Arpita Akhanda

Portfolio



Arpita Akhanda’s practice is firmly rooted in research and develops interdisciplinary lines of enquiry on the meaning of body, belonging, home and migration. Akhanda creates nuanced, politically and socially charged, multi-dimensional works that raise pertinent questions about colonial and post-colonial history for a generation that has only known this through handed-down memories or written texts.

Working across paper weaving, photography, performance, installation, and video, Akhanda's practice conceptualizes the body as a "memory collector", a repository of lived experience and a site for post-memorial reconstruction. Born into a family of artists who migrated from Bangladesh during the 1947 Partition of India, moving through various regions before settling in Odisha, India, she explores the intricate relationship between contemporary life and inherited trauma. She navigates this terrain through intergenerational memories, family archives, and the elusive quest for home.



Watch the artist discuss her 2026 solo



Watch the artist discuss her practice

Akhanda's performance practice serves as the foundation for all her works -- be it as a standalone medium or the conceptual base for her weavings and videos. She utilises paper weaving as a metaphorical process, intertwining the warp of past with the weft of the present and vice versa to interrogate identity. The resulting visual language -- fragmented, pixelated, and obscured -- serves as a metaphor for lost narratives as she revisits institutional and personal histories, memories and archives of colonial and post-colonial recollections. These include her family's collection of poems, photographs, documents, letters, telegrams, postcards, oral histories, and travelogues, meticulously preserved by her grandparents and parents since the Partition of India.

Through these methods, she explores how memory travels in the body, the archive, the water and the land: what is kept, what is rebuilt, what fades, and what resurfaces through the ongoing act of remembering. Arpita Akhanda's artistic practice responds to the imperative to decolonise and reinterpret these memories.



The Memory Collector

Arpita Akhanda

“Working across paper weaving, photography, performance, installation, and video, my practice conceptualizes the body as a "memory collector", a repository of lived experience and a site for post-memorial reconstruction. Born into a family shaped by the trauma of displacement during the 1947 Partition of India, I explore the intricate relationship between contemporary life and inherited trauma. I navigate this terrain through intergenerational memories, family archives, and the elusive quest for home.

My performance practice serves as the foundation for all my work, whether as a standalone medium or the conceptual base for my weavings and videos. I utilize paper weaving as a metaphorical process, intertwining the warp of past with the weft of the present and vice versa to interrogate identity. The resulting visual language, fragmented, pixelated, and obscured, serves as a metaphor for lost narratives.”

“Core of my practice lies on the exploration of personal histories often overshadowed by institutional narratives. Preserved within my family's archive since the partition and their migratory journey are poems, photographs, documents, letters, telegrams, postcards, oral histories, and travelogues by my grandparents and parents. Through staged photography and mise-en-scène, I seek to revisit these memories, reshaping their narratives and reclaiming agency over them.

Rivers, seas, and waterways, has become a recurring motif in my work, carrying memory across time and space. I am particularly drawn to the presence of water in archival or collected maps, elements that endure despite shifting political borders. By isolating and weaving these water forms into my pieces, I intend to shift their meaning from tools of territorial demarcation to symbols in my own search for home. Woven as weft through broken images, they form fluid connections through which stories of migration, loss, and connection can be reinterpreted. Rather than hiding breaks, water binds them, offering a kind of repair that embraces fragmentation.

Through these methods, I explore how memory travels in the body, the archive, the water and the land: what is kept, what is rebuilt, what fades, and what resurfaces through the ongoing act of remembering.”

Arpita Akhanda



Image from: 360 minutes of requiem | 2022 |3 hours, 2 days



When the curtain falls (Series)
Digital Jacquard weaving
2025-26



When the curtain falls (Act I-scene I)
40 x 20 inches

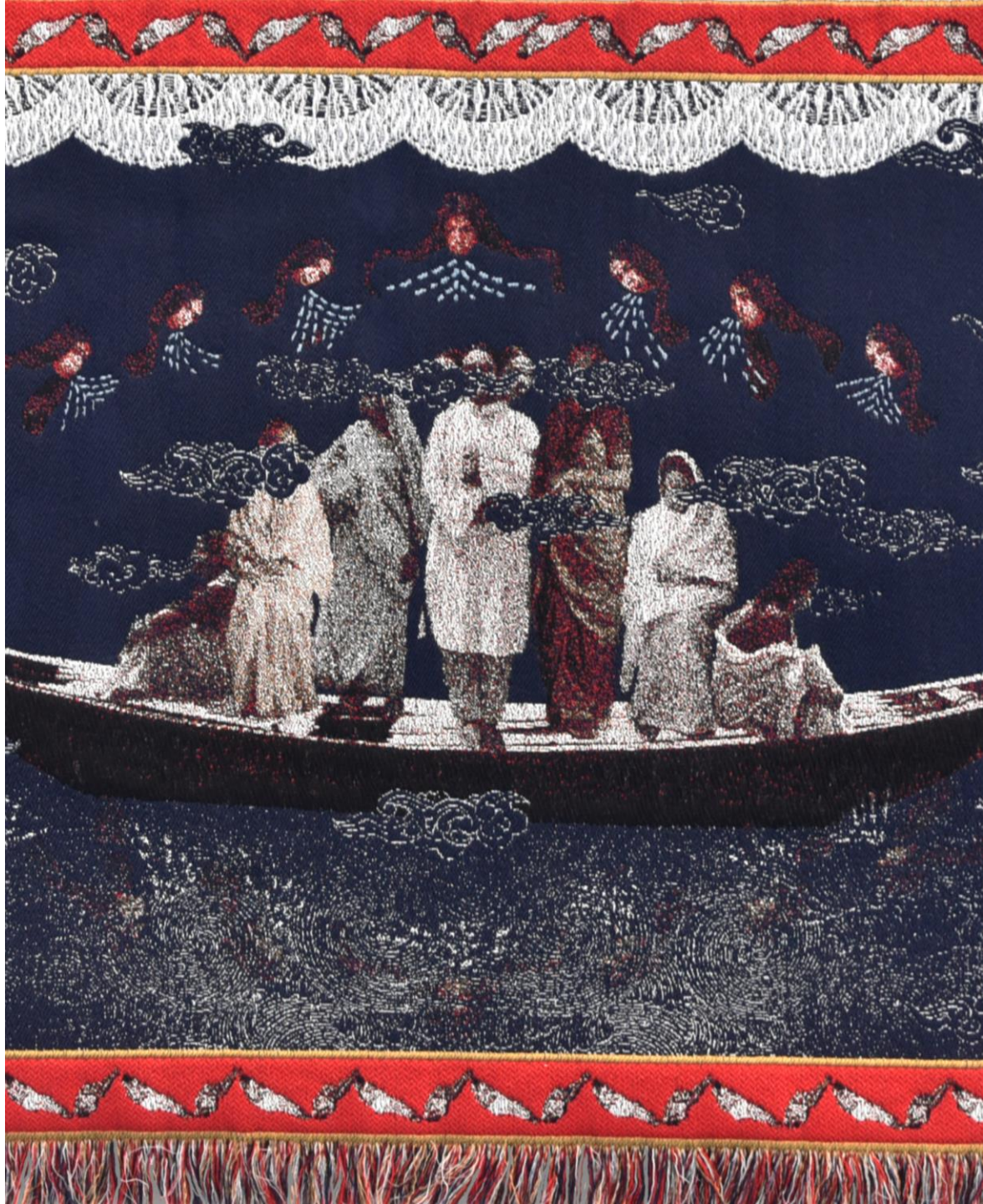


When the curtain falls (Act I-scene II)
40 x 20 inches

*When the curtain fall*s series is my first experiment with Jacquard weaving, extending and expanding my ongoing explorations of paper weaving into the language of textile. The series unfolds as a theatrical sequence across five pieces. Like the structure of a play, each tapestry marks a different act, gradually building toward a climactic moment before dissolving into silence.

The first two works introduce the female and male protagonists independently. Each stands upon a boat, a recurring motif in my practice that functions simultaneously as stage, vessel, and threshold. Suspended on water, the boat refuses permanence, embodying migration as an ongoing condition rather than a completed journey. Above them, the sun and moon register the passage of time. For me, however, time is not linear; it is cyclical, layered, and parallel, where past, present, and future coexist and repeatedly intersect.

Surrounding these characters are wind heads borrowed from early maps. Historically, these decorative faces appeared around the borders of maps, blowing wind from their mouths to indicate directional forces. In one corner, a floating figure holds a stereoscope, attempting to peer into the unfolding scene. I consider this figure my own self-portrait, looking into a past that can never be fully witnessed, trying to bridge the distance between archival photographs, oral histories, and lived experience.



Detail



Installation view



The narrative builds toward the large central tapestry, where the story reaches its climax, capturing the suspended moment just before the curtain falls. Rather than presenting a complete narrative, the work offers fragments and clues, inviting viewers to imagine what has happened before this scene. The stage curtains are inspired by my paternal grandmother's crochet work, particularly the torans, or decorative doorway hangings, that she made by hand. By transforming these domestic textiles into theatrical curtains, I connect intimate family histories with the language of performance.

When the curtain falls (Act II)
118.11 x 118.11 inches approx.

Within this central composition, all the characters converge, climbing over one another until they arrive at a collective frozen gesture at the end of the act. Their intertwined bodies form a sculptural mountain of figures, a monument to accumulated memories. This suspended moment echoes my own experience of working with inherited histories: memories that remain incomplete yet momentarily crystallize through acts of reconstruction.

Running through the composition are traced river systems rendered in gold. Like kintsugi, these lines do not conceal fractures but hold them together, stitching together broken narratives while acknowledging their incompleteness. They become both geographical markers and symbolic repairs, connecting fragmented memories into a shared landscape.

