

AN UNQUIET MIND

YOU DHISTHIR MAHARJAN



TEXT BY AMIT KUMAR JAIN

Produced by

TARQ

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INTRODUCTION

Youdhisthir Maharjan's first solo exhibition at TARQ brings together a body of work that underscores the artist's meticulous practice which explores the materiality of text. Maharjan does this by using reclaimed text and painstakingly obliterating alphabets and words through a range of techniques. The result is a sculptural object that is free from the signifying purpose of words.

Influenced by Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Maharjan explores the idea of futility and Sisyphean labour through a process of carving out and erasing words and alphabets from their original, embedded position in the text. What remains is a composition of textures and patterns that turn the flat surface of a page into a dynamic entity. These sculptural pieces, with their unique visual language, are intuitively decipherable and bafflingly elusive in equal parts.

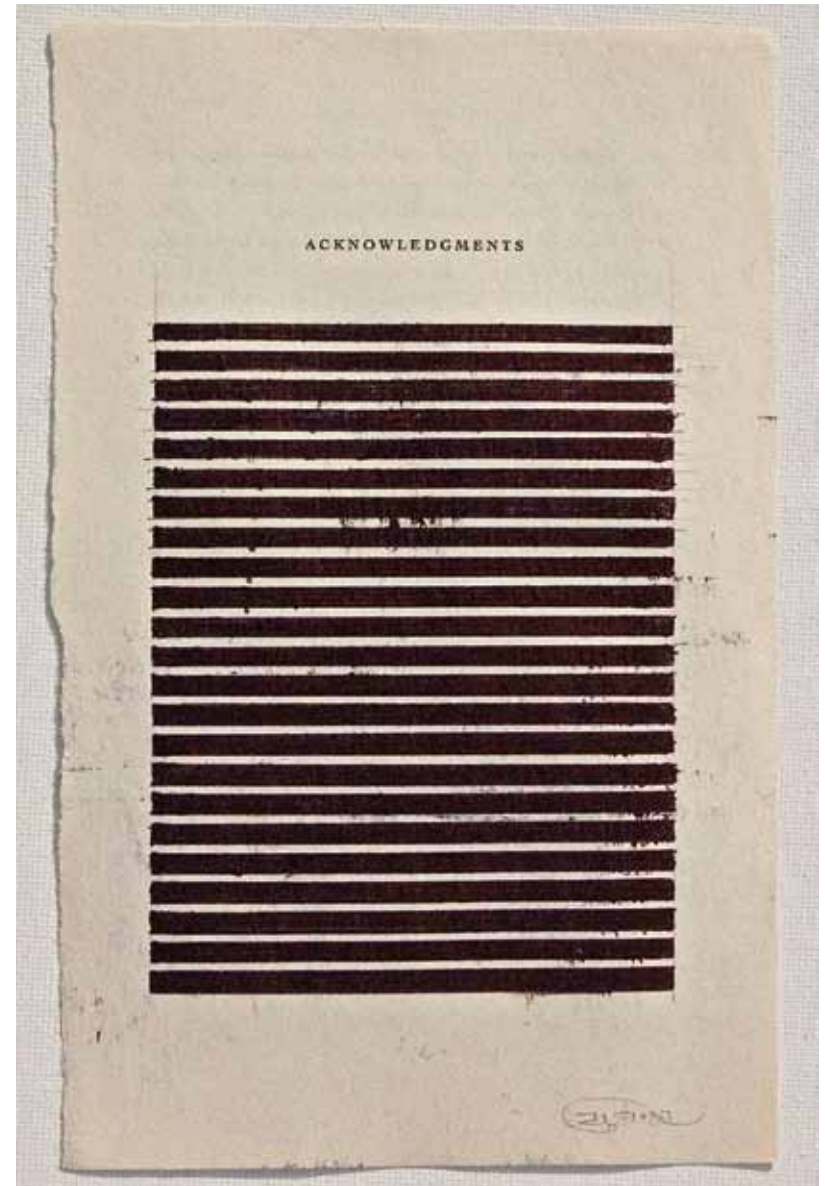
In his text accompanying the exhibition, curator Amit Kumar Jain writes "For me, this solo exhibition is a series of works that culminate from a three year exploration of Maharjan's work, as it showcases the multiple techniques that he has experimented with - doodles, ink work, cutting, pasting and more recently burning - each portraying a different emotion. For him, his substance of imagery stems from the twenty-six Roman alphabets of the English language and their potential to be re-contextualized."

Hena Kapadia
Gallery Director, TARQ

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THE JOURNEY OF YODHISTHIR MAHARJAN

On a page titled *Acknowledgements*, black ink erases names of friends, family and colleagues that contributed to the author's literary work; on another page titled *Crossing the Border*, each and every word is surgically cut and pasted around the circumference of the paragraphs. Now torn away from its original carrier – the book, Youdhisthir Maharjan's practice and imagery reflect the biographical nature of his artworks. It was his straightforward and minimal approach, complimented with a laborious process of cutting and erasing words that I found inviting. In his disciplined, meditative practice that stems from years in military school and an unstable political environment, *Acknowledgements* and *Crossing the Border* were my introduction to an artist who, through a self imposed exile in the United States, decided to carve out his own niche.

