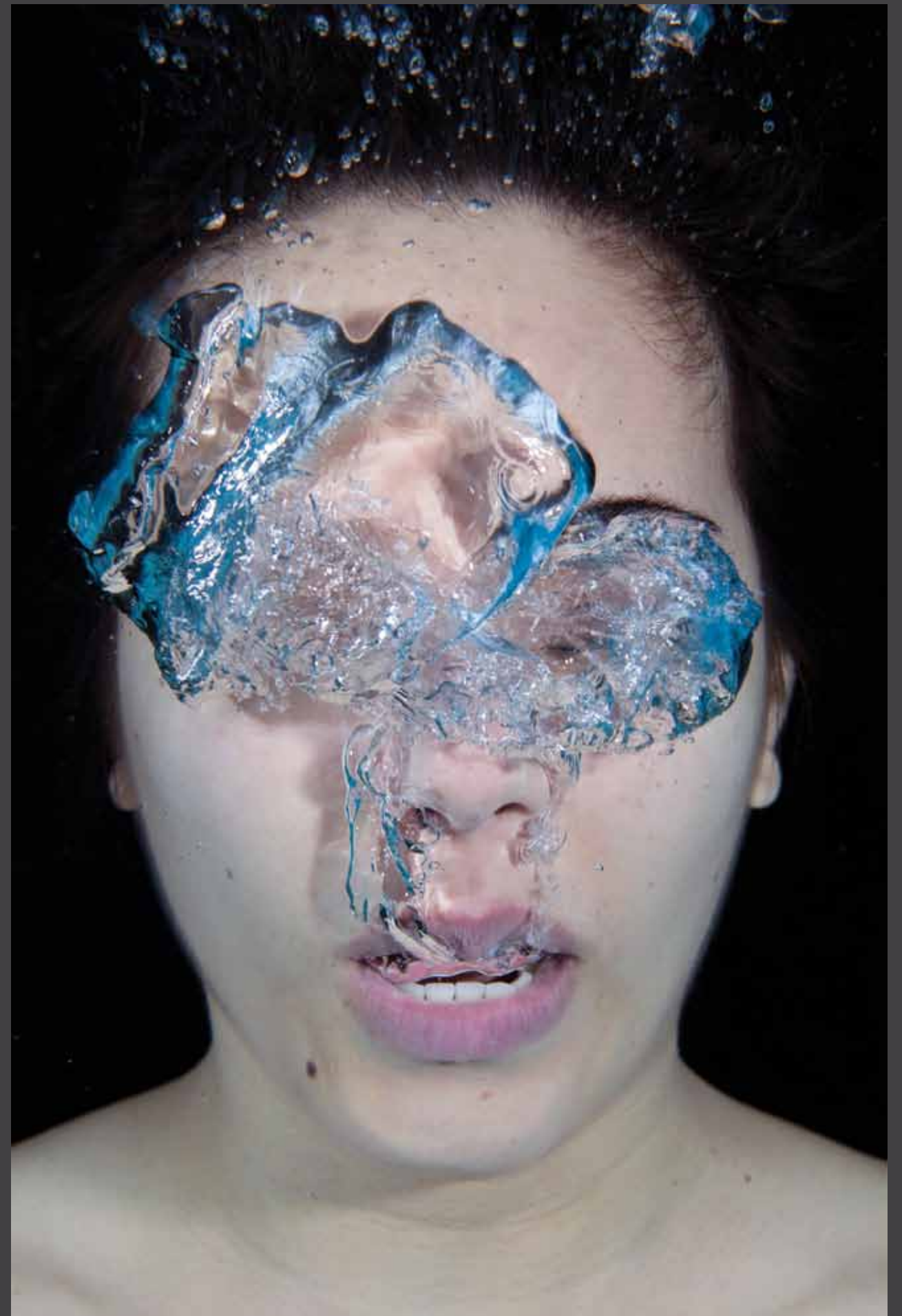


Figures of Speech series 1  
 #1-5  
 2012  
 C-Type photographic print  
 Series of 5, 101.6 x 67.6cm each  
 Edition of 5 + 2AP





Figures of Speech series 2  
#1-3  
2012  
C-Type photographic print  
Series of 2, 40.6 x 27cm each  
Edition of 5 + 2AP



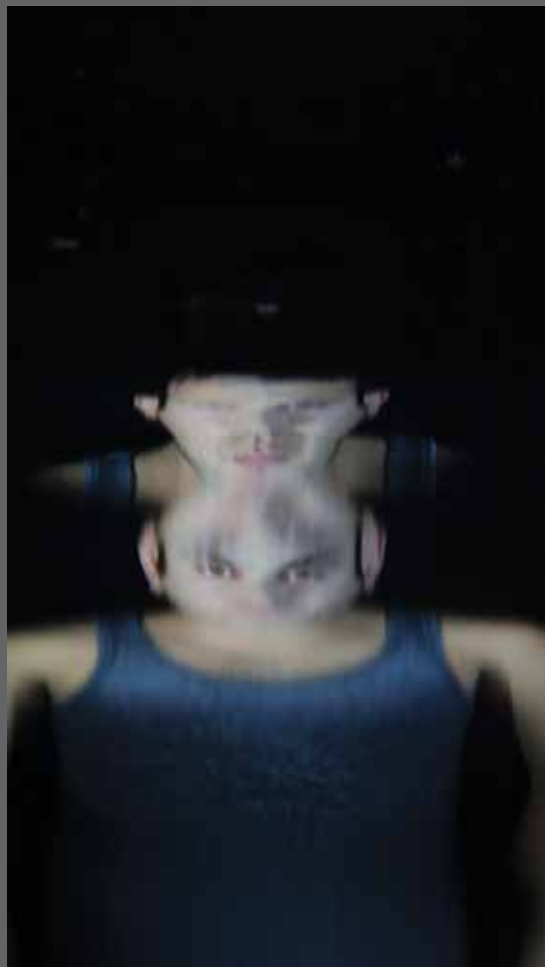




**Before Language**  
2012  
16:9 HD video (colour, sound)  
1:30 minutes  
Edition of 3 + 2AP







There is nothing in Language, which has not come from the Senses  
2012  
16:9 HD video (colour, no sound)  
2:00 minutes  
Edition of 3 + 2AP

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# MIMESIS

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*"It is supposed, that man, being as yet mute, heard the voices of birds and dogs and cows, the thunder of the clouds, the roaring of the sea, the rustling of the forest, the murmurs of the brook, and the whisper of the breeze. He tried to imitate these sounds, and finding his mimicking cries useful as signs of the objects from which they proceeded, he followed up the idea and elaborated language."*

-Max Muller



## Mimesis

2012

16:9 HD video (colour, sound)

1:15 minutes

Edition of 3 + 2AP

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<sup>1</sup> Muller, Max. Lectures on the Science of Language. Lugmans, Green and Co, 1866. 396–397.



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# INBOX: 08.10.12: SORRY FOR THE RADIO SILENCE

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*by Emma Critchley*  
*Artist*

Inbox: 08.10.12: Sorry for the radio silence  
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A man attempts to break the speed of sound by sky diving from space to earth. In the final moments before he leaps into the earth's atmosphere his helmet steams up and he can no longer see. He reports this to mission control and the response is that the only way to resolve this issue is to turn off radio communication whilst they try to fix the problem. But it cannot be guaranteed that the radio will come on again.

As he stands on the edge of the earth's atmosphere, he must make a split second decision—whether to lose the ability to hear and speak to ground control, potentially permanently—or to remain unable to see.

...

HSE Commercial Diving Rope Signals

In case of radio failure

There are two types of rope or line signals:

A Pull  
A Bell

A Pull is a full arm movement, which causes a substantial movement of the line, i.e. 0.3 to 0.5 of a metre. Pulls can be sent singly and can be used in conjunction with Bells.

A Bell is a short, sharp motion of the line, which results in a sharp pulse being sent. The line should not move more than .1 to .2 of a metre. Bells are always sent in pairs i.e. five Bells are sent as: two Bells, two Bells and one Bell.

When a message is to be sent, the procedure to follow is:

- One Pull to gain attention of recipient
- Wait for an answering Pull to acknowledge receipt of message
- Send the message as required
- Wait for the message to be repeated by the recipient

## SINGLE LIFELINE SIGNALS

Attendant to Diver:  
General Signals

- 1 PULL—to call attention. Are you well?
- 2 PULLS—Am sending down a rope's end (or as previously arranged).
- 3 PULLS—You have come up too far, go down slowly until we stop you.
- 4 PULLS—Come up.
- 4 PULLS—followed by 2 BELLS—Come up, hurry up or come up, surface decompression.
- 5 PULLS—followed by 5 BELLS—come up via your safety float.

Diver to Attendant:  
General Signals

- 1 PULL—to call attention. Made bottom. Left bottom. Reached the end of jackstay. I am well.
- 2 PULLS—Send me down a rope's end (or as previously arranged).
- 3 PULLS—I am going down.
- 4 PULLS—May I come up?
- 4 PULLS—followed by 2 BELLS—I want to come up, assist me up.
- 4 PULLS—followed by 5 BELLS—May I come up to my safety float?
- Succession of PULLS (must be more than 4)—EMERGENCY SIGNAL. Pull me up IMMEDIATELY.
- Succession of 2 BELLS—Am foul and need the assistance of another diver.
- Succession of 3 BELLS—Am foul but can clear myself if left alone.

...

A girl turns 18 and for her birthday wants to skydive. Not strapped to someone else, but to learn how to jump out of a plane on her own and freefall back to land. After a weekend's training, the day comes when the conditions are right and she is able to make the jump. As the four nervous trainees line up ready to board the small aircraft the instructor shouts above the noise of the plane's engine.

'It will be difficult to communicate when we are up there, so I'm going to give you numbers: 1, 2, 3 and 4. This is the order that you will jump out of the plane. You will jump out in pairs. You have radio headsets but they only work one way, as ground control doesn't want to hear your shrieks (he laughs). Make sure you listen to them, they will guide you down but will refer to you as your number not your name.'

The 18-year-old number 4 excitedly climbs into the plane and squeezes in amongst the other divers. As the plane reaches the optimum height, the hatch opens and with it a patchwork quilt of the world below. With hand signals, the instructor indicates

Number 1, ready, go

Number 2, ready, go

The divers disappear into the sky, like chicks launching themselves from the nest.

Number 3, ready, go

Number 4, ready, go

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The wind is deafening as it rushes through her body. The sound of adrenaline-fuelled chaos. But

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<sup>1</sup> Abram, David (1996) The Spell of the Sensuous. Vintage Books New York p. 90  
<sup>2</sup> Max Muller (1866) Lectures on the Science of Language. Lugmans, Green and Co: 396–397.



