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Place is the physical basis of our experience and an inherent fact in our existence in the world. More than a location, place shapes and is shaped by us, informed by our experience and interactions, the physical world and its history, our memories and emotions. I explored these layers and complexities in my BVA Honours printmaking project, *Traces*, 2024 at the Dunedin School of Art. The outcome was a series of eight relief-print woodcut diptychs. Each diptych includes one image-based print and one text-based print, printed in solid black. Both the images and the texts have place as their core referential content, but do not explicitly depict, place. The project took a phenomenological approach, condensing experiences of place and drawing on memory and emotion, with the result of abstracted and formally reduced imagery and text. My aim is to explore the capacity of reduction to invite deep engagement from the viewer, expand potential meaning and amplify affective impact.

WHAT IS PLACE?

The study of place can be broadly categorised into three approaches: descriptive or regional, phenomenological and social constructivist.[1] British geographer John Agnew defines place as a "meaningful location," having not only a) location or objective coordinates and b) locale or a material setting and visual form, but also c) a sense of place.[2] That is, places have a level of relation to the human experience and the human capacity for meaning-making and emotional attachment. This definition is an example of a phenomenological approach in line with the views of the humanists of the 1970s, who emphasised human experience and subjectivity. According to Yi-Fu Tuan, a major figure in humanist geography, an understanding of place begins with an understanding of human nature.[3] Our sense of place is formed through our experience, in relation to locale or a material setting. Tuan describes it as a product of 'pause.'[4] This pause allows attachment and emotion to build.

Indigenous ontologies disrupt the humanist notion that human interaction is necessary to a definition of place. According to Alison Jones and Te Kawehau Hoskins, Māori ontologies take for granted that the non-human world, other beings and material objects, have agency, can "speak, act, and have effects independently of human thought and will."[5] Mason Durie states that all things, beings and objects have mauri, a "vigour, impetus, and potentiality," often thought of as a lifeforce.[6] This material setting (which Agnew would call 'locale') has a rich existence and vitality regardless of human interaction and perception. Humans then exist in relation to the world around us, not as more or less significant. Recent post-humanist and new materialist theories follow this view that non-human things in the world have agency, emphasising the interconnectedness of all things.[7]

Place, definitionally, may not need human interaction. However, it is an intriguing layer in the exploration of ourselves, because although humans may not be essential to place, place is essential to human experience. Edward Casey argues for the ontological importance of place as a fundamental aspect of our existence, stating that "to live is to live locally, to know is first of all to know the place one is in."[8] This is in line with Fred Lukerman's assertion that "consciousness of place is an immediately apparent part of reality."[9] In other words, there is no existence without place; to be human is to be in place. Tim Cresswell summarises these arguments as the idea that "place is primary to the construction of meaning and society … because it is the experiential fact of our existence."[10]

Figure 1. Alexia Moore, *An opening*, 2024,
woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.

