

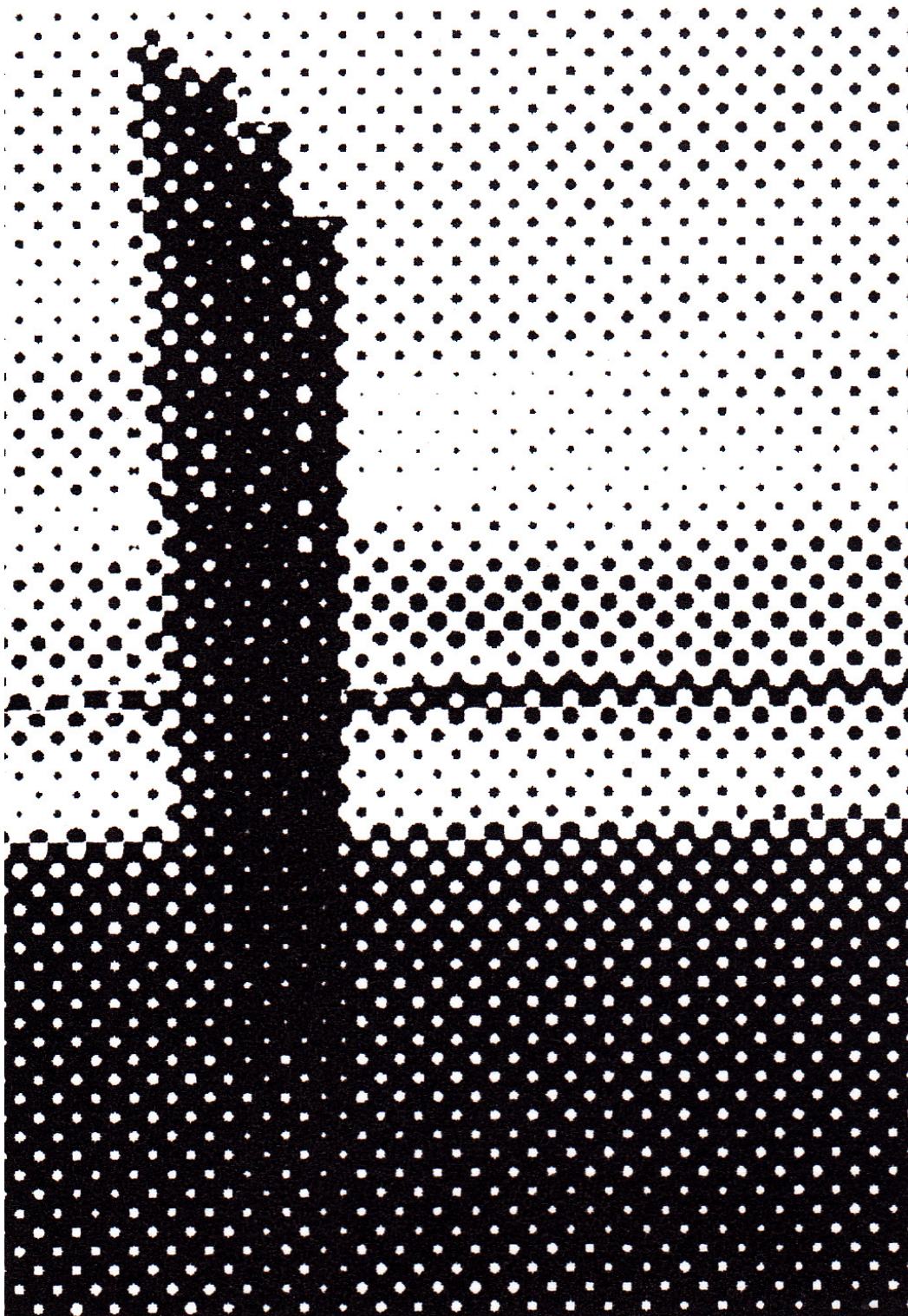
Saskia Haalebos

**Day Dreamer
/ Night Thinker**

8 July

2 September

2023



catching something ‘before absence becomes absolute’¹

Saskia Haalebos is different. Well, we all are, but she is fully conscious of it, and especially so now that we’ve developed labels for such things. For her, the whole world is an unknown, alien place, and her diverse artmaking is a strategy to log her investigation of it. She keeps field notes, which are scientific observations written during explorative field work. If this exhibition looks formal, as if in a museum, that’s because you’re walking through her findings from her latest expedition. And this time, it hasn’t been fun.

