

THE MAP OF THE SKY

A document for a 4th-year body of work

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LITERATURE	FAMILY	EDUCATION	OTHER
<p>tribe (8)</p>	<p>sister (2) single (2) pregnant (3) friend (3) relative (3) man (4) father (5) husband (10) boyfriend (14) baby (15) old (16) parents (20)</p>	<p>test (3) exam (3) matric (2) arithmetic (2) Afrikaans (5) Bantu Education (5) school (8) rule (3) certificate (11)</p>	<p>teacher (1) boarder (6)</p>
<p>INSTITUTIONS</p>	<p>roles</p>	<p>fetch (3) travel (4) ask (5) shopping (9) washing (9) scrub (10) brush (10) dust (10) earn (11) iron (13) fire (13)</p>	<p>read (1) verb (11) word (11) write (13) fail (15)</p>
<p>PRACTICES</p>	<p>room (8) hostel (10) house (17)</p>	<p>farm (5) car (5) uniform (6) food (3) bucket (10) bus (10) mine (13) train (15) labour (15) station (15) soap (16)</p>	<p>school (8) book (7)</p>
<p>PROPERTY</p>	<p>love (10)</p>	<p>dear (18) cost (9) need (11)</p>	<p>work (11)</p>
<p>EMOTION</p>	<p>love (10)</p>		
<p>EMOTIONAL</p>			

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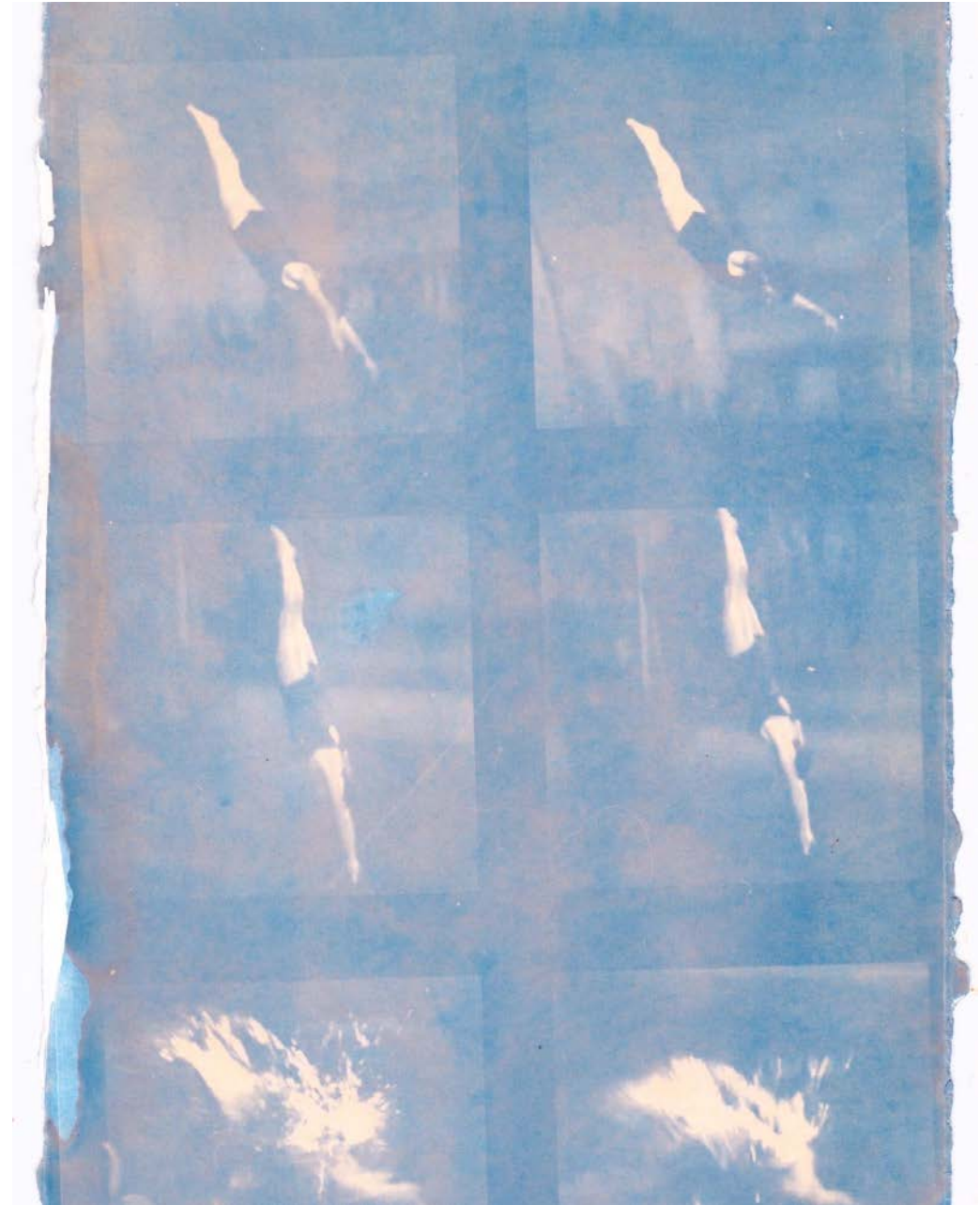
THE MAP OF THE SKY

This body of work follows the imaginative pretext that the sky has fallen into the sea, and that it must be put back. I do not know why it has fallen, and continue to gather it while knowing that I cannot bridge the distance or put it back. The task is futile and the pieces are irrevocably fragmented. The reparative story is impossible, but I must tell it.

This is a storytelling of the impossible. It is a holding pattern for the miracle thing that arises in the gap *between* the story and the possible — between the map and the territory, between repair and fragmentation, and the mirror-image blues of the sky and the sea. It is a willingness to facilitate ‘the futile’ for its own sake, and to tolerate incompleteness and ambivalence, and it is a belief in the transformative potential of creative practice.

A body of work about creative practice is also, in this case, a body of work about conversations. Informed by disciplines of printmaking and curatorship, this is a commitment to dialogical meaning-making, arising in the gaps between labels and objects, between the singular and the collective, and between people in a room.

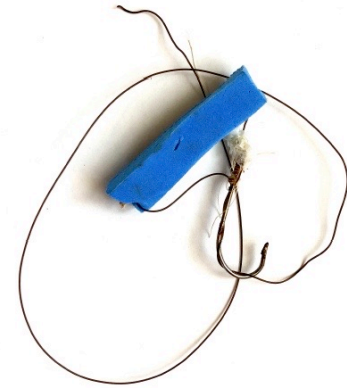
In the absence of the thing that I would so like to hold, I have found a conversation. The heartbreak of the un-stitchable gap between the sky and the sea is also the source of all of my hope and momentum. Held in the catch and release of creative practice, reimagining the fragments in the patterns between them, I am doing what I cannot. *The Map of the Sky* is an impossible story, and the task of telling it is everything I have.



