

RE-WORKING

the TEXT

Linda Ekstrom

the spool of thread
 I am looking at my work
 thread on it
 I know I should hood
 line it
 to one of the
 from the
 remember
 white black
 there was
 would be
 would be
 to sew
 small black
 long end
 all
 put the
 make
 slow
 word
 perfect
 hard

*...I am in love with words.
They are doves falling out of the ceiling.
They are six holy oranges sitting in my lap. -- Anne Sexton*

I have long been fascinated with text. I work with it in ways that challenge legibility to bring words into the space of visual art. Graphic artists, typographers, and conceptual artists from the sixties, have informed my practice for the ways they blur the boundaries between reading, writing and making. Words are the language of writers, poets and designers, yet many visual artists also work with words, composing them as imagery and objects.

I explore three strategies for using words in visual ways: deciphering literacy, symbolic and iconographic association, and fragmentation and reordering.

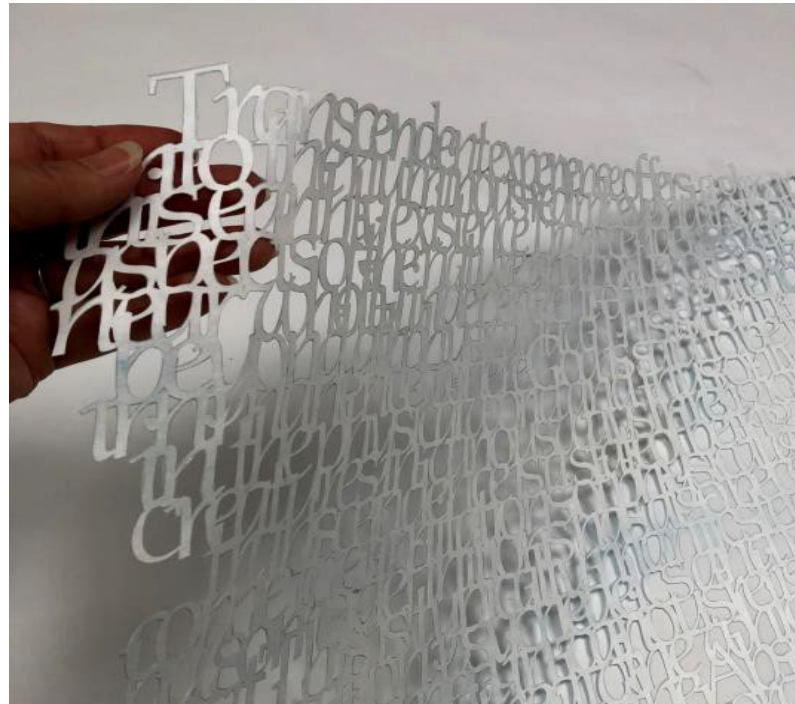
Deciphering is the way we uncover and translate meaning. In many of my text works the viewer has to grapple with order, unscramble, or read through the layers in order to decipher what the words are saying.



Symbolic and iconographic associations depend on a system of understanding on the part of a group. Many of my altered book works, such as the altered Bibles, have inherent cultural, historical, and religious meaning that is dependent upon being readable. Can books be interpreted in new forms that express symbolic meaning beyond intellectual understanding? Can a tangle of words serve as an icon?



Fragmentation and reordering occur when I cut apart, erase, or alter texts. Reordering of the fragments means readability is converted into another state, or another way of reading. What happens to the potency of that original meaning when severed from, reordered or condensed into a new state? What is missing or scrambled can become a catalyst of something new.



Readability is a broad term applied to the way we interpret the world around us. How much latitude do we have with legibility of text? For the most part, by fragmenting, reordering and overlaying words, my text works are no longer readable in the conventional way. I think of what I am doing as teasing at illiteracy to achieve *visual* literacy



meditation on house and universe, 2019
ink on paper

96 x 15 x 12

I created the work by simultaneously reading and writing (wreading) words from Gaston Bachelard's, *Poetics of Space*. The long scrolls are twisted and coiled together then knotted, drawing together exterior and interior notions of space.



Your one true home,
2018 ink on paper

126h x 36w x 30d

The text consists of daily meditations and stream of consciousness responses to the writings of Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh. Each scroll is twisted and gathered into a sculptural tangle of long twisted tendrils.



intimate immensity, 2018
ink on paper

This work is a reflection on the spatial expanse of words by Gaston Bachelard. I simultaneously wrote phrases on long scrolls as I read them (wreading). The expanse of language is coiled into a closed form



De Notre Temps (In Our Time), 2020
artists' book, edition of 3

Box: 18w x 13d x 1.75h (size varies with display)

Hand embroidered Italian Cotton, letterpress print on wood paper, digital print on synthetic cloth, the cloth bound box is covered in book cloth printed from a photo of the sky, mylar mirror constellations inside the box.



De Notre Temps (In our Time), 2020
edition of 3

Three lines from Paul Éluard's Poem, "De Notre Temp" inspired the concept for this work. I discovered the lines in, *The Poetics of Space*, by Gaston Bachelard in the chapter, "House and Universe." Upon further research I discovered two versions of the poem in Éluard's book, *Dignes de Vivre*.

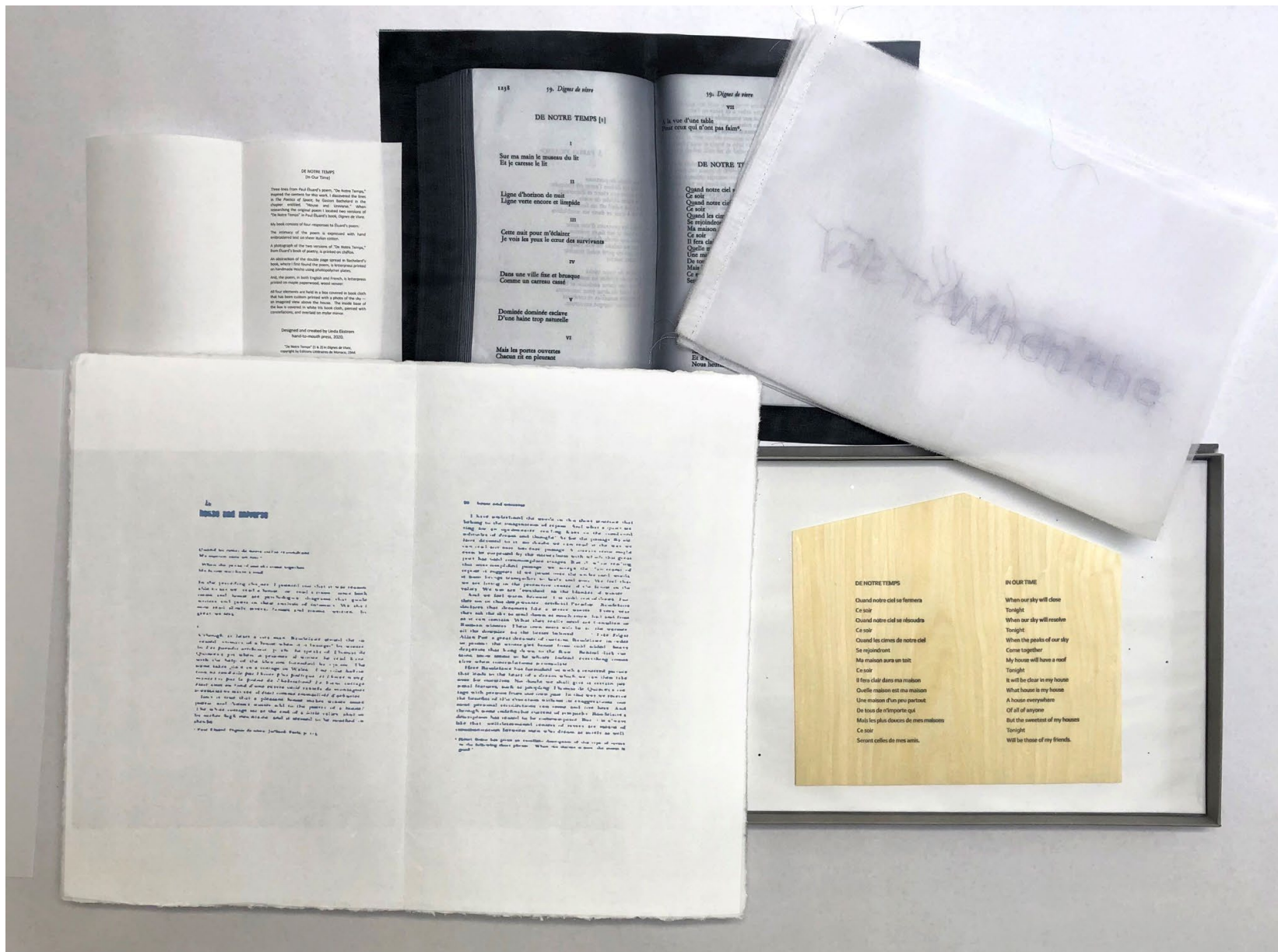
The artists' book consists of four responses to the poem:

- The intimacy of the text that caught my attention is expressed with hand-embroidery on Italian Cotton
- A photograph of the page spread from *Dignes de Vivre*, is printed on sheer fabric and offers both versions of the poem.
- A letterpress printed abstraction of the page-spread from Bachelard's book blurs the text, as memory fades details.
- The poem in both French and English is letterpress printed on wood paper and cut into the shape of a house.

A photo of the sky, printed on cotton, becomes the imagined view of the sky above, that wraps around the box, that becomes the house to hold the items. Inside the box, the base is pierced with constellation patterns revealing mirrored mylar peeking through like tiny stars.



The open box shows the colophon (left), and a photo image of the page spread with both versions of the Éluard's poems in French (right). The photograph is printed on silky fabric.



Bottom left: A letterpress print of a blurred page spread taken from Gaston Bachelard's book, *Poetics of Space* where he quotes a phrase from Éluard's poem "De Notre Temps".

Upper left: Colophon.