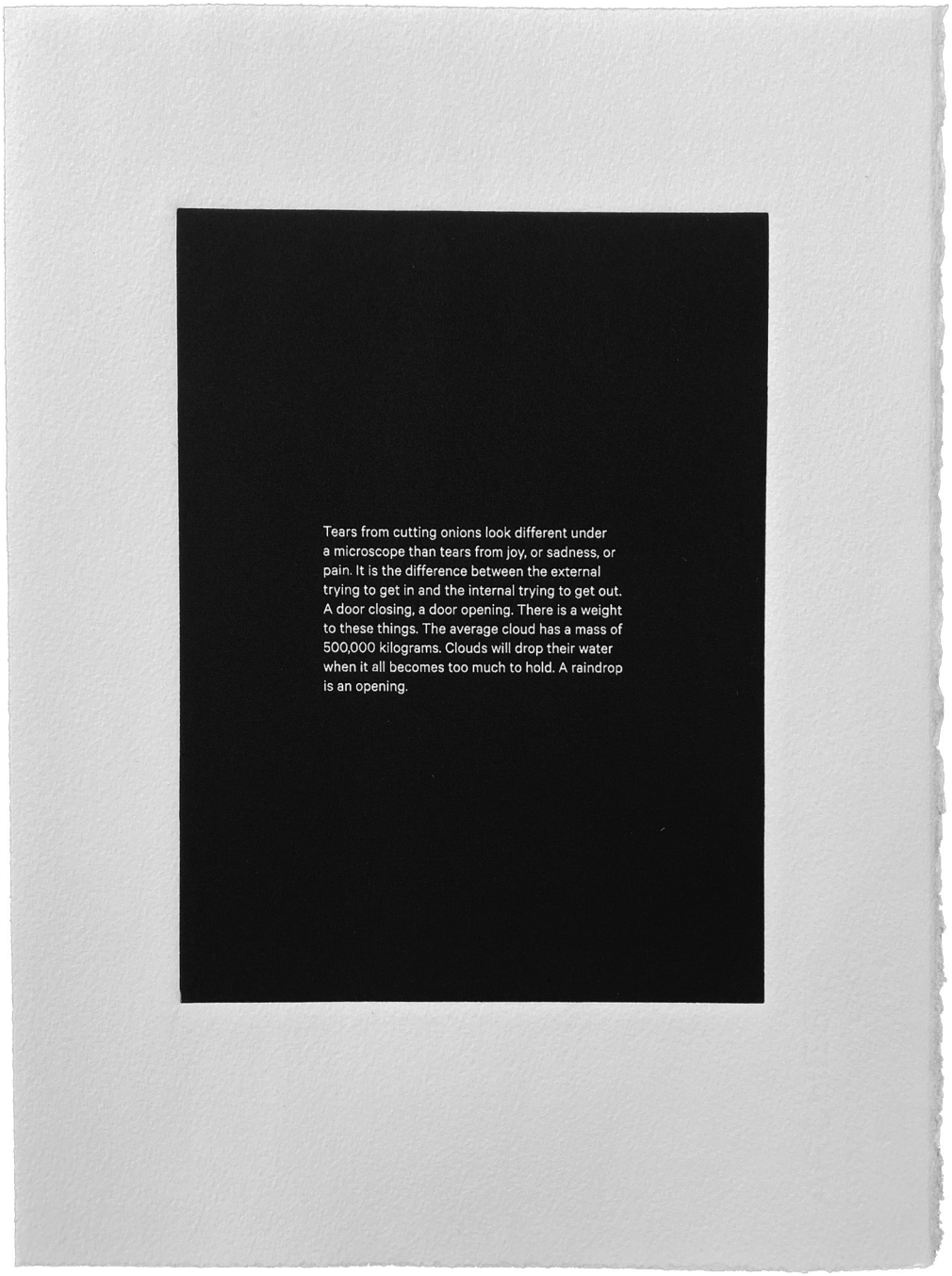

Figure 2. Alexia Moore, *An opening*, 2024,
woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.

Central to the experience of place is memory. French philosopher Henri Bergson refuted the idea of memory as a storage system, a mind container for past events, and rather emphasised the active relationship memory has with our experience.[11] In Bergson's concept of duration, time is thought of qualitatively through the fullness of lived experiences, rather than quantitatively through linear measurement.[12] Memory is tied to this experience of time, allowing us to integrate past experience with present consciousness in an active process in which past and present shape each other. Casey's phenomenological theory likewise suggests that memory is not a static repository. Casey maintains that memory is not just a mental function but an undeniable factor in our experience of place and the physical world.[13] Emotional responses to place are integral to the formation of memories, which, in turn, can evoke further emotional response, shaping our perception of place.[14] Although this human experience, intertwined with memory and emotion, may not be a requisite element of place, there remains a richness to it that justifies asking: what is place *to us*?

WHAT IS PLACE *TO US*?

In Aotearoa, tangata whenua can answer this question with whakapapa. Such an answer may go beyond phenomenological experience. It is not uncommon to hear Māori refer to a mountain or a river – what Pākehā might think of as a location or thing in the landscape – as self.[15] All things have whakapapa, an origin with layers of history and connection.[16] Furthermore, for Māori, there is a cosmogony in which all things descend from one set of primal parents, and therefore all things are related.[17] A whakapapa connection to place is beyond physical experience and beyond a single lifetime.

As a Pākehā artist, I explore my relation to place through experience and memory. *Traces* takes a phenomenological approach to the subject matter, focusing on the experiential and relational aspects of what it is to be human in place. I do not whakapapa to this land or the places that I explore in this work. I focus on places I have lived or frequented and built emotional and storied attachment to. In this way, I return to Bergson's idea of duration and the experience of time as lived rather than measured. If we think of our experience in this way, it follows that place is not static or fixed; rather, it develops over time as memories accumulate. Places can be viewed as gathering personal and collective thoughts, memories, stories and emotions.[18] Lucy Lippard captures this idea, stating that place is "latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life … a layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth."[19] Place has not only a material level and an imagined level but also a practised and lived level.[20] If place is thought of as lived and experienced, then it is a thing to be in and with, not to view from the outside. In my work, I do not claim to get to the essence of specific places. Instead, I aim to get at something of the feeling of this place-experience. I explore this notion through my own lived experiences of place.

WHAT IS PLACE *IN MY WORK*?

