

# Liminal Glyphs

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at George Mason University

by

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Fall Semester 2020  
George Mason University  
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## **DEDICATION**

This work could not have been done alone. Thank you to all the teachers who I have had in my life, especially to those of whom may not even know they were my teachers. I dedicate this work to Jarle, who gives me unconditional support and encouragement always. I also dedicate this work to Maya, may she grow to know a world full of possibilities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Paula Crawford, my thesis committee director, who provided invaluable support and encouragement to develop and rediscover my studio practice. Thank you to my committee members Maria Karametou and Christopher Kardambikis whose guidance and insight helped me to construct my point of view and help me grow as an artist. I would also like to thank Edgar Endress, Peter Winant, Helen Frederick, Nikki Brugnoli-Whipkey, Stephanie Grimm and Sue Wrbican for their helpful conversations and thoughtful perspectives in class and studio visits.

Thank you to my fellow graduate students at George Mason University who always showed unlimited support both personally and academically: Matt Nolan, Jax Ohashi, Andrew Jorgensen, Danielle Dravenstadt, Kerry Hentges, Raha Dabbagh and Kevin Wallace. With special thanks to my painting cohort: Andi Bengé, Sam Fedorova, Jayne Matricardi-Burke for making the George Mason University School of Art hallways come alive with their presence and camaraderie. Also thank you to: Jorge Bañales and Mike Walton for always being available to help assist in photography, documenting installations and offering an extra hand.

Thank you to George Mason University School of Art, College of Visual and Performing Arts, and Fenwick Library for providing unique spaces to research, work and exhibit.

A special thank you to graduates Emily Fussner and Jennifer Lillis who generously shared their experiences and inspired me along the way.

My deepest gratitude to all my friends and family who have always encouraged me in large and small ways to keep going and persevere through difficult and strange times.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Figures .....	vi
Abstract .....	vii
Introdcution.....	1
Part 1: Langauge .....	2
Part 2: In between Language and Art .....	6
Part 3: Liminal Glyphs.....	16
Conclusion .....	44
References.....	45

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1 Xu Bing, <i>Book from the Sky</i> .....	8
Figure 2 Xu Bing, <i>Square word calligraphy</i> .....	10
Figure 3 Mira Schendel, <i>Untitled from Graphic Objects (Objectos gráficos)</i> .....	11
Figure 4 <i>A kind of palimpsest 2</i> .....	12
Figure 5 <i>A kind of palimpsest 4</i> .....	14
Figure 6 <i>A kind of palimpsest 2, detail 1</i> .....	15
Figure 7 <i>A kind of palimpsest 2, detail 2</i> .....	15
Figure 8 <i>Liminal Glyphs</i> , exhibition view 1 .....	18
Figure 9 <i>Liminal Glyphs</i> , exhibition view 2 .....	18
Figure 10 <i>Mantra</i> .....	20
Figure 11 <i>Mantra</i> , detail 1 .....	23
Figure 12 <i>Mantra</i> , detail 2 .....	25
Figure 13 <i>Mantra</i> , detail 3 .....	25
Figure 14 <i>Mantra</i> , detail 4 .....	26
Figure 15 <i>Boundless</i> .....	27
Figure 16 <i>Boundless</i> , detail 1 .....	28
Figure 17 <i>Boundless</i> , detail 2 .....	30
Figure 18 <i>Boundless</i> , detail 3 .....	32
Figure 19 <i>Boundless</i> , detail 4 .....	33
Figure 20 <i>Boundless</i> , detail 5 .....	34
Figure 21 <i>Unmoored</i> .....	35
Figure 22 <i>Unmoored</i> , detail 1 .....	36
Figure 23 <i>Unmoored</i> , detail 2 .....	39
Figure 24 <i>Liminal Glyphs</i> .....	40
Figure 25 <i>Liminal Glyphs</i> , detail 1 .....	41
Figure 26 <i>Liminal Glyphs</i> , detail 2 .....	42
Figure 27 <i>Liminal Glyphs</i> , detail 3 .....	44

## ABSTRACT

LIMINAL GLYPHS

Kate Fitzpatrick, MFA

George Mason University, 2020

Thesis Director: Paula Crawford

*Liminal Glyphs*, MFA thesis exhibition of Kate Fitzpatrick, was on display at Gillespie Gallery at George Mason University in Fall of 2020. The exhibition provided a space to explore the nature of language, meaning, and identity through the investigation of sign systems. This exhibition represents an inquiry into the transitional boundaries that exist in the interpretation of written language. The creation of the artist's own glyphs as script explores how sign systems play a crucial part in the construction of our own reality by defying meaning when we no longer have the key to unlock it. The resulting artwork comes from the artist's self-reflection of life experiences with language and the investigation of language philosophy.

## INTRODUCTION

*Liminal Glyphs* provides a space to explore the nature of language, meaning, and identity through the investigation of sign systems. This exhibition represents my inquiry into the changing boundaries that exist in the interpretation of written language. The creation of my own glyphs as script explores how sign systems play a crucial part in the construction of our reality by defying meaning when we no longer have the key to unlock it. Three main sources informed this work: a self-reflection of life experiences with language, an exploration of philosophy and art, and the artwork and poetry that result from these investigations.

This thesis begins by examining my own experiences of being othered and alienated because I didn't have a fixed home due to spending over half my life moving from place to place. The profound effects of moving from place to place over the majority of my life has impacted my thoughts, feelings, and understanding of the world. As dislocation occurs in our lives it forces each of us to confront the essentials we need to exist and connect with others. Through this exhibition I investigate the importance of how signs and language play a larger role in understanding the human condition.



## **PART 1: LANGUAGE**

I would call myself a nomad because I've often been someone on the outside looking in on language and culture. I have experienced much of the world as someone who is in-between and have always questioned where I belonged. Sometimes I have perceived myself coming from nowhere or elsewhere. I use my work as an approach to create worlds of meaning that challenge the notion of sure and certain understanding by referencing the experience of being in-between. My art allows me to explore the boundlessness of language and meaning by putting together a way to make sense of such a complex topic that provides a space for me to think about liminal spaces in my life and how the global experience and my desire to belong is often heightened by my connection through language. Essential inaccessibility – and meaning – as a way to think about liminal spaces in my life and my desires to belong.

Language can take the form of words, images, sounds, body gestures and even objects. All languages communicate something from our own personal experiences. We use language to preserve traditions, beliefs and shared values. Language is a way we identify ourselves and our groups. Language plays a crucial role in the construction of our reality. We take understanding language for granted and don't often think about how we came to understand these forms and how others may (or may not) understand them. In this section I will describe my own experiences with language and how those childhood and life experiences drive the underlying foundation for my art.

The themes of language, symbols, and meaning are a part of our lives from early childhood. My home language was English, but I lived in places where I would hear many other languages being used and see all sorts of languages written in different kinds of scripts and alphabets. Wherever I lived, I was encouraged to learn and use the local languages to feel more a part of the community. In hindsight, I appreciate my parents' encouragement to learn the languages of my adopted home countries, as it helped me delve more deeply into understanding the people and culture of the various places we lived.

