

fragile equilibriums

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:

Date:

Opening pages:
Details of *who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom I* (2013)
Details of *who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom II* (2013)

To my daughter, Charlene, and sons, Marcel and Ruan.
You inspire me. I dedicate this work to you.



Process work (2012)
Tracing paper

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Process work (2012)
Canson Paper (180 gsm) and charcoal
380 x 150 cm

... at each moment our ideas express not only the truth but also our capacity to attain it at that given moment ... our ideas, however limited they may be at a given moment – since they always express our contact with being and with culture – are capable of being true provided we keep them open to the field of nature and culture which they must express ... The idea of going straight to the essence of things is an inconsistent idea ... what is given is a route, an experience which gradually clarifies itself, which gradually rectifies itself and proceeds by dialogue with itself and with others. Thus what we tear away from the dispersion of instants is not an already-made reason; it is, as has always been said, a natural light, our openness to something. What saves us is the possibility of a new development, and our power of making even what is false, true – by thinking through our errors and replacing them within the domain of truth.

Merleau-Ponty (1964:21)¹

¹ Edie, James M. 1964. 'The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences', in *The Primacy of Perception, And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*.

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Introduction

In my art making I use paper as a primary material. I erode its materiality, perforating the surface in anticipation of whatever may be revealed, searching for new ways of seeing. What emerge are contradictory concepts: reduction and accretion. These mechanisms exist in counterpoise with one another yet the boundaries are blurred – indefinable. The fragile balances that operate within the mechanisms of power are similarly contradictory. It is here that this exploration resides, moving away from what has gone before – as Merleau-Ponty proposes above – taking an ongoing 'route', anticipating the possibility of new developments.

While the motivation for this study was a personal need to understand my creative process, and my task was to challenge my own perception of what drawing could be, I find myself at the same time processing issues – personal and public – that concern culture, gender and society. Patriarchy has become a central concern.² Such abstract ideas continue to shape and define the practical realities of my life circumstances, my personal identity.

Having grown up during the late nineteen fifties to early seventies, before television was introduced in South Africa, exposure to media and information as a child was limited. My ‘known’ was informed and shaped by the ‘accepted norm’ as experienced within the context of my white, middle class Afrikaans family. From my adult perspective, abuse and violence were categorised as ‘discipline’. Therefore, despite the impact sustained, they remained largely unquestioned because issues of abuse and violence were not exposed, not openly acknowledged or discussed. Domestic violence was kept private through socially accepted norms such as *ons praat nie uit die huis nie*, meaning what happens here stays here. This supported a discourse that kept abuse secret – enforced and entrenched in silence.

My growing awareness of power and its effects required a deeper questioning of mechanisms that sustain abuse of power. This questioning was amplified by the disclosure – two years prior to this study – that my father had another daughter. While this new knowledge brought closure for her, for me the revelation became a catalyst as it brought my strained and disrupted relationship with my father into sharp focus – putting me in a place of intense discomfort and conflicting emotions. I found that sharing information about my father with my estranged sister required a wary sensitivity, a careful weighing of words, because I did not want to project my own negative perceptions onto her unblemished and fragile awareness.

The residues of abuse are accompanied by disqualification, a sense of doubt, and of anxiousness to not let ‘this thing’ spill out of control. However, exposure is a necessary part of reclaiming. How does one unmask the effects of power wielded abusively, violently or destructively and create a place from

² While patriarchy, in simple terms, is defined as ‘a form of social organisation in which a male is the head of the family and descent ... and any society governed by such a system,’ discussion with my supervisor established that it is an assemblage of many things at once. It cannot be pointed to and defined – its effects are made visible through actions and structures of authority (*Collins English Dictionary (CED)* 1999. Sv ‘patriarchy’).

which to face it? A culture of secrecy is replaced with one that allows greater transparency. Despite this positive change, academic research in various fields reveals that patriarchal structures that create imbalances of power continue to support mechanisms of abuse. The incidences of gender-based violence and violence against children are high – these mechanisms seem to be ‘normalised’ in the larger sociopolitical context of South Africa (Hulme, 2012:1; Subiros 2011:21; <http://www.ghju.uct.ac.za/>).³ Complex issues of race and culture have come out of the information that I have researched, many of which are beyond the scope of this paper. My focus here will be abuse, violence and trauma as a shared experience of South African cultural life – the trauma that Desmond Tutu has described as ‘penetrating the very fabric of our society’ (2011).⁴ This notion of ‘fabric’ underscores the body of work presented here, in personal, domestic and experiential terms.

How do our narratives unfold when information – new and stored – is brought into the picture? I believe that the manner in which we attempt to contextualise, rationalise and control our life situations can be equated to a filtering⁵ system. The continuous assault of new information and experiences leads to a revisitation of personal and collective history and memories. When recalled, this stored knowledge is reconsidered. Perceptions of what is ‘true’ or false, ‘real’ or imagined or ‘fact’ or fiction are adjusted and readjusted in an attempt to comprehend and make decisions. Such processes involve active engagement as Merleau-Ponty observes (1964:21).

His notion of our capacity to attain ‘truth’ at any given moment is reflected in my explorative working processes within the limited means of paper and charcoal. The visual language that I developed is most closely related to the art historical context of Minimalism and related movements. Although my work visually or formally relates in terms of a reduction of means, use of everyday and industrial materials (found and activated charcoal, and filter, wax and sanding

³ The Gender, Health and Justice Research Unit of the University of Cape Town is an interdisciplinary research program for gender-based violence from various academic fields.

⁴ This comment was made in a television program. The source is unknown.

⁵ Amongst others, filtering is defined as any process that involves separating or removing suspended particles from fluids by moving it through a porous substance such as paper or sand and any transparent substance or device that is used to reduce or eliminate frequencies of radiating light or sound (*CED* 1999. Sv ‘filtering’).



Richard Serra. *Deadweight IV (Philae)* (1992)
Paintstick on paper
376 x 194 cm

papers from industry) and the use of repetition, my concerns are different to those of prominent Minimalist artists. I was first attracted to the visual impact of Minimalist works – and particularly intrigued by Richard Serra’s black oil-stick drawings. The extreme reduction of visual and narrative means and a strong emphasis on materiality are central interests. A Minimalist approach to art making allows for reduction of ‘noise’ and elimination of excess. It pushes me out of my comfort zone of working in mixed media and familiar methodologies. Limitations of media intensify my focus and therefore require me to delve deeper, continuously striving to find and develop new possibilities, leading to new insights and engaging in a process of ongoing incremental unfolding. *Fragile equilibriums, operating within complex processes of unconscious and conscious awareness – constantly shifting, adjusting and readjusting.*

Charcoal is the material that provides a strong link to my childhood place, and establishes a point of reference and departure for the narrative of this study. During my childhood our home was threatened on several occasions by fires in the *koppie* behind the house. These events were always strangely unifying experiences for our family – we pulled together, as a family, to keep the fires away from our house. Our successful efforts were always accompanied by a sense of achievement and elation, in contrast to the tense undercurrent that existed in our household. Somehow we performed a balancing act – a fragile equilibrium – between holding something together, and that something falling apart.

Throughout my artistic process the challenges remain: How to manipulate and exploit materials, process and formal considerations to say what I want to communicate? How does one give form to traumatic experience? My method in response is ‘filtering’ – the term offers collectively a concept, structure and process of production. Filtering serves as my concept from which to develop artworks. My choice of materials – charcoal as ‘filter’⁶ and various kinds of paper used as both surface and support – act as a limit, a controlled framework within which to operate. These self-imposed limitations, to me, symbolically link to the limitations of women in a patriarchal society and the limiting structures and mechanisms of power.

Through this body of work I hope to create a new context and a symbolic ‘place’ for resistance, setting up new balances for power relations towards fulfillment –

⁶ Charcoal is a natural filter based on its porosity which provides an extended surface area. (<http://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/energy/question209.htm>)



Found charcoal

unknowing the known – and in the process a reconstitution and a reimagining of the self, embracing the unknown – the possibilities of a new known.

This essay explores the unfolding of my creative process and the shifts therein. The themes central to my artworks that will be discussed are as follows:

Charcoal as Material and Idea introduces charcoal as being a 'vibrant matter' with the capacity or power to effect change. Power – Destructive Force/Constructive Capacity offers an overview of how I address 'power relations' through formal devices, working methodologies and materials. Minimalism and Power investigates the devices Minimalism employs in asserting issues of power and authority.

Drawing as Filtering Process considers Elizabeth Gunter's (2012) perspectives on the act of drawing as a filtering process in relation to David Bohm's (2002) notion of internal processes of reflective thought as 'deep structure', and its manifestation into action as 'surface structure'. Drawing Emerging as Surface introduces surface as being an 'interface' for reflection and absorption to potentially facilitate the process of filtering, and surface bearing evidence that filtering has taken place.

Unmasking and Dismantling of Power in Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse provides current perspectives on power as understood and addressed in a 'Western' context, aiming to unmask and make visible the mechanisms and discourses which translate into trauma for women. Approaches are proposed for moving on towards constructive change and new possibilities. Trauma – Wounding/Healing considers violence and abuse as defined and categorised by Kaethe Weingarten (2003) and the 'coping strategies' she offers for processing these.

Sewing as Process of Retrieval, Reconstruction, Restoration and Reparation introduces and explores sewing as a mark and as a conveyor of meaning linked to care. Fallout of Process reflects on the products generated from the creative process and how these are acknowledged and recontextualised.

A discussion of the artworks will be accompanied by reference to those other artists whose work and ideas had the most direct influence on my decision-making. These include amongst others, Elizabeth Gunter (1957–), Richard Serra (1939–), Frank Stella (1936–), Cy Twombly (1928–2011), Robert Ryman (1930–), Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), El Anatsui (1944–), Eva Hesse (1936–70), Jackie Winsor (1941–) and Kiki Smith (1954–). In closing, I will discuss the formal considerations and motivations for a presentation in installation format.



Documentation of working process (2013)



Found charcoal

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Charcoal as Material and Idea

A 'vibrant matter', Jane Bennett argues, is materiality that has the potential to impact on another 'body' or material (2010:xiii). It is therefore not static, passive, 'dull' or inert. It has the capacity to influence and affect change. She uses the term 'thing-power' to acknowledge a 'liveliness intrinsic to the materiality of the thing' which she argues is also present in 'the thing formerly known as an object' (2010:xvi) and that 'things do in fact affect other bodies, enhancing or weakening their power' (2010:3).⁷ Bennett notes that 'a vital materiality can never really be thrown "away", for it continues its activities even as a discarded or unwanted commodity.' Therefore '*Thing-Power*, the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle' (2010:6) is ongoing.

The 'fragile equilibrium' I find through the use of charcoal energises my process-oriented art making. By engaging with charcoal as substance, it revealed itself as being the concrete product of a process of transformation. Charcoal, in this sense, marks possibility within fiery destruction. I find in charcoal not that which is lost in the fire, but the physical 'mark' of the fire that remains burning – charcoal contains the 'memory' of the fire and has come to represent an acknowledgement of that which can be valued and reclaimed from a consuming and destructive force. In this sense, I am pointing to a process that is transformative. Charcoal remains a hopeful medium.

⁷ Bennett links her idea of 'thing-power' to Spinoza's idea of *Conatus* which 'names an "active impulsion" or tendency to persist ... Conatus names a power present in every body: "Anything whatsoever, whether it be more perfect or less perfect, will always be able to persist in existing with that same force whereby it begins to exist, so that in this respect all things are equal"' (2010:2).



A drawing (or a painting, photograph, and so on) is first and foremost an expression of its medium ... The medium is the artwork's first identity. It is secondarily about what it depicts. Form shapes content ... Master your technique to protect your content.

Kit White (2011:5)

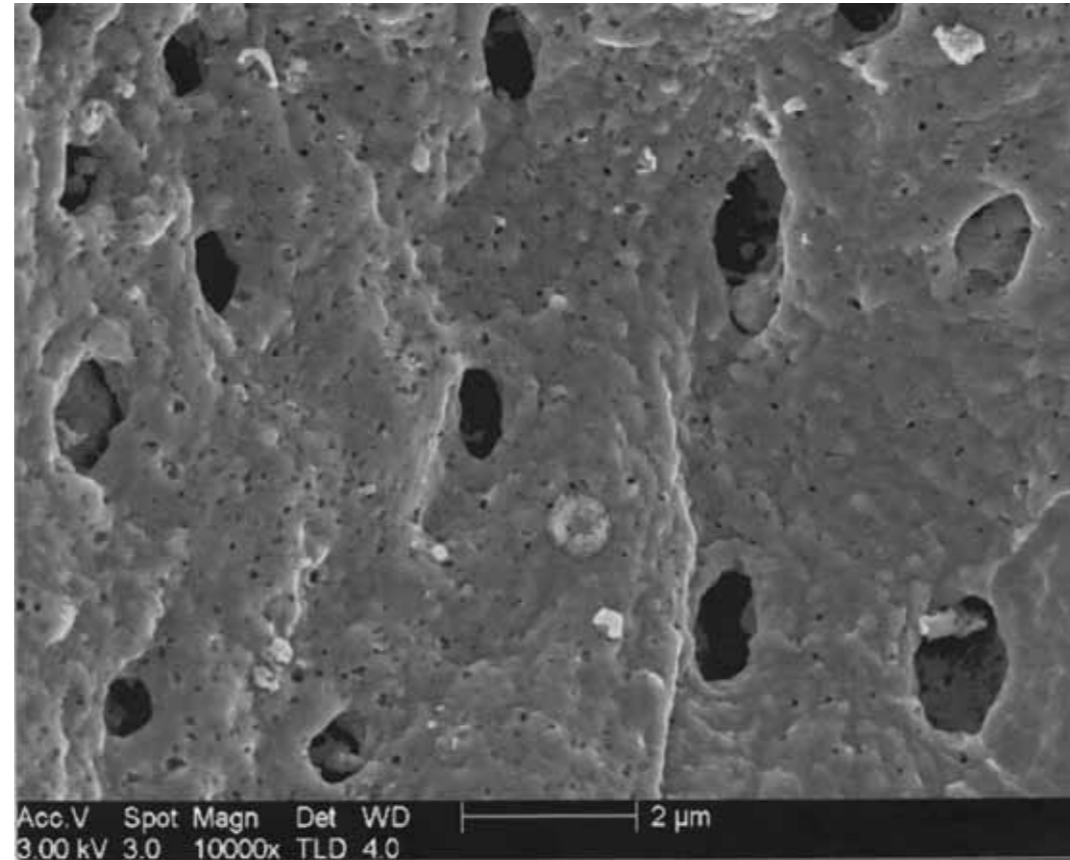
Activated charcoal

fragile equilibriums

Power – Destructive Force/Constructive Capacity

‘Power comes from the word posse, meaning “to be able.” People have power insofar as they are able to realise their projects – insofar, that is, as they are able to define/change the world’ (Burstow,1990:2). When considering power relations, I intend my work to hold references to power both as overwhelming and/or destructive force and in its capacity as constructive potential. Clear and increasingly subtle tensions operate between these poles. ‘Speaking’ from my position as a woman artist – a perspective that Anne Wagner (1996) underscores and extensively explores in her book *Three artists (Three Women)* – I view my personal ‘power’ more as a capacity than a force – a perspective which Anna Chave clarified (1990:56). As bell hooks⁸ (1990) proposes, I came to understand and embrace my creative process as a ‘place of struggle’ where ‘actions of resistance’, with the potential for reconciliation and renewal, embrace the capacity for transformation (1990:146).

