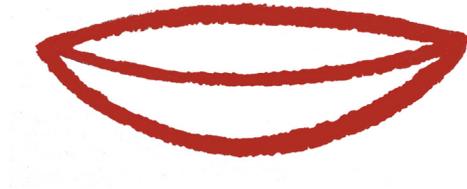


*Crossing Sublime*  
*(After After Nature)*



*reflections on substance and being in three parts*  
~ Valerie Constantino

*Madame Gherardi maintained that love, like most other blessings of civilisation, was a chimaera, which we desire the more, the further removed we are from Nature.*

~ W. G. Sebald

1.



*After Anne Ryan 1 (Performance with Window)*  
photomontage

*In the secret  
country where the  
solitary mind exists...  
all colors, arcs,  
patterns, images have  
steady room for  
themselves to move  
about and resolve at  
last into being.*

~ Anne Ryan

*Anne Ryan grew up in New Jersey  
near the Atlantic Ocean.*

*Set adrift by the untimely deaths of her parents,  
she found sanctuary for a time, living with her grandmother  
while attending a convent school.*

*Though still quite young,  
she married and began a family of her own,  
perhaps to escape parochial restrictions  
or establish bearable moorings.*

*But that domestic setting was as well,  
far too confining for her creative fluency,  
as she began to locate her own quiet corners  
amid the bohemia of New York and Paris  
and the unaffected villages of Majorca.*

*I will tell you that she was from the start,  
alert to the tissuey, connective substances  
that knit the things of the world together.*



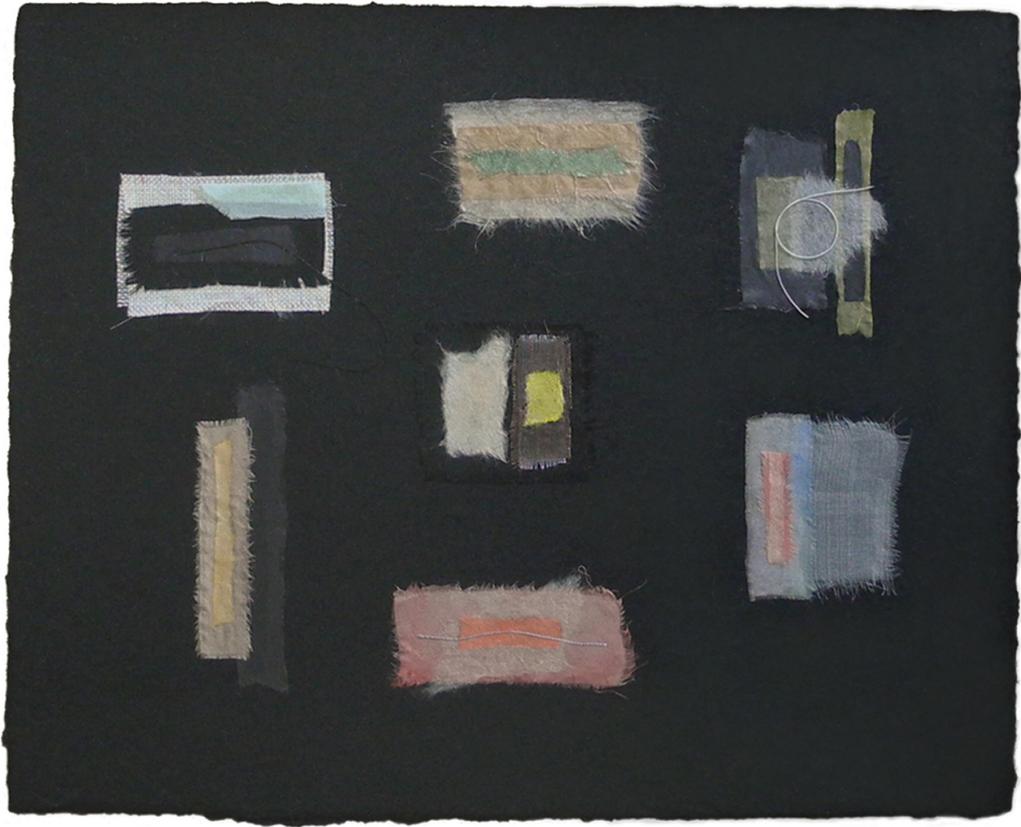
*After Anne Ryan (Red Planet)*  
mixed media collage

