

The Word as Bait
Alex Moni-Sauri

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Michael Swaine
Rob Rhee

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Alex Moni-Sauri

University of Washington

Abstract

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Alex Moni-Sauri

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Michael Swaine

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This thesis examines the relationship between language, image, and object through four major works developed during an MFA in 3D4M. Working across drawing, poetry, sculpture, and language systems, I investigate how visual and linguistic forms interact and overlap to exceed their conventional functions as tools of representation. Underlying these projects is an interest in language and art as forms of human behavior situated within a larger ecology of perception and meaning-making. Drawing on the writings of Clarice Lispector, John Berger, and David Abram, I consider how acts of description and symbolic play might approach experiences that resist articulation. Rather than seeking a definitive representation of their subjects, the hybrid modes I work within explore how meaning emerges through the relation of parts and the engagement of varied forms of looking. The resulting work proposes a holistic artistic practice as a mode of inquiry—one which follows language to its edge and stays alert to what exceeds it.

The Word as Bait

“Writings are small strange walldrawings.”
—Clark Coolidge

The central pursuit of my work in the MFA and beyond is the integration of visual and linguistic modes, toward a synthesized choreography in which no particular mode speaks over any other. I am developing a holistic practice in which the slantness of poetry, immediacy of image, and spatial presence of objects and installation move beyond the sum of their parts to illuminate the thread strung between them.

Underlying this inquiry is a broader interest in language and art as forms of human behavior. These capacities are often treated as evidence of human exceptionalism, but they can also be understood as particular expressions of our animal condition: distinctive, complex, and remarkable, but no more separate from the living world than a trunk is from an elephant. Thinkers such as John Berger and David Abram argue that human language emerges through sustained contact with other forms of life, and this perspective has informed my own growing interest in animism, interspecies entanglement, and the many forms of communication unfolding beyond the human. Language and art provide a lens through which I investigate human experience, while remaining attentive to the mystery, intelligence, and unknowability of the larger world in which that experience is situated.

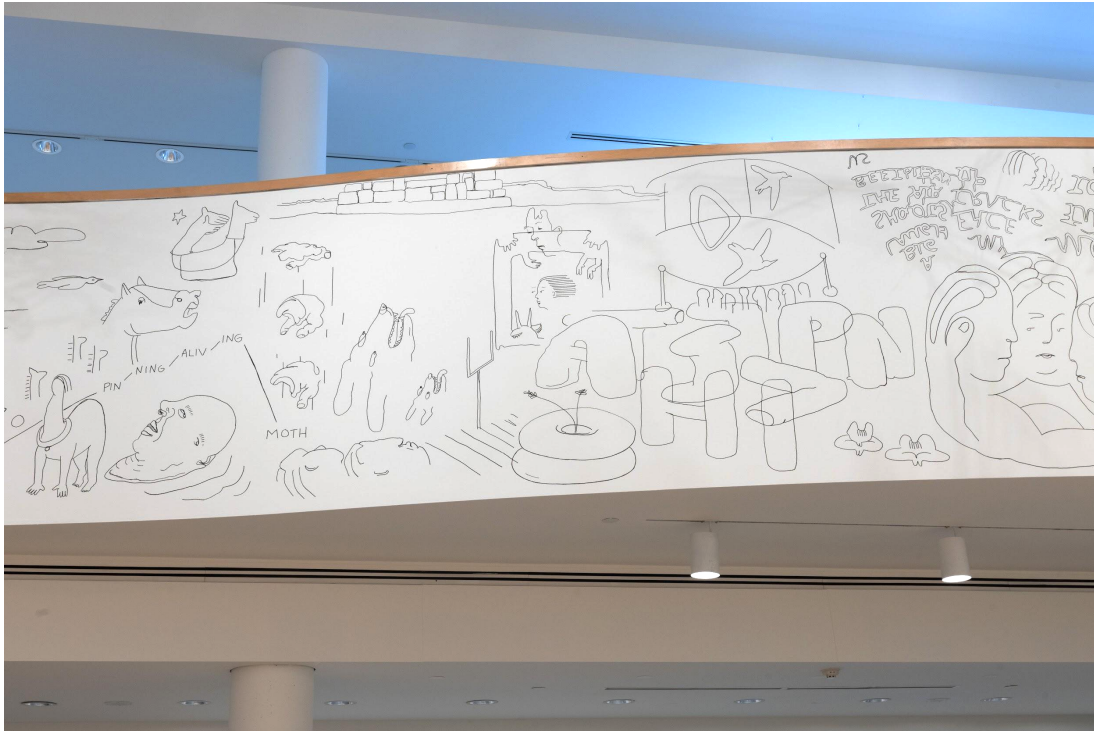
This inquiry has led me to develop a body of work that includes wall-scale text installations, handwritten drawings, combinatory writing systems, physical words, and sculptural environments. Though varied in form, these works are animated by a shared set of questions: How does writing function as a visual, sculptural, or environmental material? How can reading be dispersed through space and made more like looking? What invites a viewer to become a

reader, and a reader to become a viewer? Across these projects, language exceeds its utilitarian function and becomes experiential. Supporting this investigation are artists and writers whose practices similarly engage the porous boundary between word and image, including Ann Hamilton, Christine Sun Kim, Christian Bök, and Clarice Lispector. Their work provides models for understanding language not only as a symbolic system, but also as a material, sensory, ecological, and perceptual phenomenon.

The sections that follow examine four major works produced during my MFA research. Together, they explore description, constraint, spatial reading, symbol, and the limits of expression. Across these projects, accumulation, repetition, erasure, distortion, play, and chance function as methods for approaching experiences that continually exceed the structures available to describe them. Each work begins with language, but all eventually arrive at the same threshold: the mark of the hand as it strains toward something larger than itself.

I. Life Is Supernatural and Everything Around Me Within Reach

My installation for the MFA/MDes show at the Henry hinged on a handwritten list poem and a field of images, each applied with acrylic paint markers to adjacent gallery walls. The text wall (*Everything Around Me Within Reach*) was nested in a shallow, wedge-shaped alcove, while the image field (*Life is Supernatural*) ribboned out across the face of the upper balcony. I chose these sites for their specificity, the alcove offering depth and shelter within its cavelike corner wedge, and the balcony adding torque and motion with its ripple. Leaning into the corner by the text stood an oversized pencil with a blue-lined butterfly net attached at the tip; gathered at the base of the eraser was a cluster of small paper cubes.