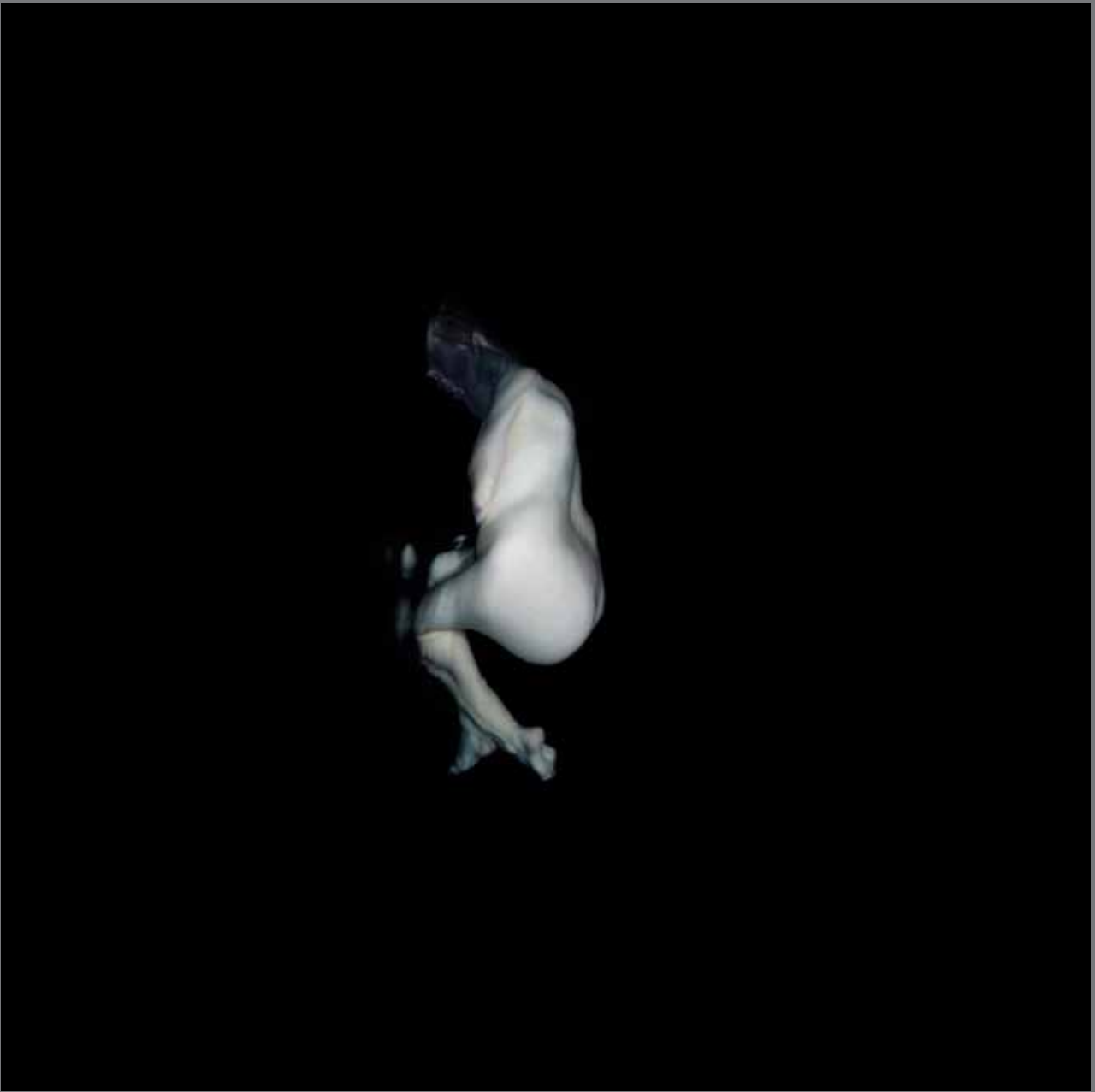


**Two Breathe**  
2011  
16:9 HD video (colour, no sound)  
2:00 minutes looped  
Edition of 5 + 1AP



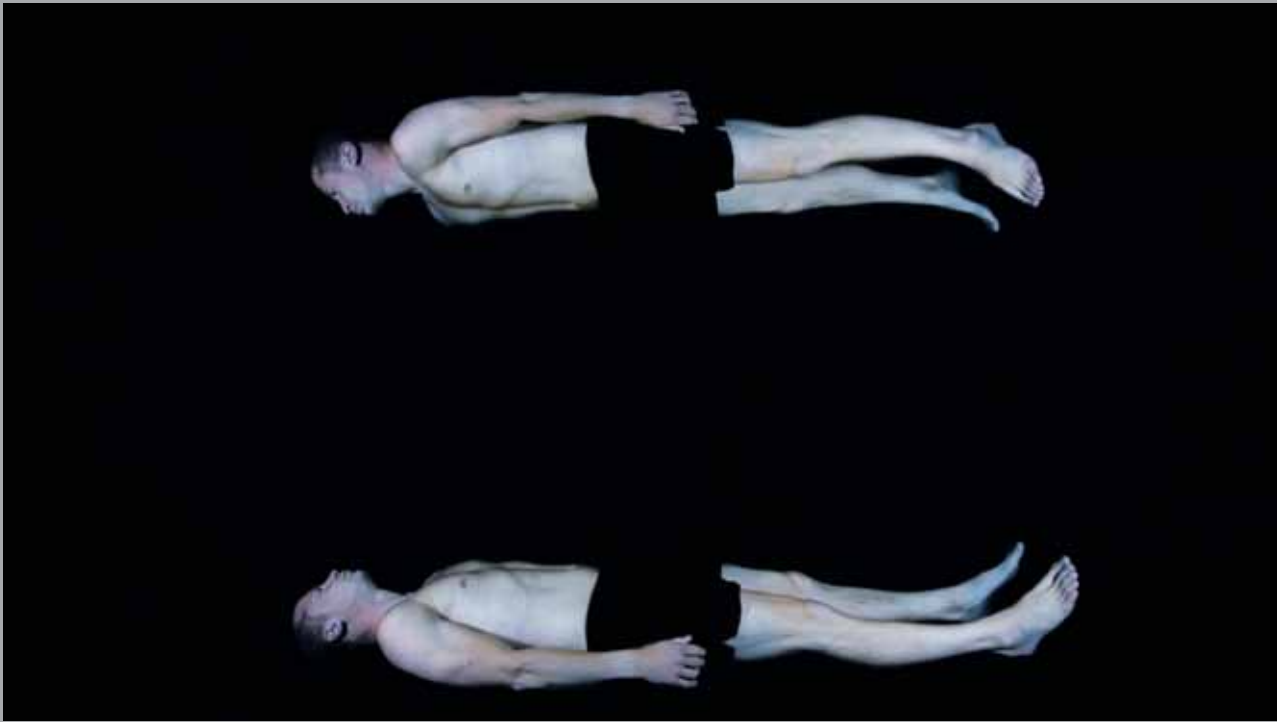
**Single Shared Breath**  
2011  
16:9 HD video (colour, no sound)  
2:00 minutes looped  
Edition of 5 + 1AP

**Surface series**  
#1-6  
2012  
C-Type photographic print  
Series of 5, 51 x 51cm each  
Edition of 5 + 2AP





**Suspended**  
 2011  
 C-type photographic print  
 153 x 102 cm  
 Edition of 5 + 2AP



**Reflection**  
 2011  
 16:9 HD video (colour, no sound)  
 2:00 minutes looped  
 Edition of 5 + 1AP

# GLISTENING TWIGS UNDERSEA

Through discussion, we established similar qualities in our work and interests—such as the peculiarity of light in the evening, or an underwater glistening—that both have a temporality in their bid to either “disappear” or transmogrify. This collaborative process forced us to look at our work obliquely in pursuing a connection that would be most intriguing. The selection of images in *Glistening* can be described as two found situations from our respective archives.

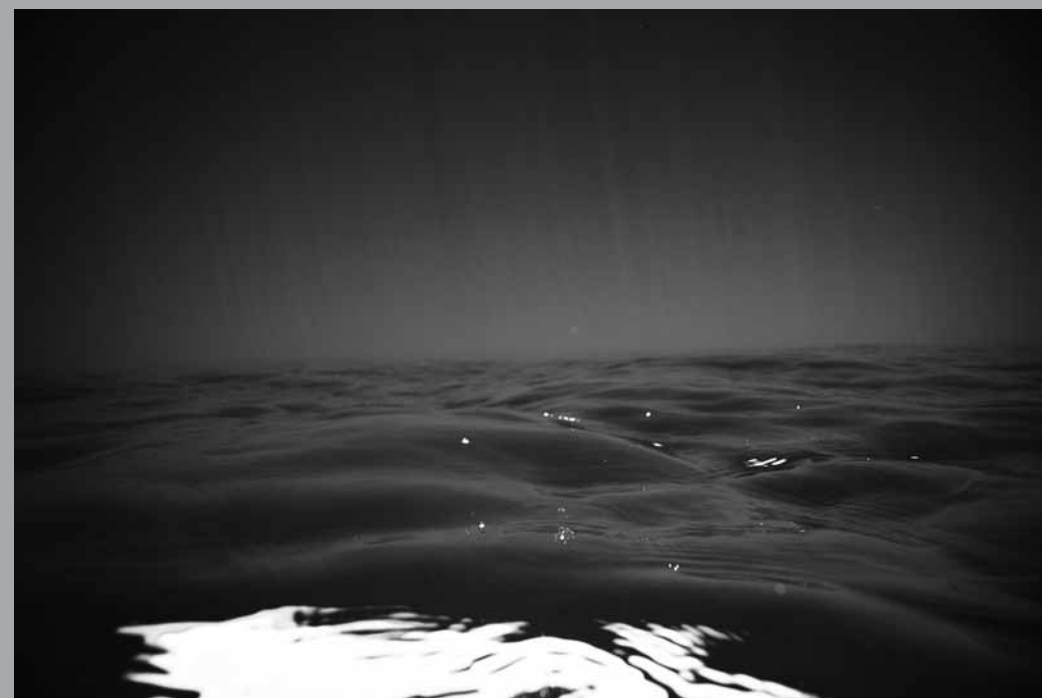
Three of the images by Genevieve Chua depict small twigs hidden in the grass whereupon bokeh formed by the filter of sunlight through the leaves above disturbs the image. Three other images by Emma Critchley are photographed underwater, whilst looking up at the water’s surface. The intermittent dispersal of light, maps the contours and behaviours of the water within an otherwise invisible and colourless territory. Presented as an observation study, the six images are printed on polished surfaces and arranged inside a plinth as a re-enactment of two occurrences in areas we are unaccustomed to representing, due to their ephemeral settings.



Emma Critchley & Genevieve Chua  
**Glistening Twigs Undersea**  
2012  
Piezography Print on Steel; Custom plinth  
Series of 6 prints, 13.5 x 9 cm each  
Edition of 5 + 2AP









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# DISAPPEARING MOON

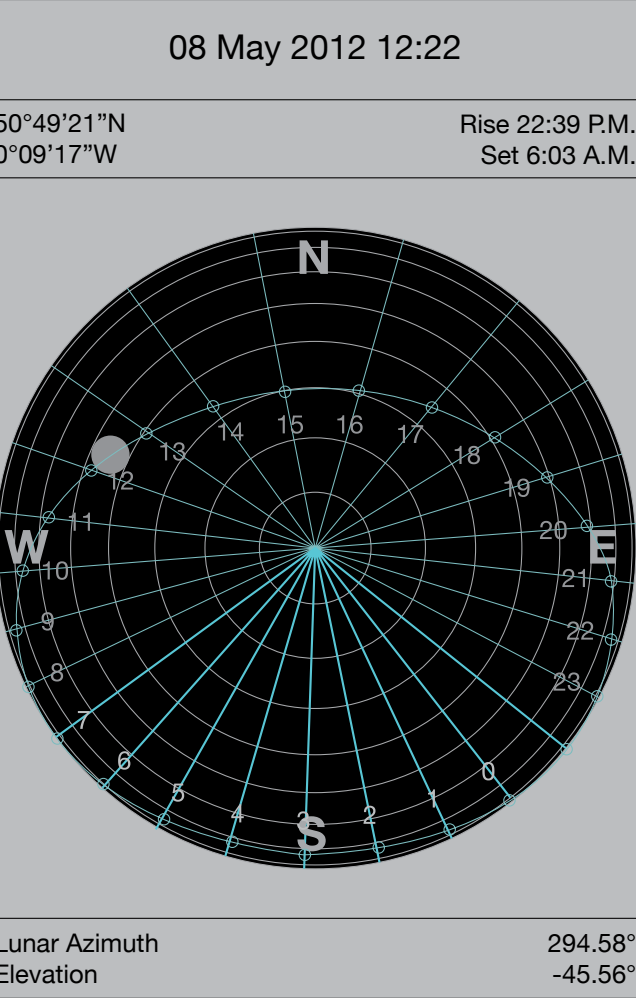
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The moon's constancy is often thwarted by idiomatic expressions that personify the moon as being illusive in appearance. However, using specialised devices, the moon can be deemed constant insofar as it functions as a compass. Furthermore, it does for a fact, reveal and conceal itself on schedule throughout the month. We found that this was something challenging to conceive by mere observation, especially in cloudy weather. It would be erroneous to say that the moon disappears since it is always there. However, it appeared that this paradox would later add texture to the project we had in mind.

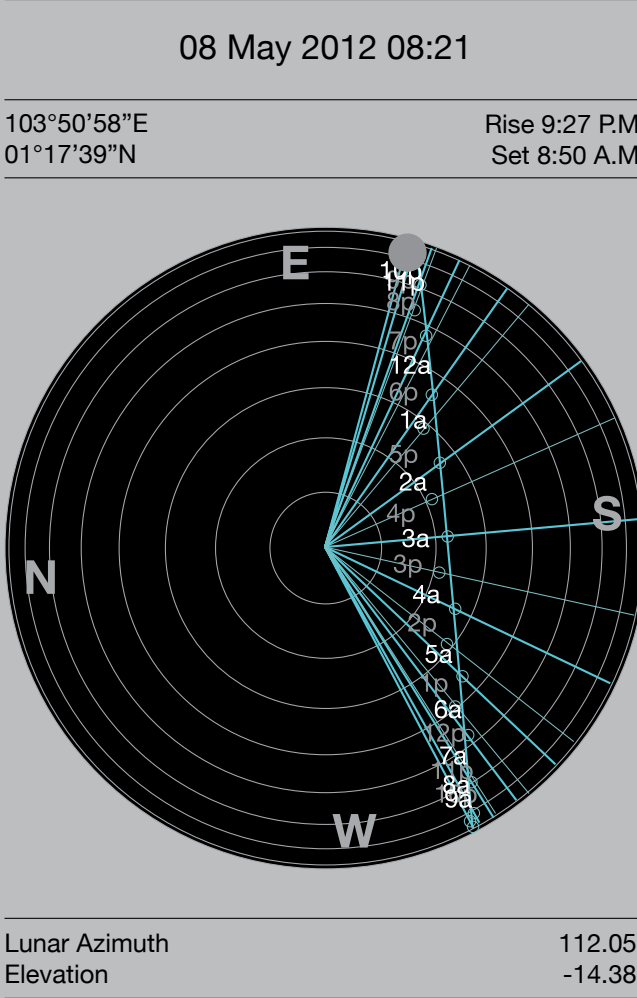
We ventured out to the edge of the sea at dusk when the moon was full, and began to document the moonrise-moonset in our respective locations, being Brighton, UK and Singapore. The moon diffused a light that blurs visual perspective and slowly buffers the hours between its rise and set. Under its diminishing glow, objects and surfaces surrounding the sea began to fade into the background. We were interested in these nuanced scenarios of change, loss and irregularity.



