



# Omo River

## Only the River Remains to Speak

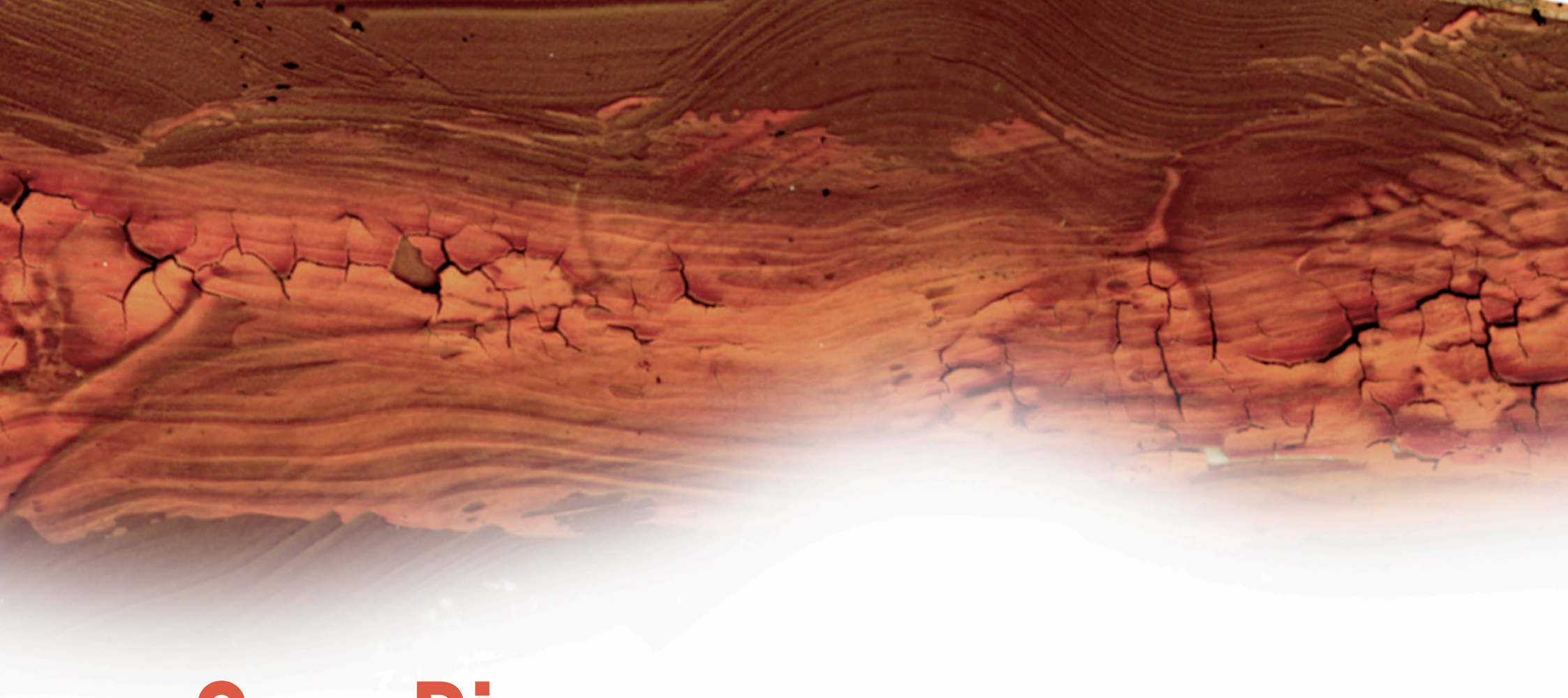


Tell a story

Tell a present-day story

Tell a story appropriate to everyone to listen to

Meandering like a river, the red clay recalls the story  
of people whose lives depend upon the River



