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Coda: Persistence at the End of Civilisation

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Migration and
the Climate Emergency

Honi Ryan





"To the migrants from *outside* who have to cross borders and leave their countries behind at the price of immense tragedies, we must from now on add the migrants from *inside* who, while remaining in place, are experiencing the drama of seeing themselves *left behind by their own countries*. What makes the migratory crisis so difficult to conceptualize is that it is the symptom, to more or less excruciating degrees, of an ordeal common to all: the ordeal of finding oneself *deprived of land*."¹

Bruno Latour

Persistence at the End of Civilisation is a body of work about climate migration that I produced between January 2020 - December 2021. As a series of performative installations, it comprises sculpture, painting, photography, video, food, participation, embodiment and movement, research and text; as well as sound, text, and performance pieces made in collaboration with artist Abi Tariq.

This body of work grew in response to the megafires that burned in Australia in 2019-20, and brings an urban audience into proximity with the tactile reality of the aftermath of wildfires. The burnt trees that are the central, consistent part of the work are pine trees. They were previously used as Christmas trees, discarded on the streets where I collected them before burning them at Les Moulins, Studio Orta, east of Paris.

Reusing these materials was an attempt to intervene in the blatant commodification of nature, a topic that was explored in the first performance of the work wherein I sat under a row of bushy green pine trees, hung from the ceiling like carcasses in an abattoir, reading and tearing up a delicately aging French-English 1960s edition dictionary. Dictionaries, a bastion of recorded knowledge and culture, are made from the wood pulp also resulting from the commodification of nature. During the performance, when the first and last words on the page spoke poetically to me, I kept them. Some of these word combinations are on the following page here.

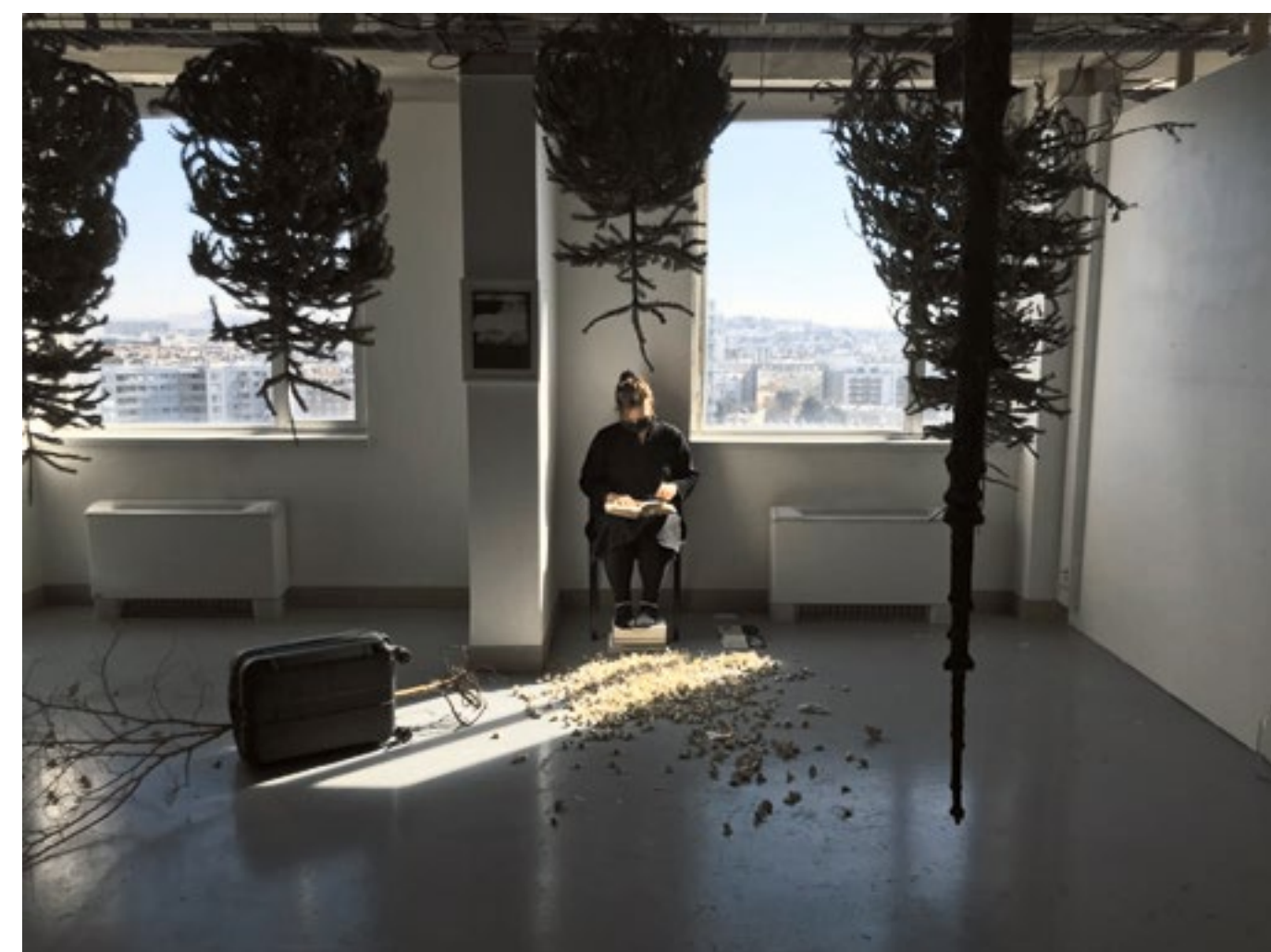
A second installation of the work saw the exhibition of a text piece made in collaboration with Abi Tariq in our series of 'mindsculptures' - texts based on the effects of a speculative 'new gravity', stating that "New Gravity Melts All National Borders". These mindsculptures invite the reader to create a world in their mind where a force of nature has pushed back against some of the issues we have created. Other texts in this series include "New Gravity Makes All Guns Stop Working", and "New Gravity Stops All Nukes from Falling".

