

Reflective Creative Journal (RCJ)

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Edited by:

NO JOBS
IN THE ARTS

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The RCJ is a unique digital space dedicated to publishing visual artists' reflections on their research experiences and creative ideas. Edited by No Jobs in the Arts, the journal welcomes submissions from creatives working across all visual art mediums, providing a platform for critical engagement and shared learning within the arts community.

Full submission guidelines for the free-to-submit open call, and all publication titles, can be found here: www.nojobsinthearts.co.uk/reflective-creative-journal-rcj/

No Jobs in the Arts CIC is a non-profit dedicated to supporting emerging creativity in the Visual Arts. Your donation funds projects supporting early-career creatives like this journal. [Donate here](#).

Any thoughts or feedback can be sent to the editors at nojobsinthearts@hotmail.com

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Editorial: The Unpredictable Nature of Reflection

No Jobs in the Arts

For this first issue of *Reflective Creative Journal* (RCJ) we welcomed contributions on anything and everything from the field of visual arts. The writing we received was excitingly varied, each an act of reflection wildly different from the last. The following essays have been curated from those submissions, into something of itself, quite unpredictable. So please, scroll down for a medley of grassroots contemporary research from across the globe.

The lineup within these digital pages consists of seven pieces of short-form, reflective writing, with accompanying images. The first two articles take a look into the future. In *Tonghai Gaotai 2066*, emergent technologies suggest that heritage isn't a static, dust gathering concept; and, *Data Decomposing: Glitching the Self* explores the meeting point between the digital and its analogue, through the means of identity.

'My role as an artist is to create the conditions for that reassembly to unfold.'

– Wanrong Zhu, see page 6

In our second set of articles; *Sunset Drive II* offers a reflection on painting at scale; *Everything Is Kung Fu* mediates on the garden and its role in practice; whilst, *Exploring Space and Repetition* investigates drawing in three dimensions.

The final article pairing addresses the role of chance in creative practice. *Unpredictability* and *How The Infinite Panopticon Reshaped My Practice* considers the role of inviting in randomness to the creative process as a creative collaborator.

"Unpredictability is not the opposite of structure but its counterpart. It keeps the work alive, breathing, and responsive, reminding me to approach each project not as a fixed statement but as an ongoing conversation with the world around me. "

– Ningrui Liu, see page 20

We hope, like us, that your curiosity will extend across each of these essays, and onwards, to the next issue of the RCJ. Possibly, you'll even consider sharing your thoughts in our rolling open call. Full submission guidelines for the free-to-submit

open call, and all publication titles, can be found [here](#). We'd love to read about your reflective musings on or around new ideas, projects, collaborations, and learning experiences—including encounters with exhibitions, publications, fresh ways of working, and creative inspiration.

The best way to keep up to date with the journal and the associated open call for submissions is to sign up to No Jobs in the Arts [newsletter](#) - that way you'll always be the first to be notified when we've got something exciting to share.

