

.....KATE MONTGOMERY

CENOTOPE

for my father,

Lee Montgomery.....

a tangle of roots I am still unpicking,

freeing
from its confines,

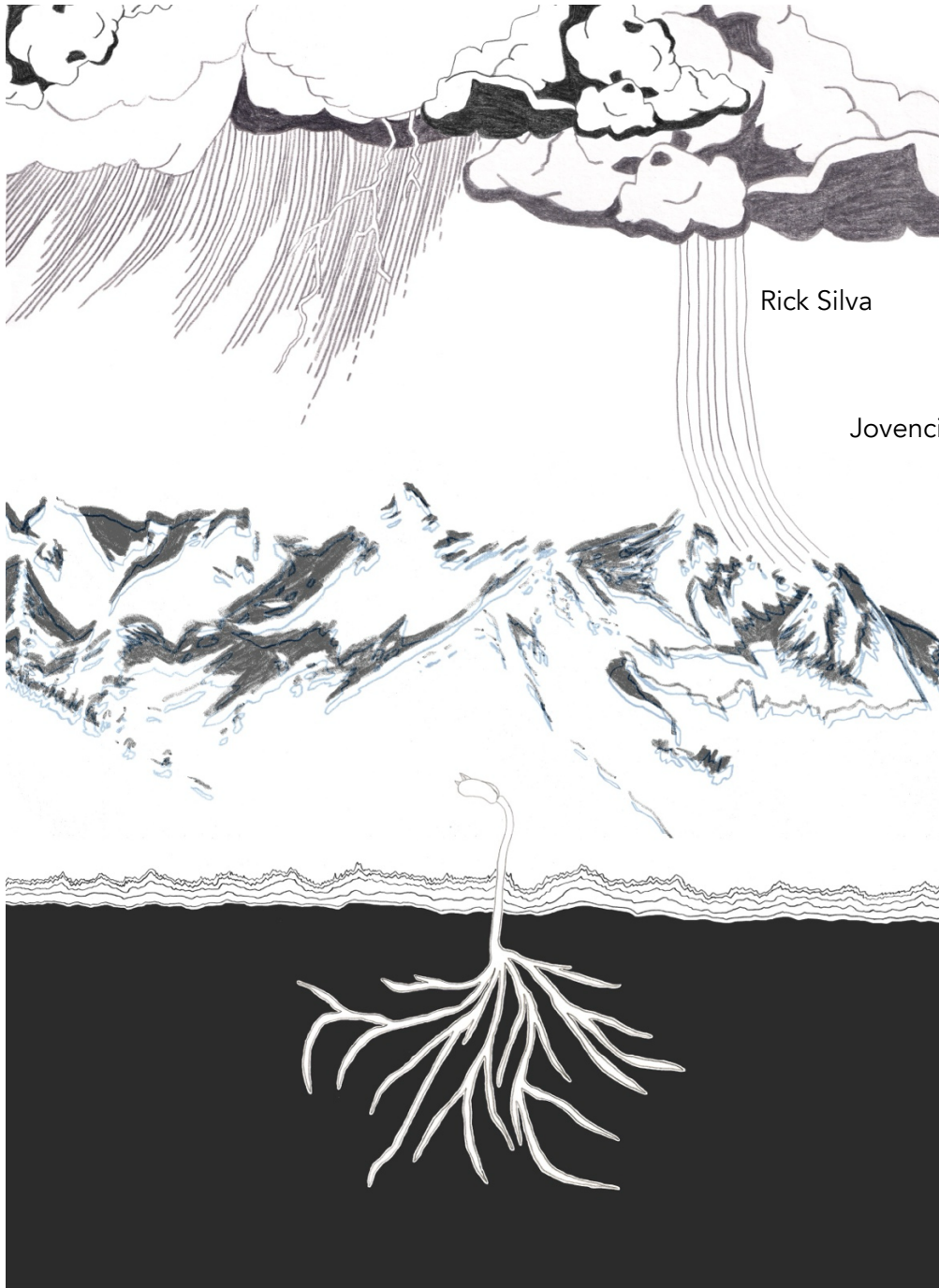
and connecting back into the Earth.

*Y pren ar y bryn,
a'r bryn ar y Ddaear,
a'r Ddaear ar ddim!*

*Ffeind a braf oedd y bryn
lle tyfodd y pren.¹*

¹ Lyrics from *Y Pren ar y Bryn (The Tree on the Hill)*, an ancient Welsh song passed down through the ages by mouth, by ear. I have been singing this song since I was a child, it has lived within me for a very long time, shaping my concept of this strange, interconnected world we briefly inhabit before "someday or later we all help the little flowers grow."

Translation:
*The tree on the hill, and the hill on the Earth, and the Earth on nothing!
Fine and fair was the hill, where the tree grew.*

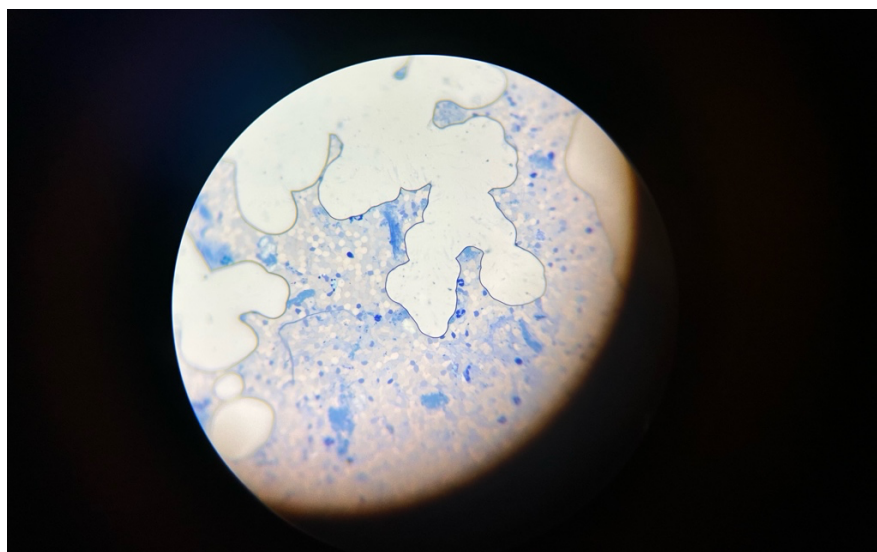


Kate Montgomery, *The Clouds Fracture into Unmapped Pathways*, 2023

Illustration from a collaborative project with Brandy Nālani McDougall, Poet Laureate of Hawai'i 2023-2025

Signed by Rick Silva, Committee Chair

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Kate Montgomery, *Penumbra*, 2025
Cells from my cheek, methylene blue stain, microscope slide. 1/16" x 3" x 1"



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TA VERY MUCH / DIOLCH YN FAWR

Each of the following people have formed the incalculable strata that have shaped this work. Without your support, generous collaboration, and capacity to imagine alongside me, the work would have taken a very different form. There are no words that could possibly articulate my gratitude. Thank you. Diolch.

Many thanks to my committee Rick, Jovencio, and Amanda, for asking questions that prompted me to consider my work from new and sometimes unexpected angles. Your responses gave me cause to reflect more deliberately on the ways my practice speaks beyond itself, preparing the work for its emergence into the world outside of my studio.

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I offer innumerable and unquantifiable thanks to Joey Capadona and the entire Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art preparator team who have graciously welcomed me into their world.

² Illustration from Goss, John, ed. *Ballads of Britain*. London: John Lane, 1937.

To be entrusted to hold such close and intimate proximity with the museum's collection has been a powerful and pivotal experience for me as an artist, but also as a human. I cannot thank you enough for your warmth and generosity. Special thanks to Mark O'Harra and Megan Sinclair who patiently sat and problem-solved with me through numerous unexpected thesis installation challenges.

I extend thanks beyond measure to the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art and its wonderful and enigmatic staff, who give me the opportunity to fill my everyday with wonder and awe through the staggering and infinite power of art.

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To my dearest Charlie "*Miss Girl!*" Rini, without your bountiful and unmeasured support and friendship I could not have made it through the last few years unscathed.

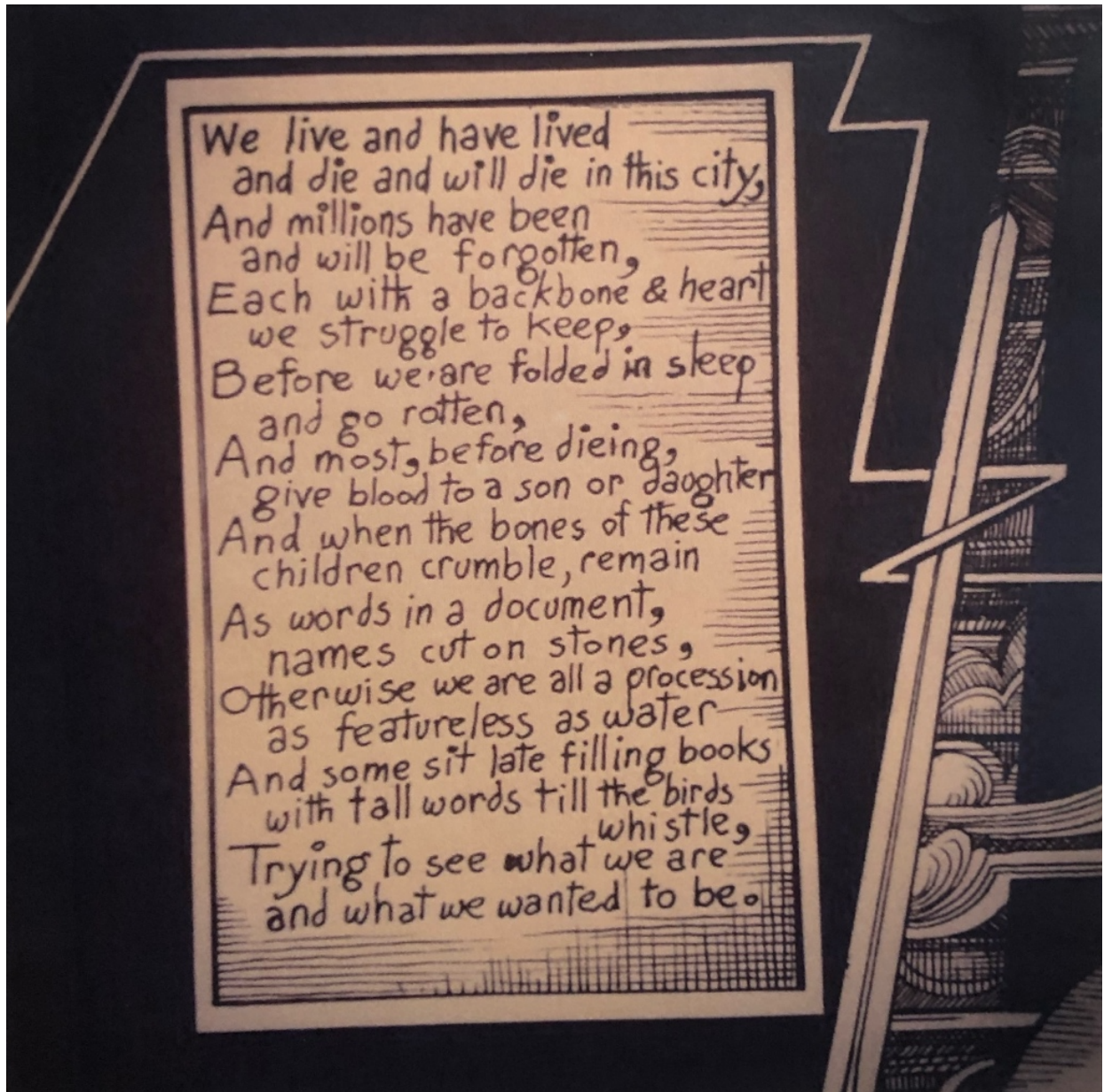
To the names that follow; the meandering conversations and enthusiastic exploration of ideas I have shared with each of you have been foundational to the development of my practice. I cannot thank you enough. To Colin Ives, John Park, Claire Webb, Nina Amstutz, Laura Vandenburg, Brian Gillis, Tarrah Krajnak, Emily Scott, Jerry Hooker, and Jeremy Schropp.

