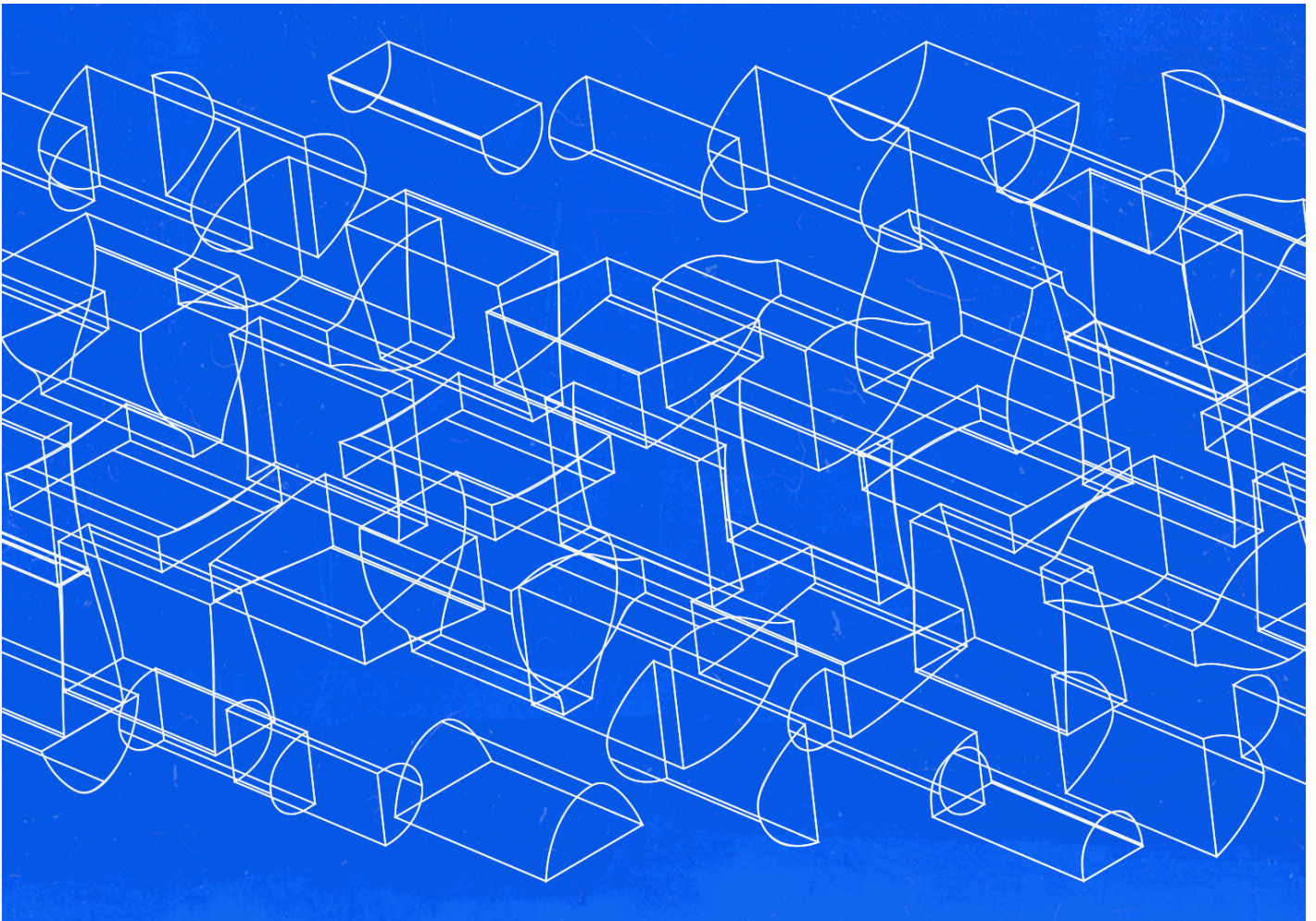


How can systematic recording of material traces be used as a catalyst for reclaiming the design process in a time of continuous dematerialisation?



PRENTICE, E. (2023) TRACES.
AVAILABLE AT: [HTTPS://HTTPS://EVYP.MYBLOG.ARTS.AC.UK/](https://https://evyp.myblog.arts.ac.uk/) (ACCESSED: 24 MAY 2023).

