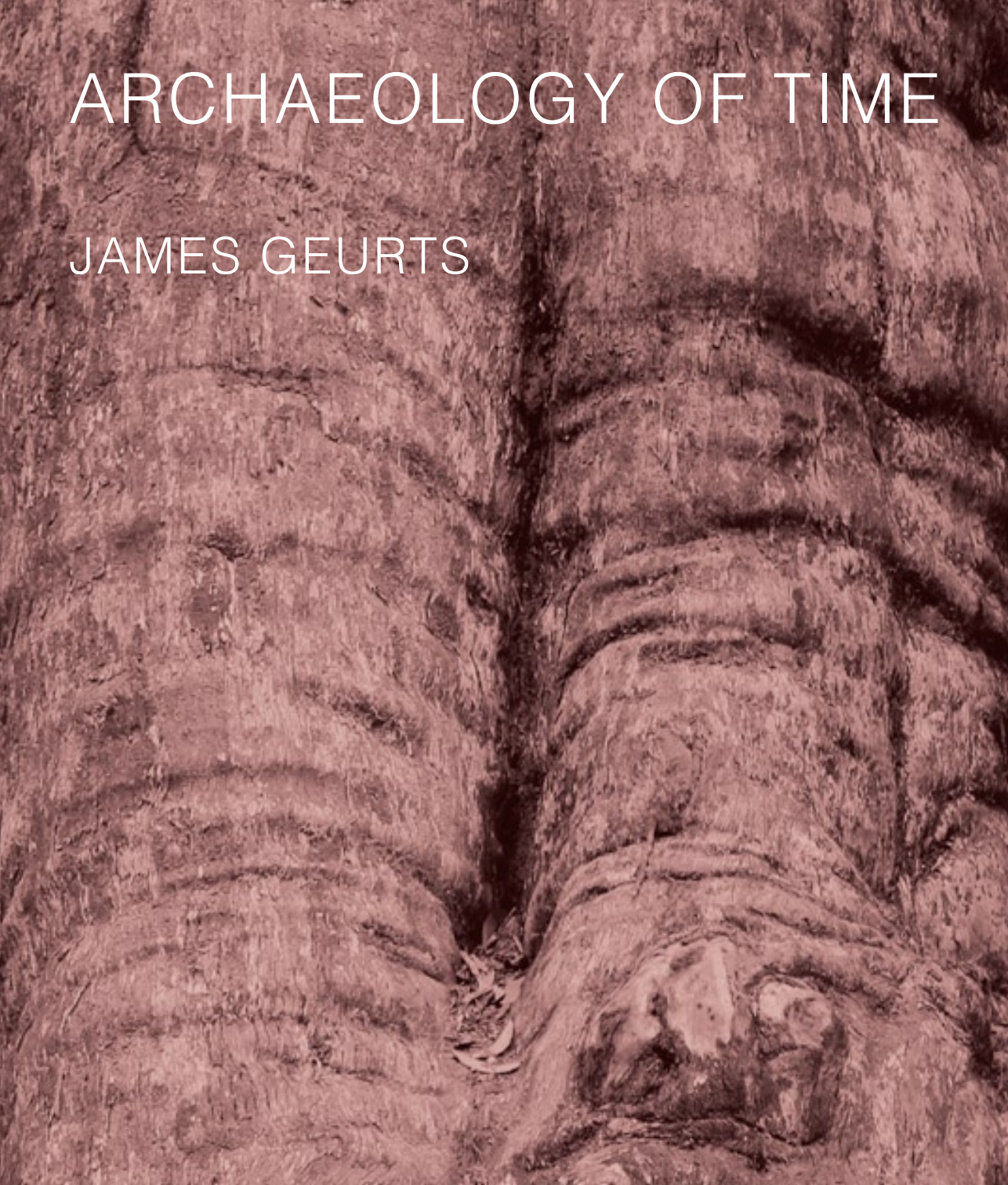


ARCHAEOLOGY OF TIME

JAMES GEURTS



























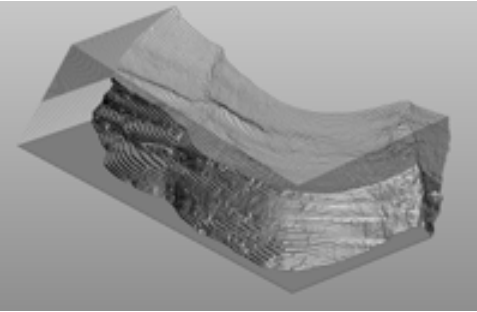




Cover and preceeding
pages:
Circumference of the Ada
Tree, a giant Mountain Ash
near Powelltown, Victoria.
This tree was 3d scanned
to produce *Archaeology
of Time* Public sculpture
2016.