Diolch, diolch, diolch.



TA VERY MUCH / DIOLCH YN FAWR

.....
.....We are all a Procession as Featureless as Water.....
.....



This poem sits above my studio desk. It is a guide, a map, a friend.³

³ Alasdair Gray's incredible untitled poem, an excerpt from his 1987 essay *Middle Age Self Portrait*

I share my life with animals.

Each day, I cultivate a deeper intentional presence in nature, actively listening and observing as we walk together in the forest. This is particularly important in the context of grief; it is how I remind myself that I am still a part of a living world.

Engaged in a daily practice of embodied research, I capture field recordings and search for materials, noticing minuscule changes on our familiar paths. Each day there is something new to discover. I delight in the landscape, but make it a point never to mine, sever, or disturb anything from within its delicate balance. Instead, I collect objects already disconnected from their origins: a cluster of seeds on a broken branch;
emancipated clumps of vibrant mosses and lichens blown groundward by storms;
the lacelike skeletal remains of decomposing leaves;
mycelial bark brightened by speckled molds;
intricately patterned twigs carved by wood-eating beetles.

These objects speak a visual language generated by the material fluidity and interdependence of the natural world, and indeed, of the Cosmos; the processes undergone are evidenced on their rich surfaces. They exist in a transitional state between existence and extinction, slowly eroding back to dust that will take a million splintered journeys into unknown futures.

This is where I intervene, in a somewhat futile attempt to preserve and capture what's left of objects that are already partially immaterial. The materials I collect are earthy and raw. Over enough time, they will become intangible, degenerating back into specks of potent potential emanating from decaying structures that can no longer retain their stability. The desire to archive something fragmented and eroded by time is one I explore through a multitude of approaches and mediums, as no one approach seems to capture the scope of this desperate endeavor.

Clay has become an essential collaborator in my attempt to archive the finite, as the transformative nature of the medium allows it to exist both in liquid and solid states, vulnerable to the influence of fluctuating atmospheres, extreme temperatures, and time itself. I encase the organic materials I collect, smothering them in thin layers of ceramic slip which clings to their surfaces and tangent points, infiltrating cavities and capturing remarkably detailed impressions of their intricate forms. Over time, water leeches from the original objects, transferred by osmosis through the clay body and back out into the atmosphere. The clay fractures as it dries, forming delicate eggshells that allude to something that once was, conveying both its existence and disappearance.

When I unload the kiln, I begin the careful work of retrieval, fragment by fragment. The original objects are cremated, leaving only traces and dust behind. I arrange these delicate remains into dimensional drawings in undulating layers, through which I explore a visual language inspired by the fluidity of matter in the material Cosmos. I draw with the bone-like fragments and impressions, forming complex fossils, each shard gravitationally bound to the next, suspended in the slow process of accretion.

It feels important to note that it is not the objects themselves that are cast in clay, but rather the negative space that once surrounded them. Through this process, the clay creates an archive of meeting points, impressions where presence meets absence⁴, akin to how memory operates in grief.

My father died more than a decade ago. I can't know him like I used to since he is no longer here to offer direct insights into the intricacies of his personhood. I can, however, embrace the tangent points where our lives intersected, clinging to the immeasurable impressions his existence made on my own. These impressions are all I have left. The fluctuating area of negative space that separated us while he was alive also kept us intertwined, invisibly drawing a line of continuity from his life to my own.



Kate Montgomery, *Rhizome* (detail), 2024. Acrylic, mirror, glass, wood, stoneware, overhead projector, ceramic slip, acetate, stoneware dust. Installation dimensions variable.

⁴ "The archive of feelings is both material and immaterial, at once incorporating objects that might not ordinarily be considered archival, and at the same time, resisting documentation because sex and feelings are too personal or ephemeral to leave Records." Ann Cvetkovich

Rachel Whiteread's work similarly embraces voids and captures negative space as a form of remembrance⁵, re-presenting the familiar in an altered state. Her imaginative approach to the construction of memorials is particularly relevant to my practice – exemplified by *Shallow Breath*, in which Whiteread casts the underside of her father's deathbed, made more visceral by the visible sunken area created by the weight of his body.



Rachel Whiteread, *Shallow Breath*, 1988

⁵ "...another salient feature of direct casting is that it often involves making a trace of something that is assumed to be ephemeral, inaccessible, or outmoded; casting is closely connected with the anticipation of loss or absence. It is an act of preservation. If casting has a psychic mood, then, it is neither expressionist self-projection, nor "modernist" restraint and respect for the character of the medium. Rather, it seems to involve the ambivalence characteristic of melancholy, of being caught between acknowledgment of loss and refusal to mourn, that is, to give up the object." Margaret Iversen

Bones, bones, dry bones ⁶

Rough surfaces undulate against my hands, resembling shell and stone, Cretaceous. I feel the hardened clay split in two, once sandwiching a thin relic that has now disappeared in fire. I find ways to enter the space between - a delicate slice of nothingness, paper thin and barely perceivable. Like a curious animal, I am compelled to pull it apart, to see what imprints were left behind, to study what remains. My hands are my preferred tools until I am willing to concede to their limitations. If I'm not careful the clay will slip in, slip through. It will rupture the continuity of my skin, exposing an open space in my body that should have remained closed. The thin clay bends to the pressure of my inquiry, splintering, bonelike as it suddenly enters my skin, an unwelcome inclusion. Red blots on porcelain, a moment of rupture. This material holds power⁷, memory. Its resistance brings my practice into the stone age. I must now embrace tool use. I am an ape eating termites with a stick.

I turn to harder objects with sharper, focused edges. Fine points to puncture surfaces with. Metals formed to extract filth from the crevices of our bones now become curious tools of excavation. Hardened and industrial, these tools are often bent towards destruction.

I have learned to live with the risk of loss. I am producing possibilities. I am a tree growing many seeds. The clay bends and cracks, it fragments, revealing a material archive of the effects of time, pressure, heat, intention, hope. It harbors traces and processes; it holds my ideas so tightly I have to pry it open to find them again. Sometimes I surprise myself.

This is a geological endeavor.

This is field work.

I am digging to the other side of the Earth.

I am trying to find you.

I search for delicate filaments of continuity that thread from your existence to my own.

It is a conversation between geological time and personal experience,

between your most delicate bone

and the entire Cosmos.

⁶ Borrowed fondly from The Incredible String Band's *Koeoaddi There* from *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*.

⁷ I think a lot about the power of material objects to present pathways to emotion, to memory, as explored by Jeanne Randolph: "Materialism is not the opposite of imagination; it is the condition for its possibility."



Kate Montgomery, *We are All a Procession as Featureless as Water* (detail), 2025.

Wood (walnut and oak), acrylic, mirrorpane glass, stoneware, stoneware dust, LED projector. 32.5" x 99" x 38"

*So it goes...*⁸

Grief itself is spoken in an incomplete language of shards and dust, of fragmentation leading to further fragmentation. In my own grief I am presented with intangibility where there was something solid and familiar; a void in space that was once filled by something so complex. My father encapsulated worlds within worlds that have simply vanished, existing now as mere remnants, peripheral imprints, and intangible moments which similarly dissipate as the Earth continues its orbit around the Sun. Each day my memory of my father becomes more nebulous. I exist, at least partially, as a living archive of his memory, before it too becomes lost to time.

⁸ Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse Five*. New York: Dell Pub, 1969.

My practice actively engages reconstruction, a delicate task of collection, preservation, and reorganization. The process of handling these fragments feels pertinent. Every gesture to collect the smallest trace inevitably redistributes a fraction of them back out into the atmosphere, where they become lost to the material din. How do we talk about what has already disappeared? I try to hold on to what is left and amplify it out into the Cosmos.



Kate Montgomery, *We are All a Procession as Featureless as Water* (detail), 2025. Wood (walnut and oak), acrylic, mirrorpane glass, stoneware, stoneware dust, LED projector, 32.5" x 99" x 38"

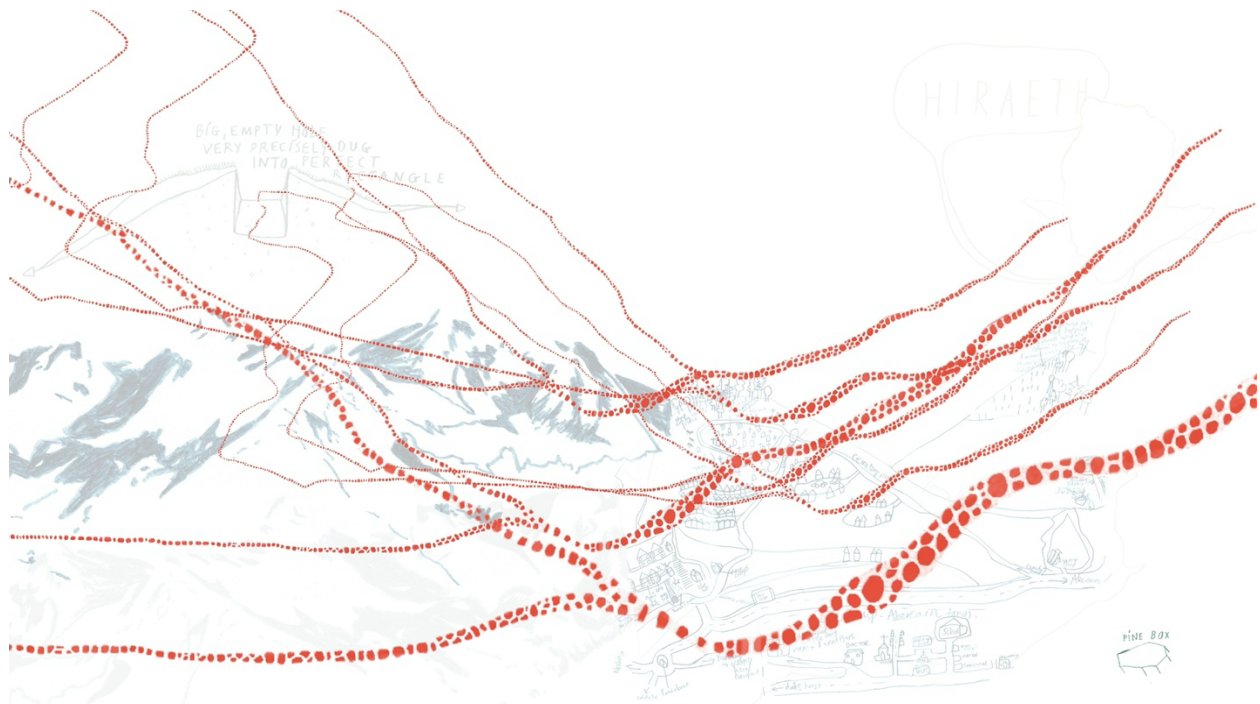
These fragments were cast from natural objects collected from my father's gravesite in Wales, gathered from his garden, and from hikes we took together through familiar mountains, forests, and riverbeds. Each branch is a thin bone reaching through my memories of home, of him. The rest were cast from objects taken from my own life, 4,918 miles away from where my father's body lies in Welsh soil. This is their meeting place.

