



Unruly and Unresolved  
*a shared, precarious survival*

by Sara Inácio

I'm just a little rat trying to survive,  
To exist and not be perceived.

Building a home,  
In a place unnatural to me.

Destroyed and rebuilt again,

I've learned to live in the toxic world you've created.

**Abstract:**

In a world that is not made for my belonging, I've had to find my way, to exist and build with what's within reach. Such a constant state of construction feels oddly familiar and comfortable to me, home is always in the process of becoming. As I build, I think about how the home building process always takes up the space of others, it involves a disruption of an ecosystem, and the habitats of other beings. Taking only what goes unnoticed, I look out cautiously to make sure no one catches me in the act. I scurry away in the dark; the feeling of being and not quite belonging, but continue to silently take up space. My home is an ever-evolving concept and physical space. As it grows and expands, it falls apart and disintegrates, then grows again.

Sometimes I'm flat on the road. I am without definition, constantly changing, and unrecognizable. You might pass by and not see me, at least not fully, it's too much to take in. It is jarring to face something that still has its body, especially in an unexpected encounter. Realizing what they are looking at, this ambiguity sometimes gives people the "ick."



Image 1: *Unruly and Unresolved* installation view. (Photo by Sara Meftah)

## Introduction

Having a dog in the city means going out on multiple walks a day. Having one in a neighborhood that is not well maintained by the city means constant attention on the ground to keep them from eating chicken bones or other discards along the way. This was what first led me to notice the amount of roadkill that exists in the few blocks that make up Federal Hill in Providence, Rhode Island. It was not the obvious roadkill with guts spilling out that drew my attention, but the subtle ones that often go unnoticed or ignored. Between the harsh weather and being flattened by cars, most of them eventually fade into the asphalt, ultimately becoming part of the road.

My current body of work, *Unruly and Unresolved*, is about growth and persistence through time and a space not made for one's survival. As a non-binary person whose

existence is often at odds with the world around me, I relate to the rats in my neighborhood as they scurry away in the dark, the feeling of being but not quite belonging. Using various forms of printmaking, from mezzotints of a local rat's everyday life to prints made directly from roadkill remains, as well as video recording and immersive installations, I explore relationships between the human and non-human, their conflicting survival and placemaking. Relying on multi-species investigations of urban wildlife and small glimpses into their lives and deaths in my current neighborhood, this work draws connections between our complex coexistence and the ever-changing experience of queerness. It highlights our parallel resilience and precarious survival.

As an installation, *Unruly and Unresolved* is continuously under construction. It is a temporary structure that forms a room or a house in its becoming, with wood framing and print-lined walls that evoke a sense of both a potential home-space and incompleteness. In *Cruising Utopias*, Jose Esteban Muñoz describes Queerness as “not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. It is a rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.” (Muñoz, 1). This is a constant state of being for queer people and rats alike. According to Muñoz, queerness's time is a stepping out of the linearity of straight time. Its “ecstatic and horizontal temporality is a path and a movement to a greater openness to the world” (Muñoz, 25). Through this installation, I aim to create a material experience of queer time and a space for imagining complex multispecies coexistence. Donna Haraway describes this existence as “staying with the trouble”, as “multispecies players who are enmeshed in partial and flawed translations across difference, redo ways of living and dying attuned to still possible finite flourishing, still possible recuperation.” (Haraway, 10) The room is a cumulation of human-built space as well as the life and death of urban animals, translated through its construction, imagery, and video recordings. It is meant to be beautiful and unsettling as it holds many complexities of what it means to exist and imagine alongside the non-human.



Image 2: *Rat Remains: Federal Hill, Providence, RI* process image, collagraph print of rat carcass, 2020

## Trying to Survive

The printed work in *Unruly and Unresolved* are primarily made of collagraph prints, including the impressions of various roadkill remains found in my neighborhood, from little rat and squirrel pups to full-grown parents. Alongside the animals, there are pieces which add texture and form such as printed from tree bark, layers of plywood, as well as plants collected from the area. The first rat I collected and made prints from was one that I had walked by for weeks before noticing. I took the flat carcass home for printing. To make prints out of roadkill, I only collect those that are already flat and dry. I put them in the freezer to kill off any harmful bacteria, then store them in a container submerged in salt to further dehydrate it, a process I came to through trial and error, as well as advice from a taxidermist I contacted online. The specimens are left in the salt for about two months before they are safe to handle and be varnished for printing. Though the process is very unconventional, the printed results are beautiful and inspiring. They are rich in form and texture, looking much like a landscape or a

topographic map, bringing a new life and appreciation to an animal that had been disintegrating and untouchable (Image 2).

