

Weaving Performance

- Washi, Weaving, and the Visibility of Emotion

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A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art in Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design (IAMD)

Ada Slaight Hallway (MCA 228), 100 McCaul St
March 24th - March 30th
Toronto, Ontario, Canada 2026

Abstract

This thesis investigates how weaving, a domestic textile practice, can be transformed into a live, costumed performance that holds and reshapes experiences of bipolar emotional sensitivity. Rather than treating emotion as purely internal, the project understands feeling as something that moves between bodies, materials, and environments. It asks how a loom, a squid-yokai costume, and my performing body can make states of overwhelm, exhaustion, and relief visible in everyday spaces, and reframe emotional intensity as a form of knowledge. Using a practice-based, autoethnographic methodology, I conducted a series of 30- to 60-minute weaving sessions in private, semi-private, and public locations in Toronto and Hangzhou. In each session, I wore a white washi-paper costume inspired by the bigfin squid and Japanese yokai, with two long, expandable tentacles that exaggerated a sense of stretched, fragile reach. The loom was set up so that one continuous length of cloth recorded changes in density and structure over time. Each performance was documented through video, photographs, field notes, still images of the textile, and reflective writing. The project identifies how bipolar rhythms shape material decisions at the loom, how costume and movement externalize inner states without reducing them to symptoms, and how site changes the risks and possibilities of being visibly “not okay” in public. The outcomes show cloth and costume as emotional archives that carry traces of contact, weather, and mood, while offering alternatives to strictly medical or productivity-based views of mental health. This thesis contributes to craft studies, performance, and mental health discourse by proposing weaving as a relational, mobile space for thinking with emotional sensitivity. It suggests that slow, fragile, and repetitive practices can hold complex states in ways that invite curiosity, care, and shared reflection.

Keywords: Weaving, Comparative Performance, Performance Autoethnography, Washi, Yokai Costume.

Acknowledgments

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my primary advisor, Nithikul Nimkulrat, and my secondary advisor, Ayumi Goto, for their generous guidance, thoughtful criticism, and sustained encouragement throughout the development of this thesis. Their support has been invaluable to both my research and my practice, and I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to have worked under their supervision.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to the faculty of the Material Art & Design program and the Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design program. Their teaching, support, and intellectual generosity have shaped my development as both a researcher and an artist. Without their guidance, I would not have been able to complete my studies.

I am equally grateful to my friends for their emotional and technical support throughout this process. I would especially like to thank Enze Mao, Jiayi Wei, Ming Zhang, Wenxi Lyu, and Ziyuan Wang. Their encouragement, assistance, and presence supported me in meaningful ways during the writing, making, and presentation of this work.

I would also like to acknowledge my dogs, Pablo and Lalo, whose companionship brought comfort and emotional support throughout this journey.

Finally, I wish to thank my family for their continuous care, patience, and support. Their presence sustained me through the many challenges of this project, and this thesis would not have been possible without them.

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Chapter1: Introduction

1.1 Thesis Questions

This thesis investigates how a domestic, embodied textile practice, such as weaving, can become a live performance through which bipolar emotional states are expressed, held, and transformed. I approach emotion as something that circulates between bodies, objects, and environments, rather than as a purely internal psychological condition (Ahmed, 2004). I also understand attachments to stability, productivity, and artistic success as shaped by cultural fantasies of “the good life,” which can sometimes be damaging or impossible to sustain (Berlant, 2011). Within this framework, I ask how the loom, the costume, and my performing body might work together to materialize shifting affective states in different spaces and to reframe emotional sensitivity as a form of knowledge. These performances will take place in a range of locations, including my studio, the OCAD university as the university space, my balcony, and nearby parks, in sessions of roughly 30 to 60 minutes.

My primary research question is: How can a domestic and embodied textile practice like weaving be transformed into a public performance that provides a space to express personal and collective emotions surrounding mental health and familial experiences? This question foregrounds my lived experience with bipolar disorder and my heightened emotional sensitivity as central, rather than supplementary, to the research process. By treating emotional fluctuation as a generative constraint rather than a problem to be concealed, I aim to test how performance-based weaving can host, translate, and gently redirect intense feelings in front of an audience.

This primary inquiry unfolds into several secondary questions that structure the project:

- How does emotional sensitivity play in the creative process, and how might it be cultivated rather than pathologized? To address this question, I draw on affect theory to consider how vulnerability, instability, and mood shifts can fuel artistic decision-making rather than undermine it (Ahmed, 2004). I also consider how cultural expectations around a “good life” or a “good artist” can create pressures that intensify self-blame and shame (Berlant, 2011).
- How can narrative, costume, and gesture transform inner emotional states into legible forms of visual language? To answer this question, I draw on craft theory, which understands making as a mode of thinking and knowing, so weaving does not simply illustrate feeling but participates in its formation (Adamson, 2007). I also draw on textile research that emphasizes the traces of embodied experience left in crafted artifacts, treating the woven surface as a record of bodily and emotional decisions over time (Nimkulrat, 2024).
- How might using textiles and performance to express joy and relief around a subject usually understood as negative reshape how the artist and the broader community experience and perceive it? This question leads to the adoption of autoethnographic approaches that value lived experience as a legitimate source of research insight and encourage writing from the body and from vulnerability (Adams et al., 2017). I also draw from somatic and performance-based methodologies that treat movement, gesture, and sensation as central to understanding and communicating complex emotional states (Fernandes, 2014).
- How do the cultural and social contexts of Toronto and Hangzhou shape the performance’s visibility, meaning, and emotional risk across private, semi-public, and public spaces? This question justifies the project’s comparative structure across Canada and China. I use it to examine how the same weaving performance may be

read differently depending on local expectations around dress, public behaviour, and emotional expression. By moving between Toronto and Hangzhou, I investigate how the place affects not only audience perception, but also my own sense of comfort, exposure, and belonging.

Together, these questions guide both the conceptual and material dimensions of the thesis. They shape how I design and inhabit the yokai-inspired costume, how I configure the reverse loom as an emotional continuum, and how I interpret the resulting textiles, performances, and audience responses. By articulating the research in this way, I position the project at the intersection of affect theory, craft studies, and autoethnographic performance and establish a clear trajectory for examining how weaving might function as an emotional archive and as a shared space of reflection on mental health.

1.2 Methodology

The subsections that follow outline the main approaches that support this methodology. This thesis uses a practice-based, autoethnographic methodology grounded in textile-based performance. Weaving, costume making, and live performance function as primary research methods through which knowledge is generated rather than illustrated. To support this approach, I draw on craft and material thinking, affect theory, mental health scholarship, narrative and art therapy, and references to creative works that inform the project's visual and performative language. Together, these approaches allow me to examine how bipolar emotional sensitivity is materialized through cloth, costume, gesture, and site.

1.2.1 Textiles-based Performance as an Autoethographic Method

My methodology combines practice-based research, autoethnography, performing autoethnography, and reflective analysis to investigate how weaving can operate as both an artistic practice and a mode of emotional inquiry. Practice-based research is central to this thesis because knowledge is generated through making, rather than only through written interpretation after the fact (Nimkulrat, 2010). In this project, making, wearing, weaving, and documenting are not secondary to the research; they are the research process itself. I also treat reflection as an iterative part of that process, returning to notes, video documentation, photographs, and woven samples to consider how meaning develops over time through performance.

I use autoethnography to centre my lived experience with bipolar disorder and emotional sensitivity as a legitimate source of knowledge. Bipolar disorder is characterized by marked shifts in mood, energy, and activity levels that can affect a person's ability to carry out day-to-day tasks (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], n.d.-a). In my own experience, depressive phases involved severe exhaustion, reduced appetite, and periods in which I felt unable to attend school; at times, they were also accompanied by suicidal thoughts. During manic phases, I experienced unusually high energy, rapid thinking, and a feeling that my mind was moving too quickly to settle. NIMH notes that mania can include racing thoughts and increased energy, while depression can include changes in appetite and symptoms that interfere with daily activities (NIMH, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). What mattered most for this project was not only each state on its own, but the exhausting movement between them. The repeated shift between depressive and manic states consumed energy and shaped how I came to understand fatigue, vulnerability, and emotional exposure in performance.

Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2017) describe autoethnography as an approach that uses personal experience to examine wider cultural and social life. This approach has also been used in mental health research to connect embodied experience with professional, institutional, and relational contexts. For example, Foster, McAllister, and O'Brien (2005) show how autoethnography can produce situated knowledge about care, identity, and lived mental health experience. Following this approach, I track my emotional and physical states before, during, and after each weaving session through reflective writing, paying attention to how shifts in mood, energy, and anxiety influence decisions about material choice, structure, density, and scale in the cloth.

Performing autoethnography extends this work into embodied, live practice. Spry (2001) presents autoethnographic performance as a way to “perform the self” while also questioning power relations. I follow this idea when I weave in real time across a comparative set of settings in Toronto, Canada, and Hangzhou, China, my studio, the university space, my balcony, family home, and public parks, while wearing the squid-yokai costume. The selected sites are shaped not only by conceptual comparison but also by practical concerns of safety, familiarity, and emotionally manageable exposure. I therefore treat each live weaving session as a performance that tests how my body, gestures, and pace respond to internal states and to the presence of viewers. In this thesis, my body is the primary research site because it is where mood, fatigue, attention, and sensory responses are first felt and negotiated. At the same time, the loom and the costume both extend and reshape my body in performance by altering how it moves, occupies space, and is perceived by others. Video and photographic documentation allow me to revisit these performances later and connect visible actions at the loom.

These methods constitute a practice-based, autoethnographic research approach. Autoethnographic writing allows me to track emotional and bodily states before, during, and after performance. Performing autoethnography allows me to examine how weaving, gesture, costume, and bodily presence operate in live situations. Reflective analysis helps me connect the performances, documentation, and woven samples over time. In this thesis, knowledge is generated through practice, documentation, and reflection, rather than from a position outside the making process.

1.2.2 Craft and Material Thinking

Because this is a craft-based project, I also treat making as a research method in its own right. Craft theory provides a language for understanding weaving as a form of thinking. Adamson (2007) argues that craft can function as a way of thinking rather than merely a category of objects or skills, and that craft practices engage critically with materials, histories, and hierarchies of value in contemporary art. I draw on this position to locate my work within debates about the status of textile and domestic labour, and to argue that my weaving practice produces conceptual as well as material outcomes.

Similarly, Nimkulrat (2010) emphasizes material engagement as central to craft research, showing how knowledge emerges through handling, repetition, and response to material. I take this seriously by allowing woven structures to develop through repetitive, iterative engagement with the loom, rather than from fixed, pre-drawn designs. During each session, I respond to my emotional state by adjusting the density, pattern, and rhythm of the weave, treating those adjustments as small experiments in how feelings become material decisions.

In later work, Nimkulrat (2024) argues that crafted artifacts retain traces of the maker's embodied experience. I therefore treat the completed textiles as layered records of bodily tempo, pressure, hesitation, and risk-taking, and I return to them in my analysis of how each performance unfolded. Nimkulrat (2024) also connects textile practice with theories of cognition that extend beyond the brain. I adopt this view to frame each live weaving session as a cognitive system in which body, loom, washi thread, costume, and space all participate in decision-making. This perspective supports my argument that weaving does not merely represent emotion, but actively shapes and is shaped by emotional and sensory states. This understanding also resonates with Nishida's emphasis on experience as grounded in

embodied action rather than detached thought, which helps me think about weaving as a form of knowing that emerges through doing (Nishida, 1990).

These craft-based frameworks allow me to discuss the loom as more than a neutral tool. In my project, this means that the body does not end at the skin. The loom, the washi thread, and the costume all become part of how the body acts, senses, and appears in space. The washi costume can be understood as a kind of temporary outer skin: it wrinkles, stains, tears, and carries the marks of movement and environment, just as the woven cloth records pressure, hesitation, and rhythm. Together, these elements allow me to frame the textile not as a detached object, but as an ongoing conversation between body, material, and context.

1.2.3 Affect, Emotion and Mental Health

Affect theory helps me understand emotion as relational and mobile, rather than as a fixed inner property. Ahmed (2004) describes how emotions stick to bodies and objects, shaping who feels at home, who feels out of place, and how particular things become saturated with comfort or fear. I apply this perspective to the weaving environment, treating the loom, yarn, costume, and gallery as affectively charged elements that already carry histories of domestic labour, illness, gender, and care.

Berlant (2011) develops the concept of “cruel optimism” to describe attachments to ways of living that promise stability, improvement, or belonging, but may actually make life harder to inhabit. I draw on this idea to think about my own attachment to appearing stable, productive, and emotionally controlled, even when my bipolar rhythms do not fit those expectations. Cruel optimism also helps me understand the tension between wanting to be seen and wanting to remain safe from judgment. This tension became especially clear in my performances in Hangzhou, where appearing in a full white costume in everyday public space could conflict with local cultural associations of white clothing with mourning and funerary ritual. In that context, the wish to be accepted within familiar social norms came into conflict with the need to perform the work honestly. Berlant’s concept helps me describe how the desire for belonging, recognisability, and social comfort can become difficult when the work deliberately takes on a form that risks being misunderstood.

By placing these ideas in dialogue, I treat emotional sensitivity as both a personal condition and a response to wider affective economies. Ahmed’s (2004) work draws my attention to how feelings circulate through the space of the loom and the exhibition. Berlant’s (2011) analysis enables me to question the hopeful yet sometimes damaging promises attached to craft, self-care, and art-making as paths toward a better, more stable self.

Together, they guide how I read the performances and textiles as sites where mental health, hope, and disappointment are continually negotiated.

1.2.4 Narrative and Art Therapy

Narrative theory helps me reflect on how mental health experiences are shaped by the stories people tell about themselves and others. White and Epston (1990) argue that people live their lives through stories that can be rewritten, rather than fixed once and for all. I draw on this idea when I notice and gently challenge narrow stories about myself as “sick,” “failing,” or “behind.” Their work is useful for this thesis because it offers a way to think about bipolar experience not as a complete identity, but as something that can be described, reframed, and lived with in different ways. In this sense, weaving and performance become part of a process of re-authoring, in which material action supports the development of new stories about emotional sensitivity, vulnerability, and endurance.

Alongside making and performing, I use narrative and reflective methods to think through the work. White and Epston (1990) propose narrative therapy as a way to loosen problem-saturated stories and cultivate alternative narratives. Inspired by this, I pay close attention to the stories I tell myself about being “productive,” “ill,” or “behind,” and I use writing and weaving to gently reframe those narratives. Norman and Salomonsson (2005) describe “weaving thoughts” as a method for presenting and discussing psychoanalytic case material in a peer group. Their project uses a structured group setting to support the presenter and participants in reflecting on the material together, creating, as they metaphorically describe, a weave of thoughts emerging from it. I borrow this idea as a metaphor for layered interpretation rather than as a formal group method, and I reflect on informal conversations after some performances only in terms of how they shaped my own thinking.

Research in art therapy and drama therapy supports the idea that animal symbols and imagined non-human selves can play a healing role. Bédard-Gascon (2014) explores how animal symbols in art therapy can help people reconnect with a more instinctive

“animal-self” and find new ways to hold strong feelings. Fort (2022) similarly shows that, in drama therapy, animal imagery can provide a safe metaphorical frame for approaching difficult emotional experiences without reducing a person to a diagnosis. This is important to my project because bipolar disorder is often understood primarily through a medical model, as a condition to be stabilized, treated, or controlled. By contrast, I am also interested in artistic ways of modulating emotion: not denying intensity, but giving it form, distance, rhythm, and symbolic structure. Thomson and Jaque (2017) place emotional regulation, resilience, mood, and psychopathology at the centre of their discussion of performing artists, suggesting that difficult affect is not only something to manage clinically but also something that artists must work with in practice. Through this lens, I understand my attraction to non-human forms not as a symptom to be explained away, but as a creative way to hold and transform emotional intensity. The squid–yokai figure, therefore, becomes a material and performative form through which difficult feelings can be approached indirectly, with both distance and care.

