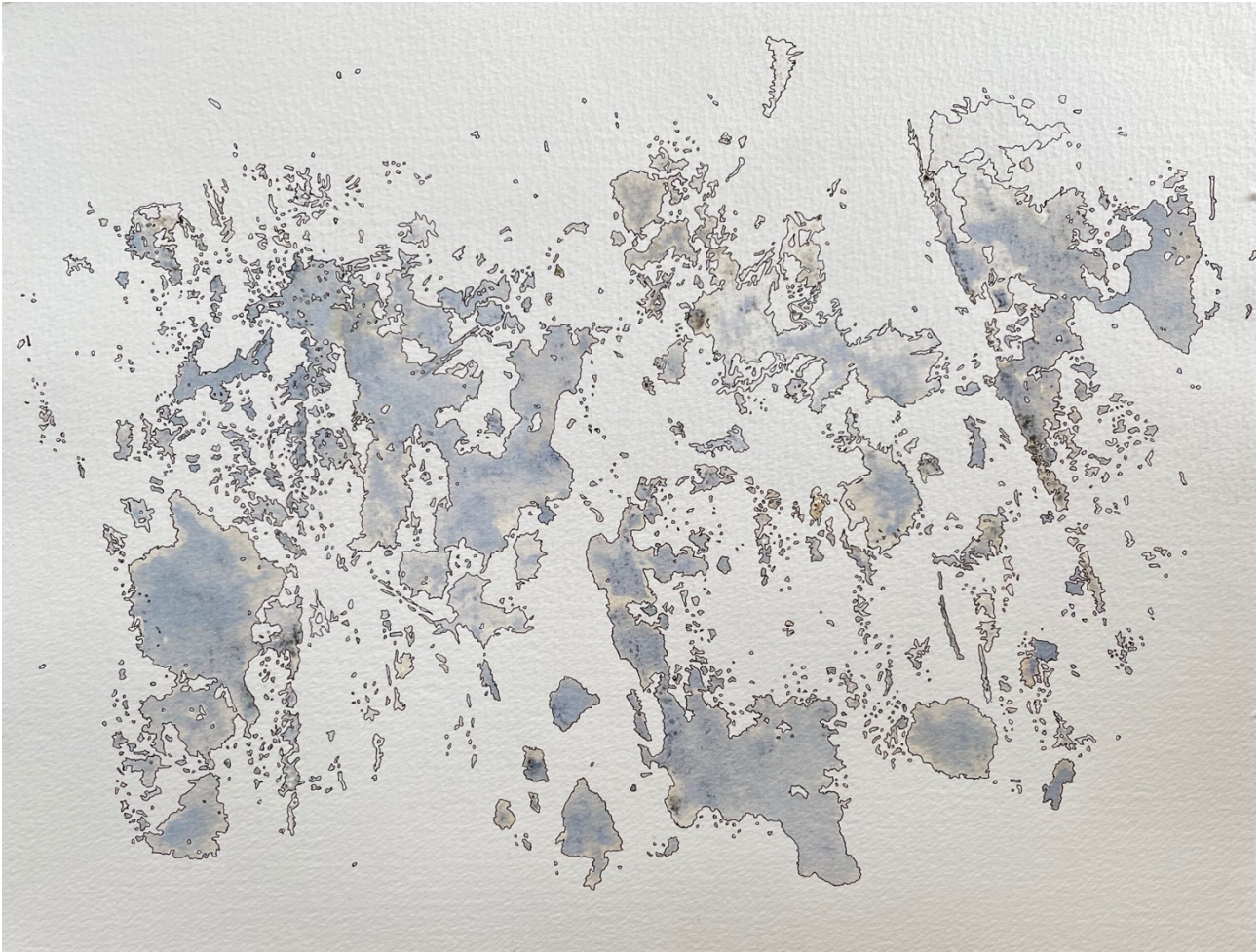


# Groundlines and Puddle Worlds: maps as records of real and imaginary worlds

Ruth Broadbent



*Puddle World IV*  
*Rainwater and ink on paper*  
2021

Before the pandemic and free to roam, I followed lines across landscapes, creating the work *Groundlines*. In lockdown, I made *Puddle Worlds* in the confines of my garden. Both works respond to and record traces of my surroundings: in *Groundlines*, through small square pencil on paper rubbings of the ground at intervals during each journey; in *Puddle Worlds*, through the repeated mapping of a puddle, tracing its outlines in ink, creating possible worlds to freely wander in my imagination. *Groundlines* began with *A Line Across England*, following the chalk and flint network of ancient tracks from Norfolk to Weymouth. The small scale of the rubbings, each one 7cm x 7cm, reflected the limited space available when travelling on a loaded touring bike. As so often happens, my initial plan adapted to the natural pace of the journey:

‘So much for best laid plans: 6B pencil for start and ends of each major track, 4B for significant places and 2B for in-between. Scary barking dog at the end of the track in Norfolk put paid to that plan and a broken lead in the 4B made it impossible to sharpen. So instead, as with the trip itself, plans were adapted and a more flexible system for the realities of a trip on foot or bicycle came into place.’



