



Yolande Harris Listening to the Distance

21 July - 19 September 2015

Woodbury Art Museum
Utah Valley University

I am a Hermit 7
Yolande Harris

Eagle
Whale Walk

Listening to the Distance with Yolande Harris: 17
Techno-Intuition, Sonic Consciousness, and Alternative Ways of Knowing
Edward Shanken

Eyrie

Eternity Sensuously Displayed: Yolande Harris' *Eyrie* 33
Robert Campbell

Light Entering My Room

Yolande Harris: Aesthetics of Intensity 47
Brandon LaBelle

Map Room: Taking Soundings,
Sextant, El Camino, Sun Run Sun

Integrated Circuits 63
Annea Lockwood

Mississippi Tornado
Pink Noise

Biographies 72

List of Exhibited Works 74

Acknowledgements 75

I am a hermit.

I inhabit an eyrie.

I look down on the resting eagles.

I fly with them.

There is no sense of time in this journey.

Just the gliding of wings through air and the

motion of water.

Can you look through my layered lenses,

open your ears

and hear the air moving?

Can you listen to the distance with me?





Eagle (2015)
Video and sound installation

Whale Walk (2015)
Sound walk, museum visitor wearing headphones







Previous pages:
Eagle (2015)
Video stills
Installation still

Listening to the Distance with Yolande Harris: Techno-Intuition, Sonic Consciousness, and Alternative Ways of Knowing

Edward Shanken

In *Listening to the Distance*, Yolande Harris transports us to her magical world of techno-intuition and expanded sonic consciousness, where getting lost is at least as important as knowing where we are, where sound and image mix in unpredictable but profoundly insightful ways. As she guides us through scorescapes in the environment, navigating by circles, sextants, and GPS, we tune in and space out on the presentness of sound. The artist has a truly extraordinary sense of space, of location and navigation, of environment; so wherever she happens to be significantly impacts her work, often becomes a driving force for it. *Listening to the Distance* is inspired by remarkable sites that Yolande and I have called home in recent years: Amsterdam, the Balearic Islands, the Mississippi Delta, the Sonoran Desert, the Pacific Northwest. The land and the landscape, the sea and the seascape, our relationship to the environment and to other life-forms that inhabit it - these are the raw materials of Yolande's artistic practice. She approaches them with an unerring ear and eye, joining image and sound, video and music, in an evocative counterpoint that plays the human off of the non-human and the beautiful off of the sublime. She has purposely honed her sensitivity to her environment through a focused, dreamlike artistic process of meditation and creation. By unifying this sensitivity and process, she has developed the uncanny ability to penetrate the surface and reveal truths that are hidden below, to question instrumental applications of technology, to expand our consciousness and (re)sensitize us to the environment. Her work helps us become aware of and extend our own techno-intuition, in which understanding is inevitably mediated by technology but not beholden to it. *Listening to the Distance* constitutes a certain culminating point in Yolande's artistic journey of heightened sensitivity to and empathy for her environment, for the environment.

Upon entering *Listening to the Distance*, we are drawn to multiple works simultaneously. First, we are beckoned forth by *Pink Noise*, a large, shimmering pink and turquoise floor projection that is visible from the glass entranceway. While approaching it, an even larger wall projection with electronic sound, *Eagle*, lures us in another direction.

The exhibition title text and beside it a tall, spot-lit black and white wall-drawing entitled Mississippi Tornado, pull us in yet another way. Set in a Plexiglas vitrine, Whale Walk might elude notice altogether, even though it, too, is visible from the entranceway. Comprised of open-ear headphones and an integrated audio player with field recordings of humpback whales, Whale Walk can be worn during our stroll through the exhibition - its sounds and those of the other works intermingling in unpredictable ways. From the outset, the artist thus poses us with a quandary of navigation. There is no map, no right or wrong way to see and hear the exhibition, but we become aware that any chosen path is simply one of several options, each of which offers a unique experience, so we must use our own intuition to select one.

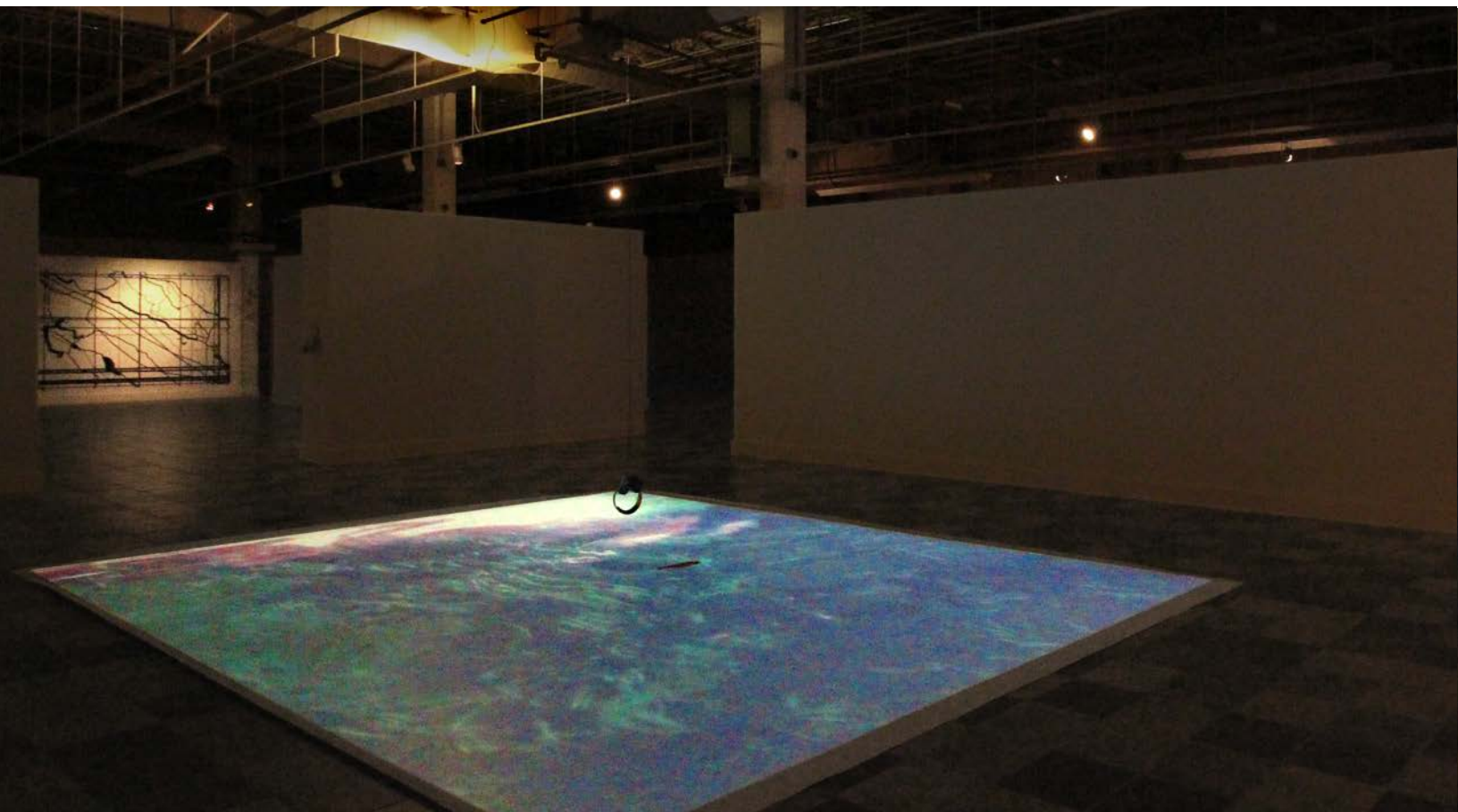
Pink Noise offers an example of Yolande's artistic wizardry and demonstrates her principles of techno-intuition and sonic consciousness. At first, we only see the very large and altogether-too-pretty floor projection of the Mediterranean sun sparkling pink on turquoise sea. The imagery and scale are sublime and slightly overwhelming. Headphones hang from high above, casting a shadow on the projection, like bait dangling from a rod, luring us to metaphorically fish for sound. A hydrophone (underwater microphone) recording provides access to a sonic landscape otherwise inaccessible to human ears, offering intuitions about the underwater environment that invoke empathy for its inhabitants. What we hear contrasts starkly and startlingly with the idyllic video: heavy, industrial sounds of pleasure yachts teem beneath the saccharine surface; oversized motors crank, anchors drop, depth sounders ring in an otherworldly song. This noise pollution - at once horrible and beautiful - impinges on sea creatures, even in the national marine preserve in Spain, where the sound and video were recorded. As our intuitions are technologically mediated and amplified by the hydrophone, our consciousness of the environment - and the distressing human impact on it - is expanded through our awareness of underwater sound.

While approaching Pink Noise, we were also captivated by the enormous wall-projection, Eagle. This spectacular video installation

was commissioned especially for the exhibition and is now part of the Woodbury Art Museum's permanent collection. Although at first glance the work might appear simple, it harbors unexpected complexity. The video alternates between a close-up shot of a single bald eagle, larger than human scale, framed in a hazy circle, unselfconsciously being an eagle, and a full-frame image of two bald eagles, equally absorbed in their "eagleness," perched on barren limbs, gazing out into the distance. The artist has given us an eagle's eye view of an eagle's eye view. The potency of the eagle - as the predator at the top of the food chain, as a metaphor for superior vision, as a symbol of freedom and liberty, and as a mythic being and spirit-guide - resonates powerfully, reinforced by the sense of timelessness imparted by the video and the phenomenal halo surrounding the close-up image.

Yolande's relationship to the eagle is not simply one of artist and subject. Through her artistic meditations from her studio on the Puget Sound, itself a sort of eyrie perched above that of the eagles, she has become absorbed in eagleness. Through her artistic process, she has experienced a sort of journey mediated by these iconic beings, in which they have transported her into the distance. On a wall beside the projection, a poetic wall-drawing, hand-written by the artist, asks us, "Can you look through my layered lenses, open your ears and hear the air moving? Can you listen to the distance with me?" Here, techno-intuition is complemented by ancient technologies of meditation and spiritual practice. Eagle invites us to become absorbed in eagleness, to listen to the distance and be carried off, carried away, over the Sound, to cross the mythical water to other lands, other states of consciousness and being.

