

**UNFURLING
BLUE CARPET
MEMORIES**

SARA AHLI

**APPROVED BY MASTER'S
EXAMINATION COMMITTEE:**

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www.saraahli.com
saraahlistudio@gmail.com

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20 Washington Place
Providence, RI 02903
Cover image: Blueprints of Dubai Home for Aref Hussain Ahli, 2000



Jocelyne Prince, Professor Glass Dept, Thesis Chair



Rachel Berwick, Professor Glass Dept, Thesis Advisor



Denise Markonish, MassMoCA, Chief Curator, Thesis Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

For the past four years, during transitional periods of waking and falling asleep, images recur involuntarily in the private space of my dreams. They arise as overlapping layers and textures, often connected to places I've known. The frequency with which they occur and the nature of the sensory details that animate their formations have led me to ponder their persistence. If memories are embedded in the body, what do they reveal? This recurring question has made its way into my work and provided the terms for an exploration—even interrogation—of these fragmented, hypnagogic impressions. I call them [Blue Carpet Memories](#).

The concept of [Blue Carpet Memories](#) probes at repressed childhood memories, prompting critical questions about their authenticity and existence by exploring the blurred boundaries between what is real, fictional, imagined, and forgotten. I remember a blue carpet from my childhood that served as a witness to my lived experiences within the spaces I spent time in growing up. The color blue represents the initial hue of those involuntarily surfacing memories.

While the presentation of my process in this thesis seems to follow a chronological order, it has in fact been during studio experimentations that my understanding of the process evolves, revealing itself through cause and effect. Whereas I may first begin to perceive memories in the studio, I do not consciously bring them to the forefront of my mind and call them out as such until a later stage.

ABSTRACT

Glass is an amorphous solid, existing in a liminal space, embodying indeterminacy. Its states of transformation from viscous flow to structural solidity carry the imprints of bodily influence. With the direct intention of using glass as a conduit to explore materiality, memory, and self-awareness, I construct a language of embodiment that arises through a series of performative encounters between my physicality and glass in the hot shop. The mediating process I employ to create and arrive at the glass artwork I make is as necessary as its final form. Motivated by the desire to claim agency over my personal narrative, this written thesis is both a document of process and an examination of the impact of memories on identity formation.

As such, it integrates insights from writers like Sigmund Freud, Marcel Proust, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This hands-on study explores the interplay between memory, perception, and selfhood in the ethos of process, thus elucidating the centrality of an embodied practice in the work. Moreover, I anticipate the thesis will catalyze a transformative shift in readers' perspectives on memory, urging them to reassess and redefine their relationship with this fundamental aspect of human experience.

Accepting that the body plays an active role in delivering messages, I capture and encapsulate a sense of them through direct materialization. The studio work brings these memories to life, giving them tangible space outside myself. What begins as a process of excavation becomes a performative trace expressed through the medium of glass. It is necessary to engage in an archival excavation of the past to allow a return of the repressed and, ultimately, to liberate it. I let my intuition and physical engagement guide me as I connect with material and memory.

I compare the medium of glass to the human body as I consider both to be amorphous solids, based on my continuous, complex, and corporeal negotiations with this chosen material. I reckon with what surfaces—some unwanted, some seeking amends, some acting as clues or blueprints to a liberated self. Through collection, recollection, repetition, and casting, glassmaking immerses me in a state of physical or imaginative transience. Navigating between construction and deconstruction, fragments and wholes, decay and preservation, I traverse realms of introspection exploring themes of memory, home, and the body.

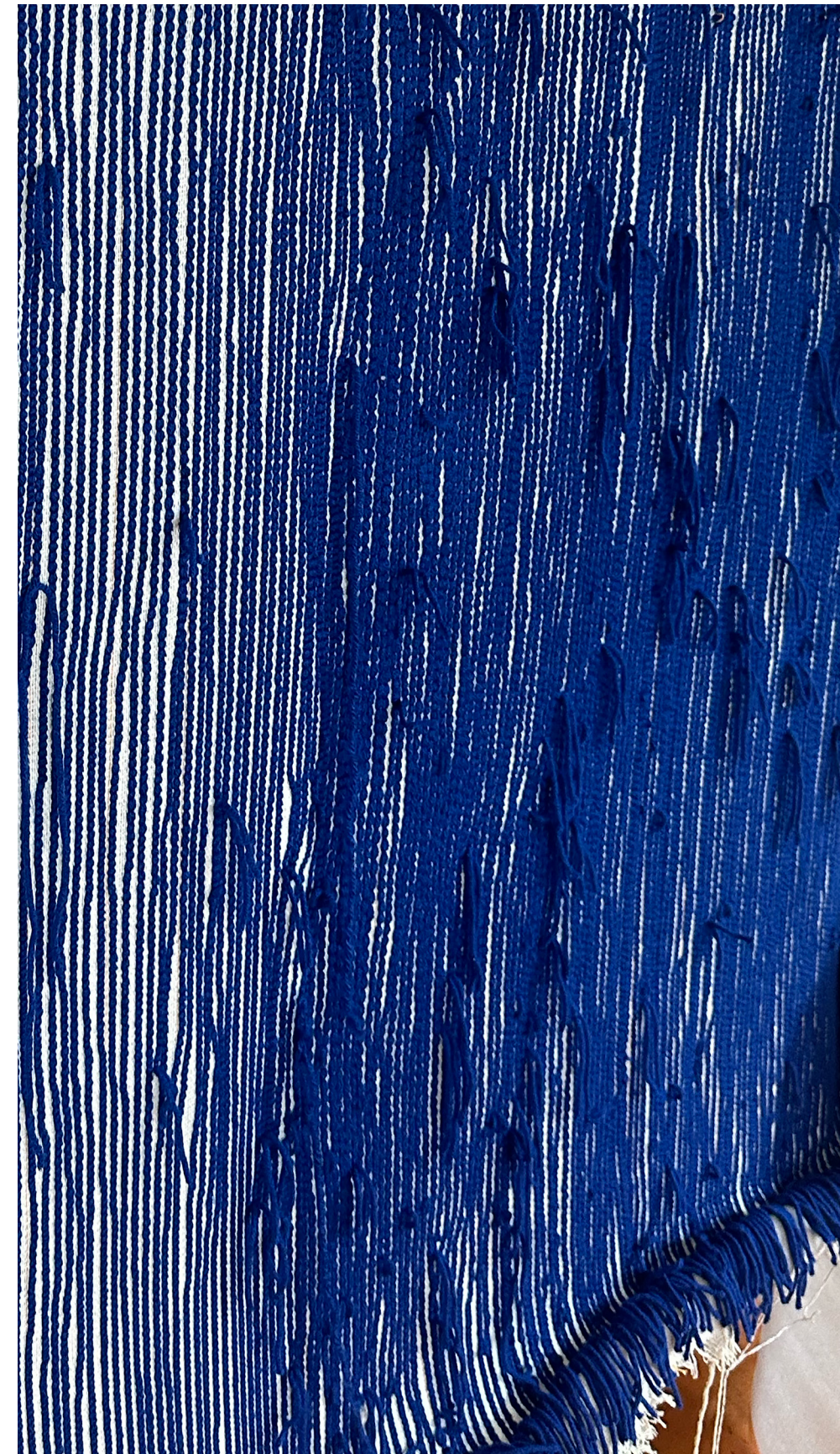


Fig.1. Work in-progress tufted blue carpet, 2023 - 2024

1. CORPOREALITY & GLASS

A Series of Performative Encounters



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Interacting with glass in its molten state demands that I move my body as a tool and conduit for giving form to the work in a performative and intimate dance. It's an experience in transformative relations. In the hot shop, the labor of shaping glass takes place. Here, my body meets the ever-in-flux characteristic of glass. I must know how the material behaves, moves, and responds. There is rhythm and choreography in the making process in which I contour my body to accommodate the physical tools in hand throughout the glassblowing process. As I shape glass, the material shapes my body.

Fig. 2. Blowing a bubble using a blow-hose, Hot Shop, 2024, Photo by Yiko Yang



Fig. 3 - 6. Shaping glass in the hot shop, 2024, Photo by Yiko Yang

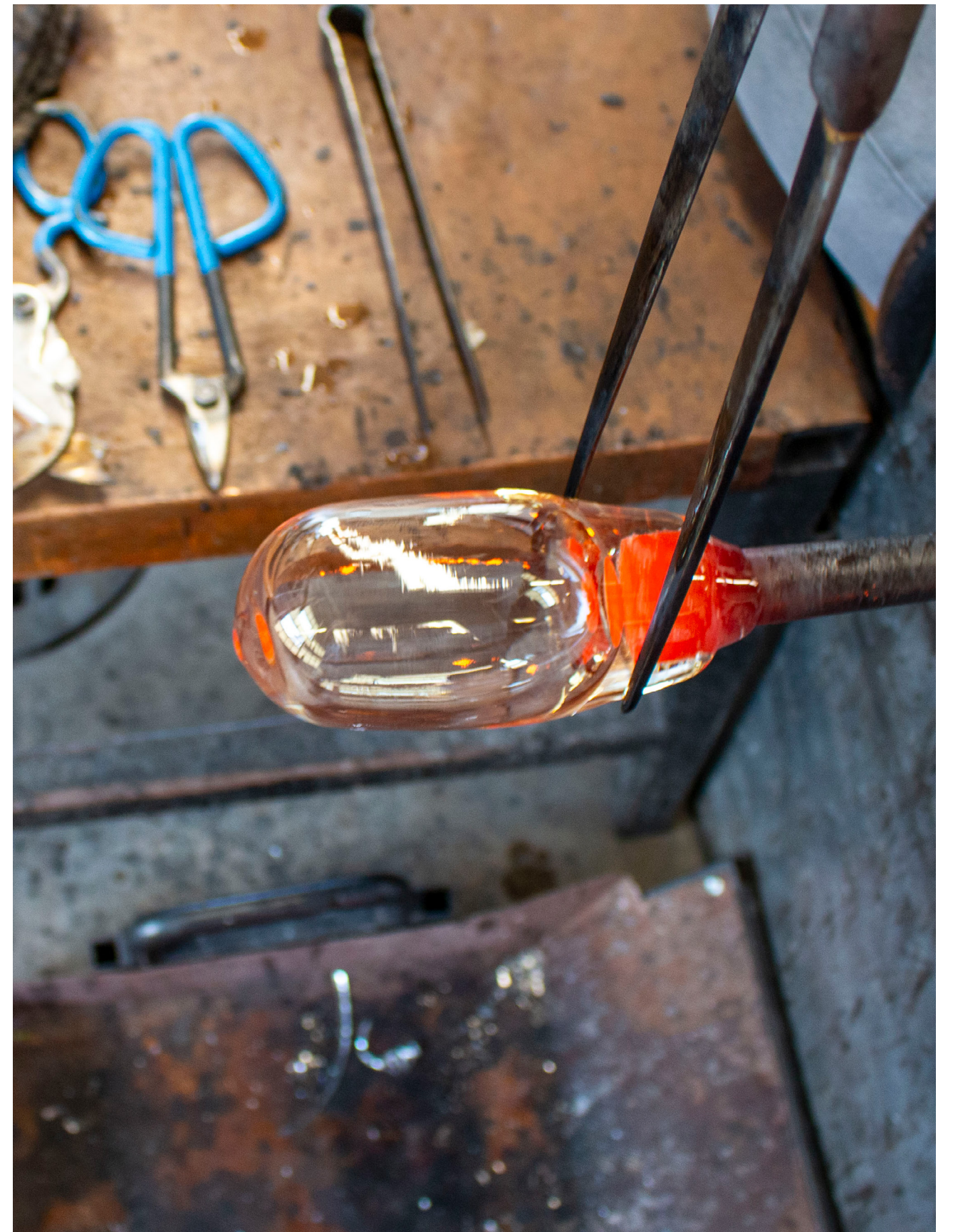
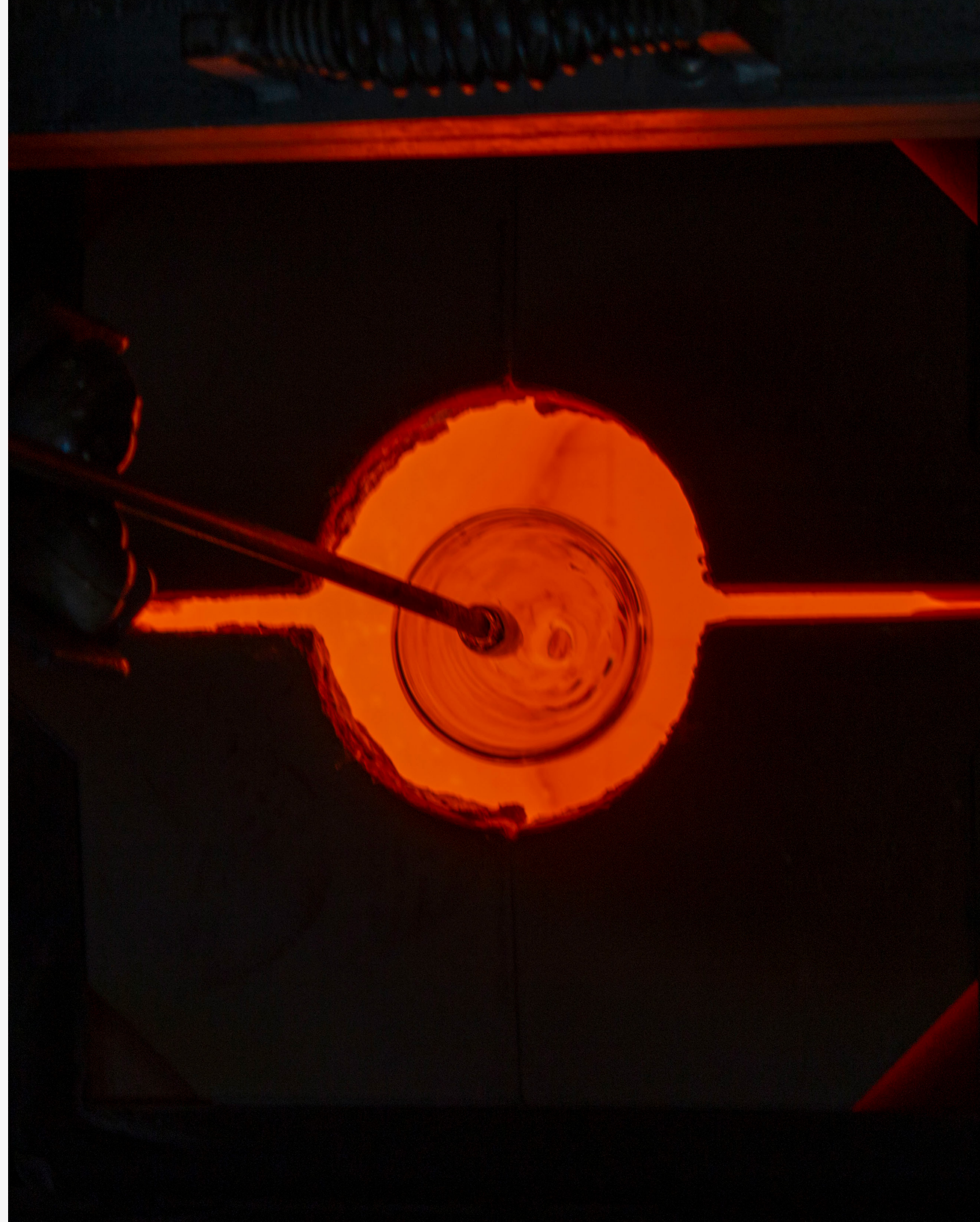


Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



VISCOSITY AND BREATH

Engaging with this molten material makes me more aware of my breath and body. Heated to a temperature of 2150° Fahrenheit, the glass is gathered from the furnace using a long, steel blowpipe. Through repeated rotations, what begins as a small bubble of glass accumulates at the end of the blowpipe. To control the viscosity and malleability of glass, a series of actions are performed to manipulate the material's temperature. The glass is taken back and forth from the bench, the marver table and a hot chamber called the glory hole, which is used to reheat the glass to make it malleable again.