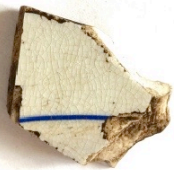
Sky Confessions

104-page concertina book: 14 X 1458cm

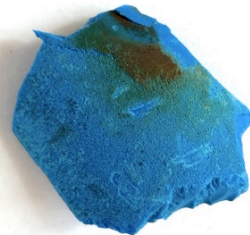
This book is a pairing of a hundred blue objects with a hundred anonymous confessions from e-admit.com. The objects were found on the ground in various public peripheries. Both the objects and the sentences are pieces of the sky that have fallen. We cannot put them back, but we can put them together. A relationally defined afterlife for the fragments is perhaps the next best thing (*not less than everything*).



Longing for a father I hardly knew



I don't even believe in god



I hate feeling fleshy



I think about you a lot when
you go off to plant trees



Sky Confessions: partially expanded view

AVE MARIA: the pink cake video

2min38s video collage

This video articulates the unsaid desire to have one's cake and eat it, the tragedy of the desire that remains unrealised, the willingness to pursue it anyway. The subtitles explain why the sky fell, and why we must put it back. The video fragments depict the hands of a man in post WW II America, instructing housewives in 'the art of cake decorating.' The audio is from Elisabeth Kulman's rendition of *Ave Maria* by Schubert.

Video text:

*Year after year
the sky fell
and was replaced
by the sky
behind the sky.
We did not notice
(we had not cause to).
But this year
the sky might fall
for the last time.
This means
we must gather the pieces
(the ones that have fallen)
and prepare
to put them back*

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXD6QR84eRg>



Above & below: screenshots of *Ave Maria* video



ATLAS: the blue cake video

Imin48s video collage

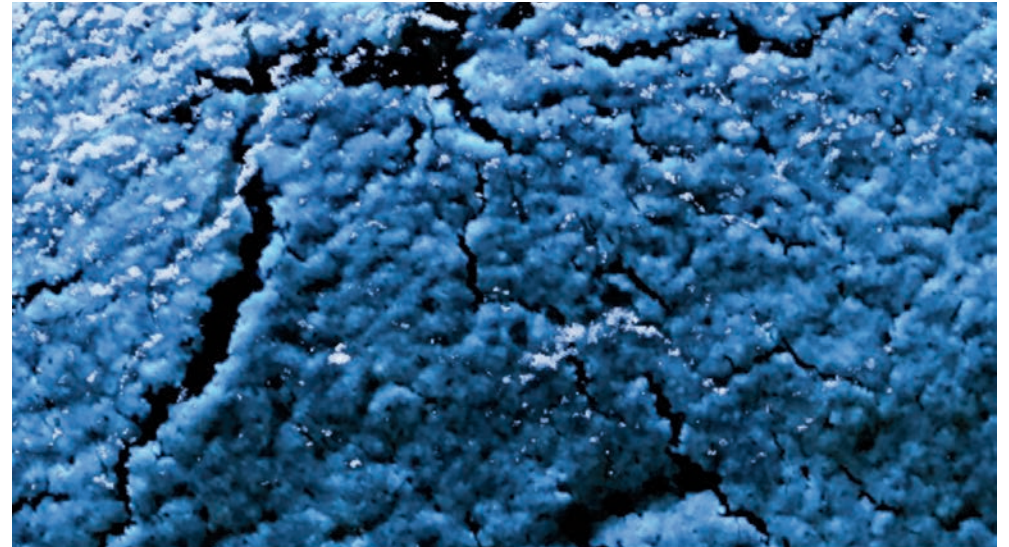
This is a video in which the crust of a round blue cake becomes the weight of the world on the shoulders of Atlas. Atlas would like to eat this cake, and have it, and cut it into pieces, and eat this lines between each slice. This is not possible, and so it falls into the sea. The narrative is my own, but it is read aloud by the robot voice of Siri. Familiar words made catastrophic and distant, Siri turns the myth into an uncanny reality, somewhere between a bedtime story and a fire drill.

*The weight of the world
is a big blue cake
on the shoulders of Atlas.*

*Atlas would like to eat this cake
and have it
and cut it into pieces
and eat the lines
between each slice.*

*This is not possible
and so it falls into the sea.
There's a big black hole
where the sky used to be.
I must fill it before it eats me.
I must eat it
before it fills me up.*

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2kdz3EAoXI>



Above & below: screenshots of *Atlas* video

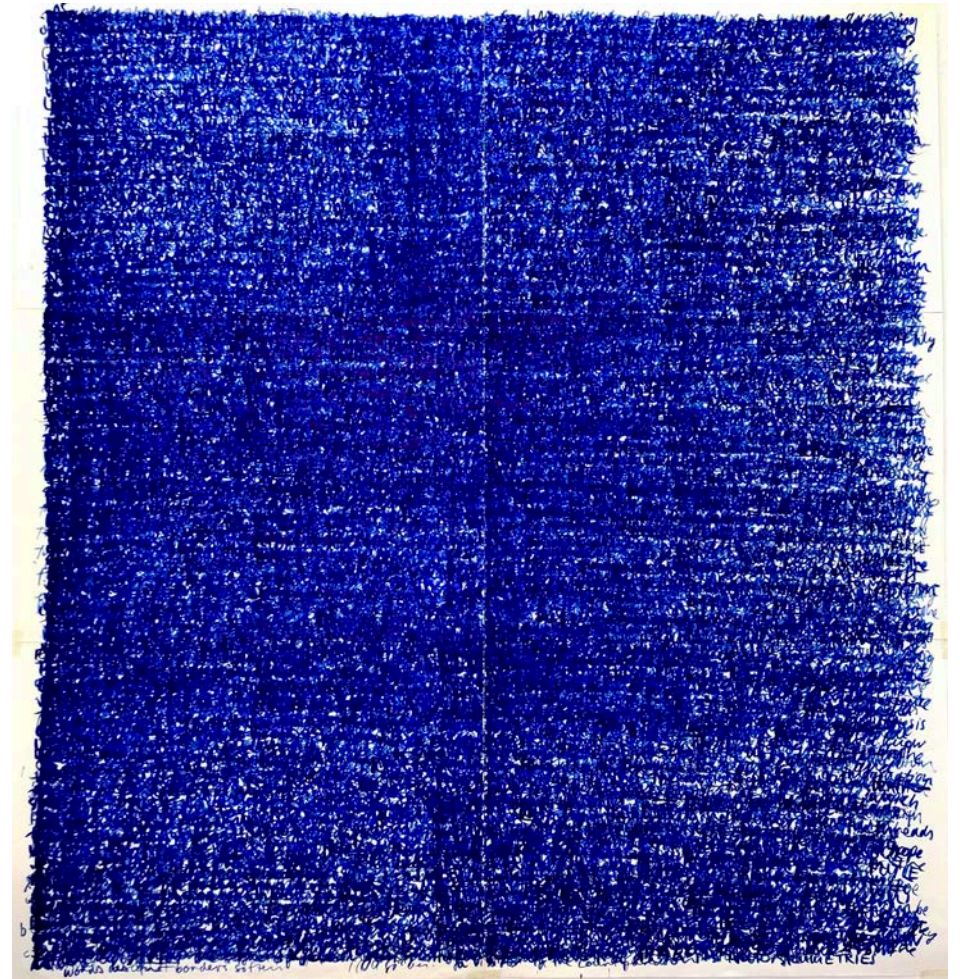


Sky of Myself

1.8 X 2.2m blue ink on Munken joined with micropore

Scaled to the dimensions of my own height and arm-span, this is a layering of all of my handwritten text 'about' my work this year, projected onto the page and rewritten in ephemeral blue stamp-pad ink. Here I am materialising the map in a territory that is the human-sized piece of the world that I have. It is if to say — *I can only repair a piece of the sky the size of this*. I have also been thinking all the time about the influential short story by Jorge Luis Borges, *On Exactitude in Science* (1998/1946) in which the map is scaled 1:1 to the territory, and the space between them momentarily collapses.