The lines of my hand always mirrored these trails
I look down at my palms, tracing deep contours to navigate by

I was young here

You were too

Before, before



Kate Montgomery, Still image from *Letter to My Father's Atoms*, 2024
Analogue drawings, digital animation, sound design, poetry, running time: 1m 32s

When I draw with ceramic fragments and dust, I think of Motoi Yamamoto's painstaking salt drawings⁹ and Cornelia Parker's suspended works. In both artists' practices, both the conceptual weight of the original materials and the use of expansive forms of drawing in space to re-present them anew relate to acts of reconstruction as archival endeavors. Both artists are creating works that transform, relocate, suspend, and memorialize fragmented objects, constructing immersive experiences of spatial materiality that surround the viewer, eliciting awe and wonder.



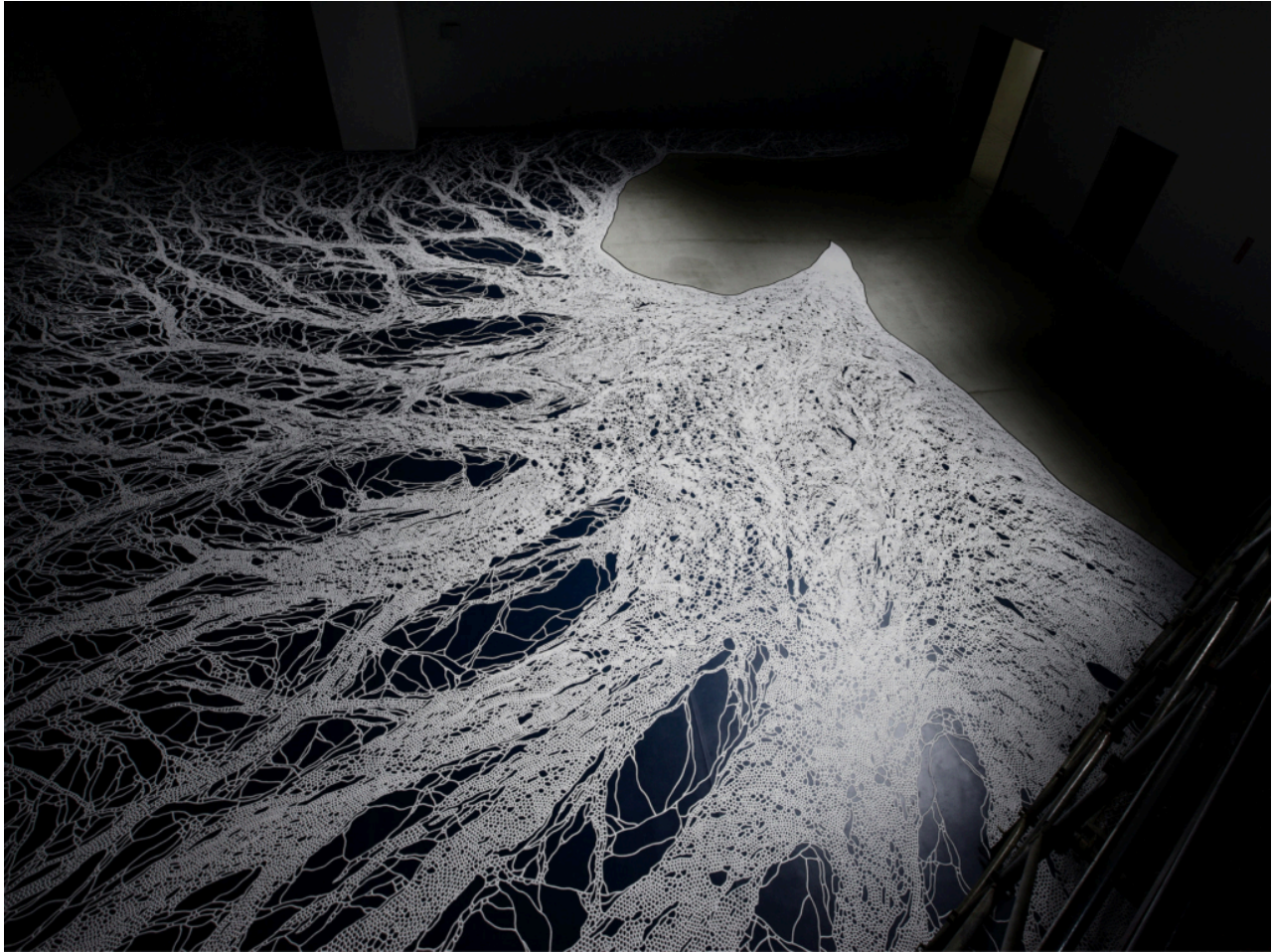
Motoi Yamamoto, *Floating Garden*, 2013, salt, installation dimensions variable

⁹ "Continue creating artwork not to forget.

I keep creating so that I will not forget memories of my family.

In 1994, my 24-year-old sister died of a brain tumor, and my wife, who had been by my side for 25 years, died of breast cancer in 2016. There is shock and sadness when something important that should still exist disappears from right in front of you.

No matter how much you want to be reunited, this is a reality that never will come true. I have faced this conflict and given it shape... I create works to ward against the self-defense instinct of oblivion, looking for a convincing form of acceptance to come to terms with the parting of ways." Motoi Yamamoto

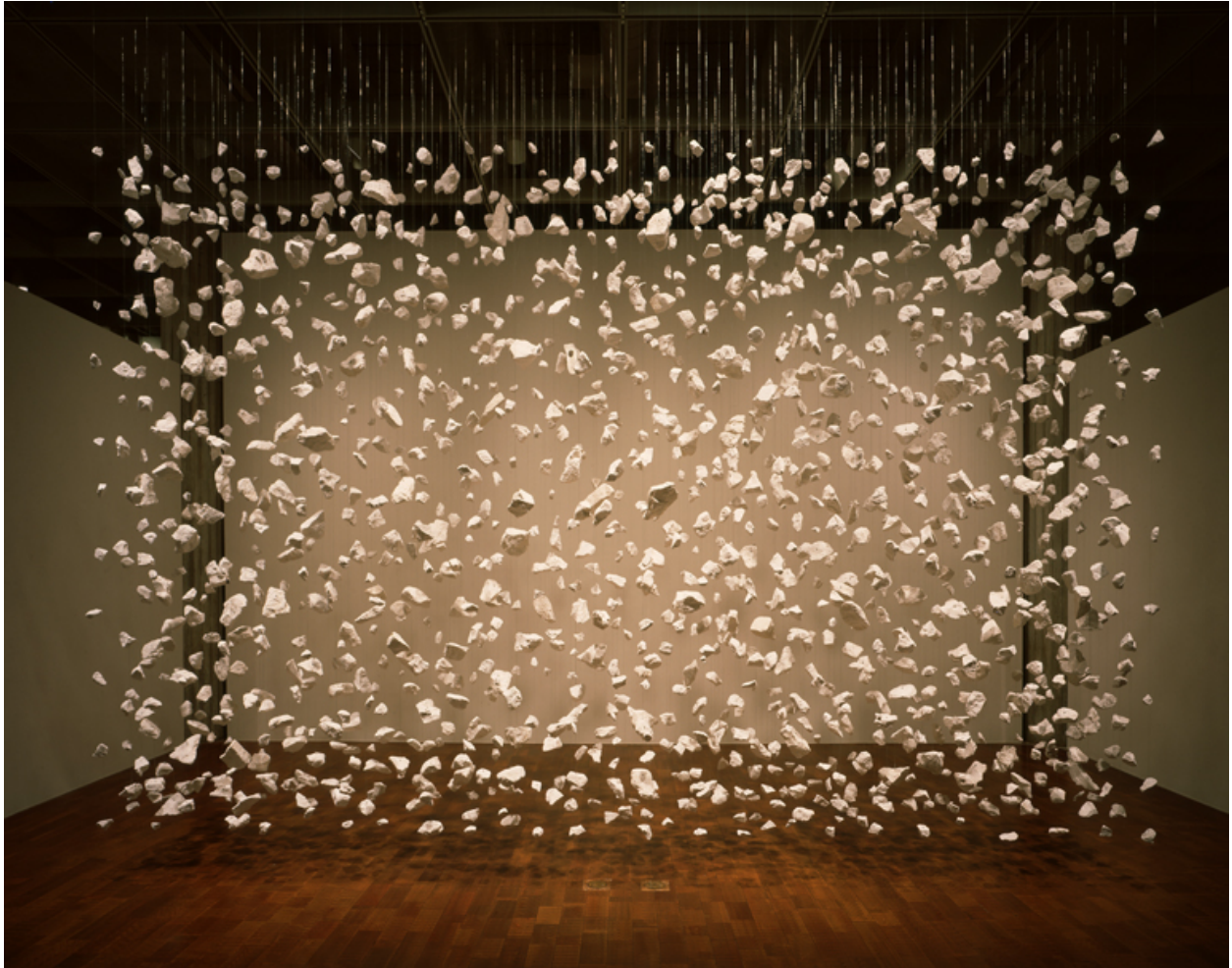


Motoi Yamamoto, *Forest of Beyond*, 2011, salt, installation dimensions variable

Yamamoto's work similarly emerged from a direct relationship with profound loss. His salt drawings are meditations on the unimaginable – that someone can exist and then simply disappear, while somehow you must learn to continue on without them. At the end of each exhibition, the artist invites the local community to deconstruct the drawings and collectively return the salt to the ocean, so that the material may live on.¹⁰

¹⁰ "The shape of the work disappears. However, this salt will spread throughout the sea and support the lives of various creatures. Perhaps it will find its way into our mouths once again." Motoi Yamamoto

Cornelia Parker similarly transforms and reanimates materials through acts of destruction, suspension, and illumination. The careful installation of each individual fragment constructs a new narrative for the material, new configurations transform and breathe life¹¹ back into the selected objects.



Cornelia Parker, *Edge of England*, 1999, chalk, wire, and wire mesh, dimensions variable

¹¹ "As the objects were suspended one by one, they began to lose their aura of death and appeared reanimated, in limbo... I operate very often in these 'frozen moments' where there's been lots of action but this [is] a sort of quiet corner of that... It takes away that kind of pathos, which is there when you see a lot of the debris on the ground after an explosion, well put it back in the air and it's still got some life." Cornelia Parker

Andy Goldsworthy's early works have been a significant inspiration to me. They speak a language of ephemerality, of transience. They are an exercise in extreme control and a total loss of control, each piece created with the knowledge that the work will inevitably be lost to the elements. The time spent with the materials – this collaboration — is the work. Accessed by the viewer only through photographs taken during one brief moment in time, the work itself is so careful, so private and personal, created outside of the traditional arenas for art making. His materials lists are particularly engaging, often including substances like 'urine' or 'breath,' and sometimes exasperated notes on the failures endured in the construction of certain works.



