

LEEDS
ART
GALLERY

HONDARTZA
FRAGA:
ARCHIVE
BLUES

HONDARTZA FRAGA: ARCHIVE BLUES

Archive Blues is a new body of work created by artist Hondartza Fraga in response to Leeds Art Gallery's new exhibition of John Sell Cotman's works and Sydney Decimus Kitson's archive.

The British artist John Sell Cotman (1782–1842) was one of the most original and important watercolour painters of the 19th century. Today, he is recognised for his remarkable series of watercolours depicting Yorkshire – his *Greta* series – as well as for his sensitivity to the societal changes and growing brutality that he witnessed during his lifetime.

The prominent architect Sydney Decimus Kitson devoted his retirement to collecting drawings by Cotman and researching the artist's life and work. Kitson's *The Life of John Sell Cotman* was published on

1 April 1937, just a few weeks before his death from tuberculosis – it was the belief of Kitson's friends that he had been sustained and kept alive by his work on the artist. To this day, Kitson's book remains the only full-length biography of Cotman.

Many artists have found Cotman's work inspiring. This was particularly true during the 1920s and 1930s when Cotman's reputation stood at its highest. British artists including Eric Ravilious, John Piper and Paul Nash have all described him as an important forerunner to British Modernism.

Artist-in-residence Hondartza Fraga has created a series of new works in response to the Cotman collection and Kitson archive. Fascinated by the relationship between the original objects and the tools used to care for them, Fraga has sought to reveal and



make visible the hidden workings of both an archive and a collection.

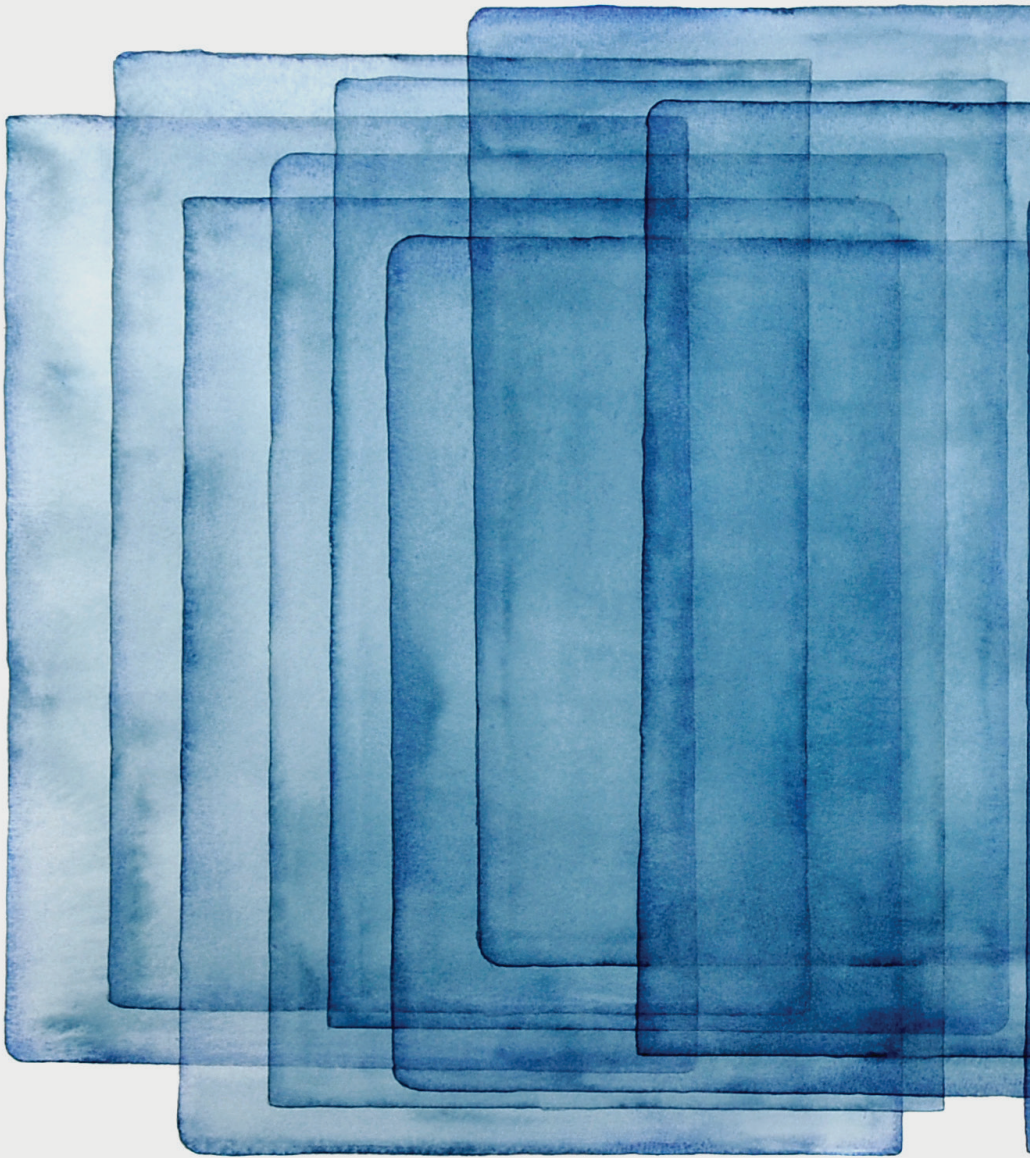
Fraga worked in watercolour after Cotman and chose blue after Kitson who bound his Cotmania notebooks in a greyish blue to echo Cotman's use of the colour. Her animations and watercolours offer a contemporary response to the work of John Sell Cotman and a homage to Sydney Decimus Kitson's 'Cotmania'.

