



KIERA O'TOOLE
BETWIXT AND BETWEEN
2015

Kiera O'Toole

Betwixt and Between

Tinahely Courthouse Arts Centre

Funded by Wicklow County Council

and the Arts Council

2015

A publication in support of the exhibition Betwixt and Between in the Courthouse Arts Centre in Tinahely, Co Wicklow. 2015

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For Craig and Cionn



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WICKLOW COUNTY ARTS OFFICE

In 2014 Wicklow County Arts Office launched an open call for projects of high quality for development and delivery during 2015. Visual artist and practice based researcher Kiera O'Toole was successful in her application for a twelve month residency under the Arts Offices' Strategic Projects Scheme, funded by Wicklow County Council and the Arts Council.

In her project *Betwixt and Between* O' Toole interrogates ideas of the religious and spiritual aspects of Irish identity. The artist moved from her childhood home base in County Wicklow settling in County Sligo the homeland of her mother's namesake. Using graveyards, in Wicklow and in Sligo as historical and cultural sites, O'Toole's research and project outcomes culminate in this exhibition. The exhibition creates a space where drawing reaches back and forward between times past, present and future to express new lines of being Irish.

Betwixt and Between develops themes explored in O'Toole's Master Thesis and also aims to develop

and expand the Preban archaeological project, *The Story of Preban Graveyard* in Tinahely, County Wicklow.

On behalf of Wicklow County Arts Office, I extend warm congratulations to Kiera on the successful completion of her project and the presentation of the work arising from it in this exhibition.

Jenny Sherwin
Wicklow County Arts Officer





THE COURTHOUSE ARTS CENTRE TINAHELY COUNTY WICKLOW

The Courthouse Arts Centre is situated in the heart of Tinahely village and is a uniquely visible and valuable asset in the cultural landscape of south Wicklow, north Carlow and north Wexford. The Courthouse Arts Centre was formally opened on May 3rd 1996 by Liz McManus, Labour TD and Minister of State, Dept. of the Environment. It is the longest established arts venue in the County and will be celebrating 20 years in 2016.

The Courthouse offers a professional and intimate space which hosts a wide variety of multi-disciplinary arts events and is funded by both the Arts Council of Ireland and Wicklow County Council. The Courthouse is recognised by the Arts Council as having "a high quality exhibition programme" with a "good reputation among visual artists". We are delighted that Kiera O'Toole, who was an artist in residence during the summer of 2014, was successful in our visual art exhibition stream and is a recipient of Wicklow County Council's Strategic Arts Project Award in 2015.

Maggie Gallagher
Director of The Courthouse Arts Centre

KIERA O'TOOLE - A FRAGILE INTENSITY

In the fascinating exhibition *You'll Never Know: Drawing and Random Interference* curators Jeni Walwin and Henry Krokatsis chose drawing as a way of considering randomness, chance and the drawn mark. Importantly for them in the case of their show, and equally significant when we think about the works of Kiera O'Toole, randomness provides a system to allow us to find the unexpected. While harnessing chance can bring us on an intriguing journey, Walwin and Krokatsis importantly suggest that this might not be enough. They state that "Randomness for its own sake is not interesting. It's the right kind of randomness – the kind that resonates in a relevant way... that's important."^[1] With this sentiment they converge with the work of O'Toole. As her drawing practice evidences this relevance and importance, and goes beyond using only chance – to richer outcomes.

Her compelling drawings and video work operate in a space between using a process outside of her control and then entering in to this action with a measured delicacy and refinement. Her work reads

^[1] From the conversation between Walwin and Krokatsis, page 15 of the exhibition catalogue *You'll Never Know: Drawing and Random Interference*, 2006.

as an open and generous act responding to a disruptive set of elements that coalesce and point towards something greater outside of the drawing process alone. In this sense we could consider her work as having an engagement with the legacy of experimental process led drawing practices associated with high moments of conceptualism. Similar, on an initial reading, to intentions in the process works of William Anastasi subway and walking drawings [1] or Richard Serra's thrown molten lead drawings. [2] In these examples the act and conditions of the drawing dictate the outcome of the work. But this is only half the case in O'Toole's approach to both her drawing process and the range of subject matter she brings to her practice.

