S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram draws on Sigmund Freud's concept of the Es—the unconscious drive beneath Ego and Superego—to create a series of abstract portraits exploring how identity forms between conscious thought and unconscious desire.

During a residency at Forrest Hall, University of Western Australia, artist Hiroshi Kobayashi invited researchers, artists, and alumni to participate in a collaborative investigation. Through interviews, each participant shared a personal epiphany and chose a symbolic object—a totem—which became the foundation for layered compositions combining deformed text, photographic images, and machine-assisted mark-making.

This publication documents the paintings, the interactive web gallery, and the unexpected exchanges that emerged within a unique academic community where marine scientists, linguists, bee researchers, artists, and oceanographers cross paths daily. Through theoretical reflections spanning Cézanne to Conceptualism, Kobayashi traces a genealogy of abstraction grounded not in pure form but in duration, ecological thinking, and the generative energy of the unconscious.

The work asks: how does painting capture what is constantly in flux? How does identity form through collision between social language and unconscious drive?

S(ES)GRAPH\S(ES)GRAM

HIROSHI KOBAYASHI

S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram

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S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram

Forrest Hall Residency, University of Western Australia, Boorloo/Perth.

6 October - 16 November, 2025

HIROSHI KOBAYASHI

Installation view, Hiroshi Kobayashi, *S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram*, 2025.
Forrest Hall Residency, Boorloo/Perth.
Photography: Robert Buratti. Images courtesy of Hiroshi Kobayashi.

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Andrei Smolik – Computational scripting (Rhino + Grasshopper)
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Participants

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Editor

Robert Buratti

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S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram
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For more information: hrsk.com.au

Explore the Interactive Web Gallery

The full project exists beyond these pages. Visit the interactive web gallery to read complete interview transcripts, view the deformed text in motion against participants' photographic backgrounds, and experience the shifting relationship between the social and personal layers of each portrait.

S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram Interactive Web Gallery
https://sgsm.hrsk.com.au/

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Above: Installation view, Hiroshi Kobayashi, *S(Es) Says,* 2025
Art Collective WA, Boorloo/Perth. Photography: Robert Frith, Acorn Photo.

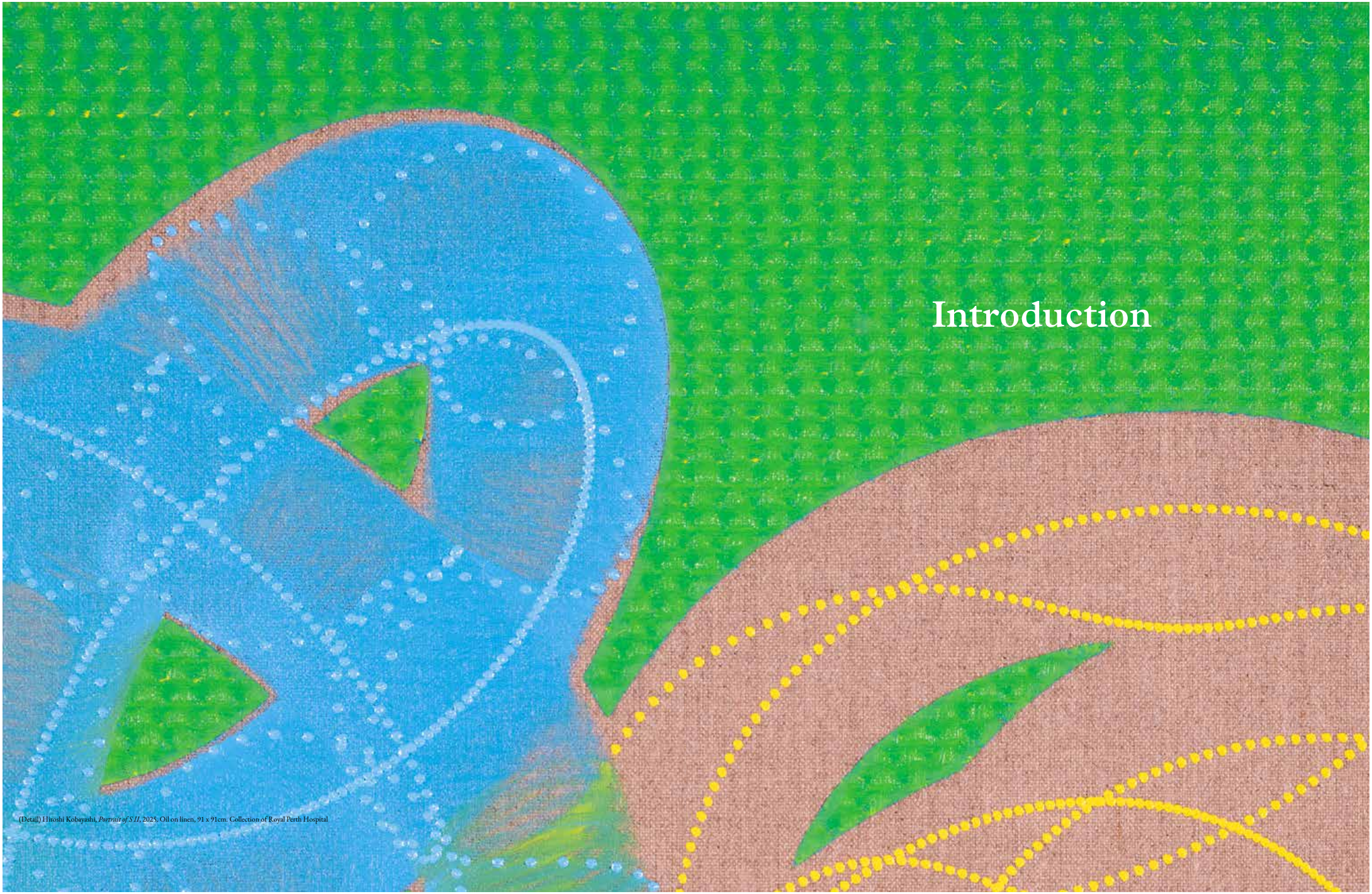
Opposite: Portrait of the Artist.Photography: Emma Dolzadelli
Images courtesy of the Minderoo Foundation.

Hiroshi Kobayashi

Hiroshi Kobayashi is a Perth-based artist whose practice merges computation, custom-built machinery, and painting to construct layered forms of abstract portraiture. Working with CAD scripting, physics-based simulations, and a modified cutting-plotter system, he translates text, geometric structures, and photographic material into intricate vector formations. These digital configurations are then reinterpreted through paint, where programmed precision meets the contingencies of fluid mark-making — a hybrid methodology he calls *Patagraphy*.

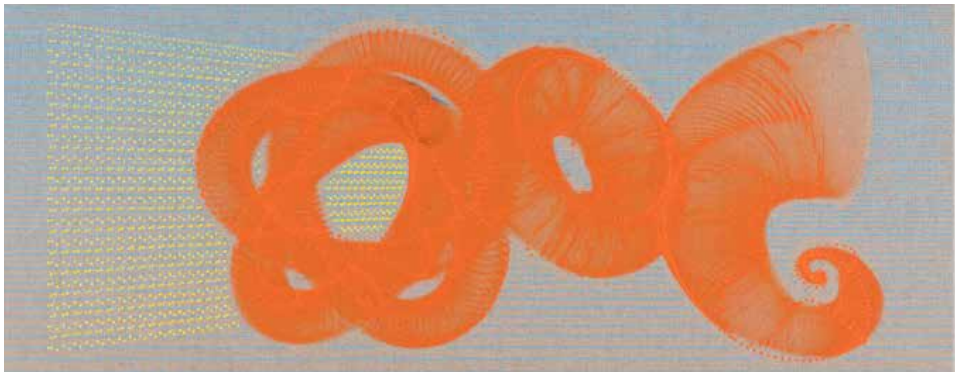
hrsk.com.au

Introduction



(Detail) Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of S II*, 2025. Oil on linen, 91 x 91cm. Collection of Royal Perth Hospital

Above: Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Bone Conduction*, 2025. Oil on linen, 96.5 x 96.5cm.
Opposite: Hiroshi Kobayashi, *QOL*, 2025. Oil on linen, 36 x 91cm.
Images courtesy of Hiroshi Kobayashi.



Overview

S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram draws on Sigmund Freud's concept of the Es (or "id") — the unconscious drive beneath Ego and Superego — to create a series of abstract portraits that explore how identity forms between conscious thought and unconscious desire.

For this project, I invited researchers, artists, and alumni from the Forrest Hall and UWA community to participate via open call. Each collaboration began with conversation — a shared curiosity about how thought, memory, and the unconscious might be visualised.

Using machine-assisted mark-making and scripted geometric structures, the project translates these conversations into paintings: layered visual fabrics of texts, photographs, colours, and textures. These arrangements are also implemented in an interactive web gallery, where portraits and transcripts can be viewed together from multiple viewpoints.

Each portrait combines two strands: one drawn from the participant's biography in text form, and another from personal memories, emotions, or an epiphanic moment, materialised through objects and photographs.

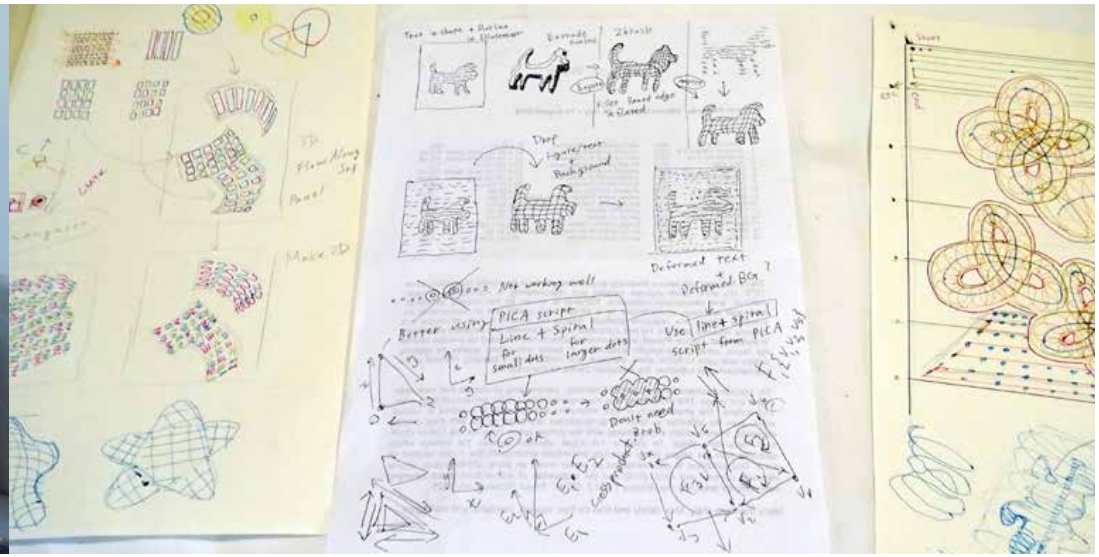
Through this interplay of planned outputs and unpredictable inputs, the project investigates abstraction not as a purely formal language but as a foundational mode of portrayal — a way of sharing the constantly shifting formation of identity between the social and the personal.

What Participants Contributed

Each participant provided three elements that became the foundation of the work:

- Research Abstract / Bio – representing social and intellectual identity.
- Object (Totem) – either the object itself, its name, or a photograph, linked to a personal moment of insight or transformation. This functions as a symbolic totem within the work.
- Photographic Image – an image relating to that personal epiphany or the emotion it evokes.

These materials were discussed and developed through a short interview conducted at Forrest Hall.



The Process

Interview

The project began with interviews at Forrest Hall and UWA. These discussions allowed participants to speak about their research interests, motivations, formative memories, and personal experiences related to moments of epiphany.

From each conversation, I collected words that emerged from personal reflections, emotional cues relating to these epiphanies and chosen totems, and later edited them into transcripts. These texts became supplemental material for both the paintings and the web gallery.

Totem

Through the interviews, each participant identified an object connected to their epiphany. Using CAD software and scripting, I created a 3D form from the photograph taken during the interview. This object, or totem, became the symbolic core of the portrait within virtual space.

Physics Simulation

The participant's biography or abstract — representing the external, social self — was converted into vector (line) data and dropped onto the totem form using a physics simulation, where it collided and deformed like woven textiles.

View

A virtual camera and picture plane were established to define perspective and composition — the symbolic station point of vision. The deformed text and totem were projected onto the picture plane, turning motion into momentary stillness. By reducing their dimensionality, the 3D forms became illusory 3D objects on a 2D surface.

Photography

Each participant's photographic image was converted into a halftone image, providing a grounding layer that mediates between the text and the totem on the material surface of the painting.

Painting

The vector-based compositions were translated into paintings through Patagraphy, my hybrid process combining custom machinery with oil and acrylic paint. Scripted precision meets the unpredictable behaviour of the medium, merging computational structure with material fluidity. The illusory 3D objects on the 2D surface are embodied through paint, carrying traces of movement in real space.

Web Gallery

The interactive web gallery extends this process by visualising the motion of the deformed text against the participant's photographic background. In the slowly rotating view, viewers can read interview transcripts and see images of the physical paintings, observing a multi-layered representation of complex identity.

Opposite: The studio space, Forrest Hall, Boorloo/Perth.
Above: Preparatory research and drawings by Hiroshi Kobayashi.
Right: Materials and the studio space, Forrest Hall, Boorloo/Perth.
Photography: Robert Buratti.

S(Es) Says

S(Es) Says is the title of my solo exhibition at Art Collective WA that preceded *S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram*, and served as a preparatory project to investigate "abstract portraits." Developed from my previous project Rhizograph/Rhizogram (2024)1, five 3D shapes generated in CAD scripting and projected onto a 2D surface populate the canvases. Each shape was created by a "single line" tracing a geometry that is morphed into a "single surface."

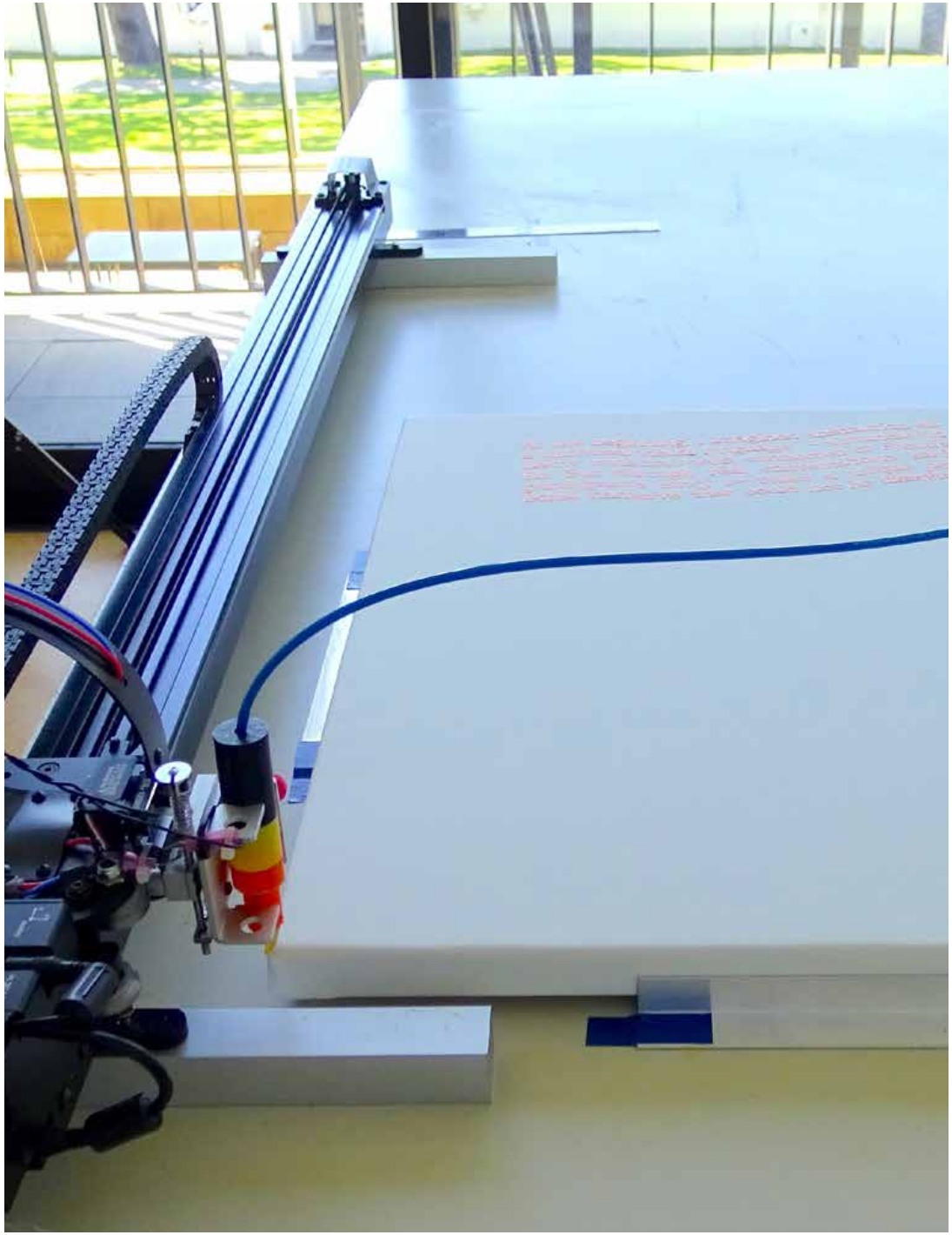
My initial plan for abstract portraiture in *S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram* was to treat this single surface as a kind of skin of an organism. Through the project, however, this idea shifted and transformed, leading to results I had not anticipated. It prompted me to return to, and deepen, my ongoing reflections on earlier works and recurring concerns in my practice — reflections that I expect will continue to evolve in future projects.

