

Following the rhizomes

*An exploration of place and memory, objects and images, drawing upon
object-oriented ontology and biology in an installation practice*

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2023

Exegesis in support of practice-based Thesis

Master of Visual Arts

Auckland University of Technology

Abstract

This project explores the presence of human and nonhuman memory within place and the way in which memory might contribute to connective feelings of familiarity and belonging. In approaching this research with affective rhizomatic thinking, this project connects to place-making phenomenology whilst drawing upon ideas from object-oriented ontology and biology. Through an installation practice, utilising image and object, I explore the potential of portals and platforms as a means of enhancing our ability to both remember and reconnect with the ecological world.

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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

09 / May 2023

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All my thanks

To Ingrid and Dieneke, for your support, belief, and enthusiasm in this project.

To Harriet and ET, for every piece of pottery knowledge you have shared with me – this project wouldn't be what it is without you both – and for creating a wonderful, friendly environment to work in.

To Esther Deans for proofreading this exegesis.

To the people I have shared studios with throughout the last five years; it was amazing to be surrounded by such creative company.

To Jacob, for all the years of art school; I'm glad I got to share them with you.

And to Mum, Dad, and Tilly for everything. For always supporting me. Words can't describe how thankful I am or how much I love you. Love you xx



Figure 1. Taashi Sheers, (installation experiment) clay, wood, fabric, 2023.

Introduction

Where did this project start for me? I'm trying to think of the place that triggered it all and, ironically, I can't think of one. I'm trying to follow the rhizomes¹ back in my mind, to find where this story began but they're all tangled together, looping and interconnected. All along this practice – the photographs I've taken, the vessels I've thrown, the installations I've assembled, the rhizomes I've found and made and followed – they have been a search.

A search for place.

For places.

For places in places.

Maybe it was a lack of place that started this project.

Rhizomes have become an underlying thought network throughout this project; they are the imaginary lines of thought that guide my practice.

Did you know all trees are interconnected by rhizomatic threads that connect underground? When viewed under a microscope, these lines appear a deep blue.

These threads that connect underground and their rhizomatic web feel like a metaphor for my own thinking. As this project has evolved, rhizomes have grown from being visual subject matter, such as the use of blue thread and blue ceramic glazing, to also becoming an important part of my methodology.

My rhizomatic methodology draws on thinking from Deleuze and Guattari's text *A Thousand Plateaus*, object-oriented ontology, and Karen Barad's diffractive methodology. Deleuze and Guattari explain that in all things, there are "lines of articulation," which are compared to strata or territories.² These lines of articulation are fixed ideas, key concepts. Along with these lines of articulation there are "lines of flight," which are described as movements of deterritorialization.³ These lines of flight are rhizomatic in nature, interconnecting the fixed ideas. The thought connections that move along them at various speeds, Deleuze and Guattari call "assemblages."⁴ An

¹ Rhizomes are the trails of thought, feelings of affect, and lines of research that interconnect every facet of this project. This term evolved from the rhizomes found in tree networks and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, (London: Continuum, 2011), 4.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

assemblage only has itself in connection with other assemblages.⁵ In this project, assemblages are manifested both through a series of interconnected concepts, and physically in the artwork. An assemblage can be a vessel with its object-image relationship, part of an installation such as a small arrangement of beads or a single platform, and entire installations. The vessel, the beads on top of fabric, a platform, exist in themselves but they also exist in relation to each other, to everything they affectively touch. In this project, the rhizomes, the trajectory lines of thought and connection, are just as important as the objects and images. The shapes of the beads, the watery glaze on the vessels, and the abstract shapes in the photographs are only grasped through their connections to other assemblages formed through the manifestation of installation. Nothing is beyond being interconnected.



⁵ Ibid.



Figure 2. Taashi Sheers, (example of an assemblage in installation) clay, wood, fabric print, 2023.



Figure 3. Taashi Sheers, (example of an assemblage in installation) clay, MDF, 2023.

In this project, I am looking at science, phenomenology, ontology, art, and philosophy through each other. I use art to understand the biology of trees and look at place-making phenomenology (the phenomenology and psychology of experience and consciousness in the making of place) through memory, philosophy, and object-oriented ontology. I am thinking through the perspectives of humans, trees, clay, and objects.

Theorist Karen Barad describes her methodological approach as diffractive.⁶ By reading approaches and insights through each other, Barad provides an attentive way of understanding the world by being a part of it rather than reflecting on it from the outside.⁷ Barad uses the metaphor of waves to describe her methodology, ripples from two different fields intercepting and blending to cross disciplinary boundaries.⁸ Like Barad I look at elements of my artmaking through different fields of research, for example looking at placemaking through biology, through object-oriented ontology, or through ceramics. However, I think of my practice as rhizomatic. I do not try to blur boundaries. By combining Barad's methodology of looking at notions through each other, and Deleuze and Guattari's idea that a rhizome constantly establishes connections between areas of the arts, sciences and humanities, my methodology builds an attentive web of interconnection.⁹

A rhizomatic methodology means a project full of potential. My rhizomes are not permanent, they shift and change as my work progresses. Impermanence exists as an undercurrent throughout this project to provide potential and possibilities. Impermanence occurs in the provisional nature of my installations, in the versatility of my objects, but also in the way I order my thoughts. Lists allow me to experiment. I can form imagination lines or rhizomes between ideas. Lists have become a device of impermanence in my thinking and my writing. Lists, in no hierarchical order, allow thought lines to exist, for old connections to be re-found, and new connections to be made. Lists allow the shuffling of my ideas. Impermanence also lends itself to affect relations forming. A complex series of affective relations appear twofold throughout this project. Brian Massumi states in his book *The Autonomy of Affect* that affect relations and resonances exist in suspension, the moment between encounter and the linear progression of action-reaction.¹⁰ Massumi describes affect as non-linear, and in this project I follow the rhizome of affect.¹¹ For me, affect is a state of potential to interconnect. It exists between mind and body, between past, present and future. Benedict de Spinoza states that affect enhances or diminishes our power to act, enhancing or

⁶ Karen Michelle Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 25-30.

⁷ Ibid., 88.

⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 8.

¹⁰ Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* No. 31, *The Politics of Systems and Environments*, Part II (1995): 86-87, 10.2307/1354446.

¹¹ Ibid., 86.

diminishing an experience or encounter.¹² In this project, affect leads to the joyous wondering of “what ifs” and enhances connections. It does not have to be qualified into an emotion. For me, affect is a guiding sensation that ignites the recognition of something *else*. It begins as an intensity, an energy, that becomes a passage, a rhizome followed into the artworks both in the viewing and the making.

My initial inclinations often form the impetus for reading about certain concepts. These newfound understandings in turn provide theoretical knowledge, contemplation, concepts, and ideas that feed into my artmaking practice, which in turn leads to more hunches or compulsions. These rhizomatic connections help this project to take form and give voice to the more hidden connectivity found in nature. Rhizomatic thinking requires thoughtfulness to see and make connections, to see and recognise where things can relate. This project is premised on thoughtfulness and attentiveness. It exists through thoughts of care towards handmade objects, trees, and places. It is a way of thoughtfully seeing, but this project is also thought-full. Full of thought. Full of thoughtful and affective connections.

In my art-making practice, some rhizomatic connections form intentionally – conscious wonderings or visual parallels I set out to explore, such as using pinhole cameras to bring to mind how and what trees might see. Others grow out of a moment or encounter, like the hand drawn rings that contour the fabric that came out of an embroidery hoop experiment in studio (Figure 4). Objects, images, trees, places, materials – all are connected for me with what I visualise as blue lines of thought. This is rhizomatic thinking performed as pragmatic approach and exploration. Like a rhizomatic network, everything – all the elements, the readings, the experiments – nourish each other, allowing the project to grow. Out of an undeniable curiosity, I follow these rhizomatic lines of thought deeper into the artworks and out again. In and out of affect, in and out of vessels, in and out of image-object and object-object relations, in and out of place. It’s part of the search: I flow in and out. And although “the inside and the outside” or “the in and the out” sound better, in reality I start outside and venture in.

¹² Benedictus de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, trans. Edwin. M. Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 70.

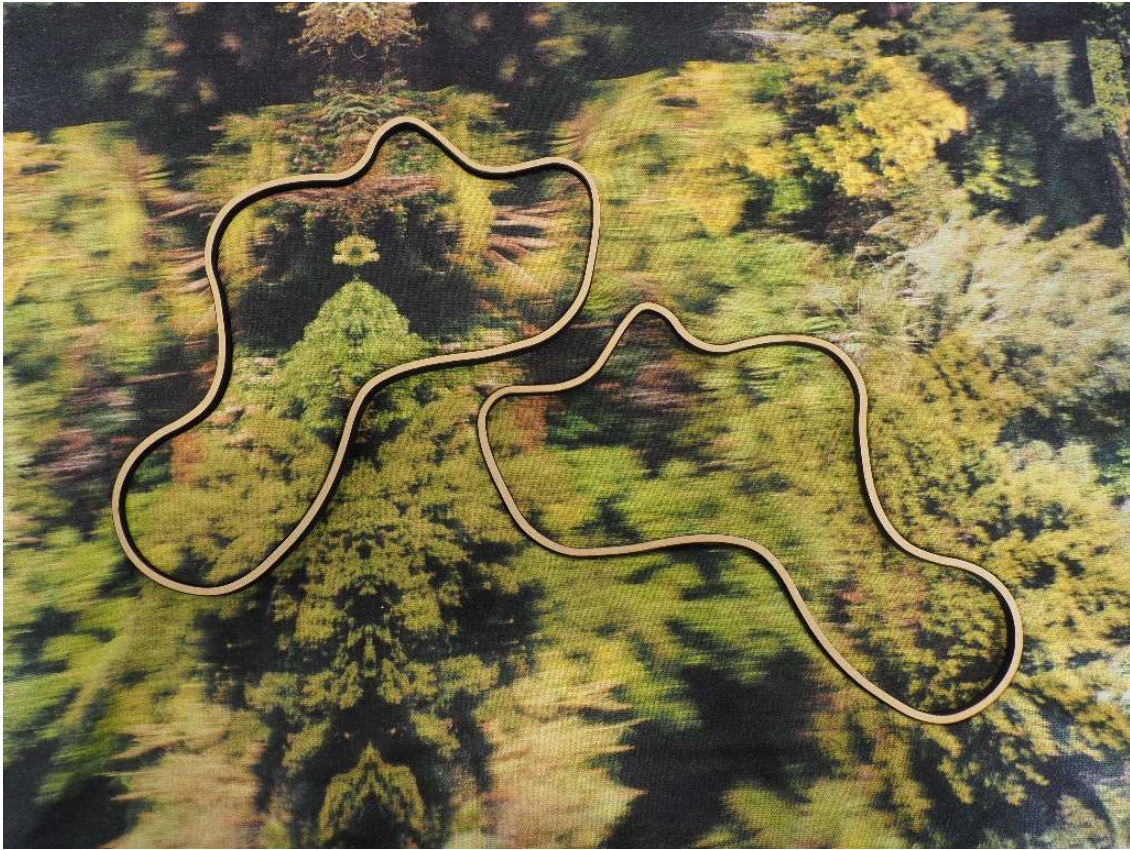


Figure 4. Taashi Sheers, (Detail) hand drawn MDF rings in fabric print, 2022.

