

# AMONG FLOWERS AND BONES

by  
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## ABSTRACT

A journey with grief, *Among flowers and bones* is an exhibition and thesis paper exploring the subjects of death, memory and afterlife, based upon complicated personal grief and trauma stemming from mental illness and the ongoing opioid crisis. This journey is expressed through an incomplete collection of photography, found objects, video, autoethnography and poetry. Pondering questions of what does it mean to 'be in-between'? I examine the relationships between grief and liminal spaces. Using an array of analogue and digital techniques such as collage, image transfer, 16mm film, and polaroids, I create dreamscapes that explore both presence and absence, preservation and decay, loss and longing. Fusing images and found objects I conjure altars, creating space to embody one's grief and open up communication around topics of loss. Death guides my research from the Cemetery, and the liminal, to Hauntology, Spiritualism and death rituals. Through questioning our relationships to objects, to understanding how trauma effects our memory and bodies, I search for a way to live amongst the heaviness. Infusing my emotion in the processes of making through cathartic and repetitive mutations, with the belief that the act of creating is transformative and healing. I am finding ways to honour both the death and life, that surrounds us.

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To Lyndon, my partner. Words fail the magnitude of all you do.

To all my friends, I love you, thank you for being you, for being a part of my existence, you all mean so much to me.

## DEDICATION

For Jeremy Mckenzie, Dylan Thompson, Rama Horricks, Louis Mackinnon, Ezra  
Cleary-Axline and the many more loved ones lost far too soon.

You are missed every day.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
DEDICATION	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS	5
IMAGE LIST	6
INTRODUCTION	10
THE INTERSECTIONS OF TRAUMA, ADDICTION AND MENTAL ILLNESS	15
MEMORY AND NOSTALGIA	19
DEATH	25
HAUNTOLOGY	29
SPIRITS AND SPIRITUALISM: TALKING WITH THE DEAD	31
OUT OF TIME: PORTALS INTO THE LIMINAL	36
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY	40
THE CEMETERY	43
GATHERING	50
ASSEMBLAGE	53
PHOTOGRAPHY	55
IMAGE TRANSFERS	59
DEATH OBJECTS	62
FILM	69
EXHIBITION REFLECTION	74
CONCLUSION	78
WORKS CITED	79
APPENDIX	82

## IMAGE LIST

- Fig 1. *Guided by angels*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid emulsion transfer on to watercolour paper, 2023-2025
- Fig 2. *The void*, Image transfer on canvas, 2025
- Fig 3. *Out of time* (still), 16mm film, 4 mins 33 seconds, 2025
- Fig 4. *Wither*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid emulsion transfer on to watercolour paper, 2023-2025
- Fig 5. *Buzz buzz* (detail), Image transfer on canvas, 2024
- Fig 6. *Beach Portal*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid, 2023-2025
- Fig 7. *Coffin*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid, 2023-2025
- Fig 8. *Mother*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid, 2023-2025
- Fig 9. *Altar (spiderweb)*, collected dirt, candle, installation, 2024
- Fig 9. *He loves me, he loves me not*, Found window, ink, acrylic medium, dried plants, 2024
- Fig 10. *Grave side*, pencil crayon, graphite on inkjet photograph, 2025
- Fig 11. *The Void*, installation view, Image Transfer on canvas, 2025
- Fig 12. *Buzz buzz*, Image transfer on canvas, 2024
- Fig 13. *Lantern*, found stained glass lamp, image transfers, chain, lightbulb, 2024
- Fig 14. *Cairn stone*, found stained glass window, image transfer, led lights, 2025
- Fig 15. *Out of time* (still), 16mm film, 4 mins 33 seconds, 2025
- Fig 16. *Out of time* (still), 16mm film, 4 mins 33 seconds, 2025
- Fig 17. *Water womb*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid, 2023-2025

Wandering  
Wandering spirit  
What do you seek  
I know you can't go home anymore  
What do you seek  
I know you can't feel this pain anymore  
What is it you seek  
Wandering spirit  
I don't know how to be here all alone  
Wandering spirit  
Please don't leave  
Wandering spirit  
I can't hear you speak  
I have turned myself inside out  
Listening to the wind  
spirit  
Gathering sticks  
Carrying stones  
Searching for you wandering spirit



Fig 1. *Guided by angels*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid emulsion transfer on watercolour paper, 2023-2025

It's not just about death  
It's also about life  
How intertwined they are  
How they cannot escape one another  
How the loop keeps looping  
The cycle  
Keeps spiraling  
Around and around again we go  
What is gone, transforms, and returns, only to leave again and repeat the pattern  
Around and around, we go  
Cycling  
Through and through again  
What is lost is not lost  
Its transformed, morphed, changed, gained new life, new forms

## INTRODUCTION

Where it begins, and by that, I mean where this telling of the story begins. Like most things, it begins in the past, and the endless strands that brought me here, to this moment now. An interconnected web of people, places, objects, stories, experiences, and relationships that inform who I am, here, in this moment. Because like with everything, time will transform. Not all remains the same. But for here, in this moment, this is what I find I can offer or share.

This work is grounded in lived experience, and therefore is informed by my positionality, bias, and perspectives. While I seek to explore the subjects at hand in a generous and generating sense, I cannot encompass nearly enough on these matters into these pages. As a white settler woman, I carry the colonial legacies of my ancestors and cannot speak to the array of lived experiences of grief related to other cultures and racial experiences. With that in mind this work is a very narrow scope of much broader ideas and discourses. But I wish to focus on only speaking to what I know firsthand. This project cannot cover the great breadth of these topics and ideas across places, peoples and cultures but is a glimpse into my own unique experience and unfolding of grief and transformation while constantly learning/yearning about how to cope with loss.

**Part of me is here, part of me is not here, elsewhere, in the abyss.**

When diagnosing someone with a mental illness, doctors and psychologists often look to the past for patterns, for trends in behaviour that align with certain criteria. I remember always being like this. I remember hyperventilating and crying incessantly for over a week when my parents decided to replace my childhood couch.

Something that may sound absurd or ridiculous to others. I could not accept change, in fact I was sick with feelings, feelings beyond what I could articulate or attend to as a child. It wasn't until later on in life, after meeting with a new therapist all together, that my parents mentioned how as a child I was unable to soothe myself to sleep. They tried the methods of letting your kid cry and self soothe, only I would cry to the point of vomiting, unable to calm myself down. Learning this as a teenager, I felt a moment of bittersweet validation, I have always been like this. I am a deeply emotional person, I have always struggled with my feelings, I have felt at times that I feel things more intensely than others. I still struggle to calm myself down, I still struggle with how deeply I feel. I still struggle with the idea of 'letting go'.

Being diagnosed with depression and anxiety disorders was never a surprise. When it finally happened at sixteen years old, I had spent many years in pain and knowing this, I had finally reached a breaking point of necessary intervention. The following would include years of medication (some of which I am still on) and extensive years of therapy (some of which is still ongoing). Understanding I am a person that lives with mental illness is important to this story, because it is in these experiences, these relationships, that my knowledges were formed.

I met you in seventh grade, we weren't friends right away but that would change over the years.

Two mentally ill teenagers, finding solace in each other. Two mentally ill teenagers that felt so much pain in ourselves and the world around us, that like many others, we searched for escapism in any form we could muster.

This is how I came to face the monstrous beast of addiction for the first time, a beast  
that does not seem to sleep or rest, victim after victim.

I did not know then, what I know now.

I was 17 when you died.

But the deaths were just beginning

I was 19 when you died.

I was 20 when you died.

I was 23 when you died.

I was 25 when you died.

I was still 25 when you died.

I was 26 when you died.

It has been nine years since I first came to know grief face to face. In fact, when this  
paper is finished it will have been exactly ten years since you died. Ten years out of  
time.

Something that still makes me sick to my stomach,  
but now more so that I can't believe it has been that long without you.



There is an uncontrollable sense of sorrow and of rage when growing up today means watching the people you love die helplessly around you. When people are so obviously in pain, but the systems fail them, and the support is not substantial enough. And you feel so small and helpless against the world.

**Does anything really matter?**

But then I stop myself. If I were to love you, how can I take for granted the opportunity to keep you alive in whatever ways I can. To find you everywhere, in everything. To breathe past the knot in my throat and the shaking in my body, to submerge my bare hands and feet in dirt, the heat of the sun burning my skin, the red glow of light that overtakes my closed eyes.

**“My depression points to my not knowing how to lose- I have perhaps been unable to find a valid compensation for the loss? It follows that any loss entails the loss of my being-and of Being itself.” Juila Kristeva *Black Sun* 3**

I carry you with me, I carry you all. I search for the glimpses of the other side, the spaces you now inhabit. My art is opening up and creating portals. Portals to the other side, the spirit realm, the unknown. Portals to the past and future. A passageway between here and elsewhere.



Fig 2. *The void*. Image transfer on canvas, 2025

## THE INTERSECTIONS OF TRAUMA, ADDICTION AND MENTAL ILLNESS

The numbness of another death. How many deaths does it take? How many lives could be saved with adequate health care, and the decriminalization and destigmatization of drug use? How about with proper funding for mental health and treatment programs? There is an unbearable amount of rage at the system, at the way capitalism dehumanizes people, and that we continue to care more for profit than people or the planet. That we feel hopeless in the face of crisis, that our government fails us, time and time again.

Making art has always been a survival mechanism, a way to express and understand myself and the world around me. Creating allows me to work through my own trauma and grief, much of which stems from the ongoing opioid crisis and the tremendous amount of loss being experienced. Understanding trauma is foundational to this work, as is understanding addiction and substance use is directly connected to people trying to cope with trauma and mental illness.

When I speak about trauma, I am speaking to the multi layered complex nature of trauma. Trauma can look different from person to person, and can be experienced in diverse ways, at different severities. Using a generalized term to encompass such ideas fails in many ways but also allows a necessary distance from disclosing personal details. *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel Van Der Kolk details the scientific research explaining how trauma lingers in our body, affecting our physical and mental health, and ways to move forward and heal trauma. A significant psychologist and researcher Van Der Kolk participated in decades of research, informing the criteria of diagnosis and treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (29). He explains that “we have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on the

mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present” (Van der Kolk 21). Trauma leaves residue and traces of the past in the present, it obstructs, it influences, it submerges, it has a lasting effect. Trauma directly links to mental illness, and the emotions related to the experiences of trauma can heighten depression and anxiety (Van der Kolk 136). The complex layering of mental illness and trauma are common and the lines between the two can become blurred. Van der Kolk explains that “traumatized people have a tendency to superimpose their trauma on everything around them” (17). It literally takes over, often displacing a person from reality.

