

# COHUNA DIARIES

NEW WORK BY  
**NICOLA CHATHAM**

## Exhibition Details

Dates  
7 October - 31 October 2009  
wednesday - saturday 11am-5pm  
and by appointment

## Curated by

**ANITA TRAVERSO**  
Director

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## CAHUNA DIARIES

Photography, writing, video and oil painting have been used to investigate ideas relating to landscape, travel and intimacy in this new series. The small oil paintings are based on photographs I took while traveling in Australia and New Zealand and their lengthy titles are extracts from my personal journal. These provide a glimpse into my private, interior world of neurotic musings, day-to-day trivia and observations.

Combining paintings of farmland, animals, trucks and landscapes with such personalised titles, the works explore the segmented, sometimes dislocated experience of traveling through changing scenery while still contemplating my personal life, feelings and relationships in the face of supposed leisure.

'Cohuna Diaries' refers to the small country town of Cohuna, in northern Victoria where I was born. Last summer I returned there for the first time in fifteen years. I wanted to share memories of my childhood with my partner Chris Bennie, while also searching for connection within the landscape that was my home until I was six years old.

Being an irrigation district, the landscape around Cohuna had been transformed dramatically by the drought. Seeing the farmlands and my old home, I was struck by the desolate plains and cracked earth. Returning to my studio I soon painted the photographs I took there and later added the titles from my journal.

A new mode of working for me has been using photographs as artworks. I've written word paintings or further extracts from my journal in permanent pen over the photo's surface. Many pictures in the series were taken within five kilometers of my home in Brisbane. The descriptive writing was a way of noticing and recording the details of my local surrounds.

Whether traveling through my local neighbourhood, revisiting rural Australia or journeying overseas, a large part of the experience is affected by an interior world that occurs almost independently of my surroundings. As the philosopher De Botton writes,

It is unfortunately hard to recall our quasi-permanent concern with the future, for on our return from a place, perhaps the first thing to disappear from memory is just how much of the past we spent dwelling on what was to come: how much of it, that is, we spend somewhere other than where we were.

Through these paintings and photographs, I'm trying to present a more accurate representation of my experience of landscape and place – a representation that celebrates nature but is not divorced from the psychological landscape I constantly inhabit.

Nicola Chatham 2009



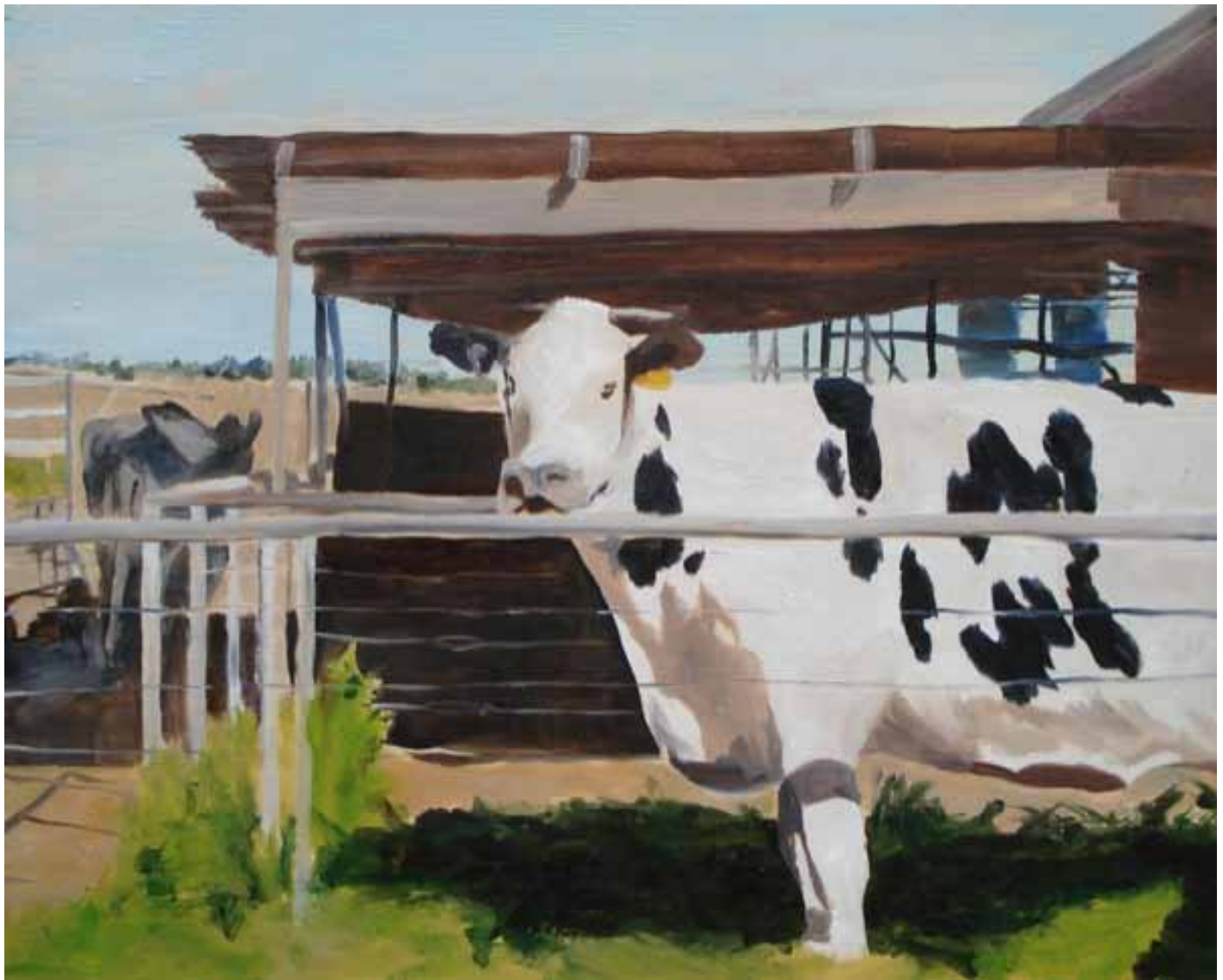
**#01** The wind's blowing the hair around my face – little strands that are loose from my ponytail are tickling my skin.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35 x 45.5cm



**#02** Perhaps he does love me.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
36 x 45.5cm



**#03** What I remember from the drive to Cohuna was the long, straight, flat plains and roads. And the mirages.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
34 x 45.5cm



**#04** The chooks have laid and I'm making banana bread with our first egg. It had two yolks!  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35 x 45.5cm



**#05** Deep in my soul I knew it was where I had lived and grown up.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35 x 45.5cm



**#06** I could have paid someone for their time but I like being in control and able to see each stage as it develops.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
34 x 45.5cm



**#07** If I was born in Tibet, I'd be Buddhist.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35 x 45.5cm



**#08** I'm feeling better – less stressed and more able to relax – although confused how to start today. It's ok. I'll have a cuppa.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
15.5 x 45.5cm



**#09** The sun's shining today. It's beautiful. I'm thinking of staying overnight again.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
15.5 x 45.5cm



**#10** It was a bit scary calling, but I soon got over that. I told her all my news and everything was back to normal.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
15.5 x 45.5cm



#11 He doesn't ask me to explain myself.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35 x 45.5cm



**#12** We filled two buckets with rainwater and used one to wash the side of the van. That was satisfying.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35 x 45.5cm



**#13** I'm disappointed, but not surprised.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35 x 45.5cm



**#14** I know it's a long journey – learning how to communicate. It's something we'll be practicing until the day we die.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
36 x 45cm



**#15** I'm scared of losing the intimacy we've sometimes experienced.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35 x 45.5cm



**#16** I always come away from an interlude with her doubting myself. Doubting the kindness of my actions and value of my intentions.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
36 x 45cm



**#17** He's dancing to some beautiful ambient music in front of me with the sliding doors open wide, looking out over the sea.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35 x 45.5cm



**#18** I can smell some lovely pine trees or another earthy smell wafting through my window.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35 x 45.5cm



**#19** She burst into tears when I got there and strangely, that made me relax.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35 x 45.5cm



**#20** It's so bloody hot today.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35.5 x 45cm



**#21** It was a good night. Nic carried the conversation and Ian showed us his beautiful photographs.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
35.5 x 45cm



