

I



II



III



*On-Growing:
Intertwined, knotted, coiled Landscapes*

MAMAC (Nice, France)
July – September 2018

On Growing: Intertwined, knotted, coiled Landscapes came together as an exhibition at MAMAC through following the thread of several works which I have made over a number of years and locations. It focuses on works which investigate the complex structures of trees and vines and use many of the foundational elements of my practice in the form of drawing, painting, notes and colour pallets. As a collection of works from different periods and including two new paintings, the exhibition provided the opportunity to revisit some earlier investigations with a new approach to consider how nature's forms are the result of very complex processes. The exhibition focuses on the different patterns that trees and forests create as they develop and the connections among those growth patterns.

Over a period of three years between 2012 and 2015, I visited the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) in Panama several times. It was in January 2014 that I began the project *Vertical Landscape, Lianas*, a series of drawings of lianas in the tropical forest of Panama. The liana is a woody vine which roots itself in soil and uses the support of trees in the forest to climb vertically to reach well-lit areas. It creates dense networks of long stems which twist together and wrap around their host structures, often destroying them in the process. They are abundant in Panama's forests where, according to one census, there are up to 90 different species of lianas from 21 different plant families. I was fascinated by their impact on the forest and the tension between these dominant forms and the other vegetation. I decided not to draw the tree, or the trees, from which the lianas were hanging and instead to visually extract the lianas from their

supportive trees and plants. I thought of this as a forest without trees; a forest made only of that which hangs from the trees and between them. It was a way of filtering the view of the forest using a very specific criteria and to decode the environment using a very specific set of questions, method and medium. I found that the chaos of the forest is well represented through the lianas own knots, angles, curves and rotations. Everything was very abstract in this landscape and I made the series entirely from observation.

It was during this trip that I also became interested in mangroves. In early 2015 I returned to the STRI in Panama, to Bocas del Toro, to dedicate time to understanding and observing the incredible biodiversity of the mangroves which inhabit the coastline and low-lying swampy area of the forest. The intimate root architectures of these trees were of interest to me particularly because they seemed to resist visual comprehension. An integral part of the ecosystem, the mangrove exists in several layers as larger trees on the shoreline which grow into the water, getting smaller as they go further inland. Their defining feature is their 'prop' roots, in other words aerial root structures that support the trees like stilts and also provide essential oxygen; they are extensive and expand in many directions. In order to capture this complexity and understand the many facets of the mangrove, I went out on a boat in the middle of a protected creek and made a series of drawings from this vantage point, adjusting my proximity and perspective on a daily basis in order to create different viewing frames from which to draw the mangrove roots.

Lianas in Barro Colorado Island, Panama



Mangroves in Bocas del Toro, Panama



The works that I made in these dense environments in Panama, where vines and trees were part of a highly ordered and integral chaos, had their roots in fact in another project, in another place, some years earlier. Back in 2009 in the botanical garden in Kolkata, India, I had undertaken drawing the largest banyan tree in the world. This tree has similar features to those I found in the lianas and mangroves of Panama, with prop roots and aerial roots. Although a single tree, it appears as a forest and covers more than one and a half hectares, continually spreading further through its cyclical process of roots growing upwards and branches becoming roots when they reach the ground, to in turn give growth to new trunks. It was encountering the banyan's overwhelming scale and lateral topology which first made me consider how one could isolate and extract sections of such a complex system, through the process of drawing. For the exhibition at MAMAC, I decided to revisit this particular series of drawings and produce two large-scale acrylic paintings which allowed me to bring some of my current concerns to the subject matter; namely how to experiment with scale through painting and bringing field work into the studio.

The exhibition also includes my notes from the various expeditions and colour palettes which are both crucial to my process and tie together my approach to these subjects over the years. It was a welcome and productive process for me to go back, revisit and rework, so long after the initial projects.