The viscosity of glass crucially impacts its physical properties, such as melting, softening, and crystallizing, thus determining the pressure and temperature ranges that allow the glass to be worked and reworked. Understanding this temperature-viscosity link is vital. The breath carries out the closest contact between my body and the glass material. Expanding my lungs and cheeks, I can control and move my breath through the blowpipe to form a bubble inside the molten glass. My breath expands the glass during this molten window of time—it is as though I am breathing life into the material—while using heat and time determines the placement and outcome of the bubble's shape.



Fig. 6. Shaping glass in the hot shop, 2024, Photo by Yiko Yang

THE PHYSICALITY OF SHAPING GLASS

Physicality is an essential part of the language of my work. For instance, I confront glass by experimenting with gestural actions such as stretching, slumping, pulling, bending, and blowing until just before the point of rupture. The medium ceases to be a mere material; it transforms into a physical extension of my senses, a medium through which my thoughts are externalized and eventually translated into a visual narrative. Each step is a deliberate act of tangible excavation into the realm of thought, intertwining the process of making with introspection. Here, I discover an intensified awareness of my inherent essence and my corporeal existence within space—I uncover what truly matters to me. In the performative practice of glassmaking, physiology influences the outcome.

My bodily knowledge flourishes, becoming a visceral, tactile manifestation of my innermost reflections. The bench is home to both body and tools. Here, they meet and reside in the labor of shaping glass. The tools rest on a table to the right side of the bench, at arm's reach: the jacks, tweezers, diamond shears, scissors, and paper. While working with glass in the hot shop, another body is by necessity involved: an assistant. I am fascinated by this choreography of two bodies in tandem.



Fig. 7. Hot shop exploration - working with gathered glass, 2021, Photo by Isabel Roberts



Fig. 8. Making a Vessel, 2024, Photo by Yiko Yang



Fig. 9. Stretching Molten Glass, 2021, Photo by William Beattie

PERFORMING ANATOMY

A Tandem Dynamic

Bone Marrow (2021), a testament to the materiality of glass, captures the relationship between molten glass and the physical body. The artwork is suspended on stainless steel rods, symbolizing the strenuous pulling process. This showcases the unseen labor of pulling, thus adding weight and substance to the piece. In defying conventional assumptions about glass, this piece showcases its dynamic malleability.

As an artist, I wield my body as a pivotal tool in the transformative journey of glassmaking, engaging in a dynamic interaction between my bodily movements and the glass's adaptable nature. This physical engagement underscores the inherent physicality of the creative process, epitomizing the concept of "performing anatomy." This piece prompts a reflection on the collaborative possibilities between the material and my anatomy.

Questions arise about the limits of glass manipulation: How far can my body pull it before breakage or rigidity sets in?

The tension in this exploration evolves into an integral part of the visual narrative. By mirroring the modifying nature of the body, the glass transforms into a vessel for expressive possibilities, embodying the fluidity and adaptability inherent in both the material and the human form.



Bone Marrow
Glass, steel rods
Dimensions Variable
2022

*the glass
transforms
into a vessel
for expressive
possibilities*



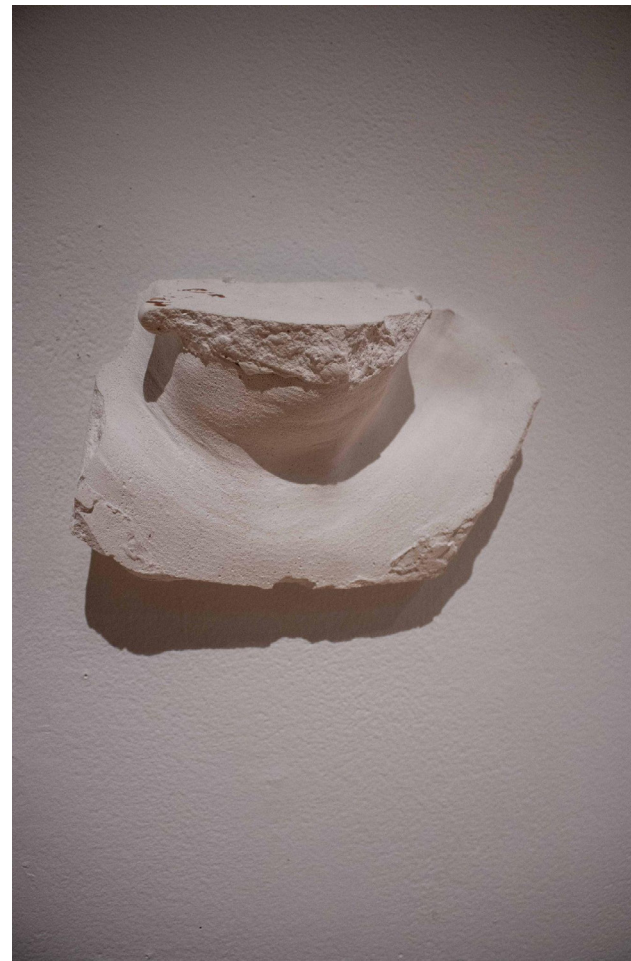
Bone Marrow (close up)
Glass, steel rods
Dimensions Variable
2022

Bone Marrow
Glass, steel rods
Dimensions Variable
2022





Reconstructed Ruins (arm)
Glass, Plaster
Dimensions Variable
2022



Reconstructed Ruins (clavicle)
Glass, Plaster
Dimensions Variable
2022

SOURCING THE BODY THROUGH TRANSPARENCY

As I cultivate intimacy with the material, a connection extends into the realm of transparency, where the glass becomes a lens to source suppressed memories. I use my body to take ownership of these memories and bring them into the world. At this point, the glass is a physical and metaphorical lens through which I govern my body, navigating the boundaries between visibility and concealment. Engaged as a vessel of truth, I trust this medium through which vulnerability and authenticity intertwine. As the concealed intricacies are unveiled, a visual dialogue invites the viewer to deeply engage with the exposed and buried. In this space, the lucidity of the glass mirrors the dance between body, material, and the unveiled self.

Embracing this transformative approach, I willingly put my body into the work as a bold statement of self-expression. The glass performs as an active collaborator in this narrative, capturing and reflecting the nuances of my corporeal presence. Through this convergence of corporeality and glass, I chart unexplored territories within my artistic exploration.



PLASTICITY OF THE BODY SCHEMA

¹ Elizabeth A. Grosz, “Lived Bodies: Phenomenology and the Flesh,” in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), 86–87.

Glass has structural memory like the plasticity of the body schema—it records all past actions within its material. Technically referred to in physics as an amorphous solid, glass lacks a defined lattice pattern. In the arrangement of its atoms and molecules, glass exhibits properties of both liquids and solids. It retains the recollection of being both. In the realm of structural memory, the human body and glass serve as repositories of their pasts.

Tool-marks etched onto the glass surface are a testament to its history, recording a narrative of molding and shaping. Similarly, the human body bears the imprints of a lifetime of experiences, growth, and adaptation.

The parallel echoes philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s exploration of the “body schema.” Merleau-Ponty describes it as a dynamic framework that governs our body’s experiences, fostering coherence within it — connecting motricity with perception and harmonizing the senses in space and time.

Though characterized by ingrained habits and skills, the body schema remains dynamic, open to new challenges that prompt its reorganization through the acquisition or modification of habits. This plasticity challenges traditional dualistic views, emphasizing the inseparable connection between bodily sensations, movements, and perceptions. Influenced by lived experiences and interactions, our bodily experiences shape our understanding of ourselves and surroundings, underscoring the active role of the body in defining our reality.¹

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Making Amends with the Foreign and Fragmented
Glass, plaster bandages, surgical latex tubing
Dimensions Variable
2022

In constant flux, our subjectivities undergo a constant process of embodiment. This journey is marked by gradual, evolving stages, changes and an interconnectedness with the spaces we inhabit. This shared characteristic of structural memory establishes a poignant parallel between the fragility and susceptibility expressed by the human body and glass. In exploring the plasticity of the body schema through the lens of glass, I find a way to unravel the boundaries of materiality, going beyond the mere physical form and instead offering insights into the shared essence of adaptability and memory that are present in both the human body and glass.

In Making Amends with the Foreign and the Fragmented (2021), I explore the tactile and conceptual interplay between surgical latex rubber and glass to evoke a contemplative dialogue on the human body's elasticity. The surgical latex rubber is a metaphor for the body's innate ability to stretch and rebound. My act of stretching the material serves as an inquiry into its muscle memory, into whether it will seamlessly return to its original form or forever retain the memory of this action. *Making Amends with the Foreign and Fragmented* asks viewers to contemplate the intersection between the elasticity of materials and the enduring echoes of past bodily experiences.

Glass has structural memory like the plasticity of the body schema— all past actions are recorded within the material. Technically referred to in physics as an amorphous solid, glass lacks a defined lattice pattern, exhibiting properties of both liquids and solids in the arrangement of its atoms and molecules.

Bones (in a corner)
Glass and plaster bandages
76.2 cm x 33 cm x 114 cm
2022

THE TRANSPARENT REPLICA

Casting is a large part of my artistic practice. I cast parts of my body—joints and limbs and combine them to create a new disembodied double. These casts are of my body, but they are not my body. They are replicas highlighting an unsettling difference between the living body and its copy. With casting, what is left is a residue, an imperfect indexical mark, a repeated impression of a self-positioned elsewhere in the space of presence and absence, neither here nor there. Casting creates a separation between the breathing, living body and the cast, which I consider to be a documented memory fragment—an inert object. Body casts are physically taxing before there is much preparation before pouring the desired material into the cast.

As a disembodied double, the cast forms a realm of disassociation and disconnection, establishing a crucial distance for discovering, deciding upon, scrutinizing, and gaining insights into my own body. This intentional distance is a pivotal departure from my physical body, offering breathing room and evoking an uncanny effect, deliberately creating space for introspection. The casted body is a repository for somatic memory fragments and residues of the past. I began this casting process by focusing on smaller body parts such as the forearm, ankles, chin, and neck to capture nuanced details. This approach resulted in an intermingling between familiarity and a generalizing abstraction of the universal recognition of specific body parts. Yet, under the pressures of societal and cultural taboos, I have altered specificities identifying my actual body.



Fig. 10. Plaster casts of artist's body, Metcalf Building, 2022

With each iteration of casting, a new form of body emerges, one that deviates from the living original to embody a more gestural and abstract representation of it. At times, the process allows for dissociation and removal from my physical body, yet the work is still deeply personal and specific, even in its abstraction.

Each piece is a duplicate of the original yet transformed in its own way. Moving onto a larger surface area, starting from my living, breathing, kinetic body, I directed my attention to the torso. Two casting sessions were necessary to understand its formation from fragment to whole. I layered skin-safe silicone on my body and spread it with my hands, sometimes requiring additional hands for assistance.

I choose whose hands are allowed to touch my body.

Moving from a physical representation of my body cast, I thought of ways to distort and fragment the body to become less recognizable. I mixed the plaster into the mold I distorted and waited for the final outcome.



Fig.11 - 13. Plaster cast of artist's torso, Fletcher studio, 2023



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Who am I without my body?



Fig. 14. Impressionable vessels series experiments, Fletcher studio, 2022

HEALING THROUGH REPETITION

I coat graphite powder to the final cast of my body to serve as a mold release for the glass. As I prepare to blow a glass bubble over the cast, encasing it completely, what remains is the impression—an echo of a body now absent. The glass captures this form onto its surface, creating a ghostly impression of presence. The imperative of the multiple stems from my rhythmic and repetitive engagement with the creative process. Iteration enables intimacy with the material and embeds an imprint of my body by blowing molten glass over the graphite-coated cast. Repetition helps to create movement within the artwork, guiding me into a trance-like state where the body takes precedence over the mind in the present moment. Healing occurs through repetition.

UNFURLING BLUE CARPET MEMORIES



Encased, preserved and protected
Glass and plaster coated in graphite
6.5 x 5.3 inches
2023
Imprinted glass vessel rested on body cast



Imprinted Vessel (chest and ribs)
Glass
10 in x 8.5 in x 5 in
2023
Detail of vessel showcasing the absence and presence of my body



Liquidated Memory
Peony floral print wallpaper, cotton curtains extracted from an archival family photograph, glass, steel rods, dried peony flowers, wooden table, projected animated EEG scan, and plaster coated graphite
2023
Dimensions Variable

Rather than aiming for exact replicas, I embrace the contrast between the human hand and the defect, introducing contradictions that resist the pursuit of perfection.