**#22** I don't even know why it's bothering me so much.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
36 x 45cm



**#23** When I see him, all the petty frustrations melt away.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#24** We went for a paddle. It was very windy & blustery, but fun!  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#25** I loved the sounds of the birds and the smell of the creek.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#26** Our red wine tastes like it's gone off and the fridge has run out of gas – but we are relaxed for the first time in what seems like ages.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#27** It's a pleasant evening – temperature wise. The cicadas are buzzing. A tiny little ant is scurrying around my notebook.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#28** Woke up to kangaroos outside, only a metre and a half away, eating the green spouts of grass in the early morning light.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#29** I don't know how to handle my sadness.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#30** I have to find what I'm looking for, within myself.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#31** And that heals my fractured world.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#32** Lots of other things I used to worry about have dropped by the wayside.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#33** I woke up feeling more tired than when I went to sleep.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#34** I can only imagine what I'd have been like if I married at nineteen and my parents were still together and I'd never had a truly broken heart.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
22 x 16.5cm



**#35** She's similar to my other friend with her matter-of-fact, caring temperament.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#36** Next week I plan to go to the library.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#37** A goanna is circling around the picnic table and me.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
16.5 x 22cm



**#38** I was trying to fill the empty spaces with trivial up-beat conversation, too afraid to ask him how he was; it was bad timing anyway.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
37 x 47.5cm



**#39** His sunglasses are resting on his head.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
37 x 47.5 cm



**#40** It's only a small cup and holds a small cup of tea; just enough to stay hot and satisfy me.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
37 x 47.5cm



**#41** I'm in my new study. It's beautiful. The desk's by the window and my lily flowers are still fresh and smell divine.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
20 x 14.5cm



**#42** Jordie's leaning against me and letting out little whimpers and huffs as she thinks she can hear strange noises.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
18.5 x 24cm



**#43** Maybe I expect too much, wanting for us to share so many similar views of the world.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
18.5 x 24cm



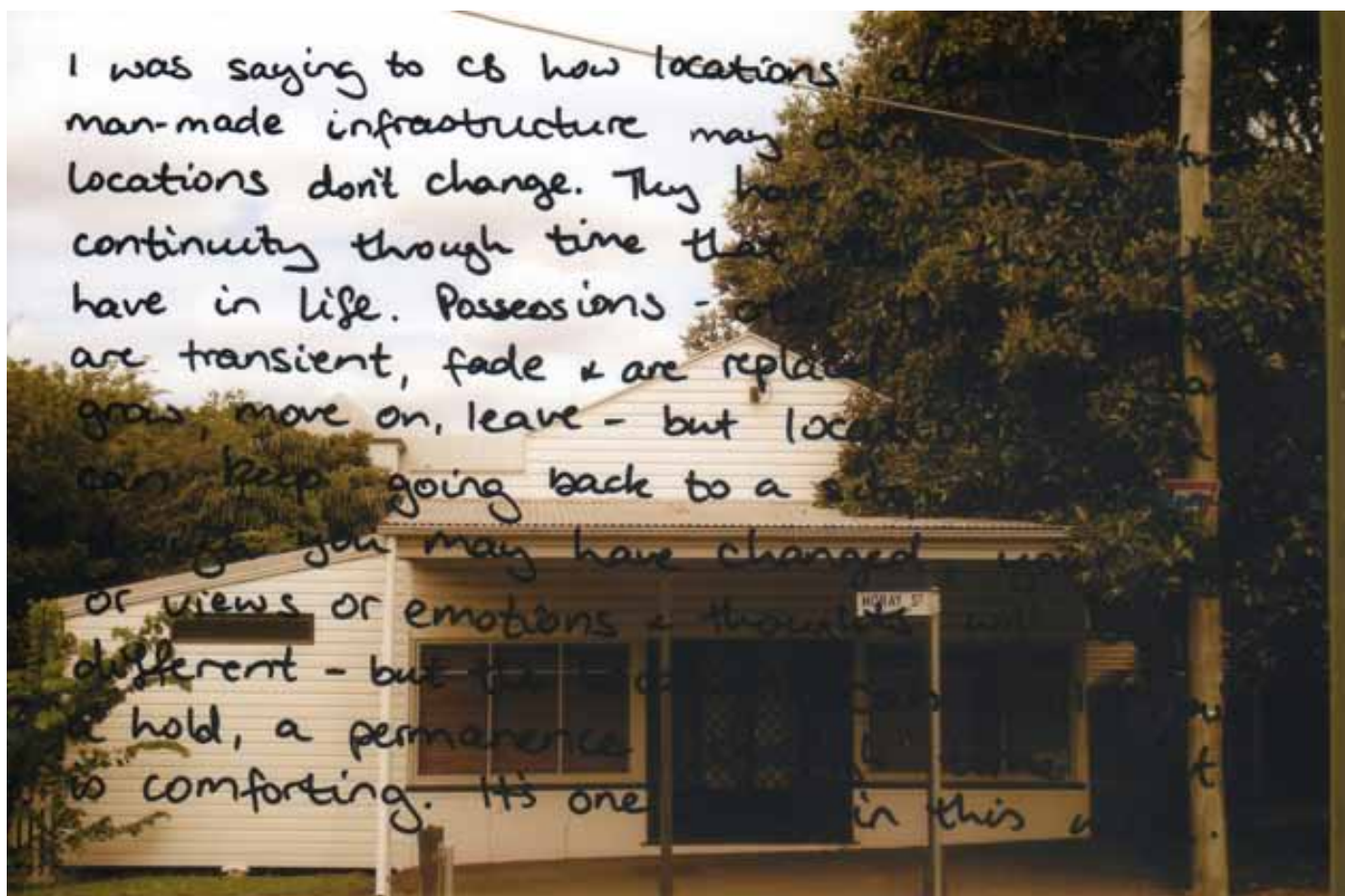
#44 Nic and I boxed together. She said I have a strong punch.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
37 x 47.5cm



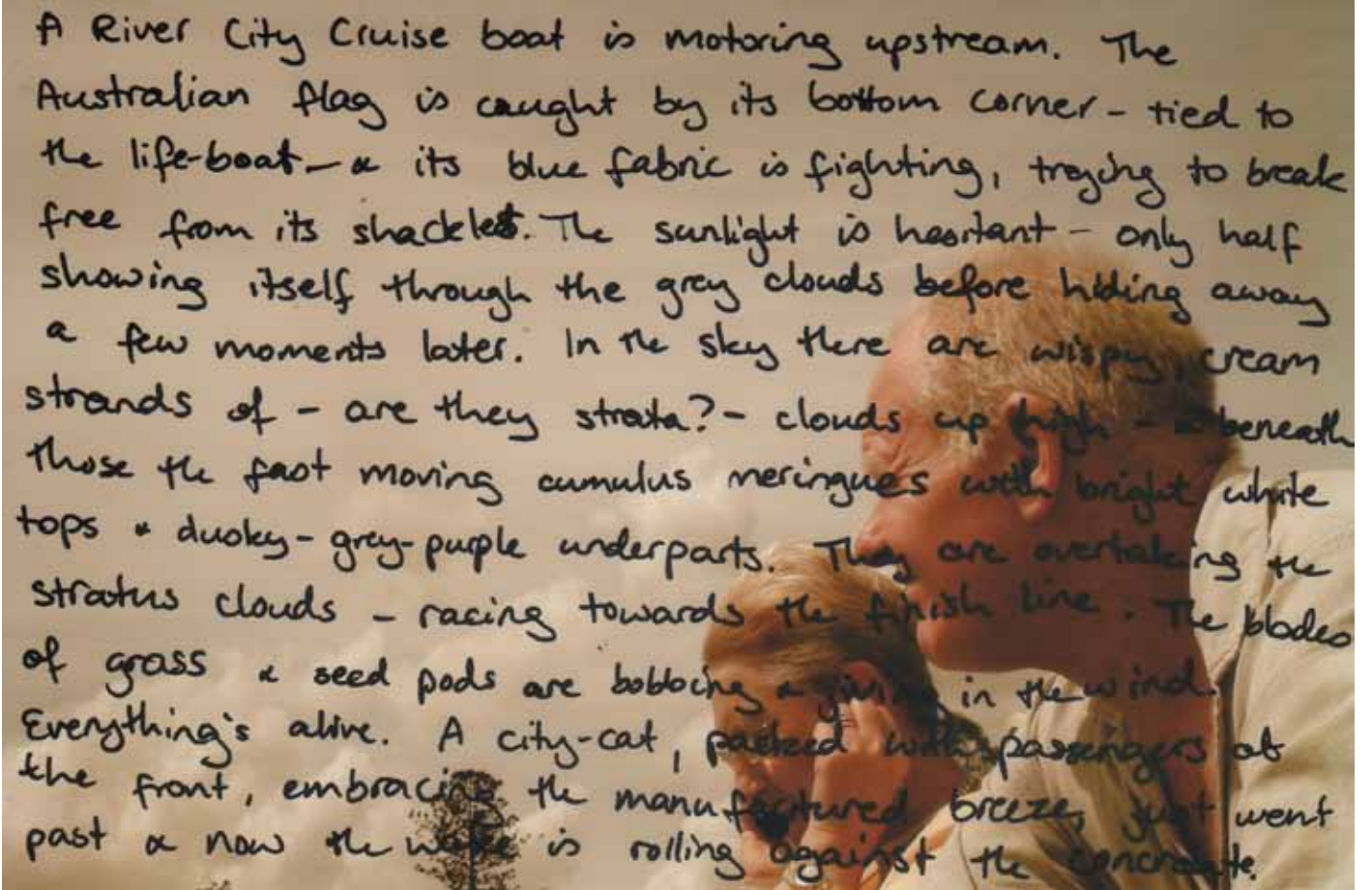
**#45** In a way it's made him more human in my eyes.  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
37 x 47.5cm



