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# CODED GESTURES

4.05.23 - 16.07.23



The new 250 m2 industrial space designed by T.ZED Architects, presents the works of five conceptual artists: Alexander Ugay based in Almaty, Kazakhstan, Minja Gu based in Seoul, South Korea, along with UAE-based artists Fatma Al Ali, Mona Ayyash and Khalid.

These contemporary artists translate the creative gesture into a means of invisible labor, exploring it as a source of repetitive vocabularies, ultimately becoming a compelling way to look at the disciplining of bodies and forms. Distilling the idea of labor from a broader social lens to an artistic one, with its varied manifestations of alienation, the exhibition connects the idea of psychological absence with the presence and absence of the body in performance, ultimately questioning the core notion of labor itself.



**Fatma Al Ali** (b.1994, UAE) is a multidisciplinary artist who explores diverse themes such as perception, materiality, memory, weight, and tension in her artwork. She examines societal constraints and the human condition while paying close attention to the form and texture of her creations. Her approach is marked by a delicate balance between strength and delicacy, and she often challenges conventional notions of what materials can be used for. Al Ali earned a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from the University of Sharjah in 2018 and was awarded the Salama int Hamdan Emerging Artist Fellowship (SEAF) program in 2019, a collaboration with Rhode Island School of Design. Her work has been showcased in several group exhibitions, including 'Getting over the color green' at Alserkal Avenue, Dubai a collaboration with Engage101, 2023, Sikka, Dubai, 2023, 'Community and Critique' at Warehouse421, Abu Dhabi in 2020, 'Printmaking Exposium' at 4bid gallery, Netherlands in 2019, 'Exit: Extension' at the Maraya Art Center, Sharjah, UAE in 2018.

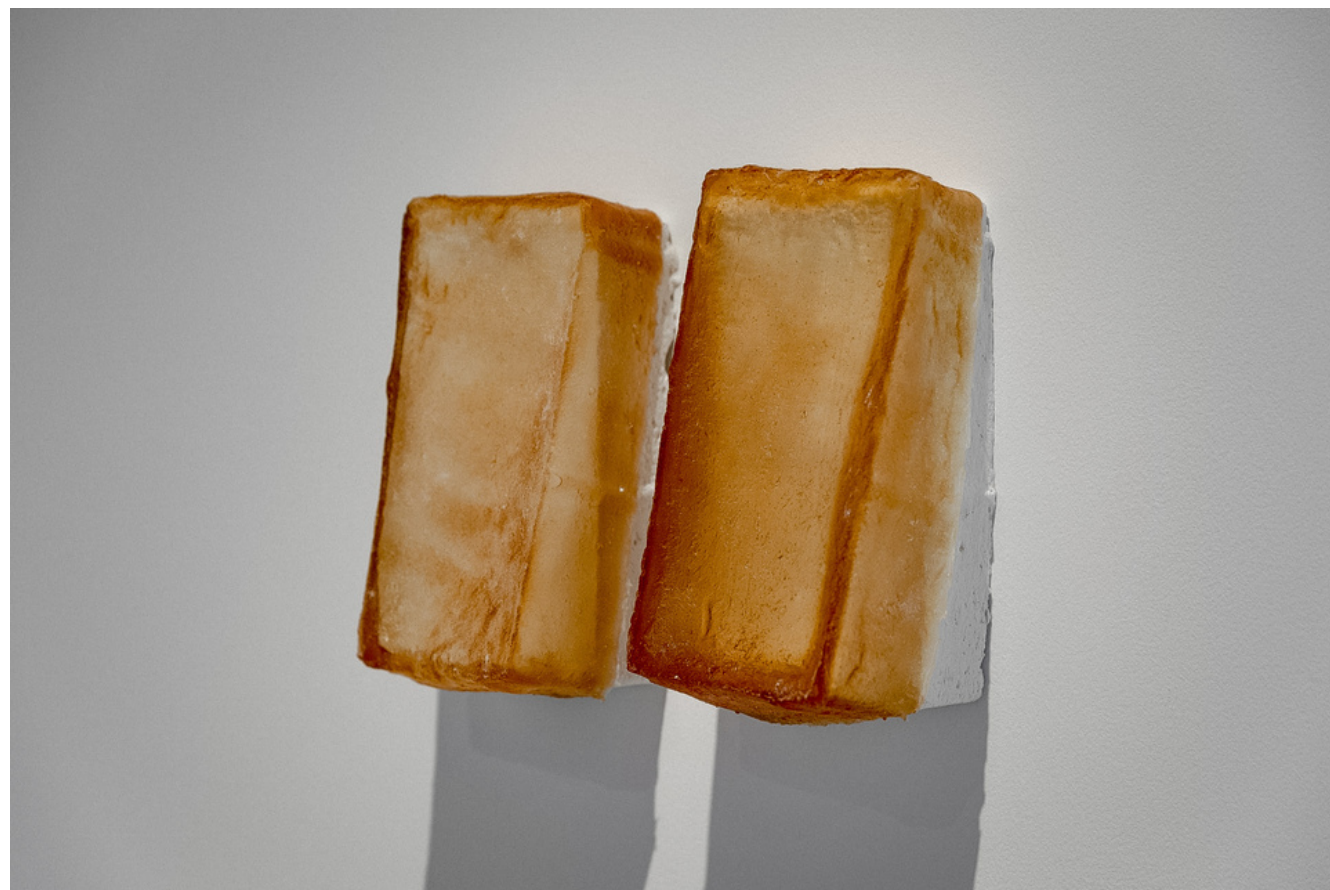
## **Fatma Al Ali. My Mother Told Me Not To Collect Bricks. 2020-2023**

My Mother Told Me Not to Collect Bricks began after a conversation with a friend, when I was trying to explain the feeling of putting on a glove that doesn't fit. I knew it didn't fit, yet it felt like I kept on pushing and forcing it to fit and failing every time. I look at walls, buildings, and structures, and all I see are barriers and rigidity. Yet they are supposed to be home — to shelter, protect, and give peace. I started questioning this.

What if the smallest unit of a wall, a brick, is no longer stable? What if it mimics what it is supposed to be? If I created it a hundred times, would I always get the same result?

What would happen if I start creating a skin for the brick? What if it were no longer strong and rigid? What happens to structures built with fragile materials? If I made a brick of latex that is hollow on the inside, would it still have the same shape and stand in the same way as rigid bricks do?

What does it mean to make a copy of the self? And can these hollow copies be seen as the whole self? After all, they have the same shape, size, and texture, but do they act in the same way? How many masks and skins do you wear? How heavy does it weigh on you?



**Fatma Al Ali** ●

My Mother Told Me Not To Collect  
Bricks. 2020-2023  
Gypsum bricks, latex bricks  
20,5cm x 25cm x 6cm



**Fatma Al Ali**

My Mother Told Me Not To Collect  
Bricks. 2020-2023  
Gypsum bricks, latex bricks  
20,5cm x 15cm x 10cm



**Fatma Al Ali**

My Mother Told Me Not To Collect Bricks. 2020-2023

Gypsum bricks, latex bricks  
20,5cm x 10,5cm x 6cm



**Fatma Al Ali**

My Mother Told Me Not To Collect Bricks. 2020-2023

Gypsum bricks, latex bricks, plaster,  
acrylic paint.  
25cm x 23cm x 20cm



**Fatma Al Ali**

My Mother Told Me Not To Collect Bricks, 2020-2023  
Gypsum bricks, latex bricks, foam plinths, paint

