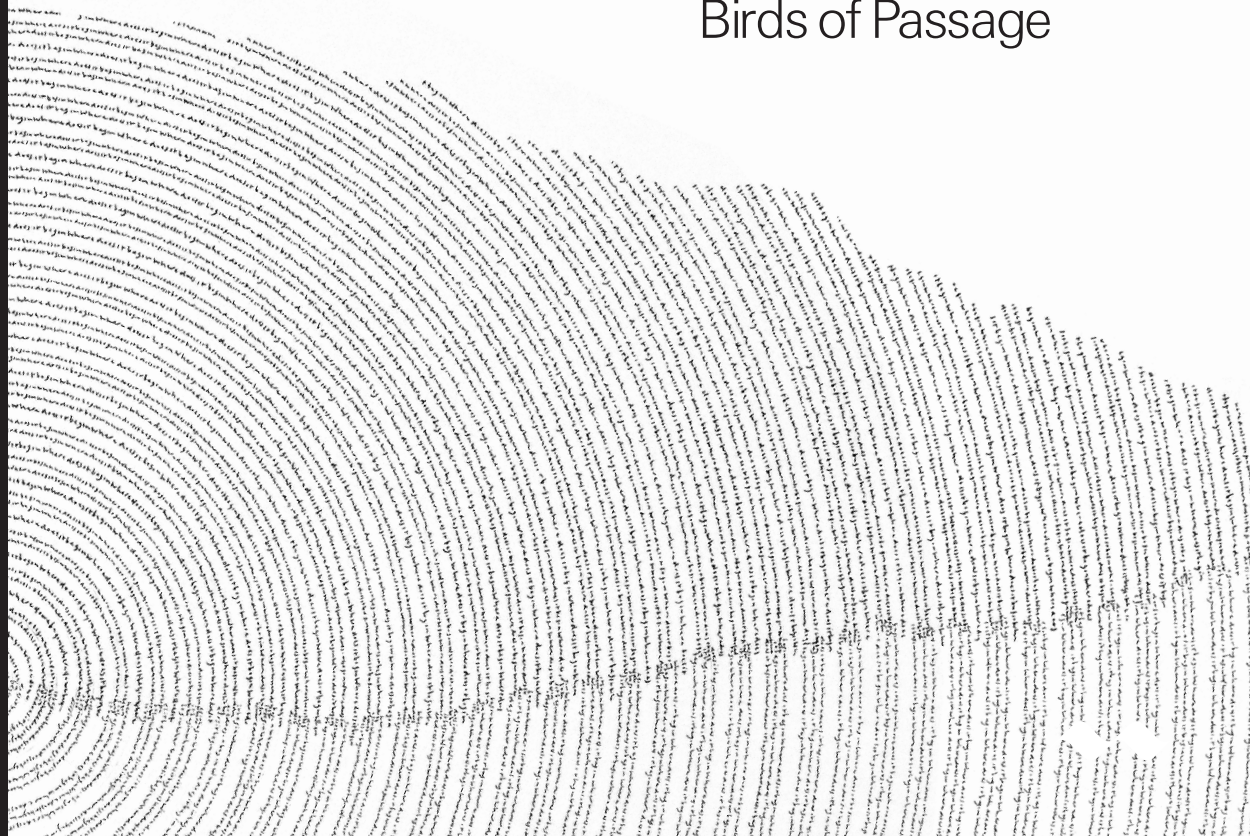


Marine Contemporary

008

Debra Scacco
Birds of Passage



Essay

Claressinka Anderson

There are not too many artists that have moved me to tears in the presence of their work. Debra Scacco is one of them. While conceptually raw, deeply personal and often exceptionally poignant, her work can be almost austere in its visual minimalism. The two things, while somehow incongruent, make for the perfect marriage, as they allow the sentimentality of the work to be offset by an ordered graphic language, that both enhances the content and is simultaneously disarming and unexpected.

Scacco's practice is centered around the concept of home. Born in 1970's New York to an Italian family, ethnic ties instilled in her both a devotion to family in the truest sense and ownership of a history not strictly her own. Her ties to Italian culture result in a set of unattainable self-imposed expectations, particularly in regard to her role as a daughter and wife. These ties paired with geographic displacement (first with her family for southeastern America and later to establish her own life in England) also mean that she is perpetually in a transient state: in between places, in between origins, in between roles and ultimately in between the person she feels she should be and the person she has become. The result of this constant emotional flux is a lifelong fixation with what home is and the seeming impossibility of belonging.

The outcome of this fixation is a body of work based on the artist's personal diaries. Each piece created from a sentence persistently repeated, the obsessive text-based drawings attempt to project a magical chimera. Intimate and compulsive, the composition of the work from a distance resembles dots or fragmented lines. On closer inspection, word after word reveals itself, creating an organic ebb and flow within a rigid visual language. The works are both sombre reflections over choices made throughout a lifetime and contemplations on the future: all in

the hope of helping to discover what (or where) is home.

How come the distance seems to grow is the first of Scacco's works to address the physicality of this magical place. The piece depicts the artist's two home countries — the United States of America and Great Britain — surrounded by a sea of words that exemplifies both the vast distance between them and the continual cycles of mental and physical uncertainty caused by constantly commuting from one to the other.

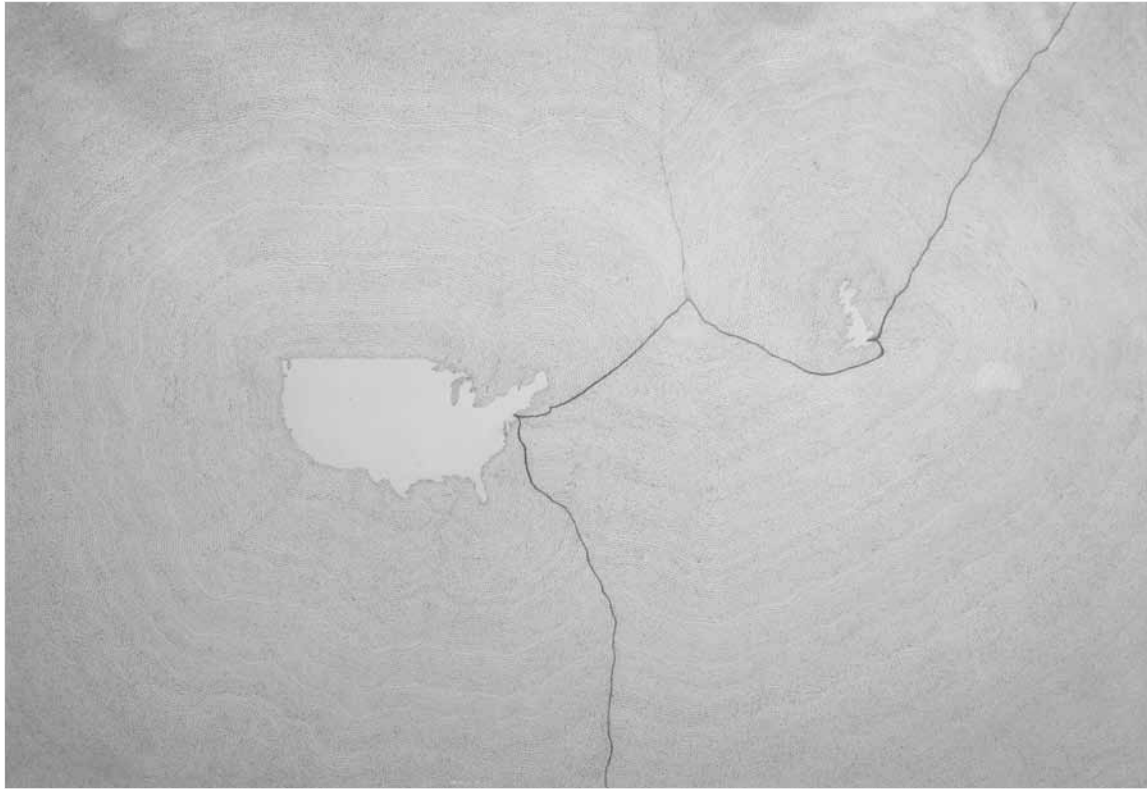
As if a stream of consciousness reproduces her transatlantic journeys, the endless flow of the sentence gradually forms the outlines of the two countries. Seemingly infinite written lines create folds and profiles between her homelands which, like scars on the skin, indicate the special emotional history that spans the space between. The two countries themselves stand out from the surging waves and remain untouched — a blank space to stress their exceptional and precious entity, but just as much to epitomize the gravitational voids which Scacco is drifting between.