By choosing to layer the text until it vanishes into an unintelligible rectangle of blue, I am also choosing to believe that, through repeatedly attempting to 'make sense' of it all, I might paradoxically free myself from the need to make sense. Perhaps one must say everything in order to realise that the end is the beginning — like striving after the blue of distance, only to realise that the Earth is the blue planet.



The Library & The Reservoir

Two-part video work: two parallel blue screens

This two-part video work *The Library & The Reservoir* is comprised of two blue screens, positioned side-by-side. The blue on the right is an image of the sky where the roof of UCT's Jagger Reading Room used to be — where the sky burned and fell and was replaced by the sky behind the sky. The blue on the left is a video of a white helium balloon, reflected in the water of Molteno Reservoir on 04 June, 2021. This day was the 121st anniversary of the death of hot-air balloonist Isidore Michaels, who flew his balloon above the city, and became tangled in the strings, and fell and drowned in Molteno Reservoir.

Book-ending 121 years of flying and falling in Cape Town, I am using this work to think about parallels of libraries and reservoirs, fire and water, the defiance of gravity, and the defiance of time. To fly a small white balloon above this reservoir now, so terribly late, is a futile gesture. They still had to drain the whole reservoir to retrieve the body of the balloonist. But it is also as close as I can get to the repair that is impossible because it is 121 years late. The repair of past-tense disasters echoes into the present.

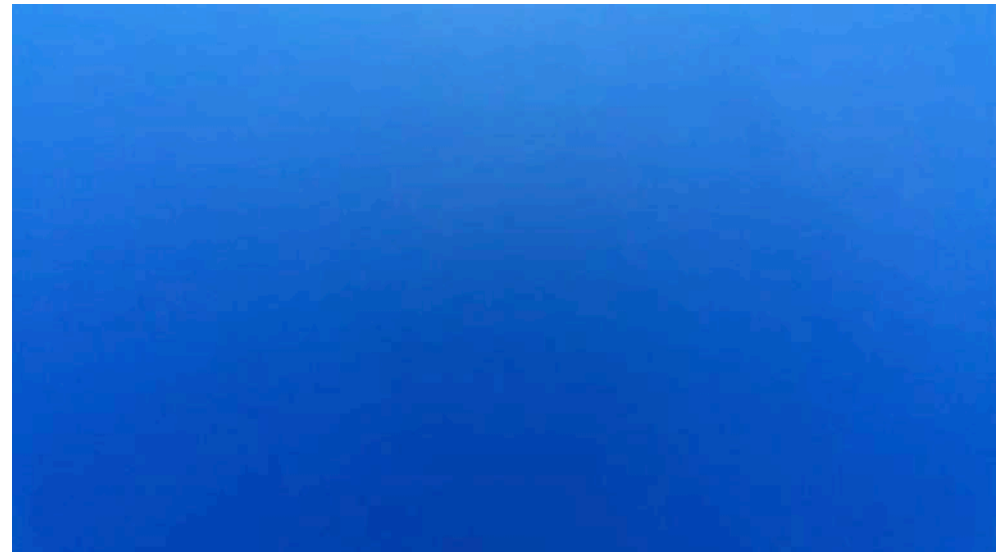
Video links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxOkE5qiECs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnzKr6aQg8w>



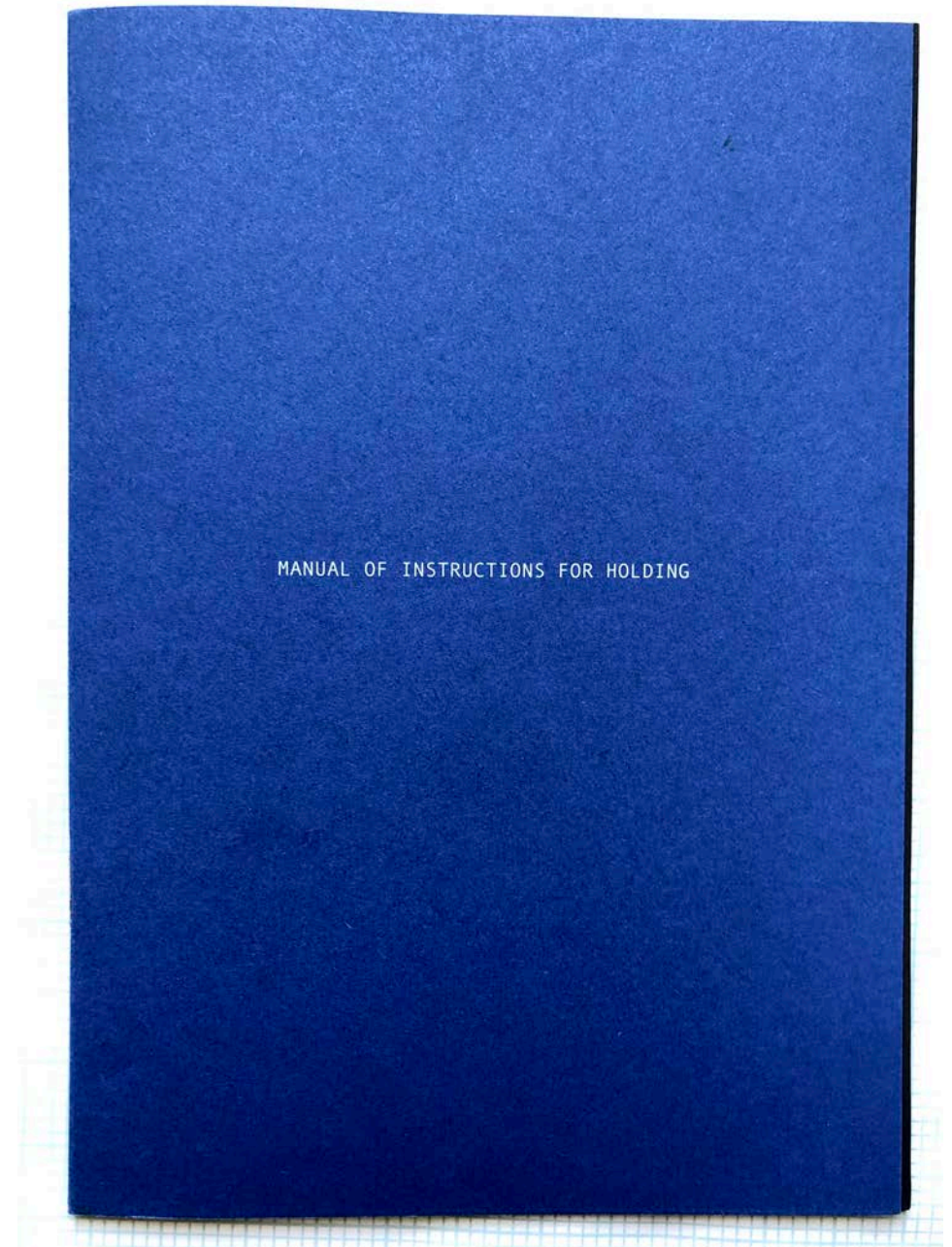
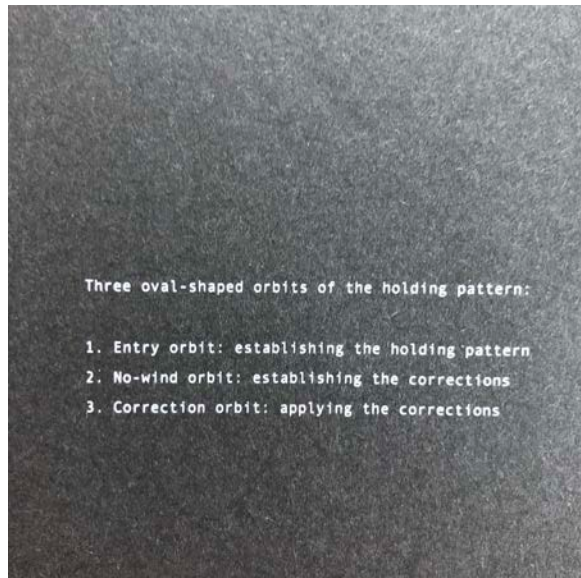
Above: screenshot from reservoir video (balloon reflection in Molteno Reservoir)
Below: screenshot from library video (the sky where the ceiling used to be)

