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Entre Cousins – Amongst Cousins

Compact Blur and Sprouting Leaves

Sandra Lori Petersen
Entre Cousins – Unter Cousins. Verdichtete Unschärfe und sprießende Blätter
Abstract: Entre Cousins porträtiert eine Gruppe von Personen, die an der Beerdigung ihres Cousins teilnehmen. In einer Folge von Zeichnungen legt der Comic Zeugnis von dem Schweigen über das jüdische Erbe der Familie ab und beschreibt unterschiedliche Ausdrucksformen von Leid, wodurch hervortritt, dass diese möglicherweise mit eben diesem Erbe in Verbindung stehen. Methodologisch wird das Zeichnen hier zu einer Praxis, in der sich auf langsame und intuitive Weise eine Beziehung zum ethnografischen Material, zu dem, was zwischen uns geschieht, und zur Vergangenheit herausbildet.
Keywords: Transgenerationalität (Trauma), Holocaust, (Still-)Schweigen, ethnografisches Zeichnen
(Übersetzt mit DeepL.com und bearbeitet von Victoria Hegner)

The drawings of "Entre Cousins – Amongst Cousins" take as their point of departure the recent suicide of a French man in his sixties. In the drawings, his cousins are gathered for his funeral and share reflections on their Jewish origins, the silence accompanying it and the different expressions of a suffering that seems to move across generations and be expressed in the lives of different family members as illness and early deaths.

Because of the family's Jewishness, the parents and grandparents of these cousins were in danger during the Second World War and all had to hide. Some fled France, others stayed in the country and successfully hid themselves there, some joined the Resistance, some died, and one fought with the British. Some of the family members changed their names, never to change them back; some were baptized Catholics; others immersed themselves in Protestant communities. Various strategies were employed to find safety and keep deportation at a distance. As part of these strategies, it seems that a silence about the Jewish origins of the family was installed.

"Entre Cousins – Amongst Cousins" is pre-empting the anthropological research project "Distances: a privileged French family's navigation through antisemitism in France" for which I am currently applying for funding. In the project I will explore the production of distance and its expressions across generations in my own family. The empirical data in the project will be a combination of archival material, recordings

from field trips and interviews. Ethnographic drawing forms part of the methodology of the project as a means of relating to and integrating the historical and contemporary material produced for this project.

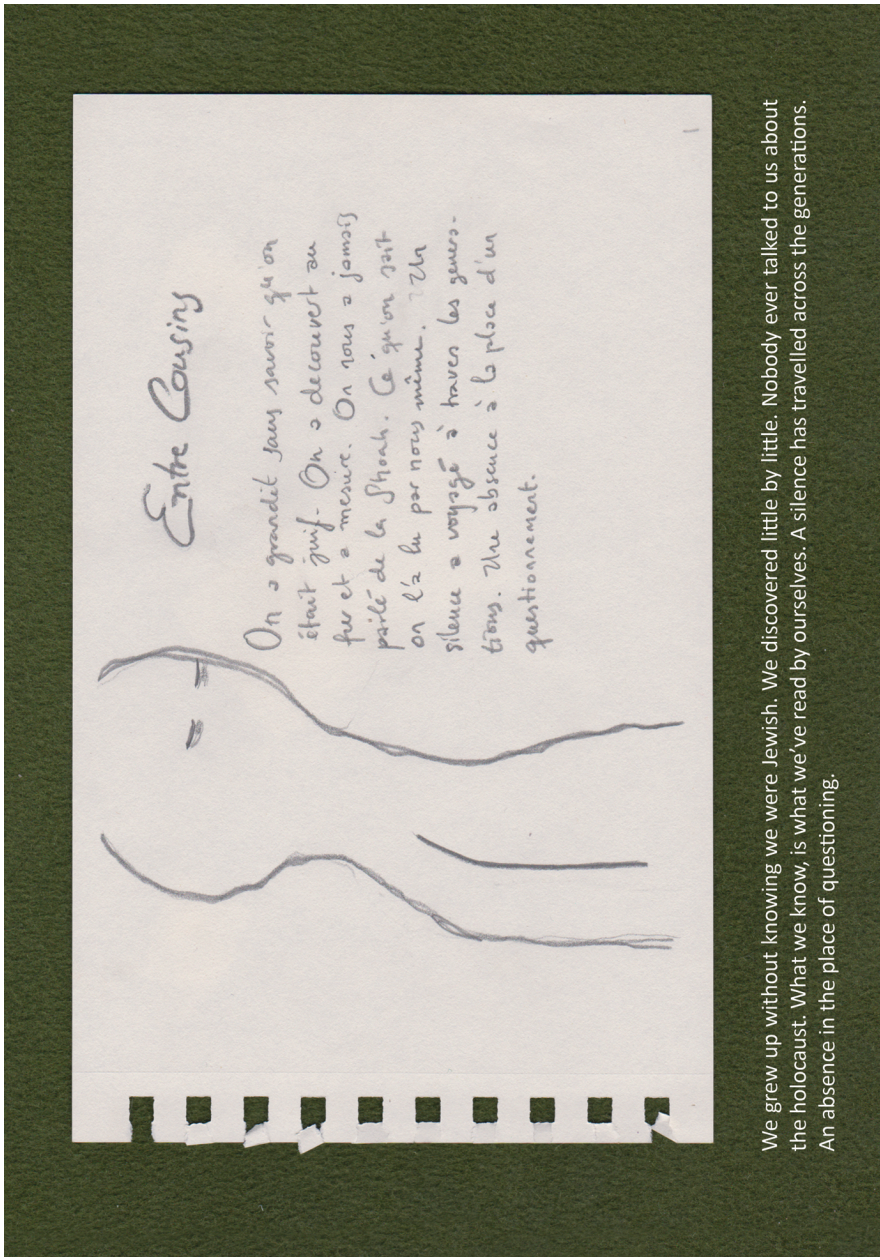
When I draw, I enter into a process with the ethnographic material in which I relate to it in a slow, intuitive and nonverbal way. I experiment with giving it a concrete form. This form is obviously subjective; rather than any pretense of objectivity, drawing as a means of knowledge production offers a room for reflection, and a way of pinpointing what to me is essential in the given material at the moment of engagement. I can explore the feelings accompanying this information, its forefront and background as well as the intuitive associations emerging in me with the information through the drawing.

In this specific case the drawings are based on the account of one person, who told me about the funeral she had attended the day before the interview, and related the conversations she had had with her cousins. Her account moved me, though at first, I was unsure of why exactly. The element of suicide is sad and shocking in itself, but her account also encompassed other kinds of information; other expressions of suffering and a sense – communicated by my interviewee – that these different