Two countries, two homes, two blind spots. Never able to fully fulfill her dream of a home at one of the two places alone, she continuously has to redefine the essence of this place with each homecoming; trying to readjust or reassert what has changed, faded or been erased since the last visit.

While the literary content of Scacco's work remains consistent in its personal nature, the visual content has evolved from a direct manifestation of memory to a more abstract pairing of words and graphic elements that reference physical space. Her earlier works were often directly grounded in her childhood environment: the subject of each drawing

taking the form of childhood associations, such as family furniture, textile patterns and the family home itself. The idea of the house as home — what that means — and the memories contained within this shell, are all threads that continually repeat throughout her work.

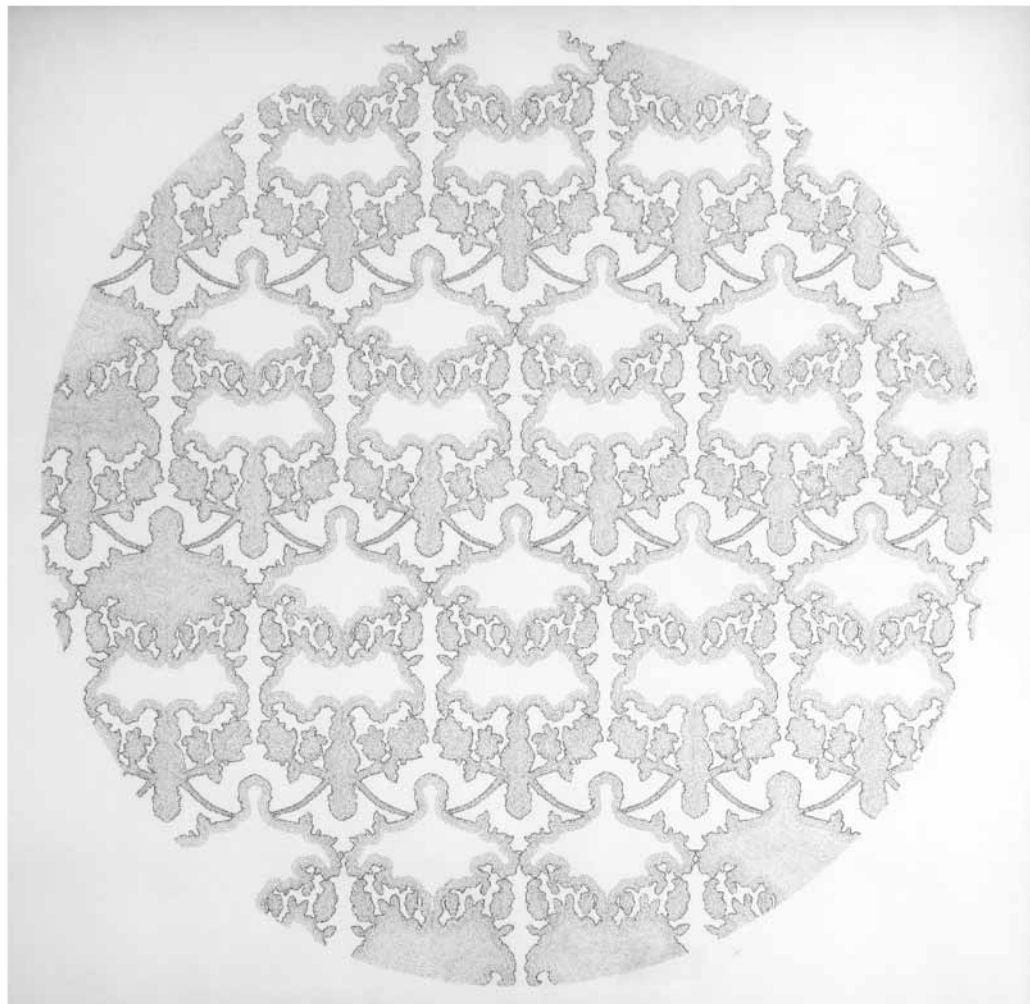
In a world that is continually changing, with each new journey to a place once called home, comes a newly reset impression: another temporary moment demanding a changed perspective again and again. The transitional area between Scacco's homes thus spreads to a metaphor of home, one we are all trying to define and possibly never can. It is an ever-changing ocean over which thoughts travel, continually moulding itself from the constantly growing distance traversed in an effort to belong.



How come the distance seems to grow
Ink on paper 25" x 33", 2008



You are heavy with memory
Ink on paper 25" x 21", 2009



You are with me always I
Ink on paper 27" x 27", 2009



I dream of coming back to you
(I dream you will come back to me)
Ink on paper 19" x 37" x 3", 2010

Birds of Passage

For the last several years, Scacco has been exploring her past in numerous ways: through the interiors she has inhabited, through the associations of certain objects and through the interpretative view of her own memory. This redrawing of her past was in many ways an attempt to come to terms with the fact that she feels different: someone other than who she is *supposed* to be according to the rules of tradition. As a result, Scacco has spent the best part of her life drifting in search of something she will never find. The impossibility of this search is attributed to two key reasons: the home she continually searches for is a place that exists only in her own naïve memory and more importantly, the choices she has made in her own life mean that she will never allow herself the very environment she seeks.

