

# Portfolio of recent work

Rishin Singh

## the silence of floorboards (2018)

installation; tree, non-human animals, weather, flour, water, salt, yeast, dried fruit, fishing line, text; dimensions variable



(installation view, East of Elsewhere, Berlin)

A poem, the letters of which are baked bread sculptures, is hung in a tree. As they turn in the breeze and are disturbed by hungry birds, squirrels, and other small animals, the letters constantly rearrange themselves, reconfiguring semiotic meaning and visual form.

Time and the elements eventually not so much destroy as reconstitute the work, dispersing the material further into the world in the stomachs of animals which is later excreted elsewhere, and breaking down – degrading into the earth as parts of the eaten-away letters fall to the ground.

the silence of  
floorboards  
echoes your departure

The poem can be read simultaneously as a domestic love poem – a familiar statement of loss from one person to another with whom they share (or had shared) a home; and as a human’s reflection on our relationship with trees – they exist for themselves, until we cut them down and turn their bodies to use for ourselves. That the poem itself will be hung in a tree, and will even-

tually morph and then disappear through the actions of birds and other animals, is an active level of irony but one which relies on the agency of other living beings besides me as the work’s creator.

*the silence of floorboards* is a sacrifice offered to the park in which it is installed, an artwork, the form, semiotic meaning, and longevity of which are left to the whim of the park’s non-human inhabitants. However, this can be understood as a futile gesture. The poem’s lament of the loss of both lover and tree is impotent in the face of the varying magnitudes of loss. Perhaps the lover is leaving only temporarily, but once the tree is cut down it is dead. Furthermore, the poem does not address the tree in which it is installed – planted there for the pleasure of the city’s inhabitants – but a meta-tree, one that represents all the trees in all the forests which are preserved not for their own sake, but for human use either in their living form, or else in their potential use as building or decorative materials. The exchange – the non-preservation of an artwork for the destruction of living trees – is an unequal one.





**remember when we will? [22.8.18] (2018)**

sculpture; permanent marker on photograph, nails, text;  
300cm x 200cm (variable)



(installation view, East of Elsewhere, Berlin)



To take a photograph is to reinforce to the photographer the significance of the time and place of its capture, just as a written account of that same time and place does for the diarist. Cutting up one's photographs or diary is a cathartic act usually performed to exorcise that time and place, or the person/people therein, from one's memory, to deny what was once so significant- as if to expunge the object were to wipe its correspondent memory.

In *remember when we will?* (22.8.18), these dialectically opposed actions exist simultaneously: a photograph, with its correlating diary entry written on its reverse side, has been cut up, however rather than destroying the image and the text, they are expanded to a size greater than their original. The object is twisted and intertwined with itself, offering to the viewer multiple perspectives of the image and description, allowed to intersect with itself at different points in time and space.

What is exhibited is not a memory itself, but a process of recreation. To show a captured time and space in multiple points of time and space existing simultaneously in

the 'present time' of the gallery is to demonstrate that memory is not an act of recall, but of invention. To preserve a memory is to engage in an ongoing process of narrating it, therefore the value in preserving memory is in the rituals of recreating it, whether they be individual or communal. Folklore, mythology, religious holidays, family traditions, and the music, dance, and object making within oral cultures are all other examples of this phenomenon.

The viewer is invited to participate in such narration. They are blind to the work's 'original' image and text, but are encouraged to invent their own version. The signified meanings of form, colour, and language (including its own forms) within the work are ambiguous, and therefore can be described from different perspectives in time and space relative to each viewer. Finally, the form of the sculpture itself is mutable. It is installed and given shape, using thumbtacks, directly onto the gallery wall in every iteration of its presentation, and so therefore, like the slippery nature of its subtext, never twice takes the same shape.

## Treephones (2017)

performance/installation; polyurethane earplugs, found sticks and twigs; dimensions variable



The Artist collects tree twigs from all across the city in which the work is to be exhibited. In the gallery he assembles them into pairs of 'organic headphones' - Treephones - by affixing them to polyurethane earplugs. The Treephones are displayed and available for participants to take and wear. Each pair of Treephones are distinctive pieces of site-specific music co-composed with the participant who navigates the city, their footsteps and the wind exciting the leaves, creating vibrations which are turned into sound waves: a personalised piece of music created by the environment and the participant.

Participants are encouraged to enter the exhibition space, select a pair of Treephones and explore the surrounding area. When inserted into the ear, the polyurethane earplugs close the wearer off to outside sound, leaving the vibrations of the twigs' leaves from the wind and the wearers' footsteps to create an organic, site specific music.

Participants can also choose to take a map of the local area, on which the artist has drawn some suggested walking routes which could be considered interesting compositions - exploiting different combinations of exposure to the wind, textures of the ground, etc which all influence the piece of music that the participant and their Treephones create together. Participants can, of course, choose to explore the area with their Treephones without the guidance of a map.

