

Dane Mitchell

Spectra to spectre: An art exploration on the margins of the visible

2012

Master of Philosophy (Art and Design)

2012

Dane Mitchell

Spectra to spectre: An art exploration on the margins of the visible

2012

School of Art and Design

An exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment
of requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy (Art and Design)

Table of Contents

1. Attestation of Authorship
2. Acknowledgements
3. Abstract
4. Preface
5. Introduction
6. Terminology
7. Terrain
8. Being Honeyed
9. Duration and the Higgs Boson
10. Inframince
11. Revelation and Concealment
12. Conjuring Form
13. Ineffable Magic
14. Plastic Invisibility
15. Theoretical Chimeras
16. Embedded Memory
17. The Observer Effect
18. Scent
19. Parfumare
20. Concluding Commentary
21. References
22. Illustrations
23. Table of Illustrations
24. Appendix — Contextualising Commentary of Exhibition
25. Appendix — Documentation of Exhibition
26. Appendix — Table of Illustrations

1. Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other.

2. Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of my supervisors, Ian Jervis and Monique Redmond, and the support of the Department of Visual Arts, in particular Simon McIntyre.

I also wish to acknowledge Clare McIntosh for proofreading my exegesis, and Tana Mitchell for her support throughout.

3. Abstract

This project is an extension of ongoing enquiries in my professional art practice, and explores ephemeral phenomena on the threshold of perceptibility. In particular the project investigates a form of 'plastic invisibility', exploring territories of transformation between physical states, and seeks to frame, invoke or reify material and sensory qualities which are marginal, unstable, dynamic or transitional. Through art making the project studies how we might encounter or intuit such states or qualities, and how objects / images from memory are drawn into that experience. The method incorporates and references aspects of diverse practices such as shamanism and perfume making — and elaborates connections between these perspectives and their potential as sculptural material.

4. Preface

I have structured this thesis project by building it around several large-scale professional art exhibitions. Two new projects, for the Gwangju Biennale, Korea and the Liverpool Biennial, United Kingdom make up the major part of my production of work in 2012. Both of these projects have offered me a way to consolidate my current practice and its concerns — concerns that have been running through my practice for the past 10 years.

A final thesis exhibition and exegesis has allowed me to condense and convey areas of research. The visual documentation section of this exegesis will directly illustrate the sort of images and objects that I have been producing within the timeframe of the MPhil, and the exegesis defines areas of interest in relationship to these outcomes, as well as consolidate and focus my current practice.

5. Introduction

By no means a complete image of my practice, this exegesis attempts to identify several approaches to making that I am engaged in. These converge on a single postulation: that *images, objects, things*, which are either invisible or virtual, may also be complex and forceful in their agency within an art practice, and its effect on the viewer.

This project is an extension of ongoing explorations in my art practice developed over a period of some 10 years, during which I have investigated ephemeral phenomena on the threshold of perceptibility. Much of my work is concerned with producing a tension between the seen and the unseen — both through suggested forces and experimental demonstrability. In particular, this project explores a form of ‘plastic invisibility’, investigating territories of transformation between different physical states and seeking to frame and invoke material and sensory qualities that are marginal, unstable, dynamic and durational.

As will be elucidated in the main text, there is a clear sense of transmitted material qualities in my work which are mixed up. This occurs through the kneading together of two perspectives. The first is ‘what we *feel* we know’ through empirical

evidence (this includes the sphere of particles, forces, thermodynamics), which to some extent illuminates the agency of the material quality of the work (such as in *Various Solid States* (2011) (Fig. 1 & 2) and *Gateway to the Etheric Realm* (2011) (Fig. 3, 4 & 5)).

The second is an activation of ‘what we *can’t* know’ through employing that which is philosophically and epistemologically problematic. This is exemplified in my use of magical thinking, conjuring and spell making (such as in *Conjuring Form* (2008) (Fig. 6 & 7), *Gateway to the Etheric Realm* (2011) (Fig. 3, 4 & 5) and *Celestial Fields* (2012) (Fig. 8, 9 & 10)).

Importantly, in the merging of ‘what we *feel* we know’ and ‘what we *can’t* know’, a space is opened up within and between the perspectives, which continues to expose more questions for me as a maker. In this way transmitted material qualities become extended and difficult to pin down. This extension and difficulty is central to the way the work operates.

6. Terminology

Throughout this text, I will variously refer to *objects*, *images* and *things*. There are several reasons for doing so, but perhaps most significantly, I have deliberately employed them as a way of being indeterministic and to extend the work across a number of perspectives; that is, they all internally negotiate invisibility. It is pertinent to clarify these three interlocking yet differentiated terms.

The word *object* comes from the Latin *obicere*, from *ob* — ‘in the way of’, and *jacere* — ‘to throw’ (*Concise Oxford English dictionary*, 1911/1982, p. 699) From a sculptural perspective this becomes an active tool for thinking through the possibility of obstinate forms, or artwork that might be encountered as a cerebral obstacle — something in the way. For example, *The Dragon or The Purple Forbidden Enclosure* (2011) (Fig. 11, 12 & 13), in which a physical barrier demarcates a field of potential experience, separating us from it at the same time as enclosing us within it.

My use of the term *object* throughout this text seeks to include that which is visible and invisible, as well as that which is neither real nor physical. This is not

as a means of reducing the *object* to a position of insignificance, but enabling it to operate in a broader perceptual space. My use of *object* comes primarily from the definition offered by Graham Harman, in his development of ‘speculative realism’, a movement in continental philosophy which places the *object* at the centre of philosophical thought. His *object* includes, yet is not limited to, that which is “. . . as strange as ghosts in a Japanese temple, or signals flashing inscrutably from the moon” (Harman, 2011, p. 6). Harman’s definition is useful in my own attempts to extend the sculptural form — namely in my ongoing investigation of invisible and molecular sculptural-objects (explained within the exegesis), most clearly articulated through my use of spells and perfume as material.

Not only is *object* useful to me as über-tool; it is also employed in order to allude to Harman’s analysis of object-as-idea, and his undertaking of an “object-oriented philosophy” (Harman, 2010, p. 95).

When rocks collide with wood, when fire melts glass, when cosmic rays cause protons to disintegrate, we are asked to leave all of this to the physicists alone. Philosophy has gradually renounced its claim to have anything to do with the world itself. Fixated on the perilous leap between subject and object, it tells us nothing about the chasm that separates tree from root or ligament from bone. Forfeiting all comment on the realm of objects, it sets itself up as master of a single gap between self and world . . . Will philosophy continue to lump together monkeys, tornadoes, diamonds, and oil under the single heading of that-which-lies-outside? Or is there some possibility of an object-oriented philosophy, a sort of alchemy for describing the transformations of one entity into another . . . (Harman, 2010, p. 94 –95)

I have also made use of the term *image* throughout the text. My use of this term is in alignment with Henri Bergson’s conception of the *image*. Accordingly, *images* are more than appearances; they are constantly in motion and go beyond material reality. The body too is an *image*, as is all matter and our perceptions of it. As Suzanne Guerlac explains, “[t]he term is meant to interrupt our usual habits of thought so that we might think differently...” (Guerlac, 2006, p. 112).

Bergson's conception is complex, and my use of it is merely to engage his opening up of the terrain that surrounds it — to make use of its indeterminacies, and specifically to make use of it encompassing that which is virtual and that which is not visible, “[i]mages are not things, although they are real. They are not merely appearances either, since they persist even when I shut down my sense and no longer perceive them” (Guerlac, 2006, p. 112).

Thing is employed sparingly in the text. It is predominantly used in relationship to historian Lorraine Daston's analysis of Martin Heidegger's *thing*, to which she attributes the role of being anchored in material form. Heidegger uses *thing* positively, to carry an implication of truth (Harman, 2011; Guerlac, 2006) and self-sufficiency (as opposed to *objects* which Heidegger suggests are the product of ideas). The *thing* has the ability to be autonomous, yet contradictorily exposed to accumulation — gathering meaning and associations to itself. In this way the *thing* has the ability to act like a *gestalt*, amounting to more than the sum of its parts and containing more information than is perceived or presented. As Daston here describes Heidegger's analysis: “the thingness of the thing lies in its power to ‘gather’ other elements to it: the humble jug gathers to itself heaven and earth, mortals and immortals” (Daston, 2004, pp. 157–75).

More broadly with regard to terminology my use, citation and interpretation of theoretical concepts by various thinkers throughout this exegesis is not meant as an appeal to authority. I make use of their ideas as I do material for making artwork — often through usurping an intended purpose. On this issue, Harman usefully suggests that, “[w]e are no more obliged to . . . limit our uses of electrical power to those devices patented by Thomas Edison himself. The historical greatness of explorers or inventors or philosophers does not guarantee that they have exhausted their own subject matter” (Harman, 2002, p. 16–17).

7. Terrain

This exegesis deals with primary areas of my art making and attempts to focus on my interest in thinking through some possibilities for expanding a sculptural space. I have done this by focussing on areas where this is most active in my

work — in practical terms this can be exemplified by the spell works I have been developing (in which esoteric knowledge from a practitioner of magic or witchcraft is used as a material in the work), and concludes in the text with a consideration of the scope of scent as a sculptural tool.

I have been exploring the sculptural possibilities of the molecular in my practice, as in the use of scent-as-object. Perfume has been the prevailing agent for this particular thread of making and has led to thinking about perfume as a sort of cognitive-object — a thought-object that takes shape upon the body of the viewer. This development in my practice concludes the text as a possible means of further exploration and development.

Spell-making and magical practices draw many parallels with art making; for example, both employ material reality to some other end.

Magicians prepare images from paste, clay, wax, honey, plaster, metal or paper mâché, from papyrus or parchment, from sand or wood. The magician sculpts, models, paints, draws, embroiders, knits, weaves, engraves. He makes jewellery, marquetry and heaven knows what else. (Mauss, 1950/2001, p. 66)

From experience I can say that the above analogy oversimplifies the terrain of shared production. For example, I am currently involved in a method of communication (and production) with a shaman in order to realise a work in Korea. This clearly builds on the analogy by illustrating a subversion of communication tools — which I would add to Marcel Mauss' list of those things that usurp material reality to some other end, as carried out by magicians and artists alike.

During a research site visit to Gwangju, I met several shamans in the hope of establishing a working relationship with the intention of involving a shaman in my project. After an intensive four-hour meeting with one in particular, his participation was confirmed. I returned to New Zealand and a number of weeks later requested that the Biennale co-ordinator overseeing the production of various elements for my project speak with the shaman about meeting me in Seoul in several weeks' time (he lives in Gwangju) in order to work with him in a

glassblowing studio and, more specifically, to capture his breath in glass. A reply was relayed to me by the co-ordinator telling me that he no longer wanted to communicate by way of an intermediary, nor regular means of communication, and requested that I now only communicate with him on the astral plane, by way of sending “spiritual letters” (Na Jung Kim, Personal communication, 4 July 2012).

Interestingly, what this does, besides see me sit at my desk, pinching the bridge of my nose as I send spiritual letters the shaman’s way, is to materialise and ritualise the process of communication — these actions become both rites within the work and its material being. As Mauss explains: “The preparation of the ingredients and the confection of the products is the main — the central — object of the whole ceremony and has its own entry and exit rites. . . It is a moment in the ritual” (Mauss, 1950/2001, p. 66). This method of communication might at first seem to obfuscate and complicate things but, in fact, working with such practitioners is never transparent, is always full of complexity and unknowns. It is in this space of not knowing that the tension and poignancy of the work emerges, and is why it is the area of predominant focus in this text.

8. Being Honeyed

In my work qualities are mixed up. The edges of the work are dynamic — through the activation of the spaces between substances, images and the body. In this way the work becomes more than the sum of its parts — it becomes affirmed and reaffirmed by the intermingling of constituent parts which, I would suggest, continue to accumulate and synthesise as they are temporally experienced in the context in which they are presented. Elements continue to synthesise internally (within the work itself) and externally (within the viewer) in ways that determine them to be more than aggregate forms, opening up a complex network of possible interactions.

