

SAILING
STONES
IN
DEATH
VALLEY

Grace Culley
Mi-Mi Fitzsimmons
Nelle Rodis
Simon Clark

CURATED BY Sujin Jung

*Sailing Stones
in
Death Valley*

ARTISTS
Grace Culley,
Mi-Mi Fitzsimmons,
Nelle Rodis,
Simon Clark

CURATOR
Sujin Jung

George Paton Gallery

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SUJIN JUNG

Let us watch it [the magic stone] in a watery surrounding. It immediately shows, there, a kind of shy agitation. It circulates, flees, makes a thousand affected gestures, swathes itself in veils and finally prefers to dissolve, give up the ghost, to give up the body rather than let itself be caressed, unilaterally rolled about by water. ... Besides, the water is very moved and troubled by it, very seriously punished. It does not easily rid itself of the traces of its crime.¹

Non-fungible tokens (NFTs) are hot, and *Zoom Land* (the so-called online world) has become a fortress by divesting the materiality of art, music, books, film, and television. The deluge of information, through hashtags and links, seems to set all the world in motion and connection, yet we are living in a world with stronger boundaries than ever. In the middle of this flood, the vibrant works by the four artists featured here—Grace Culley, Nelle Rodis, Mi-Mi Fitzsimmons, and Simon Clark—certainly show a strong materiality and sense of mobility through their *trans-material* approach to artistic practices, like the magic pebble or stone—soap—against water in Francis Ponge’s poem, ‘Soap’.

The artists’ material dialogue is revealed not only through the material itself but also in the structural certainties of its construction and migration—the boundless traversing of substances, media, and disciplines. The artists assemble, manipulate, and translate materials, from natural through traditional to industrial, to create new structures and meaning. In the process of traversing other disciplines and building new structures, we observe how the materials drift and leave traces, thus linking with the originals. What forces make them move, leaving traces that did not exist before? Following constantly rebuilt and reforming structures, we gain an extended understanding of time and space.

Grace Culley’s assemblage work, *I want to see your backyard and I want to see you, Milk Thistle* (2021), merges recycled and architectural materials to form ‘visceral relics’ of suburban areas.²

If suburban motifs inspired by nature reveal the suburban frontier's defence of nature over the urbanised, technological development of the twentieth century, then Culley's works, inspired by the suburban motif, reveals a strain on relations between public and personal spaces.³

In this work, familiar motifs and architectural materials from the suburban area construct beautifully intricate imagery—the thistle on the grid. The thistle is defined as both a flower and a weed, often characterised by spiky leaves. However, despite their rough appearance, thistles are not toxic, and even some are used for treatment. Nonetheless, encountering thistles is often considered unpleasant in terms of controlling and managing gardens in suburban areas. Traversing public to personal spaces, Culley reprocesses the motif of the thistle to explore the language of Gilles de la Tourette's syndrome. Creating a thistle made with soft materials, including newspaper pulp and silicone, adds tenderness. Spiky leaves are no longer rough and harsh; instead, they become a large, curved path that is free and unimpeded by the grid. The thistle cradles the wooden grid with its subtle leaves and spines. The repetition, pattern, and rhythm, offering a certain level of symmetry in the material structure, open an 'informative discourse about the misunderstood enigma of Tourette's'.⁴ This thistle, as the result of material drift and construction, becomes a threshold of the discourse.

Mi-Mi Fitzsimmons' sculptural work, *With arms awide we step (all the sweet enclosures)* (2021), consists of three individual works incorporating found and collected materials, including cotton and horsehair. They 'preserve' a particular time and memory. The particular memories keep going 'round and round' through the artistic process from drawing to weaving. To borrow Clarice Lispector's beautiful sentences from *Água Viva* (trans. Benjamin Moser), the artist seems to persistently seize 'the fourth dimension of this instant-now so fleeting that it's already gone'.⁵ In another way, Fitzsimmons perseveringly materialises the 'unattainable forever'.⁶

The integration of Fitzsimmons' personal experiences and connections into her process creates a contemplation of intimacy. Through repeated processes, the insubstantial past is refined and materialised into liquid monuments. Persistently yet leisurely stretched white threads around the wooden frame convey

geometric shapes and lines filled with horsehair, and these simple shapes seem to be the atom of time and memories. Subtle material gestures in motion—wrapping, filling, and weaving—hint at the connection to one another over time through memories that can be shared or hidden.

