



**trace**





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# EDITORS' LETTER

The **MODA Critical Review** is dedicated to exploring and presenting artistic research, forms of criticism, and creative work beyond the academic format. Edited by current MA in Modern and Contemporary Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies (MODA) students at Columbia University, each annual issue is organized around a keyword that serves as an origin point for a diverse body of contributions.

A perpetual yet elusive term, *trace* embodies gestures of continuity, ephemerality, and nostalgia. As we trace, leave traces, and trace back, we critically activate opportunities to unearth lived histories or realize prospective futures. Trace, at once a verb and noun, is both conceptual and tactile. It encourages fluid, sincere reflections on the varied potentialities that emerge from narratives left behind and those yet to be found. It embraces the incessant tempo of time, while simultaneously allowing us to dwell in the reverberations of our past, for just a moment longer. These entangled meanings form the foundation for Issue VI of the *MODA Critical Review*.

This year's contributions dissect the term through a myriad of perspectives and approaches. We retrace them here.

**Aristotle Forrester**, whose work can also be seen in the cover design, uses both art and poetry to navigate and reconcile the complex intersections of his family history.

**Ridwana Rahman** visually and textually threads a personal history of her own, seeking answers to how we define and document the home, and how these definitions and documentations mold us in return. Similarly, **James Xue** utilizes Yoyo Zhang's *Labor Lake series* (2023-2024) as a lens through which memories of home are echoed and eternalized.

In parsing through photographic records of place, **Yanai Perry** draws our attention to Jacob Riis and Arther 'Weegee' Fellig's symbolic use of flash when immortalizing New York City and the people who used to inhabit it. **Sharon Cheuk Wun Lee's** postcard series likewise concerns the mobility and plurality of photographic imagery, wherein she investigates power dynamics deeply rooted in the geopolitical history of Cantonese immigrant communities in America. On histories of migration and displacement, **Siyang Dai** and **Zijun Zhao** honor the cultural resilience of the Dameng community; namely, their crafting of the Dundun as an object of resistance countering gentrification.

**Julie Gan** and **Evan Pan** bring us out of the cityscape and into the natural world, shedding light on stories to be told and lessons to be learned from a ubiquitous, yet often inconspicuous, life form: trees. **Harold Garcia V's** artwork responds to similar environmental cues, juxtaposing the natural, delicate splendor of the Everglades with the human actions that endanger it. In moving away from the landscape and zooming in on the debris itself, **Juntao Yang** presents a conceptual, multidisciplinary installation that critiques apparatuses of memory and trauma through herb remnants.

Indeed, memory is a core, recurring theme of interest in this year's oeuvre. **Linda Dai** centers her musings on Mary Kelly's *Lacunae* (2023) and its layered commentary on tensions between loss and remembrance. In the same vein, **Aileen Yujeong Min** unravels how Han Kang's *The White Book* (2016) and Lee Lee Nam's digital art explore the persistence of memory through absence. **Susan Zheng** grapples with a related, liminal paradox in her study of Do Ho Suh's *Jet Lag* (2022) and its treatment of memory as a vessel that is materially empty but affectively full.

These next authors approach trace as material, focusing on its physicality: **Justin Huwe** portrays Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio's *Sepultura de Semillas* (2021) as a dynamic, sculptural embodiment of the cyclic nature of life and death. In turn, **Summer Park** writes on Álvaro Urbano's *TABLEAU VIVANT* at SculptureCenter (2024), which includes an interview with the artist himself on how monuments reinforce and reconstruct notions of impermanence.

Others turn to temporal, interdisciplinary examinations of music and sound. **Lauren Stockmon Brown** analyzes how Miriam Makeba's linguistic and performance-based activism critically challenged Apartheid and promoted Black Consciousness. Through a nonconventional writing structure that mirrors its content, **Jiayin Flora Song** outlines another example of communicative dissent: JJJJerome Ellis's *transCRIPted* (2020) and its dysfluent protest against linear temporality and so-called "fluent" speech and text.

Moving from the public to the personal, **Sophie Taylor** expands on trace as a form of intimate history, revealing how different modes of contact can accumulate and shape meaning within and between bodies. **Agnese Fanizza** traces relationships between bodies as well, targeting the column as a trace of Imperial, ideological power that dictates relationships between our bodies and institutional buildings. This is as public as it is personal.

Taken together, this year's archive of traces feels especially intimate—each work a deeply felt imprint of its maker, and together, a collective portrait of personal histories that both draws from the past but is dependent on its present.

We are deeply appreciative of all of our contributors and readers of this year's issue. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to MODA Director Dr. Janet Kraynak, GSAS student group advisor Lucia Espinera, Department Manager of Graduate Programs Catherine Warden, and Financial Coordinators Faith Batidzirai and Sonia Sorrentini for their continued support of the *MODA Critical Review*. We would also like to thank our graphic designer, Seojin Ahn, for working with us to bring this year's publication to life. Lastly, we want to recognize the generous grants from the Department of Art History and Archaeology and the Arts and Sciences Graduate Council, which were instrumental in making *Trace* a reality.



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Agnese is an art and architectural historian from Washington D.C. and Rome, Italy, with international curatorial and editorial experience in the U.S., U.K., and Italy. Her research tackles constructions of heritage, identity, and memory across the monuments and narratives of modernist architectural histories. Ultimately, she hopes to reveal (both to others but mostly to herself) the intricate, transnational narratives that develop notions of home, land, and belonging. Her current projects trace these frameworks across concrete, columns, and courtyards.

Agnese holds a First Class MA Hons degree in Art History and Management from the University of St. Andrews, and is a final year MODA MA candidate at Columbia University.

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Linda is a curator, writer, and editor currently based in New York. She has worked with galleries and arts organizations in Vancouver (her hometown), Toronto, Los Angeles, and New York City. Her research is grounded in contemporary restorations of cultural and personal memory through photography, film, and everything in between. She is interested in critical and curatorial themes of nostalgia, temporality, and identity—expressed and complicated by the fluidity of history and narrative.

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James is a curator, writer, and editor from Beijing, China, currently based in New York. His research focuses on Asian diasporic paintings, installations, and conceptual arts in the age of globalization, as well as their connections to Asian history and traditions. He worked as an assistant curator and translator for Beijing Fine Art Academy's gallery and contributed to the gallery's export exhibitions in Milan, Berlin, and San Francisco.

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Summer is a writer and editor from Cheonan, Korea, currently based in New York. Her research interests center on contemporary artists working in the traditions of conceptual art and postminimalism, as well as time-based practices within contemporary Korean art. Her writing on art has been featured in publications including *W Korea*, *Marie Claire Korea*, and *Maison Korea*. Before joining Columbia, she served as Associate Director of Public Relations at Kukje Gallery in Seoul. In 2022, Summer founded @crakti, an Instagram channel that shares exhibition insights and reviews from cities around the world.

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Susan is a writer and editor currently based in New York. Her research is centered on global contemporary art and its intersection with and intervention by transnational feminist theories, critical translations, and affect studies. Previously, she has held internships at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Sotheby's New York, Gurr Johns, and Chambers Fine Art.

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received his BES and MSc from the University of Toronto and is currently a PhD candidate specializing in Computer Graphics. His research focuses on procedural animation of gaze, singing, and expressive speech driven by audio. His work has led to two patents, which are used in the video game industry. He has presented and published at leading computer graphics conferences, including SIGGRAPH and SIGGRAPH Asia. Outside of research, he is a professional longboarder who has competed across North America, Europe, and Asia, ranked first in North America and among the top 20 in the world. *Engaged to Julie Gan.*

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## JULIE GAN

is an illustrator, plant scientist, and PhD candidate at Columbia University. Her research explores how global change affects terrestrial ecosystems, with a focus on the Arctic. Passionate about science communication, she strives to make science accessible to people of all ages and professions. She has served as the liaison for PlantingScience for four consecutive years and illustrates for an Indonesian children's book series dedicated to preserving culturally significant animals and plants. Her artworks, created in both digital and traditional mediums, are often inspired by themes of nature. *Engaged to Evan Pan.*

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(杨君陶) is a writer, curator, and artist. Yang's critical writings and artistic practices focus on the traces of the operations of micro power in the specific field of visual and material culture, the visible or invisible conflicts and violence in daily existence, and the organization and fluidity of the proxy of power. Yang is committed to resorting to Speech, sometimes hysterically, to counteract the silent power of ideology and the pervasive political apathy. Yang's current research focuses on planetary cinema and geological thinking, as well as toxicity and catastrophe media. Yang obtained a BA in Drama and Film-and-Television Literature from Wuhan University, followed by an MA in Film and Media Studies from Columbia University.

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## SHARON CHEUK WUN LEE

(b. 1992, Hong Kong; lives and works in New York) holds a BFA, MFA from The Chinese University of Hong Kong and an MFA from Columbia University. Lee's first institutional exhibition was at Tai Kwun Contemporary (HK, 2022). Her work has been exhibited at WMA, HART haus (HK, 2024); Kyoto Art Center (Kyoto, 2023). Commissions include The Listening Biennial (Berlin, 2021), Art Promotion Office (HK, 2021), Peer to Peer: UK/HK (2020), and HKIPF (2018–2020). Featured in ArtAsiaPacific, Harvard Advocate, Artomity, Lee was a finalist for KG+SELECT and the Sovereign Asian Art Prize (2023) and won the WMA Master Award (HK, 2019). Lee approaches images in a sculptural, tactile, and relational manner to address the disappearance of histories, memories, and negotiating with temporality. Her practice bridges organic and industrial materials interrogating cultural dislocation, itinerant belongings and double colonization in women's history, using images and materiality to evoke both vulnerability and resistance.

## SIYANG DAI

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## YANAI PERRY

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## ZIJUN ZHAO

was born in Tangshan, Hebei. His work explores the intersections of furniture design, architecture, and social engagement. Challenging conventional definitions of furniture, he investigates its role as a mediator between people and space, creating objects and environments that reshape human interactions.

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# THE COLUMN AND ITS FASCIST BODIES: A PROPOSAL FOR DECOLUMNIZING INSTITUTIONAL MONUMENTS

AGNESE FANIZZA

*"The strangest thing about monuments is that they are not noticed at all. Nothing in the world is more invisible. There is no doubt, however, that they are made to be seen, indeed to attract attention; but at the same time they have something that makes them waterproof, and attention flows over them like drops of water on a garment soaked in oil, without stopping for an instant."*<sup>1</sup>

Columns are monolithic, but also monumental. Monolith supports but also monuments in and of themselves. Tom Cummins argues that through the continuity of their relevance and use throughout time and architecture, the column communicates a 'historical contingency' between its 'power' of production in Ancient Rome and its reproduction in Modern-day America.<sup>2</sup> If seen in this way, the column, and works of art and architecture on a grander scale, are 'no longer' things 'to be possessed by a guiltless, timeless "gaze," but sites that extend beyond this gaze "to where the tension between art and history is manifested in the present, and where an art historian must engage with the work."'<sup>3</sup> They don't only support a building's weight, but also the ideologies proposed by its institutions. In terms of monumental invisibility, Aaron Betsky considers columns as the 'easiest way to hide a building's faults'.<sup>4</sup> The fault I recover through this essay is the conflation and confusion between memory, history and the column as modern monument. More specifically, I do so through the uncomfortable relationships between two columnized facades, and

their exertion of power, in fascist Rome and Morningside Heights. Ultimately, I argue that it is not only crucial to interrogate the place, position and influence of the column within art historical narratives, but also the ways these narratives have formed and deformed what they communicate and remember.

Adalberto Libera's *Palazzo dei ricevimenti e dei congressi E'42* (1936/1954) and Charles Follen McKim's *Low Memorial Library* (1895-7) constitute, in many ways, a singular point of departure. Both look to Ancient Rome, specifically the Pantheon, to generate similar messages and conditions of fascist ideology and censorship, albeit from different places. While Libera uses modern materials to incorporate column precedents, reinforcing the Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF)'s image as both a continuation and elevation of Ancient Roman glory and Romanità, McKim builds a university on columns that replicate those of the Pantheon, visually distancing Columbia University from its current, contemporary students. Therefore, these architectures have become monuments

to fascism, forming and supporting similar claims. Indeed, architectural forms, just like language, can be easily manipulated and coerced.

Libera's original plan for the *Palazzo dei congressi* did not foresee a colonnade, but a row of purely supportive pilasters. However, upon receiving his competition proposal, the PNF, through Marcello Piacentini, obligated the architect to transform these into columns.<sup>5</sup> The architect was told "se non fai le colonne non si costruisce."<sup>6</sup> The current columns are products of a reluctant compromise from both parties; they are thin, with entasis, and have no capitals (Fig.2). This compromise directly exemplifies how the fascist regime utilized the column to connect new Roman buildings to the influence, grandeur, and legacy of those from the Roman Empire. The columns now act as a conflation between Ancient and Modern Rome, tracing fascism as a continual and naturally evolving phenomenon. Libera's columns are in reinforced concrete, the new material the Rationalists championed as the future of classical form and architecture. This slight material change, as well as its lack of decoration of capitals, roots the column to Modern Rome.

There is another layer to this propaganda. Esposizione Universale Roma (EUR), the exposition that the *Palazzo dei congressi* was supposed to be a part of, was never completed due to the outbreak of WWII and the consequent fall of the regime. After his return to Rome, Libera described what was built of the EUR as 'the graveyard of our defeats'.<sup>7</sup> These columns, then, become symbols and direct invocations of the PNF's generation of a national identity based on the history, memory and glory of ancient Rome, as well as, paradoxically, the failure of this vision for Modern Rome.

In Morningside Heights, around 45 years prior to Libera, McKim also drew from the Pantheon's columns, creating perhaps the most famous columns to be found on an American university campus. The fundamental

metaphor of classical architecture and its historicization is that the column represents the human body. This generates a relationship between bodies and buildings, where the 'body imitates the world [and] buildings imitate the body'.<sup>8</sup> The Low Library colonnade is the icon of Columbia University and the image we are confronted with when the media reports on what has and is happening on our campus and within our institution. This is a difficult relationship to understand as a graduate student standing under the columns of Low Library. The way we feel looking up at these colossal columns is not the same as what was perceived when McKim first erected them. I, for one, feel powerless and tiny.

The importance of this reference lies not in evoking the power, influence, and heritage of the Roman Empire, as with the EUR, but as a mode of creating a classic and timeless monument of leading scholarship. Libera writes that 'tradition does not vanish, but it appears in a different way, so it might be a great force'.<sup>9</sup> This repurposing, according to

<sup>1</sup> Robert Musil. *Pagine postume pubblicate in vita*. Translation by Anita Rho. Turin: Einaudi, p.56.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Cummins. "A sculpture, a column, and a painting: The tension between art and history," *The Art Bulletin* 77, no. 3, (September 1995), p.371.

<sup>3</sup> Cummins, p.371.

<sup>4</sup> Aaron Betsky. "Style Wars: Back to the Classics," *Architect Magazine* [online] 18 December, 2020. <https://www.architectmagazine.com/design/back-to-the-classics-o>

<sup>5</sup> Luca Veresani, in: *Adalberto Libera Opera completa*. Exh cat., Milano and Trento: Electa and Museo Provinciale d'Arte Sezione Contemporanea, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> "If you don't make columns, the building won't be built," Adalberto Libera. "La mia esperienza di architetto," *La Casa*, no.6. 1960.

<sup>7</sup> Paolo Castelli and Damiano Castelli. "Adalberto Libera Between Fascism and the Republic," in Jones, Kay Bea, and Stephanie Pilat, eds. 2020. *The Routledge Companion to Fascist Architecture*. London: Routledge.

<sup>8</sup> Paolo Castelli and Damiano Castelli. "Adalberto Libera Between Fascism and the Republic," in Jones, Kay Bea, and Stephanie Pilat, eds. 2020. *The Routledge Companion to Fascist Architecture*. London: Routledge.

<sup>9</sup> Jas' Eisner (rev.). "The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture by Joseph Rykwert," MIT Press, 1996. *Architectural Research Quarterly* 2, no.1, 1996: 92-93.

<sup>9</sup> Gruppo 7. *Rationalist Manifesto 1*, *Rassegna Stampa*, 1927.



current ideals, political agendas, and relationships between architecture and the bodies they communicate with and to, is what we are experiencing in Low Plaza. In the past two years, the columns of Low Library and the traditions and ideologies embodied in them have taken on a new relational meaning to its student body. At this moment, as we are told that international students should not be on this campus, that certain perspectives take precedence in contemporary scholarship, and that police and ICE officers have more right to stand with the columns than the students. Yet, the columns have relationships with the few that the American government grants the right to stand amongst them, as well as those who have been unjustly sent away, or detained. It means that this tradition of imperialism, presented through power, and censorship, is indeed here to stay, forcing scholarship into a singular direction towards a singular American body type - the column. The bodies and traditions this building has begun to imitate, are anything but our own. These traces of power take on different messages depending on the institution's positions. Yes, tradition does not vanish, but it is co-opted, reformulated, and replicated as a never-ending positive feedback loop. One that goes on without listening to what its students have to say.