Much of this is due to my employment of liminal, near-invisible images, such as my use of dust, as in *Extraterrestrial Smithereens* (2010) (Fig. 14, 15 & 16); perfume, as in *Epitaph* (2011) (Fig. 17 & 18); and magic made active, as in *Gateway to the*

Etheric Realm (2011) (Fig. 3, 4 & 5). The experience of such material at the limits of perception heightens perceptual awareness, mental analysis and our proclivity for asking active questions about what we see.

A clear example of this would be a work exhibited in Los Angeles, *Untitled* (2011) (Fig. 19 & 20), at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. The work consists of a perfume contained in a collection of small glass ampoules left open in the gallery. The scent itself is intended as a liquid and gaseous medium to conceptually quantify vast distances. It contains molecules of ambergris collected from the belly of a whale; of an ocean dense with seaweed; ozonic electrical notes reminiscent of a distant storm. The gentle release of the scent into the gallery through the open ampoules leads the perfume to subtly infiltrate without clear boundaries, so viewers become uncertain about whether they are sensing the work or not, and as to where the work begins and ends.

This work, and much of my other work, extends the range of that which we term sculpture. Through a synthesising of experience, space, images and ideas, a dynamic engagement with the aforementioned idea of qualities being mixed up is activated. This might be likened to a form of synaesthesia, as in when a sensation is experienced in a part of the body other than the part stimulated. My work does this by being viscous — operating like ether, an actual chemical medium and postulated as a classical concept much like the field or medium required for forces such as electromagnetism to occur. This viscous ether becomes a medium through which images, responses, ideas, memory and feelings interact. Viscosity is a certain kind of interaction, one that is elastic and sticky, which I liken to a metaphor described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty as “being honeyed” (Merleau-Ponty, 1948/2004, p. 46).

In a collection of radio lectures broadcast in 1948 and published as *The world of perception* (1948/2004), Merleau-Ponty suggests that our senses are intertwined — that the perceivable differences we encounter between, say, taste and touch, are artificially differentiated in a way which fails to acknowledge the fact that our sensory experiences are honeyed.

Merleau-Ponty borrows being honeyed from Jean-Paul Sartre (Merleau-Ponty, 1948/2004) to describe the way in which we experience the world or, more so,

how the world *acts* on us. In this respect the notion of being honeyed usefully describes the way in which my work could be considered a viscous, sticky thing:

Honey is a slow-moving liquid; while it undoubtedly has a certain consistency and allows itself to be grasped, it soon creeps slyly from the fingers and returns to where it started from. It comes apart as soon as it has been given a particular shape and, what is more, it reverses the roles by grasping the hands of whoever would take hold of it. The living, exploring, hand which thought it could master this thing instead discovers that it is embroiled in a sticky external object . . . Viewed in this way, every quality is related to qualities associated with other senses. Honey is sugary. Yet sugariness in the realm of taste, “an indelible softness that lingers in the mouth for an indefinite duration that survives swallowing”, constitutes the same sticky presence as honey in the realm of touch. To say that honey is viscous is another way of saying that it is sugary: it is to describe a particular relationship between us and the object or to indicate that we are moved or compelled to treat it in a certain way, or that it has a particular way of seducing, attracting or fascinating the free subject who stands before us. Honey is a particular way the world has of acting on me and my body. (Merleau-Ponty, 1948/2004, pp. 60–62)

It is this stickiness that occurs in the haptic confrontation between the viewer and much of my current work. The space connecting the two is viscous and sticky, like a resinous resonance — the works reverberate in a viscoelastic way. This unsteady proximity between the edges of the work, the viewer’s body and the temporal space the work is exhibited in is perhaps most specifically evident in my spell works. In these works the invisible is framed and named through the employment of a specialist involved in conjuring unseen realms through occult practices, where the porous boundaries — be it the atomic structure of an identifiable substance or a charged field of energy of an unknowable kind directly used in the work — congeal and carry these elements away into the exhibition space and towards the viewer’s body. The work sticks, clings and continues to

interact in front of *and* in the viewing subject; the space; the framing mechanism of the work alike — always in the process of emerging. These congealing, porous boundaries pertain both to affective ideas that stick and cling to the viewing subject, as well as to material itself — be it visible (as in the case of a cordon-like structure or a de-humidifier, both of which I have employed in work), or invisible (as in the case of a diffused perfume that fills a gallery space).

Images do not simply wait to be encountered, and through their being honeyed they are sticky external objects that don't disappear once the viewer leaves the site of the encounter. They stick and cling in a way that is formless — glued to each other (and to the viewer) without a determined structure; they are pliable to the conditions of the environment (both physical and metaphysical).

The metaphor of being honeyed sits comfortably with the way I think about affect in my work — there is a persistence in the way the work interacts with us that goes beyond the immediacy of the encounter. The work does not let go.

In this sense, externalised ideas operate in a condition that exists before, during and after our experience of them. The work has an active field of energy or sensations — an invisible viscous effluvia (Mauss, 1950/2001, p. 90), moving between the concrete, the liminal and the subliminal. As might be clear, it is not Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological point of departure that I am so interested in here, but the analysis of the image, and the conditions around it.

9. Duration and the Higgs Boson

Being honeyed could also be thought about in relation to Henri Bergson's notion of time. The object in Merleau-Ponty's description appears to me to be fundamentally an object embedded in time — the effects of time determine the qualities we perceive in it.

Bergson recognises time as elemental to matter, he identifies time as a property of matter, where time becomes substantial — becomes substance (Guerlac, 2006). The stickiness and viscosity related to the notion of being honeyed, which I am likening to my work, is the same honeying quality of material-in-time. Experienced as qualitative states of change, this is the work's material reality.

The contraction of time or “rhythms of duration” (Meillassoux, 2007, p. 80) gives them their perceivable qualities. Bergson’s precise example of this is the effect of light, on which I quote from Quentin Meillassoux’s analysis:

In the space of a second, he writes, red light accomplishes 400 trillion vibrations—in other words an immense number of events, which it would take us no less than 25,000 years to enumerate, were each vibration to last long enough to impinge upon our consciousness. So we carry out an incredible contraction of material reality when we perceive in one moment what includes within itself an immense number of events. Now, it is this work of contraction that gives rise to qualities.... [we] comprise under the form of distinct qualities an immense number of events which, for matter, represent so many moments in which the qualities are strung out . . . We only live at one scale of matter — immensely vaster than that of the atom, and immensely less vast than that of galaxies. We thus occupy a scale of durations, a particular rhythm of the current of time, which renders us unconscious of all events below two millionths of a second, whereas such a duration is sufficient for luminous matter to produce millions of vibrations, that is to say millions of distinct events. (Meillassoux, 2007, pp. 79–80)

The recent discovery of evidence in support of a Higgs boson-like particle in Cern, Switzerland at the Large Hadron Collider points to the layers of dimensionality present yet not seen; or more so, to layers of dimensionality slowly revealing themselves as technology allows increasingly more precise observation. The Higgs boson in particular seems to operate much like a sticky, viscous effluvial substance; an ether, operating at a duration imperceptible to us, yet honeying particles in such a way as to give them mass.

This durational aspect of images as events occurring in duration and their porous, sticky material relationship — whose physical (durational) reality is only partially viewable — might allow for a particular way of making, a way of making that embeds and compresses a nuanced strata of matter into restrained sculptural outcomes.

10. Inframince

The translation of *inframince* from the French language gives us ‘ultra-tiny’ or ‘ultra-thin’ and speaks directly to the imperceptible qualities that Marcel Duchamp was addressing when coining this term. Duchamp doesn’t so much define *inframince* as allude to its hidden mechanics through various active examples, claiming that it cannot be defined at all (an example of *inframince* itself). To analyse Duchamp’s notion of the *inframince*, in relation to sculpture, is to locate an efficacious way of reifying effect and fleeting moments alike, which are bound up in an equally fleeting material effect. Some examples of the *inframince* from Duchamp include:

The warmth of a seat that has just been left; the difference between a clean shirt and the same shirt worn once; when the tobacco smoke smells also of the mouth which exhales it (the two odors marry by infra-mince); the gap between the two sides of a sheet of paper; the separation between the detonation noise of a gun (very close) and the apparition of the bullet hole in the target. (Infrathin, 2012)

Duchamp’s notion opens up a dynamic way of thinking sculpturally. These enquiries are evident in his own *50 cc of Paris Air* (1919) — a work which consists of a small glass ampoule supposedly containing 50 cubic centimetres of Parisian air. Contemporary examples also come to mind, namely Gabriel Orozco’s photograph *Breath on Piano* (1993). My own work which links to the *inframince* includes, but is not limited to, a funeral lament allegedly contained in the air of glass objects, as in *Bagpipe Talismans (Funeral Lament in Glass)* (2011) (Fig. 21, 22, 23 & 24); a glass vial containing sea spray, as in *Landing the Sea* (2010/2011) (Fig. 25, 26 & 27).

What the *inframince* underpins is a curiosity for an experience beyond the retinal to that which extends outside the limits of sensation. It demonstrates a prioritising of the cerebral, or conceptual, at the same time as opening up a particular kind of materiality and a space in which sensations might be mixed up (honeyed), or

where sensory slippage might occur. It addresses the possibility of something being concealed — something beyond the grasp of a first glance or, more so, a concealment that can in fact do just the opposite — be revelatory of that which cannot be perceived. This conceptual tool, the *inframince*, is a useful device for an exploration of threshold spaces and unseen realms in its interplay between residue and material; the ephemeral and the permanent; the concealed and the revealed.

11. Revelation and Concealment

My work engages the threshold of revelation and concealment in conceptual and physical ways. I variously look to concealment as an active process — by disguising process; working with chimerical images; confusing the location of a sensation or invoking the microscopic.

In moments of collision between revelation and concealment, my work is given agency. For example, in the folding up of immateriality in material; of the intangible in the tangible; the imagined in the perceived; and where *inframince* becomes active and realised.

Sociologist Michael Taussig's thinking around revelation and concealment is interesting to consider here with regard to the potential for deep embedding of concealed notions within a sculptural outcome.

Taussig discusses at length the notion of concealment as a revelatory strategy, suggesting that this reverse enlightenment "...brings insides outside, unearthing knowledge, and revealing mystery. As it does this, however, as it spoliates and tears at tegument, it may also animate the thing defaced and the mystery revealed may become more mysterious" (Taussig, 1999, pp. 3–4).

Perhaps the *inframince*'s intangibility — or the positioning of the retinal experience as secondary, is better considered in regard to what Taussig calls "uncontrolled seeing" (Taussig, 2006, p. 164), as this offers a way of considering the inter-relationship of revelation and concealment. Uncontrolled seeing illustrates the movement between revelation and concealment — here Taussig discusses the contradictory nature of "mystical illumination" (Taussig, 2006, p. 165) in regard

to the simultaneous power of both taboo and the transgression of taboo.

. . . [S]uch revelation ensures not disenchantment but further enchantment thanks to a mystical illumination. In this sense revelation leads to further concealment. Showing the secret leads to another if not deeper secret . . . once again displaying the artful play of . . . concealment and revelation, taboo and transgression. (Taussig, 2006, p. 165)

Duchamp's *inframince* works in much the same way, revealing and concealing the ultrathin. This was evident in the possibility *and* impossibility of capturing spoken word in material form in *Spoken Heredity Talisman* (2011) (Fig. 28, 29 & 30), where I spoke directly into molten glass to give voice tangible form; the possibility *and* impossibility of creating an olfactory vacuum as in *Smell of an Empty Space (Vaporised)* (2011) (Fig. 31, 32 & 33), in which a scent is built and diffused in an attempt to replicate the smell of an empty space — a terrestrial impossibility, for when we call a space empty it is merely a convention for describing a space that is filled with something we do not wish to name; the possibility *and* impossibility of making an audio recording of the present, as in *Celestial Fields* (2012) (Fig. 34, 35 & 36), in which fifty-two records (one for each week of the calendar year) contain a single locked groove on the outer parameter which repeats the word “now” in my own voice *ad infinitum*.

