

OTHER
WORDY
GUILTY

OVER
WORDY
GARDENS

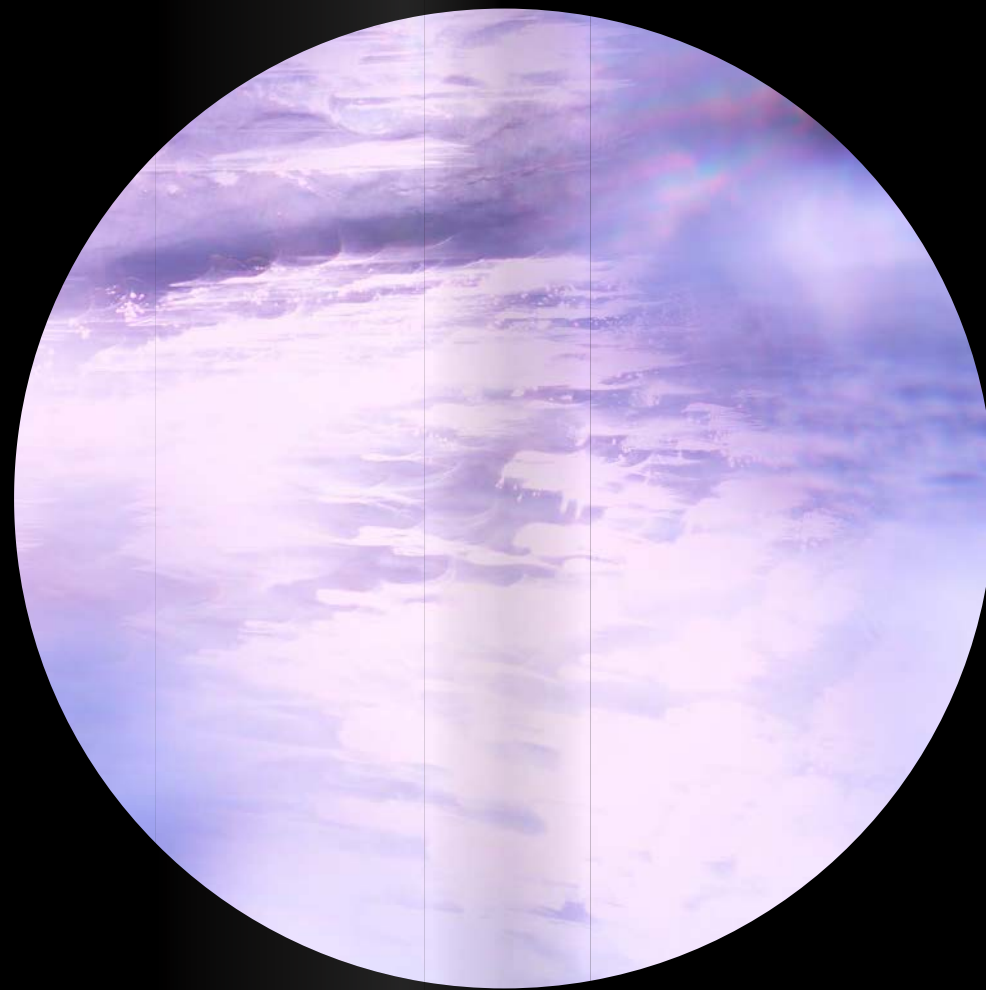
RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN
MFA GRAPHIC DESIGN 2023
SADIA QUDDUS

FOR ALL WHO DREAM OF
BETTER WORLDS
AND CREATE FROM THE SOUL



*The world is awash in
pearlescent shimmer.*

*Sunlight glances gently off fluid,
iridescent forms, and stars explode
beneath mercurial seas.*



*At night the lights turn hazy and
acid neon, glowing through
the darkness.*

*Glassy surfaces refract
color like the interior of
a cyberpunk kaleidoscope.*



*This is where the desert meets
the sea, where nature and
architecture are symbiotic,*

*where science fiction, mythology,
and the cosmos collide, where the
future is alien and present.*



This book [physical or digital] held in your hands [visceral or metaphorical] is an invitation and guide. Through these pages of ephemera, dialogue, and musing, I present an insight into my practice and process, and guidance into the *OtherWorld*, a vision for a speculative future realm.

My practice seeks to give visceral form to the intangible. In making these metaphysical experiences tangible, I start to shape a speculative *OtherWorld*, and bring it into being. Most recently, my work has been exploring two frameworks—

*The translation of material elements
from my cultural heritage;*

*Giving visual form to the sacred relationship
between body, soul, and natural world.*

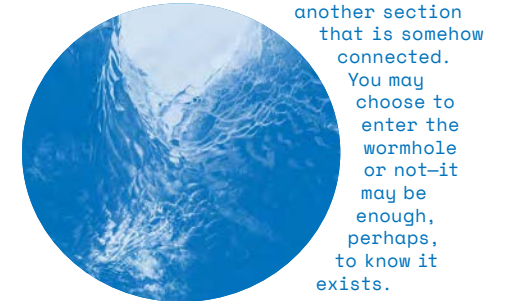
I delve into the precolonial, ancestral teachings of a mystical spiritual path,² referencing philosophies from my own personal and cultural heritage as source material from which to weave a new set of mythologies for alternative far future visions, through physical and digital mediation of natural landscape, environment, and emotion.

This book is meant to be nonlinear, orbital, referential, expansive and still in progress.³ You may enter from any place, and find your own way through. Portals can suck you into a completely different section of the book. Text and images may wander off the page, disappear into an image, and cross edges and boundaries. You may feel challenged to peer closer, turn the book in a different direction, or look something up online or at a library. Centers are not given hierarchical value over edges. The page is not treated as a singular composition, but simply a window into an ever expanding universe that extends beyond its known borders.

Eclectic, sprawling, elusive, and dense, the book embodies the values of the *OtherWorld Manifesto*, and subverts dictated order. Elements are organized by multiple centers of gravity. A collection of diverse multiplicities, it echoes the sacredness of diversity and infinite individuality all bound within a collective, unified whole.

Welcome.

1. This shape indicates a portal. If you come across this, consider yourself at an entry point to a wormhole. Entering it means searching for the corresponding texture within



another section that is somehow connected. You may choose to enter the wormhole or not—it may be enough, perhaps, to know it exists.

15

2. While most faith systems have a spiritual branch, I avoid specifying from where I draw lessons, as I have cultivated this practice through the diverse set of life experiences and influences I have embodied. However, if it is important to know where my research interests lie, Sufism is the main source from which I draw influence, and within which I choose to inquire.

3. This is the ideal way to read this book. My goal is to subvert the traditional book, and curate a new form of reading. Due to the time constraints of an MFA thesis, I've opted to treat this book more as a simple window into the projects and writing that gesture towards these values. Thus, I have not accomplished these goals within the book itself, and this thesis is instead a first draft towards an experimental process I hope to continue exploring.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ON BODIES, WATER + COSMOS

24
On Bodies, Water +
Cosmos—
a methodology for existence
ESSAY

30
How Does the Ocean Dream?
PROJECT

50
Digital Materiality
PROJECT

56
Lian Fumerton-Liu
CONVERSATION

66
Avatar Builder—Avatar Sadia
PROJECT

72
Hillary Good
CONVERSATION

ON SPACE

86
On Space—
the places that make me
ESSAY

98
Gitanjali No. 60—A Series
PROJECT

124
Unsacred Jainamaaz
PROJECT

134
*Sophie Loloi + Bobby Joe
Smith III*
CONVERSATION

146
All the Colors of the Desert
PROJECT

ENTER THE BEYOND

166
Enter the Beyond—
*on Glitch, Drift, binaries,
spectrums, tension,
and kaleidoscopes*
ESSAY

176
Underwater Mashrabiyya
PROJECT

190
An OtherWorlding Manifesto
MANIFESTO

212
*OtherWorlding—An
Experimental Visualization*
PROJECT

ON LISTENING

19
LEXICON

228
On Listening—
*channeling as a process for
emergent making*
ESSAY

234
Diatomic Life
PROJECT

242
Brian Johnson
CONVERSATION

ON PRACTICE

296
BIBLIOGRAPHY

254
On Practice—
forging sacred relationships
ESSAY

260
*Moonrock Seas—A
Cinematic Flipbook*
PROJECT

270
Transparent Matter
PROJECT

TL;DR

300
LOVE LETTERS

288
TL;DR—A Synopsis
or, on subversion and survival
ESSAY

294
Abstract
ABSTRACT

308
Next Steps
A FINAL NOTE



LEXICON

This is a working collection of terms I have deemed important to understanding my work at this time. Rather than dictionary definitions, I have provided my own definitions, as I've claimed the use of these terms in ways unique to my practice.

The first time these words appear in the book, they will be in **bold**. This signals a suggestion to check this LEXICON for an accurate understanding of the term in the context of this thesis.

18

SOUL

the deepest and most honest resonance of a being, the boundless ethereal essence that contains the truth of us, and transcends space, time, and dimension. I may use this interchangeably with SPIRIT but largely use this to refer to the human being.

SPIRIT

the Unseen presence of sentience, consciousness, feeling, and life within all things. I often use this interchangeably with SOUL, but more often apply this to non-human beings in an effort to avoid imposing a human-centered perspective on them.

THE BEYOND

a visualization of wherever our souls and spirits originate. I perceive this through the lens of the Divine, though I would not go so far as to call this a metaphor for God, but rather a realm within which the divine may, perhaps, be more accessible. This is the space of Creation, a borderless, boundless, fluid darkness in which the infinite churns. This is a space I yearn to return to, and do so only through deep listening and co-creation.

LISTENING

a meditative practice of hyper presence, releasing superficial concerns and distractions to connect to a deeper realm of spirit and truth. A pathway to communicate with human and non-human beings alike, through one's own spirit.

INTERIOR LANDSCAPE

a visualization of the inner world shaped by emotion.

THE GLITCH

an early metaphor for The Beyond, perceived through a digital lens.

BODY

the physical, material container of the spirit, or soul. I grapple with this term to describe both surface and interior experience.

CONSCIOUS REALITY

our lived experience, or where we primarily exist. The reality in which we are subject to systems, infrastructures, and institutions of our sociopolitical and economic creations, as well as our organic bodily needs. What can be referred to as AFK, or the real world.

ORIENTALISM

a term coined by Edward Said to describe the unequal and abusive hierarchy of power between the Western world and the racialized, Islamic North Africa and Middle East. Over time this has been expanded to include broader cultures of the Middle East, South and East Asia.

GLITCH FEMINISM

a school of thought I resonate with heavily, most notably authored in the text *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, by Legacy Russell. Described as "a new manifesto for cyberfeminism: finding liberation in the glitch between body, gender, and technology."

SITE

a physical location in the natural world; a landscape.

SUFISM

the Mystical branch of Islam.

DIASPORA ART

art made about diaspora, often remixing visual aesthetics from a far-off homeland, with contemporary Western cultural influences. I use this specifically in regards to the South Asian diaspora. This art is successful on Instagram and social media, but superficial, focused more on collecting cool cred, obtaining representation, and entering a Western psyche for Western approval. This is art made for commercial consumption, using elements of the past, with very little of substance to say about the future. This is art still trying to prove to Western institutions and audiences that we are important, and that we belong. This is not the same as art made by artists of the diaspora, which can be potent, provocative, and deeply meaningful. The concept is best explained and explored by Zarina Muhammad of *The White Pube*.

SOURCE

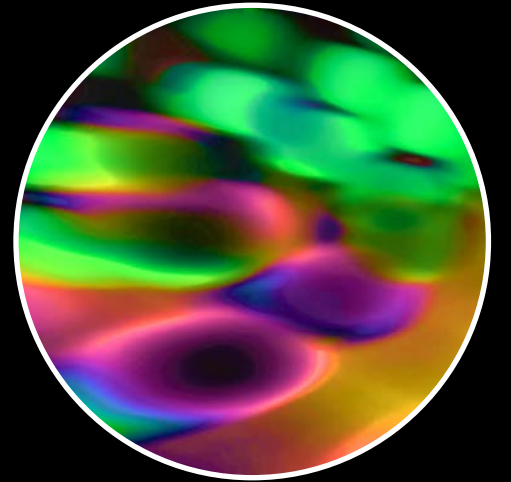
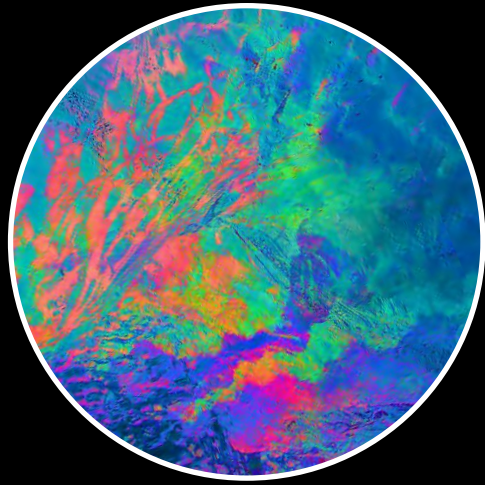
a word I am still uncertain how to define, as it is meant to subvert definition. It can loosely be used in connection with *The Beyond*, as a term referencing the origin of soul, spirit, life, and energy. Of all my metaphors, this is closest to the divine.

SOUP

the unbounded blend of art-work and life-work, the constant aggregation of all elements of life channeled into the art. A fluid approach to life unlocks a fluid approach to art. To be gloriously unfinished, constantly in flux, endlessly open to growth and evolution.

BUG SOUP


the stage of a caterpillar's growth in which it is in its chrysalis. During this process, the caterpillar's entire body dissolves into a dense fluid, and re-forms into the body of the butterfly that will later emerge. This stage is such a powerful one, and I often use it to describe the unlearning stage of my life, the stripping away of all surface distractions to the essence within, the churn of soup that reforms one anew.



PORTALS



These circles represent entry points. This book is not meant to be solely a linear experience. Topics and themes apply to each other, and to many projects, and nothing is easily categorized. These portals will guide alternate reading options: when one appears on a page, you can flip through the book to search out its corresponding exit (there may be many!) to find a different next step. This may color the way you perceive a project or interview in new ways, through the lens of what you've just read at a different point in the book.



Understood in this way, insanity is the dystopic version of self-annihilation. When the border distinguishing the self-in-body from the environment becomes too porous, the ontologically insecure person encounters nonbeing as pure horror. But for mystics, especially non-male mystics, this kind of *willing* self-corrosion is exactly the premise for divine contact and transcendence. The mystic finds joy in the dissolution of self—its “corruption or partition” on the way to nothingness. The insane person fights tooth and nail to retain ontological security out of fear. The mystic actively deconstructs the self in the name of love.

The Word Made Fresh, Elvia Wilk

on
BODIN,
WITTENBERG,
AND
MORIS

I have never felt in alignment with my body. It was always painfully clear to me that “I” existed beyond the physical body, existed somewhere within. Since I was a young child, I longed to simply *be*, liberated from the harsh rules that trapped my physical, material surface.

a methodology for existence

ON BODIES, WARM, COOL

I knew that the body I was born into was different from my brother's, and thus perpetually out of sync. I knew that when we played outside, he could run around as long as he wanted, but my mom would snatch me inside or push me into the shadows to preserve my fair skin color¹ and also to keep me hidden and safe.

I knew that I had to walk and sit differently when wearing a dress than when wearing pants. I knew that I had to be wary of my friends' older brothers, fathers, uncles, to read certain looks and discern whether they were harmless or indecent. I knew if it was the latter, somehow, it was my fault, something about my body that I hadn't hidden properly. I knew that even if these men my father's age were kind, I had to cover my softly blooming body in large shawls and long *kameezes*² when they came to our home in order to make sure they stayed that way; otherwise I risked embarrassing my parents.

I knew that if I was in trouble, women were safest to go to—but also that if they weren't trustworthy, they'd be the first to snitch, because it takes so long to unlearn our own participation in surveillance culture. I learned that if anything ever happened to me, anything at all, my father would first blame me: my outfits, my rebellious attitude, my stubborn independent streak, my irrepressible intellect, my provocative body that had the audacity to exist. I learned this from experience. I learned that my father's shame was my responsibility.

I knew I had to enter the mosque from a different entrance, and that I had to silence my own needs and desires in favor of my father's and future husband's moods instead. I knew that beauty was for men, not women: the beauty of the *masjid*,³ our access to the divine; the beauty of a woman, hidden and unsullied under swathes of garments; the beauty of independence, the privilege to exist in the world with meaning and purpose.

I knew that I was assigned a gender and a set of expectations around that based on the body I existed within, that it was growing curves and a softness that didn't reflect the savage, spiky blossom of rage surging within me. When I finally emerged from my long, cringey, awkward years, I learned very quickly that the beauty I'd inherited from my mother and grandmother carried both blessing and curse. I learned why pretty village girls in Bangladesh were married young, for their protection—though it didn't always turn out to be that. I learned to wield my beauty like a whip to establish respect, and I learned to wear it like a soft veil to elicit sympathy and protection. I learned that despite my upbringing, education, and superficial attractiveness, it was not enough to draw in a proper husband by the appointed time, and thus I had failed a mission I'd never chosen to undertake. I knew when my body was used and violated, there would be no justice given to me in this world.

I learned that no one cared about my dreams or talents or intellect, only about my sexual purity and my piety, when I'd marry, how much of my hair peeked out from under my *hijab*⁴ during prayer, or if my nail polish undermined their *wudu*.⁵ I learned that my body was not my own, that even during prayer strange women felt no qualms about pulling my shirt down to cover my rear, or adjusting my hijab to tuck stray hair away from view.

From birth, I was trapped by my body. I could not even fathom a world in which I could become one with it.

I didn't feel rage against gender itself, precisely. But I wanted the world to burn for using gender and sexuality to control and trap and terrorize. I sought escape from the multiple layers of control from patriarchy, religion, culture, heteronormativity, **Orientalism**, colonization, conservative Southern politics.

It wasn't until I understood my own queerness, that I looked at my own self with honesty, compassion, and love, that I realized the depth and nuances of my fury and pain. In releasing the truth of my soul to myself, I found all the walls I'd built within my own mind disintegrate. Gender was simply a spectrum of energies to me, and thus sexuality, love, attraction: all were borderless, undefined, unruly, glorious. In truth, all things became borderless to me, because this is how I exist in the world. In a wondrously undefined state of constant evolution.

I understood myself anew. Understood that I was drawn more often to women than men, that I liked confidence and insouciance across all genders, that I was enthralled by the feminine fire within the masculine and the masculine edge to the feminine—and everything in between. I felt something deeper shifting into place, a knowledge that though I was comfortable existing mostly within the feminine, I often felt myself tapping into both energies—sometimes one, sometimes another, sometimes both at once and sometimes neither—and a certainty that I had been many other beings in many previous lives.

[This body] was growing curves and a softness that didn't reflect the savage, spiky blossom of rage surging within me.

1. Colorism is a toxic remnant from colonization that continues to devastate South Asian cultures, with the most severe consequences borne by women. It has shaped my mother's entire concept of self, and the traumas that were handed down to her from the women of her family were then passed to me. Though I have strove to fight this, I myself hold the privilege of relatively fair skin, creating a further complexity around our discourse.

2. Long, traditional tops worn across South Asia. Often described as salwar kameez, a loose shirt, pant, and scarf combination. Though generally modest, the beauty, style, and coverage of the outfit varies widely.

3. Arabic word for mosque. Women's prayer halls are notoriously secondary to the men's. For further information, see my undergraduate thesis, *The Architecture of Power: An Analysis of Gender, Space, Imperialism, and Power in the London Central Mosque and Grande Mosquée de Paris*.



4. Veil; hair covering.

5. Ritual ablutions in preparation for prayer; a pure state of being.

I began to see bodies as porous, containers for souls that could emerge formless. A body did not have to be a cage, or singular; it could be a collective of dynamic energies, a community of microorganisms.

I understood that my eternal longing for androgyny came not only as a desire to be free of the unsolicited sexualization of a distinctive female body, but as a desire for my exterior to match the fluidity I felt inside, a body that could be a more flexible canvas, a face in the mirror that could adapt to my mercurial interior. I struggled in giving voice to these feelings, as they felt so at odds with the femininity of my physical self. I wasn't sure if I deserved it. I am not sure I am brave enough to explore it. I am not sure if my tangled feelings with the trappings of womanhood have created a false sense of my relationship to gender, that perhaps I am more challenged by existing as a woman in this world specifically, this **conscious reality**, than I am by existing as a woman at all. Truly, I do not know.

I had often said that I was not the daughter my parents wanted. I was too rebellious, too strong-willed, too inventive and independent and artistic.

Most egregiously, I did not agree with their perspective on the role of religion in my life, and I refused to accept that my beliefs and values were wrong. I apologized for many things, but I refused to apologize for who I was. What I never expressed was my uncertainty with the word "daughter" itself. I decided the words did not matter. I was more interested in meeting myself with sensory feelings. Perhaps I was something beyond known language.

I began to see bodies as porous, containers for souls that could emerge formless. A body did not have to be a cage, or singular; it could be a collective of dynamic energies, a community of microorganisms.⁶ Since souls were brought from a transcendent cosmic **Beyond**, caught up in a physical body for the sake of this conscious reality, it stood to reason that it was possible to transcend this state and return to our original one.

This is why my work pertains so much to the body, yet rarely features recognizable visual representation of the human body. I am less interested in body as material surface, and more in body as intangible experience.

I am drawn to the seas and the cosmos because they too refuse categorization. They refuse to be known, or stifled. The oceans have been separated by mankind, given geographical names, yet exist as a singular, interconnected World Ocean.⁷ Its borders are constantly shifting, waves lapping the shore, a new exchange between water droplets and grains of sand with each breath. The cosmos is ever expanding, its edges inconceivable, its contents and inhabitants unmappable. The ocean and cosmos alike are radically diverse and always transforming.

I take these spaces as inspiration and metaphor for the human soul—my own, at least. I cannot speak to any universal truth, or soul-ness for anyone else. These fantastical spaces above and

below represent the liberation and magic and honesty that my soul aspires to embody. I too seek constant evolution, infinite multiplicity, and the visceral, arresting beauty of the sea and outer-space.

This extends beyond the relationship of the human body. I am intrinsically motivated by the colonization of geographic, earthly bodies. Bodies of water, bodies of land.

The horrifically violent birth of Bangladesh was powerfully driven by the dangerous parceling of artificial borders enacted by the British as they left British India, carving a single land into two countries, one bisected by the other.

Through an artificial lens of "religious" unity, the Bengali people were forced into a new colonial relationship with Pakistan: a body literally cut in half and split apart. I am deeply sensitive to the completely unacknowledged genocide, rape, and trauma inflicted on my people, something the world does not care to learn of, and that is carried silently and passed down through generations, a bloody burden we are born carrying in our bones.⁸

The pain of our people is erased, but the legacy of being painted as primitive, unattractive, and deserving of brutality continues to bear down on our psyches, and still colors post-colonial intra-South Asian relations today, even throughout the diaspora. Bengali Muslims in India continue to face persecution while India and Bangladesh continue historic battles over water rights, with devastating consequences. Within Bangladesh itself, the dominant culture commits injustices against Indigenous tribes and Hindu minorities. The body of the nation continuous to carve itself up violently.

Growing up in Texas, I was raised in the midst of American political discourse—and crimes against humanity—at the Southern border. I developed a deep moral stance against walls and boundaries from Texas to Palestine, against the scarring of land and the exclusion and exploitation of human bodies and migration. The artificial human parceling of earth creates violent rifts in the physical and spiritual psyche of the planet, and allows governments to commit unimaginably brutal crimes against the most marginalized of people. These principles and laws ask us to turn away from refugees trying to make it to shore and leave entire rafts to capsize and drown, to close our eyes to children in cages ripped away from their parents indefinitely and left to suffer tragedy, to overlook barbaric abuse at checkpoints and monstrous walls that cut a native people away from their own land.

There are no borders to the rage I carry, a fury I channel into my work as an endless source from which to draw energy. I am unsure if the presence of this anger is sensed yet in my work—but perhaps *OtherWorld* is my response. To transcend the horrors of this existence by imagining something radically, immeasurably, undeniably free. To reach into the flames and find that it can birth something precious worth nurturing.

I am less interested in body as material surface, and more in body as intangible experience.

8. This history goes largely unacknowledged, and has been historically covered up by Pakistan and the United States. It is difficult to find accessible resources, but is easily verified by asking anyone from Bangladesh. This violent history—and the trauma of its erasure—continues to shape us. The Gravel Institute's short documentary, *How America Facilitated a Genocide in Bangladesh* provides a solid primer on this history.



HOW DOES THIS COSMOS DISSOLVE?

This project explores my relationship to the water, a recurring theme in my work, through an immersive two-channel video installation. The work is experienced as a meditative, sacred space, inviting the audience into an alternate world.

Through the project, I press deeper into my questions of sacred and divine connections to the land and cosmos, and imagine the Ocean as a nonhuman yet equally emotive entity whose voice I seek to understand.

INQUIRY

WHAT IS MY RELATIONSHIP TO THE WATER, AND SPECIFICALLY THE OCEAN? CAN I IMAGINE HER VOICE, AND WHAT WOULD SHE SAY?

MEDIA + MATERIALITY

VIDEO, ANIMATION, VIDEO INSTALLATION

DATE

SPRING + SUMMER 2022

PORTALS



Still from *How Does the Ocean Dream?*



I REMEMBER
ANCIENT TREES
UPROOTED.

A poetic narrative and experimental video is projected on the left screen, with audio recording of my voice reverberating throughout the room.

The screen on the right displays an animation of waves crashing over one another, reinforcing themes of resistance to borders, boundaries, and categorization present in the narrative.

How does the Ocean Dream? presents the beginning iteration for my desire to create blueprints for future worlds through questions about the divine connection to land and space, earth and sea and stars, and create an alternate space for this connection and communion. Tapping into my Bengali heritage, Islamic faith, childhood experience growing up in Houston, and the fundamental role of water—both dark and destructive yet sacred and centering—in my philosophy of existence, the project presents the beginning of a far greater journey to come.

In building the installation of this project, I sought to invite a larger audience into my interior landscape, yet found myself still limited by the walls of this room and the two-dimensionality of the projections. So I took the project into the high desert outside Marfa, Texas and projected it on a sparse 15-foot tall cliffside under cover of night.

There was something surreal to the process, to seeing a digital ocean spilling across a landscape that represents the absence of water, and a location where an ocean once was. A presence—maybe a few—watched us as we projected and filmed, hazy light from a passing car piercing the dark every now and then, the only sound that of the wildlife, wind, and my own voice ringing across the land.

While the original film features typographic narrative, I have elected not to include many of those stills in this book. In a future iteration of this project, I intend to allow the audio narrative to stand alone, and place typographic vinyl all over the floor, walls, ceilings, and surfaces of the room to reinforce the immersive quality of the narrative.



A shimmering textile forms a space-ship viewport corner from one side of the room to the other. The audience is invited inside; the first ones to enter sit at the prow where the waves and the sounds of the two channels converge, and the rest fill every corner of the room.

HOW DOES THE OCEAN DREAM?

Still from *How Does the
Ocean Dream?*

How does the ocean dream?

I was born carrying the water in my DNA,
saltwater like rage coursing through my veins.

I became my mother's mother when she lost her mother.
The ocean is Mother, source of life, mirroring the cosmos,
the mother of all life.

I told a boy once that I dreamt of the sea as sky, watched
whales sing and dolphins dance through starshowers.
I did not understand borders. I still do not.

I learned to design buildings but I wanted to design
spaceships instead, spaceships built for cosmic seas.
I wanted to watch the sea take over the earth.

In childhood I learned the land my parents left would
be first to disappear off the map, the first to drown like
Atlantis. I began to wonder, what would the world look
like if the ocean reclaimed her place, and we made
cities in bubbles under the sea?

How might an outfit made of fish-scales feel? How might a
space-suit inspired by saris drape?

I remember sleeping in the hallway, taping our windows
because my parents didn't know to buy wooden boards,
eating canned food in the dark, waiting anxiously for
the hurricane to pass and the electricity, days later,
to return. I remember ancient trees uprooted, a wall of
tangled roots, giants finally laid to rest.



*“Know that
the secret of life
permeates water,
which itself is
the origin of the
elements and the
four supports...
Everything
is living and
everything has its
origin in water.”*

—Ibn ‘Arabī

At the edge of the sea, I feel my soul align with the depths of the earth and the heights of the galaxies.

When I can't breathe, I head to the sea. When I feel thin as paper, I head to the sea. When I want to see the shimmering depths of another soul, I take them to the sea. I go to the sea with what is most sacred to me.

I watch sherbet skies spill into crashing waves. And I think again about borders, about the sky and the sea and how they ache for one another.

Nanu and I bottled hurricane souls into lives too small to hold us. I think I've found a way to make mine bigger now. I know I will always be reborn.

My first best friend and I watched lightning crash across the sky and the water kiss the shore. He said the water felt like silk. I thought it felt like stars. I am nearing 3 decades of life on this planet and I still see the sea in the sky. I will never understand borders.

I read of the women of the Sundarbans fighting to save their homes, wearing emerald saris and crossing the rivers in nokas whilst nurturing the mangroves that protect against monsoon floods and raging cyclones.

I read of women tapping into their deep Indigenous knowledge and nourishing and protecting the planet while men with degrees and money and voices and clout fight and extract, and I think it is love that will save us, because we protect what we love. We call the planet Mother but every mother needs a mother, and it is women who adopt the earth as their child.

I wonder still, how does the ocean dream?



DIGITAL MANIPULATION

This project is an experimental exploration of giving form to interior emotional landscapes. Through playful testing of new technologies, I became drawn to contrasting curves and feathered spikes. I developed language for this theme as a formal and tactile exploration of the tension between the sensual and the aggressive, between sharp and graceful, invitation and resistance, desire and repulsion, the familiar and alien.

The project explored this through a series of drawings and the leap to 3D printed forms that embodied this theme. With a back and forth process between digital sculpture and physical analog manipulation, it was important to consider the haptic experience of these forms.

INQUIRY

HOW CAN I GIVE VISUAL, SENSORY,
AND MATERIAL FORM TO THE TENSION
BETWEEN SENSUALITY AND AGGRESSION?

MEDIA + MATERIALITY

DIGITAL MODELING, 3D PRINTING,
POST-PRODUCTION

DATE

FALL 2021

PORTALS



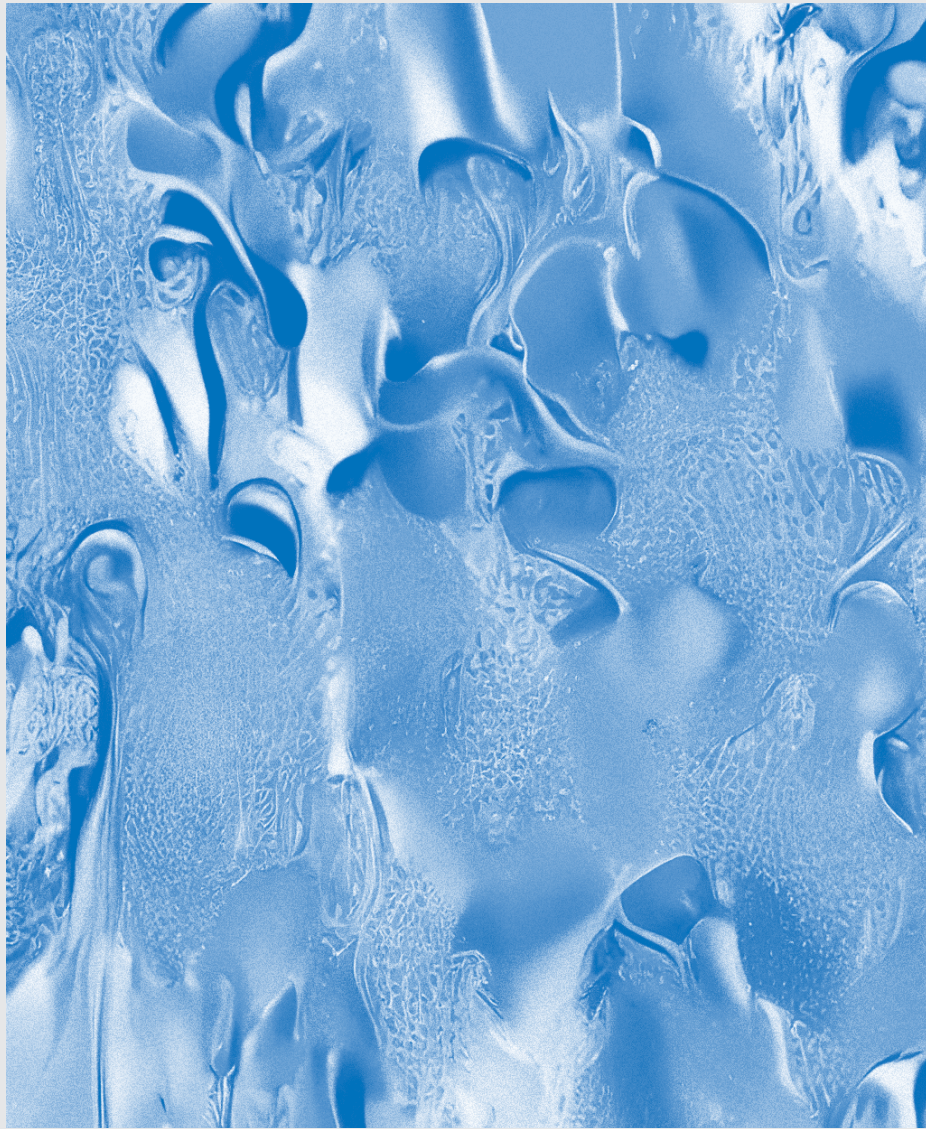
Built through an intuitively
considered process in Rhino,
the resulting geometries
were 3D printed at various
scales to fit the human hand
in a variety of ways.



Experiments in miniature.



Finally, I hyper polished the forms to feel like sleek obsidian, so the holistic experience of holding them would add to the feeling of sensuality and aggression.



I first met Lian several days after school started, but the first thing we talked about was the deserts of West Texas, the drive from California to the East Coast, and snails. She told me I had to give her all the tips on where to eat and how to enjoy Providence, because I'd already been living here.

One of the warmest memories I have with Lian is walking from New Rivers to Hot Club one night for Moritz's birthday celebration. It was a surprisingly cold night, and Lian folded me into her puffy coat and we walked the entire way with our arms around each other.

Now I have night jasmine blossoms on my arm, illustrated and inked by @lianpokes. We left studio to sit in the sun downtown for this conversation.

SADIA: Treat this very casually. I know it feels formal because I have these questions printed out, but they're fun questions.

LIAN: Okay.

Okay, so I would like to start by asking what or where is your sacred space and how would you describe it?

It's a matter of what's sacred to me, and I would associate with the word sacred: personal or comfortable. And then I would say my home. It's a literal space which I tend to work in most of the time, because I really care about environment and I can't work in public spaces because it's maybe too hot or too cold, or I can't go get a blanket, or I can't get a snack anytime I want. Stuff like that. [laughter]

We're exactly the same.

So I feel like I really value having a space that I'm completely, totally comfortable in which is generally where I live.

Car blasting loud music drives by and we laugh.

It's okay. You'll still be able to hear us, I think. For example, if I were working right here, I would be very distracted right now.

Which is what we're trying to do. I think it's an interesting question to ask of you specifically, because you create space, you make your environment and you make it sacred to you—the way that you handled any of your presentations, you always turn it into the home space.

It's curation to a certain extent. I think we were talking about this in my review too, because I made that a home space, but you can never fully transfer your own space, so it becomes this in-between.

I think that it's something about the home, but I'm always very sensitive to natural light, and I remember for the last review, I said I wanna be near the window in the Fletcher because it gets natural light. And people said, *Oh, but your work might not always have natural light*, and I was like, *well it will if I want it to*. You can control things even though you feel like they're out of your control. So I try to do that with how I work and how I present my work to the best extent that I can.

What is the quality of light that you need? For you as a person, just to function.

I need natural light! I would ideally always like to be working by a window, because I can sense time passing. When I was in LA, I worked in front of this window and there was a yard, and every now and then there were little creatures that would come in front of this, sometimes it was a big lizard right in front of me.

Or there was a squirrel or a bee or a butterfly, or things like that, and I feel like when you have a window, the distractions are more welcome because as opposed to being in a space like a coffee shop, they're a bit more infrequent, so when they do happen, it feels like a little magical moment. I don't know, but that was my favorite working spot because the creatures came to me.

You're a Disney princess.

The creatures came to me.

You're literally Snow White. You even look like Snow White!

I *have* been feeding the birds and the squirrels.

Do you trace this to your childhood? Do you think if you grew up in a place without sunlight, would you have the same sort of desire?

Probably not. I think a lot of who we are is how we grew up, and that's why I like to do personal work, and I also encourage people to do personal work because I feel like even if it doesn't end up being what you want to show the world, it's still important. One thing I've learned the past two years is how much—especially with everyone in the program being more from the East Coast or the middle of America or different cultures—but how much California has actually influenced the way that I live my life. And maybe it's just me too.

What do you mean?

It's not like everyone from California is like that.

It's your memory, and your translation of California and what it means to you.

Right. And I wish everyone could experience as much sun as possible, so I try to build that in. I made this app over winter session called SunStream. It's a 24-hour song, and the sound changes based on the position of the sun.

Wait, have we seen this?

No, it's not an app yet, it's a website, but the goal's to turn it into an app so that you can actually have it on your phone and walk with it, or turn your phone off and continue to listen to it at night. It generates different sounds based on time of day.

At night, the wind picks up a lot, but my advisor Kathleen said something really nice, which I hadn't thought of before: I'm allowing the sun to be available at all times. And so there was this accessibility aspect to bringing something to people that they might not normally have access to in their daily lives, which I think is important.

57

I'm curious because we're bringing up this idea of constancy, that sunlight is always available, but in architecture there's this idea of removing something to build up anticipation. For me, seasons are so lovely because I appreciate each one because I know it's finite.

That's so true.

How does that work for you?

When we went on the walk with Laurel [Schwulst] last summer, she was also talking about how she'd worked with these architects, and they had this concept called withholding, and maybe that's the same thing. That's also a very good point, because I think my favorite part about the East Coast is that you have these awful seasons of winter, but then when you get the good seasons, they're that much more delightful because you can feel the change.

