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For as long as the earth will endure.

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Twenty artists from the UK and Europe made a collective response to 'Ground Up – Extraction' the theme set by Veronica Sekules, Director of GroundWork Gallery, for the GroundWork Gallery annual residency programme. Extraction had close connections to each artist's studio practice and research which had a shared fascination with materiality as a unifying focus. Coming together in the summer of June 2024, we each took part in a combined research week, walking, talking and listening to local experts in re-wilding, extraction, plant and wildlife, geology and local history. They told us stories that are woven into the bedrock of East Anglia and stories of the cliffs crumbling rapidly into encroaching seas.

My own response to our time spent there was shaped by the unlikely meeting points of King's Lynn's history and trade, regenerative agricultural practice at Wild Ken Hill and foraging for earth from collapsed cliff sites on my many walks along the coast path. My subsequent making with materials resonated with a sense of taking and giving back (Springgay and Truman, 2019), exploring extraction and possible acts of healing. What follows here are text and image of the process of responding *through making* (Halcrow, 2023) to the complex and multi-layered stories of human extraction within King's Lynn and the surrounding area and its long legacy into the now and the unknown future.

For As Long As The Earth Will Endure is the title of the work shaped by my time in Norfolk (Fig. 1.). More than a title, these words have forged my thinking. They come from the walking tour of Kings Lynn with Ivor Rowlands and the words told to our walking group of artists, that stemmed from a kind of contract between a wealthy Medieval merchant and the person, perhaps a servant, whose role it was to pray for them after their death 'for as long as the earth will endure'. The words formed a kind of contract connecting one powerful human to another less so, to a set of deeply held religious beliefs, to a length of planetary time that seemed to assume eternity but is now open to question. The words made me pause to reconsider the contract between intergenerational time and my own sense of endurance. They stayed with me and became a question, a statement, a threat, an omen. They hung in the air above each place we spent time in during our research weeks and followed me home. I'm interested in human traces within our landscapes and the emotional responses to our places amidst the unfolding climate crisis. These words speak to so much – to our troubled relationship with our world, to a sense that humankind are pushing the planet and all who exist within it to the breaking point of its endurance and beyond, and to an intergenerational timeframe of extraction and

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Figure 1: Detail of *For As Long As The Earth Will Endure* eroded earth, salt, wax, pins. All the images in this essay are by the author.

destruction. The actions of generations before are unfolding around us, just as current actions and materiality will continue to unfold for generations to come (Conway, 2023).

The walks and the words held a sense of repetition to them, so I started to type them on an old typewriter over and over (Fig. 2). To try and test out the weight of each word and to work within my own endurance, as a way to 'act with the material' (Lange-Berndt 2015, 13). Each typed key stamping its mark and embossing it on the surface of paper dipped in eroded earth inks was much like our human imprint on the earth beneath our feet. How long can the earth endure? And what can we as witnesses and actors endure within it? The more you hold and sound and spell a word or phrase, the more it is unsettled as it gradually untethers itself from its meaning.

At the same time, I was testing a sense of endurance and the physicality of extraction in the studio with materials gathered from our research weeks and the many walks together and alone. Earth from the collapsing cliffs at Huntstanton, bacterial bog and earth from Dersingham and Ling Common, fragments of fossilised forest washed in on the tide at Holme beach.

We took part in a flint knapping workshop with master flint-knapper John Lord during our residency. The act of striking flint was a powerful embodied reminder that extraction is violent and a trace is held within our muscle memory. Touch can be care(ful) but so too it can be care(less) depending on intention and responsiveness to the environment (Rodaway, 1997). I wanted to work within this space so my poorly crafted flint tools that emerged from the workshop became grinding tools in my studio through which to

