



Gravity Portal
Sara Maher
Curated by Kylie Johnson
1 February – 8 March 2025
Contemporary Art Tasmania

Contemporary Art Tasmania acknowledges the first peoples of Nipaluna/Hobart, the Muwinina and we acknowledge the devastating truth that they did not survive colonisation. We recognise today's First Nations families as custodians of Lutruwita/Tasmania and pay respect to their elders across all times.

Cover image: *The sky is my gravity 1*, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink and indelible Indian ink on paper, sun faded, 105 x 150cm,
photo by Peter Whyte



Previous page: *Matrilineal Trace 3*, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink and indelible Indian ink on paper, sun print, 152 x 107cm, photo by Peter Whyte

Right: *Gravity Well*, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink and indelible Indian ink on paper, sun faded, 107 x 152cm, photo by Peter Whyte



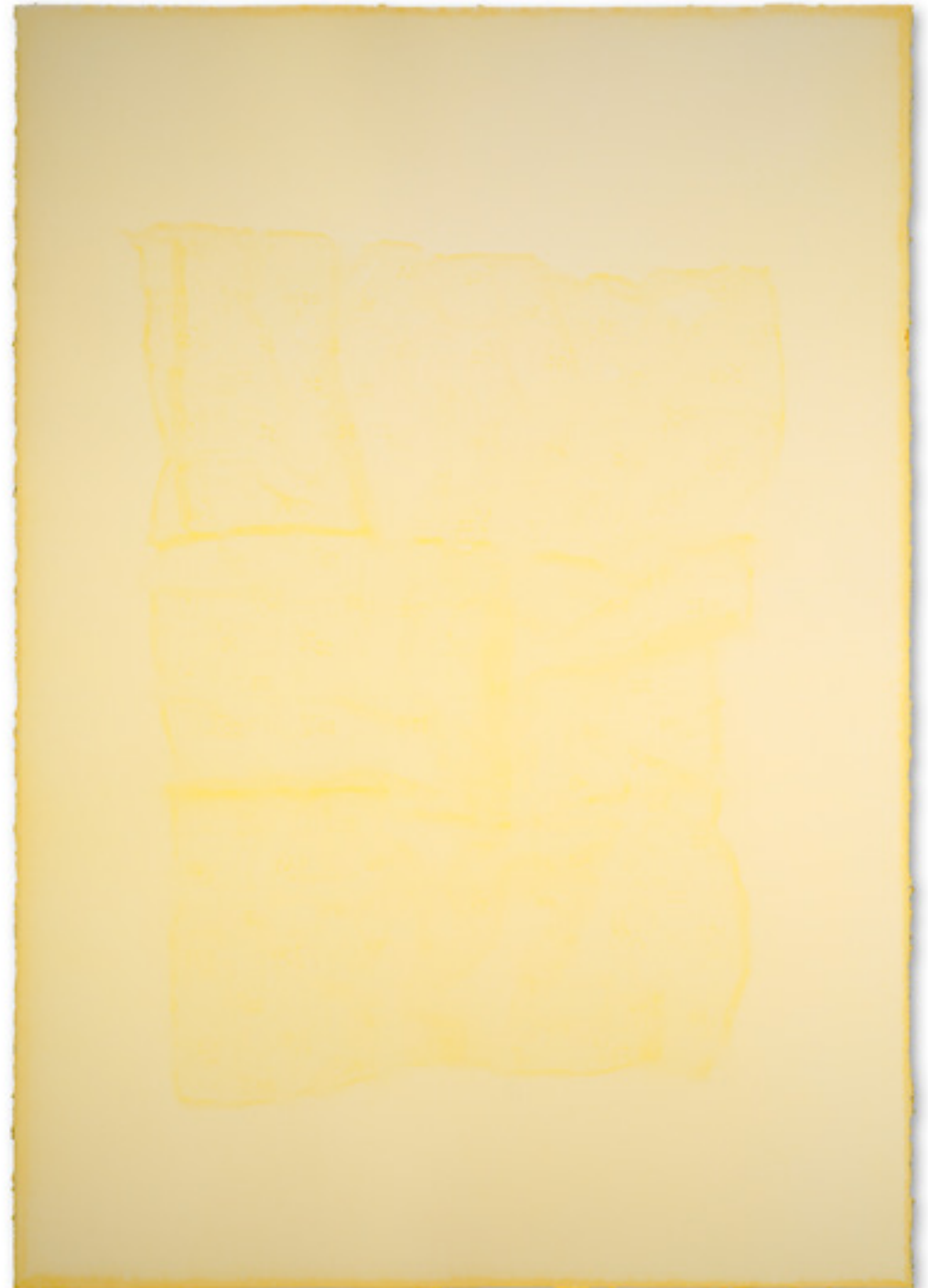


Previous page: *Matrilineal trace 7*, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, sun print, 152 x 107cm, photo by Peter Whyte

Tympanic (In the sound-space of tinnitus) 1, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, 152 x 107cm, photo by Peter Whyte

Right: *Matrilineal trace 6*, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, sun print, 152 x 107cm, photo by Peter Whyte

Following page: *The sky is my gravity 2*, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink and indelible Indian ink on paper, sun faded, 150 x 105cm, photo by Peter Whyte





TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

H.R. HYATT-JOHNSTON

The French surrealist artist and poet Jean Cocteau in his 1950 film *Orpheus* used the mirror as a central motif to evoke a mystical portal between the worlds of the living and the dead. In his notes on the film, Cocteau highlighted the symbolism of the mirror: “we watch ourselves grow old in mirrors. They bring us closer to death”¹. For the American poet Delmore Schwartz, “Time is the fire in which we burn”² – this idea has often been referred to in popular culture, including in the film *Star Trek Generations* (1994) where the villain Dr Tolian Soran expressed it. Also concerned with metaphysical themes was the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot; in *The Step Not Beyond* (1973) he writes of the “Eternal Return” and that “one must think [of] time as an infinite recurrence of finitude” and that it is “the infinity of rupture that the lack of the present introduces into time”³. In other words, being aware of time means also that we need to think of time as both finite and infinite in order to think about it at all.