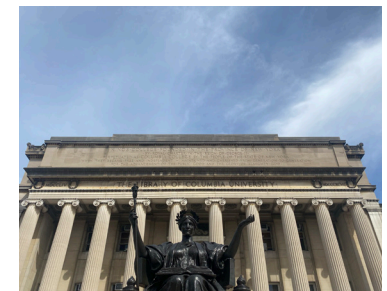
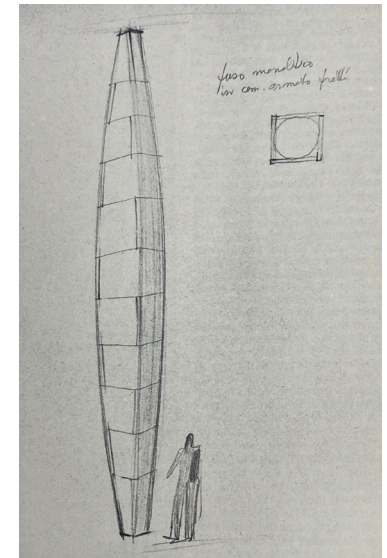
Columns are the traces of empire that still condition and perpetuate the recycling of canonized art histories. Again, tradition does not vanish but we must reckon with why this is the case, as monuments also create memorial doubt, warning us that we are capable of forgetting. As with Libera's *Palazzo dei congressi*, monuments that once immortalized the power, influence, and future of the fascist regime, now have become graveyards for this regime's failure. Now, with the return of right-wing governance in Italy, Libera's columns are generating another memory and message, one that is rooted to the present, and potential future. What will become of these columns, under these leaders? The situations are separated by the Atlantic Ocean but the leaders' agendas are terrifyingly and infuriatingly similar. The column's

perseverance across time, space, and changing powers has monumentalized history's nonlinear and constructed central canon. As time and ideologies move towards fascism, we are left to consider who our work and ideas are benefiting, and whether they will see beyond Low Library's columns.

By centering the column, I have not intended to revisit the foundation of classical architecture, but to instead consider, visualize, and condemn how its forms and bodies have been enacted to communicate narratives of history, power, and belonging that not only strip the freedom of speech away from its students, but also endanger their livelihoods, critical thinking, and hopes for academia. But, what if we were to erase these columns? We must notice these monuments and consequently repurpose them. In fact, for Manfredo Tafuri, "one should always address the critique of ideology towards his or her own ideology, not the ideology of his or her enemy. What needs to be de-ideologized is precisely the cultural context within which one must fight."<sup>10</sup> These words, even coming from one of the most canonical Italian architectural theorists, could be considered as an early trace of decolonial theory. Similarly, they gain a greater importance as we write from and decolonize Low Library, our shared, tension-filled point of entry.

Columns are monolithic. They are monumental. They are also seen, felt, and, now, condemned. This has been my attempt to begin to drench them, and open a case to work towards their possible erasure. What can we make of a world without the column? What would it mean to live and write art history in that world?

<sup>10</sup> Manfredo Tafuri, interview by Luisa Passerini, *La Storia come Progetto*. Los Angeles: University of California and the Getty Center for the History of Art Humanities, 1993, p.44.



**Figure 1:** Adalberto Libera, Palazzo dei ricevimenti e dei congressi. Source: *Adalberto Libera Opera completa*. Exh cat., Milano and Trento: Electa and Museo Provinciale d'Arte Sezione Contemporanea, 1989.

**Figure 2:** Adalberto Libera, sketch of columns for Palazzo dei ricevimenti e dei congressi. Source: *Adalberto Libera Opera completa*. Exh cat., Milano and Trento: Electa and Museo Provinciale d'Arte Sezione Contemporanea, 1989.

**Figure 3:** Low Memorial Library, 2025. Photograph by author.

**Figure 4:** Low Memorial Library, 2025. Photograph by author.

# ALSO RIGHT NOW ALSO RIGHT NOW

RIDWANA RAHMAN



If you Google "history of photography of people in front of their property," the first suggestion will be AI-generated. It will say, "the practice of photographing people in front of their property, often seen as a symbol of wealth and home ownership, became popular in the late 19th century, particularly between the 1880s and early 20th century, as photography became more accessible with the introduction of cameras like the Kodak, allowing families to document their prosperity by posing in front of their homes and land."

After that will be a link to a blog written by Michael J Douma, who is a historian interested in ethnic groups, migration, slavery and emancipation, as well as the liberal society of markets and the law. Michael will write about Dutch-influenced brick houses in Michigan, and the single family portrait framed and kept inside the home. Michael will say that he believes the tradition of family portraits in front of their houses was replaced by family portraits on picnics with their automobile in the 1910's and 1920's.

The third result will be Quora, with the question "when did people stop taking pictures outside in front of their homes?" – to which Michael Kay will give the first answer.

Michael Kay is a 1969 graduate of University of Wisconsin-Madison and Phi Beta Kappa Society with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Economics, and is married to a Mega-Firm Litigation Attorney since 1969, and lives in Ankh-Morpork. Michael will write that families took photos outside in front of their houses because the lighting was even and the porch let them stagger two rows of people. He will write that the accessibility of photography is when people stopped.

The second and only other answer will be from T Evans, who is at a complete loss for words and is working as a motion imaging technician and consultant at Various, Consultant, and who studied Transubstantiation and movement therapy at UC Santa Cruz Astrophysics, and who lives in Earth. T will say, "Never. People are taking pictures in front of their homes right now.

Also, right now.  
Also, right now.  
Also, right now.  
Also, right now.  
Also, right now.  
Also, right now.

Etc."

If you want to build a driveway, you have to put an image of your mother and your aunt before a dinner party in front of her house in New Jersey on your studio wall and look at it every day for two months straight. You have to think about the textures, the colors, the silk against concrete, unsure why you're doing it. You have to take the image down, carry it around in a journal with you, talk to Giorgia about it, put it back on your wall, collect screenshots of internet forums, realize you have to make a driveway, that's the only way.

You have to order thirty-five 80-pound bags of concrete and while you wait, you have to watch a lot of YouTube tutorials made by accounts that sound like *Concrete Lover* or *The Concrete Expert Friend* or *Nothing But Concrete*. You have to learn how to thin out concrete (acrylic fortifier), how to smooth out a square of concrete (scree with a 2x4 wooden plank), if you can add a new layer of concrete to an old one (yes). You have to talk to Colm and Rama and Roma about it,

you have to talk to Anna about it, who says their girlfriend's grandparents have a framed photograph of their own house inside their entryway.

If you want to build a driveway, you have to realize you have to make one hundred square foot tiles actually, and then you have to realize you could have just ordered them ready-made, and then you have to realize that the whole point of it is to hand-make a driveway and move it from your studio into a gallery, so you mix a starter batch of concrete by hand, just with a wooden plank.

If you want to build a driveway, you have to figure out how to make art about a photograph of your mom and her sister without making art about your mom, or about immigration, or about diaspora. You have to love concrete so, so much that you must find a way to make art with it, and maybe you're just making excuses and finding shortcuts, but maybe this must be the piece.



Also right now also right now  
2024  
Concrete  
Dimensions variable





# JET LAGGED

SUSAN ZHENG

Jet lag drapes oneself in liminality, between here and there.

*I am here.* But your body, unmoored and disoriented, fails to register its very dislocation, deferring itself into an ineffable time-space of indeterminacy. *I am still there.* The clock's hands move forward, yet your body clings onto the memory of another time zone, tied to a disjointed rhythm that no longer matches your reality, your present. Every dawn becomes one further away from there, while each dusk brings you one closer to here. You are caught in between places, times, selves. *I am no longer there.*

A sculpture made at an early post-pandemic moment, *Jet Lag* (2022) distills the deferred movements and temporal drifts experienced by the Seoul-born, London-based artist Do Ho Suh during his lockdowns. On view at his most recent solo exhibition with Lehmann Maupin in New York City, more than four hundred polyester replicas of household items were mounted across an entire gallery wall and assembled in the shape of an airplane (Fig. 1). Held together and supported by stainless steel, Suh's installation of objects, or what he calls *Specimens*, functions as a sculptural collage that refuses to be grasped in whole. The form of *Jet Lag* demands embodied movements from its spectator, who, through a to-and-fro process, finds the airplane gradually dissolve in their visual field and disassemble into scattered pieces of familiar objects made strange. Doorknobs, sockets,

intercoms, landlines, light switches, cupboard handles, bathroom fittings, wall lamps—ubiquitous objects once made to be durable and functional are instead given a diaphanous quality, rendered ephemeral and fragile with sculpted fabrics (Fig. 2). As Suh empties and makes obsolete their typical utilitarian value, what supersedes is an aesthetic force: parts and pieces decontextualized from the everyday reality of domesticity and ritualized, if not spectacularized, in the quintessential white cube of modern art. Imagining an expressively vibrant palette for his semitranslucent *Specimens* with fabric, the sculptor reinvents the once-immobile as detachable and transportable, thereby representing the mundane as an elegiac sight of reverie.

Over the course of his peripatetic journey, Suh has marked numerous destinations as home: Seoul, Providence, Berlin, New York, London—and the list continues. Each piece in his long-running *Specimen* series is modeled at a one-to-one scale from household objects found in his past homes and studios, and those comprising *Jet Lag* are no exception. But unlike the typical approach to exhibiting Suh's *Specimens*, which are often grouped according to the type or source location of their prototypes and oftentimes framed behind glass, *Jet Lag* not only brings together productions across both categories, but also merges isolated pieces into a fluid, overlapping, and interconnected assemblage. Therein, Suh collapses multiple temporalities

and geographies into a materially mediated conflation of personal pasts, suspended on the wall without any frames or pedestals to delimit its boundaries. As such, the magic of the art object conventionally endowed by the presentational frame is obliterated and, in turn, replaced with an archival aesthetic and a condition of extendibility. That is to say, in this non-linear archival accumulation without beginning or end, nor logical coherence immediately legible to the eye, it becomes possible for one to imagine the removal, addition, or exchange of individual *Specimens*. The plane accommodates new places, new times, and new selves yet to unfold.

Suh started receiving critical and curatorial attention in the 1990s amidst the rising tides of global contemporary art, as larger questions of border, immigration, displacement, and diasporic identity took on a newfound urgency in post-Cold War cultural discourses. His nomadic life as an expatriate artist in the Korean diaspora, coupled with his earlier interests in making monumentally scaled architectural replicas of homes, had an appeal that earned him international cachet in the nineties art world. While *Jet Lag* still accords with Suh's longtime interests in home, it, too, yields an affective power that veers away from autobiographical particularities and toward a universal condition—that of loss.

The pandemic, a global crisis that registered loss as both personal and collective, has reconfigured the social world and restructured the human experience in a curious yet paradoxical way. During those years, we had become a world bounded and bonded by collective trauma: the number of deaths broadcasted on news and social media, that, for quite some time, never ceased its upward spiral, the stories from the medical frontlines that never failed to break our hearts, and, the turbulent, catastrophic, overwhelming feeling of unknowability. All the while, we were atomized through confinement and estrangement, thrown into a heretofore unprecedented state of isolation and separation. Across the globe, social injustices thrived rampantly in a moment of vulnerability;

human touches became luxuries at a time of social distancing and lockdowns; quarantines and travel bans broke promises, families, and relationships at a juncture of life-and-death. We as humans, were conditioned by loss.

*Jet Lag*, coming out of this suspended time, encapsulates not our wound but where and how we once lived with that wound. These domestic objects—often submerged in the cadence of pre-pandemic routine—took on a new weight. On the affect of objects, feminist scholar Sara Ahmed relays:

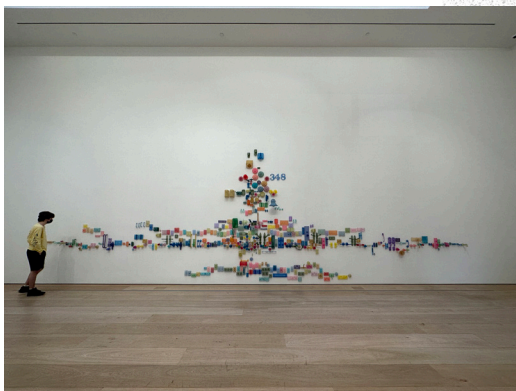
*We are moved by things. In being moved, we make things. An object can be affective by virtue of its own location (the object might be here, which is where I experience this or that affect) and the timing of its appearance (the object might be now, which is when I experience this or that affect). To experience an object as affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object but to what it is around that object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival.*<sup>1</sup>

Like the rest of us trying to navigate our day-to-day through loss during the pandemic, Suh lived among these objects longer than ever, not only using them but dwelling with them, their quiet endurance and still company. These soft, spectral replicas do not reproduce the home so much as they evoke its affective sediments: the comfort in repetition, the claustrophobia of confinement, the tenderness of care. They recall the pandemic household not just as a site of containment, but as a paradoxical memory-space that brought us both escape and isolation, belonging and estrangement—a household of both presence and loss. But Suh does not merely offer us nostalgia either. Rather, the plane maps out our present, how we carry the residue of lived lives within us when our bodies were marked by the temporal disjunctures of the pandemic, and our minds still lagging behind the so-called recovery.

Since most of the spaces evoked by Suh's objects were no longer accessible to him at the time of production, Suh had to realize



each sculptural replica based entirely on his memory and prior measurements. Formally, the impermanence of their materials and the flimsiness of their textile surfaces haunt the spectator with an unfathomable sense of unattainability, while resurrecting that time- and site-specific intimacy. By nature, *Specimens* are traces of life whose presence is tethered to a perpetual absence: The doorknobs, the light switches, the landlines—once touched with such regularity that they have seeped beneath one's conscious thought—residually allude to a physical site beyond reach, now unable to hold the work. They linger as faint signatures of being while their origins dissolve and recede into memory; they gesture toward and hold the weight of their referents, but only through the absence thereof; they are here, but also hover *there*, in a locatable yet unreachable elsewhere. However impalpable the passage of time may feel, *Specimens* delicately cradle that decay and evanescence, for they bear witness to a life once lived—or, lament a life now gone. More than a spectacle of objecthood or a ritual of quotidianism, *Jet Lag* beholds Suh's relationship with loss, as much as the sculpture itself is beheld on the gallery wall by everybody and every body who has known loss, however varied in its shape or form.

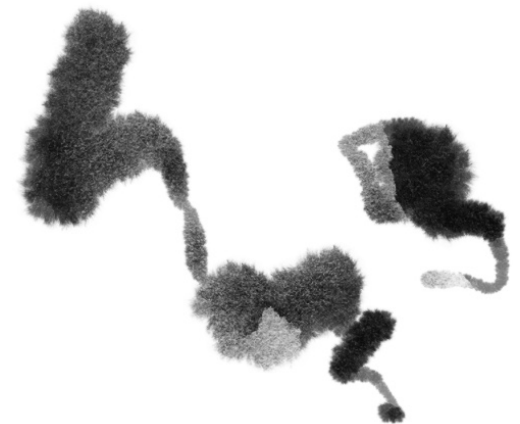


1 Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 25.



**Figure 2:** Do Ho Suh, *Jet Lag*, 2022 (Detail). Polyester fabric, stainless steel, 130.64 x 412.57 x 1.17 inches (331.83 x 1047.93 x 2.98 cm). On view at *Do Ho Suh*, Lehmann Maupin, New York, September 8 - November 5, 2022. Photo by Susan Zheng.

**Figure 1:** Do Ho Suh, *Jet Lag*, 2022. Polyester fabric, stainless steel, 130.64 x 412.57 x 1.17 inches (331.83 x 1047.93 x 2.98 cm). On view at *Do Ho Suh*, Lehmann Maupin, New York, September 8 - November 5, 2022. Photo by Susan Zheng.



# ANIMATING TRACE IN EDDIE RODOLFO APARICIO'S SEPULTURA DE SEMILLAS

JUSTIN HUWE

Originally standing at seven feet tall, Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio's 2021 sculpture *Sepultura de Semillas* towered over most people who stood before it. The dark red cube was seemingly perfect: crisp edges and flat surfaces, the giant sculpture immediately evoked a sense of awe. But throughout its three-month display at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, the two-thousand-pound monolith slowly crumbled. Day after day the sculpture collapsed in on itself (Fig. 1), the three-year process of crafting the work ending with a lumpy puddle by the exhibition's close.