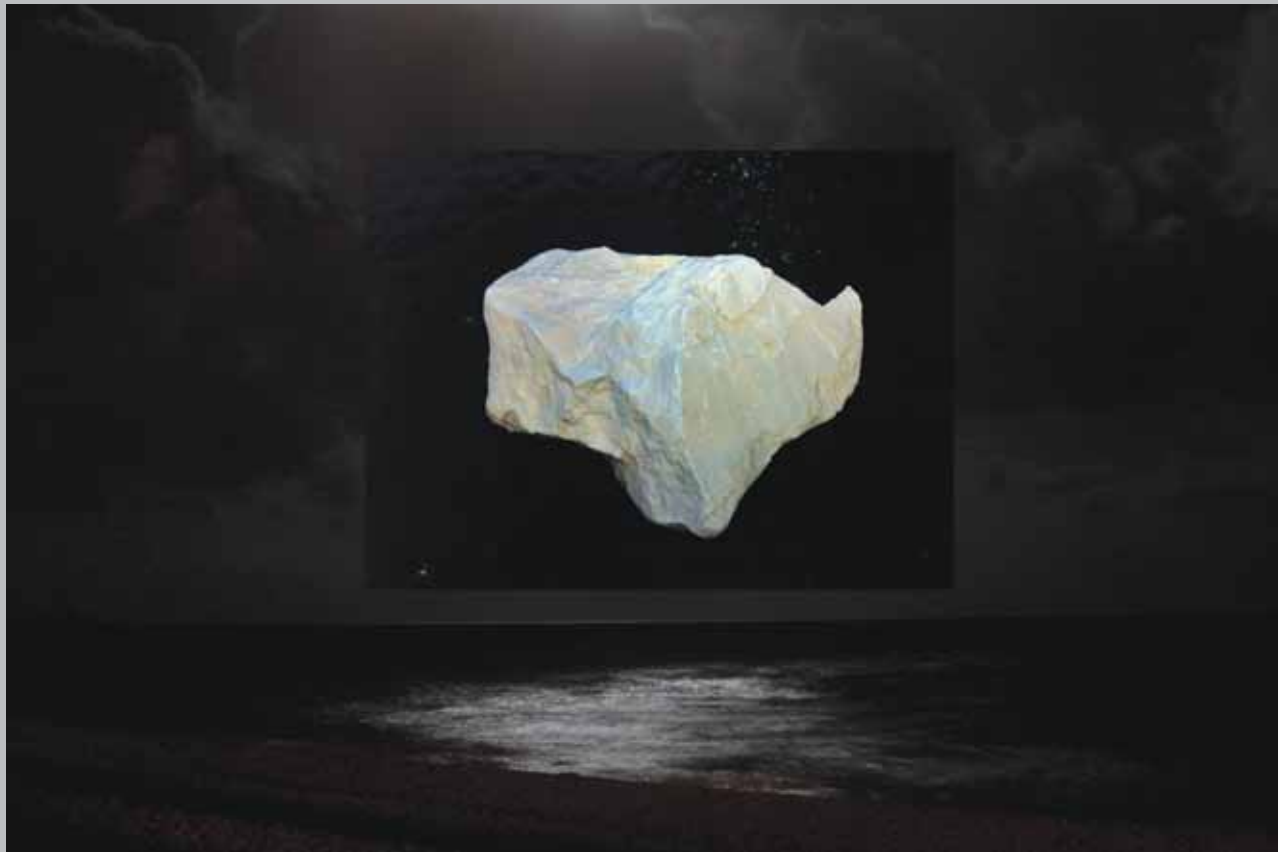
# EMMA'S MOONSEEKER



# GENEVIEVE'S MOONSEEKER







Emma Critchley & Genevieve Chua

**Disappearing Moon #1**

2012

Archival Pigment Ink on Hahnemühle Fine Art Baryta

50.8 x 76.2 cm

Edition of 5 + 2AP



Emma Critchley & Genevieve Chua

**Disappearing Moon #2**

2012

Archival Pigment Ink on Hahnemühle Fine Art Baryta

50.8 x 76.2 cm

Edition of 5 + 2AP



Emma Critchley & Genevieve Chua  
**Disappearing Moon #3**  
2012  
Archival Pigment Ink on Hahnemühle Fine Art Baryta  
50.8 x 76.2 cm  
Edition of 5 + 2AP

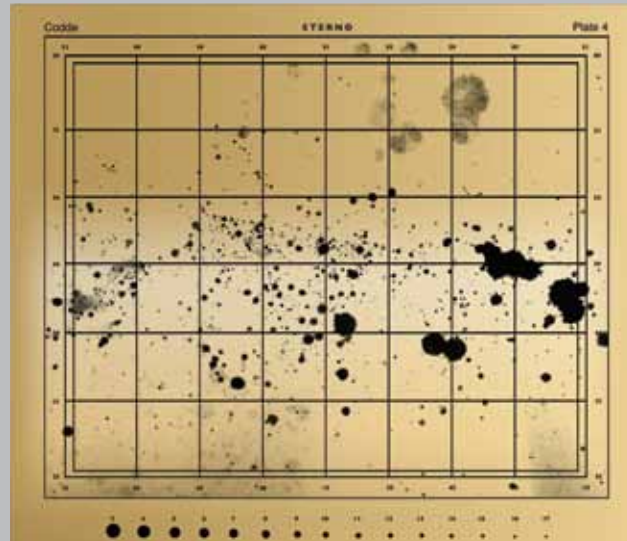
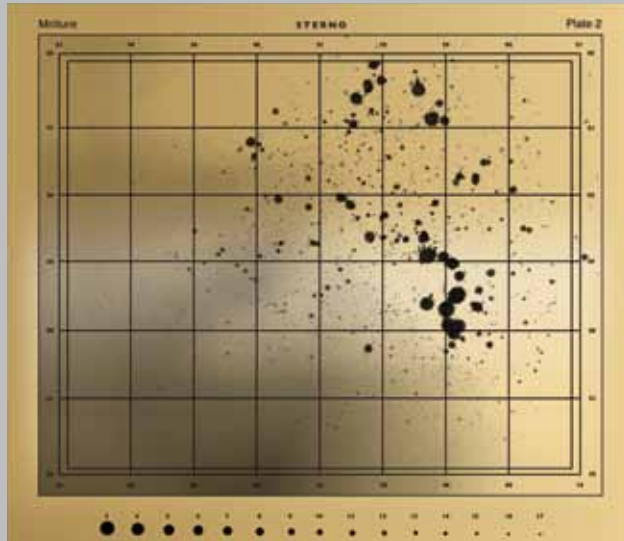
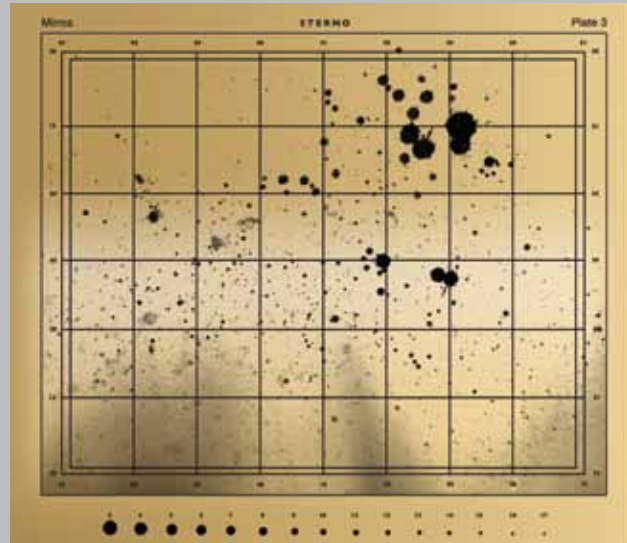
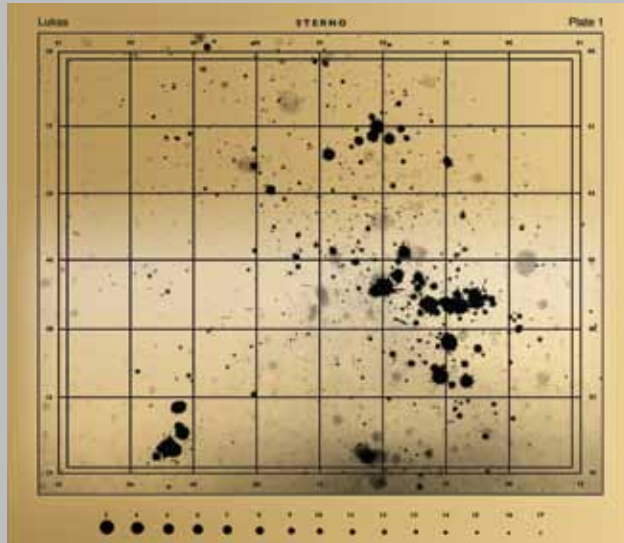
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# STERNO

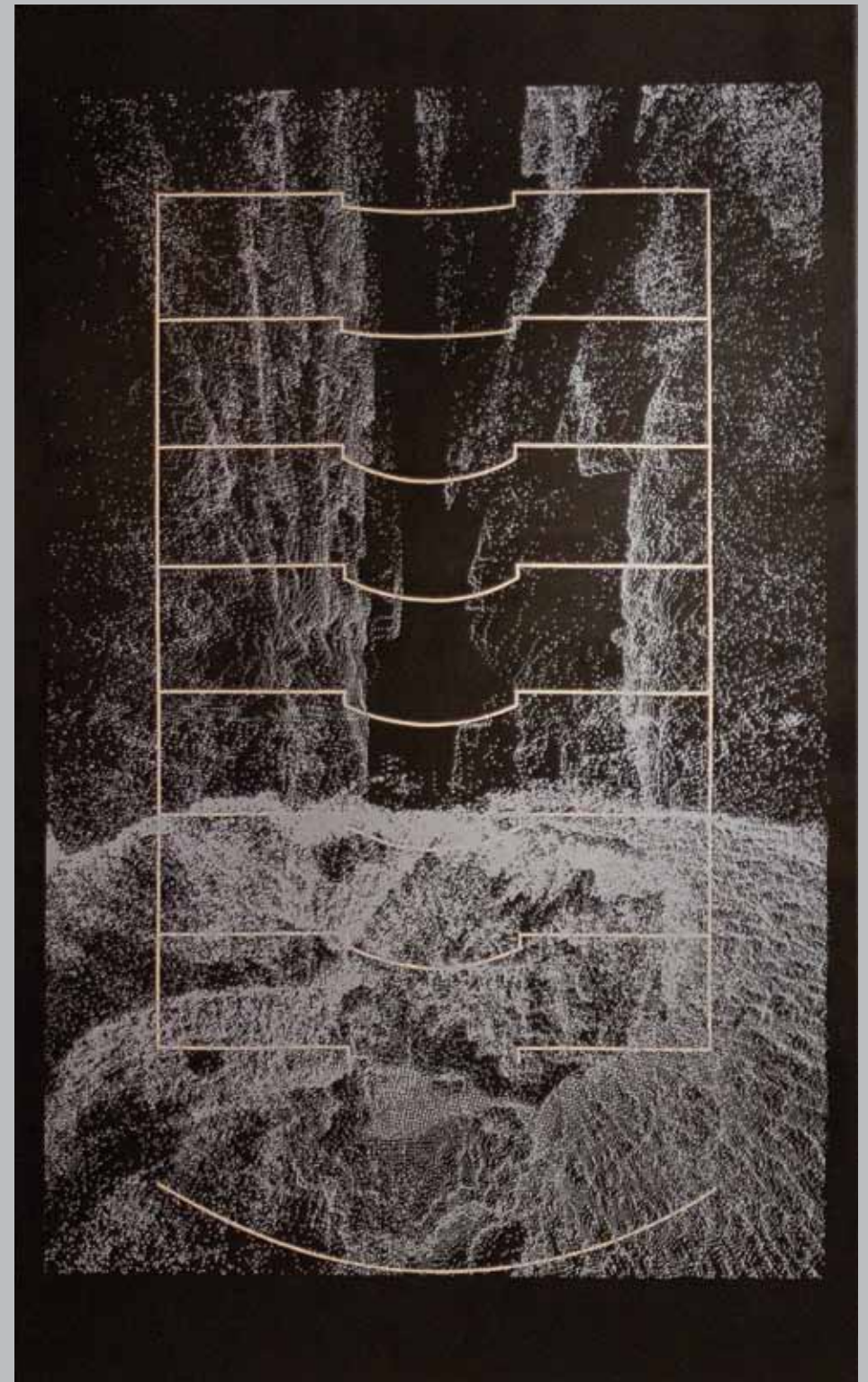
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The title *Sterno* was coined from the Latin word ‘Sternu’ which means sneezing; or the act of. The piece is an extension of the collaborative work *Disappearing Moon*, which involved us photographing the moon cycle on the same night and negotiating how the encounter could be presented. Star constellations consequently became of interest to us, especially in the form of maps, which are in a way, an approximation of space and reality.

We imagined how a serendipitous act could have placed these stars, and the way grid keys on star maps give order to the seemingly random appearance of the night sky. Sterno was developed from this afterthought and executed by sneezing coffee onto piece of paper. *Codde, Lukas, Mirros* and *Mniture*—curious misspellings found in our correspondences while making the work—lend the plates their names.