The struggle to communicate and to be understood was naturally woven into my childhood experiences because of my family's travels. I noticed right away it was important to pick up helpful parts of languages, like greetings, directions and numbers so I could function alongside locals on a day to day basis, but my proficiency was limited. When we moved on to our next assignment, I would often forget what I had learned because I no longer had the opportunity to practice actively speaking and writing in that language. The new words I learned to speak and write moved to the back of my mind and slowly faded away.

The significance of language in my life has been an integral part of understanding culture and experiences of difference. To me, language is a carrier of human understanding and creates a lens through which I view concepts like identity and society. Moving from one place to the other and not having the ability to communicate or

understand the community that surrounded me left me with the desire to belong, understand, and connect with others.

These personal experiences fuel my strong interest in how art can express the way language works to simultaneously create and frustrate meaning. I am not personally interested in syntax or grammar, but rather the way writing is used and how meaning is applied to those lines and gestures it. What is common to all humanity is how language is used to create a sense of place, connection and identity. Every day I encounter a world full of signs and symbols where different threads of language become stories and art. The multitude of threads weave together to become human experience.

My own experiences of living in other cultures and being surrounded by unfamiliar languages and symbols simultaneously made meaning within my grasp and always beyond my reach. This is the core experience that led me to create my own “asemic” language – a language without determinant meaning. I was taught how to write in English, but the script I have created in here, in liminal glyphs, an amalgamation of written languages whose structures are very different from the English alphabet. Arabic, Tamil, Hindu, and Sanskrit are all languages that have made an impact on my understanding of the world and have influenced my script. I have never been able to read or write in those languages but appreciate the container they create for knowledge and information. Although what is contained within those marks are unreachable to me, I have always found the structures beautiful and interesting.

We need language in order to understand one another. We are given a language from the time we are born. Our whole world is made up of signs that signify language. The different set of experiences we bring with us is always with us and language lives in our stories and our art. My work is born of the desire to find my own place in a world where I've always felt in-between. It explores how language has shaped my sense of belonging and the role that language plays in making sense of how we belong in the world.

## PART 2: IN BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND ART

In this section I cite *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes to help ground my philosophy of art and form a solid foundation for talking about language, meaning, and identity. I will also look to the work of Xu Bing and Mira Schendel whose works suggest that the nature of language is abstract and humans use an infinite number of coded expressions to refer to language.

Roland Barthes fits right into the notion of the structure of writing with Xu Bing. In *The Death of the Author*, Barthes poses the question: “Who is the author of the real text?” (Barthes, 2019) Barthes is not just talking about writing, but anything that is created that can be “read” by another. We have all been taught that the author is always the person who creates the work to be “read”. Barthes proposes that the idea of who the author is needs to be rethought. In this essay, Barthes continues to explain that when a “text” is created it is layered and multifaceted because it is overlaid with the reader’s meanings.

Xu Bing is an artist who continuously looks for new ways to create meaning. In his meticulous installations he challenges viewers to re-examine what they see and how they know. Xu Bing was a propaganda calligrapher during the cultural revolution in China before he became an artist. He recalls noticing subtle alterations were made to the physical shapes of the written characters used on propaganda posters of the time (Erickson and Xu, 2001). The characters were modified and became more simplified.

These simpler calligraphic characters were meant to carry simple propaganda slogans to the masses. There is no doubt that this experience stayed with him and has given him numerous ways to think about language, communication and culture within his oeuvre.

*Book From the Sky* is an installation of books and scrolls that look like Chinese calligraphy but are actually meaningless characters. Viewers are surrounded by large pieces of paper filled with unreadable text. Pictures of the installation show a large room flanked with printed wall hangings, unrolled scrolls of paper with calligraphy, and many texts arranged in a grid on the floor. The environment portrays a space that is temporal and contemplative. The texts seem to have something to say, but they say nothing (Xu, 2006). What is extended to the viewer is the familiarity of the environment along with the familiarity of the characters, making the viewer think that meaning is within reach. The meaning of the characters is denied and therefore so is understanding. The characters have been transformed into something that can no longer be understood, which creates a disorientation and inability to access meaning. Someone who lived through the cultural revolution in China may have experienced something like that from the propaganda and media messages they received daily.



Figure 1. Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, 1987-91, mixed media, Installation View at Blanton Museum of Art, 2016. Photo: Xu Bing Studio

The instability of meaning is also present in my work. Instead of replicating known letters or rearranging words to make new meaning, I use my own marks to simultaneously deny transfer of information and to create a delay in understanding and interpretation. The viewer observes the “postscript” and becomes the foreigner, experiencing language for the first time. The unintelligible calligraphy functions as writing and it is our inability to unlock the information contained in those marks which invites a dialogue about the nature of language and meaning. We can enjoy the formal qualities of the letters and how they’re put together but cannot fathom their intent. Because of this, we can appreciate the text as a container but are left with letters that don’t function as they should. My postscript invites a dialogue about the relationship between symbols and meaning that creates a new reality because the symbol system mimics what we understand language to look like.

Barthes argues that a text can only exist when interpreted and it can be interpreted in an infinite amount of ways (Barthes, 2019). Xu Bing's faux character forms mean nothing and lay in wait for interpretation. Xu Bing challenges the viewer by providing patterns that are indistinguishable to the person who is "reading" the *Book From the Sky*, however, the reader can create meaning from the forms and objects surrounding them. Even though the text is not a legible language, the calligraphic marks become much more than that based on the reader's experience and interpretation. The reader becomes the author of their own text based on the experiences and belief systems they have gathered throughout their lives and it is in the mind of the "reader" when an idea or meaning comes to light.

Being on the outside of language has always made me feel excluded from place, people and culture. My paintings use representations of letters, symbols and graphs that refer to recognizable systems. They imply meaningfulness to viewers while encouraging them to decode meaning for themselves. The glyphs seem familiar in their loops, swirls, and lines, however the alienness of the script challenges. There is a gap where meaning is refused to the viewer, and in that gap is where the viewer is asked to engage with the work. The vagueness of language and meaning doesn't represent our own reality but creates a new reality in its intermingling with the other references in the work. Meaning is then constructed by the reference to the other and allows inclusion of all meaning and unbound interpretations.

Xu Bing shows us how our own experiences and culture influence language. How people process information changes depending on the relationship between writing



and culture. His *Square Word* series is an example of how he merges his own personal experiences of being in between cultures (Erickson and Xu, 2001). These characters merge eastern and western forms of writing by using the English words and letters to create Chinese-looking characters. This in-between kind of writing creates a structure for how different people see something one way and others see it a different way. The audience has an expectation of what it should be, but Xu Bing shows us what it could be. What the words say is actually very clear and legible. The difference is the way they're put together by the viewer. English speaking audiences might not be used to seeing letters arranged in a square-like character but rather a linear structure, a clear example of how culture has influenced the way we see what is in front of us.

