

# Unfurling

// Material Affect and Intimacy  
Through Sculpture and Installation

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Exegesis in support of practice-based Thesis  
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## Abstract

By engaging with the liminal, both as a conceptual threshold and material state, this sculptural project examines how intimacy can be revealed through spatial and material relationships within installation. Moving beyond an initial engagement with the abject and the singular sculptural object, this practice explores the affective potential of material proximity, weight, gravity, and scale within an installation framework. Through arrangements of objects and armatures, the work seeks to implicate encounters that foreground embodied perception, drawing attention to the physical and psychological tensions between the viewer, form, and space.

**Fig.1.** *Object: Arc, 2025 (detail)*  
mutton cloth, primer.  
1250 x 4000 x 600mm.

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*All images are the artist's own unless stated.*



**Fig.2.** 'Objects' (various), installation view, 2024  
Image credit: Monique Redmond

## **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

15 May 2025



Fig.3. *Object: In State I, Object: In State III, Object: In State IV*, installation view, 2024  
Image credit: Monique Redmond

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To Monique Redmond and Ingrid Boberg, your guidance has been more than academic; it has been quietly transformative. You held the work and me in times of doubt and undoing. With unbelievable patience and steady kindness, you allowed this practice to unfurl in its own time. In your care, critique became conversation, and conversation became a form of *being with*. Thank you for reminding me that art can hold complexity without closure, and that to be rigorous is not to be rigid. The shape of this work owes much to your insight, and the sinew of my thinking even more.

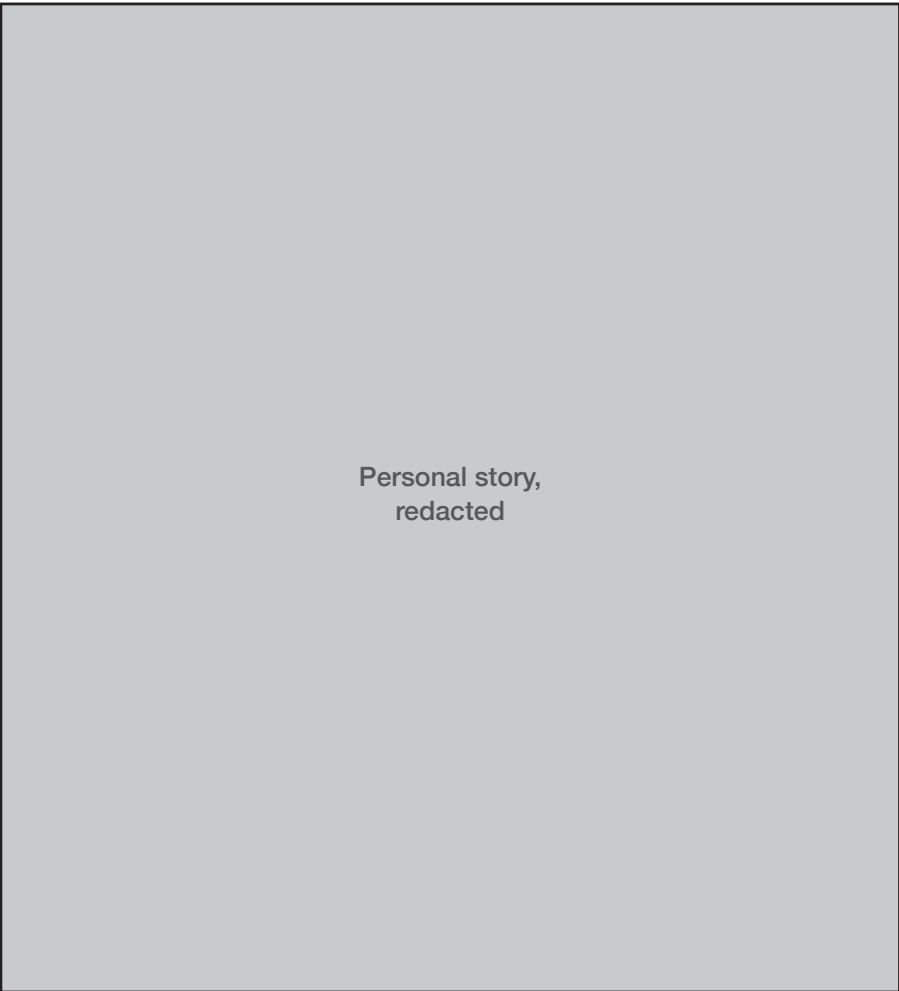
Thank you to my Mum, Dad, Clinton, Gem, Paula, and family. Your unwavering support of my endeavours invites a sense *it might just be possible*. Every check-in, gesture of care, and every time you reminded me *I'm steel*, I heard it (eventually). With echoing sentiment across the words, to my chosen family, Michaela, Dunja, Ashleigh + Nick, Matthew + Sophie + Bowie, James + Hannah, Jessie + Steffi, Megan, Charlotte, Georgia, and my gallery family, without you my bones would be bereft of flesh, thank you for letting me come undone with a soft landing, and for polishing the edges when I clambered back into form.

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I am grateful to Elwyn Sheehan for her kindness and expertise when polishing my ramblings, and to the Post Graduate Visual Arts faculty and the technicians who keep the studio breathing, thank you for the insight, structure, and gentle provocations that shaped this work.

*"I think I'm in a constant state of adjustment"*  
- Patti Smith

Caring for a Dear One  
( A Reflection on Encounter and Intimacy )



## Introduction

### // Liminal Ground and Material Intimacy

This thesis project, *Unfurling Material Affect and Intimacy Through Sculpture and Installation*, explores how intimacy can emerge through spatial and material relations in sculptural installation, moving beyond fixed meanings to dwell within the unstable, the tentative, and the affective. By attending to the liminal, as both a conceptual and material threshold, I position my practice within a space of in-betweenness, where boundaries between body, object, and space are porous. Intimacy, as a primary consideration in the making, is not bound to the personal or the sensual. Instead, it is approached as a quality of relation, a way of *being with* that is contingent, felt, and unresolved.

Throughout the exegesis, I draw on theorists who think through materiality, embodiment, and affect, including Barbara Bolt, Karen Barad, Luce Irigaray, and Sara Ahmed. In differing ways, these thinkers trouble the notion of static subjects and objects, insisting instead on relations of becoming, entanglement, and responsiveness. Their work underpins my attempts to articulate how sculptural and spatial forms might produce visual engagement with the physical, sensory, and emotional proximity. In this sense, the project is not a representation of intimacy but a staging of the conditions through which intimacy might emerge.

Materials and materiality play a central role in this inquiry. Whether through the stretch of soft mutton cloth across ready-made pieces of furniture, the folding slump of a clay body as it yields to gravity, or the barely-there contact between suspended forms, the artworks seek to foreground the agency of matter. As theorist and artist Barbara Bolt asserts, the process of making is not a simple translation of *idea* into *object*, but a *thinking with* materials.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* (I. B. Tauris, 2004), ProQuest Ebook Central.

Therefore, the studio becomes a site of negotiation, where gestures, repetitions, and hesitations all matter. I understand this approach to making as a form of material intimacy, a conversation between body and matter in which meaning unfolds through encounter, not instruction.

The project's installations are composed as environments rather than displays, inviting viewers to move among and around forms, adjust their posture, and notice the pull of scale or the insistence of a surface. Feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad's concept of intra-action is particularly relevant here; she suggests that entities do not precede their relations but emerge through them.<sup>2</sup> This notion resonates with my desire to create works that do not stand apart from the viewer but cohere, however temporarily, through shared presence. For me, the installation becomes an entangled field where objects, bodies, and space inform one another.

Philosopher and linguist Luce Irigaray's writing on sexual difference and relational ethics informs this practice. She argues for a co-presence that maintains difference without collapsing into sameness, a space of encounter where the other is not absorbed or reduced.<sup>3</sup> Many formal decisions made during making in the studio, such as gaps between forms, suspended tensions, and objects that carry a register of a form, resonate with this principle. In resisting completion or resolution, the work aims to open a space where intimacy is not predefined but co-created through proximity, attention, and affect.

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<sup>2</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007), ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>3</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Cornell University Press, 1993).

This exegesis unfolds across five sections. The first situates intimacy within contemporary sculptural and installation practices, not as a fixed subject but as a felt relation emerging through material, space, and proximity. The second reflects on in-studio methodologies, where acts of folding, slumping, and suspending open gestures of care, resistance, and attunement. The third traces a shift from abject object-making to the expansive affective conditions of an installation-led practice. The fourth explores installation's spatial and temporal dynamics, where scale, proximity, and form hold multiple gestures in tension and quiet conversation. The final section reflects on installation as a mode of thinking where sculptural processes are both material and epistemological, inviting a relational way of *being with*.

Within the writing, I move between theoretical reflection and the insights generated by the practising and material engagement in the studio, allowing each to inform and disrupt the other. I understand this exegesis to be an extension of practice: a site where tactile experience, spatial sensitivity, and attunement shape the thinking. In this context, writing becomes a form of *thinking through making*, an iterative process shaped by tacit knowledge, which theorist Estelle Barrett describes as embodied, intuitive, and situated knowing that arises through direct engagement with materials.<sup>4</sup> In choosing to dwell within the liminal, I do not seek resolution but aim to stay with what unfolds in the space between.

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<sup>4</sup> Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice As Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (I. B. Tauris, 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central.

## I.

### Situating Intimacy in Contemporary Practice

#### // Material, Proximity, and Form

This section explores how intimacy operates within contemporary sculptural and installation practices as a relational and affective condition. Rather than treating intimacy as a fixed subject, I consider how it emerges through materiality, spatial arrangement, and bodily proximity. Through reflection on key influences, including feminist theorists and artists whose works engage tactile, political, and embodied concerns, I situate my shift from object sculptural forms toward installation as a mode of relational encounter.

#### Reorienting the Sculptural Encounter

Intimacy, as it emerges through the encounter with installation and sculptural form, is not merely an emotional or psychological state but something negotiated materially, spatially, and temporally. In this project, the ways in which materials behave in proximity to the body and how they suggest, withhold, or invite forms of closeness compel me. The shift from what I now see as object-oriented forms toward installation has been, in part, a response to this need to articulate a more reciprocal, embodied relation between works and the viewer. Installation allows for a choreography of encounter; it grants space as an active element and invitation for visual contemplation and affective and physical proximity. This section investigates intimacy not as a fixed category but as a felt relation, explored through scale, texture, relationality, and the soft negotiations between bodies and objects.

This project began with a question not easily articulated, by words or my existing practice: How might sculpture be encountered, bodily, emotionally, and with affect, without relying on the literal or representational? In the early stages of my research and practice, I drew on object forms that were suggestive of the feelings I wanted to communicate: rupture, discomfort, and interiority.

These sculptures were singular and self-contained, objects that bore traces of the body or alluded to its absence versus its presence. Over time, I began to recognize the limitations of this approach. There was an urgency in me to move toward something more reciprocal, to generate work that allowed for softer negotiations between viewer and object, that did not demand recognition but invited relation.

In her book, *Radical Intimacy in Contemporary Art: Abjection, Revolt, and Objecthood*, artist, philosopher, and curator Keren Moscovitch draws on Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic and poststructuralist thought to position intimacy as an inherently unstable threshold between subject and object, self and other, inside and outside. Rather than something private or sentimental, Moscovitch frames intimacy as a radical state that disrupts fixed identities and opens a generative space for new forms of thought and relation. Moscovitch cites that for Kristeva, intimacy emerges from deep interiority, where bodily sensation and preverbal affect blur the boundaries of the psyche and the flesh. Within this zone of indeterminacy, the artist becomes not merely a maker of objects but a navigator of affective terrains, working with and through materials to access what Moscovitch calls "the deepest strata of the human psyche".<sup>5</sup> This notion strongly resonates within my practice, and intent for how sculptural installation might unfold felt relations, and a drawing out of porous proximities between body, material, and space.