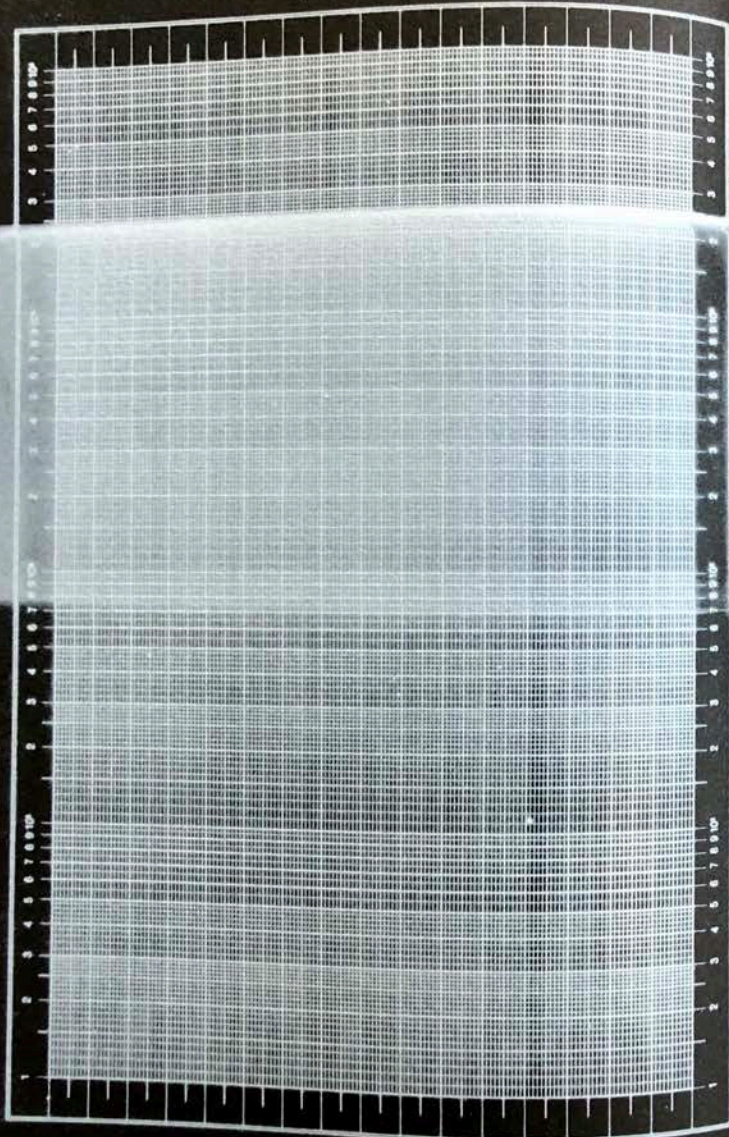


Manual of Instructions for Holding

A5 staple-bound book, white ink on black paper

The Manual of Instructions for Holding draws a comparison between curatorial ‘holding,’ and the path that a pilot must fly between the earth and the sky in order to deliberately delay arrival. The text is comprised of directly quoted fragments from an online aeronautical instruction manual (CFI Notebook, 2021) in which the steps for flying a literal holding pattern are described. Paired with ten different graph paper grids, the white on the black seems evocative of a city approached at night, and the empty grids act as holding patterns of a different kind. Suspended between the map and the supposedly ‘more-real’ territory, stalling on purpose, refusing to choose, it is a striving for both.





Vertical Length, 10.000 in. (254 mm)

