

Aisha Asghar

MAFA 5

Research Report

Research Statement

My practice centres around the complexities of identity and how these can be found and pieced together from our experiences, memories, and relationships. I am interested in how identities can be curated through the associations and narratives tied to objects and how objects have been used historically as physical evidence of the materiality of human life. My research considers museum and archives as memory institutions and containers for history and investigates how this can be applied to domestic and sacred spaces. Working from family photo albums, childhood memories, and past and present perspectives, I use processes of distortion, dissection, deletion, retrieval, and supplementation, to investigate the relationship between collective memory, fabricated memory, and reality. My work questions how domestic and sacred spaces can be recreated to act as safe holding places for personal histories. The act of making my work is a cathartic process. One that reveals and embraces identity as an ever-evolving concept, finding comfort in the familiarity of nostalgia in a time of change and uncertainty.

My research centres around how identity and memory can be preserved through different spaces, objects, and means. Looking at artists which have worked with these themes in the past. Considering the impact of Nelson Goodman's concept of worldmaking, the processes involved with this, and how this act can be seen as a creation of 'holding places.' Looking at traditional forms of preservation of history in museums, archives, and cultural institutions, and further how underrepresented communities have formed their own 'holding places' for collective histories and stories over time. Considering the many different forms of 'holding places' and how these can be formed and recreated by individuals and collectives through the reconstruction of objects and spaces. Reframing the home and domestic spaces as holding places for memories, childhood, and family. Exploring the role of language in relation to the fabrication of memory and the censoring of information, whether unconscious or conscious, and how this can affect the relationship between the artist and the audience. Towards the end of the year, my research focussed on the unconscious intertwining of my faith and culture in my practice and how deeply this influenced by work. I began to look at how sacred spaces, museum spaces, and domestic spaces relate to one another and how these can be combined to recreate 'safer' holding places for artwork which holds personal sentiment and value.

Research Strand 1: Worldmaking – Processes, Perspectives, Identity

Beyond Boundaries: Exploring How Worldmaking Theories Emerge Within Selected Contemporary Art Practices



Synopsis

Within the context of Nelson Goodman's worldmaking philosophies, every individual can be considered as a conceptual creator and a 'world maker'. The evidence of worldmaking is present historically throughout visual art, with the artist simultaneously embracing the role of both creator and documenter. Whether creating abstract, observational, or conceptual work, the artistic process is inherently phenomenological. Individual experiences, perceptions, and understandings, bleed into the work that is created. Goodman's philosophy asserts that the act of worldmaking is inherent to human existence, with every observer functioning as both a conceptual creator and a 'world maker', which makes for an interesting interplay between the role of the artist and the observer of the artist's work. This dissertation begins to examine the role of worldmaking in contemporary visual art through a selection of artist case studies using visual and contextual analysis of selected works to investigate how their work can be understood within the context of Goodman's philosophical framework. Looking at Peter Doig, Jacob Steensen, Sin Wai Kin, and wider artistic discourse, this text will consider the diverse ways in which worldmaking can manifest in different artistic approaches and understand how these artists construct, deconstruct, and reshape their own worlds. By relating and applying Goodman's ideas to the analysis of contemporary artists, a deeper understanding can be formed on how art is created, interpreted, and situated in different worldmaking contexts through interdisciplinary insights.

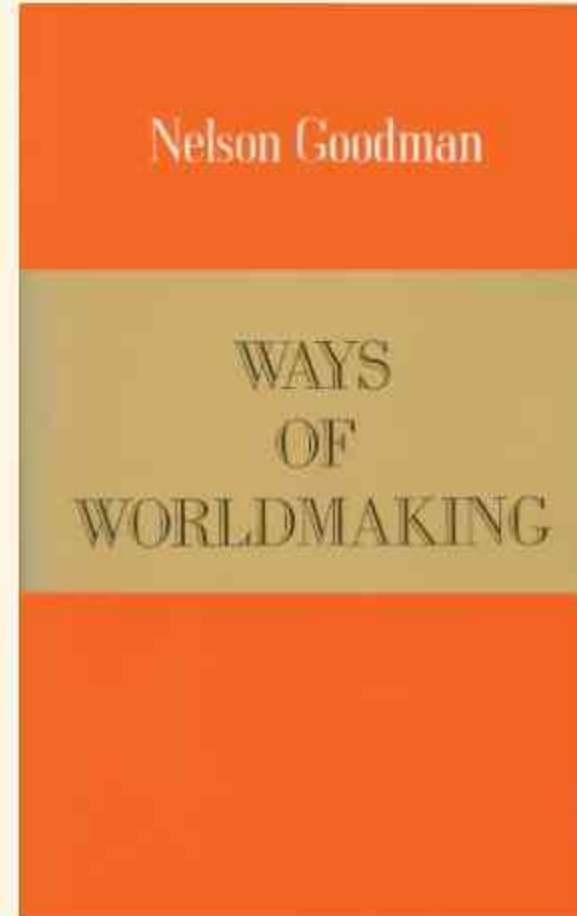
Whilst completing my dissertation, I realised that philosopher Nelson Goodman's worldmaking theories and processes could not only be found in the artists I was discussing, but also in my own work. Goodman proposes that each individual perspective of the world is altered by their own personal histories, experiences, memories, relationships, and backgrounds, and that each perspective can be considered a viable 'version' of the world.

In a time of great change, the processes of worldmaking can be employed as a form of comfort to create safe spaces where identity can be explored.