ARCHAEOLOGY OF TIME

JAMES GEURTS



Introduction:

The *Archaeology of Time* is a site-specific public sculpture by James Geurts, positioned in Civic Park, Warragul at the site of a former giant Mountain Ash tree. The sculpture is 8 metres in diameter and spans 35 metres around its undulating circumference. These figures are based on a Mountain Ash from Thorpdale, which measured a monumental 114.3 metres tall. In the late 19th Century, it was known to be 'the tallest tree in the world'. In 1884 the tree was cut down, in order to measure its height.

Geurts' bone-like sculpture evokes an archaeological dig site, revealing an absent space where the tree once existed. Detailed topographical layers cast in-situ from white concrete are embedded in the open lawn. The topographical layers were produced by a high-definition 3D scan of the living perimeter of the Ada Tree, a large Mountain Ash near Powelltown. The landscaped mound of the sculpture shows how the tree drew the earth up with a root system almost one kilometre in diameter. A line of light is drawn around the base of the tree's perimeter and glows upwards. The light creates an impression of the former tree rising up from the land, enhanced when captured in mist and fog.



Anatomy of a Tree II:
James Geurts 2015.
Site-specific work on paper
110cm x 100cm.
Printed on archival Hane-
mühle paper
Limited Edition of 10
Courtesy of
Greenaway Art Gallery/
GAGPROJECTS

ARCHAEOLOGY OF TIME

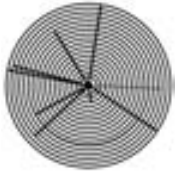
Dr Julie Louise Bacon 2016

A long time before language was invented or tools were made, before any human had made any type of clock, the tree was recording time in the fabric of its being. Like all organic and indeed inorganic entities, the tree embodies time: from the mayfly which lives for just 24 hours, to the rocks that capture millennia in their strata, with human life positioned in-between, far closer to the insect than the coastline. From the earliest known species of tree, the 'wattieza', which lived some 385 million years ago, to the ancient 'eucalyptus regnans' or great mountain ash which has lived for some 30 to 50 million years and is still with us today, the cells and the symbolism of the tree offer us a connection with deep prehistoric time.

In the 19th Century, a mountain ash from Gippsland, Australia was the tallest known tree in the world. A plaque in Thorpdale commemorates this tree, which had grown to be some 114 metres in height. This remarkable feat becomes a bittersweet fact when we learn that in 1884 a local landowner and his brother, a government surveyor, cut the tree down to ascertain its height. Archaeology of Time is inspired by this moment in the timeline of life on the planet and recalls a passing moment in the life of the region, and its greater significance to the way that changes in our actions relate to the evolution of our sensibility. The artwork transforms the footprint of a great mountain ash that has survived in the local

area - the Ada tree - into a gathering place. The sculpture is an invitation to sit in the space of the tree's time, to align our everyday living space and imagination with a physical form and timescale that extends way beyond our own.

Time is an uneven phenomenon; physicists now agree with poets, astronomers and psychologists concur. Our sense of time is conditioned by the planetary forces that govern life as a whole, the forces of the Age into which we are born, and the patterns of the particular lives that we lead. At this juncture in time, it is perhaps both strange and highly pertinent to recall that there was a beginning to what we know as history, in Antiquity, when after some 200 thousand years of human life on the planet the model of the city-state began to spread. The historical perspective spread with the growth of cities and populations, as the question of social and individual destiny arose with denser human settlements. Gradually, history has replaced the absolute sense of time with which the human had navigated reality previously, a time that was based on the cycles of nature, or the physical world. Since that era, just three millennia ago, we have been on a journey that has seen time and life increasingly measured and rationalised, moving away from cycles, reinforcing the linear concept of 'progress', and now vector-based reality ; this is the story of the shift from the nomadic to the agricultural eras, to the rise of the industrial and now the information age.



