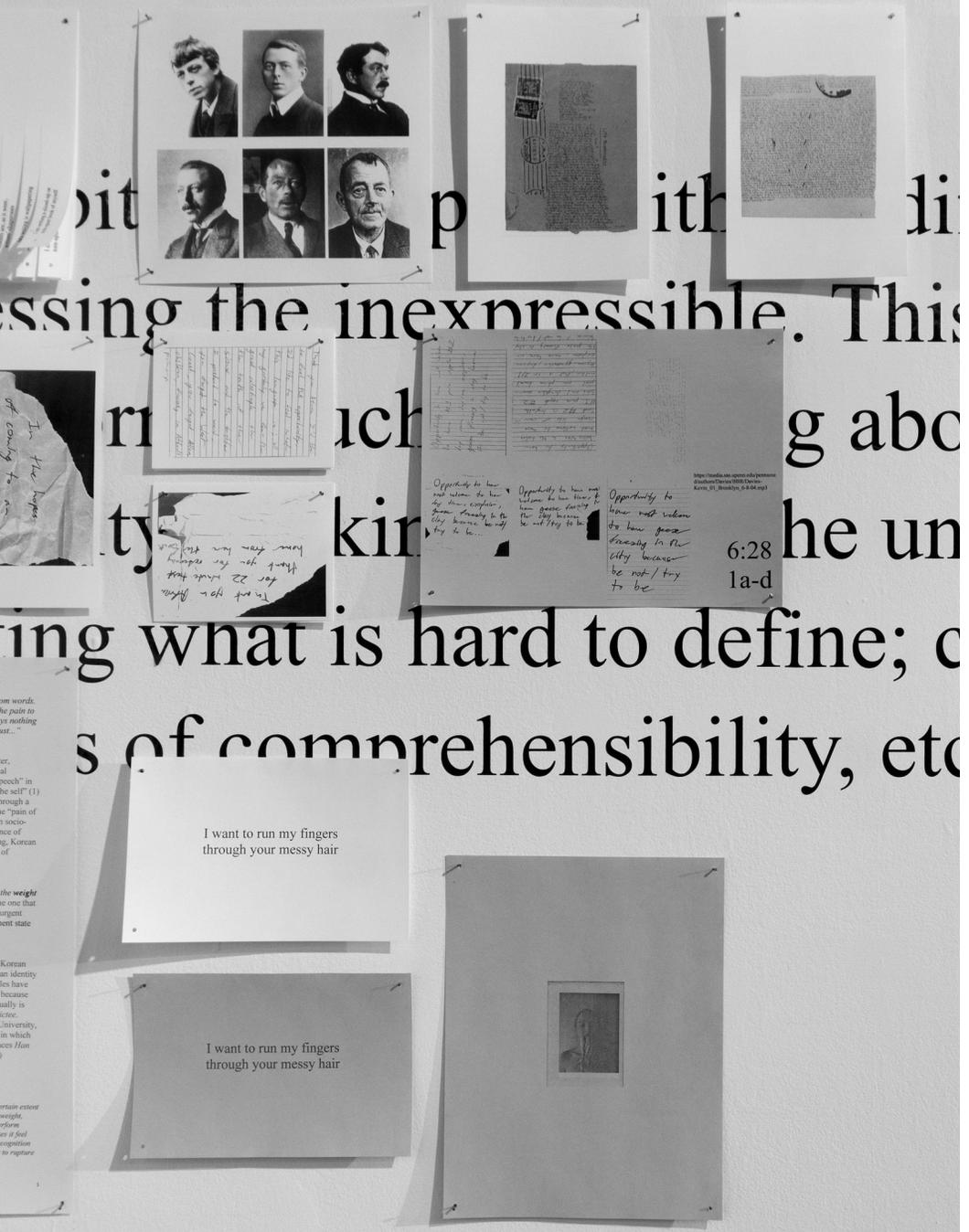


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...and this book is a straight line in space