1.2.5 References to Creative Work

Alongside these theoretical references, the project is informed by artists whose practices engage monstrosity, transformed embodiment, thread, and site-based performance. Shigeru Mizuki is an important reference because his yōkai imagery helps shape modern understandings of yokai as ambiguous beings at the intersection of the everyday and the extraordinary (Foster, 2008). This ambiguity is relevant to my own use of the squid-yokai figure, which is not meant to appear purely frightening, but also strange, awkward, and curious. Alex Da Corte is relevant for his use of staged persona, disguise, and psychologically charged visual environments. His installations and films often place him in a costume-like transformation while surrounding viewers with vivid, dreamlike scenography, offering a way to think about how theatrical transformation can carry emotional tension without becoming a literal illustration (Museum of Contemporary Art Toronto [MOCA Toronto], 2025; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2022). Chiharu Shiota is important for the way she uses thread to materialize memory, absence, and emotional space. Her large-scale thread installations, built from personal experience and emotion, resonate with my interest in weaving and fibre as carriers of trace and feeling (Shiota, n.d.).

I am also informed by artists whose work activates public or everyday sites through bodily and material presence. Naomi Daryn Boyd's site-based practice is relevant because *Blood, Water & Bathurst Street* treats land, place, and community as active relationships translated through material process, helping me think about how ordinary urban locations can become charged through textile action and embodied attention (Boyd, n.d.). Rebecca Belmore is important for the way her work connects body, land, language, and public intervention. Her performances and installations are especially relevant to my project because they show how visibility and vulnerability can be staged through bodily action in relation to place (Belmore, n.d.; National Gallery of Canada, 2018). Together, these references help me

situate my project within a wider field of creative practices that transform costume, thread, and bodily action into emotionally and spatially charged forms.

Chapter 2: Material Practice

2.1 Overview: Material and Embodied Practice

This chapter explains the project's material and embodied practice concisely before detailing each part. The work takes shape through a set of connected actions: constructing and wearing a squid-yokai costume made from white washi paper, preparing and carrying a portable loom, and performing live weaving across a sequence of private, semi-private, and public sites in Toronto and Hangzhou. These actions are not separate components added together at the end. They form one performance system in which body, costume, loom, thread, environment, and duration work together. Through this system, the project asks how a domestic textile practice like weaving can become live performance, how inner emotional states can take visible form through costume and gesture, and how mental health experience can be expressed in ways that make room for vulnerability, contradiction, and relief.

This material and embodied practice are central to the thesis because they are the primary means by which knowledge is produced. Rather than beginning with a fixed design and then illustrating it, the project unfolds through repeated acts of making, wearing, weaving, and reflecting in specific places, which aligns with practice-based and autoethnographic approaches to research (Adams et al., 2017; Nimkulrat, 2010). The performances are carried out in 30-60-minute sessions so that the work remains responsive to weather, health, mood, and social context. This duration allows the practice to build gradually through repetition while also respecting bodily limits. In this way, the project uses material processes not only to express ideas but also to test how emotional sensitivity moves through cloth, costume, and public visibility. The following sections detail the three main elements of this practice: the costume design, the loom set-up and weaving process, and the performance preparation across different locations.

2.2 Costume Design

The costume is a central component of *Weaving Performance* because it shapes the relationship between body, material, movement, and visibility. Rather than functioning as a visual supplement to the weaving, it operates as part of the research itself, altering how the body moves, appears, and communicates emotional states in performance. Through its scale, fragility, colour, and altered silhouette, the costume gives material form to sensitivity, exposure, and transformation.

This section is divided into four parts. Section 2.2.1 Inspiration outlines the conceptual and symbolic references that informed the costume. Section 2.2.2 Material discusses the choice of kozo-fibre washi and the significance of white paper. Section 2.2.3 First Version of the Costume examines the initial design and the reasons it was revised. Section 2.2.4 Final Version of the Costume analyzes the redesigned garment, including its structure, construction, and performance function.

2.2.1 Inspiration

Research in art therapy and drama therapy suggested that animal symbols and imagined animal selves could help people work with strong feelings by providing a safe form and a small amount of distance. Bédard-Gascon (2014) described how animal images in art therapy could help people reconnect with a more instinctive “animal-self” and find new ways to carry intense emotions. Fort (2022) showed that, in drama therapy, animal metaphors could create a protective frame around experiences related to mental illness, making it possible to explore them without reducing a person to a diagnosis. I drew on this idea when choosing a squid-like costume, understanding my attraction to non-human form not as something to explain away, but as a creative way to hold and transform emotional intensity.

The yokai costume in my performances also grew out of Japanese folklore. Foster (2009) described yokai as ambiguous beings that moved between fear and play, horror and humour. I used this framework when designing and wearing a costume inspired by the bigfin squid, a deep-sea creature with extremely long, jointed arms that looked fragile, strange, and alien (Osterhage et al., 2020). The bigfin squid was mostly known through images taken at a distance, where people could see it and record it, but never fully “catch” or contain it, and this distance mirrored how passersby might only briefly glimpse or photograph my performances. The bigfin squid’s extended limbs and slow, drifting movements echoed how my body could feel when my emotions were out of sync with everyday life, especially in moments of exhaustion or overload. By imagining myself as a squid-like yokai in different places, curled on my studio chair, edging along my balcony, or moving through a park, I gave form to feelings of being too sensitive, too much, or “not quite human enough,” and I could explore those states with more distance, curiosity, and care. When I put on the squid–yokai costume, my outline, pace, and balance changed, but I could still sit, stand, and weave. The costume helped me turn emotional states into a visible, moving form.

Wearing the squid-yokai costume also matters for how I relate to my own mental health. I am not only trying to hide myself, and I am not simply “playing a character (Figure 1)” .



Figure 1. Screenshot from the final Hangzhou weaving performance, showing the artist wearing the squid-yokai washi paper costume and weaving in a community park. *Documentation by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

When I put on the costume, I do not disappear, but I add another visible layer that can hold some of the feelings I find hard to show directly. The long arms, awkward shapes, and rustling paper allow me to express being stretched, overly sensitive, or “out of place” without putting all of that directly onto my everyday clothing and face. The costume lets me say “this is how it feels inside” in a way that can move through private, semi-public, and public spaces. At the same time, the costume does not fully protect me. It still shows how I move my hesitations, my fatigue, my speed, and it can rip, wrinkle, or slump. For this reason, I think of it less as a mask and more as a second skin that negotiates between my inner states and the outside world. Putting it on and taking it off becomes part of how I test different levels of

visibility and care: how much exposure I can manage, how I can stay with difficult feelings, and how I might transform them into shared images and movements rather than hide them or be overwhelmed by them.

2.2.2 Material

I chose to build the costume from washi paper made from kozo fibre rather than fabric. Thin, semi-transparent paper is often assumed to be fragile, easy to tear, and temporary. It matches how people sometimes think about mental disorders, as if they were “breakable” or unreliable. At the same time, the material I used was not just any washi, but a kozo-fibre washi roll. Prestowitz and Katayama (2018) explain that traditional washi can be made from several bast fibres, especially kozo, mitsumata, and gampi, and that these fibres differ in strength, softness, translucency, and moisture response. Kozo fibres are the longest and strongest of the traditional fibres, while mitsumata is softer and more lustrous, and gampi is shorter, weaker, and more reactive to moisture. The paper I used in this project was an Awagami Kozo Thick White Roll (42 g/m²; 970 mm × 10 m), so it gave me a material that could appear fragile while still surviving sewing, folding, movement, travel, and repeated performances. That balance between delicacy and endurance was important to the emotional logic of the costume. This tension between a fragile appearance and real strength mirrors my own experience of living with bipolar disorder. From a distance, I might seem unstable, but the fact that I keep working, studying, and making is also a form of endurance that is not always visible.

As I move in the costume, the paper gradually fills with wrinkles, creases, stains, and breaks. Each performance and each journey to a site leaves traces of my experiences. When I walk or weave outdoors, the paper can absorb dirt from soil and grass, as well as water from snow or rain. These signs of wear are easy to see on paper: the surface changes shape, colour, and texture as it is touched, bent, and knocked. In this way, the costume slowly gathers memory. It becomes a record of where I have been and what has happened to me, not only during the performances but also in transit and in the studio. Paper supports this kind of

storytelling more clearly than many fabrics, which often collapse into smooth folds and hide some of their history.

The physical behaviour of washi also supports the exaggerated form of the squid-yokai body. Kozo paper can hold sharp folds, angles, and protrusions simply through sewing, ironing, layering and pattern design, without heavy internal armatures (Figure 2), which allows me to build long, extended “tentacles” shapes that stick out into space instead of collapsing. The costume can drag on the ground, brush against the loom, or catch the wind, keeping a crisp outline. Most fabrics would drape against my body, soften the silhouette, or require a lot of stiffening to do so. By choosing paper, I can create a body that feels delicate and architectural at once, clearly signalling both vulnerability and resilience.



Figure 2. Close-up of the V-neckline of the white washi paper costume, highlighting crisp folds, stitched seams, and a gathered structure that holds a sculptural shape. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

The costume was made from white paper rather than coloured material for both symbolic and practical reasons. White carries different meanings in the two main contexts of this project, China and Canada. In Chinese funerary traditions, white clothing is closely

associated with mourning and death (Guo & Herrmann-Pillath, 2023). In many Western contexts, white is more often linked to bridal dress, religious purity, and cleanliness, and in medical settings, it has also functioned as a sign of hygiene (Walsh, 2005; Bates, 2023). I was drawn to this tension because white can suggest both ending and renewal at once. In relation to bipolar disorder, that dual meaning felt important to me: depressive episodes often felt like endings, while recovery phases, even if fragile, acted as new starts. White allowed the costume to remain in these states rather than settling into a single meaning.

Wearing a full white costume in everyday spaces also shaped how the figure was interpreted in public. Studies of Chinese mourning dress note that white has long remained the main colour of funeral clothing, especially in plain, loose garments made from undyed fabrics (Li et al., 2026; Guo & Herrmann-Pillath, 2023). Because of this background, a head-to-toe white silhouette could suggest funerary dress and therefore appear strange or unsettling. In Canada, the same figure entered a different visual field, where white more often suggests bridal purity, hygiene, or clinical space than funeral ritual (Bates, 2023; Walsh, 2005). For that reason, the costume could seem clinical, ghostly, or unusually pure rather than directly funerary. I was interested in how people might respond when a colour with strong ritual associations appeared in an ordinary setting, attached to a body that was weaving rather than attending a ceremony. The white paper also made every mark visible. As I moved through different places, the surface absorbed soil, grass stains, dust, and city grime, gradually losing its apparent purity and becoming a travelling record of each performance and each site.

2.2.3 First Version of the Costume

My initial decision was to develop the costume as a single, continuous triangle from head to toe, echoing the basic outline of the bigfin squid's body (Figure 3). The costume was constructed in one piece, including the hat, so that my entire body was enclosed inside a large, geometric form. Two sleeves projected from the sides, and a vertical opening at the centre front allowed me to see out. From the chest down to the ground, along the centre front, I added a couple of triangular inserts pleated to support the large outer shape. When I knelt on the floor, these pleated sections allowed the costume to sit like a squid resting on the seabed, especially from every side. To make this triangular volume wearable, I adapted the “wearing a triangle” pattern from Tomoko Nakamichi's *Pattern Magic 2* (2011, pp. 32–33), adjusting the proportions and translating the design into white washi paper.



Figure 3. Prototype of the first version of the squid-yokai costume in white washi paper on a small mannequin, showing the one-piece triangular silhouette, integrated hood, side sleeves, and central front opening. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

As I began to test this first version in the studio, practical problems quickly emerged. Because the costume was one continuous triangle from head to toe, the distances between my head, chest, and sleeves were difficult to calculate precisely on the flat pattern. The result was a structure that severely limited movement: kneeling was more difficult than anticipated, and the pleated centre-front section restricted how far I could reach toward the loom (Figure 4). The sleeves sat at an awkward height and angle, making it hard to perform basic weaving motions such as throwing the shuttle and beating the weft. The facial opening also shifted upward during use, especially when I bent or turned, sometimes blocking my vision at the very moments when I needed to see the loom clearly. In effect, the costume pushed past a productive level of constraint into a form that made sustained performance unsafe and unsustainable for my body.



Figure 4. Flat side view of the first version of the white washi paper costume, showing the broad triangular silhouette, pleated centre-front section, and geometric paper construction.

Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.

There were also serious concerns about how the first version might be read in public. The combination of an all-white, head-to-toe garment, a sharply pointed apex at the top, a

covered face, and rigid triangular geometry risked recalling conical robes used by white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (NMAAHC, n.d.; *KKK - The fight for white supremacy*, 2015), especially in North American contexts. This resemblance was not intentional, but I could not ignore the possibility that viewers might associate the costume with racist terror rather than with deep-sea creatures or yokai. Because the project is concerned with vulnerability, care, and mental health, I did not want the costume to reproduce visual forms that could retraumatize or alienate people who encounter the work. Recognizing this potential misreading was an important ethical turning point and a key reason to abandon the first design. Aesthetic and technical issues reinforced this decision. The strong geometric shape and long sleeves meant that certain seams had to be sewn with their allowances exposed on the outside of the paper, while others were hidden inside the structure. This produced a patchwork of seam treatments that felt inconsistent and unresolved: some joints read as clean, folded edges, while others appeared as raw ridges. In a costume already dominated by a single large triangle, these irregularities did not add productive complexity. Instead, they were distracted from the intended reference to the squid's body and made the form feel more like an unfinished prototype than a coherent, inhabitable figure.

2.2.4 Final Version of the Costume

In response to the practical, ethical, and aesthetic problems of the first version, I redesigned the costume into a second version that is closer to a garment than an enclosed structure (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Final version of the squid-yokai costume in white washi paper, showing the straight robe-like silhouette, widened sleeves, and two extended pleated tentacles. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

For the body of this version, I drew on the silhouette of a kimono or long East Asian robe: a straight, column-like form with slightly widened sleeves and a modest amount of ease around the torso. This shape is not oversized but slightly larger than my usual clothing, allowing the costume to sit between everyday dress and an altered, creaturely body. The kimono-like structure connects the costume to domestic and ceremonial garments that I

recognize from my own background, bringing the human-squid hybrid yokai closer to human scale while still marking it as other. It also provides a stable, rectangular base to which I can attach the extended tentacles without overcomplicating the outline.

In the second version, I keep the circular-sleeve tentacles developed from Nakamichi's (2011, pp. 49) pattern and attach them to the lower part of the dress. They exaggerate the stretched, reaching quality of the bigfin squid while remaining manageable in performance and transport. The hat is now a separate element rather than fused into a single triangle. I base it on the form of a hooded cape, with the hood attached to long, scarf-like extensions; translated into washi paper, these flowing strips echo the movement of squid tentacles drifting in water. As I move, the breeze trails, twists, and lifts in the air, reinforcing the sense of a body that is part human, part cephalopod.



Figure 6. White washi paper sample testing the circular sleeve adapted from Tomoko Nakamichi's *Pattern Magic 2* (2011, p. 49), showing the layered spiral form later used to construct the tentacle elements in the second version of the squid-yokai costume.

Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.

In rethinking the yokai dimension of the costume, I turned to the story of Ika no Kōan (Yokai.com, n.d.), a cuttlefish who serves as an advisor and physician at the undersea court of the dragon king. In this tale, Ika no Kōan is usually depicted as a human doctor with a cuttlefish on his head, a hybrid figure whose expertise is constrained by court politics. This image of a human–cuttlefish composite, caught between care and power, resonates with my own position as I try to navigate mental health within larger social systems. It also reminded me that yokai are not simply animals but transformed or hybrid beings. In response, I shifted the costume away from a fully abstract triangle toward a more recognizably human garment with squid-like extensions and paper “gills.” The second version keeps the bigfin squid reference through the elongated limbs, washi surface, and white colour. However, it removes the full triangular enclosure and pointed apex that risked harmful associations, producing instead a body that is human-like yet visibly altered.

To build the extended tentacles, I use the structure inspired by squid or octopus gills and siphons, and I employ the circular sleeve pattern from Tomoko Nakamichi's *Pattern Magic 2* (2011, pp. 49). This pattern creates a tube that can expand and contract like an accordion or a flexible vent pipe. When fully opened, the tentacles can reach more than a metre in length, but they can also be flattened and folded for carrying and storage. It is important because I need to travel with the costume and set it up in different locations without damaging it. The circular sleeve lets the tentacles be both exaggerated and practical: visually oversized in performance, yet compact and repairable in the studio. It also supports the feeling that the limbs do not simply hang, but breathe and pulse with movement, echoing the cephalopod body more than a simple, straight strip of fabric or paper would (Figure 7).