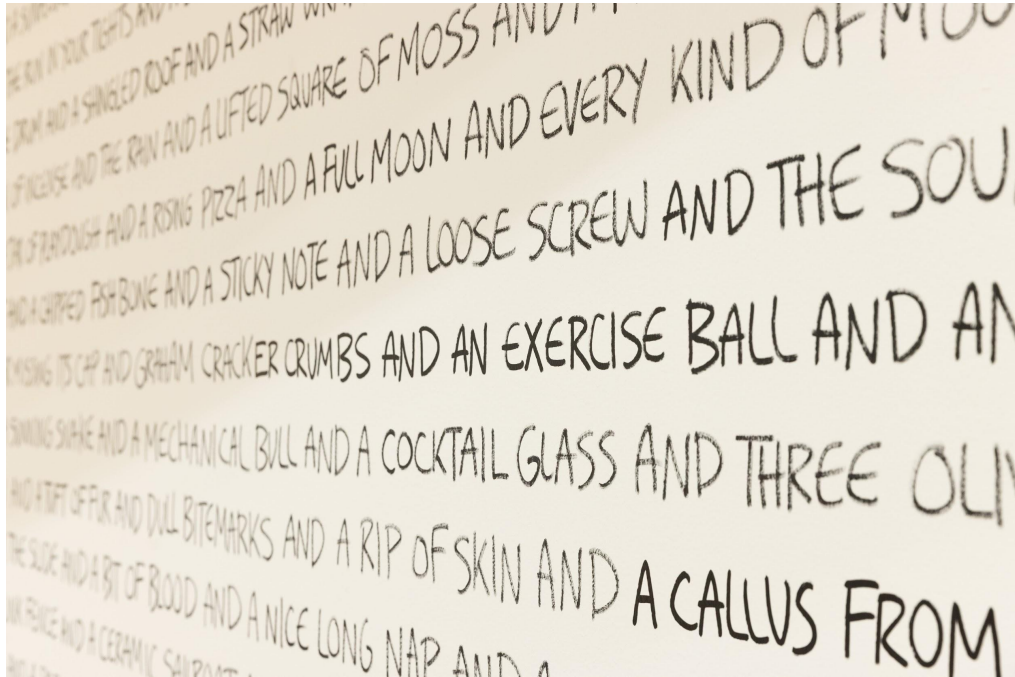
Life is Supernatural (above) and Everything Around Me Within Reach (below), photos by Jacob Chung



Biography for my living dog. We live together. He is a forest and an ocean and a mountain and a molehill and a pile of sand and an hourglass and a river and a hot air balloon and a ripped kite and a wind sock and a slammed door and a smashed window and a painted frame and a seat on the bus and lint on the stairs and a magnet and a magnifying glass and an easel and a saddle and a sunflower seed and a mashed strawberry and a string cheese and a tall cup and a clay moon and a paper sock and a silky gown and some dried toothpaste and the run in my tights and a secret santa and fallen needles and a lucky penny and shed hair and rye toast and a whole baguette and a hummingbird and a wide drum and a shingled roof and a straw wrapper and a piece of tinfoil in the mouth of a crow and a waiting alligator and a corkboard and a phonebook and a stick of incense and the rain and a lifted square of moss and a patterned kitchen tile and a pillow that smells like hair and a bath full of salt and a streaky mirror and a jar of playdough and a rising pizza and a full sun and every kind of moon and a piece of kelp and a lily pad and a rub of ash and a drip of wax stuck in the carpet and a chipped fish bone and a sticky note and a loose screw and the sound of airplanes and a bag of lawn clippings and a steady hammer and a fresh blue marker missing its cap and graham cracker crumbs and an exercise ball and an Olympic swimming pool and a high dive and the smell of chlorine and a rock face and a sunning snake and a mechanical bull and a cocktail glass and three olives on a spear and a tiny umbrella and a mothball and a leaf of cedar and a deep burrow and a tuft of bear and dull bitemarks and a rip of skin and a callus from the monkeybars and the smell of wet woodchips and cafeteria and the static shock from the slide and a bit of blood and a nice long nap and a wooden chair and a woven basket and a bottle of wine and a stick with which to beat a drum and a chainlink fence and a ceramic sailboat and a full jug of water and a buried bone and the skull of a man and a picture of my mother and a sliding door and raised blinds and a pad of paper and packed-down dirt and a pulse in the earth and a million threaded roots and the tassels on the corn and dandelion fluff and underwater pipes and a train tunneling through mountains and a roll of packing tape and a used cardboard box and a lighthouse and an outlet and a plug, and a stack of books, and a bed.

(Text of *Everything Around Me Within Reach*)

A conventional biography promises a coherent account of a life. Dates, events, accomplishments, relationships, and defining characteristics are assembled into a narrative structure capable of producing a recognizable person. The premise of the work invokes this expectation while immediately destabilizing it. The subject is a living dog; the form is a list of noun phrases. The resulting text wanders through an expanding field of sensory images that undermines any expectation of factual completeness. The block gathers together texture, memory, atmosphere, and emotional association, resulting in a constellation that balloons past its premise of definition. My subject remains intact, persistently exceeding the inventory constructed in his name. The list's inability to arrive at a final account produces its momentum; each new comparison emerges from the limitations of the previous. Language keeps reaching, circling, expanding, and returning, creating structure as a child piles treasures from the beach into a jar.



The variability of boldness and texture left by the paint pen running dry and being re-filled enacts the urgent pace of straining toward an idea, reaching for the next word, trying and failing. Scattered eraser peels and wadded-up paper cubes with distorted language wet into them are further material gestures toward this effort.



Repetition, erasure, and visible error are consistent features of my work across mediums, functioning as tools to externalize and spotlight the working mind. Language accumulates around the dog because language cannot fully reach him; every image gestures toward a subject that continues to morph beyond the frame of the text. The language then becomes a monument to the attempt. A guiding image for this pursuit is the impossible act of *pinning a living moth*, a phrase which appears in the adjacent image field, *Life is Supernatural*.

The drawings in *Life is Supernatural* extend this investigation through visual forms. Importantly, they do not function as illustrations of the poem; a direct correspondence between text and image would flatten the resonance established by the work. Instead, the drawings participate in the same field of associations, operating according to rhythms of accumulation, fragmentation, and juxtaposition. The spatial distribution of the drawings plays an important role in this process—rather than gathering into a single composition, the images disperse across the balcony in clusters, gaps, and intervals. A viewer encounters them sequentially while moving through the space, but no fixed order or linear narrative dictates movement. Individual forms remain discrete while participating in a larger network of associations. The experience of moving through the installation mirrors the process of reading the poem: attention wanders, returns, leaps across distance, meets itself unexpectedly, and finds coherence through repeated encounters.

John Berger's writing offers a useful framework for understanding the impulses behind this work. In the essay *Why Look at Animals?* Berger develops the idea that meaning emerges through relationship rather than isolation, and describes the impossibility of fully seeing another's interiority—an impossibility which is heightened for humans across the species-divide. "The animal scrutinizes [man]," he writes, "across a narrow abyss of non-comprehension. The

man too is looking across a similar, but not identical, abyss of non-comprehension. And this is so wherever he looks.” And further:

The parallelism of their similar/dissimilar lives allowed animals to provoke some of the first questions and offer answers. The first subject matter for painting was animal. Probably the first paint was animal blood. Prior to that, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal.

Berger resists accounts of identity that position humans as self-contained subjects, emphasizing instead the entanglement of attention, memory, place, and encounter through which a life becomes legible. This proposition has important implications for representation: if identity emerges relationally, then any attempt to describe another being through a fixed set of characteristics will be fundamentally incomplete. The dog remains partially unknowable, yet increasingly present through the density of attention assembled around him.

The title for the work *Life is Supernatural* and the title for this paper, *The Word as Bait*, are both lines from Clarice Lispector’s uncategorizable masterpiece, *Água Viva*. Various translations in English as *Breath of Life*, *Stream of Life*, and *Living Water*, (and meaning, in Portuguese, *jellyfish*) it is a plotless, chapterless stream of prose emitted by a first-person painter-narrator in her attempt to capture the wordless pulse of the present moment, the non-word, the neutral, the “it”—using, of course, plain words. It is an extended meditation on the act of making and the slipperiness of expression in the face of primary experience. But it is not defeatist in the face of its limits—the impetus for Lispector’s work, in this and other novels, is that the constraints and failures of language are precisely the mechanism for arriving at the unsayable, the ineffable, the “vital knot” around which we all spin. As she writes in *The Passion According to G.H.*,

Reality is raw material, language the way I seek it—and how I don’t find it. But it is from seeking and not finding that what I have not known is born, and I instantly recognize it.