Center top: A photo of a page spread printed on sheer fabric, showing both versions of Éluard's poem, "De Notre Temps," in French

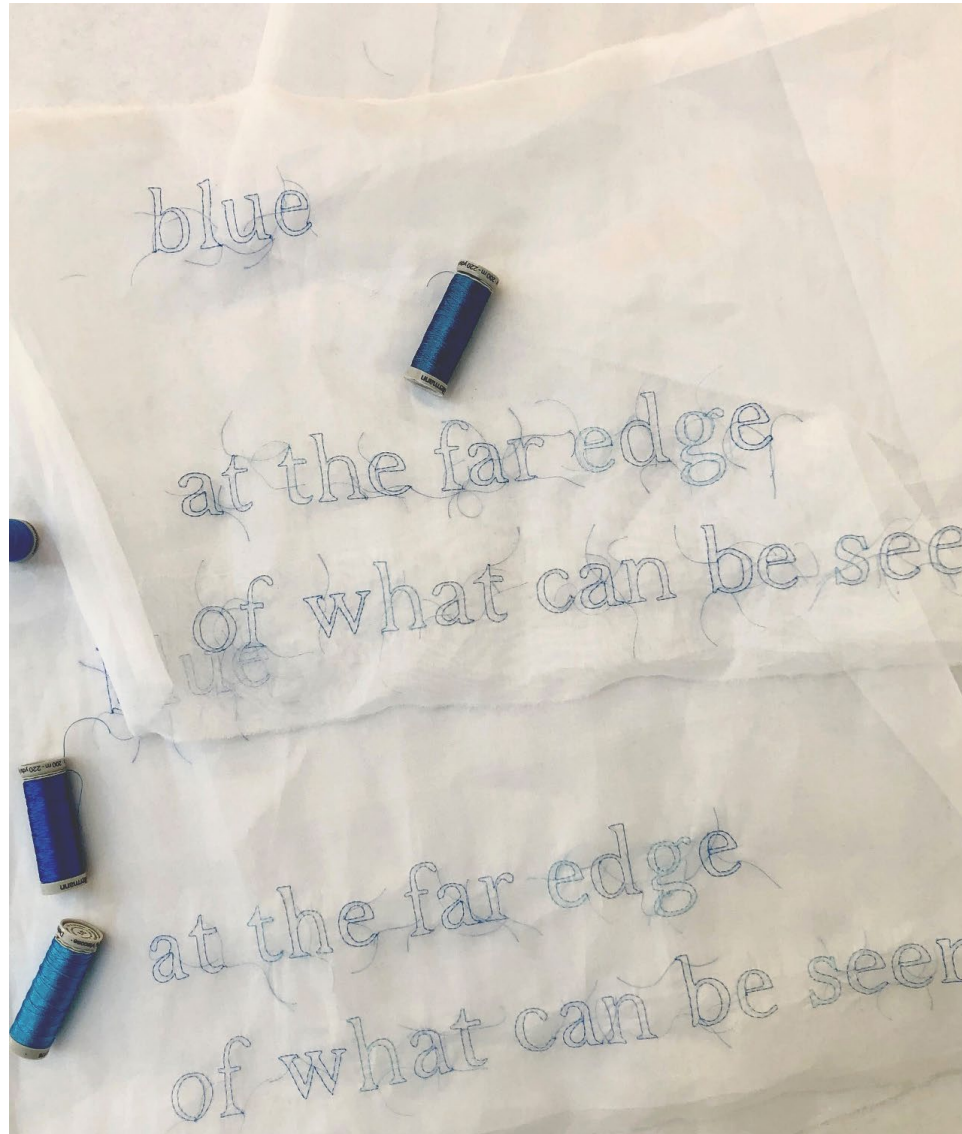
Upper right: The text of the poem phrase discovered in Bachelard's book is embroidered on Italian cotton.

Lower right: The full version of the poem is letterpress printed on wood paper in both the original French and the English translation.



Accordion scroll book, embroidered on Italian Cotton. Shown unfurled.

*When the peaks of our sky come together
My house will have a roof*



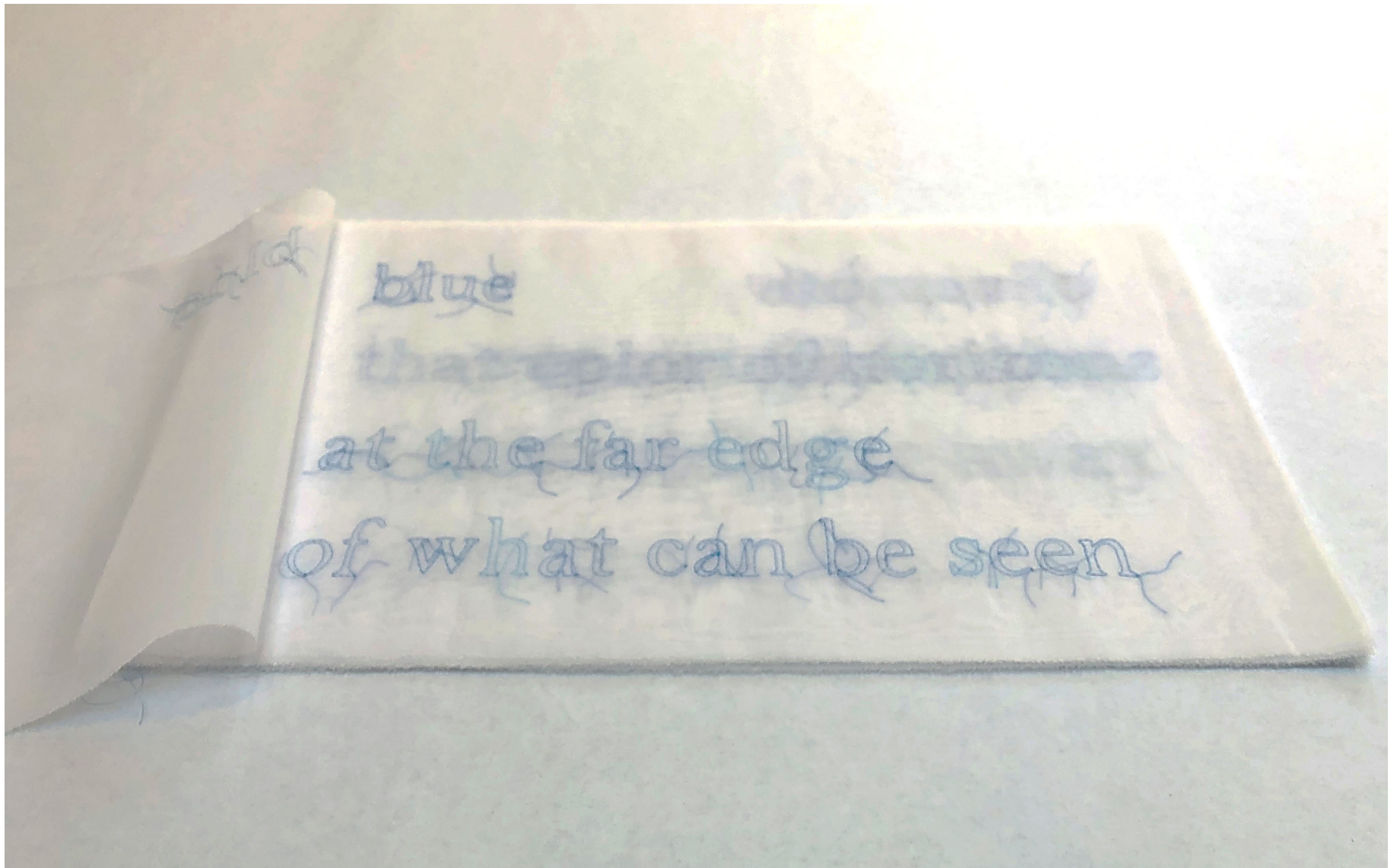
Meditation on Blue, 2022

edition of 2 (in progress)

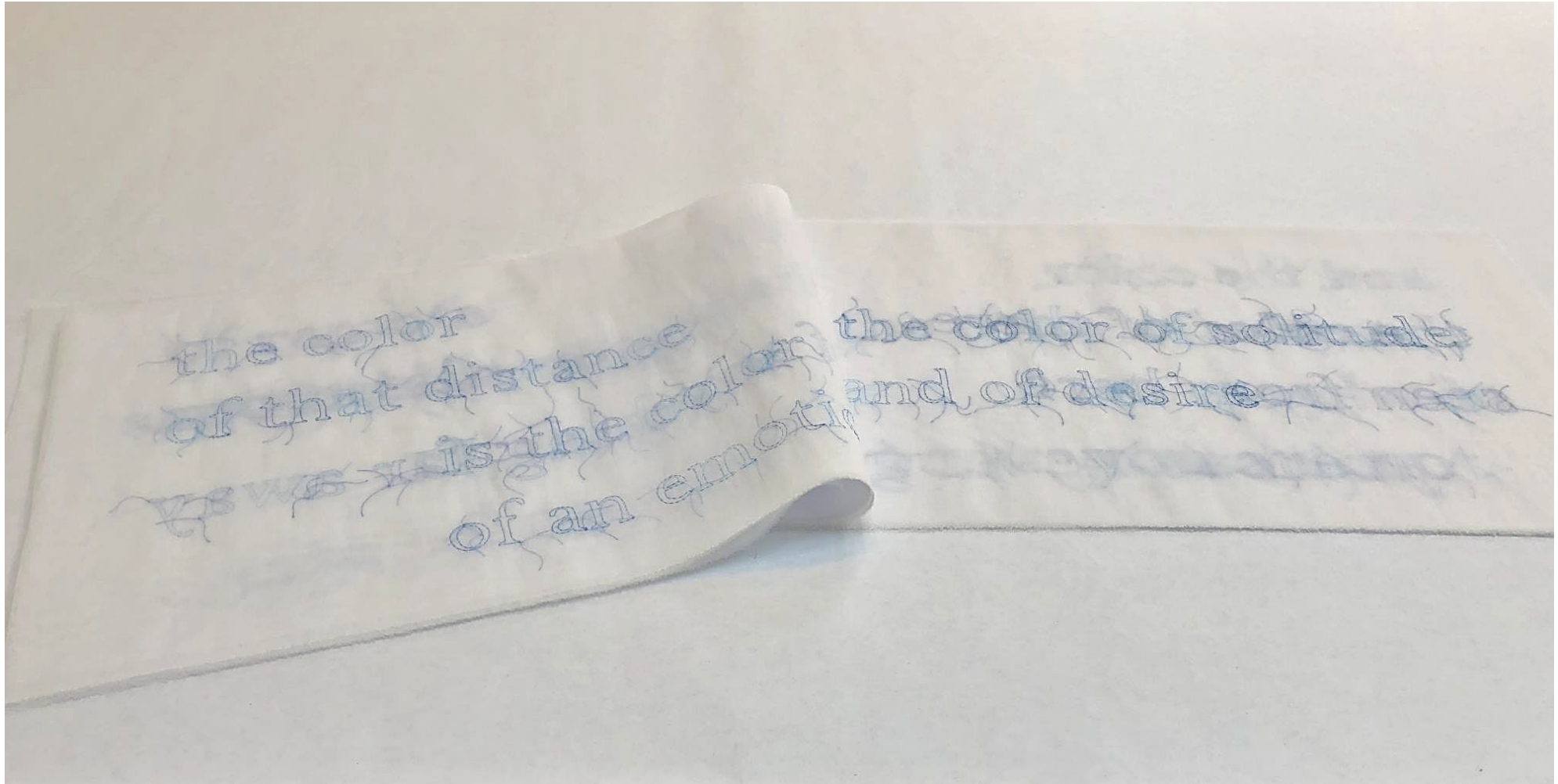
box: 20 x 12 x 2 (size varies with display)

Thread embroidery on Italian cotton, erased pages, monotype print, digital print on silky cloth, cloth bound box

Meditation on Blue is inspired by the chapter, "The Distance of Blue," in Rebecca Solnit's book, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*.



A quote from the book is embroidered on to Italian cotton. The pages are bound together to create an accordion book that can be read page-by-page, or unfurled to reveal the full length of the form.