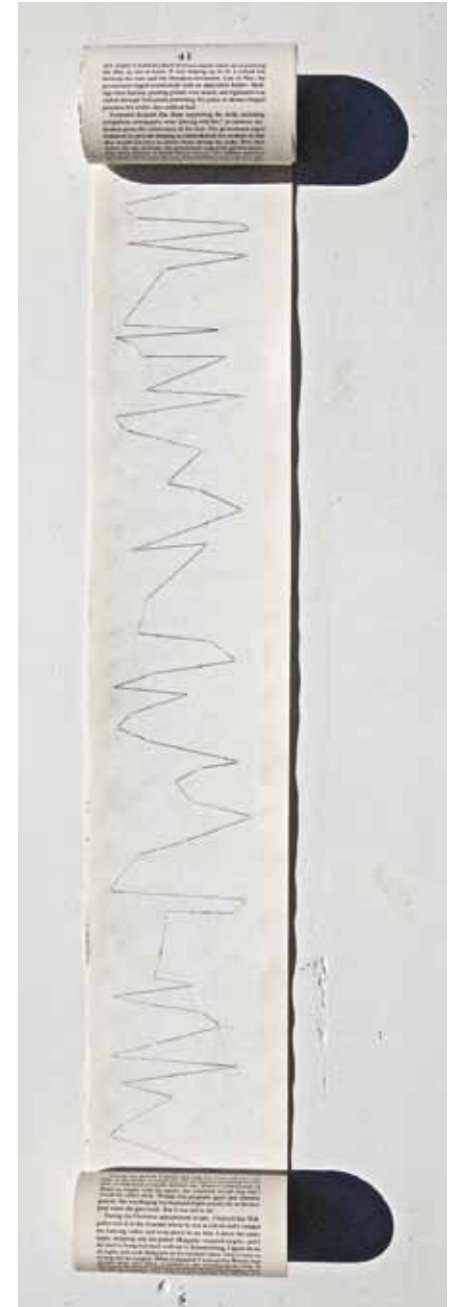


Acknowledgements
Ink on Reclaimed Text
8 inches x 5 inches
2015



Maharjan's association with language can be traced back to his undergraduate degree in creative and experimental writing, making him scavenge for books from numerous thrift stores, at times for reading but mostly for subconscious doodling. It wasn't until he was introduced to Beckett's two-act play *Waiting for Godot*, that his literary interest took visual forms. The play was envisioned as a standalone performance with both acts exactly similar to each other with no beginning, body or an end – almost a cyclical narrative without a conclusion. Beckett's underlying message of repetitive occurrence without an end result influenced the young Maharjan. It dawned on him, through his Hindu and Buddhist sensibilities, with the often repeated idea of reincarnation, that salvation and enlightenment ensued endless cycles of rebirth and repetition¹. Fuelled by Beckett, and other existential writing, it was this act of futile repetition, and the processual form of making that Maharjan wanted to incorporate in his works.

Long Walk to Freedom
Acrylic and Graphite on Reclaimed Text,
2150 inches x 5,5 inches



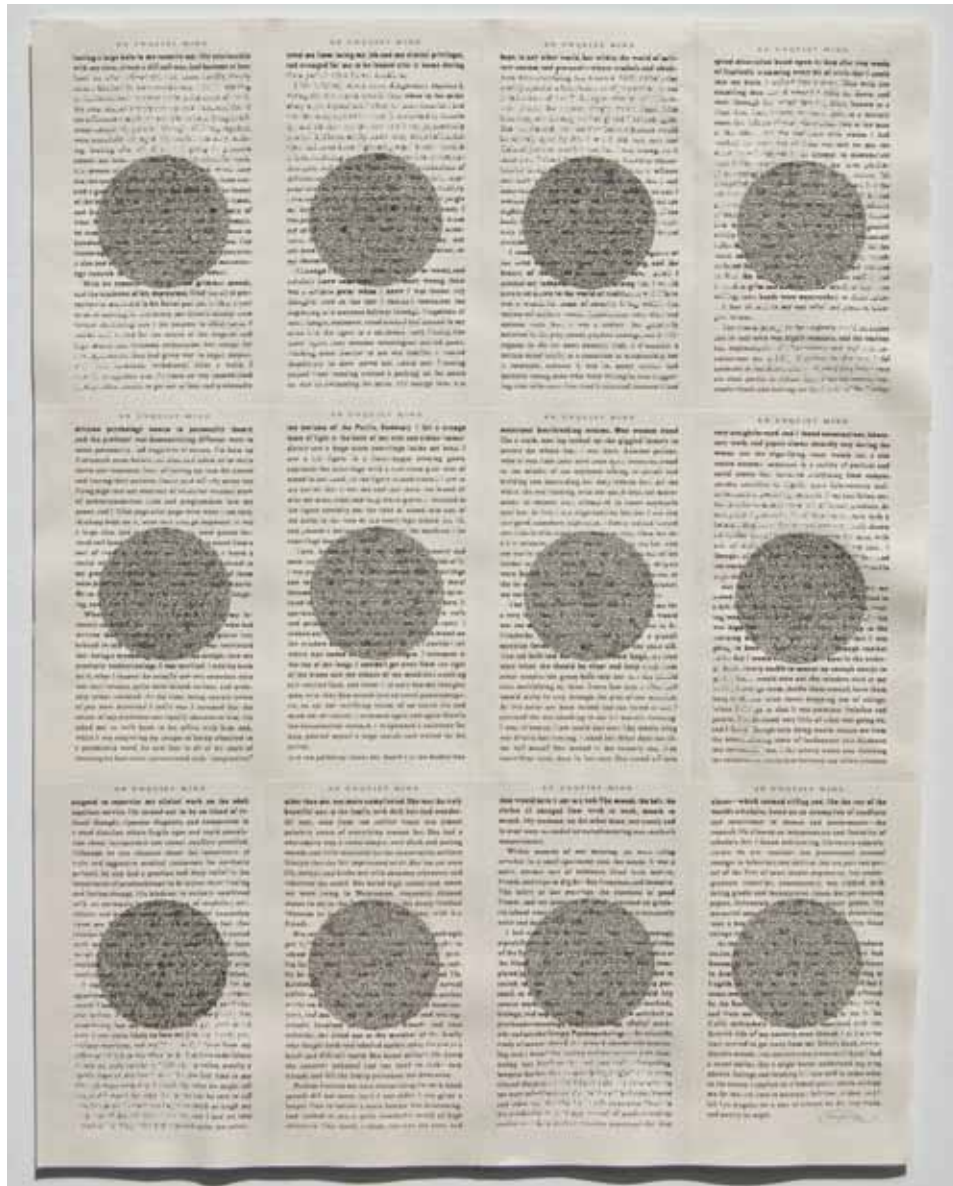
For Maharjan, the key to his creative process was the endless time-consuming labour, making him experiment with his own text on a printing press. Through numerous reprints of the same text, he understood that language was susceptible to loss, in both meaning and value. Alphabets could be converted into whimsical shapes that were universally accepted rising above the limitations of a language. His experiments soon stretched to his collection of books, which became active zones for interventions, where, as Berstein quotes in Buckart's *Mongrel Nature: A consideration of Artist's Books and their Implications for Art Education*, he 'carved out new worlds out of wilderness of human thought and language.'²

As a book artist (if I may identify him as one), Maharjan has shuffled between both schools of thoughts attributed to book art³. Firstly, as an avid reader, he considers the book as a venerated object, a carrier of information and a link to the past and present. Secondly, as an artist, he considers the medium of the book to be in a constant flux, adaptable to numerous appropriations and textual innovations such as cutting and pasting, allowing him to comment upon the acquired knowledge from the books and question the political and social agency that the authors represent. One such work that pushed Maharjan's studio practice and brings forth his meditative process is based on Nelson Mandela's biography titled *Long Walk to Freedom*. Maharjan tore and pasted every page of the book to transform them into a 208 feet scroll. The book, written in prison by Mandela, is an account of his fight and struggle to achieve independence for South Africa. For Maharjan, the book had already served its political agency but as an artist he

wanted to renew the process of achieving freedom. By patiently painting over the entire text in the book, he focused on the punctuation marks serving as pauses, between two sentences. The process of struggle and the quiet contemplation, for him, was best emphasized by these pauses, which Mandela would have taken amidst what must have been an intense daily routine. Maharjan joined the pauses into a straight line, thus giving a new lease to the work and becoming a metaphoric lifeline of the country.

