

ISSUE #1 2026

ARTDOC

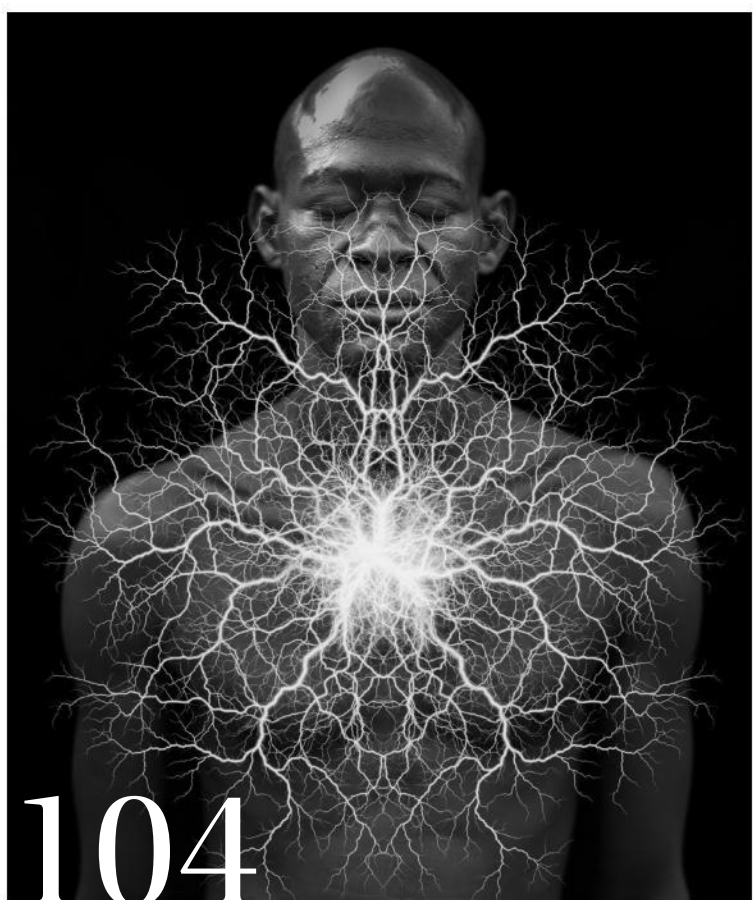
Photography Magazine

THE INNER LENS

CONTENTS

INTERVIEWS

- 16 Emotional layers of pain, anger, and brutal history
Aletheia Casey
Aletheia Casey overlays paint on photos to evoke wildfires and Australia's brutal past.
- 56 Sculptured Assemblages and Psychological Installations
Yi Hsuan Lai
Yi Hsuan Lai's photography explores the space between the body and the environment.
- 88 The relationship between space and remembrance
Susana Espana
Susana Espana examines the intersection between domestic space and the internal landscape of memory.
- 122 Stitching Memory into Being
Olga Shatokha
Olga Shatokha explores memory and displacement, mending fractured home through tactile photography.



EXHIBITION

- 104 Inner Worlds & Inner Landscapes
Artdoc Exhibition Highlights
The exhibitions connect photography with inner experience and the natural world.

PHOTO CULTURE

- 32 Rethinking Iconography in Contemporary Photography
From fixed sacred symbols to open photographic meaning, art's language evolves.





INSPIRATION

12 Rose Water

Seth Cook

Seth Cook describes *Rose Water* as a love letter across cultures and languages.

50 La Loba

Ornella Organzini

La Loba unfolds as a heroine's metaphorical journey towards self-awareness.

84 Reginae

Chiara Innocenti

Chiara Innocenti senses a quest for freedom in air and water around her.

118 Honouring the Ancestors

Shannon Nahara

Shannon Nahara's current work reflects on time, memory and the psyche.



FEATURED

06 Silk Veil Through the Trees

Charlotte Schmid-Maybach

Charlotte Schmid-Maybach reimagines the photographic landscape as tactile and atmospheric.

44 In the Wake of Memory and Emotional Change

VJ Martin

In *Surface-Level Ghosts*, VJ Martin fuses psychiatry and art to explore memory and perception.

78 Otherworldly Crows in a Restless Sky

Lawrence Manning

In *Murder in Nampa*, Lawrence Manning transforms crows into symbols of resilience and identity.

112 Hidden Waterways of the American South

Virginia McGee Richards

The *Inner Passage* traces canals built by enslaved Africans, whose names were lost.



“

Today, photography
increasingly serves as a
way to express individual
emotions.

- The Artdoc Team

The inner lens reveals personal realities

Photography has long been considered a mechanical art, yet this hasn't prevented artists from infusing it with their personal feelings. Today, photography increasingly serves as a way to express individual emotions. Instead of a mechanical lens, photographers now use the inner lens: an individual's eye, which not only perceives reality but also blends it with psychological awareness. In her series *Lifelines*, Olga Shatokha explores the stories she inherited from Ukraine. She merges memories of displacement and family history with photographs and landscapes. Using images and superimposed text, she crafts layered memories of home—more internal and mental than tangible or fixed.

Yi Hsuan Lai examines the body as a canvas for psychological expression. Her work explores femininity, shaped by themes of emigration and her personal journey. She produces staged self-portraits and still lifes featuring various objects and her portraits.

Susana Espana explores the inner landscape of memory by creating layered images inspired by her experiences. She employs self-portraits, landscapes, and material interventions to craft her unique visual language. For her, art serves as a means to turn raw, personal experiences into a universal form of visual communication.

Australian artist Aletheia Casey combined aesthetic elements with original documentary photos

to deliver an emotional message about the wildfires and Australia's harsh history. She diverged from traditional photojournalism to better express her ideas and feelings. Her approach is both exploratory and intuitive. "We're all human, and even though we have unique stories, we also share experiences in life."

This Artdoc issue also highlights emerging talents who portray the tumultuous world through their personal perspective. VJ Martin produces pieces inspired by memory and emotional shifts, navigating between beauty and unease. Lawrence Manning turns an unusual influx of crows in his Idaho hometown into a deep exploration of resilience and self-examination. Using wet-plate collodion, Virginia McGee Richards examines colonial-era canals constructed by enslaved Africans, whose forced labour reshaped the landscape and whose names have been lost to history. We introduce *The Inner Lens*, consisting of two related exhibitions: *Inner Worlds* and *Inner Landscapes*. Together, they create a dialogue between inner experience and the surrounding environment. We thank all the talented photographers who contributed their inspiring works. Finally, our in-depth essay, *Rethinking Iconography in Contemporary Photography*, examines the important role of symbols in art history and how their function is evolving in today's photography.

- *The Artdoc Team*



Silk Veil Through the Trees

Charlotte Schmid-Maybach

In *Elsewhere*, Charlotte Schmid-Maybach reimagines the photographic landscape as something tactile, layered and quietly otherworldly. Blending lens-based imagery with the intimacy of hand stitching, she threads metallic and cotton fibres directly into her prints, transforming paper into richly textured, tapestry-like works. A second image, printed on silk gauze and suspended above the surface, introduces a veil of mist that softens and deepens the scene. The result is an imagined terrain poised between memory and myth, where trees, folklore and fragments of nature take on a dreamlike presence. Schmid-Maybach's intricate interventions dissolve the boundary between document and invention, inviting viewers to look closer—and step gently beyond the visible.

“ In this ongoing series, *Elsewhere*, I engage with landscape through an interdisciplinary approach that combines photography and textiles. First, I sew on my prints with free-motion sewing, like drawing with thread. Sewing lets me get my hands into the photograph, and the coloured metallic and cotton fibres transform the paper into something dimensional and textural. The finished pieces feel like tapestry.

I print a second image on silk gauze and layer it over my sewn photographs on Kozo paper. The gauze both deepens the pieces and makes them more ethereal. It's as if I've found a way to print a layer of fog and add it to my process, which already integrates photography and textile. This misty layer creates a space that only exists in imagination or memory, an interior landscape.

My intervention blurs the line between what's real in the photograph and what's beyond the picture. I'm drawn to themes of nature, myth, fairytale and legend, with a particular focus on trees. The work is intricate and tactile, inviting the viewer to take a closer look.

About

Charlotte Schmid-Maybach is an interdisciplinary artist working with photography, textile and assemblage. Originally from San Francisco, she has a BA in South Asian Studies (UC Berkeley) and an MA in Photojournalism (University of Missouri). Her background as an archaeological photographer in Pakistan and fifteen years as a photojournalist have informed her artwork. Charlotte began studying with artist Tom Wudl in 2016 and transitioned to a full-time studio practice. She was selected for Critical Mass Top 50, 2021 and Klompching Gallery's FRESH 2023. Charlotte is based in Los Angeles, and her work has been widely shown in galleries and museums.

www.charlotteschmid-maybach.com





© Charlotte Schmid-Maybach | Elsewhere





Rose Water

Seth Cook

“*Rose Water* is a love letter to my wife, to language, and to the spaces where cultures intertwine. As an Iranian and an American, our relationship is shaped not just by words but by silences, gestures, and the quiet ways we learn to understand one another. This project began as I learned Farsi to deepen my connection to her culture and to intimacy itself.

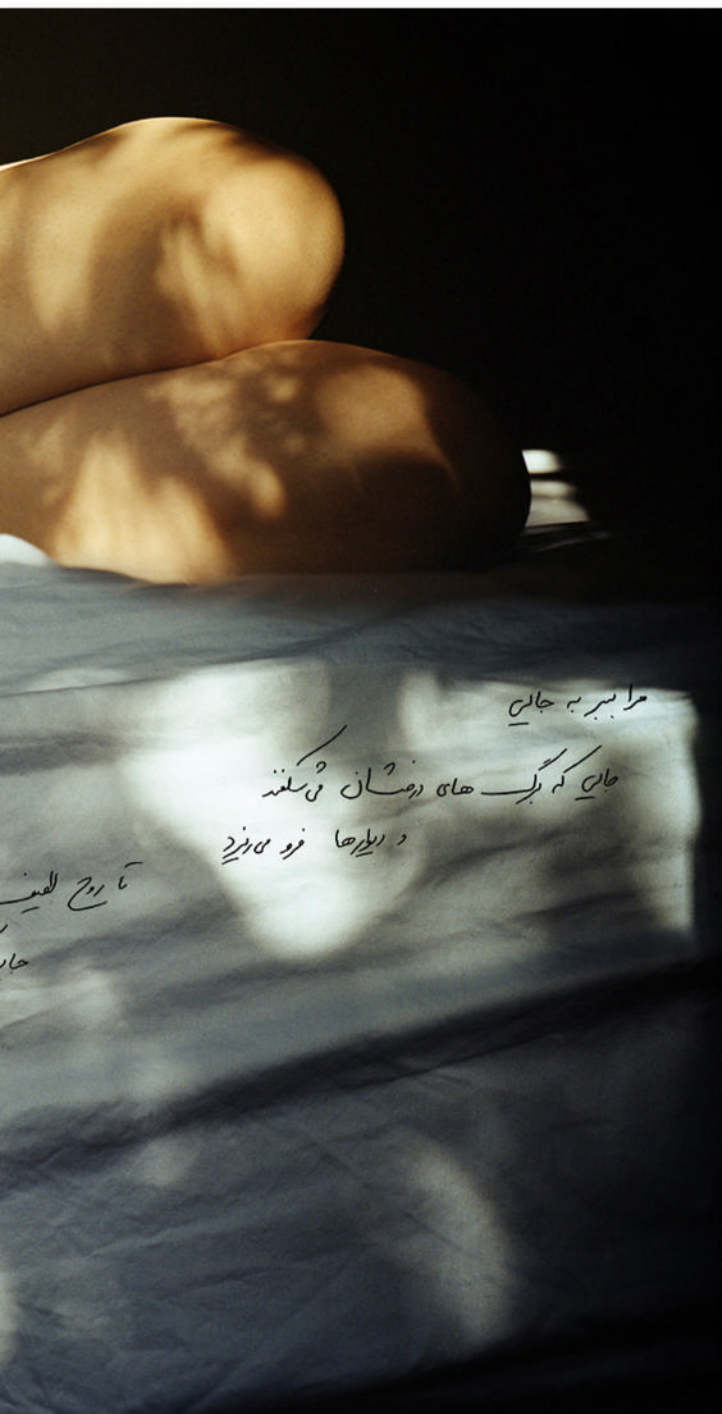
Through photography and poetry, *Rose Water* captures the quiet, everyday moments where love is felt beyond words. Some images present poems written in Farsi, echoing the beauty and effort of learning another’s language. Language in this work is shared but not mirrored; English carries the public narrative, while Farsi appears as an intimate, handwritten trace of shared experience. More than just a portrait of our relationship, *Rose Water* speaks to those who have navigated love across borders shaped by geography, language, or emotion. It is an invitation to see meaning in the spaces between words and to embrace the quiet beauty of culture and intimacy.

About

Seth Adam Cook is an artist based in the Bayou Teche region of south-central Louisiana. Inspired by the area’s swamps and marshes, his versatile studio practice often combines photography with other creative media, imbuing a deeper sense of meaning through material and technique choices. He earned a B.F.A. in studio art from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 2016 and an M.F.A. in photography from Indiana University, Bloomington, in 2020. Cook’s work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, with features in publications like Lenscratch, SHOTS Magazine, and Der Greif.

www.seth-cook.com







نو ندی بر دیو ار
ندم، گذرا، و هرگز در دست نگر فتنی

رستم را دراز می کنم -
اما عشق، سایه ای ست
لمس کردن بی لمس
حاضر، ناپدید، و باز باز می گردد

بمان، آنگاه که نور می رود
بمان، آنگاه که محو می شویم





All images © Aletheia Casey | A Lost Place

Emotional layers of pain, anger, and brutal history

Aletheia Casey

An intense red brush of paint covers the barren trees, which appear like skeletons in a lonely landscape. In another photo, we see a blue hue over a distorted landscape, with scratches, ink spots, and indistinct dark spots. Australian artist Aletheia Casey layered these aesthetic elements over original documentary photographs to convey an emotional message about the wildfires and Australia's brutal past.



© Aletheia Casey | A Lost Place

The photoworks of the series *A Lost Place* consist of realistic images with a superimposed layer of hand-painted colours, blending geographical reality with personal emotions about the devastating wildfires in Australia. This style was a deliberate choice. At the beginning of her career, Aletheia Casey wanted to become a photojournalist, but she concluded she wasn't the type to cover conflicts. Turning the camera towards ongoing injustice would completely deplete her emotionally. "I went down more of a documentary route to tell longer stories. And then that documentary path has led to an expanded documentary art practice, where I figured there are no rules — there are simply no rules in my practice. And that's the difference between my early photojournalistic work and how I work today."

Casey wanted to move away from the strict format of photojournalism to better express her ideas and emotions. "I think there is definitely a place for observational photojournalistic work in order to depict particular events and record them. These days, there is a big question about how to depict the truth. But I want to engage myself without being constrained by any fixed rules. My work is both exploratory and intuitive. We're all human, and even though we have unique stories, we also share experiences in life. My work, *A Lost Place*, explores

how we experience environmental catastrophes. Many of us will face these things, or have already. It is becoming a universal experience, tragically."

Set the mind at ease

Even though Aletheia Casey, an Australian artist, currently lives in London, she remains strongly connected to Australia. "For me, it's still home. So when the fires started in 2019, I felt devastated by what was happening, and I felt anxious, fearful, and also angry about the government's response or lack of response." The Australian government does not acknowledge its role in the environmental crisis. "They show a lack of acceptance that their policies on mining, coal exploitation, and damming contribute to what we're experiencing today. I was also interested in how our colonial history has played a part in why we are facing such disastrous environmental issues today." Casey felt fearful and upset about the catastrophic bushfires, known as the Black Summer, that swept across Australia amid exceptional dry conditions. "At that time, I spoke to a friend about it, and she said: you just have to make work, just for yourself, just make work because it's the only thing that will set your mind at ease a little and calm it down because there was no point in me going to Australia at that point."



My work, *A Lost Place*, explores how we experience environmental catastrophes.