**Sterno: Lukas; Mirros; Mniture; Codde**  
 2012  
 Engraving, Infill and Print on Brass Plate  
 Series of 4, 30.5 x 27.6cm each  
 Edition of 2 + 2AP





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# STRUCTURES, NARRATIVES AND MEDIATIONS

## A CONVERSATION BETWEEN GENEVIEVE CHUA AND HO RUI AN

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by *Ho Rui An*  
*Writer and Artist*

**Ho Rui An (HRA):** Fear is the thread that seems to run through most of your works. What’s interesting for me is that you always seem to interpret fear as an affective relation towards a certain absence or void rather than towards something that is directly sensible. This notion of the radical indeterminacy of the object of fear seems to be becoming more prominent in your recent works. In *Ultrasound*, for instance, the ultrasounds you painted of a shopping mall that has supposedly been inundated by earth from surrounding forests are akin to an attempt to map out something that can’t quite be seen directly, hence the need for a technological supplement. How would you relate this to what you are exploring in *72*?

**Genevieve Chua (GC):** *72* started with my research into geomancy and how people use objects to calculate fortunes. I was interested in the small margins of variations in these objects, such that a very slight difference in interpretation can result in colossal damage or rampant paranoia. There is something quite frightening about these dice being instruments for fortune-telling since they are not perfectly formed. At the same time, there is the tragic premise that is people’s need to know their futures and how they grapple with predictions of an apocalypse or smaller tragedies—whether true or false—in the past, present and future.

**HRA:** This talk about fortunes and futures bring up another aspect of your practice that is your interest in narratives. Or maybe it’s more accurate to say that it’s not narrative itself, but structures of narrativity that interest you—for instance, in both *Raised as a Pack of Wolves* and *Full Moon and Foxes*, the audience is never given the full story but is instead given a structure through which they can construct the story by themselves with the little hints that each image offers. How do you go about constructing these structures?

**GC:** There is no beginning or end in these structures. Being static images, they have to be read within the coordinates of a contained layout as opposed to a left-to-right manner of presentation. In *Wolves*, the images are arranged within an invisible grid. This grid is an instrument for fastening things together so that it can be read in a non-linear fashion. While each image has its evocative powers, as a whole, there is never a climax in the story.

This grid operates like a kind of *yantra*. The *yantra*, for me, is a cage that locks many incantations together so as to activate their charge. As *sak yant*, or a multi-headed *hevajra* sculpture, for example, helps one focus visually during meditation because its symmetry and repetition of form creates a radial perspective leading to an elusive central point-of-origin. I say elusive because symmetry and exact repetition is actually unattainable in real life. It is an

optical illusion which serves no purpose except to draw you into an endless loop. It is also very, very difficult to make an object symmetrical if you want to make or draft it by hand.

In *72*, these dice would initially appear calculated and familiar. Anyone who knows geometry will be able to identify some of the shapes as platonic solids, but upon closer inspection, they would realise that these shapes have anomalies and are in a way bastardised.

**HRA:** So you are kind of frustrating the drive to seek symmetry and perfection in geometry?

**GC:** I suppose I’m expressing a kind of resignation, towards how these seemingly sacred forms are striving towards the unattainable. But there are also the trays that are designed to categorise and store the dice. They are designed in an overly pedantic manner such that there are individual and separate cavities for each die, shaped to accommodate its eroded facets. So despite the constant erosions, there are still moments of rest, however short-lived.

**HRA:** But back to my question on narrative. How does narrative figure in this current work you’re making?

**GC:** What I’m concerned with these days is the question of my position in the narratives I construct, whether I’m standing inside or outside the scene. Say, for *Ultrasound*, everyone has evacuated the flooded mall, including myself, the person attempting to document it. So I have to use sonar to see what is going on inside the mall. Similarly, in *72*, I am the curious onlooker. I don’t throw the dice but I’m curious about what happens after the dice is thrown and to what kind of futures it points.

**HRA:** The images in both *72* and *Ultrasound* suggest some form of mediation happening, a certain distancing from the thing itself by showing or pointing towards it through a mediating interface. I contrast this to your use of the more direct medium of photography in your earlier works, especially in *Foxes* and *Wolves*, which were furthermore marked by a certain theatrical presence. What accounts for this shift?

**GC:** I like how you questioned why I gave up on the immediacy of photography for a more mediated form. The camera’s gaze always obscures parts of reality, such as the location of the photographer, what is happening behind her, and why she is there. So the photographic gaze is always already mediated.

For *Ultrasound*, I cannot account for what happens when a mall is flooded since I have never experienced it. Using abstract shapes to suggest an ultrasound recording is thus a way to negotiate this gap in knowledge. Perhaps in so doing, the image becomes more open-ended.

**HRA:** Let’s talk about *After the Flood*, which for me is a pivotal series in your practice. As photographs that have been hand-painted, they seem to mark a certain point of transition between photography and painting. They also mark the point at which you moved to the border between the forest and the city.

**GC:** I see *After the Flood*, *It Eludes Me*, but *I’m Trying to Describe it to You* and *Ultrasound* as a sort of trilogy. In *After the Flood* and *It Eludes Me*, I’m using the same subject of the weeds. In *Ultrasound*, the flood that is invoked in *After the Flood* takes place in the present continuous tense. As you said, it was *After the Flood* that brought me into the city. When I was photographing that series, I stood on the pavement, away from the shrubs I was capturing. I was at the brink of the city, leading into the forest. I could feel the tension in the form of those railings that separated the two spaces from each other. Those railings were waist-high, so they were not completely prohibitive as you could climb over them. There were also no real consequences for such actions. So it made perfect sense for me to project a situation in which the earth transgresses this barrier and overwhelm the overly sanitary road and buildings of urban spaces.

**HRA:** Yes, a lot of your works are very conscious of this barrier. Would you say that your turn towards abstraction, towards a distancing of the viewer from the thing itself an expression of this barrier?

**GC:** I would say my works reflect this barrier, but they are also about its dilution. On which side of the railing is the wilderness—the unmanaged forest or the exorbitantly maintained garden city? I want to build a 360-degree observation tower where the railings are. That could be my last work or it could be a premise, where this tower is a device for viewers to

enter and plot various futures and possibilities between the two wildernesses, being two places that have developed out-of-hand.

**HRA:** This notion of a device brings us back to 72, in which the dice, just like the hypothetical tower you mentioned, are not narrative devices (devices that help to advance a single narrative), but devices *for* narrativity (devices that proliferate multiple narratives).

**GC:** Yes, the dice here are devices for people to plot various outcomes. Perhaps we can even call them devices for hypotheses, insofar as they give rise to partial truths, approximations and likelihoods. In time, I might change my mind, but for now these narratives do not need conclusions, because the end points, abrupt as they appear, would allow for new works to propagate in multiple ways.

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# 72

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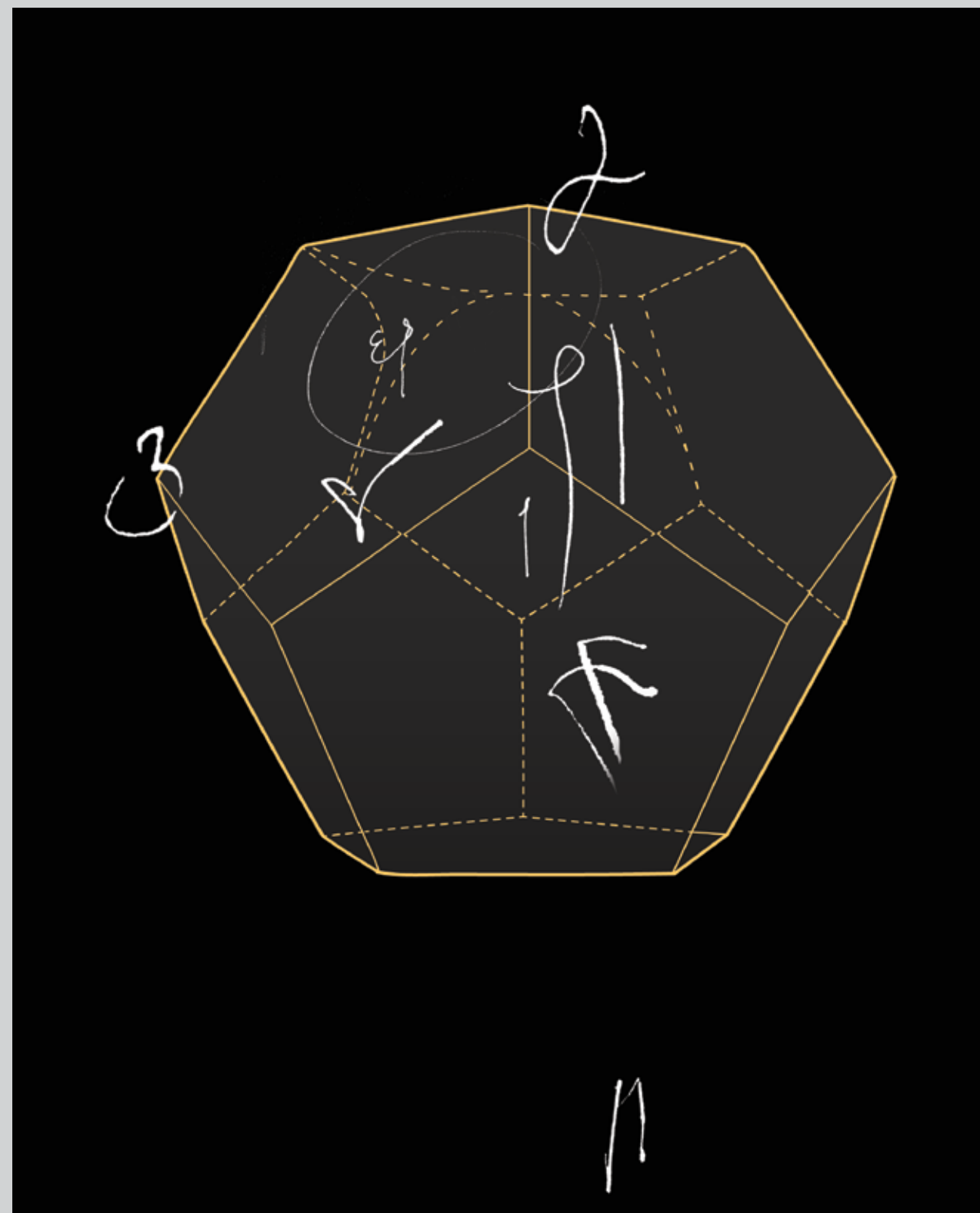
Titled 72, the work illustrates 72 eroded geometrical forms that have been assigned roles as dice. Due to excessive throwing, and having been passed on from person-to-person, each dice has developed an anomaly. When thrown, the dice predicts individuals' futures through the sum of numbers. The drawings serve as a manual, which demonstrates how the dice is handled to calculate a hypothetical future for an individual. On occasion, these recordings can progress to a point so complex that information becomes mangled and difficult to read.