Andy Goldsworthy, 1982_186 *Ice Arch*, 1982, ice, stone, urine, dimensions unlisted, Brough, Cumbria

1982, [work] 186

*Ice arch
left to freeze overnight
before supporting pile of stones removed
(made in a field of cows - tense wait)
pissed on stone too frozen to come out
fourth attempt successful
other three arches collapsed or melted
Brough, Cumbria
1-2 December 1982¹²*

¹² Andy Goldsworthy, diary notations to accompany work 1982_186 *Ice Arch*, 1982, Brough, Cumbria

I respond to artists who think imaginatively beyond conventional parameters, often engaging a scientific, multidisciplinary curiosity, amongst them Andrew Yang, Lita Albuquerque, Christine Borland, Laurie Anderson. Sally Mann's *Body Farm* series is a startling and moving project in which she photographs human bodies in various stages of decomposition at a forensic lab in Tennessee, exploring the moments where the body and the landscape begin to become indiscernible. She reveals our bodies as matter engaged in a very active process of transforming back into the land.

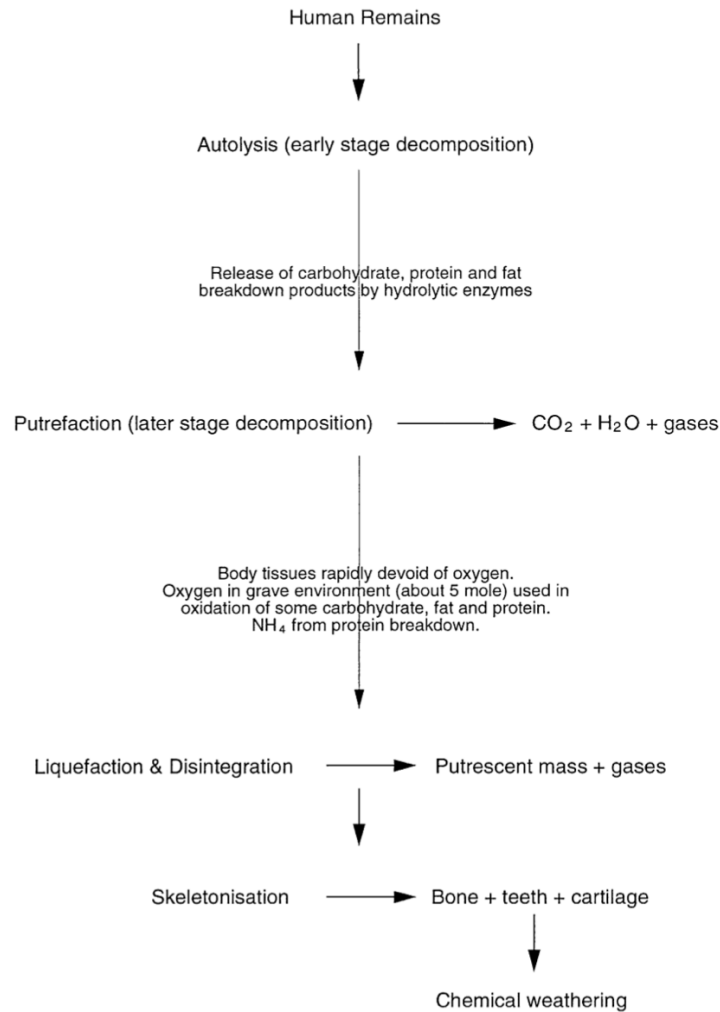


Sally Mann, *Untitled (Torso)* (from 'Body Farm'), 2000

Then days after death, when the bloat comes on, scents rise and beckon very precisely to the first responders—coffin flies, who find their way six feet down. Blowflies, carrion flies, and their young fill the dark, shallow spots next, probing the pouches and channels of us. Our filaments unlock; we leak and are drunk. We reorder as gas, liquid, sugar, and salt. When the final crew comes to finish up—the skin beetles, centipedes, snails, and cockroaches—the slow descent can begin: the decades-long stretching, darkening, and drying; time collecting as it does on wood, where it gets called by its forest names, lichen/moss/fungi.¹³

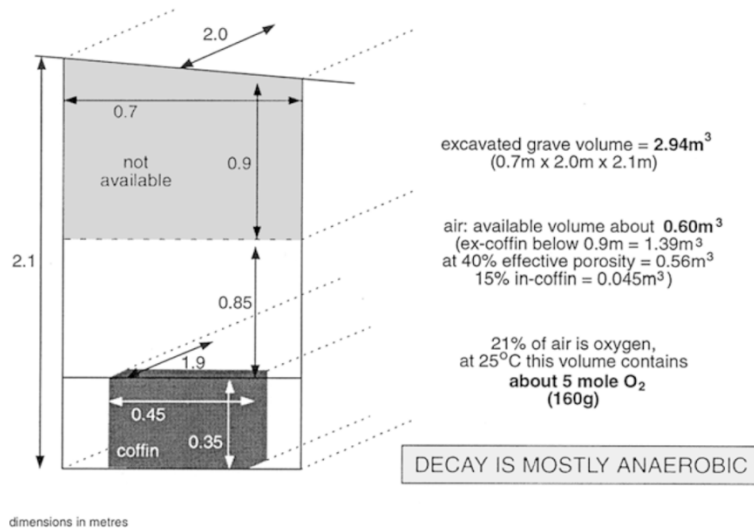
¹³ Purpura, Lia. "Imagining Burial." *Emergence Magazine*, February 1, 2019.

I am drawn to post-humanist conceptions of matter that undermine the concept of human exceptionalism, particularly those that recognize the agency of material which continually exists in an active state of becoming: porous, dynamic, fertile.

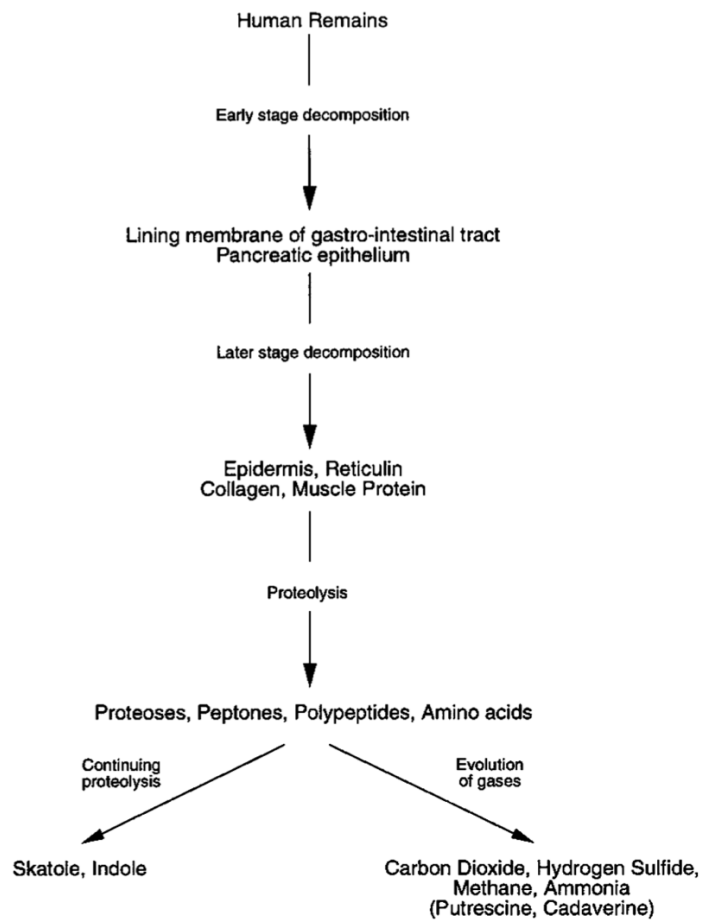


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¹⁴ Diagram describing human decomposition processes in soil



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¹⁵ Diagram illustrating oxygen availability for in-grave decomposition

¹⁶ Diagram illustrating changes to protein during human decomposition processes in soil

In exploring the materiality of the body and imagining its journey through deep time, scale shifts have become an important aspect of the work I am creating. As such, the work of Scottish artist Katie Paterson has been of particular importance to me. Her inventive strategies root her concepts in deep time through material acquisition, transformation, and inventive installation strategies, exemplified by *Requiem*, (2022) and *Fossil Necklace*, (2013).



Katie Paterson, *Requiem*, 2022

Paterson is known as an artist whose imaginative work defies conventional limitations, notably extending projects into the distant future beyond her own lifespan, as in *Future Library*, (2014-2114), or beyond the physical limitations of Earth by collaborating with the Moon to create a 'Moon-altered' musical composition, as in *Earth-Moon-Earth (Moonlight Sonata Reflected from the Surface of the Moon)*, (2007).

*I see my role as a mediator between the information and what that actually means to us as humans and our place in the wider universe, evoked through the prism of a visual experience.*¹⁷

¹⁷ Paterson, Katie. "In Conversation with Katie Paterson." *Art of Change* 21.



Christine Borland, *Ecobolic Garden*, 2001, Centre for Health Sciences, Inverness, Scotland

Marguerite Humeau's installations, particularly *The Opera of Prehistoric Creatures* (2011-2012), *Migrations* (*El Niño*, *La Niña*, *Kuroshio*), (2022), and *meys*, (2023), inform my work, as she is constructing speculative futures through sculptural, organic forms that allude to both existence and disappearance. These works illustrate Humeau's wide-ranging approach to making, combining extensive research, imaginative speculation, collaboration with scientists and historians, and multidisciplinary exploration.



Marguerite Humeau, *The Guardian of Fungus Garden*, 2023

*I have been looking at the soil, and the 'surface horizon', the layer of the soil where the living becomes dead, dormant, and alive again, or transforms into mineral matter. For me the 'surface horizon' is this sort of mythical place where the most important transformations happen.*¹⁸

SURFACE HORIZON

Soil has been a fixture of my practice for some time now. For me it relates directly to home, to the grave, to transformation, to the microcosm beneath our feet. There is a Welsh word that bears no English translation: *hiraeth* — a longing for a home that no longer exists, a place you cannot return to. When I think about Wales, I think of the underground network that ties me to its soil, about how many (countless) times I've scrubbed it out from under my fingernails, from wounds endured while exploring the surrounding mountains and falling from great yew trees.

¹⁸ Humeau, Marguerite. "Living Content 54: Interview with Marguerite Humeau." *Living Content*, accessed January 25, 2024. <https://www.livingcontent.online/interviews/marguerite-humeau>.



Pontywaun, the neighborhood where I grew up, ~1994



Returning to the neighborhood where I grew up, 2024

My thoughts of home are now marked with grief. I no longer have an architectural structure to return to; what I do have is my father's body in the ground. In a way, his grave has become a signifier for home. It is the only land on the planet that I own. The only thing that is familiar and constant, always there to welcome me back, is my father's grave. This has deepened and enriched my relationship with the soil and surrounding environment, with the animals and microscopic creatures that inhabit this specific area¹⁹ of Abercarn Cemetery.