So, like my practice, this writing is going to start outside, with places in the ecological world, and slowly make its way in, into *interior-places*¹³, into the installations, and into the affective resonances of familiarity and belonging that occur in the making of this practice.

In the first chapter, titled *Place*, I define and discuss the notion of place in this project and how it is considered both in my installations and photography. The second chapter, titled *The presence of trees*, ponders the role of trees in place and explains their presence in the project. Chapter three, titled *Memory vessels*, discusses my ceramic practice and explores the potential for objects and materials to hold memory – both human and nonhuman. The final chapter, titled *With-in*, explores the relationship between my installations and the concepts of interiors, play, and pause. I begin each chapter with a passage of writing. These passages are windows into my mind, into initial thoughts and inclinations I had when starting to think about each section.

¹³ I use the term interior-places in this project. This term refers to non-staged, domicile, inhabited interiors in which I feel a sense of connection, familiarity or belonging. These interiors can range from, and be experienced in, an entire room or through the layers in a window reflection.



Figure 5. Taashi Sheers, (installation view) clay, MDF, 2023.

Place

Sometimes I swear you reach out to me
I can feel you pulling me back
Calling my name
I swear sometimes I see you when I'm
looking elsewhere

It's like you open up these portals
Through time
Through place

You reach out to me

Or maybe I am reaching out to you
Either way you are there,

reaching towards me through the trees
Reaching towards me through the lens
Reaching towards me through the
places I'm close to now

You are here in my home
You are here in my hands, your memory
more instinctual than visual, guiding as
I work

Sometimes I swear you reach out to me
I can feel you here so close yet unseen,
like the air upon my skin
This is my reply

This project begins in places outdoors.
In places distant but somehow near.
In places foreign but deeply familiar.

In this project, place isn't just a location.

Place is *more*.

More than a location.

More than a site we walk through

Place is the reason we pause.

Place is everything we feel in a particular area, everything we remember.

Place is evoked.

Place is something inside us, a connection, a feeling of belonging, that we fleetingly find in the world.

Because although 'place' as a geographic term can be broad, it can be incredibly specific if it is felt rather than defined.

As portal: Finding memory through place

Place: it seems so permanent, but it can be so portable.

I don't know if you've ever felt an instant connection to a place. Whether it be a sudden sense of affection, of feeling at home, or a place that transports you to another.

I have.

A million instances spring to mind as I type this, but I am going to choose just one.

We were off-road camping at the time, a six-week trip around the South Island during the summer holidays. Me, my mum, my dad, my sister. It was the first time we'd been camping in years. Mum found the place in a book. There weren't any pictures.

We got there and hopped out. A gravel carpark, some native bush, a little path barely threading through the trees. Kind of underwhelming.

Either way, I followed it, some deep intuition pulling me forward. And with each step something inside me awakened. A swooping in my stomach, some ancient instinct lifting its head. For some reason I was riddled with suspense, some deep part of me knowing something was about to happen. I remember my breath catching at the sight of the river. My entire being freezing, my mind caught in a web of confusion. I was in two places at once, one present one remembered. It was like looking through a window. The water was clear, the air green. The light dappled and dancing. It was all so familiar. It was like I was looking in a mirror, at some deep ancient part of myself. And at the same time, for a split second, I was at another river. On another continent. I was so convinced. All those miles, all the land and sea and sky between me and that other place – the place in my memory from years ago – for a moment the distance was gone and I was there. Then my sister said something, and the disorientation cleared. And although I didn't continue to see double, the feeling of closeness remained. The sense of belonging remained.

This story is one of the stronger connections; sometimes I don't feel transported to another place, the double vision window doesn't appear. Sometimes I feel a sense of belonging in a place before I realise where it reminds me of. Sometimes I don't realise, and there's just the hum of memories. Sometimes the remembering is gentler.

When Covid-19 shut down travel and we were bound to the places where we reside, I found these same resounding encounters occurring on a smaller scale – in everyday life. A stand of trees near my home. A street on my bus route. I was transported again, to places I've resonated with elsewhere. I'd look outside and the landscape became the window in, into my memories, into other places.

Within this project place is a way of knowing the world.¹⁴

Present places become temporary portals. For a moment, past experiences or encounters are glimpsed through places in the present. Through an open mind and a connected, rhizomatic way

¹⁴ Cultural geographer Tim Cresswell is also interested in place as a way of understanding the world. He states "When we look at the world as a world of places, we see different things. We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience."

Tim Cresswell, "Defining Place," in *Critical Encounters with Text: Finding a Place to Stand*, 7th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2011), 136. <https://www.northernhighlands.org/cms/lib5/NJ01000179/Centricity/Domain/159/Defining%20Place%20by%20Tim%20Cresswell.pdf>

of looking, we might begin to reconnect to the ecological world.
It is through experiences like the story above that I approach my work.

As platform: Inviting memory

Place, in this project, is a platform that provides the opportunity for connections to occur.
And in this project, place can be many things.

Geographer and writer Yi-Fu Tuan states “at one extreme a favourite armchair is a place, at the other extreme the whole earth.”¹⁵ I take a similar approach. In my photography, place can be a platform of any size: a city tree, a window, a table, a street, or an entire national park. And in my ceramic practice, a vessel, such as in Figure 6, although not considered a place, has the same potential for being a portal, and provides the same platform for initiating a remembering encounter. The organic shape, the colours, the loose imagery invites remembering, its quiet suggestion of a representation prompting the imagination to fill in the gaps, to complete the picture.

¹⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 149.



Figure 6. Taashi Sheers, (installation view) clay vessel on fabric print, 2022.

Just as I am thinking of place as a platform to connect, so too are my installations filled with literal platforms (Figure 7) which provide the opportunity for connections between things. Between space and place; objects, images, and remembering; affect and conceptual thinking.



Figure 7. Taashi Sheers, (installation view) clay, plywood, 2023.

As I connect to it: Photography as platform and portal into remembering (and) places

At the beginning of this project, place was a location or site *plus* emotional connection; something else that resonates with us. In his essay, “Defining Place,” Tim Cresswell provides a straightforward, common definition of place – that of “a meaningful location,” with the most important point being that all places are located.¹⁶

But what if location isn’t crucial to finding a meaningful place? Maybe places don’t need to be tied to a site. Maybe they could be found in any location if only we are open to the possibility, if only we learn to look.

¹⁶ Tim Cresswell, “Defining Place,” 132.

I learnt to look through photography.

For me, photography is a way of noticing instances where I felt connected to a place through familiarity or remembering. The presence of a camera allows any preconceived expectations to slide. I relax when I'm behind a lens and I become more in tune with my surroundings. It's like putting on a pair of glasses: I can see and connect and notice without a camera, but the camera focuses me. I photograph areas in my everyday life, areas I'm not overly familiar with. I do not plan anything, neither my route nor what I'll photograph. I go where intuition takes me. This is similar to the idea of a *dérive*, a way of drifting in which affective knowledge – and in my project, relations – guide or compel our movement through a space. I walk as in a *dérive*, emptying my mind of expectation so I can be aware of the affectual human and non-human relations around me and open myself up to the possibility of connecting to places both immediate and distant. Through this portal-like way of seeing in the present, we can connect to past places and might begin to repair a sense of ecological dislocation from everyday life. At the beginning of this project, my photographs were accurate, indexical representations of places and the things I encountered within them. However, my attention and approach began to shift once I started to think of places as portals that could potentially offer a doorway into reconnecting with past experiences and the present ecological world.

Yi-Fu Tuan coined the term *topophilia*, “the affective bond between people and place.”¹⁷ In combination with Marc Augé's insistence that places are organically social or relational (for Augé a site where this does not occur naturally is a non-place), I became interested in place as being an intersection of affects, as a site of connection where resonances occur, placing humans at the centre.¹⁸ I continue this exploration through photography and installations. The way I think through affect differs depending on whether it is an installation or a photograph. In my photography, affect is not something I explore through the intimate embodied understanding of creating something by hand, it's an intensity that I experience from an external position. I experience the affect of place. I follow the affect of trees. As the project has developed, I have grown a particular interest in photographing reflections in city buildings, where the natural and the human-made layer seamlessly, melding and morphing into and out of each other so thoroughly that I cannot tell where one ends and the other begins. These feel like ecologies, everything inextricably interconnected.

¹⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 4, <https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=3029399>.

¹⁸ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London; New York: Verso, 1995), 94.



Figure 8. Taashi Sheers, *someplace else in you*, digital photograph, 2022.

In windows, boundaries blur. Outside becomes inside. Distinct shapes become one. For me, affective relations grow out of photographs where the representations become less of what I had seen and more of what I had felt. Affect was something I think Claude Monet experimented with in his paintings, and his works have become increasingly relevant to how I photograph. Monet focused on expressing the sense of a place rather than the location, aiming to capture the very act of perceiving nature, the thinking-feeling of the moment.¹⁹ After seeing Monet's work, my photographs have shifted further towards capturing the sense of place or the feeling of a re-encountered memory. I have become aware of the significance that this "affect of place" has for the process of developing the project.

¹⁹ Laura Auricchio, "Claude Monet," The Met Museum, October 2004, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cmon/hd_cmon.htm. Brian Massumi coined the term "thinking-feeling" in relation to our experience of perceiving and connecting with objects. Brian Massumi, "The Thinking-Feeling of What Happens: A Semblance of a Conversation" (University of Montreal, May 2008), 6.