Decay was the goal. Made from prefossilized amber, the cube melted naturally from the sheer force of gravity and room temperature heat. As the amber deteriorated, and seven feet became six and then five and then four, artifacts contained in the cube—rocks, leaves, plates, knives, legal documents, a car wheel, and more—drifted around, fluctuating. Gradually, the cube's walls bowed outwards under its own weight, and objects poked out from the amber. A plate, for example, dangled perilously from the cube's side, half stuck in the amber wall. These organic and inorganic objects were gathered from the L.A. Salvadoran community Aparicio calls home. Encased in the amber, the artifacts gained a life of their own as they slid and pressed past each other, the stories attached to each object simultaneously colliding.

I encountered *Sepultura de Semillas* several times in fall 2021 working as a museum educator. Each time I saw the sculpture, it looked different, and no two audiences I toured it with got the same experience. Words frequently used to describe the work in October, like "monolithic" and "massive" and "perfect," were no longer uttered come December. Instead, "fragile" and "precarious" dominated. On each tour, the spectators disrupted the sculpture's linear decay, freezing the artwork in time and memory with adjectives that were ultimately ephemeral, just like the piece itself. Moreover, the sculpture's constantly shifting state simultaneously created a changing affective relationship between spectators and the artwork, although this change required multiple visits to recognize given the slow pace at which the work decayed. In my own encounters with the sculpture, the sense of sheer awe I initially felt toward the piece eventually transformed into a complicated mixture of grief and pity.

During the cube's collapse, one of its most striking features was how its sides bulged out in ways resembling a pregnant person's belly (Fig. 2). These four "baby bumps" each contained ephemera, in essence becoming both physically and metaphorically pregnant with history. Notably, the sculpture's title translates to "sepulchre of seeds"; in essence, it is a tomb—a place of burial—for

reproduction. While "tomb" certainly invokes death, seeds bring to mind new life. There is a feeling of contradiction—the tension between death and birth—but also cyclicity, as death is followed by the promise of new beginnings. Despite amber's famously fossilizing effects, *Sepultura de Semillas* created new life by birthing traces of LA's Salvadoran community as the amber decayed over time.

Oftentimes, ephemera is thought of as "stuck" in a specific temporospatial moment, as a marker of past happenings and histories contained within a present object. But the amber's melting process challenges the static status of ephemera, instead allowing the remnants of human life to move and take on a life of their own. The sculpture makes us ponder: what does it mean to think of trace as living, instead of something left by the living? While the entombed artifacts suggest human stories—the legal documents of immigration journeys, for example, or the plates and cutlery of meals shared around a kitchen table—the objects are now animated long after they've been discarded by the humans who once used them. But how does animating trace create new stories, and not simply reveal old ones?

The amber's slow collapse facilitates—perhaps paradoxically at first glance—a kind of post-human birthing process where the traces of human activity now take on a life of their own. Now, the ephemera has gained its own sense of agency, while the original humans who used the objects have faded away. In an interview, Aparicio spoke about the significance of the sculpture's capacity for movement. "I love the idea that the piece moves because that's how memory works," he said. "Memory is never fixed. It's always in motion. Nothing ever stays in the same state and this idea to try to preserve it is the colonial impulse to try to control."<sup>1</sup> The moving amber counters the notion of an immobile past—a static history—by conveying the dynamic nature of memory. The sculpture renews the seemingly static past by emphasizing the unfixability of memory. By bestowing the ephemera with the capacity

for movement, Aparicio not only unfreezes the memories contained within these objects, but creates new ones for the spectators who view his work.

Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz has offered a definition of ephemera as "trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor."<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, *Sepultura de Semillas* uses trace as its material building blocks: the car wheels, cutlery, and legal documents that remain as evidence of human life become aesthetically repurposed. But Aparicio takes Muñoz's definition and goes a step further, animating the air itself that surrounds the rumor. Conceptualizing trace as rumor means understanding ephemera as a suggestion—it gestures toward potential stories, toward the possibilities of a life lived. By casting these objects in moving amber, Aparicio physicalizes the gestures of these objects. We see both the immense power and fragility of the connections humans hold to objects through memory, and Aparicio troubles this connection by allowing these artifacts to move through the forces of nature, untouched directly by man.

Throughout the months of decay, I began to tower over the cube instead of the other way around. Eventually, it became evident that the cube was in fact hollow. The four walls were about six inches thick, but there was no roof on the box and certainly nothing inside it (Fig. 3). Thus, the illusion of the sturdy, solid, perfect—and timeless—cube melted away just like the cube itself. The decay of this illusion reflects the hollowness and fragility of memory: while certain events or objects or sensory experiences stay crystal clear in one's mind, the connective tissue between these memories often fades away, leaving the feeling of a gap, although it can be difficult to pinpoint what exactly is supposed to fill these gaps.

<sup>1</sup> Hammer Museum (@hammer\_museum). Instagram post, November 26, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CWv8tbtgVQ/>.

<sup>2</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press, 2009), 65.



After touring the sculpture for several weeks, it left my life just as quickly as it entered. A new reality quickly emerged: the only way to still experience *Sepultura de Semillas* was through its traces—photographs, videos, museum wall text, artist interviews and statements, or even an article like this one—because the sculpture, forever ephemeral, fully melted into a puddle of amber. Now, all that is left of the sculpture are more traces.

And yet, Aparicio offers another possibility. In a past statement about *Sepultura de Semillas*, he said: “This piece can be re cast [sic] over and over again in a cycle of rebirth that honors the cycle of life rather than trying to overcome it.”<sup>3</sup> In essence, he offers the potential for more memories—for traces of the past to collide in new ways, to move once again, in front of new spectators, and to create more memories. Ultimately, at a macro level, Aparicio is tracing the very cycle of human experience itself—of life, death, memory, and the everyday movements that make this all possible.



**Figure 1:** Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio, *Sepultura de Semillas*, front view, 2021. Prefossilized amber, clothing, glass, ephemera, ceramics, 84 x 60 x 60 in., Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA. Photographed by Justin Huwe.

<sup>3</sup> Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio, (@eddirodolfoaparicio). Instagram post, October 15, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVDh2qeFgKC/>.



**Figure 2:** Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio, *Sepultura de Semillas*, side view, 2021. Prefossilized amber, clothing, glass, ephemera, ceramics, 84 x 60 x 60 in., Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA. Photographed by Justin Huwe.



**Figure 3:** Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio, *Sepultura de Semillas*, top view, 2021. Prefossilized amber, clothing, glass, ephemera, ceramics, 84 x 60 x 60 in., Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA. Photographed by Justin Huwe.



# REHOMING DUNDUN

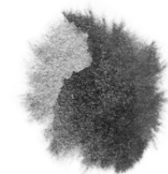
SIYANG DAI & ZIJUN ZHAO



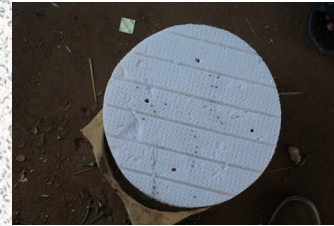
*Rehoming DunDun* is a collaborative initiative with CBC and Bungee Space that uses "adoption" as a co-creation approach to share stories of displacement of the Dameng community in Zhengzhou, China, and to reflect on the repercussions of urbanization and gentrification. DunDuns are handmade stools crafted by the villagers of Dameng, made from abandoned heat insulation foam from the construction site that was once their home. In reaction to the demolitions, the villagers made DunDuns as a subtle mode of resistance. Carrying DunDun to walks, sitting on it while chatting with old friends in the new neighborhood, Dameng villagers maintained a rhythm of their lives on and with it. We collected handmade DunDuns from Dameng Village, hoping to find new homes for them in New York.

Objects are embedded in the traces left by their producers, users, and all other agents who have co-authored a biography for them. A successful adoption does not necessarily imply a unidirectional process of relocation, but rather a reciprocal one in which both the adopter and the adoptee experience transitions.

"Adoption" refers to the act of engaging and understanding DunDuns as not merely decorative commodities but storytellers of the struggles and losses of the villagers. *Rehoming DunDun* brings forth and addresses such processes that displaced the villagers and DunDuns from their original contexts. The project is not just about relocating stools, but also about connection: It fosters meaningful connections, bringing people, places, narratives, and cultures into dialogue through each DunDun. To visualize this sense of connection, all adopters are asked to record their interactions with their DunDun and its active participation in new spaces and socio-cultural contexts. We hope to share DunDun's New York stories with villagers back in Dameng as a means of exploring the notion of "giving back to society."



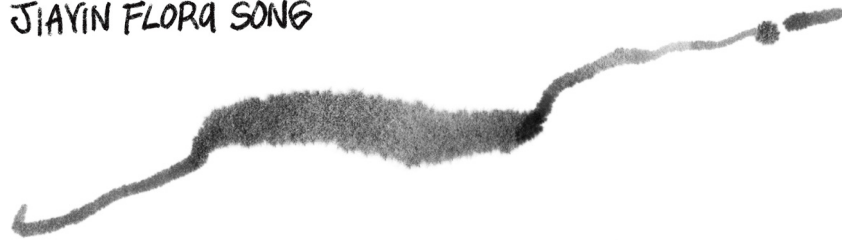






# TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE TEMPORALITIES: ON JJJJEROME ELLIS'S *transCRIPted* (2020)

JIAYIN FLORA SONG



Like a keyboard smash, oceans of letters stretched across the screen. A webcam feed: a bearded person with headsets, focused. The Zoom aesthetics of it all. Words appeared on a TextEdit document as sporadic audio echoed in a room on the second floor of the Zimmerli Museum. Hearing and seeing words like "timing"

"fluency"

and "speech language"

struck me. This was *transCRIPted*, by JJJJerome Ellis, an artist, poet, and musician who investigates how dysfluent speech disrupts linear time and affords alternative temporalities. Ellis screen-recorded a live transcription of their reading at Poetry Project in 2020, their stutters included, represented by the repetition of letters. (Fig. 1) Bookended by OBS Studio's recursive windowing, an infinite-mirror-like phenomenon that occurs when the software captures its own display, *transCRIPted* is an eloquent declaration of nonperformance. (Fig. 2)

Ellis speaks with a glottal block, a form of stutter marked with gaps of unpredictable occurrences and durations. The reading being transcribed in *transCRIPted* discusses the paradox of the two-to-three-minute time limit for each performer at the event: although the rule aims to provide nonhierarchical a space for expression, it bears the shortcomings of generalizing speech, problematizing the assumed ubiquity of temporal access. Contrary to the lush sonic landscapes in Ellis's album *The Clearing* (2021) and their other performances, *transCRIPted* is stripped back: Ellis places the contested nature of fluent speech centerstage, troubling the presumed neutrality of transcription by rendering the labor of communication visible. In doing so, they imagine alternative temporalities against the violence of hegemonic, fluent time.

.....

There is a difference between "dysfluent" and "disfluent." The lexical sleight of hand favored by scholars of dysfluency jettisons a medicalized, pathological framing in order to reclaim the perceived moral transgression of deviating from fluent speech, thereby asserting the political dimension of stuttering.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, "to stutter is to disobey, to overstep the narrow boundaries of able-bodied speech."<sup>2</sup>

Ellis conceptualizes the gaps in their speech as "clearings." Echoing their wayfinding in Virginia's deciduous woods as a child, the metaphor traces the expansiveness and openness of Ellis's glottal blocks.<sup>3</sup> If fluent speech (and by extension fluent time) is a path through a forest, when I stutter I come into a clearing where the path temporarily disappears. The clearing opens the present moment.<sup>4</sup>

Fluent time ruptures in the clearing.

Ellis's critical characterization of the clearing evokes the concept of crip time, which articulates the multiplicity of temporal experience among disabled communities. Time may slow under

the

weight of chronic pain,

or erupt/in/spontaneous/bursts.

As with the uneven distribution of physical access, temporal access remains a contested terrain. Alison Kafer asserts, "Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded... rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds."<sup>5</sup> Thus, crip time demands a reorientation of time, pushing back against the ableist structures that regulate pace, productivity, and agency. The spatiality of the clearing makes room for alternative temporalities against the authority of linear, fluent time. As Ellis and their peers proclaim in a public installation: "Stuttering can create time." (Fig. 3)

If the clearing bends time, it also opens up sound. The gesture hearkens back to John Cage's 4'33" (1952). By embracing indeterminacy and traces of ambient sounds, Cage refutes the absolute nature of silence and challenges the authority of the composer. For Ellis, the traces of their clearings visualized in repeated letters reveal that these indeterminate gaps are in fact not silent, as silence denotes suppressed or oppressed thought. I draw on Kevin Quashie's staunch distinction between silent and quiet, wherein the latter is a metaphor for the expressiveness of Black interiority.<sup>6</sup> Through repetition's quiet resistance, Ellis confronts the linearity of progress, aligning with what James A. Snead identifies as the Black cultural logic of repetition—one that generates meaning through return, accumulation, and temporal layering.<sup>7</sup>

"Progress is a bush, not a ladder."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Joshua St. Pierre, "Disfluency vs. Dysfluency: What's in a Name?" *Did I Stutter?*, n.d. <https://www.didistutter.org/blog/disfluency-vs-dysfluency-whats-in-a-name>.

<sup>2</sup> St. Pierre, "Disfluency vs. Dysfluency."

<sup>3</sup> Sonic Insurgency Research Group, JJJJerome Ellis, "Conversations in Sound and Power: JJJJerome Ellis," *MARCH*, December 2021. <https://march.international/conversations-on-sound-and-power-jjjjerome-ellis/#easy-footnote-1-84006>.

<sup>4</sup> JJJJerome Ellis, "The clearing: Music, dysfluency, Blackness and time," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, 5, no. 2 (2020): 219. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jivs\\_00026\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jivs_00026_1). Title stylization in original.

<sup>5</sup> Alison Kafer, "Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips," in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Indiana University Press, 2013), 27.

<sup>6</sup> Kevin Quashie, "Publicness, Silence, and the Sovereignty of the Interior," in *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 2012), 20-22.

<sup>7</sup> James A. Snead, "On Repetition in Black Culture," *Black American Literature Forum* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 146-54.

<sup>8</sup> Ryan C. Clarke and Rasheedah Phillips, "Fractal Rip: A Conversation between Ryan C. Clarke and Rasheedah Phillips" (conversation, Triple Canopy, New York, NY, March 17, 2025).



Within the realm of speech, Ellis's repetitions underscore the labor of legible communication for a dysfluent speaker. The audio in *transCRIPted* captured the audience's inattention during the first few of Ellis's prolonged pauses, represented by walls of the letter "d" that fill the screen; the rustling subsided only after Ellis disclosed their condition. Erving Goffman's speaker-listener dyad establishes that legible communication requires mutual work, however, Ellis exposes that it is the dysfluent speaker who bears the burden of correcting one's body to adhere to the normalized sense of fluency in any interaction.<sup>9</sup>

In *Cheap Talk*, St. Pierre frames fluency as a Foucaultian *dispositif* that insists on a mechanical quality of fluent speech and casts dysfluency as a biopolitical problem. The book maps the relations of forces that constitute "cheap talk," an expression he stretches to signify speech uncoupled from action and truth. Following Deleuze, St. Pierre asserts that speech and fluent communication under neoliberal masking of inequalities have become a cheap resource of connectivity, a distinctly technical rather than a political event.<sup>10</sup> St. Pierre introduces three archetypes to explore these dynamics: the dysfluent speaker, the talking head, and the troll.<sup>11</sup>

The talking head is the fetishized "expert knower," the epitome of the commodification of speech. But it is also replaceable, for it is a "connection machine that spews soundbites to keep the flow of information and affect in resonant circulation."<sup>12</sup> In *transCRIPted*, framed like a talking head, Ellis inserts themselves in the mechanical process of transcription, assuming the antithetical object of desire of the dysfluent speaker archetype. By relegating the role of speaking to typing, Ellis deconstructs the body of the dysfluent speaker. *transCRIPted* thus stages the ontological conflict between the fluent and the dysfluent speaker, as Ellis moves between these positions.

It is telling that, at times, Ellis's typing cannot keep up with their fluent speech: the clearings allow him to catch up, to complete the transcription. Quite literally, their stuttering has created time, making space for communication. Typos, meanwhile, occur and remain uncorrected; resonating with the recursive glitches of the recording software, they form unapologetic "glitches" that *crip* the parameters of faithful transcription, that reject the hegemony of fluency. In dialogue with Legacy Russell's glitch-as-refusal model, Ellis resists the flattening and othering of the dysfluent, Black body, and exposes the ideologically loaded medium of language.<sup>13</sup> The supposed neutrality of transcription bursts into the traces of Ellis's truth.

