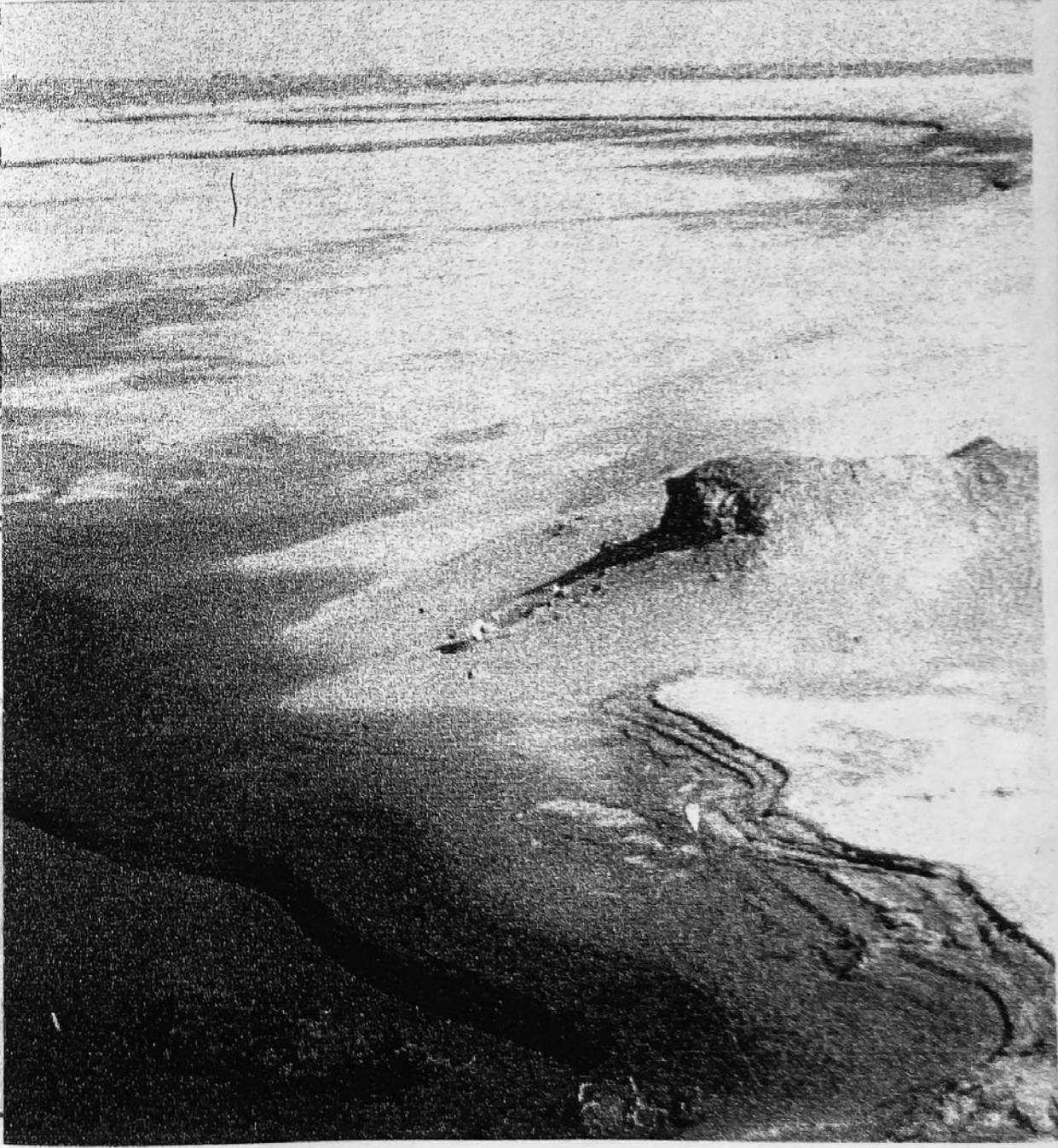


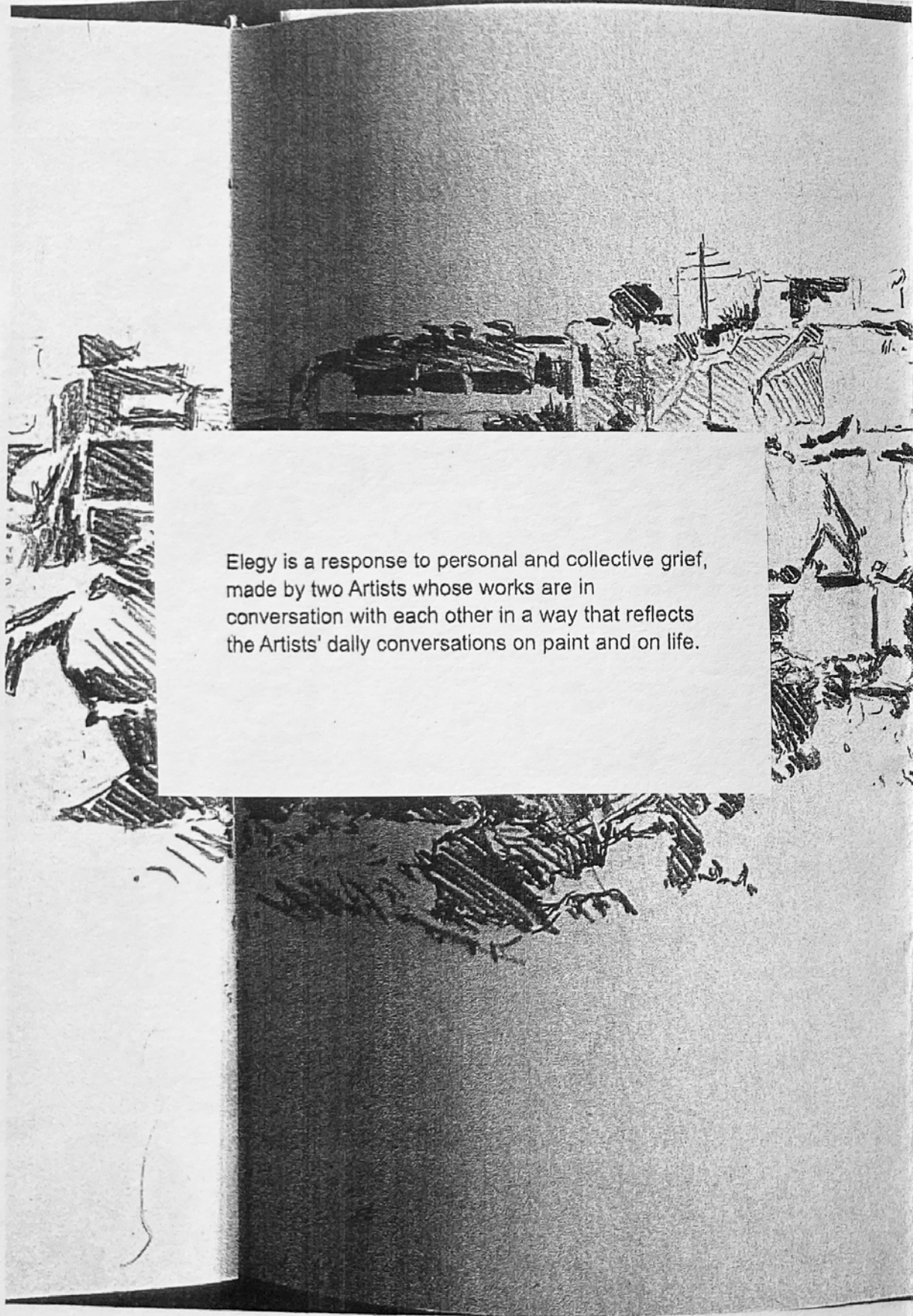
ELEGY: LIZZIE HALL/KATE STEVENS

22nd feb - 22nd March 2025
CIVIC ART BUREAU





"To reminisce and gather wool is negative. You have to differentiate between memories. Are you going to them or are they coming to you. If you are going to them, you are wasting time. Nostalgia is not productive. If they come to you, they are the seeds for sculpture."
-Louise Bourgeois



Elegy is a response to personal and collective grief, made by two Artists whose works are in conversation with each other in a way that reflects the Artists' daily conversations on paint and on life.