My art process involves layering, collecting and building up. This starts introspectively, with reflections on experience, memory and emotion. The initial explorations are expansive, involving musing, writing and sketching. I extend my attention to the material setting of places, to the sensory and emotional experience, to memories and stories and events. In a way, my process embodies the idea of place as continually layered, collecting and transforming.

This is not unlike the process of New Zealand artist Amanda Watson, who works with and in place, responding to site and layering experience and memory to create gestural and abstract paintings in a process that reveals her experience.[21] First, the canvas is taken into the environment and wrapped around various surfaces in order for the pouring and directing of ink to take an indexical impression of the site; the canvas is then taken to a studio where it is further worked into, using memories, photographs and other recordings; finally the canvas is taken back into the environment and worked into again, this time using sensory experiences of sound, colour and light.

My process also involves sitting with the work. I work mostly from memory of experience rather than working with tangible experience in real time. I focus on durational memories and personal attachments. One artist who sits with memory in this way is Zarina Hashmi. Hashmi was an Indian-born, United States-based artist, whose work often centred around ideas of displacement and home.[22] She spoke of how her works were intertwined with memory, using words and images to weave together recollections of place and home.[23] In *Home is a Foreign Place* (1999), she recreated a home that she could not return to in a series of 36 woodblock prints, each featuring an abstracted geometric form printed in black ink and an Urdu inscription to which the titles correspond.[24] Titles such as the *Door*, *Courtyard*, *Hot Breeze*, *Rain*, *Fragrance* and *Despair* recall objects, physical areas, weather, sensory experiences and emotional experiences of place.[25] My visual and text-based reflections on place similarly explore the depth and breadth of personal experience.

Working with woodcut as a medium and the process of printmaking slows down the production of imagery, allowing me again to sit with the subject matter. Images are sketched on paper, transferred to blocks, and carved. The blocks are coated in shellac, rolled in ink and pressed onto paper that has been torn and soaked in water. This physical process allows my mind to be free to dwell on the memories and emotions associated with the place that the work is about. This acts as another experience, an iterative memory, feeding back into the creation of the text in my works in a reciprocal relationship. For me, the physicality of carving imagery into a woodblock and pressing that block into paper holds a relation to memory. The block holds the memory of the carved marks; the paper holds the memory of the impression. These objects have thereby gain layers over time. Hashmi also works with woodcuts and paper. She likens paper to skin for its ability to "age, stain and keep secrets."[26] Through the process of printmaking, I physically engage with memory and emotion connected to place, bringing them back into the tangible world.

Both the imagery and text go through a process of formal reduction – a condensing of ideas, experiences, memories and emotions that I have explored in the earlier stages of my process. The works are printed in a solid, flat black; the imagery created with line or dot work; and the text produced in a simple sans serif. My motivation to reduce and abstract comes from a desire to get at those things that are difficult to explain, articulate or represent: our tangible and intangible lived experiences of place, and the memories and emotions that shape and are shaped by those experiences. It may seem counterintuitive to simplify in order to communicate complexity. I approach it as a distillation, exploring the capacity that the reduced form has to say more than what is obvious and explicit.

WHAT IS PLACE *IN READING MY WORK*?

In this project, my aim is for formal reduction to function as conceptual expansion. The limited palette and formally reduced aesthetic have something of the quality minimalism. Such abstraction often has the appearance of simplifying content, but I have often felt it can have the effect of deepening the affective impact. I explore whether the creation of condensed forms can reduce volume without taking away weight. My aim is for this condensed form to pull the audience in and draw out emotional responses. This is in line with Kirk Varnedoe's assertion that reduction can act as a means to expand or amplify.[27] Varnedoe dismissed early interpretations of abstract art as lacking substantive content, acknowledging its ability to convey profound meaning and emotional depth. Abstraction and emotion are not mutually exclusive. Reduction of form can work to invite engagement and open up space for emotional response.

Given the relational, experiential and emotional basis of my making, I want the work to remain open to an experience and emotion-based response in the viewer. Deepa Bhasthi finds a similar quality in Hashmi's work: "while minimal in their execution, and thus open to multiple meanings, her works … are rich in associations."[28] Like Hashmi, I steer clear of explicit illustration of locations but load my works with suggestive implication. I want to create room for the viewer to bring their own experience, memory and emotion to the work.

In reflecting on the pared back visual language of my prints, I find there are varying degrees of representation and abstraction. Figures 3 and 4 show abstract linework. Figure 5 could be read as representing veins, rivers, roots or myriad other things, depending on the viewers' interpretations and biases. Figure 6 might be seen as a pile of bricks. However, there is still an abstraction from the experience of place that leaves the imagery open to interpretation.