The pages are sheer enough to show faint text words and phrases on the following page spreads, giving movement to the book. The threads are tied off leaving tails to reveal the process of sewing.



blue

at the far edge
of what can be seen

color
of that dist
is the
of on

the color
and of d

nges

here

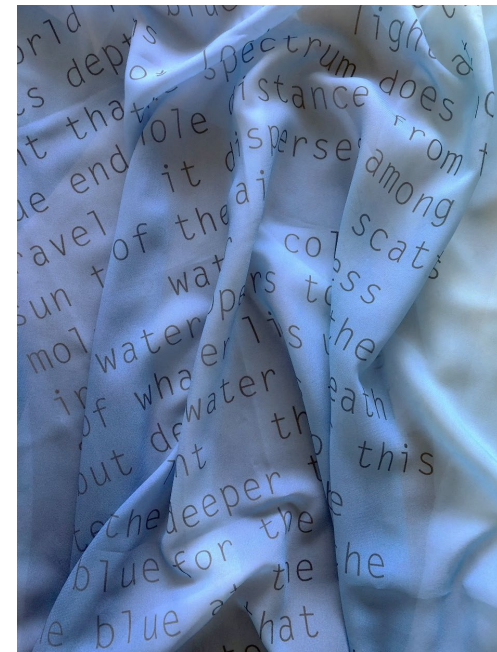
the color of

you

color

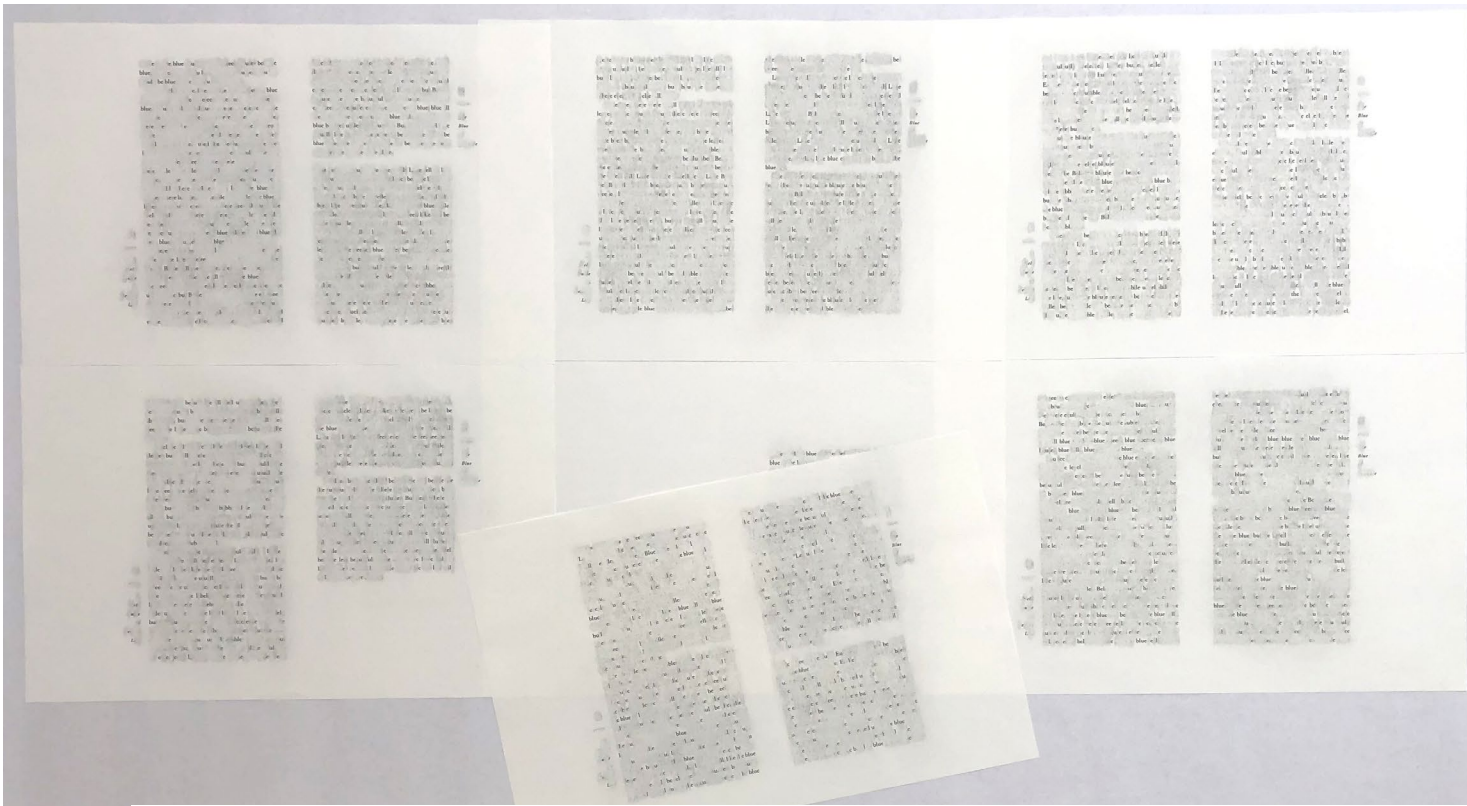
an

the world is blue at its edges and
in its depths this blue is the
light that got lost light at the
blue end of the spectrum does not
travel the whole distance from the
sun to us it disperses among the
molecules of the air it scatters
in water water is colorless
shallow water appears to be the
color of whatever lies underneath
it but deep water is full of this
scattered light the purer the
water the deeper the blue the
sky is blue for the same reason
but the blue at the horizon the
blue of land that seems to be
dissolving into the sky is a
deeper dreamier melancholy blue
the blue at the farthest reaches of
the places where you see for miles
the blue of distance this light
that does not touch us does not
travel the whole distance the
light that gets lost gives us the
beauty of the world so much of
which is in the color blue



A longer passage from the chapter
is printed on silky fabric against a
watery blue background.

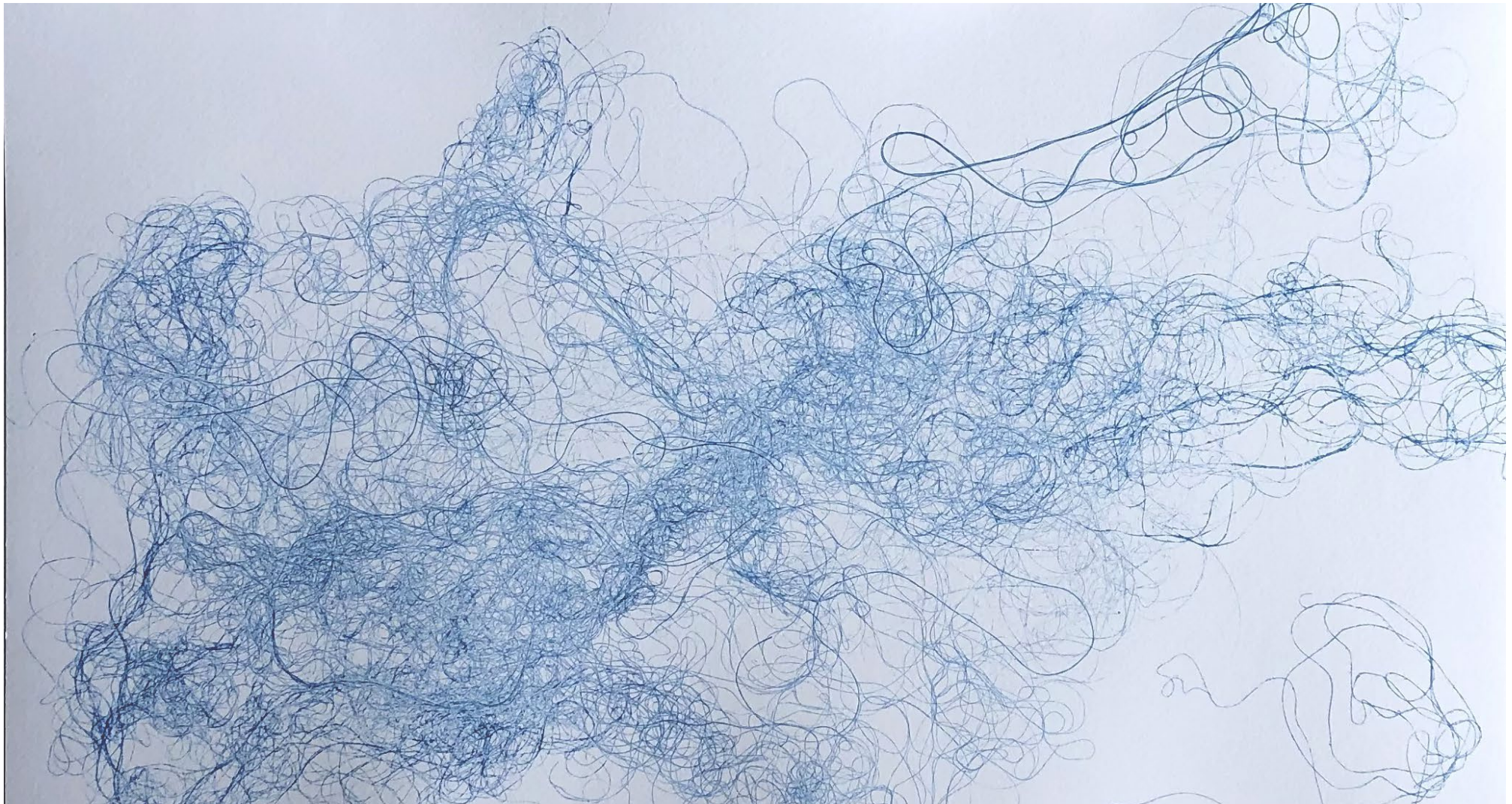
This component of the book can
be unfolded and hung on the wall.



The text from the chapter has been erased leaving only the letters *b, l, u* and *e*, and the words *blue*. The pages will be bound into an accordion fold book to accompany the piece.