Helen Abbot
Masha Kouznetsova
Suarjan Prasai
Matthew Samuelson
Sean Sokolov

January 7 - February 3, 2022
artLAB Gallery

*I have a story to tell but
what it is I cannot describe*

by Ashar Mobeen

#artLAB publication series <04>

*I have a story to tell but
what it is I cannot describe*

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...and this book is a straight line in space, an exceptionally well-executed exhibition, was on display to Western faculty, students, and staff at the Cohen Commons Gallery from January 7 - February 3, 2022. This exposition investigated the issue of conveying the inexpressible. Writing pertaining to ephemerality, making the un-said/un-worded visible, expressing what is difficult to articulate, and challenging the bounds of comprehensibility; this beautiful spectacle visually portrayed such concepts. The exhibition has been a most welcome addition to the corpus of material that has graced the walls of the Cohen Commons over the years. Helen Abbot, Masha Kouznetsova, Suarjan Prasai, Matthew Samuelson, and Sean Sokolov amalgamated their efforts to masterfully exploit the characteristics of language and produce a varied, but powerful presentation of themes, that could not be more relevant (given the current global socio-political climate).

The material displayed was immensely compelling – as an avid reader of poetry and an individual that struggles with expressing the inexpressible due to a mood disorder, I found myself completely mesmerized and magnetized to the content on the wall. Interestingly, the collection of texts is designed in the shape of an open book to let the viewer have complete access. Also, the content is not rigorously fixed; rather, it is interspersed with collaborative moments to allow the spectator the liberty of pulling certain parts off the wall to create their own book, their own story, their own *masterpiece*. However, this process dislocates and disseminates authorship. The individual pages, while separate in nature, unify to create

