

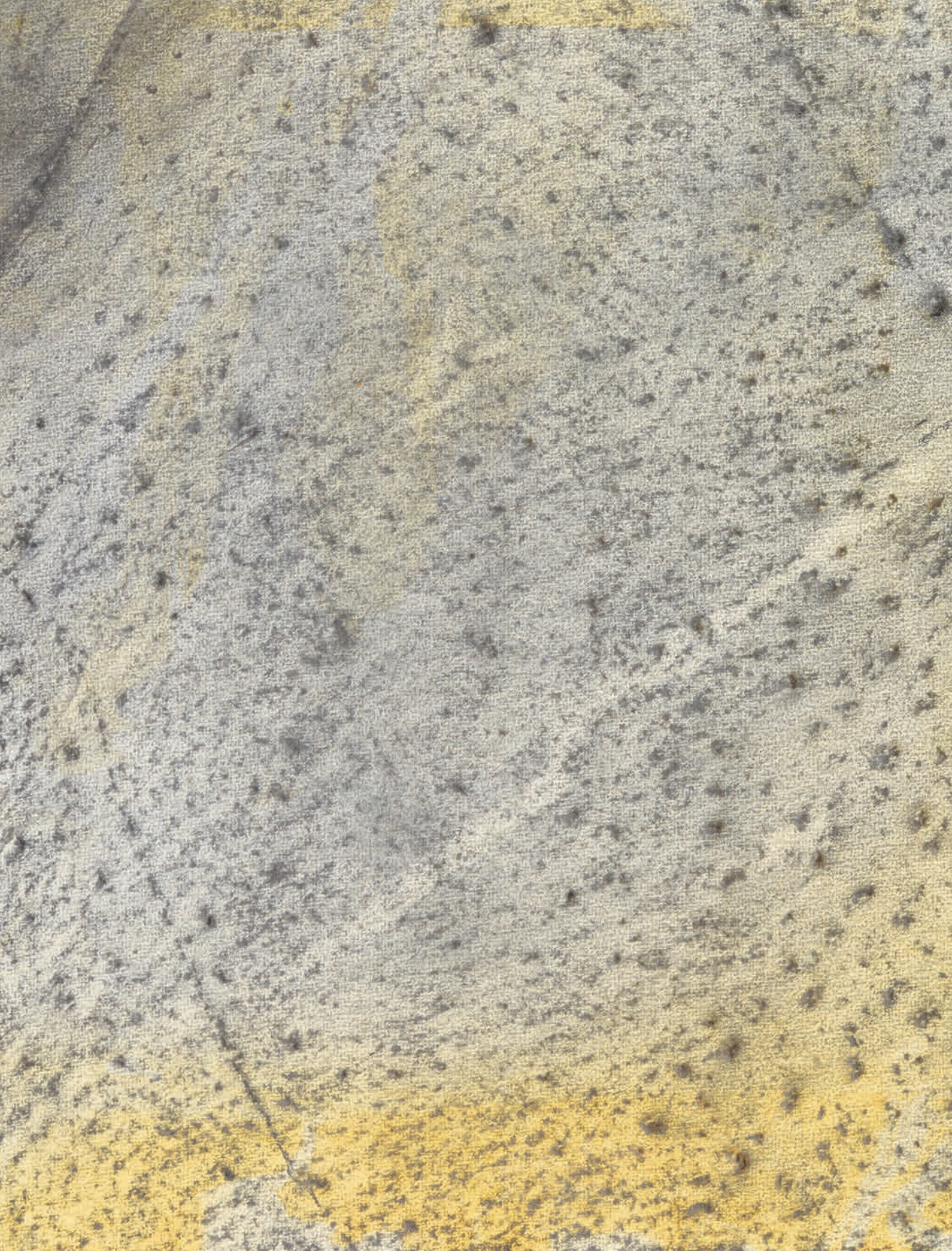
# LITTLE DOOMSDAYS

NIC LOW  
*and*  
PHIL DADSON



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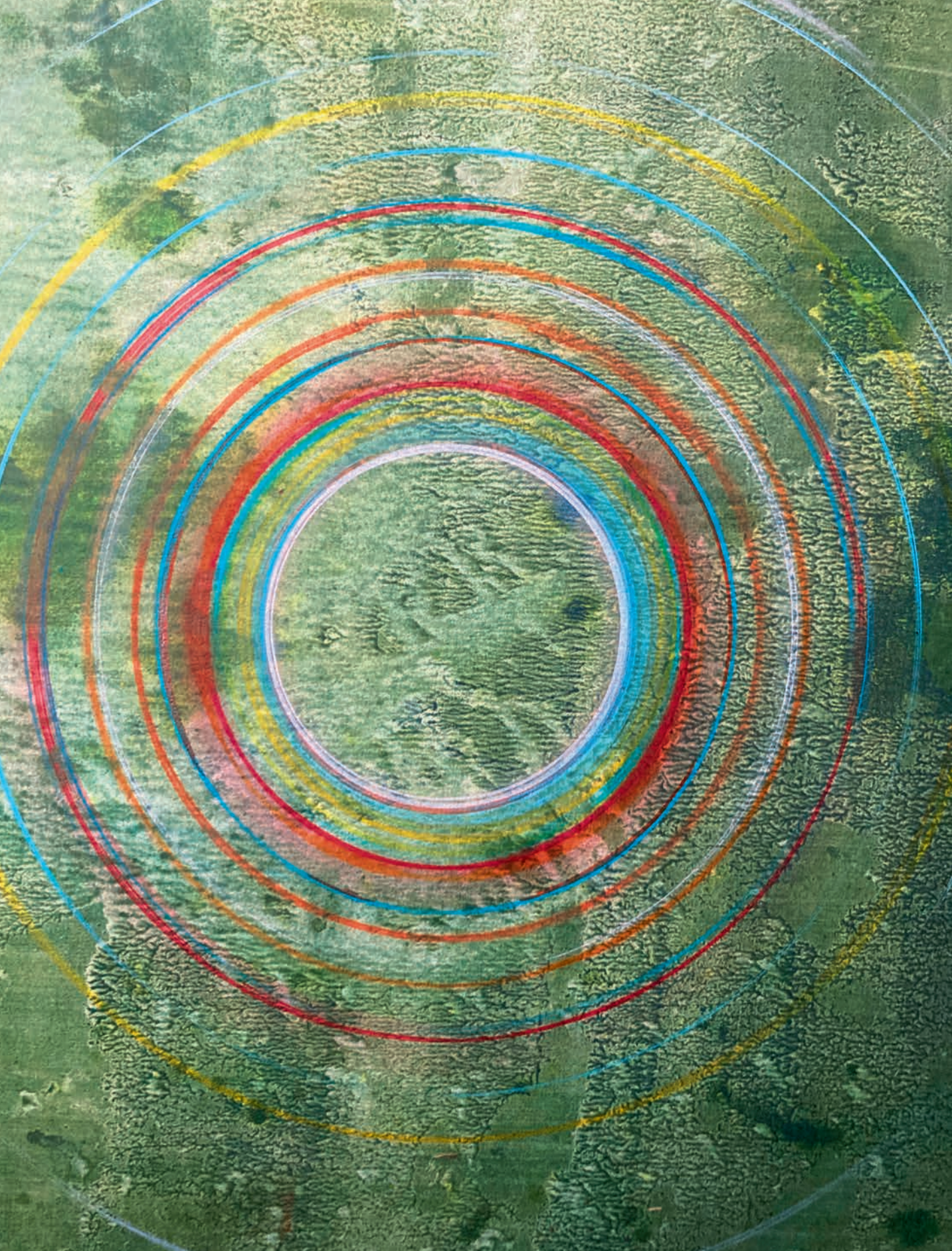














**E kore au e ngaro, he kākano ahau i ruia mai i Rangīātea.**

**I can never be lost; I am a seed sown from Rangīātea.**

It's said — in the quiet between buses, down the back of the pub, in the hushed elevator rising to the penthouse — that in the late twentieth century an unstable grouping of scholars, writers and fanatics from several Ngāi Tahu hapū in Murihiku created what has come to be known as the Ark of Arks.

It's said that this project, ill-conceived and poorly executed as it was, aimed to catalogue all known arks from the last five millennia.

It was a failed attempt to capture previous civilisations' failed attempts to preserve whatever was valuable to them: waka huia, time capsules, caches, burial ships, seed banks, languages, objects and data.

The Ark of Arks was, in itself, useless. But not without merit.