During the time of the performance/installation, notions of 'private' and 'public' spaces are intentionally confused. Increasingly this century, the common habitus of people walking in public is to be wearing headphones, listening to music, cut off from their environment and other people. This work similarly cuts people off from others, yet connects them intimately with their environment. However, even this alienation is called into question as one could argue that there would exist a point of recognition (empathy) between people seeing others also wearing the Treephones, knowing that they too are co-composing their own private music.

Passers-by are confronted with something approaching a spectacle - seemingly normal people walking around with twigs sticking out of their ears. However the spectacular nature of the work is diminished once one considers that each person wearing a pair of Treephones is co-composing their own piece of music with the twigs and their movement through the environment: an active, sensual experience far beyond simple, passive consumption.

**Excerpt from Room Sheet:**

*One need not take and wear a pair of Treephones in order to experience the sound of the work, as each pair of Treephones already visually suggests an individual piece of music expressed through their shape and texture. Each pair exist as potential music.*

*In viewing and participating in the work, one is required to relinquish, in part, our Anthropocentrism and abandon ourselves to 'plant agency', for we have a lot to learn from the nonhuman inhabitants of this planet which we humans seem so determined in destroying.*

*The work is an exploration of the overlooked sounds and beauty of a particular place at a particular time, and a celebration of the otherwise ignored material of fallen twigs, sticks and leaves.*







**Knowing all by the mastery of one (2016)**

Four photographic prints on paper; each 59.4 x 84.1cm







(installation view, [un-stable.eu](http://un-stable.eu), Kunsthalle am Hamburger Platz, Berlin; photos courtesy Anna Bernhardt)

The series derives its name from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century essay on Linguistics by Pierre Besnier *A philosophical essay for the reunion of the languages, or, the art of knowing all by the mastery of one.*

As an immigrant twice-over, I am interested in how the process of crossing physical borders is embodied - by those who cross - through the need to learn new languages. It is almost as if once a person has crossed a border, there takes place a period of renovation of their interior architecture - of the ears (to listen), of the eyes and hands (to read and write), and of the mouth (to speak).

It is the changing of the architecture of the mouth in the face of *Fortress Europe* that my photo series seeks to problematise. While it is vital to our survival as immigrants to learn the native language of our new homes, by emphasising the almost bondage-like retraining which that sensual organ - the tongue - engages in to do this, in *Knowing all by the mastery of one* I want to generate conversations around the aspects of control and sensuality that make up much of the fabric of the lives of immigrants when attempting to assimilate into a new culture.

## Signaesthesia (2018)

acrylic paint on cardboard; series, each work 70cm x 100cm

Hex colours (eg. #4274f4) are primarily browser-based computer generated colours. In text form, they are written representations of colours.

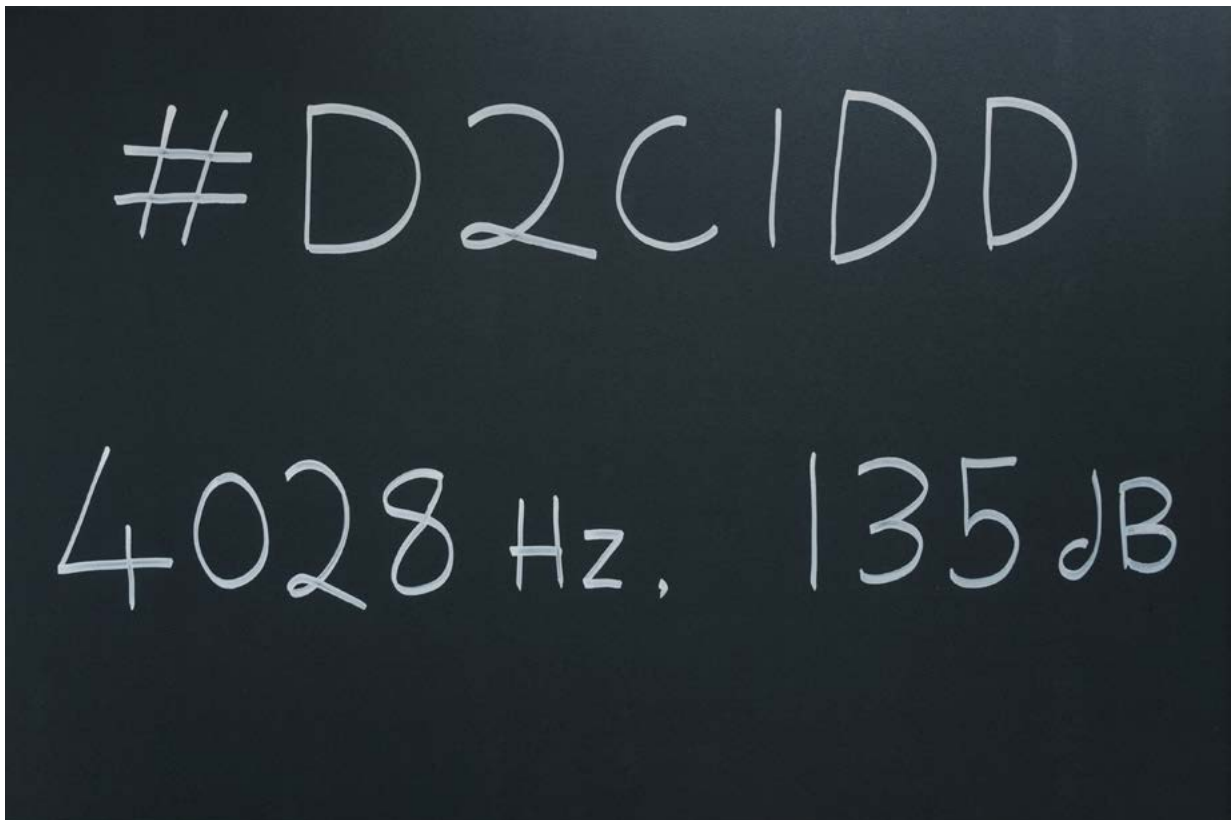
The numbers given in Herz and Decibels (dB) are a written representation of the frequency (pitch) and volume, in Decibels, of a Sine Tone which is a pure tone without harmonics.