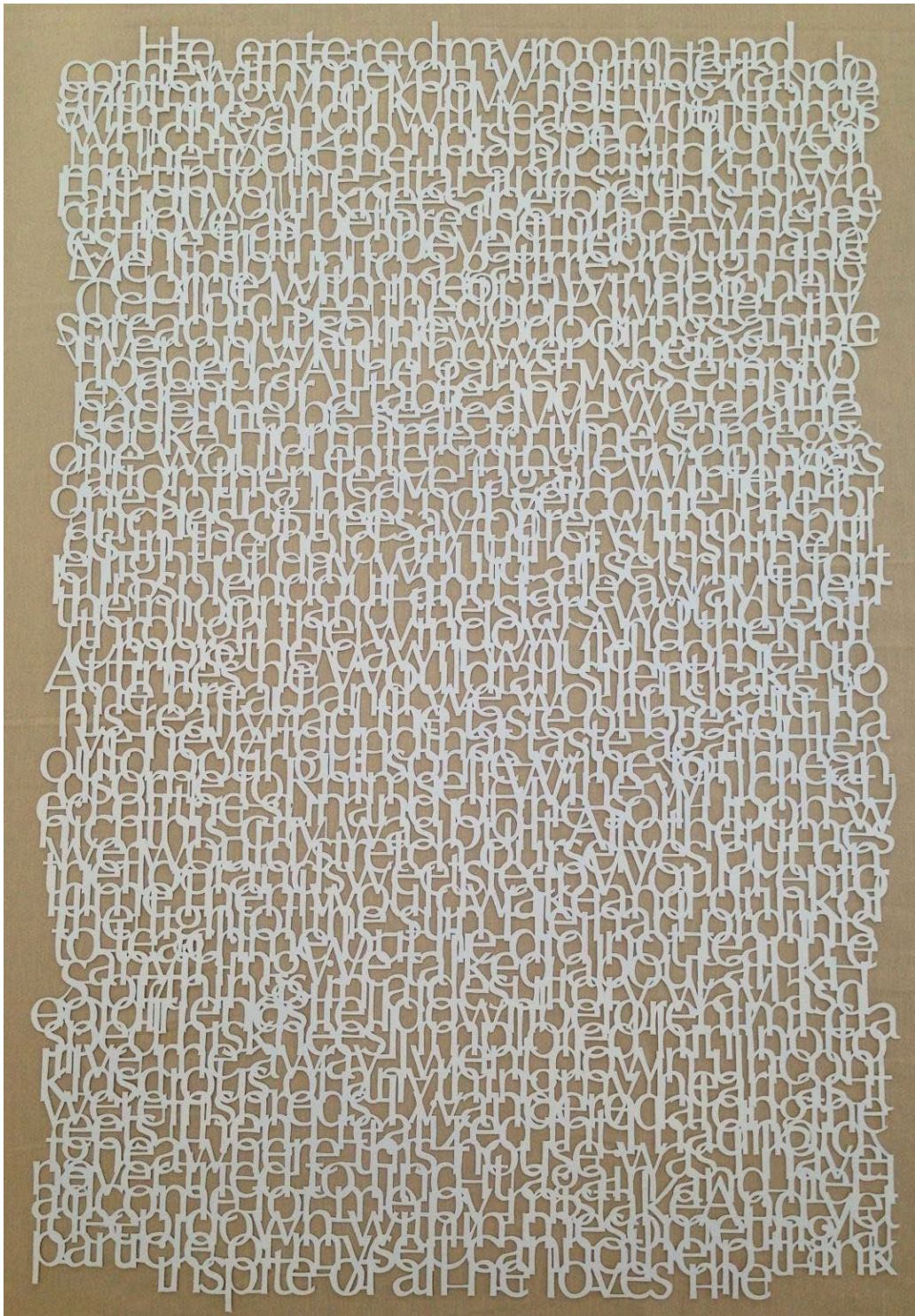
e e e e u e u
L e e e e e u e e e
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e e u e e e e e blue l
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e e l u e e
blue e l l e e e
e l e l e blue ll blue
bul u l e e e l l e e
e e e e e e e l l e
e e l l e e e e e
e e l l l l l
e u e l e
e e l e e ble e l e e
l e e e u l l e e ll
u e e l l e u e l e e
e e u e e l e e e e u
e b e l e e ll e e b e e

e u e e e l l e blue e
l e e e e e l e e e e
e e e e b e u l e e
e a e u e l e u e e e
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u l e e e e
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e e e e ll l e e b e
e e e l e e e E e e e
e l e e e e e e b l
e e e u e r r e b e e u
e e e u e e e
ble u l l b e e e e
e e e e e e e l l e ll
u e e
e e e e u Eu e b e
e blue e E l e b e



A final component of *Meditation on Blue* compilation is a monotype of thread printed on the etching press to suggest a spatial and topographical element to the microcosm within the macrocosm.

All of these components will be contained within a cloth bound box

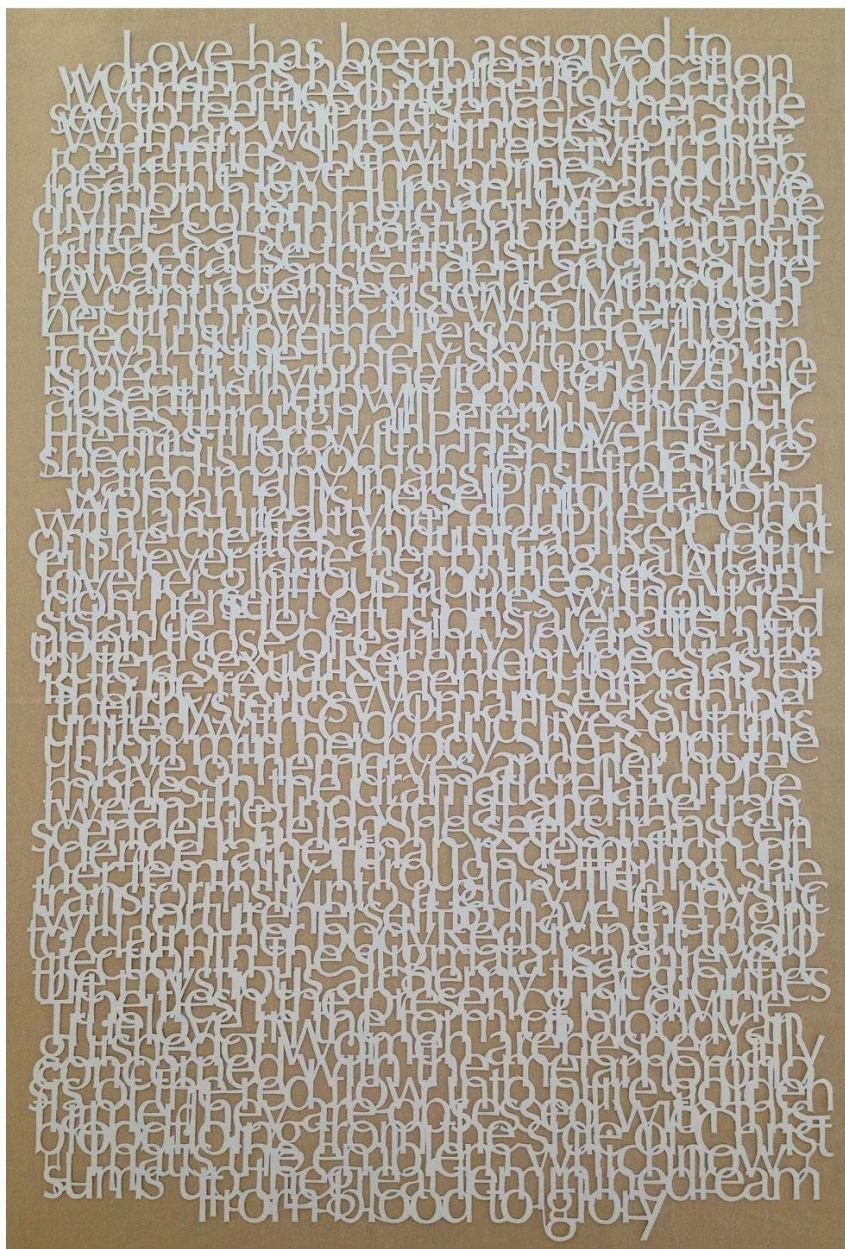


Mystic: Simone de Beauvoir, 2016

hand cut Tyvek, acrylic paint
39h X 25w

The Mystic series is a meditation on the mystical experiences of three women, Simone de Beauvoir, Simone Weil, and Teresa of Avila.

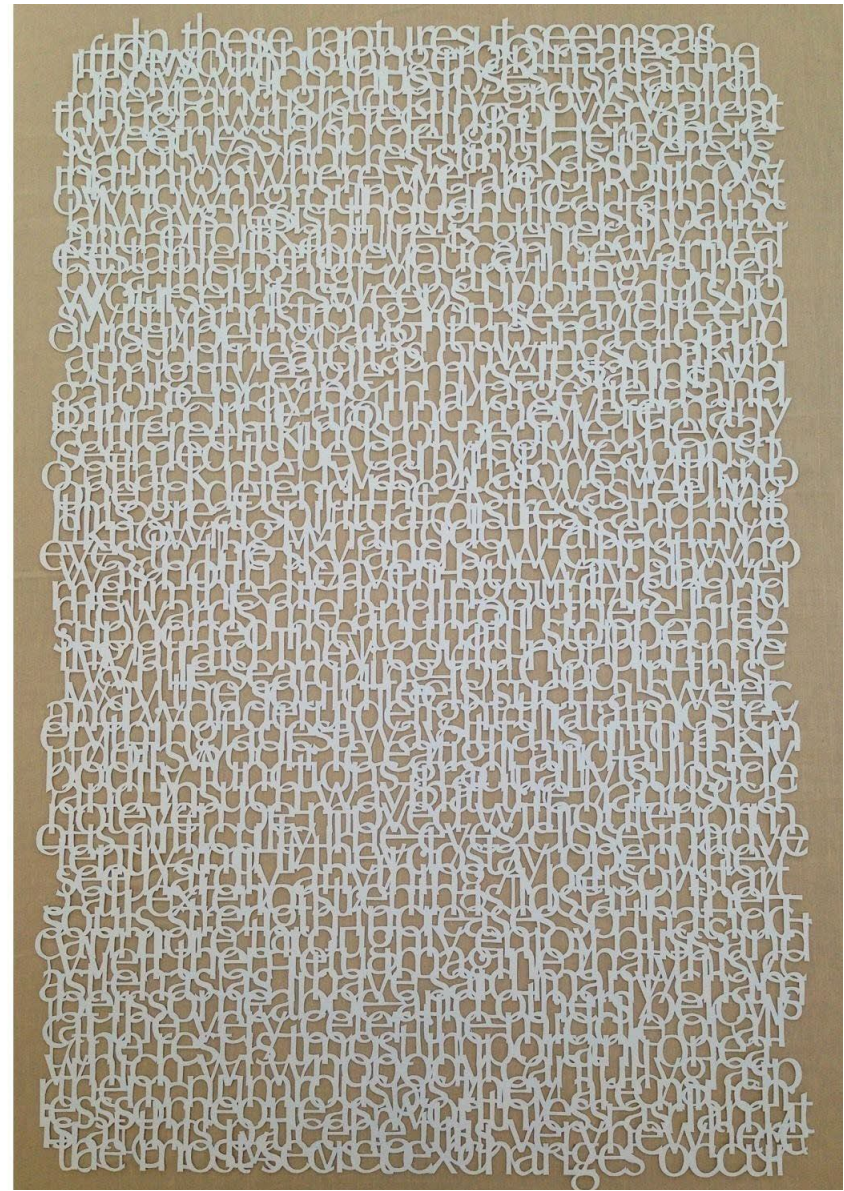
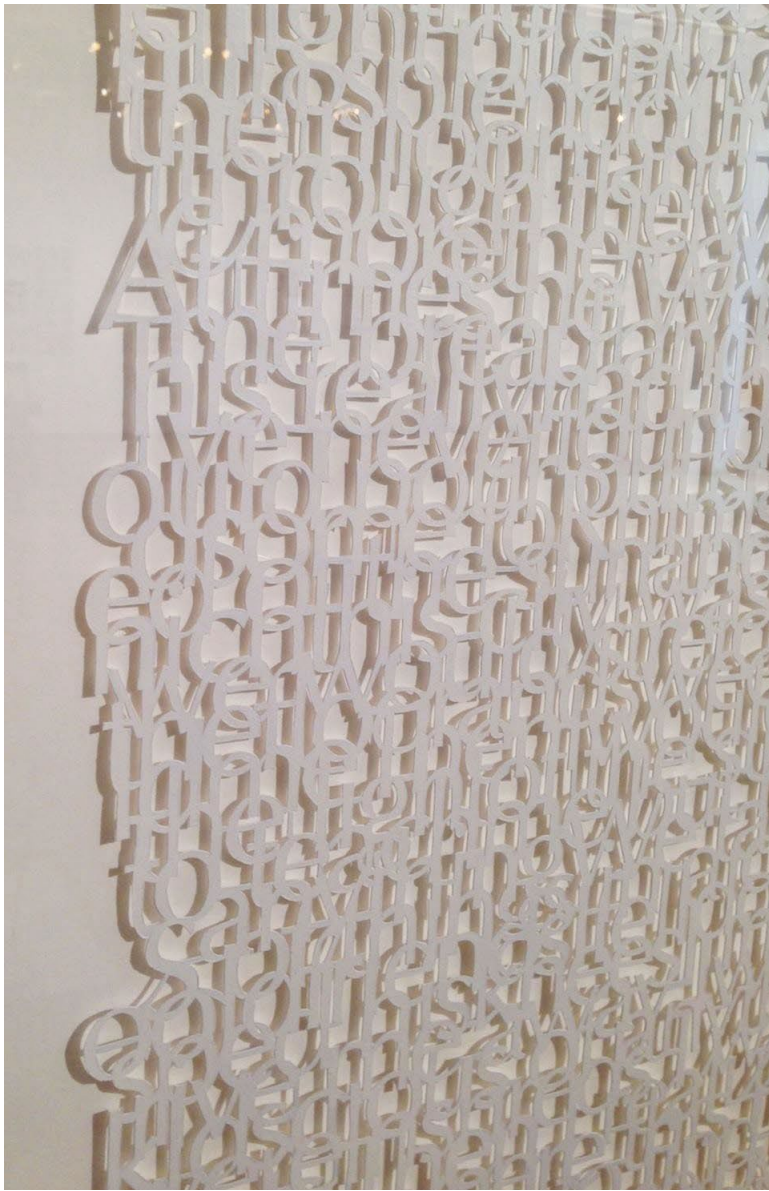
Each page was cut by hand transforming their words into lacy patterns of letters. I wanted to create a symbolic form for the power of each woman's experience and voice. Their words served as the material I used to create their portraits. The work embodies a sense of their essence, as an icon is believed to embody a presence.