145cm x 20cm x 20cm

83cm x 20cm x 20cm

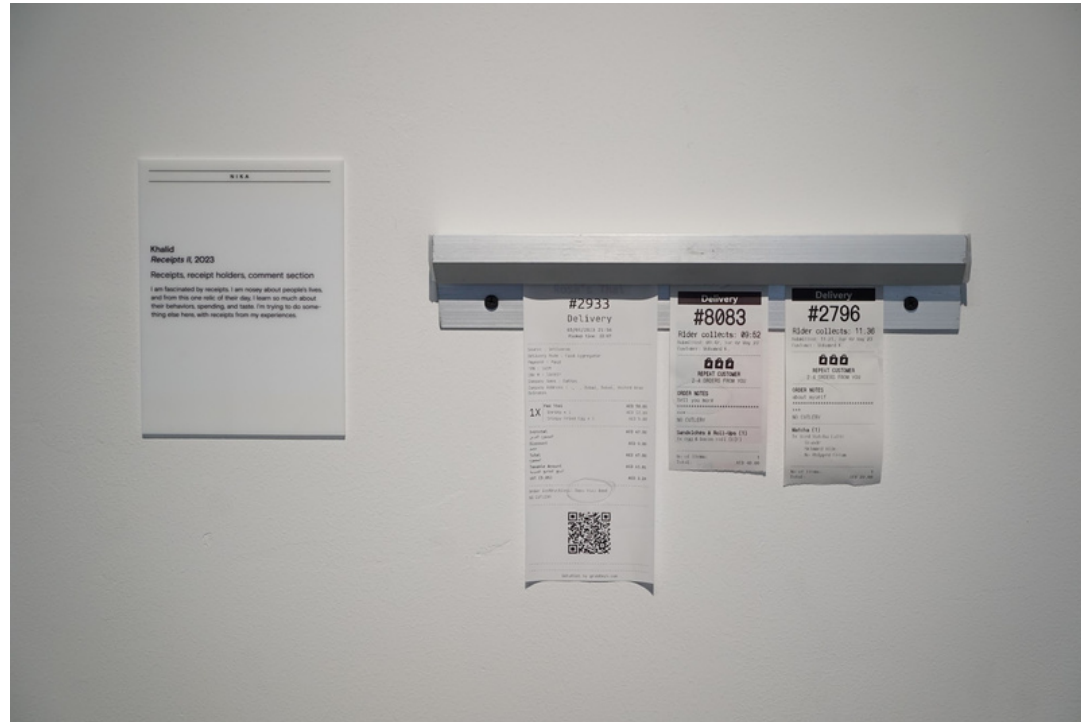
113cm x 20cm x 20cm







**Khalid** (b. 1996, Dubai) is an artist, walking, running, cycling and driving. He examines the materiality of everyday objects and coaxes out their metaphoric potential. Through fabricating receipts, playing with street cats, composing fictional tours and stealing corporate pens, he dissects ironies embedded in his everyday surroundings. What begins as an arbitrary flânerie, develops into a methodical formula that addresses philosophical and phenomenological, revealing the spatial, poetic relationships between his subjects and their frangible correlation to human beings. Khalid is an alumnus of programs Salama bint Hamdan Emerging Artists Fellowship and Campus Art Dubai 7.0 with previous group shows in Yorkshire, Jeddah and Abu Dhabi.



## Khalid

### Receipts II, 2023

Receipts, receipt holders, comment section

Variable dimensions

I am fascinated by receipts. I am nosey about people's lives, and from this one relic of their day, I learn so much about their behaviors, spending, and taste. I'm trying to do something else here, with receipts from my experiences

## Khalid. During work hours. 2022

Cyanotype treated textiles, transparent film, office computer, office printer, sun, 21.6 x 27.9 cm (each piece). 56 pieces in total

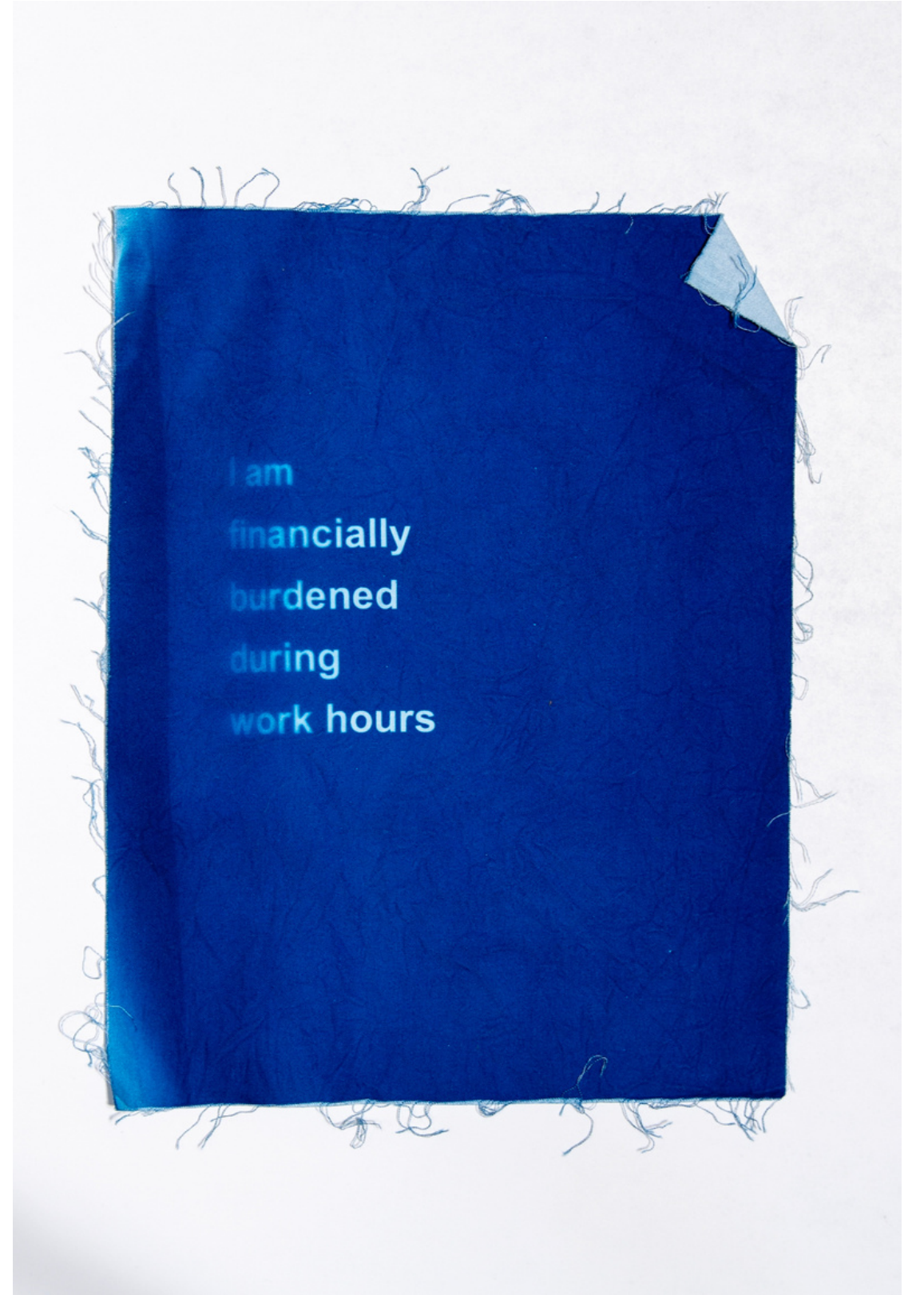
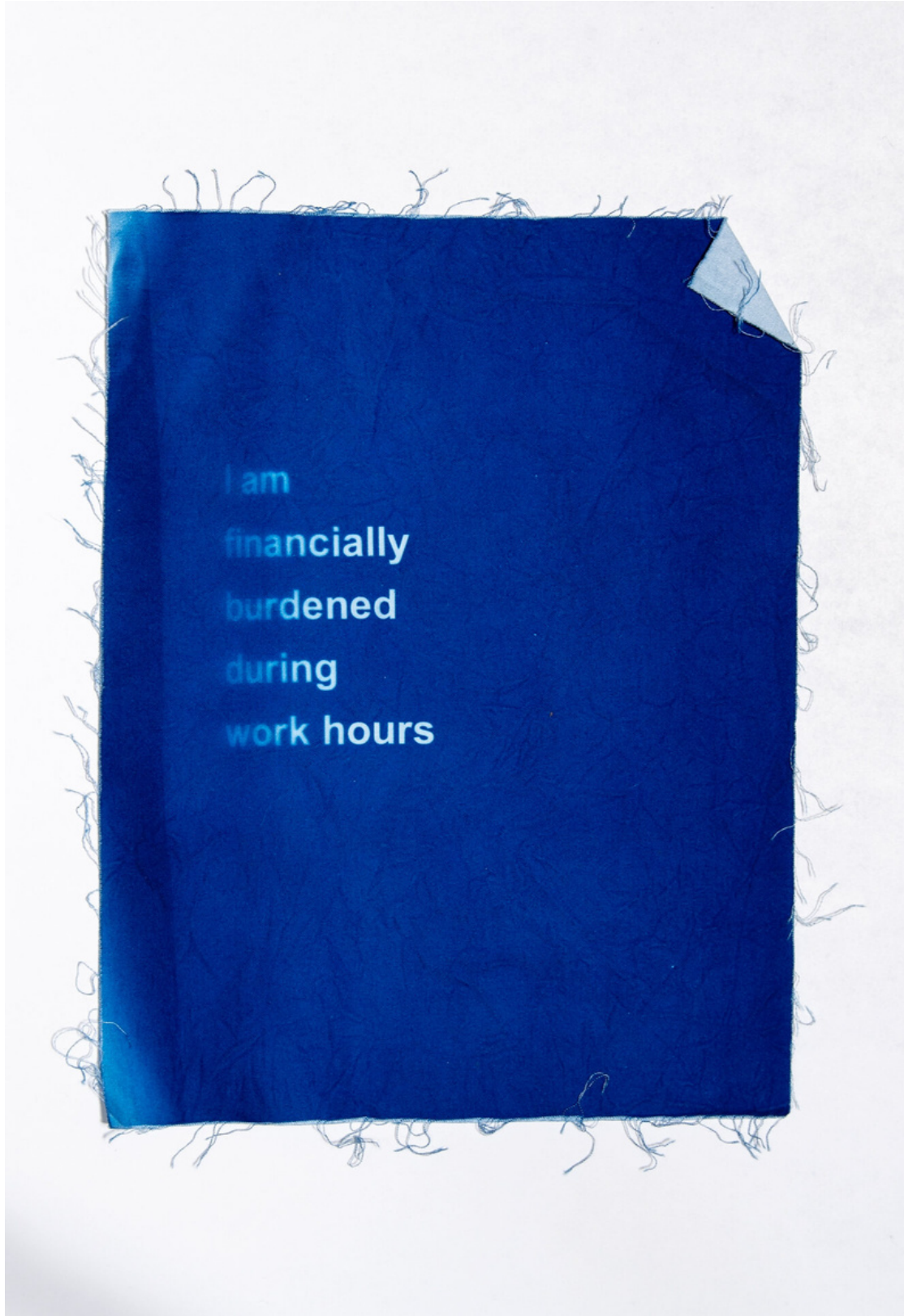
Commissioned by 421