It is said to contain a complete inventory of the waka *Horouta* on its colonising voyage from Hawaiki to Aotearoa, down to the grains of sand lodged in the hems of the sails, and the whakapapa of those grains of sand.

It is said to contain a complete inventory of the biblical ark.

It is said to contain the hopes of those who have moved past denial and mitigation to open fear.

It is said that the Ark of Arks was compiled immediately before the last flood.

The people of the whare wānaka, the house of sacred learning, gathered their knowledge onto a dozen hard drives and placed them inside a lead-lined stainless-steel waka huia.

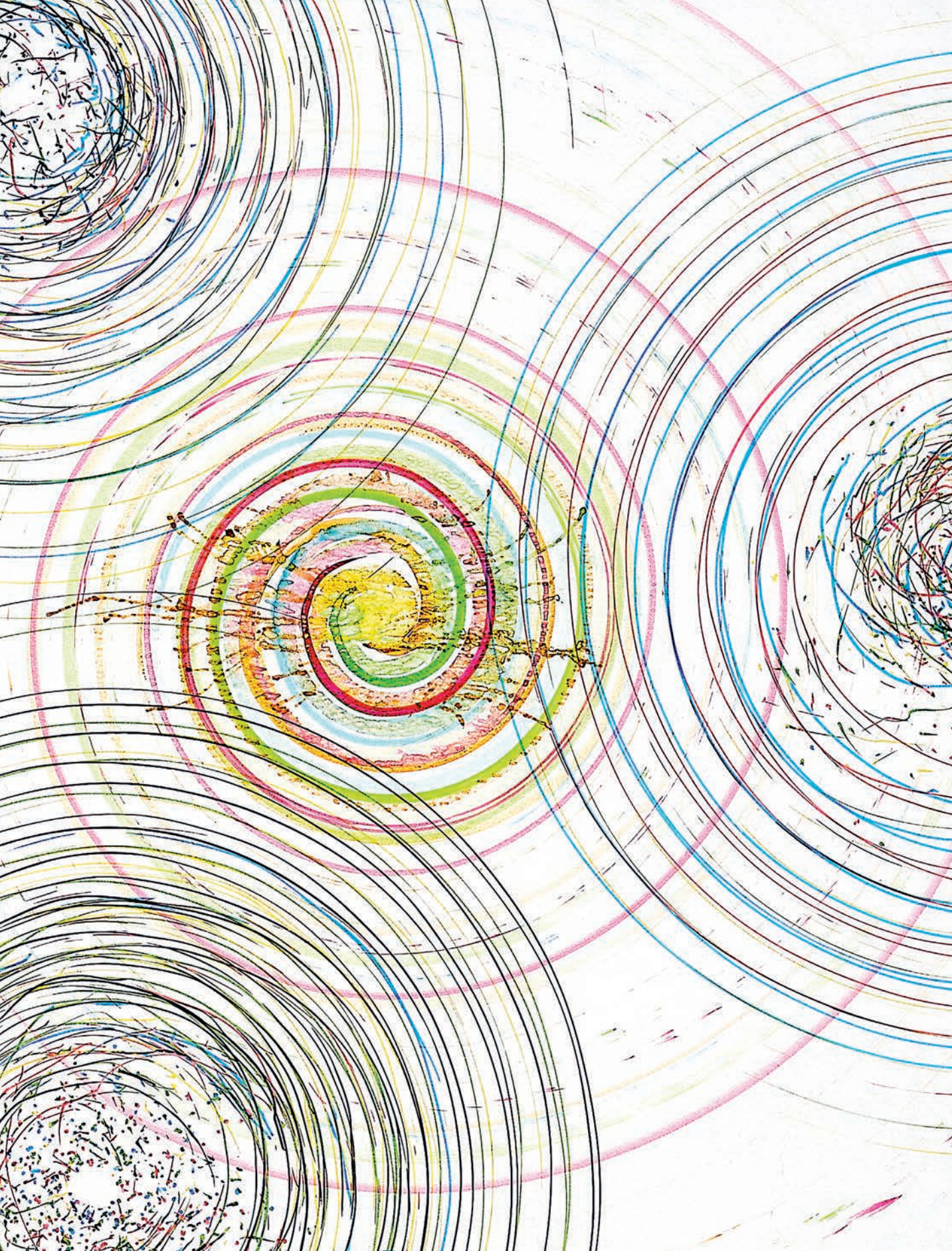
It's said they built the great wharenui at Ōraka, where the spirit of Tūterakiwhānoa resides.