Language is my human endeavor. I have fatefully to go seeking and fatefully I return with empty hands. But—I return with the unsayable. The unsayable can be given me only through the failure of my language. Only when the construct falters do I reach what it could not accomplish.

In *Água Viva*, the narrator's attempts to describe the effort of writing/living gather in images of fishing lines, arrows, oysters, lemon juice, pebbles, mirrors, glass, and perfume, relentlessly circling the limits of the word and the impossibility of the task. But impossibility is not futility; it is the construct that clarifies the target, draws us closer to the "it." The passage from *Água Viva* which both lent its name to this paper and led to the creation of the pencil-net describes the process of casting the mind out plainly on a string of words:

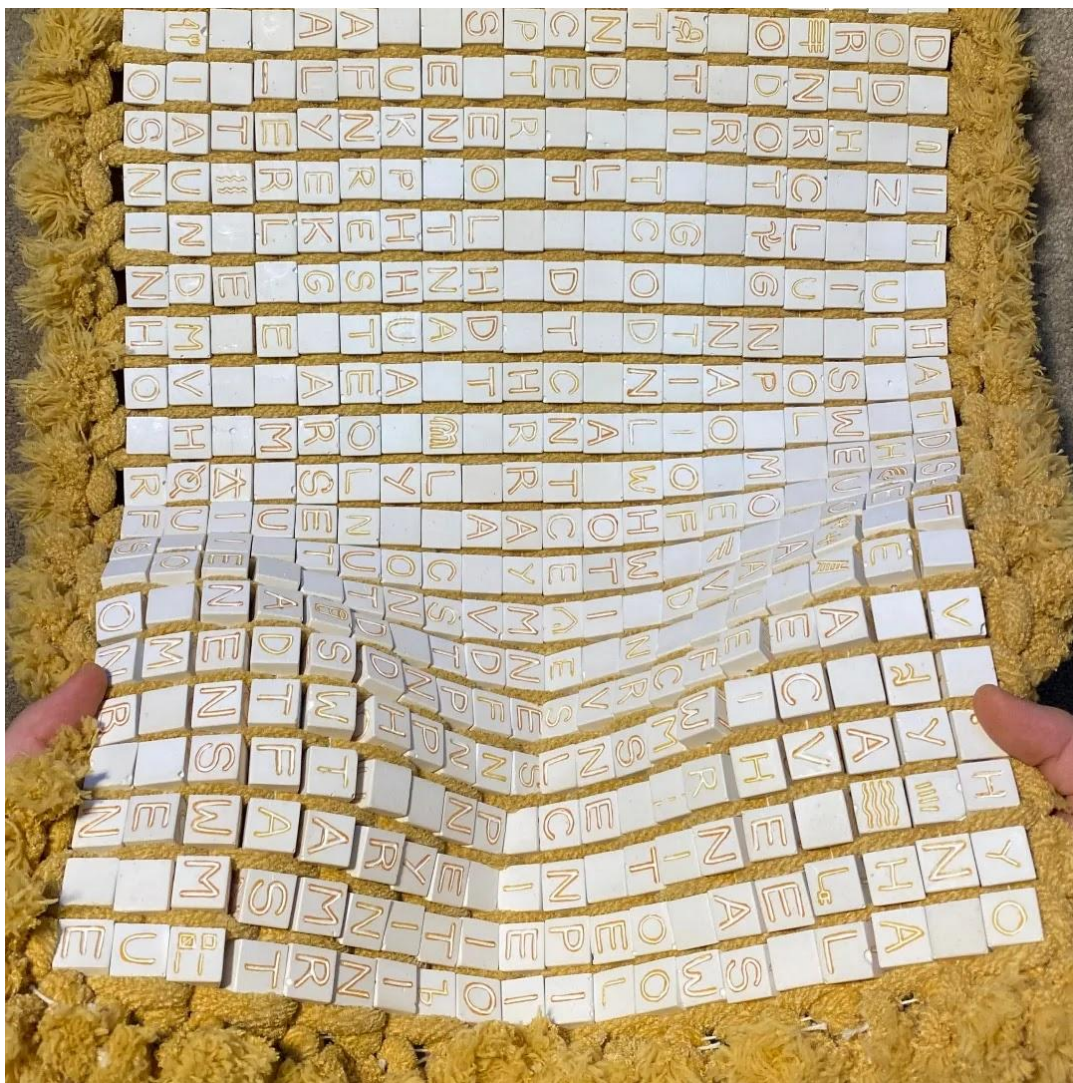
So writing is the method of using the word as bait: the word fishing for whatever is not word. When this non-word—between the lines—takes the bait, something has been written. Once whatever is between the lines is caught, the word can be tossed away in relief. But that's where the analogy ends: the non-word, taking the bait, incorporates it. So what saves you is writing absentmindedly.

Poetry is already a suitable form for these questions of language limits and the slippery meaning that grows between lines. Its slantness, multiplicity, and associative logic constantly birth new behaviors of language. My interest in expanding the poem's context to include spatial, material, and imagistic elements is in service of its innate elasticity. While the poem provides one method for pursuing what Lispector calls the "non-word," images and objects approach the same problem through their own systems, constraints, and procedures, creating a climate in which new relationships may emerge.

II. Language Games and the Slippery Net

The next project began with the treatment of language itself as a material, sourced through a systematized procedure of collection and chance. It was conceived as a ninety-day

experiment in gathering word-matter. Each day began with a simple ritual: a set of letters and/or symbols was selected through a brief tactile encounter with an object I'd made the year before—a woven mat of cast plaster cubes, carved with letters, symbols, and blank faces—and the resulting characters established constraints for that day's harvest. Words were then sourced from books according to rules generated by the selected cubes, written onto squares of soluble seed-tape paper, transcribed into a digital document, and composed into daily fragments. The soluble seed-tape paper with its handwritten harvest was dissolved and re-cast into lumpy cubes, which eventually accumulated at the base of the pencil-net.



Textile, 2023



Language Game in process, 2026

The resulting body of work included physical objects, blurred handwritten logs, daily language masses, poem fragments, and a record of time. Yet none of these outcomes fully constitute the work; the fruit of the system lay in the form of attention it demanded. Many artistic processes, including some of my own, begin with a seed and proceed toward realization. The language game I played with my cubes inverted this relationship, as its system became a tool for encountering language that I would not have sought intentionally. It rewarded wandering,

noticing, and obsessive foraging. The language gathered over ninety days emerged from poetry collections, bird guides, essays, Laurie Anderson albums (*The Heart of A Dog*), short stories, children's books, literary journals, radio, and religious pamphlets. Each daily crop holds traces of its previous environment, but takes on different flavors when placed between yesterday and tomorrow in the calendar of words.

The process of linguistic composition was almost not writing at all. It was all play, puzzle, arrangement, and surprise. This distinction became increasingly freeing as the project developed. The work with fragments relied on sensitivity to what appeared unexpectedly, and the role of the artist lightened away from pure invention.

Some days the findings were small—

Umbrella caught sun
Naturally stuck

(February 14, *The Cosmicomics*, Italo Calvino, u-l-m-blank-n)

Some taut—

Time frags beyond space
Light-years dragged along
Soft galactic emptiness
Then teeth

(February 20, *The Crystal Text*, Clark Coolidge, t-[]-g-i-blank)

Some fleshed—

Applied sun: the house-taught shapes. Little bottles holding still.
Bathrobe practicing Nudes. Fragments of time slanting in lines
through kitchen air

as morning claws north.
The chair and I clasped together as hands.