Emotional exploration

She took images she had taken a year before in Australia, around the place where her parents live, along the south coast, and also inland in her children's home of Wagga Wagga. "I took these images from both of these places. In some, I painted and then scratched onto them. For other images, I went into the darkroom, made prints, and then altered and manipulated them through analogue processes. I scanned and sandwiched other pictures while scanning, resulting in a double exposure. There were no rules about the process and no set agenda. It became an emotional exploration and an expression of the profound devastation I felt by the loss of land and animals, and the horrific impact this had on people." The handcrafted process allowed Casey to express more emotion than a digital process would. "I generally try to handprint all of my work. Although for this series, it later became impossible to handprint every photo because we then went into the Pandemic. Darkrooms were closed. At the start of the year in Australia, everybody was trying to escape the fires, but then, only a few months later, they went straight into the pandemic. Then it was another sort of trauma – from having to flee their homes, they then couldn't leave their homes further than a few kilometres."

As Aletheia Casey was still in London, she was unable to return to Australia at that time. "So I kept making this work. Some images in the book were made from scans I had taken. I had printed them on my digital printer, but the paper went wrong, and the ink splattered and spread across the paper, which was not suited to the printer. That became fascinating and wonderful, so I explored that. There were absolutely no rules when it came to making the work, and a tension began to develop – between horror and beauty."



© Aletheia Casey | A Lost Place



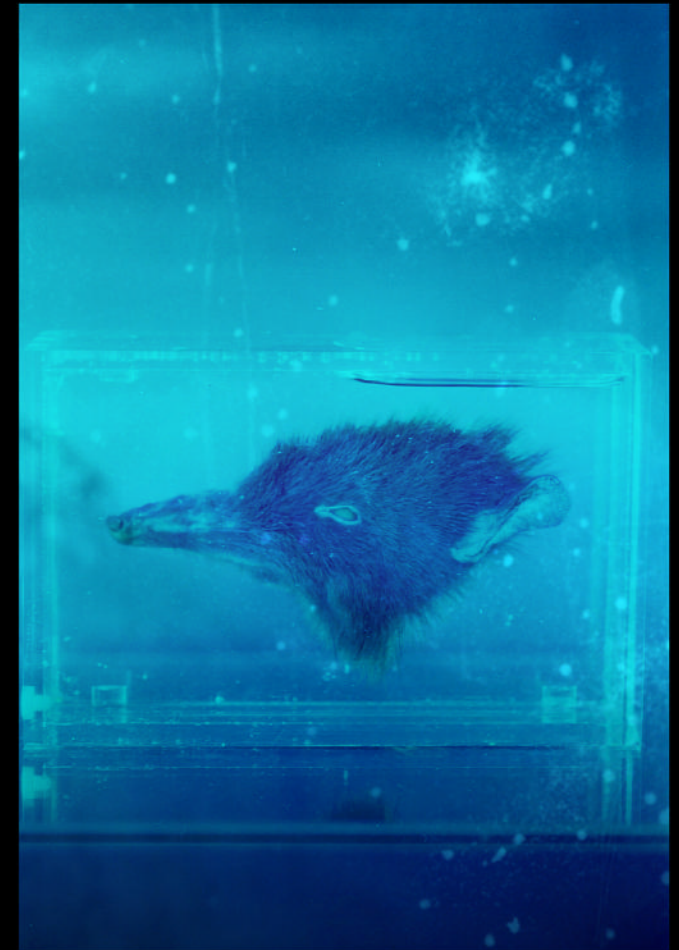


All images © Aletheia Casey | A Lost Place

No truth, but a language

Nowadays, we understand that in photography, ‘truth’—a term Susan Sontag still often used in the 1980s when describing it as one of the two main goals of photography (truth and beauty)—is no longer viewed as a realistic outcome of photographs. Moreover, Casey rejects the idea of truth as its essence, instead considering her work as an artistic language. “I doubt that there is a singular truth in photography because it is a manipulation of what we see, whether the world is shown in black and white or has been transformed into

colour. It will always involve manipulating what our eyes perceive. I see it as a further step in expressing an idea. For me, my practice is about conveying the idea and making work in a way that feels right. It’s not so much about sticking within strict boundaries or conforming to anyone’s standards. Photography as an art form is about being authentic. Every piece of work I create is new to me because I try not to repeat steps. And because photography is so exciting, there’s no need to redo anything; it’s about exploring and expanding your practice. It’s an endless process, really.”



Environmental laws needed

In painting on the surface of the previously taken photographs, Casey was able to merge her sadness, grief, and anger with old memories. “If we compare it to the UK, where I currently live, the amount of land that was burnt in those fires was roughly the size of England. It’s unimaginable that this entire territory could have been burnt. What does this mean for the future?” Her deeply felt anger was directed at the Australian government, which failed to act adequately. “We require

laws to change things, and lawmakers need to do that. During the pandemic, laws and rules changed, and people changed their habits. So humans are adaptable – we know it’s possible. Yet the people making these laws seem not to be taking the environment seriously enough. We don’t have another world to live in. Money has no value or worth when there is no world to be safe in. Nothing makes sense within this spectrum of environmental denial that many politicians are engaging in. I think that should make everybody furious.”







© Aletheia Casey | The Dark Forgetting

The Dark Forgetting

Despite numerous reconciliation efforts by the Australian government towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, significant injustice persists against the original inhabitants. The First Peoples of Australia endured profound and immeasurable historical injustices, including the devastating loss and systematic disruption of their cultural identity, sovereignty, land, language, and ancestral continuity. In the series *The Dark Forgetting*, Aletheia Casey used distorted and disfigured landscapes, photographed at sites of conflicts and massacres, to depict past violence. “I think we are finally, slowly, starting to relook at who we commemorate and who we remember and who history has purposefully tried to forget. The anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner calls it the ‘disremembering’ of our history. It has been a very purposeful eradication of one aspect of history and that of our violent colonial past.”

The painted photographs depict the guilty landscapes that hold troubled memories and, as such, form an archive of trauma from Australia’s troubling history. “The land is an archive of history. It’s an archive of violence. It’s an archive of memory. From a colonial perspective, an archive is something you collect and categorise, then put in a closed room, label, and put away from light. However, there are alternative views that consider an archive to be something held and stored in the landscape. I’m interested in this idea of the landscape being an archive of history, and also of trauma, war, and conflict and all of

the consequences of that.” For these series, Casey found the exact points where these massacres of Indigenous Australians took place. “The settlers were moving into places to take over the land. They had weapons and other means of violence. Then there would be terrible violence and at times massacres throughout Australia.”

Influencing people through emotion

Even though photography may have a significant impact on viewers, it probably will not directly influence politicians. Nevertheless, art holds political importance in general, as it sparks conversation and influences people through beauty — not just graceful beauty, but also a form of ethical beauty. Aletheia Casey aims to reach people’s hearts through art rather than rational discussions. “People have become despondent about what art can change, but there is still room for small improvements. We don’t always understand why those in power make certain decisions. Occasionally, some choices are made for the benefit of humanity. If we become too despondent, nothing will happen. My work can touch an emotional part of people’s minds. I believe that if you move individuals emotionally, you invite them to view something with the power of beauty. To create an impact, it should include some element of beauty, which also fosters engagement. With the story behind the images, it may have a stronger emotional effect. That could leave a lasting, memorable impression.”

About

Aletheia Casey is an Australian photographic artist based in London. Her work is concerned with environmental issues and post-colonial legacy, alongside personal themes around family and cultural identity. Aletheia was the winner of the World Press Award for Southeast Asia and Oceania (Open Category) in 2024. In 2025, Aletheia was named a finalist in the Global Focus project in the UAE and also in the Olive Cotton Award (Australia) and the Head On Portrait Award. In 2022 and 2023, Casey won a category of the Australian Photography Awards, and in 2021 won the Head On Landscape Award. Aletheia has been nominated for the Prix Pictet award, was shortlisted for the PHMuseum Woman Photographer's Grant, and was named '31 photographers to watch' by the British Journal of Photography. She won the Judge's Commendation for the Iris Award at the Perth Centre for Photography and was a finalist for the Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Award, and has twice been a finalist for the National Photographic Portrait Prize. She has published in The New Yorker, The Guardian, The Sunday Times Magazine, The Financial Times Magazine, the BBC, the Australian Associated Press, and various other publications. Aletheia Casey has exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery, Museum B elv ed ere (Holland), The Perth Centre for Photography (Australia), The Royal Shakespeare Company (London), The National Geographic Society (London), The Australian Centre for Photography and The Art Gallery of Ballarat (Australia), and Xposure Festival (UAE), among others. Aletheia is a senior lecturer and the Course Leader on the Masters of Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at London College of Communication, UAL.

Aletheia Casey's work "A Lost Place" will be published by Damiani Books and released in Europe in October 2026.

www.aletheiacasey.com



  Aletheia Casey | The Dark Forgetting





“

Nothing makes sense
within this spectrum of
environmental denial
that many politicians are
engaging in.

- Aletheia Casey



Joachim Patinir, *The Penitence of Saint Jerome*, ca. 1515. Oil on panel (triptych). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Rethinking Iconography in Contemporary Photography

By Artdoc Magazine

Throughout Western art history, symbols have played a crucial role in how images convey meaning. In religious painting, the symbolism was fixed and widely understood, grounded in doctrine and repeated motifs. The seventeenth-century still life translated these symbolic meanings into tangible objects, linking moral messages to everyday items while maintaining shared codes. Over time, this sense of stability declined as modern art movements moved away from traditional symbols toward individual expression. In this changing environment, photography emerged within a culture at ease with ambiguity, which further transforms the meaning of symbols. The transition from enforced clarity to interpretive freedom highlights the shifting function of icons in our visual culture.

In the early history of Western art, iconography functioned as a disciplined and collective language. Within religious art, symbols were neither ambiguous nor optional. They were part of a structured visual system through which religious doctrine was communicated, reinforced and stabilised.

A lily symbolised purity. A lamb stood for sacrifice. Keys represented Saint Peter. A skull beneath the cross pointed to Golgotha and the certainty of death. Such symbols weren't poetic suggestions subject to personal interpretation; they were unambiguous statements. Their meanings were rooted in theology and reinforced by centuries of repetition.

The power of these images lies in their clarity. In a largely illiterate society, painting and sculpture served as visual scripture. Churches functioned as spaces where the faithful encountered narratives made legible through recognisable attributes and recurring motifs. The viewer did not approach the image as an individual interpreter but as a participant in a shared belief system.

This symbolic language was maintained through tradition and authority. Artists worked within established conventions, ensuring that saints could be recognised instantly, and that biblical episodes could be decoded without hesitation.

Consistency and stability were important because the image had to accurately convey Christian doctrine.

The preset meaning, therefore, imposed the interpretation of the images. The skull did not invite existential speculation; it affirmed a moral truth already defined by religious teaching. The lamb did not oscillate between possible meanings; it stood firmly for Christ.

This clarity endowed ecclesiastical art with a powerful means of communication. The image served as a bridge between the visible and the invisible, connecting earthly materiality and divine reality. The Church dictated the symbolic order, and deviations from accepted meanings were discouraged.

Ambiguity, as we understand it in modern art, had little place here. The image's purpose was not to destabilise perception or invite subjective reflection. It was to confirm belief.

Understanding this early phase of iconography is essential because it establishes a baseline: a moment in history when symbols were stable, meanings were collectively understood, and interpretation operated within defined limits. Only against this background can we fully grasp the shifts that would later transform the role of symbolism in art.



The viewer did not approach the image as an individual interpreter but as a participant in a shared belief system.



Jan Jansz. Mostaert, Triptych with the Lamentation, ca. 1515–1520. Oil on panel (triptych). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Pietro Perugino | Delivery of the Keys, c. 1481–1482, Fresco



Symbolism in the Still Life

When religious authority gradually loosened its grip on artistic production, symbolism did not vanish from the visual field. It migrated to the still-life genre that was popular in the seventeenth century, during the Dutch Golden Age. Metaphors shifted from saints and sacred narratives to the material world itself. The still-life emerged as one of the most refined vehicles of this transformation. In seventeenth-century Northern Europe, still-life painting developed into a well-defined genre. These artworks primarily showed arrangements of fruit, flowers, silverware, game, books, or musical instruments. However, behind their detailed realism, they contained a structured symbolic language that was broadly recognised.

A skull signified mortality. A guttering candle marked the passage of time. A half-peeled lemon suggested both luxury and bitterness. Rotting fruit indicated decay. A watch or an hourglass reinforced the inevitability of death. These objects formed a recognisable lexicon within the *vanitas* tradition — a moral reminder that earthly pleasures are fleeting.

The transition from ecclesiastical imagery to still life did not remove fixed meanings; it secularised

them. Instead of divine figures representing theological truths, ordinary objects conveyed philosophical ideas. The table replaced the altar, and the domestic interior replaced sacred spaces. Nonetheless, the symbolic framework remained notably consistent.

The meaning of still lives developed through relationships, using proximity and contrast. An abundant display of imported fruit might symbolise wealth and international trade, while its decay foreshadowed impermanence. The moral lesson was conveyed through material richness.

What makes the still life significant in the history of iconography is its quiet authority. Unlike religious altarpieces, these paintings did not explicitly narrate any doctrine. They appeared as modest observations. Yet their viewers were trained to recognise their signs. The symbolism functioned almost discreetly, derived from ordinary life.

Importantly, the list of symbolic objects was not limitless. It was relatively stable and consistent. Both artists and audiences understood what specific objects represented. For instance, a skull never symbolised joy; a fading flower did not imply immortality. Although these codes were secular, they remained symbolic.



Pieter Claesz, Vanitas Still Life with the Spinario, 1628. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



N. L. Peschier, Vanitas Still Life, 1660. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Vincent van Gogh, Still Life of Oranges and Lemons with Blue Gloves, 1889. National Gallery of Art, Washington



Vincent van Gogh, Green Wheat Fields, Auvers, 1890. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington

This stage in the history of iconography shows that symbolism can persist beyond explicit religious contexts. Instead of sacred stories, meaning was linked to objects, yet it remained understandable to the public. The viewer mainly recognised symbols rather than created new meanings.

The still life holds a vital position bridging the authority of religious art and the unpredictability of modern visual culture. It demonstrates that symbols can be embedded in tangible objects while remaining clear. Simultaneously, by emphasising everyday items—such as food, tools, and luxury goods—it paved the way for a future where meaning would be more closely connected to lived experience and material circumstances. Within this world of objects, the groundwork was laid for photography—a medium that would inherit still life's realism and symbolism, and later push beyond both.

Dissolution of the Fixed Symbol

By the late 1800s, the stability of symbolic language in art started to weaken. The established set of objects—such as skulls, candles, hourglasses,

and lilies—lost their unquestioned significance. Images no longer needed to convey a common moral message. Instead, art increasingly evolved into a space focused on personal expression.

Impressionism represented a decisive shift. Painters such as Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir focused on light, atmosphere, and transient moments. Instead of symbolising labour or transience, a haystack became an exploration of changing colours. A cathedral's façade appeared to shift in hues at various times of day. The significance no longer lay in the object's symbolic meaning, but in the act of seeing itself.

The emphasis moved from what was depicted to how it was depicted.

With Vincent van Gogh, this transformation intensified. His sunflowers ceased to be vanitas symbols in the conventional sense or mere decorative still lifes. Instead, they became expressions of emotional intensity. Colours vibrated beyond naturalism; brushstrokes pulsed with psychological intensity. The painting did not communicate a predetermined message; it embodied a moment of existence.



Henri Matisse, Apples, 1916. Oil on canvas. The Art Institute of Chicago

Henri Matisse



Wassily Kandinsky, Improvisation No. 30 (Cannons), 1913. Oil on canvas. The Art Institute of Chicago

Cubism expanded this approach. In the fragmented compositions of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, objects no longer had clear outlines. A violin or a glass could be deconstructed into flat surfaces and facets, seen from different angles at once. The object stayed recognisable, but its symbolic meaning faded. The viewer was faced not with a moral allegory but with a fresh way of constructing visual reality.

Later movements like Cobra radicalised this break even further. Emerging in the aftermath of the Second World War, Cobra artists consciously sought freedom from classical art, academic refinement, and symbolic conventions. Spontaneity became a guiding principle. The artists, including Karel Appel, used raw colours and urgent gestures to dismiss polish, perspective, and established iconography altogether. Their figures and animals appeared childlike, distorted, and instinctive—more like eruptions of energy than traditional representations. These works defied fixed interpretation, favouring vitality over clarity and process over symbolism. In doing so, they not only rejected traditional iconography but also challenged the very idea that art must encode predetermined meaning.

In these modern movements, colour, technique, and expression replaced traditional symbolic systems. Art no longer primarily functioned as a carrier of coded messages. Instead, it established its independence, where form was no longer secondary to meaning; instead, form itself became the meaning.