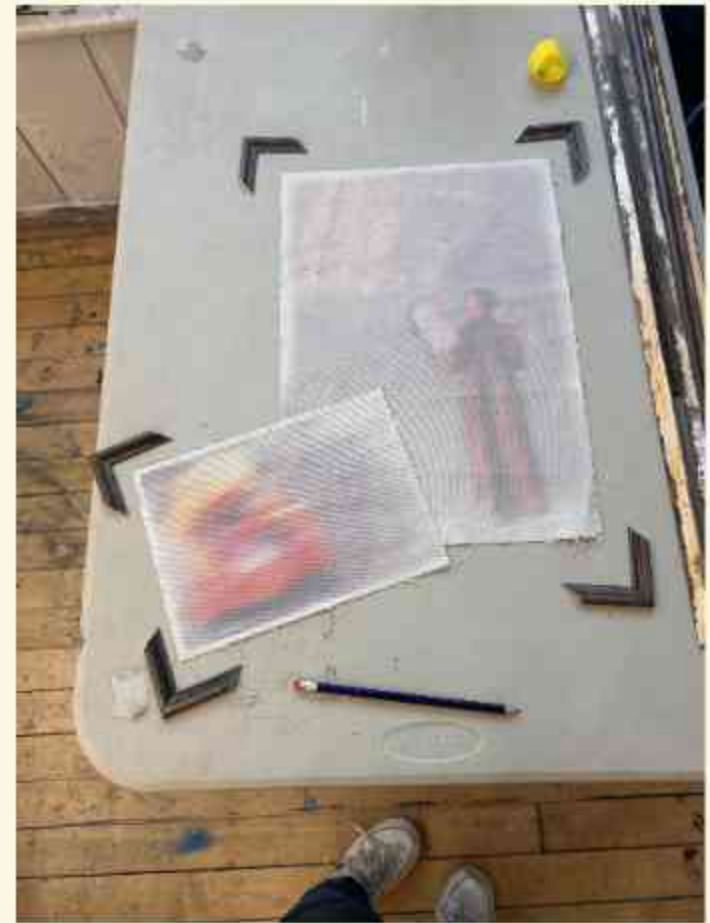
'We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.'

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (1972).

Ways of Worldmaking further identifies the actions of worldmaking, as Goodman reaffirms that worlds are made from other worlds and 'making is remaking'.²⁸ His interests, however, lean more towards identifying relationships between worlds and worldmaking 'processes' than reviewing how worlds originate from others.²⁹ Firstly, he discusses the process of *composition* and *decomposition*, noting how worldmaking often involves breaking something down before assembling it back together.³⁰ This includes dividing that something into distinct parts, examining and combining these elements to create new wholes. Labelling or categorisation plays a key role in this process as things can be identified and understood differently in relation to their groupings and associations and leading to the composing of a partially or seemingly entirely new thing.³¹ This results in the emergence of diverse worlds influenced by the worldmakers' own perspectives and distinctions. Next, he writes about the process of *weighting*, which is essentially the emphasis that the worldmaker places on certain elements.³² He notes how the relevancy of components is dependent on their purpose, value, or importance and in art this often takes the form of visual emphasis.³³ A traditional example of this is the differing representations of the Madonna, with artists portraying the same figure but choosing to emphasise different features based on what they deem to be most important. The process of weighting can often be hierarchical and rely on the individual perspectives of the worldmaker which means that even when worlds share elements the prioritising of these elements can create distinct interpretations.³⁴ This leads to the next process of *ordering*, which concerns the order in which we group and arrange information.³⁵ This is an important and active worldmaking process as our arrangement of information strongly influences our perception and constructs our understanding of the world and reordering can therefore directly result in new versions. Creating one world from another, often naturally involves the process of *deletion* and *supplementation* as humans have the capacity to both overlook things and fill in blanks because our perception is selective.³⁶ Again Goodman highlights how artists successfully use this process by giving the viewer essential features that imply the subject of a work.³⁷ The deliberate deletion of elements can influence the supplementation of missing information and leave room for large variations in interpretation. Finally, Goodman speaks of the process of *deformation*, which is the act of distorting, manipulating, and even destroying existing elements that occurs during making to create new perspectives.³⁸ Goodman concludes that these ways of worldmaking can often be used together and overlap to collaboratively contribute to the creation of worlds.³⁹



**Excerpt from the introduction of
my dissertation - summarising
Goodman's worldmaking processes.**



Photos of in-progress work in studio space

Identity and Memory

Memory is profoundly implicated in questions of identity, both personal and social or cultural. The point is well made in numerous literary and scientific contexts. The neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks discusses the cases of patients suffering confabulatory delirium, who through severe memory loss have to make up their identity and that of those around them every minute. 'We have, each of us,' Sacks reflects, 'a life-story, an inner narrative – whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a "narrative", and that narrative is us, our identities.'¹⁴ This narrative is, in effect, memory, the mechanism by which we recollect ourselves in that continuous inner drama which constitutes our sense of uniqueness in the face of the facts of biological similarity. Gabriel Garcia Márquez makes a similar point in talking of a gradual decline of memory that will be familiar to many witnessing (or living with) what is now widely identified as a disease, Alzheimer's: firstly 'the recollection of his childhood began to be erased from his memory, then the name and notion of things, and finally the identity of people, and even the awareness of his own being ... until he sank into a kind of idiocy that had no past.'¹⁵ Kavanagh invites us to imagine ourselves loose in a world without the support of experience, or in the present context without memory.¹⁶ 'Imagine,' she says, 'waking up one day not knowing how to boil water in a kettle, and not being able to recognize a life partner. We literally remember ourselves in all our conscious acts. ... Every time we repeat an action or bring something to mind (however small) we are underlining, reinforcing and buttressing the subjective sense of self.' At the level of existential perception this makes clear **the crucial part played by memory in our most fundamental sense of being.** As far as Western understanding of the matter is concerned, we grow into memory at the point of birth, and we relinquish it, at least as far as knowable experiential criteria are concerned, at death. Memory is essential to a sense of being.

In a social context, shared memory promotes coherent communities. In the modern world the estimable aims of modern multi-culturalism are confronted by divergent, potentially fracturing, assertions of separate memory until common cause produces common remembrance. Wars, and the commemoration of those who fell in them, are amongst the most dramatic

I have been exploring the worldmaking processes of deformation, deletion, supplementation, composition, decomposition, and ordering within the manipulation of my family photographs to create an ambiguous sense of space and time that is representative of both how memories form and deteriorate within the mind, and my skewed perception of memory.

'Aura is also bound up with the intertwining of memory and present experience.'

Ian Farr, *Documents of Contemporary Art: Memory* (2012).

Excerpt from the introduction of
Documents of Contemporary Art: Memory



Sin Wai Kin

the story changes the body changes (repeating)

2020



Jakob Kudsk Steensen

RE-ANIMATED

2019

Worlds and fictional spaces as holding places and safe places to explore sensitive topics.

