



Elizabeth Kealy-Morris

The Artist's Book

Making as embodied knowledge
of practice & the self

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08-16 December 2016

The Foyer
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Faculty of Arts & Media
Kingsway Campus, Kingsway
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***The Artist's Book:
Making as embodied knowledge of practice & the self***

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Front cover: *A Walk of Twenty Steps [expanded]*
by Elizabeth Kealy-Morris

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© Elizabeth Kealy-Morris
e.kealymorris@chester.ac.uk
www.ekealymorris.com

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[1] Detail, *A Walk of Twenty Steps*, 2016

Contents

Thesis Abstract.....	03
<i>Leaving (a work in progress), 2012</i>	07
<i>A Walk of Twenty Steps, 2012-16</i>	17
List of References.....	36
Acknowledgements.....	37

Plates

Plate 1: Detail, <i>A Walk of Twenty Steps, 2016</i>	i
Plate 2: Title page of <i>Leaving (a work in progress), 2012</i>	06
Plate 3: Detail from <i>Leaving (a work in progress), 2012</i>	08
Plate 4: Detail from <i>Leaving (a work in progress), 2012</i>	10
Plate 5: Handbound spreads of <i>Leaving (a work in progress), 2012</i>	12
Plate 6: Detail from <i>Leaving (a work in progress), 2012</i>	14
Plate 7: Debossed front cover, <i>A Walk of Twenty Steps, 2016</i>	16
Plate 8: Title page, <i>A Walk of Twenty Steps, 2016</i>	18
Plate 9: Detail, <i>A Walk of Twenty Steps, 2016</i>	20
Plate 10: Selection of digital photographs, Northern View, December 2012.....	22
Plate 11: Selection of digital photographs, Southern View, August 2014.....	24
Plate 12: Early Prototypes, <i>A Walk of Twenty Steps, 2014</i>	26
Plate 13: Early Prototypes, <i>A Walk of Twenty Steps, 2015</i>	28
Plate 14: Final Prototypes, <i>A Walk of Twenty Steps, 2016</i>	30
Plate 15: Final Prototypes, <i>A Walk of Twenty Steps, 2016</i>	32
Plate 16: Final Artist's Book, <i>A Walk of Twenty Steps, 2016</i>	34

Thesis Abstract

This exhibition is a curation of the visual elements to my practice-based PhD thesis of the same title which has explored whether it is possible to develop a more confident, self-conscious creative voice able to articulate one's identity more clearly through the making of handmade artefacts; this thesis applies the methodologies of autoethnography, creative practice and pedagogy to consider an answer.

My original contribution to knowledge through this enquiry is the identification of the ways in which the exploration of identity through autoethnographic, creative and pedagogic methods encourages an expanded field of self-knowledge, self-confidence and sense of creative self.