Sara Maher’s installation *Gravity Portal* at Contemporary Art Tasmania makes us aware of the passage of time: by the very processes involved in the making of her work; the transcendental

depth of the compositions; and the placement of objects in the gallery, such as the fireplace, which pays homage to the original one that has served as a companion in her studio for decades. The objects are mostly like shadows or echoes that trigger memories. Recollections re-emerge, endlessly opening and closing doors in the mind, like falling dominoes though rarely in sequence.

The fireplace in the gallery is similar enough to the one in Maher's studio to evoke memories of the archaic and temporal. In the original flames burned decades ago, giving rise to a wealth of metaphors and numerous imagined gateways that expand into other portals. Contemplating a gentle flame can take you to another place, another time and into a reverie. You are compelled to look beyond, to see further. The burning wood is now an obscured breath from an older sun, and, as the Renaissance astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus reminds us, the sun is "the pupil [*prunelle*] of the world"⁴.

As evidenced in the installation, Maher's technique is reminiscent of the second-generation American abstract expressionist Helen Frankenthaler's (1928-2011) "soak-stain" approach. However, what makes Maher's work quite different is her use of traditional Japanese and Indian inks to infuse and permeate large sheets of un-primed paper to create her atmospheric compositions. The work is process driven with individual pieces initially taking form over many hours. The colours used are evocative of the twilight palette whose distinctive hues come from "scattering". In this phenomenon the molecules in the atmosphere alter the

direction of light rays. The colour blue is scattered more than the warmer primary colours of red and yellow because it travels in shorter wavelengths. As the sun sets its light takes longer to reach your eyes, favouring the longer wavelengths of the reds, pinks and oranges, with the greys and indigos belonging to the hours when the sun's rays have almost disappeared. Maher's transcendental works are tilted and suspended in space, defying gravity and predictable boundaries, and creating opportunities for capturing moments of contemplation, resonance and musing.