Figure 9. Claude Monet, *Coin du bassin aux nymphéas*, circa 1918-1919, oil on canvas, © 2019 Christie's Images Limited.

Windows are portals between places, between inside and outside. They reveal how we long to feel connected to the ecological world and how we want to bring the outside in. They allude to our primal need, our want, to be in connection with the ecological world. Roland Barthes describes photographs as “the windowpane and the landscape.”²⁰ My photos literally are the windowpane and the landscape. There is a relationship between the light and image reflected on the glass, and the lens of the camera.

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage Books, 2000), 6.



Figure 10. Taashi Sheers, *in or out?*, digital photograph, 2022.

Photographs of the windowpane and what it holds, such as *in or out?* (Figure 10), capture the boundary between inside and outside, humans and ecology, in a way that no longer separates us from nature but connects us, as it was intended to do. These images blur the lines between inside and outside until they are one, seeing each other through each other. Seeing the inside from the outside and the outside through the interior.



Figure 11. Taashi Sheers, *elsewhere here, elsewhere now*, digital photograph, 2022.

Just as a photograph is a moment outside of time, it can, for me, also be a window outside of place, or more accurately a window - a portal - *into* place.



Figure 12. Taashi Sheers, (installation view) clay vessels, fabric print, 2022.

The presence of trees

There's a silent humming
I cannot hear it but I know it is there
Your presence
I can feel it inside me
In memories
In my past
In my very cells - some ancient biology connecting
me to you
Every time I step outside I feel your presence
Every time I look out my window
I feel your presence
In my own home I feel your presence
It sings soundlessly, a bare note below
all else
A familiar song I could not name if
I tried
I could not repeat if I tried
there's a silent humming
I cannot hear it but I know it is there
Your presence - the presence of trees



Figure 13. Taashi Sheers, (installation experiment) wallpaper, clay, fabric print, 2023.

You have probably noticed by now the presence of trees in this project. They are present in photographs and on vessels, considered in the making of beads and the choice of materials. Just as rhizomes create connections throughout this project, trees visually link the elements in my installations.



Figure 14. Taashi Sheers, (Detail) clay, wallpaper, fabric print, 2023.

In place: Dwelling trees, dwell in connections

I've always noticed trees; I've always been in wonder of them. For me, trees have an individual energy. As a kid they seem magical, a mixture of familiar and *other*. They are a site of possibility, of imagination. In a tree, beneath a tree, you could be anywhere, in any time. That doesn't have to change because we grow older.

In this project trees, like places, are portals.

They are portals to memories.

They are portals to other places.

And trees can be a doorway to reconnecting with the ecological world. They can bridge the perceived gap between humans and the natural environment, and seeing trees as memory vessels, as portals, can change how we think about and connect to the ecological world moving forward.

Trees are a part of this project because I feel they have a role in creating a sense of familiarity and of belonging in a place. Trees have been with us since the very beginning; we once used to live in them. They used to be homes. For some they still are. And even if some of us have forgotten this, I think our bones still remember. Our cells still remember. Some ancient biology in us sees trees and feels a sense of belonging. Of familiarity. Of safety. And still trees are all around us. There must be a reason why we feel the need to surround ourselves with them. There must be a reason why we are drawn to them.

Artist Xin Cheng, in her project titled, *dwelling trees, trees dwelling*, captures trees in urban environments.²¹ Her photographs convey the charisma that trees bring to place and the physical structure they lend and create.



Figure 15. Xin Cheng, *dwelling trees, trees dwelling*, digital photograph, 2014, <https://enjoy.org.nz/publishing/the-occasional-journal/the-dendromaniac/dwelling-trees-tree-dwellings#article>.



Figure 16. Xin Cheng, *dwelling trees, trees dwelling*, digital photograph, 2014, <https://enjoy.org.nz/publishing/the-occasional-journal/the-dendromaniac/dwelling-trees-tree-dwellings#article>.

²¹ Xin Cheng, *Dwelling Trees, Trees Dwelling*, 2013–2014, digital photographs in "The Dendromaniac – Enjoy Occasional Journal," Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington, <https://enjoy.org.nz/publishing/the-occasional-journal/the-dendromaniac/dwelling-trees-tree-dwellings#article>.

Cheng's works highlight the two metaphors commonly used for trees in place-making phenomenology – trees as people (bringing character) and trees as buildings (providing visual and felt structure, providing shelter).²² Dwelling has become a word that flows through this project. Dwelling can be a noun (a place) and it can also be a verb (to dwell on). To think. Your mind can dwell in a place your body is not. This is to be in a thought. It can also be a physical action; to let one's eyes or attention dwell and linger on a particular object or place. This project dwells in places, in memories and in artworks. Being in. Thinking in. Looking in. When photographing, I dwell. The pinhole vessels dwell. When installing, I dwell in moments. It's about being in the moment, and all that entails.

I want to dwell in the wonder.

By including trees in this project, I wanted to explore their potential for contributing to place. My initial relationality with trees and their presence in the places I felt connected to encouraged me to pursue readings and research on trees in place-making phenomenology. Jacky Bowring, a landscape architect specialising in memory, writes on the importance that trees add to a sense of belonging in place. Bowring states that “the longevity of trees embeds them deeply into feelings about place.”²³ A single tree can be a blue line that connects generations.

The same monstrous gum has stood watch outside my grandparent's house for as long as anyone can remember and earlier – witnessing the land change, watching them build a home over fifty years ago, watching their family grow, and now watching as they slowly pack up their lives and leave.

This is just one example of how trees can be a forever-presence in our lives. They become memory markers. They can be portals into remembering, intensifying our affective relations with themselves and, in doing so, enhancing our cognition and memory, connecting us back with our younger selves. In saying this, a tree doesn't have to be intimately familiar in order to open a portal into remembering. Sometimes, when I notice a tree, I re-find a dormant memory in myself, a connection to a past or distant place and am instantly transported to another time, another place, another tree. In this project, affect is a pull, a guiding sensation. It draws me towards trees, towards connection, and in this project, I explore my affection for and with trees through digital photography. Affect makes me cognisant of something more than myself.

²² Jacky Bowring, “Tree Sense of Place,” in *Tree Sense: Ways of Thinking about Trees*, ed. Susette Goldsmith, (Auckland: Massey University Press, 2021), 110–111.

²³ *Ibid.*, 107.

I am now starting to think perhaps places and moments reach for us through affective relations. Perhaps affective relations are portals, to place, to remembering, to the ecological world. Maybe we pick up on the affect relations between trees, the way they bend around each other, the warmth of the light shining green through their foliage. Maybe their relations also add to a sense of familiarity and belonging in place.

Perhaps, as Cheng's title suggests, trees dwell in place too.

In time: Light sensitivity of tree trunks and cameras, leaves and film paper

Trees witness so much – not just of our lives but before that.

Through digital and pinhole photography, I imagine the concept of “tree time” and how they might “see” places, and through these two ponderings, wonder what they might remember.

Artist Anne Noble began her series of works *Observations from the Critical Zone* and *Ratanui* by posing the quasi-scientific questions “do trees talk?” and “how might I imagine it?”²⁴ Noble built upon the recent discovery by scientist Susan Simard that suggests trees communicate through the combination of roots and fungi networks – their rhizomes²⁵. She buried photographic film, a medium sensitive to both time passing and the chemistry of the earth, between two trees in both projects with the idea of capturing some trace of tree language.²⁶ Noble explores how a chemical language might flow along these lines. But what if other things flow too? Memories? Images?

²⁴Anne Noble, “A Line Between Two Trees/Observations from the Critical Zone,” in *Tree Sense: Ways of Thinking about Trees*, ed. Susette Goldsmith, (Auckland: Massey University Press, 2021), 47.

²⁵ Suzanne W. Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Uncovering the Wisdom and Intelligence of the Forest* (UK: Allen Lane, 2021).

²⁶ Anne Noble, *Observations from the Critical Zone*, 2019, 1280 x 922 mm film print framed, Two Rooms Gallery, Auckland, <https://tworooms.co.nz/exhibitions/observations-from-the-critical-zone/>.

Anne Noble, *Ratanui*, 1978/2021, Pigment on paper, Two Rooms Gallery, Auckland, <https://tworooms.co.nz/exhibitions/ratanui-1978-2021/>.



Figure 17. (Detail) Anne Noble, *a line between two trees*, *Observations from the Critical Zone II*, 2020, artist book, 430 x 7175mm, <https://www.jonathansmartgallery.com/Exhibitions/a-line-between-two-trees/>.

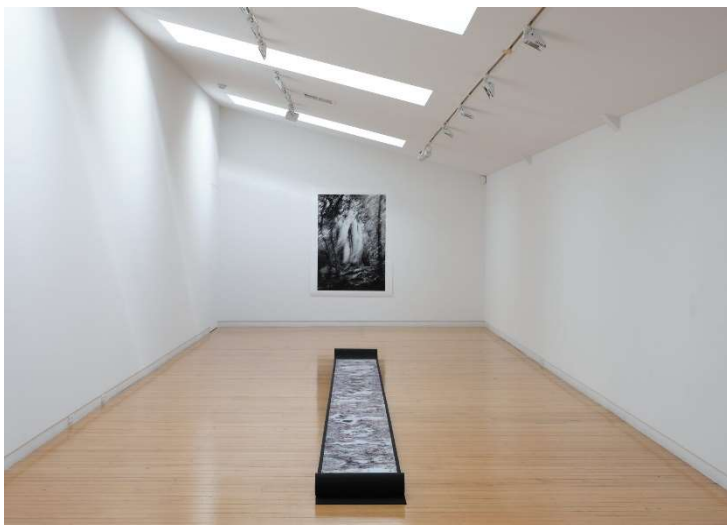


Figure 18. Anne Noble, *Ratanui*, installation view (photograph taken by Sam Hartnett), 1978/2021, <https://tworooms.co.nz/exhibitions/ratanui-1978-2021/>.

I find assurance in Noble's approach of allowing scientific discoveries to inspire her creative imaginings and methods. I am now thinking, imagining, and photographing from the point of view of the trees, using more experimental methods inspired by scientific knowledge to explore the parallel between human sight and visual memory, photographs, and the light sensitivity of trees. Photography is an interesting middle ground between art and science. Between gathering facts and storytelling. It is also an interesting light-sensitive medium that might bridge humankind and the arboreal.



