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Against the View From Nowhere: Situated Drawing as an Ethics of Attention on the North Coast of Northern Ireland

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Abstract

This article explores situated drawing as a method of attending to place, memory, and embodied knowledge through an artist-researcher practice developed along the north coast of Northern Ireland. Working through walking, observational drawing, annotation, photography and animation, it treats drawing not as a secondary record of place but as a way of thinking with it, asking what becomes visible when drawing is understood as a cartography of practice: not a neutral map viewed from above, but a relational tracing produced through movement, pause, encounter, affect and the layered social histories held in particular sites.

Grounded in a practice shaped by personal and public memory, the article asks how drawing can register what conventional mapping often leaves aside: hesitation, residue, fragility, repetition, care, and the slow negotiations through which place is inhabited. Particular attention is given to coastal and edge environments. The meeting of sea and land is understood not simply as landscape but as a dynamic and unsettled threshold through which questions of boundary, belonging, and memory can be re-read.

Rather than claiming mastery over site, the article argues for drawing as an ethics of attention. The drawn line is both aesthetic and methodological: a means of noticing, returning, and remaining with complexity. By positioning drawing as a form of cartographic practice, it contributes to discourse on situated knowledge, expanded drawing, and practice-based research, proposing that drawing can function as a critical and reflective method for engaging places marked by layered histories, unresolved tensions, and fragile forms of belonging.

Keywords

Situated knowledge; cartography; arts-based research; place; memory; embodied.

1. Introduction

1.1 - The Cartographic Refusal

To map the north coast of Northern Ireland is never an innocent act. It is to engage a place already shaped by histories of surveying, naming, partitioning, bordering, and claiming. Conventional cartography often works through distance. It looks from above. It seeks legibility. It abstracts. It flattens. It turns terrain into information. Yet in doing so it can lose the lived texture of place: the

pressure of Atlantic wind against the body, the rhythm of tide as it erases and redraws the shore, and the memory that clings to a particular edge, ruin, or outcrop. In the Northern Ireland context, mapping has long been entangled with colonial logics of possession, political division, and generational claim. Any mapping of this land therefore raises questions not only of location and scale, but also of whose knowledge, whose language, and whose memory are being inscribed within its lines.

When I describe this work as a cartographic refusal, I signal a refusal of the view from nowhere. A refusal of distance as the default condition of knowledge. Drawing, in this practice, works at eye level, foot level, hand level, and breath level. It insists that knowledge is situated: made somewhere, by someone, through a body, within history, and in relation to specific material conditions. Drawing, in this expanded sense, includes the body moving through and within the landscape; the arrangement of found objects and materials; mark-making; photography; and animation as a way of recording change across time. The drawn line is therefore not only aesthetic. It is also methodological. It thinks, registers, hesitates, returns and bears witness.

The north coast, in this practice, is not a passive object to be observed and represented from a safe analytical remove. It is an active and charged field of encounter, and drawing here is not a secondary record of experience, rather it is part of the encounter itself. The line is not only what remains afterwards, but also one of the ways the encounter becomes thinkable, and through which I enter into relation with the place. This expanded account of drawing matters because it allows artist-research to attend to what more extractive or more abstract forms of inquiry can easily miss. It can hold together the visual and the verbal, the somatic and the historical, the reflective and the material, without forcing them into premature resolution.

The questions this practice keeps returning to are not only methodological. They are questions of adequacy. What does it mean to research responsibly within a place marked by layered histories, fragile forms of belonging, and continual environmental change? What does the researcher owe to the site, and to themselves within it? The north coast is especially generative in this regard because it continually resists simplification. It is a place of extraordinary physical beauty, but also of shipwrecks, plantation, military infrastructure, tourism, migration, silence, noise, and memory. It is a place where the more-than-human and the social are inseparable. The tidal edge, the harbour wall, the rocky outcrop, the sea cave, and the patchwork fields are not just settings, they are

conditions through which attention, vulnerability, and relation become material. This article works across theory and practice to explore what becomes visible when drawing is understood not only as representation but as an ethics of attention: a way of remaining with the complexity of a place rather than resolving it from a distance.



Figure 1. 'Untitled Mapping' (found cloth, natural dyed calico and thread, machine and hand stitching) by Louise O'Boyle.

2. Borders, Affect and the Body

2.1 - Situated Epistemology and the Cartographic Turn

Haraway's account of situated knowledge challenges the fantasy of neutral, universal seeing (Haraway, 1988). Her argument is not simply that all knowledge is partial. It is that responsible knowledge must acknowledge its own conditions of production: where it comes from, through which body, and under what histories and relations of power. Once that is taken seriously, method changes. The body is no longer treated as a complication to be managed away. It becomes one of the conditions of knowing.

That matters acutely in landscapes marked by layered histories and unresolved tensions. The north coast, for me, is not a stable object of study. It is a site where geological, ecological, political, and personal histories are constantly meeting and moving across one another. Massey's ac-

count of place as a "throwntogetherness" of intersecting trajectories is useful here (Massey, 2005). The coast is dynamic, contingent, and always in the process of becoming. It is composed through encounter and relation, not simply occupied by them.