In her own words Fraga has sought to create 'a visual eulogy to the archival process itself, its instruments and also its melancholy'.

Kitson's notebooks are particularly poignant. They trace his unfailing dedication to the study of Cotman. The last volume is incomplete, disrupted by his death, and remains bound in red.

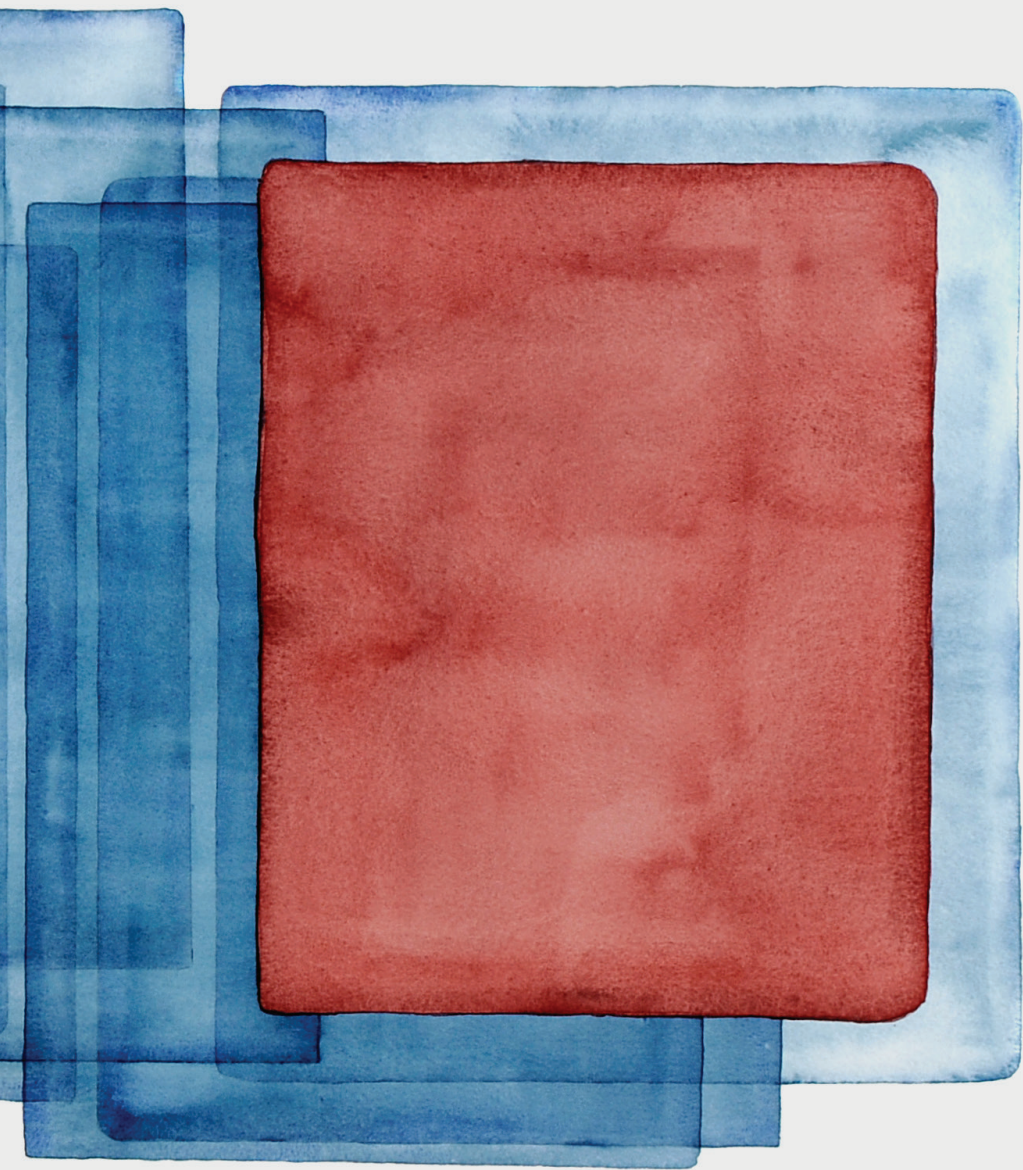
The works *Spines I & II* and *Covers* closely follow the form of Kitson's notebooks, directing our gaze not to their contents but to their character.