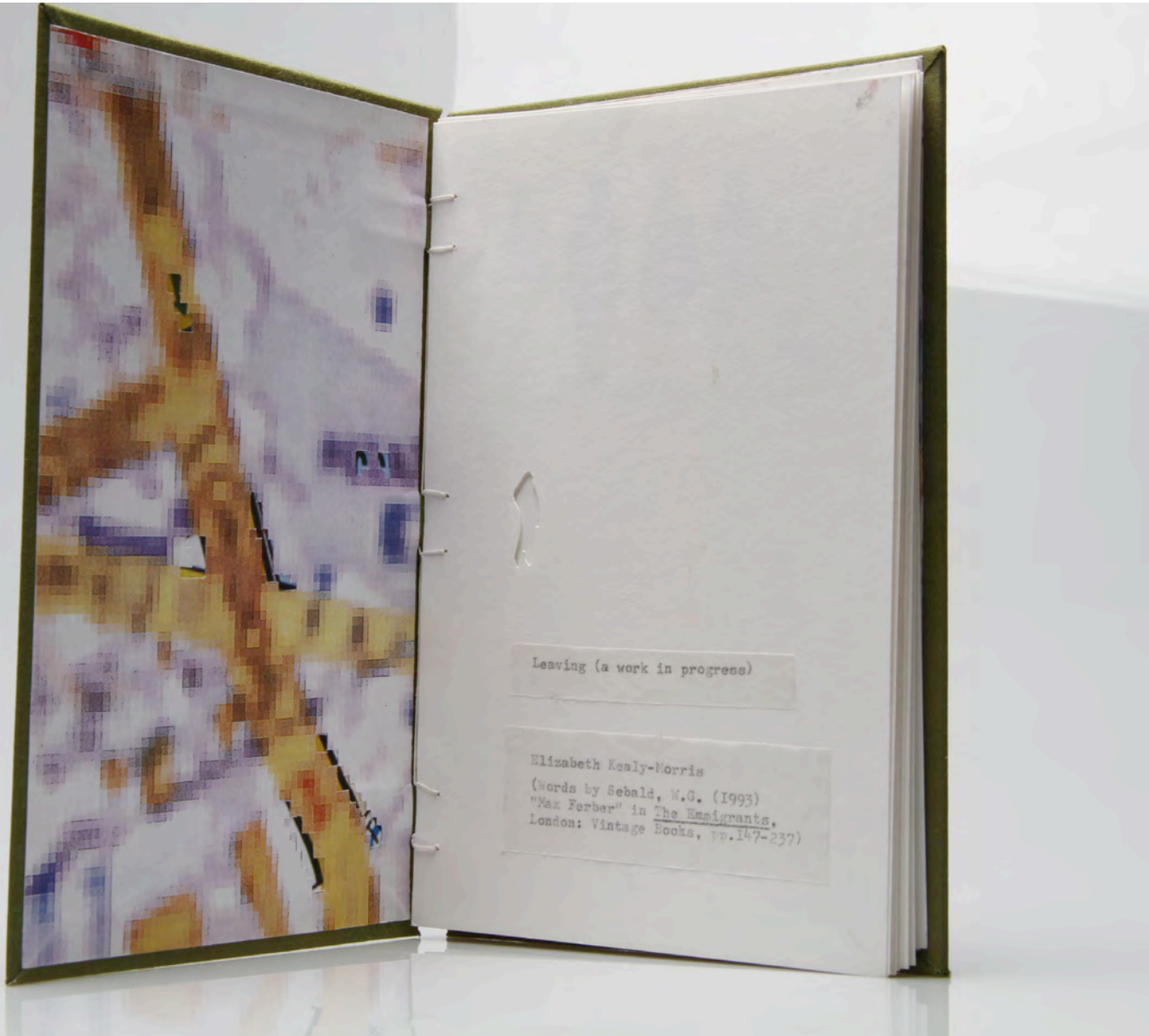
This autoethnographic study focuses on the analysis of my experiences as a first-generation middle class girl, with working class roots, growing up in an upper middle class suburb of Boston, Massachusetts in the United States. Diagnosed with a spine deformity at the age of ten, I utilise autoethnographic theory, methods and analysis in this thesis to gain knowledge of myself and the culture I grew up in to understand the possible reasons

for my sense of shame and rejection, and my subsequent development of a fragile identity. This thesis evidences that the study of one's culture and its signifying practices develops knowledge of the self; they are necessarily intertwined.

Central to this study has been my development of embodied, theoretical and material knowledge through learning the craft-based skill of hand bookbinding, and my emergent confidence to encase my visual practice into artist's books. The visual element of this practice-based PhD, *A Walk of Twenty Steps*, is a series of artist's books which contain collaged digital photographs of walks I took in my home town. This thesis confirms that through learning these skills I have developed greater self-knowledge as an artist/designer/maker. This approach has been successfully translated to the teaching of bookbinding skills through workshops influenced by Wenger's (1998) theory of 'communities of practice' in a collaborative learning setting. This thesis reports that participating students' perceptions of themselves and their creative skills have changed through their development of the skills and knowledge involved in binding their individual creative work into artist's books.

Through the critical analysis of empirical and practice-based methods engaged in during this study, I argue that the artist's book, as performative autoethnographic practice, evidences embodied knowledge of one's identity and creativity by encasing the self within the book.

Elizabeth Kealy-Morris
December, 2016



[2] Title page of *Leaving (a work in progress)*, 2012

Leaving (a work in progress)

This early PhD practice examined my experience of making a home in an adopted city as an immigrant (Kealy-Morris, 2011; 2012; 2013). This work laid the groundwork for the autoethnographic visual and linguistic practice embodied in my PhD thesis.