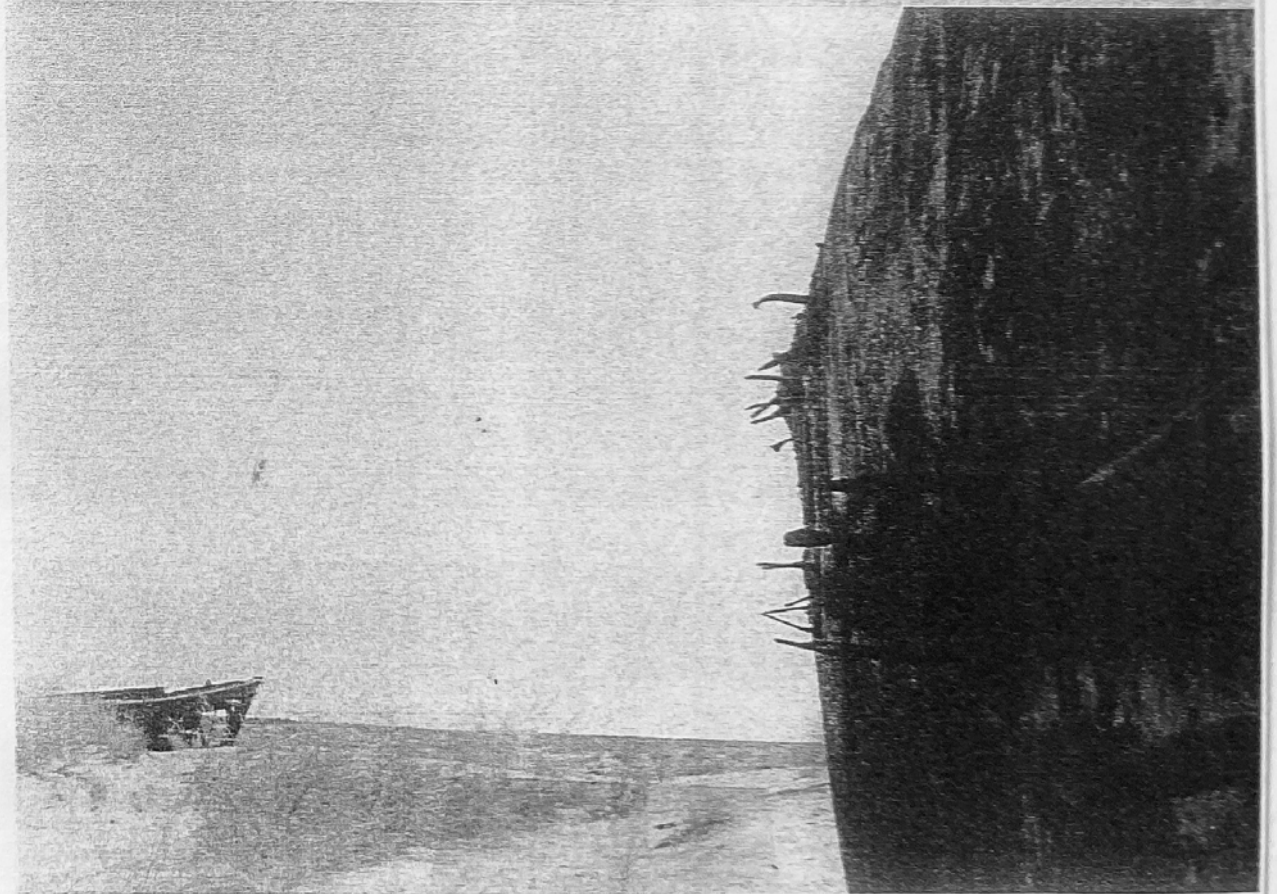
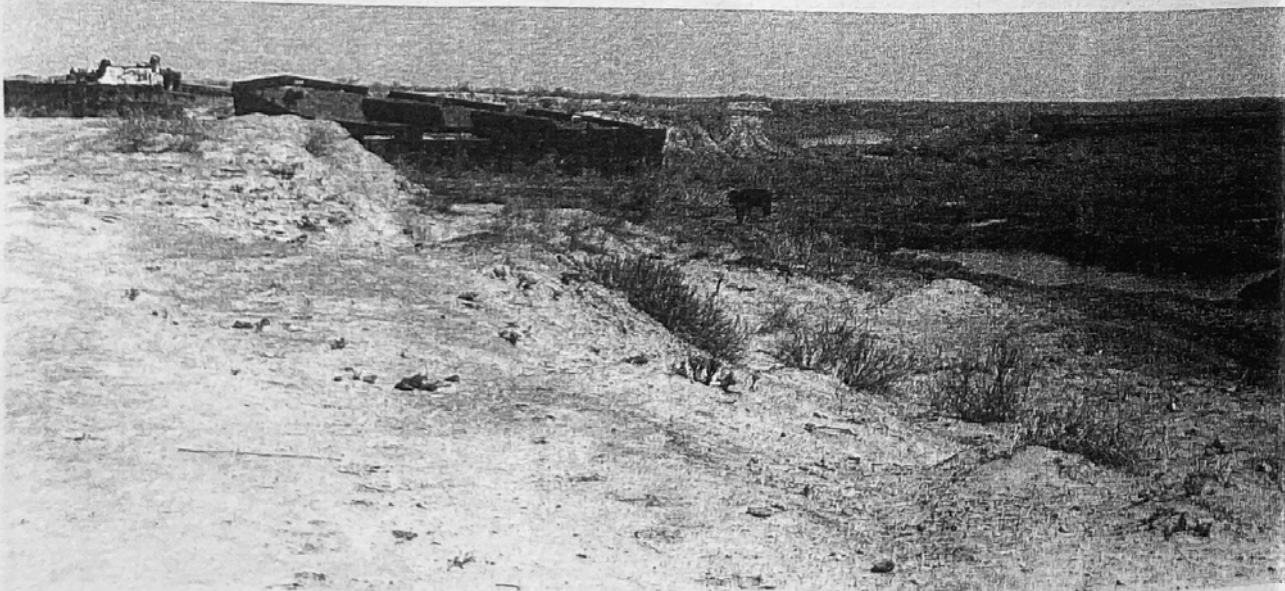
So, this photo appears while I'm looking in boxes for other memories of the dead. Instead I found that dead Sea. Soviet mismanagement of the Aral Sea left a vast salinised environment where nothing can regenerate. I took the photo when I had just left art school, my father was working there, as part of a remediation effort to try and save what was left.