The artist employed two key processes in the making of the public art work, processes which are emblematic of the immateriality of the digital era on the one hand and the materiality of the industrial era on the other: scanning and casting. An old technique combines with the latest technique of reproduction, as data drawn from the tree's circumference and surface is translated into the 3D strata of the sculptural body. There is a desire, a need, in the human to represent the world around us, to create forms that convey the nature of what we see and confirm our experience of interacting with the world. The art of today is connected with deep time - with the petroglyphs and cave drawings of the lower Paleolithic - through the continuity of this act.

The aesthetics of the sculpture embody and merge a number of time codes, among them: the algorithm of computer science; the molecular time of casting materials; and the processual time of artistic gestures. These time codes are enmeshed with the multiple timelines that the work captures, given that many generations are spanned in this public artwork. These include the eons of the tree's biological time and those of the social ages it has known, through which the region and nation developed in waves of settlement and industry, along with the longevity and passing of attitudes and activities that this implies.

The methods and materials used to produce the sculpture were devised in the course of numerous field trips and through extensive

consultation with engineers and fabricators over a nearly two-year period. In order to create a rendering of the life of a unique tree form the artist had to devise a similarly unique process. The work proposes a sense of presence that connects the near and far, and a sense of absence that expresses potentiality.

Conventionally, the archaeological process involves "the scientific study of historic or prehistoric peoples and their cultures by analysis of their artifacts, inscriptions, monuments, and other such remains, especially those that have been excavated." Here, the archaeological process is inverted as a cultural artifact is created in order to commemorate time. There is also a blurring of the notion of subject and object, as well as a questioning of the basis on which we perceive something to be primarily a living being or a being of use.

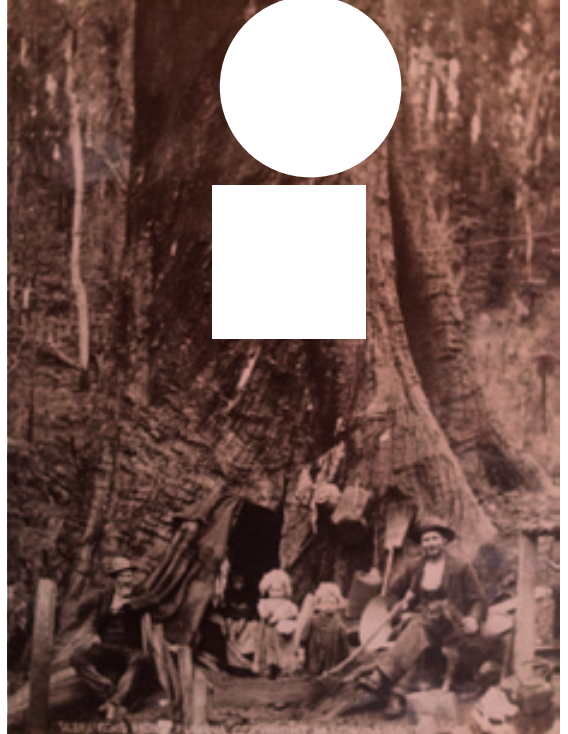
The artwork is an invitation to the long view, to feel the relationship between the scale and reach of our lifespan, and more specifically the journey that the human has been on with that of the tree, through the succession of eras and ages. For this view to take place a decompression of the hurried pace of life, tasks, and projects is needed: a pause in time.

It takes millennia for dead tree matter to decay, creating a fuel, coal, that powered the industrial age. It is interesting to reflect on the timeline of this process of compression in the physical world and the compression

Above left:
Geologic clock design
as drain plate cover,
used in *Archaeology
of Time*, site-specific
public sculpture.
Stainless steel.
32cm diameter
2016.