It is a strange compulsion to think of the grave...and yet, contemplating this world of underground activity provides me with avenues for the return of wonder and awe, which could be considered the opposite end of the spectrum of grief.²⁰ The soil of my father's grave has become an ecotone between the biome of his body and that of the mountain, and as such, it contains a strange sense of immortality, transience, and transmogrification: it is a product of the life cycle at work. The soil is active. It is alive. Not inert. Fertile, it surges. Waves of matter emit from the grave, now a central site that attracts and generates life, presenting unimaginable opportunities for generative collaboration²¹.

My father's gravesite sits high on the mountain above where he once lived. Looking out from where his body lies in the ground, I am surrounded by mountains.

It is a typical Welsh landscape comprised of bracken, tuffets, great oak trees, the unfurling remains of ancient, braided hedgerows, bluebell woods, stone bridges built over rivers by rough Welsh hands, and other environmental markers that have existed here, unchanged, for hundreds and hundreds of years. I feel the electric pull of this place: it provides me with a way to reach back into the past. Touching the grave soil is the closest thing I will have to holding his hand ever again.

¹⁹ Measuring roughly 144 cubic feet. The exact parameters of the grave surface is 8'4" x 3'2"

²⁰ As discussed by UC Berkeley Distinguished Professor Dacher Keltner in *Awe: The New Science and Transformative Power of Everyday Wonder*. London: Allen Lane, 2023.

²¹ Some of my imaginative wondering in relation to my father's body underground has been supported by the concept of material agency as explored by Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*

I often wonder about the bones underground, which microscopic creatures must have found after more than a decade of exposure. I am continually fascinated with what is happening in that microcosm underground. It is a world I cannot know but curiously seek to understand. My imagination runs wild when I contemplate how far his biology could potentially travel from the burial site through these interactions. In this context, I am fascinated by the concept of personhood as it is interpreted anthropologically²².



Human remains in an unnamed commingled burial site.²³

²² As extensively expanded upon in Fowler, Chris. *The Archaeology of Personhood : An Anthropological Approach*. London ; Routledge, 2004.

²³ Adams, Bradley J., and Lyle W. Konigsberg, eds. 2008. *Recovery, Analysis, and Identification of Commingled Remains*. Totowa, NJ: Humana Press.



James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) Deep View, 2025 ²⁴

When we trace the pathways of our impermanence, we realize that the components of our bodies connect us to the plants and animals around us, bacteria within us, to volcanism, comets, cosmic rays, and to the Sun's light, all the way to the birth and death throes of stars throughout the Galaxy and to the beginning of the Universe itself. The most common element in our bodies, hydrogen, is as old as the Universe. Other elements were formed generally over 5 billion years ago, in the interior of stars. Some atoms were formed later, as radioactive Stardust within the Earth, which decayed to create, for example, some of the calcium in our bones²⁵.

²⁴ Image credit: ESA/Webb, NASA & CSA, G. Gozaliasl, A. Koekemoer, M. Franco, and the COSMOS-Web team

²⁵ Schrijver, K., & Schrijver, I. (2015). *Living with the Stars : How the Human Body is Connected to the Life Cycles of the Earth, the Planets, and the Stars* (First edition.). Oxford University Press.

A Disarticulation of Selfhood; of Landscape, of Dust

My entry point into the concept of material fluidity has been anthropological research that explores the burial practices of the Neolithic Welsh people, who constructed monumental passage graves, known in Wales as *cromlechi* (plural), *cromlech* (singular). The concept of corporeal deconstruction and disarticulation was reflected in these structures, which were constructed from stone that bore differing visual qualities of water. The relationship and interplay between stone and water founded an incredibly powerful metaphor in Neolithic society, providing a vehicle through which to contemplate the permeable nature of the material world.

Fluids could sediment in making solid things and solid body parts, while the solid could eventually be rendered fluid or worn away by water...Yet they were drawn together in building sites for transforming the bodies and persons of the living and the dead. Even the most enduring and solid materials were rendered fluid at times when the status of the world and/or persons was in flux.²⁶

Quartz was perhaps thought of as a fossilized fluid due to its strange material quality that reflected its own unique liminality that straddled the solid and the fluid. Quartz and stones with quartz inclusions were frequently used on the exteriors of *cromlechi*, it is presumed for their reflective material qualities and ability to sparkle in direct sunlight, referencing water. Concepts of liminality, deconstruction and recombination were celebrated and explored in the construction of *cromlechi*... Like the interplay between stone and water, the Neolithic conception of personhood could also be understood as fluid.

...persons can be understood as amalgams of relationships and substances, or as temporary aggregations of materials which are disaggregated at death, or as partible combinations of body parts, or as entities linked by flows of energy and bodily fluids.²⁷

The changing material composition of the body and its natural deconstruction through the gradual process of decomposition reinforced the Neolithic concept of the fluid permeability and transformative power of the body, and thus, the person. The disintegration of flesh made possible the emergence of bone, another visible material transformation that referenced the interplay between liquid and solid. Within the *cromlech*, bodies were subject to mortuary practices and rituals that the Neolithic believed aided the transition from the living world to the ancestral world. *"In death, if not also in life, the human body had permeable boundaries. People were dismantled and fragmented in death."*²⁸ Neolithic mortuary practices served to ritualize the transformation of the person, through an active process of bodily disarticulation.

²⁶ Fowler, Chris, and Vicki Cummings. "Places Of Transformation: Building Monuments From Water And Stone In The Neolithic Of The Irish Sea." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9, no. 1 (2003): 1–20. [p.16]

²⁷ Thomas, Julian. "Death, Identity and the Body in Neolithic Britain." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6, no. 4 (2000): 653–668. [p.658]

²⁸ Kirk, Trevor. "Materiality, Personhood and Monumentality in Early Neolithic Britain." *Cambridge archaeological journal* 16, no. 3 (2006): 333–347. [p.342]



Kate Montgomery, prototype for *We are All a Procession as Featureless as Water* (detail), 2025
 Glass, geological sample display boxes, stoneware, stoneware dust, light, 12" x 36" x 24"

.....T H R E S H O L D.....

My work emerges from a liminal space that bridges death and the living world. It is an archival endeavor rooted in ontological inquiry that seeks to preserve, comprehend, and reorganize traces of existence, from the minuscule to the macrocosmic.

I think of my terminal exhibition, entitled *Cenotope*²⁹, as a form of cromlech, built from four separate, interdependent components that work together to construct an active site of remembrance. When entering the liminal space of the cromlech, mourners encountered physical examples of a world of material fluidity. Carved boulders with surfaces that appeared to ripple as water does when illuminated by firelight; offerings of stone that bore sparkling inclusions of quartz. Within the cromlech, rites of passage were performed, including through song and chanting, to aid the passage of the deceased from one world to the next.

I explore the line of continuity between the endpoint of my father's lifespan and my own continuing life through acts of material exchange. They are intimate gestures shaped by a belief, central to affective materialism, that matter is never still. Objects and substances hold emotional weight; they carry, transmit, and quietly translate grief, anchored by its gravity, and yet, somehow moving it across time, across distance, across the porous threshold between past and future.

²⁹ A cenotaph, meaning empty tomb, is a physical memorial constructed when the remains of the deceased lie elsewhere. A *cenotope*, the word constructed similarly from the Greek *kenos* (empty) and *topos* (place) could be understood as a conceptual or symbolic site of absence; a space in which meaning is shaped specifically by what is no longer materially present.

It is a ritual of cross-continental object transferal that bridges the expansive distance we now share.

It is a distance of geography, and of time. Of sound. Of space.

I collect natural objects generated by the world surrounding his gravesite, which I either archive in slip, or explore microscopically. In exchange, I offer delicate materials collected from my home, granted a new life of relative permanence in stoneware. I place them carefully amidst the soil that covers my father's remains underground, and watch as the wind blows soil into their intricate forms.

Soon, they too will become engulfed by the landscape.

A rich history harbored by occupied soil,
is scattered by wind
while mycelium and mineral extraction
disturb stories of kingdoms and coal.

Overhead, bats in flight
cross the motorways
adrift on an ocean of limitless connection,
collision,
we will not find you;
a million beetle legs, crawling away from us.
A new home found in infinity, invisibility,
particulate, prehistoric.

Who will unearth these bones?
Once abandoned in cold ground,
dug now out from the mountainside
a quarry, a cliff,
while a garden grows in your absence,
emerging in sunlight and hail into a future unknown.

A dearth of monument
Cleaved away from the rough edge
singeing the heather with cigarettes, sighing,
while damp weather seeps in
through the interstitium.



Kate Montgomery, *4,917.99 Miles*, 2024. Grave soil, stoneware, stoneware dust; cast flowers from my garden in Eugene distributed into the upturned soil of my father's grave in Wales. Installation dimensions variable.

*Death indeed destroys things,
but does not annihilate atoms;
For it but severs their union,
and joins them anew with each other*³⁰.

What remains? What is remembered? How can memory endure in a rapidly (d)evolving world?

As the Anthropocene forces us to imagine a world without us, the line of continuity from the past to the future becomes increasingly personal. Margaret Iversen describes Whiteread's sculptures as "*memorials to a world we are losing*³¹." Locating ourselves within a larger system is vital. My work embraces the concept that beyond death, the matter that once constructed our bodies lives on, swirling through an active process of decay and transformation as it redistributes back out into the Cosmos.

*[Mourning] is a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (rites of the lifting of mourning). In some cases, the transitional period of the living is a counterpart of the transitional period of the deceased, and the termination of the first sometimes coincides with the termination of the second - that is, with the incorporation of the deceased into the world of the dead.*³²

³⁰ Lucretius Carus, Titus. *Lucretius On the Nature of Things. : A Philosophical Poem in Six Books, Literally Tr. into English Prose*. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1886.

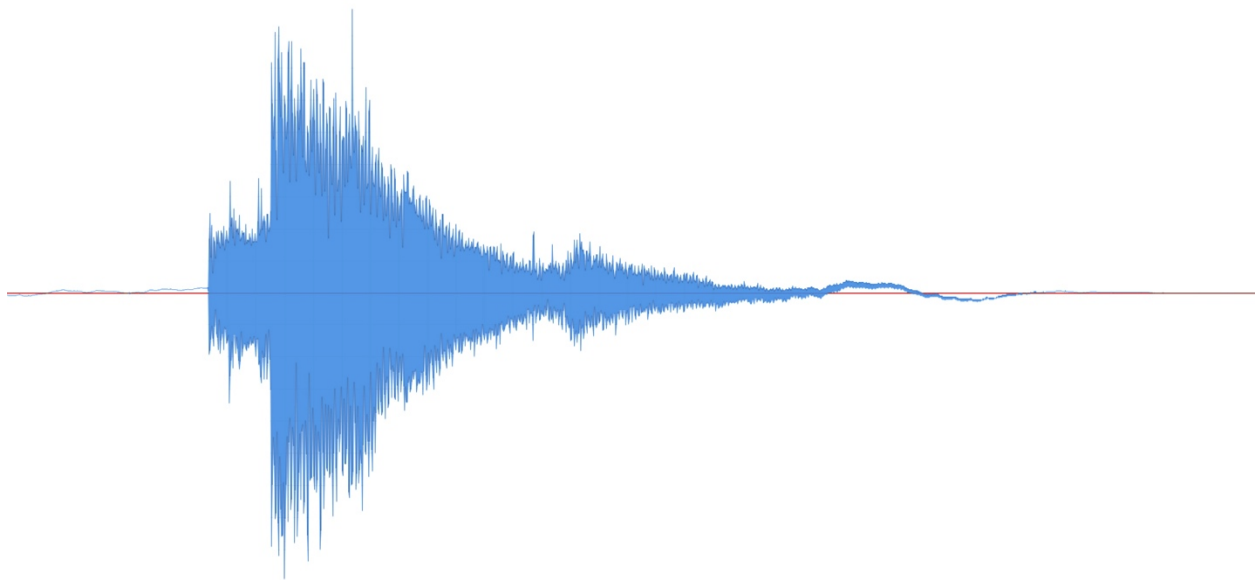
³¹ Iversen, Margaret. *Photography, Trace, and Trauma*, University of Chicago Press, 2017. [p. 67-68]

³² Gennep, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

_____ S E P A R A T I O N : from original state, from normal time _____

.....L I M I N A L I T Y : a period of transition, transformation, learning - an inversion of typical structures and hierarchies.....

