



# ground.

April 9 - 22nd May 2022

Alicia King

Eloise Kirk

Sally Ann McIntyre

Henri Papin (Meijers and Walsh)

Dylan Sheridan

Everything known comes from the ground.

It is the basis of all of our tangibility. Everything we can touch (and a few things we cannot) have been birthed from it in one way or another.

The ground. Both earth, but also, a connection *to* the earth.

Electrically, the ground speaks of the invisible waves of energy which hug its curvature, bouncing from protuberance to protuberance, antenna to antenna. It signifies the vast potential of the terrestrial, while suggesting an infinite capacity to absorb, whether that be weather, seismic energy from below, atmospheric energy from above or electrical currents, both natural and human engineered.

We have exploited it in many ways to grow our technology in leaps and bounds, most of which has returned to ground. Objects distinctly transformed from their origins, whose functions have begun a period of obsolescence which materially, will take centuries to complete.

Dylan Sheridan gives life to inanimate things by feeding them electricity. He is both composer and artist, and the machines/instruments which he creates are wrenched from the precipice of dysfunction. With quiet imposition he forces their materiality into an organised marriage. From the solder through to the metal, the plastic, and the in-between from which they are constructed, you can feel the tightly directed currents of energy which jerk each object into a doleful kind of repetitive dance.

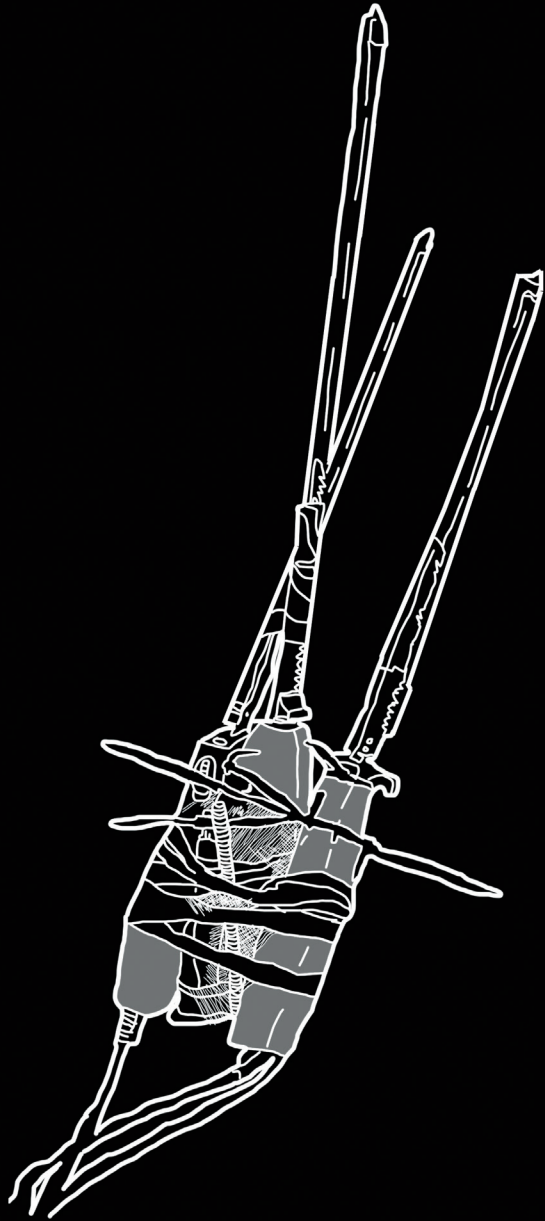
The works are surprisingly anthropomorphic. Hans Bellmer, in his publication *Les Jeux de la poupee*, focussed on “*the mechanics and ball joints of the kinetic artifact*”<sup>1</sup> citing their origins “*in the automatons of the byzantine epoch and even in Judaic mysticism – ‘the apparatus resembles those censers that turn yet retain their equilibrium.’*”<sup>2</sup>

Sheridan’s objects, likewise instilled with the mysticism of the electrical, show their energetic expenditure. But electrical circuits are less easily ‘read’ than mechanical ones, the tiny resistors and capacitors take on qualities like those mystical censers – they function yet retain the secrecy about their workings.

