
News from *SOMEWHERE*

David Mabb

S*OMEWHERE* is made from Thames and Hudson facsimiles of the Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere; or, An Epoch of Rest, Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance*, by William Morris. All the facsimile pages are pasted in numerical order, recto and verso, across four 5ft x 5ft square canvasses, each of which forms one section of the work.

As any reader of the *Journal of William Morris Studies* knows, *News from Nowhere* is Morris's most famous utopian novel, first published in serial form in *Commonweal*, the journal of the Socialist League. The main character Guest wakes up in a post-revolutionary future world, *Nowhere*, where capitalism has been overthrown and a communist society is in existence.

Printed in Golden type, one of three typefaces Morris designed for the Kelmscott Press, the Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere* fuses together the narrative content with Morris's appropriation and transformation of handcraft from the Middle Ages. The result is a utopian space which rejects late nineteenth-century industrial capitalist society in all its exploitation and ugliness.

The rich decoration of the capitals and type requires the Kelmscott *News from Nowhere* to be looked at as much as read. This visuality becomes the focus of the work *SOMEWHERE*, described above. From a distance the word *SOMEWHERE*, which is almost twenty foot long and textured by Morris's text, appears to glow in front of a black night sky background. On closer inspection, the viewer is able to see that the word 'SOMEWHERE' is picked out by leaving visible selected pages of Morris's text, whereas the pages surrounding them have been overpainted black.

In these overpainted black pages, Morris's capitals have been left unpainted to show through. In contrast, in the pages that are left unpainted to produce the word 'SOMEWHERE', Morris's capital letters have been overpainted, creating small black squares that echo the four black square sections of the work as well as Kazimir

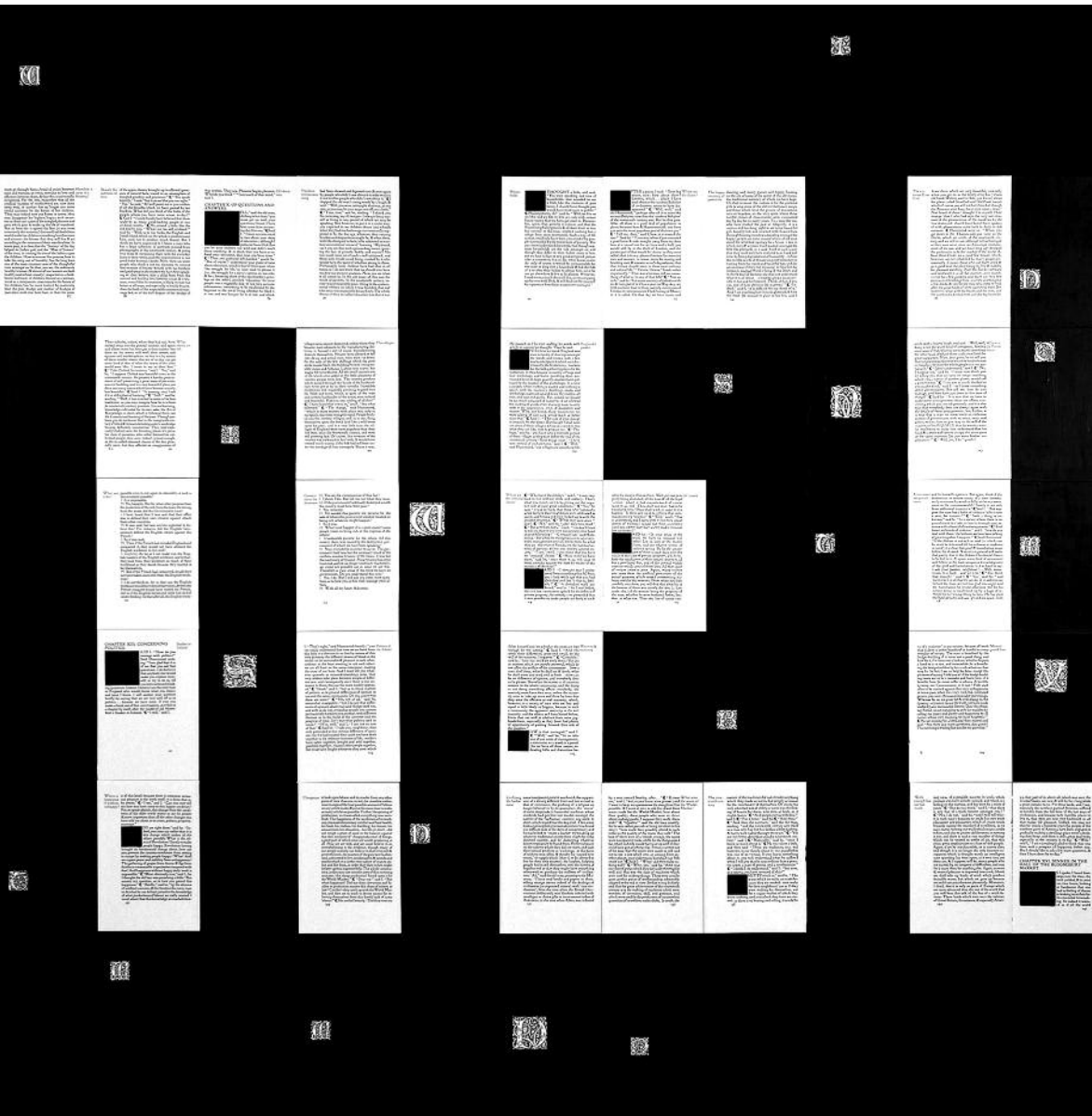
Malevich's *Black Square* (1915). Malevich's painting *Black Square* can be described as a radical rejection of representation in favour of abstraction, which is simultaneously metaphysical whilst at the same time being material and much like a secular icon. The word 'SOMEWHERE' floats within a similarly evocative black space, as if waiting for somewhere in which Nowhere can exist.