**It makes sense why I feel you in my bones, the body remembers.**

Julia Kristeva writes about the link between depression and trauma in *Black Sun* “Sadness (like all affect) is the physic representation of energy displacements caused by external and internal traumas” (16). By beginning to understand the complex nature of trauma and its intertwined relationship with mental and physical health we can make sense of how accessible it is to turn to substances to cope. How easy one can go from not wanting to feel, to not feeling at all. Addiction like trauma is complex, it is life altering and it lingers.

Van der Kolk not only provides an in-depth background and explanation of trauma and its effects on our minds and bodies but also recommends methods to help people heal and let go of trauma. Van der Kolk claims this requires “reconfiguring a brain/mind system that was constructed to cope with the worst. Just as we need to revisit traumatic memories in order to integrate them, we need to revisit the parts of ourselves that developed the defensive habits that helped us to survive” (281). This is the uncomfortable work of confronting yourself, the learned traits that have helped you survive.

**It is easy to remain stuck here.**

Since 2015, I have known over ten people that have passed away from an opioid overdose. Three of those people I considered best friends/family. And I am not alone in this loss, many of my friends and others have also faced a tremendous amount of loss. We hug a bit harder every time we see each other now, mixing tears with laughter, reminiscing on old times all together. With every loss, the greater community feels the effect. It is all around us. It is the people we love. Statistics and numbers will never do justice, never convey, and represent the immense effect of every individual's death. We wear our grief as patches, sewn haphazardly, visible to some but not all.

Amy Sullivan, author of *Opioid Reckoning: Love, Loss, and Redemption in the Rehab State*, writes emotionally about the subject after fighting for her daughter's sobriety and recovery. Sullivan highlights the necessity of harm reduction, recognizing the relationship between marginalized communities and drug use, and the systematic harms of stigmatizing and criminalizing drug users that has been seen historically, referencing the parallels between the AIDS/HIV epidemic where stigma and policy have a direct effect on people's access to health care and treatment (Sullivan 13). Sullivan uses real life stories and accounts from the loved ones of those who have died from overdoses (and past or current addicts). In doing so she also highlights the raw emotion, and psychological damage that occurs while trying to support someone you love through addiction and coping with their untimely deaths (Sullivan 78). She writes:

What if there was a way to make visible the losses, fears, and sorrows experienced by everyone over the past twenty years of the opioid epidemic? Very few people would remain untouched by it. If we could see each personal loss as a black armband on the sleeves of our friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers, would we be able to bear the enormity of the loss? Would we be

moved to change laws and policies about access to addiction-related medications, treatment protocols, and the failing war on drugs? Would stigma finally fade? (Sullivan 87)

Mental illness, trauma, and pain, turn people to find forms of relief. It is all intertwined. Sullivan and many others discuss how we need to address the trauma that leads people to use, in order to mask their pain (190). Advocating for better funding and access to alternative health care systems for treating addiction and mental illness are much needed. Sullivan opens the door to these important conversations, acknowledging that these experiences often lead to someone using their lived experience to help others (155).

How do we survive all the pain? While I do not have the answer to such a question, I find the little ways that help me. I make art. I write. I find you in everything. Julietta Singh captures the use of poetry to deal with pain perfectly in the following quote from *No Archive Will Restore You*:

For all the ways that I remain bound to pain, I can find almost nothing to say about its specificity. When I first tried to write about extreme physical pain, I discovered that I could only write in opaque poetic fragments. Pain seemed to belong more to poetry than to narrative prose. But even poetry, for all its subtle rendering, fails to capture the pain of pain, its illegible core. (61)

I try to channel my pain towards creative outlets, but there are more times than not that words fail me, that art fails me.        It is simply not enough.

*It's not just about your death, or yours, or yours,  
It's also about how those of us left are still trying to be alive, still trying to fight to hold  
on to life, for all of us, for all of you.*



## MEMORY AND NOSTAGLIA

Memory has come to be a facet of obsession. Of holding on and of letting go. Since I was a young child, picking a p a r t details, the fear of death and nothingness lurking, existential dread bubbling. Everything fleeting, fading, fast, shifting, morphing. Memory is experienced in the present but also is of the past, binding it with loss (Huyssen 3). Memory is a component of how we construct ourselves, how we know ourselves and form our identities. Andreas Huyssen examines the liminal nature of the relationship between memory and trauma, in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* noting that “trauma as a psychic phenomenon is located on the threshold between remembering and forgetting, seeing and not seeing, transparency and occlusion, experience and its absence in repetition.” (8) Much of my art practice echoes this, creating a space in between, one linked to a psychological or psychic space.



Fig 3. *Out of time (still)*, 16mm film, 2025

I have lost a lot of memories. There are parts of my life that are hard to recover.  
Especially after you died. Trying to recall leaves me with so many gaps and holes.  
Looking back, I feel bad for the friendships I lost over the years but drifting amongst  
grief can be such an isolating experience especially when most of the people around  
you have never experienced such things.

Now memories are the only place where you are alive.

Where I hear your voice, your laugh.

Memories are not enough.

Moyra Davey writes about nostalgia as an unfillable longing for home or what is no longer (6). This constant state of longing reflects how I live with grief. This explains why I find myself drawn to old objects and images as a way to reimagine or to feel connected to something out of reach.

When someone dies from an overdose or suicide, those left alive have complex emotions to face, including regrets of what you wish you could have done differently. Academics and anthropologists with a focus on death, Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey express the challenges of coming to terms with losing a loved one in such a way and how that can make you reflect differently on past memories (112). Their book, *Death, Memory, and Material Culture* investigates the interconnections of death, memory, and material culture providing helpful histories and thoughtful research on our relationships with death in western society.

Huyssen reflects too upon this obsession with memory, one where futile attempts to preserve memories and moments, are subconscious attempts to control and



understand the world and our experiences (18). I am constantly trying to balance holding on, while letting go, remembering to forget or forgetting to remember. An internal battle. There is always a sense of loss, and that sense of loss can be overwhelming and all consuming. Dualities of the desires to remember and/or to forget flood through the experience of living with trauma and grief. Due to the fleeting nature of memories, memories can't be fully pertained, contained, or held the same, they are always shifting, always fragments, distorted stories we tell ourselves that develop ruptures over time (Hallam and Hockey 27).

Kristeva highlights the connection between depression and nostalgia and points out that it is about the longing for the loss of time not a specific place or home (4). This inability to accept loss and perpetual longing embeds in our psyche. Kristeva insists that the depressed ruminate on loss creating chambers of self-entrapment (4). I long for times that are no longer. I wonder how much my depression amplifies my complicated grief and vice versa. My depression was there before your death, I was always unable to cope with loss, or the endless movement of time. Maybe I am getting better at it now, some days it is hard to tell.

## MEMORY, PHOTOGRAPHY AND DEATH

The connections between memory, death and photography are potent for exploration. I often return to photographs in my own practice as one of the best mediums to explore the interconnected nature of these subjects. Feminist and cultural theorist Marianne Hirsch writes about post memory, and the relationship between trauma and photographs in *Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory*. Her writing is focused on the context of the Holocaust and its lasting effect across generations, providing profound insights and connections between trauma, memory and photography, that can be applied elsewhere as well. Hirsch argues there is a “simultaneous presence of death and life in photographs” (5). Something very familiar to the words of the famous photography theorist Susan Sontag “all photographs are memento mori” (Sontag 16). Hirsch (and Sontag) argue that duality of both life and death is embedded in the photograph, that it provides an object of a certain moment in time, one that can outlive us, one that reminds us (6). People seek out images, metaphors, objects, and connections to bring us closer to the loss, to try to fill the absences; we find symbols everywhere, often ones of transformation and the ephemeral (Hallam and Hockey 8).

Hallam and Hockey confirm the presumption that we wish to control our memories, to control our remembrance of disparate moments that have come to inform our identity and construction of self (3 and 13). The way we remember, shapes us; photographs become a vital tool in that process. Defying permanence, photographs, like memory, begin to fail us, they become distorted, mutated over time, shaken from their context. Annette Kuhn and Kristen Emiko McAllister argue in *Locating Memory* that due to photographs relationship with time, there is no fixed meaning, and due to this nature, is always malleable to transformation (15). They note that “The very compulsion to record the present points to an insecurity: the

urge to preserve is driven by a fear of loss.” (Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister 14). In resistance of death and loss, I create, I float between the decay and preservation, materially and conceptually infusing my work with the process.



Fig 4. *Wither*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid emulsion transfer on to watercolour paper.  
2023-2025

The land is haunted  
The wind echoes cries of those forgotten  
Screaming to be heard  
Whistling through branches and in a cold burst of air and pressure against your skin  
Screaming silently  
Remember  
Remember me  
I am here, I never left  
Only to fade and leave you drawing in a big hesitant gulp of air, reminding yourself  
you are indeed, not alone, surrounded by these whimpering pines and skeletons of  
birch towering over head.  
How can silence be so loud?

## DEATH

When it comes to the topic of death, there are often mixed reactions. On one hand of extremes you have gothic culture, obsessed with darkness, symbology, the occult and on the other you have people with emotional walls, crippling fears, and an inability to confront death, sheerly based off avoidance and the good luck that they have yet to encounter it face to face. Most people fall somewhere in between these extremes, based off their experiences, upbringings, belief system and societal norms. In western society today, we have many shortcomings on how we deal with death, especially when layered with other stigma associated with mental illness and/or addiction. *In the Art of Death* author Nigel Llewellyn writes about western contemporary cultures separation from death, noting that we lack the proper rituals and immediate relationship with the dead that allow for more wholistic forms of grief, acknowledging the impact of which can be mentally detrimental (136).

Looking to the past, we have inherited many different rituals of mourning and understandings of death from history. Llewellyn mentions, “Today very little attention is paid to the visual culture of mourning and extended private grief is by and large discouraged as psychologically unhealthy” (93). Yet we see the extensive ways throughout history that people have honoured the dead and mourned in more expansive ways then we have in today’s culture. Our society lacks the frameworks to deal with complex bereavement, even when so many of us share this experience of untimely loss. Our mourning rituals, or lack thereof, in western culture echo the colonial. My cultural relations are connected to European and North American cultural legacies, a descendent of settlers. That of the church, of power, of control, of domination. Other cultures have a range of cultural practices, rituals, and belief systems that I am unable to address within the scope of this research. It is a common desire to look to these other cultures, across time and learn valuable lessons and uncover the many holes present in how western culture fails us and our grief.

In *The Art of the Death*, Llewellyn mentions anthropologist and structuralist theorist Claude Levi-Strauss, who theorized “that relations between the living and the dead in 20th century Europe depend on a structural opposition between the ‘good’ deaths of those who have succumbed through natural causes and the ‘bad’ deaths of those who have been murdered, been bewitched or taken their own lives” (51). This common belief displays how religion played a role in stigmatizing certain deaths as good or bad, some worthy of redemption and salvation but others condemned to burn for eternity. While, I do think things have progressed from this time, these ideas linger, society still stigmatizes and stereotypes certain types of deaths, valuing certain lives over others. It is often seen that people have little care if an addict or homeless person passes away, you hear the rhetoric of “they deserved it for using” or “that’s what you get”. It is easy for people to dehumanize addicts as lesser than, the way society continuously does to marginalized people.

