



**What Lurks in the
Shadows:**

**Emotional Residue at the
Intersections of Image
and Text in Participatory
Practice.**

**Karen Brett &
Nic Coplin**



‘with the housing crisis in full swing, social housing stock depleted and local authorities struggling to make ends meet, it is harder than ever for survivors of domestic abuse to find safe accommodation’.

(Refuge, 2024).





The overall aims of the project were to:

- Empower survivors of domestic abuse by enabling them to represent and share their stories of resettlement.
- To create a space for reflection and healing for the participants, bringing with it a sense of achievement and empowerment.
- Raise public awareness, promote discussion and potentially instigate change at a societal and local government level, about the many challenges faced by survivors of domestic abuse through the circulation and display of the work.



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Exhibition Installation photographs (2025), The Exchange, Penzance.

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Layout of page from participants zine.



‘Photovoice has been described as the “daughter of many mothers” as it is based in empowerment/Freirean philosophy, feminist theory, and documentary photography, which when combined, engage community members to identify, represent, and change their community through photography, dialogue, and action’.

(Wang and Burris, 1994, cited in Strack, Orsini and Ewald, 2022).



Kate Watson (2015) 'Listening Through Images' PhotoVoice Workshops.





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Kodak Disposable Film Camera

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‘Photography can help participants uncover hidden aspects of themselves and encourage deep discussion which may support positive change when used appropriately’.

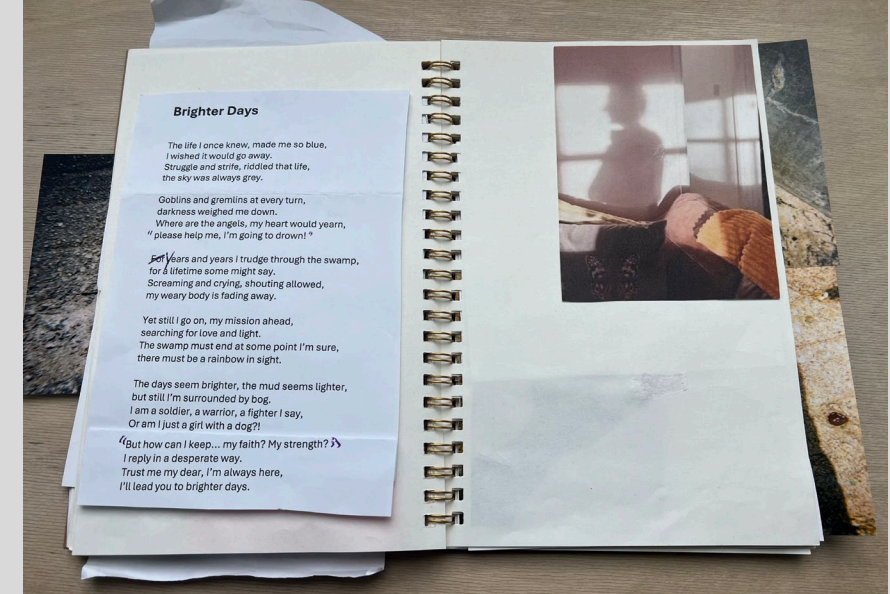
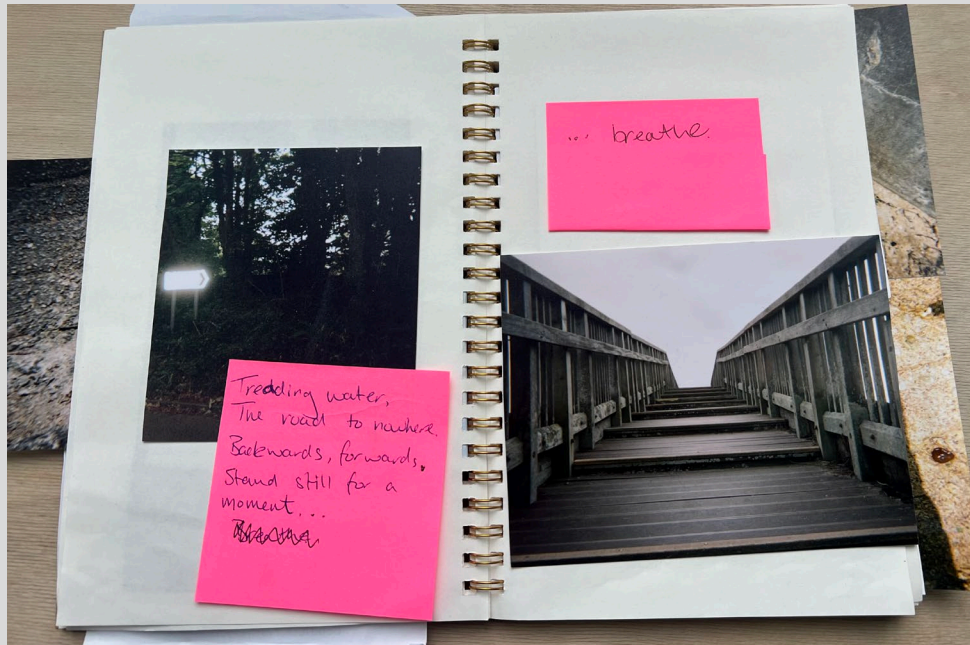
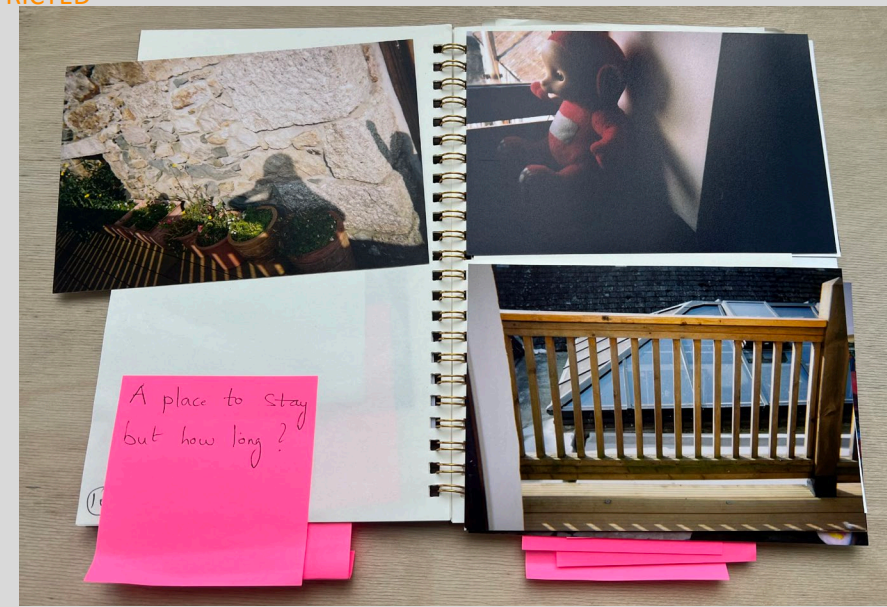
(Maes, 2018, Photography as a tool to help survivors of domestic abuse, World Photography Organisation).