Scacco recurrently examines her past to try and resolve issues of guilt, restlessness and lack of belonging; issues that stem from not having a home in the most conventional sense of the term. What she has not yet addressed is what this means in physical terms. She is continuously fascinated by the notion of a place that exists where everything is as it *should* be. As a result, she felt the need to create a place wholly her own - a kind of escapist utopia. But where is it? Can it exist? Should she keep moving until she finds it? This new body of work addresses these issues by creating a world that blurs the boundaries of fact and fiction. Although Scacco is shy as a person, she is not afraid to expose deep vulnerabilities through her work. This is what makes the work so compelling in its honesty and beautiful in its tentative and careful exploration of space.

Every element of Scacco's work is carefully considered, from the number of works chosen to the words that contour the works themselves.

In this case, the core of the exhibition is composed of seven large-scale maps, each in some way referencing a geography significant to the artist's personal history. In each drawing of these seven key territories, there is no sense of scale - each is a nowhere place floating in white space. In these seven places, there is always a single fragmenting feature: something that divides the city / state / country.

1. England (Thames River): where Scacco has spent the majority of her adult life
2. Staten Island (Staten Island Expressway System): where Scacco was born and partly grew up
3. Georgia (Chattahoochee River): where Scacco spent the remainder of her youth
4. Manhattan (Broadway): where Scacco's father emigrated to and she once lived
5. Sicily (Salso River): where Scacco's father is from
6. Brooklyn (Brooklyn Queens Expressway): where Scacco's mother grew up and her parents lived for many years
7. Calabria (Crati River): where Scacco's maternal grandfather comes from

Whether it be a river, highway, or borders between countries, the way that geographies fragment (and therefore determine where we are "from") are ultimately the first step in defining us. So what happens when you're not really *from* anywhere? Who are you then? This is why these territories could not be presented as a solid whole.

According to Scacco, "The phrases for these seven territories bring to light feelings on my past." They are: *We do not belong, Traces are all I have, All I ask is one more day, I owe everything, Where does it begin, I cannot reach you, and I am trapped in your shadow.*

The circle as the key shape to populate these territories was chosen for all it symbolizes: the cartographic vernacular of "you are here", the idea of a continuous whole, the parallel between the circle and endlessness. With each set of circles existing within a square, Scacco has reduced the framework of each drawing to the most basic graphic elements.

Promise you will never fade away marks an expanded focus: evolving the black and white ink on paper drawings into layered watercolors, incorporating text over a base painting. Used to create an organic division between land and sea, the paint takes on a loose and even slightly violent quality: like stormy seas or inky tears on the page. All of the painted pieces deal with the concept of promise, as they are purely about fears of what will happen in the future — fear of the new, fear of loss, fear of change and in some ways, fear of the future itself.

Birds of Passage is both literally and metaphorically the central piece to the show. The term "birds of passage" was used to refer to early 20th century immigrants who traveled to America in search of migratory labor. The intent was always to return back to their homeland permanently, but only a small percentage of Italian immigrants did so. A three-dimensional map, it sits in the center of the gallery, charting the location and relationships between the territories depicted in the drawings. This installation work also incorporates the islands from the purely fictional landscape as seen in *Promise you will never fade away*: tying together the fragmented real and wholly fictional to create an imagined utopia. This sculpture is a shrine to a place that can never exist. Made of approximately 4,000 intricately cut gold plated beads, it feels protected, precious, untouchable.

The sea of cut gold sits on a white acrylic sheet, inside a protective case. Reminiscent of the kind of jewelry an Italian child may receive on their first Communion, cuts in the gold allow light to play throughout them, casting beautiful reflections; the undulating sparkle becoming an illusory sea that surrounds these fragile, isolated worlds.

Debra Scacco

(b. 1976, New York)
Lives and works in London, UK

- Solo Exhibitions
- 2012
- Birds of Passage, Marine Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA
- 2011
- Forever In Between, Marine Art Salon, Los Angeles, CA
- Selected Group Exhibitions
- 2012
- Incognito, Santa Monica Museum of Art, Los Angeles
 - Pieces of Heaven, Smashbox Studios, Los Angeles (Benefit for Art of Elysium)
- 2011
- If these walls could talk: A conversation, Charlie James Gallery and Marine Art Salon, Los Angeles
 - Incognito, Santa Monica Museum of Art, Los Angeles
 - Pieces of Heaven, Siren Studios, Los Angeles (Vanity Fair benefit for Art of Elysium)
- 2010
- Outside the Lines, Royale Projects, Los Angeles
 - Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts, London
 - Gem, Gallery 825, Los Angeles
 - Salon No. 3, Marine Art Salon, Los Angeles

- 2009
- Follow Your Art, Royal Institute of Great Britain (In association with Sotheby's)
 - Jerwood Drawing Prize, Jerwood Space, London (Followed by national tour through 2010)
 - Salon No. 1, Marine Art Salon, Los Angeles
- 2008
- Postcards from the Edge, James Cohan Gallery, NY
 - Allotment, Seven Seven Contemporary, London
- 2005
- 70 Years of Penguin Design, V&A, London
- 2004
- Metamorphosis, Surface Gallery, Nottingham
 - La Isla, Teatro Odisséia, Rio de Janiero
 - Ocularis, Galapagos Art Space, New York
 - Carbonari, Florean Museum, Romania
 - Mesh, Seven Seven Contemporary, London
- 2003
- Signes de Nuit, Cinema Balzac, Paris
 - Reduced, Century Gallery, London
 - Viper Basel, Littmann Kulturprojekte, Switzerland
 - Intervals, ATA, San Francisco
 - Arte Digital Rosario, Center de Expresiones Contemporanias, Argentina
 - Covert, Whole Gallery, Baltimore
 - Mutiny, Oxo Tower, London

- Collections and Corporate Showings
- The Media Centre, London
 - The Florean Museum, Romania
 - The Penguin Group, London
 - Financial Dynamics, London
 - Galerija Doma Vazduhoplovstva, Belgrade
 - London Chamber of Commerce, City of London
 - International Art Consultants (Art for Offices), London
- Private collections throughout the UK and America

