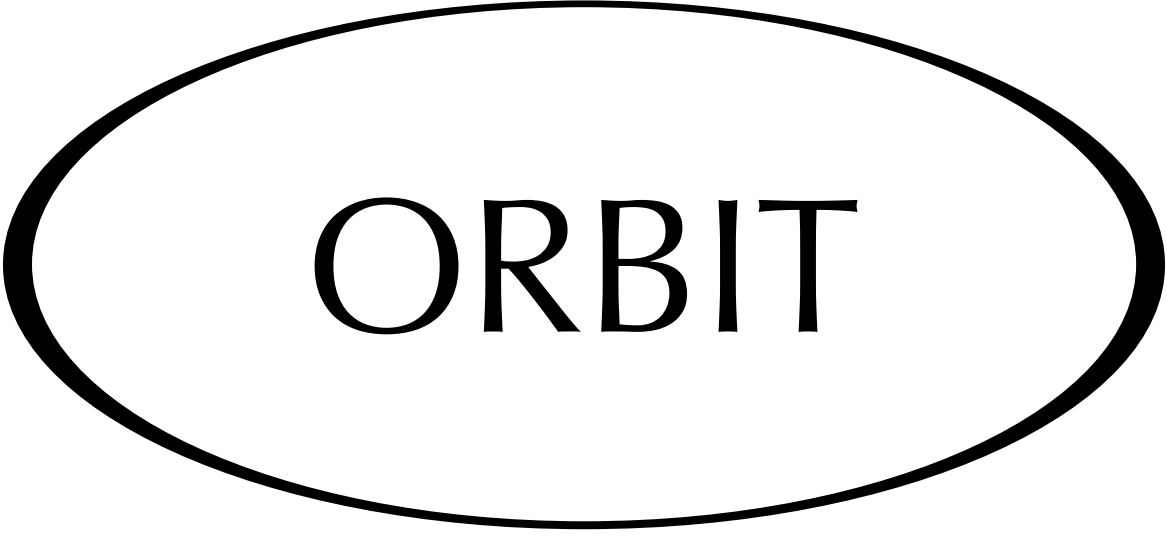


SIMON HITCHENS





ORBIT



## ORBIT

This book explores the ideas and concepts behind the making of a set of drawings, a process which is central to my artistic practice. It also acts as a catalogue to a series of editioned prints made of these works. Accompanying the drawings, and for the first time, I'm showing a series of photographs of the landscape within which I made each drawing. Each photo was taken after the day had finished and my drawing equipment packed up for the journey home. In some ways I consider these many hundreds of circumnavigations of the now absent stone, drawing and table, as much an artwork as the drawings themselves. These subtlest of interventions into landscape which I call Indicators are born from a quasi-ritualistic system of actions informed entirely by that site, the weather patterns of the day and indeed the time of year.

The twelve drawings which make up *Orbit* were drawn at equal intervals over a twelve-month period. These are process-based drawings made in, of and about the landscape - the result of a particular set of conditions, in a particular place, over a particular span of time. They record celestial time, geological time and human time as well as the weather patterns unique to that day and site: a meditation on time and space.

*Orbit* develops the durational day-drawings I have been working on for several years: I walk into a specific landscape, find an indigenous stone at the very location where I set up my drawing table before dawn and place that stone upon a sheet of paper. As the sun rises in the east (and with a pen in my hand) I trace its first shadow cast upon the surface of the paper which takes about two minutes to complete. In that small space of time the Earth has spun just a little on its axis, advancing the shadow and so I immediately start drawing the new shadow line. This process is repeated relentlessly until either a cloud obscures the sun and there is no shadow to draw or the sun dips below the western horizon at the end of the day.

This work records the fluctuating azimuth of the rising and setting sun, between the summer solstice to the winter solstice and back again. Each drawing is made using the same geological object, a piece of Chert from the Cretaceous period circa 66 – 143 million year ago, and in the same geographical location, an area of high common-land near to my studio in South Somerset. The work set out to interrogate and explore the interconnectedness between the human and the non-human, body and rock, what passes and what outlasts, as a means of exploring our relationship with impermanence. What it delivers, I believe, is a poetic way to link us to the past through the present and in doing so, connects us to something larger than ourselves. To be able to comprehend the deep time of rocks is to shine a light upon our own short lifespan and begin to understand the transient yet interconnected nature of what we share with the world.

Simon Hitchens June 2026

*Image overleaf: this reads clockwise from any point, with high summer at the top.  
The work forms a quasi-ritualistic map of celestial, geological and human time.*