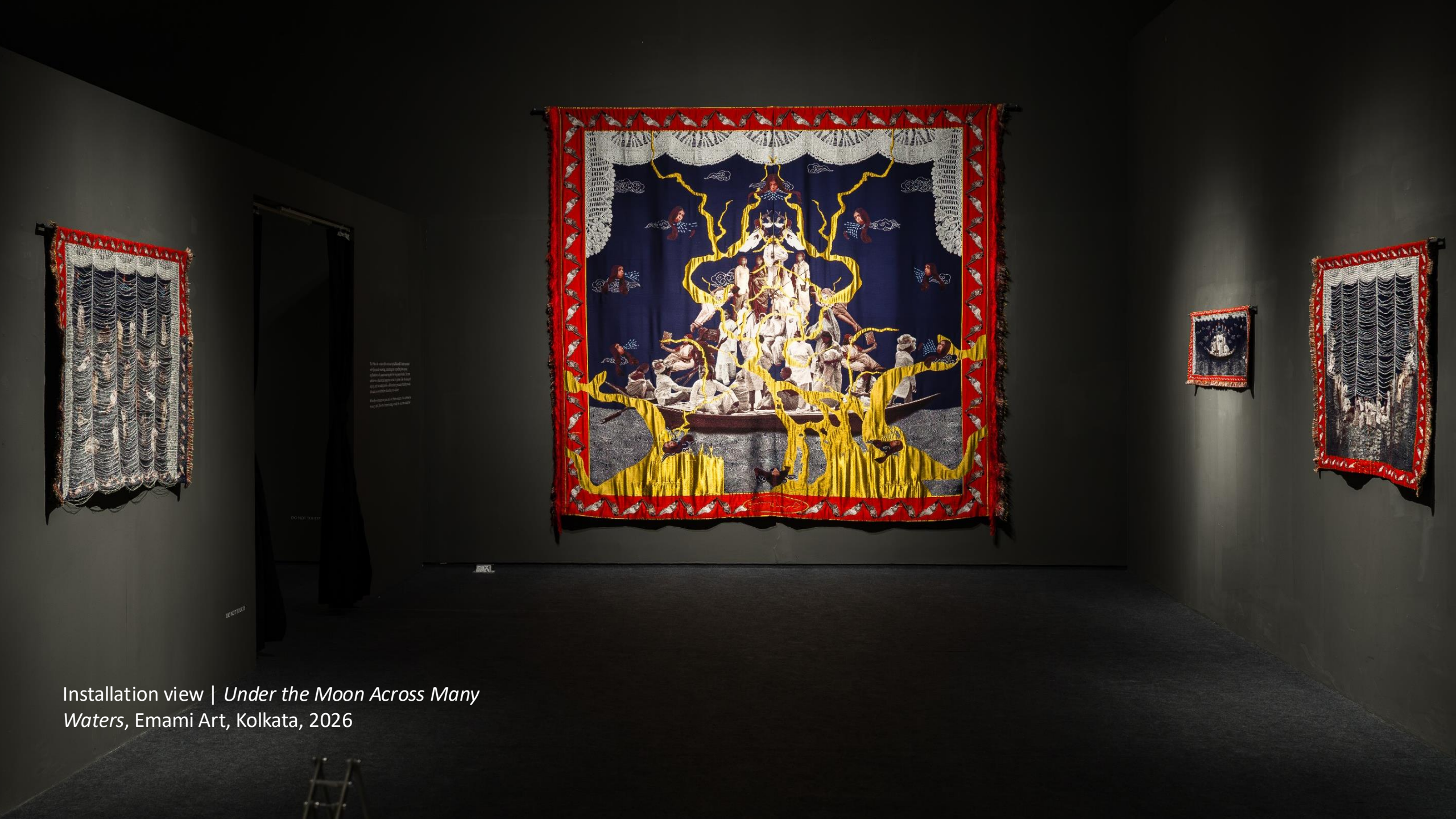


Detail

Along the borders appear repeated images of my grandmother and me in reenacted photographs. I hold a hath pakha (hand fan), an object she would use to fan us as children while sharing stories of migration before we fell asleep. Here, our roles are reversed. Instead of my grandmother narrating these stories to me, I appear to be recounting this climactic scene back to her, carrying forward memories that were once passed down to me through the gesture of holding the hathpakha.



Detail



Installation view | *Under the Moon Across Many Waters*, Emami Art, Kolkata, 2026

The penultimate tapestry marks the closing gesture of the performance. The boat, which has carried the characters throughout the narrative, is no longer present. In its absence, the water rises, gradually overtaking the landscape. The figures stand together in a semicircular formation as the curtain begins to descend. This final gesture acknowledges not only the end of the performance but also the inevitable surrender of the body to time, memory, and history. As the water continues to rise, the boundaries between figure and landscape begin to dissolve.



When the curtain falls (Act III - scene I)
40 x 40 inches

In the final tapestry, the curtain has fallen. The characters disperse into the flooded landscape, their bodies slowly disappearing into the water as though being reclaimed by it. Rather than depicting an ending, this work suggests a return, a quiet merging of the body with the terrain that has carried these histories across generations. The absence of the boat marks the end of movement as a physical journey; what remains is the persistence of memory itself, diffused through water, landscape, and time. The figures do not vanish completely but dissolve into the very environment that has shaped their stories, leaving only traces behind.

When the witnesses are gone and only traces remain, what survives: the memory itself, the act of remembering, or only the desire to remember?



When the curtain falls (Act III - scene II)
40 x 40 inches



Installation view | *Under the Moon Across Many Waters*, Emami Art, Kolkata, 2026



はざま1 (Hazama I)
2026
Paper weaving, Archival pigment on Bamboo Paper
200 x 70 inches approx.
Photodocumentation by Nagano Satoshi
Fukuoka Asian Art Museum Residency



Front view

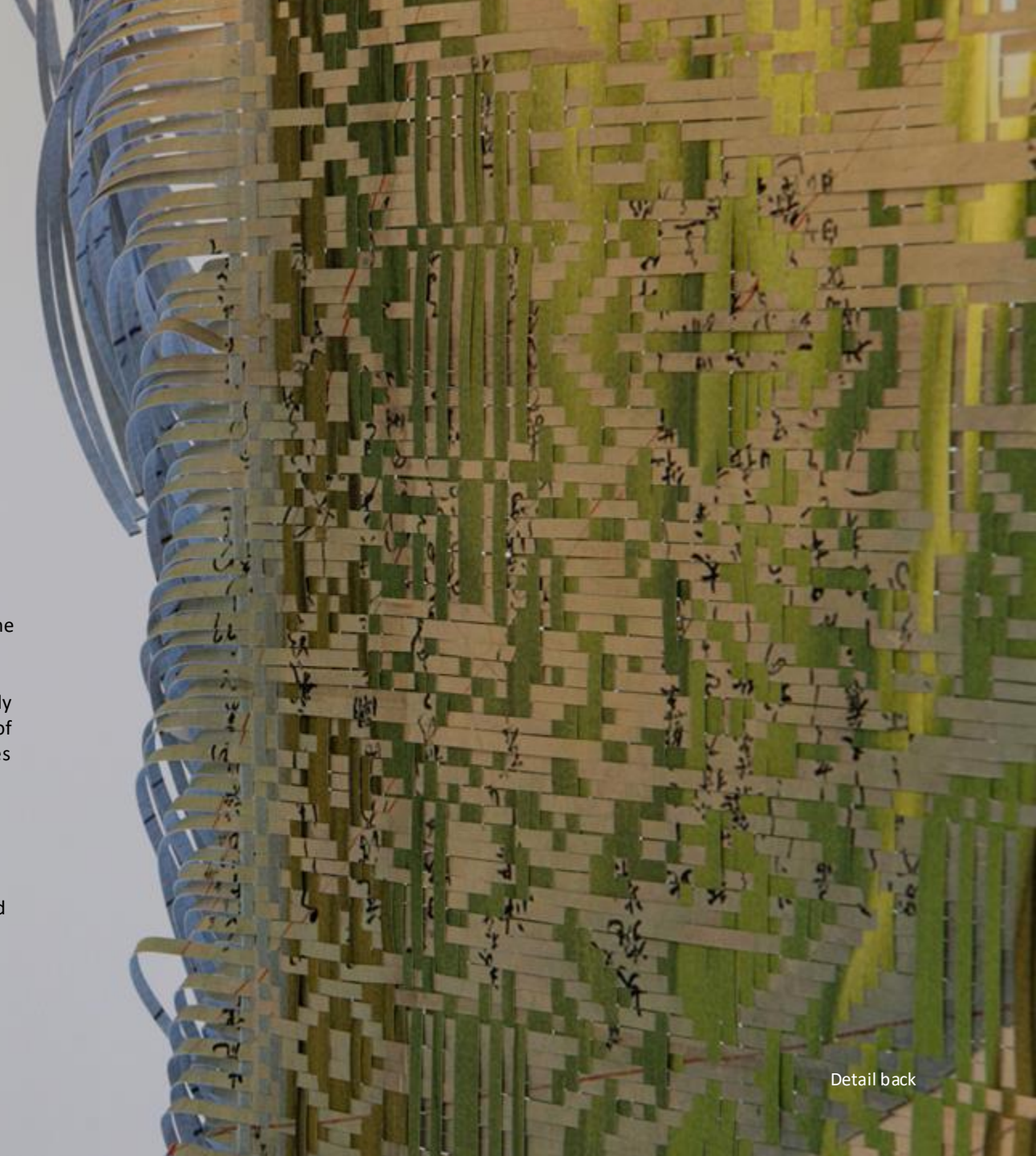


Back view

Hazama I explores the notion of the in- between as a space where memory, geography, and identity continuously intersect and transform. Developed during my residency at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, the work is rooted in the Japanese concept of hazama, the interval or threshold between one state and another. Moving through Fukuoka, crossing its rivers, and observing its patterns, architecture, and histories, I began to understand the city as a living archive where cultural memory is embedded within the everyday landscape. These encounters became the foundation of the work, opening a dialogue between my own history of inherited memory and the
local histories of Fukuoka.