Roland Barthes, a seminal figure in semiotic theory, argued that there is an instability between signs and meaning; a sign is open to interpretation within a viewer's context irrespective of author intention.[29] I work with this instability, aiming to connect with the audience and open up space for them to bring their own experiences, memories and emotions to the pieces. It is relevant to consider that these works are viewed in series, paired with texts, rather than in isolation. This influences the experience of the work and has a cumulative effect on meaning-making. Barthes spoke of text as a form of 'anchorage,' allowing meaning to be more fixed or communicating a preferred interpretation.[30] Text can work to add or disrupt meaning. There is a conversation at play between the works themselves and indeed between the works and the audience. This is perhaps where the emotional intent of the work can be read or experienced.

A similar relationship is at play in Chris Burden's *Coyote Stories* (2005), in which the artist worked with master printer Jacob Samuel to produce a series of prints detailing stories of encounters the artist had with coyotes.[31] The series is a collection of etchings of objects and sites that played a significant role in these stories, together with digital prints of the stories written in Burden's own handwriting. According to Samuel, Burden told him "I don't want there to be any pictures of coyotes, I want the coyote to be in the imagination."[32] Similarly, my images do not illustrate the words, or vice versa. However, in placing them in relation to each other, the meaning of both image and text shifts. This interplay between text and image is summed up by a review of Burden's work: "the relationship between them, like the looping cursive, is neither clear nor didactic; its perception is dependent on meditative reading."[33] It is this meditative reading that I aim to invite in my work.

Burden's text is narrative-based story with action and a timeline. The text in Roni Horn's *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* (1999) is more fragmentary and musing. Horn's work is a series of 15 lithographs of the surface of the River Thames. Initially, the water surfaces have an emotional depth that feels hard to place. On closer inspection, numbers invite you to refer to footnotes that open up deep layers of research and reference, an expansive world of meaning.[34] These footnotes contain observations of colour and texture, lines from songs and poems, references to books and movies, accounts of bodies found in the water, definitions of water, personal thoughts and musings of the artist and questions directed to the viewer.[35] They are at times loose and fragmentary in nature, a stream of consciousness,[36] perhaps inviting the viewer to explore their own thoughts when looking at the images. The text in my work uses this fragmentary and speculative tone, avoiding explicit descriptions of place but referring to tangentially connected ideas to invite a similar engagement and reflection in the viewer.

There is a similar fragmented style in the work of contemporary writers such as Jenny Offill and Rebecca Solnit. Offill's writing, such as the novels *Dept. of Speculation* (2014) and *Weather* (2020), is often characterised as autofiction, blending elements of autobiography and fictional storytelling.[37] She often draws from her own life experience through snippets of thought, cultural references and disjointed observations, reflecting on the personal while resonating with broader human experiences.[38] Solnit's writing, such as the book of autobiographical essays *A Field Guide To Getting Lost* (2005), similarly straddles the line between autobiography and fiction.[39] Like Offill, she employs a fragmented narrative style that allows for the exploration of disparate ideas and memories.

The text of my print works is intended to be musing and fragmentary, rooted in personal memory and emotion but speaking to a wider experience. I made choices in the writing process to hold them in reference to memory and emotion rather than make them explicitly personal. I wanted the text to be matter-of-fact, favouring metaphor over simile, giving a register of clarity. The text is not overtly expressive or florid and often based in action rather than description. In this way it is not pushing the inside out but speaking in parallel to emotional experience. John

Ward Knox, an artist who often writes creative prose in response to art, speaks about the impact of the removal of excess in writing:

> I've always been struck by the simpler sentences, and how they're the most open to creating a sense of empathy for the character of the situation. Maybe not even a sense of empathy, but it's something that hits you in between your guts and your lungs. They tend to just be matter-of-fact sentences … So where Steinbeck simply says, 'and the world opened out' – there are no flowery descriptions there – it's just an action and an object.[40]

The matter-of-fact sentences of my text, focused on object and action rather than description, are in a similar register to the image-based works that sit alongside them. They are pared back, withholding a certain amount of information. The text is not an explanation of the imagery, nor is it a description of the place. It is a reduction of form, in a practice of saying less in order to communicate more. As with imagery, the aim in this reduction is to expand the possibility of meaning and interpretation, allowing the viewer to bring their own experiences, memories and emotions to this meditation on place.

CONCLUSION

The eight diptych woodcut prints, that are the outcome of my BVA Honours project, each include one image-based print of minimalist line or dot work and one text-based print containing a short paragraph of musing and fragmentary prose. The project was informed by the idea of place as lived experience, entwined with memory and emotion. The work is a distillation of this experience. It steers clear of obvious illustration, employing reduction as a means to expand and amplify communication and emotional response.

