

# [be] Holding Light:

Things unseen and the spaces between

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Light enraptures me – that intangible but see-able thing, or thing that is seen with. It transforms, it activates, like a force to be reckoned with, yet can be quiet and gentle. Its caress can be felt but not held. And how do we return its embrace?

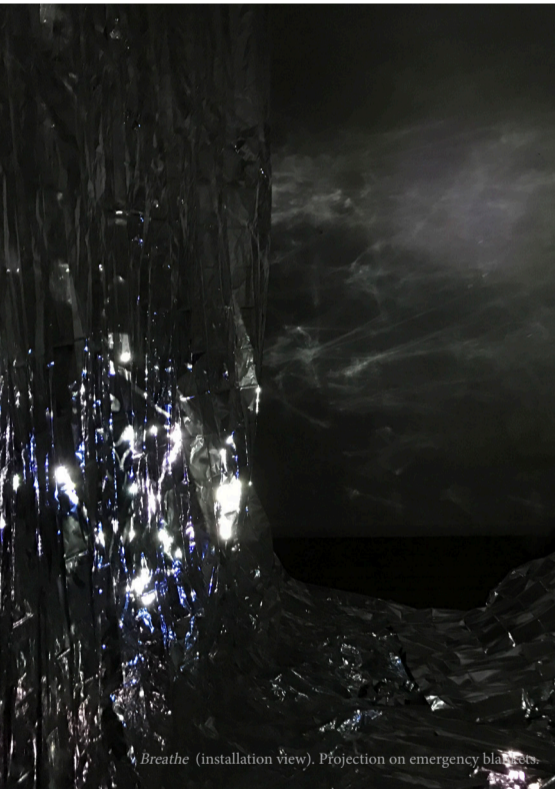
Although the concept of this research project is expansive and multidimensional, it could be summarized in one word: light. Light can mean and be so many things in both definition and experience. Its' meaning, like its' form, is fluid and elusive. [be] holding Light is a paradoxical and whimsical search for understanding and meaning while acknowledging that this, like light, cannot be fully grasped. It is a contemplation on the multifaceted nature of light and its contradictory manifestations as an epitome of life's unanswered questions. Guided by the characteristics of light and sight, this body of work is an enquiry into the possibility of the unknown, otherworldly and spiritual, and a critique against anthropocentric perspectives.

The exhibition experience is intended as an immersive space for wonder and for questioning in which one can reach between and beyond preconceived limits. Motivated by my recurring battles with life's uncertainties and unanswerable questions (which have become particularly poignant to many since the Covid-19 pandemic), it grapples between dichotomies such as absence and presence; knowing and unknown; permanence and transience. Blurring the boundaries between these extremes, through illusion and the visual entanglement of matter, light and audience, the installations demonstrate the complexity and fluidity of meaning, resisting dualistic thought which typically divides and denies different perspectives. They call for a more nuanced, cross-disciplinary understanding of the world.



Cloud (detail). Wire mesh, light.

In both their transitory forms and limited physicality, the works which constitute [be]holding Light are reminders of human limitation, the fleeting nature of the material world, and thus, of all that is beyond us. In this place of heightened smallness and awareness, the embodiment of light in the exhibition allows the viewer to indulge the possibility of the otherworldly and what those things 'beyond' might look or feel like. It prompts one to step beyond the comfort of known structures with the possibility and hope of finding something beyond imagination. If we do not dare to step into the darkness, we might never know the light awaiting within it.

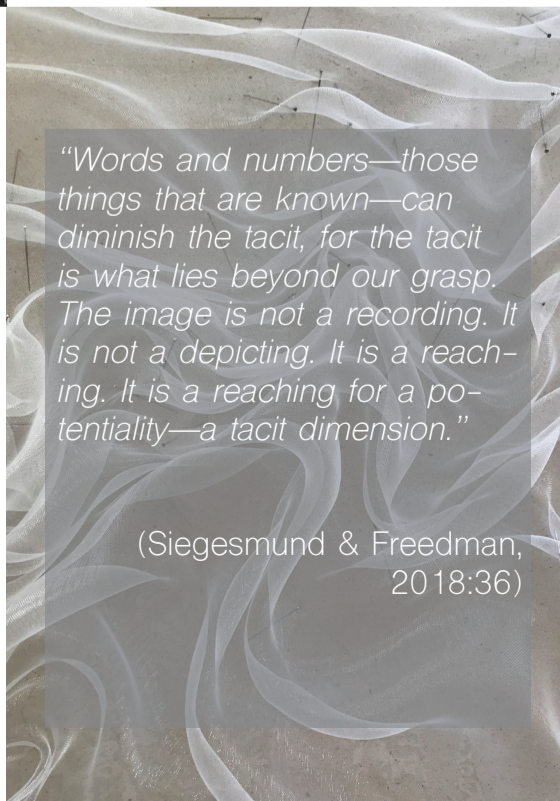


Breathe (installation view). Projection on emergency blankets.