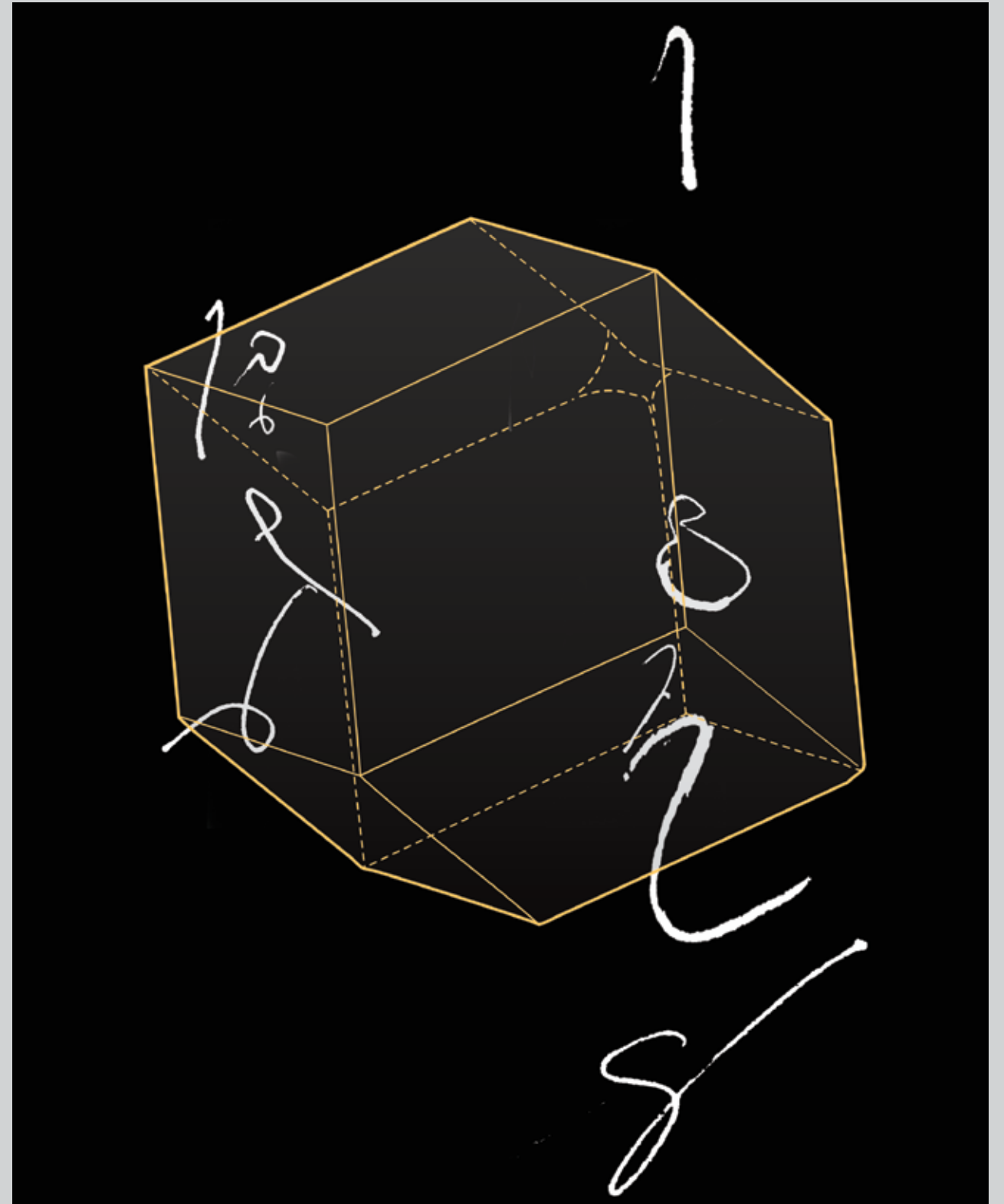
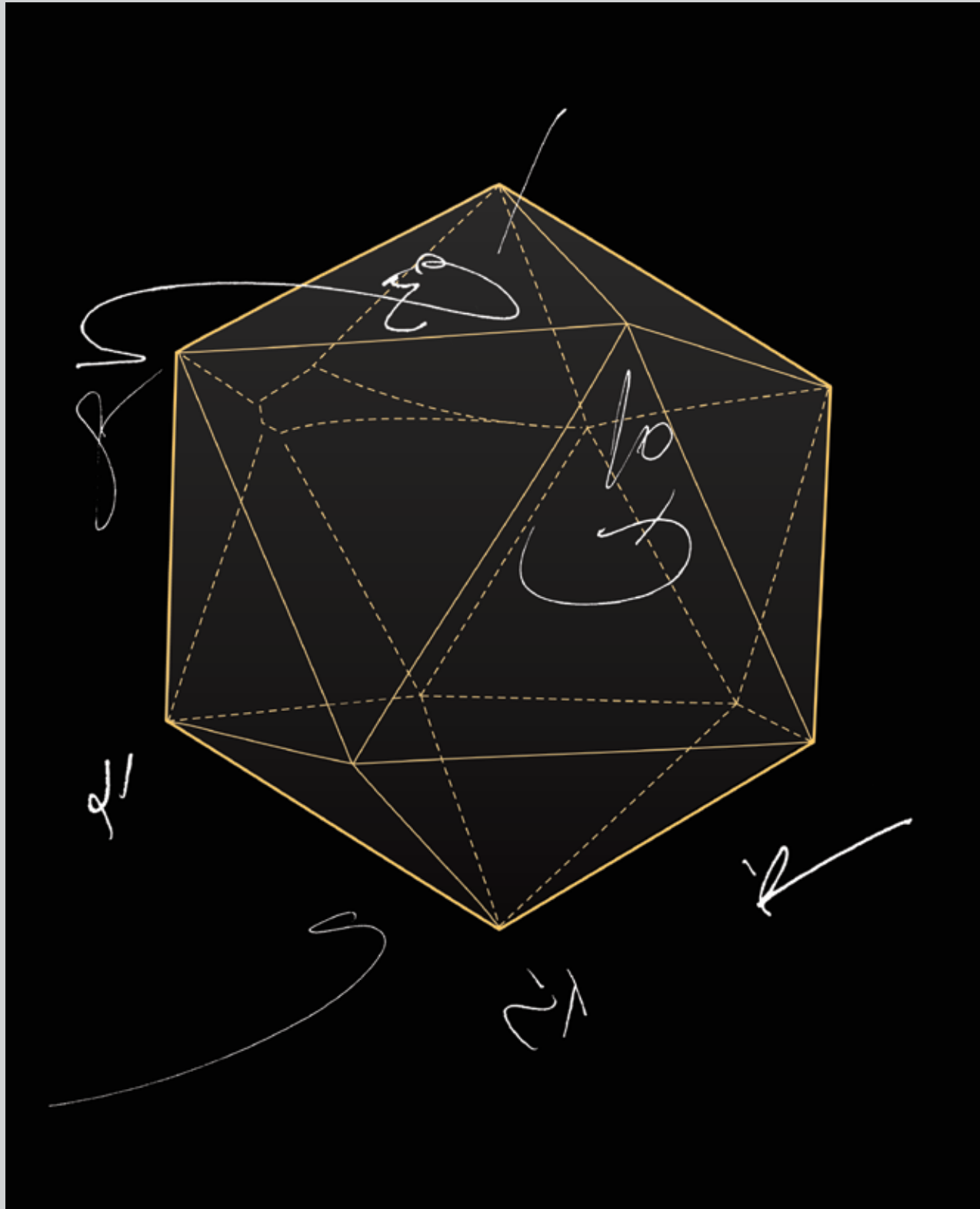
The work experiments with new, seemingly calculated, and personal systems of logic that are gleaned from existing ones within the purview of geomancy. Seeking futures is a priority for some, a contingency or provisional act for others while a great number reject these beliefs, as results appear in growing verisimilitude.

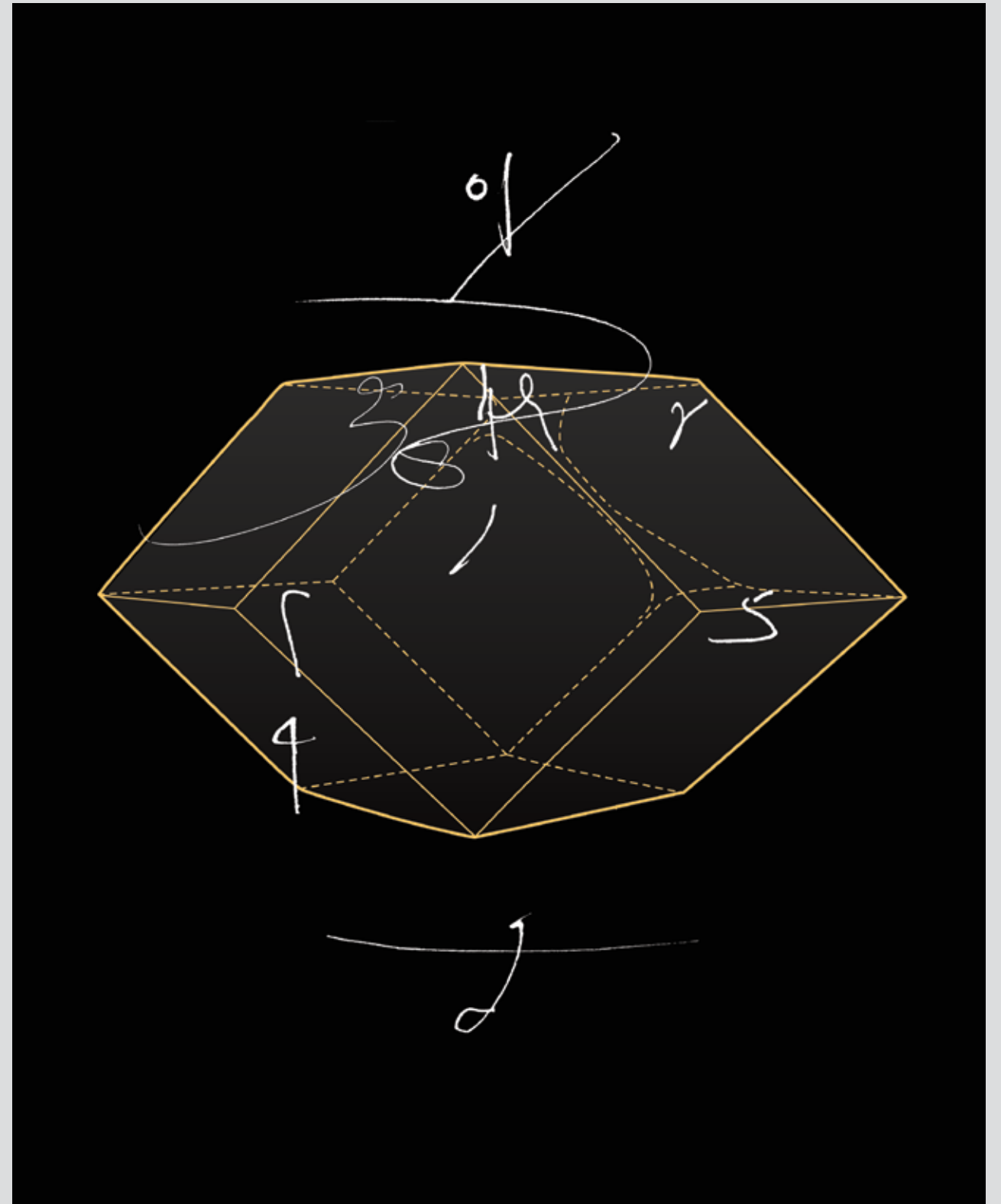
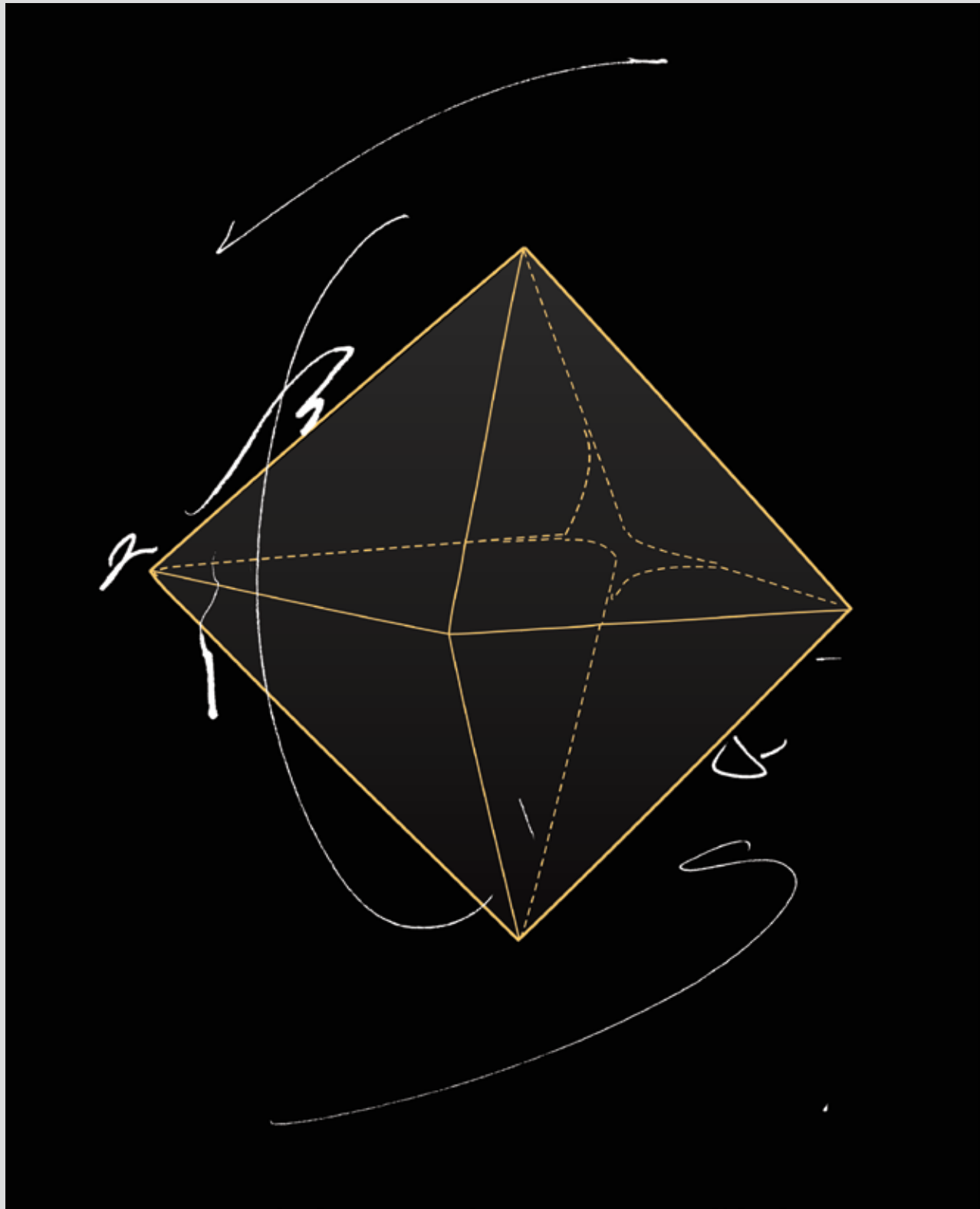
The dice are carefully categorised and stored in trays with designed cavities that cradle each piece. Some pieces have become a mere fragment of their previous selves. Eroded edges are counted as a "side". This goes against classical mechanics and presents an illogical, albeit loaded premise that reminds us of futures being most interesting when they are improbable.