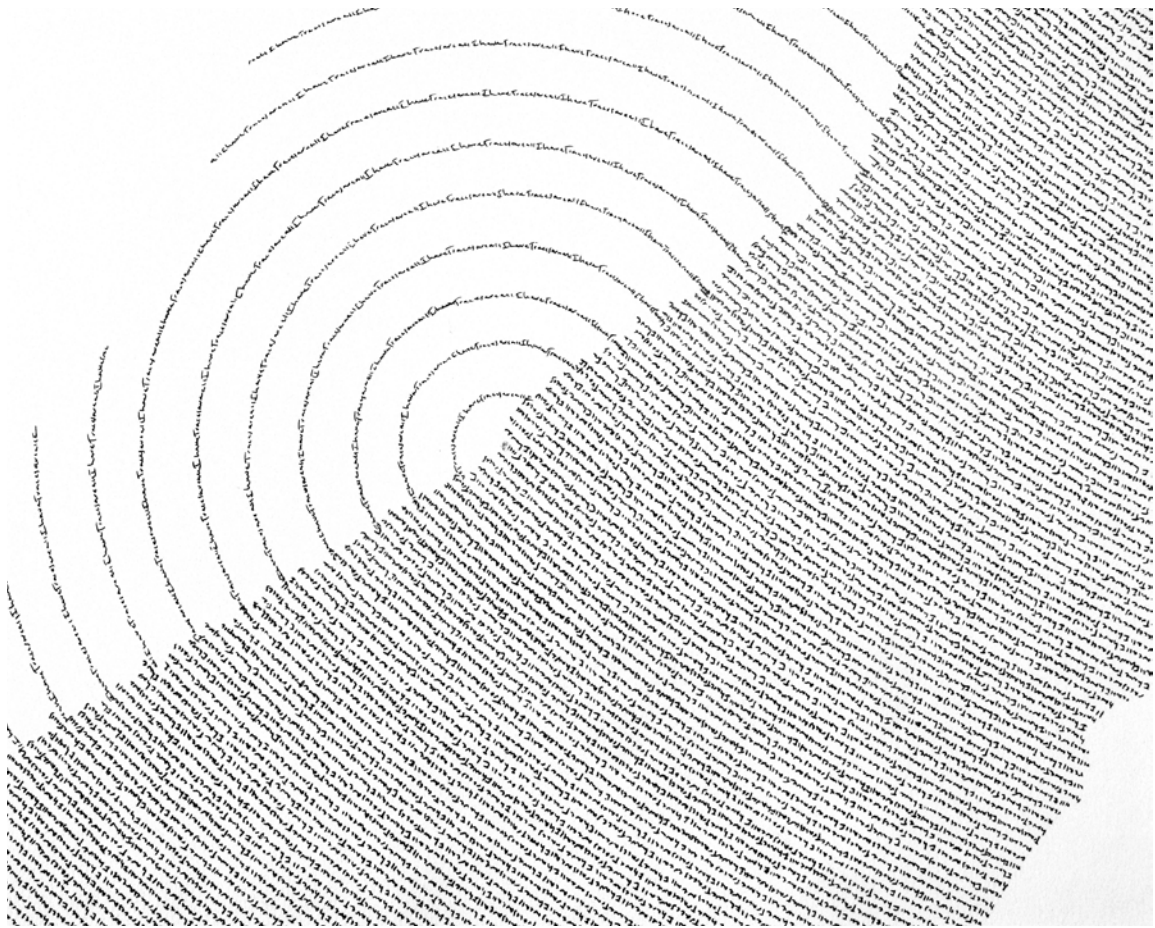
Debra Scacco received a BA in Studio Art from Richmond University (London, 1998). She has exhibited widely in the UK and abroad, including The Royal Academy Summer Show, Jerwood Drawing Prize and Viper Basel (Basel, Switzerland).



All I ask is one more day (Detail)
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2011



All I ask is one more day
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2011



Traces are all I have (Detail)
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2011



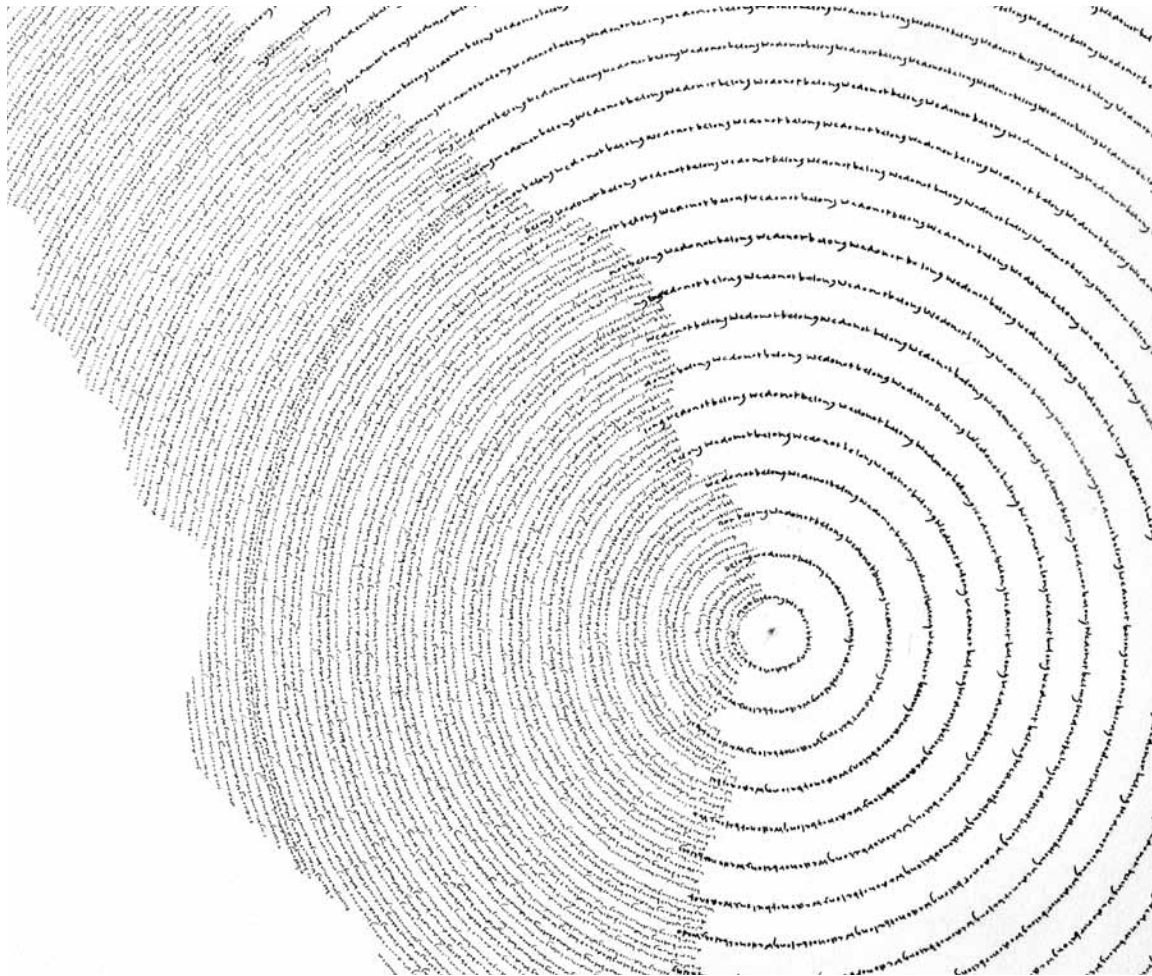
Traces are all I have
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2011



I owe everything (Detail)
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2011



I owe everything
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2011



We do not belong (Detail)
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2012