Whilst light is often taken to be the agent which makes things known and visible, this project ponders also on its limitations: what cannot be seen or is not known, and ironically attempts to use light to illuminate such things. Using various materials, lighting and movement, the exhibition strives to develop an awareness of the invisible through the transiently visible and whispers of the otherworldly through worldly material means. It has also formed part of a personal journey and process of seeking out the supernatural and spiritual amidst the mundane and dark of this world, believing that it is present whether perceived or not.

*“Words and numbers—those things that are known—can diminish the tacit, for the tacit is what lies beyond our grasp. The image is not a recording. It is not a depicting. It is a reaching. It is a reaching for a potentiality—a tacit dimension.”*

(Siegesmund & Freedman, 2018:36)



Bodies of water (installation view). Organza, plastic, pins, LEDs.

*Folding as a way of holding*

*On*

*We fight*

*With the fabric of life*

*Trying to keep it together*

*Draft it on confined lines*

*What we deem the straight way,*

*Trajectory to follow*

*Elegant to world's eye*

*We try*

*To save ourselves*

*To fit back in*

*The angular frames given*

*The grid which we must grow in*

*We do not know how to fly.*

*We put the wings (we don't have)*

*Away*

*Each time more crumpled*

*Crimped with our out-of-line-ness*

*Marked by mishap*

*We keep falling out*

*Striving to put ourselves back*

*Where we think we belong*

*But still, falling*

*In state of emergency, all in*

*Great need, of saving*

*We find ourselves grasping at the folds*

*Of nothingness*

*Longing, for the comfort of a hold*

*We cannot handle*

*Refusing to believe there's a clutch*

*In the tumble*

*Unravelling, sustained by an upwards call*

*Instead of dropping, in place*

*We're held*

*Secure in favour of matchless light*

*Which makes all creases glorious, bright.*

29.8.21

Although there is value and security in the numbers, words and structures, of science, religion, philosophy and other such fields, they often permeate dualistic or linear thought which results in segregation and denies the tacit – things that are beyond their range of measure (Siegesmund & Freedman, 2018). In this context, I wanted my work to demonstrate that visual research can play a critical role in furthering our understanding – particularly in providing insight to the immeasurable and metaphysical. Whereas science typically prioritises control and what can be known, the artistic laboratory can find joy, synchronicity and meaning in the uncertain and unknown. Although my work gradually expanded beyond this hypothesis, treating my studio as laboratory and light as the source material and raw material was foundational to my concept because it positioned light as something that can be learnt from.



Breathe (installation view). Projection on emergency blankets.

My final year project began with the hypothesis that light was a living thing which could be investigated in my studio-turned-laboratory. Inspired by artists such as Veronica Janssens, this approach simulated the experimentation and research evident in scientific laboratories and the accompanying element of curiosity and discovery (Janssens in Lloyd, 2020). Suggesting that this intangible thing called light could be measured and recorded in physical form, the practice aimed to expose the limitations of human systematisation and knowledge production.



Reflections (aerial view from moderation exhibition).



"things affect other things"

(Siegesmund & Freedman, 2018:36)



During my years at Michaelis, I have been cultivating an expanding fascination with light, from its physical manifestation (aesthetics) to its properties and potential. Born out of a frustration with the stereotypical divisions and rankings of knowledge, as well as a struggle for certainty in life, light has become an embodiment of hope to me as its physical properties and anomalies integrate fields which have typically been separated and reflect a divine essence. Light's extensive and diverse definitions have propelled my final-year project and provide ample space for investigation and meaning to be formed and questioned.



Bodies of water (detail). Organza, plastic, pins, LEDs.