Banyan tree in
Kolkata botanical
garden, India



Kopelman
working on site
Barro Colorado
Island, Panama



I



II



II



II



V



IV



IV



I

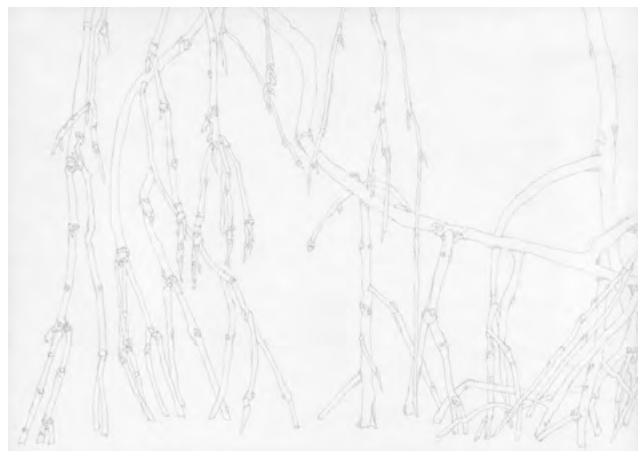
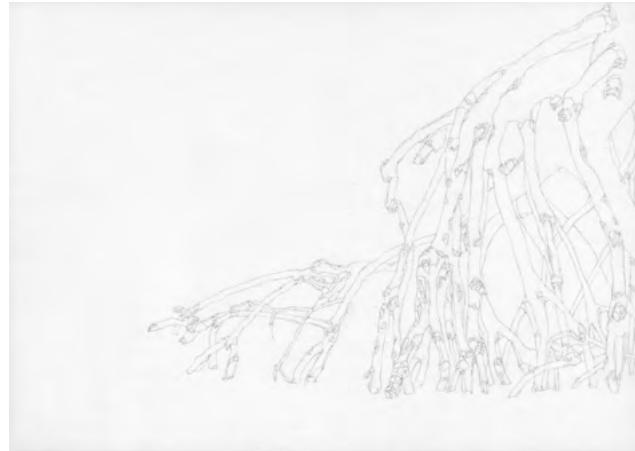
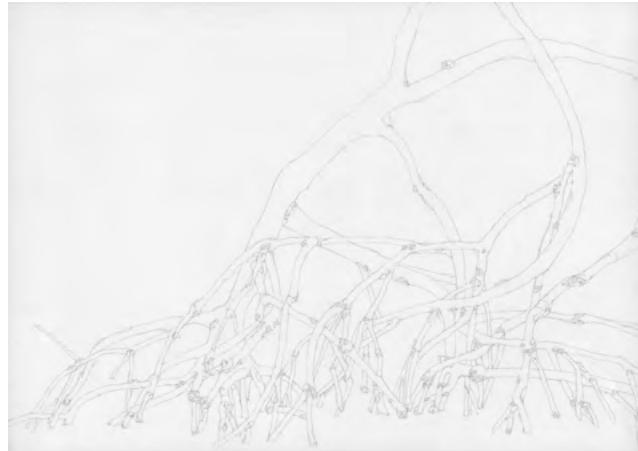