If that wharenui still stands above the waves, go to Ōraka and walk around the walls, the likes of which have not been seen before, or since.

Examine the carved pou that hold up the spine of that house; be watched by the ancestors' eyes that flash like -----.

Inside, lay your hands on the pou tokomanawa. Admire the carving. Inhale the tōtara resin fresh from the chisel's blade — though the wood is older than the dead at Pūharakeke-tapu.







At the base of the pou, search until you find where the stainless-steel waka huia is lodged. Open the tungsten lock and decipher the ingenious mechanism by which it unfolds.

Take out the screens, power them up and begin to read.

The first line of the Ark of Arks reads: **E kore au e ngaro, he kākano ahau i ruia mai i Rangiātea.**

And the second: **I can never be lost; I am a seed sown from Rangiātea.**

The third: **It's said — in the quiet between buses, down the back of the pub, in the hushed elevator rising to the penthouse — that in the late twentieth century an unstable grouping of scholars, writers and fanatics from several Ngāi Tahu hapū in Murihiku created what has come to be known as the Ark of Arks.**

You will be told to visit the great wharenui at Ōraka and to find the stainless-steel waka huia. You are to take out the screens and power them up. As you have just done.

You have found the Ark of Arks. You are reading it now.

We have found you, at last.



### **Entry 34CH4D: Fragments of clay tablet, 2100 BCE**

It is said that in the 1860s, George Smith earned his keep in London as an engraver of bank notes.

It is said that his other more notable skills in reading ancient languages were self-taught.

It is said he spent his days in that great repository of stolen property, the British Museum, hunched over fragments of clay tablets unearthed from ancient Nineveh, nowadays Mosul in Iraq.

It is said that in 1866 George Smith began translating a sequence of fragments that revealed the history of a man named Uta-napishti.

The gods warned Uta-napishti of a coming flood.

Uta-napishti built a cube-shaped ark, one acre by one acre by one acre. He gathered domestic and wild animals, and skilled craftspeople and his whānau, and set sail the day before water covered the Earth.

The fragments said this flood drowned all living things except Uta-napishti and his charges.

It's said that when George Smith translated these words, and their meaning sank in, he threw back his chair and ran through the echoing halls of the great museum, tearing off his clothes.

Those fine cuneiform letters, so like birdprints in wet sand, seemed to prove the truth of Genesis. The biblical flood was real.

Except that Uta-napishti wasn't Noah. It was the other way round.

Smith had found the Epic of Gilgamesh: the earliest work of written literature, the source of the story of Noah's flood.

Clay was the ark that preserved the ark.













### **Item 35DI3J: Seven blank books, 1258 CE**

It's said that the House of Wisdom, sometimes called the Grand Library of Baghdad, was, by the thirteenth century, the largest library in the world.

It is said that in the preceding centuries the Caliphs poured funds into acquiring and translating texts from Greek, Chinese, Sanskrit, Persian and Latin sages. They preserved and mainlined the knowledge of those civilisations into their own.

It is said that on a midwinter's day in 1258, the knowledge contained within the House of Wisdom reached its peak, then began to decline: the Mongolian army breached the walls at Baghdad and began sacking the city.

The attackers created a bridge across the Tigris by dumping the House of Wisdom's books into the river and riding their horses across.

It's said that the pages bled ink for seven days, staining the river black.

By the eighth day the ink was gone. What remained was a bridge of tens of thousands of blank books.

Our ark contains seven of these blank books.

We say it is worth remembering what has been lost.









It is said that the Ark of Arks was once carefully catalogued but became scrambled when we scribes began fighting over what should be preserved. Now it is a collection of fragments making only passing sense.

Whole sections are lost. Missing words are noted with -----, though some hypothesise these omissions are deliberate.