This transformation was closely linked to wider cultural shifts. The processes of secularisation, industrialisation, and the growth of individualism

disrupted collective symbolic systems. Lacking a leading religious authority or common moral language, the artist was free from traditional signs. Consequently, imagery could explore perception, subjectivity, and formal experimentation.

Modern art represents a significant shift in the history of iconography. Although fixed symbols disappeared, art did not become meaningless. The symbol itself did not completely vanish; rather, it lost its firm grounding. Instead of interpreting a set message, viewers engaged in a dialogue with the artwork.

This shift would have enduring effects. As photography eventually became a dominant visual medium, it entered a world where fixed symbolic codes no longer imposed meaning. The images had to function within a culture accustomed to ambiguity, interpretation, and expressive freedom.

The Return of Meaning in Photography

If modernism dismantled the authority of fixed symbols, but contemporary art and documentary photography do not just discard meaning. Instead, they have reshaped how meaning functions, with symbols now serving as open-ended metaphors rather than stable icons.

In many modern practices, images again hold symbolic meaning, but their importance is not dictated by tradition or doctrine. For example, a melting glacier can symbolise a climate crisis, and burned forests remain connected to ecological themes. Meaning is constructed within shared realities, even if it isn't predefined. Today's visual symbols are more relational than instructive, encouraging viewers to participate in completing the message.



Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O'Keeffe—Hands and Thimble, 1919. Palladium print. The Art Institute of Chicago

An empty landscape—a field left to the wind and silence—can symbolise absence or loss. The terrain becomes more than just land; it appears as a remnant of something gone. A self-portrait, emerging from darkness with a face partly shadowed, might suggest feelings of depression or inner conflict without explicitly stating it. The image does not directly show suffering but implies it through its mood. A hand gently holding a delicate natural object — such as a fading flower, a slender branch, or a melting piece of ice — can hint at vulnerability or fleetingness. The gesture is subtle, almost accidental, yet it carries emotional depth.

None of these meanings are imposed; instead, they develop through mood, context, and the viewer's personal experiences. The photograph does not tell us what to think, but creates a space for recognition.

The distinction from traditional iconography is clear. In religious art or vanitas still life, a skull symbolised mortality within a common moral context, strengthened through repetition and collective belief. In contrast, a landscape today does not inherently represent loss, nor does shadow always symbolise despair. The image suggests rather than enforces meaning, with its metaphor coming alive through engagement.

Documentary photography vividly demonstrates this transformation clearly. An image of a border fence does not function as a medieval symbol; it signifies a tangible political reality. At the same time, it serves as a metaphor for division, exclusion, fear, or sovereignty. The image fluctuates between a documentary record and a symbolic

message. Its interpretation isn't completely objective nor purely random; rather, it varies according to the viewer's social and political discourse.

In contemporary art photography, still life has made a comeback in a transformed form. Images of consumer products, plastic waste, prepared foods, or home interiors can serve as metaphors, illustrating themes such as excess, environmental harm, or emotional loneliness. The objects themselves lack inherent fixed meanings; instead, their symbolic significance depends on how they are arranged, repeated, and framed.

What has changed most profoundly is the viewer's role. Lacking a fixed symbolic language, interpretation turns into a dynamic activity. We project our personal histories, knowledge, and anxieties onto the image. Instead of a static metaphor, meaning is generated through interaction. Cultural backgrounds influence how we interpret. We are no longer just passive recipients of symbols; we actively co-create meaning. However, this freedom requires more careful attention, since without common codes, meaning can quickly fade as it appears.

The disappearance of fixed symbols in modern art did not end iconography, but transformed it. Freed from assigned meanings, images now operate within a space of multiple interpretations. They no longer tell us what to see but instead prompt us to ask what we perceive — and why. This change brings both responsibility and opportunity. While traditional art aimed to instruct the viewer, modern photography encourages engagement. The act of viewing now shapes the future of photographic iconography.

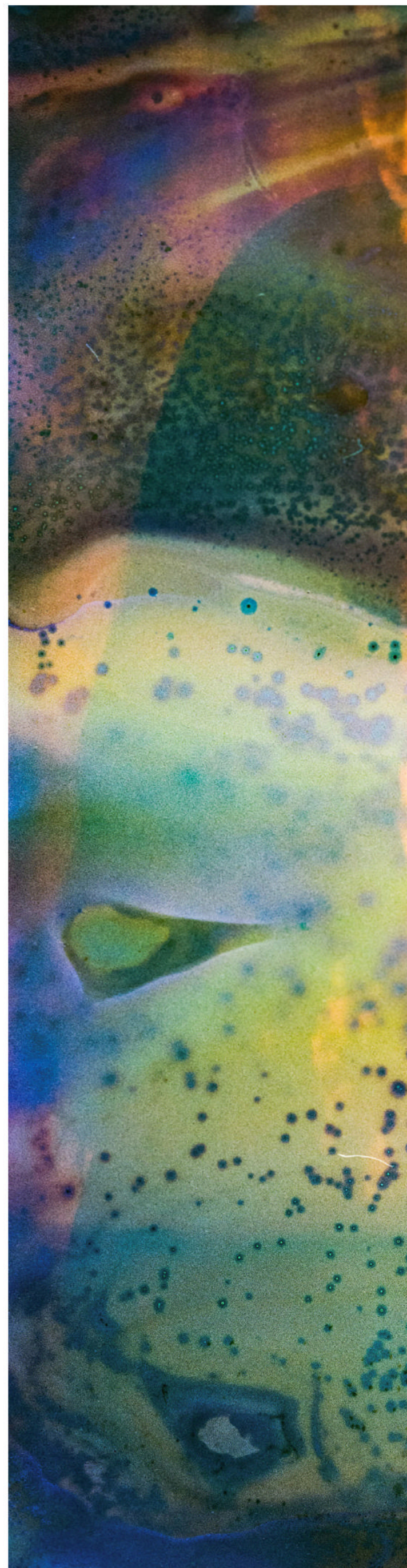


© VJ Martin | Surface-Level Ghosts

In the Wake of Memory and Emotional Change

VJ Martin

In *Surface-Level Ghosts*, VJ Martin combines his roles as a psychiatrist and artist to create work influenced by memory and emotional change. His years of helping patients navigate uncertainty inspire him to include unpredictability in his photography. Techniques like film soup, double exposures, light leaks, and scorched prints distort the images, letting accidents shape the outcome. This series emphasises atmosphere as much as subject, with moments that oscillate between beauty and discomfort. Martin's photographs explore the delicate line between experience and memory, urging viewers to consider how perception is affected equally by emotion and fact.



All images © VJ Martin | Surface-Level Ghosts



“ At some point between taking a picture and seeing the result, I like to sacrifice my images to the creative process. As a doctor, I’ve learned to relinquish control of my time and expectations. More specifically, as a psychiatrist, I constantly work with people who are adapting to unforeseen events. These experiences have trickled into my art, leading me toward experimental techniques. Using film soup, double exposures, light leaks, weird scanning techniques, or setting prints on fire, I’ve ruined some of the best photos I’ve ever taken. I’m fascinated by the dynamic interplay among feelings, memory, and time. These techniques allow me to see an image with a deeper subconscious emotional layer, because they highlight the limited control we have over our experiences and how we remember them. A simple, beautiful moment can become macabre, and a straightforward subject can become obscured. This series, *Surface-Level Ghosts*, is a selection of photos which I feel highlight the ‘special effects’ as much as the subject, giving the final image a chance to draw a viewer inward, toward their own preconceptions or expectations.

About

VJ Martin was an artist before becoming a doctor. For him, these two worlds share common ground. As a psychiatrist, he is perpetually preoccupied with memory and feelings, and with the impact of one on the other. Through film and experimental techniques, he tries to create images which reveal a degree of relinquished control, allowing subtler emotions to come to the forefront.

www.vjmartinphotography.com





La Loba

Ornella Orlandini

“ My series *La Loba* unfolds as the metaphorical journey of a heroine in search of her own awareness. It is inspired by the words of Clarissa Pinkola Estés: “The wild nature has a vast integrity to it. It means to draw on the innate feminine powers of intuition and sensing to come into one’s cycles, to find what one belongs to.”

My series is a wandering through the psyche in search of the primordial and universal female archetype. Through the analysis of myths and traditional fairy tales, the project seeks to free the feminine vision from social superstructures and allow its life force to manifest once again.

My personal history and my body have been the instruments of my artistic research, which, although it began as a personal investigation, later extended towards the universal feminine, following a process of reconnection with intuition and nature, from the microcosm to the macrocosm. I have adopted a performative method: by combining bodily memories, oneiric material, and the content of fairy tales, I use self-portraiture and intimate performances to awaken ancestral images.

The synthesis of this process, combining archetype, body and nature, generates a poetic activity through photographic narrative. *La Loba* is an image-map that evokes pathways of reunion — through reflection, epiphany and awareness — with one’s instincts and one’s own unique essence, stripped of structures, conventions and conditioning.





All images © Ornella Orlandini | La Loba





About

Ornella Orlandini, born in Turin in 1980, holds a BA in Education from the University of Turin and an MA in Photography from IED. In 2021, she was selected for the annual mentoring programme with Simona Ghizzoni, and in 2023/24, she attended Yogurt's curatorial LAB. In 2015, she exhibited at the Museum Europäischer Kulturen in Berlin in *RÜBER FRAUEN. Segni di una recente emigrazione italiana femminile a Berlino*, with an installation comprising photography, interviews, and objects, created for Rete Donne e.V. Her works have been shown in national and international group exhibitions. Since 2012, she has lived in Berlin.

www.ornellaorlandini.com

ARTDOC

Photography Gallery



DISCOVER FRAMED ART
PHOTOGRAPHY PRINTS

READY TO HANG ON YOUR WALL

[ARTDOC.GALLERY](https://artdoc.gallery)

View in the Gallery

Andrea Christl

Andrea Christl's photography takes us to mysterious and enigmatic landscapes. The monochrome photographs reflect themes of silence and transformation. They show nature as the mirror of our inner being, where the invisible permeates the visible.

Inspired by Japanese ink paintings and calligraphy, she reduces her motifs to the essential. The deep tranquillity of nature becomes tangible in her images, making us travel internally. We discover a magical universe in a wonderful flower. Combining two photographs in a diptych allows us to travel beyond our limited view of reality. In this vastness, we may feel a little glimpse of the soul.

Presented as framed prints in white, black or oak, and produced on Hahnemühle Bamboo paper, the works unite material refinement with conceptual clarity, preserving tonal depth while honouring the quiet poetics at the centre of her practice.

[VIEW ARTWORKS](#)



Sculptured Assemblages & Psychological Installations

Yi Hsuan Lai

Yi Hsuan Lai's photography explores the space between the body and the environment, where physical form serves as a canvas for psychological expression and negotiation. Through staged interactions with discarded and synthetic materials, she creates images that blur the lines between sculpture and photograph, surface and depth. Her work reflects themes of femininity and belonging, expressing an embodied visual language influenced by emigration and personal experience. Although tension and vulnerability are evident, they are balanced with subtle humour and playfulness. For Lai, the photograph serves as both a document and an object—a spatial construct that challenges perception and prompts viewers to rethink how bodies are framed, perceived, and experienced. “Through performative acts in the photograph, I question how the female body is framed, staged, and consumed.”

The sculptured photographs by Yi Hsuan Lai are an investigation of the relationship between objects and the body, shaping them into environmental dialogues. “My work explores the interplay between physical form and psychological landscape, using the body, including my own, alongside found materials and environments as extensions of interior experience. I’m drawn to the interconnectedness between objects, space, and the body, shaping them into dialogues between corporeal and emotional states.”

Her work fluctuates between two and three dimensions through straight photography and photographic installations. She creates staged self-portraits and still lifes using found or discarded materials, disposable objects, sculptural forms, and her own portraits. “These objects serve as proxies for the self—stand-ins that allow me reframe impermanence into sentient, psychological landscapes. Rooted in my experience as an emigrant and an Othered body, the worlds I create for the camera offer a shifting sense of belonging, where materials, objects, and bodies merge into unfamiliar territories.”

Taiwanese-born, New York-based artist Yi Hsuan Lai draws on her personal experiences to infuse her work with emotional depth, especially her emigration. “My experience of emigration has shaped an ongoing sense of suspension. My work responds to this condition of constant shifting, adaptation, and negotiation, exploring how the body navigates instability and constructs a sense of belonging. The body becomes central: I see it as both shelter and extension, carrying memory while continuously negotiating its surroundings. Through a visceral visual language, I aim to move beyond linguistic barriers and connect through shared bodily experience.”





All images © Yi Hsuan Lai | Ongoing Narratives



Constructed Femininity

In her work, she explores the visual traditions that influenced her childhood. “Growing up immersed in image traditions rooted in stereotypical representations of the female body, I challenge how femininity is seen and constructed. Through photographed performative acts, I explore how the female body is framed, staged, and consumed. From a feminine perspective, I question the visual conventions that shape conceptions of the female body. Through performative staging, I enact femininity through tactility and spatial construction. At the same time, I seek to create a reflective space where viewers can pause, engage with the work, and reflect on their own views on visibility and embodiment.”

Lai discusses her involvement in cultural discourse in a balanced manner. “I view my photography not as making direct statements but as altering perception. It participates in larger conversations about visibility, identity, and embodiment while creating psychological landscapes.”

Between Attraction and Discomfort

Through her sculptural photographs, fragility and transformation are crystallised into sensorial moments, she explains. “I extend the photograph into sculptural assemblages and spatial installations, allowing material and architectural conditions to expand the image beyond the frame. While the work carries tension and vulnerability, it also holds a sense of humour, allowing discomfort and playfulness to coexist.”

Fragmentation and partial visibility are deeply embedded in her visual language, generating tension and disorientation. “These strategies reflect ongoing conditions of negotiation, protection, and instability that run throughout the work. I explore photography through materiality and spatial extension, letting tactile and spatial relationships shape the image into an embodied encounter. Expanding the photograph beyond the frame creates a push and pull between seeing and sensing, enabling the work to oscillate between visual perception and bodily awareness.”

“ Through photographed performative acts, I explore how the female body is framed, staged, and consumed.







All images © Yi Hsuan Lai | Rubber, Rubber

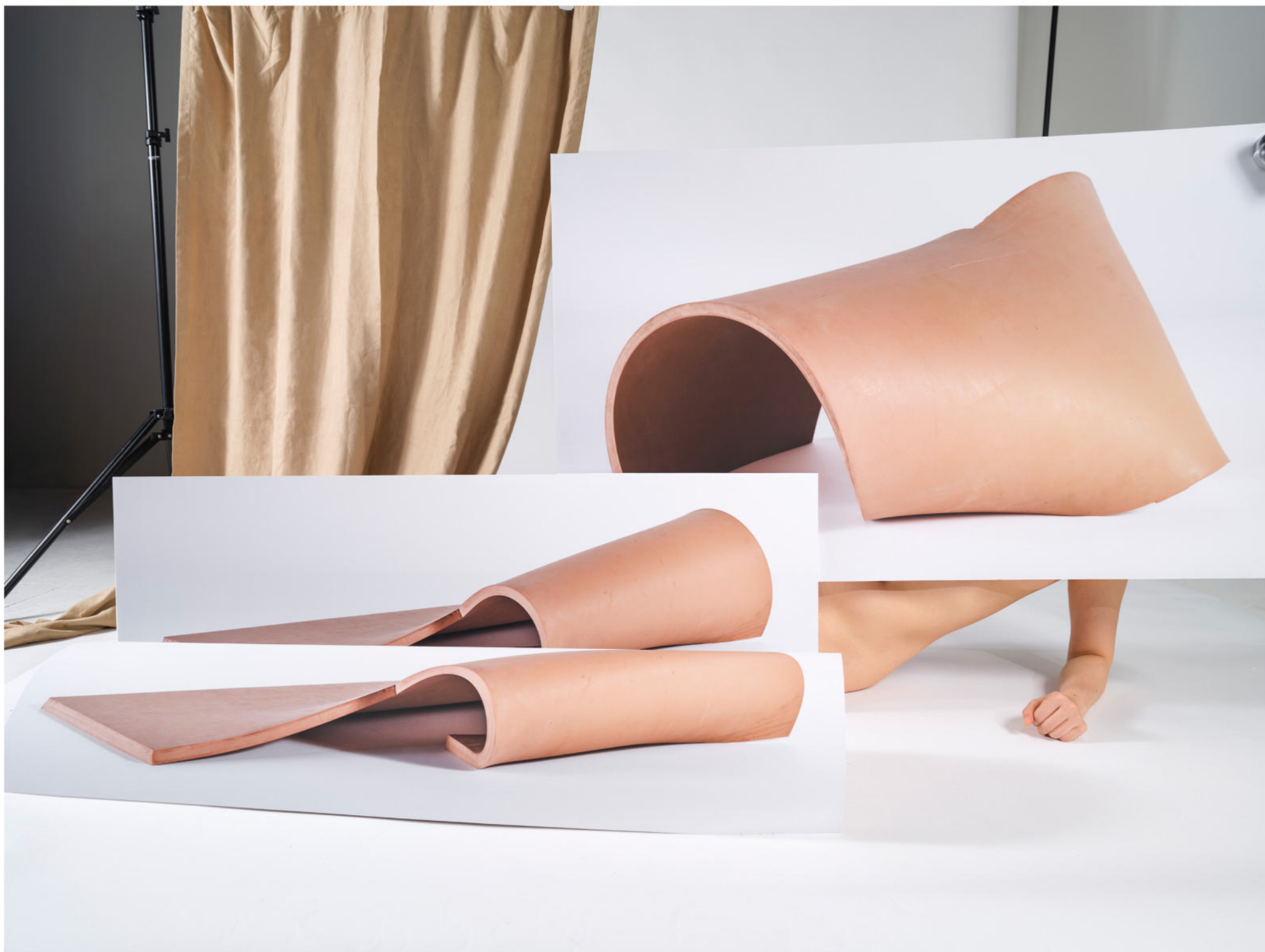


Awareness of Perception

Yi Hsuan Lai prefers to avoid assigning a fixed meaning and sees the viewers as active participants in creating meaning. She encourages them to make their own connections and uncover details gradually. “I like to create a sense of unfamiliarity in something that appears recognisable, adding a subtle visual twist that encourages people to pause and look twice. My work often contains subtle humour and a touch of absurdity, creating a dynamic tension between attraction and discomfort.”

