



D E A T H
F E E D I N G
L I F E
A n o d e t o d e c a y

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Death Feeding Life: An Ode to Decay

P r o c e s s D o c u m e n t a t i o n

Sheridan College

Faculty of Animation, Arts and Design

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"I have always looked upon decay as being just as wonderful and rich an expression of life as growth."

Henry Miller






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"Life would end without rot."

Knute Nadelhoffer



**I N T R O
&
P R O J E C T
S T A T E M E N T**

I n t r o d u c t i o n

I use my work to explore macro, universal themes in smaller, more personal ways. It's my way of retaining connection to the human collective, while speaking from my own experiences. Aging, life and death were not topics I often contemplated before my husband and I started trying to conceive. We struggled for many years, and the process took a large toll on me mentally and physically. While we were very fortunate to eventually get pregnant, our son was born two months early, resulting in a five week stay in the NICU. My state was already fragile, so this experience really tipped me over the edge. When we were finally able to bring our sweet little boy home, I was so happy to finally be a mom, but I was not the same person I was when I started the journey.

My relationship with decay started as an innocent collection of dried plant matter, gathered from hikes with my dog. That time in nature was deeply healing during those lonely days fighting infertility. As we would walk, I would pick up a leaf here, some bark there. In hindsight, I can see I was trying to find the value and beauty in aging and deterioration, trying to learn from mother nature; A desperate attempt to accept all the changes and trauma I was going through.

Understanding the necessity of death, and the transient and vulnerable nature of physical life, has been a way for me to accept the deterioration of my own physical self and my constructed identity. Seeing decay as the essence of life, the single most important process for the existence of life, has been truly liberating, empowering, and healing for me. It gives aging and death both a logical and spiritual purpose. *This capstone is an ode to decay, and all those who volunteer to breakdown in service of growth.*

P r o j e c t S t a t e m e n t

Within this body of work I explore the meaning of aging and death through the process of decay. Decay becomes both my aesthetic muse, as well as my technical adviser. The outcome is a 3'x4' woven banner, made from silk steel thread, and treated with devoré to depict the image of a deteriorating maple leaf.

Using plant waste to create monoprints, I have captured the decline of the humbling and always graceful Maple Leaf. The last moments of its recognizable life before it feeds a new one. Here in Canada, maple leaves represent the passage of time. The changing of seasons. Three out of those four seasons, millions of leaves lie beneath our feet, churning life from "waste". The print of the maple leaf represents more than just plant waste. It is a portrait of the overlooked value in deterioration, a process essential to life. It symbolizes a small but powerful truth: *only through the breakdown of self, can we feed life.*

The process of decay can only be understood if there is value behind what is deteriorating. The effort it takes to grow a flower, an animal, a tree is engulfing to the effort it takes to turn that life into food. My technical process mimicked this tension. Weaving is an art of patience. Of empathy. Of willingness to follow a thread all the way to the knot, to understand it, and to carefully and slowly untangle it. Weaving reminds me of motherhood. I care for my threads like I do my baby. Devoré, on the other hand, is destructive for the sake of creating something new. It is reductive. Bringing these two together, weaving and devoré, created an emotional studio process. One with anticipation and moments of fear. For me, the artist, it was a study in learning how to let go of control.


Humans are animals. We are nature. We are not just on this earth, but a part of it. We are meant to breakdown like all of nature. However, much of what we humans have made does not decay. The thread in this banner has been made by wrapping fine silk around thin steel wire. Each twist, the silk shows its flexibility and the steel proves its rigidity. Together they make a beautiful but strong and moldable fabric. Once treated with the devoré paste, however, a division is created between nature and machine as the dissolved silk leaves behind only steel. The silk represents our human connection to nature; *just like the silk it is not our purpose to be permanent*. The steel, without the silk, becomes woven mesh wire begging the question *“what do we leave behind, what is our collective legacy”?*

To celebrate is to notice and uplift. The intent of this work is to celebrate and honour the process of decay, while probing us to ask ourselves: *“what is the price of devaluing our own inevitable decline? What are we missing out on in doing so?”* Deterioration is the most essential stage of growth. It is both an end AND a new beginning. Many new beginnings. With this banner, I honour the process of decay to give ourselves the permission to honour our own aging bodies. To allow us to find value, acceptance, and happiness in a body that transforms so very much over time.



"Decline is also a form of voluptuousness, just like growth. Autumn is just as sensual as springtime. There is as much greatness in dying as in procreation."

Iwan Goll



**V I S U A L
I N S P I R A T I O N**

Fig. 2



Fig. 4



Fig. 3



Fig. 5

Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Monoprinting (or "monotyping") is a unique technique that walks the line between traditional print making (which is the act of making multiple prints from the use of one reusable template) and painting (the act of putting ink immediately to paper with a brush). To create a monoprint, you first apply ink to a flat surface that will act as your template (such as glass, metal, acrylic, or gel). You can paint on the surface as you would a painting, or you can cover the whole surface and etch designs into the wet paint. When your design is done, you then press your paper or fabric against the template to transfer the design. This technique yields only one original print, and sometimes a second ghost or mirror print, which is much more faint and ethereal.

M O N O P R I N T S

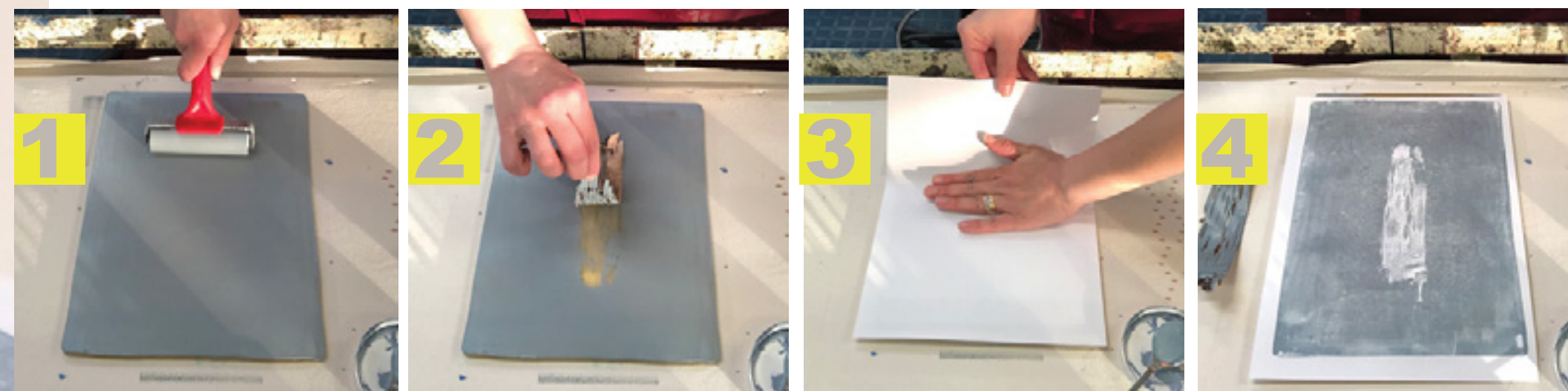


Fig. 11-14

The ambiguous nature of monoprinting is considered to have contributed to an unclear historical beginning as Ann D'Arcy Hughes and Hebe Vernon-Morris outline in their book "The Printmaking Bible":

"The nature of the monotype means that historically it has been difficult to define or categorize. Although the technique follows the printmaking template of reproducing images from one surface to another using ink and pressure, the marks made and the immediacy of the approach are more closely associated with painting." (Hughes, 369)

Hughes and Vernon-Morris further explain how this ambiguous categorization has also led to the historical exclusion of monoprinting from museums and exhibitions.

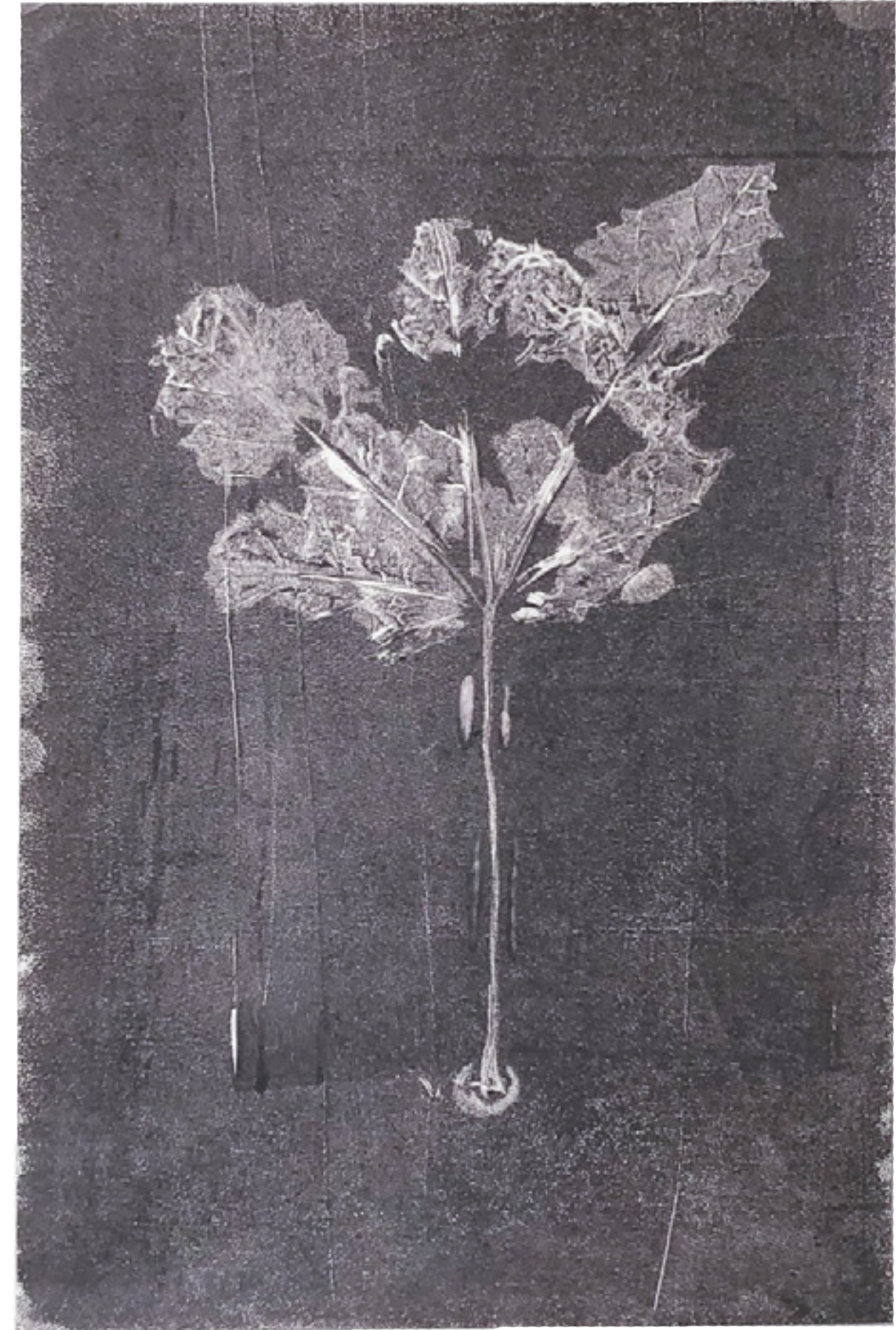
“Historically, the profile of the monotype within the art world has been undermined by the ambiguity of its classification. The medium was thought to fall between painting, and printmaking, and was consequently excluded from museums and exhibitions. This was despite the interest in the process shown by high-profile European and American artists such as Degas, Whistler, Mary Cassatt, and Gauguin”. (Hughes, 371)