**#46** I wonder if they feel the depth of connection that I'm projecting onto them?  
oil on plywood with solvent varnish  
18.5 x 24cm

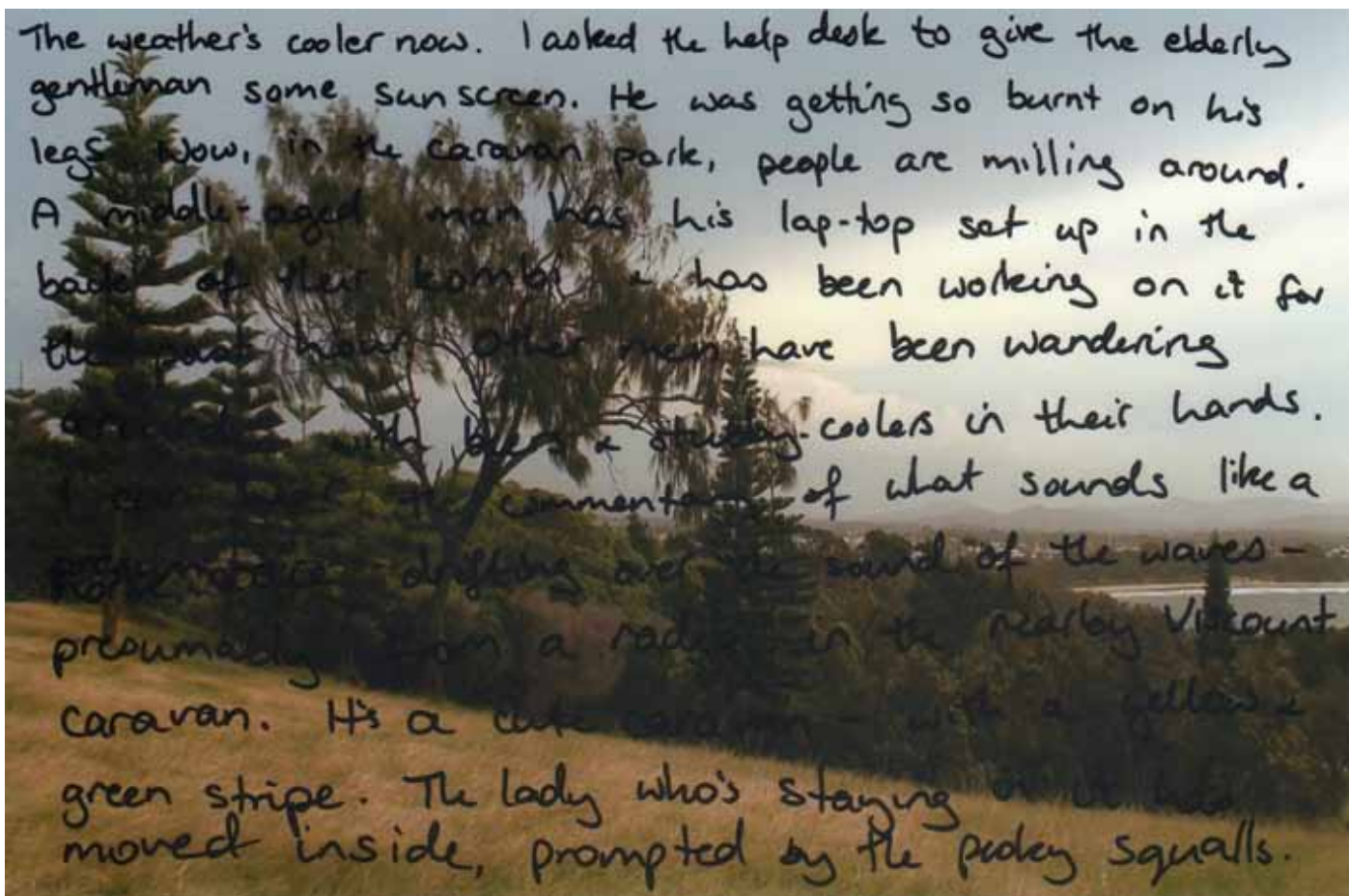


#47 I was saying to CB.  
 digital photograph with permanent pen  
 10 x 15cm



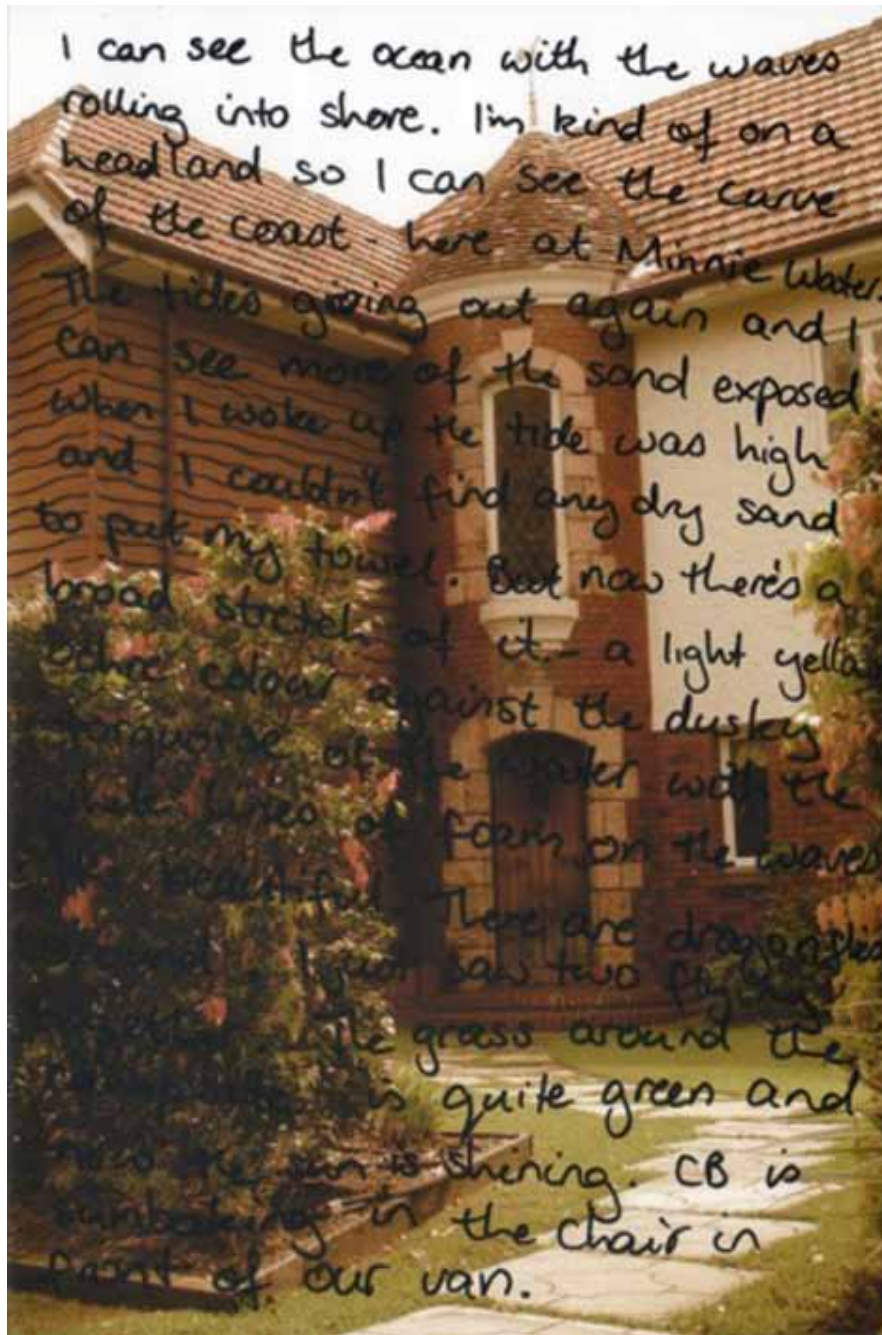
A River City Cruise boat is motoring upstream. The Australian flag is caught by its bottom corner - tied to the life-boat - & its blue fabric is fighting, trying to break free from its shackles. The sunlight is hesitant - only half showing itself through the grey clouds before hiding away a few moments later. In the sky there are wispy, cream strands of - are they strata? - clouds up high - & beneath those the fast moving cumulus meringues with bright white tops & dusky-grey-purple underparts. They are overtaking the stratus clouds - racing towards the finish line. The blades of grass & seed pods are bobbing & jiving in the wind. Everything's alive. A city-cat, packed with passengers at the front, embracing the manufactured breezes just went past & now the wake is rolling against the concrete.