The image stood in for all the lost faces and lost landscapes and the gulf of Time. An image of absence and inexorability.

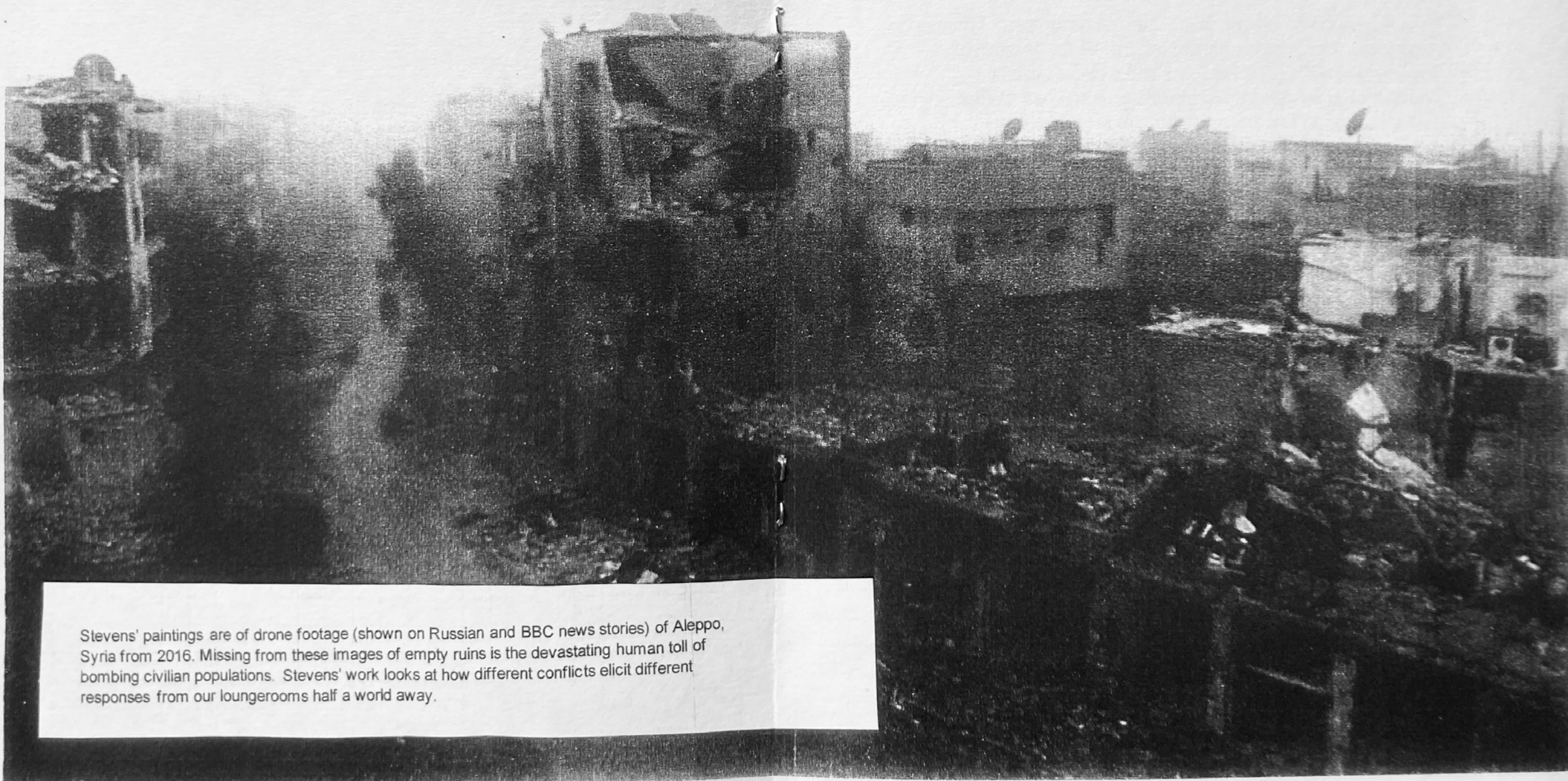
Barthes referred to it in Camera Lucida as punctum, that aspect of a photograph that wounds and pierces you. He goes on to say

"I know that there exists another punctum...than the 'detail'. This new punctum, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the noeme ('that-has-been')." I read Camera Lucida at art school, it took 25 years to fully get what he meant.

So, I have been painting the absence, the distance between then and now, in an attempt to retrieve my father and to retrieve a missing sea and in doing so, let the salt pour out.



LY



Stevens' paintings are of drone footage (shown on Russian and BBC news stories) of Aleppo, Syria from 2016. Missing from these images of empty ruins is the devastating human toll of bombing civilian populations. Stevens' work looks at how different conflicts elicit different responses from our loungerooms half a world away.

Loss

For Lizzie Hall and Kate Stevens

We are often taken by surprise, shocked even, by the experience of loss and the grief that it triggers. This can even be true as much for objects as for people. Maybe we shouldn't be.

Loss is a continuing, permanent and structuring part of human experience. I'm thinking here about loss as the absence of something. Dealing with absence and presence can be considered as a fundamental binary: zero and one. (What might it mean to say that something or someone is neither here nor there? Is there a third term for this? Or more than one other term?)

Freud's account of the fort/da game. In Freud's account, the fort/da game is played by the infant by holding then throwing away an object, accompanied by ascribing sounds to the presence of the object in the child's hand (the 'fort') and the absence of the object that the child has sent away (the 'da'). This game is fundamental to the development of the sense of the individual self, and the parallel path of the acquisition of language in the child.

For Freud, and subsequent psychoanalysts, especially Lacan, the newborn infant has no sense of self. The infant is thought to be multiform and so is said to be in a state of polymorphous perversity. In this blissful state the infant is not even considered to have a sense of having a body that is separate from that of its mother. The breastfed infant begins to learn about its own bounded body by dealing with the presence and absence of the mother's breast. The child can be considered to rehearse the absence/presence of the breast in the fort/da game. In this way they can manage the trauma of weaning: separating definitively from the body of the mother: coping with this loss which is at the same time essential for the development of an individual self. The loss here is thus positive and negative for the infant. Perhaps this is one third term negotiating presence and absence: both and.