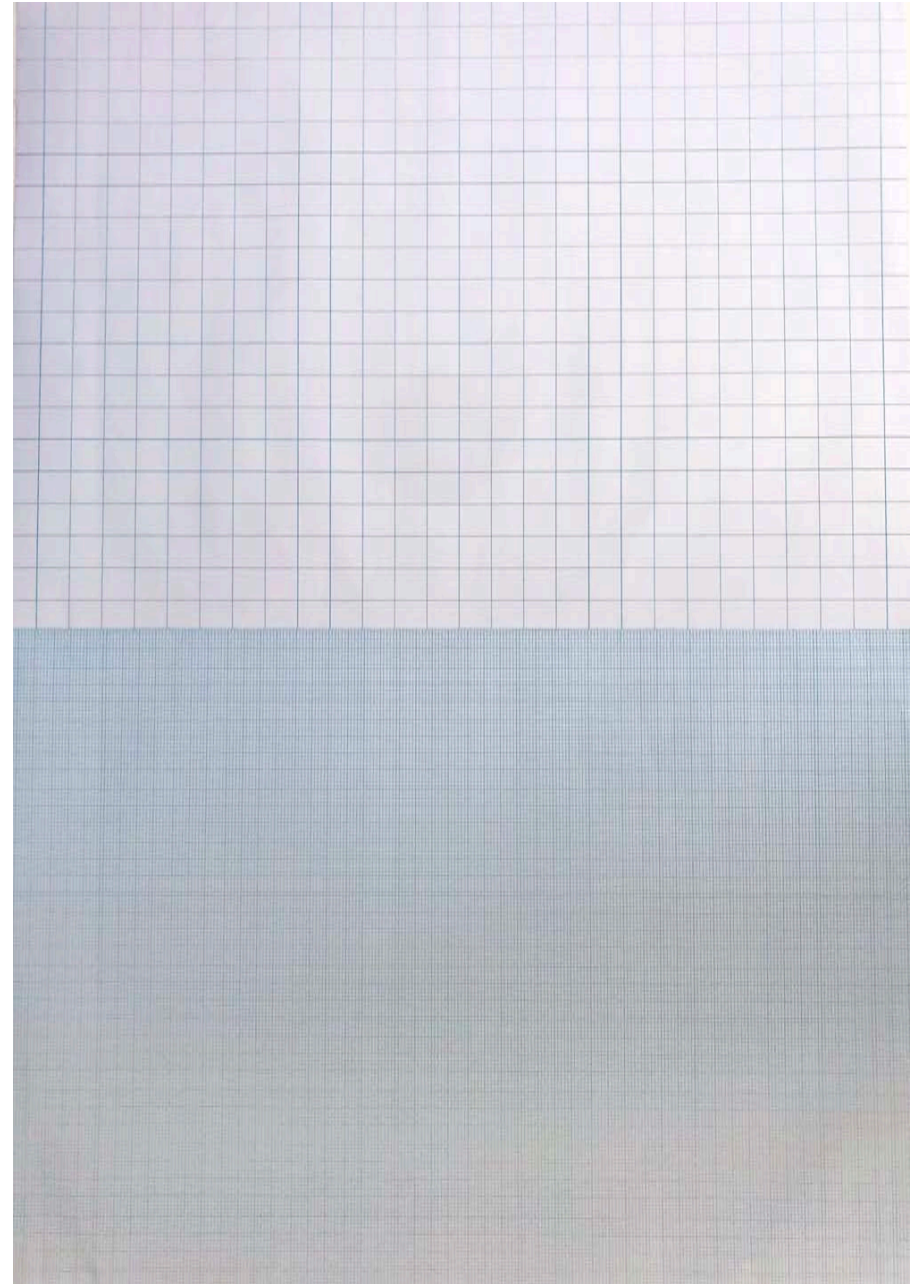
Horizontal Length, 10.000 in. (254 mm)

If the air-traffic controller doesn't issue complete instructions, the pilot is expected to hold as depicted on the appropriate chart.

Mapping the Sky

Two digital lithograph grid stacks, 48 X 68cm, approx. 18cm tall, edition of 950 each

Referencing the print stacks of Felix Gonzales-Torres, this edition of stacked grid prints is large enough to claim three-dimensional object-presence. Here, the map is also a ‘thing.’ My intention is to disperse the grids as a ‘democratic multiple,’ so that each viewer may have their own piece of the map. In repeating without repeating, and in granting the ‘same’ print multiple possible interpretations, I am using languages of printmaking to think about how a system of ordering may be used to facilitate its paradoxical release. The grid exceeds and subverts the grid — through the grid.

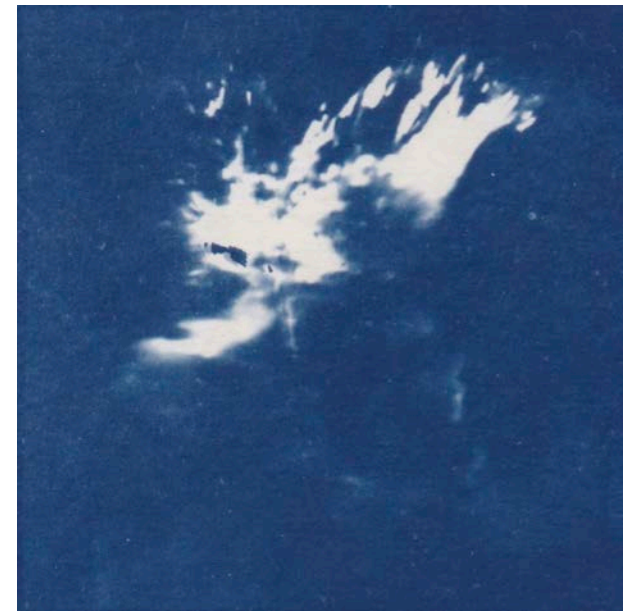


A Decision to Jump

Looping 48-frame stop-motion video (scanned cyanotype prints)

Using found footage from a 1940s women's Olympic diving competition, this consolidation of scanned cyanotype prints articulates a path between the sky and the water, and between each frame. The movement is fluid, and the blues are varied and transitory. I am using this to think about the completely literal associative leaps we repeatedly make in our construction of the moving image, and in our construction of the world. In relation to the narrative of the sky that has fallen, it is also a decision to leap with the falling, and to rename it as 'a decision to jump.'

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSAmTH8mEJU>



Blue & Blank Time

Two-part looping video work on facing box TVs

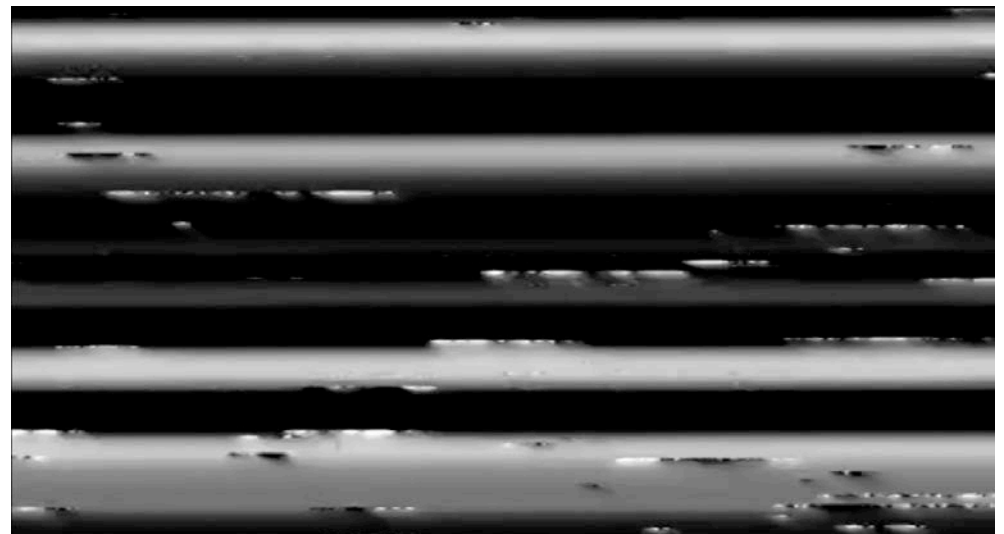
This work is comprised of two looping videos on two box TVs that face each other. Every minute, the videos alternate screens. The first of the two, *Blue Time*, is a fragmentary collage of home video footage, filmed when my twin brother and I were 2-3 years old. The footage is silent and blue, transitioning from one tiny piece of childhood to another, never staying long, like breathing or blinking. The second part, *Blank Time*, is a loop video tape static from the end of the final childhood video. In the alternating blue and blank, the presence of a viewer in the space between the two screens acts as an integrating thread.

