

MANDY BONNELL

Imparaticci 2017–2020

If physicists are right, the universe began as a single, unimaginably small, exploding dot. Nature, it seems, really does abhor a vacuum. Nothingness, unstable, will always tend to something. And with that something comes everything: energy and mass, space and time. Then, if physicists are right, all this will go into reverse. After cosmic inflation, cosmic deflation – time and space and mass and energy, rewinding to a now-imploding dot; a something that is next to nothing, until it again explodes.

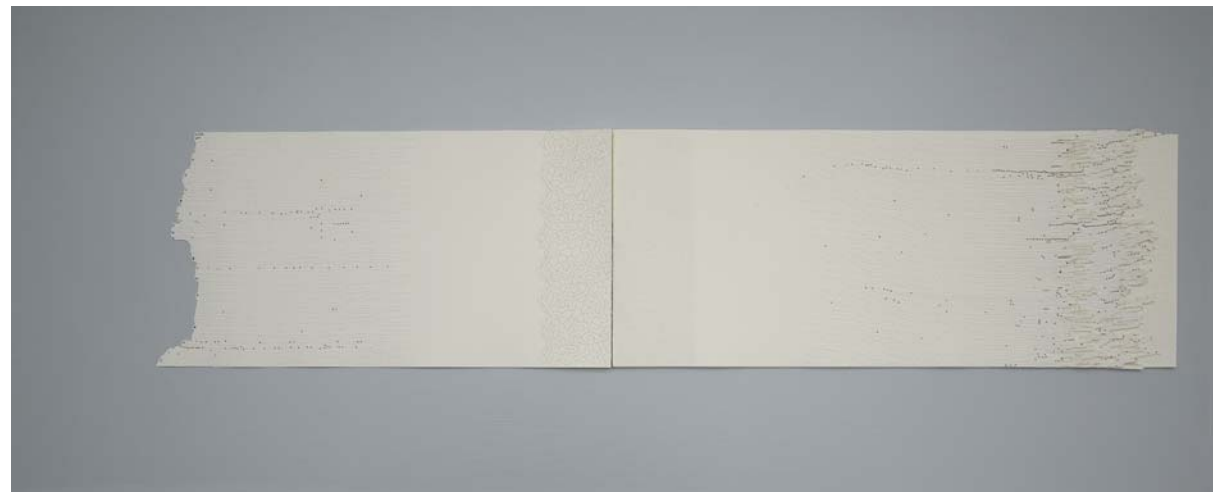
Mandy Bonnell's new artist's book is its own creation myth. Bonnell has long been fascinated by craft, a thing dismissed in modernist discourse as women's work. *Imparaticci* is a meditation on all the things that, formally, lace is: making and unmaking, solid and void. Like sculpture, lacemaking calls for subtraction as well as addition, a sense of what to leave out as much as of what to include. It is, above all, the result of a process, or a set of processes – a social system of male solids and female voids; a code handed down from woman to woman via the pattern books that Bonnell has pored over in museums.

There is an unexpected savagery to these books. Their generational patterns, so fragile in their outcome, are pricked in paper with pins, so that the process of what will become creation begins with destruction; with a kind of wounding. Something of this paradox clearly caught Bonnell's eye. At what point, *Imparaticci* asks, does destruction outweigh creation? Does destruction *become* creation? If the edge of a page shreds with wear, can that be a creative act? And what of a whole page being shredded, and on purpose?

Like the physics of cosmology, Bonnell's new book is a mise en abyme, a story that endlessly recurs. As you turn the pages of *Imparaticci*, you sense that things could go either way: reduce to nothing, or explode into a universe.

Charles Darwent, 2021





The forms of frost, unfurling fronds of lace
or foam the tide left in the surge's place
or what the unnamed woman, lost in space
slow-stitched as anchors: forms of secret grace



Mandy Bonnell's art is a contemporary response to the work of self-taught, often anonymous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women who produced botanicals, herbariums, watercolours, embroideries and lace; through practices frequently dismissed as feminine leisure activities. Drawing inspiration from a variety of international sources, her unique books, drawings and prints have variously celebrated the Victorian botanist Miss Rowe of Liverpool, the collage artist Mary Delaney, and the hand-printed textile patterns of the Kenyan Archipelago of Lamu.

