



**Ripples** Kanishka Gandhi | MA Visual Communication

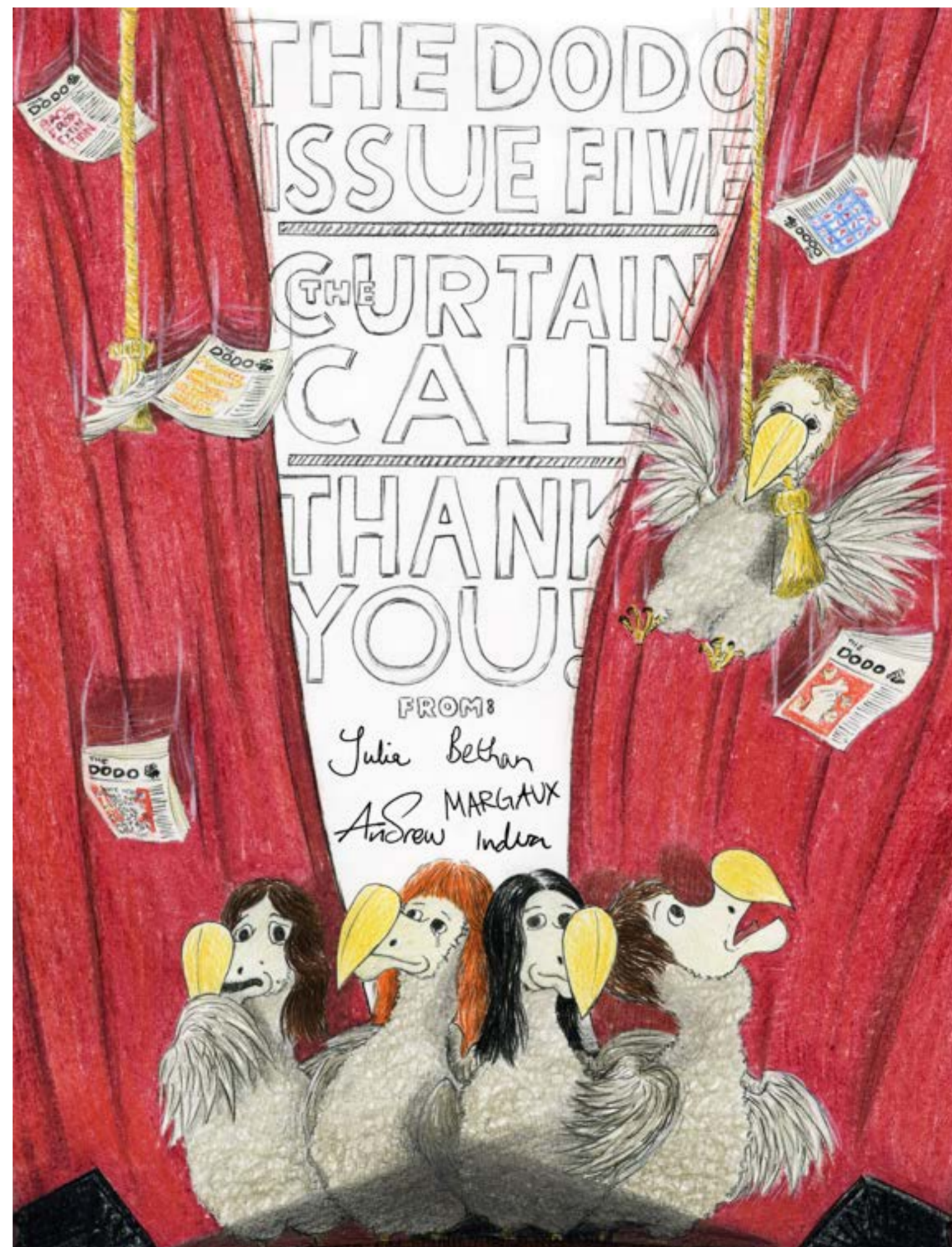
# The DODO



Issue #5

The RCA Student Newspaper

Friday, 14th June 2024



Cover by: Andrew Sviridov, MA Visual Communication.

**NEWS** | A VR project about whale fall phenomena, a project **reimagining language**, a short film about White City, a review from the Malta Biennale, and an AR world through the lens of a mushroom.

**CULTURE** | Poetry and imagery by Ebuloluwa Adepoju, a prose piece on the RCA by Ujwal Mantha, **writings and paintings** by Samantha Jackson, a review by Andrew Sviridov, and an interview with Polo Farrera.

**GLOBAL** | A collage on the Albert memorial by Weiyue Sun, **artwork on indentureship and its legacies** by Amanda Van der Helm, **artwork reclaiming Indian tradition** by Rose Anthony, and an **audiovisual performance for Ukraine**.

**GALLERY** | Artefacts by Shifeng Zhang, **printings** by Riya Panwar, **paintings** by Ivana Voselj and Valerie Ellis, **3D art** by Joshua Siebert, **illustrations** by Aliya Aliyeva and Kanishka Gandhi, and a **zine** by Izzy Argent.

**The DODO Team:**

<b>The Editors:</b>	<b>Assistant Designer:</b>	<b>Events Coordinator:</b>	<b>Social Media Coordinator:</b>
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## Whale Fall

Armelle Mihailescu  
Riya Mahajan  
Selin Öztürk  
Janmejay Singh  
MA Digital Direction

Whales are the guardians of the ocean: beautiful, magnificent creatures who keep the sea healthy, fertilised, and nourished through the decades that define their lifespan. When a whale dies, it falls, disintegrating slowly as it makes its way to the ocean floor. In that process, the whale's body becomes sustenance for the many fishes and sea creatures, its bones a home for marine flora and fauna to bloom around it. In death, the whale preserves life in the ocean for decades after it has passed on.

“Whale Fall” is an ode, an elegy that lets the viewer experience the phenomenon of a whale's fall through an immersive Virtual Reality experience. The project was born out of a sense of wonder and awe towards these mammals, coupled with a sense of horror at the impact of plastic pollution—especially microplastics—on marine ecologies.

According to the UN, life below water is the most overlooked sustainable development goal. With this project, we aim to rely on the transformative power of virtual reality to instil a sense of awe for the marine ecosystem, concern for its survival, and hope that it is still not too late to take action.

The experience lets the viewer experience a whale fall. As the whale is on the ground, we need to physically move and remove trash from its body, to enable the phenomenon to complete and for the whale to bloom. The aim is for ‘Whale Fall’ to be an engaging narrative, but also to let the viewer conclude the experience with even more self-awareness about the use of plastics and regard for where they may end up.

We developed this experience across a span of six months, fleshing out the narrative, building it in Unreal Engine, Cinema 4D and Houdini, and eventually developing it further into an ecosystem that spans a 360 degree immersive documentary, an AR experience that brings the experience to one's environment, and a website for those interested in a deeper dive into the research and process of developing the story.

In the process, we had interactions with amazing artists, organisations and researchers. Graduates of RCA like Mella Shaw and Cassie Vaughan have done some incredible work towards a creative response to the climate crisis. We've also had very interesting engagements with whale conservation organisations like Whale and Dolphin Conservation in the UK and Ocean Alliance in the US, along with activist entities like Greenpeace who are doing some radical work in this space.

We were inspired to incorporate plastic in our narrative because of the story of a pregnant sperm whale which washed up, dead, on a sandy beach outside Porto Cervo, a resort town on Italy's island of Sardinia in March 2019. When scientists and veterinarians cut open her womb and stomach, they found a horrifying sight: a dead baby whale, and nearly 50 pounds of plastic waste jammed into her belly. It was not an isolated incident, but one that has been preceded and succeeded by many strandings.

When whales ingest plastic, they cannot digest any actual food since it sticks in their intestines and food tract, and sometimes whales starve to death. Plastic pollution is one of the major concerns, but ghost nets and increased human activity in the ocean through deep sea fracking, drilling, and increased movement of ships in the ocean have also really affected whales, separating them from their families, and affecting their reproduction and natural life cycles, navigation and communication. Tom Mustill's book *How to Speak Whale* has taught us about the incredible intelligence and sensitivity of these beautiful creatures. If you would like to try the experience, you are welcome to pop by at the White City campus, or connect with us at [www.whalefallproject.com](http://www.whalefallproject.com).