In *A Tomb with a View* by Peter Ross, this stigma and death relationship is reflected in the cemeteries of Europe that he studies and writes about. In this book he visits various cemeteries including Crossbones Cemetery in London, a site of a large, unmarked mass grave where those marginalized by society were buried separately, this was made up of the bodies of sex workers, homeless, deaths by suicide and so forth (Peter Ross 137). Today people gather here to pay their respects and honour those buried here. The stigma of deaths related to drug use or suicide find themselves in this historical marginalized zone of outsider that still haunts the present. Interestingly enough, the idea of other or outsider is represented through symbols and icons related to death throughout visual culture, through serpents or insects, historically linked through stories, found amongst the decay of the natural world, cast in the permanence of stone or metal (Hallam and Hockey 76). Symbols carry meaning and are vital to communication; symbols can speak certain stories. Such symbology informs the imagery used in my work, whether it’s found in the



cemetery in *Out of time* or *Collecting Decay* or the animal/insect creatures that populate my image transfers.

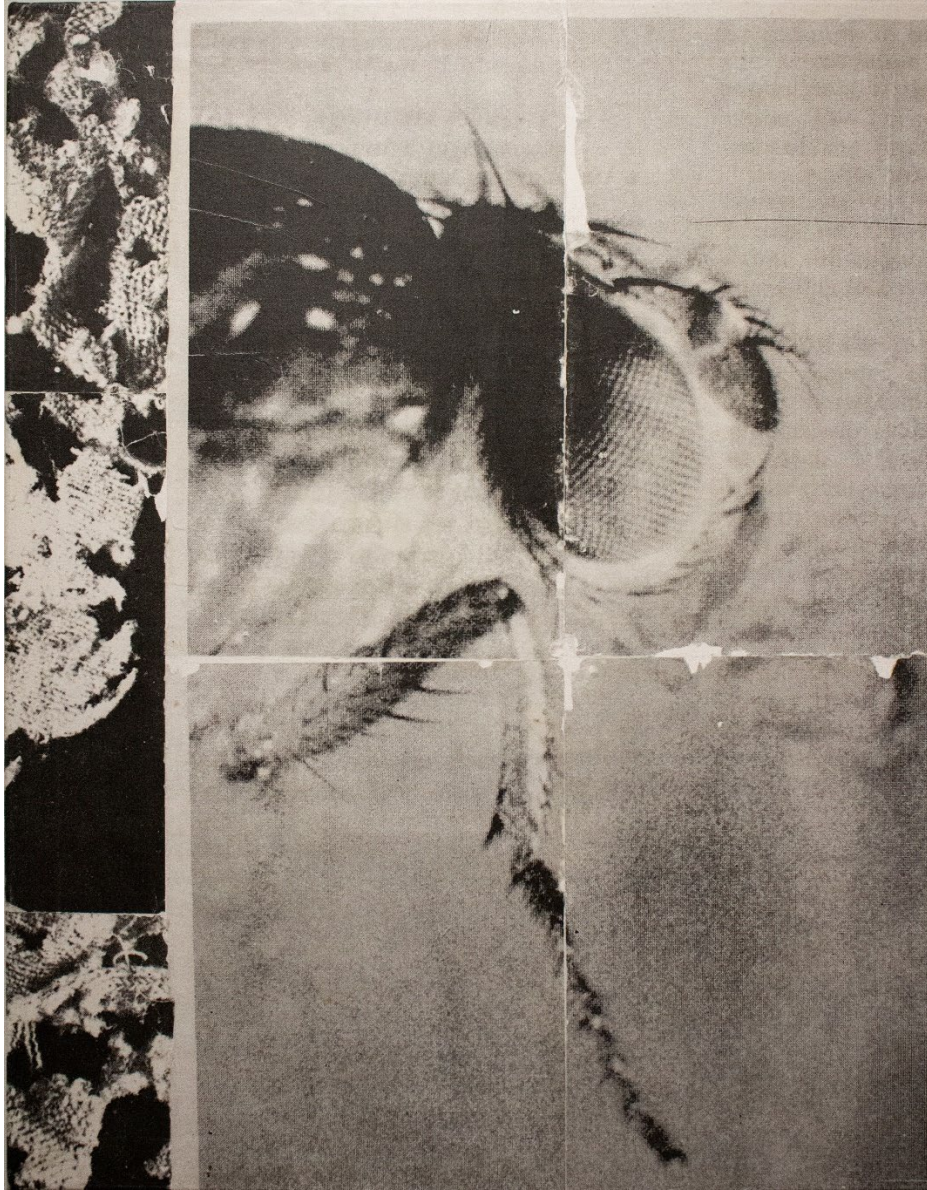


Fig 5. *Buzz buzz* (detail), Image transfer on canvas, 2024.

You are in my head  
You are in my breath  
In the shadows on the wall  
You are in the sky  
Open blue  
Clouds  
The night stars  
The moon  
Oh, you are in the moon  
In the riverbanks  
In the wake and turbulence of the water  
You are all around me all the time  
The ducks floating by  
You are in the heat of the sun and the comfort of a warm blanket  
You are here  
You are always here



## HAUNTOLOGY

Through my experience and research, I have come to believe that hauntology attunes with trauma. Trauma reemerging, ghosts that will not leave you alone. A persistent reminder. I look towards hauntology wondering how do we conceptualize what lingers after loss? Explain the unexplainable, imagine alternative worlds, or find our space in this one?

Avery Gordon describes haunting, as the following quote:

“An animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly sometimes more obliquely. I used the term haunting to describe those singular and yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearing on the world lose direction, when the over and done with comes alive when what’s been in your blind field comes into view.” (*Some thoughts on Haunting and Futurity* 2)

Gordon and Eve Tuck, both address the idea of haunting from the perspective of the greater social, systematic hauntings associated to trauma of colonization. I believe deeply in this assertion, but I am looking at hauntology with the framework that any type of trauma can result in a form of haunting. In my own practice haunting is the trauma reemerging, again and again, making its self-present. The past haunting the present, effects that linger, leaving residue, shining through at certain moments.

“Haunting raises specters and it alters the experience of being in linear time, alters the way we normally separate and sequence the past, the present and the future” (Gordon 2). This collapsing of time occurs in trauma and in dealing with complex grief. This being out of time, allows the residues of ghosts to reveal themselves.

Avery argues that “Trauma not only misaligns our perception of time, it is one could say, itself a misalignment of the temporality of experience since trauma is characteristically experienced belatedly” (Gordon 4). What keeps trauma contained?

Keeps us stuck out of time? Being traumatized and being haunted may look different in certain cases, but unresolved trauma haunts us. It affects us and demands attention as both Tuck and Gordon argue.

Mark Fisher approaches the theory of hauntology slightly differently than how Gordon and Tuck approach the idea of haunting. Fisher lies in the philosophical realm, a capitalist realist framework that is deeply rooted in Jacques Derrida and the spectres of communism in our current world (19). Fisher also possesses this position completely disregarding race and the trauma of colonialism that Gordon and Tuck focus upon. His perspectives focus on European life, music culture of the underground, post punks, pastoralism, nostalgia and longing for analogue technology or a past time. Many relationships can be drawn between these two divergent streams of hauntology, mainly this idea that Hauntology is a longing and acknowledgment of what could have been, as much as it is about the past it is about the loss of futures (Stephen Prince 17). Derrida insists there is no closure, that a ghost always returns which leads Fisher's thoughts that "Haunting, then, can be constructed as a failed mourning. It is about refusing to give up the ghost or- and this can sometimes amount to the same thing- the refusal of the ghost to give up on us" (Fisher 22). It is in this persistence I find myself, unable to let you go, desperately wishing to appease your ghost but unable to fully move on.

My words are not enough. My art is not enough. My tears are not enough. Nothing  
is enough.

## SPIRITS AND SPIRITUALISM: TALKING WITH THE DEAD

After experiencing profound loss, I found myself overwhelmed with questions that seemed as if no one had answers too, or those who claimed they did believe in false gods shrouded in oppressive forms. Religion is not the answer for me, but knowledge is. The more I seek out on these subjects, the more I learn from others, the more I can grasp my own reality, and where I fall amongst this world.

I think I was seventeen, maybe freshly eighteen the first time I visited a medium. I went with your mom and grandmother. I had such intense anxiety and uncertainty and desperation, as your mom drove us over an hour to the suburbs of Airdrie. This lady had a practice in her house, inviting strangers into her own home to connect them with their departed loved ones. She had a small room on the first floor, with couches, and chairs, tissues, much like a cozier therapist's office. Her kids running around upstairs. And although I am skeptical about certain things, there are absolutely things she spoke of that were not possible for her to know, things that make you hold out the belief that even if I can't, someone can speak with your spirit. Over the years, I returned two more times with your mom. She still goes once or twice a year, to a different medium now as the lady we used to go to has since also passed away.

Death was once a lively subject. The obsession with ghosts and communing with the dead can be seen across cultures in time. When thinking of the direct residues of past rituals that are very much still present in the western world, we have the role of mediumship. Spiritualism was a time of seances, phantasmagoria (phantom theatre), magic shows, mediums, and psychics that also challenged hierarchy, binaries, politics, and religion (McGarry 19). Author Molly McGarry's book *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* dives into the history of this era. McGarry argues that Spiritualism became popular

in the post-civil war era as people faced large amounts of loss and longing (9). A sort of religious or spiritual practice performed primarily by women as a conduit with the spirit, offered a form of empowerment to certain women, even though they found the role still in domestic spaces (McGarry 3). With this obsession of death and the other side prevalent, it is no surprise the concept of the liminal applies here too, to conceptualize states of transition. McGarry describes the medium as a liminal figure stating:

The anthropologist Victor Turner's concept of liminality as a space or transitional period between two established social roles is useful for understanding both cultural practices of mourning and the making of a Spiritualist medium. Mourners and the dead might be understood as passing through analogous liminal spaces: mourners' journey from grief through mourning and back to the world of the living; the dead travel from the land of the living to the other side. (28)

Here again, is this transitory space, the in between for both those who passed and those who remain, forever changed. The medium, a bridge between worlds. Despite lack of meaningful evidence and science to back up the claims and abilities of mediums, there is still a cultural desire or longing for this ability for someone to see or speak beyond this realm. As humans we also have a desire to believe in order to create meaning in our lives and deaths, a common reason why people turn to religion (Schwartz 15).