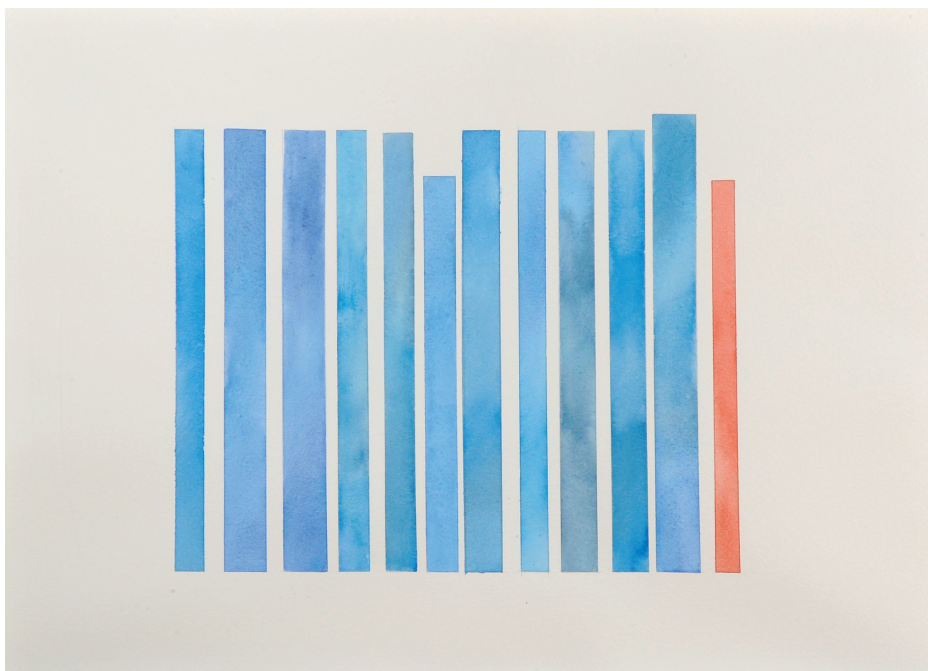
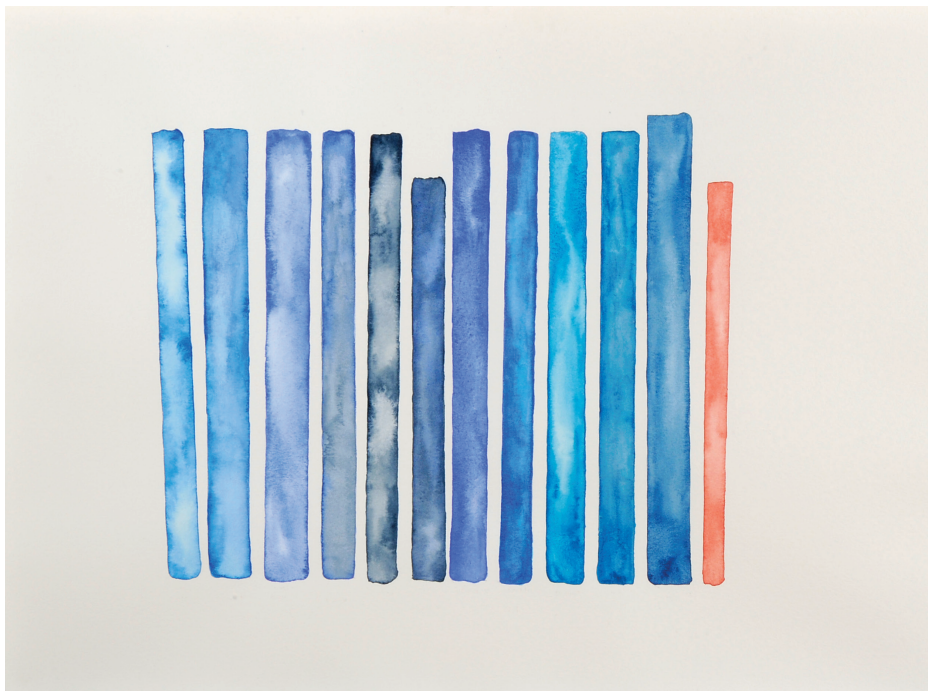
Exhibition History is based on *Greta Woods*, which was regarded as one of Cotman's most important works, following its inclusion in his 1922 exhibition at the Tate. The back of the frame is covered with labels that reveal a rich history of past exhibitions, owners and auction sales. Fraga has used the forms and arrangement of these labels to inform this watercolour.