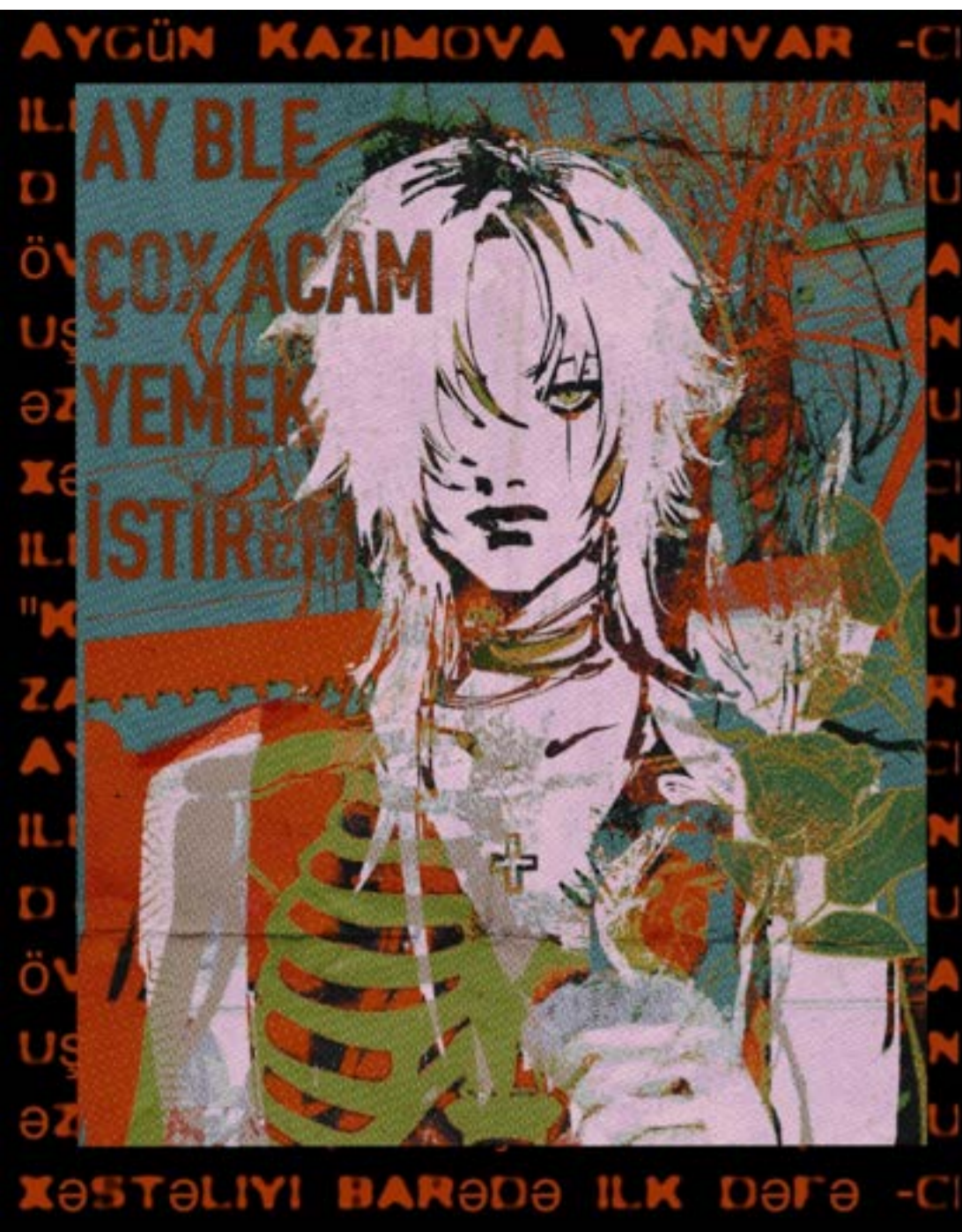


## Devilish Cunt Zine

Izzy Argent | MA Visual Communication

This was made with the intent of the feminist act of reclaiming a word historically used to abuse: cunt. The Christian church used to use the phrase devilish cunt in Latin as an insult to women, who they believed to be carriers of sin, and this piece aims to reclaim and play with the words in a joyful way. I riso printed it in the print labs at White City as the poster side to my concertina zine for my series ‘Fat Cunt Power’ that celebrates fatness and feminism.





*"We are not protecting nature. We are nature protecting itself."*

- Arias Kalpana, TedX Talk, 2022



Artwork by  
Aliya Aliyeva  
Graduate Diploma



# Fluid Language

Jane Lee

MA Information

Experience Design

'Fluid Language' is the second work of the 'Fluid Series', exhibited as part of Future Worlds: Attunements at the Orleans House Gallery, London. The 'Fluid Series' project started with speculating a future where gender is constantly changing, as in a screenplay. 'Fluid Language' is the next chapter of that.

This project examines how gender performativity is formed from a vocal perspective when discussing gender norms. When contemplating specific examples of gender and gender norms, we usually focus on the visible aspects: movements, behavioural patterns,

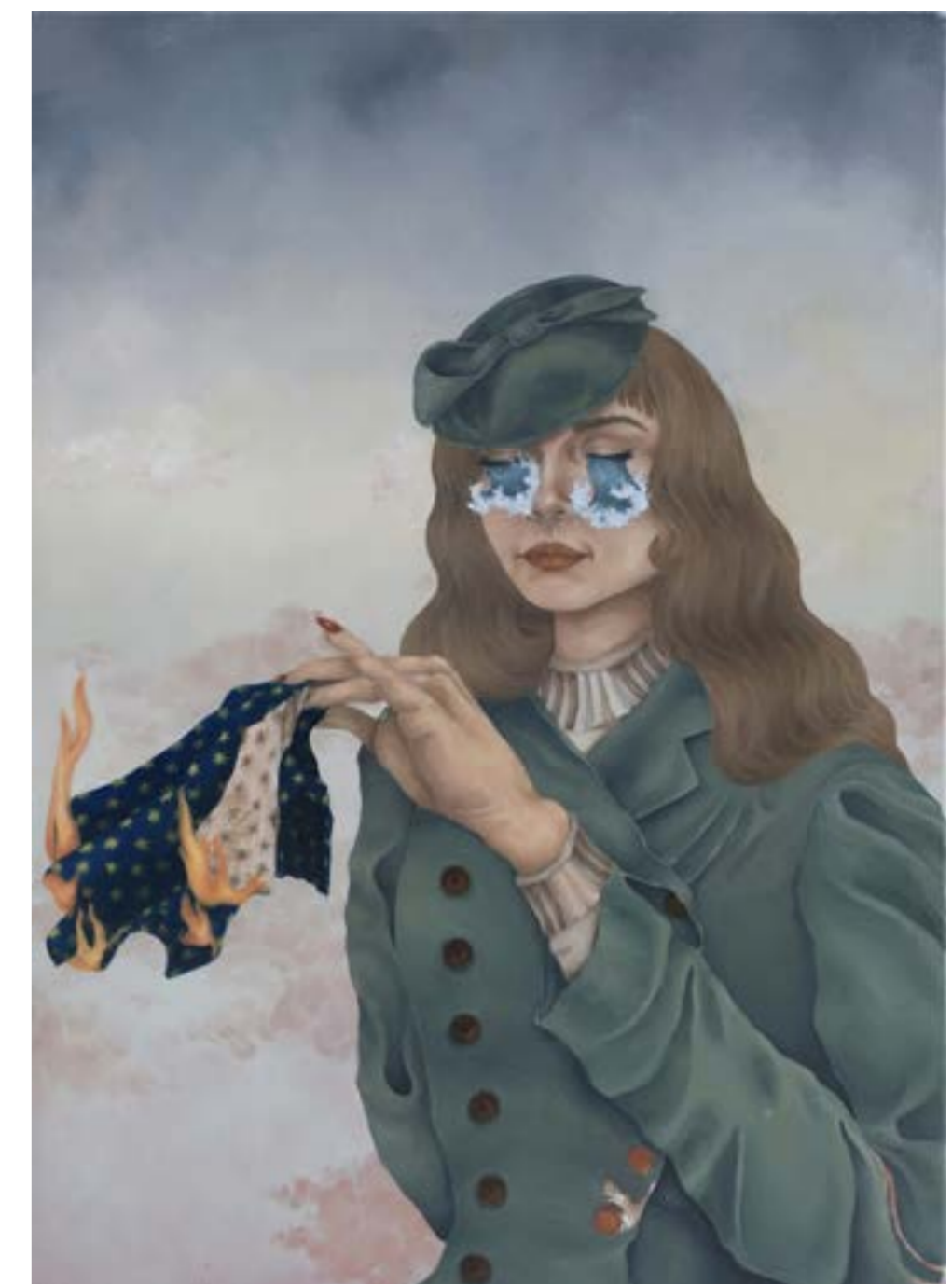
attire, body hair, makeup, hairstyles, and so on. For instance, women's sounds have been gendered in various ways. Women's domestic labour, for example, has been marketed with "silence" as a selling point, even emphasised in vacuum cleaner advertisements. This reflects an implicit societal rule that noise generated by women's domestic work should not disturb other family members.

Drawing from the perspectives of posthumanism and queer theory, this study endeavours to identify non-gendered sounds within gender-neutral organisms. Human language is gendered by socially constructed norms of gender performativity. Twelve letters are generated from audio visualisation and bio-sonification of gender-neutral organisms, and made into a typeface.

Bio-sonified data is collected from gender-neutral organisms based on their electrodermal activity characteristics. For this prototype, flowers were chosen as a sample organism. This data is subsequently processed into

parametrically generated sound. The resulting sound is then visually represented following the principle of hieroglyphic morphology, generating new characters corresponding to each sound. The sound is then converted into a font, following the modular pattern typography method. This interdisciplinary approach merges bioinformatics, sound synthesis, and typography, offering novel insights into the intersection of technology, biology, and language. By harnessing the inherent sonic properties of biological processes, this project explores innovative avenues for artistic expression and challenges conventional notions of communication and representation.

Through the creation of a gender-neutral future language, it seeks to promote inclusivity and diversity while pushing the boundaries of creative experimentation and technological advancement.