In her spatial constructions, perception shifts between two- and three-dimensional forms, between objects and images, and between interior and exterior spaces. “It unfolds through texture, surface tension, performative action, and scale, generating conditions where viewers undergo a perceptual change, and where the image starts to behave like an object and the object like skin.”

Lai constructs spatial constructions that call for balance but leaves them unresolved. “My compositions are organised but inherently unstable. I frequently develop centred or stage-like arrangements, then disrupt them using layering, compression, and material tension. Instead of depicting neutral space, I craft psychological spatial constructions where bodies and objects engage in a quest for balance. Surface and depth are in constant flux, and stability is intentionally left unresolved.”



Construction of Materials

Her scenes often include organic or discarded objects she finds. Specific materials and gestures recur, serving as anchors in her visual language. “I often use elastic materials like rubber, tubing, mesh, and balloons because they symbolise tension, stretching, and resistance. They are closely linked to the body, serving as metaphors for skin or even internal organs.”

Lai intuitively gravitates toward materials, initially reacting to texture, surface, or physical tension. Her subjects arise from interactions between the body and the material. “I’m especially drawn to discarded or synthetic materials because they carry remnants of use, effort, and temporality, which become woven into the image. The scenes are meticulously staged, often temporary, and

their history is ultimately preserved through photography.” By emphasising texture and tactility, Lai evokes the viewer’s desire for closeness. “I interpret materials originally designed for single use as representations of the body and the supernatural, highlighting fragility and desire. My compositions serve as gateways for viewers to recognise themselves and be recognised, prompting reflection on the fluidity of bodies and experiences as they seek connection in a transient physical realm.”

She shapes her work by the found materials she encounters. “I respond intuitively to what is physically present around me, including ready-made objects, discarded materials, and architectural settings, allowing these elements to guide the construction of each piece. In this way, the work evolves alongside my lived experience.”





All images © Yi Hsuan Lai | Ongoing Narratives



Light, Tension, Construction

She prints her images on paper, nylon, lycra, vinyl, and aluminium, then cuts, layers, and stacks them into sculptural compositions. “Through this process, I manipulate perspective to blur the boundaries between reality and construction, shifting between soft and hard surfaces, animate and inanimate forms, the mundane and the whimsical. The work often exists in a liminal space—between image and object, surface and volume—where the photograph becomes something to engage with.”

Lai’s visual language is meticulously crafted, even when it seems fragile. In her series *Ongoing Narratives*, light serves as a sculptural element. “I combine multiple light sources, such as strobe and continuous light. This lighting emphasises the sculptural form of objects and the body, enhancing their surface textures. In the *Rubber, Rubber* series, projected images mimic skin tones on synthetic materials, blurring the lines between body and object. This layering creates an interior, slightly surreal world that feels both theatrical and psychological, reflecting a constructed space that can appear disorienting.”

About

Yi Hsuan Lai is a Taiwanese-born, New York-based visual artist whose practice merges photography, sculpture, found objects, and her own body. Lai received her MFA in Photography from the School of Visual Arts in 2020. She will be a participant at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2026) and has held residencies at SoMad (2025), Light Work (2024), and Vermont Studio Centre (2023). Her solo exhibitions include NARS Foundation (2024) and Gallery 456 (2024).

www.yihhsuanlai.com



“

I view my photography
not as making direct
statements but as
altering perception.

- Yi Hsuan Lai

Xposure 2026: Ten Years Later, Seeing the World Differently

Photographers, filmmakers, and visual thinkers from around the world gathered in Sharjah to examine how images influence the way societies remember, understand, and imagine the future.

There is a moment, just before a photograph is taken, when time seems to hesitate. The world holds still for a fraction of a second, long enough for meaning to emerge from motion. Photography has always lived in that pause. At Xposure International Photography Festival 2026, that pause stretched across seven days, an invitation to slow down, to look again, and to reconsider what images have come to mean in an age when they are everywhere.

Held in Sharjah from 29 January to 4 February, the festival marked its 10th edition under the theme “A Decade of Visual Storytelling.” It was not framed as a celebration of the past, but as a reflection on how the past decade has reshaped the image itself, how photographs now move faster, travel further, and carry greater responsibility than ever before.

Over the course of the week, more than 420 photographers, filmmakers, and visual artists from over 60 countries gathered in Aljada, presenting 95 exhibitions and more than 3,200 artworks, alongside talks, workshops, portfolio reviews, and conversations that extended far beyond technique. Yet what defined the festival was not only the scale of participation, but the atmosphere it created, a sense that photography was not merely being shown, but examined.

Xposure has always been a meeting point, but this edition felt different. There was a quiet awareness that ten years is long enough for a generation of photographers to emerge, long enough for technology to transform a craft, and long enough for the world itself to change in ways no one could have predicted.





© Xposure 2026

A Festival That Feels Like a Journey

One of the most noticeable changes this year was the way the festival unfolded spatially and emotionally. Exhibitions were organised into distinct zones, each shaping its own mood and perspective, from documentary and portraiture to nature, travel, fine art, and photojournalism. The structure encouraged visitors to move not just through rooms, but through ways of seeing, from the intimate to the global, from the poetic to the urgent. Rather than feeling like categories, the zones felt like chapters in a larger narrative about how images shape understanding.

Among them, conversations about the natural world and environmental fragility surfaced repeatedly, sometimes quietly, sometimes with striking urgency. A series of discussions and presentations on the state of the world's oceans and ecosystems underscored the idea that photography is no longer only about recording reality. It is increasingly about protecting it.

Elsewhere, images of conflict, migration, and social transformation reminded audiences that the last decade has been defined as much by upheaval as by innovation. Photography, in this context, became a form of testimony, a way of preserving evidence in a time when truth itself often feels contested.

Conversations Beyond the Frame

What distinguishes Xposure from many photography festivals is the space it creates for dialogue. Throughout the week, artists, editors, filmmakers, and thinkers gathered not only to present work, but to question it.

Discussions moved easily between ethics and aesthetics, between the philosophy of seeing and the realities of working in fragile environments.

Again and again, a central question emerged. What does it mean to make images in a world where images can be endlessly manipulated, generated, or detached from context?

For younger photographers and students, these conversations were as significant as the exhibitions themselves. Portfolio reviews and workshops offered something increasingly rare in a digital age, direct mentorship, unfiltered critique, and the chance to learn through human exchange rather than algorithms.

Athens and the Idea of Cultural Dialogue

This year also introduced a new dimension to the festival's identity, with Athens presented as Guest of Honour. Through a curated programme of exhibitions and talks, the collaboration created a dialogue between two cultural landscapes shaped by history, philosophy, and storytelling. It was a reminder that photography is never isolated from the societies that produce it. Every image carries traces of language, geography, and memory, and festivals like Xposure become places where those traces meet and resonate.

The Human Side of Photography

Beyond the exhibitions and discussions, some of the most meaningful moments at Xposure happened in the spaces between events. Photographers lingered over prints, students compared notes after workshops, and visitors returned to the same image more than once, each time noticing something new.

Photography, after all, is not only about what is captured. It is about what is felt. The festival's atmosphere encouraged that slower kind of looking, where an image reveals itself gradually rather than instantly.

There was also a sense of continuity, of photographers who had attended earlier editions returning with new bodies of work, and of emerging voices stepping onto the same stage for the first time. Ten years is enough time to watch a community grow, and Xposure has become a place where that growth is visible.

The Image in a Changing World

If there was a quiet theme running through the festival, it was the recognition that photography is entering a new era. Artificial intelligence, synthetic imagery, and new forms of digital production are reshaping what it means to create a photograph. At the same time, the appetite for authentic storytelling has never been stronger. Many of the most compelling works at Xposure 2026 were not technologically complex. They were patient, attentive, and deeply human, images shaped by time, trust, and presence rather than speed.

In that sense, the festival offered a kind of reassurance. While the tools of photography may change, the instinct to witness, to understand, and to remember remains constant.

A Decade Behind, A Horizon Ahead

As the tenth edition drew to a close, the mood was not one of conclusion, but of transition. The first decade of Xposure helped build a photographic culture, attract global voices, and create a platform where images could be seen in context rather than isolation.

The next decade will likely bring new questions, new technologies, and new visual languages. But if Xposure 2026 demonstrated anything, it is that the power of photography does not lie in the image alone. It lies in the pause the image creates, the moment when the world slows down long enough for us to see it clearly. And ten years later, that pause still matters.

About Xposure

Xposure International Photography & Film Festival is where the magic of visual storytelling comes alive, a dynamic celebration that seamlessly blends the artistic brilliance of photography with the compelling narratives of film. Set against the backdrop of Sharjah, UAE, the vibrant cultural pulse of the region, Xposure is not just a festival; it is a global meeting point where the world's most visionary photographers, filmmakers, and creative minds converge to ignite conversation, inspire collaboration, and elevate the art of visual storytelling.

Be part of something extraordinary, where every frame has a voice, every film tells a deeper truth, and every conversation inspires the next great idea.

www.xposure.net

اكسبوزجر
XPOSURE





Otherworldly Crows in a Restless Sky

Lawrence Manning

In *Murder in Nampa*, Lawrence Manning transforms an unexpected influx of crows in his Idaho hometown into a profound examination of resilience and self-reflection. Coming at a time of personal turmoil and global unrest, these birds serve as both subjects and catalysts in his developing work. Manning depicts them as otherworldly entities set against atmospheric, stage-like backgrounds, leveraging their intelligence and strong communal bonds to explore themes of mortality, doubt, dignity, and social duty. Through complex photographic constructions, he captures their energy in images that feel both metaphysical and deeply intimate. The crows have become a symbol of his enduring identity, shaping a visual language through which he explores vulnerability and affirms his artistic voice.



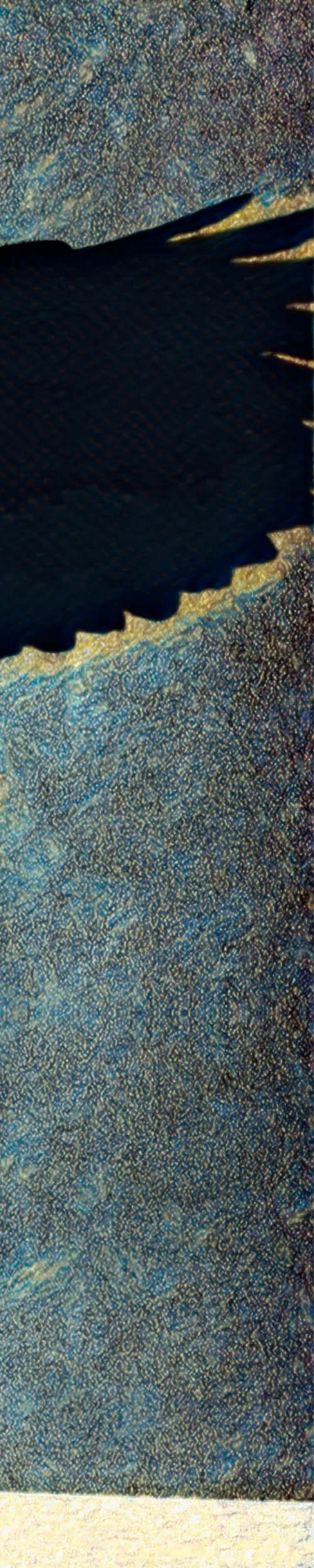
“ I never could have imagined that when a murder of crows “invaded” my hometown of Nampa in 2020, and that their presence would influence my lingering connection to my creative voice and consciousness. They eventually became the focus and the seeds for nurturing my art. These birds arrived during a dark, desperate time for me. Also, the world seemed to be in crisis with financial, social, and political storms. The crows came and fortunately remained, and the images I made of them, and continue to make of them, continue to reveal my themes, whether of confusion, death, frustration, communication, dignity and depression. Inadvertently, they provided me with important survival tools, not only opening new, challenging doors of perception but also prompting introspective examinations

that exposed the wounds of my uncomfortable self-doubt. But ultimately, they encourage me to express myself. I learned new ways to reveal, like a stage set, my themes through atmospheric, ethereal backgrounds. My computer and photographic abilities were challenged. I learned how to represent them as metaphysical and as magical as possible.

These corvids served as the symbols and metaphors I needed. Even now, I hide behind them to represent and express my relationship with the world around me, attempting to shed the guilt from some very sad experiences. Their constant cawing helped me cope; their industriousness inspired me to work. Their care and protection for one another remind me of my social responsibilities. I feel like I am a crow.







All images © Lawrence Manning | Murder in Nampa

About

Lawrence worked as a commercial photographer for almost 40 years. He is self-trained. He first started taking pictures while a Peace Corps volunteer and discovered how much he enjoyed photographing people. He has experience in all aspects of the photo industry. He has been widely published both under his name as well as the company he founded, Hill Street Studios. After the disaster of 9/11, the post office selected his image of an American flag from thousands of submissions for the “United We Stand” postage stamp. He has been dedicated to an art career since 2020.

www.lawrencemanning.com





Reginae

Chiara Innocenti

“ There is an invisible threshold between looking and perceiving, and I have chosen to cross it through photography. Often, our eyes glide over the surface of things without stopping to breathe them in, but Ansedonia encourages us to look differently: slowly and deeply.

Inspired by Abelardo Morell's sensitivity and energetic research, I stopped thinking of space as a void and started to feel it as a living body. Here, rocks are not just minerals, but photosensitive films that have absorbed the heat of the sun and the salt of the wind for centuries. Above all, I believe they have absorbed the energy of Queen Ansedonia, who was killed for taking a forbidden bath. I feel that her tension towards the light and her yearning for freedom have not vanished, but have become layered in the very matter itself. Morell taught me that by allowing the 'outside' to enter the 'inside', perspectives are reversed. That quest for freedom now vibrates in the air and floats in the water around me. In an age when reality often appears upside down and illogical, rediscovering these energies allows us to make sense of the absurd. I thus restore joy to those dreams still floating, understanding that beauty is not a mere aesthetic exercise, but a political and spiritual force capable of finally setting us free.