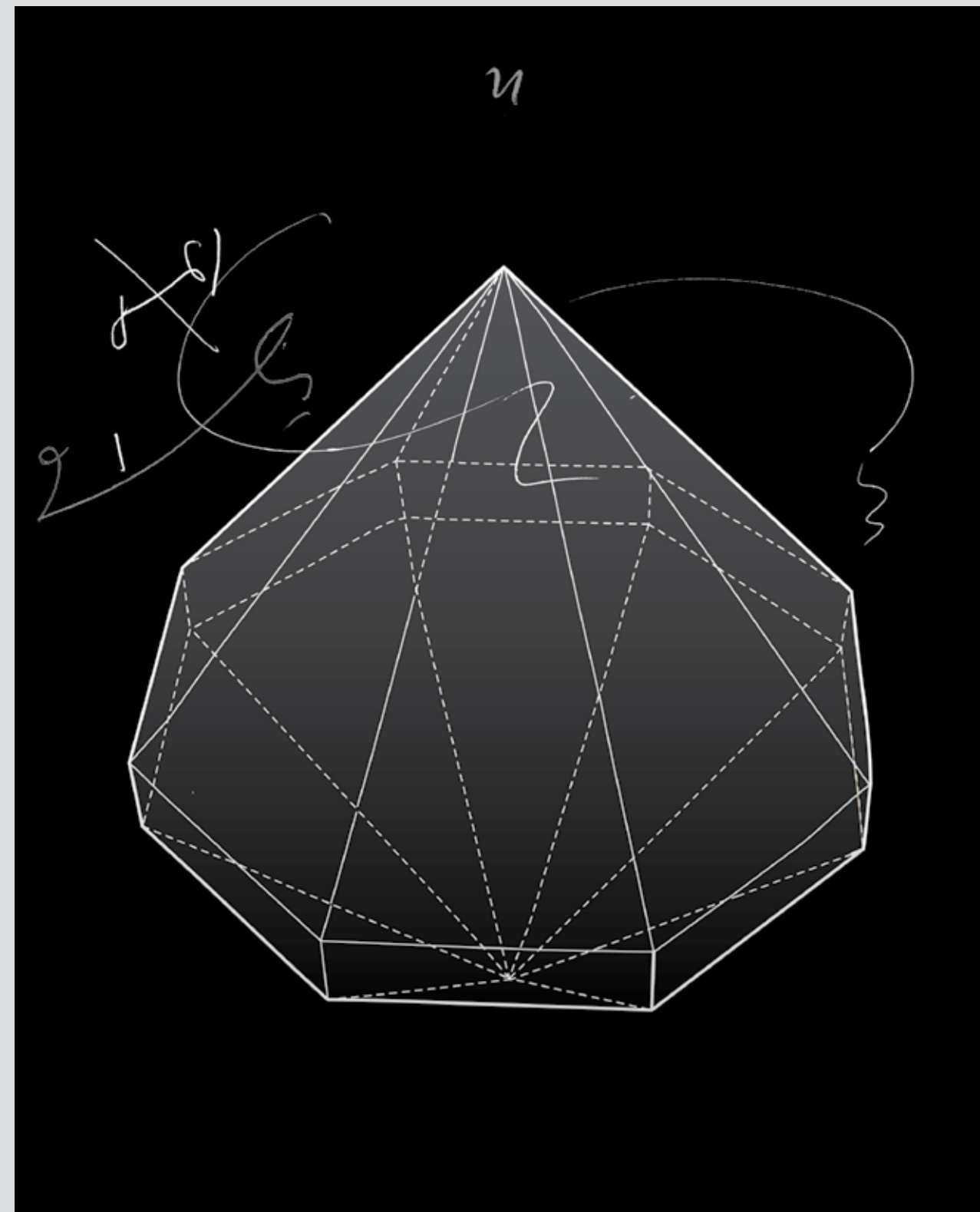
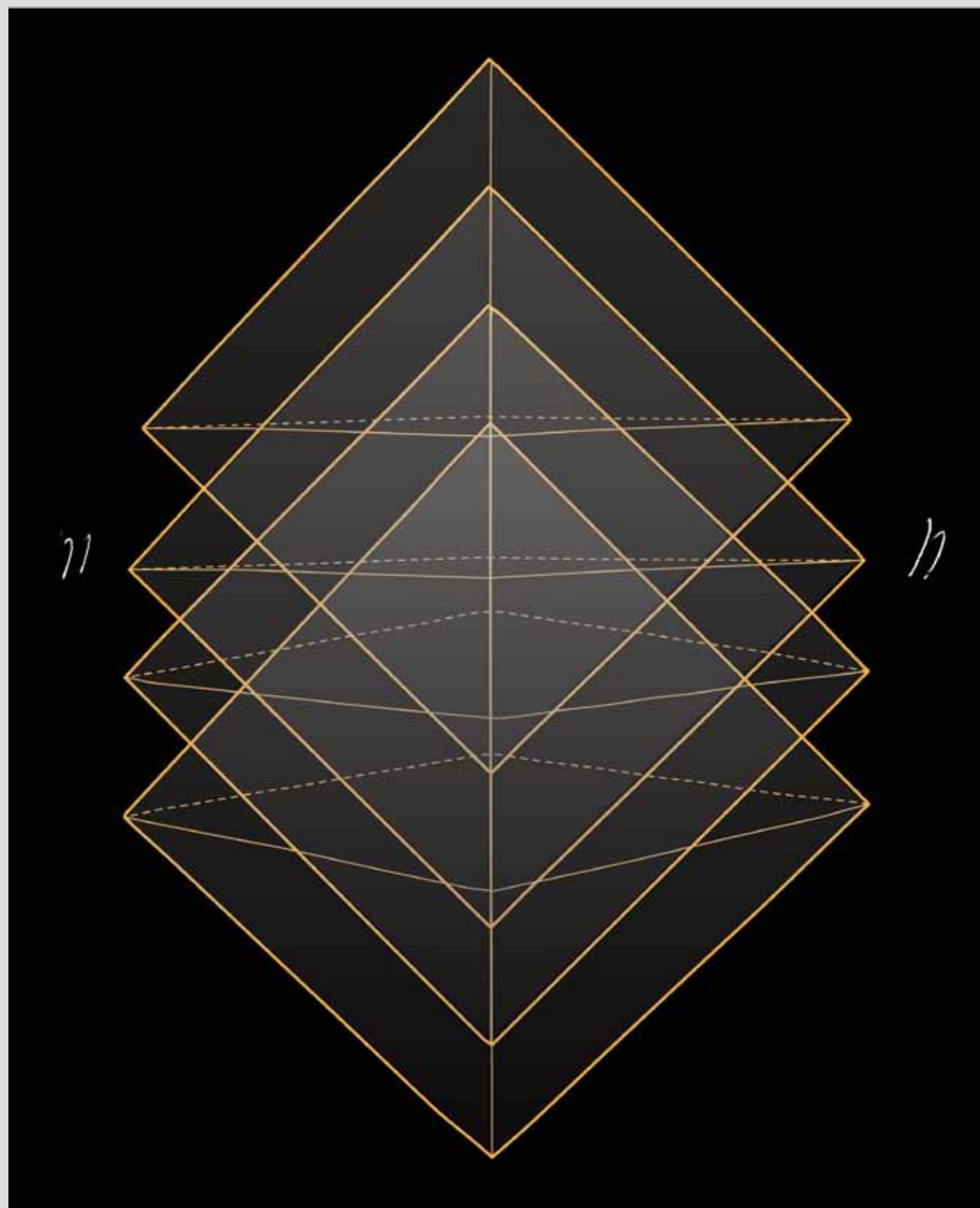