*Throughout her life,  
all of her creative output, her writing, her prints  
and her meticulous collages,  
reflected this essential knowing.*

*Like nature's elemental proceedings,  
her commentary occurred micro-cosmically.  
There was never a call for the grand gesture,  
though others of her time would press their case  
that she must, as they had, expand.*

*But thunderous roars and crashings  
had little bearing upon her being.  
Hers was a collapsing in of space,  
an actual, subliminal interior.*

*Private and scrupulous she was  
as a cartographer or lapidary,  
but precisely  
an artist.*



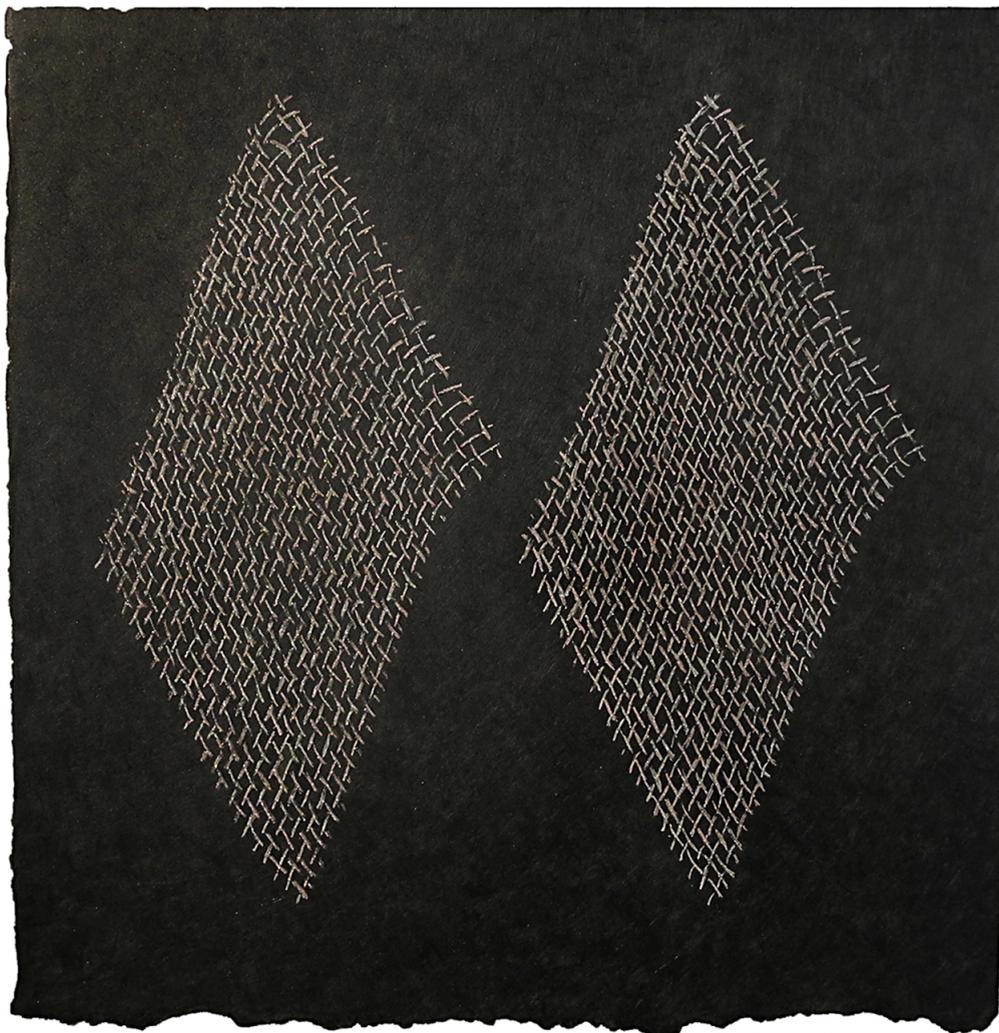
*After Anne Ryan 3 (Constellation)*  
mixed media collage