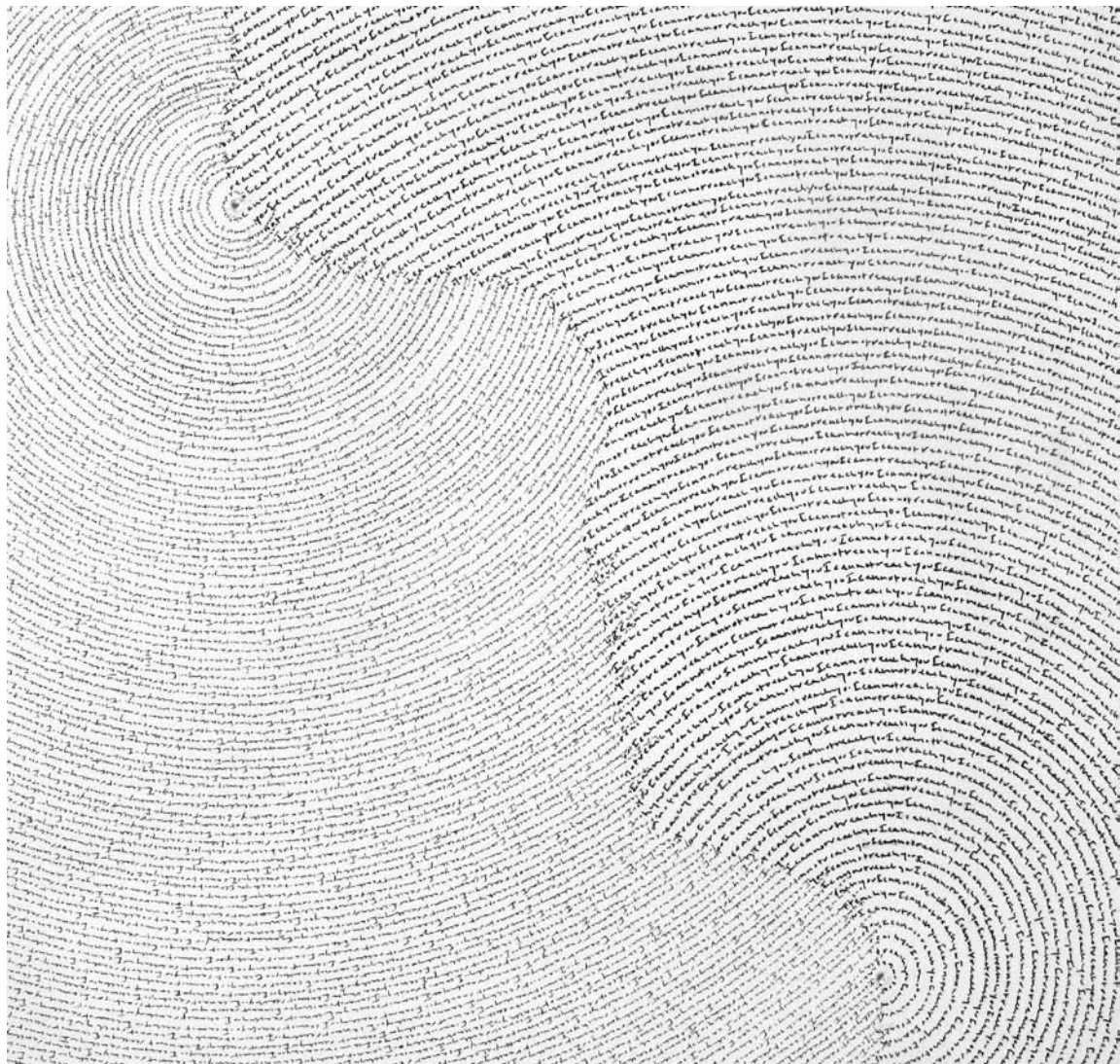
We do not belong
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2012



I am trapped in your shadow (Detail)
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2012



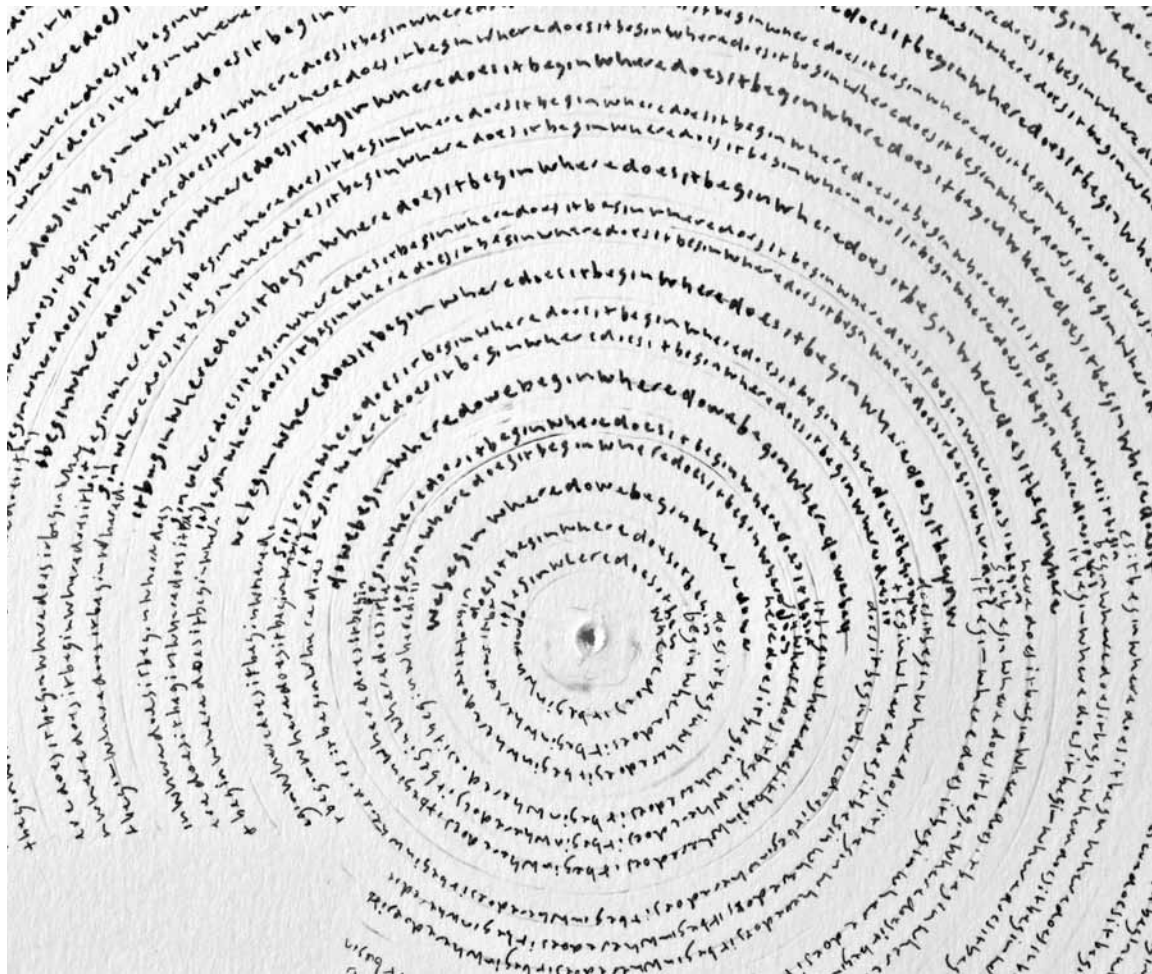
I am trapped in your shadow
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2012