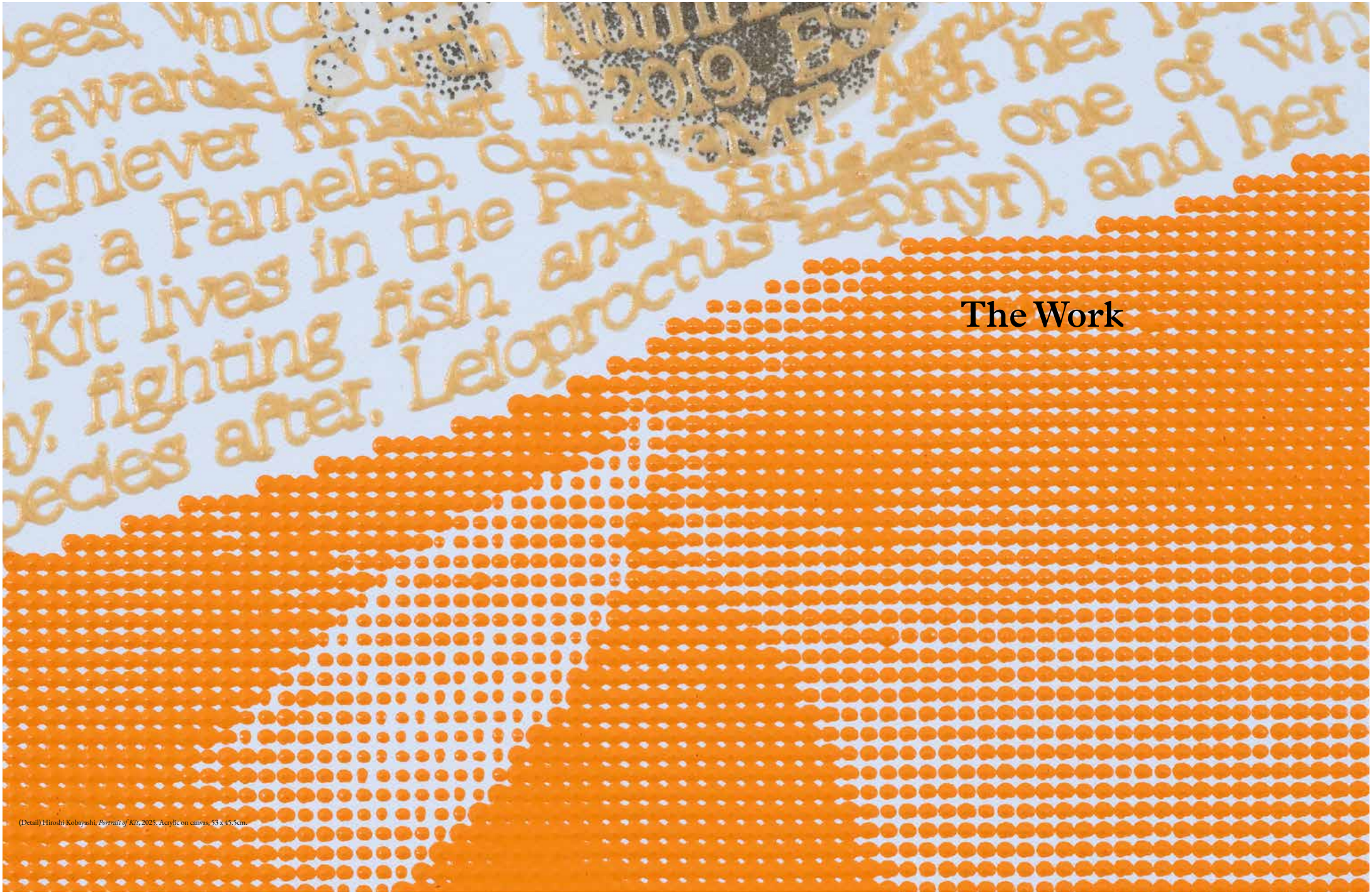
I gathered these reflections as fragments that might look, at first, like scattered essays. Yet the core idea I have been seeking throughout my career — and which I felt I could finally articulate most clearly through this project — can be condensed in the epigraphs and in the following thought: Painting shows the possibility of communication that implies the possible, after the consolidation of an initial vision and all the failures and impossibilities experienced throughout production.

The sections that follow expand on this thought.

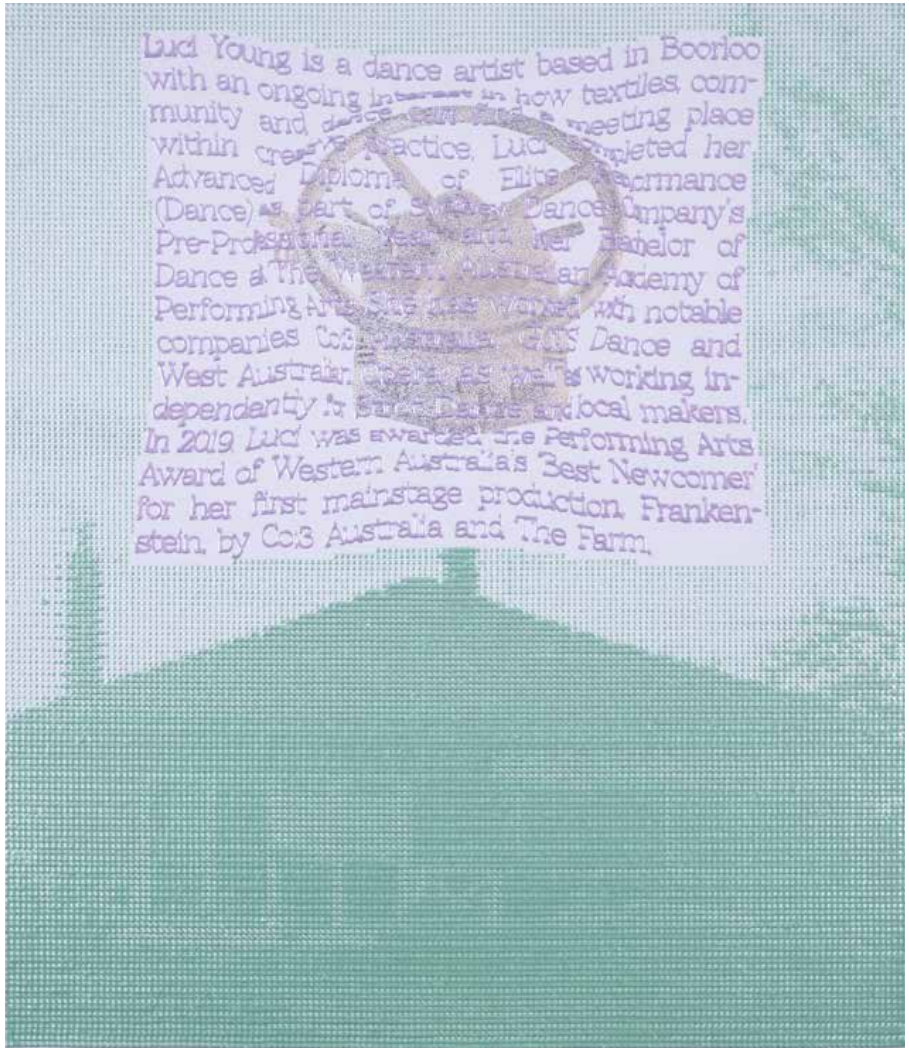
1 Rhizograph\Rhizogram (2024) - rhizographrhizogram.hrsk.com.au

Opposite: The studio space, Forrest Hall, Boorloo/Perth.
Above: Work in process by Hiroshi Kobayashi.
Photography: Robert Buratti.





(Detail) Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of Kit*, 2025. Acrylic on canvas. 53 x 45.5cm.



Portrait of Luci, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm

"I am interested in the way knitting connects us. My skills have developed through ongoing question-asking between my grandma and me."

#01 Luci

The following epiphany story was written and shared by the interviewee:

My first experiences of dance started within colonial so-called Australia, and were shared with an abundance of white, conforming, well-off 'girls' in established classrooms. In my youth, it offered me deep female friendships, a sense of belonging and my first commitment. When my experience in the classroom shifted, I re-met dance, working in the club. It offered me new female friendships, led me to the queer community (belonging), and I followed it back into my own body as commitment. Now, I follow dance back into the 'real world' where it cultivates in many places as work, party and routine and creates a thread through my life of deep friendships, places to belong and commitment to myself.

And while these impacts are real and strong, I question what more and who else?

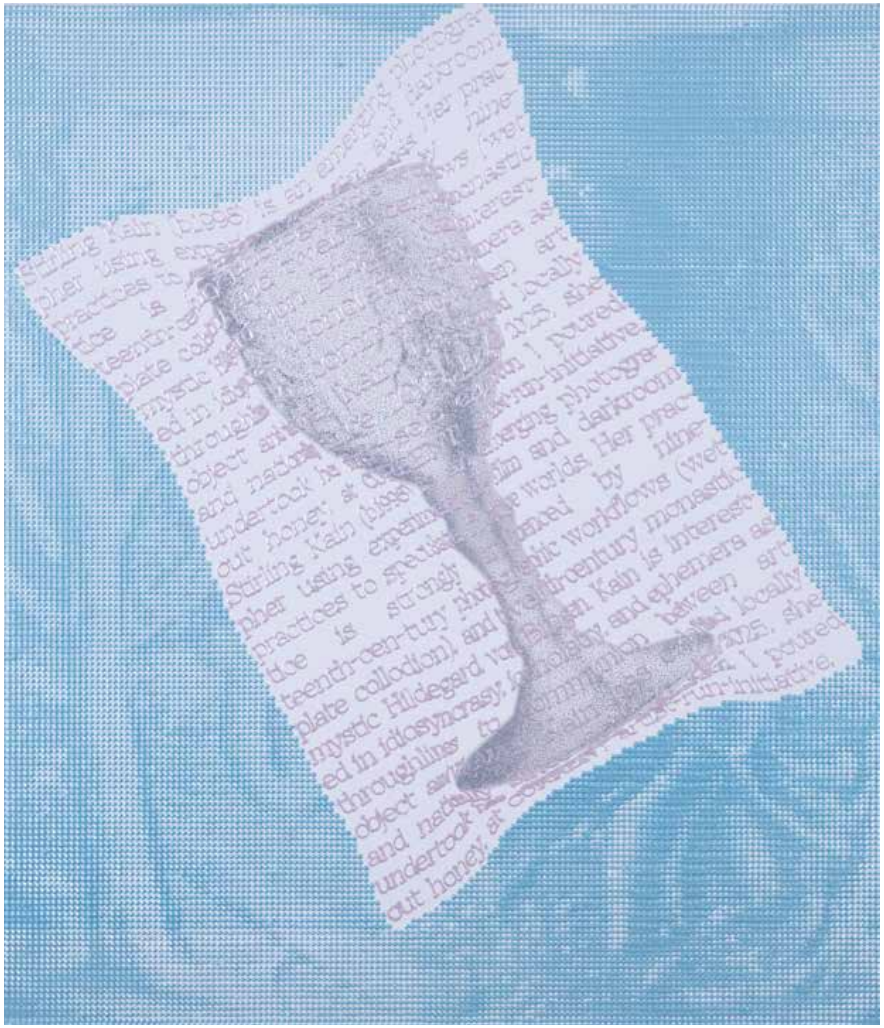
With the weight of the world looming over us, what do we have to hold on to and lie beneath?

In September 2024, I'd been travelling for a long time, dancing amongst it, falling in love, but mostly floating. There was something in being anonymous, meeting people you haven't imagined before, shapeshifting between spaces, disappearing and re-emerging, that felt vital to understanding the world as a disproportionate place. But without anything lasting, beyond memory, I felt lost, purposeless and self-centred. I arrived in Berlin. G, my best friend from Velvet Underground, happened to be there at the same time. She took us to meet Geo, who was teaching knitting in the park, and there I landed. I became addicted to knitting. I knit on the train, walking down the street, in different bars, at my friend Sarah's house, and I returned again and again to the people I met in the park. What I was making felt lasting, tangible and useful- something I could see, feel the weight of and wear.

In rebellion from the practice of minimalism in dance, I am drawn to the tactility of textile works. In these moments between you and me (a dance), what do we make that others can see, and we, together, can wear?

From all of this, 'Knit Club' was born. The Knit Wits and I meet weekly in Hyde Park to repurpose discarded textiles into yarn and then into new knit projects of clothes, bags and installation pieces for parties and events. Knit Club offers people a reason to go outside, meet new people and learn a new skill in sober, low-pressure social environments. The sense of community at Knit Club is strong between the group and its connection to Boorloo's queer spaces through the projects we do. We have made installation pieces for Rave Relief (Pride 2025), Audible Edge Festival and other local music events.

I am interested in the way knitting connects us. My skills have developed through ongoing question-asking between my grandma and me. A lot of knowledge about textiles is held by the older generations. In the future, I am looking forward to bridging the gap between young people and the older generation through knitting.



Portrait of Stirling, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm

"I place the plate into the fixer, and watch my photograph emerge. Do it again. Do it again."

#02 Stirling

The following epiphany story was written and shared by the interviewee:

I walk with my camera down to the creek. And I bring my props: mandarins; a bag of ice; an unidentifiable but noticeably underripe fruit I found on the side of a quiet road; and tiny early spring flowers. I take off my shoes, roll up my pants to my calves, and step onto the rocks in the creek. I arrange the props in the reeds at the creek's edge. I watch the fruits and flowers roll and bob with the water's flow. I pull the viewfinder to my eye, show Hildegard what I've found and made. I ask her what she thinks. The water running over the ice refracts the light and creates inexplicable shapes. It reminds me of the trumpets of light she speaks of so often.

My brother and I go to the back room of the church. We each select a white robe that's long enough to cover our shoes, but won't trip on. Tie ropes around our waists. We're given the candles, we light them. We walk behind the priest in the procession. At the front of the altar, we bow to christ dying on the cross. I'm not careful, and I hear my hair singed by the candle. Later, I dress in the long-sleeved shirt and pants. Place the ventilator over my head, and check there are no air leaks. In the dark, with only the red headlamp, I pour the plate. Place it into the silver bath, and time it. Undertake the darkroom ritual. I place the plate into the fixer, and watch my photograph emerge.

Do it again. Do it again. When I turn the lights back on, I see a dark streak on my wrist. The silver bath met my skin, and leaves a stain for days to come.

Portrait of Lucy, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm

"It was the first time I thought, I can choose not to keep doing this."

#03 Lucy

Shared with permission; details edited for clarity.

H: Why did you study engineering?

L: When I finished high school, I didn't have a strong direction, so I followed what I was best at — maths and science. I liked chemistry, so I chose chemical engineering because it seemed practical with many options afterwards. I liked problem-solving — working through problems rather than memorising things. Solving something always felt rewarding.

H: That's really interesting. Painting is very physical for me, while maths feels abstract.

L: I think I see it the opposite way. To me, maths feels concrete because it has logic and structure. Art feels more abstract and open.

H: I like that — we both think through the abstract, but the meaning reverses completely. That's actually why I call this project an abstract portrait. So, during your time studying, was there a moment when things shifted for you?

