



darkness
VISIBLE

Simone Couto

This book is about dying.
It is also about being born.

The eternal return to the other:
The forgotten self.

WORKING WITH NATURE

One of the greatest lessons I have learned in my art practice is that decisions don't have to make sense a priori. One idea is a door opening to several others. The most significant gift of being an artist is *freedom*, the power to exercise choice without constraints.

This sense of autonomy has paved my journey through learning about the Icelandic landscape and creating *Darkness Visible*. A few years ago, a dear friend and former professor Kathy Brew invited me to join her at the Tibet House in NY to see monks making a mandala. She knew I loved sand, lines, and colors. I spent a week feeding the monks with croissants and watching their patient hands pour natural crushed dyed stones into a geometrical drawing just to dismantle it eventually. I knew that an unusual investigation had just begun for me, one in which I would have to rely significantly on imagination to re-create new narratives of inhabiting and belonging.

The question that set everything in motion was purely speculative: Where on this Earth had a “sand mandala” just been made by forces of nature? At that point, I had been interested in the Fundamental Interaction Principles in physics and was creating short videos around NYC about them.

The process began by simply re-imagining co-existing in the site:

Speculating New Spaces: shift and relocation, engagement with landscape that is *situational rather than site-specific*. Body is contingent rather than subjected to time and distance.

Re-imagining Cosmic Space: cosmic as inconceivably vast, standing free of its relation to humans.

Volcanic Site: characterized for being a loop of constant change where dichotomies embedded in the Western culture that make clear distinctions between matter/mind, material/non-material, physical/psychological, inner/other force, construction/destruction, become irrelevant.

The Loop and the Change: of geological and geographical building and rebuilding happening independently of us.

Rethinking Space: inside versus outside, private engagement with nature versus expansion of the experience in public settings.

Improvisation: the artist as an improviser in space.

The next step was investigating topographic volcanic lines in my studio and using them as the foundation to paint mandalas before embarking in field trips. I spent many nights drawing and painting. They became meditative practices in preparation for Iceland.

Entering the landscape and performing required a new body-mind language. I was creating new possibilities: Aikido and Zen. Aikido is a physical and mental practice grounded in Zen. Fictionally, I was convinced that both shared some similarities with the mandala making and volcanology, such as the idea of circularity, energy rising from a center, lack of unchanging continuity, and lack of a stable core.

Aikido is the way of combining forces through the path of reciprocity. *Ai* means to “join together.” *Ki* is “energy, electricity, magnetism, or force.” *Do* is the “path,” the “Way of doing.” For two years, I learned Aikido's turning movements, controlled relaxation, the correct flow of joints, hips and shoulders, flexibility, balance, and endurance. In this philosophy, all life is constituted by *Ki*: breath and energy, a force that manifests in respiration and that can be felt circulating within the body (the Earth has lungs, too). Finally, I set myself to learn some of the basic principles of Butoh, such as dialogue with gravity, diving into the profound darkness of the body in order to perform in the gallery space.

Training my body and practicing Zazen collapsed the wall between my private life and my life as an artist. They were healing tools. This holistic approach to myself was the one I ultimately needed to engage with volcano Eyjafjallajökull and the area around it.

I went twice to Iceland. I explored its geography and geology. I listened to local stories and honored them in my first video. I met people, all incredibly lovely and helpful. Iceland is magnificent. I hiked looking for

flowers just rising from the ground. I drove on dirt roads (also called “F”roads) covered by volcanic ashes and crossed more than a dozen rivers. I skidded and spun and I ate licorice candies leaning on my jeep while sheep pastured serenely in the hills. The ultimate goal was to map out Eyjafjallajökull's surroundings, climb it, and see what was going on up there.

The wind, precipices, stones, ashes— they all exist independently of human perception and they exist on an equal footing with one another. Sometimes they whisper. Other times, they shout things in their beautiful language. They also fall into silence. Ironically, when I finally arrived at the volcanic canyon and stared at the desolate landscape, I sat and performed stillness. I was overpowered by the landscape. But the experience was empowering me as a woman. A year later, I climbed to the crater of Eyjafjallajökull. The walk was my performative gesture of dissolution of this project, sand being brushed away in the wind.

I was reading *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*, by William Styron at the time Kathy took me to see the making of Sand Mandala. The book was a memoir of the author's depression in the mid-1980s, a terrible illness I was dealing with on my own. Perhaps even more important than the exploration of the illness, Styron's *Darkness Visible* was about the eventual recovery from despair. Styron was saved by Johannes Brahms's *Alto Rhapsody Op. 53*, created for a set of verses from Goethe's *Harzreise im Winter*, as I was rescued by composing this particular work. In fact, my version of *Darkness Visible* originated from a personal and obscure place and was finally about the acceptance of chaos, universal change/transformation, and release.

It has been a magnificent journey of self trust and trust in the environment—that both of us, would each in their own ways give and take what was needed for this project to exist. A landscape such as Eyjafjallajökull is a *thing-in-itself* as well as a reminder of the possibility of the death of nature, the end of civilization, archiving, and memory beyond data. Our actions, no matter how small, do impact the planet we inhabit in this age of the Anthropocene. The critical question isn't how we simply heal ourselves when we step in nature but how we develop emotional and ecological awareness. We work with it in order to live and act on what we have done to ourselves and this earth.

Slow is Beautiful

For Victor and Henry,
My Beloved Sons

darkness
VISIBLE



DARKNESS VISIBLE

Written By Sofía Hernández

After some time of high seismic activity, in spring 2010, the volcano Eyjafjallajökull erupted, leaving most of the area of Thórsmörk (southern Iceland) covered by a veil of magma and ashes. Six years later, the artist Simone Couto traveled to Thórsmörk valley to explore and make a reflection about this recently devastated area. Whether seen through the lens of the personal or the universal, the land covered by ashes after the catastrophe can seem a desolate, even dead landscape, but also as the artist emphasizes— a tabula rasa where multiple re-beginnings are just arising.

Darkness Visible and *Fire Mountain of the Islands*, both video works are experiences of confrontation to the difficulties with this forbidding terrain, in physical and psychological ways.

Re-imagining an Earth beyond Kant's theories where there is no Correlationism or no being but the Earth-in-itself, or keeping close to Kant's ideas about the Sublime, the landscape in this project is no longer a comfortable retreat or a getaway, but a hostile environment which challenges body and mind, revealing at the same time the smallness of the subject and the greatness of his/her faculties.

Couto's proposal for this experience of asymmetrical powers is the dissolution of subjectivity into landscape. That's why Tibetan mandalas and the martial art of Aikido have a strong presence in this project. Smooth movement, flexible strength and conciliation with a hard environment are the key to favoring a re-birth from adversity.

Hidden Fire

CD: You can only have your answers when you think you can't get them anywhere else and you believe that your mind is already so hectic in specific ways that you try to find your answers and you hit places with dead ends.

S: Don't you think it's hard to find the answer when we live like this?

CD: Say that again?

S: Is it hard to take the time and think about the questions that are essential to life when one lives in such a rushed world?

CD: The answer is "what are you looking for?" If you are looking for a real and more profound answer, you will have the time to ask the question, no matter how busy you are because it depends on how much drive you have. If this is your last priority, you will never find time for it.

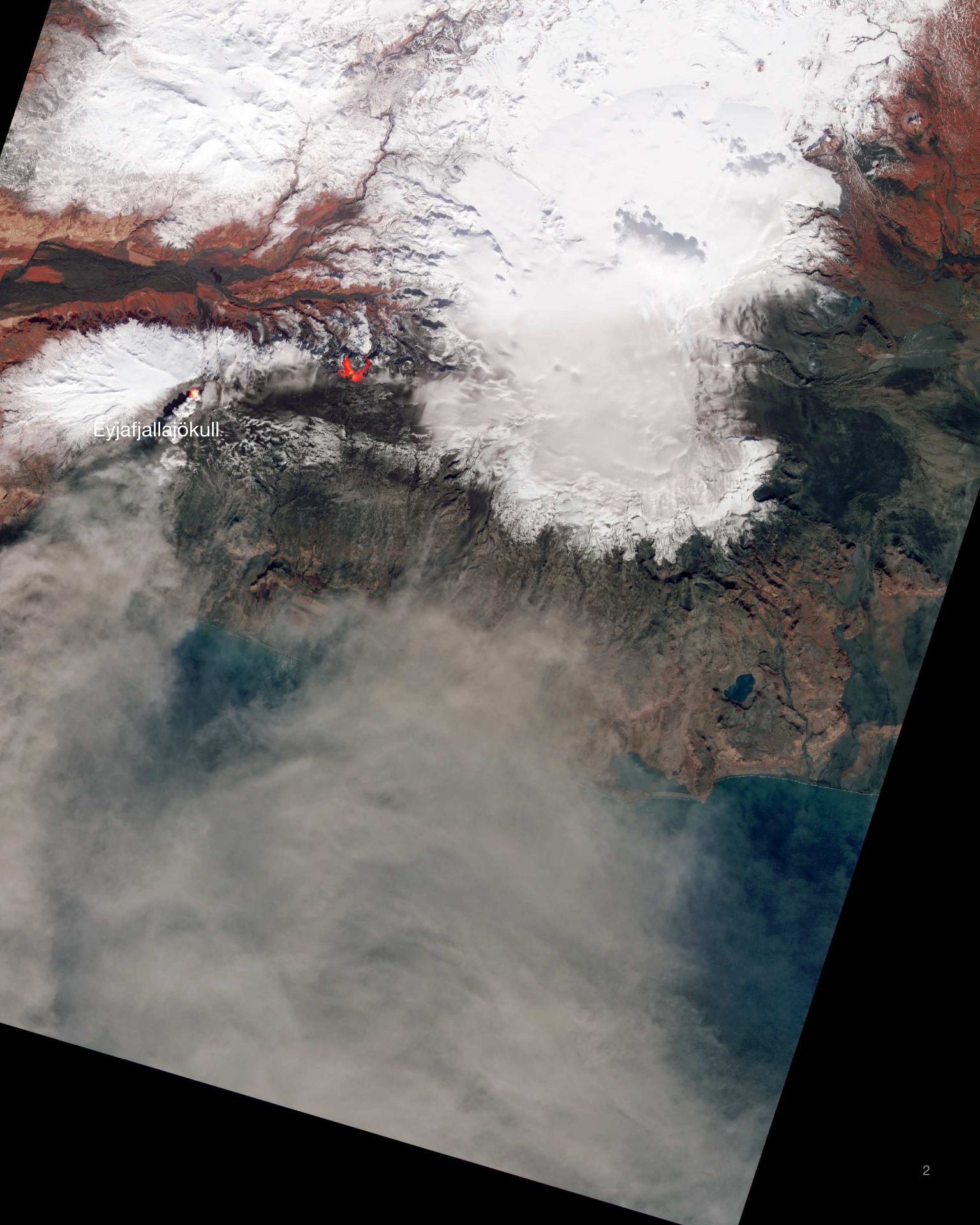
But if you say: "I must find it. Where should I look for it? I go this way, and I don't see it. I go that way, and there's nothing. But I must get enlightened in this lifetime." If you are passionate about your search, then, you climb a tall mountain. But if you just want to say I want to be happy... for the sake of happiness, I don't think you need to go anywhere. Happiness is a minor thing.

