



Parallels

Simon Hitchens

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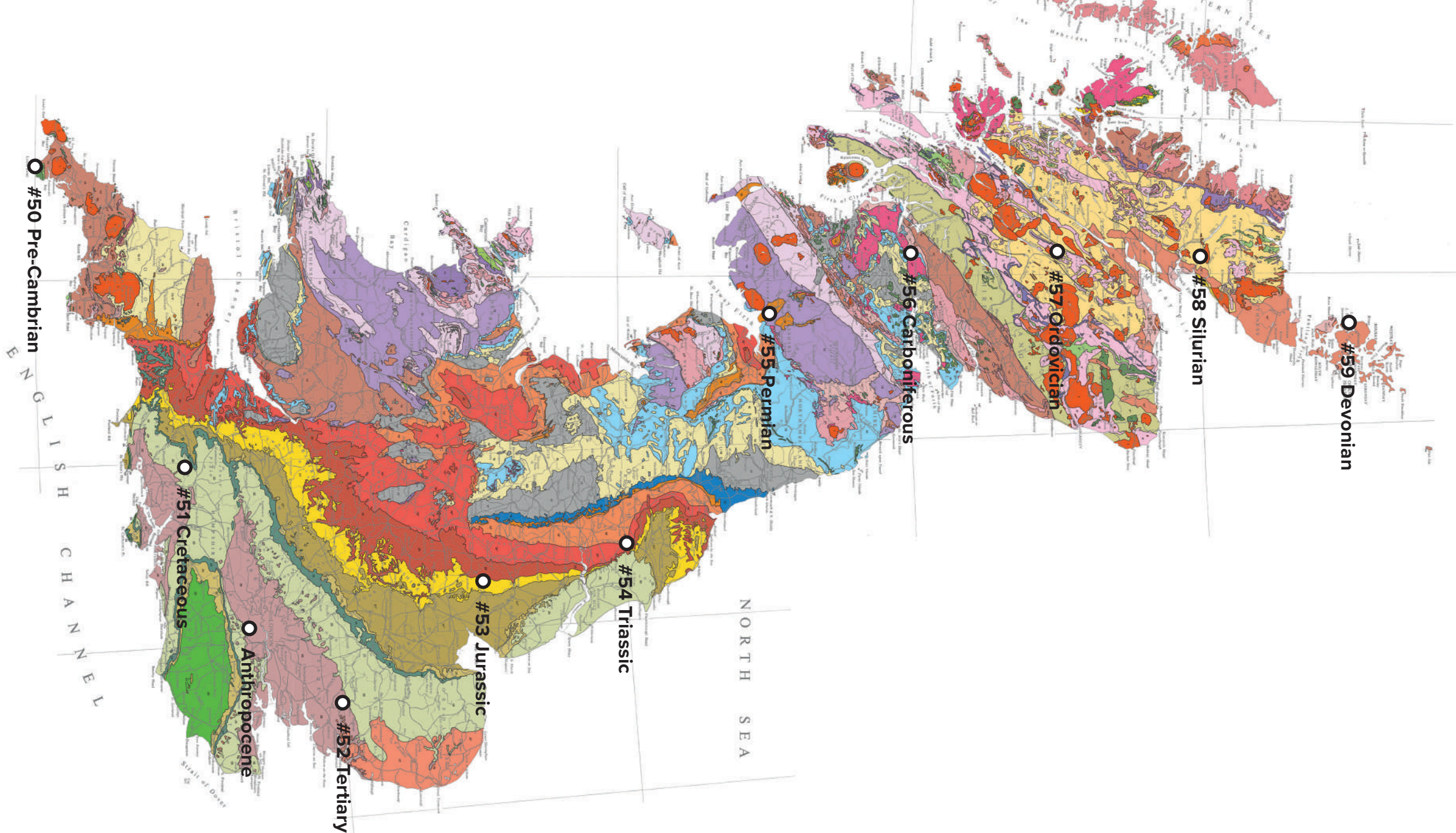
An exploration into
time and transience

Simon Hitchens

What happens to us
is irrelevant to the world's geology
but what happens to the world's geology
is not irrelevant to us.
We must reconcile ourselves to the stones.
Not the stones to us.

Hugh MacDiarmid, excerpt from *On A Raised Beach*, 1934





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CLOSE Ltd is delighted to have collaborated with the South West Heritage Trust to present *Parallels* by Simon Hitchens at the Somerset Rural Life Museum.

This powerful exhibition comprises a series of drawings and sculptures propelled by a journey through nature. A modern day land artist, Hitchens displays a lightness of form in his rigorous practice which reveals sustained processes, craftsmanship, and a wealth of knowledge about materials. Hitchens is reaching for a deeper meaning, inspiring us to pay attention to the phenomenal in our everyday life.

Freeny Yianni
Creative Director
CLOSE Ltd



Somerset Rural Life Museum has long been a venue for innovative work by artists and makers of many kinds. It is thus a particular pleasure to us that Simon Hitchens, working with CLOSE Ltd, has brought his exhibition *Parallels* to the museum, and through drawings and sculpture is sharing his memorable artistic response to things that survive through the ages and shadows that vanish so swiftly.

Simon Hitchens invites us to reflect on time and the connections that link the human and natural worlds – connections which for our vulnerable planet seem more important than ever. The museum, with its medieval Abbey Barn and the yet more ancient and enduring Glastonbury Tor, which rises near at hand, seems a particularly appropriate setting for such an exhibition and for the questions it asks of us.

The exhibition is likely to challenge and inspire anyone who engages with the artworks it contains and with the fascinating process of their creation. At the same time *Parallels* is for the museum a further expression of our commitment to contemporary creativity and all that it has to teach us about the past, the present and the uncertain future.

Sam Astill
Head of Museums and Engagement
South West Heritage Trust



The Parallel Project

The British Isles have a rich and varied geology, with rocks ageing from the present to some of the oldest on our planet. Each day these rocks get a little older as we too get older. To be able to comprehend the deep-time of rocks is to shine a light upon our own short lifespan and to begin to understand the transient but interconnected nature of what we share with the world.

For three weeks spanning the autumn equinox of 2019 I travelled the full height of the British Isles, from latitude 50 in Cornwall to latitude 60 in Shetland. The purpose of my journey was to find rocks from eleven different geological time periods and to make a durational day drawing of the shadow lines cast from each rock, on each of the eleven lines of latitude. I would place a rock upon a sheet of paper I had set up before dawn. As the sun rose in the east I would trace its first shadow cast upon the surface of the paper with a pen, taking about two minutes to complete. In that small space of time the Earth had spun just a little on its axis, advancing the shadow and so I would immediately start

drawing the new shadow line. This process was repeated relentlessly until either a cloud obscured the sun and there was no shadow to draw, or the sun dipped below the western horizon at the end of the day. The twelfth drawing is of the youngest geological time period, the Anthropocene; this records the shadows of a discarded lump of plastic drawn upon a landfill site in London.

These are process-based drawings made in, of and about the landscape: the result of a particular set of conditions, in a particular place, over a particular span of time. They record celestial time, geological time and human time as well as the weather patterns unique to that day and site: a meditation on time and space. Even the solidity of mountains, given time, will eventually erode into nothing, echoing the transience of human life.

Simon Hitchens, 2023

Twelve Days Around the Autumn Equinox

Nicholas Alfrey

Simon Hitchens' *Parallels* is a project in which meticulous planning comes up against a series of unpredictable circumstances in the field. The guiding principle was to make day-long drawings of the shadows cast by stones sourced at locations spanning the whole length of Britain, determined by the intersection of two systems, one concerned with space, the other time. Britain is crossed by eleven lines of latitude, or 'parallels', part of a system of global projection that, in conjunction with longitude, enables the location of any position on earth to be precisely specified. The long history of the British land mass can, in turn, also be expressed cartographically, a succession of eleven geological periods rendered on the map in a range of colours according to the underlying rock formations. Hitchens' journey, his itinerary for making the drawings, was worked out in careful detail by identifying the coincidence, on the surface of the land, of these two abstract systems.

There is a twelfth geological period, the most recent, the much-debated Anthropocene, but this is not located at any particular latitude, and its bedrock is still in the early stages of formation. The twelfth drawing, appropriately enough, is the wild card here, made out of sequence on a separate journey, and with a lump of plastic instead of a stone as its basis.

The drawings are site-specific, a form of fieldwork, each one the unique record of unrepeatable circumstances, whereas the twelve *Noontide* sculptures, an integral part of the project from the outset, were made later, of course, in studio and foundry.

They have an essential relationship with the drawings from which they are generated, since their precise form and small scale relate directly to the shadows cast by the original stones. Taken as a whole, the project represents a step away from the monumentality that has often characterised Hitchens' previous work, though it is hardly a scaling-back of ambition. Displayed together, drawings and sculptures form an ensemble of twenty-four discrete pieces which make up a single collective work.

Conditions for an adventure

The project is only conceivable because of the extraordinary circumstance that evidence of almost the entire span of geological time is encompassed in the short length of the British Isles. Along some latitudes, the underlying geological time zone extends for many miles, while along others there are only rare instances where they coincide. Hitchens' journey is anything but a straightforward linear transect of the country, therefore, and involved intricate plotting out in advance, using both geological and topographical maps.

The terms of Hitchens' project meant that some very specific conditions had to be met on the ground. To make his 'durational day drawings', in which the changing silhouette of the shadow cast by a stone is traced from daybreak to sunset, required a vantage point with an uninterrupted view of both the eastern and western horizon. While this information can be deduced from the contour lines recorded on a map, there is always going to be a small but perhaps crucial disparity between the map and the territory, between the record made by cartographers and the experience of a traveller in the field. Even the most accurate map will not enable the potential traveller to prevision fully the character of a specific geographical location. This matters particularly here, because there is the question of access to be considered: the drawing apparatus must be carried up to the vantage point before dawn. There is also the issue of access and private property; since it was simply not practicable to negotiate

permissions in advance, this aspect had to be left to chance.

The stones themselves, fragments of the underlying rock churned up to the surface over the years, had to be found on location the evening before each drawing was begun, sometimes by the light of a head torch if it was already dark by the time he arrived at the location. Each stone had to be roughly equivalent in size to all the others, and to be capable of standing upright without modification. The most unpredictable factor of all, of course, was the weather, but this very uncertainty is at the heart of the project: an exploration of the relationship between durable rock and volatile skies.

There were so many conditions to meet for the project to succeed, so many factors that needed to coincide, so much that could not be predicted with any degree of certainty. Quite apart from the long car journey, the actual working process required great reserves of physical and mental stamina because it meant drawing continuously from dawn to dusk if the skies were clear, or at least being at the ready by the drawing board if it clouded over. (The titles of the drawings indicate the time span involved to make them, giving the precise hour of sunrise and sunset; the variations in these times are accounted for by the different geographical positions, the curvature of the earth and the position of our planet on its annual orbit round the sun).

All this lends the project something of the quality of an adventure, different in kind from any studio-bound enterprise. To accomplish his objective, Hitchens has said that he needed to draw on his experience as a rock-climber: assembling the right equipment, assessing the conditions and risks, travelling as lightly and efficiently as possible. In this case, the apparatus consisted of a collapsible aluminium table, designed to enable the artist to draw in a standing position; paper of sufficient weight to stand up to open-air conditions, and exactly the right size for the tabletop; fine Rotring pens, capable of producing a delicate but emphatic

line for hour after hour; a compass to establish a consistent orientation of the table. The physical stamina and concentration required to draw for twelve-hour periods might also be thought comparable to that required for a long climb.

A lone figure on a strategic viewpoint, bent on some mysterious activity at a portable table, might seem to anyone catching sight of him a puzzling presence, or, if that observer happened to be a farmer or a landowner, a suspicious one. He might be taken for a surveyor of some kind, with who knows what potentially disruptive business in hand. In practice Hitchens met relatively few people while at work in the field, but he recounts one episode in which he was approached by an initially mistrustful farmer. His suspicion soon turned to an acknowledgment of common interest, however, and artist and farmer entered on a discussion of the cycle of the days, the passage of the sun, the changing angle of shadows, observed from their very different walks of life. Hitchens later commented that 'the exchange we had has stayed with me and reaffirms the universal within these drawings'.¹

Interruptions in the light²

Each drawing consists of the multiple tracings of the outline of a stone's shadow as the position of the sun gradually changes throughout the day, with a new outline started roughly every two minutes. The journey was undertaken around the time of the autumn equinox in 2019, when day and night are of approximately equal duration, and there are roughly twelve hours of sunlight. Theoretically, one might expect the resulting configurations to have a formal consistency and symmetry, the only variations between them accounted for by the difference in latitude at successive stages of progress to the far north. But this would be to assume that the exact same stone was placed at every latitude and an unlikely sustained spell of clear skies at all points in the nation. All the same, about half the set do indeed display a broad symmetry, like spread wings of fine mesh, though on closer

examination there are always many differences in the detail. Other drawings in the set, though, are startlingly varied in form, all the more surprising given that all twelve have been created by the same rigorously-defined process.

The blank passages, sudden intervals, discontinuities and what look like tears in the fabric are explained by the vagaries of the weather: no lines were drawn when the sky was overcast or the sun obscured by a passing cloud. So, at Normanton, for example, a dense bank of high-level cloud moved in by early afternoon and did not clear for the rest of the day, resulting in half the sheet almost blank, except for the occasional broken line when a ray of sunlight broke through. At Haughhead, there was hardly any sun, and at Catlodge not much more, the sparse lines in these drawings suggesting a stop-motion sequence of unfolding petals. Each drawing represents the history of a day's sunshine and cloud, objectively, though not mechanically, recorded. John Constable famously remarked that 'No two days are alike, nor even two hours', but on this evidence, he could have reduced the time in question further still, and made it two minutes.³

The loose ends and sometimes unpredictable-seeming trajectories of the closely spaced lines themselves are due to the varied shapes of the stones. The outline of the shadow amplifies the anfractuositities of each one, so that the most imperceptible change of angle will send a line shooting off in an apparently wayward direction. But the stones themselves, the solid objects interrupting the light, are entirely absent, registering only as an intense void, a white portal made all the more dazzling by the mesh of dark lines beginning all around it. 'The mouth of a cave full of white light', as the artist himself has described it.⁴

Some of the preoccupations, processes and motifs in *Parallels* suggest affinities with the work of certain British Land artists of the later 1960s and 1970s: the very idea of making work directly in the landscape, most evidently, but also an interest in the themes

of duration, deep time and first-hand experience, the planning and undertaking of expeditions, the use of maps, the motifs of stones, clouds and shadow. In a very early work by Richard Long, for example, the artist made a six-day journey by walking and hitch-hiking from London to the summit of Ben Nevis and back, taking two photographs at 11.00am each day, one with the camera pointing to the ground, the other to the sky.⁵ This laconic documentation blanks all the scenery along the way, wilfully occluding what must have been the climax of the enterprise, the ascent of Ben Nevis itself. The boundary-pushing interrogation of the nature of sculpture itself is characteristic of Long's generation, whereas for Hitchens, although his is also a conceptually-driven project, the traditional categories of drawing and sculpture remain settled. All circumstantial aspects of the landscapes he was working in are entirely absent from the drawings, just as they are from Long's photographs, but whereas the latter chose to adapt a perversely oblique approach to his experience, Hitchens concentrates only on that which is absolutely essential, the outline of a gradually changing shadow.

Hitchens' practice of durational drawing has a closer precedent in the work of Roger Ackling: his *Five Hour Cloud Drawing* (1980), for example, was made by turning focused sunlight into a drawing medium by using a magnifying glass to burn parallel lines on to a piece of card.⁶ Intervals of cloud cover register as gaps, so that the drawing is the record of the artist's presence in the landscape for a set period in variable conditions. An hour holding a magnifying glass steady requires intense concentration and physical control, but while Hitchens' lines are freehand, they are no more expressive than Ackling's, and he commits to a still more demanding schedule of continuous activity, or at least watchfulness, for the entire duration of a day.

Intervals of sunlight and cloud also play an important part in a seminal work of 1974 by the film-maker Chris Welsby. His twenty-minute 16mm film *Seven Days* was shot on a Welsh mountainside

with the camera mounted on an Equatorial Stand, designed to rotate at the same speed as the earth.⁷ One frame was shot every ten seconds, beginning at sunrise and ending at sunset; the camera was set up to point down at its own shadow if the sun was out, otherwise up at the sky. The film is in effect edited directly by nature, with no personal agency involved. Hitchens' medium and process are different, but the two projects engage with so many of the same concerns that, in the unlikely event of their ever being shown together, they would make for a remarkable double bill.