Nelle Rodis' drawing works, *The Lady or The Soldier* (2021) and *Read with eyes and mouth* (2021), mediate between charcoal drawing and crochet patterns in artistic practices converging to 'translation'. Crochet patterns written in numbers and punctuations are repeated and translated into different material structures, but the 'translation does not mean a shift from one vocabulary to another, from one French word to one English word, for instance, as if the two languages existed independently'.⁷ Patterns constantly change whenever mediating a new environment, with the artist's mistakes on the original patterns and different mediums, continually transformed into evocative imageries that are linked together in the cycle of translation.

In Rodis' work, charcoal becomes the tool for revealing what the artist sees. The pixel-like or crochet-like ambivalent images that the solid yet porous charcoal drawing conveys seem to create a vital element of clarity from the masses of information. The patterns encoding the artist's life experience appear from abstraction to figuration, completed through the artist's constant mistakes or attempts to find a better language to communicate with the world.

Simon Clark's set of 25 prints entitled *Harfield Market Garden* (2021) suggests an alternate parallel reality by reconstructing or manipulating brutalist structures—which are very honest, simple, and yet modern in their materials, primarily concrete—using a generative adversarial network (GAN), an artificial intelligence system. In the machines' 'deep dream' of thousands of archival photographs of buildings built in the UK between 1960 and 1980, the materiality of concrete architecture is traded with the immateriality of digital images; or, perhaps, one can say they coexist.

Harfield Market Garden is set in a fictional, mid-sized town, including churches, schools, and a cinema. The stunning yet soulless utopian/dystopian buildings in this fictional town contemplate promises in vain. Are they slowly fading away, like going up in smoke or roaming around us like a heat haze or ghost of the city? Material traces in the new but familiar buildings of

Clark's uncanny town reactivate and interrogate the concept of a concrete utopia through their relation to failure and (architectural) reconstruction.

The exhibition title is inspired by the sailing stones in Death Valley National Park, which are often considered a mystery. These stones are found on the playa desert floor, with long trails stretching behind them. They seem to be moving, which makes one wonder about the powerful forces that move them. (In fact, they are propelled by a rare combination of natural conditions and events.) The vibrant productions of the four artists featured here are resonant with the material drift of the sliding stones, blurring the boundary between life and death. I hope that this exhibition, blurring the boundary between materiality and immateriality, invites every viewer to ponder what created the subtle dialogue on our world in the *trans-material* works contained within.