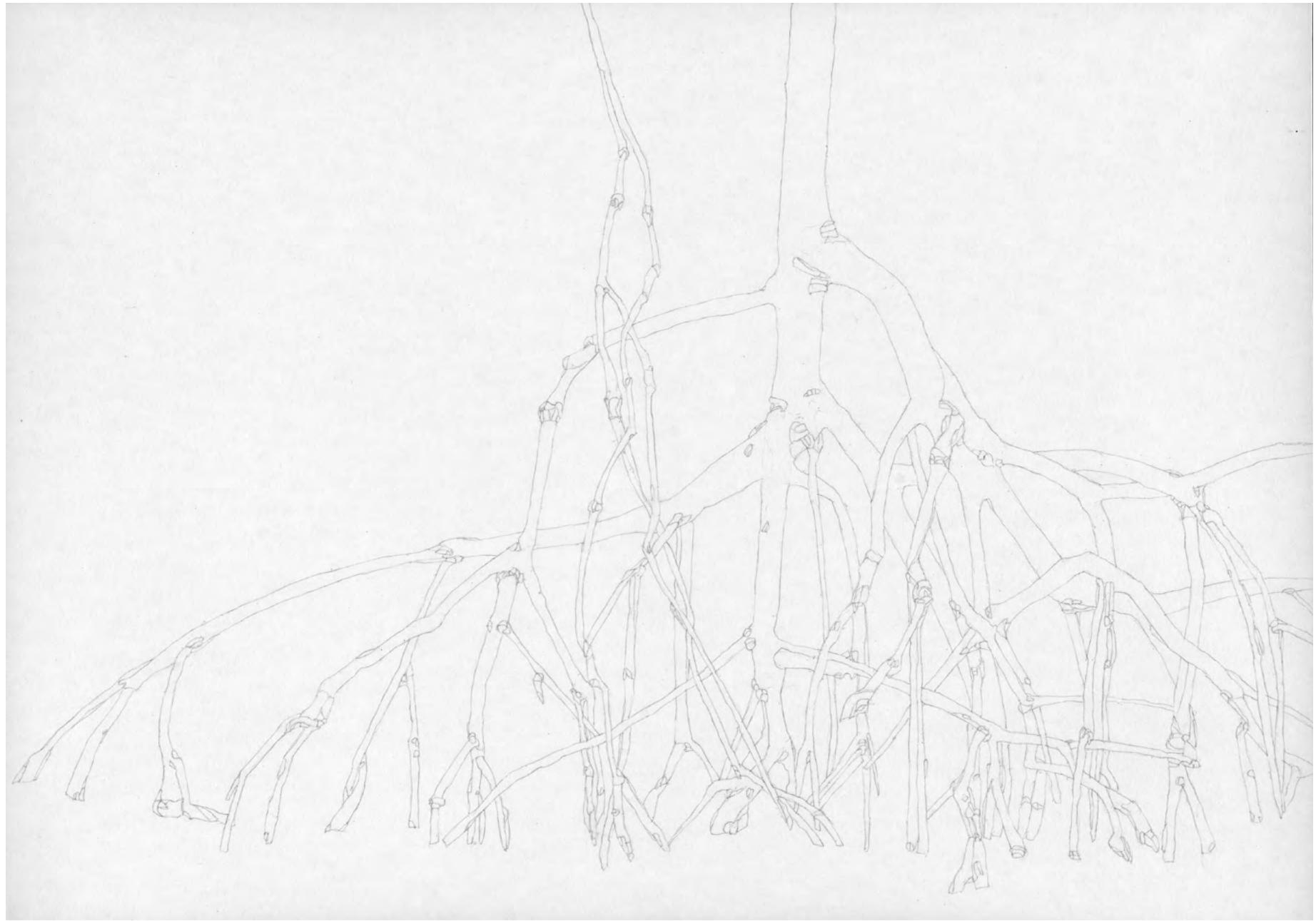
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Mangroves, 2015