The work takes the form of a paper weaving in which photographic self-portraits become the warp and archival maps of Fukuoka's waterways form the weft. The self-portraits depict me wearing a white hadagi (kimono undergarment), a gesture that symbolizes an intimate conversation with the inner self. In each portrait I hold a sprig of evergreen pine (matsu), traditionally associated with endurance, prosperity, and resilience through the harshness of winter. As these images intertwine with the maps, the act of weaving becomes a space of internal healing, binding the body to the geography in which the work was created and experienced. The resulting surface suggests that both the human body and water bodies function as repositories of memory, continuously collecting, carrying, and reshaping lived experience.

The work is informed by research into Hakata-ori, where simplified forms hold layered meanings, alongside influences from Hakata-bei, Yamakasa, Kurume-kasuri, noh, kabuki, butoh, and the local nature and history of Fukuoka.



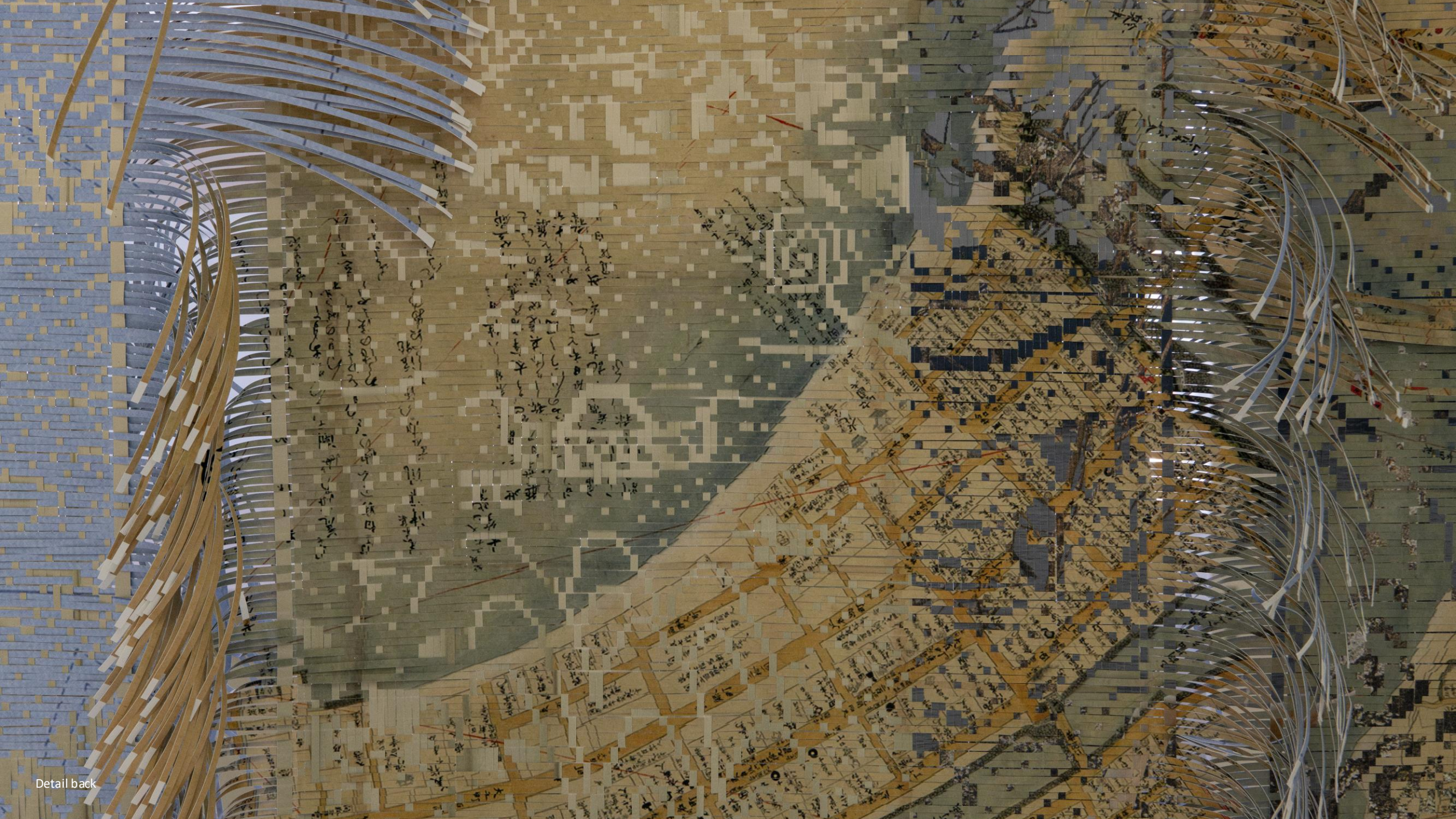
Detail back



Installation view | *Under the Moon Across Many Waters*, Emami Art, Kolkata, 2026



Detail front



Detail back



時を包む (Toki o Toutsumu)
2026
2hrs
Produced during Fukuoka Asian Art Museum Residency
Image documentation FAAM
Video documentation and Editing: Kenji Makizono



In *Toki o Tsutsumu*, I use wrapping as a way to think through memory as something that is both held and transformed through touch. Stones collected from the Mikasagawa, fragments of geological and migratory history, are cleaned and wrapped in fabric printed with maps from the present city hall, bringing together two temporal layers of the city: what is recorded now, and what has accumulated over time.

The act of wrapping also comes from my experience in Fukuoka, where wrapping carries its own cultural weight as a gesture of care, offering, relation and also border. I am interested in how this shifts meaning when placed in dialogue with these stones: what it means to hold something, to conceal it, to protect it, and at the same time to acknowledge disappearance. Through this process, I think about the city as something shaped by migration and diaspora, where histories are not fixed, but continuously folded into the present through acts of covering, carrying, and remembering.

Excerpt Video link: 時を包む (Toki o Toutsumu)















Post performance remains



懐かしい (Natsukashii)
2025
Paper weaving
Archival pigment on Bamboo Paper woven with Tatebaku
91 x 22 inches
Kyoto Art Centre
Photographed by Haruka Oka

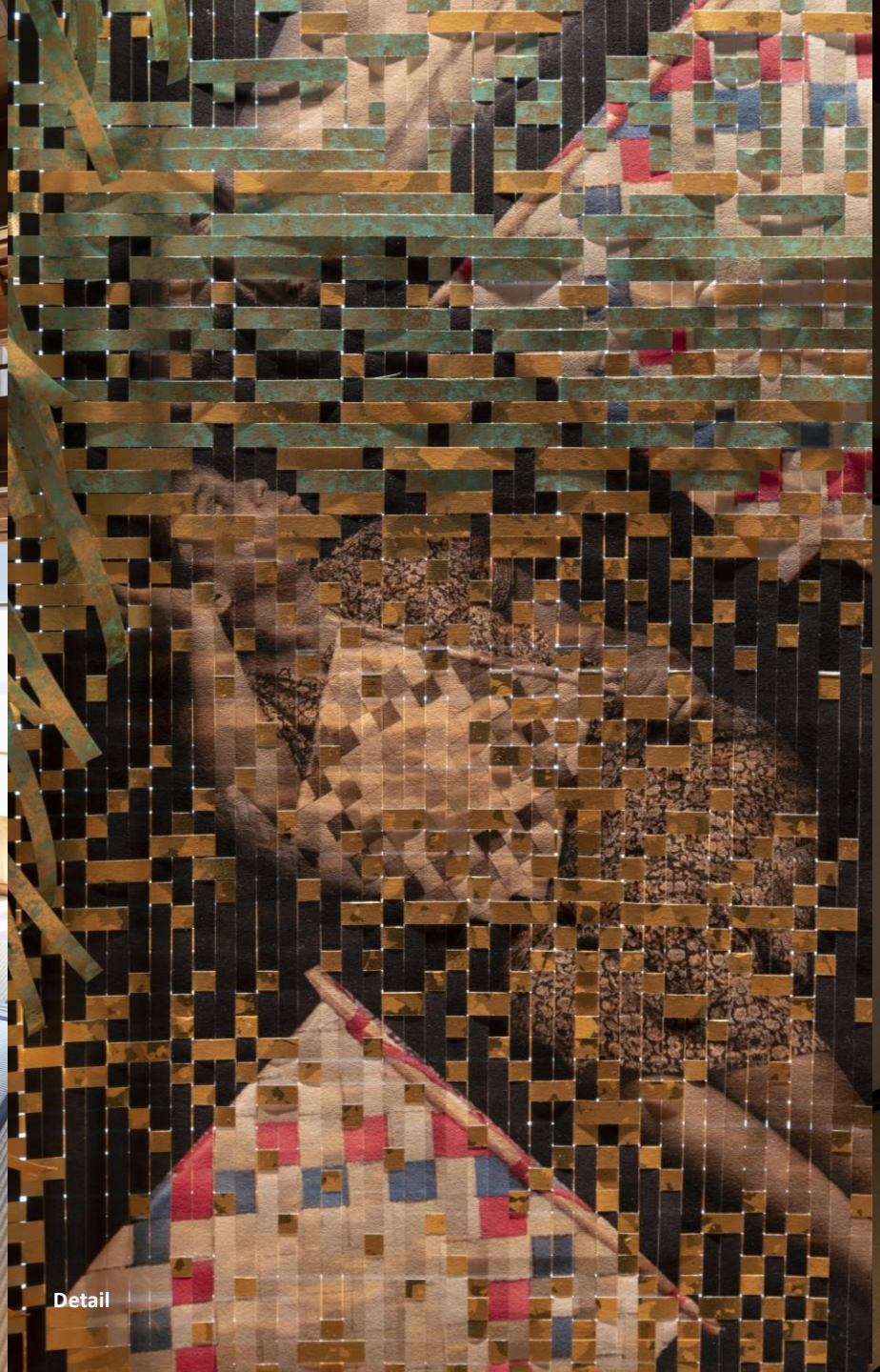


懐かしい (Natsukashii) emerges from my engagement with textile traditions and material storytelling. Inspired by Kyoto's centuries-old Nishijin weaving, renowned for its intricate patterns and craftsmanship, I developed woven paper works that echo the rhythmic structures of these textiles. By intertwining Nishijin's historical significance with my practice, I tried to construct a metaphor for memory, threads interwoven across time, binding past and present, rupture and repair. Gold paper, reflecting the fine gold threads of Nishijin textiles, becomes a vital element, turning material into a vessel for narratives beyond its form. In this delicate interplay of texture and meaning, I try to evoke natsukashii, a longing for what is remembered yet distant.