In the videotape a house of light stands
in an atmosphere of flesh. Weather is beating

and caressing the stretched surface of the ceiling
as transparent, bluish children crouch in a recess,
chanting Latin.

The videotape is our workshop.
We cherish action. Out of necessity
understand our life as Middle.

Covers slid back, revealing Rock.
We reached a place of floating, looking north.
Time, water, and telephone traffic
slid into the moor.

The leftover mind a shred.

(January 20, *The Glass Essay*, Anne Carson, t-h-l-c-symbol)

Some haunted—

Dull at play
Father face raining

This particular child
An electrical disturbance

Nightly
Emulating light

(March 23, *Some Trees*, John Ashbery, s-l-f-i-blank)

—none I could predict alone in my own head.

The cube game belongs to a lineage of artistic and literary practices that use rules, constraints, and chance operations as generative tools. Dada experiments in randomness, Fluxus event scores, and the procedural investigations of OuLiPo (*Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, or "Workshop for Potential Literature") all offer key precedents. Threading these far-spread traditions is an understanding that limitations can generate possibilities unavailable through the

logical mind and unrestricted choice. Constraint alters attention, bypassing well-worn routes and revealing hidden doorways within familiar bounds.

The writers associated with OuLiPo in particular approached constraint as an engine for discovery. Georges Perec wrote an entire novel without the letter "e." Italo Calvino's fractal-like work *Invisible Cities* unfolds through hidden mathematical constraints. Christian Bök's *Eunoia* organizes entire chapters around a single vowel. My game with cubes shares interests with OuLiPo while departing from them in one respect—most OuLiPian constraints operate upon the written output, deploying rules to structure composition. The cubes intervene earlier in the process, shaping the conditions through which language is sourced and determining the field of my attention before what is written.

This practice recalls Italo Calvino's well-loved essay "Cybernetics and Ghosts," in which he imagines literature as a machine capable of generating combinations. Calvino is fascinated by the possibility that literary production might be understood as a process of permutation rather than pure inspiration, and delights in its liberatory potential in freeing the maker from the genius-myth—yet the essay ultimately draws an irreducibly human conclusion. The machine can generate combinations, but the ghost appears in the act of recognition.

Another parallel can be found in the work of Agnes Martin and the reflections on her use of the grid. Martin (and others writing on her work) describes the use of structure as a vehicle for attention. Her paintings create environments in which perception slows and subtle differences arise in texture, color, line. The underlying geometry remains stable while revelation unfolds within it—much like Lispector's notion that the limitations of language create the conditions for encountering the unsayable.

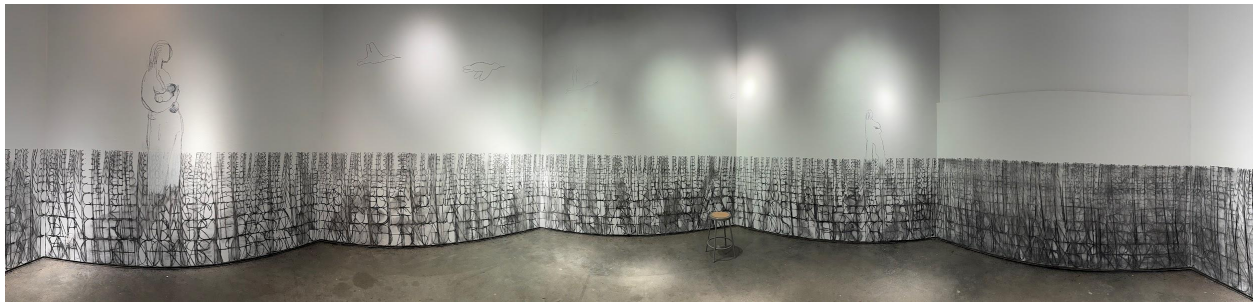
My time with the cubes repeatedly produced this experience: the system generated conditions, material, and combinations, but meaning emerged only in the moments of surprise, resonance, and coincidence that could not be predicted in advance. Many divinatory systems operate according to a similar logic. Tarot cards, the I Ching, bibliomancy, rune casting, and other such practices function by drawing images and symbols into contact with a seeking mind and leaving room for interpretation. Similar to divination, the cube game regularly offered evidence that language possesses a tendency toward self-organization, as though words were seeking each other across distance. The mind leaps at the chance to bridge the gap.

By the end of ninety days, the project had produced hundreds of physical cubes, thousands of collected words, and a growing archive of texts. More importantly, it transformed my relationship to language and strengthened my appreciation of its malleability and migratory nature. The cubes gathered at the base of the pencil in *Everything Around Me Within Reach* was one such instance of migration—the outputs of the system detached from their origin and entered another context entirely, as the poem fragments will inevitably do in future compositions.