L: Yeah. My degree was divided into bachelor's and master's. When I finished my bachelor's, I got an email asking if I wanted to continue. I'd always assumed I would, but that message made me realise I didn't have to. It was the first time I thought, I can choose not to keep doing this. I deferred for a year, and never went back. I was burnt out and wanted to focus on myself, to get into a better mental space and figure out what I actually wanted.

H: During that pause, did you discover something important?

L: Two things stand out. First, my dad had passed away about a year before, and I hadn't really processed it. That break gave me space to work through it. Second, I realised how little time I gave myself for joy or rest. I'd spent years only studying. Taking that year let me recognise how much I needed those small moments to recharge.

H: Was there something tangible that supported you?

L: My dog, definitely. I moved back home and spent a lot of time caring for him. Taking him for walks every day gave me rhythm and purpose. Walking my dog grounded me. Being outside slowed everything down. Things that felt urgent didn't seem so big anymore. That's when I realised how important it is for me to be in nature. It helps me reset and de-stress.

Portrait of Saskia, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm

"It was my first time really feeling like the way I play is a skill that I have, not a problem."

#04 Saskia

Shared with permission; details edited for clarity.

H: Can you tell me about the objects you brought today?

S: I have two objects here. My Kingma system flute and a candle. My flute is more about when I first realised that I didn't like Western classical music and was interested in different things and began to improvise, and the candle is more like what drives me now. The candle is from an experimental improvised opera I played in recently. I really like improvising. I really enjoy introducing people to each other and creating community and supporting others to find the kind of music that they're interested in making. The way that I improvise—I'm often really listening. I will really match the sounds that they're making or if someone starts a new idea, straight away I'll be supporting that idea to sound good. But sometimes I can feel a bit self-conscious that I'm just copying a lot. Even though I know that it's a really good thing to do and that it makes me easy to play with and makes the music better.

H: You feel self-conscious about your improvising style?

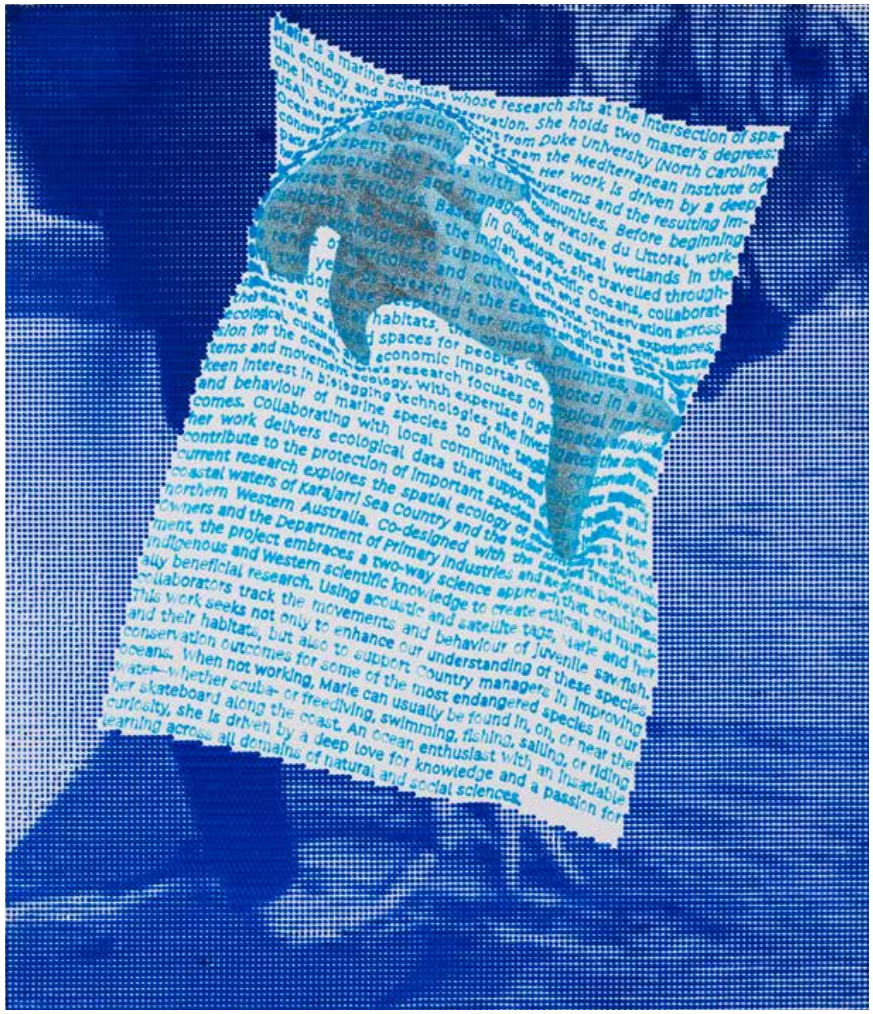
S: Our friends [producing the opera] chose us really carefully so that all of our skills, the ways that we naturally play would work together. So it was kind of my first time really feeling like, 'I know that the way I play is a strength and that everyone is unique,' but really feeling like it was a skill that I have, not a problem. Or knowing that actually that's just the way that I play because it's how I am, and that's why I was chosen for this project. Because they knew that whatever the singers did, I would make it sound like they were making a good choice.

H: You mentioned not liking Western classical music. Can you talk more about that?

S: I especially don't like how sexist and racist and classist it is. It's never been financially sustainable unless you have rich patrons. It's been a measure of how special people are and why they're better than others. I really hate that. I don't want to continue those kinds of structures by playing that kind of music, but also, it's quite confusing. I have so much privilege, and I'm still realising all the time how much it is because it just feels normal to me.

H: How does thinking about privilege connect to improvising for you?

S: I'm so lucky in so many ways, but actually it's not luck. It's things my ancestors have taken for a long time. They've had the education and opportunity to hoard wealth and pass it on. Even improvising, most people only start if they've played an instrument more conventionally for a long time, which takes time and money. But in improvised music, there isn't really a hierarchy, so it doesn't need to be like this. Anyone, no matter how many times they've done it, makes a valuable contribution.



Portrait of Marie, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm. Collection of Forrest Research Foundation.

"In French, 'mother' and 'the sea' — la mère / la mer — don't spell the same, but they sound the same."

#05 Marie

Shared with permission; details edited for clarity.

H: Could you tell me about the moment that inspired your current research path? What connected everything for you?

M: I'm doing fieldwork in Galapagos, putting this tiny hammerhead shark back into the ocean. That's when everything I had learned up to this point — my academic training, my professional experiences, and all my travels — just perfectly fell into place. It made sense and the next step was crystal clear. Everything was connected, just like in ecology. I remember giving him all my strength and courage to fend for himself in this big ocean and to hopefully one day become one of these majestic creatures. For years, I knew that I wanted to do research but didn't exactly know how to link everything. For the first time in my life, with this baby shark, I knew that I wanted to focus on the movement and behaviour of coastal wildlife to protect these ecosystems that we, humans, share with so many species. Putting this tiny shark back into the ocean felt like the most important thing in my world at that moment. This day forever is like an anchor point in my research journey.

H: I'm very fascinated by that story because it all came together with that one baby shark. I'm curious, do you think having something tangible, something physical, helps drive you?

M: This [hammerhead-shaped pencil case] was a present from a very dear friend. He was the one who pushed me to take the next step. Send this email to my future supervisor, apply for the PhD, apply for funding, move to the other side of the world, and make it all happen. He set me on the path of becoming who I wanted to be. He was an important force in my life, and this pencil case was his farewell gift to me when I left Galapagos. I keep something very important and precious in there. I lost my mother at a very young age, and this is her fountain pen. It's older than me, and I've used it to study my entire life — through high school, one bachelor's degree, two master's, and now a PhD.

In French, "mother" and "the sea" — la mère / la mer —don't spell the same, but they sound the same. Since childhood, I've told anyone who would listen that I wanted to "learn everything about la mer." To this day, I still don't know if what I meant was that I wanted to know everything about the sea or about my mother. I connected these dots much later in life, and that was the first epiphany. I then decided to go back to school, get another master's degree, and this time study la mer. I didn't have ma mère, but I could study la mer. For me, the sea is the mother of everything, so mine too, at least a little bit.

H: What was it like working with Indigenous communities?

M: If studying sharks is the silver lining, working with Traditional Owners is the golden lining. I'm fascinated by knowledge in general, and while Western science is one way of knowing, there are other ways. Traditional Owners in Australia have a different way of holding, sharing and transmitting knowledge, and this fascinates me. There is a strong sense of continuity with nature and with elders. Growing up with one of my elders gone, I suppose that's something I quite naturally appreciate and value. It just resonates with me.

Portrait of Kit, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm. Collection of Forrest Research Foundation.

"We are part of nature and nature has its own way of communicating."

#06 Kit

Shared with permission; details edited for clarity.

H: I noticed in your bio, you named a bee species after your dog. Can you talk about your connection with bees and animals?

K: I think about bees every day. I have tattoos with bees on me. They're very much part of me. Research has helped me get through really hard times and made me feel like I have value. During difficult times, or when I've been lonely, I always know my animals are there. They're not gonna judge me for how I look or anything like that — they're just a presence that's always happy when you come home, and they're there for you. I feel like I connect with animals more than I do with humans. I have a very strong drive to protect biodiversity and animals, and have a deep connection with them. Research and animals give me a sense of purpose and belonging.

H: And you spend a lot of time in the field?

K: I was doing surveys in the jarrah forest, and it's just so beautiful for me to go out there by myself, and there's no one else. It's just me, and the flowers, and the bees. It's very grounding. Evolution is literally the most important theory ever, because it shows us that we're all connected, and we all evolved from a common ancestor. I find that with any sort of animal, when you're interacting with it, it's such a privilege. Especially with horses. You've got this animal that has a reason to be scared. Humans traditionally are predators. And then if you show them that you're safe, they trust you. And that's such a beautiful thing.

H: When I was a child, I felt a bee moving inside my palm, and thought, maybe the bee feels me too — like there's intelligence there. Do you feel that when you research bees?

K: For a long time, insects have been thought of as just mindless things, just following their programmed ways of being. But especially for native bees, there's been a lot of research on honeybee intelligence. They can have a concept of numbers; they can identify different colours. Native bees as well, especially the larger ones... when they see you, you can see they're sort of checking you out. They're hovering there and looking at you. Like, "What is this strange creature?"

So I definitely think they're aware. They can feel and think to an extent. We often think of intelligence as anything that humans create, separate from nature — artificial intelligence, or computers, or language. But our ability to do that came from nature, because we are part of nature, and nature has its own way of communicating. With bees, it's a lot of scents and pheromones. There are so many different ways of being and thinking. Defining it based on our idea of intelligence is obviously quite restrictive and anthropocentric as well. We get to decide what's intelligent or not.

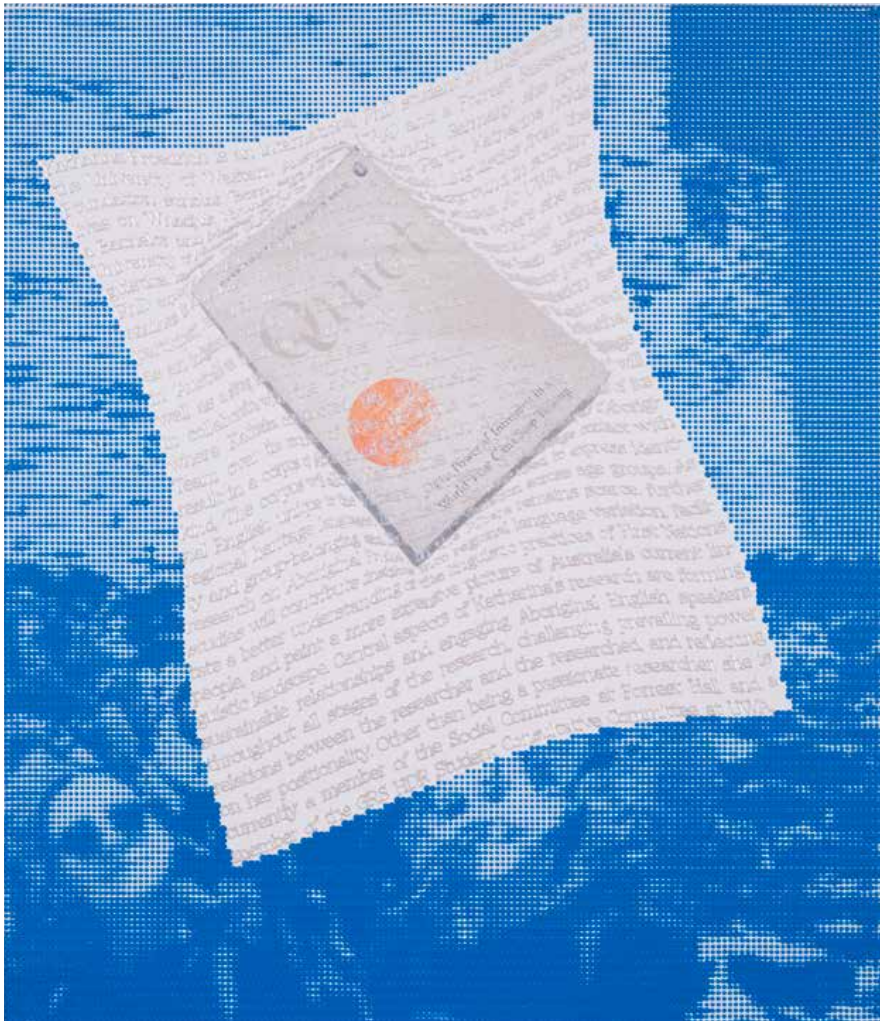
H: You're naming a new species. Can you tell me about that?

K: In a couple of weeks, I've got another new species being described, which is really exciting. This one is in a different genus. I'm calling it Megachile lucifer, because it's got these horns on its face, like the devil. What's really interesting is, only the female has these horns.

H: What keeps you motivated in your research? You must need a lot of energy to continue.

K: That's what I also love about native bees and nature as a whole — you'll never stop learning, because it evolves as well. Everything we knew about nature a hundred years ago — species have evolved since. So there are always more things to keep learning.

Sometimes research is characterised as boring, and there are some boring parts, like data entry, for example. But yeah, that drive to know more, and especially use what I know to protect species — I feel like that's something that really drives me, that passion for knowledge.



Portrait of Katharina, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm. Collection of Forrest Research Foundation.

"The deeper you are connected to something, maybe the stronger your intuition can grow."

#07 Katharina

Shared with permission; details edited for clarity.

H: You mentioned in your bio that you're reflecting on your positionality. How do you manage that when researching in the community?

K: Positionality is probably one of the hardest things to talk and write about. Reflecting on your positionality is all about uncovering your own subconscious biases. Like, okay, what perspective do I automatically apply to my research or to my outlook on the world? How can we look inside our own minds and then even write about it? That's very hard.
The big question for me in language is that so much of it is subconscious. When my speakers do something that stands out to me and I tell them, "Did you notice that you just used this word?"— people don't. It just comes out. That, to me, is so interesting: the subconscious.

I often like to think my brain has little cabinets, and I can open all these drawers and pick things — and sometimes you can't open a drawer, and you can't remember a word in English or German, or whatever language. We don't really know how it works, and I think that's fundamentally what I find interesting.