The work associated with the original phase of Land art belongs to a period when landscape, which had come to seem irrelevant for progressive art, was being reclaimed for various forms of radical practice. The legacy of Land art is still very evident in a certain strand in the art of our own time, when to declare an interest in landscape is no longer a contentious proposition. A significant number of contemporary artists are once more willing to take up themes of wonder and enchantment, and to address such subjects as the vast spaces beyond our planet, the unimaginable reaches of deep time, and the exploration of how our lived experience relates to the forces of long duration around us. This is the context in which *Parallels* must be understood.⁸

Cast shadows

Each drawing has a corresponding sculpture, small enough to be displayed on a table top, in which the shadow of the stone at midday is rendered in cast iron. The word chosen for the collective title, 'Noontide', has a faintly antiquarian ring to it, and contains within it a suggestion of both moon and tide. The material, though, has connotations of the industrial age, hinting at the presence of iron ore in the bedrock and at the coming of the Anthropocene. In these pieces, space becomes solid, an absence of light is made dark and substantial. They are mysterious looking objects, at first glance evocative of half-buried fragments of entablatures and cornices such as we see in nineteenth century

pictures of the ruins of Rome and the Campagna. The smooth flat base corresponds to the surface of the paper on which the shadow originally fell, the irregular edge to the silhouette of the now absent stone which cast it. The steeply slanting, grooved and ridged mass between them seems, for all its weight, to have a curious velocity, as if black rays were beaming down to earth and passing right through its surface.

In contrast to the drawings, created in the field and in which the process of their making is frankly disclosed, the sculptures are studio-made, produced through complex procedures, involving multiple moulds and materials, which are not apparent from the finished object. Hitchens was fortunate in that the sun was shining at midday in every one of his locations, even on the cloudiest days, so that he was able to trace the outline of the noon shadow, when the sun was directly overhead, in every case. This enabled him to recreate the shadow back in the studio with the stones placed exactly as they were, and so begin the long process of realizing it in material form. The stone itself registers in the final work as a dark negative counterpart to the white void at the heart of the drawings.

The *Parallels* project was planned and the drawings executed in September 2019, but any plan to show the work was delayed by the pandemic. The exhibition at Glastonbury also includes a more recent sculpture, *Bearing Witness to Things Unseen*. This may be a return to a more monumental scale, but many of the elements of the *Noontide* series are recognisable here: the idea of an absent stone, the implication of human presence, a cave-like void, the suggestion of projected shadow or the passage of dark rays.

The sculpture is made in black concrete, but once again an absent rock is at the heart of the work. The piece is designed to be seen at first end-on, as if in cross-section, its shape determined by the profile of a large boulder of carboniferous limestone. The height of the piece is roughly equivalent to a

standing human figure, and since this first surface is rendered smooth and reflective, an approaching spectator will see themselves as if dimly emerging from a dark portal. The profile is then projected a considerable distance, the outline carried on in parallel ridges and grooves, like the moulding of a cornice or a sustained chord in music. At the far end, looking back, is a cavernous opening, formed by a cast of the 'lost' boulder.

The sculpture was first exhibited in the nave of Chichester Cathedral in 2022, oriented to the east-west axis of the building, and gaining additional resonance from its medieval setting. (Photographs of the work being installed there show it entering through a narrow Norman archway like some ominous catafalque). At Glastonbury, it will be displayed in the Abbey Barn, a magnificent fourteenth-century farm building situated just outside the former monastic precinct. The dark matter of the sculpture will emerge only slowly from the gloom of the interior, making the depth of the cave-like hollow at its far end difficult to gauge.

Taken together, the drawings and sculptures that make up *Parallels* and *Bearing Witness to Things Unseen* present a striking contrast of daylight and darkness, the delicacy and intricacy of the drawings on the one hand, looming mass on the other. Both works explore our relationship with rock, and therefore with deep time. *Bearing Witness to Things Unseen* sends the echo of a limestone boulder across 300 cm of real space; it has its counterpart in *Parallels* in the drawing made on latitude 56, at Haughhead, on a very cloudy day, where a stone from the carboniferous period of more than 300 million years ago cast its fleeting shadow on a sheet of paper. For an artist to stand tracing that shadow for the entire duration of a day is undoubtedly quite a thing to accomplish. But that little stone is itself a fragmentary token from a vast historical sequence of rock formation, in which mankind appears only in the last chapters. *Parallels* is a work that encourages us to reflect on such connections.

¹ Simon Hitchens on '06.57 Bankhead 19.16' in Giulia Ricci, *Lines of Empathy*, London 2023, p.32.

² I adapt this sub-heading from the title of a sculpture by Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Sundial: A Small Interruption in the Light* (1977), Arts Council Collection.

³ C.R. Leslie, *Memoirs of the life of John Constable*, ed. J. Mayne, London, 1951, p.273. Purely coincidental, but the drawing at Twinstead on the 52nd parallel was made in the Constable Country.

⁴ *Lines of Empathy*, p.32.

⁵ Richard Long, *Untitled* (1967), Ink with typescript on card and photographs on board, Tate. The work is also known as *Ben Nevis Hitch-Hike*.

⁶ Roger Ackling, *Five Hour Cloud Drawing* (1980), sunlight on card, Arts Council Collection.

⁷ Chris Welsby, *Seven Days* (1974), 20 mins colour and sound, 16mm. https://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/chris_welsby/seven_days.html

⁸ For some of these artists see Nicholas Alfrey and Rebecca Partridge, *Scaling the Sublime: Art at the Limits of Landscape*, Nottingham, 2018.



Bearing Witness to Things Unseen

Concrete, 190 x 60 x 300 cm

2022

Location: Chichester Cathedral

The following pages are taken directly from my Instagram posts made during this journey through time.

The photos and text were solely taken and written by me, in real time, in the landscape. I had no assistance and they often took 1.5 hrs to slowly compose, catching a brief 10-15 seconds between each drawn line. If, however, there was cloud cover and no sunshine, then of course I had the luxury of not feeling rushed.





Latitude #50 – dawn

06.53 This morning I welcome the sun rising on the Lizard, Cornwall. Today my drawing is located on the 50th parallel north which runs through this southern tip of Britain. This piece of rock, whose shadow I'm starting to record, happens to be from the Pre-Cambrian – that means I'm drawing shadows which directly link me to the deep time of over half a billion years ago. Such an age, such a gargantuan time-scale, also an intimate day spent learning a little about this humble piece of Earth. This is the start of a bit of a road trip up Britain, crossing key lines of latitude and discovering new geological time periods.

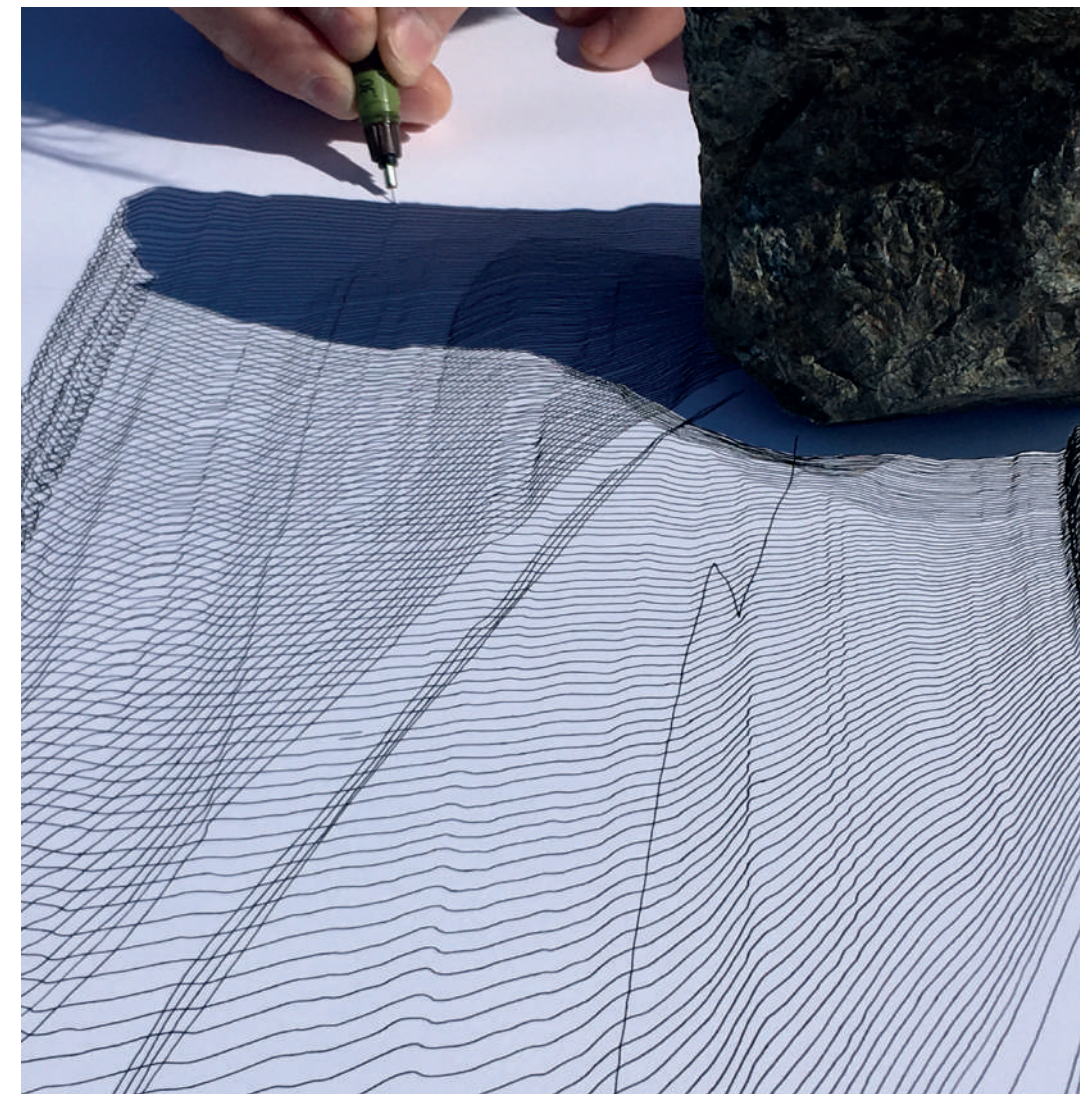
13 September



Latitude #50 – midday

There's a certain irony in my location being the 50th parallel, as I have clearly drawn more than 50 parallel lines today.

13 September





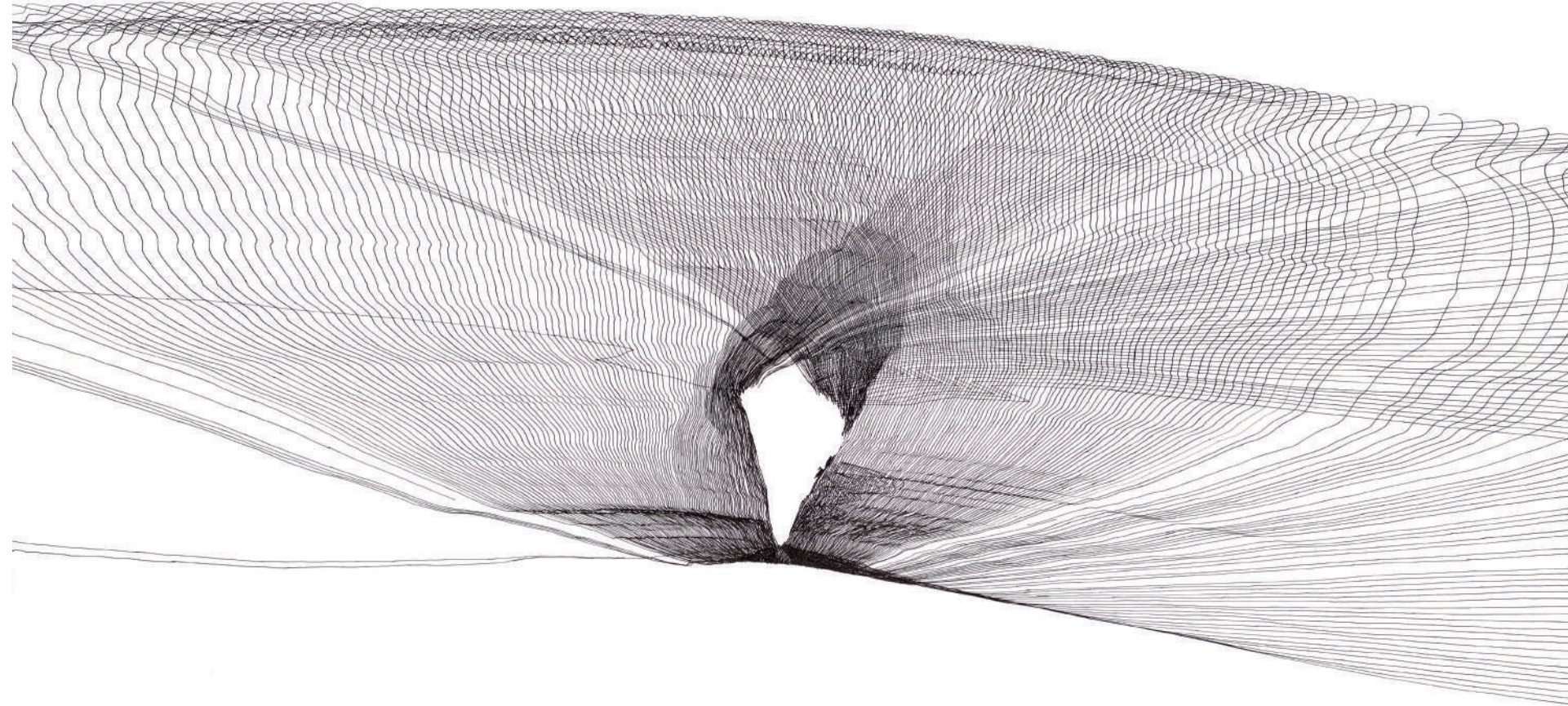
Latitude #50 – dusk

19.40 and the Pre-Cambrian 50th parallel drawing is complete. A few clouds at either end of the day but essentially, a dream. Bye-bye Cornwall, I'm heading north.

13 September

#50

06.53 Kugger 19.40



#51



Latitude #51 – dawn

06.43 and it's sunrise on Cranborne Chase, the 51st parallel north. Day 2 of my drawing trip and today I'm recording the shadows of the Cretaceous period: 145 - 66 million years and a day. I got a bit cocky this morning, seeing a full day of sun forecast, I didn't quite pack enough warm clothing – cold fingers and legs – lesson learnt! Early morning mist wrinkled the paper, but now it's clearing to get stunning views north with the sun on my right and an almost full moon on my left ☺.

15 September



Latitude #51 – midday

Noon at Cranborne Chase on the 51st parallel. Spending time getting to know this lump of flint circa 145 to 66 million years old and five and a quarter hours into this shadow drawing.

15 September





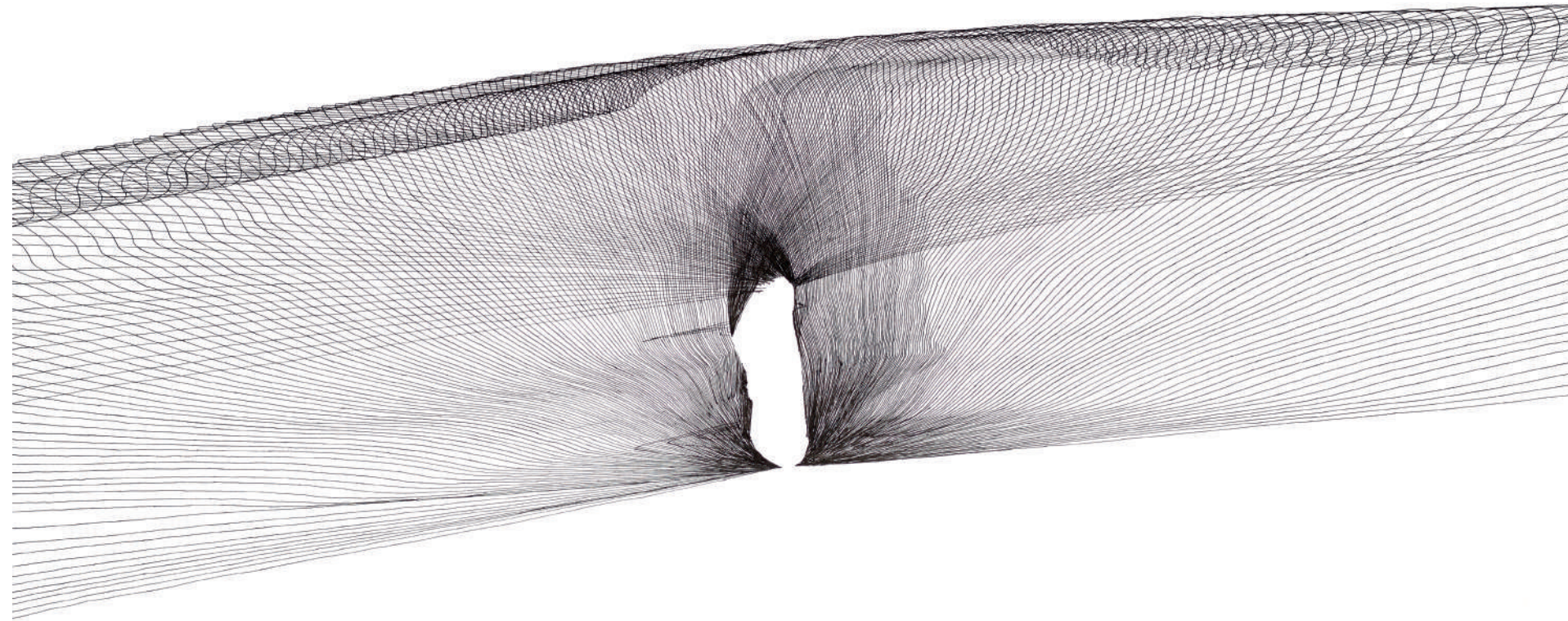
Latitude #51 – dusk

Goodbye #Wiltshire, time to hit the road.