Maher selects some works and engages in a further process using lacey or patterned fabrics resting upon the surface. These works are exposed to the sun's rays for weeks or months at a time, creating "ghostings". They are not unlike the American artist Man Ray's (1890 - 1976) rayographs, which he created by placing objects on photosensitive paper and subjecting them to light. Maher's various interventions bequeath fingerprints of themselves after exposure to the sun and when they are removed leave a barely-there solar x-ray. The remaining trace is unpredictable, like some leftover vapour of solar respiration that lingers between an abstract and figurative form.

To a certain degree Maher also relinquishes an amount of control over the elements she is working with. Even though Maher has dyed the paper the sun is 'dying' the colour after its exposure. Its decay is inevitable, the work will age and the colour will fade, eventually disappearing as it does during twilight. The ephemeral nature of the process and the inevitable loss it produces means

you are not just seeing but you are feeling. You experience a different sort of awareness and realisation in relation to matter.

As part of the exhibition, sound artist Nigel Farley has produced an electro-acoustic soundscape that hums like low-pitch gravitational waves rippling through the universe. It feels eternal, like some ancient omnipresence. It evokes disquieting reminiscences and thoughts of some primordial pulsation, whose undulations are initiated by black holes compressing and elongating everything in the universe, and tearing through the super-heated particles of plasma, it creates a cosmic pulse. These otherworldly acoustics are evocative of a Phillip Glass or Michael Nyman soundtrack, referencing solar flares transmitting their eruptions when their stored magnetic energy is released into the atmosphere of the sun.

These audio ripples are also mirrored in the artworks if you look hard enough. It is in the trace elements from the ink sediment that have remained with the passage of time, lasting longer, and becoming sharper and more focused as the colour deteriorates. Again, the artist is conjuring images of the fireplace whose fires died down long ago, and whose flames left only ghostings of their grey carbon stains from the fire's warm breath. This is not an endless return of the same but an eternal recurrence of infinite possibilities.

1. Jean Cocteau, *The Art of Cinema*. Ed. André Bernard and Claude Gauteur. Trans.
2. Robin Buss (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1992) p 158.
Delmore Schwartz, "Calmly We Walk Through This April's Day" in *Selected Poems*
3. (1938-1958): *Summer Knowledge* (1967).
Lycette Nelson, "Introduction" in Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*. Trans.
4. Lycette Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) p xs.
Nicolaus Copernicus, *Des révolutions des orbes célestes*. Introduction, translation and notes A. Koyré (ed.) (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1934) p 116.



Previous page: *Matrilineal trace 8*, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink and indelible Indian ink on paper, sun print, 152 x 107cm, photo by Peter Whyte

Right: *Matrilineal trace 7*, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, sun print, 152 x 107cm, photo by Peter Whyte



Matrilineal trace 4, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper,
sun print, 152 x 107cm, photo by Peter Whyte



Beneath the surface of things: reflections on
time, memory and materiality in Sara Maher's
Gravity Portal

ELIZA BURKE

'art is...a portal, an access point, to another world (our world experienced differently), a world of impermanence and interpenetration, a molecular world of becoming.'

At the front of Sara Maher's house, old rose bushes grow high up the wall, covering most of the weatherboard and latticework and obscuring the windows that look out to the street. When in season, the bushes produce an array of pink, purple and apricot blooms, a hazy spectrum of colour that changes throughout the day under the moving sun. From inside the house, the roses provide privacy and a soft blush of colour through the frosted windowpanes of the sunroom, a place Maher uses for fading some of her works and a filter for imparting warmth and sunlight to the rest of the house.

Since 2005, the house has been Maher's home and studio, with several rooms providing spaces for assembling her materials and testing her methods. Throughout the house, wallpapers and carpentry hold traces of the lives of past residents, lead light

windows throw subtle fields of green, yellow and red amongst the still interiors. Art and life mingle here. Doorways become thresholds or frames, windows become portals for Maher's experiments with light and colour. Art materials and handwritten notes sit easily amongst family objects and photographs, blending to form a versatile language and energetic field of play. Far from the traditional domain of the domestic, the unique ambience of Maher's house-studio stems from the qualities of time and light that permeate its spaces and a sense that the house itself is a quiet collaborator in Maher's work.