As a contemporary printmaker, I am interested in pushing the boundaries of the medium through developing an eye for what is printable, not only in a traditional sense, but also through matrices that can be found in everyday life and our surroundings. Printmaking as a form of reproduction creates a record of a moment which can be shared and multiplied. By printing what is found, discarded, overlooked, or decaying, I am able to extend their existence and invite many others to look and interact with them. This kind of encounter has continued to shape my current practice, as well as my relationship with my surroundings and the organisms cohabitating them.

Roadkill, especially those found in city streets, can say a lot about an ecosystem, its habitants, community, and infrastructure. It shows the ways that neighborhoods are split, which spaces receive the most care and attention, and the areas that become neglected or overlooked by the city and sanitation department. In his book *Crossings*, Ben Goldfarb explores the many forms of ecosystems that roads create, their negative effects, as well as new habitats that emerge from them. Goldfarb describes humans as occupying every trophic level<sup>1</sup> of road ecosystems, from top predator, to scavenger and prey. In the necrobiome that is formed in the road, the car is a keystone species, causing unnatural death and initiating the natural decomposition process.<sup>2</sup> When humans clean the roads, they also take away food from scavengers and the many living organisms that live off of the kill, intervening in the functions of the ecosystem yet again. (Goldfarb 181)

Roadkill is a link in the modern ecosystem, a consequence of human domination. Even from a moving vehicle, coming across roadkill is unsightly and uncomfortable. It is not only evidence that death is all around us, but also that much of it is human-inflicted. It is deemed disgusting to handle something dead on the road. In

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<sup>1</sup> trophic level - the position which an organism occupies in a food web

<sup>2</sup> necrobiome - the community of species associated with decaying remains, such as microbes, fungi, nematodes, insects, and larger scavengers

contrast, many of the dead creatures that humans in the West do handle come in the form of food that is already chopped, skinned and wrapped in plastic, an interaction that is distant and stripped of any connection to the animals themselves. It is jarring to face something that still has its body, especially in an unexpected encounter. I think about this relationship to living things and wonder who gets to decide which bodies are disgusting, which are fit for consumption, and which are worthy of respect. This applies to both the dead and the living. Making prints out of roadkill is inherently a queer act. It is a form of resistance; pushing against cultural norms and ideas of what is beautiful and worthy of memorializing. Much of the roadkill I print is formless and unrecognizable. It takes time for the viewer to explore and understand what they are looking at. At first glance, many may find the prints beautiful, however, the realization of what they are looking at gives many people “the ick.” I often see myself as the rat in my neighborhood both in the way that they hide and their unrecognizable, disintegrating form. The “ick” of seeing a live rat or roadkill is reminiscent of my parents’ reaction when I came out to them, the moment when they could no longer recognize me. Their revulsion and deeply fundamentalist beliefs kept them from seeing. Turned away, they couldn’t even try to understand. The ways which we pass by and try not to look at the kill feels much like their ignorance of my queerness and their attempt to stifle and ignore every aspect of it. The ambiguity and uncertainty of the animals’ shapeless bodies resembles my own relationship to gender and the body: something that is without definition, constantly changing, and unrecognizable.

As an interdisciplinary printmaker, I draw inspiration from various sources and artists working both within and outside of the field of printmaking. Though very different in form and medium, I find my work aligning with Mother Pigeon (Tina Piña), the high priestess of the pigeon religion. Her love for pigeons and urban wildlife has shaped her practice and lifestyle. With her main goal being to build appreciation for the misunderstood birds in the streets of New York, she dresses like a pigeon, feeds them, and talks to people about them. Mother Pigeon spends time outside and invites others

into her religion, which simply calls them to admire pigeons for the beautiful birds that they are. Followers can also adopt their own fabric pigeons and rats from her, as a memento and a reminder to appreciate the wildlife they encounter each day in the city. Tina Piña's life revolves around her connection with the birds. Her work as an artist is usually categorized as performance, however she calls it a lifestyle. I am inspired by Piña's work because she not only brings forward the animals that are overlooked and disdained, but she invites others to truly see them and find their own connection to nature in the big, concrete-filled city of New York. My own practice invites people to pay attention to the wildlife that is overlooked in the human-made space, calling into question the complexity of their own relationship to it.