Another interesting component of monoprinting, is that there is no one way to do it. If you look back at the history of monoprinting, technical methods and outcomes vary greatly between artists. As Hughs and Vernon-Morris outline:

“The nature of the monotype encourages the modern artist to be spontaneous within the creative process in a medium that is both flexible and expressive.” (Hughes, 371)

The pull I felt towards starting my journey with monoprinting is exactly that which Hughs & Vernon-Morris touch on: because it encourages spontaneity and expression. I wanted to get my hands wet and my creativity flowing, and figured a fun and quick exercise like monoprinting would be a good way to get me back in the studio and over my nerves. I decided to use scraps of dying nature simply because that is what I had on hand and because it made sense to keep close to my concept of *decay*. It is only now, in hindsight, that I see how perfect the combination was. This project is my attempt to tell a story about an overlooked and undervalued part of life. Monoprinting is an overlooked and undervalued technique. This project is my attempt to capture the beauty and meaning in decay. Monoprinting is an expressive technique that can capture essence and emotion. Although the path to my idea did not feel linear or obvious, looking back it's hard to argue that I would have ended up anywhere else.

The Chosen Print



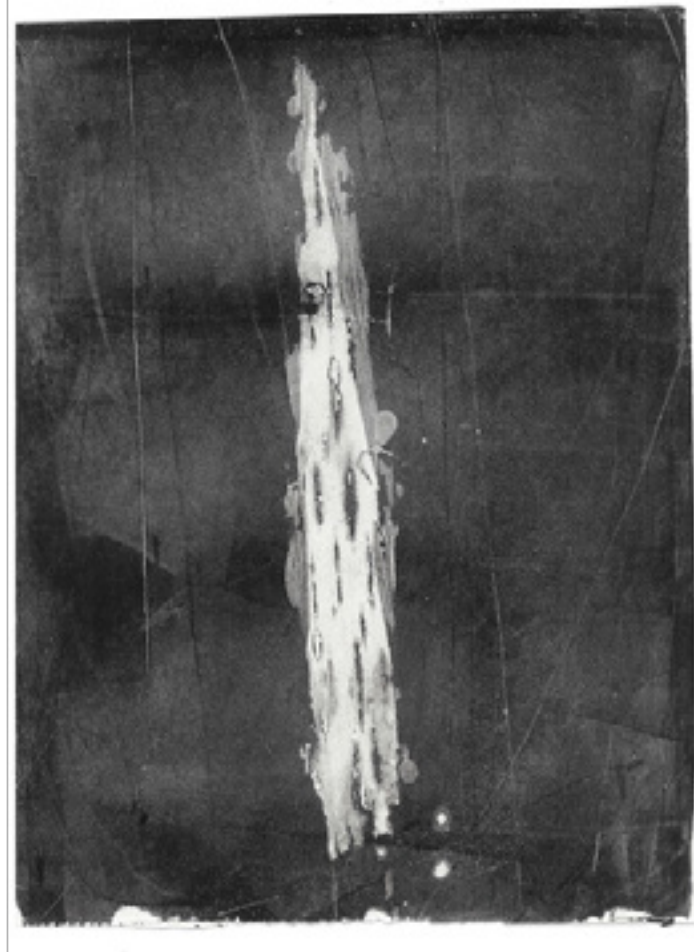


Fig. 16 - 18



Fig. 19 - 21

Monoprint Samples



Fig. 22 - 24

Fig. 25 - 27

M o n o p r i n t S a m p l e s

P R O C E S S

I think of my process as a series of funnels in succession. Each funnel represents a different stage, and each stage involves the repetitive act of ingesting multitudes upon multitudes and refining them into more concrete, physical articulations. It's an evolution from abundance to focus, big picture to detail, plural to singular. A never ending line of this funneling action.

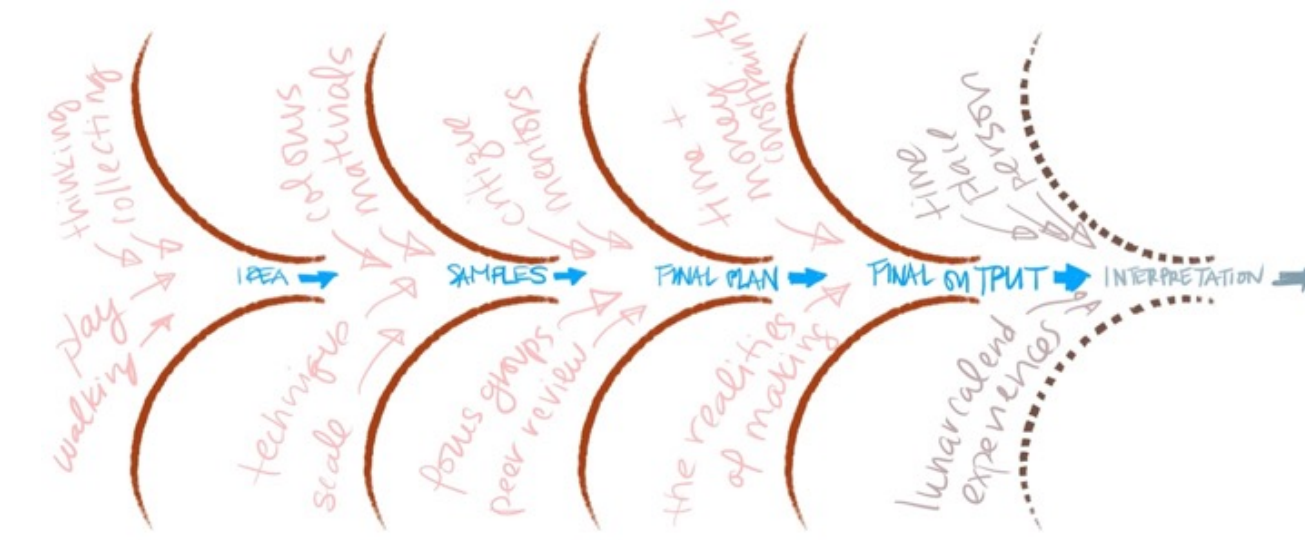


Fig. 28

As a crafter, my art is rooted in my material, which often creates the need for calculation and care. I try to balance this need by including aspects of spontaneity and a loss of control. Both control and the lack of control play a vital role in my process, and balance is key.

In totality, I am bringing together four different techniques in this Captstone investigation. Some of the techniques I have explored within their traditional functions. For example, monoprinting was used as a quick expression medium for artists' studies, I explored monoprinting to achieve an expression of decay. Other techniques I have used outside of their traditional function and was more interested in understanding the capability of the technique. Where I could take it. How it could be used to achieve and inform my vision. This is most evident in my explorations of devoré outside of clothing and outside of traditional material use.

My process is an ever-evolving study on how I create best. It nearly always deviates from the plan, but never without good reason. While I have tried to capture my process and pin it down, lately it has proven more productive to instead capture the feelings associated with the development of my work.. The more I get acquainted with the role of my feelings in my process, the easier it seems to be to navigate idea to execution.

"The world is afflicted by death and decay. But the wise do not grieve, having realized the nature of the world."

Gautama Buddha



**A R C A D E M I C
R E S E A R C H**

Fig. 29 , 30



D e c a y a s a T e c h n i q u e

There are a few different techniques I could have explored for the theme of deterioration within textiles (rust dyeing and fabric bleaching to name a couple). The technique I felt most pulled towards for this project, however, was devoré. Devoré, also called burnout, refers to the textile technique of using chemicals to dissolve one type of fibre in a two-fibre cloth. The chemical paste can be applied through a screen, or painted on by hand, and is therefore often used for complex patterns and imagery. Devoré was developed in Lyon, France at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. It has a long history in the fashion industry, and was originally known as “poor man’s lace” because of the way it imitated lace’s airy and delicate qualities but is much easier and cheaper to make. It was also named from the French verb *dévoré*, which literally means to devour (Wikipedia).

Devoré is unique as a decorative technique because it is one of the only techniques within textile making that is reductive (Robertson). It’s about taking away without replacing and breaking the fabric down to its components. There is a loss of control when using any technique that is reductive. A certain surrendering to the process that is required. To accept death is to surrender, and so in this way devoré seems emotionally similar to decay. It too walks the line of loss and creation.

If one studies the process of decay alongside the process of devoré it becomes easy to see the parallels. Although we don’t think of chemicals as natural, the process of decay is a highly acidic, highly chemical process much like devoré. The sun and its heat plays a vital role in the speed of decay and is the catalyst for the chemical reaction in devoré. Finally, a wash from the rain helps to spread all the nutrients deep into the soil, while a wash is needed to sweep away the loose fibres and reveal the final burned out design.

D e c a y a s a n A e s t h e t i c

Decay as an aesthetic has actually received its fair share of criticism, though you would not guess by its mainstream popularity that seems to keep growing. The controversy lies in the act of glorifying the visual components of urban decay without connecting them to the people and the social conditions that led to deterioration. For example, ruin photography (a genre which “captures the decline of vacated spaces left to decay” (Knight)) has actually been labeled “ruin porn” by its critics “due to its hyper-aesthetic nature and its reduction of the impacts of urban decay” (Knight).

One city that illustrates the problem clearly is the once automotive capital, Detroit, Michigan. As Doucet and Philip outline in their article *“In Detroit ‘ruin porn’ ignores the voices of those who still call the city home”* for The Guardian :

Such shocking photographs amount to “ruin porn” and only serve to obscure the humanity and the complexity behind the city’s long struggle and reduce Detroit to its ruins. We believe that Detroit’s experiences with capitalism, racism and political fragmentation make it an important place to study and understand. Art can play a role in this. But the challenge for those who have an interest in Detroit is to turn curiosity into something which contributes to both the people of the city and a sophisticated understanding of its history and challenges (Philip).

It’s odd to think of these pictures of Detroit ruins going on to live glamorous lives hanging in mansions and being valued at high prices, while many still suffer in the city without proper social funds and investments. It’s also odd to think of our collective ability to hang such art in casual spaces, never considering the pain behind the image as we eat our breakfast and watch our reality TV.