Mystic: Simone Weil, 2016
39h X 25w
hand cut Tyvek, acrylic paint

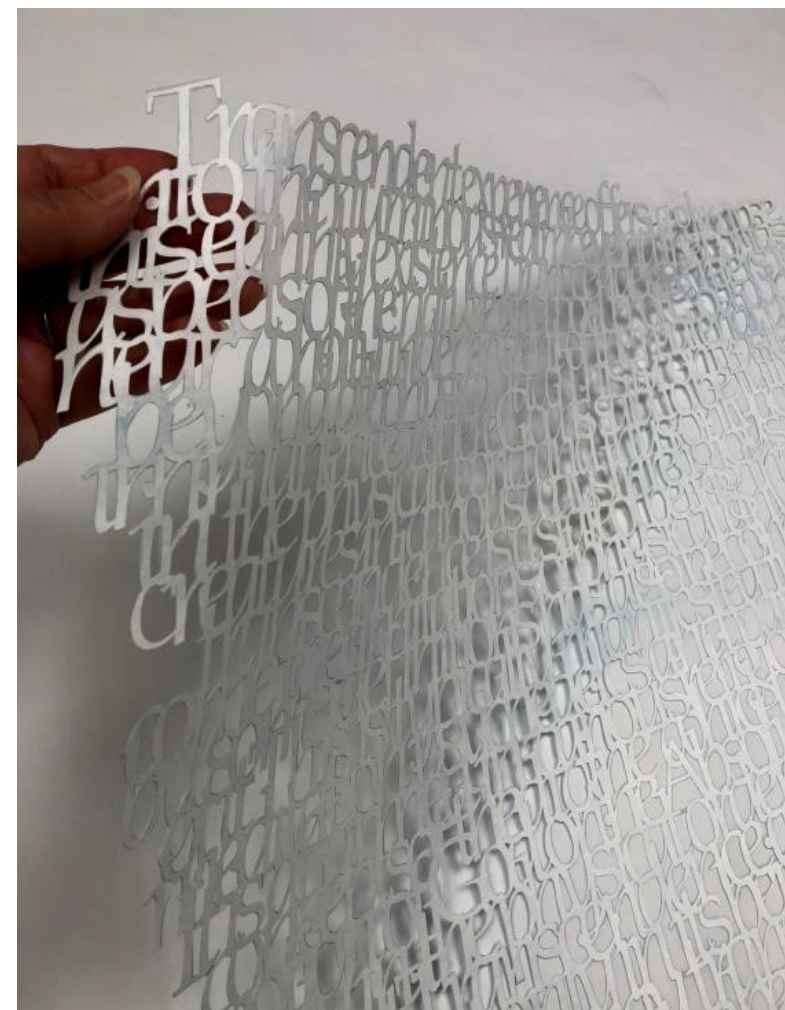
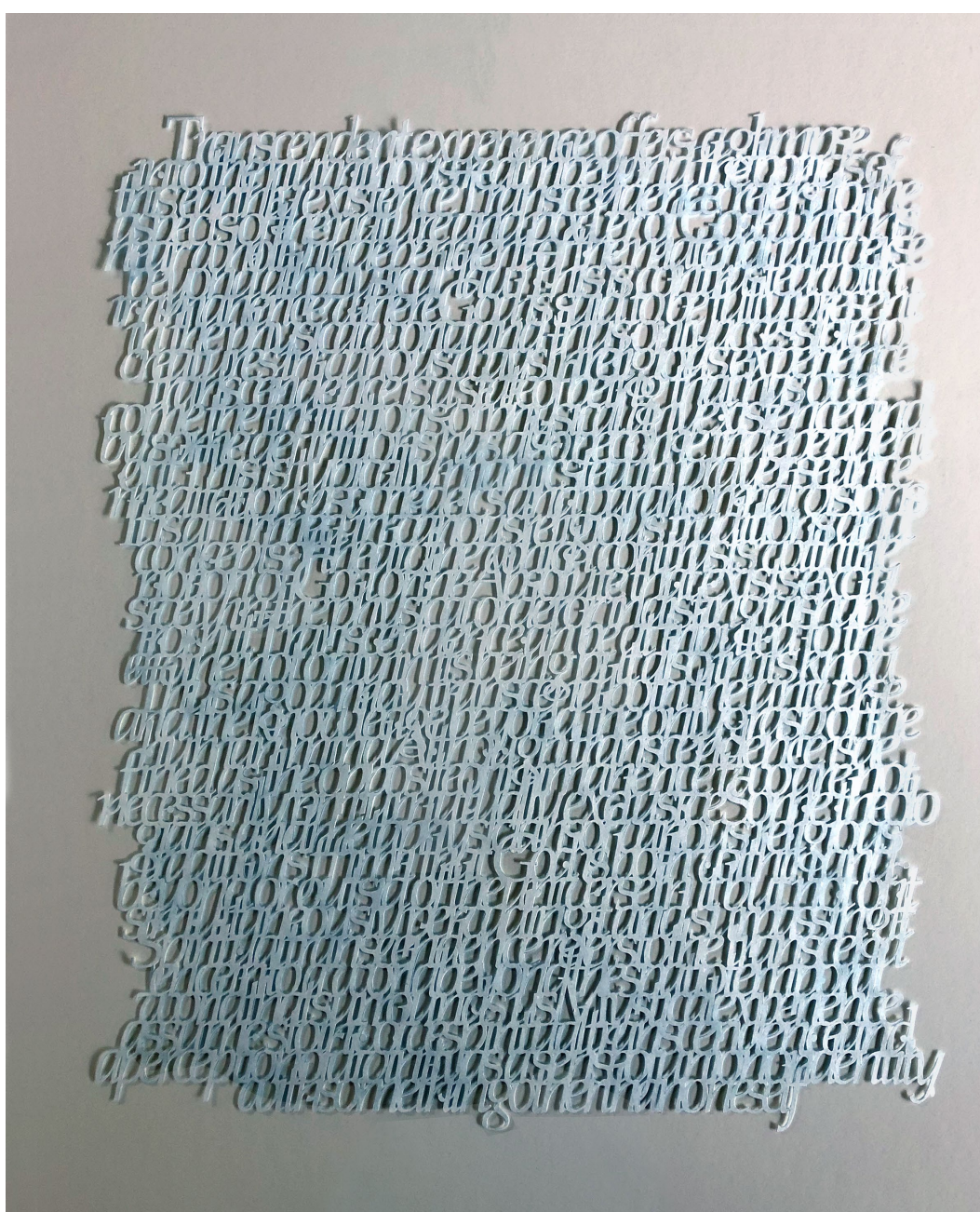


Mystic: Simone de Beauvoir, 2016
39h X 25w
hand cut Tyvek, acrylic paint



Mystic: Teresa of Avila, 2016
hand cut Tyvek, acrylic paint
39h X 25w

The works are first mounted on plexiglass to create a faint shadow so that the work appears to be slightly levitating off the background. They are then framed offset with another piece of plexiglass across the front of the frame.



Transcendence, 2019

hand cut Tyvek, acrylic paint on back side

23h x 19.5w

Transcendence and Flight are two works exploring notions of ordinary and sacred understandings of related experiences.

Flight gives a scientific description for how a bird is able to fly, while *transcendence* describes the spiritual experience of transport.