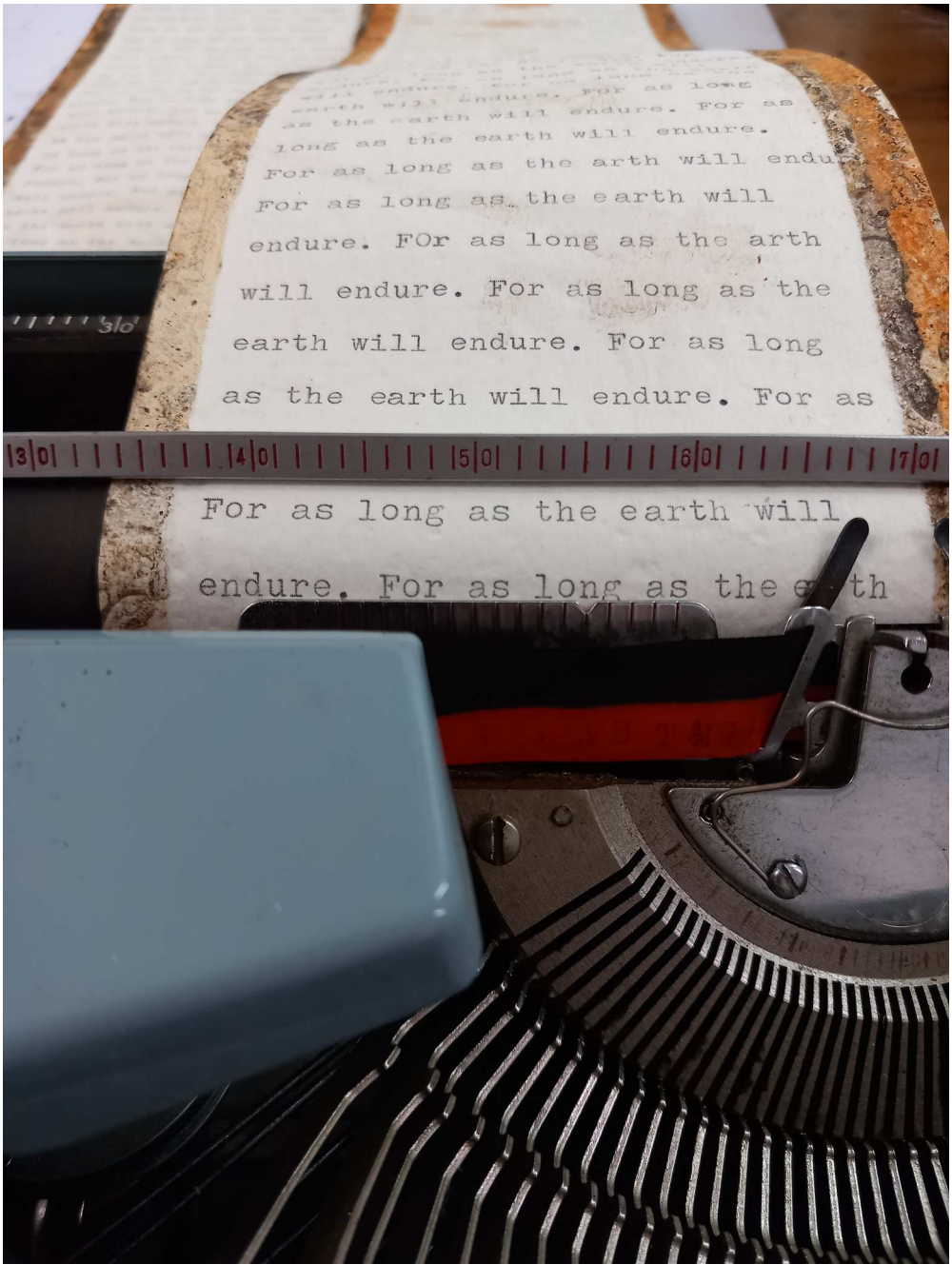

Figure 2: Detail of *For As Long As The Earth Will Endure*, work in progress, typing onto earth and wax dipped paper.

make the earth inks to work with. As I ground down earth foraged from collapsing cliffs along many walks on the coast path, the scratches and residues of the grinding process were held within copper etching plates that were placed beneath, a register of destruction in a small scale (Fig. 3). The earth was mixed with sea water, paper that was ready for

Figure 3: Grinding eroded cliff earth with flint tool made during residency.

Figure 4: Artists walking around ancient salterns during GroundWork residency in 2024.