But the mythic eagle as spirit-guide contrasts with the matter-of-factness of the video. The eagles are simply and unselfconsciously being themselves. The halo is simply an optical artifact of the artist's use of low-tech compound lenses: a digital camera and telephoto lens amplified and chromatically warped by the single barrel of consumer-grade 100x binoculars. While viewing the video, we become aware of faint, indeterminate electronic sounds, which evoke parallels with the eagles'





process of scanning the distance. The sound is a hydrophone recording made on a “sea-glider,” a submarine drone that surveys extreme underwater environments, collecting oceanographic data over long durations. Most of the sounds we hear are the internal workings of the sea-glider itself: the heartbeat of its own operations. Suddenly, the eagles seem slightly mechanical and the sea-glider acquires a humanlike pathos – a solitary, lonely robot, combing the distant sea for signs of life.

Proceeding through the Eagle installation, we are immediately drawn to the large, brightly colored, spot-lit images in the following gallery. Despite the sizable dimensions of the gallery itself, the five Eyrie series prints completely energize the space with their concentrated chromatic resonance. At first the images appear to be dream-like abstractions of pure color. But as we look more carefully, we begin to recognize outsized, gently pixelated features of an eagle: feathers, beak, eye, tail. These details belie their source: the images are extreme enlargements derived from a single frame of the Eagle video in the previous gallery.

The Eyrie images offer an occasion to discuss the consistent but unusual lighting scheme that Yolande devised to reinforce the exhibition’s conceptual coherence across a diverse range of media. Prints and drawings hunger for light, while projections crave darkness, so this posed a considerable challenge. Most exhibitions use a combination of floodlights and spotlights: the former diffuse light and provide even illumination and a brighter overall ambiance; the latter focus illumination more precisely on a specific area, minimizing ambient light. Listening to the Distance uses only spotlights. By regulating their distance, number, and angle, the exquisite subtlety in the Eyrie prints’ highly saturated colors is revealed, while the video projections shine brilliantly in the dusky ambience. This lighting scheme results in a tranquil atmosphere, punctuated by the videos and spot-lit works, which seem to jump off the wall with a dynamic, theatrical quality.

Visually whispering to us from the adjacent gallery, we see the highly atmospheric video installation *Light Entering My Room*, which captures the artist’s fascination with the magical dance of light and

shadow as it penetrates and is transformed by interior spaces. The work begins with source material drawn from video recordings made of light and shadows filtering into the artist's mobile studio through old-growth forest in the Pacific Northwest. Two digital projectors, perched atop opposite corners of the gallery walls, project the video at unexpected angles on all four walls and the floor, filling the space with gently dancing tendrils of light. The scale and brightness of the projections varies with the distance and angle from the lens, skewing the images, though not beyond recognition, and creating an abstract total environment. Although the piece itself has no specific sound of its own, it absorbs the diverse ambient sounds that circulate through the museum. Those sounds, moreover, seem to animate the rhythm of the video's wave-like pulsations. Waves are, of course, the foundation of sound, which is so central to Yolande's work, and in this sense the installation seems to implicitly embody a sonic element, reinforcing the theme of listening to the distance. As art critic Geoff Wichert wrote in his excellent review of the exhibition, "Such ambient, accidental light forms an analog to ambient sound. Conventionally ignored in favor of illuminated stimulation, such lights have the power to calm the agitated modern psyche" (15 Bytes, Aug 2015, p 5). Indeed, Yolande has created a calm, contemplative atmosphere, one that gently envelops us in a virtual blanket of shadows, a dream-like environment in which near and far are continuous.

The monochromatic wave-patterns of *Light Entering My Room* find a parallel in *El Camino*, a large black and white print visible in the adjacent gallery, a space that Yolande has referred to as "the map room." The realization of an idea she has had for some time, this densely packed gallery is dedicated to maps and navigation, including works from her projects *Sun Run Sun* (2008-9), *Navigating by Circles/Sextant* (2007-8), and *Taking Soundings* (2006-8). *El Camino*, like the *Taking Soundings* series of works of which it is a part, plays with the "the edge between a score and a map, line and sound, an event and a recording," to use the artist's words. It consists of lines generated from GPS traces of a journey Yolande and I took together along *El Camino Real* in California,

the historic trail of eighteenth century Spanish missionaries, including Junipero Serra, a Franciscan friar from Mallorca, one of Spain's Balearic islands, the site of several works in the exhibition, including *Pink Noise* and *Navigating by Circles/Sextant*.

Yolande's sound and video installation *Navigating by Circles/Sextant* juxtaposes romantic sublimity with the challenge and pathos of navigation. The video presents the artist's first-person perspective while navigating by sextant in a sailing boat off the coast of Mallorca. In other words, we see essentially what she, herself, saw while using this eighteenth century, celestial-navigation device. Set against a black background, the blurry circular outline of the sextant's eyepiece bobs slightly on the screen. It bears a striking formal similarity to the circular image of the lone bald eagle in *Eagle*. In the left side of the circle, we see the bow of the boat pitch on the waves as the artist struggles to keep the sun – a small orange dot – superimposed on the horizon in the right side. The stereo sound was generated as a sonification of GPS traces from the same sea journey. Mirroring the solitary quality of the video, and rocking from side to side like the boat, the sound suggests electronic surf, rhythmic clicks and pops, and frogging tones that at once indicate location and serve as a sonic corollary to the rotation of a lighthouse lantern.

On an adjacent wall in the map-room hangs an image from *Sun Run Sun*, a complex project that centers on an electronic, hand-held instrument, the *Satellite Sounder*, invented by the artist. By joining a GPS receiver, custom software, and a composition for sonification, Yolande transforms live satellite data into music that users listen to on headphones while walking, usually in an urban environment. In *Listening to the Distance*, the work is represented by a single color print from a live performance of *Sun Run Sun* combined with a musical composition also drawn from the project. The music blends sonified GPS data from the *Satellite Sounders* and the comments made by users about their experience of that work. We can listen to this sound work on a sculptural object adjacent to the image. Set on a pedestal, a small digital music player and headphone amplifier are visible under Plexiglas, with two sets of head-

phones on top. The black wiring is completely exposed, a visual corollary to the GPS tracks in *El Camino* and other works from *Taking Soundings* in the map room. Indeed, the room is tied together by a similar set-up across from *Sun Run Sun* and adjacent to the three prints from *Taking Soundings*, offering a rich sonic program spanning nearly a decade of the Yolande's work as a composer.

With *El Camino* at our back, looking through the map room and past *Pink Noise* in the adjacent gallery, we see *Mississippi Tornado*, a ten-foot tall, undulating wall-drawing beside the museum's entrance. These two stark, black and white images serve as bookends to the exhibition. *Mississippi Tornado* includes a set of headphones suspended from high above. The spot-lit, black oil pastel drawing, crafted by the artist on site, reveals the changing shape of the Mississippi River over time. The so-called "Big River" famously splits the United States into east and west. The river served as a natural boundary between states, fixing political boundaries at a certain moment in time. However, as the river's shape has changed, tiny portions of Arkansas, which used to be completely west of the river, have become stranded east of the river and are now contiguous with the state of Mississippi. Similarly, portions of Mississippi have become stranded to the west of the river and are now contiguous with Arkansas. The sound on the headphones can only be described as otherworldly. I'll never forget the stormy night in Memphis when Yolande and I happened upon and listened to these entrancing musical sounds. Like the mythic Sirens that lured ancient sailors to their doom, we were mesmerized by these ethereal tones, which seemed to be coming from multiple directions. Wondering if there were some super-cool hipsters in our neighborhood experimenting with spatialized electronic music, we went outside to investigate. We could not have been more wrong or foolish: the sounds were WWII warning sirens used to signal an approaching tornado!

Listening to the Distance, like art or, for that matter, any method of making sense of the world, is obviously not foolproof. Techno-intuition may mislead us; heightened sonic consciousness may turn out to

be a false consciousness. But the same can be said of reason and logic, the foundations of philosophy and science. Nearly half a century ago, art theorist Jack Burnham argued for the crucial importance of art as a means of survival in an overly rationalized society. He feared that the cultural obsession with, and faith in, science and technology would lead to the demise of human civilization. He claimed that, "the outermost limits of reasoning" are not reachable by post-human technology but "fall eternally within the boundaries of life" (1968: 376). In this context, Yolande's work participates in the process of demythifying hyper-rational scientific culture. By suggesting alternative ways of knowing and being that are not fraught with anthropocentric prejudice, she proposes alternative systems of value in which humans, machines, animals, and the environment itself collaborate as partners in bringing forth expanded forms of consciousness and understanding. In this sense, Yolande's artworks "shamanize us into realizing our true condition" (Burnham 1974: 143). Following the logic of ancient cultural traditions, the artist's theories of techno-intuition and sonic consciousness "invert the evils of [her] tribe, and in doing so draw people away from substitute objects and back toward the ancient memories of life and productivity" (Burnham 1974: 144).

Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of This Century*, New York: Braziller (1968)

Jack Burnham, "Artist as Shaman", *Arts*, 47: 9 (1973) 42-44.



Eyrie (2015)
Prints on paper

This page:
Back (40" x 53")

Following:
Ruff (40" x 56")
Eye (40" x 46")



Eternity Sensuously Displayed: Yolande Harris' *Eyrie*

Robert Campbell

Animals, according to American psychologist James Hillman are "the palpable presence of the regeneration of time, of adapting and surviving life - an immortality utterly of this world, this world its Eden, needing no elsewhere, and no ecstasies"(24). In regarding nature, Hillman invokes a displacement of the "human subject from center stage to the wings [...] sideways to the soul's habitation extended in the world"(1), a tone that resonates in the pleas of environmental writers and activists to consider the plight of other species as equal in importance to our own. The imperatives of climate change and our current global ecological crisis demand this lateral shift, one could argue, in order that we really see the truth of what we are doing to the biosphere and enter into active relationship with its manifold plant and animal species - "the aboriginal inhabitants of this earth, this air, these waters"(1). Artists like Yolande Harris are in the vanguard here, in their gentle but insistent evocation of the metaphysical imagination out of respect (literally, "to look again") for the world.