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1 Siegfried Zielinski, ...After the Media, 2011 [Berlin] p. 33.

2 Ibid.



Three violin bows emerge from the suggestive brutality of electric knife motor bodies. They form a chorus of both aggressor and witness, but their scale is comical. Almost doll-like. Bellmer, who was also a fan of the deconstructed figurative commented that the best quality his creations could adopt would be one

*“far removed from the lofty pedestal of some unchanging function, instead...rich in chance and possibilities...(one) which approaches its surroundings provocatively like a divining-rod in order to discern, here and there, the feverish responses to what is always awaited, and everyone can repeat: The sudden images of the You.”*<sup>3</sup>

Bellmer was speaking on the notion of games as a kind of experimental poetry, and the nature of the “playable” as being something which could be regarded as a “poetry stimulator” Here, the jittering cacophony of bows (*String Trio*) jostle for attention. Beleaguered by their limiting connection to the wall by the same cable which allows them life, they are deeply poetic in their reflection of a human spirit always gambling against its better interests.

Nearby, *Squealy Bin*, a rigged-up oscillating bin lid that chirps merrily as it becomes active, responds to a sound composition by transmission artist Sally Ann McIntyre. McIntyre (known in the radio world as radio cegeste), a New Zealand/Australia based artist composed the work *The New Zealand Storm Petrel* in 2014. The petrel, (a tiny seabird which was thought in 1850 to be extinct,) was sighted again in 2003, and although its image is now once again available, its call has never been recorded.

McIntyre has a taxonomic relationship to sound, rather like a bowerbird padding her aural nests with a specific focus of the electromagnetic frequencies, collecting tiny grains which formulate her complex and richly layered works. They evoke a sense of the field recording, but also, field-recording-as-diorama. Particularly in this piece, for the *Petrel* is not only a reconstruction, but a reimagining of a species

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3 Hans Bellmer, *Preface to Les Jeux de la poupee / The games of the doll* [Paris 1949], in: Hans Bellmer (2005), *The Doll*, trans. Malcolm Green, p. 59.

which has kept possession of its own voice, uncolonized by early collectors of the natural world.

*Petrel* uses elements from the broader electromagnetic spectrum combined with the resonant vibration of strings. Here and there, VLF\* flickers and pops. The sound of lightning strikes and high-altitude discharge. The song of the auroral chorus, chirping its way into a dawn perhaps shared by this oft nocturnal, pelagic\*\* bird. Beneath this, a broader composition in static.

The sounds of distant stars exploding; the raining down of ancient dusts. This is the sky which carries the *Petrel* – a dark landscape of magnetic creaks and hisses, of rapid oscillations between silence and enveloping drone. Richard Allen reminds us of McIntyre’s fondness for early recording devices.

*“A wave of radio static rides in like the tide. McIntyre writes that she ‘wanted to evoke the sounds of the earliest field recording before the tape recorder was invented.’ The static field suggests magnetism and wax cylinders, the recording choices of a bygone era.”*<sup>4</sup>

In the beginning, they used phonographs to engrave sound onto the surface of a wax cylinder which could then be listened to. Not infinitely though, the delicacy of the wax ensured that the recordings would eventually be erased by the same process used to listen to them – a thin penetrating needle. This manner of collecting is so beautifully ephemeral and suggests a very clear sense of value in the process of acquisition. Although nothing is permanent, some things are worth trying to hold onto a little longer. Like an endangered species of bird. Like what we might imagine its song to be.<sup>5</sup>

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\* Very Low Frequency. Natural radio frequencies operate here in the 3-30kHz range.

\*\* The New Zealand Storm Petrel spends most of its life in the open sea, coming in to remote land only to breed, being active mostly only at night.