#48 A River City Cruise boat is motoring upstream.  
digital photograph with permanent pen  
10 x 15cm

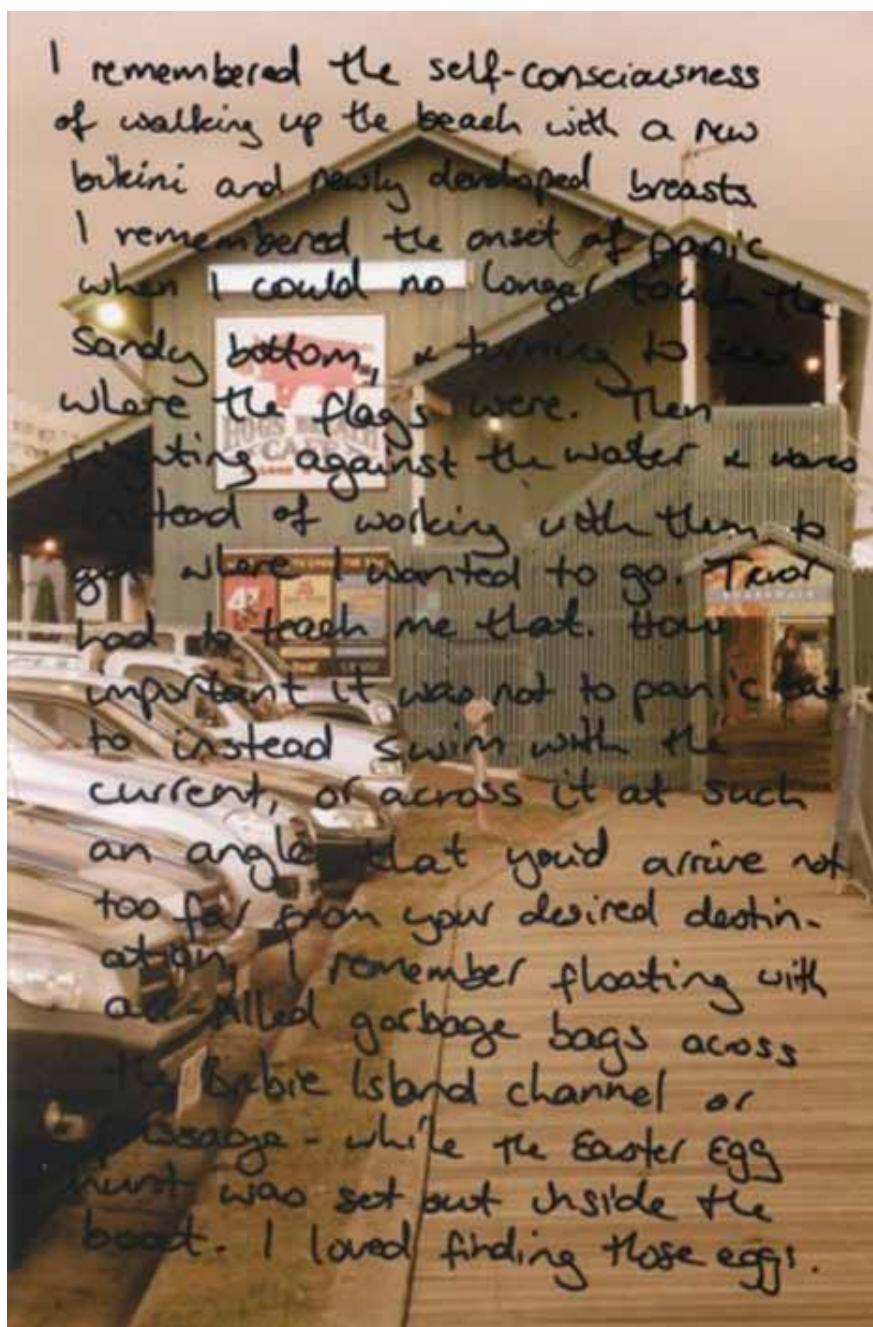


The weather's cooler now. I asked the help desk to give the elderly gentleman some sun screen. He was getting so burnt on his legs. Now, in the caravan park, people are milling around. A middle-aged man has his lap-top set up in the back of their kombi & has been working on it for the past hour. Other men have been wandering around with beer & sticky-coolers in their hands. I can hear the commentary of what sounds like a radio broadcast drifting over the sound of the waves - presumably from a radio in the nearby Viscount caravan. It's a cute caravan - with a yellow & green stripe. The lady who's staying in it has moved inside, prompted by the peckey squalls.

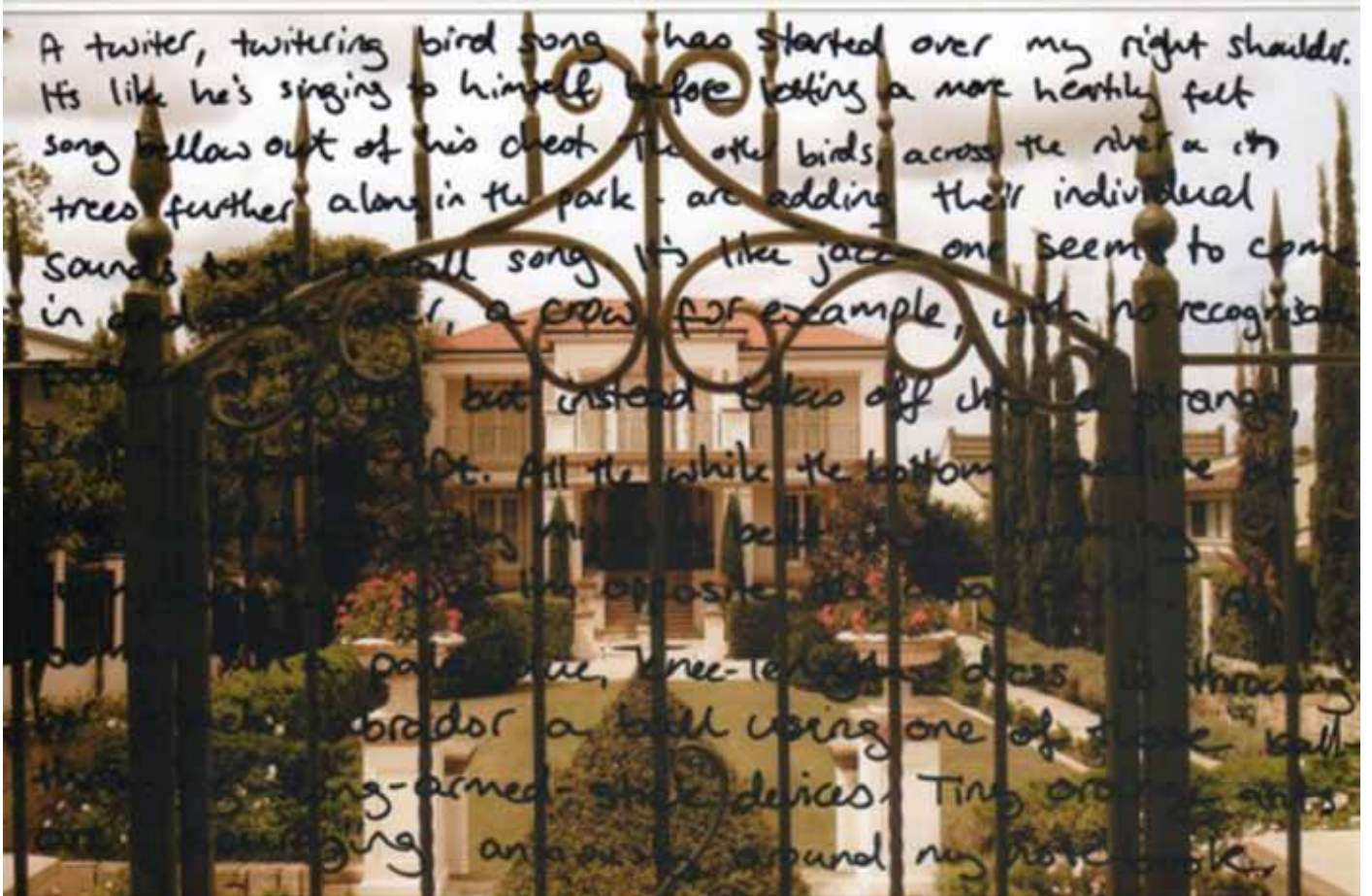
#49 The weather's cooler now.  
digital photograph with permanent pen  
10 x 15cm