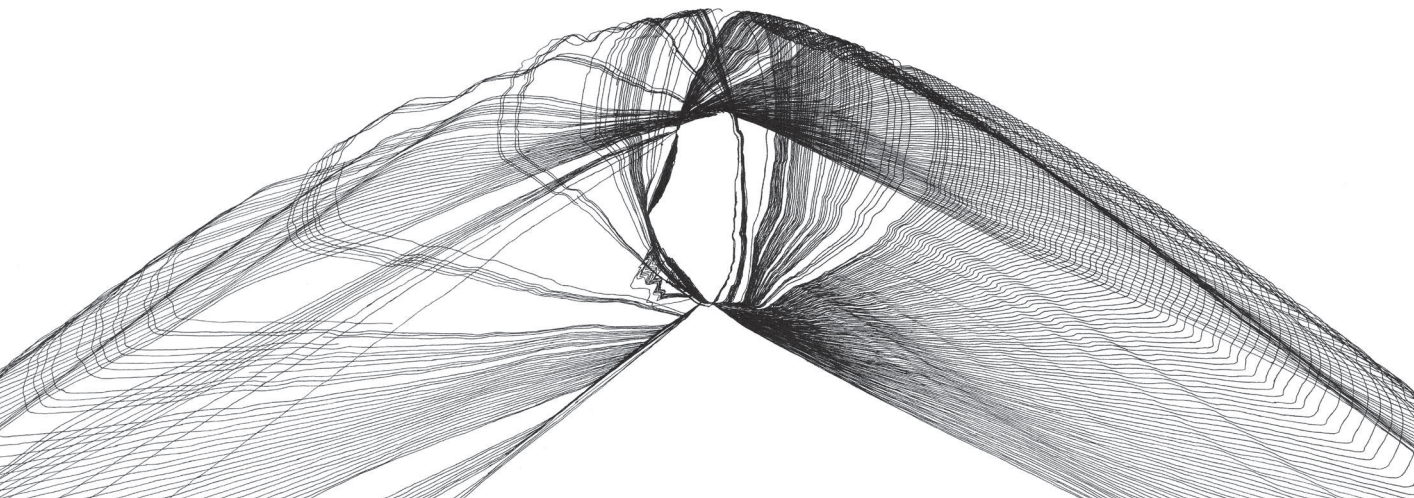




*ORBIT*

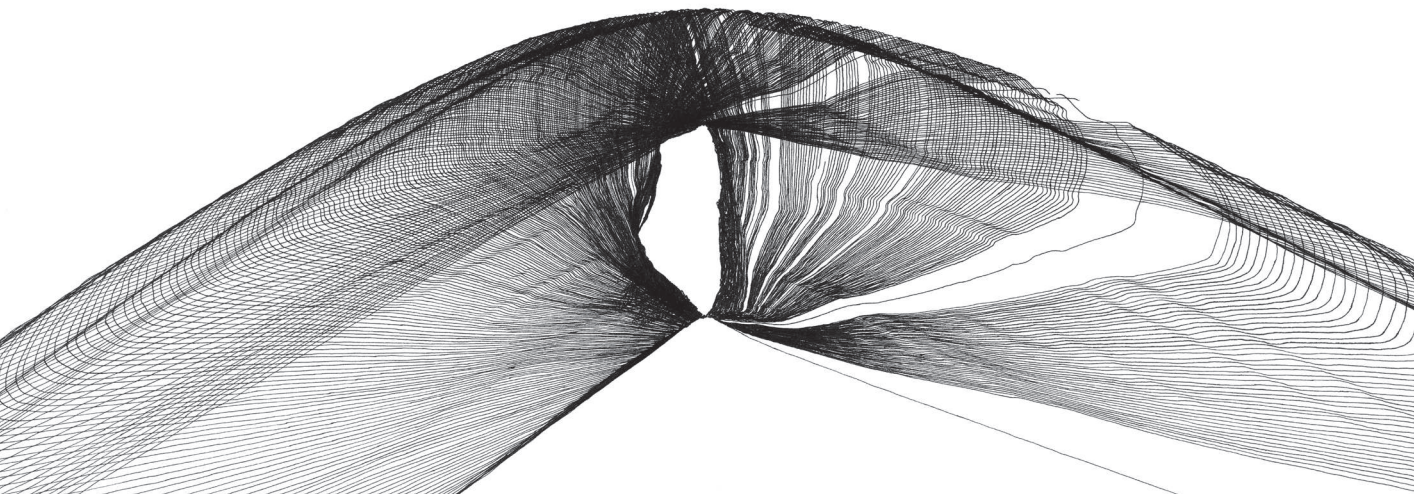
*ORBIT - June*

*04.49 Hartridge 21.30*



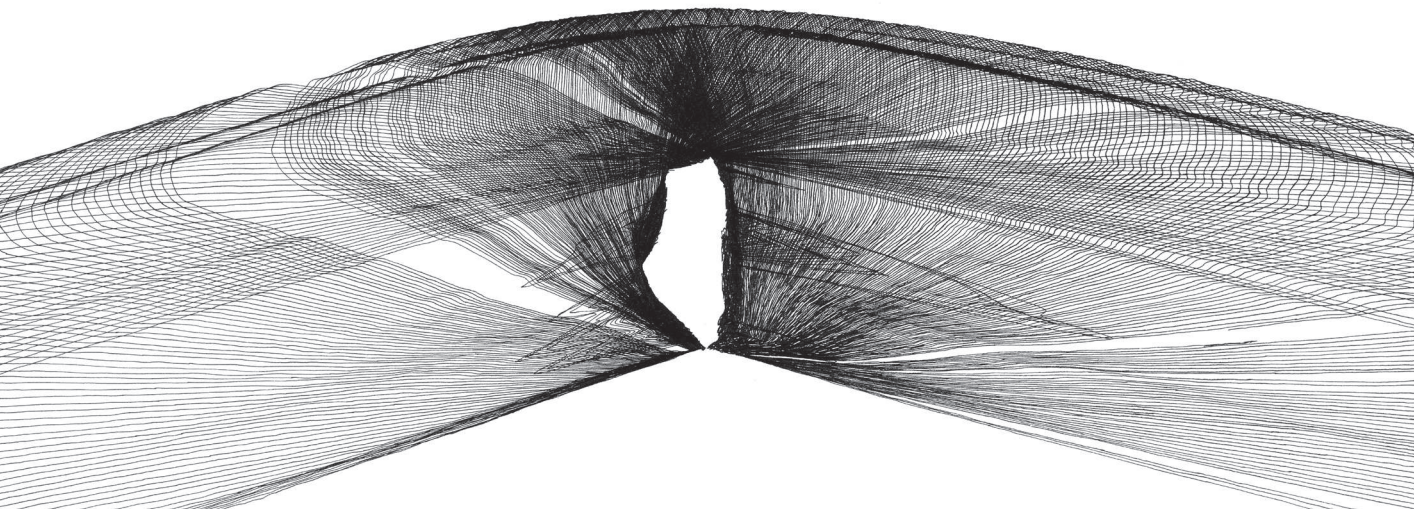
*ORBIT - July*

*05.29 Hartridge 21.09*



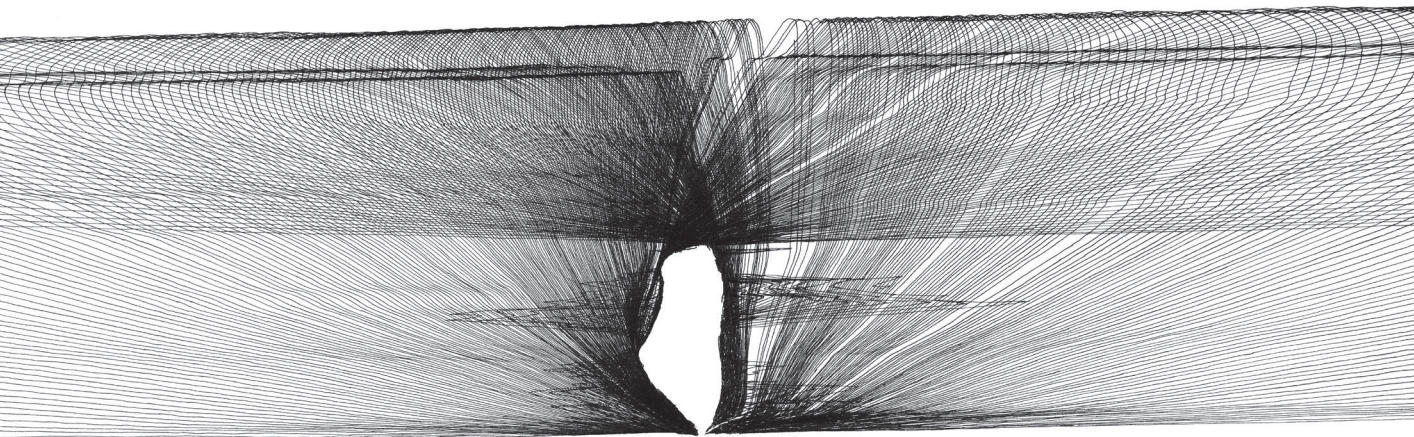
*ORBIT - August*

*06.15 Hartridge 20.13*



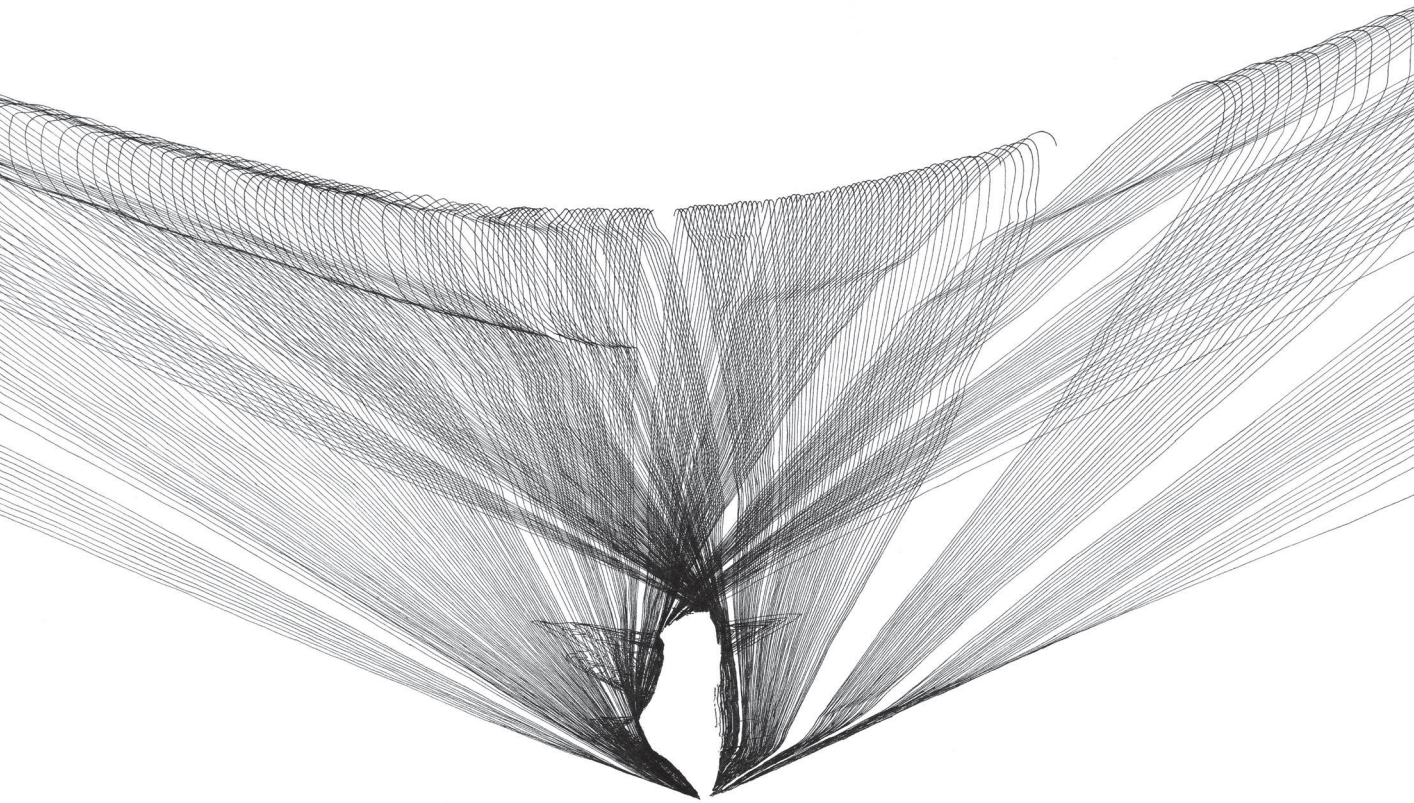
*ORBIT - September*

*07.00 Hartridge 19.09*



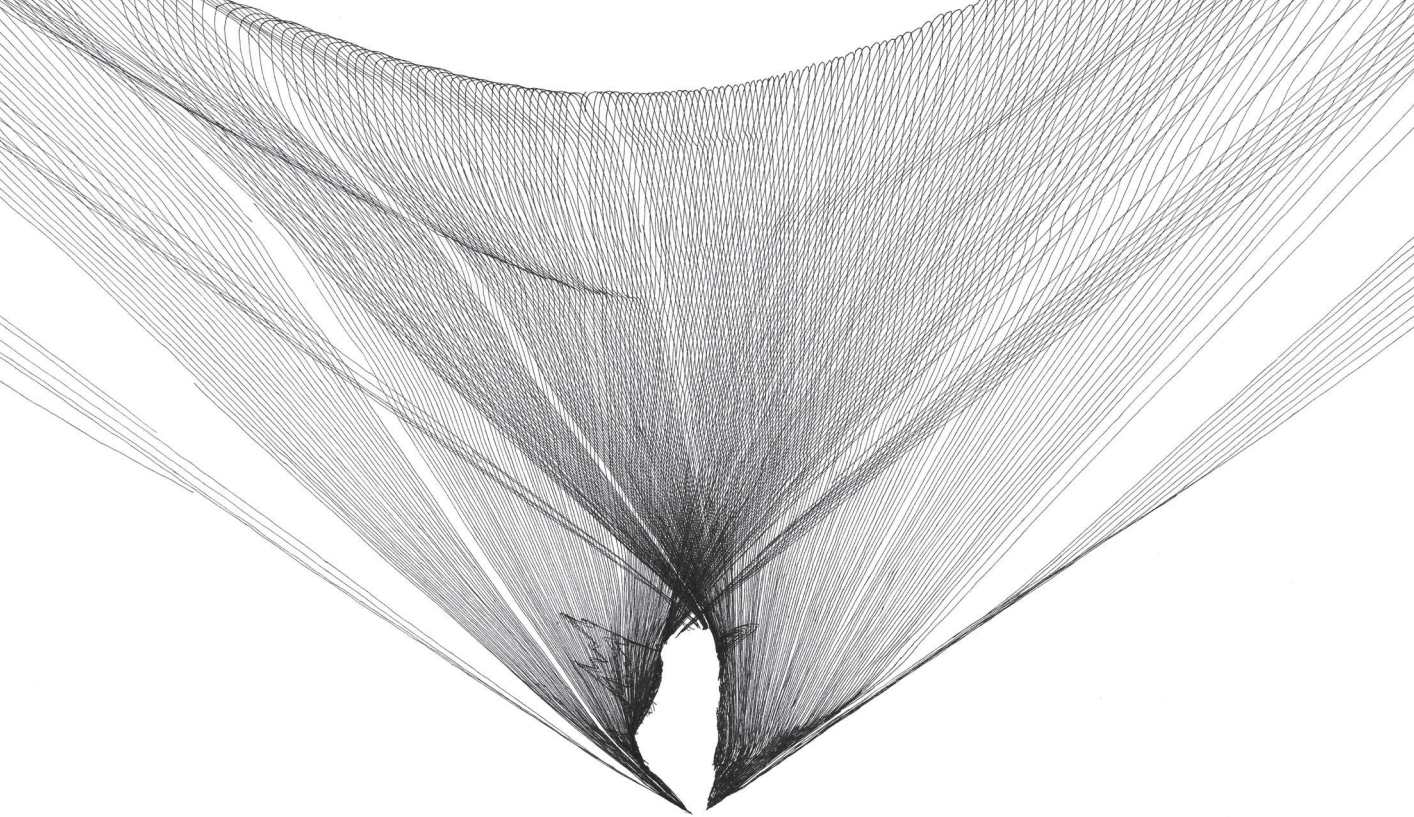
*ORBIT - October*

*06.56 Hartridge 16.57*



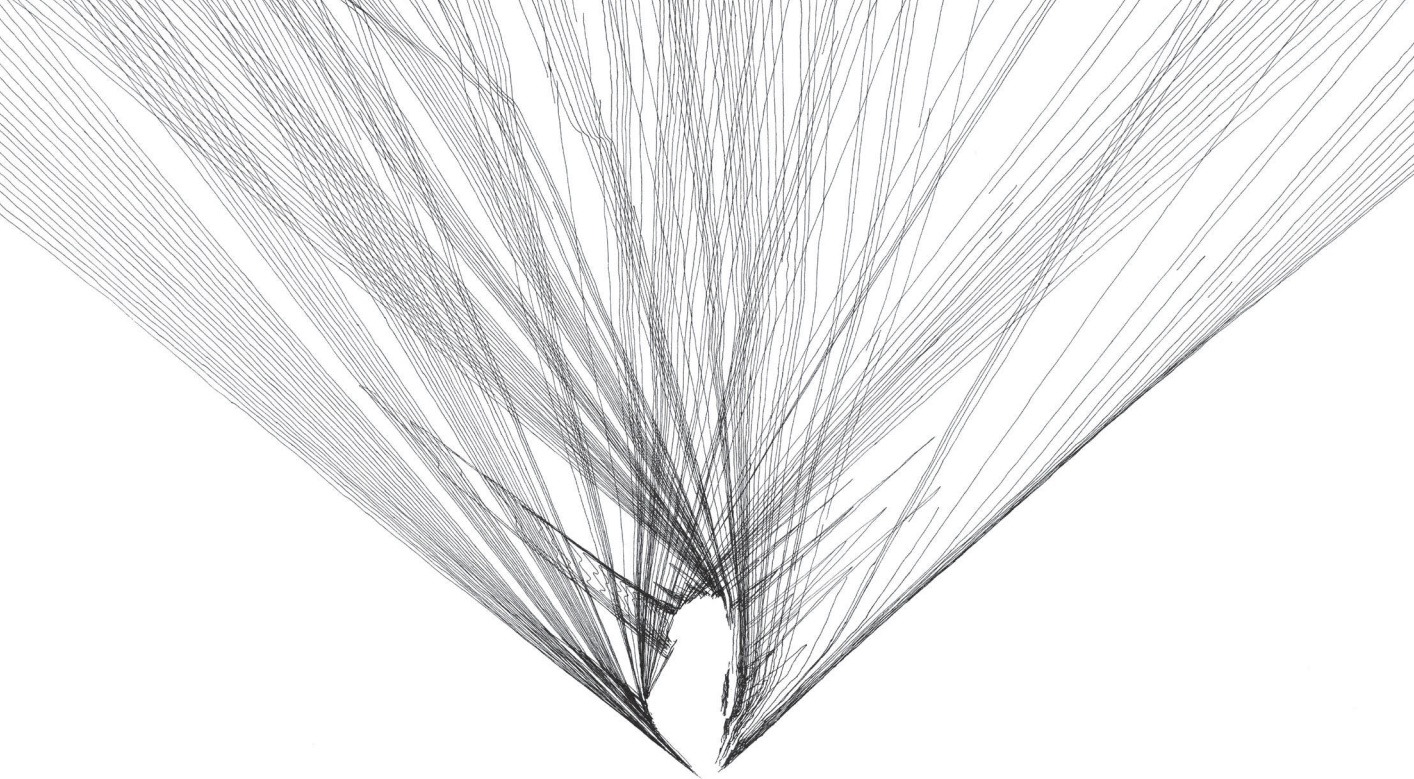
*ORBIT - November*

*07.36 Hartridge 16.20*



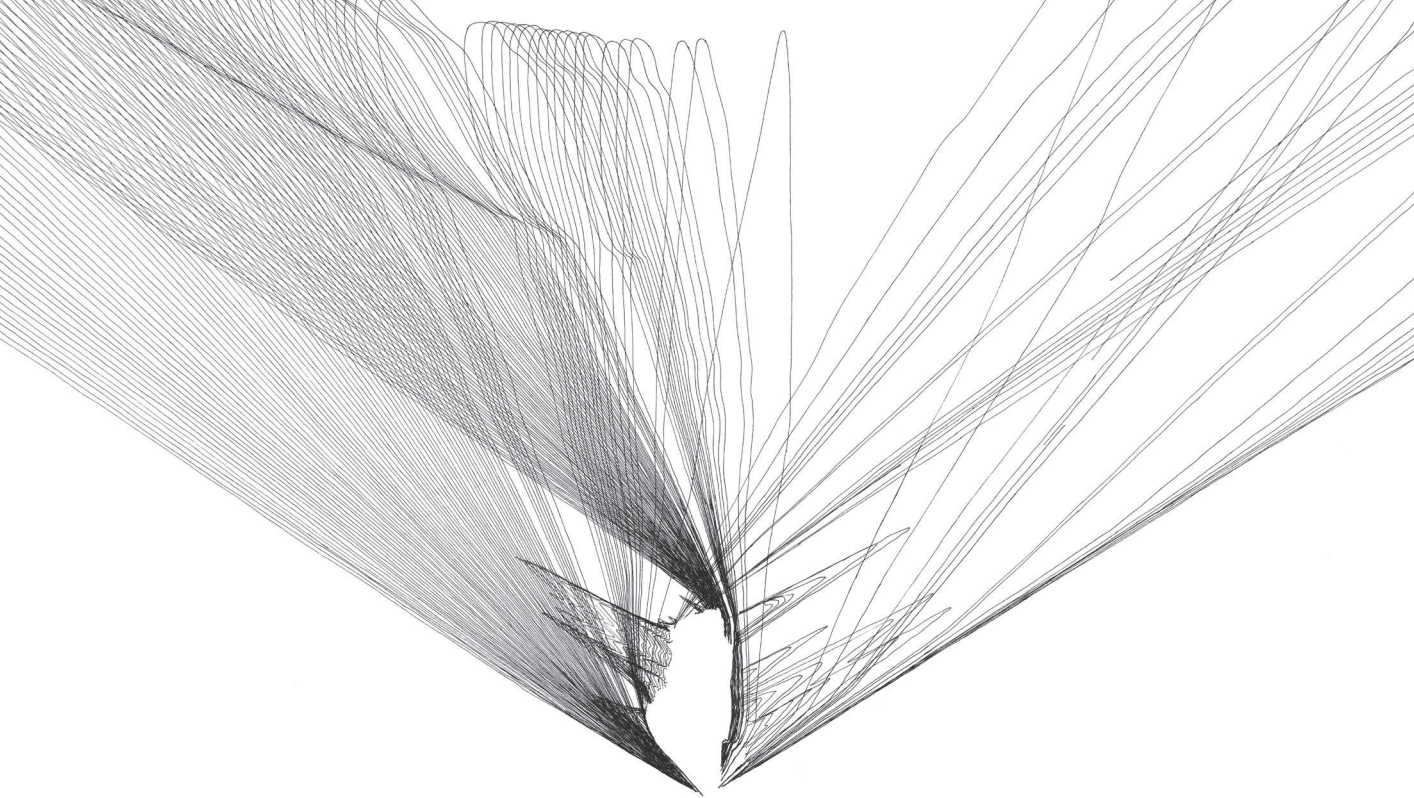
*ORBIT - December*

*08.11 Hartridge 16.08*



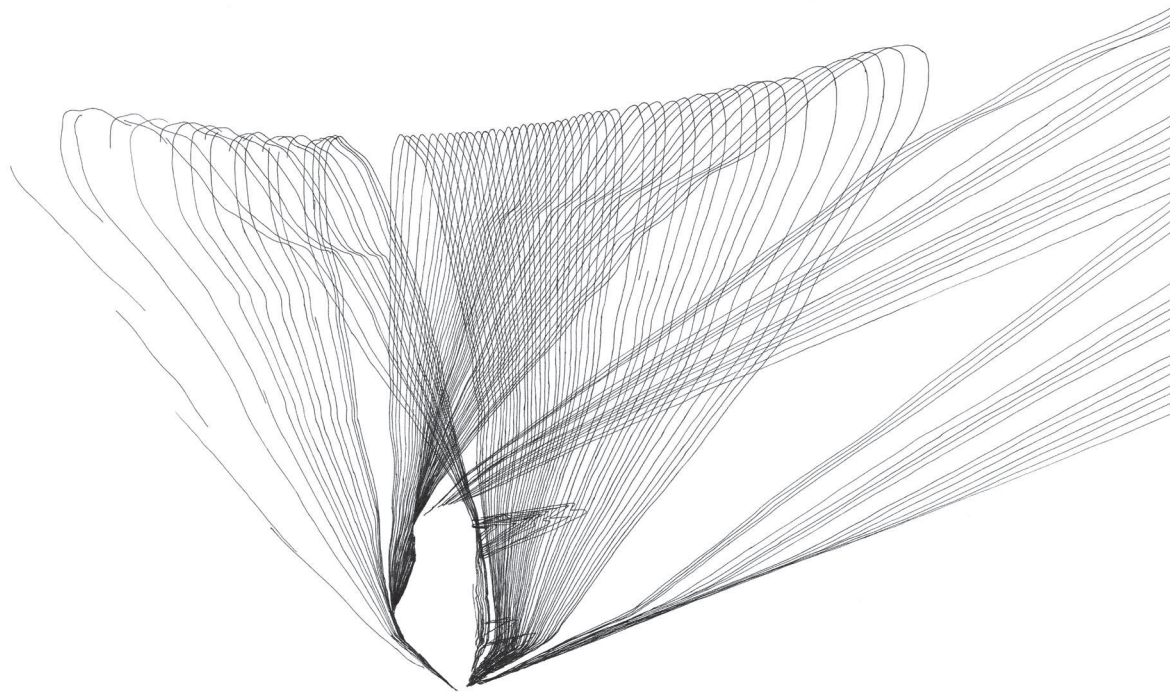
*ORBIT - January*