Research Strand 2: Holding Places

The concept of a 'holding place' became an important topic within my work. Although I am sure this term has probably been used plenty in the past, this is not something I discovered through my research but instead was a term I felt could encapsulate the commonality within the many different objects and spaces which have captured my interest during this year.

'Destruction is difficult. It is as difficult as creation.'
Antonio Gramsci (Italian Marxist Theorist)

I have always had collecting and even hoarding tendencies, finding sentiment wherever possible and attaching it to objects and spaces. Gramsci's quote above really speaks to me as I have often found it difficult to let things go in times of change and choose to seek comfort in memories of the past through their material remains.

It interests me that humans seem to always seek or create 'holding places' to store important things. Examples of this can be seen everywhere and in many forms. Museums, libraries, and archives have historically been used as memory institutions or containers to hold and display the materiality of human history and life. When an object or history is highlighted within a cultural institution it is given an element of value which is arguably bound to structural and societal views on which objects and history deserve attention and respect. With such spaces generally excluding minority communities, locals began to create their own safe holding places for their collective histories, stories, and identities.

This made me think about how, similarly to Goodman's idea of everyone creating their own world versions, holding places can be made and established anywhere through assigning personal or collective value to spaces and objects. Physical spaces, photo albums, notebooks, sketchbooks, digital spaces, trinket boxes, audio devices, diaries, artworks are all examples of potential holding places. The mind can be seen as a holding place for many things such as thoughts, emotions, memories, and dreams (which in of itself can be seen as a holding place for lost memories).

Identifying objects or 'treasures' within photos, childhood stories, or memories and recreating these feels incredibly precious and it seems only natural to have a suitable holding place for these. Looking at how artists have displayed both found and made objects, which perhaps traditionally wouldn't have been exhibited or displayed. I was keen to explore the idea of domestic spaces as a safe and familiar holding place and how the recreation of certain elements could affect the atmosphere of a gallery or museum environment and further how the audience interacts with the space.

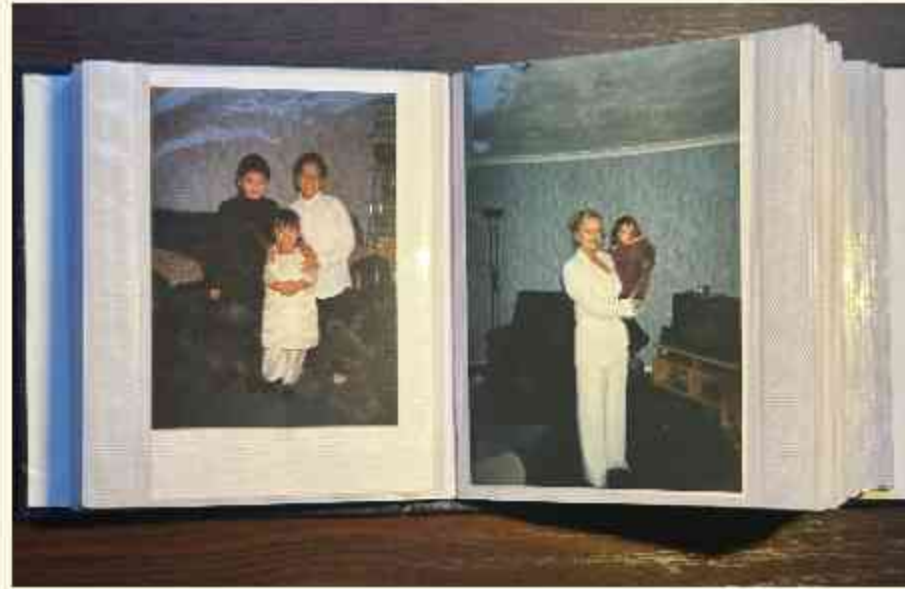


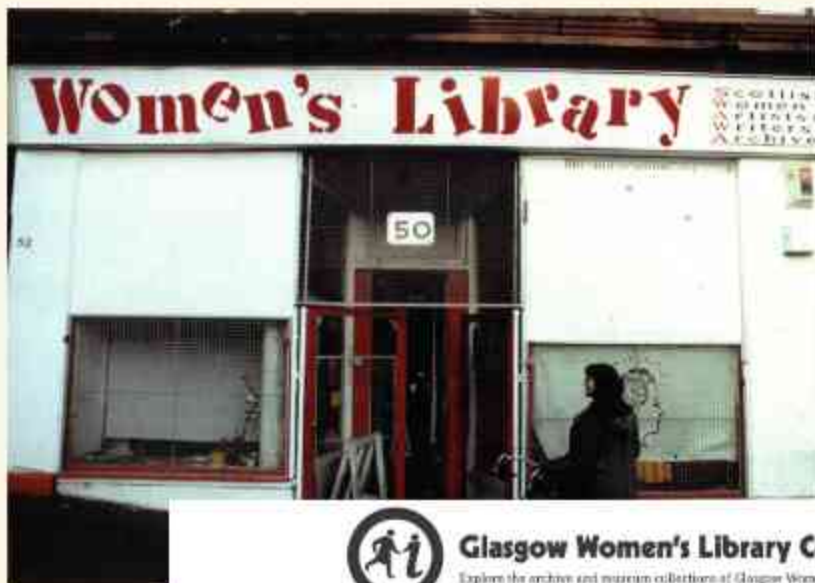
Photo album curated by me.

'To collect photographs is to collect the world.'

Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (1977).



I find it interesting how multiple photo albums curated from the same batch of photos would be completely different varying with the curator's life chapter, generational knowledge, familial role, personal relationships, individual associations, personal recall of memories, etc.



*Glasgow Women's Library - first location
Glasgow, Scotland.
1991*



Glasgow Women's Library Collections

Explore the archive and museum collections of Glasgow Women's Library

The Archive Collection The Museum Collection The Learning Library Collection Search

The Museum Collection

Use the search field below to find objects from our museum collection. To find objects in both our museum and archive collections, please try the Custom Search field, or search for archive material in our Archive collection (above)

You can also access our museum collection catalogue directly on [eMuseum](#)

If you would like to access any material in our museum or archive collections, please contact us to make an appointment.