I am now employed full-time, and I also was promised a solo. Now I am expected to work twice. If eight hours of my day are now compromised, I must devise a formula to produce 'work' during work hours. Something easy, something thoughtful.

I can't draw. That takes too long and requires space.

I've been working on a lot of texts at work. I decided I'll write texts for the show. I also found these cyanotype fabrics at the art supply store. During my lunch break, I clock in, open the office computer, type a text, print it using the office printer, and expose it to the sun.



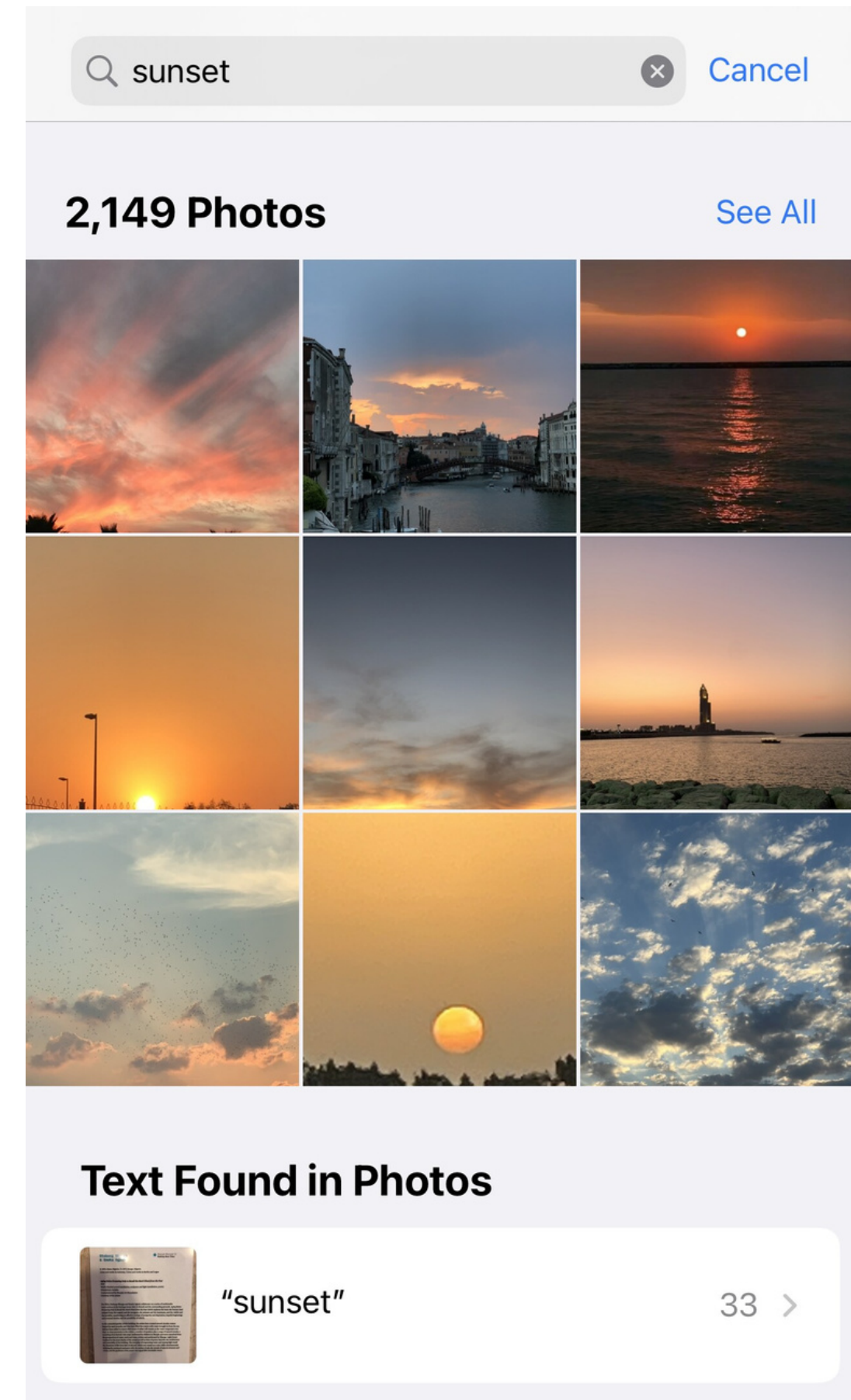


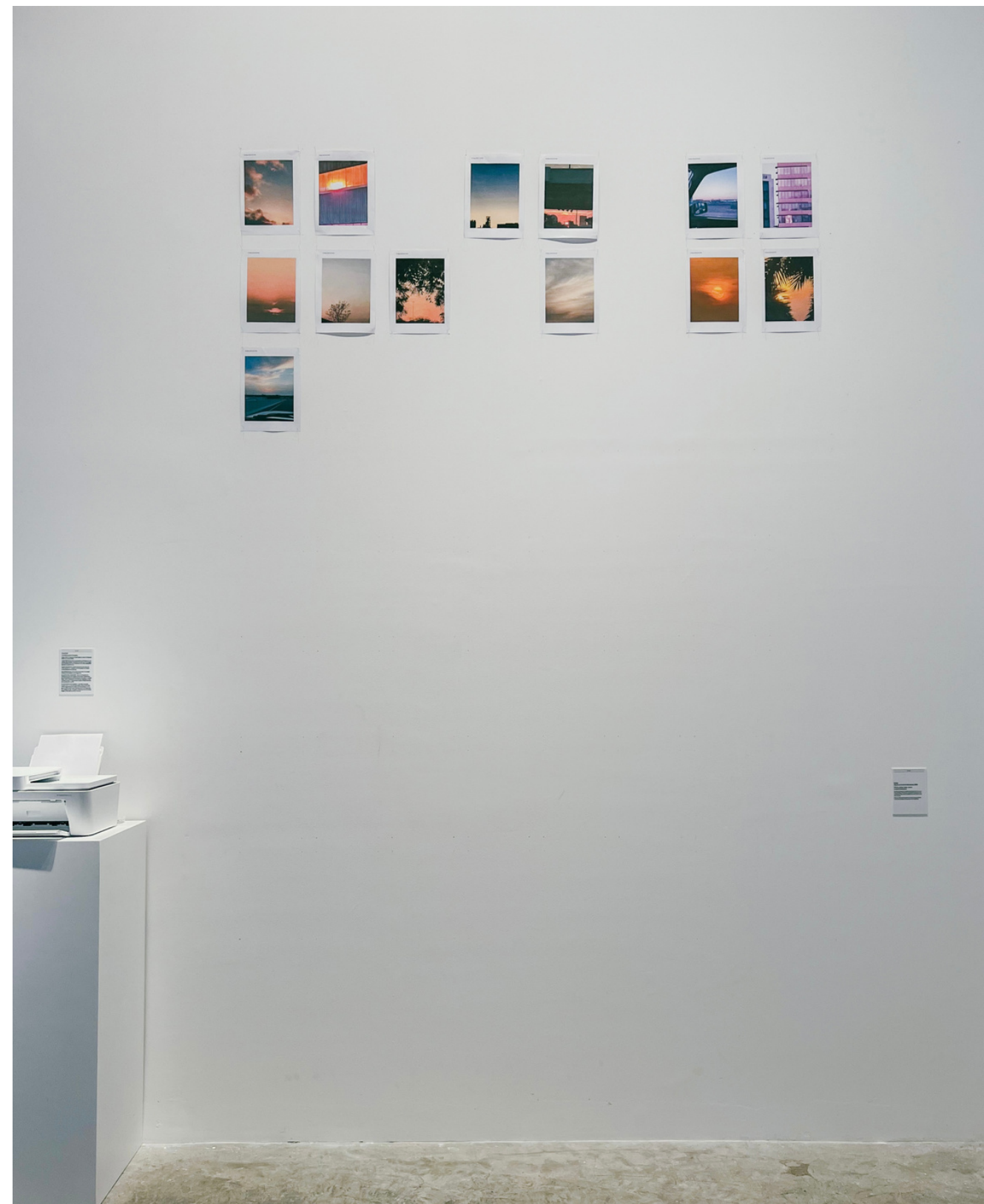
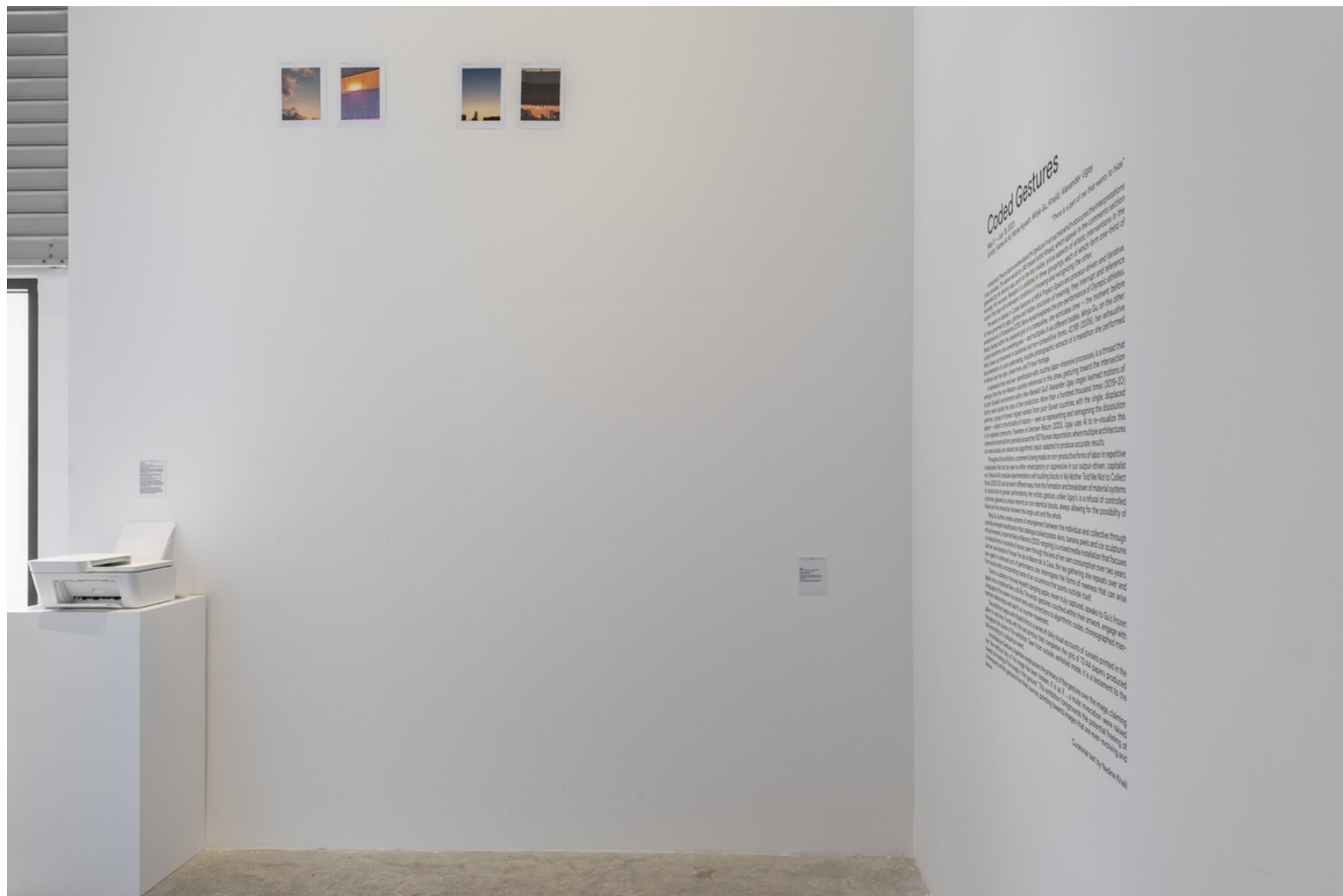
# Khalid. My job is to look at the sunset. 2023

iPhone, printer, letter, sunset, variable dimensions

My documentation of sunsets was always tied to my routine patrolling; it formed as a disciplined structure to my unemployed days, that no matter that I did, it had to end with a sunset.

Here, an office printer prints out my live documentation every day throughout the course of the exhibition.











**Mona Ayyash** (b. 1987, Kuwait City) is a Palestinian visual artist, raised in Dubai. Her practice focuses on repetition, memorisation, slowness, and boredom. She holds an MFA in Studio Arts from Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. Her work was exhibited at the Jameel Art Centre in 2021 and in Maraya Art Center, as part of the UAE Unlimited programme in 2019. She took part in the homebound residency with 421 in 2020 and was an artist-in-residence at the Alserkal Residency for their Fall 2017 cycle. She has participated in several group exhibitions such as, 'The Distance from Here' at Hayy Jameel, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in 2022, 'Tashweesh' at Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah, UAE in 2019 and 'Loaning Sister Cities' at Casino Artspace, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada in 2016.