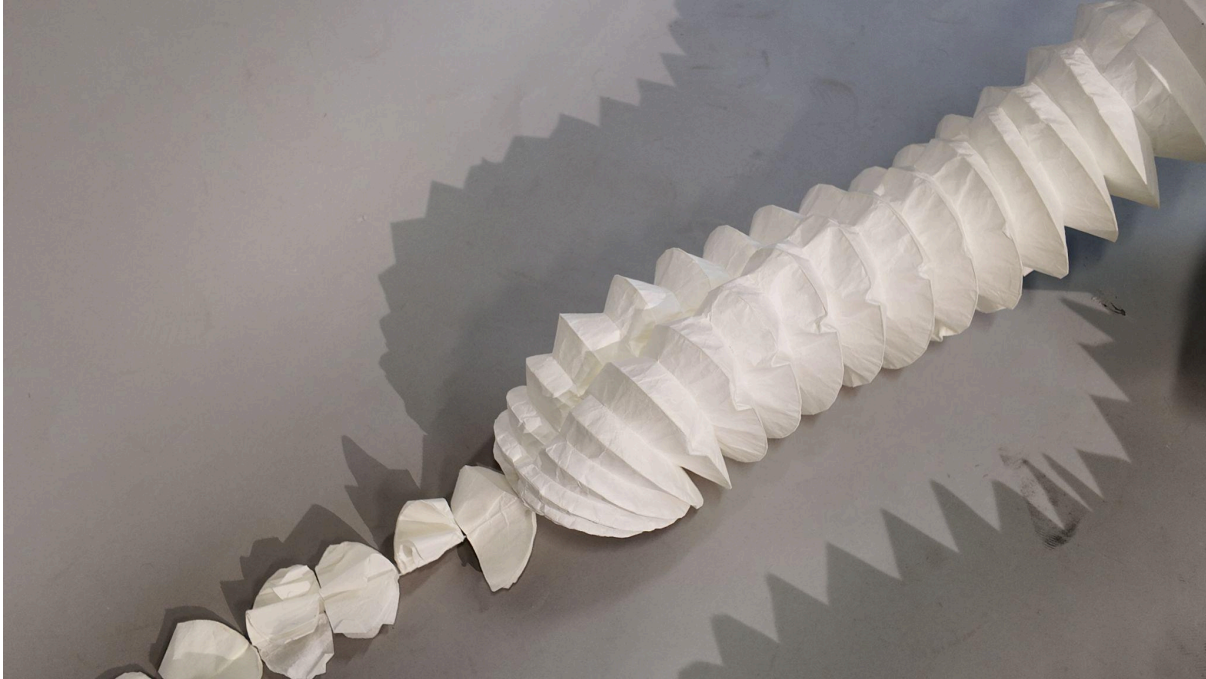


Figure 7. Detailed view of the opened tentacle structure in the final squid-yokai costume, showing the circular-sleeve construction in white washi paper that allows the form to expand, contract, and fold for transport. Adapted from Tomoko Nakamichi's *Pattern Magic 2* (2011, p. 49). Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.

The circular sleeve form also connects to how squid move and breathe. In many cephalopods, water is drawn into the mantle cavity, passed over the gills to take in oxygen, and then pushed out forcefully through a funnel, producing a jet that drives the animal forward. This cycle of filling, pressing, and release repeats as the animal swims or escapes (Smithsonian Ocean, n.d.). I think of the paper "gills" on my costume in a similar way: as channels that open and close with my steps, my turns, and my shifts in posture. When I walk or weave, the tubes expand, collapse, and sway, as if they are ventilating tension and circulating emotional pressure through the body instead of letting it stay trapped inside. Because no adult bigfin squid has been physically collected and its detailed anatomy remains uncertain, I based these elements on more familiar squid and octopus forms, then adapted them into a hybrid, imagined species that belongs to both marine life and Japanese yokai

traditions. In this case, the choice is less about storage and more about consistency of form. Using the same ringed, expandable shape for both the eyes and the tentacles ties the body's different parts together, so the figure reads as one coherent creature rather than a collage of unrelated pieces (Figure 8). The repeating circular motif makes the silhouette more unified and easier to recognize, which is important when the costume appears only briefly in a space and may be seen from a distance or in passing.



Figure 8. Detail of the hood and eye-like paper form in the final white washi paper squid-yokai costume, showing the repeated circular folded structure that unifies the head and tentacle elements. Adapted from Tomoko Nakamichi's *Pattern Magic 2* (2011, p. 49). Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.

Instead of reproducing all ten limbs of a real bigfin squid, I focus on two long tentacles placed opposite each other along the back of the costume (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Back view of the final white washi paper squid-yokai costume, showing the two extended tentacles attached opposite each other along the back and the long trailing hood extensions. The cast shadow reinforces the squid-like silhouette. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

This decision keeps the design centred on a single clear idea: a central body with two extreme extensions. Building on Stanowski's (2021) theory that visual impact arises from how contrasts are organized within a form, I limit the costume to two elongated tentacles so that the main contrast between a compact body and extreme extensions remains legible, rather than multiplying many tentacles, which would distribute contrast across too many similar elements. Two tentacles are enough to make the stretched, reaching quality of the bigfin squid obvious, without overwhelming the viewer or overcomplicating the structure. They swing in the wind, trail along the ground, and catch on objects, acting like visible antennas for both the environment and my own fatigue. Small changes in weather, pace, or mood become visible in

how these two limbs bend, drag, and snag. In this way, limiting the number of tentacles strengthens both the clarity of the costume and its role as an instrument that registers and displays emotional and physical change.

The remake also brought new material challenges. The fresh washi I used in this version behaved more like stiff paper than cloth, which made sewing and wearing difficult at first. To reduce cracking and make the paper easier to fold and handle, I pre-treated the sheets with a mixture of fabric softener and water, spraying and then ironing them dry after cutting the pattern several times. This treatment allowed folds to form more smoothly and reduced cracking along sharp bends. During construction, I used fusible tape together with top-stitching to secure key seams, especially in areas that would bear the weight of the tentacles or experience repeated movement (Figure 10). I also ironed frequently throughout the making process to set seams, reactivate the treatment where needed, and keep the paper layers flat. These technical adjustments were necessary to make the second version durable and wearable, while still retaining the distinct behaviour of paper.



Figure 10. Detail of the hood edge in the second version of the white washi paper costume, showing fusible tape and top-stitching used to reinforce the paper and strengthen the seam.

Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.

2.3 Loom Set-Up, Materials, and Weaving Process

I focus on weaving rather than other textile techniques, such as knitting, crochet, or embroidery, for reasons that are closely tied to the aims and questions of the thesis. One of my research questions asks how costume and movement can externalize inner states without reducing them to symptoms, so I chose a technique in which the process itself is visibly performative. Earlier in my practice, I tended to avoid weaving because of its complexity and lengthy preparation: measuring and beaming the warp, threading the heddles, sleying the reed, and tying on. Over time, this preparatory work has become a somatic meditation. The repetitive tasks of counting, knotting, and winding allow my mind to quiet and my body to settle into a steady rhythm. Craft theorists describe such extended engagement with material and process as a way of thinking through the hands, where understanding emerges from bodily repetition rather than from detached planning (Adamson, 2007; Nimkulrat, 2010). For me, warp preparation is often where bipolar rhythms become most noticeable and processable: on days when focused, linear thinking is difficult, the slow, ordered actions of setting up the loom give me a structured way to stay with my emotional state without being overwhelmed by it.

For this project, I work with two different table looms: a four-shaft Louet Erica 50 wooden loom in Toronto (Figure 11) and an eight-shaft plastic loom in Hangzhou (Figure 12), China. During the Toronto phase, I use a four-shaft wooden table loom that I keep in my studio. In Hangzhou, I work with an eight-shaft plastic table loom that I have there locally. The two looms reflect the different equipment available at each location, but both are portable table looms that can be carried to multiple spaces for performances, allowing the loom itself to move with the performance across private, semi-private, and public spaces. The differences in loom specifications and materials are primarily practical rather than conceptual: the wooden loom cannot travel with me, and shipping it would be costly and unsafe.

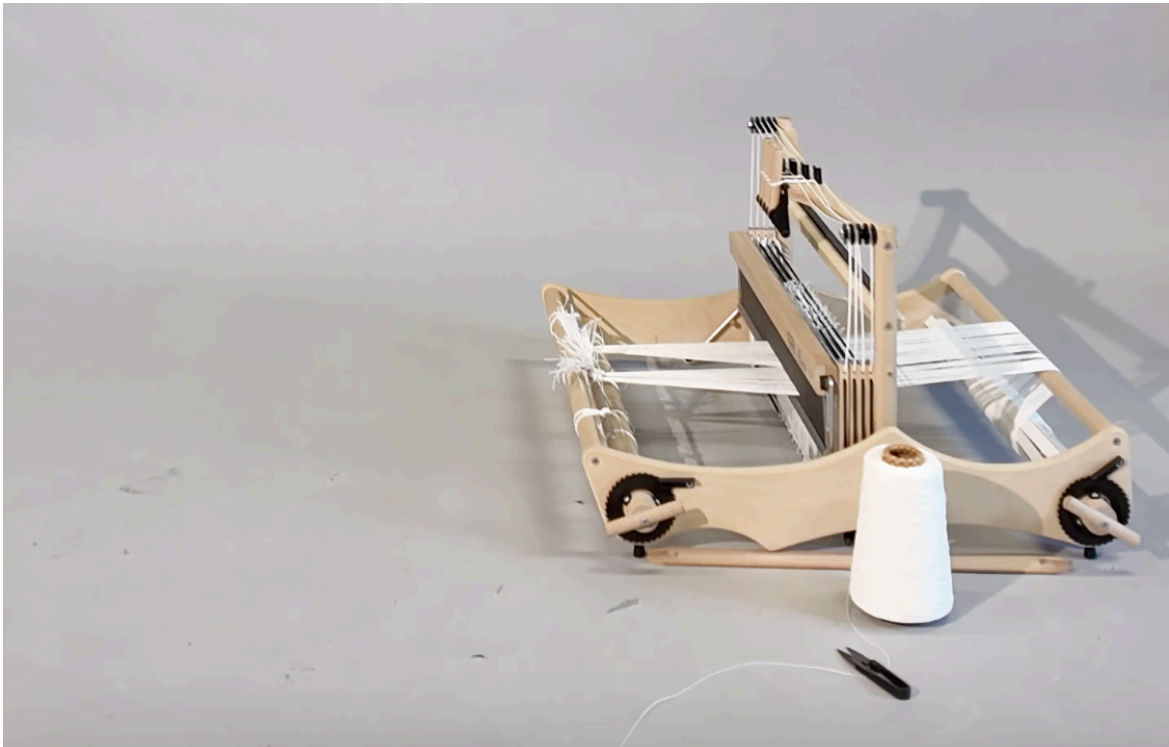


Figure 11. Four-shaft wooden table loom used in the Toronto weaving performances, set up with white washi thread in straight draw threading. A cone of matching thread and a small weaving tool are placed beside the loom. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

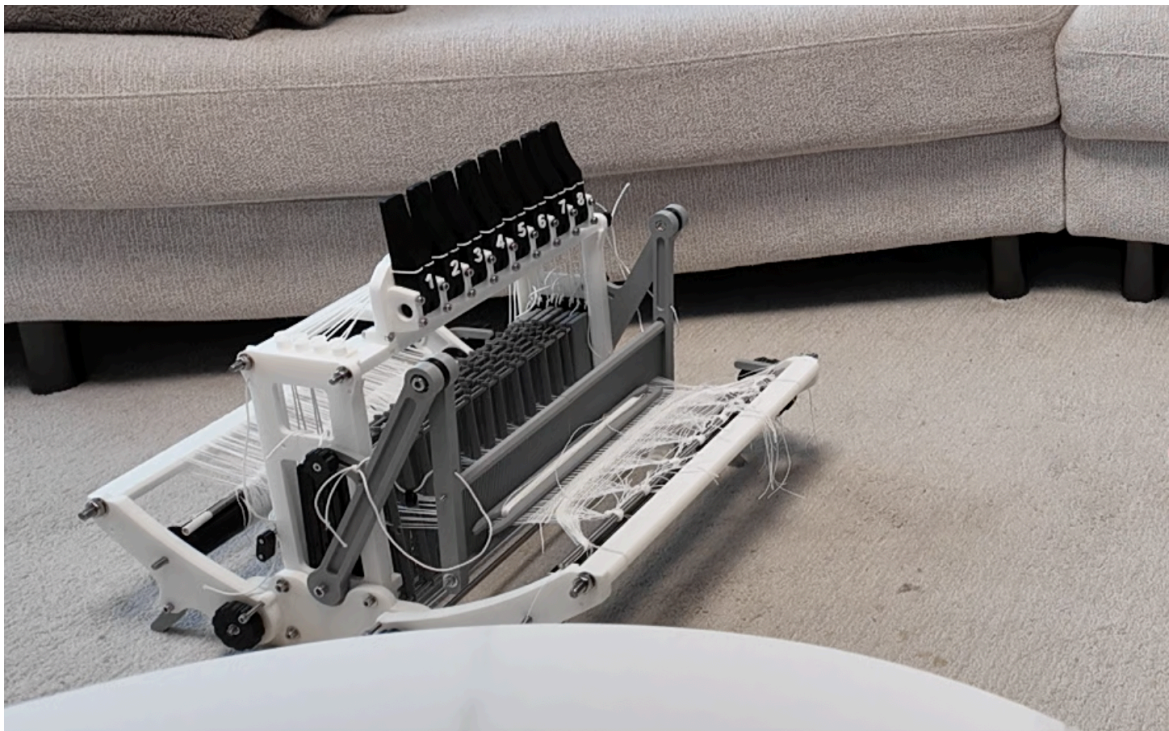


Figure 12. Eight-shaft plastic table loom used in the Hangzhou weaving performances, warped with white washi thread and shown in a domestic interior. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

Weaving also makes bodily gestures unusually visible. Sitting at the loom, my hands and upper body repeatedly move the shafts, shuttle, and beater. These motions create a clear choreography that can be seen from a distance, even in larger or noisier environments. In contrast, techniques such as hand knitting or embroidery often involve smaller, more contained hand movements that are harder for viewers to read, especially in public spaces. Scholars of practice-based craft research note that weaving's interlaced structures and repetitive actions highlight the relationship between bodily rhythm, tool, and textile in a particularly direct way (Nimkulrat, 2010, 2024). In performance, the loom is not only a tool for making cloth. It becomes an extension of my body, working with my hands, posture, tempo, and force, allowing ideas and emotional shifts to take material form through repeated action. Bringing this historically domestic and workshop-based practice into semi-public and public spaces also highlights how unusual it is to encounter weaving in public, and how emotional labour usually hidden in private spaces might be made tentatively shareable.

To keep the material language consistent with the costume, I weave exclusively with white washi paper thread for both warp and weft. The yarn I used was labelled as a 1-ply 7.6-count washi-blend yarn, composed of 45% cotton, 26% imported washi, and 29% rayon. This link between cloth and costume is important because it prevents the woven textile from functioning as a separate prop or illustration. As with the costume, the washi thread appears delicate but is strong enough not to break easily under normal tension. Its smooth surface, with few loose fibres, makes the weave structure very legible: changes in density, beat, and small disruptions stand out clearly, as do broken threads and repairs. Over successive performances, the white paper threads are likely to pick up dirt, oils from my hands, and environmental marks, so that the cloth gradually registers traces of contact, weather, and mood, mirroring the staining and wrinkling of the costume, supporting my broader aim of treating both cloth and costume as emotional archives.

In preparing the loom, I wind relatively short warps of about 1.5 to 2 metres. Each warp is planned to accommodate roughly three to four weaving sessions, depending on how densely and for how long I weave. Shorter warps are easier to manage when transporting the loom and reduce the risk of tension problems outdoors. They also encourage me to think of each warp as a small chapter within the larger project rather than as a single continuous piece that must carry everything. I thread the loom in a basic straight draw (straight threading) across the shafts, without pre-planning a complex pattern. A straight draw offers flexibility; it can produce various simple structures if needed, but it does not impose a strong design in advance. During performance, I use very simple interlacements so that the preset pattern does not dominate the cloth. The straight draw threading allows the warp to interfere as little as possible with the live decisions I make in the weft, such as tightening or loosening the beat, leaving small gaps, or repeating certain motions when my mood or energy shifts. In this way, the loom set-up and material choices create a flexible but stable framework in which bipolar rhythms can shape the cloth through small, moment-to-moment decisions rather than through an elaborate structure decided long before the performance. Weaving becomes a practice where emotional sensitivity is not an obstacle to “proper” technique but a force that moves through preparation, gesture, and material, generating knowledge from within the act of making (Adams et al., 2017; Nimkulrat, 2010, 2024).