At a time influenced from the Victorian mourning culture, death was not the taboo subject it is today. We can trace back to commodification and capitalist introduction to death as business at this time. People realized all the potential avenues to profit off death and loss and the effects are still felt today. For some people, death is here every day, for those who have lost someone, for those who are

dying, for those who work with and support the dead and/or dying, for those who struggle with suicidal thoughts, those who work on the front lines and in harm reduction, death is always there. For some people, death is at a distance, they have yet to grapple with it up close, they can turn their backs upon it, look the other way as they move past.

Even during times when death was much more a part of everyday culture, some still felt failed by the community, especially those that faced marginalization or lacked wealth. In letters of grief published in the Spiritualist press, people shared their sense of isolation and lack of support in their smaller community and used writing as a meaningful tool to express their grief (McGarry 25). This is important to note, due to the human need for community but also the shortcomings of an idealized community. Our community is important, but a community full of people in mourning, like those effected by the overdose deaths may not be able to hold all of the grief, especially with the layers of stigma attached to this type of loss.

Mourning rituals are important to the processing of grief. There is a great breadth in rituals or ceremonies that can be performed to mourn the lost. Looking to other cultures and religions we can see these funerary or mourning rituals, but we must also look at ourselves and find the ways to honour our grief and the life and loss of someone we love in the everyday, in the forms that best reflect your beliefs and feelings. There is no one way to grieve, just as there is no one way to die, or to live, or to heal. I can only offer my insights and reflections, that does not merit any value over someone else's insights or reflections. Rituals can be big or small, they can be daily, sporadic, annual. However, you wish. The importance lies in the process, in externalizing and conceptualizing your emotions, the feeling of and release of grief as well as a ceremony of honouring whomever has passed and bidding farewell to this known world where they were alive and present.

*Conjuring the Spirit World: Art, Magic and Mediums* highlights the intersections between art and the spiritualist movement through a collection of essays and artifacts. One of the interesting objects of the time was known as the magic lantern, a relative of the camera obscura (first form of projector that went on to inform cameras), the magic lantern was used to project images and light to conjure ghosts and haunting in a space (Schwartz 35). This spectacle called *Phantasmagoria* became a theater performance using optical illusions to illicit this spiritual experience. This has me thinking of references to my *Lantern* (Fig 13), and the use of light and images to heighten intensity and project shadows and images in a darkened space.

Spiritualism also had a relationship with photography. Occurring around the same time photography began being used to create spirit portraits, photographs that captured the sitter and glimpses of spirits (Morgan 79). The magical powers and potentials of photography added to swaying the public's belief in the Spiritualist movement, adding to their evidence to the claims of our loved ones lingering in ghostly forms. Although this has been disproven, there is a magical property about photography and its ability to reveal the invisible and capture time that continues to inspire and ignite our imaginations and the possibilities of what is beyond what we can see.

I may not be able to touch you anymore, but you are in my bones, buried in my  
soul,

your ashes sit untouched in a vessel, then how do I explain how you exist in my  
veins; in every breath I take?

How come someone who no longer has a body can feel so close yet so far, you're  
inside of me but also ungraspable, intangible

I can hold things that were once yours in my hand, I can wrap myself in the same  
clothes you once did, lay my head where you once did, I can return to the same  
spot, the same memory again and again

Trying to grasp the intangible, the air hovering around me

Trying to embody your spirit

To give your spirit a body

Trying to feel like any of it was real rather than living in my dreams

## OUT OF TIME: PORTALS INTO THE LIMINAL

out of time,  
out of what was, what is no longer,  
being out of time, out of time together, out of time with you, no longer,  
loss of times, loss of futures, loss of presence, lost in the past,  
out of time.

Finite, temporal, temporary. We have limits to our time. There is a rupture in time when someone dies, a temporal disjuncture occurs when one is frozen, stuck. Time keeps flowing around them, the clock keeps ticking and every moment is another moment further away from what you thought you knew. For a long time now, I have felt out of time, frozen, stunted, here and elsewhere simultaneously. Poet Denise Riley unravels this idea speaking about the sudden loss of her son in *Time Lived, Without Its Flow*. Judith Butler remarks on Riley's use of poetry and writing to grapple with such immense feelings of loss, and proposes that new sense-making is needed, in the face of the altered reality one finds themselves in after loss (Butler 331-337). She also proposes that there is no overcoming- no closure, no return to normal linear time as you move through the world, changed to the core, but that some, like Riley can embrace this state and in doing so help others along this journey as well (Butler 337). Using writing, art, the act of creating, allows me to embrace my altered state, to begin to try to piece it all together, to find the ways to convey that I am shaped by these losses.

Ten years have slipped by, and I am still stuck in the past.

In *The Timeless Time of the Dead: At the Limits of Temporal Experience in Grief*, Emily Hughes elaborates on the interruption in temporal experience, suggesting that when Riley's son died, so did part of Riley, evoking the thresholds



between presence and absence and life and death and forever altering one's sense of self and place in the world (37-51). Such experiences collapse and expand our senses of time, the notion of linear time becomes challenged by the haunting encountered. In Hauntology, in trauma, **time becomes a spiral**. In grief you find ways to live in the in-between.

I keep returning to the liminal or being in-between as a concept to traverse the thresholds of the known and unknown, between here and elsewhere, between life and death. *Passages: Moving Beyond Liminality in the Study of Literature* dives into the varied applications of liminality across theories and genres, a useful term to describe what oscillates, divides, and merges, an idea of transition or passing through (2). This idea of passing through or journey can be applied in countless ways evoking dualities and movement between two states, and when we think beyond the idea of physical spaces (alive and dead) (preserved and decaying) (growth and rot) (here and there) and we can also see the psychological spaces and manifestations (internal and external). Psychoanalyst Carl Jung explored the psychic realm of the sub-liminal mind by channeling the “creative, transformative, and healing potential residing in ‘unconscious’ content, revealing itself in dreams, meditation, and visions.” (Nünning 156). Jung saw the transformative potentials of internal self-awareness and actualization. There is potential even in the dissociative states of grief and mental illness for transformation. This is something I remind myself, that it's not for nothing. I let the unconscious emerge in my creation.

Time seeps, memory flows. Trauma submerges; death emerges. The body becomes spirit, haunting what remains. The land remembers.



Fig 6. *Beach Portal*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid, 2023-2025

I am far too used to writing to ghosts,  
To no response  
So maybe I need to write for me,  
for all those things left unsaid

## AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Auto-ethnography is foundational to this body of work. Reflecting on lived experience in conjunction with critical analysis we are able to weave powerful stories. Stacy Holman Jones writes “we tell ourselves stories in order to live. Stories are our way in to understanding, to theorizing, and thus to knowledge and working to change our culture and ourselves” (224). It is here through storytelling, that the meaning is made and that we find transformative power through complex, layered experiences. Holman Jones also highlights the transformative power of loss, the journey through such and the ways it changes one’s relations in the world (235).

In *What makes Writing Academic* by Julia Molinari, I find encouragement to write with a critical realist approach. Molinari stresses the importance of the transformative power of knowledge and recognizes that knowledge is a system interlinked with many social, economic, political factors, and that writing can be a form of resistance in exposing these systems and challenging Eurocentric hegemony, creating a potential catalyst for change (Molinari 122). In honouring those thoughts, Molinari continues by advocating for nonlinear approaches to academic writing, illustrating how an interdisciplinary approach of communication can be taken through prose or composition, and it still have academic value (Molinari 136). My writing style has always leaned more on the poetic side of things. Embracing that I can communicate my knowledge, in the tools I possess, rather than trying to conform my voice and style. The idea of non-linearity appears in my writing as looping or jumping around time as I grapple with the effects of memory and grief.

Molinari seeks to challenge the standardization of academic language by emphasising ways to share and communicate unique lived knowledges to others in a way that also honours those knowledges (Molinari 39). I do not need to sanitize my writing to be perceived as academic or fit myself into the moulds that were made for

someone else. Auto-ethnography becomes a methodology I continuously fall back upon, one where I find the space to honour and bring forth my lived perspectives and experiences in hope that others too can find themselves and use theory, research, and creation as a part of that process.

Writing from what you know, what you've lived, and felt. Writing from you. Writing for you. Writing for the child in me, writing for my future self. Writing for you, and you and all of you. Writing and making because I don't know how else to keep you alive, to keep you here in the present. Writing to cry, to process, to mourn. Writing to know, to understand, to peel back the layers of being. Writing to feel, to connect, to be.

In honesty a lot of time with grief is spent distracting yourself. Trying not to feel, to try to find space not bound to action or thought, a sort of mindlessness. I have spent many years wasting, trying not to feel, or distract myself from the pain. The grief is too immense, the pain is too much, so you smoke, and you drink and scroll your phone, playing tv shows to fall asleep at night so you drown out your thoughts, living without really living.

Nothing brings you back, how can I believe in ghosts when yours is not here?

I often find myself turning to memoirs and personal writings by inspiring women in how they deal with life and with death. Auto biography and auto ethnography offer the tools to ruminate and reflect on ones lived experiences in relation with the world. The writings I have found the most profound and impactful always fall in these areas of finding ways to seep their personal identity and experiences into the meaning making. I am vulnerable in sharing the ugly parts of myself, just how many women and queer artists and writers have done before me, moving me in such ways that I believe in the transformative power of art. Writers like Moyra Davey, Yasuko Thanh, Joan Didion, Patti Smith, Sasha Lapointe, and Amy Lin who share their

writing as a way of being in the world, utilizing vulnerability, honesty and lived experience to illustrate their journeys, through trauma, life and death. It is here I find my comfort, here I find my voice, mirrored, reflected. Where I feel less alone. Writing and art creation become my ways to exist. Rather than a desire to make this work, it is need, to survive this all, without you. Alike to what Amy Lin writes in her memoir *Here After*, about the unexpected loss of her husband and moving through grief as a writer

Writing about my grief is so agonizing, so exhausting I always think I will need to stop. Yet, I do not. It is the only thing I feel able to do since he died. The only way I am able to say what it is like for me. The only place I can meet grief without being utterly consumed by it. (140)

Many of us must face our reality through the tools that help us understand, honour, and live through, finding our way day by day. So, I channel the emotion into my artwork, into the process, letting my practice hold pieces of me momentarily as I carve out the path forward. Sometimes venturing backwards or to the side.

**“The intensity of the emotions are too much for me to handle, so I transfer the energy of it into sculpture”- Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, The Mistress, and The Tangerine, 2008**

## THE CEMETERY



Fig 7. *Coffin*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid, 2023-2025

A place full of stories, a place where many histories intertwine. A resting place. A jungle of growth and decay. A place full of life, yet full of death. A container for memory and grief. A space of longing and contemplation, of reflection. Where death transforms life and life transforms death. A landscape flourishing yet fragile, a

memento mori, a memorial, a landmark, a home, a cemetery. Cemeteries are a cultural, dedicated landscape to remember, mourn and bury the dead, but they are also a place for the living. A community space, a solace from the city streets, a route to walk with friends (Deering 184).