When I first visited Yolande's studio on the topmost floor of a spacious, rented home situated at the edge of a steep, wooded bluff in an old, established Seattle neighborhood, I was immediately impressed with two things: this was a real garret, and one with a spectacular view. Uncluttered and austere, with a rough wooden floor, it was situated at the top of a narrow third story flight of stairs. The open and airy interior space had the feeling of a calm center for focused and solitary musing, research and responsiveness. Fragments of works-in-progress were hung here and there, readily visible from her long narrow worktable situated in the center of the room. There was a primacy of vision in this room for me, even as I donned a set of headphones to listen to one of her exquisite underwater hydrophone recordings. Occupying the entire upper half of the wall on the west side of the garret was a set of large windows. The view was breathtaking. Hundreds of dizzying feet below, and extending for miles to the west, was the vast body of silvery grey seawater called Puget Sound. Rising up beyond the distant shore were

the blue shimmering mountains of the Olympic Peninsula, clearly visible that day. With nothing much of the Anthropocene apparent in the scene, except the worrisome absence of snow on the peaks, it was easy to imagine launching one's body into that huge expanse and gliding effortlessly across a silent and primordial watery hunting ground. Observing the sweeping and commanding view of the world from those windows was the closest one might come to imagining the view from the eagle's perch on the old-growth fir not far below- the one that, while occupied, inspired Yolande's binocular and telephoto lens-based video (from Latin *videre* 'to see') interventions.

There are many artists in the Pacific Northwest, photographers and otherwise, who seemingly adopt native animal species as personal totems and offer up ever more crisp, detailed and colorful renderings of their encounters. There is something different about this artist's interspecies connection, however, mediated as it is through lens and pixel. The images invoked in *Eyrie* are more of a trace of something felt through seeing, or seeing through feeling. A mutual arising, garret and tree branch; perhaps more metalogue than dialog, more haecceity (the Latin word for "thisness", haecceity refers to the particular qualities of a thing that make it unique unto itself) than metaphor.

A note about the artist: there is a clear sense of highly intelligent, gentle and focused presence when in Yolande's company. You have her undivided attention, which seems to effortlessly emanate from her being- her astonishingly clear blue eyes are more-often-than-not twinkling with genuine wonder and engaged curiosity.

Referencing the work of Swiss zoologist Adolf Portmann, Hillman writes that "the self presentation of the animal is its own end, and its color and shape and pattern [...] is the work of very specific biological structures"(23). With more cones in their retinas, deeper, magnifying foveas, and superior color (and ultraviolet) vision, eagles exist in a perceptual world that differs markedly from ours, with a 340-degree visual

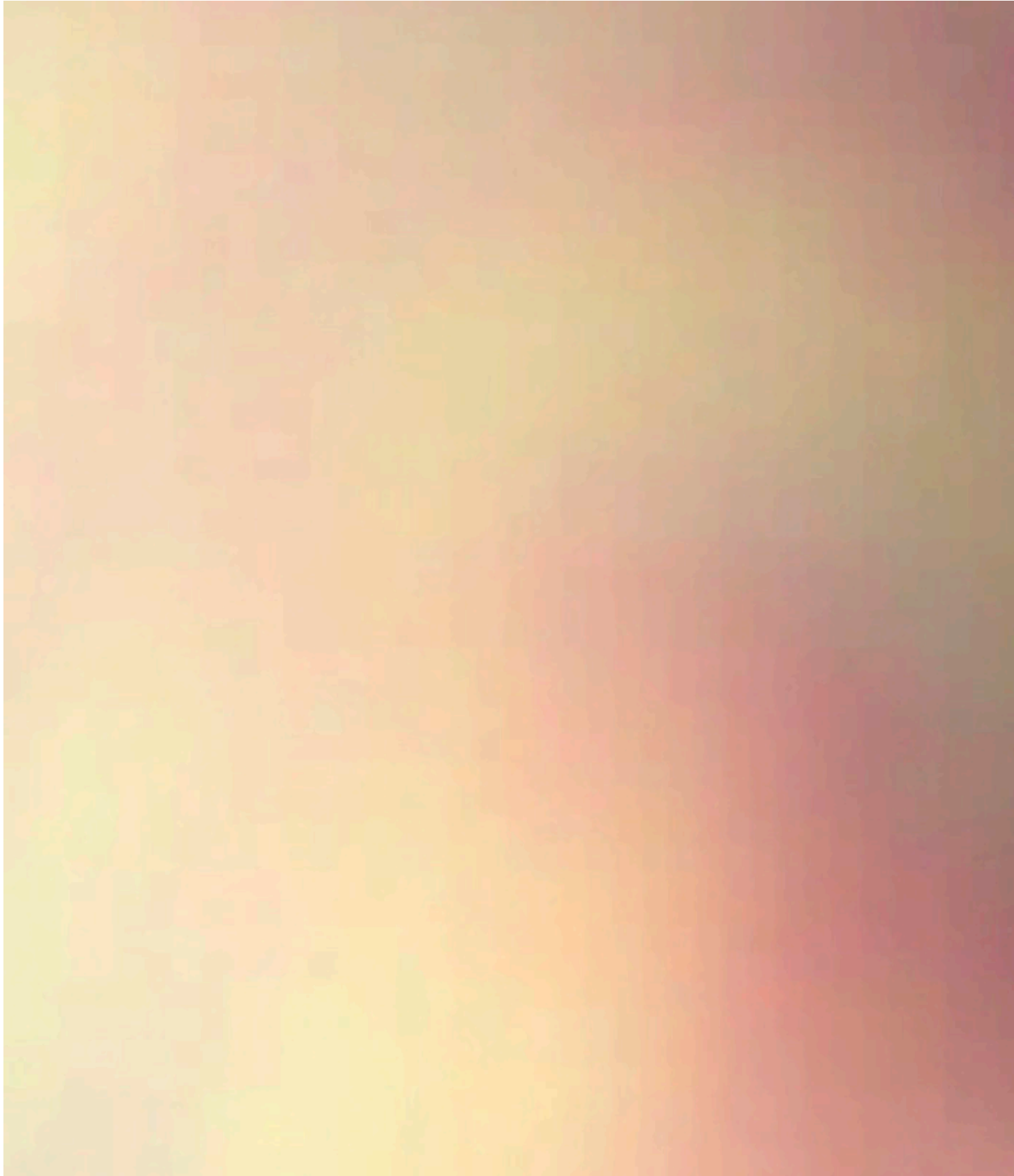
field and eyes that can discern detail up to five times farther than human eyes. In Yolande's large Eyrie prints, there is a reciprocity through amplification taking place, a kind of mirroring of magnification and intensification through the electronic sampling of light, relying on the aid of the telephoto lens, the camera sensor (CCD), and a large format archival printer; tools for sampling, magnification and reproduction. Whereas the eagle's retina would likely afford a sharp and detailed close-up of the attentive artist in the garret window, the comparatively frail human relies on interpolated vision for its external imprinting: sampled light data are funneled through innovations like the CCD's Bayer filter pattern, which corrects, for example, the uneven human sensitivity to colors, producing a simulacrum made of orderly columns of red, green and blue pixels. This is also where the poetry of the work lies: Yolande willingly responds, relates with something like deep appreciation and curiosity, to this avian species' visual prowess (as well as the haecceity expressed by this individual eagle) utilizing her own technical and contingent aesthetic proficiency, pushing and then embracing limits and finding an unexpected beauty there. I had the distinct honor of assisting Yolande with the printing of Eyrie in the digital print lab at Cornish College of the Arts where I teach. After careful selection of printing profiles and some tests, we spent the day watching each print slowly emerge from the printer, the ink almost resonating off the paper as it came into the light. The unusual combination of the telephoto lens and the binoculars, which allowed light to seep in and create the effects of halo and color in the videos during the recording process, had somehow transformed the pixels into a prismatic array of pattern and shape. The haloed feathers, the diffuse yellow hue of the beak: color artifacts emerging from pixel patterns emerging from biological shapes. Again, from Hillman: "the biological necessity of the aesthetic explodes the sheerly functional notion of animals [...] Biology itself insists on aesthetic display"(23). Here, the artist's skillful hand, guided by technological ingenuity, was producing its own reciprocal imperatives of creative and aesthetic display.