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Participants mock-up photobooks

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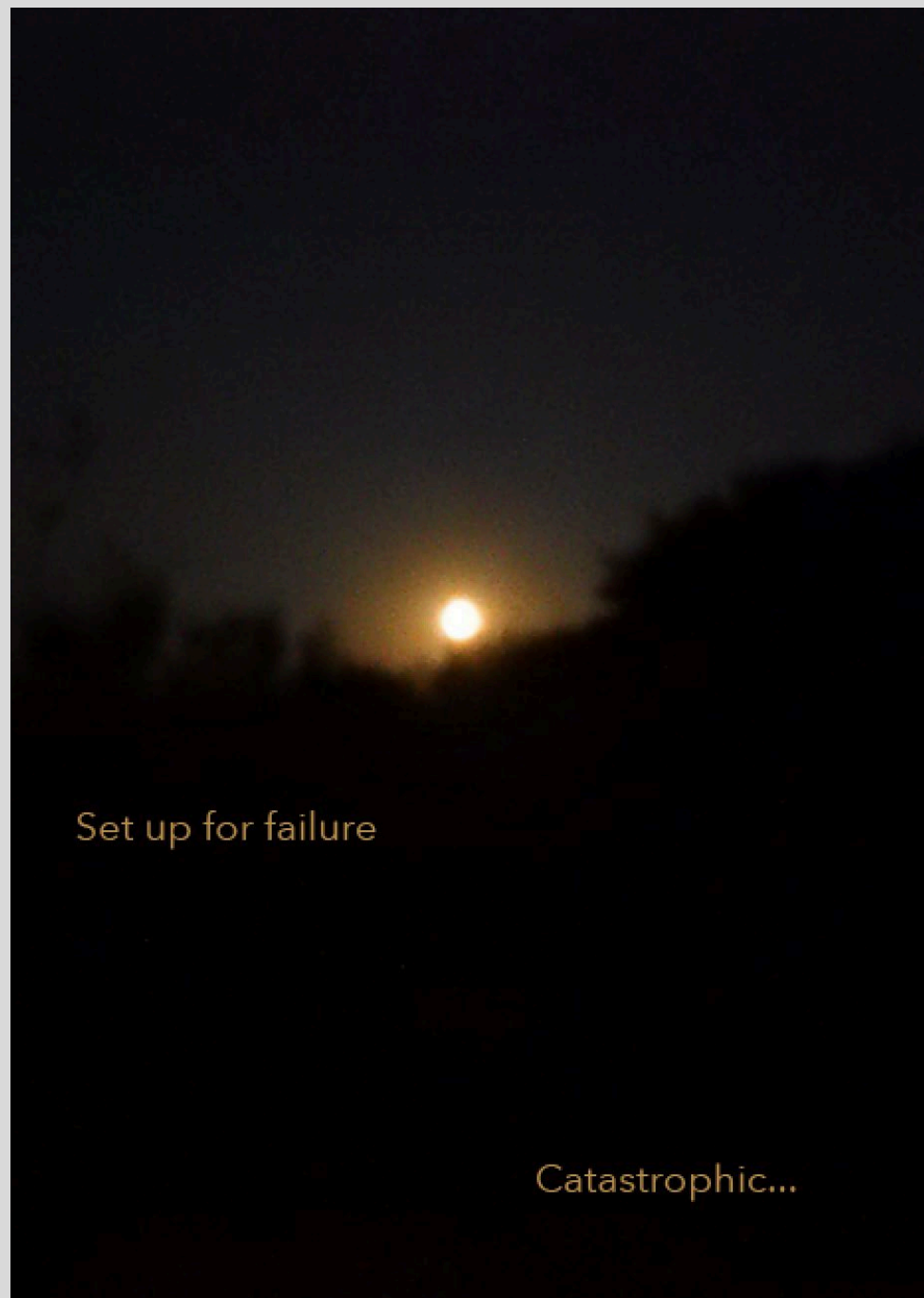
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Set up for failure