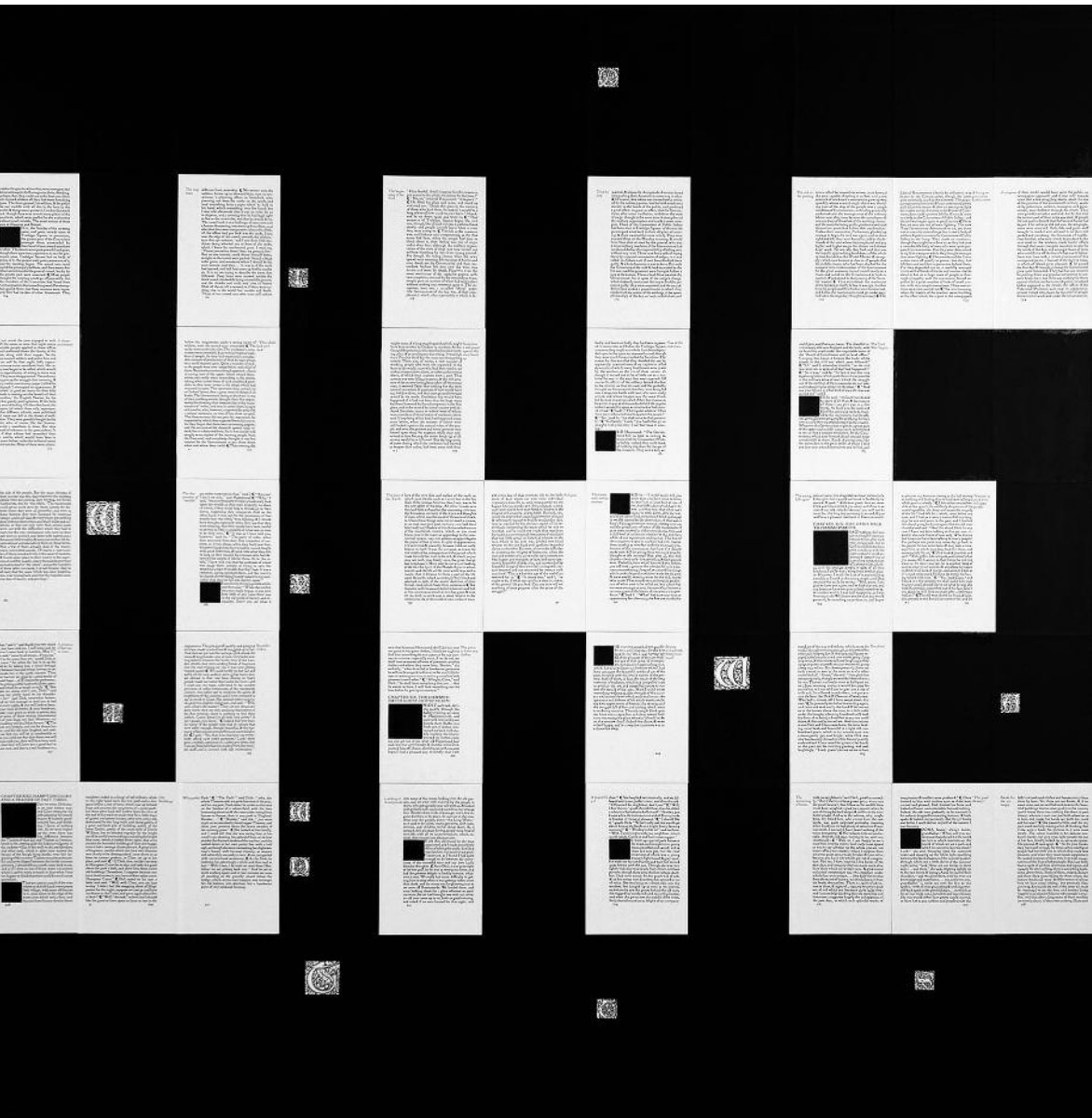
A similar pun on Morris's title is used by Roger Scruton in his collection of essays *News from Somewhere: On Settling*, a collection of writings based on the journalism of the Tory philosopher's life as a gentleman farmer in Wiltshire. For Scruton, who in his preface describes Morris's *News from Nowhere* as being a 'preposterous book', *Somewhere* is a real place connected to the soil by rural traditions and a class structure where everyone knows their place.¹ Unlike Scruton's *News from Somewhere*, *SOMEWHERE* utilises rather than rejects Morris's *News from Nowhere*.