I wove motifs collected during my time in Kyoto, matsu (pine), mizu (water), and kumo (cloud), representing land, water, and sky, extending the tradition of landscape representation. Pine, symbolizing resilience, anchors the composition; waves, embodying impermanence, flow through; clouds, ever-shifting, suggest freedom.



Front view



Detail



Back view



Transitory Body
2025
Image from Performed at Kyoto Art Centre, Kyoto, Japan
Photographed by Haruka Oka

In *Transitory Body*, I adopted the action of stamping dates on my body, resonating it with the action of stamping as an official procedure connected with the body in transit. These dates hold dual significance, intertwining the threads of my family's history with the broader narrative of shared histories.

I extend an open invitation to those who bear witness to my work, urging them to share their own memories of loss, whether stemming from partition, separation, division, dissection, or detachment. I offer my body as a memory collector, I, in turn, share a memory of my own, initiating a migration of memory.

Specifically for the Kyoto edition of the performance I asked my viewers to share a memory related to river or water.



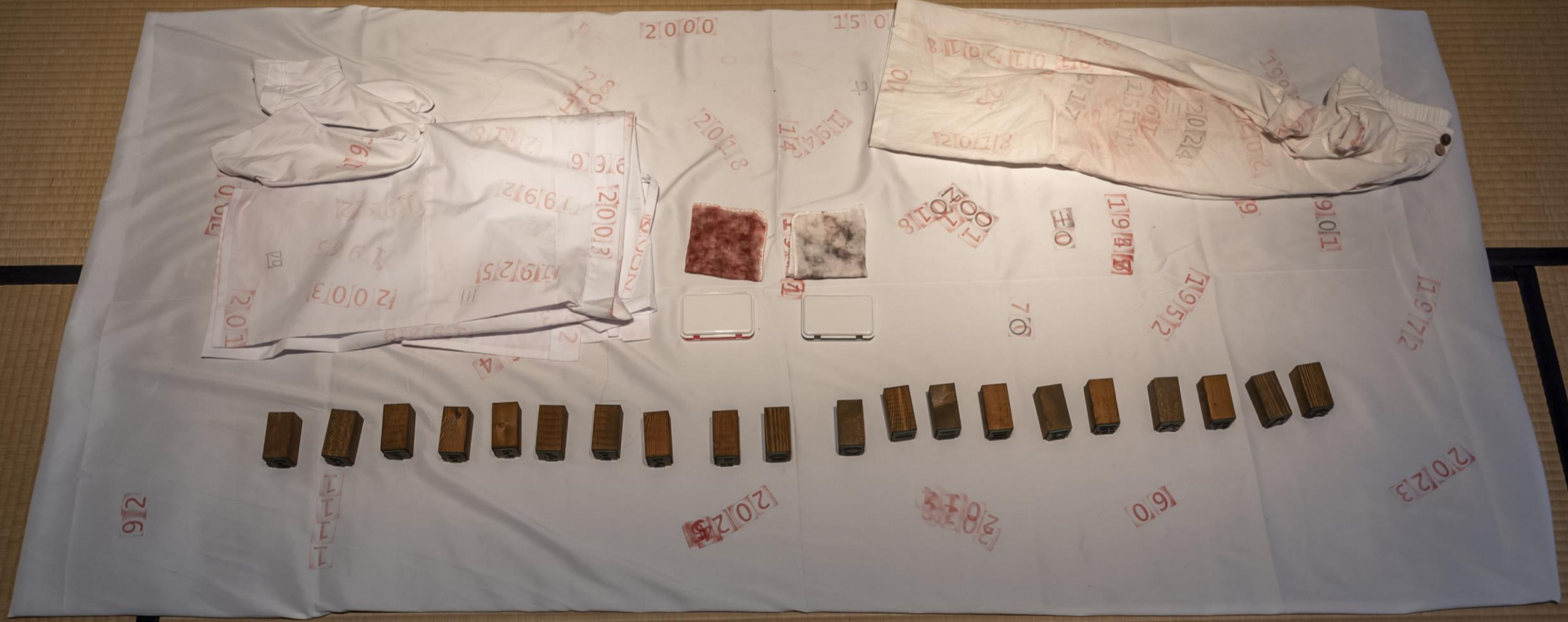




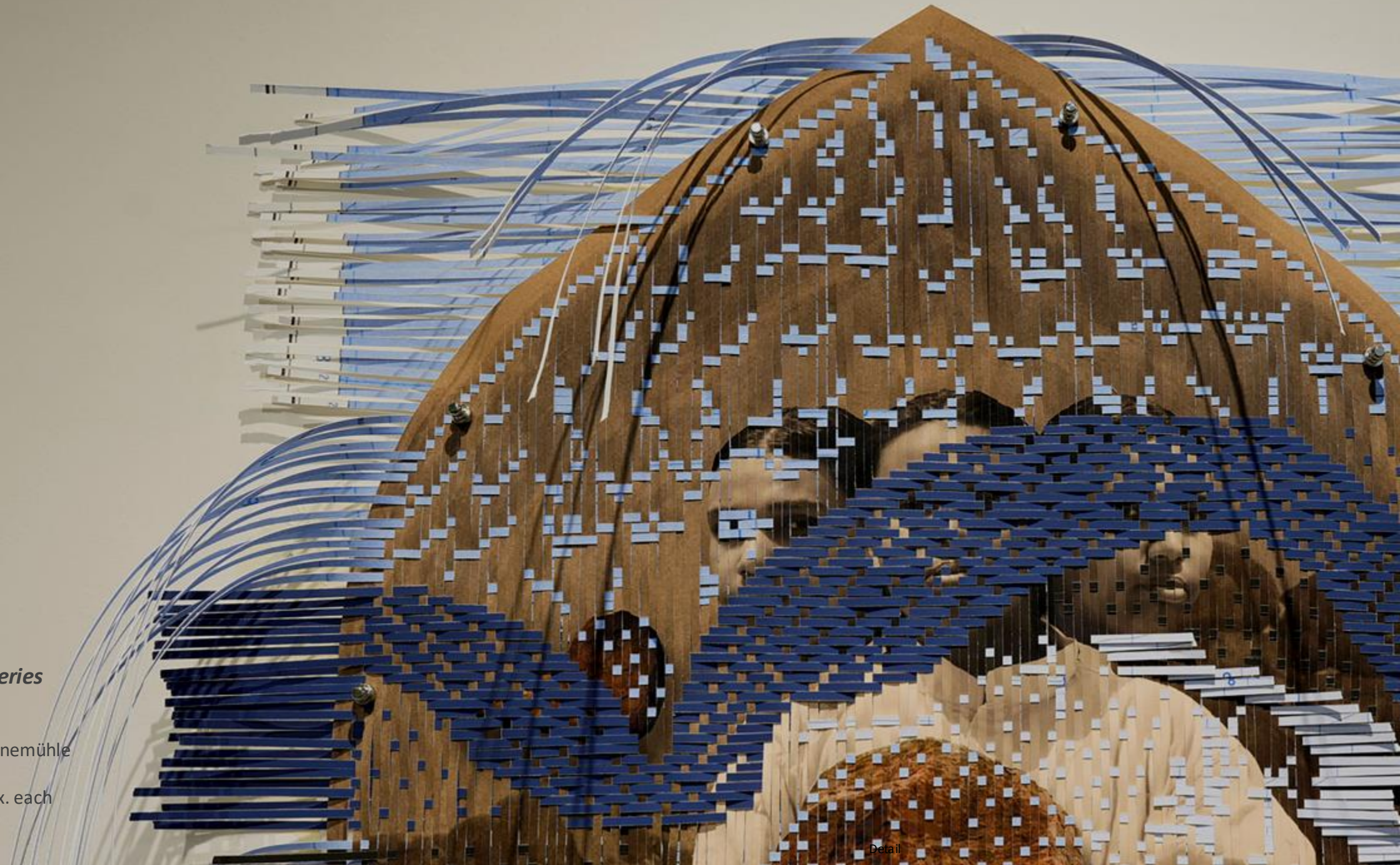








Post performance remains



Dendritic Data I Series
2024
Paper weaving
Archival print on Hahnemühle
Photo Rag paper
69 x 50 inches approx. each
Hampi Art Labs

Detail





Detail

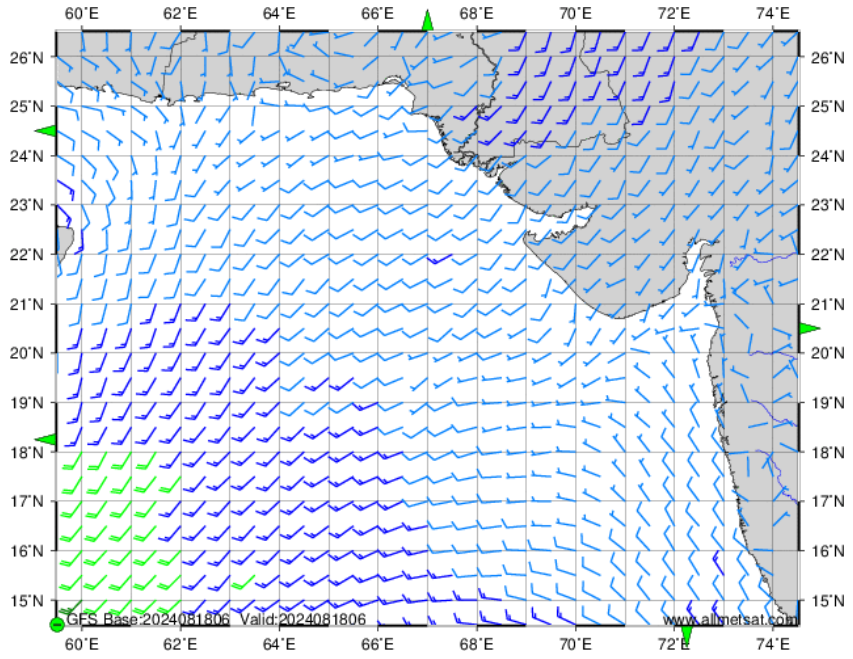
Inspired by the iconographies of temples and the intricate patterns in the landscape of Hampi, India. Dendritic Data I is a layered exploration of time and place, interweaving elements of land, water, and wind.