There is also, rewardingly, in her working process the next stage. Here she intuitively and aesthetically adds to what has already emerged through the earlier employment of chance. Through her considered actions of incising, cutting or puncturing the drawings surface, or the removing of geometric patterns, the additional mark-making, or indeed the blowing of pigment in response to the initial system she sets in place, O'Toole creates and communicates a richer

[1] Anastasi provides a clear account of his working method in his 2012 interview with Rachel Nackman for *Notations: Contemporary Drawing as Idea and Process*, see the link <http://notations.aboutdrawing.org/william-anastasi/>

[2] For a brief description of this work see *To Collect* by Samantha Friedman, on the link http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2011/10/20/to-collect

experience in how she draws and what she draws. As artist and writer Patricia Cain points out that this double staging of drawing provides an enhanced engagement and outcome. One that might initially involve ambiguity "... in the initial tacit act of externalising a drawing, whilst a second more explicit process, could resolve ambiguity." [1] O'Toole's drawing method offers a space for her to be informed by the work and equally for her to inform the work. But the drawing still possess Cain's call for a rich ambiguity that allows us, as an audience, to be informed by the decisions she has made in the drawing. Her drawings do not stand only as sequential stages denoting a process, but as entities that have their own material history and sets of artistic intentions.

The three strands of Kiera's practice in this show demonstrate a considered pursuit of drawing across media and materials, each form sharing a particular intimacy and a persuasive intensity. This concept of intensity is, as Alain Badiou points out, a key property of drawing. For him "A Drawing is fragile. But it

[1] Cain discusses this fully in her text *Drawing as Coming to Know*, available at <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/microsites/sota/tracey/journal/ambi/images/cain.pdf>

creates a very intense fragility.”^[1] The focus this suggests is most suited to her interest in the re-use of emblematic burial and funereal imagery. The history of the drawings production over time parallels the temporal experience of the burial markers and structures over time. Each maintaining a significance outside of their own function and aesthetic, a significance that points to entropy and fragility.

That O’Toole brings all these competing elements and more to her work is an assured performance. This enriched process provides us with something that is more than an interaction with chance, yet still it is something we feel lucky to receive. It is also one that emerges far from mere chance or randomness.

Brian Fay

Artist and Lecturer (Fine Art) Dublin Institute of Technology.

^[1] The full version of Badiou’s text on drawing is available at <http://lacan.com/symptom12/?p=65>

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

As a mode of thinking and doing, drawing offers myself as artist possibilities of gaining new knowledge through the materialising of the mark. From an intuitive and reflective process of drawing, a subjective dialogue of enquiry explores my inherited spiritual and religious past, which shapes our current systems of belief and cultural identity. As a returning migrant after nearly ten years in Australia, this project acts as a physical and psychological space where drawing mines the liminal spaces that reach backwards and forwards in time to articulate old and new lines of being Irish.

The catalyst for this exhibition came when I was invited by archaeologist Yvonne Whitty to take rubbings of some of the headstones for project *The Story of Preban Graveyard* in Tinahely, County Wicklow in 2014. Funded by the Heritage Council, the archeological project documented the ancient site which includes the hallmarks of an enclosed early medieval church/monastic site, rock art dating from the Neolithic period (c.4000-2500 BC) which was discovered by archaeologist Chris Corlett and slate stones (18th century) by an accomplished stone mason Denis Cullen of Monaseed.

Taking Preban as a site of departure, I researched the emblematic and ambiguous imagery found in graveyards and ancient burial grounds in counties of Wicklow and Sligo where a fusion of megalithic, pagan, famine, Catholic and Protestant stories merged.

The drawings in this exhibition are a measure of the presence of self in the work and are also spaces to posit the question; can these markers of individuals, societies and cultures act as thresholds to explore the authorship of spirituality in contemporary Ireland in an age of secularism? Through an exploration of these publicly private sacred spaces, the exhibition also serves as a reminder of our own mortality and how in conversing about death, we inevitably talk about life.