4 Richard Allen. 2014. [acloserlisten.com/2014/01/07radio-cegeste-the-new-zealand-storm-petrel/](http://acloserlisten.com/2014/01/07radio-cegeste-the-new-zealand-storm-petrel/)

5 McIntyre referred to this technology again in later works, namely the *Collected huia notations (like shells on the shore where the sea of living memory has receded)* (2015) by having this new composition cut to wax cylinder and exhibited on a small playable phonograph inside the gallery space. The composition, which is “a work for phonograph, solo piano, and extinct bird. It collates the four known Western musical notations of the song of the Huia (*Heteralocha acutirostris*), an endemic New Zealand wattlebird of the ancient family Callaeidae, which was driven to extinction in the last decades of the Nineteenth Century, partially through the attentions of overzealous wealthy Victorian Ornithologists and Museum collectors.”



There is a democracy in storing information like this, a recognition that not everything is important and needs to be archived into our collective history. Some things are to be shared until they cannot be shared any longer. Perhaps the experience of listening to a thing together constructs its tangibility. The conversations afterwards, the collective remembering locates its place. This technology, and the use of radio as a medium itself, describe a passion in McIntyre for the seemingly fleeting or impermanent.

Radio is the thing which continues long past our collective present. In describing the propagation of radio waves, one must refer to spacetime. We can hear our history still if we are able to occupy the space it inhabits.\*\* Our strongest broadcasts can travel through space almost infinitely. In the era of analogue television, you could fall asleep on the couch and wake to the sound of stars collapsing from the beginning of the universe.

That static used to signify the end of broadcast. You would wake, blinking in the darkness, to a hypnotic hiss we used to call *snow*. Outside the streets would be dark and quiet and there was a sense of the world shutting down for the day. Hard to imagine now with the incessant broadcasting which infiltrates tv, laptop, phone, etc and which crosses time barriers with a mocking laugh.

It is *always* the present on the internet.

Douglas Kahn describes the moment this rapid increase in time dilation began,

*“...Any sense of terrestrial materiality and connectedness in the earth-in-circuit – with its earth returns, earth circuits, grounds and earth currents – that may have attended earlier telecommunications have over time given way to tropes of the annihilation of space and time...[which] was accelerated in the early nineteenth century by railway travel...”*<sup>6</sup>

Railway travel was the forerunner, but the telegraph made movement

\*\* i.e.: Get in a spaceship, travel through space to find those early wavelengths which continue to reverberate through the (almost) vacuum of space. Moving at the same speed as light, one would have to travel some 112 light years in order to hear them. 1 light year is about 9.7 trillion kilometres. It's a lot. But theoretically not impossible. Maybe one day.

6 Kahn, Douglas. *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth :Magnitude in the Arts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. Print.



through physical space almost completely irrelevant. Suddenly one could inhabit the space of another, irrespective of distance or time. It marked the distinct and destructive change in perception of the relevance of both time and space. Our obsession with technological development allowed us to then impose this state of being *outside-time-and-space* onto everything around us. Rebecca Solnit describes this imposition here in regard to materiality:

*“Labour and Materials were themselves abstracted as the one went into the factory to become a series of simple repetitive gestures rather than an authorship of objects, and the objects themselves came to be bought and used by people more and more remote from the process of their making.”*<sup>7</sup>

Objects became divorced from the origin of their making, and we produced far too many of them. Then the airwaves were flooded with noise. So much content became a blanket, obscuring the delicacy of natural radio signals, but also the simplicity of existence.

Radio was once magic made by science.\*

Copper coils, induction, long wires cut into fractions of wavelengths. Early broadcasters embedded sound onto invisible waves and allowed them to drift into space, to be caught somewhere else by an antenna. Like a butterfly net. I imagine these radio waves as filaments which have grown in immense density to fill every square inch of airspace, from below the soil to the edge of the ionosphere, a density forming a thick jellified standing wave which repeats and bounces between both boundaries with incessancy.