Personal notes:  
  
For me, art and poetry have been a way in which I can begin to express the wonderings and yearnings I have that I do not know how to put into formal words, but even these manifestations and modes of perception are inadequate.  
  
As I try to explain what my work is about or what it 'does', I am to some degree breaching (or proving the futility of) my project as it is precisely about that which we can't quite put our finger on, that which cannot be [fully] captured, that which is beyond us. So now, as I have made material artworks to evoke the immaterial, I hope you will bear with me as I attempt to put in sentences what evades being worded, to put in summary what is about vastness, and as I exercise some poetic license where I find academic structure insufficient or insincere.  
  
The words and titles used are to be taken lightly, as mere entry points into the possible readings of the work and world. They are in no particular order because each is taken to be happening or becoming at the same time, or in relation to another.



Bodies of water (detail). Organza, plastic, pins, LEDs.

A humble cascade  
An outpouring of the heart,  
Longings  
    Fall  
From head to hand  
From pen to paper  
From thought to fabric  
    My human means  
    To channel what's not  
    Down to this earth  
        Splashes catch the light  
        Some, fall through  
        Head  
            Drops  
            A trace of hand, of heart  
            I dare hope to see  
            This abundance which drenches me  
            Brings me,  
                To my knees.  
                That it would sweep down  
                On this lowly cup, I am, and  
                Fill me  
                    To overflow.



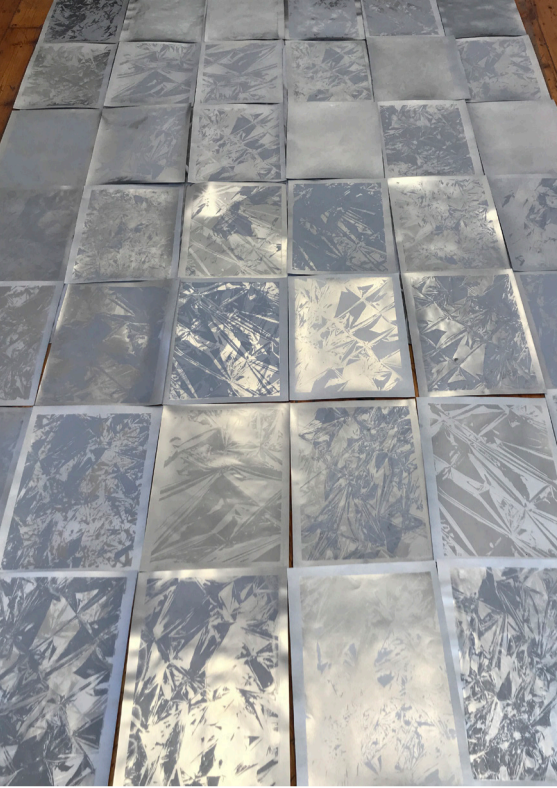
Balance  
  
Of wings and strings  
Holding us there,  
Or pulling us down?  
Of tugging on the clouds  
Hopelessly,  
Or with hope?  
Of something beyond  
Within our reach  
But not quite?  
Of pulling stardust down  
And going up  
Could we be so strong?  
Or they, pulling us up?  
  
So we sit, somewhere between  
Heaven and earth  
Falling upwards



Reflections (installation view). 2021. 72 shadowgraphs, LEDs.



Holding light (installation view).



How do you fold a liquid?

How do you create a sense of the infinite?

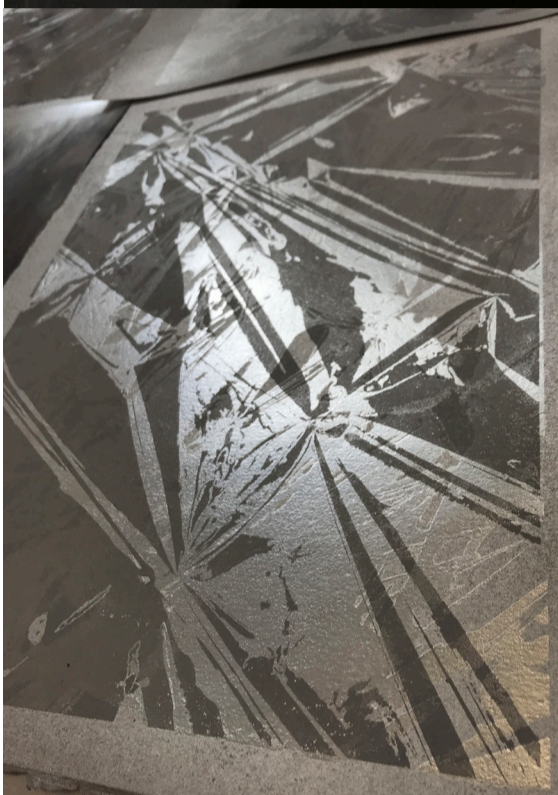
The galaxy that's inside.  
And beyond me.  
Stretching across time and form.