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<sup>5</sup> Moscovitch, Keren. *Radical Intimacy in Contemporary Art: Abjection, Revolt, and Objecthood*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central, 3.

## Material Thinking and Relational Emergence Through Process

Bolt's articulation of material thinking is particularly instructive for how the practice could manifest these negotiations. She insists on the agency of materials, suggesting that the process of making is not a simple translation of an idea into matter, but a complex interplay between material, maker and meaning.<sup>6</sup> From my viewpoint, this interplay forms a kind of intimacy, a negotiation between artist and material where meaning does not precede the work but emerges through it. In my making process, I often let the material's responsiveness guide me, observing how the soaked cloth or wet clay slumps, or how the raw mutton cloth clings as I stretch it over found furniture, and how a curved surface might echo or repel the human form. These gestures are not illustrative of intimacy; they are intimate acts. The process, therefore, becomes a slow attunement to material resistance and offering. In this dialogue between maker and material, decisions emerge not from the imposition of form but from 'our' co-sensitivity to what the material might want to become.

Barad's theory of intra-action similarly resists a static understanding of relationality. In their framework, entities do not pre-exist in their relations. Instead, they emerge through them.<sup>7</sup> This notion is instrumental in considering how an installation can stage intimacy not as something possessed or directed but as something that comes into being through the key relationships between viewer, object, and space.

<sup>6</sup> Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation*.

<sup>7</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.



Fig.4. 'Objects in waiting', studio view, 2024

Barad writes, “We are part of the world in its differential becoming.”<sup>8</sup> In this project, creating environments that refuse distance foregrounds this *becoming*. The viewer is not positioned as a removed observer (looking at) but potentially becomes entangled in the work, sometimes literally through spatial constriction or tactile invitation, and sometimes affectively through suggestion or unease.

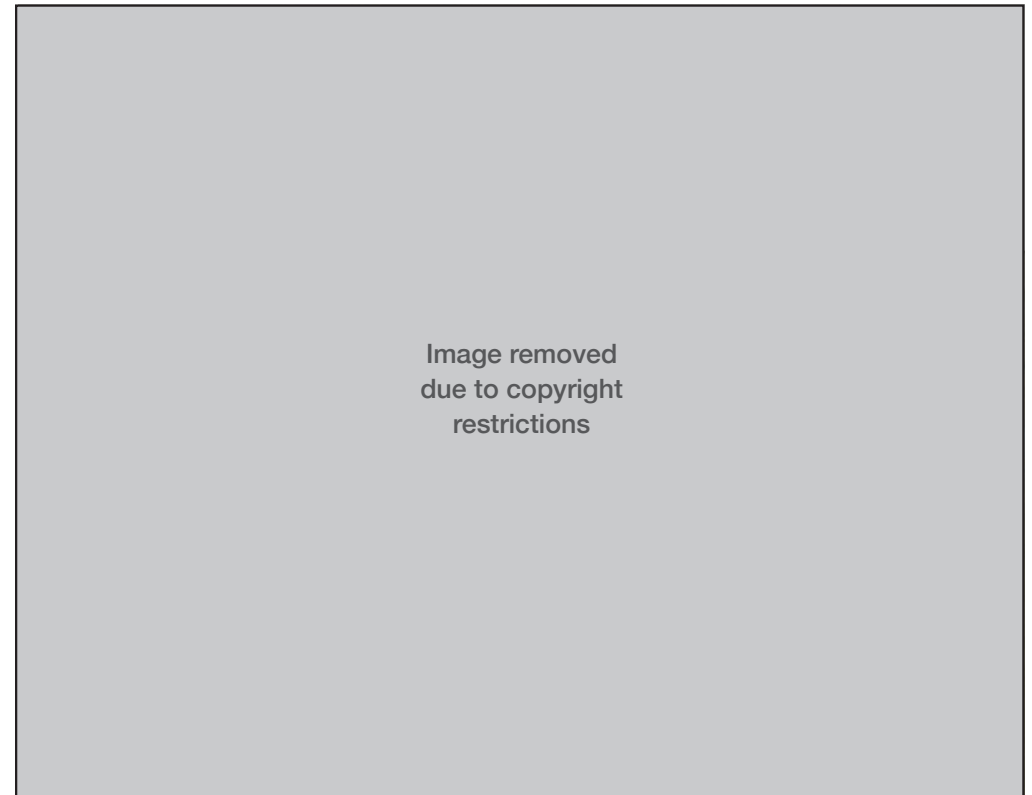
The spatial logic of installation is the characteristic that affords this form of entanglement. I spend time considering how a viewer might navigate an object: whether they must duck, step around, or linger in close quarters to encounter it on their terms. These gestures of movement fold the viewer into the work, inviting an experience that is as physical as it is perceptual. This negotiation is not just about presence; it is about participation, with the viewer becoming a contingent element in the artwork’s unfolding. My aim is that a shared temporality emerges, an intimacy formed through encounter and the body’s negotiation of thresholds, weights, textures, and silences.

### Feminist Precedents: Intimacy, Trauma, and Form

Women artists such as Doris Salcedo, Louise Bourgeois, and Mona Hatoum demonstrate in their sculpture practices how materiality can articulate a form of intimacy that is also political and embodied. Salcedo’s installation *Unland: The Orphan’s Tunic* (1997), for example, merges domestic furniture with human hair and thread, transforming a table into a site of grief, care, and historical trauma.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 185.

<sup>9</sup> Tate. ‘Art Now: Doris Salcedo | Tate Britain’. Tate. Accessed 16 May 2025. <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/art-now-doris-salcedo>.



**Fig. 5.** Mona Hatoum, *Incommunicado*, 1993  
Metal cot and wire.  
1264 x 575 x 935 mm  
Image: Tate, London

**Fig. 6.** Mona Hatoum, *Incommunicado*, 1993  
(detail)  
Image: Tate, London



The stitching of fine, fragile threads across the table's wooden surface suggests repair and rupture, a closeness that is also a wound. Her ongoing use of familiar material objects in works, such as chairs, beds, and fabric, evokes domestic intimacy, yet, through a simplicity of representation, they are stripped of comfort and turned into spaces of haunting and absence.

Bourgeois' *Cell (You Better Grow Up)*, (1993) and her *Lair* series (1962–2000) construct bodily enclosures that I read to be both protective and confining. Her use of soft, often biomorphic forms made from fabric and latex expresses a tactile vulnerability that resists spectacle. These works enact intimacy as layered, porous, secretive, and folded interiors. The body in Bourgeois' practice is not always present, but its traces are everywhere: in the sag of cloth, the hollow of form, the tension between enclosure and exposure.<sup>10</sup>

Hatoum's *Incommunicado* (1993), a baby's cot rendered in stainless steel with taut cheese wires replacing the mattress, offers an especially stark account of intimacy's double edge. The cot, generally associated with care and nurturing, becomes a site of cold, potentially disturbing, threat. The scale and form remain recognisable, almost tender, but the material transformation creates a sense of unease. I perceive this simultaneous proximity and danger to be central to Hatoum's practice, where intimacy is often tinged with volatility.<sup>11</sup> Her works frequently implicate the viewer in this discomfort, asking them to question what it means to come close and engage, and what might be at stake in doing so.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Bernadac, Marie-Laure. *Louise Bourgeois*. Flammarion, 1996.

<sup>11</sup> Tate, "Incommunicado', Mona Hatoum, 1993', Tate, accessed 15 May 2025, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hatoum-incommunicado-t06988>.

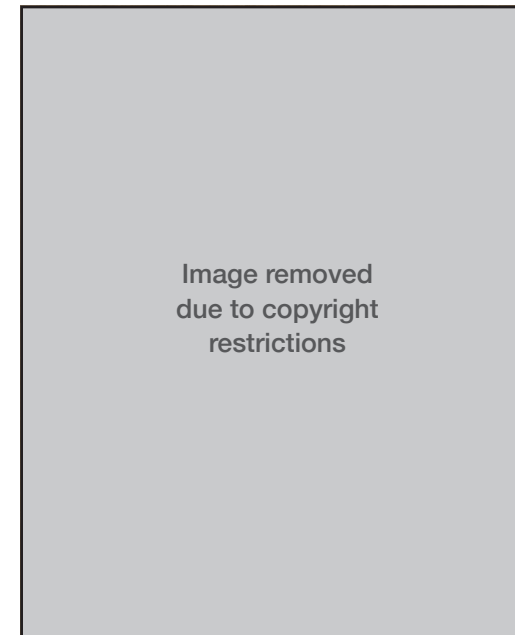
<sup>12</sup> Archer, Michael. *Mona Hatoum*. Phaidon Press, 1997.



**Fig. 7.** Louise Bourgeois, *Cell (You Better Grow Up)*, 1993 (detail)  
steel, glass, marble, ceramic, wood, and mirror.  
208.3 x 212.1 cm  
Photo: Peter Bellamy, ©  
The Easton Foundation /  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2015



**Fig. 8.** (L) Louise Bourgeois, *The Quartered One*, 1964-65, Bronze  
149 x 72 x 54.1 cm. Image: MoMA, New York



**Fig. 9.** (R) Doris Salcedo, *Unland: the orphan's tunic*, 1997. Wooden tables, silk, human hWair, thread  
80 x 245.1 x 97.8 cm. Image: Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), Miami



**Fig.10.** *Object: Fall, 2024* (detail)  
Mutton cloth, primer.  
3000 x 800 x 600mm.

### **Ethics and Proximity: Touch, Threshold, and Material Language**

Irigaray's writings on intimacy resonate with me, particularly her call for a between-two, a relational ethics approach that allows for difference without assimilation.<sup>13</sup> For Irigaray, intimacy is not fusion but respectful co-presence, a relation that maintains the otherness of the other. In this light, the spatial arrangements of my installations, where many objects never quite touch or are held in delicate suspension, might be read as gestures of non-intrusion. I have realised that these formal choices become ethical, in broader interpretations of implicated intimacy: How close can we come to someone or something without the collapse of a threshold? What does it mean to remain proximate without impinging upon the space they or it hold/s?

Material selection also speaks this language of intimacy. The skins and surfaces of my sculptures evoke a tactility that hovers on the edge of invitation. There is a not-quite quality—not quite soft, not quite solid, not quite animate—that opens space for intimate relation without prescription. The viewer must decide how close to physically position themselves, whether to bend, lean in, and then withdraw, echoing the ambiguity of intimacy and its refusal to be pinned down or easily articulated. Theorist Sara Ahmed reminds us that emotions “do not reside in subjects or objects but are produced as effects of circulation.”<sup>14</sup> In this way, intimacy might be understood as an effect of its encounter, a circulation of affect that binds viewer and object through sensation, memory, and the body's shifting edge.

<sup>13</sup> Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.

<sup>14</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 17, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Scale plays an essential role in these negotiations. Working at bodily scale invites recognition, a sense that the work is pitching toward the viewer's body, not in grandeur but in adjacency. The sculptures' intimacy lies in their scale, surface details, and relationship to the ground. They ask us to approach them slowly, to be noticed rather than seen. I am particularly interested in how the smaller forms create a pull, due to how they whisper rather than speak. This quietness becomes a mode of address that resists domination and instead asks for attentiveness, care, and a soft approach.

In several of the artworks, materials are formed in tension, suspended just before touch. In others, mutton cloth is pulled taut across angular supports, evoking the stretch of skin or enveloped protection. These gestures are not incidental but deliberate inquiries into matter's emotional and sensory potential. I return to the question: How might an object embody intimate touch without hands, and how might its form speak through encounter? These are not metaphorical gestures but material ones. How might the object foment tacit effect? The invitation is not to interpret but to *feel*.

### **Intimacy as Potential: Encounter, Risk, and Closeness**

Ultimately, intimacy arises through the relations between materials and form, viewer and space, bodies and boundaries. In this project, I aim to create conditions for these relations to emerge and open the possibility for intimacy to occur without obviously demanding it. What is at stake is not simply closeness but the quality of that closeness, the tension between nearness and otherness, the charge that comes from being *beside*. Intimacy, in this sense, is neither

wholly guaranteed nor wholly known. We must take risks in the viewing to feel something. Intimacy flickers in the space between us and the object/s, asking us to come close, listen, and stay a little longer.