This work is primarily a response to a lecture I attended by British psychoanalyst Lisa Baraitser, who referred to a patient's description of psychoanalytic time as 'Blue Time' — the most intense part of the week, simultaneously intimate and very abstract, separate from the 'real' world, real but out of reach. The rest of the week was likened to 'Blank Time,' or the flickering grey of TV screen static. Baraitser framed the never-arriving project of integrating the two — surviving and making meaning in the oscillation between the blue and the blank — as a version 'mental health'. Here I am suggesting that creative practice (and curatorship as creative practice) may be another way of surviving the oscillation between the blue and the blank, and of making new meaning in a shared holding of the fragments.

Video links: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-1JnicBRdM>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncEeBXnyZUg>



Above: *Blue Time* screenshot
Below: *Blank Time* screenshot



Attacus atlas, wing of the world

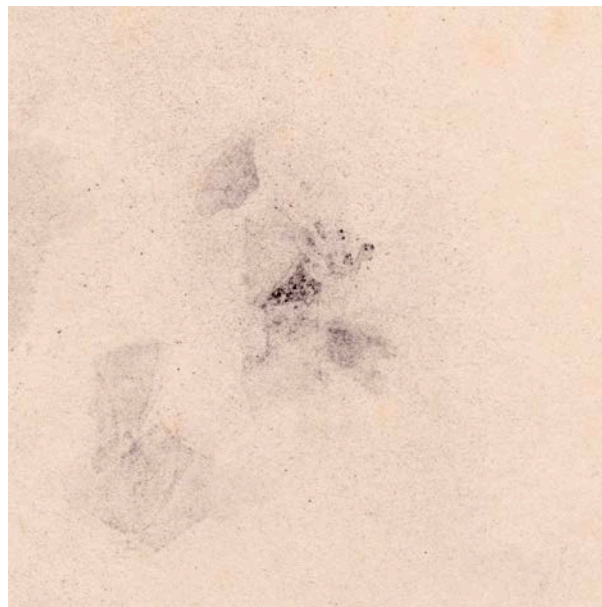
13.5 X 13.5cm book with centre-stitching

(Book awaiting binding — hence no actual images of the book as an object)

This is collection of scanned burnt-book residues from the Jagger Library fire of 2021. The size of the open book is the same size as the open wingspan of the Atlas moth (*Attacus atlas*), and the combined surface area of the pages is approximately one-billionth of the surface of the earth. The powdery charcoal impressions echo both a micro view of moth wings, and a macro view of continents. The world as we know it is held up in the finest powder on the wing of a moth, and it is changed and erased in our attempts to pin it down. The material presence of a burnt book exceeds and outlives its symbolic potential, marking out a third shared space between ‘the text’ and ‘the object’ — at once the same and entirely reimagined.

Attacus atlas
WING OF THE WORLD

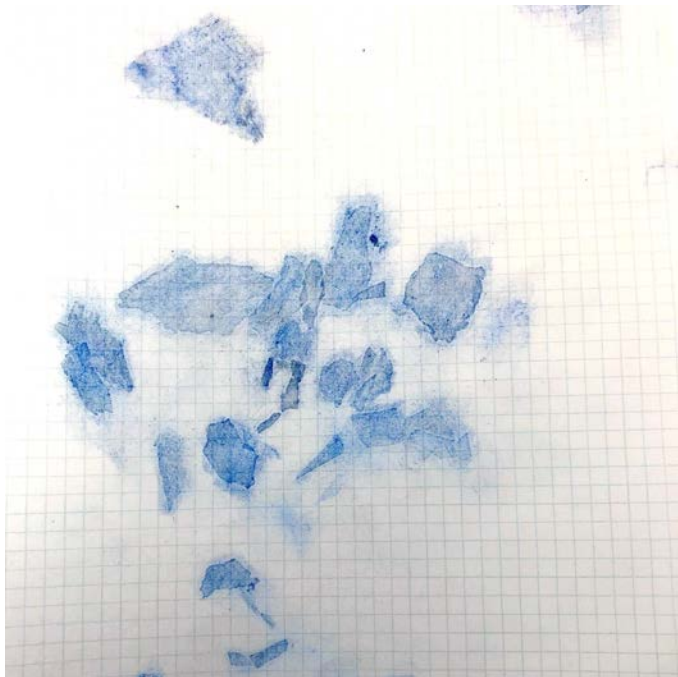
Sophie Cope



The Thread Back (to the Karman Line)