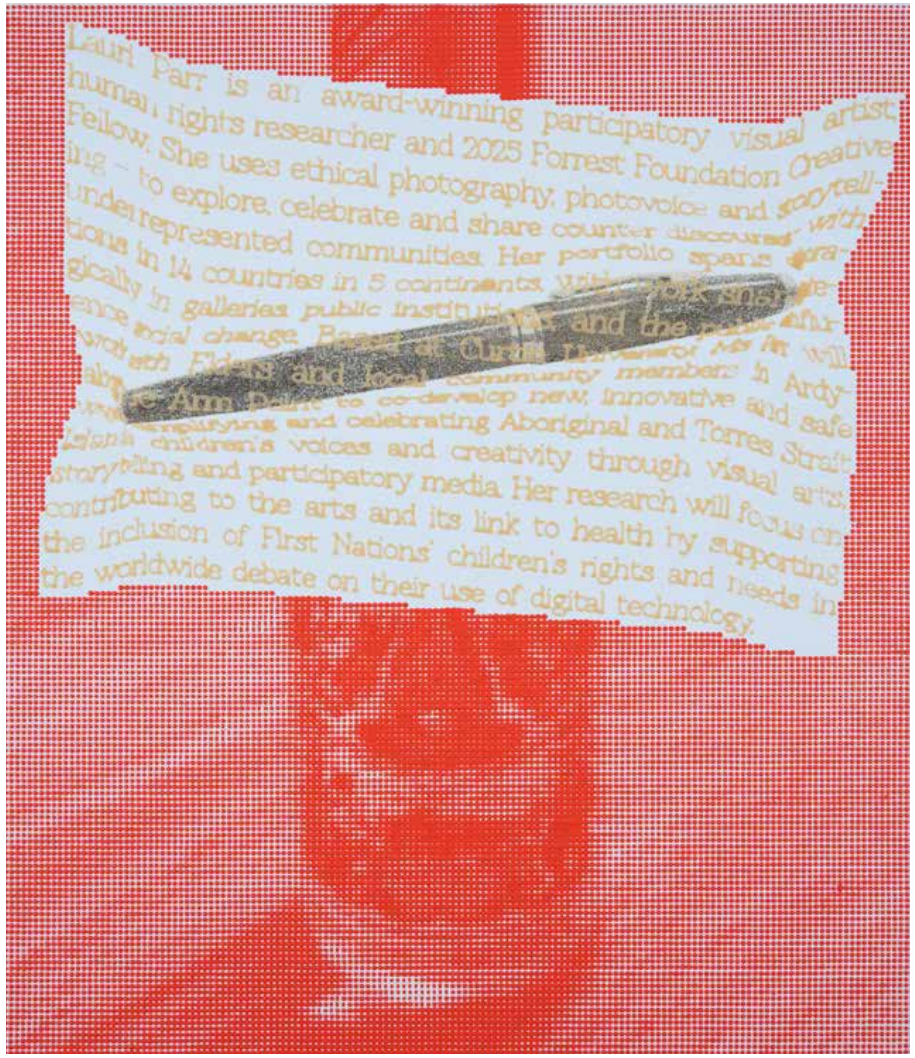
We all use language in some form or another, but how does it work? Being able to bring my linguistics knowledge to show the Aboriginal English speakers I work with and say, "Look, I'm a linguist, I study these things, and I can tell you — it's totally valid, the way you talk." And having people say, "Oh my god, no one has ever told me that. I got scolded by the teacher in school because I wasn't speaking proper English."

Being able to provide them with validation has been really important to me.

H: What I was impressed by is when you transcribe your recordings, you remember the time, place, how they communicated. How do you describe that kind of memory?

K: It's all these sensory impressions that stick with you, but you don't actively collect the impressions. Especially if you're recording outside, something prompted the next topic, like "Oh look, there's an aeroplane." On the recording, I hear the aeroplane, but I also remember we all looked up at the aeroplane, and then we started talking about it.

So it's these audio-visual or sensory impressions that stick with you. For me, in life in general, I cherish the deep connections — I think that's one of the most beautiful things we can experience in life. That feeling when you realise, okay, they trust me more and they include me and they share very personal things with me — that is just so rewarding. From listening, I can read and hear what they said verbally, word by word, but I remember how they were feeling, how they were saying it. So it's all these emotions that are also communicated through the recording. It's everything – the emotions, the context, the body language, the place.I think language is so much more than words. As a group, they have shared so many experiences. But I wasn't there, so sometimes they talk about things and I don't know who they're talking about, where this happened, what they did.



Portrait of Lauri, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm. Collection of Forrest Research Foundation.

"Actually, I'm the person rejecting myself before other people have the chance to do it."

#08 Lauri

Shared with permission; details edited for clarity.

H: How do you see the relationship between art and human rights in your work?

L: I studied human rights law, and I started thinking about images and how they construct us, the visual 'lore'. Traditionally, in photography, people will take photos of people — and it will be a rich white man most of the time. So my work is participatory, and I work with people and support various visions in collaborative settings to create visual stories that represent what it's actually like, or what people imagine it could be like, rather than the media's idea of what it's like.

When I was 17, I'd gone to a protest and a police officer had whacked me with a baton. I broke two of my ribs. But it was really formative, actually. Because when I saw it on the news, it was like 'these rowdy students', and it didn't really record the police behaviour. Living it, I was like —well, that's not what happened. I was there. The ability to think and to create is of itself a revolutionary action. This action is denied to people who are 'marginalised', and this is not because they are insignificant, all humans are humans. So the rights are important, but expression and beauty — and beauty through the human pain —are also very important. I don't know if I can separate human rights and art that much.

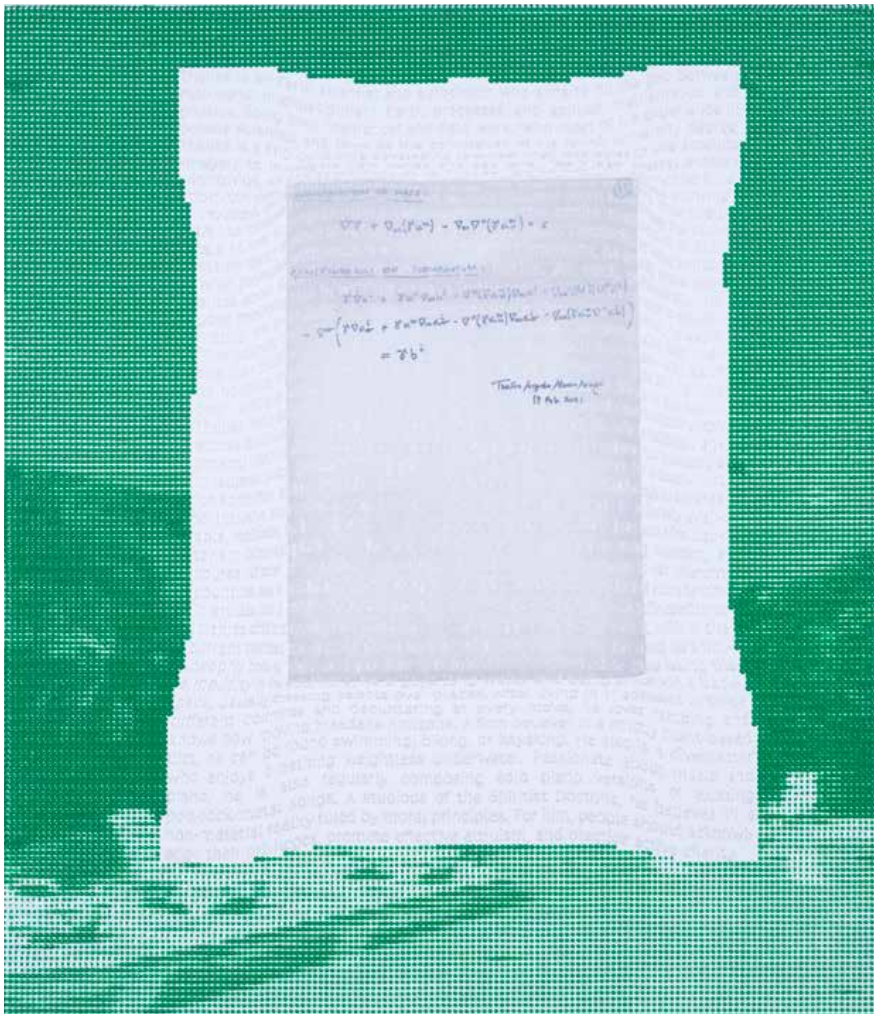
H: Can you talk about this pen you brought?

L: This pen was given to me by a friend. I'd written a poem for him; I usually don't share my poems, but I'd shared it with him, and he was delighted. A year prior, I'd spoken about this woman who had a fountain pen with her name on it, and so he made me this [pen with my name on it]. And I was like, right, write some more poems. I was supposed to be writing research, but instead I was writing these poems with this pen and sharing them with people. In my head, I was constantly filtering — Oh no, are they gonna think that poem is too emotional? Is that one too out there? I was gearing myself up and being like, No, Lauri, you can cope with the rejection.

The epiphany moment was the realisation that, actually, I'm the person rejecting myself before other people have the chance to do it. And not only is that not necessary, but when I do share things, people aren't rejecting it — they actually really love it. I see it's not that I'm criticised by other people. It's that I'm criticising myself before I have the opportunity to share. We are really sold this idea that we are somehow naturally against each other. There are plenty of very real reasons that is true, and especially for the communities I work with who face structural discrimination and mass misrepresentation. But through sharing stories and art, maybe we can also prove it false and connect to our innate love of fellow humans.

H: You work with the community, but is it your project or the community's project?

L: That's a constant consideration, because I wouldn't ever say, "Right, this is Lauri's project." It's the community's project. But at the same time, all of those steps of collaboration throughout the way — I don't think I can be removed from it for it to happen. I find joy in creating a process where they are able to create things and actually participate. Because so often, people are shut down and told, "You're doing it wrong," before they get the chance to.



Portrait of Thalles, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm. Collection of Forrest Research Foundation.

"You can see the top of the mountain. You don't know the way to get there, but you can see that the mountain exists. You know that it's physically possible to get there."

#09 Thalles

Shared with permission; details edited for clarity.

H: In your bio, you mentioned that you figured out the circle of fifths at age 12 without being taught. Do you think your intuition comes from that analytical side?

T: When I was 12, a friend of mine taught me how to play the acoustic guitar. I knew a few chords, and I wanted to understand it better. My mind has always been very mathematical. Using logic and maths, I could understand the structure — why, for example, the chords G and C sound nice together. My intuition is actually rooted in a very analytical sense as well. But the analytical can also bridge towards intuition, I think.

H: You study oceanography, but you also work with music, mathematics, and philosophy. How do you see all of these connecting?

T: I like languages a lot. To me, mathematics is a language. Music is another language — not only in the way of writing music, but also when I think about the structure of the circle of fifths — that is a language to me. Just as we have spoken languages, I feel that we also have mathematics. It's a different language. I am the only oceanographer that I know who did not choose to study oceanography because of the oceans. I chose to study oceanography because of the interdisciplinarity. I wanted something that combined mathematics with physics, chemistry, and biology. I like seeing the big picture of things, but also going super deep into them. I like to think of myself as some sort of polymath.

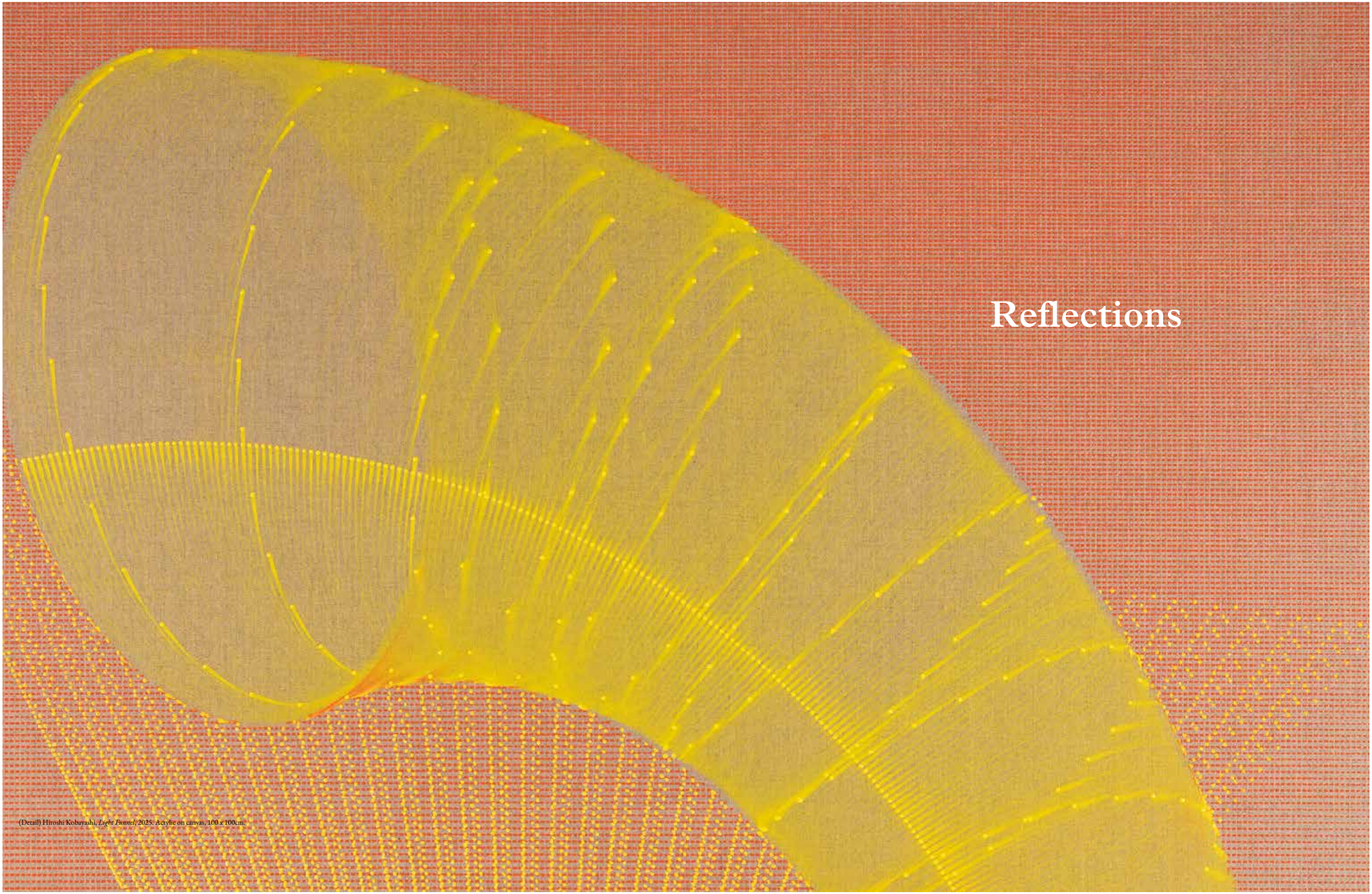
H: You do a lot of diving, and you mentioned you became vegan. Did that change your relationship with nature and other animals?

T: I loved diving at night — night diving — because with a flashlight I could see the particles in the water. I could just appreciate the turbulence of the water in front of me. And another thing that I really liked, as I was diving, was just to play with my body — like I could fly.
As I became vegan, I naturally started to see every other animal as, like, this is my brother, this is my sister, in terms of human species. I feel a connection to planet Earth in a completely different sense now.
My dad and my uncle sometimes went fishing, and they would take the worms. I never touched the worms because I just didn't like that. I never liked snails or these types of animals. But once I became vegan, that just went away. Now I just see an animal, and it's like a younger brother or sister.

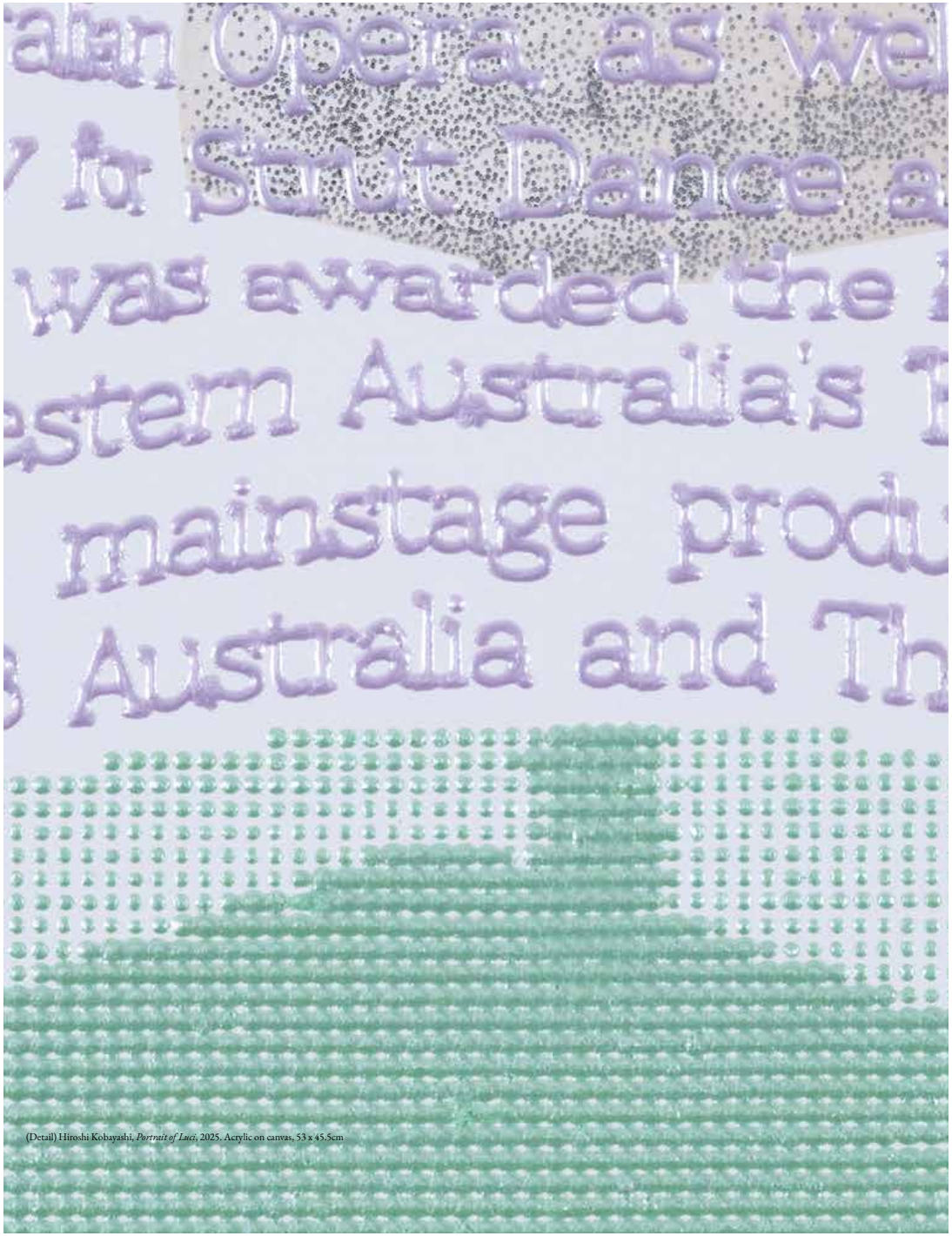
H: You brought this paper with equations. How did this start? What motivated you from the beginning?