Real-time is no longer real time;  
it erupts into alternative temporalities that hold  
space for care,  
reorientation,  
and resistance.

<sup>9</sup> Erving Goffman, "Footing," in *Forms of Talk* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 131-137.

<sup>10</sup> Joshua St. Pierre, "Introduction," in *Cheap Talk, Disability and the Politics of Communication* (University of Michigan Press, 2022), 2-31.

<sup>11</sup> St. Pierre, *Cheap Talk*, 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> St. Pierre, *Cheap Talk*, 4-7.

<sup>13</sup> Legacy Russell, "Glitch Refuses," in *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (Verso, 2020), 18-31.

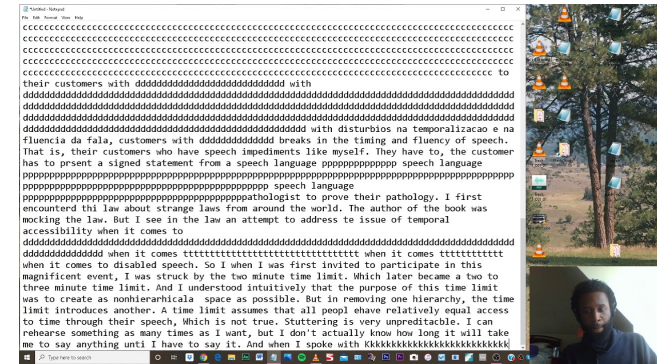


Figure 1: JJJJerome Ellis, still from *transCRIPted*, 2020. 10 minutes, single-channel video. <https://www.jjjjerome.com/transcripted>.

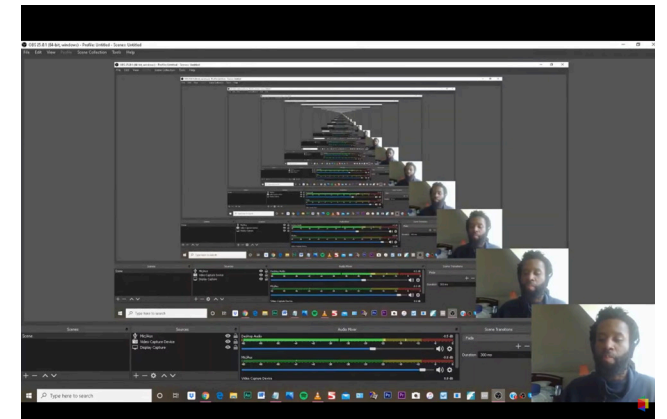


Figure 2: JJJJerome Ellis, still from *transCRIPted*, 2020. 10 minutes, single-channel video. <https://www.jjjjerome.com/transcripted>.



Figure 3: People Who Stutter Create, *Stuttering Can Create Time*, 2024. Installation view at "Whitney Biennial 2024: Even Better Than the Real Thing," 95 Horatio Street, New York. <https://whitney.org/exhibitions/people-who-stutter-create>.

## TRACING ABSENCE: MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND THE IN-BETWEEN SPACES IN HAN KANG'S *THE WHITE BOOK* AND LEE LEE NAM'S DIGITAL ART

AILEEN YUJEONG MIN

In Han Kang's *The White Book* (2016), the narrator describes watching paint run down a newly whitewashed door in an unnamed European city, one "rebuilt on ruins": "Paint tin in one hand, brush in the other, I stood unmoving, a dumb witness to the snowflakes' slow descent, like hundreds of feathers feathering down."<sup>1</sup> This image of white paint, which simultaneously covers and reveals traces of the surface's material history, crystallizes a central tension in Han's literary work: how memory lingers in absence. Similarly, in Lee Lee Nam's digital installation *The Girl Reading a Book* (2022), technological manipulation overlays multiple temporalities—the present and past merge as a young girl reads in quiet stillness while remnants of historical trauma materialize around her; warplanes cut across the sky, explosions ripple through the landscape, and falling flowers evoke a subdued sense of loss. Both artists employ their respective mediums to investigate the persistence of memory in absence, engaging with Korean histories of war and political repression across both personal and national dimensions to explore how the past endures, even as it fades.

The unnamed city where Han's narrator reflects upon the drying paint is widely assumed to be Warsaw, a place rife with the

history of war. Though the narrator has no direct connection to the Polish city's violent history, their family's experience of the Korean War—during which a sister was lost—profoundly resonates with its wounds. As the narrator reflects on this loss, Warsaw becomes a palimpsest of memory where "to write of this city is to write of what has vanished."<sup>2</sup> Through this engagement, Han demonstrates how the pain of war speaks a common language of absence and survival that can transcend national boundaries, allowing her to connect Korean and European histories of devastation by navigating wartime memory.

The symbolism of white objects throughout Han's text reinforces this dynamic of presence and absence. Snow becomes a metaphor for both cleansing and preservation, where "each object seemed to carry its own weight, not of memory, but of something just out of reach, like the lightest flake of snow before it touches the ground."<sup>3</sup> Rice cakes evolve from ethereal

symbols of the narrator's sister's face—"white as a crescent-moon rice cake"—to mundane sustenance: "Only afterwards, dished up on a plate with a pine-needle garnish, did they become disappointingly matter-of-fact."<sup>4</sup> This transformation from the ethereal to the tangible reflects the liminal space where meaning forms between ideal and real, between loss and presence. Similarly, whiteness itself becomes a paradox in the narrator's reflections. When the narrator describes a sister who died hours after birth—a loss that mirrors Han Kang's own family history—they write, "I wanted to show you clean things. Before brutality, sadness, despair, filth, pain, clean things that were only for you, clean things above all."<sup>5</sup> Here, whiteness functions as both erasure and preservation—simultaneously cleansing pain while ensuring its lingering imprint. Han develops whiteness not as empty space but as an active medium for inscribing memory, allowing the narrator's voice to articulate the tension between absence and presence.

Lee Lee Nam's digital artworks also explore this threshold between presence and absence but through technological intervention. Lee's rural upbringing in Damyang, a region rich in Korea's artistic heritage where calligraphy, landscape painting, and traditional crafts were part of everyday life, merges with his digital

innovations to create new forms of artistic expression that, like Han's, transform individual grief into broader historical consciousness. His installation *The Girl Reading a Book* processes memories of the May 18 Gwangju Uprising—an anti-government pro-democracy movement in South Korea that was violently suppressed by military forces in 1980. The installation situates the girl before a row of small wooden chairs, evoking the shared experience of classroom storytelling. The sculpture itself is an adaptation of an actual elementary school statue, reinforcing the intersection between personal and collective memory. Behind the girl, projected images of writing and erasure unfold—lines are drawn and wiped away, mirroring the instability of recollection and the human tendency to cling to fading memories. Through the soft yet persistent voice of the girl reading aloud, Lee channels his own childhood fears and uncertainties, particularly those surrounding death and historical trauma. The installation encourages viewers to participate in this act of remembering, illustrating how memory is fragile, mutable, and deeply shaped by the stories we inherit and reimagine.

This engagement with the instability of memory extends into Lee's other works, including *May 18, 1980, Weather Fine* (2022), which similarly explores how history is

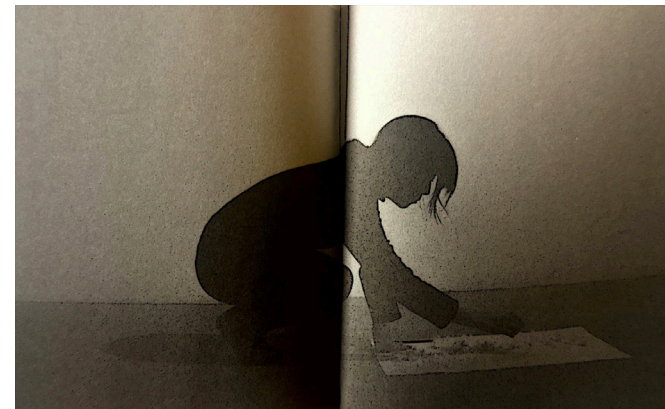


Figure 1: Silhouette of a crouching figure from *The White Book*

<sup>1</sup> Han Kang, *The White Book*, trans. Deborah Smith (New York: Hogarth, 2019), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Han, *The White Book*, 42.

<sup>3</sup> Han, *The White Book*, 56.





recorded and erased over time. In *May 18, 1980, Weather Fine*, Lee materializes historical traces through mechanical repetition. A boy holding a torch stands opposite forty oscillating electric fans, their rotating blades striking photographs of children. Each turn of the fans simultaneously marks, erases, and re-marks the images, creating a shifting visual archive that captures the instability of memory—its preservation and its distortion. The flickering torchlight mirrors the flames carried by protestors during the Gwangju Uprising, casting fleeting illuminations that fade as quickly as they appear. Through the repetitive movement of the oscillating fans and the intermittent glow of the torchlight, Lee visualizes the fragility of historical memory, illustrating how collective remembrance is continuously rewritten, erased, and reshaped by time. As the fans' blades strike the photographs, they enact a physical cycle of inscription and disappearance, demonstrating how recollection remains in constant flux rather than fixed in permanence. In Lee's own words, "the installation wraps memory as what I want rather than keeping any fact," suggesting that memory functions not as an objective record of the past but as an active process of reconstruction shaped by present perspectives.<sup>6</sup>

Lee's works materialize what Marianne Hirsch terms "postmemory"—the relationship that the "generation after" bears to personal and collective trauma. Hirsch argues that postmemory emerges through imaginative reconstruction rather than direct experience, often mediated through cultural forms.<sup>7</sup> Lee's use of digital tools—from video projections to mechanized installations—creates a new kind of trace, one that exists between physical and virtual reality. The technological apparatus



**Figures 2-3:** Lee Lee Nam, *May 18, 1980, Weather: Fine*, 2022, mixed media, dimensions variable; *The Girl Who Reads*, 2022, mixed media, single-channel video, dimensions variable, loop.

Images reproduced from *Lee Lee Nam: The Light that Shines on Each Person*, exhibition catalogue, Gwangju Media Art Platform (G.MAP), 2022.

becomes part of the meaning-making process: each digital manipulation transforms static imprints into dynamic inscriptions that continuously evolve through the act of remembering.

Through their distinct approaches—Han's white objects and Lee's digital mediations—both artists reveal how traces operate as active sites of transformation. In Han's work, the paradoxical and simultaneous erasure and preservation of memory encapsulated by the color white underscores the generative power of absence, while Lee's installations use technological processes to rewrite and reshape historical memory. While their works emerge from specific Korean historical contexts, they resonate universally, illustrating how absence transforms into presence through the act of tracing. Their art suggests that meaning resides not in what is lost or what remains, but in the dynamic process of tracing itself—a process that transforms memory into new forms of understanding.

<sup>4</sup> Han, *The White Book*, 19, 23.

<sup>5</sup> Han, *The White Book*, 157.

<sup>6</sup> Lee Lee Nam, *The Light that Shines on Each Person*, exhibition at Gwangju Media Art Platform (G.MAP), Gwangju, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).



## WHAT THE TREES SEE

JULIE GAN, EVAN PAN

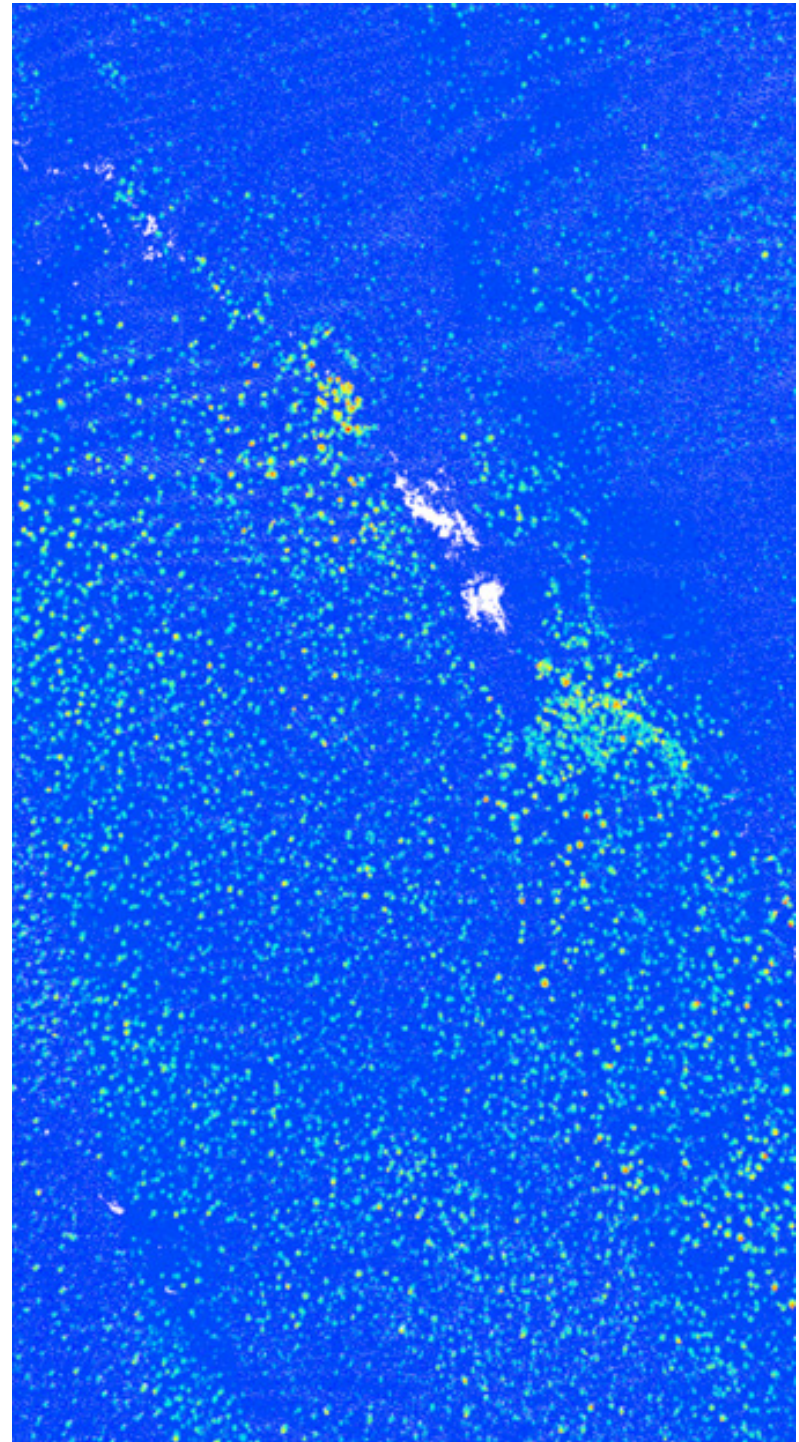
Traces of our changing climate sweep across the Arctic landscape. What stories do they tell of trees that thrive—and those that fail?

Vegetation is a physical manifestation and continuous trace of our climate. Plants form visual representations on the landscape of environmental processes that can easily escape our perception. We worked in the Arctic tundra, where rising temperatures are expected to advance the treeline (the delineation of where trees can and cannot grow) further north. At the treeline, trees struggle quite literally for existence—most saplings never make it past 50 cm tall, even if they scrape by for decades. The Arctic winters are frozen endless nights for half the year. Often, they die due to relentless herbivory or starve to death because they cannot accrue enough sustenance from photosynthesis to both maintain normal cell function and heal themselves from constant wind and frost damage. Nevertheless, some trees do make it into “tree”-hood (> 3 m tall). Their presence and absence etch delicate traces of resilience, loss, and the changing environmental processes that we do not directly observe.

Changing temperatures, precipitation, and soil conditions are all projected onto the terrestrial landscape. Using aerial LiDAR data, which provides a cloud of points that composes a 3D model of the landscape—almost like a blanket draped over the physical structures—we studied the patterning of adult trees at the treeline: were they clustered, uniformly, or randomly distributed? We found that adult trees were spaced out uniformly, even though saplings often grow in clusters. We created a 3D rendering of the point cloud of a 1.5 km<sup>2</sup> swath of the Arctic tundra at the treeline. The rendering shows the trace of our current climate on the Arctic landscape with the surviving trees as well as an alternative reality shaped by the missing ones.



A 3D render of the landscape can be accessed through the QR code (horizontal viewing is recommended).