In the context of Northern Ireland, borders are never only geopolitical. They are also social, psychic, communal, and affective. They shape where one walks, what one remembers, and what remains unsaid. If the border line fixes and divides, the drawn line in this practice seeks to do something else. It dwells. It hesitates. It returns. It attends. It does not dissolve conflict or overwrite history. But it can create a slower and more careful way of being with a site that has been overdetermined by systems of ordering and control.



Figure 2. (detail of Figure 1). Images credit: L. O'Boyle.



Figure 3. 'Untitled' (marker pens, charcoal rubbing, distressed cloth) by Louise O'Boyle. Image credit: L. O'Boyle.

2.2 - Resisting the Technologies of Violence

Aizeki et al. (2023) describe contemporary border-making as dependent on technologies that categorise and fix bodies in space. These technologies privilege the efficiency and legibility of the border over the complexity and humanity of lived experience. That language is useful here because it helps articulate why drawing matters methodologically. If the border line fixes, divides, and contains, the drawn line in this practice attempts something else. It lingers. It connects. It returns. It makes room for complexity rather than resolving it through the efficiency of classification.

This practice is, in that sense, a slow technology. The phrase matters because it marks a refusal of the temporal logic that often governs contemporary forms of research and representation. To remain on a cliff edge for hours, to move repeatedly along a tideline, to sit on a harbour wall with no outcome more measurable than attention itself, is to step outside the expectation that knowledge must be fast, extractable, and productive in immediately legible ways. This is not a romantic claim for slowness as virtue in itself. It is a methodological claim. Certain places cannot be meaningfully engaged through speed. Certain histories cannot be responsibly approached through forms of capture that demand rapid coherence.



Figure 4. 'The Haptic Line' (photograph). Image credit: L. O'Boyle.

The act of remaining with a site is not neutral. It is a political and methodological choice. It refuses to let the landscape be simplified into a vista, a resource, or a dataset. It acknowledges that the border is not only a line on a map, but a lived condition of exposure, memory, and uneven access.

2.3 - Touching Feeling: The Haptic Line

Kosofsky Sedgwick's attention to texture, affect, and encounter is important here (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2003). Texture, in this practice, is not simply a visible quality. It is haptic. It is produced in the meeting between body and surface, between hand and page, between weather and mark. A drawing made in Atlantic wind carries that encounter within it. The mark is shaped by moisture, resistance, cold, instability, and bodily limit. The page is not outside the site. It becomes another place where the site continues to act.

This is why the haptic line matters to the argument. In conventional terms, the line is often understood as representation, contour, or boundary. Here, the line is also an event. It is the registration of a relation. It carries the pressure of the hand, the instability of the ground, the interruption of wind, and the emotional charge of presence. A line made while balancing on wet rock is not equivalent to a line made in studio conditions, nor should it be. The difference is not incidental. It is part of what the work knows.

Drawing therefore positions knowledge not safely out there, at an analytical distance, but in here, in the relation between body and site. Clarke's account of returning home to our bodies is resonant here (Clarke, 2024). Breath, fatigue, exposure, steadiness, and limit are not interruptions to method. They are part of method. Once knowledge is understood as embodied and situated, the question is no longer how to remove the body from the research. It is how to remain accountable for the body's presence within it.

2.4 - Somatic Return, Ethics and Vulnerability

It is in the encounter between body and site that the work

becomes explicitly somatic. Situated drawing requires the researcher to be physically present, vulnerable to the elements, and attentive to the internal rhythms through which place is encountered. Breath, steadiness, fatigue, alertness, fear, and limit are not merely background conditions. They shape what can be seen, what can be held, and what kind of mark becomes possible.

To speak of vulnerability in this context is not to indulge confession, nor to elevate exposure for its own sake. Vulnerability, in the practice, names a condition of openness to encounter. It acknowledges that I do not stand outside the site as a neutral observer. I arrive as a body in relation, affected by weather, by physical precarity, by memory, by uncertainty, and by the limits of what I can know. On the coast, this vulnerability is literal as well as conceptual. The hand shakes. The paper tears. The body hesitates at an edge. The route is revised because the ground becomes unsafe. These are not signs of methodological weakness. They are records of the terms on which the encounter has taken place.

This is why vulnerability functions here as a methodological strength rather than a deficiency. It allows the practice to remain partial and honest. It resists the fiction of full control. It makes visible the extent to which relation changes the researcher as well as the work. In this sense, vulnerability is not opposed to rigour. It is one of the conditions that makes rigour possible. A practice that admits uncertainty can be more accountable than one that covers uncertainty over with the appearance of mastery.