Tonghai Gaotai 2066

Wanrong Zhu

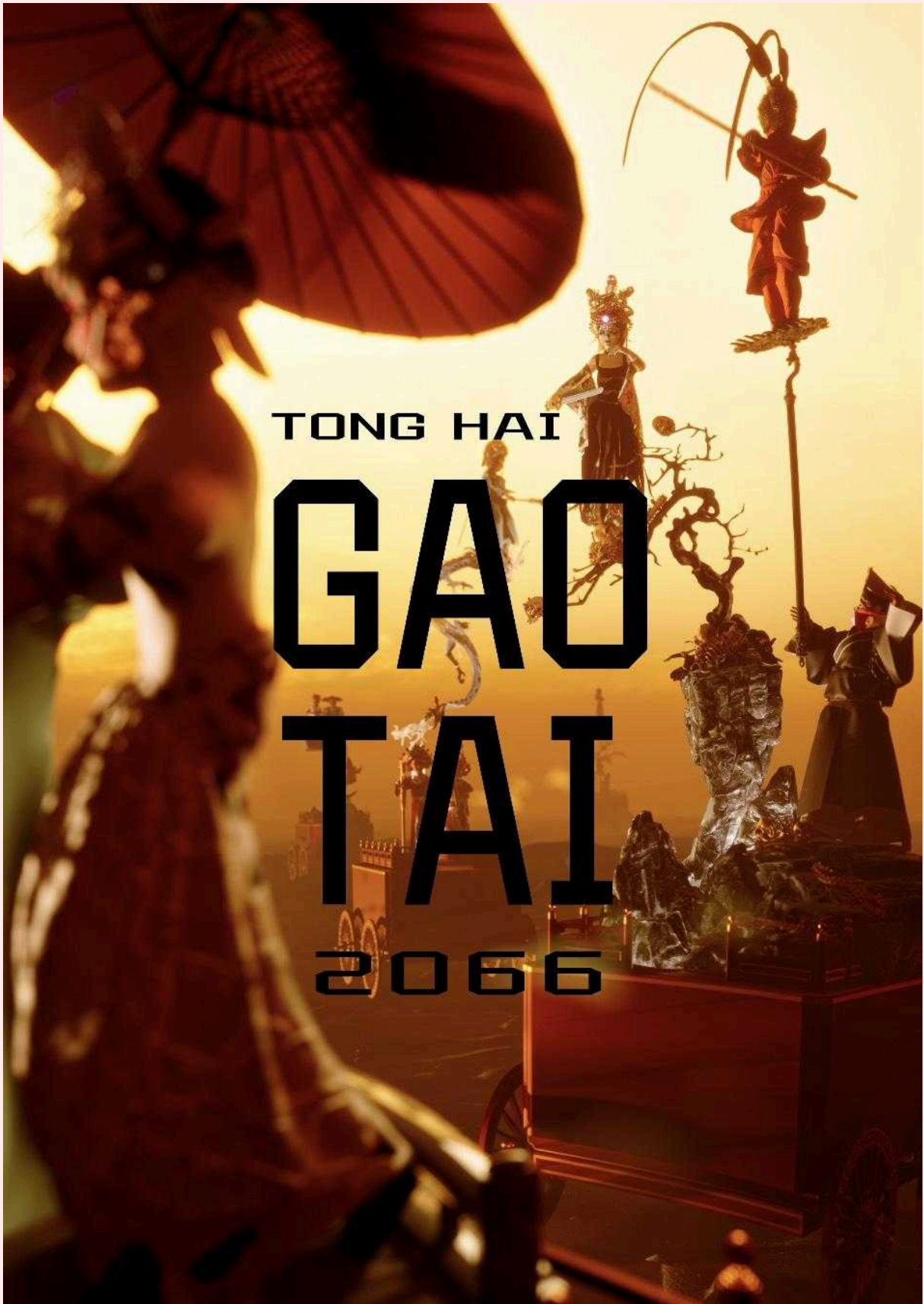
In my recent project, I revisited *Tonghai Gaotai*, a 400-year-old folk ritual from my hometown in Yunnan, China. Each year, children are dressed as gods and historical characters, standing atop steel structures paraded through town - a surreal mix of sculpture, myth, and living performance. I grew up watching these slow, silent processions, where a child might embody *Sun Wukong* or *Guanyin*, towering above a street crowd in full costume, both real and unreal.

As the ritual slowly faded from public life, I asked myself: ‘what does it mean to inherit a tradition shaped by performance, myth, and collective memory?’ and, ‘what happens when these memories are digitised, simulated, and remixed?’

In *Tonghai Gaotai: Electronic Rebirth* (1993–2014), I used AI to animate decades of archival images from the community. With each frame, I tried not only to preserve but to activate the memory, inviting viewers into a non-linear time structure where the past is not fixed but reconfigurable. Watching the past flicker into motion through generative tools, I began to feel both reverence and unease. AI offered new life to cultural artefacts but also introduced the risk of simulation replacing substance.

To explore these tensions, I created *Tonghai Gaotai 2066* (2025), an immersive VR experience that reimagines the ritual in a speculative future. Audiences enter a virtual desert city ruled by algorithms and choose one of three roles: *Human*, *Deity*, or *Machine*. Each role offers a different sensory logic: *Humans* explore ruins freely, *Deities* are placed high on altars under constant gaze, and *Machines* must follow strict pathing rules or trigger alarms. What started as cultural preservation evolved into an interactive philosophy exercise on agency, identity, and system control.

Throughout this process, I collaborated with digital costume designers, 3D artists, and sound programmers to build an imagined world where traditional opera aesthetics meet cybernetic futures. We borrowed from Beijing opera, sci-fi fashion, and cyberpunk games to design the avatars. The resulting visuals didn’t just reference tradition they hacked it, stylised it, even contradicted it.