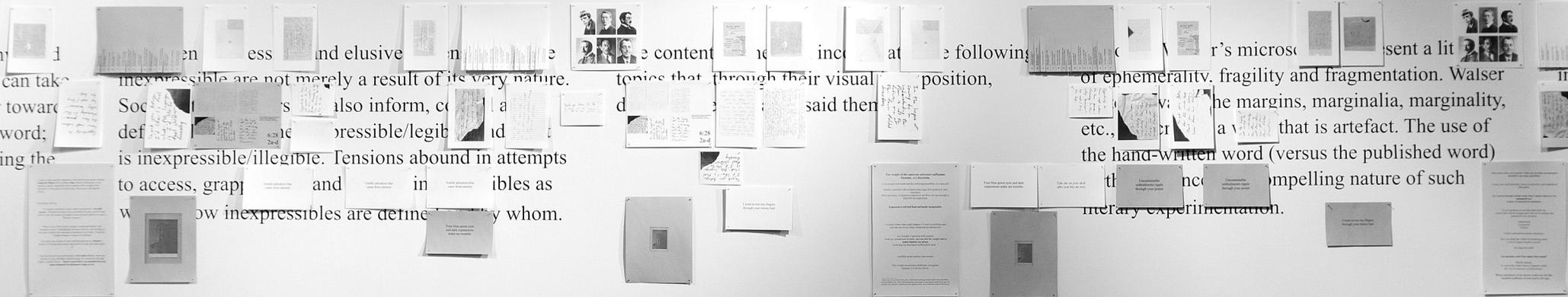
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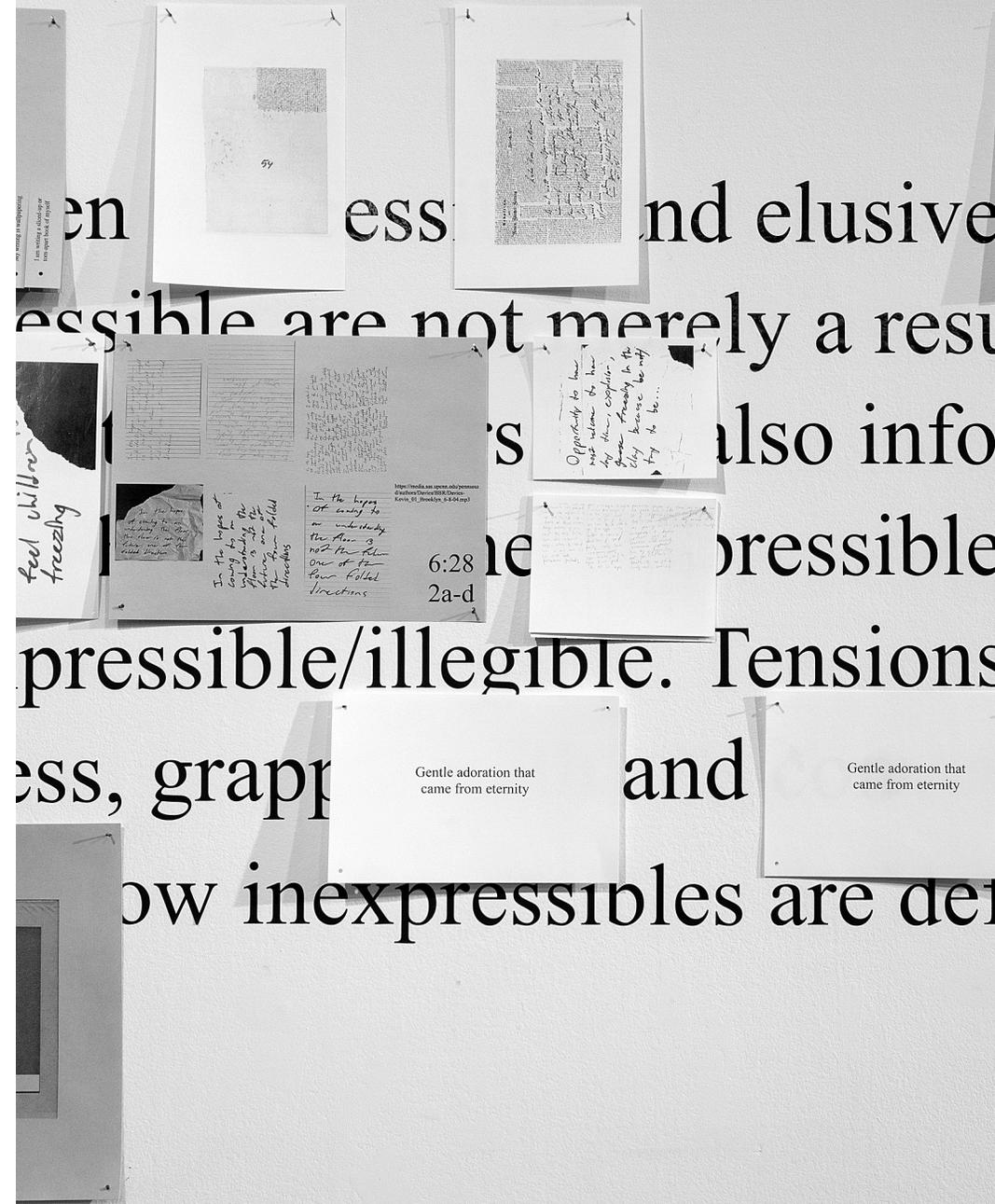
ripples through spacetime, revealing a complex cosmic web that connects us all; we as viewers are forced not only to question our exact locus, but elements of the inexpressible that are frequently inaccessible and elusive.

Language allows us to express our thoughts and verbalize our opinions. We say what we think and understand about the world. However, many belief systems contend that it is possible to have knowledge of something beyond – a connection with an upper dimension of sorts; something that no conventional language may express. What is known to us in this special landscape is indescribable, possibly an understanding and/or knowledge of something other than conventional reality. How can we express these experiences? Manipulating language can do the trick, perhaps. This leads us to parallelism, a technique for expressing words, especially within poetry, that are otherwise inexpressible “non-words”.

*“Your blue-green eyes and dark expressions make me tremble”
“I want to run my fingers through your messy hair”*

Parallelism is the use of different words to express the same concept multiple times, implying that the meaning is not directly communicated at all. Repetition, in this scenario, suggests that neither of the individual statements is sufficient to express what is meant; the meaning must be discovered somewhere between the parallel expressions. Parallelism, thus, has something in common with metaphor - another process to highlight concepts that cannot be conveyed explicitly in language. This concept is beautifully evoked in the exhibition through transcriptions from a group exercise of Kevin Davies’ poetry, “Excerpts from an Ongoing Narrative of Some Length”. They are presented in a form that encourages reflection on comprehension, content visuality, and semantic stability. The presence of ‘error’ in the works on display is particularly provocative as they endeavor to push the boundaries of the aforesaid concepts and their interactions.

