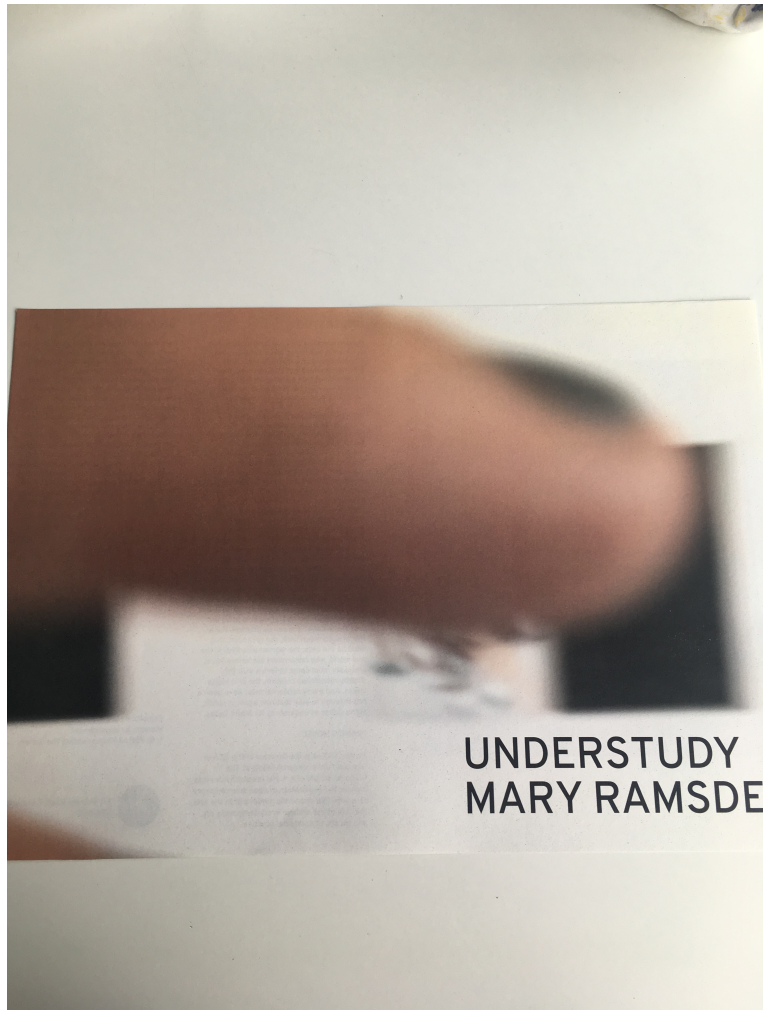


Understudy

Curfew Gallery, Edinburgh, 2018
In collaboration with Francis McKee



Hannah could see the black hole looming. Her quick break had turned into a YouTube binge. A documentary on a fairy tale writer from New York tumbled into clips on magic, then witchcraft and then media witch-hunts. Now she was scanning ten versions of the final Amy Winehouse concert in Belgrade.

Before the black hole Hannah had been playing a Maria Callas album in the background while she worked. Not exactly a performance by the singer nor a studio recording. It was a rehearsal in Dallas from 1957, one of the many bootlegs that circulated through her short musical career. It was great to work to because it captured such a loose, relaxed atmosphere. Backstage noises permeate the whole recording – footsteps, turning pages, overheard conversations, coughs, a musical director announcing the next pieces to rehearse (*Puritaniiii!), laughter. When the record drops into the actual music, there's an immediate shock as the minor chaos of the everyday is sharply replaced with the polished sound of a well-prepared orchestra. Callas herself is a revelation – her voice is more relaxed as it's a rehearsal but it's also a snapshot of the singer in her element. Hannah liked to think of Callas as an unknown woman rehearsing to be the best Maria Callas she can be onstage. For a star of such magnitude, she reckoned, that must be the case: the woman who lives in the real world, who remembers life before fame, gradually must come to terms with this slightly monstrous creation, the diva Maria Callas. And every rehearsal must have been a run-through to play that role again in public. Maria Callas as understudy for Maria Callas.