About

Chiara Innocenti, born in Florence, has developed a sensitivity that transcends rationality, choosing visual language as a means of investigation. After studying science, she has devoted herself entirely to photography since 2019, refining her practice at the Marangoni Foundation and through professional mentoring. Her introspective research has led her to be a finalist in national competitions and to participate in international festivals and biennials. Awarded and published in trade magazines, she transforms reality into symbolic stories. Through her works, she invites the observer on an inner journey and into personal reflection, exploring and sharing a profound, subjective vision of reality.

www.chiarainnocenti.it



The relationship between space and remembrance

Susana Espana

Susana Espana's photographic practice examines the intersection between domestic space and the internal landscape of memory. Working with analogue processes, collage and hand intervention, she draws extensively from her personal archive to construct layered images shaped by lived experience. Rooted in private histories yet reaching towards a shared emotional terrain, her work approaches metamorphosis as both method and subject. Espana treats photography as a process of excavation and reconstruction, in which self-portraiture, landscapes, fragments, and material interventions form a visual language grounded in texture and vulnerability. "My worldview is shaped by the belief that art is a tool for alchemy, a way to transform raw, personal experiences into a universal visual language."



Susana Espana is particularly interested in the concept of metamorphosis and in how memories are not static but evolve over time. Through layering, archival excavation and material intervention, she constructs images that examine how personal history persists within physical space. “By using my personal archive, I engage in an intimate dialogue with my past self, transforming raw emotions into a visual language of layering and texture. This exploration is important because it allows me to process the ephemeral nature of life, turning vulnerability into something tangible. Ultimately, I strive to create a visual echo that invites viewers to reflect on their own internal realities and the poetic beauty hidden in their most intimate spaces.”

Espana’s central concern lies in the relationship between space and remembrance. “My work explores the intersection between domestic space and the

internal landscape of memory. I aim to investigate how our physical surroundings, specifically the home, act as a sanctuary for dreaming and a springboard for poetic inquiry. These themes are vital to me because they address the universal human experiences of belonging, isolation, and healing.”

Grief has played a decisive role in shaping Espana’s practice. This event led her back to earlier images and materials. “The emotional tone of my work is deeply influenced by my journey through grief and healing, particularly following the loss of my father in 2019. This experience compelled me to revisit my personal archives, turning a vulnerable excavation into an enriching journey of recontextualisation. My photographs function in the space between sensation and remembrance, often carrying a tone of quiet melancholy balanced with the warmth of a sanctuary.”





© Susana Espana | The Construction of a Dream



Alchemy of Materials

In her practice, technical elements are never purely aesthetic; they are the vocabulary of her internal world. Her use of light functions as a symbol of presence and absence. “I often seek a soft, diffused light that evokes the ethereal nature of a dream or the hazy quality of a fading memory.” Her compositions shape psychological spaces. “My compositions are used to create a sense of intimacy or isolation, often placing subjects in a way that emphasises the protective ‘shelter’ of the domestic space or the vastness of an internal void.” Colour and texture are deliberately selected. “My colour palette is deliberately chosen to resonate with the ‘emotional residue’ of the scene, muted tones and monochromatic bases are often interrupted by the ‘dream work’ of special techniques.”

Her commitment to analogue processes informs the image’s surface. “By using analogue photography, I embrace the grain and the organic texture of film, which I then manipulate through collage and hand interventions. I use ink bleeds, thread, and digital layering to create a temporal depth that a lens alone cannot capture.” Espana describes these accumulations as temporal markers. The act of making is integral to meaning. “The physical act of manipulating the image, layering or painting, is a metaphor for the metamorphosis of memory, turning a flat photograph into a tactile, multidimensional visual poem.”

Her practice continues to expand in both scope and scale, while remaining grounded in the dialogue between lived experience and visual form. “My work is evolving from a purely visual medium into a more tactile and multi-sensory experience. I am moving deeper into the alchemy of materials, allowing myself more freedom in hand interventions and collage, which I previously used primarily for personal, therapeutic exploration.”



Lens of Emotional Layers

Espana's photographs function within a particular emotional register. The language she uses reflects a structural approach to image-making. "I perceive the world through a lens of 'emotional layering'. Just as memories are non-linear and fragmented, my images are intentionally translucent and layered to reflect the complexity of our inner lives. This perspective influences me to seek the sublime in the ordinary and the overlooked nuances of daily life." In her work, certain motifs act as silent protagonists, bridging the gap between the physical and the metaphysical. "The most recurring symbol is the 'domestic interior': the room, the window, the curtains, which represent the sanctuary of the mind and the 'shelter for dreaming'. These spaces are not just settings but metaphors for the internal world and the layers of our identity."

For Espana, storytelling is about evocative resonance rather than literal explanation. Meaning is formed through the resonance of the images with the mind of the spectator. "Storytelling in my work does not follow a traditional, linear path. Instead, I aim to create a visual poem where the narrative is woven through layers of memory and sensation. By incorporating self-portraiture and

archival images, I invite viewers to participate in *The construction of a dream*. The story is complete when the image achieves an emotional truth that resonates with the viewer's own well of experiences, blurring the lines between my personal history and a universal sense of remembrance."

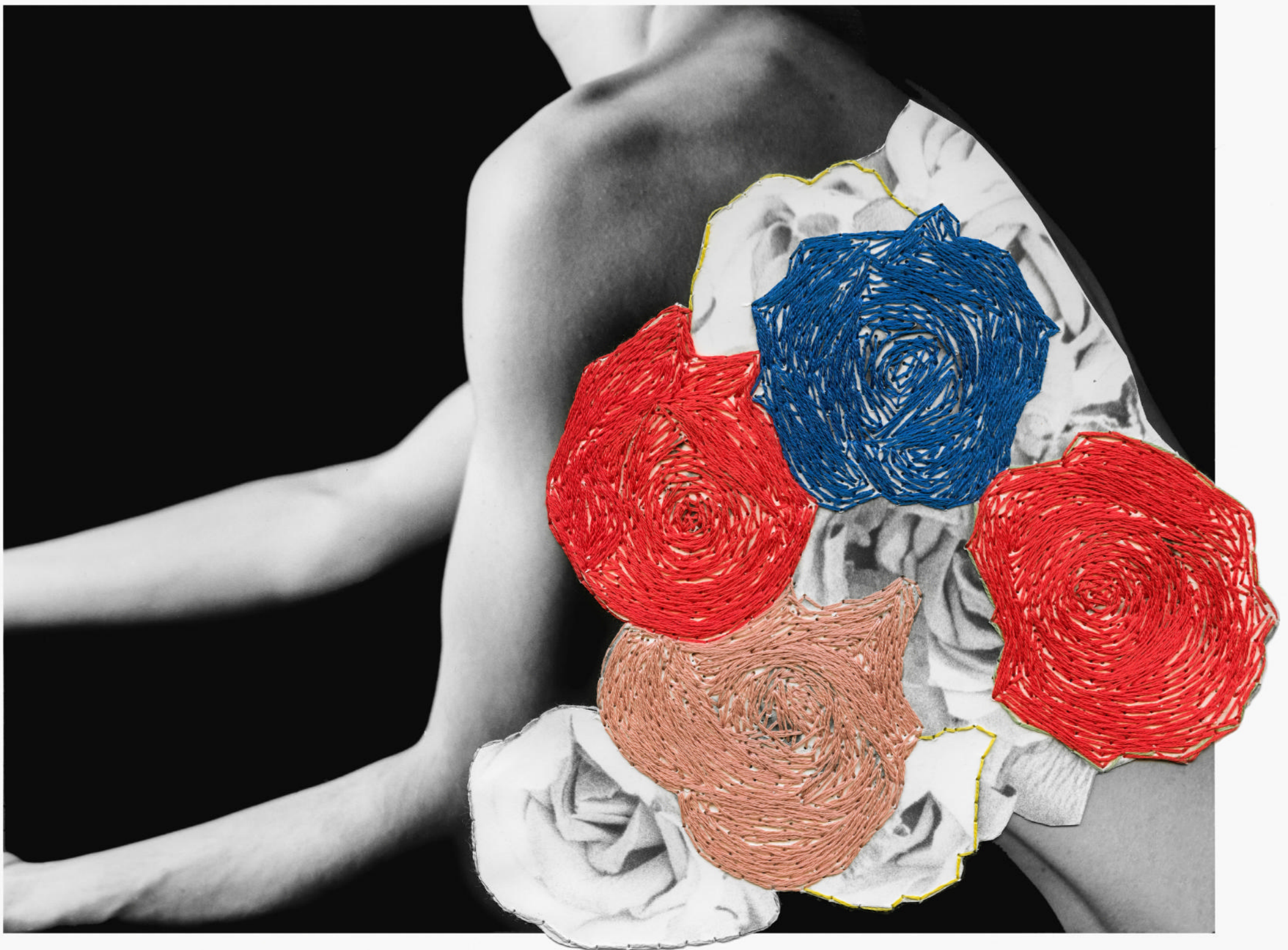
Self Portraits as Symbols

Self-portraiture occupies a recurring place within her framework, creating a process that remains dialogic and ongoing. "By placing myself within the frame through self-portraiture, I engage with themes of vulnerability and the shifting nature of identity. Ultimately, my work is an intimate dialogue with my past, aiming to create a sense of peace and recognition for anyone who has ever sought shelter in their own memories."

Self-portraiture also appears as a symbol of vulnerability and transformation. "My own body becomes a map where time and experience leave their mark. Finally, the use of organic textures, such as ink bleeds or the grain of analogue film, serves as a motif for the 'alchemical' transformation of grief into art. Together, these symbols create a visual language that speaks of belonging, the passage of time, and the poetic beauty found in life's most intimate remnants."



My own body becomes a map where time and experience leave their mark.



© Susana Espana | Juxtaposed Memories

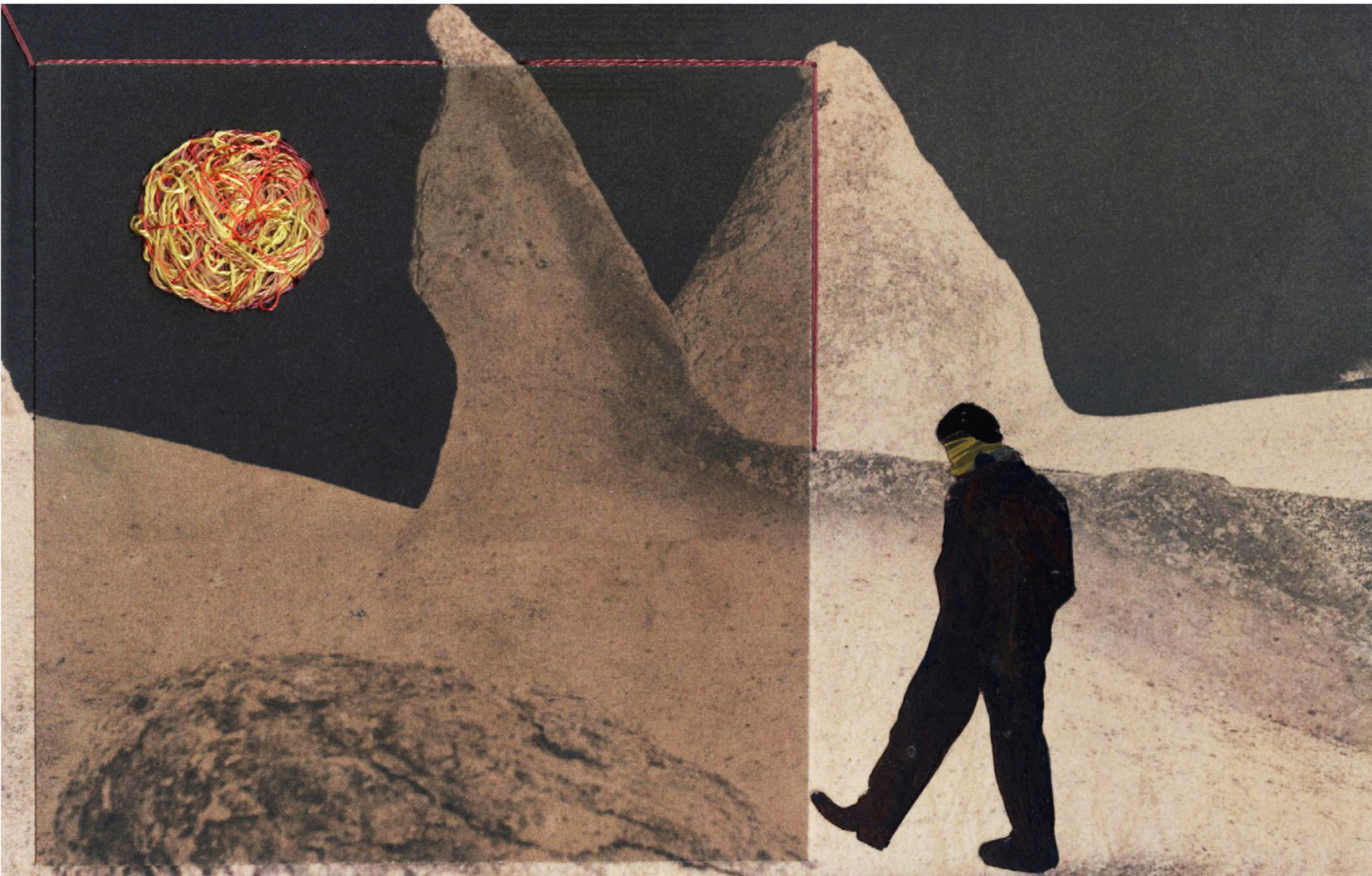
For Espana, self-portraiture and the manipulation of analogue materials challenge the contemporary obsession with digital perfection. “This influences a broader cultural conversation about the subjective nature of truth and perception. By showing the ‘scars’ of the creative process, I advocate for an artistic culture that values vulnerability and the non-linear path of human experience. I see my work as a contribution to a more empathetic visual culture, where the intimate and the domestic are recognised as essential pillars of our shared human story.”

The Internal Landscape

Through her inner landscapes, she aims to raise awareness of the non-linear nature of healing and the complexity of memory. “My message is

an invitation to embrace metamorphosis and to recognise that the most profound human experiences often occur in the quietest, most overlooked moments of our lives.”

She describes her intention to foreground interiority within contemporary culture. “I believe my photography influences conversations by shifting the focus toward the universal cultural experiences of memory, loss, and the concept of home. While my work begins with my personal history, it touches upon a shared social reality: how we, as a society, process grief and preserve our collective identity through individual archives. By bringing the *internal landscape* into the public eye, I encourage a dialogue about the importance of emotional well-being and the need for reflective spaces in our fast-paced modern culture.”









All images © Susana Espana | Memories of an Empty Day



Finding Stillness

Her choice of subjects is an intuitive process that begins in the domestic sphere. “I am drawn to scenes where intimacy resides and where the subtle dramas of daily life unfold. I don’t look for grand spectacles; instead, I find my subjects in the emotional residue of a space, a corner where the light hits a certain way or a fragment of an old photograph from my personal archive. These scenes serve as anchors for exploring intangible feelings like loss, connection, and the passage of time.”

The domestic interior becomes a sustained focus of inquiry, not merely as a setting but as a structural element of her visual thinking. She directly references the seventeenth-century French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal in framing this perspective. “As the philosopher Pascal noted, the inability to remain quiet in one’s own room is a source of human unrest; my photography aims to capture that quietude and the ‘God of small things’ found in daily life. My work serves as a reminder, as Pascal suggested, of the profound value of being still within one’s own space. In a world that often prioritises the external and the immediate, I seek to highlight the beauty in the mundane and the importance of our domestic sanctuaries.”

About

Susana Espana is a Spanish photographer, visual artist and collector. Born in Spain, she currently lives and works in Bremen, Germany. A graduate in Dentistry, she began studies in Art Restoration, which she later abandoned in favour of photography. She holds a Master’s degree in Fine Art Photography from the London College of Communication (London, 2007). She has participated in group exhibitions in Europe, England and Turkey. Her first individual exhibition in the United States took place in 2024 at the Atelier Laforest, Robert Munford Archive (Maine, USA).

www.susanaespana.com



“

I use ink bleeds, thread,
and digital layering
to create a temporal
depth that a lens alone
cannot capture.

- Susana Espana

Inner Worlds & Inner Landscapes

Highlights of Artdoc Exhibitions

We're pleased to present The Inner Lens, an online exhibition series published in two interconnected chapters: Inner Worlds and Inner Landscapes. Together, these exhibitions bring photography into conversation with inner experience and the natural world. Inner Worlds focuses on the unseen spaces we carry within — emotional, psychological, and personal — explored through approaches ranging from abstraction and portraiture to personal documentary. Inner Landscapes shifts the gaze outward, presenting landscapes and organic forms as spaces shaped by memory, mood, and reflection.