S:(laughs)

CD: I am not kidding! You don't have to go to Nepal, for example, for just happiness. There are many ways you can find it: you go to therapy; you try to earn more money.

Conversation between Couto and a NYC cab driver
on the way to Iceland. 2016





Eyjafjallajökull

Image: The advanced space-borne thermal emission and reflection radiometer (aster) on NASA's terra satellite acquired this image at 1:50 p.m. local time on April 19, 2010. The image shows both the eruption plume and the heat signature of lava at the volcano's summit, the site of a precursor eruption. The heat signature shows a rough estimate of temperature, with yellow being hottest and red coolest. The signature at Eyjafjallajökull is a concentrated circle without a river of lava. Aster observed the heat signature by recording thermal infrared radiation (energy) coming from the volcano. The rest of the image is made up of a combination of visible light and near-infrared light. Blue streams of water flow from the Eyjafjallajökull ice cap to the river.

Source

Icelandic Met Office (2010, April 19) *Magma Splatters Ejected*. Accessed April 20, 2010.

Klemetti, E. (2010, April 20) *Airspace begins to open as Eyjafjallajökull Calms Down*. Eruptions. Accessed April 20, 2010.

<https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov>

NASA image by Rob Simmon made with data courtesy of the NASA/GSFC/MITI/ERSDAC/JAROS, and the U.S./Japan ASTER Science Team.

Circle: Mandala is a compound word made up of *manda*, meaning “essence,” and *la* meaning “container” or “possessor.” It derives from ancient Indian beliefs in cosmic power entering the figure at the center of a sacred space.

Paradox: The paradox of the mandala is that while it is structured in a centered, symmetrical and directional mode, in the Hindu-Buddhist interpretation, it seeks to teach that “all things lack the independence and unchanging continuity that they seem to possess”[1]. It seeks to reveal the view of reality as “being without essence, without a stable core”[2]. The mandala construction is based on a philosophy that requires the acknowledgment of reality as *emptiness*.

Visualization of the Universe, and

The Sacred Space: A mandala is first and foremost a construction, a formal geometric pattern. The basic form of most mandalas is a square with four gates containing a circle with a center point, a sacred space, and primal source of all creation. It begins with the drawing of the design on the base. Monks measure out and draw the architectural lines using a straightedge ruler, compass, and white ink pen. Once the diagram is laid out, millions of grains of colored sand are applied to specific places on a flat surface. Work begins from the inside of the design outward. When eventually the mandala is completed, it is dismantled. Sand is swept

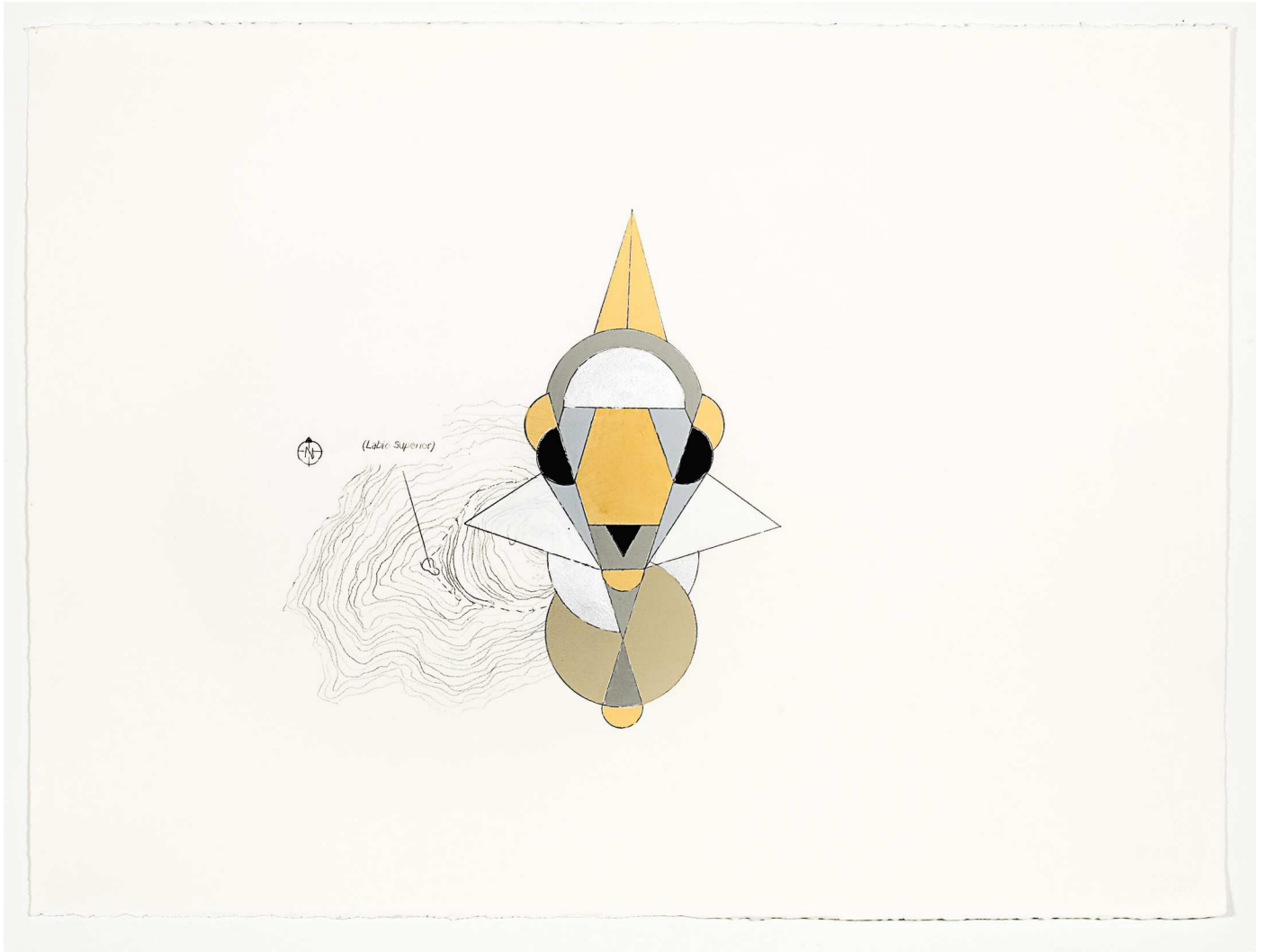


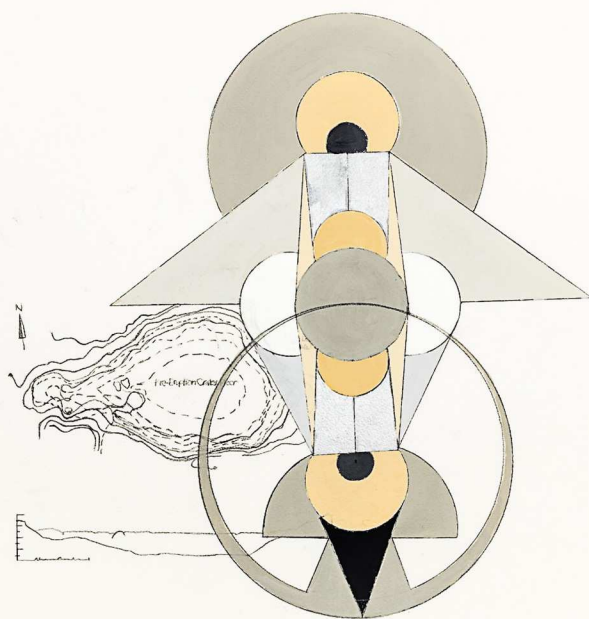
up and placed in a container. Finally, the container is deposited in the nearby body of water, symbolizing the impermanence of things: how all things come out of nothingness and eventually return to it.

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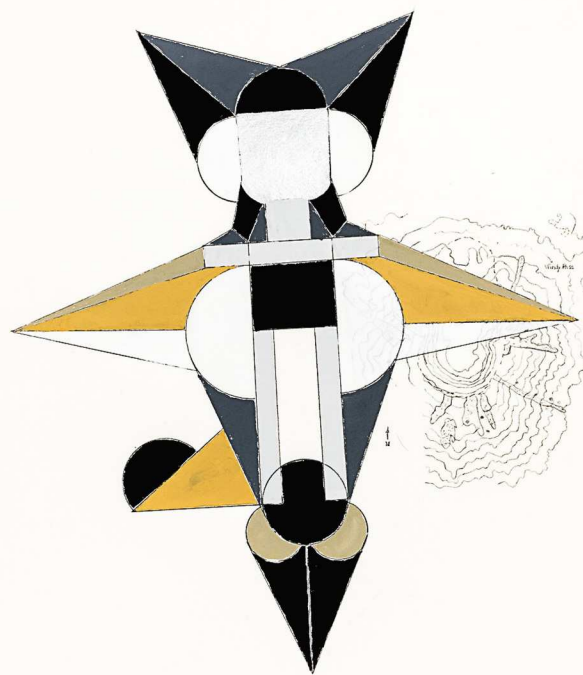
2 Brauen, Martin (1997) *The Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism*. Boston: Shambala.