Figure 19. Taashi Sheers, *all I know*, slow shutter speed digital photograph imaging tree perspective, 2022.

Leaves, like the human eye, like film paper, are light sensitive. And trees live such long, slow lives. We must seem so fleeting, blurs rushing by. How, with their sense of time, might they know place? I begin to imagine how trees might “see” the world by slowing down my shutter speeds. The painterly photographs (Figures 19 and 20) show what is constant in a tree’s sense of place, what trees might connect to. What they might see.



Figure 20. Taashi Sheers, *changing view*, slow shutter speed digital photograph imaging tree perspective, 2022.

My curious wonderings led me to read Peter Wohlleben’s book *The Hidden Life of Trees*. Wohlleben explains that the shedding of leaves and the growing of new ones depends partially on day length.²⁷ For trees to grow new foliage, they must be able to register day length, even when they don’t have leaves.²⁸ It has now been discovered that tree trunks are also sensitive to sunlight.²⁹ This knowledge prompted a shift in my photography. My exploration of shutter speed moved into making pinhole cameras. I imagine that if trees can “see” by registering light in their trunks, it would be through small, light-sensitive cells, the size and shape of a pinhole. And

²⁷ Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World* (Carlton, Victoria: Black Inc, 2016), 148.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 148–149.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

perhaps, like a pinhole camera, the trunks hold images inside. Wohlleben concludes that “trees must have memory, how else could they inwardly compare day lengths or count warm days?”³⁰ These pinhole vessels represent windows, the aperture becoming a portal into the trees, into their sense of time and place, providing a view into something that exists outside of ourselves. The vessels became a site of imagining, forming a bridge between my ceramic and photographic practices, between human and tree perspectives. I placed the pinhole cameras in trees, as close to the trunks as possible, looking out into place (Figure 21).

³⁰ Ibid., 149.



Figure 21. Taashi Sheers, pinhole vessel in tree, 2023.

The photos these produced, for example in Figures 22 and 23 are inverted in tone, mirroring the inside-out, outside-in nature of the pinhole vessel, and capturing the differing speeds of our world. In them I started to notice things I otherwise overlooked. Familiar sites became foreign, and the foreign felt familiar.



Figure 22. Taashi Sheers, *(b)rush hour*, pinhole photograph, 2022.



Figure 23. Taashi Sheers, *(s)tree(t) view*, pinhole photograph, 2023.

These images are going to be printed onto wallpaper, a material with a history of being a tree, and in installations will be anonymously interspersed with photos from my own perspective, in an exploration of how trees, and materials with a past as trees, might hold memory and carry these memories into the home.

I wait with you, take everything in like light through a pinhole. We wait and I listen. To you. To the gentle rustle of your existence. To the wind. I have to concentrate. There's so much I have been tuning out. What I thought to be silence is still so loud. The deep rumble of the modern world, humming at the base of my skull. The constant roar of grey noise. I'm aware of the wind caressing my bare shoulders, my neck, my arms, ruffling my hair like an old friend welcoming me back. I feel it creep beneath the hems of my clothes, inquisitive, curious. The warmth of the sun skips my skin and warms my bones. I see you, old tree; I feel your presence overhead, arms raised in an open embrace, letting this place fill you up, becoming part of it, welcoming me in. It's nice to pause. To notice what you notice. It's nice to slow down. The world must seem so fast to you. I guess you're wondering what the rush is. I wait with you and watch as people hurry past, heads down. They don't know what they're missing. It's nice to be aware of your company. To feel connected again. I'm awash in your fading green. I wonder what you see. Is the traffic a blur? Am I a blur? Everything must be changing for you, change your only constant –

The alarm sounds. I take the vessel from you, which I asked you to hold. And we part ways, or rather, I depart. Leaving you but you not leaving me.

You open up a portal in me

A portal back in time

Everything is so much closer when I look at it through you



Figure 24. Taashi Sheers, (Detail) clay vessel, 2023.

Memory vessels

All I do is hold and hold
Hold in
Hold on
Hold tight
Things that cannot be held at all

A list of memory vessels

You

Me

Trees

Clay

Rooms

Seeds

Beeds

Pots

Vessels

Tiles

Photographs

Textiles

Threads

Fabrics

Papers

Wallpapers

Woods

Homes

Objects

Interiors

Me

You

The holder and the held



Figure 25. Taashi Sheers, (installation experiment) wallpaper, clay, fabric print, 2023.

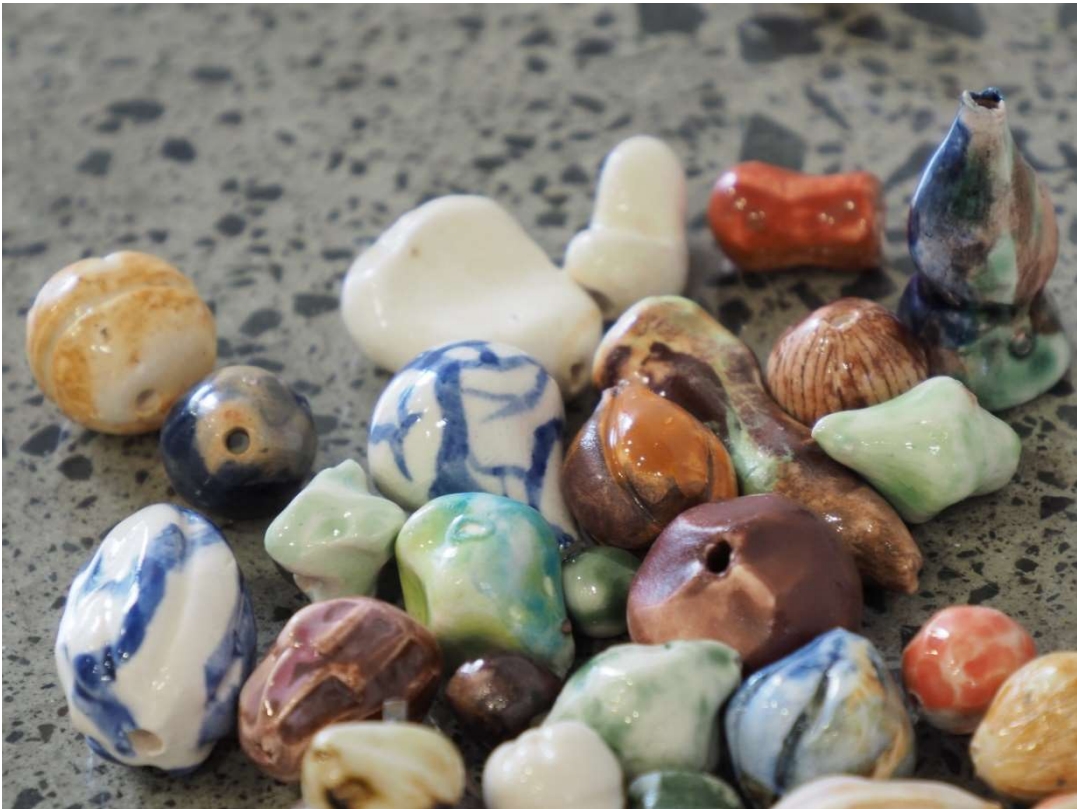


Figure 26. Taashi Sheers, (Detail) *Seed Beads*, clay, 2023.

I am thinking of places not only as portals and platforms, but as ecologies. As sites in which objects accumulate and beings – human and nonhuman – exist, in interrelation.

Places, like ecologies, are sites of gathering.³¹ Places gather and places hold.³² I am interested in what is gathered and held in place for us to feel connected to a location. Perhaps a conglomeration of:

Objects

Beings

Memories

Experiences

Histories

Resonances³³

Thoughts

Intensities

Feelings

The term “place” is not specific to inside or outside. As this project evolved, I wanted to explore how memory and objects might contribute to a sense of belonging or familiarity in interior-places as well as outdoor places. What might objects and their resonances, their intensities, bring to a location to make it a place?

I think objects can become conduits for places and memories to reach through to us, and if not take us into personal memories, provide an opening into an affective awareness. Following this

³¹ Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*, Second edition. (Chichester, UK: J. Wiley & Sons, 2015), 67.

³² Edward S. Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena,” in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1996), 24–25, http://escasey.com/Article/How_to_Get_from_Space_to_Place_in_a_Fair.pdf.

³³ Timothy Morton compares object-object relations in object-oriented ontology to the ecological connectedness of all life forms. Timothy Morton, “Here Comes Everything,” *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (December 1, 2011): 166, accessed April 28, 2023, <https://read.dukeupress.edu/qui-parle/article/19/2/163/10176/Here-Comes-EverythingThe-Promise-of-Object>.

curiosity led me into exploring a ceramics practice and reading about memory in place-making phenomenology.

Human: Memory as a means of connecting to place

Theorists from the humanities such as Lynne Pearce, Edward Casey, and Christopher Tilley draw connections between memory and placemaking, leading me to question whether memories might not be locked in places. What if, like my notion of place, memories are transposable, which in turn makes place transportable?

Lynne Pearce's paper "Finding One Place in Another: Post/Phenomenology, Memory and Déjà Vu" suggests that places can be portable and accessed through memory in our everyday lives.³⁴ Pearce argues that we can use memory to feel ourselves back into locations we once knew.³⁵ This occurs for me through digital photography where I experience glimpses of the past through portal places I stumble across. Portal places, for me, are places in which I unintentionally see through the present and feel, remember, connect, and find past places. When I take photographs, my approach is to create images that are evocative, which many people may resonate with. I do this through light and an absence of any geographical or cultural markers that may be recognisable and therefore locatable. Both memories and the recognition of particular affects can open these portals and form connections. Pearce questions how movement, muscle memory, the flow of the earth, and the pattern of our steps – a slight movement here, a downward dip there – can temporarily slip us into another place, into a memory.³⁶ This happens when I photograph, when I stop thinking and start perceiving, and this same awareness also guides my installations to varying degrees. I find myself feeling the movement and thinking *through* the assemblage, rather than outside of it.