Figure 3. Alexia Moore, *Time is different*, 2024,
woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.

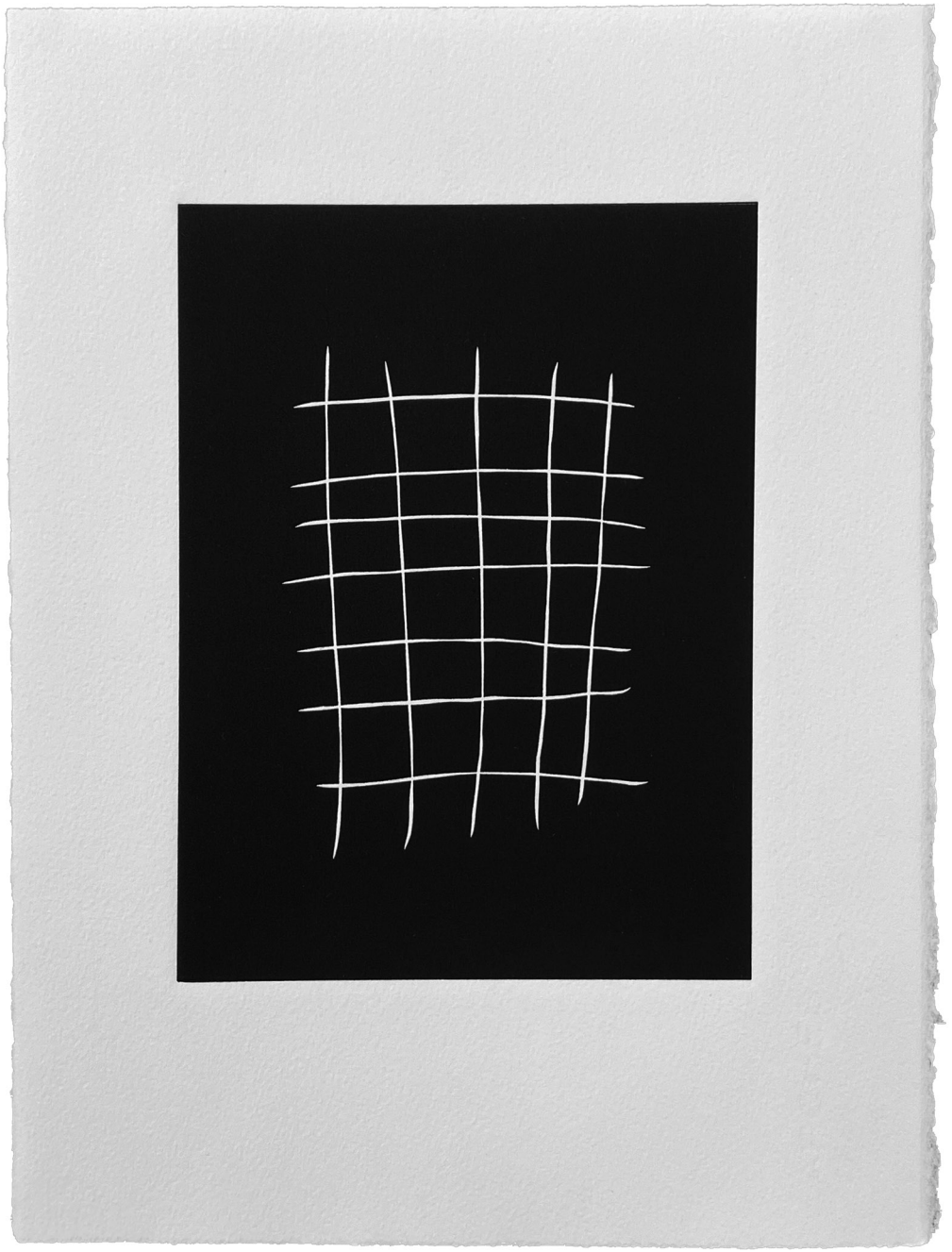

Figure 4. Alexia Moore, *White noise*, 2024,
woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.