Both codes are text representations of primarily computer generated elements. In painting them in stark white on black, with the vagaries of the human hand clearly

visible, each work creates a form of silence forged between languages without computerised translation, and viewers without computer-aided generation.

A computer is capable of performing the synaesthetic leap of seeing colour and hearing sound in the text but we humans cannot. The viewer can perceive the sign but not the signified. Occupying the silent space of impossible-to-imagine colour and sound are then just the aesthetics of white symbols painted in a human hand on black cardboard.

Pictured are two works from the series.



#C3F7F4

126 Hz, 9 dB

## Numbers Descending (2016)

An ongoing performance work in which one million breaths are counted aloud backwards



(courtesy of Nahmad Projects, London. Photo Benedict Johnson)

In this work, the viewer is invited to observe the performer expiring. That is all.

The breath – prana, or life-force – is described in language. However, given the concentration required in the performance, inevitably the performer will skip or repeat some numbers. The insufficiency of language to describe our shared expiration is exposed.

*Sit on a chair facing the audience. Place your hands in your lap. Keep your eyes open and focused on a point somewhere amongst the feet of the audience members. Breathe calmly.*

*Count your breaths aloud, backwards from One Million to Zero. Carry on regardless of any mistakes in counting.*

*As this task will take a very long time, it can be carried out over a series of performances across a number of years. In this case, in the following iterations of the performance begin counting from the number one below the number that ended the previous performance.*

*The work ends either when the performer reaches Zero or when he dies – whichever occurs first.*

(Text from the exhibition catalogue  
**I am NOT Tino Seghal:  
Numbers Descending** , Rishin Singh)

## Eros Thanatos (2015)

Mixed media - helium, latex balloons, blu-tack, nails.





The space, a white room, is filled with microcosms of itself - semi-transparent white helium balloons and its negative potential - row upon row of sharp nails affixed to the floor.

The viewer is presented with the potentiality of sound. One can see the composition in its entirety: eventually the helium will seep out of each balloon causing it to float to the ground and either burst on a nail, or not. With any element of surprise or uncertainty dispensed with, all that is left for the viewer is to attend to the process of balloons stationary and in motion - small units of the space shifting, causing the overall configuration of the space to be always, gently, in flux.

As the balloons lose their buoyancy and shrink, eventually floating to the ground, the helium seeps out of them and into the space, meaning that the space still holds the same material, but in a different form.

Equally part of this ecosystem is the viewer whose movements entering, exiting and walking through the space, as well as their very breathing, create waves of air which alter the fragile architecture of the space.