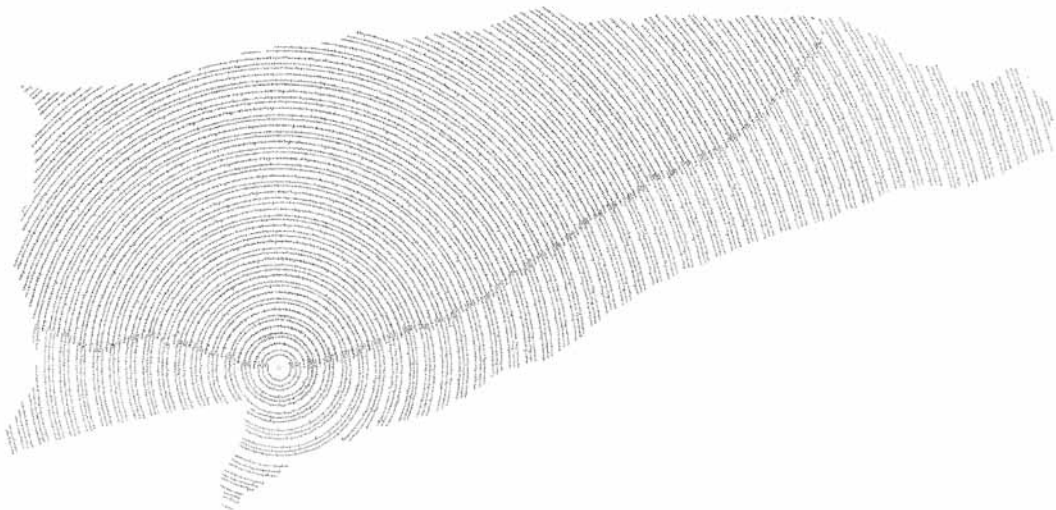
I cannot reach you (Detail)
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2012



I cannot reach you
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2012



Where does it begin (Detail)
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2012



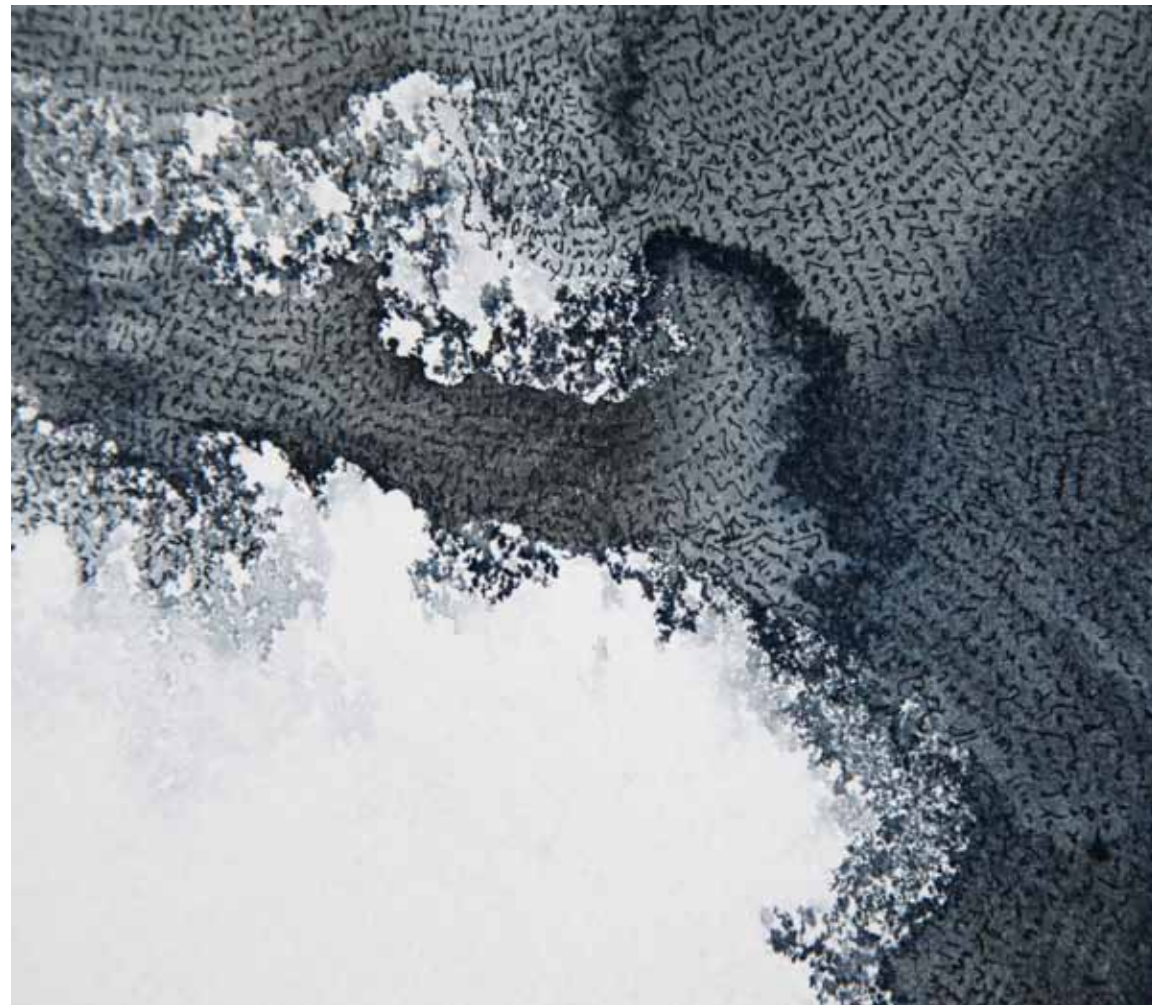
Where does it begin
Ink on paper, 60" X 60", 2012