72  
2013  
UV print on Silhouette Paper  
Series of 42, 25.4 x 20.3cm each

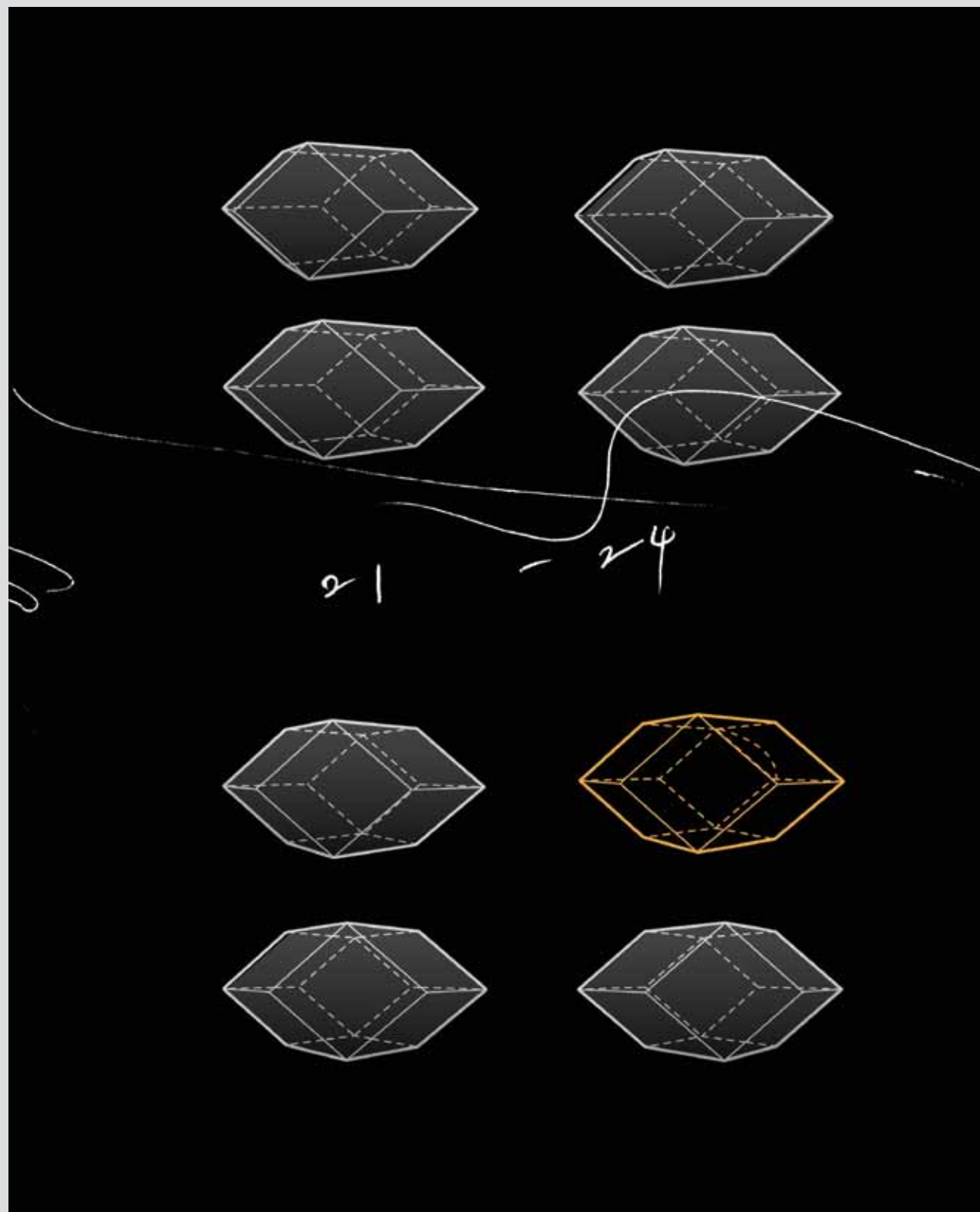


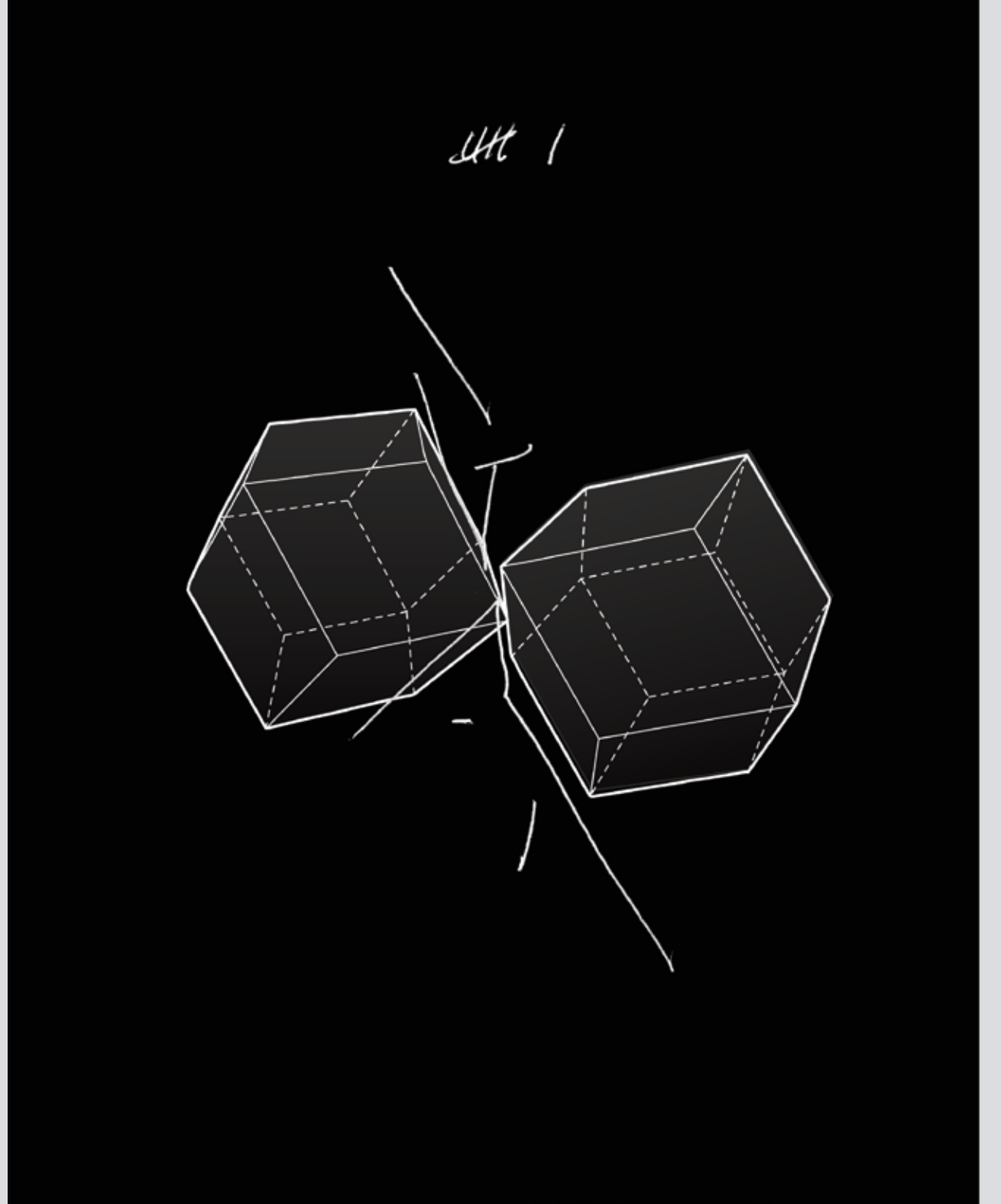
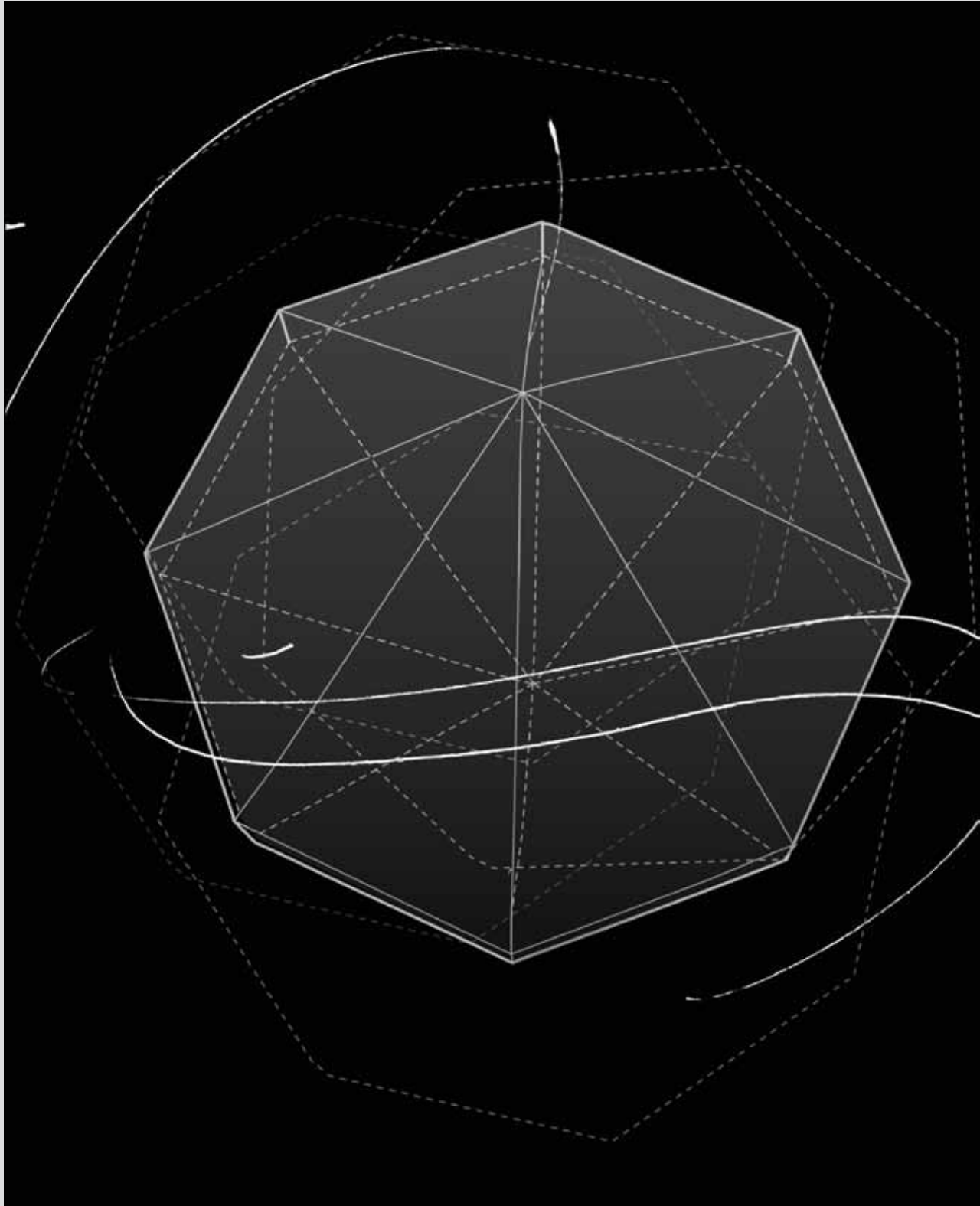


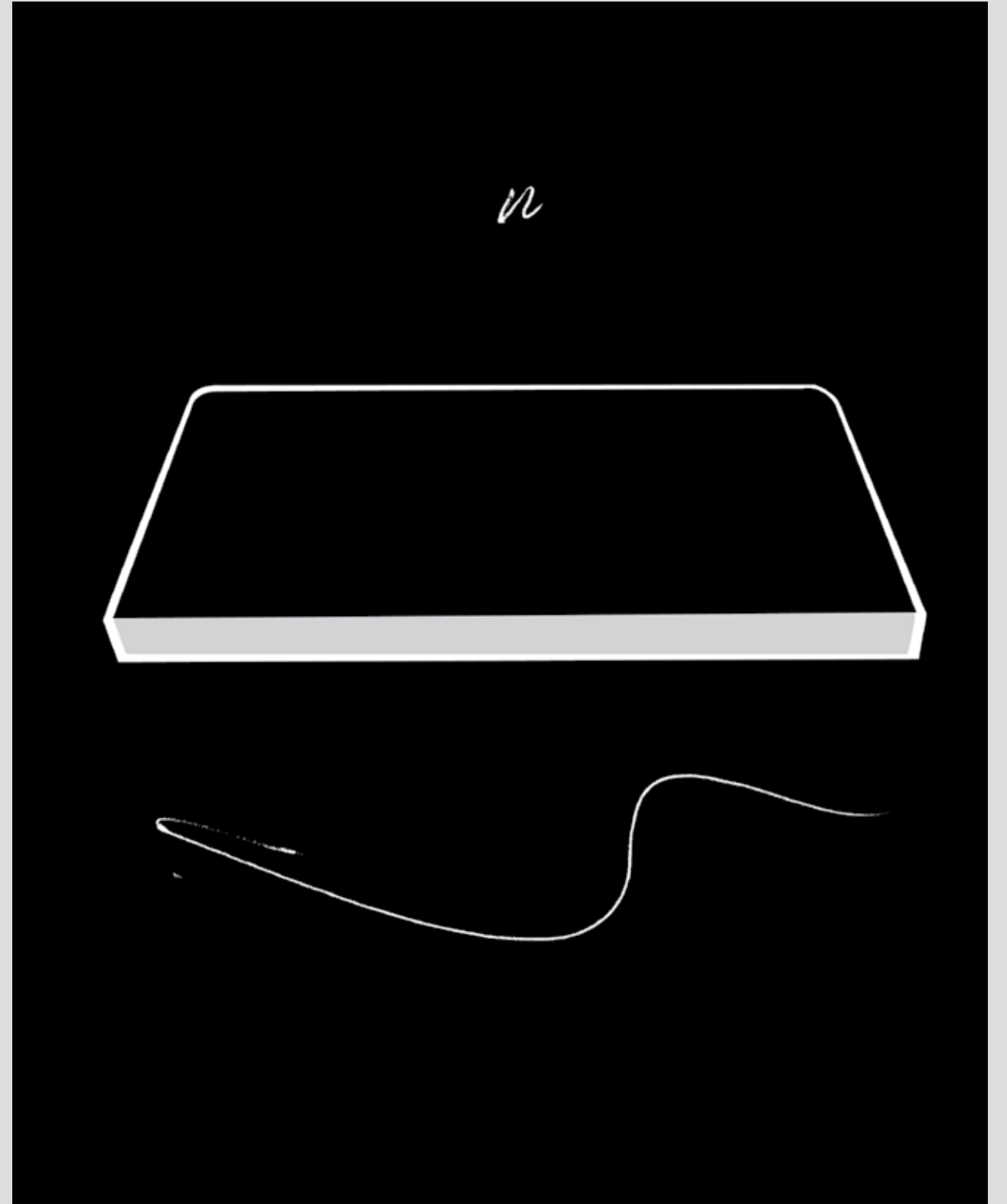
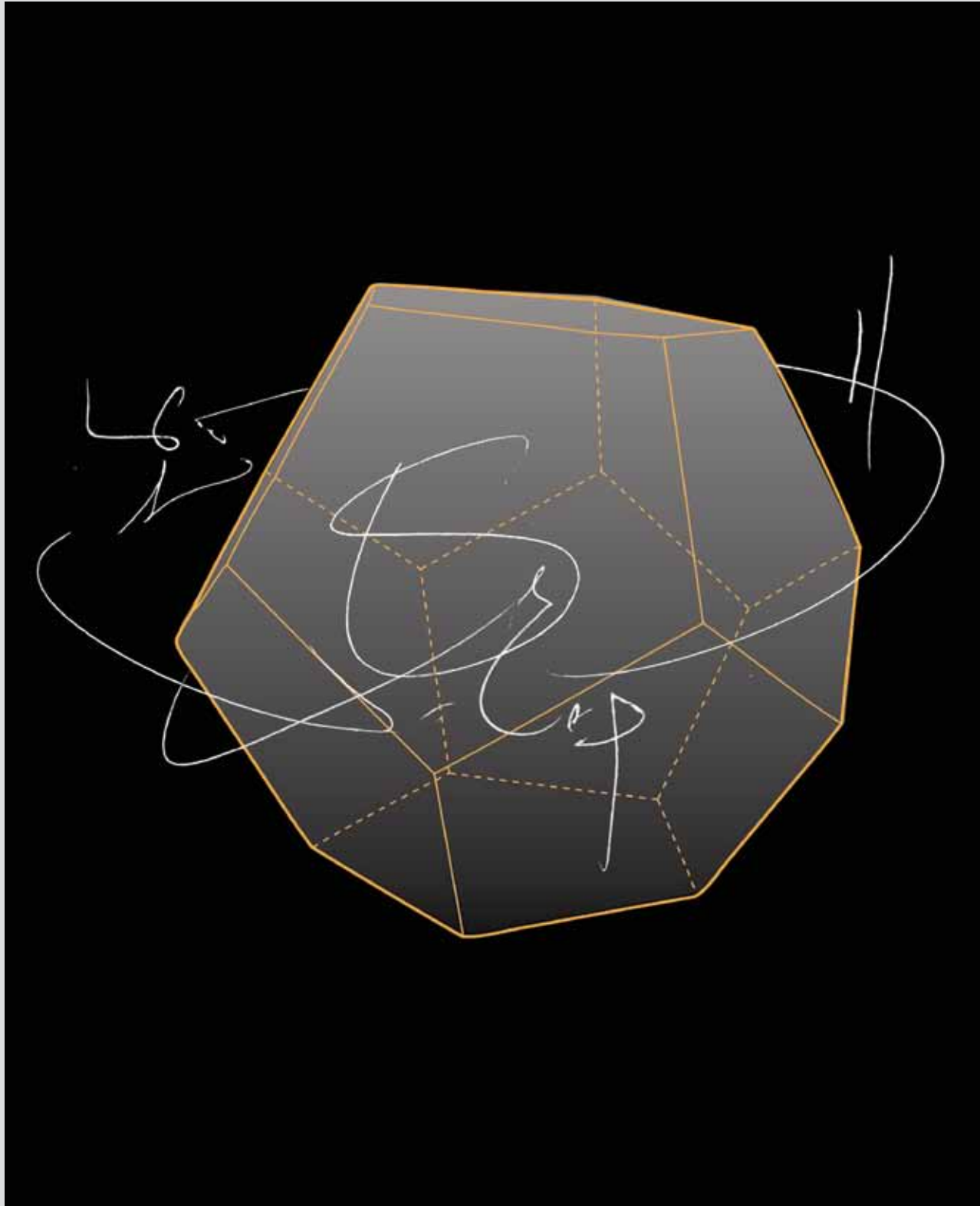