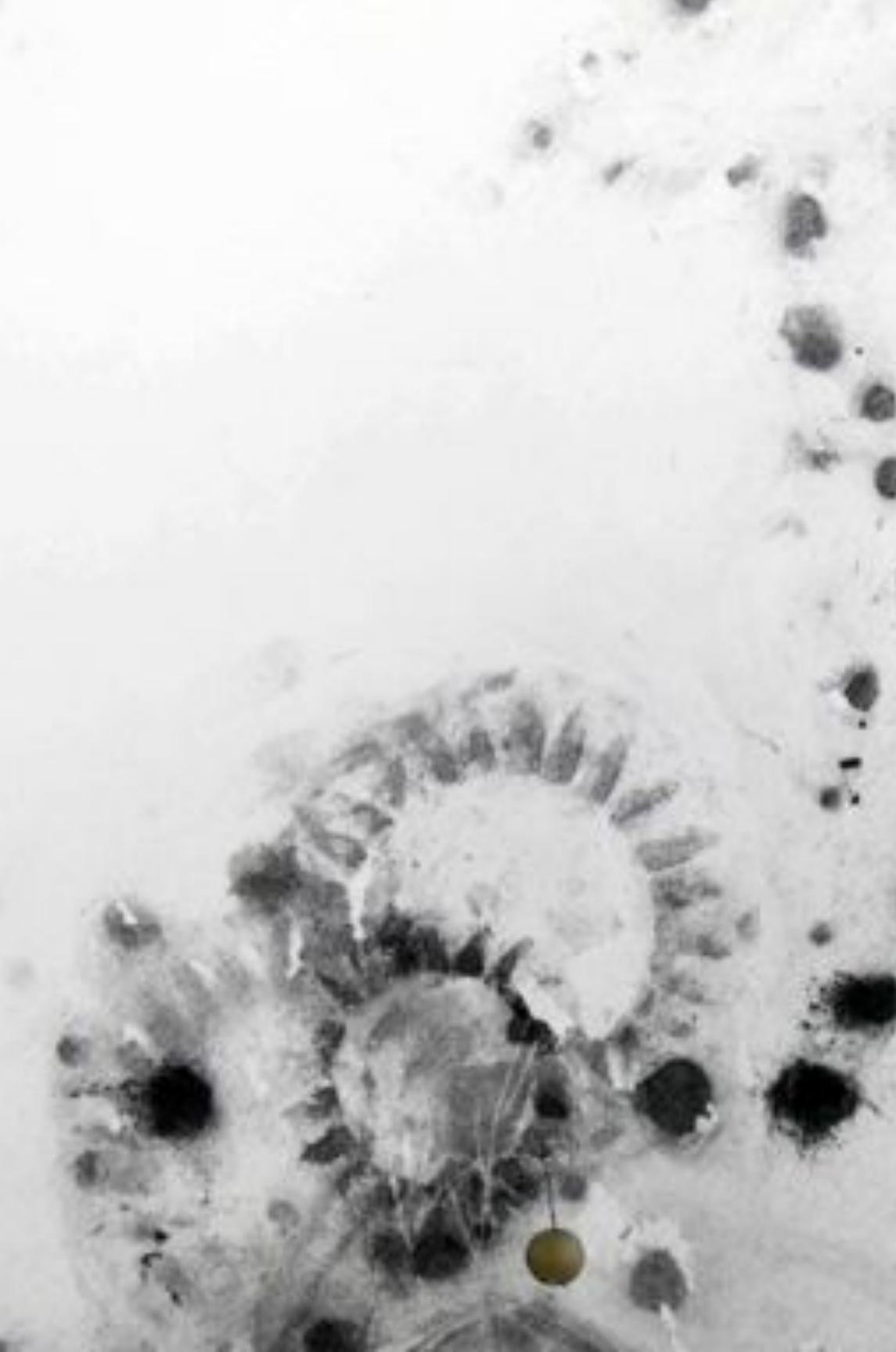
Kiera O'Toole
Visual Artist

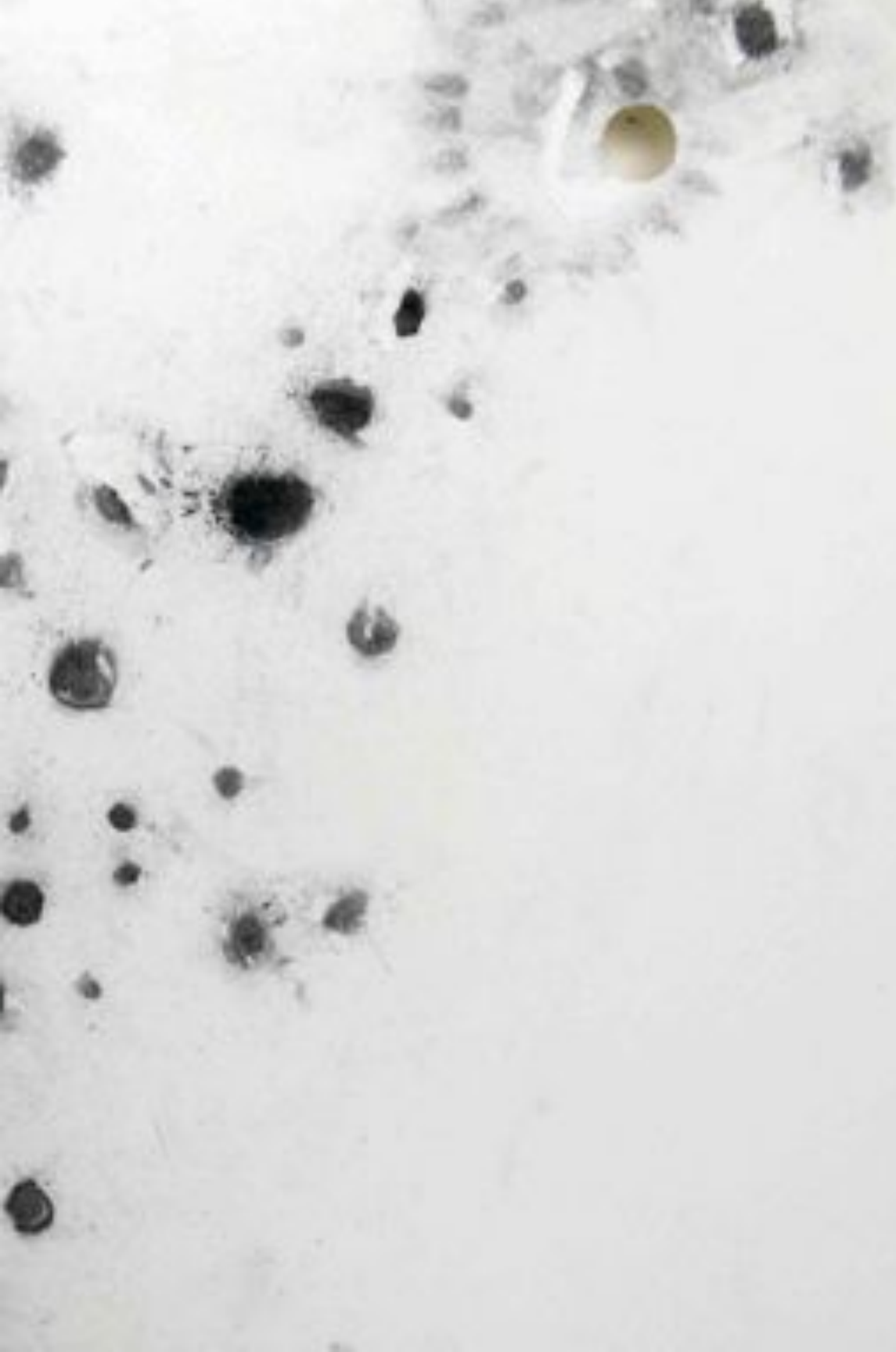
Kiera O'Toole, Untitled, 2015, charcoal and
graphite on archival paper.