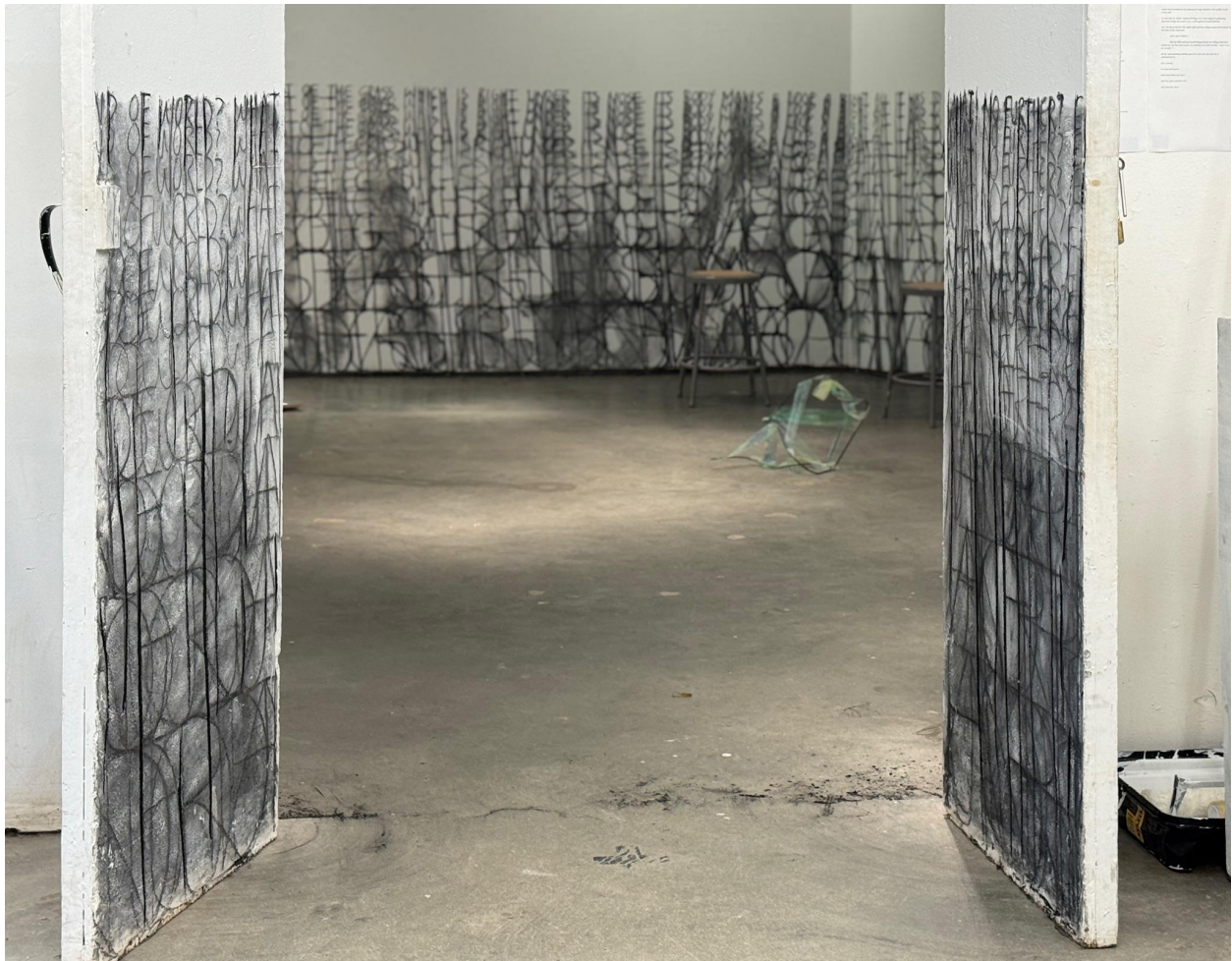
III. What! *No Further?*

The work discussed thus far approached language through accumulation and collection. The list poem gathered images around a subject that continually exceeded description, and the cube system gathered language-material using constraint and chance to create unexpected relationships. The next installation, *No Further?*, attempted to literally merge its linguistic and visual meaning, and extended this investigation into immersive space.

Across the walls of the enclosed, hexagonal space of the North Gallery ran an excerpt from Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life*, handwritten in vine charcoal, enlarged, repeated, distorted, and partially erased. Figures appeared intermittently throughout the field of text, and symbol-birds winged across the white space above. The room functioned simultaneously as a drawing, a text, and a landscape through which viewers moved.



The excerpted text describes the "dimwit life" of an inchworm, tracing its process of flailing through the grass. In Dillard's book, this is both a detailed image-description of a real event and an implicit metaphor for the process of writing. In this installation, the visual presentation of Dillard's sentences (repetition, distortion, erosion) resonates with both the linguistic meaning of the text (searching, uncertainty, getting lost) and with the image it describes (field of grass). Similarly, the addition of figures and forms strengthens the dimensional setting of *field* as well as the emotional setting of *searching, unsure*.



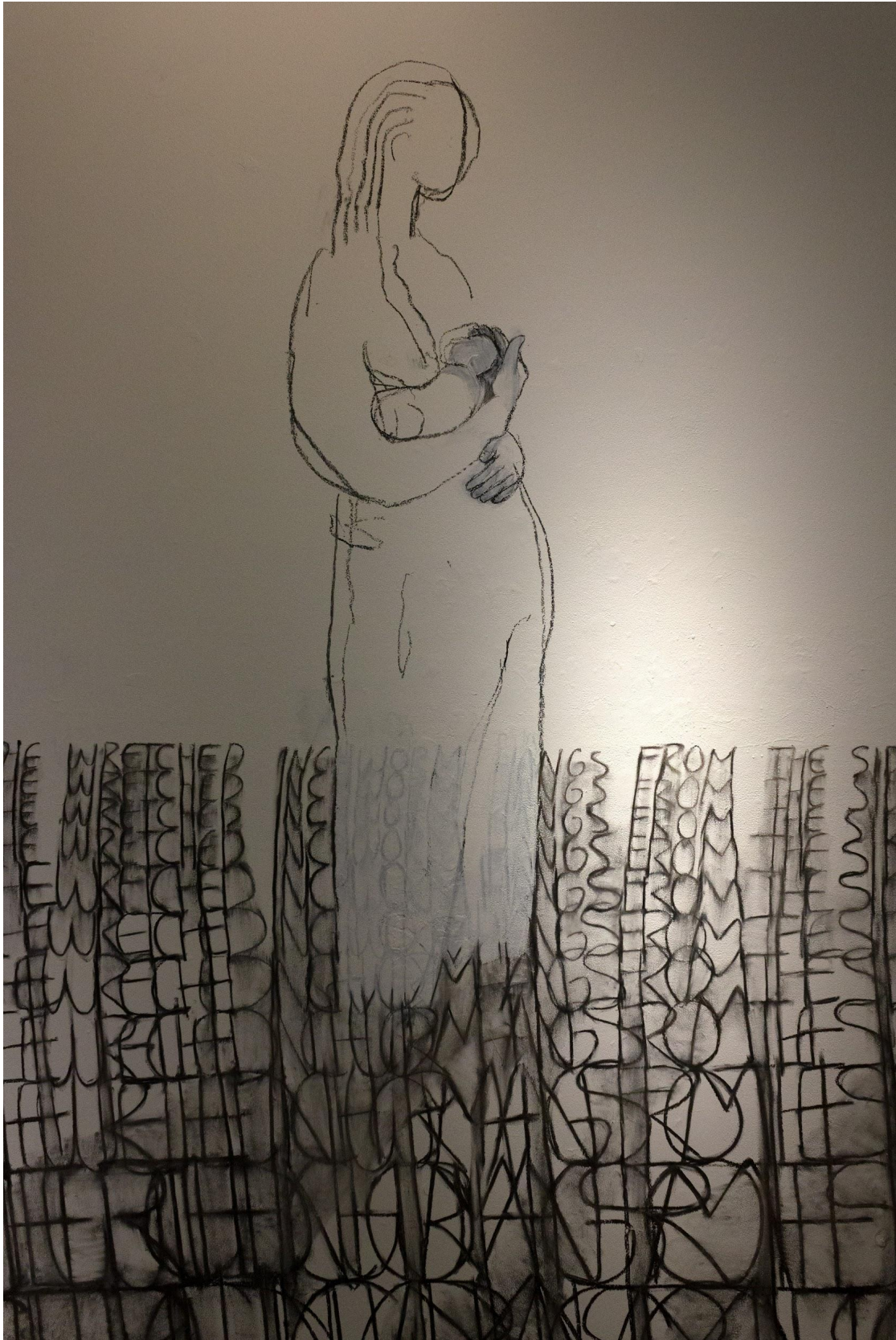
Dillard's account observes the bright green inch performing its flail and loop along a single grasshead, blindly rearing against the void before the stalk bends with weight and bumps the

creature into another blade. The inchworm stretches forward, loses footing, flails, reorients, and continues; movement advances through repeated acts of reaching.