Catastrophic...

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unsettled



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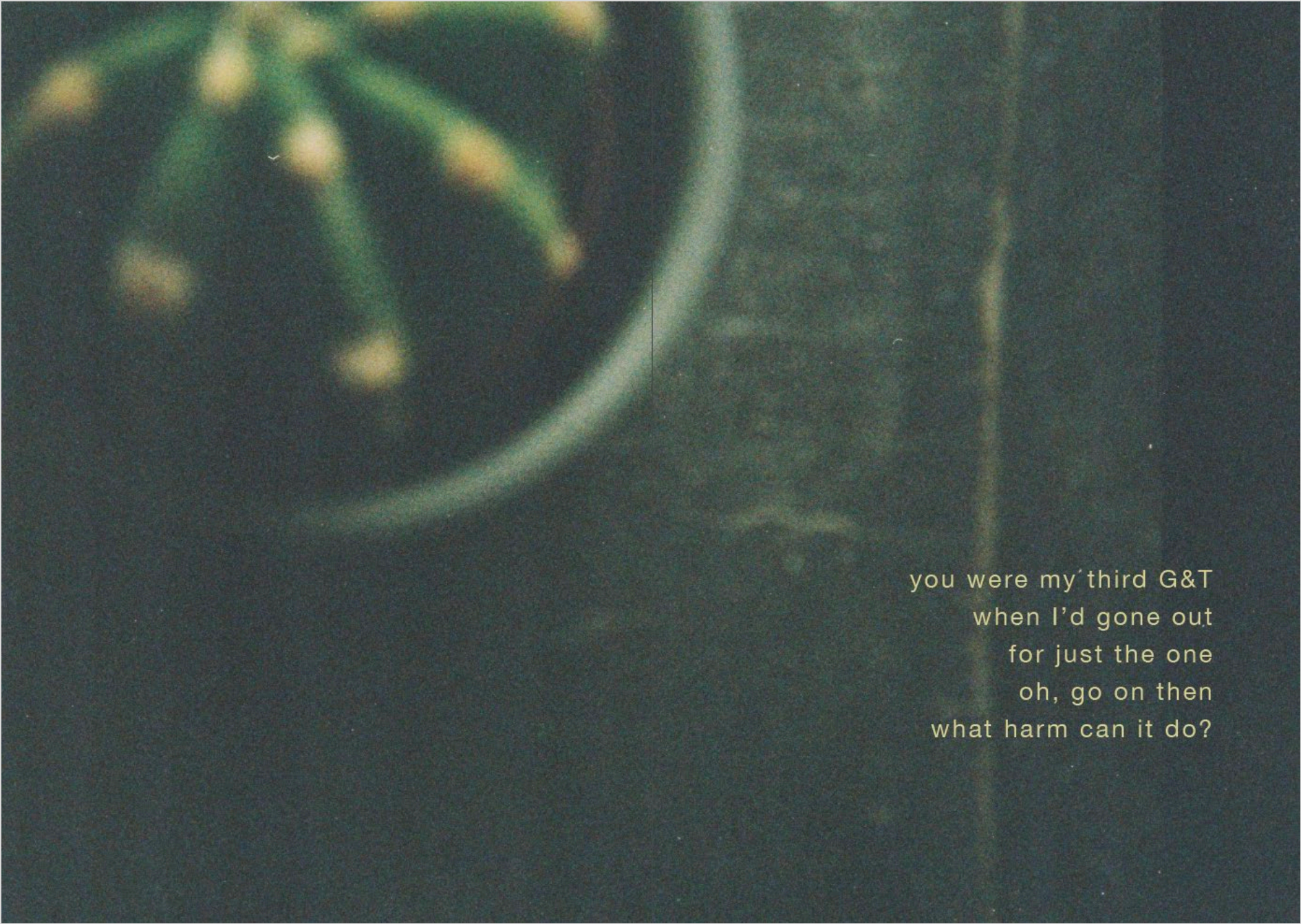


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‘blur as not simply a formal flaw that impacts the aesthetic qualities of an image and therefore a viewer’s detached appreciation of it, but as a sensory phenomenon in itself’.