It is in such ways that loss and dealing with presence and absence can be considered as a continuing, permanent and structuring part of human experience. Loss is always with us and is essential for the development of or self-recognition as individuals. There is much more to this story, but for now my key observation is that loss should not be unexpected.

This said, I do realise that even when loss is expected there is the shock of grief. Grief, the unpredictable wild beast. Grief is the process of managing the loss of an object (person/thing) to which we remain attached even in its absence. Grief takes time. Grief is something even more complex and multiform than loss itself.

The paintings of Kate Stevens and Lizzie Hall comprehend both loss and grief. The exhibition is called *Elegy*: a lamentation or melancholy reflection on absence, particularly death. Both seek figures to stand for lost people. Lizzie's veiled paintings are haunted by the ghosts of a dried and devastated lakescape, and lost and grounded boats. Kate's images of bomb-ruined Aleppo in Syria are empty of people but full of traces of their absence in the collapsed and broken buildings. Their window spaces in particular are like the black shadows of missing teeth in a battered visage.

It seems almost impossible to me for a viewer not to be drawn into melancholy reflection in front of these works. They are full of loss and grief. And in this they are models for our entropic world with its environmental disasters wilfully ignored, and its apparently constant state of war (somewhere), wars consistently prosecuted with impunity in the face of an outraged world. Is there nothing to be done? To produce such powerful paintings in the face of these terrible global circumstances shows us that all is not lost. Our melancholy reflections can lead us to nurture hope.

Gordon Bull
February 2025



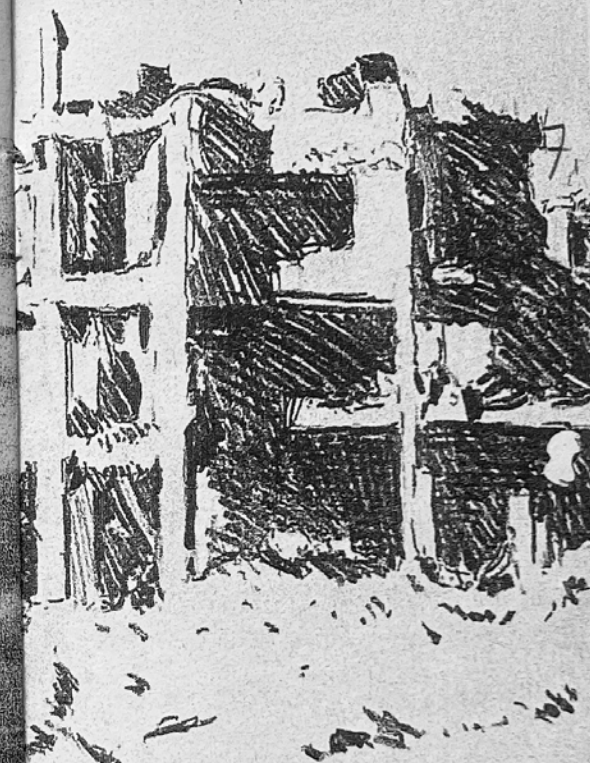
1. Ship in the Desert (Aral Sea 2001)
Lizzie Hall
113x95cm
oil, oxide on linen
2023
\$2400