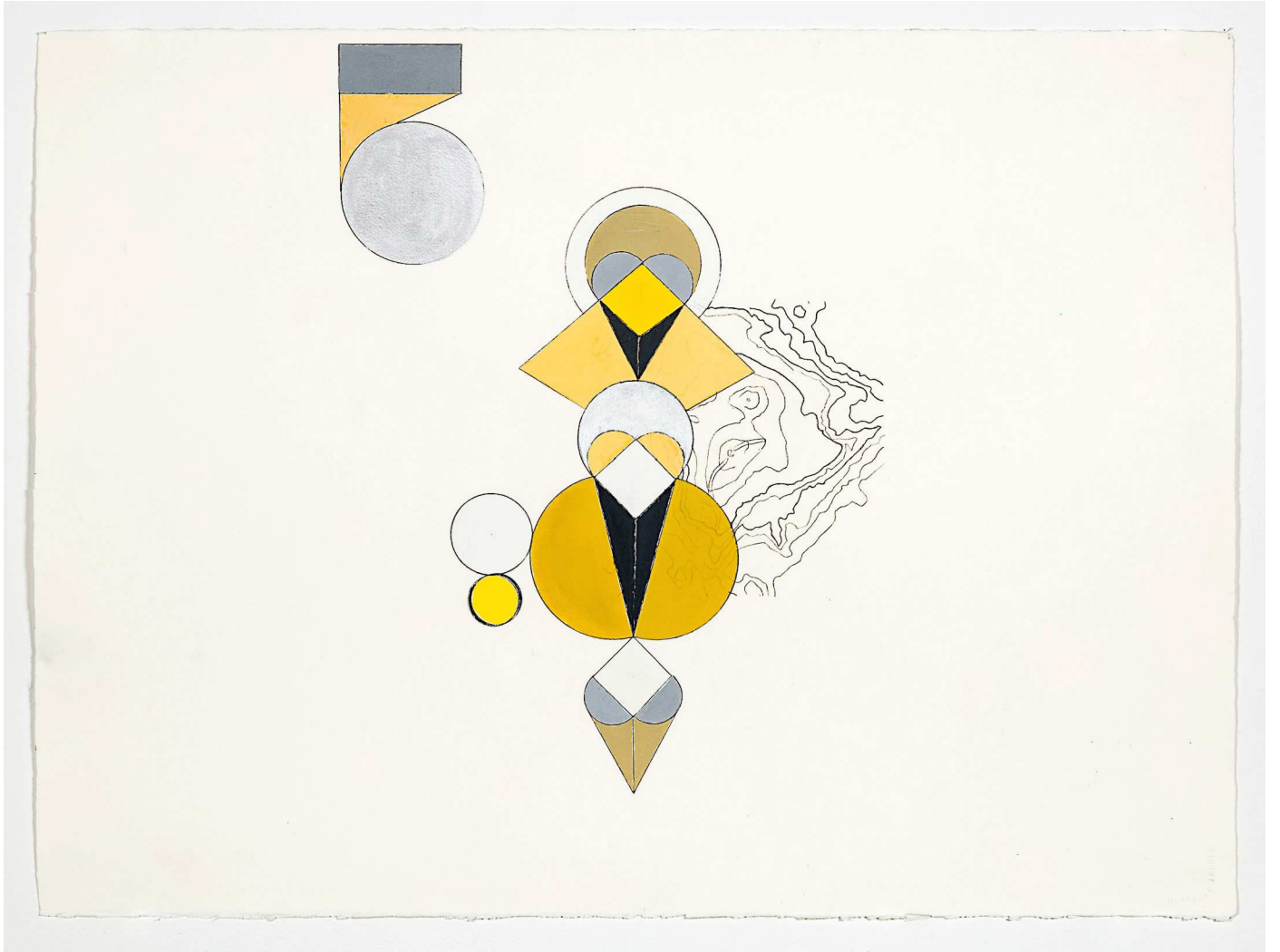


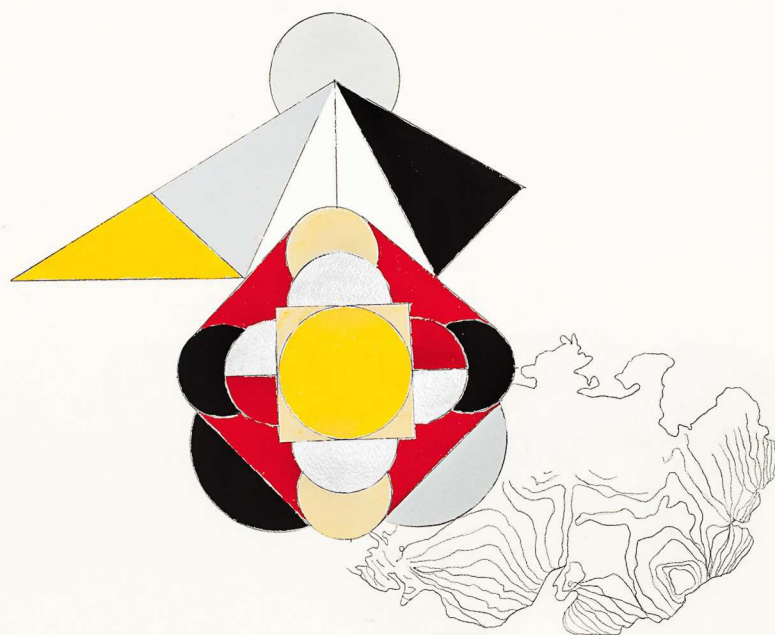


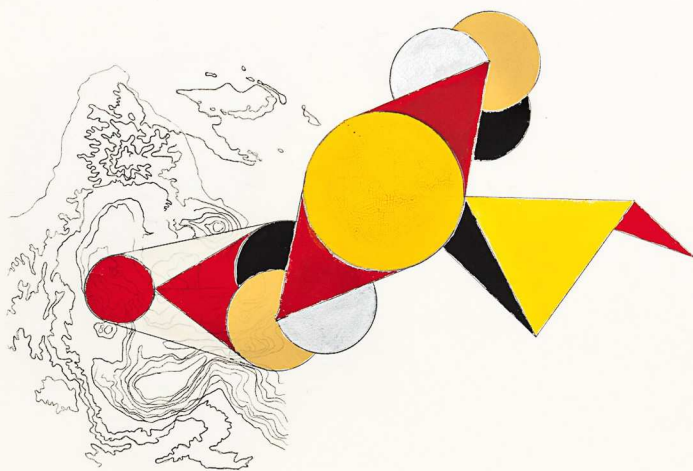




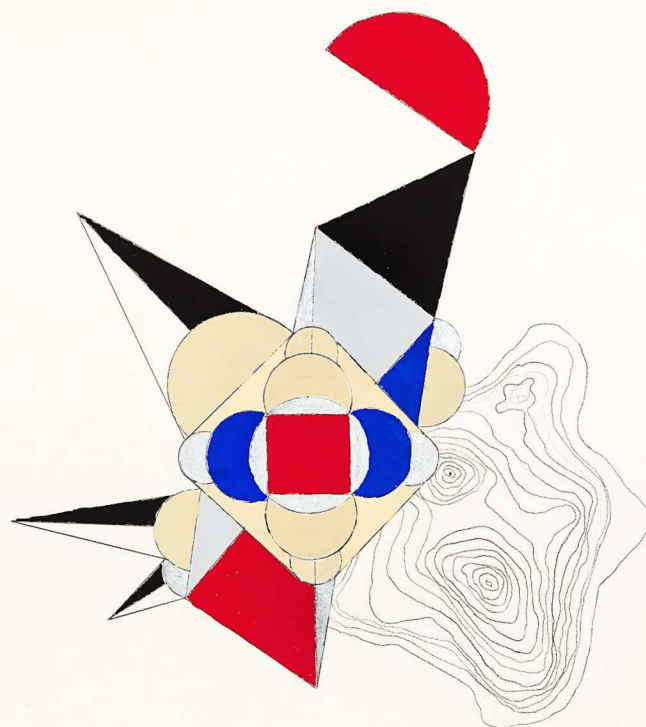




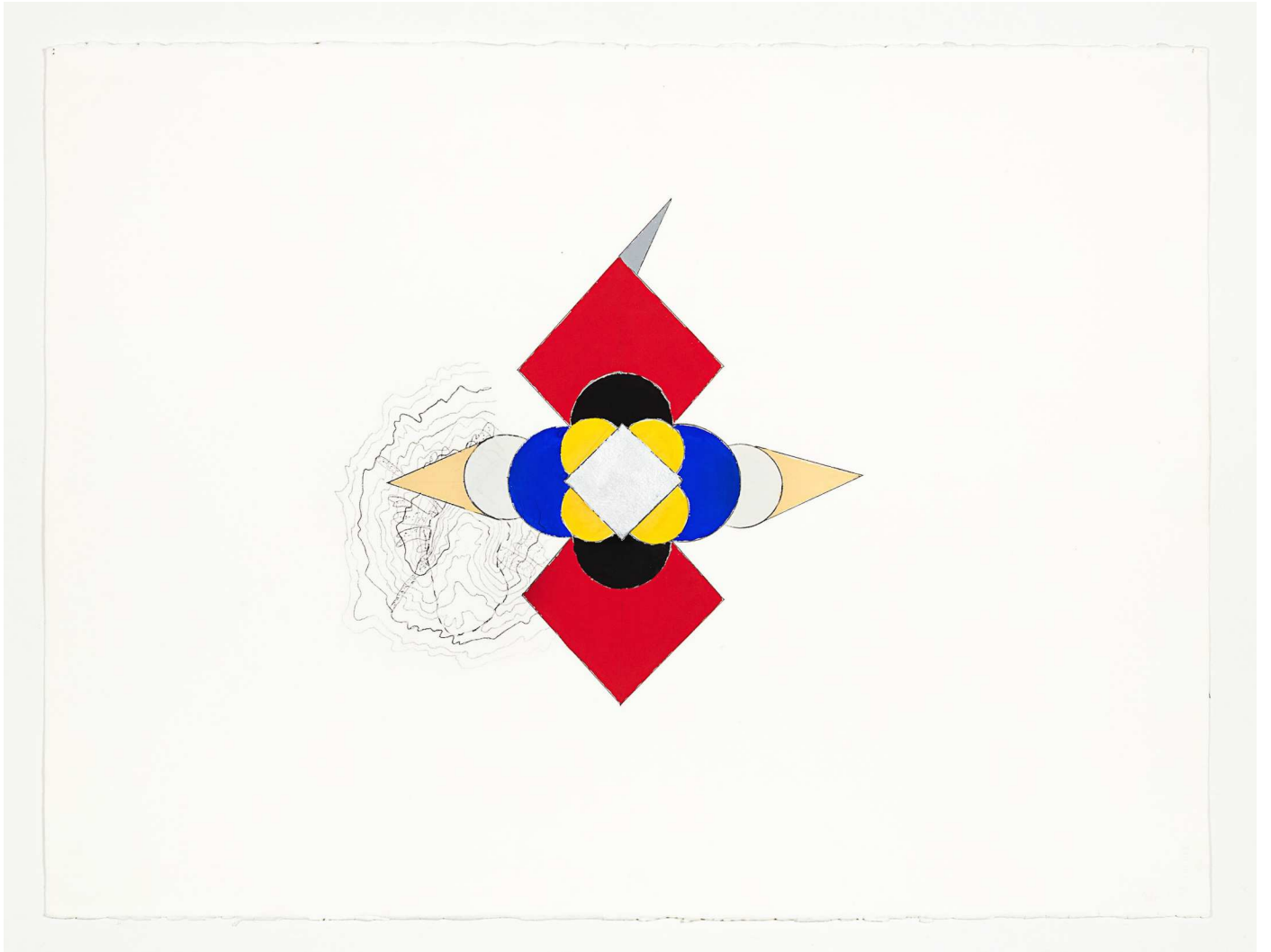




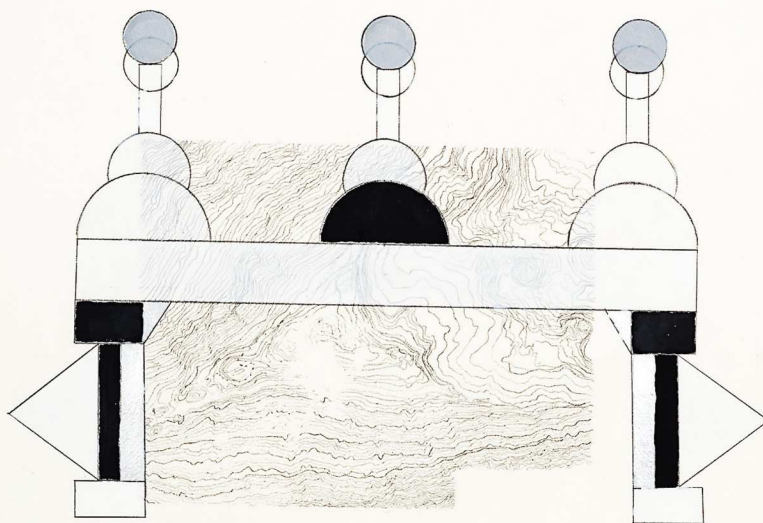


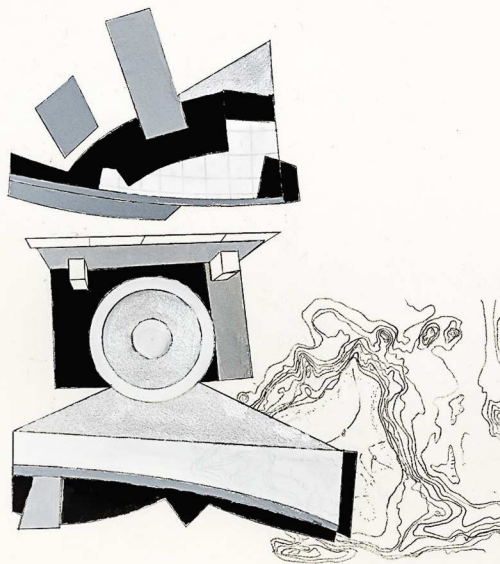


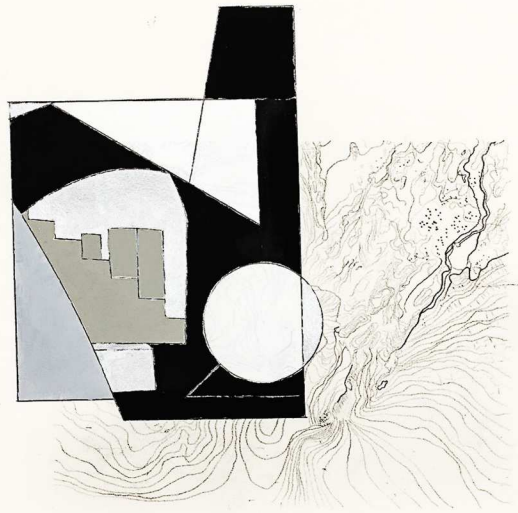


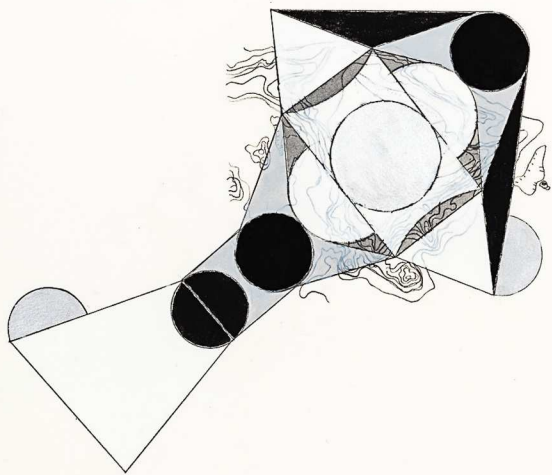


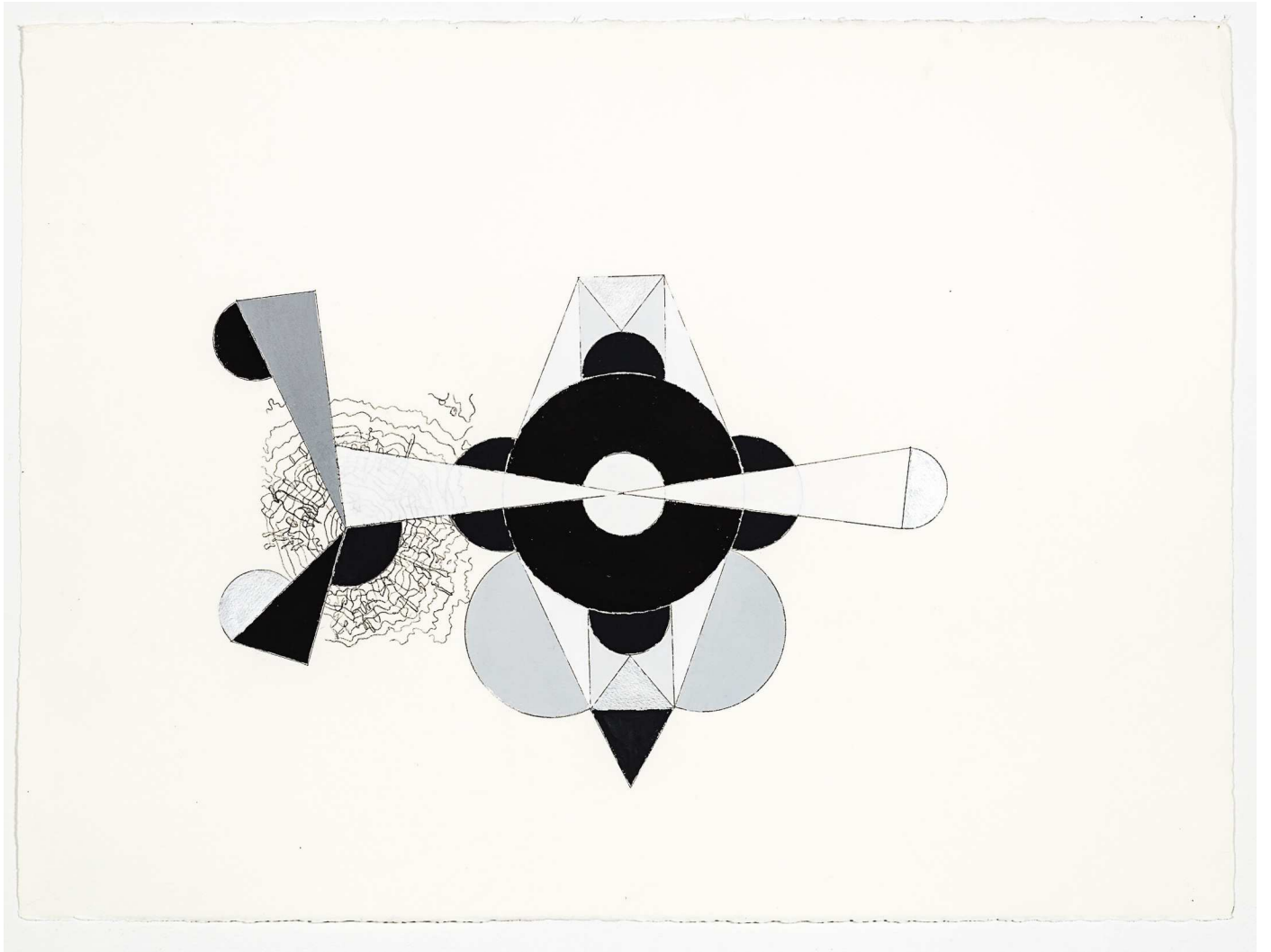














I came here for the walk and the great silence after the walk. I place my mind in my muscles. Sometimes I miss a step. My mind transforms invisible matter in space into tension and resistance. Both slow me down. It appears to be emptiness to the right and emptiness to the left. But I know that there is more into the drop. There is the existence of the body and the possibility of the body in pain. There is finitude. I came for the grace embedded in cells being created and dying, for the silence melting into the soil like ashes so the first Arctic flowers can break the land in tiny slow fissures of translucent green. I bring colors, bright colors, to pour over this washed gray of stones and snow. A thought: devouring the strange things of this world. Let them sit between the tongue and the soft palate. I hold the wind in my mouth. I play with it. It has no shape. It is not visible. I can only feel its dynamic presence. The wind is object, one I can engage with. Where am I entering right now? The wind leads me. I penetrate it. Sometimes, it washes me with new emotions. Other times, I feel nothing. "There is someone in the wind," I read once on page 230 of a book that is so dear to me. I reach the top of the mountain. It has been fourteen hours since I woke up and made my bed. I opened my suitcase and got dressed. I selected a few things to pack for the walk: water, an extra layer of clothing, some bread. The wind and the clouds came with vigorous action, but there was no opponent. There was never one. In the crater, I encountered the one in the wind. This someone was I.