The artworks from his current exhibition titled, *An Unquiet Mind* further explore the possibilities of futile and meaningless repetition of form. For me, this solo exhibition is a series of works that culminate from a three year exploration of Maharjan's work, as it showcases the multiple techniques that he has experimented with- doodles, ink work, cutting, pasting and more recently burning - each portraying a different emotion. For him, his substance of imagery stems from the twenty-six Roman alphabets of the English language and their potential to be re-contextualized. Though there is no intention to link the process of his work to the title of the page, the final artwork subconsciously blends in a harmonious dialogue with its title and form. For instance, the circle made of cut alphabets featured in his recent works such as *Before Women had Wings*, *Woman in Love* and *An Unquiet Mind*. While the circle aligns with femininity in the first two works, it represents the act of repetition, the feeling of eternity, making it seem futile and inescapable in *An Unquiet Mind*. Maharjan connects this work to the fate of Sisyphus, who was condemned to the laborious and meaningless punishment of rolling a rock up a hill, only to find it roll down every time.

An Unquiet Mind
 Reclaimed text cut-out collage
 22.5 inches x 17.5 inches
 2017

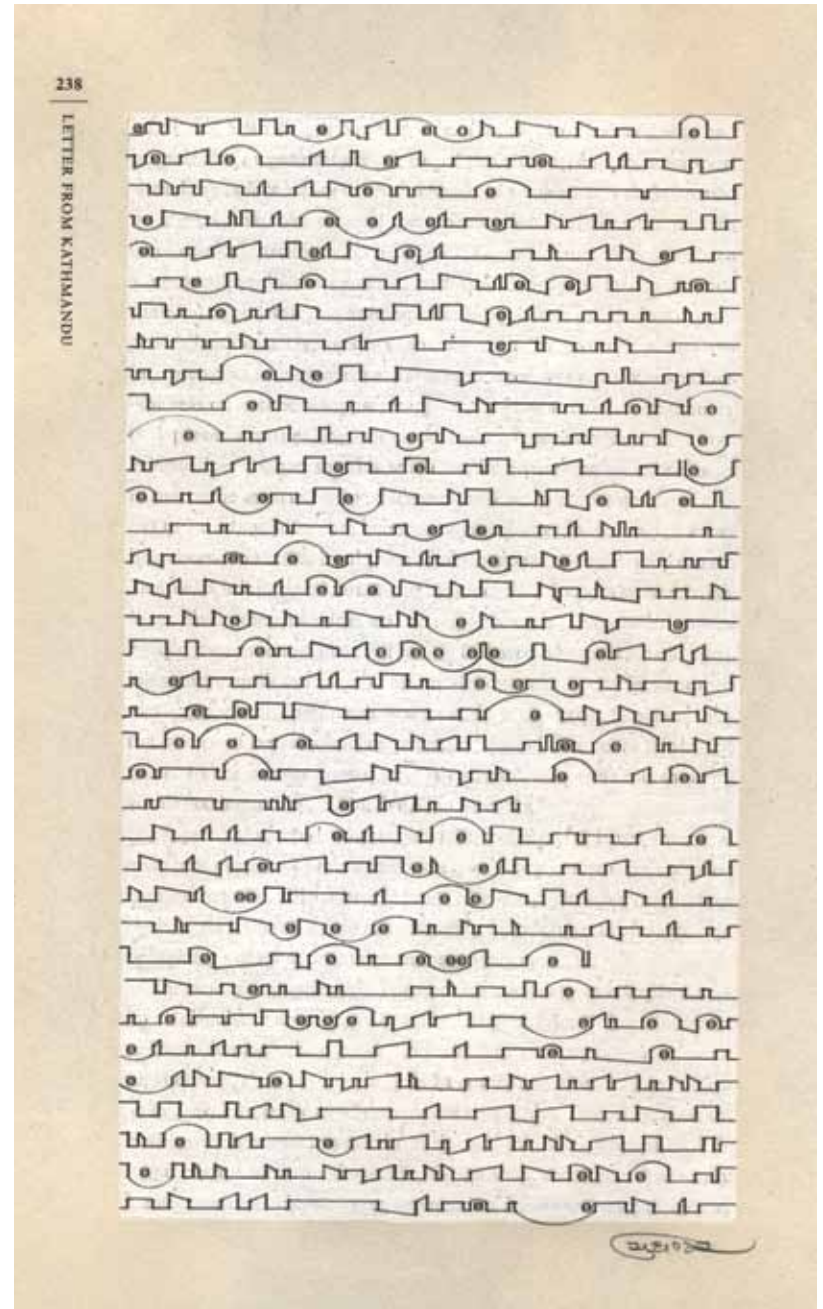


Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* refers to the *Animal Laborans*, of how the human being is akin to a beast of burden—a drudge condemned to meaningless inescapable routine⁴. Maharjan's rhythmic and contemplative works are achieved by long hours at his desk, meticulously cutting away each and every alphabet. Contrary to Arendt, for whom the maker is engaged in a result oriented process, Maharjan's mind is constantly questioning and applying logic and formulas to his work without any dictated result of the final artwork. For him, as K.G. Subramaniam wrote in *The Magic of Making*, the magic lies in the labour of making the work of art rather than the artwork itself⁵. His process blurs the boundaries between literature and art, an artist and performer, and between documentation and meditation. In a world where languages define cultures, Maharjan's visual vocabulary crosses the borders of art making and exemplifies the power of a silent but unquiet mind.

References:

- 1 Heisler, Eve, *Youdhisthir Maharjan: The Absurdity and Redemption in Repetition* on Asymptote, <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/visual/youdhisthir-maharjan-the-absurdity-and-redemption-of-repetition/>, (2017)
- 2 Burkhart, Anne L, *Mongrel Nature: A consideration of Artist's Books and their Implications for Art Education in Studies in Art Education* (Vol 47, No.3), pp 248-268, (2006)
- 3 Perera, Ruhanie & Jain, Amit *Book Art: Contemporary Practices in the Indian Subcontinent* in Marg (Vol 67, No. 1), Pp 23-33, Mumbai, (2015)
- 4 Sennett, Richard, *Prologue: Man as his own Maker, The Craftsman*. pp 1-15, Penguin Books, USA (2009)
- 5 Subramanyan, K.G, *The Magic of Making in Creative Arts of India*. Published by the Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai (1989)

Letter from Kathmandu
Acrylic and graphite on reclaimed book page
9.25 inches x 6 inches
2017