# FOOTPRINTS ON MUDDY SNOW: EPHEMERALITY AND ETERNITY IN YOYO ZHANG'S LABOR LAKE (2023-24) SERIES

JAMES XUE

人生到处知何似？应似飞鸿踏雪泥。  
泥上偶然留指爪，鸿飞那复计东西。

*What is life like here or there?*

*It's like a swan stepping on muddy snow.*

*Seeing its occasional footprints on mud,*

*Will the flown swan care for its left-behinds?*

— Su Shi,

*"Recalling the Old Time at Mianchi in the  
Same Rhymes as Ziyou's Poem"*<sup>1</sup>

People like to say the city of Anshan belongs to history. Riding through the city on a high-speed train is therefore a fleeting tour of what is left of China's once most burgeoning industrial empire. Turned into a Rust Belt after the central government's privatization policies in the 1990s, the entire Northeast part of China suffered and is still suffering problems of over-production, unemployment, and irreversible ecological damage.

Yoyo Zhang, currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), considers Anshan to be his hometown. Yoyo has witnessed Anshan's transformations, tracing them in his memory and attempting to translate some of the most precious into a series of landscape paintings entitled *Labor Lake* (2023-2024) after the park he used to visit daily when he was young.

The project began as a landscape-based painting exercise at RISD, but once his brush landed on canvas, the action transformed from a simple exercise into the tracing of memories. Labor Lake is a natural lake in downtown Anshan, located in the February 19th Park to the east of the city. A hub for residents to enjoy their spare time, Yoyo remembers this lake as a node of his days back in his hometown. Yoyo's use of dense brushstrokes and colors can easily remind his viewers of Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro, capturing the sunlight and breeze through natural manifestations of ripples, footprints, or canopies.

However, Anshan is not Argenteuil. It is not the playground for visual experimentation and yuppie resorts the Impressionists had, but the exact opposite. Beyond Yoyo's frames, Anshan is characterized by abandoned industrial landscapes and unrenovated Soviet style architecture that represent not only a past but also an underdeveloped present and a pessimistic future, one that has been buried by the political neglect of Beijing's decision makers. By focusing on Labor Lake, then, Yoyo's works become almost utopian. These natural landscapes, characterized by bright sunlight and clear atmosphere, can be said to be creating a surrealist depiction by way of conscious selection of natural subject matters, which turns a realistic and multilayered

memory into a fleeting impression rather than attempting to reconstruct the entire memory.

Yoyo omits the human figures who are supposed to be found in the park but preserves the traces they have left on the skin of nature: deep footprints on the thick snow are meticulously depicted in the two winter scenes; a piece of the ice has been carefully removed in a rectangular shape from a frozen lake surface, exposing the water beneath in *Labor Lake in Winter* (2024) (fig. 2); and hedges are positioned in the close-ground, interrupting the natural visual extension of trees and grasses in *A Sunny Afternoon of Late Summer* (2023) (fig. 4). Through these traces, Yoyo tells us that, even if not directly depicted, people were here.

These natural imprints reflect Anshan's recent local history. The central government's policies that aimed at privatizing state-owned corporations caused a tide of unemployment in the city in the 90s, forcing many workers and residents to emigrate to more developed cities such as Beijing and Shanghai for livelihood. These temporal policies resulted in an ongoing economic paralysis like the city's icy winters, echoed in Yoyo's metaphorical erasure of humans.

Yoyo himself is one of these Anshan emigrants. He grew up in Beijing and pursued education in the U.S., becoming one of many Chinese international students whose artistic expressions intertwine with diasporic experience. Instead of emphasizing the movement across borders by engaging with theory by scholars who study immigration in the West, Yoyo's thoughts seem to linger around the specific locations of home as a site and space that houses his identity and memories.

So, where is home for Yoyo? Anshan feels like an immediate answer, but Yoyo is no longer a permanent resident of Anshan, and he only returns at most twice a year, during winter and summer breaks. The city became a distant house of his relatives and his origins. As Yoyo travels from Anshan to Beijing and then to

Providence, Rhode Island, his sense of home transforms from a specific geographic location into a psychological complex of the three locations he has and still considers to be home-like. This complex is composed of the memories he keeps of each city. Thus, when he is painting the *Labor Lake* series while overseas, he is not realistically sketching the park from nature but instead expressing his memory of the place that reflects his constructed sense of home. In this particular way, he might not remember the details of who stepped on the snow or who cut the ice, but he retains an impression that the snow was stepped on, the ice was cut, and that there were ripples on the lake. Even if ambiguous and anonymous, these human traces function as nodes in his memory that fabricate a map in his mind for Yoyo to find his way home.

Yoyo's lingering sentiment to a place that is left behind is well contemplated in the existing literature of the Chinese writer Su Shi (1037-1101). In "Recalling the Old Times at Mianchi in the Same Rhymes as Ziyou's Poem" quoted in the epigraph of this essay, Su Shi asks, "Will the flown swan care for its left-behinds?" which points to an existentialist discussion of one's past and one's being. In another treatise titled "Ode to the Red Cliff (赤壁賦)," Su merges the original question with subjectivity:

盖将自其变者而观之，则天地曾不能以一瞬；自其不变者而观之，则物与我皆无尽也，而又何羨乎？

*When viewed from a changing perspective, the universe can hardly be the same even within a blink of an eye; but when looked at from an unchanging perspective, everything conserves itself, and so do we. Therefore, what's in them to be admired?*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Su Shi, "Recalling the Old Days at Mianchi in the Same Rhymes as Ziyou's Poem (1061AD)," *Chinese Poetry in English*, accessed March 24, 2025, <https://www.cn-poetry.com/su-shi-poems/recalling-old-days.html>

<sup>2</sup> Su Shi (蘇軾), "Ode to the Red Cliff (赤壁賦)," *Chinese Calligraphy*, accessed March 25, 2025, <https://learning.hku.hk/ccch9051/group-24/items/show/38>.



Su laments the ephemeral time, which made him feel that his being was relatively small in front of eternity. This lamentation is relieved by looking at the subjectivity from "an unchanging perspective," which cannot be simply understood as viewing oneself as unchanged or unchangeable. Instead, it refers to an individual's past, present, and prospected future as a whole entity rather than paying attention to each one of them as a single moment. Once these temporal existences are present at the same time, one's entire personal existence is buckled together like a Lego tower. Thus, Su suggests that when a swan looks back and cares about what is left behind, its being can be perceived as eternal.

Yoyo's *Labor Lake Series* provides the answer that a flying swan does look back and care about its past. In painting a conglomeration of his past that actively defines his identity as well as his current memories and impressions of the past, Yoyo achieves the "unchanging perspective" in Su's ode and preserves an eternity of his temporal being. He planted in the paintings not only ephemeral traces in nature like footprints or ripples but also his memory and sense of home, enriching the impressionist images with a hidden image of diasporic sensations. A landscape painting freezes natural traces in a momentary capture of a scene, and it also eternalizes the ephemeral existence of the painter.



**Figure 1:** *Labor Lake*, oil on canvas, 2023.



**Figure 2:** *Labor Lake in Winter*, oil on canvas, 2024.



**Figure 3:** *Winter Scenery of my Hometown*, oil on canvas, 2024.



**Figure 4:** *A Sunny Afternoon of Late Summer*, oil on canvas, 2023.



## THE VIEW THAT LEGITIMIZES A STATUS

HAROLD GARCIA V

In *The View that Legitimizes a Status*, from *La Mode Pratique Series* (2020), I delve into the fragility of the Everglades, juxtaposing its natural grandeur with the human tendencies that threaten it. Through a poignant interplay of photographs and watercolors, I portray the Everglades as a physical body subjected to humanity's relentless pursuit of pleasure, power, and prestige. The piece reflects our vanities, tracing the long history of environmental degradation caused by economic greed, urban sprawl, and aesthetic obsessions.

The work narrates the region's transformation, from urban sprawl and canal systems to the massacre of birds in the early twentieth century to the adornment of luxurious hats. The land carries the imprints of past actions, whether through destroying bird populations, carving artificial canals, or layering luxury over loss. These marks function as traces of history, revealing how nature has been reshaped, often irreversibly, by human ambition. Through meticulous watercolors, I bridge the past and present, critiquing a cultural legacy that sacrifices biodiversity for superficial elegance.



The narrative culminates in a circular sequence linking birds, hats, and sprawling housing developments. Here, I underscore the cyclical nature of exploitation: natural ecosystems bend to the artificial whims of luxury. Satellite images of residential arabesques carved into the Everglades like scars starkly remind us of humanity's impact. The interplay between photography and watercolor serves as an act of tracing my watercolors, reimagining, reinterpreting, and extending archival images of the past. Through these interlocking viewing experiences, I invite my viewers to reflect on the tensions between conservation and consumption, imploring them to reconsider the costs of humanity's desires.

Throughout *The View that Legitimizes a Status*, I weave a compelling story of beauty and loss, setting the Everglades as a symbol of what is at stake when vanity triumphs conservation.





# MIRIAM MAKEBA AND THE SOUND OF BLACK LIBERATION

LAUREN STOCKMON BROWN

Miriam Makeba, 1969. Photo by Rob Mieremet. Public domain.



*This article is a shortened excerpt from an academic paper titled "Miriam Makeba's 1950-60s Musical Performances as a Precursor to Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement and a Response to the Epistemological Erasure of Blackness in Urban South Africa," which examines Makeba's music and language as resistance against Apartheid-era oppression. To trace Makeba's work is to follow the echoes of a voice that countered Black erasure—and to uncover the significance of pop music and resistance in Apartheid South Africa.*

## MAKEBA: "THE ARTIST"

Zenzile Miriam Makeba (1932–2008), also known as "Mama Africa," was one of the most prominent singers and activists in the anti-apartheid struggle. She began her professional singing career around the same time the Afrikaner Nationalist government came into power, contributing to genres including Afropop and jazz.<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing Makeba as a trailblazer in the "Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)" helps illustrate why her music became such a powerful symbol for justice in South Africa and beyond.<sup>2</sup> Makeba never sang in Afrikaans and rarely in English—the two official languages of the Apartheid government in South Africa. Instead, she primarily sang in Xhosa, Sotho, and Zulu. Three songs that have brought Makeba the most international attention in the United States and Europe include "Pata Pata," the "Click Song" in English ("Qongqothwane" in Xhosa), and "Into the Yam," all performed using the distinctive "click" sounds of her native Xhosa language.

Over her career, Makeba made 30 original albums and 19 compilations, becoming the first African artist to receive a Grammy Award in 1966.<sup>3</sup> The influential scale of Makeba's work stands as a direct counter to Black erasure; her linguistic performance challenges the epistemological erasure of the Black feminist presence in South Africa. As an affirmation of Blackness, the BCM began as an ideological symbol of beauty, creativity, competence, and

<sup>1</sup> "Miriam Makeba," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified February 28, 2025, [www.britannica.com/biography/Miriam-Makeba](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Miriam-Makeba).



diversification. Three of Makeba's musical performances released in the 1950s and 1960s created space for the Black feminist perspective prior to the public rise of the BCM in the 1970s. The coded movements, sensory aesthetics, and the body's sonics that Makeba shared with her audience functioned as a precursor to the BCM within a wider context.<sup>4</sup> Profoundly, these creative productions raise the question: how do Makeba's songs sung in Xhosa linguistically resist the South African Apartheid regime and promote key ideological elements of Black Consciousness?

### MAKEBA: "THE ACTIVIST"

In the 18th Meeting of the Special Committee against Apartheid in 1963, Makeba's address to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly provides deeper insight into the systematic displacement of Black South Africans and the process of Black epistemological erasure.<sup>5</sup> In this instance, the UN provides Makeba a platform to share her firsthand experience of living under the institutionalization of Apartheid. From a methodological standpoint, Makeba's statement (in English), "South Africa has been turned into a huge prison,"<sup>6</sup> serves as direct testimony of Apartheid's carceral logic. In a theoretical and conceptual sense, she employs her voice as a tool of resistance, combatting an epistemological erasure of the Black perspective on a global and public platform.

Throughout her speech, Makeba both directly and indirectly references several South African policies of removal, including the 1913 Native Lands Act, which prevented Africans from owning or gaining land outside of "reserves," initially comprising only 7% of land throughout national borders. This policy led to the 1923 Urban Areas Act, which legalized segregated areas for Black populations, prohibiting them from acquiring property or business outside of the legislatively designated Black areas.<sup>7</sup>

Thirty years later, Makeba and her counterparts were subjected to the 1950 Population Registration Act, which then led

to the Group Areas Act—enforcing racial segregation in housing and business—and the establishment of "Bantustans," designated territories designed to confine Black South Africans. Shortly thereafter, the Suppression of Communism Act was passed, and any group or individual who attempted to spark political, economic, industrial, or social change was labeled an illegal "communist." Lastly, home ownership for Black South Africans was eliminated due to the 1952 Native Laws Amendments Act, further limiting the residential and labor rights of urban Blacks.<sup>8</sup>

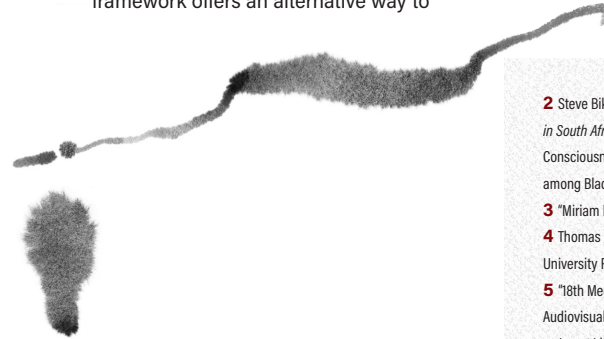
Keeping in mind these acts that have crafted the foundational nature of the Apartheid system, Makeba addresses the UN General Assembly, stating:

*I ask you and all the leaders of the world, would you act differently, would you keep silent and do nothing if you were in our place? Would you not resist if you were allowed no rights in your own country because the color of your skin is different from that of the rulers, and if you were punished for even asking for equality. I appeal to you, and to all the countries of the world to do everything you can to stop the coming tragedy. I appeal to you to save the lives of our leaders, to empty the prisons of all those who should never have been there.*<sup>9</sup>

Shortly after this address, the South African government revoked Makeba's citizenship. Approximately a year later, on March 10, 1964, *The New York Times* published an article, distributed to a primarily English-speaking audience, reflecting on Makeba's contribution to the international political climate.<sup>10</sup> In this piece, the *NYT* seems to find Makeba's politically charged sentiment and her status as a performer as an unusual pairing. The article, titled "UN Hears Anti-Apartheid Song," emphasizes "hearing" and "song," reflecting the fascination of one of America's most prominent newspapers at the time with Makeba's voice—even when she was not singing. This raises the question: how do Makeba's performances show the conflicting relationship between sound and erasure?

### EXAMINING MUSICAL PERFORMANCE AS A FORM OF PROTEST

Western narratives of erasure are most evident in cultural practices, literature, and language, which have been used to silence social advocates and performers like Makeba. More specifically, the *NYT* writes, "she spoke rather than sang, the words in a low and sometimes broken voice."<sup>11</sup> Western media's fascination with Makeba's coded movements, sensory aesthetics, and her body's sonics—even outside a traditional performance stage—guides her embodied tactics of denouncing the South African regime. Therefore, it is crucial to situate an analysis of Makeba's mid-twentieth-century performances in a broader framework detailing the development of "Black Performance Theory" (BPT).<sup>12</sup> Emphasizing the entangled nature of these political institutions through a performance studies framework offers an alternative way to



examine the historical complexities of conflict and memory with an equally multifaceted approach.

Racial inequality is deeply embedded in South African law and society and cannot be easily reversed through legislation alone. In this context, Makeba's linguistic and musical performances emerge as a form of protest that serves two key functions: 1) They centralize the Black female perspective in advocacy spaces where this experience is often overlooked, and 2) they increase awareness regarding relevant contemporary conversations about the Black liberation struggle on an international scale. Through further theoretical analysis, we can explore how Makeba's positioning as an artist and activist challenged global racial oppression efforts—and how music, language, and performance continue to shape social, political, and economic progress in South Africa and beyond.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Biko and Millard W Arnold, *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1st ed. (Random House, 1978). Biko defined Black Consciousness as a movement aimed at awakening a sense of self-worth among Black South Africans.

<sup>3</sup> "Miriam Makeba," *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, *Black Performance Theory* (Duke University Press, 2014), viii.

<sup>5</sup> "18th Meeting of the Special Committee against Apartheid," UN Audiovisual Library, July 16, 1963. Video, 9:57. <https://media.un.org/avlibrary/en/asset/d255/d2553678>

<sup>6</sup> "18th Meeting of the Special Committee against Apartheid," UN Audiovisual Library, July 16, 1963.

<sup>7</sup> Sipho Buthelezi, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the Late 1960s," December 1, 1987. <https://jstor.org/stable/al.sff.document.joa19871200.032.009.762>.

