

NOT TO SCALE:  
Exploring the edges of meaning-making  
through textilic writings

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by  
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every weekend, traveling along the coasts of our bear-shaped island, which the Romans called 'Hibernia', or land of winter (and chose not to colonize, perhaps because of this...). From the top of the island to the bottom, the longest distance is 302mi, and from side to side, 170.9mi. It is a relatively small place, with a big footprint. The island is known for its musical and literary heritage, as well as having a kind of aura of mysticism, no doubt offset by the mists and clouds that hover over the first landfall the Gulf Stream makes on its way to Europe. Ireland is a place of contradictions. Small, but fierce, gregarious, but emotionally repressed. Warm people, cold climate. Modern, European, progressive, but old as time itself, with bogs and castles every few miles. The island's history is defined by emigration, as wave after wave left the island for England, or America, or Australia, to seek a better fortune. Motivated by famine, poverty, repressive cultural norms, or a lack of work, these people brought little pockets of memories with them across the globe and helped to create the nostalgic view of Ireland in the popular imagination. This is where I am from. I am made of this place. It shapes me, even as I reshape my understanding and relationship to it. It is written on me. The poet and philosopher John O'Donohue described this as the 'inner landscape', the place from which we are always becoming (O'Donohue, 2008). It is a place of rock and moss and lichen, of oak and salt and huge arcing sky. Of salt and vinegar chips, and dark velvety stout. Of wool and gorse and heather. Of peat and butter and tea. It is a place of textures, and time.

















figure 03: Helen Frankenthaler pouring paint onto a large unprimed canvas as part of her soak-stain technique of painting. Source: <https://www.thoughtco.com/painting-technique-of-helen-frankenthaler-4118620>









confronted with the act of looking, and can find community in making meaning. These works are intended to be read as sympoetic. In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway defines sympoiesis as “making-with... a word proper to complex; dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company.” (Haraway 2016, p.58) Sympoiesis is contrasted with ‘autopoeisis’. Where autopoeisis indicates an individualized self-propagation, ‘sympoiesis’ refers to the inextricable nature of our collective being. These two words share the root ‘poeisis’ meaning ‘making’ in Greek, which is the basis of the word ‘poetry’ in English. Poetry uses the aesthetics and rhythms of language to make meaning over and above that of the nominal. Following this etymological thread, *Not to Scale* then can be considered works of textile poetics, in working with the senses to create aesthetic experiences grounded in a kind of materialized intertext. Textile poetics was the subject of a 2023 conference organized by the International Society for Intermedial Studies, entitled “Text & Techne”. In the call for papers, the organizers framed the topic thus:

*“Poetry is often referred to as a craft rooted in the making of a poem; similarly, textiles are often referred to as a form of language, one that disregards most of the elements that we are accustomed to in the way we understand and experience the written language of poetry: from ideas of linearity to a supposed superiority of sight over touch.”*

In moving from bezier to bitmap in the creation of the visual content of this work, and then letting the process of weaving substantially change the visuality of the















all, I loved being on the outside, on the edge, away, reading and steering, peering into the viscose green-blue of the water, a drizzly twilight. I spent summers in the sea, and liked my anxious overthinking self the most when I collapsed into bed, entire body aching from the effort of the day, skin crispy, hair straw, mind quiet. For some reason, these are my memories of home. The biggest ones. The brightest in spite of the often murky scenery. The works in this show explore the outsized importance of these experiences in my life, and how they have shaped me. The experience of occupying the space between, an interest in what lies at the border, not beyond, but at. What grows in the spaces between, at the edge?

In Hyde's *A Primer for Forgetting*, he exposes the societal emphasis we place on memory, while reminding us that our capacity to forget might be the actual force winnowing and shaping our perceptions of our own personal and collective narratives. In these works, I attempt to create a sense of mapping, navigating, to thread the holes in my memory and in doing so, expose a kind of shared forgetfulness, the feeling of something being on the tip of one's tongue, on the edge of consciousness, that marks us out as terrestrials making meaning together.

The Irish poet and philosopher John O'Donohue held a conception of beauty as the act of crossing 'worthily over a threshold'. He saw beauty not as an aesthetic complete but as the ongoing act of moving into a "more critical and challenging and worthy fullness..." (O'Donohue 2008). He described the inner landscape of a person as that which forms their interactions with others and

shapes the world. Recognizing these markings of experience in each other is what tethers us to our humanity, and each other. Ingold considers the threshold as a similar kind of ongoing becoming:

*“there are lines in the landscape because every landscape is forged in movement, and because this movement leaves material traces along the manifold paths of its proceeding. To perceive these paths is not to see things as they are but to see the directions along which things are moving. It is to see their grains, textures and flows, not their layout or their formal envelopes.”* (Ingold 2021, 169)

Between the infinite landscape of digital vectors and the finite and concrete, embodied temporality of a woven artefact. It is this interconnectedness, and the fact that weaving can expose the story of its making, in fact, can never be anything but both structure and surface, that is harnessed in this work, which asks the audience to engage in lines of becoming, and cross the threshold together.

### *Before Language*

*“Colour is a given of our sensory experience since birth; it precedes our entry into language and for the most part remains outside our linguistic selves. We can’t choose to be or not to be in colour, but at the same time we can barely know, measure or describe the colour we are in”* (Batchelor 2014, 9)

The works in *Not to Scale* are made of a diversity of materials — acid-dyed wool, mohair, angora and wool blends, silver and copper-sheened rayon yarns, cotton



itself around other yarns. There is also linen in some of the pieces in the Not to Scale series (not all included in the show), and hemp. These drier fibers feel like the relationship between crisp dry lichen and springy mosses to me.

Contrasting with the toothiness of these materials is flagging tape. Flagging tape is used by contractors, surveyors and ecologists alike to mark the earth or other parts of the natural landscape. It is made from chemicals, and though temporary it is nonetheless made to endure. The limited color range is used to signal different land uses or planned actions, to grab attention and to encode space and landscape, boundary, direction. These tapes annotate our landscapes. In using flagging tape, and embedding it in the weavings themselves, this annotation melds with the thing being described. The signifier becomes the signified as writer and reader distinctions collapse. (Barthes 1986, 63) As material, the tape is translucent and sheer in isolation, but opaque and densely pigmented in the aggregate. Naturalistic and artificial at once, the interactions of the hairy yarns and the smooth plastic taffeta creates a tension in between a sense of hyperreality and artificiality (figures 09 and 10).

