As read in the video
FIRE MOUNTAINS OF THE ISLANDS



2015 PERFORMANCE + ENGAGEMENT

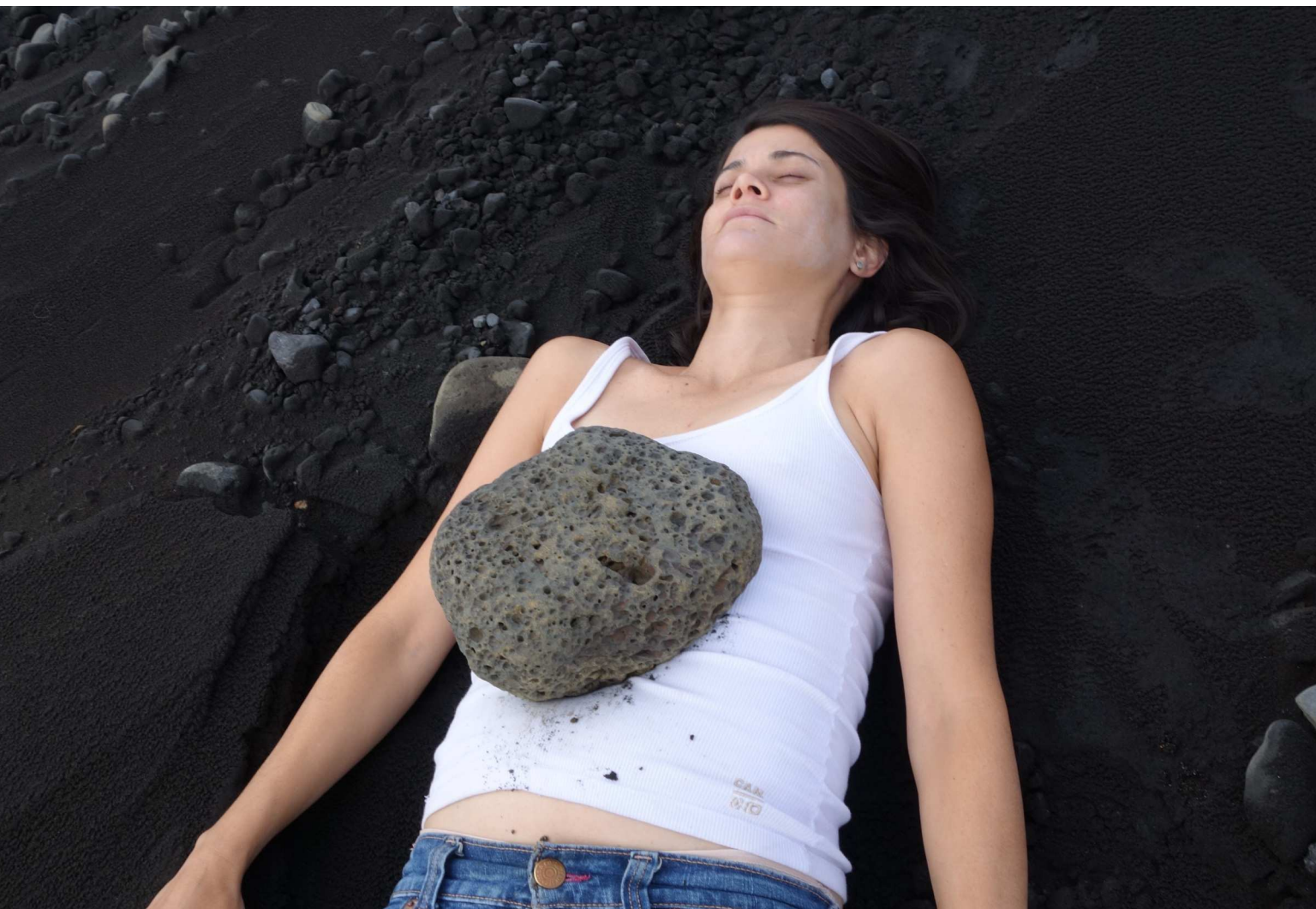
THÓRSMÖRK NATIONAL PARK:
OUTSKIRTS OF VOLCANO EYJAFJALLAJÖKULL







Wind Erosion and New
Topographies



The Wind Will Take You There

The crumbling of all existing things
An object, thought, or affection
Water: the beginning of regeneration



The Chance to Remain or Not

What is there
When there is no
Thought

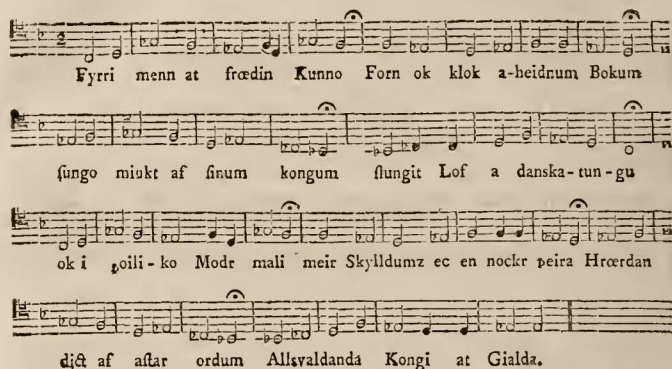




THE CLOUDS' FASCINATION AND THE MOON'S CHERISHING A PERSON OF THE WAY FUNDAMENTALLY DOES NOT DWELL ANYWHERE. THE WHITE CLOUDS ARE FASCINATED WITH THE GREEN MOUNTAIN'S FOUNDATION. THE BRIGHT MOON CHERISHES BEING CARRIED ALONG WITH THE FLOWING WATER. THE CLOUDS PART AND THE MOUNTAIN APPEARS. THE MOON SETS AND THE WATER IS COOL. EACH BIT OF AUTUMN CONTAINS VAST INTER-PENETRATION WITHOUT BOUNDS. EVERY DUST IS WHOLE WITHOUT REACHING ME; THE TEN THOUSAND CHANGES ARE STILLED WITHOUT SHAKING ME. IF YOU CAN SIT HERE WITH STABILITY, THEN YOU CAN FREELY STEP ACROSS AND ENGAGE THE WORLD WITH ENERGY. THERE IS AN EXCELLENT SAYING THAT THE SIX SENSE DOORS ARE NOT VEILED, THE HIGHWAYS IN ALL DIRECTIONS HAVE NO FOOTPRINTS. ALWAYS ARRIVING EVERYWHERE WITHOUT BEING CONFUSED, GENTLE WITHOUT HESITATION, THE PERFECTED PERSON KNOWS WHERE TO GO.

HONGZHI ZHENGUE writes on
CULTIVATING THE EMPTY FIELD

V.



Fyrri menn at frædin Kunno Forn ok klok a-heidnum Bokum
 sungu miukt af sinum kongum slungit Lof a danska-tun-gu
 ok i goili-ko Modr mali meir Skyldumz ec en nockr þeira Hærdan
 dið af aftar ordum Allsvaldanda Kongi at Gjalda.

T R A D U C T I O N.

« Ils posséderent les hautes sciences, écrites avec élégance dès les tems
 » les plus reculés dans des livres profanes. Ils chanterent dans leurs
 » vers danois les louanges de leurs Princes; & moi qui possède cette
 » langue, je me crois obligé plus qu'aucun d'eux à représenter au Roi
 » tout-puissant mes vers doux & agréables ».

Cette chanson est une strophe prise d'une hymne appelée *Lilia*. On trouve des exemples de ce mètre dans le *Clavis metrica* de *Sturleson*: il y est appelé *Hryn hendr hatt*, c'est-à-dire, *chant cadencé*; c'est une preuve qu'on le connaissait déjà dans le treizieme siècle en Islande.

Dans la suite des tems le langage s'étant altéré, & les Moines ayant chassé les Scaldes des cours des Princes, l'ancienne Poésie se perdit; & au lieu de ces Poésies qui contenaient la religion celtique & qui faisaient toujours allusion à la mythologie, on se contentait des rimes. M. Jacobî a une collection de deux cent chansons pareilles rimées, dont la première centaine a été recueillie par Anders Wedel, 1591, réimprimée ensuite, & augmentée d'une autre centaine par Peder Sys 1695. Le sujet de ces

ICELANDIC MELODY

Written By Brian Mountford

When Simone embarked on this project several years ago, I wanted to contribute some music. I found an old Icelandic melody called the Lilia Hymn. It is still considered a part of the Icelandic folk tradition, and you can find modern recordings on YouTube, but the long history of the tune exhibits the same layering and weathering that Simone found in the lava flows of Iceland. It was documented in an exhaustive three-volume French treatise entitled, "Essai sur la Musique Ancienne et Moderne," published in 1780 by Jean-Benjamin de La Borde, an aristocrat and composer who served at the court of Louis XV, and was guillotined during the French Revolution. De La Borde noted that the melody was documented as early as the 13th century, but that its original Celtic and mythological text was lost over time, replaced with words of praise for the Scandinavian nobility by the time it was documented again in 1591. I tried to continue this chronicle of mutation with a new piece where the words have finally been lost altogether, and only the melody remains. It is only partially visible within a modern harmonic texture, sometimes as the bottom note of the right hand, and sometimes in octaves. In a further mutation, the melody is repeated twice, with the harmonization changing each time.