Archaeology of Time, site-specific public sculpture. James Geurts 2016. 8m diameter x .6m White concrete, stainless steel neon flex light, drain cover in the form of a geologic clock. Civic Park Warragul Victoria



Penny tree at Fumina, 1907.
L to R: John Green, Mrs. Eva
Penny (inside the tree, nurs-
ing Charlie), May, George
and Nicholas Penny with
"Rover".
Recomposed by James
Geurts 2015.

of our sense of time and space produced by mechanisation and the new industry of the digital era. In ways that are both complex and blunt, the interaction between forces of compression in the world of matter and spirit shapes the fabric of mindsets and societies, and their impact on the physical world.

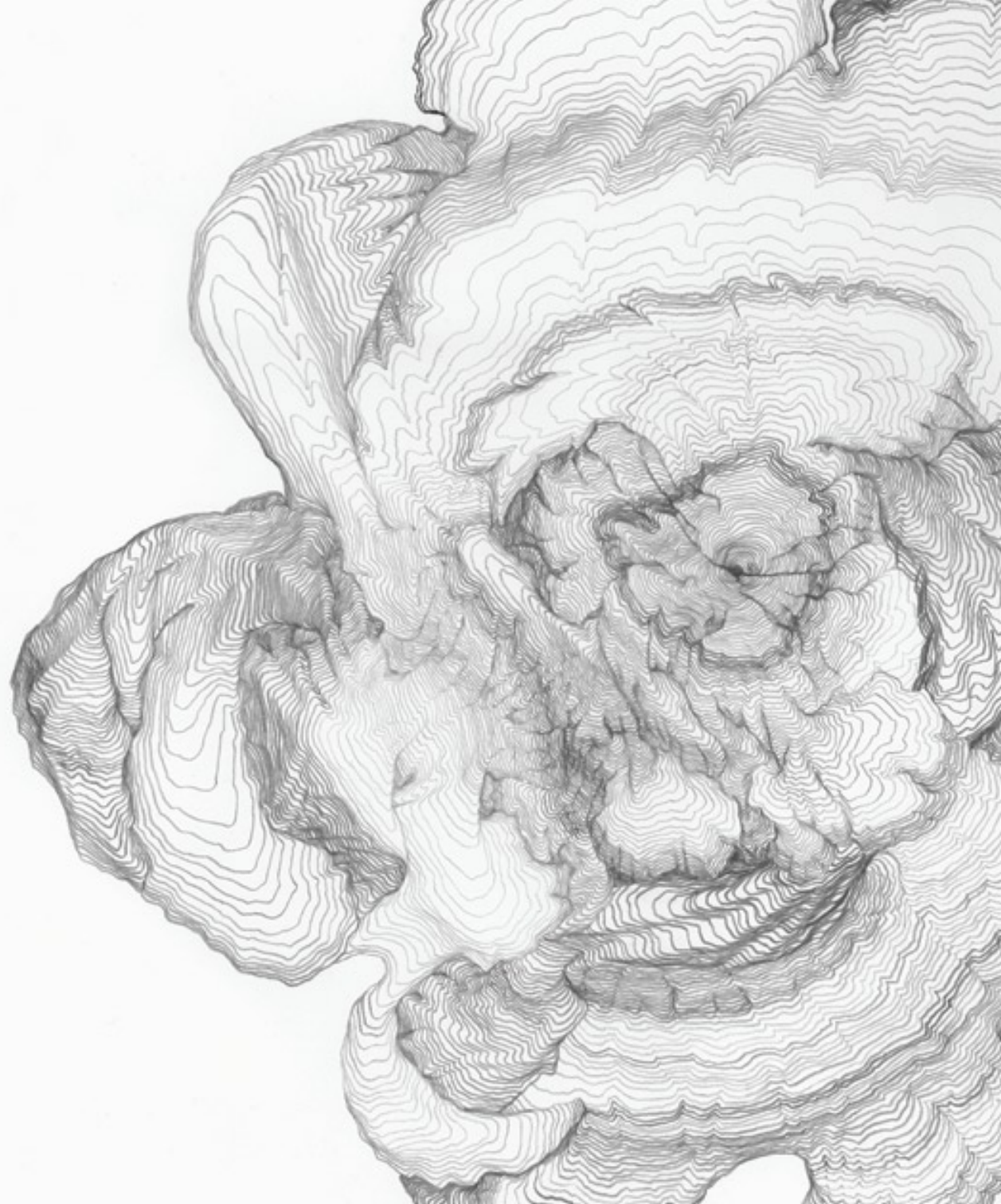
Our social attitude to trees has shifted, with varying consequences for the tree. The sense of the use-value of the tree has changed. The protection that trees offer, through their shade, helped to preserve them in pre-modern societies. As the human population grows and the city model spreads, so architecture replaces forests. There has been a gradual shift from thinking of trees, and other fundamentals such as water, as nature to viewing them as 'resources'. The commemorative plaque, at the site of the giant Thorpdale tree that the art work acknowledges, signals the shift in perspective, from the physical to the ideological view of the tree: the plaque is signed by the 'Minister for Fuel and Power'. This signals the harnessing of the tree in the large-scale systems that underpin our world, transforming life into use-value and profit.