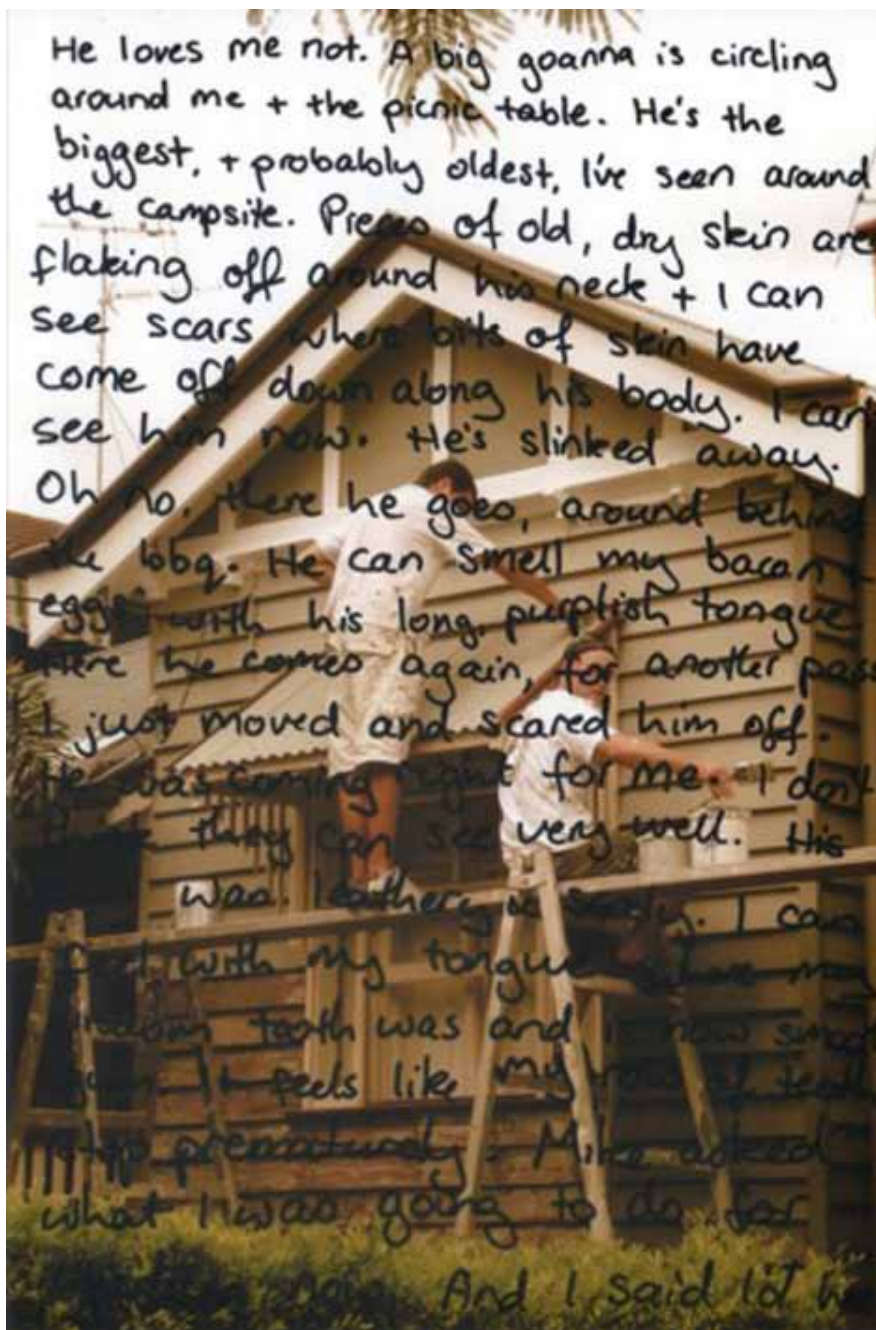
#50 I can see the ocean with the waves rolling onto shore.  
digital photograph with permanent pen  
15 x 10cm



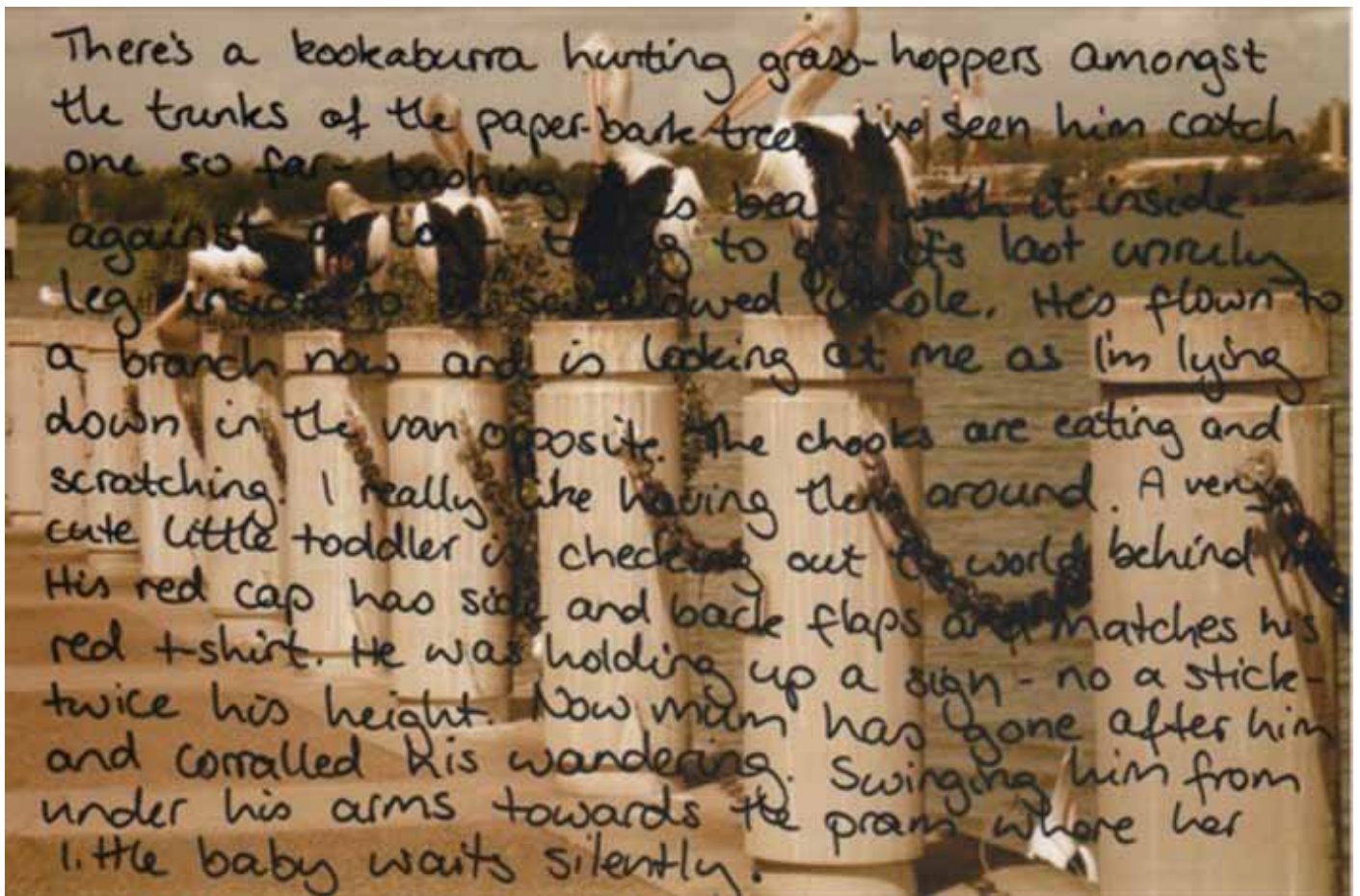
- #51 I remembered the self-consciousness of walking up the beach in a new bikini and newly developed breasts.  
 digital photograph with permanent pen  
 15 x10cm