# Omo River

Only the River Remains to Speak





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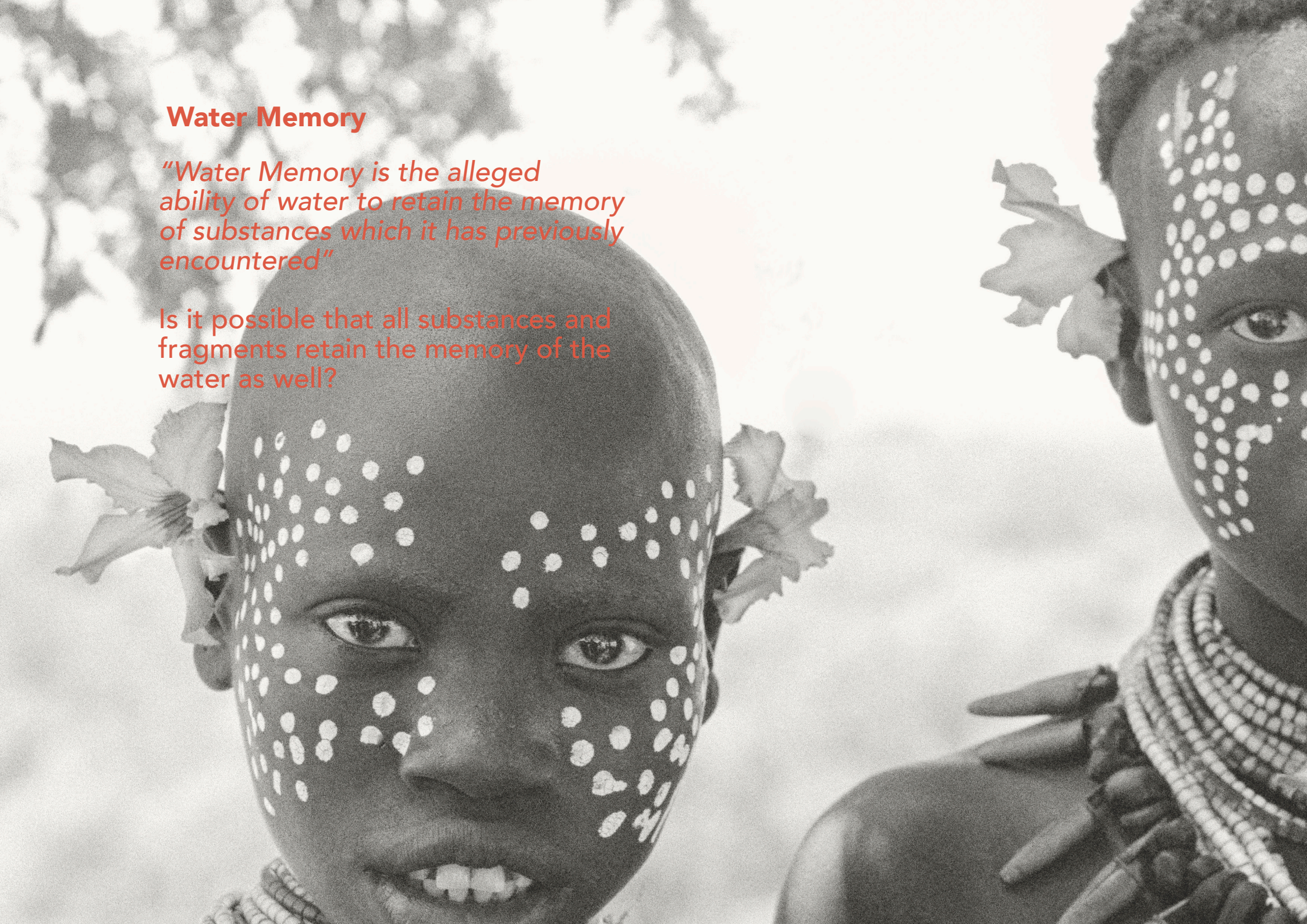
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## Water Memory

*“Water Memory is the alleged ability of water to retain the memory of substances which it has previously encountered”*

Is it possible that all substances and fragments retain the memory of the water as well?