The hypocritical part in me touching on the controversy is that I am someone who partakes in the aesthetic of decay. I find it comforting to be around something or someone not so polished, with some character and a sense of ease. I am fascinated by history and ruins, and have toured them with my camera in Detroit. I also value the opportunity to recycle and restore that this aesthetic allows for. Which leaves me torn. I’m not sure how to tease these two realities apart. What is the line between helpful and harmful? These days, I find the best way to answer that questions is to connect back to the source. To stop consuming without context. To force myself to look beyond my own two feet.

We must ask: what do we learn by viewing an abandoned house dissociated from its context? It does little to challenge us to think differently about the people within Detroit and their struggle for dignity, safety and economic decency, nor does it explain how these ruins are produced. (Philip)

At the end of the day, that is what my investigation into decay is about: its about context, connection back to the source, back to ourselves and to the nature from which we come and which we will return. I value this important reminder that there is a cost in our humanity when we dissociate.





Fig. 35 - 37

D e c a y a s S y m b o l i s m

Although the process of decay seems to be the end of a chapter, in many ways *decay* symbolizes the beginning of new life. Nothing emphasizes that more than a closer look at what decay leaves behind. Soil below a decaying animal body reaps the chemical rewards, becoming a world of lush growth for the next few years. For example, a decomposed “bison can affect the structure of plant communities for at least five years” (Barnett). As Knute Nadelhoffer, an ecologist at the University of Michigan, so eloquently puts it: “*Life would end without rot...Decomposition releases the chemicals that are critical for life.*” (Kowalski). What Nadelhoffer is referring to are phosphate, nitrogen, and most importantly the element carbon. “This chemical element is the physical basis of all life on Earth. After death, decomposition releases carbon into the air, soil and water. Living things capture this liberated carbon to build new life. It’s all part of what scientists call the carbon cycle” (Kowalski). Decay is such a vital process to life itself and our way of living (decomposition aids farmers, preserves forest health, and helps create biofuels to name a few), that scientists are feverishly studying how climate change may affect the process of decay (because climate change alters things like moisture and temperature which decay relies on).

Ancient Buddhists in Japan understood the symbolism of decay, as evidenced by the Ancient Japanese art form *kusôzu*. This art form, inspired by the traditional Buddhist teachings around “*mindfulness of death*”, were paintings and drawings that depicted nine different stages of human decay. In their teachings, Buddhists would use visuals of a decaying corpse (or sometimes even an actual decaying corpse left out in the open called ‘sky burials’) to contemplate on and meditate about death and our physical existence. The philosophy behind this method (as Buddha himself put it) was that “*death is the greatest of all teachers, for it teaches us to be humble, destroys vanity and pride, and crumbles all the barriers of caste, creed and race that divide humans, for all living beings are inescapably destined to die*” (Patowary). In other words, to sit with decay, understand it and value it, is a path to inner peace.

To help us further ponder the power of symbolic growth in decay, one has to look no further than Anya Gallaccio’s *Preserve Beauty*. Gallaccio’s installation has been self-described as “*theatrical*”, a kind of performance due to the fact that the audience is witness to the active decaying of the flowers. She does not believe herself to be the sole creator of her work, instead describing it as a “*temporary collaboration between her and the viewer that invite reflection on the themes of ‘place, time, decay, death, beauty and renewal*” (Tate Modern).

*"Earth knows no desolation. She smells re-
generation in the moist breath of decay".*

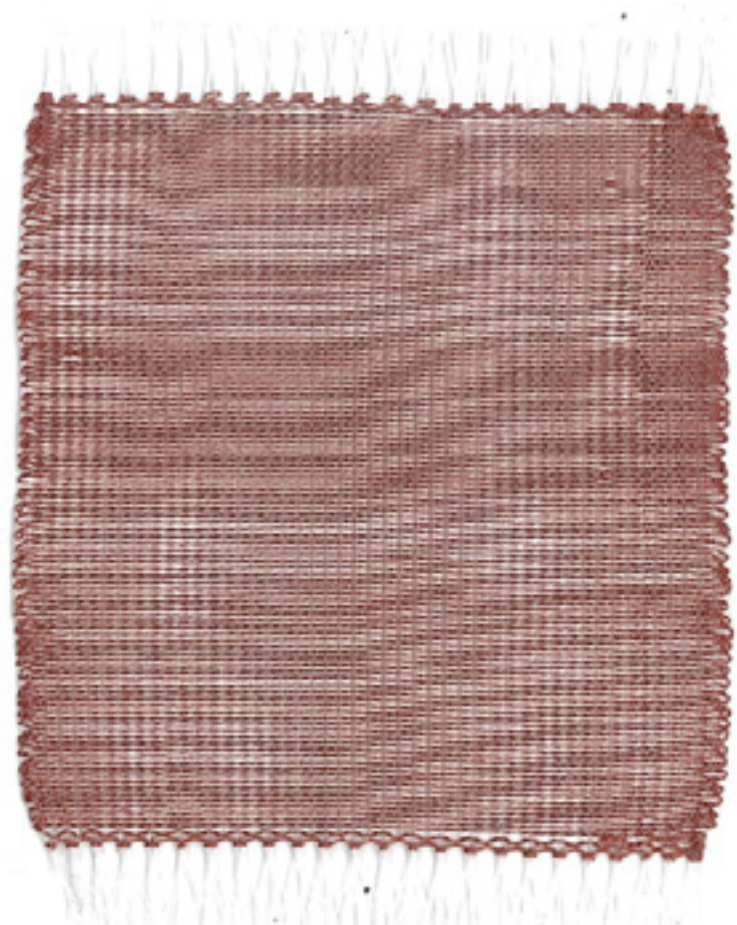
George Meredith



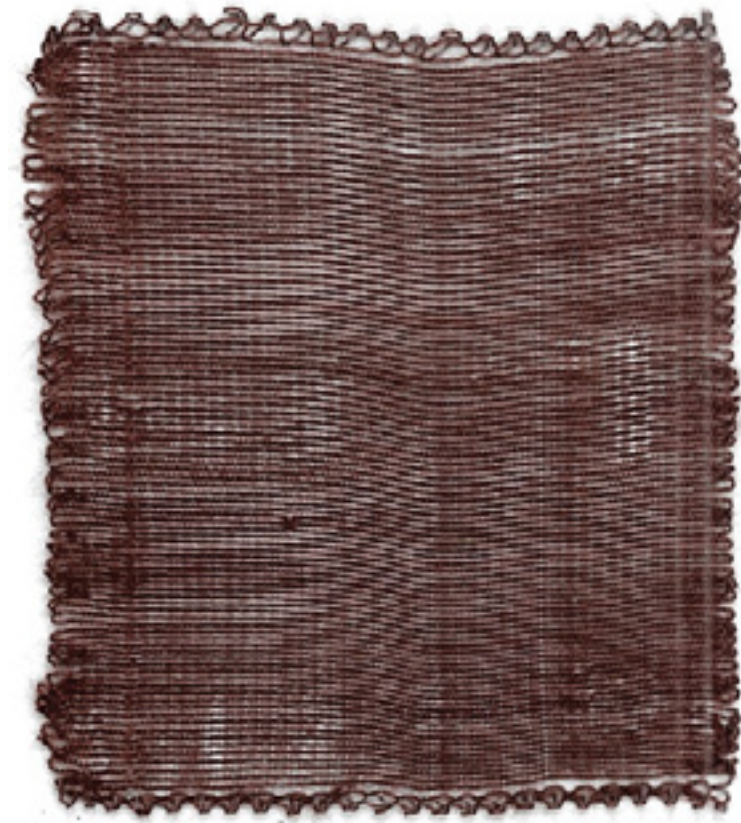
S T U D I O
B A S E D
R E S E A R C H

EXPLORATION MATERIAL

Weaving with the purpose of devoré printing means I had to consider the material choice and structural needs of the cloth, alongside the appearance. I decided to use only synthetic thread as the warp, and experiment with the weft, since a synthetic warp would allow me the opportunity to explore both cellulose and protein devoré pastes with just the one warp and save me from having to thread the loom multiple times. For the warp I used a mono-filament at 60 e.p.i., and a steel thread wrapped in silk option at 36 e.p.i. For the weft, my samples included fine merino, fine cotton linen paper moire, linen stainless steel, silk stainless steel, silk noile, linen, fine mohair, and a fine boucle cotton. Before the devoré tests got underway, I would say all my material samples were successful. I achieved a good variety of textures, colours, and transparencies. The biggest deciding factor at this point would be the length of time it took to thread a monofilament warp, making that material choice less than ideal.



