

Thin Skin: Diaphanous Margins of Encounter

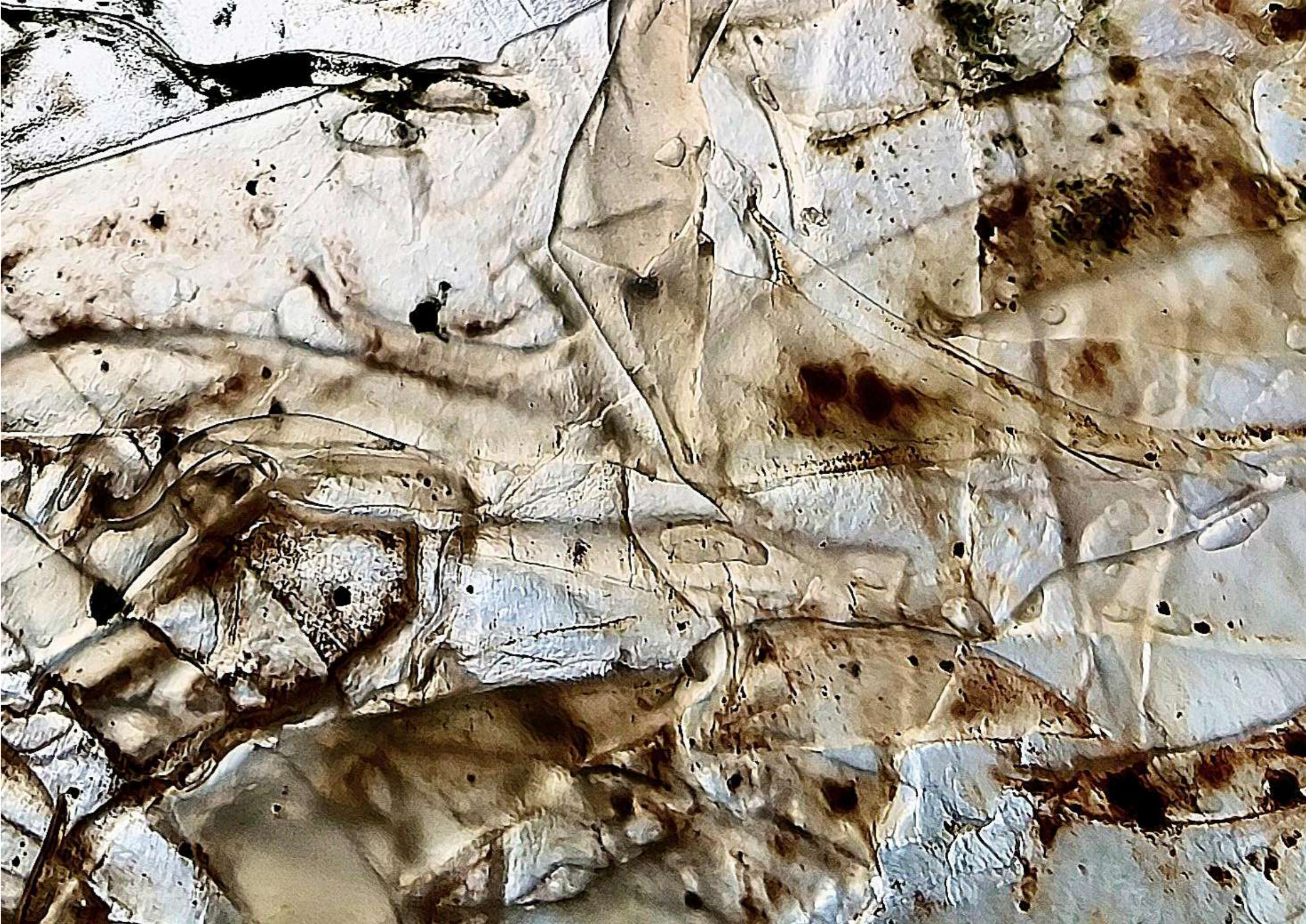
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Abstract

This sculptural installation project seeks to engage with questions of materiality, fragility, and form. It explores sensory diadermic encounters with thin skin through sculptural processes utilising cellulose rice paper as a primary material. In the research, skin functions as a margin, a boundary that is at once containing, porous, and continually undergoing transformation. It operates as both a sensory organ and a tactile interface, a diaphanous threshold between the concept of an independent self and the world. Drawing on Buddhist teachings and a curious enquiry, the practice identifies doubt and not-knowing as generative thin spaces, sites where rigid identities soften and begin to dissolve. Fostering a mode of curiosity that remains open to sensing, encounter, and transformation, it aims to illuminate marginal spaces where meaning can begin to emerge.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

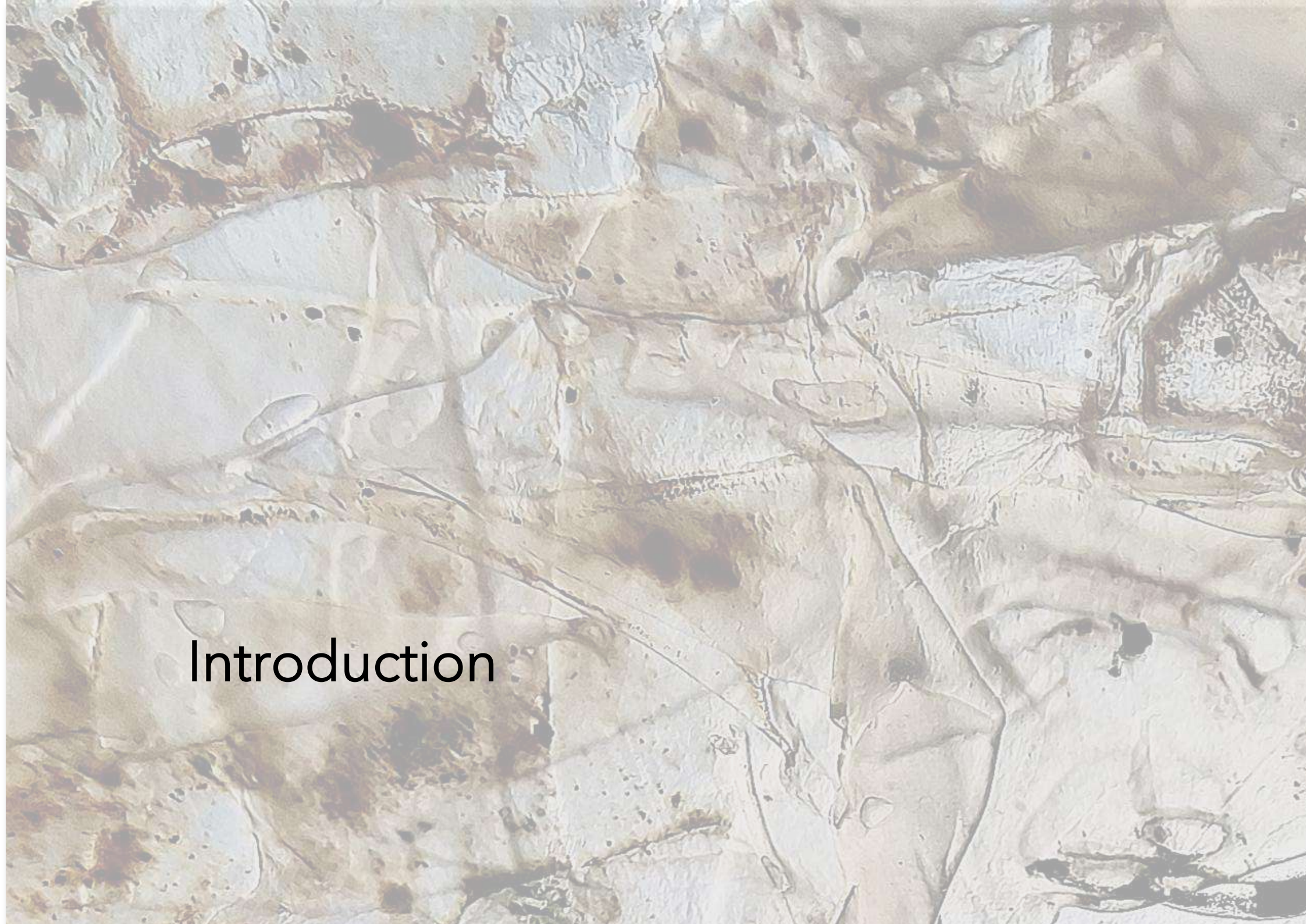
7 May 2026

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Thank you, also, Athena, for your enthusiasm and hugs throughout.



Introduction

Some years ago, I sailed across the Tasman Sea from Aotearoa to Australia on a 40-foot yacht. On the second day, we encountered a cyclonic weather system. One moment, we were lifted atop a watery peak, looking out across an immense and shifting seascape; the next, plunged into a deep basin of churning ocean. It is difficult to convey the scale of that experience, the overwhelming sense of exposure, the loss of control, the acute awareness of a threshold between life and death. It was at once profoundly personal and, paradoxically, entirely impersonal. The ocean, I realised, had no intention to harm, no agenda. My own decisions had brought me there. The experience, in turn, led me toward an interest in and practice of Zen Buddhism, which now forms part of the broader worldview underpinning this research project.



Image 1. Kym Burke, 'Seascape', 1994. Photographic image crossing the Tasman Sea in a forty-foot yacht.

This research project, *Thin Skin: Diaphanous Margins of Encounter*, is an enquiry into the notion of a physical and metaphysical *thin skin*, conceived simultaneously as a material condition and an experiential threshold. Situated within sculpture and installation practice, the research investigates materiality, fragility, and form. These are considered not as stable properties but as dynamic and contingent processes through which presence (understood as the state of existence) is continuously constituted, destabilised, and reconfigured. Rather than treating form as something fixed, I explore how it can both register and dissolve, holding traces and absences within an ever-shifting field of encounter.

At the conceptual core of this enquiry lies a Zen Buddhist philosophy.¹ The thought of the Indian philosopher, Nāgārjuna² and contemporary interpretations by author and founder of the Diamond Sangha, Zen Master Robert Aitken Roshi, and author and activist Joanna Macy. Drawing on my own understanding of these frameworks, the research engages the concepts of form and emptiness as mutually arising conditions rather than opposing states. Form is approached as provisional, evolving through making within a wider field of indeterminacy, while emptiness is understood as a generative openness from which phenomena emerge. Within this nondual orientation, the distinctions between solidity and dissolution, and notions of an independent self, soften into a relational process rather than fixed binaries. Doubt and not-knowing are embraced as generative conditions in the practice and are understood as productive thin spaces in which fixed identities can loosen, and transformation becomes possible. These material conditions resist classification, allowing perception to remain open, responsive, and in flux.

Material experimentation using cellulose-based rice paper as a primary sculptural medium is central to the research. Chosen for its fragility, translucency, and responsiveness, it becomes a material site for exploring transformation.

¹ Grounded in my own Zen Buddhist practice.

² Founded the Madhyamaka (Middle Way) school of Mahayana Buddhism and is renowned for articulating the doctrine of Śūnyatā or emptiness (c.105–250 CE).

Utilising iterative processes of soaking, layering, forming, suspending, and reconstituting, as a sculptural material, cellulose rice paper operates not as a passive substrate but as a collaborator. I enact small rituals to create moments of connection, foster attentiveness and find material rhythm in the process. The sculptural actions do not simply visualise conceptual ideas; they are enacted, allowing processes of formation and disintegration. This engages with notions of plasticity both as a material condition and a conceptual aspect. Extending beyond physical malleability, plasticity becomes a methodological commitment to continual transformation through curious enquiry that resists closure. Within this project, the enquiry is sustained by questions that operate as openings, keeping material, conceptual, and sensory processes in motion. In this way, meaning is understood as provisional, adaptive, and continually responsive to the contingencies of encounter.

Within the practice, the thin skin emerges as a liminal interface, rather than a fixed boundary. It becomes a “diadermic”³ mediator of sensory encounter and conjunction. Circumventing the dialogical method that seeks cohesion, it privileges meaning-making through quiet absorption, where paradoxical concepts can be held in proximity. This is not a fixed demarcation but a porous boundary state, where the interior/exterior is suspended in a shifting tension between containment and emergence. Rather than functioning as a separation, thin skin becomes a threshold, an intimate margin in which proximity does not resolve into unity but persists as a relational tension. My own sense of self, in turn, is reconsidered not as a stable entity, but as a contingent formation produced through ongoing encounter. This relational condition is extended in the work of physicist and writer Karen Barad, whose concept of intra-action frames entities as co-constituted rather than pre-existing relations. This work is situated with uncertain outcomes, where meaning is continually reconfigured at the margins of encounter and affect, emerging as situated, embodied

engagement with material forms rather than as dialogic interpretation. I therefore consider the installation environment not as a representational space but as an experiential field that invites harmony, presence, and relational awareness.

Located in the field of material enquiry, the project is informed by the sculptural practices of artists such as Eva Hesse and Mikala Dwyer. In particular, their engagement with fragility and materially unstable forms contributes to an understanding of sculpture as provisional and process-based. Resonances with vanitas traditions, as seen in the quiet meditations of the painter Giorgio Morandi, highlight the transience of materiality. Through installation and processes of making and unmaking, I generate conditions in which forms hover between recognition and indefinability. This is influenced by the practices of artists Kosei Komatsu, Do Ho Suh, and Yayoi Kusama, as well as by the form and formlessness of Zen gardens. This extends installation practice into perceptual environments shaped by light, atmosphere, material and immaterial elements, presence and absence. In essence, this research proposes a mode of practice in which the encounter itself becomes the primary site of meaning-making. Through material fragility, spatial stillness, and perceptual instability, the thin skin operates simultaneously as a metaphor, a method, and a material logic: a diaphanous and transformative interface.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of skin as both a metaphorical and material threshold, establishing the key research frameworks. Chapter 2 explores plasticity as both a methodology and a material practice, focusing on work made with cellulose rice paper, and presents installation as the primary site of diadermic encounter. Chapter 3 examines themes of containment, intimacy, and affect, while Chapter 4 highlights water as a vital elemental force shaping the project. This final chapter also expands on the nuanced aspects of installation.