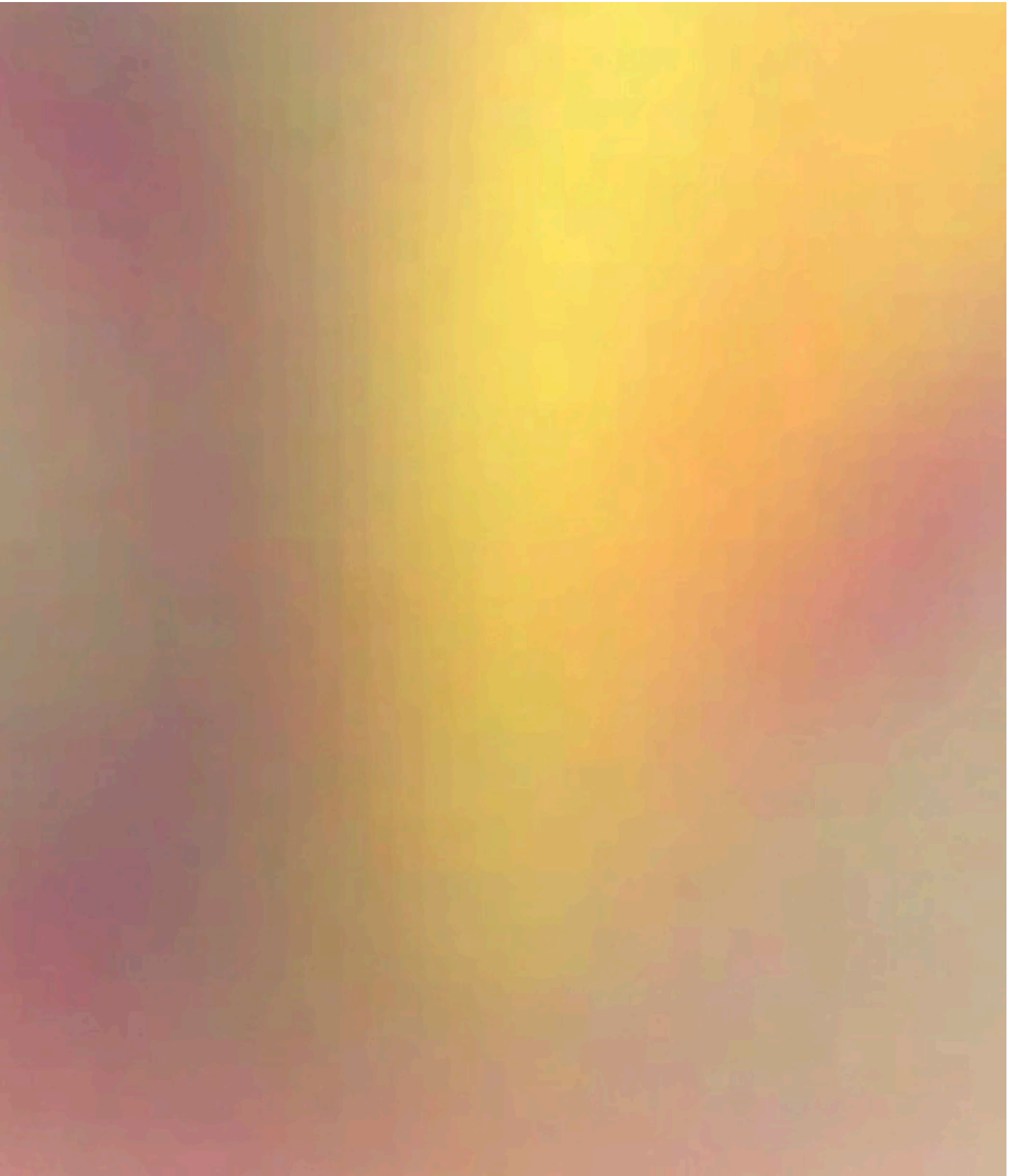
Hillman also notes that, “to be seen is as genetic as to see”(24). When you listen to Yolande’s hydrophone recordings of underwater environments, you can’t help but marvel at the aesthetic qualities of the auditory sound print of life forms below the surface. Her mentor, ecologist and artist David Dunn , writes that when we are engaged “in more attentive listening, we are drawn deeper into a resonance with life itself”(90). In her writing about the eyrie encounter, Yolande invites you to a different kind of listening: “Can you look through my layered lenses, open your ears and hear the air moving? Can you listen to the distance with me?” It seems clear that it was through this synaesthetic sensibility, initiated spontaneously from her perch at the garret window, that Eyrie was conceived. Hillman again, of the animal: “No Being guarantees its existence; its existence guarantees being. Each animal is eternity sensuously displayed”(24). By actuating the colorful and compositional poiesis of the Eyrie series, Yolande Harris draws us deeper into the resonances of display, of life itself, through her sensitive and elegant transactions with the eternal.

James Hillman, 'Culture and the Animal Soul', *Spring 62 (American Soul): A Journal of Archetype and Culture* (1997): 10-37.

David Dunn, *Why Do Whales And Children Sing? A Guide to Listening in Nature* (Book and audio CD). Santa Fe, New Mexico: Earth Ear (1999).

Following:
Eyrie (2015)
Feathers (58" x 40") detail
Beak (69" x 40")



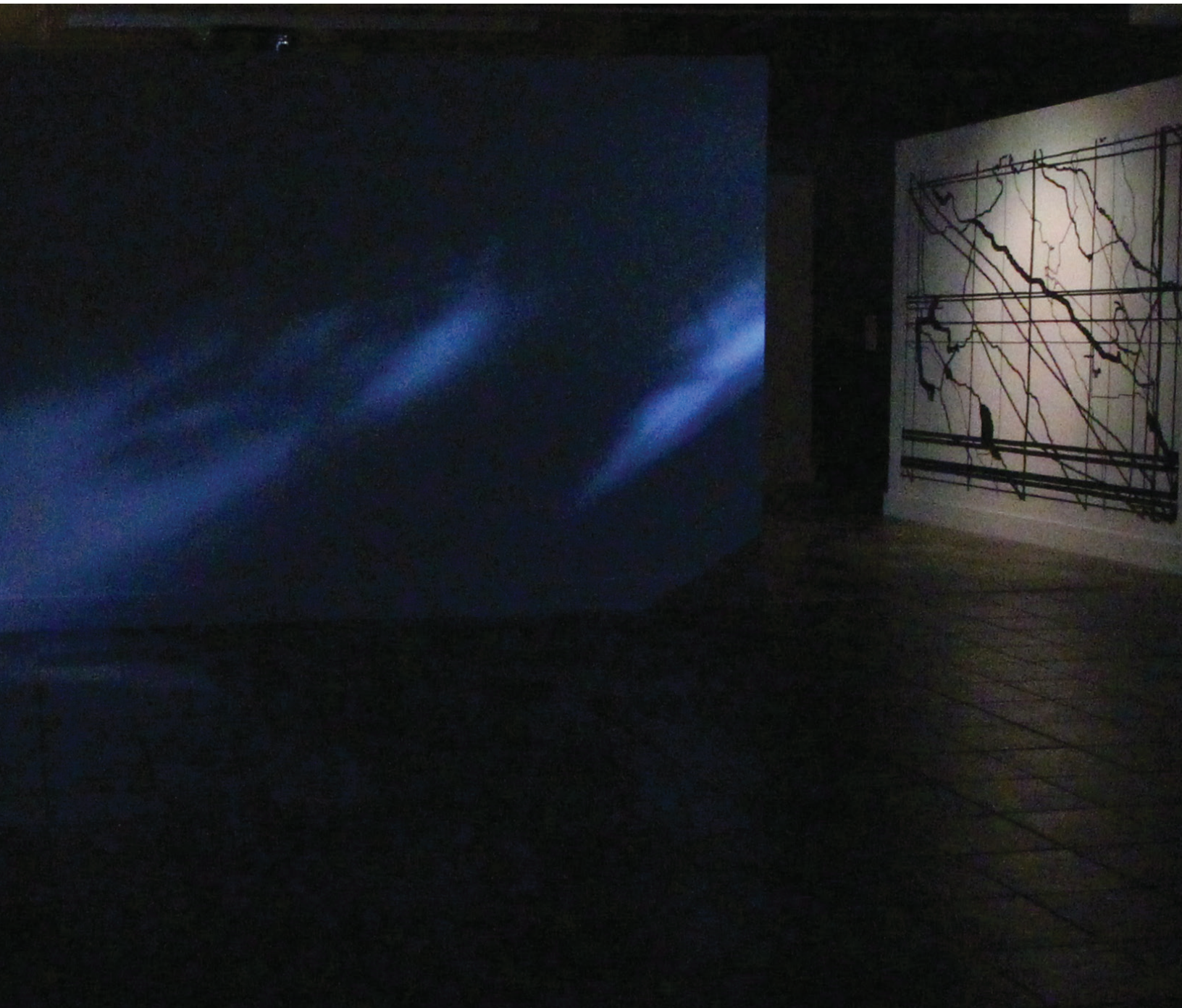




Left to right:
Eyrie: Beak (2015)

Light Entering My Room (2015)
Video light installation (whole room)

El Camino (2010)
Print on paper (79" x 109")



Previous:
Light Entering My Room (2015)
Video still

Yolande Harris: Aesthetics of Intensity

Brandon LaBelle

Shifting, undulating, trembling, these shadows that appear as darkness full of light and that flutter across the walls already announce a deeper shift: are we to see the shadows for what they truly are, video projections of gradations of light and their agitated movements? Or rather, as events experienced one afternoon by the artist in the Pacific Northwest as she watched the sunlight cascade through the trees?

Shifts in time and space, and undulations in daily perception, are active elements within the work of artist Yolande Harris, brought forward through her deep curiosity for the world. A gap or fissure seems to appear, to break in – between seeing and believing, between material fact and poetical imagining, and between the near and the far, along with the ineffable and animate threads that may also connect and therefore disrupt such dichotomies. The gap, and the threads that traverse and link, and which invite us to enter their subsequent web of associations and slippages, disorienting layers and close-ups, and from which new perspectives are generated.

Yolande Harris' works of audio and video situate us within this unsettled condition, and they act to prolong and deepen the rich relational nexus that ultimately captures us. Or, that lurk just on the surface, as a suggestive poetics. The shadows recorded on that single afternoon are not only a play of light and dark, but rather, they lead us into an intensity of felt energies: from the human eye to the wall of the gallery, shadow and light captured in the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest, agitated and flustered by gusts of wind, and relocated to the Woodbury Art Museum in Utah, thrust us into a dynamic weave of force and feeling. Harris is an artist sensitive to the world around her, and her works are full of thought and affective stirring, conjoining questions of human-animal relations, environmental sustainability, and technology with that of an embodied knowing and experience.

Becoming-Animal

The projection I'm referring to here is a work by Harris titled *Light Entering My Room*, which was featured in her exhibition *Listening to the Distance* presented at Woodbury Art Museum, Utah Valley University. The video piece was part of an ensemble of works distributed throughout the gallery, each relating to different found phenomena and experiences of "natural" events, from the casting of shadows and the flickering of sunlight to underwater audio recordings and video recordings of animal life.

Relationships to animals and animal habitats appear as a strong thread throughout Harris' works. She continually draws our attention to animal life by watching and listening, recording and amplifying winged creatures and underwater bodies. In her exhibition, such an approach is featured primarily through two works, *Whale Walk* and *Eagle/Eyrie*. Yet Harris is no straightforward ethnographer, nor does she aim for documentary capture only. In "*Whale Walk*" we are invited to listen to a series of audio recordings the artist collected from scientific collaborators at the University of Washington. Presented through headphones and a portable audio player, visitors are invited to walk through the gallery space, letting the sounds of Humpback whales envelope them in their watery, deep murmuring. These sounds are at once distant from our earthly territory, our terrestrial senses, while they in turn immerse us within their sudden proximity: the immensity of the sounds – the great depth and dimension of their sonority – are brought right up against our skin, delivering all this depth and resonance into our listening.

Such are the concerns that also lead writer David Abram to express a profound astonishment in the face of natural force, of animals and the creaturely, and all the delicate and enormous movements embedded within natural habitats. His phenomenological texts veer between critical analysis and poetic wonder, leading us to the edge of human reason-

ableness, and the touch of the marvelous – quite literally, a writing that shudders with admiration for the wisdom of the animal. Abram honors the animal, in particular, as a wondrous and vital figure, a type of body of knowledge from which human understanding may find guidance, as well as humility.