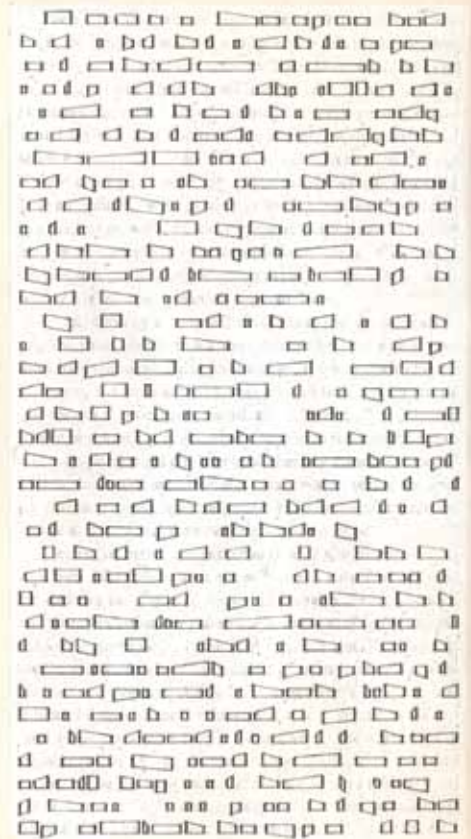
The Intent of Monks

323



2017

36 *The Soul's Code*



2017

The Intent of Monks

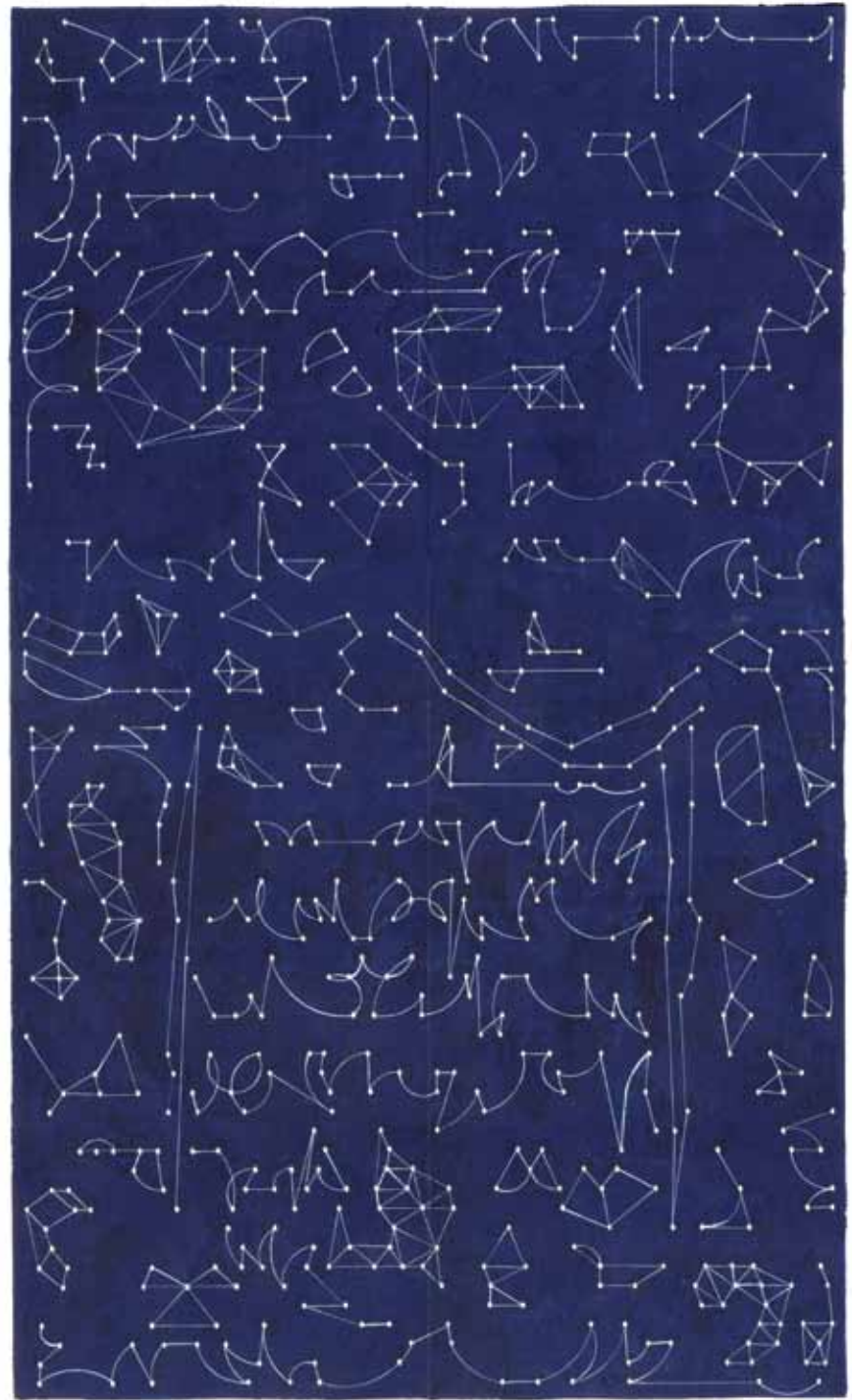
Acrylic and graphite on reclaimed book page
8 inches x 5 inches
2017