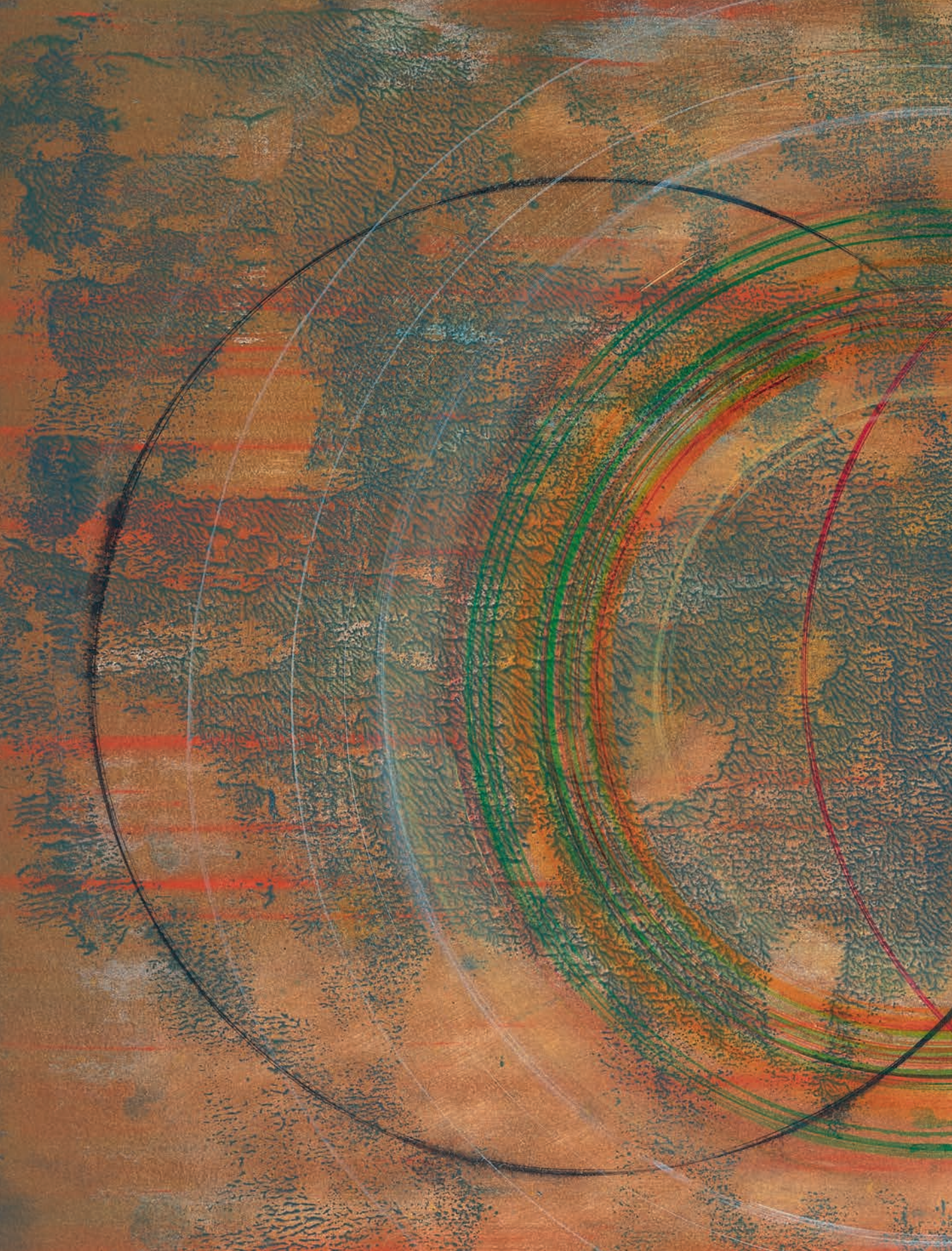
It is said that we set out to record lofty truths but quickly descended into banality.

It is said that our loftiest truths are often found in banality.