Please be aware that cataloguing of the museum collection is ongoing, so search results may be incomplete.

Search

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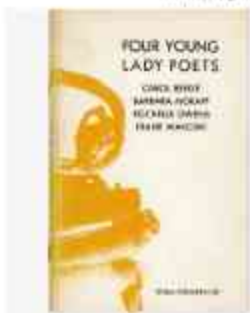
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*Glasgow Women's Library.
Online Museum Collection and Archive
2024*



*Glasgow Zine Library.
Glasgow, Scotland.
2024*



*Glasgow Zine Library.
Online Zine Collection and Archive
2024*

<https://gzlarchive.omeka.net/>

<https://womenslibrary.org.uk/explore-the-library-and-archive/>



Physical archive of thoughts, ideas, and memories through personal sketchbooks, notebooks, and photo albums.



Objects as holding places - personal baby box and photo frame.



Marcel Duchamp

La Boîte-en-Valise [Box in a Suitcase]

1941-48



'Everything important that I have done
can be put into a little suitcase'.

Marcel Duchamp on *La Boîte-en-Valise*



Mark Dion
Tate Thames Dig - Locker
2000



Mark Dion
Tate Thames Dig
1999



Joseph Beuys
Untitled (Vitrine)
1983



Susan Hiller
From the Freud Museum
1991-6

There is something about the drawer as a holding place which feels synonymous with the mind to me. The idea of a home 'junk' drawer captures the essence of how memories, thoughts, and part of our identities form within our minds - a display of how objects which were once essential or treasured are now scattered and pushed into a corner. Remnants of our lives which we once knew like the back of our hands now stored away for safekeeping waiting to be reused or recalled in the future.



Bernie Kaminski
Paper mâché medicine cabinet
2024



Bernie Kaminski
Paper mâché junk drawer
2020



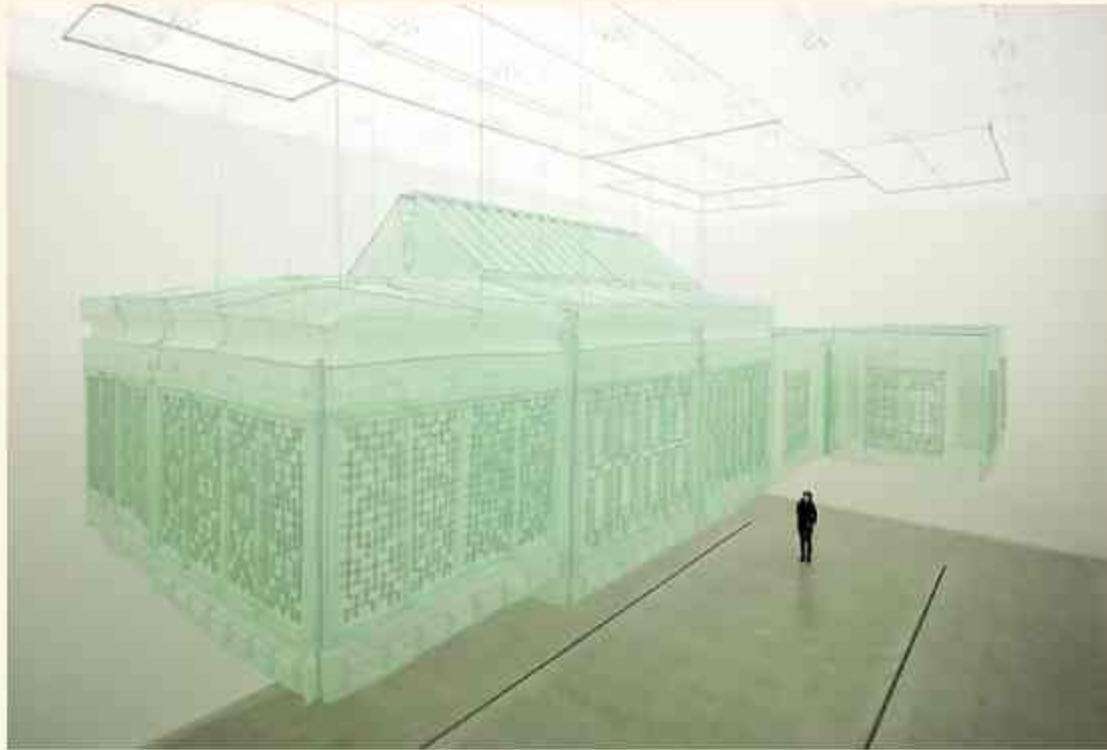
Right: My family living room drawer full of photos.
Below: Beginnings of Holding Place work





Childhood photos which evoke memories of spaces that no longer exist as they once did.

Memories and photos can be a holding place for spaces or experiences that no longer exist physically, yet part of who we are feels tied up in the spaces we once inhabited.



Do Ho Suh

Seoul Home/Kanazawa Home

2012



Do Ho Suh

Apartment A, Unit 2, Corridor and Staircase, 348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA

2011-14

Research Strand 3: Language, Documentation, and Fabrication

Language has always been an important part of my practice. My work can sometimes spiral and grow into many different things, so I often use word banks to create some restriction and boundaries that allows me to redirect my focus. I enjoy exploring the positive and negatives of these boundaries within my work

Language is also a form of documentation for history - oral histories have been a holding place for communities since the beginning of time with generational knowledge being passed down over years. The notion of language as a holding place for your mother tongue, and for your parent stories and experiences is really interesting to me. I often think about if my memories are entirely mine or if they have been fabricated over time through stories passed on from family members. My work and the transferring processes of making and influence in a way feel like a form of documentation - an archival filing of the input and output of my mind.

Part of my research involved looking at how artists have used and intertwined language and memory within their work. The relationship of trust between the artist and the viewer is something I have come to consider. It is instinctual for the viewer to trust what the artist is showing them to be true, however it is an active choice for the artist when selecting what information to allow the viewer to access. This can be done through text, audio, and visual inclusion and censoring. There is of course the idea of unconscious and conscious misinformation - with some artists using intentional deception and manipulation of information in their work. Elizabeth Loftus, American psychologist who has dedicated her research to memory, has conducted many experiments and studies on how memories and recollections of events are easily subject to manipulation and how completely false memories can be planted by absorbing from influences and people around us. This applies to the work I have made, as I can never be completely sure what information, experiences, and memories are wholly my own, which I have adopted, and which has been given to me. I am more interested however, in exploring this relationship of trust and boundaries between the artist and the viewer through selectively allowing the viewer to access information whilst simultaneously creating distance through omission.