I’ll give you the *précis*: It’s about grief. Large, snot-dribbling, heart-wrenching grief. But to her credit, she’s held back on the snot, instead giving you small stories to unpack. They are intertwined, from deeply personal to universal loss. Her field notes often take the form of lists, so I’m turning to a favourite poetic list written for nature writers by poet/printer/explorer Nancy Campbell, as a device to help you navigate Saskia’s findings.²

1. **———— Be complete. Tell the whole story: every day in every season, summer and winter, from the present until the beginning of time.**

Nan, Saskia's grandmother, was the first person to set eyes on her when she was born. They shared a birthday. Nan pretty much raised her. They knew each other for half a century. It was a profound connection. This was her first birthday without her. The depth of loss is never going to go away. Nothing will ever be the same. Everything around her is a reminder. She's kept small things, like a teacup, as if she will ever need a reminder.

2. **———— Be discrete. Record events in one location only; preserve the unities of space, if not of time.**

Weereewa/Ngungara (Lake George), an endorheic lake, filled up in the first year of COVID-19, only one of a few times in half a century, and is starting to empty again. It's magical when full: the tips of the fence lines are the only trace of the human activity on its surface, and the lake fills with aquatic birdlife rather than farm animals. Saskia filmed the lake in winter just after Nan died, conscious of its imminent disappearance. And then her work of parsing this urge, of processing, began.

3. **———— Be precise. Do not get distracted by your own fears, the imminence of extinction. Never decide your results in advance.**

One of the best things about art is that you never end up where you expected to. If you have, you've just made something, not discovered anything. Art is exploration: outcomes are almost the detritus of the process, building up resilience for the next expedition. Many discoveries are made during the deceptively simple act of hanging the exhibition, no matter how much it was planned in advance.

4. **———— Be concise. Do not use too many words. Do use a language that everyone can understand.**

Saskia uses the visual language of contemporary art because it aligns with her skillset as a graphic designer. It's got elements which are actually rules: engagement with the grid, a simple palette of colours (usually monochrome), minimalist presentation, a focus on systems and process. Many neurodiverse people rely on systems to cope with the random presentations of the world. While Saskia calls herself a multidisciplinary practitioner, her heart belongs to printmaking because it's essentially a controllable yet random system that never fails to produce revelations.

5. ——— Air is invisible, but it holds just as much information as ice.

Her short film is shimmering immateriality. It's flickering through something solid, onto you, making its way through the air on dust motes. There's thick, thick layers of sediment under the shallow waters of Weereewa/Ngungara. Imagine how many times it's lived through time. I've been thinking a lot about memory since my mother developed early-onset dementia. It's a fragile thing, easily eroded, but there remain layers that can be accessed by something simple: a song, a photograph, the angle of light on an object.

6. ——— By the time they reach your readers, the events you describe will seem infinitesimal. That faint grey line left by a volcanic eruption that grounded all the world's planes? It's nothing to them.

Don't be distracted by the spectacle of the animated minute she presents to you, there's much more to it. Each video frame has been painstakingly separated out, bitmapped for dot screen, transferred to the silk screen, printed *once*, scanned, and reassembled into light. For me, this attention to detail, these hours of effort, evokes someone gently washing every small surface of a corpse, an exquisite

expression of love and care and respect. For Saskia it was a manifestation of the fear of her memories dispersing and disappearing, echoing Nan's slow decline over the last five years. Gaze at her rendered stills. What do you grieve for?

7. ——— Remember that ice is the frozen state of water. Your document may take on other forms.

There are other things on display. Do you know about *memento mori*? The translation from Latin is Remember that you must die. Roman generals and emperors would have a slave beside them during triumphal parades who would whisper this into their ear, to temper the feeling of unbeatable immortality that comes with winning at life. Saskia tries to find ways to evoke empathy, to make you feel something along with her, but she also likes to include a punctum, a small sharp point,³ which hopefully makes you question why something makes you feel uncomfortable. Or not feel at all. She's also not afraid to include a touch of the silly, like her own typographic invention, the bum font.

8. ——— If you want to find ice, go to the cold places, but keep your own temperature constant.

One thing Saskia and I share is a love of the small shards of materiality that everyone thinks are

dead in the face of digital production. Remnants of library books, printed by machine, well before digital processes, held by many hands. Relics of the age of printing, of everyday print-making. Who notices library stamps in old books? Think about it. The librarian, stamping a date on a return slip in a library book, is making a print. The person borrowing the book is undertaking an ephemeral act involving human interaction. These are the ideas Saskia wants to share with you, when you witness her collages of these fragile interactions.

9. **————** The work will not be quick. Anticipate seven seasons.

So far through her creative life, Saskia has aligned herself with comics/zine/animation culture, music, and literature, and that's before she went to art school as a mature-age student. Her agenda is to weave it all into moments that make you think and feel, and this exhibition is just one iteration. I've seen her do remarkable things with sound and vision. She's no longer 'emerging', whatever that is. She's fully present. Add yourself to her mailing list.

10. **————** Keep going deeper. The story is already there: extraction is the reader's art. Reading in the cold, drilling through the dark.