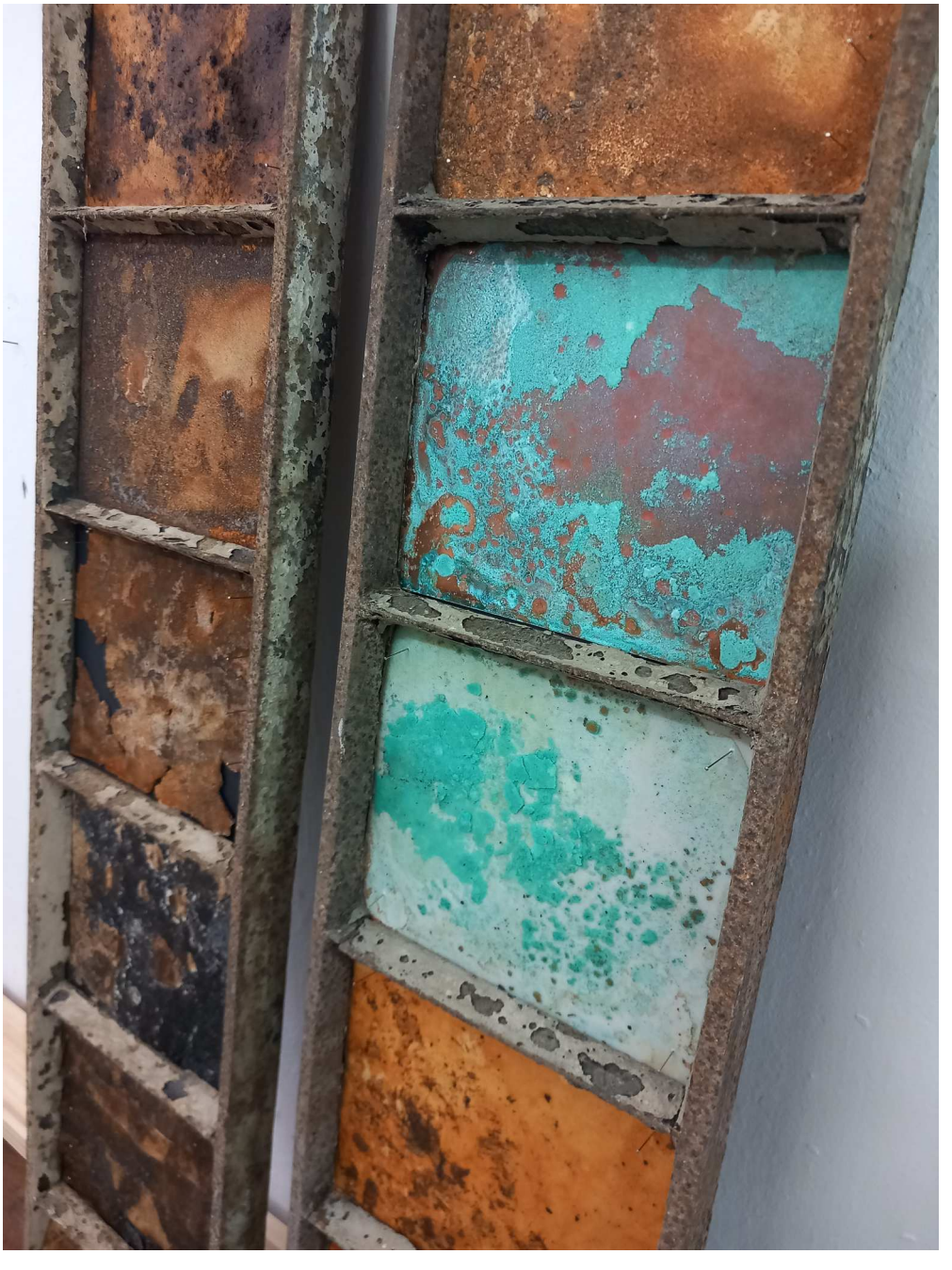

Figure 5: Detail of *For As Long As The Earth Will Endure* copper oxide, iron oxide, eroded earth and bacteria bog waters.

recycling was submerged within it and left to repeatedly evaporate before being re-submerged to echo the incoming and outgoing tides and processes of past extraction in the ancient saltern sites we visited during the residency (Fig. 4). In this way the work holds a record of the endurance of these materials and the processes that surround the ancient

extraction of salt in this area. It holds residues of decay in the materiality of the evaporated polluted sea water and eroding earth from cliffs rapidly collapsing as storms become more frequent and severe. Human extraction in one place has consequences in another, although the two may sit at distances of time and place. There is a sting in the tail.