15 September

#51

06.43 Bowerchalke 19.23





#52



Latitude #52 – dawn

06.33 and sunrise over an Essex field. Today I'm drawing on the 52nd parallel and with a stone from the Tertiary geological period, young in geological terms at 66 - 2.6 million years old. Given that the Earth is circa 4.6 billion years old, the age of this flat part of the country seems a mere trifle. Standing here, with a stone I picked up from the field I'm in, I begin to realise how definable the curvature of the Earth is: the sun rises here in the East, a full 20 minutes before it does on the Lizard in Cornwall where I was drawing but a few days ago.

17 September



Latitude #52 – midday

Midday on the 52nd parallel north, a line of latitude which runs around the Earth and just four miles south of Thomas Gainsborough's birthplace in Sudbury. Big cloud above me right now – time for a quick post.

17 September





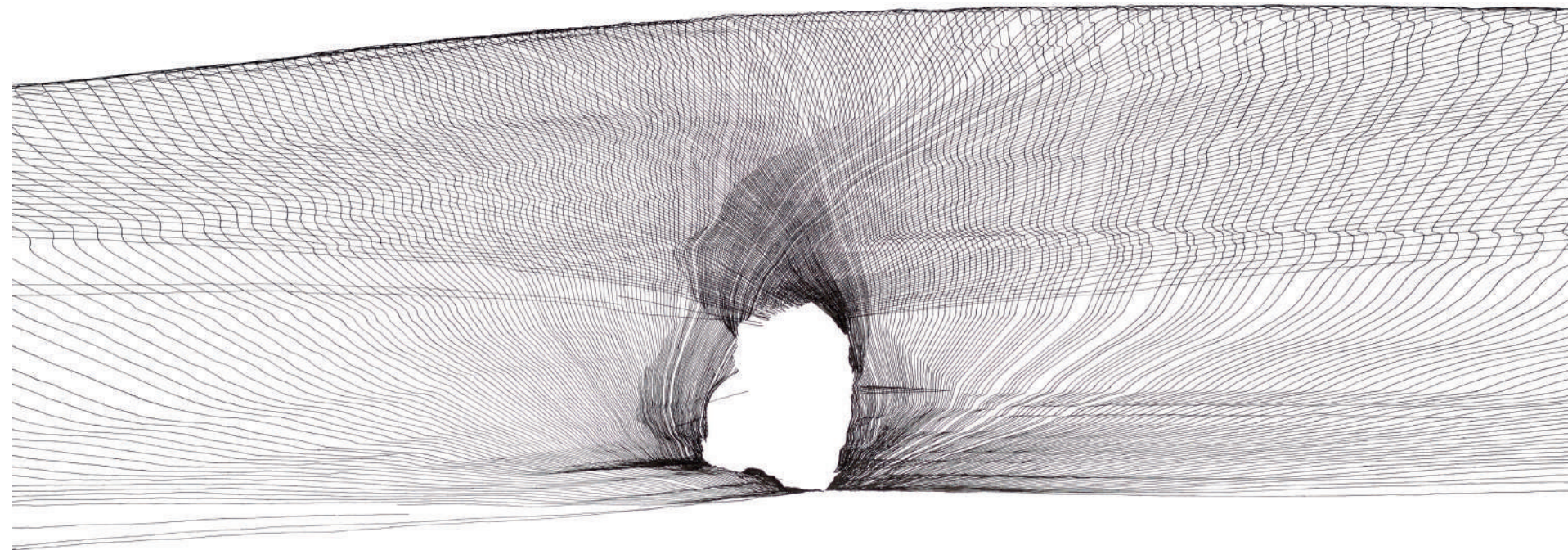
Latitude #52 - dusk

That was a good day.
Drawing number three completed and now
off towards Lincoln.
Goodbye Essex.

17 September

#52

06.33 Tinstead 19.07





Latitude #53 – dawn

06.43 and its sunrise again, time to strike the pose – this is feeling familiar now: sun on my right shoulder, slight ache in the back, cold fingers and excited anticipation of what promises to be a wonderful day spent drawing under the sun. Today the 53rd parallel, somewhere in Lincolnshire and immersed in the Jurassic.

18 September



Latitude #53 – midday

Midday in a Jurassic landscape. Looks just like any other ploughed field to me, but underneath the surface lies rocks aged 201 – 145 million years old, such as this piece of Ancaster limestone. Time passes, the Earth rotates and this rock endures.

18 September



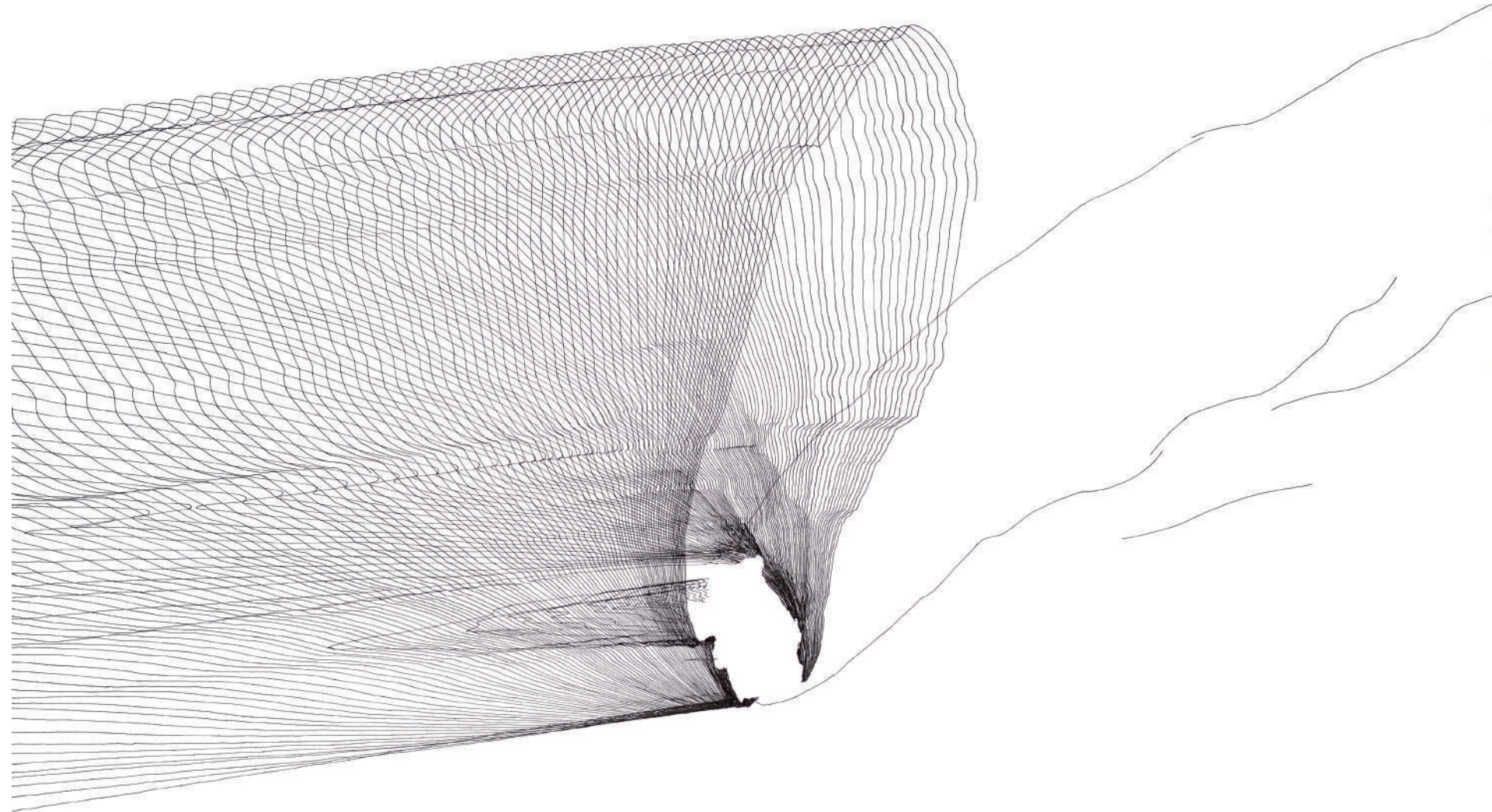


Oh boy, I reckon tomorrow's day spent
drawing is going to be memorable.

19 September

#53

06.43 Normanton 19.12





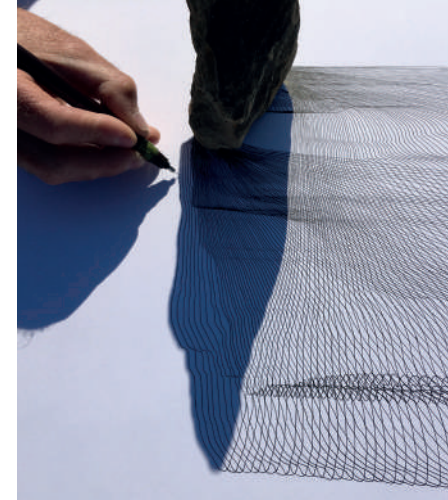
#54



Latitude #54 – dawn

Sunrise over Yorkshire, and I'm set up directly on the 54th parallel north. Today I'm chasing shadows of the Triassic period, all 201-252 million years of them. Last night's bit of serendipity happened in a local pub: chatting with the landlord about what I was doing, he told me that where I was sat, Hockney had sat in the exact same seat a few years ago. A good omen?

20 September

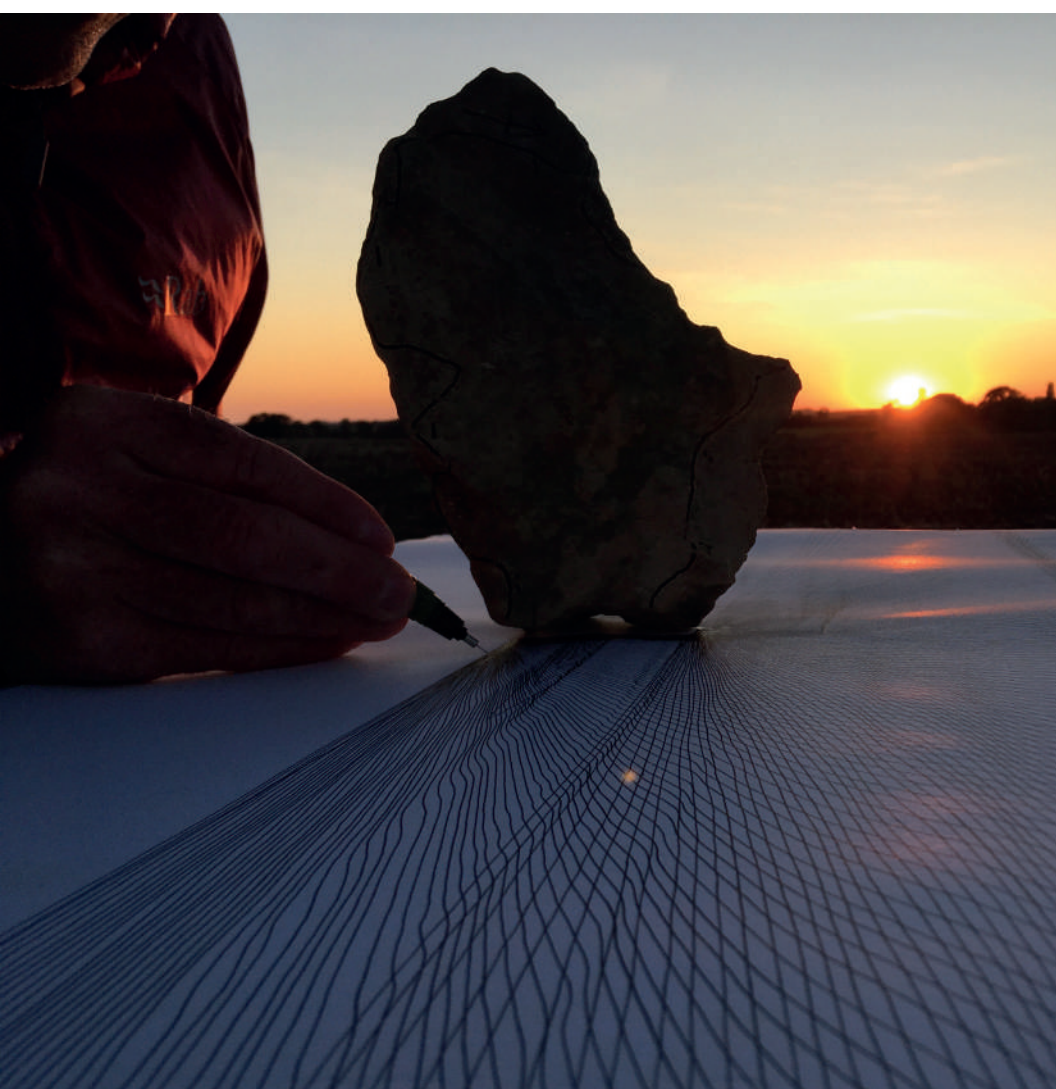


Latitude #54 – midday

Midday on the 54th parallel north, and the Sun continues to provide me with striking shadows. Drawn lines as echoes of what once was – time passing.

20 September





#54

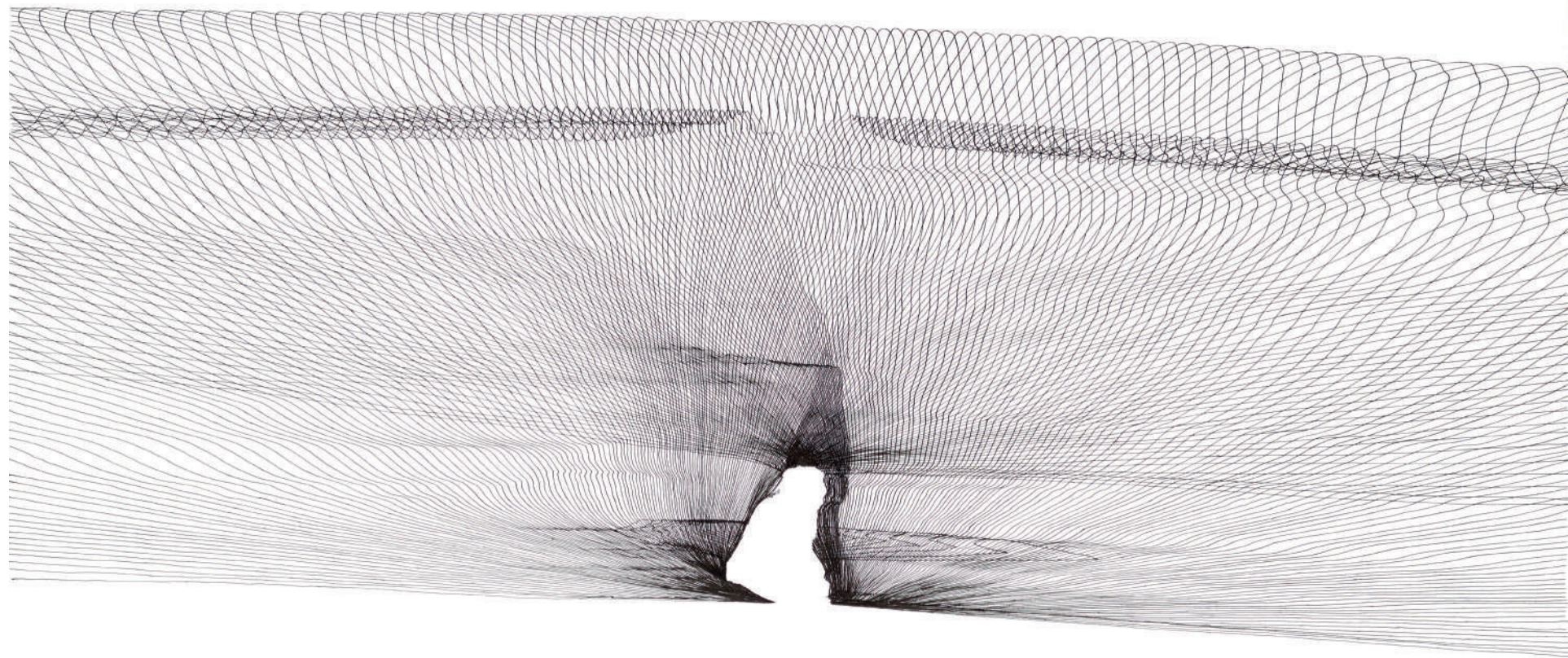
06.45 Skirpenbeck 19.08



Latitude #54 - dusk

Goodbye, Yorkshire, next stop Scotland.