If deforestation has been part of the civilisational process all along, for better and for worse, the acceleration of this process is striking. The conditions of mass population, combined with new industrialisation and intensive digitisation, call for a renewal of the ways in which we think about the forest. Professionals from many disciplines and fields are suggesting that the world has now moved into a new Epoch, that of the Anthropocene, which "begins when human activities started to have a defining global impact on Earth's

geology and ecosystems." Amongst other things, the Anthropocene is marked by a sixth wave of mass extinction. The meaning of the tree shifts profoundly in such a climate.

While the codes and structures that frame life may change outwardly, this recoding and restructuring of ideas and values remains part of a continuum. The world of the digital relies just as much on the Earth as any era ever did. One has only to look at the vast amounts of precious metals and building materials required to make the server farms that support The Cloud to see this. The ideology of progress and technology-driven futures often masks or suppresses such contradictions, whereas reflective and creative space thrives on alignments of seemingly dislocated conditions, activating the potent relations that shape physical, social and imaginary worlds.

The Archaeology of Time invokes a practice that concerns our mind and senses: sensing time is quite different from thinking about time, but the relating of the two generates possibilities beyond the reach of either. By excavating the history of this Gippsland tree, unearthing and bringing its story to the foreground, the artist has created a clearing; this is a space in which to explore time as an internal and external event, a feeling and a phenomenon, a medium of the body and history. In this space, we may feel a particular relationship with the region or country, be reminded of how we evolve with others and other species so critical to our lives, or gain a renewed sense of place. This public artwork dwells on the fact that the story of the human cannot be told without the tree, dwells on a sensing that our futures are, as ever, shared.





Anatomy of a Tree I:
James Geurts 2015.
(Detail)
Site-specific work on paper
110cm x 100cm.
Printed on archival Hane-
mühle paper
Limited Edition of 10
Courtesy of
Greenaway Art Gallery/
GAGPROJECTS

Acknowledgements:

The *Archaeology of Time* was funded by the Creative Victoria Public Sculpture Fund, with secondary funding by the Baw Baw Shire Council, and the Warragul Rotary Club. Additional financial support was provided by the West Gippsland Arts Centre and Collective Good, with in-kind support by Get the Giant up Committee, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning Powelltown, Gary Miles Studio, Blackwoods Readymix and Screedline Concreting.

With special thanks to Hon Heidi Victoria MLA, Dean Linguey, Stuart Koop, Liana Thompson, Rob Robson, Karen Whitaker-Taylor, Julie Louise Bacon, Chris Major, Ewin Wood, David Dunstan, Garry Websdale and the Outdoor Staff from Baw Baw Shire Council, Maudie Palmer AO, Ruth McGowan, Dave Cann, Lynne Stephenson, Robert Sinclair, Aja Martin, Paul Greenaway, Laura Thompson, Wally Notman, Kate Hill, Grant Hardie, the members of the Rotary Club of Warragul Chad Potts, Kerry Warren, Haydn Major, Jarryd Telford, Walter Gross, Darryl Whitaker, Christopher Sutton, Cally Jarrod, Warragul Arts Market, Warragul Farmers Market, ATF Fencing, Warragul Historical Society and Aunty Eileen Harrison, Gunai Kurnai Elder.

This project acknowledges the Kurnai and Gunai nations, custodians of the site of the artwork both past and present.