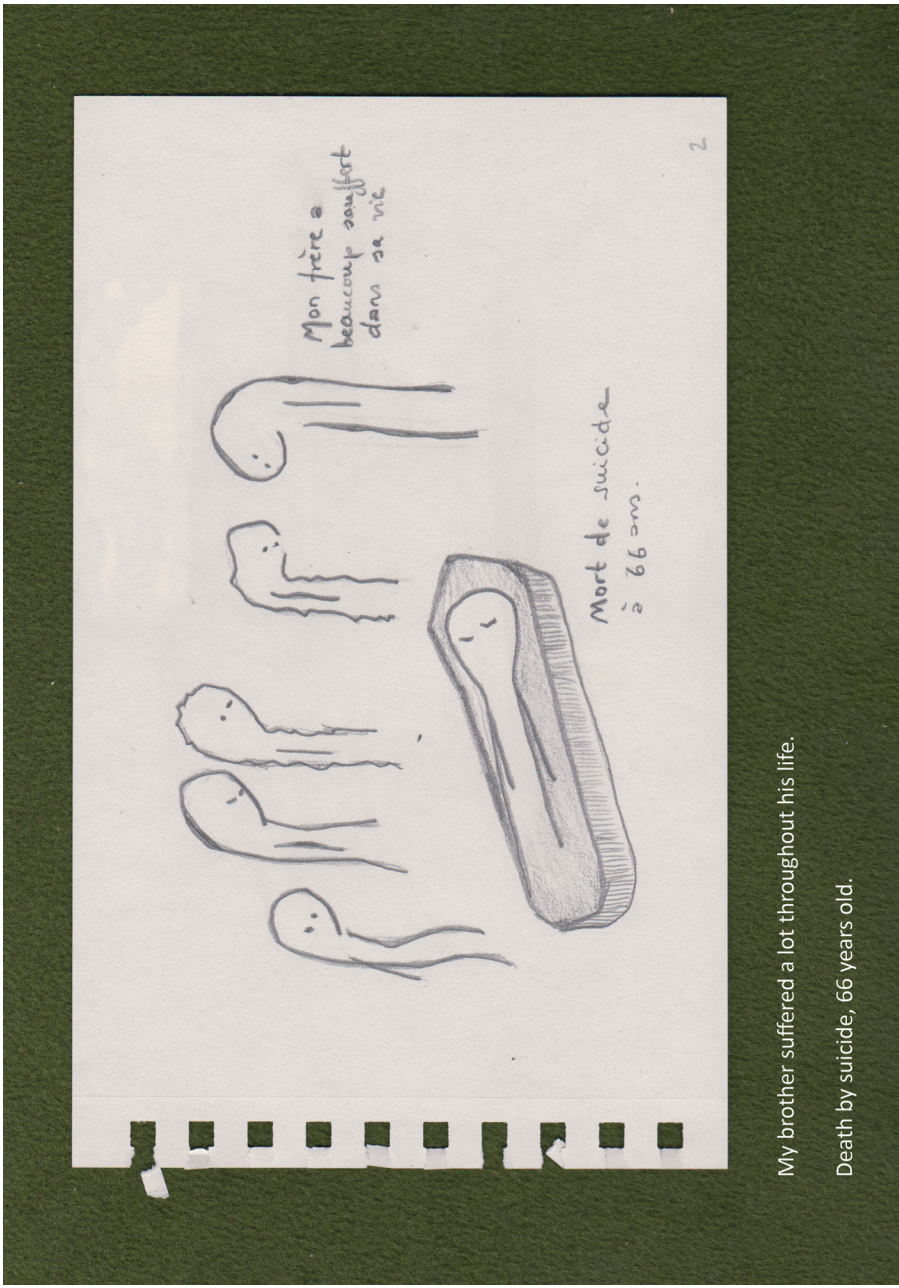
expressions of her cousins and herself might somehow relate to the same heritage and to the silence around it.

In a first version of the drawings, I gathered all information in one single drawing (see above): a coffin with the dead body was surrounded by the cousins, attempted to be depicted as realistic-looking people. They each shared bits of information on elements of suffering. The presence of the past amongst them was symbolized by a fog of white chalk smeared on the top of the drawing.

As a reinterpretation I made the series of drawings with more finger-like creatures shared below. Moving from one rather compact drawing to a series of more minimalistic and simple ones allowed me to access the material in a more direct way. I experienced it as a pinning out of the points. The blur of the first drawing was replaced with the passing of time in the series. To me, it made it possible to access a transgenerational trajectory of silence and suffering that might in various versions be weaved into the lives of many. And somehow, sometimes, with time turn into sprouting leaves.

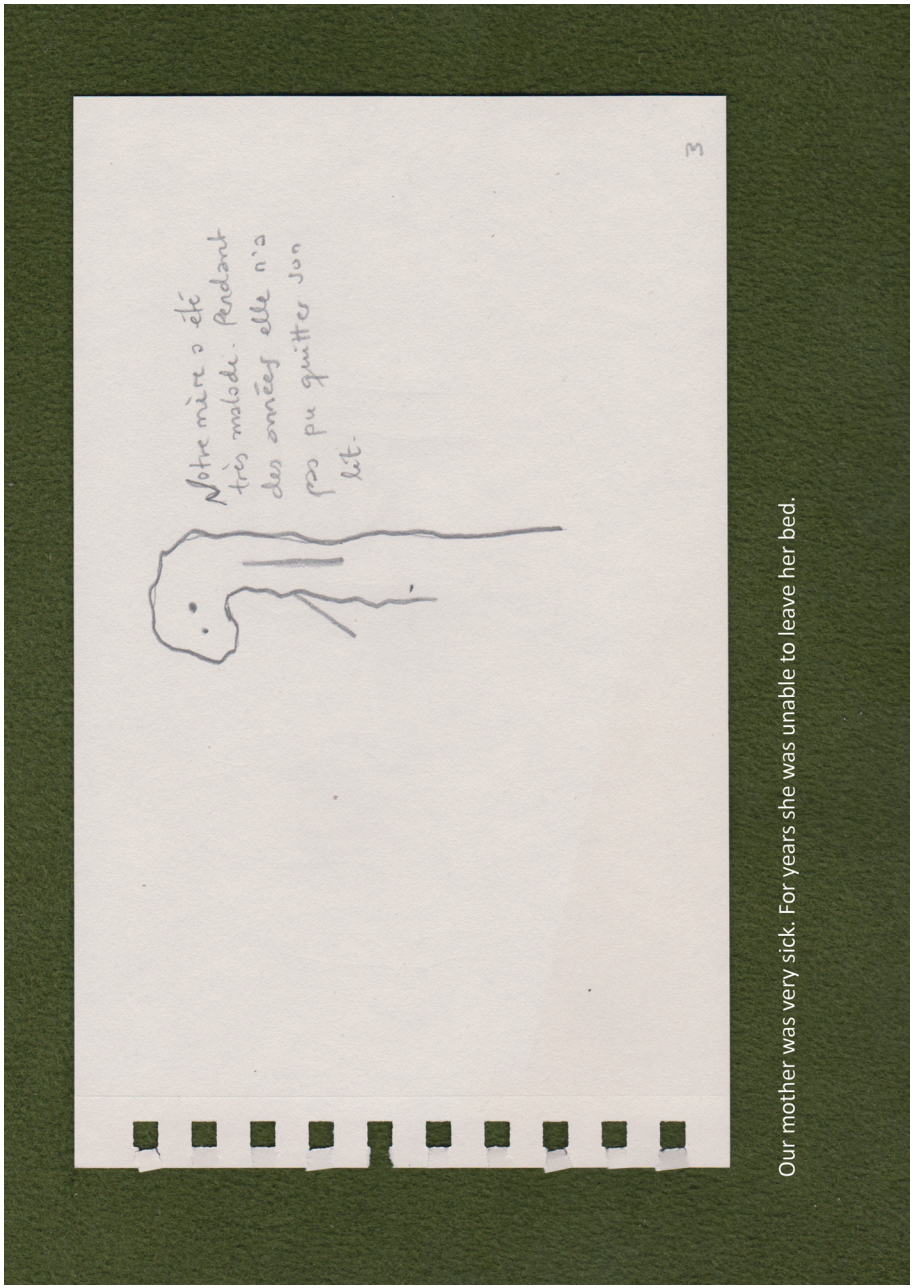


We grew up without knowing we were Jewish. We discovered little by little. Nobody ever talked to us about the holocaust. What we know, is what we've read by ourselves. A silence has travelled across the generations. An absence in the place of questioning.