12. Conjuring Form

Conjuring is an active notion in my practice. It allows the work to draw up a virtual, imaginary sphere of activity that is as close to a marginal experience as one is likely to get. And although it might be marginal in terms of belief structures, it is still not so distant from one's own world of experience — after all, are ideas not the first conjured things?

Conjuring enunciates a form of conceptual practice. It offers a way to engage the viewer with an idea that sits at the threshold of perceptibility — yet at the same time questions perceptibility by allowing for the possibility of an imagined,

delusional, hallucinatory and illusory experience to take place. I am interested in conjuring, not as a romantic counterpoint to rationality but as a device for illuminating illumination itself.

Conjuring can be viewed as a sociological tool of analysis and a constituent part of modern life (Gordon, 2008). This is a key underpinning to varied explorations and practical outcomes in my work. Magic — routinely described as the antithesis of the modern — is also something that is very much at home in modernity. It is widely acknowledged by scholars that magic is not only at home in modernity, but that it belongs to modernity (Pels, 2003). Examples of this are numerous; for example, the state's chimerical eminence over populations, as described by Peter Pels in his introduction to *Magic and modernity* (2003). In *The golden bough* (1922/1996), James Frazer modernised the practice of magic by equating it with the inconceivabilities of science, suggesting magic to be "bastard science" (p. 49). Modernity does not, however, have the only claim to magic. Also having a trajectory into our past, magic is "... the foundation of the whole mystical and scientific universe ..." (Mauss, 1950/2001, p. 16).

Conjuring goes some way to invoking the past, drawing attention to invisible realms and inviting us beyond the immediately discernible into the space of memories, potential experiences, indiscernible facts and hazy visions framed within a space of uncertain reasoning. Avery Gordon suggests that the unseen holds a visual power — disappearance being a strong force both politically and aesthetically, and one I clearly reference in my work.

Our habituation to the dominant sense of vision might suggest that the real is associated with the visible (Jay, 1994). To be seen is to disclose and to be consumable, and by extension the assumption follows that vision reveals essential knowledge, but conjuring works as a counterpoint to the expectation of transparency, offering an interesting balance between the entanglement of revelation and concealment.

Gordon suggests, "[c]onjuring merges the analytical, the procedural, the imaginative and the effervescent" (Gordon, 2008, p. 22); in this sense, conjuring becomes a lively and excitable space, giving precedence to physically marginal objects, suggested outcomes and bellied conceptual structures that sit below

the surface. Conjuring advances a form of cognitive doubt and might describe how “that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence” (Gordon, 2008, p. 17).

To conjure-up something unseen does more than allude to the fact that something is missing — it demonstrates it. That which appears to be invisible, or lurking in the shadows, announces itself as present through absence, yet not through representational means, but by presentation itself. That is, conjuring produces material effect through a seemingly absent material.

13. Ineffable Magic

The active role of looking and the non-static nature of images, which are bound up in memory — indeterminate, complex and changing — necessitates a dynamic means of viewing in my work.

Within my practice, conjuring plays an important role in activating this dynamic. Conjuring is not utilised as metaphor but is actualised in the work as a methodology and material process. A practitioner of the occult — a witch, a shaman, a geomancer or a soothsayer (depending on requirements), is called upon to conjure, to call up, to name, to invoke some *object / image / thing* from another unseen dimension. This dynamic ultimately shifts much of the responsibility for the realisation of a work onto the viewer — determining the viewer as active in the capacity to perhaps complete the work, be it through cynical reasoning, wonderment, belief, disbelief, scepticism or one of a plethora of other potential responses.

Conjuring allows for an activation in the work of a type of ineffable image — images that are incomprehensible. Magical practices and magical thinking provide for the collapse of logic — by magic’s very nature it doesn’t have to make sense.

In an attempt to comprehend the ineffable image, an intuitive approach is activated in the viewer. This intuitive methodology might, for example, enter the realms of the phantasm and the transcendental — things that we cannot measure or know, yet which we might still attempt to measure, capture,

describe and see. Intuition is not suggestive of unconscious receptivity, but is an “athletic trajectory of thought” (Badiou, 1997, p. 36) and is an engaged active responsiveness, being “neither a feeling, an inspiration, nor a disorderly sympathy, but a fully developed method . . .” (Deleuze, 1966/2011, p. 13).

Activated by the work, an intuitive responsiveness to an invocation or spell, such as in *Conjuring Form* (2008) (Fig. 6 & 7), positions the viewer at the limits of logic, as the work invokes irrationality and goes beyond knowing, yet is still open to revelation because it allows for a space in which we might still somehow be able to fathom the unfathomable and see that which we cannot see.

The presence of magical thinking in much of my work could be likened to the mystifying and spurious union between dilution and potency. Just as in homeopathy, through interplay between dilution and potency, there is an inversion of logic in the spell-making process. The swarming presence of the unseen, activated by the employment of spell making, operates in much the same way as the homeopathic inversion of the logic that higher doses deploy a stronger effect. That is, potency is gained through diluted (visual) means. This cannot be explained rationally, only mystically. We may not be able give physical evidence of effect, nor even determine presence, but just as with homeopathy and sympathetic magic alike (Frazer, 1922/1996), a part is seen to be the same as the whole and psychic contact results in contagion:

Each object contains, in its entirety, the essential principle of the species of which it forms a part. Every flame contains fire, any bone from a dead body contains death, in just the same way as a single hair is thought to contain a man’s life force. (Mauss, 1950/2001, p. 80)

Contagion as a means of transference is a compelling way of articulating the activation of an invisible effect in my work. The Law of Contagion was developed by James Frazer in *The golden bough* (1922/1996), as a major thread in the definition of sympathetic magic (the other major thread, being the Law of Similarity — like produces like — which infers that the practitioner can produce effect through imitation). Contagion on the other hand suggests “contact results in contagion”

(Mauss, 1950/2001, p. 17); that is, whatever is done to a material, creates an effect on those whom come/came into contact with it. Although contagion suggests actual physical contact, it is in fact not necessary (Frazer, 1922/1996; Mauss, 1950/2001) — proximity is enough — just as in *Curse* (2005) (Fig. 37 & 38), a work that employs the skills of a pagan witch to curse a corner in a gallery, the invisible effect of the curse may achieve considerable dimensionality through its contagious effect in and on the viewer and the space alike. In this way the contagion swarms around the work like ether or, as in Mauss' terminology, effluvia: "[t]here is the idea of effluvia which leave the body, magical images which travel about, lines linking the magician and his field of action, ropes, chains" (Mauss, 1950/2001, p. 90).

Contagion also suggests the transference of an idea that detaches itself from the artwork and attaches itself to the viewer (not necessarily through physical contact). Additional to this, contiguity suggests that through proximity, ideas accumulate around and are gathered (again, physical contact is not required) by the artwork. I also liken this to a kind of swarming, where the work hosts a conglomeration of invisibly manifested complexities that hover around it, disperse from it and gravitate towards it.

Magic and conjuring are difficult to reduce; they hover and churn around the artwork. Like ideas, they emanate from, and conversely, bind themselves to it. Working with practitioners skilled in the art of 'other ways of knowing' to produce spells, force fields and gateways to other dimensions, opens up a zone of invisible ideas, images, objects and indeterminate possibilities that occur in a state of reciprocity between the viewer and the work, in an interplay between Mauss' "mystic states" and "corporeal techniques" (Taussig, 2006, p. 121).

14. Plastic Invisibility

My work deals with a form of the invisible that is more often than not conceived in thought and then manifested in objects. In the work, an attempt is made to give shape to what I have been calling 'plastic invisibility'. The word plastic is used here to denote a malleable materiality and for the ability to spatially

engage the invisible object; it allows for thinking about absence as being akin to a surging presence; it allows for the naming and highlighting of that which is outside the realm of retinal experience.

My choices of material in order to investigate this temporal space tend to embody this logic — these are not representations, but qualities immanent to a material's nature or being. Such materials include glass, which I see as a shape-shifting material, being simultaneously liquid and solid, or some alchemical in between. Glass operates at various moments in my work as stratum, container, screen, membrane, surface, support and *entomber*. What glass allows, as is also the case with perfume-as-material, is for material to embody invisibility through plasticity: the material does not stand for something; it is itself. It is caught up in scales of active responsiveness and material ductility that are temporal and unseen. Through sublimation, these materials allow the invisible object to swarm.

In her introduction to *Things that talk*, Lorraine Daston mentions the way we might consider objects to talk, as opposed to repeating, mimicking or echoing, which ostensibly shapes them to the contours of our intentions alone by the mirroring of those intentions.¹ She discusses how René Descartes viewed language as characteristically human, “a criterion for distinguishing anthropos from automaton” (Daston, 2004, p. 11). Daston figures a way out of this reflexive enclave of language dividing the sentient and the insentient, to suggest that although objects may not literally shout at us, they speak in revelatory ways.

[S]keptics will insist that all this talk of talk with respect to things is at best metaphoric and at worst a childish fantasy about tongues in trees and books in brooks. Accept these doubts for the sake of argument: there is still the puzzle of the stubborn persistence of the illusion, if illusion it be. If we humans do all the talking, why do we need things not only to talk about but to talk with? (Daston, 2004, p. 12)

She weaves an argument from an historical, epistemological position that points to two diametrically opposed ways in which things have been said to talk for themselves. One involves false gods and idols “made of gold or bronze or stone

¹ Daston states: “Cartesian anthropocentrism, which asserts a monopoly on language for human beings, is a form of narcissism that condemns things merely to echo what people say” (Daston, 2004, p. 11).

that make portentous pronouncements to the devout who consult them". The other suggests a rational self-evidence, namely "*res ipsa loquitur*" (Daston, 2004, p. 12) which translates from Latin as "the thing speaks for itself" (*Res ipsa loquitur*, n.d.), it was first used by Cicero in 52BC and then found its way into English common law in 1863 (Pro milone, n.d.). Its legal application is 'to that which is obvious'. For example, the smoking gun in the hand of a supposed killer. Clearly here the thing, wrongly or rightly, appears to speak more clearly than the voice of the person holding it.

These two dissimilar moments, in which we take the nuances of things emanating and graft them into epistemological truth, is where we also encounter the invisible object, which is capable of much talk. Within many cultures (Daston refers to Christ's miracles, for example), magic, miracles and the supernatural,

. . . were almost always worked in things, be it the body of a cripple suddenly made whole or the water turned to wine at the wedding feast . . . in all these cases, the talking thing spoke the truth, the purest, most indubitable truth conceivable. The chief reason why the truth was so pure was that it had been uttered by things themselves, without the distorting filter of human interpretation. (Daston, 2004, p. 13)

15. Theoretical Chimeras

Henri Bergson usefully suggests that absence is still defined in relationship to the thing it is not: "one must still define these denuded things negatively in relation to perceivable qualities: a lightless vision, an immaterial touch, an impotent touch, an ineffectual impulsion, a colourless light" (Lawler, 2003, p. 5). This opens up a terrain of possibilities with regard to the invisible thing being defined in relation to perceivable qualities. By extension, the notions of emptiness, invisibility and nothingness become types of theoretical chimeras, "[o]ne cannot understand emptiness other than by reference to an intuition of plenitude" (Perraudin, 2006, p. 470). Just when you assume to point to an emptiness, it is charged and filled. We compress meaning upon things, as a form of thickening or reifying of their being — what Gilles Deleuze calls a "contraction of matter" (Deleuze, 1966/2011,

p. 25). However, it is not the matter that is active, but as Deleuze suggests (by way of Bergson), it is memory that contracts and interpolates, because “perception always includes memory” (Guerlac, 2006, p. 116). Bergson goes further in describing this thickening (honeying), or gathering (swarming), with memory “strengthening and enriching perception, which, in its turn becoming wider, draws into itself a growing number of complementary recollections” (Bergson, 1911/2005).