⁸ The author chooses to write her name without capital letters as an act of resistance against patriarchal power structures.



Microscopic image of activated charcoal

*'The 2 basic quantity [or substance] questions, how much and how often, distinguish 2 kinds of quantity:
 1 of size – extension in area ...
 1 of recurrence – extension in number
 [These] measurements ... establish weight in space – and weight in time'* (Hickey & Shiff, 1994:27).

In setting up 'power relations' in the work, formal devices of scale, weight, format, tone, texture and so on create fragile equilibriums between aspects of visual and material darkness and lightness, heaviness and lightness, density and openness, saturation and clarity, and firmness and pliability. Scale is considered between elements in the work itself, between different works, between the work and the viewer and between the work and the environment in which it 'lives', which will be addressed in more detail with discussion of each work.

My working methodologies are characterised by processes of 'dematerialising', employing actions, such as eroding, tearing, fragmenting and discarding. Perforating surfaces as a positive intention to allow light and air to move through them, paradoxically, employs actions that are potentially destructive⁹ – the activity symbolically becoming a resistance against the suffocating and violent effects of power. If abuse is seen to have weight, the physically strenuous process of sanding away the drawing's support becomes the counterweight; the engagement and energy invested operating in direct relation to the negation of the weight. Dematerialising processes are again counterbalanced by processes of 'materialising' – employing processes of retrieval such as reclamation, reconstruction and restoration. I have control over how much is to be revealed or concealed, what to reclaim and tend to, and what to let be or fall away.

Both the materialising and dematerialising of surface involve repetitive actions. Joseph Albers' formula for establishing weight in space and/or time is of relevance here. He states: 'The 2 basic quantity [or substance] questions, how much and how often, distinguish 2 kinds of quantity: 1 of size – extension in area – and 1 of recurrence – extension in number. [These] measurements ... establish weight in space – and weight in time' (Hickey & Shiff, 1994:27). By implication, I understand the repetitive actions involved to build or destroy surface as contributing to the conceptual scale and weight of the work, meaning that the actual scale is larger than it physically presents itself. Applied for my purposes here, repetitive action, contributing to weight and scale – be it perceived as contribution, or as 'burden' or 'damage' (and their extent or amount) – becomes commentary about capacity and endurance, measurable despite being 'invisible'.

⁹ The drawing's supports are eroded by placing the paper, drawing side down, over the abrasive surface of coarse sanding paper and sanding the reverse sides until the process perforates the surfaces with tiny 'pores'.

Where the removal of weight with the erosion of the paper reduces physical weight, it also contributes, in counterbalance, conceptual weight. Activated charcoal,¹⁰ used in some areas, has an enormous surface area that conceptually extends the scale of the surfaces of the work, again, into much larger surface areas than which they visually present themselves. This, coupled with the notion of continuity, underscores the capacity of a surface as effective 'filter'. Repetition translating into expansion of scale and weight, can arguably also apply to the physical action of repetitive filterings in the filtered drawings.

There is tension between controlled processes – calculated rational planning and organising – and intuitive free-flowing processes, with potential for contributing what I like to call 'gifts of process'. Images produced by filtering powdered charcoal suspended in water through funnels, speak of the limitations of the capacity to control. Although the method is one of controlled action, the outcome of these images is random and does not 'conform' to a preconceived notion of what should be achieved. Repetition and seriality in both the filtered drawings and the drawings of surface, function as capacity for endurance and choice for constructive action, acknowledging that these 'filtering' processes have the potential to continuously – consciously and unconsciously – contribute to the unfolding 'experience which gradually clarifies itself' towards new insights.

¹⁰ The efficiency of activated charcoal as filter is based on its properties for adsorption. It is processed 'to be riddled with small, low-volume pores that increase the surface area'. One gram has a surface area that can vary between 300–2000 m². Adsorption takes place by electrostatic binding (trapping) of pollutants to its vast surface area. Activated charcoal is selective. It will trap other carbon-based impurities ('organic' chemicals), but will let many other chemicals that are not attracted to carbon, pass right through. Once all of the bonding sites are filled, the filter stops working and should be replaced (<http://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/energy/question209.htm>).



Richard Serra. *Delineator* (1974–76)
Two steel plates
Dimensions unknown

fragile equilibriums

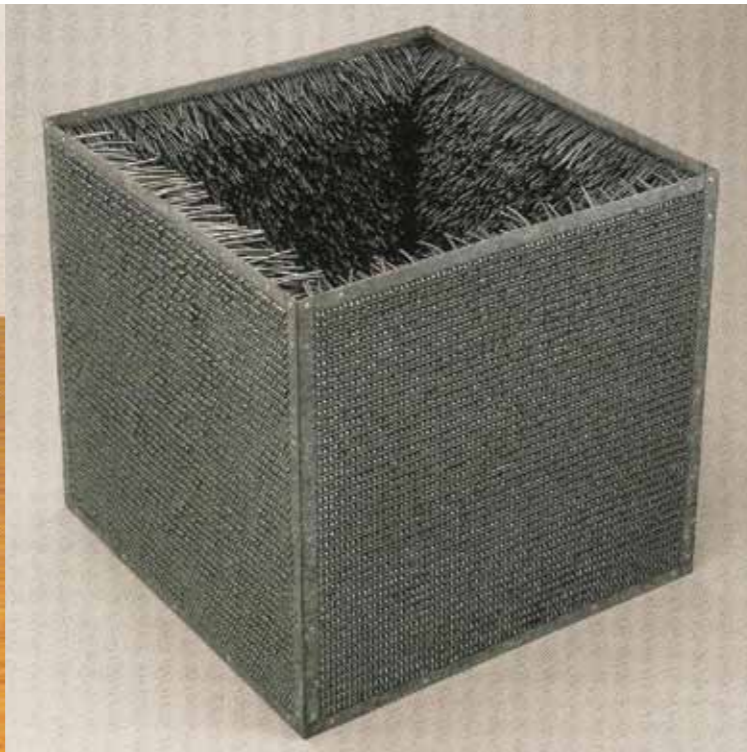
Minimalism and Power

Writing from a woman's perspective, Anna Chave's (1990, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2011) greatly-detailed insights on the links between Minimalism and Power are particularly helpful. She frames her concerns with Minimalist art within what Theresa de Lauretis describes as 'the relations of power involved in enunciation and reception', relations 'which sustain the hierarchies of communication; ... the ideological construction of authorship and mastery; or more plainly, *who speaks to whom, why, and for whom*' (1990:44) (my italics).¹¹ Clearly then: whose agenda is being served? A position that is also central to this body of work, and which I hope to clarify as I go along.

¹¹ Chave exposes the 'spiritualised construction' of Minimalism as it emerged in the mid-sixties, as the manifestation of a deliberate fosterage by its leading patrons – first by Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo and later the founders of the Dia Art Foundation in New York (2008:466).



Richard Serra. *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)* (1969)
Lead antimony
Four plates, each 121.9 x 121.9 x 2.5 cm



Eva Hesse. *Accession II* (1967)
Galvanized steel and rubber tubing
78.1 x 78.1 x 78.1 cm



Jackie Winsor. *Four Corners* (1972)
Wood and hemp
72.2 x 128.3 x 131.4 cm

Chave argues that the 'blank face of Minimalism may come into focus as the face of capital, the face of authority, the face of the father' based on the 'qualities or values' portrayed by Minimalist objects, 'unfeelingness and a will to control or dominate' (1990:51). Their 'cool displays of power' and 'the authority implicit in the identity of the materials and shapes the artists used, as well as the scale and often the weight of their objects, has been crucial to Minimalism's associative values from the outset' (1990:44). These artists, mostly male, made use of common industrial and commercial, often impersonal materials, such as galvanized, 'hot- and cold-rolled steel'. When they eventually employed 'factory-made' processes of fabrication, exploiting to their advantage 'the cultural authority of the markers of industry and technology' (1990:44, 51), they also 'elevated the role of the concept by devising objects that appeared untouched by human hands' (2010:28).

The Minimalists' use of a restricted vocabulary of simple geometric forms is most often indexed to the 'secular realm of the industrial or technological' (2008:466), but Chave also links it to 'the dominant tradition of Western architecture', in particular the repetition of the square or rectangle as used in classical architecture, creating a balanced and therefore 'pleasing sense of proportion and scale coupled with a clarity and austerity of design' (1990: 53).

Chave asserts that the possibility for the outsize scale – 'an age-old mechanism for inspiring awe' and demonstrating power – of some Minimalist works, was afforded by Dia's generous patronage and agenda to 'enshrine' monumental Minimalist works, such as Walter de Maria's *Broken Kilometer* of 1977 (2008:470). Minimalist projects did not initially 'assume an epic scale nor required great sums' but artists rather 'tended to use commonplace materials simply and on a moderate scale, exploiting resources at hand' (2008:469).

Drawing attention to the relations between power and the language of art history, Chave demonstrates that the 'highest level of praise' is meted out using descriptive terms related to the exercise of power:

... as strong, forceful, authoritative, compelling, challenging, or commanding; and the masculinist note becomes even more explicit with the use of terms like masterful, heroic, penetrating, and rigorous. That what is rigorous and strong is valued while what is soft or flexible is comic or pathetic emerges again and again in the minimalist's discourse, as it does in the everyday language of scholars. (Terms

that might, but do not as readily, serve as high praise for art include, for instance: pregnant, nourishing, pleasurable) (1990:55).

She argues that this use of language relates directly to that used to describe 'a human figure of authority', meaning '*whether or not the speaker holds that figure in esteem*' (1990:56) (my italics). This implies that the patriarchal is also in language and 'value' judgments are shaped by biases.

Chave further brings to attention Foucault's 'gender-neutral assumption'. She cites Balbus who states that Foucault 'takes for granted the persistence of patriarchy', arguing:

His gender-neutral assumption of a will to power (over others) that informs True discourses and the technologies with which they are allied, transforms what has in fact been a disproportionately male into a generically human orientation, and obliterates in the process the distinctively female power – my own word would have been capacity – of nurturance in the context of which masculine power is formed and against which it reacts (1990:56).

It is here that I would situate this body of work, as an expression of a distinctively female 'capacity' – in both my visual expression and language. Where Minimalist artists in general tended to 'obliterate' the presence of their personal mark, I deliberately show my hand, valuing my labour and female identity, as Eva Hesse did, and Jackie Winsor does (2010:28). Having left my marriage of 26-years with the words 'should not have allowed' (which overtly implies authority and ownership), and '... no contribution' (implying worthlessness ... invisibility) ringing in my ears, it is important to me that the labour – and the 'mark' – should be my own.¹²



Walter De Maria. *The Broken Kilometer* (1979)
Five hundred polished, round, solid brass rods,
each measuring 2 m in length and 5 cm in diameter
Long-term installation at Dia center for the Arts
New York

¹² Winsor, like Hesse, does not require that all the labour in her work should be her own (2010:28).



Process work. *untitled (through)* (2012)
Canson paper (180 gsm) and charcoal
150 x 80 cm



Process work. *untitled (out)* (2012)
Canson paper (180 gsm) and charcoal
150 x 80 cm

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Drawing as Filtering Process

Elizabeth Gunter's perspectives on drawing as a 'mark of a silent language' provide valuable insights about the 'inner-outer' processes that come into play in the act of drawing. In my own experience these seem to appear as a seamless integration between a subconscious awareness/processing of what I am dealing with at the time, and my conscious intentions of what I aim to work towards. What translates into action is based on a complex interaction of conscious and intuitive knowledge and decision-making. What takes shape on the drawing surface, therefore, is not fully 'controlled' and, at best, surprises – the gifts of process.



Process work (2012)
Canson paper (180 gsm), tracing paper and charcoal
150 x 150 cm

Gunter considers three analogies of the act of drawing as a 'filtering' process: the ebb and flow of the ocean (2012:154), the mask, and the sword and its sheath (2012:198). In relation to these, David Bohm's proposal of the internal processes of thought – 'deep structure' translating into action, becoming 'surface structure' – and this process therefore equating movement (2002:65), offers another, and similar, perspective.

Gunter's approach is based on the premise that drawing as practice 'interfaces between internalisation and externalisation in the mobilisation of habitus' or expression (as proposed by Bourdieu). Her perspective is from an 'enactionist theory of mind' where these two 'sides' are not seen as opposing – 'inside' and 'outside' – but rather as being in a reciprocal interchange of 'varying degrees of drafter-centered cerebrate processing'. This involves both 'information' (observation, coherency, stability and so on) and 'the surge and chaos of the somatic and unconscious mind'. Drawing 'interfaces', becoming the meeting plane where information from both these 'oppositional stances' is registered and 'resolved' (2012:153–154).

She further posits: 'interactivity and enaction' as 'generative facilities' in drawing 'engage in a duel between the ontic mask (the visible) and the hidden face beneath the mask (the invisible). In this duel the sword (as drawing tool) unmask the 'ontic', revealing the 'hidden face beneath the mask', with the implication of scarring – yet 'revealing' scarring (2012:198). The drawing then (the scars left by the sword) becomes the 'other' of the invisible, rather than 'another' visible (2012:200).¹³ This continuous exchange/interchange between visibility and invisibility embodies that which lies between the 'unconscious and the conscious', and 'between the layered dispositions of body–mind'. These perspectives serve to demonstrate that '[t]he "ontological" in drawing practice implies incorporation of the visible and the invisible, as well as the self in relation to the world, and through the act of drawing, the world in relation to self' (2012:200).¹⁴

¹³ As the inside of the mask represents the 'non-visible negative of the face' it simultaneously also represents the 'visible positive of the back of the mask'. So too function the positive and negative of the sword and the inside of its sheath. In both instances 'the comfortable fit of the visible positive into the non-visible negative suggests an inevitable intertwining' and 'interchanging reciprocity ...' (2012:198).

¹⁴ The complexities at work here are fully discussed in chapter 5 (2012).

For Bohm, the processing of reflective thought, if done constructively, has the potential to create 'higher thought' patterns. This processing results in better and continuous adjustment and readjustment to 're-establish a state of stability and equilibrium in which reactive thought is once again adequate to meet the situation in which we find ourselves' (2002:57).¹⁵ This ongoing successive processing can arguably be seen to function as a 'filtering' of the information at hand. If not, does it not remain merely reorganising? In my view, productive or constructive thought processing should involve letting some information 'fall out' of the 'picture', in order to not become 'entangled' in a perpetual accumulation of information which potentially weighs down and stifles movement and growth towards a new known.



Process work (2012)
Rives paper (300 gsm) and Indian ink

¹⁵ Bohm elaborates on the irony that 'man's thought and language, whose deep aim is to make possible rational communication and constructive action, have been a principle factor making for the indefinite continuation of irrational hatred and destructive violence' (2002:69).