The biggest learning on the creative journey was this: heritage doesn't live in stillness. It lives through conflict, translation, error, and regeneration. Technologies like AI and VR are not just tools to document culture; they are spaces to negotiate it sometimes faithfully, sometimes provocatively.

Reflecting on this project, I no longer see myself only as an artist preserving the past, but as a mediator between generations, systems, and languages. Ritual, I've learned, is not bound to geography or time, it can travel, fragment, and reassemble. My role as an artist is to create the conditions for that reassembly to unfold.



Above: *Tonghai Gaotai 2066*, an immersive interactive performance

Wanrong Zhu

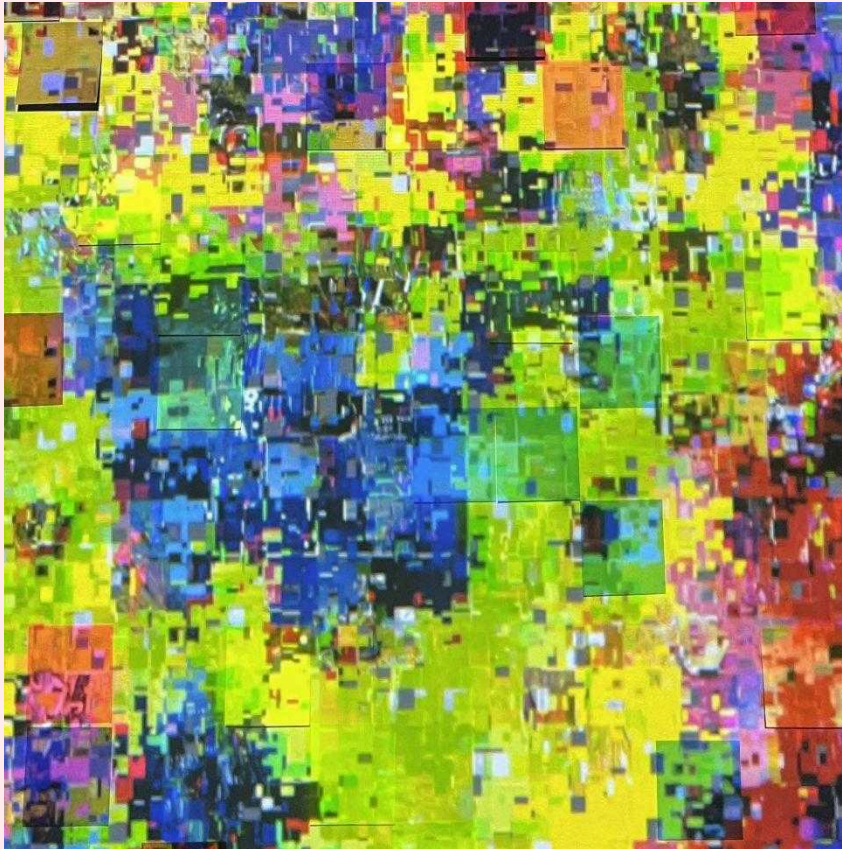
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I explore cultural memory, ritual, and posthuman futures through AI video, VR performance. My work reimagines endangered traditions like Tonghai Gaotai as immersive experiences, using emerging technologies to question identity, authorship, and the evolving forms of heritage in the digital age.

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Data Decomposing: Glitching the Self

Emma Croney



Above: detail of video from *Data Decomposing*

In my recent work *Data Decomposing* (2025), I explored how our identities are filtered, broken down, and reconstructed through digital media. I was particularly interested in where physical and digital elements meet—and what happens when they blur.

The artwork combines three main elements: (1) a looped glitching video of a face disintegrating into pixels, (2) a collage piece using paper textures, and (3) an interactive Post-it note wall that allowed viewers to leave hidden UV light messages. The installation invited participation and interpretation, reinforcing the idea that identity is not fixed—it's layered, shifting, and deeply influenced by external input.

The glitch video was created by digitally manipulating half of a face to produce pixelation, colour breakdowns, and fragments of digital distortion. I wanted the video to loop like a cycle of digital decay and recovery, breaking down the self, only to build it again through fragmented data. Projecting this over handmade textures created a contrast I found really interesting: soft, imperfect paper collage underneath a clean, structured digital decay.

What challenged me most was balancing the physical with the digital. I tested different surfaces to see how projections reacted, and experimented with collage techniques that mimicked pixel structures. The interactive Post-it wall became an unexpected turning point—some participants left simple notes, others drew images or personal confessions visible only under black light. It added an unexpected emotional dimension: people layered their own identities into the piece, hidden unless you knew how to look.