In the weaving phase, I work with a single shuttle wrapped with white washi paper thread and keep the interlacement as simple as possible. Rather than using complex drafts, I let changes in beat, spacing, and rhythm emerge in response to my emotional and physical state during each session. This decision follows my aim to let bipolar rhythms shape material decisions at the loom, rather than forcing those rhythms into a predetermined design. The weave structure becomes a kind of seismograph: repetitions, disruptions, and uneven areas are not mistakes to be corrected, but traces of how the session actually unfolded.

Because I want each woven section to respond directly to the conditions of the performance, I do not assign a hierarchy of “good” and “bad” selvages or expect consistent craftsmanship across the cloth. I intentionally relax some of the usual standards I apply in studio weaving, especially straight edges and even beat, to treat weaving as a research tool rather than the production of finished artworks. It does not mean that the technique is irrelevant; rather, it means that technical variation is read as data. As Nimkulrat (2024) suggests, craft artifacts can carry traces of bodily tempo, pressure, and decision-making. Uneven edges, broken threads, and sudden changes in density are therefore understood as evidence of how my body and mood shifted during each 30–60 minute session, not simply as flaws to be hidden.

After each performance, I cut or mark the section of cloth produced in that session and label it with the date, location, and basic contextual notes, for example: “Toronto studio, afternoon, low energy” or “Hangzhou park, windy, anxious” (Figure 13). I treat these segments as documents rather than stand-alone artworks: they belong to a series of samples that collectively record the practice's movement over time. In later analysis, these labelled samples are examined alongside video, photographs, and written reflections, so that material features—such as open-work areas, dense bands, or frayed edges—can be read in relation to the emotional and spatial conditions under which they were made (Nimkulrat, 2010, 2024; Adamson, 2007). Through this approach, the weaving process becomes a way of generating and storing knowledge about bipolar sensitivity and its interaction with costume, place, and performance.

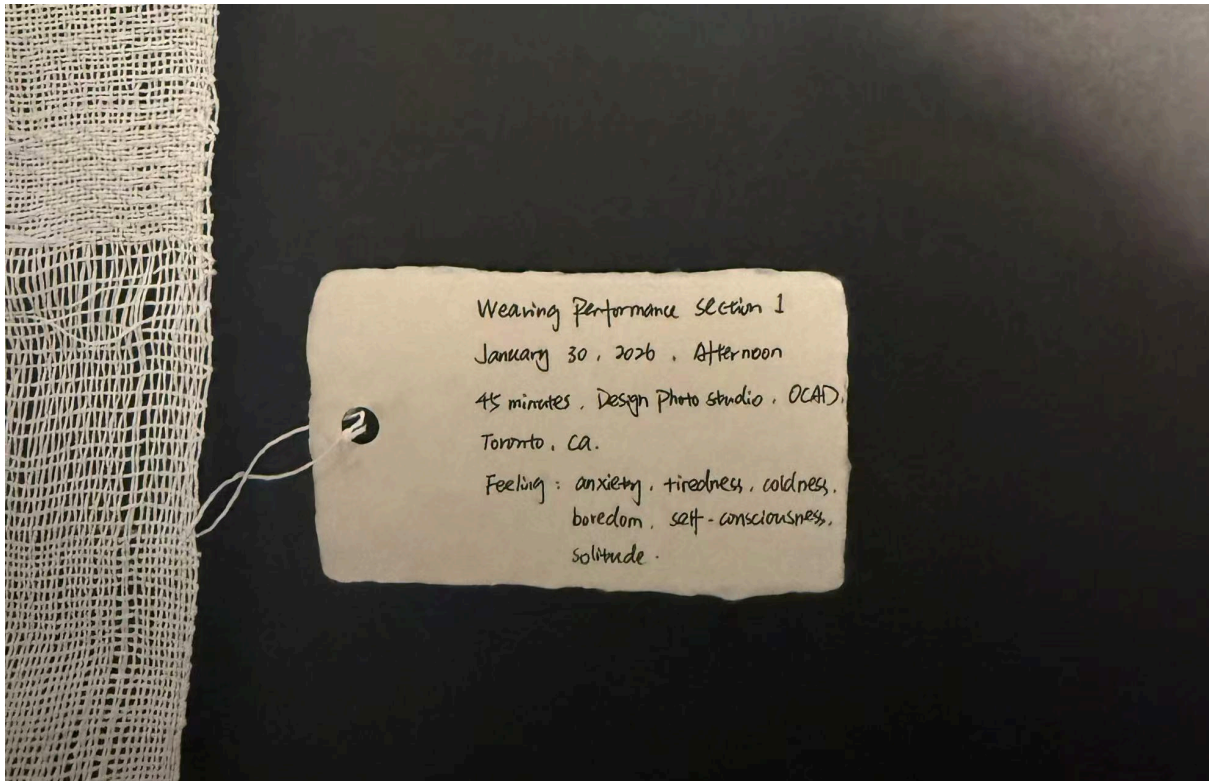


Figure 13. Detail of the first labelled woven sample, showing a handwritten washi paper tag tied to the cloth and used to record the date, location, duration, and emotional context of the performance session. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

2.4 Performance Preparation and Locations

The performance plan is structured as a comparative practice between Toronto, Canada, and Hangzhou, China. In each city, I conduct a small series of weaving sessions that move from private indoor spaces to semi-public and public outdoor spaces. Both conceptual and safety considerations guide the choice of locations. Each session lasts approximately 30 to 60 minutes. However, the exact duration is flexible and depends on the weather, my physical health, and how much emotional exposure I can tolerate on that day. This self-paced timing reflects the autoethnographic nature of the project: the performances are not scheduled as fixed events for an audience, but begin when I feel able to inhabit the costume, move the loom, and be seen.

In Toronto, I plan four performance sessions. The sequence starts in a photo studio on campus, which functions as a controlled “laboratory” where I can test the costume, loom, and camera set-up in a relatively neutral space. The second session takes place in the Great Hall at OCAD University, a large institutional interior that is publicly accessible but still tied to my everyday academic environment. This site is important because it allows me to test what it means to make vulnerability visible inside an art-school setting, where performance may be more tolerated but is still shaped by institutional expectations of behaviour and attention. The third session moves to my home balcony, a semi-private threshold where domestic life meets the outside. The fourth occurs in St. Andrew’s Playground Park. I chose this park because it was close enough to my home to remain manageable in terms of transport and safety, but public enough to test how the costume and weaving practice would be read in an ordinary outdoor setting. Its winter exposure—often around -20°C , depending on whether there was snow on the ground or a period of snowmelt—also made it important to understand how weather, bodily discomfort, and visibility could shape performance. These locations form a gradual movement from controlled interior space to open public visibility.

In Hangzhou, I repeat a similar progression across three sessions: first in my family home, then on the home balcony, and finally in a nearby public park. These sites are not interchangeable. The home allows me to reflect on the family not only as an intimate space, but also as a small institution that shapes behaviour, emotional expression, and what is expected to remain private. The balcony marks a threshold where domestic life becomes visible to others. At the same time, the nearby park places the work within a shared public setting shaped by neighbourhood observation and light social regulation. In this way, the Hangzhou sequence supports an autoethnographic form of institutional critique by examining how emotional exposure is shaped not only by formal art spaces but also by family structures, residential visibility, and everyday public control. This parallel structure allows me to compare how the same squid–yokai weaving practice unfolds in two different cultural and urban contexts, moving along a shared gradient from private to semi-public to public space (Table 1).

Comparative level	Toronto	Hangzhou	What it allows to compare
Private indoor	OCAD Design Photo Studio	Family home living room	Solitude vs. intimate domestic presence
Semi-public / threshold	OCAD Great Hall; home balcony	Home balcony	Institutional visibility vs. domestic threshold visibility
Public outdoor	St. Andrew's Playground Park	Nearby community garden / park	Public exposure, passersby, and social interpretation
Single-city comparison	All Toronto performances	—	How the practice shifts within one city from controlled indoor settings to more exposed outdoor spaces, including changes in comfort, weather, visibility, and weaving rhythm
Single-city comparison	—	All Hangzhou performances	How the practice shifts within one city from intimate domestic space to public outdoor space, including changes in family presence, neighbourhood observation, and public interpretation

Table 1. Comparative framework for the Toronto and Hangzhou weaving performances, organized by spatial visibility, exposure, and single-city variation.

The performances are designed as pop-up actions rather than announced events. I do not pre-advertise them or fix their start times. Instead, I begin each session when I feel ready—when the weather, energy, and mental acceptance align enough for me to carry the loom, put on the costume, and sit down to weave. This approach keeps the work close to lived experience rather than to a theatrical schedule. It also allows the performances to register how my own bipolar rhythms of exhaustion, agitation, and mental acceleration intersect with ordinary conditions such as cold, heat, or noise. Because the project is centred on my own emotional and physical states, this flexible timing is part of the methodology rather than a logistical accident.

Each session is documented using two digital video cameras: a vintage Sony DV camcorder and a high-resolution DJI Pocket 3. The Sony camera produces footage with a soft, grainy, early-2000s look, including slight colour shifts and image noise. I use this material as the primary video documentation (with sound). At the same time, the DJI footage serves mainly as high-resolution source material for still images and close-up details of the loom, cloth, and costume. Media scholars describe the current return to older imaging technologies and faux-vintage effects as a form of “technostalgia,” in which outdated formats are reappropriated to evoke distance, memory, and a past that may never have been directly experienced (van der Heijden, 2015; Konstantinova, 2023). In this project, the aged DV aesthetic underscores the sense that a squid-yokai weaving in a park or on a balcony is slightly unreal, as if it were a fragment from an unreliable archive or a dream. The worn look of the footage mirrors the worn surfaces of costume and cloth, reinforcing the idea that the performances sit somewhere between reality, memory, and folklore.

Throughout both phases, I treat the woven cloth as a core form of documentation. After each performance, I identify the section of cloth produced in that session and label it (Figure 14) with time, date, location, and a brief note on my physical and emotional state. I keep a

chart that records these details (Table 2), along with the approximate duration of each session. This labelling system lets me later cross-reference the material features of each textile segment, changes in density, open-work areas, broken threads, with the situational context in which it was woven. Together with video, photographs, and reflective writing, these samples function as a comparative archive of how bipolar states, costume, and place interact over the course of the project.

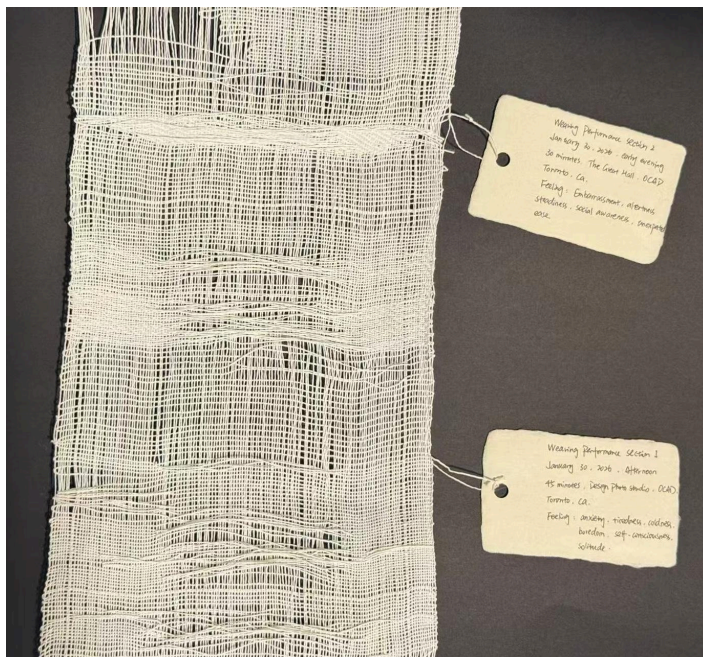


Figure 14. Detail of the woven cloth as documentation, with handwritten washi paper tags attached to identify individual performance sections and their contextual notes. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

Section	Date	Site	Duration	Spatial Condition	Physical / Emotional State	Key Situational Conditions	Material Features in Cloth
1	Jan. 30, 2026, afternoon	OCAD Design Photo Studio, Toronto	45min	Private indoor	Fatigue, anxiety, uncertainty, coldness, boredom, self-consciousness, solitary theatrical calm	Heavy carrying before start; access quiz delay; large empty studio; nearby voices; no direct audience	Looseness, openings, loops, irregular passages, improvised structure
2	Jan. 30, 2026, early evening	OCAD Great Hall, Toronto	30min	Semi-public / institutional threshold	Embarrassment at first, then steadiness, attentiveness, heightened awareness, surprising ease	Friend recording; open hall after uninstal; nearby student lounge; dinner-time foot traffic	Steadier field with subtle disruptions; long vertical floats; overall consistency with alert tension
3	Feb. 1, 2026, afternoon	Home balcony, Toronto	25min	Semi-public	Freezing, exposed, curious about being seen, but inwardly calm because of territorial familiarity	Sudden cold; snow and dirt; office windows facing balcony; warm air entering from open door on right	Strong asymmetry; lower left more open and fragile; right side denser with longer vertical floats
4	Feb. 4, 2026, afternoon	St. Andrew's Playground, Toronto	25min	Public outdoor	Exhaustion, self-consciousness, concentrated calm, narrowed attention, brief fear, curiosity	Carrying equipment through winter streets; kneeling on icy snow; strong wind; traffic; barking dogs; bright snow affecting vision	Relatively consistent field with interruptions; square-like opening at lower right; irregular passages; elongated floats; uneven tension
5	Feb. 28, 2026, afternoon	Family home living room, Hangzhou	30min	Private indoor/ domestic threshold	Intimate misunderstanding, unsettlement, emotional compression, then steadier attention	Partner filming; dogs moving through space; crowded domestic interior; relational tension rather than public exposure	Compressed surface; repeated vertical passages; pronounced vertical line from one lifted shaft; long floats and narrow vertical bands
6	Mar. 2, 2026, afternoon	Home balcony, Hangzhou	30min	Semi-public	Semi-public / domestic threshold Calm, familiar, less pressured, recurrent bodily memory of earlier balcony weaving	Warmer weather than Toronto; no close facing windows; dirt on balcony; warm air from open door; quieter exposure	Open structure with elongated vertical passages; more even openwork; less dramatic asymmetry; calmer recurrence
7	Mar. 3, 2026, near noon	Community garden, Hangzhou	25min	Public outdoor	Excitement, thrill, secrecy, enjoyment at first, then vigilance, defensiveness, divided attention	Deliberately risky public setup; comfortable weather; neighbours nearby; children playing; silent security observation; post-performance explanation	Broad central field of relatively even weaving; large opening and distortion near upper area; looser horizontal lines; uneven absorption of tension

Table 2. Session chart for the woven cloth archive, comparing the seven weaving performances across Toronto and Hangzhou by date, site, duration, spatial condition, physical and emotional state, situational context, and resulting material features of the woven washi cloth.

I select public sites that have a relatively steady flow of people—parks and university interiors where passersby are common—but that are also close to home or familiar workspaces. Research on place attachment and urban wellbeing suggests that familiarity with a setting and its cultural background can significantly shape affective responses; people often feel more relaxed and less stressed in landscapes that resemble those they know well or grew up in (Bazrafshan, 2023). Studies on place attachment also highlight that nearby neighbourhood spaces can support a sense of security, belonging, and mental wellbeing, in part because predictable environments reduce anxiety and make everyday movement feel safer and more manageable (Kamani Fard, 2024). Choosing parks and balconies that are geographically close and emotionally familiar reduces the logistical burden of transporting the loom and costume. It helps me feel more grounded and protected while performing in public view. This is important because the project depends on a level of vulnerability that is manageable rather than overwhelming: if I feel too exposed or unsafe, the performance cannot unfold with enough openness for me to observe how emotion, gesture, and weaving interact.

The comparative aspect of the project arises from staging similar performances in Canada and China. These two contexts differ not only in language and social norms, but also in how clothing, colour, and public behaviour are read. Hangzhou and its surrounding region are close to the city where I lived until the age of sixteen, and I have strong attachments to its domestic and neighbourhood environments. At the same time, I often feel more easily judged there and more exposed to conservative expectations about how a person should look and behave. Canada, where I have lived from high school through to my MFA, has played a

major role in shaping my sense of self, diversity, and acceptance, yet I still do not fully experience it as a place of belonging. The same white, squid-yokai costume can therefore carry different meanings: in a Chinese context, a full white dress may evoke funerary associations and be seen as ominous or inappropriate in everyday settings, while in Canadian contexts it may appear more ghostly, clinical, or fashion-like. By repeating the performance sequence across these two locations, the project asks how bipolar sensitivity and non-human costume are received, tolerated, or resisted under different cultural readings of dress, mourning, and public emotion. Comparative work on urban aesthetics and site-based artistic practices suggests that similar artistic gestures can produce very different affective and social responses depending on the city, its histories, and its norms around public art and performance (Lin, 2024; Spinks, 2014). This thesis adds to that discussion through an autoethnographic lens that foregrounds mental health and emotional vulnerability.