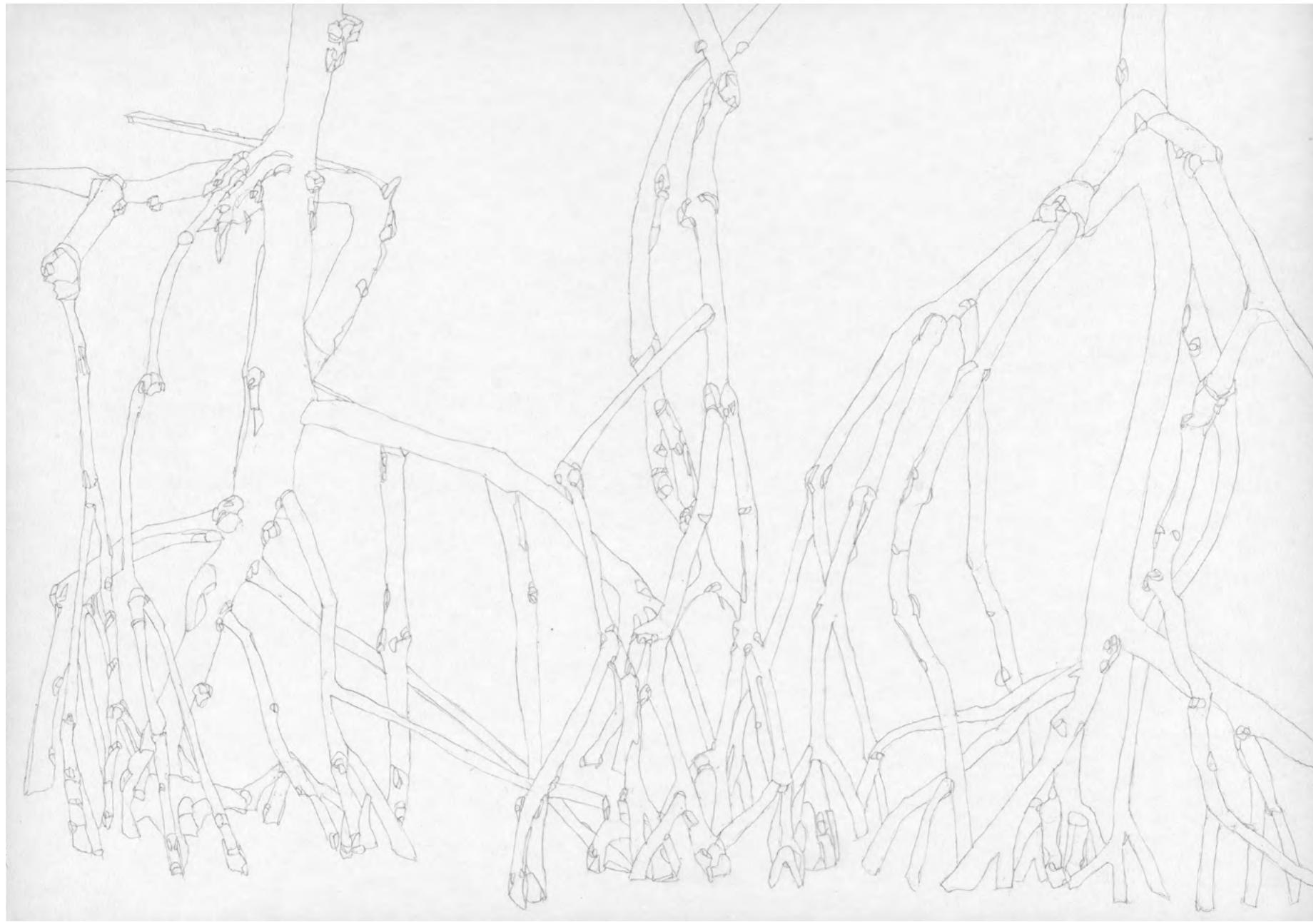
pencil on paper

16 drawings, 30×42 cm each









II

Banyan Tree Paintings, 2018

Acrylic on canvas

2 paintings

220×310×2.5cm





process & details



These paintings are based upon:
Banyan Tree (Looking at Trees), 2009
Watercolour on paper
5 watercolours, 30 × 40 cm each