This deliberate use of repetition becomes a gesture against mass production and machine-made precision, emphasizing the value of the human-made, including its inherent imperfections and defects.



Fig. 15. Impressionable vessel series experiments, Fletcher studio, 2022

2. TRACING MEMORY



Deliberate Excavation

2. BRACING MEMORY

Deliberate Excavation

UNFURLING BLUE CARPET MEMORIES



Imprinted Vessel (Abdomen)
Glass, projected light, dried peony flower
7.5 in x 10 in x 2.5 in
2023
Detail of projected shadow

As with the transparent replica, I contemplate the significance of leaving traces, imprints, residues, or captured gestures in glass to explore the visual impact of both absence and presence. I am intrigued by the capacity of glass to retain memories, akin to the human body. Serving as a vessel for residual imprints, the material acts as a metaphorical magnifying glass that can either expose or protect. The body, which also hosts memories, plays an active part in the process of creating glasswork. It is both a material and tool that can be manipulated to leave an internal or external mark on the final work.

Composing the body of work represented in [Unfurling Blue Carpet Memories](#) has become a meticulous process of extracting memories embedded in my body and mind to externalize and grant them space to exist in the world. I give these hidden fragments room to breathe, allowing them to exist beyond the confines of my mind. The process involves exposing the underside of feelings, liquidating the memory of distressing experiences, reshaping and reordering collected fragments across continents and histories. My work draws on my personal experiences to inform a story that is both personal and universal. I know that I am not alone in this experience. I invite others to share this vulnerable space beside, with, through, and alongside me.

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Date: 4/2/2022 ID: 044571
Name: Ms Sara Aref Hussain Abdulrahim Ahli

NAVIGATING THE PARADOX OF PURITY AND IMPURITY

I extensively utilized graphite powder to make plaster casts of my body to serve as molds for imprinting onto glass surfaces. By its very nature, graphite leaves behind tangible traces of its material presence. This presence is far from discreet; it is tangible evidence of where fingertips and hands have pressed and surfaces have been touched. Its black residue seeps onto the surfaces it encounters.

In this context, I reflect upon the deceptive notion of purity in creating my works. While inherently messy, the act of visually claiming leaves behind a tangible residue—an undeniable testament to the tactile connection between material and maker. This residual evidence visually narrates the intimate interaction and captures the nuanced journey of touch and transformation inherent in my artistic process.

The interplay between purity and impurity becomes a visual and tactile dialogue, signifying the complexities of every marked surface.

This examination extends beyond conventional dichotomies, recognizing that purity and impurity are not mere opposites but integral components shaping my artistic visual language. As molten glass envelops the surface of the cast, a paradox emerges, where both impurity and purity assert their essence. The once pristine glass embraces the impurities of the graphite-marked cast, fusing the pure and impure, the untouched and the marked, the clean and the soiled. This paradoxical union challenges the notion of absolute purity, revealing the beauty and complexity of the coexistence of seeming opposites.



Fig. 16. Plaster cast coated with graphite powder, 2024



Self Portrait
Plaster cast, carbonized graphite, brown paper and painted plastic
12 x 16 in
2023
Kiln slumped sheet glass and cast of artist's torso

*What if my body were
transparent?
How would it appear?*



Trapped residue in glass
Newsprint paper residue and glass
3 in x 7 in
2022

THE UNWANTED BODY

Confrontations through
Creative Catharsis

Before producing art, I had yet to understand that the interconnection of purity and impurity are integral to my essence. I lived in tandem with an unwanted body—a vessel bearing impressions I neither comprehended nor desired. With each artistic pursuit, memories surfaced, becoming ever more palpable.

A suppressed memory, once dormant, began to haunt me—an unwelcome touch, without consent, inflicted onto me at a young age. This happened at a family member's home—not my own. This experience plunged me into a labyrinth of confusion and self-loathing. Disconnected from my own skin, I found myself trapped within a bodily vessel tainted by shame and guilt. I embarked on a journey to grapple with the consuming force of this violent memory. I confronted this stigmatized, seemingly indelible imprint of violation as well as the shame and guilt held within my unwanted body. Unwanted because it fractures, makes foreign and impure this vessel. Seeking release from this undesired burden propelled me toward an embodied artistic practice.

I endeavor to unravel its mysteries through the act of creation, giving physical form to these emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that were once a disassociated force. Each sculpted form becomes a means of understanding—an attempt to reconcile with fragmented memories. My exploration transcends the surface, delving into the depths of transparency within my own being. I contemplate the profound revelations that await when the material itself becomes transparent, offering a window into the profundity of my human experience.



Fig. 17. Detail of Self Portrait
Plaster cast of artist's torso
12 x 16 in
2023

INVOLUNTARY MEMORY

Triggers from the Past

As Marcel Proust articulated, involuntary memory unfolds when daily life cues trigger recollections of the past without conscious effort. In his novel *Swann's Way*, Proust utilizes the Madeleine cake as a powerful literary device to delve into the themes of memory and time. When the narrator tastes the Madeleine dipped in tea, it sparks a cascade of memories and emotions, illustrating how sensory cues can lead to profound introspection and self-discovery. Proust investigates the nature of memory as a nonlinear and subjective phenomenon, emphasizing how memories can resurface unexpectedly and influence one's perception of time. He invites readers to ponder memory's fluidity and profound influence on identity and existence. His approach to narrative recognizes the interconnection between sensory perception and memory, highlighting how consciousness shapes our perception of time and identity and illuminating the intricate relationship between sensory stimuli, consciousness, and the construction of personal narratives through memory.²

In the article *Freudian Repression*, Simon Boag elucidates Sigmund Freud's original conception of repression, portraying it as a nuanced unconscious defensive mechanism. This process, according to Boag, distorts or obstructs access to unacceptable thoughts or memories, rather than simply banishing them from consciousness. Boag contends that the prevailing perception of repression is overly simplistic and overlooks the intricacies of Freud's theory, which posited repression as a form of motivated forgetting rather than a literal expulsion from the mind.³

² Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, In *Search of Lost Time*, volume 1, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Modern Library, 1992) 60–64.

³ Simon Boag, "Freudian Repression, the Common View, and Pathological Science." *Review of General Psychology*, 10, no. 1(2006): 74–86. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.10.1.74>

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud introduces his theories on involuntary memory, which form the cornerstone of his broader psychoanalytic framework, highlighting the significance of the unconscious mind in molding human behavior and experience. He explores the distinction between the manifest (literal) content of dreams and their latent (hidden) meanings. Dream content is derived from three primary sources: recent real-life experiences, childhood memories, and physical or bodily sensations during sleep. Freud suggests that dreams serve as a "royal road" to access the unconscious mind, revealing repressed wishes, fears, and conflicts significantly influencing human psychology and behavior. Central to Freud's ideas is the concept of "repression," wherein the mind unconsciously suppresses undesirable thoughts, memories, or desires. He posits that such memories can resurface involuntarily in the form of intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, or other unconscious manifestations, thus embodying his notion of "involuntary memory."⁴

Overall, Proust and Freud offer distinct perspectives on memory. Proust highlights the evocative power of sensory experiences in triggering memories, while Freud focuses on the unconscious mind's influence on memory processes and psychological development.

⁴ Freud, Sigmund, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 51–63, 455–456.

*As the work unfolds,
it becomes a vessel for the body to*

reveal concealed truths

*and release unnecessary
emotional burdens.*



Fig. 18. Close up of crack detail on plaster cast of artist chest and ribs after multiples uses, 2023

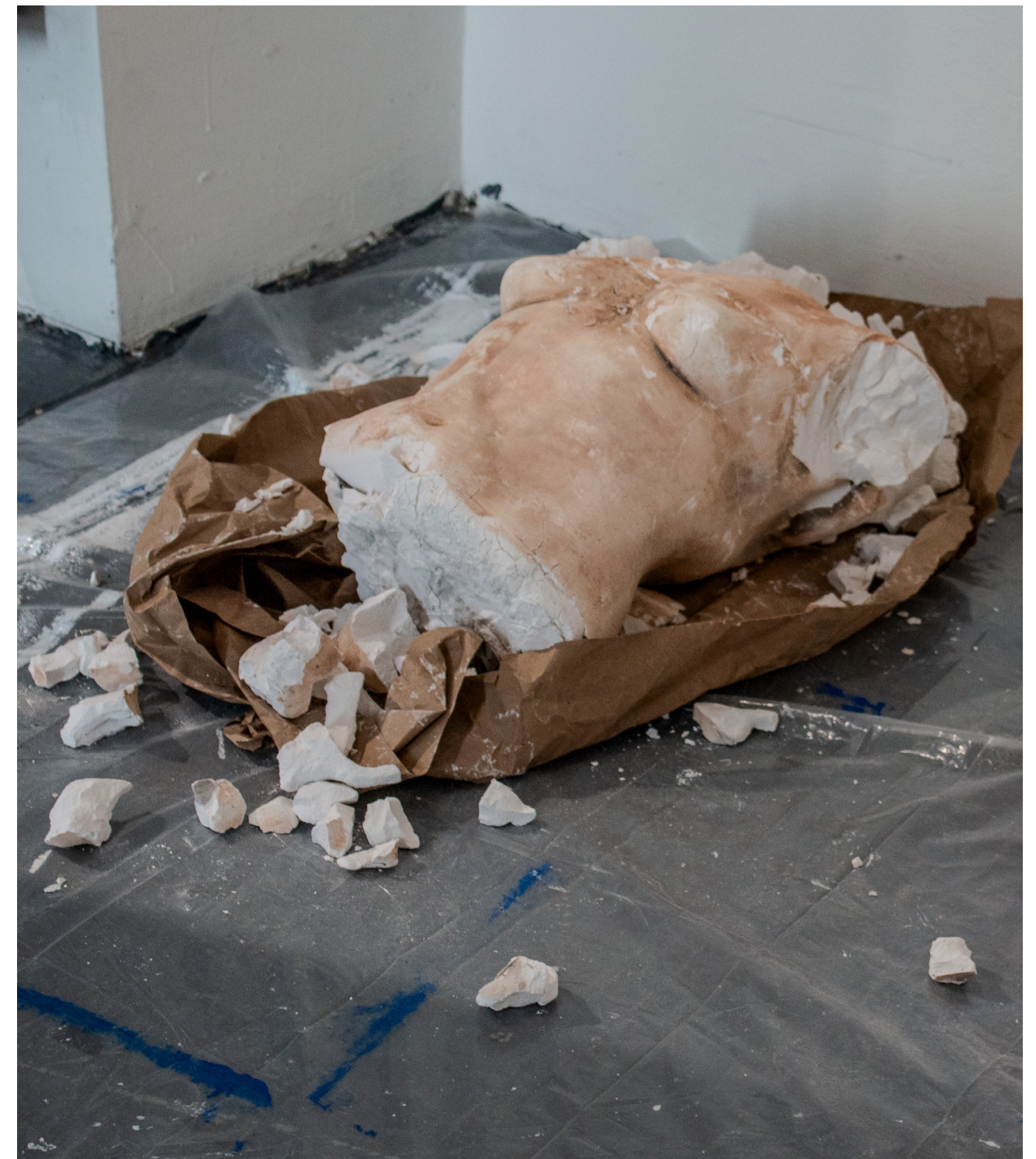
THE BODY AS SITE

The body's perception is shaped by mediated perceptual information, internal cues, and stored body representations known as body memory (BM), challenging the idea that memories are solely stored in the brain. Contemporary discourse on BM often focuses on traumatic memory, particularly how the body responds when recalling such memories, finding application in treating conditions like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

In *The Body Keeps the Score*, psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk extensively explores this concept, further emphasizing that traumatic experiences are not only stored in the mind but also inscribed in the body. In alternative medicine, the idea of bodywork emerges as a transformative tool to evoke memory. Its purpose extends beyond the conventional scope as a catalyst for relaxation, enhanced breathing, and a profound connection with one's body. This process allows for a deliberate exploration of deeper layers, facilitating a sense of safety and ease within the body,

My artistic process involves immersing myself in an embodied practice, engaging with profound and often overlooked issues through creation. As the work unfolds, it becomes a vessel for the body, allowing concealed truths to surface and unnecessary emotional burdens to be released. My artwork intends to engage viewers in a way that deepens their understanding of the body's role in storing memories. Through this personal yet universally relatable experience, I aim to foster self-awareness and facilitate healing within the viewer—offering a liminal space for contemplation, a moment of pause to breathe and an opportunity for them to become aware of their body in space.

Exploring the qualities of glass as a medium further underscores its inherent corporeality and ability to mirror and interact with the human body. In the hot shop I become most aware of my body's movements in space.



Self Portrait
Plaster cast, carbonized graphite, brown paper and painted plastic
12 x 16 in
2023
Kiln slumped sheet glass and cast of artist's torso

A COLLECTION OF FRAGMENTS

In the pursuit of understanding weighty information, fragments and the act of collecting them have always held immense significance for me. The essence of the fragment truly resonates—its importance rivals that of the whole. Literary theorist, philosopher, and semiotician Roland Barthes considers the fragment as form in his autobiography, where he calls them “a pure series of interruptions” and “each piece self-sufficient, and yet it is never anything but the interstice of its neighbors.”⁵

Fragments invite contemplative pauses, offering spaces of in-betweenness where beginnings, middles, and ends converge to form a coherent narrative. A fragment demands attention, compelling us to gradually unfurl hidden signs. Grant Faulkner writes in his book, *The Art of Brevity*, “A fragment has edges, cracks, seams, and structure. By being broken apart, it possesses new boundaries, existing in a liminal state.”⁶ The art lies in splitting, dismantling, and dissecting these fragments to comprehend their inner workings through careful examination. I have become a fragment collector.

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1994), 94.

⁶ Grant Faulkner, “Telling a Story in Fragments,” in *The Art of Brevity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2023), 36–42.



Fig. 19 - 21. Studies of glass fragments, Fletcher studio, 2021

Fragments become storytelling agents; in collecting them, I allow myself to be collected. I navigate a landscape of interruptions and revelations, piecing together a narrative. These fragments enable me to begin again and find the joy of playing an archaeologist sifting through these pieces, restructuring, retelling a story, and making anew. As a fragment collector, I arrange and rearrange, or, as artist Louise Bourgeois aptly expressed in the title of her 2000 installation *I Do, I Undo, I Redo*.