silk stainless steel & monofilament



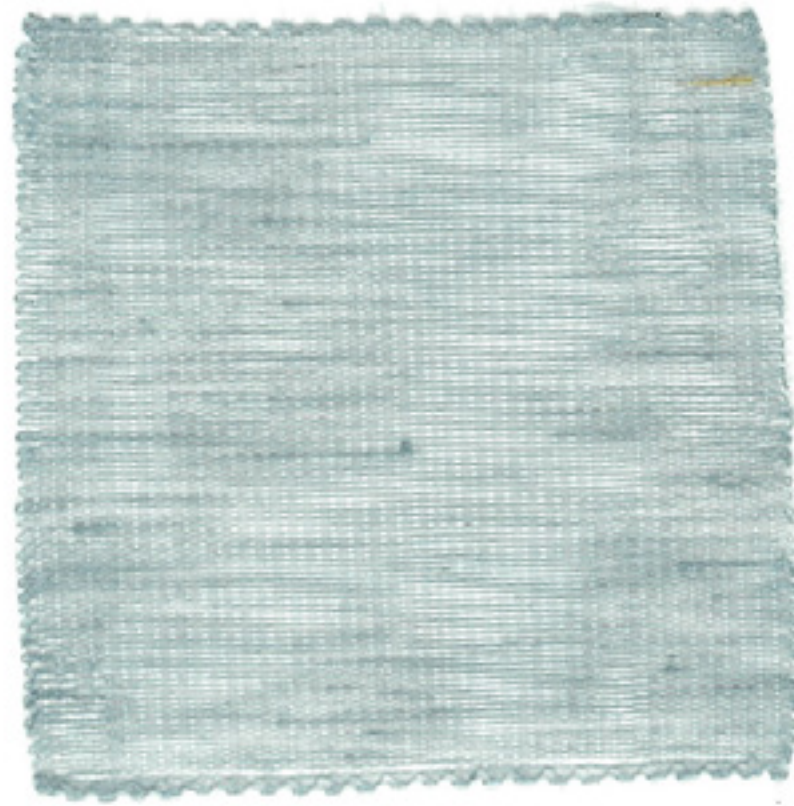
merino wool & monofilament



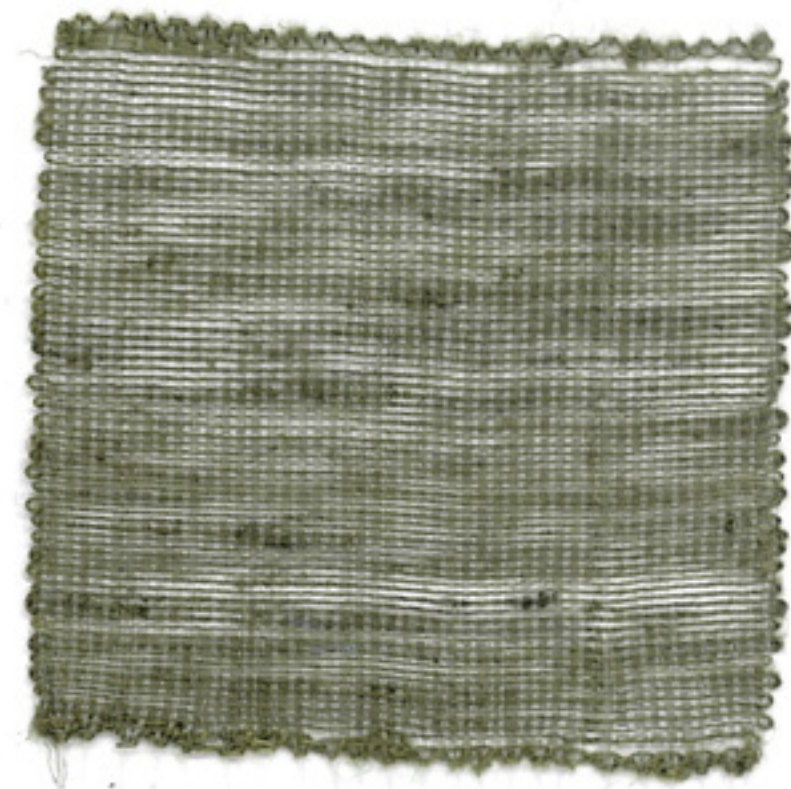
silk noile & monofilament



merino wool & monofilament



linen stainless steel & monofilament



linen & monofilament



mohair & monofilament



boucle cotton & monofilament



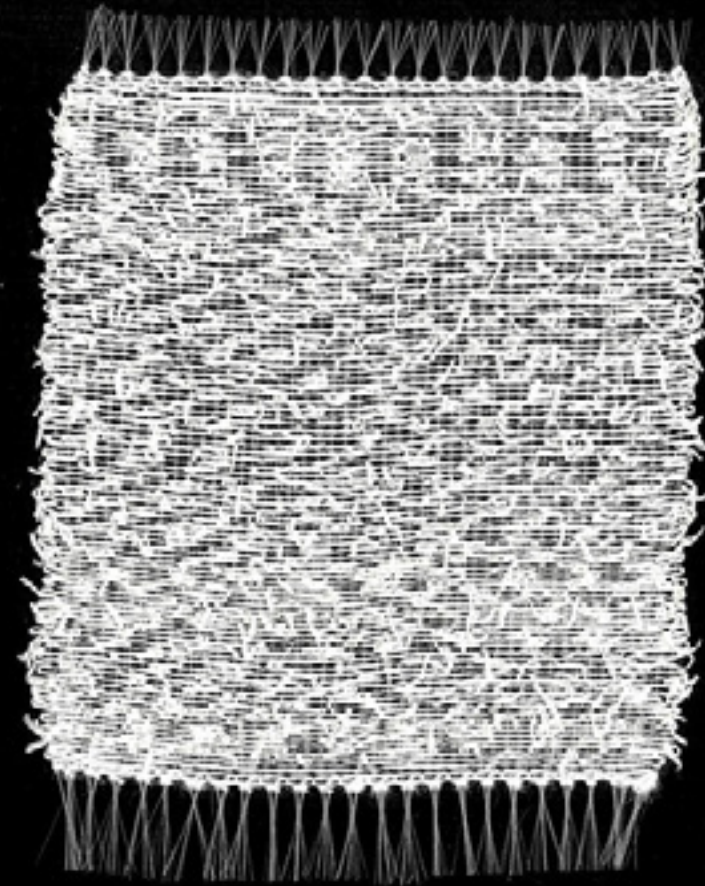
silk stainless steel & silk stainless steel



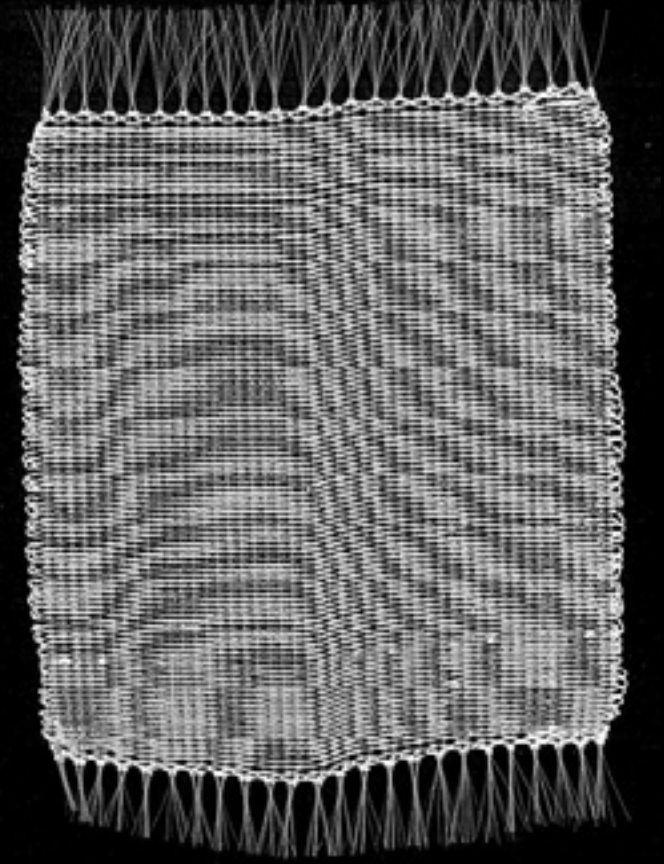
merino wool & silk stainless steel



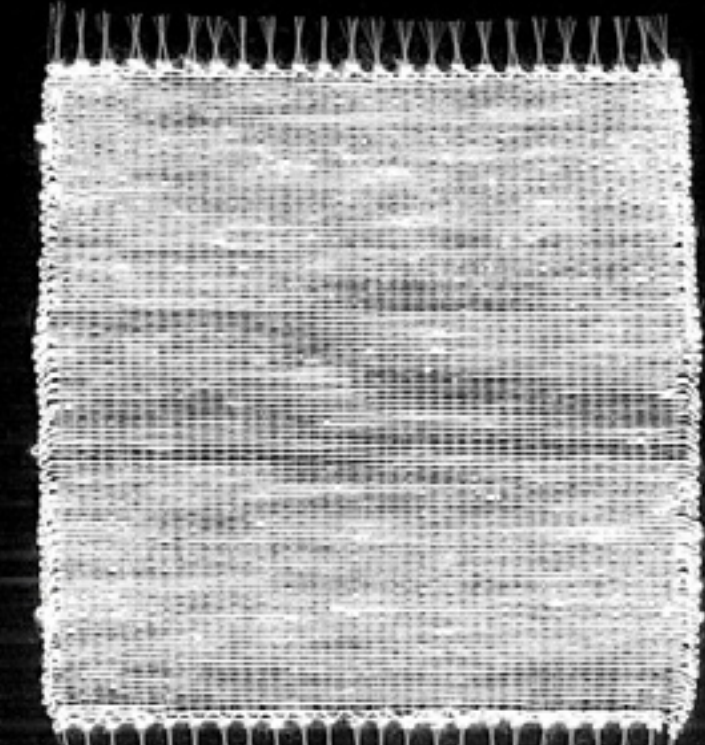
merino wool & silk stainless steel



cotton linen paper moire & monofilament



silk stainless steel & monofilament



merino wool & monofilament



D E V O R T É S

The devoré tests were probably the most vital tests in all my work because of the information they yielded. I performed two separate tests. One to identify which materials are ideal, and the second to test how printing and treating a larger piece would be.

Test One

The first round of devoré tests included the small squares of fabric I wove to see how the materials would react. I was not exploring any specific motifs in this experiment, simply a range of different sized holes. I used sodium hydroxide for the protein fibres, and the store bought Fibre Etch (with a chemical base of sodium bi-sulfate) for my cellulose fibres. Through these tests I discovered that my handmade devoré fabric would require synthetic thread in both the warp and weft, otherwise the integrity of the whole cloth would be compromised when exposed to devoré. I also found that the strength of the sodium hydroxide burning agent lead to more artistic control, cleaner lines and just overall a better image transfer. In the end, the most successful material results came from the silk stainless steel (in both warp and weft) sample. The contrast of the silk and woven stainless steel, aside from being beautiful and intriguing, also created a poetic sense of deterioration.

Test Two

My second round of devoré tests included large scale prints on industrial made silk viscose velvet (with Fibre Etch), to get a better sense of how the process changes with scale. I struggled a lot with these experiments, needing multiple tries to get the technique down and desirable results. The heat exposing stage was by far most difficult at the increased scale because my tool (the hand-held iron) did not scale up as well. Although I struggled to get things right, these tests clearly helped to avoid some unforgivable mistakes I would have made on my final weaving, and so I am thankful for these practice runs.



silk stainless steel & silk stainless steel
sodium hydroxide



linen stainless steel & monofilament
Fibre Etch



silk stainless steel & monofilament
Sodium Hydroxide



silk stainless steel & monofilament
Sodium Hydroxide



Fig. 38, 39





D R I G I T A L R E N D E R S

Although my work focused on nature, technology was greatly utilized in my process and actually granted me the ability to bring my vision to cloth and celebrate nature at such a large scale. I predominately used digital renderings in two ways: 1) to create a scalable vector image for screen printing and 2) to create a template design for my process document.

The relationship between monoprinting and screen printing is an organic and symbiotic one. By monoprinting with only one colour, the colour gradation and detail already exists in pixels, so it was no work at all to then translate that image into a black and white for screen exposure. The spotty aesthetic of monoprints also lent itself well to screen printing as the organic nature of the detail was perfectly captured, and any screen printing error fits the aesthetic and goes relatively unnoticed.

With a lot of affinity for these prints I decided to spend some time finding other ways to utilize and centre them within my work, which lead to my process document design. To achieve this I vectorized all my prints so that I could increase scale and explore different colour options in order to determine and reflect my final colour palette.