³ Situated, embodied engagement



Image 2. Kym Burke, *'Depth of Breathing'* (*directed light/dark, sound/silence*), October 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, LED lights, standing light, audio speaker.



Image 3. Kym Burke, *'Elemental'*, November 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, repurposed plastic rubbish bags, paper tape, audio speaker.



Image 4. Kym Burke, *'Cosmoscopic'*, photo courtesy of Ziggy Lever, August 2025. Cellulose rice membrane, ink, nylon thread, projected rice membrane and pigment image, light and fan

The background of the slide is a full-page image of marbled paper. It features a complex, organic pattern of swirling, veined, and mottled colors. The primary colors are shades of light blue, off-white, and beige, with darker, more saturated tones of brown, tan, and muted purple interspersed throughout. The texture appears fluid and natural, reminiscent of traditional stone or shell marbling techniques.

Chapter One: A Matter for the Skin

In Mahayana Buddhism, *The Great Prajñāpāramitā Heart Sutra* is one of the most concise and influential texts, stating: "Form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form."⁴ This paradox suggests that what appears solid and distinct is inseparable from what appears empty or formless. Zen Master Robert Aitken Rōshi connects this to the principle of complementarity, formulated by the Danish physicist Niels Bohr. Aitken describes the relationship between form and emptiness as an elaborate and profound paradox. For Aitken, this points to a more fundamental reality in which insight cannot be grasped purely through intellectual reasoning. It requires a different kind of awareness, he says, it is "not a matter of the cortex... more a matter of the large intestine".^{5 6}

In this sense, paradox, as suggested by American philosopher Susanne Langer, is not a philosophical challenge to be resolved by analysis and correction.⁷ Rather, it must be processed by the body, in the gut. Similarly, writer Catherine Vasseleu says that when phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty proposes that "flesh has no name in any philosophy, he means it cannot be experienced as thought or reduced to the theoretical" [...] and that there is an "experience, or a sensing of flesh, whose meaning is not grasped through concepts."⁸

Eduardo Cadava, in discussing still images, refers to Walter Benjamin's concept of "now-time" – a moment of encountering that Benjamin observes as both a 'then' and 'now' coming together, "dialectics at a standstill".⁹ These moments of stillness, of sensing flesh, could be understood as sites of diadermic encounter.

In this way, skin is understood as an embodied margin, a transformative, porous threshold and mediator that holds a tension between perception and doubt.

Within art discourse, a parallel challenge to stable categories emerges in Georges Bataille's introduction of the concept of *formlessness* (*informe*).¹⁰ For Bataille, formlessness functioned as an operation that works to "destroy categories"¹¹ and reject the assumptions of high-minded humanism. This line of thought was later expanded by Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois, who argued that formlessness actively resists the foundational myths of modernism. In doing so, it challenges an artistic ontology predicated on the expectation that an artwork possesses a "defined beginning and an end... an interpretive grid"¹² through which meaning is stabilised.

Artist Eva Hesse sustained a sculptural practice that investigated formlessness, particularly the negotiation between structure and dissolution. Resisting fixed categorisation, her work accentuates a tension between organic contingency and material constraint. Contemporary art theorist Dominic Rahtz situates Hesse's sculptures within a framework of "metaphorical materialism", drawing attention to the relationship between "the material of a life and the materiality *per se* of materials."¹³ Rahtz proposes that it is through the corporeal form that these two dimensions are brought into contiguity, allowing lived experience and material substance to intersect in Hesse's work.¹⁴

⁴ "Diamond Sangha Sutras," accessed April 13, 2025, <https://www.essentia.com/book/spiritual/buddaprayers.htm>.

⁵ "Caught in Indra's Net," Lion's Roar, accessed April 25, 2025, <https://www.lionsroar.com/caught-in-indras-net/>.

⁶ Robert Aitken Rōshi founded the Diamond Sangha Zen Buddhist lineage to which I belong. Originating in Hawaii, his teachers were Harada Rōshi, Yamada Rōshi, and Yasutani Rōshi.

⁷ Susanne K. Langer, "Paradoxes," in *Feeling and Form - A Theory of Art* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 16.

⁸ Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light* (Routledge, 1998), 28.

⁹ Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 64.

¹⁰ Philippe Theophanidis, "Georges Bataille: 'L'informe' ('Formless') 1929," *APHELIS*, June 30, 2011, <https://aphelis.net/georges-bataille-linforme-formless-1929/>.

¹¹ Tate, "Formlessness," Tate, accessed April 11, 2026, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/formlessness>.

¹² Rosalind E. Krause and Yves-Alain Bois, *Formless A User's Guide* (Zone Books, 1997).

¹³ Dominic Rahtz, *Metaphorical Materialism : Art in New York in the Late 1960s*, vol. 00004, Studies in Art & Materiality (Brill, 2021), 2959562, <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id>

¹⁴ Rahtz, *Metaphorical Materialism*, vol. 00004, 113.

For Hesse, the issue is in “solving an unknown factor in art and an unknown factor in life,”¹⁵ An image, she says, that is about the totality of her life and her art. This matter of an interface underpinning Hesse’s investigations resonates with my own embodied enquiry of materiality, brushing up against an intimate totality through encounter, intersected by a metaphorical thin skin. This intimate, diaphanous proximity becomes an interpretive lens for investigating thin skin. A metaphorical border akin to the Zen concept of the Gateless Gate,¹⁶ functioning as a threshold that navigates transitions.

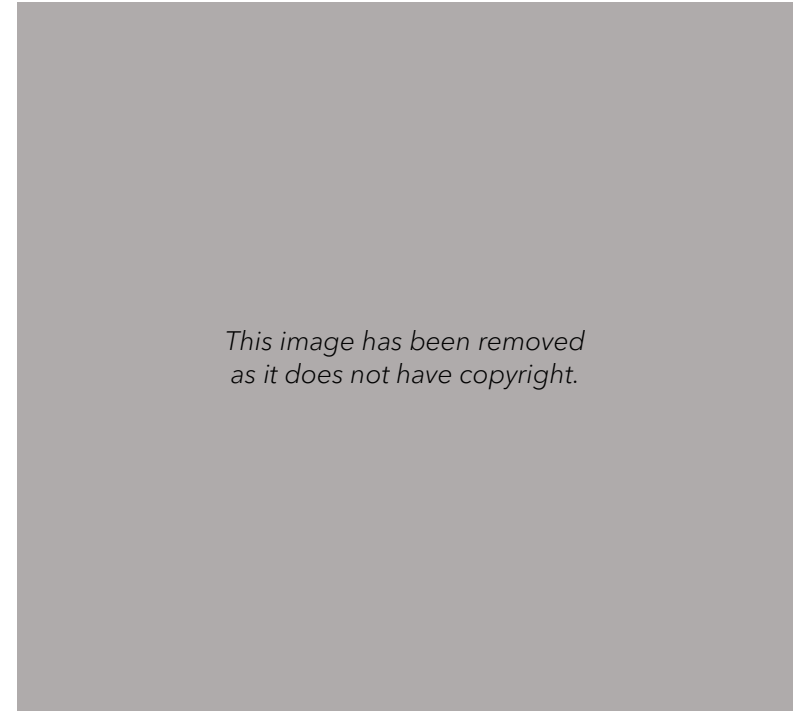


Image 5. Eva Hesse, ‘Contingent’, 1969. Mixed media fibreglass, cheesecloth and latex. National Gallery of Australia. Canberra.

¹⁵ Rahtz, *Metaphorical Materialism*, vol. 00004. 116.

¹⁶ The Gateless Gate represents a barrier that, upon realisation, is understood to be no barrier because enlightenment is already present within us.

The Shape of Skin

Early investigations into the materiality of materials, including fabric and nori, initially revealed an underlying and overlaying structural grid.¹⁷ However, this quickly shifted to an increasing interest and engagement with the concept of surface. Not as a stable or permanent condition but as a provisional margin capable of registering fleeting, temporal traces and remaining subject to continual transformation. Similarly, human skin has a diaphanous quality, a thin and transmutable membrane. It appears as a marginal border space that defines human form, at once containing and porous, delicate and substantial.¹⁸ Skin is also a sensory organ, receptive to the world; it is a tactile interface and permeable boundary with significant plasticity.



Image 6. *Early surface investigation of processed nori sheets*, May 2025. Nori and plaster.

¹⁷ Grids have been a significant aspect of my previous work, an attempt to map the relationship between form/emptiness, inside/outside.



Image 7. *Layering experiments, hanging punctuated fabric interfacing, orange and black mesh, with applied plaster*, May 2025.

Metaphorically, having thin skin suggests vulnerability and heightened sensitivity to criticism or external pressures. By contrast, someone described as having thick skin is understood to possess mental resilience and be able to withstand judgment or adversity without being easily affected. Such expressions reveal how deeply the idea of skin is tied to notions of protection, exposure, and boundaries. In this way, skin can largely be understood as a margin or threshold between the “self” and the external world. It reflects internal states while mediating our interaction with others and the surrounding environment.

¹⁸ For humans and other animals, skin functions as a protective outer barrier that simultaneously sheds and regenerates. It is a layered membrane composed of the epidermis and dermis, with fleshy muscle, fat, and connective tissue beneath.



Image 8. (a,b,c). Material surface testing with plaster and ink on tracing paper, May 2025.

Writing on spiritual aspects of skin disorders, Professor of Dermatology and Cutaneous Surgery Philip Shenefelt and Rabbi Debrah Shenefelt propose that the links are so strong that skin conditions have been interpreted as physical manifestations of emotional and spiritual experience, influencing personal identity and a sense of belonging.¹⁹ Writer Maria Popova, reviewing Jenn Shapland's book *Thin Skin*, reflects that, for humans, the boundary between ourselves and others is difficult to discern: "there is no boundary – only a fluid, permeable membrane that is constantly shifting depending on the stories we tell ourselves."²⁰ Even as boundaries such as skin persist, they do not function as absolute divisions. Like the shedding of skin cells, the sense of self may appear less as a stable object and more as an emergent, momentary phenomenon, observable and contingent, with plastic qualities.

Upon encountering the work of Australian artist Mikala Dwyer, I was struck by a similar tension within her sculptures. Balancing presence and dissolution, I saw her work as holding form while simultaneously appearing fragile or insubstantial. These moulded plastic forms have appeared in Dwyer's work since 2002. She often employs transparent, unwieldy materials to create structures described as "all skin," forms that are both insubstantial and "space hungry."²¹ With *A Shape of Thought* (2017) and *Empty Sculpture* (2019), both sculptures occupy the gallery space while remaining almost immaterial. Adjacently interested in structural form and in thinning containment, my own practice explores dissolution as both a material characteristic and the concept of plasticity, rather than working exclusively with plastic.



Image 9. *Skin on the back of my hand (close-up)*, February 2026

¹⁹ Philip Shenefelt and Debrah Shenefelt, "Spiritual and Religious Aspects of Skin and Skin Disorders," *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, August 2014, 201, <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S65578>; Hektoen International, "More than Skin Deep: The Spirituality of Chronic Dermatologic Disease - Hektoen International," September 15, 2025, <https://hekint.org/2025/09/15/more-than-skin-deep-the-spirituality-of-chronic-dermatologic-disease/>.

²⁰ Maria Popova, "The Power of a Thin Skin," *The Marginalian*, December 15, 2023, <https://www.themarginalian.org/2023/12/14/jenn-shapland-thin-skin/>.

²¹ Robert Leonard, "Mikala Dwyer: Psychoplastic," 2017, <https://robertleonard.org/mikala-dwyer-psychoplastic/>.



Image 10. Mikala Dwyer, *'Empty Sculpture'*, 2019. Plastic and hessian. Collection Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. Acquired with generous support from the Govett-Brewster Foundation, the Artist and Hamish McKay Gallery. Photographer Sam Hartnett.



Image 11. Mikala Dwyer, *'A shape of thought'*, 2017. Plastic and hessian. Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

Curious Inquiry

This research explores the material qualities of plasticity and spaciousness as a methodology of Curious Inquiry, a term I use to describe an active, iterative approach guided by naïve wonder, curiosity, questions, and encounter. This is complemented by a contemplative practice that includes periods of reflection and small ritual grounding moments. These draw on the Zen concept of Beginner's Mind.²² Also, upon educator Leo Casey's discussion of the relationship between questions, curiosity, and learning, in reference to philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey's assertion that "curiosity is a natural resource."²³ Curiosity in this enquiry is an inherent capability to embrace ambiguity and not-knowing, a joyful openness to possibility, guided by material agency and spatial relationships.

The approach resonates with Zen, particularly the practice of kōan study, which can be understood as a disciplined cultivation of curiosity. Kōans, often presented as folk stories or verses, are not problems to be solved but sites of experiential realisation.²⁴ Aitken Roshi describes them as "tiny doors that open to great vistas,"²⁵ and Zen teacher Joan Sutherland Roshi, suggests that they "throw you back and forth between form and emptiness until you're completely off balance."²⁶ This is a tradition, she says, that is inherently supple and curious.

Within this context, states of not-knowing and doubt can be understood as particularly generative thin spaces in which habitual thought patterns begin to loosen. Encounters with both materiality and space in the absence of knowing can create metaphorical cracks and fissures, advancing productive states of transformation.



Image 12. *Testing the translucent qualities of nori and rice paper with applied plaster and light, June 2025.*

²² A Zen practice of approaching all activities with eagerness, openness, and with no preconceptions.