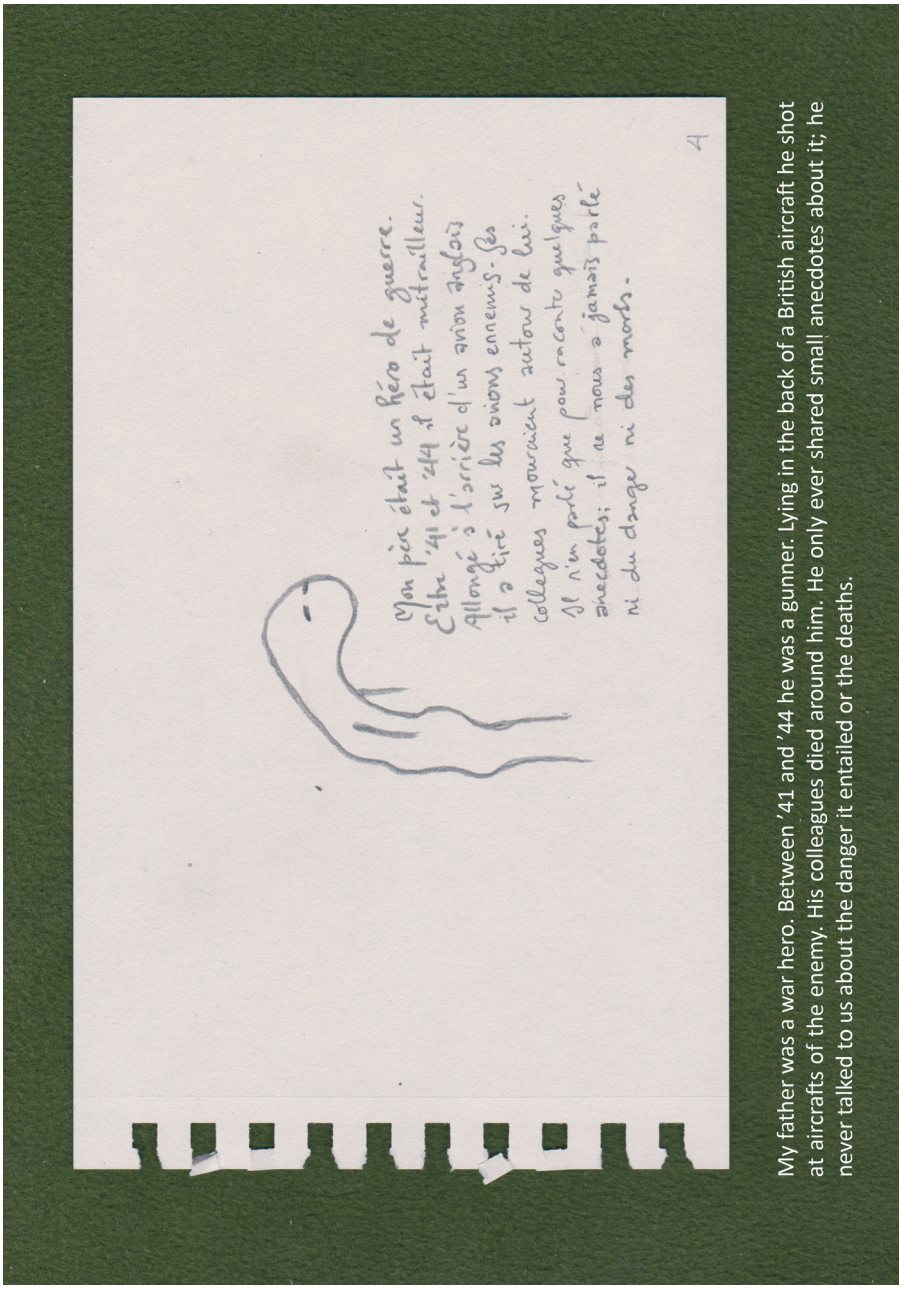


My brother suffered a lot throughout his life.

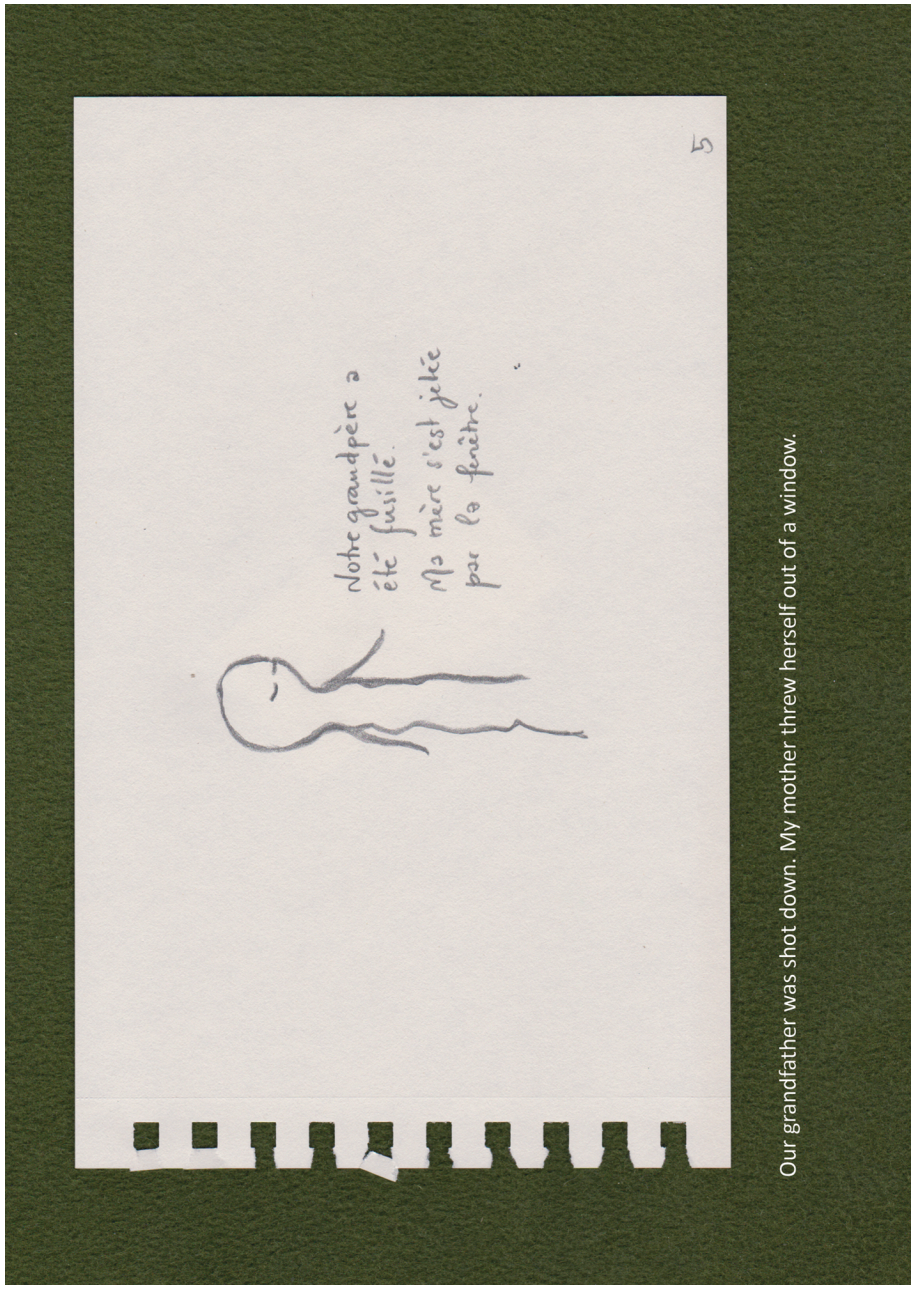
Death by suicide, 66 years old.