Like trying to lasso the moon?  
Or pin down the clouds  
Like trying to fold a liquid?  
Or scoop up stars from its pond

Is it all in vain?  
Is it supposed to be reached or touched?  
Now?  
Not now

Do we only live for these moments  
When the sky sweeps down  
And brushes the earth,

When waves crash upwards  
And glitter the sky?



Silver and gold  
They will never be enough.  
The things we build  
Out of them,  
Even they themselves.  
Allure and shine  
Draw us in  
Can teach us things  
Being reflective  
But always a gift,  
Sign of a greater glory

They cannot fully capture  
Nor begin to compare  
Yet our senses absorbed  
In small things (shiny things)  
Can forget the Spring

What lies behind, and within,  
And ahead.  
Not silver and gold at the head  
But the insufficient pointer  
To the more-than-enough  
And Always

A hand at work,  
Not our own.

28.3.21



Breathe (installation view). Projection on emergency blankets.



Holding light (installation tests).

"Description does not and never can fully explain the tacit" (Siegesmund & Freedman, 2018). It is this very act of division and description which I am wishing to avoid in my conceptual practice. Meaning cannot always be expressed in lines and dualisms or sentences – what we might call order. The point is that the work is fluid in its meaning and interpretation. It cannot be isolated into tidy titles (maybe, if I could have a million of them). It is broad and reaching and interlocking. Always in between places, *in the process of becoming*. Perhaps this is why I found refuge in poetry, synonyms and visuals – because they implicate and intersect rather than dominate and divide. I am not trying to claim that the work is absolute, for since it is still "becoming" or taking shape, it can never be complete, but perhaps one can come a fraction closer to understanding the whole through its very incompleteness.