The language of ethics enters the work at this point with greater precision. When I describe drawing as an ethics of attention, I am not using the term ethics in a narrow procedural sense, although procedural questions matter. I mean ethics as a way of being in relation. It concerns how I arrive at a site, how I remain with it, what I attend to, what I refuse to take from it, and how I understand my responsibility within the encounter. Taylor's work is important here not for any single argument but for its insistence on totality as a condition of understanding (Taylor, 2017). To engage a place, a community, or a set of histories re-

sponsibly requires holding the full ecosystem of actors, relations, lived experiences, and structural conditions together. Totality matters here. To extract one thread while discarding the rest is to misread the place. It is only by holding the full complexity together that genuine understanding becomes possible. It begins with the insistence that the site, its histories, and the bodies that have and continue to inhabit it, must be approached in their full complexity rather than simplified into what is most convenient to know.

Ethics is therefore tied closely to humility. I am not trying to capture a place completely, stabilise it, or render it fully knowable on my own terms. Knowledge remains incomplete. It is shaped by the body, by the histories carried within the site, and by the conditions through which the encounter takes place. Ethical practice, in this sense, means resisting the temptation to move too quickly from encounter to interpretation, or from fragment to totalising claim. It asks for patience with uncertainty.

This patience is inseparable from care. Drawing, here, is an act of care not because it is gentle or consoling in any easy sense, but because it asks for disciplined and sustained noticing. It asks the researcher to remain with what may be fragile, contested, or difficult to resolve. It asks for attentiveness to the layered conditions of place, including those that do not immediately yield themselves to visual

statement. Care is thus not sentimentality. It is a methodological commitment to staying with complexity.

The practice of returning repeatedly to the same stretch of coastline deepens this ethical orientation. Return matters because it unsettles the fantasy that place can be known in a single encounter. Repetition is not redundancy. It is a form of accountability. It acknowledges that the site changes, that the researcher changes, and that relation is made over time rather than achieved in a moment of capture. To draw the same shoreline repeatedly is to practice a form of accountability to the site, its histories, and one's own shifting position within it.

3. Cartographies of Practice:

A Multi-modal Methodology

The research employs a multi-modal approach designed to respond to the unsettled condition of the coast. This methodology is not a rigid set of rules applied in advance. It is better understood as a slow negotiation between the artist and the site: one that remains open to what the terrain, the weather, and the encounter itself demand.

The work unfolds through several interwoven modes of practice. Each mode produces a different kind of knowledge. None is sufficient on its own. Together they make possible a cartography of practice. These modes include the body moving through and within the site; the ar-

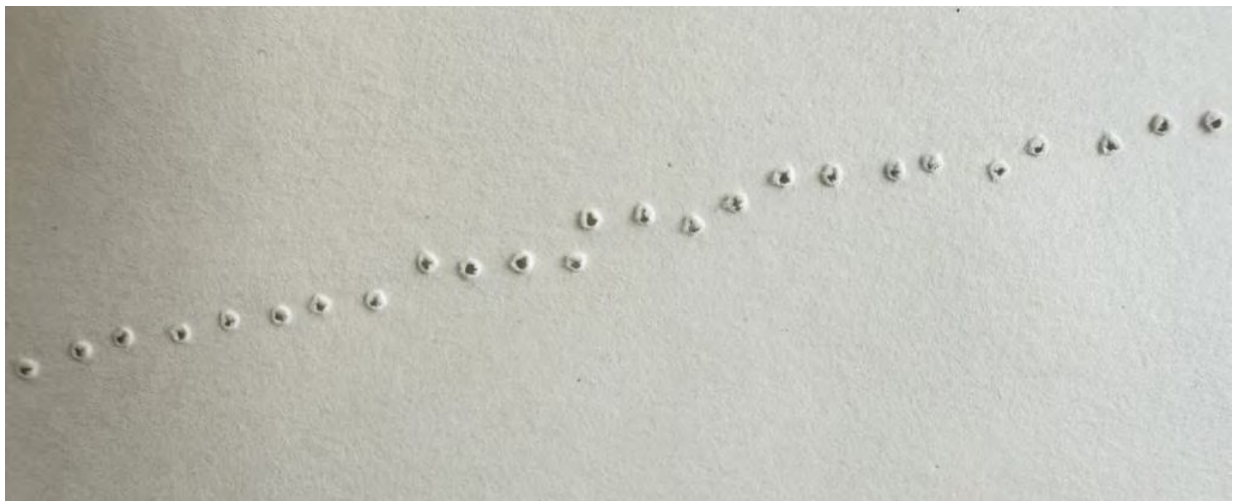


Figure 5. 'Untitled' (pierced paper) by Louise O'Boyle. Image credit: L. O'Boyle.

range of found materials gathered from the tideline; mark-making; photography; and animation as a temporal extension of the drawing act. Taken together, these modes do not produce a neutral map. They produce an archive of encounters: partial, embodied, and made over time.