## A Twitcher's guide to Prenzlauer Berg (2015)

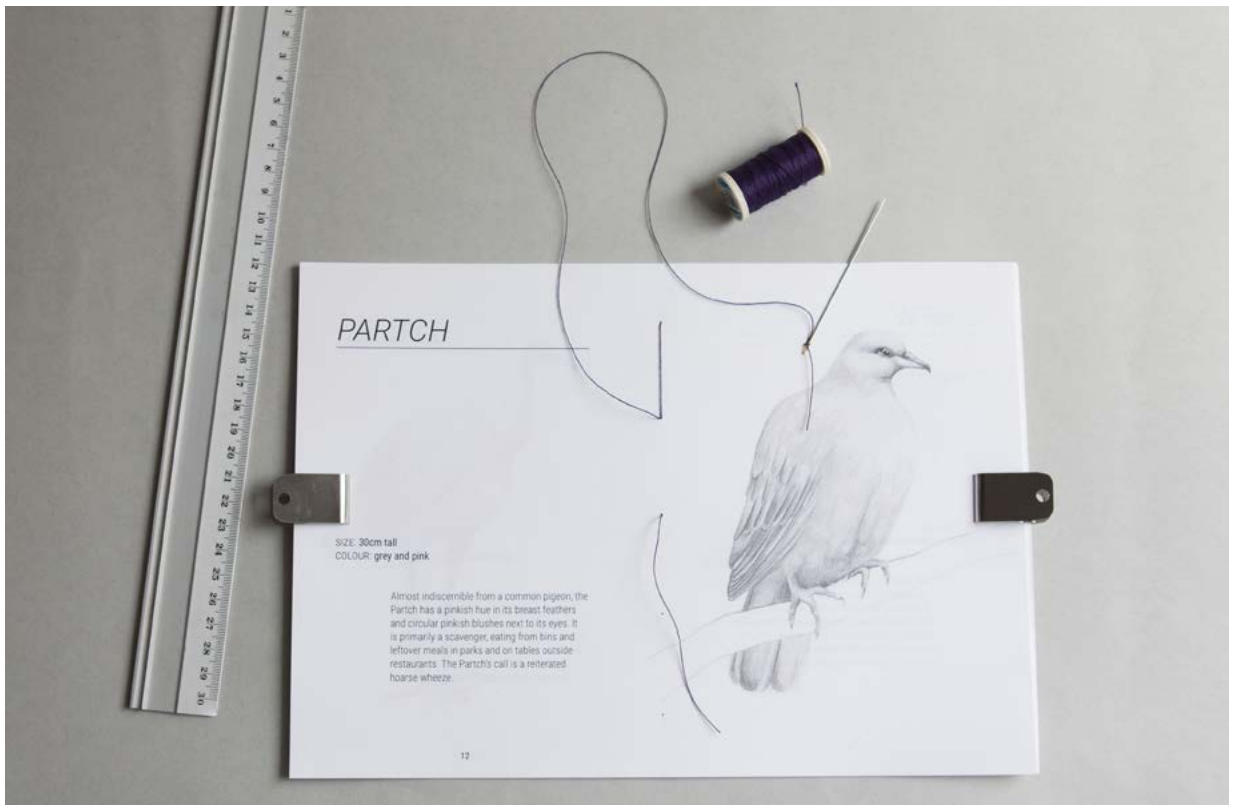
Mixed media - pencil drawings, text, paper, thread.

Illustrations and Design :: Anna Bernhardt



a twitcher's guide to prenzlauer berg is a zine which gives life to imaginary bird names quoted in Varieties of Audio Mimesis: Musical Evocations of Landscape by Allen S. Weiss (Errant Bodies Press).

The zine functions as a form of a map. Readers navigate a relatively small area - Prenzlauer Berg - guided by drawings and descriptions of the habitat and calls of birds that don't in reality exist. In providing false sonic and visual directions, the work asks the question of its readers *what is encountered when one is looking for something that doesn't exist?*



## Yantra

A Yantra is a Tantric object which focusses the user's meditation. Yantras can also be used as conduits for the worship of gods - their forms, and the mantras with which they are imbued, are specific to different deities.

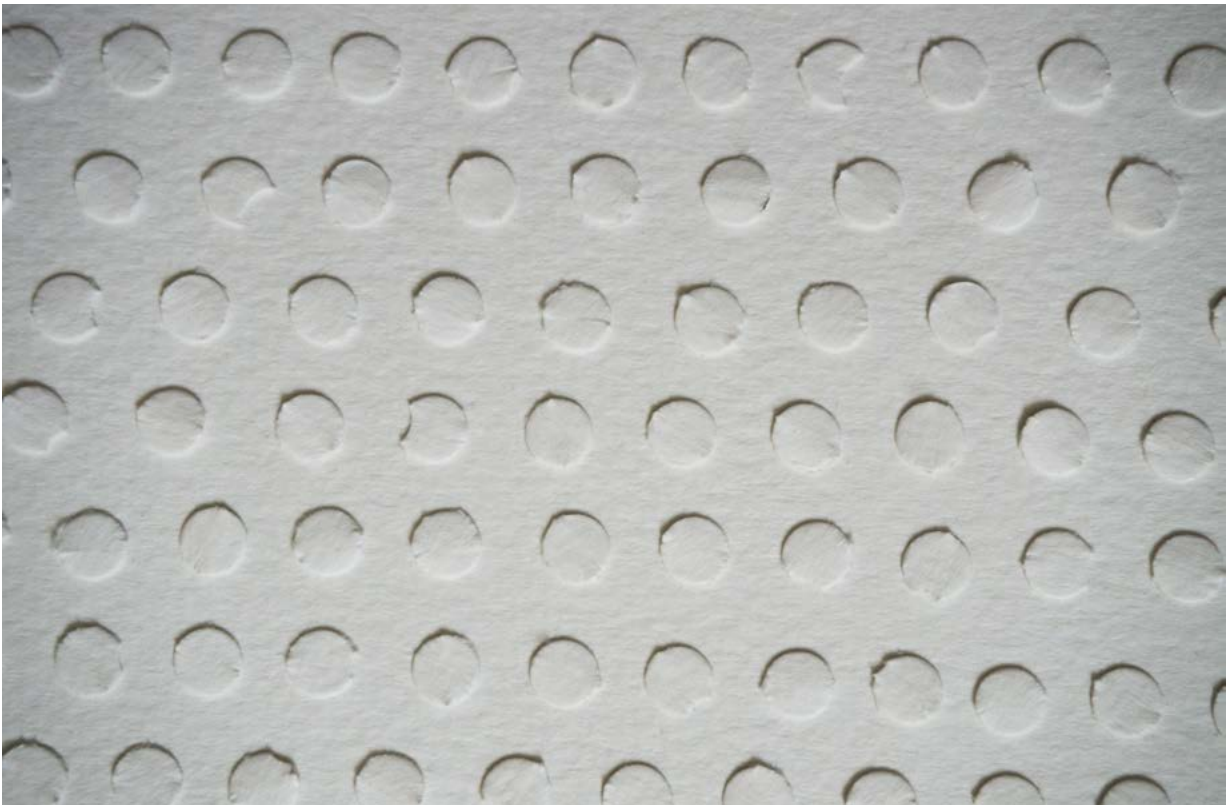
In my work I use Yantra to communicate in two directions: towards contemporary art in order to encourage the viewer to slow down,