My studio and sketchbook word banks.



Richard Serra
Verb List
1967

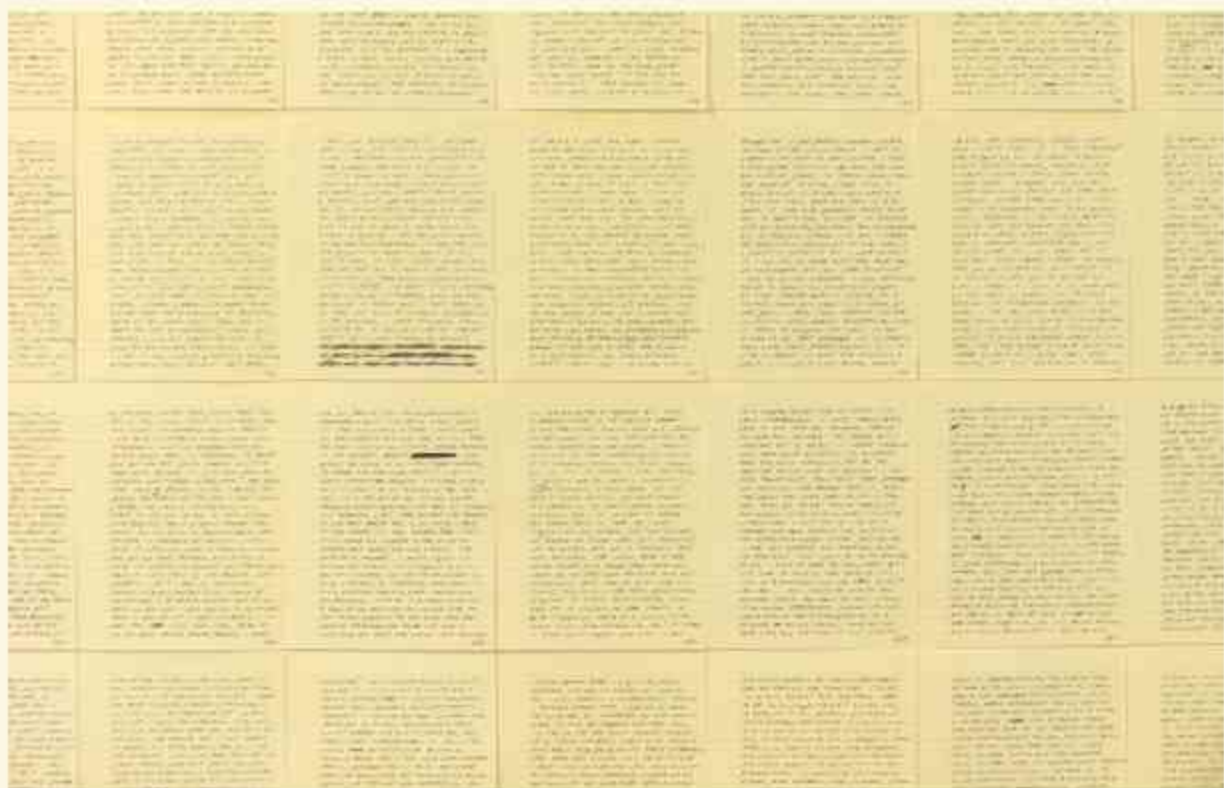


I REALISE NOW THAT I WAS THE SAME
ONLY NOW, DO I BURN WITH SHAME.
SO - SONS AND DAUGHTERS, BEFORE IT'S
TOO LATE -
DO NOT CONSIGN YOURSELVES TO THAT
SAME FATE.
WE KNOW YOU HAVE YOUR OWN LIVES TO LEAD
YOUR PARENTS ARE THERE ONLY WHEN YOU'RE IN NEED.
SO, PLEASE GIVE A THOUGHT TO THE OLD DEAR
OR OLD MAN
TRY TO MAKE US WANT TO, WHENEVER YOU CAN.
BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, YOU WILL BE 'US'
AND YOU'LL KNOW HOW IT FEELS 'TO HAVE
'MISSED THE BUS'