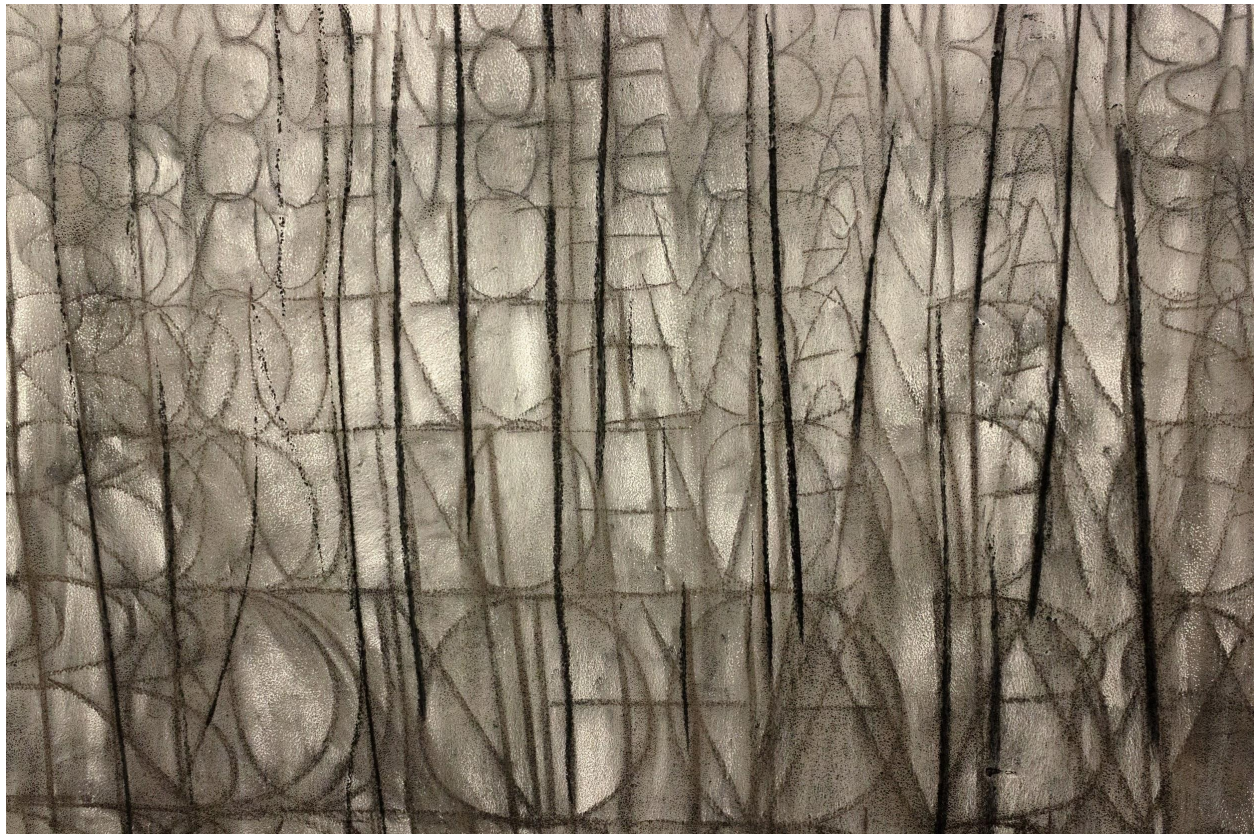
The enlargement and circular immersion of the sentences alters the act of reading by changing the orientation of body to text. Reading ordinarily unfolds through a linear sequence within the borders of a familiar rectangle. In *No Further?* language disperses across space. Following the horizontal trail of the passage requires a revolution of the body, and word fragments emerge from multiple directions at once. The figures embedded in the room further complicate this relationship. Their presence introduces an emotional dimension that exceeds the descriptive content and metaphor of Dillard's passage. Human forms appear searching, uncertain, and partially submerged within the surrounding field, caught within the same conditions that

govern the inchworm's movement. They look out beyond the field's horizon with postures similar to those of viewers in a gallery..



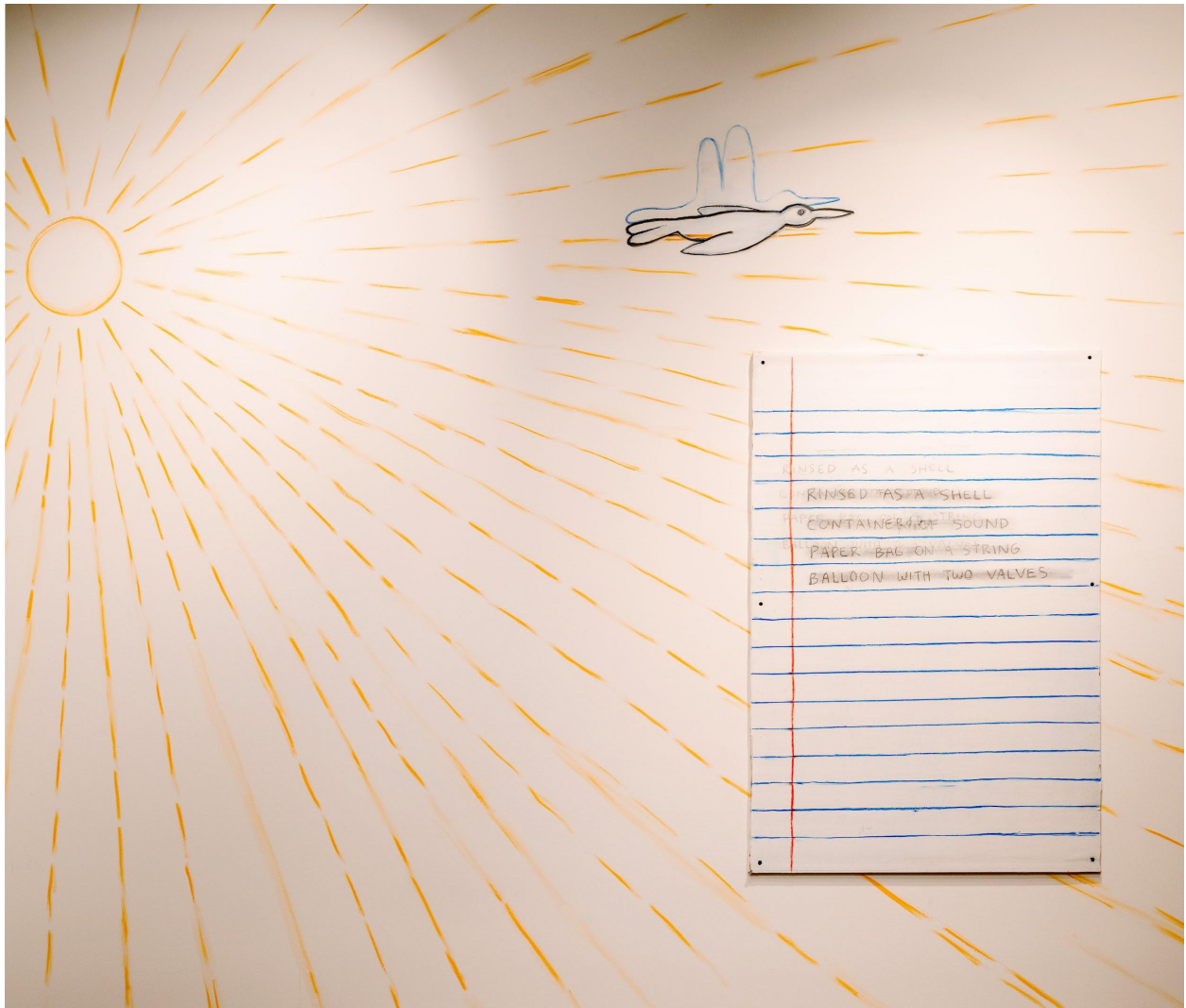
Transforming the act of reading into embodied physical effort is a special concern of artist Ann Hamilton's, whose installations frequently shift reading from a private cognitive activity into a spatial and often social one. In her works *tropos* (1993), *verse* (2010), *lineament* (2017), and *the common SENSE* (2016), language circulates through architectural spaces, appearing on walls, paper, cloth, and skin, as well as in sound and smoke. Words become tangible physical materials that viewers encounter with their bodies as well as their eyes and mind. Architecture, distance, and scale intervene, calling forth the sensing body as an active part of the reading apparatus.

Hamilton's sense of infinite movement between language, object, image, and space is a steady north star for my work. The balance achieved in *No Further?* marked a step in that direction. The installation does not depict or describe an inchworm moving through grass; instead, the formal properties of the writing participate in the same visual world as the linguistic event. Language grows grass-like, and the field becomes textual.