contemplate and reflect on images, as opposed to the frantic consumption of images encouraged by contemporary exhibitions and online art platforms; and towards the religious traditions which use Yantra, in order to inject critical perspectives springing from relationships between colour, form, and material to challenge conservative and reactionary currents within those traditions, of which I am a part.

### **(yantra) Spelled in an Alphabet lost to Time (2017)**

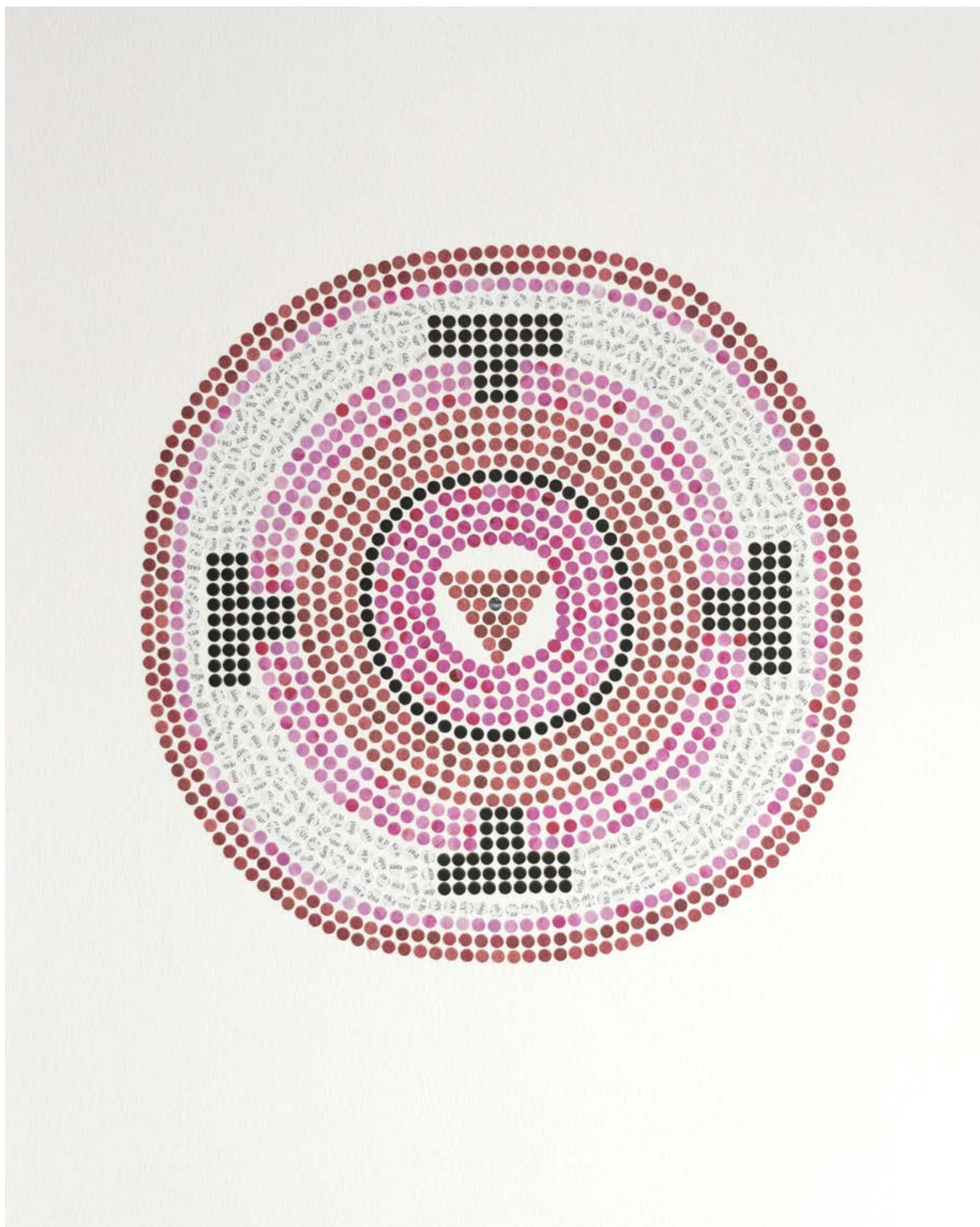
Collage; paper punch-outs on paper, 42cm x 29.7cm

