

HOLD HANDS SPRING TIDE

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Introduction – Writing and Hold Hands Spring Tide

Artworks often emerge – whether announced or covert - through processes that resist concrete written language. Art-making operates through intuition, insight, negotiation, and moments that feel powerful, strange, confusing and sometimes inarticulate. To analyse such processes through review, essay or exegesis can feel reductive, as though language risks flattening a critical precarity only just navigated. In writing about *Hold Hands Spring Tide (HHST)*, I am aware of this tension, and of the risk of diminishing the peculiarities that shaped its making.

The relationship between art and writing is nonetheless deeply symbiotic. Writing often operates alongside practice as a method of inquiry - one that processes, contextualises, and extends artistic thinking. Artists read, annotate, reflect and produce texts that drift between perception and articulation. Edward Hopper’s remark “saying a thing in paint and saying it in words is quite different”¹ may appear initially to position language as inferior to visual art. Yet Hopper himself wrote extensively about his work, demonstrating that writing does not replace visual practice but rather supplements its comprehension and legacy.

HHST operates as a multifaceted vessel. It holds fragments of my psychic landscape - observations, memories, anxieties, and dreams - translated into extensive embroidered text. Functioning simultaneously as archive, companion, and studio, it supports processes of documentation, reflection, and catharsis. As a portable workspace, *HHST* enables continuity of practice across contexts, while also acting as an investigative tool and autobiographical record. Within its small, textile-bound form (20 × 22 cm, closed), *HHST* condenses and disperses experience, operating as both accumulation and expansion.

¹ Edward Hopper, interview by John D. Morse, June 17, 1959, *An Interview with Edward Hopper*, American Suburb X, June 1, 2011, <https://americansuburbx.com/2011/06/interview-interview-with-edward-hopper.html>.

One of the persistent challenges in writing is lexical limitation. Despite the vastness of the English language, much of what occurs during artmaking unfolds beyond precise terminology. As Roland Barthes suggests, language does not transparently convey meaning but instead produces it through unstable systems of signification. Because of this, meaning is not fixed or stable, it can shift.² Similarly, in art there exists an undercurrent, a sensation or intuition that is often intercepted before it can be fully apprehended - a spark, a notion, sometimes a word, but not always.

My notions of lexical explication and limitation are the reason why *HHST* is so complex with text-based hand-stitched embroidery. As a kid, I used to wonder if every possible combination of a word has been paired practically and sensibly in the history of English writing. I wondered how new words were coined and how old words fell off the pages of use. I was drawn to gaps, words that are unwritten, or not yet articulated. I made up my own languages with corresponding alphabets, testing and complicating my own discourse. And I have felt the same way in making *HHST*. While written words are often my preferred mode of expression, I frequently encountered the limitations of writing when making notes to embroider in *HHST*. To navigate this tension in my artist book, I incorporated both structured and associative forms of language: lists, codes and data sit alongside memory, dreams, stream-of-conscious writing and speculative thought.

The modern English alphabet can be broken down into 4 to 8 fundamental strokes in manuscript - a graphic process corroborating with what little language we truly have at hand. It is also true that an abundance of letters carries a different weight to a select few. The fragmentation, intensity and materialisation of language within *HHST* resonates with Lettrist approaches, a

² Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

French avant-garde movement, established in Paris in the mid-1940s by Romanian immigrant Isidore Isou.³

Writing is a necessity, to make sense, remind, plan, motivate, anchor and reason. Often, I see writing as a life-preserver, an investment marked in safety orange and pitched out to sea, anticipating need. In its making, *Hold Hands Spring Tide* functioned similarly as a safeguard and a point of pressure - a place to hold experience, but also an experiment: how far could I push written communication as practical self-therapy? How much can truly be conveyed, read and received? Writing, within *HHST*, is not treated as a transparent vehicle for meaning, but as a substantial and durational process that both reveals and obscures. The labour of stitching slows language down, interrupting immediacy and introducing gaps between thought, inscription, and reception. In this delay, meaning wobbles – it becomes unstable or fragmented across personal filters of memory, sensation, and analysis. Certain experiences resist clear articulation, while others are altered through fabric transcription. *HHST* therefore does not seek to resolve the question of communicability, but instead inhabits it, positioning writing as both a necessary tool for understanding and an inherently limited system. In doing so, the work foregrounds the tension between what can be said, what is felt, and what remains beyond language.

The Artist Book

When I first properly encountered the artist book format in 2023, I saw an opportunity to check a limit, the speed of experience condensed to writing. I decided to write in the same autobiographic gear I utilized making *LEVO* - a decelerated translation to cloth. This speed modulates process, a metaphor for the effect of chronic illness (both physical and

³ “Lettrism: The Alphabet as Art,” Composition Gallery, accessed March 17, 2026, <https://www.composition.gallery/journal/lettrism-the-alphabet-as-art/>

psychological) and a way to create thoughtfully. The urgency of thought or movement rushes in, but its application is heavily slowed by the output gate. In basic terms, *Hold Hands Spring Tide* possesses the structural features of a book: a cover, pages, a spine with text and imagery within. It was built to be looked at, touched, pages turned. Writing read. Symbols deciphered. It can easily be carried around and revisited. I kept it close to me at home, in hospital and travelling.