If we contemplate the metaphor itself and the wider reality about language that this very metaphor exploits, we will observe that using language



may not always allow us to express the exact meaning of the words and phrases. The words employed in metaphors provide indirect proof of the message being transmitted. Then, it can be argued, in theory of course, that we transmit meanings that elude the schematics of common language, because language is only evidence for meanings, not necessarily a direct embodiment of them. All types of ineffable meanings can be transmitted in this way, with language serving as indirect proof for the meaning. In this sense, ineffability is consistently present as a possibility, even in everyday language. Metaphors can be crucial to the way deeper realities might be conveyed in literature and/or social and cultural practices. For instance, religious scripture and/or prayers are frequently communicated by making assertions that, if taken literally, seem nonsensical. Rather, these phrases must instead be taken as an oblique proof of a deeper meaning that is unable to manifest itself using regular words. Hence, the use of paradoxes and romanticism to communicate unusual but otherwise inexpressible thoughts is a variation on metaphor.

The microscripts of Robert Walser presented in the exhibition exemplify this - they are part of a literature of ephemerality, fragility, and fragmentation. To construct an artefact, he writes towards the margins, marginalia, and marginality. The use of the handwritten word rather than the printed word adds to the allure of such textual creativity. Walser's work aspires to vanish, to be easily misplaced, to fold in on itself. Portraits of Walser are shown beside his creations. The illegible, almost undecipherable script is indeed a clever way to convey inexpressible meanings; one of the motivations behind this is the belief that a textual form distinct from our common parlance can express genuine reality. However, there may be several obstacles that prevent an amorous utterance from being realized. These obstacles, which are referred to as a 'weight,' are addressed in written and visual form, allowing both the artist and the spectator to reflect on the nature of the weight and how to traverse it.

The idea that we have access to a special dimension that transcends comprehensible reality, a place where thoughts and words cannot be

articulated, is quite perplexing; in fact, it clashes with another modern belief: that language impacts our thinking. Yet, as *...and this book is a straight line in space* demonstrates, language is only one type of evidence for meaning that is used in communication; it does not necessarily dictate what we want to convey. Indeed, the ineffability of the gap between what we know and what we can articulate is to be expected. Our vocabulary may certainly be restricted, but our sense of perception and understanding of the ineffable is not.

...and this book is a straight line in space is dynamic, thought-provoking, and deeply humanistic in nature; the inexpressible is wondrously expressed through the manipulation of language. It is worth noting that amid a worldwide epidemic, the intimate moments with the respective artists and their compositions felt ever so more poignant. We've spent the better part of twenty-or-so months away from friends and family, devising constructive ways to make do of solitary time. The curatorial vision of the artists in this show not only reflects the times in which we live, but more importantly, facilitates a journey of self-discovery.

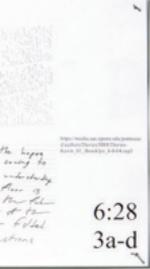
ENDNOTES

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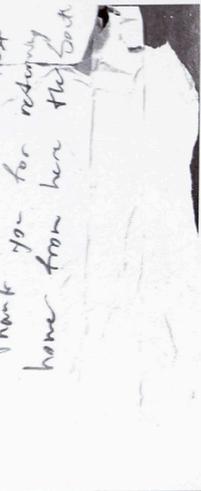
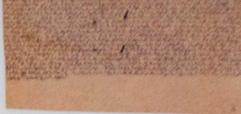
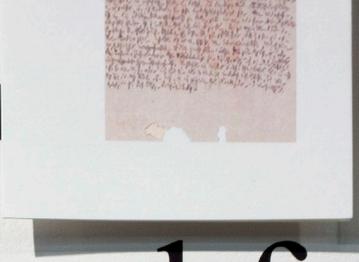
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