Vector - Full Image

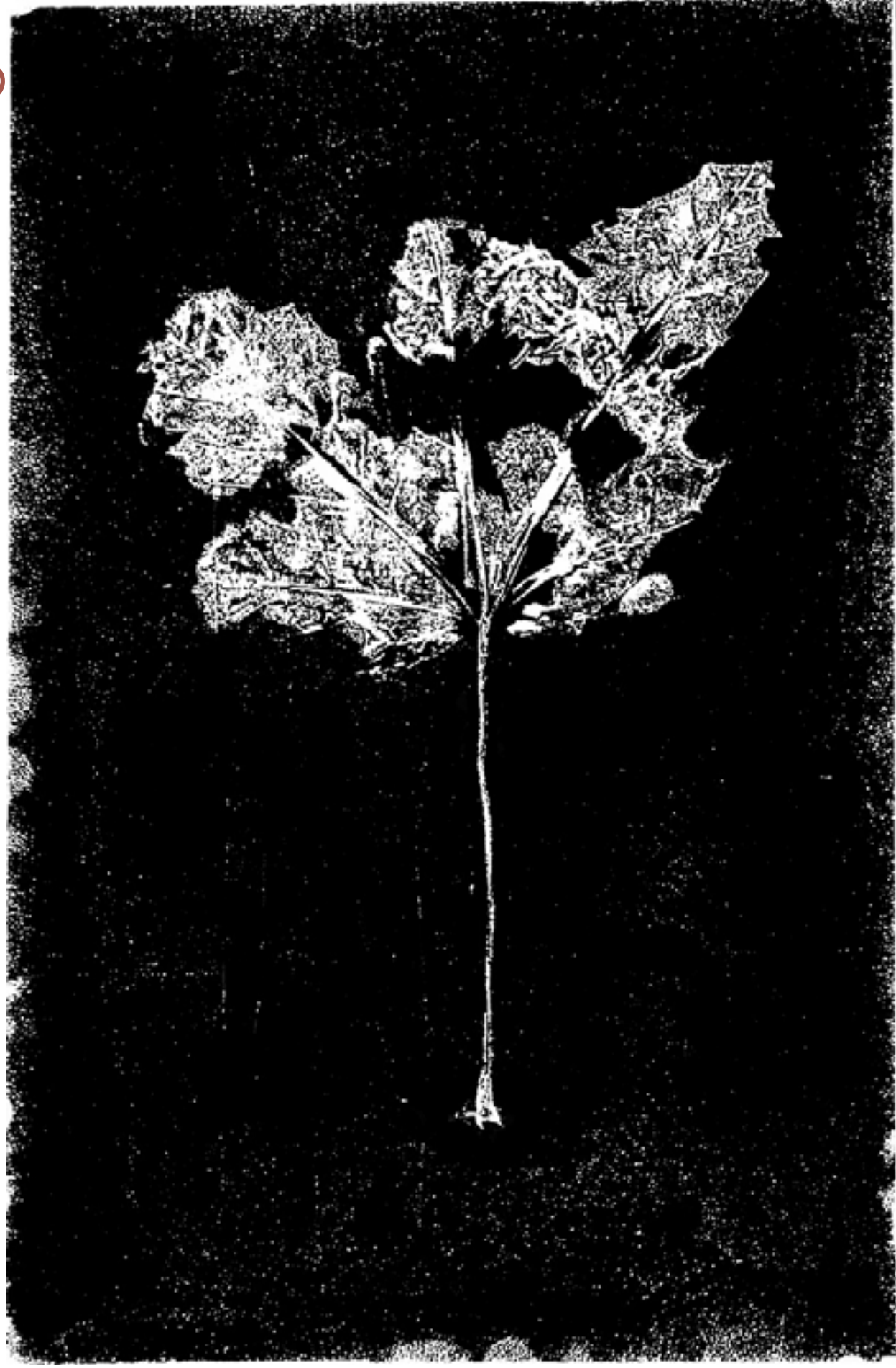


Fig. 40, 41

To Scalle Snippet



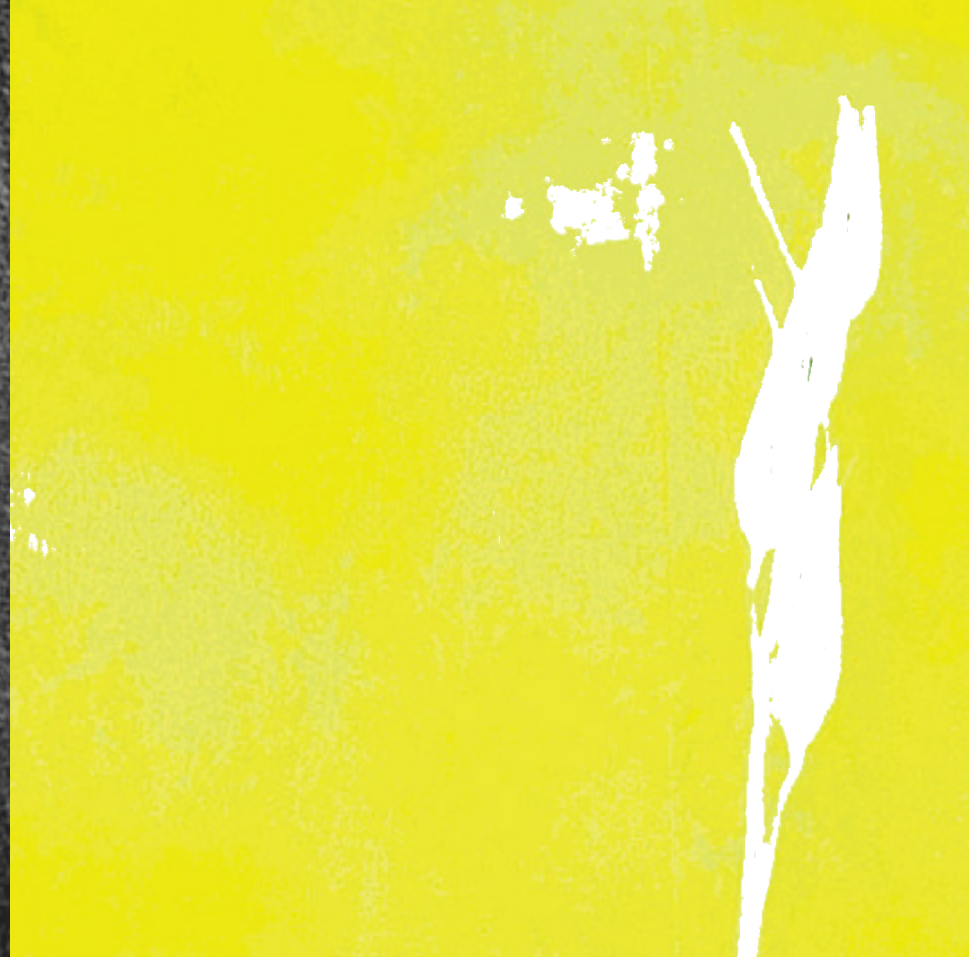
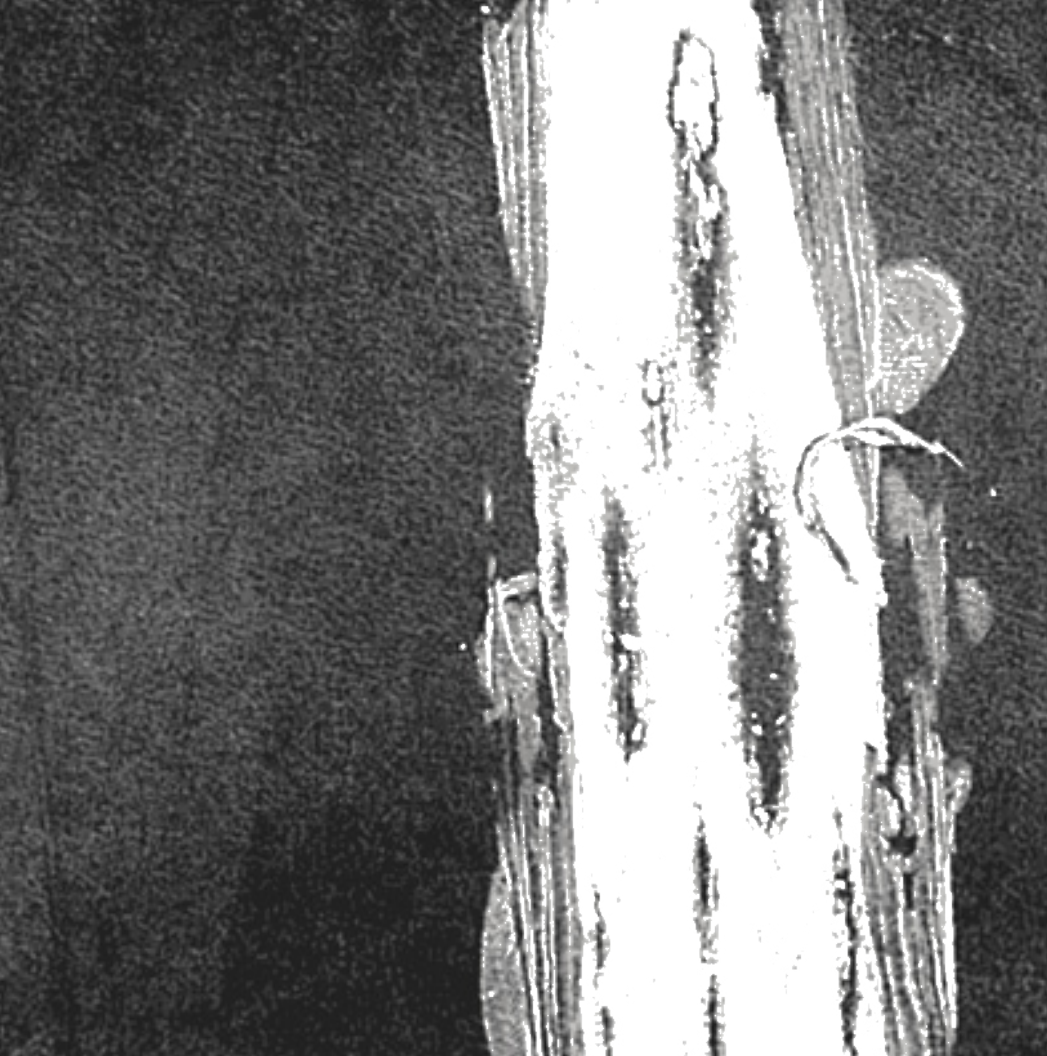
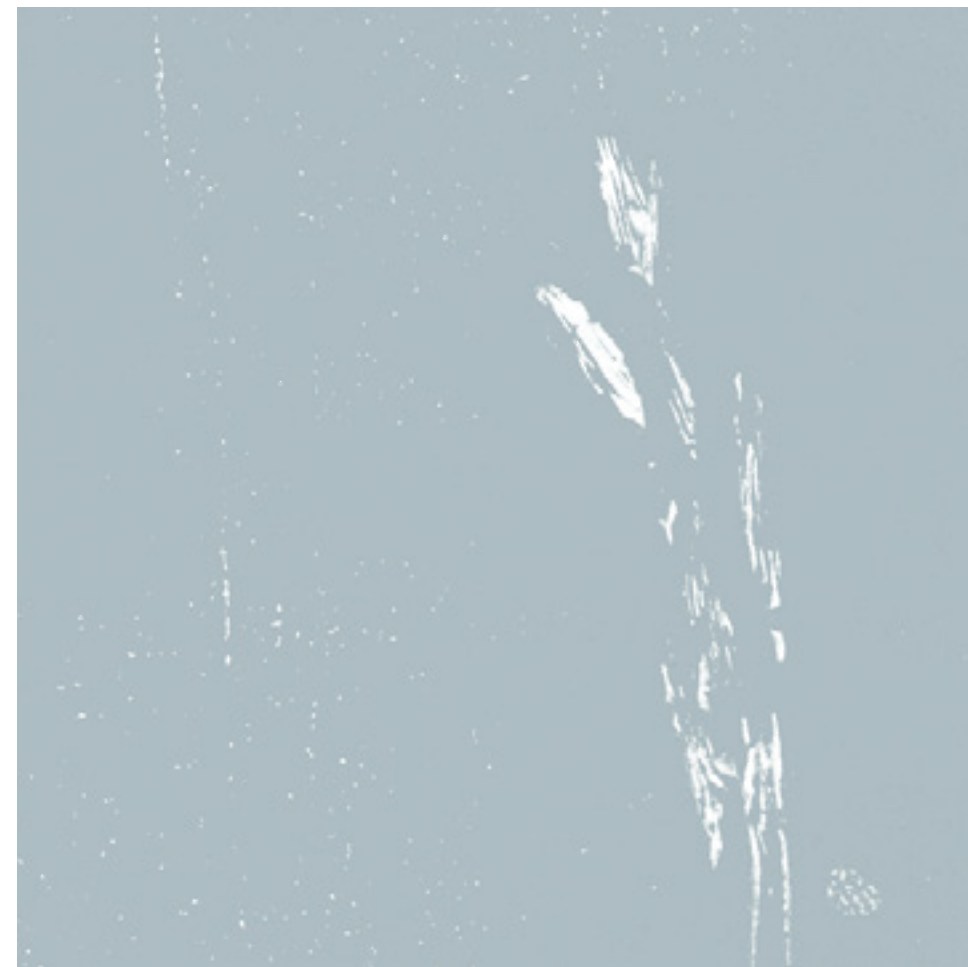
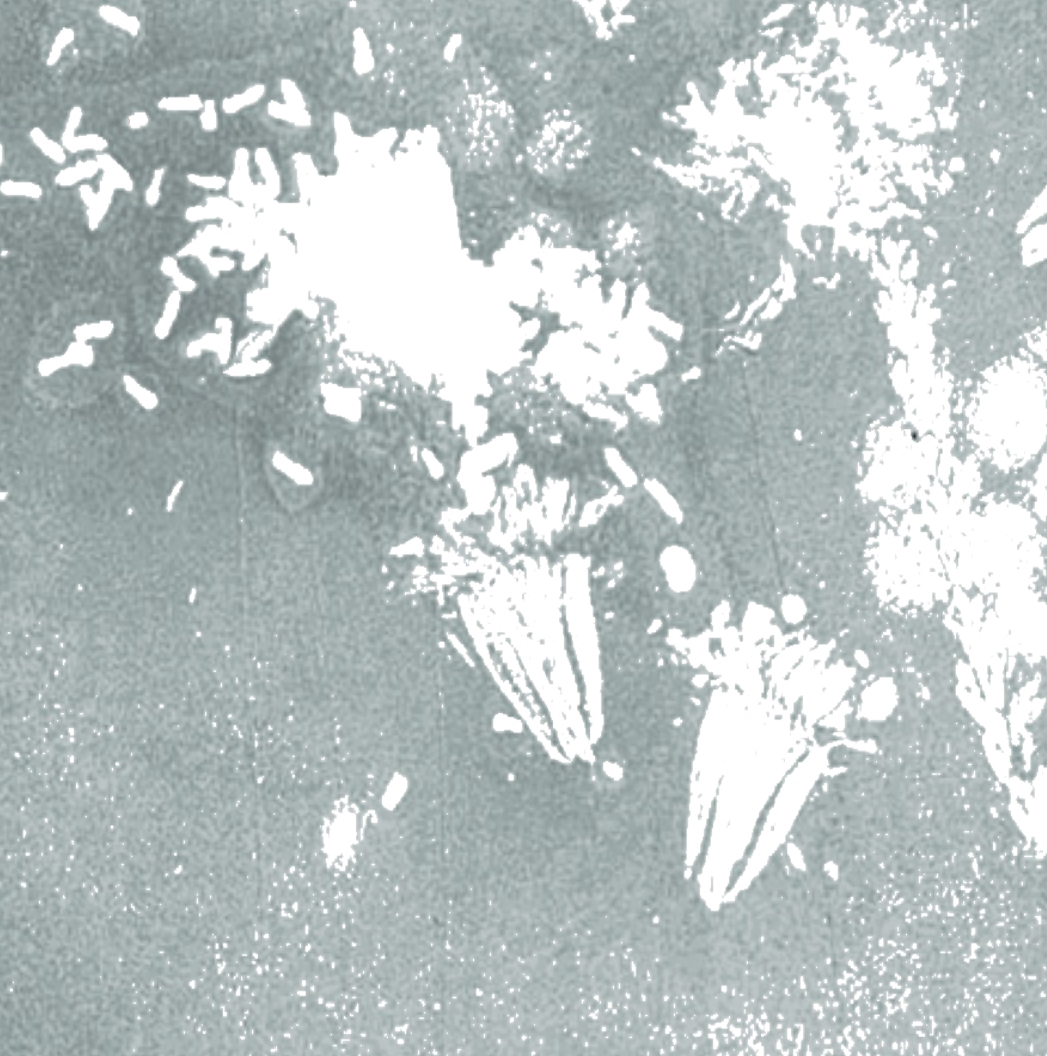