Yet *HHST* is an *artist book* - that requires critical distinction. Although books and artist book formats may share a seemingly common formula, the intention of the maker diverges. A conventional book is typically structured around the distribution of narrative or knowledge. An *artist book*, by contrast, adopts the physical armature of the book while functioning primarily as an artwork. Structure, material, and sequence all operate as conceptual devices. In this way, the pages of *Hold Hands Spring Tide* act as sites of interactive meeting, a place where thought, memory, and sensation are logged. The artist book format offers a particularly fitting structure for my diaristic textile practice, expanding on elements first applied in my prior practice-led research.

Unlike a single textile surface, the presence of pages in *HHST* is significant. An artist book allows thoughts, observations, and experiences to unfold over time. There is an act of *unveiling*. Each page operates as an individual moment of inscription, connected to a broader narrative anchored by the spine. This structure mirrors the rhythms of diaristic reflection, where entries accumulate gradually rather than arising to a singular resolution. The turning of the page becomes analogous to the passage of time, or the navigation of shifting mental states. The artist book therefore functions not only as a container for stitched text and imagery, but as a safe framework where knowledge is gathered, revisited and reinterpreted. Owing to pages, the artist book lenses the viewer as a participant, like the hand that activates the crank on the music box.

HHST is unusual in that it is predominantly textile. Most viewers approach book formats with an ingrained understanding of how they operate. Books carry cultural behaviours: they are opened, held, turned page by page, and experienced sequentially. This familiarity provides an accessible entry point into the work, inviting viewers to engage with the object through the instinctive gestures of reading and handling.

But *HHST* is also personal and informal, like a journal or diary. In leafing through *HHST*, there is a sense of voyeurism, or intimacy. Rather than neatly printed pages, the viewer encounters torn bedsheets, pillowcases, and recycled fabrics that have been stitched, layered and marked intensively by hand. The slow labour of embroidery replaces mechanical reproduction, transforming language into a tactile and time-laden surface. In this way, the familiar book structure becomes a framework that holds together fragments of textile, thought, and memory. Suspended between reading and viewing, between textile and text, the familiar format of the book offers orientation, while the material and tactile interventions shift the act of reading into a slower, more embodied encounter.

Textiles

Historically, embroidery is one of the longest surviving creative practices, associated with prestige, labour, and cultural identity. As Rozsika Parker argues, embroidery has been shaped by systems of discipline and gendered expectation, while also offering a space for subtle resistance and expression.⁴ From the preserved linen garments of Ancient Egypt to the disciplined production of samplers in eighteenth-century Europe, embroidery has functioned as both a marker of value and a register of virtue and labour. Such histories position embroidery

⁴ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1984).

not merely as decoration, but as a practice embedded in systems of gender, discipline, and time. Within *HHST*, this legacy is both inherited and reconfigured.

The soft, portable textile work also offers a different kind of intimacy to an audience. Unlike large textile installations that require significant wall space and viewing distance, the small artist book encourages close handling, slow looking, and tactile engagement. Presented at Artspace Mackay as a hands-on experience, the viewer physically approaches the work - turning pages, leaning in, and encountering the stitched words bodily.

Stitching

For *Hold Hands* I aimed to write freely, loosening conventional expectations of grammar and structure. To alleviate the rigidity of conventional composition, I wrote automatically, responding to environment, memory, and event in a manner aligned with Surrealist automatism. During the translation from paper to cloth, further instinctual adjustments were made. Errors were retained, and the labour was sustained through intensive periods of making.

The reverse of each stitched surface reveals a tangled underside—an abstract counterpart composed of knots, threads, and loose registrations. At times, this reverse becomes more visually compelling than the intended surface. It operates as an unintentional form of automatism, exposing process and material contingency. By leaving these undersides visible, I foreground a dual narrative of control and improvisation.

On some of the pages in *HHST* I have also incorporated worry stitching. Worry stitching is a practice I have developed to ward off anxiety by maintaining busy hands. Put simply, a loaded needle is pushed in and out of a textile surface, working little lines of thread into the face of the cloth. When these stitches build up, a dynamic textural exterior is developed, an abstract but pleasing and productive manifestation comes into fruition. I translated some worry stitching

to the pages of *HHST* in the hopes of shifting worry and incorporating a familiar process into a new project.

Historical examples such as the jacket embroidered by Agnes Richter in 1895 demonstrate how stitched language can operate simultaneously as personal record and material expression.⁵ Similarly, Louise Bourgeois frequently described her textile works as acts of repair and recollection, where fabric carried the emotional residue of memory and domestic life.⁶ Embroidery extends outside what can be read. In stitching, each letter carries the extent of its making and the physical attention required to bring it into being, a somatic investment. Most letters must be executed by several individual passes. In this way, the stitching in *HHST* operate in three key layers at once: as language that can be read, as decorative textile and as material marks that tally an embodied process.