Fragmenting the body implies a rediscovery of the body through constant rearrangement. The fragmented bodies I collect gain weight and presence, shedding their former density to become transparent, translucent entities. They take up space, so you may feel their weight. No longer suppressed or suffocated but vivid and alive, their histories are honored and illuminated for all to see. They are given presence and light to the life they have lived. What was once dense, solid, and opaque transforms into transparent, translucent, clear bodies.



Fig. 20

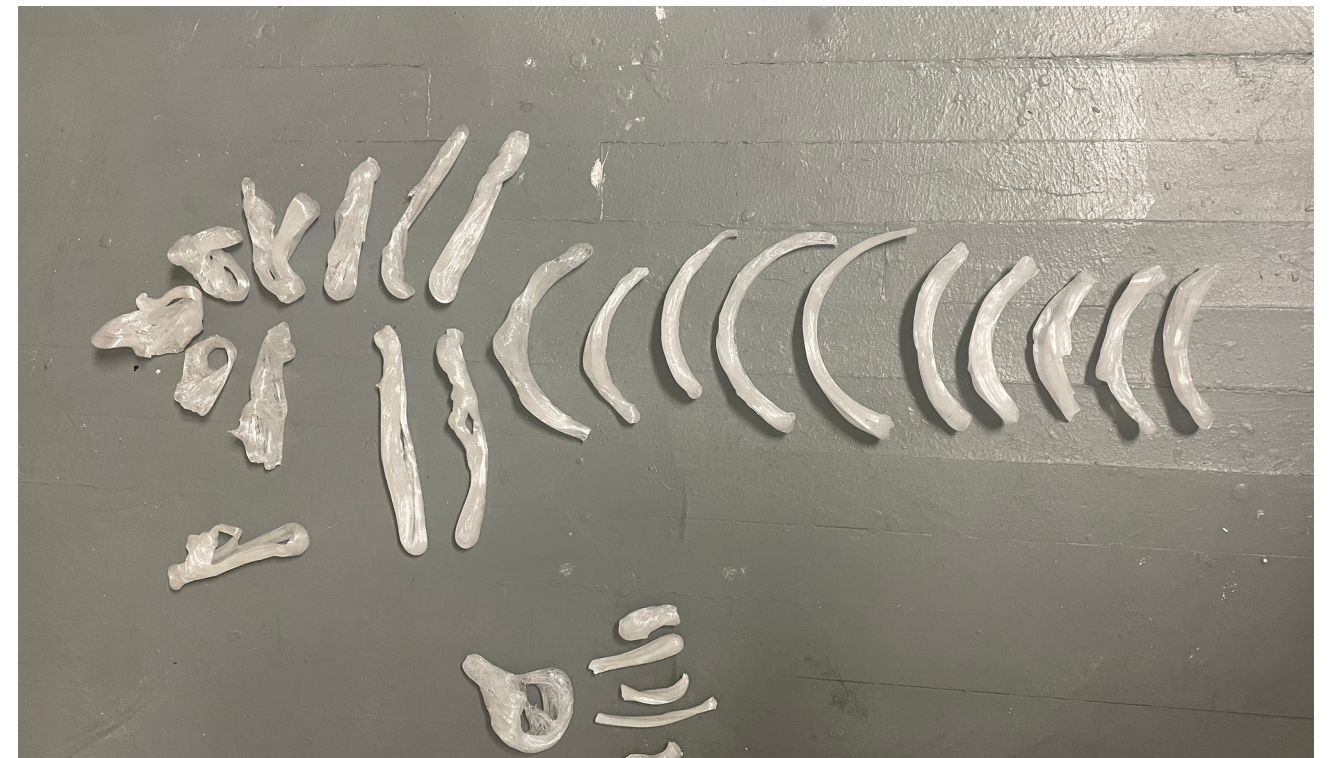


Fig. 21.



*“Memory is a delay.
Memory is a fragment.
Memory is of the body that passed.
Memory is the trace of a wave goodbye made
with a slightly clenched fist.”⁷*

⁷ Robert Morris, “Golden Memories,” interview by W.J.T. Mitchell, *Artforum*, 32, no 8 (April 1994): 89.

Fig. 22. Projection of floral printed bedding onto blown glass, Fletcher studio 2022



Imprinted vessel (ankle)
 Imprinted glass vessel rested on body cast
 8 x 6 x 4.5 inches
 2023

CARBONIZED MEMORIES

Paper Impressions of the Past

In blowing and shaping glass, the moistened newspaper, often called pad paper, facilitates the shaping and tempering of molten glass. An intricate dialectic between the glass and the paper medium lies within this procedural framework. As the glass undergoes manipulation, it gradually imprints onto the skin of the paper, thereby affecting the progressive combustion of the paper layers. This transformative process yields a visual narrative wherein intricate patterns emerge, suggestive of organic structures, such as pulmonary tissues, subtly etched onto the paper's surface. Burning, symbolic of elemental fire, invokes contemplation on vitality, purification, and annihilation. This nuanced interrelationship between the paper as a tool for forming glass and the archival inscription of the process reveals multiple unseen layers. Within this process, the shaped paper assumes a sculptural presence as a body, and the carbonized imprints, acting as negatives, leave traces of the body's impression.

The more I used paper, the more I witnessed the ephemeral yet indelible marks left by the molten glass. Each manipulation etched a story onto its surface, a testament to the dynamic between form and material. I grew fascinated with the pad paper as both a medium of and witness to glass transformation and began exploring the interplay of those roles on its surfaces. This seemingly humble yet profoundly significant tool became a visual recording of memory.



Burned Impressions
Floral printed paper, carbon residue and metal harness.
Dimensions Variable
2023

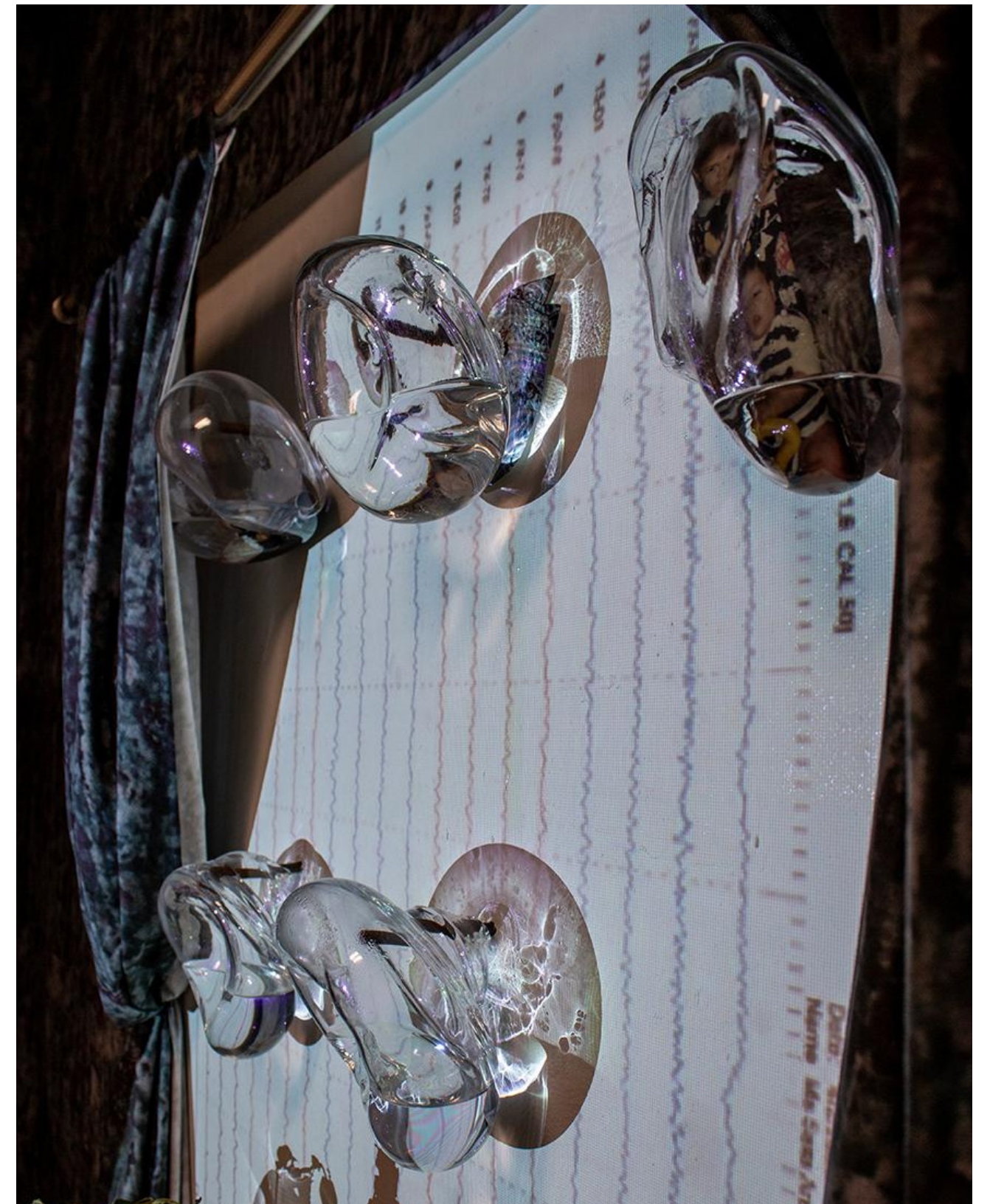


Burned Impressions
Floral printed paper, carbon residue and metal harness.
Dimensions Variable
2023

LIQUIDATED MEMORY

Liquidated Memory (2022) is a visual exploration of human memory. This installation unravels the complex nature of memory by intertwining physical imprints taken from a cast of my body onto the glass. I incorporate visual elements invoking pieces of my history through images and projections. The ethereal quality of glass becomes a canvas for the convergence of past and present. The transparent surfaces of the glass vessels and orbs are a looking-glass and vitrine, inviting viewers to peer into layers of remembrance. The interplay of transparency symbolizes the act of seeing through not just the physical medium but also the recesses of one's mind.

The projected sequential moving image is of my brain scans, with a glimpse into the intricate neural pathways juxtaposed against the delicate yet enduring imagery of peony floral wallpaper. A space of interiority and exteriority interrelate. The wallpaper, extracted from a 1996 photograph, captures my brother, Saoud, and nanny, Nora, playing in my room as I sit on a plastic pink chair, looking at the person taking the photograph. This recreated wallpaper and curtain are visual anchors, grounding the installation in a specific moment in my history. This deliberate fusion of scientific and nostalgic elements prompts contemplation on the malleability and resilience of memory.



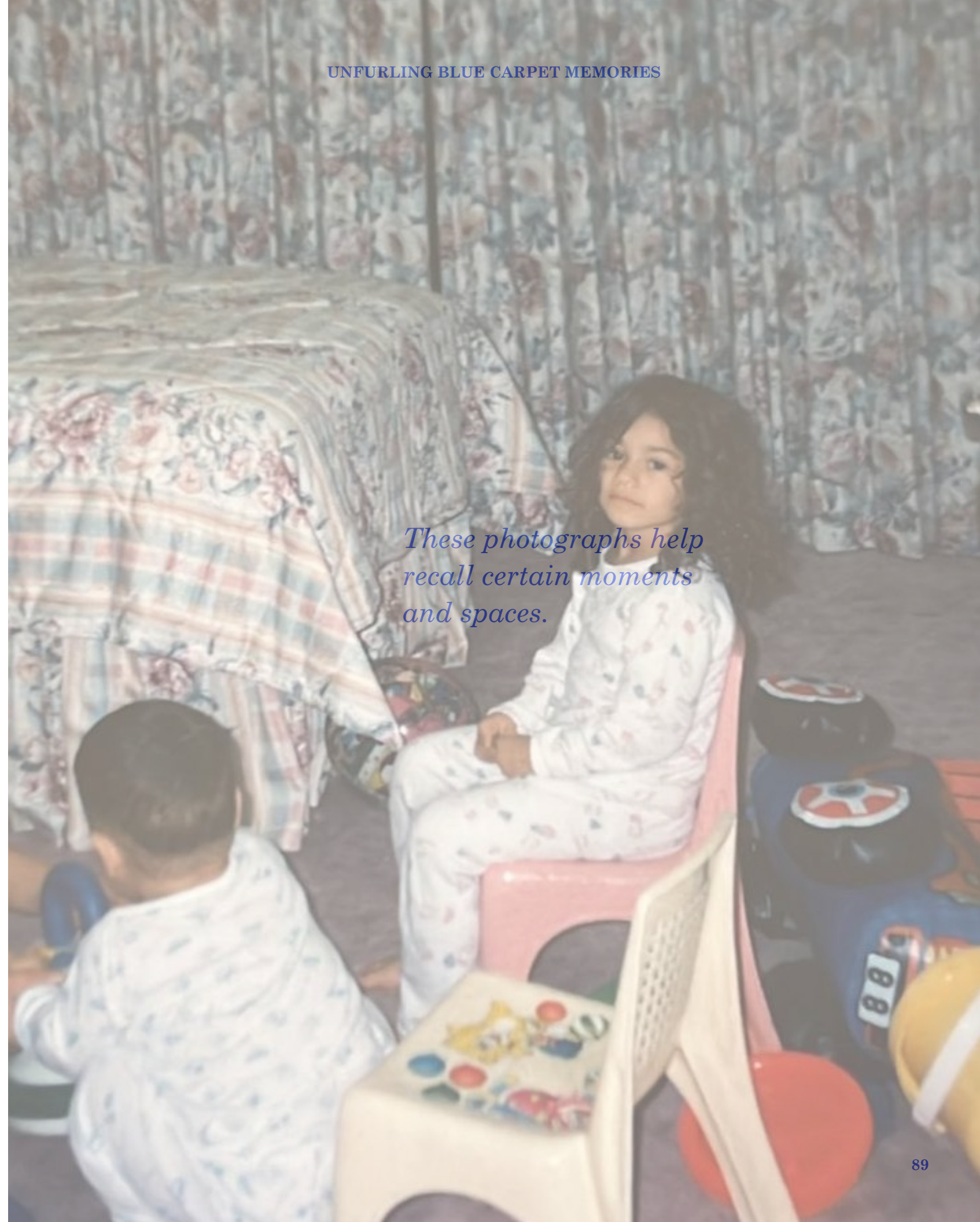
Liquidated Memory

Peony floral print wallpaper, cotton curtains extracted from an archival family photograph, glass, steel rods, dried peony flowers, wooden table, projected animated EEG scan, and plaster coated graphite
2023

Dimensions Variable



Liquidated Memory
Peony floral print wallpaper, cotton curtains extracted from an archival family photograph, glass, steel rods, dried peony flowers, wooden table, projected animated EEG scan, and plaster coated graphite
2023
Dimensions Variable



These photographs help recall certain moments and spaces.