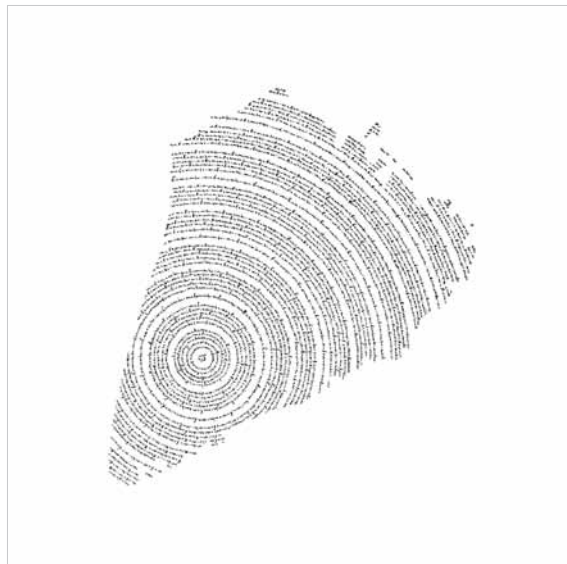
Promise you will never fade away
Ink, watercolor and pigment on paper
48" x 60", 2012



Promise you will never fade away (Detail)
Ink, watercolor and pigment on paper
48" x 60", 2012



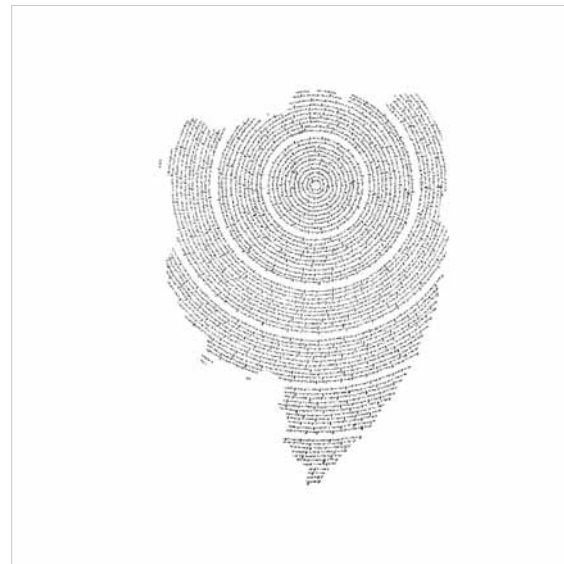
Promise you will never fade away (Detail)
Ink, watercolor and pigment on paper
48" x 60", 2012



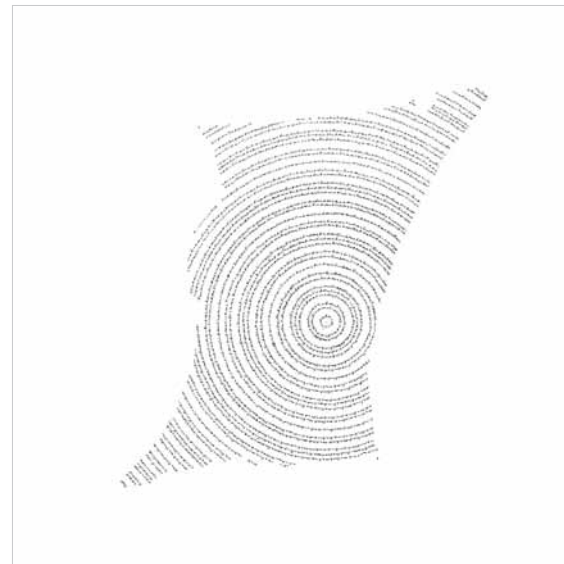
Remember me
Ink on paper, 11" x 11", 2012