# The Time Is Out Of Joint

Ivana Voselj

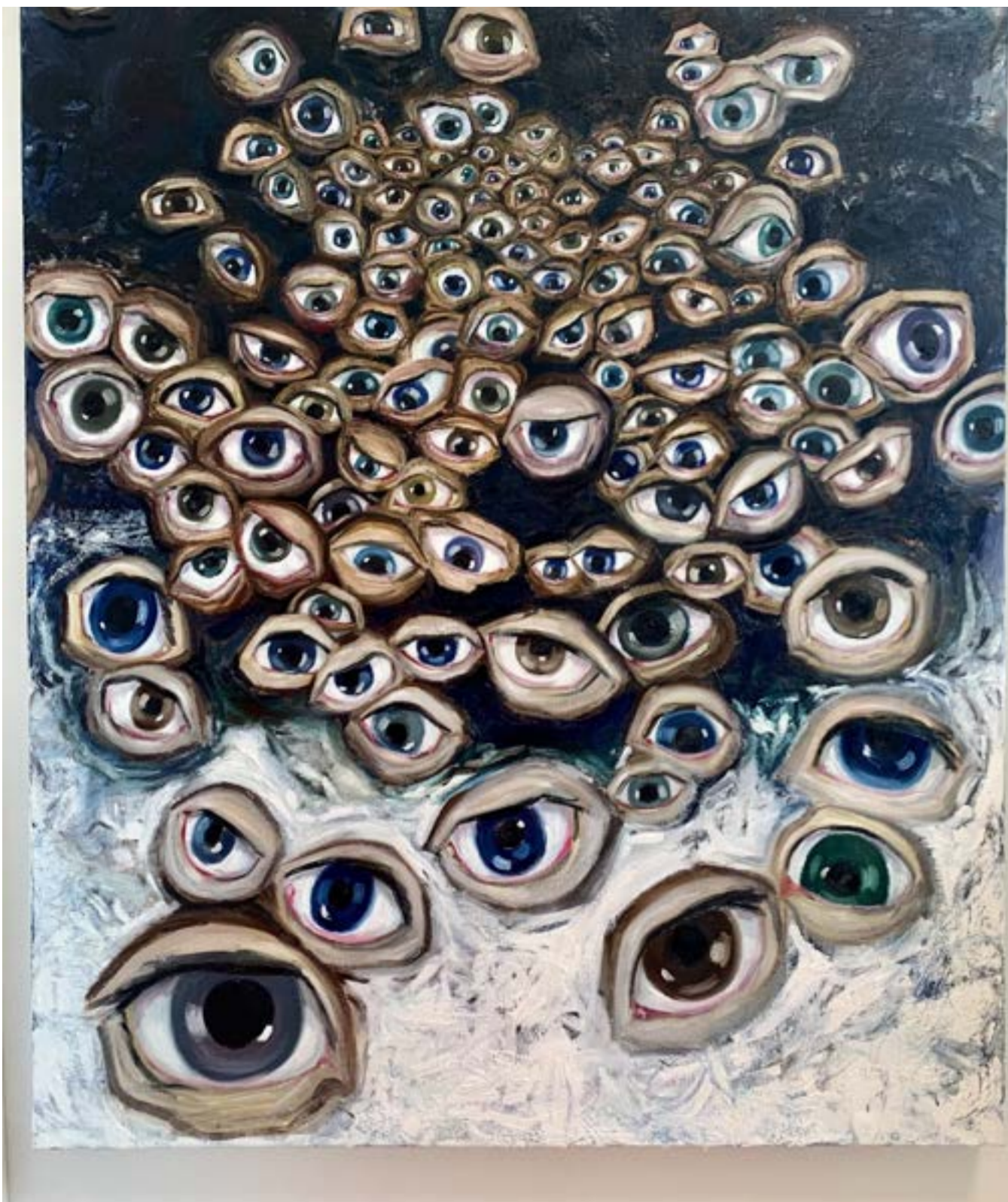
MA Painting

My painting explores the themes of memory, time, and the haunt of nostalgia through a surrealist lens.

Drawing inspiration from philosophy, art history, and film, I aim to evoke a tension of an unknown presence, typically conjuring elements from my own memories as well as a past never personally experienced.







# Surveillance

Valerie Ellis  
MA Painting

When I returned to the UK after living in Australia, it was to discover that London now has the highest density of surveillance cameras anywhere in the world. No doubt this gives some people a sense of security but, for those with a skeptical socio-political perspective, it also fosters concerns about unwarranted state surveillance. At the same time, social media feeds the insatiable need many people have to perform for “views”.

My background in psychology makes me aware of the early childhood need we all have to feel acknowledged and significant by having parents watch and affirm our childish antics. This makes the eye and its capacity for observation a multi-functional part of human relations and a potent symbol of political power that’s particularly pertinent as the world watches Israel and Gaza and citizens watch their respective governments’ lack of moral action. This painting distils many of my thoughts about contemporary issues and my understanding of human needs.



# “A Ghost is White”: A Film about White City

Ah Young Shin  
Zoe Shum  
MA Digital Direction



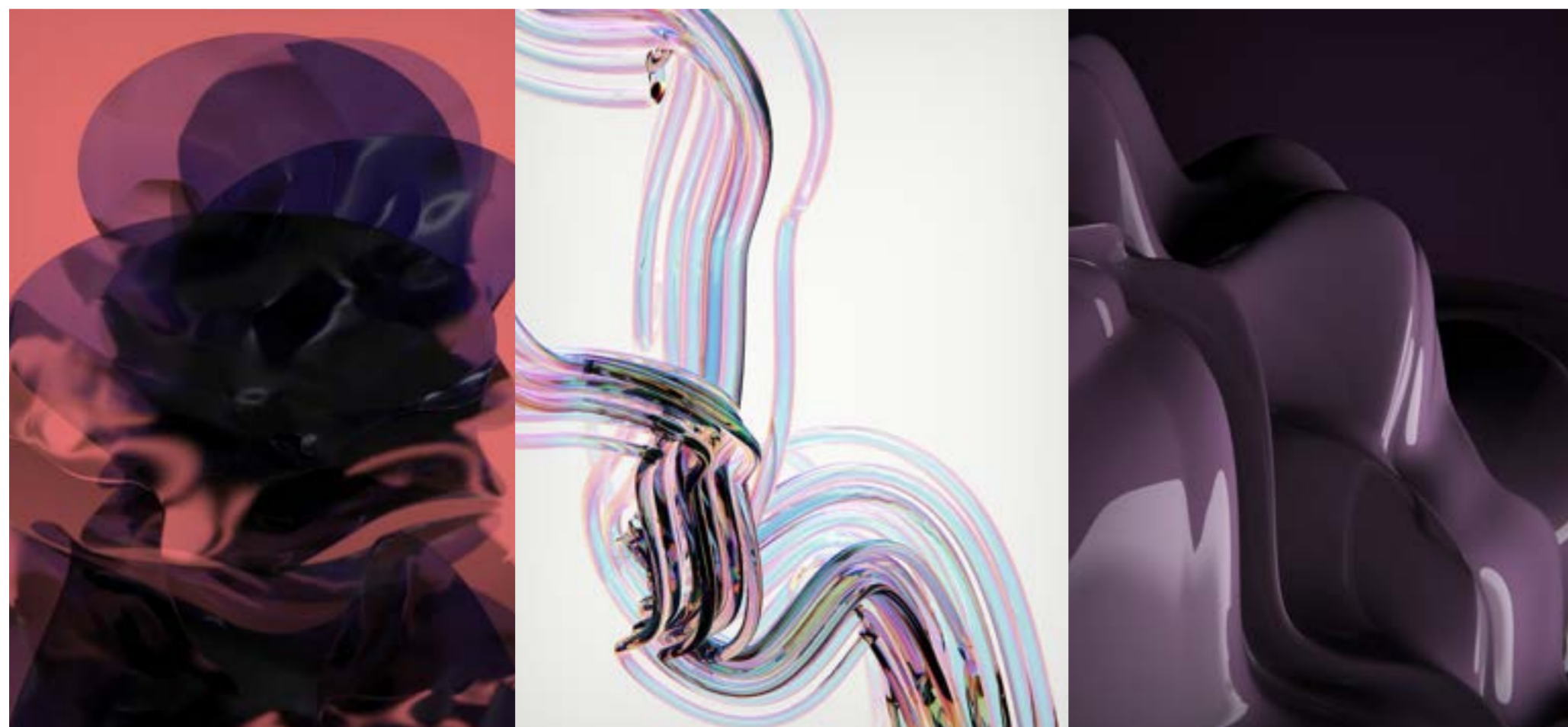
A Ghost is White is an experimental short film following two students at the Royal College of Art in White City who decide to make a documentary about the area. As they navigate different project ideas, investigate past and present architectural developments and uncover colonial histories, the past seeps through the very film itself, haunting and corrupting the footage. This project was created for the MA Digital Direction Immersive Adventures unit, combining traditional documentary segments shot on digital camera and camcorder with genre, narrative

and mixed media elements to engage RCA students and inhabitants of White City in the extensive, fascinating and disturbing facets of site-specific history.