²³ "Questions, Curiosity and the Inquiry Cycle - Leo Casey, 2014," accessed March 17, 2026, <https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/doi/10.2304/elea.2014.11.5.510>.

²⁴ Robert Aitken, *The Gateless Barrier*, Second (North Point Press, 1995). xiii

²⁵ Robert Aitken, *Original Dwelling Place*, First (Counterpoint, 1996). 103.

²⁶ Joan Sutherland, *Through Forests of Every Colour - Awakening with Koans* (Shambala Publications, 2022). 10, 49,



Image 13. Kym Burke, 'Elemental' (Detail with viewer), November 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, repurposed plastic rubbish bags, paper tape.

In this regard, I approach thin spaces of non-knowing as fertile sites of inquiry. These become access points for both myself and the viewer to be affected through embodied encounter. Canadian philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi sees being affected as synonymous with "the passing of a threshold"²⁷ which relates to a change in capacity. He suggests that affecting also opens oneself up to being affected, "it's all about the openness of situations and how we can live that openness."²⁸ Massumi argues that being affected becomes more inclusive than approaches that engage in critical thinking because of a "meeting of the singularity of a new arising", which connects the future to the present.²⁹

In this research, affect creates an interpretive opening that remains generative. This extends into studio practice, where making becomes both an intimate and dynamic mode of thinking. The work does not seek resolution; instead, it privileges experience as an ongoing process, emphasising sensation, encounter, and the unfolding of meaning over definitive conclusions. This engages with the supple and curious process of questioning, an iterative exploration of "What would happen if..." as a methodology of making. It operates as a threshold into a deeper trust in embodied intuition. Such an approach enables a responsiveness to transformation, both in my own embodied awareness and in the evolving forms of the artwork itself.

²⁷ Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Polity Press, 2015). 4.

²⁸ Massumi, *Politics*. 6.

²⁹ Massumi, *Politics*. 148.

The background of the slide is a piece of marbled paper with a complex, organic pattern. It features swirling, vein-like structures in shades of cream, light brown, and pale blue-grey, creating a textured and aged appearance.

Chapter Two: Plastic Entanglements

Taking up plasticity as a methodological framework, I sought materials that embodied this mutable quality. New Zealand artist Raewyn Martyn characterises plasticity as that which “exceeds fixed form,”³⁰ describing it as the capacity for continual transformation. She further invokes the notion of “shape memory” to articulate a material’s “four-dimensional” quality: an ability to move between states in response to changing conditions, such as temperature.³¹ This could be understood in reference to the four elemental states: water, fire, air, and earth. Described as “archetypal forces”³² these shape and transmute life. Martyn’s understanding differs from technical engineering definitions of Shape Memory Materials (SMMs), which typically describe substances that recover their original form after deformation when activated by external stimuli.³³ Plasticity, in this sense, is the capacity of a material to undergo permanent, non-reversible deformation. For Martyn, by contrast, the emphasis lies not on return, but on transition – on a material’s capacity to inhabit multiple, shifting configurations.

In philosophical discourse, plasticity acquires a broader ontological significance. Catherine Malabou, often described as the philosopher of plasticity, defines it as the fundamental capacity to receive form, to give form, and to annihilate form.³⁴ She frames plasticity as a process of “self-moulding” that extends beyond adaptability to include rupture and radical transformation. Within this framework, destruction is not external to life but intrinsic to it; subjectivity must periodically “explode and face its own erasure.”³⁵

³⁰ Raewyn Martyn, “Entropy and Empathy: Mediums of Transformation” (Doctor of Philosophy, Massey University, 2022).

³¹ Martyn, “Entropy and Empathy” 2022.

³² Lin Wang Gordon, “We Are the Elements,” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, n.d., accessed February 21, 2026, <https://tricycle.org/magazine/4-elements-buddhist-meditation/>.

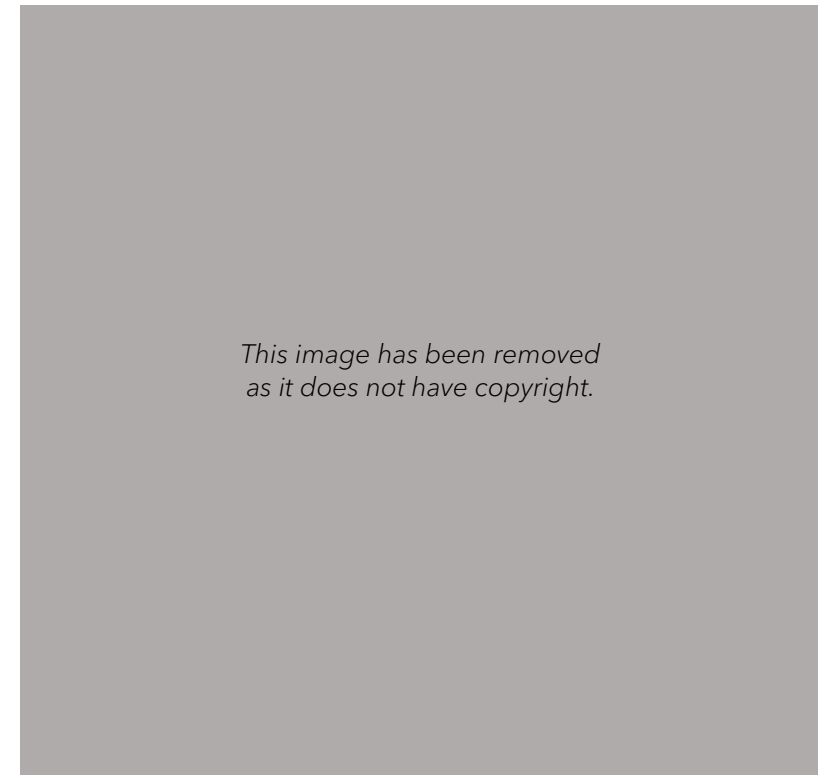


Image 14. Raewyn Martyn, *Medium Reconfigured*, 2016-17. Cellulose emulsion, synthetic, mineral, insect, and plant-based pigments. Jan van Eyck Academy.

³³ British Plastics Federation, “Shape Memory Polymer - A Complete Guide,” British Plastics Federation, accessed January 4, 2026, <https://www.bpf.co.uk/plastipedia/applications/shape-memory-polymer.aspx>.

³⁴ “Catherine Malabou’s ‘Destructive Plasticity,’” *Ifilnova*, October 7, 2024, <https://ifilnova.pt/en/destructive-plasticity/>.

³⁵ “Catherine Malabou’s ‘Destructive Plasticity.’”

Initially investigating plastic as a peripheral material, I also wanted to remain attentive to minimising its proliferation where possible. Initial experiments attempted to reuse everyday plastic drink bottles made from polyethylene terephthalate (PET) to produce translucent, moulding sheets. However, these efforts were quickly constrained by the technical limitations of thermoplastic welding. Dwyer similarly acknowledges the limitations of plastic material, noting that "it will only make what it will let you make."³⁶ Despite this, Dwyer keeps finding new possibilities, and these plastic welding processes have become a "staple of her practice".³⁷



Image 15. *Experiments with plastic polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles*, April 2025.

In response to these constraints, my enquiry shifted toward organic alternatives. A number of artists, including Laura Messing, Julia Lohmann, Anicka Yi, and Raewyn Martyn, engage with bio-based materials in their practices. Martyn's doctoral research, for instance, investigates "bio-based plastics derived from plant and bacterial growth,"³⁸ which she developed into biopolymer media for painted, site-responsive interventions. Her artworks operate less like static objects than dynamic systems, resembling ecosystems or living tissues; process over fixed substance. Visually, they evoke both skin-like surfaces and marine macroalgae, oscillating between the organic and the ephemeral. Central to her methodology is a strategy of "adventure,"³⁹ understood as a mode of inquiry driven by curiosity. This approach resonates with my own practice, in which material exploration unfolds iteratively through attentive, inquisitive encounters with surface and form.



Image 16. Raewyn Martyn, 2018. *Bio-based cellulose*. Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin.

³⁶ Leonard, "Mikala Dwyer: Psychoplastic."

³⁷ <https://robertleonard.org/mikala-dwyer-psychoplastic/>

³⁸ Martyn, "Entropy and Empathy" 2022.

³⁹ Martyn, "Entropy and Empathy" 2022.

Inquisitive about materials that evoke the qualities of skin and embody plasticity as a sculptural property, I returned to earlier studio experiments. Investigating readily available daily goods as organic substrates led to the use of pre-formed rice paper. Commonly associated with Asian culinary practices, rice paper is composed of rice flour, tapioca flour, water, and salt. The rice plant, *Oryza sativa*, is a member of the grass family.⁴⁰ It is a semi-aquatic crop that requires substantial water during cultivation, followed by extended periods of heat and dryness.⁴¹ Its material composition is shaped by varying proportions of starches, primarily amylose and amylopectin. Synonymous with nourishment and sustenance, rice remains a primary staple for over half of the world's population. It contributes to the maintenance and vitality of our own skin as a living surface.

Applying a curious approach, I enquired into the sculptural potential of cellulose rice paper.⁴² Initial investigations revealed a skin-like quality and transformative plasticity when exposed to elemental forces, water and heat.⁴³ The sensory contact with my own skin was understood to position me as an elemental agent, a diadermic mediator in the transformation of this cellulose-based material into emergent sculptural forms. Throughout the project, while the investigation of cellulose rice paper has been ongoing, other plastic materials have been incorporated. Most recently, this has included testing water-filled repurposed plastic rubbish bags in the studio.

⁴⁰ The history of rice is extensive. Archaeologists excavating in India have discovered rice that dates back to 4,530 BC. The first recorded mention of rice dates back to around 2800 BC in China. Rice was introduced into Japan around 1000 BC, and into Europe in the 4th century. It never took root in Great Britain due to the unstable climate.

⁴¹ <https://www.riceassociation.org.uk/history-of-rice>



Image 17. *Cellulose rice membrane submerged in water, July 2025.*



Image 18. *Studio tests with water in repurposed plastic rubbish bags, April 2026.*

⁴² I also experimented with making my own bio-based material using online recipes, creating two bioplastics: one very thin, similar to acetate, and another with a rubbery quality that was difficult to manipulate. Intending to work at a large scale and experiment with the limits of fragility and translucency, it quickly became apparent that these processes had limited application due to their processability.

⁴³ Analogous to the rice plant's dependency on water, sunlight, air, and nutrients, rice paper exhibits both heliophilic and hydrophilic tendencies.

Energetic Activation

Upon entering the studio and before beginning to make, I light incense, a small ritual that serves as a reminder to slow down to the material's pace, be present in bodily awareness, and foster attentiveness. Activating the rice paper wafer initiates the shaping and sculpting process. Exposing the wafer to humidity awakens it from stasis, a state where the Equilibrium Moisture Content (EMC) has been stabilised. The crisp, brittle rice paper wafer quickly reacts to room temperature, moving and curling in response to the ambient moisture. Additional soaking produces a skin-like texture, transforming it into a tacky cellulose membrane. Pliability varies depending on saturation time and water temperature; higher temperatures accelerate the saturation point. When making, I am driven to find the appropriate energetic activation. Too hot, and within several minutes, the membrane starts to lose material integrity; too cold, and the process becomes idle and lifeless. Not unlike rice cultivation, I needed to find ways to both flood and drain the "field" at crucial points.

Without ongoing hydration, the rice paper becomes increasingly tacky and extremely sticky. This indicated a limited period between extraction from the water and arrangement, during which the desired adhesion will occur. The membrane's elastic viscosity also allows it to fold back upon itself at any point, creating an unforgiving situation. Slippery and gelatinous, the membrane is sculpturally challenging to handle. My fingers retain a tactile memory through repetitive contact, an efferent sense of the movements required to quickly manoeuvre this lubricious material.

Cellulose rice paper is a material that resists control, inviting contingent, indeterminate interactions. In this context, transformation is not a singular event but an ongoing condition. Transmutable, this becomes a mode of making that is responsive to material agency rather than directive to it. Consequently, my hands and skin become a companion to the membrane, and sculptural forms become a collaborative endeavour.



Image 19. *Initial experimentation with different types of cellulose rice paper, May 2025.*



Image 20. *Saturated workable membrane with ink, flexible enough to be shaped and moulded, September 2025.*



Images 21. (a, b, c, d, e)
Variations of cellulose rice membrane and dried cuticle
composites (*detail*), August 2025.



Adhesion and Release

A secondary complementary element to the membrane is the adhesive substrate onto which it is placed to dry. During the making process, the rice paper membrane, tacky and tenacious, is carefully handled. It passes through a relational and responsive encounter with my own skin in a curious, embodied improvisation. Clinging to the adhesive substrate, it dries into a ridged yet flexible, impermanent form. Drying time can vary depending on conditions, including ambient or directed heat and humidity. Once stasis is reached, the membrane forms a hardened, sturdy, yet fragile shell-like material, which I will refer to as the cuticle in this context. The term cuticle commonly denotes a thickened, resilient yet flexible layer of non-living skin that surrounds and protects the fingernail.

The adhesion and release relationship between the membrane, cuticle, substrate, and myself, is a key aspect in the making process. Adhesion to porous surfaces, such as concrete or glass, can form a tough bond. If, however, the substrate is structurally compromised, as the cuticle continues to cure, it will, over months, release itself by lifting off its adhesive base.⁴⁴ Applying water can also assist in releasing the cuticle from the substrate. Further material investigations revealed that the cellulose membrane adheres to plastic-based materials. This includes being free-formed on plastic sheeting and moulded around plastic objects.