Poem by my Nan
Missed the Bus
Date unknown



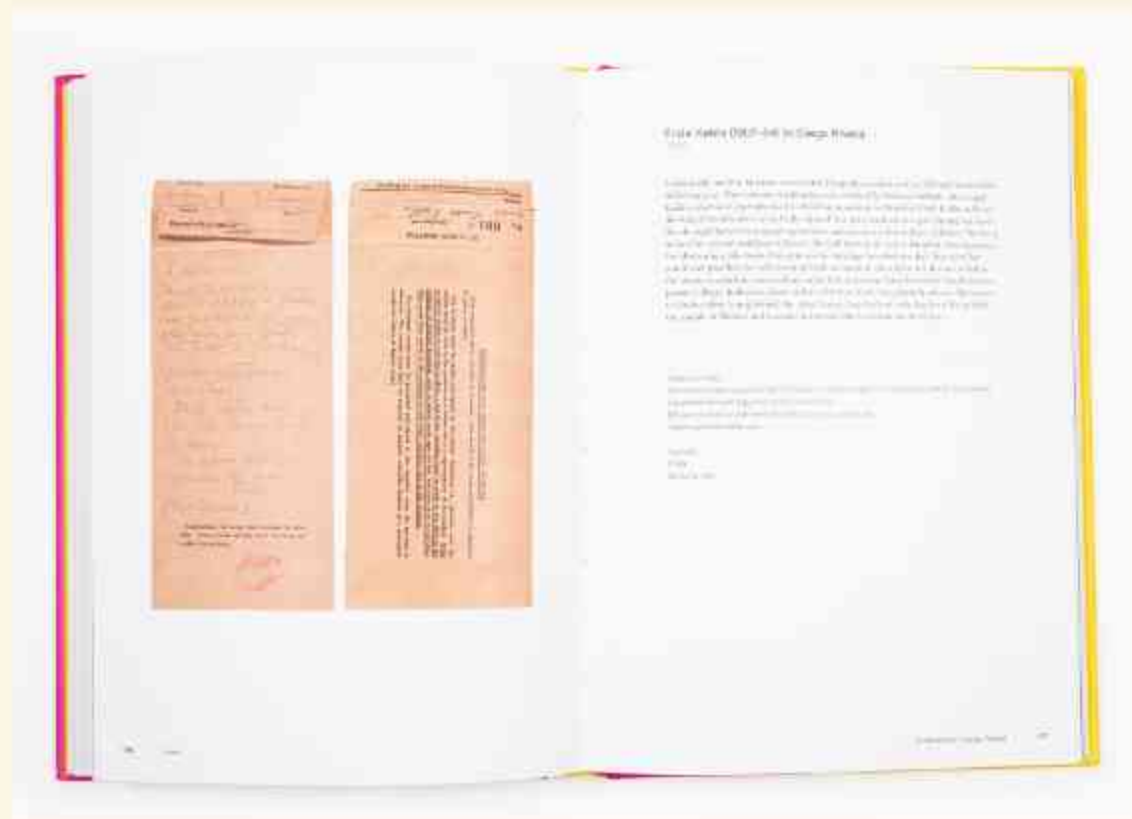
Tracey Emin
May Dodge, My Nan
1963-94



Sean Landers

Sic.
1993

An artist's practice itself can become an autobiographical holding place. Objects and documents recovered from their lives can become part of their documented practice posthumously - and this of course removes the artists control over how much they reveal within their work.



Michael Bird

Artist's Letters
2019

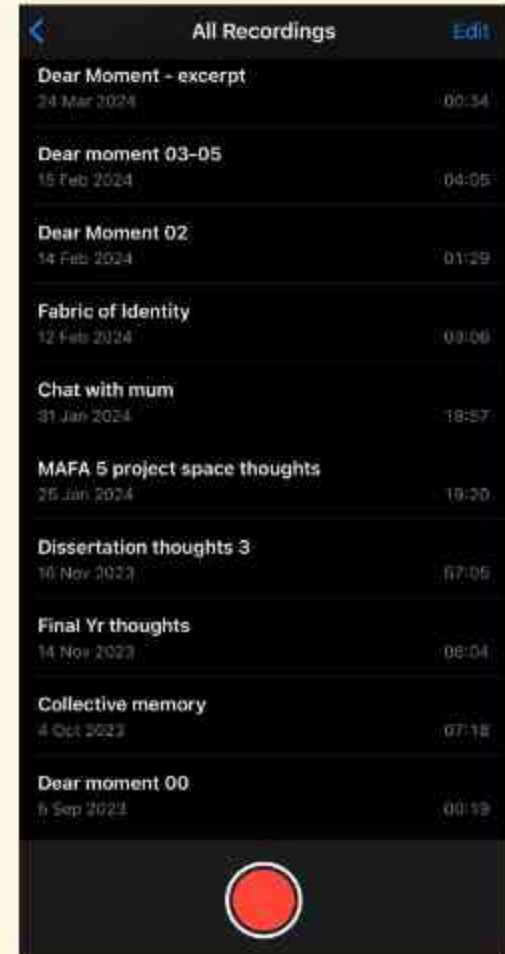
A letter from Frida Kahlo to Diego Rivera (1940).



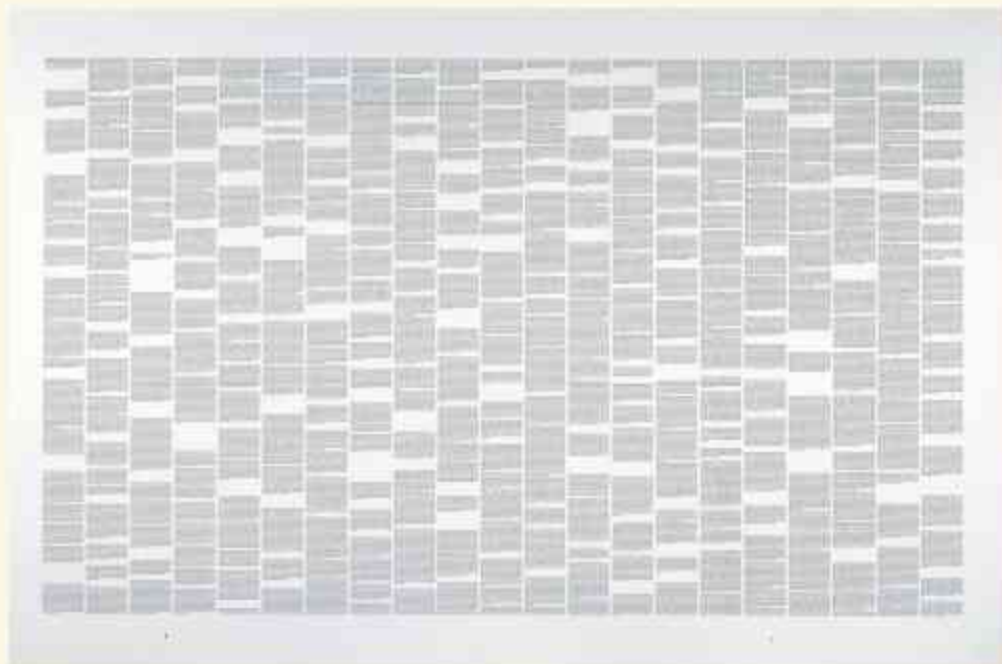
Aisha Asghar

Dear Moment - physical transcripts

2024



Voice memos - an audio archive of my thoughts.