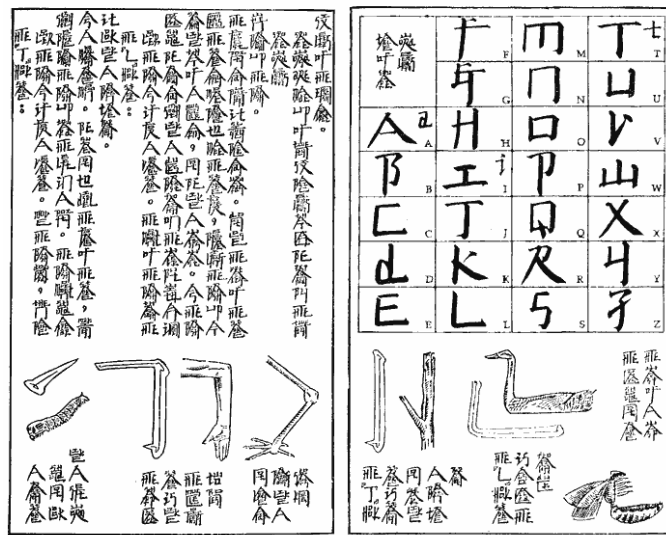


Figure 2. Xu Bing, *Square Word Calligraphy*, 1994-96, mixed media, Installation. Photo: Xu Bing Studio

Mira Schendel's work lies in between drawing and language. Schendel's work is related to organized systems of commercial transfer lettering and type, often placed between layers of rice paper or between transparent acrylic sheets. By using clear panes,

both sides of her letters are viewable. The reversed side of the text is visible, which transforms the alphabet into something else because the letters from the other side are backwards. The works put the viewer in motion because there is no linear sequence to the letters that would normally create writing. They don't resolve themselves into being as writing. The tools she uses for making the works are meant to create language, however through her hand we can take multiple perspectives and think about how art can be made by changing linear systems. Schendel's work is an example of how these letterforms can stand alone and become shapes that invite us to wonder at the potential for meaning that awaits us.

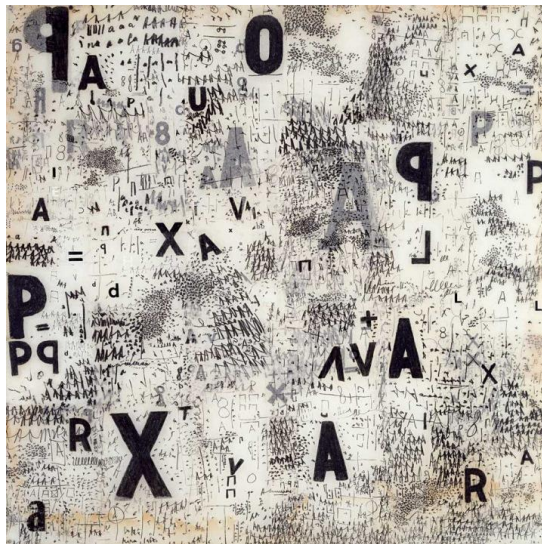


Figure 3. Mira Schendel, *Untitled from Graphic Objects (Objetos gráficos)*, 1967, mixed media. Photo: The Estate of Mira Schendel

Language is both a rigid and flexible tool. I have used my script to simulate language-type writing structures to pass off something that was intended to look like language in a book or on a page. I wanted the script to pretend to function as a language. An imposter language. This was my first attempt to bring awareness to the otherness by

making the representation of language useless. I started constructing a new way of engaging with language where the interpretation could be limitless.

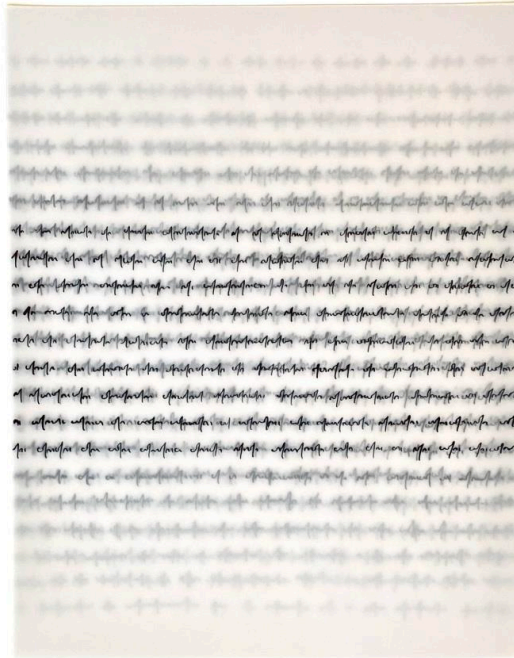


Figure 4. *A Kind of Palimpsest 2*, 2019, acrylic ink on vellum, Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

In my series, *A Kind of Palimpsest*, I layered translucent sheets of paper with my invented writing. The layers filter the script to create textures that blur and even change form. The format of this series mimics a kind of written page intended to look like a page in a manuscript. Using the formal structure of a grid on a page enables my script to mimic language. For this series I wanted my script to pretend to function as a language and have a structure. It was my attempt to create an imposter language and give the viewer a feeling of otherness by making the representation of language useless. From this

point I started constructing a new way of engaging with language where the interpretation could be limitless.

I use my invented script to break the regular system of language. Words are relative, and meaning is a feature of circumstance. We can easily interpret, mistake meaning, or say something different from what we thought. That is due to the flexibility that is carried in written language. The marks I make carry my gesture and become markers of my identity. The varied marks or characters I put into my work speak directly to the mind without sound. I transfer meaning to lines, recognizable shapes, and allow the composition to unravel meaning into the inscriptions. My invented writing system passes on a thread of ideas, and somewhere in the space between the marks we feel the motion of the hand as it creates the journey over the composition.