Fig. 42 - 45

Fig. 46 - 49



Fig. 50, 51

P R I N T I N G

I decided to explore printing with pigment to give myself practice printing with my screens before using the devoré chemicals. I am glad I did, because I discovered how physical a task it is to screen print at 3'x4', and how much preparation and practice is required. Nearly every aspect of the printing process is affected by increasing the scale, from coating and exposing the screen, to laying and removing the screen, and most obviously the printing itself. Every step of my process ended up taking double or triple the time and effort for the quality and output I was looking for. Much like the devoré tests, it was immensely helpful to master the printing before tackling my final piece as it afforded me the chance to improve my screens, materials, skills etc.

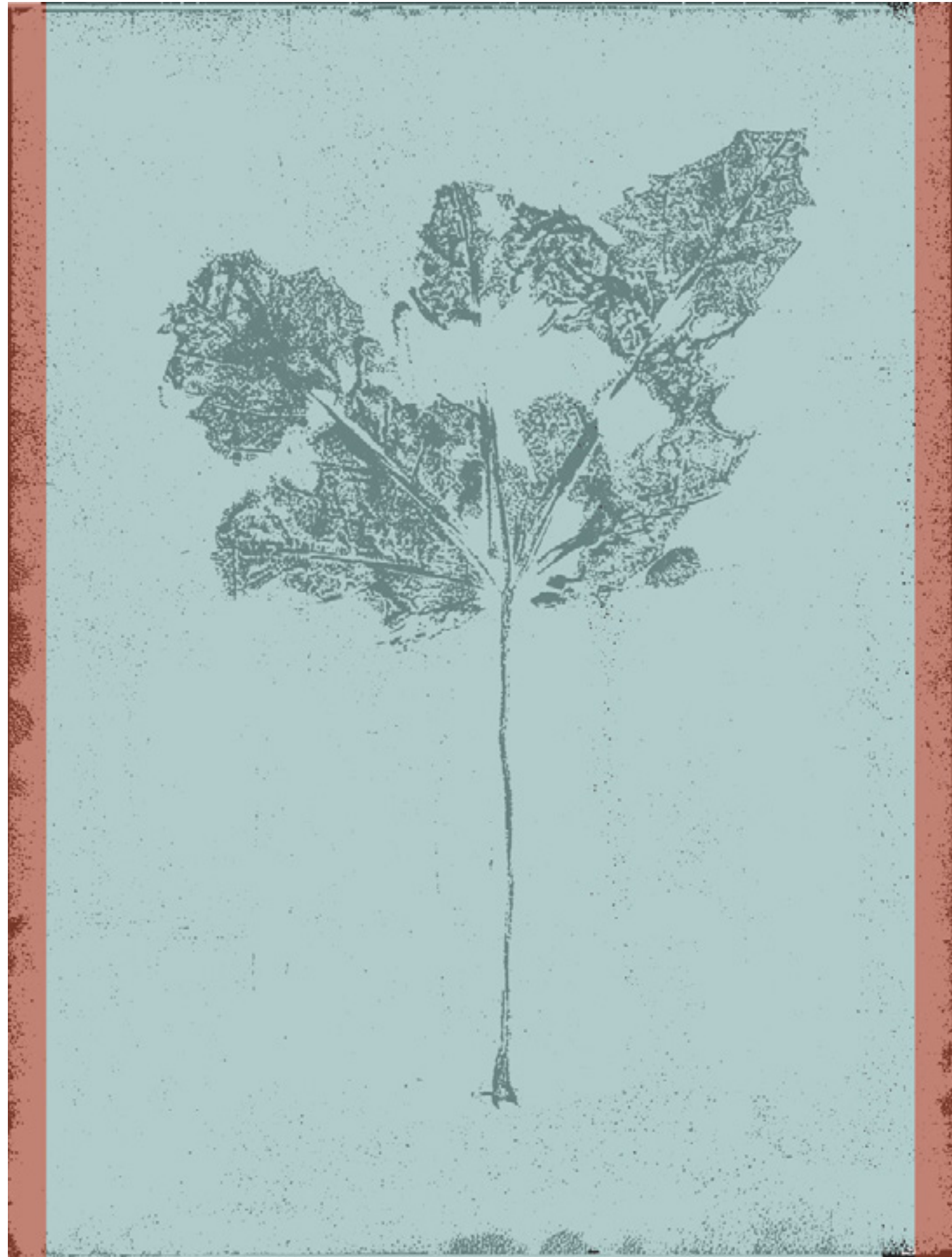
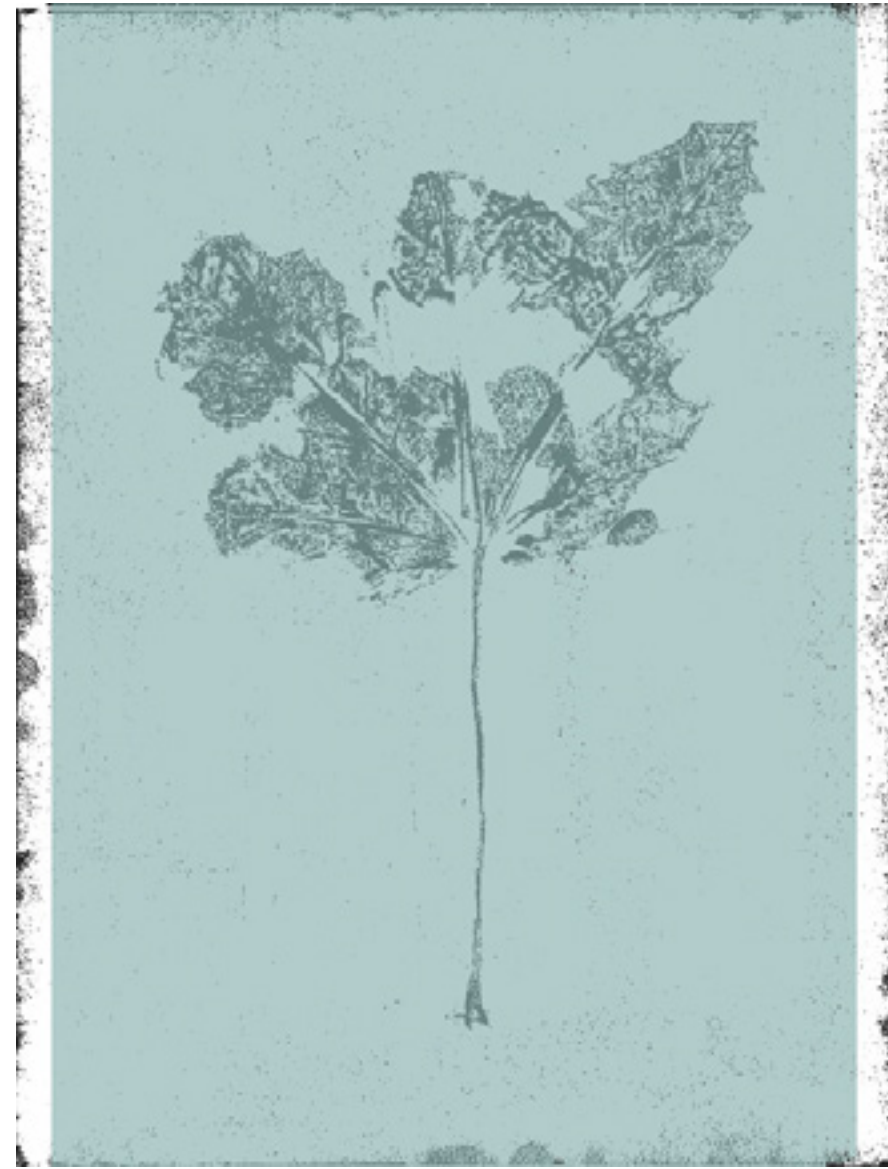