References and graphs drawings of the collected patterns

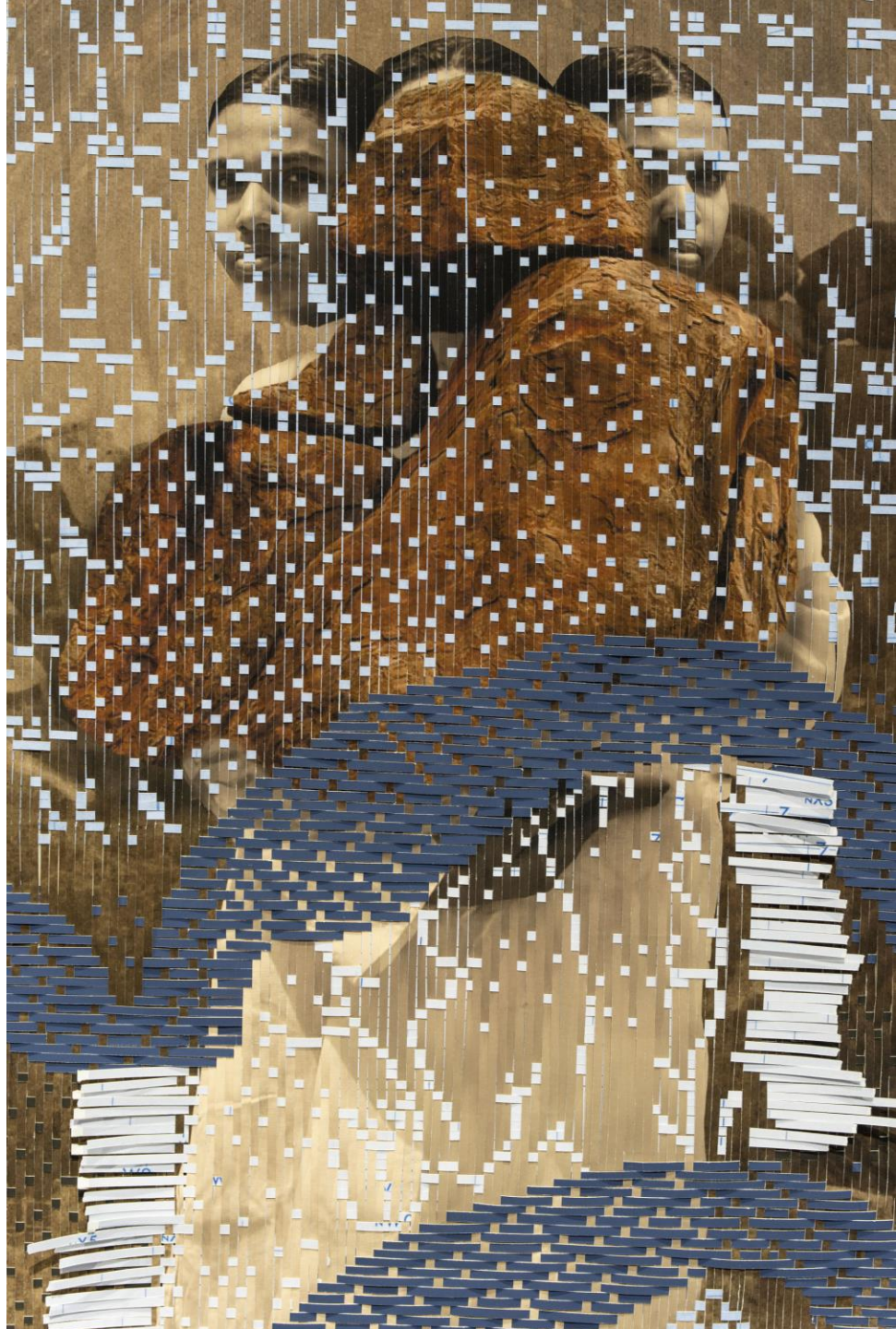


The piece is rooted in the dendritic patterns I found on granite mines in Hampi, reflecting the natural contours and identity of the region. These patterns intertwine with representations of the Tungabhadra River, an essential waterway that shapes both the city and the lives within it. The movement of the wind across the river and onto the land is also captured in this work, with wind patterns woven into the top section, evoking the appearance of ancient text or coded language.



The piece is divided visually into three segments by the flowing, river-like patterns that cross the central figure, symbolizing a passage through time. This tripartite division corresponds to the three faces of the self-portrait, representing past, present, and future as concurrent, coexisting states rather than a linear sequence. This choice reflects a personal philosophy of time as a parallel phenomenon, where moments coexist rather than follow one another.

In the figure's embrace is a heavy boulder, symbolizing the weight of memory and the burden of history each of us carries. This weight is an inextricable part of our being, grounding the figure while also reflecting the resilience of the human spirit. The lower section of the work incorporates motifs inspired by the temple bases of Hampi, grounding the piece in the cultural and architectural heritage of the place.



Detail



Ongoing work

Whispering Memories, confessing past and holding secrets

2023

Paper weaving, Archival ink on Tyvek

177 in x 150



Installation View



Whispering Memories, confessing past and holding secrets is an ongoing large-scale paper weaving project from my immersive experience during the Jan Van Eyck Residency in Maastricht, Netherlands. This work draws inspiration from my travels across Europe and delves into the intricate fabric of memories carried by sites and objects that unfurl their narratives through time.

Detail





Documentation from the process of making the work.

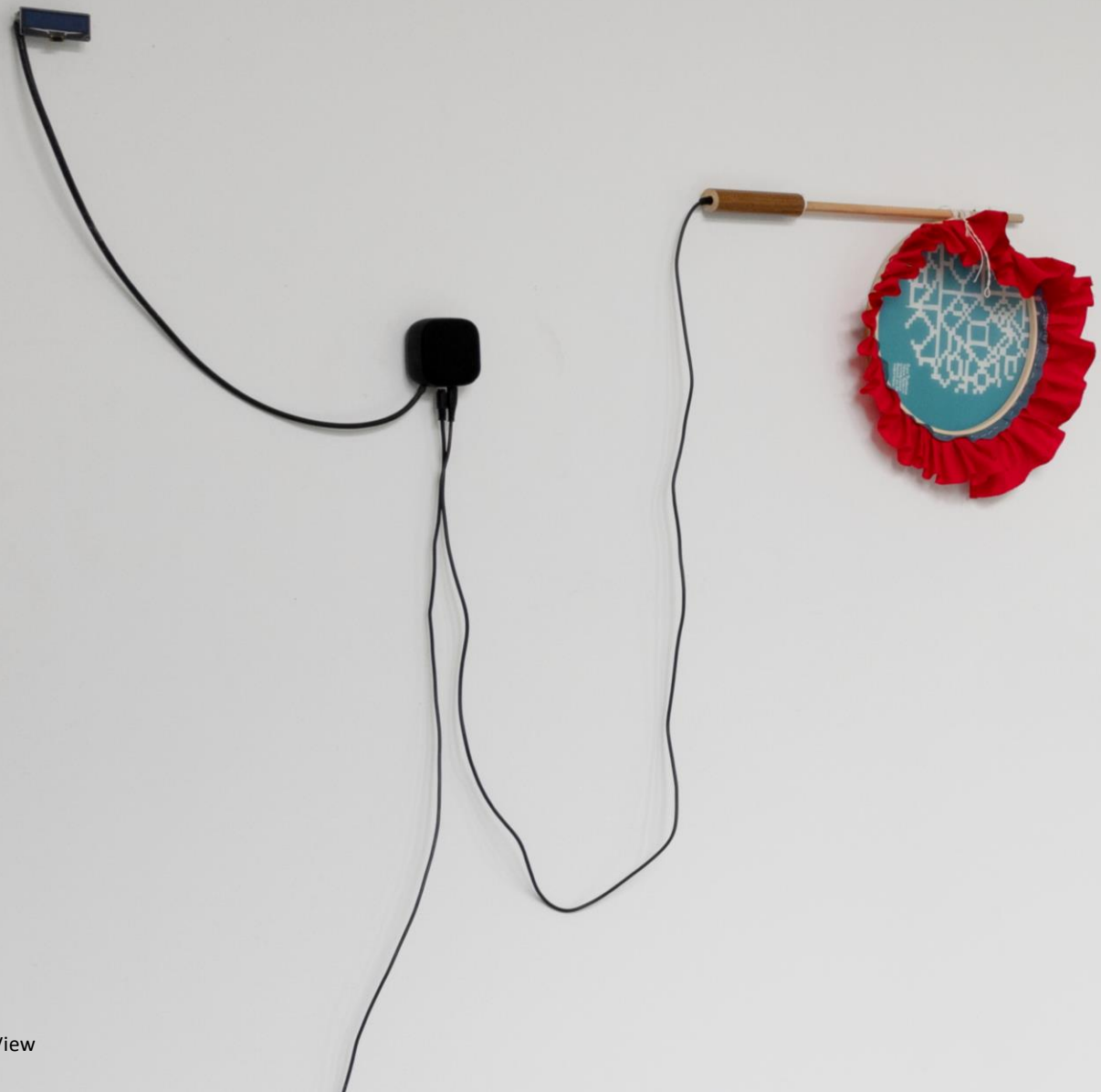


On going

Hath-Pakha

2023

Silkscreen print, Hand fan, Speaker, Digital screen



Installation View

This work is an ongoing documentation of the memories of our home through the memories of the existing women in the family who came to India during/after the partition.