3.1 - Walking as a Primary Line

The research begins with the footstep. Before any instrument touches paper, the body has already begun to draw. It climbs rocks, pauses at an edge, turns back where the terrain becomes unsafe, crouches at a tideline, stands in wind, enters a sea cave, and waits. This is not walking as transport. It is walking as wayfaring. The route is not fully known in advance. It emerges through encounter. The body's negotiation of terrain becomes the first line of the work. In that sense, movement is not simply preliminary to drawing. It is drawing.

The legacy of Barbara Steveni and the Artist Placement Group is useful here, and in particular the notion of the artist as an incidental person: a presence without a fixed script, available to the site on its own terms (Bell-Jones

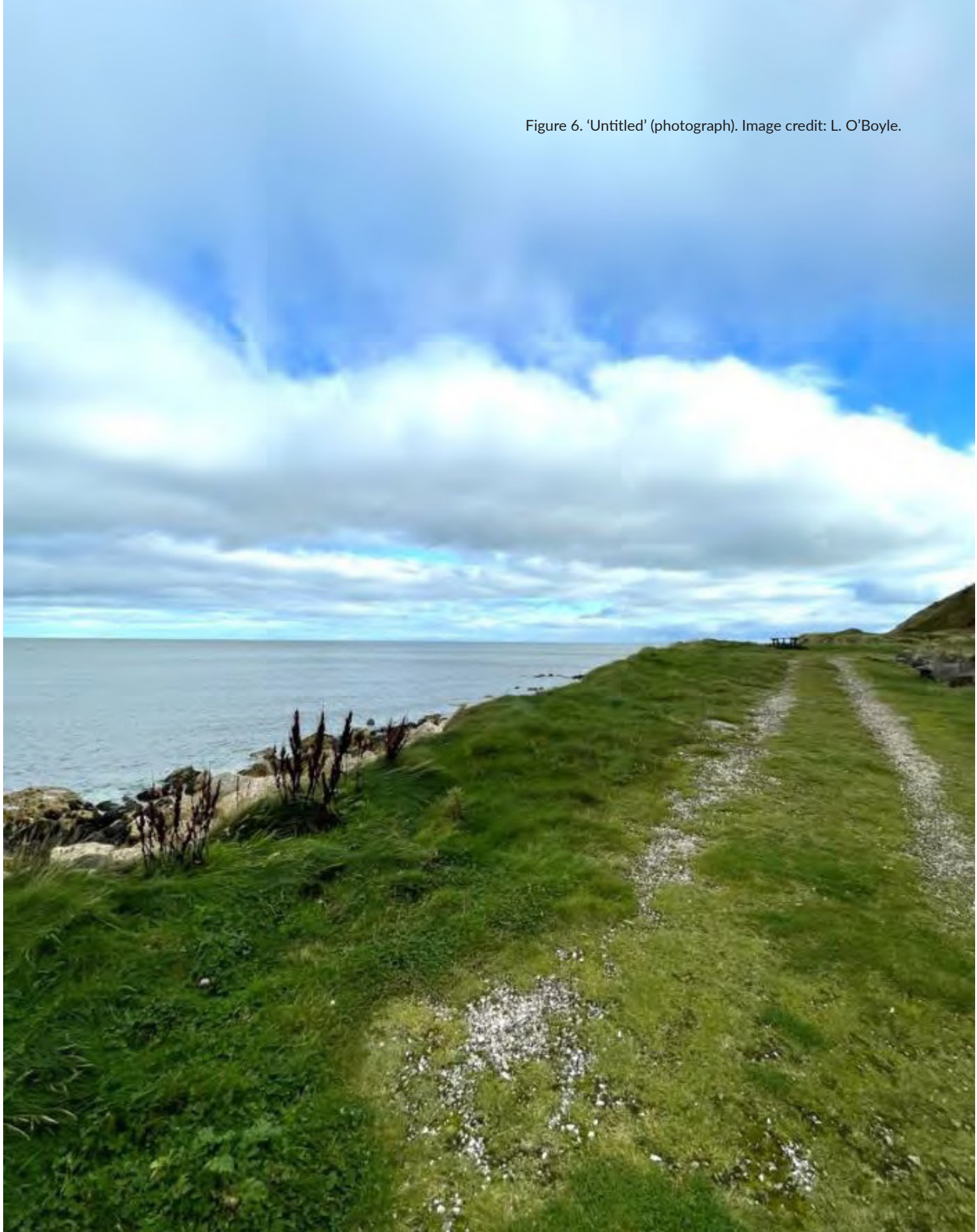
et al., 2025). Walking enacts that availability. It creates a rhythmic engagement through which place is not merely viewed but inhabited and read through the body.

3.2 - Incidental encounter and situated attention

Walking also makes the research available to the unexpected. A change in weather, a conversation at the harbour, a trace of previous industry, a fragment of rope caught under rocks, an abrupt shift in light: these are not distractions from the method. They are part of the method. The incidental nature of the practice keeps it from becoming overly instrumental. It allows the work to register encounter as it occurs rather than forcing the site into an already determined framework. That matters in historically charged landscapes, where too much is often already over-interpreted from a distance.