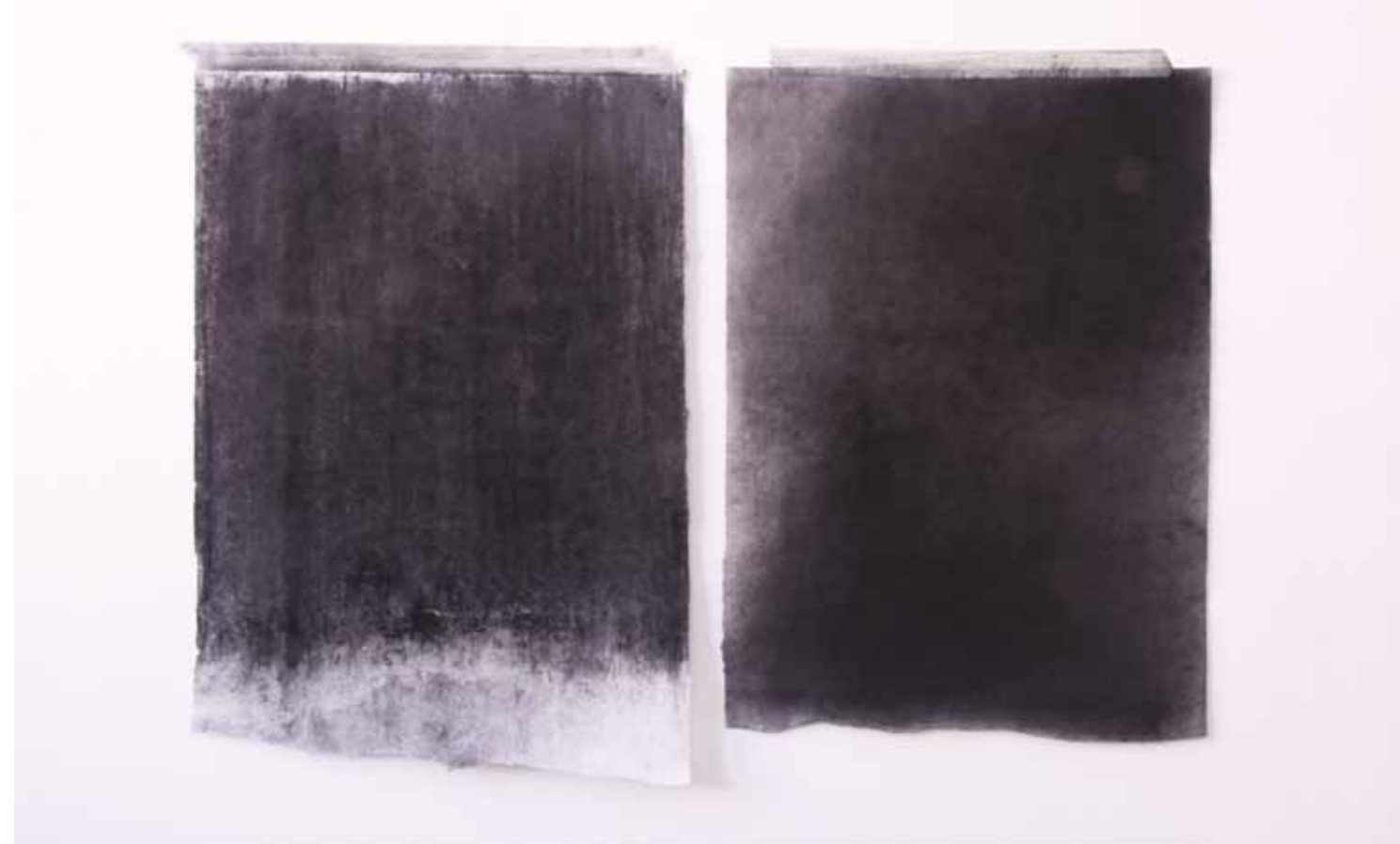
Found object
Handmade funnel

fragile equilibriums

Drawing Emerging as Surface

My focus on the funnel as object in previous work shifted to that which takes place inside the funnel. Following initial attempts of employing more conventional drawing methods – which lacked skill and failed to inspire – a series of monochrome surfaces emerged.¹⁶ Resulting from a need to simplify and reduce – perhaps as a symbolic action of filtering out excess – and influenced by Serra's extreme formal reductive process of removing any 'associative, symbolic or intellectual added value' (Varnedoe, 2006:254), another shift occurred. The monochromes developed into elimination of all references to recognisable imagery and text, and asked for repetition and seriality. The result was a series of various reflexive and absorbent surface 'samples' on different papers, in different techniques and tonal variations.

¹⁶ I have not drawn in the last few years, other than for the purposes of developing my three-dimensional works.



Documentation of monochromes (2012)



Surface presented itself as 'interface' for reflection and absorption, potentially facilitating the process of filtering, or bearing the evidence that filtering has taken place. Ultimately I want the surfaces to relate to 'filter cloths' (Baruth, 2005:13.5), continuous 'filter bands' (2005:14.17) and 'filter membranes' (2005:13.5–25) as used in industry.¹⁷ The surfaces that emerged shift between being the filter and being the residue. What happens on, below and between surfaces symbolises negotiation between inner and outer experience, as Gunter and Bohm propose above. As residue, surface represents the visible evidence of filtering enacted in drawing, and active participation in the filtering processes of life – whether conscious or unconscious, negative or positive.

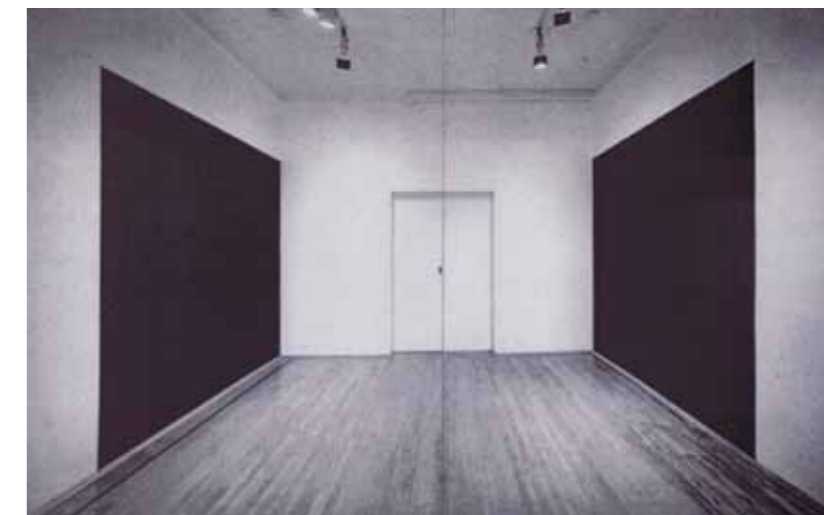
When the focus is narrowed to the point where the work becomes a surface saturated with material, the inherent qualities of the material itself become amplified. How the material is manipulated to create a tactile surface of density, saturation, tonal variation and texture, has the potential to heighten the sensuous experience of the work. Slight and calculated differences between the above-mentioned aspects serve to comment on how the material was handled and transformed, and establish interrelationships that draw attention to these differences. Where saturation of surface and integration of materials create a fusing of materials, they arguably set up a situation where the boundaries become blurred between surface as material substance and material substance as surface.

The amount of drawing surface covered with charcoal in relation to my small studio space, coupled with the density of the surfaces themselves, started to 'suffocate'. This bodily experience began to inform an understanding of how these elements function in terms of scale relationships as Serra exploits in his monumental, site-specific installation drawings in black oil-stick. Designed, as with his sculpture, to disrupt as well as complement existing spaces, these often occupy entire walls, becoming integrated into the architecture. His intention is to create another space in the space of the architecture – 'the space of the drawing'. For instance, where two drawings 'bracket' the end of a room, the viewer walking between them will experience a compression of space. The space becomes 'palpable' (Rose, 2007). The viewing experience is intentionally staged to emphasise the physicality of matter through the heaviness and depth of the large area of saturated black surface, and the

¹⁷ These are terms used for components in filtering systems in industry. Amongst others that are of interest for future reference are 'filter cake' (2005:13.35) and 'filter bed' (2005:14.17).

spatial relationships between the drawing and the architecture of the space.

These insights prompted a reworking of some of the surfaces in an attempt to counteract the visual and material weight. Surface emerged as the site where my response to issues of power is registered – where information is processed and damage and repair negotiated.



Richard Serra. *Taraval Beach* (1977)
Paintstick on Belgian linen
Shown installed at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Whitney Biennial



fragile equilibriums

Unmasking and Dismantling of Power in Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse

Finding alignments with the points of view of poststructuralist feminist writers contributed to valuable shifts in personal perceptions and understanding of my creative process. Their discourse embraces a process of working through towards a new known, rather than giving in to the impulse to turn away from, deny or suppress the resurfacing memories of traumatic experience. bell hooks' perspectives of the transformational capacity in the creative practice of writing similarly apply to my own creative practice. She argues that the oppressed 'struggle in language to recover [them]selves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew.' Words have meaning and become actions of resistance, making language a place of struggle' (1990:146). She continues:

I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving to the center – but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to me the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds (1990:149–150).

This perspective negates a 'victim status' or 'neurotic clinging' to it, but makes possible an honouring or claiming of traumatic experience lived through as part of one's personal narrative and authentic voice. When acknowledging my creative practice as 'a place of struggle' with room for acts of resistance, I am deeply aware of the significance of the fact that I am breaking the silence, as it were; that I am also *writing* about that which I learned to and/or was expected to conceal, or to perceive and accept as normative. This writing has become, in tandem with the visual communication of my artistic practice, an unmasking.

Feminist poststructuralist discourse aims to unmask and make visible the mechanisms and discourses which translate into trauma for women. It functions within a relationship of mutual exchange with that which it criticizes. It does not look in from the sidelines or margins but 'leaps into' a 'messy process' of 'decomposition' as Barthes proposes – changing also the subject who delivers the critique (Davies et al, 2006:90). This involvement in the 'decomposing' process operates not only in language, but also affects the 'material body', meaning that:

The process of transformation, then, is not so much the result of a rational choice to be someone or something else in particular, but a movement, a 'decomposition', an engagement in a messy process in which one 'scrapes and catches and drags' in a complex process of reinscription, of rubbing out the unthinkable; a decomposition, and a fractured, messy recomposition, of thought and of body. In that work of reimagining the possibilities, we are always also the inevitable *effect* of discourse, through the 'reiterative and citational *practice* by which discourse effects what it names ... [and] the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains (Butler, 1993:2).¹⁸

In this process of transformation, despite a change of self, '*the deconstructive process remains always partial, messy and incomplete*' (2006:90) (my italics). It is a complex process that remains in constant 'mo(ve)ment' from moment to moment, where the change that is argued for, within the discourses and structures in which one operates, exerts its effects also on the one that criticises. The subjectivity of the one that criticises is also shaped by a

¹⁸ Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge.

position within these discourses and structures in which one operates.¹⁹
Davies et al clarify, citing St Pierre:

The newly transforming subject is aware of its own messiness, its own vulnerability to the processes through which it is subjugated and governed, aware that reason 'is produced within discourses in which certain statements are privileged and others are silenced or excluded' and that 'reason is always situated, local and specific, formed by values and passions and desires' (St Pierre, 2000:487).²⁰

This proposed ongoing transformation of unknowing the known towards knowing the unknown, contains a challenge that requires both engagement with new questions posed by poststructuralist writers 'along with their conceptual repertoire', which 'enable us to see about *what we are now*' and 'in making visible what we are now, to develop strategies (conceptual and practical) for making a radical break with current forms of domination, for imagining a new kind of subject' (2006:90).

In addressing unequal power relations in the context of patriarchy, Kim England asserts that 'feminism and poststructuralism have opened up geography to many voices other than those of white, Western, middle-class, heterosexual men. This allows for a geography which "... neither dismisses nor denies structural factors, but allows a range of voices to speak"' (1994:242).

In claiming my own voice and owning my responsibility in processes of transformation in my personal life and social interaction, these perspectives provided both an underpinning and a mirroring of what I hope to achieve through my creative practice.

Documentation of working process
who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom II (2013)

¹⁹ As opposed to 'the transforming poststructuralist subject [as] the rational, unified subject, newly liberated from liberal humanism' (2006:90). Therefore, viewed by Davies et al, as no longer 'the naive liberal subject who believes itself to be creating itself and is blind to the constitutive effects of discourses and systems of thought ... a subject who has become an object to be observed and analysed by psychologists and by itself' (2006:89) independent of context.

²⁰ St Pierre, Elizabeth. 2000. 'Poststructuralist Feminism in Education' in *Qualitative Studies in Education* 13(5), 477–515.





Process work. *untitled (place)* (2012)
Fabriano paper (180 gsm) and charcoal
150 x 80 cm



Process work (2012)
Canson paper (180 gsm) and charcoal

As soon as people begin to have trouble thinking things the way they have been thought, transformation becomes at the same time very urgent, very difficult, and entirely possible.

Michel Foucault (2000:457)

fragile equilibriums

Trauma – Wounding/Healing

As artist my response is also to silence and powerlessness as effects of trauma, and the strategies through which these came to be regarded as 'the norm'. The powerful and potentially aggressive mark produced by sanding, scars, dematerialises and transforms the material substance of the paper into an opened and tactile surface that reads as fragile, where some areas disintegrate to the point of falling away completely. These varying degrees of 'damage' and fragility evoke, for me, associations of stages or shifting degrees in intensity of exposure to, revelation of and/or processing and coming to terms with traumatic incidents and information. Feelings of being vulnerable and exposed, as if one's skin is being opened, are also examined.



Detail of *lie*. From the *murmurings of the mind* series (2013)

The new knowledge of my father's other daughter had particular significance for me in the light that I had been 'disowned'.²¹ Although it was never explained, I worked out that my disownment had to be the result of an incident of 'disobedience' – which was based, the way I saw it, on a matter of principal. A painful process of revisiting traumatic memories and wounding experiences set in motion a questioning of my perceptions of what was 'real' or imagined or even 'justified'. It reignited the futile and familiar exercise of trying to make sense of the senseless. In short, how to make the pieces of the puzzle fit. What is more unsettling is not so much the memories themselves, but that the effect of those memories presents itself so forcefully and insistently so long after the fact.

In processing issues of abuse and violence Kaethe Weingarten's (2003, 2005) insights brought valuable light. She categorises and defines violence with the terms personal violence, structural violence and violation, and trauma as common shock and trauma response.

Common shock refers to trauma resulting from ongoing daily exposure to incidents of violence, whether witnessed between people, in the media, or experienced as an interaction that is disturbing. Weingarten notes that despite the fact that we are surrounded by violence and violation – events ranging from 'the ordinary to the extraordinary' – defining what they are is a complex matter. She perceives the category of *personal violence* – when we harm or injure another – as probably most prominent in our awareness. She justifies her use of the term 'shock', saying 'regardless of our response – spaciness, distress or bravado – it affects our mind, body and spirit.' The consequences can be observed, 'whether the harm is physical, psychological, spiritual, or material' (2003:3–5). Achille Mbembe uses the term 'traumatic agent', referring to trauma as constituting 'moments – reverberated events in memory' (2013). A *trauma response* constitutes a severe form of common shock that 'disrupts our fundamental sense of who we are, who others are, and our sense of safety and security' (2003:9).