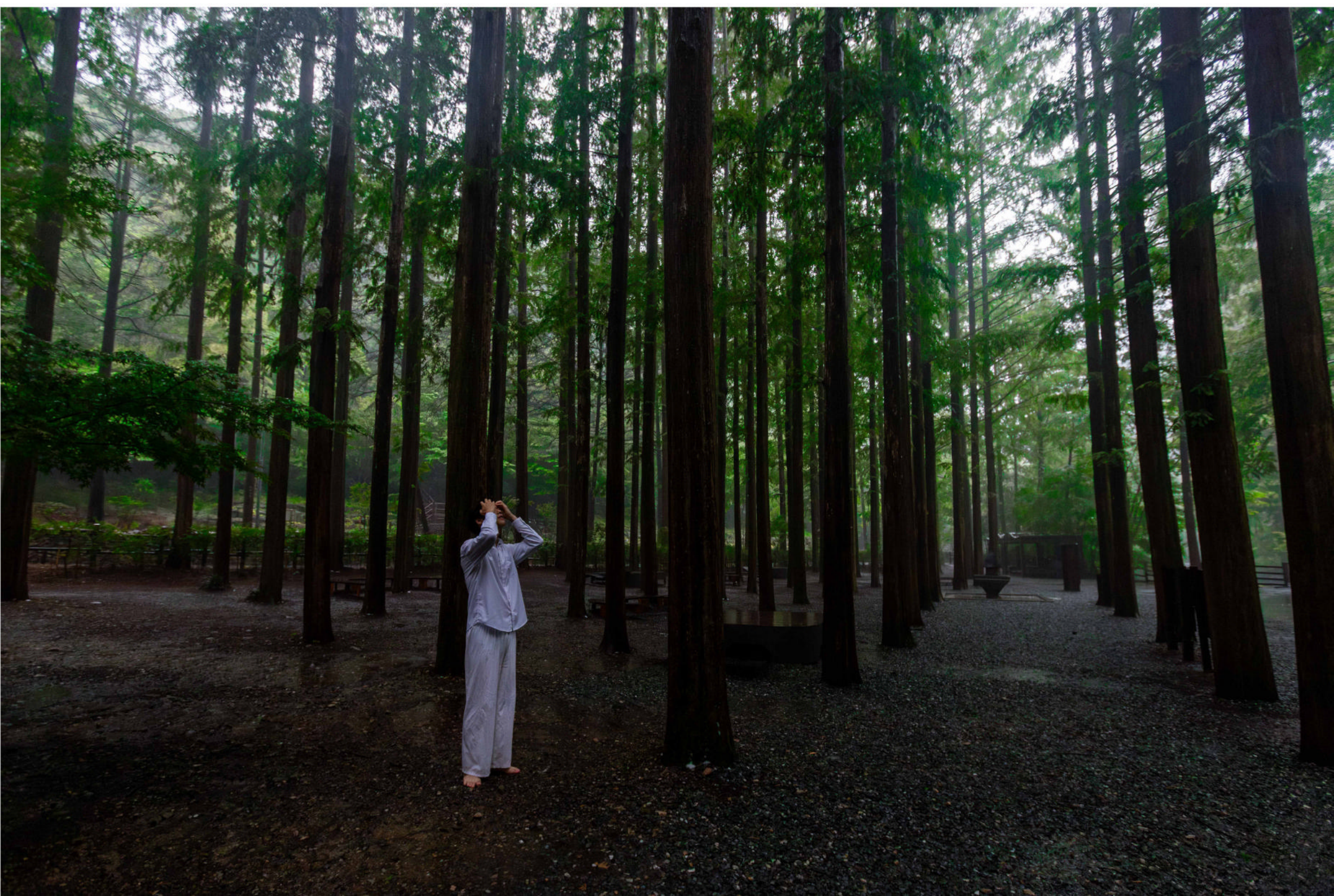
Seen side by side, the two exhibitions form a dialogue between inner life and environment, showing how photography can translate states of feeling into visual form. The works gathered here reflect attention, presence, and a thoughtful engagement with both subject and process.

Exhibition — Inner Worlds

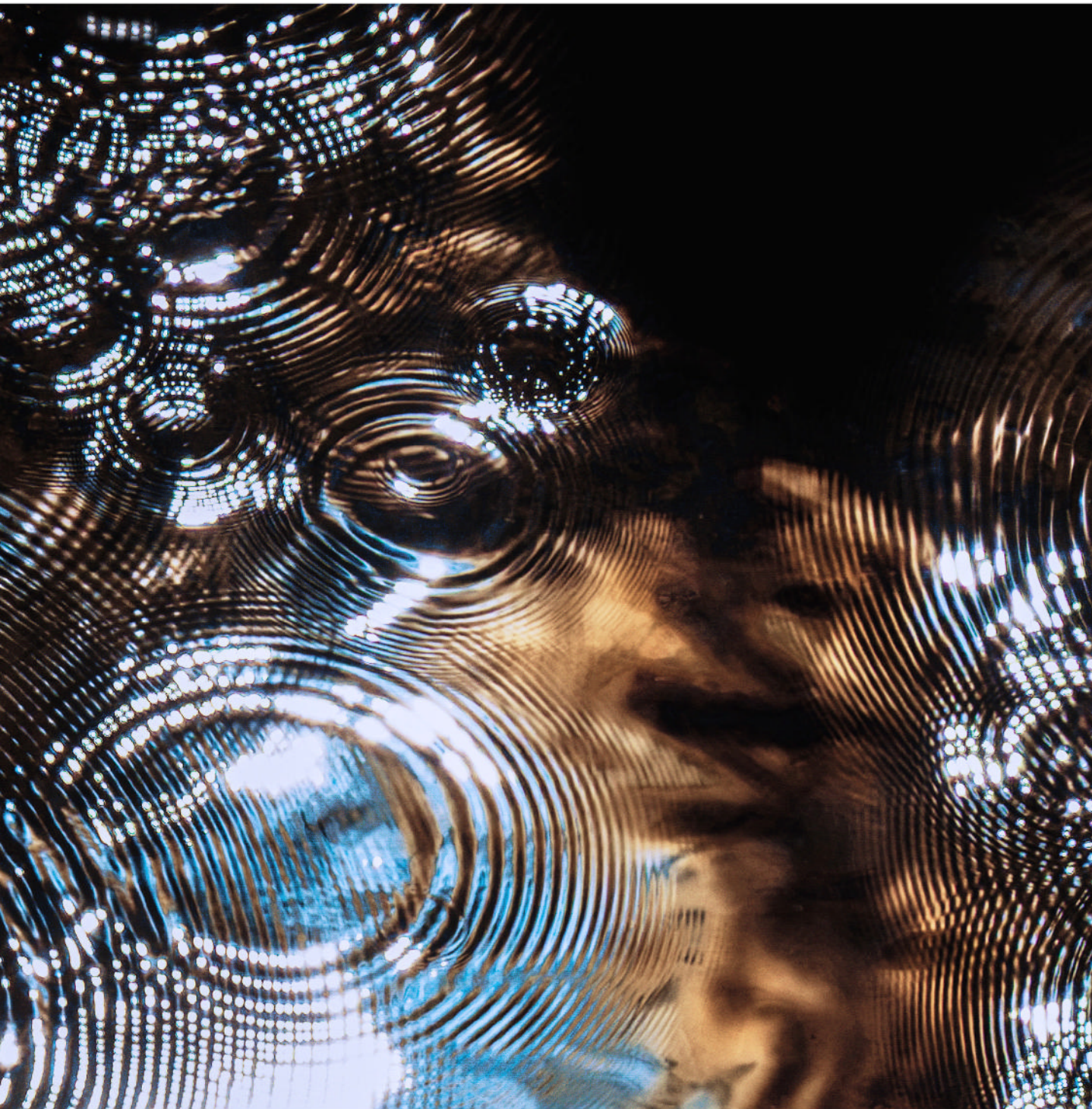
Exhibition — Inner Landscapes



© Anatoly Suzdaltsev | Total Theater



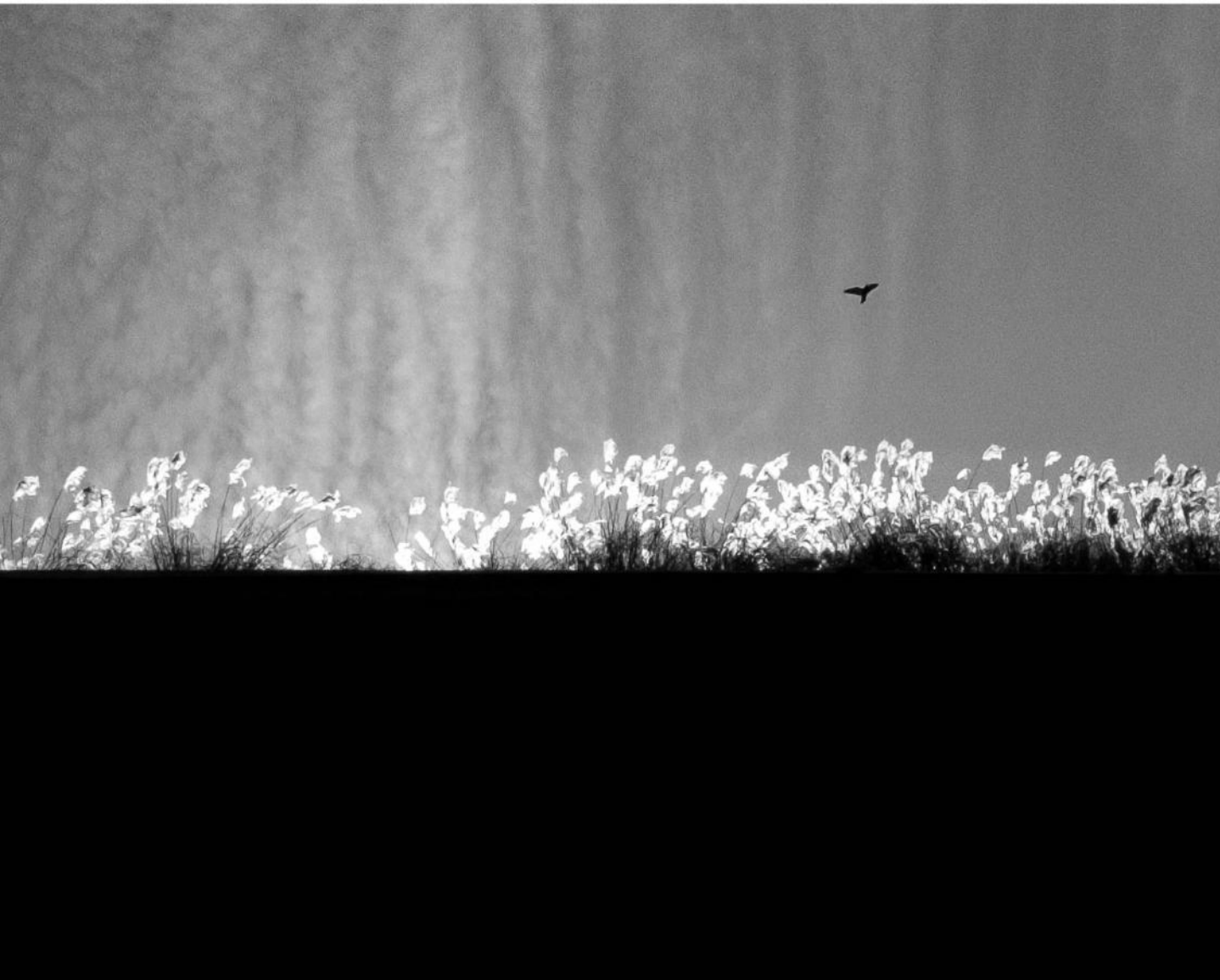
© Duhui Choi | Vegetative State



© Tara in Abstract | Evolution of Self



© Bertrand Capelle | Yugen



© Eida Grabocka | The Weight of Release





© Ioana Vrabie | Psychological Landscapes



© Ina Bieliokaite | In Between - Iceland



© Andrés Jordán | Lightscapescapes



© Paola Francesca Barone | Libera necessità



© Anne Berry | A True Song



© Linda Plaisted | Brave New World

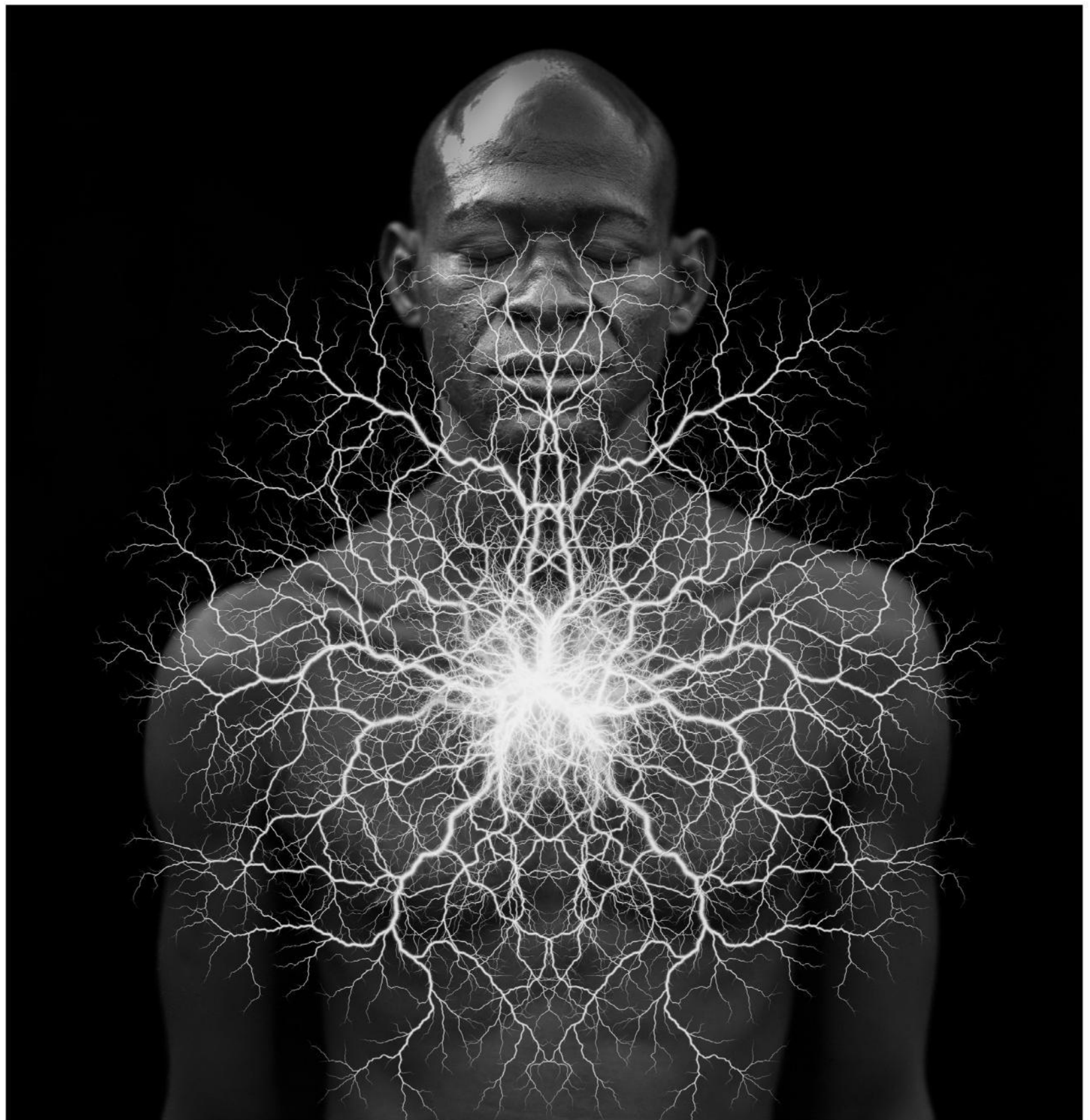




© Yoanna Walden | The Lunatics' Common Room



© Anatoly Suzdaltsev | Total Theater



© Ricardo Guixà | Taat (Soul)