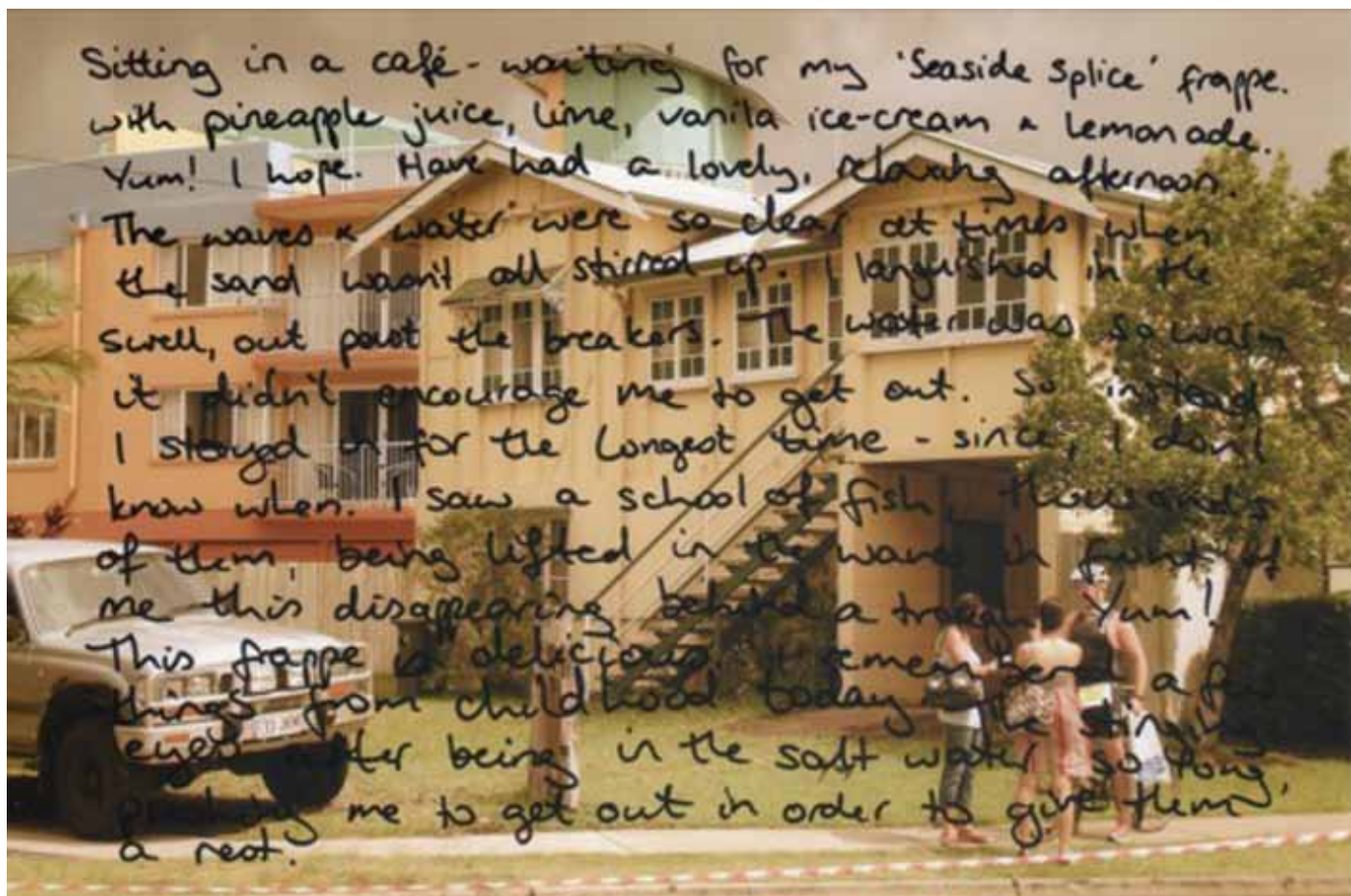
#52 A twitter, twittering bird song has started over my right shoulder.  
digital photograph with permanent pen  
15 x 10cm



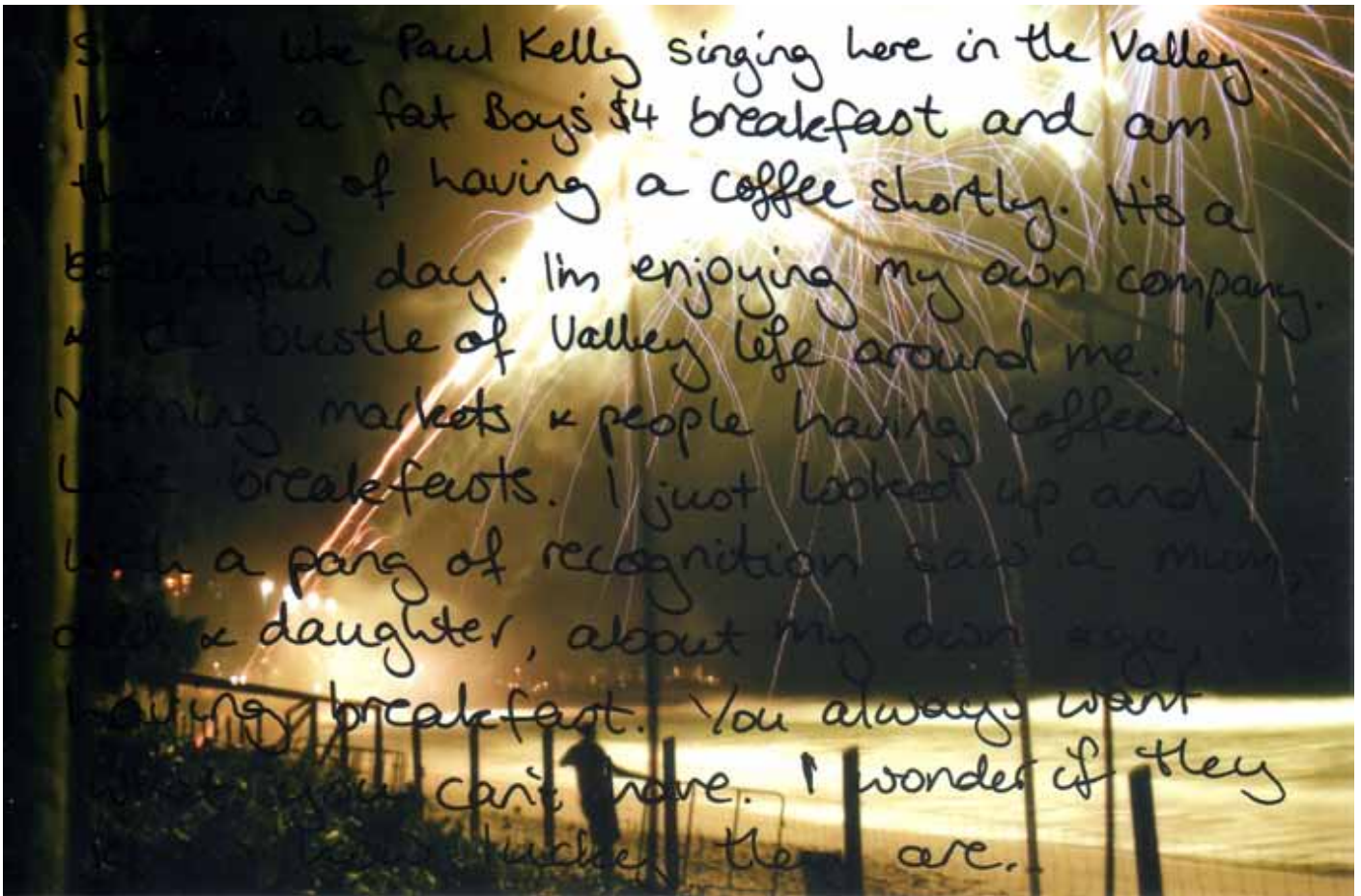
#53 He loves me not.  
 digital photograph with permanent pen  
 10 x 15cm