<sup>8</sup> Buthelezi, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the Late 1960s," 1987.

<sup>9</sup> "18th Meeting of the Special Committee against Apartheid," UN Audiovisual Library, July 16, 1963.

<sup>10</sup> "U.N. Hears Anti-Apartheid Song," *The New York Times*, March 10, 1964, Archives section, <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/03/10/archives/un-hears-antiapartheid-song.html>.

<sup>11</sup> "U.N. Hears Anti-Apartheid Song," *The New York Times*, March 10, 1964.

<sup>12</sup> DeFrantz and Gonzalez, *Black Performance Theory*.



## SELECTED WORKS OF ARISTOTLE FORRESTER

### ARISTOTLE FORRESTER



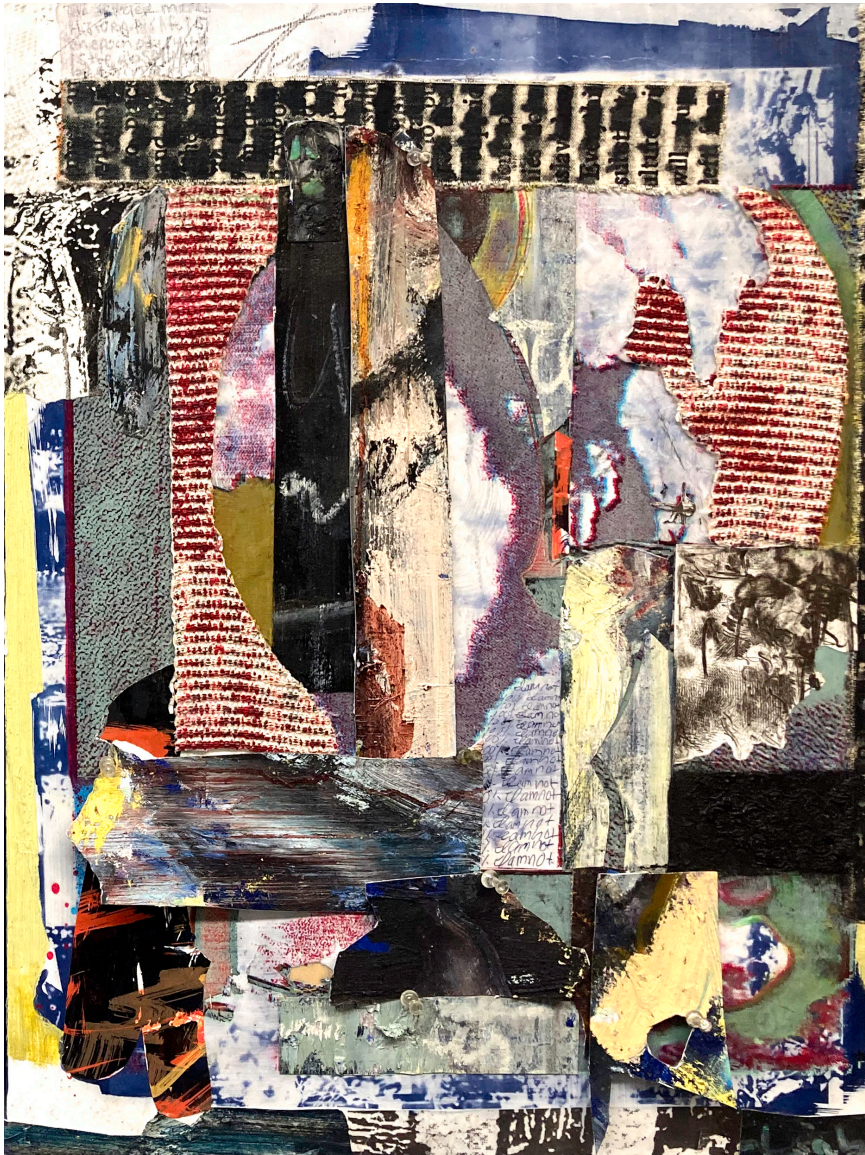
*Transfiguration of Byron the Great, Oil, hand-ground pigment, lock ash, marker collage on canvas, 2024, 42 x 37 inches*

#### **Artist Statement**

For me, Trace is following the thread of creative impulse through my familial line, connecting the touchpoints in my practice and my palette to the ancestors that created me. It is remembering that the quilts I slept under as a child were threads given by and to matriarchs, a patchwork of compassion and knowledge which I now will add to. It is something known, not by definition, but felt in the conjugation of self, a magnetic pull towards a familiar form or location, something left from another life.

As a black artist navigating the intersections of personal and collective history, I present my perspective on the human experiences through the emotive power of pigment and gestural mark-making. My current work unearths personal and historical evidence of racial injustice, questioning the racial constructs and power structures of intimidation that have defined my experiences and those of so many other people of color living in America. Through my abstraction, I create moments for viewers to stretch their subconscious and push their understanding of imagery. By extending the traditions of printmaking, painting, quilting, collage, and language, I highlight the duality of imprisonment and freedom personified by the symbols of visual culture and identity.





*Remembering the Way Home*, Oil Paint, Ink, Mixed Media on Wood Board, 2023, 25 x 18 inches

### *Ancestors or Tessellations*

Who is more important than the one holding the spool.

I would argue the vantage point of the ones pushing the spool depends on the one holding it,

Who is this man transfixed beyond all Deltas consistently trying to hold up the Maverick of pedigree.

Forces exchanged not by hand but by mind.

Finding folds in the matter that alter themselves too easily,

forward.

I asked why am I placed here in this lawn-chair equidistantly relating to the far vast reaches of tessellations, Grasping way longer than I can reach.

I long for citrus  
I cry for leaves  
I hold not only dirty wood but the nails that rusted beneath me

& Somehow, I hold my own flesh transfixed in the iron that is making these chains that I bind

locking my own bone to be undone.

I ask only for knowing these anatomical pluralities of purpose and the pluralities of decency, as it exists in codex and common knowledge.

I'm Calculating.....

I ...m calculating .....  
-//:)-.?>\_-:?

Calculating.

Looking forward is what we were taught without absence I am bought.

& so fucked the colonial consumerism metric swings

I have two brothers one I have met and one I have not

there are legends told on sturdy knots.

Swift be the marks of my gesture that I offer you this day

if you ask the weight of my metric I will please, please, ask you to delay.

For my language has no meter it was bought and not sailed and I've lost my map along the way

I use my hair to keep my trail

in it you may find seeds, in my heart you may find blood

but the one thing that is missing is that beautiful irie rock I love.

-Aristotle Forrester nov 2022.



## A SCULPTURE IN TRANSIT: ÁLVARO URBANO AT SCULPTURECENTER

### SUMMER PARK

In 315 CE, Constantine the Great commemorated his victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge with an arch that still stands in the center of Rome. A hulking monument, a symbol of imperial power. What makes this structure particularly interesting is that the reliefs and sculptures adorning it weren't newly commissioned; they were repurposed, taken from earlier monuments dedicated to Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius. This deliberate act of appropriation carved the past in marble and rearranged it to serve the present.

Art historian Beat Brenk argues that this wasn't just a matter of cost-cutting or convenience.<sup>1</sup> Constantine, who wasn't born into the aristocracy, needed to cement his authority. By incorporating imagery from Rome's so-called golden age, he was inserting himself into a lineage of great emperors, reinforcing his rule through a visual language of continuity and power.

Some materials are inherently political. No matter how thoroughly they're repurposed, they remain tethered to their original context, their past lives lingering beneath the surface. Spolia, as this act of reuse is called, always comes with echoes.

But not all acts of retrieval are about power. And not all monuments are meant to last forever.

At SculptureCenter in Queens, NY, Álvaro Urbano (b. 1983) approaches the past in a way that is entirely different from Constantine's. His exhibition *TABLEAU VIVANT* (2024) reconstructs *Atrium Furnishment*, a public sculpture that once stood in the heart of Manhattan. Originally installed in 1986 in the lobby of the Equitable Center, an office building in Midtown, this work by American sculptor Scott Burton (1939–1989) consisted of a semi-circular arrangement of green marble benches with onyx lamps that functioned both as a sculptural object and a site for rest. For more than thirty years it remained in place, until renovations in 2020 threatened its complete destruction. At the last moment, curator Jeremy Johnston intervened, and the piece was carefully dismantled and placed in storage.

Now, almost forty years after it was first installed, Urbano gives it another life—but not as a pristine reassembly. He retains the sculpture's circular composition and keeps it functional; visitors can still sit on the benches. "Since it was originally designed as a space for people to rest, it felt important to respect and continue that intention," he explains.

<sup>1</sup> Beat Brenk, "Spolia from Constantine to Charlemagne: Aesthetics versus Ideology," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987): 103–109.



Installation view, Álvaro Urbano: *TABLEAU VIVANT*, SculptureCenter, New York, 2024-25. Courtesy the artist and SculptureCenter, New York.

Photo: Charles Benton



Scott Burton, *Atrium Furnishment*, 1986

Semi-circular verde larissa marble bench with four onyx lights and inset brass floor element surrounding a verde larissa marble circular table with a fountain; opposite the bench is a complimentary semi-circular grove of conifer trees. Overall installation 40 feet (diameter), originally commissioned by Equitable Life Assurance Society, NY. This work has since been dismantled and is now in the collection of 787 Seventh Avenue, NY.

© 2024 Estate of Scott Burton



"At the same time, I wanted to offer a new perspective on the work. In the original installation, certain details weren't visible, so I exposed cross-sections of the marble slabs to create a sense of memory being taken apart or reassembled." The result is not a fixed monument but a work in flux—an exploration of how artworks persist, adapt, and change over time. "Societies constantly shift their priorities," Urbano reflects. "Even the most prestigious buildings can fall into disarray. We can discover a lot of essential truths by thinking about what we choose to value and what we overlook."

Burton himself knew something about impermanence. Just three years after installing *Atrium Furnishment*, he died from AIDS-related complications. His work, like that of many queer artists of his generation, was at risk of being forgotten, lost to an era that saw so many lives vanish before their time.

Urbano often extends a site's historical narrative by layering it with speculation and imagination. "I don't really approach these stories from a strict historical perspective," he says. "I'm more drawn to fiction and rumor. I like when research unfolds like a chain of coincidences—when there's space for emotion and speculation."

For *TABLEAU VIVANT*, he links Burton's work to The Ramble, a heavily wooded section of Central Park with winding paths and dense foliage. Officially, The Ramble is known as a haven for birdwatchers. But it has also served, throughout the early 20th century, as a gathering place for New York's queer community—a site for cruising. Open yet concealed, The Ramble was one of the rare spaces in the city where the divide between public and private softened, where social norms briefly unraveled.

While preparing for the exhibition, Urbano made multiple visits to The Ramble, selecting specific plants that bloom in early spring. "Most of them reflect the beginning of spring," he explains, "when blooming takes place." In the gallery, this imagined forest comes alive.

Magnolias and morning glories bloom. Jeffersonia plants emerge from the concrete floor. A half-eaten apple rests on the ground as if just abandoned. Vines twist and tangle, their branches sprawling outward. But none of these are real plants. They are sculpted from metal, meticulously painted to mimic life.

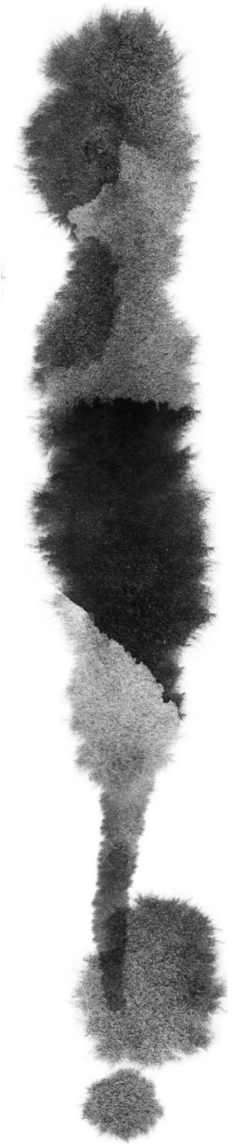
This artificial forest, frozen in time, reads as a kind of memory—a spectral echo of something once real but now only reconstructed. Like *The Ramble* itself, it exists in an ambiguous space between presence and absence, between the living and the remembered.

Overhead, a false ceiling of translucent panels flickers unpredictably—warm amber shifting to cold fluorescence, light pulsing in uneven rhythms. Shadows move across the ceiling's surface: the scatter of leaves, the surface of a puddle, a butterfly caught in the air. The room itself seems unstable, caught between times.

"Instead of repurposing a monument to create another one, I see this project more as an open space—almost like an amphitheater where people can gather and discuss the work and its future."

Burton's work was made of marble, a material associated with permanence. But nothing is permanent. Not monuments. Not histories. Urbano does not try to hold onto them. Instead, he lets them shift, resurface, become something else.

*This piece was developed in correspondence with Álvaro Urbano during his exhibition TABLEAU VIVANT, on view at SculptureCenter in New York from September 19, 2024, through March 24, 2025.*



# ONE FACE ON THOUSANDS POSTCARDS

SHARON CHEUK WUN LEE

## Introduction: The Original and Halfway

Technological reproduction enables the original to meet the recipient halfway.<sup>1</sup> The liminality of postcards exists at the intersection of original and replica, manual and technological reproduction. There is a constant interplay between text and image. A postcard never exists as a singularity, but instead subordinates itself to the cultural plurality dictated by seemingly unnoticeable captions. After all, the mass-produced lithograph image serves as an intimate, personal handwritten note. The weight of history vanishes into generic greetings wishing you well. The in-betweenness of postcards inspired my visual research and its examination of how porous objects traverse territories and ideologies.

My research started with the Canton Girl portrait, a hand-painted photograph in The Metropolitan Museum of Art collection. The museum's description focuses solely on the technical reproduction of the portrait as an economical keepsake, ignoring its historical context and the identity of its subject. Confronted with both the presence and absence of information within institutional archives, I found myself using eBay as an expanded archive to open up alternative narratives. *One Face on Thousands*

*Postcards* (2024–25) uses three postcards as a lens to investigate power dynamics in image production and the construction of the "other." By tracing the successive alterations of re-coloring and re-captioning an identical portrait, the work sheds light on the veiled history of *Mui Tsai*—Cantonese girls who were sold as servants from the port of Hong Kong to San Francisco in the 19th and 20th centuries. Its subsequent alterations prompt a visual inquiry into these changes. The project investigates the mobility of image and immobility of class, tracing the geopolitical immigration history of early Chinese Cantonese communities in America.

## The weight of 1 cent

History is shaped not only by monumental forces but also by the unnoticed weight of a single cent. The origins of the American postcard industry trace back to the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, where souvenir picture "postals" were sold. These fairs also amplified ideas of "others" and "exoticness." A major factor in the industry's expansion came in May 1898 when the federal government reduced the postage rate for private cards from two cents to one, fueling the "golden age" of American postcards (1905–1915). Postcards should not be seen as isolated media but as interconnected with world fairs, printing, mailing systems, empire-building, and

immigrant labor policies, all of which examine the power dynamics embedded within and beyond them.

## Re-colouring the 4x5" Shifting Grounds

Three postcards of San Francisco's Chinatown depict the same girl, yet each transforms her image differently. Subtle alterations—her hair, the color of her dress—along with radical changes in background, transform these 4x5-inch photographs into tools for categorization, subordinating personal stories to fit into imperial frameworks of race and gender.

Charles Weidner, a San Francisco-based photographer and postcard publisher, originally photographed the girl and published the image as a postcard captioned "Chinese Slave Girl—Chinatown" (dated prior to the 1906 earthquake) [left]. In a later version, the same image reappeared, this time labeled "Chinese nurse-girl without home after fire, April 18, 1906" Britton & Rey, the leading Western American lithography firm, repurposed Weidner's photo again, using it as a canvas for reinvention. Their version was titled "Chinese custom of carrying children, Chinatown," recoloring her dress using vibrant colours [middle]. In yet another iteration, the girl was cut from her worn surroundings, and placed into a garden littered with pink flowers. Her hair was retouched. Her dress was now a bourgeois burgundy [right]. The radical transposition of the pink flower inspired me to explore the hybridity and resilience of the symbolic pink flower of Hong Kong: Bauhinia × blakeana, which can only be propagated through grafting.<sup>2</sup>

Drawing inspiration from the emotional correlation of facial heat zones, as well as the use of thermal imagery in customs borders nowadays, I recolored the portrait. This time, the color does not emphasize race or class, but emotion—or, perhaps more accurately, how I interpret her emotions through my own: How do I feel today, living as a foreigner, a nonresident alien, in the same country she once did?