Figure 6: 'Regeneration', felted sheep's wool, bacterial bog ink, mixed with clover, compost, fragments of fossilised forest and iron rich black strap molasses.

The fragments of paper and metal holding a residue of decay came together in two old reclaimed window frames. These two frames housing the work were propped against the wall within Groundwork Gallery (Fig. 5). The windows are a connection back to the sash facades in Kings Lynn – built on the riches of extractivist trade in Georgian times, the medieval buildings were extended out and up to create the illusion of wealth. The grander the window, the more wealth on display. The reclaimed windows in the gallery leaning from floor to wall stand at around one metre. They served as a marker for the high-water flood lines visible by the doorway of King's Lynn Minster. Their height is a reminder of expected sea level rises through the 2050 future flood map in this and many coastal places. They might give an embodied way to measure your body against the line and imagine a world with this much water in this and every place (Springgay and Truman, 2019). Visually there is a nod to the incredible collections at the Sedgwick Museum that we spent time in during our research week, fragments held in place with pins that hold as many stories in the negative space of the missing pieces as they do in the time worn materials and the textures within their surfaces (Fig. 1).

The destructive nature of these processes that made the work, the submerging and evaporating, the peeling of layers, the scratching and scraping and grinding of earth and the heavy words left me feeling weighed down. So, the last work I made was from the hopeful encounters at Wild Ken Hill. On our walks around the farm, we had talked about a positive feedback loop created by the interventions staged with beavers and the no dig philosophy for soil health. I was struck by the scale and nature of research into compost as a tool of regeneration. I wondered if I could make on a miniature scale some of the compost tea we saw slowly cooking and fermenting in the vast vats. I wondered if this compost tea could be held within a portable framework to let things grow in small pockets of space, on windowsills, balconies and back yards. A kind of sticking plaster or an offering perhaps to this damaged earth on which we find ourselves carving out an existence. An embodied, earthy act of hope where 'danger and possibility are sisters'. (Solnit 2016, 11). A small-scale experiment is ongoing here – sheep wool was submerged to become felted in warm bacterial bog waters, mixed with clover, compost, fragments of fossilised forest and iron rich black strap molasses (Fig. 6). In springtime these mineral laden felt rectangles will return to a patch of garden that the last occupants had weed-killed to make the perfect lawn to see if I can grow seeds within them. Food and wildflowers could bring back some biodiversity lost through intergenerational legacies in a small-scale attempt at regeneration.

As `Donna Haraway says 'It matters what matters we use to think other matters with'. Perhaps compost tea held in felted wool is a matter to think with. Haraway goes on to say 'it matters what stories make worlds and what worlds make stories' (Haraway 2016, 12). These processes are for me a mode of *thinking with* and a mode of story-telling, telling material, embodied stories about our world and what it can endure, what we humans take from it and how much and what we might give back.

Notes on Contributor

Lydia Halcrow is an artist and educator exploring the meeting points between human traces and processes of decay within our landscapes. She develops experimental devices to record walks and the passage of time within post-industrial landscapes rapidly flooding or eroding. The

artwork forms alternative maps of a place, through the lens of Counter Cartography, that attends to the often overlooked and fleeting matter of the everyday. It examines the time frame of human trace in our environment at a time of rapid human-induced loss. Her work has formed a practice-based PhD and subsequent AHRC funded post-doctoral fellowship 'A Living Map of Loss'. She received the Burton Gallery's first Environmental Artist Award (2019) and has featured in group and solo shows in the UK and Internationally. Her work and writing is included in the Bloomsbury publication 'Art and Creativity in an Era of Ecocide'. In 2024 she took part in a group residency at GroundWork gallery to explore the theme of extraction.

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