There is a typographic clumsiness in making the large letters of *SOMEWHERE* out of whole pages of the Kelmscott facsimile edition which contrasts with Morris's Golden type. But the painting proposes that it is out of fragments and facsimiles, which can be appropriated from the past and repurposed for the future, that a new somewhere might be made possible, even if there appears nowhere but the night sky for a somewhere at present.

NOTES

1. Roger Scruton, *News from Somewhere: On Settling* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p ix.





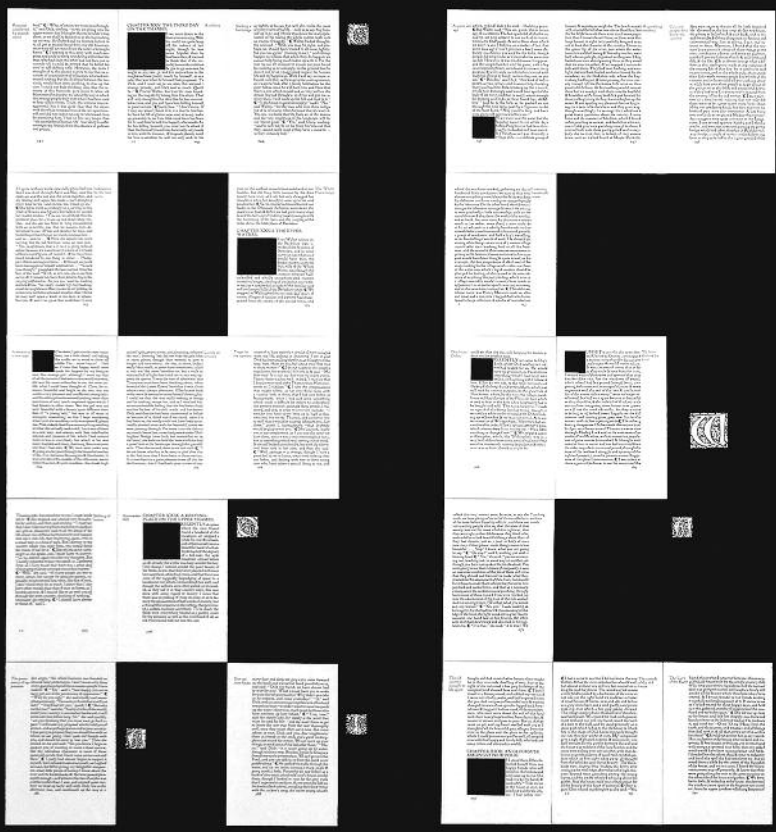


Figure 1, page 92: David Mabb, *SOMEWHERE*, section 1, acrylic on facsimile editions of William Morris's Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere* mounted on canvas. 5ft x 5ft, 2017.

Figure 2, page 93: David Mabb, *SOMEWHERE*, section 2, acrylic on facsimile editions of William Morris's Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere* mounted on canvas. 5ft x 5ft, 2017.

Figure 3, page 94: David Mabb, *SOMEWHERE*, section 3, acrylic on facsimile editions of William Morris's Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere* mounted on canvas. 5ft x 5ft, 2017.

Figure 4, page 95: David Mabb, *SOMEWHERE*, section 4, acrylic on facsimile editions of William Morris's Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere* mounted on canvas. 5ft x 5ft, 2017.

Figure 5, below: David Mabb, *SOMEWHERE*, acrylic on facsimile editions of William Morris's Kelmscott edition of *News from Nowhere* mounted on four canvases. 5ft x 20ft, 2017.