Walking is therefore both a practical and an epistemological act. It creates the conditions for situated attention. It allows the research to proceed through responsiveness rather than control, and through presence rather than projection.

Figure 6. 'Untitled' (photograph). Image credit: L. O'Boyle.



3.3 - Observational Drawing and Annotation

The pause in movement is where observational drawing begins. However, this is not drawing as illustration. It is a form of relational tracing. The marks on the page do not simply depict the site. They record a relation between body, material, weather, memory, and attention.

Annotation is central to this process. Written words, temperature, sensory notes, fragments of overheard lan-

guage, and remembered phrases are all carried onto the page. These are not supplementary to the drawing. They are part of the drawing itself. What interests me here is that annotation makes visible what the image alone cannot hold: sound, weather direction, affective change, historical association, or a moment of hesitation. In that sense the page becomes a layered field rather than a single visual statement.

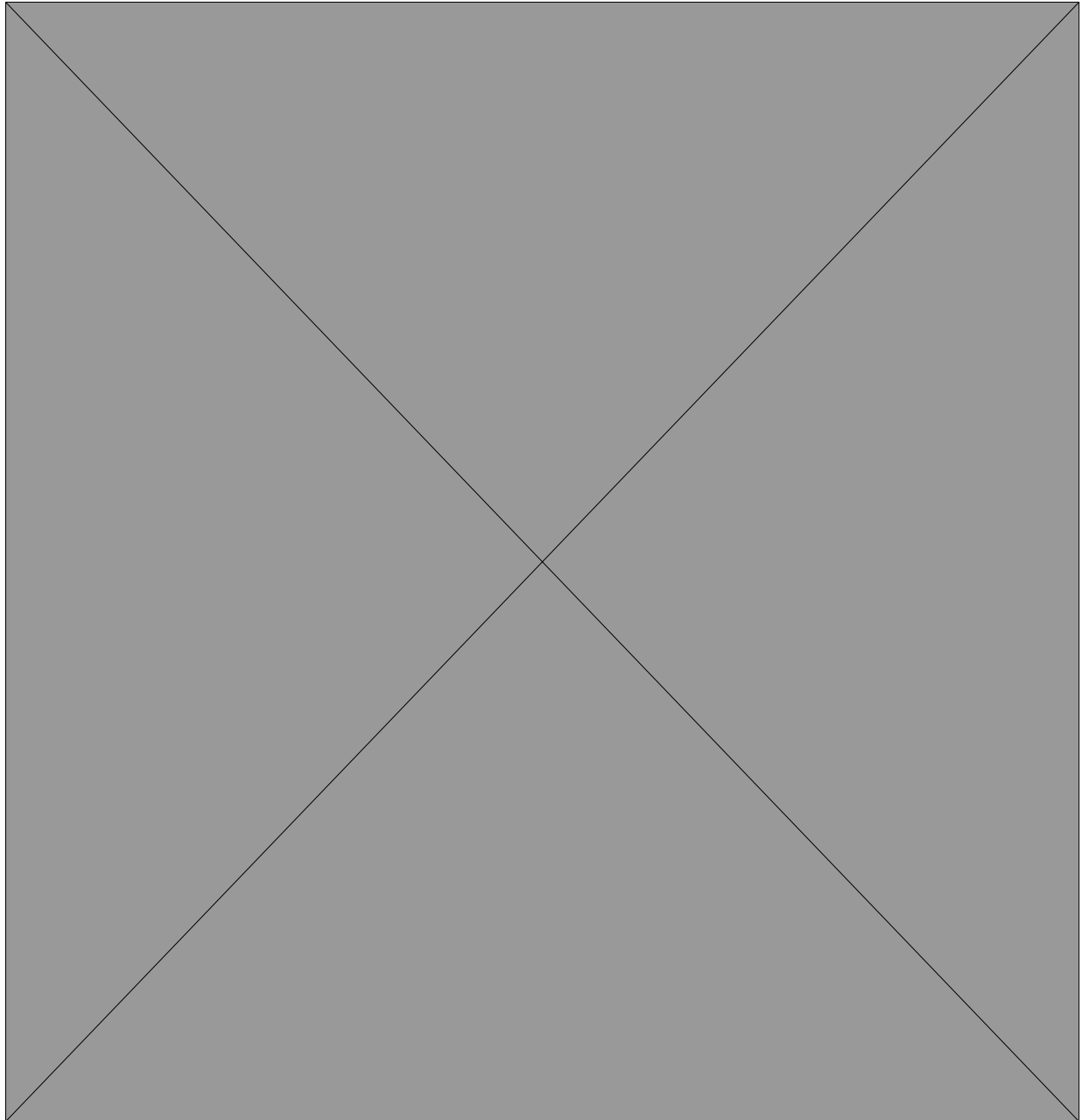


Figure 7. 'Untitled' (charcoal rubbing, ink, collage) by Louise O'Boyle. Image credit: L. O'Boyle.