Once dried, the cuticle can be gently peeled from the substrate. The free-formed cuticles evoke sclerites, the hardened elements of an exoskeleton that shield an arthropod's vulnerable interior. While an exoskeleton serves as protection, it also imposes containment and constraint for the anthropod. A delicate process of softening and shedding must take place for growth or transformation to occur.⁴⁵ In this way, the cuticle could be understood as a barrier that shields the self against vulnerability and, simultaneously, as a boundary capable of being cracked and transformed.



Image 22. (a,b). Cellulose rice cuticle adhered to a plastic curing bed, and adhering a bamboo stake to the studio ceiling, September 2025.

⁴⁴ For example, when removed from the cement floor or ceiling, the cured cuticle lifted the concrete overlay.

⁴⁵ "Molting and the Exoskeleton: A Double-Edged Sword," accessed April 11, 2026, <https://evolution.berkeley.edu/the-arthropod-story/an-evolutionary-constraint-small-size/molting-and-the-exoskeleton-a-double-edged-sword/>.

When forming and moulding, there are active and decisive moments when tactile imprints become trace memory in the lines and the shape of the cuticles. Anthropologist Tim Ingold says lines and cracks can be read as habitual gestures.⁴⁶ In forming 150 small cuticle “flecks” for the installation *Cosmoscopic*, I become aware of my own repetitive actions. Each gesture becomes part of an embodied rhythm, habitual yet unique. These are intra-actions between the membrane and my skin. The repetition facilitates a brief meditative release from the adhesive substrate of self-narrative, a return to the present, and a contemplative and generative mode of thinking through action.



Image 23. *Forming flecks with cellulose rice membrane on a plastic curing bed, July 2025.*



Image 24. *Dried rice cuticle flecks waiting for installation, July 2025.*

⁴⁶ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (Routledge, 2007), 47.

Emergent Relations

In this project, the rice membranes' penchant for adhesion can be likened to clinging to the notion of a separate self⁴⁷ as a fixed and stable construct. Within Buddhist thought, such attachment or clinging is understood as a primary cause of *dukkha*. This is viewed as a pervasive condition of dissatisfaction or suffering that is said to characterise human experience. Buddhist scholar and activist Joanna Macy argues that denying the self would run counter to lived experience. Rather than negating the self, her position reframes it: the "I" cannot be apprehended as a fixed or independent entity but is more accurately understood as a "flowing stream of being."⁴⁸ Discussing Zen research as contemplative inquiry, professor and academic Valerie Janesick says, "Essentially, non-self means that there is no such thing as separate existence."⁴⁹

These are both contemporary interpretations of the Indian philosopher, Nāgārjuna (c.105–250 CE).⁵⁰ Renowned for his exploration of *śūnyatā* (emptiness), he proposed that all phenomena lack inherent, independent existence, and described this as Dependent Co-arising.⁵¹ It posits that all phenomena are fundamentally relational, embedded in a vast and complex network of causes and conditions operating across both microscopic and cosmic scales. Vietnamese monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh has described this as the inter-being of emptiness, where phenomena arise from the interplay of fundamental physical conditions and elemental constituents.⁵²

A parallel line of thought emerges in the work of physicist and feminist Karen Barad. Her theory of relational ontology and entanglement similarly rejects the notion of self-contained entities. Barad proposes that existence is constituted through "intra-action," whereby "entities do not precede their relations but rather emerge through them."⁵³ Her framework of agential realism reconfigures conventional understandings of subject and object, dissolving such binaries by situating all matter within dynamic, material-discursive processes. Barad's emphasis on entanglement can also be read alongside physicist Niels Bohr's notion of complementarity. As interpreted by Aitken Roshi, seemingly contradictory propositions – "A" and "B" – are each incomplete in isolation, while their conjunction "and" suggests a more generative, yet indeterminate, ground.⁵⁴ Such a foundation resists fixity, favouring ambiguity and relational complexity over singular truth claims.

While Barad's approach is epistemological, attending to how knowledge, matter, and discourse co-constitute reality, Buddhist accounts of dependent co-arising are primarily existential, foregrounding nonself. In this project, the notion of skin functions as a conjunction, holding a tension that privileges uncertainty, an embodied unfolding in the practices of making and installation.

⁴⁷ Meditation wears away at the narrative of 'the self', a thin skin of separation, softening and tenderising the heart.

⁴⁸ "The Incredible Exploding Self: An Interview with Joanna Macy," *Inquiring Mind*, n.d., accessed June 1, 2025, https://inquiringmind.com/article/1102_6_macy-exploding-self/.

⁴⁹ Valerie J. Janesick, *Contemplative Qualitative Inquiry: Practicing the Zen of Research* (Left Coast Press, 2015).

⁵⁰ Founder of Mādhyamaka ("Middle Way") school of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

⁵¹ David Ross Komito, *Nāgārjuna's Seventy Stanzas*, First (Snow Lion Publications, 1987).

⁵² *Emptiness: Empty of What? | Thich Nhat Hanh (Short Teaching Video)*, directed by Plum Village App, 2020, 21:41, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3XqhBigMao>.

⁵³ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=1169310>.

⁵⁴ Lion's Roar, "Caught in Indra's Net."

Cosmoscopic

The installation, *Cosmoscopic* aimed to evoke a Zen metaphor of understanding in which the teacher “pecks” from the outside and the student from the inside. This suggests a gradual transformation of a metaphorical skin or barrier. While dualisms of interior and exterior are fundamentally destabilised by the foundational Buddhist teachings of Dependent Co-arising and contemporary concepts of entanglement of matter, the installation presents a margin of skin, a barrier that continues to delineate. Similar to Aitken, John Daido Loori refers to an understanding that circumvents traditional discourse, asking whether we really hear it, sense it, and feel it with our bones and our marrow?⁵⁵ Daido Loori is pointing to direct experience as distinct from intellectual understanding, a whole-body knowing in which demarcations dissolve.

Installed in a test space, cuticle flecks are suspended to generate a dynamic field of entangled relations and modes of engagement. Light and shadow functioned as critical agents enacting both solidity and dissolution. Earlier research focused on the material quality of light, with particular attention to the effect of shadow, revealing the umbra as a nuanced, fleeting phenomenon. Light applied to cutaneous forms revealed shadows exhibiting degrees of complexion and translucency. The luminous interiors and delineated peripheries defined and stabilised the overall shape. Some assume a quasi-figurative presence, appearing as subtle personages that introduce various characters. An animation within the installation that is both present and absent, formed and formless.



Image 25. (a, b). *Practice installations experimenting with plastered nori and cellulose rice paper, (light and shadow), June 2025.*

⁵⁵ John Daido Loori, *The Zen of Creativity*, Second (Random House Publishers, 2005).

A projected image of a membrane encapsulating pigment, created earlier in the project, appears subsumed into the concrete wall. Lines materialised as cracks and crevasses, alluding to stress, tension, or movement at the margins. A floor fan introduced gentle motion in the space, activating the cuticles and animating the installation. Shadows punctuated the field, evoking apertures or perforations, suggesting a passage to an implied inside or outside, with a thin skin in between. The projection light also refracted through each cuticle, revealing a distinct spectrum of jewelled colour, and directing attention to the specificity of the individual flecks in proximity.

The Mahayana Buddhist concept depicting entanglements and differentiation in proximity is perhaps best illustrated in the Net of Indra.⁵⁶ Macy says, “At each node of the net was placed a single jewel, and since the net is infinite, the jewels are infinite too. The polished surfaces reflect all the other jewels; the process of reflection is infinite also.”⁵⁷ It speaks to the notion of interpenetration of all phenomena, while at the same time, each individual phenomenon is not hindered by any other phenomenon. This reflects Aitken's proposition of paradox, a together that is also apart, contained “and” simultaneously liberated.

The work's intention was to envelop the viewer in a sense of entanglement and containment, where release was also imminent. A margin of thinning skin or a medusoid boundary, holding an embodied tension. While physically containing the installation space also becomes a site synonymous with not-knowing and curiosity. In this way, I begin to consider space as a question: simultaneously thin and vast, like dropping a pebble into a pond, creating ripples on the surface, sensation on the skin. This becomes a diadermic encounter in which questions penetrate the skin's porosity.



Image 26. *Shadow of hung cuticle flecks on Test Space concrete wall, July 2025.*

⁵⁶ In Buddhist and Hindu cosmology, the Net of Indra describes the interconnectedness of all phenomena in the universe. It is said to hang over the palace of Vedic deva Indra on Mt Meru. Stretching infinitely in all directions,

at each vertex, a multifaceted jewel reflects in all other jewels. SAND, “Indra’s Net,” *Science and Nonduality (SAND)*, June 4, 2024, <https://scienceandnonduality.com/article/the-indras-net/>.

⁵⁷ Joana Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self*, First (Parallax Press, 1991).



Image 27. Test space experiments with projections of cellulose rice membrane images encapsulating pigment in the test space, July 2025.



Image 28. Kym Burke, 'Cosmoscopic' (detail of cutaneous fleck), August 2025. Cellulose rice cuticle, ink, membrane and pigment projection, lighting.



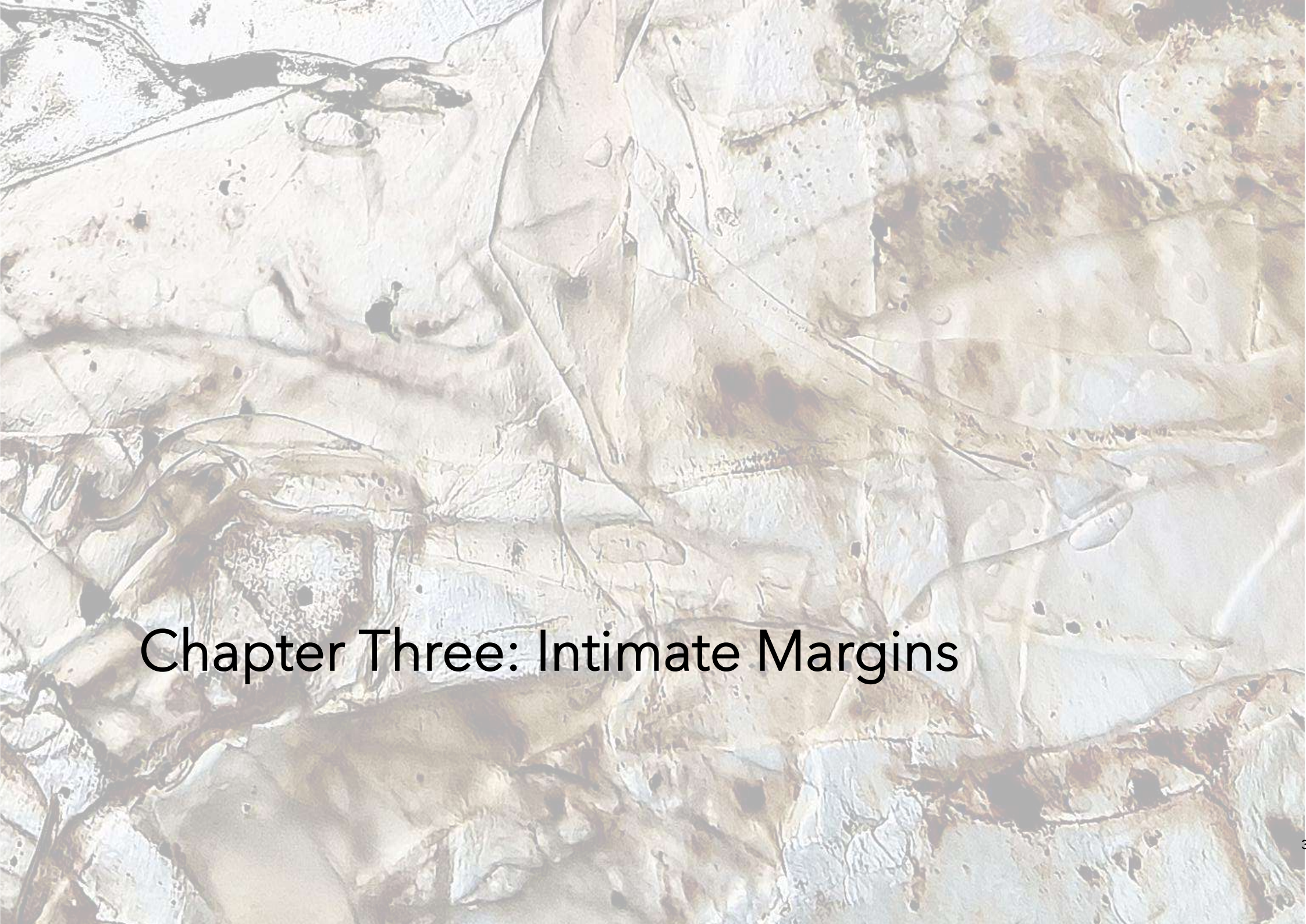
Image 29. Kym Burke, 'Cosmoscopic' (detail with viewer), August 2025. Cellulose rice cuticle, ink, nylon thread, membrane, pigment projection, lighting, and floor fan.



Image 30. Kym Burke, *'Cosmoscopic' (with viewers)*, August 2025. Cellulose rice cuticle, ink, nylon thread, membrane, pigment projection, lighting, and floor fan



Image 31. Kym Burke, *'Cosmoscopic' (with viewers, back facing)*, August 2025. Cellulose rice cuticle, ink, nylon thread, membrane, pigment projection, lighting, and floor fan.

The background of the slide is a full-page image of marbled paper. It features a complex, organic pattern of swirling, veined, and mottled colors. The primary colors are various shades of beige, cream, and light brown, interspersed with darker, more muted tones of taupe, olive green, and hints of greyish-blue. The texture appears fluid and painterly, with no straight lines or geometric shapes. The overall effect is one of classic, elegant pattern.