Abram's interest in animals and animal habitats is given parallel expression in Harris' *Whale Walk*, as well as *Eagle*, a video that shows us bald eagles nesting in their North American habitat. Moving between a close up of a single bird outward to a grouping of two, the work locates us as a distant viewer; we observe the winged creatures, following their activities, their movements and gathering. Yet such distance, as in *Whale Walk*, brings us closer as well – following the captivating presence of this bird of prey, as well as this landscape, the work creates a type of focus, acting as a meditation that invites us to linger within a space of sensing, of being and relating. The video includes an audio recording taken from an entirely different setting, that of the deep sea. Consisting of recordings of a robotic sea-glider as it moves through the ocean recording the environment, which in this case sounds forth as a mysterious ambience of electronic textures, the audio dislocates us, enmeshing what we see within an auditive energy. Such a combination – of the aerial figure of the eagle and the deep underwater acoustics – creates a jarring, hypnotic and strangely serene experience.

Accompanying the video-audio work, the artist has additionally produced a set of five photographic prints. These are larger stills taken from the video, which zoom in on particular details of the eagles. From feathery patterns to hazy color fields, the prints bring us directly against this winged figure; we are immersed in this sudden expanse, which collapses that sense of the near and the far, turning distance and otherness into an aesthetic of slow suspended perception.

Shifting Borders

The shifts in perception embedded in Harris' works lead us into a rather ambiguous field where figure and ground are no longer clearly fixed. In fact, as we move up close, immersed in creaturely sound, or pull back, to wonder at the sudden movements around, the limits of subject and object are equally diffused, remixed. Harris creates a world of animate forms, while drawing upon the vibrancy around her, which equally draws us away, to occupy a zone of becoming.

Mississippi Tornado, a work also appearing within her Listening to the Distance exhibition, is a piece consisting of an audio recording and a wall drawing, both of which refer us to the greater relation between territory and landscape, and the shifting borders between the two. Recorded one evening in Memphis by the artist, the audio captures the sounds of an air raid signal (originating from the second world war) used to warn of impending tornados in the area. In conjunction with this recording, which is presented through headphones in the gallery space, the artist produced a wall drawing depicting the current route of the Mississippi river along with the state border between Arkansas and Mississippi. While the original border was defined by the route of the river, the changes in its pathway have shifted the river away from the state border, creating a tension between what the artist calls "the fluid power of the natural border and the stubborn power of the political border." These two lines are thus intertwined, looping the natural, earthly flow of the river with the rigid state territory, and figuring a simple yet compelling dialogue.

The Wind, the Sea, and Aesthetics of Intensity

Borders and distances, documentary capture and sensorial captivation, creatures and beings, the work of Yolande Harris hovers around these territories of concern, bringing into conversation the pleasures found in perceiving and being part of earthly events, and the questioning as to what might such events impart or enable. The artist seems driven by an interest in synthesizing the affective knowledge gained from the senses and the processes of mediation that empower and extend our acts of sensing. In her research and writings, Harris describes her interests and strategies through the key term “techno-intuition,” which, as she says, “encourages the combination of different ways of knowing, through both technological artifact and intuitive response.”

Her work, *Pink Noise*, installed as a floor projection, gives expression to these overarching concerns, bringing us directly into a zone of immersive and mesmerizing light and sound. Consisting of a video recording of sunlight flickering on the sea, along with audio of underwater recordings captured at the same site and played over headphones hanging above the projection, *Pink Noise*, as in the artist’s *Light Entering My Room*, captures the play of light as a type of found phenomena, while also amplifying the intensity of sensorial experience – of letting such phenomenal appearances delight as well as confound. In this regard, Yolande Harris navigates through an array of daily events, confronting these highly sensuous temporalities, and constructing from them an art of immersion, where noises, reflections, shadows and deep sonorities incite a generative reorientation.

David Abram, *Becoming Animal, an Earthly Cosmology*, New York: Vintage Books, 2010.

In conversation with the artist, 2015.

Yolande Harris, ‘Scorescapes: On Sound, Environment and Sonic Consciousness’, doctoral thesis, (University of Leiden, 2011), 116.

out5: 10 11 28 34
gsvsat 13 4 315 25

out6: 13 4 315 25
time 12 30 30

lat: 52 22 0.289551 N
dlt: 13.7
latlong 52 22 289551 N 4 53 28045

out3: 24 39 57 21
tracking 3 45.110001

out5: 10 11 28 34
out1: 25 7 333 22
date 31 20 66

out2: 16 67 282 28
long: 4 53 0.0280457 E
altitude 13

out4: 31 16 20 30
gsyframe

gsvsat 25 67 111 15

out5: 13 4 315 25
gsvsat 16 67 283 29

lat: 52 22 0.289551 N
gsvsat 24 39 57 19

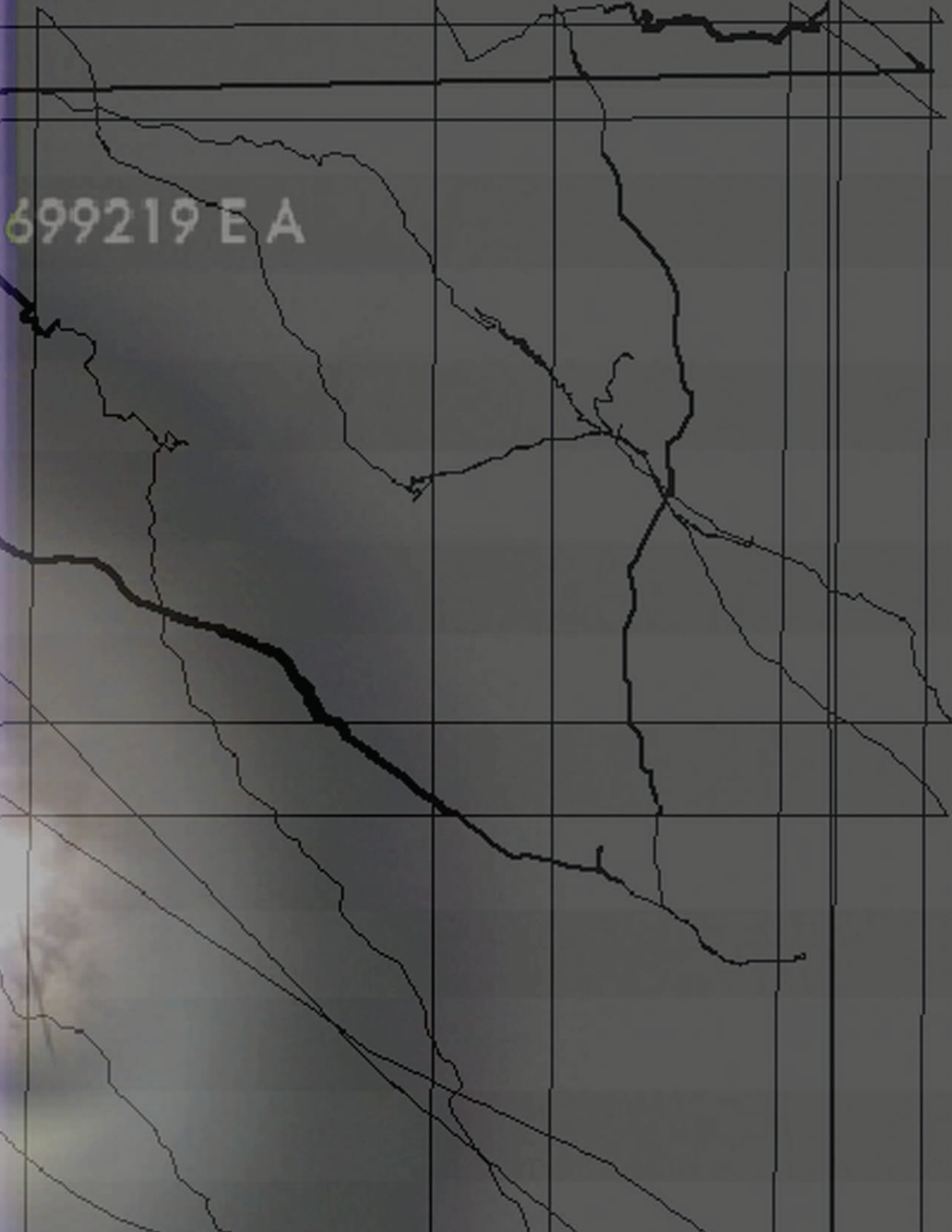
out2: 16 67 282 29
out3: 24 39 57 21
gsvsat 6 34 8 3