16. Embedded Memory

Memory and intuition play a decisive and critical role in my production of images which engage realms of experience, are liminal, unseen or beyond the capability of sensory perception. Various works of mine have looked at experience, which is displaced temporally and spatially to the extent that it can be accessed only through memory, and reconstituted only through imaginings.

Bergson suggests “[m]atter . . . is an aggregate of ‘images’” (Bergson, 1911/2005, p. 81), which when considered through a process of encountering a subject beyond perceptibility allows the sculptural image to be more than the sum of its parts, more than a representation — it opens it up to the complex workings of the past being conjured up and pulled forward (and invoked) in the memory of the viewer. In this way, Bergson’s suggestion that an image is “a prearrangeable juxtaposition of things already known” (Bergson, 1911/2005, p. 223) — that images are saturated by the past beyond the threshold of visibility — goes some way to describing and shaping my exploration of making the invisible active, or naming and charging the invisible. This framework allows for the conflation of images to play out in the memory of the viewer, such as in work of mine in which nothing is seen, yet by employing mystical practices, an image or field of action is invoked for the viewer through an unseen action, and remains ever beyond the threshold of visibility.

The fields of activity, articulated in *Celestial Fields*(2012) (Fig. 8, 9 & 10) and *Portal to the Spirit World* (2008) (Fig. 39), framed by cordon-like structures containing spells, are caught up in a system of dynamic energy. They become

fields of potential with which the viewer's body is engaged through proximity and embedding.

Just as activation of the invisible allows for a way of embedding matter below the threshold of visibility, activation of the invisible also allows for the viewer to be implicated in the work.

The viewing body is part of the material world in a specific way — it is changed and affected by internalised “molecular movements of cerebral substances” (Bergson, 1911 / 2005, p. 22) when external molecular forms make “a disturbance” (Bergson, 1911 / 2005, p. 22) in what Bergson calls our “centres”, or what we might think of as the brain.

[T]he centres are the theatre of very varied molecular movements, and these movements depend on the nature and position of the objects. Change the objects, or modify their relation to my body, and everything is changed in the interior movements of my perceptive centres. (Bergson, 1911 / 2005, p. 22)

In this way, viewing becomes active, specifically through memory — as the viewer slips through time (or as literal time passes for the viewing viewer), a void opens up (cordoned and framed) into which memory runs: “the onrush of our activity makes a void behind it into which memories flow” (Bergson, 1911 / 2005, p. 65). And so, active viewing engages the unseen; or, more so, active viewing engages the framed unseen because “perception and recollection, always interpenetrate each other, are always exchanging something of their substance as by a process of endosmosis” (Bergson, 1911 / 2005, p. 67). Put another way “perception ends by being merely an occasion for remembering” (Bergson, 1911 / 2005, p. 66), so no matter how active a field of potential experience (that is to say, a cordoned area containing an invisible spell) might be, it finds reality in the mind of the active viewer through the phenomenon of memory.

Active viewing resists passivity to some degree, and I believe this is clear in my thinking around the way that a work of art should not do all of the work — should not explain itself away. This is clearly articulated in Bergson's thinking and my relating of it to the potentiality of active viewing as being crucial to the

agency of an artwork:

Bergson's theory of attention depends upon this notion of a dynamic circuit between object and memory. An increase in attention or concentration, he argues, involves widening the scope of the memory images that come into play . . . Thus the deeper the memory layers we tap into, the more we actually perceive of reality, and the more meaning we can give to the real. (Guerlac, 2006, p. 136)

Bergson preserves the efficacy of memory through an analogy: "there [is] no more reason to say that the past effaces itself as soon as perceived than there is to suppose that material objects cease to exist when we cease to perceive them" (Bergson, 1911 / 2005, p. 142). This thought becomes constructive in another way, too, not only pointing to the bond between the viewer and the image through memory, but also because there is real efficacy for me in conceptually thinking through how an object *could* cease to exist when not being viewed. This idea seems to offer future sculptural development and an interesting notion to actively work through in my practice.

17. The Observer Effect

The Observer Effect states that through the very act of viewing, or observing, the thing viewed is affected and altered; for example, "for an electron to become detectable, a photon must first interact with it, and this interaction will change the path of that electron" (Observer effect, n.d.). Much of my work has the capacity to be considered in relationship to this theory — predominantly through its reiteration of the way the active viewer affects the work in some way. This is certainly the case in working with perfume-as-material. Not only do the gradations of a given environment affect scent, so do the viewer's own odours — they interact with and affect the perfume in subtle and complex ways: altering its structure and honeying its effect.

Two further connections can be extrapolated here in relation to the Observer Effect. Firstly, the operational mode of a molecular scale is actively engaged.

The Observer Effect is discussed most commonly in relation to Particle Physics, (though not solely, for it is also discussed in relation to the Social Sciences, such as in Anthropology).

Much of my work activates this particular microscopic dimensionality — the spell pieces do this at a spatially voluminous scale by framing large void-like spaces that appear empty, yet in fact are filled with countless molecular forms, such as in *Conjuring Form* (2008) (Fig. 6 & 7); in *Various Solid States* (2011) (Fig. 1 & 2), which collects liquid from the gallery environment and the viewer's bodily exhalations before solidifying them; and in *Your Memory of Rain* (2011) (Fig. 40, 40 & 42), which uses perfume as a molecular sculptural material to conjure an image of wet concrete and rusty metal after it has rained. This scent is called *petrichor*, deriving from Greek, *petra*, meaning stone, and *ichor*, the fluid that flows in the veins of the gods (*Petrichor*, n.d.).

Dealing with particles of this scale leads to an interesting and slippery “crisis of determinism”, as Guerlac explains:

When we are dealing with subatomic particles, which exist in motion, it is impossible to determine their precise location. All we can determine is the *probable* location of a particle at a given time. Of course, all of this leads to a crisis of determinism . . .
(Guerlac, 2006, p. 86)

Through the continual random Brownian motion² of these microscopic sculptural materials — locations, boundaries and thresholds are uncertain and affected by being viewed, and exactly where the work spatially begins and ends is excitingly unascertainable.

Secondly, my work operates in a manner whereby performative (temporal) qualities are actuated in such a way that the work not only continually undergoes changes, but so too does the experience of it. Unfolding in time, much of my work operates performatively and temporally, in that it emerges through an accumulation of qualitative experiences, suggesting that each viewing is different. Guerlac articulates Bergson's hypothesis of a continually shifting experience:

Bergson's radical claim is that the way things feel in experience

2 “...the erratic random movement of microscopic particles in a fluid, as a result of continuous bombardment from molecules of the surrounding medium”, (*Concise Oxford English dictionary*, 1911/1982, p. 116)

depends upon the particular moment in which they occur. We never have exactly the same feeling twice, because the very fact of having felt something before changes the nature of the experience the second time round. It becomes something else. (Guerlac, 2006, p. 86)

This same continually shifting experience occurs in an integrated way within much of my work. Artworks which make use of perfume-as-material clearly articulate this, as perfume has a built-in time register — changing over the course of time, the top notes dissipate before the heart notes, and when they scatter, they leave the base notes behind. This determines that the perfume-as-sculptural-form itself is forever transforming and shifting, resulting in a continually shifting experience of the work. Certainly other works of mine operate in this same performative way, with subtle and complex attenuations and interactions. I would argue that my various spell works operate in this way, in that although being spatially defined, the temporal nature of a spell — cast during installation and removed during de-installation — determines their field of effect to an ebb and flow throughout the period of exhibition as viewers move in and out of a sphere of effect.

18. Scent

Much of this discussion around active viewing, memory and the uncertain boundaries between the work of art and the world (including the viewer) is concerned with our sentience — our ability to be conscious, through sensory experience. My ongoing research has led me to examine the potential of smell as an agent in this space or site of production, given its potential to be understood as establishing a fusional relationship with the world.

Smell reaches beyond the capability of our other senses, perhaps even assuming a position closest to what we term the sixth sense — the sense of intuitive awareness, or one's gut feeling. Smell can be revelatory of places, circumstances and people alike, and not in ways we necessarily understand or control, as is the case with the role pheromones³ may play in libidinal attraction.

3 Pheromone, from Greek pherin (convey) and hormone (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 1911/1982, p. 769)

Memory and smell have a distinctive bond, olfactory processing and long-term memory both being situated in the limbic system of the brain, which also supports behaviour and emotion. We can all attest to the incredible force with which a scent can take us (involuntarily) into the past — or as Bergson suggests, bring the past to us in the present, to bear on the future. Deprivation of other sensory experience can illustrate just how active smell's role is in conjuring up the past, as is the case here in the words of Helen Keller:

Smell is a potent wizard that transports us across a thousand miles and all the years we have lived. The odor of fruits wafts me to my Southern home, to my childish frolics in the peach orchard. Other odors, instantaneous and fleeting, cause my heart to dilate joyously or contract with remembered grief. Even as I think of smells, my nose is full of scents that start awake sweet memories of summers gone and ripening grain fields far away. (Keller, 1908/2003, p.44)

At the same time that smell is seen as this evocative agent for connecting us to memory, it is also seen to hold a low status among our senses. It has often been deemed as the “most animal” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944/1987, p.184) of our senses. Freud has suggested that our sense of smell was at one time as important to us as it is to quadrupeds. He goes further — to suggest that the evolutionary moment in which our antecedents stood on hind legs, was not only the moment when smell became of secondary importance to sight, but was key to the development of human civilisation (Freud, 1930/1961, pp. 46–47). Smell's distant evolutionary development might explain why its properties challenge explication — it is most certainly resistant to sense making and analysis (outside the laboratory). A language of representation has not been adequately developed around smell, so we work by analogy to other senses, borrowing from the signs used to describe other sensations. For example, we might describe a smell we encounter using haptic terminology — hot, soft, rough, sharp; hearing — vibrant, piercing; sight — flat, round, clear, radiant; taste — sweet, sickly. Smell's primal status among the senses⁴, its resistance to sense-making, its ability to conjure the unseen and the way it throws up an array of “dizzying

⁴ From an evolutionary perspective smell is recognised to be primal among our senses. For further discussion, see Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944/1987, p. 184

epistemological conundrums” (Taussig, 1993, p. 67) have determined it to have a clear alignment to usage within marginal practices, namely that of spell-making, ritual practices and magic in varied cultural practices. Quoting anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski, who was writing about practices in the Trobriand Islands, Taussig describes smell as “the most important factor in the laying of spells on people” (Taussig, 1993, p. 67). Taussig notes that Malinowski went on to:

describe how, in order to achieve its greatest potency, magic there must enter through the nose. Just as love charms there were borne into the victim on the scent of some spellbound aromatic substance, so in sorcery the object over which the maleficent magic has been done is burned, the smoke entering the nostrils of the victim and thereby causing disease. (Taussig, 1993, p. 67)

19. Parfumare

In respect of the evolutionarily primary position of smell among our senses, the advent and continued proliferation of the global perfume industry could be seen as the attempt to tame smell by exploiting its primal associations. Of course, most contemporary marketing of perfume taps into played-out representations of animalistic urges and bridled libidinal desires — perhaps an acknowledgement of scent’s low status.

However, this taming is only surface deep, seeming to have more to do with marketing than it does the chemical (and alchemical) process of combining aroma molecules in order to build olfactory forms.