Pearce proposes that this sort of transient connection-making converts location into place, and that memory can become a means of *emplacement* – creating a sense of familiarity and belonging.³⁷ In this project, the word emplacement has taken on a life of its own, becoming an important idea, and a method. Emplaced has come to mean the embedding of a memory place. Rather than replace, which suggests the awareness of a place already residing in the object and overwriting it, emplace

³⁴ Lynne Pearce, "Finding One Place in Another: Post/Phenomenology, Memory and Déjà Vu," *Social & Cultural Geography* 24, no. 2 (April 28, 2021): 3, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14649365.2021.1922734>.

³⁵ Ibid., 3.

³⁶ Ibid., 9.

³⁷ Ibid., 4.

is the conscious putting of a memory into an object or the recognition of a sense of ecological connection, a feeling of familiarity or belonging, in something.

a bead,

a vessel,

an arrangement.

This way of seeing and connecting to places creates a network across the world, like rhizomes; if we can think of locations as windows into other places, past places, and emplace memories within these locations there is always a chance of interconnection, of repairing a sense of dislocation from the ecological world. We are, effectively, memory vessels, carrying our experiences within us and emplacing locations we encounter. I believe we emplace objects too, turning them into place-holders. Looking back, I did this subconsciously from a young age.

I have always been a magpie with the eyes of a hawk, finding things other people have lost. Earrings, coins, little toys, scraps of handwritten paper. I call them “sparkly things” because to start with they were, but the term has evolved to mean something that called out to me, something others overlooked but caught my attention. I was eleven when my family packed up all of our possessions to travel overseas. We did a lot of travelling, visiting dozens of countries, hundreds of places. More than I could count then. More than I can remember now.

I have always been observant, always noticed things. During that period of travel my collection grew rapidly. In the box of belongings at the foot of my bed, one ziplock became two, became three. They were my form of souvenirs, but they became more than that; these objects became my ties to places. To this day someone will ask me if I remember a town or a city or a park or a beach and I’ll ask myself if that’s where I found ... ? And the memories will come flooding back.

Holding onto the object, feeling it clutched in my hand, it becomes a doorway. The memories are suddenly within reach, it’s like time collapses in on itself and I am there again.

It is this experience of collecting and holding objects that inspired me to pursue the making of objects, starting with the seed beads. For me, emplacing an object can transform it into a portal.

When I encountered Frances Hodgkins' collection of still-life landscape paintings (for example, Figures 27 and 28) I started thinking about the potential for objects to hold their own memory and carry a material past – as well as being emplaced with human memory.



Figure 27. Frances Hodgkins, *Berries and Laurel*, ca. 1930, oil on canvas, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Collection, <https://completefranceshodgkins.com/objects/26728/berries-and-laurel>



Figure 28. Frances Hodgkins, *Landscape with still life*, 1930, Bradford-on-Tone, England, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 76.2 cm, 80.0 x 93.0 x 9.0 cm (frame), South Australian Government Grant 1959, 0.1839, <https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/collection-publications/collection/works/landscape-with-still-life/25067/>

Initially when I saw these works, I felt a recognition. Hodgkins encapsulates a sense of home and familiarity in her paintings, balancing abstraction and representation so it feels like she is painting the way she felt in that place from memory. Although she travelled throughout Europe, there is a feeling that in each new location she was still connected to the one(s) before. For me, Hodgkins' paintings activate the same portal-seeing that I can experience in some places.

What became of particular interest when I spent more time with her works, was that the same

vase appears in several of her paintings, almost like she took it with her on her journeys. I became interested in the objects in her paintings and the idea that this cream-coloured floral vase had been to so many places.

What might this vase have seen or heard or witnessed? Could this little vessel contribute to the sense of familiarity in the paintings? I wonder if it could hold both human and nonhuman memory.

Clay: Material memory I

In the vessels I make there is a presence of past.

A presence of past touch.

A presence of material history.

A presence of memory.

Like seeds and trees and people, the pots I make are memory vessels.

They are a site of muscle memory, their shape holding the ghost of my hand. They are a site of personal memory, my mind wandering when I was shaping and glazing. They are a site of the clay's memory.

Did you know clay holds memory? When throwing on a pottery wheel the clay remembers the shape it has been and will form like that again.

I've often wondered if it remembers being in the ground, if it remembers being nestled between the roots of the trees, because sometimes it feels like the shape of the vessel unfolds from the clay itself. The clay holds its material past, and therefore so do the vessels.



Figure 29. Taashi Sheers, unfired clay vessels, 2022.

I keep this in mind when glazing.

I take inspiration from the shape of the vessel. It's like seeing the invisible.
Listening to the pots. I allow the vessel's shape, its affective energy, to roll over
me. To draw me in, in, into the clay. I spin the vessels, round and round.
Listening. Waiting.
I wonder what memories the seeds, dissolving into the dirt, might leave behind.
If roots sent images to the clay, what would they send?

This curiosity guides my hand. When an affective response comes, I keep the glazing quick and
gestural as it allows chance occurrences in the glaze and surprises to slip through.

Days tick by in excited suspense.

The kiln door opens.

And the glaze seems to be flowing out of the clay itself, watery and vibrant like memory.



Figure 30. Taashi Sheers, clay vessel, 2022.

I started glazing the vessels to find another point of connection, with the pots, with the clay, with the ecological world. Unlike the seeds – which I glazed from my own thoughts and memories of encounters – the glazing on the vessels began as a way to imagine clay memory and became a bridge between the clay’s memory and mine.

Wallpaper: Material memory II

Along with glazing clay vessels, I explore the possibility of material memory through printing. I print digital and pinhole photographs onto mediums which have a material history of being a tree, such as natural fabrics and papers. By doing this, I play with the idea that the material holds some

of the trees' experiences as well as a subconscious knowledge about their presence to us. For me, the act of photographing is a moment of connection, but unless the photograph is printed, the act of photographing is all the memory it holds – there is no material past. It is a caring gesture to print a photograph, giving it a place and creating connection with the ecological world.

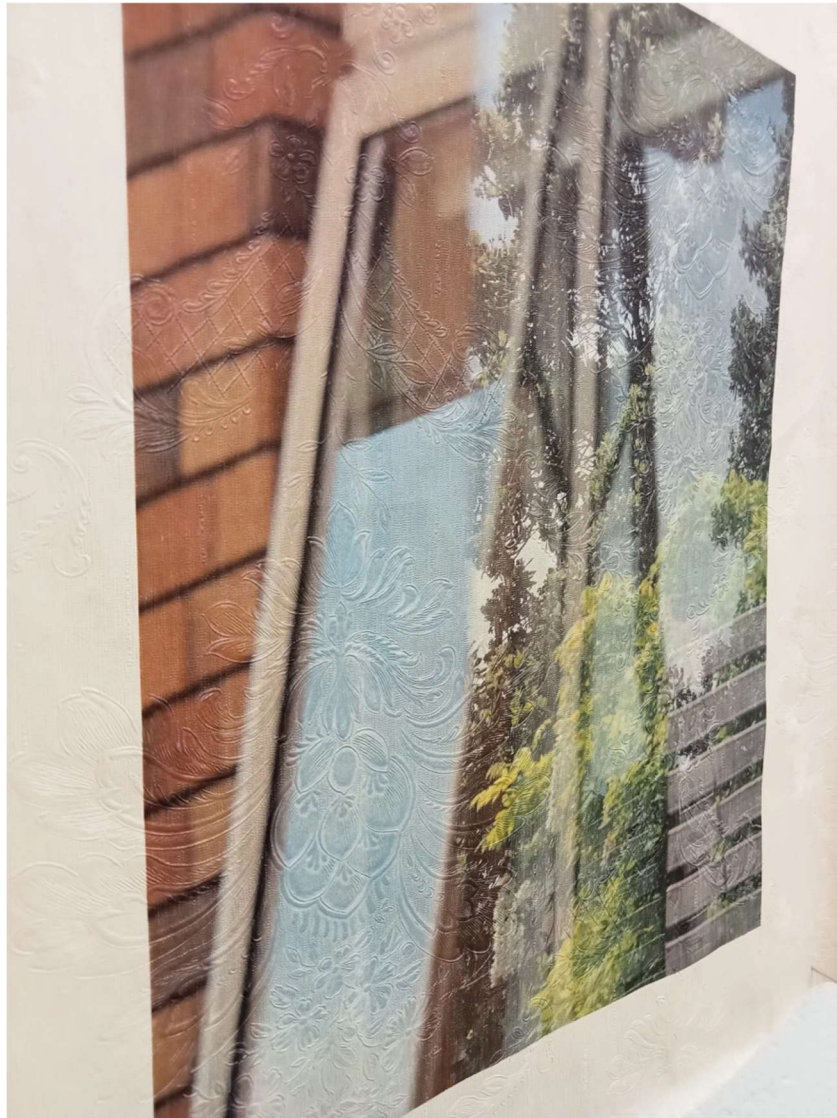


Figure 31. Taashi Sheers, (Detail) *making it home*, print on wallpaper, 2022.

In her essay, “Photographs as Objects of Memory,” Elizabeth Edwards states, “the materiality of the photograph is integral to its affective tone as an image.”³⁸ I play with how the relationship and

³⁸ Elizabeth Edwards, “Photography as Objects of Memory,” in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, ed. Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 223.

interference of a surface may add to the affect of an image. As in the wonder of opening a kiln, there is an element of chance and the unexpected in printing on unconventional materials.

I print my photographs on old rolls of wallpaper. I like its material history. I also like the length of wallpaper – how it alludes to its past as a tree. After having been printed, the wallpaper naturally curls again into sculptural objects, the cylindrical shapes formed from material memory. I like the interference between texture and image: it suspends the image and object, blurring the line between the two.



Figure 32 Taashi Sheers, (installation view) wallpaper prints, clay vessels, 2023.

Images: Painting and photography as different ways of reconnecting with memory

I am interested in the presence and juxtaposition of painting and photography. For me, both methods are very immersive acts and are ways of expressing how I see and relate to the ecological world. In this project, painting through glazing was another way to express remembering, a way to capture something I felt photography was unable to. It is the nature of photography to diligently document the physical world. Through this project, places have become portals, but the places I photograph in the present are still not the ones I remember. For a moment I see through them to another place, but the present is still an intermediary. Painting comes straight from remembering, a direct line to the place inside me. It holds a different kind of affective relation. Rather than the affective appreciation of trees, glazing comes directly from me responding to the vessels during their making. I utilise the affect relations that form when I interact with something over time.