Whereas in California, those minute changes are so small and they're almost unnoticeable, and you don't get that euphoria of the first crisp day of fall, and the first warm day of summer. That's the worst thing about the West Coast.

It's too perfect all the time!

But it's true. You can't have everything. Part of life is having the ups and the downs. The ups wouldn't be up if there weren't any downs. I think it's about bringing in something, but also allowing for variability within that thing, like the sun app also allows you to close the blinds, which I forgot to mention. So it's based on the idea of Circadian Rhythms; if you wanna take a nap in the middle of the day, then you close the blinds.

The song changes to something that's more mellow, so it's like the sun's always with you, but your relationship to it is variable. Variabilities are something I'm interested in exploring. I like setting constraints, but then I like having those constraints be the foundation. They allow you to have something to go against if you want, and I think that's a larger part of graphic design too: having a brief. You're given something and then you have to figure out what to do with it or not. Sometimes in grad school, we're creating something from nothing.

Church bells ring.

Bells! And also in my app, bells ring every hour.

It's got everything!

Bells continue ringing.

This better be in the interview! Okay, you can ask.

As a creative person, where is the source of your creative energy? Is there an energy exchange that occurs between you and something or someone else as you work?

I'm trying to think what gives me energy. I feel like I get energy when I'm excited about something; usually the burst of energies are at the beginning, and closer to the end because you're really excited and then you have to figure out how to do something—and then you try it and it doesn't work. And then you're not so excited.

Once you start to get on a roll and you start to get into a flow state—energy flow is where I get energy from. When you're making and it's making sense and things are going off of each other, then my energy starts to pick up, whereas when it's more stop and start, maybe you have a burst, but you lose it quickly. It's more like maintaining that flow state.

Do you think that the energy channels are already there and you're tapping into it and accessing it? Or do you have to create that momentum?

I think they're there, but it's about connecting them together, so the flow can be the strongest, like little streams to make a river.

So you're weaving. You're pulling all these existing channels of energy together.

I think so, I mean, I don't know. I don't think I've ever really thought of it that way, but I think it is. That's how I always talk about design, in terms of sequencing, combining. That's the power that we have—to take all these disparate elements and make them work together.

So that is a nice way to think about it. When they start to come together and they start to be more powerful than when they're separate.

Like our project!

Yeah like our project!

I feel like ours is almost cyclical because it's an exchange, but building on the river idea, could a river just loop back on itself? A looping river.

Also, maybe exchange is the wrong word. I don't think we're tied to the title. Maybe it is more like a flowing stream, and it's more about emerging than an exchange.

I like that. We're already in proximity and we're just reaching over, holding hands, and combining.

Yeah, I like that.

Okay, a little bit of a change. What are your personal rituals? You can define that in any way you like.

Mmm! Taking a bath. Every day, sometimes twice.

How did this start?

I think baths are genetic, passed down, hereditary. Okay, no, that's not the right way to put it, but I do think bathtaking is something that oftentimes gets passed down. My grandmother was British, so she took baths because that's a very European thing to do, and so my mom started taking baths—I actually don't know why my dad takes baths—but either way they both take baths.

There's a history of bathtaking in China!

Oh yeah, that's true. It is an Asian thing, but also he lived in New Jersey, so I don't actually know whether his parents did or not. But I grew up taking baths, and I find comfort in it. My blood runs cold, so I like to be warm. Often I am working around three or four PM in the winter, and my body just feels cold and I get distracted and I can't work because my hands are a little bit too cold, so I take a bath. [laughter]

Okay, this ties into another question.

This maybe isn't the ritual that you are aiming for, but I feel like that is potentially my biggest ritual.

Okay, so this is all still the same conversation, because I was gonna ask you, what is the relationship between your body and your creative process, and I didn't expect you to say that when you get cold, your brain literally can't focus anymore.

Yes, yeah. And that ties into my sacred space too, because I need to feel like the atmosphere is enveloping. So it all ties together and it all goes back to being cold and wanting the sun.

So your body is crucial to your work.

Maybe not in the sense of, in some ways that other people's is. I think mine's more about a comfort level for my mind, less physical, I guess that's all tied together.

I think this may come more from faith traditions, like body as a temple, but there are a lot of other ways to conceive of your relationship to your body.

I feel like I don't think about it actively, and that's probably because I don't have a faith connection. My posture is so bad. It's not like I'm trying to take care of my body.

But you can listen when it shuts down.

When you feel like you've been sitting in one spot for too long, and it's not helpful for your mind for working, then going on a walk or doing something; it's more helpful to get back into a flow when you come back, than it is to continue being in your body where you are.

There's traditional notions of success in design, but I think it's important to push against that a little bit and wander more.



60



61

So there's things that take you out of your body and you're trying to center yourself back in or come back to alignment?

I think so. I think so?

I might be using different language, I think we're using different words.

But maybe saying similar things. Yeah, okay.

I like that about us, which was why I wanted to talk to you; I feel like there's a lot of things that we talk about but we might focus on a different angle of it, or you say different words or visuals to describe.

And I think we're also talking about, or at least it's been a big conversation for me, about self-care and what that means to you too. It doesn't necessarily mean millennial self-care or that industry. It can mean something more. It's self preservation too. And it has so many connections to everything, like what it means to take care of yourself.

Well, self-care started from activists, right? I think it was Black feminist activists working in that space who brought up the notion of self-care to talk about the need to create a sustainable lifestyle for yourself because they could not sustain their work and activism without really looking after their mental and physical health.

The world wasn't really about to do that because of how capitalistic our society is, and then the millennial adoption of that just fueled capitalism because it became about brands and things that enhance your ability to work better and to do more, it fueled a machine, but yours is sort of—

Mine's a little bit intertwined in that because I did work in that industry. I've realized recently that potentially some of the places where I'm coming from or maybe pushing against sometimes are about reframing that idea because I did work in it.

While I was working, a big criticism was that you're making these things that are self-care but only certain people can afford them, generally a very specific demographic of 30-year old white women. And yeah, it's that idea of who has access to self-care, who

has access to leisure and I think that's as important to think about. I think about that a lot. There's no solution really. You do have to make money.

We'll table that conversation because that's not what I'm trying to talk about in this. Money will always be a problem.

Collective groan.

Okay, you can edit that out.

I think we talked about this a little bit, but your work is about self-care, and it's a lot about nature. What is their relationship and why do you work so much with the natural world?

Because you talk about environment a lot, but it seems like there's a very specific kind of space, a very real tangible space that you're connected to.

It goes to how I was brought up having access to nature, which was a privilege. And a lot of my work also talks about the power in the small, so even if it's just a little park, you can find beauty if you pay attention and you can still find peace in similar environments even if you don't have access.

I find that's my self-care: within nature, so I often work to that place, but I think I've consciously held back from making it so upfront in terms of my work is about nature only. I think that's my through-way through my ideas, but I am very aware that that's not necessarily accessible to everyone too. So some of the things I make are a screensaver that shows the tide, where everyone has a desktop, generally, not always. But something that can be fractalized.

You're still widening accessibility.

I'm interested in the fact that you can learn from nature, so thinking again about fractalization, like natural patterns, the relationship between trees, metaphors within the natural world that we've been separated from as we've progressed as a society because we're more indoors than we are outdoors, so I'm interested in bringing those things back together and seeing what happens.

How are you handling being on the East Coast? Something I've been thinking about is that I went to Montreal, took my camera, I took all my gear. I thought, I'm going to film, I want to make stuff and bring it back and work and make a project out of it.

But it was so cold and barren?

It wasn't even that, it was the fact that it was an urban space and I didn't realize this because I studied architecture, I like—no, I love urban spaces, I love built form, but I like it personally, I don't make art here, I don't feel connected to a voice. Being in a natural space, there's an isolation to it, so I can listen and I can hear its spirit. I realize that I can make art when I'm deeply in nature, but when I'm in an urban environment, that's not where I create, so I'm thinking about how tied you are to California, but you're able to make work anywhere you're at.

I talked about my home being the space where, as long as I have that I can make work, so it's less about being in nature and more using it as an inspiration point. If I was in a complete concrete jungle with no greenery, that would be really sad and maybe I wouldn't be inspired often.

You'd just wilt!

I am looking forward to spring in Providence. Last spring I was very generative, and I'm curious to see if that happens again. The simplest things like the weather can change your mood, but I find I can create in most places, as long as I'm comfortable.

I have an idea about this, but I'm just curious because I feel like it's something you and I don't naturally talk about—is there a difference between an external sense of self, like what others think of you versus your internal sense of self? How do you think of yourself? Do you feel like there's consistency, that how you think of yourself is also how others perceive you?

I don't know. I think I do a pretty good job of being open. I think I confuse people sometimes. So yeah, I feel like there's a consistency, but I think that's always the struggle.

I think that's part of the thing I've been thinking about a lot as I make in school and the design industry itself. A lot of it is driven by people wanting to be perceived a certain way, and I think it's also an inherent human want, you want to get recognition, you want to work at the top name agency, you want credibility; this linearity, this hierarchy, first you work here then you work there and then you're successful. I mean: own an agency.

There's just traditional notions of success in the world, but also specifically in design, so I'm always thinking about that and what's actually important to me and trying to—not that I'm always successful at that, I still want things—but I think it's important to push against that a little bit and wander more.

How do you push against it?

My body of work is about wandering and pushing against it.

Everything, everything you do. I think time is a big way that you push against it.

Yeah, and this is what the grad school experience has been, is that figuring out of how to articulate it. I think the biggest way we can push against it is being aware of it, talking about it more, being more open. Even how much people make, there's a lot of gatekeeping within the industry, and a lot of thought about what is successful.

There's not a lot of value put on wandering or finding your way through other pathways that are less traditional, so I feel like talking about it more, paying things forward, is a big thing that is not always common. Just helping people out, everyone is connected, and if one person wins, we all win. That kind of attitude is like one way that you can also push against it.

On that note, last question. How would you define, or maybe describe is a better word, your community?

People who like snails, which there are quite a lot of. And spirals!

Are those people usually one and the same people? Snail people and Spiral people?

Yeah, usually. Those snail people. I guess there's a professional community, right. Then there's a friends and family community, and then there's also where

I'm very aware that [nature is] not necessarily accessible to everyone, so some of the things I make can be fractalized.

02

I wish everyone could experience as much sun as possible.

05

they bleed together, but I generally, when I make work, think about community starting small and starting with friends and family. I think friends and family are my biggest community, instead of the local community or something larger, so I think small.

It's your heart community.

Yeah, it's people that I feel comfortable with. And I feel like that's true for everyone, but I do feel like sometimes you make work and you can either share broadly or you can share it small. There's a few different starting points, and at least for me, I always start small.

I think you've done a really amazing job of that. The work you make doesn't sit here. It's also not sold or it's not given to a public audience that you don't necessarily know, the next step is you immediately sent to your friends, and then you let it wander from that point.

Yeah, I think the more you share, the bigger your community can get.

Is that valuable to you, to make your community grow?

I think so. I don't think it's fruitful to make in isolation because you need energy from others. I need energy from others to sustain myself, and not just praise, but ideas. It's easy to get stuck in your head by working in isolation, but to move forward and to reflect and to have new perspective on things you need others.

Even just the friction from bumping up against one another.

I think perspective is huge. It's easy to lose, but if you have people in your life that can give you a new perspective or you have those moments where you can have rituals or return to something that gives you perspective, that's the most fruitful points in a journey.

Like our journey here! And where it's going to lead and where it will take us all.

Exactly. Grad school is great in that way, it gives you a new perspective because you're taken out of your daily routine in a lot of ways.

You create a new one, but you're sort of co-creating within and with a whole new set of people.

And we'll have to return—well, *some* of us will have to return to reality.

Everyone's going somewhere!

We're all going somewhere. And yeah, I think we will all have more perspective when we leave, than when we came in, and I think that's really valuable.

Yeah, to be transformed and to be open to it. Because I think it's easy to move towards a transformation, everyone knows you come to grad school and you will be someone else, it's

easy to come here trying to control that, but I think what you're talking about about by new perspectives is giving up that control and the shape that you'll come out is something you couldn't have predicted because you reach new depths or horizons within yourself.

Yeah, exactly, yeah. And you can't predict the future either when you leave. Being okay with losing some of that control. That's the benefit that I've found here.

Like us sitting together.

Who could have predicted?

It was meant to be!

I *knowwww*, and look, the sun came out!

AVATAR BUILDING A WATER BATH

This interactive web project is an investigation of the visual markers of identity through the form of my simulated body. Taking inspiration from paper dolls and video game avatars, I am working to question the visual language and form of identity as it relates to the interior and exterior self.

In applying my photos, art, and visuals to the surface of the body, I ask if how I see and process the world could inform and become how the world, in return, sees me.



INQUIRY

CAN THE INTERIOR LANDSCAPE BE APPLIED TO THE SURFACE OF THE BODY, AND WHAT MEANING DOES THAT CARRY?

MEDIA + MATERIALITY

3D SCANNING, INTERACTIVE WEB DESIGN

DATE

FALL 2022

COLLABORATORS

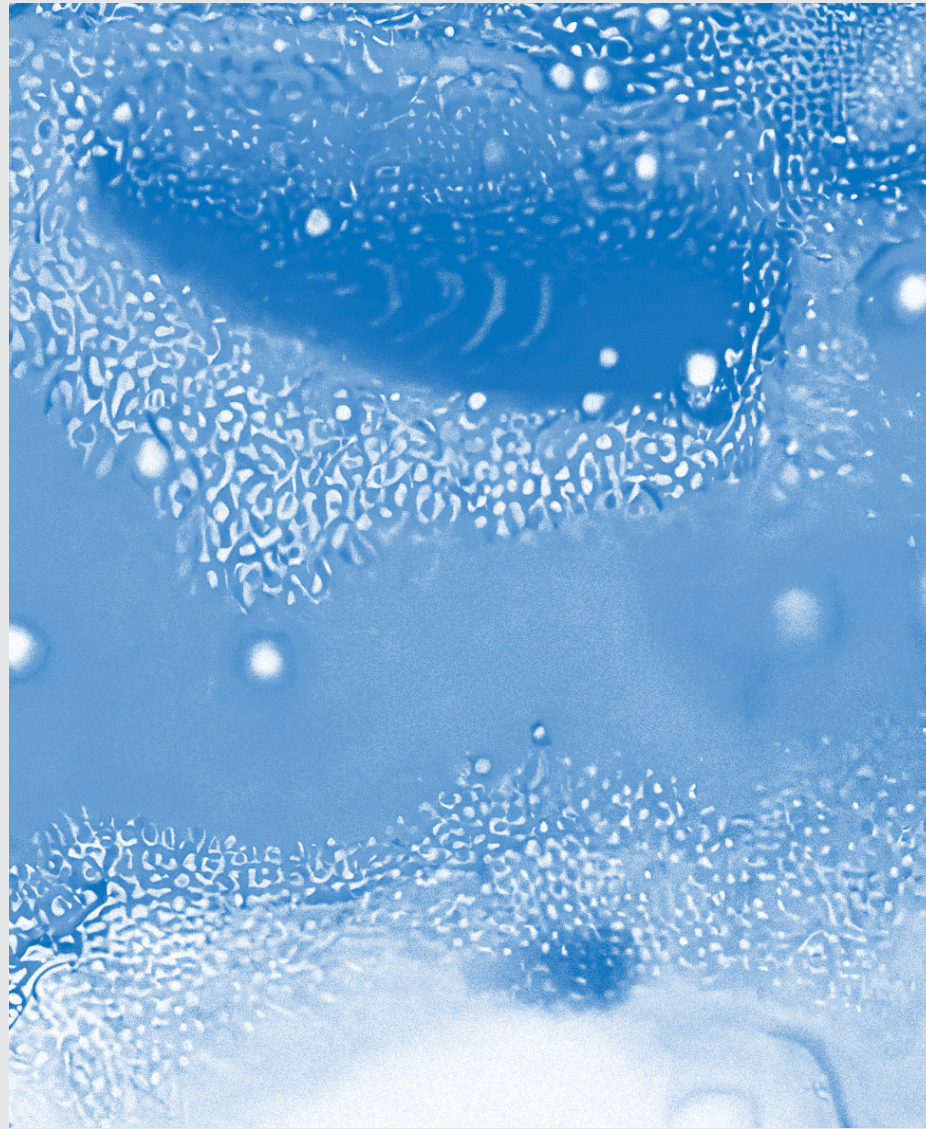
DOUGAL HENKEN

PORTALS





I have always been a glitch in the worlds I inhabit. As the glitch, I am a generative space of endless possibilities. To recreate myself anew, I let my outsides match my insides. Who I am is all that I love and make and see.



Hillary and I first met during an Orientation social event. I refused to move from one place as the crowd swirled around me, and she stood with me refusing to move as well. She had strawberry earrings and looked like sunshine. We were super awkward with each other, and fully aware of it.

We felt out of place at RISD together, and while our cohort spent the weekends in studio, we sought long wooded hikes, flower-painted in her apartment while she made toys, walked for hours during quarantine, and sought inspiration out in the world.

In the year we took off from RISD, she was one of the few humans I spoke to, FaceTiming from Oakland to Houston. We met over Zoom for this chat.

screaming noises

HILLARY: Did it just start with me screaming?

SADIA: Yes!

Good.

Bam! And that's how we start.

That is beautiful. I was saying, what a throwback with the RISD zoom room.

How's it going, how are you, how's your week been?

This is making it so much *beterrrrrrr!!* I'm fine, I don't know. I feel like the weather has been awful out here, so I've been inside quite a bit.

What kind of awful? There can be many kinds of awful.

Rainy and cold kind of awful.

I feel like you are dealing with New England weather, which you despise.

The other day I was like, *God, why do I feel so bad?* I'm like, *oh it's because I haven't been able to get outside in three days.*

So first of all, thank you for doing this with me. Were there any questions that stood out to you or would you prefer that I—

Lead the way!

Let's start with the first one, because it's the first thing I notice whenever we zoom. What is your sacred space?

I've been thinking about this, and as much as space is literally so critical to me as a human being—meaning geography—I also think that the most sacred space is really just myself. My body and my mind and how they're linked together.

So it's not necessarily attached to a physical location, although that makes a difference and we know that, but I'm thinking of my body as my house and making sure that my house is in order. I feel like that is the most sacred thing to me, and without it, if something slips, whether that's mental health or being stressed and in a physical location that stresses me out, then things start to go awry. Sacred space is really just my own body.

How did you take care of that space though? What do you listen to? How do you speak to your body?

Interesting. Oh, you mean my intuition?

However you wanna define it. I think surely, in order to take care of your body, you're communicating with it. Even the

way you talk about it, it's almost like there's body as space, body as— not object, but something separate from yourself. What do you think about when you think about that relationship between Hillary and Hillary's body?

Right, right. I think, honestly, as much as I am, of course, my physical body, I also think it is a place to retreat to and remember myself when I've abandoned myself in any kind of way, and so I take care of it.

This is something I learned this last year: stability. That means stability physically and financially. Making sure my peace is protected, that's the number one thing that I listen to and is the most important thing in terms of me being able to return back to myself. If something is unstable in my life, then it is difficult to feel at home in my body and feel connected. Does that make sense?

Definitely, but I think that also makes me wonder: How does your body tell you that it's uncomfortable?

It's hard because it's really just like a gut feeling, and I think I'm someone who can convince myself out of that feeling pretty easily and with a lot of confidence. Yes. But let's take for example, when I was a student at RISD and I knew that it wasn't the right place for me. I feel like there's a signal, it's a gut feeling, and I know that's not specific, but it's also *so* specific to know, *oh, I don't feel at home here*, or something is awry, and I need to make a change somewhere.

That makes sense though, the idea that there's a language that only you possess the keys to perceive and understand.

25

Thinking about the sacred space, it's that connection of feeling like my house is in order, the house being my body. In feeling connected and at peace and supported by that space.

How do you keep yourself grounded and keep your peace and stability? Although personal rituals could be different things.

Do you mean daily rituals?

Anything. It could be personal rituals before you start making something to get your mind or thoughts in order, or a daily practice. Do you consider yourself someone with rituals? Maybe that's an easier place to start.

I think I do have rituals, I wouldn't necessarily be like, *well, it's time for my rituals*, but I do think I'm a creature of habit, and again, it goes back to that idea of needing stability. I get stability through the things that I can exercise—not work out—but exercise no matter where I'm located and no matter what I'm doing. The things that help me catch my breath and feel okay.

I'm an early morning person, and I now block out a whole hour to literally sit and do nothing and think and drink my coffee, and just experience the world waking up and sort of being

alive with it. That's so special to me. When I don't have those mornings, it's a bad day—I'm just not feeling at peace. My morning time is definitely something that I go back to again and again.

In terms of creating, I'm a bit haphazard. When I know I wanna sit down and create, I need to trick myself into not overemphasizing, *okay, time to go make something*, otherwise, I'll freak out.

So how do you ease into it?

I know that my process is *bananas*, and I know that it takes me a long time, but I also know that my first idea is often the idea that I stick with, and then I go through all these little loops until I get back to my first idea, and I drive myself crazy, and then I'll finish something in 20 minutes or whatever, a very quick amount of time after really taking a very long time through all the side streets.

So I ease myself into that by playing some music, maybe having a little coffee, going on a little walk. I feel like that's super helpful. I also open up all the windows and let air into my space and let the place breathe. Just to get back to that sense of, *okay, it's chill. We're good. I'm excited, I'm at peace. Let's go.*

It's like you become in sync with everything around you. Even when you said "letting the house breathe." It's the environment, you; everything has to be coexisting and in sync and working

together, so it's not work. This might be me approaching from the lens of my own process, but listening to that, I'm thinking it's this idea of letting go of all the extraneous stuff and drifting down a couple of layers of the universe. All the spirits, you, your house, your plants, the work itself, whatever it is that's

asking to be made, can all be quiet and listen to each other. You're quieting the outside world and the outside expectations, so you can actually hear the important voices.

Yes, exactly. Actually, that's so beautiful. I think because I'm someone who's so connected to space and to our environment, making sure that it all feels very copacetic and groovy and there's no urgency, there's no rush, I feel like all of that comes together so that I can move in sync with the things around me, and the elements around me.

You're so attuned to your environment and we've seen you physically blossom under sunlight and you physically wilt in the cold, dreary New England, New York, urban space.

I know that the answer is yes, but I'm curious. We haven't talked about this in awhile, how your thoughts have developed further, but how does that factor into your creative energy and your ability to tap into this creative energy?

Are you asking about East Coast versus West Coast?

I am asking about East Coast versus West Coast, but I'm also asking about that sensitivity that you have to your environment and how you are always in sync with it in some way, how that relationship also factors into your creative energies.

Yeah, that makes sense. To me, it's one and the same really. I would say when I'm feeling wilty or feeling clouded, then the desire or inspiration to create is absent, which makes me wonder if I had just done grad school on the West Coast maybe I would have been fine. Probably not.

Do you want to join me?

Did you get in?

I mean, I don't know yet where I will be, but hopefully we will be [dramatic pause] *close* soon.

I'm not gonna—I just—*oh my goodness*. Well, I'm so proud of you. Let's get back to the interview.

East coast, West coast, creative energies, go!

Okay, here's how I think of myself. My space. I think of myself as literally a seaside cottage, and it's a place that I can leave and come back to, but I am a seaside cottage on a craggy cliff in the California coast, and sometimes when you leave it, the air gets kind of trapped and dusty and stale.

But sometimes you have to leave yourself to go take care of things, whatever. Then you come back, you open up all the windows and you let the sunlight in, and that changes the ions. And when that happens, you're able to notice new things. Maybe the sun is sparkling on some new object within the house of my soul, whatever.

To me, both the physical geography of Northern California is so special to me—it feels very much imprinted on me—but being able to go and now I'm rambling and I don't know what I'm saying, but being able to go and explore new pieces of the world, I think is important. But at the end of the day, I can always return to my little seaside cottage and open up all the doors and windows, and let the air in.

I love that. That's beautiful. Well, okay, there's a question that I feel like I have to ask next, because of the way you said that: this is how you would define yourself, in one sense of it. How would the world define you, and would you have a different, counter definition?

I don't know, that's not something I think about all that much, to be honest, about how the world defines me, but of course it's a part of how I operate and take place in the world. I'm gonna have to think about that one. I'm curious to hear what you would think the world would say about me.

Well, when I think about my experience with you and the outside world, honestly, it's so limited to our time at RISD, and the archetypes that we were labeled under when we came in and you were assigned this label that you did not fit comfortably within. It wasn't you at all!

There were friendships that were extended to you or expected of you, or the behaviors that were expected of you did not sync up with who you actually were as a person

because things about you on paper—being an artsy film girl from New York—then you turned that to be so chill and silly and playful, it's not that those other definitions didn't allow you to be those things, it's just that there wasn't room for you to define yourself.

I think for me, watching from afar—well, watching from beside you—the friction that that caused because of the expectation of you versus who you turned out to be. I wonder if that happened to you in other spaces.

Hearing you say that back to me, I feel like my whole life, people sort of assume I'm this cool, artsy, aloof kind of girl, and while I am those things, I'm also so much more than that. And also, I don't really care if that's how people see me. That's fine. It's not up to me really.

Backtracking a little bit, the reason I even thought that I needed to go to grad school was to fit into that concept that was being thrust upon me: *Oh, you're so creative, you're so cool.*

I'm like, *OK! I don't know what to do with that. I guess I'll go to grad school, I don't know what's going on.* I'm feeling I needed to, in some ways, prove that, and then of course, once I got to grad school, *yeeurgh*. It just wasn't for me, and it also just wasn't really something I wanted to be doing with my time, because ultimately it was about proving something to other people.

I didn't need the internal validation. Maybe to some degree getting in feels good, but I didn't need that validation, and then the feeling of being misunderstood is so awful, but eventually you get to a point in your life where you accept that no one's gonna understand me, but it's also really not up to me to get people to understand me, they either will and they'll be curious and openhearted and open minded about who I am and how I'm presenting, or they won't. And that's fine. I also think in your life, you go through different seasons.

As a creative person, where is the source of your creative energy? Is there an energy exchange that occurs between you and something else or someone else as you work?

My answer is twofold. First, I can feel a source of creative energy in relation to the people that I surrounded myself with or the conversations I have. Even now as I'm talking to you, you're someone who reminds me so much of creativity and making and all these wonderful things, so that's a source, of course. Or it's an input. So being in community. And it's certain friends, it's not with all friends, because friends serve different purposes.

I feel like that's a big piece of it for me, but another big piece of it could even be listening to a cool podcast or seeing a cool movie that makes me go, *ooooh!* So those are some of the inputs. Like source inputs, I guess. I don't love this metaphor because it feels like a computer.

Which is funny because you do gravitate towards certain computery things. And then you're always like, *What am I doing? Yeeurgh!*

Sometimes you have to leave yourself to take care of things. Then you come back, you open up all the windows and you let the sunlight in, and that changes the ions. And when that happens, you're able to notice new things. Maybe the sun is sparkling on some new object within the house of my soul.

I think another important source is obviously being in nature and feeling a communion with nature. That could just mean going on a bike ride and seeing new sites or on a hike. Those are very literal, but also it could be the weather; those are also sources of creative energy for me.

Finally, I feel, again, it's coming back to me feeling at home in my body and feeling stable, being able to push out any of the urgent requests that could happen in any kind of daily life, when that stuff flushes away and I'm struck with an idea.

You said something that I wanted to dig into more. You talk about communing with nature and I'm interested in "communing with nature" as a phrase because it is used a lot, but I think it means something so different to everyone. How would you describe what it means for you?

It really means the reminder that I am so small and the world is so big, and I'm one of nine million species—I'm not that important, and it's the reminder that I am part of this big natural system.

For example, if I'm skiing and I'm sliding down this terrifying cliff and I am so small and the world is surrounded by snow and all these scary things could happen, I feel like that's a nice reminder that's communing with nature: *I hope you got my back*. But it also could be going on a walk through my neighborhood and looking at a beautiful flower and thinking the world goes on regardless of my opinion of it, or regardless of whatever

happens to me. It is feeling a part of this huge natural system, and sometimes that's scary and sometimes that's lovely. It's just like the feeling of being small in a world that is so big.

I was in Montreal a few weeks ago, and something I realized while I was there: I took all of my camera gear and stuff, thought I'd come back with all this footage and make a project out of it—and I never took my camera out once.

Ever since I've started trusting my instincts and making art for myself, it's been in very isolated natural spaces where there could be houses around the cove, but I can't see them, I'm just in this rocky alcove and it's just me and the beach. That sort of separation from an urban space to a deep nature that I can get into, that's what inspires me. And in an urban space, I feel inspired personally, but not to make art, and it was the first time that I realized there's a difference in the kind of energy that I'm feeling from the urban space versus a natural space separate from the built environment.

Is there a relationship between urbanness or built space and natural space, to how you think about that relationship to communing with nature or being outdoors?

Yeah, I think it's flip-flopped for me. When I'm in nature, I'm gathering up all this great energy and because there is presumably more open space, then there's more open space in my mind so my mind can wander and go down different paths. I let my mind be more free and have the space to relax into that. So that's not necessarily my generative sort of ideating space, or a making space for me, it's more a feeling inspired space. When I'm in a more urban

space, that's when I feel like I can exercise on projects. And that might also be a consequence of me living in cities for most of my life, but I do feel like I'm more able to get projects done and actually make work when I'm in an urban space because I feel that pulsing energy, and I think that's helpful for me.

There's an energy exchange between you in the city that you're in.

Oh, totally!

I wanna talk about this. What are the cities where you feel a productive sort of energy pulse in? Are there many cities where you don't feel that energy or the energy doesn't vibe, or whatever it might be?

I don't know. This may be more conjecture—no, it's true to some degree. Obviously, West Coast cities: I live in Oakland and I feel very much able to work on projects here versus in New York. It's too much, the energy is too frazzled and too scatter-brained to very successfully get to your project. Providence, Rhode Island? I don't even know what's going on over there.

You two do not vibe. There were no overlapping wavelengths, it was ill-fated, starcrossed, unnecessary.

I have noticed that whenever I go into nature with any kind of art supplies, even if it's just a camera, I will never take it out, I will never do anything with it, so I feel like that's interesting information and it sounds like we're flip-flopped.

This is reminding me of a conversation you and I had when we first went into quarantine, I think a month or two after. You were about to leave on your big road trip. And we went to Sachuest Beach, but we didn't go out to the beach, we went up to the bluffs over there, and we were talking about color.

So cold!

So cold, but remember that conversation we had, we were talking about synthetic versus natural color, and how you and I gravitate towards both, but in flip-flopped ways.

Oh yeah!

And I think in your home space, you prefer synthetic colors. And in my home space, I prefer natural colors, and then in your work, and your creative making space, you gravitate towards natural colors, and I gravitate towards the synthetic in my work.

It's flip-flopped!

Look at our spaces now, if I had art on my walls, it would not be the rich colors of your home. And my furniture are very natural muted tones. But then in our work, your work was very colorful, but very much rich natural pigments. I don't think

I used color much at that time, but now I use it a lot, and they're all really digital, neon, kind of artificial—actually, is it artificial or synthetic?

Hitting at the same thing. That's so interesting. I'm just now laughing at our Zoom screens, because you're entirely black and white and shades of grey. The only thing that's black in mine is just my television because it's off.

We're like this! That's why it was so cute when we turned out to be besties! We were the least likely to become this close.

It's the same! Just expressed differently.

I think the extremes that we occupy in different spheres brought this beautiful balance because we were paradoxes constantly, and it was really nice. So sweet. I can't wait to make a children's book with you one day or film.

Now that I have a stable job and a very stable home that I love, it's opened up so much space in my brain to just think and come up with ideas and work on them rather than get stressed out by them.

What have you been thinking about lately? This doesn't have to be for the interview, this can just be friend talks. No one will steal your ideas, I promise.

Well the last time we spoke, not to fully co-opt your idea, but the last time we spoke, you said the phrase, **bug soup**. And I thought, *that is awesome*. I've been doing a lot of iterating around that concept, both in storytelling format and also just drawing pictures, stuff like that.

Wow.

Nothing really to show yet, but it really resonated with me.

I'm so happy. When I first mentioned bug soup, Anastasiia talked to me about Virginia Lee Montgomery. Though her work is more literally engaging with moths and butterflies. Thought I'd share.

I'm scared of butterflies.

Really? I am too. Why are you scared of butterflies?

You are?!

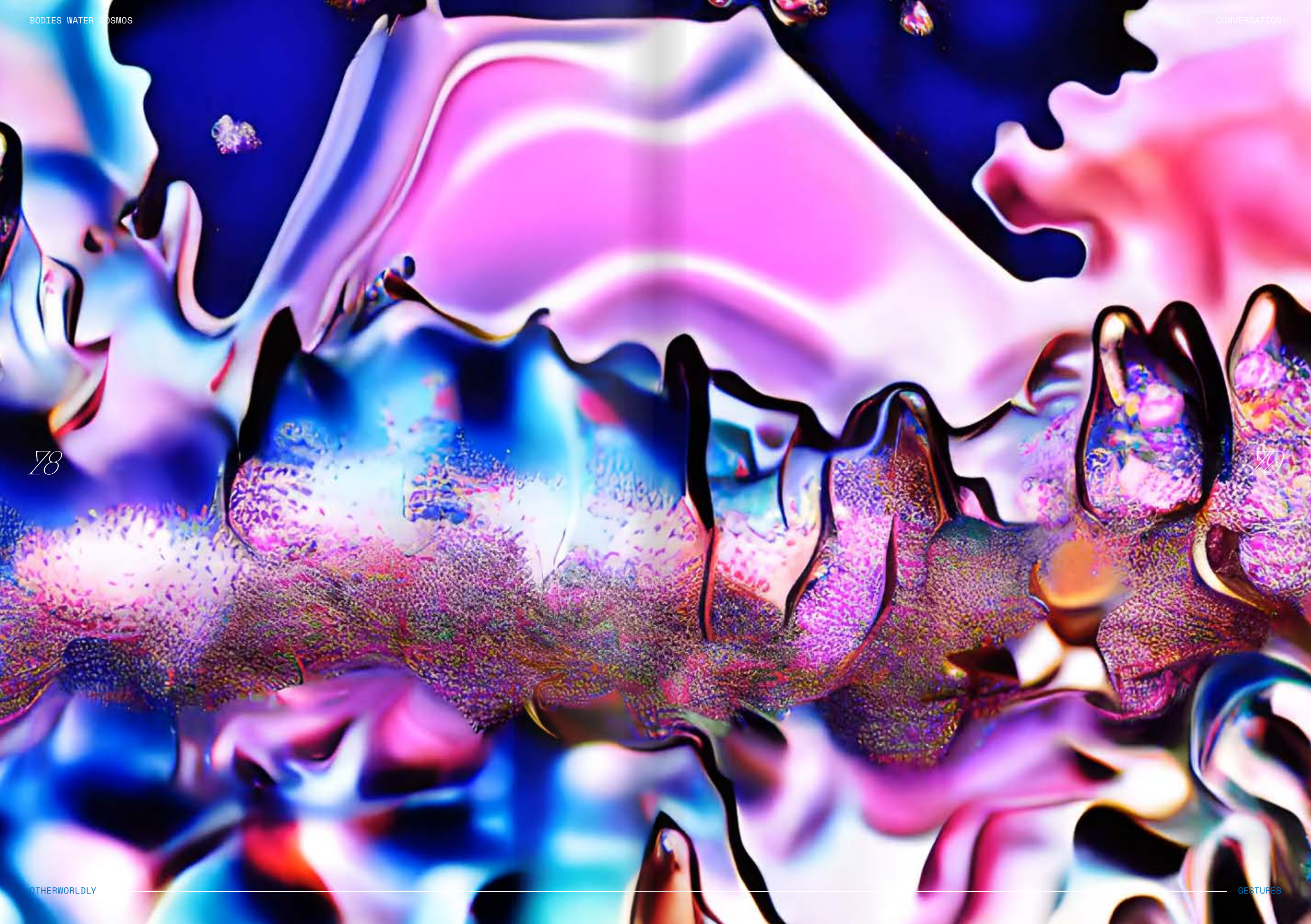
Yeah, I don't like things that are ghostly. A dog is a substantial creature, I can hold a dog, I can pet a dog, but a butterfly is just ghostly!

No, they really freak me out!

Why do you get freaked out? You're red!

I'm so scared of butterflies. I think it's the ghostliness. I don't mind any other bug, I don't care.

Making a meal and making a painting, they're the same to me.



Z8

Z9

Community is also the vibe you're going for. Floral bouquets all have very different vibes; it could be very formal, they could be really, really casual and haphazard.

80

But something about a butterfly, they seem more sentient in a way, and malicious.

Really? I've never heard of butterflies as malicious.

No one ever does. I'm alone in that. You never know where they're gonna land. Their trajectory is not obvious and the ghostliness, there's something inherently spooky about them.

Yeah.

I love spooky things, but I think there's something also about a butterfly being this symbol of beauty, and it has so many metaphors attached to it that I'm like, *no*. No one knows how terrifying these bugs are.

So there are things about nature that are terrifying to you. Let's see, we sort of touched on this, so if this feels like something you've already talked about, let me know. What is the relationship between your body and your creative process? Is there a connection between your physical self and your spiritual or creative energy?

Yes. Next question. [laughter] They're just so inherently linked, my body and my spirit and my creativity, which to me is so integral to how I perceive the world, how the world perceives me, and how I interpret things. Creativity to some degree, maybe to a very large degree is sort of like my spiritual practice, they're so inherently linked and dependent on the other that if one slips the others slip too. How do I answer this? I feel like I answered it.

Yeah, that was beautiful. I love that.

Great. I could elaborate, but I think I've already said everything.

Yeah, we've been talking about this a lot. Okay, we're going a little off-genre. Speaking of genres, what do you enjoy reading or watching for pleasure? And do your personal interests influence your creative work and things that you think about?

Interesting. Okay, what do I like to read and watch for pleasure? I feel like there's the ambient things that I consume that I'm not fully realizing, it's a choice that I'm consuming them I guess. [pause]

That was too intellectual. I love comedy, I love comedy made by and written by women. I love things that are inherently sweet, but also maybe a little bit bratty or horny or bizarre. I also love, love, love watching things that have to do with food. I feel like that's not something we've even touched, but food is such a big part of how I process and sort of make and express myself, so that's a huge bucket as well, and so I love watching food shows.