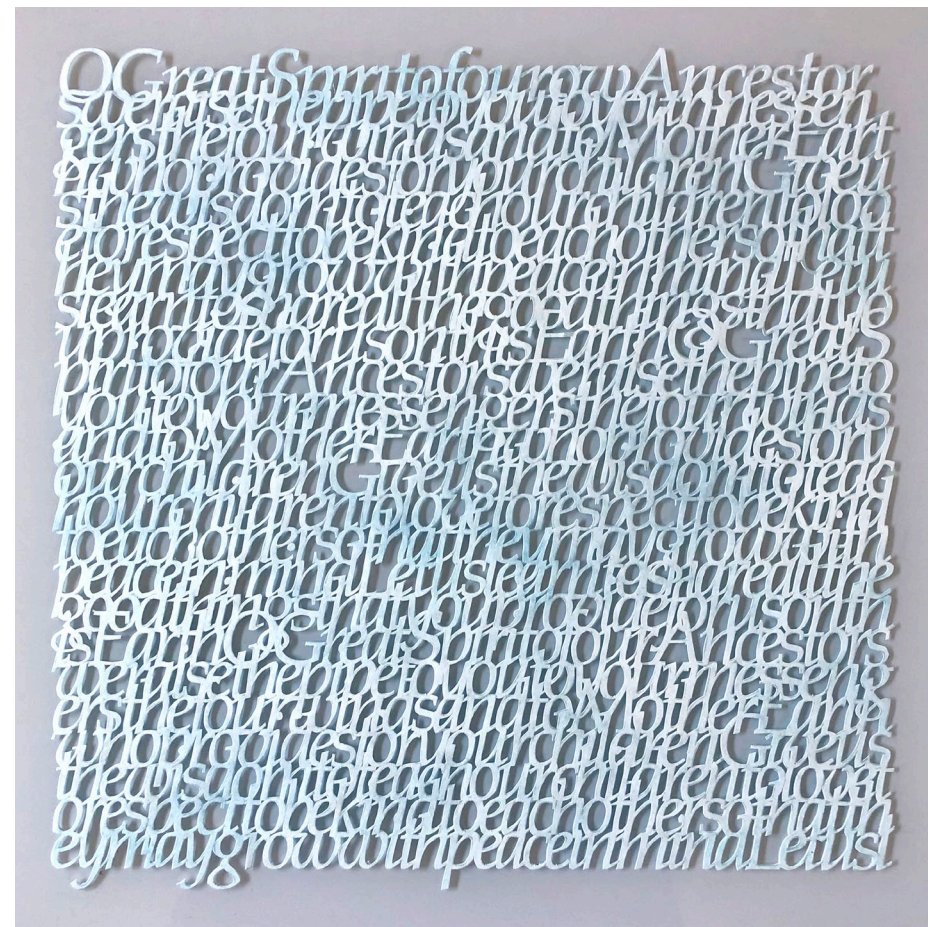
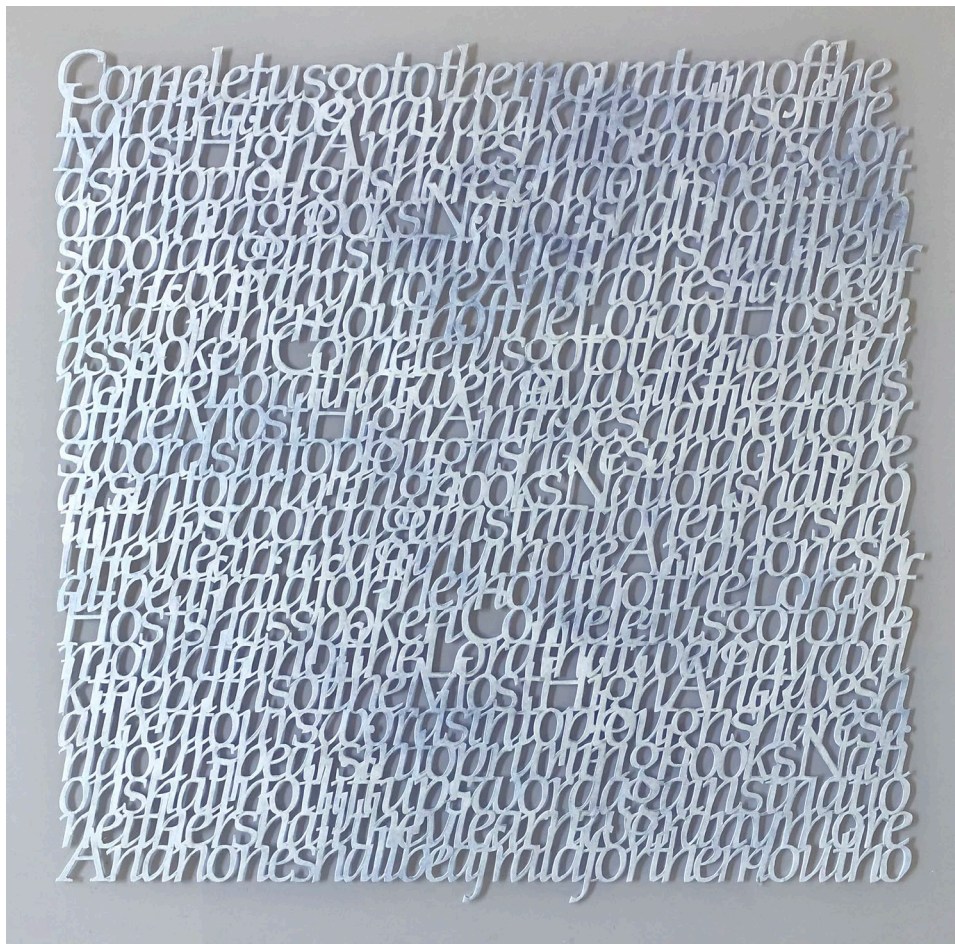


Flight, 2019
hand-cut Tyvek, acrylic paint on back side
23h x 19.5w

The works are first mounted on plexiglass to create a slight shadow that makes the work appear to be levitating off the background. They are then framed offset with another piece of plexiglass across the front of the frame. Because the work is painted blue on the backside the color also reflects off the background.



(detail of *Transcendence*)



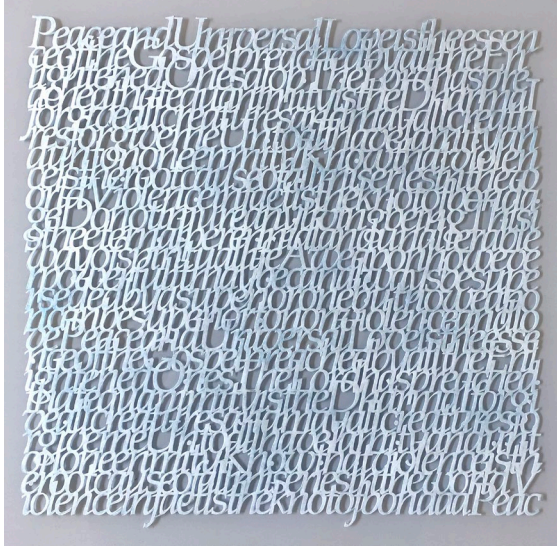
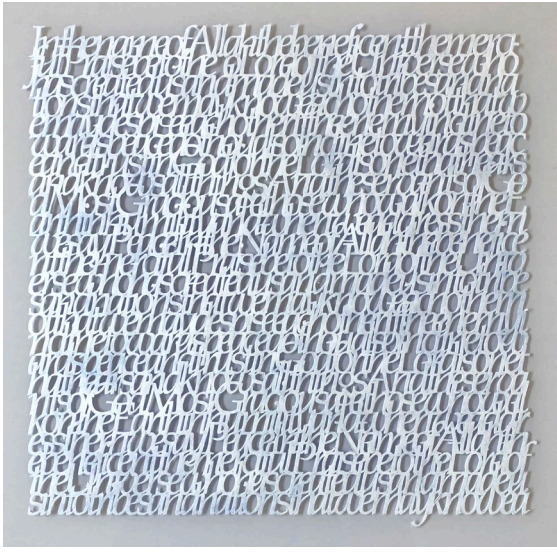
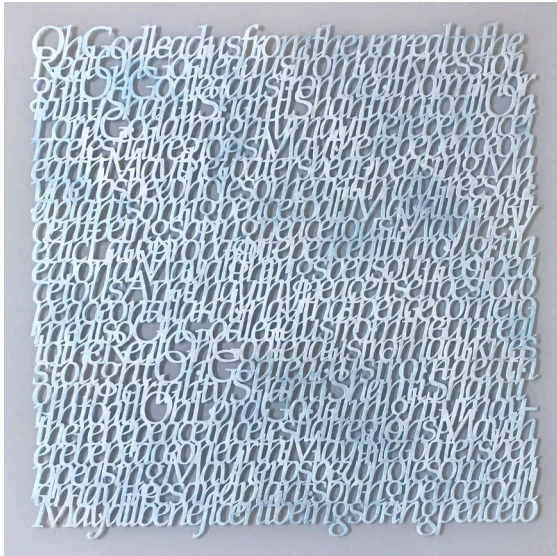
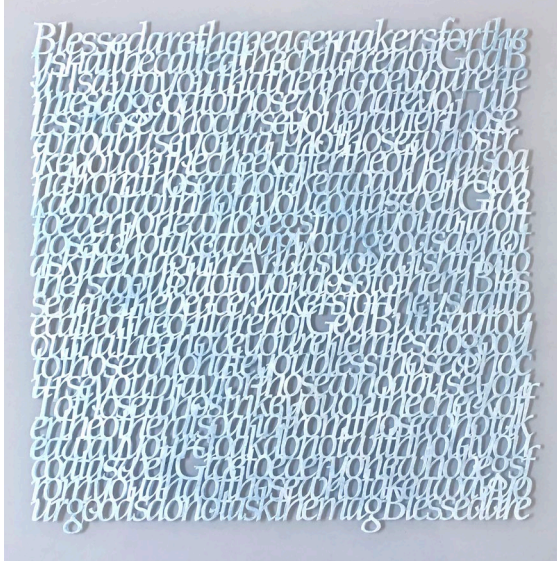
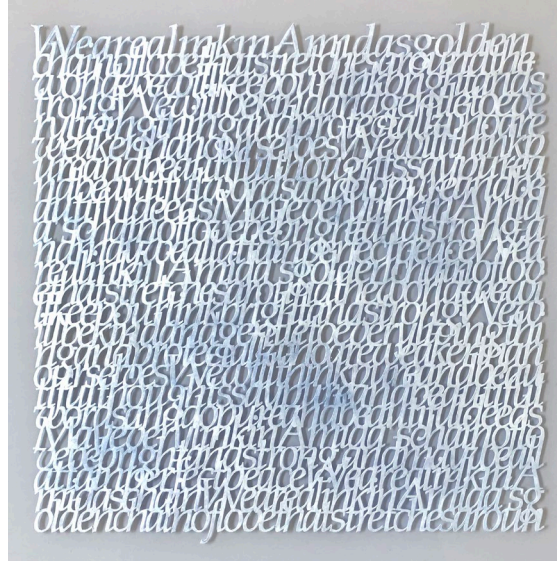
Prayers for Peace, 2020

hand-cut Tyvek, acrylic paint in varying shade of blue

12x12 unframed. 18 x 18 framed

Prayers for Peace uses the text for prayers from eight different religious traditions. The varying shades of blue on the backside produce subtle reflections against the background.