This project deepened my understanding of how materials - whether digital files or scraps of paper - carry meaning. It also helped me appreciate the value of audience interaction in reflective creative practice. By combining glitch aesthetics with handmade elements, I learned to see the 'pixel' not just as a part of a digital display, but as a metaphor for fragmented identity and memory.



Left: interactive UV element from *Data Decomposing*. Right: detail of collage from *Data Decomposing*

Data Decomposing builds on artists who explore digital/physical overlap, like *Nam June Paik's* media layering or *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's* interactive works. But it also felt personal: a response to the disconnect I sometimes feel between my online and offline self.

If I revisit this project, I'd explore how sound could enhance the experience—maybe distorting voice fragments or using audio glitches. I'd also like to push the interactive layer further, letting people alter or manipulate visuals in real-time.

Reflecting on this piece reminded me that experimentation and uncertainty aren't signs of failure—they're often the starting point for the most valuable insights.

Watch the video loop of the projection here: bit.ly/3IWFsYz

Emma Croney

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I'm currently a third year student studying fine art at De Montfort University Leicester. My creative practice explores the combination of digital and physical identity through collage, painting, and glitch aesthetics. I use pixelation, distortion, and layered textures to question media-driven beauty standards and self-perception, often inviting viewer interaction to uncover hidden meanings and challenge the boundaries of visual representation.

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Sunset Drive II

Abibat Bonuola Adedayo

In 2024, I painted my largest work to date, *Sunset Drive II* (50cm x 60cm, acrylic and oil on canvas). It is part of my ongoing series, *The Traveller's Path to Serenity*, a body of work with recurring motifs such as winding roads, floral grass fields, glowing skies. The series is personal: it reflects my own search for calm and clarity.

What went well in this painting was my willingness to experiment. I often work across acrylics, oils, watercolours, and gouache, choosing each medium for the qualities it lends: acrylics for speed and vibrancy, oils for softness and depth, watercolours for lightness, and gouache for bold matte surfaces.

For *Sunset Drive II*, I began by blocking the structure quickly with acrylics before moving into oils, which allowed me to layer warmth into the sky and create subtler transitions. While working on this painting, I struggled most with the gradient of the sky, which at one stage became heavy and flat from overworking. I was also eager to complete the painting within two days, and that impatience showed in moments where the paint lost vitality. The turning point came when I stepped back from the canvas, returned later, and allowed myself to apply lighter, more confident strokes.

Giving the work space to breathe restored the sense of movement I was aiming for. The journey of this work extended beyond the studio. In August 2024, *Sunset Drive II* was exhibited at Echoes of Preservation (Creative Youth, Fuse Box, Kingston) and later entered the running for the People's Choice Award at the London Graphic Centre Art Prize 2025. Seeing the painting in public space, and observing how viewers engaged with its atmosphere, reinforced the importance of creating work that invites pause and contemplation.

What I learned from this piece was patience not just in technique, but in approach. Working on a canvas of this size for the first time was overwhelming at first, the scale felt almost too expansive, but it taught me how to take my time, to see the painting as a gradual unfolding rather than a race to the finish. Now, I find joy in the process itself, not only in the outcome.

Looking to the future, I feel encouraged to work in even larger canvases. I want to continue developing this series with even broader horizons, more complex skies, and landscapes that hold immersive spaces for pause, wonder, and serenity.



Above: *Sunset Drive II*

Abibat Bonuola Adedayo
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My name is Abibat Adedayo, a self-taught Nigerian artist based in Birmingham, UK. My practice explores the emotional language of landscapes, using light, colour, and atmosphere as metaphors for memory, healing, and transformation. I often draw inspiration from the natural world and from quiet journeys through urban and rural spaces.

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Everything Is Kung Fu

Tales Sabara

Raised among gardens, orchards, and small farms, always in the company of my paternal grandfather, my bond with plants began in childhood. Even the name of my hometown, Congonhas, comes from the congonha plant, which in Tupi-Guarani means ‘that which sustains, that which nourishes’.

Every artist who works with matter — paper, paint, brush, or clay — inevitably wonders where these materials come from, and what their primal sources are. Much like a chef who falls in love with ingredients, the artist shares the same longing. Perhaps that is why both the artist and chef turn their creative gaze toward what a garden can yield.