Covers

Winsor & Newton Cotman Watercolour on mould-made Daler Rowney hot pressed paper, 2017





Spines I & II

Winsor & Newton Cotman Watercolour on mould-made Daler Rowney hot pressed paper, 2017

(Below left)

John Sell Cotman

Greta Woods: 'Cotman's Bridge' Above the River

Greta in Rokeby Park 1805

Watercolour and graphite on laid paper

Bought with the assistance of the Art Fund, Leeds Art Fund and The Patricia Hurst Bequest, 2015

(Below right)

Exhibition History

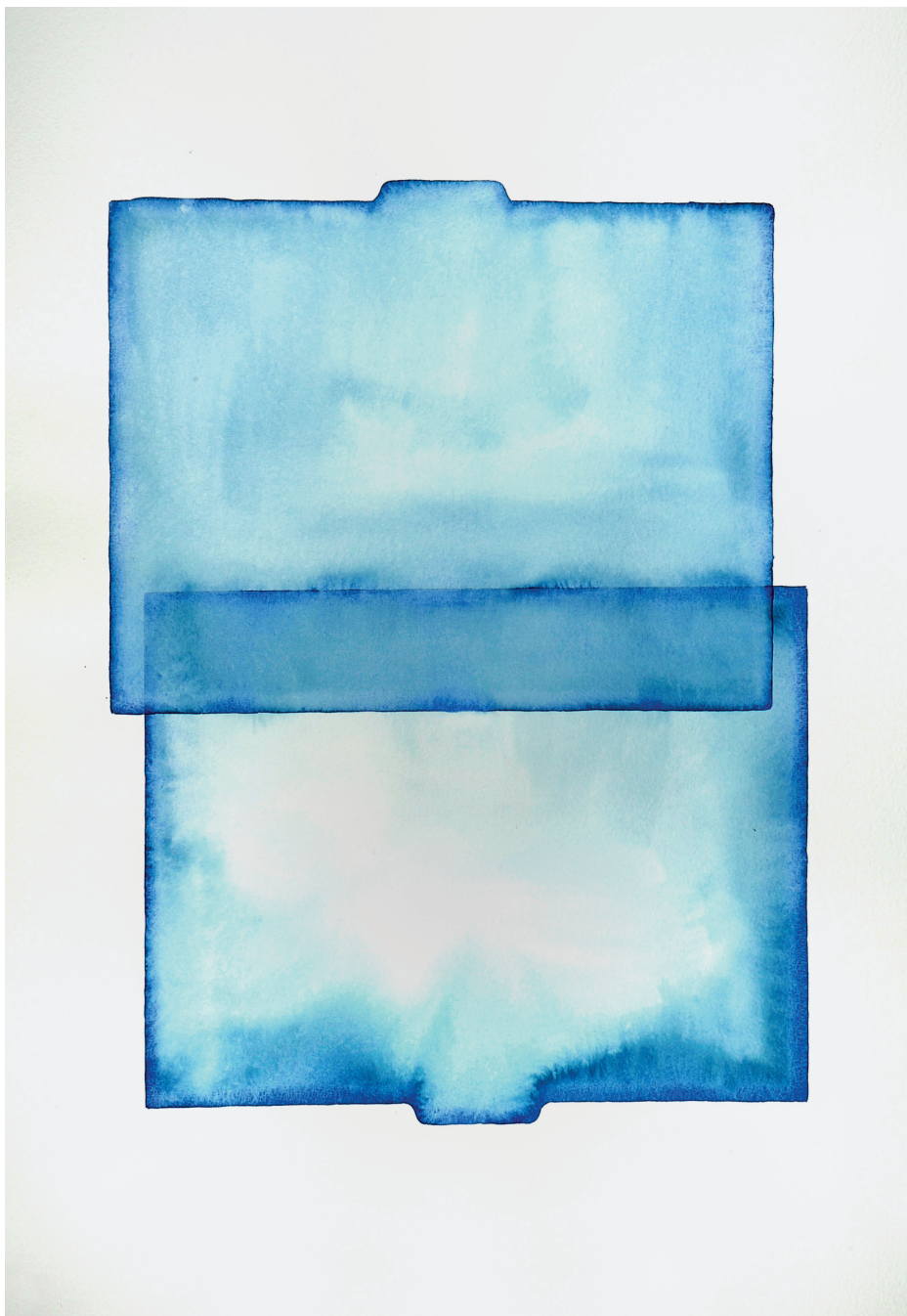
Winsor & Newton Cotman Watercolour on mould-made Daler Rowney hot pressed paper, 2017