T: In 2017, I went to have eye surgery. My sister and I have very thin corneas, so I had to go through a different type of surgery. I had to spend five days with my eyes closed. I started seeing equations in my mind, and I thought to myself — these equations, they are new. They haven't been written this way before. I need to write that down.

Reflections



(Detail) Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Eight Funnel*, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100cm.



(Detail) Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of Luci*, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm

Project Outcomes

Written by Hiroshi Kobayashi

When I began this project, my plan was to transform each participant's nominated object into an abstract form, following the visual language of my recent paintings. At that stage, I imagined abstraction as a kind of foundation beneath consciousness — a shared space where individual stories could be translated into form and made "universal," functioning both as a vehicle for my practice and as a conduit for shared narratives.

However, as the project unfolded through real conversations, my understanding of abstraction began to shift. Each participant's epiphany and chosen object revealed a distinct personal narrative, full of specificity and singularity. Their stories could not simply be dissolved into form. Instead, they reminded me of an idea I had early in my career: that, in terms of human recognition, there is no such thing as abstraction in a pure sense. Abstraction is never universal "just as form"; it is always entangled with histories, technologies, institutions, perceptions, or spiritual beliefs. I have long appreciated abstraction as the expression of unconscious desires and struggles that drive artists to expand the value of art.

In response, I revised my process. I began incorporating photographic images of each totem — taken during our interviews — directly into the compositions. After several unsuccessful experiments, I revisited techniques from earlier works and developed a new approach: converting the photographs into stippled patterns of tiny dots. This became a bridge between representation and abstraction, uniting human touch with mechanical precision.

All elements — deformed text, halftone photographs, and stippled imagery — were translated into vector lines and structured through computational processes. This digital foundation allowed the interview transcripts and CAD simulations to become part of the interactive web gallery, extending the project beyond the canvas and into a shared digital space.

In the WebGL environment, the participant's biography deforms across an invisible totem while their photographic image slowly rotates into view. The viewer must continually shift focus: when zooming in to read the text, the background recedes; when zooming out to see the photograph, the biography becomes nearly unreadable. It becomes impossible to perceive both the social and the personal layers at once. This tension mirrors the conceptual core of *S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram* — that identity is always in motion, and that the conscious and unconscious can be glimpsed only from shifting vantage points, never simultaneously.

When the works are physically produced, the precision of the digital process inevitably yields to the unpredictability of fluid paint. This merging of control and contingency lies at the heart of the work. Identity itself, like paint, can never be perfect or stable. The unconscious cannot be fully articulated. No one can physically stand at the exact "station point" of perspective; the position is always imagined, always shifting. In the same way, our personal ideas evolve through communication — colliding with the physical world and transforming in real time. I came to imagine that a similar collision occurs within the unconscious, where deformation becomes part of identity.

This process of revision, failure, and reflection reshaped not only the paintings but also my own sense of self. I am deeply

(Detail) Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of Stirling*, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm

grateful to all the participants who shared their stories — each marked by compassion for the world around them, whether for nature, ecology, animals, or people. Their sensitivity, often undervalued in competitive environments, reflects a quiet but profound intuition that I believe art is uniquely able to reveal.

As a studio-based artist, I had often thought of my work as an expression of the Ego — a conscious act of making. But through *S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram*, I came to understand that it is the Es — the instinctual, unformed drive — that propels me to think, struggle, fail, and continue creating. Supported by the participants' trust and stories, I was able to visualise the layered narratives of their epiphany moments and, through them, reflect on what the Es says within myself.

Ultimately, this project became a journey of rethinking not only how I make art, but also how identity is continually shaped — in dialogue, in process, and in the shifting balance between reason and instinct. It also allowed me to reconsider what "abstraction" means for me: not a neutral or universal language, but an operative framework — a mode of inquiry that holds together conceptual structure, technological precision, and lived experience.

Abstraction

Because *S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram* presents itself as an "abstract portrait" project, it inevitably speaks to the history of abstraction in modern and contemporary art. However, as noted earlier, the abstraction I work with is not the Formalist sense of pure form and medium-specificity—a framework that rejected narrative as "literary" and dismissed representational images as mere convention.

In the mid-twentieth century, Formalism sought to determine the "essence" of painting: flatness, opticality, and medium-specific qualities. Within this logic, abstraction appeared as a pure visual language developing inside a closed system of art history—a linear progression from European modernism to American Abstract Expressionism, diagrammed and legitimised by institutional figures such as Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the founding director of MoMA, in the 1936 exhibition Cubism and Abstract Art. This vision was connoisseurial, male-dominated, and deeply tied to museum and market structures. Abstraction appeared "universal" only because it had already been naturalised within the institutional and monetary systems that sustained it.

Yet Formalist abstraction was not merely a source of "form." By stripping away content and treating narrative as an impurity, Formalism claimed to deduce the specificity of painting from the evolution of European modernism and to preserve this lineage in pure visual form. Contrary to Greenbergian deductionism, however, what Abstract Expressionism actually amplified and declared as art was the medium as product. What was purified was less the condition of visuality than the condition of the commodity. Visuality is not produced by vision alone; it is constructed through all sensory systems. The "flatness" championed by Formalism is simply the surface appearance of the canvas as manufactured object. Dripping or staining likewise appear as surface effects of industrially produced pigments and synthetic polymer binders. These gestures function almost as interpretations of the Readymade—demonstrating the material conditions of production rather than transcending them.

This historical framing also clarifies what was excluded by Formalism. By treating abstraction as a self-contained visual language, Formalist theory functioned not only as an aesthetic doctrine but as a historical filter, marginalising spiritually motivated, esoteric, and non-rational currents within abstraction. In this sense, abstraction was stabilised by suppressing forces that could not be easily reconciled with medium-specific purity or institutional legibility.[10]

From this Formalist base, postwar art unfolded into:

- Pop and Minimalism, which absorbed consumerism, industrial production, and standardisation into the logic of the commodity;
- Conceptual art, where the "idea" itself became central—often framed as a logical extension of the Readymade,

(Detail) Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of Marie*, 2025. Acrylic on canvas. 53 x 45.5cm

even though Duchamp himself never treated either the Readymade or the idea as art.

Conceptualism is frequently presented as a critique of the art object as commodity, yet it ultimately expanded the conditions for commodification. As art historian Thomas Crow observes, the shift from crafted objects to "discursive substitutes"—textual instructions, descriptions, and documents—"reinforced a principle of equivalence, thereby shifting artistic practice closer to the fluid exchangeability that characterizes the true commodity."[1]

Far from eliminating the market, Conceptualism provided a logic that the market could readily absorb. At the same time, its misunderstanding of Duchamp became widespread. As Thierry de Duve argues, the Readymade eventually produced a condition in which art became "do whatever"—a nomination validated through institutional recognition rather than through the object itself.[2]

Thus the Pop–Minimal–Conceptual constellation does not stand outside Formalism but grows out of it: it inherits a belief in art's autonomy while incorporating the languages of mass media, industrial production, and information systems. Later, these tendencies were criticised as "institutional," giving rise to institutional critique and politically engaged art in the 1970s. Yet it soon became clear that no one had ever truly stepped outside the institution; these critical practices were themselves produced, circulated, and canonised within capitalism.

By the 1980s, in a market-driven climate partly enabled by Conceptualism's dematerialisation, this tension produced what came to be called Simulationism or the "Pictures Generation": a moment when art became less about seeking truth and more about navigating survival within capitalism. De Duve's formulation of the "do whatever" condition captures how the Readymade was transformed from a precise critical act into an all-purpose mechanism for artistic nomination.

Within this genealogy, abstraction is never neutral. It is shaped by institutions, by capitalism, and by art's own strategies of survival. This is precisely why I cannot treat abstraction as a universal foundation. Instead, I must reconsider where abstraction came from, what was lost through its institutionalisation, and what other possibilities it might still hold.

Modernism

To rethink abstraction, it is necessary to return to the early 20th century — not from the distance of American Formalism, but from inside the struggles of artists themselves.

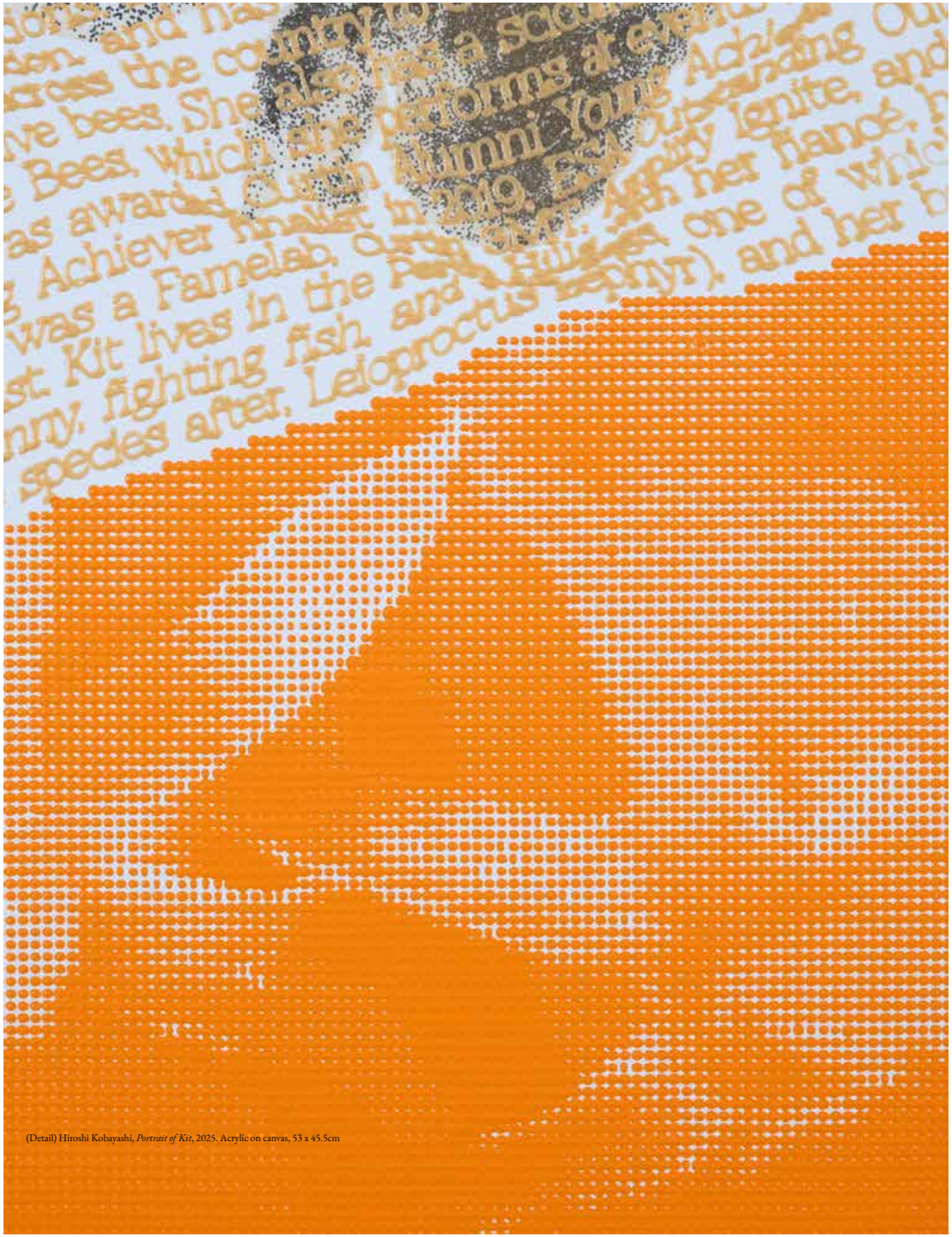
We tend to trust a clean progression of styles, like Barr's diagram of the history of modern art, as an institutional vantage point that adapts the methodology of social science. But if we focus on artists' unconscious lives and their works, a different picture emerges:

- continual struggle against tradition and convention;
- fascination and suspicion toward emerging technologies (photography, film, and now digital media and AI);
- various forms of unconscious drive — something like Freud's Es — pushing artists toward unexplored forms.

Many of these trajectories were marginalised or only recognised belatedly. Hilma af Klint, for example, produced abstract works grounded in her own spiritual practice and cosmology, operating largely outside the dominant narrative of modernism.[2] She was not an "outsider" in the naïve sense — she was academically trained and active within a local artistic community in Sweden — yet the major cycle of works such as The Ten Largest was neither publicly exhibited nor absorbed into the modernist canon during her lifetime. Partly by her own choice and partly due to the era's Formalist expectations, her late works remained isolated and were recognised only long after the fact, revealing a parallel modernism that the dominant, male, Formalist lineage failed to accommodate.

Similarly, Van Gogh lived in close relationship with the

1 Thomas Crow, "Historical Returns," Artforum, April 2008, p. 289.
2 Maurice Tuchman (ed.), The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985 (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986).



(Detail) Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of Kit*, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm

art community through his brother and sister-in-law, who effectively acted as private patron, manager, and dealer. Yet he sold almost nothing in his lifetime, and his practice unfolded on the edge of economic failure. His work is driven by something beyond commercial success, rooted instead in a form of existential and perceptual struggle.

Many artists have sacrificed themselves within modern society, never achieving institutional recognition, yet their works testify to intense internal labour — an alchemy of creation that cannot be captured by market metrics.

By contrast, many contemporary artists have learned to prioritise commercial, financial, or academic legibility over this more complex struggle. The risk is that the work becomes perfectly legible, yet can appear to lack an inner urgency.

My own use of "abstraction" is closer to these marginal, spiritual, and unconscious lines of modernism than to the purified abstraction of Formalism. This is one reason why I look back to af Klint and others: to find models of abstraction that emerge not from stylistic deduction, but from inner principles, beliefs, and perceptual experiences.

Duchamp

To shed light on Simulationism and Conceptualism, I want to reconsider Marcel Duchamp and the Readymade. He is often cast as a figure who undermined authorship by de-contextualising mass-produced objects, nominating them as art, and thereby dissolving the boundaries between art and commodity.

However, Duchamp is also a meticulous craftsman, who constructed The Large Glass with complex manual procedures, patiently reassembled shattered glass fragments, designed and hand-built his Boîte-en-valise (portable museum), and constructed Étant donnés largely on his own, in secret, over many years.

Crucially, Duchamp never simply appropriated a mass product and left it untouched as a final work. The famous upside-down bicycle wheel on a stool was something he kept in his Paris studio for his own pleasure in 1913 — "like having a fireplace in my studio." After he enjoyed it privately, he lost the "original." Later, in 1964, he recreated editions of the Readymades based on photographs and memory, producing replicas rather than presenting the original objects themselves.3

In this light, the Readymade is not just about nominating a commodity. It is about personal appreciation of the movement or form of an object, and then an elaborated re-presentation of that object — almost like a meticulous painting of a portrait or still life.