Though I empathize with the rats' lived experience and admire their resilience, my work is about what they reveal about the human tendency to intervene, change, and attempt to control ecosystems and communities and how this is reflected in moments of difference within our own species. Unlike Piña, I am not campaigning for these creatures' survival, as they already thrive at survival. Instead, I hope that people are able to acknowledge and find appreciation of their incredible ability to adapt, as well as the nuances of their existence in the human-dominated space. In *How Far the Light Reaches*, Sabrina Imbler describes their love for feral goldfish<sup>3</sup> not as someone interested in the supremacy of goldfish, but in the sense of triumph from a creature that was not expected to survive and yet is flourishing. (Imbler 20) I feel a similar love and kinship with the rat, as a being that thrives and adapts because and in spite of human intervention. I recognize that they are destructive, and though a rat-filled world would pose a lot of problems, rats will likely outlive humans as well as many other species.

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<sup>3</sup> Feral goldfish - goldfish that has been disposed of, or flushed, and managed to survive and thrive in the wild, becoming invasive.





Image 3: *Unruly and Unresolved* installation view. (Photo by Sara Meftah)

## Exist and not be Perceived

My fascination with these little rodents comes from their ability to resist, thrive and silently yet effectively take up space. Rats live and move through places such as sewers, drains, railway lines and tunnels, where humans are less likely to be present. Being nocturnal allows them to be most active and go about their regular activities at night when they can move about freely without worry. In *Unruly and Unresolved*, the video projection that plays over the printed work comes from a trail cam that was set in the community garden at various times. In the recording, the viewer gets to experience and witness larger-than-life moments in the lives of the wildlife that frequent the garden. Using a trail cam allowed for recording of the animals' day-to-day lives without human interruption, we get the unique opportunity to slow down and see what the rat is like

when it is not running in fear. The footage is occasionally interrupted by the disruption of a house that was being demolished in my neighborhood last year. The heavy machinery that claws at the house, taking it down piece by piece, resembles the destruction of digging up burrows in the garden: the destruction of a home. In contrast with the calmness of the rat and slow movement of other urban animals, I hope to bring forward the ways in which humans create bigger and louder destruction in their ecosystems, an action that is often masked through ideas of progress and renovation.

The act of collecting footage of wildlife using a trail cam has been used by other contemporary artists who are interested in multispecies relationships. In Dana Sherwood's work, she uses video, painting and sculpture to explore and understand human relationships to the natural world. In her piece, *Feral Cakes*, Sherwood engages directly with the non-human using carefully curated feasts and alluring scenes. Much like a collaborative performance, Sherwood invites her local animal neighbors to participate in her work. Setting a table with elaborate meals outside, she uses a trail cam to capture the wildlife that show up to enjoy it. From careful foxes and possums to clumsy racoons and skittish cats, she forms a multispecies space around the table. The meals are elaborate and beautiful as still lives themselves, which shift and change over time as she discovers her guests' interest. In Dana Sherwood's work, she also explores the control of nature by humankind, the desire to tame for self-centered purposes, and the unpredictability in nature's response. Much like Sherwood, I see the animals in my work as collaborators. However, instead of inviting them, I meet them in the spaces they already congregate in. Sherwood's work takes place in a less urban setting, where animals may come through if there is food available, while in the urban space in which I work, they are naturally presented with nightly feasts by simply existing in close proximity to a high population of humans.