This is where you come in, dear reader.

Caren Florance
2023

Dr Caren Florance is an artist, designer, writer and creative researcher. Her practice is informed by material bibliography and book history. She works predominantly with text, often collaborating with artists and publishers. By using traditional letterpress and bookbinding processes along with more contemporary technologies, she produces diverse works across the book arts spectrum, from zines, artist books and installation work to formal publishing outputs. She is collected by national and international institutions (mostly libraries) and private collectors. Her most recent commercial volume is *Lost in Case* (Cordite Books, 2019).

-
1. 'Before absence becomes absolute' is a phrase by Helen Ennis in her introduction to *Reveries: Photography and Mortality*, Canberra: National Portrait Gallery, 2007, 6.
 2. Nancy Campbell, 'The Vostok Ice Core gives a creative writing lesson' from *Navigations* (HappenStance, 2020). Used in full with generous permission from the author.
 3. Also an anatomy term for the opening of a tear duct.

Saskia Haalebos

Day Dreamer / Night Thinker

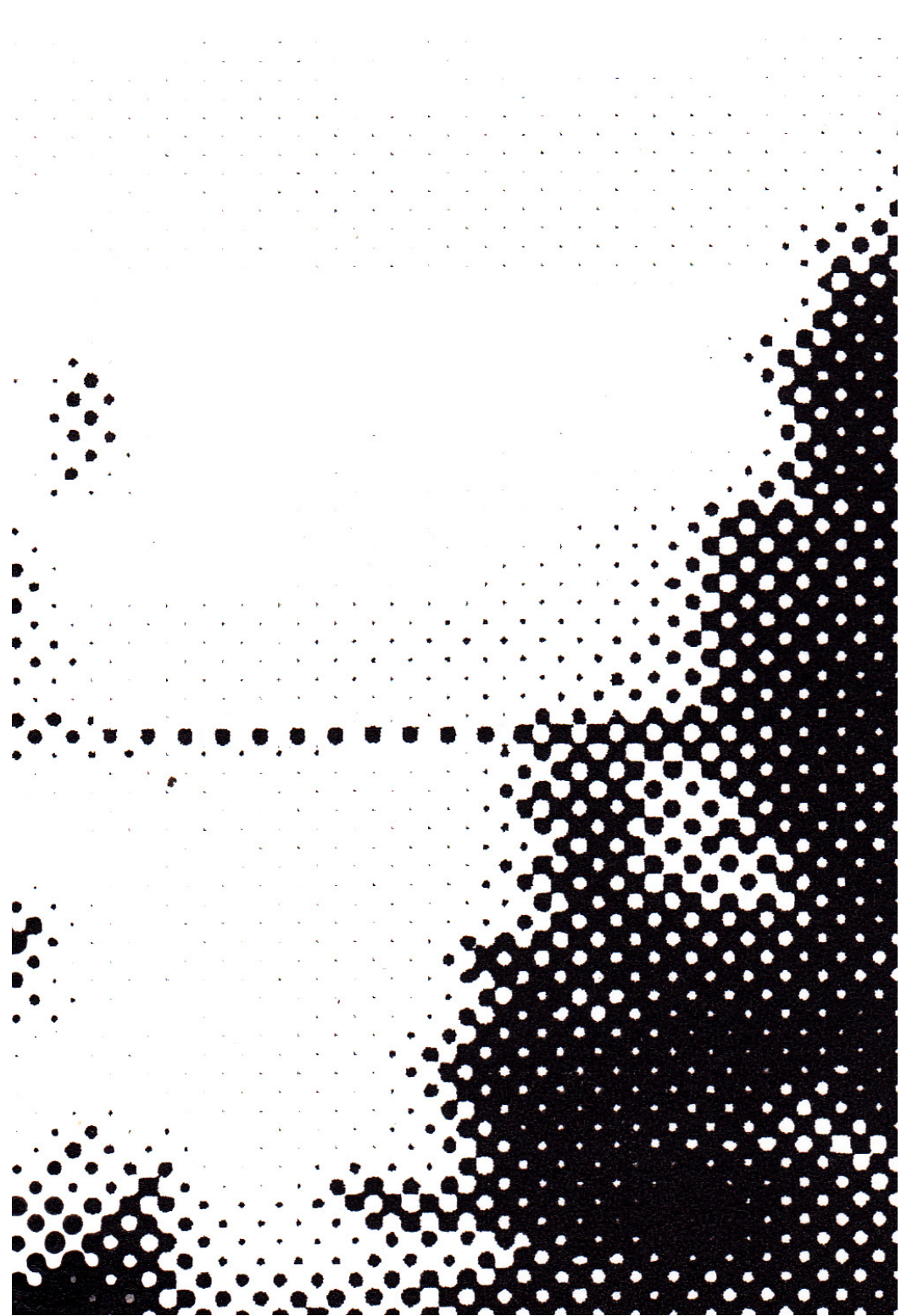
- 1 Permanent Ephemera I (unknown printmaker series), 2023, found library due date slips, found library card pockets, sticky tape, book page, dimensions variable, paper size 520mm x390mm
\$250
- 2 Permanent Ephemera II (unknown printmaker series), 2023, found library due date slips, found library card pocket, book page, dimensions variable, paper size 520mm x390mm
\$250
- 3 Permanent Ephemera III (unknown printmaker series), 2023 found library due date slips, found library card pocket, sticky tape, book page, paper size 520mm x390mm
\$250
- 4 Permanent Ephemera IV (unknown printmaker series), 2023, found library due date slips, found library card pockets, book page, paper size 520mm x390mm
\$250
- 5 Permanent Ephemera V (unknown printmaker series), 2023, found library due date slips, found library card pockets, book pages, paper size 520mm x390mm
\$250
- 6 Permanent Ephemera VI (unknown printmaker series), 2023, found library due date slips, found library card pockets, book pages, paper size 520mm x390mm
\$250