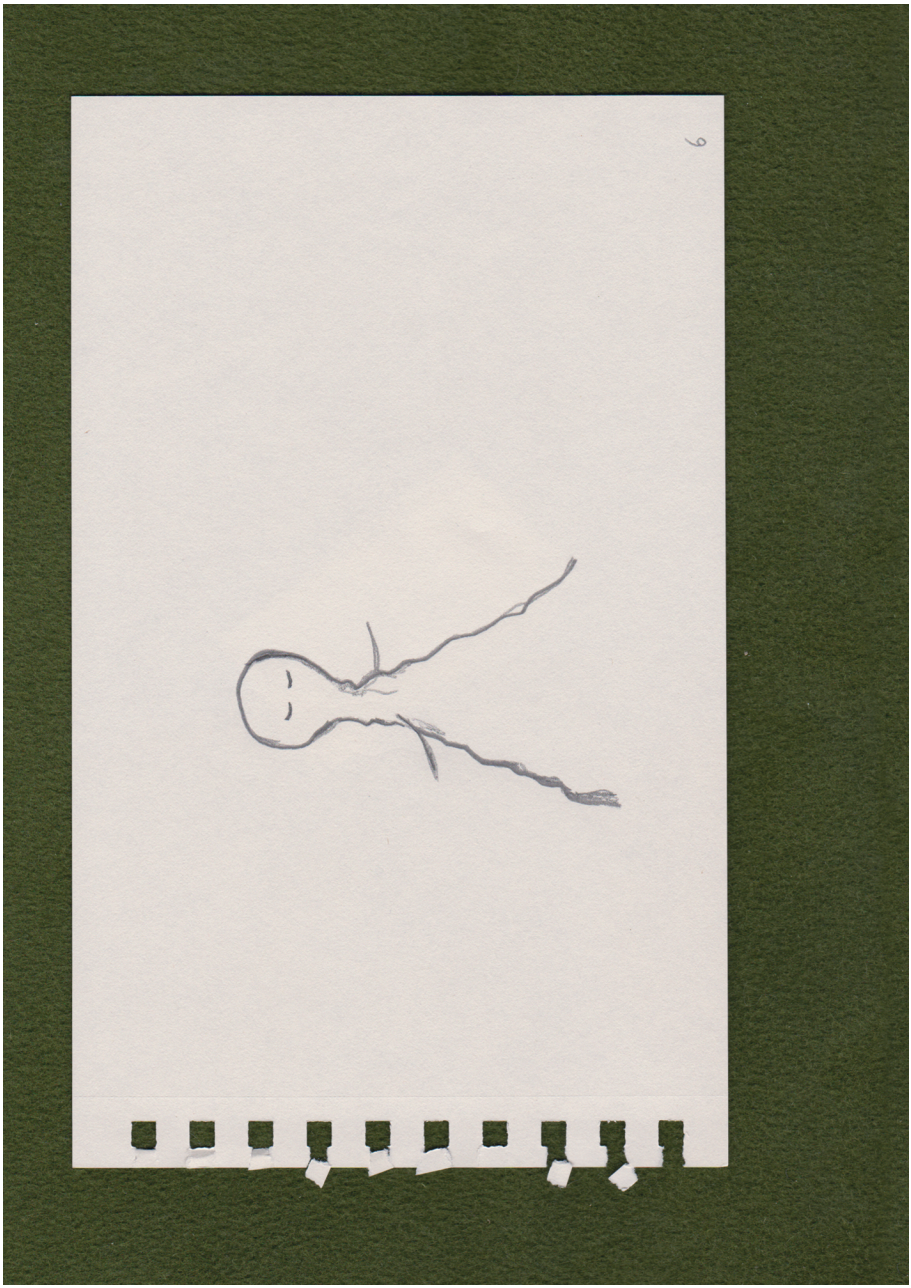
Our mother was very sick. For years she was unable to leave her bed.



My father was a war hero. Between '41 and '44 he was a gunner. Lying in the back of a British aircraft he shot at aircrafts of the enemy. His colleagues died around him. He only ever shared small anecdotes about it; he never talked to us about the danger it entailed or the deaths.