It all starts with the hand. The hand that touches, makes, feels, produces, draws, and records the world around, sensing to understand the surroundings. Taking note of every single detail. Relying on gestures, lines and forms, to produce knowledge that passes from one generation to another. The hand of an archaeologist, a designer, full of skill and thirst for making an imprint. A hand that traces as a means to capture time, space, essence, what it means to be human.

Think about ancient Sumerian tablets, perhaps the signs of extinct civilisations. Sometime before 700 AD, the indigenous people from the South American Patagonia recorded their lives through hundreds of stencilled imprints now known as the “Cave of the Hands”. These drawings, patterns and hand prints, speak about their identity, their relationship to the world. They are in a way their very own signature, their property, something of their ownership.

There’s always been an intense human desire to leave a material trace. As a way of recording our own existence, hoping to produce new knowledge about what it means to be alive. What will happen now

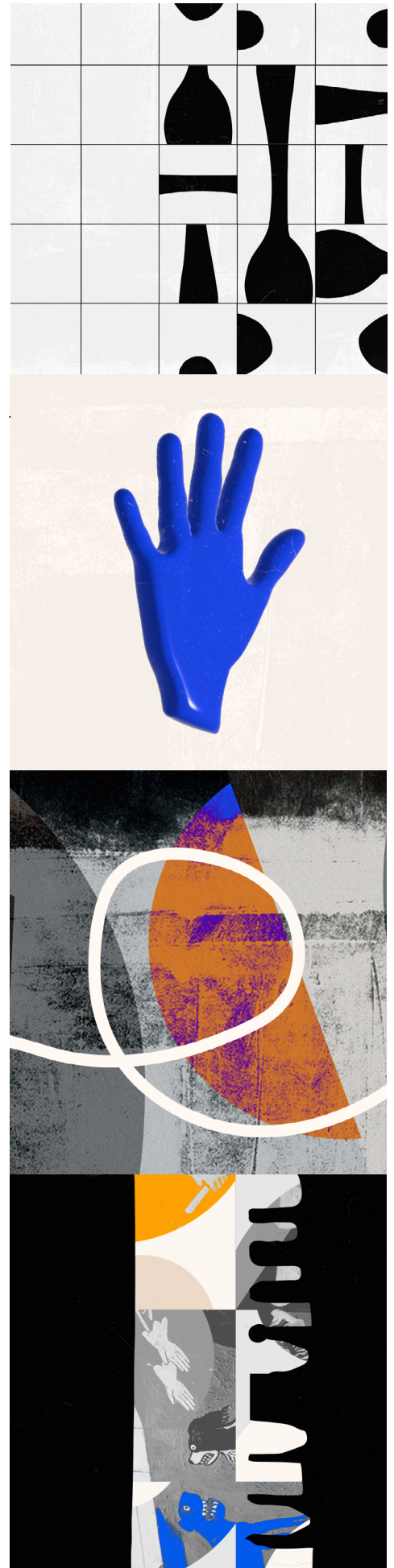


“It all starts with the hand. The hand that touches, makes, feels, produces, draws, and records the world around, sensing to understand the surroundings.” (Prentice, 2023)

to this obsession with owning through touch, of tracing materiality, longing to own a mark? The immediacy of designing through materiality is fleeting and quickly being replaced by digital processes. Will our imprints have less value as they cease to exist in a material sense and start to exist exclusively in the digital realm? Or will material expressions of design (printed and constructed artefacts) become, in fact, so rare and valuable that will be beyond common ownership, taking us beyond the age of mechanical reproduction. What does this say about the value of design? Have our traces become so futile and temporary in a world that's obsessed with consumption and instant access?

De-materialisation proposes a model of consumption based on services, partly in response to previous generations focus on hoarding stuff, at the back of the industrial revolution, and the impact this has had on the environment. This poses a fork road for the practice of graphic design, the role of printed matter in the recording of culture, and the relevance of mechanical processes in the production of knowledge.

As I record the very things I own as a way to leave a trace of my own existence, I encounter the conundrum of access vs ownership over again, but with a renewed focus on interrogating and recording our current reality through mechanical and instinctive tools as a way to produce knowledge. Considering the world as “a printing surface” quoting Paul Elliman, perhaps this is a time when the current cultural and social trends can give us an opportunity to look more critically at the way we engage with materiality and use these processes that are becoming extinct to produce new knowledge about who we are.



“This poses a fork road for the practice of graphic design, the role of printed matter in the recording of culture, and the relevance of mechanical processes in the production of knowledge.”
(Prentice, 2023)

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