*Her predilection for the minute and prosaic  
arose from silent surveillances;  
the glide of a Glasswing;  
an air ball from a Bivalve.*

*The thread is the line,  
the fragment, the matter.  
Exploring dimensions of color through texture,  
excavating the substrata of the seemingly flat,  
Anne Ryan laid the full extent of her findings bare.*

*All color, all substance, all of us really,  
are like that:  
time capsules,  
pulsating assemblages  
of fervent and burgeoning layers.*

*Constellations of tatters,  
Anne Ryan's definitive poetry,  
her last word.*



*After Anne Ryan 4 (Reticula)*  
mixed media on paper

2.



*When the ship  
flies over the dark  
half of the earth,  
I train in defining the  
constellations that are  
as bright and shiny as  
the cleaned buttons on a  
military uniform.*

~ Valentina  
Tereshkova

*After Valentina Tereshkova 1 (Performance with Star Trails)  
photomontage*

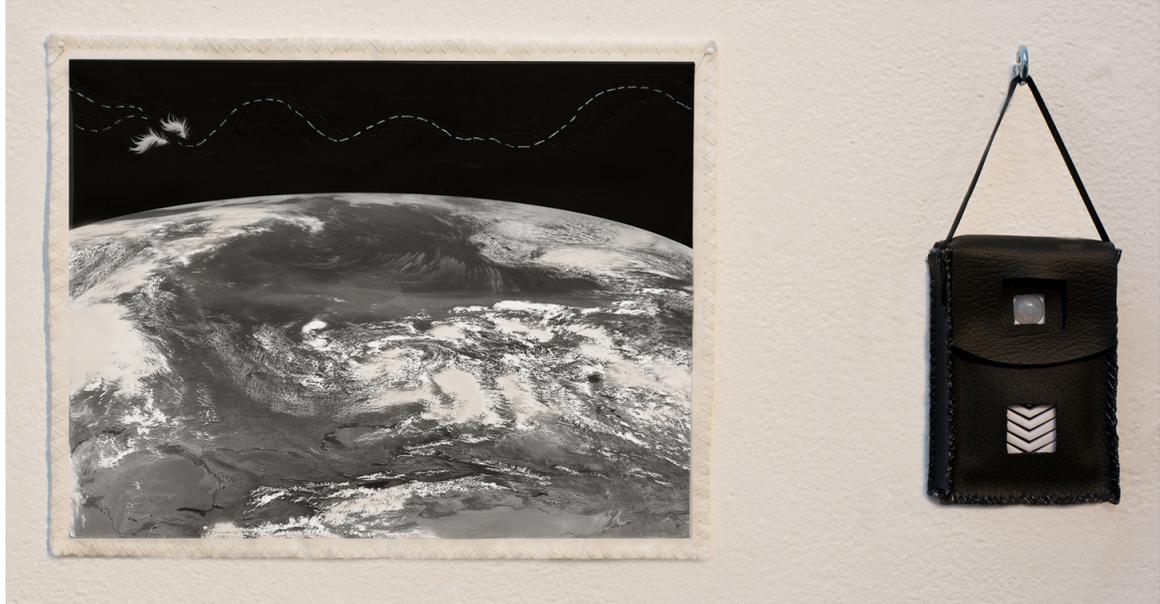
*The child Valentina looked up at the night sky  
and up into the early morning sky too.  
She watched birds flit and soar on cloudless days,  
and she tracked the stars at night.*

*She imagined herself there,  
way up in the motionless outer regions  
of the earth's atmosphere.*

*She worked long hours in a textile factory  
alongside neighborhood friends.  
After the workday, they would join together  
in group activities including the rarified art of skydiving.*

*Her hesitation is palpable.  
Was it fear or anticipation,  
self-doubt or the thrill of synchronicity?*

*But Valentina did jump on that day  
and on numerous occasions thereafter.  
And she absorbed the material quality of the air itself.*



*After Valentina Tereshkova 2 (Я ЧАЙКА [I am Seagull])*  
assemblage with photomontage and embroidery on quilted silk,  
motion detector, faux leather, found audio with the voice of  
Valentina Tereshkova from space.