Figure 8. 'Untitled' (found object assembled drawing) by Louise O'Boyle. Image credit: L. O'Boyle.



Figure 9. Collection (multiple found object assembled drawings) by Louise O'Boyle. Image credit: L. O'Boyle.

3.4 - Arrangement of Objects: Drawing in Three Dimensions

Fragments gathered from the tideline are placed together as *found object assembled drawings* to function as spatial marks. These arrangements are often deliberately provisional. I am not interested in monumentality here. I am interested in relation, in the temporary placing together of materials already held within the site, and in the fact that wind, tide, time, and human and non-human presences will undo the arrangement. Its fragility is part of the meaning. The work does not claim permanence. It registers a relation that allows that relation to remain temporary.

3.5 - Mark-Making

The variety of mark-making in the work is methodologically deliberate. Observational pencil drawing allows close attention to geological and botanical detail, where the fineness of the line matches the fineness of the perception required. Charcoal responds differently. It can hold the tonal mass of a headland, the density of a storm sky, or the darkness of a sea cave.

Paper placed directly against barnacled rock and rubbed over, produces an indexical surface trace: a mark made by

the land itself through the mediation of the hand's pressure. Wash and diluted ink allow atmosphere and moisture to be held differently. Blind contour drawing, meanwhile, records attention rather than control. In this sense, the sketchbook becomes a boundary object. It mediates between visual and verbal, sensory and analytical, personal and historical forms of understanding. The drawings remain intentionally messy, iterative, and open.

3.5 - Photography and Animation: Registering Instability

To account for the instability of the coastal environment, I integrate photography and animation. Photography can capture the exposure of a particular moment: the raw relation of light, form, atmosphere, and site. But animation is even more significant here, because it allows drawing to exist as a process rather than a fixed object. By layering observational drawings, photographic traces, and records of material arrangements as they are dissolved by tide and weather, animation holds movement and pause together. It registers the coast not as stable scenery, but as continual change. This matters because the coast is a threshold condition. It is never the same from one moment to the next. Animation allows the research to remain faithful to that instability. It becomes the cartography of practice at its most explicitly temporal.



Figure 10. Still from 'Untitled' animation. Image credit: L. O'Boyle.

4. The North Coast: Deep History and Contested Memory

4.1 - Thresholds: the sea and the land

The meeting of sea and land is the central threshold of this research. It is often described through a binary: permanence and transience, rock and water, stability and flux. But what matters more here is that both sea and land are in continual relation and continual change, though at different temporal scales. Rock is eroded, exposed, undercut, and colonised by a variety of lifeforms. Water withdraws and returns. Tide rewrites the same place differently each day. The coast makes multiple temporalities palpable at once. It is not a line of separation. It is a line of inquiry.

This threshold condition is not simply environmental. It is also methodological. The research itself sits at thresholds: between practice and theory, visual and verbal, in-

dividual encounter and wider history, artistic process and academic method. It is drawn repeatedly to places that are neither one thing nor another, that exist through relation rather than fixed identity. This is why the intertidal zone becomes such a powerful figure for the work. It is alternately exposed and submerged. It resists stable categorisation. It is defined not by what it is, but by what it is between. In this sense it does not only describe the site. It models a way of thinking that the methodology itself requires.

The bodily experience of moving through this site is crucial. A mark made on a headland during a squall is not the same as a mark made in the relative shelter of a cave or harbour wall an hour later. One carries wind resistance, cold, instability, and physical precarity. The other allows a different kind of steadiness and duration of attention. These conditions are not obstacles to the research. They are part of what the research knows. The drawn line re-



Figure 11. 'Layered Thresholds' (photograph). Image credit: L. O'Boyle.

cords the circumstances under which attention was held. It is a document not only of what was seen but of what it cost to remain there.

Margolin (1978) and Risling Baldy (2017), writing from Indigenous contexts that cannot and should not be straightforwardly transferred to the Northern Irish context, are nonetheless helpful in reminding us that land is not simply backdrop but relation, and that relation is sustained through practice, story, and attentive return. These works are invoked carefully, not to collapse distinct contexts, but to remain alert to the inadequacy of treating place as empty ground for projection. On the north coast, land and sea are held through labour, kinship, conflict, memory, and inherited forms of regard. The practice must therefore approach the site as already socially and historically inhabited, and as a place with its own prior claims on attention.

This practice attempts an anti-colonial and anti-extractive orientation. It tries to remain alert to the histories through which naming, mapping, and claiming have operated on this coast, and to resist reproducing those logics in contemporary artistic research. In this context, cartographic refusal is not only an epistemological move. It is an ethical one. It is a refusal to approach the coast as empty scenery, as available ground, or as a resource open for capture.

The unsettled condition of the coastal edge therefore exceeds the visual. It encompasses historical memory, environmental change, bodily vulnerability, and the limits of representation. This is precisely why it is such a potent research site. The coast continually resists any attempt to arrive at a final account. It asks instead for methods adequate to fragility, instability, and relation. Situated drawing, as developed here, is one such method. It does not resolve the threshold. It works from within it.