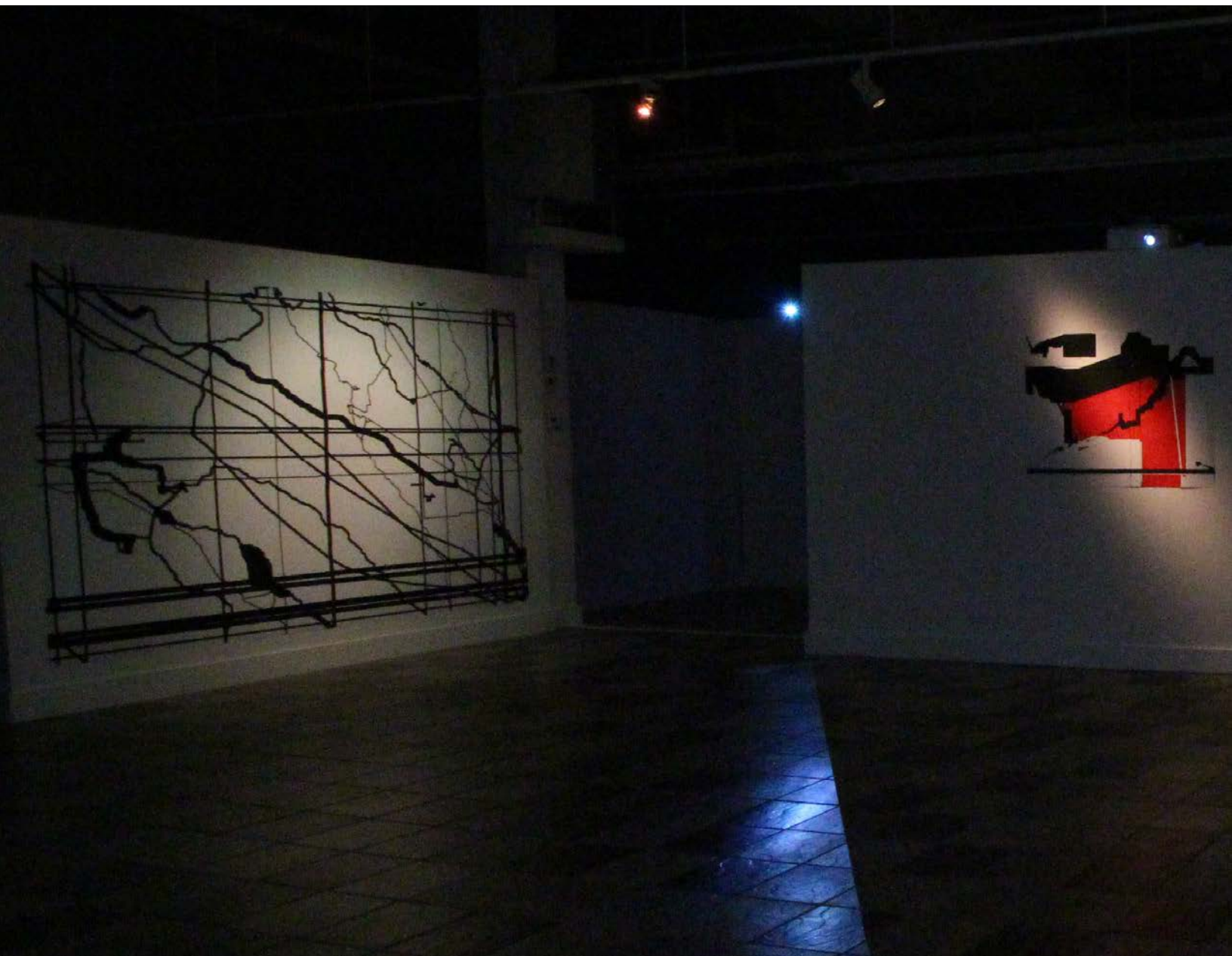
out5: 10 11 28 34
out1: 25 7 333 22
gsvsat 3 16 204 31