Open Call Abstract Visions

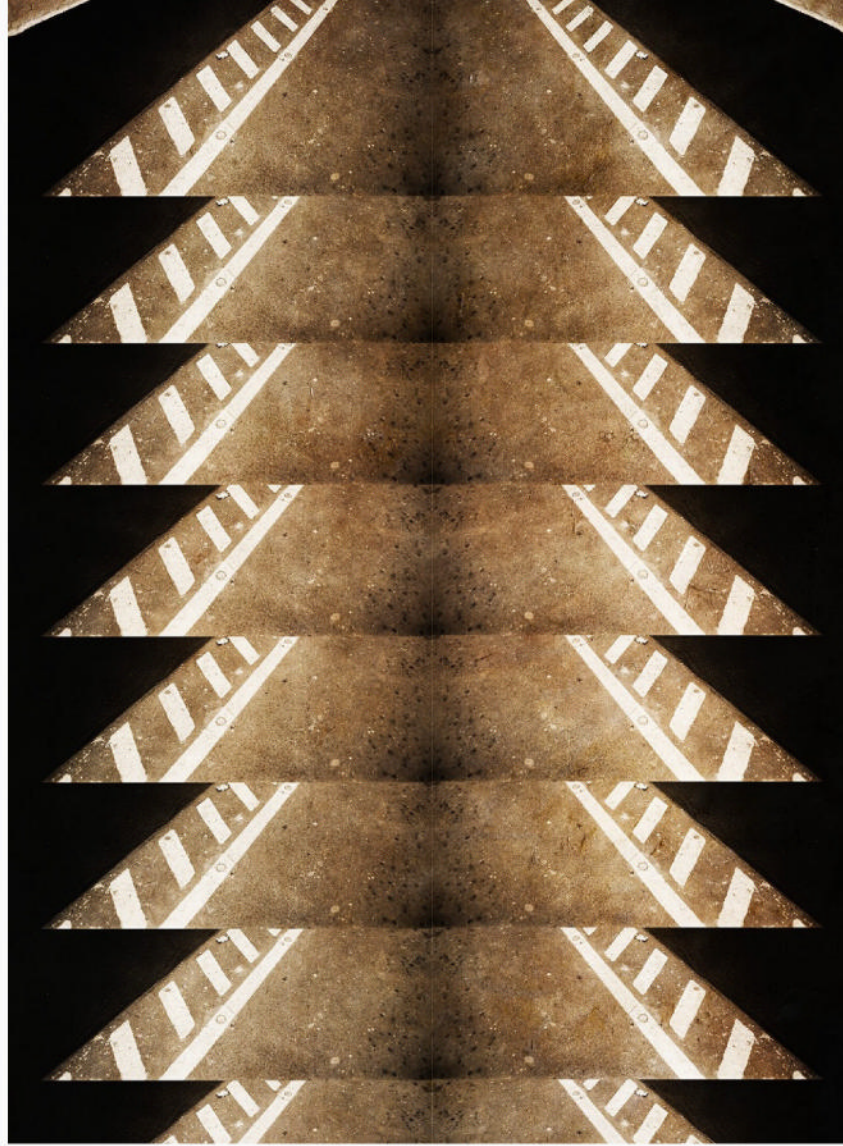
Abstraction as a visual response to uncertainty

In moments when reality feels shaped by political threats, abstraction becomes more than a visual choice. It becomes a way of seeing, sensing, and surviving. *Abstract Visions* invites photographers working with abstraction as a method of engaging with the world — emotionally, politically, and intuitively. We are interested in work that communicates through atmosphere, rhythm, colour, and form. *Abstract Visions* welcomes photographic projects that build their meaning in sequences, contrast, and repetition. Colour may function as emotional structure. Form may carry tension. In an unpredictable world, abstraction can become a way of creating a self-contained visual world where complexity is allowed to exist without explanation.

SUBMIT YOUR WORK

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 30 MARCH 2026

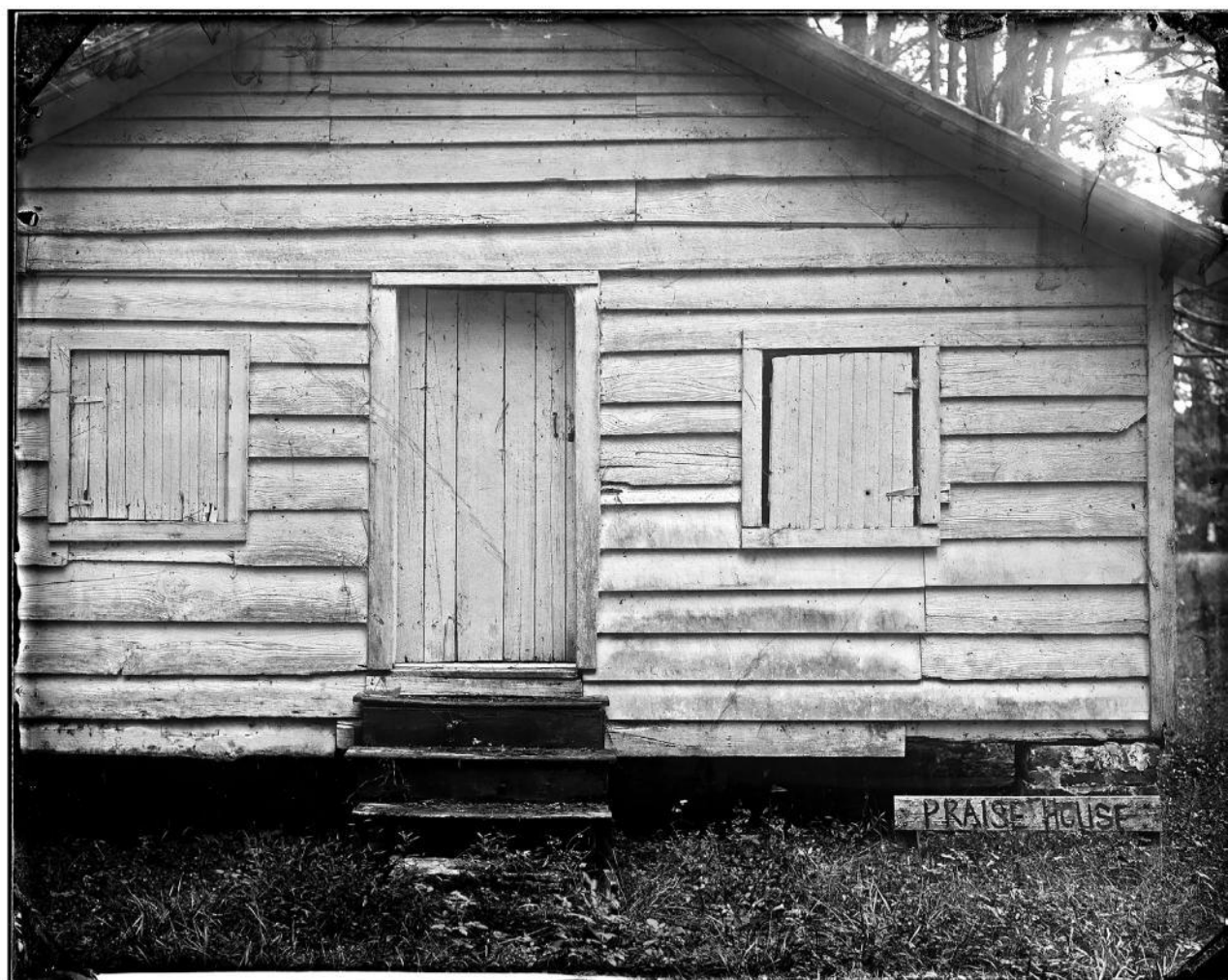
ARTDOC.PHOTO/SUBMIT



ABSTRACT VISIONS

GET FEATURED IN ARTDOC MAGAZINE

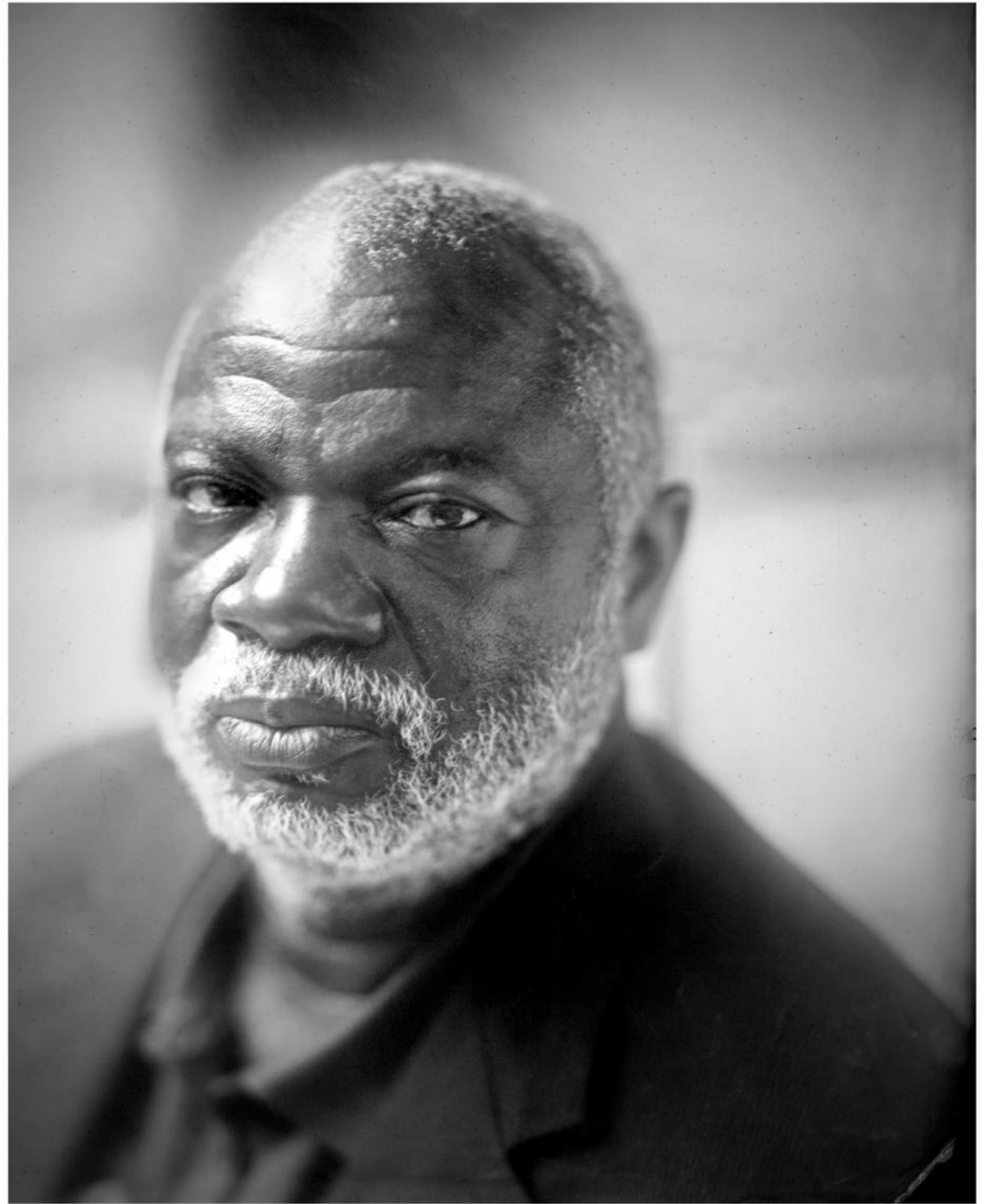
DEADLINE MAR 30, 2026 | [ARTDOC.PHOTO/SUBMIT](https://artdoc.photo/submit)



Hidden Waterways of the American South

Virginia McGee Richards

Virginia McGee Richards has spent fifteen years exploring the hidden waterways of the American South, revealing submerged histories along the Atlantic coast from Charleston to St. Augustine. Her series, *The Inner Passage*, explores colonial-era canals built by enslaved Africans, whose forced labour transformed the landscape and whose names have been forgotten. Using archival research and fieldwork, Richards reconnects these routes to stories of resilience and self-emancipation. She employs wet-plate collodion photography, capturing the changing tidal terrain where natural elements leave their mark. Her portraits of marshlands, ancient trees, and descendants with deep roots in this land serve as a profound reflection on memory, heritage, and the persistent influence of place.



All images © Virginia McGee Richards | *The Inner Passage*

“*The Inner Passage* began with a question. While cooling off in a river near my home in Charleston, South Carolina, I found myself thinking about the deep histories held in the landscape and surrounding waterways. That moment sparked a fifteen-year inquiry—part fieldwork, part archival excavation—into the maps, documents and lived memories embedded in the region’s marshlands.

My research uncovered a largely unrecorded network of colonial-era canals carved along the Atlantic coastline from Charleston, South Carolina, to St. Augustine, Florida. Built by enslaved Africans using little more than shovels and axes to clear forests and excavate coastal mud, these waterways remain sparsely documented. The names of the Black labourers were

never recorded. Enslaved people also used the Inner Passage to self-emancipate, navigating from South Carolina and Georgia to Spanish Florida, where they were granted freedom. This layered history shaped my approach to the work. I turned to wet-plate collodion, a nineteenth-century photographic process whose alchemical unpredictability mirrors the watery, shifting world I sought to capture. A slight change in temperature or humidity alters the chemistry and the final image on the glass.

This immersion gave rise to portraits of trees, landscapes, and living descendants linked to the waterways. All the individuals I photographed have family histories deeply rooted in the region for centuries, embodying the geological and cultural history embedded in the land.







All images © Virginia McGee Richards | *The Inner Passage*

About

Virginia McGee Richards' work is rooted in nature and a sense of place. Born in the American South, she grew up surrounded by family and fields, shaped by the rhythms of Southern life. This intimate connection to land and history forms the foundation of her practice. *The Inner Passage* traces an undocumented network of canals built by enslaved Africans. Through years of fieldwork and archival research, she uncovered the environmental and human histories embedded in these waterways. Her book, *The Inner Passage* (MIT Press, April 2026), features sixty wet-plate collodion photographs.

www.ginnarichards.com

Honouring the Ancestors

Shannon Nahara

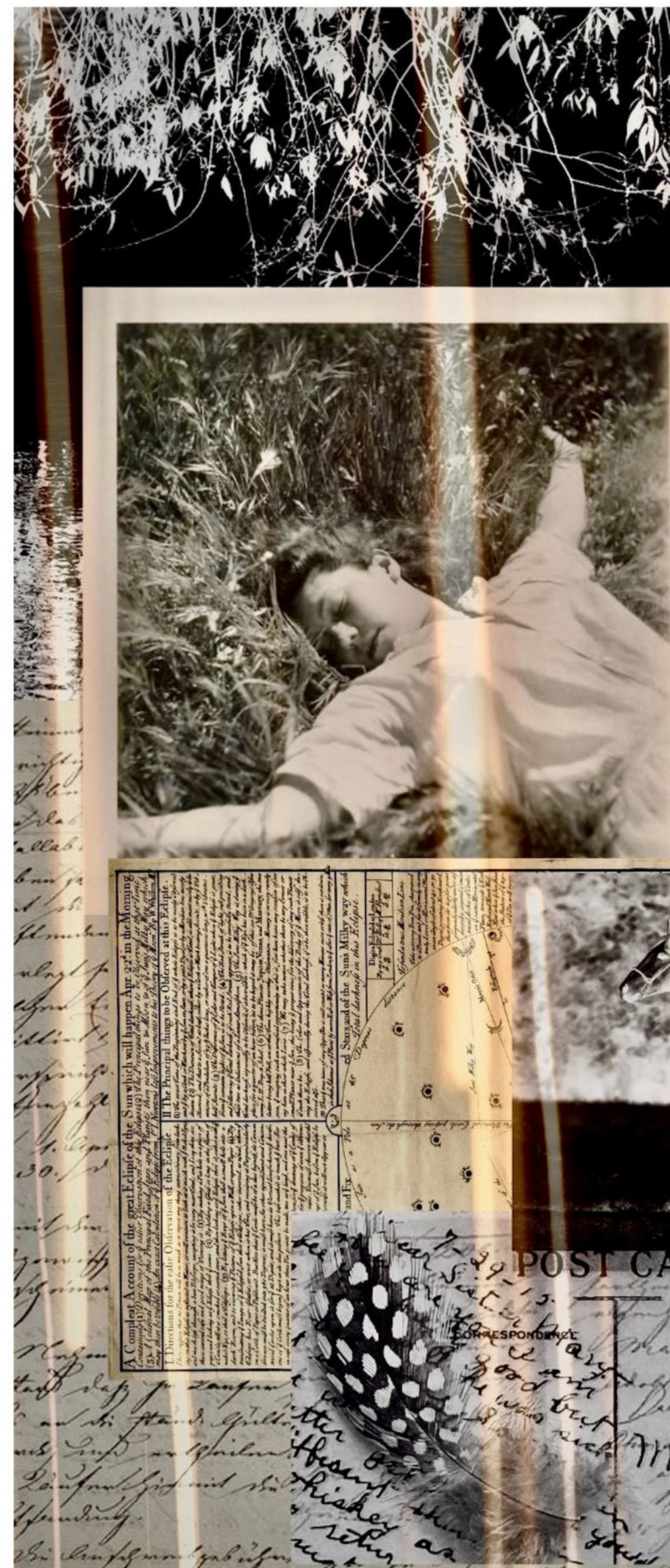
“ My current work is a meditation on time, memory, and the psyche. As both an artist and art therapist, I create photographic collages that weave together historic found photographs, contemporary images, and my own photography. These layered compositions explore how visual fragments from different eras can coexist in a shared, symbolic space—inviting the viewer into a dialogue between past and present, conscious and unconscious.