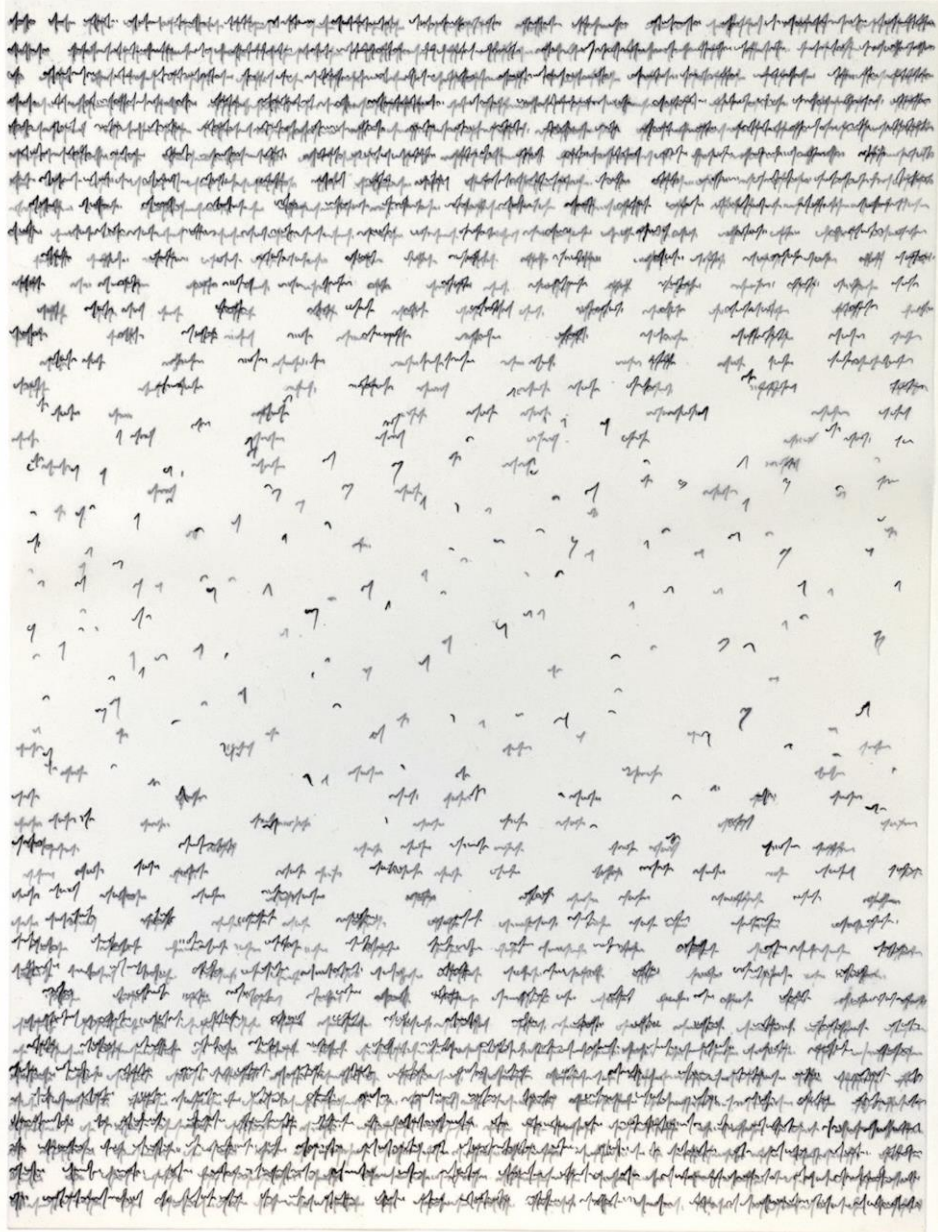


Figure 5. *A Kind of Palimpsest 4*, 2020, acrylic ink on vellum, Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

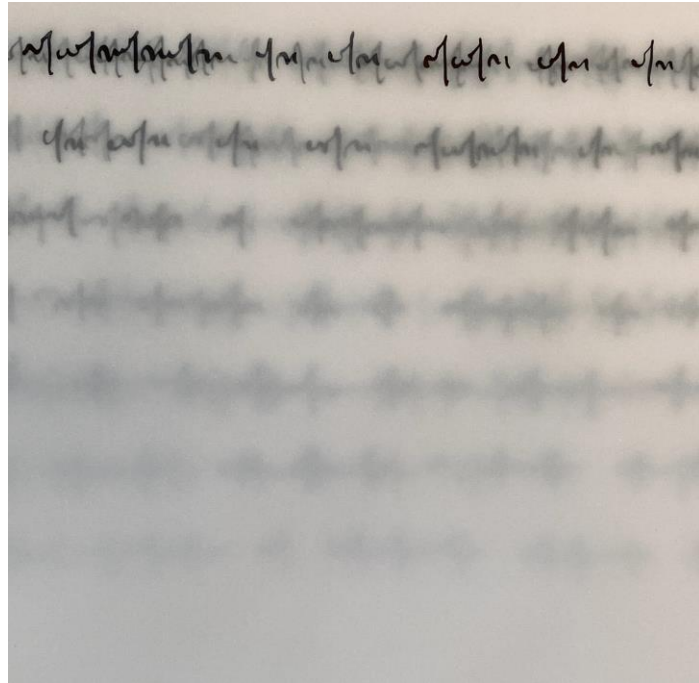


Figure 6. *A Kind of Palimpsest 2*, detail 1, 2019. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

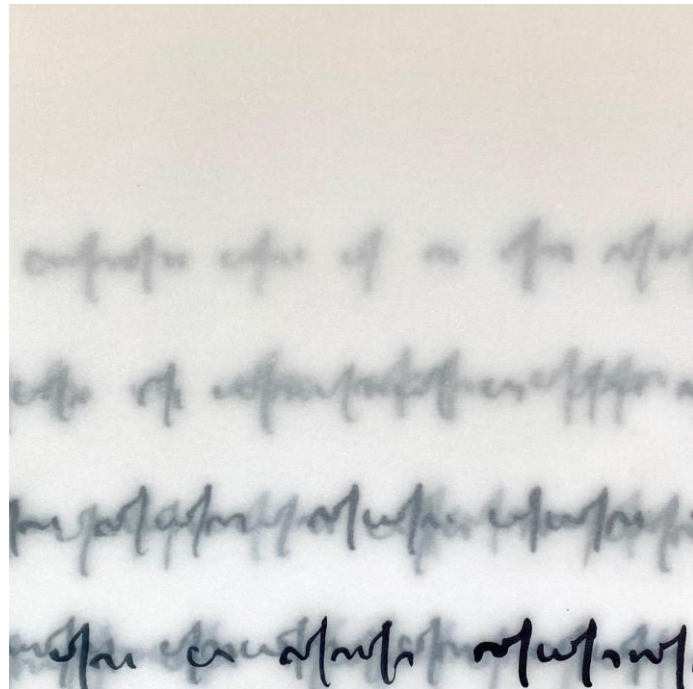


Figure 7. *A Kind of Palimpsest 2*, detail 2, 2019. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

### **PART 3: LIMINAL GLYPHS**

Liminal:

Origin: from Latin *limen*, *limin*- “threshold” + -al

Adjective: an in-between state characterized by ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy;  
a period of transition, during which normal limit to thought, self understanding, and  
behavior are relaxed, opening the way to something new

Glyph:

Origin: from Greek *gluphē* “carving”, from French *gyphe*

Noun: glyph; plural noun: glyphs

In typography: an elemental symbol, intended to represent a readable character for the  
purposes of writing

I explore the gaps that exist between image and text. The basis of my work centers around my own sign system to create interpretive spaces filled with unknown letter forms. Repetitive glyphs appear as mantras or broken language, glyphs gather and float away, thread is stitched and rolled into a ball, and paint is scraped away to reveal new worlds

*Liminal Glyphs* is an exhibition of four distinct but connected artworks that explore my relationship with language, meaning and identity and how understanding those themes connect to the intangible and infinite. Four pieces are placed in the four directions of the room and are connected through my invented script. The first piece, *Mantra*, is displayed as an unrolled scroll that hangs high on the wall with a waterfall of invented script running down the long page. The second piece, *Unmoored*, is a painting tethered to a ball of webbed threads that seem to be losing grip of the glyphs that fly free from the surface. Opposite *Unmoored* is *Boundless*, a densely incised black painting that sets free new growth and ideas from its rigid grid. The final piece, *Liminal Glyphs*, is an array of shadow and light created by the thousands of glyphs that cover the expanse in front of the wall. The intention of these works was to deliver a way to step out of traditional use of language and letterforms and use invented signs as a way to conceive new places and forms in search of meaning and identity.





Figure 8. *Liminal Glyphs*, exhibition view 1, 2020. Photo: Kristin Adair



Figure 9. *Liminal Glyphs*, exhibition view 2, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

## *Mantra*

Language, by its very nature, is in between. The development of language looks much like the development of one's identity. Every part of language has been borrowed and redistributed throughout time, until it is pieced together and gains a certain amount of acceptance and usage. Understanding the evolution of language and accepting my own in between conditions helped me to create a context to express my own understanding of identity and relationship to place.