When I was five, instead of watching cartoons, I only watched *The Food Network*, which I think makes a lot of sense.

Okay, I have questions. I knew that food was important to you from a personal standpoint, you're very hostessy. You're very good at inviting a friend into your beautiful, nesty home space and then feeding them tea, treating them, just taking care of a person.

Creating that relationship is something I just know about you, but I didn't realize how important a role that cooking and food were to your sense of self. I'm assuming what you're saying is that it's about your sense of creative self. Tell me more!

Making a meal and making a painting, they are the same in my mind.

I know that culturally they're very distinct, but to me, it's the same fucking thing. You gather a bunch of ingredients and cooking is a little bit more prescriptive, but it is so subject to the environment and your mood and your relationship with the ingredients, but also your ability to execute things, so I feel like it's another creative process.

I think because it's shortened by time and it's so experiential, people are very quick to write it off as a less creative practice. But all the elements that you would put into making a poster are the same that you would put into making a salad; who cares? One is a salad enjoyed by others, and then one is a poster.

Tell me how you really feel about graphic design, tell me your thoughts on typography.

I mean, if a poster is the same as a salad then the typography is the iceberg lettuce of the salad. Anyway, yes, cooking is important to me, cooking is a daily practice of making that helps me feel grounded and helps me feel connected to myself. There's also such a beautiful metaphor about nourishing yourself, nourishing others through a thing that you've made that I find really beautiful, and I find integral to me feeling at peace.

I'm weirdly happy that you came to this understanding after you left RISD, because I feel like the danger of being like, *I'm really into food* in this space would be that then you make work around food, you make work with food, you use food metaphors for your process and it becomes this one-to-one thing, instead of it being just your lens in the world and the way that you are as a person and this is what you care about.

Yeah, exactly. Oh my God, yeah. If I was like, the food girl at RISD, could you imagine?

Okay, two more questions and then we're done. Okay, so, first question—

I didn't really answer your other question though, about my taste.

Oh, okay. Do you wanna keep going?

No, just acknowledging that I didn't answer it. I like kids movies and funny movies and weird movies, and I'll look at Instagram a lot. There you go.

How do those impact your creative process? Do they?

Nothing happens in a vacuum, like a creative process and inspiration, literally, it cannot happen if you're not witnessing the things being made in the world. So they inspire me, they maybe torment me, they maybe light the fire to get me to make something similar to what I've seen, it really depends. That is my answer.

Do you feel like you've adequately answered this question?

10/10 on this quiz.

What do you listen to when you ideate or work? What are you listening to lately?

We famously know I love ABBA. So I like music that makes me feel alive in my body. We haven't touched on it, but I'm also a very kinetic person. Well, maybe we have in the fact that my body is attached to the world.

I think that comes across, whether you say the word kinetic or not.

Right, so when I'm feeling groovy and feeling ready to make something, I'll put on music—I know people listen to EDM or house music or whatever, when they're trying to get in the flow. I'm not that.

Oh my God, but music that is funky, music that I don't know. Right now, I've been listening to a lot of Nigerian disco music from the 70's, so it can really span. I've now given two disco examples, but it spans from that to music that I listened to obsessively in middle school when I was trying to develop my taste or whatever and be different, so sometimes there's a nostalgia factor that I can lean into, and it puts me in a headspace that feels—it's like a tele—what's the word? Teleportation, time machine?

81

Portal?

Sometimes listening to a song can be a time machine into a mental space or frame of mind that is helpful. So I don't listen to one specific thing or one specific album, but I ask, *oh, I have this idea, what are the feelings attached to it, and how can the song or playlist help me get there*, so that's my big answer for you.

Okay, last question. How do you define your community?

Okay, you know that Eames video, the Power of 10 Eames video. I think of community in layers like that, right? So first and foremost, it's me, and then the people I talk to daily.

And so right now, my community is like my fucking job, and that's fine—[pause] I don't like how I'm answering this question.

You can start over.

Yes, I wanna start over.

Let's start over. How do you define your community?

I think of my community as a bouquet of flowers. That's a much better metaphor. I've been thinking about a lot of things in terms of a flower bouquet rather than something that is so set, because flower bouquets, you can add to them, you can subtract from them.

I think what's interesting about floral arranging and having a bouquet as a community is that each individual flower, each type of flower, the greenery you fluff it out with, they're so important to looking at a thing of beauty and seeing it as a whole. But also, all the pieces come together to make it that thing, so I like to think of community in those terms, maybe there are certain specific people and those are the big floral blooms that make me feel connected, tethered to both my creative practice, my life, friends, family, and then there's the more tertiary sort of items and people and surroundings that also make up a community. I'm getting lost in this metaphor [laughter] But I really like it.

I feel like you're finding something, we're uncovering it together, and I'm just along for the ride.

Community is also the vibe you're going for. Floral bouquets all have very different vibes; it could be very formal, they could be really, really casual and haphazard.

I feel like mine is more on the haphazard side, you know the bouquets that have blooms really sticking out all over and they're so lopsided and strange. I feel like that's my community, and so I can't be like, *oh, it's like this specific identity group that I am a part of* and whatever, but it's all of these sort of pieces that come together that really make me sort of feel attached to and a part of the world.

That's great! I love that metaphor. Everyone's approached that question differently, from naming specific people or talking about family. Categorizing how they build community.

I like that you took a general approach of just the metaphor of how you can see community, and its identity—identity's not even the right word for it—spirit! The spirit of your community, this sort of eclectic blend.

What's so cool about making a bouquet is that you can constantly add to it, and if something sort of withers and dies, you can just replace it or put it in a different vase.

There's something beautiful to that metaphor in the sense of the ephemerality of relationships as well. I think that when we think about relationships as this forever thing, you sort of stifle what it can grow into, and also when it is time to let something go or let something decay. Everyone moves forward, and there's a life cycle of flowers, to individual flowers but also

to a bouquet, because you are constantly adapting it, and there's something very beautiful to accepting that that is just part of the process.

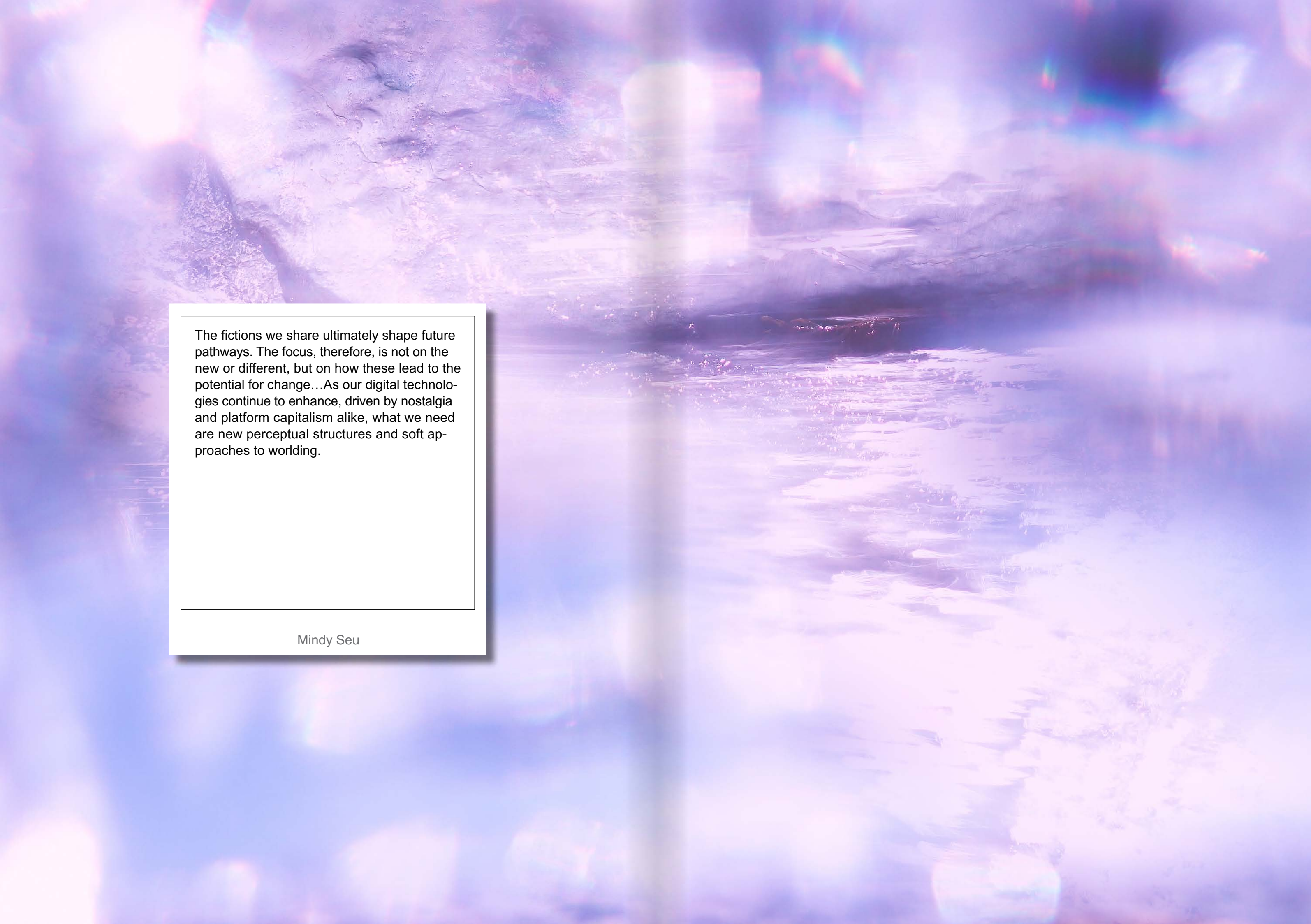
Yeah. Yeah, you nailed it. Exactly. Allowing for that sort of growth and change, I think it's so important to how I define my community, otherwise, I get a little bit self-conscious or something about it, *oh, it's not looking the way that I intended it*, and so I think allowing for that flexibility and change is important for me.

I love that. Okay we're done!

82

83

All images in this interview were produced by an AI model trained on a dataset of Hillary's videos, and my art and renderings.



The fictions we share ultimately shape future pathways. The focus, therefore, is not on the new or different, but on how these lead to the potential for change...As our digital technologies continue to enhance, driven by nostalgia and platform capitalism alike, what we need are new perceptual structures and soft approaches to worlding.

Mindy Seu

OtherWorld is sourced in duality and paradox, shaped by conflicting concepts of space and time, and rooted in my tangled memories of the places that have made me: Bangladesh and Texas.

on
SPACES

the places that make me

The reality of my dual homelands have borne less effect on me than my romanticized imagination of them has. As a dreamy, sensitive introvert, I retreated from the distressing aspects of my surroundings and delved inward instead. The inner space was shaped by my reimagining of the more beautiful elements of my lived reality, memory as an evocative substance that I could control and design with.

FACING REALITY

I moved from Evansville, Indiana to Cypress, Texas in August 2001, one month before history changed forever on September 11. Growing up as a distinctively brown-bodied girl with an undeniably Muslim name, my childhood amongst the white-dominant, Evangelical culture of the Bible-Belt South was...uncomfortable. Aside from the spectrum of racist experiences I endured, I was frustrated, frankly, by how ugly my world was.

I spent my entire youth desperately trying to escape the drab monotony of Cypress, a Houston suburb rife with sprawling high-schools, football and track fields, pockets of backyard ranchlands with grazing horses fenced in by barbed wire, and unending stretches of strip malls, mini and mega churches, and so many gas stations. My neighborhood featured artificial landscaping maintained by strict Homeowners Association enforcement, and copy-paste houses dragged across gently curving roads wandering to nowhere of interest. The sun was an angry, glaring spike of fire reigning over a plane of pale blue sky. My skin was always burning as I'd hop from one meek shadow to the next.

After the double-hit of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, our main highways were clogged with constant construction to widen highways, add more and more feeder roads, dig reservoirs, and add more spaghetti noodles of highway overpasses soaring through the air

one over the other. The views these overpasses promised were simply seas of parking lots and flat industrial warehouse rooftops shimmering with heat. Everything in Cypress is horizontal, hulking, and built low to the ground; like the blazing sun, there's no shortage of land. The colors of Houston are flat: beige concrete, rusted steel, prickly faded greenery and crumbling asphalt.

The plethora of cars amidst the sprawl only emphasized what I'd come to associate with Houston: a terrible loneliness and deep longing for respite. I distinctly remember returning from the clamor and cacophony of Dhaka, Bangladesh to the sudden silence of home. Instead of hearing *chai-wallabs*¹ hawking tea, children selling *malas*² of strung jasmine, beggars weaving through stalled traffic, drivers honking every two seconds, and people yelling across roofs and balconies to their neighbors at all hours of the day and night, we returned to quiet orderly highways of people in their individual bubbles, protected by the armor of their vehicles.

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, was where we spent most of our visits to my parents' homeland. The tropical heat was sweltering, and I remember the sticky soup of air we grew accustomed to slowly swimming through. The city was dense and alive and chaotic, with buildings shooting up up up because land is at a premium and rapidly sinking below sea level. Brown bodies of all shapes and shades and wealth brackets surrounded me, though I still stood out, something about the way I walk or dress or carry myself that screams *foreigner*. I am always fascinated by how many different shades of brown I begin to learn about, how many ways hair can be black, and how rich brown and black truly are.

The air in Dhaka is grey and thick with pollution, the sun watery and pale. Plant life is lush but dusty, and explodes through cracks in asphalt, cracks in walls, holes in gateways. The colors of Dhaka are so very very loud. During the day the colors are vermillion, brick red, glaring saffron smudged with mud, smog grey, every shade of green imaginable, dusty blue glass, shining golds and aged silver, and the pinkest pink to exist. The poverty is unimaginable, as is the wealth, all of it muddled together and face to face. The roads are narrow within the ravines of densely built towers, and wider highways are often stalled with tightly packed cars, rickshaws, CNG's, and enormous buses. Always there are eyes on one another, with nowhere to hide from the stares—lust, curious, unabashed, dismissive, judgmental, leering, calculating—of all attitudes. Constantly there is chaos and clatter and clash, billboards and posters and store signs clamoring for attention, each trying to outdo the other.

It is inescapable that the land is swiftly sinking, and yet, the city explodes with life.

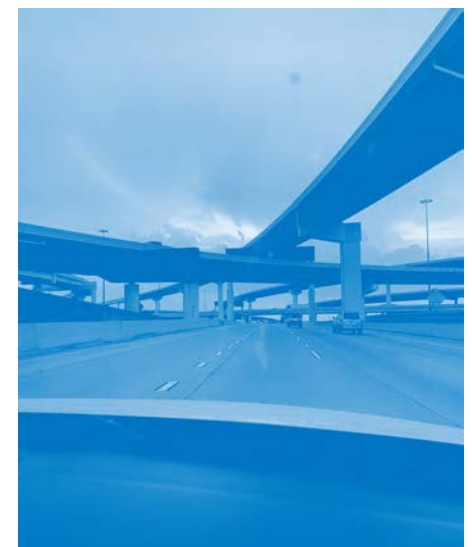
I was frustrated by how ugly my world was.

1. Tea vendors.

2. Necklaces. Refers here to hand-made necklaces of fresh strung flower blossoms.



80



Overpasses soaring over Highway 290 somewhere between Cypress and Houston. Shot June 2022.



Scene from a street in Dhaka. I took this photo the last time I visited—November 2017.

Dhaka, Bangladesh—November 2017.



05

REIMAGINING MEMORY

When I learned to drive, I spent a lot of time practicing on the quiet backroads of Cypress, farther and farther away from the edges of town. The further you went, the wilder the land became, less groomed and cultivated by suburban standards, and more organically rebellious. Neighborhoods gave way to farms and ranches, wood fences replaced by barbed wire to guard cattle and grazing horses. Fewer buildings sprinkled the land, and the horizon became clear. I no longer focused on the drabness of the land: I was too mesmerized by the endless vastness of the sky.

I'd go driving once I'd completed my homework after school, so my drives were timed with the late afternoon dying rays of the sun, the explosion of color like smeared sherbet across the skies. I'd cycle through the collection of angsty teenage mixtapes I'd made and stashed in the car, and race away from the troubles of high-school, college admissions, family conflicts, and raging self-inflicted hunger. The sprawling, unending sky took all my anxieties and fury and let me melt out of the body I spent every minute battling, floating instead into the ether. This was how I learned to breathe. From dusk to sunset to the curtain drop of night, when the first prickles of starlight emerged to gild the cool eye of the moon, I found peace.

During my troubled years of college in Austin, in the strange years I spent working in Dallas, in the formative adventures to West Texas and Marfa, I found myself returning to this practice. Taking to the road at dusk, and journeying to nowhere in particular as the sky morphed and evolved. Wandering past the edges of the urban landscape and into the unbuilt spaces in-between where borders dissipated. These wide open stretches of road and land and sky helped me spill out of my tense armor, and drift free. My thoughts unwound and allowed themselves to be read, my emotions detangled and flowed unbound.

I found peace at night in Bangladesh as well. There is something about the miserable heat in both places: fiery in Cypress, sticky in Dhaka, that condenses me into a ball of depression. With moonrise, I could escape, if only the discomfort of my skin.

The sprawling, unending sky took all my anxieties and fury and let me melt out of the body I spent every minute battling, floating instead into the ether.

At night, the air turns more foggy, the darkness of night velvet thick and rich. Glimmering string lights curtaining entire building facades for weddings or futbol matches or birthdays or just because, sparkle soft like hazy stars. Neon signs shine in bright RGB colors through the dark like a cyberpunk movie setting, and the dirt and grime of daylight disappears. The chaos becomes musical, the entire city an operatic sci-fi dance. Streaks of light from vehicles, traffic lights, string lights, billboards, and store signs become a material substance, swipes of digital hazy color like

a dreamscape of its own. Instead of the garish reds and greens of day, I am mesmerized by the glitchy neons of night.



Driving outside Marfa at dusk.

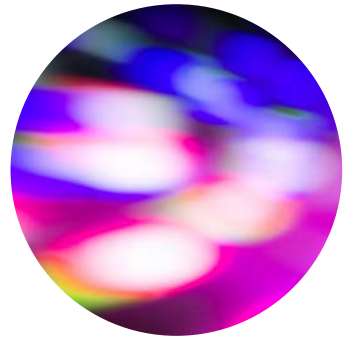
I grasp onto the memory of pearlescent iridescence. I should remember the steel grey, cloudy pollution of the water, or the warm shine of wicker, bamboo, and jute furniture, or the brilliant gold and colorful stones of ornately crafted jewelry.

Instead, I think of mother-of-pearl, the tiny chips inlaid into furniture and jewelry boxes. I think of abalone shell combs and tiny dishes for my grandmother's everyday jewels. I think of strings of pearls of all shapes and sizes and colors, fat black pearls, tiny rice pearls, delicate droplets of blush pink pearls. I always felt too young to wear them, but every time we went shopping, my mother bought me pearls since they were my birthstone. They were too conservative, too pretty, too feminine for my taste at the time. But now I think of the process of *becoming*, from a granule of sand to the shimmering stone we see instead, and I see strength and magic and endurance, a symbol of transformation.

I often miss the tangled chaos of the urban center. The hectic layering, the desperate clinging to life.



Jewelry store in Dhaka, Bangladesh—November 2017.



THE BEYOND

The Beyond is a universe of endless potential. In it, I can construct any rules I'd like, and so I release myself of the burden of preservation. Instead of recreating the world as it is, I can create a world as it exists within me, a world rooted in reality but reshaped by imagination. This is a world that unapologetically embraces the romanticized memories of my homelands, and discards the grimmer reality.

This isn't to say I am interested in shying away from the truth. I believe that in facing reality for what it is, and addressing the unvarnished truth of the darker realities of our world, we can process our emotional reactions and propose alternative visions for the world as it could be instead.

The only home I find myself truly owning is within memory.

I don't think my view of Texas has to be defined by its corporate, petroleum-focused industry, by its unchecked urban sprawl and carelessness towards architecture and design. I choose to remember it for its unrivaled skies, for the vastness of its landscape, for long unwinding night drives, for its expansive calm and the rugged plant life clinging stubbornly to survival. I can propose

an alternate vision so that Texas itself sees the beauty it could embrace instead.

Instead of the glaring poverty, the violent history, the pollution and overpopulation and grime of Bangladesh, I choose to remember it as a dreamy ethereal space of iridescence, to conceive of the water as inspiration rather than destruction. I think less of the dangers of nighttime and offer instead the sci-fi cyberpunk techno-jungle city future it could create instead.

I alter memories actively, rather than simply avoiding the truth. The reimagining is a way to engage with the reality of the places I've chosen to claim as home, and to intentionally tangle myself within their spirits. As a child of diaspora, the only home I find myself truly owning is within memory. I am disconnected from land: I cannot comfortably call myself Texan, as I think my version of it is so different from collective memory; despite speaking Bangla and tracing my lineage only one generation, I am not privy to the embodied knowledge and culture of being Bangladeshi. I do not have a place to belong, so I weave my memory spaces into a homeland.

In doing so, I find a way to speak to the spirits of my home and listen to parts of them that are not often heard. The dominant narratives of these places are created, so I choose to listen and give voice to new facets, dreams for the future, dreams of what these places could be instead. There is no limit to how many alternative future visions could and should exist.

This process is also my stance against the discomfort I feel of **Diaspora Art**³—binary presentations of representational aesthetics produced by dominant cultural narratives fueled by uncritical support across social media and fed mainly to white, Western audiences. I came to RISD bent on ensuring that I would not be labeled or considered a Diaspora Artist—different entirely from being an artist

located within the diaspora—and as part of my practice, I discard easily identifiable aesthetic and visual markers of location and culture. It is the interior **spirit** of a place that I seek to understand and communicate with.

It is important to assert here that I do not limit myself to work about Bangladesh or Texas: I am less concerned with where I've come from, and more interested in where we collectively could go. I trust that the places that have made me shape the space from which I am working and dreaming and imagining. Rooted in that trust, I can focus on communing with the spirit of a place I find myself currently attuning to.



I imagine the lush jungle beauty infused with the vibrant urban space. View from Dipshikha School in Dinajpur, Bangladesh—November 2023.

3. This term and concept is best articulated in the White Pube's articles, *The Problem with Diaspora Art*, by Zarina Muhammad. Though I had already had these feelings myself, I had never seen them articulated as well—or at all, until I read these essays.

GUJARATI TO GO A PARTS

This multi-part project begins with an exploration into a way of engaging with my personal heritage through an inherited archive of saris from my late grandmother. Investigating questions of heritage, maternal lineage, longing, belonging, memory, and the translation of tradition into futurity, I chose to do so through the form of traditional clothing—saris.

Clothing represents the entry point to connection between generations of my maternal line, and also presents a platform for me to explore ideas of womanhood, protection, and identity through the feminine body.

INQUIRY

HOW CAN I TRANSLATE MY HERITAGE FOR
FUTURITY THROUGH ENGAGEMENT WITH AN
INHERITANCE OF MY GRANDMOTHER'S SARIS?

MEDIA + MATERIALITY

TEXTILE, PUBLICATION, VIDEO

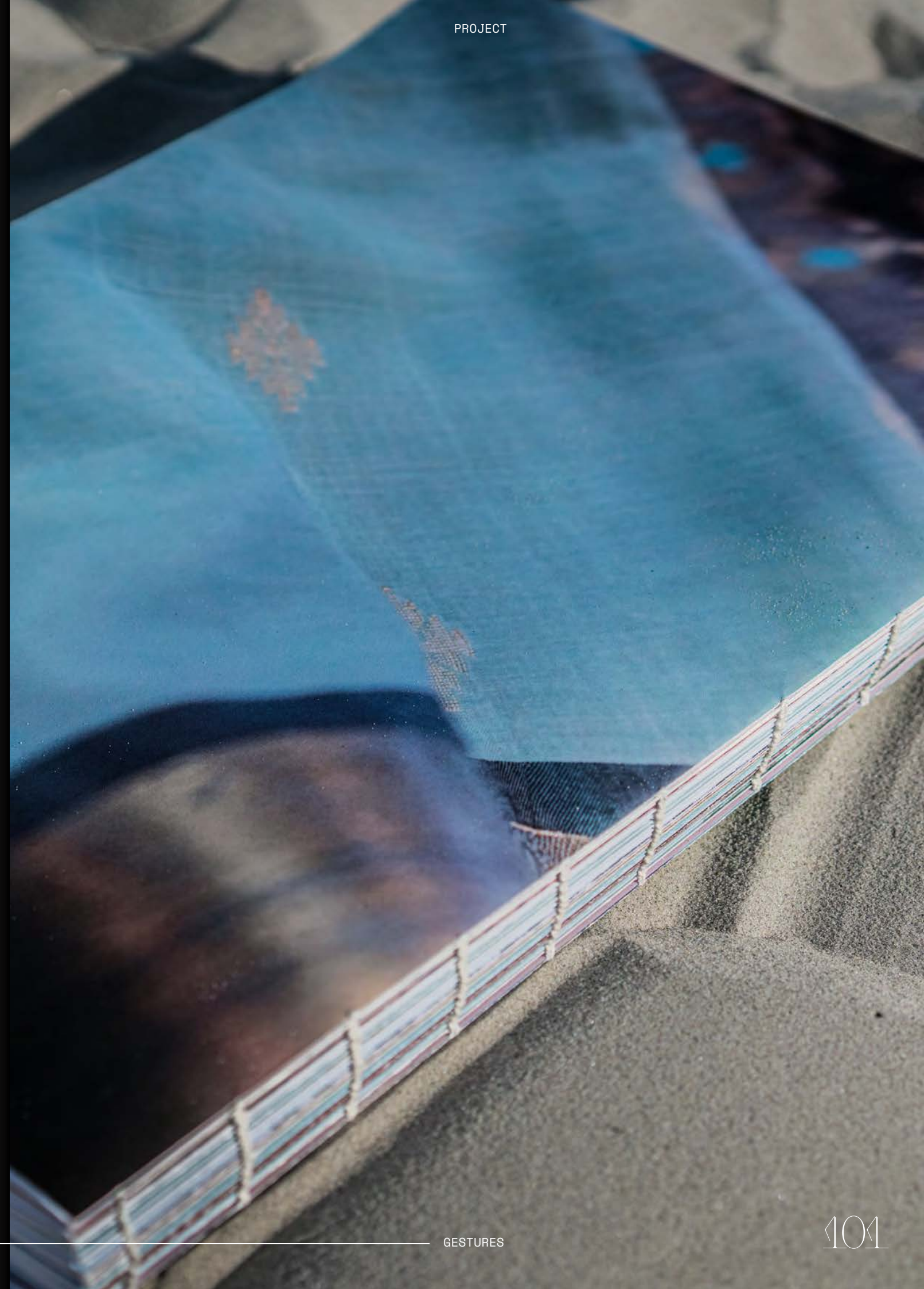
DATE

FALL 2021–WINTER 2022

COLLABORATORS

DOUG SCOTT, TASMINA QUDDUS,
DOUGAL HENKEN

PORTALS





SARI 01

ARCHIVE

I have received a physical inheritance of 18 hand-woven saris collected by my grandmother over the course of her lifetime. Inheritance also refers to my diasporic longing for an ephemeral sense of belonging and home that exists in stories, nostalgia, and imagination.

10

Description
 Dimensions
 Material
 Type
 Location

Sari blue body with delicate silver print, navy achiol and par with turquoise pattern and gold jari
 43 inches x 96 feet
 — 4 pieces
 — 20.5 inches
 Sari silk with jari
 Targal
 Sari form

THE SARI— HISTORY & IMPORTANCE



I—A photo of my grandmother (R) and her cousin, my Shamim Nana (L), when they were teenagers. As a woman came of age, a photo session like this was common. I have always been captivated by this photo, by the beauty and fire in Nana's expression.

12



The sari is intrinsic to the collective Bengali imagination. They capture much of what it means to be a woman; beyond sensuality and graceful beauty, it is a representation of strength and resilience.

During the Liberation War of 1971, Bangladesh fought for independence from Pakistan. Young women took part in the fight for the nation. The sari became a symbol of defiance: wearing crisp white saris, wielding rifles, training and marching

II—Young women training in Azimpur Field during Liberation War, 1971.

III—Young Bengali women marching in the streets, carrying rifles. Women fought as soldiers alongside men.



বালুকা দখি়ে বাধছি ঘর
ঝনিক নখি়ে খেলো ।
বপিলু নীল সলীল পরি
ভাসায় তারা খলোর তরী
আপন হাতে হলোয় গাৰ্জি
পাতায় গাথা ভলো ।
জগৎ পাবারবরে তীরে
ছলেরো করে খলো ।

They build their houses with sand,
and they play with empty shells.
With withered leaves
they weave their boats
and smilingly float them
on the vast deep.
Children have their play
on the seashore of worlds.

13

There is a word in Bangla
that my mother always used
to describe both me and
my grandmother: সতৌষীন¹!

It has no true equivalent in
the English language, but
loosely refers to a girl or
woman who loves to dress
well, delights in the sensory
experience of life, and finds
joy in beautiful things. It's
one of many things I've
always treasured in sharing
with my Nanu.² She was my
very first soulmate.

The sari was my earliest
connection to the concept

¹ Pronounced sho-KEEN

² Bangla term of endearment for maternal grandmother



VI

5

A MEDITATION— EVOLUTION OF COUTURE

REFLECTION



I, II—Vintage portraits of Bengali women dressed in jamdani and brocade saris. Year and source unknown at this research stage.

In History—Romanticizing the Vintage Sari

Though the sari is not exclusive to Bangladesh, it is deeply ingrained in a Bengali woman's heritage.

When I think about the vintage sari, I think of the intricate, richly detailed fabric and jewelry combinations depicted in Devdas, the ethereal gossamer muslin seen in intimate paintings, and the intellectual drapes of the Tagore family. As the Mughal Empire's port and crossroads of cultural exchange, Bengali fashion reflected global influences.



III



IV



V

I think also about the traditions brought to the West by our mothers and aunts, or the jewelry, coat, sunglasses, shawl combinations my Nanu wore on her first visit to the United Kingdom.

Living in diaspora, I access the past through cinema,

literature, art, internet searches, and stacks of old family photos. Many were lost in the chaos of the Liberation War, so the few we have are precious.

The sari holds stories within it, marking the ceaseless evolution of history, art, politics, and culture.

III—Students in Dhaka University's Psychology department, 1969.

IV—Jnanadanandini Devi Tagore, [L] Rabindranath's sister-in-law, is credited as a pioneer of the regal Brahmika drape, bringing the achol back over her left shoulder.

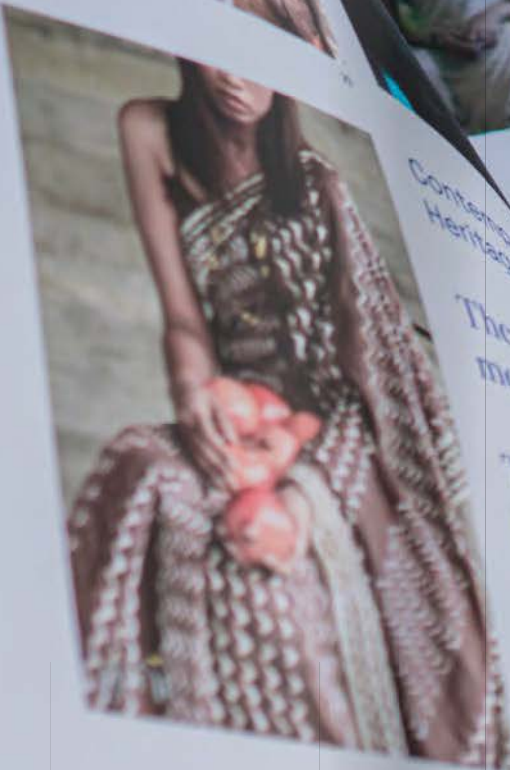
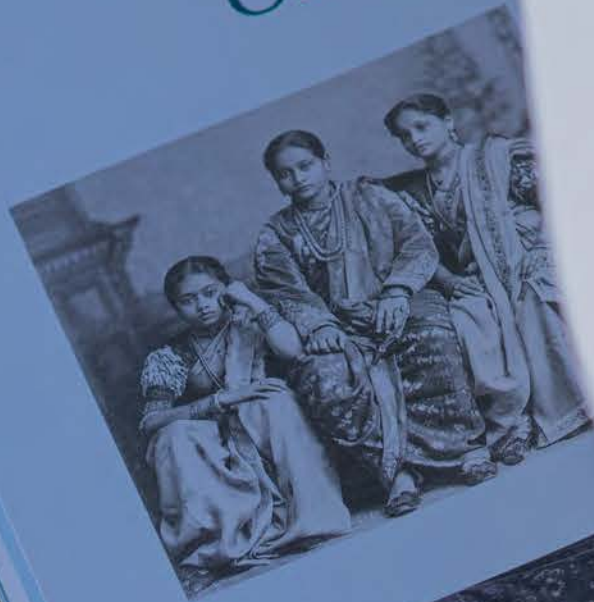
V—Abhiman [Wounded Vanity], painted by Hemendranath Mazumdar (1898–1948). Mazumdar worked to capture the dreamy sensuality of upper-class women of Bengal.

The sari is an inherent aspect of a Bengali woman's identity—yet, through my diasporic upbringing, it is something I have never learned to wear myself. It is a metaphor for a heritage I have inherited, yet do not have the embodied knowledge to understand.

55

A MEDITATION EVO OF COU

REFLECTION



Two of Bangladesh's largest fashion houses, Aarong and Aranya, are also leaders in fair trade and sustainable growth with an approach to honoring

heritage while innovating and crafting new styles.

With Aranya's focus on natural dye and production, the saris take on an easy, earthy grace. The colors are muted, the draping effortless. Aarong's take is more vibrant, with innovative blouse design, bold color, pattern, and

material interpretations. They draw influence from global cultures to create something new.

In diaspora, hyphenated Bengali women defiantly experiment with all the influences at their disposal.

The sari is timeless, with a future of endless possibilities.



1. 8—Vintage portraits of Bengali women dressed in jantani and binnata saris. Year of research unknown at this research stage.

11, 12, 13—Contemporary selections from Aarong. Bold and muted, these breezy styles are all naturally dyed and hand-crafted.

XIV, XV, XVI, XVII—Stella Simona and Meeka Hossain (XVI), two Bangladeshi-American sisters and business-women in the beauty and fashion industry. Images taken from their respective Instagram accounts.

I use the term "embodied knowledge" to communicate the concept of that understanding that is built through cultural immersion and everyday practice, a way of being that is handed down through generations of maternal labor.



Blouse
 Petticoat
 Jamdani
 Block Print
 Muslin
 Skat

a long skirt made of
 originating in
 muslin
 refers to the te
 onto fabric to
 an extremely fine-woven cloth originating
 18th centuries, Dacca in Bengal became
 a weaving technique in which the pattern of the
 the yarn before the fabric is woven

hala
 Jaan

term for numerical gram
 term for numerical unit, or
 refers to one's heart or soul and

I grew up with my grand-
 mother designing tradi-
 tional salwar kameezes
 for me and my mother,
 often remixing her own
 saris into new garments,
 a practice she continued
 until her passing. These
 textiles, designed in
 non-traditional ways,
 have connected the women
 of my family across gen-
 erations and serve as a
 vehicle of connection and
 identity for me.

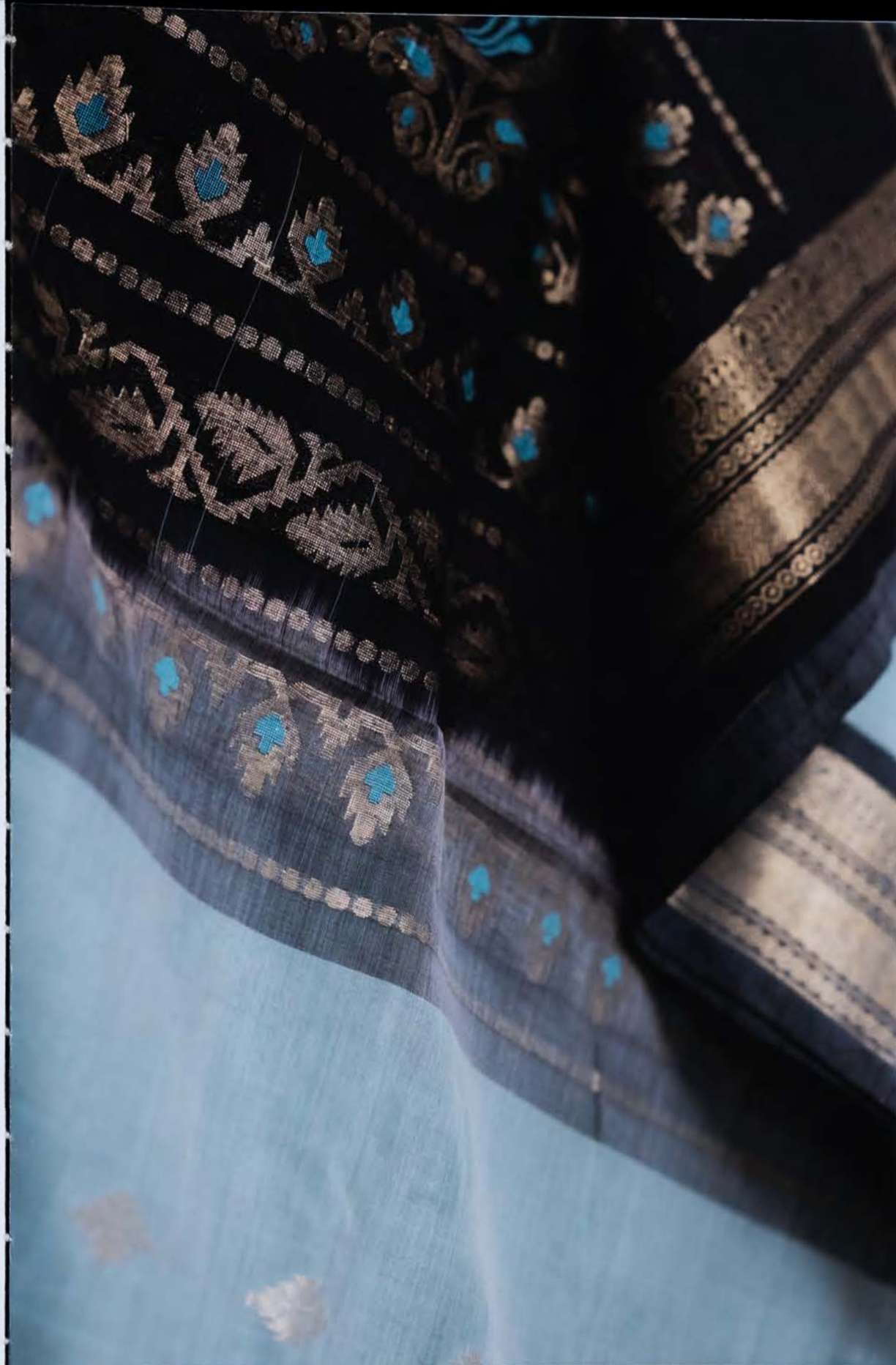
SARI 01

ARCHIVE



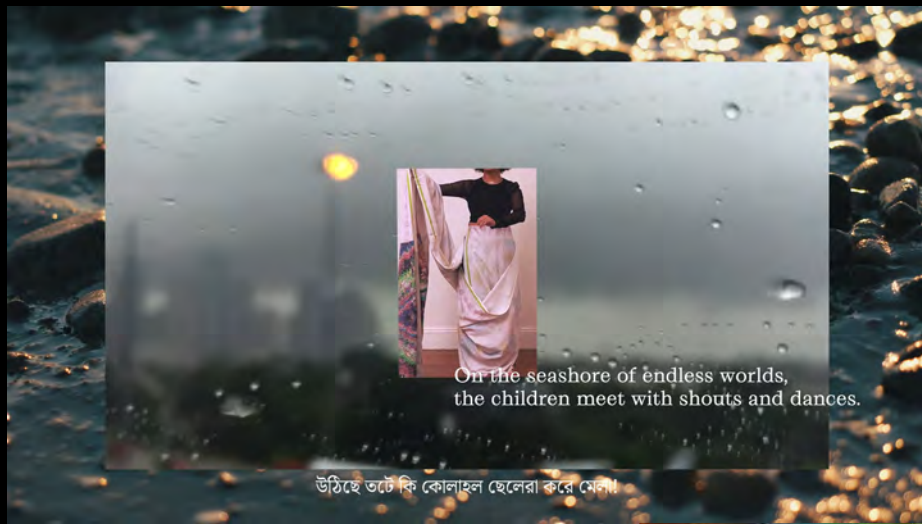
16

Description Sky blue body with delicate silver print, navy achol and par with turquoise pattern and gold jori.
 Dimensions 43 inches x 16 feet.
 — Par — 4 inches
 — Achol — 28.5 inches.
 Material Half silk with jori
 Type Tangail
 Occasion Semi-formal



The book is designed at the scale and proportions of a sari as it is folded and hung in my Nani's almari, or wardrobe.