*Did we know that,  
that this apparently colorless, formless substance  
that surrounds all vibrant matter  
is itself vibrant and substantive?*

*She who jumps and falls  
and then floats is keenly aware of this fact:  
that in concert with the earth's potent gravitational pull,  
she will be at once held aloft,  
enveloped by discrete atmospheric particles  
as they act upon her own particular matter,  
as they merge and disperse as they will.*

*The heavens are for Valentina, like feather down,  
like a warm wrap against the rain.  
She learns to sink into that indistinct substance  
and she learns about flight.*



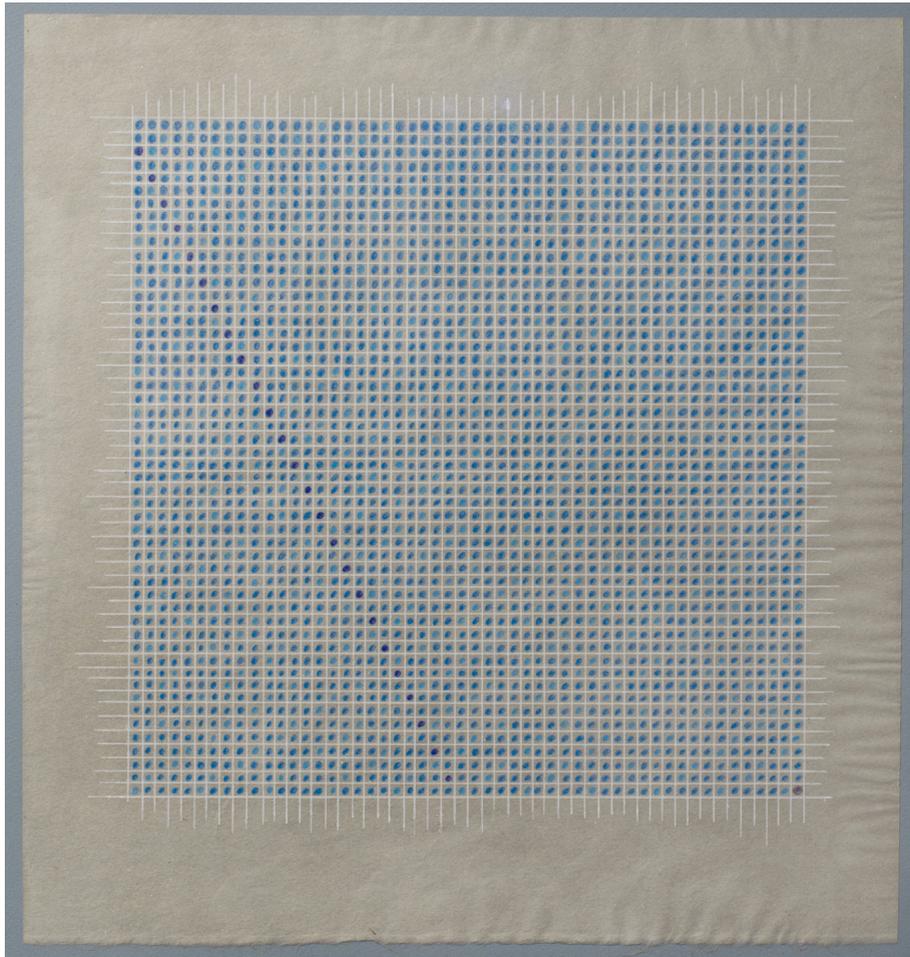
*After Valentina Tereshkova 3 (Blue Arc)*  
mixed media on paper

*In those early days,  
Valentina had not thought much about enlistment.  
She believed in community principles;  
she was diligent and participatory for the good of all.  
She challenged and improved herself as she was taught to do.*

*But called she was.  
And there was never any doubt  
that she would go forward as required.  
And for Valentina Tereshkova,  
forward meant skyward.*