20 September





Latitude #55 – dawn

Wow, what a sunrise - 06:57 and worth the effort of slogging up a hill in Dumfries & Galloway with all my drawing kit. Today I'm drawing on the 55th parallel north with a lump of Permian rock circa 299–252 million years old. Just another day on our beautiful planet for a tiny piece of rock and a man who traces its echo.

21 September



Latitude #55 – midday

Midday with the Permian. The wind is gusting strongly today, which makes the repetition of parallel lines challenging. These drawings have a strong relationship with time and space, presence and absence. They are as sculptural as they are 2D, describing every textured ripple on the stone's surface. As the Earth revolves beneath my feet, the hidden quality of the solid stone slowly reveals itself. Even when climbing, I am not attuned to the minutiae of a rock's surface as I am when drawing its shadow lines – a meditation.

21 September





#55

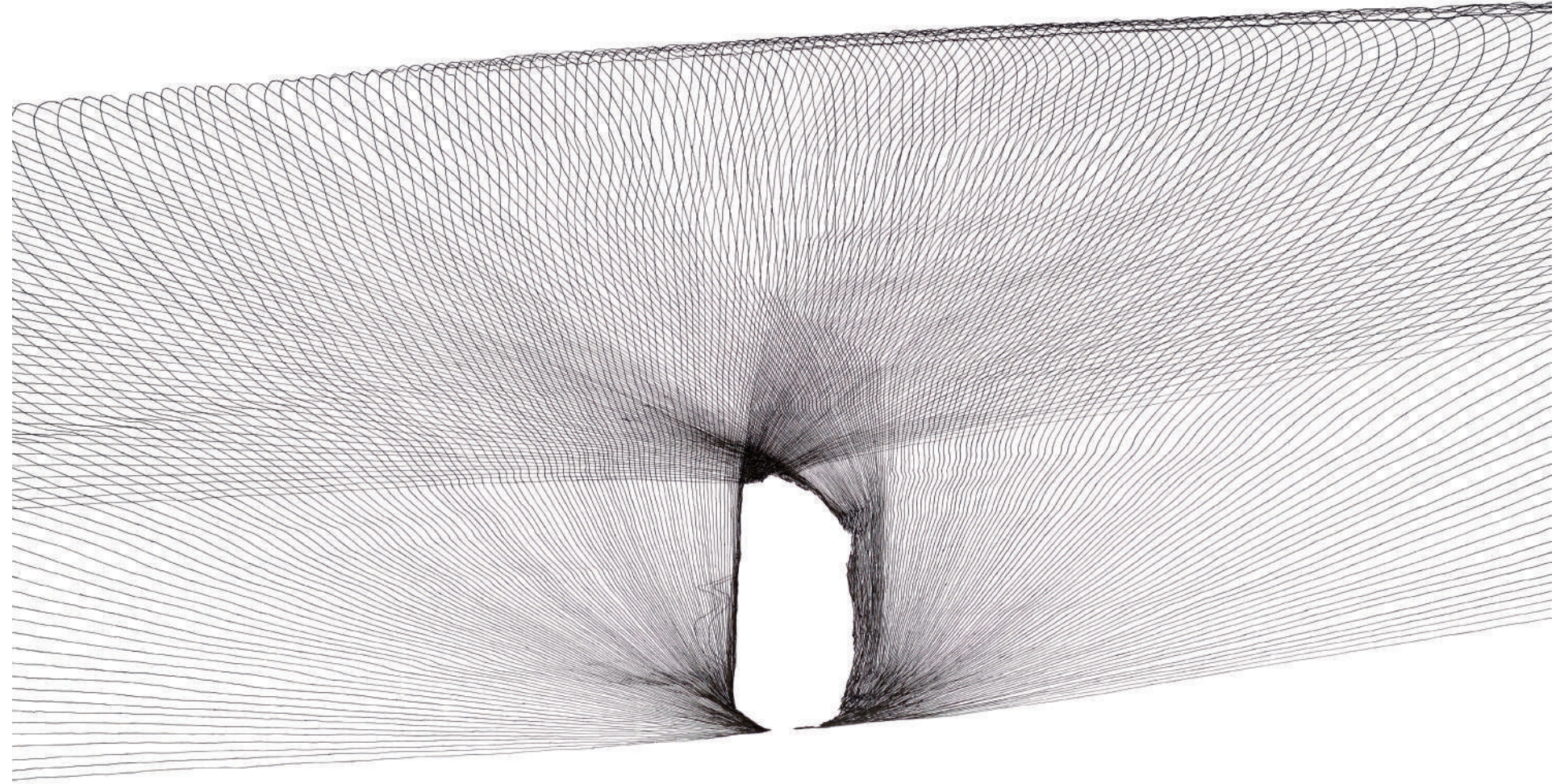
06.57 Bankend 19.16



Latitude #55 - dusk

#standingstone

21 September





Latitude #56 – dawn

And so the wait begins. A cloudy day on the Campsie Fells north of Glasgow.

25 September



Latitude #56 – midday

Drawing #8 Stunning views off the Campsie Fells now the clouds have lifted in East Dunbartonshire. I'm spending today in the company of a block of basalt from the Carboniferous era, circa 359-299 million years old. My location is 56° north of the equator and I'm glad I bothered to sit through hours of low cloud this morning when visibility was down to 100ft. It's a curious thing time: a few hours can seem like an eternity and yet put into the context of this rock, it's nothing. Context is everything and my odyssey continues.

25 September





Latitude #56 - dusk

-

25 September

#56

07.07 Haughhead 19.08





#57



Latitude #57 – dawn

Well, I did my bit, I turned up. So, where's the Sun? A beautiful morning here, overlooking Strathspey towards the Cairngorm National Park on the morning of the equinox. Today I aim to be drawing shadows from the Ordovician on the 57th parallel north. Just enough breeze to keep the wee beasties at bay. I have patience and a good book to see me through the wait.

23 September



Latitude #57 – midday

How quickly time passes! Midday and 57th parallel North: cloudy, but the Sun has shone. At one point I thought the entire table was going to blow over in the gusting wind. Given that the UN are meeting for a climate summit today in NY, the concept of time and how we perceive it seems pertinent. In the words of Gandhi “The future depends on what you do today...” These words are relevant on both macro and micro levels, personal and global. Perhaps I should encourage all UN leaders to look into the abyss of time and make a day's shadow drawing of ancient rocks, such as this one from the Ordovician period circa 485– 443 million years old... and a day.

23 September





#57

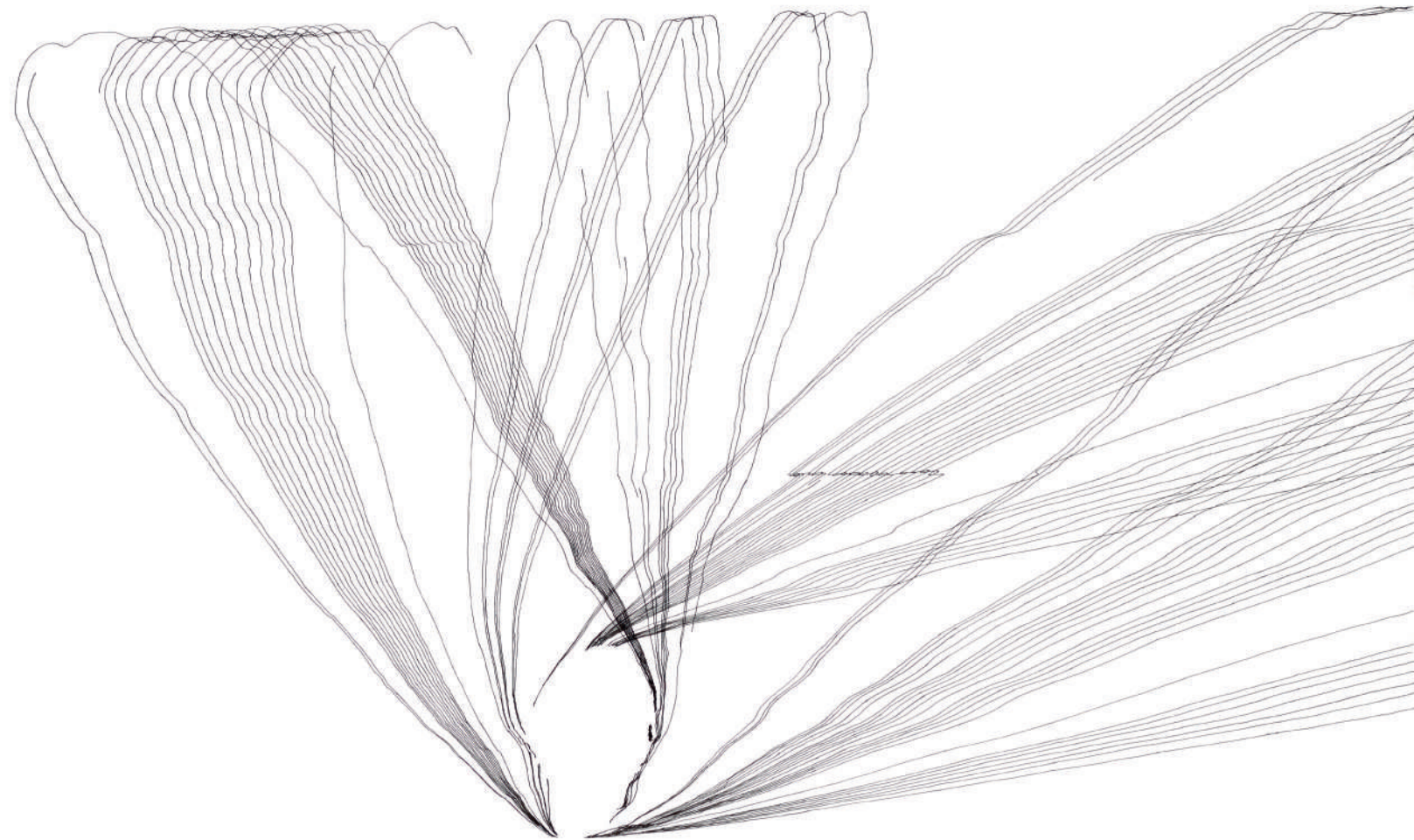
07.03 Catlodge 19.14



Latitude #57 - dusk

A few good hours of setting sun to round off a full weather day in the highlands of Scotland. Drawing on latitude 57 complete ☺.

23 September





Latitude #58 – dawn

Okay, so the sun doesn't always shine in Scotland. I know that. After a steady walk for half an hour, I'm now hunkered down behind my umbrella, waiting for the rain to stop before erecting my drawing table, which will be exciting because there's a stiff wind blowing. It was lashing it down before dawn this morning, so I decided to have a lie in – lovely to enjoy the sound of rain on the roof of the car I'm dossing in – very comforting. Anyhow, fingers crossed, eh?

26 September



Latitude #58 – midday

Latitude 58° north, in Sutherland. Silurian, rock 444-416 million years old. Beautiful flora, horrible fauna: midges, midges, midges... Arrrggghhhhhhh. Last drawing on the mainland.

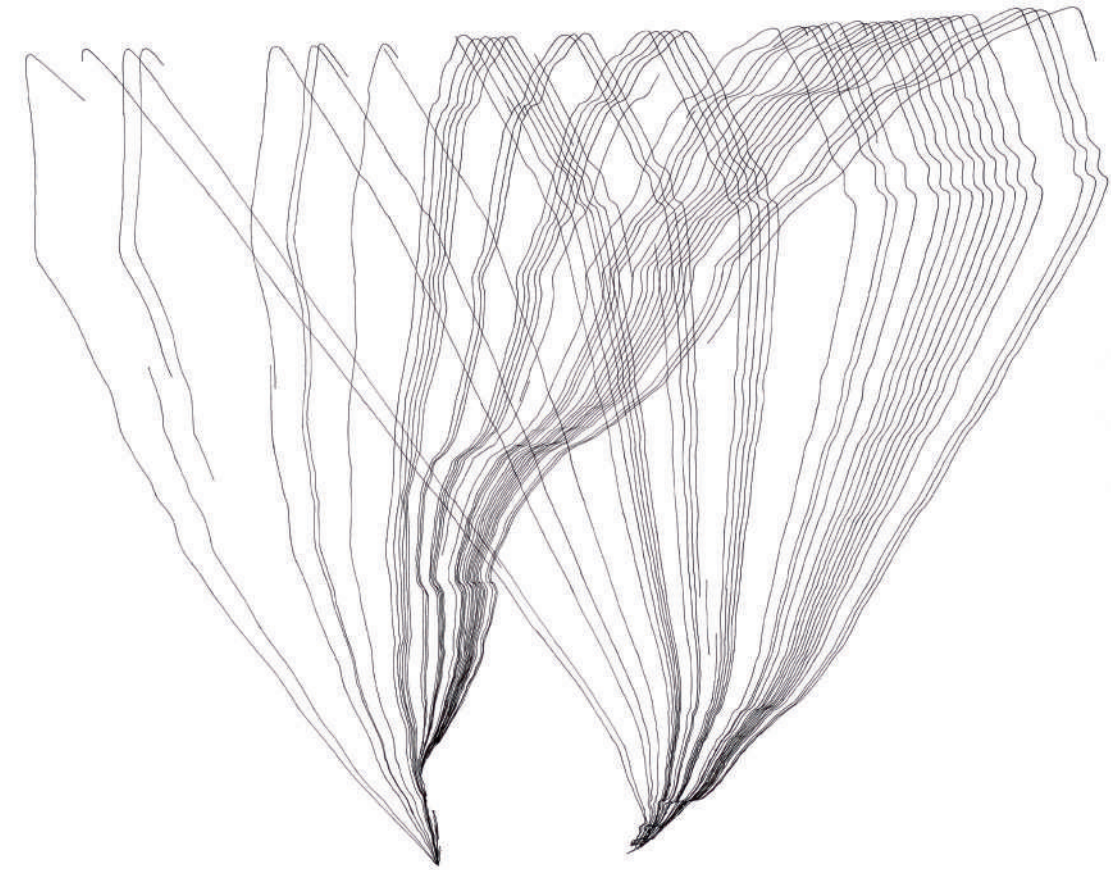
26 September



Latitude #58 - dusk
-
26 September

#58

07.06 Inchcape 19.05





Latitude #59 – dawn

Today the sun rises over Orkney at 07:08, though I can't see it yet through this band of fog. I can hear the Atlantic Ocean crashing to my west, the chunter of cattle and sheep all around me, even the distant drone of wheels on tarmac, but I can't see more than 100ft. Never mind, I have this block of Devonian sandstone to keep me company. Aged between 419-359 million years, it gets me thinking of the incredible Neolithic standing stones dotted around this island and how long humans have been wandering over this landscape: the 59th parallel north.

27 September



Latitude #59 – midday

Midday on Orkney and looking South over an ancient Devonian landscape. The contrast between sun and shade today is strong: shadows of scudding clouds over the rolling landscape echoed in the gaps between my parallel lines.

27 September





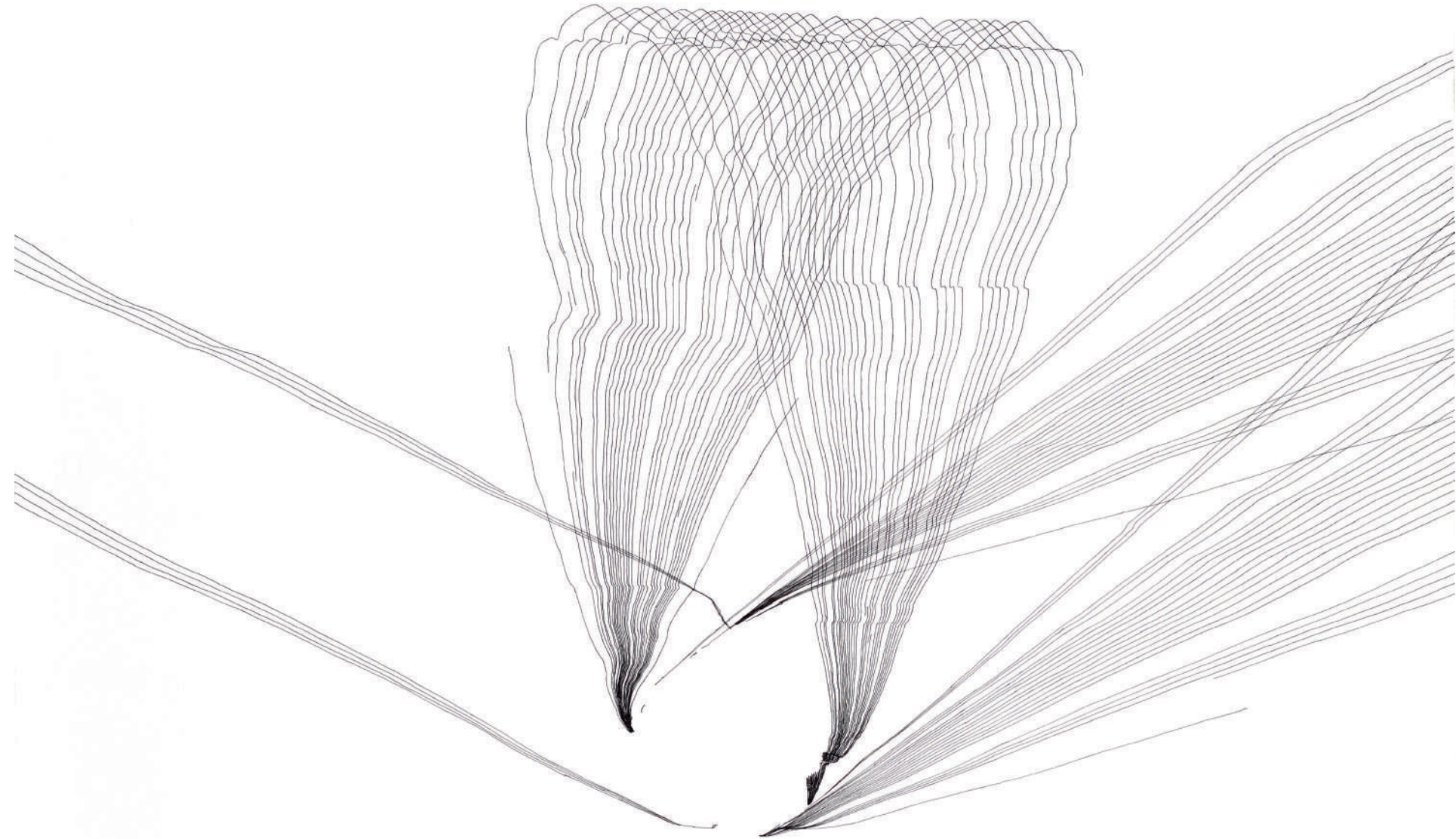
Latitude #59 – dusk

-

27 September

#59

07.08 Quholm 18.59





Latitude #60 – dawn

60° north on mainland Shetland: the Sun has risen, and there's a glorious rainbow behind me. Problem is, the rain has started again, and the wind threatens to blow away my table. So, the odyssey continues.