(Jennifer Good, 2019, The impossible Photograph: Blur and Domestic Violence’, Photography and Culture).



you were my' third G&T
when I'd gone out
for just the one
oh, go on then
what harm can it do?



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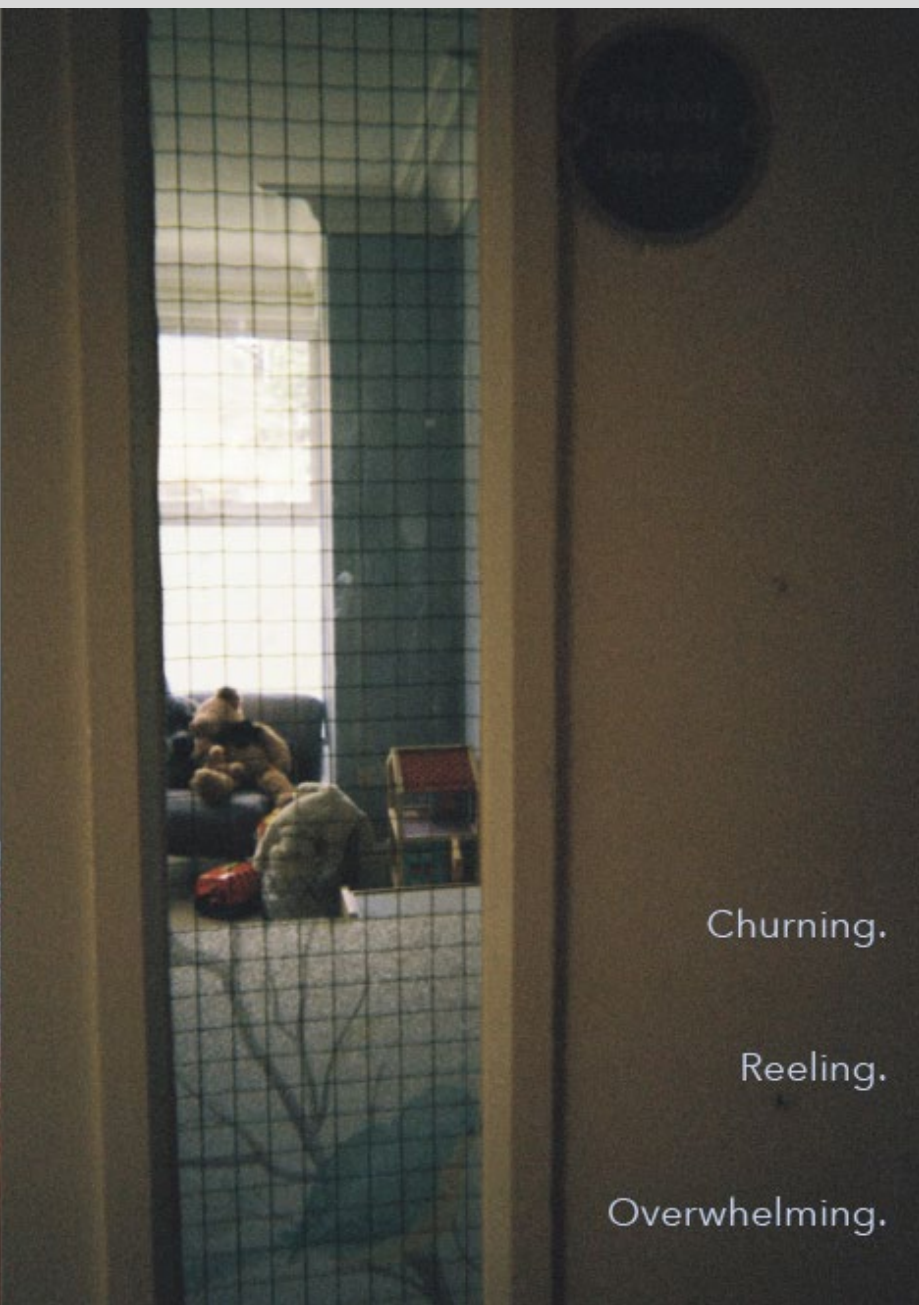
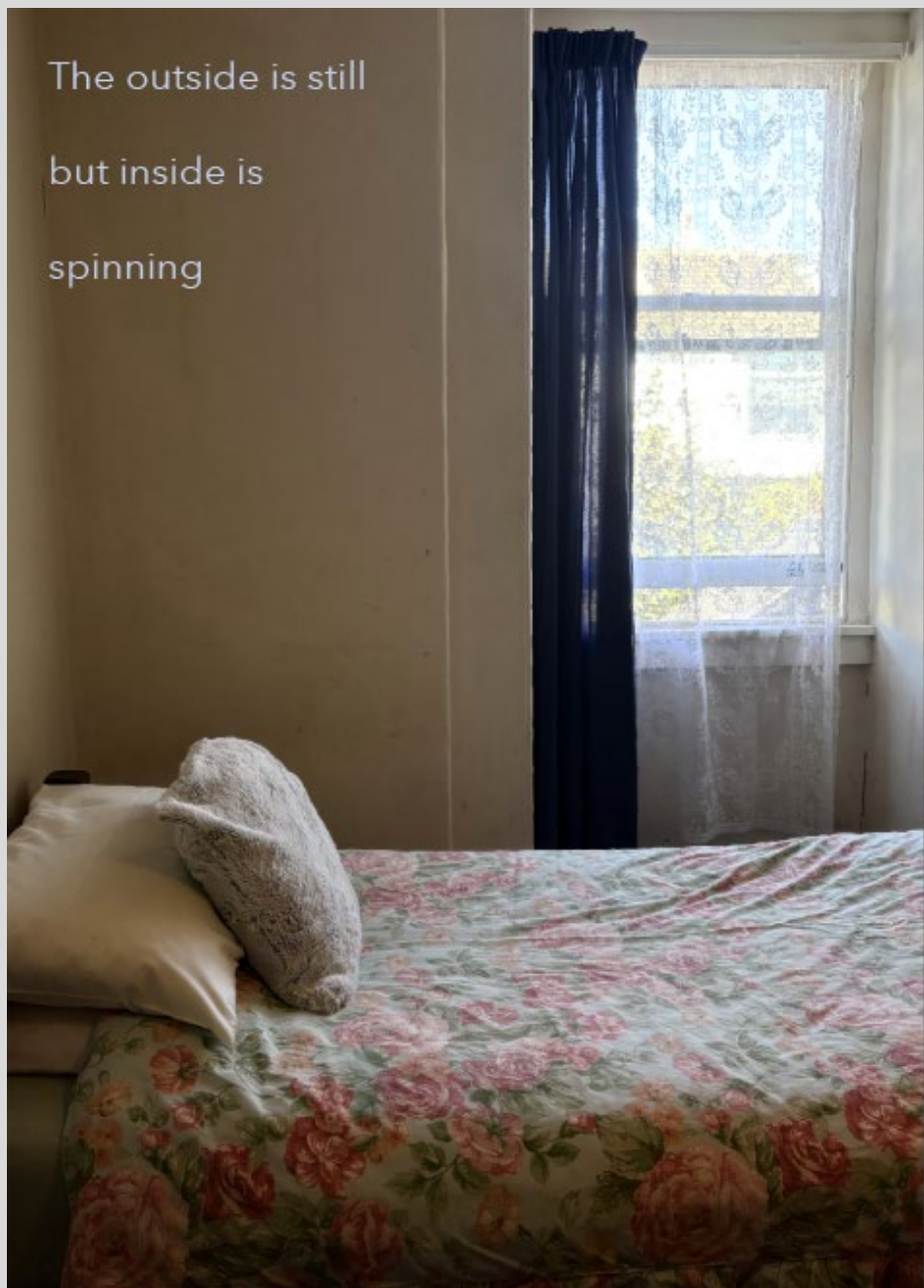