These forms operate as complex perceptual structures that vanish soon after they appear — many factors play a role in this process. While being familiar to the language of sculpture — weight, mass, heat and dimensionality — these all account for why molecules loosen themselves from their complex perceptual structure one after another, dissipate, cling, reform, swarm and spread themselves thin — like Mauss’ effluvia.

The efficacy of perfume as a material in my work is bound up in its interesting multifarious properties and for its ability to open up a development in sculptural practice. Perfume making is the spectrum of smell making whereby aroma

molecules are combined and joined in such a way as to demonstrate some control over an experience, and so become an advantageous way to think about composition and structure with regard to sculpting smells. I am directly thinking of and engaging perfume as a material that allows me to assemble molecular sculptural structures — consider here Richard Serra's *Verb List* (1967–68), which serves as a list of possible actions an object may undergo as well as contexts for those actions. Serra's list can be applied almost in its entirety to perfume as a molecular sculptural material.

Through sublimation, perfume expands in the air, filling space (and escaping it) with molecules, which are given agency through a variety of complex forces, including gravity, air current, diffusion and dispersal. Their entropic movement is affected by factors such as gradient, temperature and spatial configuration, which make them receptive to random Brownian motion. Yet in having a structural foundation — aroma molecules are selected, measured and released — their movement and effect can be thought of as both random and directed.

However one might attempt to control conditions, indeterminate forces and agents are always at play in scent-building. The indeterminate nature of forces is balanced against the chemical precision and historical knowledge of perfume making — the subtle interplay between various molecules allows for a controlled durational effect, as is the case in *Epitaph* (2011) (Fig. 17 & 18). Over the course of time this perfume-sculpture undergoes a radical change when released in the gallery. At first the work produces a scent that alludes to a bodily (ghostly) presence or effigy, predominantly due to the use of an overpowering aroma molecule that is fleshy, carnal and corporeal. Called civetone, it is one of the oldest-known perfume ingredients, and although now synthetically reproduced was originally collected from the perennial gland secretions of the African Civet⁵. Through a spatiotemporal development, the perfume-object undergoes a transformation in which the civetone's more visceral characteristics give way to something dry, pale and powdery — the smell of dust in the corner of a long unoccupied attic room.

Perception, categorisation, memory, attention, mental imagery and language, are all concerns of perfume making. Perfume making is also secretive, anachronistic

5 “...a slender nocturnal mammal with a barred and spotted coat, native to Africa and Asia” (*Concise Oxford English dictionary*, 1911/1982, p. 169)

and has alchemical proclivities — perhaps a throwback to its (continued) use in magical practices. Perfume's proneness to evaporation (partly through its high ethanol content) and its dual physical state as both a liquid and a gas mean it always dissipates, leaving in its wake a faint echo. The word perfume derives from Latin *parfumare*, meaning 'to smoke through' (*Concise Oxford English dictionary*, 1911/1982, p. 762); its etymology is bound up in its capability to be thought about as a concentrated form of loss — just as it arrives, it transforms and dissipates.

Illuminating the unseen, perfume dwells on multiple thresholds and substrates — of vision, physicality, affect, time, dimensionality. It is at once revelatory of substances and substance itself.

20. Concluding Commentary

Various realms of activity and territories of research hover around my practice much like Marcel Mauss' effluvia, or a contagion — adhering to and infiltrating the work, but also emanating from it. These realms resonate and proliferate in multitudinous ways, and they continue to draw my attention and to open new avenues for working and research. I see myself continuing to explore this space of active tension between 'what we *feel* we know' and 'what we *can't* know', in part because of the poignancy of the territory, but also because of the scope for creative production that is complexly connected and difficult to pin down.

Spell-making and perfume-as-sculptural-material continue to be the most efficacious means of creative production in my practice — both offer further operational modes of production. Being esoteric fields of secretive knowledge, spell-making and perfume-as-sculptural-material appear endless in their scope for further research and exploration. Looking for ways of kneading these fields together also continues to expose more questions for me as a maker and offers a fascinating way forward with my work.

The potential for amalgamation of these two fields also allows for continued investigations into the tension between visible material, and that-which-*can't*-be-seen. In my work the material elements are ancillary, they serve as a disposable

vehicle or sign (elements which are often dispensed with or downplayed in conceptual art). Aspects of how the spectator associates by habit with the materiality of an artwork also continues to be an area of continued research. It remains unclear to what degree the material elements *seen* might remain active — as a form of divining device for example, or whether it is simply the exhausted detritus of past actions — actions which have moved on beyond the material realm. One of the implications is that it may infect other work, or the site of exhibition, until some restorative action is taken (such as a blessing or exorcism or rededication). In this instance, the material elements are secondary — signifying a site of past action which continues to resonate through its having set up a continuing agency — a spell which is neither seen nor circumscribed, or a perfume without spatial perimeters is not defined nor understood, but resonates and proliferates in the spectator's imagination.

Developments around 'speculative realism' offer an area of continued research with regard to my notion of 'plastic invisibility'. Placing the object as central to an enquiry (as speculative realism does) allows for an encounter with the physical properties, or object-hood of that-which-*can't-be-seen*. Much like the hypothesised presence of dark matter in the universe, its presence is inferred from its effect, yet it continues to elude us. . . .

21. References

- Adorno, T.W. & Horkheimer, M. (1987). *The dialectic of enlightenment*. New York: Continuum. (Original work published in 1944.)
- Badiou, A. (1997). *Deleuze: The clamor of being*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bergson, H. (2005). *Matter and memory*. New York: Zone Books. (Original work published in 1911.)
- Daston, L. (2004). Introduction. In L. Daston (Ed.), *Things that talk object lessons from art and science* (pp 9–24). Massachusetts: Zone Books.
- Deleuze, G. (2011). *Bergsonism*. Massachusetts: Zone Books. (Original work published in 1966)
- Frazer, J. (1996). *The golden bough*. London: Penguin Books. (Original work published in 1922)
- Freud, S. (1961). *Civilization and its discontents*, (J. Strachey, Trans.). New York: W. W. Norton. (Original work published in 1930)
- Gordon, A. F. (2008) *Ghostly matters*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Guerlac, S. (2006). *Thinking in time. An introduction to Henri Bergson*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Harman, G. (2010). *Towards speculative realism, essays and lectures*. Hants, United Kingdom: Zero Books.
- Harman, G. (2002). *Tool-being, Heidegger and the metaphysics of objects*. Illinois: Open Court Publishing.
- Harman, G. (2011). *The quadruple object*. Hants, United Kingdom: Zero Books.
- Heidegger, M. (1954). Das Ding. In F. W. von Herrmann (Ed.), *Vorträge und aufsätze* (pp 157–75). Pfullingen: Neske.
- Infrathin. (n.d.). Retrieved 2012, July 5 from <http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Inframince>.

Jay, M. (1994). *Downcast eyes, the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought*. California: University of California Press.

Keller, H. (2003). *The world I live in*. New York: The New York Book Review Books. (Original work published in 1908.)

Lawler, L. (2003). *The challenge of Bergsonism: Phenomenology, ontology, ethics*. London: Continuum.

Mauss, M. (1936). 1960 *Les techniques du corps in sociologie et anthropologie*. 2d edition. Paris: University of France Press.

Mauss, M. (2001). *A general theory of magic*. (R. Bain, Trans.). London: Routledge. (Original work published in 1950.)

Meillassoux, Q. (2007). Subtraction and contraction: Deleuze, immanence, and matter and memory. *Collapse III*, 3, (ed. R. Mackay), pp. 63–107.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2004). *The world of perception*. New York: Routledge. (Original work published in 1948.)

Mitchell, D. (2011). Table of elements. In D. Mitchell (Ed.), *Radiant Matter I/II/III*. Berlin, Germany: Berliner Künstlerprogramm/DAAD.

Observer Effect (n.d.). Retrieved 2012, July 7 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Observer_effect_\(physics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Observer_effect_(physics)).

Pels, P. (2003). Introduction. In P. Pels & Birgit Meyer (Eds.), *Magic and modernity, interfaces of revelation and concealment* (pp 1–38). California: Stanford University Press.

Perraudin, J. F. (2008). *A non-Bergsonian Bachelard*. *Continental Philosophy Review* 41 (4). Retrieved 2012, July 2 from <http://www.springerlink.com/content/t5ul326260238m88/fulltext.pdf>.

Personal communication with Na Jung Kim, 4 July 2012.

Petrichor (n.d.). Retrieved 2012, July 30 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrichor>.

Pro milone (n.d.). Retrieved 2012, July 2 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pro_Milone.

Res ipsa loquitur (n.d.). Retrieved 2012, July 2 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Res_ipsa_loquitur.

Sykes, J. B. (Ed.). (1982). *Concise Oxford English dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published in 1911)

Taussig, M. (1999). *Defacement: Public secrecy and the labor of the negative*. California: Stanford University Press.

Taussig, M. (1993). *Mimesis and alterity, a particular history of the senses*. New York: Routledge.

Taussig, M. (2006). *Walter Benjamin's grave*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

Turin, L. (2006). *The secret of scent, adventures in perfume, adventures in perfume and the science of smell*. London: Faber and Faber Limited.

22. Illustrations



Fig. 1
Various Solid States (2011)

A de-humidifier continuously runs in the gallery collecting vapour from the atmosphere. Each morning gallery staff are instructed to mix the collected water with plaster and pour it on the bubblewrap. The resulting solid forms are stacked and accumulate over the course of the exhibition.



Fig. 2
Various Solid States (2011) (detail)

Examples of solid plaster forms, which are stacked and accumulate over the course of the exhibition.



Fig. 3
Gateway to the Etheric Realm (2011)

A repeated and interlocking metal structure delineates a field of activity, in which a witch has worked during installation to open a gateway to the etheric realm. Trace elements are found on the ground — the residue of the spell-making process. The spell is deactivated during de-installation.



Fig. 4
Gateway to the Etheric Realm (2011) (detail)

A detail of the structure and spell-making materials.

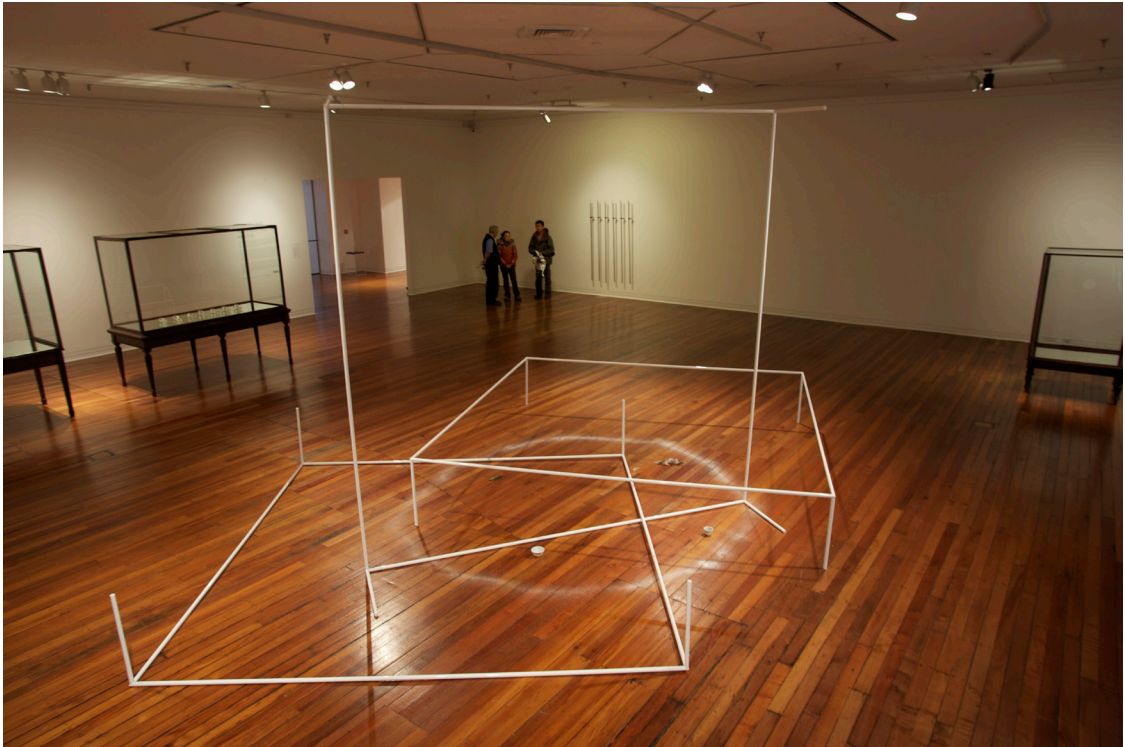


Fig. 5
Gateway to the Etheric Realm (2011)



Fig. 6
Conjuring Form (2008)

An area of the exhibition space is labelled and made off-limits. Within this space, a witch has performed the rites to call up a ghost for the duration of the exhibition. The ghost conjured is that of Anna Goldi, the last person executed for witchcraft in Switzerland.