Facing the video projection from the opposing wall, there are three small and intimate mezzotints made in reference to the nighttime video footage of the rats going about their evenings. The images are each from a different part of the garden and are

titled after the exact date and time of their capture. The first piece in the series, *November 26, 2022, 5:34am*, is the most zoomed out of the three images. With leaves on the ground, and a pile of pallets behind her, a mama rat stands alert, with bright eyes and ears perked up. She was busy preparing for the cold winter to come, building a nest between the wooden pallets. Moving back and forth, she carefully examined the leaves, choosing just the right materials and taking an occasional pause to watch her surroundings. The second print, *November 27, 2022, 1:05am*, takes place on a path well traveled by both rats and mice. Between the fence and the asparagus plants, it leads from the shed to the street. In this piece, there is a close view of the rat as she passes through the narrow path that is lined with weeds. Walking through after a little mouse that runs back and forth through the path, this rat looks especially large and slow-moving. *May 8th, 2023, 11:07pm*, shows mama rat foraging just outside of her home. The wooden pallets where she nests sit right by a compost pile where she is able to find food and other discards to take back. She nears the center of the composition, with flowering plants carefully mirroring the arch of her back. The three pieces are framed with a backlight, making the highlights of the prints glow in contrast to the velvety darks of the mezzotint. Unlike the video and the chaos of the nest and installation, these still images call for slowing down and examining each of the moments carefully and intentionally. Using the slow and intricate process of mezzotint was my own way of getting to know each of the rats in their life in the garden, taking the time to render and capture their essence. I chose each of these moments as they were some of the times where I could see the rat most clearly.

Mezzotints have become uncommon within the printmaking field. It is a labor-intensive process, and its results are ephemeral. Mezzotint is an engraving process that requires a curved blade to be rocked back and forth throughout the entire copper plate from many directions. This eventually forms a texture that holds ink and creates rich and velvety black ground. Rather than starting with a white ground to create the image, mezzotints start with a dark ground, and the image is revealed

through burnishing the lighter areas. Because the texture on the plate is created by hand, it is fragile and unstable. The initial prints will be the most rich and dark, but as it is printed more, the texture is slowly flattened and the image becomes lighter and lighter. I chose to use this medium because the softness and stark contrast of the prints felt the truest to the glow of the night video footage. The care that went into each plate, while also knowing the results to be temporary, acts in tandem with the prints of roadkill remains. It is an effort to preserve a moment in time, through a process that will eventually disintegrate.



Images 4-6:

*November 26, 2022, 5:34am*

*November 27, 2022, 1:05am*

*May 8th, 2023, 11:07pm*



Image 7: *Unruly and Unresolved* detail. (Photo by Sara Meftah)

## To Build a Home

The rat's nest in *Unruly and Unresolved* (image 2) is not a realistic depiction, but an imagined one. It is made out of found materials from the neighborhood I live in, including natural materials such as grasses and twigs, as well as trash – plastic, straws, pamphlets, food wrappers, and containers, etc. The structure is held together by paper pulp made out of food scraps and supported by old tomato trellises I once used in the garden. Though at first glance the nest looks like a pile of trash, both messy and precarious, each piece of it was intentionally chosen and carefully placed. The nest is a representation of rats' ability to find home and comfort using what is available in their immediate surroundings. According to Michael Vann, "rats make their own history, but

they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from human actions" (Vann 2003). Rats do not exist in a world that was built for them. However, they have learned to imagine and create their own worlds within human-centered space. In Eva Hayward's "Lessons from a Starfish," she describes the multi-layered trans experience, built out of necessity and survival:

"Transsexuals survive not because we become whole, but because we embody the reach and possibility of our layered experience – we have no choice. This is all to say, the transsexual body, my body, is a body created out of necessity, ingenuity and survival – to carry the heft of social identity. I, like many transsexuals, may desire some mythic wholeness, but what is truly intact for me, what I live, what I must be part of, is a body pliant to a point, flexible within limits, constrained by language, articulation, flesh, history and bone." (Hayward, 257)

While desiring and reaching towards wholeness, queerness is continuously in process. It is malleable and, though expansive, it is forced to exist within constraints. As trans and gender nonconforming people, we work with what we are given. Much like the rat, we learn to inhabit spaces that are not meant for our flourishing, bearing the weight of social identity, and making home within the body in spite of its limitations.