Another kind of violence, harder to notice, and the effects of which are harder to discern, is referred to as *structural violence*. Weingarten cites Johan Galtung,

²¹ I find the word 'disowned' problematic. As a young adult, I learned that I had been disowned by my father. This status, apparently, was reversed years later. Somewhere between these 'events' my father announced his adoption of a 17 year old girl.

the peace scholar who first proposed the term. He states: 'If one husband beats his wife, that is ... personal violence ... but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence' (2003:5).²² It is not hard to confirm this diagnosis in the South African context where social injustice continues to impact on multiple levels, the high incidence of violence in general, and the abuse of women and children in particular.

An area of particular interest to me is patriarchal abuse that involves a more insidious kind of violence, which I understand to be what Weingarten categorises as 'violation'. She notes that violation may be subtler and harder to discern than violence because of the confusion it can create in dealing with the effects. While it 'may not leave a physical mark, there can be psychic traces, for violation disrupts our sense of meaning and makes us feel fear and dread' (2003:6). She explains that psychological wounding has the potential to 'fracture a person's experience of continuity of self', meaning 'for some people who have experienced trauma, the past has moved into the present. In this way, the traumatic experience has never really passed' (2005:75).

Weingarten proposes a therapy – *compassionate witnessing practice*, based in the discipline of narrative practice – which functions as a support process to 'restore a sense of continuity of self' with one's history. While this sense of 'restoration' cannot be imposed, the 'delicate' working through process aims at 're-linking people with the histories of their qualities, feelings, beliefs, values and commitments' (2005:75). Frustrated with my own reawakened vulnerability I questioned whether my process of 'unknowing the known' might be the route of therapy, with the outcome that there is no better method than a working through by means of my artistic practice. By implication I had to become my own 'compassionate witness'. However, I do not perceive my creative practice as therapy, but rather as the vehicle for processing and giving voice to issues of concern. Underlying a version of power asserted as a proactive, productive, transformative and quiet strength is care, whether in the form of care for self or for others.²³

²² It also 'occurs when the social system itself exploits some people to the benefit of others. It produces the same kind of harms, but to classes of individuals ... and therefore creates social injustice' (2003:5).

²³ Mbembe asserts that 'the ethics of care is a relationship of being which requires a different kind of temporality.' Care takes time and therefore requires patience. It should be methodical and disciplined. 'In favour of a new imagination,' it should involve all the senses (February 2013, Keynote Lecture, Michaelis).



fragile equilibriums

Sewing as Process of Retrieval, Reconstruction, Restoration and Reparation

Sewing as an act of reclaiming amplifies the fragile equilibrium operating between destruction and reparation. In my work, sewing as a mark and as a conveyor of meaning is linked to care – based on regard and empathy, as a nurturing capacity, providing optimal conditions for growth and/or healing. When I commit to the project of care, the function is not unlike the care that I exercised as a nursing sister – the taking care of wounds in particular. The action of distressing, which erodes the surface, produces a mark that scars. Similarly, the potentially destructive action of invasive surgery, or the snipping away of dead tissue in an open wound, is the route 'through' towards healing. The 'removal' of that which is harmful, and 'reconstruction' is crucial. In this sense 'destruction' and repair both become acts of care – honouring actions.



Louise Bourgeois. *Endless Pursuit* (2000)
Blue fabric and thread
45.7 x 30.4 x 30.4 cm

Damage to the scraped and torn paper is taken care of with surgical and mending stitches. The reverse sides are reinforced to prevent these from tearing out, with the use of micropore²⁴ plaster which is flexible and porous, allowing skin to stretch and breathe. The used sanding paper resembles the real distress of burnt skin. It is also reminiscent of a burnt landscape – earth's skin. It is rigid and tough and lacks elasticity. When the support is eroded it becomes brittle and very fragile despite its abrasive visual appearance – perhaps like bravado can mask vulnerability or insecurity.

It is important to me that my stitching should be hand sewing. The mending stitches – small and in rows close to one another and sometimes in both directions – are a method that I often saw my maternal grandmother, who was the embodiment of care, use. This time-consuming action literally requires commitment, which embodies care. I identify strongly with sculptor Jackie Winsor's sense of the value of her sculpture being 'closely tied to the countless hours of effort' she invests in it – effort that she believes 'attracts energy to it ... [P]ut[ting] energy into the piece' amounts for her to a 'caring process', to 'affection' and 'commitment; ... It's simply having put in the time, like a life' (Chave, 2010:29).²⁵ Sewing is such a familiar action to me that it becomes almost an extension of myself,²⁶ creating an experience that is soothing, allowing for a quiet contemplative space.²⁷ The process becomes a seamless shifting between conscious, rational decision-making and almost automatic action. I relate to Nigerian artist El Anatsui's comments about the stitching in his work being 'laborious ... The process of stitching, especially the repetitive aspect, slows down action and I believe makes thinking deeper. It is like the effect of a good

²⁴ Micropore™.

²⁵ In her work, *Four Corners* (1972), page 14, Winsor 'submitted some humble materials to a humble process purposely performed with an excess of diligence.' It took her six months to complete with assistance (2010:28).

²⁶ Since childhood sewing served as a creative outlet. Before my divorce, during the time of my husband's extended studies, it provided a means to contribute to our income, working from home while raising our children.

²⁷ This action functions in complete contrast to the physically strenuous process of eroding the supports of the drawings.

mantra on the mind' (<http://www.octobergallery.co.uk/artists/anatsui/index.shtml>). American artist Kiki Smith similarly asserts that 'there's a spiritual power in repetition, a devotional quality, like saying rosaries' (Weitman, 2003:45).

When contemplating my sewing as an act of reparation it represents positive intention, futile or even desperate perhaps, within the 'small scale' of my own scope and power to fix things in place or make a contribution – a small fraction in relation to the whole. It also gives voice to my limitations and inability to restore that which is beyond my control. About the sewing in her work, French American artist Louise Bourgeois (Morris, 2007)²⁸ commented 'this sense of restoration is deep within me' and made the confessional statement; 'I break everything I touch because I am violent. I destroy my friendships, my love, my children.' (2007:242) Likewise, the fractured nature of my close family structures, continues to make for complex negotiation of these territories. Taking responsibility for my own contribution to the mechanisms operating here I am consciously aware of how filtering and shaping of my perceptions translates to my actions, hoping to counteract perpetually destructive family behavioural patterns.

Sewing as mark also represents the mundane, repetitive and time-consuming nature of domestic activities.²⁹ As a reference to patriarchy, it speaks of the exploitation of woman labour and the disregard for contributions that are not 'measured' to equate any monetary value. In her article 'Sculpture, Gender, and the Value of Labour' (2010), Chave asserts that although Hesse and Winsor 'seemed to mouth the name of minimalism' with their use of industrial materials, geometry and 'disdain for conventional sculptural procedures', they 'aggressively emphasized their labour' and therefore 'their sculpture emerged, pointedly as a form of counterstatement.' They also both reused fibre 'extracted' from an industrial context and brought in processes that were 'coded' as domestic, therefore 'indelibly feminine' (2010:29).³⁰ Linda

²⁸ Bourgeois related the sewing aspect of her work to the witnessing of her mother's restoration of tapestries and petit points.

²⁹ A common thread of domestic actions and concepts emerged, such as dusting, sweeping and polishing.

³⁰ Chave asserts that where a male artist's employment of needlework (such as with Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures) 'could be vaunted as transgressive and catapult him to fame, so entrenched is the social habit of regarding women's work as negligible that a woman's use of the same medium could help consign her to obscurity' (2010:29).

Nochlin (2007) notes that the 'introduction of sewing and embroidery into the sacrosanct realm of high-art [painting] has a special, often transgressive, meaning for contemporary woman artists' (2007:52). Here the medium is often used in a manner that 'de-sanctifies' and 'de-beautifies' (2007:53).

When Bourgeois referred to gender roles in her use of the sewing needle her symbolism shifted between its being an instrument of labour and a therapeutic device – in her own words, 'a cure for guilt and a tool for craft' (2007:186).³¹ She stated 'when I was growing up, all the women in my house used needles. I've always had a fascination with the needle, the magic power of the needle. The needle is used to repair damage. It's a claim to forgiveness. It is never aggressive, it's not a pin' (2007:187). This thought-provoking comment by Bourgeois left me contemplating the meaning of these signifiers in my own work. As an instrument, the pin holds together temporarily, rather than repair. In a sense, the pin remains ambivalent, noncommittal. It provides perhaps an interim solution, signifying a process incomplete. The needle affects change. It alters the condition of the thing upon which it 'acts'. Employed diligently, repeatedly, the needle creates change on a scale much larger than its own. When the task has been completed, the labour done, it stands back – out of sight. 'Invisible.'



Louise Bourgeois. *Three Horizontals* (1998)
Fabric and steel
134.6 x 182.9 x 91.4 cm

³¹ Elisabeth Lebovici (2007) highlights that the Marxist historian J.K. Huysmans wrote in 1898 about the heavily industrialised region, with textile mills and tanneries, where the Bourgeois family lived after World War Two, 'today represents the perfect symbol of female misery exploited in the big city.' Lebovici further points out that Bourgeois' mother was the proprietor of a workshop that restored tapestries, and that through this position she 'became socially bound to its economic marginality. Her professional life bears out Huysmans's observations that in class relations the seamstress is exploited, while her private life confirms the Marxist belief that this exploitation originally arose in consequence of traditional gender roles which subordinated women to men' (2007:186–187).



Fallout paper fibres (2012)

fragile equilibriums

Fallout of Process

The ongoing nature of filtering processes inevitably also involves generation of redundant or expired information and materials. Fallout products come out of the process and are generated in various ways.

Erosion of the supports of drawings of surface, on conventional papers, generates paper fibres. The reductive process of the erosion of the paper support is meaningful in itself as it embodies, for me, fragile equilibriums between the unknowing of unproductive 'knowledge' and the revelations of 'new knowings'. The physical manifestation of the paper fibres generated creates a counterbalance and gives form – it becomes an acknowledgement, similar to my stitching, of energy invested, time spent and care taken.

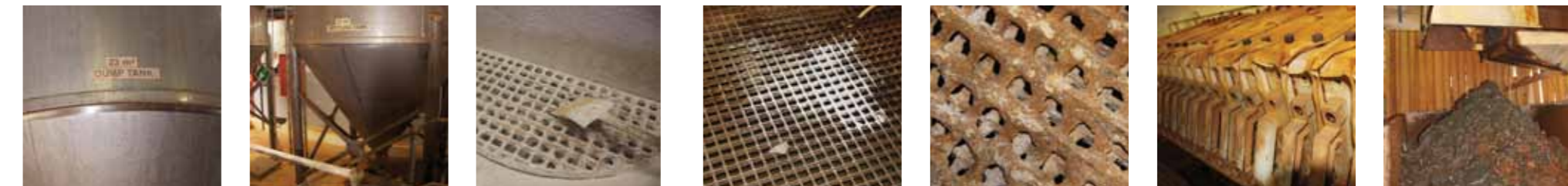


Documentation of process work (2012)

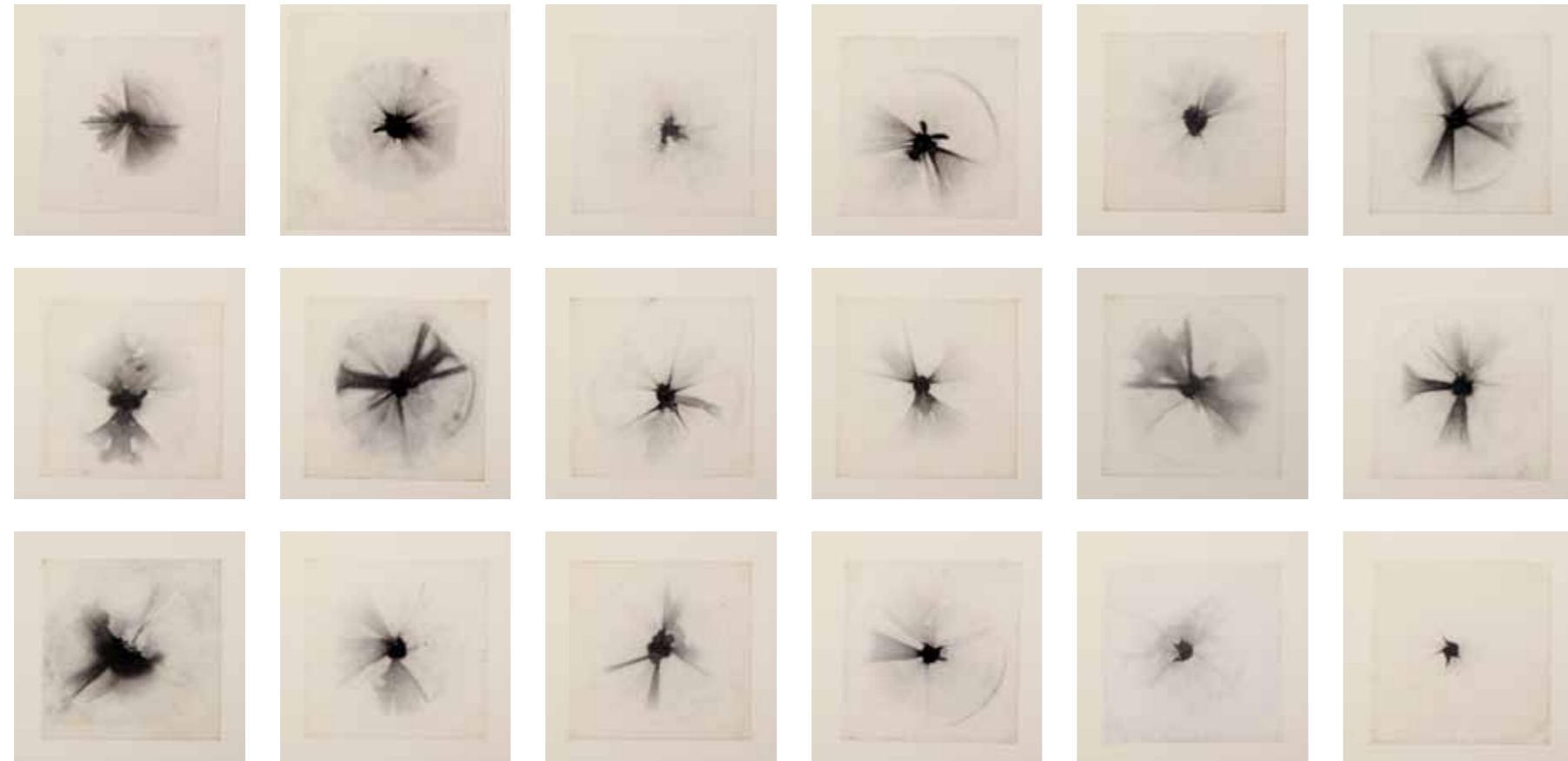
Fragile equilibriums function also between processes of discarding and retrieval – speaking of loss and gain. The crumpling of some surfaces in the monochrome series, was initiated by experimentation with texture, and in particular with reflection and absorption of light on surfaces. A link between discarding and fallout of process emerged.³² The action of crumpling a drawing in which time and energy was invested is a liberating feeling and represents in a sense 'a letting go'. It also alludes to the weight of disregard and abandonment.