Like many houses of its era, the interior is structured by a long hallway with small living rooms to the left and right. Timber fireplaces remember old comforts and rituals, boarded up now but still breathing with the occasional breeze. In one of these rooms, Maher prepares her ink washes on paper, using processes of pouring, resting and drying and allowing time and temperature to draw out each visible world.

Maher's process is patient and slow. Over weeks or months, she harnesses the natural energies of her materials to push the boundaries of abstraction and materiality. Using permanent and impermanent inks and processes of fading and drying, her works explore the limits of (im)permanence and visibility, mapping interactions between light and colour over time. Each work is a unique reflection of the fluid conditions of its making, uncertain about where it begins or ends, a record of confluence on its way to stillness.

In contrast to the materiality of Maher's processes, the images that emerge are spectral in nature, suggesting the presence of something more felt than seen, its full meaning ungraspable. Maher's focus is less on the spectre as a figure, and more on the light spectrum as a field of emergence, a space of diffusion and coalescence where thoughts, memories and ideas move through consciousness. Maher's works reference scales both intimate and immense, slipping between the personal space of the house and the expansive spaces of atmosphere, creating an affective force that unsettles any attempt at definition.

In a strange and uncanny event in 2023, a clutch of six photo negatives appeared in Maher's wet studio room. Depicting two women (likely sisters who once lived in the house) and a child, they seemed to have slipped from behind the fireplace mantle, mysteriously connecting the studio to a past world. The negatives share something of what artist Patrick Pound has termed the 'unhinged' nature of the found photograph², an untethered image that has survived its lost referents, hauntingly reclaiming a space in the present. Roland Barthes aligned such effects to the unsettling aesthetics of photographs, as they evoke both the 'return of the dead' and an immobility at 'the very heart of the moving world'³.

The appearance of the photo negatives for Maher represented a profound collision of past and present, a moment where the forces of matter and memory resonated with the histories of the house. In their language of light saturation and exposure, the

negatives echo Maher's fading processes where she overlays ink washes with inherited laceworks made by a maternal ancestor, her great, great 'Grandma Smith'. Left in Maher's sunroom over several weeks or months, the coloured inks fade leaving sun prints of the textiles, delicate traces of the disappearing language of women's domestic crafts and ghostly echoes of the colonial past. The ethereal qualities of these 'matrilineal traces' echo the affective force of the photo negatives where light is a medium for memory, exposing connections between past and present and the lineages of women's lives. The process of fading breathes life into the remnants as they take on new dimensions and colour, resuscitating lost connections and refusing amnesia. In what Maher terms a process of 'presencing', Grandma Smith's laceworks become memories floating on paper, light frequencies tuning in and out of the ancestral field. Blending her materials in this way, Maher reminds us of etymological lineages and the shared Latin roots of 'maternal', 'material' and 'matter'⁴, all words relating to the generation of physical forms. In some works, Maher incorporates textiles from the family collections of her women friends, further exploring the relationships between inheritance, family and shared languages of making.

Just as the photograph gives substance to light, Maher's 'colour fields' give substance to memory and time as they move through her works like super-mediums, connecting her sense of place and family to other histories and worlds. These works recall the ghostly qualities of Ann Ferran's photograms⁵ or the atmospherics of Tacita Dean's lithographs of Los Angeles

skies⁶ in their focus on light and time and the parallel forces of memory and materiality. The electroacoustic soundtrack 'Anti-gravitational event' by Nigel Farley, Maher's long-time collaborator, heightens our receptivity to these forces, inviting reflection on 'how colour and sound might physically or metaphorically correlate through frequency'⁷.