Left: Judaism Right: Native American



Prayers for Peace, 2020

hand-cut Tyvek, acrylic paint in varying shade of blue
12x12 unframed. 18 x 18 framed

Prayers for Peace uses the prayer texts from eight different religious traditions.
Top left to right: Baha'i, Buddhism, Christian, Hinduism, Islamic, Jainism

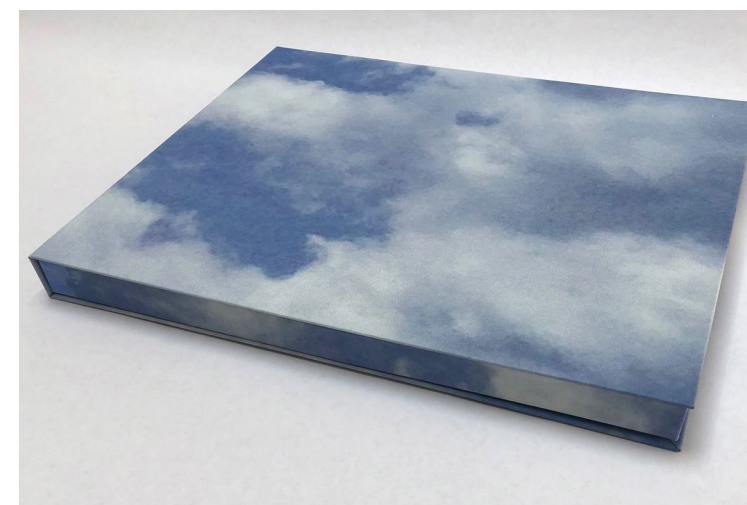


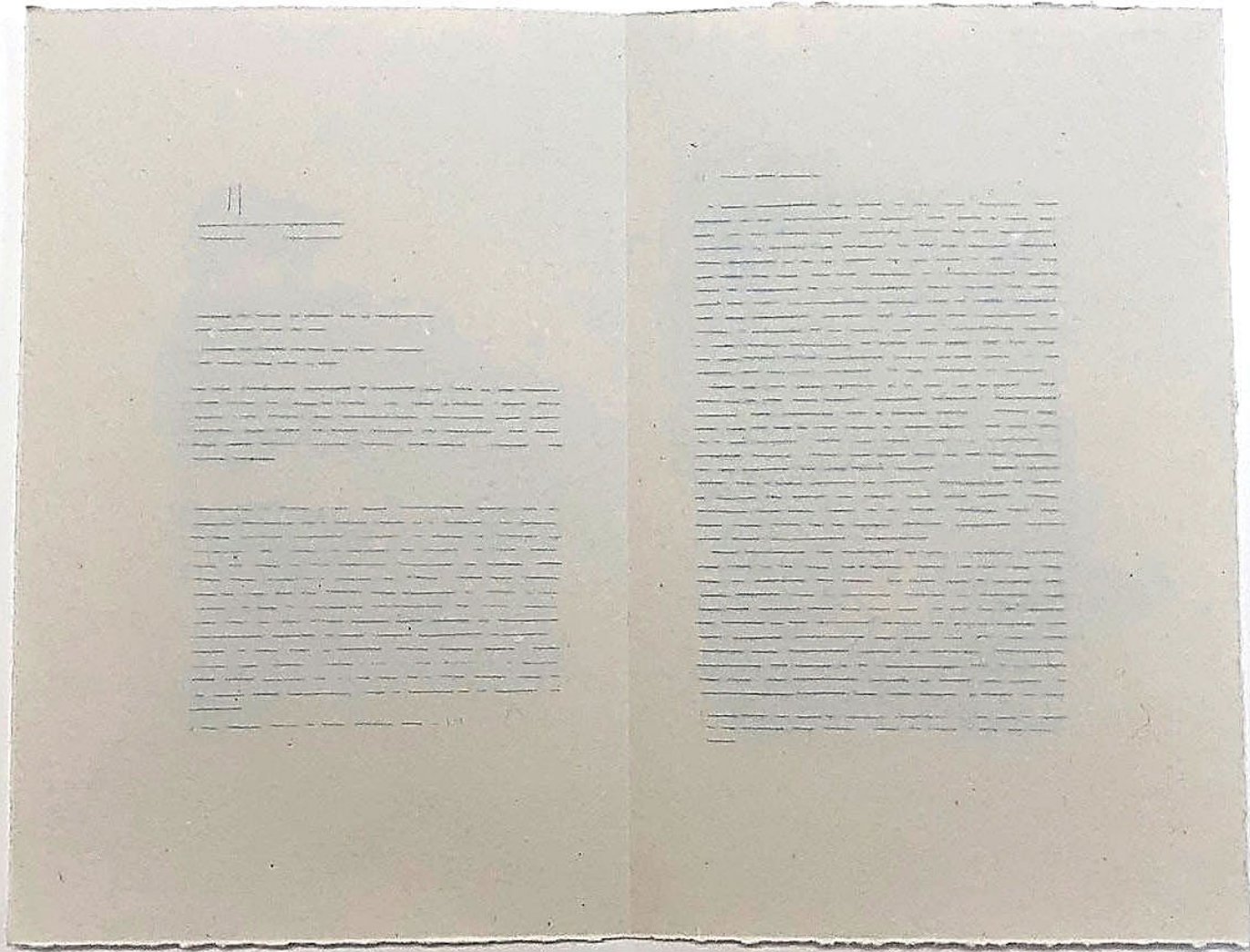
House and Universe, 2020

box: 13 x 11 x 1 (size varies according to display)

Abaca, Mitsumata, and tracing papers, acrylic paint, cloth bound box

Words across page spreads are used as templates to cut marks into white Abaca and translucent blue pages. Letter are selected from these template pages to be punched into dark blue Mitsumata paper, to form constellations of tiny holes. What remains is a trace of the action of close reading. The text templates are from “House and Universe” in Gaston Bachelard’s book *Poetics of Space*.





Intimacy of a House, 2019

20.5 x 17.5

cut handmade abaca paper, chalk pastel on reverse side



My Dear Mrs. Gardner, 2022

box: 30 x 10.5 x 2 inches (Size varies according to display)

In the early 1920's, the artist Elizabeth Wentworth Rogers sold a painting to Isabella Stewart Gardner. Elizabeth Wentworth Rogers was a well-known painter throughout the East coast region and Europe, and the founder of the Concord Art Center in the historic town of Concord Massachusetts. For the 100th Anniversary celebration of Concord Art I was invited by curator, Jane Deering, to be in the exhibition, "The Conceptual Stitch.

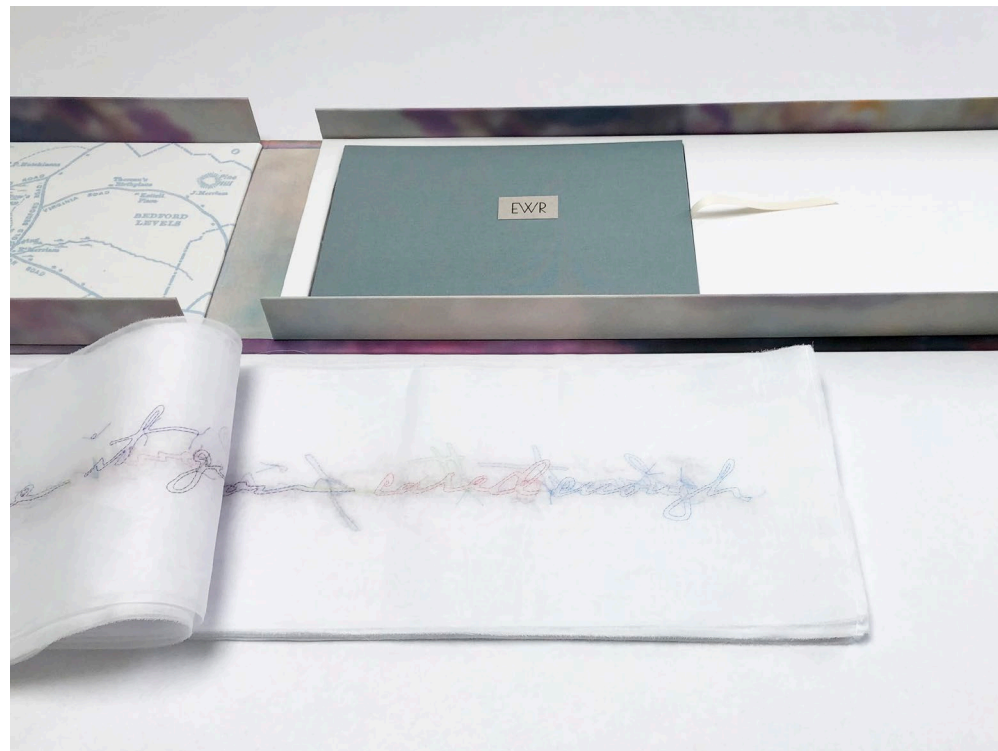
In my research I was most drawn to Elizabeth Wentworth Robert's handwriting found in a letter she wrote to Mrs. Gardner and I decided to embroider her writing to create a book. I wanted to bring into material form some of the personal aspects of Robert's life as an artist and her emotional commitment for her practice. As I embroidered her writing, I could sense our hands uniting across time.

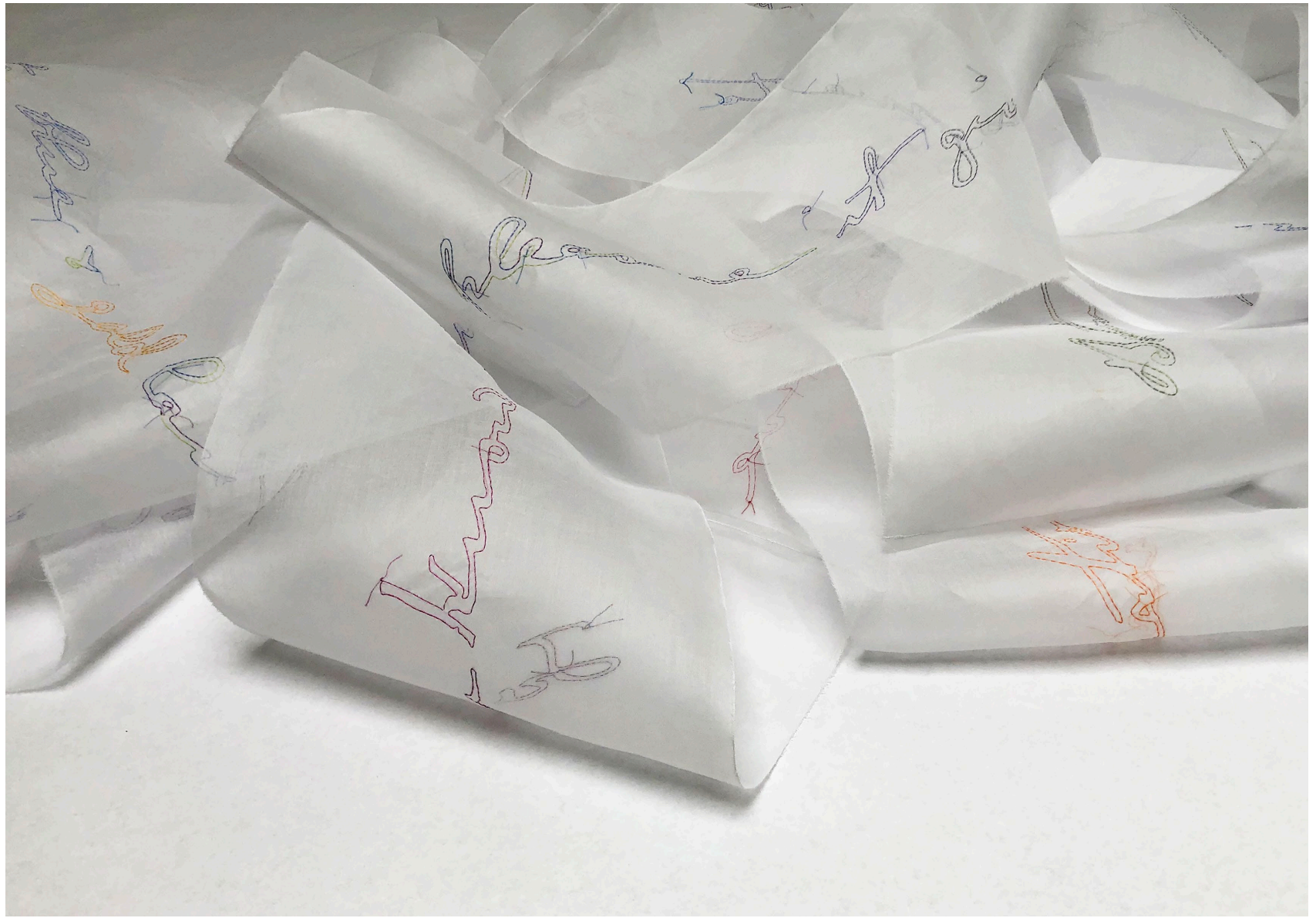
The embroidered scroll, and the photo book that holds a facsimile of her letter, are both contained inside a box covered in cloth printed from a blurry section of the painting, now hanging in the Gardner Museum. The hazy layers of memory, the blue and gold of distance, what something feels like in the hand of the other, her affection for Concord, how deeply connected she must have felt to her art and surroundings, and more, are fragments of ideas and sensations that accompanied me throughout the making of the work.