out6: 13 4 315 25
long: 4 53 0.0280457 E
gsvsat 10 11 28 34

lat: 52 22 0.289551 N
dlt: 13.7
gsvsat 27 79 335 30

699219 E A

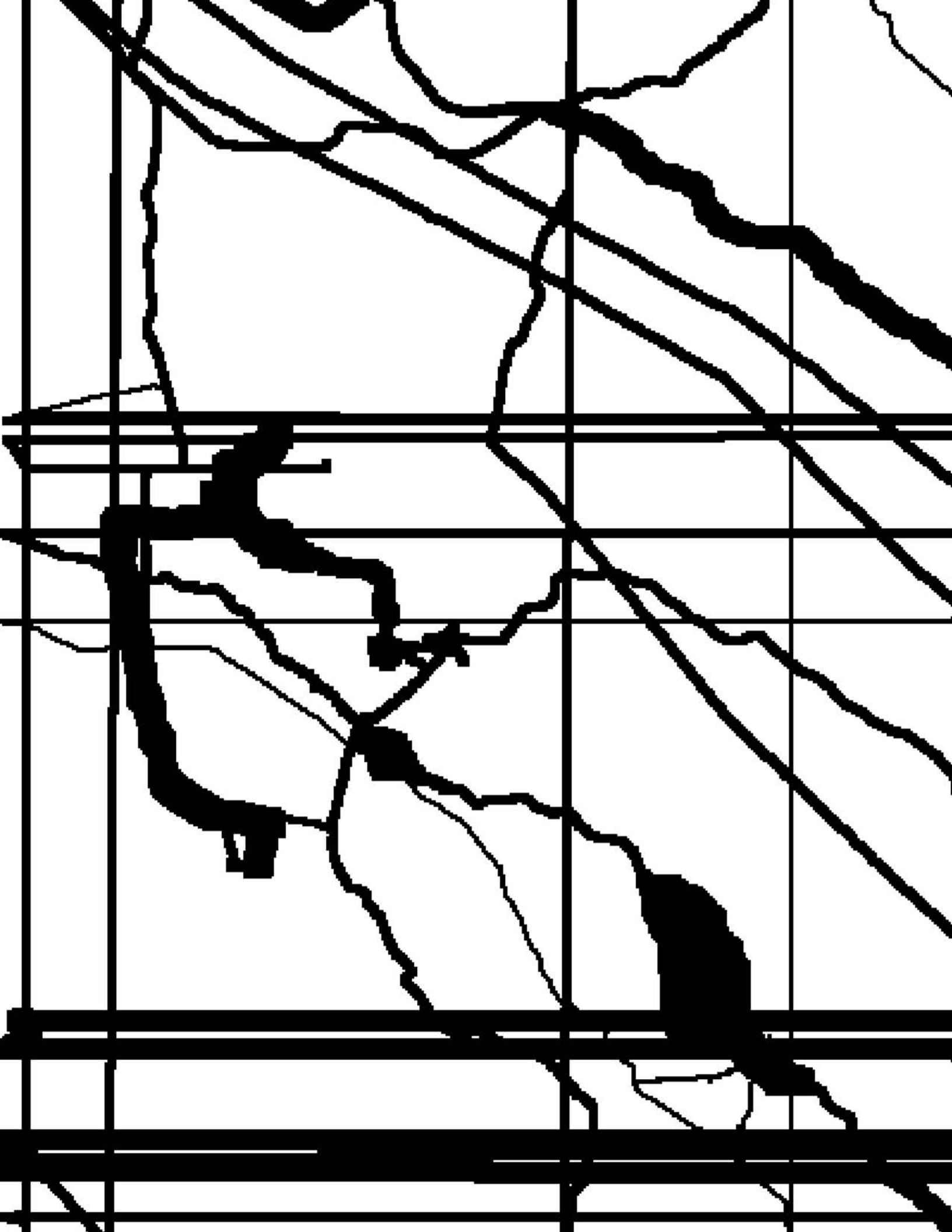


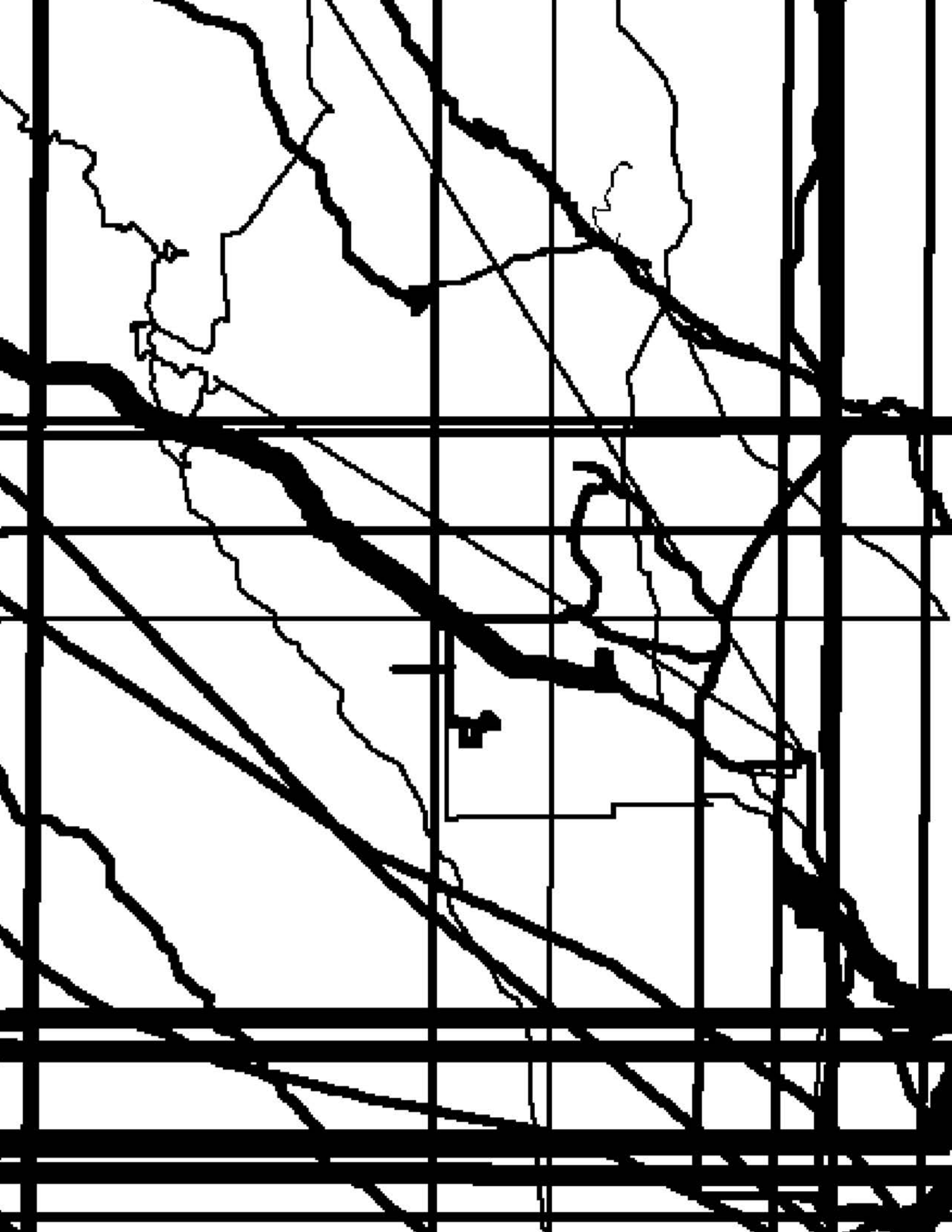


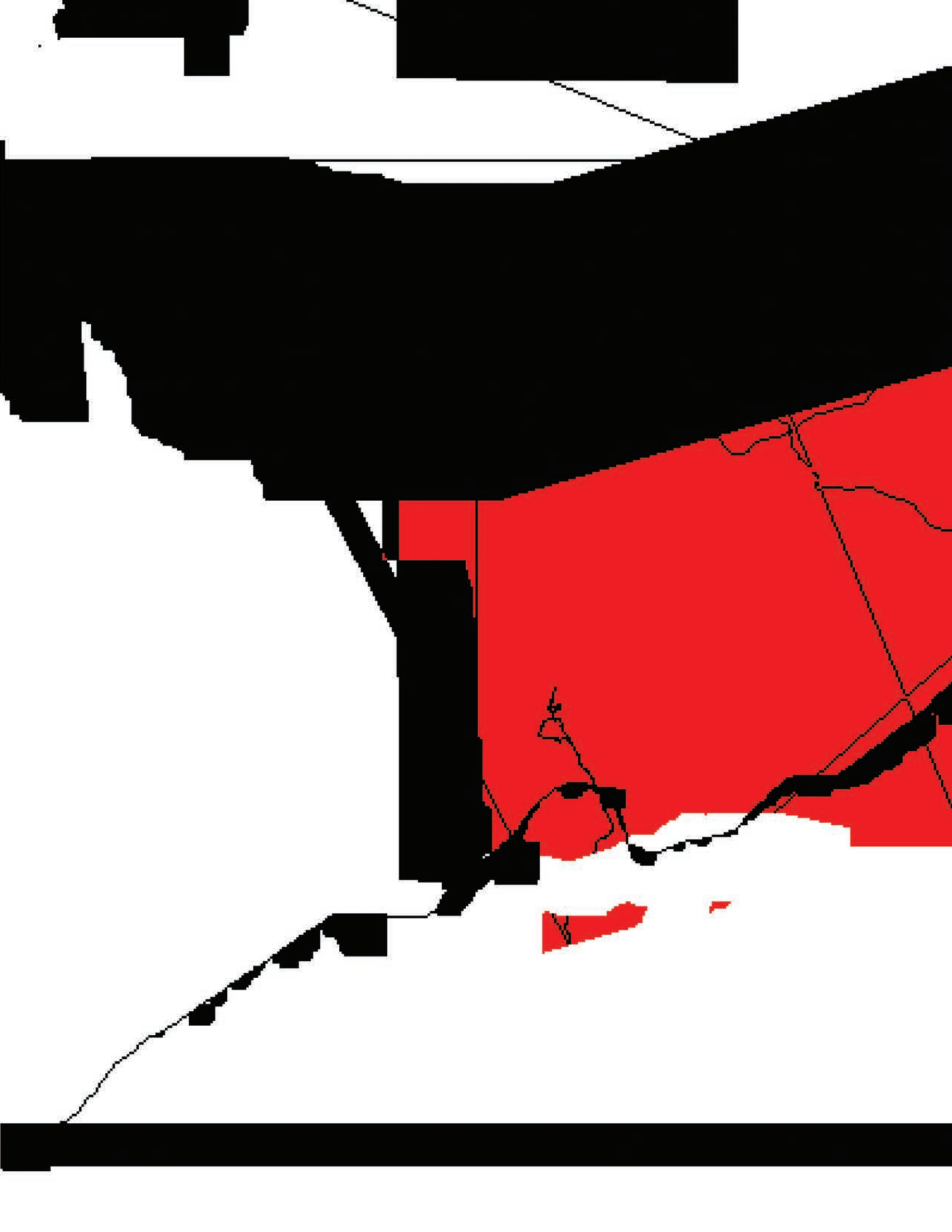


Previous:
Sun Run Sun: Satellite Sounding (2009)
Print on paper (48" x 36"), sound installation
Including video still *Sextant* (2007)

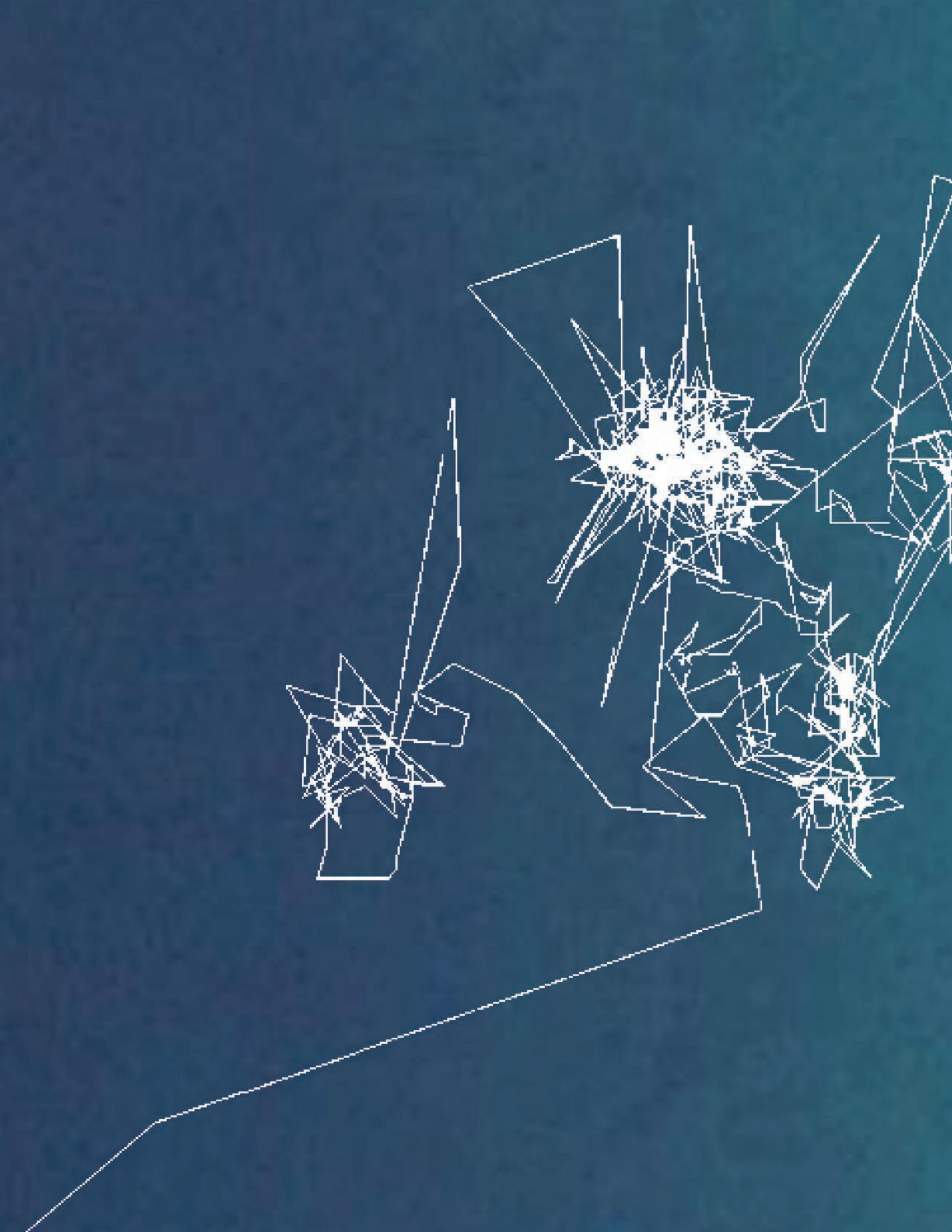
This page:
Map Room: includes
El Camino, *Taking Soundings*,
Sextant, *Sun Run Sun*













Previous:
El Camino (2010), detail

Taking Soundings (2007)
Red Chart (47" x 36"), detail
Anchor (55" x 36"), detail

Integrated Circuits

Annea Lockwood

I first experienced Yolande Harris's work at the Sonic Acts XIII festival in Amsterdam, 2010 and was struck by its boldness - the video work, Pink Noise in particular. Here she was, tackling head on the anthropogenic noise pollution of oceans and rivers, just the sounds I'd been avoiding in my underwater recordings on the Danube, a few years earlier. "Yes", I thought then, "that's the necessary next step," the next stage in acknowledging and reckoning with "the ongoing transformation of the environment through human intervention", as she defines it in the abstract of her paper 'Scorescapes: On Sound, Environment and Sonic Consciousness'.

Her concept of techno-intuition, "combining technical and intuitive methods of knowing" is most timely, as tools for recording environmental processes (as data) and sensory experiences (as visual and aural impressions) are becoming ever more accessible and seductive without necessarily replacing direct experience. I observed a demonstration of the compatibility of these perceptual modes recently, while standing with a group of Audubon members by the Flathead River in Montana at dusk. We were watching three bat specialists delicately extricate several bats from mist nets which they had set up in order to get an idea of which species frequent the area, check individual's weight and age etc., this being a year in which the insect populations on which they feed were really impacted by the hot dry weather and bats are starving in some areas. Several people were tracking the shifting bat numbers on iPods and iPads, using an "app" that also indicated the pitch bands and intensity of the bats' ultrasonic calls. The app was fun to follow, but I was struck by the nice balance watchers showed between tracking the bats by eye and by iPod, with the eyes perhaps winning.

Other than listening to the agitated bats' rapid clicking sounds as they were being freed from the nets, we naturally heard nothing of their striking ultrasonic echolocation calls however. It was like being deaf, able to track their swift acrobatic dance but not hear the 'channel' which guided it. However, through ultrasound recording devices, and transposing software, we can now hear how intricate those calls are.

Realms of sound outside the range of our natural, unmediated hearing, and thus our conscious experience, have fascinated Yolande Harris for a number of years. "Range" has a broad meaning for her, spanning underwater environments and satellite navigation data converted into sound for example, two geographic extremes, but also sound created in the treatment of PTSD, all three of which are interleaved in her audio/visual work *Fishing for Sound* (2010). The radical juxtaposition of these three apparently separate realms suggests all sorts of connections between them as I listen and watch. I'm not only drawn into the lovely sensual world of her imagery, sonic and visual, but more critically, to the intuition that these phenomena are indeed all interconnected. Critical, because that sense of interconnection is, I think, the essential bedrock of environmentalist action and lies at the core of much of her work, expressed in both her art and her research: "... increasing auditory awareness of one's environment promotes a sense of belonging, environmental stewardship, and engagement" (Harris, 2015).