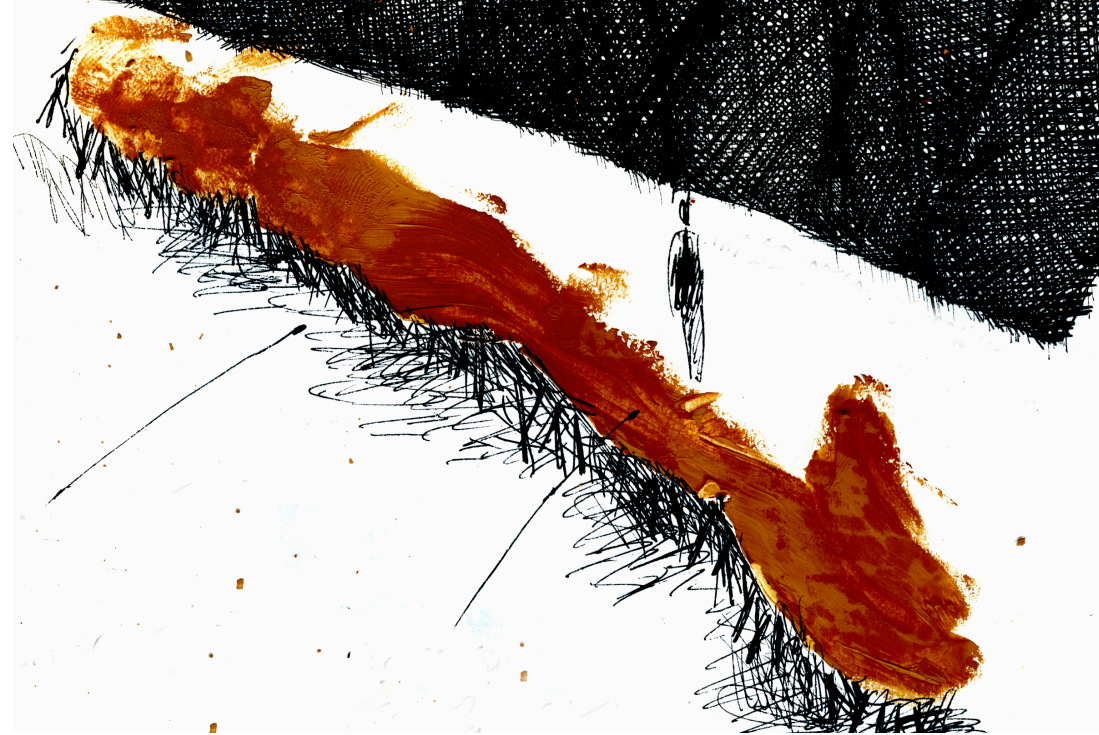


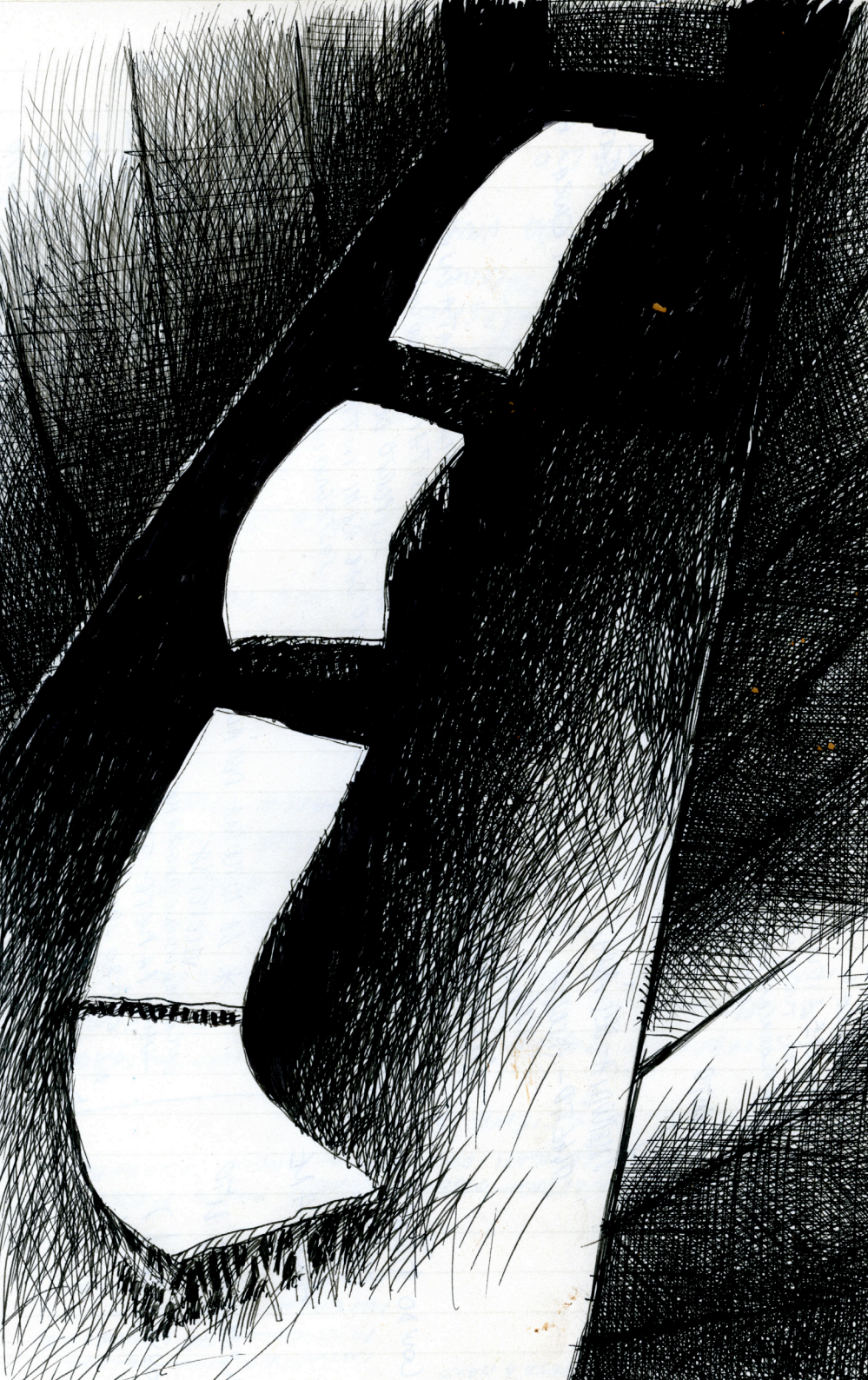
## THE APPROACH

In the dimness of an achromatic space, the apparent static nature of the fragmented surface of red clay appears to hover in midair. With a simple hand gesture of picking up a fragment of the red clay there is a suggestion of transformation. The fragmented piece of red clay becomes an object able to convey stories and sounds. At first, there is the slow emergence of sounds, then words, then words become women's voices and then the women's portraits slowly emerge. We listen to their voices, to their stories. Then slowly the portraits fall silent and slowly, almost aching, they dissolve and completely disappear. *Only the River Remains to Speak.*

### The Ritual Space I

A surface of red clay is created and stretched out by hand. The clay slowly desiccates and the water within it evaporates. The red clay begins to crack into thousands of fragments. The surface appears to be suspended in mid-air, but careful observation reveals that under it there is a tangle of honed branches, branches honed over time by the flow of the river. The branches seem to support and hold the red clay surface in mid-air.





This raw material surface emulates the sinuous course of a river.

The space on both sides of the River installation becomes corridors where the viewer is able to walk along the River Bank.

## The Ritual Space II

Within the ritual space simple gestures are designed to add significance to the exhibition.

The opportunity to perform rituals with other people strengthens and amplifies the power of an idea and identity of place and its people. *Only The River Remains to Speak* embraces ancestral stories and ritual practices told by the women whose stories are featured within the exhibition.