*She became a pilot, an astrophysicist, a cosmonaut,  
training in the extremes  
of anti-gravity and solitude.*

*Her rocket shook like a young tree in a windstorm.  
And as it roared its range of dissonant tones, she said:  
I am flying.*



*After Valentina Tereshkova 4*  
(The Sixth Ocean: the relative chemical composition of the earth's  
atmosphere as ● 78% nitrogen, ● 21% oxygen, ● .95% argon,  
● .038% carbon dioxide, ● .0087% trace elements.)  
mixed media on paper

*Her sensation, though exquisite,  
is not without apprehension.  
Up there, Valentina was utterly untethered  
and alone.*

*Oh, she was brave, all right.  
But then, there was that crossing  
between courage and pride,  
and absolute uncertainty.*

*Beyond the mechanics of lift-off and orbit,  
confined in her capsule,  
Valentina Tereshkova dropped into the current  
below the surface of herself;  
her liminal passage,  
predicated upon trust.*

*All was greyness, without direction, with no above or below,  
nature in a process of dissolution, in a state of pure dementia.*

- W. G. Sebald

3.



*After After Nature 1 (Performance with Spyglass)*  
photomontage

*Each single thing is itself of light.  
To be an object or any thing,  
is to coruscate with probability.  
With each breath,  
light penetrates and has its way.  
A continuous, quivering thread;  
as brilliant as it is indeterminate.*

*The overlooked everyday;  
that tea stain,  
those tangles and tears.  
And the grand global malaise;  
that plummeting peak,  
those shrivels and shrouds,  
that sea of grey green:  
luminous and flat.  
Assemblages of nebulous, transient bursts.*

*She who wanders  
seeks radiance and also refuge,  
and wonders just how eternal is the source,  
or might there be a limit?  
Might it extinguish  
against her spirited capacity to absorb?*



*After After Nature 2 (Bird and Boat)*  
photomontage on quilted and  
embroidered silk, felt, gold leaf

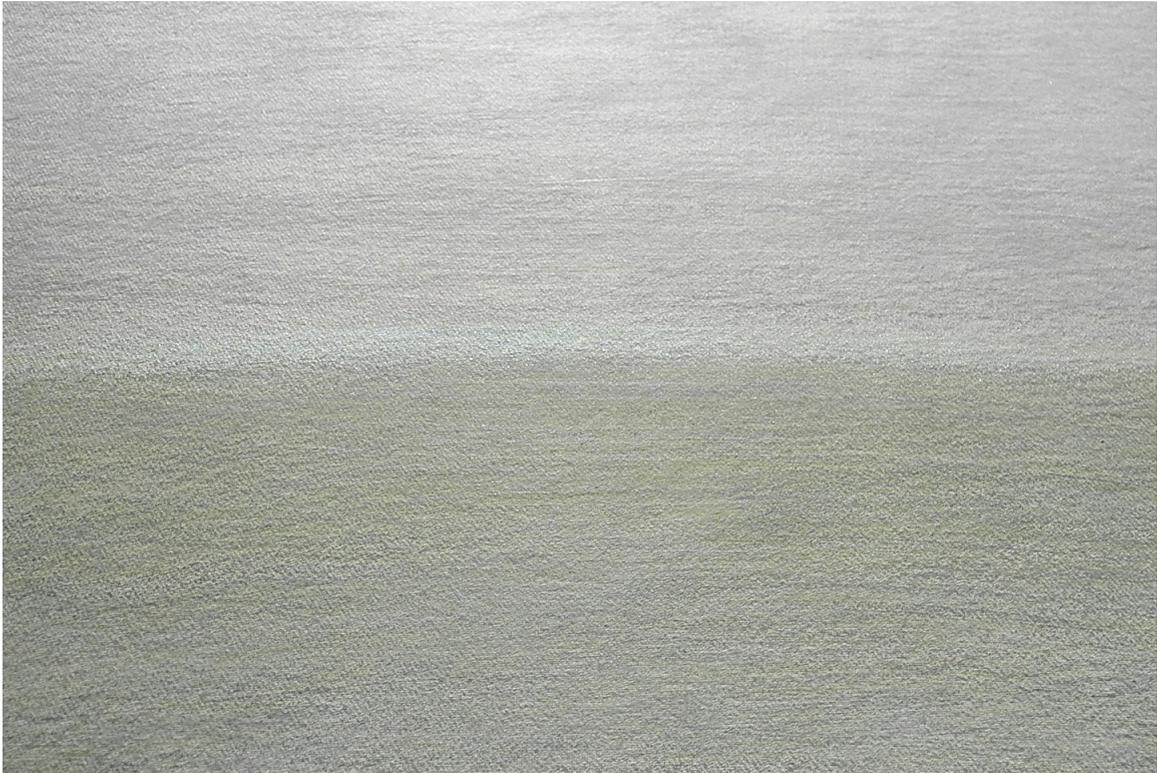
*There was one time  
when I was at a particularly low ebb.  
I was set upon a threshold  
of diffused light.*