# Mona Ayyash. She'll be apples. 2013

Three-channel digital video, 36' 59"

She'll be apples is my first video piece. It marks a reaction to a life experience and a transition in my art practice. I had decided to throw away old photographs and negatives as I packed to move to a new country. Recurrent thoughts of regret began to manifest in my mind about a particular negative of an apple hanging on a tree branch with string, turning it into something more beautiful than it ever was. As time went by, it became more apparent that what began as the sorrow of a lost negative was actually a disguise of my struggle to leave home and the parts of me that had to be left behind. She'll be apples — an Australian saying — is a reminder that everything will be all right.

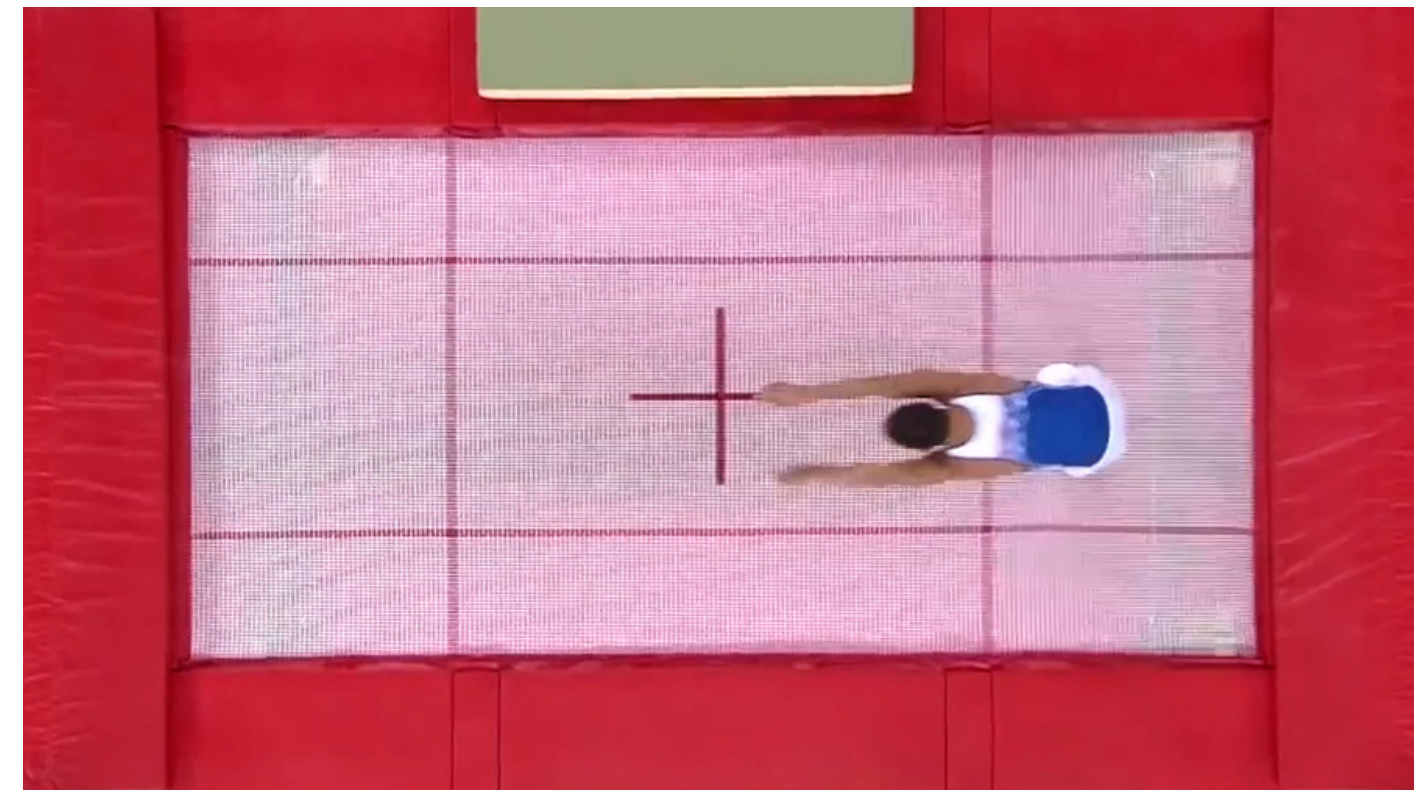
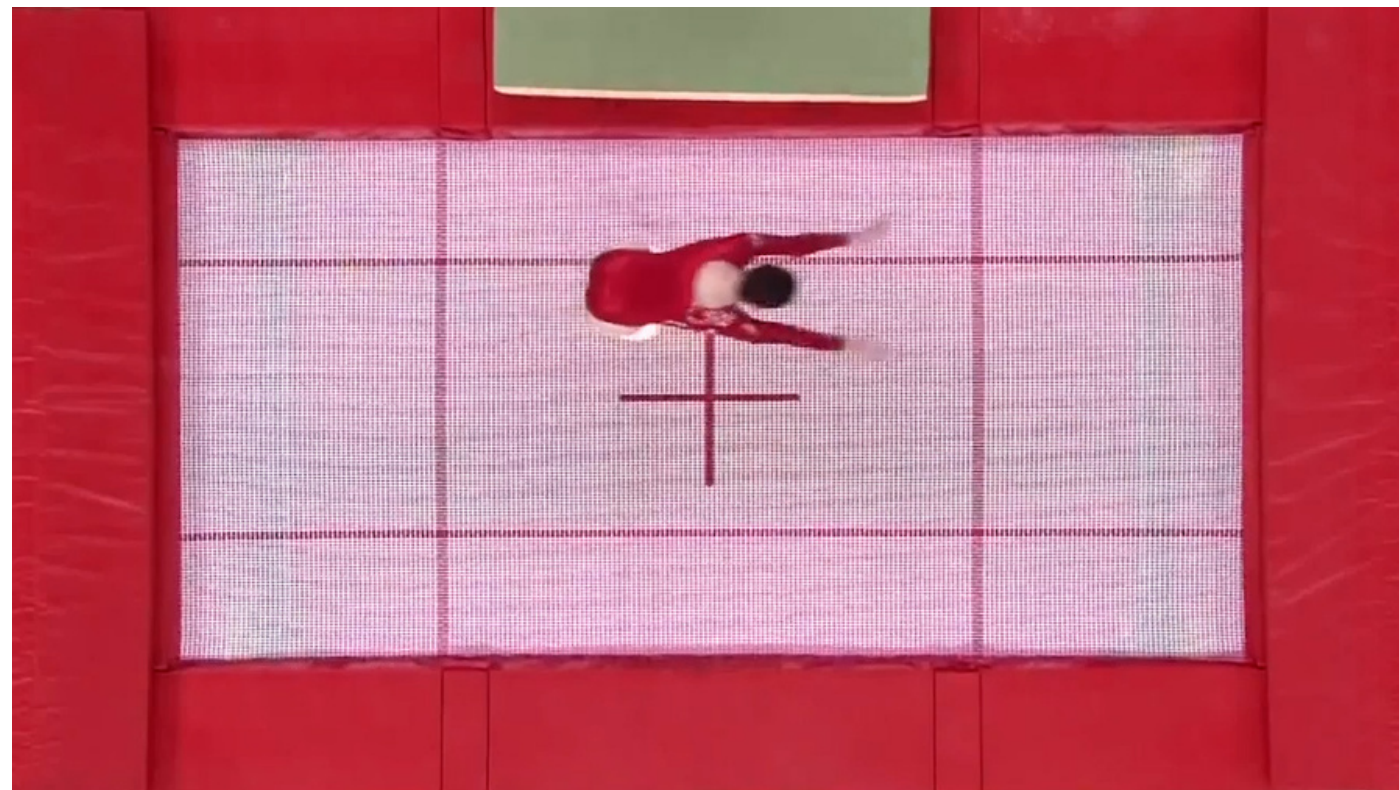