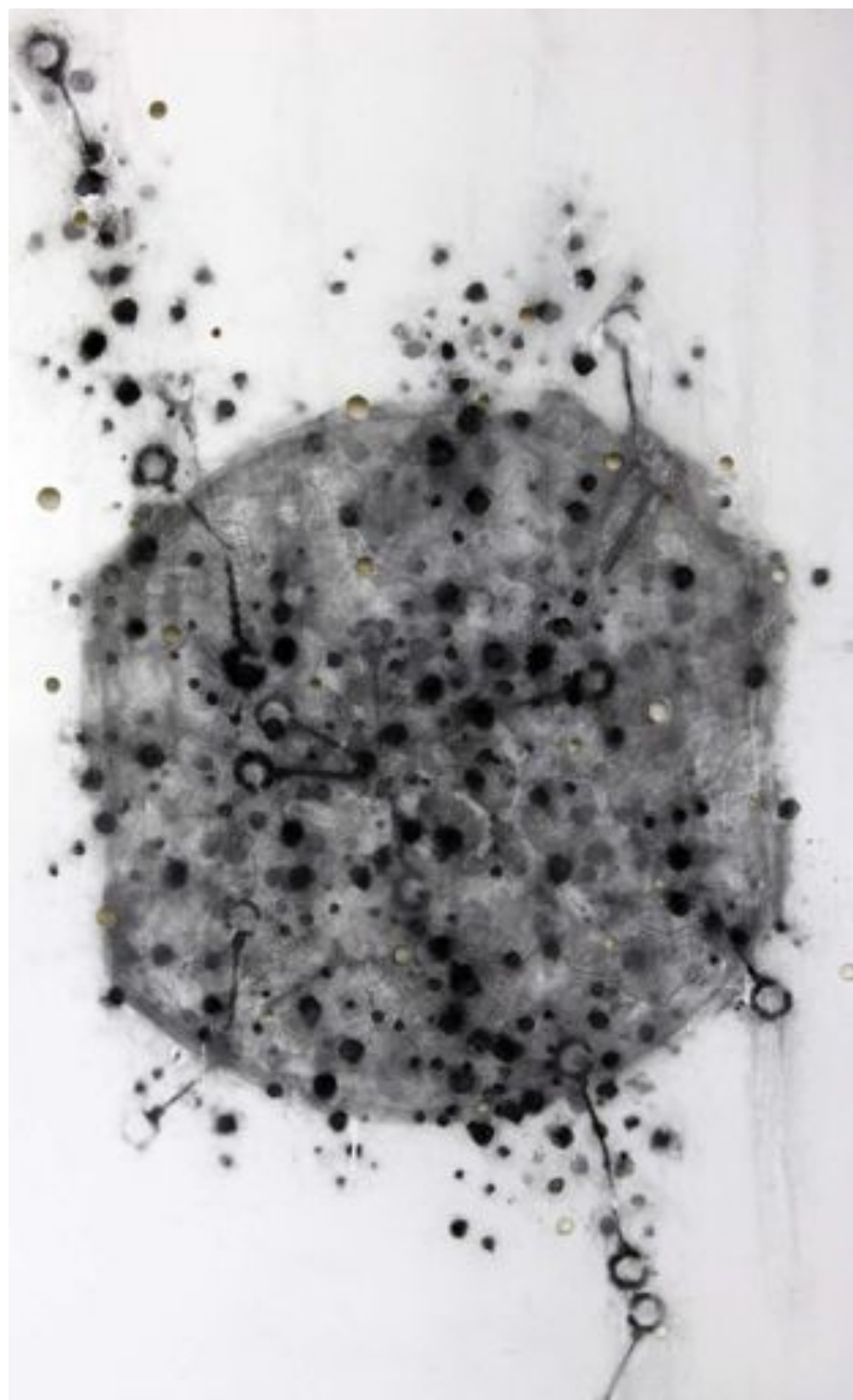


Kiera O'Toole, Untitled, detail, 2015,
charcoal and graphite on archival paper.