Figure 33. Taashi Sheers, clay vessels, 2022.

This way of working connects directly to memories or a sense of a memory, whereas photography is a more fleeting re-connection filtered through reality. Both are personal, one just utilises looking in (glazing) whilst the other requires looking out (photography). The pinhole vessels directly connect photography and ceramics, looking in and looking out. Rather than the memory-image occurring on the outside, they happen within, the vessel gazing out from the branches of a tree.

Unlike places, unlike trees, vessels are not distant. They are present in every home. In this project, in my installations, the vessels become invitees.



Figure 34. Taashi Sheers, clay vessel, 2023.

With-in

And everywhere
I looked I saw
And everywhere
I saw I felt
And everywhere
I felt I knew
you'd been here
all along

Come in, I said
Come in
Come in
Not that you need
an invite
You've been here
all along

Like afternoon sunlight, this project shifts inside – naturally. Into interior-places, highlighting where nature resides within our homes and how we inadvertently fill them with links to the ecological world.

The objects and the beings, the images and the materials

Become with and in

With each other

In

With-in

Interior-places and installations

There are deep ties between memory and the home.³⁹ In ancient times people believed one could remember better by assigning reminders to imaginary places.⁴⁰ One would envision a place and its contents, usually based on a real place or room, and each thing one needed to remember would be assigned to an object or feature in the place. To recall everything, one simply had to imagine walking through the place and encountering the objects. These sequences of reminders and places are known as memory palaces.⁴¹ It was the contention of architect Edward Hollis' book *The Memory Palace* that all interiors are memory palaces, places in which memories are encountered.⁴² In this project, my installations suggest that interiors are constellations of places and place-holders, memory vessels in which memories and other places are encountered. Hollis states that “interiors ... remind us to remember.”⁴³ For me, interiors don't remind us to remember, rather, they provide a portal – a platform – through which to remember and connect. In my installations, place as platform and place as portal are interwoven. Places are not one or the other; they are both. The platforms in my installations are a literal manifestation of this idea.

³⁹ Edward Hollis, *The Memory Palace: A Book of Lost Interiors* (London: Portobello Books, 2013), 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15.

Fortuyn/O'Brien's installation *House and Garden, Undergrowth* in combination with Frances Hodgkins' landscape-still life paintings, led me to think of interior-places as ecologies.⁴⁴ Fortuyn/O'Brien's work illuminates a connection between the outside and the interiors of our homes through metaphor. The floral fabric – bed sheets – rolled out on the floor are a playful parallel to actual flower beds. The wallpapers and embroideries on the walls are landscapes. And the sprawling networks of pipes and cables are a root network. When writing about Fortuyn/O'Brien's installation, Barbara Nemitz said, "the house is a garden. Even in the heart of the inner city ... the city-dweller surrounded by his four walls has a close relationship to plants."⁴⁵

This image has been removed due to copyright.

Figure 35. (installation view)
Fortuyn/O'Brien, *House and Garden, Undergrowth*, 1996, textiles, plumbing material, ferns, chairs.

⁴⁴ Fortuyn/O'Brien, *House and Garden, Undergrowth*, 1996, an artwork discussed in Barbara Nemitz ed., *Trans Plant: Living Vegetation in Contemporary Art* (Ostfildern: New York: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 56.

Frances Hodgkins, *Still Life in a Landscape*, ca. 1929, oil on canvas, <https://completefranceshodgkins.com/objects/26243/still-life-in-a-landscape>.

⁴⁵ Barbara Nemitz, ed., *Trans Plant*, 56.

Frances Hodgkins' artworks comment on the interchanging flow between inside and outside, the presence of the ecological world in our homes, by painting household items outside. In some of her paintings, Hodgkins' vases reach into the trees, the tabletop merging with the land until the lines between outside and in are blurred.

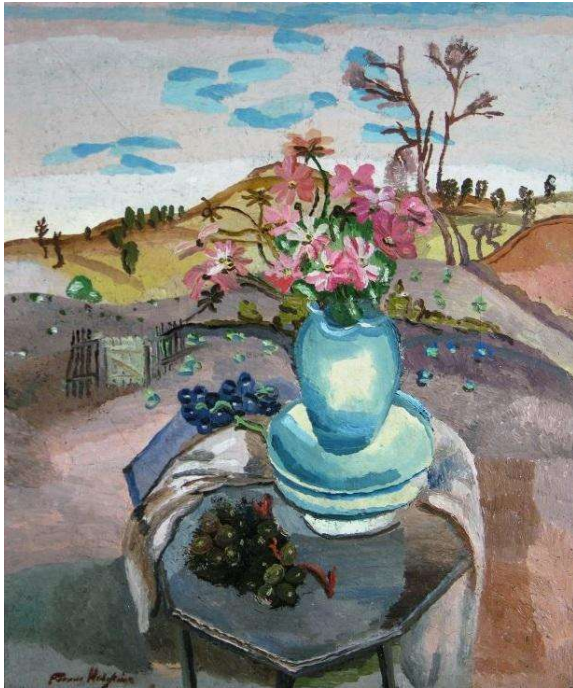


Figure 36. Frances Hodgkins, *Still Life in a Landscape*, ca. 1928, oil on canvas, Parliamentary Collection Wellington, <https://www.parliament.nz/en/visit-and-learn/visit/art-and-objects-at-parliament/parliaments-mfat-art-collection/>

Together their works made me think about how we arrange the interiors of our homes and play with the idea that we might subconsciously form ecologies within them. Perhaps the affective resonances between objects within interior-places not only reach into remembering but also connect us to the outside world.

Play: What ifs and affective resonances

This project is premised on joy. The joy of being outside, seeing and listening and being connected; learning, experimenting, and making. On wonderings and imaginings and what ifs.

What if trees can see?

What if clay could speak?

What if we listened to objects?

What stories would they tell?

It's what makes the notion of affect so relevant, because affect can brighten the joy.

Affect leads me into the what ifs. When photographing, what if I walked this way? When on the pottery wheel, what if I push here? What if I carve this away? When arranging installations, what if I put this here? There? What happens if I lift this? Shift that?

Affective relations, or searching for affective relations, brought play in this project. Play is a series of rhizomes I follow, created by the provisionality and potentiality of the artworks I create. Play is a method of joy that appears throughout this project. Although rooted in research, I play with ideas that have an element of imagination: ideas about how trees might see, about places as portals, vessels holding memories, interiors as ecologies. Play also manifests physically in this project through being open to the unpredictability of chance in glazing vessels and printing on wallpaper. The arranging of my installations is built upon play.

My installations begin with a platform, then a length of fabric, and grow from there.

This is the beginning. I move around. Around and around the platform. I pick up a vessel, a bead, whichever calls to me. I place it down. There is play in cross-sensory relationality. Beads speaking. Listening to vessels, the wallpapers. Seeing invisible resonances. I enjoy taking part in the objects' dialogue. Sometimes it feels like overhearing someone else's conversations. How does it sit with the image beneath? How does it sit with the others around it? Do I feel the need to move it? Is there something I have to follow? I shift it slightly. Again. Again. The searching settles. It's like finding the next marker on the path. I move on. And so, it unfolds.



Figure 37. Taashi Sheers, (Detail) clay, fabric print, 2023.



Figure 38. Taashi Sheers, (installation view) clay, MDF, fabric print, 2022.

There is a strong element of care not only in the way I make but in the way I install. For me, cross-sensory attention is an act of care. Listening to the fabric, thinking vessels might speak, believing there is a possibility for objects to be a little more than inanimate, for them to have the potential to relate to each other. When installing I keep acts of care in mind.

To hold

To accompany

To be made for

To sit with

To connect

To support

And this dialogue that takes place in little moments also occurs between the platforms.

There is fun in following the objects into the installation, not just through the processes of listening and play with installing, but in the encounter as well. Affect begins as an intensity, an energy, and becomes a passage, a rhizome, followed into the artworks both as I make and as I install.

I have begun to call one of my methods of play Photographic Seeing. I play with the depth of field. How does the relationship between image and object coax us into moving? I play with the resonances between objects, but also between objects and viewer. This is how affect flows in and out of the work. The same compulsion and curiosity that guides me when photographing, guides me when installing, lending them to the flow of the body through the platforms. For me as I install a work, there is play in shifting, in winding, in peering through and looking in, in exploring.

Pause: Affect in the silences

With play comes pause. This can be a physical pause between objects or a felt pause. In this project affect can be a pull into movement but it can also be a pull into pause. Affect with a tree causes me to halt and photograph it. A moment of pause has me leaving an object where it is in the installation; when making vessels, pause has me ceasing during throwing or glazing. There is an interesting relationship between place and pause. Yi-Fu Tuan states that whereas space is movement, place is pause.⁴⁶

With objects comes the space between objects. I listen as much to the empty spaces as I do the vessels, the wallpapers, the fabrics. Just as the resonances between objects guide my arranging, so too do the quiet spaces in between. When I install, I see the negative space, and I'm aware of it

⁴⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place*, 6.

throughout arranging the platforms and the objects on the platforms. The space between things, the physical manifestation of a pause, is important for me because it is in these empty spaces that our mind makes connections, filling in the gaps.



Figure 39. Taashi Sheers, (installation view) clay, wallpaper, 2023.

In “Silent Spaces: Allowing Objects to Talk,” Megan Sherritt uses the artworks of Haim Steinbach to explore what occurs in the spaces between objects in an installation, drawing parallels between these spaces and silence.⁴⁷ She calls these spaces “silent spaces” because they operate in the same way as silence, by providing a space to think.⁴⁸ Steinbach refers to silence as a “space of reflection” between all objects in an arrangement.⁴⁹ I think of these silences between objects as spaces of remembering or connection. Sherritt states that the (multiple) silent spaces between objects, and between the artworks and the viewer, are spaces of possibility where objects can talk to and affect

⁴⁷ Megan Sherritt, “Silent Spaces: Allowing Objects to Talk” in *Open Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (October 2, 2019): 348, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/opphil-2019-0028/html>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 348.

each other, and we must listen.⁵⁰ I see the spaces between objects as areas of potential in which we might connect with the objects, and spaces of play in which silence can provide us the space to be open to what the objects could be. Perhaps these spaces, as much as the objects, reach into a place of reconnection.