Some of the first unsuccessful attempts at drawing were abandoned. The crumpling of surfaces brought attention to the three-dimensionality and the sculptural potential of these drawings. Formal aspects can be exploited to create tensions and balances – visual and material darkness/lightness, heaviness/lightness, largeness/smallness and so on, as mentioned before. More dynamic interaction of light and shadow extends the potential of these works to communicate subtle tensions and balances and ongoing movement between the works – these are more pronounced in natural light conditions. Displaying literally discarded drawings on the wall changes their status to being precious. This retrieval can be related to that which can be gained/learnt/treasured from challenging and/or traumatic experience. Varying degrees of crumpling create areas that are more or less accessible to view, creating tensions between revealing and concealing.

The first emergence of the acknowledgement of the fallout of process resulted in the *daily servings*, introducing the first series of the filtered drawings.



³² In the water filtering unit of an industrial plant (BEVCAN) that I visited, the first step in the filtering system is a 'dump tank' and the second a 'settling tank'. Completing an elaborate sequence of processes, filter cakes – dense compacted residues which are captured on filter cloths – fall through an opening below the filter press into a trough-like container forming a heap which assumes a triangular shape. Steam evaporates from the heap of waste, creating an eerie otherworldly atmosphere.



daily servings (2012)
Charcoal fallout and used disposable serviettes
Variable – approximately 33 x 33 cm

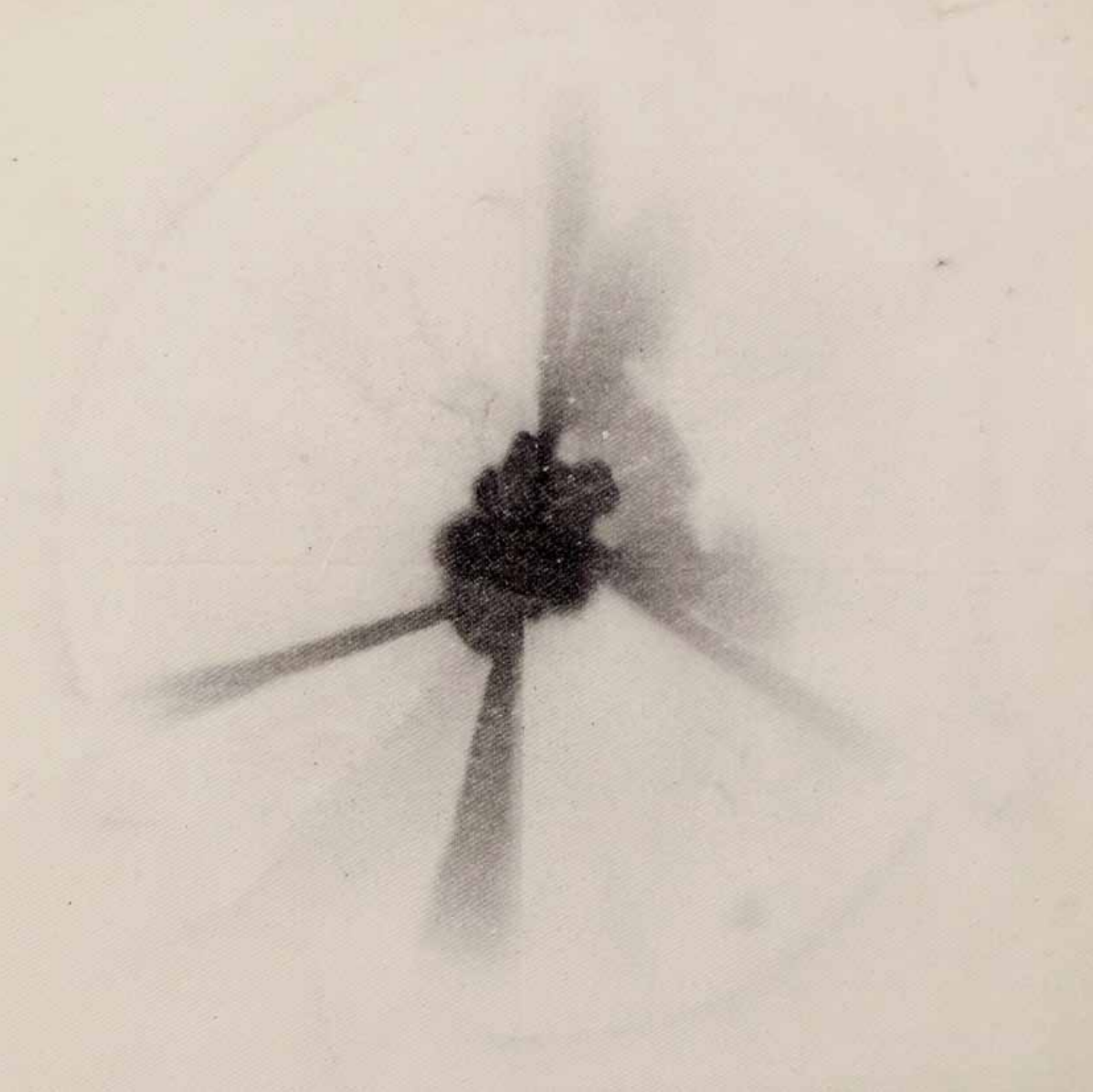
daily servings

Charcoal fallout and used disposable serviettes
Variable – approximately 33 x 33 cm

Earlier more conventional drawing processes generated charcoal residues on the floor beneath the work. These were retrieved, suspended in water and filtered through disposable serviettes at the end of each working day. The captured residue settles as it may in each filtering, creating the 'drawing' and the filtered solution is discarded.

The indefinable fluid images are contained and framed by the stable, square format of the serviettes. In some instances the mark that is registered on the surface resembles a stain, marking an incident or event – not unlike the marks or 'stains' left by physical abuse and perhaps also psychological abuse. These images evoke endless references and 'murmurings of the mind'³³ – perhaps pain or unsettling thoughts ... rays of hope ...

³³ The phrase 'murmurings of the mind' is borrowed from Avis Newman (2003:231).



Detail of *daily servings* (2012)

These filtered drawings function as a common thread, a continuity between the different strands of the early work. They share DNA. During the course of a day I would often have worked on several drawings. The retrieved charcoal at the end of the day contains fallout of all these works collectively, as well as tiny amounts from the preceding days.

Each of the drawings in the *daily servings* series has become a marker of a day's work and information processed. The materials are humble – fallout charcoal and used paper serviettes. The process deals first with the mundane practicalities of collecting the charcoal. Then with filtering the solution through the washed and ironed serviettes, leaving these to dry over an absorbent surface, evaluating the outcome, ironing the drawings again and repeating the process at the end of the next day.

Some filterings are done through four layers at the same time or alternatively, filtering the same residue four times, using a different serviette each time to establish different outcomes. In this sequence of increased repetition of actions each mark becomes smaller in circumference and more concentrated at its centre, as if extracting the essence or narrowing the focus. Some of the residue that produces these marks appears to lie on the surface (adsorption) while what is absorbed into the material creates stains that are permanent. This also amplifies how the same information's being filtered can produce different outcomes, depending on how (through which filters) and by whom (sex, language, cultural identity and so on) it is processed, allowing for countless possibilities of interpretation/misinterpretation and action.



mark(er) I

Filter paper, found and activated charcoal, cotton thread and pins
Variable – currently approximately 370 x 340 cm

mark(er) II

Filter paper, found and activated charcoal, cotton thread and pins
Variable – currently approximately 370 x 240 cm

With the intention to increase the scale of the filtered drawings, I use a large scale purpose-produced funnel (27 x 102 cm) from my *Angle of Repose* (2004) work to filter found and activated charcoal that has been ground to a powder, through fragments (106 cm wide and varying in length) of lightweight industrial filter paper. Introducing a sense of carelessness, the paper is torn from the roll, deliberately destabilising a potentially perfect square format and counteracting the neatness of the paper. The tension of the action of tearing remains registered in creases along the torn edges of the paper.



Documentation of working process. *mark(er) I* and *mark(er) II* (2013)
Filtration in process



Installation view of *mark(er) I* and *mark(er) II*

Each image is manipulated by using a 'recipe' (water, charcoal powder and binding agent), adjusted according to my intention to create tonal variation or some degree of sheen, which is determined by the amount of binding agent. I find that leaving the paper in the funnel to dry creates a more pronounced crumpled texture that enhances three-dimensional effects. The filtered images themselves did not relate clearly enough to associations of trauma. Despite similarity in the woven structure of wire mesh used in filtering systems and that of surgical gauze, I was reluctant to use surgical gauze at first, concerned that it might become too literal. However, finding a reference to the earliest methods for controlling bleeding by using spiderwebs prompted experimentation.³⁴ My aim was for a range of tone and texture, and density of clustering, attempting to refer to the intensity of the first stages of trauma – the initial impact, the repetitive revisiting, processing, decision making and recuperation towards healing. The indefinable images acknowledge trauma as an abstract concept, commenting also on the confusion involved, particularly where there is violation.

³⁴ The earliest and most popular known method of tending wounds as learnt from primitive cultures today, was the filling or covering of wounds with spider-webs. The belief that spider-webs help to stop bleeding existed in many places. Other methods of tending wounds included glowing-red needles and direct burning with a torch or firewood. At the Battle of Crecy in 1346 every soldier's field equipment included little boxes containing spider-webs (Haeger, 1988:9–10).



Detail of *mark(er) I* (2013)

Detail of *mark(er) II* (2013)

Apart from the intention to create a further increase of scale in the images themselves, the overlapping grouping of the fragments to form a collective image comments on the cumulative and compounding effects, the gaining weight, of repetitive exposure to trauma and violence in individual lives. Similarly, acknowledging that what is played out in individual narratives collectively constructs a whole, is a shared reality and therefore mirrors also the impact on the 'fabric' of a society, resulting in 'structural violence'.

When the fragments are sewn together, as in *mark(er) II*, the light weight of the materiality of the paper becomes more pronounced in relation to the larger surface area of the work as a whole. The paper, assuming a cloth-like quality, drapes into soft folds and the surface reads increasingly vulnerably. The creases registered in the surface by the funneling process are acknowledged as marks of process, traces. They also evoke images of unironed linen and serve the same purpose as the rather 'sloppy' sewing. Deliberately and rebelliously not perfectly neat, leaving pins and loose threads hanging from the work translates as acts of resistance and incompleteness – an ongoing unravelling in order to oppose and expose.



Kiki Smith. *Untitled (Moons)* (1993)
Collaged Lithograph on handmade Nepalese paper
166 x 163 x 5.5 cm

I find the materiality of Kiki Smith's prints on delicate, translucent, handmade Nepalese paper, and her use of repetition and seriality particularly inspiring. In her work *Untitled (Moons)* (1993), she collaged individual lithographs of breasts together, allowing the paper to 'puff and pucker. The expansive scale and sculptural nature of the work reflect Smith's interest in the crafts of quilts and wall coverings' (Weitman, 2003:23), with associations of nurturing and warmth underscored by the breast imagery. Smith relates these choices also to her childhood when they 'had rugs on the walls ... because it was so cold ... protecting the walls, like blanketing something' (2003:23).

The work *mark(er) I*, consisting of loose fragments pinned directly to the wall without consciously over-emphasising a deliberate composition, embodies for me the first impact of trauma where there is violence/violation and the accompanying chaos/confusion. In juxtaposition, and representing a different register of working in, *mark(er) II* consists of a progression of quieter images. Being more organised, but destabilising the notion of a perfect grid, it speaks about taking some measure of control and the ongoing fluid processes of recuperation towards healing.



Detail of *single utterings* (2013)

single utterings

365 Miniature filterings, medicinal activated charcoal, filter paper cut-outs,
filter fabric and entomology pins
Variable – approximately 40 x 180 cm

The aim with this work is to reduce scale to an extent that opens up different associations and connections while still being 'in conversation' with the other filtered drawings. I filter 'medicinal' activated charcoal³⁵ powder through a Victorian perfume funnel (3 x 3 cm), using filter paper cut-outs retrieved from industrial waste.



Documentation of working process. *single utterings* (2013)

³⁵ Medical grade activated charcoal powder (Detoxinol™) is an internal and external detoxifying agent.



As formal device the cut-out relates to notions of 'cutting down to size', 'cutting loose' – with implications of humiliation, severance and loss. 'Cutting out' implies deleting and removal from context. Yet, removing the background brings the image into sharper focus, with the possibility of more attentive inspection.

The word 'pin' holds references to something of little or no importance, force or violence. As an instrument it holds together temporarily, rather than repair as the needle does. As a weapon a pin pierces, fixes. The black entomology pins are chosen for their deceptively fragile appearance and their graphic quality. Apart from pointing to the stinging sensation associated with a sharp, emotional pain, the notion of 'pinning up' to study closer and 'learn', appeals to me.

What emerges here is reference to scale in association with unequal power relations – 'small' being regarded as of lesser importance. A commonly used saying when I was growing up, *kinders moet gesien maar nie gehoor word nie* (children should be seen but not heard), comes to mind. When grouped together the blotchy images evoke vivid memories of cigarette burns on the tiny bodies of battered babies.³⁶ The small scale can speak of distant memories. It can also refer to the apparent unimportance of exposure to violence that goes 'unnoticed'. Repetition alludes to the cumulative effects of daily exposure to violence, as Weingarten describes with the term 'common shock'. The trauma affecting our 'mind, body, and spirit' and trauma as constituting the accumulation of 'moments – reverberated events in memory', that Mbembe speaks of (2013).

single utterings (2013)
365 Miniature filterings, medicinal activated charcoal, filter paper cut outs,
filter fabrics and entomology pins
Variable – approximately 40 x 180 cm

Detail of *single utterings* (2013)

³⁶ The most common visible injury I witnessed when nursing battered babies. Less noticeable, were the fractures.





dwell. From the *murmurings of the mind* series (2013)
Canson paper (180 gsm), charcoal, activated charcoal, Indian ink and fabric mesh
45.3 x 98.3 x 3.3 cm

Whatever is true for space and time, this much is true for place: we are immersed in it and could not do without it. To be at all – to exist in any way – is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced.

Edward, S Casey (1998:ix)
The Fate of Place

murmurings of the mind

Individual works: *dwell, hide, seek, find, lie, g(r)asp, mind, cover(ture)*
Various papers, medicinal and industrial activated charcoal, drawing charcoal,
Indian ink and surgical gauze.
Varying – between 42.7 x 93 x 4.2 cm and 55.5 x 168.5 x 9 cm

Rectangular sheets of paper are glued together with fine fabric mesh in between them. When dry, they are pulled apart. The separated layers, some more damaged than others, hold on to fragments and imprints of one another – residues, memories of shared experiences. As with the first filterings of retrieved charcoal, they share DNA.



seek. From the *murmurings of the mind* series (2013)
Canson paper (180 gsm), charcoal, activated charcoal, Indian ink,
cotton thread, linen thread and micropore plaster
44.3 x 97.5 x 4.7 cm



Documentation of working process. *seek* (2013)

I work intuitively 'into' these surfaces, actively waiting for what is to appear. Some areas are eroded further, creating contrast between density and openness, smoothness and texture. In others, sanding over various textures of mesh leaves traces which I relate to layers of varying filtering surfaces or surgical gauze. Some of the reverse sides of the fragments are washed with ink³⁷ to create a seeping through the layers, revealing associations of bruising on skin, body fluids seeping through wound dressings, or the 'leaking' of information.