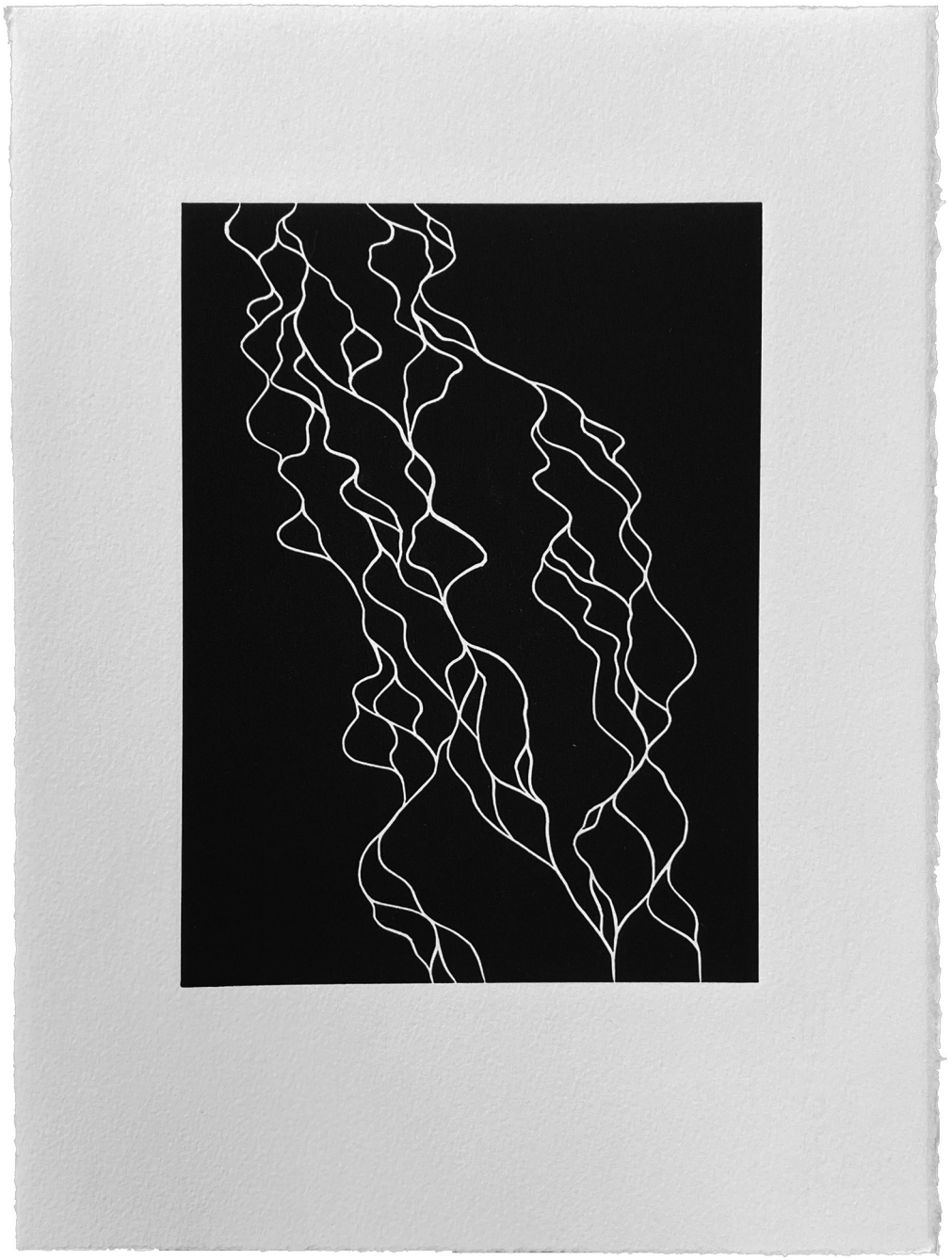

Figure 5. Alexia Moore, *Echoes in the ground*, 2024,
woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.