Fig. 7
Conjuring Form (2008) (detail)



Fig. 8
Celestial Fields (2012)

With the aid of a shaman, a circular space is constructed, in which sits a star map rendered in space. Silk prints work diagrammatically to describe various shamanistic acts that remain unseen in the outcome. The work unfolds over two sites, in three interlocking installations. Each makes use of the mouth as a tool of production: breath to blow glass; tongue to shape ceramic objects; voice to locate the present.



Fig. 9
Celestial Fields (2012) (detail)



Fig. 10
Celestial Fields (2012) (detail)



Fig. 11
The Dragon, the Purple Forbidden Enclosure (2010) (detail)

A geomancer is called upon to locate an exhibition site for its energy levels and aid in the selection materials and forms to occupy the site in order to best enhance the unseen forces present in the space. A map of a fallen constellation delineates the space; attached to it are 108 bottles of chanted-over water, among other dispersed materials.

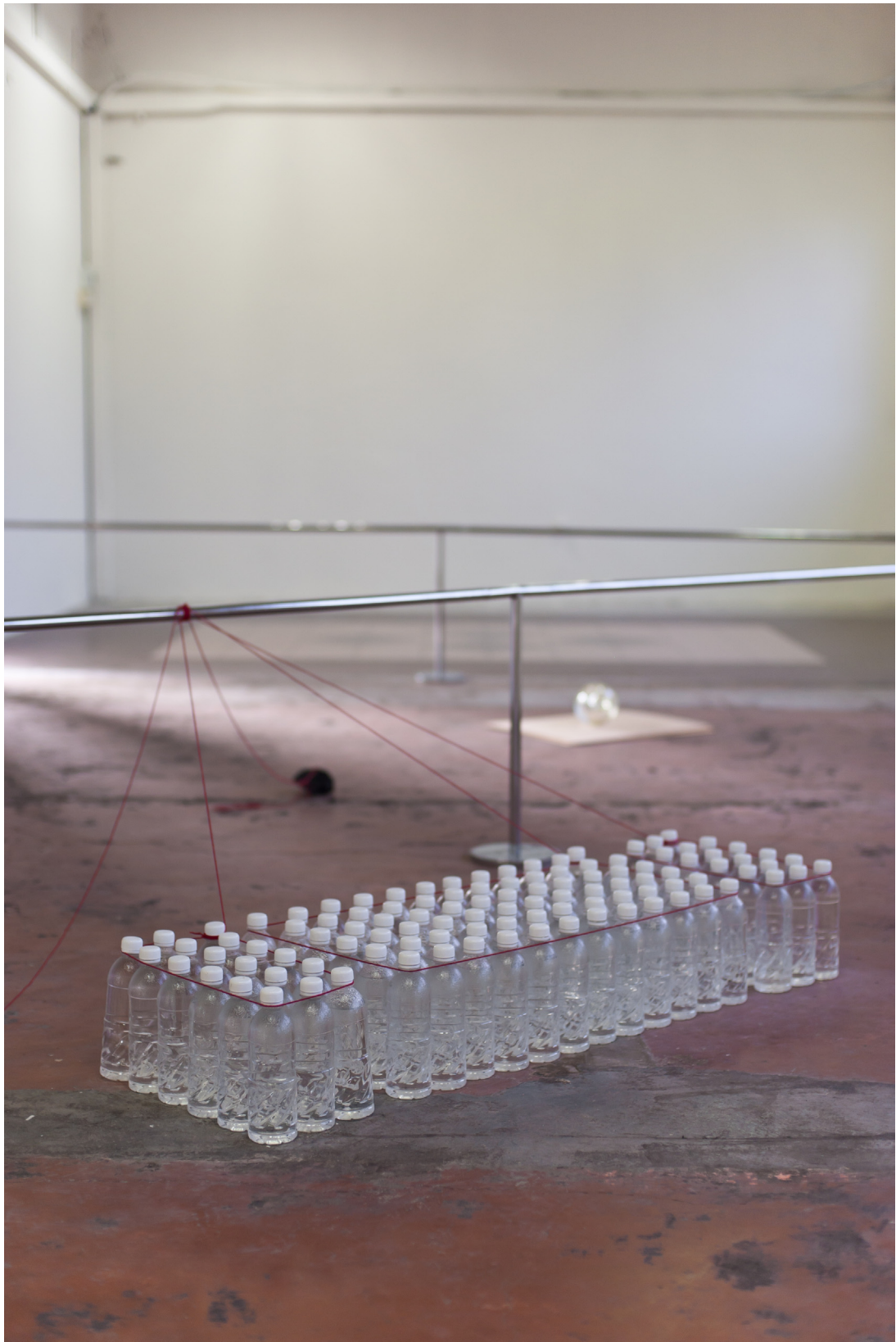


Fig. 12
The Dragon, the Purple Forbidden Enclosure (2010) (detail)



Fig. 13
The Dragon, the Purple Forbidden Enclosure (2010) (detail)



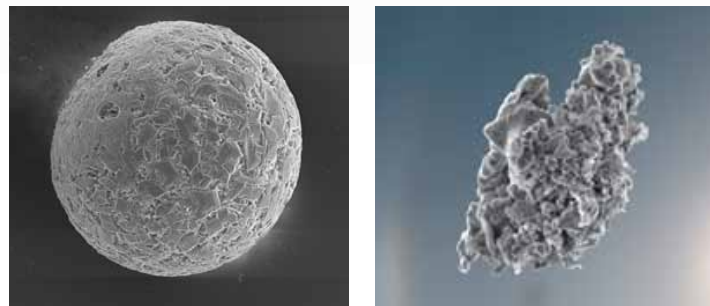
Fig. 14
Cosmic Dust Collection (Extraterrestrial Smithereens) (2010)

Seven repurposed satellite dishes work not to receive or send information, but to gather Interplanetary Dust Particles (IDPs). 40,000 tons of this near-invisible extraterrestrial matter enters Earth's atmosphere each year. Rare-earth magnets collect the particles due to their high iron content. These omnipresent IDPs evoke an image of an invisible accumulated mass — of infiltration and chaos, the presence of outer-space in our own atmosphere, and our location in its vastness.

The project, Cosmic Dust Collection {Extraterrestrial Smithereens}, takes the form of adapted satellite dishes working to collect Interplanetary Dust Particles (IDPs) as they continuously rain down through earth's outer atmosphere.



An average of 40ktons a year of this near-invisible extraterrestrial matter enters our atmosphere (100 tons a day), each particle no more than 0.1mm in size.



IDPs primarily include cometary dust, asteroidal dust, and Kuiper belt dust plus other smaller contributors. The dust is continually replenished by cometary sublimation, asteroid collisions and is ultimately blasted by inter-particle collisions, planetary accretion and scattering, evaporation, sputtering, and ejection from the solar system.

Interstellar Dust flows through the solar system, offering a tangible, physical link between our planetary system and the stars.

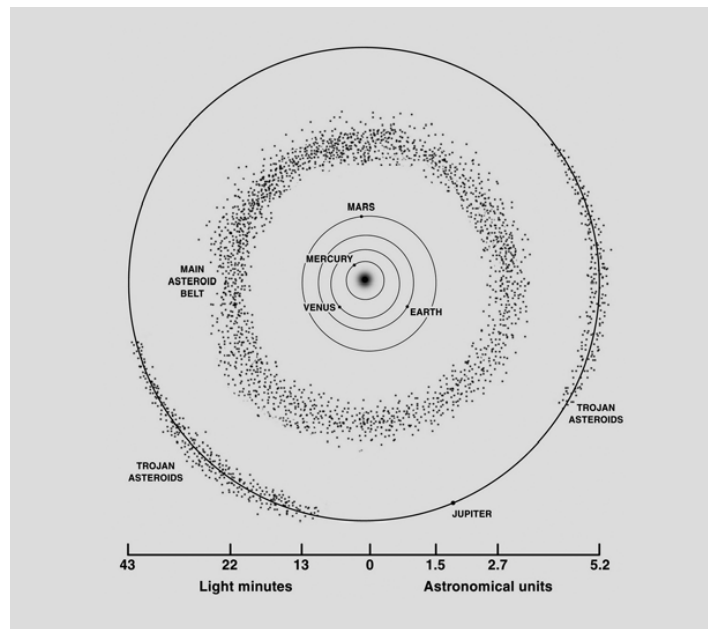
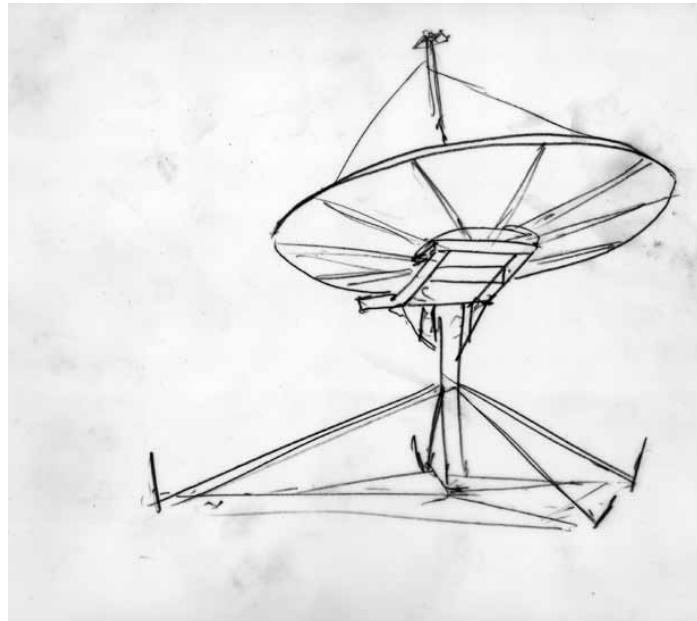
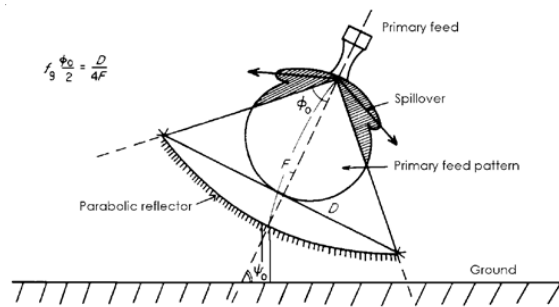


Fig. 15
Cosmic Dust Collection (Extraterrestrial Smithereens) (2010) (Catalogue entry)

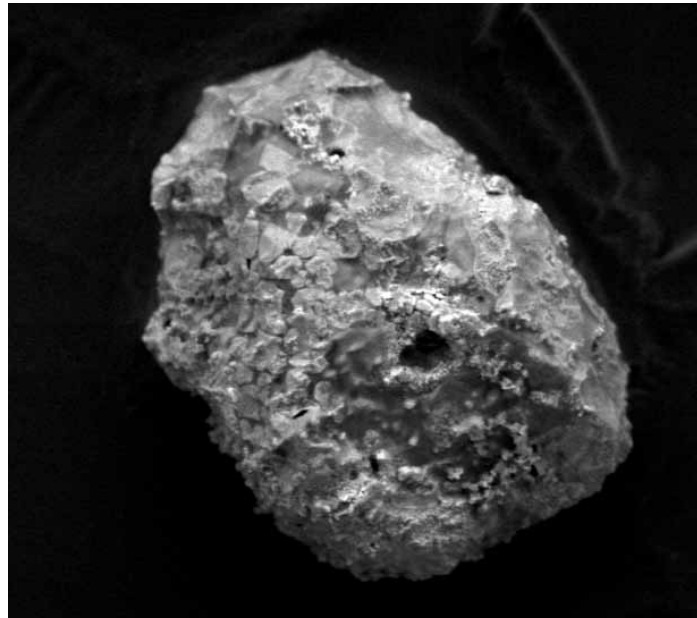
Satellite dishes act here not to transmit and receive microwaves but to accumulate a near imperceptible physical material. A cluster of satellite dishes point directly skyward, adapting a very simple technology used to collect IDP's. This technology was developed by Kenneth A. Farley, a Geologist and Planetary Science Professor at the California Institute of Technology. In the late 1990's Farley's system was developed alongside more sophisticated technology, and despite its simplicity it results in the collection of IDP's.