Both sides of the damaged surfaces are first tended with medicinal grade activated charcoal powder (proven to be best applied with cotton wool) before, in some instances, introducing drawing charcoal. Tears are sutured and some separated fragments are reconstructed and mended.

³⁷ Indian ink was introduced to create more saturated seeping effects.



hide. From the *murmurings of the mind* series (2013)
Fabriano paper (200 gsm), charcoal, activated charcoal, Indian ink, mull,
cotton thread, linen thread and micropore plaster
44.7 x 100.4 x 4.2 cm

The horizontal format and the appearance of the first three drawings evoked associations of landscape. Coupled with their intimate scale, these established a sense of place, a grounding context as a connection to my childhood place. Apart from painful memories of fear, humiliation, disruption and loss the koppie represents a place of refuge and comfort as it was our playground and generously revealed its endless wonders. I have a sense of these works being artefacts of a bygone time.³⁸ At the moment of their production, fragments of a reconstructed subjective 'reality', reviewed and filtered through by now – layers of life experience and 'veils' of perception. The notion of 'place' expands, becoming a signifier for places lived in previously and currently that have formed and continue to shape my personal narrative, embracing also country – South Africa as place.³⁹

³⁸ Purposely then, I do not neaten the edges or make the measurements exactly uniform.

³⁹ Our deep connections to place as home, are extensively discussed by Dominique Edwards in her MFA essay: *the distance between us* (2011:28–30). She notes that Bachelard (who 'approaches place as a concept referring to the existence of an inner world, a psychic place') '... traces our sense of self and mode of being to our childhood home or environment. He discusses the impact of our experience of place as integral to our existence, recurring and reflecting past environments in relation to new experiences and places, and asserts (as cited by Casey): "To come to terms with the inner life, it is not enough to constitute a biography or autobiography in narrative terms; one must also, and more crucially, do a topoanalysis of the places one has inhabited or experienced"' (Casey, 1998:286).



lie. From the *murmurings of the mind* series (2013)
Fabriano paper (180 gsm), charcoal, activated charcoal, Indian ink,
cotton thread, linen thread and micropore plaster
47 x 102 x 4.2 cm

Fragile equilibriums hover and linger between 'shouting' memories and those less loud – they cave in and collapse, sinking away, settling down, becoming absorbed and forming substrata or are suspended between states of repair and collapse, tentatively expanding into three-dimensional space, being in a constant state of flux. In my drawing process the reciprocal interaction between observing, thinking and doing results in surfaces that become an embodiment of 'loss enacted'⁴⁰ – the surface becoming a 'witness'. In drawing, Gunter proposes:

[T]he invisible needs the visible, whether in the form of memory, ... loss of that memory to the unconscious, ... subjective conception, or in the subjective experience of viewing, feeling, and touching an object. Experiential cognition entails, in drawing, arrays of founding perceptions that the drafter experiences in a continuous flow. Each ... retains traces of its precedent, thus building on one another recursively as subjective constructs of the mind (2012:200).

These complex, cumulative building processes of incremental development manifest in these drawings with repetition of the construction of layers, crumpling and scraping, and extend to kneading – damaging and creasing the heavier materiality of the paper by literally abusing the surfaces, evoking associations of bruised and scraped skin. From these emerge associations of landscape as body, body as landscape.

⁴⁰ Penny Siopis asserts: 'There is a truth to painting. The indexicality of the painting surface can become the registering of a loss enacted in painting. The surface points to someone having been there, leaving traces, making it autobiographical' (October 2013, MFA Seminar, Michaelis).



g(r)asp. From the *murmurings of the mind* series (2013)
Rice paper, activated charcoal, Indian ink, gauze, cotton thread and micropore plaster
44.5 x 99.5 x 7 cm

More fragile papers (Chinese rice paper and tissue paper) are introduced to create contrast between the richly detailed surfaces of the aforementioned with more quiet surfaces. These, similarly, go through various stages of processing: careful eroding to open tiny pores and receive imprints from the sanding paper, tending with medicinal activated charcoal on both sides and finally tentatively overlaying the surfaces by printing with surgical gauze. These surfaces are mostly intact, but extremely fragile, deceptively carrying their damage without blatant revelation: suggesting, whispering, rather than saying out loud.



find. From the *murmurings of the mind* series (2013)
Canson paper (180 gsm), charcoal, activated charcoal, Indian ink,
linen thread and micropore plaster
42.7 x 93 x 4.2 cm

The format of the series – which already contained one work, a fragment, that is completely irregular and significantly smaller than the rest – is further opposed by extending the tissue paper drawing to more or less the human scale of a reclining figure. Breaking out of the restrictive confines of a 'perfect' format by creating irregular shapes and leaving the edges of the drawings raw and open – in combination with destructive processes – holds also positive connotations. As acts of resistance they enable the surfaces to breathe and take shape. In this scenario more possibilities emerge and, in another paradox, the 'balancing act' becomes more perilous – more real.



cover(ture). From the *murmurings of the mind* series (2013)
Tissue paper, activated charcoal, Indian ink, surgical gauze and micropore plaster
55.5 x 168.5 x 9 cm

The overlaying techniques, creating various degrees of obstructed views, relate to the term 'coverture', suggesting the condition or status of a married woman considered as being under the protection and influence of her husband. It also suggests shelter, concealment and disguise (CED 1999. Sv 'coverture'). The materiality of the partially covered, eroded and stitched surfaces alludes to patriarchy being also in the body. It comments on the vulnerability and/or disintegration of 'inter-human' (Subiros, 2011:21) relationships and structures, such as marriage, family, social and cultural that define contexts within which these are situated.



mind. From the *murmurings of the mind* series (2013)
Fabriano paper (160 gsm), charcoal, activated charcoal, Indian ink, mull,
cotton thread, linen thread and micropore plaster
43.5 x 99.8 x 4.2 cm

This series of drawings in particular, representing fluctuation between past and present, searching for links and clarity, embodies for me the 'delicate' working through process of 'restoration' that Weingarten proposes in narrative practice (2005:75). They represent a sense of release, of letting go, of 'letting fall out'. Ultimately, in a state of multiple fragile equilibriums, they communicate for me the complexities involved, the continuous shifts of perception as Merleau-Ponty describes, and the possibilities of evolving thought patterns that Bohm argues for.



who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom I (2013)
Rives paper (300 gsm), compressed, found and activated charcoal,
Indian ink and household furniture wax
400 x 213 cm

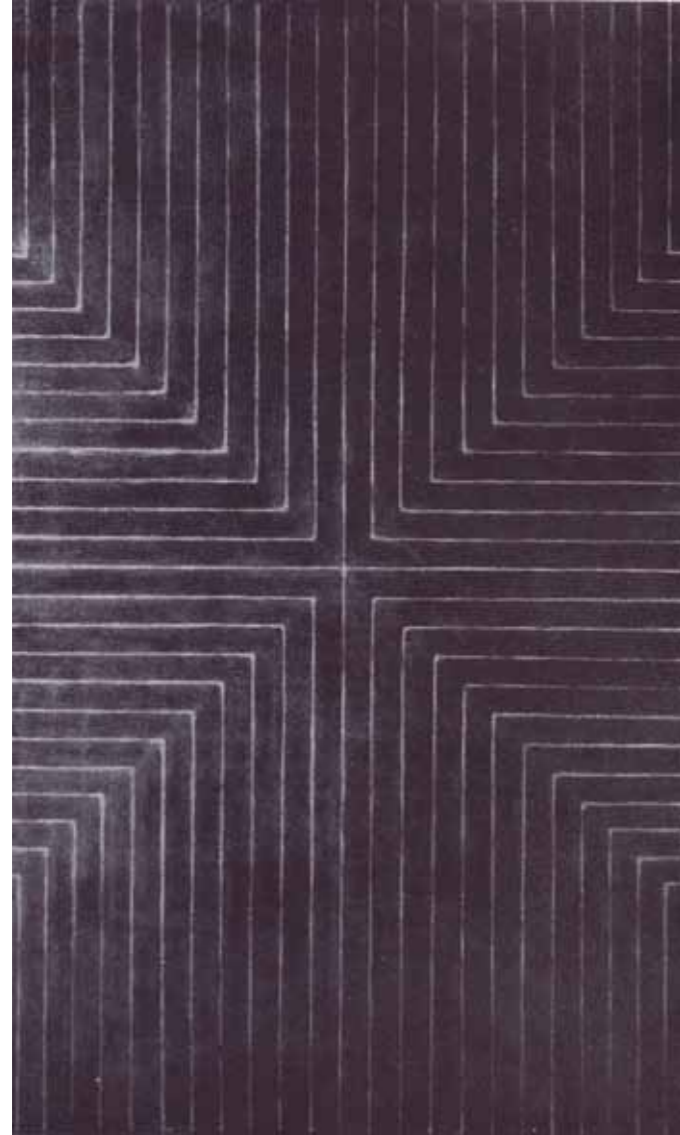
who is speaking to whom, why and for whom I

Rives paper (300 gsm), compressed, found and activated charcoal,
Indian ink and household furniture wax
400 x 213 cm

The concept of a continuous 'filter-band' as used in industry was considered for this work. The extended rectangular format, torn at the short ends, indicates that it is a 'fragment' of a larger whole. The large scale, dark tones and heavy and dense materiality is formally considered as a counterpoise to the light weight of the filter paper and the dematerialised fragile surfaces of other works. The work called for references to power both as potentially overwhelming force and in its capacity for constructive potential – in this instance as detoxifying filter. As discussed before, the vast surface area that the activated charcoal contributes conceptually extends the scale of the work into an even greater surface area than visually it appears to be.



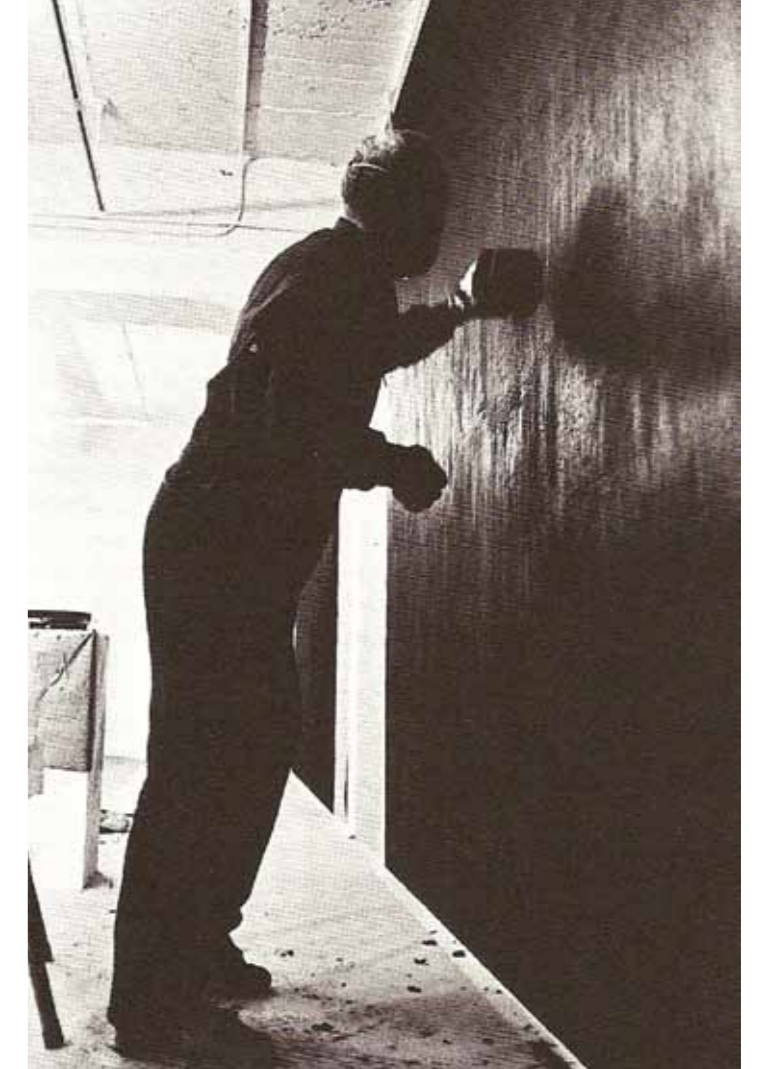
Installation view of *who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom I and II*



Frank Stella. *Die Fahne Hoch* (1959)
Enamel paint on canvas
308.6 cm x 185.4 cm

The frontal saturated charcoal surface, varying in texture and consisting of both reflective and absorbent areas, is not solid like the harsh surfaces of Serra's oil-stick drawings or flat like the black surfaces of Frank Stella's pinstripe paintings, such as *Die Fahne Hoch* (1959). With his black metallic paintings Stella stated that he wanted a 'real aggressive kind of controlling surface, something that would seize the surface ... it would probably also be fairly repellent ... these would be very hard paintings to penetrate' (1990:50–51). He intentionally wanted an effect that would 'deliver a punch ... direct to your eye', to be 'forceful and direct' (1990:48). About these works Chave argues:

In their severity – in the violence they do to the conventions of art and in the ruthlessness they exhibit towards viewers – the black paintings, like Minimalism generally, might well be described as perpetrating a kind of cultural terrorism, forcing viewers into the role of victim ... which may or may not bring ... a moment of revelation depending on the viewer's prior experience with victimization (1990:49).



Richard Serra, Installation drawing in process



Although the large scale of this dark work might potentially intimidate, the intention is rather to 'set the scene' – acknowledging patriarchal power as a 'presence' and an issue of importance. This surface bears the evidence of struggle and attempts to break through the density of the darkness.⁴¹ It also, however, offers sensuous detail, inviting the viewer in for closer inspection and a shared experience. Fluid areas of a soft, velvet-like appearance evoke for me associations of a quiet, comfortable, non-threatening darkness or a place of refuge in the midst of turmoil – a place of contemplation, of meditation. Discussing contradictory features emerging in Mark Rothko's dark paintings done between 1969 and 1970, Brian O'Doherty (Glimcher, 1991) asserts that many of these are 'sumptuous in mood' and 'far from the negative connotations of blackness'. He argues that '[t]he warm sudden appeal of [Rothko's] colour is a function of an art in which all the means, including colour, have been mobilised out of set conventions and coached into the area of paradox' (1991:145). He further claims that 'intimacy always had been associated in [Rothko's] work with large enveloping size' (1991:144).

Detail of *who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom I* (2013)

⁴¹ Due to the large scale of this work the process of production literally also became a physical struggle requiring a full body engagement. Ironically, to the point of crawling on hands and knees over the reverse side of the drawing.



Mark Rothko. *Untitled* (1969)
Acrylic on paper, mounted on board at marker
122 x 103 cm



Another contradiction appears in this work with the addition of household furniture wax in some areas of the drawing – polished to a soft sheen, introducing a recognisable smell linked to menial labour in home and institution – which smothers the surface, destroying the capacity of the filter. This serves to comment on the reciprocal relationship that operates within patriarchal structures where women, myself included, contribute also, in what Pep Subiros defines as an ‘unconscious reciprocity’ (2011:21) – keeping these mechanisms of abuse in place. Saturation of the entire surface of this work establishes an integration of front and back as one, where both sides bear evidence of a seeping through the materiality of the surface. Apart from considerations to heighten the notion of the work as being a functional object, it also points to the infiltration of the effects of abuse and violence into ‘the fabric of society’ and the leaking and exposure of covered-up information.