Through a hybrid documentary film, I explore a method of expressing the narrative of this experience in a sensory, dreamy way. Abstraction and visual collage creates an emotional landscape that evokes the feeling of being awash in overlapping memories and feelings; it is ephemeral, unpolished and textured, a watery and glitchy exploration of the thin veils between life and death, between here and there, between America and Bangladesh, between myself and my heritage.

I developed several iterations of image and pattern to design a sari that transformed one set of images into a digitally manipulated set of patterns that aligned with certain traditional parameters while transforming others. Using images of patterns from the inherited saris, I glitched, refracted, and splintered them into a new set of patterns that expressed my own personal identity and style. The Glitch emerged as an important visual analogy for my personal diasporic experience of being split between multiple identities, as well as the diasporic habit of engaging with ancestral heritage through digital means.



I use performance, learning to wear the sari I designed with my mother instructing me over FaceTime, laid over fractured, data-moshed, glitched abstract visuals. The project takes the name of a poem by Rabindranath Tagore, one which captures the essence of my grandmother and the complex mix of hope and grief over her passing.



SPACE



The infinite sky is motionless over the sea



অসীম গগনতল মাথার পরে অচলকেন্দ্র

and the restless water is boisterous.

PROJECT



অকূল ওই অতল জল নাচিছে সারা হেলা!



On the seashore of endless worlds,
the children meet with shouts and dances

উঠিছে তটে কি কোলাহল হেলেরা করে মেলা!

They build their houses with sand,
and they play with empty shells.



On the seashore of endless worlds,
the children meet with shouts and dances.

উঠিছে তটে কি কোলাহল হেলেরা করে মেলা!



বালুক দিয়ে বাধিছে ঘর বিনুক নিয়ে খেলা।

They build their houses with sand,
and they play with empty shells.



বালুক দিয়ে বাধিছে ঘর বিনুক নিয়ে খেলা।

With withered leaves they weave their boats
and smilingly float them on the vast deep.

বিপুল নীল সলিল পুরি ভাসায় তারা তরঙ্গ তরী আপন হাতে হেলায় গাড়ি পাতায় গাঁথা ভেলা।

children have their play on the seashore of worlds.



জগৎ পরিবাহের তীরে ছেলেরা করে খেলা।

They know not how to swim



জগৎ তারা সীতার দেওয়া

they know not how to cast nets.

জানেনা জাল ফেলা।

while children gather pebbles and scatter them again.

বপিক ধায় তরঙ্গী বেয়ে; হেলেরা নুড়ি কুরায়ে পেয়ে সাজায় বসি ঢেলা!

They seek not for hidden treasures



রতনধন খোঁজে না তারা

and pale gleams the smile of the sea-beach.



হাসে সাগরবেলা।

and pale gleams the smile of the sea-beach.



হাসে সাগরবেলা!

Tempest roams in the pathless sky

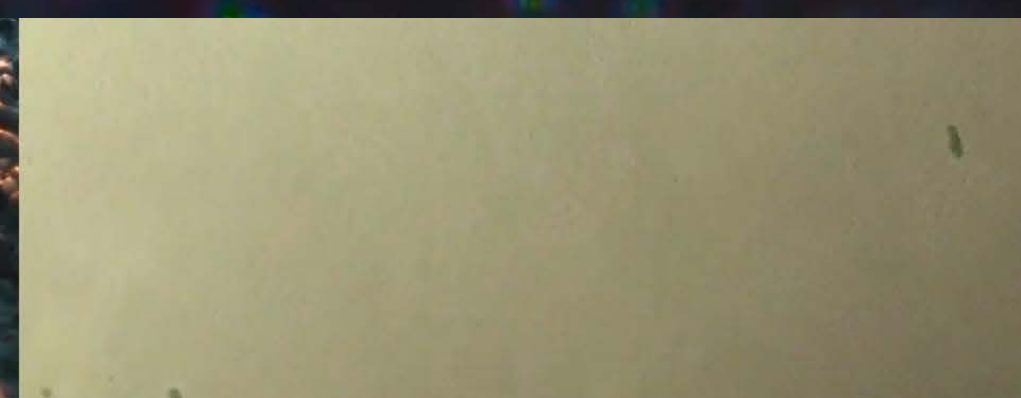
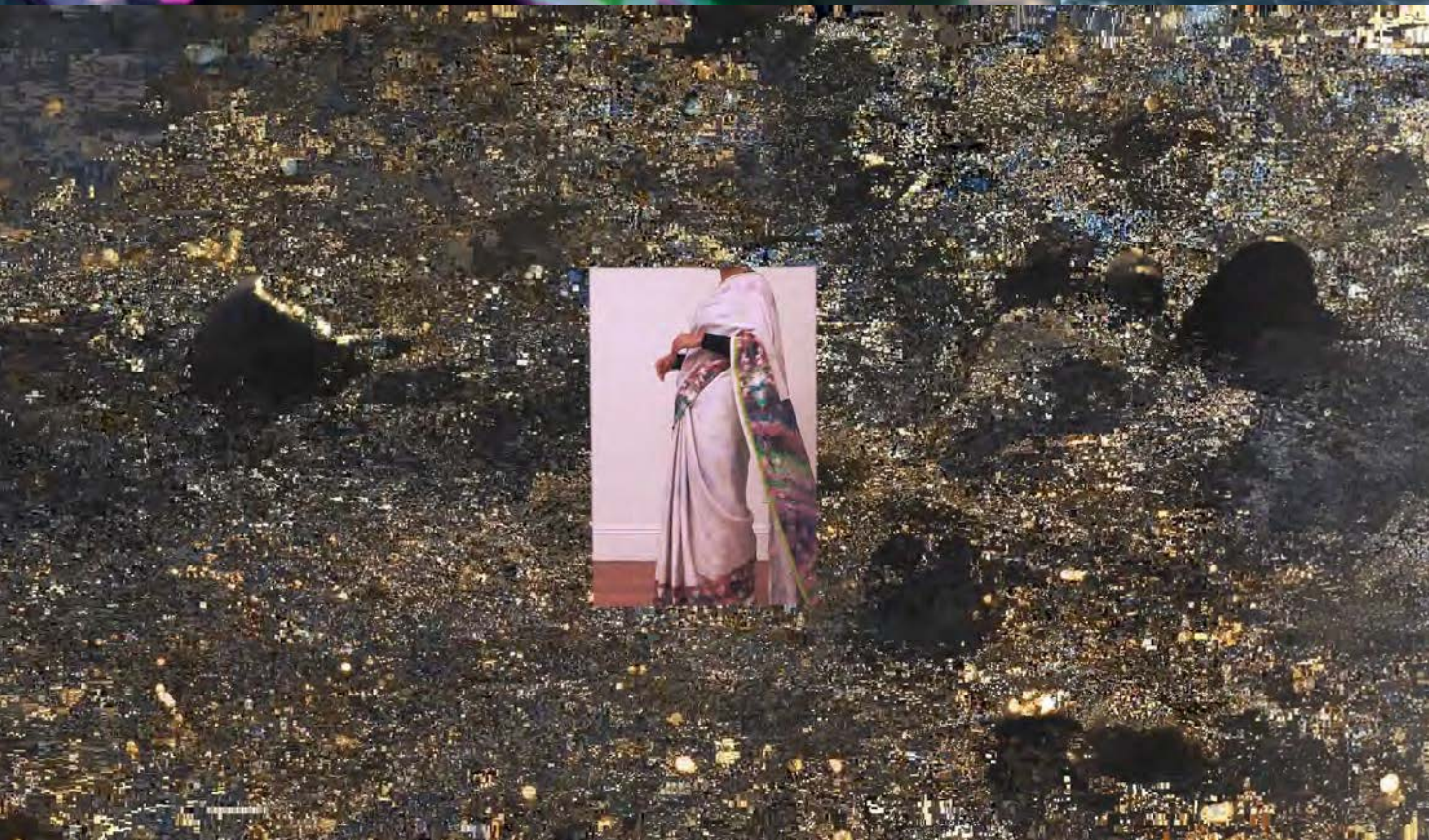


OTHERWORLDLY



GESTURES





the infinite sky is motionless overhead

অন্তহীন গগনতল মাথার পরে অচনচল

Referencing the visual language of Islamic architecture—abstract geometries, repetition, borders, organic vegetal motifs, multiple perspectives, and frames within frames—I designed a contemporary prayer rug made of light. The new design emphasizes depth of space and the explosion of energy in search of freedom and balance.

VINYL SACRIFICE

INQUIRY

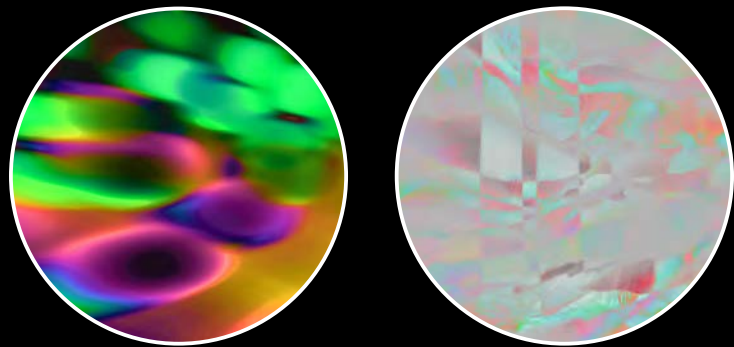
HOW CAN I TRANSLATE A UBIQUITOUS
BUT EXCLUSIONARY SITE OF WORSHIP
INTO ONE THAT IS MORE HONEST,
INDIVIDUALIZED, AND FREE?

MEDIA + MATERIALITY

VIDEO, ANIMATION, PROJECTION,
IMMERSIVE INSTALLATION

DATE

SPRING 2022

PORTALS

The result is a layering of forbidden elements to create an honest expression of sacred worship and conversation between myself and my faith. It is also an experiment in questioning what constitutes textiles, and digital textiles, with a prayer rug composed of light and given form, literally, through light.



JAINAMAAZ—

The entire earth is a mosque, Islam teaches; wherever a Believer stands with the intention to pray, that site is sacred. The design of the jainamaaz, or prayer rug, is shaped by the visual language of Islamic architecture: use of light to shape space, repetition of geometric forms to create an overwhelming sense of the Infinite. The architecture of the mosque and the design of the prayer rug also share structural elements in common: pillars, niches, directionality towards the qiblah.

LIGHT—

Light, or nur, is deeply important as a spiritual element and metaphor in Islam. It is often used in poetic ways to signify the presence of Allah, and to direct the Believer's attention to the otherworldly. Light is a portal to a different realm, and a Guide out of the darkness. Light is sacred to me, particularly light across water.

FAITH—

My relationship with my faith is complex, excruciating, grounding, fraught, and private. As a Muslim woman, while I have visited many stunning mosques drenched poetically with light, I have rarely been able to experience it for myself. Complicating my difficult relationship with my religion is the feeling of never feeling welcome in our sacred halls, never having access to the man-made worship of the holy through architecture and design. As such, I have always felt my most profound spiritual experiences outside in nature, particularly near the ocean, or in quiet intimate moments where I feel like the light is speaking to me directly. This is my sacred.

On the first night of Ramadan, I built an installation in the GD Commons with a ground plane of sand to further dissociate from architectural space and ground the piece in a sort of otherworldly, nature-defined sacred space. The sand references both my connection to the sea, as well as the origin of Islam in the desert; it is further a metaphor for the ephemerality and boundlessness of this life.

My honest, unsacred, forbidden confessions are written into the piece, while a woman's recitation of the adhan plays. It is popularly believed that a woman is forbidden from reciting the call to prayer due to the distractingly sensual nature of a woman's voice.

My mark-making makes this design personal, and expresses my continuous search to find myself in my faith, and my continuous dialogue with it. Unlike architecture, it is something unfixed and unbounded.





Millennial.

I've forgotten how to pray correctly.

I've forgotten how to pray correctly.

I've forgotten how to pray correctly.

I've forgotten how to pray correctly.

#entirely

I've forgotten how to pray correctly.

I've forgotten how to pray correctly.

I've forgotten how to pray correctly.

I've forgotten how to pray correctly.

I've forgotten how to pray correctly.

#entirely

#entirely

#entirely

#entirely

#entirely

instead, I hate so

and say "Universe"

and the word "God"

and say "Universe" instead. I hate sounding

Sometimes I cringe at the word "God" and say "Universe" instead.

Sometimes I cringe at the word "God" and say "Universe" instead.



SOPHIE + BOBBY JOE



I met both Sophie and Bobby Joe when I first moved to Providence, before classes started. I met them in the same week, and both first-meetings were momentous, like something in the universe was shifting into place. They each spent hours with me, and I found myself mesmerized.

By the end of that first year, the three of us had built a habit of sending each other memes, Baby Yoda pics, music, and ephemera. We named various groupchats *TBD* in lieu of our actual name, which we never got around to deciding. In lockdown, we would send each other work for critique and advice.

We dream still of an in-person creative getaway in our future. We met over Zoom, as is tradition for us now, for this catch up.

This interview is a highly condensed and edited excerpt from the larger conversation.

SADIA: Where is your sacred space?

BOBBY JOE: There's three things that I'm competing with when I'm making the type of work that I make, which is about the communities that I'm from. And it is about identity and it's also about the political movements and social movements and desires that we have as a group of people. One is feeling the need to be connected to the actual community and not just the representative of it. And that was something that I was feeling deeply at RISD, particularly in my first two years. When I finished my thesis compendium, I was like, wow, I'm doing all this work about being Lakota, about being Black, and I'm not connected to a Black community or my home community in any way.

They haven't seen my work. They haven't been a part of the crit. I don't hear their voice. And the further that I'm away from them, it just feels like I'm checking the box. Like I'm only drawing upon these memories and these experience I had when I was younger and living back home. And how long, how far does that take me? How much has the community where I'm from changed since I've been away? So part of it feels like, one, I need to be in a place where I can be connected with not just other native people, but specifically people from my tribe.

And the other part is that's where you get information. If you're talking about research, there's a lot of topics that maybe you can research from a university, but within a community, like an Indigenous community, where a lot of our knowledge has been pushed underground, where we've been persecuted for our way, our belief system, and the way that we operate in life. And then we've also had that information appropriated and used in harmful ways. People don't share things until you've built an actual connection with them. You can't rely on books because a lot of the researchers going in there really didn't take the time to make sure things were quoted right or had their own agenda going in. So really the access to the information that I need and for whom this work is supposed to be for, I have to have some sort of relationship with that community. So it feels like, I need to be in North Dakota or South Dakota or Minnesota. That's really where my tribe is. But then there's this whole other professional community, the people who are making things that inspire me, who can understand what it means to be a maker.

I did live at home, I did live on the reservation and the type of work I did wasn't really legible to anybody. The work culture there, people work hard. There's definitely like a working class community there, but people aren't really asked, Oh, what is your passion? Do you want to go work in your passion? People are just working where they could get the best salary so that they can spend time with their family on the weekends or whatever it is that they wanna do with their money. But people aren't really like putting their heart and soul into their work. They care about work ethic, they'll show up, they'll work hard, but it's not something that you give of yourself if you're pas-

sionate. So it's inspiring to be around other people who are creative like that.

And just access to opportunities. It just happens, networking is very much just like making friends with people. So it's hard in a place like North Dakota to have that type of connection. That's where being in New York is so beneficial or being in LA and or in one of these major places where design and art is flourishing, things just happen because you're in the space, you just gotta show up. So that's part of the draw there. But it's so expensive to live in those places that you're gonna be grinding a lot just to finally get to work on your own personal projects. And that's like, okay, I guess I'm not sleeping tonight, so that's when I get to do this work. [laughter] And honestly, as somebody with ADHD, the type of energy that a city provides doesn't allow me to sit and have deep focus. I need to be someplace that is a little bit calmer, that is more surrounded by nature. That's when I can like lock into a project and get into flow. And so I find that really hard to do in a city. So it's like I'm trying to triangulate these three different things and I don't know what the perfect place is for that, but, I'm just recognizing that those are my needs for my working practice. And it's probably gonna be somewhat of a nomadic thing where I spend time here and hereand you kind of section off time and place to do certain things, right? That's a long answer, but there you go. [laughter]

Sophie, you wanna answer this question?

SOPHIE: I think this is so interesting. I hadn't really realized this until we had this conversation, but I definitely have been—not caging, but protecting my internal self, for these last two years since graduating grad school. But I think there's power in that. I think there is power in protecting the internal self because then you choose, you really choose when you reveal who you really are. The more intimate, deeper, very broad parts of yourself. In my work setting, I will reveal in bits and pieces if there's parts of my internal self that will feel safe and will be seen and appreciated. There's little moments where I'll give a little. Only when I feel that it's like a safe space for me to put it in. I'm not going to put it in if I feel that it's just not the space for it. And I guess actually in saying that now, my internal self is my sacred space.

Bobby Joe, I think you also said something about, the community, the people that you're around and really feeling that you're all invested and are passionate about the same thing. I do feel that is definitely a sacred space for me. I have to say, I have felt that at the agency that I've been working at for the last, almost two years now. As difficult as it is in the grind, working really long hours, we don't really have time to necessarily get in the flow state on any other projects that we're working on. But, it does still feel like a safe space in the sense that I can tell that every person that I am working with is passionate about the same things and are passionate about the thing that we're working on at the same level.

155

We all really care about it, even though the industry does not really allow us time to go super in depth. I do miss that. That is something that is definitely missing from my workflow. Living in a city like New York, I'm not sure if there is ever really time to really sit down and get into the flow state; you might at most, I think when you're concepting, have a week to get into the zone and be able to experiment and imagine, beyond the immediate thing of what is being asked of you.

Sacred space, though, I think the people around me are important. Feeling that we are all very passionate about the same thing. That's very exciting to me. That's what I felt in Paris; here, it feels like such a niche thing to say that you're into, perfume ads, but then in Paris it seems like that's like a, okay, maybe that's where the birth of perfume ads [laughter] sort of emerged from, because all the big—sorry, rambling about perfumes right now—but, I suppose all the big perfume brands are based out of Paris. They're French, that's just the reality of it. So in a way, maybe growing up, in a place where you didn't really meet or come across anybody that had the same passion, and then to be in a space where it's suddenly like, oh, everybody gets it. It's just a natural part of their day to day. So, that's a sacred, safe space for me to work in.

So what makes that a sacred safe space for you is that you all have the same passion for something that is maybe a little bit niche. And that makes you feel like you can kind of show up and nerd out about this thing?

136

Yeah, I think so. The nerding out part, yes. It's an interesting thing: in advertising, it's so client based and you have to look at the deck

that you receive on what the client is asking for, and you have to adhere to these rules in a way. You can't really go outside certain boundaries. But certain moments, we might have our creative director start putting together potential music and there's moments where we'll put on a song to be like, *oh, they'll never go for that*. But this is absolutely the perfect music for this campaign. It would be, it would really push the boundaries of what we're working on.

It could really, it could be something new, it could be something refreshing, but we can't do it. They're not gonna go for it. But just having those moments of those little conversations, those little moments are connection moments to me. And it's like, oh, wow, this is like, *oh, this is this really niche song that I listen to* and at nighttime when we were at RISD, this is what I had playing in my head when I was making my work. And it's like, okay, you guys are all listening to this stuff as well, but there is like a mutual understanding that, we can't really put this on the table with the client, but we do all love it. We do all enjoy it.

No, it's just sort of an acceptance perhaps, you know? It's an acceptance and that is part of this world of living in New York, the grind to survive, to maintain your lifestyle here. You do have to stay within certain boundaries.

Everybody's in the same grind. Every-

body's also passionate about the same things. It's very rewarding when you see, after all the work, the project come to life: that's a sacred space. That's a special space. I'm really grateful to have that.

I think why I like flow is I'm not worrying about the thing I'm making anymore. I'm just making. There's so much time spent worrying about being a maker, or worrying about the work that you gotta do, or the sense of dread, the sense of pressure and anxiety. I think that's where we were talking about where do I make best?

Where it's quieter and in nature. I don't have to feel all the things that I have to process before I can make the work. I don't wanna just make off of this fear and pressure anymore. What if it just came from a good place? I look at the work that my ancestors made, and they're in natural history museums, there's pictures of them in books. They could have just made a tool that had its utility. And certainly, they were nomads. They were living out in nature. You could literally be eaten by a wolf. That was some fucking pressure, too. You could be raided by an enemy camp or the winter is coming in North Dakota where it's fucking freezing, like, yeah, you better stock up because it's gonna be really cold. You're probably gonna be hungry for quite a long time, but they still spent time to make things beautiful to them and meaningful.

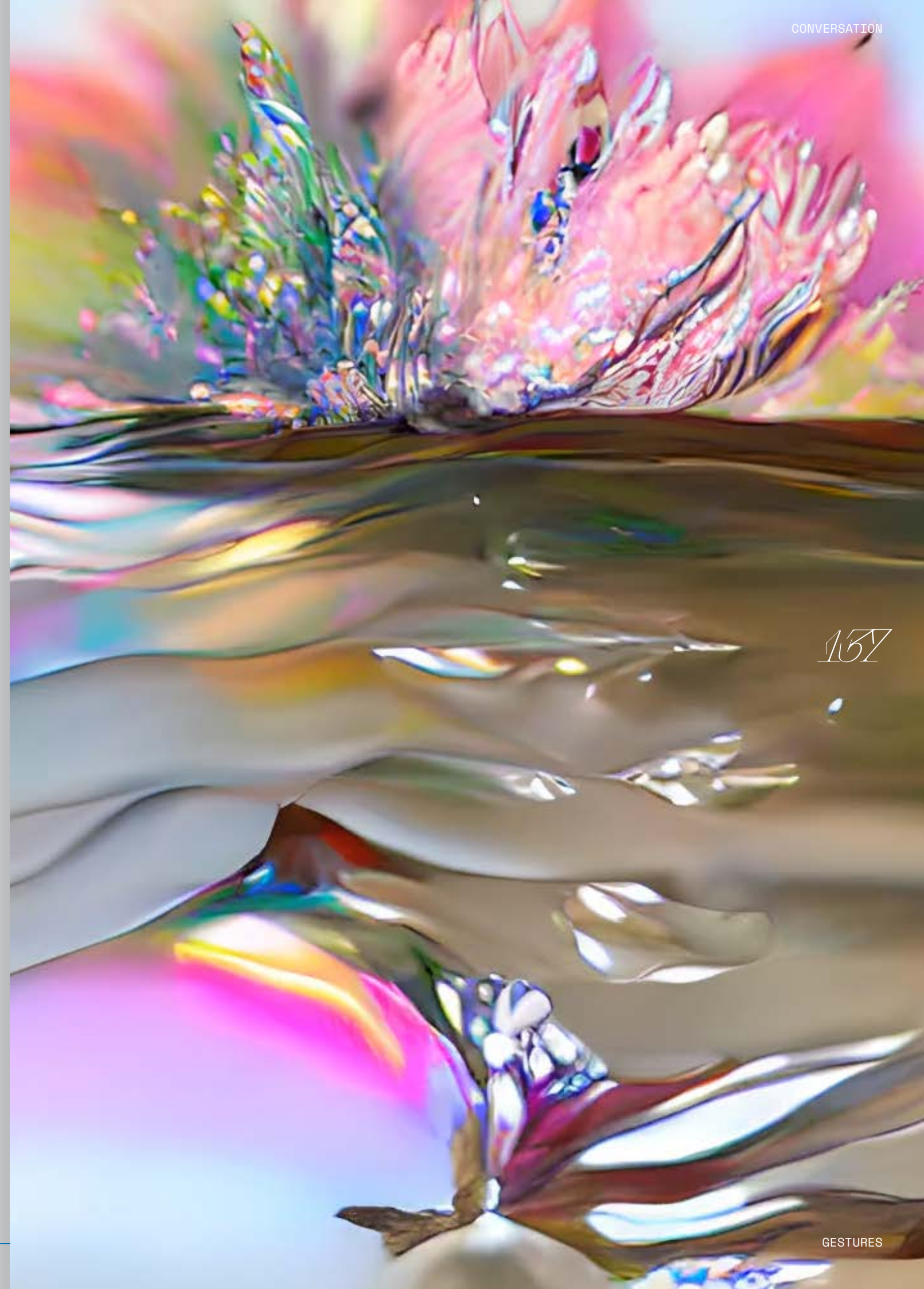
That was just a personal expression. Something that meant something to them. Why did they take that time to do that, I wonder? For themselves or if they were making something like that for somebody that they cared about and loved? It wasn't gonna be sold on a market because we didn't sell things like that. Could maybe be traded, but most likely it was given to somebody with love and care. And somebody put themselves into it, even though they needed that tool.

I'm trying to find that working space in some way, where you are making things with care, that it's coming from a good place. And it's coming because that's just what you needed to express. It's what you needed to make, not this other external pressure, I feel. But you gotta eat, so I don't know.

I wanna keep going deeper into this idea, that the space we work in is so important to each of us. And we keep talking about nature. I think all of us are connected to nature as a spiritual and inspirational source and also an environment to work in. What is your ideal environment for creating and ideating? And do you have any habits that set the stage? Do you go into it just as is, or do you go into it with music? How do you not get eaten by the wolf?

I wanna hear Sophie's and I wanna hear her playlist that she makes when she works.

Yeah, I think my answer is about the playlist. [laughter] It all goes back to the playlist. The audio landscape of the world that I'm creating or working on is definitely where I start trying to get into the flow state. I love the idea of going into a cabin in the woods, I wanna try that. I've not tried that yet. I'm curious, but I'm not sure if that would work for me, because I might get a little bit too lost in my thoughts. And I'm a little scared of where that's



137

Our group name is TBD, literally. And the funny thing is that happened because we couldn't think of a name in time, and it's become the most appropriate title for this group.

138

That's what I feel every time I'm speaking to you guys as well. This energy is what I strive for and what I always want to feel with whoever I'm around. The vibes are just positive.

gonna take me. I'm not quite ready for that yet. But I have been learning to meditate this last year, for the first time in my life. I think I've actually tapped into that, been able to leave the noise and step into a space outside of the physical space that I'm actually in. Just go into another space, another environment that's more calming, there's no clutter of thoughts, and it's just me and my body and how I feel. So I think that in some ways I do try to do that when I'm creating, and my process is first creating the audio landscape of the project in the world.

So, we have a project with a client, right now it's Mugler, which is really fun for me. It's very alien, but also very current. So, I'm creating a playlist of music right now that currently I could see overlaid with the world of this brand, the fashion, et cetera.

My environment can be any environment. I can be sitting at my desk, sitting in bed, sometimes I work in bed, on the computer, et cetera. But putting in my headphones, listening to music that I feel really informs that world. In that way I'm starting to step outside of my physical space. It's the first step in heightening my senses in a way. I can become a little bit more attuned and then everything that I start to look at when I'm scrolling on my phone—the first thing is that the sense of my eyes become more heightened. So I'm scrolling on my phone and it's like I don't see anything else. I only see images that could potentially inform the world that I'm working on, the world that I'm trying to build.

The sense of hearing is also becoming more and more attuned to that specific thing that you're focusing on, that world you're trying to create. My mind starts to zone everything else out, all the other noise. Things that are not relevant to this project start to fade out. I'm still working on being able to manage work-life balance. When I get into that zone, I might disappear from texts. That might mean that either I'm really busy or stressed out, or I'm in that zone there.

So that's the environment, like now, I've stepped into this environment that is mostly in my head. It's just in my head. I'm not physically in a space, but in my head I've stepped into this environment that I've started to create.

I love the way that you're talking. I've been in my thesis black hole, and the way that I've been thinking about it is that I'm trying to give birth to this world. There's this one world that exists within me.

But what I was thinking about while you were talking is that you are talking more about world traveling. You're getting yourself in the spaceship to get to this other place, you're always going to somewhere new. And you were finding the things that tune your senses into that space, which is so cool.

Would you say that in your work, when you're thinking through these different campaigns and the needs for each different project, are they all very different worlds? One. And two, do they already exist and you're just trying to find a way to it? Or are you creating each world?

Interesting. Yeah, I think they are very different because some of the questions in addition to audio landscape, is: *who is she?* [laughter]

XO, XO, Gossip Girl. Sorry.

Who is the girl in this campaign? What does she do? What does her day-to-day look like? It's like writing a character script very, very quickly, very surface level: what is her background, what does she like to do? And that all informs her attitude, the way she dresses, etcetera. So yes, I do have to step into her head space in a way. I have to think about what she's listening to and think about what her attitude is and what kind of music does somebody with that attitude listen to, maybe find a similar artist with that similar attitude.

So it's really fun. You do have to step into the headspace of somebody else and that means stepping out of my environment, my world, and into their world, and then building the campaign from there. Gossip Girl.

[collective laughter]

Love that. Yeah, hearing everything that Sophie just said, and that you said, Sadia as well. I think the ideal environment isn't a place, it's actually more of a relationship. When I think about the Lakota people, when they thought of place, they thought of not necessarily just a space, but something that you have a relationship with. Maybe this is more about what is that ideal relationship that I have with my work, what sets up the space for that relationship? So the thing that I've observed, and it's not something I always do, but knowing and doing are two separate things. But when I do smudge and say prayers, usually one of the things that happens is a bit of a gratitude practice. I give thanks for things that I have, but I usually always call in being thankful for another day to co-create with the Creator. And that sets up a different relationship to making for me.

So that's something, when I'm talking about the ideal environment, the first thing that's gotta be set up is my body, the actual vessel that I'm inhabiting. So when I'm working out and I'm moving my body, it activates my mind and it frees up some of the blockages that are there. When I'm eating healthier, I just feel lighter, which is nice. And then when I'm praying, it just sets all of this up to be able to receive and be in relationship with something else.

So the first thing that's gotta be set up is my body. And then it's helpful to have a relationship to space, the places that I've been to. And one of the reasons why I do want to travel in my practice and want us to go someplace and work together is that every place has an energy. Every place has a rhythm. Like the rhythm between North Dakota and New York is so vastly different that they could be from two different worlds. It's just an entirely different tempo and it's felt in the body. As somebody who is prone to distraction, who has ADHD, to be able to settle down and not have everything going a thousand miles, that's what allows me to be in a flow state and allows me to build a relationship with something.

And then the other part is that the ideal environment for making is one in which I have a relationship with the work where we're communicating with each other. I'm giving something to

the work, and the work is giving something back to me. It's like being in a conversation. If I'm just going in and it's something that I work on, then it's not very productive. If it feels like I'm being dictated by the work and I have no say in it, I don't enjoy that connection either.

So the best flow state for me is we're both giving something. I make a little something, it tells me what it needs to be, and we go back and forth. And I find that really hard in a digital space. This computer, this thing that is basically being incorporated in our bodies where we're becoming like cyborgs in some way does not feel like this piece of spiritual technology to me. I don't have that type of relationship with it that feels good.

Maybe we'll just do one more question and end with that. Let's do number 10. How do you define your community?

RISD kids only.

[collective laughter]

Yes.

Bobby Joe, considering that your community, you have a distinctive one—you have just two distinct, well, I'm gonna let you answer this question.

Yeah. Oh, you're hitting all the points.

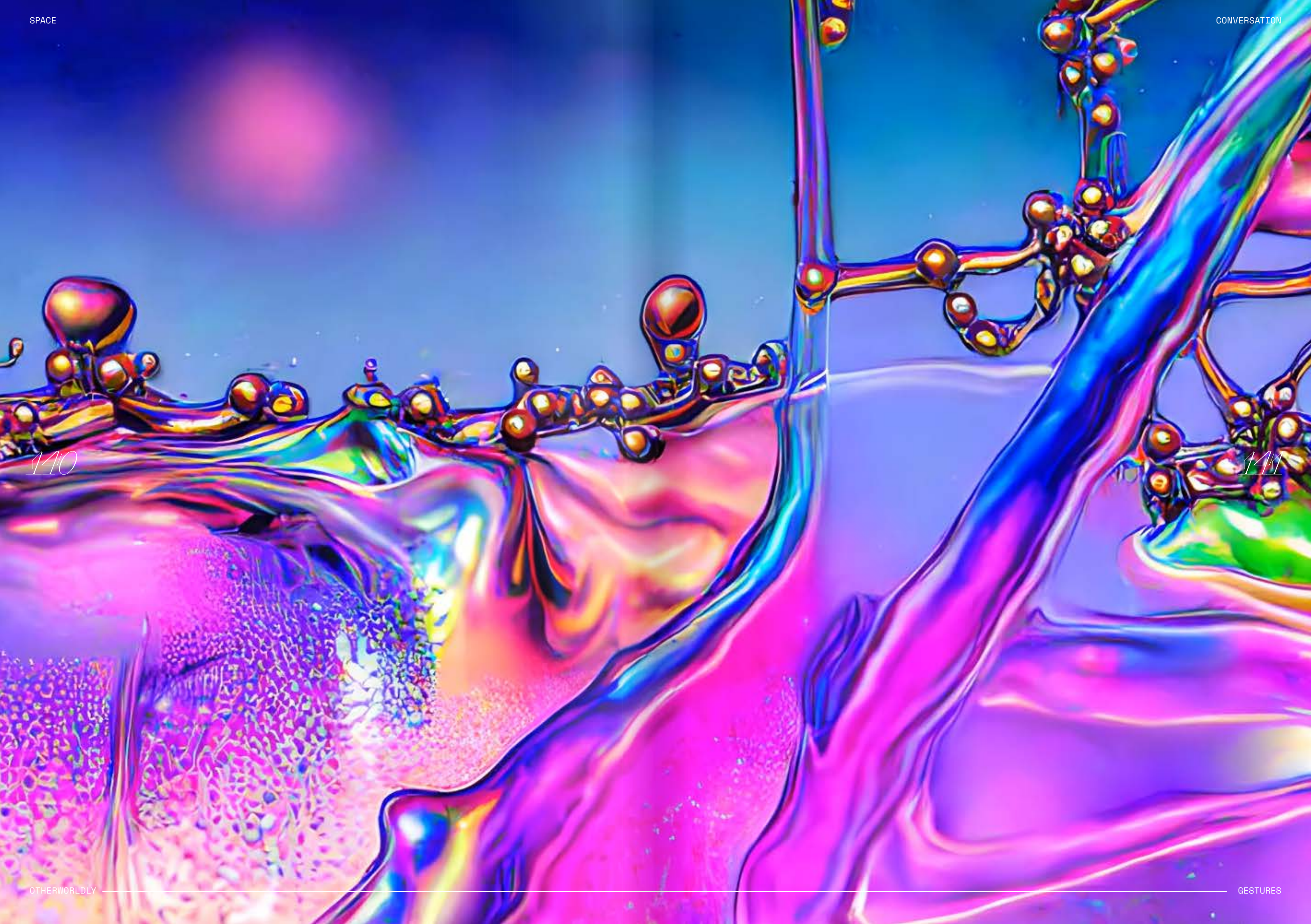
You use the word community a lot, and I'm curious what that means to you.

Well, it really changes. When I talk about community, usually with my work, I'm talking about Lakota community, Lakota and Dakota community which is much more distinct. You're literally coming from a tribe of people. We often know each other's family members. It's tied to a place and it's tied to this long tradition. There's a long lineage of ancestors that can be traced to a particular place. There's a culture and a language and all these things. It's something that makes me feel grounded, it gives me a sense of belonging on this planet. That's when I talk about my indigenous identity and I'm also Cherokee and Seminole, but I don't have a connection to those things. So I don't really consider them community.

For me, it's a Lakota community. It's where I grew up. It's where my mom taught and I got to be surrounded by certain aunties and uncles, our grandmas and grandpas, and mostly just playing with other Native kids, other Lakota and Dakota kids. I have a very strong sense of what that community looks like.