**Fig.11.** In-studio methodology - Exploration of material intimacy - mutton cloth, primer, steel, studio floor, 2025.

## II.

### Material Responsiveness

#### // Resistance, and Care

This section explores my in-studio methodology, which focuses on how materials—particularly clay, mutton cloth, steel, and found furniture—respond, resist, and collaborate in the unfolding of sculptural form. Thinking through the fold as both a conceptual framework and physical gesture, I reflect on how processes of slumping, draping, casting, and suspending open potential spaces of intimacy, ambiguity, and care. Drawing from feminist materialist thinkers including Luce Irigaray, Karen Barad, and Barbara Bolt, I consider how material choices and gestures shape sculptural outcomes and ways of knowing through making. Across these explorations, the studio becomes a site of bodily negotiation, where attention to gravity, softness, and touch generates a language of somatic tactility, partial forms, resistant and responsive surfaces in flux, and ambient intensities. What emerges is not a resolution of form, but a sustained invitation to feel towards installation as a mode of relation.



**Fig.12.** *Object: Shelf, 2025 (detail)*  
bamboo shelf, mutton cloth.  
1200 x 800 x 300mm.

## Situating the Fold: Theory and Form

The fold has emerged as a useful tool in my thinking, as a conceptual and material gesture. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze's exploration of the fold proposes a world in which (the) inside and outside are no longer fixed but constantly enfolded, complicating traditional boundaries of subject and object, surface and depth.<sup>15</sup> In my sculptural practice, the fold manifests as both a physical phenomenon and a metaphorical operation. When I allow clay to sag and collapse into itself, or when mutton cloth falls in layered pleats and piles, I am engaging with a physical language of becoming that resists finality. These forms do not close or resolve; they remain open, intimate, and indeterminate.

The notion of the fold has become a compelling framework in my practice, materially and conceptually. It gestures toward a space that resists fixed meaning, where boundaries between inside and outside and subject and object continually shift. This refusal of containment speaks to a feminist logic that values multiplicity, opacity, and that which escapes easy articulation. Rather than offering clarity or resolution, the fold suggests a mode of knowledge that is layered, partial, and felt, rather than fully seen. In this way, my installations' folded forms are not illustrative or symbolic. Instead, they operate as zones of sensual density, where meaning remains open-ended, continuously deferring, and charged with potential.

Materially, the fold allows me to explore how sculpture can hold softness without collapsing into formlessness. In the slumped clay or soaked cloth forms, the fold retains the memory of movement, capturing the moment when a form

yields under its own weight or the pressure of my hand. It recalls a trace of time, gravity, and touch in its body. In some sculptures, folds gather densely, creating interleaved surfaces; in others, they stretch sparsely over forms, provoking tension and release. These gestures are never formal; they index care, fatigue, repetition, and responsiveness.

I foreground the fold by moving away from the sculptural as static or autonomous. Instead, I embrace a sculptural language that is relational and durational, where the folded object is incomplete; it continues to invite engagement, press back, and unfold new ways of feeling and knowing. In these semi-pliable forms, intimacy becomes palpable, not as something represented, but as something enacted and enfolded in material, as it enacts its making.

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<sup>15</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

### Material Intimacy: My Body Embraces the Studio

Materiality is an active partner in my studio practice, shaping and responding to the gestures of our making. The studio is a site of encounter, a charged zone where the body engages materials through repetition, labour, and care. The intimacy here is reciprocal; I press into the material, and it presses back. We feel each other. The rhythms of practice: kneading, soaking, stretching, and slumping become rituals of closeness, of listening to what the materials need or resist, in relation to my presence and touch. This in-studio methodology echoes Bolt's conception of material thinking, where knowledge emerges not before or after the making but through it.<sup>16</sup> In my practice, this knowing is felt deeply in the bodily actions that form the basis of sculptural inquiry. The studio becomes a live and tactile archive of these movements, decisions made not through logic alone but through sensation, friction, and touch.

### Clay: Control and Release

Clay's wet and air-dried form offers an especially vivid register for exploring the tension between control and release. Using paper clay, I begin by pounding it into long narrow slabs, a metre or so long by the approximate width of fifty centimetres, flattening it by asserting my body's weight through my hands. Then, lifting one shorter edge high, I allow the form to fold naturally, slump, bend and fall into itself. I resist the urge to correct the resulting form. These folds are not purely formal but affective, soft collapses that hold the memory of contact and temporary stasis.

<sup>16</sup> Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation*

By choosing not to fire the clay, I honour its vulnerability. It remains 'in state', a term I employ to suggest a condition of becoming rather than completion. The drying process introduces time as a collaborator; cracks may appear, and surfaces may shift, curl, or lift. The object also shrinks slightly as it moves from wet to dry. As previously mentioned, Deleuze's writing on the fold speaks to this quality, where form is not an exterior contour but an interior movement. My clay forms hold these movements, inviting viewers to encounter them as partial, present, and (perhaps) unresolved.

There is something humbling in the way the clay resists resolution. In works such as *Object: In State I* (2024) and *Object: In State II* (2024), each piece begins with intent, a sense of direction, but ends with surrender. Within these works, folds open cavities that mirror internal spaces of the body or inner thoughts. They sit low, heavy and grounded, yet carry an uncanny lightness through their apparent openness and ambiguity.



Fig.13. Object in process: *Object: In State I*, 2024



**Clockwise from left:**

**Fig.14.** *Object: In State I*, 2024  
Clay. 250 x 600 x 400mm

**Fig.15.** *Object: In State II*, 2024  
Clay. 150 x 200 x 150mm

**Fig.16.** Object in process (wet):  
*Object: In State II*, 2024

While in the drying process, the top fold of *Object: In State II* lifted. Observing it's soft unfolding over several days was fascinating; watching the material react to it's own body under atmospheric influence indicated a kind of 'gentle material entanglement'





**Clockwise from left:**

**Fig.17.** *Object: Table*, 2024  
Mutton cloth, timber side table

**Fig.18.** *Object: Drawing Donkey*, 2024  
mutton cloth, drawing donkey.

**Fig.19.** *Object: shelf*, 2025, (detail)  
mutton cloth, bamboo shelf

## Armatures from Furniture: Memory and the Readymade

In the sculptures utilising found furniture as armature, I'm interested in how domestic objects carry affective weight. These are not neutral structures; they come embedded with memory and use. I create semi-sheer surfaces that reveal and obscure internal planes by stretching raw mutton cloth over these armatures. The sculptures metamorphose with flesh-like yet architectural qualities, suggestive of veiled interior spaces.

In *Object: Drawing Donkey* and *Object: Table*, the raw mutton cloth drapes to the floor, gathering like a fabric train behind a figure. This trailing, soft, grounded, and temporal gesture conjures a sense of movement stilled. This part-readymade/part-object sculpture operates as a threshold between presence and absence, utility and speculation. Here, I find resonance in the work of Doris Salcedo, who employs found domestic furniture to stage installations that I read to be tactile sites of loss and memory, using materials not for what they are but for what they withhold.<sup>17</sup> There is, similarly, an interplay between visibility and secrecy in my works. The semi-sheer surfaces become visual veils, screens one must peer through to glimpse internal forms [Fig.18]. This dynamic relates to Irigaray's theorisation of the feminine as that which eludes complete visibility, challenging the desire for total knowledge. Through their materiality, these sculptures enact spaces of partial sight, inviting slower forms of engagement and seeing.

<sup>17</sup> "Doris Salcedo | MoMA." 2016. The Museum of Modern Art. MoMA. 2016. <https://www.moma.org/artists/7488-doris-salcedo>.

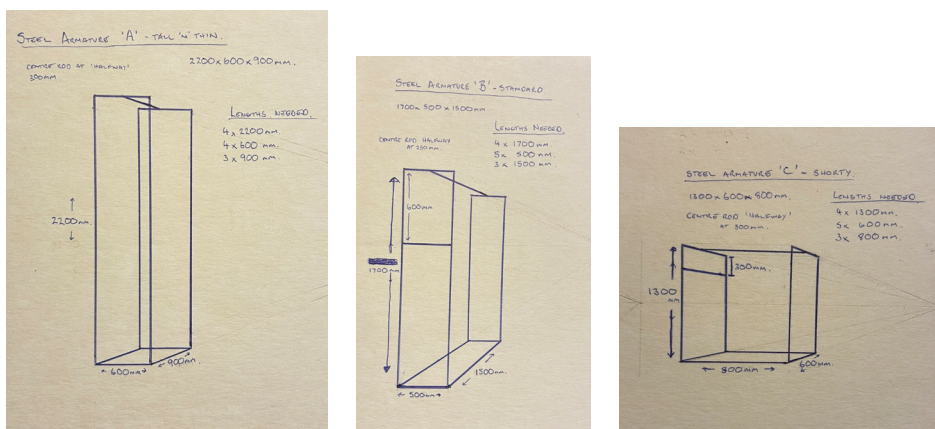


**Fig.20.** *Steel: Veil. 2024, installation view.*  
Steel, mutton cloth, primer.  
1650 x 1650 x 500mm

## Armatures from Steel: Structure and Suspension

Alongside found domestic furniture, I fabricate new steel armatures: rigid, linear forms that support the suspension of the hardened mutton cloth works. Created at bodily scale, the structures serve as frames through which cloth hangs, hardens, or droops. The juxtaposition of strength and softness, tension and fall, creates dynamic divergences. These steel armatures are not neutral skeletons or just supports for making; they choreograph the cloth's behaviour in a kind of material-support intimacy.

In *Steel: Veil* the hardened cloth leans against or stretches across the frame, refusing simple containment. In considering the agency of these steel structures, I'm called to the works of artist Eva Hesse, whose engagement with both industrial and malleable materials created works that were neither wholly



**Fig.21.** Sketches for steel armatures are currently being produced for the MVA exhibition. Each was designed to collaborate with objects in mutton cloth. I'm interested in observing the varying scales and proportions of steel in the exhibition space, as well as the potential for dynamic divergences, affect, and relationality that may emerge when positioned beside, *with*, objects.

structured nor wholly unformed.<sup>18</sup> My steel armatures operate with a similar ambiguity; they offer support but do not dominate. By engaging with Barad's notion of intra-action, the armatures invite a reading where entities do not pre-exist in their relations but emerge through them. In that, the steel and cloth are not distinct; they are always in relation, they shape one another through touch, weight, and response. The frame is not just a boundary or structure but a collaborator.

## Mutton Cloth: An Urgent and Messy Affair

I use mutton cloth<sup>19</sup> primarily for its soft, porous, and semi-unruly qualities. Preparing it for making the sculpture is a laborious process. I begin by unrolling long bolts of four to five metres before cutting each length, lengthways, to open the tubular form. This action evokes the ritualistic, almost surgical task of preparing bandages, an echo of acts of care. Submerging the cloth in tubs of acrylic primer,<sup>20</sup> I knead it under the liquid, pressing it between my hands, and squeeze out the excess fluid. This gesture, part-washing, part-massage, becomes a way of embedding care into the material process. The act has a repetitive, embodied intimacy of pressure, contact, and resistance.

<sup>18</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, *Bachelors* (MIT Press, 1999),91.

<sup>19</sup> A stretchy stockinette cloth, also referred to as 'cheese cloth,' frequently used for domestic and industrial purposes. I have grown up knowing it called 'mutton cloth' which, with its reference to meat, inherently holds domestic and bodily implications. Within the exegesis it is referred to as both cloth and mutton cloth.

<sup>20</sup> Using acrylic primer rather than plaster allows for the mutton cloth to undergo a thorough soaking without becoming brittle once it dries. The dried, 'stiffened' forms then carry varying levels of opacity, allowing for veiled light to penetrate through.