Because the performances involve working in costume with a loom in public or semi-public areas, I put safety protocols in place. For all outdoor sessions, and for indoor sessions where strangers may pass through, a friend accompanies me. During the performance, I do not speak with onlookers; my friend handles any necessary communication and calmly informs people that a performance is taking place if they ask. This arrangement allows me to stay inside the weaving process and the emotional frame of the work, while reducing the risk of unwanted confrontation or misunderstanding. It also acknowledges that vulnerability in public space is not only aesthetic but practical: staying as safe as possible is an ethical condition for carrying out the comparative performances that the thesis proposes.

Chapter3: Reflection and Analysis

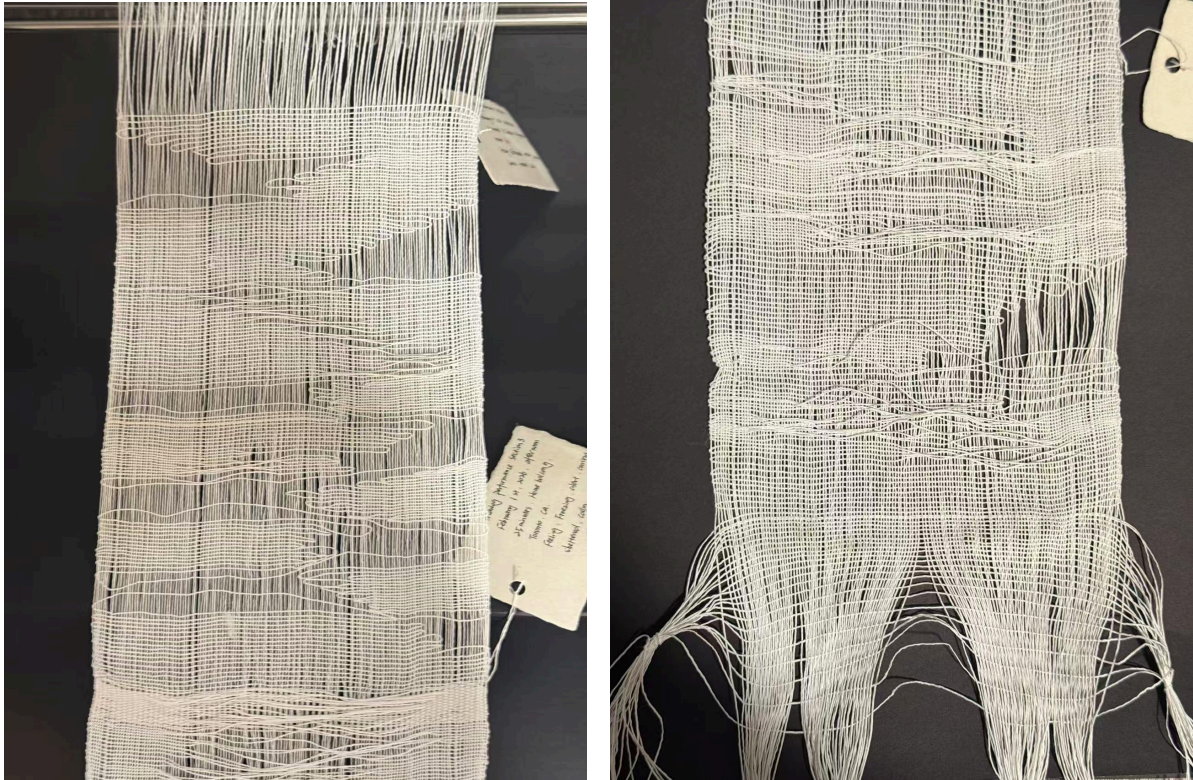
3.1 Emotional Sensitivity and the Creative Process

This section addresses how emotional sensitivity shapes the creative process and how it might be supported rather than pathologized. Through the performances, I found that emotional sensitivity did not always appear as a dramatic shift in mood or as a clear difference between Toronto and Hangzhou. Before beginning the comparative performances, I expected stronger emotional contrasts between sites because I had already imagined Hangzhou as a context in which the full white costume might feel more socially charged. Studies of emotional display rules suggest that public expressions of feeling are shaped by culturally specific norms and group expectations (Matsumoto et al., 2008). Scholarship on Chinese funerary practice also notes the longstanding association between white clothing and mourning, especially for close relatives (Lacy, 2016). These ideas led me to anticipate sharper tension in family and neighbourhood settings in Hangzhou than in Toronto. Looking back, this expectation was not only about the cultural differences themselves, but also about my anticipation of how cultural meanings would be carried by the costumes before the performances had even taken place. In practice, however, the act of weaving itself often stabilized my attention. Once I started working, I became absorbed in the repetitive tasks of passing the shuttle, adjusting the thread, and maintaining the loom's basic rhythm. Rather than producing a large emotional swing, weaving often created a focused state in which I felt temporarily enclosed in my own world. This supports my view that emotional sensitivity in this project is not only a source of instability, but can also be held and organized through repetitive material action (Adams et al., 2017; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The most noticeable emotional changes did not come from location alone, but from the moment I became aware that others were watching me. At these points, I felt a kind of shame, though not exactly in the sense of guilt or embarrassment. It was closer to a contradiction: I

wanted to hide myself, but I also wanted people to become curious about what I was doing. I wanted the work to be seen, but I was also afraid that even if I explained it, people might still not understand. This tension became strongest in outdoor and public performances. Sara Ahmed (2004) argues that emotions do not remain inside the body, but take shape through contact with others and the world, which helps me understand why the gaze of passersby could quickly change the feeling of a performance. In those moments, emotional sensitivity was not only internal; it was produced in relation to visibility, misunderstanding, and the social pressure of being looked at.

Interestingly, this contradiction did not always produce an immediate change in the woven structure. In the St. Andrew's Playground performance in Toronto, for example, I maintained a similar rhythm throughout the session, continuing the open-work structure without significant variation. The public setting made me feel watched, but that feeling did not lead to more experimental weaving (Figure 15), partly because I did not want others to see me making mistakes or struggling with the process. Instead, it seemed to narrow my decisions. I stayed with what was already happening rather than changing direction. By contrast, in the studio performance, where I was by myself, I felt freer and more comfortable. In that setting, I changed the rhythm more often, shifted where the thread travelled, and became more willing to interrupt one result to try another (Figure 16). This suggests that emotional sensitivity shaped the process less through obvious mood swings than through the degree of safety I felt in each space. When I felt exposed, I simplified and repeated. When I felt protected, I varied and explored.



From left to right: **Figure 15.** Woven cloth segment from the St. Andrew’s Playground performance, showing a relatively sustained open-work structure with limited variation across the session. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.* **Figure 16.** Woven cloth segment from the studio performance, showing greater variation in density, thread movement, and structural rhythm across the session. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

Preparation also played an important role in calming the process. Before and during the performances, weaving gave me a clear task to return to. I knew what I was doing, even when I did not know exactly what the cloth would become. This kind of concentration can be understood as focused attention or task absorption: attention is not empty, but gathered around a manageable sequence of actions. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes this kind of absorption as a state in which attention is organized around a task with clear actions and immediate feedback, and this language helps explain why my emotional state often felt less chaotic once I started weaving. The loom did not remove emotional difficulty, but it gave me something structured enough to hold it. In this sense, preparation and repetition became supportive conditions rather than neutral technical steps.

This support also changed how I understand what at first seemed like “random” weaving. I did not prepare a specific pattern, and the threading was a simple straight draw. Even so, the weaving was not actually random. Many decisions were made in response to place, weather, people, mood, and technical constraints. Temperature had a strong effect. In Toronto, the difference between indoor and outdoor conditions was large. Indoors, where it was warm and physically comfortable, I had more mental space to think about changing the weave as I worked. Outdoors, when it was freezing, my body temperature was around -20°C , my hands were stiff, and my mind felt slowed down, so I made fewer changes and repeated the same structure for longer. The weather did not remain outside the work; it entered the work by shaping what my body could do.

The presence of other people also influenced weaving decisions, even when the cloth itself did not visibly “express” that emotion in a dramatic way. When I sensed people looking at me, I often felt the contradiction described above and became less likely to experiment. The weaving then took on a more consistent rhythm, as if maintaining sameness helped me manage my exposure. In this sense, the woven samples record not only mood in a narrow psychological sense, but also the social conditions of attention and visibility surrounding the performance. This aligns with Nimkulrat’s argument that craft artifacts can carry traces of embodied experience and decision-making, including the conditions under which they were made (Nimkulrat, 2024). The woven cloth, therefore, becomes evidence of how the body negotiated weather, spectatorship, and internal hesitation in real time.

Technical conditions shaped decision-making as well. For these performances, I used a different shuttle from the one I normally use in the textile studio (Figures 17 and 18). I did not bring the studio boat shuttle with me, and I also wanted to keep the performance setup materially consistent with the loom and its existing equipment, which is a stick shuttle. My regular studio shuttle contained more thread, while the performance shuttle required me to

wrap the washi thread around it directly, which meant it held much less material. This limitation affected how I ended sessions. When I felt that the shuttle thread was nearly finished, I often decided to complete only a few more lines and then stop. In this way, the end of a session was not determined by concept alone, but by a practical interaction between body, tool, and material. What first seemed like spontaneous or arbitrary stopping points were, in fact, embedded decisions shaped by the technical setup of the performance.



Figure 17. Examples of wooden boat shuttles, showing the pointed profile and hollow bobbin-holding body typical of this shuttle type. *Note.* From “All About Shuttles,” by Gather Textiles (n.d.), *Gather Textiles*.

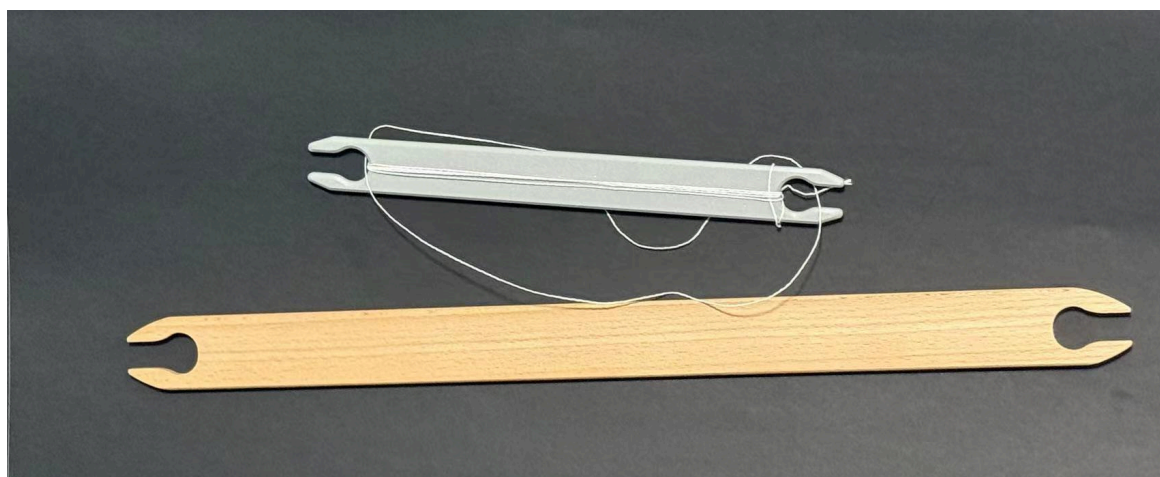


Figure 18. A long wooden stick shuttle and the smaller plastic shuttle used in the performances, with washi thread wrapped directly around the tool. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

The shorter length of each session also supported my body instead of forcing endurance. Earlier versions of the project imagined each performance lasting roughly one to three hours. However, the 30 to 60 minutes format proved more responsive to health, weather, and mental acceptance, and during the real-time performance, I actually did several 25 minute sessions due to the weather. Rather than testing how long I could push myself, the shorter sessions allowed me to stop while still feeling present inside the work. This changed the project from a model of endurance to one of repeated return. The practice became less about proving resilience through exhaustion and more about building an accumulative archive through multiple manageable encounters with the loom. Seen this way, emotional sensitivity shaped the process not by preventing work, but by setting the conditions for work to happen sustainably.

Overall, the performances showed that emotional sensitivity shaped the creative process more quietly and relationally than I first expected. The most significant shifts did not come from obvious differences between Toronto and Hangzhou, but from changes in exposure, attention, temperature, and bodily capacity. Preparation calmed me because it created focused, structured activity. What first seemed like “random” weaving turned out to be a form of embodied decision-making shaped by weather, tools, social visibility, and mood. Shorter sessions supported the work by keeping the process responsive rather than punitive. Together, these findings show that emotional sensitivity is not simply an obstacle to making. In this project, rhythm, repetition, hesitation, and change were supported by a flexible structure, manageable duration, and material practices that kept the body engaged without overwhelming it.

3.2 Costume, Gesture, and Inner States Visualized

This section addresses the question of how narrative, costume, and gesture can transform inner emotional states into legible visual language. In this project, inner feeling does not become visible through direct confession or simple symbolism. Instead, it takes form through the changing relationship between body, costume, movement, environment, and cloth. The squid-yokai costume does not merely decorate the action of weaving; it alters the body's outline, movement, and visibility, making emotional states readable through posture, strain, damage, and material change. At the same time, the woven sections produced in each session do not simply illustrate what I felt. They are shaped by the conditions under which feelings, attention, bodily adjustment, and environmental conditions unfolded. This understanding aligns with Adamson's argument that craft is not only a means of making objects but also a mode of thinking through materials and processes (Adamson, 2007). It also reflects Nimkulrat's claim that crafted artifacts retain traces of bodily action, decision-making, and situated experience (Nimkulrat, 2024).

The costume was one of the main ways that inner states became visually legible. Its white washi-paper surface, elongated tentacles, and altered silhouette created a figure that was recognizably human but clearly transformed. This transformation mattered because it allowed feelings such as oversensitivity, awkwardness, vigilance, contradiction, and exposure to appear without being reduced to verbal explanation. The costume made these states visible through shape and movement. In public and semi-public settings, the figure could appear uncanny, fragile, or difficult to place. In more private settings, the same form could seem quieter and more inward. The costume, therefore, did not have a single stable meaning. Its visual language depended on where it appeared, how it moved, and what the body beneath it was trying to manage.

Gesture was central to this process. In each session, I began by kneeling on the ground. This repeated opening posture produced a lowered, tentative, almost vulnerable image. The body entered the performance not through upright assertion, but through a position of contact with the ground. Nevertheless, I rarely remained kneeling for long. As each session progressed, I gradually shifted into lower seated positions on the ground, sometimes cross-legged and sometimes in a squat, in order to become more physically comfortable within the site. This repeated movement from kneeling to sitting became significant. It showed the body adjusting in response to weather, surface conditions, fatigue, and visibility. Visually, the shift changed the performance from a deliberate presentation to one of adaptation. It made comfort, strain, and endurance visible in real time. Rather than maintaining a single dramatic pose, the body kept renegotiating how it could remain in the work. This is important because it suggests that visual language in the project emerges not from fixed theatrical gestures, but from small bodily negotiations with environment and duration.

The woven results carry these negotiations in a second form. In the first studio session, the cloth developed loops, open areas, and irregular passages after the initial pressure of preparation gave way to boredom and then improvisation. The result did not read as a designed composition. Instead, it recorded a movement away from discipline and toward drift, which involved a loosening of control, a wandering, a less predetermined structure. In the Great Hall session, by contrast, the woven section became steadier, marked by long vertical interruptions rather than broad collapse. The surface remained more controlled, but not rigid. This difference matters because it shows that the cloth responded to shifts in social and sensory attention. In the studio, solitude and boredom loosened control. In the Great Hall, public presence sharpened awareness and produced a more sustained rhythm. In both cases, the woven result became a readable visual language of attention: loops, openness, and

irregularity suggested drift, while elongated floats and steadier structure suggested alert concentration.