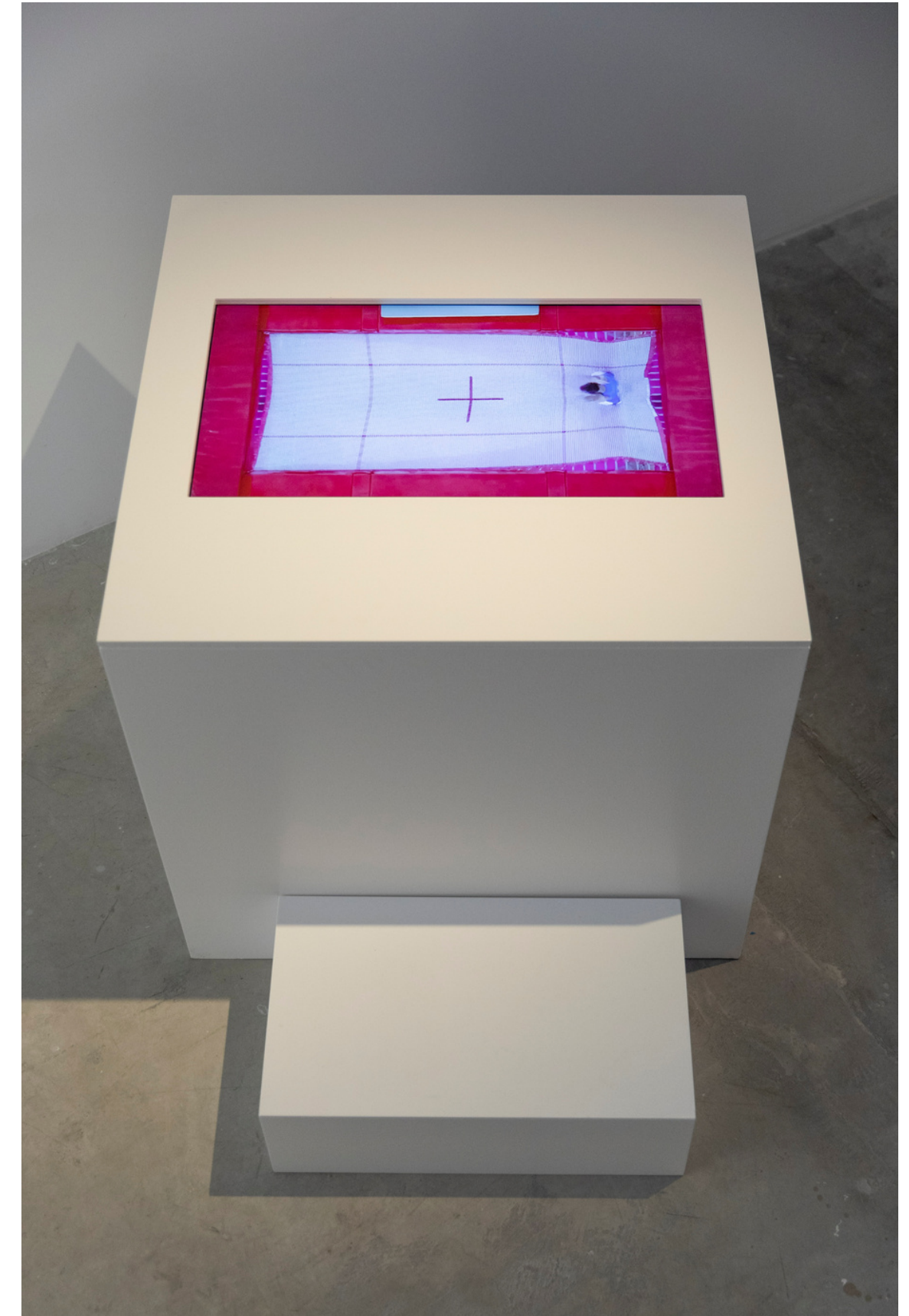
# Mona Ayyash. Trampoline. 2015

Single-channel digital video, 32'

I started Trampoline, which is part of the One, Two, Three, Four series, while living in Montreal, Canada. On one of the many dark and cold winter evenings, I was sitting in a restaurant with friends when one of them pointed up to a TV screen in the corner and said “Look, Dubai!” It was a live golf tournament in sunny Dubai. I was transfixed. My body was still there, but my mind had left for the rest of the evening. Later that night, I went home craving more. I found the tournament online and managed to download it. I began to extract the movements of the athletes that interested me. This marked the start of my exploration of body movement in a variety of sporting events.

Trampoline is from footage of the 2012 London Olympics. Here, the figure is not the highlight. I was drawn to the trampoline itself, as it appeared to be breathing — inhaling with the strain from the weight of the body, exposing a fleshy pink underneath, then exhaling back to its original shape.







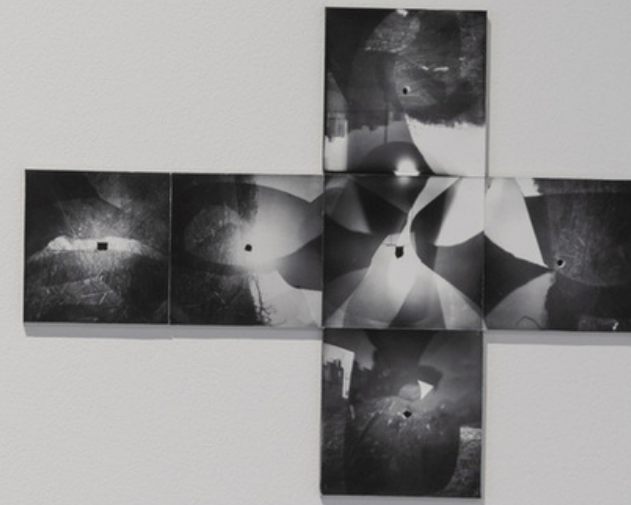
The third-generation of Koryoin (ethnic Korean in the former Soviet Union), **Alexander Ugay** (b. 1978, Kazakhstan) uses photography, video, and collage to document stories about individuals and groups, migration histories, nostalgia originating in past experience, and places where past and future coexist. In the 2000s, he produced his “cinema-object” series of short films shot on 8mm and 16mm cameras produced during the Soviet era; since 2017, he has created his own “obscuratons,” devices based on the pinhole camera approach that he uses for artistic series in which he locates historically and ideologically important settings in order to capture spatial and temporal continua. His major solo exhibitions include ‘Topology of Image’ at Aspan Gallery, Almaty in 2018 and ‘More than an Image, Less than an Object’ at Galeria Labirynt, Lublin in 2017. Ugay has shown his work at the Busan Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2022, Art Sonje Center in Seoul in 2020, Sapar Contemporary in New York in 2019, Lunds Konsthall in Sweden in 2018, and Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow in 2016. His work is part of international private and public collections. The latter includes Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Galeria Labirynt, Lublin, Poland; National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana and Lunds Konsthall, Lund, Sweden.

## Alexander Ugay. Gaptinium #1. 2023 ●

Mixed media installation, camera obscura, black-and-white silver gelatin prints, digital prints, variable dimensions

This continuation of my Obscuration series (2017-present) deals with alternative methods of documenting places and events. The "gaptinium" exposure took place in an apple orchard that has been cleared for the foundation pit of a new residential complex. It is located on the outskirts of Sinchang in South Korea, where migrant workers and the Korean community from Central Asia and Kazakhstan reside.

Shooting on a camera obscura creates a multi-layered index of noise and traces — shadows, reflections, spatial distortions and focus fields. It exposes gaps between the visible and the depicted. The gaps form the receptacle of the image, which cannot be completely exhausted or captured. I do this not to better explain reality, but to avoid linguistic, historical or ideological interpretations. I think it might be a step towards an act of documentation which will no longer divide events into a 'before' and 'after'.