Chapter Three: Intimate Margins

Australian artist Mikala Dwyer's *Empty Sculpture* artworks speak directly to an enquiry of peripheral skin as a diaphanous containment. They explore what she calls "the border between outside and inside, between me and you."⁵⁸ Rather than solid objects, they function as "peripheral surfaces", edges that define space without fully enclosing it, where one's eye is pulled through.⁵⁹ In this project, casting becomes a sculptural technique that facilitates further enquiry into material boundaries as metaphorical margins of self-containment. The forms possess a perceived inside and outside, with a translucent margin between them. In addition, using an organic, temporal material provides complementarity, as the cellulose rice cuticle is mutable and undergoes dissolution, not dissimilar to the contingent qualities of skin.

The Cutaneous Cast

Moulding membrane and cutaneous casting constitute key methods within this project's material and sculptural investigations. Conventionally, the mould is understood as a negative cavity, while the cast object is the positive form. As the membrane cures into its cuticle form, it shrinks and tightens its grip, clinging to the original object. In this process, rice paper operates simultaneously as both negative (void) and positive (form), with the moulding procedure retaining an indexical trace of the original object. To facilitate extraction in the making process, I incise a release line from top to bottom. Timing is critical; the act of extracting or pulling the cast from the mould is inherently precarious. Light and translucent, the cast forms act as hollow remnants of the object's shape or

external structure. The emerging form retains a trace of my influence and becomes a memory of shape, simultaneously formed and empty. In other free-formed works, the shape memory is more directly influenced by my own gestures, shaping and macerating the membrane directly onto the curing bed.

In Tibetan, the term *shul* refers to a mark, trace, or imprint left behind by a passing presence, such as a fossil or footprint. It is often used to symbolise the "past within the present" or as a metaphor for emptiness and memory.⁶⁰ American Zen Buddhist teacher Reb Anderson says *shul* has been used to explain the Buddhist belief of emptiness, meaning "everything perceived arises in dependence upon multiple causes and conditions; nothing exists as a singular, independent entity."⁶¹ It emphasises the lingering effects of something that has come before. This speaks to the delicate, almost immaterial quality of the cuticle, which becomes a remnant of actions performed.



Image 32. (a, b). Testing the casting capabilities of cellulose rice membrane and resulting cuticle cast using a shell, October 2025.

⁵⁸ Wayne Tunnicliffe, Interview with Mikala Dwyer. Balnaves Foundation Australia Sculpture Archive Project. Art Gallery of New South Wales. August 2017.

⁵⁹ Artist Mikala Dwyer Installs Her Exhibition "A Shape of Thought," directed by Art Gallery of NSW, 2017, 09:03, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9pz66iROXA>.

⁶⁰ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (Random House, 2006).

⁶¹ Reb Anderson, *Being Upright*, First (Shambala Publications, 2001).

Moulded plastic bottles and food packaging, and the resulting forms operated as irregular, indexical casts of these synthetic surfaces, registering both their contours and their residual material presence. This included imprints of patterns, symbols, and writing. The moistened membrane also subsumed ink, paint and paper labels on the interior of the mould, creating a feature in the cast. Unlike plastic, which is persistent and resistant to environmental influences, the cuticle's form memory is fragile, sensitive, and mutable. In the studio, over time, the cuticles lean closer together, absorbing ambient moisture and melding at the margins.



Image 33. (a, b). Studio tests moulding plastic food containers, including observing how the imprints and labels are lifted from the original moulds, October 2025.

Margins in Proximity

Intimacy, says Robert Aitken Roshi, is the wayfinder to the experience of containing all beings.⁶² Here, he is referring to being affected as an entry point to realising inter-being. Brian Massumi interprets affect as a threshold which could also be viewed as an intimate encounter that wears away at the thin skin of separation. Karen Barad, speaking of skin, says the pressure and presence of one's own hands touching presents a "proximity of otherness."⁶³ This is an entanglement that Barad proposes is not "the interconnectedness of all being one, but rather specific material relations of the ongoing differentiating of the world".⁶⁴ Entanglements, she says, are relations of obligation – being bound to the other – "enfolded traces of othering."^{65 66}

Photographing the installed cast forms, the images convey a sense of gathering, with some leaning together in a supportive and intimate way. It was observed that they begin to resemble delicately rendered oil paintings. This perceptual emphasis invites comparison with the still-life compositions of Italian artist Giorgio Morandi, whose arrangements similarly highlight subtle tonal shifts and the quiet rendering of form. Morandi's painted vessels, instantly recognisable, have a soft liveliness; each taking on a unique, character-like quality. His compositions are said to have a "sense of absence, of something phantasmic."⁶⁷

⁶² Joel Whitney, "Robert Aitken Roshi: The Last Interview," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, February 5, 2014, <https://tricycle.org/magazine/no-mean-preacher/>.

⁶³ Aboagora, Karen Barad: *On Touching the Stranger Within – The Alterity That Therefore I Am*, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4sMkN6W0Jo>.

⁶⁴ Karen Barad, "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/Continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come," *Derrida Today* 3, no. 2 (2010): 240–68.

⁶⁵ Barad, "Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance." 265.

⁶⁶ This relates to ethics, also fundamental to Zen as a life practice, guided by the Buddhist precepts that relay moral and ethical teachings.

⁶⁷ Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, "THE WORLD IN A BOTTLE," *Artforum*, December 9, 1987, <https://www.artforum.com/features/the-world-in-a-bottle-206371/>.



Image 34. (a, b). *Studio test installations - still life arrangements of cutaneous forms on shelving*, November 2025.

This description suggests a ghostly, unreal quality in his depictions, though Morandi says, "What matters is to touch the background, the essence of things."⁶⁸ Similarly, the peripheral surfaces of the cuticle forms could be understood as a thinning margin – holding a tension, an intimate conjunction, between a perceived inside (the notion of an independent self) and an outside (the background of life). Italian art critic Maurizio Dell' Arco says Morandi "softened the boundaries between the sign and the background [...] to achieve an effect of slow disappearance."⁶⁹ In this way, Morandi painted the mortality of earthly things, the *vanitas vanitatum*.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Fagiolo Dell'Arco, "World in a Bottle," 1987.

⁶⁹ Fagiolo Dell'Arco, "World in a Bottle," 1987.

⁷⁰ *Vanitas vanitatum* comes from the book of Ecclesiastes, conveying a sense of futility in the ephemeral nature of worldly pursuits, suggesting that all earthly achievements, wealth and positions are ultimately meaningless

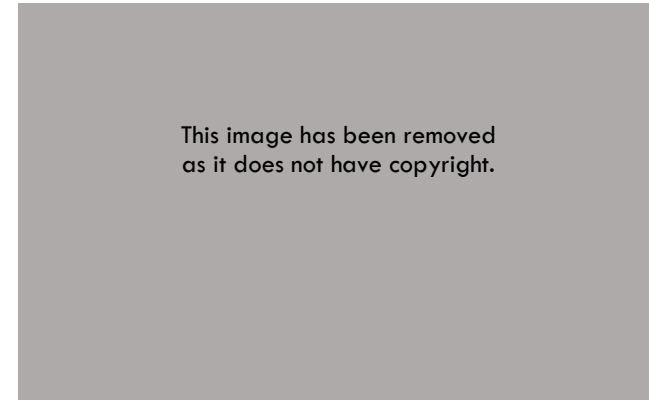


Image 35. Giorgio Morandi, '*Natura Morti II*', 1953. Oil on canvas. King & McGaw

This slow disappearance recalls the fabric renditions of South Korean artist Do Ho Suh, who produces echoes of domestic architecture. These materialise as fragile, translucent sculptural works resembling drawings in space. His installations generate soft, buoyant environments that, like Morandi's, invite viewers to contemplate the subtle background of lived experience. The translucent, diaphenous qualities of the rice cuticle forms suggest a metaphorical dissolution. A temporality in which the concept of a contained, separateness is released, and otherness transforms through intimate encounter.

In his writings, Morandi says he gave over to instinct, trusting his own powers, forgetting the teachings; that suffering had been his greatest and surest teaching to draw upon.⁷¹ Similarly, in this research, I draw on not-knowing and curiosity as a wellspring for instinct. The thin space of not-knowing, however, also

and will end in nothingness. This is also associated with the *vanitas* genre of still-life painting, which uses symbolic objects to represent the transience of life and the inevitability of death.

⁷¹ Dell'Arco, Maurizio Fagiolo. *The World in a Bottle*. 1987.

provides fertile ground for unease. In Buddhism, suffering is translated from the Pali word *dukkha*.⁷² It speaks to physical pain, mental anguish and discomfort in life, due, it is said, to the transience and insubstantiality of all phenomena. The illusory “I” to which Macy refers⁷³ that is nonetheless skin, an interiority subjected to self-narrative and moments of discontent and doubt that, *vanitas vanitatum* implies, constitute a profound type of futility. Thinning skin in this way becomes an invitation to vulnerability, the prospect of an insubstantial containment, an ever-closer intimacy through encounter.

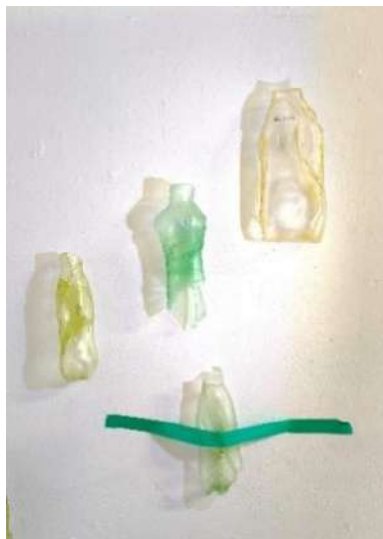


Image 36. *Studio tests adhering cuticle forms to the studio wall, October 2025.*

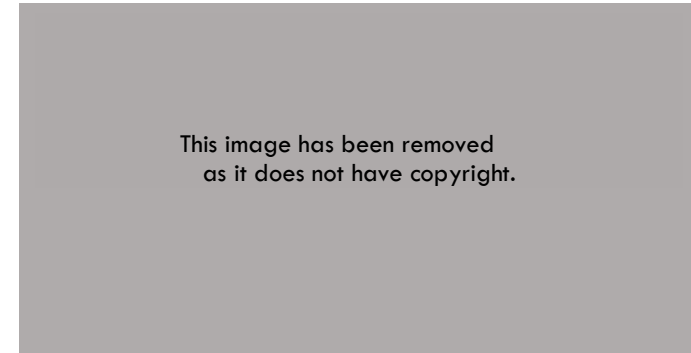


Image 37. Do Ho Suh, *'North Wall'*, 2005. Auckland Art Gallery. Tāmaki Makaurau.



Image 38. Kym Burke, *'Cutaneous Gathering II'*, February 2026. Photographic image

⁷² Alan Peto, “Everybody Hurts: Understanding Dukkha in Buddhism,” *Alan Peto*, September 30, 2018, <https://alanpeto.com/buddhism/understanding-dukkha/>.

⁷³ “The Incredible Exploding Self: An Interview with Joanna Macy.” *Inquiring Mind*, n.d. Accessed May 2, 2026. https://inquiringmind.com/article/1102_6_macy-exploding-self/.

Depth of Breathing

Exploring enfolded traces and the cutaneous capacity for casting, I moulded membranes around cardboard tubes and plastic pipes. The initially small tubular forms evoke transparent anatomical structures, bronchi or arteries. In biology, columnar describes tall, narrow, cylindrical epithelial cells that cover “membranes of tubular (hollow) organs as well as the outer surface of the body as epidermis.”⁷⁴ Slotting together graduated lengths of the tubular cuticle, I became curious about the structural capability and robustness of the frangible cutaneous column. A subset of the pillar, columns are supporting structures and a recognised sculptural form employed by artists such as Eva Hesse, Constantin Brancusi and Karla Black.



Image 39. (a, b). *Small tubular cuticle and studio testing of columnar form*, October 2025.

⁷⁴ “Simple Columnar Epithelium - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics.”, 2026.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/agricultural-and-biological-sciences/simple-columnar-epithelium>.

These three have pioneered sculptural practice with their respective media, each experimenting with the potential of the vertical form. Eva Hesse, in particular, worked continuously with materiality and structure to discover how materials respond through shaping and moulding. For Hesse, touch was an important part of her sculptural practice, in which she investigated material and life through the repetition of form.⁷⁵ Friend and art critic Lucy Lippard recalls that, “Hesse was playing with the variations”⁷⁶ curious about the capability of extension. This is reflected in my own enquiry, investigating the qualities of materiality, its possibilities and limits, not as failure but as tangible boundaries to be pushed up against.

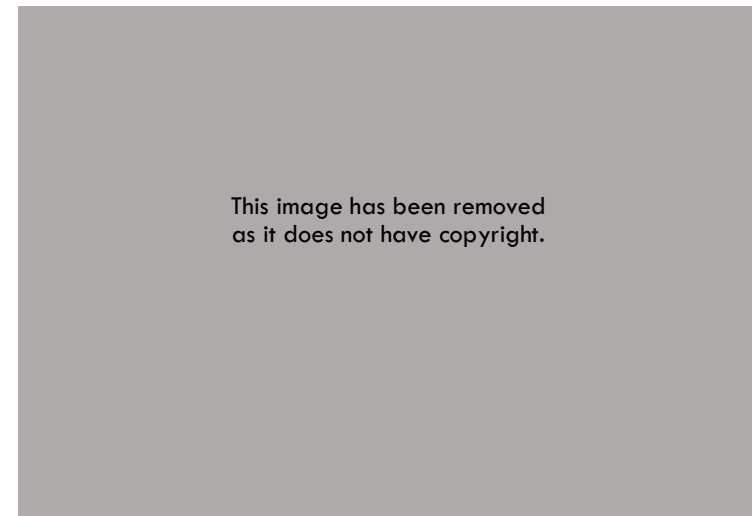


Image 40. Eva Hesse, *'Repetition Nineteen III'*, 1968. Fibreglass. MoMA, New York

⁷⁵ *The Afterlife of Eva Hesse's "Expanded Expansion,"* directed by Guggenheim Museum, 2022, 15:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bli_-u0J3lw.