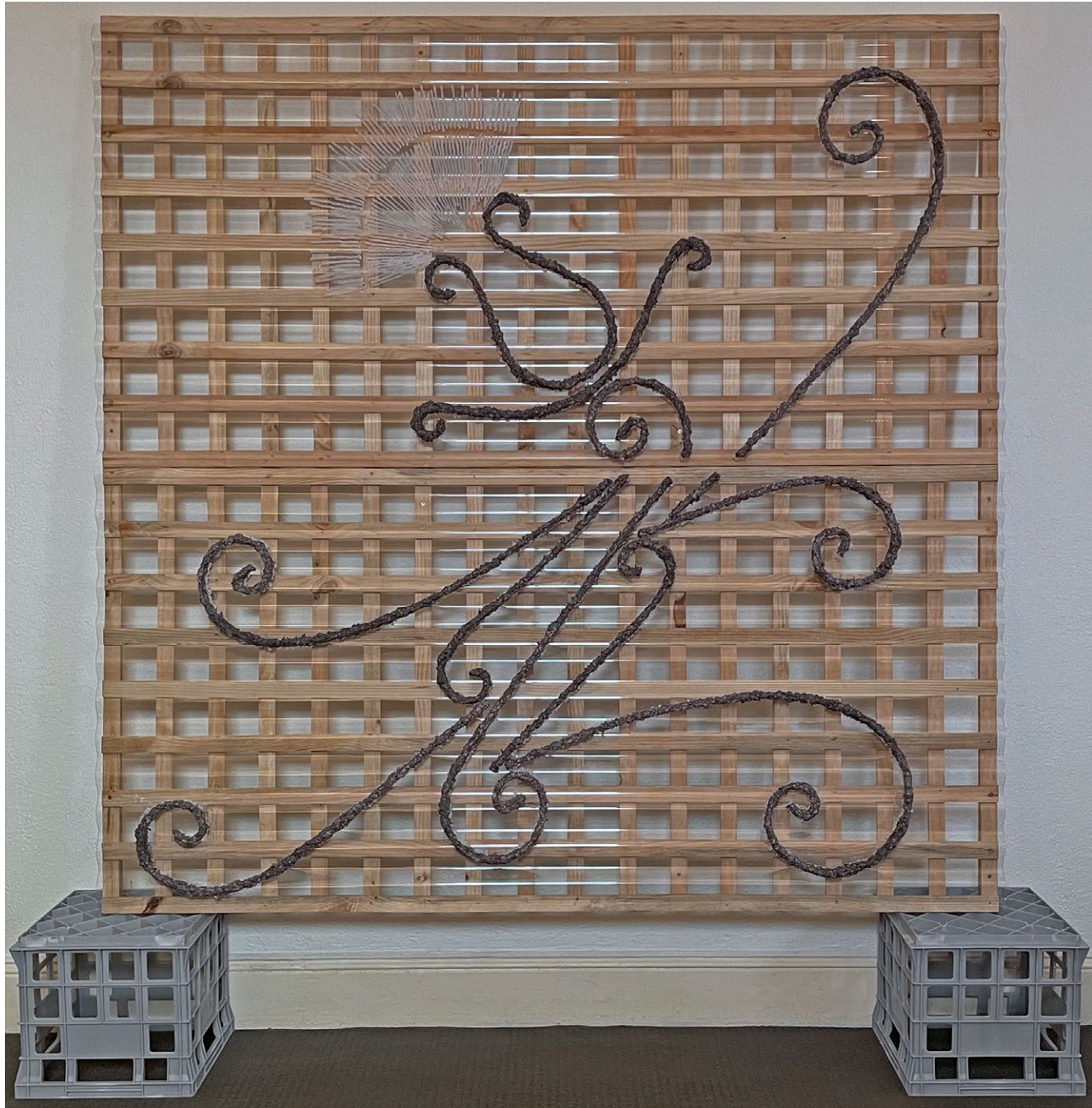
1. Francis Ponge, *Soap*, trans. Lane Dunlop (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 42.
2. Artist's note.
3. See Aidan Davison, "Australian Suburban Imaginaries of Nature: Towards a prospective history," *Australian Humanities Review* 37 (December 2005): 1, 6-7, <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2005/12/01/australian-suburban-imaginaries-of-nature-towards-a-prospective-history/>.
4. Artist's note.
5. Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*, trans. Benjamin Moser (New York: New Directions, 2012), 3, 6.
6. Lispector, *Água Viva*, 3, 6.
7. Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 179-180.

Sujin Jung is a curator and an MA student in art curatorship. Her interests include politics of ecology and new materialism in the context of contemporary art.

GRACE CULLEY

*I want to see your
backyard and I want to
see you, Milk Thistle*

Grace Culley's assemblage *I want to see your backyard and I want to see you, Milk Thistle*, reflects on defence mechanisms and tenderness by looking to thistle members of the daisy family (Asteraceae) in suburban and country Australia.





*I want to see your backyard and I want to
see you, Milk Thistle*

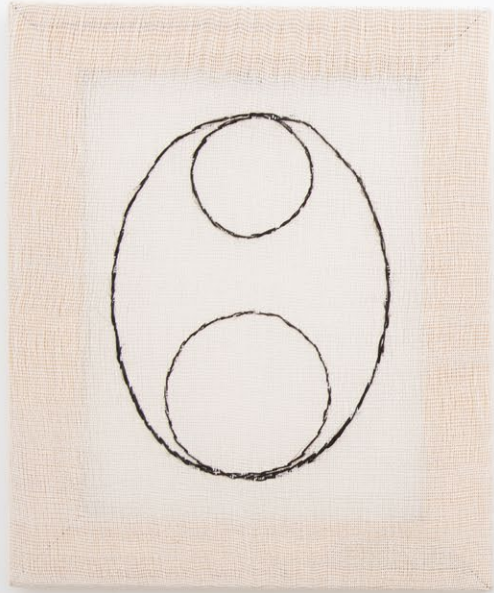
2021

Softwood lattice, hardwood, corrugated
polycarbonate, steel fixing band,
newspaper pulp, PVA, silicone, milk crates
181.6 x 211.2 x 34.2 cm