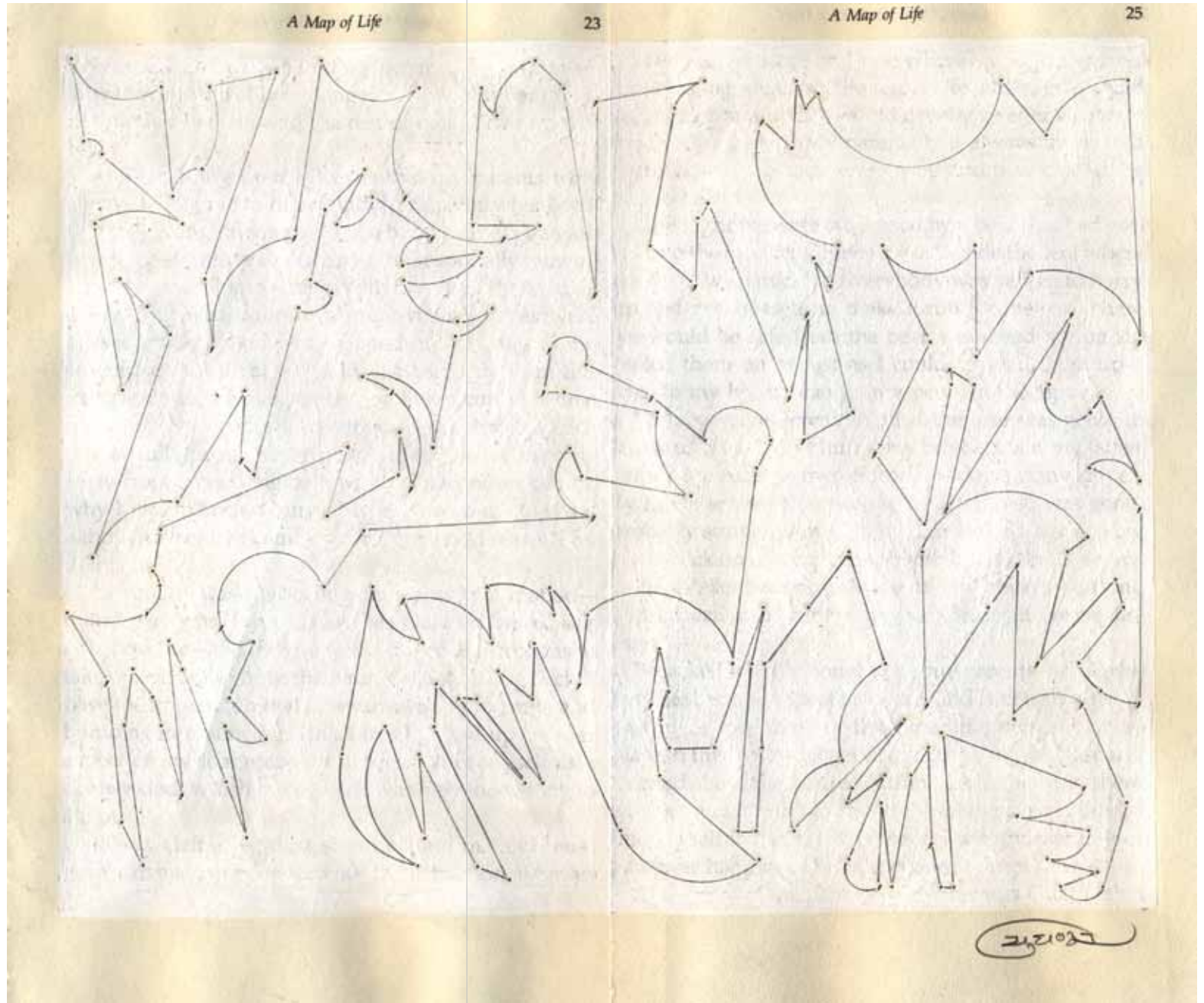
The Soul's Code

Acrylic and graphite on reclaimed book page
8.5 inches x 5.5 inches
2017

The Code of Love

Acrylic on reclaimed book pages
14.25 inches x 9 inches
2017





A Map of Life

23

A Map of Life

25

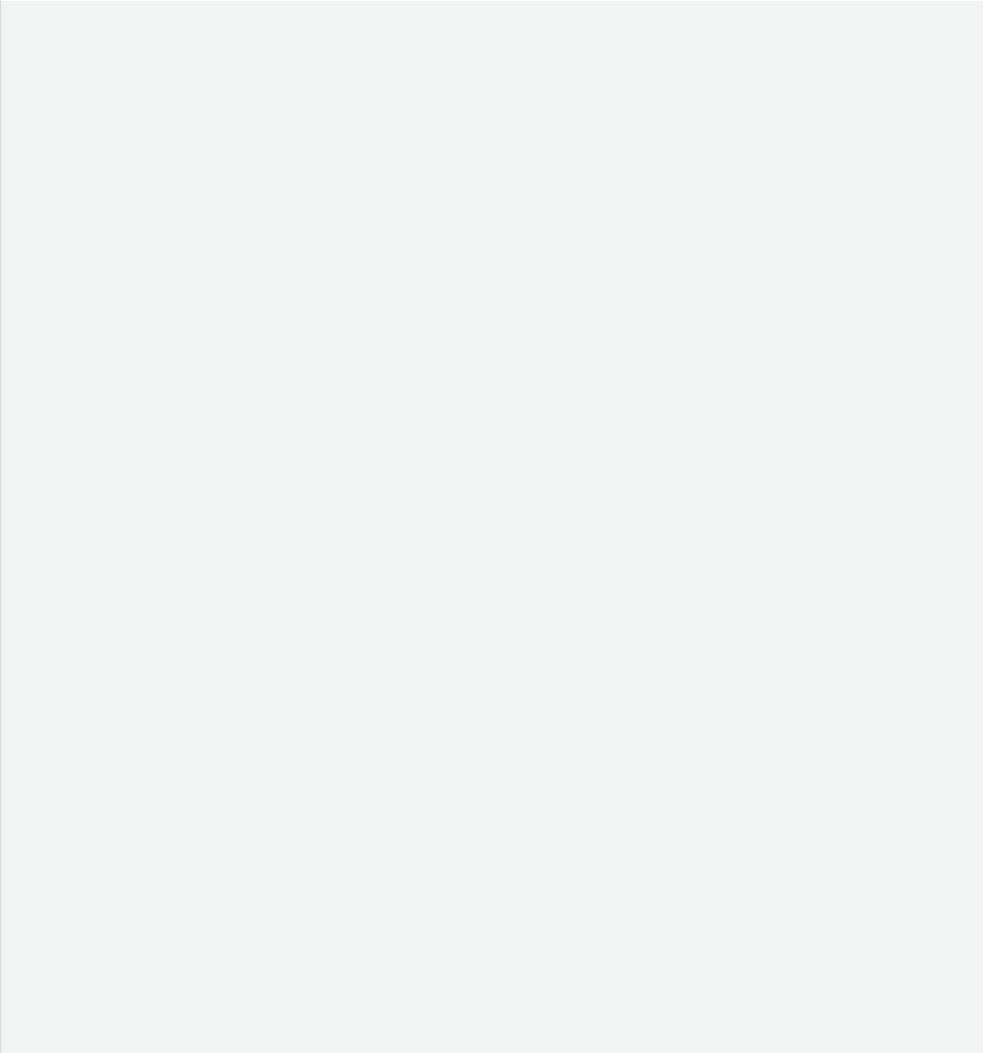
Youdhisthir

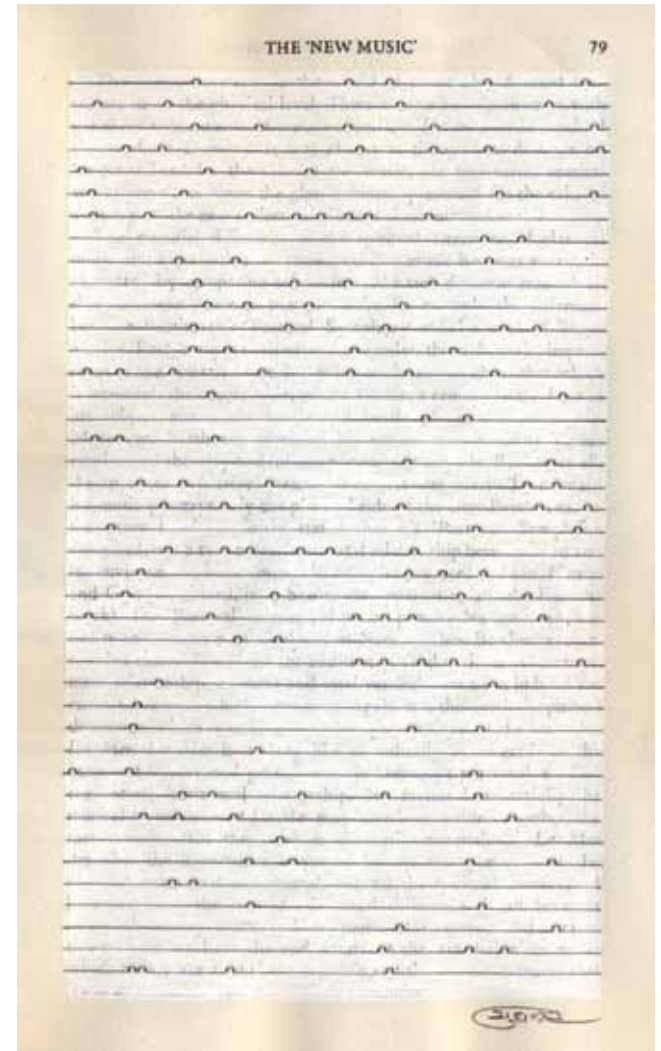
A Map of Life

Acrylic and graphite on reclaimed
book page,
8 inches x 9 inches
2017



A Time to Embrace
Acrylic on reclaimed book pages
15 inches x 13.5 inches
2017





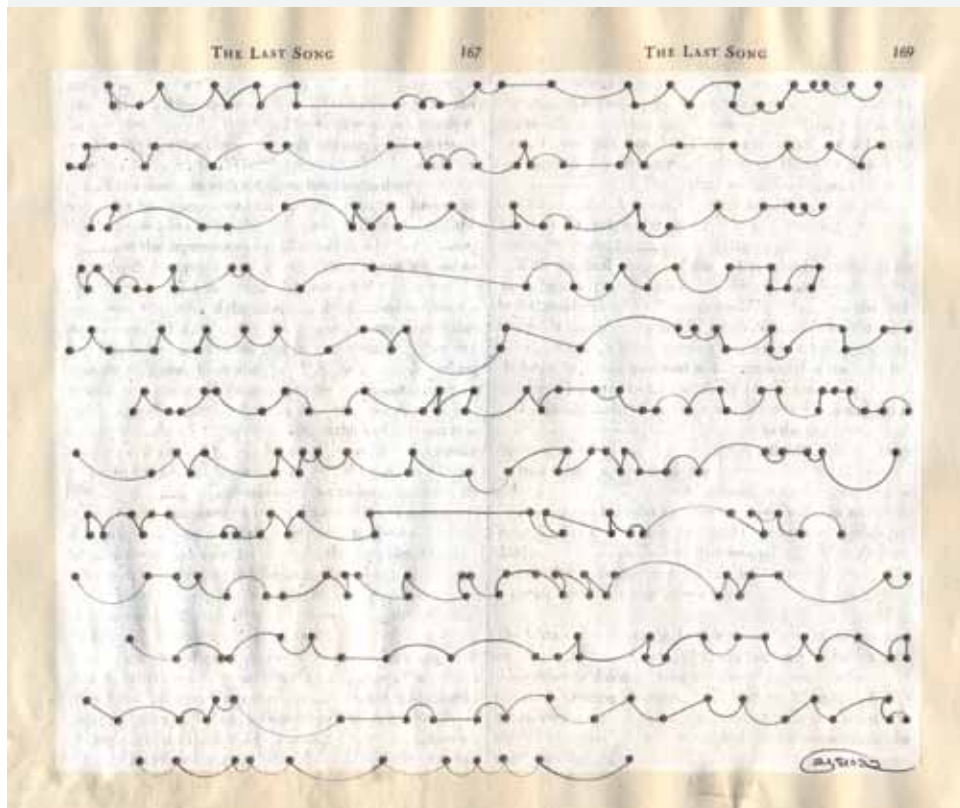