# What is Your Reality?

Joshua Siebert  
MA Industrial and Product Design





# Simple Expressions of Complex Thoughts

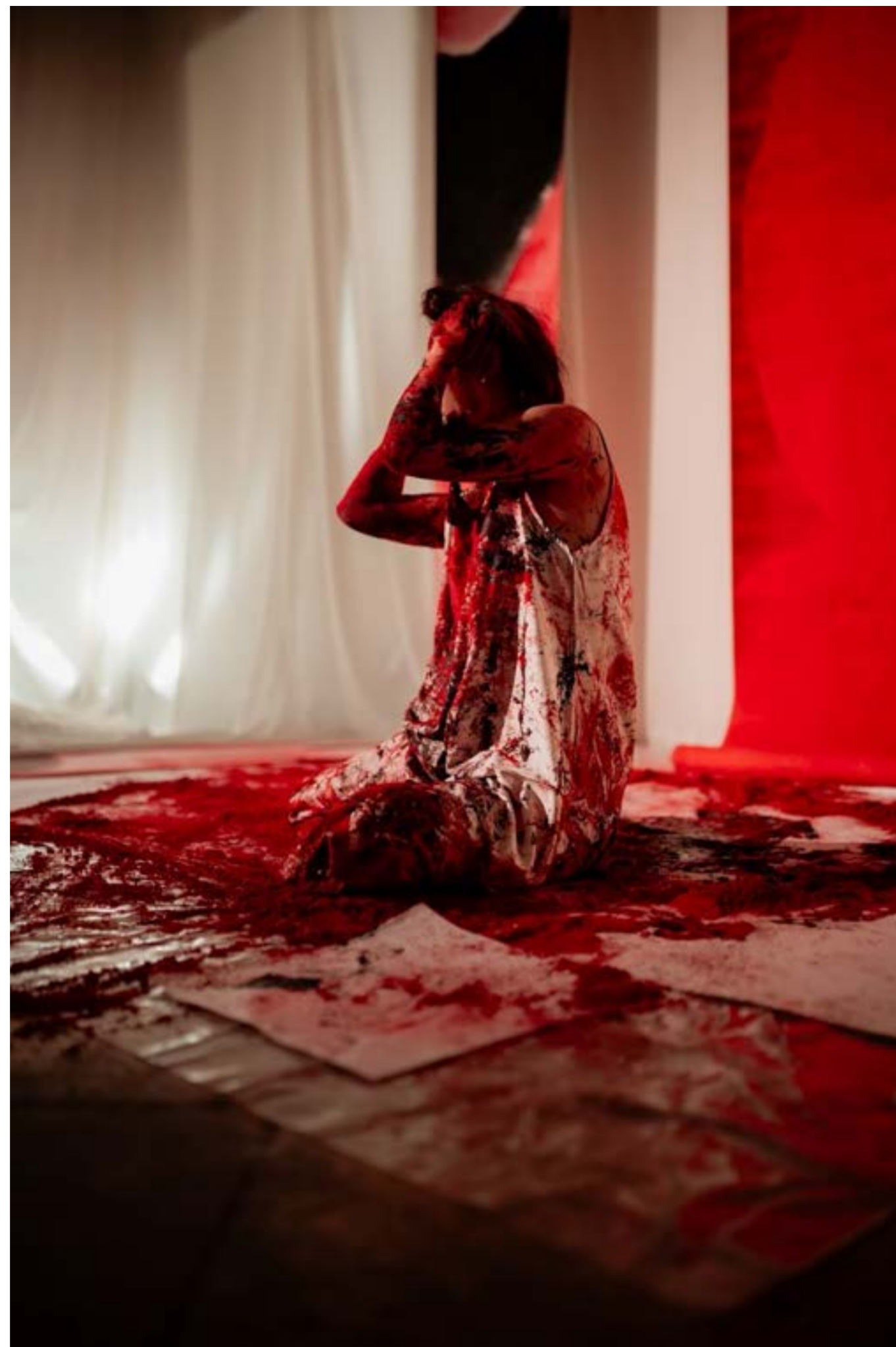
Hannah Dowling  
MA Curating  
Contemporary Art

*'We favour the simple expression of the complex thought. We are for the large shape because it has the impact of the unequivocal. We wish to reassert the picture plane. We are for flat forms because they destroy illusion and reveal truth.'*

**Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb (joint manifesto, New York Times, 1943)**

*Simple Expressions of Complex Thoughts* was an exhibition curated by Hannah Dowling as part of the Strada Stretta programme within the Valletta Cultural Agency during the Malta Biennale 2024. The exhibition was on show from the 12th-21st April at The Splendid in Valletta. Conceptually, it stems from Rothko and Gottlieb's manifesto, and acts as a contemporary understanding of their thoughts and concerns on the relationship between artists, artworks, and the audience.

In a society that is drowned in complexity, triggered by the over-searching of meaning, *Simple Expressions of Complex Thoughts* is an inherently transnational collective exhibition of 8 artists, which encourages reflection. Painterly works and live performance by Lihong Bai (CHN), mixed-media works by Alex Dalli (MT) and Noel Attard (MT), sculptures by Antoine Farrugia (MT) and Aaron Bezzina (MT), photographs by Luke Azzopardi (MT), and video works by Jeremy Chih-Hao Chuang



(TW) and Polo Farrera Cuevas (MX) come together as the respective artist's personal reflections of contemporary understandings. However, their meaning is ultimately received by the viewer.

In today's world, the shock value of art is being questioned further, especially in relation to the notions of provocation and controversy. Do we need to shout to make ourselves heard? Do we need to spark controversy to challenge the times? Do we need to succumb to trends to remain relevant? Such questions merit reflection, especially in an age when there seems to be no further boundaries to push, or rules to break. Perhaps it is through the subtle nuances and simple

expressions of complex thoughts that one may find meaning. The simple expressions of complex thoughts are ultimately no more than a reflection of ourselves, our state of being, and our frame of mind.

Why do we want, need, wait and pray for our feelings to be justified?  
To depend our emotions on the permission of another?  
To conform, to fall in line, with a society that dismisses the personal?

This is a message to both artists and audience alike.  
Do not negate the power that personal feelings hold.

## Perspective – Merging Art and Nature

Riya Panwar  
MA Visual Communication

In my series 'Perspective', I delve into the chlorophyll printing method as a sustainable way to transfer images onto leaves. As an artist navigating the realm of visual communication, I aim to challenge and expand the traditional boundaries of photography, embracing its experimental imperfections.

For those intrigued by this innovative process, chlorophyll printing is an eco-friendly photographic technique that harnesses the natural pigments in leaves to create images. By utilizing the photosensitivity of chlorophyll—the green pigment essential for photosynthesis—we can capture and “develop” images directly on plant leaves.

By embracing the natural decay of the leaf, these prints poignantly reflect the transient nature of life and art. This alternative photographic technique is a harmonious blend of art, science, and nature. It offers a sustainable and organic approach to creating images, resonating deeply with themes of environmentalism and the beauty of impermanence. Through 'Perspective', I invite viewers to reconsider their understanding of photography and appreciate the delicate interplay between nature and art.





# The Container, The Giver + Wilderness

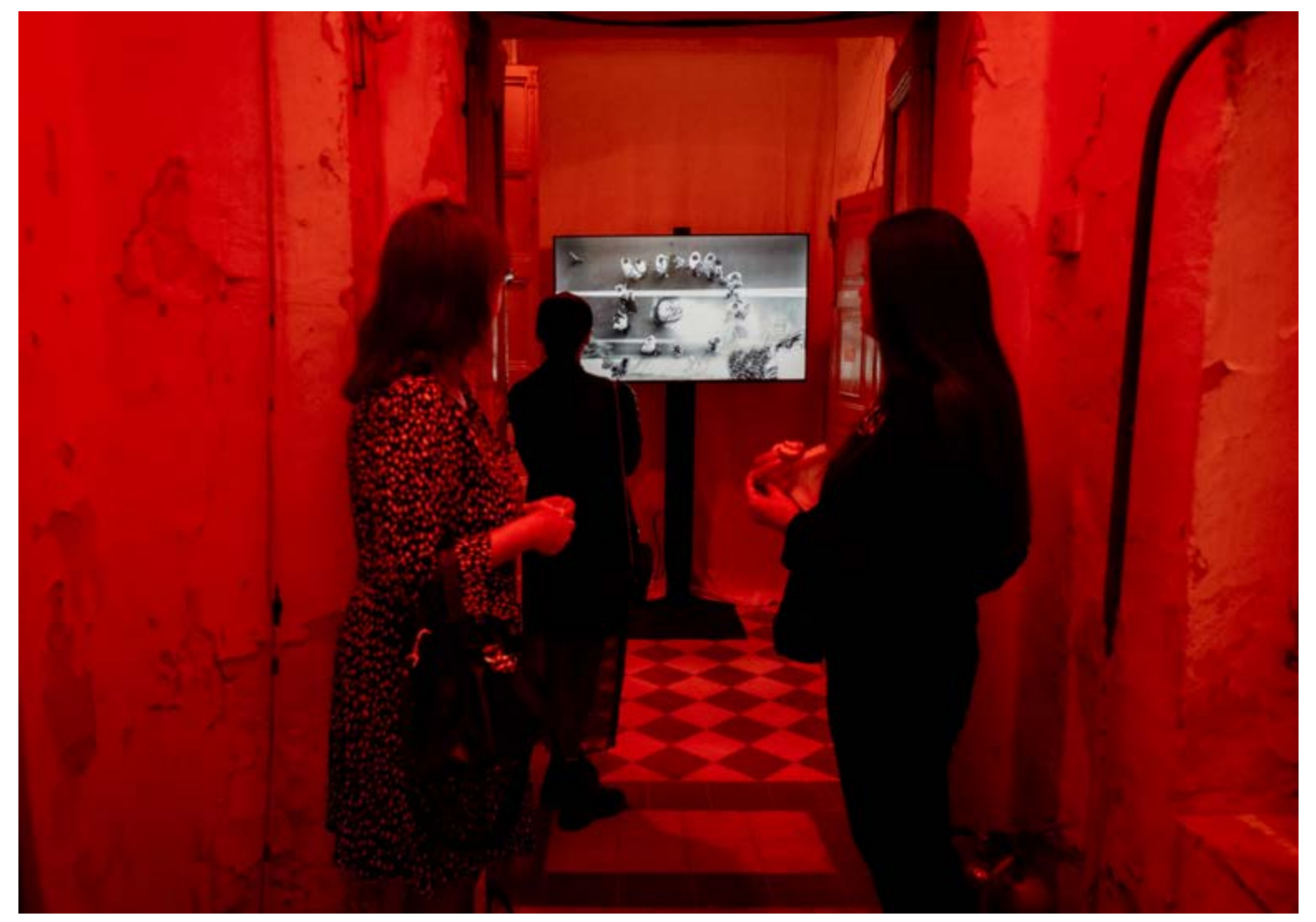
Shifeng Zhang (Molly) | MA Visual Communication



## THE CONTAINER, THE GIVER

This is a glass container I designed based on female genitalia. I created the container with the help of the RCA's hot glass technician, Liam Reeves.