Imparaticci's title alludes to a colloquial Italian term for 'learning about' a domestic task – in this context lace making and repair, which is often taught through hand-made samplers passed down in families from mother to daughter. The book was inspired by the 'white work' embroidery collection held at the Cooper Hewitt Museum in NYC (where Bonnell researched in 2015) and the lace collection held in the Museo del Merletto in Venice, which she visited whilst a recipient of the Scuola di Grafica di Venezia's Artist Fellowship in 2017.



The book is a meditation on the beauty of an art form that is achieved through the repetitive process of creating pin-pricked patterns that become the templates for fine, decorative lace. Areas of the pages are pricked with fine details that reference the *punta rosa* motif found in much Venetian lace-making, counter-pointed with drawn details that refer to stitching. In turn the book also explores the process of ageing and repair. As Bonnell worked on the heavy sheets of Fabriano paper, the pages' edges became distressed, taking on the texture of cloth, or material that had frayed. Accentuating the sense of disintegration allowed her to work back into the book's structure, repairing elements of the paper and mapping these interventions by the addition of tiny patches of paper that were printed with letterpress punctuation marks.

The durational aspect of *Imparaticci's* fabrication is an important aspect of the work, that mirrors the cycles of traditional domestic lace-making and its repair, as is the artist's decision to leave the pages of the book unbound so that each may be viewed in its entirety, front and back.