## Rice Pixel

I use rice, both a highly racialized symbol and a core tenet in Cantonese history, as a central material to trace the history of image production and reproduction. In a photograph from the American Museum of Natural History<sup>3</sup>, one captures a smiling Chinese man holding a bowl of rice and chopsticks. I reclaim its symbolism, reducing each grain of rice into an invisible unit, a "rice pixel" in the portrait that traces the sorrows and scars of women's migration.

In the late 19th century, a high percentage of girls from the Canton region sailed across the Pacific Ocean to be sold and consumed as "human commodities" in San Francisco. Known as *Mui Tsai*, or "little sisters," they were adopted by families but lived as enslaved workers. At 18, many were resold into brothels as prostitutes, confined behind barred windows.

Here, rice forms a fragile "screen." Over time, as the rice starch naturally cracks, so does the image. The face hovers between visibility and erasure, with each fracture revealing a new violent history.<sup>4</sup> Through the rice screen, I reclaim the commodified figure's face. Her sharp gaze pierces back through time, confronting her oppressed past.

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, 2nd ed. (Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Grafting is a horticultural process in which plant parts are joined so they grow together as one plant.

<sup>3</sup> Berthold Laufer, "Eating rice, China," photograph, *American Museum of Natural History Digital Collections*, accessed March 25, 2025, <https://digitalcollections.amnh.org/archive/Eating-rice--China-2URMT1Q302R.html>.

<sup>4</sup> This artistic process and conceptual framework is also informed by Francesco Casetti's concept of the "screen" as a process of becoming, where the screen represents the intersection of medium (screen/optical) and environment (space/operational), generating a continuous feedback loop in which they interact and define one another in assemblage.



## Black Ice

I would like to conclude this essay with a passage from James Elkins, whose work has deeply influenced my photographic practice. Elkins uses the metaphor of fractures in black ice to describe a photograph—not as intangible, but as a physical object that evokes a visceral response:

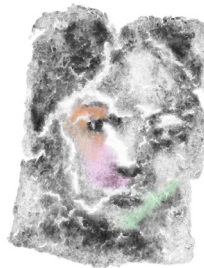
*It can be terrifying to walk on black lake ice: it fractures with each footstep, and the cracks squeal and shriek as they spread out on all sides... So I thought that looking into a photograph is like standing on black lake ice and looking down into the water beneath it. Like black ice, the material surface of a photograph is often transparent to vision: my eye moves right through the thin, shiny surface of the photographic paper, except where I see scratches or dust, or where the coating reflects my face.<sup>5</sup>*

In the case of postcards, these signs carry marks of their journey across continents: handwritten notes, postmarks, and traces of time passed. In *One Face on Thousands Postcards*, I invite the audience to look both through and at the three rice-pixel photographs, at her enigmatic yet willful gaze, and ask: who is she?

*One Face on Thousands Postcards*  
2024-2025  
38 x 49 inches, set of 3  
Rice-constructed photography,  
watercolour and inkjet pigment on silk



155 Charles Weidner Photographs, San Francisco.



BRITTON & REY, SAN FRANCISCO 4/15



BRITTON & REY, LITTONSBORNE, SAN FRANCISCO 4/15



Found postcards of Chinatown, San Francisco, dated 1900s, photographed by Charles Weidner, published by Britton & Rey. Source: eBay.



Studio view of *One Face on Thousands Postcards* (2024-2025)  
[Image making process: Constructing a portrait on a lightbox with cooked rice]

<sup>5</sup> James Elkins, *What Photography Is* (Routledge, 2011), 17-19.





Studio view of the work-in-progress *Grafting* (2025)  
[Process and medium: Engraving on aluminium]

Installation view from the 2025  
MFA Thesis Show at The Wallach  
Art Gallery, Columbia University  
Lenfest Center for the Arts.



Installation view from the 2025 MFA Thesis Show at The Wallach  
Art Gallery, Columbia University Lenfest Center for the Arts.





# THE FLASH

YANAI PERRY

The passage of time is something like a continuous process of destruction and renewal. This destruction, however, is never total. Trace remnants of the past remain among us, strewn across the rubble which we call modernity, softly calling out. We need only to stoop down and pick them up, to place them to our ears. The detritus of the previous epoch does not fall silent. It grows raucous, and, in fact, has more to say as the hour grows later, louder in proportion to the ephemerality of the object. As Sigfried Giedion noted, wherever an epoch "feels itself to be unobserved, it grows bold."<sup>1</sup> The unconscious of the epoch expresses itself most strongly in those objects, activities, and types which are derided, discarded, and ignored in their time.

Such is evidenced by the work of two photographers, Jacob Riis and Arthur 'Weegee' Fellig. These photographers, operating about 50 years apart, captured the margins of New York. Riis under the sign of progressivism and social reform, Weegee in order to sell graphic snapshots to lowbrow scandal rags. Nevertheless, the two were engaged in remarkably similar projects. They indexed and archived the underbelly of the city, the characters and settings which were shunted to the margins in the course of progress.

Indeed, the subjects of their photography—the poor, the tenement immigrant, the criminal, the drunk—were methodically removed from the Bowery, the Lower East Side, Hell's Kitchen, and any of the other neighborhoods of Manhattan which were once synonymous with privation and transgression. Today the only traces of this past remaining in those environments are the buildings themselves: tenements that once housed legions of newly arrived immigrants, destitute families, or transient drifters; or factories in which the working classes toiled, suffered, died, and, sometimes, fought back. Now these buildings are invariably high-income housing for the young and upwardly mobile.

Despite this constant process of removal and renewal, we have a record of these times: Jacob Riis and Weegee documented ethnic enclaves, subcultures, milieus, characters, and social structures which were quite literally paved over after the time of their photographing. Riis carried out his project in the 1890s, at a time when New York was coming to terms with its status as a major metropolis; Weegee, operating from the 1930s until the early 60s, photographed a city which had already accepted its importance and chaotic heterogeneity with a bemused nonchalance.

Riis' most influential work, *How the Other Half Lives*, was published in 1890.<sup>2</sup> A compilation of his previous journalism, it mixed heavy-handed prose with photographs of New York's slums and was modeled after the at-the-time common genre of "walking tour pamphlets."<sup>3</sup> Weegee's magnum opus, *Naked City*, was an instant hit, comprised of photos taken when he was a stringer for a litany of New York City tabloids. The same character-types reappear across similar settings in the photographers' work: drunks, freaks, revelers, rubberneckers, gamblers, peddlers, prostitutes, transvestites, vagabonds, criminals, street urchins, and the like, taking up residence in slums, gutters, doorways, dives, flophouses, brothels, basements, back-rooms, and paddy wagons. It is not so hard to imagine one of the inebriates of Riis' other half appearing 60 years later in Weegee's naked city, having never left his spot at the bar.

Riis' and Weegee's photos stand out from other photographers who captured New York City scenes. What differentiates them from other New York City photographers—say, Edward Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz, or Alvin Langdon Coburn—is their use of flash photography. Though Riis used newly pioneered (and dangerous) flash powder and Weegee used flashbulbs, their photos are both characterized by the stark intrusion of sudden light. In contrast, Steichen, Stieglitz, and Coburn used long exposures and soft focus lenses that created gauzy photos of skyscrapers and bridges which most closely resembled the paintings of James McNeill Whistler.<sup>4</sup> The works of these photographers imbued the city with an eerie romanticism and mystery, fashioning a sense of natural beauty from the otherwise imposing architectural forms of the city.

Not so with Riis and Weegee. Instead, the blinding force of the flash stunned their subjects into dumbstruck submission before the lens. The blast of light, which characterizes both Jacob Riis' and Weegee's styles, is suited to the moralizing of social work and the prurience of tabloids alike. The flash reveals cracks, textures, and wrinkles, which in all

probability were not even visible to the photographer himself. Nothing can escape this photographic lightning strike. Most of all, it illuminates the faces of their subjects—the signs which are perhaps the most indecipherable.

The flash was a kind of terrorist act, fulfilling a repressed scopophilic desire to see the violence, poverty, and transgression of the city. It not only had the effect of illuminating what was previously veiled, it burst the world wide open; the flash gives the viewer the impression that they are truly bearing witness to a hidden underworld, to something which had been placed out of sight until the camera was aimed at it, as though in the split second after the light the world would once again be plunged into darkness. It is the flash that gives the impression that one has got hold of a remnant of another epoch, a fossil imprint, a scene perfectly frozen in time.

Riis wrote: "It is not too much to say that our party carried terror wherever it went."<sup>5</sup> How could they not? This roaming band—comprising Riis, his assistants, and their police escorts—wended their way through the claustrophobic streets of Lower Manhattan late at night, detonating "small flash powder explosions wherever [Riis] suspected a revealing tableau."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Belknap Press, 1999), 154.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890.

<sup>3</sup> See Carrie Tirado Bramen, "The Urban Picturesque and the Spectacle of Americanization," *American Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2000): 444–77.

<sup>4</sup> William Sharpe, "New York, Night, and Cultural Mythmaking: The Nocturne in Photography, 1900–1925," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 2, no. 3 (1988): 3–21.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Carter, "Writing with Light: Jacob Riis's Ambivalent Exposures," *College English* 71, no. 2 (2008): 117–41, 124.

<sup>6</sup> Carter, "Writing with Light," 124.





**Figure 1:** Riis, Jacob. *Lodgers in Bayard Street Tenement, Five Cents a Spot*. 1889. Gelatin silver print, 6 3/16 x 4 3/4" (15.7 x 12 cm). International Center of Photography.

In Weegee's photos, we see the same use of flash, though perhaps without the censoriousness of Riis' eye. This method results in s high-contrast photos, long shadows, magnified textures—a stark, almost sterile view of the grimy city. The expressions of people in these photos are enigmatic. Both of the photographers' oeuvres are replete with images of people hiding their faces from the camera: flophouse lodgers, perhaps ashamed of themselves, or simply irritated at a disruption to their sleep; criminals and mobsters covering their faces with fedoras, stogies still drawing a line of smoke beside them.

What unites the works of these two photographers is their dedication to the sordid and the seamy. From the time of the Industrial Revolution and onwards, cities emerged in the modern consciousness as the unique focus of the anxieties and paranoid fantasies of the

emergent middle class. Cities, conceived as throbbing, teeming nests full of criminals and unassimilated immigrants, seemed to threaten more restrained and sensible bourgeois values.<sup>7</sup> While Riis' work is the exemplary instance of this paranoia, Weegee's work appears as a witty repartee to a bourgeois mistrust of cities (which nevertheless does not entirely refuse to indulge this simultaneous paranoia and curiosity).

In both cases, the photographers were appealing to a desire to see. Riis for a bourgeois middle class that had successfully insulated itself from "the other half," and Weegee for a city that was longing to find beauty in its "most drunken and disorderly and pathetic moments."<sup>8</sup> And yet, in Riis' work, do we not detect an early intimation of the desire to revel in privation? In Weegee's work, do we not hear a cri de coeur from the poor, the criminal, and the ephemeral?

<sup>7</sup> See Bramen.

<sup>8</sup> Weegee, *Naked City* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1945).



**Figure 2:** Riis, Jacob. *Basement of a Pub in Mulberry-Bend at 3:00 am*. ca. 1888-1898. Gelatin silver print, 7 13/16 x 9 1/2 in. (19.9 x 24.2 cm). International Center of Photography.



**Figure 3:** Weegee. *In the Paddy Wagon*. 1944. Gelatin silver print, 10 x 13 in. (25.4 x 33 cm.). Whitney Museum of American Art



**Figure 4:** Weegee. *An Incident in the Snowstorm. Rag Peddler Sam Karshnowitz Leads a Horse along the Street in a Bitter Snowstorm. The Horse Has Been Rented for the Day to Pull His Wagon*. 1944. Gelatin silver print, 12 3/4 x 10 1/2 in. (32.4 x 26.7 cm). Smithsonian American Art Museum.



## THE SPACES BETWEEN: LOSS AND REMEMBRANCE IN MARY KELLY'S *LACUNAE*

LINDA DAI

A space, a pause. A moment, a breath. A gesture, a death. Mary Kelly's *Lacunae* (2023) is a work of quiet ruptures, a layered contemplation on time's incessant tempo and the traces it leaves behind. Here, Kelly offers us more than just a glimpse into the erosion of time; she hands us the fragile, entangled aftermath of its passing. *Lacunae* consists of a series of collaged calendars, onto which Kelly's own personal diary is juxtaposed with ash drawings on vellum to confront questions of time, aging, and death through a lens of both neutrality and transformation. Through this work, Kelly infuses the measured structure of time with the unpredictability of loss, opening up empty spaces, also known as lacunae, where the weight of absence feels palpable—where time does not simply pass, but accumulates, folds, and spoils.

The calendar, a mundane but relentless symbol of time's advance, is disrupted here. Death punctuates its quiet regularity, transforming it into something more visceral, more haunted, and paradoxically, more alive. Each page is marked by the notation of friends' ages and their deaths, marked not with names but with lack thereof, as if Kelly is mapping out an imaginary countdown. She pointedly documents these losses

alongside her own aging process, tracing her own mortality in the gaps left by others. The calendar becomes not only a record of time but a memento mori, a reminder of the familiar yet fleeting nature of life.

There's something achingly human about Kelly's *Lacunae*, where the minutiae of daily life collides with the great, unspoken, and natural inevitability of death. Her collages feel like weathered elegies, each page unfolding into a meditation on how loss accumulates not in large, overwhelming cartharses, but in the simple, repetitive notations of days gone, friends lost, bodies matured. This is the work's greatest power: its invitation to consider the ways in which loss, memory, and identity are entrenched in time's slow unraveling. As much as it is about letting go, it is also about the ways we hold on, how we live in, or cope with, the gaps. In *Lacunae*, Kelly offers us a way to understand time as both relentless and delicate, a force that shapes us as much by what we lose as by what we remember. I am struck by this tension embedded in Kelly's work: between the materiality of time and its intangibility, between remembering and forgetting, between presence and absence, between permanence and ephemerality.

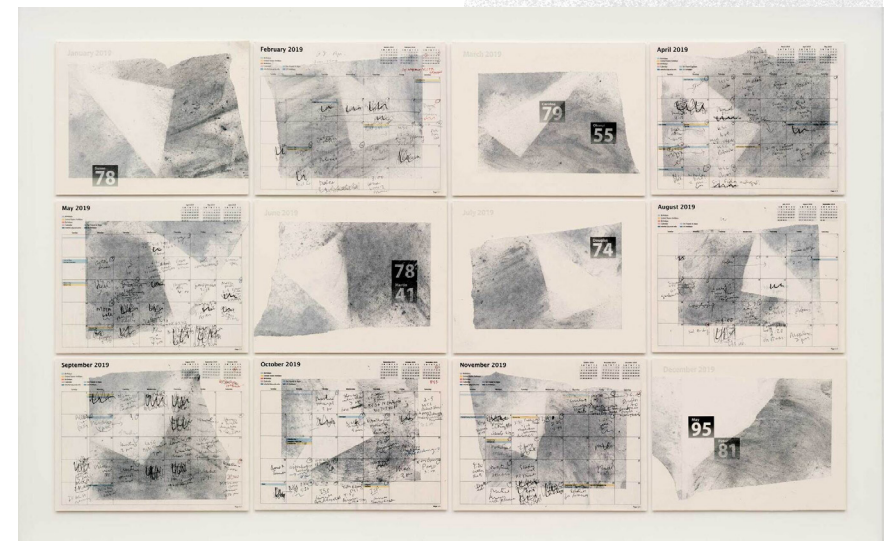
As light seeps through the translucent vellum (Fig.2), we are poetically reminded of the fragility of not only life, but of memory itself. Time, like the vellum, is stained by all that it encounters, even if only for a moment. The gaps, the blank spaces left behind by those who've gone, feel like breaths held too long, like whispers of what once was and can no longer be named. And yet, Kelly does not run from the darkness; instead, she invites us into it. *Lacunae* is an embrace of the vulnerability of absence, of the lacunae in our own lives, of the holes that form in the impossible haze.

Ash, that delicate residue of fire and death, is central to this work's symbolic potency. It hovers on the edge of disappearance, at once substantial and ethereal. Kelly's hand-drawn marks in ash, scattered across the calendar's printed structure, are more than just signs of grief. They are sites of reflection, spaces where time itself thickens and slows down. These gaps in the calendar's strict framework are neither arbitrary nor accidental. They are interruptions: in the flow of life, in the continuity of self, in the regularity of time's passage. And yet, within these ruptures, there is a certain tenderness. Kelly asks us to pause in these spaces, to dwell in the emptiness and consider what it means to live in a world

where age is documented but never explained, where death is present but never named. There's a neutrality to Kelly's process, an almost clinical approach to charting these passages—but the starkness of her method is underpinned, and to a certain degree, contradicted, by a salient emotional current. The lacunae swallow time, one by one, as Kelly's own notations of her aging body quietly mirror the deaths around her. It's as though she is asking: What is it to live in the shadow of loss? What is it to measure one's own life by the lives that have disappeared?