30 September



Latitude #60 – midday

Midday on the 60th parallel with a piece of rock from the Cambrian, circa 541–485 million years old. As Hugh MacDiarmid so aptly put it in his poem *On A Raised Beach*:
“What happens to us
is irrelevant to the world's geology
But what happens to the world is geology
Is not irrelevant to us.
We must reconcile ourselves to the stones.
Not the stones to us.”
Time passes, sunny spells and squally showers move on, the Earth rotates beneath my feet and here in Shetland, on latitude 60, level with Anchorage and St Petersburg, my drawing continues to unfold. Magic!

30 September



#60

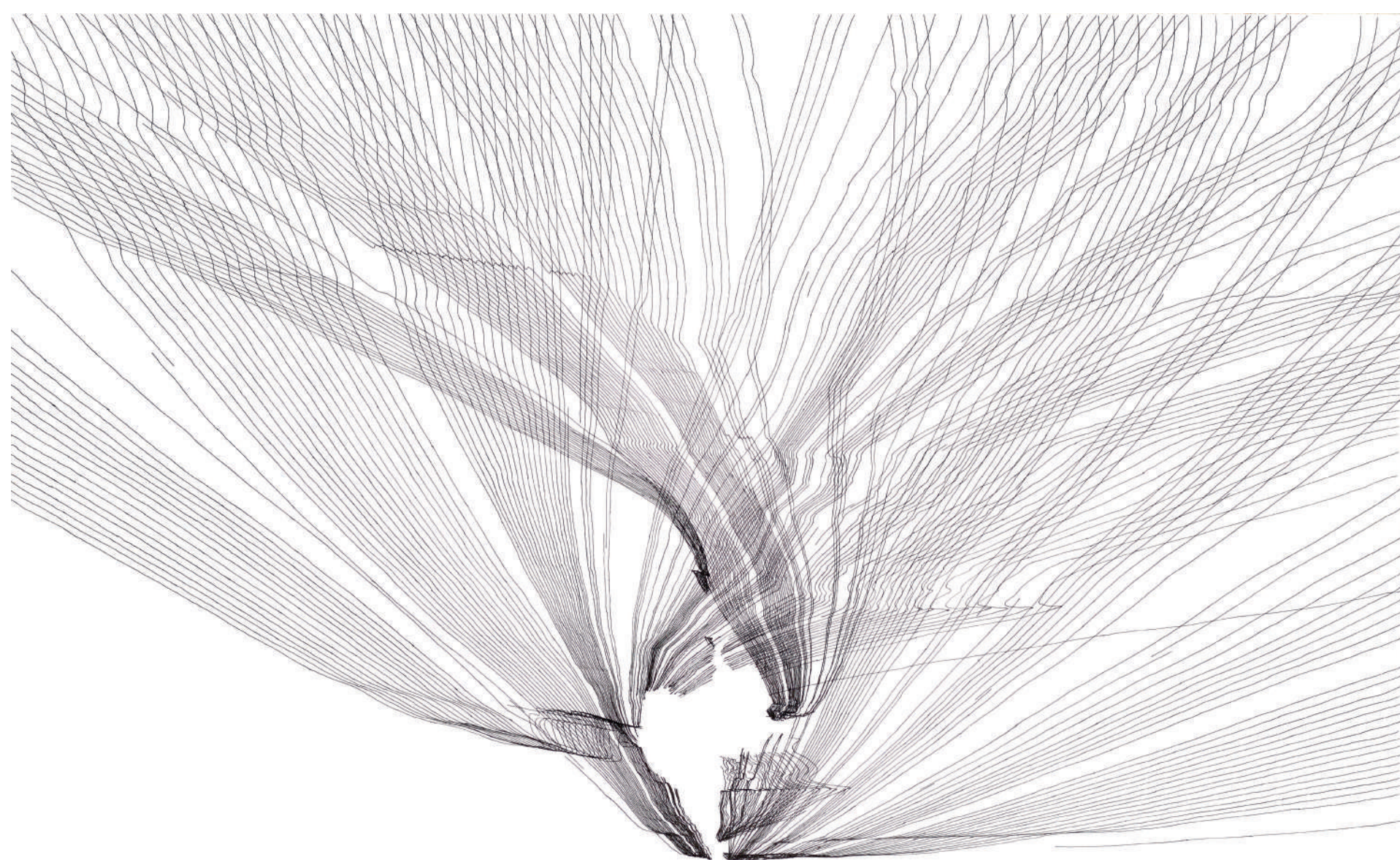
07.07 Maywick 18.41



Latitude #60 - dusk

Wow, what an extraordinary day to end on: strong winds, rain, hail and lots of sunshine. Hands almost too cold, even with gloves, but the drawing works. As always, it's been a total privilege to spend an entire day under the Sun, to watch it rise and then gently melt over the Atlantic Ocean. A privilege also to spend it on an unassuming hill. Thank you, Shetland.

30 September



● ● ●
Drawing #12 – dawn

Sunrise over the Anthropocene. I'm spending this day on a landfill site in South London, drawing the fleeting shadows from a lump of plastic rubbish. Time is relevant to us all and this will be the 12th drawing of a geological period and by far the youngest. It is now accepted by scientists that humans have had such an impact upon our planet that we are leaving a geological record of our presence upon the Earth. Over time, this landfill site will become a compacted layer in the surrounding rocks. A few years ago, I read a poignant sentence that 'Geological time includes now'. Never a truer word spoken, and something to mull over as we live this particular day on the planet.

2 December

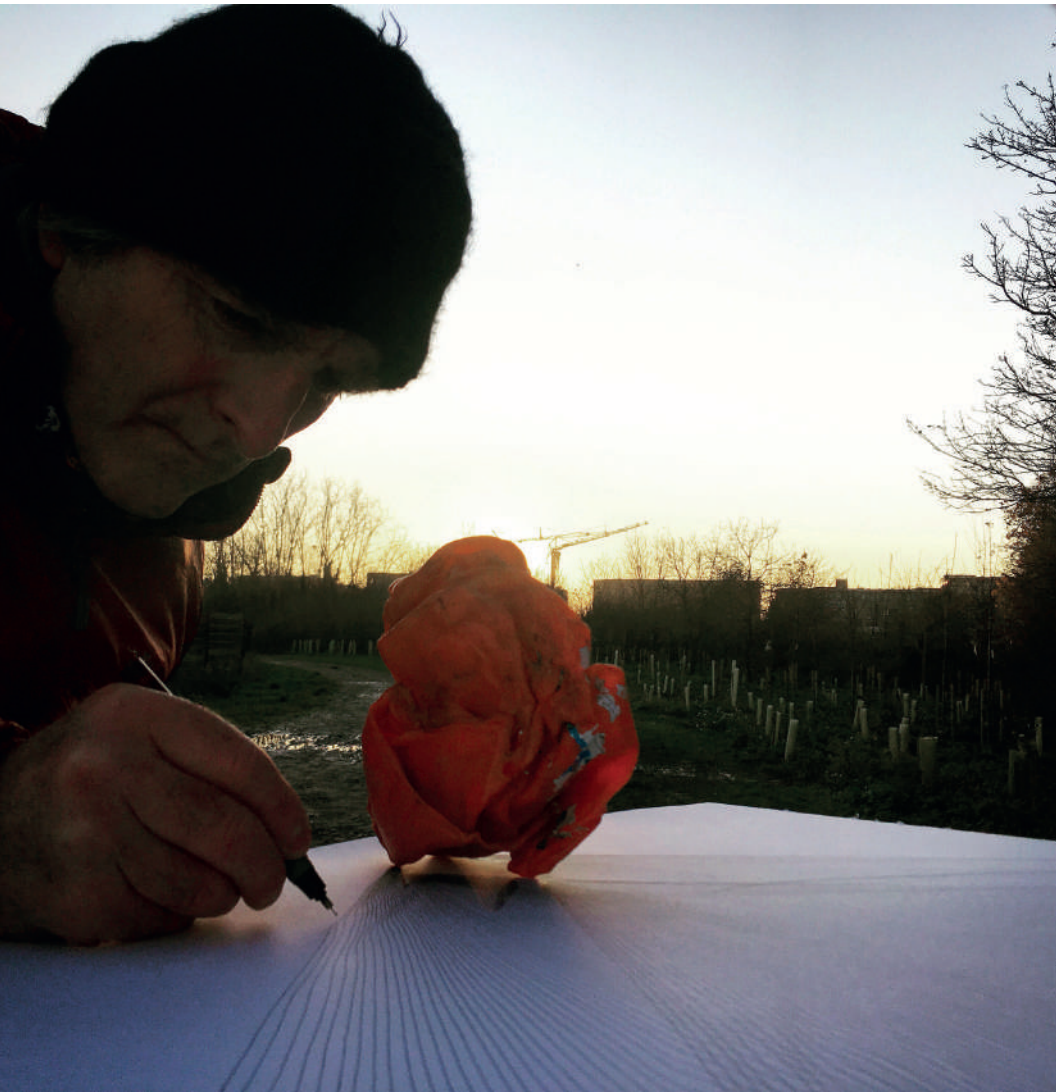


● ● ●
Drawing #12 – midday

Midday shadows, ever-changing. The beauty of plastic rubbish. The slow, immersive process of this drawing allows me to appreciate that which is around me: this landfill site I am on has been capped with earth and water, making a rather pleasant bird reserve in the heart of our capital city. However, this site is built from household waste from across the south London boroughs – approximately 172,000 tonnes of it each year. Many people = much rubbish. It's just sad that not all plastic gets recycled, even though it provides artists with source material.

2 December



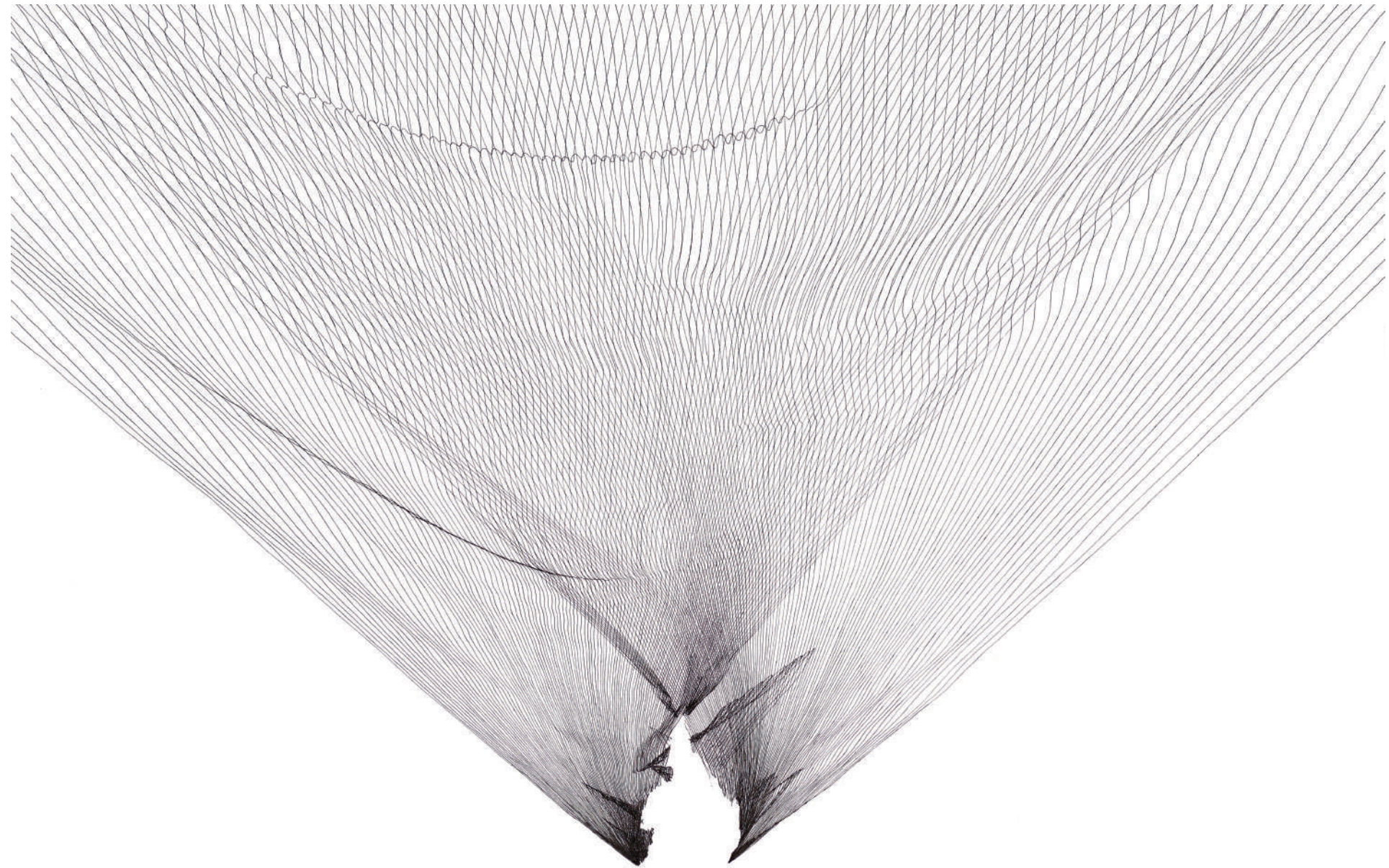


Drawing #12 - dusk

The sun sets over south London and a lump of plastic rubbish. Two and a half months ago I made a shadow drawing of a rock from the Pre-Cambrian period, circa +540 million years old. Today I finished the final drawing of twelve with a future 'rock' of the Anthropocene period circa +70 years, depending on your point of view. Many, many years ago, the length of a day on the planet was as little as nine hours long. Today I've spent almost nine hours with the sun, drawing the future and recording the past. Time... the more I think about it, the more beguiling it becomes.