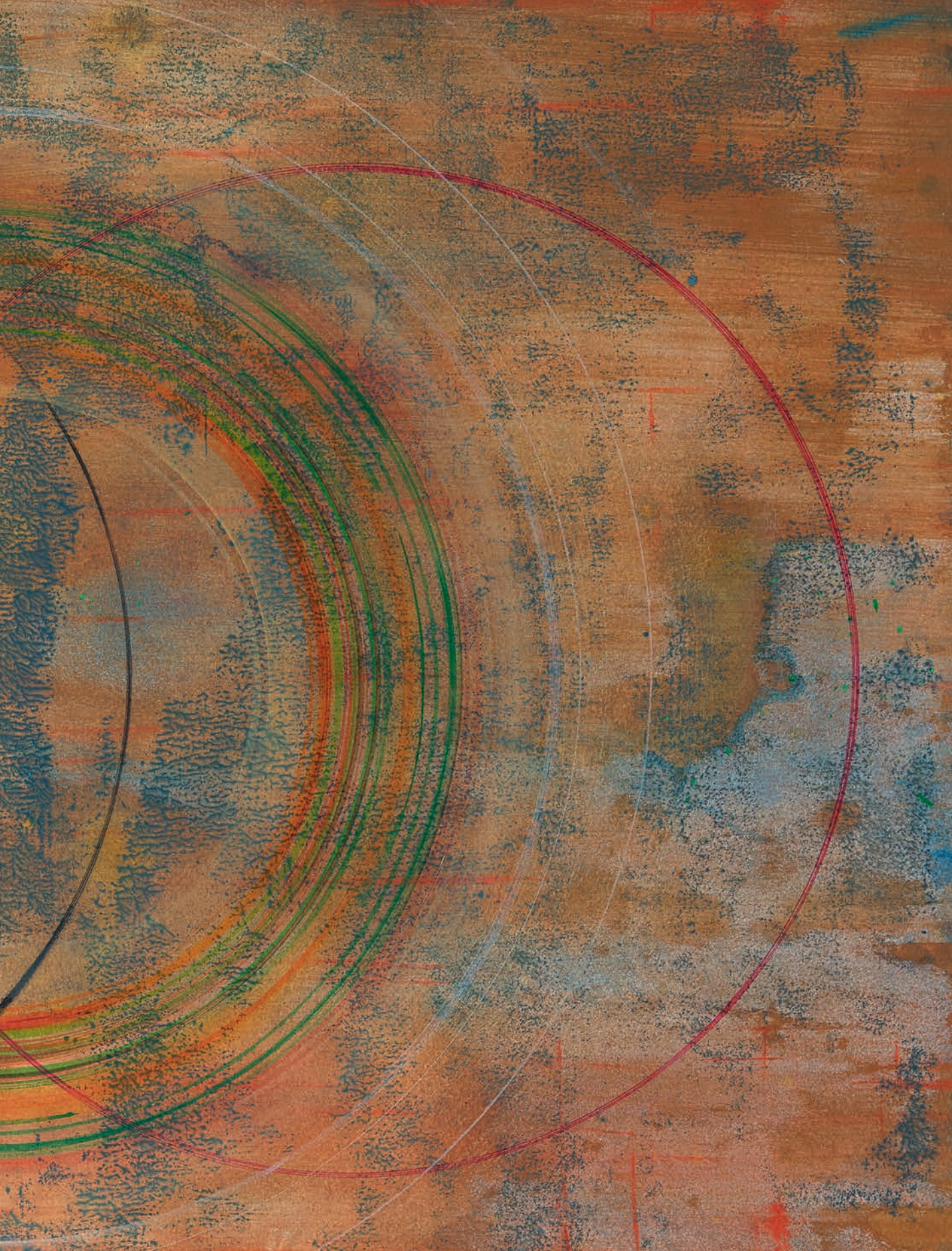
Do not believe everything people say.