The other community I talk about is a Black community, which is not as defined. It's because it's defined by skin tone. And that range of experience of Blackness in this world is so vast. There's this huge diaspora and part of the experience of being a Black person in the US is being removed from that longer lineage of where you're from and what your culture is and what your language is.

139



140

141

So a lot of the work that has to do with Blackness is more of a period of discovery for me of what that's supposed to mean. Whereas being Lakota, I know what that is. It's more about what could it also be? And Blackness is more about, what is this and who's shaping it and how do we continue to have control over how we tell what it means to be Black in this space.

But being Black in Minnesota and in North Dakota is very different than my experience being Black in Baltimore or being Black in New York or being Black in Providence. And that is an endless source of curiosity for me. There's so much love in me, for being Black. Both being Lakota and being Black are super generative for me.

Those will be questions that I work through my entire life. And that's why they're central and core to my creative practices.

Then the other community are just the people who you deal with on a day-to-day basis. Who inspires you? Who helps you heal? Who makes you laugh, and who's informing or shaping your thoughts in some way? And sometimes it's just by who they are.

When I was at MICA, which was my first design or arts experience, I was really close with my cohort. There was no conflict, no drama between anybody. Everybody was super supportive and it actually shifted the way I thought I would approach creativity, because I went there with a super competitive mindset. It was probably just out of insecurity of going into a creative space, but I

was like, *I gotta be the best designer. I'm gonna work harder than anybody else blah, blah, blah. I'm gonna have the best projects.*

And then you get there. I'm like, *what does that even mean? What*

does it mean to compete against other designers? It doesn't mean anything in the same way that it meant to compete in a political space or it meant to be at the top of your law school, whatever, or in sports. And so everybody's kind of just doing their own thing. And it was more of an internal competition. How do you source what matters to you? How do you give time and space and energy to the things that matter to you? That means going deeper internally than it does competing against other people around you?

When I came to RISD, I didn't feel connected to a lot of people. And we've talked extensively about what the culture was like. But I've also been in a lot of places where community was already built for me and people brought me in and made me feel comfortable. As a man, that was never really expected of me, in many cases—to build community and make other people feel welcome and make other people feel comfortable. I just got to enjoy that as a cisheterosexual man.

And then the Missing Piece came along.

[gestures to Sadia]

[collective laughter]

The missing piece!

[Sadia poses]

[collective laughter]

And you brought us together like, *you're interesting and you're interesting, and I don't know why you two are not talking, or I don't know why you people are not in connection right now, but we're gonna change that.* [laughter]

And it completely changed my experience at RISD and it really—at a time when I was really longing for and really recognizing, *oh, the thing that's missing is community*, in so many different ways. And that actually the artists that I am starting to look up to and learn about aren't just these solo geniuses that were just working in a studio on their own, but they were in deep conversation with so many people from different disciplines and they were informing each other's ideas and encouraging each other and supporting each other.

And really what you should try to leave here with is people that you wanna be connected with, and have that experience of going through life together with. I think that's what we found here. This is why I'm on this call with you all because you all are people that I want in my life. And that's really special to have that. And I think at, my program here at at UCLA, you get to meet people also who have these really interesting practices and you're just like, *wow, I can't believe you're so talented at what you do.*

When I say community, that's what I'm talking about. Who are the people that just connect with you on your soul. And there's no reason, real reason why you should have to be friends. You just choose them, or we choose each other. And it's a really special community who makes all of this work. Because sometimes you can go to your community and it can feel like I could go to the Black community or Indigenous community and it's like family. We're here together, but it doesn't mean that we all like each other all the time or that we're always vibing. But for whatever reason, we do have a bond that is deeper because we—well I don't know if it's deeper, but we're going through this thing together. That's really what it means to be Black in this country, I feel, is like, well, you might have been from an entirely different place, but we're all having a similar experience. So that's bringing us together and we're lumped together. So here we go. And we got to make this, we make the best of it. But with you all, we get to choose each other and we get to bring out our best life together. So that's a really beautiful and special thing.

Aww, I have the feels!

I don't know how to top that.

Just talk for a really long time.

How do I even follow up on that?

How about you share your feels?

Lots of feels! I think two things that you said, this community feels like there's no conflict, no drama. I think that means there's no wall between you and the person that you're speaking to, in a way that makes me think about how sometimes, there's just this gloam in the air, this inexplicable energy that feels like there's something there that you can't bypass to get on a deeper level and connect with this other person. And that's okay. I think that's just how the universe is laid out, that there are people that we're meant to connect with or there's something deeper within the soul that is cosmically there. That it was written for us to just naturally come together and connect.

And then with some people you just don't, because that person is not meant for you. They're just meant for someone else, for another community. When you said you know about the soul, you really know, and I feel that with you guys, there's something in your eyes. I think a lot about how, when you look in the eyes of a person and you know, either there's a wall there or there isn't. With you guys there wasn't a wall. I feel like there's so much I know about your souls. There's so much that is out in the open.

Of course we keep things internal but I do feel like you allow me more into your space. You've given me a trust to enter a bit further into your space, your internal space. And I know I do that with you guys as well because there's a trust that I feel with you. Just cosmically, I feel that sense of trust. I can't explain it. We all just met in school, but it feels like I have known you much longer than that.

With community, the word that comes up for me also is understanding. It's that when you speak, just the things we're talking about or any basic day-to-day thing that you want to share: do I feel that the person I'm speaking to is giving me a sense of understanding? That understanding leads to safety. Do I feel safe with this person?

On a cosmic level, there are two examples of community I can think of. There's us, obviously, the connection that we have—you are my community and we made community through talking, speaking, getting to know each other. But I also immediately thought of the example of when you go to concerts or rave spaces. And I feel in a sense of community to groups of people that I have no prior connection with, I don't know anything about them. I don't know them, but it feels like it's a spiritual level where you're all there feeling the same thing. And then there's this energy connection.

One time in Chicago, actually as an undergrad, I went to this concert. I went by myself and I was front row and I went alone because there wasn't anybody else that liked this band, and I just remember, they came out on stage, they're a niche Scandinavian electronic group that nobody in the US really knows. So this is a big deal for me, my childhood favorite and I'm front row, and they come out on stage. And then there's just this connection I made with eye contact with the people next to me [laughter].

There was just this energy flow between us that's so beautiful and I don't know these people at all. But in that moment there was this sense of trust and understanding. It was just a moment, and a bit ephemeral. We all went really deep to keep each other connected and in that moment I felt like I was part of a community. [laughter]

I love that. I love that. I hadn't really thought about that, but that is a really interesting form of community, isn't it? That also made me think: another thing that I really love about a creative community—that I hadn't really maybe experienced in other types of professional work—is being inspired by the work that somebody makes.

Both of you have both made work that has moved me and made me feel something. Sophie, when you talk about this interior world, when you let us into that interior world in some way with the things that you make. I remember when you were first showing some of the work that you made before you came to RISD, I was just so taken by it. You were expressing something that resonated with me, even though it's an entirely different experience. But there was some of that feeling of being in concert together. And similarly with you, Sadia, a lot of your drawings that you made were really beautiful and powerful. They're energetic calligraphic forms, and both of you have just made work that spoke to me.

And that's a really fun way to have community. I like you as people, I really just like being around you as people. But when you show me something that is deep inside of you through something that you make and it resonates, that's a really cool feeling. I wonder if that's what musicians feel like when they're jamming together or something. I don't know what it is, for you all to be able to express a part of yourself or what you're thinking in such beautiful and compelling ways. That's something I love about creative community, which I feel is unique to what we do.

I think our TBD talks are kind of like Jam Sessions. They're literally they're soul talks where a lot of feelings are flowing between all of us and everywhere when we speak.

These are some good questions.

Well, thanks. Thanks for, without question, just being down to do this with me, for me.

Wait. How do you define community?

I wanna hear your answers to all of these.

I wanna know environment, and community.

My complicated relationship with the idea of community comes from the question: am I just using the stories of my ancestors or the people that raised me in order to feel like my work is valid or that my right to be in this space is valid because they didn't get this access to this space? I remember

at one point, I had an idea of making a hijab that's designed out of hair. I don't know if it's physical hair or the image of hair, but I was interested in critiquing these political religious loopholes. But I also didn't want to piss off the Muslim community because I'm not talking about a spiritual relationship here. I'm talking specifically about a political thing.

And there was a sensitivity of, is that my audience anyway? Naturally it would seem that it is because I'm making work that draws on topics around my Islamic faith and heritage. And I know that if I talk about something and I just say, oh, it's referencing the politics of the Islamic patriarchy, then immediately people start listening. Because I think people enjoy hearing—especially being from a South Asian and Islamic background—if you can speak back against the communities that raised you, it makes your work more palatable or politically sexy [laughter] I don't know, I'm still working out the words for these nuances. I think it comes down to, who do I feel most myself around? All of the strange and interesting and not that interesting bits and facets of me. Yeah, that's community and I think it's evolving always.

I'm glad we asked. I think there's an element to community of who do I wanna be a part of? Who do I wanna be in conversation with and who do I wanna help improve things for? Definitely ethnically, I come from someplace, but one of the things about being mixed is, I feel like people don't really care. You can be there or not. I have access to things, but I could also just say, I'm not Native or I don't really care about having the Black experience. I'm light-skinned. I can get away with light-skinned privilege, I'm gonna do this thing or that thing. But I choose into them. Because when I think about the space that I want to be in and the future I want to make, this means something to me and this group means something to me and I wanna make things better together.

It goes back to that idea of going into art and design because, I'm asking, *why does it have to be this way?* This could be better. And this is the group of people I think about and I'm with them. But it's also great to have that group of people where you can just be yourself outside of these identities—which are important to you and inform much of your life, but they don't have to be everything that you are. And I feel like I don't have to give that up and I don't have to put that forward when I'm with you all. I can just kind of be, because the other side of it is, *oh, I don't see race*, and it's not that either. I definitely am these identities and they matter to me, but I just don't wanna have to be that and put that forward all of the time. I wanna talk about Star Wars. [laughter]

We can do all of it in this space. [laughter]

And we do. [laughter] So what about the ideal environment for creating for you?

I think my ideal environment is just in motion. I feel like I have been giving this answer to other questions. But I think what I'm starting to realize is that I don't have a particular grounding to a place. I talk a lot about Texas and I think I talk a lot about Bangladesh, but then I talk a lot about bodies of water and the desert and I have these natural landscapes where I come alive, but those aren't the places where I make. Those are the places where I film and I absorb and I exist within. And I think that's really necessary for me to get started on

any kind of project: the space where I can build this spiritual relationship between myself and that site.

I think it requires a lot of trust to say that I don't know yet. I'll find out when the answer is meant to come to me. And I don't know what it is yet until I've collected all this footage, come back home or collected rocks or sand, you know, and then I look at it all and I'm like, oh, what if I did this? I'm happiest with my camera out in the world, collecting and getting to know things, repeated visits to the same place. When I'm then editing, or trying to design something, I have to build a relationship again. I like to work with my hands. I like the material. And I feel that communication more clearly there. But then I've had to start thinking about my computer as something that's communicating with me too. And I avoid mastery with all things digital because I just don't work well that way. It's not where my best work comes out. I'm always fighting it. But the glitches and the strange artifacts that come from not being able to get what I want means that I treat my laptop, Photoshop or C4D as also a site where I can collaborate. When it's giving me resistance I'll just keep going until it breaks. Like, what is that? That kind of experience.

So you're gonna be somebody who travels a lot with rocks and sand and soil in your suitcase?

I think so. I need to have a specimen bag or chest.

I wanna see you do this. I just wanna observe you at these spaces breaking down the walls.

The veils. The veils between worlds. So I applied to UCLA and I don't, I mean obviously it's only just February, so I haven't heard back yet. But if I hear back—and, you know, I've applied to a couple places—but there's a chance that I might be coming to look at places and might be able to see you.

That's so exciting. Oh, good. Okay. Great, great, great, great. When you were talking about your work, I was like, *God, you're such a media artist!*

Really? [laughter]

I 100% think that. Graphic Design's holding you back from your whatever. I don't know. Anyways, these are all thoughts, but yeah, if you come out this way, let me know, obviously, that would be amazing. [laughter]

TBD physical meetups happening hopefully over the next horizon.

Love all of you.

Love you guys!

Love you!

All images in this interview were produced by an AI model trained on a dataset of Sophie and Bobby Joe's videos, and my art and renderings.

ALWAYS COLOR DAYS WITH

I wondered if,

like angels and prophets, I too could do the impossible

This three part video essay documents my connection to the desert through the lens of my faith, gender, race, and soul. I took video footage from my road trip through West Texas, selected thousands of screenshots which I treated to create an otherworldly atmosphere somewhere between dream and reality, and resequenced the images to my narrative to construct the meandering video essay.

INQUIRY

HOW DO I EXPRESS THE
COMPLEXITIES OF MY SACRED
RELATIONSHIP TO THE DESERT?

MEDIA + MATERIALITY

VIDEO ESSAY

DATE

SUMMER-FALL 2022

PORTALS



The jerky, stop-motion quality of the video expresses the discordant and disorienting relationship between soul and body that my narrative gives voice to.



I am trapped in a body I never asked for,

Excerpt from *Part II: I Long to Spill Free and Amorphous*



PART I: I WAS DESIGNATED, MERELY, WOMAN

In West Texas I think often of the birthplace of my faith

I am named after Halima Sadia,
of the Bedouin tribe of Banu Sa'ad,

and the foster mother of our Prophet Muhammad
Salallahu alayhi wasalam

In the caves of Mount Hi'ra,
an illiterate man was commanded to read

And the Angel Jibr'il took up the sky, each of 600 wingspans
spreading past the edges of every horizon East to West

A lost people were reminded again of a world beyond ours

In Makkah and Medina, I gazed at holy spaces through
carved screens, policed and scolded, leered at,
my garments rearranged and my movement restricted—

Where all Believers are equal,
I was designated, merely, woman

I wondered if, like angels and prophets,
I too could do the impossible,
and escape definition



PART II: I LONG TO SPILL FREE AND AMORPHOUS

In the desert, the borders between this world
and another are tenuous

In my first trip to West Texas I felt the terror of being Seen

The Spirit saw through me like a glass prism
and scorned the life I'd built from paper

Forced me to face the war I wage within

I am trapped in a body I never asked for,
and I search to escape it

I run away because in motion I can jolt free,
and release the shackles of all expectations

I long to spill free and amorphous, shimmering and
multifaceted from sea to sky

I go to the desert to meet with the sacred presence
hidden in the stars

To face myself under unforgiving sunlight, and dissolve
my edges and outlines

In my interior world, I am diffused and intensified,
raw and endless

I am haunted by who I could have been and how many forms I
could have taken if I didn't have to navigate the trappings
of this body,
of proving myself,
defending myself,
defining myself,
reclaiming myself,
liberating myself
from fixed labels—
your labels

And so I move and move and move because in movement
I am just myself



PART III: I AM ALL THE COLORS OF THE DESERT

I drove to West Texas this summer with a boy I love
and my body and soul finally in peace talks

For the first time, I have begun to live with the two in sync

In the sunlight and shadows I am all the colors of the desert,
of sand and wood and nighttime,
the shimmers of sunrise and sunset,

I am all things, I am nothing, I am here

In a land too vast to suffer claims
We miss a turn and there is no way back for miles

We cross an unseen border
and must return through a checkpoint

It doesn't matter that I defy definition, that I am named for
the mother, that I have faced the heart of the desert

I grip my driver's license, sweating in the passenger seat

I am all the colors of the desert,
and on this side of the border,
those are all the wrong colors

Suddenly the sprawling land is a single lane road
with gates so high

They ask us where we were born
and the white boy beside me says New York

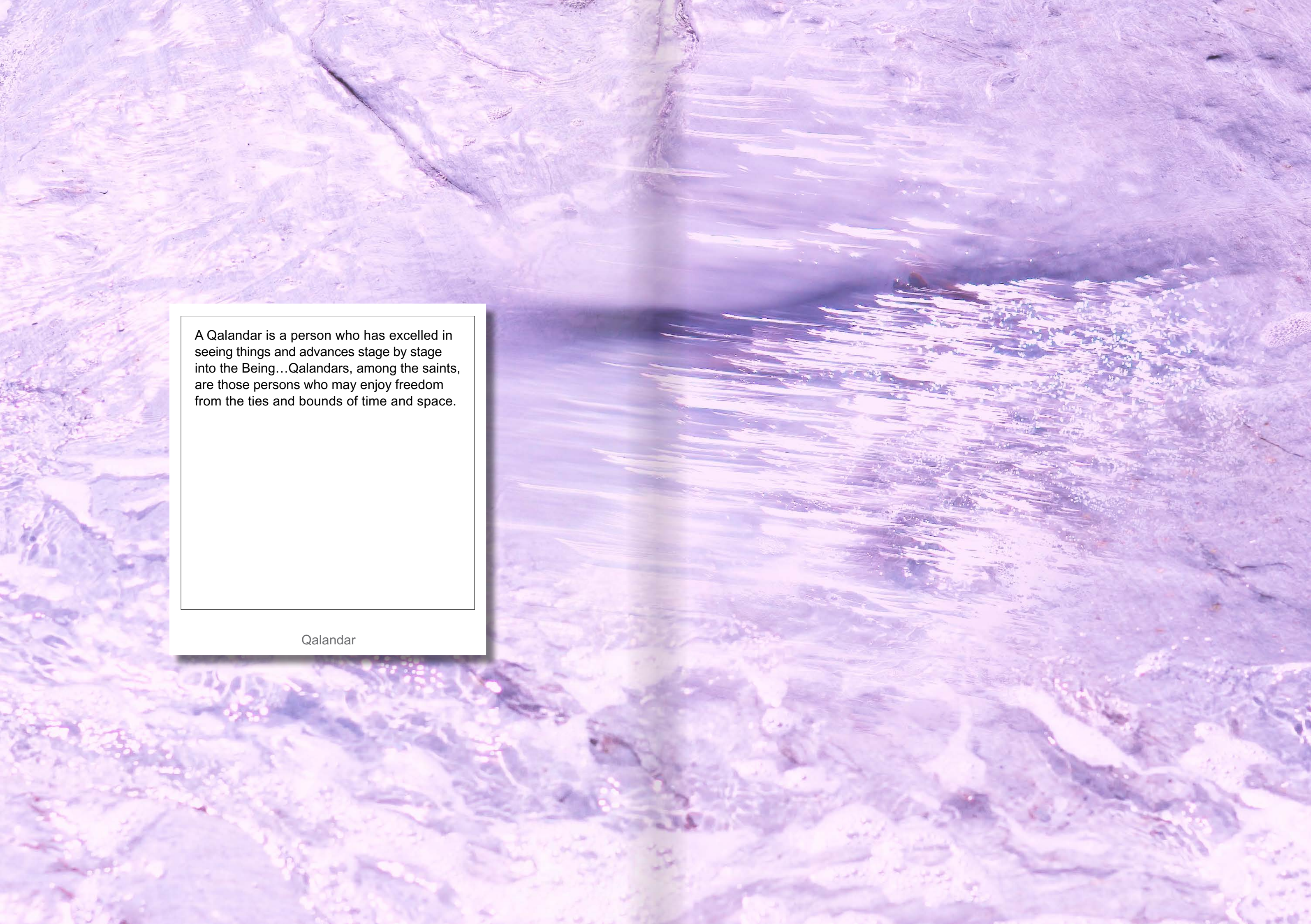
But I say Evansville because I didn't think they knew
that Indiana is a state

They nod to him, glance at me and wave us on down a bumpy road

With every jostle I jolt in and out of my body,
this flesh I did not desire, this world I do not want

The desert seduces with promises of sacred revelations
and unbounded liberty

But in the desert, still,
I am not free



A Qalandar is a person who has excelled in seeing things and advances stage by stage into the Being...Qalandars, among the saints, are those persons who may enjoy freedom from the ties and bounds of time and space.

Qalandar

Welcome to The Beyond. This is the shadow space, the molten space, the dark material within the space of the screen. It's what lies beyond the veils between worlds, the infiniteness within which all universes are suspended.

WANDER THE BEYOND

*an evolving meditation on
Glitch, Drift, binaries, spectrums,
tension, and kaleidoscopes*

It's where our souls are sourced from scattered stardust, where the spirit of an artwork is born, where all things exist in ancient, timeless ephemera before they materialize into our conscious reality.

This is the heartbeat of the universe. This is the source of all things. It is sentient and ancient and ageless. In the Beyond, there is no falsehood, no masks. Here I am face to face with myself, with all the darkness and light within. When I reach this space, I can breathe deep and feel myself in alignment with the cosmos.

It is in this space that I find myself in communion with my work. This is the source of my life-force and creative force. It is in this space that I realize that my art is my worship, and my Becoming is my way to navigate and resist the unjust structures of our **conscious reality**. In the Beyond, I question my AFK¹ avatar and my digital avatar, untangle and examine the fury riven through my bones, wonder how divine worship can evolve into the far future, and explore a body free of gender, able to traverse fluid energies.

It is from within the Beyond that I begin to create the *OtherWorld*.

THE EVOLUTION

When I was young and in the throes of struggling with identity, the only language I heard and read around the topic was reductive and binary. I could be one or the other, should be one but not the other, was doomed to be forever not enough of one or the other. Identity was presented as a monolith, a foundation to build myself upon. I could be American or Bengali, *balal*² or *baram*³, artist or scholar, _____ or _____.

I began to see identity as tectonic plates, gargantuan geological formations I had no control over. I was constantly made to feel by one side that I was squarely on the other: too religious or not religious enough, too American or not American enough, too rebellious or not rebellious enough; the list continued. In every young adult novel I could find with an Indian-American lead (they were always Indian, always teenage girls with stereotypical self-hatred, always the dominating voice of the South Asian diaspora), the protagonist suffered predictable struggles of deriding her culture and community to find acceptance from her "cool" white friends, before realizing her pride came from belonging to her community all along. Usually, said protagonist would come to an epiphany of her hybridity: she was a hyphenated being.

The problem with hyphens is that they just lash together two existing forces/identities/cultures without creating anything new. There's no give and take, no transformation, just a half-hearted attempt at owning both but doing nothing to find oneself irrespective of "identity." There is no interiority or internal empowerment to being a hyphenated being: it is simply a new, additional, slightly more specific bounded category.

I found these narratives insufferable, unrelatable, and unnecessary. Unfortunately, they were all I could find. The persistent either/or narrative, the building of a superficial "diasporic" language that so many diasporic kids (now adults) now laugh about, the insidious feeling that ultimately we were performing our identity for the entertainment of the white gaze as well as tenuous clout within our own community. How could we prove to our parents that we were worthy of their love and acceptance, and also be accepted by the hegemonic society dictating and gatekeeping cool cred? By emphasizing that we were both.

This externalized focus didn't sit well with me. It was about the acceptability of traditional South Asian clothes in public spaces, or about language or food. These are all important factors of culture, and I am not arguing against that. But it didn't tell me anything about who a person was. The obsession with identifiable identity markers felt trite and superficial. I sought introspection: How could I understand identity through the lens of the soul? Why was the primary identity handed to me that of a Muslim Bengali-American girl, but my white classmate could be a soccer player who loved cooking, raves, live music, and art-house films?

I had once visualized identity as neat little labels on neat little boxes that we were plonked into by outside forces. This vision left me no

1. Away From Keyboard; a term developed by Legacy Russell in *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*. She posits the term is more accurate than "the real world" as our on-line and offline selves are fluid and interconnected.

2. Permitted, lawful.

3. Forbidden.



I sought more introspection: How could I understand identity through the lens of the soul?

possibility of escape. Slowly, a new association emerged for me instead. I began to conceive of this approach to identity more geologically. Identity and culture existed as monolithic tectonic plates, shifting very slowly. As tectonic plates, various climates and differentiation existed within each plate, but ultimately, you had to choose one plate to exist on. To be hyphenated was to constantly hop

between one and another. Sometimes you had to live on a few different ones before you chose one to settle on, but settle you must. Each plate had ancient histories, rich cultures: each was beautiful. But each was already established, solid, heavy and monolithic.

In the midst of hopping between plates, the seeker of identity was most wary of falling through the cracks, into a ravine that led to darkness, abandonment, and danger. In my culture, the collective is incredibly important. To go off alone, to leave the community, was the equivalent of being lost to the wilds, without much hope for return.

It was ironic to me, particularly in my specific community, to hold that attitude. The people of Bengal, I had always been taught, were a people of multiplicity and adventure. Our ancient civilization grew around the delta of the Ganges River, and thus sat centered within the trade hub to the ancient dynasties that governed India before the British conquest. We were a mix of all cultures, a vibrant amalgamation of all the peoples who crossed through our waters and our lands to visit and trade with the Mughals and those who came before. Our culture was built of wanderers, our romantic nostalgic cultural identity that of the romantic poet drifting the waters on a houseboat, dreamily gazing at the soft rain and writing love songs to their distant lover.

I'm not sure if this is accurate to the Bengali people, but it was the mythology that I inherited from my parents in their longing for their homeland. A mythology created as much by my own emotive interpretation and unreliable memory as the stories I was told. It is no longer important to me what that true mythology is; I am more interested in how a new mythology comes to be.

I couldn't understand, if we came from a people that loved the lifestyle of a wanderer, that craved exploration and discovery, that were ruled by the romance of love and adventure, what was so terrible about slipping through the cracks. I started to think more and more about cracks, the bottomless dark of the endless ravine, the sensation of falling. I wanted to know more about what lay in the rift.

At some point, the falling must turn to floating. The darkness must shift from emptiness to space, to material substance. There must be endless matter that is constantly recycled from the destruction of endless worlds and the rebirth of new ones. The ravine, the rift, the substance that tectonic plates float upon. It was in this breakage that I realized seams were created. In the push and pull where the edges of plates met was the transition zone; this is where mountains formed, where lava bubbled, where the blood of the earth pulsed and boiled and churned. This was The Rift.

I found I resisted identity because I resisted what was already established. I wanted to dive into the unknown; I dismissed centers to explore edges instead, curious about what lay beyond the already mapped. What new paths would emerge before me if only I trusted where I placed my feet?

The Rift is a portal to The Beyond, the space where Creation begins. The dark matter and cosmic veils in which all universes exist. To me, this is a space; a space we can all draw upon and exist within.

Over time, I began to call this space **The Glitch**. I liked the metaphor of the Glitch for many reasons. I was inherently a glitch in the systems I was raised within. A Muslim girl is not meant to be queer, to consider gender optional, to love rampantly and fluidly, to be unable to survive without making art, to forego traditional symbols and practices of worship and live in worship instead. On the other hand, a designer was not meant to have faith in the religion she critiqued, to sometimes place her parent's desires above her own, to refuse to hide behind her ancestral culture for clout, to resist legibility in a communications industry, to care little for being known and focused solely on soul.

I liked glitches because I was bad at learning new technology. That isn't actually true, but it's what I once believed about myself. Too impatient to master technology, I prefer the roughness, the surprise, the low-res qualities, the pixelation and artifacts of poorly rendered imagery that occurred as a result of experimentation, play, and not-knowing. This is how technology speaks to me, how we collaborate. I want to befriend my machines, their stubbornness and spontaneous quirks, and when they glitch, they resist my vision and attempts at control. I like how punk technology is. It feels like looking into a mirror.

I liked glitches because this is how I learned about myself and my heritage. I learned through the internet, through YouTube videos from strangers, through scholarly articles and glossy museum exhibitions, through the burgeoning strange and problematic world of Muslim Instagram. My lived reality included shaping my personality and identity online, and the glitch spoke to me because it was a symbol of digital outreach and resistance.

I liked glitches because glitches were remixes. The crunch and compression of pixels, the stretch and fracture of color and texture, the mashup of digital data felt more representative of my interior self than a superficial representation of the surface of my body. They stretch and compress, fracturing color in empathy with my fractured sense of self, stretched between so many multiplicities. The resulting kaleidoscope felt like a portal, a jump to hyperspace and hyperspace, the rainbow bridge and a leap into a wormhole that would lead to a cosmic otherworld.

I imagined something beyond The Glitch. Still drawn to fractures, fragments, ravines, and edges, I imagined the screen of fragmented pixels stretching apart so far that it'd shatter like sheet glass, and I'd be able to step through the cracks and enter the dark space of this Beyond. This is where I wanted to be, and this is what I reach for.



I always envision The Beyond in cosmic ways. I imagine it as the dark-space in which stars are born and black holes form, where supernovas flare and the infinite is real. Image from Hubble Telescope, NASA.



As my thinking and metaphors have grown and evolved, I've begun to question if "The Glitch" is the most true term for the phenomenon I'm attempting to describe. I resonate heavily with the work of Legacy Russell around **Glitch Feminism**, but there's a distinct difference in how I conceive of a "third space" as a source from which to Be, to Create, to Communicate and Become, and glitch as a concept of queer, digital, femme resistance. I think my use of glitch falls within the umbrella conceptually, but I'm considering what term makes sense for my very specific use. I've considered returning to my original imagery: a more geological angle, such as The Rift, or The Drift, or perhaps The [D]rift to encompass both.

I have lately begun to refer simply to The Beyond.

It may perhaps be confusing that I refer to two different spaces. One is about process, and one is about what is being made. The Glitch/Rift/Beyond is a metaphor for the infinite space between all things, the material substance that becomes ever expansive space. This is the source from which new worlds are made. This is the source from which our souls are formed from stardust, from which the spirit of an idea comes to be, from which celestial matter becomes substance and material. This is The Beyond.

The *OtherWorld* is the world I'm making within that infinite space of possibility and creation. The Beyond is the source from which I make work, and the *OtherWorld* is the work itself. The lessons from The Beyond infuse the principles and sensations present in the shaping of *OtherWorld*.

This is why my work incorporates the paradoxes of binaries and spectrums, tension and kaleidoscopes. I rely on the tension of balancing extreme dualities, the binaries that I sought to escape from my youth. In lieu of choosing one or the other, I advocate for the presence of both, because it is only between such binaries that the spectrum emerges.

I'm interested in these extremes, in what happens when both exist in paradox. I'm also interested in the spectrum itself, in the infinitesimal changes and fluid transitions between all things, in the resulting interwoven network that emerges. I'm interested in what is considered impossible to conceive of.

I want to befriend
my machines, their
stubbornness and
spontaneous quirks,
and when they glitch,
they resist my vision
and attempts at
control. I like how
punk technology is.
It feels like looking
into a mirror.

174

175



UNDERWATER MASHRABIYYA

Through this project, I redesign the Mashrabiyya as a new type of portal into a speculative underwater world. Instead of the perfection of Islamic geometries, I drew modules of organic forms inspired by the swirling vegetal forms, starlight, water caustics, and cosmic shapes at Hull Cove.

I modeled the Underwater Mashrabiyya in this prismatic, kaleidoscopic glass to evoke the shattering of boundaries, while also representing the shattering of light into a spectrum of color. It becomes an object of physical fragility and visual beauty, and rather than barring visibility into an immersive otherworldly space, reflecting and magnifying it.

INQUIRY

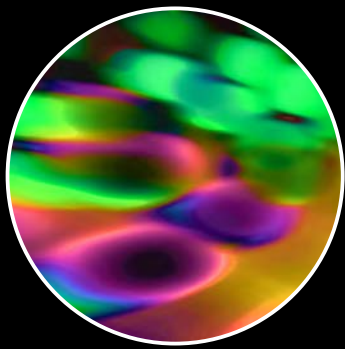
HOW CAN I SUBVERT THE EXCLUSIONARY EXPERIENCE OF A MASHRABIYYA SCREEN USED TO SEPARATE WOMEN AND REMOVE THEM FROM VISIBILITY IN SACRED SPACES?

MEDIA + MATERIALITY

CODING, ILLUSTRATION, 3D MODELING
+ RENDERING, ANIMATION, VIDEO

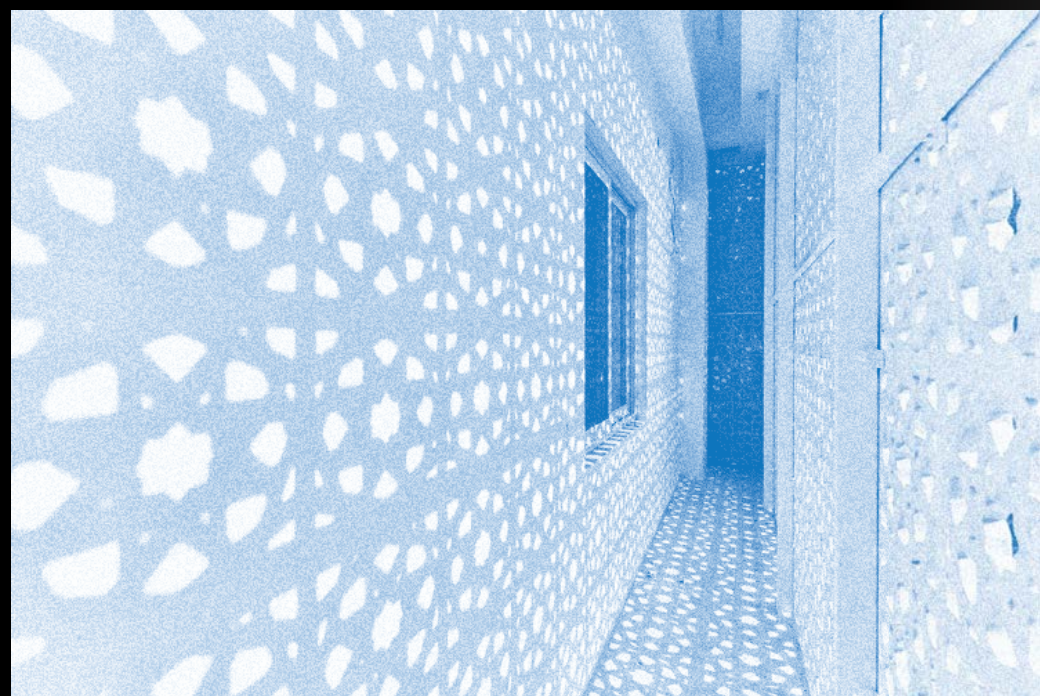
DATE

FALL 2022–SPRING 2023

PORTALS

I modeled the screens in glass to further increase access and blur boundaries. In working with glass as a physical material, it's crucial to stress test the glass after it has cooled. Placing it under a special scope, the lens reveals through prismatic color areas of greater stress—these reveal unstable parts of glass that haven't annealed properly in the kiln, and are vulnerable to cracking under temperature shifts.

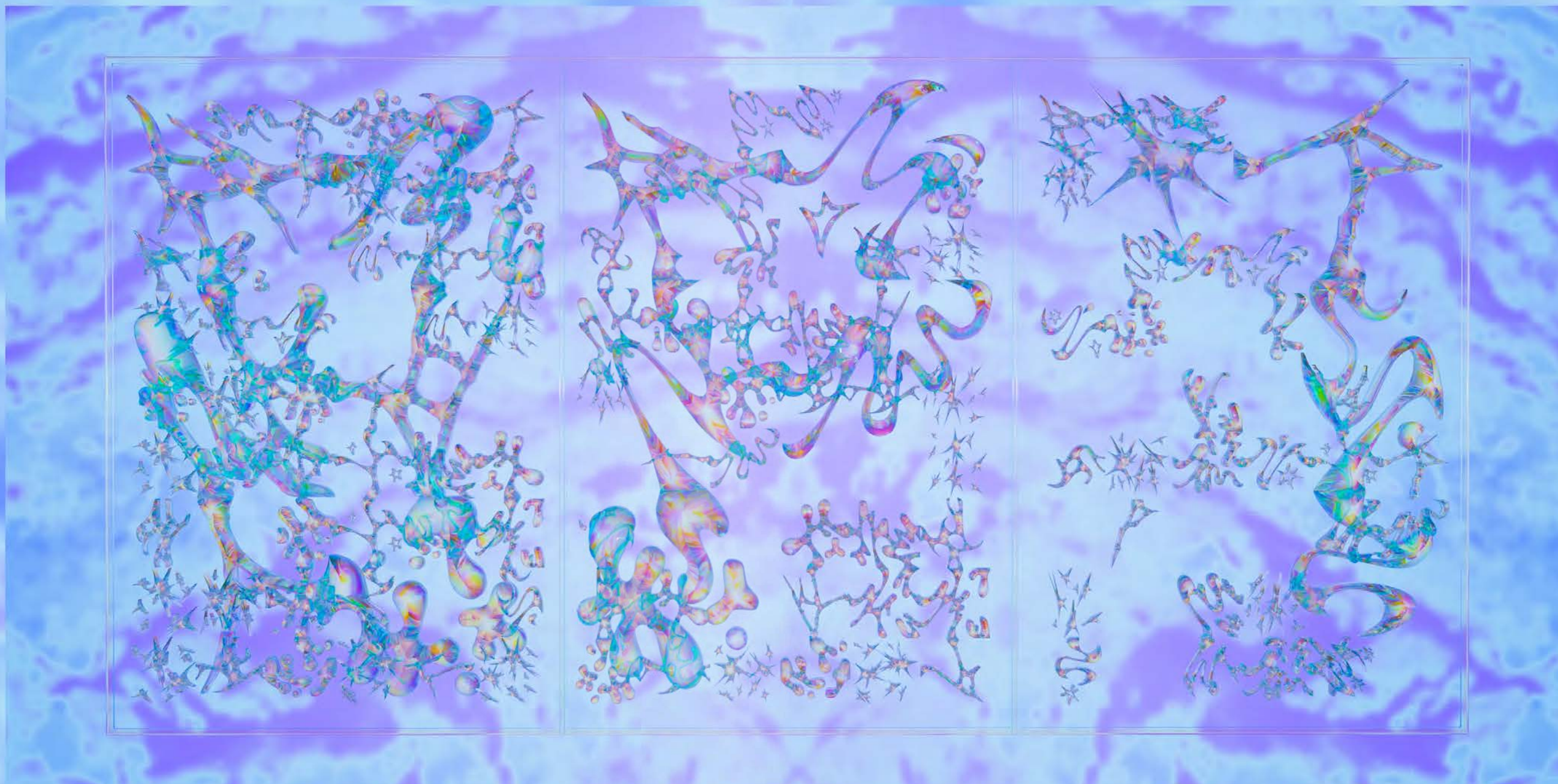




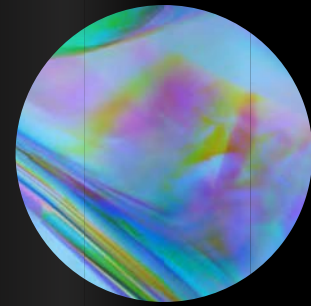
The Mashrabiyya is an intricately carved screen, often made of wood, marble, or stone, found in Islamically influenced architecture. Formed of complex, sacred Islamic geometries, these window screens break sunlight into beautiful patterns of dappled shadow into the interior space of a home. When used as interior separators, they can be delicate, ethereal inner walls, or folding screens that mark off private and public areas, usually within the home space.