Alongside the tendency towards disappearance and dissolution in Maher's work, there is an attempt to find balance, a tuning into gravity (in the Newtonian sense) as the force of attraction between all objects. Her practice seems to entail a kind of gravitational pull towards particular energies or materials, and processes that bring things together or set them apart. This is less about feeling grounded, weight-bound or seeking fixed meanings, and more about sensing an 'open moment of making'⁸ where forces connect, affect emerges and meaning becomes saturated. The luminous *The sky is my gravity 1* (2024) is a portal for perceiving such effects which, like Mark Rothko's large colour field paintings, invite us towards elevated perceptual, emotional or sensory states. This sense of balance is intuitive and fleeting, suggesting 'a lightness of being'⁹ where the sky is a holding space to contemplate feeling as atmosphere and the body as part of the wider order of things.

Maher's materials are finely tuned to the resonances of memory and time. Time is elastic and porous in her work, stretching to accommodate the movement of histories and condensing to capture their transformation into memory. Paper remembers

the way light has fallen on Grandma Smith's lacework roses, inks remember the roses through the window as they fade from blue to purple to pink, aged rose petals still remember their colour at first bloom and the hands of residents who planted them. These are objects that somehow resist the laws of gravity, conduits for the transmission of memory and feeling that allow us to perceive the soft edges of becoming.

In their layered subtleties, Maher's works provoke the workings of affect, connecting us to a world beyond the frame and inviting us to perceive 'the matter in us responding and resonating with the matter around us.'¹⁰ Such processes are her speciality, 'when you're making work with atmospheres, it's really quite big' she tells me on a studio visit, highlighting her attempt to 'apprehend life's immensity at a hand-held scale' and the intensity of her focus on the 'temporal and spatial currents that run beneath the surface of things'¹¹.

Following page: Found photo negatives, date unknown (found in the artist's house, 2023), 6 x 10cm each, photographer unknown.

Documentation: Rémi Chauvin

1. O'Sullivan, S. (2001) The aesthetics of affect: Thinking art beyond representation. *Angelaki: journal of theoretical humanities*, 6 (3).
2. Pound, P, (2017) *Patrick Pound: The Great Exhibition*, Exhibition Catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, 31 Mar – 30 July 2017.
3. Barthes, R (1984) (Transl. Howard, R) *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Fontana Paperbacks, London.
4. The words maternal, matter and material stem from the form 'matr' from the Latin 'māter', meaning 'mother.' Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "mater (n.1)".
5. Anne Ferran's series of photograms include *Longer than Life* (1998), *Float* (2001), and *Thin Air* (2015).
6. Tacita Dean's two series of lithographs of Los Angeles skies are *LA Exuberance* (2016) and *LA Magic Hour* (2022).
7. Kahn, D. (2013) *Earth sound earth signal: Energies and earth magnitude in the arts*. Univ of California Press. Berkely and Los Angeles.
8. Maher, S, (2024) Private correspondence between artist and author.
9. Ibid.
10. O'Sullivan, Op. cit.
11. Maher, Op cit.











EXHIBITION LIST OF WORKS

Wall works clockwise

Found photo negatives, date unknown (found in the artists house, 2023), 6 x 10cm each, photographer unknown

Matrilineal traces 1 and 2, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, sun prints, 152 x 107cm each

Matrilineal traces 3 and 4, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink and indelible Indian ink on paper, sun prints, 152 x 107cm each

The sky is my gravity 2, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, sun faded, 105 x 150cm

Matrilineal trace 5, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, sun print, 88 x 125cm

Matrilineal trace 6, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, sun print, 152 x 107cm

Fireplace Mantel

Matrilineal trace 7, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, sun print, 152 x 107cm

Matrilineal trace 8, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, sun print, 152 x 107cm

Floorworks

Tympanic (In the sound-space of tinnitus) 1, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, 107 x 152cm

Tympanic (In the sound-space of tinnitus) 2, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, 107 x 152cm

Tympanic (In the sound-space of tinnitus) 3, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, 107 x 152cm

Sound: Nigel Farley, *Anti-gravitation event*, 2024

11:48 minutes looped

<https://soundcloud.com/nigel-farley/anti-gravitational-event>

Lighting Design: Jason James, Lights fading in and out in sync with sound



Studio process, October 2024, photo by Rémi Chauvin

PROCESS

Sara Maher and Kylie Johnson reflect on the development of *Gravity Portal*

Kylie: [When we discuss your work] we always speak about intangibles, those difficult to pin down felt sensations of place, interconnectedness, traversing time and how histories bleed into the present.