The vierews have to rotate the hath-pakha (hand-fan) to listen to memories.

Dearest thakuma,

Do you remember the sultry, sleepless power-cut nights, when I would sleep next to you, the breeze of the rotating hath-pakha, (hand-fan) in your hand creating a cool background rhythm to the stories of partition you would tell us. As we travelled with the night into a deeper darkness, your stories wove themselves through my sense of being. These are the indelible memories of home, memories of belonging and of my childhood.



Viewers interacting with the work



Ami Utvastu Noi I & II
(I am not a refugee I & II)
2023
Paper weaving with archival print
63.7 x 57.4 in. (162 x 146 cm.) approx.

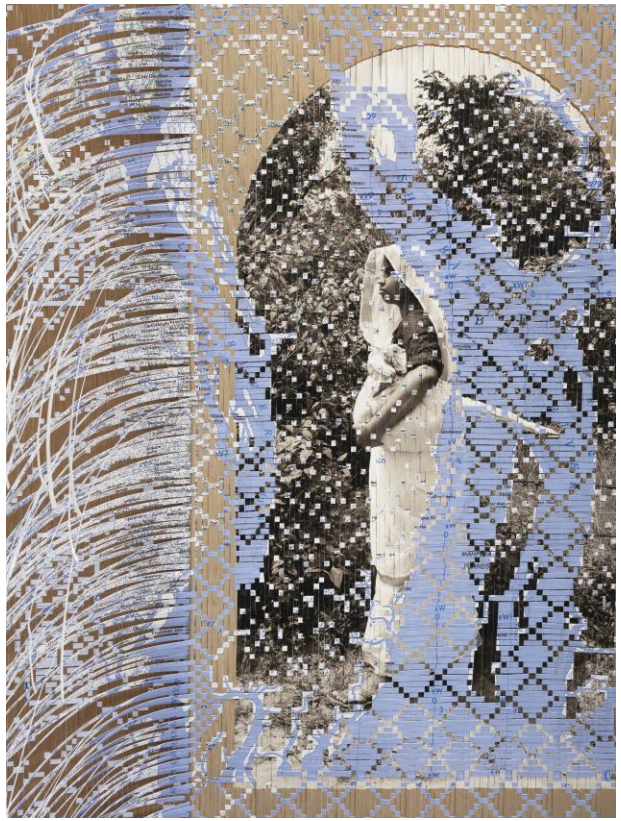




Ami Utvastu Noi, which means I am not a refugee in my mother tongue, Bengali, revisits the space of language, longing and anxiety of a person haunted by the history of displacement and migration. My process involves staged photography and mise-en-scène that revisit undocumented moments from my familial past.

Ami Utvastu Noi I (I am not a refugee I)





Ami Utvastu Noi II (I am not a refugee II)
This work is in the permanent collection of the K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen Düsseldorf



180 minutes of requiem
2023
3 hours
Part of TRESPASSING: An (Un)Intended Unity
At Huis Marseille Museum of Photography, Amsterdam

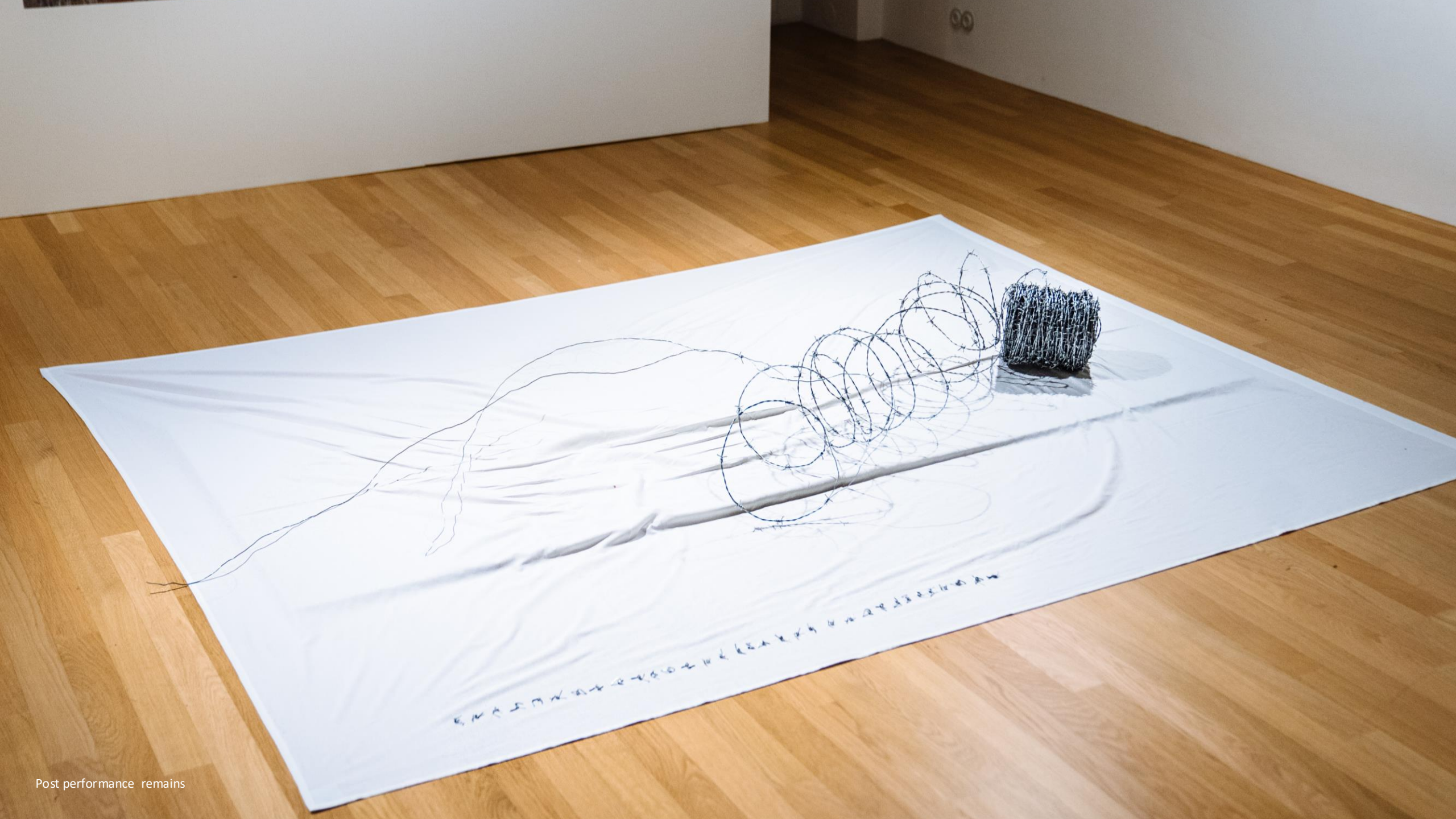




180 Minutes of Requiem explores the notions of nationalism, borders and partitions through the act of deconstructing 180 feet of barbed wire fence over a 180-minute-long immersive performance staged over three hours.







Post performance remains



Transitory Body
2023
Performed at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen Museum (K21), Dusseldorf
Photographed by Linda Inconi.





In *Transitory Body*, I adopted the action of stamping dates on my body, resonating it with the action of stamping as an official procedure connected with the body in transit. These dates hold dual significance, intertwining the threads of my family's history with the broader narrative of our country.

I extend an open invitation to those who bear witness to my work, urging them to share their own memories of loss, whether stemming from partition, separation, division, dissection, or detachment. I offer my body as a memory collector, I, in turn, share a memory of my own, initiating a migration of memory.