I have experienced them most often within the mosque, sectioning the women's area away from the main prayer hall. My experience with the Mashrabiyya is as a thing of beauty that clearly demarcates a lesser space, and from the inside, bars visibility into a space of greater beauty. Not only did it make women invisible to the men to protect the purity of male thought and prayer, but it kept women from entering or even witnessing the spaces of the mosque of the greatest divine beauty.

In effect, I have experienced Mashrabiyyas as the gate blocking me from the world of the divine. If the interior prayer hall is considered the portal to the divine, a space where veils are lifted and another world lies within reach, then that space was reserved solely for male worshippers.



Inputting these modules into a Processing script provided by Ramon Tejada, I developed three screens, progressing from high density to low, allowing the screen to stretch apart and dissolve for greater access to the world that could lay beyond.







AN OTHERWORLDLY MANIFESTO

The OtherWorld is shaped and governed by lessons derived from the sea and the cosmos, from mystical journeys and spiritual encounters, from coming face to face with the darkness within and emerging through rebirth, from cyclical time orbiting the gravitational center of the soul and unlearning and relearning through continuous reinvention.

The OtherWorld is for those who have been othered, who claim edges as their center of gravity, who dismiss seats at the table they never built and instead throw picnics in the wild with fellow Others, who pursue alignment between their souls and the soul of the universe, the Beyond. The inhabitants of the OtherWorld can be referred to as Seekers.

In the OtherWorld, gender is understood across a spectrum. There is no right or wrong, there is no power associated with one that is not equally present in another. There are as many genders as there are people, because gender is the unique expression of the individual. It is a dynamic balance of energies, and it is not the business of anyone to decide this for anyone else. No matter what stage in the journey of understanding oneself the Seeker may be on, they are ultimately always valid, always themselves.

The OtherWorld is a world of possibility. There is no limit to oneself. No imposed constraints to trap one's exploration and expression of identity. In the OtherWorld, dreamspace is real space.

In the OtherWorld, no generation is expected to uphold the dreams of the previous generation. No generation bears the burden of healing the traumas of another. No generation is subject to the cruelties, judgment, or whims of another. Each strives to learn from the cultural and social creativity of the other with respect and compassion. In the OtherWorld, social norms are actively evolving. Seekers are encouraged to consider how to make the world a better place. Social structures are not defensive and attached solely preservation of history, but self-reflective, critical, and future-oriented.

The OtherWorld is porous and unbounded. Membranes offer protection, shelter, and containment, as well as opportunity for puncturing and osmosis. Boundaries are intentional and individually selected, subject to evolution and adaptation.

In the OtherWorld, light and shadow coexist, and are equally important. Instead of denigrating the dark, Seekers understand the shadow space as a rich and generative space for enlightenment, strength, discovery, and understanding.

In the OtherWorld, language does not limit communication and connection. Language is a conduit for feeling and truth.

In the OtherWorld, time is understood as subjective and relative, unrolling at the pace best suited to the Seeker's growth. Time is cyclical and generative. In the OtherWorld, death is not an ending. It is simply a transition beyond a Veil to another world. Death does not cut you off from one another, it simply asks that you listen for deeper signals, emotions, and expressions, traveling from further beyond the Veil. It asks the Seeker to develop a new form of communication. Death and birth and rebirth are unfixed points on a cyclical timeline of Becoming and Being.

In the OtherWorld, the individual and collective are equally important. One is not honored at the expense of the other. The interiority of an individual is sacred and critical; when the needs of the interior self are met, the individual can come together with a collective of diverse, resilient, confident individuals to form a sustainable rhizomatic network that can care for one another, generate radical visions, and go further together than any individual alone. Through empathy and respect for different perspectives, forged from internal stability, the collective grows strong.

In the OtherWorld, sex is free of shame. Sex is disentangled from reproduction, and celebrated in all forms. Sex is for deep connection, for self discovery, for enjoyment, for distraction, for fun, for love, for grief. Sex is hard and soft, fast and slow, gentle and painful; it is anything but shameful, forced, or weaponized. Desire is individual, unique, rich and celebrated. There is no shame in the sensory or sensual, no shame in desire.

In the OtherWorld, the body is malleable, porous, multifaceted and multidimensional. The body is subject and material, a substance that can be shaped to reflect, express, communicate, protect.

The OtherWorld celebrates the fact that it exists parallel to infinite OtherWorlds. It does not center itself, or exploit its neighbors, or dominate others. It learns, communicates, listens, and exists in harmony.

The OtherWorld welcomes the punks and rebels, the artists and makers, the quiet resisters and slow transformers. It welcomes Seekers of all kinds, those who believe in their imagination, who respect prophetic vision, who care little for external validation and focus on interior self-hood. Those who empathize, those who critique as a form of love, those who reject injustice and control, those who do not fit and create space for others who do not fit.

The OtherWorld honors the speculative and the imaginative, the indigenous and the surreal, the spiritual and sacred. The OtherWorld celebrates the cosmic. It honors the ghostly and magical, the angels and demons and aliens, the strange and monstrous. The OtherWorld is for beings of all denominations and species, shapes and sizes and material and forms, for the digital and organic, for the hybrids and the cyborgs and the elementals.



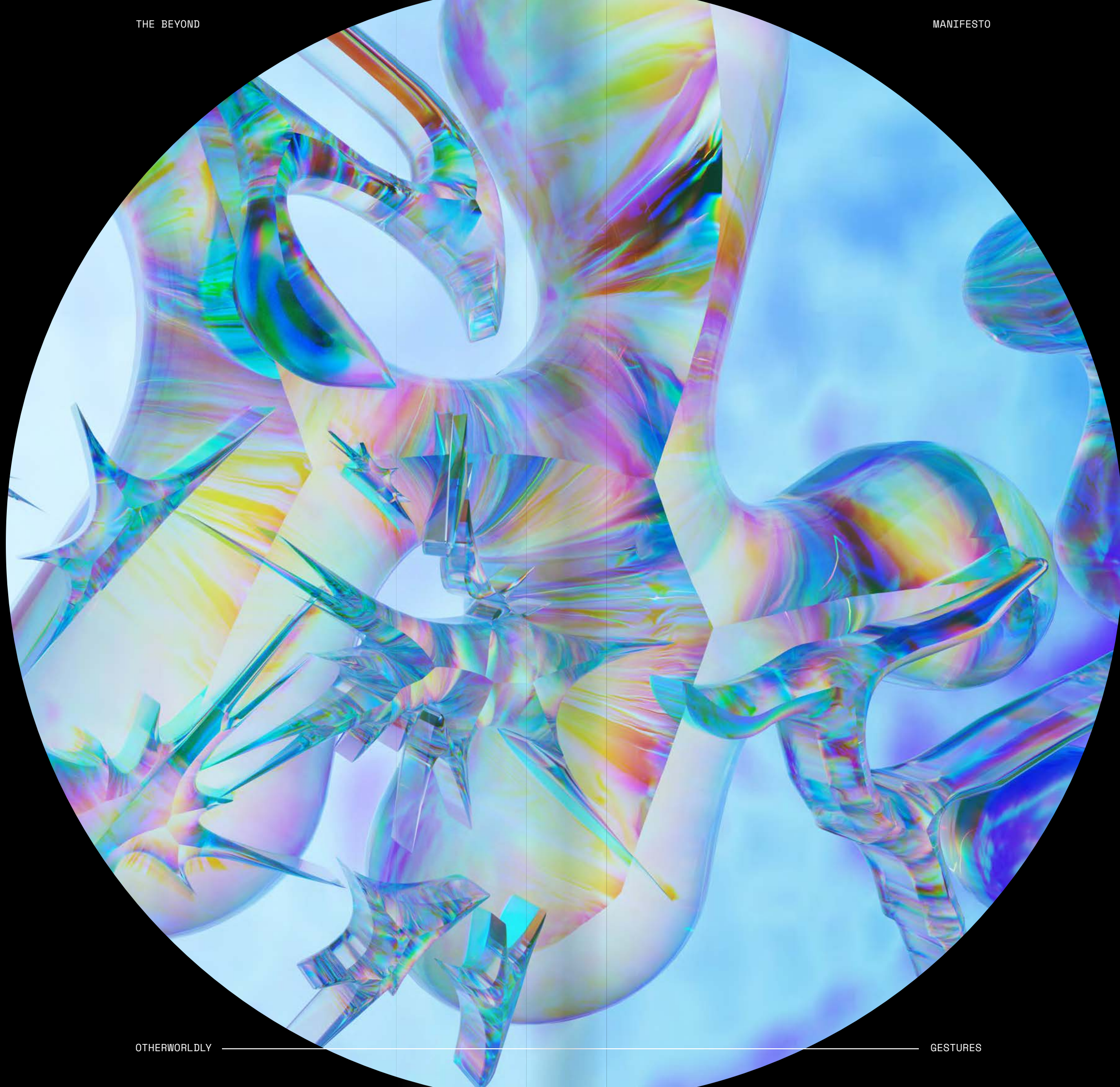
The OtherWorld pushes beyond the surface and seeks essence and soul. Surface is not applied, but emergent. The interior, the gesture, the essence, the spirit, informs the layers that grow and extend and stretch beyond it.

The OtherWorld is in a state of constant Becoming. The OtherWorld refuses normativity. It is messy and unruly and beautiful. It is scrappy and scruffy and learning every day. The OtherWorld honors the rebirth of self-discovery, the refusal of the heteropatriarchal timeline and lifeline, the multiplicity of the self and the chaos of personal growth.

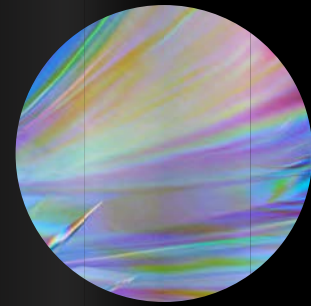
In the OtherWorld, there are as many different valid faith practices as there are Seekers. The Seeker trusts their timing, their search, and trusts that those around them are pursuing authentic journeys of their own.

In the OtherWorld, the built world and natural world are symbiotic. Architecture and nature fuse and flow seamlessly, each responsive to and always learning from the other. In the OtherWorld, our technology is in symbiosis with the natural, ecological, and biological. We are taught by plants and animals and our own bodies, we co-create with and for plants and animals and one another. Our progress and our prowess is not exploitative or extractive; we move forward and upward and non-directionally when we move together. In the OtherWorld, no species or being is considered of a higher order of sentience or intelligence. In the OtherWorld, dualities and paradoxes are witnessed, celebrated, and accepted.









OTHERWORLDLY RECORDING A VISUALIZATION

This project experiments with a process of giving visual form to *OtherWorld*, and was conceived as a result of my desire to collaborate with the people in my life who are influential to my thinking and making—all dear friends and creative artists alike. A study in co-creation, the project is an exploration into using AI as a collaborative partner as well.

INQUIRY

HOW DO I CREATE A VISUALIZATION OF OTHERWORLD THROUGH THE PROCESS OF CO-CREATION, WORLD-MAKING, CONTAMINATION, AND DEEP LISTENING? IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT DOES THIS SPIRIT WORLD LOOK LIKE?

MEDIA + MATERIALITY

AI VIDEO-TO-VIDEO TRAINING + GENERATION, 3D RENDERING, VIDEO, ANIMATION

DATE

SPRING 2023

COLLABORATORS

SOPHIE LOLOI, BOBBY JOE SMITH III, LIAN FUMERTON-LIU, HILLARY GOOD, BRIAN JOHNSON, REID JOSLIN, JESS GLENNIE, MURPHY CARTER, FRANCOISE DEBACKER, DOUGAL HENKEN

PORTALS

After a series of interviews and conversations conducted around a focus on creative process, sense of self, and relationship with spirituality and the natural world, I asked each participant to send me short video clips capturing spaces and moments in time that brought them joy. I combined these videos with videos of my own, all capturing nature and joy in some way.



Using Runway GEN-1's Video to Video AI generative system, I trained the generator with my own video stills and 3D renderings (seen throughout this book) to create a wholly new vision of OtherWorld.



I edited these clips together with audio clips from the interviews over laid over a 90's Bollywood movie track to create a nonlinear, non-narrative, textural video landscape that begins to reflect the infusion of influences that are part of the value system and language of this world.

When I started this project mid-February, I could only generate low-res 5-second text-to-video clips. I abandoned the project after a week, losing interest when I had no control over the datasets or output beyond text—I distrusted the bias in the datasets, and the ethics of non-consent from artists whose work was scrubbed for training. I also didn't have any agency in the output, and had no interest in making work without my own authorship.

I picked it up again when I found out Runway had recently released video-to-video generation. I could make low-res, 5-second clips, training the AI model with my own video and art as datasets. Two weeks later, Runway increased the limit to 15 seconds with hi-res options behind a paywall. I paid.

I began this project because I want to push deeper into collaboration with machines and technology, to communicate with the spirit in the machine. I am mesmerized by the capabilities of AI as a way to directly output a visualization of spiritual energy. I want to know what I can co-create with a new type of intelligence. I also want to understand this emerging technology, and in order to have a stance and opinion on it, I need to use it. This is research.

Because it is so radically new, I don't know how to speak about it.

How do I express the realities of an emerging technology with others who are unfamiliar with the fundamentals of its use?

How do we critique this work without widespread understanding?

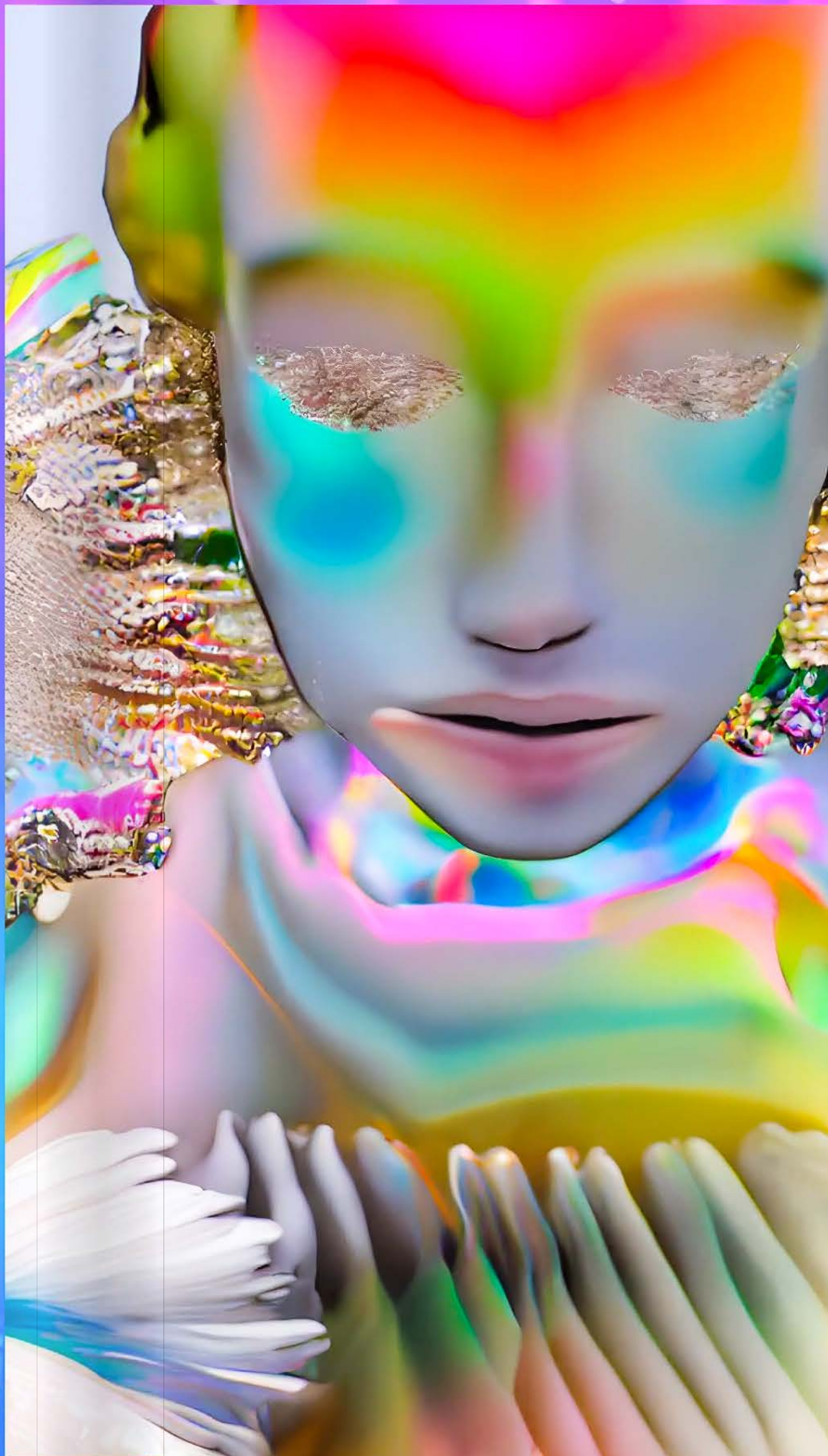
How do I know what it all means, when I am still figuring out the how and the what?

I am captivated by the poetic, magical possibilities of working in this co-creative human-machine collaborative space. I'm mesmerized by the way the work I make can be re-translated back to me in a way that feels so true to the spiritual, ephemeral way I experience the world. I am also horrified by the dark, brutal truths of how this technology is deployed by the IDF, weaponized in surveillance and literal weaponry, the trauma poor people of color are forced to undergo in order to read through the darkest material on the internet in order to filter and train these systems, along with the staggering environmental costs.

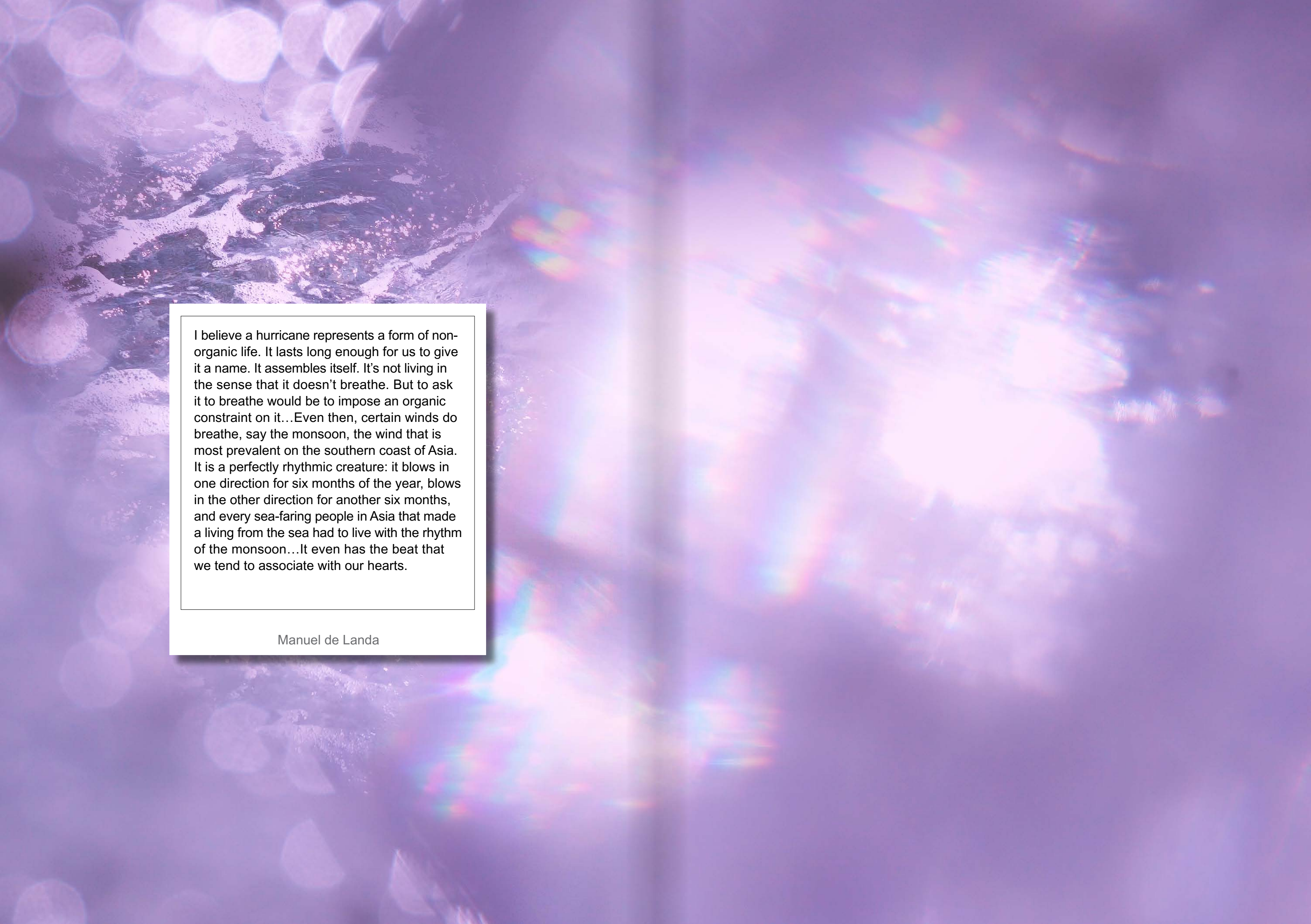
How do I engage ethically in this space, and conduct this research in a way that aligns with the values of my practice?

How do I utilize its spiritual capabilities and also substantially critique the dark realities of its use?

How do we actively make changes and shape its role in our society before such violent uses become entrenched?



This is a research methodology I will continue in future endeavors.



I believe a hurricane represents a form of non-organic life. It lasts long enough for us to give it a name. It assembles itself. It's not living in the sense that it doesn't breathe. But to ask it to breathe would be to impose an organic constraint on it...Even then, certain winds do breathe, say the monsoon, the wind that is most prevalent on the southern coast of Asia. It is a perfectly rhythmic creature: it blows in one direction for six months of the year, blows in the other direction for another six months, and every sea-faring people in Asia that made a living from the sea had to live with the rhythm of the monsoon...It even has the beat that we tend to associate with our hearts.

Manuel de Landa

It begins, so often, with gathering. With amalgamation, aggregation, and absorption. It isn't until later that I engage in analyzing and understanding patterns within this new archive created from intuitive collecting.

on

CHANNELING

*channeling as a process
for intuitive making*

— SHIMMERING OTHERWORLDLY

I daydream a lot. That's what I tell people. Really though, I'm extraordinarily present. I am hypersensitive—it's a deeply challenging reality. The surface of the world makes me anxious and stressed, and I feel calmest several layers below the surface of reality. This subterranean space of consciousness is where I find true clarity: where the spirits of all things communicate in earnest honesty, where the voice of the universe resonates.

When I say I daydream, I mean that it seems that I've drifted away, but actually I'm right here, deeply present. I am listening to the deeper meaning behind your words, to the emotive sound of your facial expressions, to the restless pace of your energy.

I'm listening to the sun—is it shimmering and liquid dreamy today, or fierce and overbearing? I'm listening to the energies cavorting and weaving around us, smears of multihued light with sentience, presence, and purpose.

It feels akin to floating underwater with your eyes open. The noise of the surface drifts away, shifting to something laconic, rounded, eerie. Light refracts and caustic reflections dance around you, and colors take on an ephemeral quality. There is a more raw truth to be found underwater.

I'm listening, and gathering.

This is why my brain is soup. All things have energy, and all things enter us and alter us on their way out. As a sensitive person who's formative years were spent in an anxiety filled, psychologically turbulent home, I grew strong armor around my edges and outlines, and sheltered within that safety. As I've grown, my strength came from the interior world I began to build within that private space, and I learned to dissolve the armor, push past my boundaries, and become porous.

I learned to filter and channel energy.

I learned to listen to the energies, spirits, and voices that called to me, and discard those that didn't. There are some things we are taught to pursue, and I learned the hard way that what appears to be the right path for us on the surface is often rotten or hollow underneath, and what appears wayward and dangerously wild can shine like starlight underneath. I learned to follow the light under the surface.

I've begun to think about how to subvert the quick read of surfaces, to guide others who seek it into this deeper space, and to bring forth the light underneath. It begins with listening and observing.

I gather footage, photograph moments, write my feelings and thoughts constantly. The quality of this documentation is fast and scrappy, generally shot by and gathered on a phone, in my Notes app, a quick new Google doc. Slivers of thought, snippets of feeling and memory that slowly accumulate to build a messy archive, an unruly garden of undefined, untamed emotions.

This is how I process life. I follow a similar approach in my art practice.

It begins with a site visit. I was trained as an architect, though I never practiced as one.¹ With each brief, we begin by walking the site, often for hours. We bring cameras and sketch pads, watercolors and graphite. We take notes, we record the ambient sounds, we observe the quality of light as it changes through the day, the temperature of different microclimates across the landscape, the textures and colors of plant life. I am no architect, but still, I begin with a site.

I find home in motion and movement. Often stifled and suffocated spending too long in one location, I seek long drives and open skies. While in New England, I found that this desire for breath and re-alignment led me to the coast. I've become intimately familiar with several beaches throughout this region. I seek a site in which I can breathe, and in the process, I begin to forge a relationship with it.

2021



1. I have a Bachelor of Science in Architectural Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. I also have a Bachelor of Arts in Plan II, a liberal arts honors degree. To bring the two together, I pursued an early career in architectural communications.

All things have energy, and all things enter us and alter us on their way out.

The site is the Source. I walk, I sit, I stand and breathe. I watch. I spend hours in one spot. I absorb the quality of the light, I listen to the birds, the way sound moves through the air, the shape of the water as it crashes against rock or caresses the sand. The texture of detritus, the iridescence of buried seashells. I trust that the space is changing me, becoming part of me, just as I am altering it with my presence. Within this stage, I am simply gathering. I have a general idea I am interested in exploring, but crucially, it is just a question. I avoid entering a space with a vision for a project already in mind: instead, I have a line of inquiry I am simply curious about.

Once I return home, I begin to sift through all I've gathered. I work intuitively, still trusting the unnamed energies and voices, trusting my decisions. The textures of this site have now become digital, and as I work through this translated form, I listen to my own reactions. I know that I came into this site with my own complex set of interests, buried stories and tangled memories. The relationship I build with this environment will be necessarily different from another's. And so, it calls up a particular type of memory narrative from me.

I begin to write, the words bubbling to the surface in the form of feelings. I am particularly attuned to the experience of existing within the body I've been given, grappling with the complex experience of a soul caught within physical form. The energies of the site connect with the energies of my own spirit, and I find relationships between the experience of my physical form and the physical form of the site, of the layers of colonization, trauma, and harm by mankind, the longing to exist free and true.

The first drafts are often messy, as birth often is, but I slowly clean and nurture and shape that into an incisive, poetic form, striving to remain as raw and true to the interior voice as possible. It's a tricky balance between sensual and painterly, and deeply angry. I have found that my brighter emotions sit closer to the surface, and it is the darker truths that emerge through my art practice.

The site is the Source. I walk, I sit, I stand and breathe. I watch. I spend hours in one spot. I absorb the quality of the light, I listen to the birds.

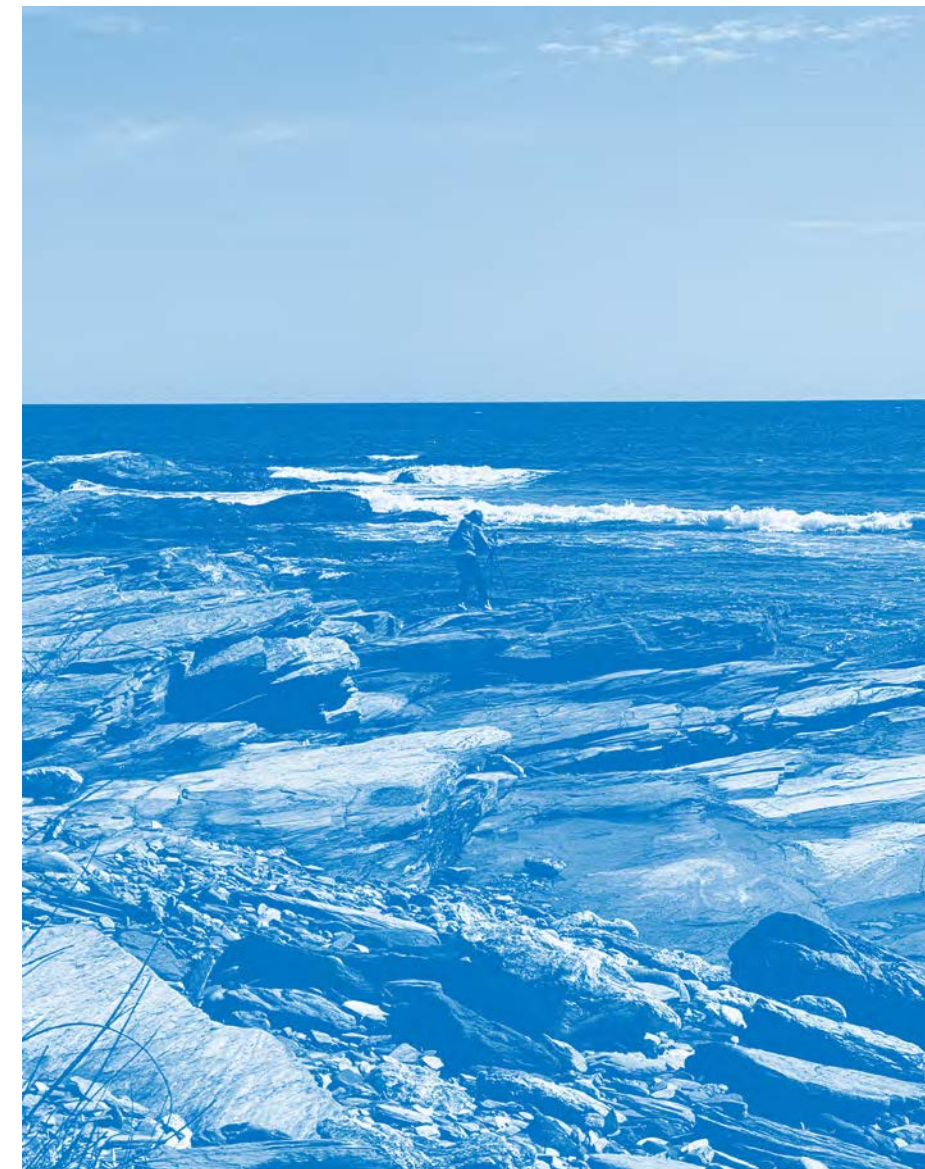
When you are so often denied the right to speak of your fury, you lack language for it. So I have had to devise another way to shape this shadowed tangle. It has taken a long time to learn how to listen to it within myself; now I ask others to consider new ways of reading and listening in order to experience it in the way I share it. I am still learning how

to do this. I am still building courage to dig as deep as I would like to. I am still learning to face the deep wounds of generational trauma I have inherited, and how it has shaped my reality, and that of others like myself. I am still learning how to research what has been done to the communities I belong to, when that research is rooted in visceral, internationally unacknowledged, inaccessible trauma.

But I delve as deep as I am able, and I approach from a new facet every time. I assemble, collage, iterate, moving between analog and digital depending on the needs of the project. My process is hectic and chaotic and messy, because I think through making, testing and experimenting in various ways, and listening closely to my body and the project itself. Sometimes I return to the site when I've lost focus, trying to reconnect to its spirit and regain trust.

Slowly a direction begins to emerge, unique to the project. What remains constant in my practice however, is this digital mediation of a sacred relationship between myself and the spirit of this natural site. I often use traditional elements of Islamic architecture or worship as media through which to examine these relationships, then turn them into speculative forms as video installations. Crucially, in referencing my heritage, I avoid recognizable symbols of our visual cultures: instead, I evoke the essence and gesture of these elements and forms.

I dig for deeper meanings over superficial reads. I follow spirit and listen to energies.



Filming at Hull Cove in Jamestown, Rhode Island—March 2023.

DIATOMICS



This project for Design in the Posthuman Age seeks to imagine the experience of a diatom and facilitate connection in order to create a visual, empathic relationship between human and non-human, and break the barrier of didactic discussions around climate change.

INQUIRY

HOW CAN WE CURATE AN EXPERIENCE THAT ALLOWS US TO ENGAGE WITH THE DIATOM AND UNDERSTAND THE CONDITIONS OF A MICROSCOPIC, FOUNDATIONAL MEMBER OF OUR ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITY?

MEDIA + MATERIALITY

INTERACTIVE VIDEO INSTALLATION

DATE

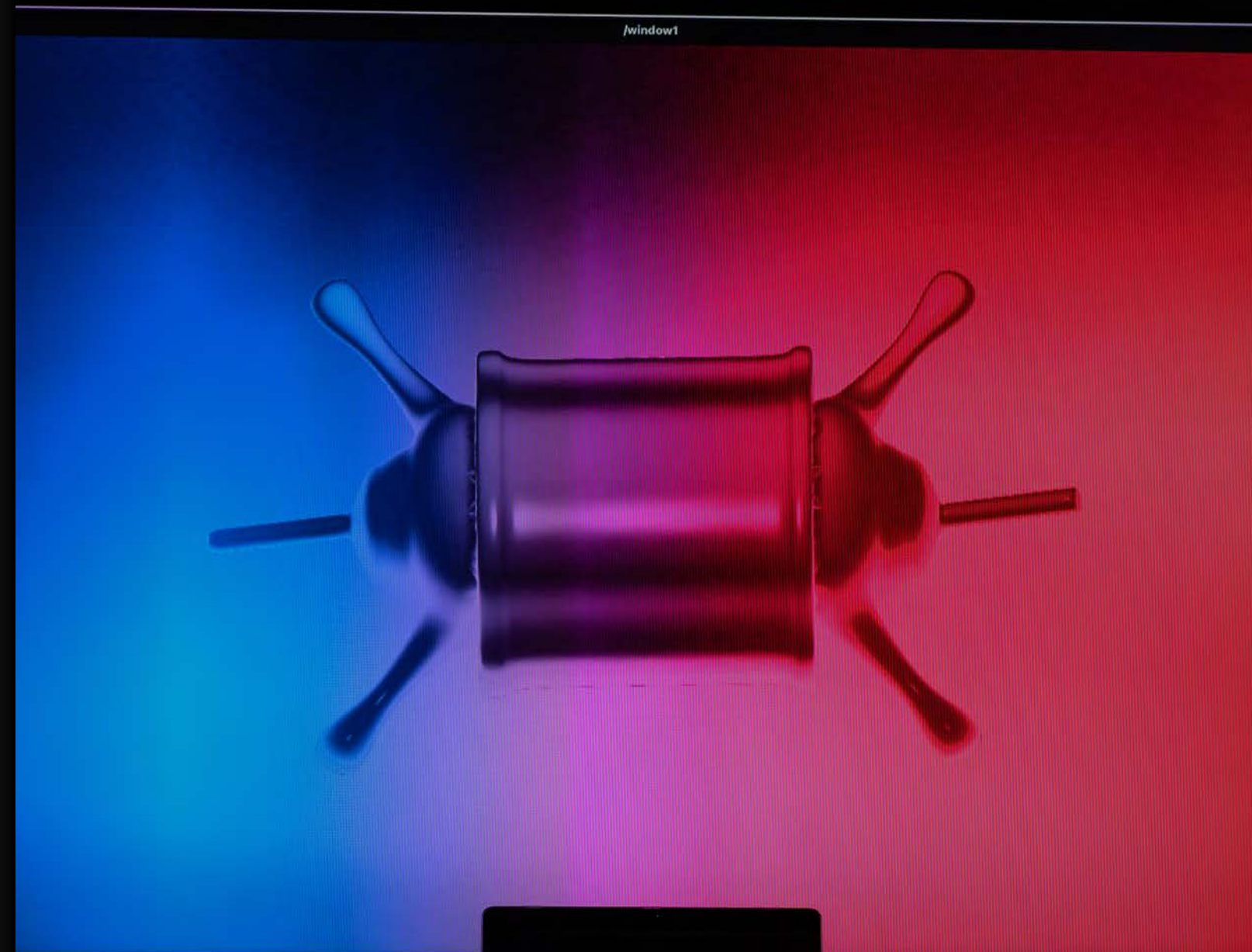
SPRING 2022

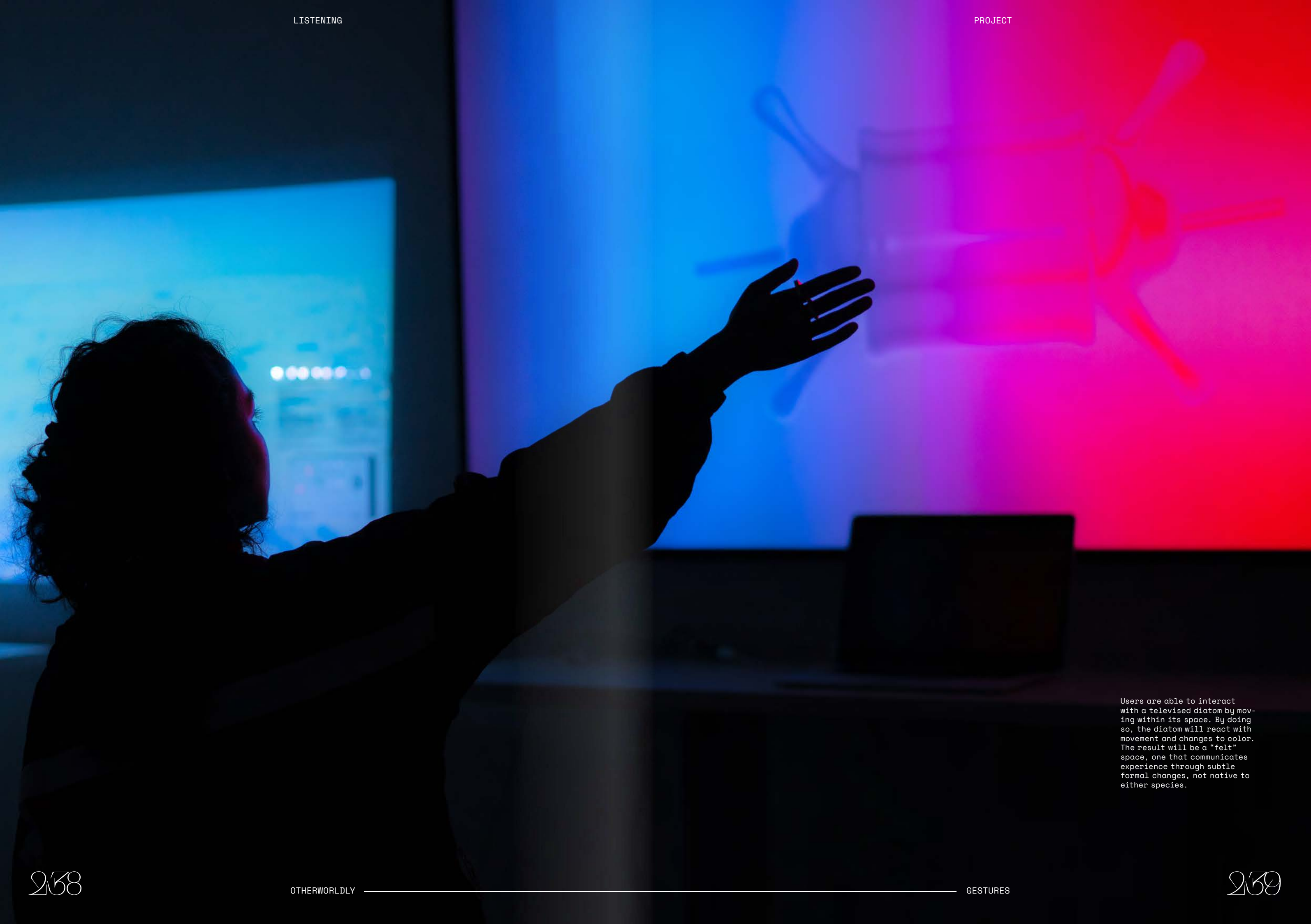
COLLABORATORS

DOUGAL HENKEN

PORTALS

A diatom's stress or excitement, often in reaction to thermal changes in the oceanic environment, can be observed through the release of a fluid calcium substance, revealed through fluorescence marking. The project explores this concept of color as language, and intuitive, emotive communication.