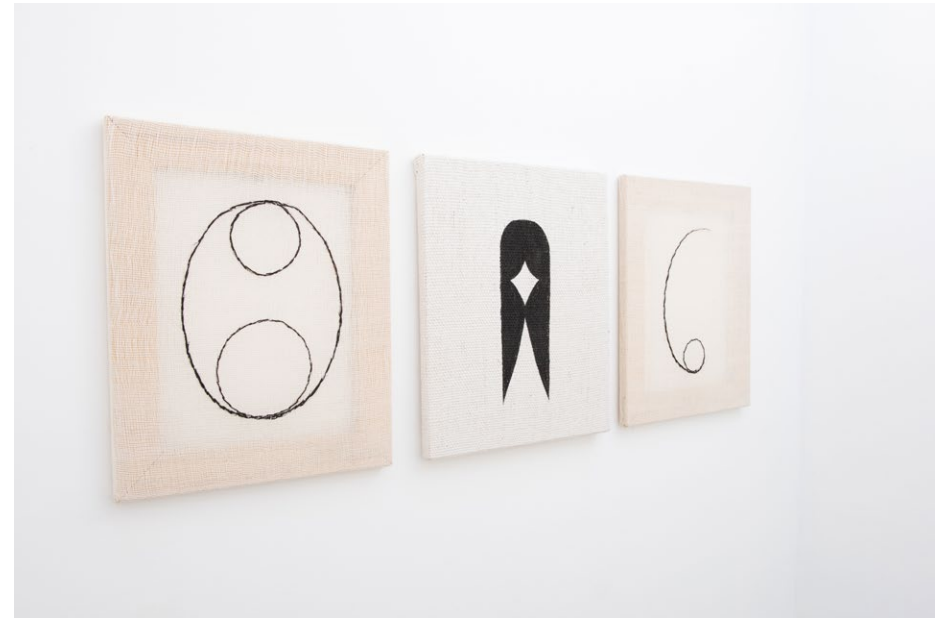
Enquiries:
graceculley1@gmail.com

*With arms awide we step
(all the sweet enclosures)*

With arms awide we step (all the sweet enclosures)
begins with the immediacy of a moment and the need to preserve it. The intuitive act of notation allows for reflection and further comprehension and an obsessive revisitation recalls sensations and deepens impressions—examining the intricacies of movement and connection. Experience is translated by notation to weaving through acts of repetition and refinement in search of a perfect definition. Each moment is seen as reflecting another; those that have passed and those yet to come existing simultaneously, always certain.







Every day for the rest of my life

I'll call you later

I've known you for so long that I give everything you fall

I love you Annie

I'll tell you what I thought
Went round and round until I lost my mind

*With arms arwide we step (all the sweet
enclosures)*

As always As ever (left)

2 (middle)

Shooting star (right)