Here, ‘garden’ is understood holistically. The same herbs that calm in tea also season meals or yield pigments for painting. Fallen branches feed compost, support tomato vines, and when sharpened become ink-drawing tools: fashioned in the quest for materials superior to those found in stores. A garden holds infinite possibilities, shaped by seasons, geography, climate, and the hands that tend it.



Above: archive image of Congonha Plant. Right: *The Invention of Oil Painting*, engraving by Jan Collaert after Jan van der Straet. ~1600.



Yet the deepest motive lies elsewhere: does my bond with matter change when I cultivate it myself? I believe it does, it becomes a search for deeper connection. In the studios of past centuries, apprentices studied not only technique but also the making of tools and materials. Some artists extended this to nature, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, philosophy — to life itself. Perhaps that is why polymaths like *Albrecht Dürer* and *Leonardo da Vinci* are seen as almost alchemical figures.

In the garden, I sense these chains of continuity, quiet relationships in the essence of all things. I recall the 2010 film *The Karate Kid*, in which Jackie Chan tells Dre: 'Kung Fu is in everything we do. It's in how we put on the jacket, how we take off the jacket. It's in how we treat people. Everything is Kung Fu.'

For me, tending a garden transcends cultivation; it is a practice of presence, discipline, and reverence for natural cycles. A kind of Kung Fu for daily life. Each act — watering, pruning, observing — becomes a mindful movement that connects the artist to time, matter, and essence. The garden ceases to be only a source of raw material; it becomes a teacher, whispering patience and harmony. Like the jacket in the film, the garden becomes a ritual; a constant weaving of action and reflection.

Tales Sabara

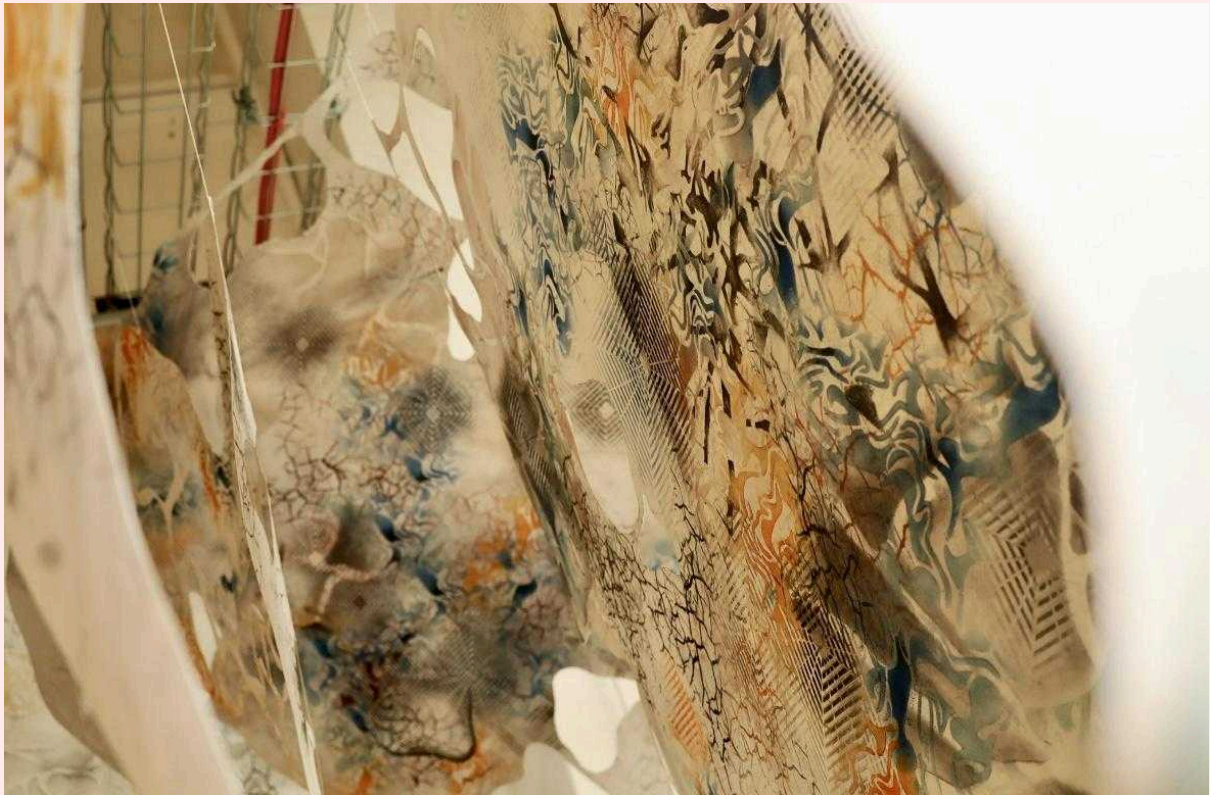
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Exploring Space and Repetition