Once soaked, the cloth is laid out, hung, or draped over bulky structures, often made spontaneously from soft studio detritus/objects, to dry and harden. Each sculpture is unique in its drape, fold, and form. The primed mutton cloth retains the evidence of these process-led gestures, the tautness, creases, pulls, bulbous mounds, and drapes. These are not further manipulated or altered but preserved, a haptic record of making. The 'messiness' of the process is integral to the outcome, as precision gives way to contingency, and the object is a result of the processual action.

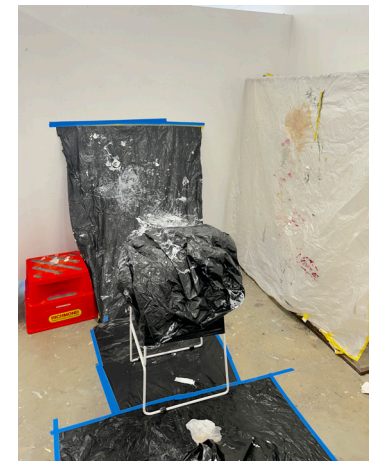
However, there is more than surface or texture at play. Casting the softened cloth over objects introduces a play between material certainty and speculative form. In some instances, the underlying shape is perceptible, embedded in the sculpture's form: a furniture edge, a shelf, a steel rod. In others, the cloth holds the memory of something no longer there, unrecognisable or unfamiliar. The resulting effect is a kind of sculptural ghosting, where presence and absence become suspended in tension. What the cloth covers or cradles is never entirely knowable; it perhaps suggests more than it shows.

This ambiguity deepens the bodily associations already latent in the process. Casting here is not the creation of a solid replica but a gentle shrouding, a skin over negative space, calling to mind a kinship with artist Rachel Whiteread's castings of empty internal architectural spaces, making those negative spaces visible.<sup>21</sup> The soaked cloth captures not only the gesture of the hand but also the echo of form, of volume, touched and then released. This veiled absence, something once supported but now gone, reconfigures casting as a durational

<sup>21</sup> Townsend, Chris, and Rachel Whiteread. *The Art of Rachel Whiteread: Edited by Chris Townsend*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004.



**Fig.22.** In-studio method of draping mutton cloth once soaked (see overleaf). Once secured high on the studio wall, the cloth is given agency to fall / drape how it will. For some, objects found in the studio will be placed beneath the draping cloth to cast the form beneath, stretching the still-wet cloth over to reach and stretch across the floor.





**Fig.23.** In-studio method of soaking mutton cloth in acrylic primer. The action pushing, kneading, squeezing the cloth evokes a sense of care and attentiveness.

trace rather than a fixed object process. In this way, the cloth does not simply wrap or rest; it creates space for a potential body, a negative presence, or a provisional architecture.

Furthermore, the processual association with healing, cutting bandages, soaking, and wrapping gives the process a bodily quality. It is as though I am ‘attending’ to the cloth, not just manipulating it for sculptural purposes. This acknowledgement aligns with the concept of care in feminist practice, not only as a thematic concern but as an embedded methodology. Care is not only in the outcome but embedded in the process: the folding, the soaking, the casting, the letting go. The cloth, for me, is a site for relationality, creating an opening for the possibility of touch and materialising unseen care.

Whiteread’s *Untitled (Pair)*, (1999) particularly came to mind as I reflected on the intimacy embedded in the casting process and its relationship to absence. The sculpture, consisting of two bronze forms that echo each other’s negative space, evokes a haunting sense of intimacy and separation. Each piece, cast from a mortuary table, carries an ambiguous, ghostly presence, suggesting a partnership or union not fully realised. The absence of bodies, implied by the empty spaces, transforms the sculptures into poignant representations of loss, memory, and the potential for intimate connection.<sup>22</sup> Its delicate balance of presence and absence resonated with me deeply, mirroring the potential for materiality and form to converse, an ambition I have for my practice. I understand *Untitled (Pair)* to speak to the idea that intimacy need not embody objects; it can exist in the spaces between, where form and absence converge to create a

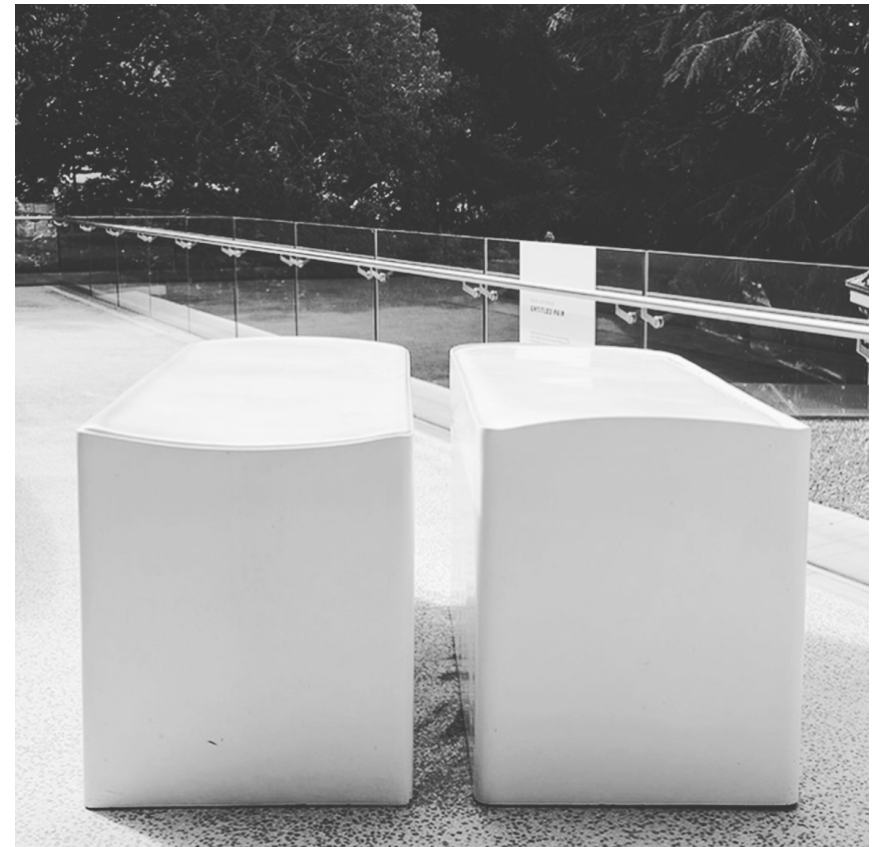
<sup>22</sup> ‘Rachel Whiteread: Untitled (Pair)’, Auckland Art Gallery, 13 November 2013, <https://www.aucklandartgallery.com/whats-on/exhibition/rachel-whiteread-untitled-pair>.

shared experience of proximity and distance. From 2013 to 2018, *Untitled (Pair)* was installed in the outdoor rooftop space at Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland Art Gallery. I would visit it frequently; each encounter leaving a profound impression, an affective positioning of intimacy.

### The Drape: Sculptural Softness and the Illusion of Flesh

The draped cloth carries with it a long sculptural history. Renaissance artists such as Donatello and Ghiberti who carved marble to resemble soft fabric, creating illusions of flesh and bodily motion underneath.<sup>23</sup> In referencing this history, I draw a deliberate line between the semi-permanent softness of cloth and the illusory softness of stone. My drapes are real; they hang, collapse, and fray. They do not feign permanence. Yet, in situ, they assume a different kind of fixity, not through the hardening of material but through the way they inhabit and command the space they occupy. The installation of a work communicates a subtle tension between the raw and sculpturally manipulated cloth; some sections remain supple and unmediated, slumping and creasing according to gravity's gentle pressure, while others are stiffened, stretched, or anchored into more assertive forms. This contrast plays out viscerally, where raw mutton cloth gestures toward vulnerability, temporality, and softness; and the primer-treated or fixed mutton cloth speaks to control, intention, and structure. Both material states resist the totality of the sculptural 'object'; instead, they remain open, mutable, and embodied.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Sculpture and Experience in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 52–55.



**Fig.24.** Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Pair)*, 1999. Bronze with white cellulose paint 900 x 770 x 2040mm (each part size)  
Image credit: Rebecca Frances Lees

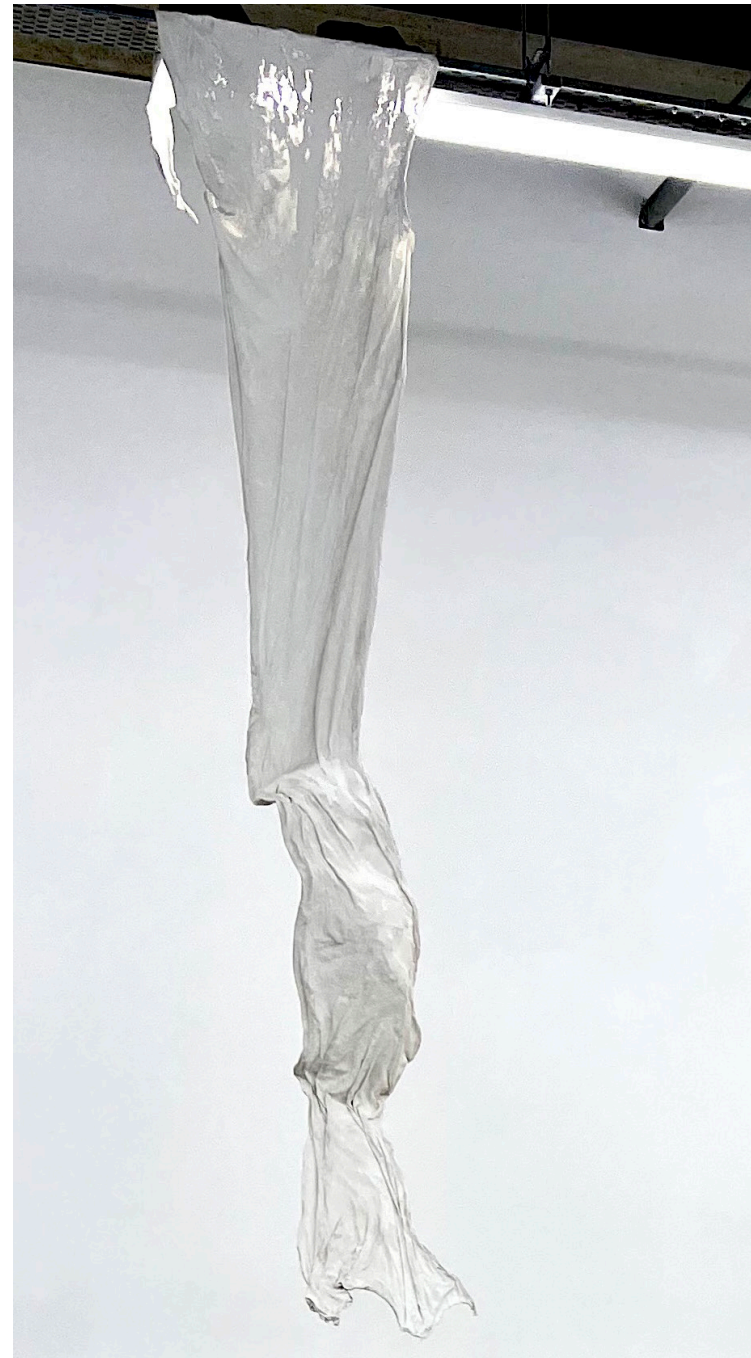


**Fig.25:** Encountering Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled (Pair)*, April 2018. Photo captured during one of my pilgrimages to *Untitled (Pair)*. I couldn't resist the urge to experience the sculpture through my body, corporeal mischief perhaps. The bronze felt cool, despite the warmth of the sun.  
Image credit: Michaela Gempton

Material choices here become a means of reflecting on power, resistance, and bodily suggestion. Where Renaissance drapery often aimed to elevate form, turning soft matter into enduring monuments, my use of cloth retains its softness, both in texture and conceptual orientation. The softened forms do not solidify or resolve; they linger in a state of partial formation, inviting viewers to reckon with ambiguity rather than clarity. They are affective, not illustrative.