The two Toronto outdoor sessions made the relationship between the body, the environment, and cloth even more visible. On the balcony, the woven section was marked by a clear contrast between openness and containment. One side opened dramatically into looser, more fragile structures, while the other held together with greater density (Figure 19). This split can be read as a material response to uneven temperatures and the site's threshold condition. The cloth did not simply register emotion in the abstract; it registered a body divided by environmental pressure. At St. Andrew's Playground, the result was different again. The structure held together more evenly across much of the surface (Figure 20). However, it was interrupted by irregular passages and several large openings, caused by the brightness of the snow, limited visibility, and bodily strain. What is important here is that the open passage was not planned. It emerged from weather and adaptation. Once it appeared, I chose not to correct it. The cloth, therefore, became a record of how environmental interference entered the work and was allowed to remain visible. This supports Nimkulrat's view that artefacts carry embodied traces, including the marks of accident, pressure, and interruption (Nimkulrat, 2024).

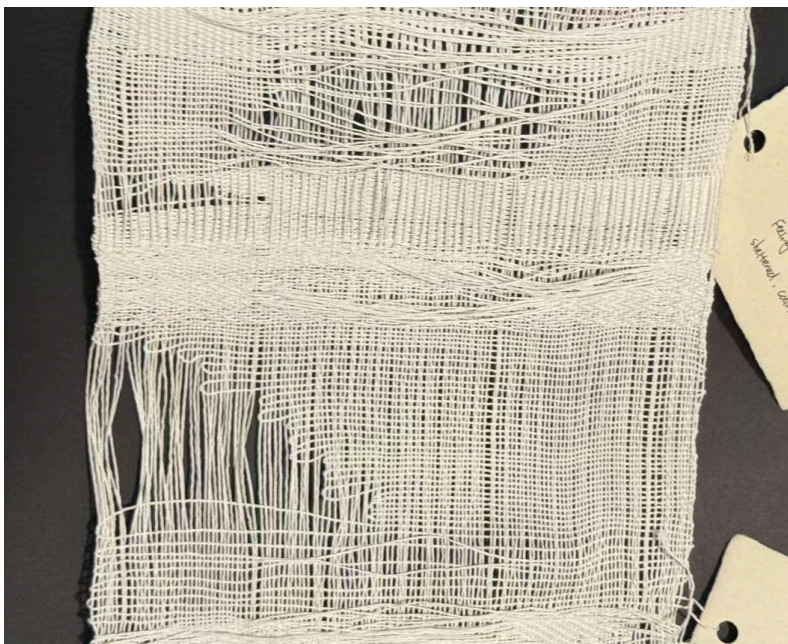


Figure 19. A close look at a woven cloth section from the Toronto balcony performance, showing a marked contrast between denser containment and more open, fragile structure across the surface.

Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.

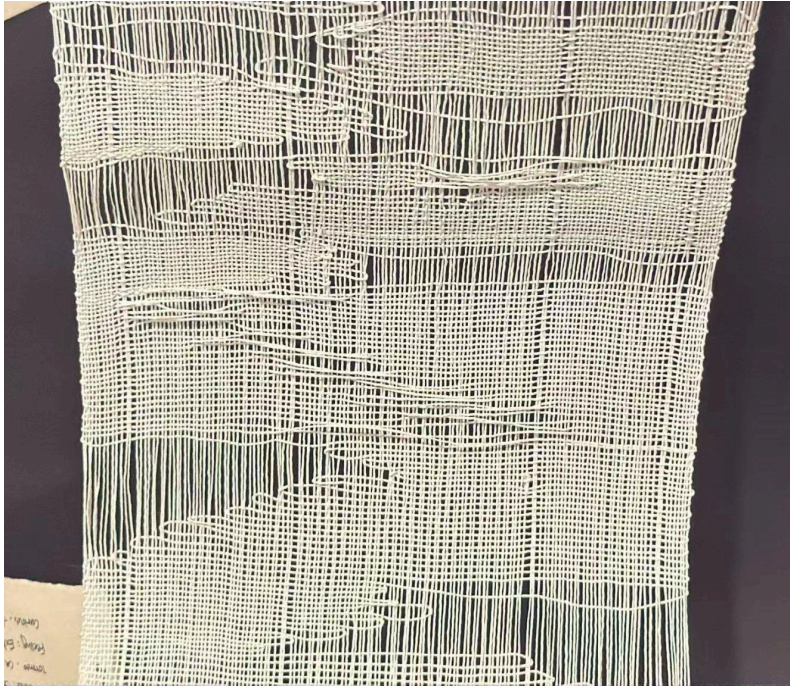


Figure 20. A close look at a woven cloth section from the St. Andrew's Playground performance, showing a relatively even woven surface interrupted by irregular passages and large openings caused by environmental interference. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

The Hangzhou sessions introduced another set of visual conditions. In the family living room, the cloth became more compressed and structured, marked by repeated vertical passages and by a persistent line caused by a shaft that remained lifted longer than I initially noticed. That mechanical condition became visually meaningful because it coincided with an emotionally tense atmosphere. The result was a textile that appeared held together, yet quietly strained. In the Hangzhou balcony session, a related but calmer structure emerged. The woven surface returned to openwork and elongated vertical passages, recalling the earlier balcony logic from Toronto, but in a more even and settled way. This repetition across sites is important. It shows that the cloth did not simply produce endless variation. It also carried memory. Similar threshold conditions led to similar structural tendencies, but the emotional and environmental context changed the tone of the result. Finally, in the community garden performance, the textile developed a broad central field of relatively even weaving, disrupted by a large opening and thinner surrounding areas. This distortion can be read as the material effect of divided attention, as the pleasure of weaving outdoors gave way to vigilance under observation. The woven result, therefore, became a legible record of interruption, social pressure, and self-protective concentration.

The costume itself also became an archive of these states. After the first two performances, the armhole area began to tear. After the Toronto balcony session, the V-shaped collar was stained by lipstick. After the St. Andrew's Playground performance, I realized that part of the dress hem had fused to the snow where I had been kneeling, and when it pulled away, a large section of washi tore from the lower edge (Figure 21, 22, 23). These changes matter because they show that the costume did not merely symbolize fragility; it underwent it. The environment acted directly on the costume, and those encounters remained visible. In this sense, the costume accumulated evidence of contact in the same way that the woven samples accumulated evidence of bodily decision-making. The tears, stains, and breakages functioned as visible forms of what the body had endured.

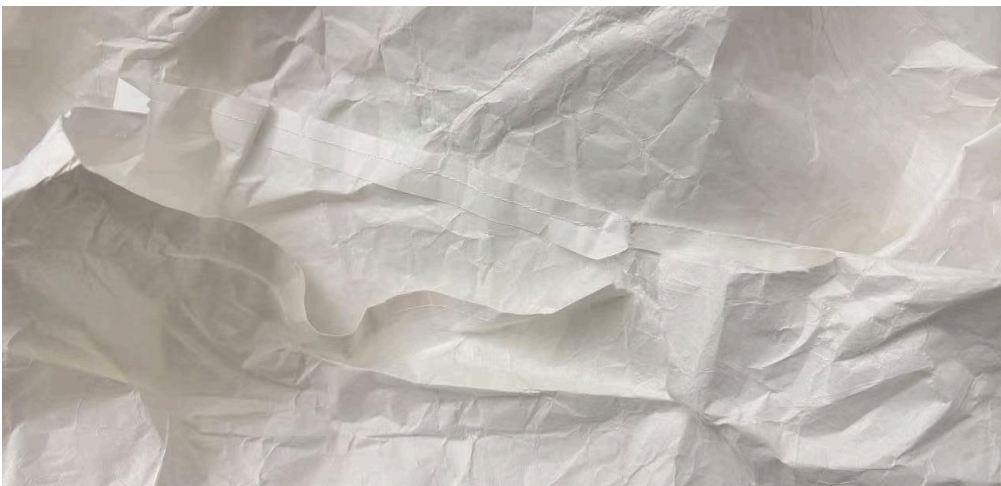


Figure 21. Tear at the armhole of the white washi paper costume after the first and second performances, showing structural damage caused by repeated movement and strain. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*



Figure 22. Lipstick stain on the V-shaped collar of the white washi paper costume after the Toronto balcony performance. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

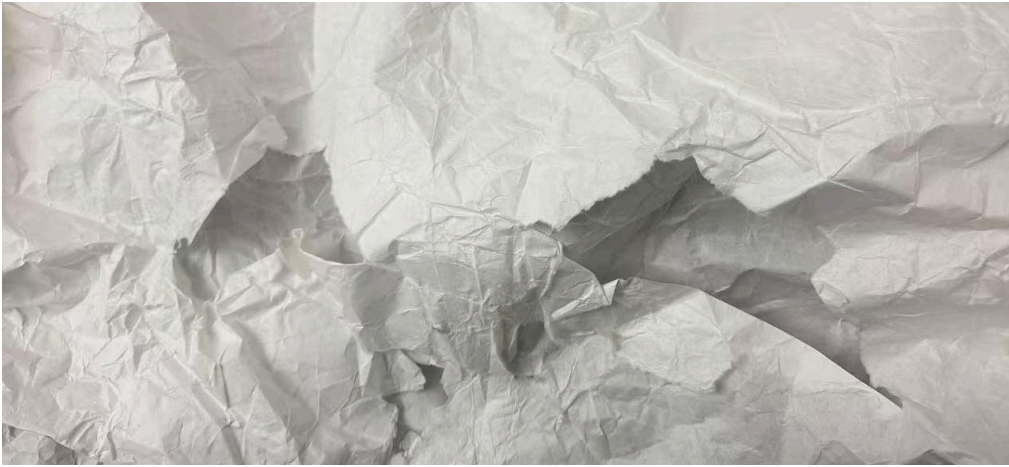


Figure 23. Torn lower hem of the white washi paper costume after the St. Andrew's Playground performance, showing large ruptures caused when the paper adhered to snow and tore away during movement. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

Travel extended this archive further. When I brought the costume from Toronto back to China, it developed more folds and wrinkles. The eye forms on the hood, which had appeared more upright and defined during the Toronto sessions, became softer and weaker after the journey. This softening matters because it materially records distance. The washi paper did not remain neutral while the work moved across cities and countries. It carried the marks of transport, compression, and handling, so that the costume itself registered the passage between one cultural context and another. The costume held not only traces of performance, but also traces of displacement. This makes it more than a theatrical object; it becomes a travelling document of pressure, movement, and change.

The environmental contrast between Toronto and Hangzhou also changed the visual relationship between costume and site. In Toronto, snow, winter light, and muted surroundings often produced a pale field against which the white washi body could both stand

out and partly dissolve (Figure 24). In Hangzhou, especially outdoors, the surrounding greens of trees and grass created a stronger contrast. The white body appeared more sharply isolated against living colour. This altered the image of the squid-yokai figure. In Toronto, it could seem ghostly, exposed, or weathered. In Hangzhou, it became more visibly foreign to its surroundings, intensifying the sense of social legibility and the possibility of misreading (Figure 25). In both cases, the costumes' visual language was shaped by the site rather than carried unchanged from one place to another. Ahmed's (2004) account of how objects and surfaces acquire affective force through their situation is useful here, because the whiteness of the costume was never neutral; it took on different pressures depending on climate, landscape, and cultural reading.



Figure 24. Screenshot from the Toronto outdoor weaving performance, showing the white squid-yokai costume against snow and winter light, where the body both stands out and partly dissolves into the pale surroundings.

Documentation by Yuting Zhou, 2026.



Figure 25. Screenshot from the Hangzhou outdoor weaving performance, showing the white squid-yokai costume set against grass and surrounding greenery, where the body appears more sharply isolated from its environment. *Documentation by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

Taken together, costume, gesture, and woven result transformed inner states into a visual language by making contradiction, strain, adaptation, and exposure readable through material form. The squid-yokai's body gave a visible silhouette. The repeated movement from kneeling to sitting made bodily negotiation legible. Tears, stains, wrinkles, and transport marks turned the costume into a record of contact with weather, ground, and distance. The woven sections carried this process further by storing shifts in rhythm, interruptions, density, openness, and error. Together, these elements made emotional states visible not as fixed symbols, but as changing traces distributed across body, costume, environment, and cloth. In this way, the project answered the second research question by showing that inner states can become legible through a visual language of material change, bodily adjustment, and textile structure.

3.3 Joy, Relief, and Reframing Bipolar Experience

This section addresses how expressing joy and relief through textiles and performance can change how bipolar experience is felt and understood. In this project, bipolar disorder is not presented only through crisis, instability, or pain. Those conditions are present, but they do not constitute the full emotional field of the work. Across the performances, I found that humour, awkwardness, curiosity, and small moments of relief were also important. These moments did not cancel the difficulty. Instead, they changed how I could remain with it.

This matters to me personally because bipolar disorder once made me feel as if I were constantly pulled between depression and mania. Calm was the condition I always wanted to reach, but it often felt unstable or temporary. Through this project, I began to understand calm not as a perfect or permanent state, but as something that can appear in brief, grounded moments through repetitive action, bodily adjustment, and acceptance. Autoethnographic approaches are useful here because they treat lived experience as a valid source of knowledge rather than something outside the research (Adams et al., 2017). Performance-based approaches are also relevant because they understand movement, gesture, and sensation as ways of knowing and communicating experience (Spry, 2001). In my project, relief often appeared through action rather than through explanation. Once the loom was in motion, the repetitive tasks of passing the shuttle, adjusting the thread, and keeping rhythm gave my body something steady to return to.

This shift was especially clear in situations where the atmosphere of a performance changed through small interruptions from the surrounding world. In one domestic session, the emotional weight of being watched and not fully understood was softened by the presence of dogs moving through the room (Figure 26, 27). Their movements and sounds pulled the scene away from pure tension and back into everyday life. In outdoor settings, barking, footsteps,

and passersby also changed the tone of the work (Figure 28). These interruptions did not simply distract from the performance. At times, they introduced a strange lightness into it. The work was no longer only about internal struggle; it became part of a shared environment in which humour, curiosity, and unpredictability could enter. Ahmed's writing helps explain this because she understands emotion as something that moves between bodies, objects, and situations rather than remaining fixed within a single person (Ahmed, 2004). Relief in this project often emerged through that movement.



Figure 26. Screenshot from the Hangzhou living room performance, showing Pablo watching the weaving performance from a distance and introducing an everyday domestic presence into the scene. *Documentation by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*



Figure 27. Screenshot from the Hangzhou living room performance, showing Lalo approaching and sniffing the loom during the weaving process. *Documentation by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*



Figure 28. Screenshot from the Toronto St. Andrew's Playground performance, showing a passerby walking a barking dog through the background of the scene. *Documentation by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

The squid-yokai costume was central to this change in tone. It not only makes the body appear fragile or exposed, but also makes it appear vulnerable. It also introduced absurdity. The long tentacles, the paper body, and the slightly awkward movements can be unsettling, but they can also seem curious or faintly comic. This mattered because it shifted the work away from a purely tragic image of mental illness. Research in art and drama therapy supports this kind of transformation, showing that non-human imagery can help people approach difficult emotional material with greater distance, flexibility, and care (Bédard-Gascon, 2014; Fort, 2022). In my case, the costume allowed difficult states to be carried in a form that was vulnerable, but not only heavy.

The second version of the costume was also important to this shift. By moving away from the fully enclosed triangular form and toward a more recognizably human garment with squid-like extensions, I made the figure easier for myself to inhabit emotionally as well as physically. The costume was still altered, strange, and non-human, but it no longer

completely hid the body inside an abstract shell. This change mattered for my mental health because it allowed me to express contradiction more gently: I could appear vulnerable, exposed, and imperfect without feeling fully trapped inside an extreme image. In that sense, the more human second version helped create room for relief. It allowed me not only to show instability, but also to accept myself more openly within it, as someone living with bipolar disorder who does not need to appear fully controlled, resolved, or “normal.”

This acceptance of vulnerability also appeared in the woven results. In the performances, I did not try to make the cloth technically perfect, as I might in the textile studio. I did not focus on keeping the selvages neat, controlling every pattern, or producing a tidy final object. Instead, I allowed irregular edges, open areas, repeated structures, and interruptions to remain visible. This was not only a practical response to living conditions. It also became part of the work's emotional meaning. Accepting the weaving as uneven and unfinished paralleled my attempt to accept myself as a person living with bipolar disorder. In both cases, I moved away from the pressure to appear controlled, resolved, or technically “correct.” Adamson’s (2007) writing is useful here because it frames craft as a way of thinking through process rather than judging value solely by a perfected finish. Nimkulrat (2024) also helps explain why these irregularities matter, since the textile carries traces of bodily action, hesitation, and material response rather than simply representing a pre-formed design.