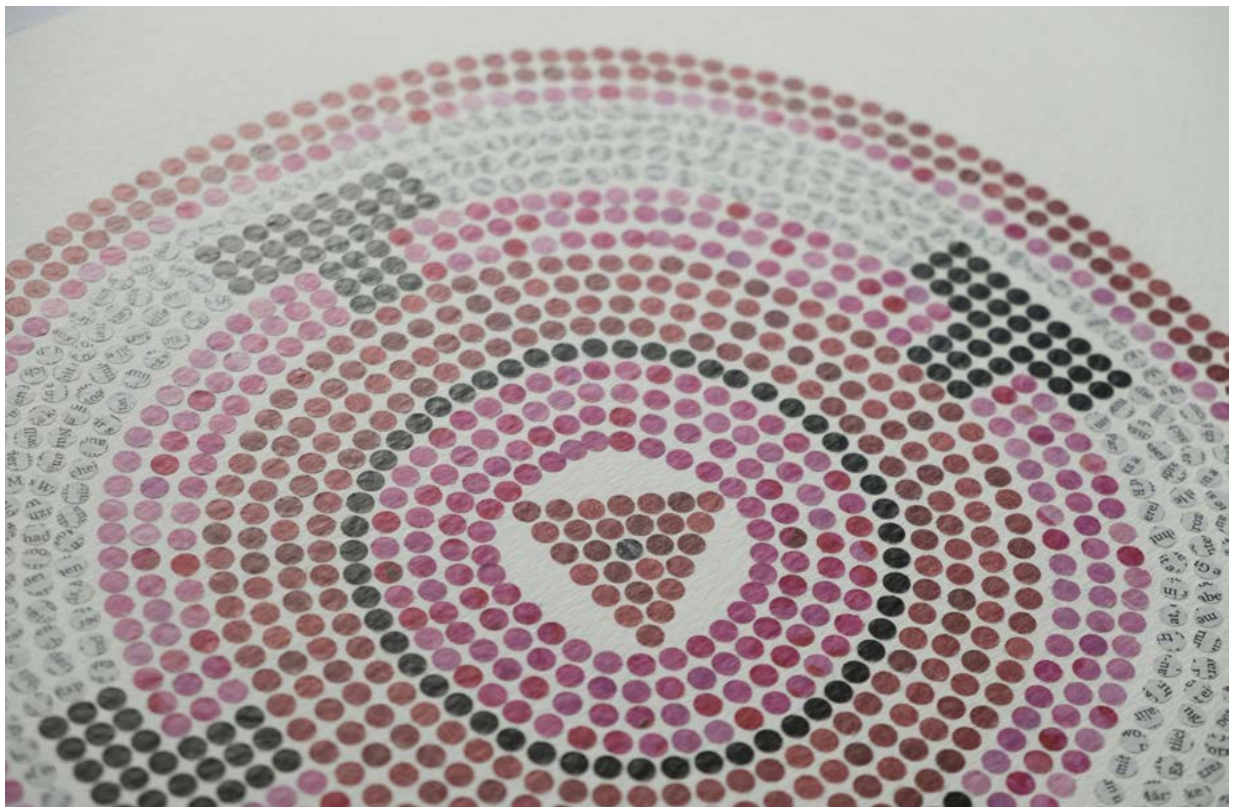
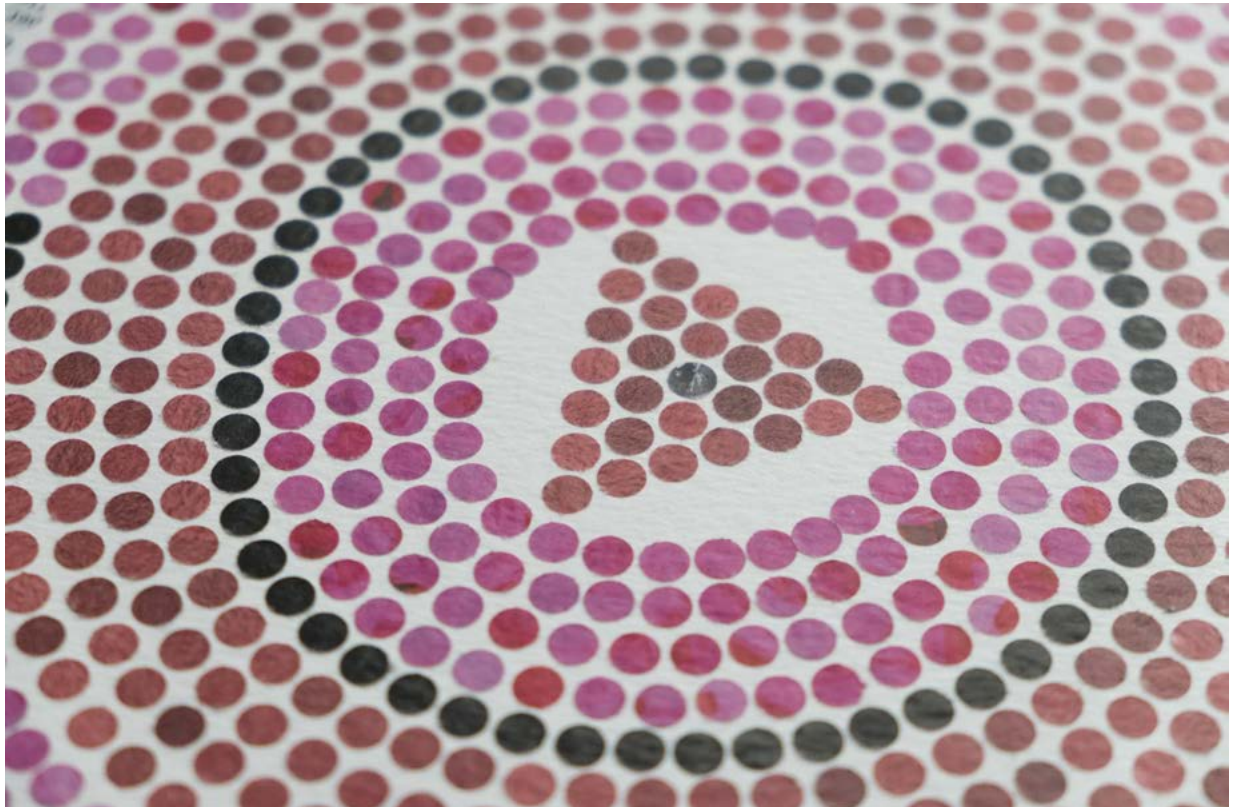