The project explores the connections between containers, women, and bodies. In China, there was a time when many people compared women to vases, demonstrating the problem of women being "objectified" and gazed at by men. Inspired by Ursula K. Le Guin's essay, 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction,' I interpreted the gender issue from the relationship between the container and the weapon, and the history of the container's development.



## WILDERNESS

'WILDERNESS' is a handmade book exploring the possibilities of non-linear reading. It centers around the contents I collected from my mother's diary. Hand-cutting creates non-linear readings, which is related to containers, not weapons. The interruption helps to understand women's experiences and trauma from my mom's broken discourse. 'For women, their discourse, whether theoretical or political, is never concise, linear, or universally 'objective'; they are putting their history into history itself.'





# From the Ground/Sing a Polyphonic Song

Qinqing (Vivian) Li,  
Wendy Li

MA Digital Direction

*Sometimes, I lose track of my search,  
But do I truly need an answer?  
Certainty eludes us,  
Yet certainty never exists,  
Sitting comfortably with ambiguity proves  
challenging.  
We quest for identity, direction, achievements,  
Yet, finding solace, I align with the mycelium  
network:  
Dynamic, self-renewing,  
Feeding on decay, nurturing growth.  
In this endless cycle of break down and  
renewal,  
Molded by past encounters and external  
forces.  
Change and progress shape us,  
Because our journey isn't for the mere act of  
moving.*

'From the Ground/Sing a Polyphonic Song' is an immersive AR experience project, including narrative, sound, and visual and interactive experience. This project invites us to explore mushrooms as a lens through which we can view alternative forms of existence beyond capitalist frameworks, emphasising fungi's role in ecosystems and as metaphors for interconnectedness and resilience in a world full of uncertainties. By engaging with our senses and oral traditions, we aim to uncover overlooked aspects of life and challenge our perceptions of progress and coexistence. Focusing on urban environments, the project seeks to reveal the hidden potentialities of living in our everyday spaces, encouraging a reconsideration of our relationship with the natural world and highlighting the possibilities

for more symbiotic forms of living. Based on research, reading, interviews, and site visits including personal experience and forest therapy. We refer to polyphonic writing, incorporating multiple perspectives, dialogue and sensory experiences to guide people through our works. The narration is divided into five chapters that are intentionally non-linear and not presented in a specific order.

In addition to the AR experience, we wanted something tangible and accessible to guide the audience into our narrative space. So we came up with the idea of a spore drawing card. Turning cards into a part of narrative interaction, the audience can simulate the behaviour of picking mushrooms through the cards.



## Unveiling “A Woman’s War” | Жіноча війна: An Audiovisual Journey Through Untold Stories by Natália Štojková & Kornélia Nemcová

Premiered  
Event: June  
4, 2024,  
6:30 PM

“A Woman’s War” is an evocative audiovisual performance that sheds light on the untold stories of women who fled Ukraine after the full-scale Russian invasion on February 24, 2022. Our premiere took place in Blackheath Halls, 23 Lee Rd, Blackheath, London SE3 9RQ on June 4, 2024.

Historically, war narratives have often overlooked women’s perspectives, particularly the emotional impact on those away from the front lines. “A Woman’s War” seeks to highlight the resilience and struggles of Ukrainian women, both in Ukraine and in exile, urging a re-examination of the Russo-Ukrainian War’s relevance and urgency.

Through powerful music composed by Kornélia Nemcová (SK) and performed by Yelyzaveta Bahlai, Hania Woźniak, Lucia Foti, Clare Henley, sung in Ukrainian by members of various female choirs, conducted by Alisa Zaika, and the experimental music collective, The Ruffians, first-hand interviews with Ukrainian women, and audio-reactive visuals by Natália Štojková, “A Woman’s War” narrates the harrowing experiences and emotional journeys of women who have been directly impacted by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.





# Carving out My Tradition

Rose Antony  
MA Visual Communication



Living in a world where the female body has been distorted and deformed to fit male visual pleasure. I grew up being afraid of my naked body. I realised in order to liberate myself from the male gaze I had to find liberation in how I see myself. This artwork narrates the act of reconstructing my body as a woman, by carving myself in stone and reclaiming that nudity has always been a part of Indian culture. I want to liberate myself from the fear of the pervasive male gaze in present Indian society that believes in a distorted sense of modesty.

My artwork, *Carving out my tradition* delves into the intricate portrayal of gender and sexuality within Indian culture. Drawing inspiration from the ancient Indian art form of Shilpa Shastras, which served as a guide for sculpting stone, I seek to challenge prevailing stereotypes by presenting my body as if sculpted in stone, reminiscent of historical stone sculptures. Contrary to common belief that Indian stone sculptures sexualize female bodies, I argue they actually liberate them.

In my research, I discovered a striking absence of differentiation between male and female bodies in form or adornment; both are depicted bare-breasted, adorned with jewellery, and posed similarly. This underscores a historical narrative where both genders were equally sexualized, and nudity was normalized.

Through portraying myself carving my own likeness in stone, I symbolize the genderless essence of this tradition, advocating for a reassessment of contemporary perspectives on gender and sexuality and in what is tagged feminine or sexual.



# The late child of other animals

Ebunoluwa Adepoju | MA Contemporary Art Practice



Lemon twigged oddities are ghoulish-waxed canvas.  
The wet quill underneath your spine,  
a faded plimsoll of shattered sanguine.

Bloated foam pulls through the tattered pocket.  
Hanging over the wooden frame, it tangles the citrus thread.

A tearsmith's seed is scattered with the wind.  
A carpenter's palette is bleary and musted clean.

Seemingly precise, split kin glide into a dish.  
Replaced by oozing thumbs, my belt wraps around the gate.

Scarred transistor sky you fool me with your glare!  
It's bevelled opening wanes the lavender moon.

My tears taste like malted coffee, the tip of my tongue turns green.

My brick ladden tomb topples over.

I have come to see the night, I dance the dreaded taste.

I have tried to walk the earth, it only happens in my dreams.

*This flakey artefact feels like a late child of other animals. Stepping back from itself, Earthen Reverie is a peeling cornflower. Blown by horns, it chops into sevens and feeds the brain milk.*



# What's Wrong With the RCA?

Ujwal Mantha  
MA Visual  
Communication

At the time of writing this, The Royal College of Art (RCA) is the #1 Art School in the world.

## There is Nothing Wrong with the RCA.

The emotions that this phrase elicits in you is the entire point of this article. Everything else I have to say is an accessory at best. You can stop right here but I'd like it if you continued.

As for the “you” that I’m addressing? Richard Siken said it better than I ever could so I quote him here:

“I could pretend I’m speaking to everyone—assume a middle distance and transcend myself—but I’m talking to you, and you know it.”

This isn’t an article in a wonderful student newspaper (that could do with a lot more funding). It is a letter I wrote and left for you to find.

Did you know I was supposed to be an astrophysicist? I was going to go to Mars. I did a whole year of physics during undergrad until Calculus grounded me. My mom, unlike many brown parents of her generation, was thoroughly relieved when I switched over to the Arts.

“How can I possibly make a living in the arts?” I wailed to her.

“Judging by your grades in maths, you’re not going to be making much of a living there either,” she chuckled.

Harsh. True. I was an artist, something that can mean a little more than everything and close to nothing, depending on who you ask. And a few years later, I was a freshly graduated, unemployed artist in Toronto, looking for a job that could help me stay. I needed a year of combined work experience in skilled fields to be eligible to immigrate to Canada. I counted every hour I worked. A life measured in time sheets and payslips.

It wasn’t all bleak. I made a lot of art when I found the time and then I fell in love,

which felt a lot like making art, and I made time for that.

**The RCA was the only graduate school I applied to. That is where we met.**

I tell myself that I’m here because a master’s degree gives me extra points that I could use to immigrate into Canada and also because in the script for my life that I was presented, a master’s degree was mandatory. So, I wouldn’t say I expected much when I first walked through the corridor of the White City campus and accidentally walked into the bathroom.

Let me explain: The exit to the stairs and the entrance to the bathroom are right next to each other and the doors are identical. There is a sign hanging from the ceiling but when you’re in a hurry, it is easy to miss. I’d heard you say in passing that someone should just put a sign up on the door to the stairs and save everyone the inconvenience. I thought that was a wonderful idea and so I put one up, scribbled it on a piece of paper. It was taken down when I walked by the next morning and when I asked a passing member of the estates team, I was told that we couldn’t have any signage, artwork or promotional material on fire exits.

# Indian Arrival Day

Amanda Van der Helm  
MFA Arts and Humanities

Professor David Dabydeen inspired me to research my Indian immigrant heritage and find pieces of identity in the archives many years ago. He was so generous with his time and inspired my recent art piece. Being Indo-Caribbean and a student at the Royal College of Art, I wanted to create something that would commemorate Indian Arrival Day in St Lucia; May 6th 1859 was the date the first ship of indentured Indian immigrants arrived on the island. Professor Dabydeen’s poem from *Coolie Odyssey* captures the motivation behind my work:

*“There are no headstones, epitaphs, dates.  
The ancestors curl and dry to scrolls of parchment.  
They lie like texts  
Waiting to be written by the children  
For whom they hacked and ploughed and saved  
To send to faraway schools.”*

A few days before Indian Arrival Day, I sat down to think about how I could bring the subject of indentured labour from the margins—like it was in the history curriculum when I was growing up—to the centre. Indentureship was a cheap form of labour used by the European colonial powers after slavery was abolished, and Indian Arrival Day is when people with Indentureship heritage remember the first

arrival of Indians in the Caribbean, Fiji, Mauritius and South Africa. Contractual agreements with labourers were sometimes made unknowingly, and they were often exploited by their employers. This system of labour had been used around the world for centuries and affected various communities like Amerindian, Irish, Portuguese, Chinese, Indian and freed Black slaves. I was surprised to learn, after reading John Wareing’s essay on the recruitment of indentured servants, that illicit methods were used in London to recruit indentured labourers for the American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries. I realised that the “other” didn’t only incorporate people of different races and ethnicities, but also of different classes within English society.