10m scroll, blue frottage on gridded tracing paper

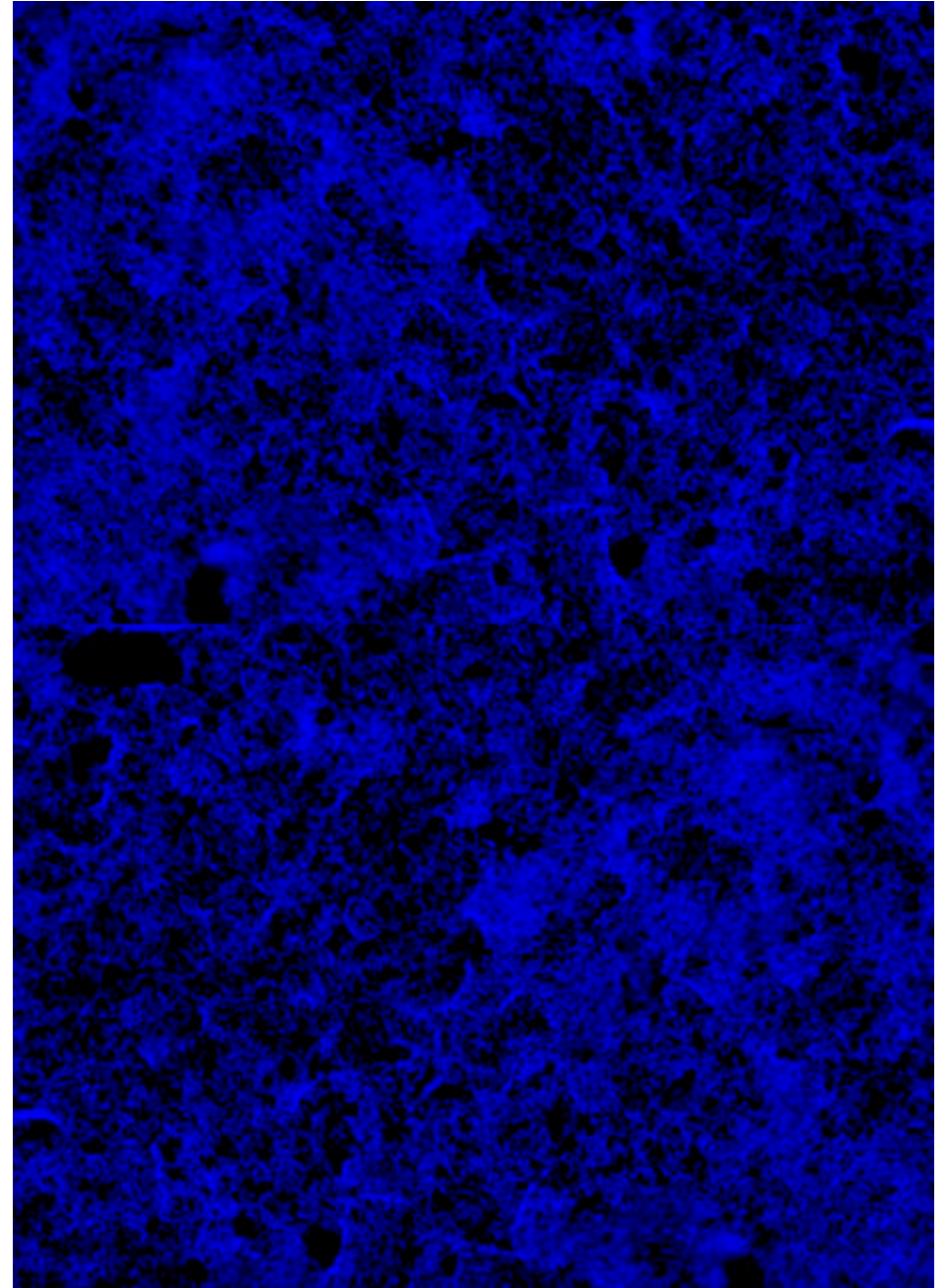
Stretching from the ceiling to the floor, this 10m scroll is approximately 1000th of the distance between the surface of the earth and the edge of the atmosphere — an edge marked out by the theoretical Karman Line. The soft blue fragments on the gridded tracing paper are rubbings of burnt-book fragments from the Jagger Library fire of 2021. Here, the burnt illegible text remains materially relevant — it is the sky that has fallen, and it is also a new map for the pieces, or a thread back.



Sky of the Mind

*Inverted fluorescence microscope image of neuron nuclei
48 X 68cm colour print on tracing paper (on lightbox)*

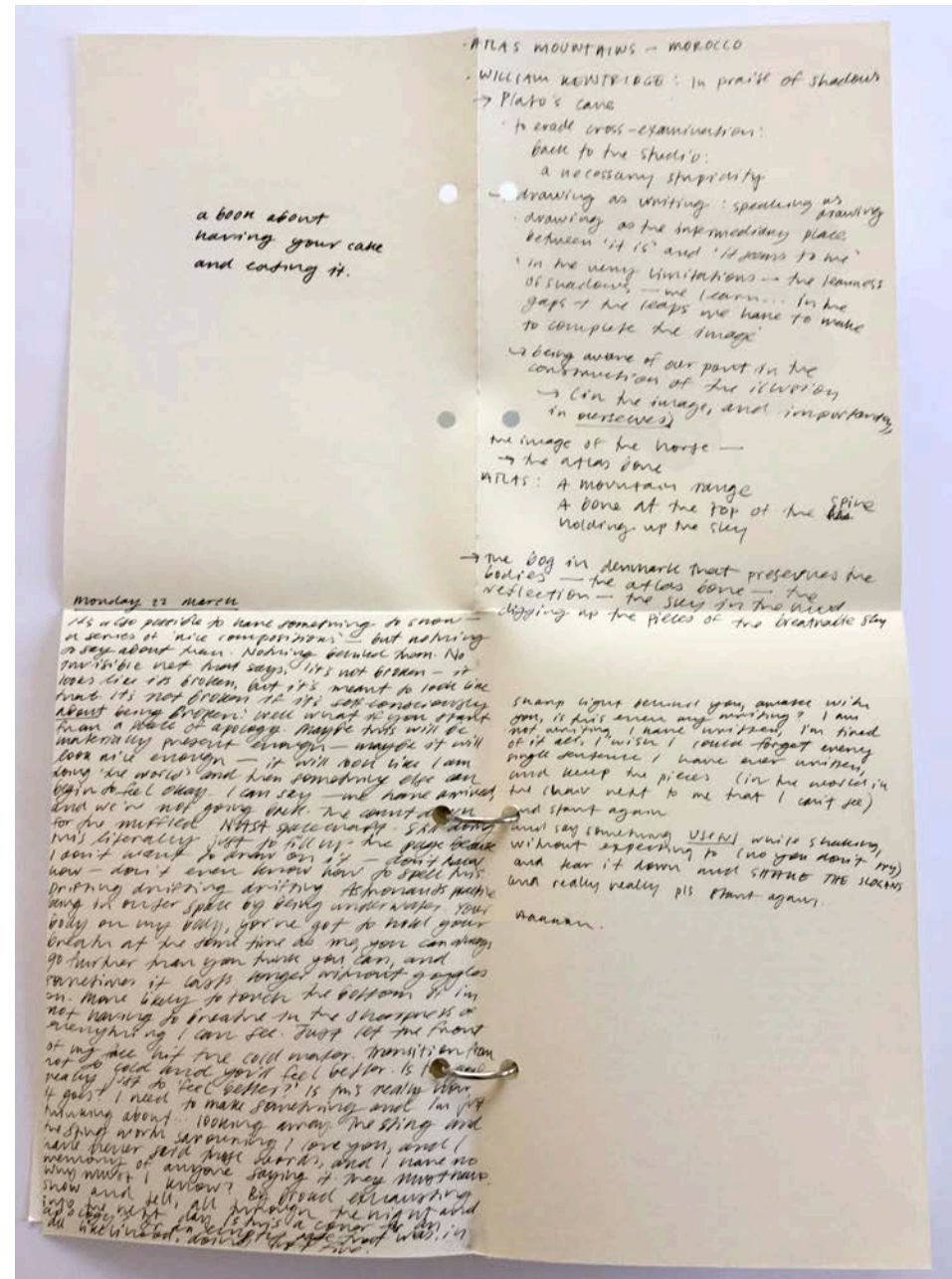
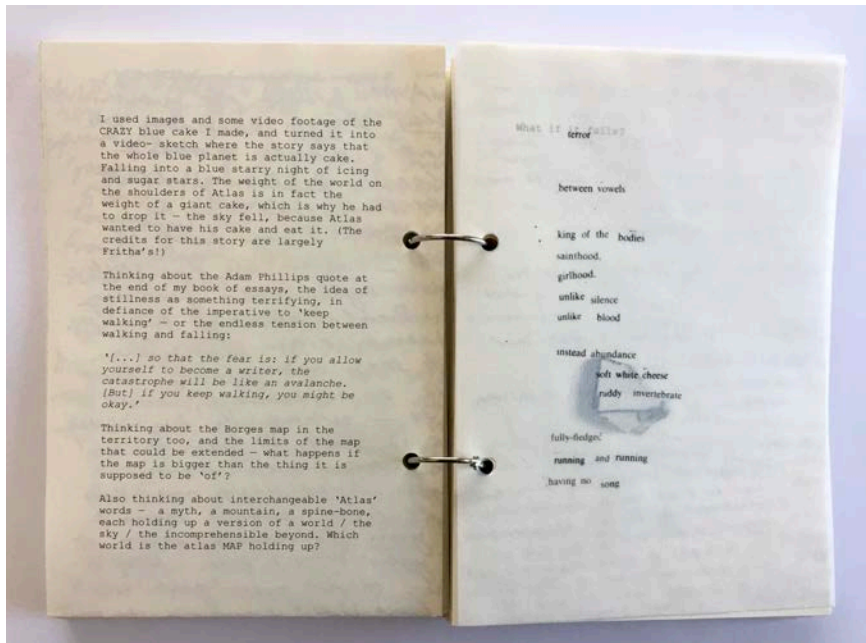
This is a microscope image of neuron nuclei, taken by my friend Caitlyn Mahony as part of her doctoral research in UCTs department of Molecular and Cell Biology (2021). In my story about the sky falling, I have been thinking about the sky the mind too — held up by the highest Atlas vertebra. The centre of the brain cell is perhaps the literal centre of this sky. Here, it is a night-time sky, and it is a visual echoing of many of my blue fragments.