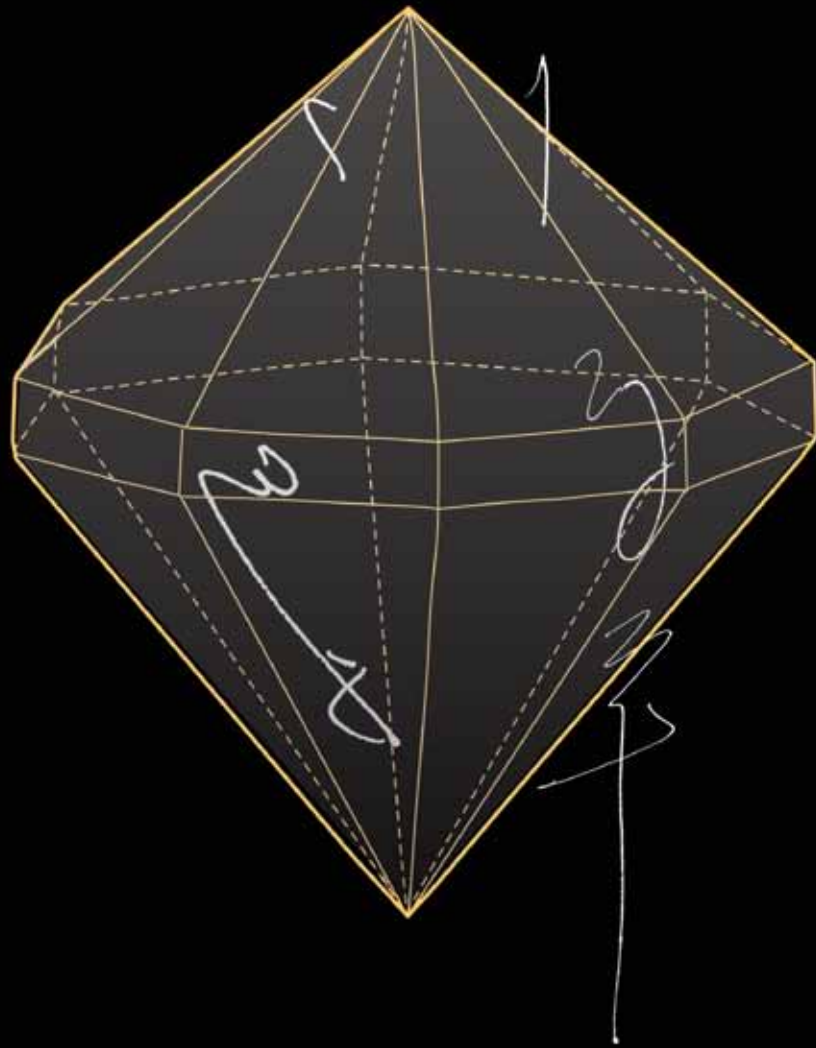


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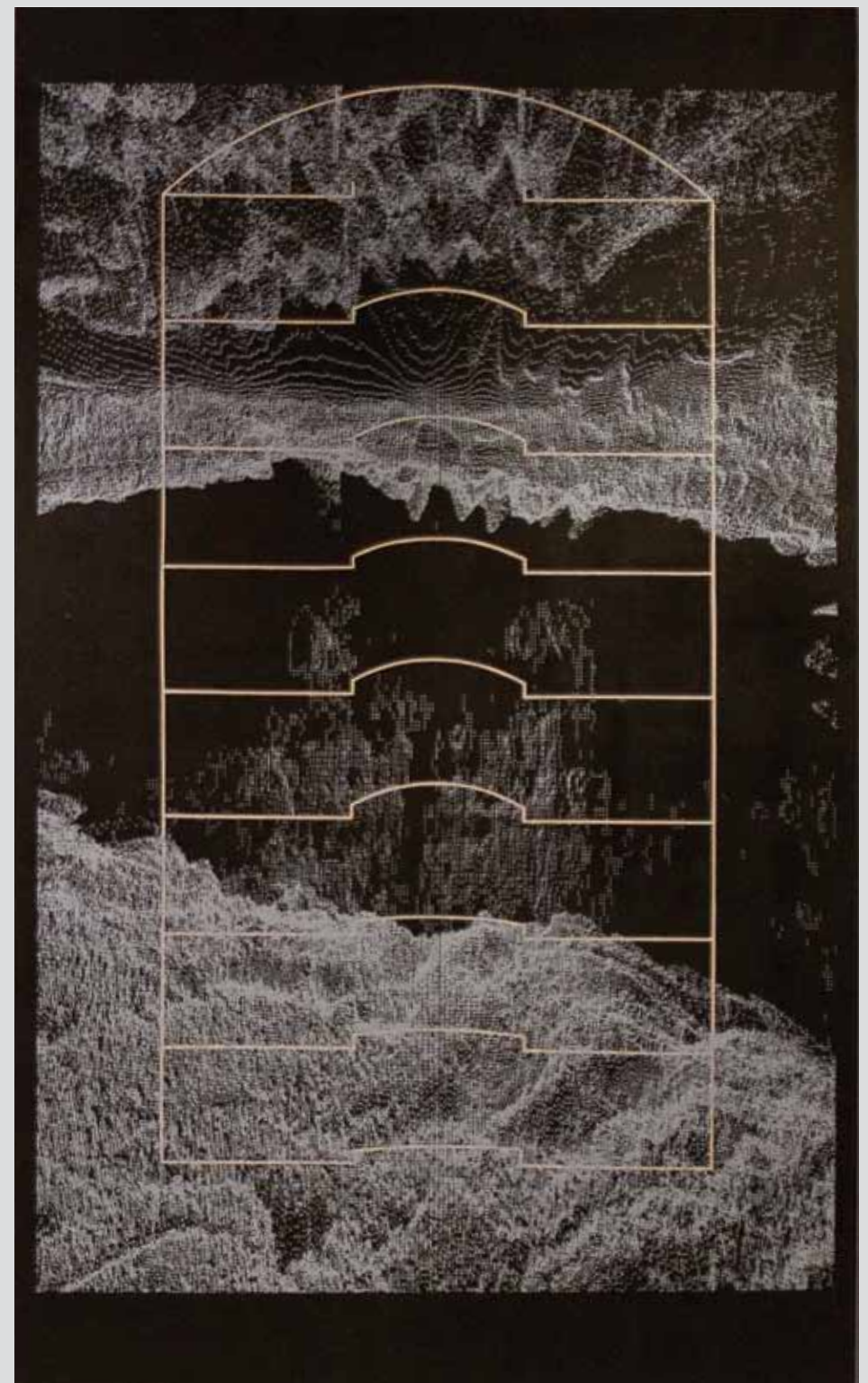
# DREADFUL SYMMETRY

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*by Genevieve Chua*







**The Cascade, Upper Floors and Underground**

2012

Acrylic and Screenprint with Enamel on Linen

170 x 278cm each



**Ultrasound #3, Foster Children**  
 2012  
 Acrylic and Screenprint with Enamel on Linen  
 180 x 118.5cm



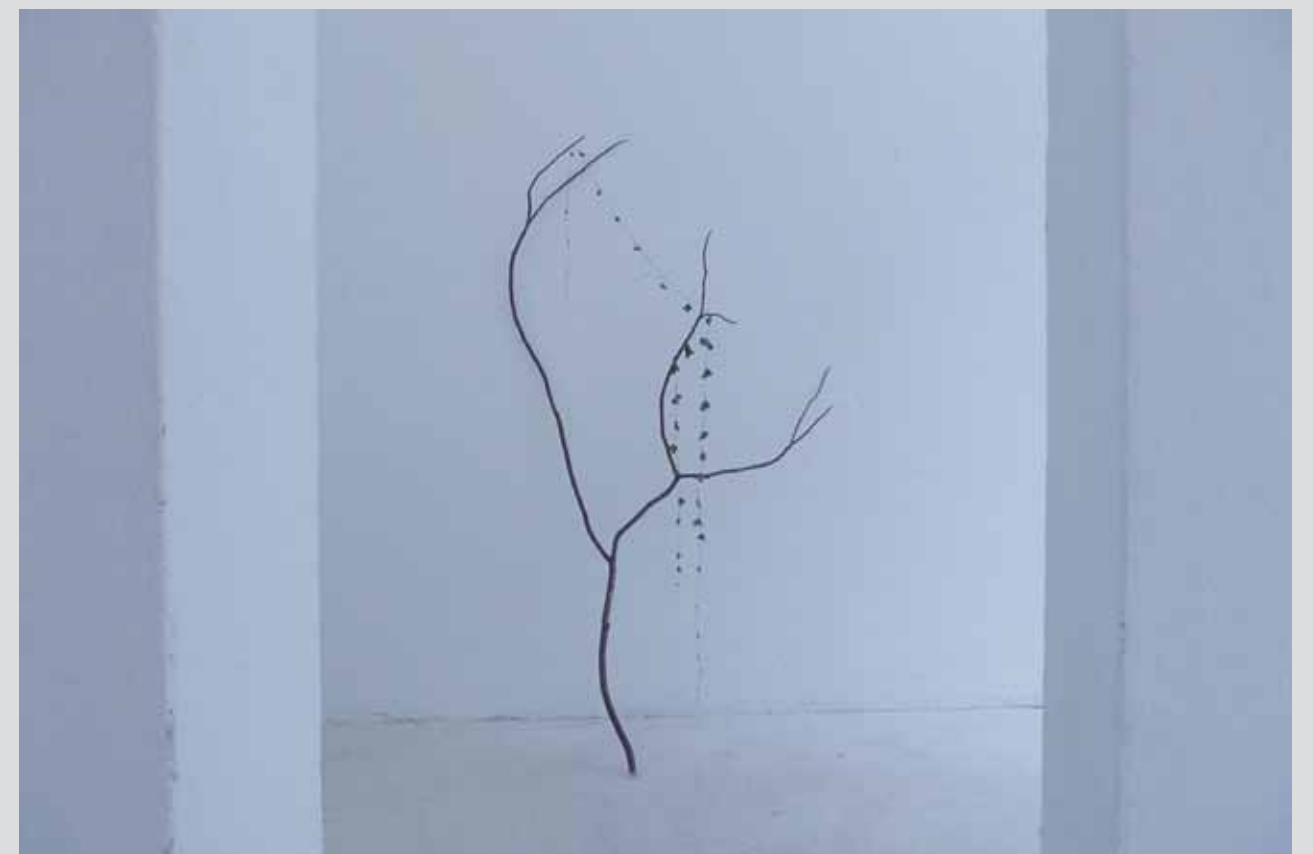
**Ultrasound #5, Foster Children**  
 2012  
 Acrylic and Screenprint with Enamel on Linen  
 180 x 118.5cm





**Adinandra Belukar**  
 2011  
 Installation with Drawings on Black Walls and 2 Videos





**It eludes me, but I'm trying to describe it to you.**

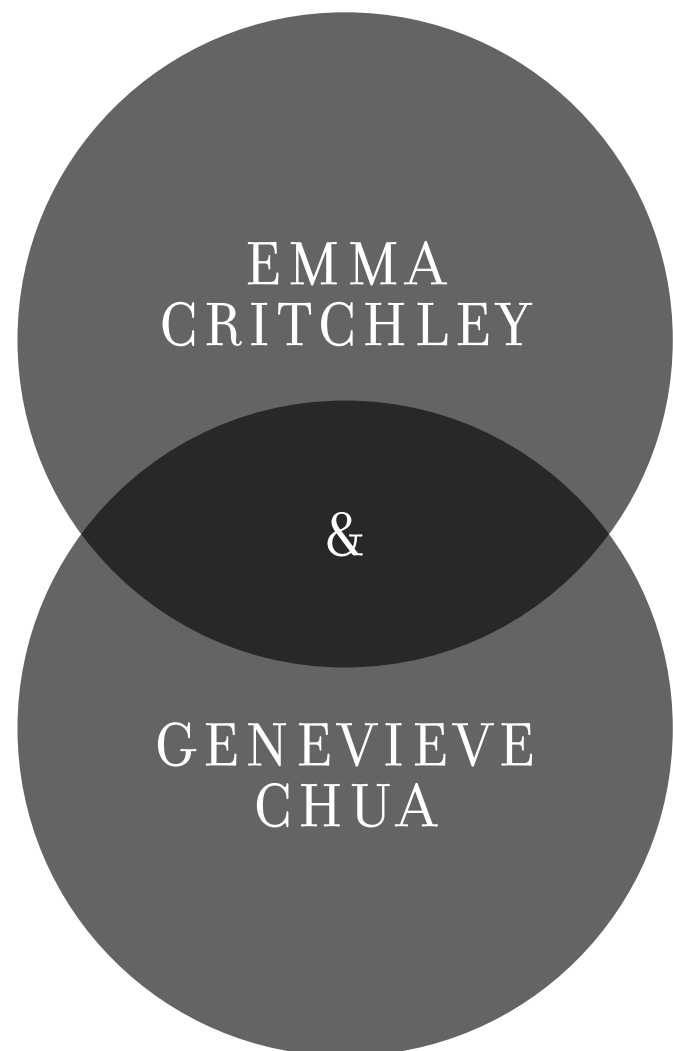
2012

Installation with Common Ivy in Room



**Detritus Series**  
2012  
Screenprint on Linen  
Series of 3, 120 x 161cm each





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Emma Critchley, (b. 1980) in UK, is an underwater photographer and videographer. Critchley has worked as an underwater image-maker for over nine years and recently graduated with an MA from The Royal College of Art. Through her practice, Critchley explores the human relationship with the underwater environment. She has also worked on projects that have been funded by organisations such as The Photographers Gallery, The National Media Museum and The Arts Council.

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Genevieve Chua, (b. 1984) in Singapore, works primarily with drawing, photography and installation. Chua researches the fear of the unknown. This process involves the appropriation of Southeast Asian horror towards new narratives. These new stories are often realised as a website, installation or drawing. She was a recipient of the NAC Georgette Chen Scholarship in 2003/4. She has developed works at residencies in Singapore Tyler Print Institute, The Banff Centre, Gyeonggi Creation Center and C-C-C Shizuoka. She was conferred the NAC Young Artist Award 2012.



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