This also changed how I related to the work myself. There were still moments when I felt exposed, misunderstood, or physically uncomfortable. Yet the performances created brief openings where I could experience the work through curiosity rather than self-blame. Sometimes this came through the rhythm of weaving. Sometimes it came through the absurdity of the squid–yokai figure. Sometimes it appeared because the outside world—animals, weather, passing people, surrounding sounds—refused to let the

performance remain solemn for too long. These moments mattered because they suggested another way of living with bipolar experience: not by denying pain, but by allowing room for lightness, imperfection, and release within it.

White and Epston's (1990) idea of re-authoring is helpful here because the work opens space for a different story about mental health, one that includes fragility and strain, but also adaptation, humour, and persistence. Instead of asking viewers to understand bipolar disorder only as a problem or diagnosis, the performances offered an encounter with a body that was vulnerable, strange, persistent, and sometimes unexpectedly playful. In that sense, expressing joy did not weaken the seriousness of the subject. It made the experience more layered and, perhaps, more shareable.

Overall, this project suggests that relief is not separate from difficulty, but can appear within it. Through costume, weaving, and live action, the performances created moments in which tension could coexist with curiosity, absurdity, calm, and acceptance. This did not turn bipolar disorder into something simple or positive. However, it did reshape how I could approach it. Instead of being fixed as a single negative condition, it became visible as a lived state that includes strain, adaptation, imagination, vulnerability, and brief but important moments of release.

3.4 Comparative Reflection on Toronto and Hangzhou

The performances in Toronto and Hangzhou changed not simply because they took place in different locations, but because each site shaped how the body, costume, loom, and cloth were read. Site-specific work is not defined only by physical setting. It is also shaped by the meanings attached to a place and by how a body becomes visible within it (Kwon, 2004). Across the studio, school, balcony, park, living room, and community garden, what shifted most was the kind of attention each place produced. In some spaces, the work supported focus. In others, it led to misunderstandings, exposure, or the need to explain. The comparison, therefore, emerges through changing relations between privacy and publicness, support and pressure, rather than through a simple repetition of the same act in two cities (Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Kwon, 2004).

One important difference appeared in how visibility worked. In the Toronto school spaces and park, attention often came in passing: people moving through the Great Hall, office workers across the balcony, or dog walkers in the park. This made me aware of being seen, but the attention was usually brief. In Hangzhou, visibility often felt more layered. In the living room, the tension did not come from strangers but from a more intimate misunderstanding. Because there was no suitable place to position the camera and capture my full body, I asked my partner to help with the recording. He was willing to do so, but his confused expression and hesitant attitude made me feel that he did not fully understand what I was doing. The feeling that arose was neither a positive curiosity nor a negative refusal. It was something stranger and more uncertain: a sense that the performance was being witnessed from within familiarity, yet without a shared language for understanding it. That intimate uncertainty shaped the atmosphere of the performance differently from public attention. In the community garden, the presence of the security guard shifted that tension again, from uncertainty toward regulation. I no longer felt only watched; I felt that an

explanation might be required. This shows that live work is shaped not only by who sees it, but by how authority, familiarity, and local expectations organize that act of seeing (Ahmed, 2004; Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

The white costume sharpened these differences. In both cities, a body dressed in white stood out, but it was interpreted differently. In China, wearing full white in public could raise concerns (Guo & Herrmann-Pillath, 2023). In the community garden, this raised concerns that the performance might be inappropriate for children. The misunderstanding came not only from the work looking unusual, but from what the costume could signify in that setting. This gave the performance a different social charge from the Toronto sessions, where the same figure could still seem strange or ghostly but was less likely to be read through funerary meaning. In Toronto, the snow may also have made the white costume slightly less visually abrupt against the winter ground, even though the moving body still stood out. At the same time, I do not want to reduce this to a simple cultural code. What mattered was the live meeting of colour, material, body, and place. The costume became a sign whose meaning was completed differently in each site.

These differences also appeared in the cloth. The woven results did not merely record place afterward; they held the pressure of each situation as it passed through the body. In the first Toronto studio session, the textile opened into loops and drifting structures after boredom loosened my need for control. In the Great Hall, it became steadier and more alert. On the Toronto balcony, one side opened dramatically while the other remained denser, as if the site's threshold condition had divided the body between exposure and protection. In the park, the woven cloth held together more evenly, but the bright snow and physical strain also produced accidental gaps where the warp remained unwoven, which I chose not to correct. During this performance, the whiteness of the snow made the white warp difficult to see clearly, and the wind repeatedly blew my hood away, making it harder to track the shuttle's

path through the threads. As a result, openings appeared in the cloth and became part of its final structure (Figure 29). In the Hangzhou living room, the cloth appeared more compressed and inward, shaped by repeated vertical passages and the unnoticed lifted shaft. The Hangzhou balcony returned to openwork and elongated passages, but in a calmer way. In the community garden, a broad field of stable weaving was interrupted by a large opening and thinner areas, making the cloth read like a record of divided attention (Figure 30). These sections show that the comparison is written directly into the textile through density, repetition, asymmetry, accident, and interruption (Nimkulrat, 2010, 2024).

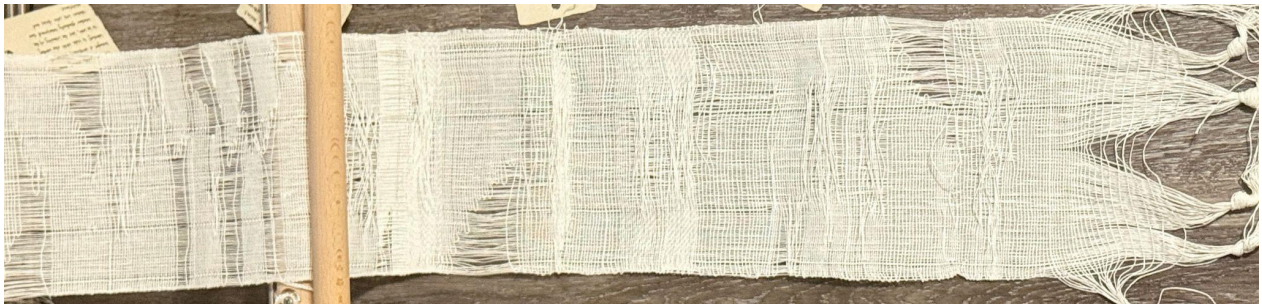


Figure 29. Composite view of all woven cloth from the Toronto performances, showing how density, open-work, and accidental gaps varied across the Toronto sessions. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

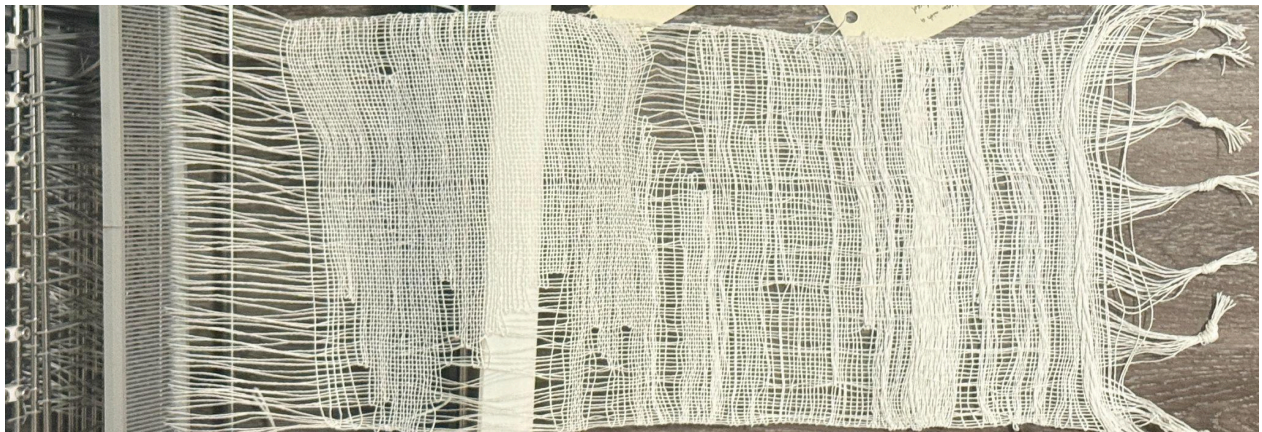


Figure 30. Composite view of all woven cloth from the Hangzhou performances, showing how denser fields, elongated passages, and interruptions varied across the Hangzhou sessions. *Photograph by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

The contrast should not be understood as one city being open and the other restrictive, or one place being calm and the other tense. The journal shows something more unstable. The Great Hall, though public, could feel socially warm. The family living room, though domestic, could feel emotionally compressed. A balcony could become a place of calm in one moment and a sharp division in another. The community garden could begin in pleasure and move toward surveillance. Even the dogs changed the tone of the work. In the park, barking interrupted the severity of the cold with a softer sense of contact. In the living room, their movement grounded the action in ordinary domestic life and reduced the force of misunderstanding. What mattered most was not simply whether a place was public or private, but how it organized relations, who or what was nearby, what kind of attention was possible, and whether the body could remain in the work without being pushed into one fixed meaning (Ahmed, 2004; Kwon, 2004).

In conclusion, the Toronto and Hangzhou performances show that the comparative structure of the project revealed how mental health, costume, weaving, and public interpretation are shaped together by site. The same white washi costume and squid-yokai body did not carry one stable meaning from place to place. They were continually re-read through architecture, weather, social distance, intimate relationships, neighbourhood life, and cultural ideas attached to white dress and unusual public behaviour. The comparison matters not because it proves one place easier and the other harder, but because it shows that emotional exposure is always relational. The cloth becomes a record of how the body responded to each site's demands. In that sense, the comparison is not only geographic. It is also about different ways of being seen, being held, and continuing to weave under changing conditions of belonging, misunderstanding, and pressure (Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Kwon, 2004; Ahmed, 2004).

3.5 Exhibition Review

This section considers the exhibition as the thesis's final public form. Installed in the Ada Slaight Hallway at OCAD University, the exhibition brought together video, loom, costume, signage, and printed materials to show how the project moved between performance, material trace, and documentation. The exhibition reorganized these elements in space so that viewers could encounter the project's comparative, emotional, and material dimensions together. Section 3.5.1 discusses the spatial setup and video installation; Section 3.5.2 examines the signage, invitation, and printed materials; and Section 3.5.3 reflects on the opening reception and the exhibition's role as a concluding form of the research.

3.5.1 Spatial Set-Up and Video Installation

The videos were divided into five parts and shown simultaneously. The first studio performance was shown on a monitor with a stand (Figure 31), while the other four videos were projected along the long hallway wall using standard projectors (Figure 32). These projections grouped the performances by site and atmosphere: Toronto indoor works, Toronto outdoor works, Hangzhou indoor works, and Hangzhou outdoor works. Showing the videos simultaneously allowed viewers to encounter several parts of the project together, rather than in a strict linear order. This mattered because the thesis is based on repetition, comparison, and accumulation rather than on a single narrative arc. The simultaneous display made it possible to see how gesture, costume, rhythm, and atmosphere shifted across locations while remaining part of a single performance language.

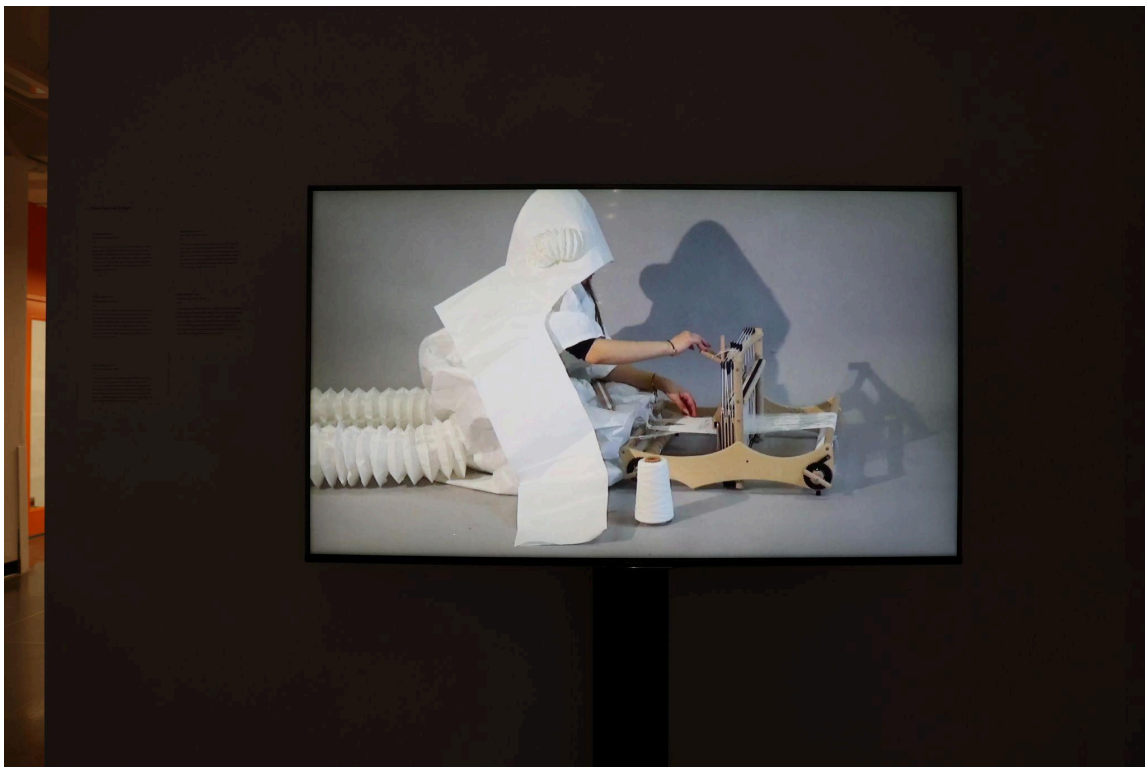


Figure 31. Installation view of the first studio performance shown on a monitor with a stand in the exhibition hallway. *Photograph by Aritra Das, 2026.*



Figure 32. Installation view of the exhibition hallway, showing four projected performance videos displayed simultaneously alongside the loom, woven cloth, and costume. *Photograph by Aritra Das, 2026.*

Preserving the original video duration was also important. Rather than cutting them into short highlights, I wanted viewers to have the option to sit with the work's slowness, repetition, and duration. This choice preserved the temporal structure of weaving as it was actually performed and allowed the exhibition to reflect the bodily pace of the performances.

The two looms and the squid-yokai costume were placed on low plinths beneath the projected videos and against the wall. Their placement connected the finished installation directly to the live actions shown above them. Instead of separating documentation from objects, the exhibition positioned them together, so that the woven fabric, loom, and costume could be read as material traces of the performances rather than as independent art objects. The costume was no longer worn, but it still carried wrinkles, stains, folds, tears, and signs of travel. The woven cloths remained on the looms, holding the shape of their making. In this

arrangement, the exhibition made visible one of the thesis's central claims: that costume and textiles can function as emotional archives, storing traces of bodily movement, weather, place, and time.

The labels on the looms supported this reading. Each woven section was identified with basic information about the related performance, including the site, date, and a small group of emotional keywords. On the back of each label, I added a short sentence describing a specific emotional change that took place during that session (Figure 33). These labels were intentionally simple. Rather than explaining the entire performance, they worked as small openings into the cloth, guiding the viewer to connect visible structures in the weave with shifts in attention, comfort, pressure, or uncertainty.