Fig. 52



SCREEN 1
CENTRE

Fig. 53, 54

SCREEN 2
SIDES LENGTH





SCREEN 1
CENTRE

Fig. 55, 56



SCREEN 2
SIDES LENGTH

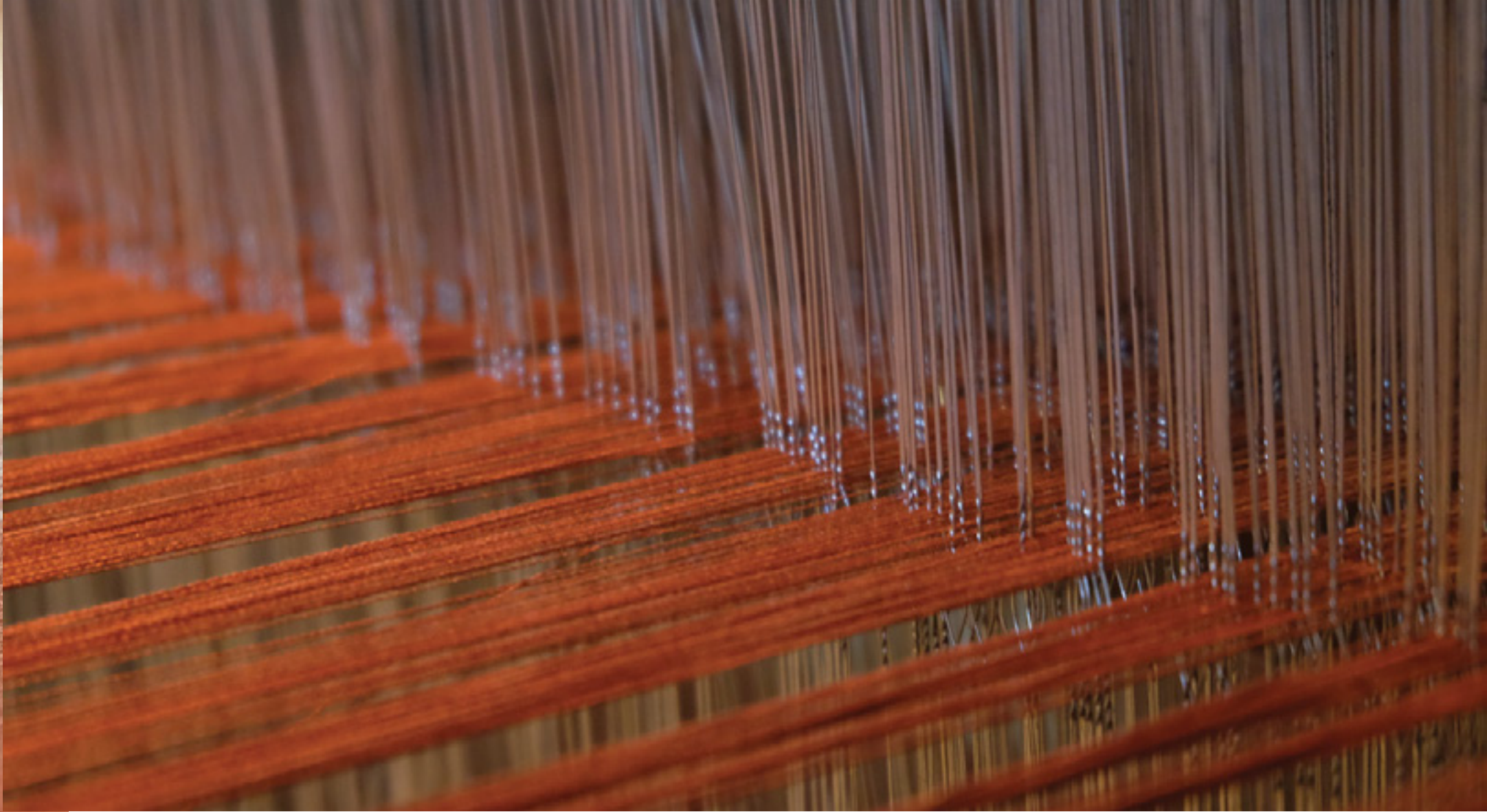


Fig. 57



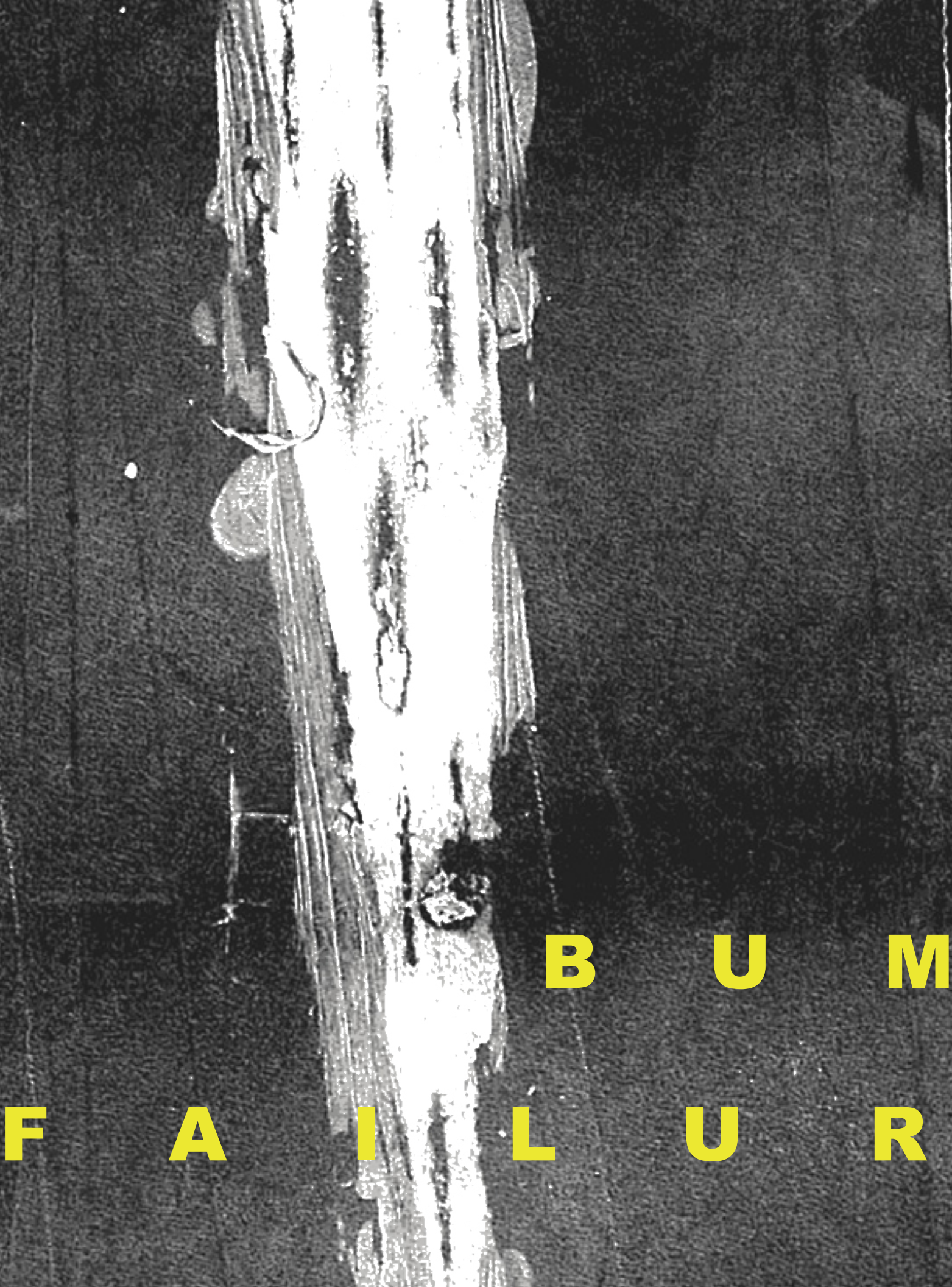
Screen Printing Samples

WEAVING



When my idea took a pivot halfway through the year, I put weaving aside since I was no longer going to be technically exploring it and instead producing only a simple plain weave cloth. How very wrong I was. Though the pattern complexity of my cloth was simple, the materials I was weaving with (very fine steel wrapped in silk), the purpose I was weaving for (devoré), and the scale at which I was weaving (5'x7') took this simple cloth and transformed it into a very ambitious weaving study. Though the technique of weaving is not meant to be the centre of my work, it has been so very integral in the outcome of my final piece and it has been the most difficult aspect of my process. In hindsight I should have spent a lot of time in the upfront of the year mastering scaling up a plain woven cloth progressively. That said, regardless of my erroneous ways, I was able to produce a 3'x4' cloth out of the silk and steel thread, helping me become intimately familiar with the functioning of the loom and an expert on threading a loom. Definitely knowledge that will be used throughout my career.