*07.58 Hartridge 16.52*



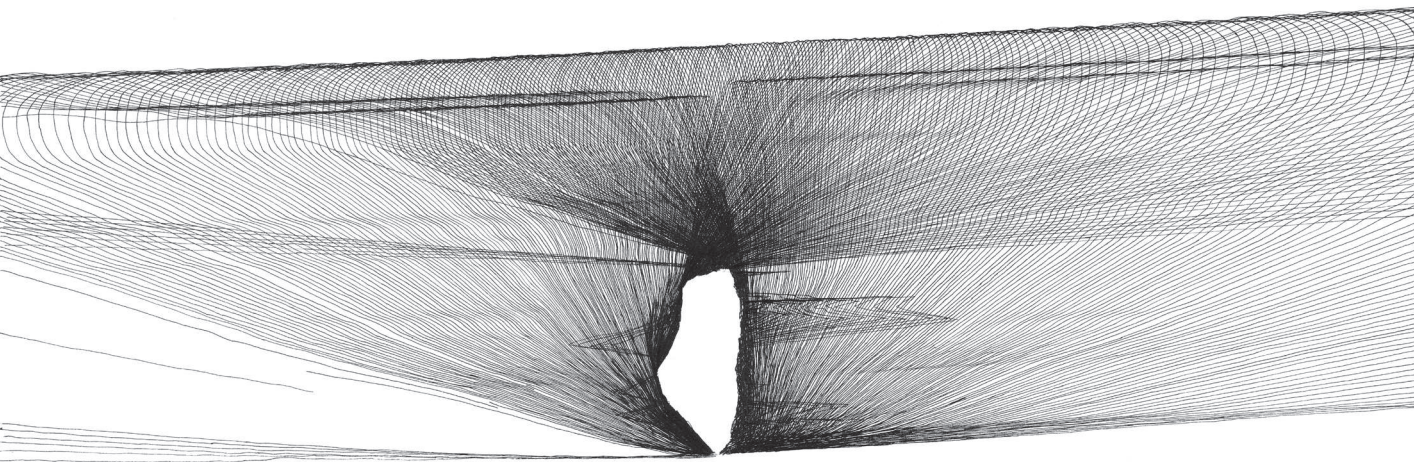
*ORBIT - February*

*07.19 Hartridge 17.35*



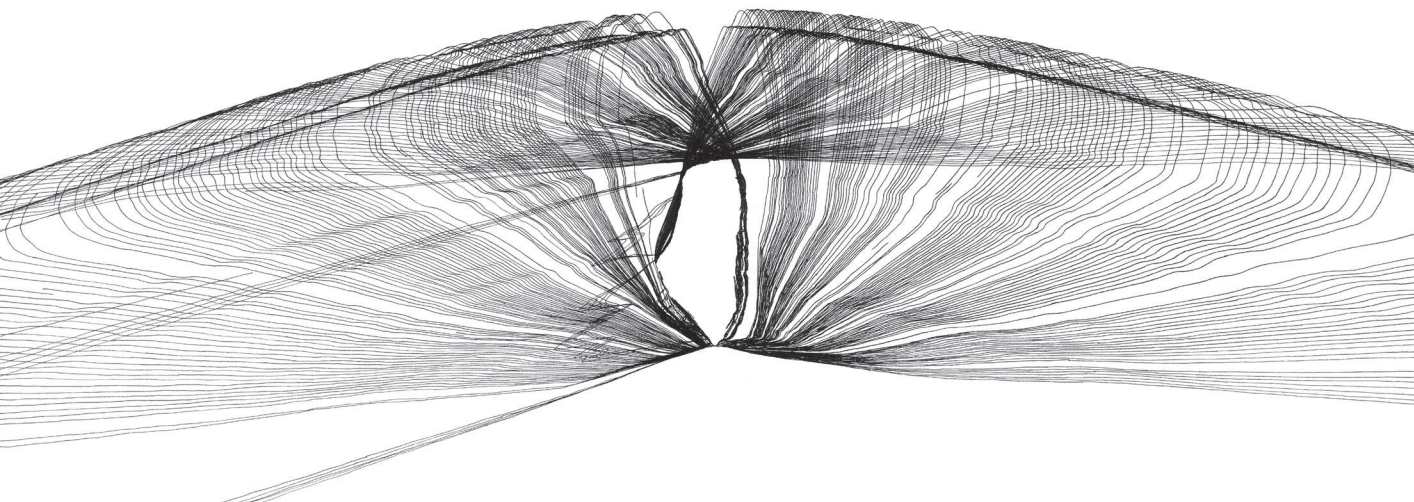
*ORBIT - March*

*06.20 Hartridge 18.22*



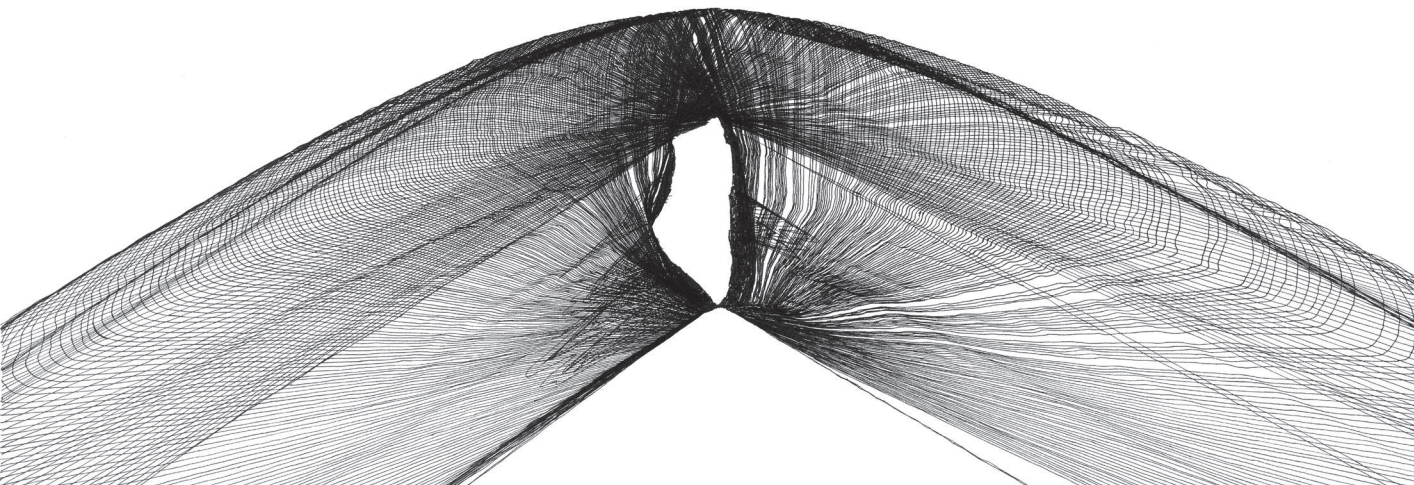
*ORBIT - April*

*06.14 Hartridge 20.21*



*ORBIT - May*

*05.19 Hartridge 21.00*





## A Drawn-Out Moment

‘pluck a feathery grass, brownish-pink and inconspicuous; hold a sheet of white paper behind it and see how the shadow stands out like an etching, distinct and black, a miracle of exact detail’. Nan Shepherd

Everything is the same and everything is different. At the heart of things lie the questions: how can a body of work be both rigorously systematic and