It highlights and emphasizes the urgency and the importance to safeguard and preserve their ancestral knowledge, which is based on the ability to be self-sufficient and to live self-sustainably in the natural world.

There is a universal urgency to safeguard and preserve our world's rivers and environment for all of humanity. We all live on this sacred earth and collectively have a responsibility to preserve it.

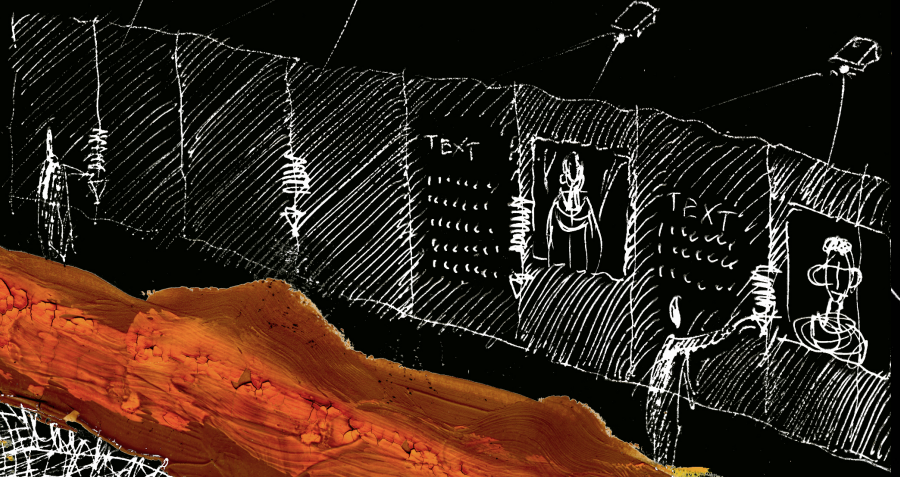
*Only the River Remains to Speak* is a public and participatory ritual space to learn and share about the urgent issues affecting the people of the Omo River.



THE "WORD-SIGN"