As light and projection reflect upon the glass, the installation takes on a dynamic quality, mirroring the fluid and evolving nature of memory itself. The inherent questions posed by the artwork challenge our understanding of memory's fidelity over time.

Does the act of replicating a snapshot of memory alter its essence, and does it, too, yield to the natural disintegration that time imposes?

The visual impact of the installation is heightened through the strategic use of projection and lighting. These carefully orchestrated elements cast shadows and illuminate the glass to produce an immersive experience that draws viewers into a contemplative space. With this artwork, I sift through photographs taken during my childhood. These photographs help recall certain moments and spaces. We hold within us fragments, moments, and impressions. Our minds discard the heaviness of text and the complexities of its connections; instead, we craft our own mental images. Every time we remember something, we fabricate a new memory. This phenomenon is known as memory reconsolidation. Memory reconsolidation is a process in which existing memories are recalled and then re-encoded, potentially leading to modifications or alterations in the memory. When recalling a memory, it becomes susceptible to change and may be influenced by factors such as current beliefs, emotions, and environmental cues.⁸

⁸Karim Nader, "Reconsolidation and the Dynamic Nature of Memory," *Cold Spring Harbor Perspectives in Biology* 7, no. 10 (September 9, 2015) 1–9.



Liquidated Memory

Peony floral print wallpaper, cotton duct curtains extracted from an archival family photograph, imprinted glass, steel rods, dried peony flowers, wooden table, projected animated EEG scan, and plaster coated graphite
188 in x 100 in
2023

*We hold within us
fragments,
moments,
and impressions.*

*Our minds discard the
heaviness of text and
the complexities of its
connections; instead, we
craft our own mental
images. Everytime we
remember something,*

*we fabricate a new
memory.*

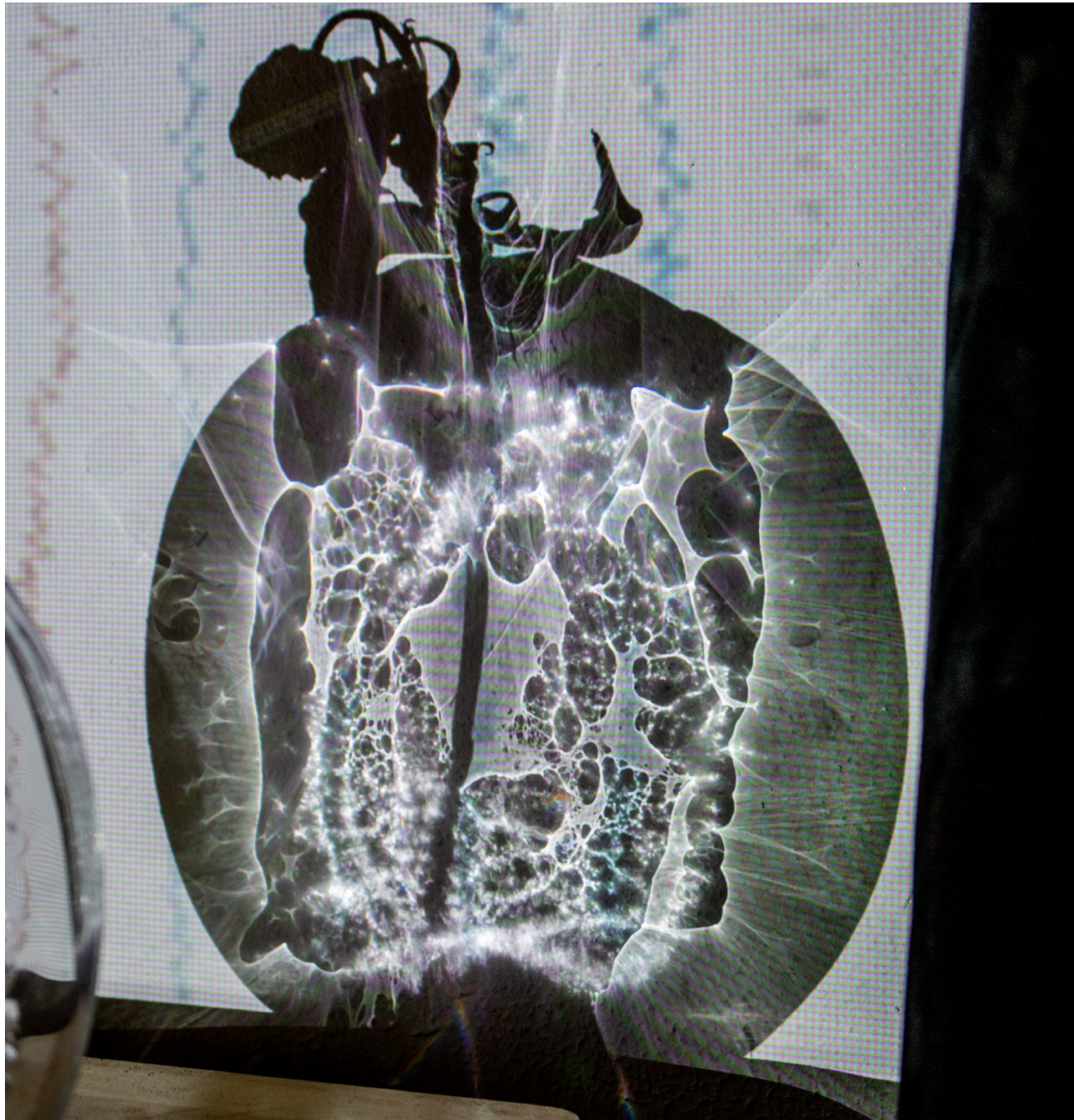
EXPLORING THE QUASI-PRESENT:

Memory, Perception & Temporal
Ambiguity

Memories emerged as fleeting mental visuals—overlapping layers of the past and present, similar to a collage. Initially tucked away in the recesses of my mind, these ambiguous images gradually materialized in the work, anchoring specific memories to physical objects and evoking a profound sense of déjà vu. The familiarity of colors and moments often leads me to muse, “I have felt this feeling before.” My artwork directly responds to this experience. I draw inspiration from the present moment and my recollection of past memories, which urge me to materialize the immaterial and ground myself in the present moment.

The term “quasi-present” derives from Freud’s exploration of the phenomenon of déjà vu in his writings and theories on memory, consciousness, and the uncanny. Far from static recordings, memories are actively reconstructed and interpreted by the brain within the context of present experiences. This often leads to instances where past memories intrude upon or influence present perceptions, merging and blending, causing temporal ambiguity and chronological disorientation or distortion.⁹

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “Memories and Images,” in *Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 66 -70.



In Paul Ricoeur's discourse on Henri Bergson's seminal work, *Matter and Memory*, he delves into Bergson's conception of memory, notably the transition from "pure memory" to "memory-image."¹⁰ According to Bergson, "pure memory" transcends linear time and affects our perception of the present, whereas memory-images are the specific representations of past events that surface in conscious awareness—serving as bridges between pure memory and our reality. These memory-images can be either voluntary and involuntary.

Voluntary memory involves deliberate recollection, whereas involuntary memory is triggered spontaneously, often without conscious effort. Experiencing involuntary memory is akin to being transported back in time as if reliving past events with vivid clarity. Something in the present triggers these memories. Involuntary memory underscores the profound interaction between past experiences and present consciousness. Through involuntary memory, we gain insight into the workings of the mind as past experiences resurface unexpectedly, enriching our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

¹⁰ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1988), 92–175.

Over the past four years, I've been visited by fragmented memories I've never consciously summoned nor wished to see unveiled. In my research into the phenomenology of memory and imagination, I have grown interested in the areas of hallucination and fiction and the two distinct processes of recalling and imagining.

Acknowledging memory as an active and creative force that shapes our perception of reality, I have sought to make the tangible intangible and to translate abstract concepts into figurative ones and vice versa. My creation of artwork has been motivated by a series of questions:

What if memory could be made material?

What would that entail?

How would it manifest?

What would it look like?