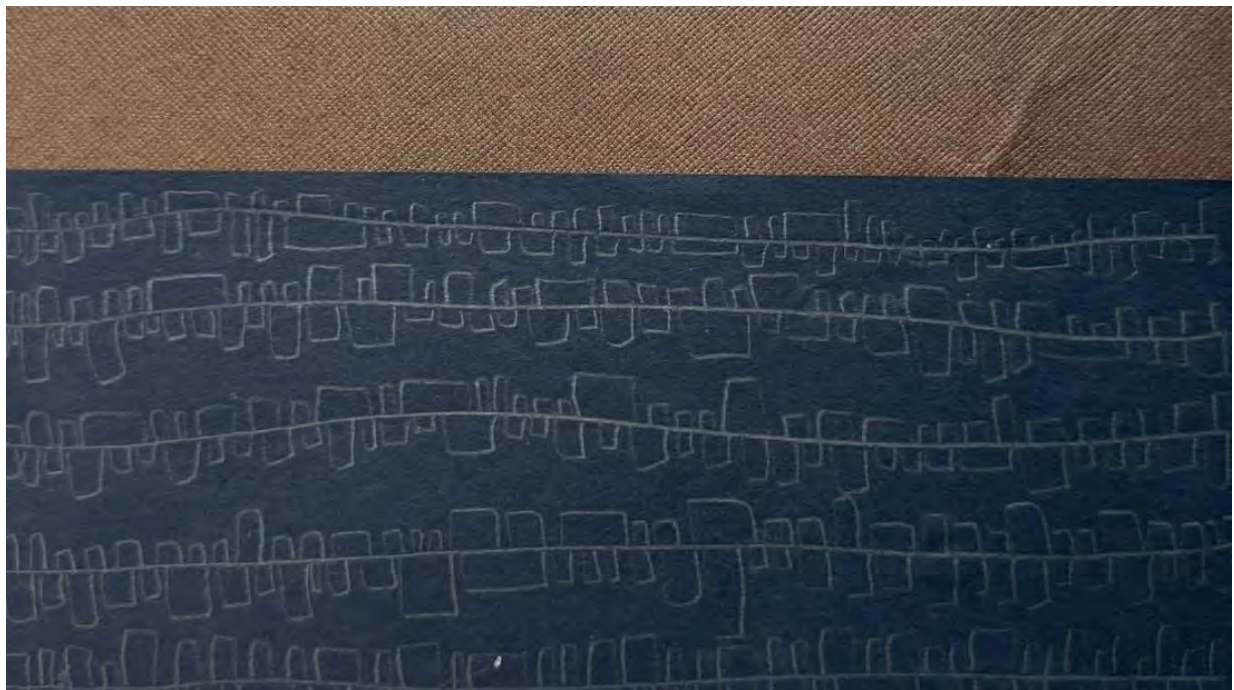


Figure 12. 'Threshold Study' (collaged papers, pencil) by Louise O'Boyle. Image credit: L. O'Boyle.

5. Drawing as Ethics of Attention

At the centre of this research is the proposition that drawing can be understood as an ethics of attention. By this I mean a disciplined, relational, and non-extractive form of noticing. It is not simply about looking at a place. It is about remaining with it. It is about allowing a site to exceed one's first reading of it. It is about resisting the pressure to move too quickly from encounter to conclusion, from experience to interpretation, from relation to representation.

Fancourt et al. (2026) synthesise evidence that disciplined creative attention works on and through the body and that making, attending and remaining with material can alter the conditions of feeling and thought. I draw on that carefully. This practice is not being offered as therapy, and drawing is not being justified through health outcomes. But the synthesis gives language to something artists of-

ten already know. That attending to a place, slowly and repeatedly, does something. It is not only cognitive. It is somatic. It is affective. It changes the conditions under which the encounter takes place.

That said, the practice described here is not soothing in any simplistic sense. It is often cold, physically demanding and emotionally charged. The coast does not offer comfort as a guarantee. What it offers is a field in which attention can become a way of being with land, weather, memory, and self without insisting on mastery. If there is something reparative within the work, it lies not in closure but in the possibility of a different quality of relation. That reparative dimension is inseparable from the ethics of the practice. It comes through return, through patient attentiveness, and through the refusal to dominate what is being encountered.



Figure 13. 'Movement Map' (inks, pencil, tape) by Louise O'Boyle. Image credit: L. O'Boyle.

This is also why extraction remains such an important counter-term here. Research, academic and artistic alike, can treat place as a source of images, data, stories, or atmospheres to be taken and translated elsewhere, with little accountability to what has been used. Situated drawing resists that logic. It is anti-extractive not because it leaves no trace, but because the trace it leaves is one of attention rather than capture. Nothing is removed from the site beyond a changed relation to it. What is offered in return is time, bodily effort, and a practice of noticing that refuses to reduce the place to a resource.