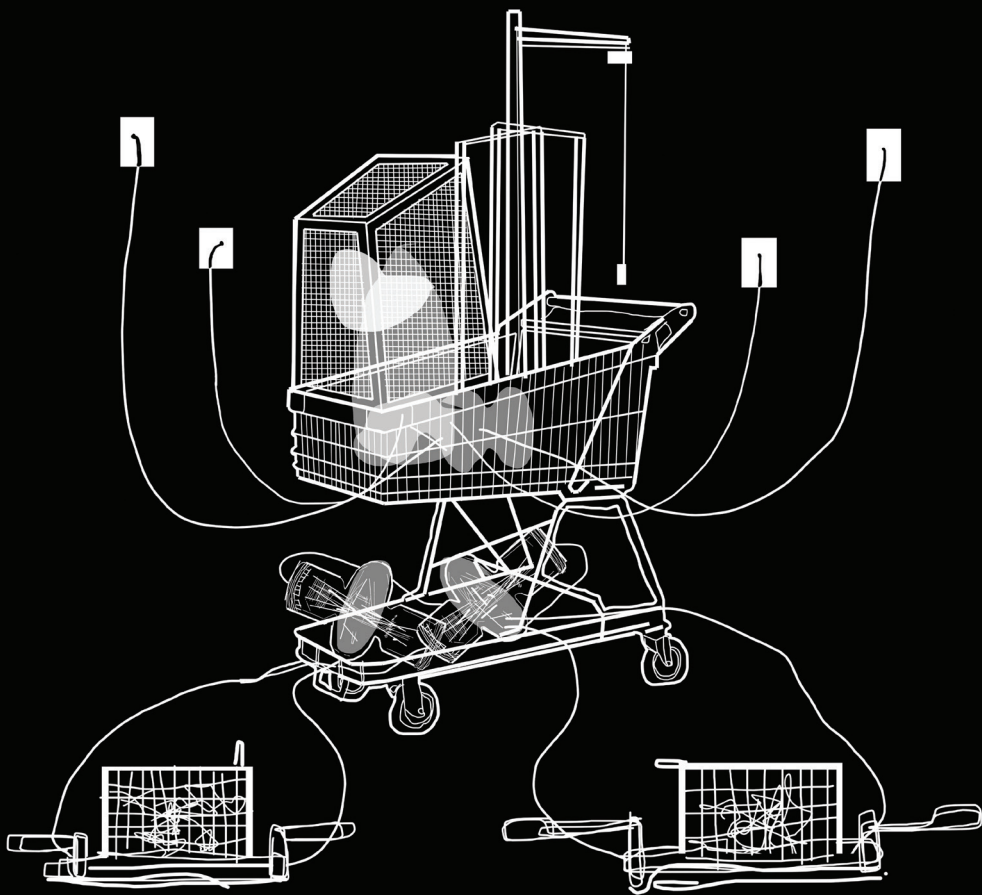
This density provokes a claustrophobia felt by a few.

Henri Papin’s *Faraday Sled* is a campaign sled with no intent on exploration. It offers temporary shelter from the encroaching electromagnetic noise of the world. A defensive architecture, an anechoic chamber which excludes all but very specific listening. Everything external is blocked, and from inside this protected cage, an empty signal is broadcast, producing a thin wave of silence amongst the mass. It blocks a nearby local religious radio station at 87.6 FM.

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7 Solnit, Rebecca. “The Annihilation of Time and Space.” *New England Review* (1990-), vol. 24, no. 1, Middlebury College Publications, 2003, pp. 5–19.

\* Before that, of course it existed unmolested by human intervention, radiating silently with the occasional rumble. Telling the birds which direction in which to travel.



A circuit of barely recognisable technology sits perched inside a glass vessel, surrounded by a dozen or so compasses which follow a moving magnet with the intensity of a sunflowers' gaze following the sun. Objects are stuffed wherever they can be stuffed. Copper pipe forms an antenna or a counterpoise to this oddly resonant circuit-of-things. Hard to tell, it all sits perched and embedded into a shopping trolley.

Surrounding this, receptive tentacles of copper cable connect to capacitor plates and to two energy centres which reproduce images of the first tesla coil test ever performed. They delight in the showers of induced electricity flying around the room, breaking the dielectric of the air itself over and over again, looking for purchase. Tesla himself sits amongst the deluge of sparks in a tongue-in-cheek in-camera superimposition. There is something of an altar, something of the strategic arrangement of the itinerant. How does one maintain a connection to ground when one cannot physically remain?