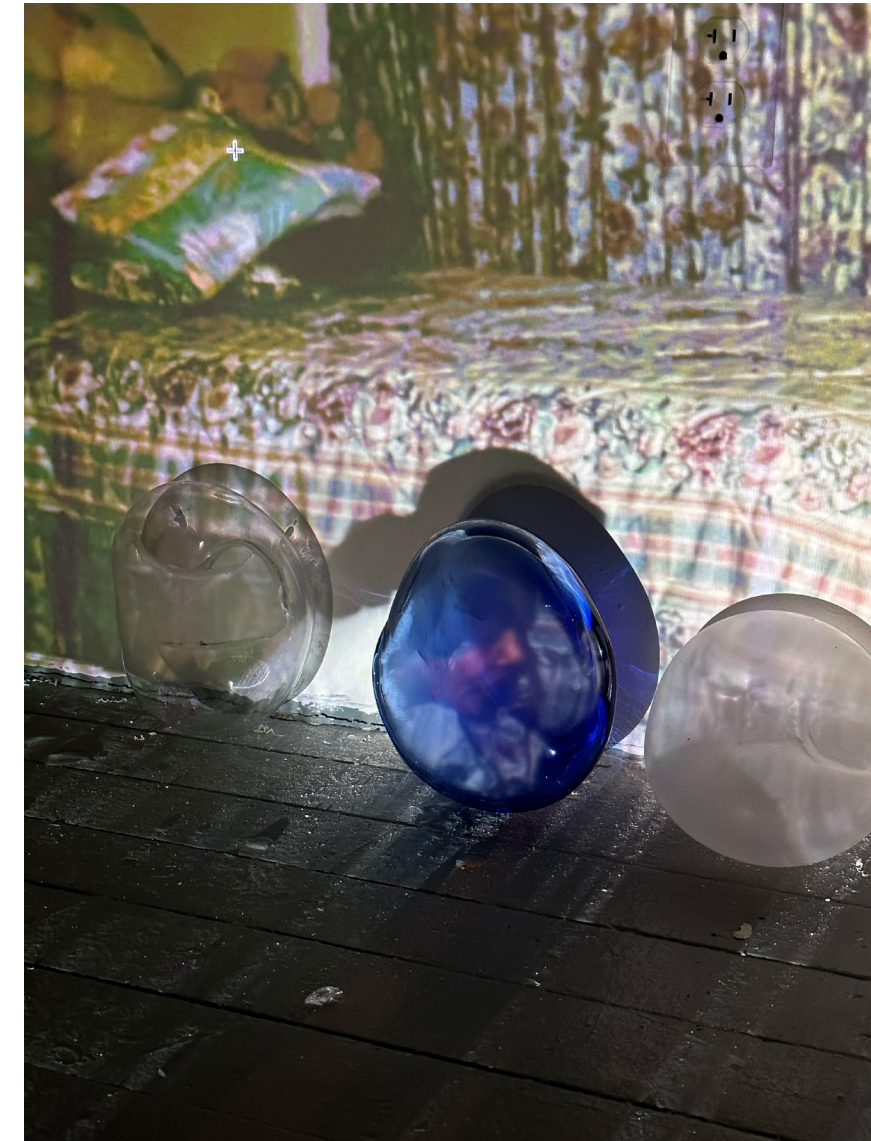


Fig. 23. Studio experiment: projected photograph onto sandblasted glass bubbles

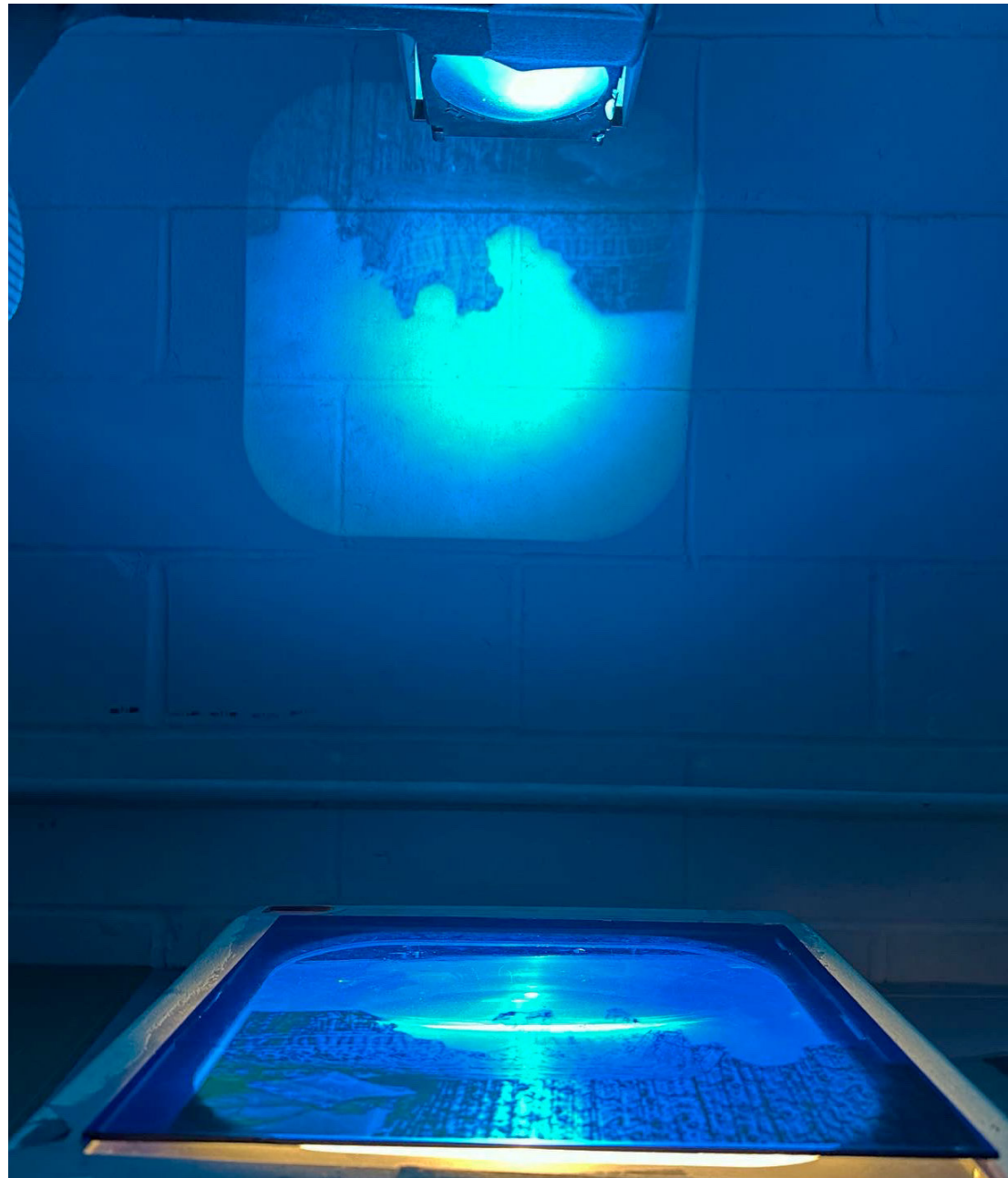


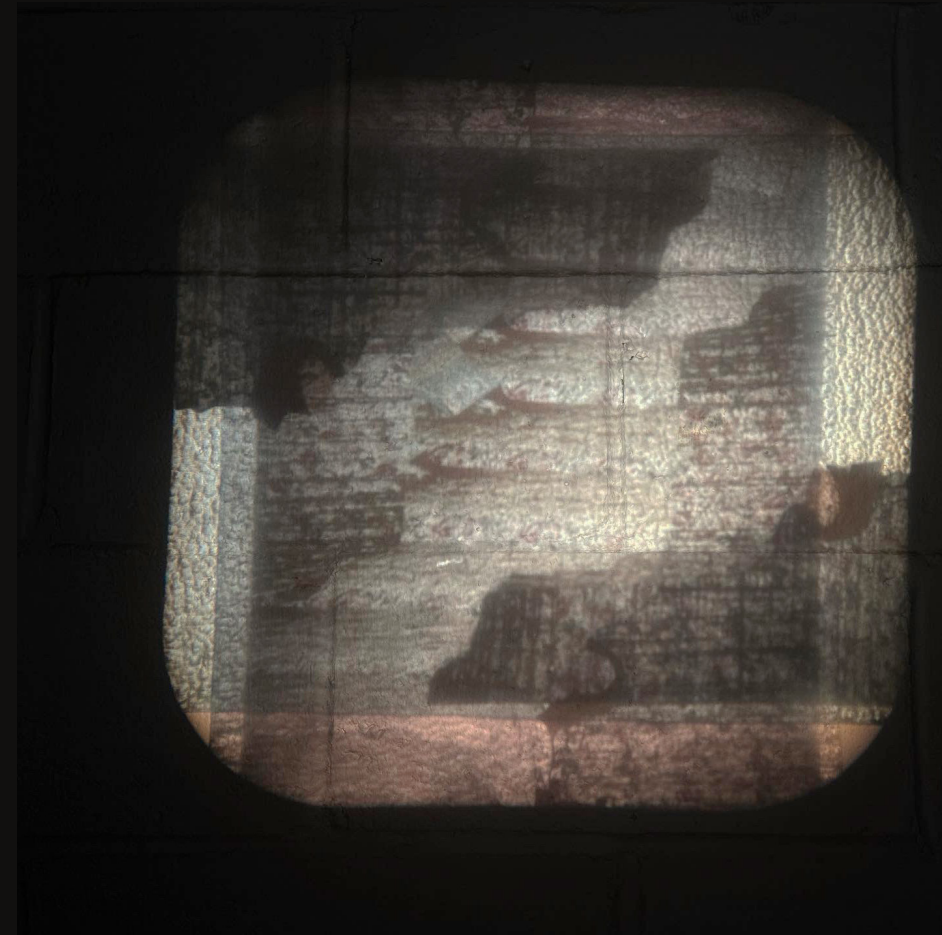
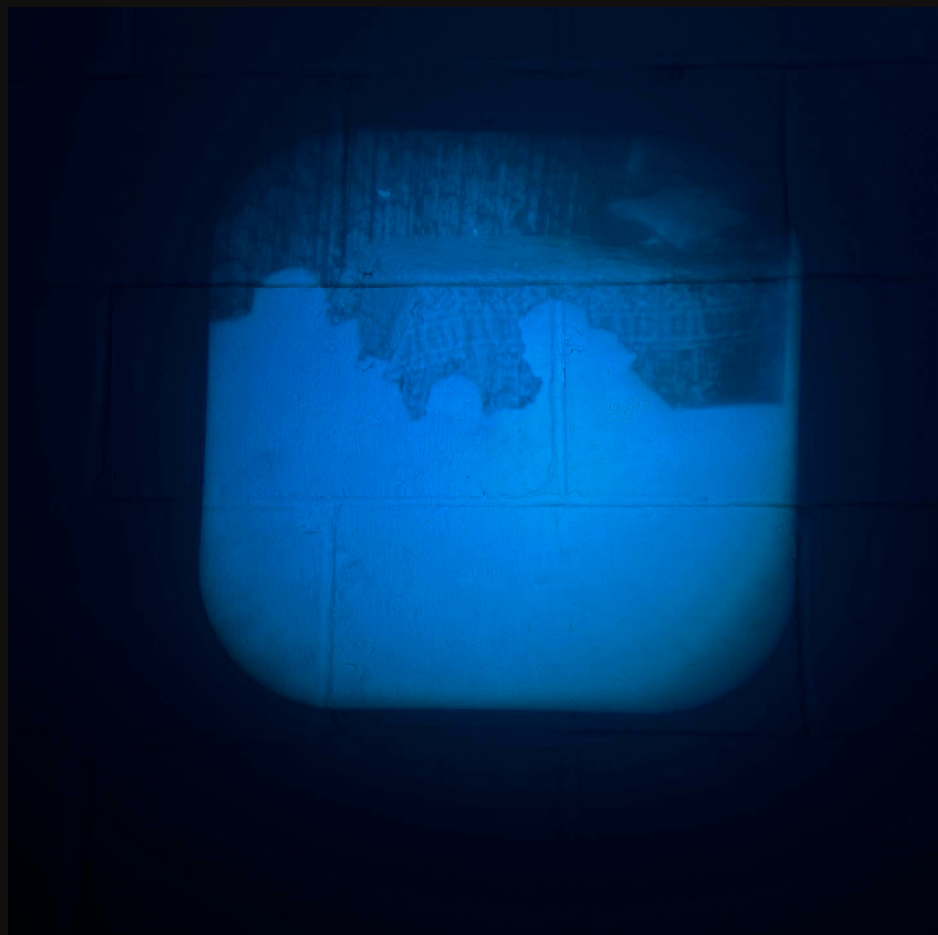
Fig. 24 - 27. Projection of UV print photograph on stained glass and light, 2022

UNVEILING THE IMMATERIAL THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

In my pursuit of answers, I turned my research from theory to the repository of photographs documenting parts of my childhood. Recognizing the limitations of relying solely on the perceptions of my mind and body, I sought to utilize these photographs to trace and resurface specific memories. These images served as portals for memories that had been lingering along the indescribable limits between reality and illusion to resurface and pass through. I hoped to gain clarity and validation regarding the authenticity of my elusive recollections by confronting these photographs. I abstracted the images and honed in on specific forms and compositions. This process has allowed me to distill the essence of memory, transcending the constraints of the material world to capture the interconnection between perception and imagination. Through abstraction, I unearth the underlying truths buried beneath layers of recollections.

My photography unveils the immaterial through the image by materializing memories of personal experiences by providing them with a grounding in physical work. The idea that thought cannot exist without images has roots in various philosophical and psychological theories throughout history. Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that thought and perception are closely intertwined, suggesting that mental images are essential for understanding and reasoning. Modern psychology emphasizes the importance of sensory experiences in shaping our thoughts and ideas. Later, psychologists such as William James and Sigmund Freud further explored the relationship between imagery and cognition, proposing theories that underscore the role of mental images in memory, perception, and problem-solving.

In my work, I capture the essence of these memories and visual imprints, translating ephemeral moments into tangible expressions and bridging the gap between past experiences and present perceptions. Memories are like abstracted images, a filmy residue lingering in an in-between state, leaving the viewer to contemplate their origin.



3. HOME

Dwelling Spaces



Fig. 28. Archival Photo of Dubai House - Back Patio, 2001

This final chapter explores the multifaceted concept of home, presenting it as both a tangible, physical container for the body and an intangible, abstract essence constructed from memories and emotions.

Home is depicted as an intricate collection of rooms, extending beyond mere walls and roofs. Within its walls, home cradles the imprints of familial bonds, personal growth, and the fleeting nature of transient moments—a dynamic intersection of nostalgia, comfort, and shared experiences. While the body serves as the vessel, the home acts as the container holding a reservoir of emotions where laughter, tears, and the passage of time amalgamate, shaping our exterior and storing memories.

What I have gathered in this chapter is a tapestry of spaces that shelter fragments of my past. Contours of walls echo with the whispers of stories lived and ones yet to unfold. The memories are embedded in the wallpaper, the carpet bears witness. The work is approached as an archival excavation. The conditioned narrative of the self surfaces, opening up a prospect of the sought-after liberated one.

OF TRANSIENCE AND RESIDING

I am fascinated with the process of building a home, contemplating the selection of materials, the decision-making process, and the complexities involved in construction. Building a house involves various activities such as designing, constructing, furnishing, and decorating the living space to make it suitable for habitation. It also involves establishing a sense of belonging, security, and comfort within that space.

I grew up in the United Arab Emirates, where houses are predominantly constructed using cement, steel rebar, and gypsum for the structural framework. These materials are favored for their durability and strength, crucial for withstanding the region's temperatures and occasional sandstorms.

Glass plays a prominent role in UAE architecture, renowned for its sleek and modern designs. Many buildings feature extensive use of glass, with large windows and glass facades offering both natural light and stunning views of the surrounding landscape. Other materials, such as wood, are less commonly used due to their susceptibility to termite damage and high maintenance requirements in hot and humid climates. Nonetheless, wood may still find its place in temporary fixtures and certain architectural elements for aesthetic purposes. As structures rise and evolve, they become markers of ever-changing architecture, embodying the essence of transience while providing a sense of permanence and belonging to those who reside within them. Through this process, I am drawn to the temporal, the liminal, and the transient spaces that transgress the boundaries between inside and outside.

“A window cuts out a new frame for looking. Walls put up barriers, but their borders easily crack. The perimeters of a room change into boundaries to be crossed. Doors open up new access, morphing into portals. An entrance way becomes a gateway to an inner world.”¹¹

¹¹ Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 187.



Fig. 29. Archival Photo of Dubai House - Spiral Staircase, 2001

THE SITE OF MEMORY

Transcending Geometric Boundaries

Gaston Bachelard's chapter, "House and Universe," in his book *The Poetics of Space*, presents the house not just as a physical structure but rather as a poetic and psychological entity. Bachelard suggests that the house encapsulates human emotions, memories, dreams, and intimate reflections on existence. His exploration extends beyond the house's visible, rational aspects to unveil its symbolic and metaphorical dimensions.

Bachelard introduces the notion that inhabited space transcends geometric boundaries, emphasizing the house's ability to evoke intimacy, cheer, and a sense of protection. He questions how secret rooms or vanished spaces within a house can become repositories of unforgettable memories and a sanctuary for an individual's past experiences. Identifying the house as a topography of our intimate being, Bachelard suggests that the spaces within a home, such as rooms, attics, and cellars, reflect and embody aspects of our inner selves and personal experiences. A house's layout and architecture reveal its inhabitants' psychological and emotional landscape. In other words, the arrangement and design of a house can offer insights into our memories, desires, fears, and dreams, shaping our experiences and perceptions within it.

Reflecting on my childhood, I know we lived at my uncle's house before transitioning to our first apartment in Dubai. I remember the details of that space—the carpeted flooring, floral and vegetational upholstery, and gold inlay wooden furniture. Soon after, we relocated to an apartment in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, for my father's work. It was there that I had many precious memories. We lived near the Royal Sheikh's palace, and my brother, mom, nanny, and I would either ride our bicycles or walk around the outside of the palace. Towering trees near our apartment's parking lot became my brother's and my tree house—not a typical one perched in branches, but nestled among the roots, a sanctuary for our imaginations. Every weekend,

we would pack our bags and drive to Dubai to visit our family, usually staying with my aunt as my father dedicated himself to overseeing the construction of our new house.

What is a home made for, if not for dreams, imagination, and the blissful blue-filtered memories that linger there? Daydreaming of this fictional space, I seek to construct it using moments that my body lived and experienced between the structure, the frames, and the walls of this home. The home becomes a repository for the ephemeral, where the boundaries between reality and the constructed dissolve, allowing the past to seep into the present. Bachelard observed that when trying to find the site of memory in an architectural landscape, one need look no further than to personal memories of home. Within the intimate confines of the home, the past and present converge, where the material and the immaterial intertwine, and where the essence of our lived experiences is distilled and preserved.

In her artistic practice, Rachel Whiteread employs methods and materials to encapsulate evidence of our temporal existence, particularly focusing on trapping traces of time and memory within unique spaces. Her signature process involves what she calls "lost form casting." Crafted from materials like wax or plaster, the mold acts as an intermediary stage between the original object and its cast, symbolizing a fleeting connection between the two. Notably, the resulting cast is not just a replication but also an impression, rendered in reverse to life, which adds to its uncanny quality. Substituting the phenomenology of absence for that of presence, Whiteread's resonant voids activate not just the (minimalist) space of object-relations but also that of memory.¹²

Whiteread's practice transcends mere object-making, delving into the rich terrain of memory and imagination, often infused with personal memories, offering viewers an opportunity to contemplate the interplay between absence and presence within the spatial confines of her works.

¹² Sara-Jayne Parsons, "193 Grove Road—The Site of Memory: Space, Memory and Identity in the Work of Rachel Whiteread," Eastern Illinois University, n.d., <https://castle.eiu.edu/~modernity/parsons.html>



THE NECESSITY OF ARCHIVAL EXCAVATION

Delving Beyond the Surface

Excavating and searching through family photo archives offered me a gateway that transcends mere recollection and enters the immersive world of remembrance. While looking into these archives, I have striven to recollect not just visual images but also the emotions and sensations tied to a range of memories—some cherished and others forgotten or buried.