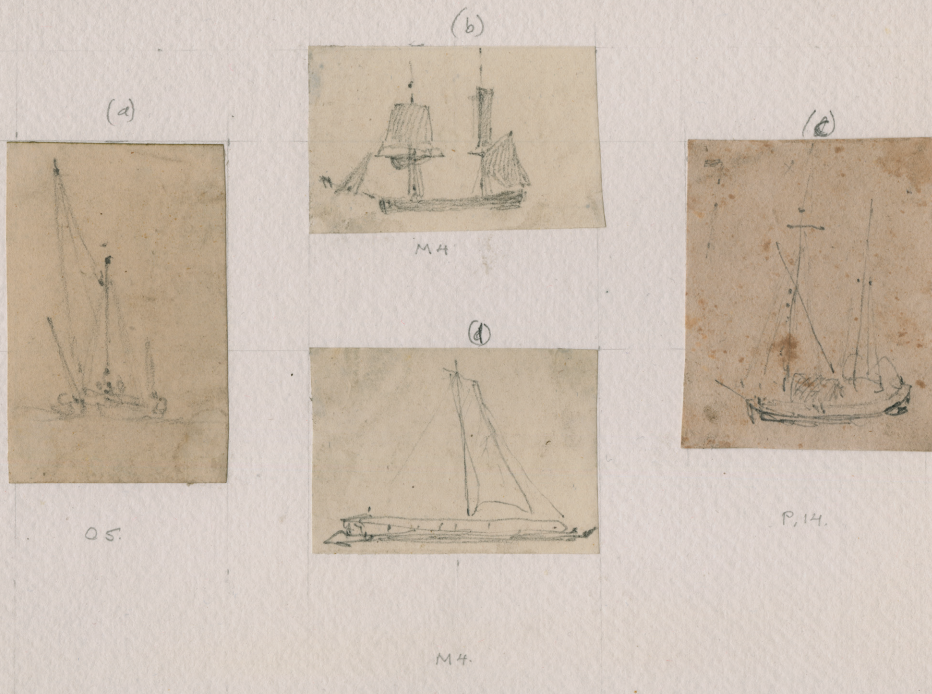
Glove

Winsor & Newton Cotman Watercolour on mould-made Daler Rowney hot pressed paper, 2017



Folders

Winsor & Newton Cotman Watercolour on mould-made Daler Rowney hot pressed paper, 2017



Leeds Art Gallery has the largest single collection of Cotman's sketchbook drawings with over eight hundred that Kitson managed to buy during the 1920s. He mounted each one separately, on individual sheets of watercolour paper, before preserving them in specially made boxes. On his death in 1937 Kitson left his entire collection of sketches by Cotman to Leeds Art Gallery.

Fraga has animated two of Cotman's many sketches to harness and bring to life the freshness of the originals, and create a link between past and present.