irreducibly of-the-moment? How can we understand the vastness of planetary action, in the smallness of our individual bodily experiences? The answer begins with the shadows.

A sheet of expectant paper, empty but for a rock retrieved from this same site, awaits the sun to throw shadows, the silhouettes of which he will rim with fine black ink. The shadow must be sharp enough that the line he traces is definite; suffused sunshine and a tenuous shadow will not do. If in doubt he will wait, until the haze disperses, the rain abates, the clouds shift, and the light rays return unobstructed and revelatory. Only then can the line begin again and on and on until, from one horizon to another, the black lines multiply, fanning out like

aggregated contours. At times these contours follow a trajectory of overlapping waves, each line an inexact echo of the one before. When the light shines in earnest these waves combine, in a rhythmical mesh, issuing from a voiceless cavity in the centre.

Each full circuit, he tells me, takes about two minutes, and maps the meeting of light wave with the extremity of rock. White space indicates an obstacle: moisture in the air, atmospheric particles weakening the force of the light, or the solid mineral particles of rock itself. When the light levels wane the regularity of the mesh disintegrates like old fabric scraps. This is drawing as site-specific trace: the same site, from the same orientation. Each month he returns with the same pen in hand, the same paper stock, the same rock from the same site and prepares to tune into the meteorological and atmospheric conditions to come. The rock, small enough to fit in a palm, lies at the paper-white heart of things always present but now only marked by its topography, and its un-inked absence. He awaits, hopeful, expectant, and as the rays of light reach out so follows his hand and therefore his body, black striae extending, indexing the trajectory of shadow like a sundial.

Each month everything is the same and everything is different. On the shortest winter day, the rock casts a V, each outline so long that the loop is but partial, extending beyond the top edge of the paper, so that the looping back of the arc cannot be captured. The lines thrown by the day are tentative, irregular, incomplete trails gathering in clusters. The longest summer day sees the looping rock shadows extend in the opposite direction in an inverted V, the inside of which, by eye, isn't far off a right angle. The lines are close together, their accumulated black mass indicating a pressing energy of confident, insistent light rays where it catches the rock's jagged edges and undersides resulting in a cross-hatched moiré effect. None of these are discrete entities; intensities play out, each a continuation, one to the next, its own duration: a day, a month, a year.