Our grandfather was shot down. My mother threw herself out of a window.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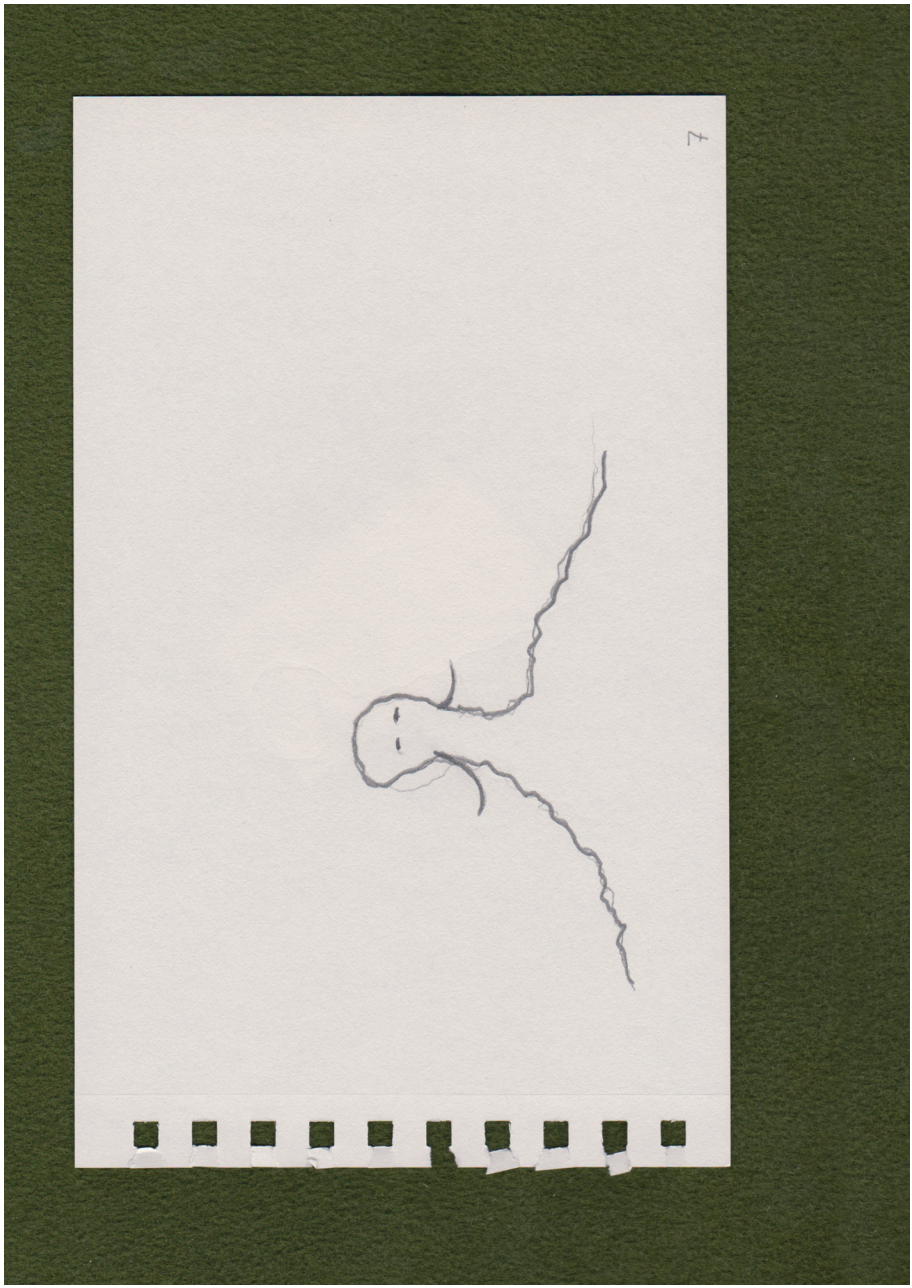