Alexander Ugly  
Gephrorum #1, 2023

Mixed media installation, camera obscura, black and white silver gelatin prints, digital prints, variable dimensions

The continuation of my *Observation* series (2017 present) deals with alternative methods of documenting objects and events. The "gephorum" reference took shape in an image which had been chosen for the foundation gift of a new residential complex. It is located on the outskirts of Stuttgart in South Korea, where migrant workers and the Korean community from Central Asia and Kazakhstan reside.

Shooting on a camera obscura creates a multi-layered image of color and texture - elements which form spatial dimensions and focus fields. It creates gaps between the visible and the invisible. The gaps form the receptacle of the image which cannot be completely captured or represented. In this way, it better captures reality, but to avoid fragments, historical or ideological interpretations, I took a night for a sleep towards all art of documentation which will no longer divide events into a "before" and "after".

## **Alexander Ugay. More than a hundred thousand times. 2019-20**

HD video, 35'48"

I made this video when I was working in a factory in Korea — a new and difficult experience for me. As a practice, it enabled me to feel both the alienation and moments of understanding and mastery that comes through repetition. During such instances of complete physical and affective capture, the consciousness of a person can wander far beyond the boundaries of a factory. It is a contradictory situation of both meaninglessness on the one hand, and awareness on the other. It feels very similar to the edge of existential abyss, beyond which there is nothing — or freedom.

In the video, migrant workers from post-Soviet countries demonstrate the motions of their working process. Their memorized movements, displaced outside factories, evoke the impact of labor on the life and imagination of the Koryoin\* community.

\* Koryoin ( Korean 고려인 , 고려 사람; Russian Коре́йцы) — is the name which ethnic Koreans in the post-Soviet states use to refer to themselves.





## **Alexander Ugay. Unknown Return. 2023.**

Mixed media installation, encaustic wax, digital prints, variable dimensions

I was born in Kazakhstan. My ancestors were deported from the Far East to Kazakhstan in 1937, an event that marked the beginning of the Korean diaspora in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. This project is a constellation of four groups of images, both photographic and AI-generated. The past, like many other things, is a construct, rendering historical artifacts, documents and archives subjective.

1. Based on the only surviving photograph of my great-grandmother, the neural network Midjourney created a typology of studio portraits of middle-aged Korean women who lived in the Far East and Russia before the 1937 Deportation.

2. The neural network created two images in response to the description of a heavily retouched and reprinted late Soviet-era photograph from the Karaganda state archive in Kazakhstan. The first incorporates the description as is, while the second, includes the word 'Korean', to correct the network's initially imperfect depiction.

3. This is a photo of my parents, who have never been to Korea and do not speak Korean. They are in the gazebo my father built, along with an AI-generated spatial and architectural typology based on the 1937 Deportation.

4. After more than 85 years of living in the USSR and later Central Asia, the Korean diaspora has failed to preserve its native language and culture. Most of the archives and testaments to that time have also been lost. The AI-generated images are wax tablets, the oldest memorial forms, which recreate lost images. As photographs, they lend the impression of absence and loss, reflecting conditions of the diaspora at the moment. To return to the beginning we need to experience the uncomfortable, repressed moments in history. This cannot be done without a critical rethinking of the Soviet influence and collective trauma underlying the diasporic identity of post-Soviet Koreans. It is a complex notion of identity, impacted on various levels by Soviet culture and the resistance to Japanese occupation in Korea, all of which have caused 25 different degrees of alienation.



1

2

3



1918  
Dolores, I cannot remember exactly  
how the - house had its position  
in the garden. I remember the garden  
was very beautiful. I was  
very happy.  
Dolores  
Dolores, I. 1918.

1918  
Dolores and I were very happy. We had  
a very good time. We were very  
happy. We were very happy.  
Dolores, I. 1918.



1918  
Dolores and I were very happy. We had  
a very good time. We were very  
happy. We were very happy.  
Dolores, I. 1918.





**Minja Gu** (b. 1977, Korea). Minja Gu's work is based on personal performances that observe and question daily behaviors, which in turn are projected through various media including photography, video, installation, and drawing. She majored in painting at Hongik University and philosophy at Yonsei University and received a Master's degree in Fine Arts from the Korea National University of Arts. She participated in the SSamzie Space studio program in Seoul, the Hangar Residency for artists in Barcelona, the International Studio & Curatorial Program at ISCP in NYC, and the HISK program in Ghent from 2015–2016. She received the award of excellence by the Songeun Art Award in 2010. Selected solo exhibitions include 'Identical Times' at Croft Gallery, Seoul, Korea, in 2009, 'Atlantic-Pacific co.' at Moore Street Market, New York in 2011, and 'Inside the Belly of Monstro' at Citadellaan 7, Ghent in 2018. Gu has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including the Taipei Biennale at Taipei Fine Arts Museum in 2008 and New Visions New Voices at National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Gwacheon in 2013. In 2018, Gu was selected as one of the four sponsored artists for the Korea Artist Prize, an annual award and exhibition co-organized by MMCA and SBS Foundation.

# Minja Gu. House Tea de la Maison de la Casa. 2019-2023.

Performance and documentation. [Click to watch video](#)

House Tea de la Maison de la Casa is a tea gathering. I prepared almost a hundred different kinds of tea, dried herbs, dried flowers, dried fruits and spices to infuse the tea. People who gather together will take time to choose and mix the ingredients to make tea that I pour from a custom-made ball-shaped teapot with 10 spouts in all directions. The artwork includes a documentation of residues from a recent iteration of this performance in the Al Quoz district, where the gallery is located.



# Minja Gu. 42.195, 2006

Photographs, 171cm x 108cm

I participated in a marathon race in solitude and silence, without making a strenuous effort by dividing the race into two days. I began the marathon at 10 am, Oct 3, 2006 and finished at 7:26 pm, Oct 4th, 2006. I want to abolish the idea of speed that is ingrained as one of the Olympic mottos. This work speaks to the whole notion of competing and the fanaticism of winning.



Minja Gu  
42.195, 2006  
Photographs, 171 x 108 cm

## **Minja Gu. Inside the Belly of Monstro, 2020-ongoing**

Mixed media installation

For more than 2 years while I was living in Ghent, Belgium, I collected leftovers and watched them drying out, such as various kinds of seeds, peels, shells, fruit pits, stems, food packages etc. Just before returning to my hometown Seoul, I had a small exhibition in my Ghent apartment to show the hundreds of leftovers — collections — which were classified and organized under 382 types. After moving back to Seoul, these habitual behaviours, collecting or not throwing away, continued. And other works derived from the food remnants began. I made collage works out of boiled potato peels and a painting of every cherry tomato from one package box.

Frozen, a photographic series, also emerged from the various investigations of food consumption. I made ice sculptures with silicon moulds of the leftovers — seeds, shells, bottles, packages etc. Then I took pictures of the ice-casted sculptures. I put water in the casting mould, and froze them — a still life of what I have eaten and drank to be eliminated in this world during that period of time.





## Minja Gu

Boiled Potato. 2019 - 2020

Installation, boiled potato peels on  
cardboard paper.