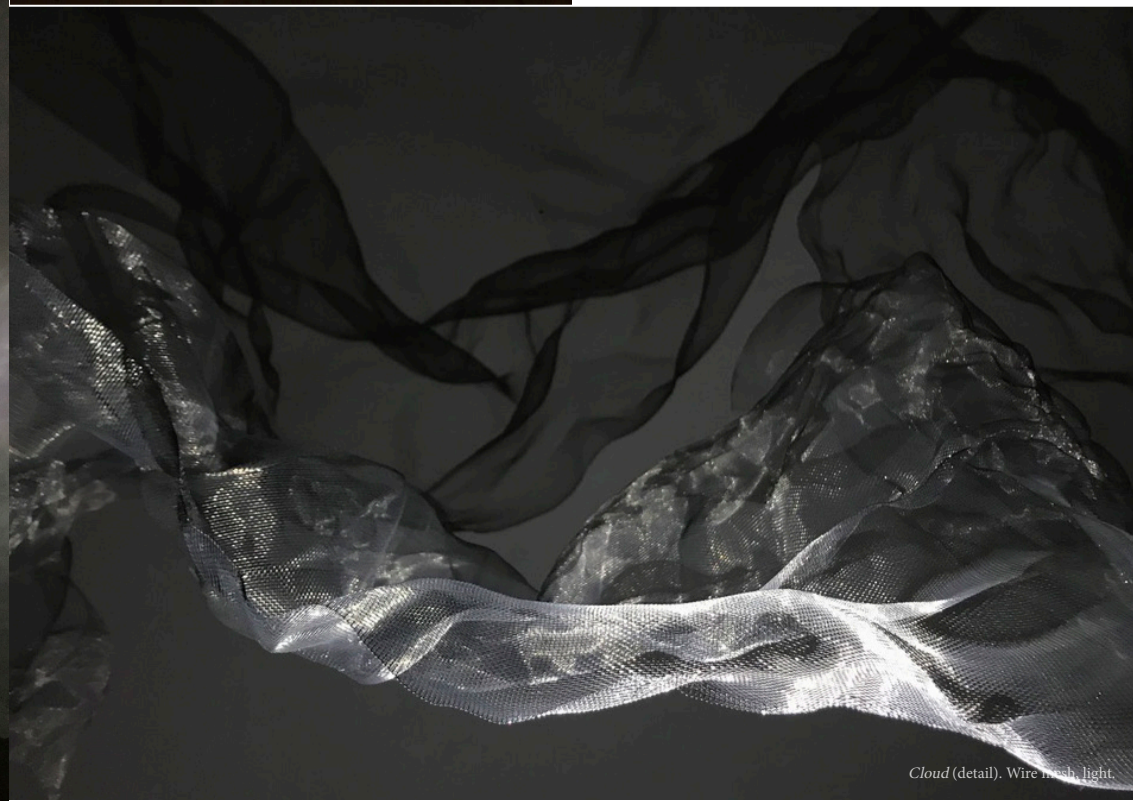


As new materialism promotes a reading through various elements and their entanglements rather than pre-defining and isolating them, the things taught *through* the process of making and *through* the materials used have been pivotal to my practice, concept and the emergence of meaning in the exhibition. Correspondingly, a physical experience – walking through the exhibition – is a fundamental aspect of my work because it stimulates interaction and can thus demonstrate the agency of the work and the world.

It is perhaps ironic that in the midst of covid-19, where our physical interactions have been so constricted, I chose to create a body of work which really requires human presence and cannot be translated to or understood fully from a virtual platform. However, I believe that the contrastive experience for those who are able to engage the work in person and the very insufficiency of the photographed images in capturing the whole experience, emphasise the limitations of our systems of recording – that there are things we cannot fully capture with our human methods – and reiterate our incredible need for embodied interaction and community.



Breathe (installation view). Projection on emergency blankets.

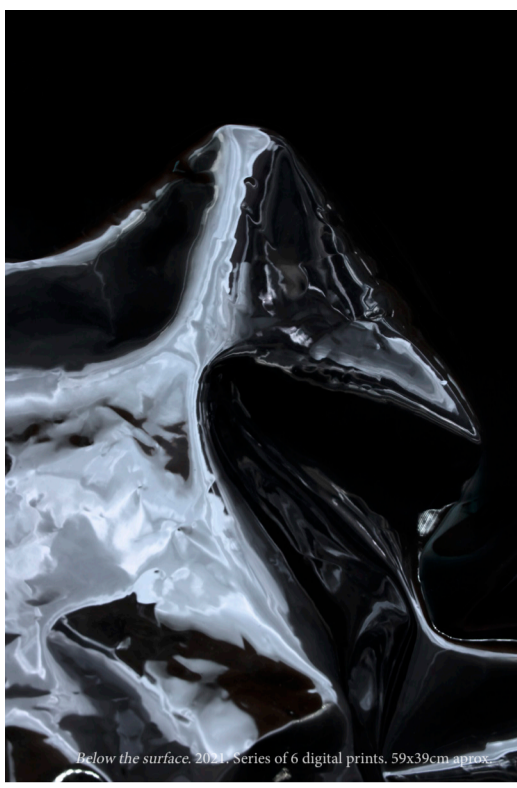


Cloud (detail). Wire mesh, light.



Like the darkroom processes of print and photography, residing in the tension and ephemerality of the work is the possibility of loss but equally the possibility of hope. Hung tenuously, held temporarily, the various installations might seem to be on the verge of coming adrift or falling. Some of the lights echo this form: with the slightest draft or nudge the whole work might change, or counterpart (shadow, reflection) vanish. This tension might be hidden from sight (at least until or unless someone brushes past an element), but I frequently experienced it in the practical process. When I found a display which I thought worked well, I had to fight the urge – driven by fear of losing the ‘best’ effect – to keep it in that exact same form. But if I did not risk that loss by altering compositions or lighting, I could never hope to find something better or something wonderfully different in its own way. Often the results of the material agency and refusal in the installations were far better than I could have imagined for myself. In every experiment this year, the installations have become something new. Always on the verge of changing, not clinging to static form or comfort, they embody what it is to hold things lightly.

