

Consolidation is Reconsolidation

Memory does not work the way we assume it does, as a stored thing consulted and returned intact. Recall reopens a memory and lays it down again changed, so that remembering and revising are a single process: every consolidation is, in fact reconsolidation¹. The memories we return to most often are what we have rewritten the most; the ones we love best are the least reliable. What we hold on to, we alter by holding.

Rayan Aljneibi's practice begins with places, images and details that are often seen but not always remembered. Drawing from her background in archival science, she treats preservation as a form of storytelling, attentive to how familiar environments are documented, recalled and gradually transformed by time. In one series, photographic traces of Khalidiya Park are carried on folded stainless-steel panels, each form drawn from the handling of film during processing. Another series, informed by Gaston Bachelard's writing on memory and the poetic imagination, fragments and recomposes archival images of urban landscapes across the UAE. Rather than reconstructing these places as complete records, the works attend to what remains, what goes overlooked and what may eventually be forgotten, so that the archive becomes a space where new stories emerge from its absences and fragments.

Layla Doueidi's practice draws on personal archives and collective histories, using sensory experience as a means of both recording and reflection. Her Syrian-Lebanese identity has been shaped largely through inherited material; memories, family stories, photographs and objects. On a three-week trip to Syria this summer she expanded her family's archive and built on it, photographing extensively as she went. Her new series of scented wax artworks emerges from that return, with scent becoming another form of archiving, carrying associations the image alone cannot hold. The series explores the relationship between what is remembered, what is inherited, and what can be witnessed.

Sara Kamar works on the entanglement of self and technological system, at the point where memory is handed over to machines. Her sculptures are arranged as a museum of the future, where artefacts of the present are displayed with wry labels that reimagine their use: a phone becomes 'The Devotion Mirror: A sacred object used for self-worship rituals. Individuals would gaze into it for hours, performing gestures (scrolling) to receive visions.'. Embossed aluminium motherboards suggest the false idolatry of digital memory, which like human memory is vulnerable to corruption, decay and disappearance. Alongside them, paintings with distorted figures and unnatural colour explore the inner struggle of revising self-perception and the metamorphosis of the self.

Martin Ong Yambao works from photographs that were never his. In the Filipino healing ritual of pagtatawas, a healer pours molten wax onto water and reads the shapes it takes to diagnose illness; his family in the Philippines still turns to it, though the practice has grown rare.

¹ Susan J Sara 'Reactivation, retrieval, replay and reconsolidation in and out of sleep' *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 4 (2010)

Living in the UAE, he has carried the ritual into the studio, using wax to obscure and abstract the images from undeveloped film rolls found in surplus and thrift stores, and taking on the healer's role himself as he interprets what the wax has hidden. Losing memory registers as violence for him, and the work becomes a way of keeping memories that belong to strangers, the obscuration stands in place of consent the strangers in the images could never give.

Husna Samer's practice explores identity, place, spirituality, and the spaces between the tangible and intangible. Working through surrealism and symbolism, she creates dreamlike works that consider how repeated acts of remembrance, devotion and longing shape the self. Across the works, recurring motifs of the rose and fruit become symbols of continual return, approached for their sweetness before inevitably withering. Together, these motifs suggest a cycle of seeking, loss and regeneration in which nothing returns unchanged. Drawing on Sufi thought and both personal and collective experience, Samer approaches the self as something continually transformed through what we return to, hold onto and let go of.

The five artists in this exhibition work from things that happened: to them, to their families, to their countries, and to strangers whose names they will never learn. They work from what is held outside the body, in the archive, the file and the server, where memory appears permanent but is not. Across photography, painting, sculpture and scent, the exhibition offers not a single account of the past but five incompatible ones.

What each make is a second object; assembled from feeling, repetition, distortion and longing. A new truth in place of one that's gone.

- Cecelia Jihu-Sara