In preparation for the rat's nest, I walked around my neighborhood in search of good nest-making materials. Having spent a lot of time in Federal Hill, I knew exactly where to look, and which streets and pathways to wander through. Anna Tsing describes wandering as making a familiar place in the landscape. When you've visited the same area enough and "you know its seasonal flowers and its animal disturbances; Familiar places are the beginning of appreciation for multi-species interactions." As someone who has moved a lot throughout my life but has now been in this area for almost five years, this familiar sense of attention to what happens in the natural/urban spaces of my neighborhood is something I have become very attuned to. I ask myself, what would the rat choose for building a home? Thinking with the rat in this process, I am very observant of my surroundings and stop every few steps to examine bits of trash and useful materials on the sidewalk.

While building the nest I thought of the first arrival of the species in this foreign place. Rats were first brought to the U.S. by colonists through following big shipments of food, spreading and finding new habitats through the growth of cities and long-distance trade networks (Vann). Suddenly arriving oceans away from home, the rat's journey across continents was a movement towards survival, ensuring a continuous supply of food, as well as new opportunities for home-making. Moving to the U.S. with my family as a kid felt similar: willingly following my parents into the unknown, onto my first plane ride to a place that would become a completely new life and home. My family and I arrived at the apartment my dad had put together for us the month before. All of the furniture he had collected for our new home came from the curb or was hand-me-downs from friends and co-workers. Curbside finds were a big part of my new childhood in the U.S. We would go on drives, always stopping when we saw something that had potential. It was both exciting and astonishing to me how quickly white Americans would throw things away, how easily something could be deemed as useless or replaceable. As a house cleaner, my mom would sometimes come home with big trash bags of clothes or items her clients were getting rid of. We would sort through for treasures, finding the name brands we couldn't afford to buy, sometimes with tags still on. We'd keep what we needed and sometimes mailed some of it to our relatives in Brazil. Along with the free clothes and furniture, we also found joy in little unexpected treats at work. Sometimes it would be from a bowl of candy when no one was home, or the communal snacks and beverages at the offices we'd clean on some evenings. We'd take only what would go unnoticed, but knowing that these things were not left there for us, I'd always look out the window cautiously to make sure no one would suddenly arrive and catch me in the act. Seeing a rat scurry out of my neighbor's dumpster, I can imagine the thrill and astonishment when they find something useful in the trash or get treats that have been left out for them to cautiously enjoy. Making home and finding use of what has been discarded has felt natural to me for a long time. The rat's nest is

an ever-evolving concept and physical space. As it grows and expands, it falls apart and disintegrates, then grows again.



Image 8: *Unruly and Unresolved* installation view. (Photo by Sara Meftah)





Image 9: *Unruly and Unresolved* installation view. (Photo by Sara Meftah)

## A Place Unnatural to Me

The installation structure forms a space that is neither perceived as solely human, nor fully natural. It explores the complexity of multiple species that disrupt one another's sense of home as well as build out of each other's existences. When entering the work, the viewer is meant to ask questions rather than to experience an artwork that is resolved and contained. In Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson's introduction to *Queer Ecologies*, they bring up the notion of "reverse discourse," as a way of challenging the naturalness of heterosexuality. They argue that if maintaining heterosexuality requires discipline, then it must be what is constructed and inauthentic. In her essay "Animal Trans," Myra Hird draws attention to various examples of

transgender non-human organisms that are found in nature. Hird explores David Policansky's documentation of the large number of sex-changing species and their many advantages. They suggest that the question is why more species do not change sex, rather than why some species do. Queer ecological thinking pushes past the constructed norm and brings about the perspectives and questions that cisgender and heteronormative spaces refuse to acknowledge in efforts to appear in control. Queer ecology points to the rat's natural success as a species: though colonialism assumes dominion and ownership, rats are relentless at survival and will not be controlled. Dana Luciano and Mel Chen refer to this desire to persist in the face of precarity as the primary catalyst for queer thought.