## Young Gods yantra (Cate Blanchett) (2017)

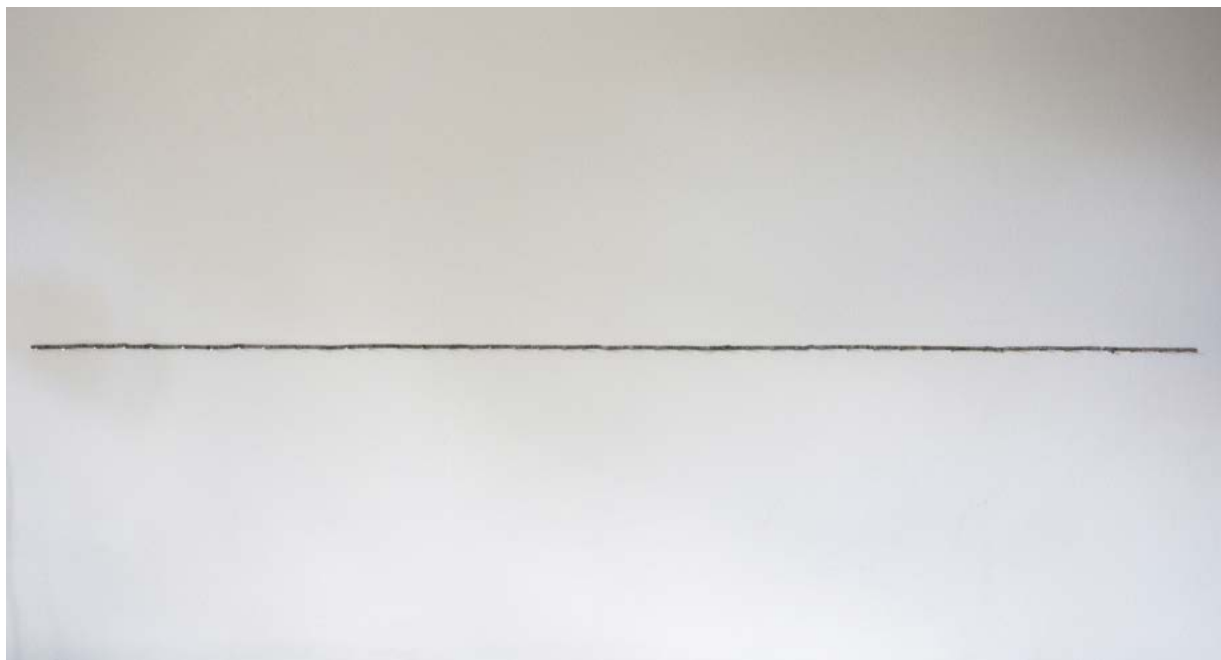
Collage; magazine punch-outs on paper, 42cm x 29.7cm





## Entropia yantra (marie claire) (2017)

sculpture; magazine punch-outs and glue, 200cm x 3cm x 3cm







## Holy vowels yantra (2018)

cotton thread and fabric; 94cm x 148cm

All four words are simultaneously holy and bodily, sewn in shades of pink which evoke human insides and flesh. Sewing is a craft both domestic and religious – Buddhism, Orthodox Christianity, and Catholicism among others feature sewn patterns into vestments which represent authority and convey holy powers.