Studio Notes: a selected chronology of thinking

Two ring-bound volumes - A3 folded into A5 pages

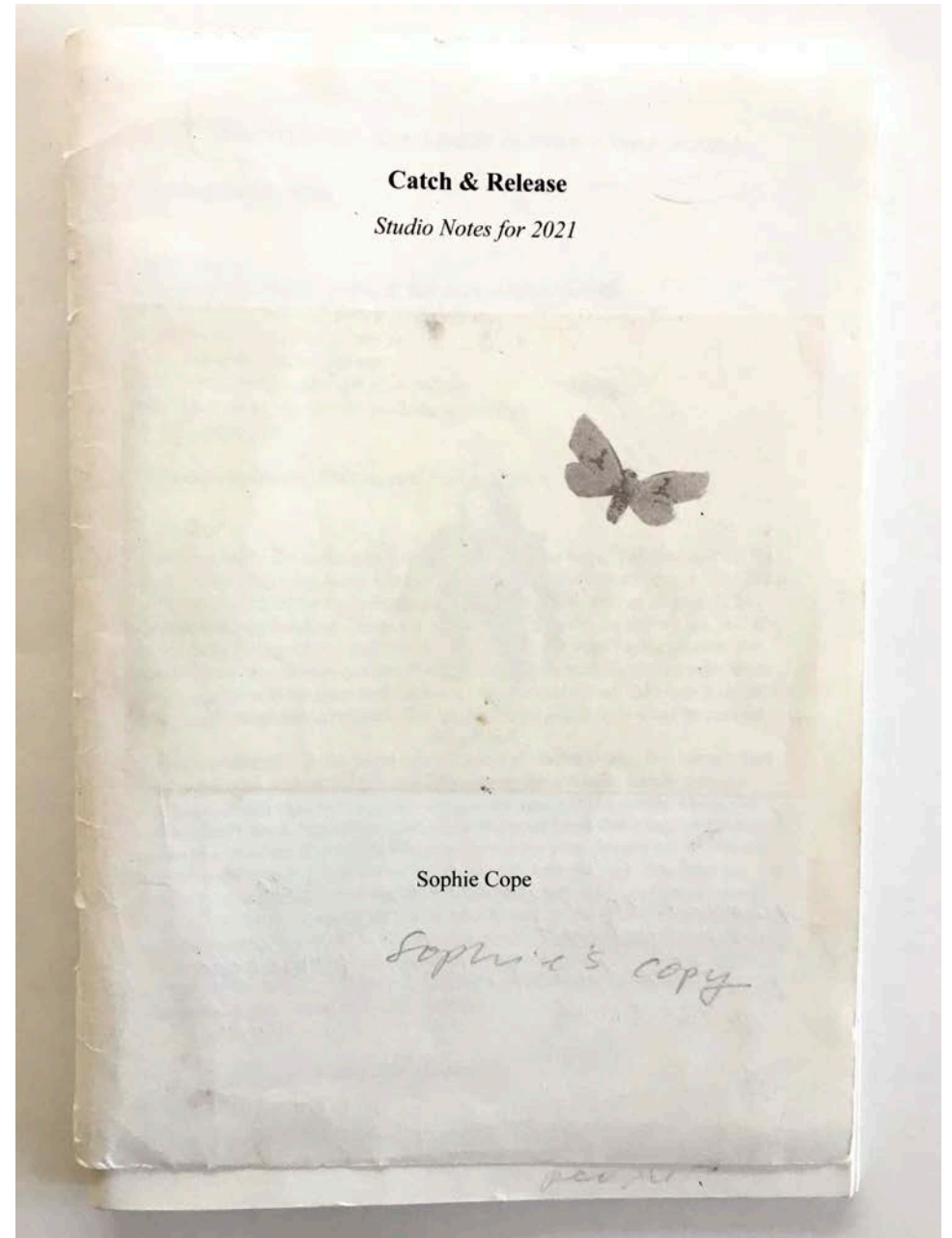
An edited chronology of my own writing and thinking from this year. Roughly 16000 words. The folded insides of the A3 pages are scanned handwritten text, and the legible outer sides of the pages are typed. It is a long, unapologetic celebration of the text 'as texture,' and as my primary medium — in all of its gaps, failures, possibilities and material and symbolic layering. Personally, this is the most important component of my body of work, because it traces an enormously valuable lived process that has already happened, and is still happening, and far exceeds the bounds of the book or the text or the gallery.



Catch & Release

A5 book of studio notes / photo-essays preceding the academic year

Annotated working copy of a book of studio notes / essays, images and references that I used, particularly in the beginning of the year, as a conceptual and imaginative point of departure.



So that we might have our cake and eat it

Found willow-pattern plate with gap in it

This plate is the last piece of the puzzle — necessarily concluding an unresolvable body of work with a gap. It is the inverse of all of the fragments that I've been gathering and trying to put back. It is like the blue planet that has fallen, and remains simultaneously fragmented and whole. The main characters have been cut out of the story, and the story continues. It says something about the preservation of dominant texts, and the gaps that mark out a significant part of the narrative. It is also, somehow, the only plate with which one might have one's cake and eat it.