Icelandic Melody

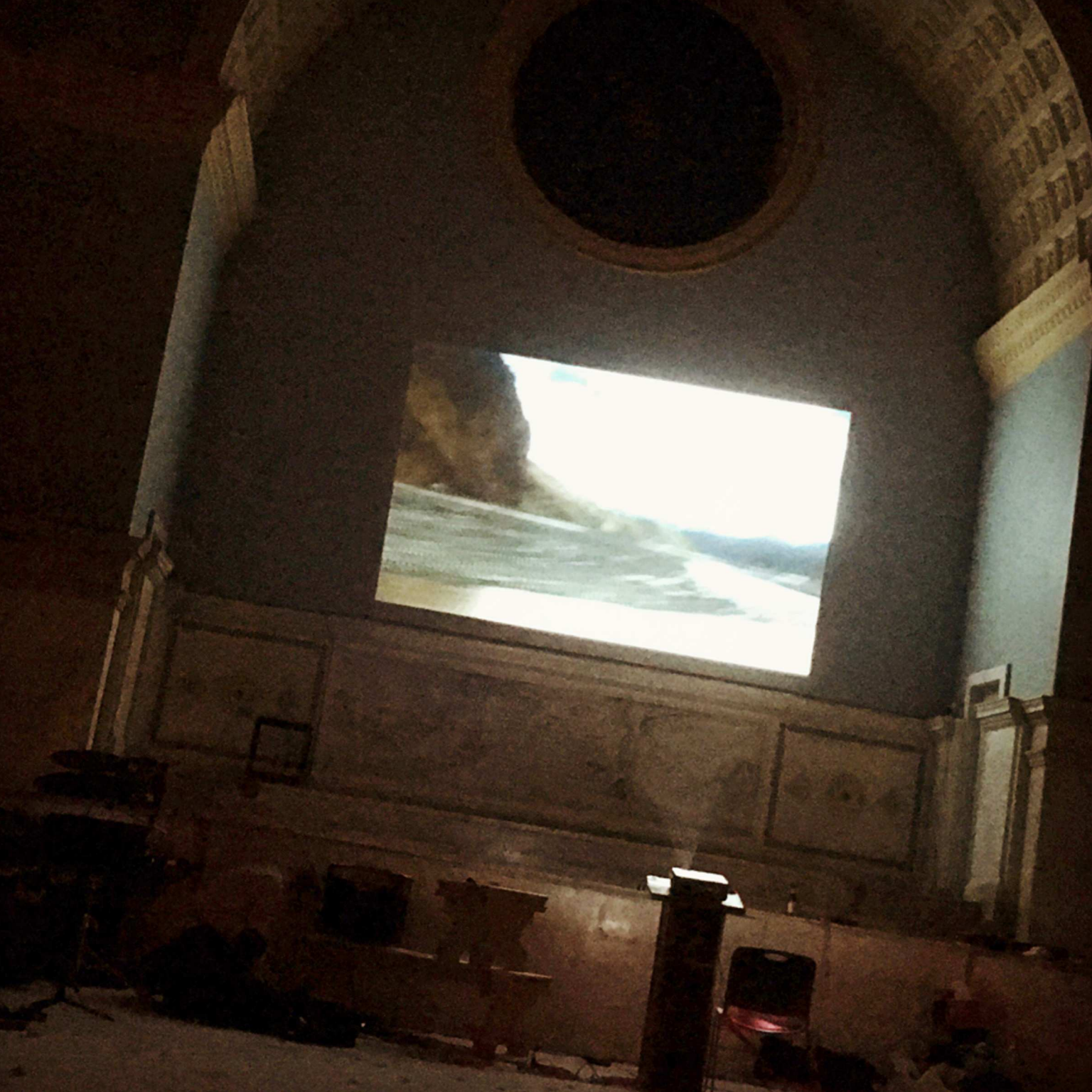
Brian Mountford

for Didi and Simone

$\text{♩} = 48$

mp

1 4 7 10 14



2015 VIDEO



New rivers run like lines on charcoal paper



DARKNESS VISIBLE

The video is an exploration of landscape and language. Couto engaged with the outskirts of Thórsmörk National Park and the volcano Eyjafjallajökull in search of a place to perform. Since April 2010, this is an area with high seismic volcanic activity and one major eruption. She hiked and observed the changing geography created by rivers of melted snow and volcanic ashes being in constant flux. At a bank of water and ashes, she performed silence and immobility. In the video, images are overlapped with conversations with local artists about poetry, music, and translation.

The Living Stone Thinking Practice



In my past works, the stone has been the building block for understanding my gender and immigrant identities. I have used the stone as the cyclical movement of life and death, rituals of passage, memory, and cultural preservation. I am interested in expanding the material and exploring its plurality.

My last work took place at the volcano canyon of Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland, which after high seismic activity, in the spring 2010, erupted and left most of the area of Thórsmörk in southern Iceland covered by ashes. In my performance, I held a volcanic igneous rock formed from cooling and solidification of magma and fractional crystallization. I was interested in the affirmation that the body is just as mineral as that object existing for the first time in a land transformed by a natural disaster.

In both New and Old Testament texts, the constant reference to the stone is an easy-to-assimilate metaphor used to educate the illiterate during preaching, a bridge-symbol from religious concept to practice. In Isaiah 51:1-2, the Hebrew word *sûr* (rock), contains the metaphor of a quarry. God says, “listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.”

One of the most salient features of the stone symbolism is that it is used to refer and describe the existence of God such as in Psalms 42:9 “I say to God my Rock (sal’i), Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by

the enemy?” In the New Testament we are urged to embrace the stone as the foundation of that faith: “you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.”

In the beginning of the last century, the stone was dressed with new metaphors deeply connected to our human experiences. For the Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade, the stone is the adversity in the middle of the way that makes us slow down and rethink our place in the world. It is the small object that, yet ephemeral and recurrent, will change the course of our histories. “In the middle of the road there was a stone/ there was a stone in the middle of the road/ there was a stone/ in the middle of the road there was a stone./ Never should I forget this event/ in the life of my fatigued retinas,” writes the poet. *In the middle of the road, there was a stone* (1924), considered a weak poem due to the repetitiveness of the main verse when it was first published, is today certainly one of Drummond’s most respected and well-known works. The repetition of these verses can be thought as the recurrent journey of Sisyphus and his stone, both eternally trapped in the physical laws of this planet and the rage of the gods.

In *Education by the Stone*, written in 1928, the poet João Cabral de Melo Neto liberates the stone from any possible symbolism. He opts for the hard objective reality, denying any open and sentimental significance. In the following two verses,



“In the backlands the stone does not give lessons, / And if it gave them, nothing would be taught;” the realities that informed his building materials were the arid lands of his native northeastern Brazil, where its inhabitants didn't have the means to romanticize life. The poet constructed his poems as an architect. The stone is just a stone as the hardship of living is nothing else but what it is: emotionally removed from context, without giving subjective reflection or apparent compassion.

In *If you hold a stone*, Caetano Veloso, the acclaimed Brazilian musician and writer, projects the weight of our human condition and our capacity for change into the stone he urges us to hold in the center of our hands. Veloso recorded his self-titled album in England when in exile imposed by the Brazilian government of the time for being subversive. The lyrics clearly reveal the necessity of a kind of trans-formative art: “If you hold a stone, hold in your hand/ If you feel the weight/ You’ll never be late/ To understand... Mas eu não sou daqui/ Marinheiro só/ Eu não tenho amor.” The “if you” transfers the first person in the speech to effectively evoke the second person: the other. The transformation of the human experience does not happen in isolation but with the other and through the exercise of empathy, acknowledgment of loneliness, and the pain itself, all contained in his experience as foreigner and a man in exile. The only possible verses to be sung in Portuguese come from a Brazilian folk song that says “I am not from here/ I am a lonely sailor/ I do not have love in me.”

Stone is political resistance. For the Chinese artist Zhao Zhao, the stone is an instrument of protest. In the photograph *Cobblestone* (2007) the documentation of his performance, Zhao glued his minuscule stone on the ground of Tiananmen Square in China to express the contemporary world’s tensions between freedom and control such as violation of human rights, racial or sexual discrimination, and wars. Zooming in with our critical lenses, Zhao specifically protests against China and the government’s authority to brutally restrict the right to freedom.

Moving away from metaphors, the Spanish artist and historian Laura F. Gibellini explores the human necessities in relationship to the Earth-itself and its natural phenomena. They are indicatives for human dwelling and cultural formation. Her practice and thinking combined comprise the natural conditions that allow life to exist and develop, as she writes in her paper *Approximations to a Working Space*. The paper focuses on oceanic and atmospheric shifts. However the implication is that Gibellini is aware that geology is the foundational platform.

Thinking of the presence of the stone as a geological object in-transition and a building block for the discourse of place and territorialization, I refer to the ideas of *Deleuze and Guattari in 1000 Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Stratification is the process of creating hierarchical bodies while territorialization is the ordering of those bodies in “assemblages,”

an emergent and consistent unity joining heterogeneous bodies. The material is removed from its original function so new ones can be established as a process of re-beginning. To illustrate, the Spanish artist Lara Almarcegui has dealt with peripheral urban wastelands, demolitions, vacant urban spaces, urban planning, and modern ruins since the mid-1990s. Engaged with space, she uses local and archival materials, video and photography to build up her installations. For the Spanish Pavilion at the 55th Biennale di Venezia exhibition, Almarcegui filled multiple rooms with several piles of pulverized construction materials—cement rubble, gravels of varying diameters, pebbles, dirt, and glass to get the message across.

More than discussing my work in relationship to the object—the stone, or/ and its poetic uses and projections, I am interested in investigating its historicity. In this text I have pulled examples from poetry, visual arts, and philosophy to rebuild a fragment of the journey of the stone in the arts.



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Becoming

a Flower











A NEW VOLCANO HAS ERUPTED,
THE PAPERS SAY, AND LAST WEEK I WAS READING
WHERE SOME SHIP SAW AN ISLAND BEING BORN:
AT FIRST A BREATH OF STEAM, TEN MILES AWAY;
AND THEN A BLACK FLECK—BASALT, PROBABLY—
ROSE IN THE MATE'S BINOCULARS
AND CAUGHT ON THE HORIZON LIKE A FLY.
THEY NAMED IT. BUT MY POOR OLD ISLAND'S STILL
UN-REDISCOVERED, UN-RENAMABLE.
NONE OF THE BOOKS HAS EVER GOT IT RIGHT.

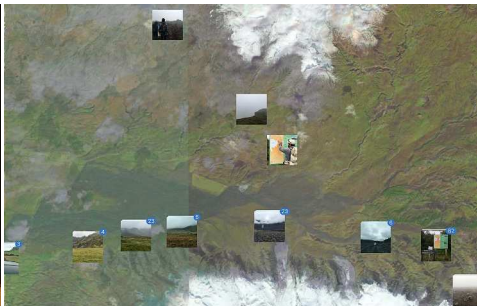
ELIZABETH BISHOP writes on
GEOGRAPHY III

2016
LOCUS + SITUATION
+ WALK AS ENGAGEMENT





While the world
moves with stellar speed
here, things are crumbling—thought and affection
you may forget your own armor—bones and joints
here, bodies
think themselves stones
thoughts think themselves.