_____ R E I N T E G R A T I O N : individual reintroduced in altered state after completion of passage _____³³



Kate Montgomery, *A Sound that Echoes: The end of a reverberating soundwave appears as a comet with a long tail*, 2025. The sound of an oak leaf from my father's grave, cast in porcelain, colliding with a cast stoneware dandelion leaf from my own garden³⁴.

³³ A diagram intended to illustrate the three-stage ritual structure observed in the research of Arnold Van Gennep regarding the life cycle rituals of differing cultures. Gennep, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.

³⁴ Please note: the central red line denotes the amplitude axis.

.....WE ARE BOTH HERE SOMEWHERE,
WE ARE ON A CONTINUUM.....³⁵

The immaterial realm of my practice centers experimentation with microscopes, light, refraction, poetry, sound, and traditional Celtic song, creating archives of existence that transform empty spaces into microcosms of remembrance and lament. I trace the continuities between our lives by mining what remains: his handwritten poetry, his glasses, a cassette tape he recorded just before my birth, rediscovered almost a decade after his death.



Kate Montgomery, *Rince Fada (Long Dance)*, 2024. Acrylic, microscope slides, stoneware, turntable, projected light, sound piece composed of my father and I singing the same song, his recorded before my birth, mine recorded after his death. Installation dimensions variable. Sound running time: 2m 27s.

³⁵ The title of the sound piece created for my terminal exhibition, which emerged from a series of sound experiments that incorporates excerpts from my father's 1986 tape, cross-continental field recordings, Irish keening, and traditional Welsh song - including a song exhumed from a 1892 book entitled *Bedd Fy Rhiaint (My Parent's Grave)*, its existence seemingly rooted only in paper and in the ephemeral melody its notations offer.

How do we talk about what has been eroded by time? I trace the lines around what I remember of you with my fingers, knowing how quickly the wind will blow it all away³⁶. I try to hold on to what is left and amplify it out into the Cosmos. We are both here somewhere, we are on a continuum. I run my fingers over the ridges of your voice, etched precisely into a shimmering surface. You are here, rendered permanent on a new tablet of hieroglyphs that pulls you out of the cosmic fugue³⁷ and into a continuous present³⁸.

Here, you can still teach me things.

We are reaching back towards each other across time.



Kate Montgomery, *Dad Stating "Working with Alcoholics is the Most Soul Destroying Thing in the World,"* 2024.

His archive, now my archive, truly is a time capsule. It is an invitation to participate in a strange form of posthumous dialogue where glimpses of him, and of myself, appear as small fissures that rupture and expand my construction of him – it is both an act of discovery and of startling self-recognition. The archive requires from me an intensive strategy of zooming in and out – both metaphorically and technically, through exercises that bring the microcosmic into the work. When I am sampling excerpts of the 1986 tape, I first must zoom into the sample and find points where the waveform naturally rests at the point of '0' on the amplitude axis, the dividing line between negative and positive. Here, I explore the past in a measure of milliseconds. I zoom in and out of his waveforms with ease, and watch his voice expand and contract from densely packed rods, into active, minuscule waves punctuated by plotting points above or below the axis.

My father's waveforms are landscapes that allow me to journey through his interiority in ways I never thought possible. Through spectral analyses of the frequency and pitch of his voice, richly textured spaces are formed, hazy, and strange. They appear as fire travelling through a forest, ghostly traces that seem to spread and fade along an invisible surface, as tacky ink scraped across arid paper. They are magical yet melancholy representations of matter once animated, now lost to time.

³⁶ A nod to Brautigan, Richard. *So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away*. New York, N.Y: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1982.

³⁷ A term coined by Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), 25

³⁸ In affectionate reference to Amy Sillman's expansive view on drawing as explored in her lecture *Drawing in the Continuous Present*

*Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant! Don't sow, grow offshoots! Don't be one or multiple, be multiplicities! Run lines, never plot a point!*³⁹

The rhizome, as articulated by Deleuze, has offered a profoundly resonant framework for the non-linear approach of my material exploration and research, through which I cannot help but embrace multiplicity over singularity. Over time, my practice has formed as a web of interconnected traces; each idea splintering off and forming a new shoot from the last, expanding outwardly as mycelial hyphae underground, as crystalline structures branching from every fissure in a ceramic fragment.

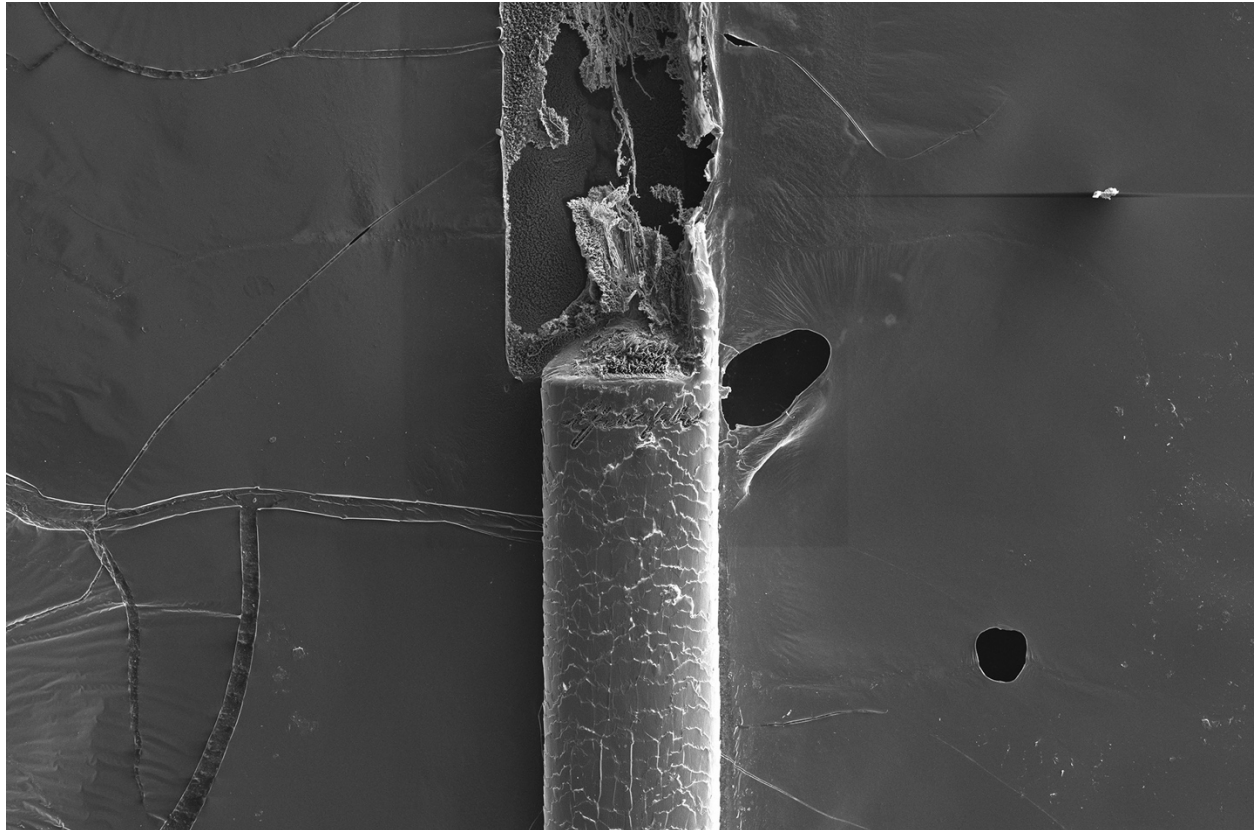


Kate Montgomery, *Cross-Continental Inclusions and Excavations: An Elegy* (detail), 2025. Wood (walnut and oak), resin casts, stoneware, hair, glass engraved with my father's poetry, monoammonium phosphate and alum crystalline structures grown on single strands of hair, on ceramic fragments, in the engraved handwriting, on microscope slides where they form new structures with soil from my father's grave, 7" x 89" x 1 3/4"

³⁹ Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

I look both outward and inward for evidence of his existence, suspending it in resin, mounting it on microscope slides. I engrave his voice into glass. I excavate artifacts from his grave, casting their intricate forms. For weeks, I then bathe them in acidic crystalline liquids, providing the original material with multiple transformational pathways back to the geological.

Here, nothing can disappear.



Kate Montgomery, *Epitaph* (detail), 2025. Hair; an excerpt taken from my father's handwritten poetry, milled into a single strand of my hair using a Focused Ion Beam, ~87 micrometer (μm) x ~14mm

Just as the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) expands our comprehension of the Universe on a macro scale, the Dual Beam Focused Ion Beam Microscope (DB-FIB) makes possible a rigorous study of the microcosm beneath our feet. Entire worlds and their strange terrains can be seen in a single grain of soil. Asteroids in a void of space. Its Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy (EDS) maps are entirely cosmic. I leverage this incredible technology, shrinking myself down to traverse the expansive world of materiality his grave soil presents. Under the lens, the world tilts and suddenly I am scrambling up the surface crevices of a single strand of my hair: an 87 micrometer (μm) thin strata that forms a phenotype I can trace directly back to my father.

Though he may be long dead, evidence of his existence and biology remain evident in me: my red hair is a very visible beacon that calls back to his Irish bloodline⁴⁰.