- 7 **Permanent Ephemera VII (unknown printmaker series), 2023, found library due date slips, found library card pockets, book page, pa paper size 520mm x390mm per size XX
\$250**
- 8 **Field notes, 2021 – 2023, digital print on bond paper, five clipboards, acrylic paint, (unit size) 240mm x 170mm x 15mm
\$350**
- 9 **The Filling and Disappearing, 2023, screenprints on Stonehenge paper, photo album sleeves, digital video, print 126mm x 87mm (each), sleeve 402mm x 291mm (each), duration 59 seconds.
POA**
- 10 **Self/your/our portrait (trace quiet), 2023, collaged old books, Japanese rice paste, double-sided tape, screenprint on end paper, approx. 250mm x 320mm x 20mm
\$950**
- 11 **Self/your/our portrait (disappearing), 2023, collaged old books, found library due date slip and envelope, Japanese rice paste, double-sided tape, screenprint on end paper, 255mm x 375 mm x 20mm
\$950**
- 12 **Self/your/our portrait (dreamer / thinker), 2023, collaged old books, found library due date slip and envelope, Japanese rice paste, double-sided tape, screenprint on end paper, 280mm x 390 mm x 20mm
NFS**
- 13 **Self/your/our portrait (small body), 2023, collaged old books, found drawing, Japanese rice paste, double-sided tape, screenprint on end paper, 254mm x 337mm x 20mm
\$950**
- 14 **Self/your/our portrait (we are all), 2023, collaged old books, found library due date slip, Japanese rice paste, double-sided tape, screenprint on end paper, 245mm x 335mm x 20mm
\$950**
- 15 **And (random poetry generator) + random poem, 2015 + 2022, found cardboard box, felt, wooden iceblock sticks, rollerball pen, 104mm x 144mm x 35mm
NFS**
- 16 **Second stage of grief (denial), 2023, dry point etching, plastic key ring, metal chain, house keys, dimension variable (in lid of And)
NFS**
- 17 **tucked away / always carried, 2023, found book, label maker tape, ink hand-stamped on Stonehenge paper, Japanese rice paste, double-sided tape, 85mm x 70mm x 10mm
\$100**
- 18 **SOUNDSCAPES, vol 3 (Mon 29 Aug 2022), 2021-23 (so far), notebook, pencil, 140mm x 90mm x 4mm
NFS**
- 19 **Self portrait (grief), 2022-23, plastic pencil case, found text, waxed thread, bone folder, awl, embroidery needles in holder, approx. 210mm x 110mm x 30mm
NFS**

Saskia is grateful to The Unconformity (TAS) for the residency where these ideas formed; to Megalo Print Studio for the residency for time to experiment and make; and to M16 Artspace for the studio residency where some of the works were created. What a community!

Dedicated with love to Nan
Ella Magdalen Gallagher 12/03/1922 - 16/06/2022.

Saskia Haalebos, The Filling and Disappearing (frame 324), 2023, screenprint, 126mm x 87mm



Events + Dates:

Wednesday 12 July:

Join us from 5pm - 7pm, as we celebrate the opening of Day Dreamer / Night Thinker, to be opened by lutruwita/Tasmania writer Jane Rawson.

Saturday 5 August:

Join the artist from 11am - 12pm at Megalo for an artist talk in the gallery to discuss her wonderful exhibition Day Dreamer / Night Thinker. This is a free event, no bookings required

Day Dreamer / Night Thinker is on display 8 July - 2 September

Megalo is open 9.30am - 5pm | Tuesday - Saturday



ACT
Government



Australian Government
Visual Arts and Craft Strategy