If we had a mantra throughout the development of *Gravity Portal*, it would be to trust our instincts and leave space for things beyond ourselves to occur. The exhibition-making process and your work corresponds to this by involving chance and gravity and, in this body of work, the sun. I am thinking about how the old photo negatives you discovered in your house mysteriously revealed themselves to you and how your works on paper are made.

Sara: The conceptualisation of *Gravity Portal* began with the discovery of six photo negatives of the 1930s era, revealing two sisters who I imagine were past residents of this house I live in (on Muwinina land). I have lived here for 19 years. I found the negatives on the floor in my studio room. Maybe they became dislodged from behind the old fireplace mantle. The photo

negatives arrived 17 months ago, shortly after we started meeting. I remember that they completely captured our attention, as if they were a house offering with unknown generative potential. I was affected and transformed by the mysterious photo negative encounter. What has arisen is a deepened sense of the agency that underscores our material reality. Certain spatial and ephemeral qualities of my lived environment have come to reveal themselves as primary mediums for this dialogue to occur.

Kylie: And from this time the roses in your front garden came into our conversations.

Sara: Yes, the old-fashioned roses that grow in my garden are a lingering presence of the sisters' lives. As the roses hone my senses to their subtle variations of colour and aroma, and modulations in the atmosphere, I experience a melancholic intimacy with the sisters' world. The transient materiality and immateriality, and vast upward expansion of the sky has become somewhere for me to contemplate this nonlinear dimension of time and being. The sky has been felt as a portal, opening onto a wider than human field through which the personal and collective, the past, present and future are linked. The ephemeral nature of these presences - the way they stir the boundary between the invisible and the visible, between life-affirming enchantment and haunting atmospheres of affect (where the past suffuses the present) - establishes the ground on which this new body of work is set.

Through a studio-based process of wetting, ink-pooling and staining large sheets of paper, I am creating surfaces that seemingly defy their materiality, as if held in a mysterious levitation. A faint glow spills from these surfaces, redolent of the translucency of a rose, or an atmospheric skyscape. Some of these works become faded through sunlight exposure... There is a felt, solar temporality read in this unceasing process of fading. It is as if the works in *Gravity Portal* are repositories for an emotional frequency that isn't stable or fixed, relating to memory. Here, a sense of being hovers in the balance between continuity and unsettlement.

Kylie: This exhibition was developed through many meetings, mostly spending time together in your home, which is also your studio. You would make tea in the kitchen as we 'chewed the fat' about life and your work. In the front room that you use as a wet studio we would talk about your pouring strategies. In the largest room that would have once been a lounge room, you put low barriers up at the doors so that Noki [your little dog] couldn't get in, and so you could set new work up for us to reflect on. Your sunroom became the place where the sun experiments on paper occurred. Towards the end of each visit, like now, we go into your backyard. You look up at the sky. We talk speculatively about our place in the world and interconnectedness.

Sara: This new body of work is an exploration of art at the edge of materiality, as if an animate atmosphere felt through light and the forces of gravity. This quality of its atmosphere heightens our sense of the expanded and elusive boundaries of both place and the cosmos.

Kylie: Time has been a recurring topic in our conversations. I'm interested in how you view the temporality of the artworks.

Sara: The works chart a journey with the temporal dimension through an engagement with material. They are a trace of time passing, that manifests on the paper in the wake of light and gravity that are at play in our environment. Their gradual dematerialization through fading is simultaneously a 'coming-into-being'...a passing further on into their entangled relationship with the atmosphere.

Kylie: From the outset [of this project], I've been interested in how vertigo does or doesn't influence your work, the thinking and the making process. Is there an alignment between the unsettling you refer to in your work and the vertigo you have experienced?