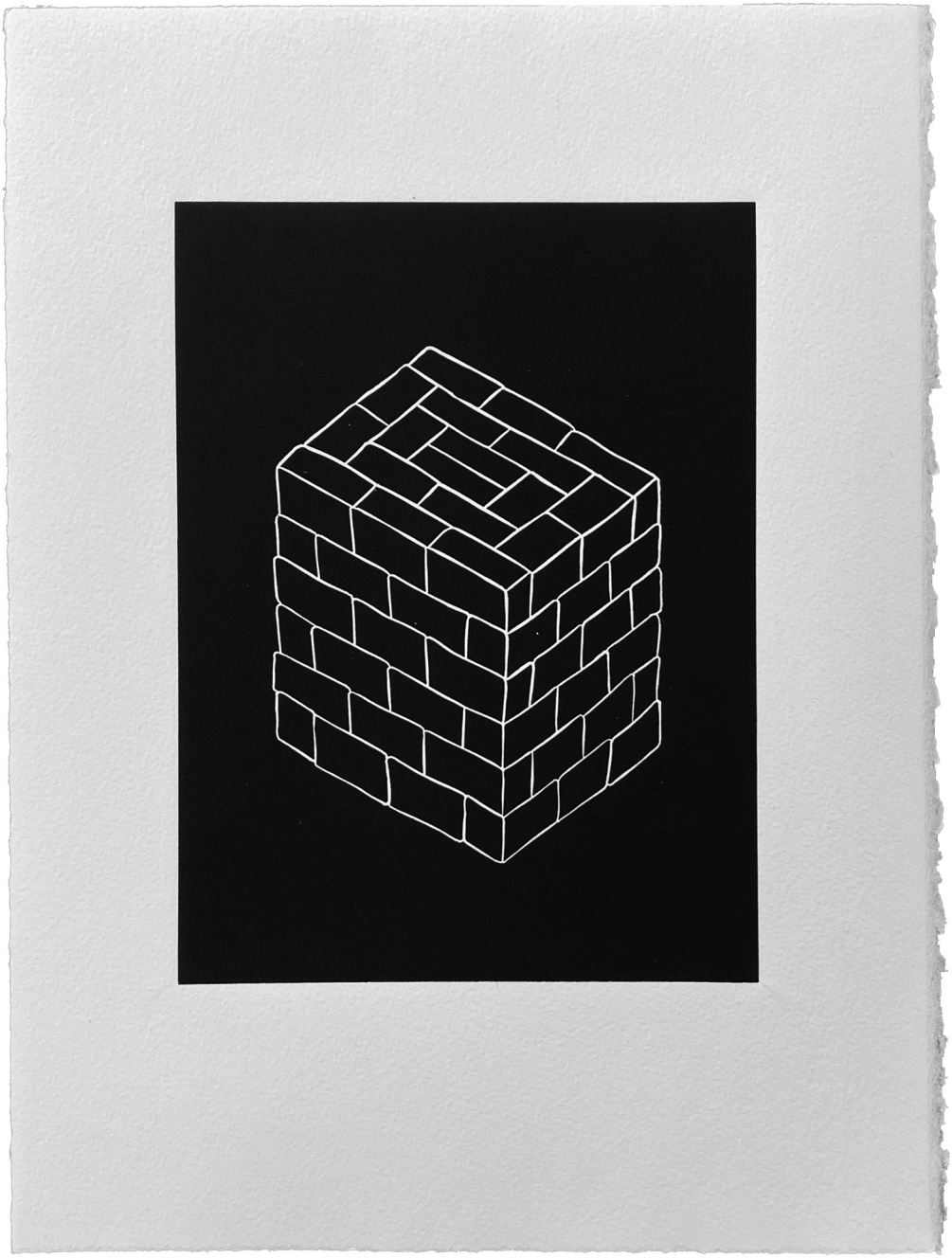

Figure 6. Alexia Moore, *Part of it*, 2024,
woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.

Alexia Moore is a Pākehā artist, writer and designer based in Ōtepoti. She holds a Bachelor of Visual Arts Honours with First Class Honours from the Dunedin School of Art. Her work explores the interplay between place, memory and emotion. Alexia is a Lecturer in the School of Design at Otago Polytechnic.

1 Tim Cresswell, Place: An Introduction (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). The descriptive or regional approach views places as discrete areas and physically describable locations. The humanists challenged this view, arguing that a physically describable location becomes a place when you attach human experience and emotion to it. The social constructivist approach focuses on how places are constructed by wider social and political movements within society.

2 John A. Agnew, *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society* (Winchester, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 7.

3 Yi-Fu Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," *Progress in Human Geography* 6 (1974): 246.

4 Ibid.

5 Te Kawehau Hoskins and Alison Jones, "Non-human Others and Kaupapa Maori Research," in *Critical Conversations in Kaupapa Māori* (London: Huia, 2017).

6 Mason Durie, *Mauri Ora: The Dynamics of Māori Health* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2001), x.

7 Jerry Lee Rosiek, Jimmy Snyder & Scott L. Pratt, "The New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories of Non-human Agency: Making the Case for Respectful Anti-colonial Engagement," *Qualitative inquiry* 26, no. 3-4 (2020): 331–346.

8 Edward Casey, "How to Get From Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Baso (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1996), 18.

9 Fred Lukerman, "Geography as a formal intellectual discipline and the way in which it contributes to human knowledge" *Canadian Geographer* 8, no. 4 (1964): 168.