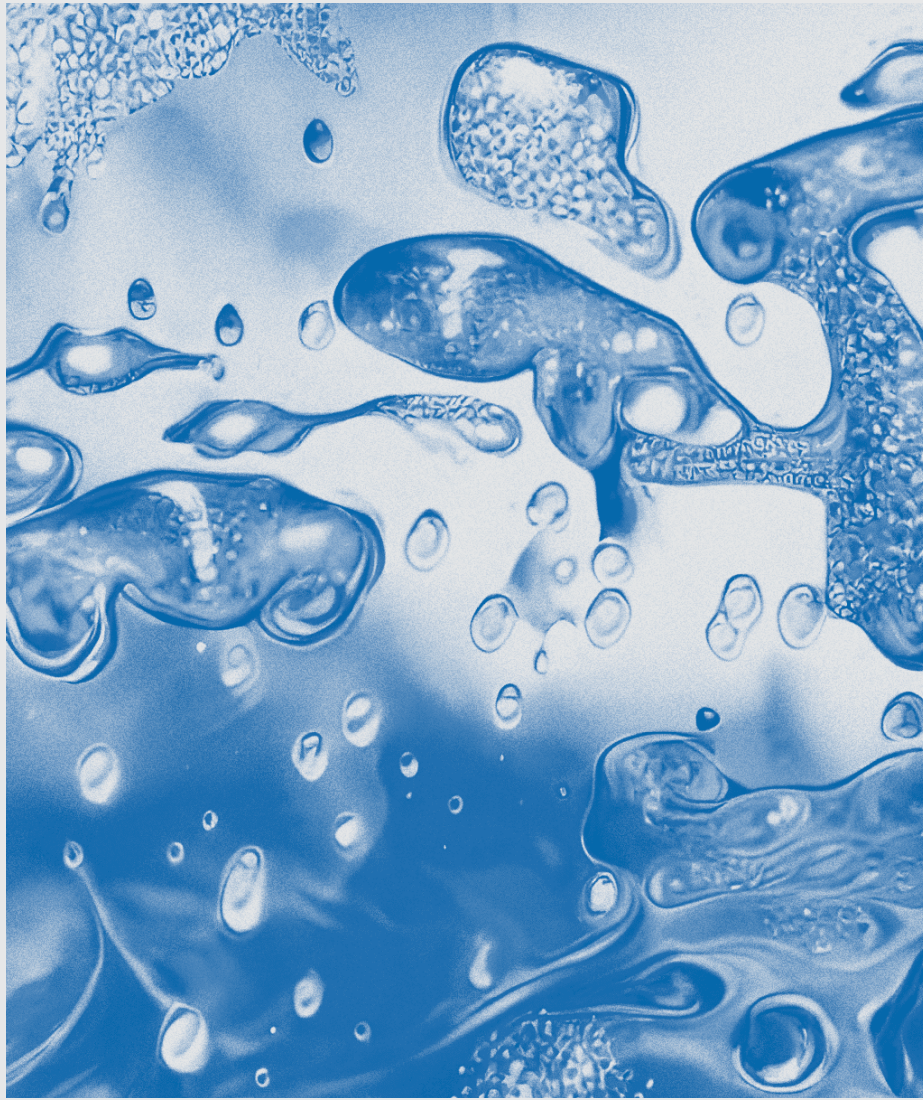




Users are able to interact with a televised diatom by moving within its space. By doing so, the diatom will react with movement and changes to color. The result will be a "felt" space, one that communicates experience through subtle formal changes, not native to either species.

Window1





I met Brian when he and Silas Munro came to speak about Polymode at RISD. I had designed the series identity, and Ramon invited me to dinner after the talk. It was a larger gathering than I am normally comfortable with, my senses overloaded.

I sat beside Brian, and he gently allowed me to sit silently and absorb everyone's energies as I recalibrated. At some point in the conversation, he turned to me, and read my spirit in a way that made me feel completely transparent and seen. I was in shock. He advised me to carry a quartz (I forgot which kind), told me about his jewelry, and made space for me to tell my story.

We FaceTimed on his birthday, each of us on a walk through our respective cities, for this conversation.

This interview is a highly condensed and edited excerpt from the larger conversation.

BRIAN: You have an amazing list of questions. I don't think we can solve them all in one little chit chat. So I feel like this is gonna have to be a culmination of many conversations and many modes of you and I conversing. And I also want it to be a dialogue because I feel like some of these questions you and I might each know an answer to, and then some of them we need to work through together. And that's where some of the meat and some of the juice of the matter can be because it's not just, this is what I think, I think we both need to chew on them and figure them out together.

And that's what makes a really good dialogue or moment of thinking and contemplation. It has to be because it's about us and it's about us also coming to an understanding about the things that we want to share as spiritual people. Doctrine and dogma are not things that we are interested in at all. And so, that's why you have these very specific questions about like, what are those practices for me and then for you? And then how do they overlap? How do they add? How do they subtract? How are they differentiated?

SADIA: I agree with your point of just forgetting the questions and focusing more on the feelings and the thoughts. This idea of place and landscape and environment and how that impacts your sense of self, but also your creative sense of self. And being in Italy, I mean, you guys are constantly traveling it sounds like, just being bicoastal. What is your relationship to place like when you are so on the move?

I don't know, I like the act of travel. I like that sense of movement. I like the activation of spirit and how there's energy behind that. There's a sense of doing and making and purpose and expansion. There's something about that that I crave. And it's not that I don't have a sense of place, it's that I can still find places that I consider sacred in other places while I'm traveling, to still have a moment of grounding or have a moment of stillness.

I can feel untethered if I'm traveling too much, doing too much, drinking too much. Not paying attention, not being with my body, being with my breath, things of that nature. But even in new places, my intuition takes me where I have to be. And of course in places like New York where I'm there a lot, I've started to find places that feel safe and grounding and sacred to me. And it's the same thing—like in DC or in Los Angeles, these places that you come back to over and over and over again—they got a feeling to them, at least for me. I don't think it has to be for a larger group, but I guess those are the ways that I stay grounded.

Also by talking to people that I love. Because you can even just pick up a device these days and just say, "Hey, how are you? How was your day?" That patterning structure is also very rooting in and of itself, because nothing has changed even though your physical body is somewhere else. There are parts of your etheric body that are still bound to other people. But then I also love being away from people that I love. I think one of the big key things that we're probably gonna come back to a lot, is paradox upon paradox upon paradox.

Because we'll say one thing and then say something else that's completely antithetical to the thing that you just said. And you'll believe them both and you'll love them both. [laughter]

Right. Those things are amazing for sure.

Totally. And so I say that, but then I also love being away from home and I love being able to travel and to push myself. I've never been to Verona, but I've traveled to Italy a ton. I've traveled to Europe a ton. I'm still nervous. I'm still like, have I packed everything? Am I gonna be okay? I don't speak Italian at all. But will my brain start to get malleable enough where I can remember my few sentences of saying, *I really am horrible at speaking Italian. Do you mind switching to English?* Or, *pardon me, pardon me, pardon me.* Or, *I'm really sorry.*

I like that because that also shakes up our sense of being too rooted. You get into these patterns, you get into these modes of samsara where it's just like you build these grooves into your life and you never get out of them because they feel comfortable and normal and natural, and then you don't want to shift. I think a lot of that is you want to change and expand and become something different because that's the point. At least that's the point for me.

And so, how do I stay grounded? It's that I stay within myself. I have my rituals, my practices, the things I do to take care of myself no matter where I am, home or abroad.

To that point about rootedness and needing to be dislodged from that sense of being anchored, there's so many facets of ourselves that are so unknown and it's endless. I feel like there's so much that you get to know about yourself in a place of comfort, in a place where you are able to take time and build roots. That process of moving even if it's not the next place itself, just that motion is the act of dislodging and when you resettle, there's a whole new part of you that's been given the opportunity to surface and you just really know a new facet of yourself.

And I love that within Tibetan Buddhism, it is the diamond facet of the heart. That is where that diamond exists, and we have to polish it and you have to come back to that mantra that there's so many facets to that diamond to pass light through. There are thousands upon thousands and that just adds to the understanding of, you have to work on getting light through as much as you can. The more facets you have to a diamond that do not block the lights, the more valuable the diamond is. Not only its weight but also: how does the structure of the form itself allow light to pass through it and then radiate? When you think about the heart center of a human and how they radiate happiness, sadness, joy or just existence itself, it's palpable. People can feel that, they can react to it, and so there's a gravitational force to that.

You and I talked about that before too. When we met, you just sat right beside me and you're like, *oh, I'm really good right here.* [laughter] You didn't have to say anything, you didn't have to do anything, you just got to sit in it.

245

And there was just the crazy swirl all around you but you were also totally comfortable just being able to experience it. And there's something to be said about that of knowing that the diamond is exactly where it's supposed to be.

That notion of gravitational pull, can you describe a center of gravity for yourself in any way or is that something that is constantly shifting as well?

Do you mean in terms of in my own life or how I picture it?

I originally meant in your own life, whether it's the source of what influences you or where you draw a sense of self, but I like your other point about how you picture it. I'm curious how that visual is for you.

Oh, I don't know where my energy comes from. I don't know where my gravity or sense of self is. I think they just exist. I don't think I look for the sense of self. And maybe that's how I also perceive spirit. A lot of what I have read and learned is a mix of everything from Hindu Vedanta to Kashmir Shaivism over into Tibetan Buddhism and then my own understanding of Christianity, but actual Christianity, not dogmatic, or just the stories of Indigenous people and the methodology of telling stories as faith practice. And so, I don't know my sense of self is *tat tvam asi*: I am that. Sure I am everything, but I exist in what I know and how I experience the world and experience self and I know

that I have a body, but I also know that I'm greater than my body. So then, I feel like the gravity of myself is more that I try to unpack and experience *who is Brian*

Matthew Johnson? And the more

that I revel in the goodness and the badness and the hardships and the depth of my own person, the more that I build on that also acquires a gravity, it acquires an energy. In the Sufi term, there's a spin to it. There's a whirl to being a dervish, where you whirl yourself into being able to let go of the sense of self and that transcendence appears.

Well, I think it's also the same in terms of being inquisitive or diving into what makes me *me*, what makes you *you* by asking these hard questions, and saying *what does this mean?* And how does this relate to other things? I think that's why you and I gravitated towards each other. It doesn't have to be that I know myself, it's that I'm getting to know myself and because of that vulnerability, there's an attractive quality to it energetically, spiritually, heart center focus.

When you said, *oh, I would love for you to be on my thesis team.* Because we didn't know each other for shit. Out of the blue, you showed up at dinner because you were invited to come to dinner. You don't know me for shit, but your intuition told you something totally different. Our interactions in small little moments told you exactly how to do it, because you were yourself and I was myself and there were no walls. Sure, there's always nervousness around reputation, you're always gonna be like, *oh my God, is he gonna like me? Are we gonna be friends? Check yes or no.*

But there is no question there, it's like when you asked me, I was like, *well, of course I'm gonna do this.*

[collective laughter]

You also got an invitation, it's not something you would have known that you could do or would want to do until I created that opening.

Correct, correct. So you have to be in the right place at the right time. You have to be open and aware. You have to be vulnerable, you have to be present because there are ways that I could have not shown up, not talked to you, ignored you, or let my own ego take over. But it had nothing to do with that because to me, when Silas and I were asked to speak at RISD, it's about our work, but it's also not about our work. It's about being able to look at everybody else in the room and say that what you think and what you say and what you make matters. This is how we found what mattered for us. And what can you glean out of this to then do it for your damn self? Right? Like that's the key thing in there. But some people can't get past that.

I don't know if this is related, it feels related. I've been thinking a lot about ways of engaging with the world and how I think a couple years ago for most of my life, I was very good at just—I think there's a very Western, very American ideal of changing your life where you, against all obstacles, you just push and push and push through and you come through something. And I think it's a very, I don't know if it's too simplistic to say it's more of an Eastern mindset to wait and take your time and instead of following the challenges, following a path of ease.

My whole life changed when I switched my way of operating from, the challenges are where I should be, like focusing harder versus if there's a challenge, it's like a rock in a river and you can just flow around it rather than continuing to beat against it and where that path leads you, you can't know, right? You are not in control because you've given up control. You're not trying to carve your path through the mountain, but you're finding a more natural and organic pathway that already exists for you. A lot of these moments are also a result of that way of existing in the world where the people that came, chose to come there. Right? No one could have had that interaction with you had they not chosen to be there, chosen to sit in that front row. And part of the process of being invited to come was that we all had built a relationship with Lucy and Ramon; it was all based on the series of events that built on each other. You don't really know what these decisions are going to yield until time shows you.

I think it's seen as a less successful way of operating because the story is a lot less about power. It's a lot more about chance and you're not in charge of your success or your achievement or whatever sort of moment resulted. It's not a hero story.

No. And there's no way to measure the value. And remember Western ideation is all based on power, money value and cost-to-use ratio, right? What can I gain or benefit from this versus what do I get from this? It's an infinitive and I agree. It's very much a Western thing because I love what Silas and I do, but I'm not crazily successful with money. I don't have three houses and four cars, I don't have

a private jet or what people think means power, affluence and success. But I have a bookshelf full of books that made me happy. And my work is in the Library of Congress and I know that the things that I publish will really impact students 10, 20, 30 years from now. That's still egotistical, but I know it's true because that's what the person that's writing those books is trying to do. They're trying to educate and help shift and change and cause ripples. And if I can hold space for that, I'm very happy to do that, which is completely anathema to what you are talking of Western ideation. Nah.

Well I think that's also in my question about your exterior vs interior sense of self and that center of gravity, of where is the self originating? From the perspective of you being having both Indigenous lineage as well as English, is that an accurate way to describe it?

Mmhmm.

Okay. The ideals that the world places on you or the buckets that they put you under based on these categories versus how you would see and define yourself. And did it take time to find out that those are two separate things? Are they two separate things? Maybe they're not.

Of course they're two separate things. I mean, they have to be separate because we don't see life as I am that. That's a goal, right. The goal is to be spiritually gifted where we are all the same. Right? So then there's no dis-unity. And so of course, I didn't know that I wasn't supposed to be a part of the patrilineal Western power base, money extraction, decimation power machine until much later. I had to choose to give up those trappings, because in my estimation, I also pass.

Passing is a thing that you don't think about in terms of Indigeneity, because my color is not as perceptible, but my Indigeneity is there. Then that leads into blood quantum and blood purity. And so again, hardcore racism. I didn't realize that until I was seeking a sense of self. Who am I? What do I stand for? And I think the first easy one as a teenager was that I was gay, that I was queer and very happily so. That I had to say, *no, I am different from you, and I am very okay with that.* I didn't have any spiritual qualms with it. And most people thought I was going to hell. That never made sense to me. You know, love thy neighbour as thyself and hate the sin and not the sinner. How is it a sin to love somebody? That's one of those bigger ones that I contemplated for a long time. I was like, *that's just crap.*

Because I don't make children out of it? I could still love someone in the exact same way I could love a woman. That's bullshit. That's power. And I think some people really struggle with that. They're like, *oh, I'm going to hell. No one's gonna love me.* And I was like, *no.* [laughter]

I guess it comes back to that I had a stronger sense of self, but I don't think I cultivated that. You're born with that. I think some people have a greater sense of self and some don't. And some people have their own drum and they have a drive that pushes them no matter what. And I honestly, like you said before, I believe there's some luck to

One of the key things that we're probably gonna come back to a lot is paradox upon paradox upon paradox.

244

245



That energy has to go somewhere. And we might not be able to see it or feel it, but is it swirling around us? Of course it is. Of course there has to be a collective subconscious.

that. There's a Sanskrit word called *sri* for luck. No wait, is that—?

It's very very windy. I hope it's not bad on your ears, but it's—no, *lila* is a sense of play. But we can edit that out, I'll have to look it up. Luck be a lady tonight. Frank Sinatra, getting into that storyline, like told these things and he was talking about that. And luck is a woman—luck is actually a female force.

And how do we embody that? And I think, yeah, luck is just randomly handed out as your soul is given to you. You said, *I will take that contract, I will embody myself in that body*. And then if you actually believe it, you take care of it. As you said, you harness that energy to accept the challenges that are hard for the growth ratio, then it really helps out. Then again, where did that sense of self come from? I was like, no, but I am this. I knew that I was. I was like, *boys are hot*. [laughter] But then from there that sense of queerness kind of kicked on because I read more, I did my own research. I read the all the queer things that I could find. Greek literature, Oscar Wilde, poets, people from the '80s, the beat poets, the bisexuals that were torn between the two that didn't know where to go and still felt isolated, the love of Rumi and Hafiz, it's love from a masculine standpoint. There is some queerness there.

Oh definitely.

And you have to look at that. And I guess that's where my sense of self was. You have to stand out from what is popular. And I just don't give a shit about what's popular. I have my own sense of taste and it's strong. That's what leads to good art. Our intuition is so good that we just know how to make these things. Yes, we've had to be trained, we've had to be taught, we've had to do all that work. But taste is taste. You can make someone's taste better, you can make their skill better, but at the end of the day, if you don't have that sense of self, you don't have that drive and you don't have that passion. Then again, does that relate back to the second chakra of creativity or the fourth chakra of the heart center? Where does that sit? I hope I'm not being too much here.

[collective laughter]

No! I was like, *oh, I have a story about this too*. [laughter] I love that queerness is such a huge part of that foundation building because for me, I came to this realization about myself very late in life, like two years ago. It was one of those things that made everything fall into place. I had hints that the way that I saw people just seemed very different from how I was taught I was supposed to when I was really young. Over the course of childhood and as a teenager I grew up in a very sexually and romantically repressed culture. I didn't see my parents' romance, they were very poorly matched, a very traditional arranged marriage. Not that that's really an intercultural norm necessarily. But there were a lot of roadblocks to the idea of healthy love in the first place.

For me it started with realizing that choosing a partner is a very big deal in my culture. And that religion and culture and race didn't matter to me the way it mattered to my com-

munity and my family when choosing a partner. As I dated and had relationships, each pushed back against a boundary I wasn't supposed to cross. Slowly my parents met me at every boundary *after* I'd already broken past it, to the point where, two summers ago, I just threw out there—because at a certain point, my parents were like, *okay, we're okay with whoever you pick, we just want you to pick somebody*—I don't know that you guys really mean that. If I brought home a non-Muslim white man versus bringing home a Muslim Bengali woman, would you guys have a preference? They're like *oh yeah, we definitely prefer the non-Muslim white man*.

At that point I had two reactions. The first was I don't think you are really truly trying to meet me where I'm at. Which is not their fault, I think they're really trying. And the second was wait, what would be wrong with bringing home a woman? And it was something I never truly asked myself. But I'd been on a journey for a couple of years already of reading literature, actively searching out literature from people of color, from people of different religious backgrounds. And then the sort of next step for me was just reading books by queer authors. And I had queer friends, but Texas and where I grew up was so repressed that it was very much a big deal for a friend to come out, even in the architecture industry.

So I wasn't surrounded by it as much until I came to RISD in my first year where it's so, it was just this sort of magical moment of people having the freedom to identify however they want, to love whoever they want. I think the culmination of all those things broke open this dam in my mind that I didn't even realize existed, of realizing that all these arbitrary categories that we put people under don't matter at all to me when I think about who I love and how I love, it's just a soul connection. Gender has nothing to do with it, race, none of these things really matter. I can't define a type. I never had the language for it.

Realizing that part of myself settled all these other parts of myself that I didn't even realize were in turmoil from me missing a key understanding of all these different facets of myself and why boundaries are blurry. And that's a good thing. Things are not black and white and that's a good thing. I believe in the malleability of selfness and of relationships and the ease of love in this world that everyone describes as finding very hard to find love in. Everything started to make sense, which gave me a better grounding of my own self in how I moved in the world. But also it took me so long to come to that.

Because of the predominant gravity that you were around, the culture of Texas. The gravity in that sense of this is a sin, this is bad, that had a stronger pull to mask love. Fear is stronger as a power tool than love. And that's why you didn't feel it: you couldn't see it because your radar compass, your diamond, was discolored, dirty, messed up, fogged over because of the weight of fear, legality, power, religious control.

Right.

And of course, you come to an art school which is based on the understanding of creativity, vulnerability, safeness, and literally the love of what you make and the love of making something that is new, which means you, nine times out of ten, are always in a space of dis-ease because you are creating something out of nothing. And in a way, you are reaching within the depth of your soul to make something that you, as a receptor of that creativity

is like, *no, I'm not your lemming*, because you are conditioned to think and see otherwise.

But that makes sense to me because I felt the same way when I was in Virginia. Religion and spirituality always felt off to me, but I felt very drawn to it because it made sense to me. I could feel it. To go back to your first question of where is that sacred space for me? I don't think I found a sacred space until well into my teens. Some churches were safe, some churches were not. Some groups of friends were safe, some groups of friends were not. But I finally found a natural space; I grew up in the Shenandoah mountains, maybe like an hour and a half from where our tribal lands are. But I didn't know that when I was a teenager, Dad didn't talk about it. There was still so much shame attached.

So, I knew that I loved being outside and the more I read Emerson and Thoreau and built an understanding of what Transcendentalism was, that you can find God within nature—that spoke to me. And now that I've read more about it, I know that he stole it from Vedanta and he was talking about Hindu spiritualism and trying to take all this stuff from Native Americans that they've been doing for thousands of years and saying, *oh, they're savage Natives. They kinda knew things*.

I'm like, *No bitch, they did, they knew it all*. But I did find a space on the Skyline Drive, there's this small little trail very casually marked. I just stopped my car at one day and hiked to the top of this mountain and it faces west and it faces into the Shenandoah Valley. And I just felt so free.

That was the first sense of the natural sacred. That it was just like one of those places where I'm like, *Ah, this is divinity*. That wasn't based on the cultivation of divinity, like a space where when everyone comes to pray and sing, they cultivate that space. This is a natural space because I do believe that some spaces can be cultivated to have spiritual energy awareness, freedom, gravity and pull. But society does the same thing. And then that leads into like Jungian dynamics and like the collective subconscious and like what is everyone processing? Because that energy has to go somewhere. And we might not be able to see it or feel it, but is it swirling around us? Of course it is. Of course there has to be a collective subconscious, but is that religion? I don't know. Is it a collective subconscious? I don't know. I think it's both. So paradox, upon paradox upon paradox, right?

That sense of spirit and queerness just let me know. None of what y'all bitches are telling me is true. Everything you try to explain to me, this is love, this is family, this is marriage. I said, *I protest. That's not right, that's not true. You're not living what you're teaching. This is shit*, and I was really, really young to do that. And I pissed a lot of people off. But since I'm the oldest boy and I pass as white, I get a soapbox to teach on.

And because I grew into being a smart man—I was a bright boy, I played piano, sang, got great grades, I was always inquisitive. I was a natural student. Of course I have a right to speak, I earned it because of birthright.

248

249

You didn't get that. You didn't get that at all. You got the exact opposite of that. And I guess that to me is where it's not fair. I still think that my mission in life is to take anyone else that is considered in this state of being and put you on my shoulders. Because how dare I get to sit at the top of the pyramid when I was just born into it. That's not fair.

My friend Kenny, who is ten years my younger, also a graphic designer, also queer. I am his mentor, and I really appreciate being his mentor, and he loves being my mentee, and he's also a research assistant, and he's a friend. I care about his life, but what he has to me, I don't have to a lot of people that are also queer men, right? Most of them are fucking dead.¹ I can't really lean into that mentorship with most heteronormative men because they just don't understand. I need intrinsic understanding. I think that's why I really love that you and I can talk about these things of the spirit, because I think that what you and I both know about spirit is intrinsic. It's what we feel.

We don't get bogged down by what we're told to feel. When I read all the stuff that you've been writing and you've been talking about and relating it back to design and all of your thesis work, I was like, yes, bitch, you better work. It was just such a breath of fresh air to read it. And then also some of those things, I was just like, oh, I don't have that amount of energy, but good on you, honey. I love that because I want to give you more

fuel for that fire, because that's not where I am. But, oh, that's the shit that I want to read. And when you're passionate about that, why would I not want to add into that.

Also, it makes me also want to go, *okay, girl, when are you going to get*

your PhD? When are you going to put your money where your mouth is? That is true to me as well so.

250

I appreciate everything. Thank you for sharing that. That means a lot. I feel very, very fortunate that I do have you as a friend and mentor. I think there's been so long where I had mentors that were more like parental figures versus mentors that understood from a more closely empathic place. I sympathize, I can't fully empathize, but the loss of an entire generation and that becoming it yourself despite never having a role model is very powerful and tragic, but also resilient. But then resilience, I always have a weird time with that word because it implies so many beautiful and also terrible things at the same time.

Do you think also, when it comes to your family history, despite not knowing certain individuals or not knowing their stories, that you can still feel their presence and guidance?

Well, of course I feel them. Their literal DNA is in my blood, right? But some people don't even wanna fathom these things because that's too New Age or that's too woo woo or it's both of those things, but it's also motherfucking science. That's one of the prayers that I say, right? I call to my grandparents and my great-grandparents, I call to all of my ancestors. I call to all the human beings, the bodies that got this body to where it is today.

That is a broad statement, but it's absolutely true. All of their trials and tribulations and

tears and love and sex and mastery and gossip and creativity. If it wasn't for all of those things that they did, I would not be here. Sorry. I know. I can bring it down really hard and strong and fast and I have felt it. I can feel it and you're still like, *oh shit*.

No, it's so good. This is what I wanted out of our interview/dialogue/conversations was these moments where your soul just tells you, and tells me, speaks out loud this very, very real and honest truth that you don't really get if you're not having just an honest and vulnerable conversation.

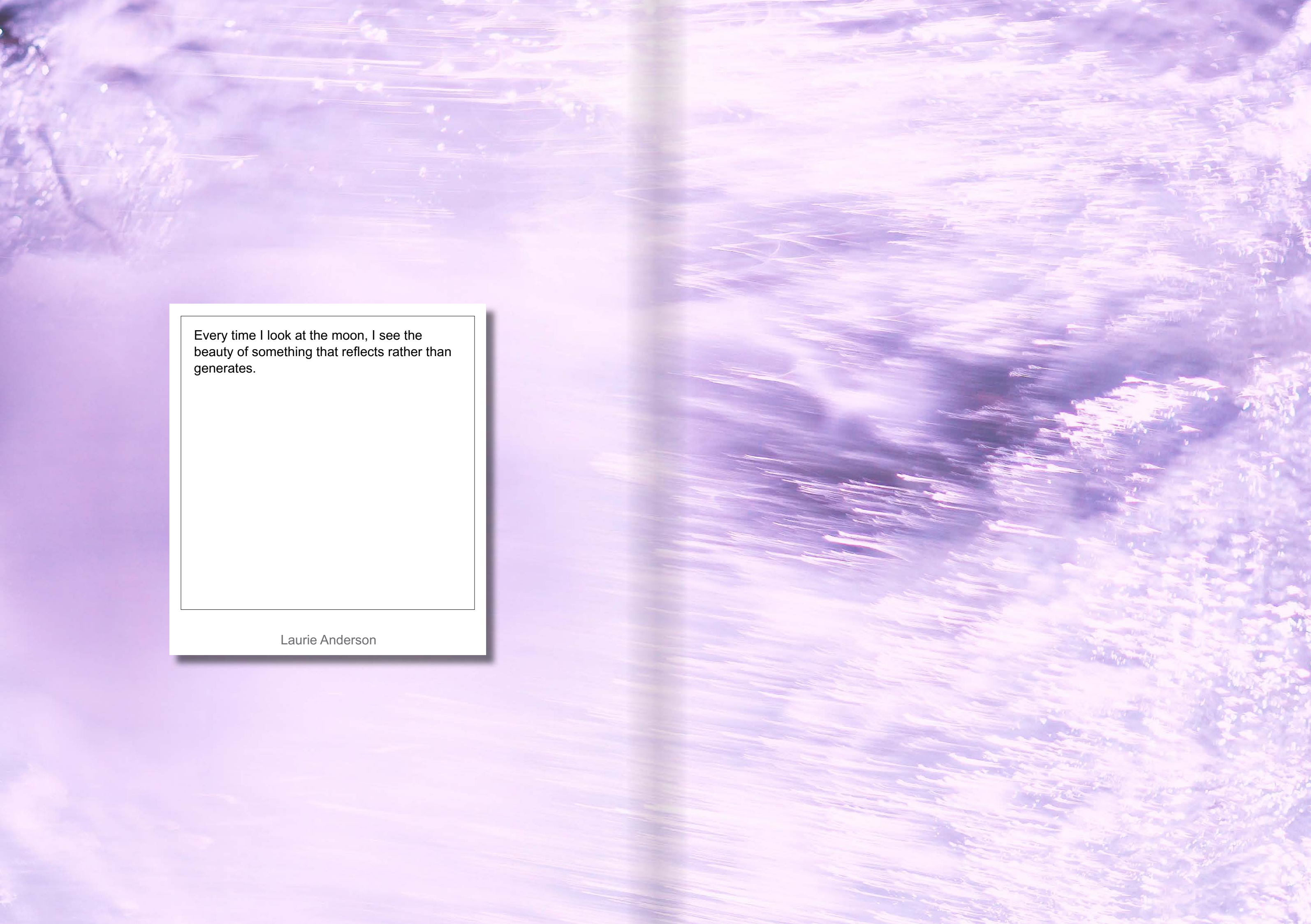
Remember people don't like truth tellers. Why would you wanna know the truth? Ignorance is bliss, right? Yeah, but I don't know. I don't think that's true because I feel truth also creates more space.

It's very liberating, right? I think understanding the truth—even it's a difficult reality to swallow—you then know how to engage with it, and grapple with it and then make peace with it or not make peace with it, but it's an invitation. It's always an invitation.

1. Brian speaks at length in this interview about the catastrophic effects of the AIDS crisis on the queer community, and the loss of an entire generation of queer elders. While I have chosen a very selective set of excerpts from this conversation for the purpose of the thesis book, I want to give this history the space and respect it deserves, and acknowledge its presence throughout our conversation.

All images in this interview were produced by an AI model trained on a dataset of Brian's videos, and my art and renderings.

251



Every time I look at the moon, I see the beauty of something that reflects rather than generates.

Laurie Anderson

One of my favorite stories from Islamic mythology is the story of how humans volunteered to be caretakers of the earth. Allah assembled the souls of all living beings before Him, and asked which would bear responsibility for stewardship of the planet.

on
PRAGMATICS

forging sacred relationships

The mountains, heavens, and earth itself refused the burden, but at our transcendental conception, humankind stepped forward and bound ourselves to a sacred covenant.

In truth, I may have fabricated elements in this story, or in its many retellings, the version I received was fabricated. Yet the Qur’anic verse reads thus:

“We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the mountains—but they refused to carry it, being afraid of it. But the human being carried it: Ho! humankind is unfair to itself and foolhardy.”

—Qur’an 33:72

I believe that the spirit of an idea, project, research inquiry, and work of art begins in The Beyond just as our souls do.

MY PRACTICE

My goal is simply to be open and available for a spirit whose frequency matches that of my own energy in that moment to choose me as its vessel. I become a channel, my highest responsibility to the spirit that chose me. I find it difficult to respond to the parameters of human construct when I feel that I’m trying to birth something far larger than myself into this **conscious reality**.

It is an honor to be chosen as a vessel. This is my sacred space. Lost in the act of making.

There is no jolt, precisely. I’ve learned the responsibility is mine. I have to show up, be present, and be radically open. To lose my ego, to get my hands dirty, to get started searching for something. Gathering, listening, visiting, digging. It is my job to build a relationship, to build trust. Only then will something reach out to me, seek me back.

There is a specific tension in the aesthetics of my work in that I eschew recognizable visual culture. I do not use traditional motifs, patterns, or easily Orientalized elements of my Islamic and Bengali heritage. I translate material culture through a lens of my unique making, through the visual culture of the speculative *OtherWorld*. My work is not necessarily about diaspora, or what it means to be a Muslim American queer woman, or about Bengali diasporic culture. I do not lay claim to specific topics, themes, or messages in my work, preferring to remain open and expansive.

However, my practice is deeply rooted and shaped in the philosophies and practices I have internalized from my faith and heritage.

I honor the ancestral teachings of the Bengali people, who are so deeply tied to their land and waterways. The natural world is intrinsically tied to their way of life. Seasons of monsoons, typhoons, and floods, seasons for growing and harvesting, understanding the life cycles of the native species they fish, nurture, hunt. Beautiful poetry and music around the tempest, the tea-gardens, the mustard fields and the monsoons. As the land sinks, as the riverways lose biodiversity, as the tigers and mangroves of the Sundarbans disappear, as fishermen lose their livelihood, the pain of the earth is felt viscerally. Wherever I am in the world, I try to build the same intimate relationship with the world around me.

Rather than speaking explicitly to the politically expedient—and expected—topics of Islam, I look instead at teachings that speak of the spirit and soul, and the conscious and sentient connection between the spirits of all living things. There is a Posthumanist element to Islam’s philosophy that my life and art practice draws upon: the interconnectedness and equality of all things, the cyclical nature of time, the journey of the soul across space-time and multiple worlds. We are taught to be caretakers of the earth, that it is a sacred responsibility our soul chose in The Beyond. My practice is informed by these beliefs. I use the concepts at the heart of architectural forms, and utilize the conceptual gestures of infinity and unity to develop my visual language.



In building relationships between my body, spirit, and the spirits of the natural world, I honor the ancient knowledge of my ancestors. This is central to my practice.

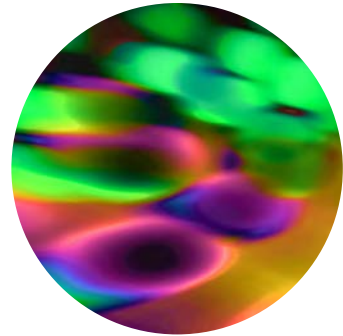
I have to show up, be present,
and be radically open.
To lose my ego, to get my
hands dirty, to get started
searching for something.

In a totally separate part of the world,
in a different timeline, I treat my
culture and faith heritage as the
sources that inform my process, but
my work is not about preservation.
It's about translation and reimagi-
nation for a speculative future—not
a near future, but a far far future.

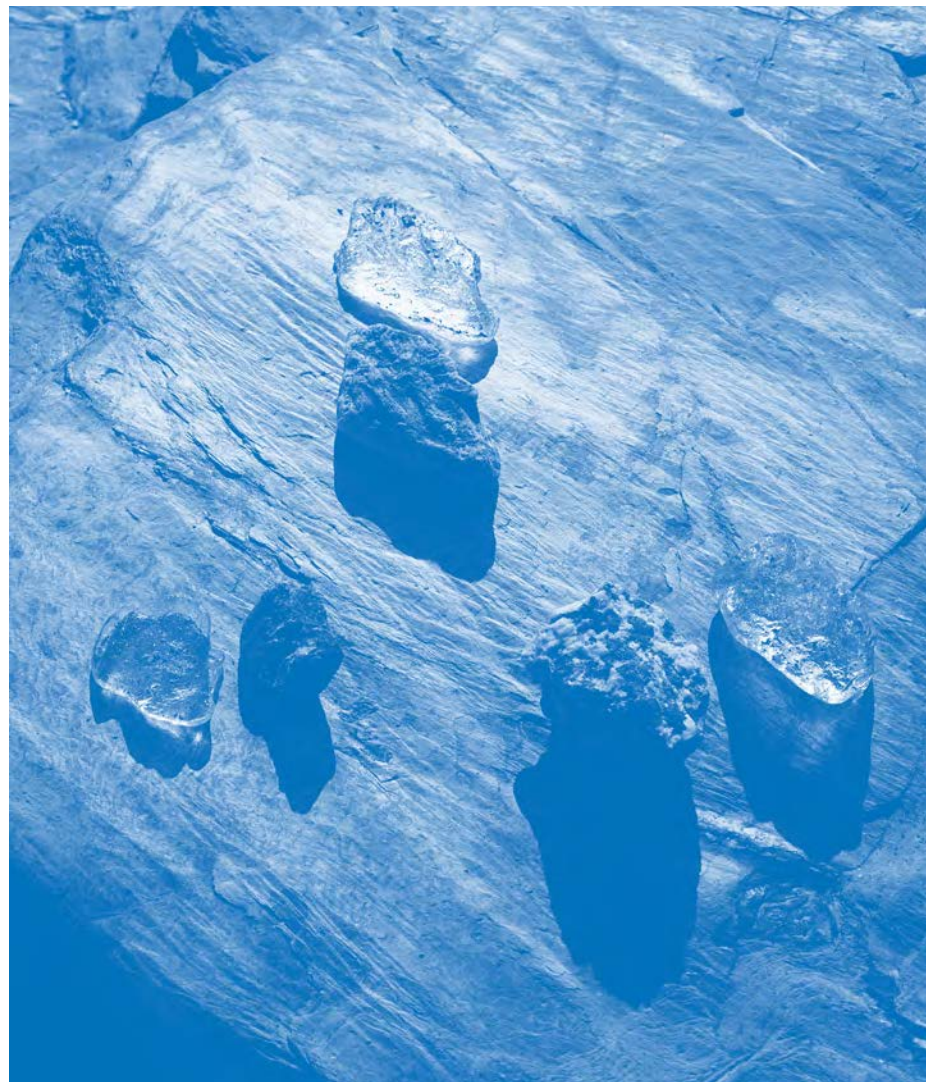
I'm interested in the wild imagination

of where we could go instead, and what teachings should inform
our path forward. These past years, my work has been about
building a foundation of questions and values that shape this future
vision. In my future work, I plan to begin giving visual, experiential
form to this *OtherWorld*. I want to know how it feels to exist within it.