(Above)

Four sketches by John Sell Cotman, all of boats, mounted together by Sydney Decimus Kitson, c. 1830, graphite on wove paper. Leeds Art Gallery, ref. LEEAG.1949.0009.A-D

(Right)

Branch

Animation still, sixty seconds loop, 2017



P. H. H. H.

Dec 1872

THE DRAWING SOCIETY: REDRAWN

Cotman became member of a drawing club initiated by Thomas Girtin in 1799 for artists interested in watercolour landscapes. Known as The Drawing (or The Sketching) Society, it was a gathering hosted in turns by the members, with the host choosing the group's poetical inspiration and being allowed to keep all works made on that night. The host for the evening provided all materials and dinner.

On the 20th of May 2017 (marking the 218th anniversary of the first ever gathering), Fraga hosted a one-off event to commemorate the society. The event took place at Patrick Studios, East Street Arts and mostly followed the original rules except for some notable changes applied by Fraga: namely that all the artists involved were women, the texts selected were by female authors.

The artists were asked to respond to three texts, an excerpt from *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (contemporary of Cotman), the poem *Boats in the Bay* by Winifred Holtby (contemporary of Kitson) and the poem *Workington – Beach* by contemporary poet Harriet Tarlo. Each artist responded to one or more of the texts and one work by each artist is included here.

The artists invited were **Louise Atkinson, Katy Devine, Cheryl Huntbach, Natalie Searle, Judith Tucker** and **Valerie Zwart**.



Louise Atkinson, watercolour on paper



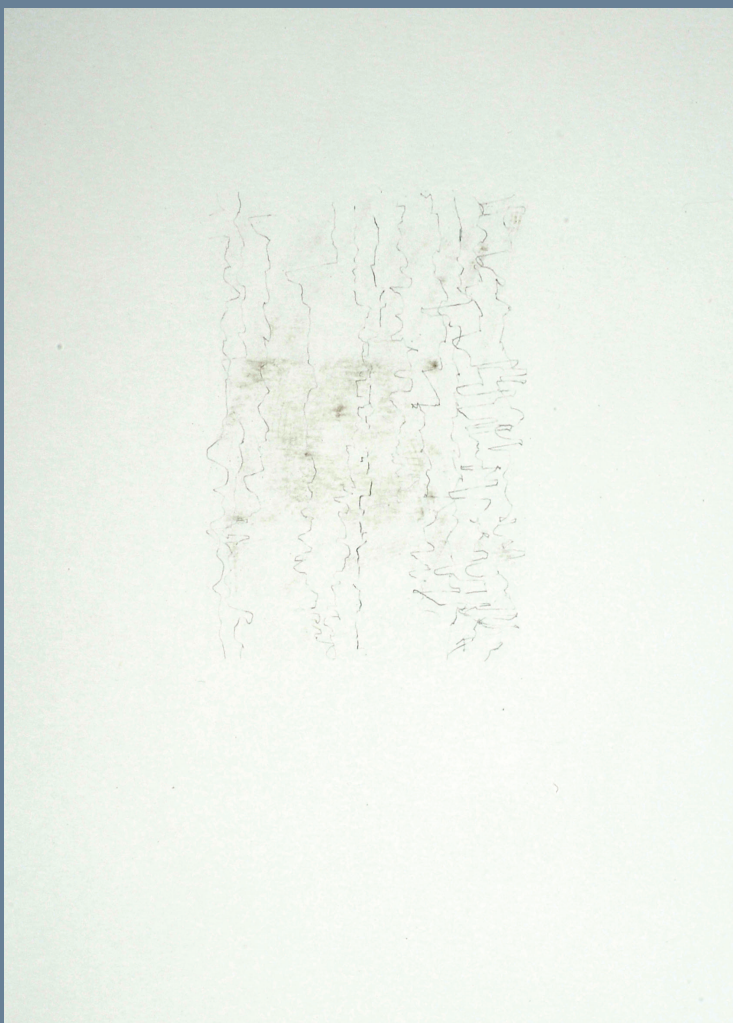
Natalie Searle, watercolour and collage on paper



Hondartza Fraga, watercolour on paper



Katy Devine, watercolour on paper



Cheryl Huntbach, pencil on paper



Judith Tucker, charcoal and pastel on paper



Valerie Zwart, watercolour on paper





Displayed as part of the *Shelter From The Storm John Sell Cotman* exhibition from the 13th of October 2017 until January 2018.

For more info:

www.cotmania.org

www.hondartzafraga.com

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Leeds, September 2017