2021

Cotton, horse hair, ink

560 x 460 mm each

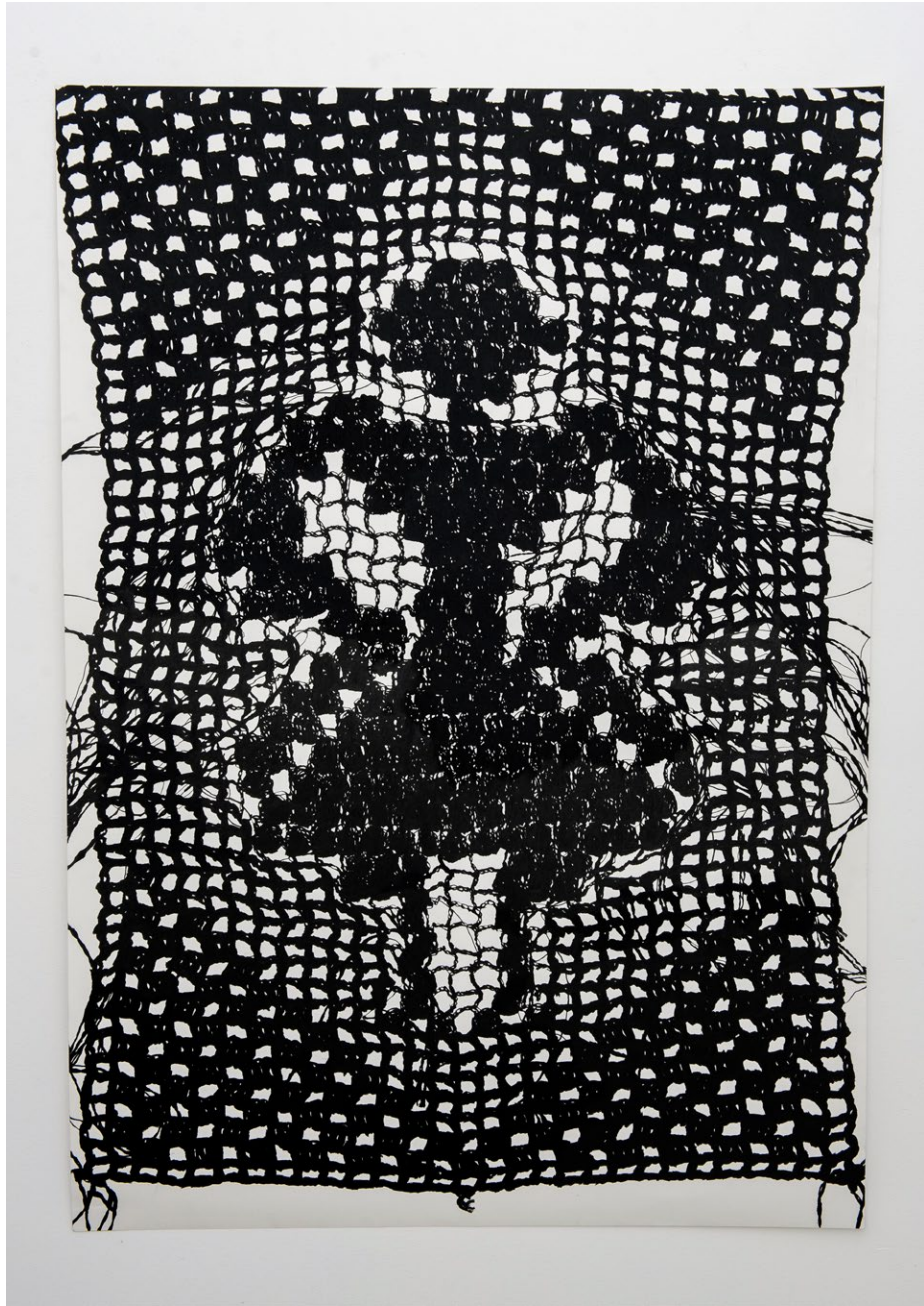
Documentation by Matthew Ware

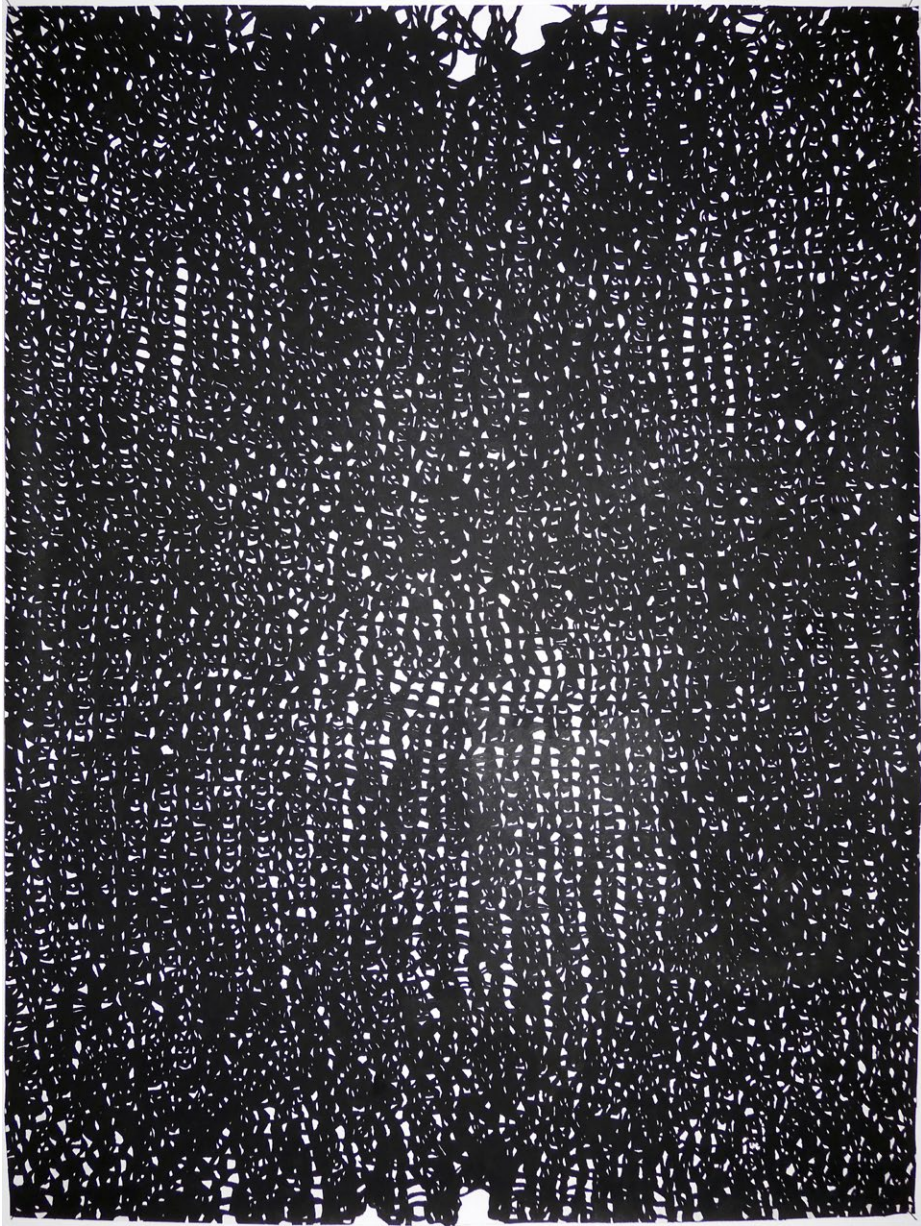
Enquiries:
mimifitz@hotmail.com

NELLE RODIS

The Lady or The Soldier
and
Read with eyes
and *mouth*

Located somewhere between drawing and textile-based disciplines, *The Lady or The Soldier* and *Read with eyes and mouth* begin as drawings that form a pattern, from which objects manifest, and which themselves become code for more drawings. This relational cycle or repetition of the same work through different forms of observation and visual language facilitates an attempt to understand and further, a specific logic that involves an intelligence of the body. As the work moves through its stages of fabrication, it reveals its inherent forms and symbols, yielding new knowledge through its machinery.





The Lady or The Soldier
2021
Charcoal on Paper
900 x 1200 mm

Read with eyes and mouth
2021
Charcoal on Paper
900 x 1200 mm

Enquiries:
nelle.240@gmail.com

SIMON CLARK

Harfield Market Garden

Harfield Market Garden is a completely fictional, mid-sized town created from thousands of archival photographs of utopian/dystopian buildings from the United Kingdom, built between 1960 and 1980. The work forms part of an ongoing project exploring the psychic legacies of Modernism, the ghosts of flawed idealisms from the past and the contemplation of a humanistic, collective future which failed to come to pass.



Betjeman's Department Store



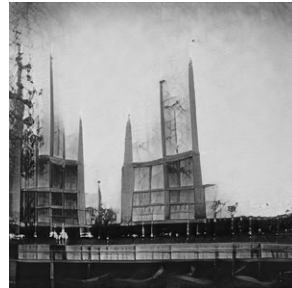
Centenary Park



*Harfield Market Garden
Central Library*



*Harfield Market Garden
Central Police Station*



*Harfield Market Garden
Central Railway Station*



*Harfield Market Garden
Civic Centre*



*Harfield Market Garden
Local Planning Office*



*Harfield Market