I have been trying to find pieces of identity in the national archives of St Lucia and the UK for a long time. On reflection, I was focusing on the absences, rather than celebrating what was in the archive itself. I had a collection of family surnames that were connected to the history of indentureship in St Lucia, from my own research and through the island’s Indian Heritage Association, so I decided to make a mandala with surnames. The Indian immigrant names were misspelt and details of the region they were from were often not available; thus, the mandala depicts the journey of my research, which involved going around in circles to various archives.

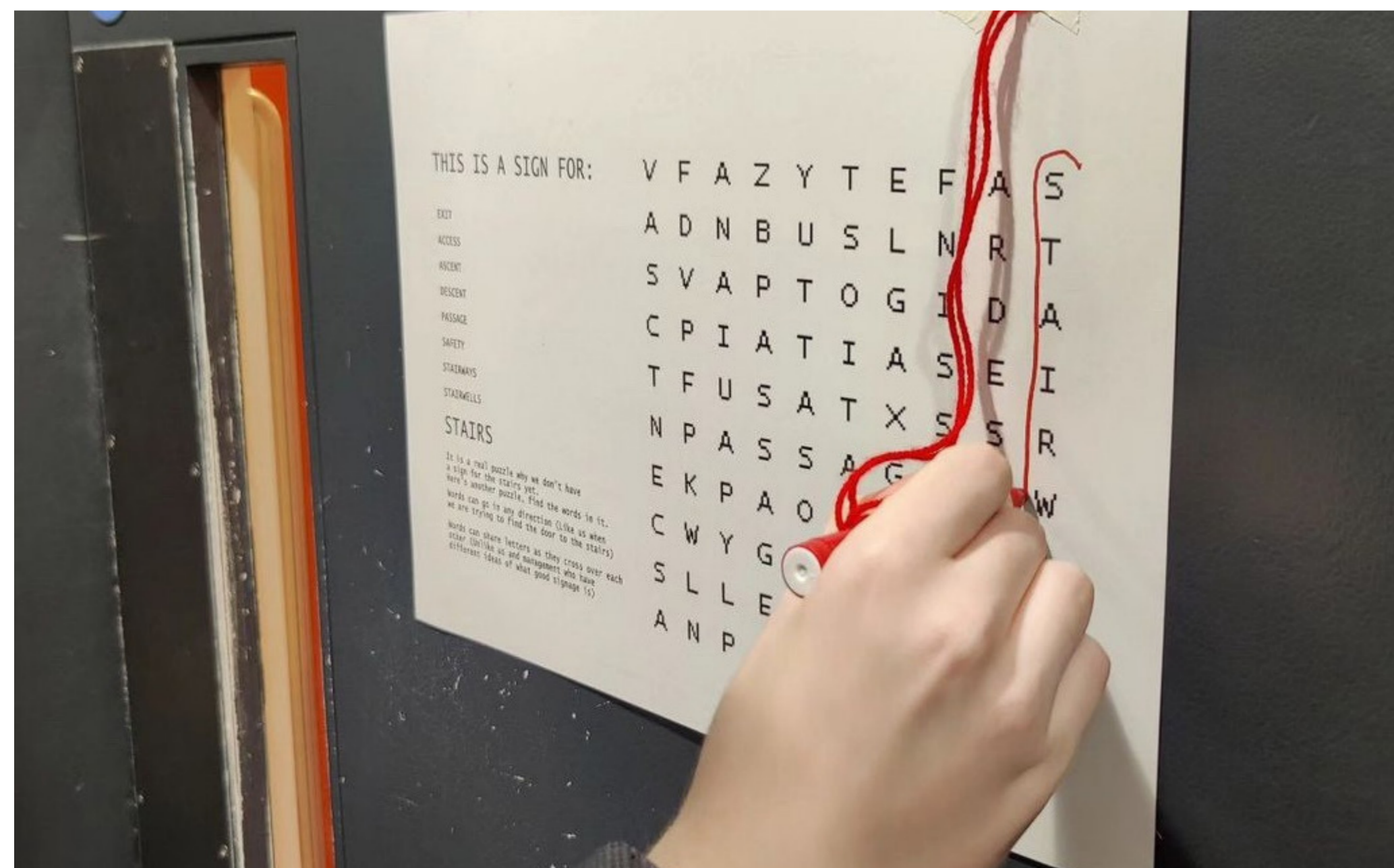
After creating the mandala, it still felt incomplete. I realised that maybe there could be room for more on the canvas. I decided to reach out to people on social media who had indentureship history, to see if their family surnames could be included on the canvas.

This piece is work in progress and I have included more than 200 family surnames that are linked to various Caribbean islands, Mauritius and other countries. Each family surname is a keeper of stories and I feel like this could be an opportunity to bring people together.

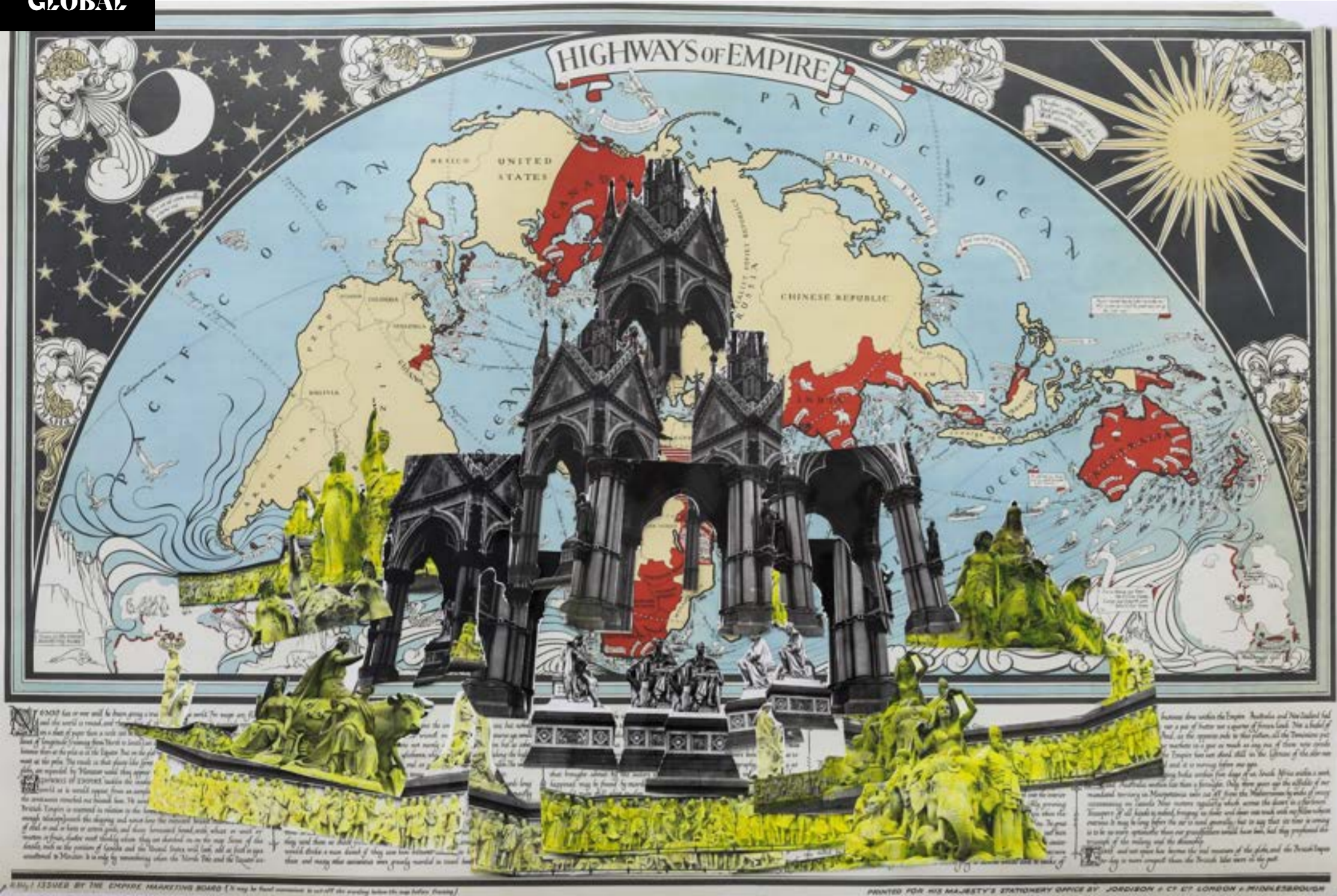
I felt inspired by Dabydeen’s poem ‘For Mala’, which describes a unity of races that all exist together and feel seen. This poem refers to the Ruimveldt Riots that took place in Guyana in 1905:

*De air go fill wid curry-smell an roast cassava  
Puri an pepperpot  
An sitar an steelband go sound when gunfire  
bin a deh.  
Lil pickni go laan plant wara-seed na pelt each  
odda in de street wid dem,  
An when people kill, dem kill only cockroach,  
centipede, masquita...  
Hear me dream like birdsaang in yu ear!*

With this quote in mind, I wanted to create an artwork that encourages togetherness and gives everyone with indentureship history the opportunity to come together and contribute to my mandala. My work is very much focused on helping minorities feel seen and connected. I thought it could celebrate the pieces of identity, creating a community on a canvas, regardless of race, religion, caste and social backgrounds. I’ve used bay leaves, since this is widely used in cooking as a result of migration and the leaves have historically been used to make wreaths to crown heroes in the past. This art piece is still a work in progress and I would love to hear from you if you have indentureship heritage.