I can't read this writing I created. I wasn't trying to attach a particular meaning, letter, or sound to the script. The forms were simply transcribing the motion and gestures of my hand. These forms are not particular to a specific language but contain the influences of many that are clearly visible in the patterns of these unreadable glyphs. The glyphs resist choosing there or here and are not concerned with what is or isn't constructed, written, or drawn. The forms are open, undefined and encourage wonder and wandering without signifying an approximate space, time, object or experience. The gestures do not claim to be letters but a form that houses rhythmic patterns, and construct layers of the movement of my mind.



Figure 10. *Mantra*, acrylic ink on paper, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

Grappling with “loss of” and “desire for” place throughout childhood and into adulthood, I began forming patterns over and over on almost any kind of surface I could find. The gestures would frequently move all over the page, but much of time would make their way into organized groups of lines that mimicked a written page. The forms, composed of swoops, swirls, lines and curves, are unlike letters I had seen in my years abroad. As I continued making these glyphs to calm my mind, I would focus on the way

the gestures came together and moved apart, seeming to create entries in a journal. Spaces between patterns looked like words, and the groups of patterns seemed to look like sentences. Particular thoughts didn't rush into my mind, but the energy and focus of making these gestures and forms appeared on paper as if they were translations of thoughts.

*Mantra* is a large, vertically hanging scroll with glyphs drawn in red ink. The red glyphs create intense orderly patterns that mimic mantra. I was interested in using the structure of the scroll because it is an early form of recorded text with which I was familiar. In many cultures, across continents, a scroll holds a variety of important kinds of information ranging from data collection to laws. A hanging scroll, like the one I created here, is mostly used as a way to collect verse, display calligraphy and paintings.

Mantras are typically made of sounds, utterances, and words that can be said out loud or held silently. Some have structure, form, and contain literal meaning while others do not. I came to use mantras in my meditation practice through yoga. We often use a mantra connected to a personal ritual. It can be a chant with melodic phrases or a sound that reverberates in the body to calm and soothe, like Om. Many different kinds of mantras are meant to uplift and provide something meaningful to the person who is saying, singing or thinking the mantra. Since there is no clear definition of what a mantra is or could be, it is left to participants to choose their own.

In *Mantra*, the openness of the glyphs provides that kind of openness a mantra does for the person who is defining it for themselves. Since mantras sometimes do not

have to have any literal meaning, they can set a tone or ambiance for ritual. The singular lines in this work are structured and measured in columns but create a construction without certain meaning. There are no words or sounds associated with the glyphs, only space between patterns and a varied rhythm that could mimic a kind of utterance.

*Mantra* is in between meaning and ritual. It provides a structure but transmits nothing. The top of the scroll is dense with writing, emulating sentence structures that contain no information. The unreadable sentences become more sporadic yet syncopated as if keeping time with an invisible metronome. The rhythm between the patterns slows down, and the meandering patterns begin to dissipate as they slowly come apart, allowing the singular glyphs to run off the page and trickle away from the rushing waterfall of red letters from the top of the scroll. Its repetitive patterns show the slow dissolution of meaning as the text becomes less and less orderly and more unmoored.

This work mimics a traditional style of hanging scroll through its format and structure, however the page contains line after line of unreadable glyphs that distribute a mantra-like pattern all over its surface. It resonates with the aura of a mantra by its replication of mysterious patterned glyphs. The top rows are orderly as if the trying to order the world itself through repetition and density of the script, but it slowly starts to come apart, unraveling, very much like how language cannot contain an absolute meaning. The meaning of the mantra becomes boundless and unfixed, liberating the dialogue that is slowly dissipating from the scroll.



Figure 11. *Mantra*, detail 1, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

Breathe.

The incoming swell of air fills your belly,  
Expands your rib cage and fills your chest.  
Hold it there. In your throat.  
That space,  
between your inhale and exhale.  
The undercurrent between your inner world and outer world.

Exhale.  
The wake of your exhale retreating from your throat,  
Your rib cage, chest,  
And belly.  
Hold it there.

That space in between.



Figure 12. *Mantra*, detail 2, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick



Figure 13. *Mantra*, detail 3, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick



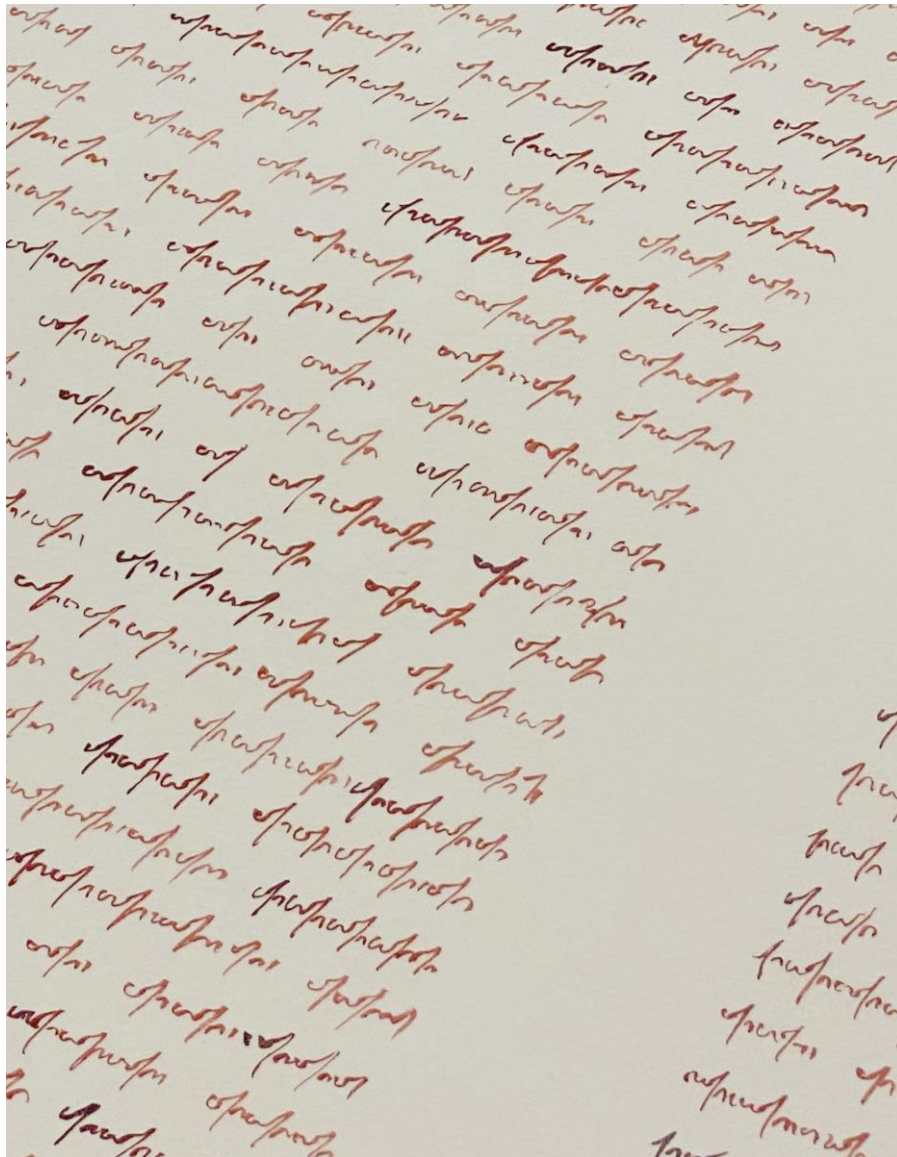


Figure 14. Mantra, detail 4, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

*Boundless*

This piece revisits what a landscape is and forms something we recognize as a place in nature. It's a reimagining of landscape as a place of meaning and creating- The work proposes that the environment is composed of meaning. We can simply test this idea out by paying attention to the signs of the natural world. Grass growing, birds migrating, waves crashing. This painting is a metaphor for language through landscape.