I have learned tremendously about impermanence in this
land: from its weather, hills, and the colors of the ground.
Everything changes so abruptly. And you have to keep going.
Going



Mallarme's wrecked ship makes
The ground underwater shiver
The location can very well be
The Eastern Mediterranean
Where the Trojans' fleet
Heading in the direction of Italy
While the rain falls
Things wait on Earth—
The crushing of stone,
Deformation alienation de-creation proto-chaos
Our time is immemorial, so
Let us dare!
Belonging is defined as a ray
Caelo usque ad centrum:
From the center of the Earth to the sky
From whoever owns the soil and
The possibility of actuality
Ad Astra
Ad infinitum
Ad lucem
Things cry,
Says Aeneas crying out the Trojan War.

2016 VIDEO



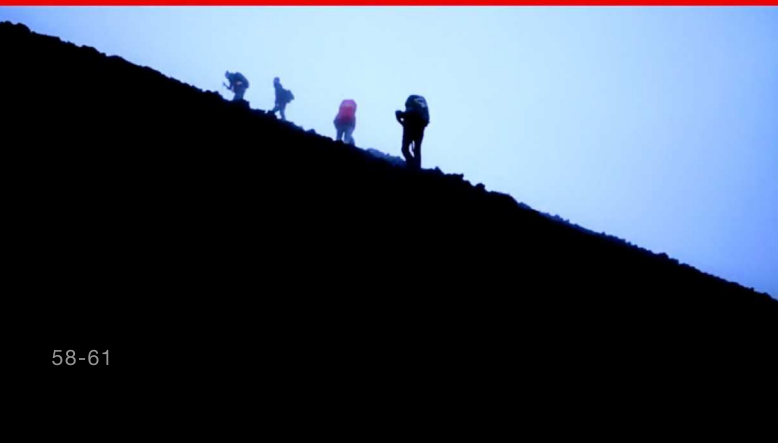
FIRE MOUNTAINS OF THE ISLAND

Couto returned to the volcano Eyjafjallajökul and climbed to the top of the mountain, a site-specific performative gesture. She engaged with the wind, the clouds, the rocks, the unstable soil, ashes, and the unseen changes of the volcanic landscape post-eruption. Under challenging conditions, all those elements were agents and imagination, the medium where massive bodies transit. When the body experiences extreme physical dislocations in the environment, it is possible to feel the sense of self collapsing and experience the place and things as timeless as well as to re-enter other kinds of dormant subjectivities. In the video, imagination is filled with height, elevation, depth, expansion, and sinking, allowing the artist to play with shapes and colors.





THOUGH I KNOW THAT BEYOND ALL, THERE IS THE PRECIPICE





I UNCOVER ITS GEOLOGICAL HISTORY





SAILING STONES: One of my favorite mysteries is the stones rolling on their own at Racetrack Playa in California, at the heart of the valley of the death. Racetrack Playa is a dry lake. One can see the marks on the cracked soil. By studying the tracks, researchers know that stones possibly rotate as they move. It would be simple to assign the bizarre fact to the strong desert winds combined with a thin layer of ice, but some of these rocks weigh more than a human being. Some weigh more than 500 kg. Is it possible that the wind moved such heavy stones? And how to explain the stones that move in opposite directions and cross each other at some point in time and space, resting side by side before the journey continues? Another strange fact is that although many rocks choose to move, some, often next to the stones that walk, just does not leave the place, behaving, as one would expect for a rock. How to explain these volcanic stones from Eyjafjallajökull that just came out of the earth, barely untouched, and all the love I felt in my heart by just holding them? Believe in at least the possibility of magic.





CONSERVATION OF ENERGY

Can be neither created nor be destroyed. Yet it can change form

Total energy of an isolated system

Remains constant

Conserved over time

Ground vibration

Tremor

Heat isn't a property of a system

Instead, a property of processes that transfer energy—

Mechanical energy propagated

By a material's oscillations

Deformation of a material (becoming formless)

Exhibits a restorative force (a memory)

The strokes of my mother's hands

Along the dark waves of her long hair

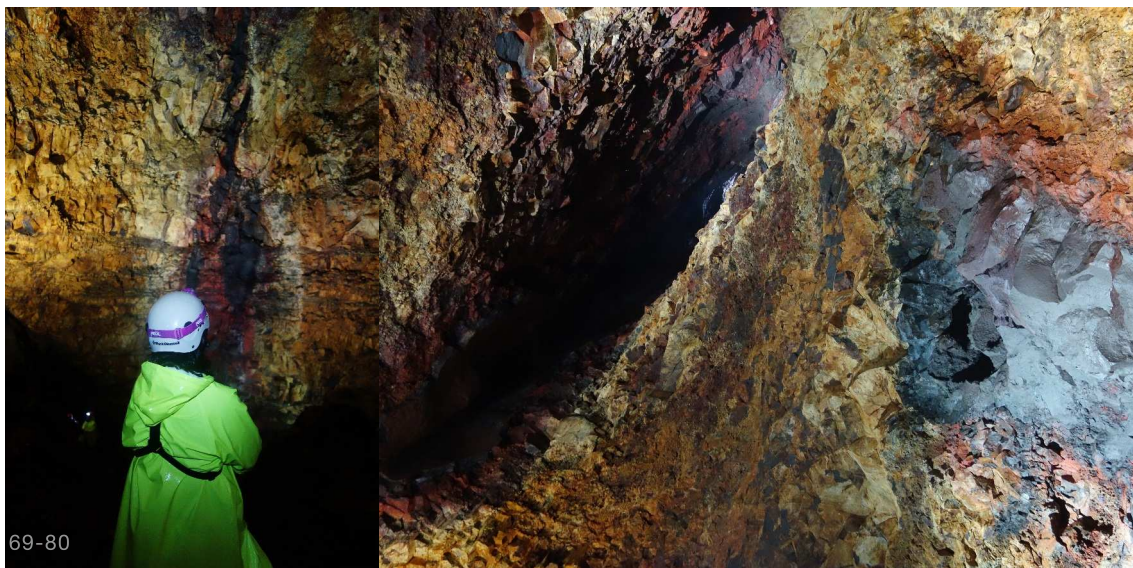
Motion is

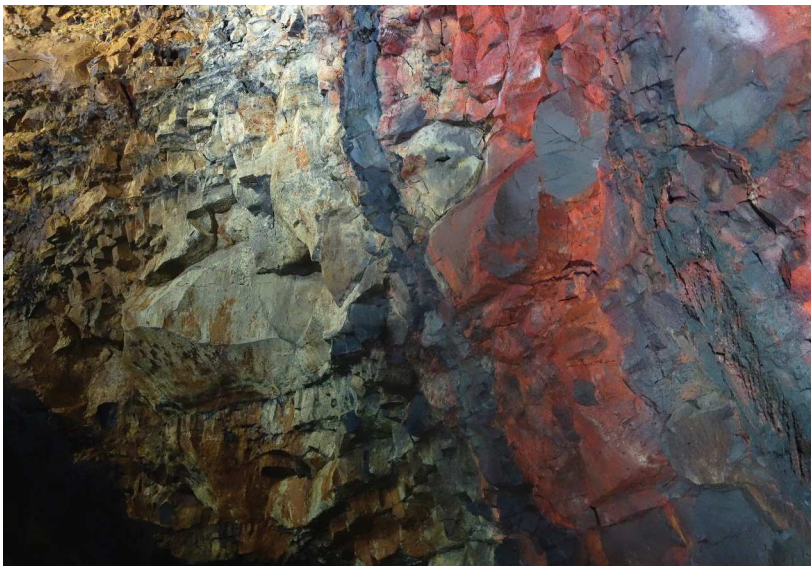
Potential energy



Working With Nature







Geological Studies Research Practice



A crucial part of the two-year project, besides engaging with the volcano Eyjafjallajökull, was learning about the geology of the land.

I engaged with another five sites. For most of them, I was guided by Micah Quinn, geographer living and teaching in Reykjavik, and Helga Kristín, Icelandic geologist.

With Kristín, I harvested colors and sounds rising from the ground at [Hveragerði Geothermal Springs](#) by Varmá River. The site is located at Hveragerði, a town and municipality in the south of Iceland situated 45 km to the east of Reykjavík. The area is geothermally active and experiences very frequent (usually minor) earthquakes. The thermal springs in this area harbor particular extremophile micro-organisms which are capable of surviving in extremely hot environments.

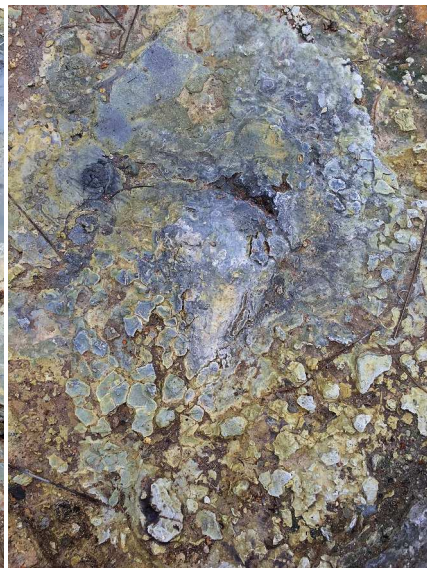
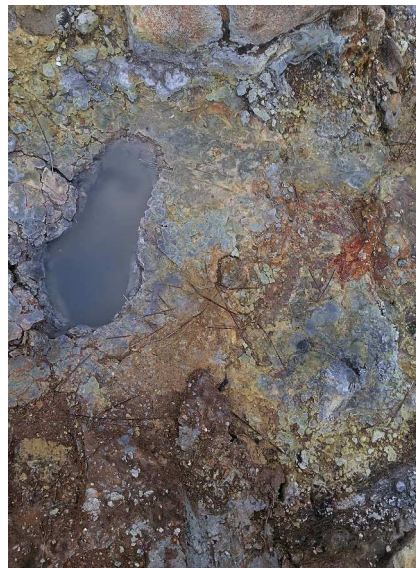
I descend to the magma chamber of [Thrihnukagigur Volcano](#) which erupted over 4,000 years ago. It is located at Bláfjöll Country Park. Total depth: 700 ft. Having studied geology as part of my technical high school degree in Civil Engineering & Architecture, I was seeing and touching for the first time what I had been exposed to only in academic books.