Detail of *who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom I* (2013)



Detail of seeping – reverse side of *who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom I*



who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom II (2013)
Canson paper (120 gsm) and medicinal activated charcoal
800 x 150 cm

One's identity or story is never one's own; it is co-dependent and interrelated with that of others ... The essential question is, Who am I in relation to you?

Kim Yung-Suk (2010:7)

who is speaking to whom, why and for whom II

Canson paper (120 gsm) and medicinal activated charcoal
800 x 150 cm

The lighter weight surface and tone of another large scale work, similarly considered as a continuous 'filter-band' – who is speaking to *whom, why and for whom II* – functions in counterpoise with the visual and material heaviness of the dark work, *who is speaking to whom, why and for whom I*. This surface is eroded over a fine wire mesh, creating grid-like openings reminiscent of the structure of a mesh 'filter-band' or surgical gauze. The reverse side, holding the mesh imprint, is tended to with medicinal activated charcoal in barely noticeable soft grey tones. The aim was for a mostly white drawing, but one that was 'invested' with the 'power' of the filtering capacity of activated charcoal.



Documentation of working process. *who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom II* (2013)

This surface is considered to speak of use and reuse, to the point where it becomes worn and fragile, but keeping its 'integrity'. Despite its vulnerable appearance its constructive potential remains intact. The time invested to erode the materiality of the paper was a month's labour of extended working hours – all the sanding was done by hand. Paradoxically, despite the disintegration, reduced physical weight and potential disappearance of this surface, it has gained substance – the repetition of actions over time having contributed to conceptual weight and scale – and can arguably be considered as a 'continuing whole that survives the changeability of its properties'.⁴² Perhaps now, also as a vital materiality, imbued with '*Thing-Power* with the ongoing capacity to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle' (2010:6).

With these factors taken into account imbalances of power can be 'equalised'. In this way, based on a capacity for endurance, this work symbolically serves as a statement or reaction against suffocating power – the relations 'which sustain the hierarchies of communication ... the ideological construction of authorship and mastery' as defined by de Lauretis (1990:44). These are confronted by 'creating' a place to stare it in the face.

⁴² This is potentially more viable if the transformed surface is considered as a 'specific type of matter', a 'material with a definite composition and having a meaningful quality' (CED 1999. Sv 'substance').



Cy Twombly. *Criticism* (1955)
House paint, crayon, pencil and pastel on canvas
127 x 147 cm



Cy Twombly. *Panorama* (1954/? nk)
House paint, crayon and chalk on canvas
254 x 340.4 cm



who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom II (2013)
Canson paper (120 gsm) and medicinal activated charcoal
800 x 150 cm

The scarring mark produced by the repetitive action which erodes this surface brings to mind Cy Twombly's 'fragmented, broken, straw-like scratching and scrawling' which Kirk Varnedoe (2006) argues destroys the surface, 'scarring it, dragging pencils through it. His is an act of desecration, vandalism, of bringing the language of abstract expressionism out of the realm of personal expression and into the world of writing and language, of shared' and therefore public 'signs and pictograms' (2006:221–222). Obsessive, repetitive gestures, repeated 'over and over, again and again' Varnedoe asserts, create abstraction 'which is [p]urer in its unendingness – who knows where it starts, where it will end ...' (2006:224).



(no)thing (2013)
Documentation of working process.
who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom II (2013)
Canson paper fibres

The fallout paper fibres of this work – retrieved and piling up daily as the surface becomes increasingly eroded – represent for me in counterbalance the positive, a mirroring. The visible evidence of input. However, there is an irony here. The amount of retrieved fibre is minute in relation to the amount of energy invested over time to transform this surface. I find consolation in this heaped image referring to *The Angle of Repose*⁴³ – resting in the knowledge that the commitment of energy and labour of woman contribute to a quality of life and therefore a living standard that is the result of care rather than income. In both my childhood family household and later my own, the standard of living that was achieved could not have been afforded if either my mother's or my own contributions had had to be 'paid' for.⁴⁴ With my title for this heap of paper fibres, *(no)thing*, I raise open questions about capacity and worth.

⁴³ The maximum angle to the horizontal at which granular substances, when tipped out onto another surface, will naturally fall and come to rest. This state is subject to change due to environmental influences (<http://www.planetseed.com/relatedarticle/exploring-hele-shaw-cell>). *My Angle of Repose* work (2004) concluded with a work balancing in a fragile equilibrium.

⁴⁴ These included managing building projects, and physical labour usually assigned to men – the laying of tiles and casting of cement, for example.



cover(t). From the *unknowing (the known)* series (2013)
Filter fabric and cotton thread
Standard measurements of a queen-sized throw – 200 x 220 cm

unknowing (the known)

The notion of creating a quiet place for solitary experience appealed to me – a 'breathing chamber' or debriefing area perhaps, in reference to the 'Soft Room'⁴⁵, as found in psychiatric hospitals. The centres providing places of safety for abused women also come to mind. The following collection of quiet works shares a sensuous, soft, comforting materiality. They emerged during different stages of the development of the body of work and involved actions and processes of production that are soothing and calming and less physically strenuous. Individual works include *cover(t)*, *balm(y)* and *lull(aby)*.

cover(t)

Filter fabric and cotton thread
Standard measurements of a queen-sized throw – 200 x 220 cm

Bands of a soft filter fabric, stretched to just before breaking point, are joined together with stitching. The measurements of this delicate, fragile 'surface' are based on the standard measurements of a 'queen-sized throw'. This device was considered both as reference to the abuse of women, and woman as caregiver. The double meaning of the word 'throw' as an act of violence, or covering with a blanket as an act of care, is meaningful here.

⁴⁵ A term used in the psychiatric hospital where I worked as a student nurse, for the room where patients in an extreme state of agitation were isolated to exclude all harmful elements from their environment.



balm(y). From the *unknowing (the known)* series (2013)
Sanding paper, linen thread and Canson paper fibres
45.2 x 120 x 5 cm

balm(y)

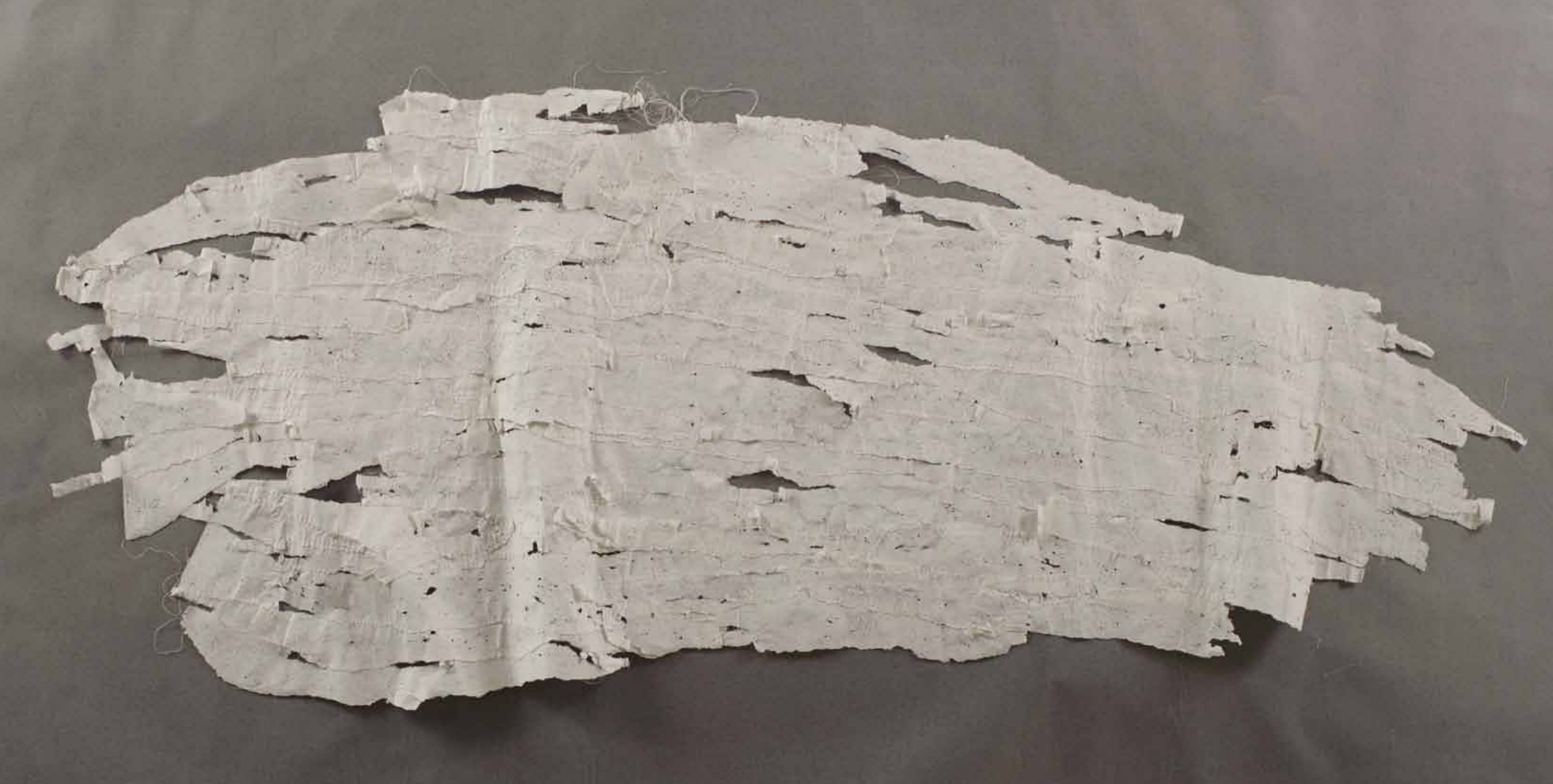
Sanding paper, linen thread and Canson paper fibres
45.2 x 120 x 5 cm

Used sanding paper was reconstructed to create a surface first intended for the *murmurings of the mind* series. During the sanding process of *who is speaking to whom, why and for whom II*, this surface was laid in close proximity to where I was working. Whilst sanding, ultra-fine paper fibres become suspended in the air and settle, covering everything in my studio in a 'blanket of mist'. At the end of each day the sanding paper surface was 'fixed'. After repeating this daily 'ritualistic' process over the course of a month, some areas were more densely covered by alternately sifting and fixing in thin layers, the accretion of fibres partially burying the stitching and counteracting the abrasive sanding paper surface with a comforting dressing or blanket.⁴⁶



Documentation during the working process of *who is speaking to whom, why, and for whom II* (2013)

⁴⁶ My awareness of Vik Muniz's (2005) dust drawings might have prompted this process. His *Pictures of Dust* (2000), are reproduced photographs of exhibition shots, using the dust from the museum as medium. It serves as a critique on the self-referential claims of minimal art exposing that '[t]he preciousness of self-representation relies on the cleaning crew that relies on the minimalist pieces to clean and to keep on cleaning' (Martin, 2005:69).



lull(aby)

Fabriano paper fragments, cotton thread and micropore plaster
55 x 130 cm

Curled fragments of paper that were generated during the sanding of the support of the first, larger scale dark surface – *untitled (place)* (2012), page 28 – were carefully sanded again to perforate and flatten their surfaces. These were simply sewn together, waiting for what would emerge. The careful, monotonous action of sewing, without the pressure of a particular goal in mind, provided a soothing lulling, and resulted in a reconstructed surface that appears delicate and fragile.



Installation view of *lull(aby)* (2012)



daily pinch

Activated charcoal salt

Variable

In this work, activated charcoal salt represents a symbolic gesture, in recognition of the ongoing transition, the 'mo(ve)ment' between *unknowing (the known)* and *knowing (the unknown)*. It comments on individual and shared experience, suggesting a daily dose, or a pinch, as needed and alludes to ongoing exposure and repetition – the continuous need for processing, clarifying and detoxifying. The word pinch suggests pain as well as the amount of a substance that can be grasped between two fingers – a small amount. Enough. As a reference to the saying 'taken with a pinch of salt' it alludes to the ambiguities and ambivalences involved in perceptions of 'truth'. As a preservative, salt can represent that which is gained and treasured, adding flavour. In combination then, charcoal and salt – both vibrant matters – detoxify and preserve.



Details of *knowing (the unknown)* (2013)
Catering format wax paper and silk thread
Approximately 1 000 x 70 cm

knowing (the unknown)

Catering format wax paper and silk thread
Approximately 1 000 x 70 cm

Catering format wax paper which is larger in scale and has a slightly heavier materiality than household wax paper, and in support of ongoing references to the 'scale' and 'substance' of the contributions of women, speaks of the collective – the shared experience.

The already-fragile, translucent, but dense materiality of the wax paper allows light to pass through it diffusely. The paper is placed, face down, on coarse grit sanding paper and perforated by carefully sanding the reverse side with a fine grit sanding paper. The transformation of the surface continues until the wax paper in some areas, almost 'dissolves'. The intention here is not to break the paper, but inevitably some small tears do occur and are allowed in acknowledgement that despite the healing process, some traces of scarring remain. Likewise, the process of discovery and exposure also involves risk and often discomfort. A length of a continuous band is sanded each day – as much as a particular workday allows – each band 'measuring' a day's labour or active involvement. The consecutive bands are then joined again, sewn together at the short ends, forming a continuous 'filter-band'.