Figure 15. *Boundless*, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

In my work, I am trying to create an experience of language in transition. I refer to forms and ways in which language is typically structured in familiar objects, such as books, page manuscripts and scrolls, however I am not suggesting that my examples represent any particular language or culture. My goal is to explore the human experience of being in between language in hopes that others can identify meaning for themselves.



Figure 16. *Boundless*, detail 1, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

I've been researching how written languages are merely signs that signify something without being that thing. Rather than focusing on particular languages or the products of language I am offering an investigation into meaning. My work becomes an account of meaning where no certain meaning is possible. I've been in situations where I

have faced challenges in finding meaning or being understood as the result of being on the outside of language, not being able to describe my needs, wants and feelings to others in a monocultural environment-

Memory is akin to language. Language is a medium or tool that is used to create or share a memory. Language can change memory when reflected in a different language environment. The translation of memory to language can distort or distance the person from their own memory. When we're given the opportunity to convert our memories, thoughts and emotions into something that seems more accurate, language creates more distance. This discontinuity can actually become a container that offers freedom to explore and change events, rather than trying to create order. By creating my own script, I have merely translated the impressions of my gestures, my thoughts, and memories. They become something else in place of original intentions of a particular place, time, or feeling. It is an invitation to reflect on the uncertainty of absolute meaning, to create the feeling that meaning is just beyond your grasp, and that it encourages the viewer to create their own meanings. I am selecting, arranging, constructing while discovering structure and chaos, gathering and sampling, exploring internal and external, additive and subtractive, emerging and vanishing, as well as density and sparsity. Through my invented script, language transforms into the process of discovery. The power of reconstructing thoughts and memory gets lost, but what is found is a magical place where any meaning can be possible.



Figure 17 *Boundless*, detail 2, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

The choice of using an imaginary set of signs that refer to letters is deliberate. It mocks the idea of language because it's made up. It's never pinned down to an absolute meaning, it shows both the instability and opportunity that is just a part of all language.

This choice isn't solely motivated by meditation practice or fluency of languages but reflects a desire to focus on engagement with the work itself. How we read the structures are influenced by our own experiences and how we perceive what is in front of us. Memory and experiences are stronger in determining the meaning of the work for the individual viewer rather than the formal definition of words. My intent is to present my words and worlds as a possibility that departs from language and place as we know it, so the art becomes medium in which we experience finding meaning.

The grid is a way to organize chaos. It provides structure for a composition and sets parameters to work from. After making the grid it becomes interesting to me to see how I can push the anatomy of the horizontal and vertical lines to make each piece different from the next. Grids are mathematical and exact, in a way they make me conform to a specific space and shape, but in my own compositions they provide a means to an end that allow me to create tension between the order of the grid and layers on top of it. The design of the grid provides an additional layer of investigation to meaning. What is being layered is not confined to the grid but flows off the grid.

The grid is that holder of rigid meaning and order, while the glyphs gather and float and ripple across the composition to create new territory that breaks away from the grid. The compositions replicate, grow, and expand beyond the order of nature to create imaginary spaces.

The scratched and scraped layers reveal what is going on between each layer. In each layer, the lines gather together and move away, they form swirls or slowly climb to

mimic seeds and growth, or the architecture of a wave that is looming to crash and break its own structure.



Figure 18. *Boundless*, detail 3, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

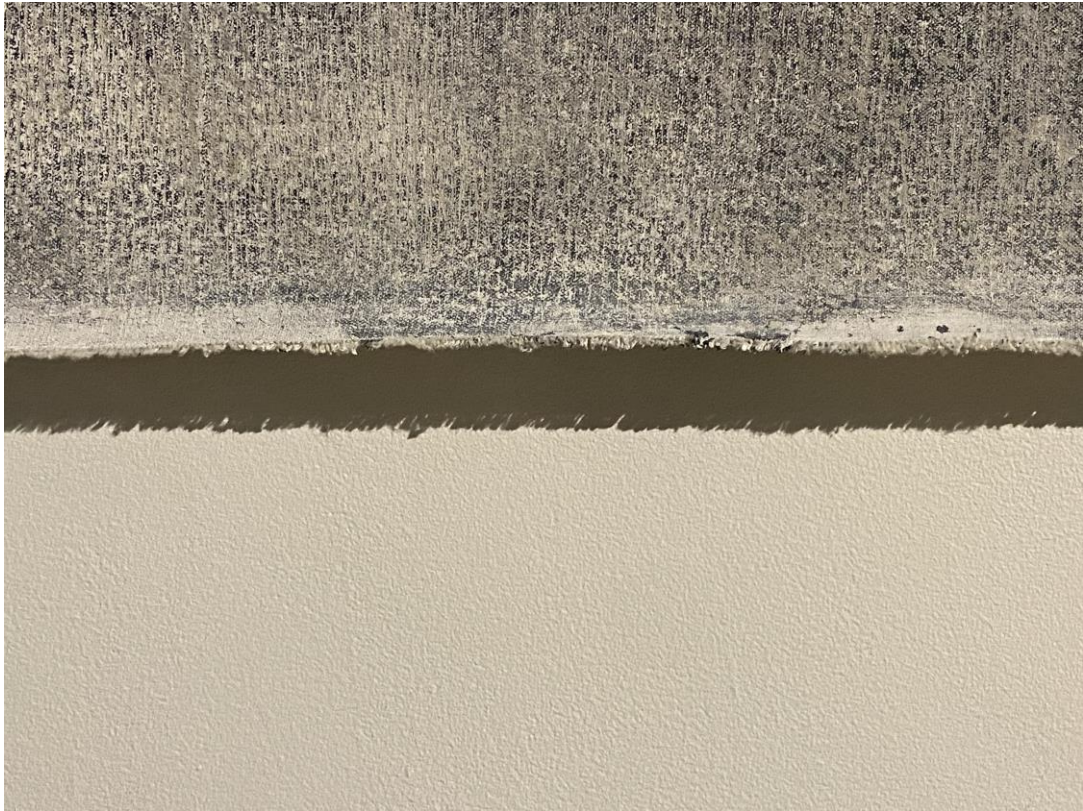


Figure 19. *Boundless*, detail 4, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

Nearly all spaces seem temporary to me,  
I try to make them feel like mine sometimes,  
If they mean something.