2 December

08.52 Hackbridge 16.52

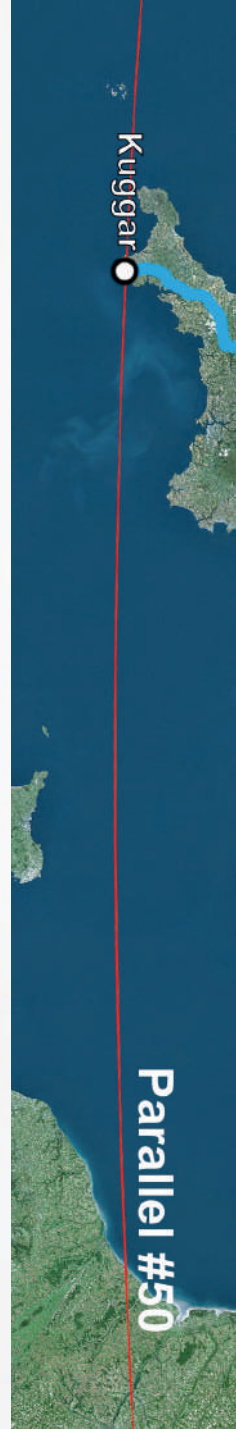
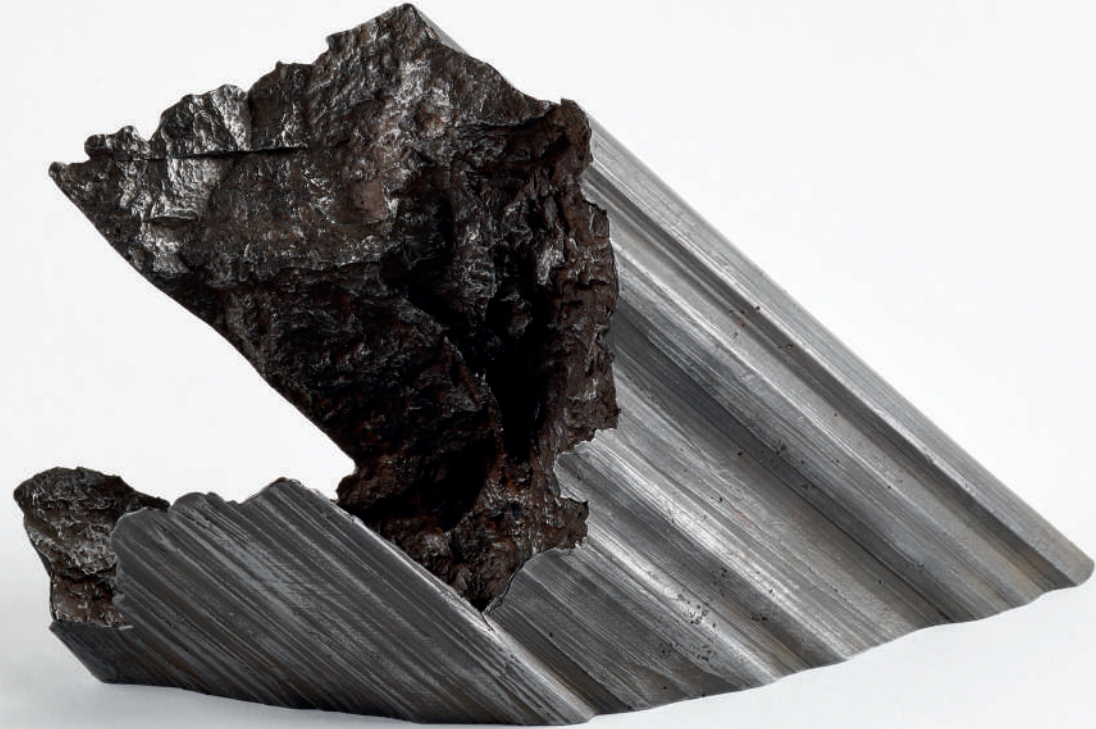


These twelve sculptures embody midday shadows cast by rocks, and a lump of plastic, representing the twelve geological time periods. They are directly indexed to each drawing and quite literally make the fourth dimension, three-dimensional.

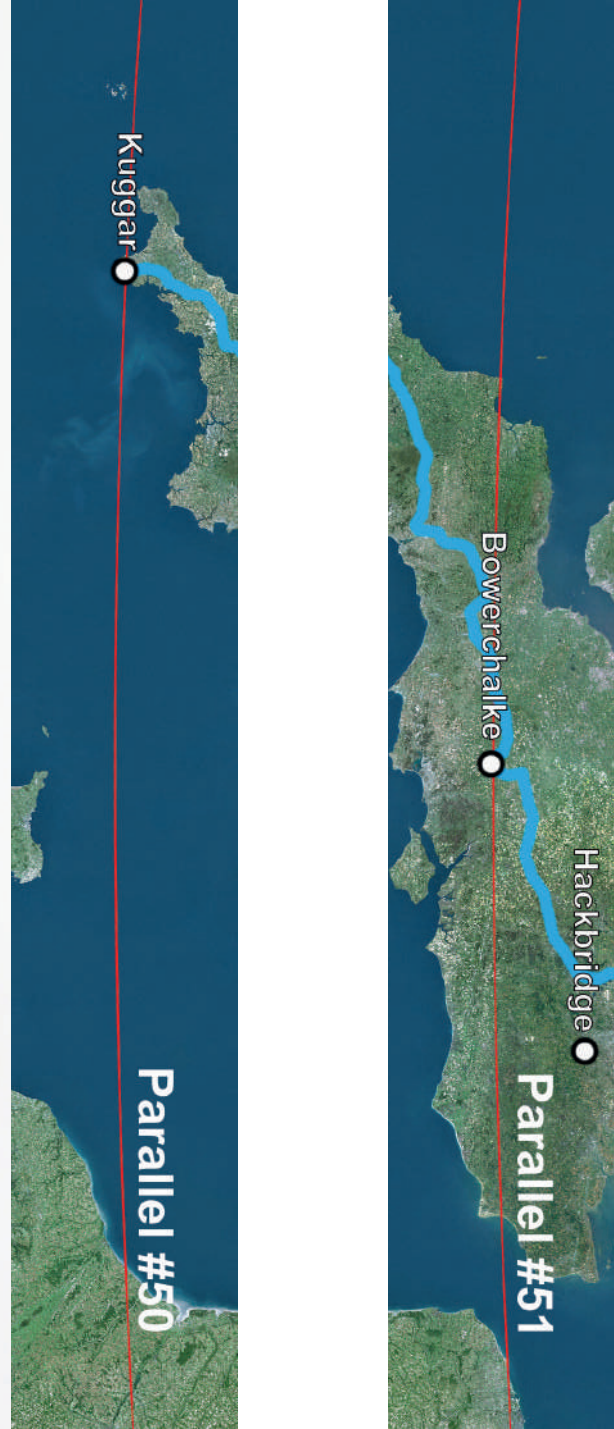
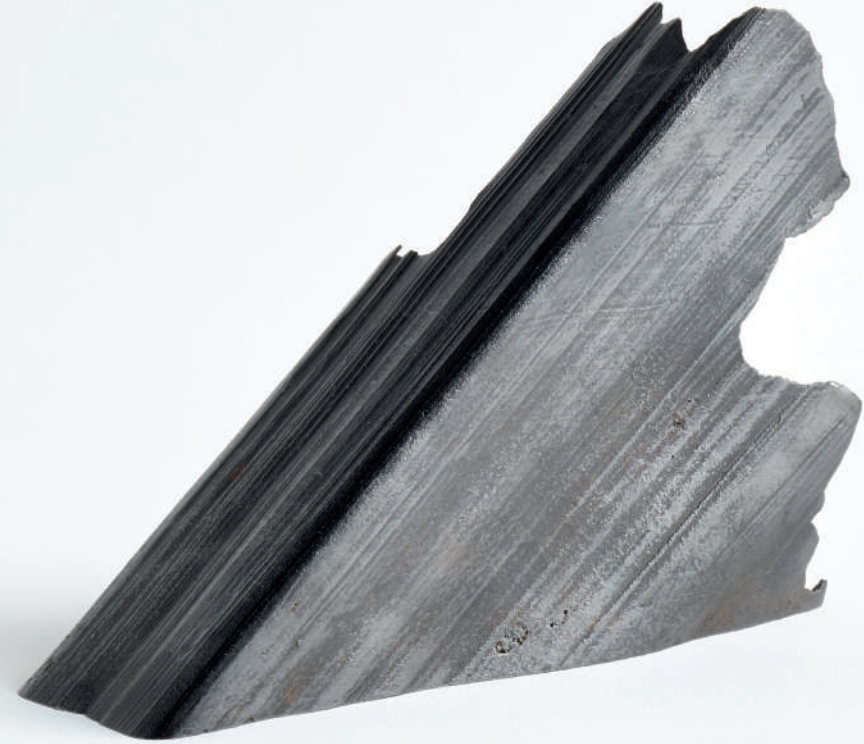
Made from cast iron, they give form to the negative, liminal space of shadows. They accurately record the haptic qualities of the Earth's geology at a specific time and location, linking us to the past through the present and connecting us to something greater than ourselves.



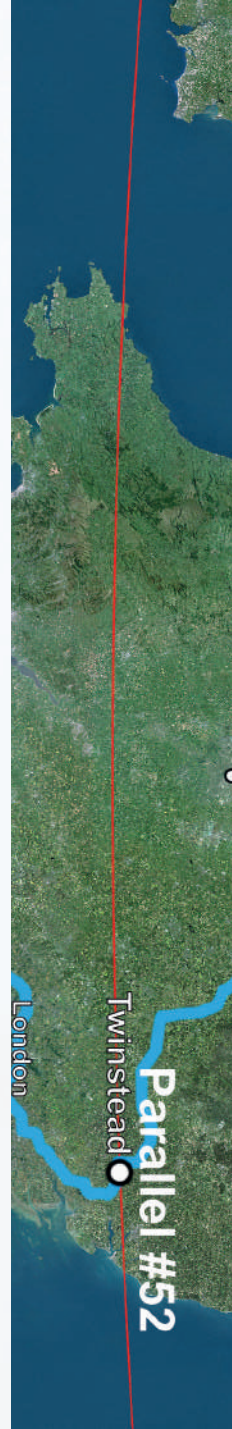
Kuggar Noontide
Cast iron
14.5 x 9.5 x 26 cm.
2023
#50



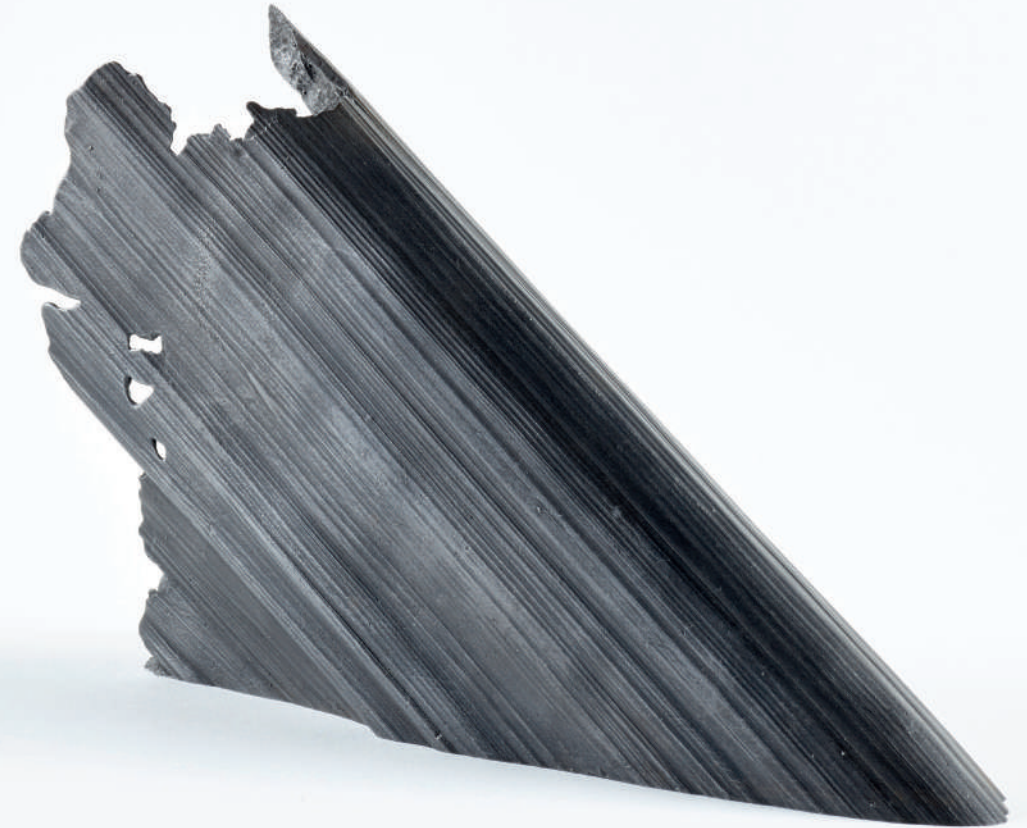
Bowerchalke Noontide
Cast iron
13 x 6.5 x 19 cm.
2023
#51



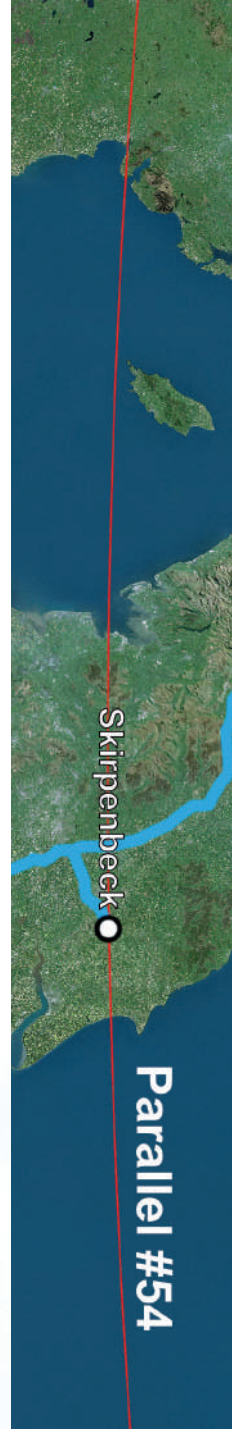
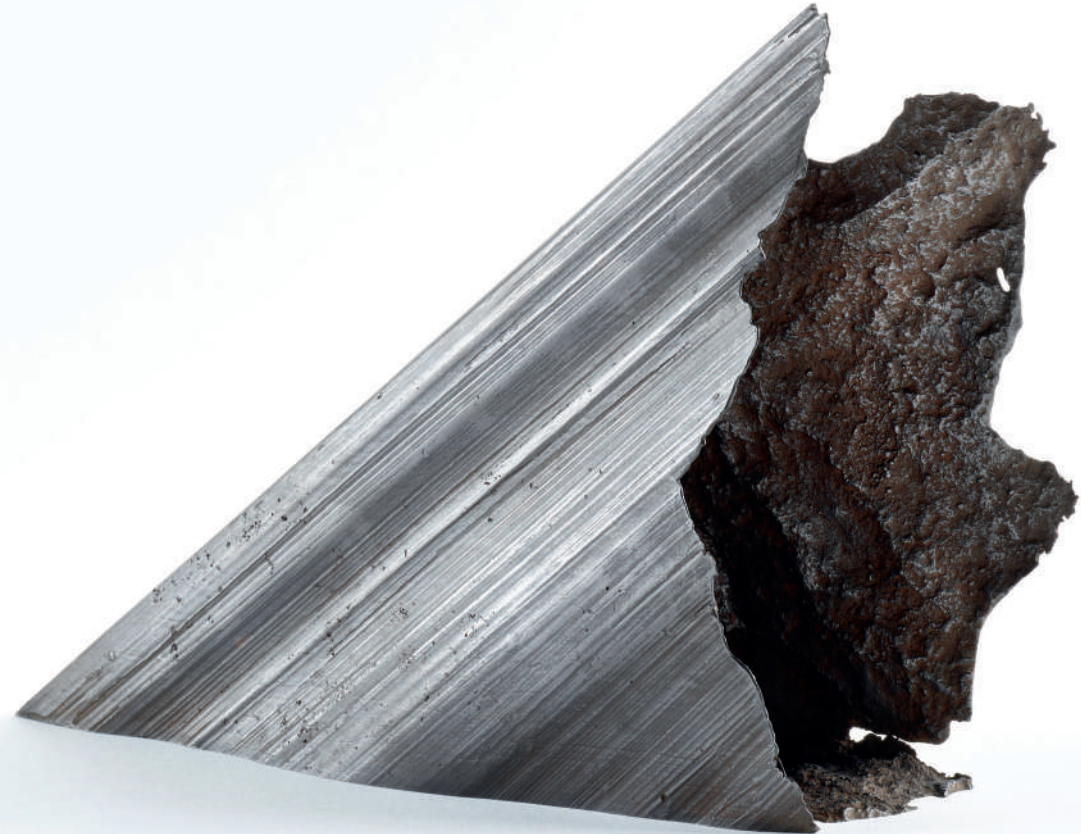
Twinstead Noontide
Cast iron
11.5 x 10.5 x 22 cm.
2023
#52



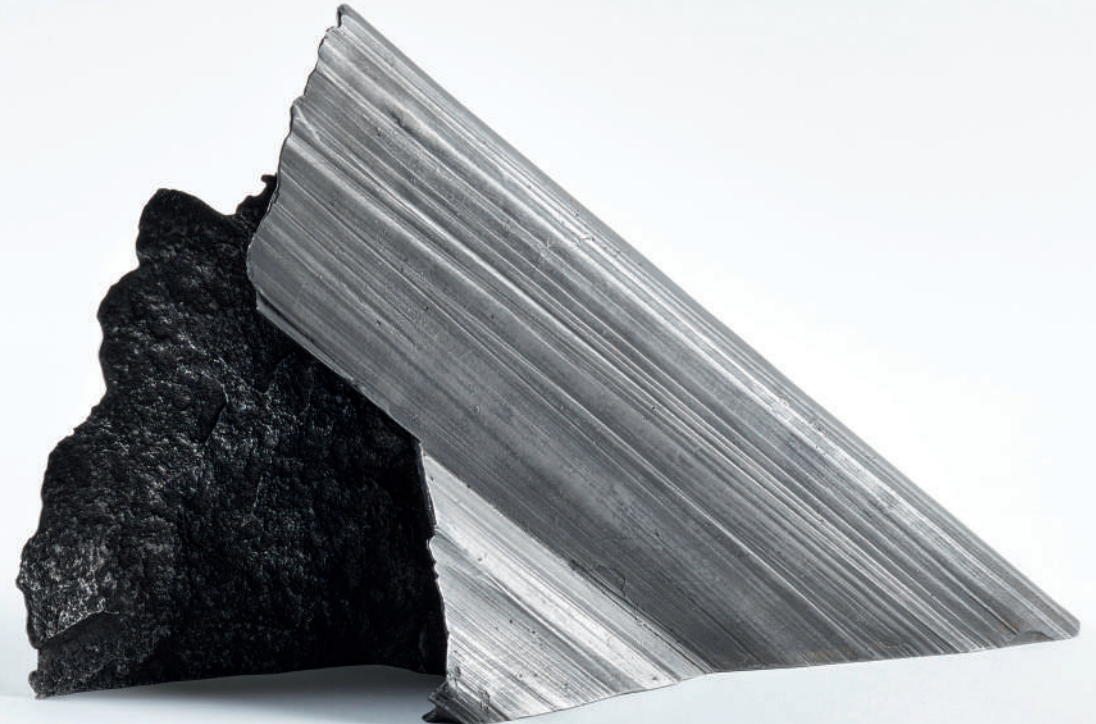
Normanton Noontide
Cast iron
18 x 9.5 x 30.5 cm.
2023
#53