10 Cresswell, *Place*, 32.

11 Keith Ansell-Pearson, "Bergson on Memory," In *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, eds. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, 61-76 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

12 Ibid.

13 Casey, "How to Get From Space to Place," 18.

14 Casey, "Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does it Mean to be in the Place-world?" (2001): 683–693.

15 Hoskins and Jones, "Non-human Others and Kaupapa Maori Research"; John R. Clammer, Sylvie Poirier and Eric Schwimmer, eds., *Figured Worlds: Ontological Obstacles in Intercultural Relations* (Toronto, Ontario; Buffalo, New York; London, England: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

16 Mere Roberts, "Ways of Seeing: Whakapapa," *Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies* 10, no. 1 (2013): 93–120.

17 Ibid.

18 18 Arturo Escobar, "Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localization," *Political geography* 20, no. 2 (2001): 143; Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," in *Reading Human Geography*, ed. Trevor Barnes and Derek Gregory (London: Arnold, 1997), 315–323.

19 Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicultural Society* (New York: The New York Press, 1997), 7.

20 Allan Pred, "Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-geography of Becoming Places," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74, no. 2 (1984): 279–297; Nigel J. Thrift, "The Still Point: Resistance, Embodiment and Dance," in *Geographies of Resistance*, ed. Steve Pile and Michael Keith, 124–151 (London: Routledge, 1997); Edward Soja, "Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination," in *Human Geography Today*, ed. Doreen Massey, John Allen and Philip Sarre (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999): 260–278. The idea that place is produced, maintained and transformed by continual process is supported by many theorists, including Allan Pred, Nigel Thrift and Edward Soja. Soja emphasises the 'reiterative social practice' of place, constantly evolving in a dynamic process shaped by physical space, perceived and lived experience and imagined meaning.

21 Amanda Watson, "Painting Encounters with Environments: Experiencing the Territory of Familiar Places," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 20, no. 1–2 (2021).

22 Tate, "Zarina Hasmhi Studio Visit," TateShots, 25 April 2013. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/zarina-hashmi-17194/zarina-hashmi-studio-visit. Deepa Bhasthi, "Zarina and the Idea of Home: What Happens When an Artist Becomes an Exile?" *ArtReview*, 7 July 2021, https://artreview.com/zarina-idea-of-home-what-happens-when-artist-becomes-exile/.

23 The Met, "Home is a Foreign Place: Zarina," accessed 1 July 2025, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/499720.

24 Zarina Hashmi, *Home is a Foreign Place*, 1999, Portfolio of 36 woodcuts with chine collé. Bhasthi, "Zarina and the Idea of Home."

25 Bhasthi, "Zarina and the Idea of Home." Kirk Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard* (New York: Abrams, 1990). This idea was a rereading of abstraction in response to the historical view that it involves purging 'life' from 'art.' During the twentieth century, abstract art was often viewed as lacking substantive content, with formalist approaches emphasising the formal qualities of art over its capacity to convey meaning.

26 Bhasthi, "Zarina and the Idea of Home."

27 Kirk Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard* (New York: Abrams, 1990). This idea was a rereading of abstraction in response to the historical view that it involves purging 'life' from 'art.' During the twentieth century, abstract art was often viewed as lacking substantive content, with formalist approaches emphasising the formal qualities of art over its capacity to convey meaning.

28 Bhasthi, "Zarina and the Idea of Home."

29 Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (London: Macmillan, 1968); Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Paladin, 1973).

30 Ibid.

31 Chris Burden, *Coyote Stories*, 2005, Portfolio of ten etchings, five with aquatint, and 25 digital prints with chine collé.

32 The Museum of Modern Art, "Chris Burden: Coyote Stories 2005," accessed 21 May 2023, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/143946.

33 Britany Salsbury, "The Serial Drama of the Serial Format: Tradition, Revision and the Print Portfolio 'Print/Out' and 'Printin'," *Art in Print* 2, no. 1 (2012): 15–16.

34 Roni Horn, *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)*, 1999, Series of 15 lithographs on paper.

35 Alice Sanger, "Roni Horn: [no title]," Tate, April 2009, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/horn-no-title-p13058).

36 Ibid; Margaret Frazier Mitts, "Roni Horn's Still Water (The River Thames, for Example) and the Psychogeography of Looking" (PhD thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2019): 50.

37 Jenny Offill, *Dept. of Speculation* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2014); Jenny Offill, *Weather* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2020).

38 Wojciech Drąg, "Jenny Offill's Dept. of Speculation and the Revival of Fragmentary Writing," *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies* 56 (2017): 57–72.

39 Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide To Getting Lost* (Edinburgh and London: Canongate, 2005).

40 Mythily Meher, "John Ward Knox: Choreographer of Objects," *Pantograph Punch*, 30 July 2013, https://www.pantograph-punch.com/posts/john-ward-knox-choreographer-of-objects.