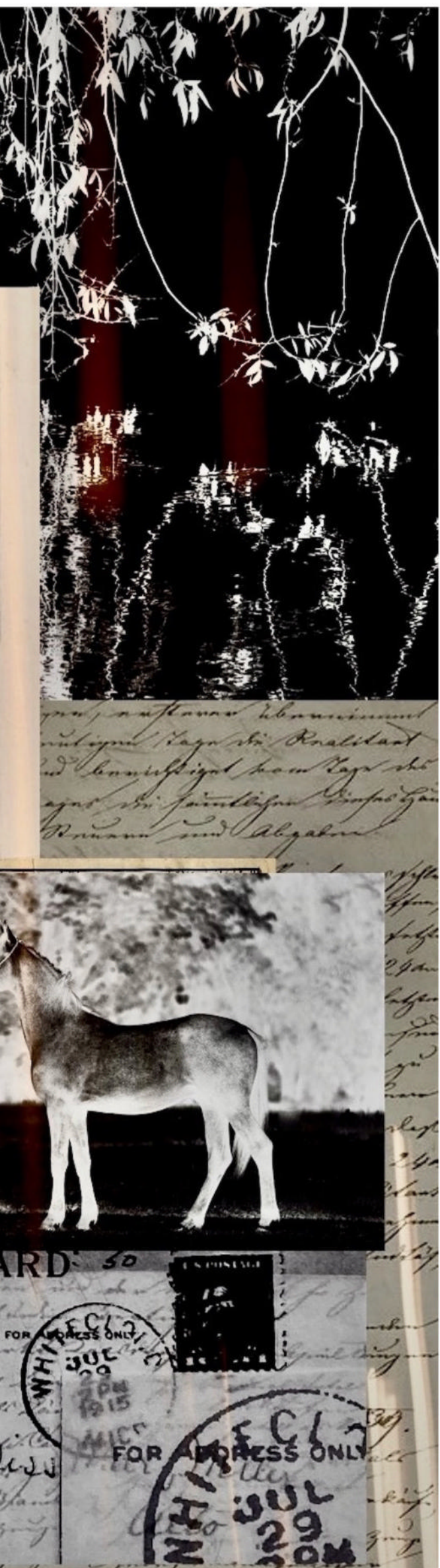
Inspired by myth and depth psychology, I view these collages as vessels for transformation. Old photographs carry traces of untold stories and cultural memory, and when placed in new visual contexts, they become catalysts for reflection, healing, and imaginative re-visioning. I am drawn to the mysterious, timeless quality of the found image—how it holds both specificity and universality, like an archetype surfacing through personal and collective history. I feel that art can be an opening into forgotten narratives, inner landscapes, and the ever-evolving nature of human consciousness.

About

Shannon Nahara is a Midwestern-based visual artist and art therapist working in photography, collage, and mixed media. Her practice explores the intersections of memory, myth, and the unconscious through layered imagery that invites reflection and transformation. She holds a BFA from the Cleveland Institute of Art (1993), an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art (1996), and an MA in Transpersonal Psychology with an emphasis in Art Therapy from Naropa University (2016). Shannon’s work often merges her own photographs with found and historic imagery, creating visual narratives that bridge personal and collective experience. She has exhibited across the United States.

www.shannonnahara.com





All images © Shannon Nahara | Honoring the Ancestors



All images © Shannon Nahara | Honoring the Ancestors





Stitching Memory into Being

Olga Shatokha

For more than a decade, Olga Shatokha has lived away from Ukraine, carrying with her a sense of home that is at once fractured and fiercely alive. Her practice unfolds at the intersection of memory, displacement and intergenerational inheritance, where domestic spaces, family photographs and landscapes become sites of repair. Working with soft natural light and tactile interventions such as stitching and collage, she transforms photographs into objects that bear the marks of rupture and reconstruction. “We inherit interrupted stories, and photography is my way of trying to make sense of them.”

She and her family have moved across countries. “I have been living outside of Ukraine for over a decade, currently residing in Lisbon (previously Porto and Tallinn), where my parents joined me after fleeing the Russian war in Ukraine in 2022.” For Shatokha, displacement is never just geographic; it is emotional, historical, and linguistic. “I explore the concepts of memory, home, and belonging.”

Olga Shatokha experienced home as something layered, shifting, and often internal rather than fixed to a single place. The layered condition shapes both what she photographs and how she alters her images. “I photograph domestic spaces, family members, and landscapes, then return to these images physically through stitching and collage, trying to mend what is torn.”

Lifelines Shaped by Trauma

Lifelines traces the migratory lines of Shatokha’s own family history, examining how belonging, lineage, and state power intersect across generations. “My family, like every Ukrainian family, has been suffering not just the consequences of the current war but the accumulated trauma of Russian and Soviet imperial aggression toward Ukraine throughout centuries. My grandfather’s family survived the Holodomor, a man-made famine designed to break the Ukrainian nation,

and my grandmother’s family endured the dekulakization repression campaigns.”

Moving between ancestral geographies and contemporary documentation, the project questions the ways governments attempt to define identity through borders, papers and official records. “In my project *Lifelines*, I want to raise questions about imperialistic absorption and the violence of archiving. Empires do not only conquer land, but they also seek to arrest motion, to turn people into records, documents, statistics that serve their own narratives. They erase the particular in favour of the universal, and the personal in favour of the official.”

In response, her practice becomes archival in its own way. “My work invites viewers to unsee the imperial narrative and to see a personal one instead because our stories have as much historical weight as any official document.” Through layered visual techniques, *Lifelines* challenges imperial logics of possession and control, suggesting that it is precisely through movement, adaptation, and continuity that histories endure. “These histories live in us whether we talk about them or not. By working with family photographs and inherited objects, I’m creating a counter-archive to official histories, one that insists on the personal, human scale of these tragedies.”



These histories live in us
whether we talk about
them or not.



© Olga Shatokha | Roots, Hopi Map



© Olga Shatokha | Roots, Hopi Silver

Histories of Displacement

In her series *Roots*, Shatokha constructs a visual dialogue between uprooted plants and displaced people, examining how history, land, and identity intertwine. The project confronts forced migration and the commodification of cultural heritage, drawing parallels between Native American and Ukrainian experiences of displacement. “I choose subjects that resonate with me personally and with whom I have established a certain intimacy. I often photograph what I can return to: my parents’ hands, rooms I have lived in, and plants surviving in difficult places. In *Roots*, this extends to landscapes and people connected to histories of displacement, approached through meaningful encounters.”

With *Roots*, she opens a space for reflection on colonisation, war and cultural erasure, and the ways these forces reverberate across generations. “Most of my adult life, I have been creating ties

with places while knowing I may not stay. This persistent inner conflict has taught me to live in the present moment, making me drawn to the ordinary, but fleeting: light on a curtain, a hand showing an object, a broken branch.”

Softness and Space

With her staged photography, she centres on an exploration of femininity and the conscious embodiment of softness within a culture that frequently rewards hardness. “Another important topic of my practice has been exploring my femininity and what it means to embody softness in a world that often demands harshness.” Qualities she once perceived as weaknesses have gradually become sites of strength and self-acceptance. “I typically model for my own photographs, extending to the idea of staying open, receiving, and vulnerable. I once considered these qualities weak, but lately, I’ve been learning to embrace them.”



© Olga Shatokha | Roots, Dad and St Seraphim



© Olga Shatokha | Roots, Ann's Letters







This sensibility is echoed in her visual language: she works predominantly with natural light. “I work mostly with natural, soft, indirect light, the kind that feels domestic and intimate. When I want to add more drama, I occasionally use flash.” Alongside these material processes, she returns repeatedly to unoccupied interiors. “I love photographing empty spaces: sometimes they provide more information about us than our portraits. A room tells the story of how someone moves through the world, what they choose to keep close, and what they’ve left behind.”

Her practice is guided by a desire to activate reflection within the viewer. “I hope my work takes viewers on a journey down their own memory lane, making them reflect on their own sense of belonging and home. I’m not providing answers; I create space for questions. Where do you belong? What makes a place home? How do we find home within us when the physical place no longer exists?”

Shatokha’s photographs function as a form of introspection, inviting each person to consider

their own experiences of attachment and displacement. “If viewers leave with a broader, more flexible idea of what a home can mean — that is enough. I want my work to validate the complexity of the feelings, not to simplify them.”

Altered Photographs

Material intervention forms the basis of her practice; the photographs are handled, altered and reconstituted. “Stitching and collage are central to my practice. These techniques transform the print into an object with its own history. The act of cutting and reassembling an image evokes the fragmentation of memory and the experience of migration. The thread is the reconstruction.”

Olga Shatokha uses written text on the frame as both a visual rhythm and a philosophical position. “I incorporate writing because within writing and photography, I love repetition. This circular nature contrasts with our Western linear thinking, and aligns more closely with Eastern philosophies, where existence is part of an endless cycle.”

In one work, we see emotional handwritten texts, around a photo of a window looking outside with a repetitive phrase ‘My happiness, I’m here and waiting for you’. “This work pays homage to Oleg Mitasov, a Ukrainian outsider artist who transformed walls, notebooks, and entire rooms into archives of obsessively handwritten phrases.” The texts on her images function is restorative. “It uses a sequence of affirming phrases to facilitate reconciliation through simple, intentional language.”

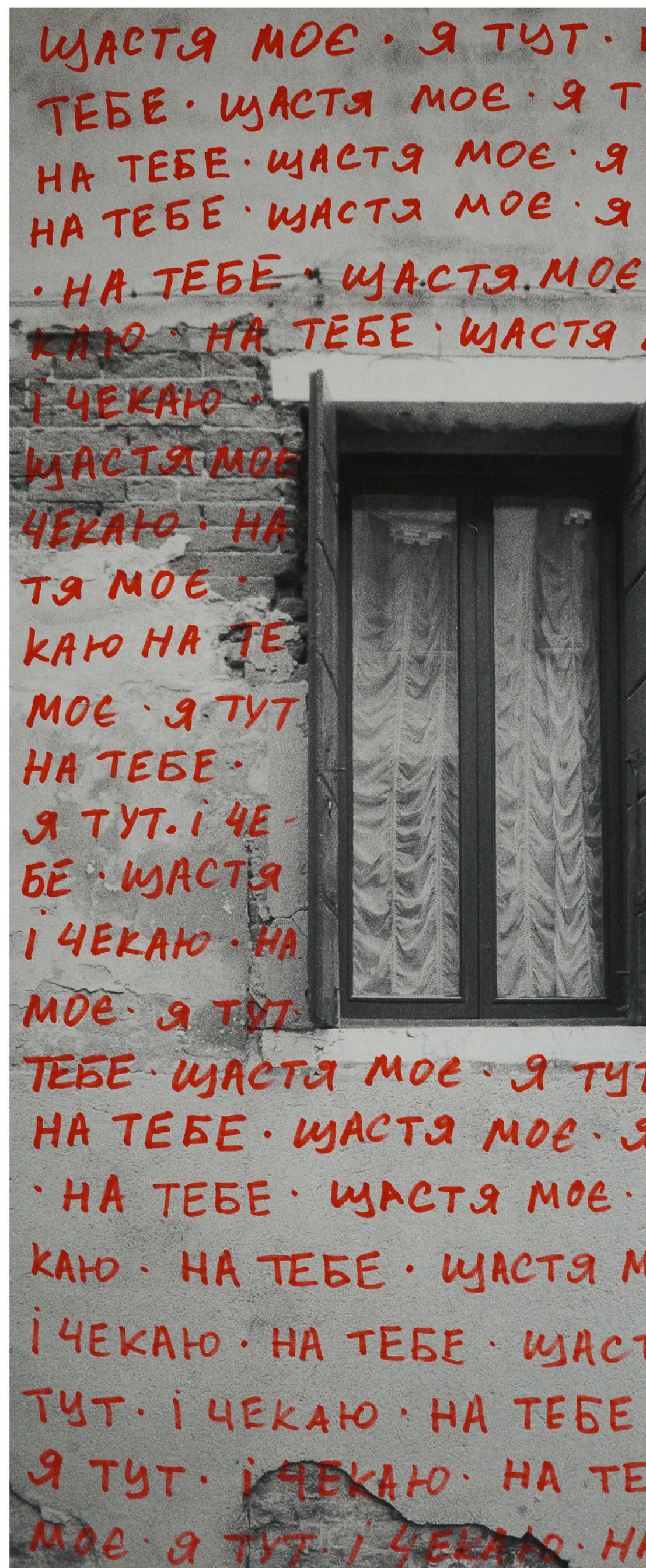
Installation

Her practice continues to expand beyond the single frame. “I am interested in photographs as components within larger installations that include fabric, found objects, archival materials, and text.” The photograph enters into dialogue with other materials, forming spatial constellations in which memory unfolds through texture, proximity, and scale. This direction connects closely to her ongoing inquiry into inheritance and continuity. “I want to explore intergenerational memory more deeply — how habits, traditions, stories, and even fears travel through families. At the same time, I’m drawn to our personal, everyday stories because these are what ultimately shape the larger mosaic of life. History isn’t only made in grand gestures, but in how we set a table, hold a photograph, or choose what to keep when we have to leave everything else behind.”

About

Olga Shatokha, born in Dnipro, Ukraine, is a mixed-media and photography artist whose work investigates memory, home, and belonging. Based in Lisbon since 2019, she creates at the intersection of conceptual art and photography, combining visual narrative with intimate, tactile processes. Through stitching, thread, collage, double exposure and analogue techniques, she transforms photographs into layered objects. Her work is informed by her Ukrainian heritage and shaped by the cultural influences of her current home in Portugal.

www.shatokha.com





“

I hope my work takes viewers on a journey down their own memory lane, making them reflect on their own sense of belonging and home.

- Olga Shatokha



Join Artdoc Magazine

Get access to all online issues, articles and open calls

Read all about art and documentary photography. Artdoc Photography Magazine is the online magazine for beginning and advanced photographers and anybody interested in the most promising art medium of our time.

[SUBSCRIBE NOW](#)

JOIN NOW

All About the Art of Photography



READ
ALL
ISSUES

WWW.ARTDOC.PHOTO



Photography is the art that combines reality and vision, feeling and truth, psychological depth, and political awareness.

- Artdoc Magazine

Artdoc Photography Magazine #1 2026
e-ISSN 3050-8029

Published by Artdoc
www.artdoc.photo
Merel Galestian | CEO

© 2026 Artdoc Photography Magazine
© 2026 All images by the featured photographers

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from Artdoc Magazine.

Front & Back cover photograph © Aletheia Casey | A Lost Place



www.artdoc.photo

We believe that photography is the most relevant global plastic form of art. Photography is a tool to communicate about the world that surrounds us and our feelings about it. Photography is the visual storytelling medium of our time, and it's deeply pervaded in the veins of our society and culture. Photographers tell stories that matter and can influence thoughts and feelings about ourselves and about our society, whereas the conventional media is continually constricted by political and corporate interests, while visual storytellers are the consciousness of modern society.

The art of photography is not limited to the aesthetics of the images themselves but encompasses the story behind them. Photography is the art that combines reality and vision, feeling and truth, psychological depth, and political awareness.



www.artdoc.photo