The New Music
Acrylic and graphite on reclaimed book page
8.5 inches x 5.5 inches
2017



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 k v l o g l : j f f l o v l o o l l v g l v v l l o r .
 l l f l l g l h o f l l g l l' , l l o l g l o f
 A l l o l b d l' g v d l o l p p d .
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 l b l' g o f f o , l' d l p o o o f l , d l , f g l l
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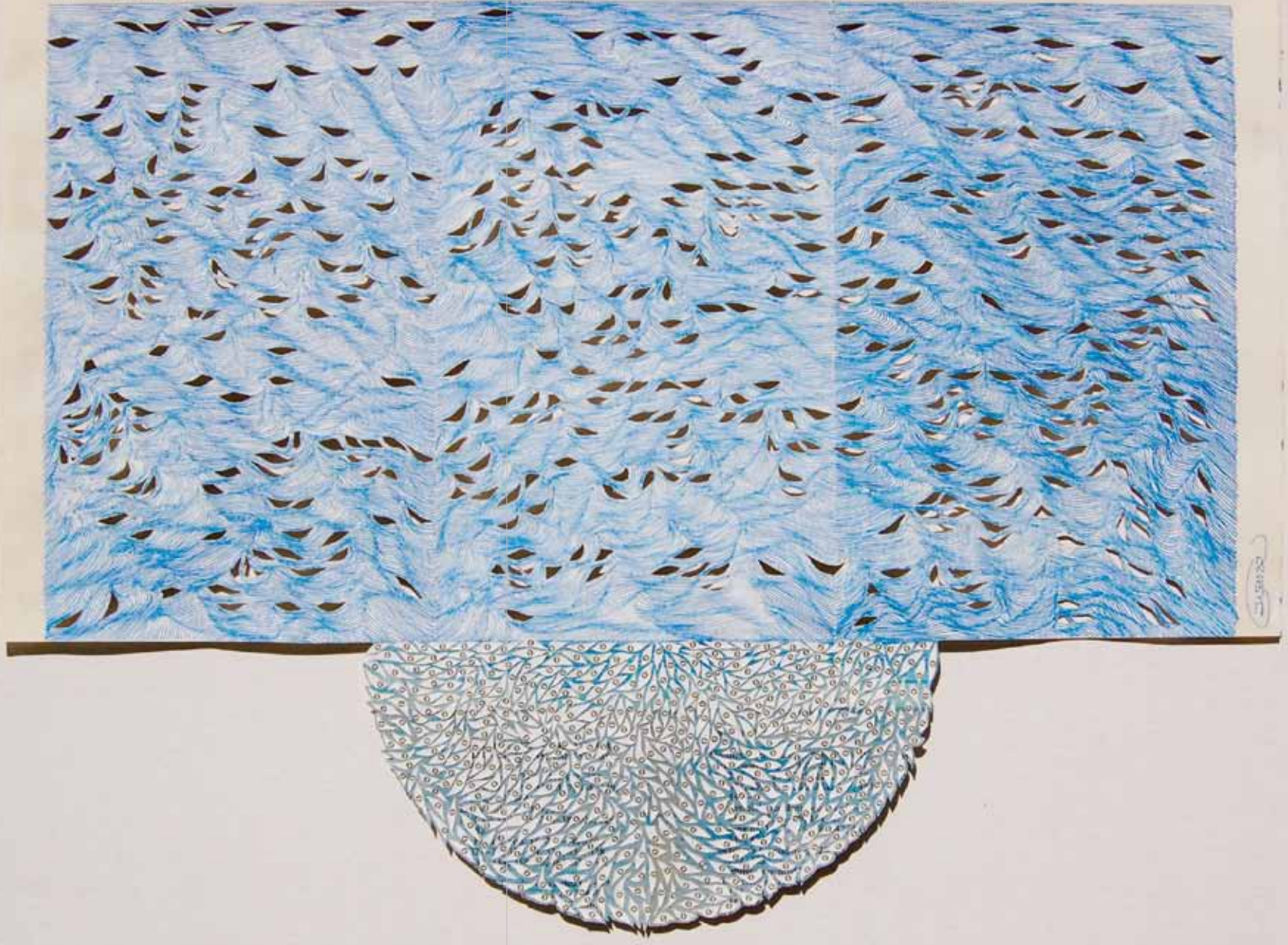
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The Last Song