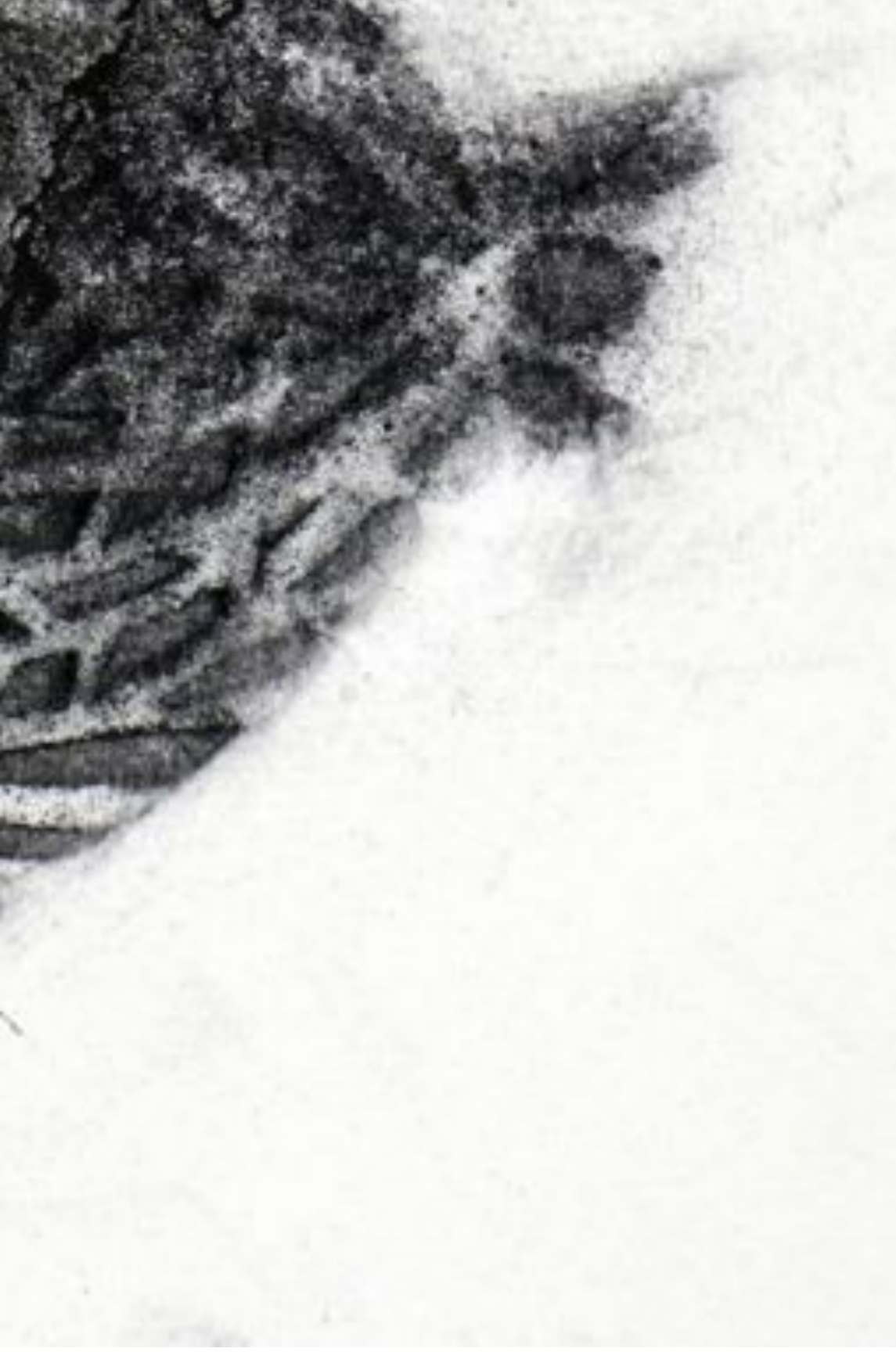




Kiera O'Toole, Untitled, 2015, charcoal and graphite on archival paper.







Kiera O'Toole, Untitled, 2015, charcoal and
graphite on incised archival paper.





Kiera O'Toole, Untitled, detail, 2015, charcoal
and graphite on incised archival paper.