As beings that are out of place, rats and many other animals considered to be pests live each day with the human effort to destroy and eradicate their species. In her book *Pests*, Bethany Brookshire points out that pests are "a problem as old as ownership," something that developed once humans decided that some things are theirs to take, keep, and protect. Brookshire comes to the conclusion that humans - especially colonizing cultures with Western ideas of dominion over the landscape - are the real pests. Gathering in cities, invading habitats, creating garbage and pollution, humans destroy full ecosystems as well as one another. She challenges us to view the idea of pests as a bigger and broader issue than that of unwanted animals disrupting our lives. She is calling attention to how pests, both as a concept and as physical manifestations, are born out of human actions and attempts to assume control. Anna Tsing describes this sense of human exceptionalism as blinding, saying that stories about human mastery from the great monotheistic religions fuels assumptions about human autonomy, directing questions to "the human control of nature, on the one hand, or human impact on nature, on the other, rather than to species interdependence." As humans attempt to assert power over other species, nature functions on its own course, simply existing and surviving while taking advantage of every change and disruption to grow and adapt.

My home in Brazil was continuously under construction, and never fully finished. My family had big plans to build out the second floor and to add bedrooms for my siblings and me. We had it prepared for building and even built a stairway that would lead to this future space. We had piles of gravel and sand in the backyard, along with bricks and bags of cement. However, we moved to the U.S. before it was ever built, leaving a stairway that was sealed and leading to nowhere. Such a constant state of construction feels oddly familiar and comfortable to me. To me, home is always in the process of becoming. Living in New England, I became fascinated by the way the houses here are constructed, and how different they look from those in Brazil. Most homes in New England are stick-built, meaning that they have a skeleton made out of wood. Watching my dad renovate our New England home, I would see walls being taken down, as well as how they were built. Their construction was fairly simple, starting with the framing made out of 2x4s, then filled with layers of insulation, covered in sheetrock panels until finally they were sealed and painted. This clear image of the process came to mind as I worked on the rat's nest. I think about how the home building process always takes up the space of others, to build a home always involves a disruption of an ecosystem, and the habitats of other beings, and at times displaces entire communities. I chose the process of stick-building for the installation piece. Though it stands tall and firm, I left some of the wood and screws still showing, making it feel partially bare and in process. By not being fully covered, the lightness and translucency of the printed work makes them feel malleable. The structure's unfinished nature is filled with opportunity of what it may become, holding both the weight of its human-made existence and the home space that it forms for opportunists such as the rat.

In 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic required many of us to shelter in place, I spent a lot of time working at the local community garden. That summer we struggled with a significant increase in the rat population that found food and home in the garden. As restaurants and businesses closed down around the city, the rats' lives were also interrupted. The food they depended on from the restaurant dumpsters downtown

stopped appearing each night, and they had to move in search of new reliable food sources. (Parsons 1) Though human culture and actions are often considered separate from nature, this is a clear example of how humans are embedded within larger, complex ecosystems. That year we had trouble growing tomatoes because the rats always got to them before we did. We came across little disoriented rat pups as we cleaned up the garden, taking apart many of their homes and digging up their burrows in hopes that they'd leave. The organization eventually hired exterminators to set traps and lay out poison, resulting in dead rats all over the garden. This also impacted the local raptors and scavengers who fed on the poisoned rats. Having to dispose of them several times a week, we were unsure whether to bury, compost or throw their little poisoned bodies in the trash. Though rats also destroy habitats, I couldn't help but wonder why humans are entitled to decide with whom they share a space, and what measures should be taken to keep others away and out of sight.

Aside from working at the garden, I spent much of my quarantine time intricately sculpting the baby rats I encountered in the garden out of porcelain. I thought of them as pure and innocent beings, contrasting the popular idea of them as "big dirty rats," or the flattened roadkill I created prints from. I find the sculpting process to be very intimate and careful, and as I worked on each one, it felt very satisfying to hold them in my palms (image). Though the porcelain pieces were made alongside and in conversation with the prints of roadkill, as *Unruly and Unresolved* developed over time, the hard and solid essence of the pieces clashed with the work as a whole and the softness I hoped to elicit from them. Instead of using the original sculptures, I made paper castings of them. With handmade paper, I carefully covered each one in wet sheets, to then cut and remove them once they were dry, a process that required a lot of patience and care. This created a hollow form, making each baby rat incredibly light, vulnerable, and easily crushed. At the same time, the long kozo fibers in the hand made paper are incredibly strong, holding the form together and making it nearly unbreakable. Some of the baby rats appear to be asleep, while others seem to move in