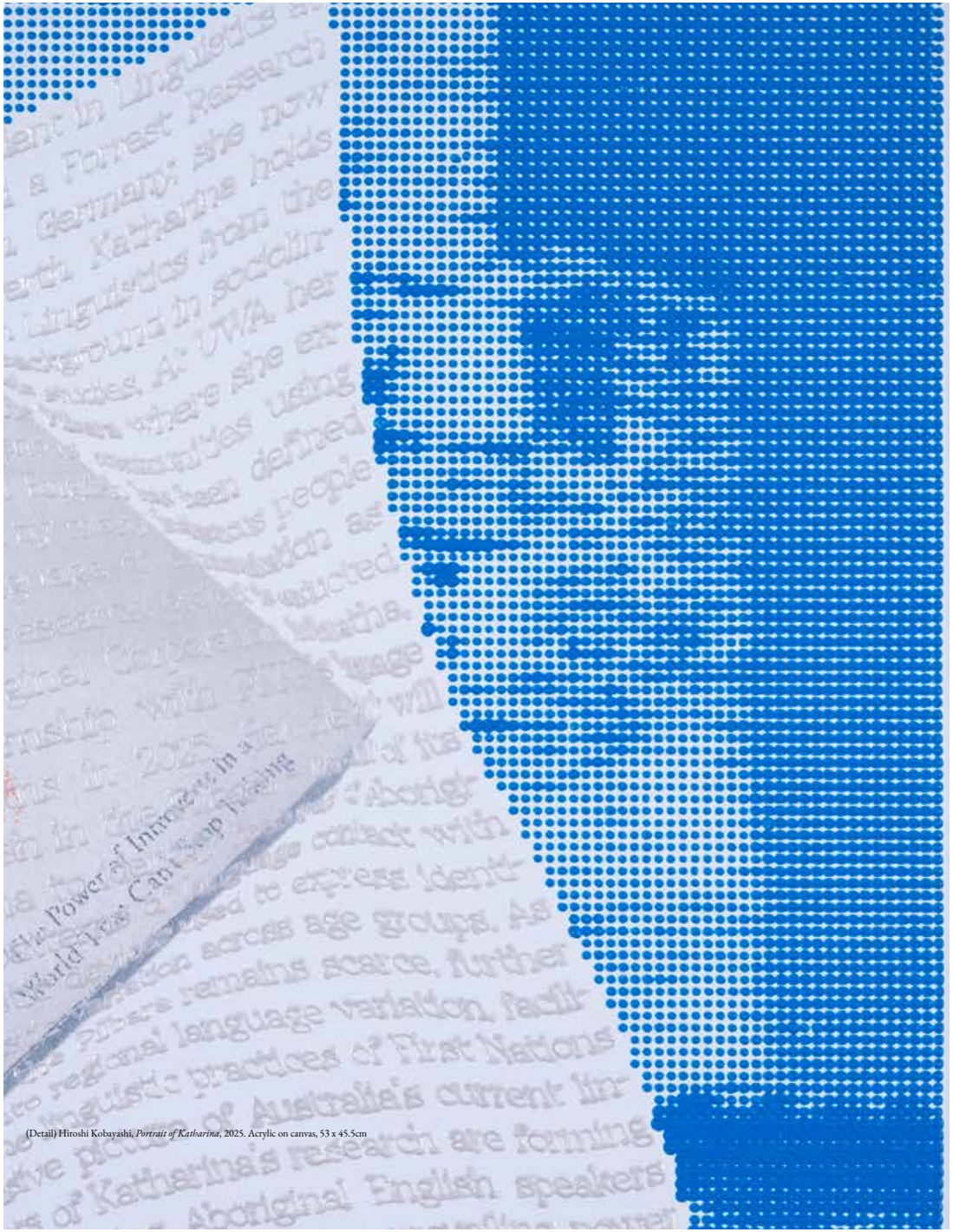
This distinction becomes sharper if we look at works like Three Standard Stoppages. Officially, Duchamp claimed to have dropped three one-metre threads from a height of one metre onto canvases, fixing them where they fell to produce curves "by its own will." But close observation reveals that the threads are stitched into the canvas, and the curves are elegant in a way that real falling threads rarely produce.

When I saw the work in person, the line of the thread looked strangely controlled, almost as if it had been bent manually. Later, I encountered research where someone replicated the supposed procedure, dropping similar threads from one metre. The results never matched the curves in Duchamp's pieces; the threads curled, tangled, and refused to form those subtle lines.4

My speculation is that Duchamp first designed the curves — perhaps by drawing them — then cut wooden rulers from those curves, and finally fixed the threads carefully along these guides. In other words, he did not surrender authorship to chance; he constructed the chance.

This reading also affects our understanding of the Readymade. Rather than a pure de-contextualisation of mass products, it is precisely the opposite of the "instant nomination" logic often associated with post-Duchampian Conceptualism.

3 Thierry de Duve, Kant After Duchamp (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
4 Rhonda Roland Shearer and Stephen Jay Gould, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Duchamp's 3 Standard Stoppages, More Truly a 'Stoppage' (An Invisible Mending) Than We Ever Realized," Tout-Fait, 1999.



(Detail) Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of Katharina*, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm

Cézanne and Cubism

To understand the origin of abstraction and the Readymade, we need to return to Impressionism and Cézanne.

Impressionism is often described as a shift from elaborate representation of subject matter to a more direct presentation of the painterly medium itself. Brushstrokes, optical mixing of colour, and subjective perception come to the foreground. Painting becomes less about modelling volume and more about registering optical phenomena on the canvas surface.

However, this shift did not occur in a vacuum. Impressionism emerged at the intersection of colonial expansion and encounters with primitivism and orientalism; growing capitalism and the art market; industrialisation (photography, printing, paint in tubes); rapid social and political change; and the broader tensions of European modernity that would later reshape the early 20th century.

Photography, as an automatic device combining lens, photosensitive material, and reproducible printing, produced images with unprecedented speed and consistency. It is often said that Impressionism developed a new painterly language against photography. But I suspect something more paradoxical.

In my view, Impressionism unconsciously simulated the phenomenology of photography:

- all-over flatness;
- stippled or grainy surfaces (like silver-halide dots);
- a reduction in volumetric modelling and theatrical illusion.

In trying to differentiate painting from photography, Impressionist painters were, at some level, imitating the look of photographs — what Duchamp later dismissed as "retinal." At the same time, their unconscious struggle also generated what photography could not: divided touch, the accumulation of substantial brushstrokes, and the material density of colour. These developments were not part of a formal program. They arose from a complex mixture of ambition, fascination, doubt, and intuition in response to new technology. Once this visual language was recognised and codified as a "style," it became repeatable. The more the style was repeated, the more the original struggle — the speculative and intuitive dimension — was lost. Painterliness risked becoming a cliché. Cézanne can be seen as a painter who attempted to move beyond this "simulation of photography." He tried to paint what happens within perception itself: the process of seeing, which involves not only optical data but bodily posture, movement, and the full range of the senses. Cézanne's distributed brushwork advances beyond photographic flatness; each touch can be understood as staging a relation between inner sensation and outer matter — approaching what the philosopher Henri Bergson calls pure perception, a mode in which matter registers the world without subjective reduction.

If we follow Bergson, matter exists in a state of pure perception: it accepts everything, deforms in response, and "records" the world on its surface. Organisms emerge from this field by reducing and delaying perception for survival. Movement and delay establish the basis of memory.

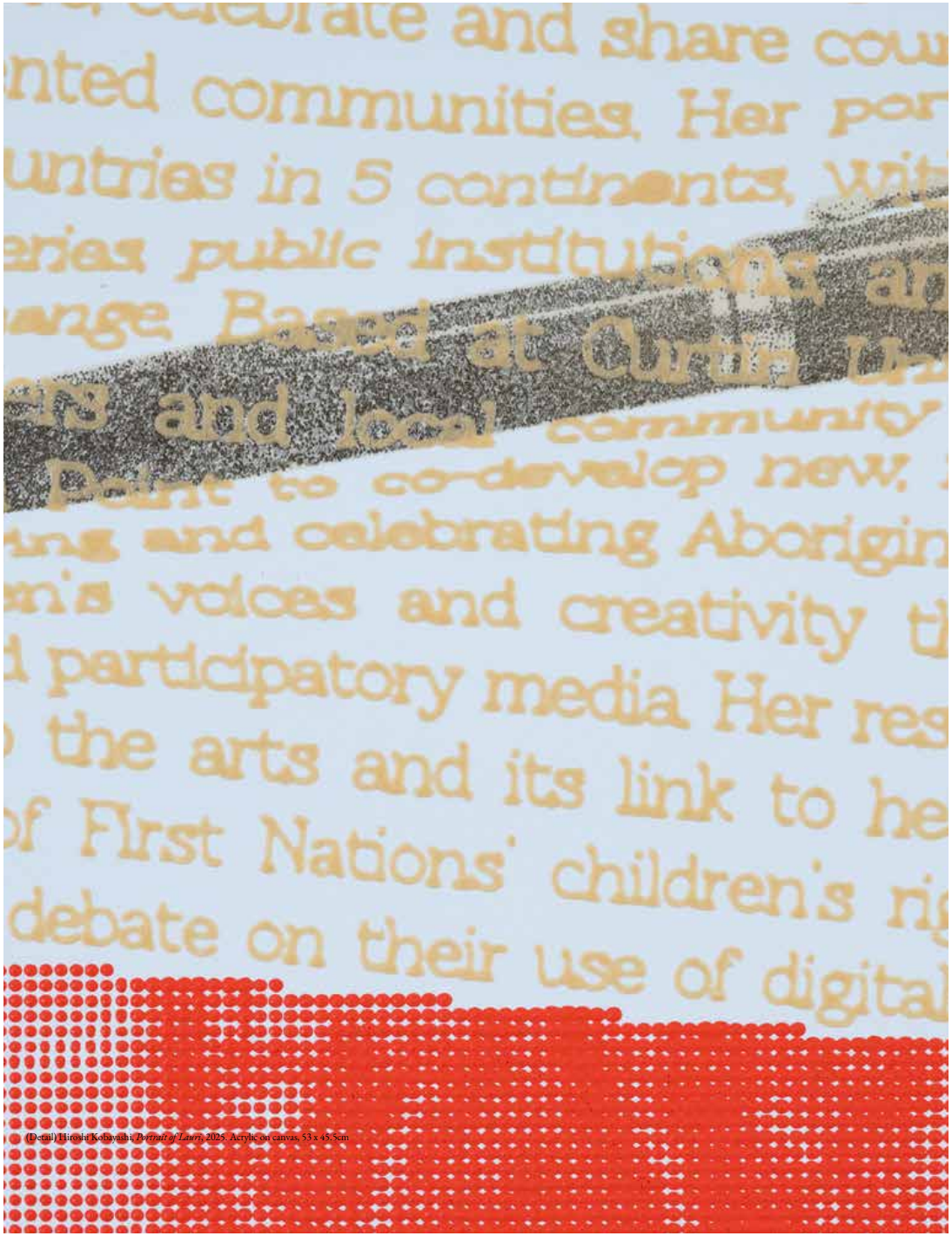
Cézanne's brushstrokes can therefore be read as:

- not simply recording what is seen,
- but staging the interaction between inner perception and outer matter,
- between duration and instant.

He attempted to represent modern vision — a perception distributed across the body, not confined to the optical regime explored by the Impressionists. But as Jonathan Crary has discussed, Cézanne ultimately encountered the impossibility of representing pure perception itself in his pursuit of the truth of vision:

"Cézanne might have seemed to approximate Bergson's model of pure perception — that absolute absorption in the present which molded itself to the external object. But the rigor and intensity of Cézanne's quest for presence disclosed to him its impossibility and opened up for him a view of the mixed and 'broken' character of a fully absorbed perception."5 Yet the works produced through this exhausted quest — this pursuit

5 Jonathan Crary, Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 328.



(Detail) Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of Lauri*, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm

of an impossible object — became the very source of Cézanne's creativity. Here, I assume, the Es or unconscious drive animates intuition, opening for Cézanne the possibility of representing this broken character of bodily perception through the "logic" of the brushstrokes.6

Cubism assimilated Cézanne's visual results after this quest, but not necessarily his perceptual questions. By adopting fractured surfaces without the underlying struggle to represent embodied perception, Cubism in a sense simulated the appearance of Cézanne's work — just as Impressionism unconsciously simulated photography. The illusional depth created by Cézanne's moving brushstrokes was flattened into a grid of fragmented marks on canvas.

When Cubism began gluing newspapers onto the canvas, another shift occurred. Instead of representing a subject, it inserted a fragment of the world itself, echoing the flattened fragmentation already present in its brushwork. This mirrors the logic of the camera, which presents the world automatically through mechanical means. Collage becomes a manual simulation of photography's instantaneous capture: placing a flat printed object onto a flat painted support.

At this point, something significant was lost. Painting shifted from the meticulous representation of subjects — and from Cézanne's attempt to depict perception itself — to a quicker, more direct presentation of the world. This "fast representation" is one of the defining characteristics of photography.

Duchamp caricatured this tendency — this "painting disguised as photography" — by collapsing signifier and signified into the same object. In effect, he presented the "newspaper without the painting" as art — and later refused even that, treating the object as a temporary source of personal enjoyment before discarding it. Only afterward did he reconstruct it as a replica.

From this genealogy, it becomes clear why I am sceptical of incorporating Readymades into my own production method. Instead, I am trying to invent a new device and intervene in industrial production through customised scripting to represent subjective perception — one that:

- does not rely on instant camera-like capture,
- incorporates movement and duration in a Bergsonian sense,
- leaves room for unconscious reflection and intuition.

This is one reason why interviewing participants, listening to their stories, and integrating their words and images became essential in *S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram*. It is a way of deliberately opening the work to the unconscious, rather than merely repeating inherited forms.

Unconscious

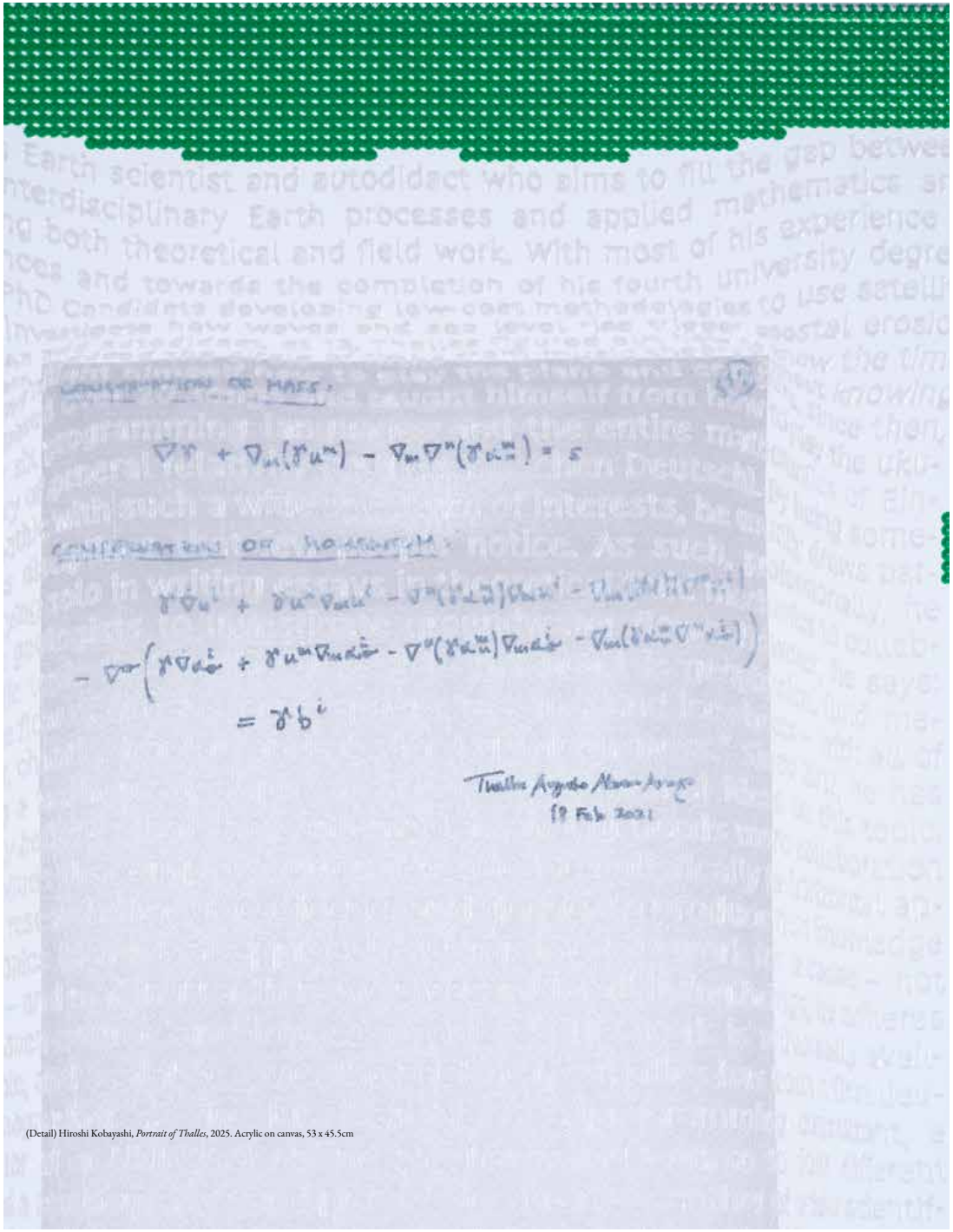
The conventions, norms, and ethics of contemporary society operate unevenly. They function adequately at certain levels, yet repeatedly fail, collapse, and must be revised by those living within them. Parents are no exception: they discipline their children through the very systems and values that structure their own lives, systems interwoven with the cycles of consumption and production characteristic of capitalism.