Fig. 59, 60



F A I L U R E B U M P S & S

A journey would not be a journey without AT LEAST a few wrong turns and a breakdown on the side of the road. After all, that is the point of a journey; To push further than you have gone before and to get lost. So was it the point of my capstone. If I knew the way to the destination, it would not be a journey. Experiments would not be needed. Trial and error, irrelevant. My work, unnecessary. So it should go without saying that I experienced my fair share of wrong turns and breakdowns throughout this process. I am a better artist for them, and my work is exponentially better as a result as well. I want to take the time to outline a few of those below to capture some of the most pivotal moments in my capstone journey, but also to celebrate them in an effort to keep the fear of failure from impacting my future work.

Ignoring a Pull

I started my capstone process with some fun, easy creative activities to get me in the studio and get me warmed up. One of those activities was monoprinting with string. I was having a hard time sketching my weaving ideas and thought monoprinting might help me translate my thoughts more easily. However, while printing, I discovered that string is a difficult subject matter and so in the last minute I replaced it with the plant matter that I just happened to have lying all around. What came out of this failed attempt and detour, really took me by surprise. The prints were so beautiful, simple yet expressive. I couldn't believe what I had stumbled upon, and so easily. Looking back now, I can see it was the ease at which these prints came to me that made me doubt. Don't good ideas require more effort? And so, I ignored my pull towards these prints. I ignored the way they spoke to me and inspired me. In the end, fortunately, I found my way back but I lost a lot of time to experiment and take the idea even further. I will remember this experience for the lesson that: *my work will always benefit from me taking the time to explore my feelings, and I get more satisfaction in the work when I do.*

Working Around the Problem

Like many students, I came into my capstone year without any strong feelings around a concept or idea as a starting point. Instead, I found my footing by first deciding I was going to focus on structural weaving simply because it interested me and felt appropriate as the subject of a year long study. I then used the class exercises to start to narrow in on my conceptual idea around decay. As my concept further crystallized, it seemed to outgrow my experiments rooted in structural weaving. Decay is about deterioration, and everything I was exploring with structural weaving felt in strong contrast to that. While I was able to visually mimic what deterioration looks like, my ideas felt like they were missing substance and a seamless connection to decay. This was a tension I could feel. It was a tension that I now believe was limiting my creative ideation. It was a tension I did not know what to do with, and so I did nothing. I worked around it. I tried to morph the idea, the materials, you name it. My efforts of deviation, however, came to an end when I participated in the tutor exchange program Sheridan offers it's capstone students. The program allows students access to teachers from different studios to provide mentorship on their project. It's a nice way to get differing opinions and views, especially if your work closely relates to the work of another teacher, even across disciplines. In this exercise, I had to confront the inevitable. A teacher could easily spot and called out the tension. I had to be honest with myself and admit, acknowledge, and accept that it wasn't working. That was the moment my whole idea fell apart. However, I did not yet fully accept it, or move on until several weeks later when meeting with my textile advisor. I ran through a bunch of different ideas I had and we bounced back and forth until landing on the golden egg. I will remember this experience for the lesson that: *when something isn't working you have to go to the source of the problem. The sooner you identify and face it head on, the sooner your work can blossom and grow into what it was meant to be.*

Make the Sample or Be the Example

The intent of my work is a celebration of an overlooked and undervalued aspect of life; decay. My vision to help achieve that was to create this banner at a 5'x7' scale, close to seven times the actual print size. The larger scale would also accommodate more detail after the devoré burning since the pixels are larger. Bringing this 5'x7' weaving to life, however, wasn't a simple task. With my timing, in fact, it would have been a very costly task.

This project is the first where I have really explored scale, and one of my biggest takeaways is the complexity required in scaling up a weaving accurately. There is so much more work required than just buying more thread. All my equipment had to be scaled up from looms, to warping wheels, and even weaving sticks and picks. With seven times the thread comes seven times the amount of effort to manage it, detangle it, etc. Some parts were actually physically impossible for me to do alone such as the winding of the warp back beam, where tension really matters. This is actually where all the work fell apart. Since we were in lock-down I did not have access to many helping hands so I "figured" out a way to wind it myself. I then warped the rest of the loom with the help of a paid assistant to make up for lost time. In the end the loom looked great. The tension looked great. Every thread was accounted for. However, every time I lifted a shaft, the path for the bobbin was blocked. With over 2100 threads, the thought of troubleshooting was overwhelming. I managed to weave about three inches, but the time it took was too inefficient to deny. I decided then and there I needed a plan B. I cut my loses and cut my scale down to 3'x5'. As a result I was able to trouble shoot, get the weaving going and complete it. The common take away from this experience could be to bite off no more than you can chew. My lesson is a bit more specific. The reason I failed so miserably in my attempt to weave the large scale was because I went from 10" to 5'. I had no progression. No tests. I believed I did not have the time for it. However, the amount of time that was wasted on warping the loom at the large scale could definitely have allowed for a middle-ground sample to witness how the materials change as you scale up, how the process changes, and where the biggest hurdles lie. I will remember this experience for the lesson that: *if you don't have the time to do it properly, you don't have the time for that idea. No cutting corners.*

SYNTHESIS

Learnings

Throughout this journey there have been many moments that tested me. Tested my patience. Tested my skills. Tested my strength. Tested my concept and idea. Above all, however, I would summarize this capstone journey as a test of my resourcefulness. Every obstacle or misstep brought about a situation I had never encountered and had to find my way out of. Some of these moments proved to be the most pivotal in my project and so I must attribute my resourcefulness for the success. But here is the kicker, resourcefulness can not be planned for, it is bred in moments of uncertainty. It is acquired through practice like anything else. It takes failing and trying again. So while artistry is resourcefulness, to be an artist is to chose uncertainty. To chose to be tested again and again. I think that is why I love textiles so much; they are such a resourceful sidekick. Textiles are versatile in how they can be made and how they can be utilized. They touch nearly every industry and have a history almost as old as human civilization. This capstone definitely helped further my love for this material.

This journey has also been a study into and out of myself. I had the chance to keenly observe my process and get a grasp on my areas of strength and the areas where work is needed. Observing and recording how I work has been a discovery I was not anticipating. One ripe with personal insight and reflection, with the invaluable reward of learning how to make more consciously and be a more present maker. My three biggest takeaways were:

1. I am most productive in a group studio or teamwork setting. I can work longer without breaks, and am more tuned into the work. I am also more creative when I can bounce ideas off of others.
2. I require a lot of studio sampling time because that is how I refine my ideas, but also that is the part of the work I like best and why I do this work to begin with. I need to use this information to start creating timelines that reflect what works best for me, and not just how long everything takes.

3. I need to work on being more conscious of my material consumption. I gave myself no limits during my school studies but it was easy to see how an idea can get financially out of control and inefficient without those limits and considerations.

The Results

There is a specific confidence around handling uncertainty gained from motherhood. An acquired calmness in the face of pressure, confusion and chaos. In this way, I felt very equipped to manage the bumpy and difficult capstone process in quarantine. Though it was a rough ride, with many emotional peaks, in the end I feel my work to be a success. More specifically, I feel very successful in my resourcefulness during pivotal moments of conflict or road blocks. I am proud of how I spotted opportunities, sometimes accepting defeat, and changed directions to elevate my work.. I am impressed with how my project evolved and of the final piece that resulted. Overall, I am proud of my work, feel it reflects my creativity, and believe overall the project helped push my skill level further.

Another success I am very grateful to walk away with, is the fact that my idea and my concept both have further unexplored potential. This investigation has been but a beginning. Out of this initial study I have a list of techniques, combinations, and materials I did not have the time to test out. I have spin-off ideas, and thoughts on how to approach monoprinting differently. I am also still interested in pursuing the very large scaled version I initially sought to create. Perhaps most fortunately, I feel I have work that is scalable. In other words, I have skillful gallery pieces, installation potential, and the prints are sellable at a very accessible price (the weaving less so). I also feel the techniques that I have studied closely (monoprinting and devoré) have great workshop and teaching potential. I am proud and relieved to be able to say that I am ending my school experience ready to work in the real world as an artist, and with the beginnings of a career path and a carved out artistic voice.

Lastly, I feel successful in how I explored decay and the knowledge I gained along the

way. I believe I found the quiet, but immovably resilient beauty of maturity. I found the peaceful acceptance of being a part of a sustainable system that feeds us from the ground from which we return once dead. As I await to see how the world will perceive my work, I can proudly say I achieved what I set out to, and found even more along the way.

The Work Goes On

A year is a long time, however, also not long enough. In order to succeed at this capstone, I found I had to pinpoint my focus and leave certain paths unexplored. Part of my work moving forward will be to layer these important considerations back into my work and see how things change. With limited time and resources, for example, I did not address sustainability within this project. Moving forward, it will be very important for me to understand the impact of this capstone work by investigating the sustainability of my materials.

Another area I left somewhat unexamined for this project was finances. If I were to do the exercise of costing my final piece out, I have no doubt the cost would be too absorbent. A large part of that is because of my materials, and so an investigation into material sustainability would hopefully also tackle financial efficiencies as well.

"I felt a strange delight in causing my own decay."

Robert Browning

C O N C L U S I O N





If we avoid what we fear , we feed the fear. Fear lives in uncertainty. In hypotheticals. It is hungry for our time and our happiness. Aging and death are the ultimate fear because we don't know for certain what is, if anything, beyond. My study into decay has taught me I don't need to change my perspective, so much as I simply need to shift my focus from the scary beyond back down to the familiar ground. What we know for certain about aging and death is that they are absolutely essential for life on earth. I can see and touch their benefit. What does fear of uncertainty have over a tangible benefit? As I create space to accept and value these later decades of my life, perhaps I can live a little more freely, and with a little more love for the body that's taken me so far. Perhaps I can shed ideas of my aging self that waste my potential, and dim my light. Perhaps I can inspire people I love to look at themselves with the same awe I carry in my eyes. To celebrate is an act of pride and love. There too, can be pride and love in the decline of life.

Fig. 62, 63

The Final Piece







Fig. 66, 67



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