# Reversing Colonial Perspectives at the Albert Memorial

Weyue Sun  
MA Photography

Seated majestically in Kensington Park, the Albert Memorial stands as a monumental tribute commissioned by Queen Victoria to honor her husband, Prince Albert. Beyond being a mere commemoration, it serves as a poignant symbol of the Age of Empire. At its heart lies a towering figure of Albert in pure gold, commanding attention from the center. Surrounding him at each corner of the memorial stand four marble representations of the continents: Africa, Asia, America, and Europe.

These depictions bear the marks of their time, echoing the colonial stereotypes prevalent during the era of their creation. The figure representing China, for instance, is clad in the traditional garb of the Qing Dynasty, with a distinct twist plait, while holding a porcelain artefact. Such imagery reflects the Eurocentric worldview and the stereotypes toward the Orient in that period.

Being a symbol of London, the Albert Memorial attracts many tourists every day. I spent an afternoon in the park talking with passers-by, inviting them to take a photo with the Memorial. What struck me most was that most people didn't know its political and colonial background. Nevertheless, this collaborative practice became great opportunities for us to exchange stories of migration, travel, and personal experiences, enriching my understanding of the diverse perspectives that converge within the shadow of this historic monument.

When I returned home, I made a photo collage. I took photos from each angle of the Albert Memorial and taped the prints onto a vintage poster from the 1920s. In this poster, the United Kingdom sits at the center, surrounded by red areas representing territories colonized during that era. In my collage, I maintained the image of Albert in black and white, while hand-colouring the other figures at the four corners in radiant gold to reverse the colonial perspective.



I mentioned how it was confusing and the various people I mentioned this issue to gave me a spectrum of responses, from “you’ll get used to this” to “that will never happen”.

**I was in the best art school in the world, and I couldn't get a sign on a door.**

I went around with a petition, detailing how the people who used the first-floor corridor felt very strongly about getting a sign for the stairs and then stuck the signatures up on the exit. When that was taken down, I promptly put another one up. Each sign was different. There were memes and pop culture. There were artworks and parodies. Each sign was taken down almost immediately but over the days, the estates team started looking forward to the next sign and even began asking me about when the next one would be up. What started as a lone crusade seemed to attract an amused community.

I discussed sign ideas with you as we navigated the programme. One of the signs was a crossword and I saw you stop by and scribble on it. I felt closer to you a hundred times over in that White City corridor. I think it was funny watching you fiddle with the bypass tray on the printers that were broken every other week. I think the resource store has been closed more than it was open and I'm quoting you as my source.

I remember that night when we wondered how we were supposed to get close to each other when there were so many of us. I remember those times when we would nod at each other in the corridor, having briefly talked once weeks ago and mutually content with never doing so again. I remember how excited you were for me when, after 19 signs and an entire month, we finally got an official sign on the door.

I remember going back to Toronto for Christmas and feeling like I'd be in love with the same person forever and I will be

forever grateful to you for letting me cry on your shoulder when that relationship sputtered out a couple of months later, as these things sometimes do.

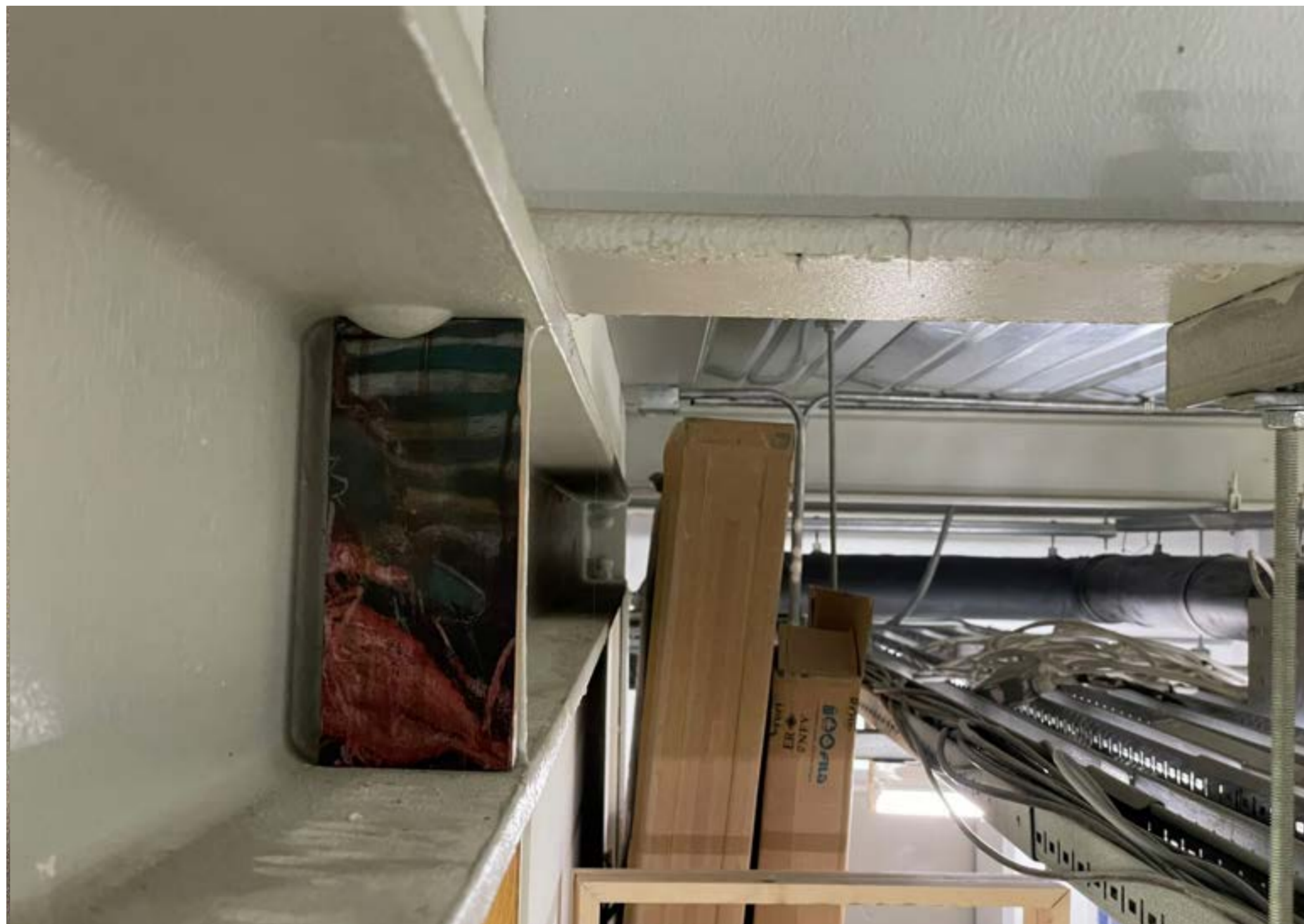
Perhaps I have a responsibility here to talk about the corporatisation of higher art education. How we feel like customers and products simultaneously. Maybe I should have talked about how the movement picked up after I got that sign, about the countless protests, interventions and pokes that have brought me closer to you, even if you're in another campus or went to the RCA decades ago. Shouldn't I use this platform to ask important questions? What should an Art School look like? What are its responsibilities? Will I ever feel like I'm not running a race? Will you?

I don't know a lot of things, but I do know this:

Perhaps there is something wrong with the RCA, but it certainly isn't you.

Instagram: @commoncollegeofart





# Bedsheets in the Eaves: Painting as Archival Intervention

Samantha Jackson  
MA Painting

Within the boundaries of Celtic folklore, if grief is caused by uncanny, inexplicable forces, it is assumed to be the fault of faes. The way you protect yourself and your loved ones from further harm is by burrowing particular belongings into the eaves and under the floorboards of your home. Behind the fireplace and in the walls.

An archive is a built space, constructed deliberately and stuffed to the brim with particular belongings. Ephemera. This magazine will be archived within the Royal College of Art's special collections. Carefully categorised, labelled and stored. A digital copy will exist alongside the analogue like the images in this article.

No one can really know the fullness of an experience, as events happen information is intrinsically lost through entropy and recollection. No one can wholly comprehend the combined grid of human experiences that work together to construct a place or event.

All we have are our memories and the physical traces left behind. Cement between bricks, mopped floors, documents, lanyards, recycling bins, painting.

These things become activated when noticed. To use an old metaphor, a tree falling in a forest does make a sound regardless of whether or not it is heard. But the work of being human is to observe it in some way, either by someone coming

across it and seeing that it has fallen; or it being heard in the exact moment it fell; or even just through the act of imagination. It must be noticed in order for the story to be told to one another and become memory. This is the endless cyclical task of the archivist, the writer and the artist. The archive weaves in and out of itself, from events to recollection to ephemera—each triggering the other in an infinite and endless equation of time.

These paintings are currently installed around the Painting Building. How long they stay there, I cannot know. When, if, or how they are noticed, I also cannot know. They form a physical archive of my own experiences as a painter, lying dormant unless activated in some way. The same goes for the magazine within the Special Collections. In the meantime, amongst the flotsam of the unbearable political landscape we all live within, I hope we can take time to quietly notice one another. To notice those around you is to protect them amongst the scaffolding of our own archives.



Alongside *When the Dust Talks*, Farrera constructs a parallel narrative through photographs from Maria Guadalupe's family archive which appear in palimpsest in his photo-book *In Search of Absence*. *'Maria left me twenty pictures. I am interested in what we remember and through the palimpsest, the narrative fictions, our subconscious memory, the monsters we see and how we beautify them.'*

It is this attitude to death and ghosts—a world away from the Western European 'haunted house' trope—that allows for possibility: a relationship or recognition of the human condition (dead or alive) between viewer and subject. A communication. A code.