Throughout installation, I listen to the objects and to the space between them. This creates energy between the viewer and the work. I've formed an interesting correlation in this project between these spaces of silence and my concept of pause. For me, these silences are a space of affect. They are a space of connection. They are a space of moving thoughts. Rhizomes. And the objects are sites of pause where these thoughts can settle, can dwell. The installations shift in and out of pause, in and out of the silent spaces. Sherritt argues that silent spaces become a point of access to withdrawn objects.⁵¹ For me, the silent spaces in an arrangement become portals to connection, to the vessels, and to the installations. We can know an installation by being in it; the spaces between things provide a pathway in.

An artist who I feel plays with silent spaces and the ecological-like connections that bridge them is Kate Newby. I recently visited her exhibition *Had us running with you*⁵². The silent spaces in her work range in size from small spaces between ceramics to encapsulate the space of the entire room. Conversations occur throughout her installations between the holes in glass panes – these could be considered as silent spaces – and the marks on the handmade tiles, between the rough texture of the tiles and the bronze and clay floor inlays. Newby's objects speak with and to the building, using silent spaces to respond to the site, making the whole building an artwork. Although I take into consideration the light and shape of the places where I install, I do not consider my own practice to be site specific.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 354, 355, 356.

⁵¹ Ibid., 349, 350, 251.

⁵² Kate Newby, *Had us running with you*, Michael Lett Gallery, Auckland, 11 February – 01 April 2023.

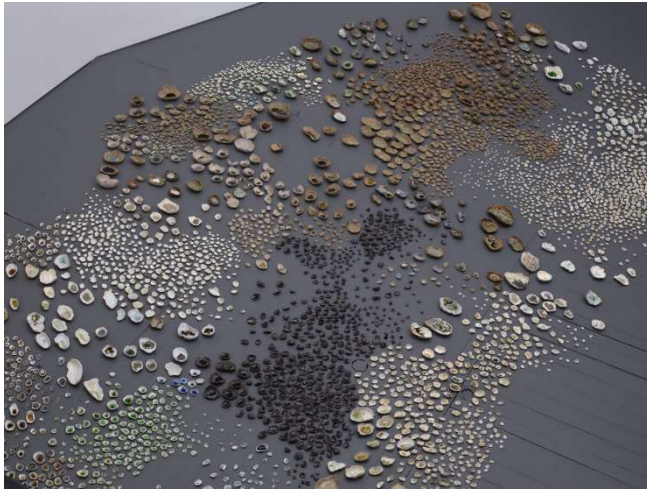


Figure 40. (installation view), Kate Newby, *Had us running with you*, ceramics, 2023, <https://michaellett.com/exhibition/kate-newby-3/>.



Figure 41. (installation view) Kate Newby, *Had us running with you*, glass panes, clay tiles, 2023, <https://michaellett.com/exhibition/kate-newby-3/>.



Figure 42. (installation view) Kate Newby, *Had us running with you*, bronze, 2023, <https://michaellett.com/exhibition/kate-newby-3/>.

I have begun to play with the idea that the insides of vessels are silent spaces, and that by sometimes glazing the inside and leaving the outside un-glazed, the outsides can be silent spaces too. Glazing on the inside creates a parallel to the pinhole vessels, a ghost of their inside-out outside-in nature, with light bouncing off the glaze within. And I play with how this glazing might be an affective pull into movement, emphasising the urge to traverse in and out of the work physically and affectively. Similarly, I have also begun to paint some of my smaller platforms, leaving parts of the woodgrain exposed, playing with the in and out of the material and surface, seeing how this small change might create a visual depth and an affective pull into the works.



Figure 43. vessels with interior glazing, 2023.

No two installations I arrange are the same. There is a correlation between the temporary nature of lived-in interiors and the provisionality of my installations. Hollis explains that staged or recreated rooms are “dead.”⁵³ They have not been constructed out of affect and so there is no life in them, whereas lived-in rooms continue to hold affective relations. I see life in my installations. There is an energy and connection in where I place objects.

⁵³ Edward Hollis, *The Memory Palace*, 8–9.



Figure 44. Taashi Sheers, (installation view) clay, MDF, 2023.

An Ending

This project has been both portal and platform, providing me with the opportunity to discover and explore my own creative potential and ways of thinking, as well as the relationships between interiors and the ecological world, and between humans and trees. This project has taken me outside, inside, up trees, and into vessels. I've stumbled across new places and reconnected to old ones present only in memory. I have been able to dwell in my practice, to dwell in the act of photographing, to dwell in photographs by giving them material presence, and to dwell with objects in affective relations. Through photography, pottery, and installation this project has freed my practice, promoting experimentation, play, and chance. I did not expect affect to enter this project the way it did, but it has become a grounding, an intuitive rhizome I follow. Affect has become a portal into play, into the works, it has brought "what-ifs" and joy, and I have valued the affective experience, especially as it has enhanced my ability to act. For me, it created a stronger presence of the personal in the project.

A rhizomatic methodology has enabled me to follow curiosity and hunches, to learn new processes and pursue wondering not only theoretically but also in making. The rhizomatic nature of this practice has meant I have been able to explore the project's potential and this way of working – following the rhizomes – is how my practice will continue to "become." Wonderings will fuel hunches, which will fuel research, which will lead to making and more wondering. The nature of this project is to grow. It is to interconnect ideas, methods, and disciplines. Although this project specifically has reached an ending, the research and practice will go on. I will continue to follow the rhizomes.

This is an ending, not the ending
I know you'll follow me through my days
I'll see you reflected in shop windows
and glimpse you between the trees
I'll find you in future photos where I
wasn't looking for you
And in projects I haven't even thought
^{up yet}
You'll appear in vessels made years from now
And installations that are completely different
This is an ending, not the ending
because I'll carry always the memory of you

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Figure 45. Taashi Sheers, studio view, 2023

Exhibition Documentation

Following the Rhizomes

St Paul St Gallery II

8 – 10 June 2023

This installation was held in St Paul St Gallery II as part of the 2023 MVA Graduating Exhibition. I installed in the first half of the room, sharing the space with a fellow student whose sculptures can be seen in the background of some of the following images. My works appear in the foreground of every image. When installing in the space I considered the approach through the door and how my installation may affect the view of my fellow student's work and how my installation may be viewed from outside through the large floor-to-ceiling windows which occupied my exhibition space. The negative space within my installation and how this may entice a meandering through the work also informed my installation decisions.

All exhibition photos were taken by me.



Installation view, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, plywood, fabric prints, wallpaper, MDF.



Outside view, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, plywood, fabric prints, MDF.



Installation view, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, plywood, fabric prints, wallpaper, MDF.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, wallpaper, plywood.



Installation view, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, plywood, fabric prints, wallpaper, MDF.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, wallpaper, plywood.



Installation view, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric prints, plywood, MDF.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, MDF.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, MDF.



Installation view, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, MDF, plywood.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, MDF.



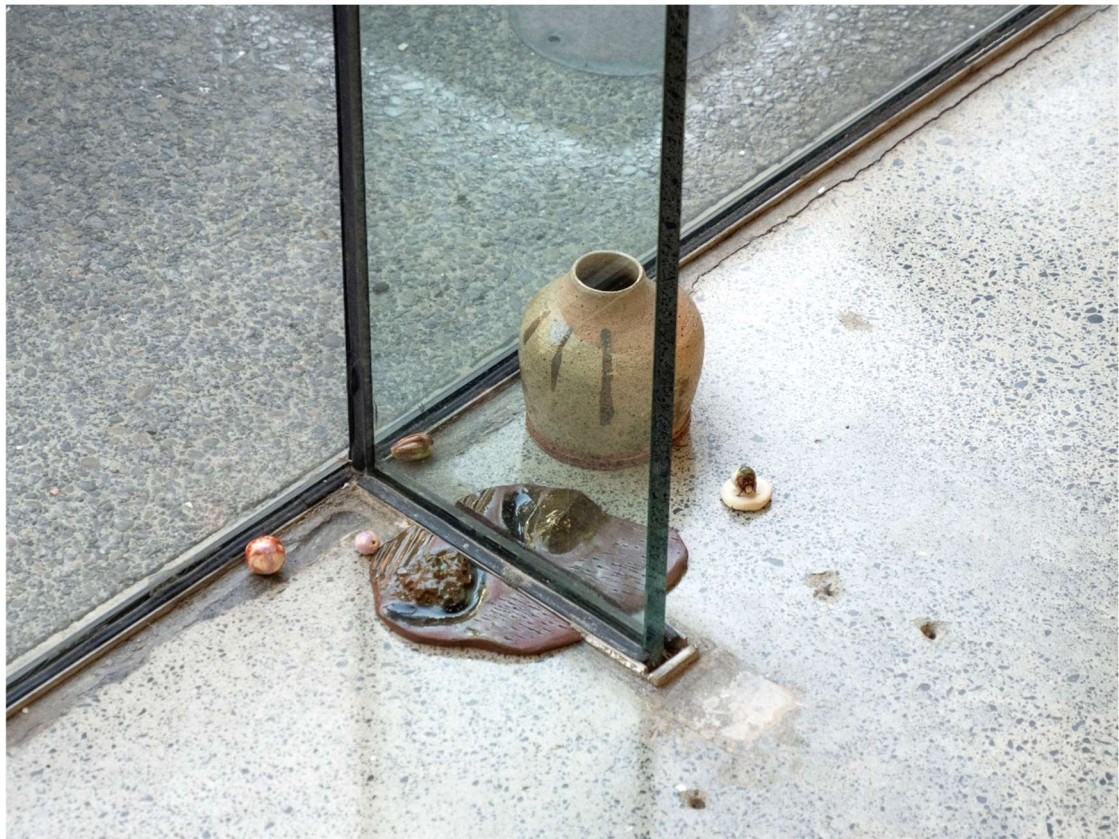
Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, MDF.



Installation view, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, MDF.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, MDF.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, MDF.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, MDF.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, plywood.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, MDF.