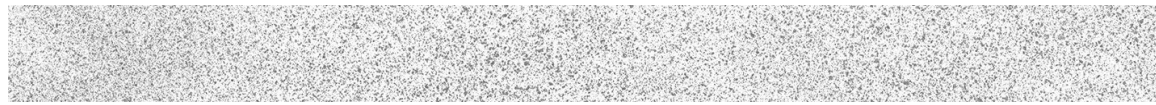
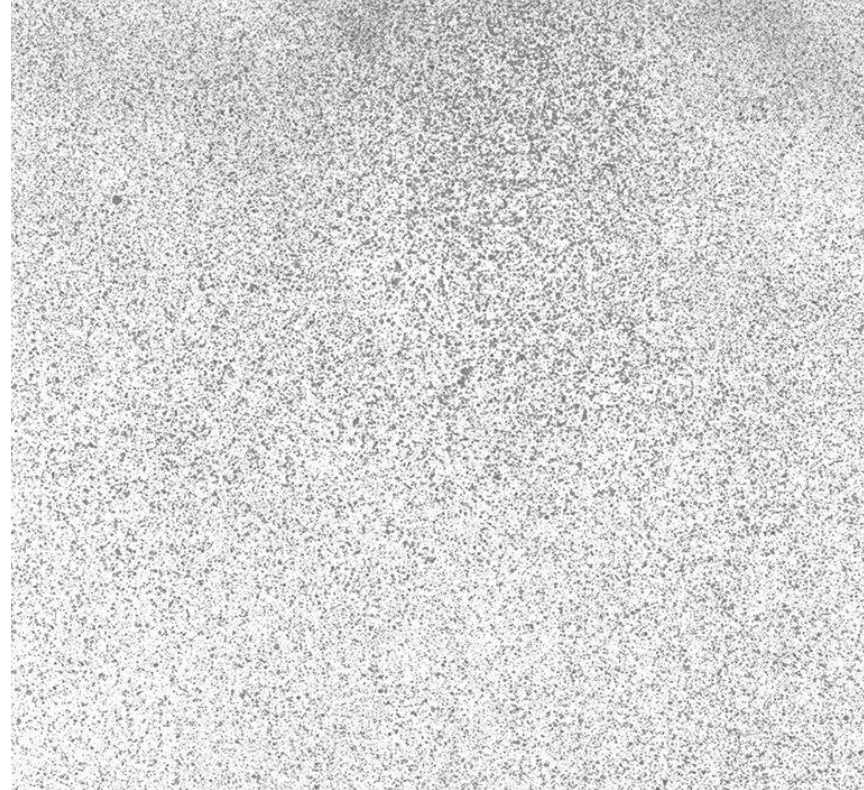
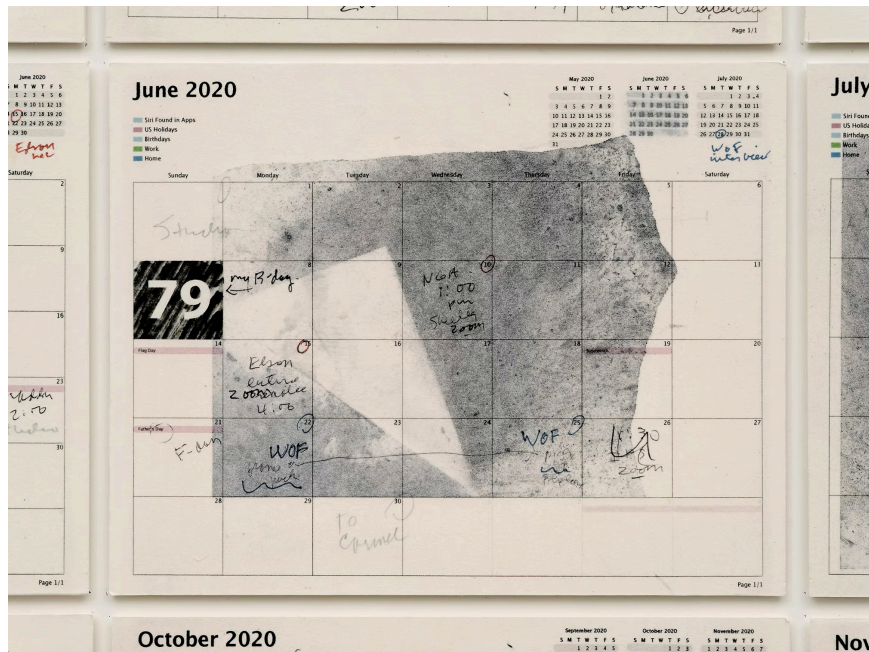
When I saw Mary Kelly's *Lacunae* at the Whitney Biennial earlier last year, I first thought of my own calendar and its cluttered chaos. How it preserved abandoned routines and uncelebrated holidays. How it mirrored the imperfect resilience of memory. After engaging with it more, I thought of my parents and my grandparents, my uncles and my neighbors, my mentors and my friends. I did not think of them in fear of death, but in awe of life.

Mary Kelly, *Lacunae* (detail), 2023. Ragboard, vellum, ash, and ink; ten framed panels, 38 1/2 x 24 x 1 3/4 in. (97.8 x 61 x 4.4 cm) each. Courtesy the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles.  
© Mary Kelly. Courtesy the artist and Panic Studio Los Angeles.





Mary Kelly, *Lacunae* (detail of panel 9 of 10),  
2023. Ragboard, vellum, ash, ink. Overall: 24 1/2  
× 403 1/2 in. (62.2 × 1024.9 cm). Courtesy the  
artist. © 2024 Mary Kelly.





## HERBARY: CO-RESPIRATION (2023)

JUNTAO YANG



*Herbary: Co-respiration* (2023) unfolds within a temporarily constructed immersive environment, saturated with the scent of medicinal herbs, resonating with animistic rituals that summon entanglements between herbs and humans, disease and memory, forgetting and recollection. Core elements include the medicinal herbs themselves, herb remnants scattered across the canvas, and projected moving images interweaving indigenous herbal medicine, ritual practices, and cultural trauma. In this multi-sensory space, herb remnants are objects to be trampled, transient relics carried away by the wind, and ritualistic mediators that trace the intermingling of bodies, affliction, and healing. Their discarding marks the vaporization of an indeterminate memory—one that does not dissolve into oblivion but cycles between loss and recovery. The work thus raises a fundamental question: under what conditions can these residues be reintegrated into the public sphere to form a new modality of collective remembrance?

Situated at the threshold between detritus and cure, herb remnants occupy an ambiguous position in traditional Chinese medicine and vernacular healing practices. My work explores this paradox, rendering these remnants not just as material residues but as symbols of memory and trauma. Through the ritual scattering of herbs in public domains, it resists the privatization of suffering through collective witnessing. Rituals, here, are not symbolic but performative acts, entangling healing with social memory. The scattering oscillates between benediction and malediction—offering remedy to the community while also bearing the weight of unresolved affliction. Thus, this ritual both wages war against the specters of disease and subverts the mechanisms of forgetting.

These remnants sediment the memory of historical violence, resisting their clinical expulsion as mere waste. They cling with stubborn persistence, defying both archival containment and mnemonic annihilation. They

assert their presence in public while evading disciplinary regulation, leaving an ineffaceable trace in history's gaps. The work reclaims these "impurities," reconfiguring breathing into a political act, fragrance into a mnemonic vessel, and lost medicinal knowledge into a counter-hegemonic force. In this process, the work enacts a strategy of counter-forgetting, imbuing what modernity relentlessly seeks to erase with new meaning.

Modernity's logic is one of systematic expulsion: it erases ambiguity, sequesters memory, and sanitizes history. The work inverts this: it resurrects the spectral presence of what has been designated as waste, orchestrating a sensorial polyphony that recuperates the marginal, the silenced, and the disavowed. In doing so, it restores displaced healing practices, suppressed bodily experiences, and lost public rituals into the collective sensorium. Entrenched in medical and political apparatuses, convalescence becomes spectral—to heal is to disappear, to be absorbed back into the normative condition of "health," to leave no trace of affliction. But *Herbary: Co-respiration* insists otherwise: what remains unhealed must not be erased. Healing must encompass social and political reconnection, rather than remain confined to biomedical frameworks. Memory, too, must not be individualized, but persist as a shared, unerasable imprint on public consciousness.

As a post-pandemic installation, the work interrogates how collective trauma is inscribed, processed, and potentially effaced. It poses questions on the nature of memory itself: What does it mean to remember? Who has the authority to remember? Whose trauma is legitimized, and whose history is erased? In the infrastructures of mourning that have emerged in the pandemic's wake, the politics of remembrance and the politics of forgetting operate in parallel, constructing public memory while simultaneously obliterating its inconvenient remnants. Against this, the work enacts a counter-intervention, refusing to let those traces disappear, instead

reintroducing them into the public sphere as enduring imprints that resist eradication.

Herb remnants permeate the city's circulatory system through footsteps and wind, assuming a diffuse, decentralized trace that eludes control and categorization. They exist in a state of flux, belonging neither to an origin nor an endpoint, gesturing toward absence while remaining material. The olfactory residue of the herbs lingers beyond the deinstallation, persisting on walls, textiles, and visitors' garments. Over time, they dissolve into the air, becoming imperceptible yet never entirely vanishing. This temporal transformation turns the work into a presence that resists containment by clinging to the interstices of reality. It reconfigures public memory as a shared experience, rather than one that is institutionalized, privatized, or archived. The herbs become a decentralized memorial that fragments, diffuses, and seeps into daily life. They extend healing beyond the personal; their dispersal does not erase trauma but instead reabsorbs it into greater social networks.

Within this conceptual framework, the herbs themselves are mobilized as symbolic apparatuses that confront the politics of forgetting—or more precisely, as a formula for counter-forgetting. The work thus asks: How can material traces rethread the ruptured fabric of social experience? How can illness and embodied affliction be collectively memorialized without being appropriated as a political spectacle? How can scent, residue, and moving images resist the sanitization of trauma? How might public healing extend beyond individual, psychological recovery?

Amnesia, once a neurological condition, has become a political metaphor—a vessel for erased traumas and fragmented histories. The medicinal herbs chosen—*Polygala tenuifolia* (yuan zhi), *Panax notoginseng* (san qi), *Moutan cortex* (mu dan pi)—are deeply symbolic; these ingredients have been used in traditional medicine to treat memory loss, cognitive decline, and neurological



deterioration. Yet they do not simply restore mnemonic capacities, but also resuscitate excised social memory. The pandemic has manufactured systemic amnesia. Breathing, once and perhaps still, remains a site of discipline, surveillance, and fear: masks, border-driven xenophobia, social distancing, medical isolation, paramilitary lockdowns. It is through the material inscription of herb remnants that the work seeks to reactivate suppressed circuits of memory, exposing the operations of forgetting to visibility and summoning the conditions for collective remembrance.

Herb remnants leave a transcendent trace, a ritual echo that refuses to vanish. They raise vital questions about memory: How might remembrance be salvaged from forgetting? How might the breath of plants summon human memory—or conversely, how might forgetting be inscribed within respiration itself? In a hyper-sanitized world these traces may be our only remnant. They do not offer a seamless historical narrative; yet it is precisely its incompleteness, its perpetual deferral that grants it an unassimilable, non-incorporable, non-forgettable force. Their dissipation is a deliberate act of resistance, a challenge to the biopolitical hygiene of modernity. The trace they leave does not point to closure but to an unfinished futurity, an insistence that what has been consigned to oblivion will persist, continuously mutating, perpetually resurfacing in the interstices of the present. It reminds us that forgetting is never passive—it is always engineered; remembering is never natural—it is always contested. Perhaps the role of art is precisely this: to summon forth those fragments that should have disappeared, to reinsert them, insistently, into our field of perception. And, to compel us with an uncomfortable yet necessary reckoning: What must be remembered?



Juntao Yang, *Herbary: Co-respiration*, 2023. Installation view. Single-channel digital video (4'19"), herbal medicine, glass containers. Exhibited in 300 Migratory Birds, Aranya Theater Festival, Qinhuangdao, China.

Photo: © 2023 Aranya Theater Festival





Juntao Yang, *Herbary: Co-respiration*, 2023. Detail view. Single-channel digital video (4'19"), herbal medicine, glass containers. Exhibited in 300 Migratory Birds, Aranya Theater Festival, Qinhuangdao, China.

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## CONTACT ACCUMULATION

SOPHIE TAYLOR

Her hands are the kind of clammy that comes after peeling off gloves from too-hot hands on a too-cold day. She doesn't move to wipe them—or doesn't think to—and for that they feel clean in their honesty. We've never met before, and yet there we stand, palm to palm. At once touching and being touched. A glance in the mirrored front wall of the room shows other pairs in similar stances. Discarded winter coats in the studio corner are our only witnesses beyond one another. Some of us are dancers, some of us are not. My body is among the untrained. I look down to my partner's bare feet, uncovered from knit socks and clogs. An unanticipated intimacy. Her nails are painted a vivid purple. I don't know why this detail surprises me.

Mimi and I were driving down one of those Vermont roads where the keen presence of quietness quickly erases the misconception of its being defined by lack. We kept the music off so we could listen to the thick silence of snow. At one point, she reached across the car's center console and encircled my wrist with her fingers, stretching my arm from my lap into the air in front of me while her other hand held the steering wheel. Then she pressed the edge of her palm at the crease of my floating elbow, gently encouraging it to bend. She started explaining contact improvisation, a relational type of movement developed by choreographer Steve Paxton, in which one body spontaneously responds to another, gestures unspooling around sustained mutual touch. A graze turns into a lean, a back curls against the foil of another's spine. Pressure on a joint molds the shape of an arm. Mimi smiled. "I have an idea for a performance."

I learn C's name during our first water break. We don't say much, but it isn't uncomfortable, having already spent the better part of twenty minutes threading our limbs together in meandering forms, learning how we move as a duo during those preliminary exercises. Mimi calls us back to the studio floor. She clears her throat and reads a quote from Paxton: "I was trying to understand what makes integrity in movement." For him, contact improvisation was "a game that takes two people to win, so it doesn't create losers; it ignores gender, size, and other differences. It's about attending to your reflexes in a touch communication—faster than words, faster than conscious thinking." C and I place our palms against one another again, starting from the same point as we did the previous session, though what's to come next is sure to look different from what came before. Listening to bodies can be hard. I'm more attuned this round without realizing; I notice a small ache as it blooms on the side of my hand, a spot that tires easily since breaking last year.





My hand had been fractured for three weeks before I knew something was wrong. That moment came when a stranger with persistent eyes gripped my fingers in a tight embrace, proceeding to introduce himself without asking my name. Nauseous with pain after pulling away, my first thought was to find a sink and soap to wash away the feel of him. Drying my hands on a rough paper towel in the bar bathroom, I winced at the soreness. I must've done more damage than I thought when I hit it on the edge of my counter earlier in the month. A body asserting its limits. When the doctor pointed to the hairline crack over the X-ray light box the next day, I couldn't help but feel this was the stranger's fault, his insistence responsible for the fissure.

I wore a wrist brace to meet you but hid it under the table. I lifted my drink with my left hand, hoping you wouldn't notice the awkwardness of the movement. I confessed this to you while walking the dog last winter, prompted by your absentminded musing that left-handedness and the hour of 4am both recall the color blue, your thumb brushing across my knuckles. We laughed, the crispness of early impressions traded for the softened haze of familiarity. You turned to me when brushing your teeth that night, grinning while clumsily trying to use your left hand.

It's cold in the snow. My fingertips, pink from the chill, match my red outfit—the color I had chosen from among Mimi's monochrome offerings for each of the performers, thinking it would make me feel some sense of certainty while being watched by an audience. More grounding is the immediacy of touch, the clarification of my body's edges against the outline of C's when numbness otherwise clouds sensation. I fold against her, my head lolling on her shoulder, my neck supported by her collarbone. Flashes of her purple clothing offer the only other color against the white expanse of our surroundings, the glare leaving sunspots behind my eyelids. The snow is packed down to ice, the vestiges of the blue and orange pair who had performed before us, the paragraph preceding our tactile conversation. Words tend to interrupt things. Traces of touches accumulate.









**moda critical review**