Anya Kalsi



Above: detail of *Chromatic Bloom*

My work, *Chromatic Bloom* (2025), investigates the tension between repetition and spontaneity, combining layered mark-making with abstract compositions. After months of experimentation, trial, and reflection, I am thrilled to share my final pieces for *Lancaster University's Degree Show 2025*. This project has been a journey of discovery, challenging, rewarding, and full of lessons that will inform my future practice.

My compositions are inspired by cobwebs. Their delicate intricacy, structural complexity, and spatial qualities guided much of my creative process. Using graphite, charcoal, and chalks, I developed textures and tones that engage the viewer and evoke curiosity. The iterative process of sketching, stencil-making, and experimenting with textures allowed me to refine the abstract forms and patterns I aimed to achieve. I felt a strong connection between my inspiration and the resulting compositions, particularly in the way they balance delicacy with structural presence.

I am inspired by contemporary artist Julie Mehretu, whose large-scale paintings and printmaking explore depth through layered mark-making. Her repetition, intricacies, and use of scale are aspects I aim to incorporate in my work in my own unique way. Considering scale, as Mehretu does across multiple panels, has been particularly influential in thinking about how my work occupies space and engages the viewer.

Each piece evolved through layered experimentation: initial sketches, stencil development, and hands-on mark-making. I introduced openings, irregular edges, and rhythmic patterns in the paper to create dynamic surfaces that invite viewers to explore abstraction, materiality, and space from multiple perspectives. One of the most successful aspects of this project was extending my drawings into three dimensions. Hanging the works introduced spatial interaction, making the pieces feel alive and responsive to their surroundings, blurring the line between two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms.

The journey was not without its challenges. Maintaining consistency while embracing spontaneity proved difficult, and there were moments when compositions felt stagnant or overly repetitive. Experimenting with new sculptural techniques involved trial and error, with several pieces not behaving as I had envisioned when displayed. Some material choices required further exploration to achieve the textures and tones I sought.

Looking ahead, I plan to further explore the interplay between drawing and sculpture, pushing the spatial qualities even further. I aim to refine my approach to repetition and layering, discovering new ways to balance structure with spontaneity. I also hope to experiment with alternative materials and methods for integrating three-dimensional elements, allowing my work to engage viewers in unexpected ways.

Ultimately, this body of work has been a process of discovering both my artistic voice and the potential for drawing to transcend the two-dimensional plane. My goal remains to create work that invites dialogue, sparks curiosity, and encourages viewers to experience abstraction, materiality, and space in new and thought-provoking ways.



Above: detail of *Chromatic Bloom*

Anya Kalsi

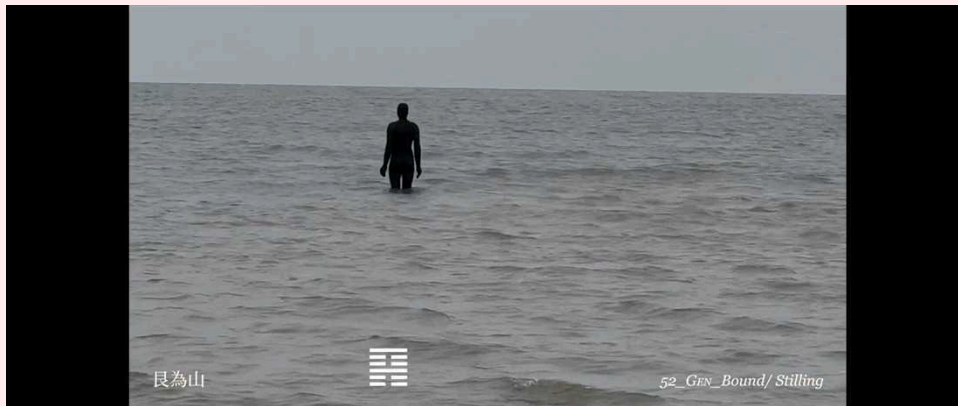
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My work explores dynamic, abstract compositions through layered mark-making, rhythmic patterns, and cut paper. Using graphite, charcoal, and chalk, I evoke texture and tone. Inspired by cobwebs, my drawings increasingly engage space, becoming sculptural. Hanging works invite dialogue with materiality, structure, and the viewer's sensory experience.