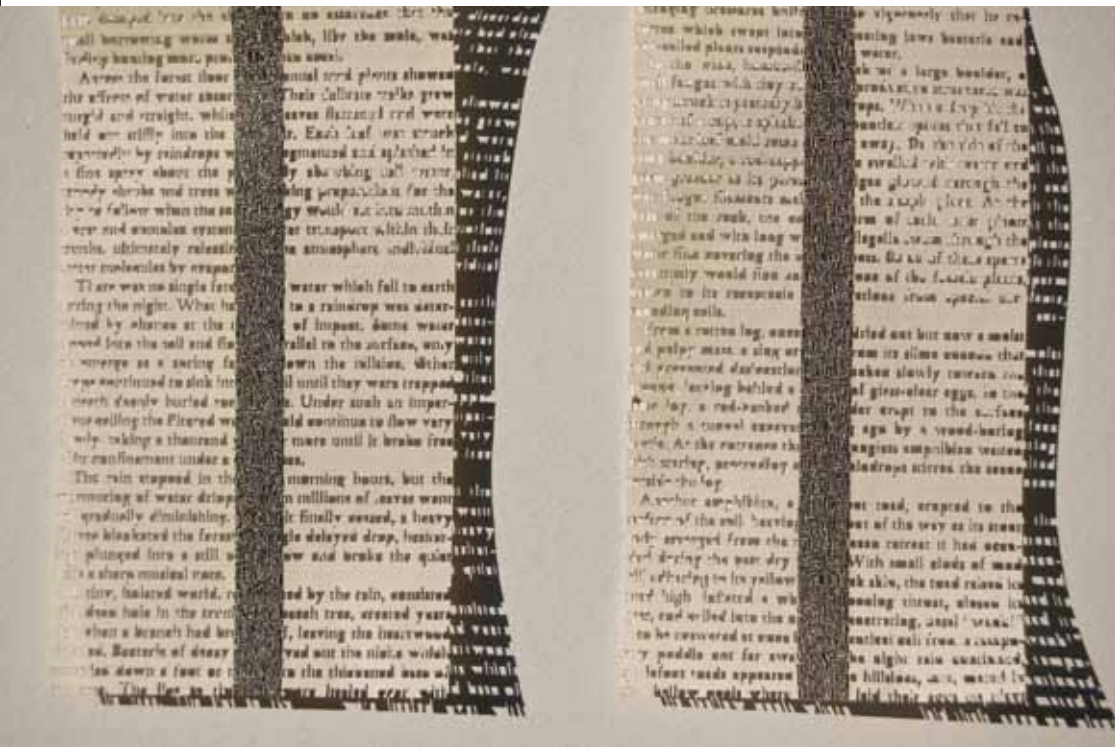
Acrylic and graphite on reclaimed book page
8.25 inches x 9.75 inches (each)
2017

108 DREAMTIME 118 DREAMTIME 128 DREAMTIME



Dreamtime

Acrylic and ink on
reclaimed book pages
11.8 inches x 15 inches
2017



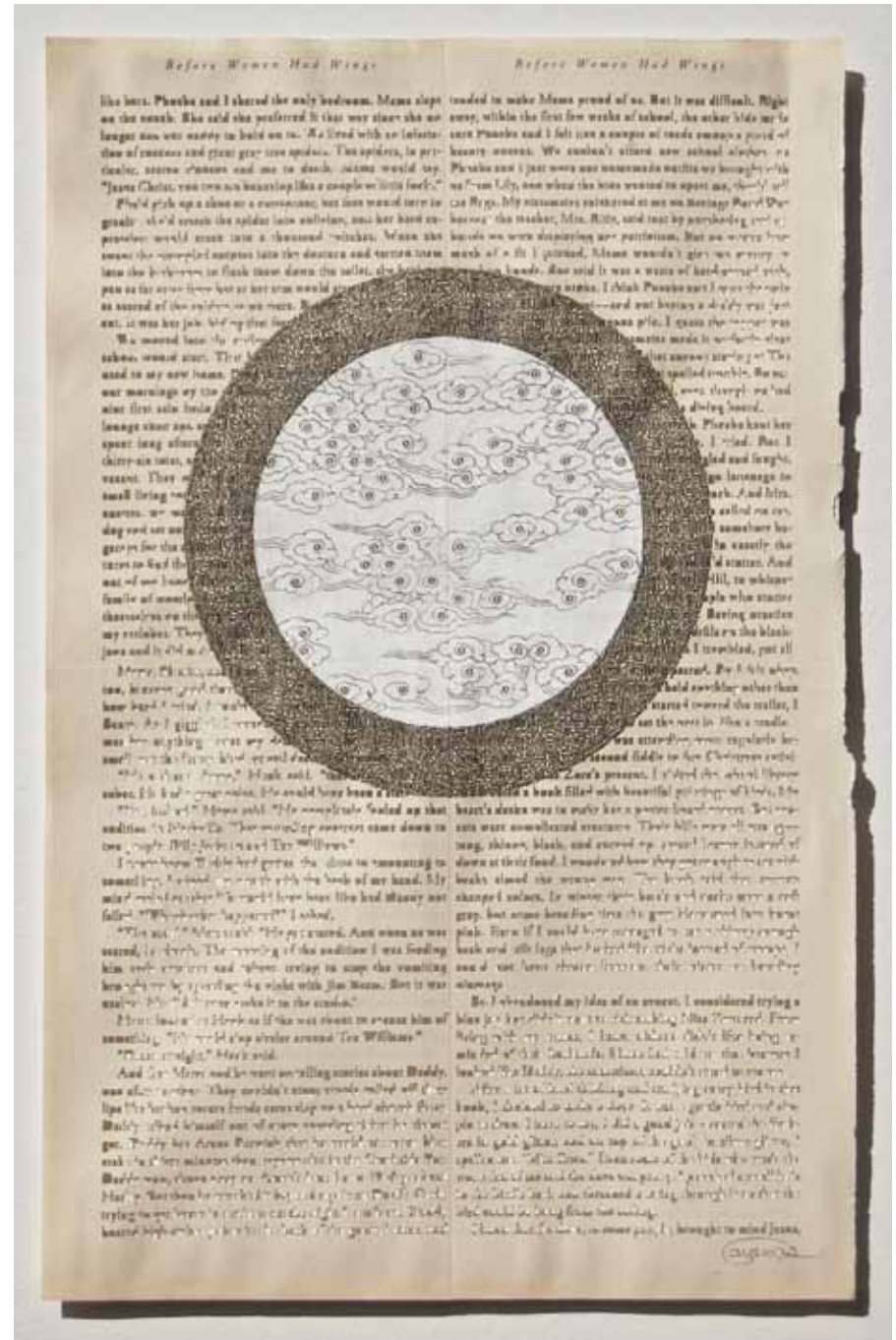
Of Murmuring Streams
 Reclaimed text cut-out collage
 40 inches x 3.35 inches (each)
 2017