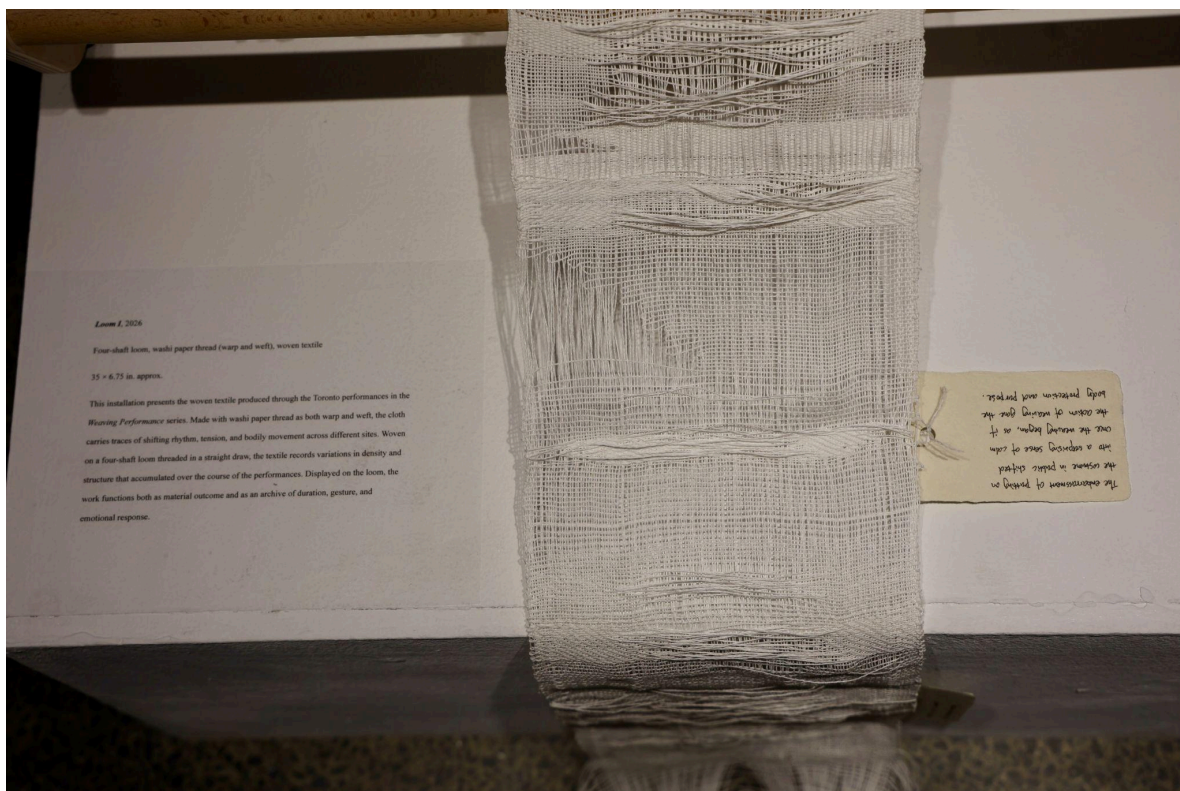


Figure 33. Detail of the labelled woven cloth on Loom 1, showing the reverse side of the handwritten tag with a brief note describing an emotional shift that occurred during the related performance. *Photograph by Aritra Das, 2026.*

3.5.2 Signage, Invitation, and Printed Materials

Material consistency was an important part of the exhibition design. The signage was made using vinyl-cut lettering transferred onto washi paper with a woven structure inlaid (Figure 34). This kept the exhibition's visual language close to the material language of the work itself. Instead of introducing a graphic system unrelated to the project, the signage remained tied to weaving and paper.

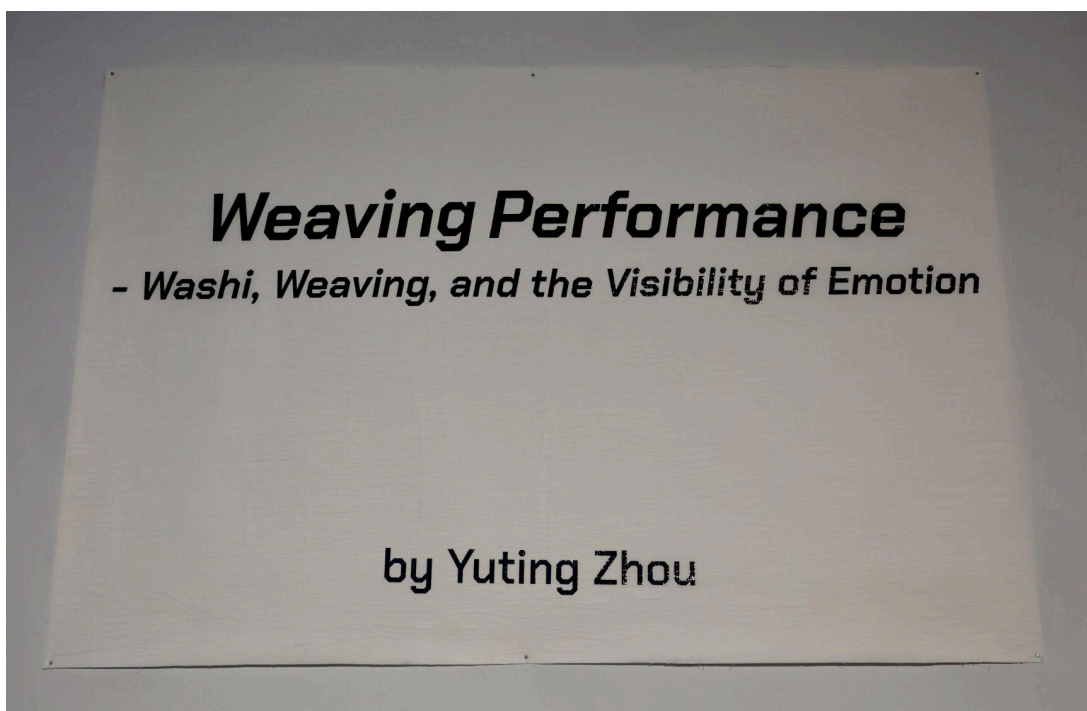


Figure 34. Exhibition title signage made with vinyl-cut lettering transferred onto white washi paper with a woven structure inlaid, maintaining the material language of paper and weaving in the exhibition design.

Photograph by Aritra Das, 2026.

The printed invitation followed the same logic. It used the same kind of washi paper and included a stylized background based on the woven cloth on the loom (Figure 35). All of the exhibition information was printed on this paper, so that even the invitation functioned as an extension of the project's material world (Figure 36). This continuity mattered because the

exhibition was not only a display of completed works. It was also an environment built from the same paper, thread, and surface logic that shaped the performances.

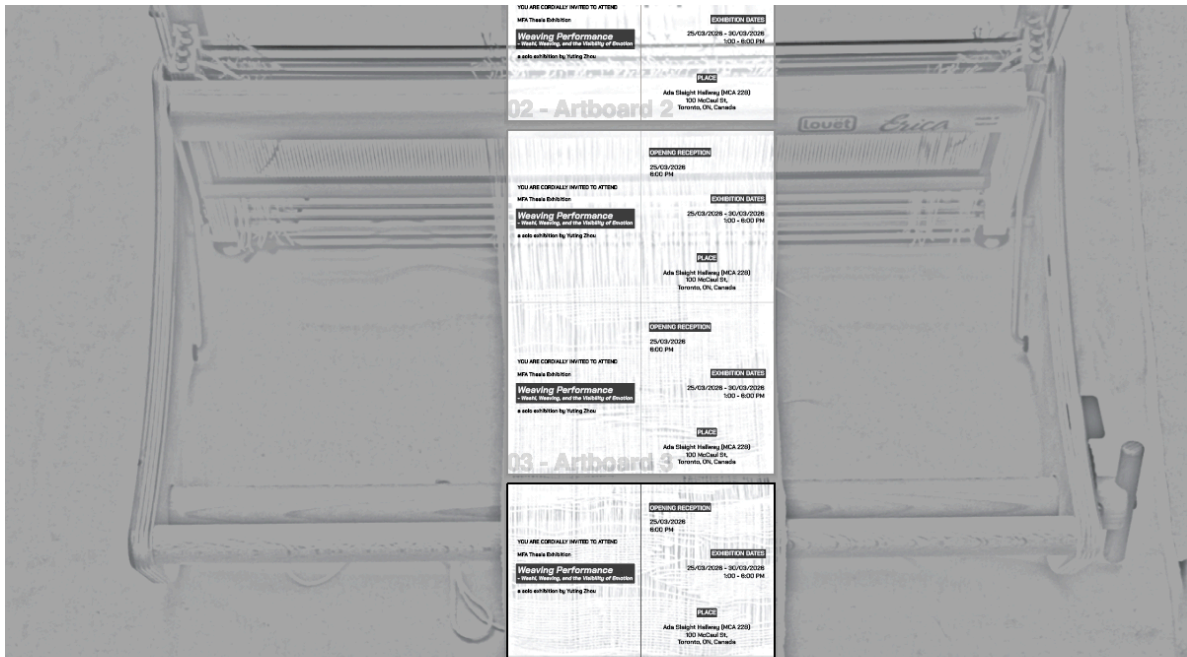


Figure 35. Adobe Illustrator layout for the exhibition invitation, showing a woven-cloth background derived from the loom and the exhibition information arranged within the printed design. *Documentation by Yuting Zhou, 2026.*

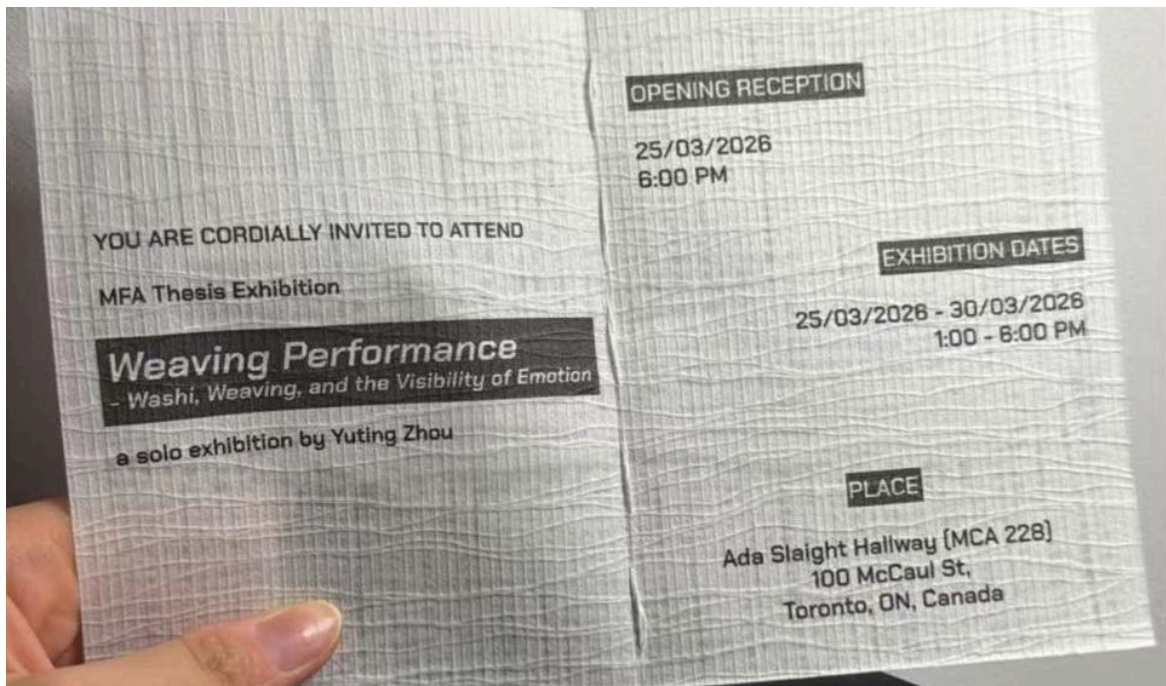


Figure 36. Printed exhibition invitation on washi paper, using a stylized woven-cloth background.

Documentation by Yuting Zhou, 2026.

I also prepared four printed booklets, which were tied to the benches in the hallway using washi thread. These booklets included my artist statement, images of the costume, and a timeline of the performances with selected photographs (Figure 37, 38). Their placement on the benches was deliberate. Because the videos remained long and unedited, I wanted viewers to have something they could hold and read while sitting with the work. The booklet offered a slower, more intimate way to enter the project. It also provided context without interrupting the videos with excessive text.



Figure 37. Printed booklet tied to a hallway bench with washi thread, showing the artist statement, costume images, and performance timeline in a handheld format for viewers to read while seated. *Photograph by Aritra Das, 2026*



Figure 38. Installation view of the hallway bench with printed booklets tied in place using washi thread, providing viewers with contextual material to read while watching the videos. *Photograph by Aritra Das, 2026.*

Similarly, I prepared postcards for visitors to take away, along with a printed artist statement attached to the plinth (Figure 39). These printed materials extended the exhibition beyond the moment of viewing, allowing the work to circulate in smaller, handheld forms.

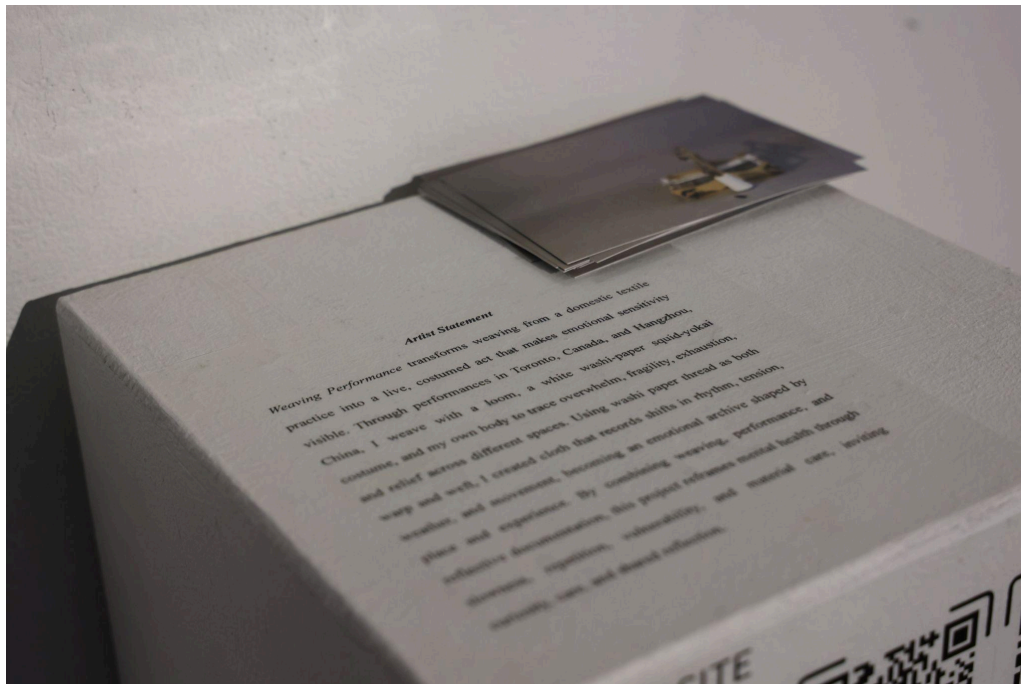


Figure 39. Printed artist statement and take-away postcards displayed on a plinth. *Photograph by Aritra Das, 2026.*

3.5.3 Opening Reception and Concluding Reflection

The opening reception was an important part of the exhibition, even though it was not a formal performance in its own right. It gathered viewers into the same threshold space where the work was installed and turned the hallway into a temporary environment of conversation, looking, waiting, and shared attention (Figure 40). During the opening, the exhibition shifted from a set of objects and projections into a social space in which the project could be encountered slowly and from multiple directions at once.



Figure 40. Visitors examined the woven cloth on the loom during the opening reception, as the exhibition space became a site of conversation, looking, and shared attention. *Photograph by Aritra Das, 2026.*

People moved between the videos, looms, costume, benches, and printed materials, encountering the project through several forms rather than a single work. This reflected the larger structure of the thesis, in which meaning did not emerge from a single isolated image

or object, but from the relations among the moving image, woven surface, costume damage, emotional labels, and printed text. The dimmed light in the hallway also changed the atmosphere of the installation. It created a more immersive environment for viewing the videos and enhanced the calmness of the setting, allowing people to sit with the work for longer. In that sense, the exhibition space carried a quiet, almost therapeutic quality that supported the slow rhythm of the performances rather than competing with them.

Informal feedback during the reception also helped me understand how the work was being received. Some instructors responded strongly to the length and intrepid nature of the performance series, especially the commitment to carrying the work across multiple sites and sustaining it through different physical and emotional conditions. This response mattered because it suggested that the project's durational and site-based structure was legible in the installation, even though viewers were encountering it after the fact through video, textile, and object.

The exhibition did more than summarize the thesis. It reorganized the project into a public installation that allowed its different parts to be seen together. The hallway setting, the simultaneous videos, the loom installations, the costume, and the consistent use of washi paper all supported the central argument that weaving can move between process, performance, and archive. The exhibition, therefore, functioned as the final form of the research: not a conclusion that closed the work down, but a spatial arrangement that allowed the project's material, emotional, and comparative dimensions to remain visible at once.

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