Sara: I have lived with a sense of disequilibrium ever since I experienced an episode of vertigo. My embodied perception of

Studio process, October 2024, photo by Rémi Chauvin



the external world emerges through the internal disruption of tinnitus and dizziness. My large ink-washed fields of atmospheric and peripheral space are an attempt to locate the altered state of existence this creates. It is a teetering feeling of not being held steady between earth and sky. It is a lingering lightness of being that is out of alignment with gravity's force. This disequilibrium of my own sensorium very much entangles with how I, as a non-Indigenous artist, apprehend a sense of place in Lutruwita/Tasmania. I look to my material practice as a form of dialogue wherein place is alive, sentient and aware, and responsive. I ask: How might my work breathe with these lands, waters and skies, to invite life-affirming, creative connections?

Kylie: Throughout the development of *Gravity Portal* I have been curious about how the sensation of vertigo would manifest in the exhibition. We have spent some time exploring different exhibition design strategies that could provide an opportunity for audiences to experience a semblance of the sensation of vertigo. We arrived at subtly shifting lighting, tilting floor platforms and the sound that accompanies the work, offering an audience a sense of this unease.

Sara: I hope that through time-based lighting, sound and experimental framing, the immersive installation will summon a heightened sensitivity to the subtle energies behind my work.

Studio process, October 2024, photo by Rémi Chauvin



I hope these surfaces will further reveal, to link our bodies' experience with the material and cosmological forces of gravity and light in a speculative and uncanny way.

The lighting in the gallery gradually shifts in intensity over time to elicit a feeling that the room is slowly moving, or turning. An electroacoustic soundtrack, *Anti-gravitational event* by Nigel Farley [Sara's long-time collaborator] will attune with this perceptual experience. The support structures that some works rest on, enable visitors to experience my works on paper horizontally, as atmospheric portals suspended and tilted in space. I hope the floating and tilting works on paper will affect a peculiar shift in our bodies' relationship to the ground.

Kylie: Working on this project has given me a pretext to spend a lot of time thinking about our interconnectedness with all things across time. The strongest sensation I get from your work is the sensation of dissolving into boundless space. That's a powerful thing, thank you.





Studio process, October 2024, photo by Rémi Chauvin

BIOGRAPHY

Sara Maher grew up on Garigal land in Sydney and moved to nipaluna/Hobart in 1997. Sara works across painting, drawing, assemblage and installation. She looks to her material practice as a form of dialogue, wherein the more-than-human world is sentient and responsive. This entangles with how she apprehends a sense of place in lutruwita/Tasmania. In the wet studio, Sara is sensitive to the way water and ink coalesce on and through large sheets of paper to reveal ambient fields of peripheral space. These abstractions heighten and displace our perception; they shift between the visible and the imperceptible, between life-affirming enchantment and haunting atmospheres of affect.

Sara holds a Diploma of Fine Art from the National Art School, Gadi/Sydney (1995); and a Bachelor of Fine Art (1999) and Master of Fine Art and Design (2005) from the University of Tasmania, nipaluna/Hobart. Sara has undertaken residencies in remote locations in lutruwita/Tasmania and nationally that have enabled an immersive engagement with place, including Lunawanna-alonnah/Bruny Island, through the Bruny20 project, TAS; Warloundigerler/Cradle Mountain, TAS; Wilyakali/Broken Hill, NSW; Milaythina ngayapimana/Queenstown, TAS; leeawulena/Lake St Clair, TAS and wukaluwikiwayna/Maria Island, TAS. In 2022 she was awarded the Tidal prize, City of Devonport Art Award, TAS. Recent

exhibitions include: *Chrysalid*, Bett Gallery nipaluna/Hobart (2023); *Ancestral Presence*, in collaboration with Luana Towney (palawa/wiradjuri artist), CULTIVATE program, connecting Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, LongHouse, nipaluna/Hobart (2022); *In (and out of) the Grey*, Bett Gallery, nipaluna/Hobart (2021); *Un/Touched Wilderness*, Devonport Regional Gallery, Paranaple/Devonport (group exhibition) (2021); and *Where time folds endlessly*, in collaboration with sound artist Nigel Farley, Biennale of Australian Art Festival, ballaarat/Ballarat, VIC, (2018).