With this work I explore ways of representing the memory of place and portray the melancholy and sense of loss felt by those leaving a place adopted through emigration and developed into 'home'. The photographs layered through collage technique were taken during a farewell walk in Manchester City Centre on the eve of my relocation to Chester. These collages utilise metaphors of memory's instability and unreliability, the material palimpsest of the city and the ghosts of past flaneurs and flaneuses to represent the walking of the city as the writing of personal history. W.G. Sebald's (1993) words



[3] Detail from *Leaving (a work in progress)*, 2012

from *The Emigrants* are carefully chosen to represent the physical and emotional attachment the emigrant can have to their adopted 'home'-land and the deep sense of loss I felt leaving the place I had made my home by choice.

I walked the rain and windswept pavements and streets early on a weekend morning; the city was quiet, the only people about were those who had to be; I almost had the city to myself. I walked and wandered and took photos of places of little consequence to anyone but me; I wanted to capture the layers of the life I had made for myself over the years.

The photographs I took on that rainy weekend morning were of both the oldest and the most recent wanderings I had undertaken in Manchester: the door on Store Street now boarded up that, on my arrival in Manchester, had been a short-cut to the narrow, crowded and uncomfortable main platform at Piccadilly rail station; the long path along London Road I had walked three times a week at an unsociable hour to board the hour-long 'fast train' to Chester while still commuting to my new post at the university. The photos attempt to 'capture' my known and experienced Manchester but, more importantly, my own story of making Manchester my home.

I suggest that it is in the reworking of the photographs utilising collage technique that the photographs as souvenirs become collages of memories of place: democratised, liberating the sign from its referent, signification open to individual interpretation, each unstable and unreliable as different views of the same city crash and clash in one imagined frame.

The collages within *Leaving (a work in progress)* contain traces of embodied creativity that my hand has effected through the materials and processes I utilised to construct them. The viewer has access to