2. Aral Sea, 2001 (diptych 7)
Lizzie Hall
114x182cm
oil, oxide on linen
2024
\$4200

3. Selective Sympathy (East Aleppo)
Kate Stevens
125x100cm
oil on canvas
2022
\$4200

4. Selective Sympathy (Aleppo) #3
Kate Stevens
125x100cm
oil on canvas
2022
\$4200

5. Aral Sea, 2001 (diptych 4)
Lizzie Hall
114x182cm
oil, oxide on linen
2022
\$4200



6. Selective Sympathy (Aleppo) #2
Kate Stevens
125x200cm (2 panels)
oil on canvas
2024
\$7600

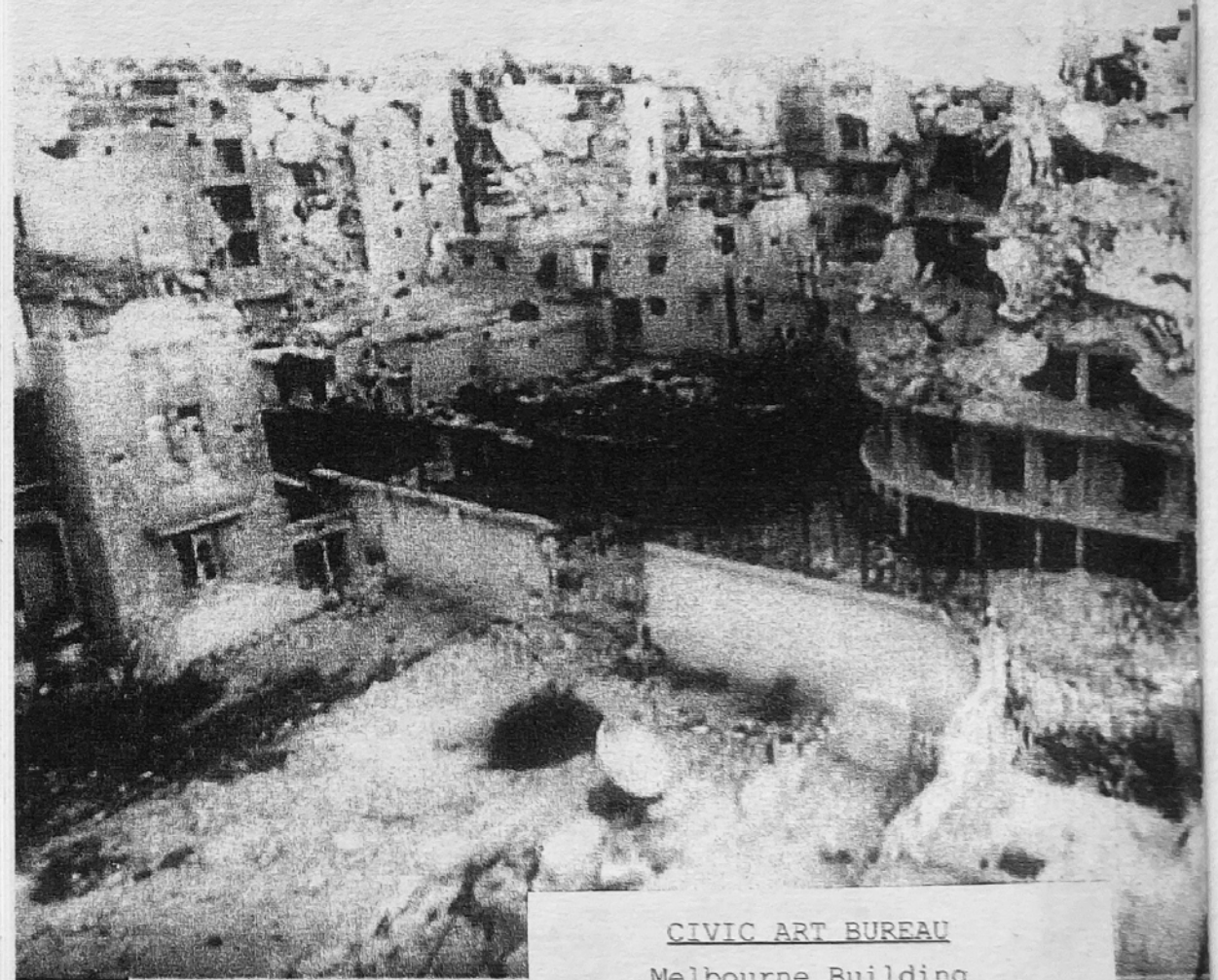
Aral Sea, 2001 (diptych 5)
Lizzie Hall
114x182cm
oil, oxide on linen
2022
\$4200

Selective Sympathy (Aleppo)
Kate Stevens
125x223cm (2 panels)
oil on canvas
2022
\$8200

9. Selective Sympathy (Aleppo) #4
Kate Stevens
125x123
oil on canvas
2023

— Aral Sea, 2001 (sketches 1-4)
Lizzie Hall
2022
Oil on oilsketch paper
80x60cm
\$600 each

Aleppo 'haunted by violence and death' - BBC News



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