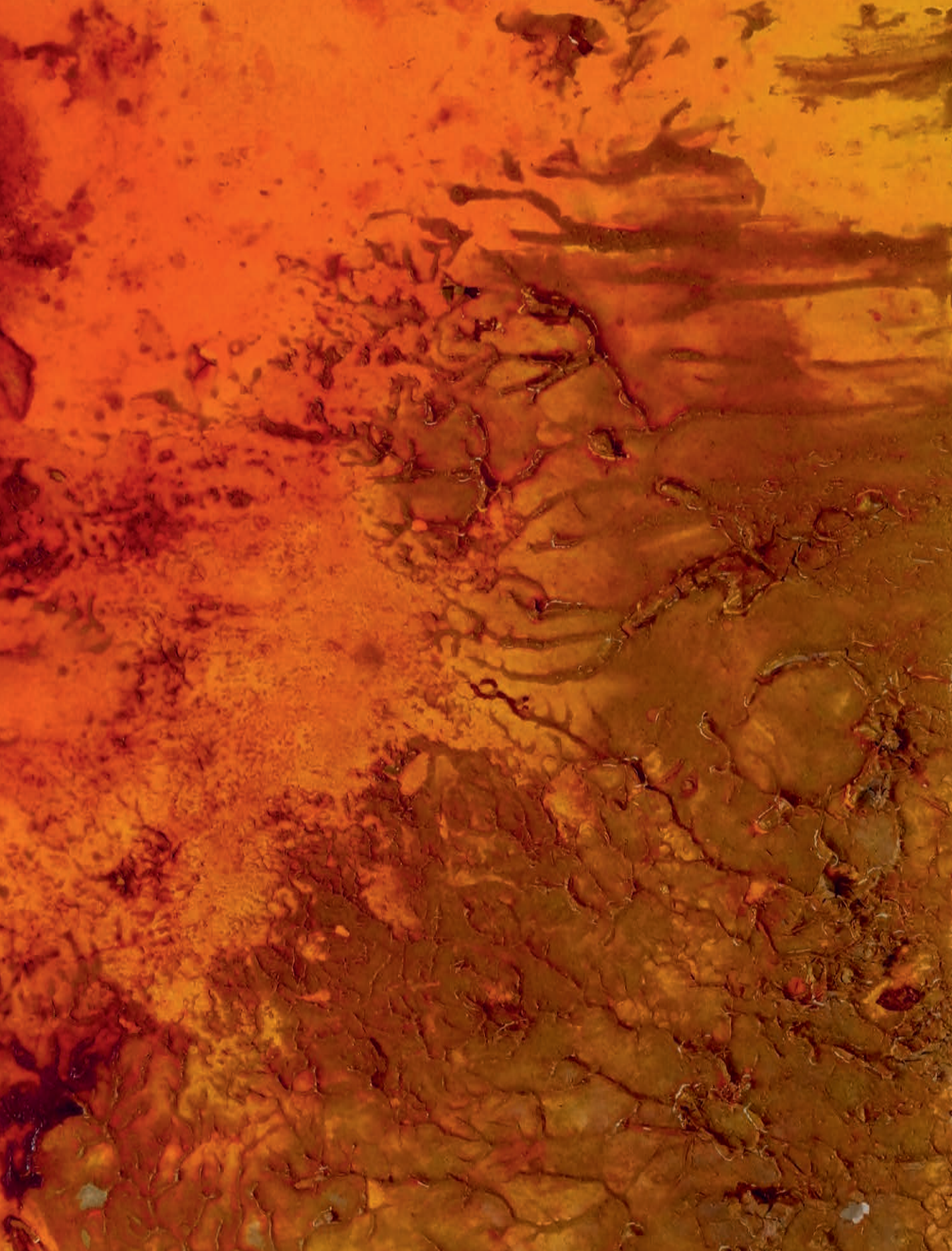














### **Entry SDFOUF-98008: Epic of Gilgamesh, 2100 BCE**

It's said that the Epic of Gilgamesh begins with instructions to examine the foundations of the great walls at Uruk, and there to find a copper tablet box.

You are instructed to take out the secret box, open its bronze lock, take out the tablets of lapis lazuli and read the Epic of Gilgamesh.

The Epic will instruct you to examine the foundations of the great walls at Uruk, and there to find a copper tablet box, and to take out the tablets and begin to read the Epic.

The oldest surviving work of written literature begins by describing a time capsule containing itself.

The oldest work of literature begins with a weird recursive joke.





Time is running out.













It's true that in the final months we discussed whether we should collect more than the records of other people's arks.

We talked long into the night about how to collect the rivers.

What if Noah had wished to preserve the sea?

We wished to preserve the sea. Our ark must contain that which we must escape.

We talked until dawn about how to collect the wind.

One of our number built wind harps. We spent nights on the beach below the whare at Ōraka listening to his strings mapping the gods.

Harmonics climbed in mathematical shimmers as Hine-pū-nui-o-toka and Hine-rōriki sparred across the sand.

We spent days discussing how to preserve the names of these atua and the stippling they wrought on the dunes.

In takurua we ventured out to film snowflakes describing the patterns of the wind. In raumati we photographed thistledown eddying through the fields beside the whare.

'Ka rere kā pūāwai', the saying goes: thistledown flying, news from afar.

The message: the winds were changing. Old weather patterns were disappearing month by month.

It's said that when our tīpuna first sailed from Hawaiki, trade winds aided their journeys to Aotearoa. When the climate shifted in the fourteenth century, the trade winds changed, closing the migratory corridor.

How many arks set sail but are forced to return?