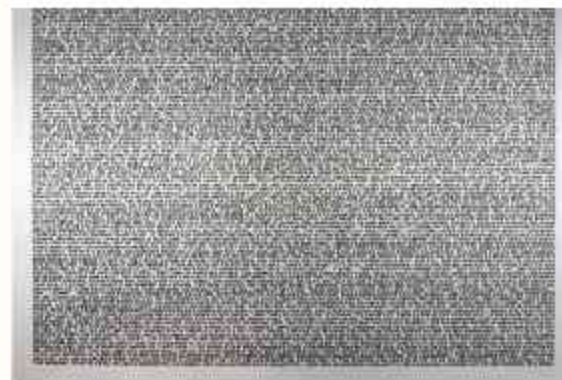
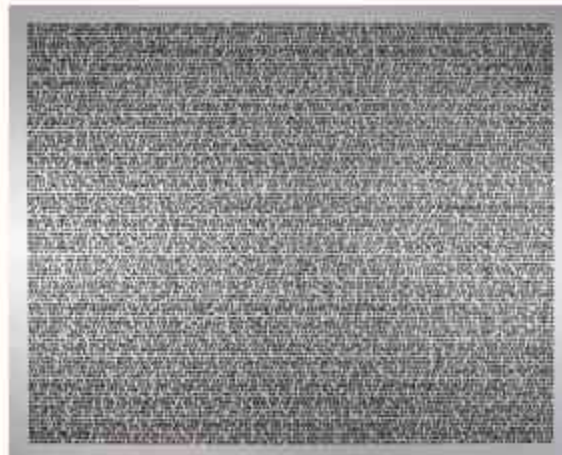


Recalling histories and stories from memory only.

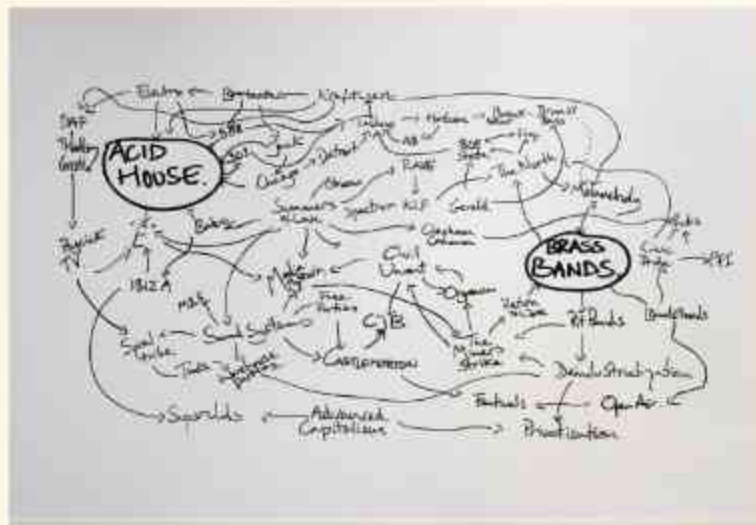
Emma Kay
Worldview
 1999

'We're bound to work with [language] but sometimes it's not enough, or it's in the way, and obviously sometimes (in life and in art) it doesn't work right as a tool for communication'

Fiona Banner,
Nude Portrait (2009).



Fiona Banner
Don't look back
 1999



Jeremy Deller
The History of the World
 1997-2004



Gillian Wearing

Confess All On Video. Don't Worry You Will Be in Disguise. Intrigued? Call Gillian Version II
1994

'A great deal of my work is about questioning handed-down truths... I'm always trying to find ways of discovering new things about people, and so in the process discover more about myself.'

Gillian Wearing,
'Sign Language'
in *Dazed and Confused* (1996).

Intentional fabrication and the collection of false truths.



A.R Hopwood

Erased U.F.O's (A.R Hopwood's False Memory Archive)
2012 - 14

I have a photographic false memory of coming home from hospital when I was few days old. I believe that this memory must have been created after listening to my mother relating the story of me coming home. My photographic memory is that my father was seated next to my mother who was carrying me and he was wearing a cream colour jacket. We were in the back seat of the car. I know it is impossible for me to remember this event and I have battled with this question for so long.

(...)

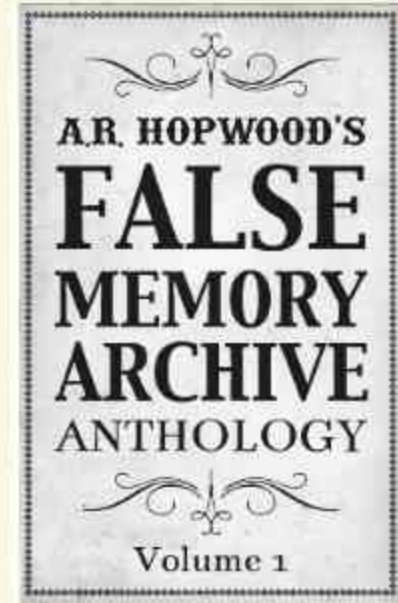
I have a vivid "memory" of a time from before I was even born. The memory is of being in a car with my family (parents and older sister) at an open-concept zoo, with monkeys surprising us by jumping on our car.

My family must have told me about the story when I was really young, and it must have had such an impression on me that I not only vividly imagined it, but also added myself to the story. The visit that this "memory" refers to happened years before I was born.

(...)

I have had a very vivid false memory of myself as a young child (maybe 4?) playing with my Granddad. He was wearing a mustard-coloured jumper and throwing me up into the air and catching me. Years later I asked my mum about it and she told me my Granddad died just before I was born. I never met him, although he did have a mustard-coloured jumper that he would always wear.

(...)



A. R. Hopwood

*Excerpts from A.R Hopwood's False
Memory Archive Anthology Volume 1
2014*



Zineb Sedira
Mother Tongue
2002



Zineb Sedira
Retelling Histories, My Mother Told Me...
2003C



Gulsan Karamustafa
Memory of a Square
2005

Research Strand 4: Faith and Culture



My faith and culture was at first a largely unconscious influence within my work and I realised that I had been obscuring the facial features of the figures within my works. This can be related to the concept of aniconism within Islam and how this imagery isn't allowed within sacred or prayer spaces. Throughout my childhood, and even to this day, we have always had a prayer room or space in the family home in which was treated with a certain level of respect and care. Although this space and room has changed over time, traces of past ones have travelled into the new spaces, and I see this concept of a prayer room as a collective holding place for building the religious identity of myself and my siblings.