In this sense, not only social and parental expectations but what Lacan calls the "discourse of the capitalist" are internalised in the unconscious in a structure analogous to the Oedipus complex, shaping personal and generational forms of desire.[7] The Oedipal schema does not simply represent a familial drama; it functions as an ideological form that naturalises relations of authority, guilt, and obedience. Capitalist discourse infiltrates desire through that inherited structure, disguising itself as something inevitable or self-evident.

Artists who have moved through dominant art-educational pathways and into the art market experience a parallel struggle: a tension between convention (Superego) and originality (Ego).

6 Ibid., p. 340: "The desynthesizing of the world which he develops in this area depends on the extraordinary 'logic' of the strokes that constitute it — strokes that autonomously mutate, that disorganize themselves outside of any subjective unity or spatial coherence."

7 Jacques Lacan, "On Psychoanalytic Discourse," lecture at the University of Milan, 1972. See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (New York: Penguin Classics, 1972).



(Detail) Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of Thales*, 2025. Acrylic on canvas, 53 x 45.5cm

As discussed earlier, the difficulty lies in the seemingly dead-end condition of contemporary art, in which radicalism is permitted only under the condition of "anything whatsoever."[8] The field has become paradoxically conventional, and the artworks most readily celebrated are those measured by attendance, profitability, and market value—a metric that mirrors the very capitalist discourse embedded in the unconscious.

Here, my earlier discussion of Cézanne becomes relevant. His lifelong attempt to embody the impossibility of complete subjective freedom—through the logic of brushstrokes and perceptual struggle—offers a counterpoint to this contemporary condition. At the same time, Sigmund Freud's concept of the Es (id) provides a conceptual ground for mediating these seemingly endless dialectical conflicts. The Es is where desire precedes structure; it is the site at which external pressures, internalised norms, and unconscious drives collide.

Although I do not accept Freud's pan-sexual theory of libido, his diagram of the psyche remains productive for my project. I am drawn to placing the Es in proximity to Bergson's notion of duration or Spinoza's concept of conatus—not as equivalents, but as neighbouring concepts that illuminate how artworks aspire toward a constellation in which time, perception, and desire converge.

My approach repositions the Es as generative rather than pathological. The Es is not merely the source of impulsive irrationality; it is also the raw energy that compels thought, struggle, and making. *S(Es)graph\S(Es)gram* attempts to visualise how identity is continually formed through collisions between unconscious drive, social language, and material process—a negotiation between the Es, the symbolic order, and the embodied act of painting.

There is, in painting, a continual negotiation between possibility and impossibility, a tension among Ego, Superego, and Es. I understand the Es as a force that precedes both Dionysian excess and Apollonian order, generating each without resolving their opposition. In this sense, I am less interested in intoxication or rationality as end states than in the unresolved pressure that animates their reciprocal movement.

Here, Jacques Lacan's notion of the "Apollonian effect" of painting becomes crucial. Painting offers a surface that pacifies the gaze—not by erasing unconscious drive, but by holding it in suspension. As Lacan writes:

"The painter gives something to the person who must stand in front of his painting which, in part at least, might be summed up thus: 'You want to see? Well, take a look at this!' He gives something for the eye to feed on, but he invites the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his gaze there as one lays down one's weapons. This is the pacifying, Apollonian effect of painting. Something is given not so much to the gaze as to the eye, something that involves the abandonment, the laying down, of the gaze."[9]

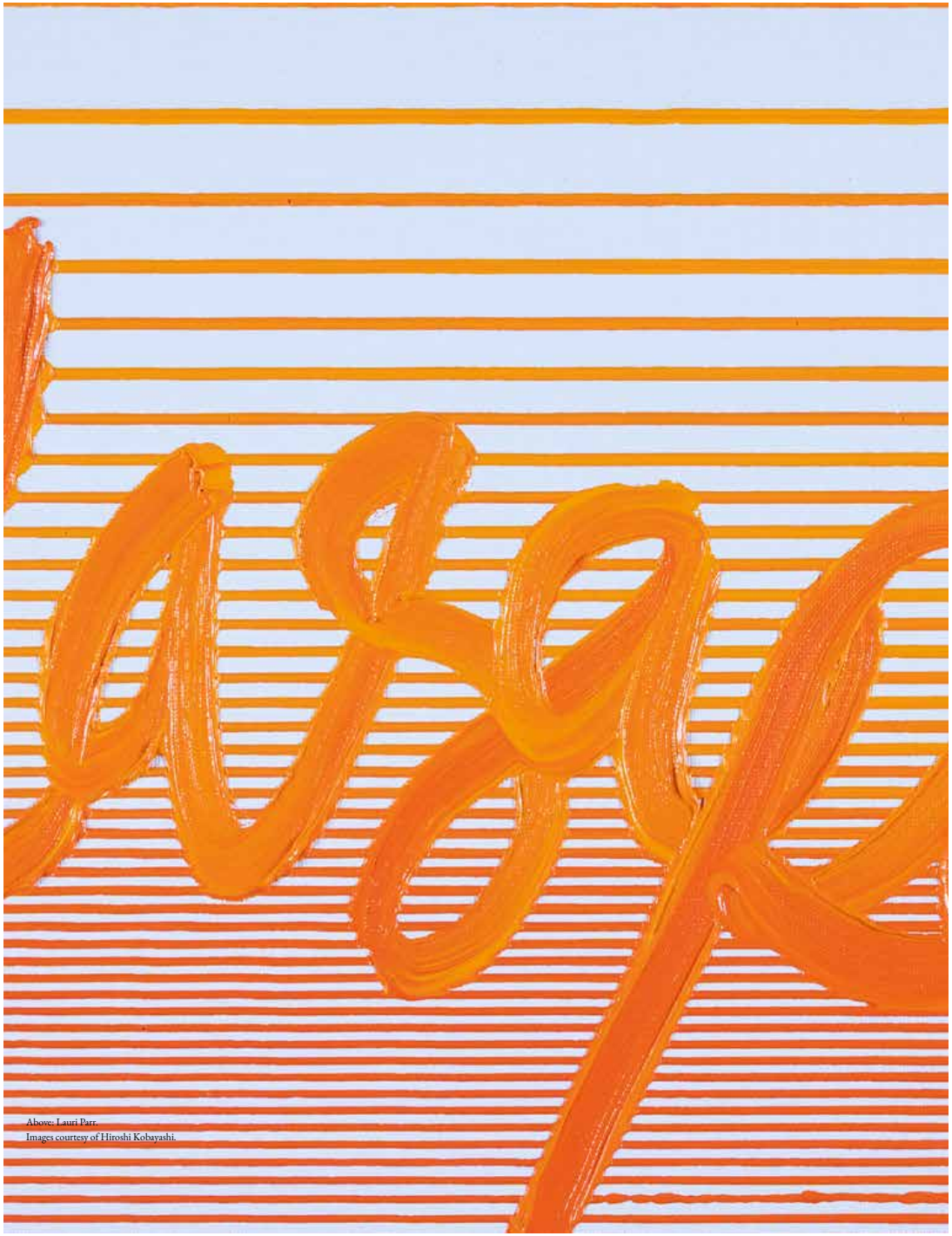
In a related way, Henri Bergson describes how a bold novelist can momentarily tear aside "the cleverly woven curtain of our conventional ego" to reveal the contradictions of consciousness:

"Now, if some bold novelist, tearing aside the cleverly woven curtain of our conventional ego, shows us under this appearance of logic a fundamental absurdity, under this juxtaposition of simple states an infinite permeation of a thousand different impressions which have already ceased to exist the instant they are named, we commend him for having known us better than we knew ourselves.

Encouraged by him, we have put aside for an instant the veil which we interpose between our consciousness and ourselves. He has brought us back into our own presence."[10]

For me, painting aspires to this double movement described by Lacan and Bergson: it offers the eye a surface on which to rest, while simultaneously hinting at something more turbulent beneath the conventional ego. It presents a "shadow" of the unconscious in such a way that we momentarily glimpse the interpenetrating forces that shape perception and desire—and, in that brief interval, find ourselves brought back into our own presence.

8 Thierry de Duve, "THIS IS ART: Anatomy of a Sentence," Artforum, April 2014.
9 Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 101.
10 Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1910), pp. 133–134.



Above: Lauri Parr.
Images courtesy of Hiroshi Kobayashi.

Commentary

Written by Robert Buratti

This project emerged through the generous participation of researchers, artists, and alumni from the Forrest Hall and UWA community. From the beginning, Hiroshi Kobayashi sensed that the participants already carried a certain vision and understanding of what the project sought to explore. Each researcher approached the process through their own disciplinary lens, yet something shared—and unplanned—began to form between them. These conversations unfolded in an environment where marine scientists, linguists, bee researchers, artists, and oceanographers cross paths daily, creating rare opportunities for meaningful exchange.

During the final week of the residency, Kobayashi prepared a series of oil-painted canvases and invited participants to add their signatures in the Forrest Hall lobby. Although this workshop began from the artist's curiosity about signatures as learned gestures, the conversations that unfolded made it far more than a signing activity. As Kobayashi reflects, "A signature is something a person writes so many times that it becomes almost automatic. That form of learned automation fascinates me. Even though the movement is quick, the writer already knows the entire gesture before the pen touches the surface."

This sense of duration—a presentness that stretches beyond the immediate moment—became central to discussions that emerged around the completed abstract portraits. For Kobayashi, this temporal quality connects to "an ecological rather than economic view of the world. Economies value speed and accumulation; ecological thinking values long spans, slow adjustments, and interdependence." Many of the researchers involved consider the global and environmental impact of their work—another form of long-duration thinking. Oil painting, despite being old-fashioned and materially inconvenient in the digital age, carries its own slowness and resistance to immediacy, offering what Kobayashi sees as "a counterpoint to accelerated production and aligning with the ecological sensibilities that shape contemporary research and society."

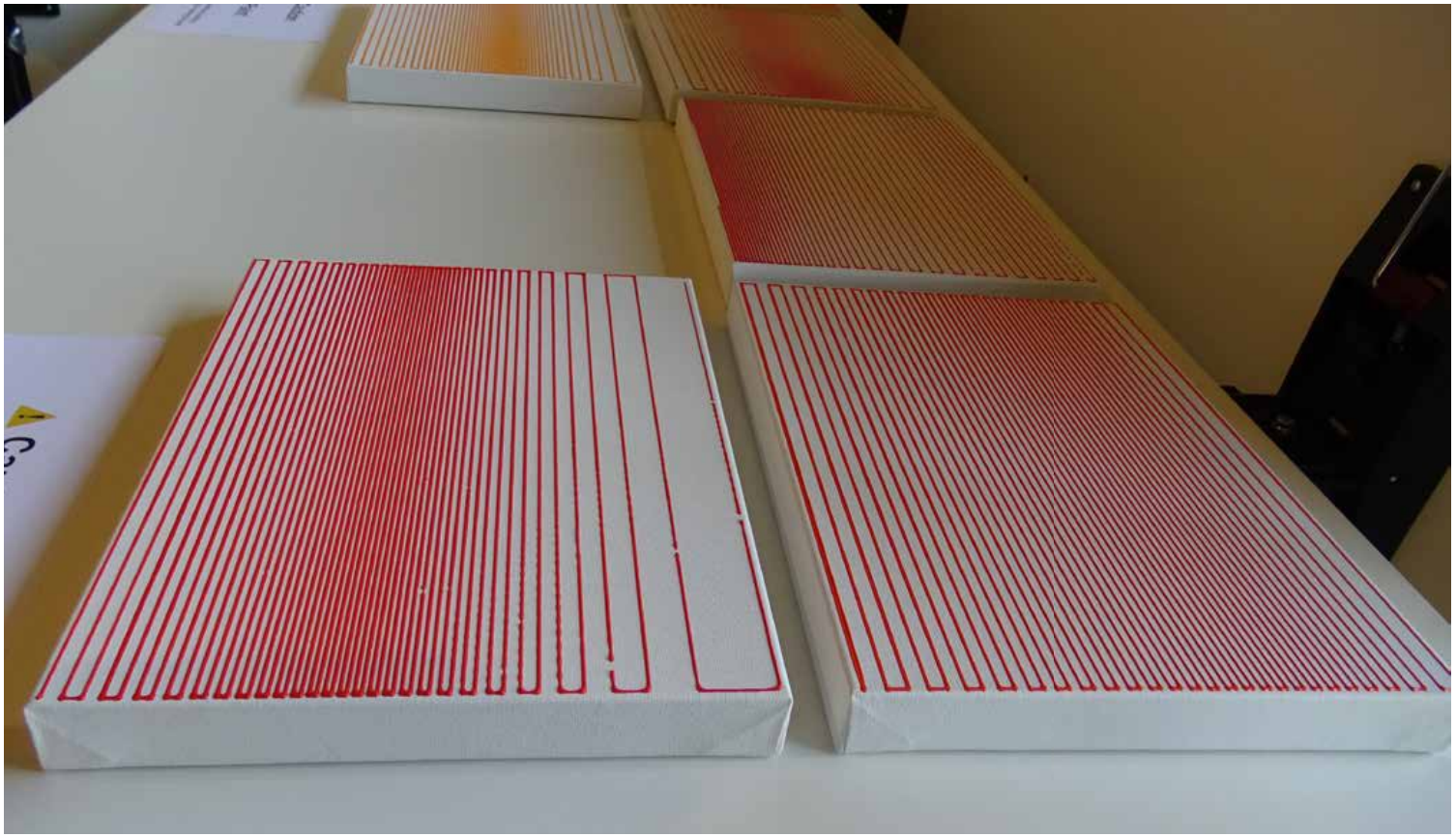
At the end of the residency, five participants and the Director created a ten-page booklet as a farewell gift. Their reflections and responses to the project came as a complete surprise. By the end of the residency, this booklet became what Kobayashi describes as "a crystallisation of that shared space: something that emerged naturally, beyond intention, method, or academic expertise."

For a project concerned with the unconscious—its gestures, durations, and invisible motivations—this booklet became a perfect concluding form. As Kobayashi observes, "These reflections were not produced as research outputs or professional statements; they came from sincerity, intuition, and generosity. They reveal how art can open a dimension of exchange that lies beyond disciplinary boundaries: a space where scientists, artists, and scholars meet not through expertise, but through the deeper human undercurrents built into our unconscious."

Both the autograph workshop and the booklet thus stand as reminders of art's role within an academic community—making visible the connections, resonances, and forms of understanding that cannot be planned, measured, or fully articulated, yet are profoundly felt.

"During the final week of my residency, I prepared a series of oil-painted canvases—each produced through my machinery-based process—and set them out in the Forrest Hall lobby between 10am and 2pm."

~ Hiroshi Kobayashi



Above: James Arvanitakis
Below: Anna Faber
Opposite: Images of the prepared canvas for the workshop period.
Photography: Robert Buratti.
Images courtesy of Hiroshi Kobayashi.