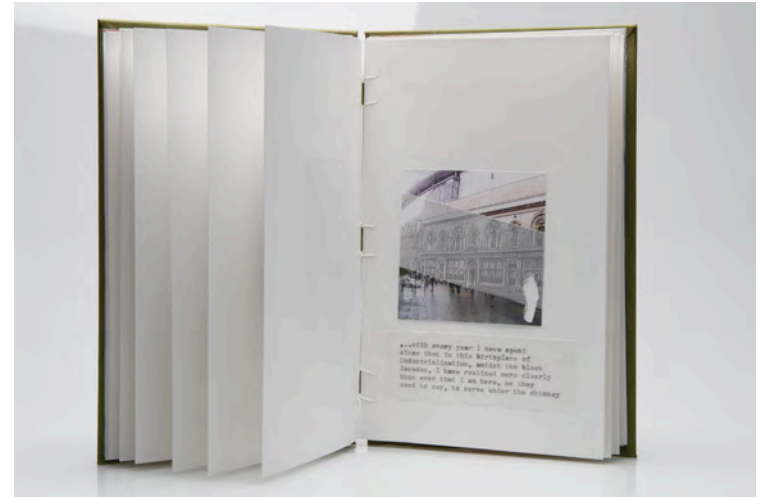


[4] Details from *Leaving (a work in progress)*, 2012

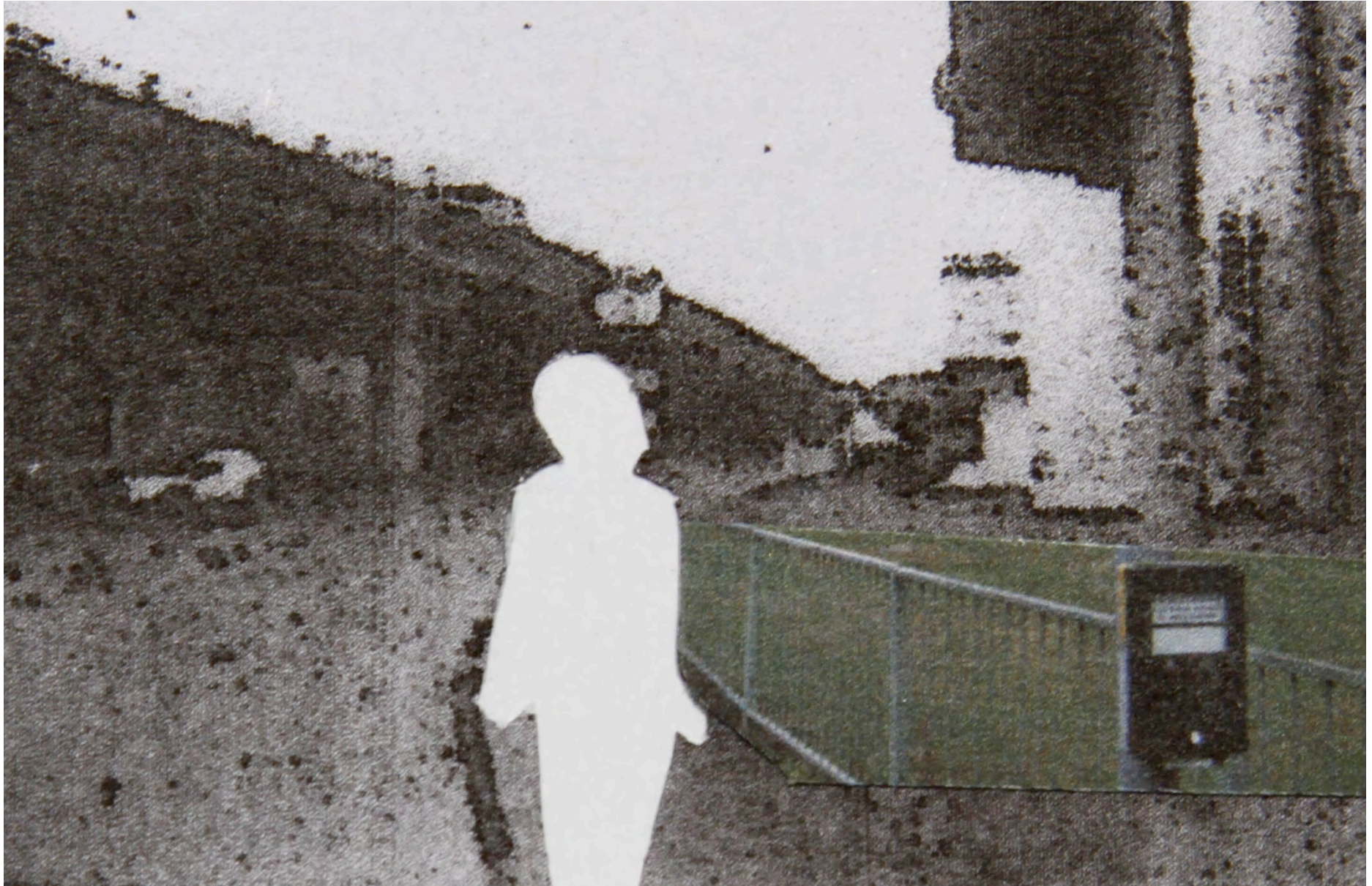
knowledge about the process of their construction through following marks from the scalpel blade and folds of paper. The act of layering and cutting and gluing attempts to tell others' stories as well: the silhouettes of ghostly wanderers I have cut from the collaged photographs have no face, no definite permanent shape; inner space and outer space are represented within the same frame.

Materially, *Leaving (a work in progress)* is a cloth-covered, single-sheet hand stitched book, A5 in size, containing paper-based collages developed from digital photographs on fourteen pages of 120gsm cartridge paper. The quotes from W.G. Sebald's 1993 novel *The Emigrants* were typed onto glassine and glued into the book after being bound. I admire the purchase of the typewriter, the debossing of paper through the pressure of the keys hitting paper fibers. The narrator of Max Ferber's story told in *The Emigrants* would have typed his narratives of walks, wanderings, observations and avoidances on a typewriter in 1966 when we meet him; symbolically and materially the typewriter was the right transcription tool.

I have titled the book *Leaving (a work in progress)* because I shall never leave Manchester for good, nor shall Manchester leave me. I still haunt the streets in my memories; I have left footprints and ghostly shadows that will be guides to other immigrants who carry their hopes of a new life with them. But this work is also a material and an aesthetic 'work in progress': it is one of many attempts I will create to explore visualising memory of place in book form and explore the possibilities that, through persistence, practice, and thoughtful repetition of skills development I may develop Merleau-Ponty's (2002) 'being as a thing'.