THE RIVER TALKS

SENTENCES IN THE FRAGMENTS THAT GENERATES

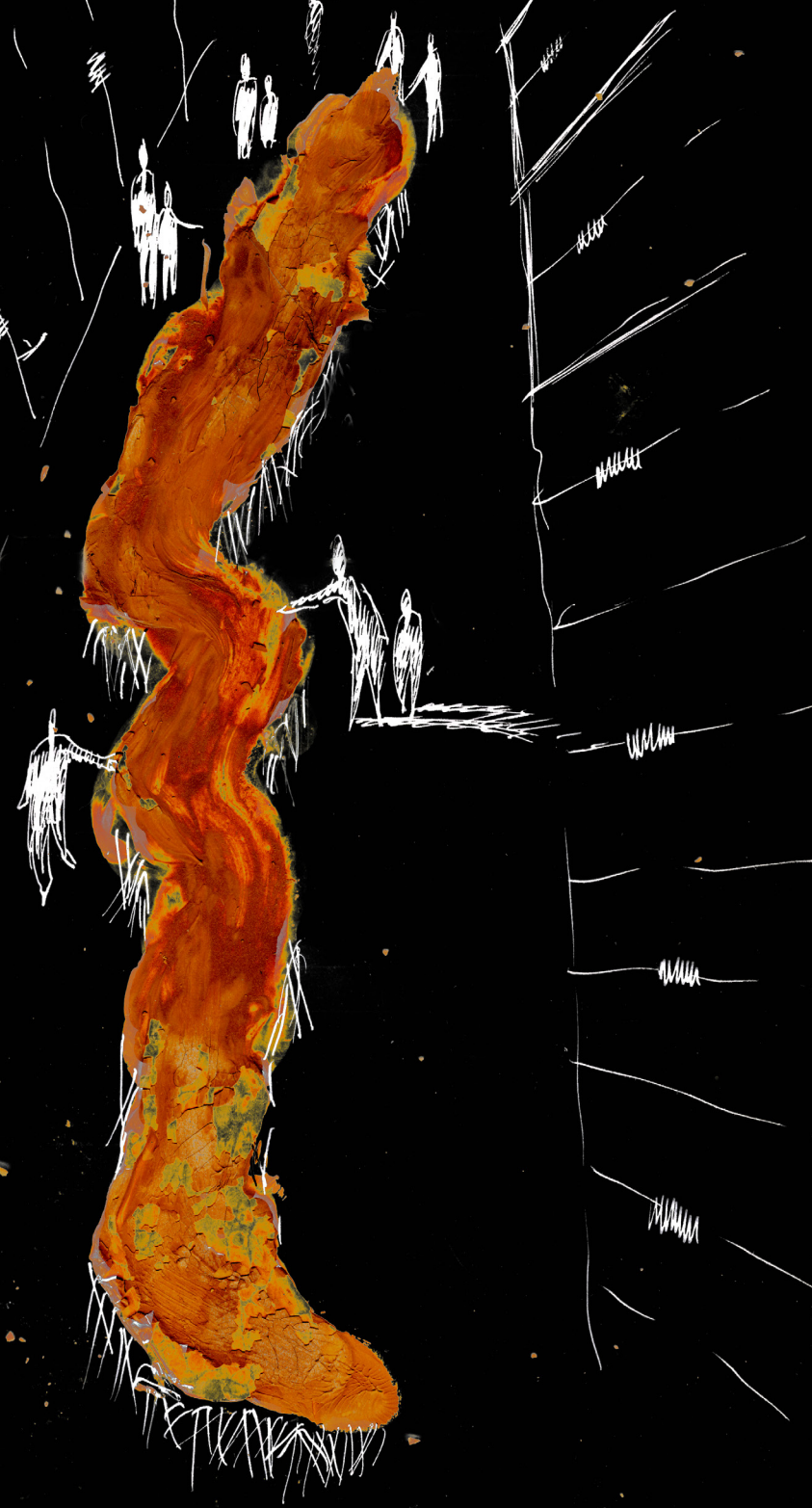


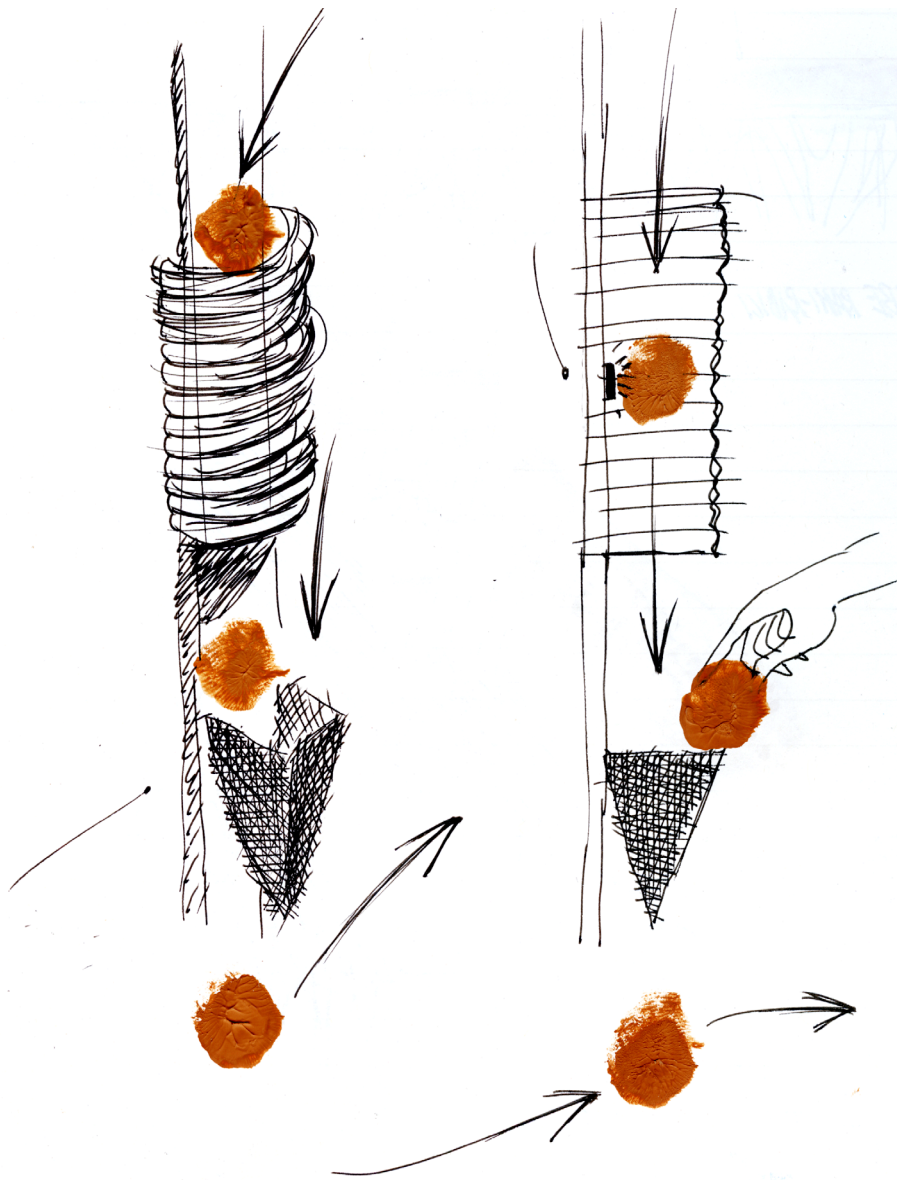
"WORD-SIGN" IN CLAY

ANY WITNESS, WAS THE CLAY  
FRAGMENT OF EXPERIENCE



EACH FRAGMENT RETAINS  
THE VALUE OF A WITNESS





## The Ritual Space III

This ritual exhibition creates a participatory experience that is unique and personal. The ritual actions encourage the viewer to tap into past memories. Past memories are deeply rooted in emotions (subconscious) that are to be symbolically recovered by the interaction with the clay fragments. The take-away clay fragments are part of the ritual as the viewers use it to activate the testimonies (video). Symbolically, throughout the exhibition visit, the clay fragment becomes a collective memory of the viewer.