*No horizon could I distinguish,  
nor hint of common form, color or scale;  
only fleeting shifts between a searing white  
and a vague, watery grey.*

*My crossing was frightening, to say the least.  
But I did pass into this borderless territory  
(or terror-story, as the case may be),  
and in my state of perceptual disorder,  
ordinary matter/s dematerialized including the substance of self.  
And I began then, to live another life.*

*Contrary to what you may imagine  
this sort of thing can occur anywhere in the world.  
You needn't travel to remote or exotic locations  
or learn any special or secret technique.*

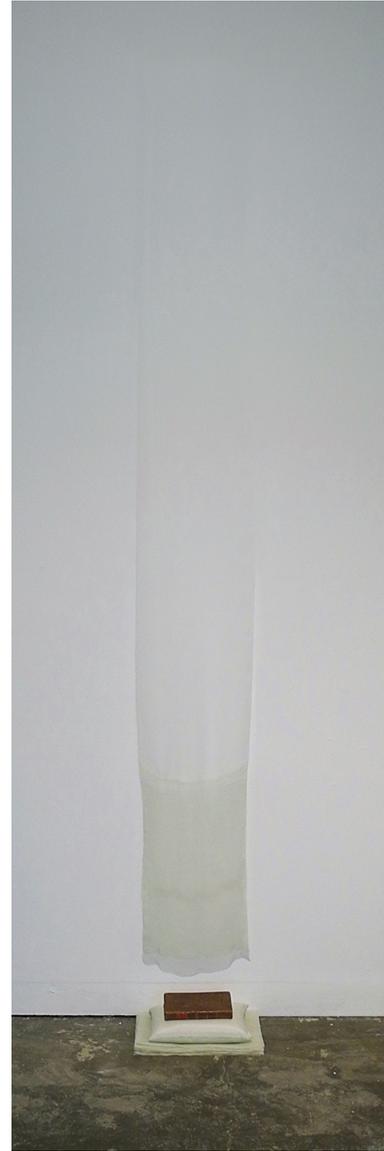
*In kitchens or at desks, on land, at sea or in the air,  
Anyone can just turn or blink  
into an isotropic state.*



*After After Nature 2, (Green Arc), detail  
mixed media on paper*



*After After Nature 4 (Reading!Photosynthesis)*  
assemblage with Wakefiled's **Botany** (Boston, 1811),  
silk, rice paper, chlorophyll



*In truth, I did not go readily  
into the sublime nucleus of my self.  
But I have actually come to prefer  
my vertiginous state of being  
to conventional forms of certitude.*

*The other day while walking  
I came upon a fallen raven feather.  
Perfectly black and arrow-tipped,  
enthralling in its lack of effort.  
More than talisman, this cast-off,  
a summons and a salutation  
to the light of the day.*



*Crossing Sublime (Portal)*  
silk gauze, gold leaf, rice paper

*It could be that God has not absconded but spread,  
as our vision and understanding of the universe has spread, to a  
fabric of spirit and sense so grand and subtle, so powerful in a new  
way, that we can only feel blindly of its hem.*

~ Annie Dillard



artwork and text: Valerie Constantino  
artwork documentation: Valerie Constantino and Mustafa Shaheen

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