Cemeteries linger in the space of the in-between, they are both private and public, an environment that evokes the past, present and future and can be used or experienced in various ways. Where body meets the land. Where the living and the dead co-exist. “Space whether public or private, can be regarded as a cultural representation that is socially produced, its meanings are negotiated through social action” (Hallam & Hockey 77) and so the cemetery becomes a place reflective of and for the greater community.

Since moving here in September (2023), I find myself wandering through Mount Pleasant Cemetery, fueling the artwork I would create throughout my thesis. The biggest greenspace nearby, it allows me the space to be in my body and develop a sense of place and connection to the land. How we embody and move through space helps to strengthen our perception and understanding of place (Springgay & Truman). Place making, is finding ourselves in relation with our environments. Walking is a methodology of embodiment that encourages a more holistic, accessible, sensory based way to generate knowledge (Springgay & Truman). Walking through the cemetery I find my senses heightened as I build a relationship with this land. Being embodied means confronting how and why I move through the cemetery, noticing what influences me and how the environment around me shapes my feelings and experience. So, I decide to bring a journal and camera with me to document the cemetery and my experiences. I document as I walk, stopping to examine details of stones that beckon me, zigzagging around graves to the ones that call to me from afar. There are never ending details to get lost in, in this cemetery,



the way colour moves among the trees, how stone transforms over time, different shapes, designs, names, different foliage and animals, the various offerings and gifts left behind in different states of decay.

Things are slower in the cemetery. It feels like stepping out of time. Birds chirp; squirrels dance around the leaves blanketing the ground. Sounds of vehicles and construction linger in the distance. Occasionally people walk the trails, a few joggers, and cyclists. A plane thunders by overhead. There is a certain stillness, quietness, slowness, you are scared to speak, afraid to disturb. But there is never real silence, you are never truly alone. As you are surrounded by death you are also surrounded by life. Every tree seems to be a different shade. Greens, browns, reds, oranges, yellow, auburn. Every tree unique and alone yet gathering together to paint the autumn landscape. The ground is a mix of leaves, grass, dirt, moss, roots, nuts, seeds, and the occasional flowers or offerings dot gravesites. Along the main concrete path, I notice a mound of dirt adorned with flowers. A fresh burial. Or at least fresh compared to most. It protrudes upwards. A mound, a hill, the shape, and size of the body that rests below. With other graves you can't tell where they begin and end, melting into one another, you are left imagining where the body rests. Each step off the concrete path I take with unease, fretting to step on top of those buried. A desire to be respectful in my presence. Something about this (being in the cemetery) feels voyeuristic or as if I am trespassing. This is many people's final home, yet this is also a public space. There is a sense of intrusion, especially when witnessing those who come to visit a loved one.

I am all too familiar with grief, but few of my loved ones are buried. I do not have a place to visit. I carry them with me everywhere I see them in places, objects, things, every day. I do not feel magically more connected to them in the cemetery. Would it be different if they had a formal grave, a site? Could I leave them or the grief behind

when exiting the cemetery? This idea of entering and exiting a space is interesting. A cemetery is regulated, has hours of open and closure, has entryways and exits. A cemetery gives you permission to grieve, to be with death, but when you exit society expects that to remain within the fenced walls of a designated space. Do not bring your emotion out here, into the everyday, death does not belong here.

Can my art create such a space, one that allows you to embody grief?

The earth feels old here, worn, weathered, deep time, out of time. The graves visualize this, the decay, the discoloration of old stones, the fading of inscriptions, the broken and sometimes crumbling headstones. The moss growing, grass and plants overtaking some, especially the ground markers that seem to vanish into the land itself. The cemetery is a portal into the liminal. Beyond the threshold of the everyday, beyond our relationship with time and space. Bel Deering reflects on Foucault's idea of cemeteries being a heterotopia precisely for this feeling conjured with this space, of being out of time (185). Branches stretch out across the sky acting as protection from the outside world. You are safe here, safe to feel. The dead leaves floating upon graves signal the season change, the end of a cycle. A time and space of transition. The decay that will cycle into new life come spring. The cycles of life and death intertwined. The trees have seen many lives, they can tell many stories. They are witnesses, even when we feel alone.

“Foucault uses the term heterotopia to describe strange spaces of ‘otherness,’ which are neither here nor there, being both physical and mental at the same time” (Deering 184). Cemeteries are one of Foucault's main examples of heterotopias (Foucault 21) and many of my own observations are reflected in this theory. Exiting the portal of the cemetery, feels like returning to another world. A world of technology, people, and speed. Cars rush by, as do people, loud noises, and buildings push, and pull you in every direction, back to the hustle. Life waits for

nobody. Those moments, those hours spent in the cemetery allow me to ground myself in the land, in life and in death. The cemetery is, as Foucault states, a place of contradictions and duality, a strange liminal space that is here while somehow elsewhere, a place resisting the outside (Foucault 20). Maybe this explains best the feelings I encounter inside the walls of the cemetery, not only am I allowed to slow down, to be confronted with mortality, I am allowed to be myself. Here it is not forbidden to speak of loss, to cry, to hold space for grief. Here I am accepted with my complicated, obsessive, painful relationship to death. I am surrounded by it.

We are shaped by our experiences, so we are also shaped by our grief. I am reminded that we are never alone, that a place filled with the dead is still a place very much alive and breathing. **And maybe that is the analogy or takeaway, that even when we are surrounded with death, suffocating in grief, we are still alive, still breathing.**



Fig 8. *Mother*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid, 2023-2025

Watching you destroy yourself  
Everyday  
Getting worse  
Nothing I can say or do to make it better  
Nothing I can say or do matters  
The cycle  
again, and again  
I have been through this time and time again  
To love someone who is hurting so bad they can't love themselves or others  
It's making me colder, it's making me older, and jaded  
All the things you could have been  
All the things you could still be

## GATHERING

Gathering is a ritual.

I find much of the research, process, and resulting artworks are forms of remembering and of honouring. Conceptualizing meaning from the roots or ground up, gathering is a way to allow the process help inform the meaning of the artwork. Gathering/foraging/accumulating/collecting as a methodology to generate.

I started running out of vessels  
To put my collections in  
Dried flowers, grasses, leaves, mushrooms, river stones, pieces of bark, bones  
Little pieces foraged, found, and brought home  
Moments of solitude, of remembrance, of prayer, ritual with the land  
Nature always feels like it can help carry and withstand the immensity of grief  
These moments with the land are when I can feel you close  
I realized no vessel can contain it all  
Including this one

I like to think that my affinity for gathering/collecting comes from my grandmother (mothers' mother). A woman of great love for antique items. Her house has become what I joke, her own museum of her thrift store finds. Floor to wall cabinets of teacups and painted dishes. My grandmother instilled a passion for a good deal and for the antique style, keeping previous eras alive through the items she surrounds herself with. Thinking back upon it I always had a thing for collections-

my first was probably a stuffed animal collection or of books/magazines. As I grew older, I started collecting various other things, vinyl records, thrifted and vintage clothing and furniture, cameras, glass jars, bones, mushrooms, flowers, plants stones/rocks, patches, photographs, videos, magazines, books, zines, prints, beach glass, shells and so forth. Little pieces of my identity reflected through the physical items I gather in my life started to find their ways to represent themselves in my artistic practice as well.

I aim to accumulate an abundance of specific materials which I transform into art. Accumulating a massive archive of photographs, magazines, cut out images allows me to create a visual repertoire to source from. But it also might mean accumulating and gathering natural material like the dirt for *altar (spiderweb)* (Fig 5), where my partner Lyndon and I collected buckets of dirt from outside locations. I brought that collected earth into the gallery space along with water and formed the sculpture in the space. After this work was completed, I returned the dirt back to the earth.



Fig 9. *Altar (spiderweb)*, collected dirt, candle, installation, 2024

In thinking about myself and about my grandmother, I can't help but wonder what the deeper psychological need is to accumulate things? Most people would say having one camera is enough, but not to a collector. Beyond the idea of accumulating, why are we attracted to certain objects? Over the years of grief, I have reflected on this a lot. How people are gone, yet objects remain.

I wear your old shoes. There so worn out. Every time I slip them on, I feel the grooves of where your feet wore out the sole so thin, impressive to me as I always managed to bust a hole in my docs before the bottoms wore out.

Black leather boots.

I feel like I am bringing you with me that day when I wear them out, or your other clothes I have. I long for you so I hold on to the little pieces I have left to conjure your spirit. I leave the sewing needle and thread still attached to the vest you were working on.

It makes sense to me, that I inherited this trait from her. I have never known my grandmother before grief, her loss rather, then mine. My grandfather died young and left my grandmother a widow and mother of four. Maybe this obsession with objects is really a defence mechanism against loss. This act of desire and preservation, in response to unfillable longing.



## ASSEMBLAGE

Acts of assemblage, of bricolage, or collage are important to the methodological process of my work. Patching disparate materials, I have gathered and a range of ideas into an assembled body, to represent certain questions, explorations and understandings found through both research, material, and creation.

Artist Christian Boltanski also works with themes of assemblage and trauma. Looking at his work I find points of convergence and divergence between our practices but found the following anecdote helpful in explaining working with found material: “by appropriating mementos of others’ lives and presenting them as if they were his own, he could both depersonalize and generalize their content, allowing each of us to share the remembrances and to see in them our own experiences” (Gumpert, Lynn, and Mary Jane Jacob 11). This reminds me of why I am often using found objects or ambiguous images in my work rather than the exact images and objects I have of those lost. This allows a distance between personal trauma and the world that makes it easier to engage with. Assemblage becomes about editing, arranging, rearranging, putting together and taking apart. The different pieces work together as an assemblage to explore the vast nature of these intersecting themes. Fragments, bound to another, forming new worlds.