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The outside is still
but inside is
spinning



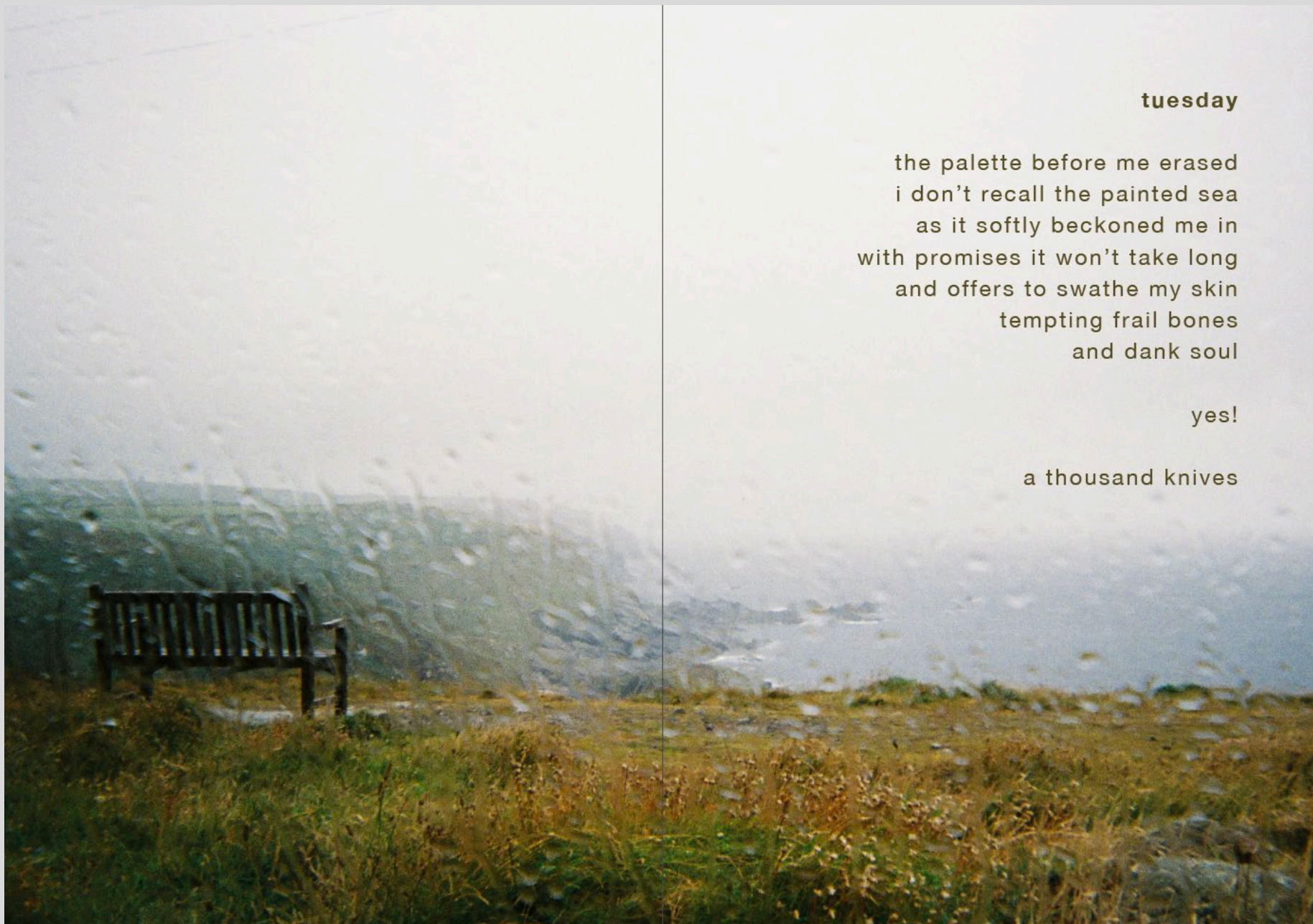
Churning.
Reeling.
Overwhelming.

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‘photography is like a point, film like a line’