*A Line Across England*

*2016 - 2018*

*Pencil on paper*

*Each square 7 x 7cm*

As the journey progressed, I valued the moments to sit quietly in a place, from deserted forest paths to busy streets. Even in the noisier spots, I was able to tune into the silence of the space I occupied and carefully make a pencil rubbing, a record of the track at this moment in time, whether sand, mud, grass or tarmac. On the back of each, I noted the number in sequence, location, date, brief description of track and anything else of interest. Each rubbing was then photographed in situ.

By pausing to engage with the surface of the ground, I became more aware of sounds (from the quietest rustlings to loud noises), scents, elements. I thought about what lies beneath the track, deep time, geological strata; of who might have wandered these paths before me, how the paths are now and what they might be in the future. Some tracks remain as rural bridleways whilst others pass through towns, linked by historical trade routes.

This slow travel, setting up camp each night, kept me close to my surroundings, with time for conversations with people met along the route, and detours to places of historical, or geological interest. These encounters with people and places are absorbed into the journey of the line. This line across England led to other journeys: *An Island Line*, which traces a coastal loop of the Isle of Wight (UK); and *Five Rivers Line* through Germany. It has also expanded into studio works based on these journeys. Through workshops, I have shared my methodology and invited others around the world to create lines of walking and to share their encounters through drawing. Together, these walks generate a wider mapping of the surface of the ground, creating a visual language and system of communication that crosses borders and boundaries.



*A Line Across England*  
2016 - 2018  
Pencil on paper  
Each square 7cm x 7cm

Lockdown put planned journeys on hold, so I turned to my garden for creative inspiration. Playing with rainwater as a drawing material, and missing being able to swim in lakes and sea, I stumbled across the idea for *Puddle Worlds* through instinctively tracing around the edges of faint rainwater marks on paper. The image that appeared had an unmistakable connection to world maps. I had inadvertently created an imaginary world I could wander and swim in, which could be an ecological safe-haven, with clean air and water. This led to a series of smaller works diving into each of the elements. I continued mapping the same puddle, recording it over time, with the shifts in the boundaries and borders of each *Puddle World* hinting at the impact of political and climate change.



*Puddle World (the original image)*

*Rainwater and ink on paper*

2021

29.7 x 21 cm

Retrospectively, I can see strong connections between the ways I created *Groundlines* and *Puddle Worlds*, from the physical and material engagement with the ground, a visual mapping of traces and stories of earth, to the explorations of imagination into and across landscapes and journeys. Both bodies of work help me tune into wider connections with geology, history, politics, culture and language, and how we tell stories and construct meanings. Their abstract nature hopefully encourages viewers to interpret them in their own way, finding their thoughts carried somewhere, travelling in their imagination.

My plan for a *Groundlines* journey linking Britain with neighbouring European countries was put on hold during the pandemic. Returning to the UK from Germany after creating *Five Rivers Line*, I was struck by how the water from these five rivers extended across boundaries and borders into the sea and

across into England. I began to plan new journey lines to places in neighbouring countries that cross the sea and are equidistant from my home, highlighting our many connections through an engagement with earth and water. With water increasingly featuring in my work, from *Five Rivers Line* and *Puddle Worlds* to a recent work, *Tide*, my next *Groundlines* will be an elemental journey of earth and water, attempting to capture both real and imagined worlds, stories and histories.



### *A Line Across England*

2016 - 2018

Pencil on paper

Each square 7 x 7cm

### **Biography**

Ruth Broadbent specialises in drawing and sculpture, often combining the two. She is inspired by nature and ecology, and the extension of line in drawing sculpture. Recent work includes a series of map-like imaginary puddle worlds and sand drawings inspired by the tide at the water's edge. She teaches in art centres, colleges and universities, is the founder of walk.draw, creates events for organisations and festivals, and is a member of drawing, walking and ecology artist networks, including Walking the Land, Walking Artists Network and hyphæ drawing collective.

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