[5] Handbound spreads of *Leaving* (a work in progress), 2012



[6] Detail of *Leaving (a work in progress)*, 2012



[7] Debossed front cover, *A Walk of Twenty Steps*, 2016

A Walk of Twenty Steps

I propose that the artist's book series *A Walk of Twenty Steps* utilises performative sequence to tell a story through autoethnographic visual and linguistic narrative.

Materially this is a series of cloth-covered hardbound folded concertina books with the title debossed on the front cover in the typeface 'Stilla'. The books are 9 cm wide by 14.5 cm tall, a size chosen so they can easily be held in the palm. They contain a sequence of collaged digital photographs captured through walking practices which have been printed by ink jet on A1 sized 140gsm cartridge paper.

The purpose of the books are to place myself into the topology of my home-town's (Wellesley, Massachusetts, USA) main street: my life; my body; my memories of this place; my use of the spaces represented in these photographs.



[8] Title page, *A Walk of Twenty Steps*, 2016

The structure of *A Walk of Twenty Steps* is based on what Drucker (2004) terms an “external determinant” (p. 178): the geographical east-west plan of Wellesley Centre is the structure which determines the form around which the books are constructed. The corporeal and embodied practice of walking and photographing the view every twentieth step further defines the “finite parameters in space and time and its demarcated physical boundaries” (p. 257) within the structure of the books.

The view is a minimalist, deadpan, flat-footed referential one; the narrative personal and opaque. My intention with the concertina/accordion fold is to forge a narrative relationship between each view, across each fold, through page-by-page sequence which suggests movement and meaning as the reader walks and observes the view from the twenty steps with me (Drucker, 2004). The sequence is therefore key to the meaning of the books: this is the same walk of my youth that I ask the viewer to join me on.

One could argue the books are devoid of narrative as there are no linguistic signs beyond the title to prompt meaning, however I suggest these books utilise sequence to tell a story through photo-narrative. The ghostly traces of my past self lead the reader to their own conclusions as to why the banalities of a middle-class commercial district could be of importance. Like the “neutral flatness” (Drucker, 2004, p. 77) of Ruscha’s photobooks, and the straight photography of the Bechers, the signifiers of the referents are open to interpretation as to what is being signified.

The performance of this work is important. Like Parsons’ (2000) *flaneuse and passante* I walked the streets with the intention of looking, watching and collecting images around and above the cars that blocked my view. The constraint and method for typological creation was the decision to walk twenty steps then photograph



[9] *A Walk of Twenty Steps*, 2016

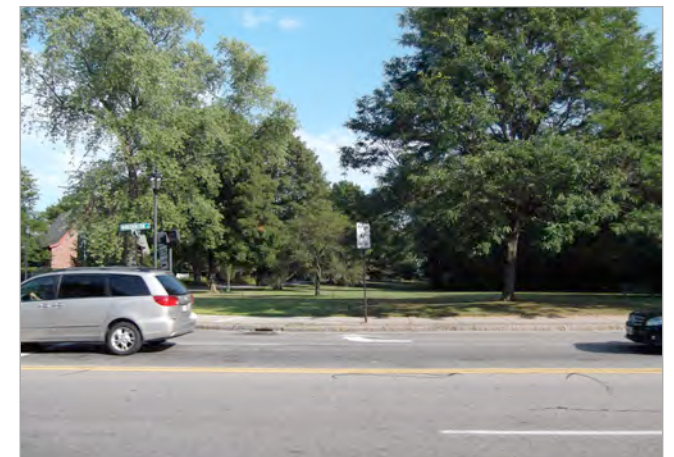
whatever I saw. I was twenty when I finally left Wellesley to join the wider world and the orthotic to correct a spinal deformity was prescribed when the curve in my spine reached 21°.

I have created further restriction to the view of the streetscape within the books' structures through lacing a line of binding thread through the concertina frames at 21°. My intention here is to limit and make difficult the viewer's access to the homogenised and sanitised utopia of Wellesley Square. One of the advantages of the concertina binding is the artist's ability to create movement and rapid sequence with still photographs. By lacing these concertina books with tightly wound thread I interrupt the sense that these books might merely be a story of a landscape. By doing so I interject a narrative of difficult negotiation with this view; the viewer may become frustrated and disappointed. There are shadows created as the pages fold into one another. The folds within the concertina books, normally at an upright 90° angle, are being pulled to one side in a curve and the viewer must take care not to rip the pages as the book is opened wide.