There is something powerful yet vulnerable about recreating a sacred space and opening it up to the public eye, inviting people into your safe place. This idea of recreating this concept of a sacred space within a new given space connects to the fact that prayer in Islam is permissible anywhere implying the innate purity and sacredness of the earth itself and more abstractly - the earth as a holding place for all life forms.

The more I related my work to my faith and culture, I found further connections. I started to think about the role and perception of creation and memory within Islamic communities and how religious museums create a new ambiguous space between sacred and institutional spaces.

Historical Example of defacing of figural imagery in Islamic manuscripts:

Marzubannama (Tales of the Margrave)

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) enthroned, al-Varavini

Made in Baghdad, 698/1299.

Held in Archaeology Museum, Istanbul.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ صَلْصَلٍ كَالْفَخَّارِ ﴿١٤﴾

'He created man from clay like [that of] pottery.'

Qur'an (55:14)

The act of creation is seen as sacred and is often frowned upon within some Islamic cultures. There is potential evidence to show that historical Islamic craftsmen have intentionally included a 'mistake' within their work to account for the belief that only God can create perfection. Whether this is true or not, traces of the human hand being visible within creations is something that personally gives me comfort in the context of my faith.



'We do not make stars as we make bricks; not all making is a matter of moulding mud.'

Nelson Goodman, *Of Minds and Matter*.

'Memories of men' - the oral transmission and preservation of the Qur'an.



Oldest known Qur'anic manuscript
Birmingham Qur'an manuscript
Dated between c.568-645



Comparison between Birmingham Qur'an manuscript (right) and 21st Century Qur'an (left) showing that the scripture has not been altered over time.

حافظ: 'Hafiz'
Can be translated as many words including 'safe keeper', 'protector', and 'guardian'. Historically and currently used to describe a Muslim who dedicates their life to memorisation, transmission and preservation of the Qur'an.

Thinking back to communities and people as holding places for faith and culture.



**Topkapi Palace
Museum**

Istanbul, Turkey.
*The boxes in which
sacred relics are
kept.*



Hirka-i Şerif Mosque

Istanbul, Turkey.
Sacred museum section holding the mantle of the Prophet.



**Cabinet holding Qur'an
copies and religious books
in family prayer room.**



Topkapi Palace Interior.
Istanbul, Turkey.



**Center of Great Mosque of Mecca holding
the Ka'bah**
Mecca, Saudi Arabia.



**Great Mosque of Córdoba
Interior.**
Córdoba, Spain.



Great Umayyad Mosque Interior.
Damascus, Syria.

Muslims believe that everything in this life is temporary and attachment to material things has no purpose as we will return to the earth and move to an afterlife. This can be related to the concept of the earth as a holding place for not only all material things but also humans as we exist physically. As someone who finds it difficult to let things go, this notion is surprisingly relieving in a way. The recreation of objects and spaces within new sites speaks to the complex physical and spiritual ties we have to the earth and how this can be cycled.



Susan Hiller

Belshazzar's Feast, the Writing on Your Wall
1983-4

I began to realise that the space holding and displaying the work I was making was also very important to me. These moments are sacred to me, and the space holding them deserves to be treated preciously.

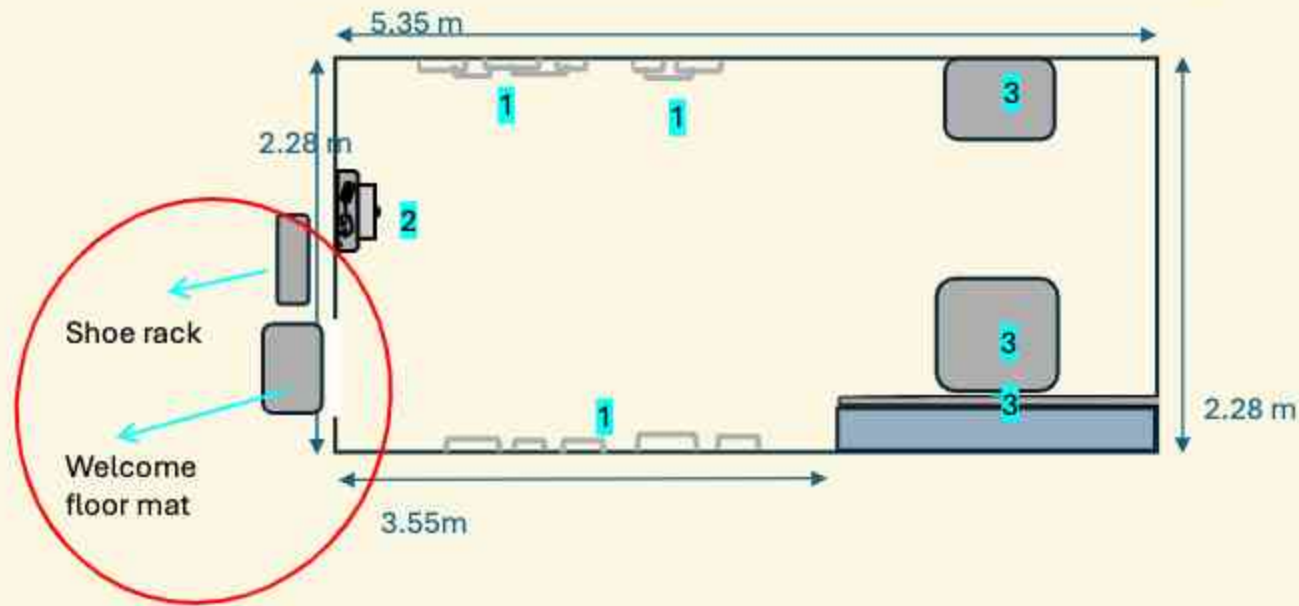


Prayer room in family home.



Family photo from previous home showing furniture and pillows that have followed us into current home and carpet that is evokes many core childhood memories.

Please remove or cover shoes before entering this space.



How to Perform Wudu



Considering Islamic cleansing rituals which prepare you for prayer and entering sacred spaces - asking the audience to partake in a version of this through removing or covering their shoes as a sign of respect for the space can prompt a reframing of perspective in relation to traditional exhibition spaces. Even if the audience chooses not to, hopefully it will prompt consideration of why they are being asked to do so.