24cm x 14.8 cm each piece, 32 unique pieces



## Minja Gu

Banana tree. 2018 - 2020  
Dried banana peels on wooden structure  
190cm x 120cm x 120 cm

## Minja Gu

750g of cherry tomatoes. 2019  
Watercolor on paper  
49.2cm x 64.8cm



## Minja Gu

500g of grapes. 2017  
Watercolor on paper  
52cm x 60cm





## **Minja Gu**

Inside the Belly of Monstro, 2015-2023  
Single-channel silent video, 55'38"  
Photographic documentation: Minja Gu,  
Alexandra Colmenares Cossio, Ksenia  
Galiaeva  
Photographic advisor: Jaebum Kim  
Video editing : Minja Gu

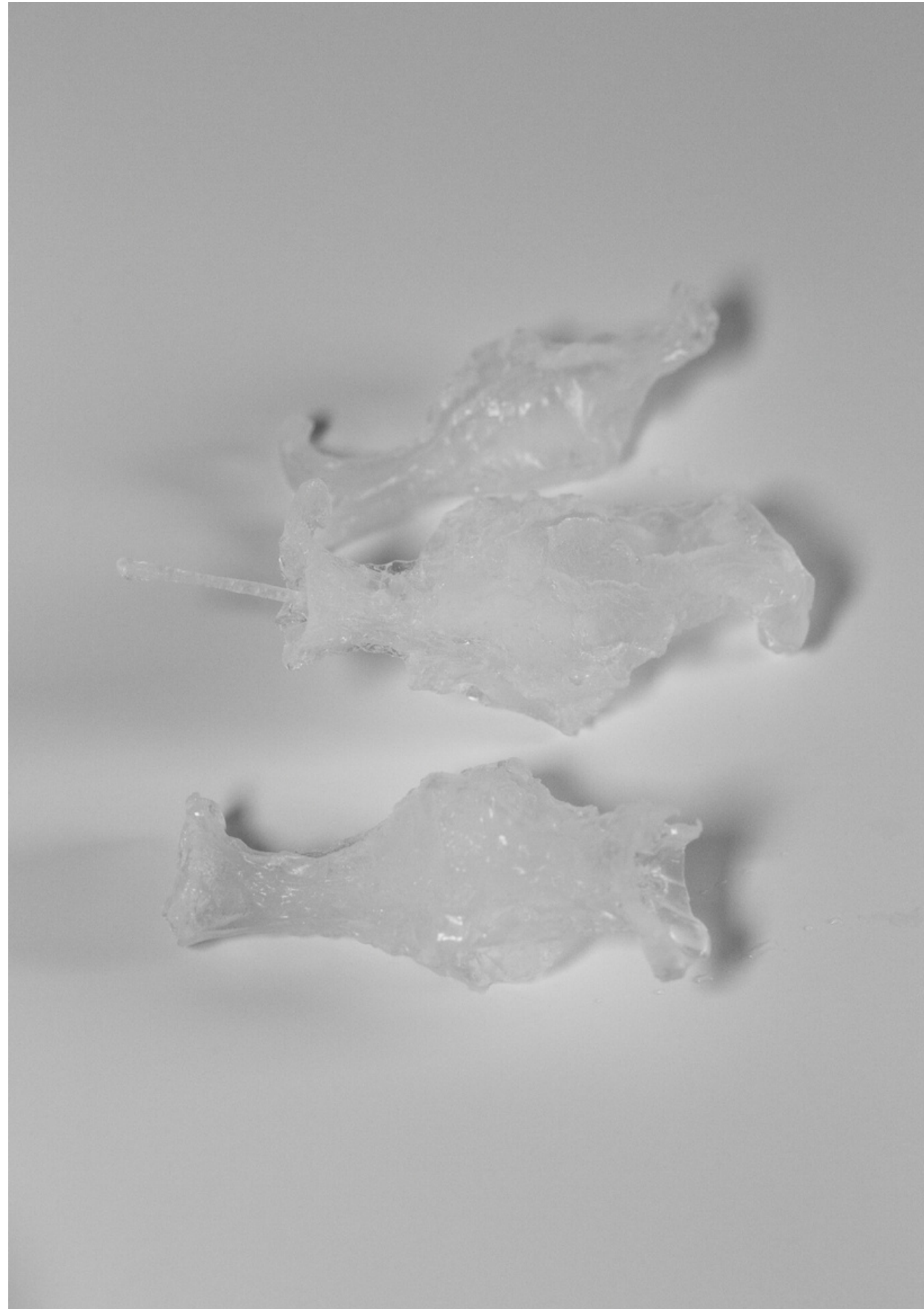
Minja Gu

**Frozen series. 2023**

Black and white photographic prints

110cm x 165cm

70cm x 50cm





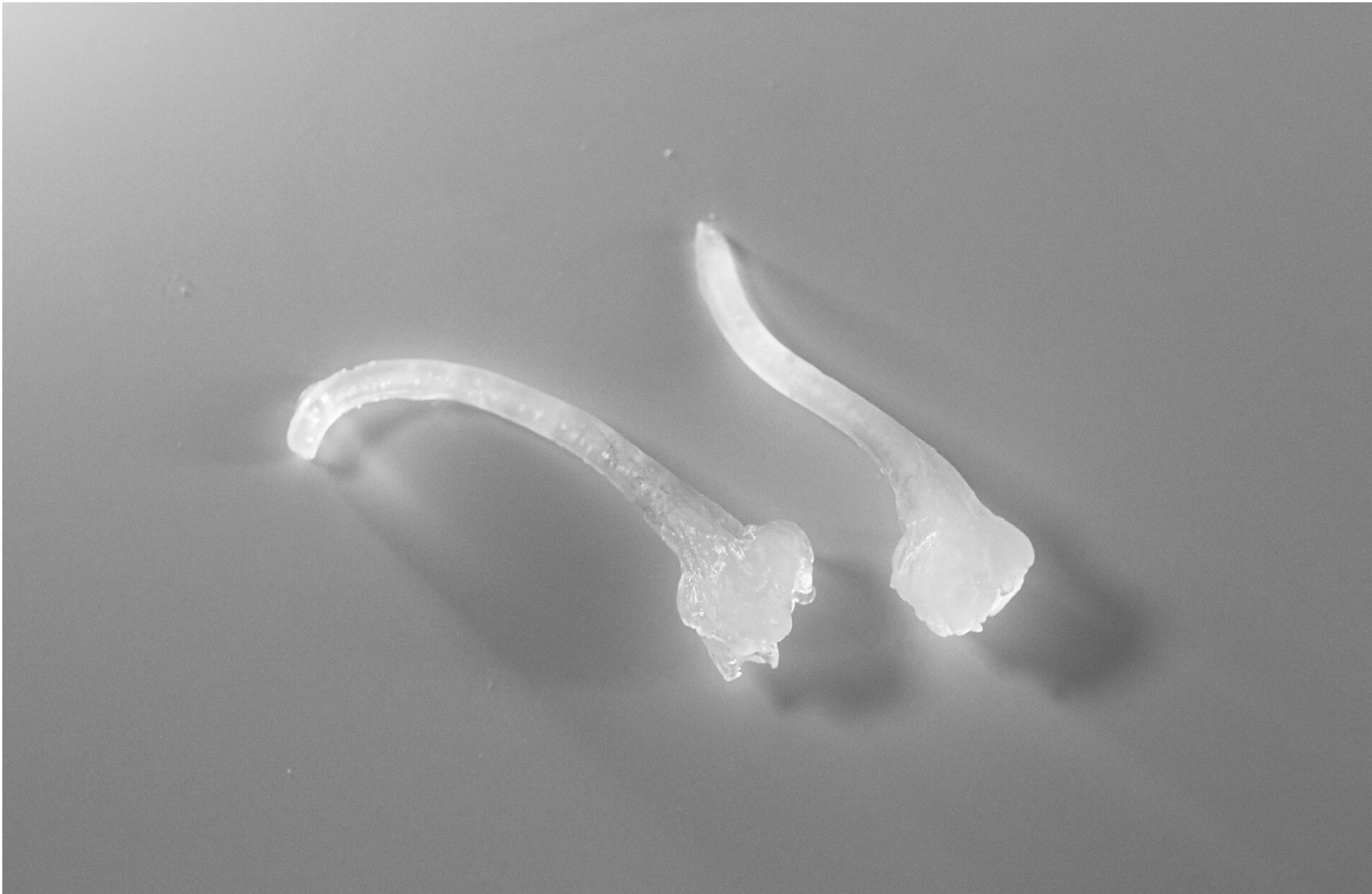














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