Fig 9. *He loves me, he loves me not*. Found window, ink, medium, dried plants. 2024

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography has always offered me a way to try to hold on to fleeting moments. I am drawn to shooting with film for the nostalgic effect and the mediums potential to evoke the otherworldly through light leaks, and chemical reactions that you do not experience with digital. The spirits infusing the photograph. In *Collecting Decay* (Fig 1) (Fig 4) (Fig 6) (Fig 7) (Fig 8) (Fig 16), I used Polaroid film and experimented with the process of emulsion transfers. This process involves separating the image from the Polaroid plastic encasing and transferring it on to a new surface, in this case watercolour paper. I use the fragmentation, the decay of the image, the cracks, rips, disruptions for its relationship to the idea of memory, of loss, of the duality of both preservation and decay of the material and concept. It further visualizes the experience of remembering, as the result is not a pristine clean image, time effects it, it is never as it once was, memories fade and become manipulated (Hallam and Hockey 27). My images focus on what beckons to me amongst the cemetery, from the fading of inscriptions, symbology, intricate carving, to how nature interacted with gravestones displaying the passing of time and new life as I revisited the cemetery over the different seasons. After the process of transferring, some of the images become unrecognizable, completely detached from my original intention, possibly becoming even more reminiscent of the act of remembering, of longing. I found it challenging to let go of all the images and control, their transformation could be their potential ruin. Deciding to hold off on further transfers due to this temperament, the image collection continues to grow, and I wonder whether the added process expands or dilutes their quality.

Photography has long been a tool connected to visualizing transition. It acts as a constant reminder of the liminal, somewhere in-between here and elsewhere, in-between the present, past and future, in-between life, and death (Cousineau-Levine 223). Photography is an attempt at preservation. Its role to capture, to hold in time.

Some even argue that photography can create visible the invisible, to conjure ghosts, spirits and that which we cannot always see (*Ghost photography: illusioned del visible*). With loss we are always longing, always looking back, not forward, always feeling an absence. With *Collecting Decay*, I am choosing to lean into the absence. Photographing will never bring back the dead, nothing we do has such a power. Although, Hallam and Hockey write that “writing contaminates; writing leaves a trace, a trace beyond the mortality of the body” (157) and photographs do this too, leave a trace. Photographs become this material object we can hold on to, that we utilize in different ways to remember, even after someone is gone, we continue to search for that trace (Hallam and Hockey 144, 153). My process of art making in relation to death and grief is this desire to maintain a relationship with those I grieve, a desire for them to still be around and a part of my every day. The duality of life and death, of presence and absence, here and elsewhere become constants, as I find myself embracing the contradictions.

A new ritual has formed over the recent years, one where I sift through old memories and photographs gathering any images of lost loved ones to share with family and friends. As the years go by more and more ghosts haunt these photographs. One thing that never changes about this ritual, is the wish for more. The desire that I should have taken more images, all the time, that this was not enough, not enough at all to hold you in, to hold your memories alive.



Fig 10. *Grave side*, pencil crayon, graphite on inkjet photograph, 2025

Grave side (Fig 10) is such a photograph produced from this ritual. An unknown image, with uncanny allure.

After the death of my grandmother in the summer of 2023, I began the process of sorting, scanning, and digitizing my grandparents old photo albums and documents, many of which I had never seen before. Amongst the Polaroids and film snaps of a lifetime of memories, I got to witness and honour my grandparents' lives. Yet I couldn't shake the dreadful emotions of not having either of them here anymore to ask about these photographs, these stories, and memories. One image I came upon, a Polaroid, of a fresh mound of dirt covered in dotted flowers, leaves and ribbons. A grave, one of enough importance to document at a time when film

was sparse and costly. This image haunts me in a way, it is an ancestor of mine, a close relative of either of my grandparents yet they are not here to answer my questions, they are not here to pass on the story. So, is it lost? I asked my dad and my uncle, so far no one knows. Likely near one of the farms where my grandparents were raised. Why was this image of death or remembrance in their photos yet no other I could discern of the type? What does it mean to wonder, to feel connection to the unknown? What does it mean to accept the unknown and the idea of never knowing? What is the power of images to outlive us?

## IMAGE TRANSFERS

The process and materiality of image transfer allow for a distressed, decaying, disintegrating image that embodies the fragmentary nature of memory, decay, and disillusion that occurs over time. Transferring images is an act of leaving traces, the act of transference. I think a lot about how we have these traces of others within ourselves. The way our loved one's shape and inform us, how the interactions add up to influence who we are and how we are. We are constantly taking little bits of the people, places, objects we encounter to construct ourselves. We are all in relation. The labour of the repetitive motions of image transfer also connect back to the repetitive nature of memory and trauma and hauntology (Gordon 4). Returning repeatedly, removing layers, creating new skins that carry the images. A flesh, laden with wounds, bearing the traces of the trauma. The photos now have a wear of time, of a certain fragility they did not possess before. Creation through embracing its distress and damage is integral to the final result. Much like how I am trying to embrace that about myself, to reveal those distorted fragments rather than conceal and hide these sides of myself.





Fig 11. *The Void*, Image Transfer on canvas, Installation view, 2025

*The void* features a photograph I took of my friend at the site of an abandoned mountain town and mine. A female leans through an opening in a stone wall of ruins, marked by spray paint and decay. Looking through to what lies beyond. The light and emptiness of the portal are almost blinding in comparison to the gray tones of the stone surrounding it. Collaged edges, breakage, canvas bleeds through the cracks from behind. This large-scale image transfers makes it feel as if you are viewing the stone portal in person.





Fig 12. *Buzz buzz*, Image transfer on canvas, 2024

Using found imagery of closeup images of flies I enlarged their size and transferred them on to canvas. Buzzing in your ear, reminding you death is always there.

Attracted to rot and decay, flies desire, they divulge, they gather, they fester, they swarm, they devour, they buzz, they flicker, they overwhelm, they pester, they linger.

A memento mori, flies are symbols of death and decay.

## DEATH OBJECTS

Objects of death, of grief. The objects that remain. How do we attach meaning to objects, how do objects influence us, our identities? How do objects become conduits for memories? Found objects occur in my work to explore these questions, bound to histories and experiences beyond my own.

The uncanny is commonly associated with both surrealism and psychoanalysis. Describing a feeling of when the familiar becomes strange, home unhomey. Natalie Loveless discusses how “to experience the uncanny is to always be like a boundary object, within and without simultaneously” (46). The unease or discomfort often linked to the uncanny becomes a way to demonstrate the emotions embedded in my artwork (Loveless 48). How do we attach ourselves to certain objects or symbols? How does their displacement reveal new meanings and associations? Loveless uses the uncanny, to also conceptualize the porous nature between the known and unknown, invisible, visible, familiar, and strange, that research and art creation move between (57). Uncanny objects allure and repel. The uncanny, is the moments of feeling Gordon describes in *Hauntology* (3).

In *Evocative Objects* Sherry Turckle further animates the liminal nature and dualistic qualities of the uncanny, suggesting that objects can conjure emotion and memory (11). I find myself attached to certain objects, ones that root our identity and our memory. Objects that keep you here with me in the present even though your gone. Julietta Singh writes:

“Every object is a narrative that is already embedded in me, and how the object came to be mine is embodied history. In this sense, the object becomes the exterior double for what is already inside me, for the historical trace that its material emergence has left in my body. “(40)

capturing the emotional attachment to objects and how they can become a part of us. Turckle also comments on the potential for an object to “hold an unexplored world, containing within its memory, emotion, and untapped creativity” (228). This potential allows found objects in art to become alive with all these possibilities. Some connections may be deeply personal and transmit different meaning to different people. This sort of life of objects or afterlife can be applied to Walter Benjamin’s concept of ‘aura’ provoking one to think of the “dynamic, fraught relationship between the beholder and the artefact” (Locating Memory 114), one that does not translate universally but is in flux. Aura evokes something inside, emanates, invites, pushes, and pulls you. Akin with the uncanny, aura can create an emotional response to visual material, one that provokes your unconscious.

In the essay *I See Thee Still: Mourning Objects in an Age Before Spiritualism*, Lan Morgan explores this notion of objects holding connections between worlds and across time, becoming important to the grief process (71). Many objects we still encounter today are associated with ritual functions, such as an altar, an urn, gravestones, candles, and some are personal belongings or gifts from the deceased, much of which I explore in my work. The echoes of the romantic period and gothic, when death was at the forefront of visual culture, still reverberate in the old stonework of the cemetery and our consciousness (Morgan 74). Searching for a visual language for loss we turn to the symbols, stories, and images of the past.



Fig 13. *Lantern*, found stained glass lamp, image transfers, chain, lightbulb, 2024

Objects carry histories, they carry stories, and in that sense, they can carry grief too. *Lantern* (Fig 13), A nightlight, a dim glow, the images skewed, the light humming, an aura emanating of this everyday object. Images of the land, animals, and the female figures transform the stain glass lamp through image transfers. Black and white images exploring the cycle of life/death/rebirth are illuminated from within. The chain beckons to constraint, restraint, a binding to or connection point both connected to the lamp but detached and beckoning beyond, its shadow interacting with the beams of light in the space. A vessel of light obstructed, contained. The hauntings a whisper, keeping you company in the dark. A container of grief, a container of wonder.

Objects become vessels for our projections and longings, for our identity and memories, they keep parts of us alive as time passes and parts of us die. I am surrounded by the objects that outlived you, your favourite sweater, your records, even things like salt and pepper shakers your grandparents collected, and you loved as a kid. I am surrounded by objects that are from you, that remind me of you, how can I ever let these precious objects go? Yet they are just that, objects, things, that feel no connection or relationship back to me, objects that disappear, that are fragile and can break and objects that wear out over time and after use, objects I barely touch for fear of damage and loss, objects so highly significant sitting on shelves and in boxes.



Fig 14. *Cairn stone*, found stained glass window, image transfer, led lights, 2025

*Cairn stone* (Fig 14) is a found stained glass window with image transfers, the edges illuminating with coloured light. Darkened, the images become hard to read or untangle visually without reference points. Holes in the image allow you to peer

through to the other side of the glass unobstructed. These faint dreamy images are just out of reach. The side panels are images of tree bark with moss growing on it, tinted by the coloured light surrounding the frame. The center two panels both reference a resting place, or burial site. The top image is from a Polaroid taken in the ravine, a stone circle surrounds a central stone, a spot that reminds of the ancient traditions of marking burial and ritual sites with stones, signifying meaning connected to a certain place. The bottom image is a Polaroid taken of the trees on Nose hill in Alberta, a sacred site and one of ceremony. A place where, as a family we spread your ashes letting you be amongst the land that you loved, where memories were shared, we let you free in places where you were happy.

Grief changes a person  
There is no going back  
To a life without this hole,  
To when life was whole  
Theres no going back  
I go back in dreams  
But its distorted, not right  
Same thing when I go back in my mind, always missing pieces  
Memory is fickle like that  
Sometimes you feel every cell of that moment  
Other times you struggle to recall what exactly transpired  
Funny how you can remember certain things in such detail and others erased,  
ungraspable.



## FILM

The haze of a dream, a memory flickering by, a misremembering, a moment woven into the fabric of your identity, a defining moment, one that returns, a reminder.