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Unpredictability

Ningrui Liu



Above: still from *Film of Changes*

In my creative practice, I constantly explore randomness, unpredictability, and uncertainty, seeking to challenge traditional storytelling and artistic structures. A core aspect of my work is embracing the unknown—allowing chance and spontaneity to guide the process, ultimately disrupting expectations and creating transformative experiences.

One of my key projects, *Film of Changes* (2023), applies the *I Ching*—a traditional Chinese divination system—to filmmaking. By using divinatory logic to guide the creation of audiovisual compositions, this project introduces randomness into the filmmaking process. Rather than relying on traditional scripts, I allow the *I Ching*'s hexagrams to shape the narrative, creating a dynamic system where the story unfolds unpredictably. This process encourages me to relinquish control and embrace uncertainty, shifting the focus from my creative intention to the unfolding of events in real time.

The use of the *I Ching* is not just about creating randomness for its own sake; it is about exploring how ancient methods can be applied to contemporary creative practice. The project has deepened my understanding of how structure can be both a tool and a vehicle for chaos, leading me to rethink how narratives are constructed, and how art can be shaped by external forces beyond the artist's control.

Another key project from my practice, *Etudes Study Group* (2025), builds on similar principles of chance and unpredictability. In collaboration with *Jo Morrison* and *Felix X Tigersonic*, we use Sharon Gal's *Etudes* performance cards to generate improvised, unpredictable compositions. The cards offer guidelines for the performers, but the outcome is never fully predetermined, allowing the performance to evolve in real time. This project has taught me to surrender control over the work and embrace the possibilities that emerge when creative processes are left open-ended. The freedom that comes with unpredictability has expanded my artistic approach, allowing me to see beauty in the unknown and to grow through spontaneous collaboration.



Above: documentation from *Etudes Study Group* performance

Both *Film of Changes* and *Etudes Study Group* share a central theme: the use of uncertainty as a tool for creative discovery. In these projects, I've learned to see failure not as a setback but as an opportunity—an invitation to explore new possibilities and challenge my assumptions. Embracing uncertainty has become an integral part of my practice, guiding me to value experimentation and imperfection as sources of innovation.

Reflecting on these experiences has reinforced my belief that creative practice is about constant exploration and evolution. By allowing unpredictability to shape my work, I have discovered new ways of thinking, making, and being in the world.

For me, uncertainty is not a problem to solve but a condition for growth. Each performance, film, or collaboration is a step into the unknown, an opportunity to listen, adapt, and learn. Sometimes that means following an idea I don't fully understand, or letting an accident reveal a new direction. At other times, it means sharing authorship with others and recognising that creativity emerges most powerfully when it is collective.

Unpredictability is not the opposite of structure but its counterpart. It keeps the work alive, breathing, and responsive, reminding me to approach each project not as a fixed statement but as an ongoing conversation with the world around me.



Above: still from *Film of Changes*

Ningrui Liu

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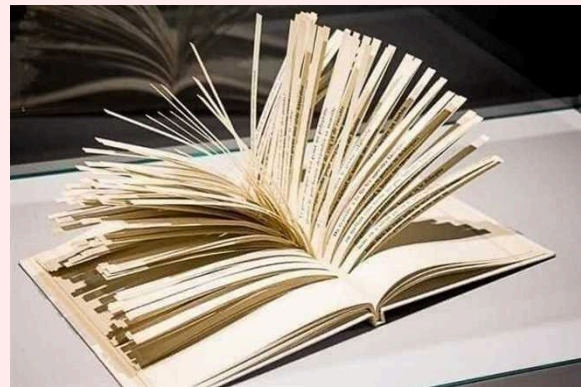
Ningrui Liu (Akira) is a transmedia artist working across film, music, performance, dance, and spoken word. Her practice explores randomness, uncertainty, and the unknown, using interdisciplinary methods and systems like the I Ching to challenge conventional storytelling and create immersive, unpredictable art experiences.

linktr.ee/akira.liu

How The Infinite Panopticon Reshaped My Practice

Micheal E Hower

As a photographer of abandoned places, I've faced a post-COVID landscape where many sites have vanished - lost to vandalism, restricted access, and the growing costs of travel. Losing these spaces has forced me to confront existential questions about my practice and seek new ways to reimagine abandonment. It's a reinvention of myself as an artist.