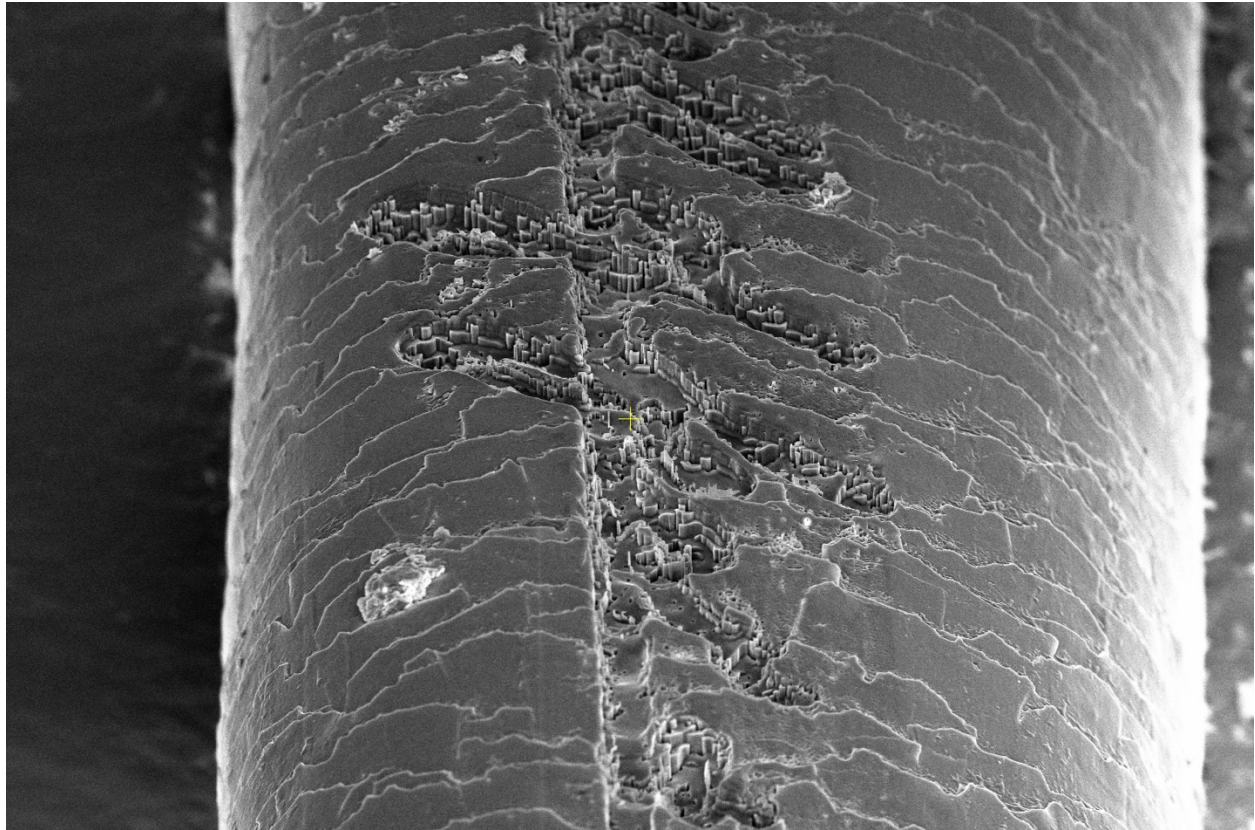


Kate Montgomery, *Reliquary*, 2025. Hair, monoammonium phosphate, alum, petri dish, 1" x 4.5" x 4.5"

⁴⁰ Hair holds a rich history as a material actant of mourning, as explored by Sophie Renken in *The Performativity of Hair in Victorian Mourning Jewellery*. "Hair-work deals with the intersection of a number of binary states - living and dead, present and absent - and involves a number of symbolic physical transformations that encapsulate the movement between these states. These transformations are examined in relation to how they construct the physical body, the person as a whole and the relationship between individuals."

.....*Full of fear + Fatherless*.....

With a Focused Ion Beam, I mill lines of his handwritten poetry into individual strands of my hair. Intriguingly, the deeper I look into the hair engraving, the more geological the work appears.



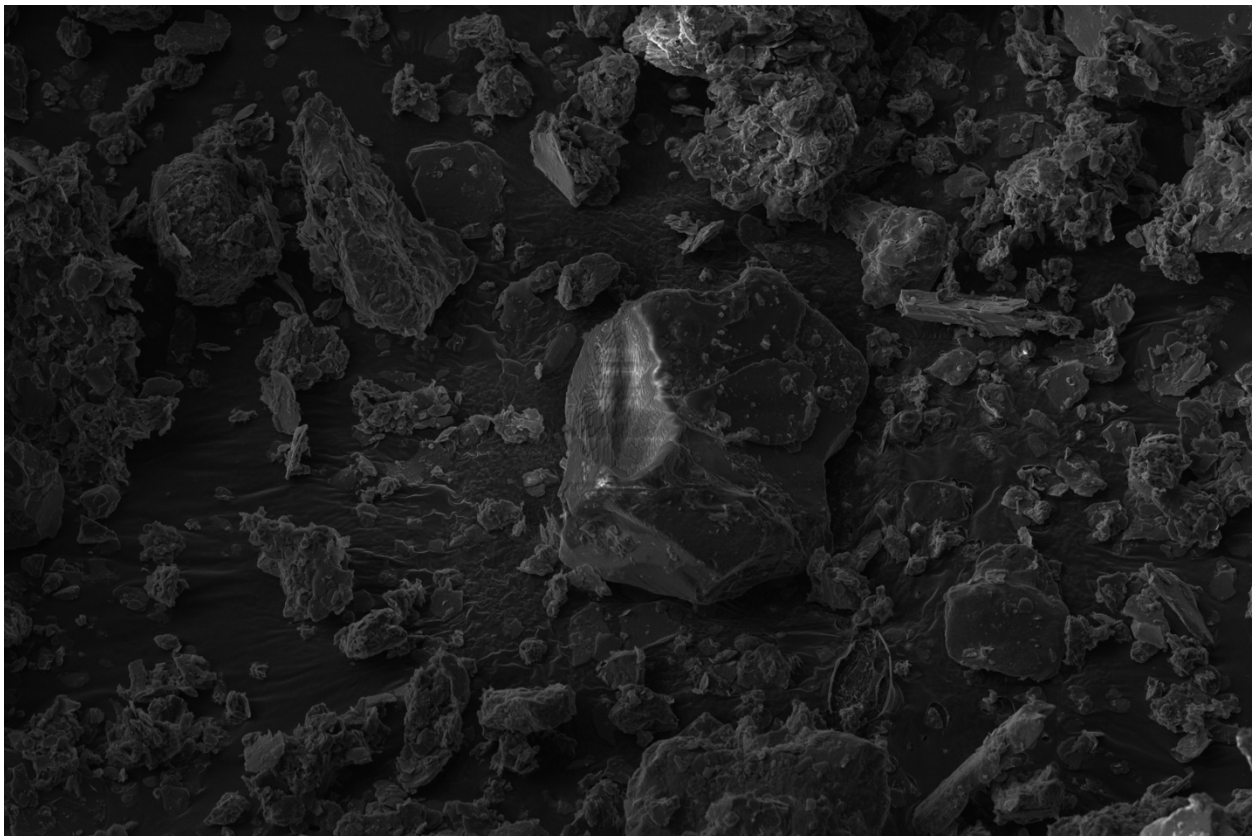
Kate Montgomery, *Full of fear + Fatherless* (detail), 2025. Hair; an excerpt taken from my father's handwritten poetry, milled into a single strand of my hair using a Focused Ion Beam, ~87 micrometer (μm) x ~14mm

Full of fear + Fatherless

41

⁴¹ A line extracted from my father's poem entitled 1941 (*The Start*), which I then engraved into a single strand of my hair

On a single grain of soil taken from his grave, I engrave a soundwave of both of our voices singing the same song.



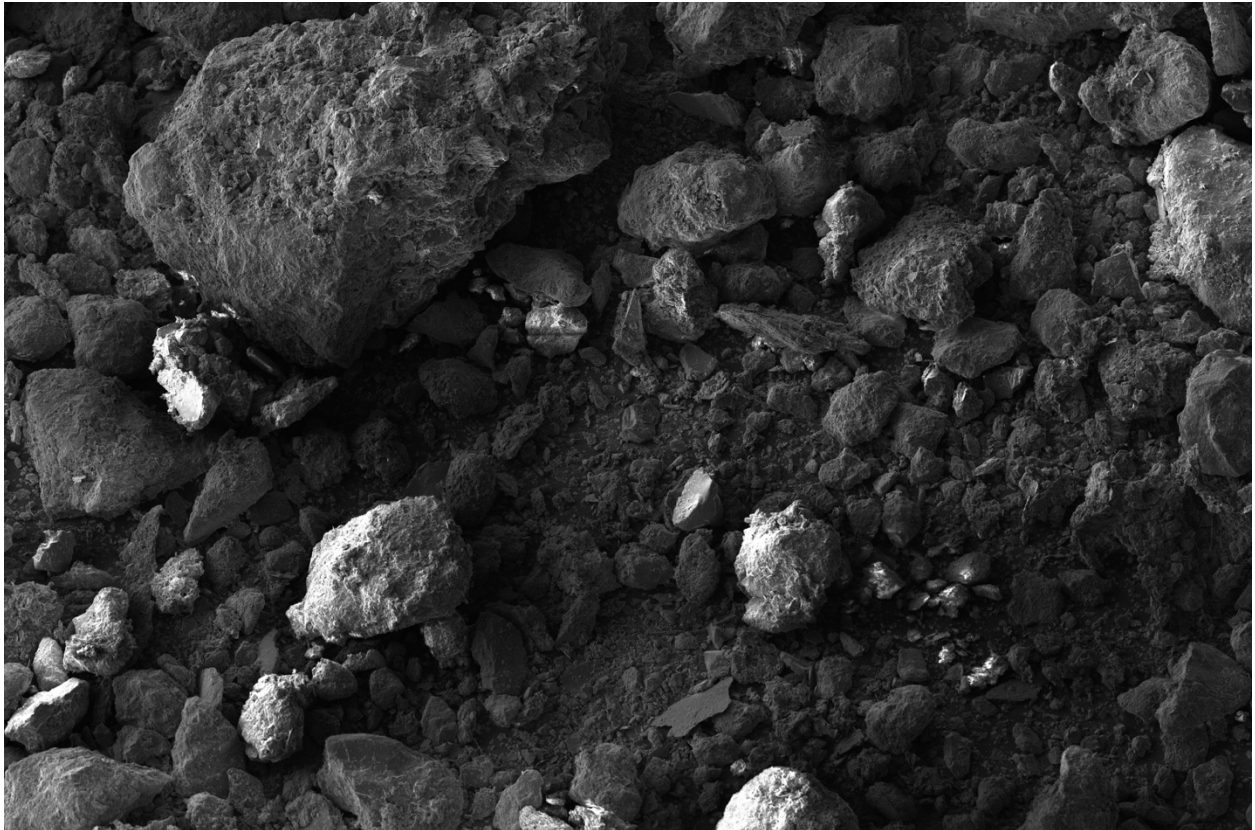
Kate Montgomery, *Duet* (detail), 2025. Grave soil; a soundwave of my father and I singing the same song, engraved on a speck of his grave soil using a Focused Ion Beam, ~87 micrometer (μm) x ~5mm