As a family, we lived in an apartment in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the U.A.E. However, every weekend, we would drive down to Dubai. My dad was focused on building our home in Dubai, so as a family, we were very excited to visit the construction site of our new home.

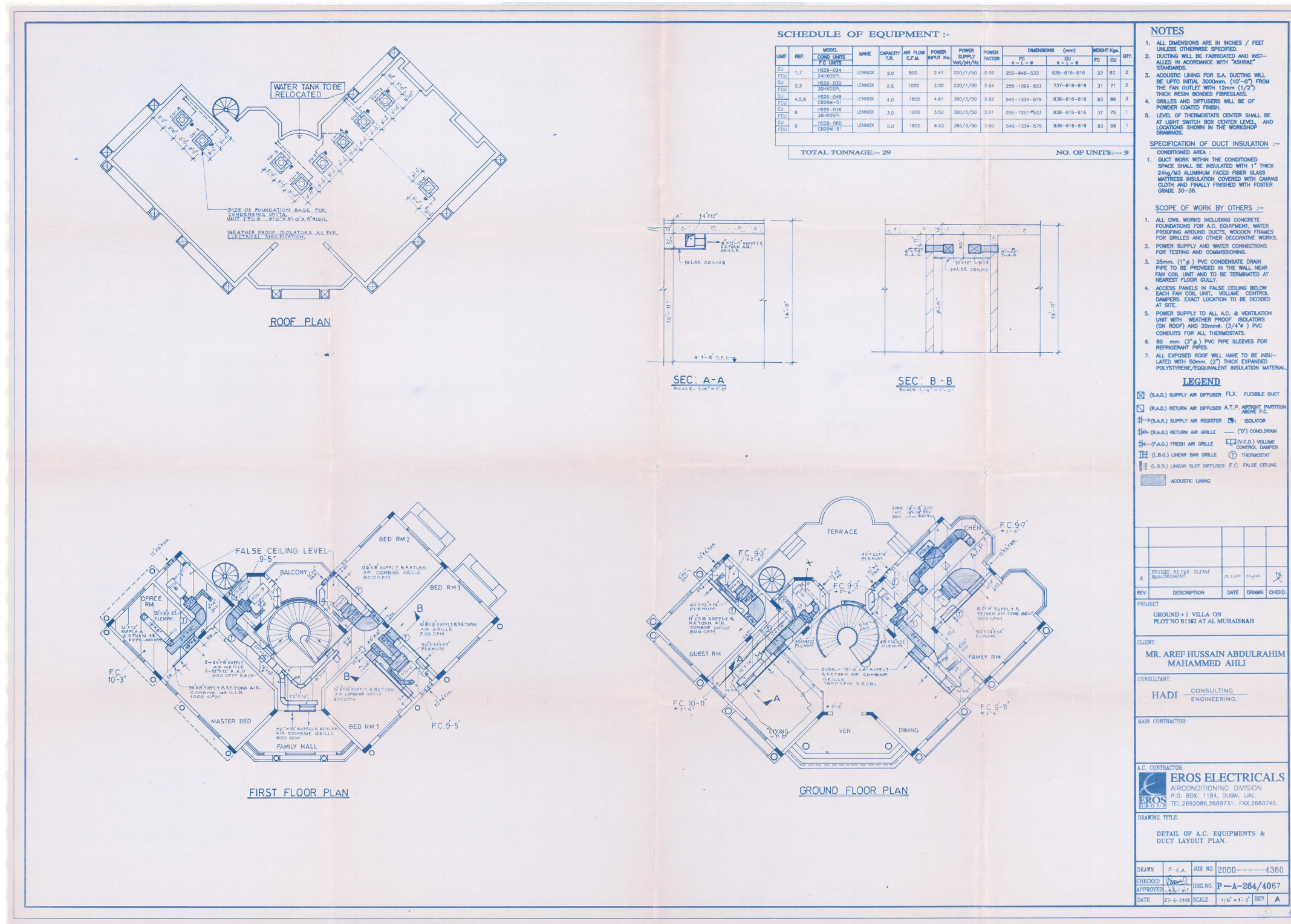
I vividly recall the excitement of exploring each room, still in the process of being constructed, with its gray, dusty interiors. Sand and debris filled the construction site of our home. Despite its unfinished state, the prospect of moving into our new home filled me with contentment, promising a permanent space of belonging and existence.



Fig. 30. Archival photo of living room under construction, 2001

Spaces are not just physical containers but are imbued with meaning, memory, and imagination, influencing our thoughts,

construction, and the interplay between what is remembered, imagined, or forgotten.



ries, dreams, and experiences, particularly during childhood. Navigating between the past and present, questioning its reality

feelings, and perceptions. Home is more than just a physical shelter; it's a vessel for memo

Fig. 31. Blueprints for Aref Hussain Ahli Home, 2000



THE LOST HOUSE

A Longing to Belong

I contemplate Bachelard's poignant concept of the "lost house"—those cherished spaces of our past that exist now only in memory. As I reflect, I am struck by how indelibly we etch the intimate details of lived spaces into our psyches through the experiences that unfold within these spaces.

What profound meaning, then, lies in reenacting, refabricating, and physically reconstructing these lost spaces? Is it to make permanent the impermanent, to hold onto something with the fear of it being forgotten? Is our sense of belonging and selfhood truly intertwined with the physical homes and environments we have inhabited? Do we seek to recapture a lost home, mourning its absence despite the inescapable displacement and change that life propels upon us?

And yet, perhaps therein lies the paradoxical beauty. In my work, I strive to recreate fragile, unfinished domestic artifacts, aiming to transform the seeming finality of loss and absence. In recreating these fragile domestic mementos, I aim to transform the seeming finality of loss. The feeling of displacement no longer burdens me with the melancholic weight of the life experiences I have left behind. Instead, I curate my memories into tangible form, making them portals through which I can return, if only fleetingly, to those comforting spaces that shaped me.

Fig.32 - 33. Studio work in progress of constructing *The Lost House*, Fletcher Studio, 2024

The lost house is a house of dreams and memories from our past.

The lost house is an idealized, intimate space living in our imagination and recollections.

The lost house is a symbolic repository for our memories, dreams, and the sense of security and comfort associated with our childhood homes and past dwelling places.

The lost house shapes our perceptions and experiences in the present.

The lost house represents a longing for the past and a desire to reconnect with a sense of home and belonging that may have been disrupted or displaced over time.



Fig.33.



Fig. 34. Print study from archival family photographs

In this act of artistic resurrection, *Figure 31* the lost house is found anew, and the longing for a place to call home is, at last, quelled by the power of our own hands to rebuild it, infinite in its impermanent and temporal existence. We become dwellers not of displacement, but of rediscovered belonging.

“[. . .] If we have retained an element of dream in our memories, if we have gone beyond merely assembling exact recollections, bit by bit the house that was lost in the mists of time will appear from out of the shadows.”¹³ Echoing Gaston Bachelard’s insights, the “lost house” concept becomes a poignant metaphor for my transient childhood marked by a sequence of households.

¹³ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. M. Jolas (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), 77–78.

The “lost house” refers to a psychological and metaphorical space rather than a physical structure. It also refers to the idea that we all have a “house of dream-memory” lost in the shadows of our past. The lost house represents a place of memory and imagination that exists in the realm of the mind, often associated with childhood memories or past experiences. It is a symbolic space that can evoke feelings of nostalgia, longing, melancholy, and a sense of disconnection from the present. Bachelard suggests that the lost house is a powerful motif in literature and poetry, serving as a metaphor for the human psyche and the passage of time.

In essence, Bachelard’s “lost house” concept emphasizes the profound psychological and emotional significance of our past dwelling places, which continue to resonate within us even after they have physically disappeared from our lives.

In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, author Rebecca Solnit reflects on her childhood home in a chapter titled “The One-Story House,” as a vessel for revisiting the past. She writes, “In dreams, nothing is lost. Childhood homes, the dead, lost toys all appear with a vividness your waking mind could not achieve. Nothing is lost but you yourself, wanderer in a terrain where even the most familiar places aren’t quiet themselves and open onto the impossible.”¹⁴

Solnit declares that the one thing truly lost is our sense of self, our identity as the “wanderer” navigating the ever-shifting terrains of the lived experience. If we accept this premise, then the “lost house” emerges as a powerful metaphor for our displaced and fragmented identities scattered across the landscapes of memory and imagination. In exploring this connection further, we can view the “lost house” concept as a reflection of our inner selves and identities.

¹⁴ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2006), 182.



Curtains of Comfort
Print on vellum
32 x 32 in
2024

The “lost house” becomes a repository for our past selves - the echoes of who we once were reverberating through its hallways. Its rooms harbor remnants of our former identities, evolving and transforming with time. The “lost house” is a mirror reflecting our own transient, mutable nature as human beings. Confronting it is to confront the specter of our unfound selves. It is to acknowledge the parts of our identity that have faded or been forgotten and obscured. The “lost house” represents a longing to recover and reconnect with those fragmented pieces of ourselves scattered like leaves on the winds of memory.

To embrace the “lost house” is to embrace the perpetual redefinition of our identities. It honors the fluidity and complexity of the self, which is ever-evolving and shaped by the ceaseless interplay of one’s past, present, and future selves. In this search for both the house and elusive sense of self in it, we become nomads—not of place, but of identity itself. We wander through the labyrinth of memory and imagination, piecing together fragments of who we are, who we were, and who we have yet to become. The “lost house,” an echo of the strayed self, reminds us that to be human is to be in constant flux—forever being remade, lost, and found anew.

In his novel *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Rainer Maria Rilke poignantly captures the fragmented nature of memory and its profound impact on identity when the narrator reflects,

Thus, seeing it now, in a version of my childhood memories, it’s not a building, rather it’s all split up: a room here, a room there, and here a section of passageway that doesn’t link these two rooms but has simply been preserved, a fragment.—all that is still within me and will never cease being within me. It’s as if the image of this house had plunged into me from an infinite height and smashed to pieces on the foundation of my being.¹⁵

¹⁵ Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1985), 17–18.

This splintered perception of a once-unified place underscores the way in which memories become preserved as disjointed fragments, plunging into the very basis of our being.

Just as Rilke’s narrator grapples with the shattered image of a childhood home, piecing together these memory fragments becomes a means of excavating the lasting emotional imprint of the past. The metaphor of a shattered house poetically illustrates the profound and enduring emotional imprint that is forever integrated into the core of one’s being.

The notions of the “Shattered House” and the “Lost House” address the interplay between memory, identity, and space. Both serve as metaphors for the human psyche and the passage of time, highlighting the fragmented nature of memory and its impact on one’s sense of self. While the “Lost House” represents a longing to recover and reconnect with past selves scattered in memory, the “Shattered House” symbolizes the enduring emotional imprint of the past, forever integrated into one’s being.

Reflecting on my childhood memories mirrors a fragmented perception yet to be complete. Looping together these memory fragments and excavating the relics of my past becomes my process of [Unfurling Blue-Carpet Memories](#)—a meticulous journey of conserving and reconnecting with the remnants that mold the essence of my identity.

Louise Bourgeois once reflected,

It is the color blue—that is my color—and the color blue means you have left the drabness of day-to-day reality to be transported into—not a world of fantasy, it's not a world of fantasy—but a world of freedom where you can say what you like and what you don't like. I would say this is almost a definition of freedom. The freedom to be yourself, that is, the freedom not to be afraid of what people are going to think about you or do to you. This has been expressed forever by the color blue.¹⁶

THE COLOR BLUE

A Memory Catalyst

The exploration of the color blue takes place at the intersection of language, culture, and perception. As a hue that defied immediate linguistic expression in various cultures, blue emerged as a latecomer to the palette of human expression. Notably, ancient Egyptians stand as its trailblazers, possessing a word for blue and the ability to produce a distinctive blue dye. This phenomenon prompts a profound consideration: does the absence of a linguistic label for something impede our understanding of it? It seems that the presence or absence of a linguistic framework can significantly influence our perception and understanding of phenomena, underscoring the intricate relationship between language and cognition.

In a literary context, in Proust's work, the color blue is connected to the symbolism of memory and longing, particularly evident in the famous madeleine scene in *Swann's Way*. This scene involves the narrator's memories being triggered by the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea, which transports him back to his childhood. Blue may be subtly woven into descriptions of the sky, sea, or other elements to evoke a sense of nostalgia and longing for the past.

Rebecca Solnit explores its significance in *A Field Guide for Getting Lost*, the color is portrayed as a representation of longing, desire, and distance. She depicts blue not merely as a visual element but as a

¹⁶ Louise Bourgeois, *Louise Bourgeois: Drawings and Observations*, trans. Lawrence Rinder (Boston, MA: Bulfinch, 1999), 48.

UNFURLING BLUE CARPET MEMORIES

metaphor for unmet longing and the beauty found in distances that can never be reached. Through her poetic prose, Solnit captures the essence of longing and desire associated with blue, emphasizing its evocation of melancholy, dreaminess, and emotional depth, thus highlighting the symbolic significance of this evocative hue.

In art, the significance of blue extends beyond cultural contexts and linguistic nuances. Renowned artist Yves Klein is a pioneer in the use of monochromatic blue in his iconic artworks. For Klein, blue transcends its visual presence, symbolizing the infinite and the boundless. His patented ultramarine pigment, International Klein Blue (IKB), has become a vessel for capturing the ineffable and sublime. Mark Rothko, a prominent figure in Abstract Expressionism, created large-scale paintings characterized by stacked blocks of color. Blue is a recurring element also in his work, symbolizing introspection, spirituality, and transcendence. Wassily Kandinsky believed that blue was the most transcendent color as it represented infinity and spirituality.

In contemplating the significance of blue, artist Louise Bourgeois, echoing Yves Klein's sentiment, eloquently unveils its profound essence as more than a mere pigment. For Bourgeois, blue becomes a symbolic portal, transcending the mundane confines of everyday reality. It embodies a departure into a realm not of fantasy but of unbridled freedom—a space where authenticity reigns supreme. In her words, blue becomes synonymous with the liberation to articulate personal preferences and opinions without fear of judgment or constraint. Blue becomes an eternal expression of freedom, a visual anthem resonating through the ages.