A third iteration of the work included an endurance performance by Mana Shojaei, who inhabited the charred landscape as her post-apocalyptic home for six hours, and offered the audience edible dirt, fashioned into balls that tasted of smoke by chef Marouane Dekaoui.

The text that is interwoven throughout this photo essay was performed as spoken word in a further exhibition of the work in Paris on 12 January, 2024. It included cut-up quotations from the late Bruno Latour's writings on climate and migration in his book *Down to Earth*.² It was layered into a soundscape by Abi Tariq, and a French translation was performed live by Camille Pellicer within the exhibition *Shaping: Refracted Times* curated by Zohreh Deldadeh at Poush in Paris-Aubervilliers.



destructively – detrimental;
domicile – *donner* (home – to give);
dying – earth;
earthen – eclipse;
enchancement – *encore* (enchantment – again);
excellent – excommunication;
ingeniously – injury;
moralement – *mort* (morally – dead);
oratoire – *ordure* (oratory – excrement);
principalement – *privilège* (principally – privilege);
scavenge – school;
témoin – *temps* (witness – time);
tenable – *ténèbres* (tenable – gloom);
violently – visitor;
voulu – *vrai* (required – truth).³





Land gives way beneath our feet

Land we stole

Land we still refuse to share



Yet the fire rages indiscriminately
across borders
and into the nation I created in my mind.







This border is in my mind
This border is on my tongue
The land did not define this border
I hold this border in my heart and I cannot let it go