*Below the surface. 2021. Series of 6 digital prints. 59x39cm aprox.*



*Below the surface. 2021. Series of 6 digital prints. 59x39cm aprox.*

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity and freedom I have been given this year to try and give form to my jumbled thoughts about life and the possibility of after-life. It has been an incredible and humbling process of learning and re-learning, discovering the life and lessons held within the materials used, and making peace with the things beyond my control and understanding. Risking the loss, deciding to fall or let fall – the leap of faith, I have found that each time I am held and carried through. Finding beauty in the unravelling, in the reaching and becoming, I am learning how each thing (myself and viewer included) is given “space to be and become” (Haynes, 2014:144) and endeavouring to put the same into practice in my own life.

*“The tacit points to that-which-is-not-yet. It is the spark that sets off the imaginative quest. It initiates the nomadic”*

(Siegesmund & Freedman, 2018:36).



*Below the surface. 2021. Series of 6 digital prints. 59x39cm aprox.*

*“For poetry too is a little incarnation, giving body to what had been before invisible and inaudible.”*

(Lewis, 1958:6).

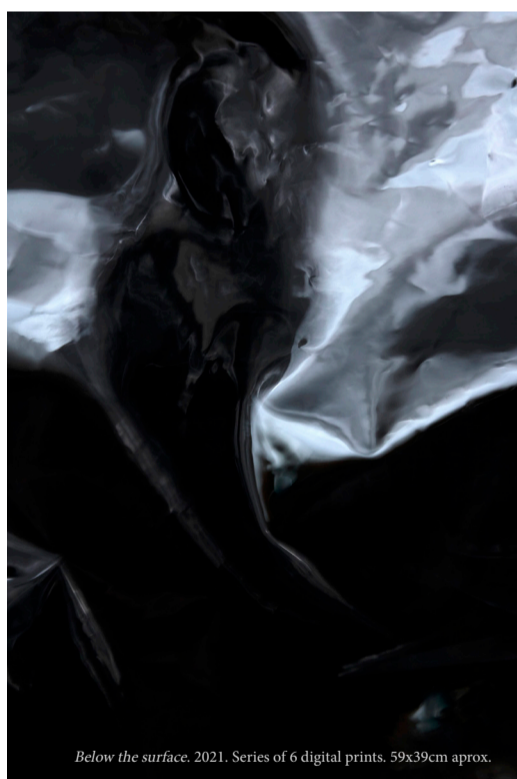


*Below the surface. 2021. Series of 6 digital prints. 59x39cm aprox.*



*Below the surface. 2021. Series of 6 digital prints. 59x39cm aprox.*

Contemplating how something can be both wave and particle; immanent and transcendent – these seemingly contrastive elements cannot be fully understood in our finite human terms. It is recognising this (that we do not have all the answers and cannot have them all now) which allows me to find freedom in the unfolding and becoming of life – in the agency of those things around us and beyond our control.



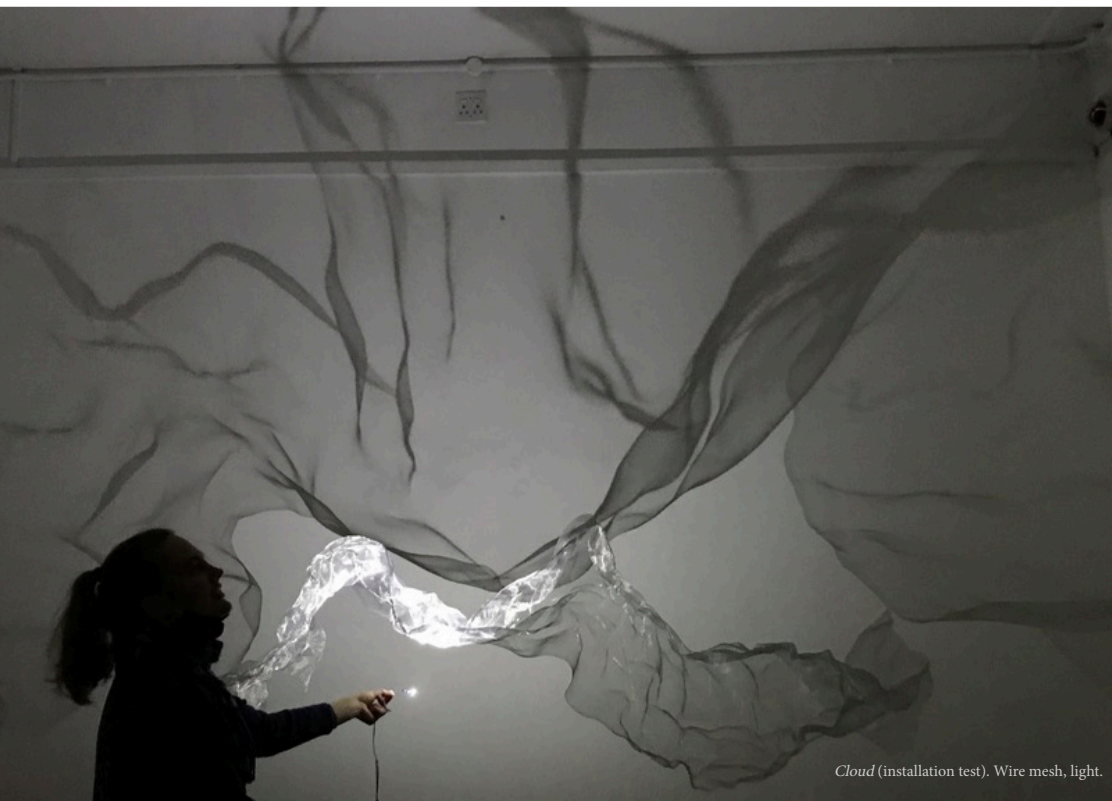
*Below the surface. 2021. Series of 6 digital prints. 59x39cm aprox.*