Taking us into remote environments through the medium of various technologies, she invites us to move through them mentally, with a fresh awareness sparked by the juxtaposition of opposites, by displacement. Thus the voices of marine mammals guide individual listeners on a sound walk through desert terrain in *Whale Walk*, a startling juxtaposition which "asks us to imagine connections to environments that are remote but nevertheless essentially connected via global climate systems and ancient imaginings" (Harris, 2015). Their convergence in the body via technology completes the circuit. Audio-visual technology is how many of us experience the world's environments and phenomena - a form of displacement in itself - but the body is truly the connective, malleable medium, and Harris's sounds and camera movements affect us physiologically and emotionally, perhaps below the level of consciousness.

The experience of being completely present and aware in a place is liberating. Artists are devising many techniques for inducing it us but the many ways in which built spaces frame a work can suck the juice out of that illusion. Harris acknowledges this problem: Rather than attempting

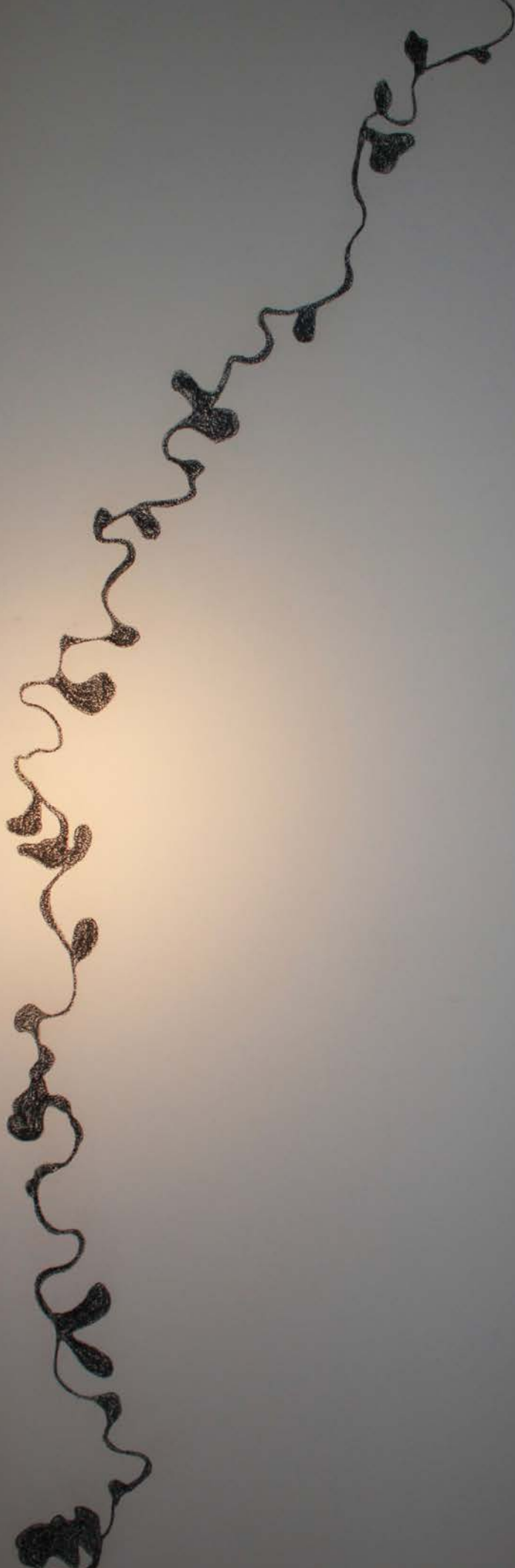
to enhance a sense of immersion by eliminating ambient light sources, for example, she gently lights the room itself, reminding visitors of the dual experiential space – gallery and video overlaid. This creates a paradox, a little tension in the body: we are aware of the displacement of environment and time when we watch and listen to a work such as *Tropical Storm* (2009), but are simultaneously seeking to break out of that framing into the turbulent space of great energies, which she presents so vividly in this work, to be within it.

There is an ongoing discussion in the practice of field recording: Should the listener be made aware of the recordist's presence in the recording itself, or is it acceptable to avoid those little give-away sounds altogether in the interests of a listener's deeper absorption? My own feeling is that the technology of recording and reproduction is so familiar by now that its agency is taken for granted by listeners, and need not be acknowledged explicitly, returning the emphasis to what is being recorded and to our experience of listening deeply. However I would be curious to participate in Harris's *Displaced Sound Walks*, which focus strongly on the physical activity of the recordist in three different modes: listening to sounds clues for navigating through a particular route as you walk, sensing the changing space while recording; listening back to that soundscape as a thing in itself; finally the mentally disjunctive experience of playing the recording back while once again walking that route, with its now-changed sonic mix – a disorienting experience. This structure returns the emphasis to the recordist's body, but from a much expanded and useful perspective, grounded in a conscious awareness of listening as a process and of its importance as we move through physical space, not to mention revealing the subtle slippage of sound-memory.

So the Möbius strip of expanding awareness moves out from one's own body to immediate place, to other phenomena, on to remote environments and back to the self in Harris's rich body of thought and art. These are powerful works, in concept and realization. The sense of interdependence which they evoke and encourage is vital to our transformation into good stewards of our environmental neighborhoods.

Yolande Harris, *Leonardo Abstract Services* 2-10-2012

Yolande Harris, 'Listening to the Ocean in the Desert'. Paper delivered at the Balance-Unbalance International Conference: Water, Climate and Place, Re-imagining Environments, Arizona State University 2015.





Pink Noise (2010)
Video and sound
installation

Mississippi Tornado
(2013)
Wall drawing and
sound installation









Biographies

Yolande Harris works with sound and image to create intimate and visceral experiences that heighten awareness of our relationship to the environment. Her projects consider techniques of navigation, worlds beyond the range of human senses, underwater environments and our relationship to other species. Through video installations and performances, photographic prints, digital instruments, sound walks, performative lectures and writings, she integrates her artwork and theories of techno-intuition and sonic consciousness, in which expanded forms of awareness emerge through a critical use of media, observation and listening. Her current project *Listening to the Distance* explores expanded perceptions, the technological mediation of distant environments and the animals that inhabit them.

Yolande's exhibitions include the Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, the Institute of Contemporary Art London, and the House of World Cultures Berlin. Awards and fellowships include the Mondriaan Fund for Visual Arts; Academy of Media Arts, Cologne; Orpheus Research Center, Ghent; Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht. Her doctoral dissertation *Scorescapes: on Sound, Environment and Sonic Consciousness*, (Leiden University 2011) was awarded Best Doctoral Abstract by the Journal *Leonardo*. Yolande is currently Assistant Professor in the Film/Animation/Video Department at Rhode Island School of Design.

Robert Campbell is a media artist, filmmaker and educator living in the Seattle area. Since 1984 his work has been exhibited at festivals and exhibitions nationally and internationally in Europe and Japan. He has produced documentaries in the U.S., Italy, Ukraine, Zambia and South Africa, with excerpts of his work in Africa selected for the *Journey to Planet Earth* series on the PBS network. He is on the faculty of the Art Department at Cornish College of the Arts, where he is co-director of the Institute of Emergent Technology and Intermedia (iET+I).

Brandon LaBelle is an artist, writer and theorist working with sound culture, voice, and questions of agency. He develops and presents artistic projects and performances within a range of international contexts, often working collaboratively and in public. Recent projects include The Living School, South London Gallery (2016), The Stranger Seminar, Liquid Architecture, Melbourne (2015), and Hobo College, Marrakech Biennial (2014). He is the author of *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (2014), *Diary of an Imaginary Egyptian* (2012), *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (2010), and *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (2015; 2006).

Annea Lockwood is known for her explorations of natural acoustic sounds and environments in works ranging from sound art and installations to concert music. Her music has been presented in many venues and festivals including: MACBA Barcelona, the Walker Art Center, Issue Project Room, Sonic Acts XIII and the Tectonics Festival 2015, New York. Recent work includes Wild Energy, a collaboration with Bob Bielecki, a site-specific multi-channel installation focused on geophysical, atmospheric and mammalian infra and ultra sound sources, created for the sound art exhibition, A Garden of Sonic Delights, at Caramoor, New York.

Edward Shanken writes and teaches about the entwinement of art, science, and technology with a focus on interdisciplinary practices involving new media. Recent and forthcoming publications include essays on art and software, land art, sound art and ecology, and bridging the gap between new media and contemporary art. He edited and wrote the introductions to *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology and Consciousness* (University of California Press, 2003) and *Systems* (Whitechapel/MIT Press, 2015). His critically praised survey, *Art and Electronic Media* (Phaidon Press, 2009) entered its third printing in 2014, expanded with an extensive, multimedia Online Companion. Many of his publications can be accessed via his website: <http://artexetra.com>.

List of Exhibited Works

Whale Walk (2015)

Sound walk, recording of humpback whales, headphones with integrated sound player

Eagle (2015)

Video and sound installation, hand drawn wall text (dimensions variable) sound recording from sea-glider courtesy of Kate Stafford, University of Washington.

Eyrie (2015)

5 archival color prints on paper, created from details of *Eagle* video

Back (40" x 53")

Ruff (40" x 56")

Eye (40" x 46")

Feathers (58" x 40")

Beak (69" x 40")

Light Entering My Room (2015)

Video light installation (whole room), recorded in a Pacific Northwest old-growth rainforest

Mississippi Tornado (2013)

Wall drawing and sound installation, hanging headphones (dimensions variable)

Pink Noise (2010)

Video and sound installation, floor projection, hanging headphones, underwater sound recording (dimensions variable)

Sun Run Sun: Satellite Sounding (2009)

Print on paper (48" x 36") sound composition based on audience responses to sound walks with GPS sonification instruments the Satellite Sounders

El Camino (2009)

Print on paper (79" x 109") GPS traces from the Camino Real

Sextant (2007)

Video and sound installation (dimensions variable), view through a sextant, with sonification of GPS data

Taking Soundings (2007)

3 prints on paper, sound on headphones, location recordings and GPS sonifications

Anchor (55" x 36") GPS trace of a boat on anchor

Red Chart (47" x 36") image from live performance using GPS data

Blue Map (49" x 36") image from live performance using GPS data

Acknowledgements

For Jasmin

This catalogue was made possible by the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation

With support from the Mondriaan Fund

Curator: Melissa Hempel
Catalogue design: Yolande Harris
Edited by: Edward Shanken
Printing: Utah Valley University

Exhibited at the Woodbury Art Museum, 21 July - 19 September 2015



Yolande Harris 2016

Sounds, videos and other documentation: www.yolandeharris.net