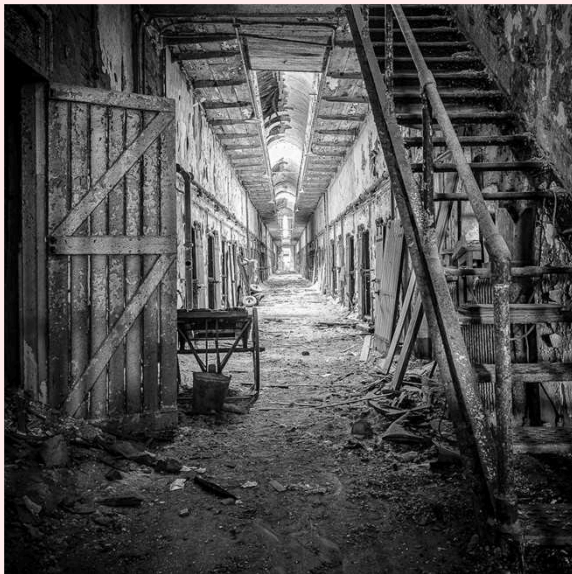
Above: *Cent Mille Millions de Poèmes* by Raymond Queneau (1961)

Left: *The Drawbridge*, Plate 7, by Giovanni Piranesi (1761)

The project framework for *The Infinite Panopticon* series was generated from an exposure to Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Carceri d'Invenzione*, whose impossible prisons blurred the line between structure and imagination. The title references a 'panopticon', a concept prison with cells arranged in a circle array, so that all the people in them can be observed at all times from a central point. The series was inspired by Raymond Queneau's *Cent Mille Millions de Poèmes*, which showed me how constraint could generate endless variation. These influences encouraged me to treat my photographs not as fixed records, but as fragments that could be recombined into new systems.

The resulting photographic systems I created accounted for countless permutations. The possibilities multiplied into the quintillions, echoing Queneau's combinatorial infinity. The process itself became a kind of reflection on chance, memory, and the persistence of human marks in places designed to erase individuality.

In practice, this meant building grids of prison fragments and graffiti 'voltas' using a random number generator. I've long been fascinated by chance as a creative collaborator, and here it opened possibilities I could not have designed alone. The graffiti strips, placed by rule and by chance, became interruptions. Human voices cutting through a rigid order. Each composition revealed something I hadn't consciously sought.



Above: *Block 5* (2019). Left: *Express Yourself* (2020). Both images created before *The Infinite Panopticon* series

Before *The Infinite Panopticon* series, I thought of photography mainly as evidence, a document of preservation. Working on this project taught me that my role is not just to record but to build. I've come to see myself less as a documentarian and more as an architect of fragments. That shift has changed how I think about making art: I now approach each project as an open system, one where meaning emerges through construction, dialogue, and chance rather than through capturing a fixed moment. This has reshaped my identity as an artist.

My sense of narrative has moved away from thinking of photographs as singular, authoritative documents and toward seeing them as components of an unfolding system. Meaning now emerges from relationships: between fragments, between structures, between interruptions. Each Panopticon grid functions less as a record of a prison than as a constructed poem of memory, resistance, and chance.



Above: *No Yourself* (2025). Right: *Knees are Weak from Nausea* (2025). Both images are from the *The Infinite Panopticon* series.

Through *The Infinite Panopticon* series I've learned how powerful constraints can be as creative catalysts. Within this structure, each grid becomes a unique visual poem, simultaneously archival and alive. This project has reshaped how I approach both photography and narrative, emphasizing that meaning often emerges not from a single image, but from the interplay of fragments, systems, and the voices they carry.

Michael E Hower

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My artistic practice reimagines abandoned spaces not as fixed records, but as open systems. Through grids, fragments, and poetic ruptures, I transform documentary photography into visual architectures that question power, preserve memory, and uncover the human traces that endure within ruins.

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Got something reflective for the next issue?

The editorial team welcomes a variety of reflective submissions that capture new ideas, projects, collaborations, and learning experiences—including encounters with exhibitions, publications, fresh ways of working, and creative inspiration.

Submissions should be in a visual essay format, combining text and images to tell a story. This could include photos, digital collages, mind maps, drawings, or diagrams—anything that visually represents creative research.

Full submission guidelines:

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