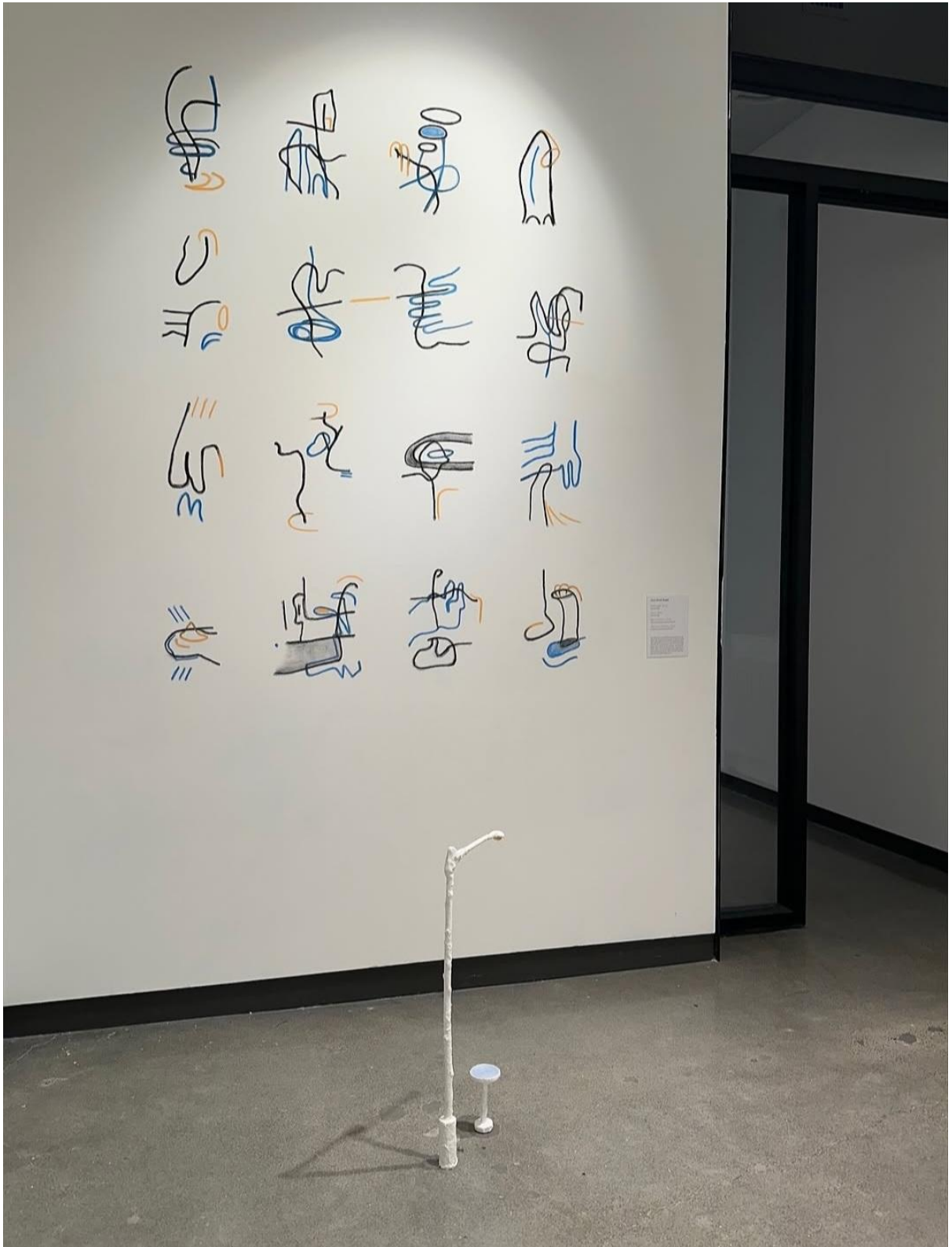
IV. Speed of Spirit, Shape of Thought

The final work this paper will discuss is the furthest away in chronological time, and marked my first exploration of large-scale walldrawings. Occupying three walls and a section of floor space, this installation at the Jacob Lawrence Gallery featured charcoal-handwritten text, sidewalk chalk drawings, glyphs, and miniature sculpture.



Rinsed as a shell/ container of sound/ paper bag on a string/ balloon with two valves, 2025

HERE IS FISH FISH FLYING UP OUT UP OUT UP UP OUT OUT CHIMNEY
 HOUSE CHIMNEYSPOUT GREY BREATH AIR FISHMOTH FLAP BENDBEND FLAP
 WRENCHBEND MOTHMOTH MEMOTH FLAPFLAP FLAPFLAP BEATBEAT LIGHT
 LIGHTBEAT OUT OUT OUT GONEGONE VANISH CLOUDMOUTH CLOTHMOUTH
 SWALLOWMOTH SWALLOW PAPER CUPCUPCUP NAKEDWOMAN WALL
 WALLWALL NAKEDWOMAN BEDSTAND MOTH THRASH THRASHTHRUM
 THOUGHTGLITTER THOUGHT LITTER CONSTELLATION THOUGHTLEAK LEAKING
 LEAKING WINDOWMIRROR MIRRORBLUE WINDOWPAINTING BLUEBLUE
 SUNDRIIP SUN SUN SUN WINDOWWINDOWWINDOW HOLE HOLE WALL
 LIGHTLIGHT LIGHT SQUAREFOOT HOWL HOWLWIND SOUL SOULCIRCLE SOUL
 SOULCIRCLE SOULCIRCLE ROUNDROUND HOLE RUBBERRUBBERBANDBAND
 SNAP TIME STRETCH TIME SLACK TIME BACK SLACKBACK SLACKBACK
 SNAP GODBLANKET NAMEBLANKET COVER COVER WRAP NAME IS IS
 IS IDEA IDEA IDEA GLAND LEAKING LEAKY GLAND DRIPDRIP BADSHOE
 BADFIT BADFITTING BADBAD SHOE SHOEFOOT LIMPWALK LIMPLIMP MOTH
 MOTHBEATING BEATING PAPER BEATING CUP HELD HELD HELD STANDING
 NAKEDSTAND STAND STAND STAND BLUE PAINT BLUEWINDOW MIRRORLEAK
 NIGHTNIGHT ECHO ECHO FISHFISHFISH OUT OUT MOTHSOUL FLAPSOUL FLAP
 TIMEBAND RUBBERCIRCLE GODBLANKET THOUGHT GLANDLEAK LIGHTLEAK
 SUN SUN SUN SUNWINDOW WALL WALL HOLE LIGHT FLAP LIGHT PASS
 LIGHT WALKWALK THROUGH THROUGH THROUGH



Story & Theory of Memory, 2025



Installation view. Photos by August Mazzara

Like much of my work, this again tried to make visible the lag between inner experience and outward expression. The glitch-like paragraph *Glossolalia* (from Greek *glōssa*, “tongue,” and *lalia*, “talking,” meaning utterances approximating words and speech, usually produced during states of intense religious experience; also known as “speaking in tongues”) gave the clearest account of this problem. It begins with a concrete image (“here is fish”) before abandoning syntax and sentence structure and proceeding through repetition, sound, and image, with words combining and slipping against one another. As in the list poem, *Glossolalia* does not function as a randomized grab-bag or wordplay for its own sake; its goal is not to be nonsensical or simply undermine language. The text progresses through related image families and specific

actions despite its unmooring from sentence-logic. Its anchors to meaning originate in recurring ideas and motifs as well as specific scenes: a moth beating against the reflection of light in a darkened window at night; a person rising from bed to trap it in a cup and let it outside; the window at night becoming a mirror, reflecting a face; the sun coming through and casting a window on the far wall by morning; a gland that produces thoughts and is responsible for dreams; the idea of the soul as a circle (Plato), of time as a rubber band (Adam Driver in *Girls*), and of god as the name of the blanket we throw over mystery to give it a shape (AC/DC road manager Barry Taylor). These fragments arose as an attempt to describe the sensation of consciousness shared by human, moth, and light inside a house, while their repetitive collapse and blur enacts the mind's movement through overlapping fields of information whose complexity far exceeds the linear structure available to language. Writing typically translates this simultaneity into chronology, as one sentence follows another and the eye moves left to right. The resulting text inevitably sacrifices something of the original experience. *Glossolalia* attempts to make this sacrifice visible by revealing the strain placed upon language as it's asked to capture experiences unfolding faster than words can organize them.