- #54 There's a kookaburra hunting grass-hoppers amongst the trunks of the paperbark trees.  
digital photograph with permanent pen  
10 x 15cm



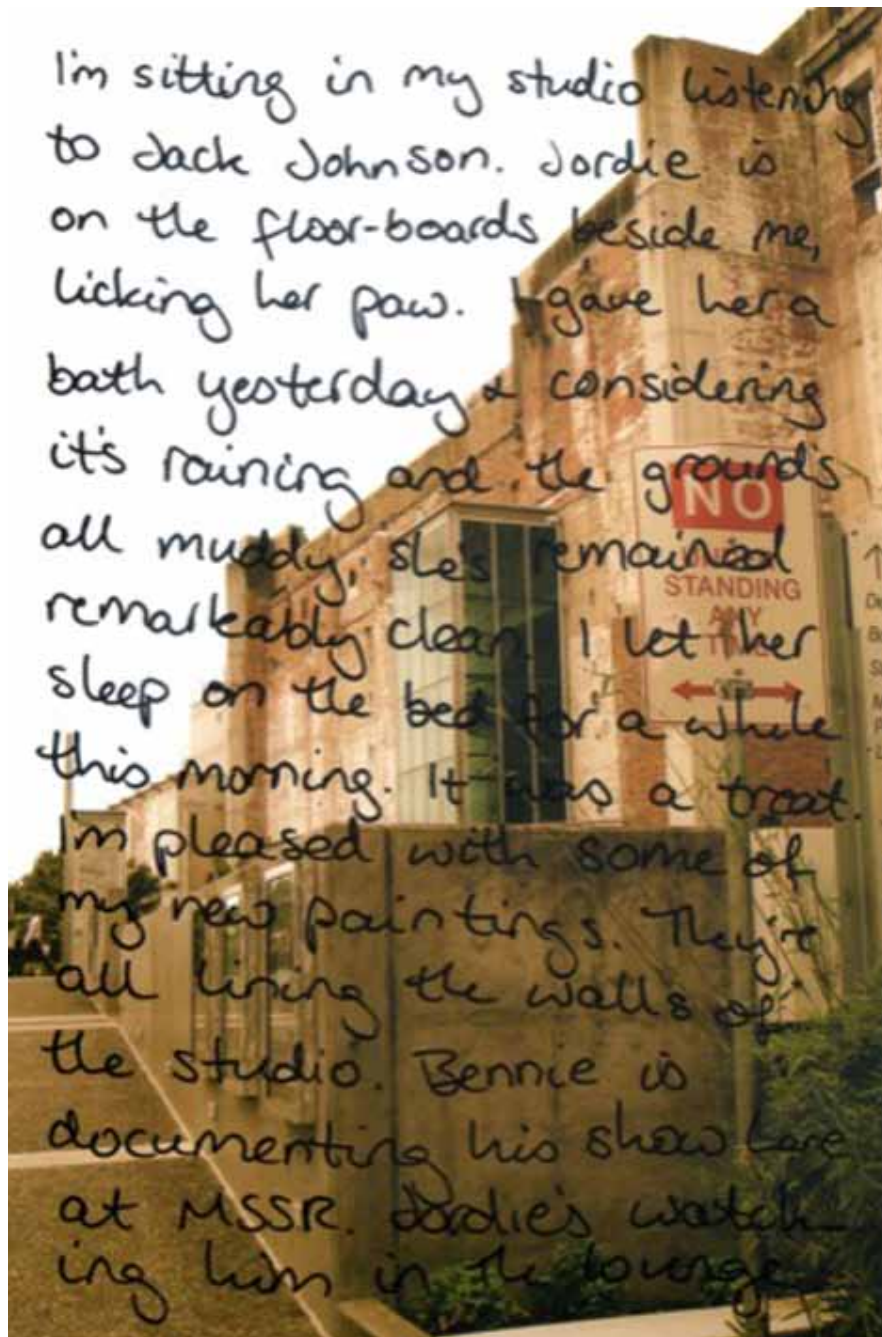
#55 Sitting in a café - waiting for my 'Seaside Splice' frappe.  
digital photograph with permanent pen  
10 x 15cm



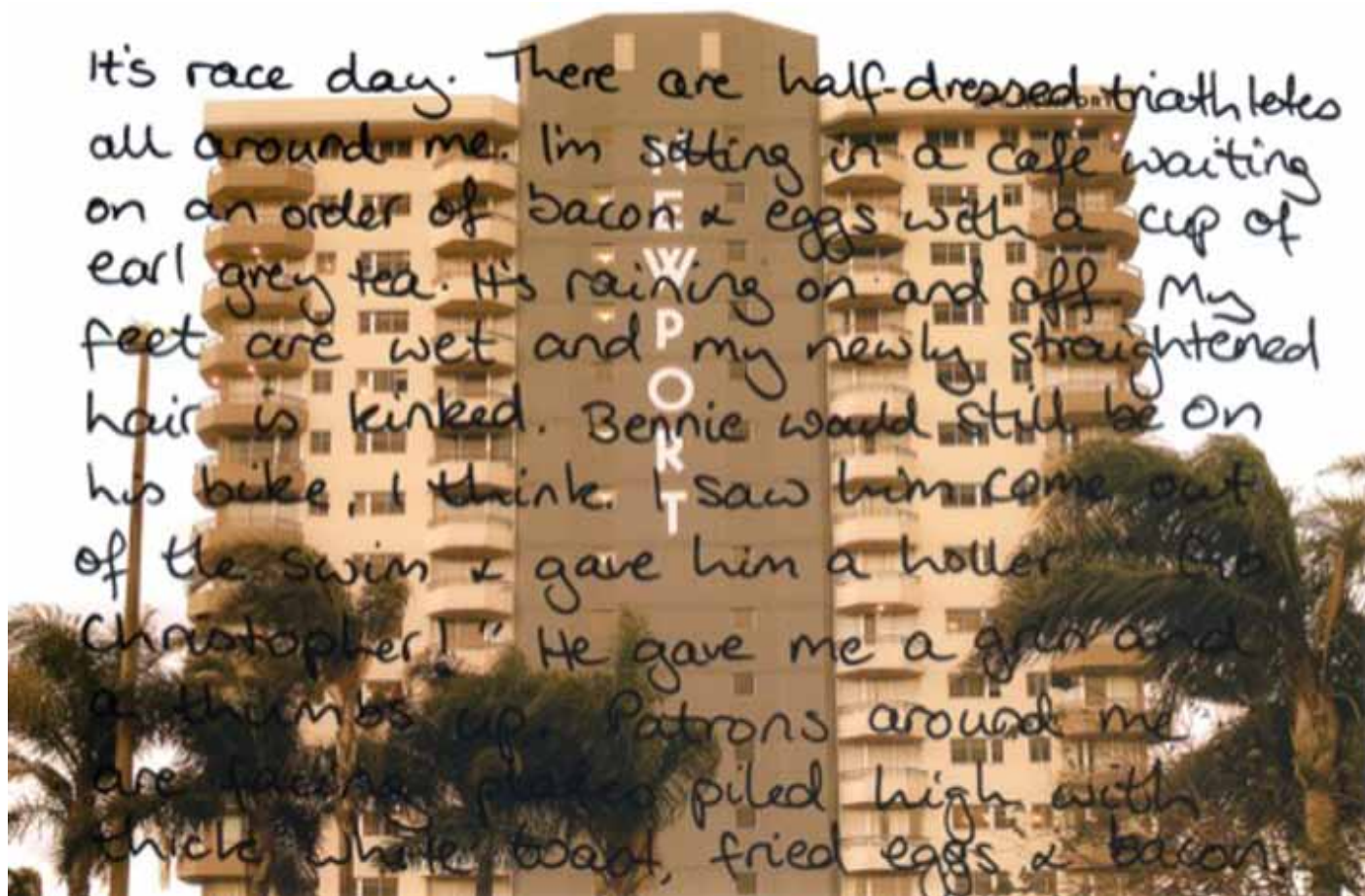
#56 Sounds like Paul Kelly singing here in the Valley.  
 digital photograph with permanent pen  
 10 x 15cm

A man just gave me a wherthers lolly. He asked if I was writing a novel. I'm going to do this more often. Get out and sit in a coffee shop & write & think & be part of society. It's going to be a scorcher today. It's 9:48am & it's so hot. So hot. 34 today, they said. Had a good, long, gentle sleep. I wrote 2500 words of reasonably coherent material yesterday, I think. I'm going to go to the library today. This heat is ridiculous. I think I will spend today cleaning out my computer, getting ready.