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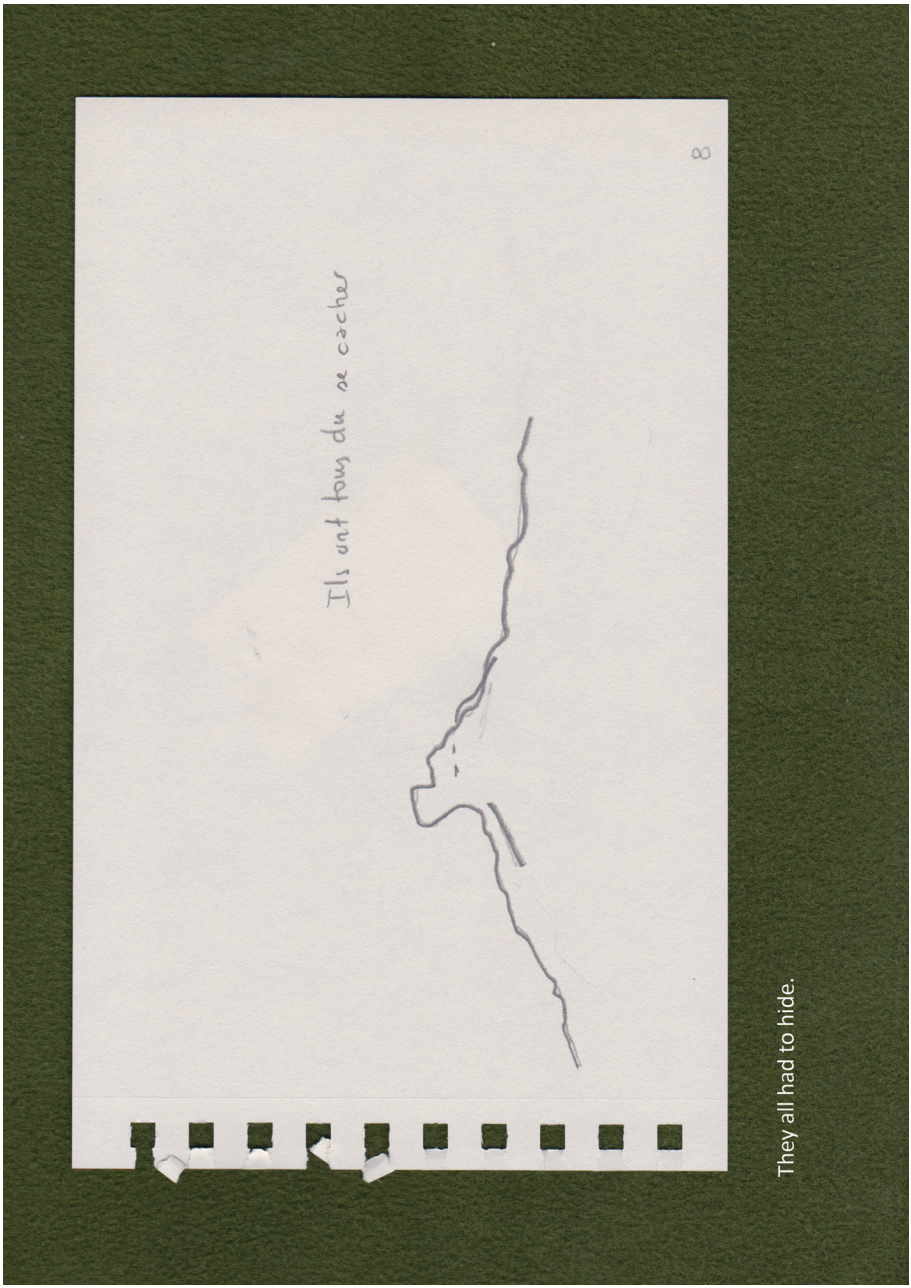
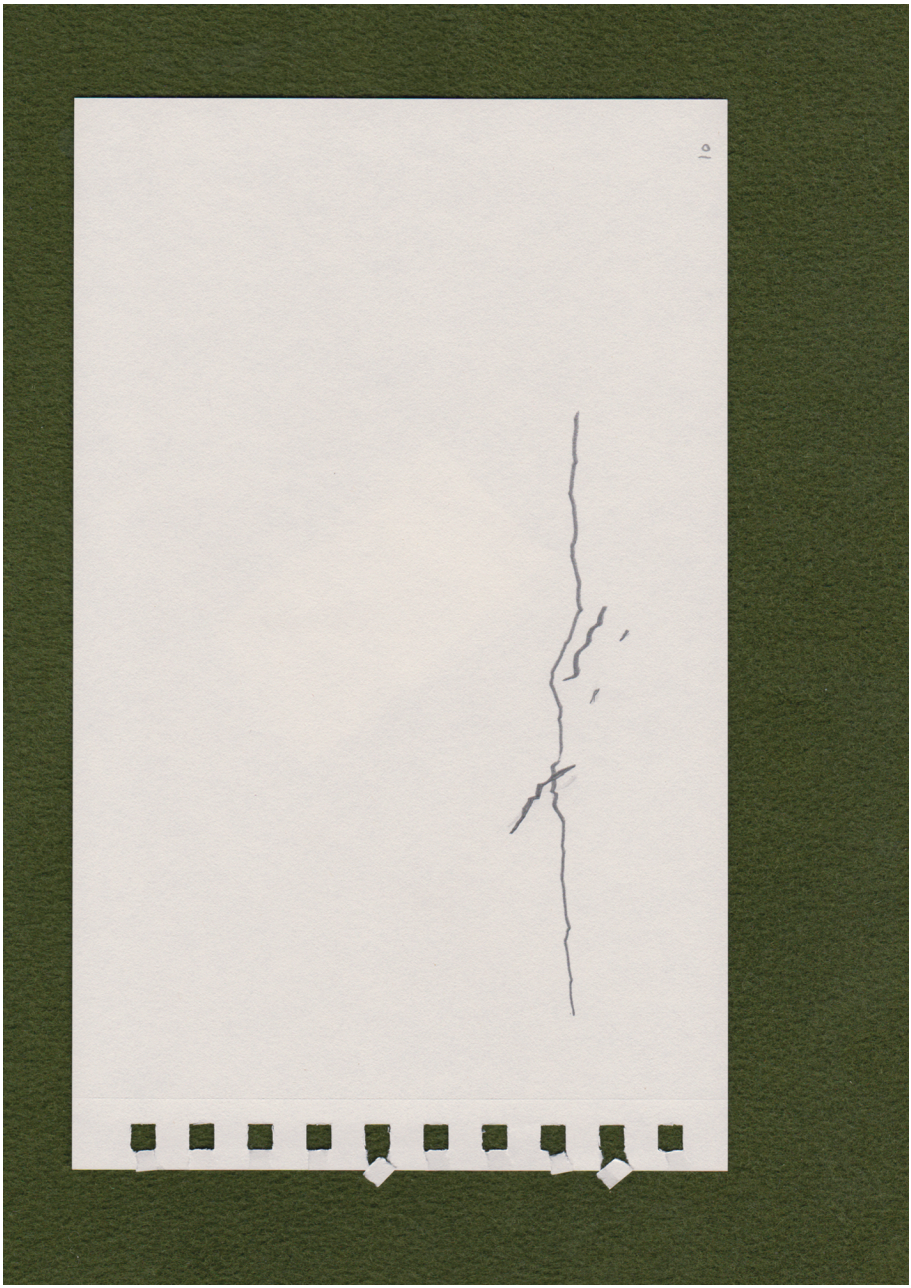
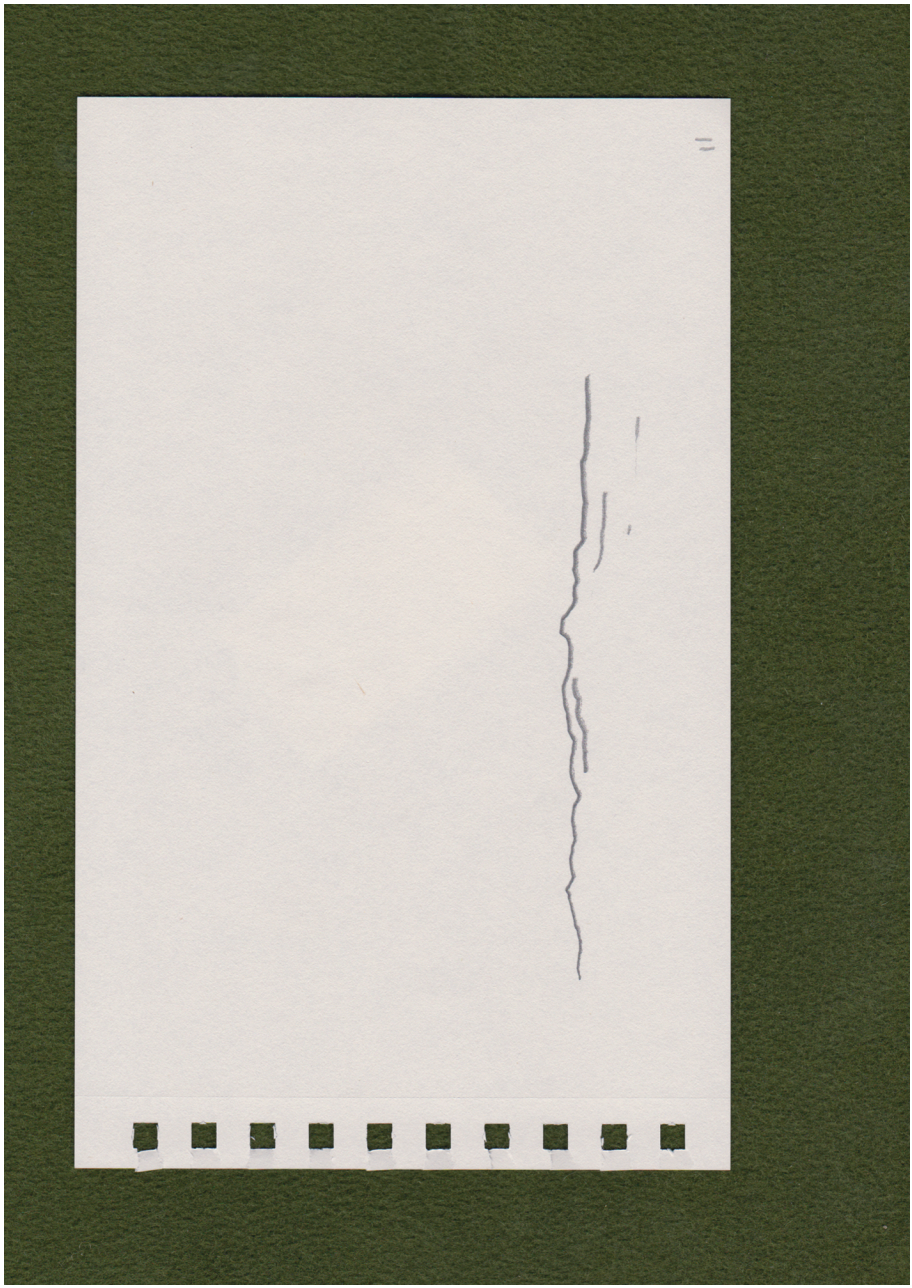
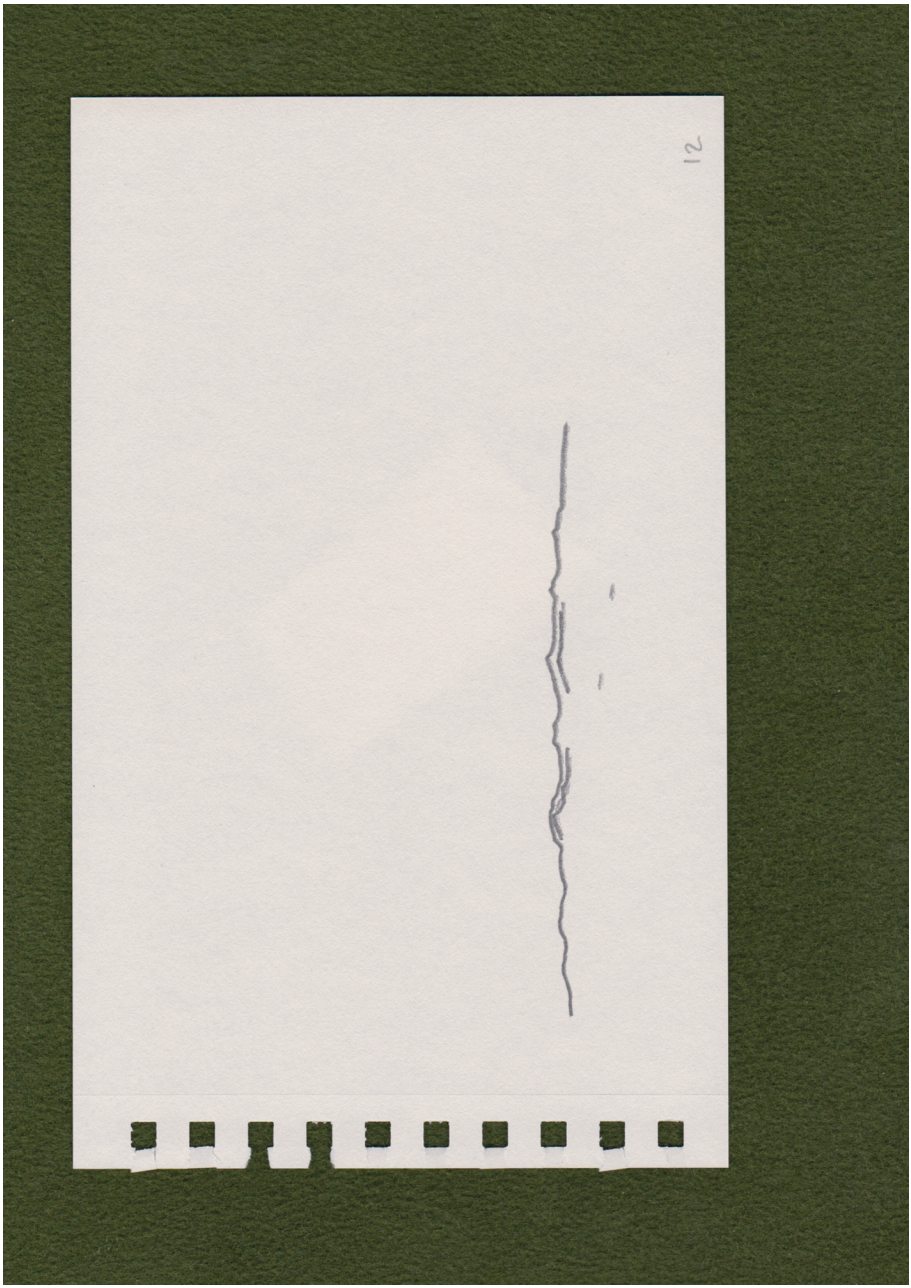