The trolley sits in this space, anchored into position with thick copper rods and copper plates, conductive and searching. Searching for the sounds of the universe. The groans and sighs of a planet world-weary with matter. Papin's *Sled* is a device for circumnavigating everything known, in favour of speculative exploration. Looking for alternatives, for clues we overlooked on the journey of our technological advancement. It uses the ground circuit to exchange the complexity of human-ness for the simplicity of being.

It projects silence into the mass of casually discarded broadcasts. A moment to reflect without exterior influence. It is a gesture, more than anything, about providing space. Where McIntyre's reconstruction pays homage to the plucky sea bird skirting extinction, Papin's *Sled* hunts for isolation while attempting to shield the earth from actions which have led us to this overwhelming place in time. What they share perhaps, is a caution about coming in to land, and an exaltation of quietness.

A sense of the vast quiet is celebrated in the works of Eloise Kirk. Her objects, sometimes hollow-and-resonant, sometimes solid-and-receptive, sit like the distributed leavings of a glacier. Objects both cemented-together and eroded-by time, placed *just so* configuring *this* ground into the seemingly random dispersal of a moraine.



Each sculpture here, however, radiates with intent. These are not the remnants of slow time and the unpredictable hand of nature but significant totems. Conglomerates which embody stillness and celebrate the process of *weathering*.

The significance of their arrangement call to mind the placement of ancient structures. They have an age to them and each one suggests the possibility of a deeper embedding – as if these stones we see are only a partially exposed part of a greater bulk which lies hidden deep into the earth.

Like earth rods.

We spend an eternity looking for significance.

Photographer Alfred Watkins published the book *The old straight track: its mounds, beacons, moats sites and mark stones* in 1925. In it he discusses a desire to know the history of the people of Britain before Roman occupation.

While photographing the landscape he noted the regularity and visual connection between significant sites and equated these regularities in the landscape as the result of human intervention, and human connection.

He noted that “*The old straight track decided the site of almost every branch of human communal activity...*”<sup>8</sup> Watkins coined these long eroded, barely visible lines Ley Lines, (Ley means *cleared space* in old English) a title which suggested connectivity and intent on the behalf of the unknown, original inhabitants of the land.

This notion of intent assumed a mystical significance many years later to the Earth Mysteries Movement, (quasi-religious, quasi-scientific group) who suggested that the placement of these pathways and ancient structures followed a network of invisible lines which circumnavigated the globe.

They were certain that these sites and others, including Stonehenge, the Pyramids in Egypt, Machu Pichu etc aligned together in one framework. The thought was that these ley lines were earth energies that were somehow related to telluric currents. The latter are naturally occurring (sometimes manmade) extremely low frequency currents which occur in the earth’s crust and mantle. Mostly geomagnetically induced, they are largely affected by changes in the magnetic field caused by solar winds and responses in our magnetosphere.

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8            Watkins, Alfred. *The old straight track: its mounds, beacons, moats sites and mark stones*. 1925. London. Xvi.

Telluric currents are easily harnessed by embedding a pair of electrodes into [a conductive, ie; wet] ground or sea. One of the simplest circuits – a copper bar, an iron bar and some cable creates a sort of earth battery. They were used originally by very early telegraphy operators as energy sources before we flooded the earth with so many signals that it became impossible to decipher one from the next. Herbert N. Casson noted the point of saturation,

*“There was no way to silence those [other] noises.  
Reluctantly they agreed that the only way was to pull up the ends of each wire  
from the tainted earth, and join them by a second wire.”<sup>9</sup>*

This was the end of the idea of an earth-circuit. Our devices grew more complex from this point, losing that initial intuitive elegance in order to make up for the loss of the earth. An earth which according to Casson, had become unco-operative. An inconvenience. It may well be that at this time we lost our own intuitive connection to ground. Our developing hunger for technology progressively turned more and more to the skies. Without our probes and our prodding, the ground once again returned to relative quietness. Or maybe our devices changed. Perhaps we just stopped listening.