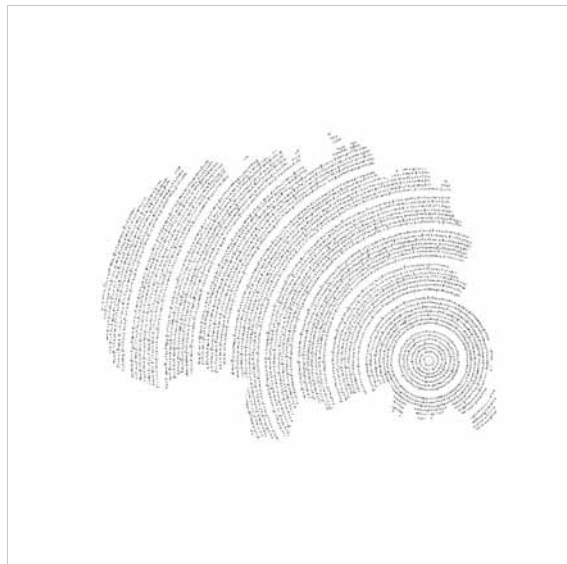
Hold me
Ink on paper, 11" x 11", 2012



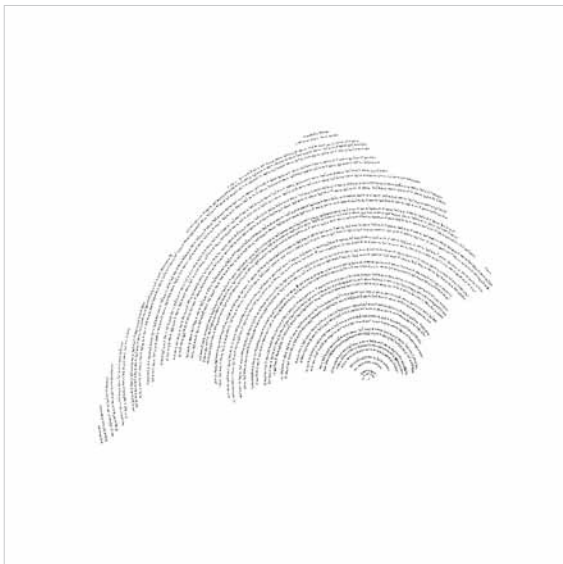
Remind me
Ink on paper, 11" x 11", 2012



Find me
Ink on paper, 11" x 11", 2012



Protect me
Ink on paper, 11" x 11", 2012



Want me
Ink on paper, 11" x 11", 2012



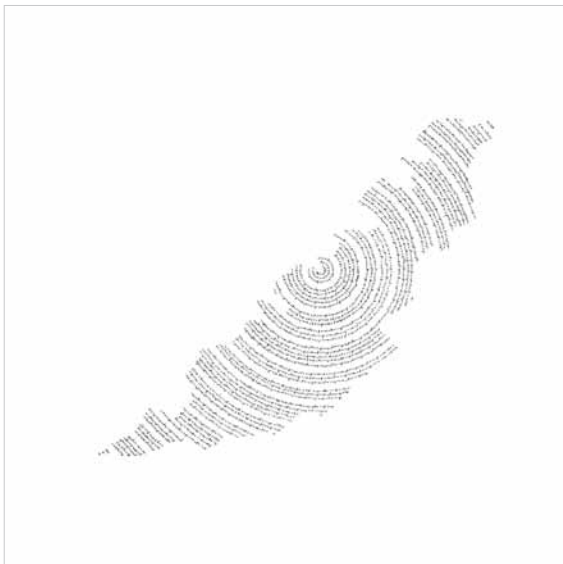
Love me
Ink on paper, 11" x 11", 2012



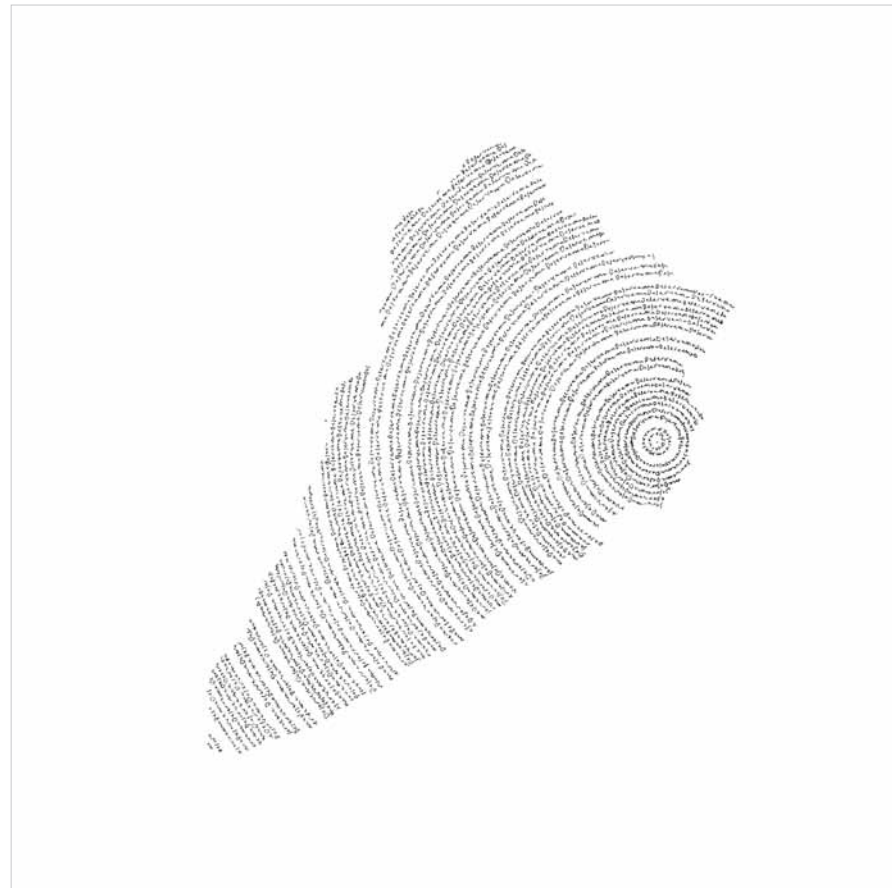
Change me
Ink on paper, 11" x 11", 2012



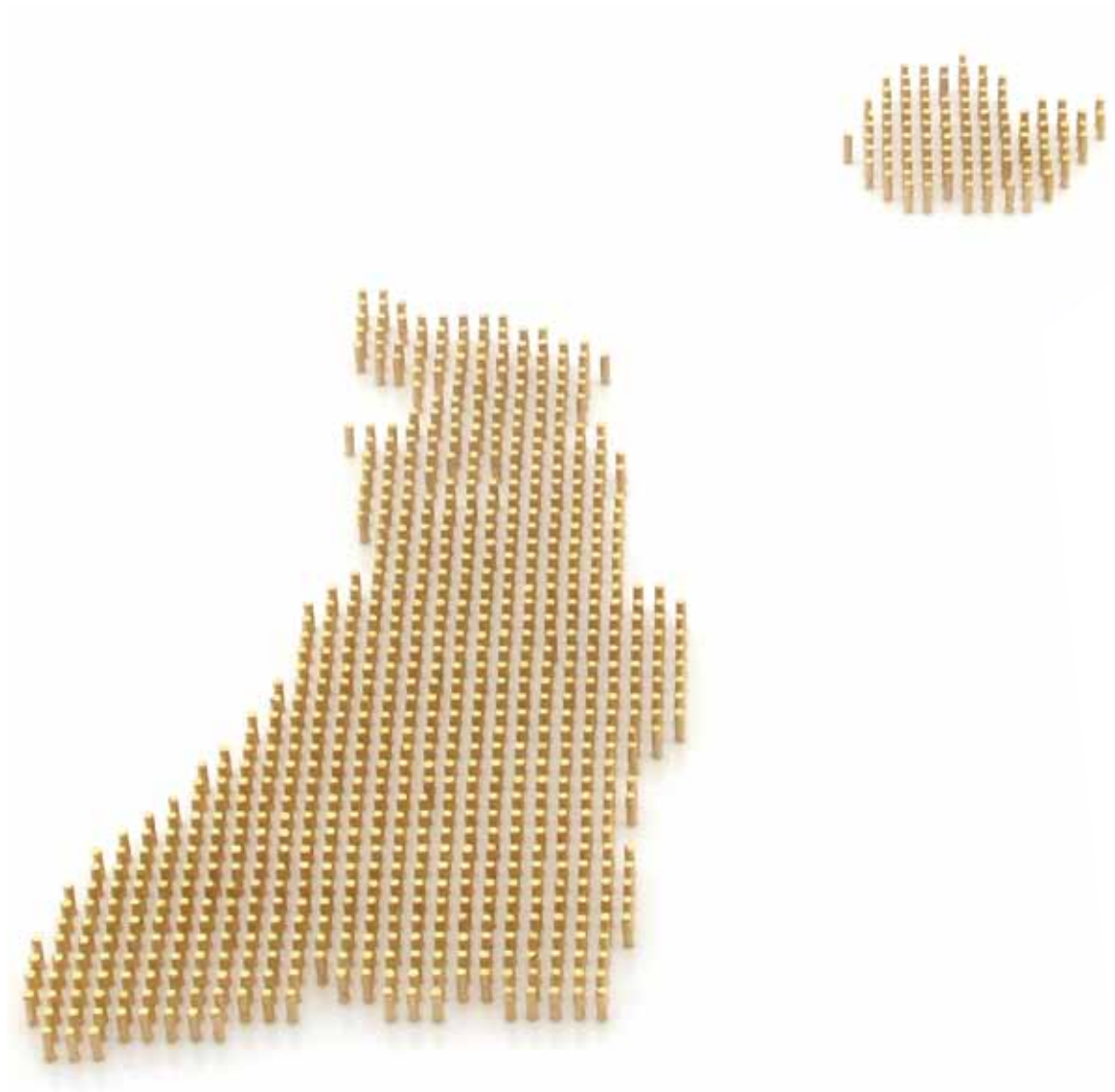
Need me
Ink on paper, 11" x 11", 2012



Accept me
Ink on paper, 11" x 11", 2012



Deserve me
Ink on paper, 11" x 11", 2012



Birds of passage (Detail)
22K gold plated sterling silver beads, gold plated
head pins, epoxy, acrylic 4" x 22" x 44", 2012



Birds of passage (Detail)
22K gold plated sterling silver beads, gold plated
head pins, epoxy, acrylic 4" x 22" x 44", 2012



Birds of passage
Installation



Marine Contemporary 008
Debra Scacco: Birds of Passage

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