Sara Maher is represented by Bett Gallery: bettgallery.com.au
Artist's website: out-of-field.net

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work in this exhibition was created on Aboriginal land. I pay my respects to ancestors past, present and emerging.

Many people have supported the development and presentation of *Gravity Portal*: I would especially like to thank curator Kylie Johnson for her lively and critical engagement with the work, and her willingness to walk this journey with me. It has been a real joy to envision this exhibition with you. I owe a big thanks to designer-maker Stuart Houghton. His expertise and kind patience have enabled me to realise an innovative way of presenting the work. I am deeply grateful to Eliza Burke and Helen Hyatt-Johnston for their compelling and insightful essays. Thank you both for sharing thoughtful conversation on the work in process.

Thank you to Nigel Farley for the soundscape that is in sympathetic resonance with the work. I am immensely grateful for your presence and insights. Many thanks to Jason James for his sensitive lighting design. To Peter Whyte and Rémi Chauvin for capturing the nuance of the work through their photographic documentation. To Cath Robinson, thank you for your receptivity to my work throughout the catalogue design. Many thanks to Robert O'Connor for installing the exhibition, and to the CAT team for providing this fantastic opportunity. I would also like to thank Arts Tasmania whose

financial assistance made this project possible. Thank you to Bett Gallery for your ongoing support of my practice.

To my friends and fellow artists, your crucial support and enthusiasm has been invaluable. A special acknowledgement to Cath Morse for her 'grounding' assistance through the framing process and during installation. Also thanks to Maria Mac Dermott. To my parents Gill and Reg, thanks for your continual loving support. To Katie, thanks for our sisterly bond and creative inquiry that has travelled through my many years of art making. Last but not least, thank you to the late sisters of the house I live in for offering a small collection of photo negatives through your chimney place, and to my matrilineal ancestors (especially Great Great Grandma Smith) for the handcrafted treasures you left behind. These traces of your existence that share in my creative process are a potent touchstone through which I feel my place in the world. Thank you to Wendy Morrow for lending your late Great Aunt Madge's magical lacework to feed into this conversation.





Previous pages: *The sky is my gravity* 3, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, 107 x 152cm, photo by Peter Whyte

Tympanic (In the sound-space of tinnitus) 2, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, 107 x 152cm, photo by Peter Whyte

Right: *Tympanic (In the sound-space of tinnitus)* 1, 2024, light sensitive Japanese ink on paper, 107 x 152cm, photo by Peter Whyte



CONTEMPORARY ART TASMANIA

27 Tasma Street

North Hobart Tasmania 7000 Australia

T +61 3 6231 0445

E info@contemporaryart.org.au

www.contemporaryarttasmania.org

© Contemporary Art Tasmania, the artist and authors, 2025

ARTIST: Sara Maher

SOUND COMPOSITION: Nigel Farley

TEXT AUTHORS: Eliza Burke, Helen Hyatt-Johnston, Sara Maher & Kylie Johnson

CURATOR: Kylie Johnson

Contemporary Art Tasmania is supported by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body, and by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments, and is assisted through Arts Tasmania by the Minister for the Arts.

Based in Hobart, Contemporary Art Tasmania is a not-for-profit arts organisation incorporated in 1992. Its primary roles are the development, presentation and touring of contemporary art exhibitions. Contemporary Art Tasmania is a member of Contemporary Arts Organisations of Australia (CAOA).

This publication accompanies the exhibition, *Gravity Portal* presented at the Contemporary Art Tasmania Gallery, 1 February – 8 March 2025.

This project was assisted through Arts Tasmania by the Minister for the Arts.

DESIGN: Cath Robinson

PHOTOGRAPHY: Rémi Chauvin, Peter Whyte

ISBN: 978-0-947335-25-0

All images © the artist.

CTPaATMI
DEORaAA
NMRYTSN



CONTEMPORARY
ARTS
ORGANISATIONS
AUSTRALIA