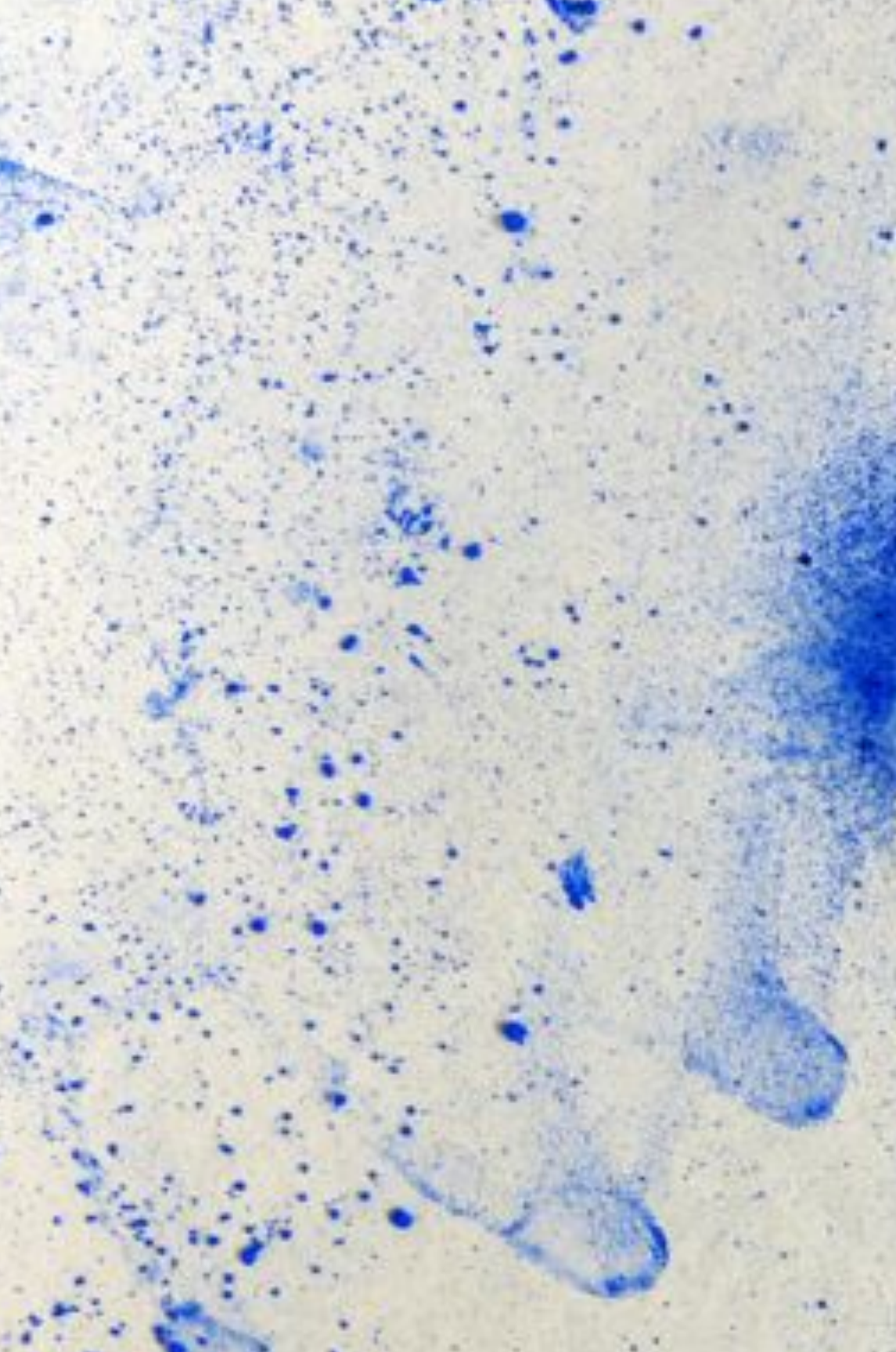


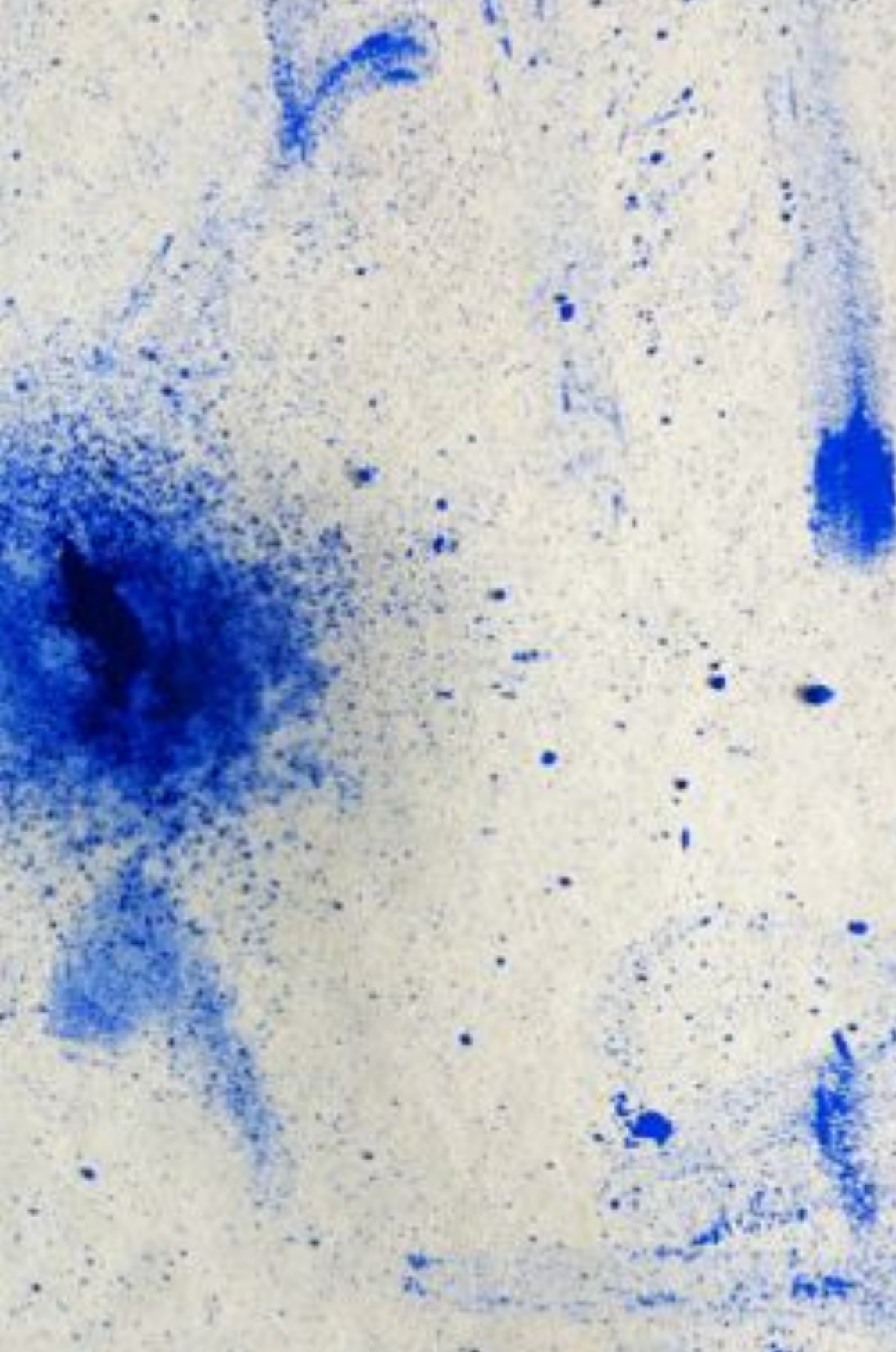


Kiera O'Toole, Untitled, detail, 2015, charcoal and graphite on incised archival paper.

Kiera O'Toole, Untitled, detail, 2015,
charcoal and graphite on incised archival
paper.











BIOGRAPHY

Kiera O'Toole is a visual artist who studied Fine Art at Dublin Institute of Technology graduating in 2000 and completed a Masters of Philosophy (Fine Art) in Newcastle University, Australia in 2013. O'Toole has exhibited in Ireland, UK, Finland and Australia including National Museum of Australia in 2011. O'Toole has obtained several artist in residencies and presented her practice including at the 20th Australasian Conference for Irish Studies in University of NSW and Not just Ned: the true history of the Irish in Australia, at the National Museum of Australia.

Public collections include the Office of Public Works and Lissadell House Art Collection in Ireland, and in the works on paper collection in the Maitland Regional Gallery and Mercure Hotels in Australia. Private collections include Australia, UK, USA and Germany.

Previous images: Breath, Video Stills 1.22min, 2015