⁷⁶ Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York University Press, 1976).

A single test column was created and adhered to the studio's fluorescent light and the concrete floor. The frangible yet stable sculptural form appeared sinuous, tapering at the centre, stretched between floor and ceiling, enacting an apparent holding together. Twelve sculptural columnar forms were subsequently created and taped to the studio wall. Facilitating the addition of a wider foot was intended to stabilise each, and house a small LED light. The columnar, lined up, taped and sinuate, were noted to resemble saplings, carefully tied to guard against the wind. The forms were translucent and indeed fragile, requiring an observance of care.



Image 41. *Cellulose rice cuticle columnar*, awaiting installation, October 2025.

While considering installation, I happened upon a video documenting South Korean artist Kosei Kosumata's work *Rain*, and was deeply moved.⁷⁷ With ambient daylight glinting off transparent rotating discs, the sound of water dripping and bubbling, I was transported to the often-seen but seldom-encountered simplicity of falling rain. The melodious musical score in the video, layered and initially energetic, heightened my intrigue before slowly dropping away. In the absence of the melody, an open awareness arises that seems acutely receptive, where seeing and hearing merge into a single experience of neither seeing nor hearing, just breathing. *Rain* is a multisensory invocation that also draws in everyday activities occurring in the world beyond the gallery window. A train rushes by, and the chords take on a subtle, melancholic tone. For me, it evoked a sense of longing and also calm.

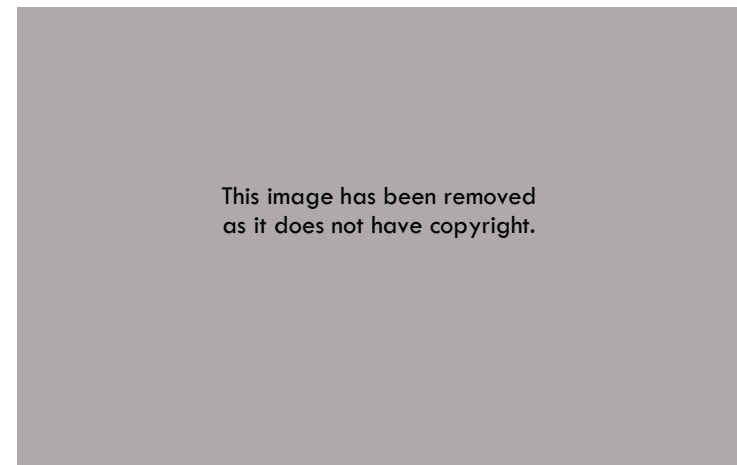


Image 42. Kosei Komatsu, '*Rain*', October 2020. Komatsu Studio Exhibition, Japan.

⁷⁷ <http://kosei-komatsu.com/exs/rain.html>

The installation *Depth of Breathing* could be understood as an exploration of encounter and intimacy within a dark border space. Cave-like, such places are said to be where each person faces the limits of their understanding.⁷⁸ Inspired by Komatsu's installation *Rain*, I incorporated sound as a sensory component capable of permeating skin and deepening the sensory/spatial experience. Discussing sound and sensation, American composer and musician Pauline Oliveros proposed that "Listening is a mysterious process", where the ear hears, the brain listens and the body senses.⁷⁹ Oliveros points to a whole-body hearing that permeates all aspects, including skin.

During the installation, a sound recording of reverberating drips initiated by a deep breath-out, echoed, creating a spaciousness in the dim, cavernous environment. The sound of the out-breath was intended as a relinquishment, a threshold between the industrious business of everyday life and quiet, immersive contemplation. Breath is the animator of our physical existence. It nurtures and nourishes the skin and serves as a mediator between body, mind and spirit. Breath holds our differentiation and is also an agent of shared connection.

In the dimly lit borderline place, certainty becomes less defined, and ambiguity invites contemplation and reflection. The Latin word "ambiguous", meaning "doubtful", implies that some information is available, but is being questioned or weighed, leading to hesitation. Not-knowing suggests a complete lack of information or knowledge. Master Lo-han (Rakan Keijin, 867-928) famously said to student Fa-yen, "Not knowing is most intimate."⁸⁰ It also foregrounds curious enquiry, a loosening of certainty, a thinning that feels familiar.

A standing light is also installed in the *Depth of Breathing* installation, casting sinuous shadows that become tilted figures. Japanese author Jun'ichō Tanizaki, in praising shadow, says, "there is a subtle beauty in leaving things partially in the dark, cutting off light from an empty space, imparting a world of shadows that forms there a quality of mystery and depth."⁸¹ In the darkness, the viewer is affected, drawn into a closer proximity by way of a thinning skin.

⁷⁸ Personal discussion with Zen Master Arther Wells Roshi. 09/11/2025

⁷⁹ *The Difference between Hearing and Listening* | Pauline Oliveros | TEDxIndianapolis, directed by TEDx Talks, 2015, 11:38, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QHfOuRrJB8.

⁸⁰ Robert Aitken, *Encouraging Words : Zen Buddhist Teachings for Western Students*, with Internet Archive (New York : Pantheon Books, 1993), <http://archive.org/details/encouragingwords0000aitk>. 1.

⁸¹ Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, Twelfth (Leete's Island Books, In, 1977). 29.



Image 43. Kym Burke, '*Depth of Breathing*' (side view), October 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, repurposed plastic rubbish bags, paper tape, and audio speaker.



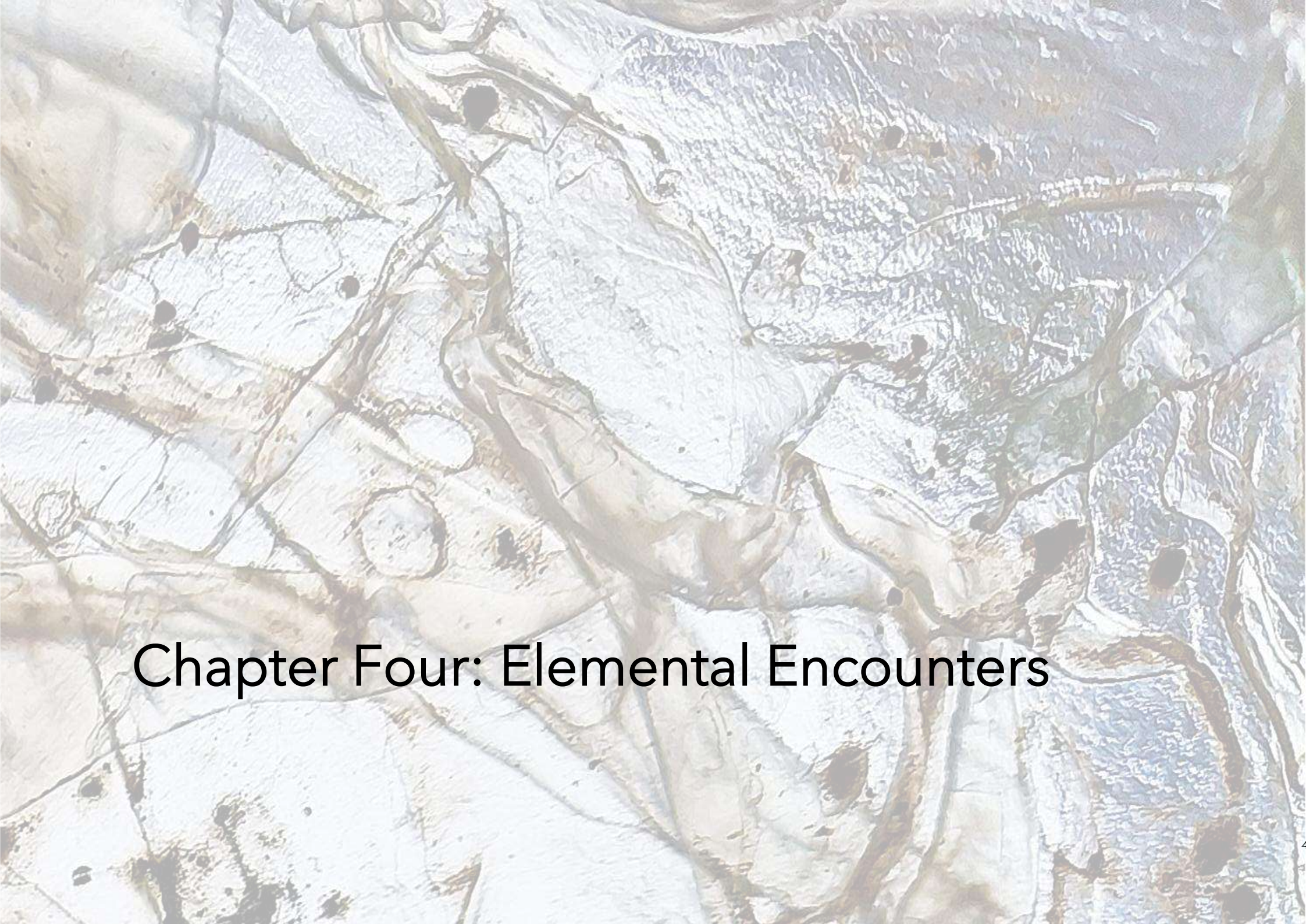
Image 44. Kym Burke, '*Depth of Breathing*' (detail), October 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, repurposed plastic rubbish bags, paper tape, and audio speaker.



Image 45. Kym Burke, *'Depth of Breathing'*, October 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, repurposed plastic rubbish bags, paper tape, and audio speaker



Image 46. Kym Burke, *'Depth of Breathing'*, October 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, LED lights, standing light, audio speaker

The background of the slide is a piece of marbled paper. It features a complex, organic pattern of swirling, veined, and mottled colors. The primary colors are shades of light blue, off-white, and beige, with darker, more saturated areas of blue, brown, and black interspersed throughout. The texture appears fluid and natural, reminiscent of traditional marbling techniques.

Chapter Four: Elemental Encounters

Time slows using these sculptural techniques. I am working with elements that require durational periods for soaking, grafting, adhering, and drying. The process demands forethought and plasticity, understood as an acceptance of a pace which is not always set by my own schedule. The varying material states, both lubricious and brittle, resist directive, forming and reforming with minimal handling and influence. It affords me days of contemplation while the membrane cures, attending to its own agency. It also affords the opportunity to work on multiple trajectories simultaneously. This becomes a generative process, a tactile shaping of diverse insights, an iterative and curious enquiry in making.



Image 47. *Lighting incense in the studio before starting to make as a reminder to slow down and connect, November 2025.*

Water

In early investigations, I placed small hardened cutaneous flecks (10–15cm cuticle forms) back into water, first in domestic plastic sealable bags and then in glass jars.⁸² Once rehydrated, the flecks assumed a rubbery, cartilaginous texture, suggesting a degree of material agency. Transferring the rehydrated flecks to containers, the tactile perception could be understood not merely as a passive sensation, but as a relational encounter between my own skin and the unusual cartilage-like material that resembles human skin. This relationality was also apparent when handling the thin, translucent, and flexible bag containing the cartilaginous substance. Though plastic, the fluid peripheral surface registered as an intimate exchange, bringing the interior and exterior into contact.



Image 48. *Sealable plastic bags, while functioning as containers, were also materially malleable, allowing the water within to assume its own form, August 2025.*

⁸² Water contributes to the elasticity of human skin, making up around 64 per cent of its component parts.

Artist Ioana Vreme Moser's performance,⁸³ *The Choreography of Water*⁸⁴ engages with relational elemental dynamics. Artistes manoeuvre with glass organelles, generating sound through movement. The performance invites a reimagining of water as a transformative element, a "fluid morphology" that connects the water flowing within our bodies, hydrating our skin, to deeper cosmocopic currents.⁸⁵ Engaged in speculative research and tactile experimentation, Moser constructs "encounters, where sound emerges as a carrier of personal narration and critical observation."⁸⁶ The interplay of sound and movement generates moments of intimacy that suggest an inversion of bodily boundaries, as though the woman's interior were momentarily rendered external. Similarly, in the installation *Depth of Breathing*, I also experienced a visceral inversion. A sense of being enveloped in a marginal state, a macroscopic encounter with one's own epithelium.

Contemplating the multiple material states of rice paper as phenomena – brittle, fluid, tacky, rigid, and malleable – I consider how these qualities may be understood in relation to the elements of water, earth, fire, and air. Water, in particular, has become a significant companion in the making process. Often described as the "basis of all conditioned phenomena," including skin, these elements constitute the fundamental physical condition through which forms are understood to arise co-dependently. Within this framework, the investigation of rice paper is, in part, an inquiry into elemental interactions and the emergence of co-constituents. This process extends to a reflective consideration of the body, wherein my own skin becomes an expression of the elements, both formative and materially constrained. Through this parallel, the limits and capacities of the rice membrane and cuticle, and my own skin, are brought into exchange.

⁸³ A collaboration with choreographer Simona Deaconescu and composer Simina Oprescu,

⁸⁴ In "*The Choreography of Water*", Visual Artist Ioana Vreme Moser Brings Fluid Dynamics to Life on Stage. In *Collaboration with Choreographer Simona Deaconescu and Composer Simina Oprescu* | *Museums News*, n.d., accessed March 29, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1085932423259168/>.