With these methods I invite the viewer to join me in my uncomfortable walk, asking only for companionship to counter the loneliness and isolation I felt while living there. Through tightly binding the concertina frames containing pleasing photographs of Wellesley Square I disrupt the 'illusion of transparency' (Rogoff, 2000) inherent to Wellesley's regime of place. The viewer must contend with the obstacles to full vision I placed before them: exclusion is experienced.



[10] Selection of digital photographs,
Northern View, December 2012



[11] Selection of digital photographs,
Southern View, August 2014



[12] Early Prototypes, *A Walk of Twenty Steps*, 2014





[13] Early Prototypes, *A Walk of Twenty Steps*, 2015

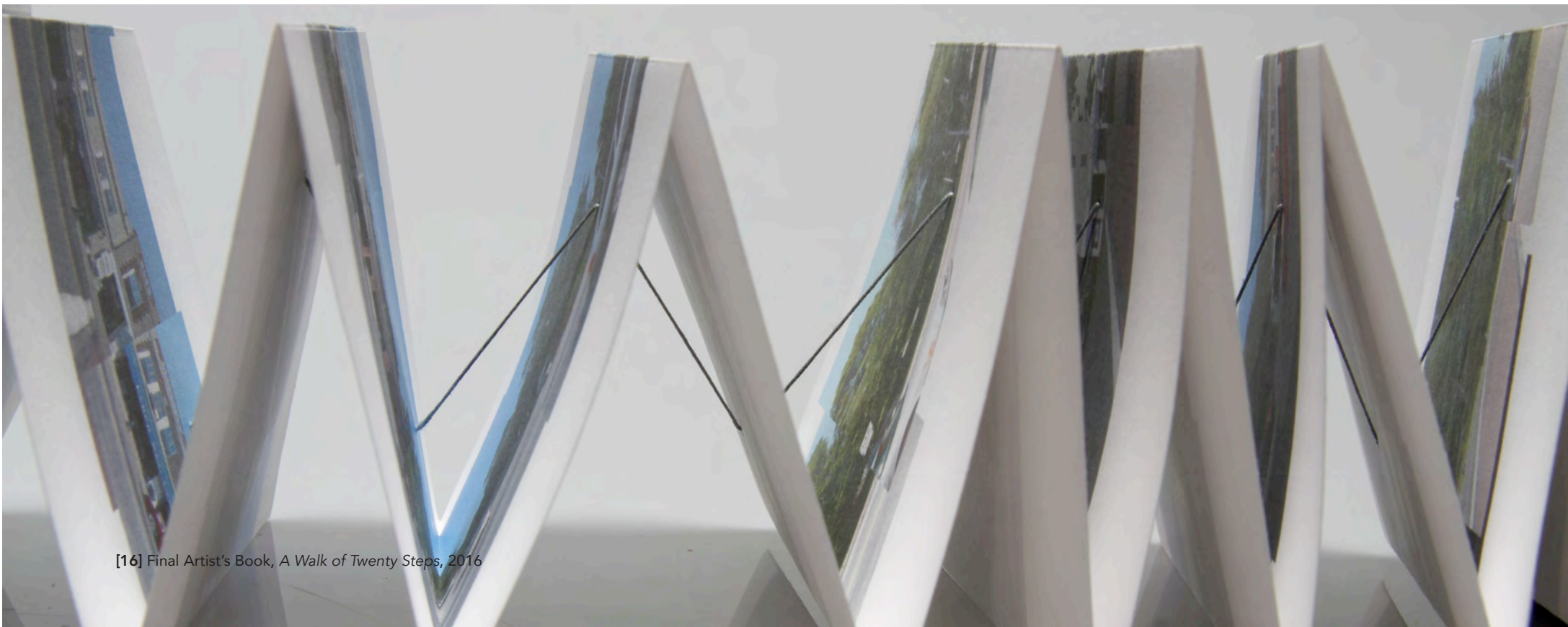


[14] Final Prototypes, *A Walk of Twenty Steps*, 2016





[15] Final Prototypes, *A Walk of Twenty Steps*, 2016



[16] Final Artist's Book, *A Walk of Twenty Steps*, 2016

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