In one of the most famous stories of the origination of art, shadows have played a key role. Pliny the Elder told of the daughter of a potter, who, distraught at her lover's leaving, drew around his shadow by candlelight to hold close his spirit in his absence. The tale has been painted many times through the history of art and has become synonymous with the possibility of reproducing desire and capturing memory through visual mimesis. The shadow

and its tracing equate to the transmission of an authentic essence, an essential truth, of the form being cast. For Simon Hitchens, the power of the shadow goes further: it transmits the material form of the cast object (the rock) not just in a single moment, but over a series of moments as the object is moved on the earth's axis in relation to the static sun. The essence that is captured is affected by the environmental, latitudinal and meteorological conditions on a particular day, but also - more quietly - the presence of a human eye, hand and heart engaged in the task of tracing that line again and again.

He materialises cosmological events, conceptualising the macro, then, but always with a view to a human scale. This impulse is akin to that of Katie Paterson whose practice revolves around finding ways to gather information or material about, and from, the earth and its atmosphere. - *there lay the Days between* - (2022), for example, is made of a ticker board displaying the number of times the sun has risen since the earth began, a number that no one can experience first-hand. *Sumingashi* (2025), a watercolour painted with thawed ice age snow from Antarctica, gives the sensation of painting with glacial time. Both attempt to make palpable the inconceivable - the essential properties and histories of our solar system. Where

Paterson makes the incomprehensible visible, Hitchens makes it felt. He isn't interested in the science per se but in how it feels in the body, as a means to illuminate the transience of human life through poetic touch. In Hitchens' work, the cosmic is measured not by data or displaced material but by a human hand moving across paper over sixteen hours in midsummer.

In this sense, Hitchens could be aligned to the plein-air tradition, but with a conceptual take. Like artists such as Rodger Ackling and Tim Knowles he draws both in the landscape and with the landscape. Each has deployed various degrees of automation, giving primacy to environmental forces beyond themselves. In tree drawings from the early 2000s, for example, Knowles set up an easel or flat surface near different trees on the branches of which he affixed drawing implements. He let the wind and the particular characteristics of the tree do the rest. The resulting drawings, made up of stuttering flecks, splodges and marks, are delicate compositions over which Knowles has largely yielded control. Ackling, on the other hand, developed a system of drawing involving holding a magnifying glass between an object and the sun, allowing the sun's rays to imprint through a series of scorched lines. Sometimes the marks he made were controlled figurative forms or patterns; at others, such as *Five Hour*

*Cloud Drawing* (1980), he reduces the level of human intervention, moving the lens at a regular pace across a semi-circular portion of a page to track changing light levels over a five-hour period. What Hitchens adds to this tradition is time - not five hours but a whole day, a week, a month, or in this case a year. His is not a single surrender to the elements but a vow to return.

And the body is never far away. In fact, *Orbit* depends on his body sharing the space and light of the spinning earth at a particular moment in time. Yet, the way in which he brings the temporality of the human body into play is paradoxical. On the one hand, the completion of *Orbit* requires considerable commitment, focus and bodily endurance; on the other, Hitchens has reduced his physical action to a series of laws - if the sun throws a line of shadow, then the pen follows - leaving little to no space for idiosyncratic deviation. Yet his lines are subtly suffused with the markers of a human hand: their flow inconsistent, their edges fuzzed, their trajectory juddering or sporadically broken as the pen nib lifts, midway, from the paper before returning not quite where it left off. I extrapolate from these markers, imagining the hand

moving more slowly first thing, being knocked off course as he braces against a gusting wind or as his lungs fill with pockets of icy winter air, wavering as his blood sugar lowers or as his mind wanders. And what about over longer spans of a human lifetime - as his steady hand falters with age, and his control loosens. His is the same body, each time just a little older than the body before.

And then there are his *Indicators*, the unintended consequences of his drawings. These landscape drawings produced not with pen and ink but with feet and weight result from his footfall as he circles his rock, his paper, his table: catching shadows. The ground bears the brunt, resulting in the parting of half-metre high spring meadows, the flattening of dried and stunted summer grass or the churning up of sodden winter mud. The traces of his actions are transformed by the time of year, the strength of the sun's rays, the firmness of the ground, the presence of grazing animals. His body is never present, but for its passing. There is a connection here to Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), but for Long, the meticulously executed drawing underfoot and its photographic capture were the primary

work. For Hitchens they are a serendipitous corollary. They are the unplanned signalling of his presence on earth, its contingency and the index of his embodied drawing in action: looking, marking, walking, spinning, breathing.

The body in *Orbit* and *Indicators* is ambiguous and loaded; it is removed, abstracted, yet wholly implicated. Hitchens' self-imposed systems for drawing depersonalise, removing expressive gesture or decorative embellishment so that the moment that he traces is not just his, but ours. His body acts as a conduit, channelling the forces of light, space and time beyond himself, beyond us. And yet the fallibility of human touch is inescapable, variable, indecisive; a line is dragged along a page, it stops and starts. Another day begins, for now.

Everything is the same. Everything is different.

Everything is not always.

Lizzie Lloyd, 2026





*INDICATORS*

*21 June 2025*



*25 July 2025*



*25 August 2025*



*23 September 2025*



*27 October 2024*



*20 November 2024*



*19 December 2024*



*25 January 2025*



*18 February 2025*



*18 March 2025*



*17 April 2025*



*18 May 2025*









## Biography

Simon Hitchens (born 1967) graduated in Fine Art from the University of the West of England in 1990. He has exhibited widely since then as well as undertaking private and numerous large-scale public commissions. He was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Sculptors in 1998, an RWA Academician in 2018 and is the fourth generation of artist in his family. Hitchens is represented by Close Ltd.

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## Acknowledgments

Each of the twelve drawings are reproduced individually as an editioned set of twenty-five Photopolymer Gravure prints on 410 gsm Somerset Satin paper, printed by Ink on Paper Press. Twelve full sets are available in bespoke presentation portfolios.

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Essay: *A Drawn-Out Moment* by Lizzie Lloyd, Writer and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art UWE

Photography of drawings - Neil White

Colour photography - Simon Hitchens

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C L O S E



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First image: September sunrise  
Last image: September sunset

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