Telegraphy operated on a system of prior knowledge. Using a device with predetermined symbols, and the binary system of on-off, one was able to direct electrical current to a series of needles which pointed at whichever symbol was relevant. It produced a very basic language between people separated by large distances in space. There was some thought that the ancient sites did a similar thing across time. That knowing a basic symbolic language would allow people across time to communicate with each other (albeit, according to the arrow of time, i.e. – from past to future)

Eloise Kirk’s structures might well do the same. Although we have lost this symbolic language, we may intuit their significance. Or even, should they act as some sort of ancient circuit, we may well feel traces of their resonance.

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9 Kahn, Douglas. *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. Print.

Alicia King's work *Anhydrous* removes the sacred object from its source and dissects it with a coolly scientific eye. Part collector of exotic materials, and part worker from Solnit's aforementioned factory, King's metaphysical objects are as removed from our working material knowledge as Kirk's stones.

The pocked surfaces of rock bleed here with a dark intensity. Moisture congeals around each cleft and fold. It does not flow according to gravity. It beads thickly, holding time and liquid together in one mystical fluid.

These objects offer up some form of evidence, as yet undetermined. Are they lodestones<sup>10</sup>? Can they measure the strength of nearby magnetic fields? Lodestones were used by early explorers to navigate. They charged a needle with the stone and floated it on a piece of cork in a dish of water, where it would align with the north-south axis and show you where magnetic north was. Magnetic north is not the same as true north, (although the former is always changing and will certainly align with the latter at some point.) Those same explorers noticed the difference, which is why they also used the stars. Different balls of rock and iron, further away.

Do these objects instead swallow the light from the sun? Tiny black holes masquerading as dark glistening orbs. There is a softness here which suggests objects under force, as if they are bearing some abrading, foreign weight. Perhaps it is the release from the earth and the lack of density encompassing them which makes them feel on the verge of dissolution. Perhaps it is the lack of gravity which allows them this feeling of drift, and weightlessness. Perhaps it is the strike of lightning hitting a receptive surface which created them, after all.

Lodestone was used by the Olmec peoples of Mesoamerica a thousand years before the first recorded use of the material by the Chinese.

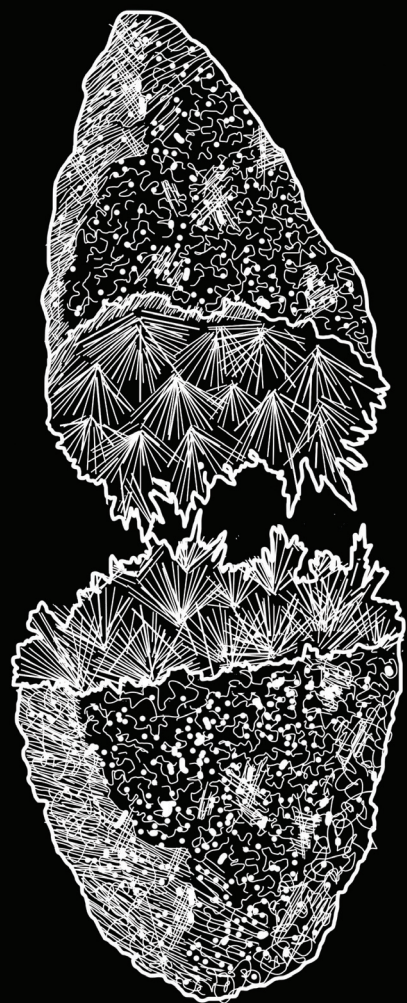
(4th century BC, mentioned in the *Book of the Devil Valley Master*)

Astronomer John Carlson discovered an Olmec artifact, rectangular in form and magnetic, bearing a strange similarity to later bar magnets:

*"The original whole bar may indeed have pointed close to magnetic north-south. The groove functions well as a sighting mark, and the slight angle it makes with the axis of the bar appears to be the result of calibration rather than*

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<sup>10</sup> Lodestone is a naturally magnetised version of magnetite, likely charged through lightning strikes, it is found mostly on the surface of the earth, not at depth.