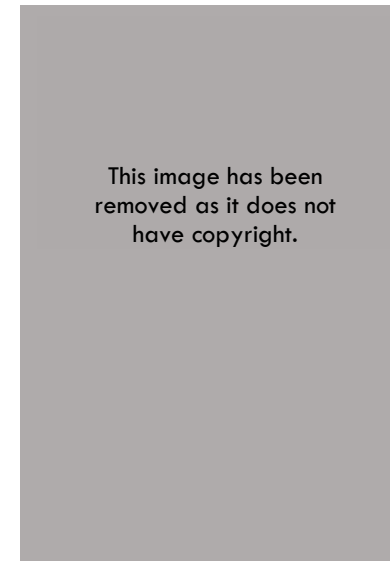


Image 49. Ioana Vreme Moser, Simona Deaconescu and Simina Oprescu, '*The Choreography of Water*', 2025.



Image 50. *A threshold of encounter in the test space*, August 2025.

⁸⁵ *The Choreography of Water (In Situ)* - *Tangaj Collective*, January 28, 2025, <https://www.tangajdance.com/cowinsitu/>.

⁸⁶ "About," Ioana Vreme Moser, accessed March 22, 2026, <https://www.ioanavrememoser.com/ivm>.

Grafting, a term synonymous with surgical skin procedures, was utilised as a method which opened further avenues of investigation within the practice, enabling the development of more complex cuticle composite forms. Grafting involves incising a small fragment of membrane and placing it between the cuticle contact points to form a bond. Graft placement requires careful consideration, as introducing moisture to the underlying cuticle increases structural instability. The membrane's self-adhesion also becomes advantageous, significantly increasing its capacity for making at scale.⁸⁷ The cuticle composite form, however, over time subsumes ambient moisture, reconfiguring, resisting directive, provisional and temporary.

In my studio, I observed a visual correspondence between the creases of the plastic substrate, repurposed from refuse bags, and those emerging within the composites themselves. To amplify this resonance, I employed a method of adhering membrane to the composite surface and macerating its edges into the curing bed. This reinforced the interplay between material behaviour and its imprint. Adhering membranes into groups of four, then curing and grafting them together, created larger cuticle composites. The translucent character of both the composite form and the plastic sheeting softens their boundaries. Delineation between the substrate and the form becomes increasingly diffuse, thinning the contact margin.



Image 51. (a, b). Studio testing the transformative capabilities of cellulose rice cuticle composite forms, August 2025 and March 2025.



Image 52. Cuticle composite macerated to plastic, October 2025.

⁸⁷ This includes a process in which single membranes overlap, adhere to one another, or are grafted into composite forms.

The adhesion of the drying cuticle composite forms exerted a contracting force on the plastic sheeting substrate. Drawing it into its own orbit, it effectively obscures the boundary between the synthetic material and the cutaneous edge. This effect provided further insight into the formal and textural correspondences between the irregular, incised edges of the plastic curing bed and those of the cuticle. It suggests a convergence of two materially distinct yet visually interrelated surfaces. This kinship is a productive line of enquiry, a distinctly separate proximity that also dissolves boundaries. It also raises a tension around environmental ethics and the proliferation of plastic.^{88 89}

Increasing scale and mass necessitated a more rigorous understanding of the cuticle's capacity for self-support, as well as more refined grafting techniques. This facilitated a visually energetic, unrestrained configuration and revealed an emerging intention to pursue a field of form in which the notion of release operates as a generative strategy. This I refer to as a loosening of attachment to the idea of an independent, separate "self". It becomes an open and energetic configuration which allows form to materialise as an elemental unfolding, which could be understood as an uncontained condition. This concept was amplified further as I transported the cuticle composite forms in the AUT lift. Reflected in the steel infrastructure, contained yet with a sense of infinite expansion, reminiscent of Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirrored Room* series.⁹⁰



Image 53. Testing maceration of the cellulose rice cuticle, September 2025.



Image 54. Transporting cuticle composite forms, they are reflected in the AUT lift, November 2025.

⁸⁸ This tension, also apparent in the casting of plastic containers, could be a site for future research.

⁸⁹ In 1997 I spent several months living in Tonga and witnessed the proliferation of plastic waste washed up and completely covering local beaches.

⁹⁰ Tate. "Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirror Rooms | Tate Modern." Tate. Accessed April 21, 2026. <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/yayoi-kusama-infinity-mirror-rooms>.

Imperfect Rhythms

Contemplating the installation space as an expanding field of inquiry rather than a confined domain for discrete sculptural placement, it became necessary to respond to the architectural conditions and the interplay of ambient light and shadow. In an effort to cultivate resonance and an immersive, affective environment while resisting a narrow mode of representation, I drew on the principles of Zen gardens: simplicity, harmony, and balance. This spatial/spiritual philosophy has become a primary approach in installation practice, creating spaces that resonate as a quiet refuge for calm and contemplation. I tap into my own intuitive rhythm for installation, an embodied sense of simplicity and form, which becomes a kind of spatial dance.

The creation of viewing platforms redefines domains of distinction as pathways of relationality, delineated with a simple beige tape. The colour of the composite forms is also intentionally suggestive of an elemental arrangement. Artist David Sequeira, in his vessel installations, "draws attention to the visual resonance and vibration of colour." He describes his work as an investigation of "languages of colour, space, and geometry to intervene and rethink the narratives of art."⁹¹ Like Sequeira, I am interested in the resonances and vibrations of colour and form. An embodied reverberation that intuitively moves one's body within space, settling the mind, attuning the senses and thinning the skin.

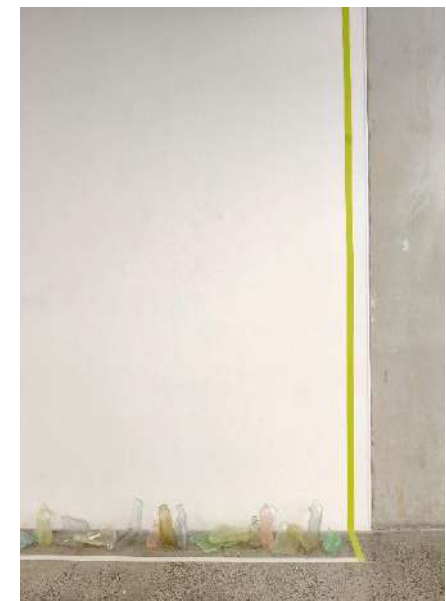


Image 55. (a, b). *Installation testing – taped viewing platforms and boundaries*, November 2025.

⁹¹ David Sequeira: *History & Infinity*. www.galleries.unsw.edu.au/exhibition/david-sequeira-history-infinity

Self-standing, I work with the forms to explore spatial relationships, carefully placing, arranging and grafting to become free-form cuticle composite stacks. These structures embody a dual condition of resilience and fragility, requiring a careful, deliberate approach to assemblage. I consider variations in light, where, like Morandi, composition becomes the stage on which light and dark illuminate form, capturing the object's sensation and aesthetic qualities.



Image 56. *Installation testing placing recycled plastic over composite forms, November 2025*



Image 57. *Installation testing: cuticle composite piles at the installation site, November 2025*

In other spatial investigations, tape is used to draw fields of inquiry as a method of illustration and to further consider the domains of distinction and dissolution. In this series, *Dissolving Demarcations*, the grid-like configurations, cutaneous forms appear marginalised, a boundary where spaces remain for the eye to move curiously beyond constraints. At various stages of installation, the evolving configurations generated a skin sense of aesthetic unease. This was experienced as a perceptual itchiness, a term used by the philosopher André Abath to describe “frustrating absences.”⁹² I consider it a frustration where the balance of form, chromatic relationships, and spatial positioning seemed unresolved. While this sensation initially seemed to indicate adhesion to aspirational ideals, I later understood it to be a frustration arising from the difficulty of articulating an intuitive sensibility in material and spatial terms. In this sense, the tension did not reflect the material's resistance to manipulation, but rather my own misalignment between embodied intuition and its translation into practice.

The combination of the tape's demarcation and the cuticles' habitation created borders of spatial containment and moments of expansion. Delineation of boundaries in the works creates a sense of secure resolution alongside marginalised constraint. The configuration of mark-making and the positioning of cuticle composite forms change across the works, creating different perspectives on inside and outside. The tape, also hardly present, became a thin margin for encounter, suggesting that viewers might, at any moment, push beyond the thin skin and penetrate the threshold.

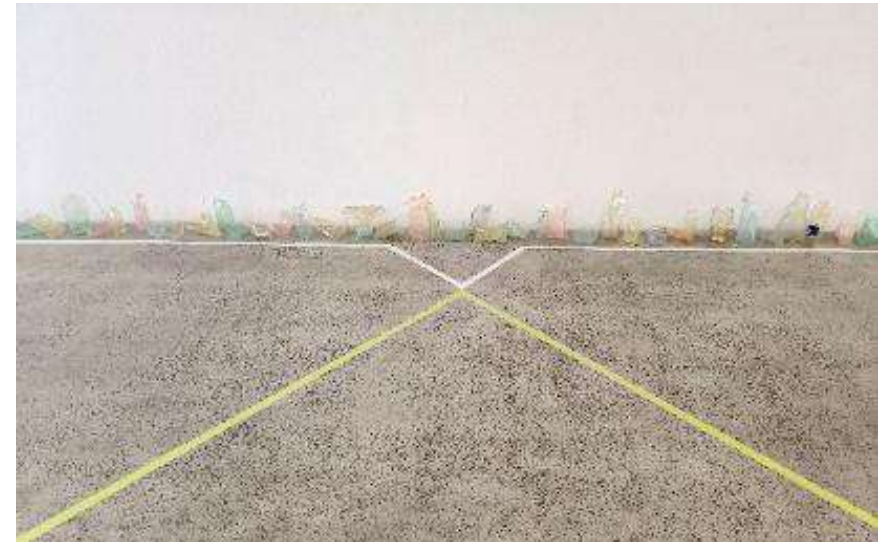


Image 58. Kym Burke, *'Dissolving Demarcation I'*, December 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink and paper tape.

⁹² André J. Abath, “Frustrating Absences,” *Disputatio* 11, no. 53 (2019): 45–62, <https://doi.org/10.2478/disp-2019-0011>.

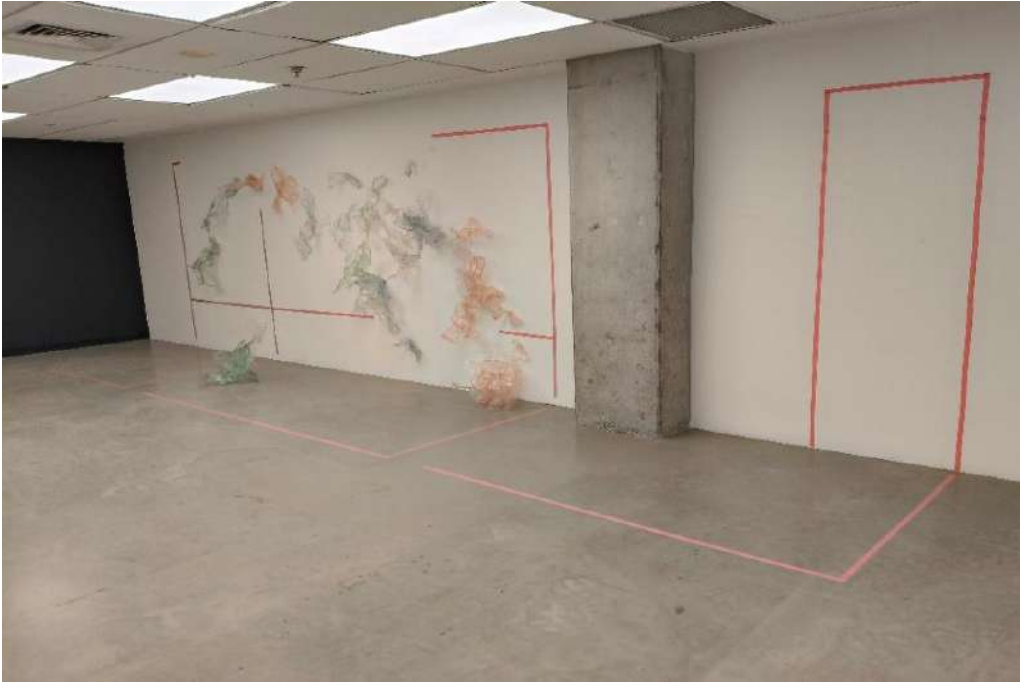


Image 59. Kym Burke, *'Dissolving Demarcation III'*, February 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink and paper tape.



Image 60. Kym Burke, *'Dissolving Demarcation II'*, February 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink and paper tape.

Elemental

The spatial composition of *Elemental* developed as an arrangement that echoes and responds to the surrounding architectural framework. Guided by an imperfect rhythm that opens to intuition, I am pushed and pulled by the material's capabilities and my own intentions. The interaction between ambient daylight and the plastic substrate necessitates ongoing reconfiguration, including the introduction of a T-shaped partition to mediate the viewer's initial encounter. The untethered nature of the plastic sheeting allowed for subtle shifts and movements, while preexisting folds in the material generated linear traces that contributed to the visual field.

The cuticle composite forms, fragile, precarious and unstable, appear to emerge from the surface; their subdued tonal qualities evoking an elemental gathering of conditioned phenomena. As drying occurs, the membrane contracts, drawing the substrate inward and producing distortions that accentuate the interplay of light and shadow on surface folds and creases. The incorporation of propositional viewing platforms, demarcated by understated beige tape on the concrete floor, invited viewers to enter the field. These stations encouraged close observation and relational movement, facilitating shifting perspectives and fostering a more affective, intimate, and participatory encounter with the work.