slow confusion, with eyes still shut as they come out of the nest and onto the structure. Since they are small, gentle, and cute, the pups are approachable and endearing, as many animal babies are. Seeing them vulnerable and alone, surrounded by prints of roadkill, and video recordings, one may connect their story and lifecycle: from the cute pups, to adolescent and adult rats grooming themselves and building nests in the video footage, to the large rat that is found dead on the road. The babies also bring a sense of loss. They feel scattered and out of place, maybe in search of their mom or the safety of their home. Their vulnerable state makes their survival and future feel uncertain.

In addition to the paper castings, I also had the opportunity to sand cast them out of glass. This process involved pressing the porcelain pieces into sand, spray them with molasses, heat them and then pour molten glass into it. As the glass starts to cool, we would quickly have to excavate the piece out of the sand and quickly put them into a hot kiln to ensure a slow cooling process. Glassmaking is a precarious process. It required a whole team of people, from someone opening and closing the doors to the molten glass, to the person that ladle and pour glass, to those who cut it and help move the piece into

the kiln. The whole operation requires incredible attention and precision, and there is always the possibility of something burning, catching fire, or shattering. I used the glass to create tiles, or window panes. Framing them into groups of four, I completed two small windows to be embedded into the structure. The partially frosted glass allows light to go through it, but still serves as a barrier for looking in or out. Installed into the projected wall, the viewer is able to see the video cast onto them from either side of the installation. This small window into the video projection brings into question whether the rats in the projection, and those embedded in the glass are existing inside or outside of the structure.