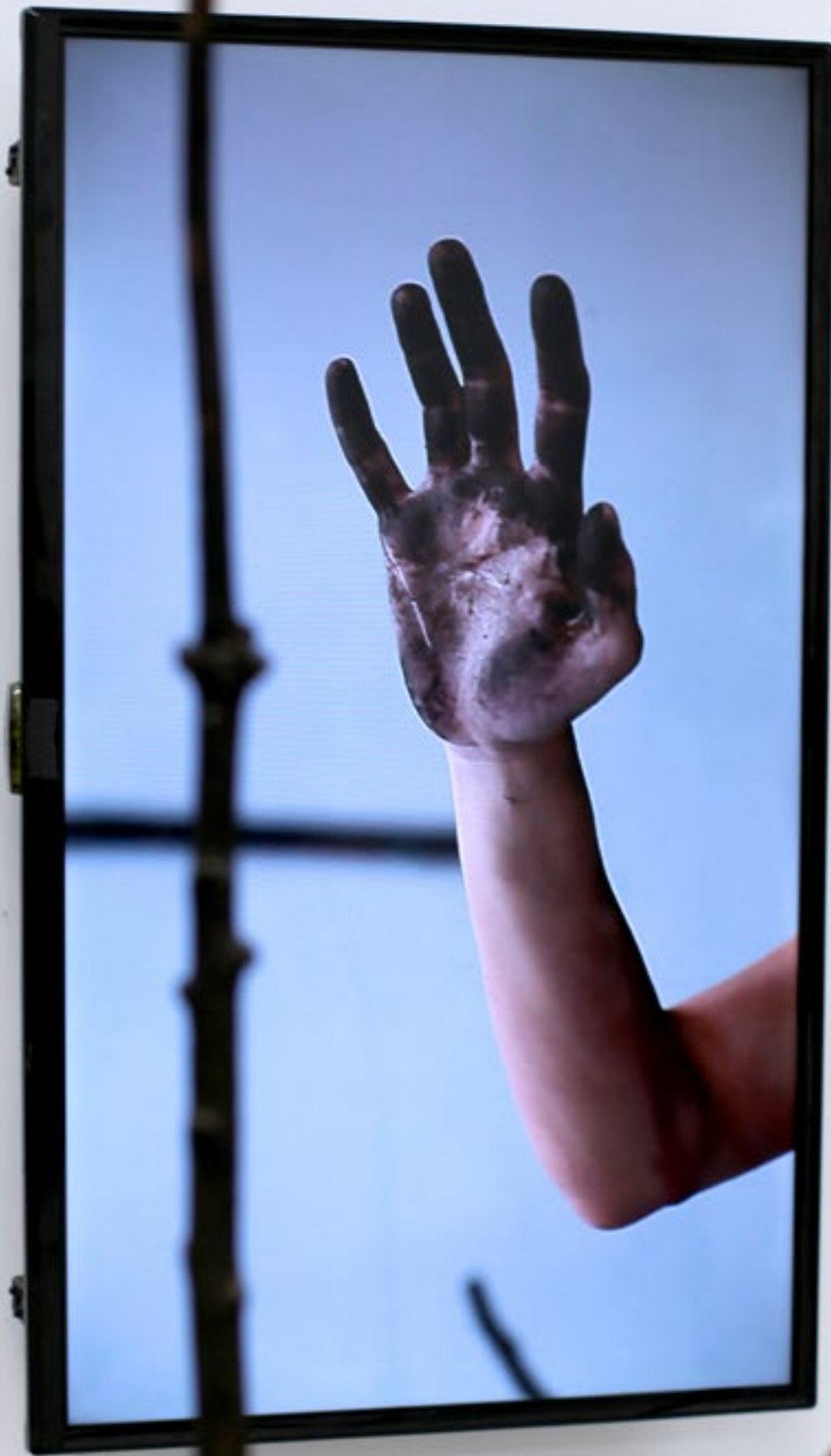
Dig
in search of hospitality to give others
dig, to relive loneliness
dig, to find home in the earth.