James Geurts is represented by:
GAGPROJECTS/Greenaway Art Gallery
Adelaide/Berlin
Zhulong Gallery, Dallas, Texas
Contemporary Art Society, London.
www.jamesgeurts.com

Geurts has exhibited his projects in galleries and landscape sites worldwide, including White Cube, London; GEMAK, Den Haag Netherlands; Centre for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv Israel; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; La Chambre Blanche, Quebec; and the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.

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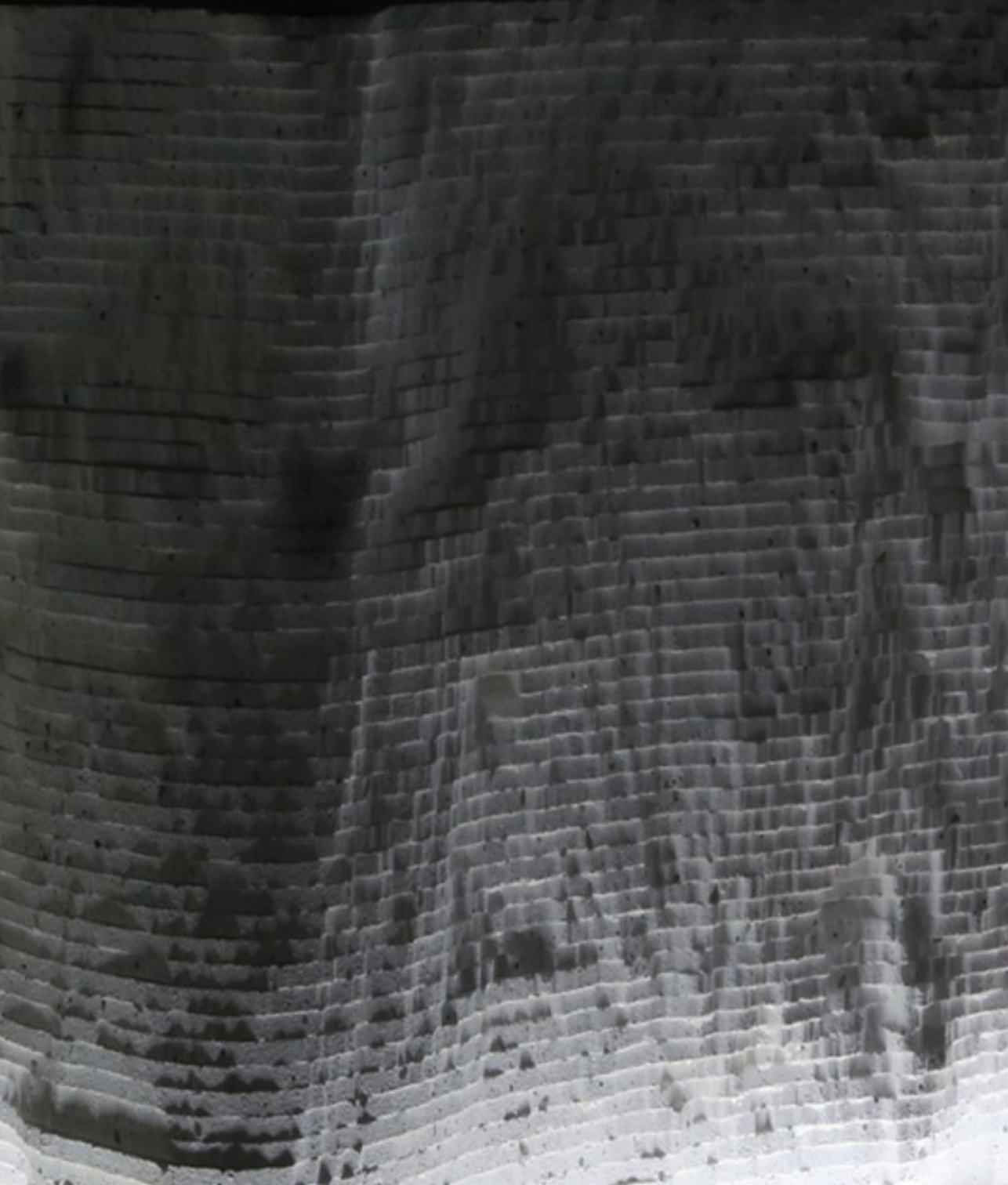
































ISBN 9780955738425



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