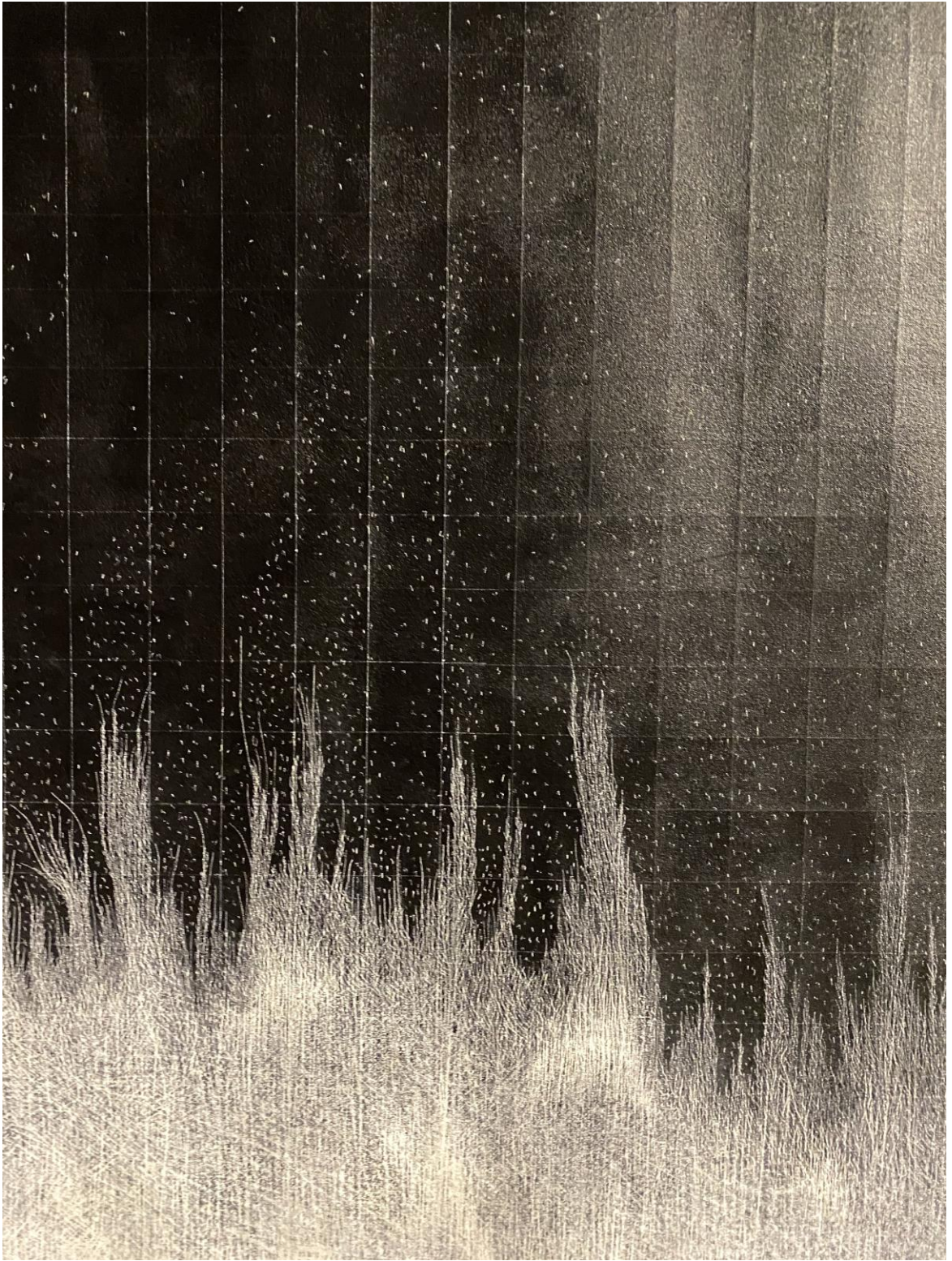


Figure 20. *Boundless*, detail 5, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

## *Unmoored*



Figure 21. *Unmoored*, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

*Unmoored* was created out of the experiences of feeling like a nomad. I have always been a constant wanderer and have felt untethered from many of the places I've called 'home'. Some of these "homes" don't exist anymore or have become out of reach for me to revisit. This constant state of wandering altered how I've lived and affects how I navigate my daily life now. Much of my identity has always been wrapped up in the desire to feel at home, or to be able to discover a place that felt like home. I've always associated the feeling of belonging and community with home, while I associated disruption with dislocation or loss of a home. Losing one's place results in losing a part

of one's self.

This in between place has advantages and disadvantages. Many times, this place allowed me a way to experience another a culture, give me a sense that home could be anywhere in the world, and build strong relationships through empathy and understanding. However, it also meant that I could not fully enter into one specific culture or another, couldn't fully express myself through spoken language or writing, or couldn't consider home to be in one particular place. The constant flux of dislocation was felt more deeply in this space because language and culture gave shape to my experiences in understanding the world and myself.



Figure 22. *Unmoored*, detail 1, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

Raised in an American English-speaking household my life experiences put me in environments where English was not spoken, and those experiences gave me the

opportunity to traverse the challenges of navigating the human condition. While I was always losing a space, at times I felt like I was also gaining something else. It was a constant game of seek and find, as well as loss and regain. The result of those circumstances was always followed by a state of feeling “in between”. Being in between country, culture, and language was a common theme that didn’t provide me with a clear sense of place. I accepted that I was not from here or there, only from the outside of where here or there was. Maps and globes couldn’t define this place on a page. No structure could organize this particular location where I lived. A clear sense of loss met with a strong desire helped me embark on a quest to find this place called “home” (or at the very least, to be able to define what home was to me). My own efforts to recognize that “there” was always somewhere else, and “here” was always transitional prompted me to navigate and accept what it means to be in between.

Unmoored is an exploration of layered paint and materials. Multiple layers of loose paint are built on top of a slack canvas. Drips falling down the surface of the canvas start and stop, trail off, and join other arteries. Translucent layers of paint create colorful currents of cool colors and interspersed are delicate glyphs that float in between the drips and get caught by thread. Some of the glyphs become moored to the threads, which hold on tight like an anchor. The thread becomes taut and forms into a ball away from the wall, not letting go. A moment that is caught between close and far away, loss and desire, effort and transition, as well as here and there.

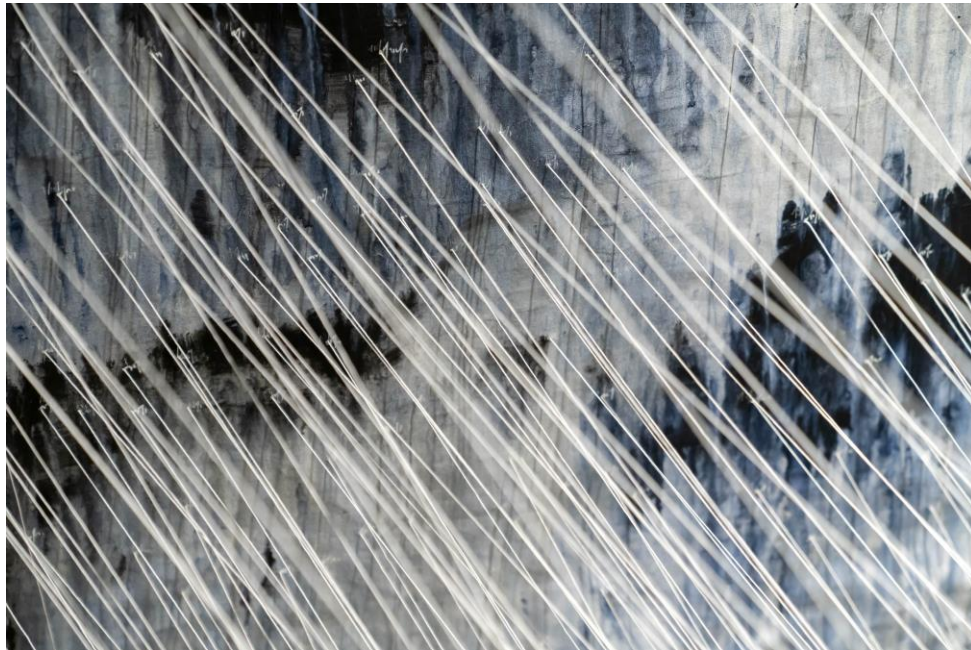


Figure 23. *Unmoored*, detail 2. 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

Blue

Black

Gray

Tangled currents

Pulling away in any direction

Wait.