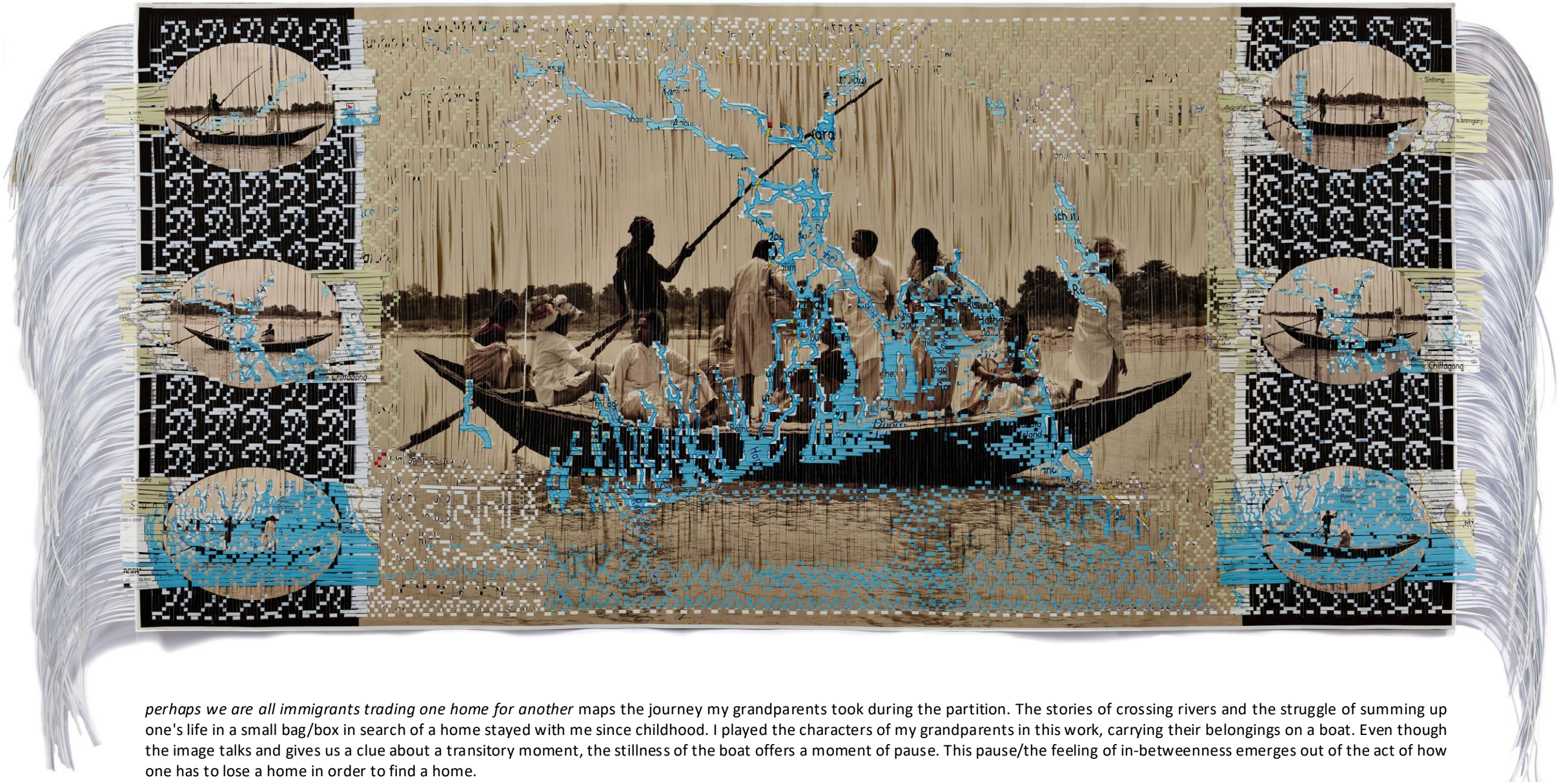








perhaps we are all immigrants trading one home for another
2022
Paper weaving
36 x 102 in. (91 x 259 cm.)
In private collection



perhaps we are all immigrants trading one home for another maps the journey my grandparents took during the partition. The stories of crossing rivers and the struggle of summing up one's life in a small bag/box in search of a home stayed with me since childhood. I played the characters of my grandparents in this work, carrying their belongings on a boat. Even though the image talks and gives us a clue about a transitory moment, the stillness of the boat offers a moment of pause. This pause/the feeling of in-betweenness emerges out of the act of how one has to lose a home in order to find a home.



Digital photo-manipulation



The transition from colour images to sepia tone deliberately employed to symbolize a shift in time.



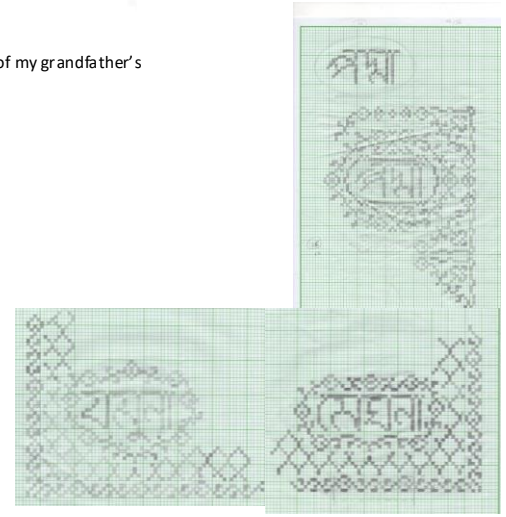
The base photograph



Enactments of my grandmother's charecter



Enactments of my grandfather's charecter



Developing the graph for weaving

Digital photo-manipulation for the paper weaving *Perhaps We Are All Immigrants Trading One Home for Another* Paper weaving
2022
Assisted by Ruma Choudhury & Ujjal Dey



360 minutes of requiem
2022
3 hours, 2 days
Performed at The studio, India Art Fair.



360 minutes of requiem questions the notions of nationalism, borders, and partitions by deconstructing 360 feet of barbed wire fence over a 360-minute-long immersive performance staged over two days. Inviting viewers to witness and physiologically immerse themselves in the laborious process of dismantling these metaphoric and literal barriers that have divided us for centuries and are continuing to do so.



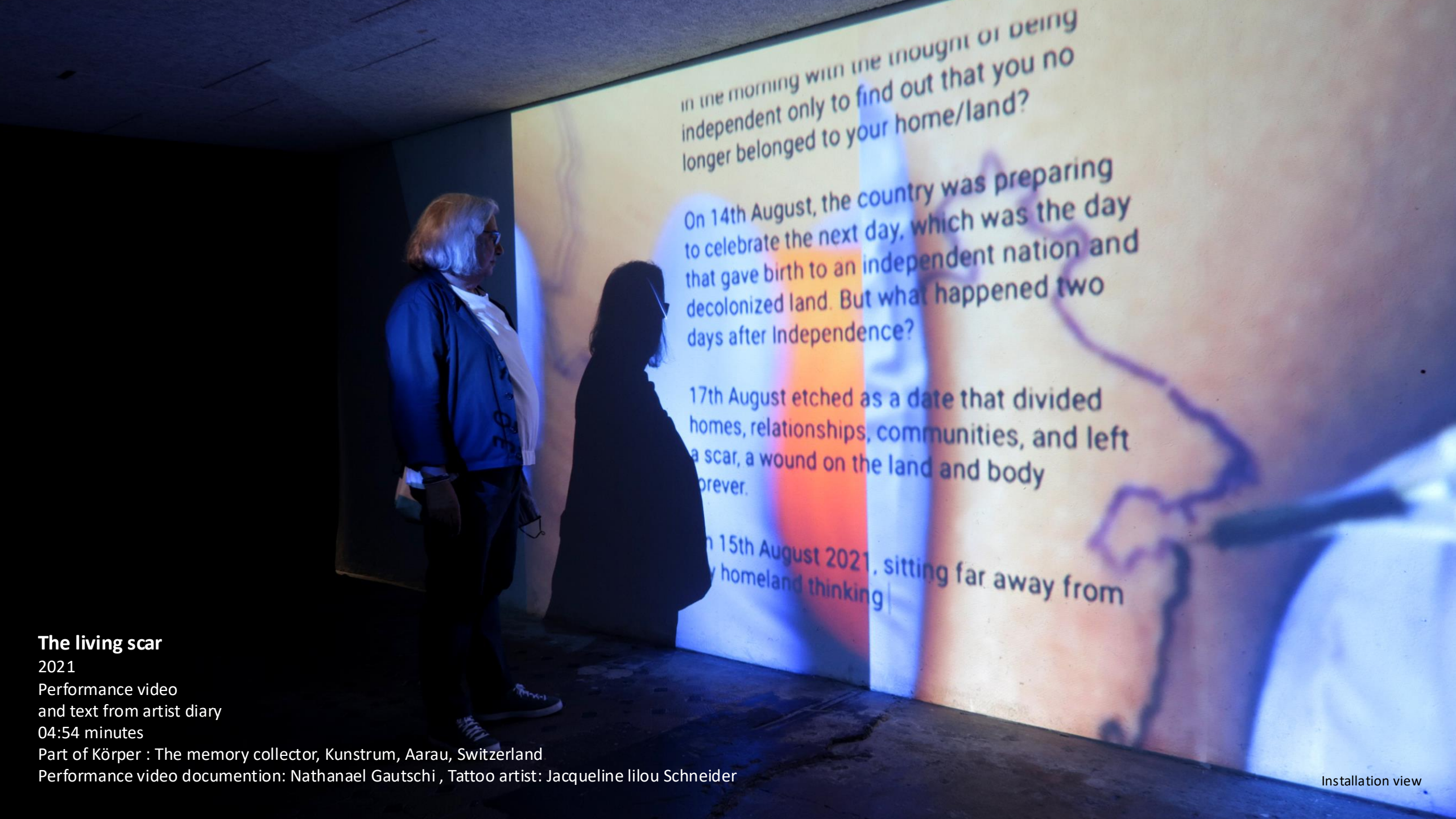




Presenting the residue to the witness as a token of rememberence



Traces from performance



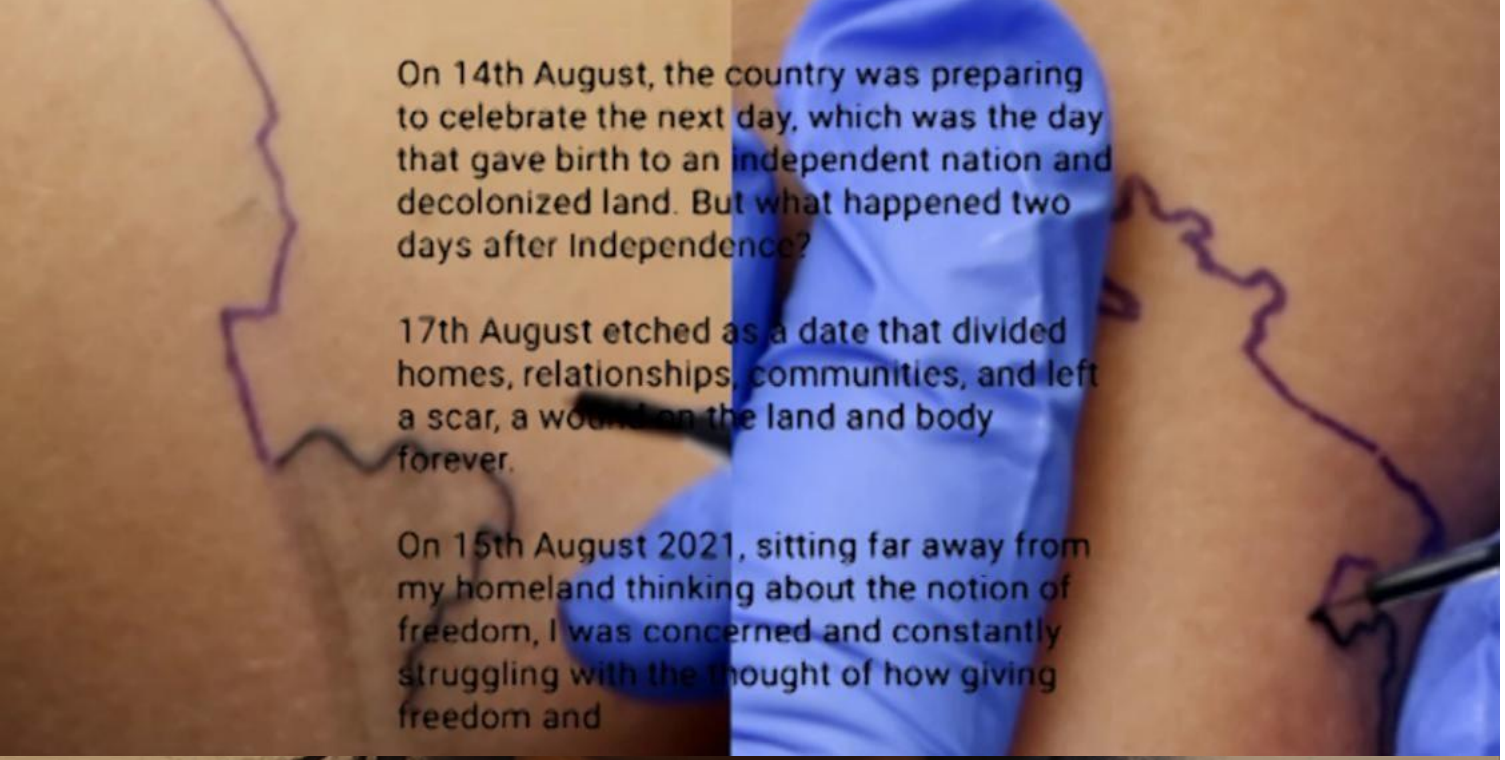
The living scar
2021
Performance video
and text from artist diary
04:54 minutes
Part of Körper : The memory collector, Kunstrum, Aarau, Switzerland
Performance video documention: Nathanael Gautschi , Tattoo artist: Jacqueline lilou Schneider