Peter Wollen (2003) Fire and Ice, The Photography Reader



tuesday

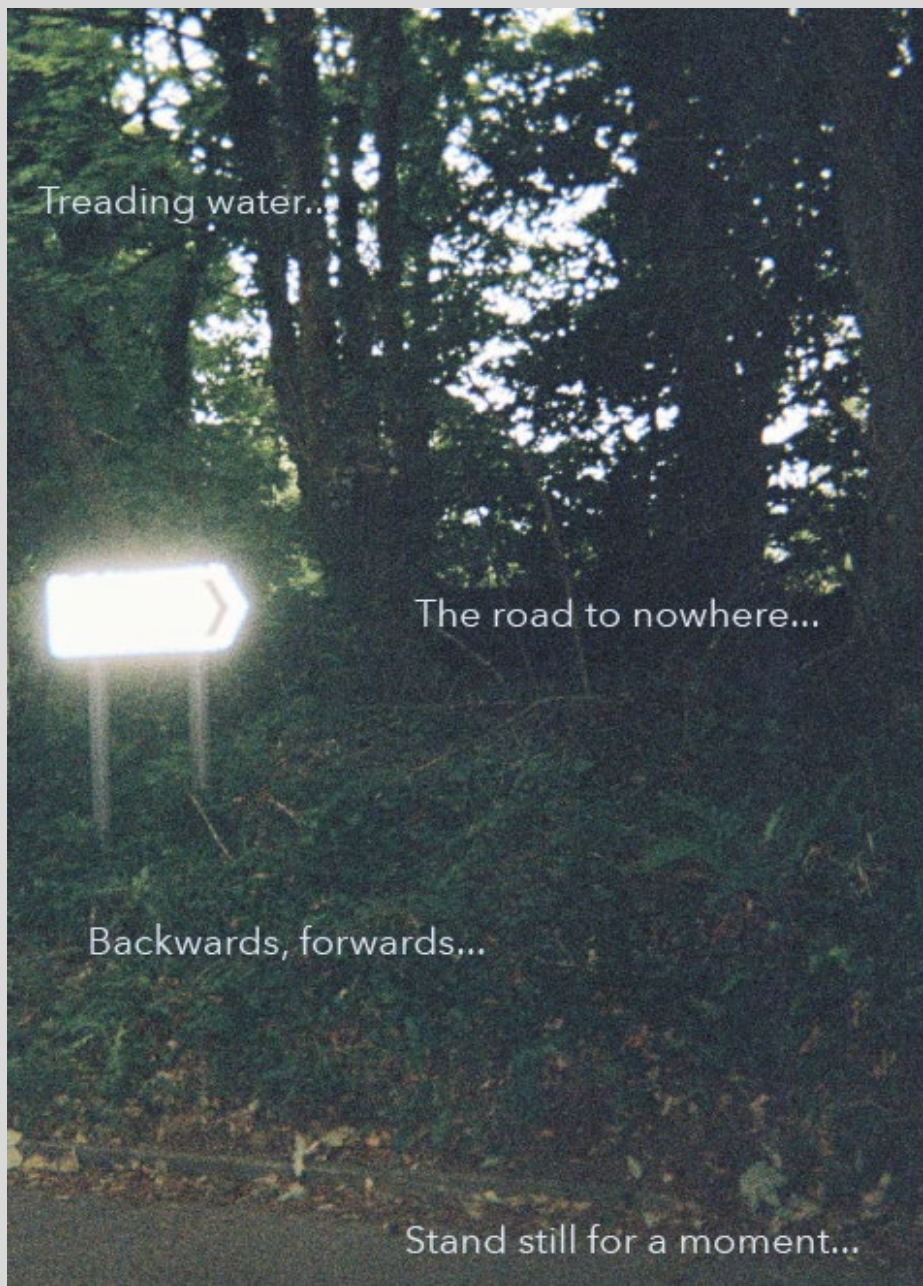
the palette before me erased
i don't recall the painted sea
as it softly beckoned me in
with promises it won't take long
and offers to swathe my skin
tempting frail bones
and dank soul