The apparatus uses strong rare earth magnets to which the Cosmic Dust is attracted due to its high magnetism. The water acts as a catchment area; Pumps submerged in the satellite dishes agitate the water so that any magnetic material passes over the plastic-coated magnet and become fixed. Terrestrial material with magnetic properties is also collected (airborne rust particles etc) these are later burnt off in a laboratory, thus leaving only the extraterrestrial material. The project expressly focuses on the collection and accumulation only.



In a cabinet sits a sample of cosmic dust from the Centre de Spectrométrie Nucléaire et de Spectrométrie de Masse (CSNSM) — Center Nuclear Spectrometry and of Mass Spectrometry, Paris, France. This extraterrestrial dust is near invisible to the naked eye — it sits sealed within a glass slide.



These omnipresent Interplanetary Dust Particles evoke an image of an invisible accumulative mass; of infiltration and chaos; the presence of outer-space in our own atmosphere, and our location in it's vastness.

Fig. 16
Cosmic Dust Collection (*Extraterrestiral Smithereens*) (2010) (Catalogue entry)



Fig. 17
Epitaph (2011)

A cabinet, with a mirrored base, plays daily host to a perfume sprayed on the mirror. A hole in the front of the cabinet becomes an aperture through which the viewer smells.



Fig. 18
Epitaph (2011) (detail)



Fig. 19
Untitled (2011)

Seven glass vials are filled with perfume. These lie in the gallery on a low plinth. The smell subtly emanates from the vials, spilling into the space.



Fig. 20
Detail
Untitled (2011) (detail)



Fig. 21
Funeral Lament in Glass (2011) (Documentation of production)

Bagpipes are attached to the end of the glassblowing pipe while the glass is molten. The bagpiper begins playing funeral laments; the expelled air from playing expands and gives shape to the glass.



Fig. 22
Funeral Lament in Glass (2011) (detail)



Fig. 23
Funeral Lament in Glass (2011) (detail)



Fig. 24
Funeral Lament in Glass (2011)



Fig. 25
Catching the Sea (2011)

An oversized glass vial is held open-ended on a coastline in an attempt to catch sea-spray. The foreshore is articulated as a zone where liquid meets solid — a threshold in which vapors are made. The vial is then closed and hung from the gallery wall next to a single image documenting the act.

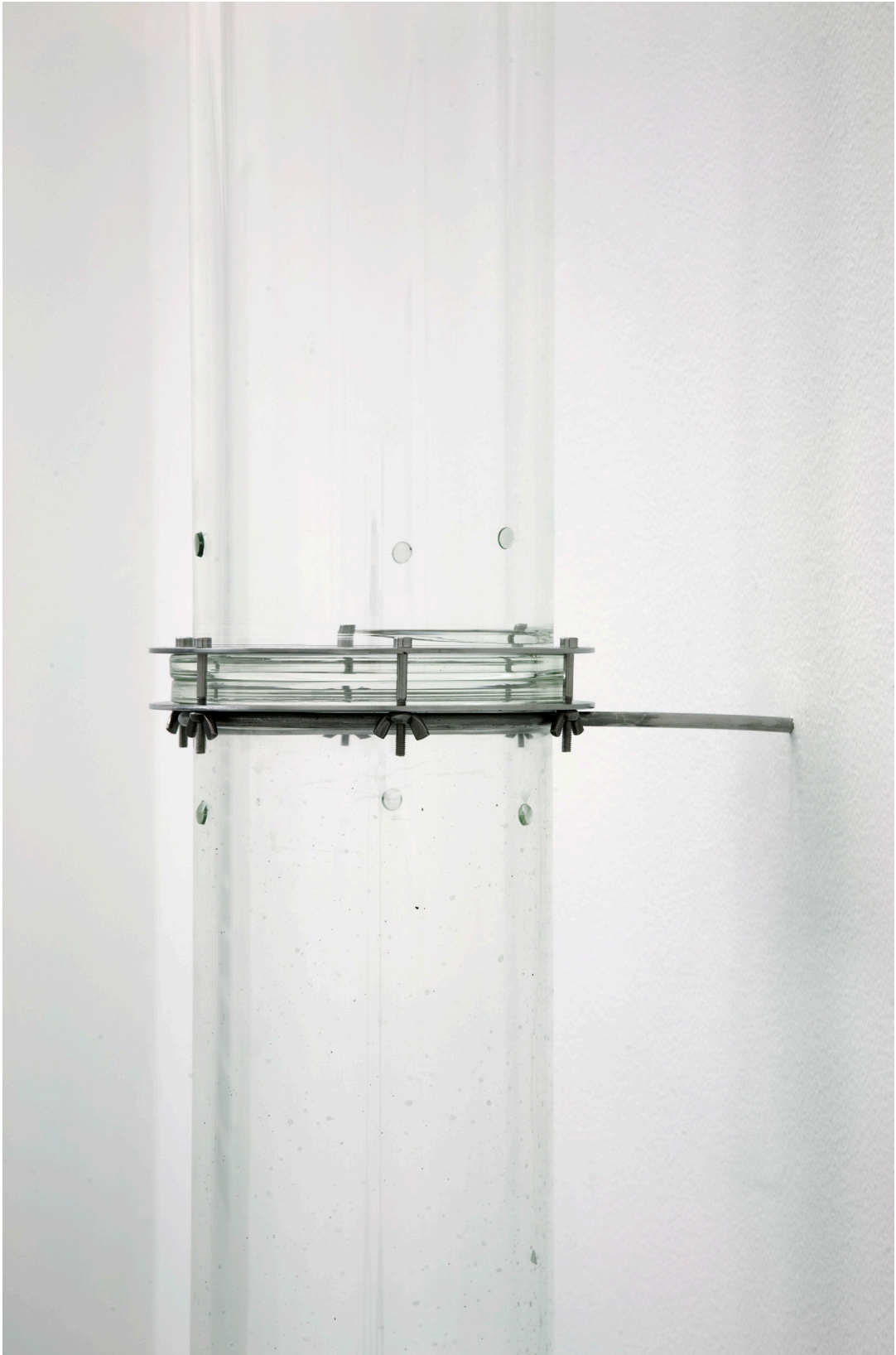


Fig. 26
Catching the Sea (2011) (detail)



Fig. 27
Catching the Sea (2011) (detail)



Fig. 28
Spoken Heredity Talismans, 2011

While the glass is in a molten state, the names of my ancestors are individually spoken into the glassblowing pipe. This renders language in glass form — the shape determined by the spoken word.



Fig. 29
Spoken Heredity Talismans (2011) (Studio production still)



Fig. 30
Spoken Heredity Talismans (2011) (detail)



Fig. 31
The Smell of an Empty Space (2011)

Within a mirrored case sits a venturi vaporiser. On a timer it activates every five minutes, releasing the perfume into the gallery atmosphere, where it hovers and clings to walls and audience alike.



Fig. 32
The Smell of an Empty Space (2011) (detail)



Fig. 33
The Smell of an Empty Space (2011) (detail)

The venturi vaporiser, concealed within the mirrored case.



Fig. 34
Celestial Fields 'Now' (2012) (detail)

Fifty-two 'locked groove' records lean against the wall, framing the room. A record player sits on the floor and continuously plays the same locked groove — my voice repeatedly saying the word 'now'. As the week progresses, the record degrades in quality. Each week the record is changed. Alongside this sound piece hang photographic prints on pure silk. These hang in the open doorways to the rooms, blowing in the breeze; they operate like diagrammatic keys to the work.



Fig. 35
Celestial Fields 'Now' (2012) (detail)



Fig. 36
Celestial Fields 'Now' (2012) (detail)



Fig. 37
Curse (2005)

A witch is called upon to place a curse on the corner of the gallery for the duration of the exhibition.



Fig. 38
Curse (2005) (detail)



Fig. 39
Portal to the Spirit World (2008)

With the assistance of a witch, a portal to the spirit world is opened in the gallery.



Fig. 40
Your Memory of Rain (2011)

An incision is made in the wall of the gallery, exposing the cavity space behind. Each day, the perfume is sprayed on concealed blotter paper inside the wall-space. A slight breeze in the cavity activates the perfume, allowing it to emmanate subtly from the wall. The viewer leans into the wall, becoming an active participant in the work. The perfume itself is reminiscent of rain in an anonymous city after a long dry spell; there are mid-tones of wet rust and newly laid concrete.



Fig. 41
Your Memory of Rain (2011)



Fig. 42
Your Memory of Rain (2011)

23. Table of Illustrations

Figs. 1 & 2

Mitchell, D.

Various Solid States (2011)

Radiant Matter I, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand

De-humidifier, water, plaster, aluminium, bubblewrap, sieve

1000 mm x 5000 mm x 5000 mm

Photo: Bryan James

Figs. 3, 4, 5 & 6

Mitchell, D.

Gateway to the Etheric Realm, (2011)

Radiant Matter II, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

Powder-coated steel, spell, spell materials

6000 mm x 6000 mm x 3250 mm

Photo: Bill Nichol

Figs. 7 & 8

Mitchell, D.

Conjuring Form, (2008)

Art Statements, Art 39 Basel, Basel, Switzerland

Polished Steel, spell, spell materials, inkjet print

4500 mm x 3000 mm x 600 mm

Photo: Artist

Figs. 9, 10 & 11

Mitchell, D.

Celestial Fields (2012)

Roundtable, Gwangju Biennale, 2012, Gwangju, South Korea

Powder-coated steel, shamanistic work, glass, silk, saliva, drywall, timber

9000 mm diameter

Photo: Artist

Figs. 12, 13 & 14

Mitchell, D.

The Dragon, The Purple Forbidden Enclosure (2011)

Open House, Singapore Biennale, 2011, Singapore

Polished steel, geomancy, spiritual intervention, blessed water, plastic, string, pine, glass, obsidian

10000 mm x 5000 mm x 3500 mm

Photo: Courtesy Singapore Biennale

Figs. 15, 16 & 17

Mitchell, D.

Extraterrestrial Smithereens (2010)

Living in Evolution, Busan Biennale, 2010, Busan, South Korea

Satellite dishes, interplanetary dust particles, rare earth magnets, water, pumps

Dimensions variable

Photo: Artist

Figs. 18 & 19

Mitchell, D.