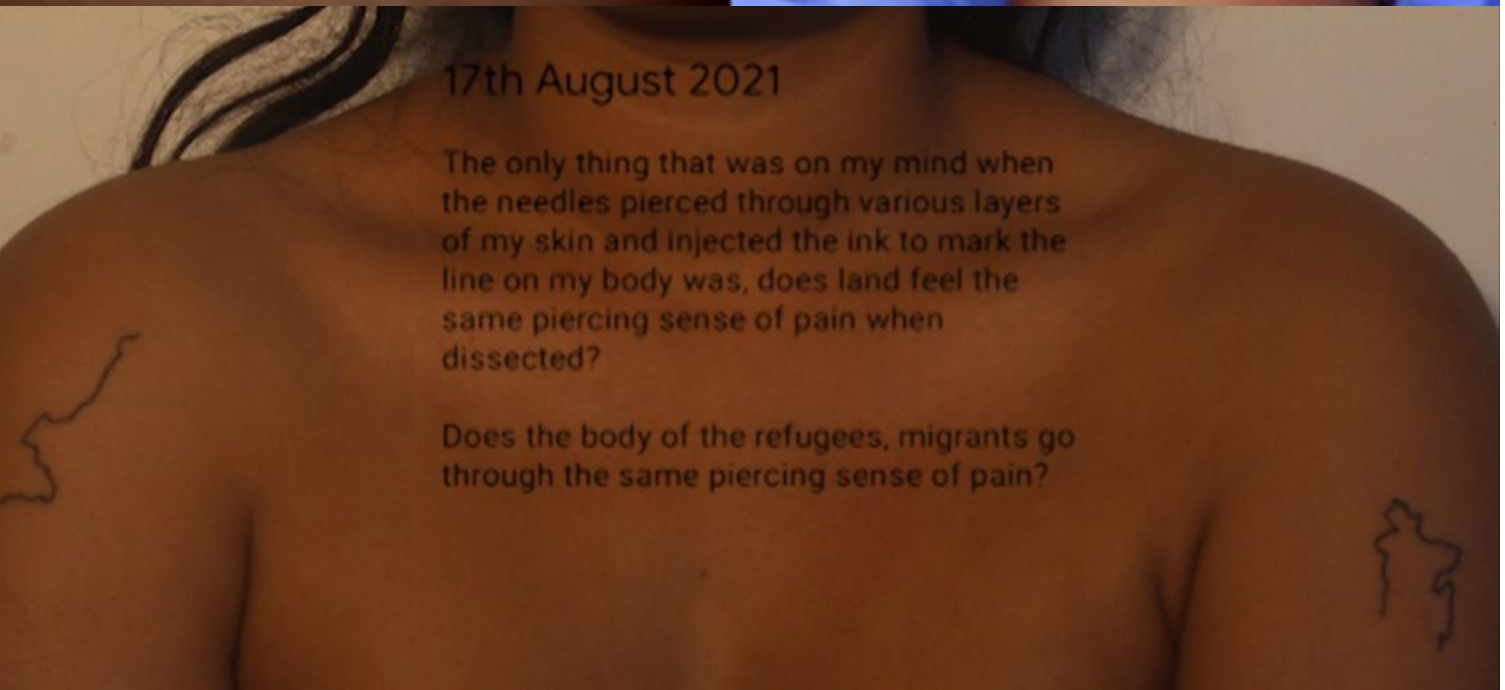
Installation view



Video link: The Living Scar

Still from video





Stills from video



Display of documentation of the performance process

The living scar is a video of two scars that I inked on my body and letters written to myself in response to the date 17th August, as a reminder of the line drawn on the map/land which changed the political and historical stance of our country.

Through this performance, I identify my body with the dissected lands and the marks as a continuity of scars of living history in my country.

My body not only carries these two historical marks/scars, but now I live inside these two scars both physically and conceptually.



Arpita Akhanda, a multidisciplinary artist born in 1992, completed her BFA and MFA in Painting from Kala Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan in 2015 and 2017 respectively.

Akhanda's solo exhibitions and presentations include *Under the Moon Across Many Waters*, Emami Art, Kolkata, 2026; *Weaving Water ー水を織る*, Kyoto Art Centre, Kyoto, Japan, 2025; *শরীর / Körper: The Memory Collector*, Kunstraum Aarau, Switzerland, 2021; and *A Walk over Senses,* JANUS Center for Visual and Performing Art, Kolkata, 2018. Notable group exhibitions are *MOOL* curated by Shaleen Wadhwana, Exhibit320 at Bikaner House, New Delhi, 2026; *Memory, in Texture: Where the Imagined Holds the World Together*, Artist Cafe Fukuoka, Fukuoka, Japan, 2026; *Of the Land* curated by Sobia Zaidi, Soil Art Gallery, Seattle, US, 2025; *I Still Dream of Lost Vocabularies* curated by Bindi Vora, Autograph Gallery, London, 2025 – 26; *Dialogues Across Time: Indian Contemporary and Folk Art,* Indian Museum x Basu Foundation, Kolkata, 2025; *Paanch, Cinci, Fünf, Wǔ, Cinque*, Galerie Russi Klenner, Berlin, 2024; *Imaging Arriving Departing*, Exhibit 320, New Delhi, 2024; *Polyphonies in Distance*, Gallery Dotwalk, Delhi, 2023; *Rivers and Roads: Meandering Stories of India*, AAIE Center for Contemporary Art, Rome, 2022 – 23; *Of Liminal Beings and Other Spaces*, Emami Art, Kolkata, 2021; *The Trifecta of Movement*, Exhibit 320, New Delhi, 2021; and *The Lay of the Land*, Exhibit 320, New Delhi, 2020. Her works have been presented by Emami Art at many art fairs including Art Dusseldorf 2024, 2023; India Art Fair 2025, 2024, 2023; Art Mumbai 2023; AD Design Show 2022, Mumbai, Hub India; and Artissima International Fair of Contemporary Art at Torino, Italy, 2021.

She has performed at various national and international spaces including Artist Cafe Fukuoka, Fukuoka, Japan, 2026; Kyoto Art Centre, Kyoto, 2025; The Prince Claus Fund Biennial Symposium 2023, Sri Lanka; K21, Dusseldorf, Germany, 2023; Huis Marseille, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2023; Museum Night Maastricht, Jan Van Eyck Academie, Netherlands, 2023; AAIE Center for Contemporary Art, Rome, 2022-23; India Art Fair 2022, New Delhi; Piramal Art Residency, Mumbai, 2019-20; and Theertha International Performance Platform, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2019. She has conducted several talks, presentations, workshops, and screenings, including the screening of *The Living Scar* at Lumière Cinéma, Maastricht NL, 2023; *Understanding Body as Home*, a talk and workshop at University of the Arts London, UK, 2023; *Memory Collector*, a talk and workshop at Camberwell College of Arts, UK, 2023; *The Living Scar & The Last Leap* screened at Young Collectors Hub at Bikaner House, as a part of India Art Fair 2023.

Akhanda has been selected for Goethe-Institut Salvador-Bahia artist residency at Vila Sul, Salvador-Bahia, Brazil, 2027; and was part of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum Artist in Residency Program, Japan, 2026; and Singapore Art Museum Residency, Singapore, 2026. She participated in residency projects at the Kyoto Art Center, Japan, 2025 and Jester, Genk in Belgium, 2024; Hampi Arts Lab Residency, Karnataka in 2024; Jan Van Eyck Residency 2022-23; India Art Fair Artists in Residence program, New Delhi, 2022; Artist in Residence program 2021, Gästeatelier Krone, Aarau, Switzerland in association with Khoj Kolkata; and Piramal Art Residency Mumbai 2019-20.

Akhanda was awarded the 2025 Sovereign Asian Art Prize; BW Masterpiece 40 under 40 Awards, New Delhi, 2025; The Arts Family Emerging Artist Award - South Asia 2024 (2nd prize); the 2022-23 Prince Claus Seed Fund; Inlaks Fine Art Award 2022; Emerging Artist Award 2020 –21 by FICA and Mrinalini Mukherjee Foundation 2021; State Award Fellowship in New Media from Prafulla Dahanukar Art Foundation, 2019; and the National Scholarship by CCRT Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India in Painting, 2016. She was selected to be on the jury for the 2026 Sovereign Asian Art Prize.

Her works are on display at the permanent collection show at K20 Museum Kunstsammlung, Nordrhein-Westfalen. She lives and works in Santiniketan.