Drapery instinctively hides and reveals, potentially creating only partial sight of what is veiled. This notion of veiling echoes Irigaray's refusal of complete visibility, suggesting that the feminine cannot be wholly rendered or known. Irigaray's theory disrupts the logic of transparency and instead privileges opacity, the fold, and multiplicity. With its cascading lines and tucked-away corners, the draped cloth becomes a material metaphor for this resistance. The folds are not simply formal; they are folds of meaning: seductive, withheld, and layered. They create conditions for intimacy without full access and encounters without possession. In this way, the cloth's surface performs a delicate negotiation between what is being revealed and what is protected, echoing Irigaray's call for an ethics of relationality grounded in difference, not dominance.

In *Object: Fall* (2024), the drape moves vertically, like a drawn curtain or banner, asserting a presence while concealing what lies behind it. Here, drapery operates as a barrier and a threshold, a screen that stages a moment of withholding. This verticality aligns more traditionally with the human figure, echoing bodily presence while simultaneously displacing it. The stiffened mutton cloth's descent from a high point in the gallery space suggests an extension of form, a material gesture that elongates space through height, drawing the viewer's gaze upward, then downward, tracing the fabric's sculptural fall. The high suspension also introduces



**Fig.26.** *Object: Fall*, 2024.  
Mutton cloth, primer  
3000 x 800 x 600mm

a reach or aspiration, while the loose drop gestures to collapse, surrender, and softness. Collectively, these dynamics produce a shifting visual rhythm somewhere between concealment and revelation, softness and assertion.

The interplay of tension and slack, of containment and release, becomes more intimate in *Object: Shelf* (2025), where the raw mutton cloth is internally slumping and folding, and the exterior bears the marks of tension from the stretch. The fold here is formal and affective; it contains and conceals its interior, holding something within. It gestures to care, not as a didactic concept but as a practice of holding, of sheltering material from exposure. The internal fold suggests an inwardness that is quiet, protected, and unspoken, invoking what might be felt rather than seen. The cloth becomes an active agent, not passive or decorative, but responsive to gravity, shelf, and wall, enfolding space and soliciting proximity. This relational quality, this attentiveness to support, weight, and rest, is where care becomes material.

### **Toward Installation: Whispers and Shouts**

Within this sculptural project, material thinking leads toward installation as a mode of articulation. The sculptures no longer stand alone but whisper to one another across space through arrangement and placement. Cloth from one piece might echo the sag of another; clay forms may suggest the softness implied in a more distantly located drape. These installations are not declarations but conversations containing subtle, affective murmurs that accumulate. Yet some gestures deliberately shout. The cloth's scale, the steel's starkness, and the frame's sharp angles are bold and interruptive. These sculptures refuse invisibility. This interplay between quiet and loud, between detail and structure, is one of the ways of composing space. I think of artists like Mona Hatoum and Louise

Bourgeois, whose installations often intersect with concepts of vulnerability and assertion.<sup>2425</sup>

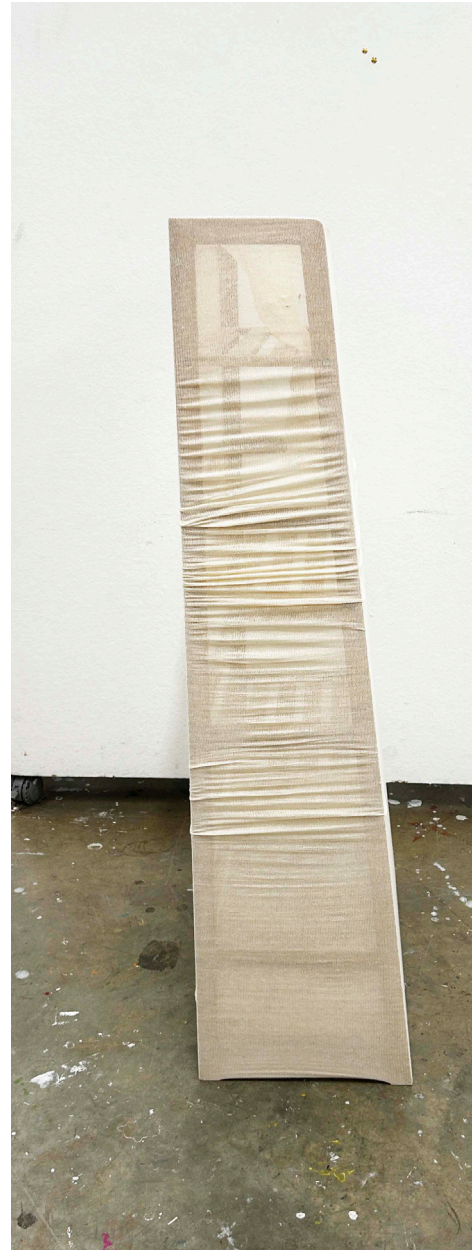
The practice of installation within the scope of my project attempts this balance. The objects in relation to one another require movement, bodily negotiation, and my attention to their details. I want to invite viewers into relationships that are not didactic but felt. Each element, whether soaked and stiffened cloth, a steel frame, raw mutton cloth enveloping armatures of ready-made furniture, or slumped clay, carries with it the memory of its making and the possibility of relation. Through resistance and responsiveness, they aim to generate form and feeling.



**Fig.27.** *Object: Shelf*, 2025 (detail) bamboo shelf, mutton cloth. 3000 x 800 x 600mm.

<sup>24</sup> Archer, Michael. *Mona Hatoum*. Phaidon Press, 1997.

<sup>25</sup> Bernadac, Marie-Laure. *Louise Bourgeois*. Flammarion, 1996.



**Fig.28.** *Object: Shelf, 2025*  
bamboo shelf, mutton  
cloth. 3000 x 800 x 600mm

### III.

#### Material Proximity and Sculptural Intimacy

##### // A Shift Toward Installation

This section traces a significant shift in my thesis research, transitioning from an exploration of what I described as catharsis and intimacy within the abject subject through singular sculptural objects to a focus on the greater affective possibilities of an installation-led practice. As stated earlier, the turn toward installation reflected a growing awareness of how three-dimensional conventions within an assemblage of sculptural objects and armatures can elicit affective situations. This, in turn, expanded the project's understanding of intimacy in visual arts practice, as a material and spatial encounter.

#### Wax and Hair: Initial Explorations of the Abject

My early research centred on exploring the psychological and material interplay between intimacy and the abject, drawing on Julia Kristeva's writings on abjection as a conceptual and affective framework.<sup>26</sup> Kristeva's theory of abjection, where bodily boundaries are transgressed, and the familiar becomes unsettling, offered a powerful means of approaching materials and forms that evoke discomfort and emotional resonance.

However, as my sculptural work progressed, I realised that the affective register I hoped to evoke, one of intimate bodily connection, was not being realised. Rather, the works began to collapse into objects of potential revulsion, operating more strongly within the field of the grotesque or confrontation.

While abjection can carry an emotional charge, I found myself wrestling with a contradiction: The forms I was creating were disallowing the intimacy I was seeking.

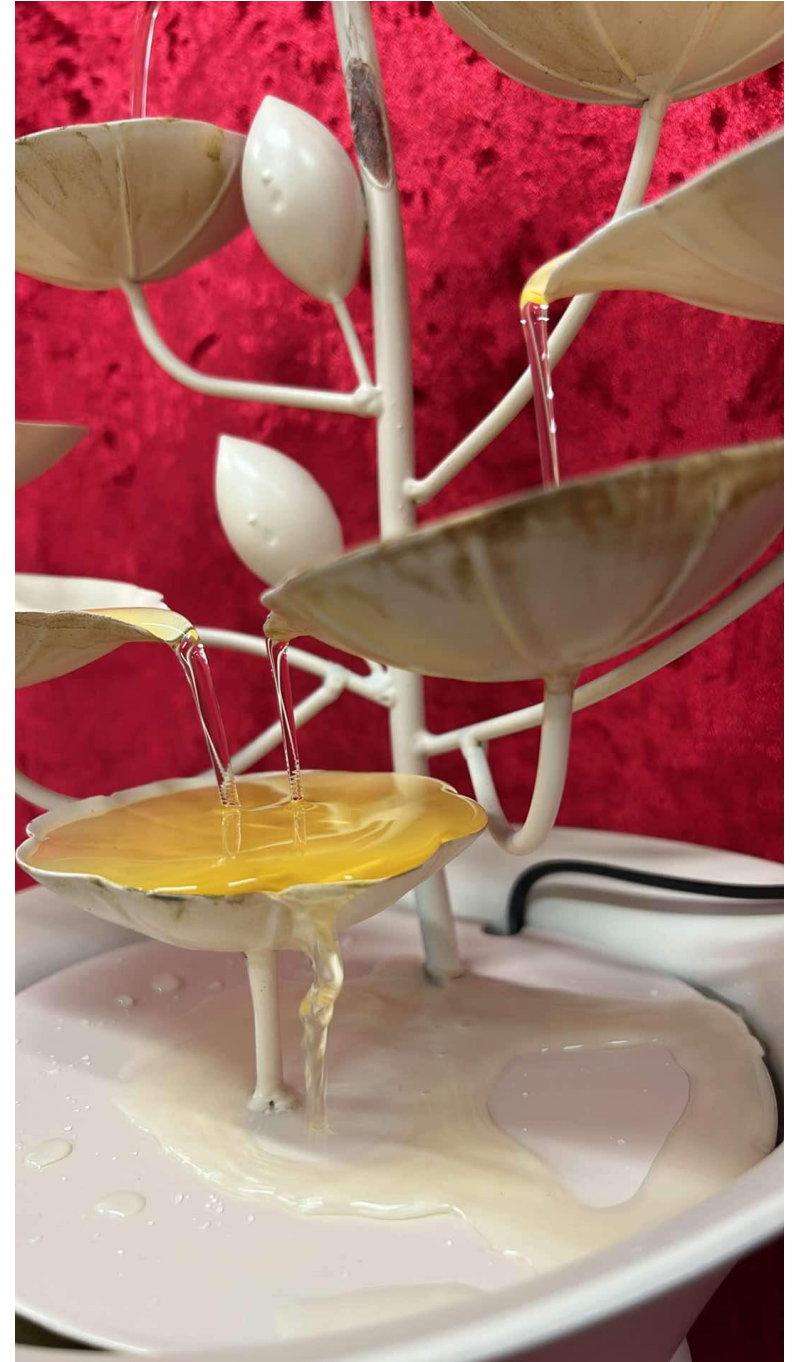


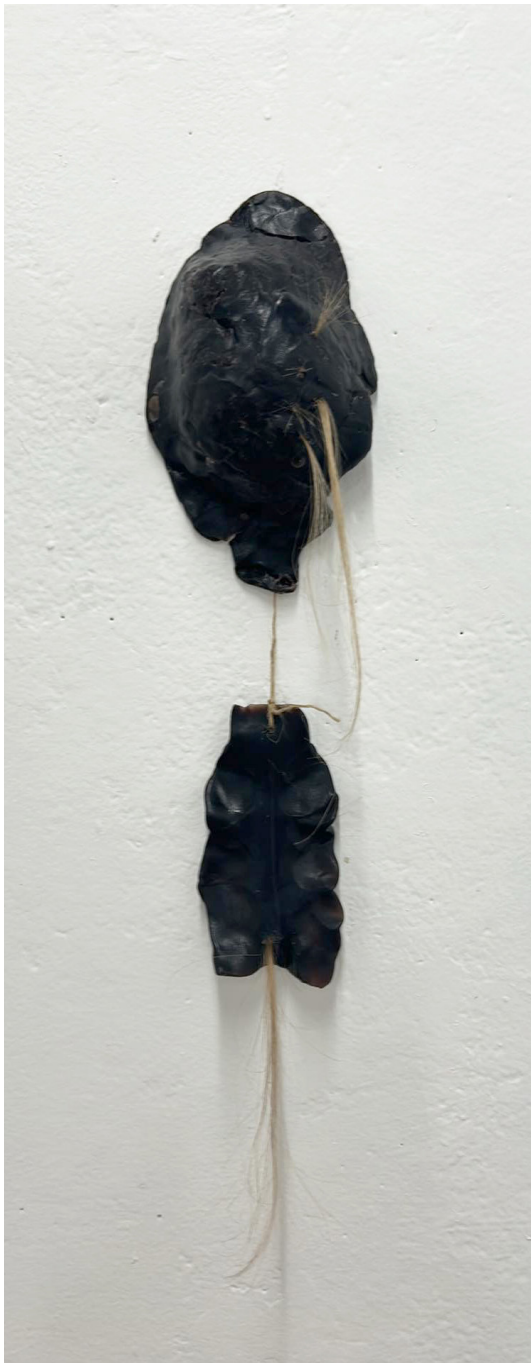
**Fig.29.** *Wax: Hair 1*, 2024.  
Microcrystalline wax, hair.  
220 x 110 x 60mm

<sup>26</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1982).