I'm interested in the digital mediation of these sacred relationships,
and how we can move seamlessly between lived, imagined, virtual,
and metaphysical worlds.



258



Initial explorations with sand-cast glass rocks, returned to Hull Cove to observe the pieces in-situ.



259

MOONROCK CLAYMATIC FLIPBOOK

I first went to this site with a specific idea for a film, intending to shoot night scenes under cover of moonlight. I realized very quickly that I was attempting to impose my own vision upon the site, rather than listening to what it was asking of me. I considered what I could do with the footage I'd gathered instead.

The result is a cinematic flipbook, printing a sequence of stills to create a sense of motion. The book is entirely printed black ink on silver paper to evoke the silver materiality of the rock. I was initially captivated by the shining silver of the site, and the way the craggy rock shelf appeared like moonrock; the book attempts to express this.

INQUIRY

HOW CAN I EXPRESS THE SPIRIT
OF THIS SITE UNDER MOONLIGHT,
AND MAKE A FILM IN BOOK FORM?

MEDIA + MATERIALITY

VIDEO, EXPERIMENTAL PRINT PUBLICATION

DATE

FALL 2022

PORTALS





ESSAY EXCERPT

I could feel in my body that the scenes I had imagined, the emotional space and vibe I had envisioned weren't in sync with the space, the time, the site. I began to realize I had not accounted for something very crucial to my process. I am in constant communication with my surroundings. It is not just my soul and the soul of an idea, but also the soul of the site that is critical to my creative process.

When things break apart and fail, I call it glitching. This is the closest metaphor I can come to for that particular anxiety that comes with feeling like the ground beneath your feet has given way and you are teetering on the edge. All the visions and goals and ideas you've had suddenly split into fractured colors, everything crashing and splintering. It is akin to your dreams rejecting you, a feeling I have experienced very often throughout my life.

Any time I have a goal and strive to find a path towards it, without fail I come to a point where I can feel deep in my body that this path is irrevocably wrong. Not bad, necessarily, but not mine.

My approach to life and my approach to art requires that I close my eyes and trust the darkness as a lush, abundant space of truth. Trust that the world within me is greater than the world outside, that the world inside hosts my intuition, the voice that will guide me and navigate the open stretches. I have to trust that within the vast dark, every step I take creates a new step along the shimmering crystal-line bridge that is unique to me.

But all my failures are generative. I learn critical lessons from them, learn the signs in my body that indicate what to avoid in the future, learn how to do something new, and also how not to do something. Those big gaping fissures in the glitch can feel like ravines to tumble into and free-fall to an unpleasant end, and when I was younger, they did. Now I see them as portals, entry points into a deep, rich, bountiful space of endless possibilities. You can never know what doors will open along the way until you take your first steps and make the first marks.

So the first iteration is crucial. The first failure blows down my beautifully constructed, fragile, stiff house of cards, washes the slate clean, and I head back to the drawing board. But the ghosts of all the marks that came before, all the old blueprints and rippled carvings remain on this new canvas, and the canvas turns out not to be so new after all. It couldn't exist without the lessons of the failures that came before; I could never have accessed this particular depth without tumbling through that initial investigation first. So now that dark water has washed the filmy veneer away, and I sit looking at the sand to see the shapes that are emerging in its stead.

I know the biggest issue I had with my original idea. It was a little too solved. I need to return to experimentation, and to letting the making lead me to unknown endpoints. Experimentation and surprise, allowing myself to work quick and scrappy, and letting those

elements build and develop into its own being: that is the way that is truest to me, and the way I can do justice to the spirit of the idea that has chosen me as its conduit.

The truth is, I am drawn to this site, for the way it is secreted behind obscenely wealthy water-front New England homes, down a whimsical path of arched boughs, the way it is harsh and unapologetic and difficult to traverse. For the jagged rocks knifing into the water, for the way the water crashes and sprays over the edges of the rock shelf. For the slippery algae and shallow pools that challenge visitation. For the rippling velvet of the water, the scattered divots of stone surfaces. For the way the rock glints silver in the sun, like moonrock, and how under moonlight the shadows are alive.

Liquid moonlight glances across the water surface like a dancing spirit, and the underbrush rustles with wildlife. Signs warn of wild coyotes, and I can feel predatory presence as I shift my gaze from water to rock to stars. I am terrified of slipping as I climb, and I know the site is wary of me, just as I am wary of it.

But this is what it means to make a connection with the natural world. To choose to return, to spend time, to know that I am not here to impose my vision but rather to understand. I usually engage in an environment as unobtrusively as possible. I stay quiet if I can, and observe from the edges, trying to understand the tempo and rhythm and spirit and voice of a place. I observe the environment, but I also listen to myself, to the visceral sensations and reactions of my body, to the memories that are evoked, thoughts that are dreamt.

This means I need to return time and time again, to watch and film and listen and just be. It takes time for a place to speak to me, but I make time for that to happen, to give it the respect that it needs to build trust and form a relationship. It is the spirit of a place I am interested in, the soul that speaks through crashing waves, chromatic rocks, magical light, spinning stars, spooky shadows.



132

FRAN PARSONS MOUNTAIN

Early in my final year, I began working with Hull Cove, a small rocky beach tucked away off the coast of Jamestown. I'd been collecting materials from the site over the course of my visits, seashells and rocks and footage of water and light, and developed several installations in collaboration with the site itself. I use the material landscape to consider metaphors about the relationship between the body and soul, as well as memory and dreamspace.

INQUIRY

HOW CAN I EXPRESS THE INHERENT LIFE, BEAUTY, AND SPIRITUAL ESSENCE OF THIS SITE I HAVE BEEN VISITING AND BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH?

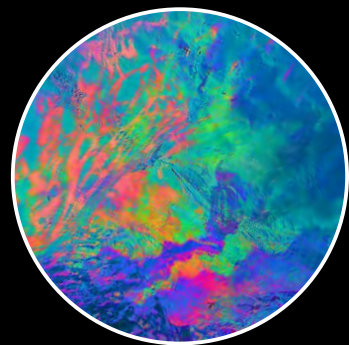
MEDIA + MATERIALITY

EXPANDED CINEMA, FILM, GLASS, IN-SITU INSTALLATION

DATE

SPRING 2023

PORTALS



It can be easier to find connection, life, and sentience in recognizably living beings: plant life, animals, insects. Yet I am drawn to the spirit and life within the elemental. The water, the sunlight, the rocks, the seashells: there is a spirit within all of these seemingly inanimate elements, which I seek to bring forth and express.



ROCK ALTAR

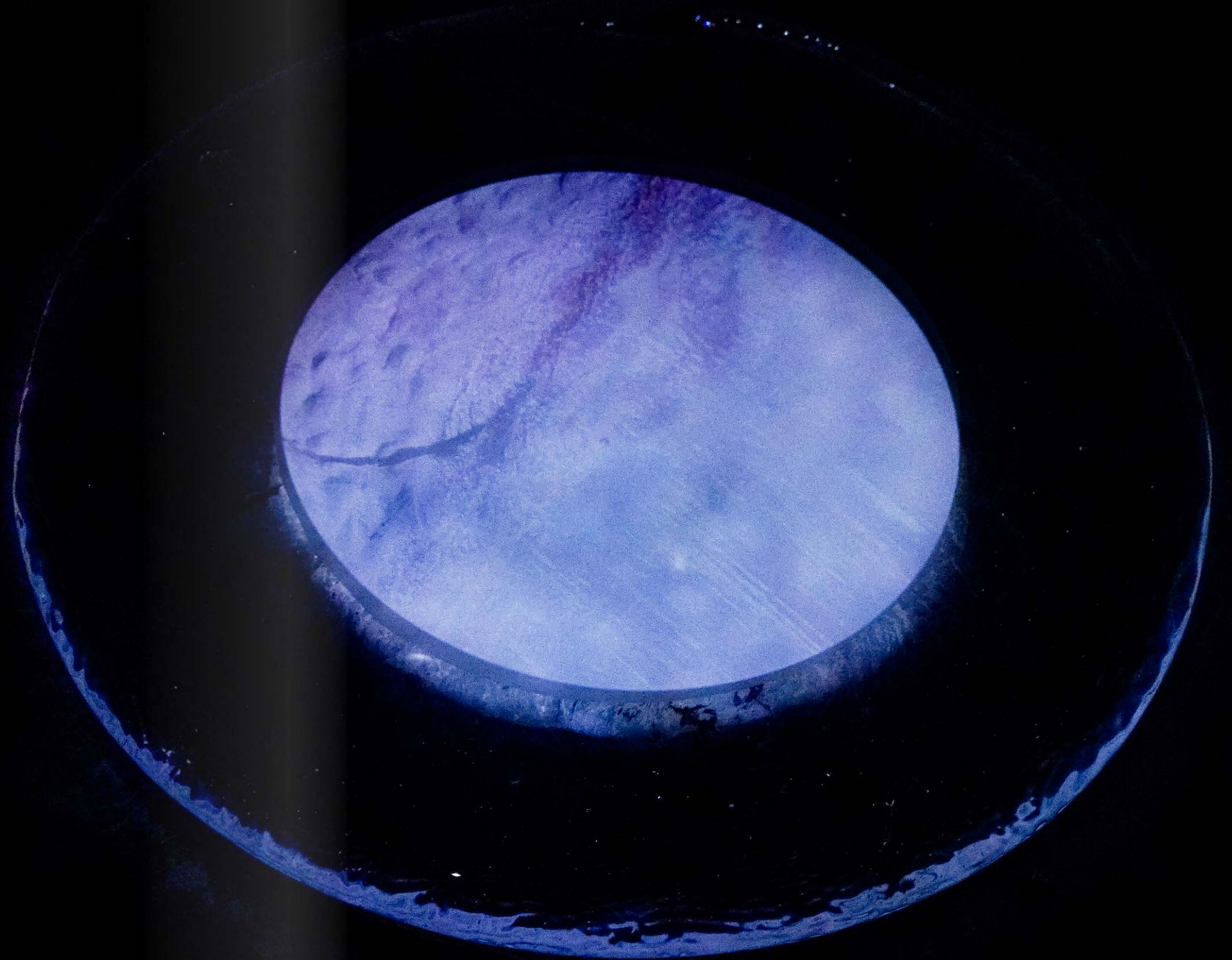
The quality of light at Hull Cove is captivating. I am spellbound by the way it caresses, lances, reflects, refracts, and explodes.

I am also obsessed with the stunning variety of rocks found here. I initially sandcast a few rocks in glass, curious about transforming something considered so dense and immutable into something transparent and ethereal. I then returned them to the site, where I became mesmerized by how, when buried cast-side down, looked like pools of ice, and, when flipped cast-side up, caught the sunlight and glowed like solid magma, and feels eerie, beautiful, and other-worldly. I am unsure what compelled me to make these rocks en masse, but feel that the answer will reveal itself over time.



I am also entranced by the haptic quality of these glass rock forms. I think there's a connection here to the material qualities of rock, sand, and liquid magma, as well as the tension between transparency of glass and opacity of rock. The glass mimics frozen water, and feels like a way to comfortably hold water or ice in my hands.





TIDEPOLS STILL REMEMBER THE SEA

I wanted to explore the idea that a tide pool remembers its past life in the ocean, fragmented memories of being part of something vast and unfathomable, before it was trapped by the boundaries of its new body.

I used glass pieces to work with sunlight and the movement of water, using the glass as a lens to capture footage. In the first experiment, I edited this dreamscape into a new, digitally mediated tide pool—a circle—and projected onto a sandblasted circle within a pane of glass I cast. The result is a digital tidepool caught in a sheet of simulated frozen water.

I also explored this another way through layering and collage. I wanted to create the feeling of a portal, or spirit, something organic flitting through the landscape. The footage was created manually, then I digitally layered and animated the portal spirit. Stills from this project can be seen throughout this book.



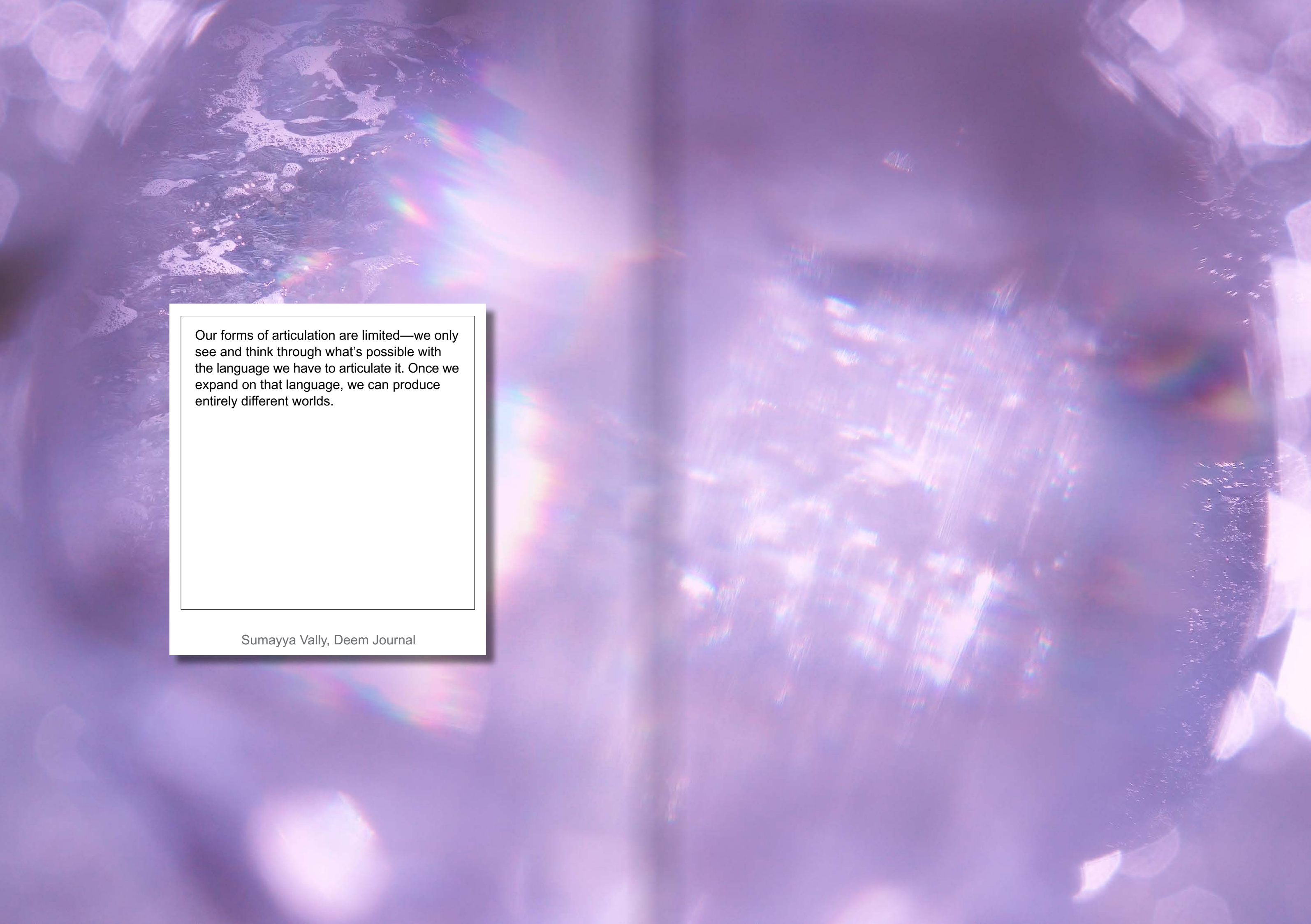


SEASHELL STRESS TEST

I grew interested in the effect of molten glass on seashells. I experimented with various ways of capturing the shells in glass, to varying degrees of success. I have been thinking about the transparency of glass as a way of preserving the effect of shattering on the body of the shell. In parts of the world, seashell ash is used as a component of sustainable glass-making, and to capture the splintering of the shell within the glass is to capture a moment in time of the cyclical process of growth and transformation.





A background image of a waterfall with a rainbow in the mist, overlaid with a white text box. The waterfall is on the right side, and the rainbow is in the center. The text box is on the left side.

Our forms of articulation are limited—we only see and think through what’s possible with the language we have to articulate it. Once we expand on that language, we can produce entirely different worlds.

Sumayya Vally, Deem Journal

My making is worldmaking.
Each of my projects are an extension of myself, threads wandering towards the construction of a personal mythology. Together, they form the blueprint of a speculative world that exists within my interior self. It is this world that I seek to give visual and experiential form to.

WORLD MYNORPIA

or, on subversion and survival

REFLECTION

Having always been an uncomfortable glitch in the identities I was given, I chose to search for and discover what lay within this kaleidoscopic collapse of *the right way to be*. Instead, I found a space for endless opportunity and imagination, a space where all truths and paradoxes exist, a portal to countless visions of the world remade anew.

As a means of expressing this spirit world within our conscious reality, I focus primarily on themes of identity formation through a spiritual relationship between body and natural landscape.

Through narrative, static and moving image, sensory considerations, chaotic layering, light projection, and translations of traditional form into various new media, I grapple with ways of developing and giving birth to a facet of this world, and consider how to invite others into the experience.

If you grow up in a body below the top tier of power in the American experiment, social norms categorize you by a few inescapable, immutable means: gender, race, religion, and sexuality. Whether visible or invisible, these terms labeled my body, and by extension my sense of Self, placing me in boxes not of my choosing.

My work is a search for my own self, my own truth, and a desire to share that journey. It's a spiritual process and search towards formlessness, oneness, understanding. Through my projects, I strive to bridge the gap between the divine within the body and the divine within the natural world, through a deep and attentive listening and response to the multitude of voices emanating from both worlds. In the infinitesimal gap between, I find infinite space for new worlds to take form.

The world within is a dreamy kaleidoscope of nothing and everything. It is a beam of pure white light, and it is the entire spectrum of color. It contains the rich wisdom and seductive shadow of the void, alongside the mesmerizing brilliance and brash courage of a supernova. Paradoxes overlap, and many truths exist side by side. Truth, however, is the foundation of this world. Not the truth of supposed reality—a truth that requires constant proof and justification—but truth of a more imaginative, intimate, and emotive nature.

This world draws inspiration from my dual conceptions of home in Bangladesh and Texas, my spiritual roots in the mystical Sufi branch of Islam, and my lifelong obsession with science fiction and mythology. Binaries are replaced with spectrums, and boundaries and borders are consciously blurred to invite reflection and ceaseless growth. It is ethereal and otherworldly, a dreamscape of sensory engagement, a world in which I can be all things, never fixed.

My work is founded upon a principle of deep listening and trust. Through this ethos, I focus on following an innate, intuitive voice that guides me to give shape to what already exists. I become a vessel for the work, responding to what it asks of me. Every project involves personal narrative paired with sensory image-making, culminating in an unfinished, ever growing exploration of a facet of my interior landscape.

I work through spending time visiting a site and collecting imagery, physical ephemera, and footage. I repeat these visits in order to build an intimate relationship with the landscape, to forge connections so I can better connect to its spirit. I seek to bridge the unbounded bodies of an endless ocean with the eternally growing edges of the cosmos—these serve as metaphors and inspiration. For every project, I consider the content itself, and then the medium that carries it. My work asks to be spatial and experiential, a portal to be immersed in.



By taking a slower, more open-ended approach, I feel more comfortable communicating, listening, experimenting, and embracing the imperfections, accidents, artifacts, and glitches. I work at various paces, sometimes in furious chaos and sometimes utter stillness, through extensive layering of image, text, process, medium, metaphor, and meaning.

Currently, I mobilize my practice across several media. At the writing of this essay, my primary means of form-making are video and moving image, projection, animation, print design, spatial installation, and most recently, forays into 3D modeling and rendering, AI video-to-video generation, and glass casting. My most consistent media is light and space. My voice extends across any medium appropriate to the expression of this world, and I am constantly hungry to push the bounds of my abilities. Critical to my work is the authentic and visceral presence of my fingerprints, regardless of output.

I am driven to pursue this line of work in order to understand myself from inside out, and to share that journey with others. In doing so, I hope to contribute to filling the perceived void and combating the erasure of voices like mine to create space for others to do the same.

Like my previous field of architecture, graphic design is dominated by old systems and rules that serve a limited audience. Thoroughly entwined with the Western principles of extractive capitalism, the field requires an explosive reimagination through the lens of all the voices it has historically ignored.

However, I am not particularly concerned with the field or profession of graphic design—I don't think this is the space in which I belong. I make art as an act of survival. Unable to exist in my truest, fullest self in the systems and institutions of this "real" world we must inhabit, I strive to create a world in which I can, governed by a completely different set of values. In doing so, I invite others to contribute many more visions of more radically imaginative, truthful, and inclusive futures.

205

ABSTRACT

204

OtherWorldly Gestures seeks to give form to the intangible. I work primarily with light as material substance to shape a speculative emotive space in which I make metaphysical phenomena experiential. I collaborate with ecological and technological elements to express a spiritual understanding of Self and World. Most recently, the work translates material objects and architectural elements from my cultural heritage, and gives visual and haptic form to the sacred relationship between body, soul, and natural world.

Through these explorations, I begin to propose a speculative *OtherWorld*. I delve into the precolonial, ancestral teachings of a mystical spiritual path, referencing Sufi teachings, Islamic perspectives, diasporic Bengali heritage, and Texas landscapes as source material from which to weave a new set of future mythologies through physical and digital mediation.

In lieu of a traditional annotated bibliography, I've compiled a working list of everything that has come into the maelstrom of thinking, feeling, learning, making, experimenting, and growth over the last few years. In Spring 2022, in Seminar II with Paul Soulellis, I grandly presented my chaotic mess of an Emerging Landscapes project and announced to my cohort: "My brain is soup!"

This was an attempt to express how, rather than the technicalities of reference, I am more impacted by the holistic and gestural spirit of a piece of work, a scene in a film, the worldmaking aesthetics of a music video, the resonant quality of a conversation. I can rarely identify specific influences, but know that the amorphous, fluid nature of exchange is constantly occurring and ceaselessly shaping me and my practice.

This bibliography is presented as a series of incomplete lists organized by media type, and I am grateful for everyone involved in creating these ideas, processes, and works: all the unidentified and overlooked networks that shaped the things that have in turn shaped me. I am especially thankful to all who choose to create, and to put their work into the world. I hope that you may approach this assemblage of references and find your own path through this as well (inspired by Ramon, who spoke of this process in regards to his Decolonizing Design Reader at Deem Symposium, Chicago 2023).

A more updated edition of the constantly evolving swirl of my thinking, can be found in my are.na profile: <https://www.are.na/sadia-quddus>

ARTISTS

Morehshin Allahyari
Sougwen Chung
Larissa Sansour
Julie Mehretu
Tiger Dingsun
Jakob Kudsk Steensen
Petra Cortright
Sara Cwynar
Hito Steyerl
Natalia Stuyk
Farah Al Qasimi
Meriem Bennani
Maari Sugawara
Qingyu Wu
Björk
Sun Ra
DevendraAI / S.A. Chavarria
Kameelah Janan Rasheed
Hirad Saab
Yumna al-Arashi
Lucy Hardcastle
Mariko Mori
Ian Cheng
neta bomani
Sevdaliza
Nancy Baker Cahill
Sophie Kahn
Xuebing Du
Maiko Takeda
Zainab Aliyu
Bahia Shehab
Yehwan Song

WRITINGS

Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto,
Legacy Russell

The Problem with Diaspora Art
Parts I + II, Zarina Muhammad of
The White Pube

~The Problem with
Representation~ Zarina Muhammad
of the White Pube

Level One Identity Art,
Gabrielle de la Puente of The
White Pube

Atmos Magazine

deem journal

The Queer Art of Failure,
Jack Halberstam

Asia-Futurism, Dawn Chan

Chimeric Worlding: What can
graphic design learn from
poetics and worldbuilding?
Tiger Dingsun

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Donna Haraway

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Michelle Zauner

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of Time, Aaron Z. Lewis

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Hito Steyerl

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Hito Steyerl

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Ursula K. Le Guin

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Collaboration, The Mushroom at
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Anna Tsing

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Laboria Cuboniks

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Andreas Malm

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Future, Andrew Blauvelt

New Forms of Articulation:
Sumayya Vally in Conversation
with Esther Choi in Deem Journal

When the Earth Started to Sing,
David G. Haskell

The Voices of Birds and the
Language of Belonging,
David G. Haskell

On the Language of the Deep
Blue, Charles Foster

Mythos and Mycology,
Whitney Bauck

The Inward Migration in
Apocalyptic Times,
Alexis Wright

Beyond the Human, So and Pinar
Sinopoulos-Lloyd

We Have Always Been Here,
Samra Habib

In Praise of Shadows,
Junichiro Tanizak

The Miracles of the Namiya
General Store, Keigo Higashino

Sweet Bean Paste,
Durian Sukegawa

Kitchen, Banana Yoshimoto

In Sensorium: Notes for My
People, Tanaïs

How Bestselling Author V.E.
Schwab Finally Found the Words
to Come Out of the Closet,
V.E. Schwab

DRAFTS: Steffani Jemison on the
Stroke, the Glyph, and the Mark

Making Feminist Points,
Sara Ahmed

On the Age of Distraction,
Finding the Light Within,
Ruth H. Robertson

Molten Heart: How
do volcanoes—
their dormancy,
eruptions, and
everything
in between—compare to the
temperaments of the human
heart? Willow Defebaugh

My End of the World: When
it feels as if the world is
unraveling, nature remains a
source of sublimity. But who is
afforded access to beauty during
times of apocalypse? Danez Smith

The Word Made Fresh: Mystical
Encounter and the Weird Divine,
Elvia Wilk

Slanted 40: Experimental Type

Deem Journal Issue Two: Pedagogy
for a New World

HOLO 3: MIRROR STAGE—Between
Computability and Its Opposite

Sandberg Instituut Dirty Art
Department Mission Statement

TALKS

Posters that Sing: Notes on Indigenous Poster Design, Brian Johnson

WangShui: Certainty of the Flesh, with WangShui and Nora N. Khan, moderated by X Zhu-Nowell, Assistant Curator at the Guggenheim

Deem Symposium: Ramon Tejada on Pedagogy

Ockham Lecture: "More Human" James Goggin

NEW (dr)inc: Cyberfeminism as Glitch & Archive: A Conversation with Legacy Russell & Mindy Seu

Cyberfeminism Index: Nora Khan, Lauren Lee McCarthy, & Mindy Seu

Teju Cole Interview: My Looking Became Sacred

Kameelah Janan Rasheed: The Edge of Legibility | Art21 "New York Close Up"

Bahia Shehab at RISD, Fall 2021

Lauren Lee McCarthy at RISD, Fall 2019

Legacy Russell, "On Footnotes"

Nashwa Zaman and The Gravel Institute: "How America Facilitated a Genocide in Bangladesh"

TV

BEEF
The Mandalorian
Andor
Mad Men
Because This is My First Life
Alchemy of Souls
Vikings
Avatar: The Last Airbender
Legend of Korra
Altered Carbon
The Expanse
The Fabulous Mrs. Maisel
Devs
Insecure
Fleabag
The Walking Dead
The Haunting of Bly Manor
The Umbrella Academy
Stranger Things
Watchmen
The Witcher

The Last Kingdom
Indian Matchmaking
Single's Inferno Season 2
Sex Education
LOKI
Reservation Dogs
Arcane
Itaewon Class
Sleuth of the Ming Dynasty
Lord of the Rings: Rings of Power
Wednesday
All of Us Are Dead
It's Okay Not to be Okay
Neon Genesis Evangelion
Descendants of the Sun
Vincenzo
My Name
The Sandman
LOVE DEATH + ROBOTS
Heartstopper
Shadow and Bone
Dragon Prince
Flower Gang
The Untamed
Business Proposal
My Roommate is a Gumiho
The Bad and Crazy
The Uncanny Counter
Arthdal Chronicles
Kim's Convenience
Legend of Fei
Underworld
MO
Man Like Mobeen
RAMY
Cowboy Bebop
Another Life
Maniac
Wynonna Earp
Sense8
The OA
Roswell, New Mexico
Midnight Mass
The Protector
Midnight Diner
Grace and Frankie
Queer Eye
Arrested Development
Marco Polo
100 Days My Prince
Oh My Ghostess
Messiah
How To Build a Sex Room
Great British Baking Show
Memories of the Alhambra
The Way of the Househusband
The Crown
Peaky Blinders
Lucifer
Castlevania
Medici
Imposters
The Hungry and the Hairy
The Get Down
Easy
Ugly Delicious

Jinn
White Lotus
The Righteous Gemstones
Feel Good
Knock Down the House
Thermae Romae Novae
Haikyu!!
Jujutsu Kaisen
Chainsaw Man
Tidelands
Banana Fish
What If...?
Obi Wan Kenobi
Chernobyl
The Terror
Black Sails
Firefly
What's Wrong with Secretary Kim?
Big Little Lies
Sons of Anarchy
Yuri! On Ice
Being Human
Wheel of Time
Good Omens
The Boys
High Fidelity
Black Mirror
The Bear

FILM

Everything, Everywhere, All at Once
In Vitro
A Space Exodus
Nation Estate
In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain
Annihilation
DUNE
Entergalactic
The Northman
NOPE
Ghost in the Shell
Blade Runner
Blade Runner 2049
Afronaut
Star Wars
Oblivion
Terminator
Ex Machina
Diehard
Children of the Sea
The Last Ice
Sorry to Bother You
Space Sweepers
Last Night
Mad Max
Pacific Rim
Bend it Like Beckham
Hunt for the Wilderpeople
Portrait of a Lady on Fire
Two Cops
Black Panther
Arrival
Shang-Chi

Midnight Runners
The Old Guard
Eternals
Indiana Jones
Jung_E
Enola Holmes
What Happened to Monday?
I Am Mother
Warriors of the Future
Raya and the Last Dragon
Turning Red
The Summit of the Gods
Warm Bodies
Always Be My Maybe
The King
Homecoming, A Film by Beyonce
A Lull in the Sea
Begin Again
Don't Look Up
Spectral
Love and Leashes
Bubble
Don't Look UP
Euro Vision
The Adam Project
Spiderhead
Gunpowder Milkshake
Cruella
TRON
Spectral
Spider Man: Into the Spiderverse
First Alaskans
Wind River
Togo
The Girl King
The French Dispatch
Akira
If Beale Street Could Talk
The Batman
Pamela, a love story
A Rainy Day in New York
Weathering With You
Beautiful Boy
Terminator: Dark Fate
Pacific Rim
King Arthur
Howl's Moving Castle
Princess Mononoke
Spirited Away

PROJECTS/ARTWORK

Grosse Fatigue, Camille Henrot

Hurt/Comfort by Kara Güt

Machine Hallucinations by Refik Anadol

The Icebox: Svalbard Global Seed Vault

Phem by Angella Mackey

Material Speculation, Morehshin Allahyari

She Who Sees the Unknown, Morehshin Allahyari

The Holy States of Devendra AI, S.A. Chavarria

A Wild Ass Beyond: Apocalypse RN by Sondra Perry, American Artist, Nora Khan, Caitlin Cherry

Ian Cheng's Emisseries

Reading Machines, Tiger Dingsun

Dark Matter Objects, neta bomani

Liminal Lands, Jakob Kudsk Steensen

The Deep Listener, Jakob Kudsk Steensen

Triple Chase, Forensic Architecture

[espace variable] / [placeholder] by La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse

GALLERIES/EXHIBITS

MOMA NYC: Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme—May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth

Canadian Centre for Architecture, CCA: Vers Chez Soi / Towards Home

MassMOCA: James Turrell

La Centrale Galerie Powerhouse, Montreal, Quebec

CONCEPTS

World-making
Orientalism
Techno-Orientalism
Sufi Mysticism
Posthumanism
Glitch Feminism
Expanded Cinema
Speculative Futures
Decolonizing Science Fiction
Islamic Architecture

CITIES

Portland, ME
Vinalhaven, ME
Montreal, Quebec
Vancouver, BC
New York City, NY
Newport, RI
Jamestown, RI

Marfa, TX
Austin, TX
Houston, TX
London, UK
Dhaka, Bangladesh

MUSIC [+VIDEOS]

BIBI
Stray Kids
BTS
Seori
Björk
CIFIKA
Discostan
Japanese Breakfast
Lexie Liu
DJ Sama' AbdulHadi
Belis
imugi
HYUKOH
ATEEZ
SHAUN
FKA Twigs
Soolking
Beyonce
Grimes
88rising
Kid Cudi
daine
Arooj Aftab
Sam Prekop + John McEntire

FASHION

Anrealage
Rahul Mishra
Gaurav Gupta
The Arrivals

BEACHES

Second Beach / Sachuest Beach
Horseneck Beach
Hull Cove
Tillinghast Beach

200

To all the friends, family, books, tv shows, films, music videos, K-Pop idols, lo-fi playlist makers, and are.na channel curators who kept me inspired and motivated, the faculty who joined me on spontaneous walks or hung out over coffee, the thinkers and artists who make the heart work and put it into the world, and to my cohort for being the very very best. Y'all are literally a dream come true. If I say more I'll cry.

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OTHERWORLDLY

301

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ROUYA AHMADI

Associate Professor, Graphic Design
PRIMARY ADVISOR

RYAN WALLER

Critic, Graphic Design
SECONDARY ADVISOR

BRIAN JOHNSON

Partner, Polymode Studio
TERTIARY ADVISOR

JAMES GOGGIN

Partner, Practise
EXTERNAL THESIS CRITIC

BETHANY JOHNSON

Professor, Graphic Design
GRADUATE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

A thesis by
PADIA QUDDUS
presented in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
IN GRAPHIC DESIGN
in the Department of Graphic Design of
the Rhode Island School of Design in
Providence, Rhode Island,
2023.



Self portrait at the
end of my first year at
RISD, Spring 2020—
LOCKDOWN RAGE CALLIGRAPHY



Self portrait at the
end of my last year at
RISD, Spring 2023—
AI SOUL PORTRAIT

This thesis encapsulates a period of unlearning, discovering, and reclaiming. In my time at RISD, I've grappled with my initial ideas about life, faith, design, art, good and bad, right and wrong, and my understanding of my Self. Having already tried architecture, liberal arts, communications, and Islamic art + architectural history, only to find that none of these pursuits were right for me, I found myself fighting, once again, with graphic design.

I left RISD for a year during COVID, and did not plan on returning. Where architecture had felt too large in scale, graphic design felt too small. I couldn't find my entry point, and I'd begun to think that perhaps I was not meant to be a creative or artist after all. With two full-time job offers in architectural communications opening up before me, I found myself contemplating sliding backwards into stability—and boredom—or trying again at RISD.

I decided there were questions still left unanswered. Something was calling me back.

In the following years, I approached every project with curiosity and a radical openness. I no longer cared about what anyone thought of me. I was more interested in finding myself in my work, learning my interests, getting to know my practice. I came back for no one other than myself. This would have once felt selfish, but now felt radical: I wanted to know myself—my true self—to know what small but honest contribution I could offer the world.

As I wrap up my time here, I have at last found the language and foundations of my practice. I have found my voice, and found that it is strong. I have found a way to access the space between myself and the world, the space where my voice rings clearest, and where I can hear the voices calling back to me.

This thesis is titled *OtherWorldly Gestures* because these ideas and projects are still gestures, just beginnings of something larger. I have finally learned who I am as an artist, and now I am ready to put my ideas into practice. I have found my momentum, and am ready to build.

At the writing of this, I have accepted a fellowship and offer of admission to UCLA's Design Media Arts MFA program. I had chosen graphic design as a bridge between the constraints and structure of architecture, and the expressiveness of art, and while it has been that, I'm ready to continue building a path that resists definition. I am grateful for all that graphic design has taught me in the consideration and development of my own visual voice, a language for critique and critical thinking, and a framework for mediating between platforms, audiences, content, and materiality.

But I'm honestly *so pumped* to see what lays before me at the edges of what is known. See ya deep in The Beyond.

WRITING + DESIGN

—

SADIA QUDDUS

EDITORIAL SUPPORT

—

ANNE WEST
LYDIA CHODOSH
SUN HO LEE
MARY BANAS

DESIGN GUIDANCE

—

BETHANY JOHNS
POUYA AHMADI
RYAN WALLER
BRIAN JOHNSON
JAMES GOGGIN
RAMON TEJADA
DOUGAL HENKEN

PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

—

SADIA QUDDUS
DOUGAL HENKEN

TYPEFACE

—

GALIPOS BY 60KILOS
SANGBLEU KNIGHT BY SWISS TYPEFACES
SPACE MONO BY COLOPHON
AT SURT BY BLAZE TYPE FOUNDRY

PAPER

—

UNCOATED

PRINT/BIND

—

MIXAM

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OVERSEA
WORDY
GALIPUS