III

working material



III

working material, note book, colour tests

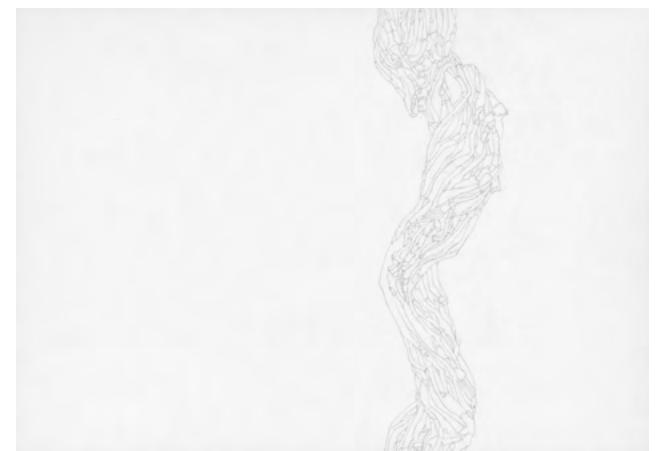
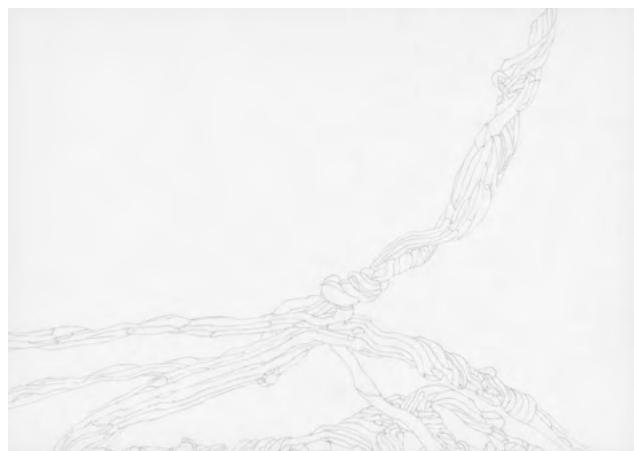


IV

Lianas, 2014

pencil on paper

20 drawings, 21 × 29 cm each



V

Books

Notes on Representation Vol.1–8, 2006–2017

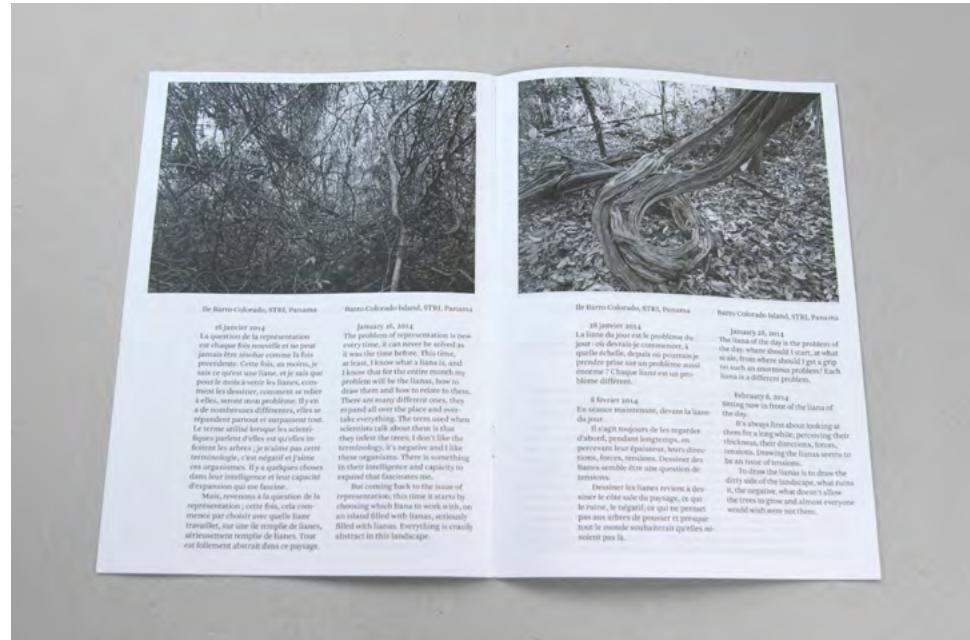
Roma Publications



Exhibition booklet

Irene Kopelman – *On-Growing: Intertwined, knotted, coiled Landscapes*

17 × 24 cm, 16 pages



Irene Kopelman
*On-Growing:
Intertwined, knotted, coiled Landscapes*

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