## STORY OUVERTURE

### The River Flows

The muffled sounds of natural elements welcome the visitors into the exhibition space. The whole venue is dimly lighted. As the visitors enter into the space the sound of a river's water flow is heard. The floor is covered in black carpet. The black rear projection screens are covered in lightweight gauze fabric. At the center of the space is the desiccated red clay broken into thousands of fragments, which extends itself over a long and sinuous surface that is suspended in mid-air.



## "Promenade"

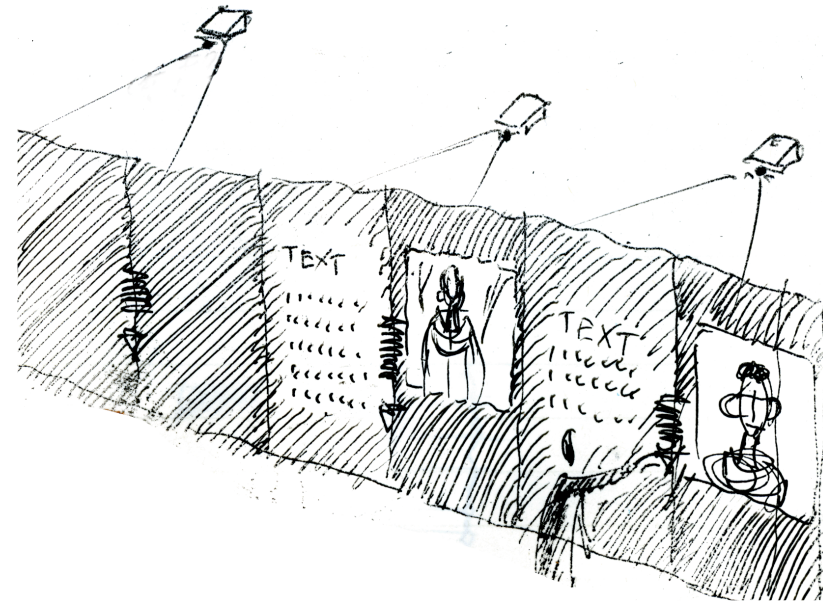
The visitors walk along the River bank and begin to hear the ambient sounds of nature. These sounds change in relationship to the visitors' positions.