**Fig.30.** *Piss Fountain*, 2024.  
Ready-made fountain, aerosol paint,  
dye, water, parfum.  
480 x 380 x 300mm  
Installation view. Right: Detail  
Image credit: Monique Redmond





**Fig.31.** In-studio exploration of wax and hair, cloth, and early armatures. These early works built the foundation for situating notions of intimacy and catharsis within the project.

*Piss Fountain*, felt valuable sculpturally however, it was at this point, along with the works in wax and hair, that I became aware my methodology had tipped too far into producing a representational language with a limited vocabulary for intimate encounter.

My in-studio presentation for Talk Week 2024, a programmed AUT VA series of talks and critiques for which guests from the broader arts industry would attend. It was a privilege to welcome Abigail Aroha Jensen into my space, where a valuable critique unfolded, along with the attendance of AUT Visual Arts students and professors. The reading from the group was deeply informative— notions of horror, kitsch (velvet), mortuary tables, revulsion, parlour, humour. On reflection, this experience sowed the seeds for moving into an installation-led practice. Alongside early material exploration with mutton cloth, I created a collection of gold fabric 'bags' that contained whoopee cushions, suspended from the found steel structure (repurposed for later works in cloth). Guests were invited to squeeze the golden bags, and were delighted by the effect.



Materials such as wax and donated hair were central to this phase of making. Wax warmed by my hands retained touch and left a residue, qualities that felt intimately corporeal. Hair, too, carried a trace of the individual, a sense of bodily proximity and identity. The act of embedding gifted strands of hair into wax carried ritualistic and relational significance, as I sourced these from people dear to me and friends within my studio cohort. However, the resulting sculptures felt jarring. Responses from my peers suggested these works leaned heavily into the lineage of abject art and the characteristic of repulsion.

The intimacy I had experienced in making, the quiet moments of moulding wax, of receiving and incorporating hair fragments from others, was rendered mute by the final sculpture. These works read too quickly, too singularly. They delivered an immediate impact but then offered little space for lingering, which is what I found wanting in the work.<sup>27</sup>

### **Emergence of a New Vocabulary: Clay, Cloth, and Armatures**

A pivotal shift occurred through continual material explorations in the studio. Clay, cloth, and structural armatures emerged as agents of a new kind of material dialogue, in which intimacy arose not from confronting bodily boundaries but through the sculptural conventions of mass, weight, gravity, and form. A lump of clay rendered flat-edged and solid, formed through the repetitive wedging and reforming of the material into a manageable mass, began to speak in its own language. Unlike the earlier wax pieces which gestured towards representation, this form held itself with a kind of embodied confidence. It no longer pointed

<sup>27</sup> While these works may still hold relevance for future iterations of my practice, within the context of this thesis, I sought a richer, more nuanced vocabulary around sculptural intimacy, one that allowed for quiet persistence, for presence that could unfold over time.

toward intimacy; it simply was. The clay communicated through its mass, its own internal structure, its density, and its capacity to receive and hold marks. Its materiality was not a metaphor; it was presence.

Similarly, my work with cloth, soaking long strips of mutton cloth in primer and draping them over structures, engaged the entirety of my body in the making acts of folding, lifting, and draping. The process demanded immediacy, as the cloth would set quickly. This urgency, the negotiation between myself and the material, constituted a shared intimacy. The cloth became both a surface and a form that contained, enveloped, and held. I began translating this draping process into clay. Large slabs were pounded, lifted, and dropped, forming folds and weighty



**Fig.32:** The ‘lump’ of clay that had a seismic impact on my practice, as described above. Sadly, I repurposed the clay soon after I photographed it, intended only to be a reference for my clay process. It was on sharing the image with my supervisor, Ingrid Boberg, and the discussion that ensued, that I recognised its continued significance as we unfolded the conceptual framework for the project

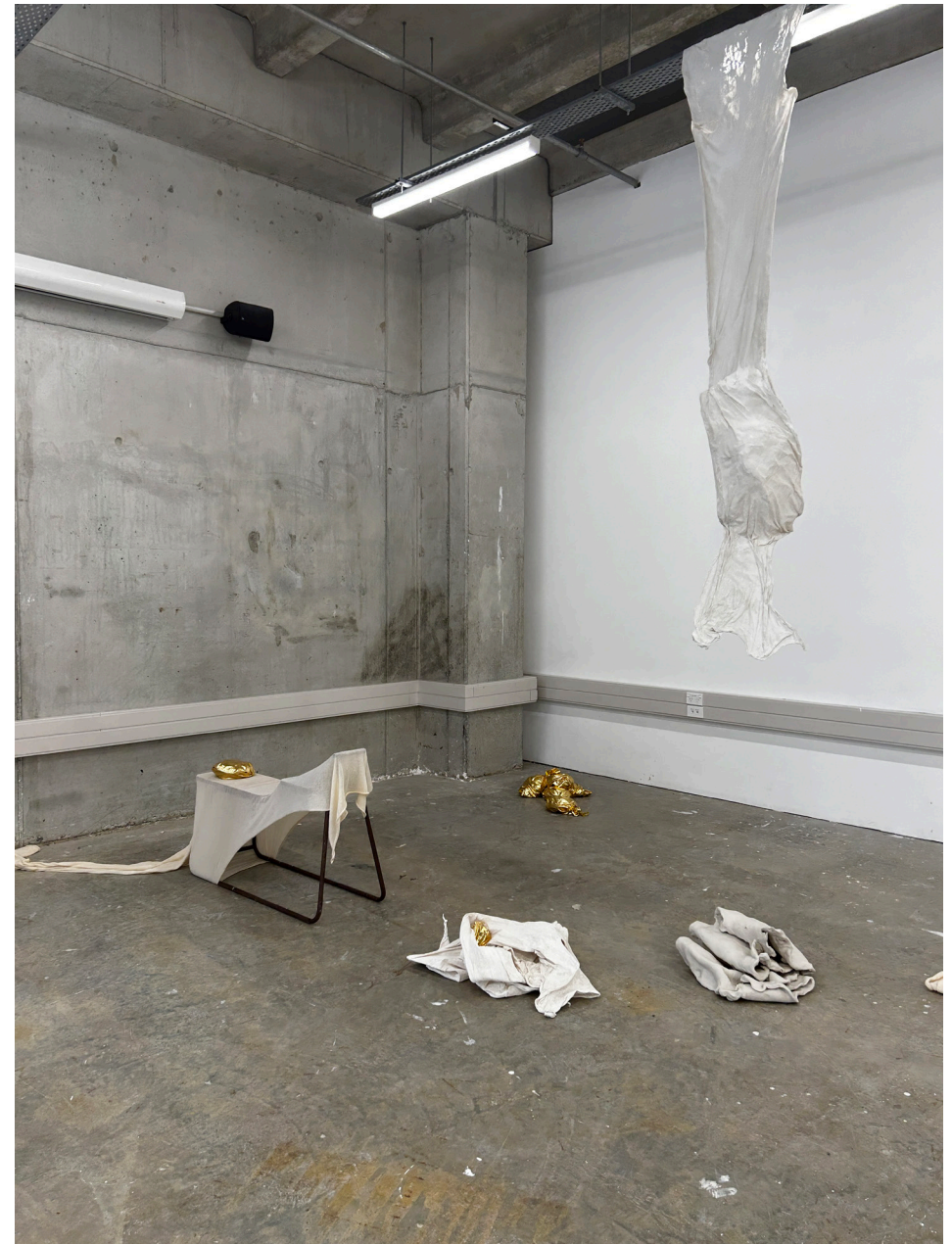
masses that read as both gestural and structural. The act of letting gravity assist the making produced forms that spoke of softness and tension, of holding and collapsing.

The act of shrouding ready-made furniture pieces in cloth extended this logic. The furniture utilised: tables, chairs, and shelves, became structures that shaped and received the drape. These sculptures no longer appeared as metaphors for the body but as entities with their own interior language; they carried tension, surface, and scale. The enclosing cloth planes over armatures born from furniture created interior volumes that hinted at breath, at space held and released. In developing these new ways of working with materials, the expression of intimacy shifted from an evocation of the abject or emotional catharsis to an exploration of a material condition: the touch between surfaces, the pull of weight, the breath between forms.

### Installation and the Intimacy of Spatial Relations

This transformation reached a critical point during the MVA Exhibition Practice presentations in November 2024,<sup>28</sup> where I installed these sculptural objects in a gallery-like setting. Initially, I approached the placement of each work as though it were a solitary sculpture. However, as I moved them, sometimes by mere centimetres, I noticed that new spatial relations were emerging. Unintentionally, I had begun to install with a method I came to call ‘Just So’, where the arrangement and spatial dynamics became instinctual and iterative. It was only upon reflection that I realised the sculptures were actively speaking to each

<sup>28</sup> ‘Exhibition Practice’ is a programmed event in the MVA thesis year that offers the opportunity to practice installing works. Scheduled critiques are then held. I was fortunate that the entire undergraduate sculpture studio was made available to me.



**Fig.33.** ‘Objects’ (various), EP installation view, 2024, Image credit: Monique Redmond

other, forming relationships. They leaned into one another, shared the weight of breath between them, and negotiated eyelines and thresholds. Their proximities mattered. What had previously felt silent was now discursive in arrangement.

In this constellation, the language of scale, weight, gravity, and form is key. The installation format didn't just present the sculptures; it activated them. These relational dynamics created atmospheres of intimacy that were not tethered to the body but nonetheless profoundly bodily in how they were felt. The spatial arrangements held pauses, echoes, and remnants of gestures, while the planes and negative spaces between works became as readable as the objects themselves. In these gaps, intimacy resided.

### **Feminist Thought: Material Encounters**

In articulating this shift from object to installation, from abjection to intimacy, the writings of Irigaray offer further resonance. Irigaray insists on the importance of embodied difference, of a space between subjects that is not collapsed but held in relational tension.<sup>29</sup> This 'threshold' space that occurs not through merging but through respectful proximity is precisely where my sculptural objects intend to dwell. The installation becomes a site where objects touch without subsuming each other, where material presence holds the potential for encounter without resolution. This mirrors the kind of intimacy that my practice intends to unfold through a sculptural language that avoids assimilation or dominance, allowing for quiet co-presence.

<sup>29</sup> Irigaray, Luce. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference: Luce Irigaray ; Translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993. pp. 34–58



**Fig.34.** *Steel: Veil*, 2024, (detail), installation view.  
Steel, mutton cloth, primer.  
1650 x 1650 x 500mm  
Image credit: Monique Redmond

I have continued to explore how each material might speak more fluently within this language of installation. I now listen more attentively, waiting to hear if a work is whispering or shouting, resting or reaching. In doing so, I return to the central question that quietly underpins this thesis: Can intimacy be sculpted? And if so, how do space, proximity, and materiality become the grammar through which it speaks?