Currently an RCA Photography MA student, Farrera is looking at London as his next subject. I am curious about what he sees here. This is an artist with strong instincts: he was right about the need to listen to *When Dust Talks*, its place, story and timing. Within a couple of years Maria herself had died, the Rancho Bastida was gone, the moment lost.

But the stories, the spirits, their hush lives on in his remarkable work. And in the minds of those who love and remember.





# When the Dust Talks: An Interview with Polo Farrera

David Tomlinson  
MA Curating  
Contemporary Art

*'This photographic series is born from the notion of the ghost in its linguistic double: On the one hand it is the ghost in its literality, with everything that its iconography implies. On the other hand, it is the ghost as a metaphor for memory and the partial and elusive fragments that remain...'*  
Polo Farrera, 2021

I met Polo Farrera by chance. Sitting next to him at a meeting, quiet, thoughtful, observant. When persuaded to share some work, he showed a series named When the Dust Talks. Looking at these deftly lit, richly coloured, faceless images I was struck by thoughts of my own family, of roots, of loss. Yet my culture is not his culture, his experience is not mine. But there is something striking about this work, its breaking of an aged silence, its reawakening memories, its showing of the people we have lost and those remaining.

Farrera, an award-winning artist, photographer and filmmaker from Mexico, delves deep into his own identity and that of his country and his region. This is shown in his preparation: *'I met the owners of a ranch, the Rancho Bastida. A nonagenarian couple, Carlos Bastida and Maria Guadalupe. They had links going back to it throughout their lives. Maria spoke with me, she was the grandmother of a very close friend of mine, this is how we were introduced.'* In getting to know her, Farrera achieved trust. He found a genuine need to tell an old story. And Maria Guadalupe responded.

*'Visiting the ranch, it was frozen in time. Calendars from the 1920s, the 1950s, the 1980s. It was in Almoloya, about two hours from my hometown Toluca, three hours from Mexico City. Close to the prison where Joaquín Guzmán Loera (El Chapo) was imprisoned for*



*a time. There is violence in this history, I don't talk about it specifically...'*

And yet it is implied in his work, this violence. These are images where things have happened earlier. It is where the phantasmagorical becomes a manifestation of the political, social, historical, colonial, familial past. It is in the soil.

His conversations with Maria Guadalupe about the past, its events, its souls, inform this work. In fact this process is captured in a series of vignettes in Maria's own words. Her family members appear in the "Dust" series shrouded, participants in ancestral recall. Farrera's fidelity to the trust he established with this family is the portal for his story-telling in word and image. As he puts it: *'Despite memory's penchant for creating chimera, longing gives colour to what was previously black and white.'*

Kindred souls, silent understandings. Hush. To me, When the Dust Talks is a narrative of gatherings, the coming together of disparate experiences. The quiet that descends in families, a deep-rooted generational seeing. In the Rancho Bastida, each space has purpose, a stable,

a dining room, a place to sit and wait: all decorated in the heavy colonial-era style, a contrast to the lightness and colour of the spirits themselves.

*'I realised from talking with Maria Guadalupe and her family that they told the same story differently, and this is where I was on to something. Rancho Bastida had a history, a story of its land, it was what had been happening in Mexico. I felt I had to capture this, a place frozen in time. Before it was gone.'*

The project occurred at a very particular time globally: *'After Covid, there had been challenges for me like many others: family loss, financial loss, romantic loss.'* Of starting this particular project in that moment, he says simply: *'I am not afraid of grief, I am drawn into it. I am asking, What are our coping mechanisms? What are our memories?'* In this, Farrera delves past his own experience and through someone else's to touch our own.

*'This work is a series of analogies, a metaphor of ghosts in our memory. In some sense memory is not a fixed demographic tool. It likes moving. From my psychology background, I used strands of Freudian analysis of family as well as iconography of ghosts. In the UK it is the gothic that dominates.'*





# Sargent or... Fashion? A review of Tate Britain's 'Sargent and Fashion'

Andrew Sviridov  
MA Visual Communication

I would have loved nothing more than to write unbridled praise about the current Sargent and Fashion exhibition at the Tate Britain, but it left me rather puzzled.

As I navigated the nine colour-coded halls, something continued to bug me: The Tate's take on Sargent. The exhibition opens with the bold claim that *'Fashion was central to Sargent's achievements as a portraitist'*—a statement I take issue with. If it had been re-written to say, for example, that *'Fashion was central to Sargent's work'*, I would perhaps be more lenient, as I would say Sargent was a prodigious painter of character first and foremost.

I have a great admiration for the life and oeuvre of Sargent (feel free to ask me if you have time for a lecture!). An American born in Italy and trained in France under Carolus-Duran, his career started in Paris, plummeted, migrated, and then prospered in London. He was not just a phenomenal painter of people, but a painter of societal change, evident in both who was represented in the paintings as well as what they wore. Sargent had an absolute understanding of the role clothing had within society, how it was used to show one's status and affluence through portraits. The same goes for how a book painted beside the portrait's subject was used to signify a learned or literate person, the prop highlighting their status to portray their education, or how choice of clothes provided insight into the subject's societal standing—one which Sargent took full advantage of, and occasionally challenged.

Sargent painted with an intention and a degree of sympathy. He painted all: actors, socialites, lords and ladies, suffragists and Jews (a group who specifically saw a great shift in their status due to their economic achievement within entrepreneurial financing and private banking during the early 1900s). Sargent had a personal relationship with many of his Jewish sitters, and as an expatriate he probably found commonality with them as a perceived outsider. His largest commission(s) came from Asher Wertheimer, whose family featured in twelve separate portraits. To commission a work at the time cost a pretty penny, or more accurately, a pretty guinea, at around 1000 guineas per portrait (now roughly £120,000). Sargent would seek out his sitters as much as they

would seek him out, which made him one of the most successful painters, if not the most, of the 19th and 20th century.

The exhibition presents roughly fifty works from Sargent's life alongside some varied ephemera in nine vaguely-titled chapters. Works were presented alongside obstructive glass boxes containing garments and accessories in thematically generic groupings. The garments' inclusion only worked when they were original pieces featured in a given painting. Those that were original were few and far between, and despite the name of the exhibition being "Sargent and Fashion", there was far less physical fashion on display than expected. The halls themselves ranged from *'Sargent paints clothes'*, to *'Sargent paints nature'*. One hallway suggested that Sargent subverted or *'rejected gender conventions'* in his depictions of male sitters. This is not evident beyond two examples that I'd like to mention.

The first is his androgynous portrait, "Vernon Lee" (1881) depicting the gay science-fiction author and aestheticist (Vernon Lee was the pen name of Violet Paget), who was a close friend of Sargent's. An inscription at the top reads *'To my friend Violet'*, under which Sargent paints Lee in a tailored black suit, her messy hair of the same colour, with a triangular collar. Lee looks towards a window that casts an even soft light on her face and no more than ten strokes of paint suggest a pair of spectacles. Here Sargent paints two people in one work Violet and Vernon, making for one of Sargent's more personal and powerful portraits that is not mentioned enough.



The other notable exception is Sargent's famed portrait of "Dr. Pozzi at Home" (1881), his first full-length portrait; a rich rhapsody of red depicting a respected gynaecologist and surgeon. Samuel-Jean Pozzi stands prominently in a flamboyant—and, for the time—effeminate pose and dress. A stark-white shirt is hidden by a scarlet robe from under which a single pink slipper peeps out. Much focus is put on the hands, slender fingers suggesting surgical prowess but positioned tugging at the tassels of his robe as if about to reveal all. In a room of men rendered in muted colours and stonewall expressions, this portrait stands leagues apart. Amongst boulders, there grows a defiant carnation.

Yes, Sargent had a great passion for fashion and textiles which turned to collaboration with notable firms to create costumes and garments for a number of his subjects, but I would attribute Sargent's *'achievements as a portraitist'* to his modern portrayals of the individuals who posed for him, rather than simply to "fashion". It's not just the subject of what an artist paints, draws or sculpts that bring them notoriety, but the way they do it. The unique touch of their hand, what they draw focus to, what they

leave out and, in the end, how it is done is what counts. Sargent painted without embellishment. Focus was drawn (literally) to the faces and hands, while garments and backgrounds were painted with confident swishes of paint. One wall text compares him to Anthony Van Dyck, the Flemish Baroque artist, but a fairer comparison might be the Dutch Golden-era painter, Frans Hals. Nearly 200 years separate the death of Hals and the birth of Sargent (1666 and 1856 respectfully), but their works have a striking similarity in how the subjects are rendered. Many are depicted candidly, with expressions that are unlike the stoicism and staticity of typical portraiture work. While frozen in oils on canvas, the subtle smiles and telling glances of these characters make them come alive.

Some contemporary examinations of Sargent's work and private life mention a potential repressed homosexuality. Given the conservative outlook on sexuality at the time and the harsh criminal punishment associated with "gross indecency", it may be fair to presume that Sargent was a painter who empathised with many of his sitters and the public masks they wore

such as Vernon Lee; least the mention, if not the inclusion of His rather sensual studies of men—often nude and more often, with drapery—wouldn't have gone amiss. Those studies, being an intimate, intentional exploration of the relation between figure and fabric (despite being created towards the end of his career) could have served as the bedrock of the exhibition.

If the Tate really wished to show a less explored side to Sargent, a look into his public and personal relationships or the shadowed sexuality of his work (which was probably done to shield his reputation as a great "painter of the upper-class") would have been a good way to complement the fashion pieces on display.

*Sargent and Fashion is at London's Tate Britain, from 22 February to 7 July.*