Image 10: Porcelain Rat



Image 11: Paper Rat

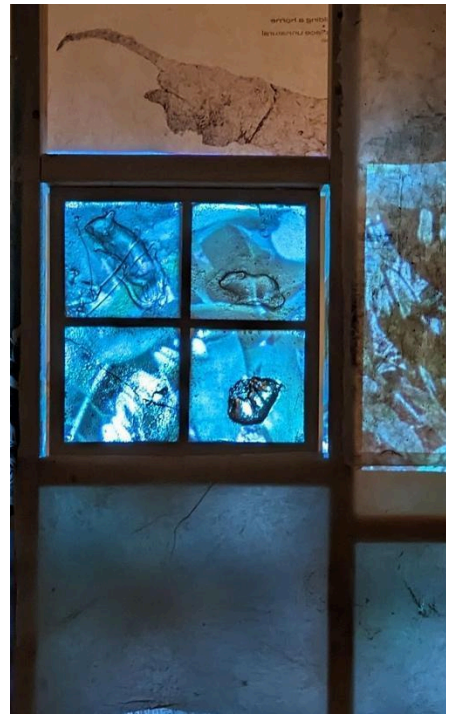


Image 12: Glass Rats



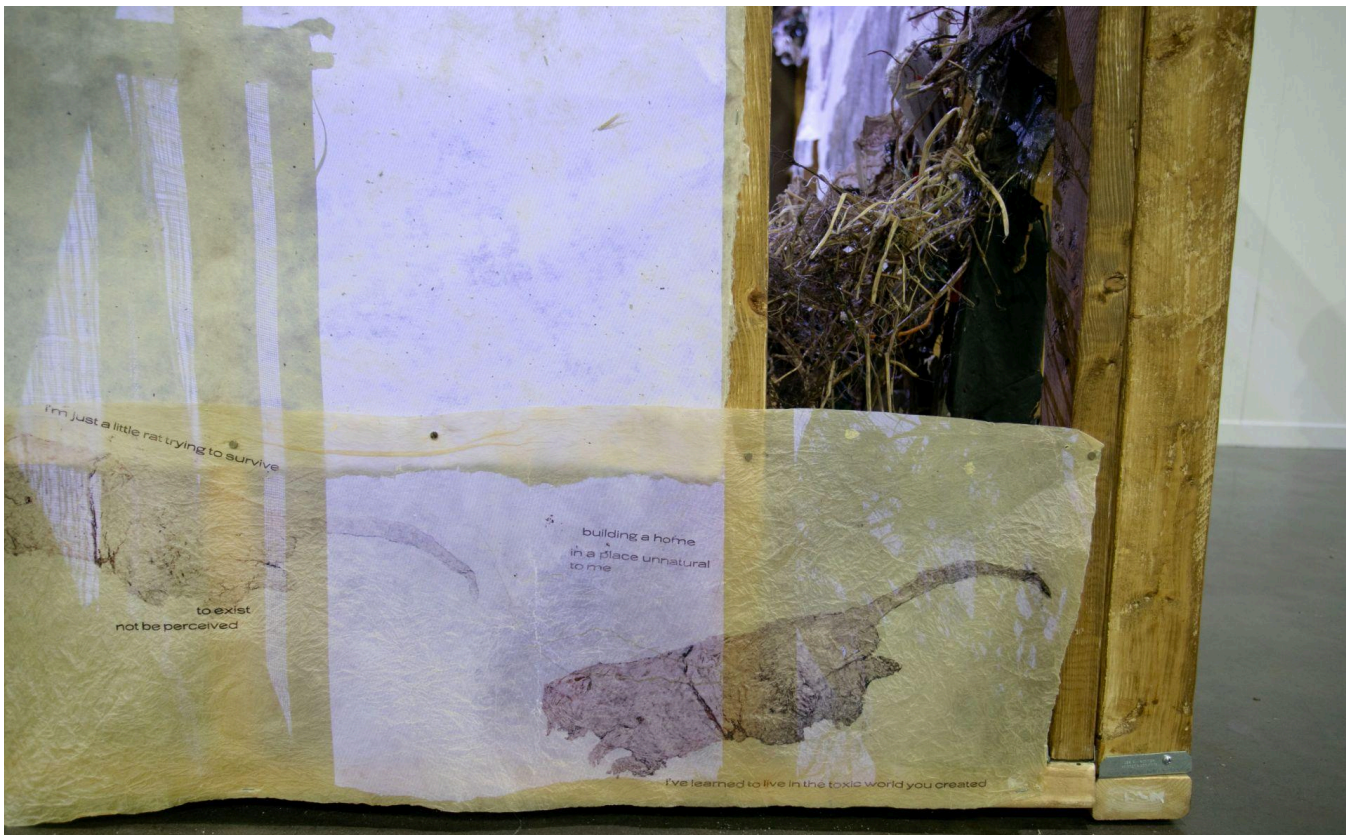
Image 13: *Unruly and Unresolved* detail. (Photo by Sara Meftah)

## I've Learned to Survive in this Toxic World You Created

I've handed a paper baby rat to every person who visited my studio in the past year, wanting them to fully experience holding something so vulnerable, the feeling of how easily it could be crushed, destroyed, or even blown away. With a paper rat in their hands, one is given the power to care and protect or to harm, with or without intention. Though this is an experience I would like to create in the final work, the viewer will face various barriers to picking up a baby rat at the exhibition. Part of the hesitance may come from their own relationship to rats, as well as the preconceived notions and expectations that art objects are not to be touched. As both precious and untouchable, the babies are just out of the viewer's reach, allowing their quiet, precarious survival.

Something about bringing the rat nest into an exhibition space feels incorrect. With plain walls and floors, this place that centers, values and protects artwork, makes the idea of rat nests and roadkill feel especially out of place. Made out of discarded and unwanted items, waste and debris, my work suddenly feels like a pile of trash. The tension of not belonging replicates again the experience of rats and other animals labeled as pests, those that are out of place, and those left to disintegrate on the asphalt. It is much like the moment I walk into a context that is especially white, cisgender and heteronormative, there is a sort of performance and expected way of being that is not natural to me. Bringing these little creatures, a representation of their homebuilding, and the uncertainty of their fate in the human-dominated world, I hope to create a space that is nuanced and complicated. As invasive species, rats are problematic to many ecosystems they inhabit and communities they live closely to. While this existence is formed by human colonialism and impact on the environment, rats themselves are only doing what they need to survive. Their flourishing is one that we, humans, may look up to, as a creature that is able to reimagine and surpass the destruction of our world.





Images 14-16: *Unruly and Unresolved* installation and detail. (Photos by Sara Meftah)

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