Survival

During a period of acute psychological difficulty in 2024, the labour of *HHST* revealed itself as a form of survival. The demands of text-based embroidery—requiring sustained attention and precision—anchored my focus. In hospital, stitching became a means of structuring time, each mark contributing to a slow but persistent continuity. Survival emerged not as a singular event, but as an ongoing practice of attention, curiosity, and making. Obstacles were examined and illness analysed and transposed into material form, with memories held up to the light. In hospital, my embroidery was in many ways a simple means to populating pages with honest wayfinding. The artist book became a site where persistence was rewarded. Survival, in the

⁵ Sammlung Prinzhorn, “Agnes Richter,” Heidelberg University Hospital, accessed March 17, 2026, <https://www.sammlung-prinzhorn.de/sammlung/kuentlerinnen-der-sammlung-prinzhorn/richter-agnes>

⁶ Tate, “Louise Bourgeois,” accessed March 17, 2026, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/louise-bourgeois-2351>

form of curiosity and expression, revealed itself as an ongoing victory, rather than a singular event. The decision to keep working, to keep attending the material, and to remain attentive to the advancing process functioned as a mode of endurance. In this sense, survival is durational, unfolding through repetition rather than resolution. *HHST* required reflection, observation, revision and gratitude. I started discovering satisfying ‘alignments’ – correlations (lucky numbers, repeated phrases...) that slotted nearly into the everyday, guiding. I frequently experienced the warm and friendly grip of déjà vu - running circuits to completion.

The title *Hold Hands Spring Tide* reflects the graces of accumulation. A spring tide occurs when gravitational forces align, producing heightened tidal margins. Similarly, *HHST* gathers moments that accumulate, recede, and return. The act of “holding hands” suggests connection and stability, while “spring tide” evokes forces beyond individual control. While each gesture is little and local in execution; they contribute a larger, lasting ripple across the whole work.

The name *Hold Hands Spring Tide* emerged from a lived moment. While swimming with my partner at a beach down the South Coast, the water was unusually rough. The currents were strong and the movement of the ocean unpredictable, the spring tide. I held my partner’s hand and dived shallowly. Fearing the sea, I saw the sand sift and shift around our legs - but I felt a conflicting sense of being secured within the flux of the water.

In naming my artist book, the memory of the spring tide returned. This notion of alignment held strong with the making of my work. In *HHST*, the embroidered pages function as points of steadiness within a volatile landscape. Just as holding hands in rough water offered a sense of security within movement, the act of stitching provided a means of remaining or surviving.

Hold Hands Spring Tide is predominantly made up of repurposed domestic textiles, surfaces of survival in themselves. Because materials such as bedsheets or pillowcases already exist in proximity to the body and the rhythms of daily life, they maintain familiar sites of personal

recognition and resilience. Here, the fabric operates as a material archive, where gestures of making accumulate alongside the quieter histories embedded within the cloth itself.

Care

Hold Hands Spring Tide is grounded in acts of care. The title of the work itself emerges from a moment of care. A key artefact in the later pages of *HHST* is a scrap of cloth I found abandoned in bushlands nearby to the hospital ward during a patient walk. I spotted it half buried in dirt but left it behind. That night I dreamed about it. I saw the cloth animate, strengthening on the pulse of the forest. But caked in dirt, I knew I couldn't take it on the sanitized ward. So, the next day I returned with my sister, and she brought it back to her home, cleaned and preserved it.

When I got out of hospital, my sister returned the cloth to me, and I stitched it down in *HHST*. To me, it was a fascinating material relic of nature and urbanization butting heads, and a document of my time in the area. But it was also an object of family, of understanding and care.

Stitching is not only reflective but reparative. The act of stitching has become a method of care, sitting with complexities, problem-solving, an embodied process through which anxiety, memory, and uncertainty are slowly worked through. Care exists in the recovery and physical tending of materials, in the patience required for hand embroidery, and in the documenting of vulnerable or fleeting states of mind. The work does not attempt to resolve these emotions but instead holds space for them.

Conclusion

Begun as a document of experience, *Hold Hands Spring Tide* evolved as a personal site where language and time soak a textile substrate. Thoughts are captured, slowed, poked into cloth and held. The pages therefore do not simply record moments of reflection: they embody the labour required to remain attentive to them. Through this process, the work gradually moved beyond its initial function as a form of documentation. Instead, it developed into a practice of endurance, where persistence itself became the central gesture. Stitch by stitch, the embroidered pages accumulate evidence of time spent thinking, feeling, and continuing. In this sense, the artist book does not resolve the experiences that prompted its making. Rather, it holds them, allowing survival to appear not as triumph, but as the quiet continuation of making. What remains is a record of persistence: keep going. Process. Progress. Imbibe and inscribe.

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