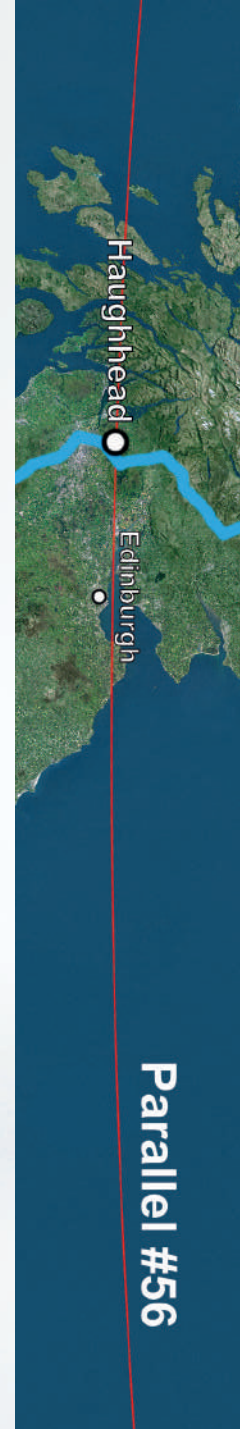
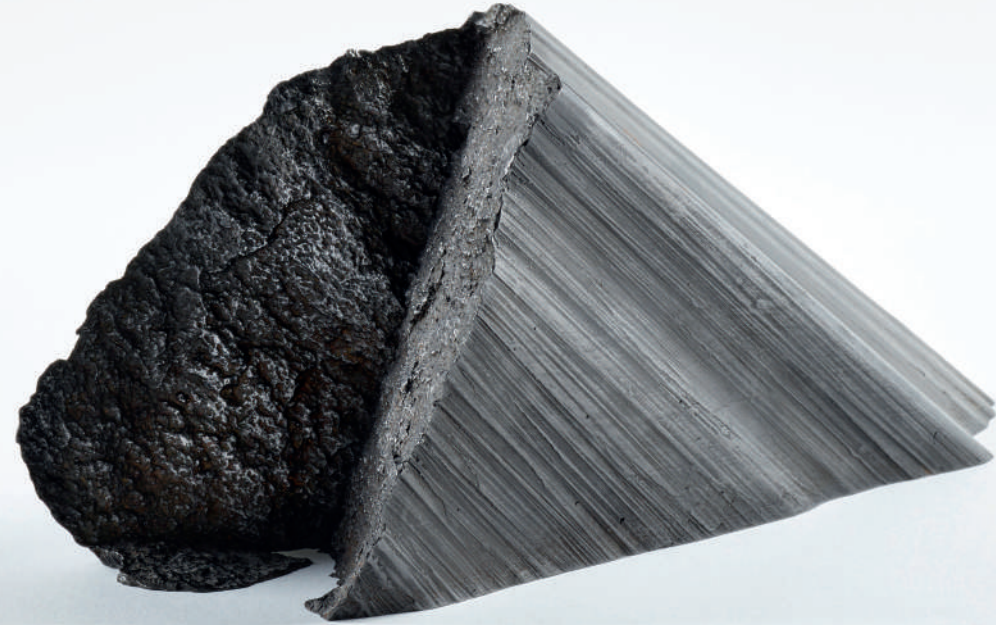
Skirpenbeck Noontide
Cast iron
19 x 8.5 x 29 cm.
2023
#54



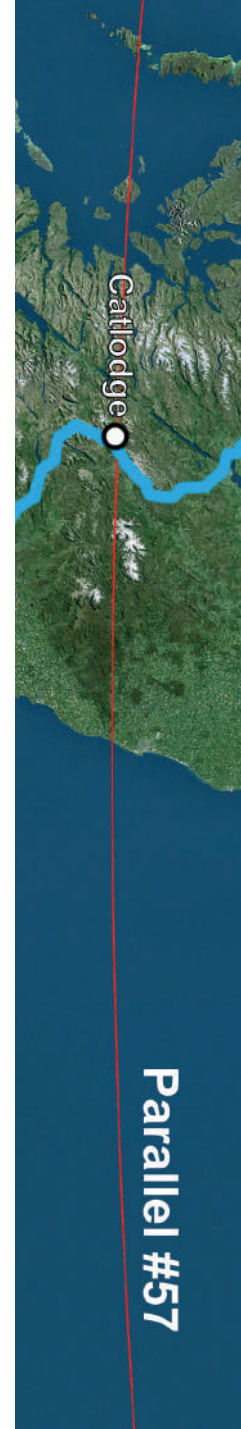
Bankend Noontide
Cast iron
16.5 x 7.5 x 31 cm.
2023
#55



Haughead Noontide
Cast iron
14 x 12.5 x 30.5 cm.
2023
#56

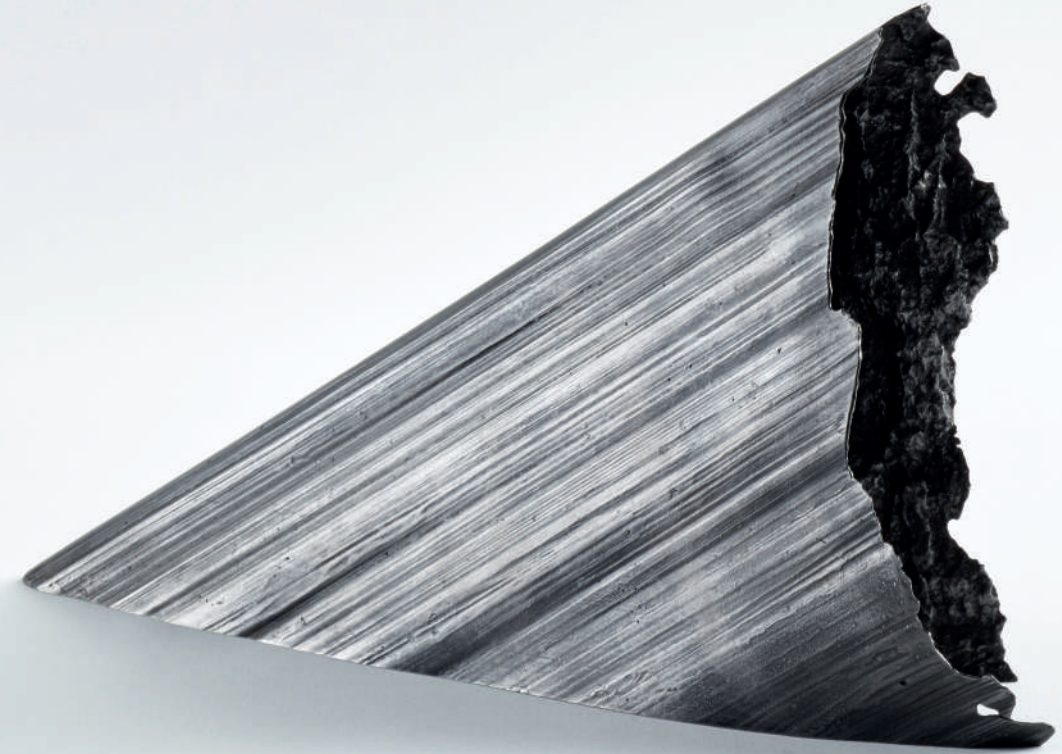


Parallel #56

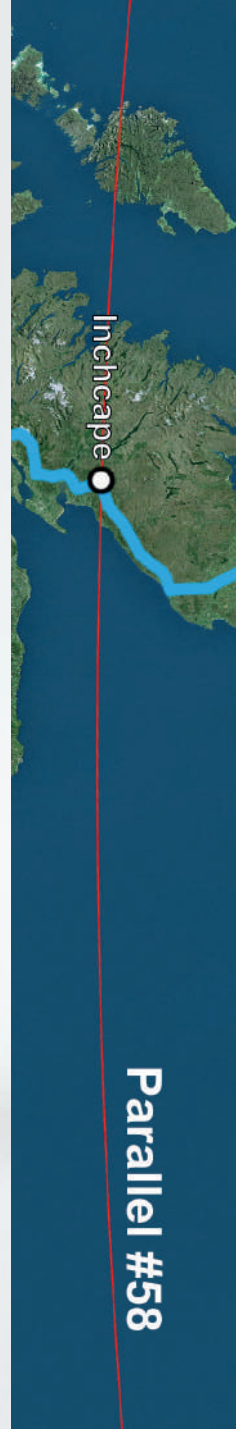
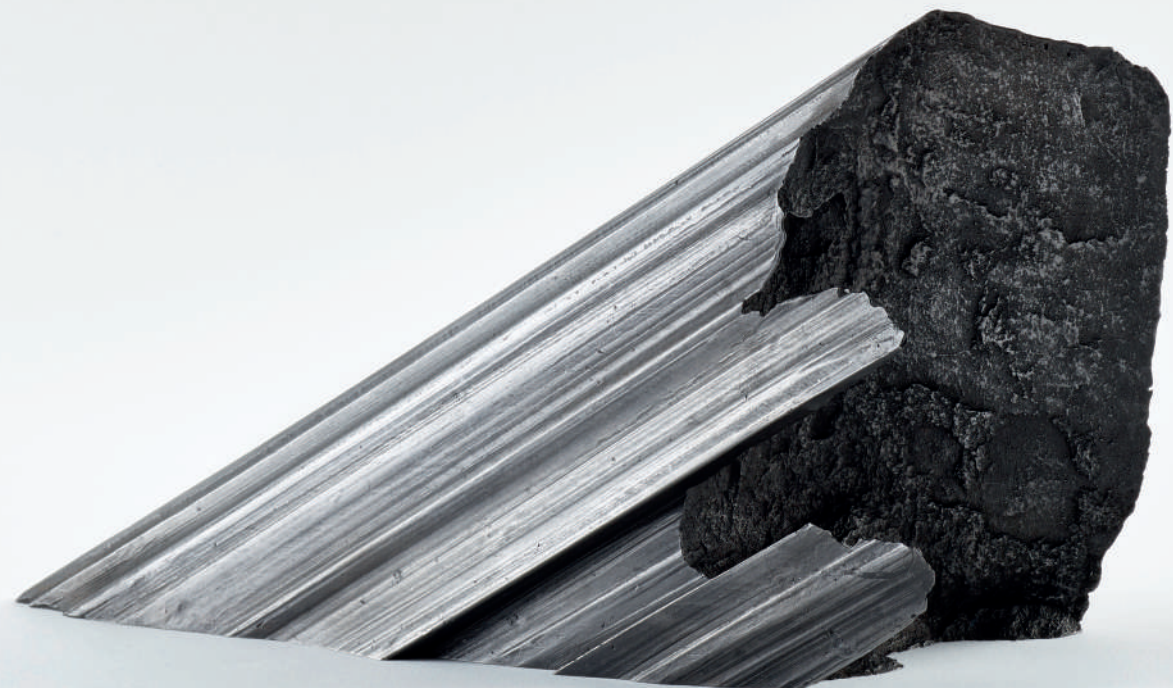