**Fig.35.** 'Objects' (various),  
Studio installation view, 2024

## IV.

### Installation as Encounter

#### // Space, Scale, and Relational Awareness

This section focuses on the spatial and temporal qualities of installation, considering how the bodily experience of form, scale, and spatial configuration might engender a mode of relational awareness. In the slow unfolding of sculptural encounters, I suggest that the viewer becomes implicated in the work, not as a passive observer but as a co-presence.

The phrase ‘piano, piano,’ an Italian expression meaning ‘slowly, slowly,’<sup>30</sup> offers an apt metaphor for the temporality of installation. It gestures toward the gentle unfolding of encounter, the attunement to subtlety, and the ethics of moving with care. Installation, as a medium, asks for this kind of attention. It slows us down. Unlike singular objects placed on plinths, installation operates through spatial immersion, haptic proximity, and embodied negotiation. The viewer is not outside the work but inside its conditions. This blurring of boundaries between artwork and environment, object and body, is central to my intention. Installation is not the culmination of my sculptural work but its expansion, a means of holding multiple gestures in tension and conversation.

#### Installation as a Relational Field

To think of installation as a relational field means positioning the viewer as an active agent in meaning-making, and it means that the work is not complete until entered or interacted with. Curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud’s concept of “relational aesthetics” foregrounds contemporary art’s intersubjective

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<sup>30</sup> A phrase frequently (and softly) spoken to me when I’ve been moving in a state of haste while in the presence of three wise and important women in my life, my mother, and two older friends. It’s become a kind of mantra for the way I approach the many facets of life if (when) they become unruly.

dimensions.<sup>31</sup> While Bourriaud focuses on socially engaged practices, his analysis of the encounter as a site of relation, co-presence, and meaning generated through interaction remains productive within the scope of my project. My installations similarly privilege the encounter, though the encounter is not necessarily with another person but a charged field of relations between sculptural objects. Each object gestures toward another; they lean, echo, and respond across space, forming an internal dialogue that unfolds through material proximity and spatial tension within the installation space. In this way, Bourriaud’s framework supports an understanding of installation as a dynamic ecology of relations, where intimacy is enacted through subtle material attunement rather than direct social exchange.

#### Intimacy of Encounter: Spatial Choreographies

The positioning of my works created at bodily scale plays a vital role in how the installations within the project are perceived and felt. Large-scale cloth forms drape and fall from the ceiling and extend across the space and floor, altering the viewer’s path and field of vision. Some elements hover above eye level, while others slump low, drawing attention to the object’s volume, its limitations, extensions, and proximity to the ground.

Artist Phyllida Barlow’s use of scale and improvised form offers similar conditions of encounter, where structures loom and lean, never fully settled. Barlow’s installations often occupy the gallery with a deliberate sense of awkwardness, rejecting idealised notions of symmetry or permanence.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Collection documents sur l’art, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Les Presses du Réel, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Perry, Colin. ‘Phyllida Barlow: 1944-2023.’ *Art Monthly*, no. 466 (2023): 22.

In my reading of her works, I understand my objects in installation to share a similar intention for productive instability in the way forms stretch, sag, or resist; they resist conventions of architectural or sculptural resolution. In some works, stiffened mutton cloth hanging from above partially obstructs the natural line of sight, the raw mutton cloth is allowed to fall where it may, the clay to crack, and the steel to be both support and skeleton. When the viewer must alter their path, crouch down, or sidestep an object, they become physically entangled in the work's logic.

The body is no longer a detached observer but a navigating presence, absorbing the affective signals of material and space. I often think of installation as choreography, not a fixed sequence, but a score of potential movements. The arrangement of cloth, clay, and steel creates spatial rhythms that unfold as I and the viewer move. These rhythms are not overtly theatrical but slow, subtle, and recursive. One might circle a form, glimpse another through a veil of fabric, or return to a previously seen object from a different angle. This spatial layering draws on writer and scholar Sara Ahmed's writing on orientation and how bodies inhabit space.

This spatial layering draws on writer and scholar Sara Ahmed's writing on orientation and how bodies inhabit space. In her phenomenological approach, Ahmed explores how the lines we follow, the objects we are directed toward, and the spaces we repeatedly occupy shape our bodily experiences. Orientation, for her, is not simply informed by physical direction but by the ways our histories, habits, and social contexts guide perception.<sup>33</sup> The

<sup>33</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), pp 27-28



**Fig.36.** Phyllida Barlow, *Undercover 2*, 2020, installation view, *Frontier Haus der Kunst*, 2021  
timber, plywood, cement, scrim, plaster, polyurethane foam, paint, PVA, calico, steel  
Dimensions not listed  
Image credit: Maximilian Geuter

installations I am creating within the scope of this thesis project seek to reorient the viewer, not through dramatic imposition but by gently disrupting expected spatial alignments. In diverting habitual lines of sight and movement, the work draws attention to the embodied nature of spatial experience. This subtle reconfiguration intends to invite viewers toward an awareness of how their position and movement co-constitute the meanings that emerge in the encounter.

### **Architectures of Attention**

The installation becomes an architecture of attention, a constructed environment that directs, diffuses, and refracts the viewer's gaze. Rather than commanding attention through spectacle, my works ask for attunement. Raw and stiffened mutton cloth stretched over armatures form semi-transparent surfaces that reveal and obscure their interiors; the viewer must approach, peer through, or walk around them. This dynamic tension between concealment and revelation is central to how the work generates intimacy. Here, offering a valuable reference, artist Rachel Whiteread's castings of interior spaces, which we don't usually register as objects, such as the interior volumes of mattresses, bathtubs, and stairwells. Her practice renders the voids visible, turning presence into form.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the use of raw mutton cloth and the suspended, stiffened cloth works gesture toward what lies within or behind, without fully disclosing it. These partial views activate curiosity, affect, and the desire to know, touch, and move closer.

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<sup>34</sup> Townsend, Chris. *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*. Thames and Hudson, 2004. ProQuest Ebook Central.

### **The Slow Unfolding of Affect**

The temporality of installation is slow. It resists the glance, the instant capture. As with the phrase 'piano, piano,' the work asks to be encountered incrementally, layer by layer. Affect is not delivered in a single gesture or viewpoint but accumulates through the repetition of folds, steps, and glimpses. This slowness is not synonymous with ease. It can also produce some discomfort, disorientation, or uncertainty in the not-knowing. The viewer's inability to see everything simultaneously, to locate a single vantage point, creates a generative sense of unease. For me, it mirrors the complexity of intimacy, which unfolds in time.

### **Material as Spatial Agent**

Each material in the installation carries spatial agency. The soaked cloth dictates its drape; the steel determines limits and extensions; the clay is settled by gravity. These materials are not passive but active in their agency. Here, Barad's concept of intra-action calls me back to where agency is not located in individual entities but emerges through relational entanglement. The spatial logic of the installation is not imposed but discovered through this entanglement. As I arrange the sculptural objects in the exhibition space, I respond to the emergent behaviours of materials: how the cloth sags, how the steel leans, and how the clay's weight anchors the floor. With a similar approach to materials, Eva Hesse's *Contingent* (1969) hovers between sculpture and installation, intimacy and abstraction. In an interpretation drawn from art critic and theorist Rosalind Krauss' reading of the work, I understand that Hesse's suspended forms bear the trace of bodily presence while resisting figuration. They act as both skin and screen, intimate and withdrawn.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, *Bachelors* (MIT Press, 1999),91.

Working with a similar understanding of the threshold, my installations imply an intended sense of the body, where form is affective but not didactic.

### Resolving Through Relation

The resolution of an object or the installation does not mean closure. It means opening: toward relation, toward feeling, toward attunement. As a compositional mode, installation allows me to hold multiple temporalities and affects within a single field. Relations fluctuate, not adhering, continuously becoming with the presence of the viewer, the conditions of light, and the scale of the exhibition space. Installation becomes a mode of resolving through relation, not by solving or completing, but by dwelling with. This notion resonates with feminist ethics of care, emphasising responsiveness, interdependence, and the value of attending to what is present. To install is not simply to place; it is to host, to prepare the conditions for encounter.

In thinking through installation as a mode of encounter, I return to the idea of slowness as a productive quality. The phrase 'piano, piano' becomes a mantra for approaching making and experiencing work: slowly, carefully, attentively. The installation does not shout its meanings but invites the viewer into a murmured conversation, a negotiation of space, material, and self. Installation transforms viewing into co-presence through scale, spatial configuration, and material responsiveness. It draws the viewer not into spectacle but into relation. In this space, awareness is not abstract but embodied, not imposed but felt. The installed gesture is a gesture of care, a way of gathering materials, bodies, and affects into a shared space of attention.



**Fig.37.** Eva Hesse, *Contingent*, 1969  
Cheesecloth, latex, fibreglass  
3500 x 6300 x 1090mm (overall)  
Image Credit: NGA, National Gallery of Australia

## V.

### Practice as Knowledge

#### // Material Thinking and the Ethics of Making

As I move toward the end phase of this thesis research project, I reflect on the notion of installation not only as a site of encounter but as a mode of thinking, a field in which knowledge is not abstracted from material but constituted through it. In this final section, I reflect on how the slow, relational, and materially responsive practices that have shaped this body of work speak to a broader understanding of practice as a way of *knowing*.

Bolt's *material thinking* articulation again offers a crucial framework. For Bolt, practice-led research does not translate ideas into form but generates meaning through the processes of making.<sup>36</sup> In this way, the sculptural gestures and spatial arrangements that comprise my installations are not simply the outcomes of thought but are unfolding. The soaking of cloth, the folding of clay, and the precarious balancing and placing of forms on steel armatures are all acts through which thought and material are, as Barad asserts, entangled.<sup>37</sup>

This entanglement is not metaphorical but physical. The resistance of clay, the collapse of cloth, and the stubborn stillness of metal all demand a response in the form of an object. Making becomes a conversation, not a monologue. It requires attunement, patience, and the capacity to dwell in not-knowing. In these moments, knowledge emerges not as a definitive solution but as a trace, a residue of having been with the material, having listened, adjusted, and responded.

<sup>36</sup> Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation*, 1-2

<sup>37</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 26.

#### Practising Care

I see attunement of practising care as a guiding ethic. The gestures that shape my making and installations are not neutral but grounded in a politics of care. Draping, stretching, holding, and cutting, while often practical and formal decisions, are also acts of relation. For instance, cutting cloth recalls the cutting of bandages in my earlier experiences of caring for loved ones, as outlined in early research into intimacy and the abject. These echoes do not dictate meaning but resonate through the material, offering a quiet trace of lived experience. There is no metaphorical form of these personal recollections for the viewer to grasp onto other than, perhaps, these making processes as evidence of care.

The installation becomes a site of encounter and remembrance, an architecture in which past gestures of care can be reactivated, abstracted, and reconfigured. There is no spectacle in these acts, no theatricality. Their meaning lingers in the folds, the sagging of cloth, and the spaces left between forms. I understand this as a practice of intimacy; it is about my willingness to remain proximate to complexity, dwell in ambiguity, and make space for encounters without mastery.

#### Making as Thinking

Through the project's unfolding, I have learned that installation is not a means of displaying sculptural objects but a way of thinking with them. The spatial decisions made in the studio, how one form leans toward another, how cloth stretches across a room, or how light moves through a semi-transparent surface, are not secondary within the work or installation. This realisation has been gradual. As the project unfolded, I became less interested in the singular sculptural object and more drawn to the field it inhabits: its relations, dependencies, and the conditions it generates.

This shift echoes Erin Manning's reflections on the "minor gesture," a concept I understand to value the imperceptible, the emergent, and the contingent.<sup>38</sup> It is through the minor gesture that the field of relation is activated, and it is in this field that installation finds its force. What matters is not the object in isolation but how it leans, folds, drapes, interrupts, or yields to what surrounds it. In my practice, I see this in the interplay of materials: Soaked cloth slumps toward the floor, clay gathers in weighted folds, and steel, even in its stoic stillness, holds. These are not simply aesthetic choices but thinking actions. They speak not only of form but of conditions such as gravity, proximity, vulnerability, and the body that senses them.