Epitaph (2011)

Radiant Matter II, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

Perfume, mirror, cabinet

1030 mm x 1830 mm x 860 mm (cabinet)

Photo: Bill Nichol

Figs. 20 & 21

Mitchell, D.

Untitled (2011)

Susanne Vielmetter Projects, Los Angeles, California, United States of America

Perfume, glass, plinth

1500 mm x 1500 mm x 300 mm (plinth)

Photo: Courtesy Susanne Vielmetter Projects

Figs. 22, 23 & 24

Mitchell, D.

Bagpipe Talismans (Funeral Lament in Glass) (2011)

Radiant Matter II, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

Glass, bagpipe air, mirror, cabinet

6 x 350 mm x 200 mm diameter (glass), 2270 mm x 1060 mm x 2110mm (cabinet)

Photo: Bill Nichol

Fig. 25

Mitchell, D.

Bagpipe Talismans (Funeral Lament in Glass) (2011)

Documentation of production, *Radiant Matter II*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

Glass, bagpipe air, mirror, cabinet

6 x 350 mm x 200 mm diameter (glass), 2270 mm x 1060 mm x 2110 mm (cabinet)

Photo: Artist

Figs. 26 & 27

Mitchell, D.

Landing the Sea (2011)

Radiant Matter I, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand

Glass, sea-spray, silicon, digital c-type print

1600 mm x 200 mm diameter (glass), 400 mm x 400 mm (frame)

Photo: Bryan James

Fig. 28

Mitchell, D.

Landing the Sea (2011)

Radiant Matter I, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand

Glass, sea-spray, silicon, digital c-type print

1600 mm x 200 mm diameter (glass), 400 mm x 400 mm (frame)

Photo: Artist

Figs. 29 & 30

Mitchell, D.

Spoken Heredity Talismans (2011)

Radiant Matter II, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

Glass, breath, mirror, cabinet

7 x 220 mm x 70 mm diameter (glass), 2270 mm x 1060 mm x 2110 mm (cabinet)

Photo: Bill Nichol

Fig. 31

Mitchell, D.

Spoken Heredity Talismans (2011)

Production still, *Radiant Matter II*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

Glass, breath, mirror, cabinet

7 x 220 mm x 70 mm diameter (glass), 2270 mm x 1060 mm x 2110 mm (cabinet)

Photo: Artist

Figs. 32 & 33

Mitchell, D.

The Smell of an Empty Space (Vaporised) (2011)

Radiant Matter III, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand

Perfume, venturi vaporiser, glass, air pump, pine, mirror

312 mm x 478 mm x 282 mm

Photo: Sam Hartnett

Fig. 34

Mitchell, D.

The Smell of an Empty Space (Vaporised) (2011)

Venturi vaporiser, *Radiant Matter III*, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand

Perfume, venturi vaporiser, glass, air pump, pine, mirror

312 mm x 478 mm x 282 mm

Photo: Artist

Figs. 35 & 36

Mitchell, D.

Curse (2005)

Starkwhite, Auckland, New Zealand

Polished steel, curse, inkjet print

Dimensions variable

Photo: Artist

Fig. 37

Mitchell, D.

Portal to the Spirit World (2008)

Starkwhite, Auckland, New Zealand

Polished steel, spell, inkjet print

Dimensions variable

Photo: Louise Hyatt

Figs. 38, 39 & 40

Mitchell, D.

Your Memory of Rain (Released) (2011)

Radiant Matter I, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand

Perfume, cut hole

120 mm diameter

Photo: Bryan James

Figs. 41 & 42

Mitchell, D.

Celestial Fields (Now Recordings) (2012)

Roundtable, Gwangju Biennale, 2012, Gwangju, South Korea

52 x 12i playable records, record player, stereo, silk

52 x 305 mm (records), 7000 mm x 4000 mm (space)

Photo: Artist

24. Appendix — Contextualising Commentary of Exhibition

The following pages document the final exhibition for my Master of Philosophy (Art & Design), which took place at St. Paul Street Gallery, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland.

The exhibition consisted solely of a new work *Illuminated Etheric Realm* (2012), which posited itself as a conceptual conundrum.

The viewer encounters ‘plastic’ material or components that act as armatures, or aerials for transmitting the work, which is ostensibly unseen.

The presentation of *Illuminated Etheric Realm* (2012) in this instance invokes questions of belief. Firstly, through the belief in the possibility of a semiotic device’s capability of pointing to difference — through the dependency on the difference in the title of the work (as well as year of production) from that of an earlier work of mine, *Gateway to the Etheric Realm* (2011) where obvious elements of connection between the works raise questions about difference and essences and what is essential in each work of art, and how the work is constituted between the virtual and the actual. These interpenetrating qualities help to open up ways in which the work communicates with past work, and perhaps future work. Secondly, the difference the title accentuates between these two works mitigates the physical components and allows the work to operate beyond the visible and to become a divining device (an armature, an aerial) with which a conceptual object is built that proliferates in the spectator’s imagination, rather than on the gallery floor in front of them.

The act of re-dress is employed here as a tactical device to point towards that which remains unseen, yet operational in the work. *Illuminated Etheric Realm* (2012) and *Gateway to the Etheric Realm* (2011) both operate beyond the visible and the knowable — problematising our reliance on a retinal approach (which sees similarity, not difference), and proffering their substantial differences to reside in an incorporeal field of activity which hovers and unfurls around the work and proliferates outwards, in an invisible effluvial drift.

25. Appendix — Documentation of Exhibition



Fig. 43 & 44
Illuminated Ethereal Realm (2012) (process of installing the work)

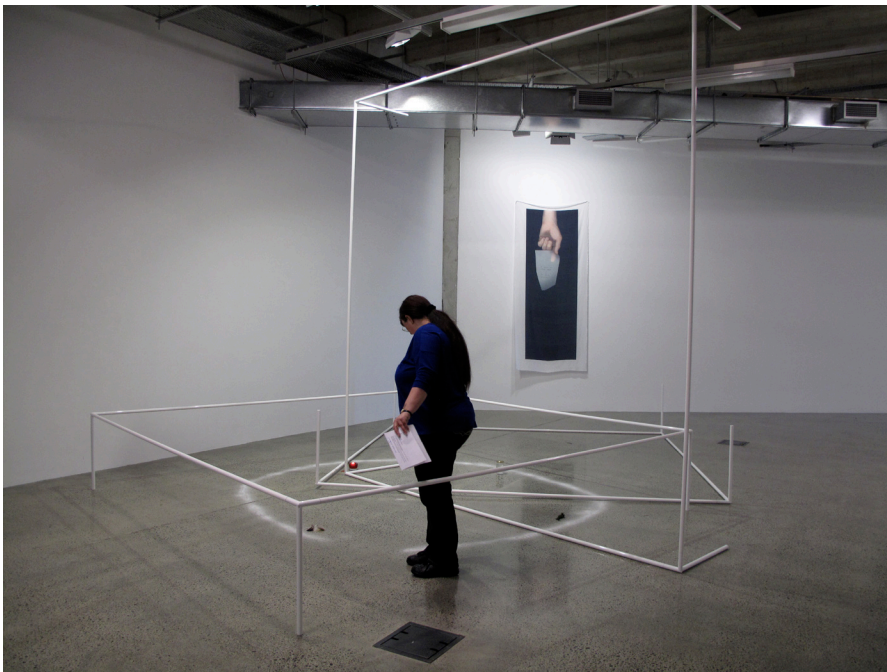


Fig. 45 & 46
Illuminated Ethereal Realm (2012) (process of installing the work)



Fig. 47
Illuminated Etheric Realm (2012)



Fig. 48
Illuminated Etheric Realm (2012) (detail)



Fig. 49
Illuminated Etheric Realm (2012)



Fig. 50
Illuminated Etheric Realm (2012) (detail)

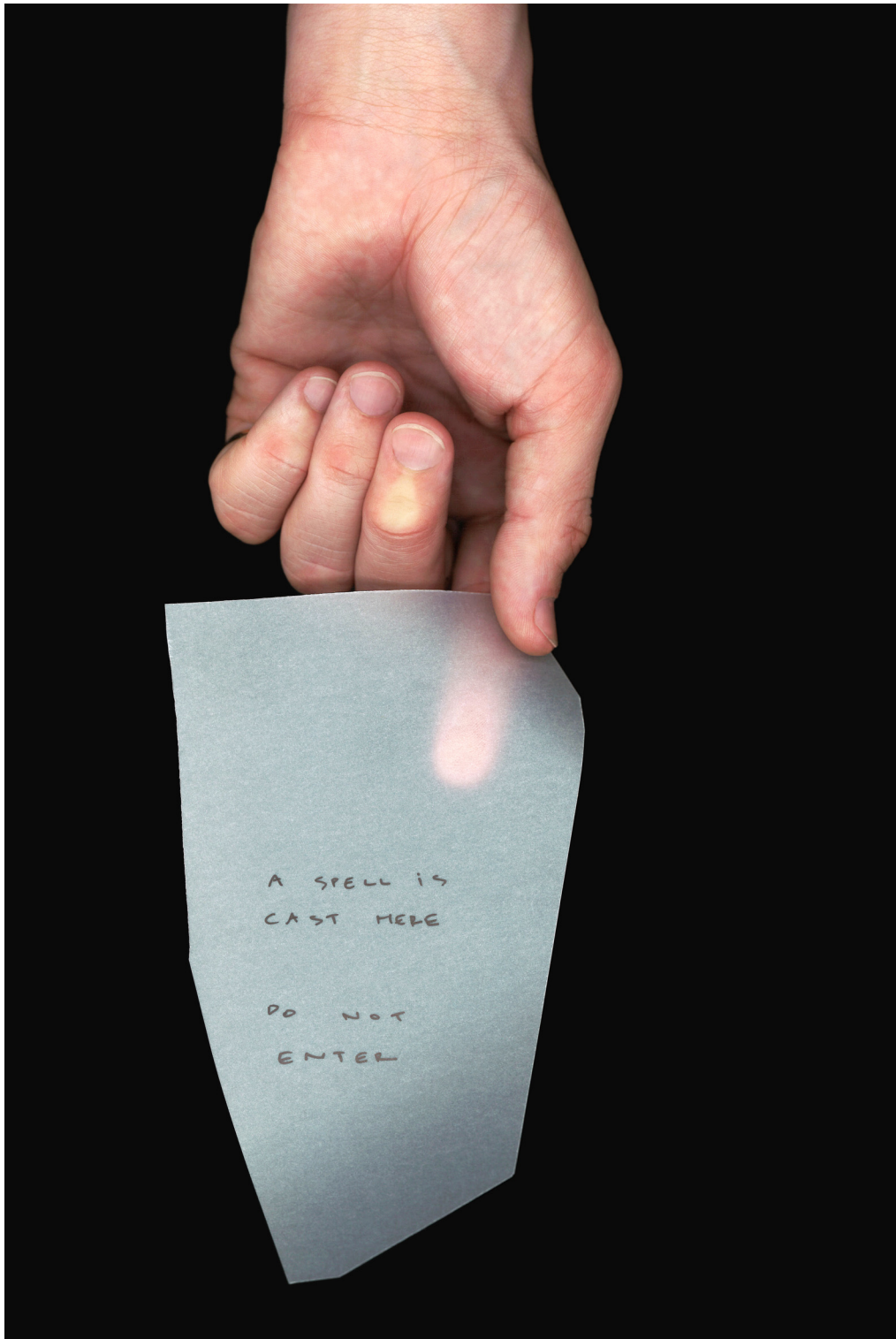


Fig. 51
Illuminated Etheric Realm (2012) (detail)

26. Appendix — Table of Illustrations

Figs. 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50 & 51

Mitchell, D.

Illuminated Etheric Realm (2012)

Graduation Exhibition, St Paul Street Gallery, Auckland University of Technology

Powder-coated steel, spell, spell materials, silk

5000 mm x 5000 mm x 3250 mm

Photos: Artist