Garden Town Hall*



*Harold Wilson
Comprehensive School*



*Harfield Market
Garden Polytechnic*



Loxwich House



Queen Alexandra Hospital



St Andrew's Pentecostal Church



St Jude's Anglican Church



St Jude's Primary School



St Mary's Cathedral



The J.G. Ballard Park Estate



The Museum of Contemporary Art, Harfield Market Garden



The Redbrook Estate



The Loxway Community Centre



The Salon Cinema



*The United Methodist Church
of Harfield Market Garden*



Thornthorpe Residential Gardens



Thornthorpe Technical College



Weston Heights

Harfield Market Garden

2021

A set of 25 images created by artificial
intelligence, a Generative Adversarial
Network (GAN)

Each 15.2 x 15.2 cm

Enquiries:
sccla74@gmail.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition, *Sailing Stones in Death Valley*, would not have been possible without the significant contributions of many people. I would especially like to thank my mentor **Sandra Bridie** for her thoughtful feedback on the various iterations of this project and especially for helping me to stay focused and encouraged. I am also incredibly grateful to all the artists involved for their extraordinary contributions to the exhibition. Despite the difficult conditions, **Grace Culley, Mi-Mi Fitzsimmons, Nelle Rodis,** and **Simon Clark** came up with brilliant ideas and generously put in their time and effort to make this exhibition. I would also like to thank **Vanessa Le** for her inspirational graphic designs, which played a huge part in the online transition of the exhibition.

With warmest thanks,

Sujin Jung

ARTISTS

Grace Culley, Mi-Mi Fitzsimmons, Nelle Rodis, Simon Clark

CURATOR

Sujin Jung

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Vanessa Le

GALLERY DIRECTOR

Sandra Bridie

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