### Knowledge in the Fold

Returning to the literal and conceptual fold has become a recurring motif in this project. Whether in cloth, clay, or space, the fold is a site of potential, a liminal zone between inside and outside, presence and withdrawal. Gilles Deleuze's philosophical writings on the fold have informed much contemporary thinking on form and the concept of becoming.<sup>39</sup> The fold in my work is felt before it is understood. It is through folding, unfolding, and re-folding that I learn what a material might do, how a space might hold, or how a body might move. This practice of folding is also a way of holding—holding ambiguity, contradiction, and memory, to offer a space in which the objects may briefly dwell in the in-between.

<sup>38</sup> Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 9.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Zepke and Simon O'Sullivan, eds., *Deleuze and Contemporary Art* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

### A Practice That Dwells

Reflecting on this project, I discovered that what has emerged is not a fixed position or transparent methodology but a sensibility that moves slowly, relationally, and with care. The installations do not seek to convey a singular message but to offer a space for attention and attunement to material, space, body, and affect. Practice, in this sense, becomes a way of being with. It is not an answer but a holding space.



**Fig.38.**

*Steel: Veil, 2024,* installation view. Steel, mutton cloth, primer. 1650 x 1650 x 500mm

*Object: Veil, 2024,* installation view. Mutton cloth, primer. 900 x 400 x 150mm

*Object: Wax + Hair Mise en +, 2024.* Microcrystalline wax, hair 700 x 300 x 200mm

## Conclusion

This project, *Unfurling Material Affect and Intimacy Through Sculpture and Installation*, began with an enquiry into how I might encounter intimacy through a sculptural and spatial practice; how relations between bodies, materials, and environments might generate a 'felt' knowledge. Over time, what has unfolded is not a definitive set of answers but a slow and somatic 'in-studio' methodology that privileges attentiveness, responsiveness, and the atmospheric registers of encounter. Through each of the project stages, practice has become a way of thinking with materials and environments, resisting resolution in favour of openness and processual unfolding.

Within the exegesis, I have explored how intimacy can emerge not from clarity or closeness alone, but from partiality, proximity, and the shifting relations between material, viewer, and space. Beginning with a turn away from singular object forms toward installation as a relational modus operandi, an evolving understanding of intimacy as an affective, contingent condition is now guiding the practice. Feminist materialist thinkers such as Irigaray, Barad, Bolt, and Ahmed, have enabled me to consider how bodily knowledge entangles with material engagement's textures, resistances, and temporalities.

In-studio processes such as slumping, folding, suspending, and casting have not served a purely formal end, but have supported an ethics of attentiveness. Making became a dialogue with gravity, weight, mass, surface, and softness, where the sculptural form arises not from imposition but from a negotiation between forces. In this context, the practice of installation allowed an expanded field of relation; a space where gestures, materials, and bodies come into encounter without being subsumed into coherence.

In this field, ambient intensities and somatic awareness take shape, where touch, breath, and proximity register as felt ways of knowing. The objects do not aim to resolve these ideas, but to hold them; to offer sites where perception and presence can unfold slowly. The intention is not to decode or interpret but to feel and move with. The installations, therefore, become propositions for how we might dwell differently with the material world; not as distant observers, but as implicated participants.

In conclusion, this research has been less about arriving somewhere and more about learning to remain within a state of intimate and responsive unfolding. It is not an answer but a holding space. In this sense, the practising is not a path to knowledge but a mode of affect relation; an intimate, uncertain, ongoing attunement; a way of being *with*.

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Image credit: Maximilian Geuter. Image removed due to copyright  
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## Appendix

### // Exhibition Documentation

#### Exhibition // Floor Sheet information

*Unfurling*

*// Material Affect and Intimacy*

Rebecca Frances Lees

MVA Exhibition 2025

Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery

19 - 24 June, 2025

#### Materials:

Mutton cloth, primer, steel, clay, ready-made armatures

#### Selected objects in installation:

*Object: Shelf*

*Object: Drawing Donkey*

*Object: Table*

*Object: Table.low.*

*Object: Table.M.R.*

*Steel: Veil*

*Steel: Fold*

*Steel: Arc*

*Object: Arc*

*Object: Fall*

*Object: Veil*

*Object: In State I*

*Object: In State II*

... Et cetera //

The exhibition, *Unfurling // Material Affect and Intimacy*, culminated my research into intimacy, material affect, and relational encounter through installation.

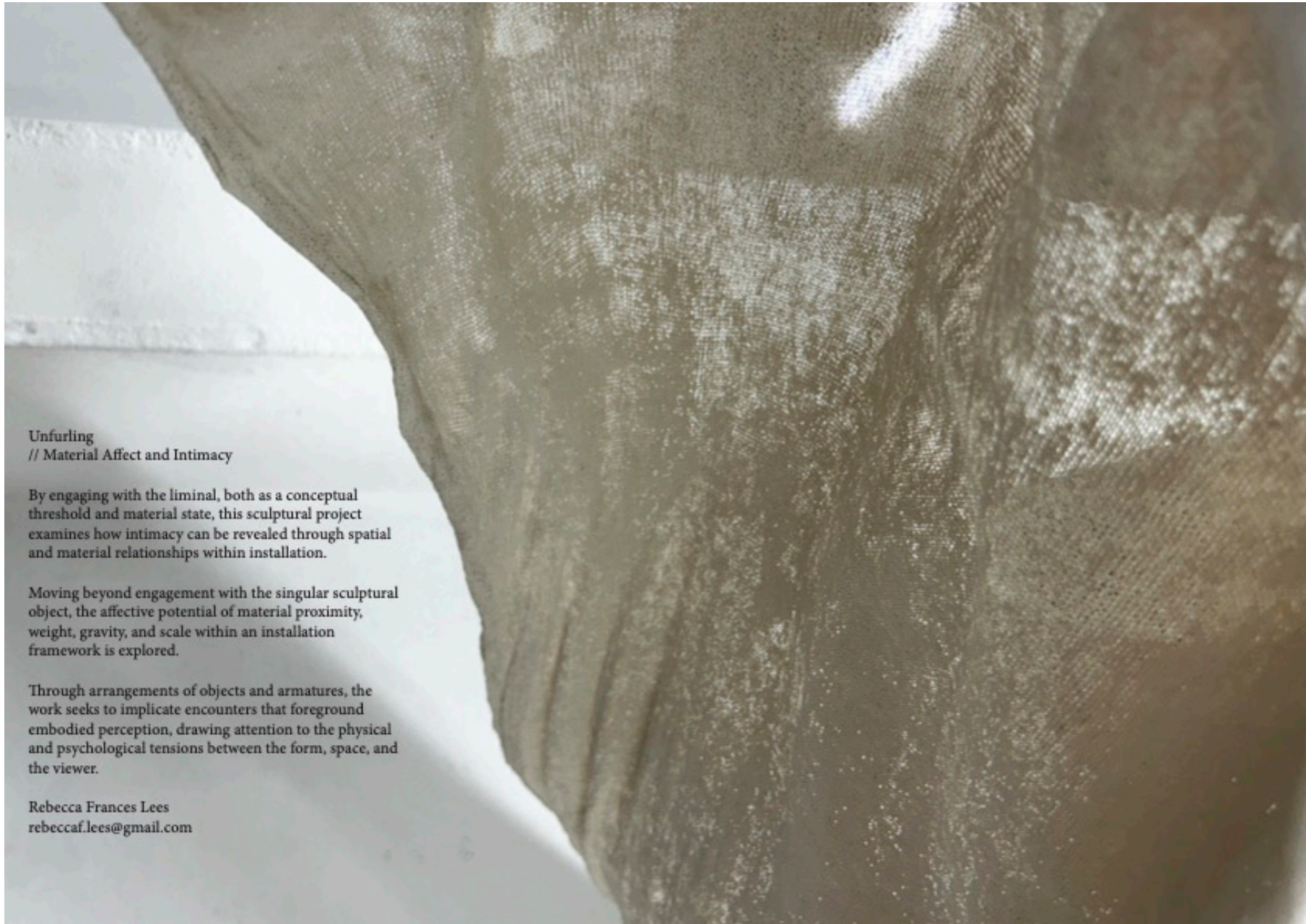
The assembled works: suspended cloth, fabricated steel armatures, slumped clay forms, and veiled armatures from ready-made furniture, were not conceived as singular objects but as elements in dialogue with one another and the gallery architecture. Their arrangement across the space was central to how intimacy emerged, not as an explicit subject but as an affective condition that unfolded through proximity, scale, and the viewer's embodied navigation.

The suspended, stiffened mutton cloth forms drew attention to gravity and weight, with a tenderness in surrendering to these forces. Draped and stretched over armatures and between gallery fixtures and armatures, they occupied a liminal state between structure and collapse, holding tension between exposure and shelter. The steel frames provided skeletal architectures; thresholds and voids rather than enclosures, that invited viewers to consider not only what was materially present but also the negative spaces between. In these gaps, intimacy appeared as a potentiality, a relational awareness that arises in the encounter between body, material, and spatial threshold.

Rather than presenting a unified or monumental statement, the exhibition worked through multiplicity and dispersal. Each element maintained its presence yet contributed to a wider rhythm across the gallery space. This orchestration of fragments enacted what I had pursued throughout my practice: a slow, responsive negotiation with materials, where meaning and affect are not imposed but allowed to unfurl. Standing within the installation, I recognised how the work had moved beyond the singular object that initiated my inquiry, toward an installation practice that acknowledges intimacy as a condition of relation; between things, between spaces, and between bodies.



*Unfurling // Material Affect and Intimacy.*  
Installation view.  
Artist's own image.



Unfurling  
// Material Affect and Intimacy

By engaging with the liminal, both as a conceptual threshold and material state, this sculptural project examines how intimacy can be revealed through spatial and material relationships within installation.

Moving beyond engagement with the singular sculptural object, the affective potential of material proximity, weight, gravity, and scale within an installation framework is explored.

Through arrangements of objects and armatures, the work seeks to implicate encounters that foreground embodied perception, drawing attention to the physical and psychological tensions between the form, space, and the viewer.

Rebecca Frances Lees  
rebeccaf.lees@gmail.com

Ephemera for  
*Unfurling // Material  
Affect and Intimacy.*  
Artist's own image.



Unfurling  
// Material Affect and Intimacy

By engaging with the liminal, both as a conceptual threshold and material state, this sculptural project examines how intimacy can be revealed through spatial and material relationships within installation.

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Through arrangements of objects and armatures, the work seeks to implicate encounters that foreground embodied perception, drawing attention to the physical and psychological tensions between the form, space, and the viewer.

Rebecca Frances Lees  
rebeccaflees@gmail.com

Ephemera, side A and side B, placed in gallery for *Unfurling // Material Affect and Intimacy*. Artist's own image.



*Unfurling // Material Affect and Intimacy.*  
Installation view.  
Image by  
Megan Archer



*Unfurling // Material  
Affect and Intimacy.*  
Installation view.  
Image by  
Megan Archer



*Unfurling // Material  
Affect and Intimacy.*  
Installation view.  
Image by  
Megan Archer



*Unfurling // Material Affect and Intimacy.*  
Installation view.  
Image by  
Megan Archer



*Unfurling // Material Affect and Intimacy.*  
Installation view. Images by  
Monique Redmond





'Object: Drawing Donkey' in *Unfurling // Material Affect and Intimacy*. Installation view. Images by Megan Archer



*Unfurling // Material Affect and Intimacy.*  
Installation view.  
Left: Image by Megan Archer  
Right: Artist's own image.



*Unfurling // Material Affect and Intimacy.*  
Installation view.  
Left: 'Object: In State I'  
Above: 'Object: Table.M.R.'  
Artist's own images.



*Unfurling // Material  
Affect and Intimacy.  
'Object: In State II',  
Installation view.  
Images by  
Megan Archer*



*Unfurling // Material Affect and Intimacy.*  
Installation view.  
Image by  
Megan Archer



*Unfurling // Material Affect and Intimacy.*  
Installation view.  
Image by Megan Archer

Fin