Installation view of *knowing (the unknown)*



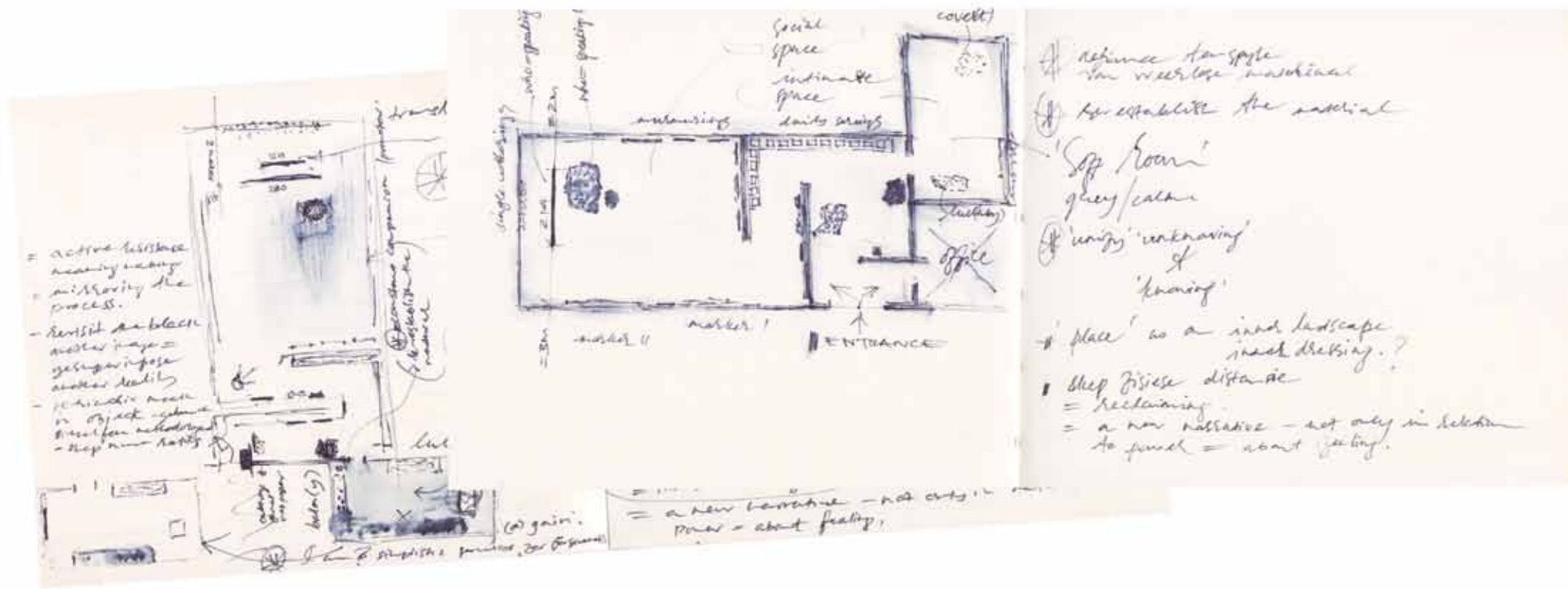
Eva Hesse. *Contingent* (1969)
Fiberglass, polyester resin and latex over cheesecloth
Overall installation size: 350 x 630 x 109 cm

Commenting about the materiality of, and repetition in Eva Hesse's work *Contingent*, (1969), Briony Fer (1999) remarks:

There is a sense in which these sheets of rubberised cheesecloth are both seductive in their translucency and have the possibility of destruction already built into them, in what are not only sheer but also scarred surfaces. The spectator is caught in the pattern of repetition and difference, repetition to the point of absurdity as Hesse liked to see it ... the work ... triggers contradictory and oscillating effects ... (1999:246).

These contradictions, to a certain extent, also operate here. The translucent surface of this work, seductive when lit from behind, at close inspection reveals its scarring and fragility. Its very method of opening up the surface simultaneously renders it increasingly fragile, and its exposure to the environment makes its vulnerability to destruction inevitable. Repetition, here – and on a larger scale as with *who is speaking to whom, why and for whom II*, arguably more in terms of the working method than as formal device – borders on the 'absurd'.

However, the monotony of repetitive actions has its rewards. Lit from behind – my preference is natural light – the transformed perforated surface 'comes alive', allowing brighter light and air to move through it. It playfully and optimistically sparkles – hopefully uttering unspoken promises and possibilities of new knowings.



Workbook entries. Planning of installation

Meaning does not exist in the singular. It is a transaction between two or more conscious minds. Your work is an attempt to bridge understanding between you and others. For this reason, there is no such thing as private symbolism. Meaning derives from communication.

Kit White (2011:98)

fragile equilibriums

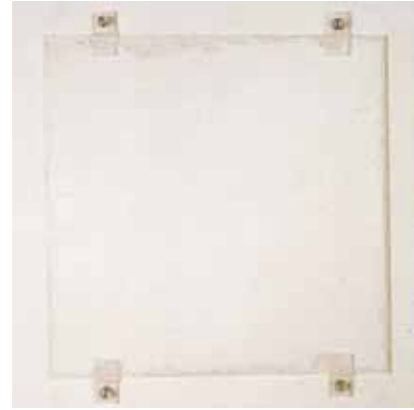
Exhibition

Meaning becomes extended by the viewer's interaction with or experience of the work – the viewer becoming a participant. The body of work calls for a visual representation that has the potential to explore complexities through the juxtaposition of formal and visual elements to create paradoxical layers of meaning. Considerations of scale and space become central in both how the work is conceived and displayed.

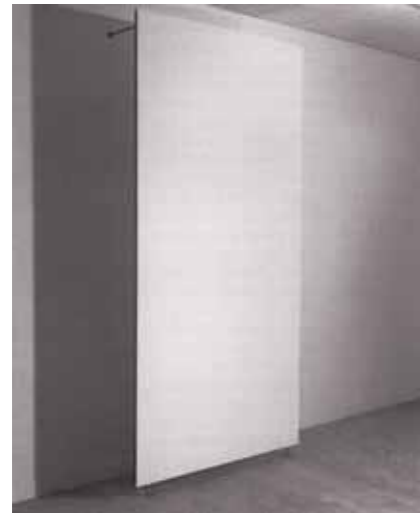
In addressing issues of power, the body of work demanded works that relate on a comfortable level to bodily scale, as well as works that would potentially dominate or expand on a larger than life scale. Susan Stewart (1996) provides insights on how these relationships function. She states that the miniature is found at 'the origin of private, individual history ... [and] the gigantic at the origin of public and natural history' (1996:71). But scale in itself only becomes significant in relation to the other elements it refers to, the first barometer being our bodies. Stewart explains that when viewing the miniature our body becomes the backdrop and when the miniature is contained, becoming a self-enclosed world, our experience becomes one of distance – of observing from the outside. The object is in our space and we can perceive it 'as a spatial whole'. By contrast, when confronted with the gigantic we are enveloped in the environment and become 'contained' ourselves, with only limited knowledge of the spatial whole (1996:70–71). These observations clarify that the scale of a work in itself does not create the experience, but how it is perceived in relation to the body and the space containing it defines the viewing experience.



Robert Ryman. *Roll* (1989)
Oil and graphite on gatorboard panel with aluminum frame mount



Robert Ryman. *Arrow* (1976)
Oil on sanded plexiglass panel
Four sanded plexiglass fasteners and hexagonal cadmium plated steel bolts



Robert Ryman. *Untitled* (1976)
Acrylic polymer on two sheets of watercolour paper
2 white sheets on dark wall
P.S. 1, Long Island City, New York, wall installation



Robert Ryman. *Factor* (1983)
Panel against wall
Oil over Swiss Lascaux acrylic on recto
Swiss Lascaux acrylic with varnish on verso of fiberglass panel with honeycomb aluminum with epoxy edge, and metal rods with oval attachments

In order to establish an environment in which the experience of the tactility of the materials and surfaces becomes an important part of the reading of the work, I have resisted containment within frames or supports. It was decided that the fragility, and therefore vulnerability of some aspects of the work, should be exposed to establish an openness – to engage without ‘barriers’ – a more intimate dialogue on ‘equal footing’, as it were.

Furthermore, interaction with the wall and space in which the work lives – the play of light and shadow – becomes an extension of and part of the work itself. Robert Ryman’s approach to these principles provides valuable insights. His works address the flatness of the plane, the material qualities that it is produced in and the space in which it exists. How these aspects are manipulated, their relationship to one another, as well as the means of attachment to and interaction with the wall, acknowledge the wall as an integral element of the composition of the work (Hudson, 2009:223–226). Considering the wall as part of the reading of the work also emphasises ‘the transition’ between the work and the context in which it exists (2009:89), creating a blurring of boundaries between work and space.

A blurring of boundaries between drawing and sculpture emerged in the crumpled works. When presented on the wall, they are viewed frontally and diagonally, but not fully in the round, and therefore don’t fall comfortably in the category of sculpture although they are ‘multifaceted’ and ‘thus multidimensional’ (Binder, 2010:52).⁴⁷ Further questions emerge when works are presented free from the wall, suspended to allow movement around, and access to, both sides of the drawings. A fusing of material and surface to form a structural unity where both sides of the drawing are integrated into this structure and accessible to the viewer, is another step towards two-dimensional surface becoming three-dimensional ‘object’.

Discussing Anatsui’s draping cloths, Robert Storr argues that the surface, support and structure of his works are one, because his additive process takes place in a lateral manner rather than a layering, meaning the support is also removed. He asserts that despite Anatsui’s work belonging ‘to the history of modern abstraction’ and ‘the traditional modernist categories to which [his] work might reflexively be assigned are ... painting and sculpture’ these categories

⁴⁷ Robert Storr in his essay on El Anatsui’s draping cloths: ‘The Shifting Shapes of Things to Come’ (Binder, 2010: 51–62).



El Anatsui. Detail of *Three Continents* (2009)
Aluminum, copper wire
243.8 x 487.69 cm



Process work. *untitled* (2012)
 Fabriano paper (180 gsm), charcoal and linen thread
 Surface area – 80 x 140 cm

Process work. *untitled* (2012)
 Fabriano paper (180 gsm), charcoal and linen thread
 Surface area – 150 x 80 cm



Process work. *untitled (absence of presence)* (2012)
 Canson paper (180 gsm), Fabriano paper (180 gsm), tissue paper,
 sanding paper, charcoal and linen thread
 Surface area – 150 x 300 cm. Compressed – 105 x 80 x 48 cm

become problematic in the way that his work is framed – and more so in how they ‘distort our appreciation, even our perception of it’ (2010:52). Considering these factors, open questions arise that may have bearing on the blurring of boundaries between drawing and sculptural aspects in some of my work.

The body of work is introduced with the *daily servings* establishing the notion of repetition and seriality. Accompanying these is a small selection of the early drawings that collectively contributed to the daily charcoal fallout, to create the *daily servings*. Some of these are ‘discarded’ and retrieved drawings that are crumpled and displayed on the wall, introducing three-dimensionality and its potential to reveal, conceal and enhance the play of light and shadow. A surface (300 x 150 cm) constructed from ‘discarded’ drawings sewn together, crumpled and compressed to create *untitled (absence of presence)* (2012), is ‘dumped’ on the floor, acknowledging that which can not and should not be reclaimed.

Upon entering the large space of the main gallery, at the far end of the space, *who is speaking to whom, why and for whom I* is suspended away from the wall. The large scale, vertical format, dark tones and heavy and dense materiality hint at authority and hierarchy. The dominance of patriarchal power as ‘alive and well’ is acknowledged, but in relation to *who is speaking to whom, why and for whom II* it does not have the last say. With the conceptual devices, as I have discussed before, scale relationships between these two works potentially counteract or equal one another. In close relationship and conversation, these two works comment, albeit perhaps strained, on the possibility of what Chave proposes ‘... a mutuality ... on equal terms’ (1990:56). The retrieved paper fibres, *(no)thing*, are displayed in a conical heap which formally echoes the triangular funnel shape.

The repetitive filterings of *mark(er) I* are pinned directly to the wall. In juxtaposition *mark(er) II* is suspended approximately 15 cm away from the wall, allowing the ‘filter cloth’ to drape and present its soft, lightweight materiality. The large scale of these works speaks of potentially overwhelming and collective experience. With the different presentations I hope to guide the viewer, giving some sense of a development through process. The scale of these works requires the viewer to move in order to view them in their entirety. Close-up observation reveals detail in individual images and surface quality of materials. To get a sense of the collective images the viewer will have to move away from the work. These factors can speak of closeness and distance, the intimacy of individual – or more distanced collective experience.



Detail of *knowing (the unknown)* (2013)

Presented on the wall behind *who is speaking to whom, why and for whom I*, single utterings becomes 'overshadowed' by the close proximity of the large, dark surface – becoming hidden or 'trapped'. Pinning the miniature images onto a unifying background/support, creates contradiction between miniature and larger scale. While the miniature scale of the individual images does not translate into notions of trauma or threat, the latent aggressive undertones in the pinning, in relation to the confined space created by the large-scale work, might or might not register unsettling effects – depending on what the viewer brings to the experience, as pointed out by Chave. These devices, coupled with the indefinable nature of the images, pose open questions about perceptions of harm. The continuous filter-band as support requires the viewer to move with the band to read the narrative, suggestive of an ongoing unfolding. The mass repetition may have the effect of the viewer becoming saturated and losing interest – looking but not seeing.

The relatively small format of the *murmurings of the mind* works establishes comfortable scale relationships between the work and the viewer. Viewed from a distance some of these drawings evoke notions of aerial views of landscapes, or topographical maps, or of cellular structures, perhaps. Presented hanging two centimetres away from the wall, subtle three-dimensionality in the works is enhanced. The play of light and shadow reveals, conceals and extends the images onto the wall. Viewed from up close, minute surface and structural details appear, reminiscent of the 'otherworldliness' of enlarged microscopic images.

Ideally, the quiet *unknowing (the known)* works should be viewed last. They are presented in the smaller room of the gallery, painted in the typical grey of the Soft Room that I recall from memory. This space provides a more intimate experience, symbolically offering a moment of pause – a contemplative space for a 'settling' experience, for restoration. It offers, however briefly, a possibility for a fragile equilibrium.

As a departing gesture and concluding this body of work, *knowing (the unknown)* hangs suspended from the ceiling at the gallery exit/entrance, its cumulative 'days' bundled loosely on the floor. Upon exiting the gallery space the translucent, opened surface – lit now from behind by natural light – alludes to Merleau-Ponty's observation '*... what we tear away from the dispersion of instants is not an already-made reason' but '... a natural light, our openness to something ...'*

The drawn mark as gesture, and the drawing becoming itself, traces that delicate conversion into 'extroversion' as a coming-into-consciousness, so much so that the drawing becoming and the coming-into-consciousness of the drafter merge to unfold as one process. The drafter positions the specificity of self in the generality of social space and collectivity, affirming her existence while demonstrating her conception of being self in the social realm. She converses with an audience and with herself.

Elizabeth Gunter (2012:81)



fragile equilibriums

Conclusion

During this period of study, my creative 'space' became increasingly a place of more amplified awareness of the complexities at work in the personal and broader context of my living environment. This space remains a place of reclaiming and honouring those personal discoveries of what cannot be destroyed – resilience and capacity for 'voice' that emerge as mark or filtered substance.

Throughout this exploration, carried by the energy of the idea of filtering towards finding marks that are grounded in personal experience and have symbolic meaning, I come to see and know retrospectively as a deeper understanding is gained of the materials chosen and processes emerging. This intuitive engagement provides a space to come to knowledge through the experience of making and transforming – in creating a new known. It is an interactive route of discovery, rather than a predetermined framework and process for reaching a specific goal. It is anchoring my work in another source of knowledge than patriarchy – and in this lies the resistance.

Fragile equilibriums function on multiple levels in the course of processing and unravelling, be they personal or creative, personal or social. *fragile equilibriums* as a title also alludes to and venerates the process that preceded – it 'became' possible to attain such a title as energy shifted. The title speaks of the absent, but implicit, struggle that is the ongoing deconstructive/constructive relationship with/in power. Shifts in personal understanding and perceptions continue to emerge, requiring adjustment and readjustment, creating ongoing tensions. The transformative journey remains mysterious. The route continuously unfolding and revealing, '*... gradually clarifying ...*' while deeply challenging and satisfying, '*... always partial ... incomplete ...*'

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Closing pages:
Detail of *seek*. From the *murmurings of the mind* series (2013)
Detail of *dwell*. From the *murmurings of the mind* series (2013)





The heavier the burden, the closer our lives come to the earth, the more real and truthful they become. Conversely, the absolute absence of a burden causes man to be lighter than air, to soar into the heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant ... What then shall we choose? Weight or lightness? ... The only certainty is: the lightness/weight opposition is the most mysterious, most ambiguous of all.

Milan Kundera (1984:5-6)
The Unbearable Lightness of Being