I then use the microscope to plunge into the depths created by the beam, marveling as I zoom out at how a sample of grave soil smaller than the very tip of my little finger resembles

a quarry,

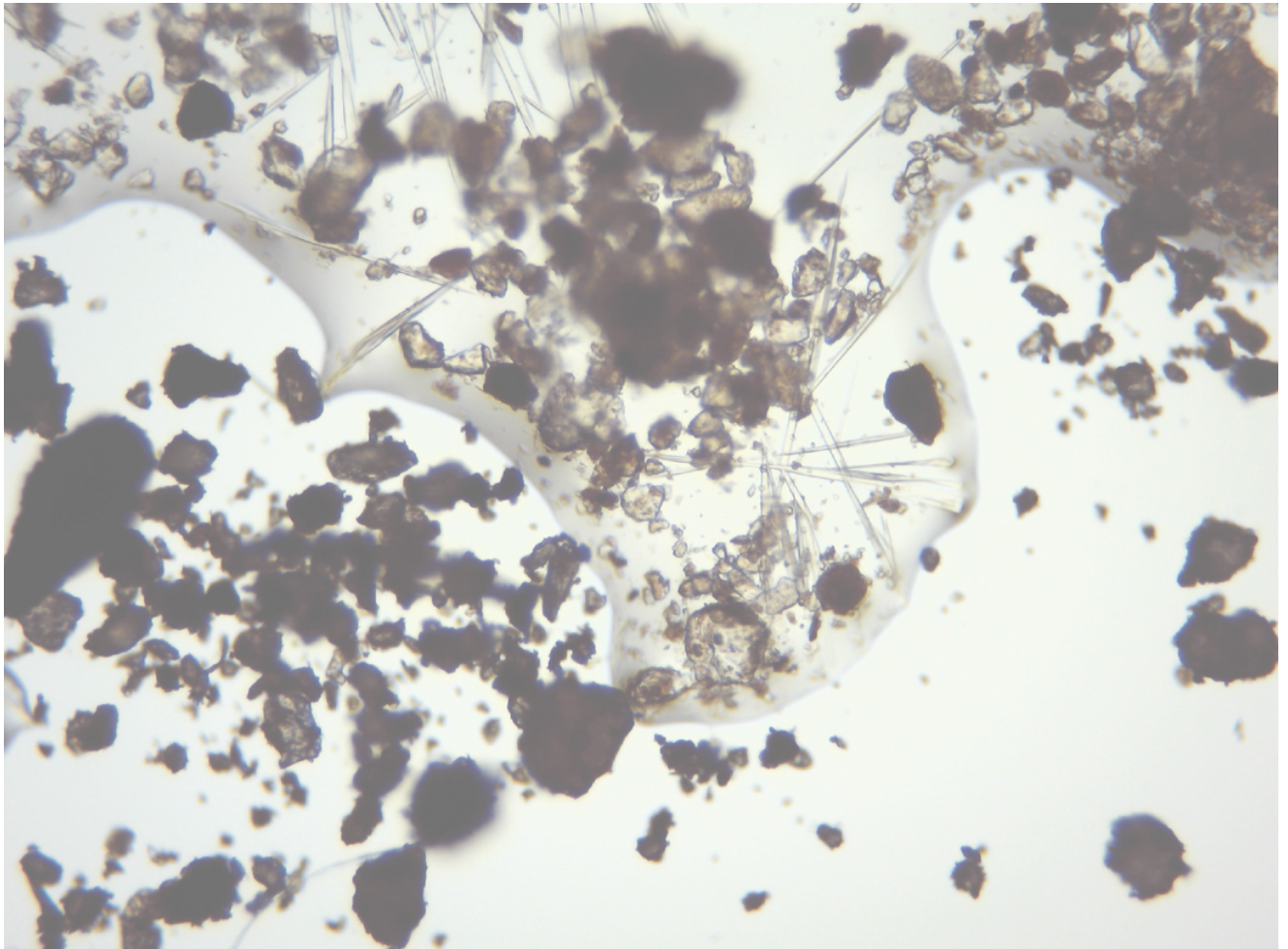
a mountain,

home.



Kate Montgomery, *Duet* (detail), 2025. Grave soil; a soundwave of my father and I singing the same song, engraved on a speck of his grave soil using a Focused Ion Beam, ~87 micrometer (μm) x ~5mm

I introduce a drop of crystalline liquid to his grave soil,
and watch
as worlds
collide.



Kate Montgomery, still image taken from *I am Digging to the Other Side of the Earth: A Series of Microscopic Epistolaries*, 2025. Full HD video, resolution 1080p, duration 54m 51s

Grief takes time



Kate Montgomery, *Grief Takes Time*, 2025. Hair; an excerpt taken from my father's handwritten poetry, milled into a single strand of my hair using a Focused Ion Beam, ~87 micrometer (μm) x ~14mm.

_____LETTER TO MY FATHER'S ATOMS_____

In Abercarn

You melt

And burrow

Bore through

You escape.

A vast expanse lies ahead

You are free...

You scatter

like ants

from poisoned walls

into fertile soil

Too quick to keep you.

I cannot keep you.

I could never keep you,
you would not be kept.

Dynamic strategies

Ensure your eternal survival

Transforming

beyond

what I knew you to be

Beyond your own wildest dreams

You are everywhere.

You are dust carried away in a powerful waterfall,

not knowing in which direction the river will take you

You're a drop in a dissipating fog,

settling onto the wing of a starling engaged in a great murmuration

You're a flurry of pollen swept up in the winds of an ominous storm

You're a lightning strike on a great Welsh yew

You are scorched earth below

a delicate filament of a cirrus cloud, slowly forming ice crystals

That tumble down

And seep into the soil

Where seeds

are growing.

.....
.....
PAST.....
PRESENT.....
FUTURE.....
..... TIME
..... SPACE
.....
.....

I look back to deep time,

where I see

you form, deconstruct, and reform

relentlessly.

You are glacial ice

Moving at great speeds

carving out coastlines

then melting back

into

the Earth.

You are mycelial hyphae,

delicately threading your way through cretaceous soil

You are rough, red ochre,

staining neolithic bones

You are iron molecules

flowing through the bloodstream of a prehistoric fish

You are gas and dust

blown out from the dense core of a first-generation star

You are cosmic dawn.

As the world turns, I won't forget you.

The 'you' you once formed,

fragmented.

Evidence that you once existed:

like a comet's orbit in space.

Eccentric and irregular,

Drawn towards aphelion.

Leaving only a thin trail of dust and rubble

burning

in the night sky.

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- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
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Dad and I, ~1988

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²⁴ Image credit: ESA/Webb, NASA & CSA, G. Gozaliasl, A. Koekemoer, M. Franco, and the COSMOS-Web team

²⁵ Schrijver, K., & Schrijver, I. (2015). *Living with the Stars : How the Human Body is Connected to the Life Cycles of the Earth, the Planets, and the Stars* (First edition.). Oxford University Press.

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²⁹ Footnote without citation

³⁰ Lucretius Carus, Titus. *Lucretius On the Nature of Things. : A Philosophical Poem in Six Books, Literally Tr. into English Prose*. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1886.

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³⁷ Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), 25

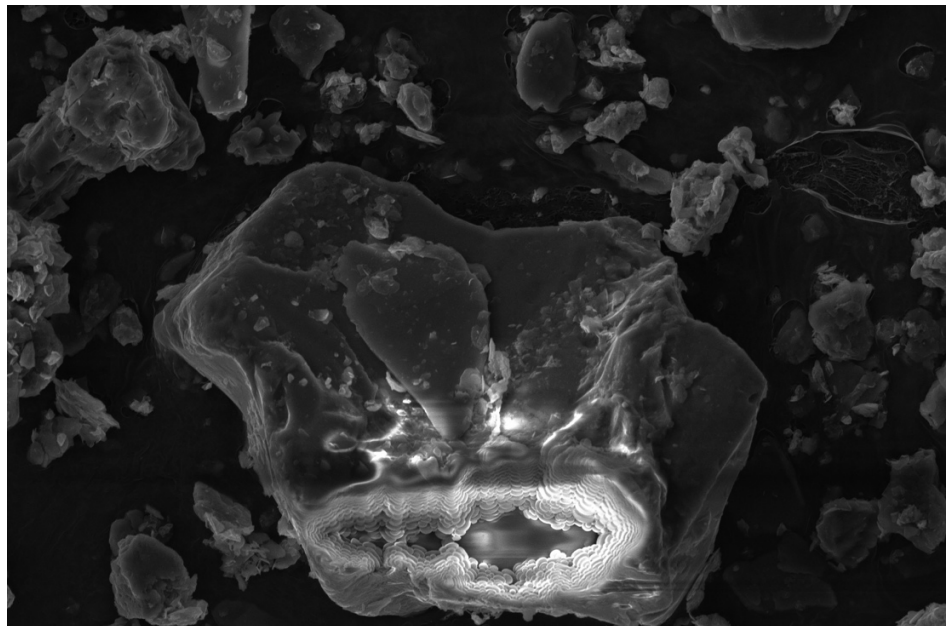
³⁸ Amy Sillman, "Drawing in the Continuous Present," lecture presented at the Menil Collection, Houston, TX, January 13, 2017, organized by the American Academy in Rome.

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⁴⁰ Renken, Sophie. "The Performativity of Hair in Victorian Mourning Jewellery." *The Coalition of Master's Scholars on Material Culture*, June 4, 2021.

⁴¹ Footnote without citation

⁴² Cutler, Ivor (as part of the Ivor Cutler Trio). "*I'm Going in a Field*." *Ludo*, EMI, 1967.



Kate Montgomery, *Duet* (detail), 2025. Grave soil; a soundwave of my father and I singing the same song, engraved on a speck of his grave soil using a Focused Ion Beam, ~87 micrometer (µm) x ~5mm

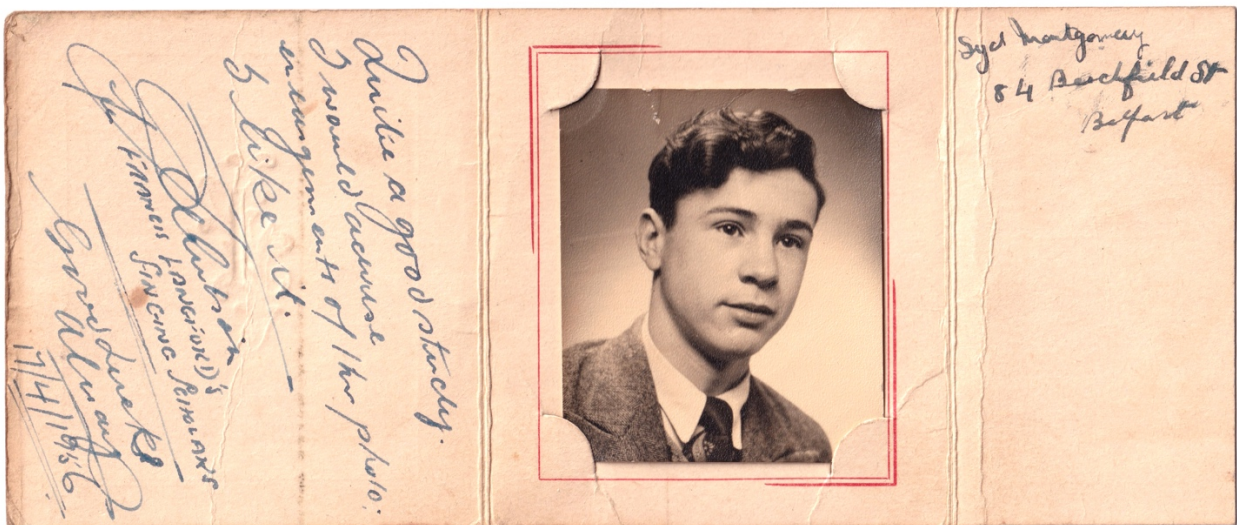
I'm going in a field
I'm going in a field
I'm going in a field to lie down

I'll lie beside the grass
I'll lie beside the grass
I'll lie beside the green grass

I'm going in a field
I'm going in a field
I'm going in a field to lie down

Yellow flower in the grass
Yellow flower in the grass

I'm going in a field
I'm going in a field
I'm going in a field to lie down⁴²



A photograph from my father's archive, a portrait taken in 1956 when he was 15 years old by a Belfast photographer. That is his handwriting on the right-hand side.

⁴² Cutler, Ivor (as part of the Ivor Cutler Trio). "I'm Going in a Field." Ludo, EMI, 1967.