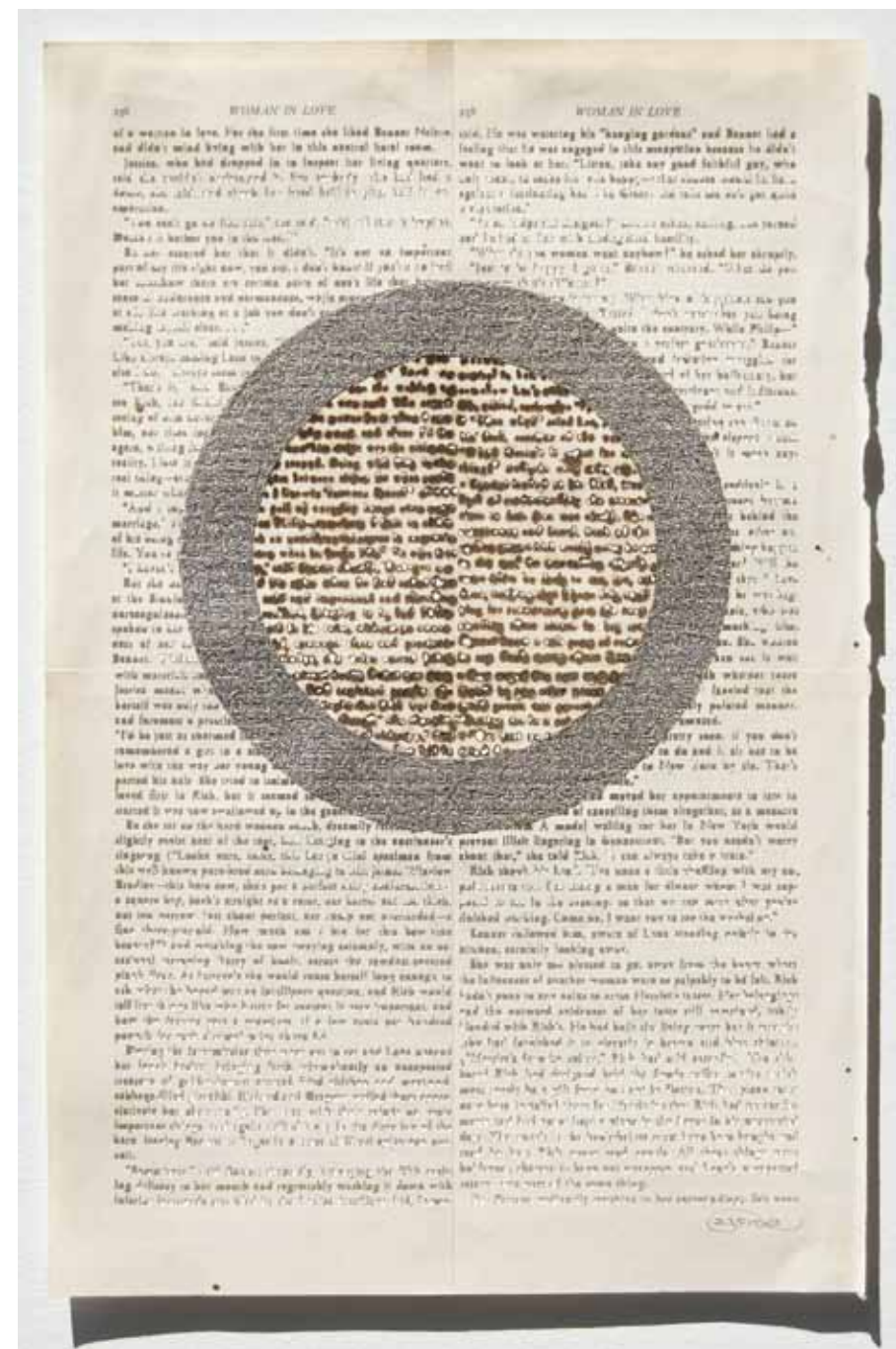




We'll Meet Again
Reclaimed text cutout collage
8.5 inches x 35 inches
2017

Before Women had Wings
Acrylic and Graphite on Reclaimed text cut out collage
14 inches x 9 inches
2017





Woman in Love
Reclaimed text cutout collage and Incense burns
14 inches x 9 inches
2017

AN UNQUIET MIND



Persian Mirrors

Ballpoint on reclaimed book pages
15.5 inches x 14 inches
2017

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Originally from Kathmandu, Nepal, Youdhisthir Maharjan (b. 1984) began his journey in the arts with a B.A. in Creative Writing & Art History from the New England College, New Hampshire (USA). He went on to pursue his M.F.A. at the University of Idaho in 2012. He has since, exhibited extensively in India, Nepal, the United States and the UK. Some of his solo shows of note include *Nothing Repeated* at Prichard Gallery, Idaho (2012), *The Art of Not Making* at the New England College Gallery, New Hampshire (2012) and *Nite Light* at Indigo Gallery, Nepal (2004).

Maharjan has also been a part of several group shows including *Himalayan Contemporary*, Desai/Matta Gallery, San Francisco (2017), *Deep Cuts: Contemporary Paper Cutting* at Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire (2017), *In Letter and Spirit* at TARQ, Mumbai (2016), *Reading Room*, Saffron Art, New York (2016), *Reading Room: Leaves, Threads, and Traces*, Winchester Gallery, UK (2016) and *Emerging Talent*, Seraphin Gallery, Philadelphia (2016). His work has been a part of large scale exhibitions such as the Kathmandu Triennale (2017) and the Boston International Fine Art Show, Boston Center for the Arts (2015). The artist currently lives and works in Boston.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amit Kumar Jain is a New Delhi-based curator and the Associate Vice President at Saffronart, New Delhi. He has been actively involved in the field of South Asian Modern and Contemporary Art since 2002. Jain was previously appointed the Head of Programmes at Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi and more recently, was the Director-Special Initiatives at the Savara Foundation for the Arts. In 2014, he curated the Colombo Art Biennale as well as *'Reading Room'*, an exhibition on book art that was showcased in New Delhi, Mumbai, Kochi and the United Kingdom. He is currently on the advisory board of the Colombo Art Biennale and the Nepal Arts Council.

Jain holds an MA in Museum and Gallery Practice from the University College London and a BFA from the College of Art, New Delhi. He also holds a Bachelor's Degree in Commerce (Hons) from Delhi University. His area of specialization includes Folk and Tribal art, a genre that he continues to work with at Saffronart.

Artworks by Youdhisthir Maharjan

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