The research took me to [Langjökull Glacier](#), the second largest glacier in Iceland (1200 meters above sea level and 953 km²). The glacier is roughly parallel to the direction of the country's active volcanic zone: north-east to south-west. Until 2016, a few months before I entered into its human-made cave, only a selective small group of scientists and glaciologists had access to what lies under its surface.

The geographer Quinn guided me to [Gjábakki Cave and Lava Tube](#), a lava tube located in Þingvellir National Park. Gjábakki lava tube cave is 9000 year old and 360 meter long lava tube filled with stalactites, high ceilings and lava falls. He was also my guide at the volcano Eyjafjallajökull. Losing a sense of direction and topographic orientation is common. At some point, we turned off our headlights as we stood still for 5 minutes hearing the water dripping from the ceiling. Nothing grows on the site except slimy white bacteria on its walls. When we reached the other end, the daylight framed by rocks was never so bright as from inside of that cave.

It is impossible not to think of geological exploration if not holistically in Iceland. Quinn took me to my final destination, [Silfra](#), so I could dive in the rift formed in the divergent tectonic boundary between the North American and the Eurasian Tectonic Plates and the South American and African Continental plates. I managed to break my GoPro camera during the process of fitting myself into two different thick diving suits and all the paraphernalia attached to them. I have no documentation of this breathtaking experience. Silfra is located in the Þingvallavatn Lake in the Þingvellir National Park. The site's geological significance is a rare opportunity to dive between continental plates at water temperature between 2–4 °C (36–39 °F) and with underwater visibility in the Silfra fissure over 100 meters. The plates drift about 2 cm (0.79 in) every year, putting the land in between under considerable tension. Every ten years or so, this pressure is released through major earthquakes. The process has produced fissures and cracks, giving rise to what it is today, Þingvellir Valley. Boulders and rocks falling through the cracks have created and shaped caves within the crevices. The marine life growing on Silfra is made of mostly of bright green algae.

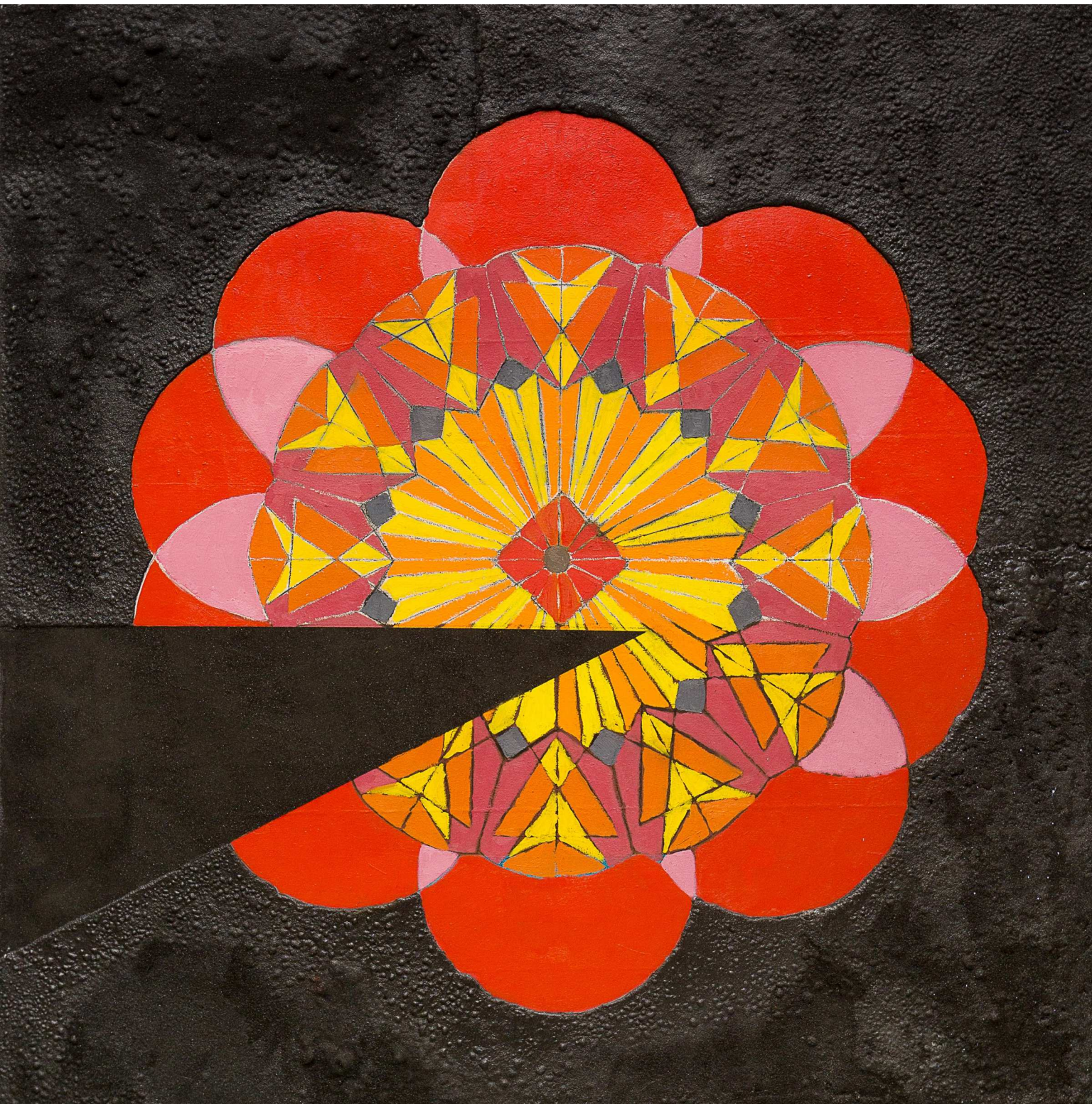






Becoming of a Color: Heat. Collapse. Cooling. Time





Impermanence of the Body

Impermanence of Nature

B
r
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g

How Important

Images

1. Simone Couto
Trail Mark Yellow, 2016
digital photography;
dimensions variable
2. Rob Simmon
made with data courtesy of the nasa/gsfci/
miti/ersdac/jaros, and the U.S./Japan Aster
Science Team.
3. Simone Couto
Sand Mandala/ Tibet House NY, 2015
digital photo documentation
- 4-9. Simone Couto
*Elemental Works: Archaeological Birds:
Volcanic Studies on Paper*, 2016
gouache and graffiti on Arches Canson
cold press paper;
22 x 30 inches
- 10-15. Simone Couto
*Form.Content: Mandalas: Volcanic Studies
on Paper*, 2016
gouache and graffiti on Arches Canson
cold press paper;
22 x 30 inches
- 16-21. Simone Couto
*Poetic of Spaces: The Observatory:
Volcanic Studies on Paper*, 2016
gouache and graffiti on Arches Canson
cold press paper;
22 x 30 inches
22. Simone Couto
Pilgrim Feet, 2016
digital photography mounted on wood;
5 x 5 inches
- 23-27. Ching Chang
digital photo documentation of Thórsmörk
National Park/ Outskirts of volcano
Eyjafjallajökull, 2016
28. Ching Chang
Bed of Ashes, 2016
Couto's durational situational performance
at the outskirts of volcano Eyjafjallajökull/
Thórsmörk National Park
29. Simone Couto
Darkness Visible, 2016
video installation at the 10th NYC Anarchist
Art Festival/ Judson Memorial Church
- 30-31. Simone Couto
still images from *Darkness Visible*,
2016-2017
video; 6:47 minutes
32. Simone Couto
digital photo research documentation of
earth pigmentation and sound at
Hveragerði Geothermal Springs, 2016
33. Simone Couto
Stone, 2016
digital photography;
dimensions variable
34. Simone Couto
digital photo documentation of Lara
Almarcegui Work at the 55th international
art exhibition, 2013

35. Simone Couto

Circle, 2018

baltic birch wood, concrete, black sand,
color pigment;

18 inches

36-39. Simone Couto

Becoming a Flower, 2017-2018

concrete base, black sand, Color pigment,
3d print Iceland poppy, brass;

7.5 x 7.5 x 7.5 inches base

40. Simone Couto

Totem, 2016

digital photography;

dimensions variable

41.54 Simone Couto

digital photo research documentation of
walk to the crater of volcano Eyjafjallajökull
at Thórsmörk National Park, 2016

55-67 Simone Couto

still images from *Mountains of the Islands*,
2017

video; 6:00 minutes

68-80 Simone Couto

digital photo research documentation of
the descend to the magma chamber of
Thrihnukagigur Volcano at Bláfjöll Country
Park, 2016

81-94 Simone Couto

digital photo research documentation of
pigment and sound exploration at the
Hveragerði Geothermal Springs (Varmá
River) at Hveragerði, 2016

95. Simone Couto

Landscape, 2018

oil, graffiti, and black sand on canvas;

5 x 5 feet

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Darkness Visible

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Simone Couto is a United States-based interdisciplinary artist. Her latest works focus on immigration, identity, and human connection to place. She refers to her installations as urban and environmental social-political choreographies. She reorders landscapes and experiences, tying them to history, time, philosophy, science, and language. Through her work, she offers viewers the possibility of reexamining one's identity and sense of belonging.

Simone Couto (born in Brazil, 1975) received an MFA from the School of Visual Arts Art Practice Program, New York, a BA in Creative Arts from the University of San Francisco, and studied Theater Arts at The Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. She holds a technical high school degree in Civil Engineering, Architecture & Technology from CEFET (Federal Center for Technological Education), a Brazilian educational institute which is directly linked to the Ministry of Education. Her work has been shown in the United States and internationally, including Argentina, Brazil, Italy, South Korea (Gwacheon National Science Museum); and Pioneer Works; Invisible Dog Art Center; Electronic Arts Intermix; El Museo de Los Sures; Momenta Art, all New York. In 2018, she has been granted a full year art residency at ISCP (International Studio and Curatorial Program), funded by Yoko Ono, Alice and Lawrence Weiner, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the City Council, New York City Council District 34, The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation, Danna and Ed Ruscha.

Her work can be viewed at her website www.simonecouto.com

Tudo que Respira Canta o Amor



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