The notebook-paper painting on the adjacent wall extends this concern through another motif I often return to in my work. Notebook paper functions as a symbol of drafting, revision, and distillation, but with the playful, childlike register of amateurism and naivety. In this case, the fragments have been written, erased, and re-written a line below the first, leaving ghost remnants that repeat and overlap. The text, "rinsed as a shell/ container of sound/ paper bag on a string/ balloon with two valves," is a condensed effort to capture the experience of spirit or consciousness moving through *Glossolalia*, but the empty lines and erasure hold the weight of visual space. The blue horizontal rules establish a structure for language while simultaneously

emphasizing the air between lines. The page is a site of pursuit, a tool for organization and an image of language's incompleteness.

The paper also introduces another recurring strategy in my work with the distortion of scale. The flapping bird-symbol dwarfs the shrunken bird bath below the toy-like streetlight, while the notebook page is monumental. These distortions create a slight estrangement from ordinary perception and reinforce the element of play and childlike directness that I strive for in my practice. The installation approaches questions concerning consciousness, language, and spirit, but it does so through forms that remain intentionally modest. The work distrusts grand declarations. It relies on everyday materials, clumsy construction, childlike symbols, and the imperfections of the hand.

The yellow rays that radiate across the walls originate in the sun drawing at the corner of the room. Their line-light leaks across adjoining walls and bleeds through the lines of charcoal text. The bird is animated by a down-flap in black and an up-flap in blue, describing its motion as well as its capture from bird to bird-symbol. The looseness of the drawing allows it to oscillate among multiple functions without being fixed in any one. The blue upper wing behaves like notation—a visual memory of movement, or a letter belonging to a hidden alphabet.

The glyph wall *Story* extends the mark and color palette across a field of forms, and it is this field that does the real unifying work. Its grid of discrete characters invokes a pictographic narrative, but it has no secret code. The forms are gestural and figurative without being representational, and are linear in their construction without being alphabetical or recognizably symbolic. Each one is having fun. The colors come from everywhere: the light from the sun, the black of the text, and the notebook's blue have all wriggled out of their symbolic contexts to participate in the greater dance.

Cultural ecologist David Abram's discussion of "Animism and the Alphabet" in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous* provides a conceptual framework for this intermingling. Abram argues that alphabetic writing emerged through a gradual abstraction and separation from the living world. Earlier pictographic forms maintained visible relationships to animals, landscapes, and embodied experience, which they attempted to describe through imagistic representation. In oral cultures, human language is understood as one voice within a stream of voices, joining the animistic din of bird, fish, water, stone. When the phonetic alphabets were born, compressing pictographs and complex sound into abstract marks and simplified code, language appeared to detach from its source. This resonates with Berger's *Why Look At Animals?*, in which he argues that animals were among humanity's earliest partners in meaning-making, participating in the development of language, metaphor, and self-consciousness itself. Human identity, in this account, arises from its embeddedness in the more-than-human world. Berger writes:

What distinguished man from animals was the human capacity for symbolic thought, the capacity which was inseparable from the development of language in which words were not mere signals, but signifiers of something other than themselves. Yet the first symbols were animals. What distinguished man from animals was born of their relationship with them.

Abram and Berger thus arrive at similar territory from different directions: Berger through cultural history and art criticism, Abram through phenomenology and ecology. Both resist the idea that language originates inside an isolated human mind and instead situate it within a field of relations that constitute the living world. It can be easy to lose sight of our fundamental entanglement in the abstract realm of the word-bound mind. The glyphs explore a space prior to that separation—not historically, but imaginatively. But they avoid any fantasy of recovering a lost universal tongue, or any moralism about the locus of human attention. They are provisional, playful, and personal; they are simple gestures.

The floor sculptures, *Theory of Memory*, condense these concerns into a small theatrical encounter. Next to the enlarged notebook page and oversized bird, the streetlight and birdbath are exaggeratedly miniature. Their tender scale invites a different mode of looking. The streetlight appears as a figure, its posture gazing down. The birdbath becomes a site of reflection in both literal and metaphorical senses. The yellow-wool bulb peers into blue-wool water and encounters its own image; the colors meet again in new material. The sculptures maintain the installation's broader commitment to animism, as objects normally understood as inert begin behaving with intention. Their visible lumpiness is helpful for this effect. The forms do not aspire to an illusion of realism; their character emerges through affection.

Christine Sun Kim is an artist I look to for this balance of sincerity and humor, seriousness and play. Her work is analytical and intuitive at the same time. Her interest in the spatial dimensions of language and her inclusion of graphics, image, and the physical body to widen the expressive field (and critique its dominant narrowness) aligns closely with my own. Many of her drawings employ the language of cartoons, diagrams, arrows, speech bubbles, and handwritten notes alongside bold, gestural lines and activated, pressurized white space. She uses the architecture of galleries and the directness of wall-marking, the compression of symbol and diagram, the energy of expressive forms and plain language to achieve a deceptive simplicity. This can be seen in her titles as well—"Words>Shape>Reality," "One Long Echo," "Mind in Rock"—which themselves are aspirational in their candor and their play.

V. Forward Looking

The works discussed in this paper began from different premises and arrived at different forms, but the fishing line between them is pursuing the same thing: the non-word, the *it*, the living presence that exceeds symbolic structure, and the human desire to pin it to form. Accumulation, repetition, erasure, distortion, procedure, chance, the hand-made mark, and playful symbolism all operate as strategies for making thought visible and spotlighting its gaps. Language remains indispensable precisely because of its limitations; its failure is not treated as an obstacle, but evidence of contact with something larger than itself. The works discussed here do not seek to overcome the confines of language, nor do they position image, object, or installation as alternatives to it. Each medium approaches its subject differently, and each leaves certain dimensions untouched. Movement among them creates openings through which new relationships may arise. The integration of visual and linguistic modes in my work is not only a formal concern, but a methodological one.

At the center of these investigations is a curiosity about language and art as expressions of human behavior. They are among the ways we make sense of experience, construct relationships, and negotiate our place within a world populated by countless other forms of intelligence and exchange. My work approaches language not as a self-contained system, but as one thread within a larger web of meaning. The limits of expression are interesting to the extent that they reveal the presence of something beyond capture: the irreducibility of another creature, another consciousness, another moment of perception.

It is this expanded understanding of artistic and poetic practice that I plan to carry forward into doctoral study. I'm still following the inquiries that drove this body of work, and the

PhD offers an opportunity to continue developing these investigations through both creative and critical research. I look forward to extending the conversation between poetry and visual art that has become central to my work. Its ambition is simple and ongoing: to follow language to its edge, plumb for what appears beyond it, and continue seeking forms that may come close to meeting it.

Oh, but to reach silence. What a huge effort of voice... Reality precedes the voice that seeks it, but like the earth precedes the tree, but like the world precedes the man, but like the sea precedes the view of the sea, life precedes love, bodily matter precedes the body, and one day in its turn language shall have preceded possession of silence.

—Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*

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