*accident... Whether such a pointer would have been used to point to something astronomical (zeroth order compass) or to geomagnetic north-south (first-order compass) is entirely open to speculation.”<sup>11</sup>*

He suspected that its use was as a detector, in determining specific placements within temples and other sacred sites for the positioning of sacred objects, but this utilitarian object almost went unnoticed in the face of more ornate treasure.

As is the obfuscating nature of Western history, the even older culture of the Monte Alto people (1800 BC from what is now the pacific coast of Guatemala) have recently been found to use magnetised rock as the foundation of some of their large figurative sculptures. This is not accidental, as scientists have tested many of the pot-bellied figures (or *barrigones*) and heads and have found that in the carving of them, the artisans worked with specific intent to place the strongest magnetic anomalies around the areas of the navel and the right cheek and temple. Roger Fu, from the Harvard Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences tested the sculptures and commented that

*“The ability of these sculptures to deflect a compass in real time would have looked very impressive to an audience, giving the illusion of persisting life in these objects.”<sup>12</sup>*

So, not only was there an intentionality in the creation of these objects, but there also suggests a working knowledge of magnetism and also the means of detecting it. That is was used here as a symbol of life, with the sculptures themselves being able to project some sort of energy upon a charged needle blurs that perpetual boundary between the supernatural and science. King's pieces similarly seem poised upon this thread.

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11 Carlson, J. B. (1975). “Lodestone Compass: Chinese or Olmec Primacy?: Multi disciplinary analysis of an Olmec hematite artifact from San Lorenzo, Veracruz, Mexico”. *Science*. 189 (4205): 753–760.

12 Roger Fu, quoted here in *The Smithsonian Magazine* in the article *Mesoamerican Sculptures reveal early knowledge of magnetism* by Joshua Rapp Learn, August 6, 2019. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/mesoamerican-sculptures-reveal-early-knowledge-magnetism-180972820/>

King has long used the body and its inner mechanisms in her work, and these sculptures feel like an expanded version of the body where the body is *planet*. From the frozen iron filings embedded into rock, to the gently levitating samples all (again, as with Kirk's stones) arranged *just so* suggest a language we have either lost or have never known. And yet both speak to some intuited recognition within us.

We have long de-tuned ourselves to the subtle frequencies.

The inner resonances which occur within the earth and around it, in favour of producing our own. Perhaps this is a compulsion to include our voice alongside the voices of the universe. So fond of it, so highly we consider ourselves, that we have sent our voices into space,<sup>13</sup> we record *everything* and store it in our invisible and increasingly expansive networks and clouds. We have, much like the Storm Petrel, sought to become creatures of the skies.

These artists are providing anchors back to ground.

Whether through the significance of materiality and placement, (King and Kirk) through remembering the things we have lost and the things at the precipice of disappearance, (McIntyre) by constructing silence by reaching into the depths of the earth (Papin) or remembering our own origin of humanity-borne-from-dust, (Sheridan) the artists here remind us that we ground, but other things do too. We are only one component in the greater life-circuit, and electricity will use anything it can to find its way to the ground. Lightning will use us if we're not careful, stringing keys to kite strings, playing out in storms.

Tricky Walsh.  
2022.

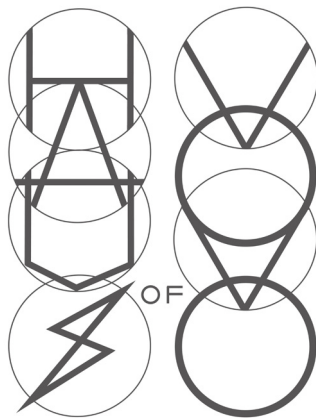
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13 The golden record, aboard the Voyager, launched in 1977. It is currently some where in the vicinity of the Kuiper belt, past the solar system and into interstellar space where we hope some unsuspecting alien life form will encounter it and also be in possession of appropriate technology to be able to perceive its contents. Personally, I'm hoping that it gets used as a sun catcher for the ancient mystical deity of some unimagined species.

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