They all had to hide.



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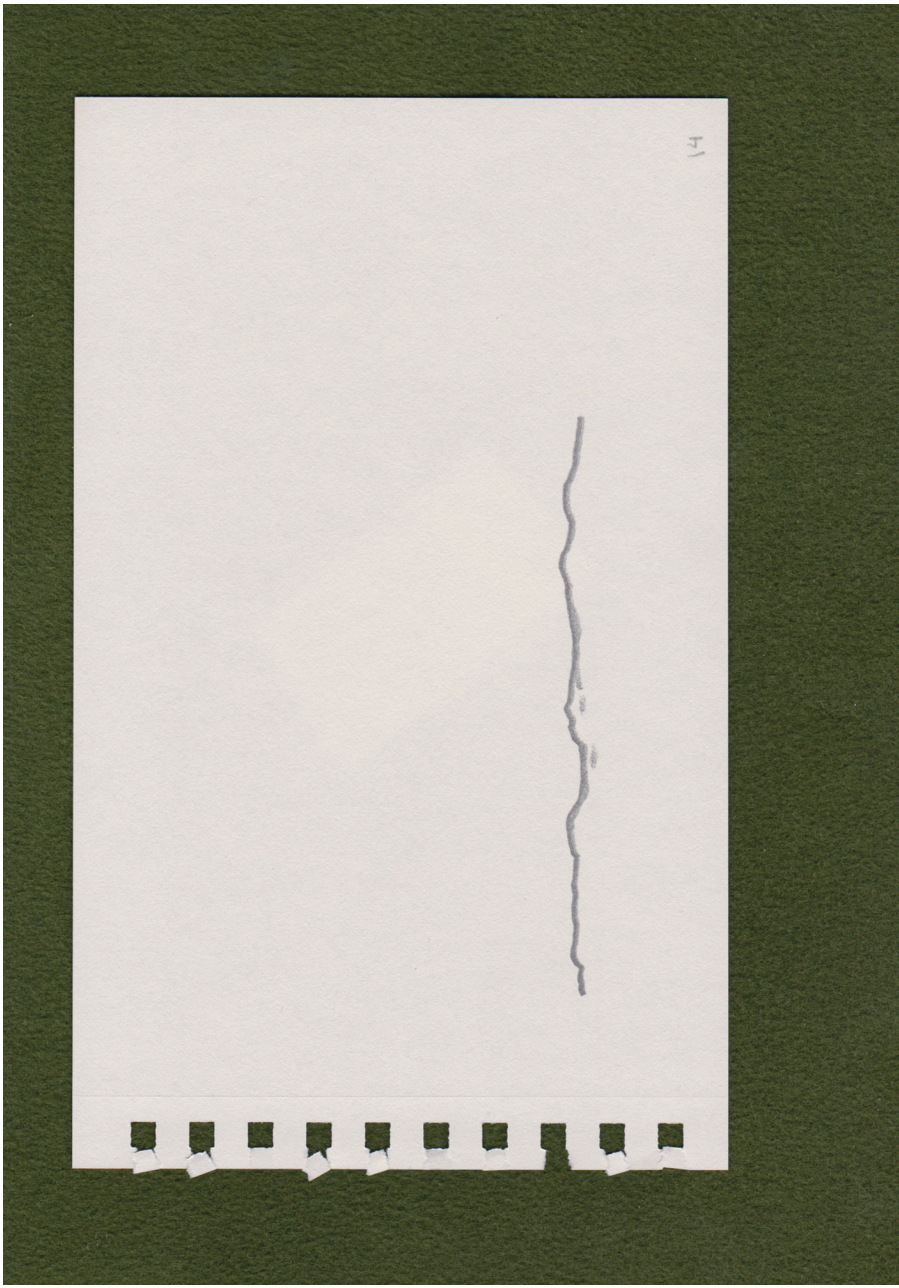