yes!

a thousand knives

‘as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are until the poem, nameless and formless – about to be birthed but already felt’

(Lorde, 1985)



Treading water...

The road to nowhere...

Backwards, forwards...

Stand still for a moment...



Breathe



candles, two

one burning with the wax shifting
to one side, ready to escape over
the precipice. their neighbour, a
bunch of white roses once so
perfect, now browning along the
edges of their pristine pages

A half read book and a small pair
of gold hoop earrings lay
alongside, concealed by the
darkness

dust is forming in the cracks of
the worn, unsteady coffee table.
its surface gives way to tiny
splinters, hiding with the
eagerness of
one thousand paper cuts



‘I didn’t know how integral it was to process the effects that my job has on me until I was given this space’.

‘This project has meant a lot to me because I was able to tell a very difficult story in a way in which I felt comfortable and am proud of’.

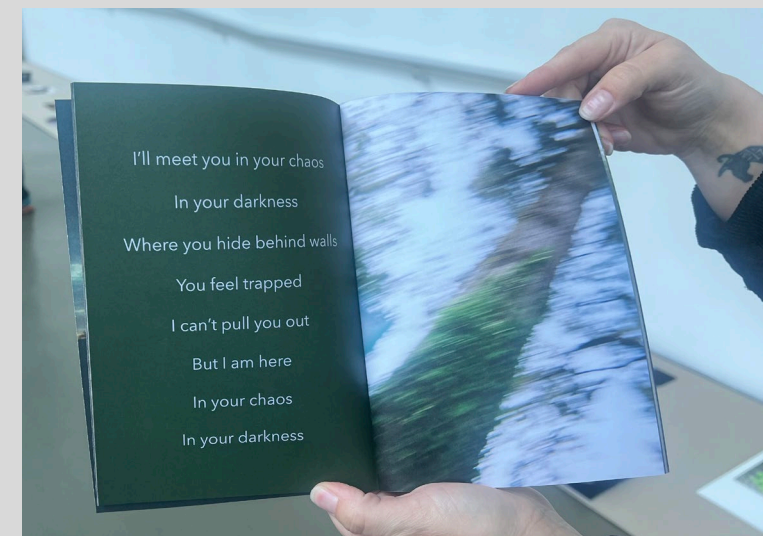
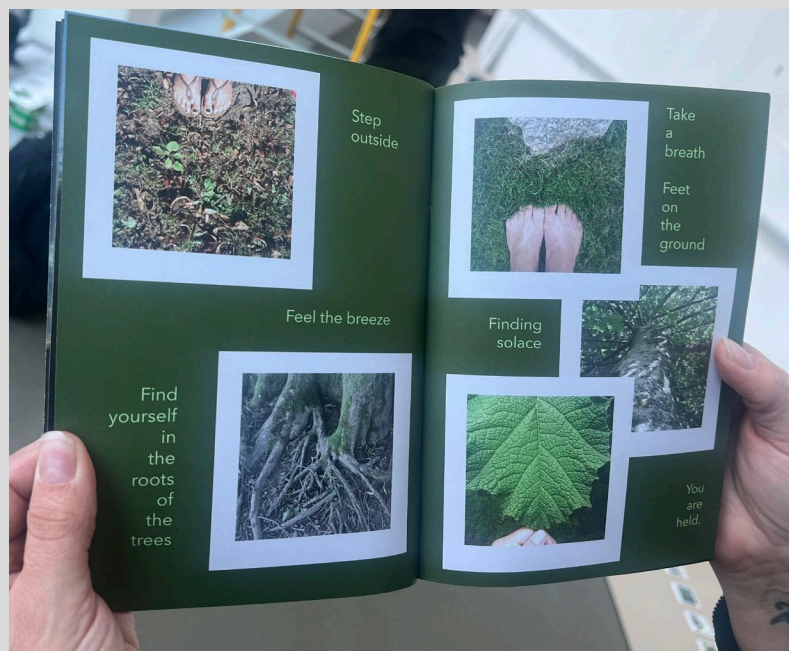
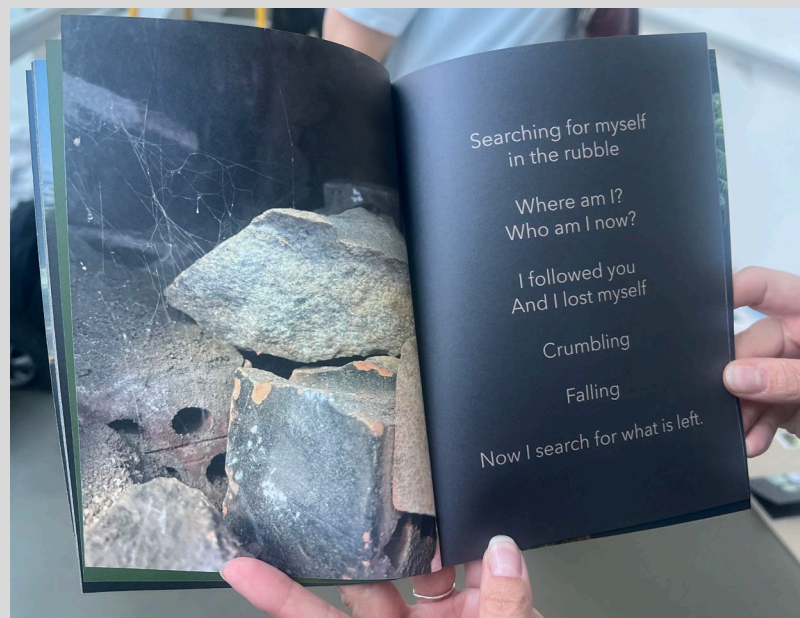
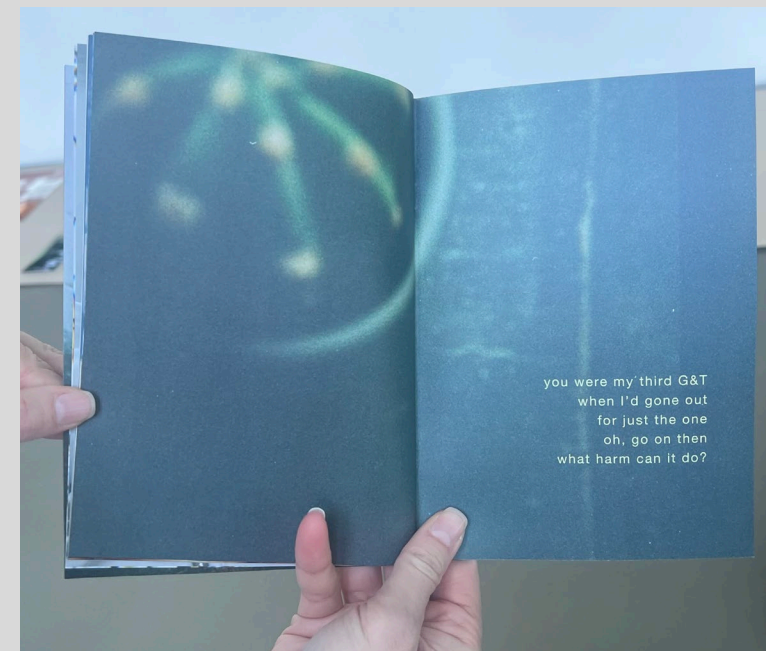
‘This project of which I am most proud; have felt most heard; and has culminated in the most powerful healing’.

‘She *joins* the other-Encounter and witnesses the other’s event: she wit(h)nesses in weaving’.

(Ettinger, 2006).



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‘I now have my story on record. It’s a condensed body of evidence that I can return to every time his voice gets louder than my own. The project, and my contributions to it, solidify the reality of my experience’.

Anonymous participant (2026)