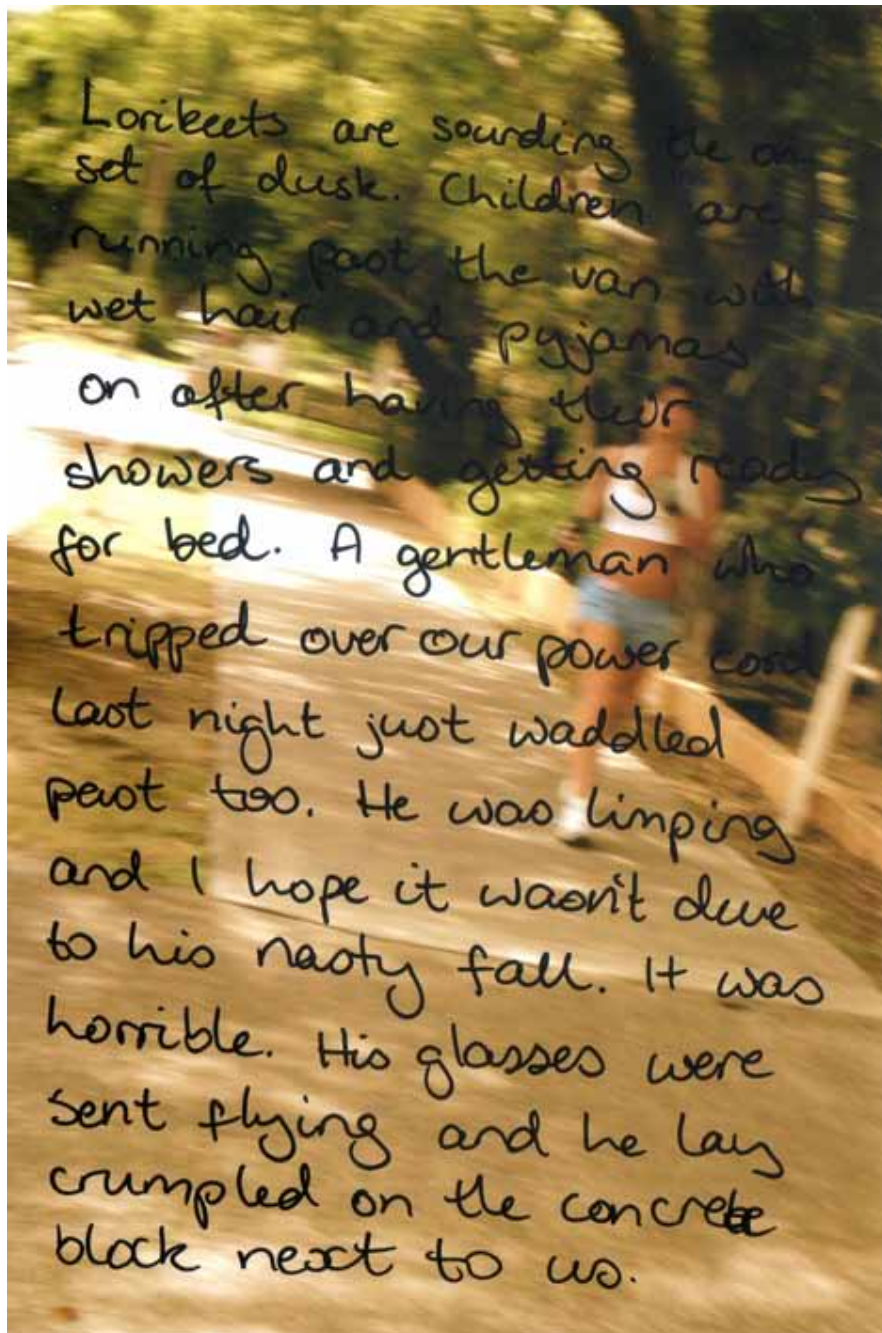
#57 A man just gave me a Wherthers lolly.  
digital photograph with permanent pen  
10 x 15cm



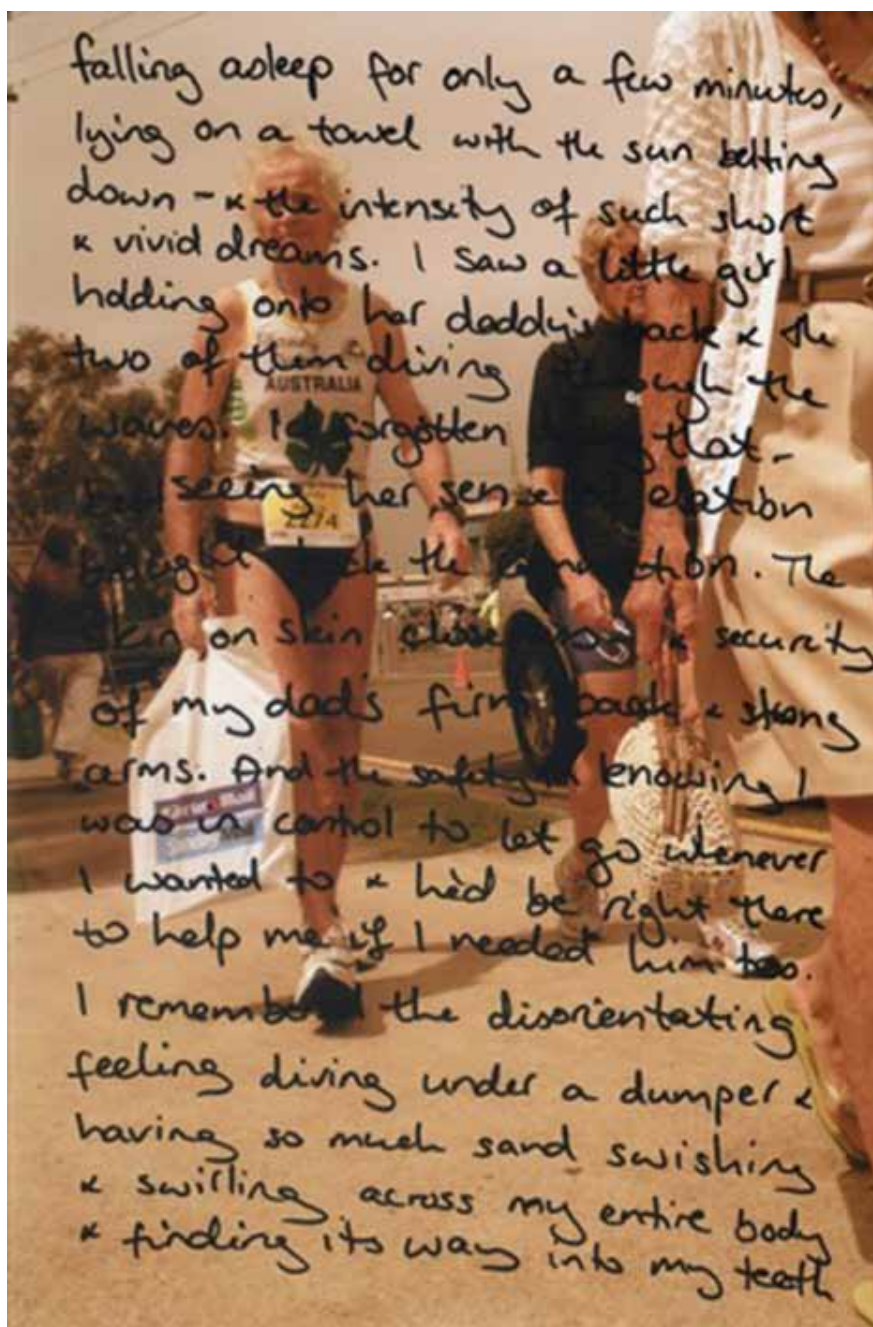
#58 I'm sitting in my studio listening to Jack Johnson.  
digital photograph with permanent pen  
15 x 10cm



#59 It's race day.  
digital photograph with permanent pen  
10 x 15cm



#60 Lorikeets are sounding the onset of dusk.  
digital photograph with permanent pen  
15 x 10cm



#61 Falling asleep for only a few minutes, lying on a towel with the sun belting down.  
 digital photograph with permanent pen  
 15 x 10cm