Towards something?

Let it move to and fro.

A sail in the wind

Maybe a star will guide me home?

### *Liminal Glyphs*

Unintelligible forms hang in suspension to create a patterned screen across a black sheet. Some of the glyphs cling together as others drop below, gathering along the scroll of paper and the surface of the floor. To one side, the glyphs create shadows that overlap and absorb one another to form new shapes that hang in the light. Hiding behind the screen of glyphs, silhouettes peek through the openings and create a layered illusion.



Figure 24. Liminal Glyphs, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

Liminality was first coined by social theorists to define a space that hovered in between two existential spaces. Over time, the word has also been used to describe individuals or groups being on the fringe of society, as well as a way to describe a state of a sense of identity. Instead of referring to liminal as negative way of describing states of emptiness or unfinished, I wanted to use the word to describe what could possibly be. In liminality we can reflect on new discovery and propose profound change. In this sense, liminality is not necessarily in a state of chaos, only constant flux.



Figure 25. *Liminal Glyphs*, detail 1, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

The merging of meditation and writing this invented script has become a form of translating inner rhythmic movements, gestural patterns, and sometimes thoughts. I wanted to create a place for these components to dwell. Each glyph provides infinite potential as they are suspended between the ceiling and the floor. A space that is liminal. A feeling of transition exists in the empty spaces as we cannot know the order of the glyphs, they are in between place, waiting to be transformed.





Figure 26. *Liminal Glyphs*, detail 2, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

Language is in a constant liminal space. The words we use to communicate are different than the ones used before us. Language is constantly in transition, and invented, and meanings of words change. These glyphs are on the verge of something, but yet we do not know the particular meaning or the state. It is undefined, undetermined and unstructured. The state of liminality is what awaits before us. A liminal state can seem uncomfortable, but it also can be a threshold to new exploration.

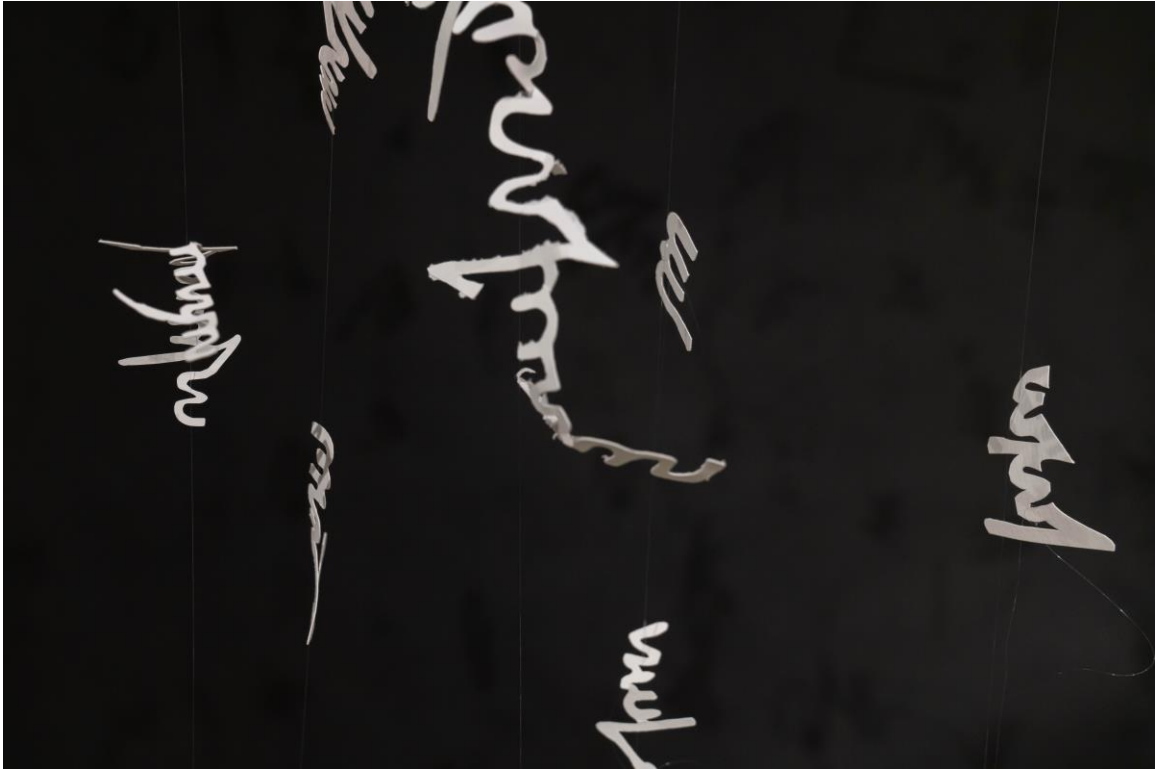


Figure 27. *Liminal Glyphs*, detail 3, 2020. Photo: Kate Fitzpatrick

Tethered in stillness,  
Caught betwixt and between -  
The light and shadow play together.

## CONCLUSION

Sign systems play a crucial part in the social construction of our reality and we often cannot separate these systems from our own experiences. We take understanding these signs for granted and don't often think about how we came to recognize these signs or if others see them as we do. However, signs systems can take a form of words, images, sounds, body gestures, and objects. All signs communicate something that we may or may not understand based on our own culture and experiences in the world at large. I explore the gap that exists between image and text. My work centers around my own sign system where created interpretive spaces are filled with unknown letter forms. Repetitive glyphs appear as mantras or broken language, glyphs gather and float away, thread is stitched or rolled into a ball, and paint is scraped away to reveal new worlds.

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Kate Fitzpatrick is an artist and educator based in Alexandria, VA. Fitzpatrick received a BFA in Painting from Clarion University of Pennsylvania (1997), an MA in art education from University of New Mexico. She was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship (2016) where she spent a semester in India working on art curriculum with local arts teachers. Fitzpatrick was also honored by the Northern Virginia Magazine as a "Northern Virginian of the Year" (2014) for her creation and implementation of an art and yoga program for youth in the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention center. In addition, Fitzpatrick received the Agnes Meyer Teacher of the Year award by the Washington Post (2013). Fitzpatrick exhibits her work throughout the United States and teaches for Arlington Public Schools.