Ethics of attention, then, is not a soft alternative to critique. It is critique enacted through method. It asks what it means to arrive at a place with care. To attend to what is difficult as well as to what is aesthetically attractive. To remain when the work is slow. To leave without having taken more than was freely given. The drawn line becomes not only an aesthetic object but an ethical one: a record of how the researcher was in relation to the site, and of what that relation made possible.

6. Conclusion: Remaining with the Complexity

This article has argued for situated drawing as a mode of artist-research that treats the drawn line not as a secondary record of place but as a primary way of thinking with it. Working from the north coast of Northern Ireland, it has proposed drawing as a cartography of practice: a relational tracing produced through movement, pause, encounter, affect, and the layered social histories held in particular sites. In doing so, it has repositioned drawing beyond a narrow representational frame and towards an expanded methodology, one that includes the body moving through and within the landscape, the arrangement of found materials as spatial drawings, mark-making, photography, and animation as temporal extensions of the drawing act. The north coast has not been a backdrop to this inquiry. It has been an active condition of it: resistant, generative, and refusing simplification at every turn.

The conceptual centre of this practice lies in an ethics of attention. Ethics, here, is understood not simply as procedural compliance but as a way of being in relation. It concerns how the researcher arrives at a site, what they

attend to within it, how they remain with difficulty, and what they refuse to take from it. This repositioning has made it possible to understand vulnerability not as weakness but as methodological openness, and slowness not as delay but as a condition of responsible encounter. To draw the same stretch of coastline repeatedly, across seasons and weathers and states of attention, is not to accumulate mastery. It is to practice a form of relational accountability to the land, to its histories, and to the body that inhabits it.

By bringing together feminist epistemology, affect theory, border thinking, and practice-as-research, the article has suggested that situated drawing offers a way of producing knowledge adequate to fragile places, unstable thresholds, and historically charged environments, especially in this moment of ecological pressure. It does not claim mastery over the coast. It does not seek a final map. It offers instead a mode of noticing, returning, and remaining that can hold bodily experience, historical complexity, and methodological reflection together without forcing them into overly stable or commercially viable forms. The drawn line can function as a critical and reflexive method, not only as an aesthetic one, but as a mode of encounter.

A line can divide, certainly. But it can also trace relation. It can register vulnerability. It can witness change. It can hold hesitation. It can remain with complexity. In a world marked by speed, extraction, and abstraction, the fragile act of drawing a coastline (slowly, repeatedly, with the body fully present to the conditions of place) can become a serious methodological gesture. It can make relation visible where other methods would only record information.

For me, situated drawing offers a way of producing knowledge that does not stand above place, but moves with it. It offers a way of thinking with the coast rather than simply about it. And in a world so often marked by the desire for distance, certainty, and resolution, that matters. Because perhaps what is needed is not a better map from nowhere, but a more careful practice of attention from somewhere.



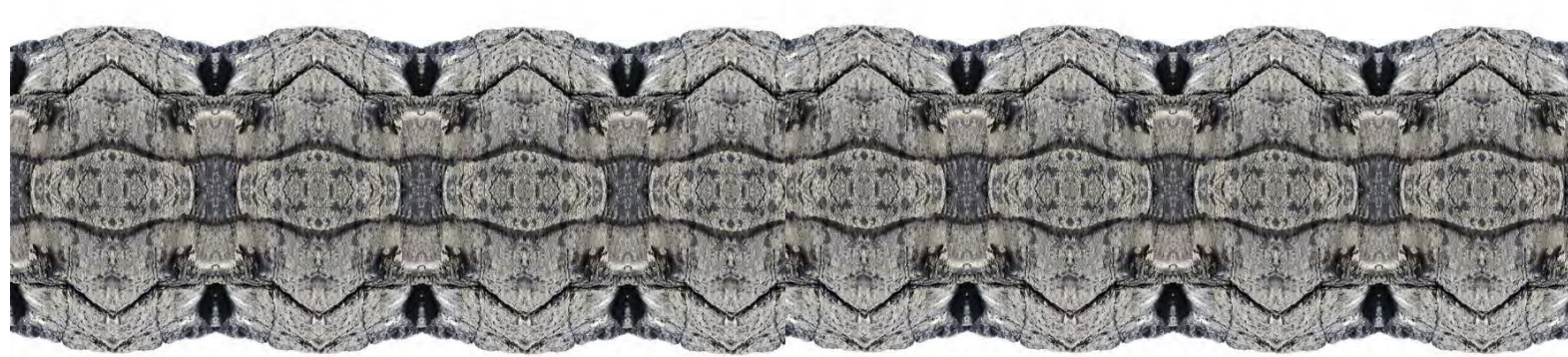


Figure 14. Still from 'Breathe Upon' (digital artwork) by Louise O'Boyle. Image credit: L. O'Boyle.

Conflict of Interests and ethics

The author declares no conflict of interests. The author also declares full adherence to all journal research ethics policies, namely involving the participation of human subjects anonymity and consent to publish.

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