Parallel #57

Catlodge Noontide
Cast iron
17 x 7.5 x 32.5 cm.
2023
#57



Inchcape
Cast iron
17 x 10 x 34 cm.
2023
#58

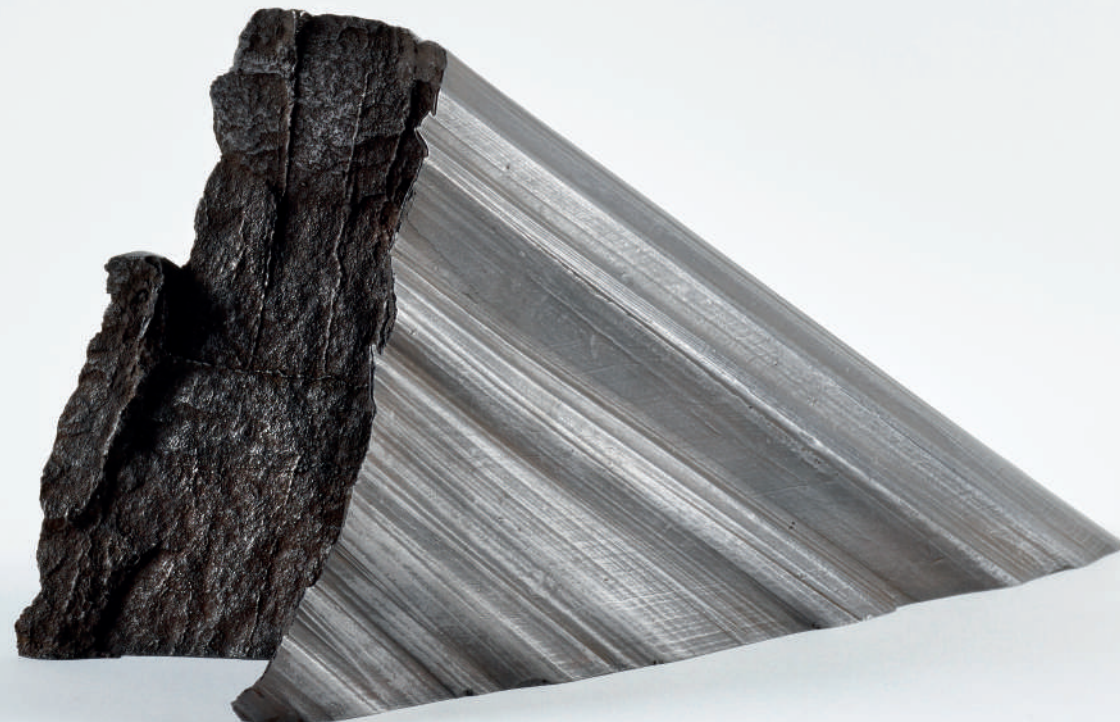


Parallel #58

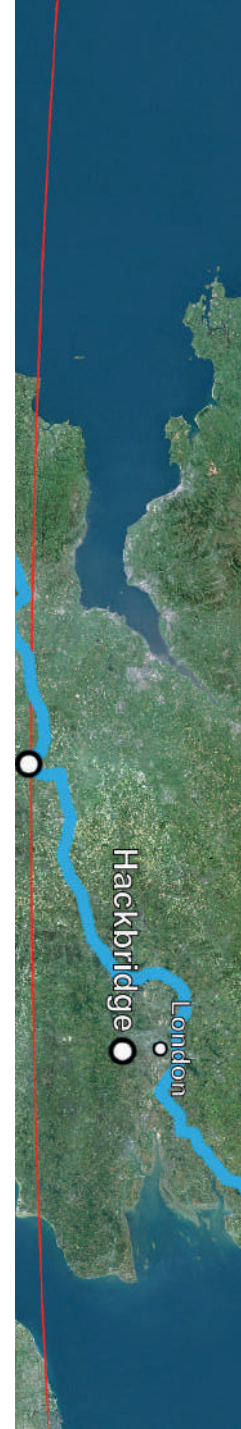
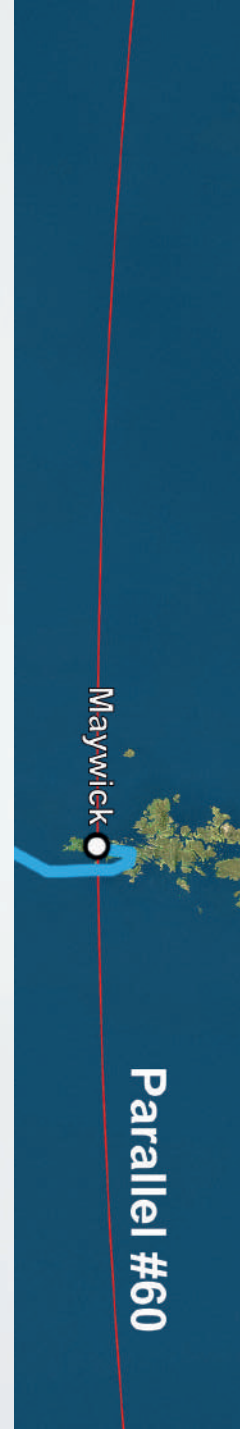
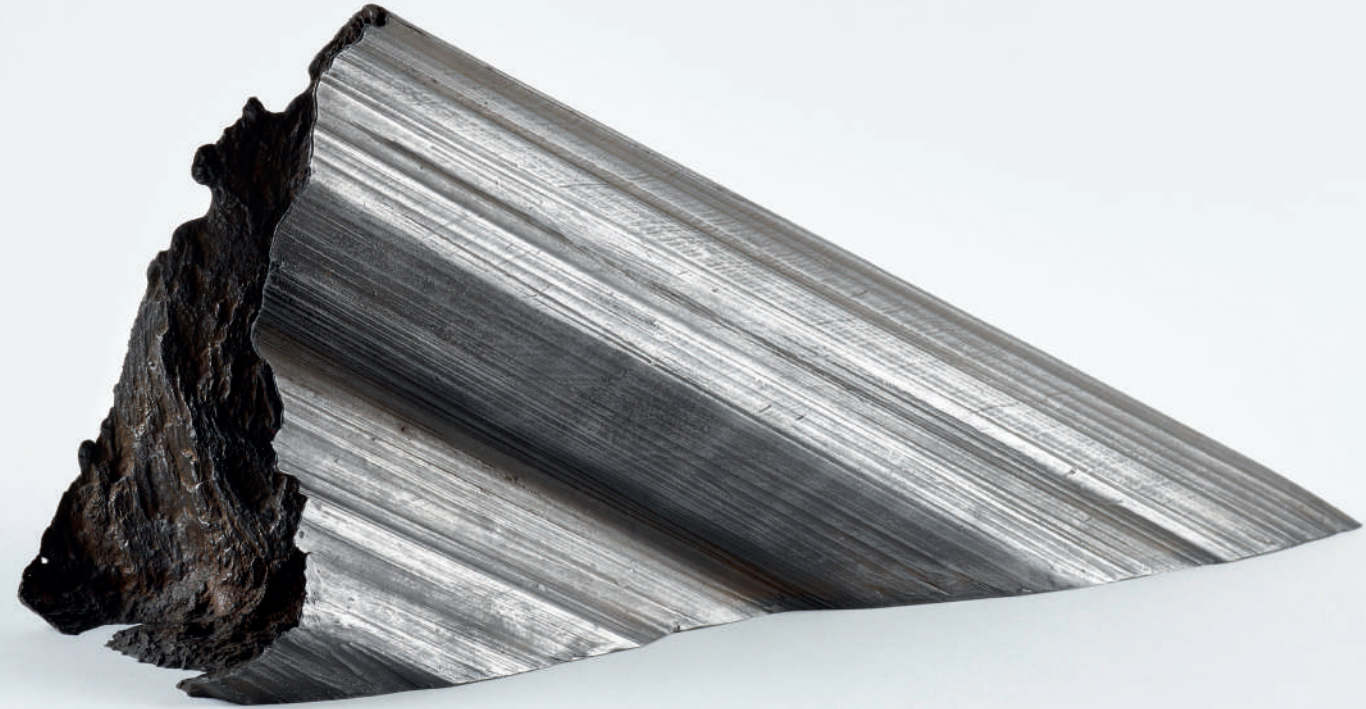


Parallel #59

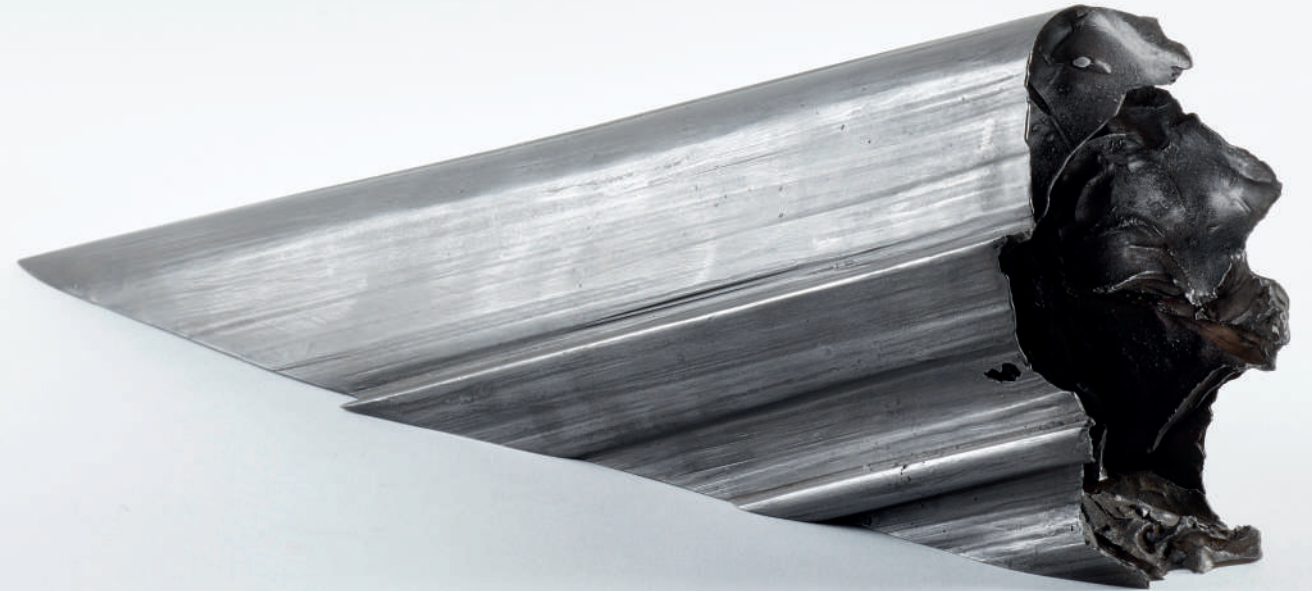
Quholm Noontide
Cast iron
16 x 12 x 37 cm.
2023
#59



Maywick Noontide
Cast iron
16.5 x 10.5 x 42 cm.
2023
#60



Hackbridge Noontide
Cast iron
16 x 10 x 59 cm.
2023



Thanks

The artist would like to thank the following people in the making of this book:

Director of CLOSE Ltd Freeny Yianni and her team, for their representation of him and their shared belief in his vision; Sarah Cox at the South West Heritage Trust for giving him his first solo museum exhibition; Lawrence Bostock at Somerset Rural Life Museum for assistance in hanging the show; Nicholas Alfrey for his insightful contextualising essay, expanding the reach of this project; Jamie Hammick for the making of a film to accompany the exhibition; Sarah for her love and support.

Credits

Quote © The Estate of Hugh MacDiarmid, pg 3 and pg 59

Instagram photos © Simon Hitchens, pgs 16-64

Map reproduced with permission from The British Geological Survey ('BGS') Permit Number CP23/038 BGS Map of British Islands: 1 584 000 © UKRI (Solid geology), pgs 4-5

A film to accompany the exhibition has been commissioned by CLOSE Ltd with the support of South West Heritage Trust, and created by Jamie Hammick (Director) and Phil Edwards (Editor)

Simon Hitchens

FRSS RWA



1990 BA Hons Fine Art, University West England

Solo exhibitions

- 2023 Parallels, Somerset Rural Life Museum, Glastonbury
- 2022 Beyond Body, Black Swan Arts, Somerset
- 2021 Trace, Kevis Gallery, Petworth
- 2019 Thinking Beyond Rock, Cheeseburn, Northumberland
- 2017 Touchstones, b-side, Portland
- 2009 A Separate Reality, Royal British Society of Sculptors, London
- 2008 Presence and Absence, Maddox Arts, London
- 2006 Napoleon Garden, Holland Park, London
- 2005 Simon Hitchens, Spica Museum, Tokyo
- 2004 Present, Paul Stolper Gallery, London
- 2004 In the Presence of Absence, St Stephen Walbrook, City of London
- 2004 Seeking the Sublime, Hestercombe Gardens and Brewhouse Art Centre, Taunton, Somerset
- 1998 New Work, A22 Lystall Street, Paul Stolper, London.

Public commissions

- 2022 Physis, public engagement sculpture for Pfizer, Science Museum Manchester & Science Museum London
- 2018- Ascendant: The Elizabeth Landmark, Northumberland
- 2015 The Space Between, M&G Real Estate, Forbury Place, Reading
- 2015 Evidence of the Unseen Mountain, Native Land, Chelsea, London
- 2014 Glorious Beauty, Berkeley Homes, Kensington, London
- 2013 Unity, Urbanest, Kings Cross, London
- 2013 Transition Point, Leys School, Cambridge
- 2009 Positive Emptiness II, 'Oasis' cruise liner.
- 2008 From Dawn until Dusk, Boscombe Pier, Bournemouth
- 2007 Parallel Presence, Limeharbour, London
- 2006 Prospect Place, Bellway Homes, Cardiff Bay
- 2005 Coastline, Workington, Cumbria
- 2003 Shining Silence, 100 Brompton Road, London
- 2001 Rubus Five, Rubus Court, London Road, Bracknell
- 1999 Quiet Understanding, Conquest Hospital, Hastings

Private commissions

- 2011 The Trees of Life, Prior's Court School, Berkshire
- 2009 The Balance of Entropy, Tetbury.
- 2009 In the Light of Night, Tetbury.
- 2006 Core, Sarrat, Herefordshire
- 2006 Silence Shining, Fulham, London
- 2005 Link, Weybridge, Surrey
- 2004 Blue Silence, Sintons Solicitors, Newcastle
- 2004 Entropic Circle, Stanmore, London
- 1998 Risen, Berkshire

Selected group exhibitions

2023 Landscapes of Progress?, Hestercombe Gallery, Taunton
2023 RWA 170 Open, Bristol
2023 Wander_Land, Tremenhoe Gallery, Penzance
2023 Lines of Empathy, Close Ltd, Somerset
2023 RA Summer Exhibition, London
2023 Congregation, The Chapel, Tisbury
2023 Ostara, Anima Mundi Gallery, St Ives, Cornwall (online)
2023 Lines of Empathy, Patrick Heide Contemporary Art, London
2023 Imbolc, Anima Mundi Gallery, St Ives, Cornwall (online)
2022 The Hitchens Family: A Shared Love of Landscape, Southampton City Art Gallery
2022 Samhain, Anima Mundi Gallery, St Ives, Cornwall (online)
2022 RWA Open, Bristol
2022 Together We Rise, Chichester Cathedral
2022 Forever in the Now, Woking, Surrey
2021 Thresholds, Anima Mundi, St Ives, Cornwall
2020 Beyond Ourselves, Anima Mundi, St Ives, Cornwall
2020 Ode to a Nightingale, Anima Mundi, St Ives, Cornwall
2020 Somerset Reacquainted, Somerset Rural Life Museum
2019 Parallel Lines, Lightbox, Woking
2019 Cheeseburn Sculpture, Northumberland
2019 Ivon, John and Simon Hitchens, Kevis House, Petworth
2019 RWA Sculpture Open
2019 RWA Summer Open
2018 Faces of Sculpture, Royal Society of Sculptors, London
2018 Glass, One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London
2018 RWA Open Exhibition, Bristol
2018 Cheeseburn Sculpture, Northumberland
2017 RWA Open, Bristol
2017 Drawn, RWA, Bristol
2017 Buffet d'Art, Hestercombe Gallery, Taunton
2016 CAN Mountain Arts Festival, Rheged, Cumbria

2016 Wells Art Contemporary, Wells
2016 RWA Summer Exhibition, Bristol
2016 Mending Revealed, Bridport Arts Centre, Dorset
2015 Wells Art Contemporary, Wells
2015 CAN Mountain Arts Festival, Rheged, Cumbria
2015 Second Site, Hestercombe Gallery, Taunton, Somerset
2015 Bedales 25, Bedales Gallery, Petersfield, Hampshire
2013 On Form London, Crypt Gallery, London
2012 Interesting Times, Leicester University, Leicester
2012 On Form 2012, Asthall Manor, Oxfordshire
2011 Under A New Sun, OSR Projects, Somerset
2011 Sculpture at The Grove, Grove Hotel, Hertfordshire
2011 Woburn Artbeat, Woburn Abbey Gardens, Bedfordshire
2011 Pincent Mason's, London
2011 Received Wisdom, Arlington Art Centre, Newbury
2011 Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden, Ockley, Surrey
2010 Small is Beautiful XXVIII, Flowers, London
2010 Ego Alter, Square1 Art, Arundel, Sussex
2010 On Form 2010, Asthall Manor, Burford, Oxfordshire
2010 Ludlow Open, Ludlow, Shropshire
2010 Quartz Arts Festival, Queens's College, Taunton, Somerset
2010 Sculpture in Paradise, Chichester Cathedral, Sussex
2010 Chelsea Flower Show, London
2010 Found, Arlington Arts Centre, Newbury, Berkshire
2009 Ten artists, Ludlow, Shropshire
2009 A Quiet Knowledge, Arlington Arts Center, Berkshire
2009 Art Contact Sculpture Show, Horseheath, Cambridgeshire
2009 Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden, Ockley, Surrey
2009 Sound and Vision, Ilminster Arts Centre, Somerset
2008 Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden, Ockley, Surrey
2007 Small is beautiful XXIV, Flowers Central, London
2007 Spectrum, Abbey House Gardens, Malmesbury
2007 Gulf Art Fair, Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai
2006 Small is beautiful XXIII, Flowers Central, London

2006 RBS, Rollo Contemporary Art, London
2005 Small is beautiful XXII, Flowers Central, London
2005 Jerwood Sculpture Prize, Jerwood Space, London
2005 Sculpture in the Planning, Atkinson Gallery, Millfield School, Somerset
2005 RBS Centenary Exhibition, Leicester University, Leicester
2005 Royal British Society of Sculptors, Inside Annual 2005, London
2004 Ivon, John and Simon Hitchens, The Canon Gallery, Petworth, Sussex
2004 Imagine, One Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London
2004 j+ban 2004, Spica Museum, Tokyo
2004 Art '04, Paul Stolper, London
2004 Bologna Art Fair, Paul Stolper, Italy
2003 Frieze Art Fair, Regents Park, London
2003 40 Designers, Aubrey Square, London
2003 Turin Art Fair, Paul Stolper, Italy
2003 C21 Art Fair, Paul Stolper, London
2003 Art '03, Paul Stolper, London
2003 Inaugural Exhibition, Paul Stolper Gallery, London
2003 Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy, London
2002 Think Big, Peggy Guggenheim Museum, Venice
2002 Somerset Art Week, The Manor House, Curry Mallet, Somerset
2002 Art '02, Wiseman Originals, London
2002 C20th Art Fair, Paul Stolper, London
2002 Royal British Society of Sculptors, Summer Exhibition, London
2002 Farmilo Fiumano, London
2001 In the Blood, Wiseman Originals, London
2001 Cynthia Corbett Gallery, London
2001 Cynthia Corbett Gallery, Boston Art Fair
2000 Defining the Times, Milton Keynes Gallery, Milton Keynes
1999 Outside Art, Arundel Cathedral, Arundel

1999 Art '99, Paul Stolper, London
1999 Seeing the light, Chichester Cathedral, Chichester
1998 C20th Art Fair, Royal College of Art, London
1997 Eight by Eight, Pallant House, Chichester
1997 Young Blood, Crane Kalman, London
1997 Lewes Sculpture Trail, Lewis Castle, Lewis
1996 Crane Kalman, London
1995 Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden, Ockley, Surrey
1995 Crane Kalman, FIAC, Paris
1995 Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden, Ockley, Surrey
1995 Contemporary Art Society Market, Royal Festival Hall, London
1995 Summer Show, Cadogan Contemporary, London
1994 Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden, Ockley, Surrey
1994 CAS Market, Royal Festival Hall, London
1993 London Group Open, Barbican, London
1993 St. Albans Art, St. Albans Cathedral
1992 London Group Open, Barbican, London

Awards

2004 Vital Elements, Cass Sculpture Foundation, Goodwood
2004 In The Presence of Absence, Arts Council Grant, St Stephen Walbrook, London
2004 Shortlisted: Jerwood Sculpture Prize, London
2002 Quiet Core, Cass Sculpture Foundation, Goodwood
1996 Sculpture Symposium, Barichara, Columbia (British Council)
1994 Sculpture Symposium, Presov, Slovakia (British Council)

Published by the South West Heritage Trust in conjunction with CLOSE Ltd, on the occasion of the exhibition

Parallels

Simon Hitchens

16 September – 2 December 2023
at Somerset Rural Life Museum
Chilkwell Street
Glastonbury BA6 8DB
www.srlm.org.uk

Drawings and sculptures © Simon Hitchens
www.simonhitchens.com

Words by Simon Hitchens

The Essay: Twelve Days Around the Autumn Equinox
by Nicholas Alfrey
*Nicholas Alfrey is Honorary Research Associate in Art History,
University of Nottingham*

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The South West Heritage Trust is an independent charity committed to protecting and celebrating Somerset and Devon's rich heritage. Its sites include the Somerset Rural Life Museum in Glastonbury and the Museum of Somerset in Taunton.
www.swheritage.org.uk



Cover image: 06.45 Skirpenbeck 19.08