



When Language Becomes Material

Words materialise and dematerialise, appearing in exhaled breaths, attenuated phrases, stencilled characters, testy scribbles. Language rolls, passed from one to another. Here are trickles of freewriting, joined-up thinking, not for the sake of productivity – there is nothing efficient about them – but for the sake of seeing what happens when a thought or two is repeated, mantra-like, to the point of illegibility or recited or shuffled or translated or withheld.

Look now.

Here are 20 years of words once performed for others, now read aloud to the scurrying field mice and the passing hedgerows racing by as her eyes scan her unfolding pages. Here is 20 years' worth of sloughing off as the oncoming country lanes are gobbled by the mouth of the car, the watchful headlamps, the waning light. These words surface in shreds, love letters from which something new grows. She turns a corner.

Listen up.

Their words emerge, along with a mirage of symbols pushed from the paper-white wall. Feel the rise and fall of wood pulp pressed hard that flaps in the occasional breeze. A bevelled corner and a perforated line are unspoken invitations to take them with you, reassemble them; pass them over, pass them on. This is instruction by intimation. This is an appeal: 'we all wanted to say goodbye to something' (JL & MM).

Another thought.

Something else. They gather through a briny meeting, an unplanned conjoining of ideas and language. 'We don't know what we're doing' she says (HM). She merges with another: an estuary, an ecotone of giving and taking. Theirs is a watery uncertainty: lungs filled; breaths held and only gradually released. The tide that was once high, has now retreated, leaving behind English and Urdu deposits in smeared clay and blown ash.

In other words.

She writes to herself, carrying her own words across from here to there. She writes to the cranes; she writes as one of them. Can you make me speak crane, she asks? How would my words be uttered through the bodies of others? How would my thoughts *become* in the throat of another?

In more-than-words.

When words do not suffice, we are left with a hand full of hand gestures, overlaid, like this, and a line struck through, and a cut exposed, its mend not just visible but underlined. I am broken. 'I think about things that I forgot to remember' (AM); I think about a succession of words that we might call a sentence, about a sentence without pause, about a thought without rest, spilling onto the floor in a wordless chain of attachment.

They do not appear as they do here, one after another, in a line of disobedient obedience but as a stuttering of signs. They speak, of a place where bodies are safe to work up, to work out, to be opaque, to be implicit, to be difficult, to be inefficient, to be illogical, pooling in the evolution of new intimacies.

When Language Becomes Material explores the material possibilities, traces and manifestations of language in art. The exhibition includes work by Huma Mulji and Emmanuelle Waeckerlé, Young In Hong and Owen Lloyd, Jo Lathwood and Marianne Mulvey, Mary Hurrell, and Amak Mahmoodian.

The exhibition runs between June 25 – July 2026, in The Corridor at Spike Island, is organised by Lizzie Lloyd and Kit Poulson who run WITTA (Writing In / To / Through Art) – WITTA.org – a research initiative supported by UWE Bristol that brings together artists, writers, practitioners and researchers whose work resides at the crossovers between writing and art. WITTA is supported by UWE Bristol and is part of VAMP (Visual and Material Practices Research Group). This exhibition and associated events are generously supported by UKRI Arts and Humanities council through an Arts and Humanities Research Council Impact Acceleration Account (AHRC IAA) award.

Lizzie Lloyd 2026