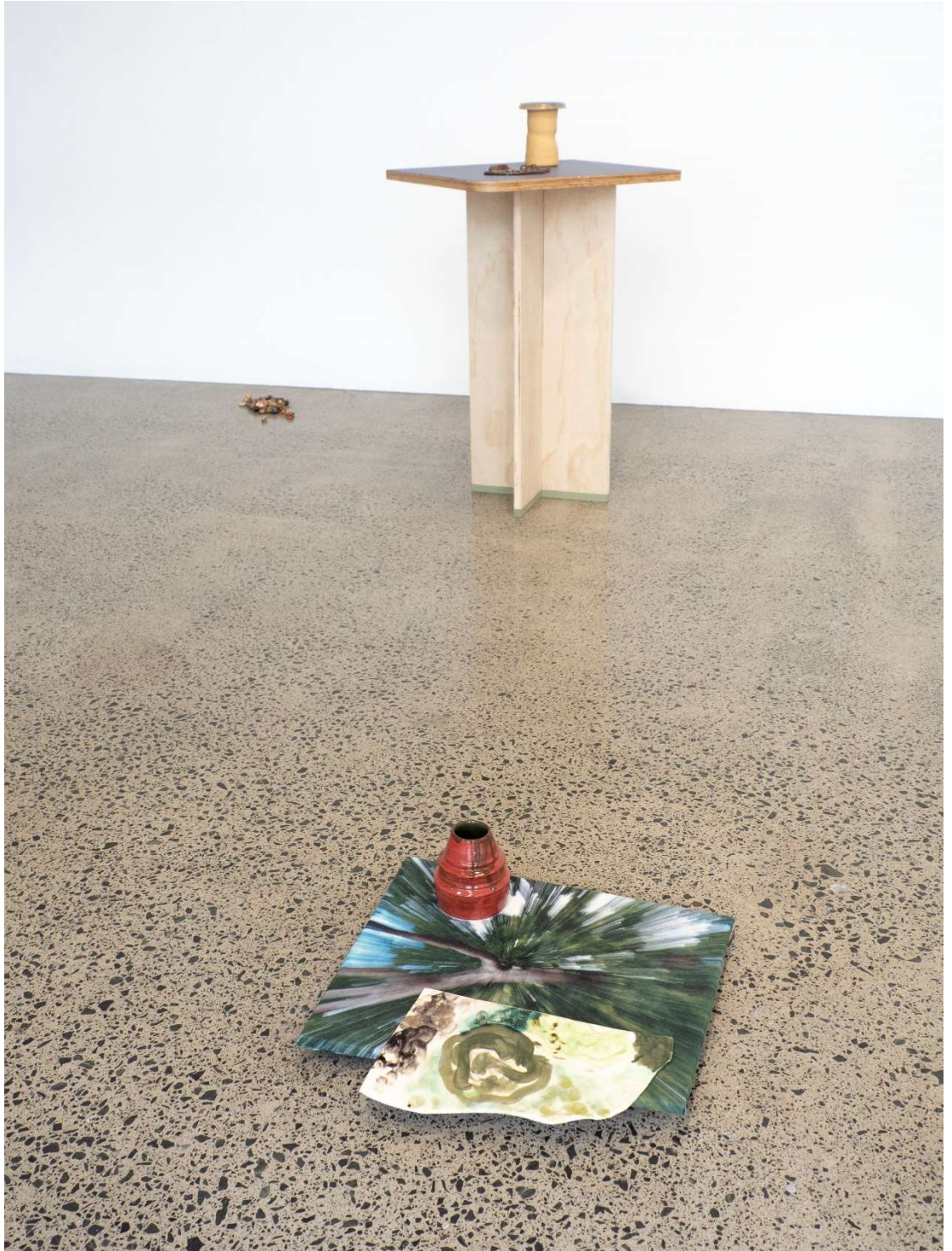
Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, plywood.



F Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, plywood.



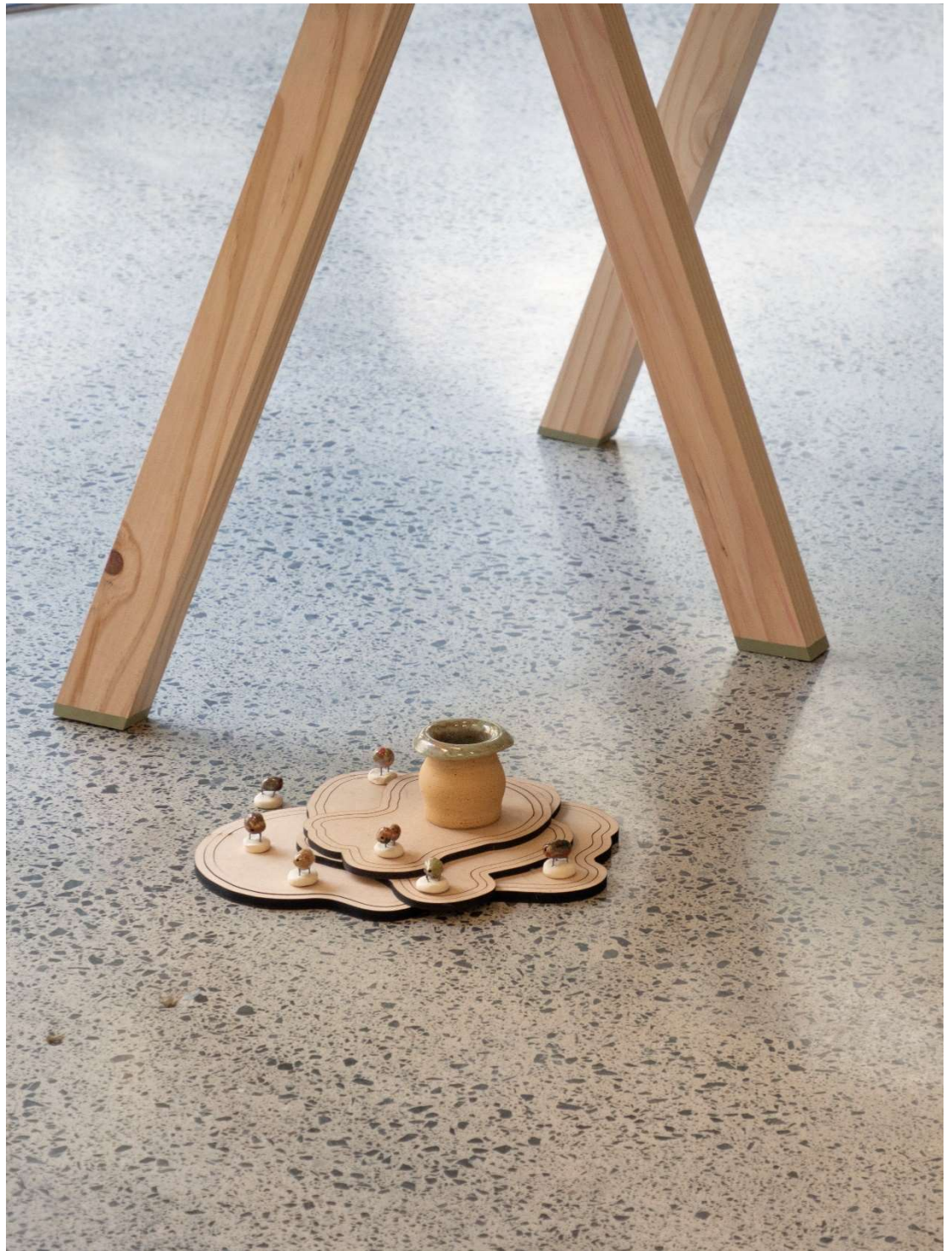
Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics.



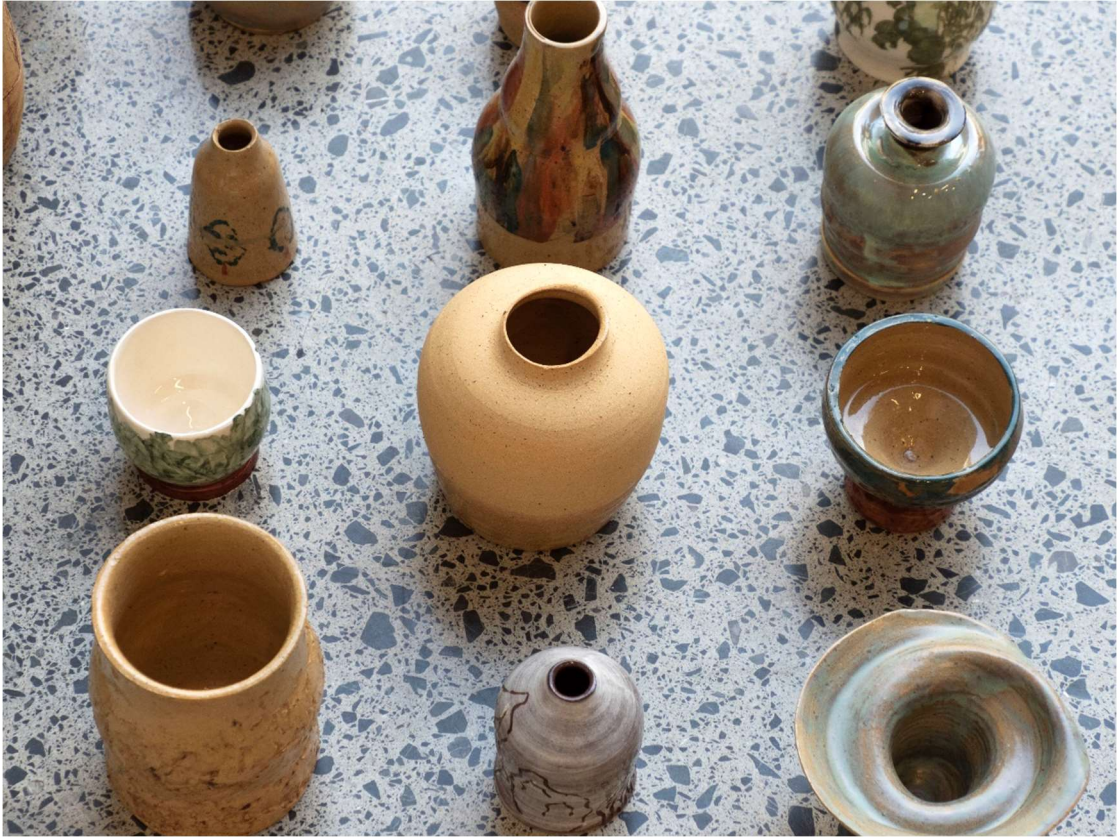
Installation view, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, plywood.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics, fabric print, MDF, plywood.



Detail, Taashi Sheers, *Following the Rhizomes*, ceramics.