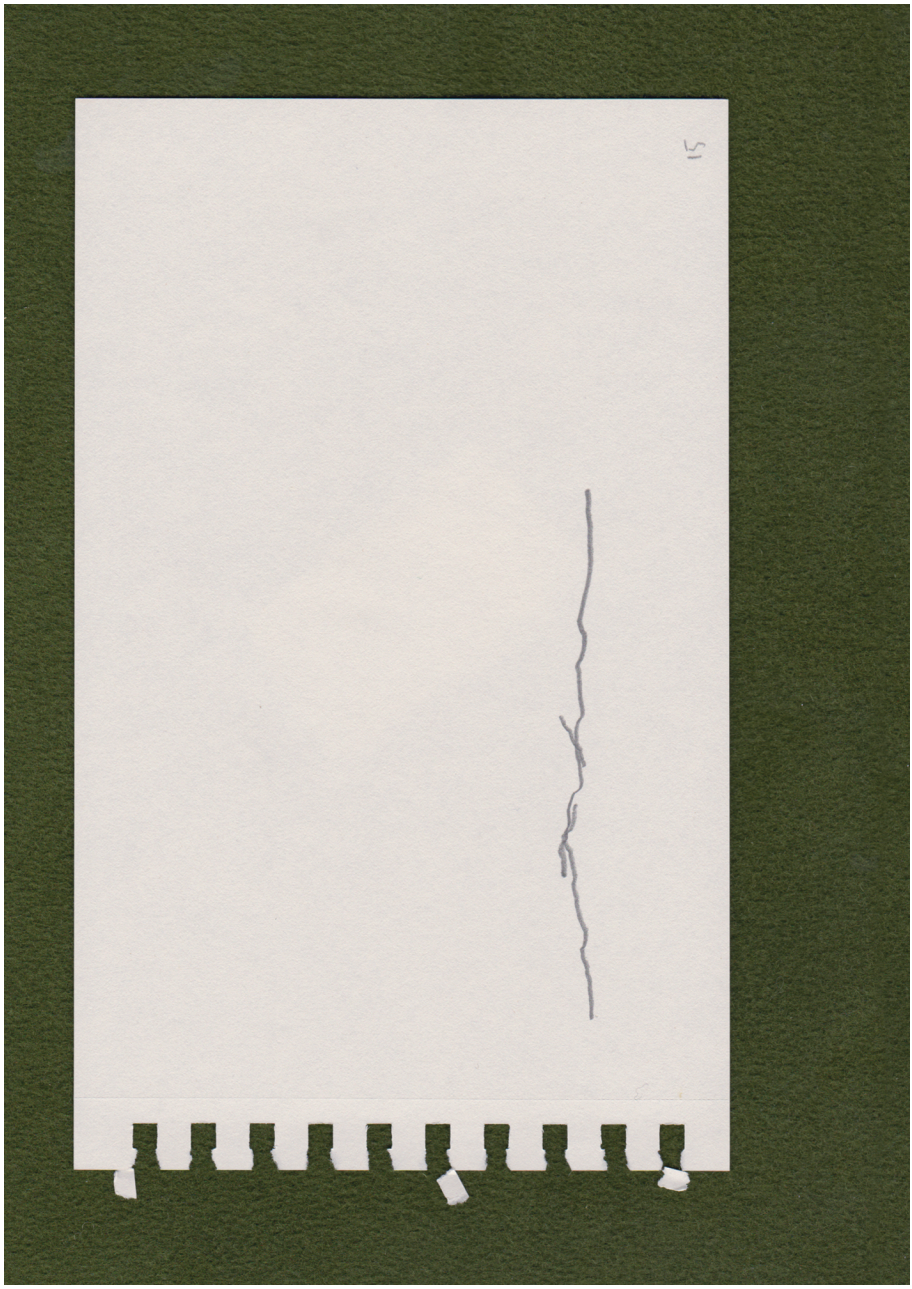

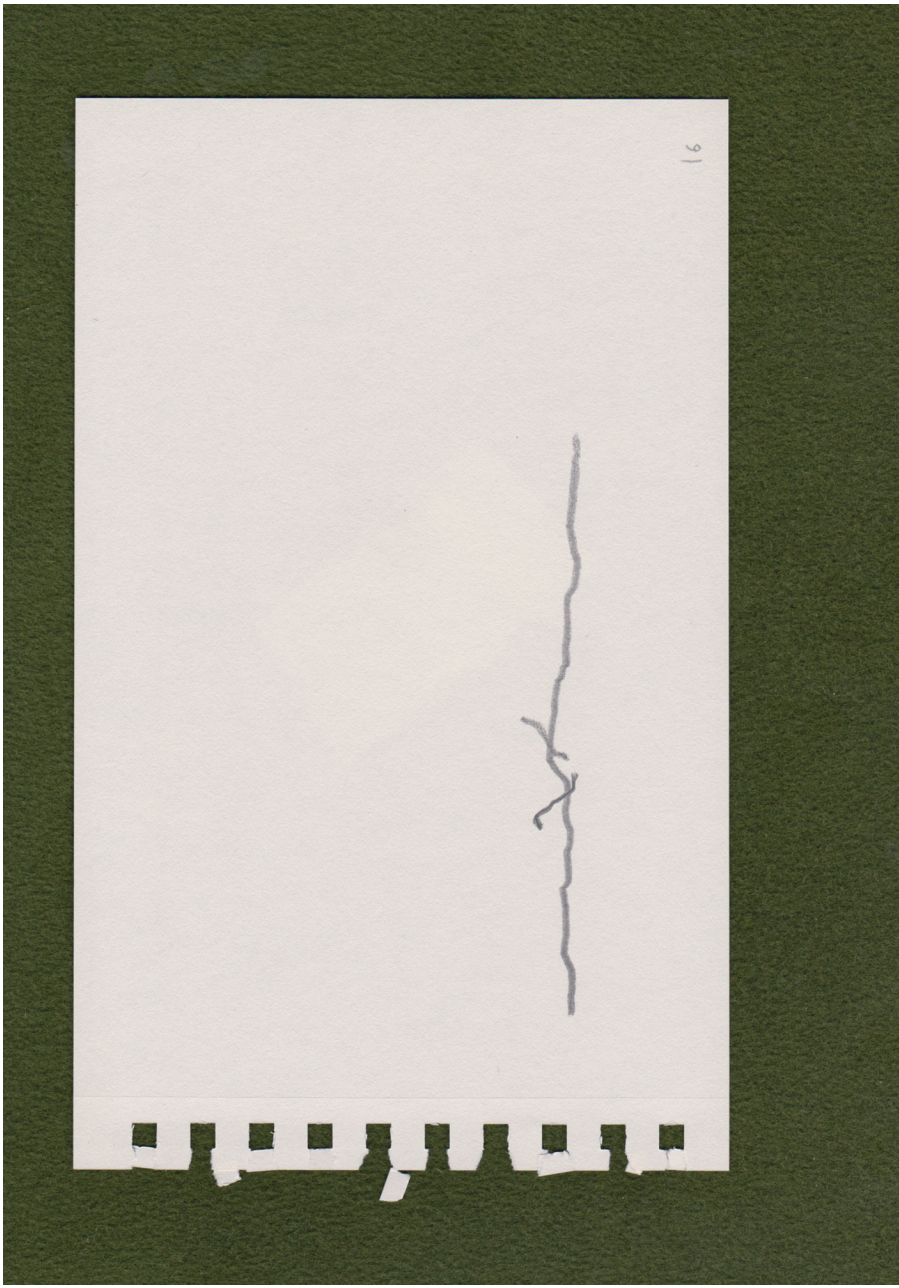

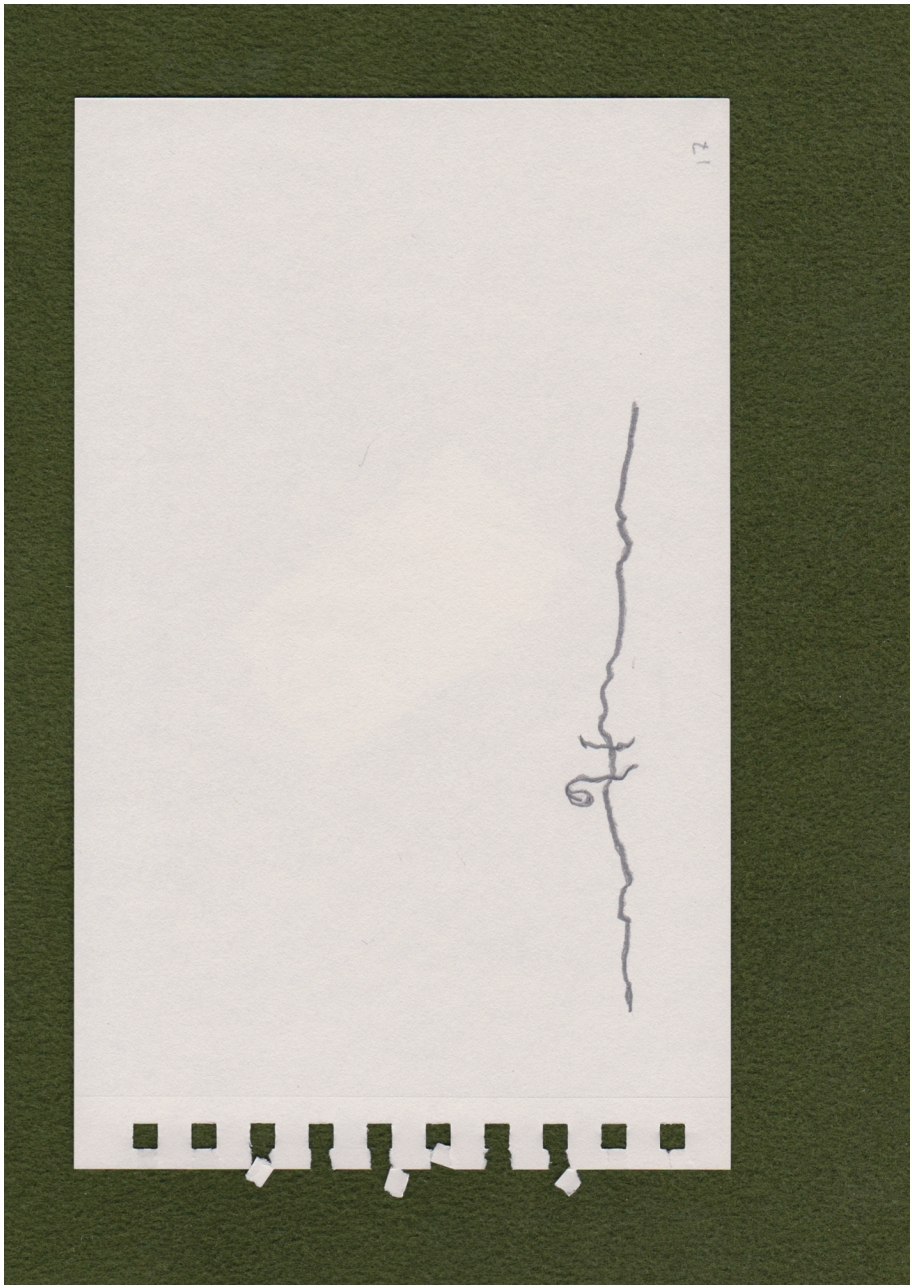

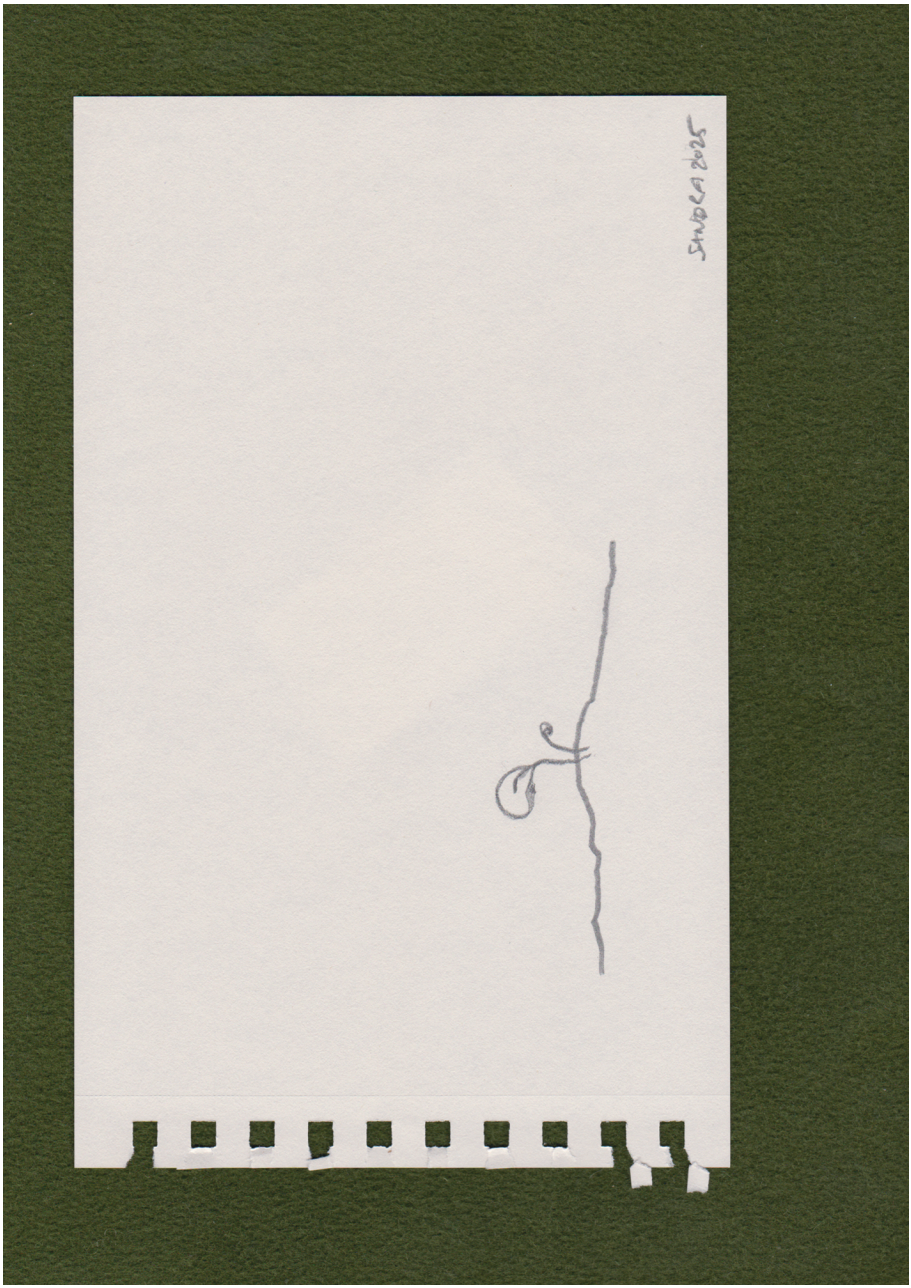
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