How do we make sense of this world? There are some things which we cannot answer or understand in our human terms – both wonderful and awful. There are some things too deep for words; some things we can never fully express. But I have this hope which brings me peace:

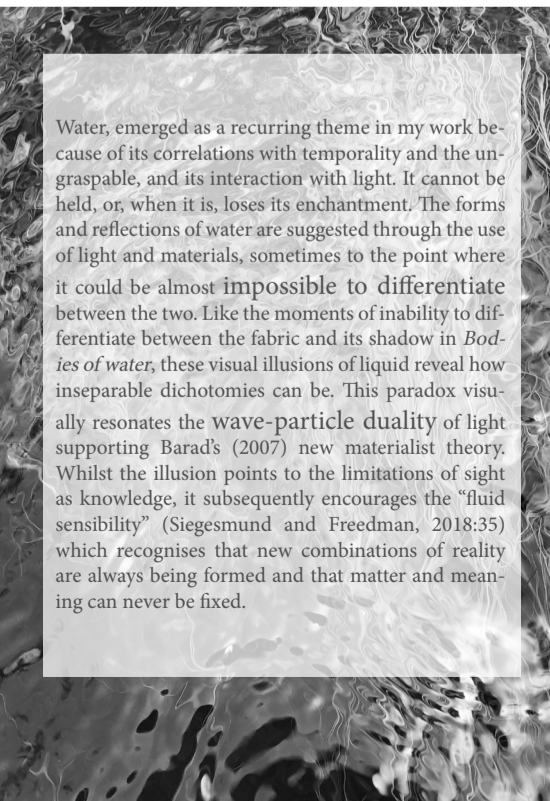
*“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”*

(2 Cor 4:16–18)

My work hopes to create a sense of the otherworldly and ignite sparks of the ‘there-must-be-more’ – a marvellous mystery awaiting. It does not attempt to overlook the reality of suffering, but proffers that even in and at our worst, there may be more than meets the eye, a tender presence to hold us and hold on to. I cannot control how people might respond to my work but my hope and prayer is that they might catch a glimpse of the hope and light which I have found and enjoy pondering the possibility of the supernatural.



*Cloud (installation test). Wire mesh, light.*



Water, emerged as a recurring theme in my work because of its correlations with temporality and the ungraspable, and its interaction with light. It cannot be held, or, when it is, loses its enchantment. The forms and reflections of water are suggested through the use of light and materials, sometimes to the point where it could be almost impossible to differentiate between the two. Like the moments of inability to differentiate between the fabric and its shadow in *Bodies of water*, these visual illusions of liquid reveal how inseparable dichotomies can be. This paradox visually resonates the wave-particle duality of light supporting Barad’s (2007) new materialist theory. Whilst the illusion points to the limitations of sight as knowledge, it subsequently encourages the “fluid sensibility” (Siegesmund and Freedman, 2018:35) which recognises that new combinations of reality are always being formed and that matter and meaning can never be fixed.



*Bodies of water (installation view). Organza, plastic, pins, LEDs.*