Fig 15. *Out of time* (still), 16mm film, 4 mins 33 seconds, 2025

*Out of time* is a short video work, where 16mm colour film shot in the cemetery merges with 16mm black and white film shot in nature creating a fluid layering of time and memory contemplating death and loss, preservation and decay of our bodies and environments. The results are a hypnotic, trance like, remembering, flickering between shots that blend together, mutate, and create new images of the two worlds colliding into one. Using different frequencies of timing the colour shifts to black and white film and vice versa, using no set pace/timing the videos collide and interrupt each other, causing glitching, overlaying and other effects. Like remembering, memories become imprinted on each other, sometimes skewed, or mixed together, mutating, and transforming over time. Living in the past means spending a lot of time with memory, replaying certain ones over and over, whether you wish too or not. Such kinds of things send people to substances to nullify, to

numb, to forget or wash away the pain associated with remembering. The 16mm videos were shot on a Bolex film camera. The colour film was shot in the cemetery during fall, focusing on the seasons state of transition and decay among the trees and gravestones. The black and white film, shot on the Toronto Island, features the land, the water, and swans in a highly contrasted ethereal whitewashed look. A stark comparison to the autumn film colours of the other reel. Abruptly shifting between the two creates a sense of urgency, at times uncomfortable where at others you want to linger in these in-between worlds. Focused on grounding and reflection, mediative techniques and expressing these conscious experiences, the point of view style creates a sense of experiencing, urging one to slow down and notice the details, before being forced on to the next scene. Creating a certain sense of time being off, out of synch with the surroundings or memory, you are missing a narrative to ground you, a story to hold on to. The repetitive looping mimics trauma and memory, the cycles of life and death, the continual loop.



Fig 16. *Out of time* (still), 16mm film, 4 mins 33 seconds, 2025

I spend my time alone

Collecting wildflowers

Searching for momentary peace staring up into the clouds.



Fig 17. *Water womb*, from series *Collecting Decay*, Polaroid, 2023-2025

The land is a witness, the trees hold me up.

We talk without words. They remind me. I am not alone.

The water births me, a renewal each time it envelops me.

I want to let the land consume me, to become a part of it.

The grass tickles me, reminds me of the joys of the wonderment of a child's eye.

The dirt pulls me to the ground, to the part of my soul that lies beneath, not in my  
body.

The wind embraces me, silent screams of reassurance.

## EXHIBITION REFLECTION

The exhibition *Among flowers and bones* took place March 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> at Ignite Gallery. Ignite has the classic empty white wall gallery aesthetic, featuring a three walled space to form a room, that attaches to a hallway and another gallery section. Adapting my initial plans and visions due to the limitations of space and certain parameters such as little ability to hang from the ceiling or use a projector. I tried to create an intimate space for reflection and ambiance from the different works that involved light, but due to the safety lighting of the hallway and office beside the gallery I did not have full control. As with much of this work I struggle to find the right balance between letting go and holding on. I tried to embrace an attitude of acceptance and rolled with the way things unfolded, such as layout. Overall, I received positive feedback, many intrigued by the use of light and stained glass. Interestingly, there was mixed reactions to the use of found objects (perception that the value is lesser then if I made the lamp from scratch). People were interested in the materiality of the work and uncertain about the alternative image processes. Once the works were up you could start seeing the connections between the pieces and overlapping narratives.

“Because each photograph is only a fragment, its moral and emotional weight depends on where it is inserted. A photograph changes according to the context in which it is seen” (Sontag 114). This means when the photographs I select go up, the fragments I put on display of my practice become the viewers full experience and scope. They no longer carry all the detail and meaning I pour into them; they are open to be interpreted, and their meaning changed by whoever views its own experience. Embracing the fragments, new lives, new stories, and meanings emerge, leaving my hands and heart, offering it outwards to the world.

*Lantern* (Fig 13), a vessel of light, illuminates the space, glowing from within, and adding a warm hue to the room. Both *Lantern* and *Cairn stone* (Fig 14) use light, image transfer and stained glass, creating many connections between the two. Everyday domestic objects such as a window and lamp are now juxtaposed into a gallery space where they function differently but bring reference to the house, to the domestic, to home. Both intimate objects are connected to reflection.

I find myself staring at the holes in the transfers, the gaps of emptiness create discomfort, a wound, a rupture or puncture you can feel inside your gut. You feel restricted from the information, you feel a sense that something is missing, a certain longing for more.

*The void* (Fig 2), a large-scale image transfer is almost life size and hung on the wall near the window. Two portals and acts of looking. Nearby on the wall *Buzz buzz* (Fig 12) throws off your perception by using scale to magnify the minute to the grand. Little flies become larger than the figure nearby, what was once small is now confrontational. What is it like to be eaten and decomposed? The process of the body decaying flies and other insects devouring and repurposing you, transforming your body into its new phase, one that will help nourish and rebirth more life even in death.

On the final wall a monitor is mounted and beside are six images grouped in pairs horizontally. The monitor features *Out of time* (Fig3) (Fig 15) (Fig 16), a video work made by digitally manipulating two 16mm reels of film. The images on the wall are from the series *Collecting Decay*, six at 16x16 scans of Polaroids printed on photo rag matt baryta paper. A ghostly lake is dotted with specks that look like stars, an emulsion spot evoking a spirit (Fig 17). A grave features a cross, the grass is overgrown, and dead grass lies along the horizontal coffin shaped grave, light leaks conjure a candle flame (Fig 7). An angel amongst the branches (Fig 1). A faded grave

with sculpted flowers on it also disintegrates like the decay of memory and the body (Fig 4). A grave titled “mother” with a mostly empty vase behind it, little flowers grow amongst the grass as spring rebirths new life into the cemetery (Fig 8). The final image is of the beach and water, a light trail beams as a doorway aligned with the trees focusing on the water and beyond (Fig 6). The water ever so related to life and birth and renewal can also be a land of mystery, the unknown, the vast.

Together these pieces remind one of mortality, and create spaces to reflect on memory, death, decay, preservation, grief, and the connections between the land, the body, and the rest of the universe. *Among flowers and bones* highlights the cycles of life and death, conjuring portals, and glimpses into the in between or elsewhere.



Time is both forever, painfully long and fleeting, all too short. It feels like a lifetime  
has passed since you died, yet it also feels like it was only a month ago. How is it  
possible to experience life when we are suspended in this limbo, this out of time,  
time without you,

“Perhaps...one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be  
changed, possibly forever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a  
transformation...the full result of which one cannot know in advance” Judith Butler  
(Holman Jones 235)

I am mourning, I am transforming.

## CONCLUSION

There is no ending. No closure. No way to wrap this all up neatly with a bow. The grief doesn't stop, the process doesn't halt. The clock keeps ticking.

Using art, writing, research, and creation I work towards healing my trauma and honouring my grief and lost loved ones. Dealing with the effects of trauma such as being out of time, I make work exploring the intersections of memory, photography, and death. Incorporating poetry and autoethnography, I try to infuse myself into the thesis, and illustrate how the personal and theoretical come together to inform my art.

A perpetual process of reflection, embodiment, learning, reading, mourning, honouring, and making, *Among the flowers and bones* allows me to excavate my own traumas, share stories and create space for others to do the same. I offer artistic wanderings/ interpretations as I search through the world, the places, the objects around me, the people, the land, for what I have lost, and for what I never had. To hold on while letting go, to find the pieces to carry forward. To carry on at all. Reminding myself death is always followed by life, the cycle continues.

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## APPENDIX



Images from *Collecting Decay*, Poloriods, 2023-2025





Images from *Collecting Decay*, Polorioids, 2023-2025



Images from *Collecting Decay*, Poloriods, 2023-2025





Images from *Collecting Decay*, Polorioids, 2023-2025



Images from *Collecting Decay*, Polorioids, 2023-2025



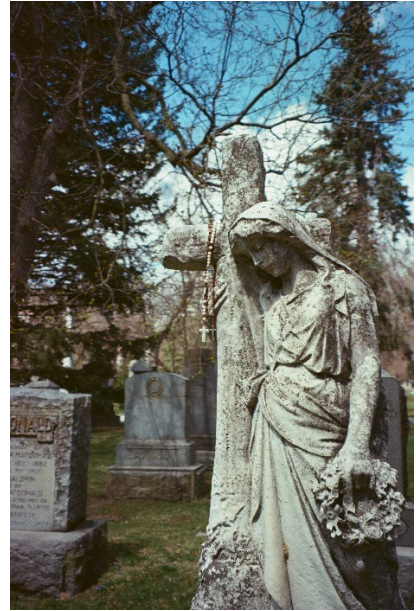


from *Collecting Decay*, Poloriod emulsion transfer on watercolour paper, 2023-2025



from *Collecting Decay*, Polorioid emulsion transfer on watercolour paper, 2023-2025





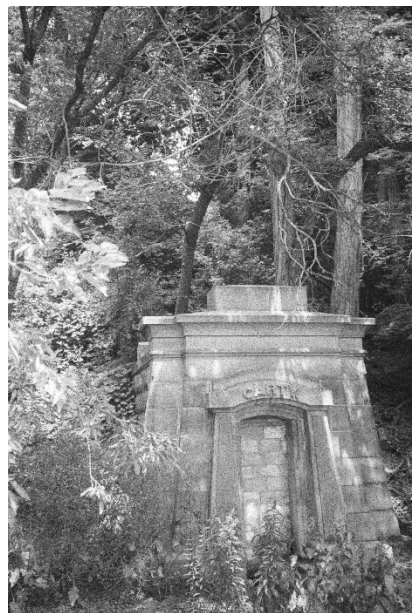
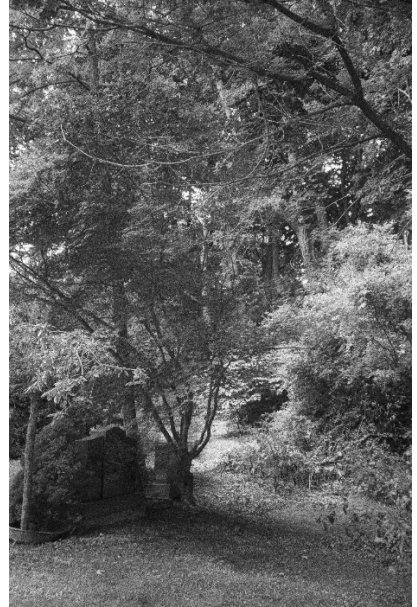
35mm Film images from the cemetery





35mm Film images from the cemetery.





35mm Film images from the cemetery.