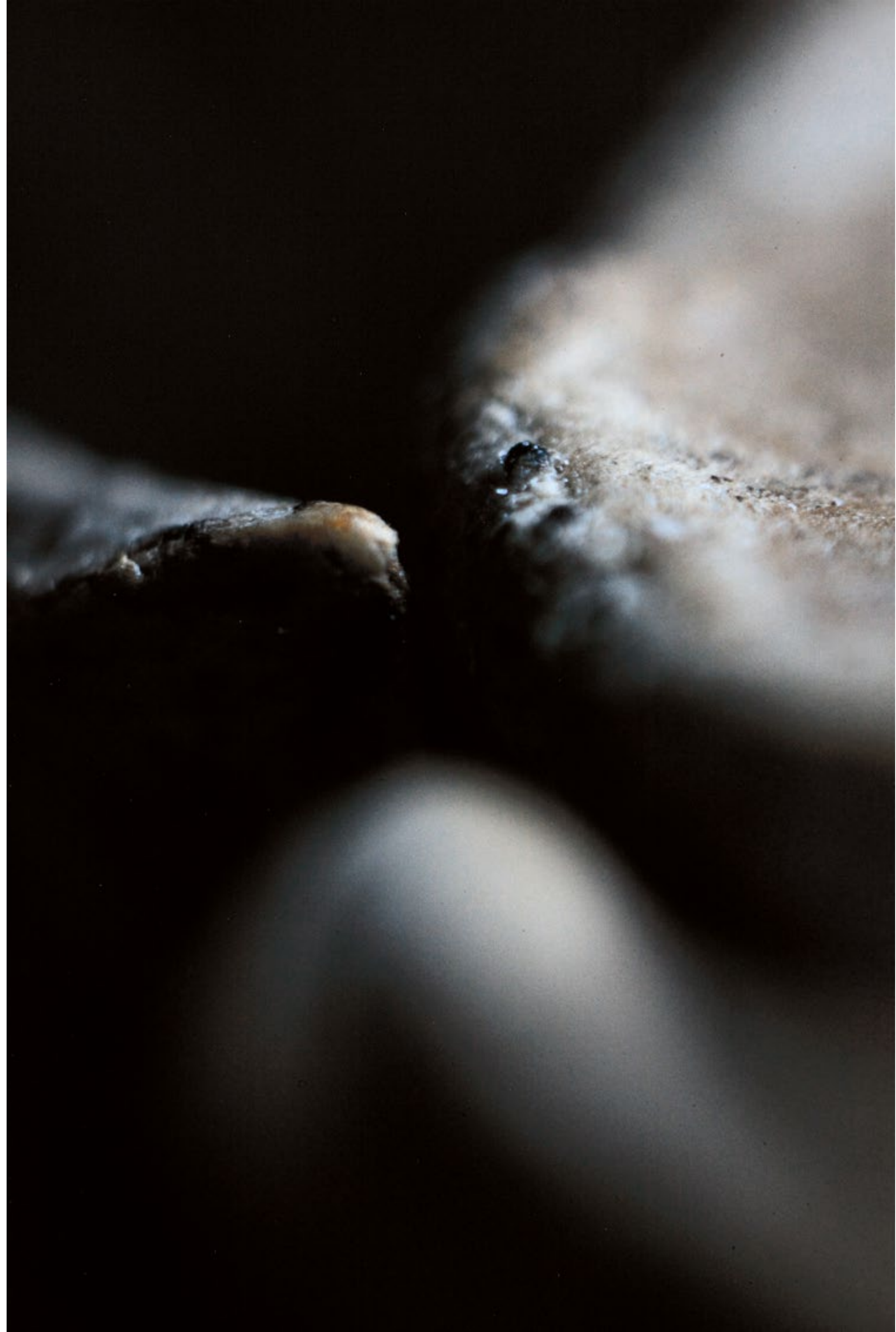
We find ashes
transform them into something we can consume
and clutch the abdomen.
Sustenance.
Sustenance.
Sustenance.





These ashes do not fertilise the memories we hold.
Instead we dig in the burned remains
in the hope of alchemy.
Looking for abundance, wanting to host,
we wait

the quiet creeps in
and makes space for wind.





Endnotes

¹ Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 6.

² Latour, *Down to Earth*.

³ Marguerite-Marie Dubois, *Dictionnaire Moderne Français - Anglais* (Paris: Larousse, 1960), various pages.

Plates

All images unless otherwise listed: Honi Ryan, *Persistence at the End of Civilisation*, performative installation, 2021.
Sound by Abi Tariq. Performances by Camille Pellicer, Mana Shojaei, and Abi Tariq.

Page 2: Honi Ryan, *Migration*, sculpture (suitcase, tree root, acrylic), 2021.

Pages 7 and 9 background: Honi Ryan and Abi Tariq, *New Gravity 3*, mindsculpture (charcoal wall text), 2021.

Page 8: Honi Ryan, *Persistence*, acrylic on paper, 24 × 32 cm, 2021.

Page 12: Honi Ryan, *Persistence at the End of Civilisation*, participatory performance installation, edible detail (nuts, sesame, rosemary, flavour). Gastronomy by Marouane Tadlaoui.