Fig. 35. A Portrait of Frida Kahlo in the courtyard of La Casa Azul by Florence Arquin. From Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art, Florence Arquin Papers, 1923 – 1985. Courtesy of Taschen

During a visit to Mexico City, I had the opportunity to explore the Frida Kahlo Museum, where I gained a profound understanding of the significance of Casa Azul. For Kahlo, the renowned Mexican painter, Casa Azul transcended the physical confines of a mere dwelling; it was more than a home and physical space. It served as a sanctuary where Kahlo's mind roamed freely, allowing for reflection and imagination, and where she expressed herself fully. This iconic blue house was a sacred haven where Kahlo nurtured her creativity, and she found the strength to embrace everything the world had to offer, inspiring generations with her boldness, resilience, and unapologetic authenticity.

Artists worldwide have long held a profound affinity for the color blue, often associating it with notions of the infinite, boldness, dream states, and freedom. My appreciation for this vivid hue stems from childhood memories, particularly those tied to a blue carpet that remains etched in my mind's eye. This carpet serves as a tangible repository for these memories, its blue hue a visual embodiment of moments past.

*There is something mystical
about the color blue.*

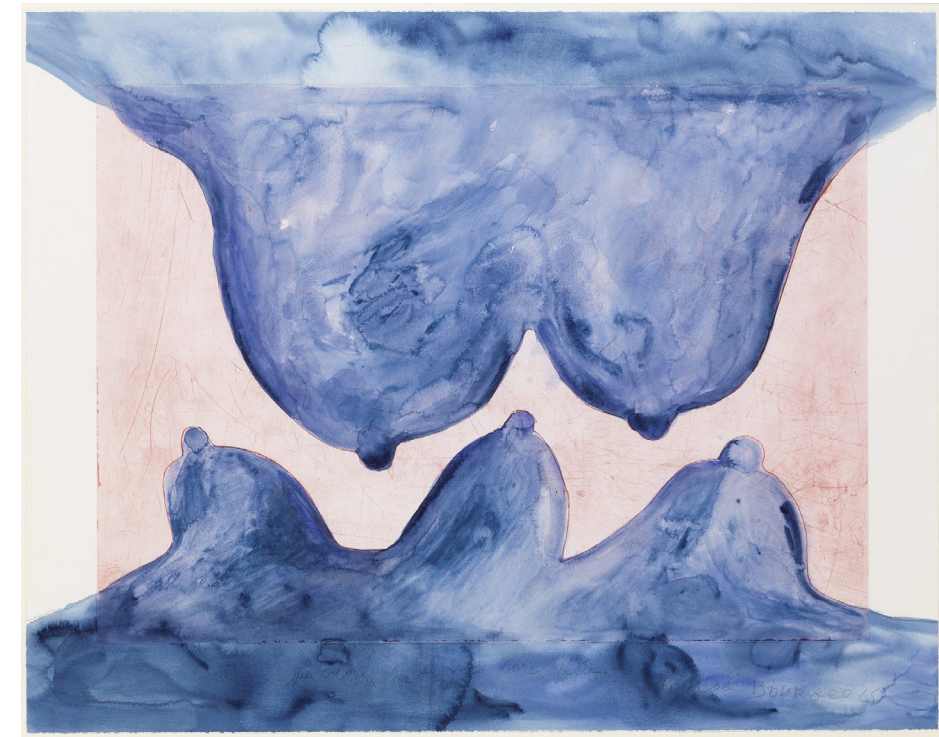


Fig. 36. Louise Bourgeois, *Blue Is the Color of Your Eyes*, 2008,
© The Easton Foundation/VAGA at ARS, NY

RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

Unveiling the Unconscious Mind

Unfurling Blue Carpet Memories is a conceptual activation of repressed memories from childhood that start out as fragments of a story: with glimpses of floral patterned upholstery, painted wood panel, and the blue carpet, I navigate between a past situated elsewhere, imbued with a sense of fiction, prompting critical questions about its authenticity and existence. By linking the past to the present moment, *Unfurling Blue Carpet Memories* opens a space for inquiry into the nature of these memories—what constitutes facts and blueprints, and how the boundaries blur between the real, unreal, constructed, fabricated, deconstructed, and forgotten.

In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud introduces the theory of the “return of the repressed,” which elucidates the phenomenon whereby repressed elements, lingering in the unconscious, resurface in consciousness or behavior as secondary, often unrecognizable derivatives. Examples of such derivatives include parapraxes and symptomatic actions. Freud explores how minor errors and slips in everyday life, like forgetting names or Freudian slips, are not random but meaningful manifestations of unconscious thoughts and desires attempting to surface into conscious awareness. These occurrences provide insights into hidden psychological dynamics, revealing the influence of the unconscious mind on daily behavior. These involuntary memories, which I call my *Blue Carpet Memories*, began unraveling, unveiling themselves to me unexpectedly.

“One of the sources from which dreams draw material for reproduction—material of which some part is not recalled or utilized in our waking thoughts—is to be found in childhood.”¹⁷

Unfurling Blue Carpet Memories rejects the idea that imagination is synonymous with memory, emphasizing that to imagine is not to remember, and to recall is not to refabricate. The concept encapsulates the artist’s journey of self-discovery and identity formation, symbolized by unfurling an inner cosmology of sensations. The color blue, resonating with notions of freedom and unrestrained expression, becomes a symbolic thread connecting disparate elements. Collecting these fragments is not just a personal endeavor but an artistic one, culminating in the act of piecing together the self through myriad pieces—each representing a distinct facet of my lived experiences.

Why did the memory of a blue carpet resurface?

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) (London: Hogarth Press, 1995), 13. Rinder (Boston, MA: Bulfinch, 1999), 48.

MEMORY LOOPS

Constructing & Deconstructing Spaces

My thesis installation explores the recurrence of memories, emphasizing the importance of informational layering and visual repetition. Viewers navigate through a splintered space, searching for stability amid the disarray. The blue stained glass embedded in the wall is a focal point, inviting contemplation and introspection.

By incorporating architectural blueprints and the tangible efforts of construction, the installation establishes a liminal realm where boundaries between building and dismantling blur, evoking a sense of transient flux.

Drawing inspiration from the architectural blueprints of childhood homes that shaped my lived experience, the installation is divided into three distinct sections. Each section references different floor plans, evoking a sense of nostalgia and longing for spaces once inhabited. To create structural complexity, I employ burned and shaped paper remnants from the glassblowing process, blurring the boundaries between finished and unfinished elements. Cinder blocks pay homage to the construction methods prevalent in Dubai, while blue swatches symbolize spaces in transition, inviting viewers to share in collective memories.

UNFURLING BLUE CARPET MEMORIES



Unfurling Spaces: Memories Unveiled
 1x 3in pine furring strip boards, luan, printed film paper, printed matte paper, blown glass, stained sheet glass, plaster, tufted carpet, UV-printed glass, galvanized steel cable wire and harness.
 150 x 350 in
 2023

UNFURLING BLUE CARPET MEMORIES

Challenging my comfort zone, the installation emphasizes hand-built elements and the transformative power of unconventional materials. The tufted carpet embodies organic forms and looping lyricism. Each component, scattered yet deliberately placed, serves as a tangible anchor for personal experiences, from moments of joy to instances of trauma.

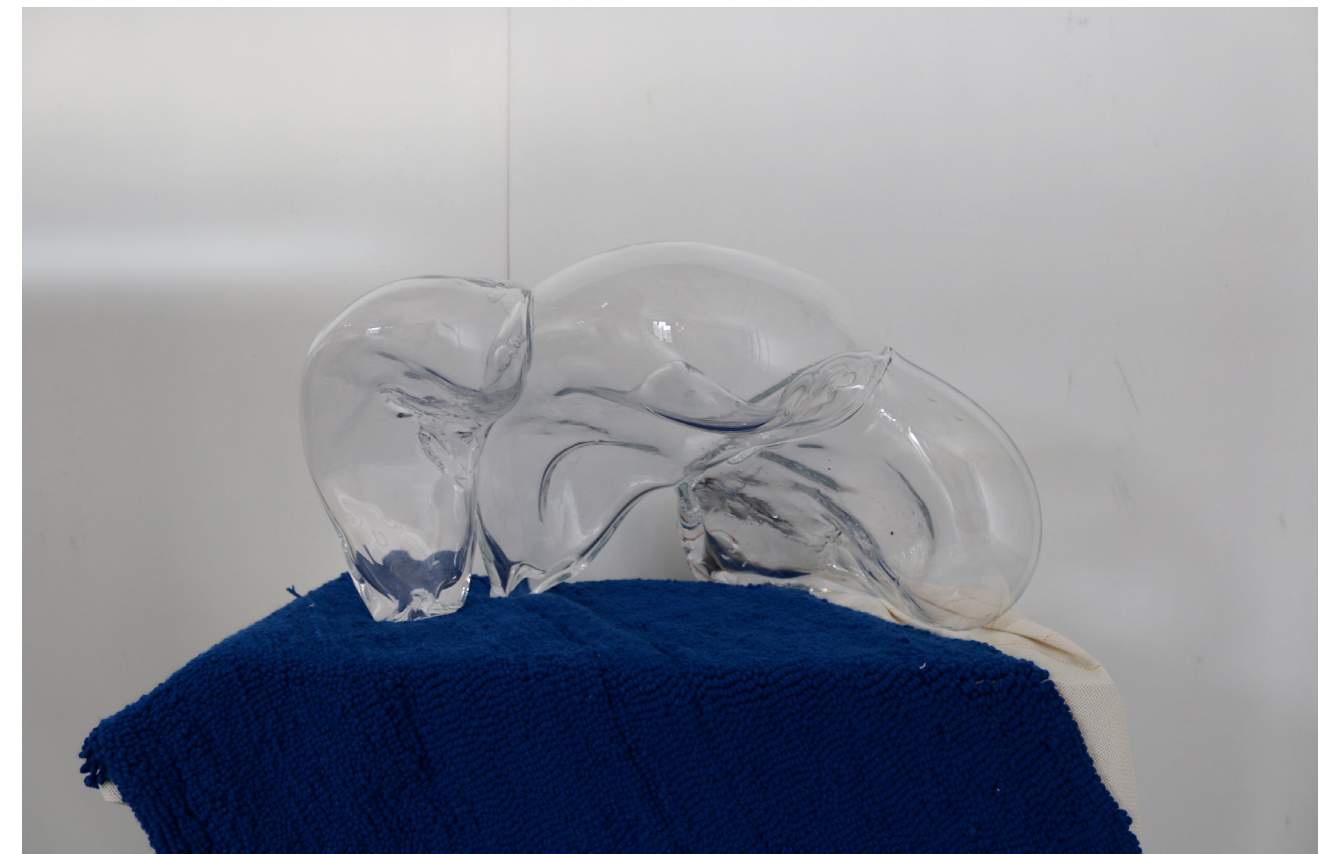
As I construct this work, I engage with it physically and emotionally, shaping a dynamic exchange between my body and the materials. This process allows specific narratives to emerge, each imbued with a blend of memories that leave a lasting impression. Like a photograph, these vivid recollections construct a rich visual landscape, inviting viewers to explore the interrelations of memory, space, and personal identity within the confines of the installation. Through multiple iterations, I aim to deeply intertwine the manifested space with my body, offering new perspectives and revelations with each reinstallation.



Embracing the Amorphous Solid
Blown glass
15 in x 22 in x 5 in
2023



Fig. 37. Back-stage of Unfurling Spaces: Memories Unveiled installation, Critique room 203 -Fletcher, 2023



Contours of a Transparent Body
Blown glass and tufted rug
36 x 25 in
2023



Fig. 38. Printed paper on pine wood and UV printed sheet glass
Fletcher studio, 2023

with each piece as a unique anchor for my personal experiences, including moments of déjà-vu.

CONCLUSION

This thesis invokes memory, perception, and the construction of selfhood through the home. It is grounded in the ethos of an embodied process and performative practice. Through the medium of glass, the exploration of memory becomes visceral and tangible. A continuous negotiation between form and fluidity, solidity and transformation, this amorphous solid becomes a metaphorical lens through which the dynamic complexities of memory are revealed.

Created over a period of two years through archival excavation of the past and a performative encounter with glass as its catalyst, this work revisits and reconstructs memories. It was a vulnerable undertaking. I now find myself entangled in even more questions and surrounded by a plethora of uncertainties, each one a thread waiting to be unraveled. Through the act of writing this thesis and creating this work, I am beginning to understand the depth of these inquiries. Yet, with each new layer of questions, I expose another vulnerability, probing not just the words I write or the materials I use, but the essence of the questions themselves.

What are these questions? And what are the answers?

I'm actually not sure, and I may never be. However, in leaning into my uncertainty, in embracing the unknown, I find clarity in the process of creation.

CONCLUSION

As I finish one chapter, as I create a new work of art, I find myself following the path into another, drawn ever onward by the allure of wonder. Along the borders where knowing and not knowing meet, I find myself a wanderer in the constructed blueprints of inquiry. In this space of uncertainty, the true essence of my creativity thrives, beckoning me to explore, question, and wonder. These words now also become the material through which I shape and reshape the narrative of my work.

As I journey forward, I aspire to continue to unravel the loops of my [Blue Carpet Memories](#). I invite others to partake in this deeply personal and collective endeavor of recollection. I invite viewers to experience the depths of their personal recollections and to share this vulnerable space beside, with, through, and alongside me and my work.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أنا شاكره الله عز وجل لهدايته وتوفيقه طوال رحلتي في السعي نحو التفوق والتطور الأكاديمي، فلولا له لم أكن لأتمكن من تحقيق كل ما صبت إليه. حكمته وتوفيقه عز وجل منحني القوة والثبات في ما سعيت إليه. أنا ممتنة لكل نعمه علي، المرئي منها وغير المرئي، والتي جعلتني أف أف أمامكم اليوم بكل نجاحاتي وإنجازاتي في هذا البحث

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بابا، شكراً على ثققتك بي والسماح لي باتباع طريقي الخاص، حتى وإن عني ذلك
مغادرتي لمنزلي والابتعاد عنك

Maria, you inspire me to be a better artist, just as I hope to encourage you to follow your passions. I can't wait to see you develop into your own woman who also stays true to herself always.

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