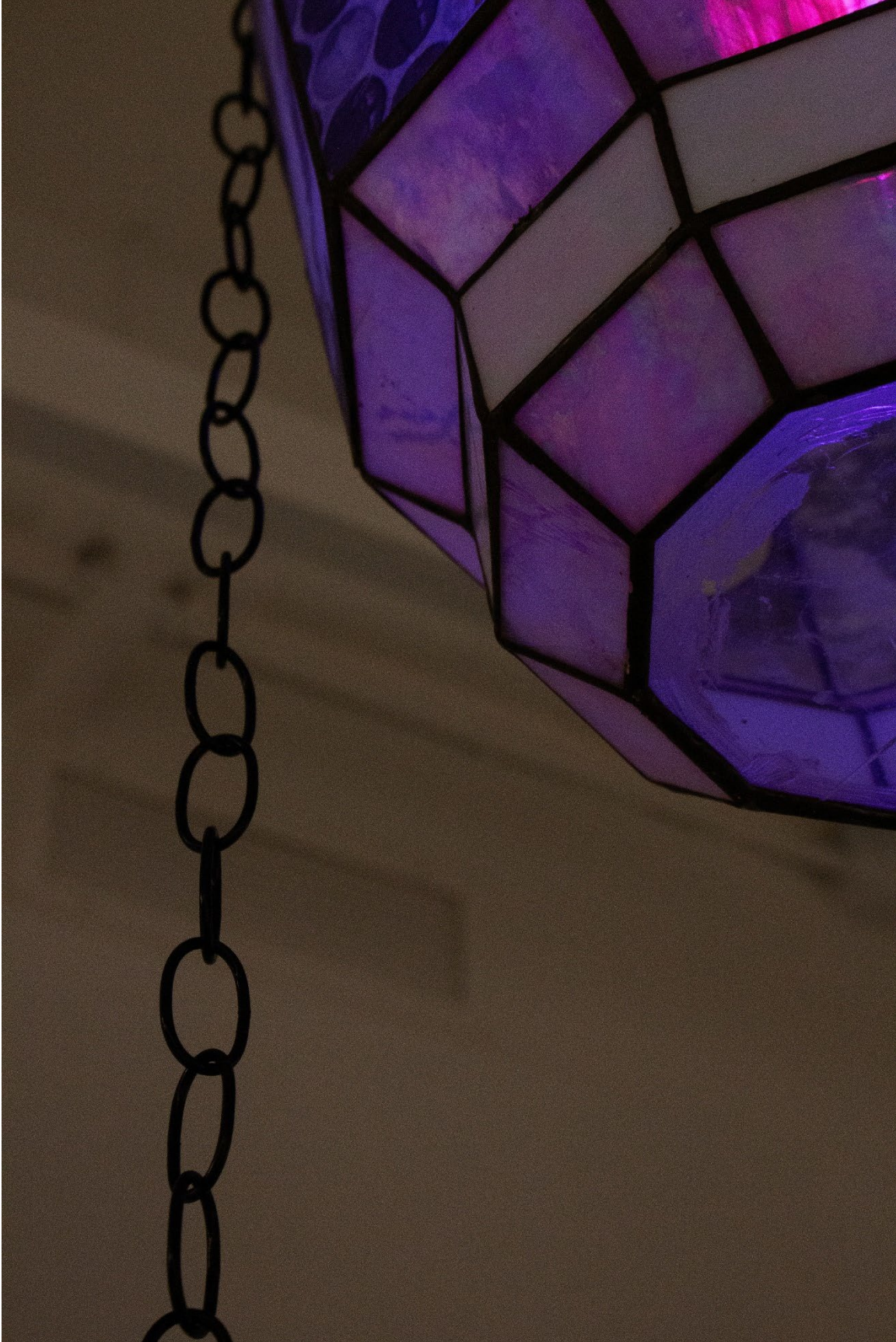


*Into the ether*, acrylic ink, found window, inkjet photograph, candle wax, dried flowers, 2023



Additional Documentation Images of Exhibition





















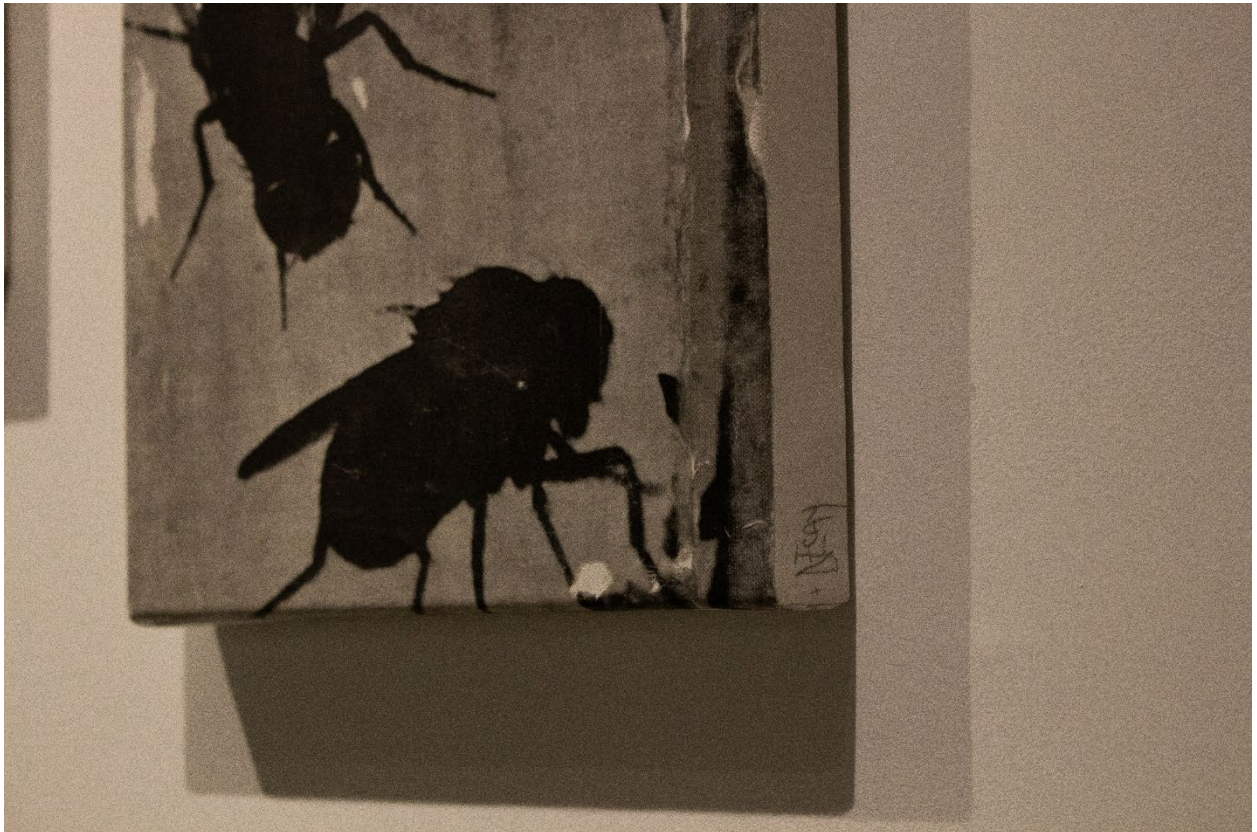




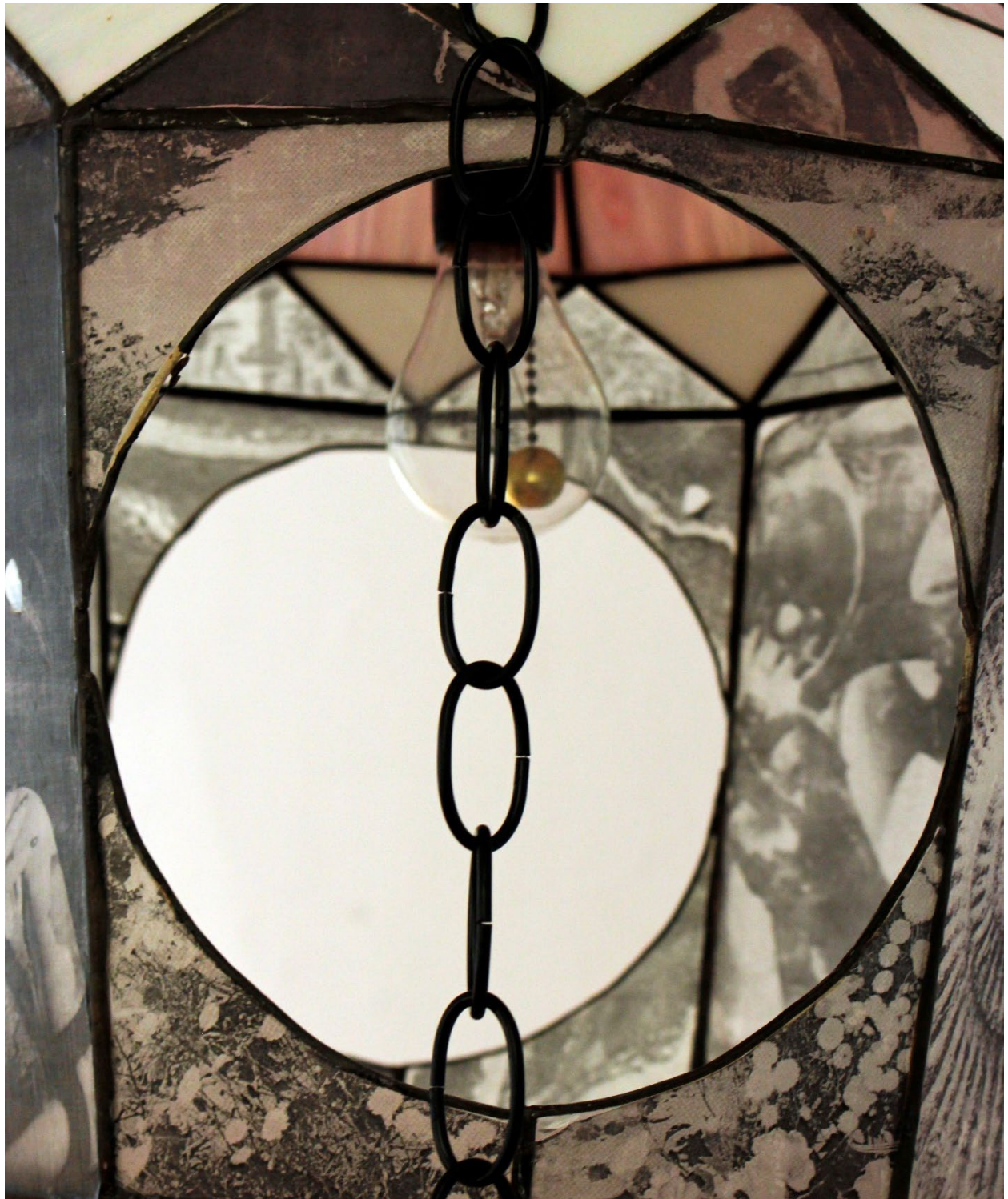














Video link to *Out of time*

<https://youtu.be/oEiptAwOIws>