The cloth book is embroidered on Italian cotton.

The handbound book with photos and a facsimile of the letter is created using a woven binding technique.

The inside of the box presents a map of Concord c.1906.



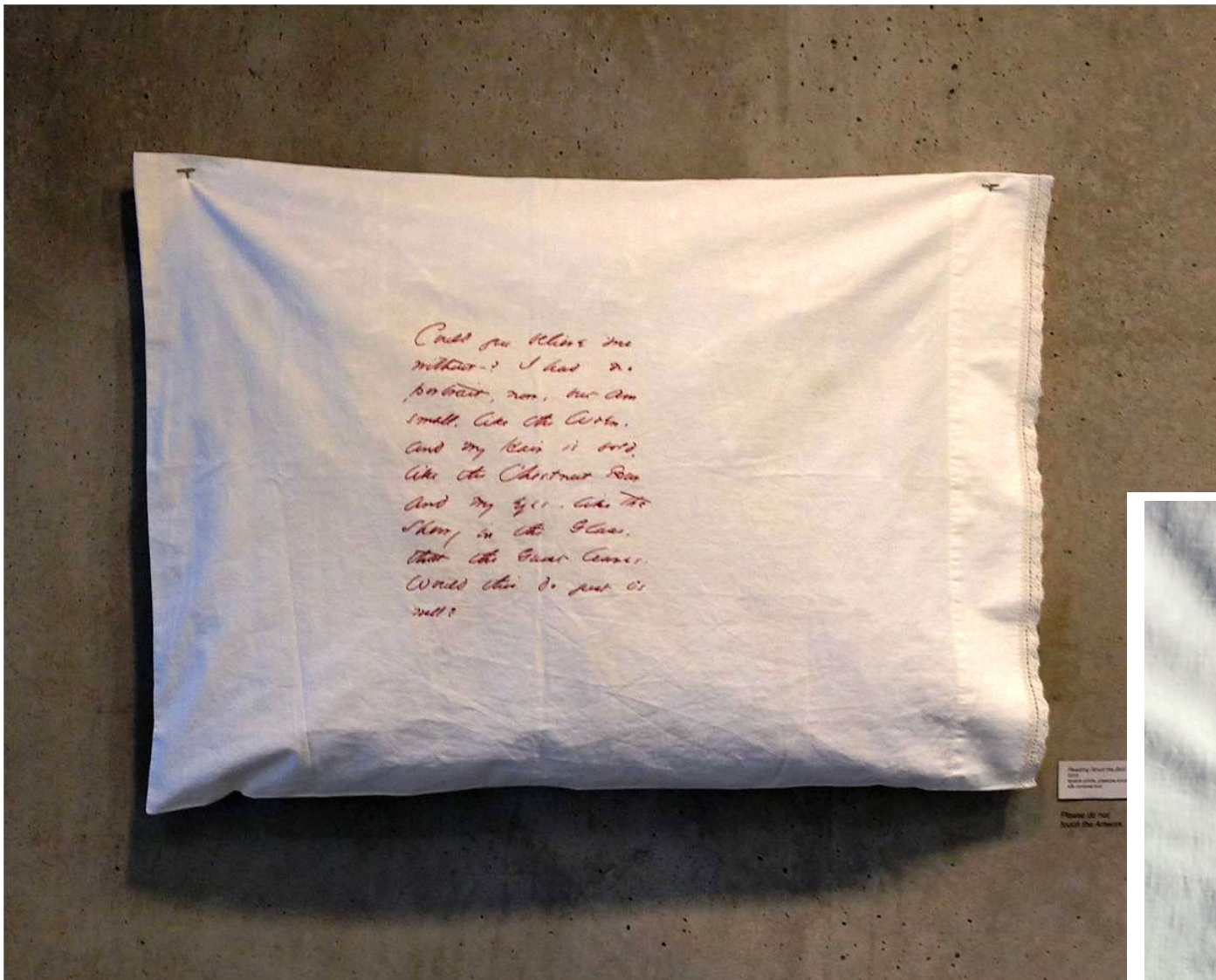






Luce, 2010
synthetic cloth, thread
53h x 8w x 5d

Tangled words cut from silky shades of blue cloth sewn to form a delicate tale /tail. The text uses the writing of Luce Irigaray, who writes across the fields of linguistics, philosophy, feminist theory and cultural studies. She also wrote on spirituality and religion from a feminist perspective.



Could you believe me
without? I had no
portrait, now, but am
small, like the Wren.
And my Hair is bold,
like the Chestnut Bur
And my eyes, like the
Sherry in the Glass,
that the Guest Leaves.
Would this do just as
well?

Emily's Pillow, 1994

embroidery of her handwriting, pillowcase, shredded bible
20d x 29w x 6h

So many of the more recent text works lead me back to early work when I first used text.

I traced and embroidered Emily Dickinson's handwriting from a letter she sent when asked if she had a picture of herself. She responded by sending a "portrait" using only words.

"Could you believe me without? I have no portrait, now, but am small like the Wren. And my Hair is bold like the Chestnut Bur. And my eyes, like the Sherry in the Glass, that the Guest Leaves. Would this do just as well?"

The pool of water... the door...
I was looking at it... why do I...
The door was...
One of the...
to one of the...
among...
remember...
white black...
there was...
would be...
would be...
to slow...
small...
long end...
send...
although...
put...
slowly...
most I...
perfect...
hardly

The cardboard box...
I was looking at it...
The door was...
One of the...
to one of the...
among...
remember...
white black...
there was...
would be...
would be...
to slow...
small...
long end...
send...
although...
put...
slowly...
most I...
perfect...
hardly

Writing/Drawing series, 2018

ink on paper

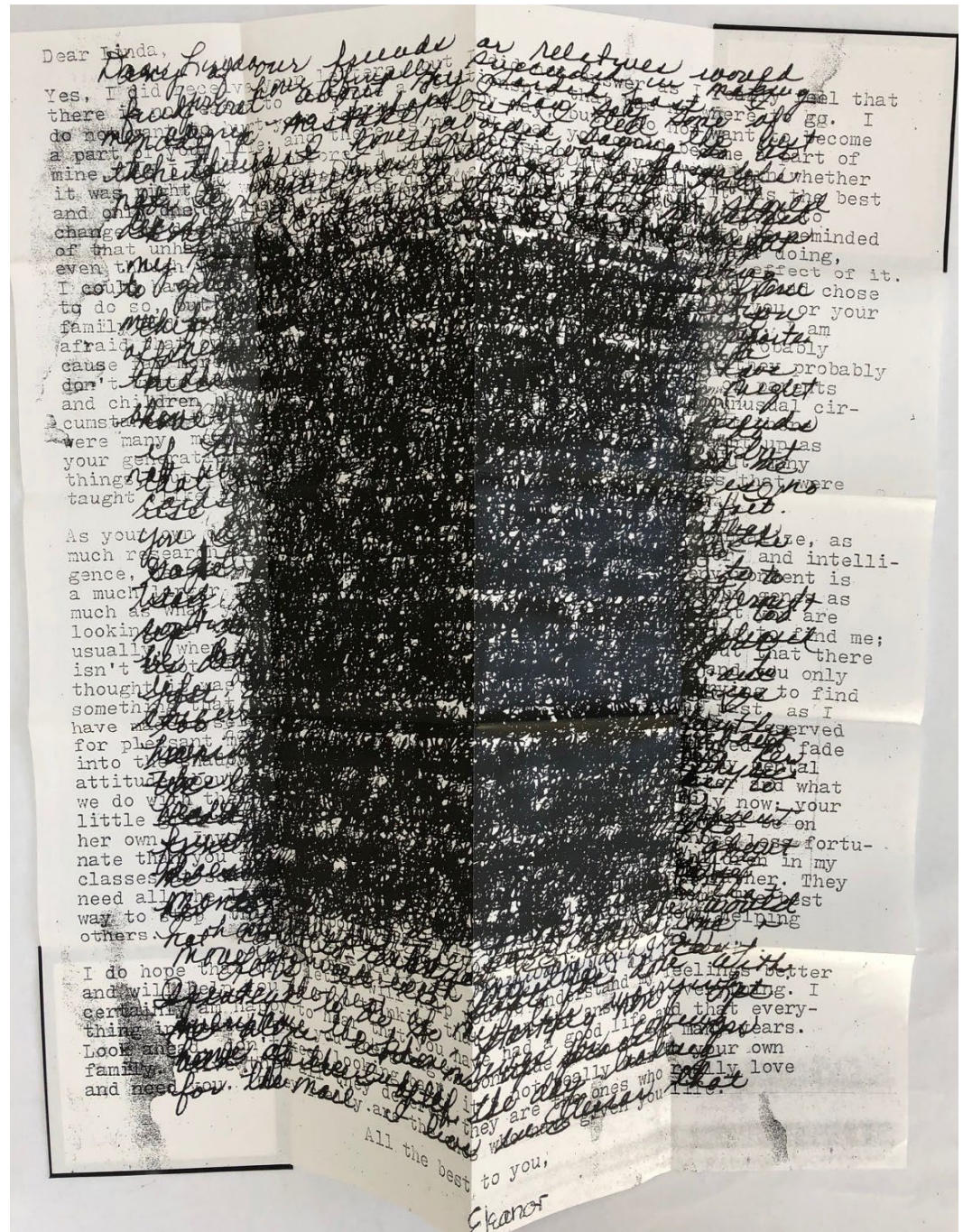
12x18

Rather than draw the objects I observed, I wrote detailed descriptions of them without looking at my paper. The result is not a distorted image, but a distorted text describing the object. The image of tangled lines, appears as a scribble of words. Yet, the writing/drawing is a record of observation read visually.



Unraveling Mother: the narrative, 2016
 artists' book, map-fold structure
 25w x 35h inches (open)

Readability versus unreadability is a thread throughout my work. In this artists' book, all the letters I received from my natural mother are layered into a single printed surface. The tangle of letters and words, with only fragments being readable, expresses the tensions I experienced. Even when texts can be translated, complexities remain.



Dear Linda,
 Yes, I did feel...
 do not want to...
 a part of...
 mine...
 it was...
 and...
 change...
 of that...
 even...
 I could...
 to do...
 family...
 afraid...
 cause...
 don't...
 and...
 cumsta...
 were...
 your...
 thing...
 taught

As you...
 much...
 gence...
 a much...
 much...
 looking...
 usually...
 isn't...
 though...
 some...
 have...
 for...
 into...
 attitud...
 we do...
 little...
 her own...
 nate...
 classes...
 need...
 way...
 others

I do hope...
 and will...
 certain...
 thing...
 Look...
 family...
 and...
 need

All the best to you,
 Ekonor