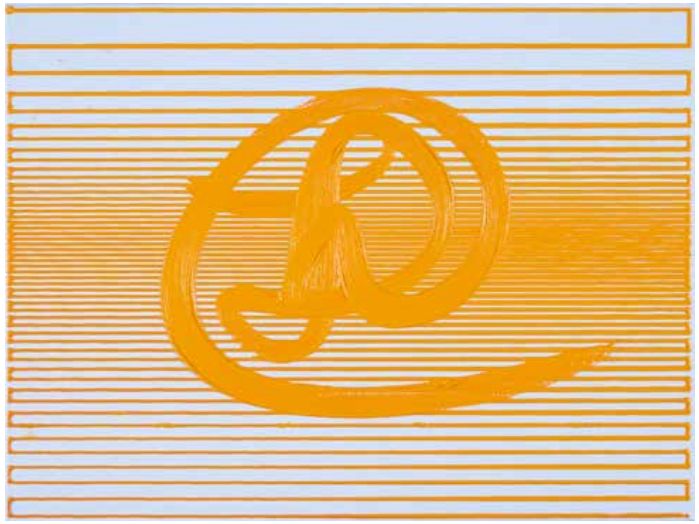
Above: Mingxin Ye.
Below: Matt Heydenrych
Opposite: Mingxin Ye completing the workshop.
Photography: Robert Buratti.
Images courtesy of Hiroshi Kobayashi.

"A signature is something a person writes so many times that it becomes almost automatic. That form of learned automation fascinates me. Even though the movement is quick, the writer already knows the entire gesture before the pen touches the surface. It isn't a series of accumulating moments; it is a single movement shaped by a broader internal timeframe. This sense of duration—a presentness that stretches beyond the immediate moment—resonates with the temporal logic of my own process, where oil paint, machinery, and human intention converge over extended time."

~ Hiroshi Kobayashi

"Abstraction is never universal 'just as form'; it is always entangled with histories, technologies, institutions, perceptions, or spiritual beliefs."

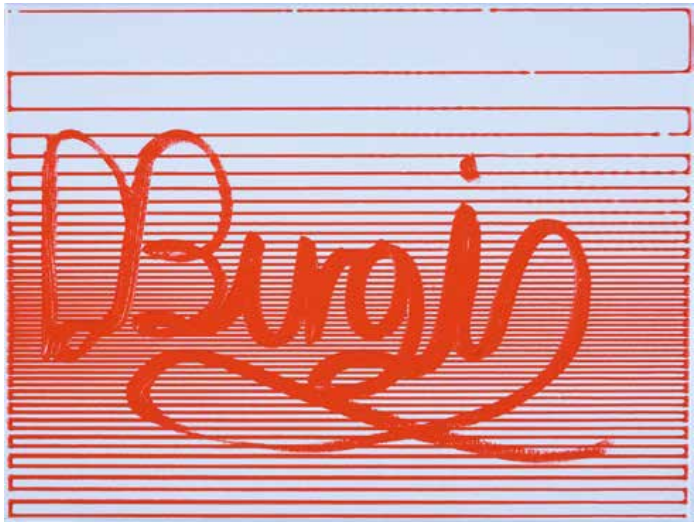
~ Hiroshi Kobayashi



Above: Lauri Parr. Oil on canvas.
Below: Thalles Araujo, Oil on canvas
Images courtesy of Hiroshi Kobayashi.

"Identity itself, like paint, can never be perfect or stable. The unconscious cannot be fully articulated."

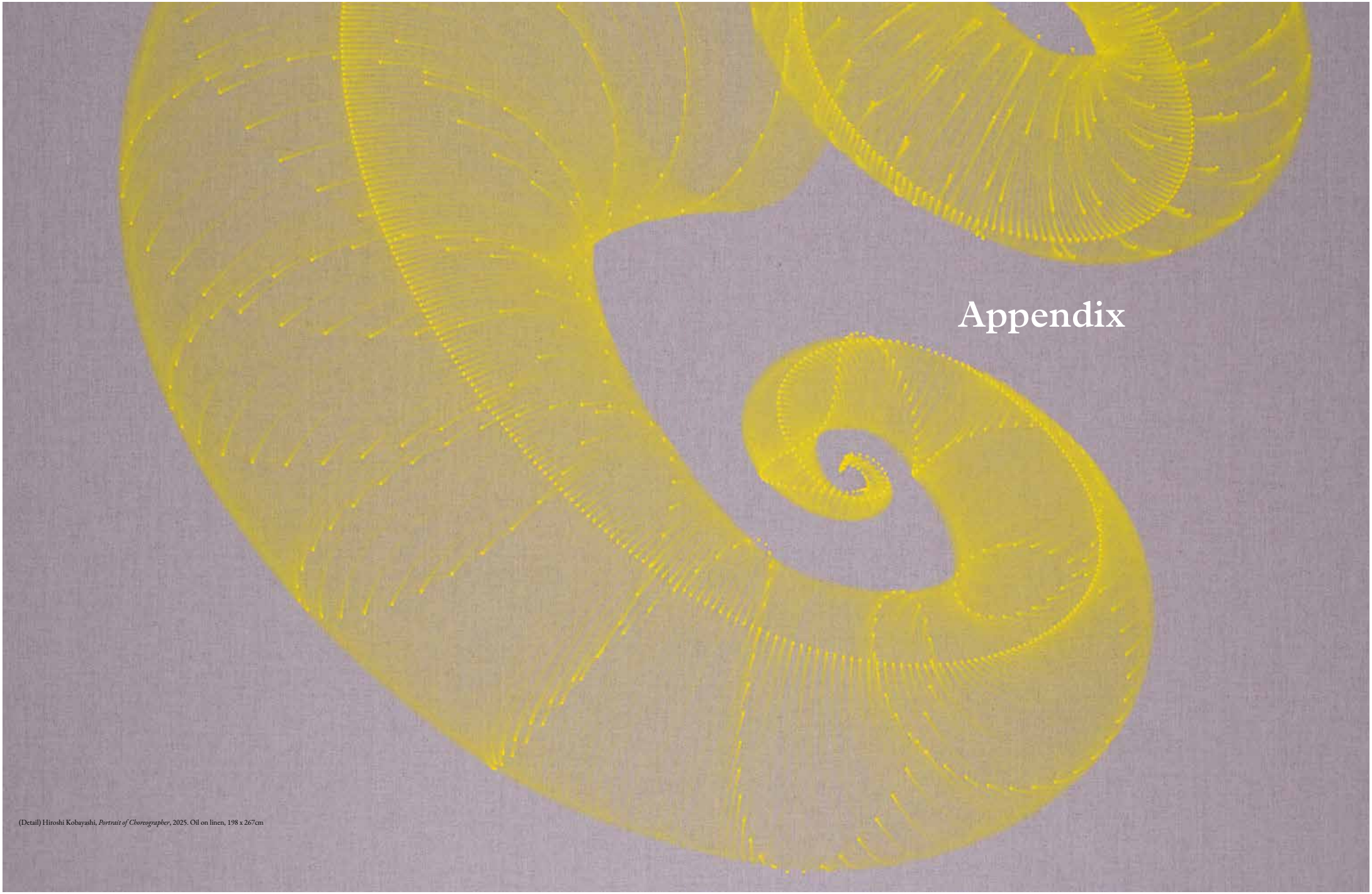
~ Hiroshi Kobayashi



Above: Jackson Mason Stephens. Oil on canvas.
Below: Daniel Burgin, Oil on canvas
Images courtesy of Hiroshi Kobayashi.

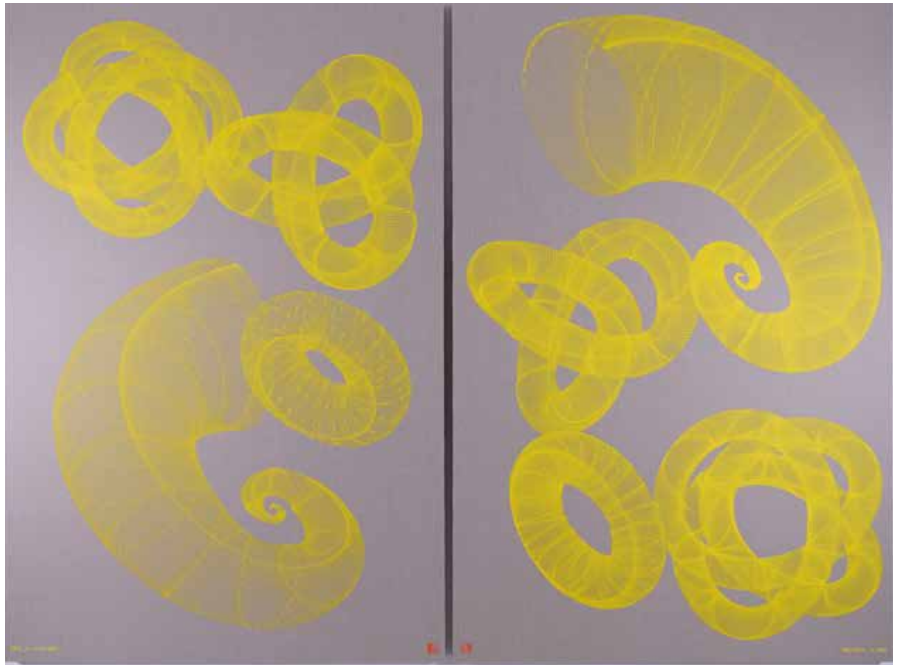
Above: Cover, *Thank You*, 2025. Album publication.
Above: Interior spread, *Thank You*, 2025. Album publication.
Images courtesy of Hiroshi Kobayashi.

Appendix

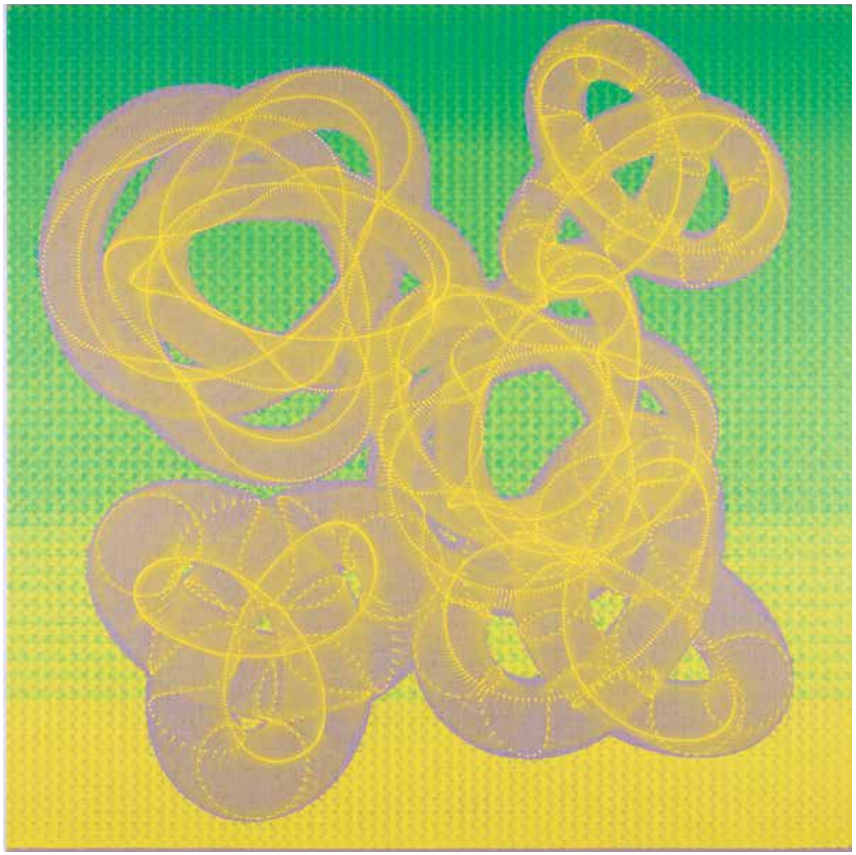


(Detail) Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of Choreographer*, 2025. Oil on linen, 198 x 267cm

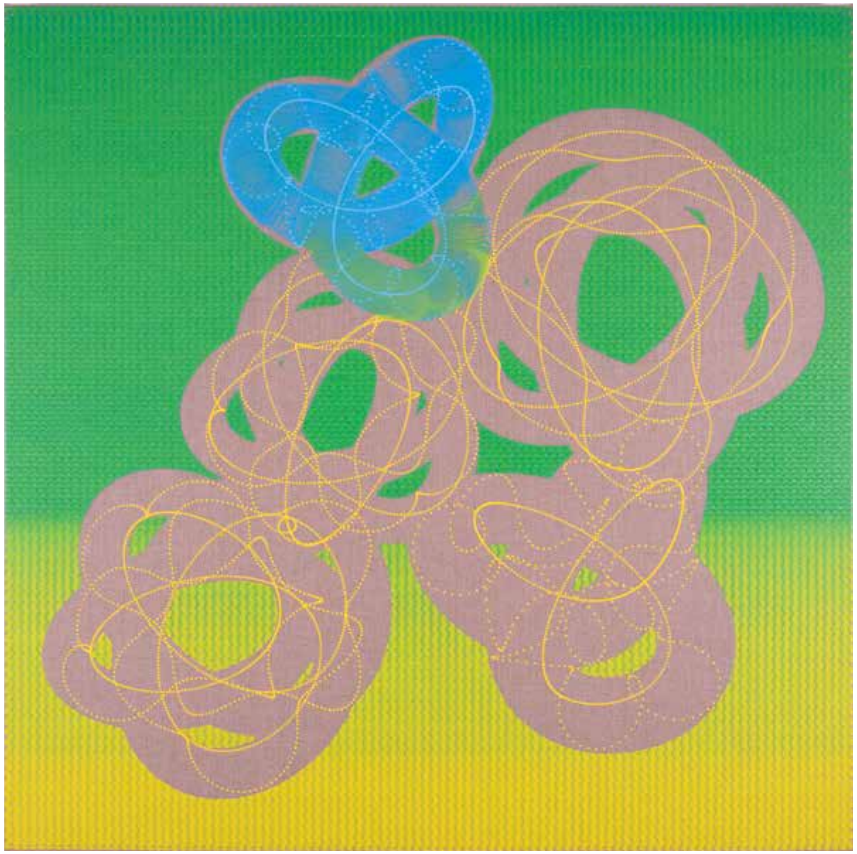
Opposite: Installation view, *S(Es) Says*, Art Collective WA, 2025
From left: *Self-portrait as fossil coral*, 2025, Oil on linen, 194x130.5cm
Phantom in the shell 4, 2024, Oil on linen, 194x130.5cm
© Robert Frith, Acorn Photo.



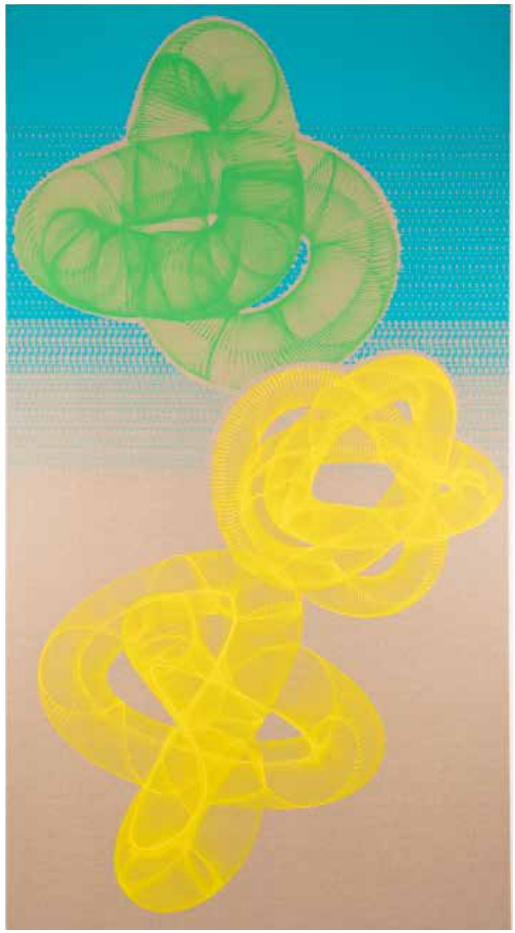
Opposite: Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of O*, 2025. Oil on linen, 36 x 31cm. Private Collection
Above: Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of choreographer*, 2025. Oil on linen, 198 x 267 cm overall, 198 x 132 cm each



Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of Sunflower*, 2025, Oil on linen, 91x91cm
Collection of Royal Perth Hospital



Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Portrait of S II*, 2025, Oil on linen, 91 x 91cm
Collection of Royal Perth Hospital



Hiroshi Kobayashi, *The Bottom of the Iceberg*, 2025. Oil on linen, 198 x 107cm

Hiroshi Kobayashi, *Sun in the Abyss (Portrait of Y)*, 2025. Oil on linen, 198 x 107cm