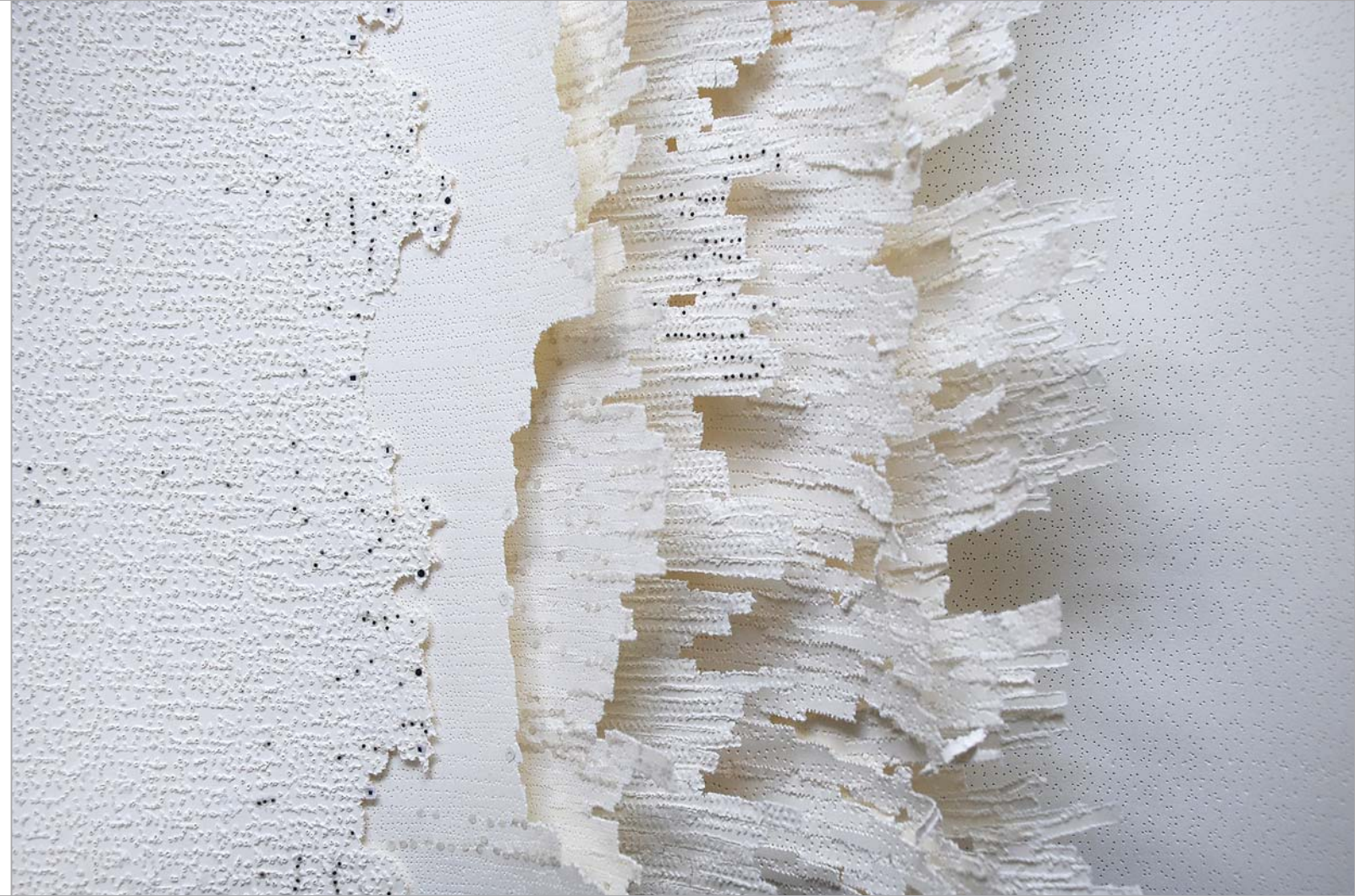
Emma Hill, 2021

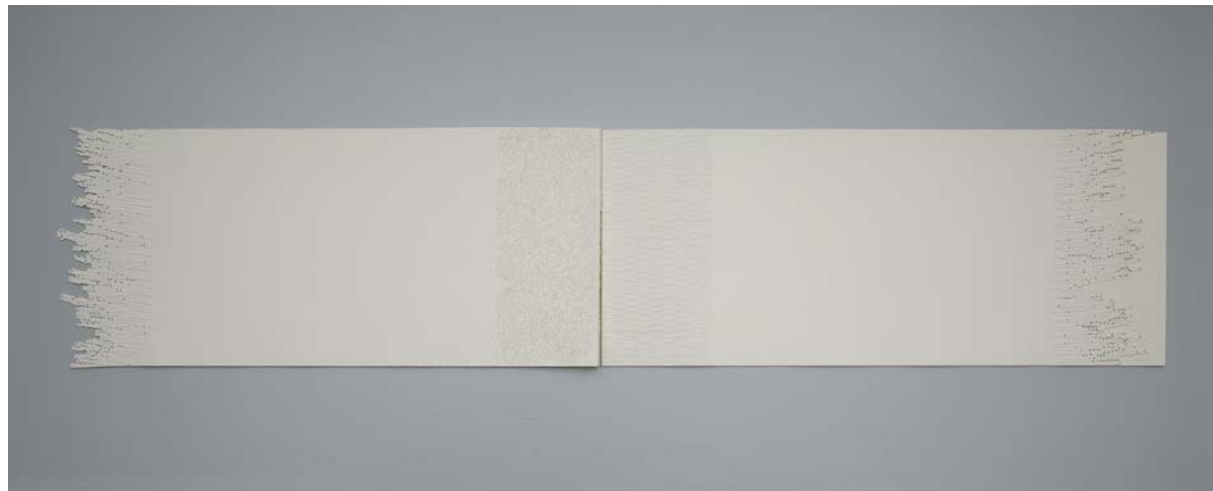


Mandy Bonnell was born in London in 1957 and attained a BA in Fine Art at Gloucester College of Art and Design (1976–79), and an MA in Printmaking at the Royal College of Art (1980–83).

In 1990 she helped establish an open access, self-sustaining printmaking studio for Wildebeest Workshops in Lamu, Kenya, and from 1990–2011 returned regularly to Africa to run outreach workshops for Kenyan artists. She has gained numerous awards and residencies for her own practice, including a Research Fellowship at the Scuola di Grafica, Venice (2017); Artist in Residence, Josef and Anni Albers Foundation (2009 and 2014); Finalist: Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, USA (2015); Artist in Residence, Minnesota Center for Book Arts, and Xian Academy of Fine Art, China (2013).

Her work has been exhibited internationally since 1988 and is held in many private and public collections, including: Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; British High Commission, Nairobi, Kenya; Special Collections, British Library, London; FIL, London; Minnesota Center for Book Arts, USA; New York Public Library, NY, USA; Rahimtullah Museum of Modern Art Nairobi, Kenya; Victoria & Albert Museum, London and Yale Center for British Art, USA.





Imparaticci 2017–2020

Unique Bookwork H 29cm x W 69cm.

Twelve pages worked front and verso, plus poem page and colophon printed letterpress, on Fabriano Artistico 200gsm. Drawing (in graphite and pin pricks), cut-outs, needle-punch, collage, hand-printed letterpress punctuation marks. Held unbound in a handmade folio lined with digital Lettraset on conservation paper, wrapped in bookbinding scrim cloth.

Commissioned poem by Imogen Russell Williams, 2019

Binding by Elizabeth Neville, 2020

Printing by New North Press, London, 2020

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