Delineating the space of encounter, the T-shaped partition created a threshold at which the full installation became visible – organising the conditions of viewing, guiding both movement and perception. A single bell chime rings out, serving as an additional sensory threshold and subtly inviting the viewer into a contemplative mode of engagement. The horizontal plane inhabited by an arrangement of cuticle composite forms generated a spatial sensibility that, while not symmetrical, aims to achieve balance and visual ease. Each of the five piles, structurally distinct, appeared to emerge from the plastic field, a thin skin-

like substrate. Their partial adhesion conveys both a sense of gravity and material agency within a site of elemental entanglement. I consider absence, in this sense, not as a lack but as a generative condition, an active presence that shapes how form is perceived and experienced. Upon closer inspection, the horizontal field reveals directional divergences that disrupt this equilibrium, producing subtle fractures within the installation's spatial landscape. The material interplay between the rice paper and plastic further contributes to this experience; their shared translucency produces a visual exchange that encourages the eye to move in rhythm, fluidly across the work.



Image 61. Kym Burke, *'Elemental' (detail)*, October 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, repurposed plastic rubbish bags, paper tape, and an audio speaker.



Image 62. Kym Burke, *'Elemental'*, October 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, repurposed plastic rubbish bags, paper tape, and audio speaker.



Image 63. Kym Burke, *'Elemental'*, October 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, repurposed plastic rubbish bags, paper tape, and audio speaker (Liz Ross).



Image 64. Kym Burke, *'Elemental' (detail)*, October 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, repurposed plastic rubbish bags, paper tape, and an audio speaker.



Image 65. Kym Burke, *'Elemental' (detail)*, October 2025. Cellulose rice paper, ink, repurposed plastic rubbish bags, paper tape, and an audio speaker.

The temporality of the installation's de-installing could be understood as affectively charged. While I experience a sense of melancholy in the stillness, its deconstruction registers not as an ending, but as an act that rekindles further questions, another phase of transformation. In this process, the sensuous coherence of the work dissipates; the constructed landscape recedes, leaving behind taped traces that recall the structured remains of an archaeological site. These residual markings evoked a sense of absence, resonating with the notion of *shul* – indentations or impressions of what was once present.⁹³ Absence remains a generative condition, as the taped traces maintain a conceptual and affective connection, a permeating sense of the absent forms. Engaging with these remnants prompted further reflection on their potential significance, informing future spatial strategies and directions for the practice.



Image 66. *Elemental Deinstallation: Tape trace remains of the Elemental installation, December 2025.*

⁹³ Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*.

The background of the slide is a piece of marbled paper with a complex, organic pattern. The colors are primarily earthy, including shades of beige, tan, and light brown, with occasional streaks of a slightly darker, muted green or grey. The texture appears fluid and non-repeating, characteristic of traditional marbling techniques.

Conclusion

Thin Skin: Diaphanous Margins of Encounter has unfolded as a sustained, practice-led enquiry into the condition of *thin skin* as both a material and metaphysical margin. Across the trajectory of this project, my own skin has been thinning, transforming from an impermeable boundary into a porous interface. Rather than demarcating inside from outside, or self from other, thinning skin operates as a diadermic site of ongoing encounter. A permeable margin where material distinctions remain provisional and temporary. In this way, the research advances understanding of form and the concept of self not as fixed or independent, but as contingent and interdependent, intimately emerging within a wider field of relational processes.

Central to this enquiry has been the commitment to material engagement as a mode of thinking. The use of cellulose-based rice paper, alongside other provisional and peripheral materials, has highlighted the instability of form as a generative condition. The cellulose character of the rice paper, its membranous and cutaneous states, resists control and predictability; folding, absorbing, collapsing, and reforming through interactions and environmental conditions. This necessitated a mode of making that was responsive rather than directive. Making, in this context, becomes an iterative negotiation between intention and uncertainty, in which processes of formation and dissolution are inseparable.

The concept of the thin skin has functioned throughout the practice as both a metaphor and a methodology. It describes a condition of attenuated containment in which boundaries are neither fully intact nor entirely dissolved but held in a state of tension. This threshold condition begins to destabilise through embodied absorption, permeating binary thinking, allowing distinctions such as presence and absence, interiority and exteriority to be more intimately experienced. Skin, therefore, conceived as a protective envelope, begins to soften, becoming a responsive surface of encounter, a site where proximity does not resolve difference but sustains it. This reframing emphasises relationality and

encounter as a means of thinning skin, intensifying the experience of proximity as the interdependence of all forms.

Philosophically, this position is grounded in a nondual understanding of form and emptiness. Drawing on Zen Buddhist thought, emptiness is not viewed as negation but as generative openness, a condition that enables the continual arising and passing of material states. Form, in turn, is understood as impermanent: a temporary thin skin within an ever-changing field of constituent elemental forces, dissolving the assumption of an inherent independent self. This orientation has been extended through contemporary theoretical frameworks (Robert Aitken Roshi, Karen Barad, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Joanna Macy, Georges Bataille and Catherine Malabou) that emphasise entanglement and indeterminacy, situating the practice within a broader discourse that challenges notions of stability, authorship, and fixed meaning.

Within this expanded framework, curious enquiry has emerged as a key conceptual and methodological principle. Not confined to notions of material malleability, plasticity has been understood as my own capacity for continual reconfiguration, a way of sustaining openness and curiosity within the research process. This approach resists closure, preferring transformation over resolution and uncertainty over certainty. Questioning, therefore, does not seek definitive answers, but keeps the enquiry in motion. In this way, doubt and not-knowing are productive conditions that create *thin spaces* in which I remain fluid and responsive. This approach allows for the emergence of relations that exceed predetermined structures of understanding, fostering a mode of practice grounded in attentiveness and adaptability.

Installation has been instrumental for articulating these issues spatially. The installation environment is conceived as an immersive field of relationships in which forms punctuate, and surfaces serve as sensory interfaces. This invites embodied engagement, a heightened sense of perceptual instability, and a thinning skin. In this way, I consider the viewer not as an external observer but as

a participant in the same conditions of permeability and transformation that define the work. Movement around and through the installations produces shifting encounters with form, where boundaries are experienced as diaphanous, porous, and contingent rather than fixed. Consequently, meaning does not reside in the form itself, but emerges through the relational dynamics of encounter. Cracks, crevices, imprints, and traces are a register of prior actions, embodying a temporal layering that resists resolution. Across the research, boundaries and thresholds are fluid, indeterminate zones rather than fixed points of division. These marginal spaces, perceived as thin skins, where form sits between emergence and disappearance, operate as sites of heightened perceptual and affective intensity. The work resists categorisation, sustaining ambiguity and inviting an engagement that cultivates attention, sensitivity, openness, and responsiveness.

Thin Skin: Diaphanous Margins of Encounter proposes a mode of artistic practice grounded foremost in encounter. Through material fragility and conceptual openness, the research articulates a vision of form that is inherently unstable, relational, and contingent. The thin skin emerges as a central operative figure: not a boundary to be secured, but a diadermic interface, through which relations are continuously formed, dissolved, and reformed. In this expanded field, art practice becomes a means of engaging with the conditions of impermanence, the fleeting, interdependent processes through which experience is continually constituted and undone. By remaining with uncertainty, the research does not seek resolution but sustains a space for ongoing enquiry. It is within this space, thin, permeable, and unresolved, that the potential for transformation resides.

MVA Graduating Exhibition Documentation

Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery

Installed across vertical and horizontal planes, these final artworks constitute a sculptural installation project in which cellulose rice paper forms can be experienced as diadermic encounters with fragile diaphanous margins. In the main gallery space, a pile of rice paper melds into a horizontal field of recycled plastic in the work *'Diadermal Arising/Passing'*. A floor-based work, it is positioned near the north-facing window where natural light accentuates the translucent, diaphanous qualities of the materials. The viewer is encouraged to experience divergent perspectives by entering into the installation via demarcated 'viewing platforms'. The creases and fractures in both the plastic substrate and the rice paper create a complementary relationship between the frangible organic form and the refracting field, which is at points both open and contained. The work *'Proximity of Uncertainty'* is installed within a vertical field of encounter in the gallery window box. Skin-like, the configuration of composite cellulose rice paper incorporates suspended and leaning forms. The suspended 'skins' hung together, creating a marginal space which is both proximate and separate. Their translucent fragility suggests uncertain outcomes, as the material retains the potential to transform when exposed to elemental forces such as water, air, and heat.



Image 67. Kym Burke, *'Diadermal Arising/Passing'*, June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, paper tape, ink, recycled plastic bags. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery.
Image by Paul Chapman



Image 68. Kym Burke, 'Diadermal Arising/Passing' (side view detail), June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, paper tape and recycled plastic bags. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery. Image by Paul Chapman



Image 69. Kym Burke, *'Diadermal Arising/Passing'* (detail), June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, paper tape, recycled plastic bags. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery.

Over page: Image 70. Kym Burke, *'Diadermal Arising/Passing'*, June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, paper tape, recycled plastic bags. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery. Image by Paul Chapman





Image 71. Kym Burke, *'Diadermal Arising/Passing'* (with architectural shadow), June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, paper tape, recycled plastic bags. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery.



Image 72. Kym Burke, '*Diadermal Arising/Passing*' (detail), June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, paper tape, recycled plastic bags. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery. Image by Paul Chapman.

Over page: Image 73. Kym Burke, '*Diadermal Arising/Passing*', June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, paper tape, repurposed recycled plastic bags.







Previous page: Image 74. Kym Burke, *'Proximity of Uncertainty'*, June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, metal hooks and nylon. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery.

Image 75. Kym Burke, *'Proximity of Uncertainty' (detail)*, June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, metal hooks and nylon. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery.



Image 76. Kym Burke, *'Proximity of Uncertainty'*, June 2026.
Cellulose rice paper, ink, metal hooks and nylon. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery.

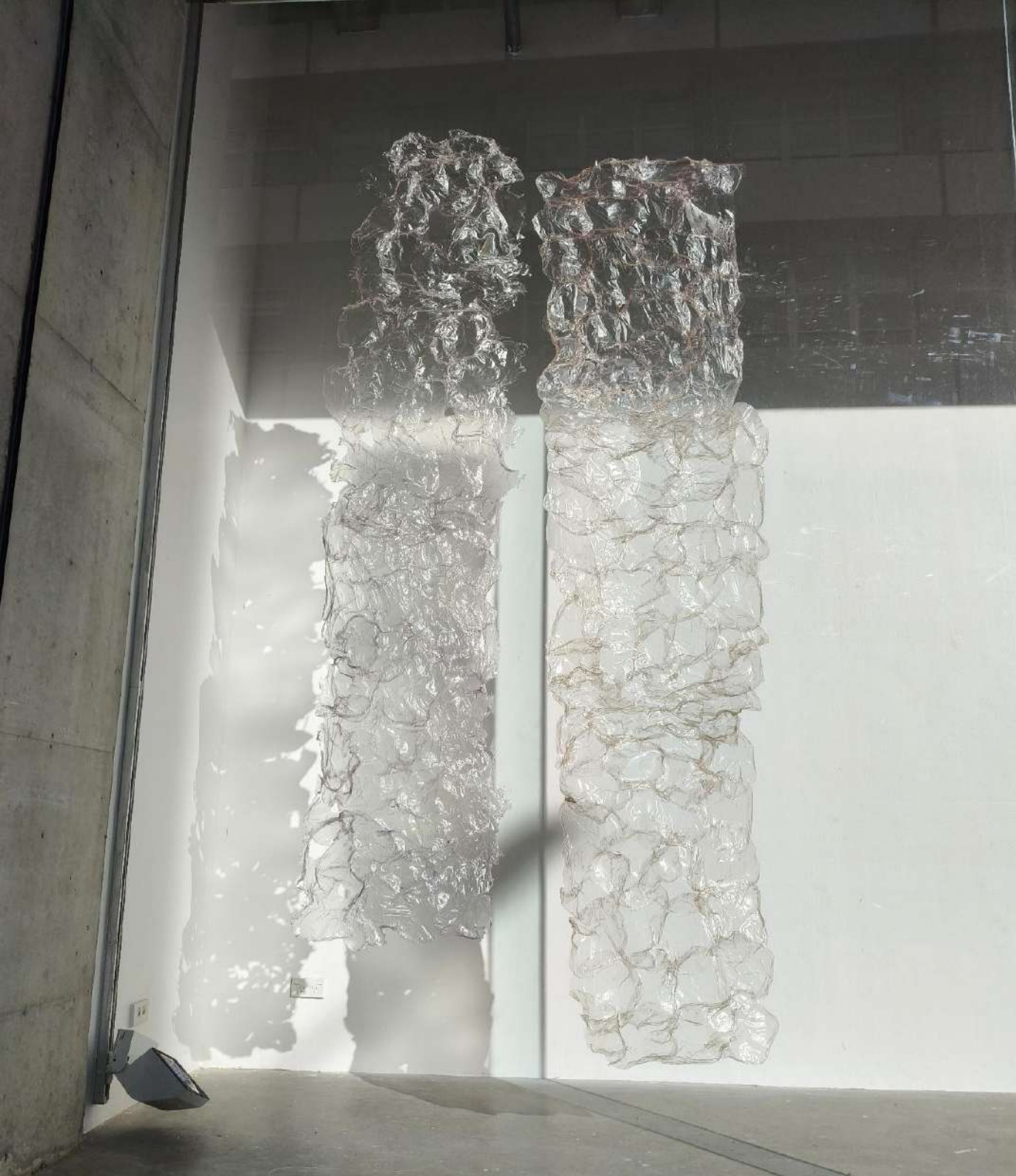


Image 77. Kym Burke, *'Proximity of Uncertainty' (detail)*, June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, metal hooks and nylon. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery.

Over page: image 78. Kym Burke, *'Proximity of Uncertainty' (back facing detail)*, June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, metal hooks and nylon. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery





Image 79. Kym Burke, *'Proximity of Uncertainty' (side detail)*, June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, metal hooks and nylon. Nguku Kākā Gallery, Image by Paul Chapman.

Over page: Image 80. Kym Burke, *'Proximity of Uncertainty'*, June 2026. Cellulose rice paper, ink, metal hooks and nylon. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery, Image by Paul Chapman.



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