In replacing the vowel in each word with another symbol, the power of that word is thought to be neutralised. The words can be written anywhere without causing offence, and documents with 'g-d' written on them can be disposed of by religious Jews without disrespecting one of the names of God.

The use of very similar shades of pink in both the thread and fabric intentionally quietens the impact of these otherwise bold and explicit words, and means that

the viewer must actively search for them. From afar, the sewn words appear only as disturbances to the texture of the fabric, but through participation in attending to the work the viewer uncovers the words and their attempted censorship.

Although the image of each word changes through the vowel replacement, the sound of it in our mind's ear when read, as well as our understanding of the word, remains the same. *Holy vowels yantra* plays with this tension between deliberately silenced words, and the viewer's automatic 'sounding out' of this silence, effectively neutralising it through self-completion of the words. The work is meditative in its construction, and guides the viewer in such reflection on the impotent nature of censorship, emanating from either religious or secular authorities, when faced with our own creative faculties.





## Haiku for The City and The Tower (2017)

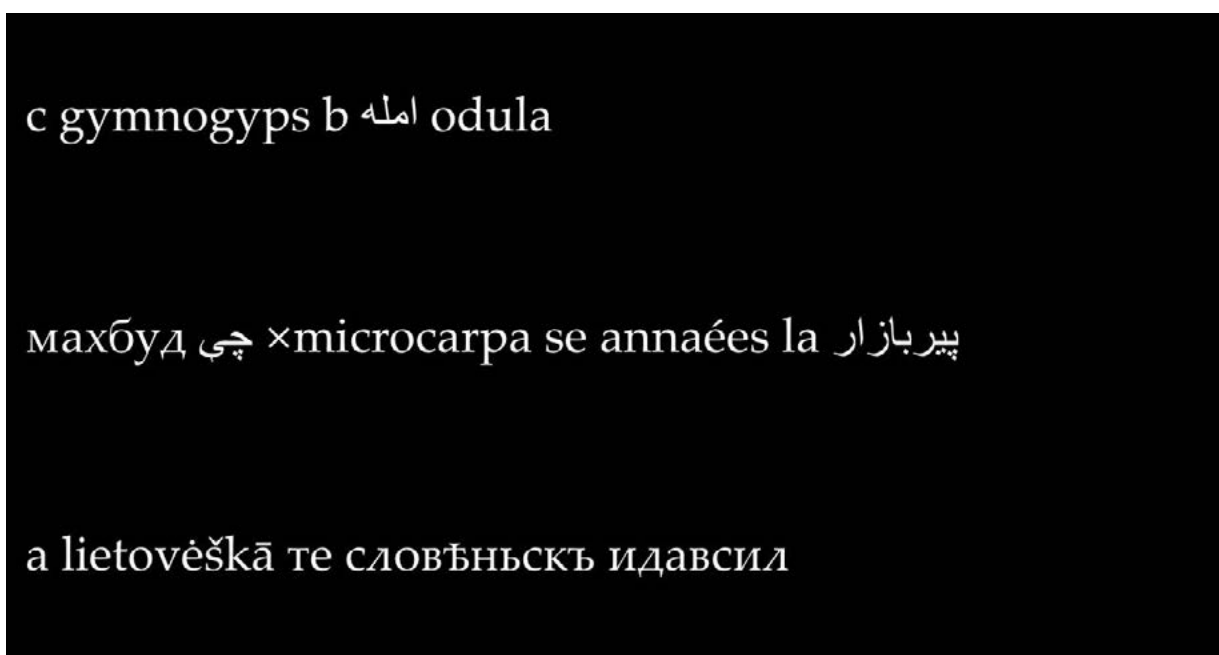
Internet-based video installation, duration infinite

'The City and The Tower' is the Old Testament name for the Tower of Babel. It is written that at that time all the people on Earth spoke the same language, and travelled to a plain in Shinar, where they built a tower tall enough to reach Heaven. According to the myth God, angrily observing this, confounded their speech so that they could not understand each other, and scattered the different peoples across the Earth.

*Haiku for The City and The Tower* automatically generates and displays a false haiku (line structure: 5 words, 7 words, 5 words, instead of 5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables) every 2 minutes, selecting words at random from all the writing systems of human languages existing on the Internet.

The work complicates the utopian idea of unfettered communication, which the Internet is said to deliver, and transforms sonic and communicative symbols into pure imagery. Even if a particular multilingual viewer were versed in tens of languages, given the number of extant languages and writing systems on the Internet, each haiku remains sonically and meaningfully unintelligible.

Below are screenshots from the video installation:



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## All the photographs ever taken (2018)

installation; text, wire, nails; 95cm x 50cm

*All the photographs ever taken* is one of an ongoing series of fragile and restrained text-images invoking things and concepts that are difficult to imagine. Each work in the series functions as a Koan – the text-image on the wall (which, in its restraint, does not leap out at the viewer) provokes the viewer's imagination to conjure its own

difficult-to-grasp images in response, by-passing the logic of language and instead contemplating a free-flow of imagined images.

Other works in the series include the history of *the philosophy of history, a good story poorly told, and faster than the speed of thought.*