## First Gesture

While walking along the river the visitors randomly choose one of the many clay fragments and detach it from its canvas support. By detaching the clay fragment the sound of the River's flow slightly increases giving more voice to the *River*. Once the visitor has collected the red clay fragment the visitor then approaches the textile screen walls. The textile walls are made of either canvas or thin black gauze and hide the rear projection screens, which are made of a suitable black plastic material.

Next to each screen there is a protruding forms, which is the system for activating the video projections.

While the video are not activated on the screens are projected light effects, which reproduce the surface reflections of the water.



## PORTRAITS

### Second Gesture

The visitor drops the clay fragment through one of the protruding forms next to the screens. The dropped fragment is caught in a canvas bag under the protruding form. The falling fragment activates the video projections on the screen.

At first, the sound of a woman's voice engages the visitor standing in front of the screen. As the visitor waits for something to happen, slowly from the

black screens surface, almost struggling to emerge, a black and white photographic portrait begins to reveal itself. Beginning with the eyes and then the face, followed by the entire body and then the entire background in which the figure is immersed.

The images are out of scale, slightly larger than life size so that the viewer will feel the presence of the women in a more powerful way, and have a



greater urgency to let others know what the women and their river communities are facing. Next to the portrait screen, separated by the clay fragment system, is another screen of the same size. On this screen the translated text of the women's stories are projected. When the women's voice is no longer heard her image slowly dissolves into the water's reflection, which has been projected onto the

screen. The photographs and ambient sounds that are part of this collaborative installation reflect over a decade of work by photographer Jane Baldwin in Ethiopia's Omo River Valley and Kenya's Lake Turkana watershed.





## PROMENADE

### The Recovered Gesture

The visitor can then remove the clay from the canvas bag and continue to use it to activate the other stories on the screens. Or, leave the already used piece of clay in the bag and choose another piece of clay and continue to repeat the process of activating the other stories while walking along the "river" until all the stories are heard.

### The end and the beginning

*"Remains only the river to Speak"*. The continuous picking up of the clay fragments that forms the "river's" surface gradually increases the sound of the river flow.

The women's stories and the ambient sounds of the natural landscape are gradually overwhelmed by the sound of the river's flow, which increases as the clay fragments are removed. Almost as if a dam is being dismantled piece by piece, and at last it is crumbled by the river's words.

When the sound of the river's flowing water increases and reaches a crescendo the women's portraits and stories, on all the screens on both sides of the River, are replaced by a single photographic image.

On each side of the River, two new images gradually appears on the walls. On one side of the River, on the wall of screens, a large photograph of the Omo River, featuring the north and south bends of the river, is projected while on the other side of the River, still on the wall of screens, a large photograph of the Galma House (parliament building) is revealed. The Galma House is where the Kara people make all the important decisions for their communities, and represents a place of honor and power. The photograph is of an immense and beautiful natural structure made from a tangle of interlocking large silvered-out tree trunks creating an interior space to gather.

Then, after a moment of suspense the images slowly fade away. As the images disappear, the sound of the River's flow begins to decrease... *"It is only the River to speak."*



## CONCLUSION

A remembrance. At the end of this “journey along the banks of the Omo River”, the visitors can take home the dried fragments of clay as a remembrance of the stories of the peoples of the Omo River Valley - a symbolic way for the river to continue to speak. The Clay fragment carries within itself the memory of the visit as a way for the visitor to recall the emotions that the women’s stories evoked.







