

THE PASSAGE: Enquiry into the ephemeral absence of social construct during transitions

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To the universe, the flux, and the stillness.

To my family who protected and nurtured me,
To my Mother who encouraged me to go through the passage of unknown fearlessly,
To Dhruv who held me on the other side of the passage.
To my supervisor Dr. Maria Lantin for all the guidance, support and inspiration.

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ABSTRACT

"In the universe, there are things that are known, and things that are unknown, and in between them, there are doors."

— William Blake

This thesis support paper presents my artistic research on the ephemeral nature of absence in social constructs while relocating myself to new places. I am interrogating a fluid positionality that is continuously shifting, leading me to contextualise the research stance in the between and betwixt of Passage. I am examining the experience of passing from one place, condition, or stage to another and highlight the in-between space made visible through artwork produced with various methods and processes. Throughout, absence is indicated via aesthetics, materiality, and immateriality pointing to subtle boundaries between play and seriousness, the real and imaginary, the ephemeral and permanent. Themes of travel, constraint, absence, liminality, and human consciousness are explored through performative installations, architectural spaces, and different degrees of audience participation. The research generates a dialogue between performance, space, and time which involves bodily experience, live actions with mixed media installations, and time-based works. The choice of media and symbols revolve around various conceptual ideas inspired by academic and non-academic sources — contemporary art, spiritual texts, psychology, lucid visions while meditating — which become the artistic expression's metaphorical core. Anchoring in an auto-ethnographic methodology of resisting mastery, the research was conducted by allowing space for unknowns to reveal their contours through silent being and doing by not doing.

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SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

An idea that has been created and accepted by the people in a society.

HERE

Here, right now, it is 10:00 pm pacific standard time on Monday December 7th 2020. I am on a cozy couch with a blanket in my condo facing the beautiful Fraser River. I need to complete this writing and go to bed. I meditate before going to bed. It calms me down. I try to shed all the fear of the future and forgive everyone for the past and thank the universe for the present. Meditation helps me detach from what was and what will be. It is peaceful in the present moment that is devoid of content, suspended in the emptiness. The absence is empowering, as there is an opportunity for infinite possibilities at this moment. I started meditating at the age of 13 years. I am raised in a joint family of 30 people, where four generations lived together in one house. And that had a dominant influence on my life.

Indian culture determines the family structure by outlining the boundaries, rules for interaction, communication patterns, acceptable practices, discipline, and hierarchy. The lines of hierarchy and authority are clearly drawn, with each hierarchical level functioning within the principle of collective responsibility. Rules of conduct are aimed at creating and maintaining family harmony and for greater readiness to cooperate with family members on decisions affecting almost all aspects of life, including career choice, mate selection, and marriage. While women are expected to accept a position subservient to males and subordinate their personal preferences to others' needs, males are expected to accept responsibility for meeting the needs of others. All family members have intense emotional interdependence, empathy, closeness, and loyalty to each other. (Chadda and Deb)

The Indian spirit of maintaining family harmony and absolute obedience to the elderly felt suppressing. These dynamics of power structure and boundaries were unsettling for me. And the absence of freedom in the outside world left me with no choice but to be free within, which nobody could deny — hence meditation. Meditation helped but the resentment, however, passive and silent, simmered. I started questioning who I was beyond this social construct. I could see my future as a subjugated woman regretting life, and I knew this multi-generational transmission process had to stop.

It was time to move on from here!

THERE

My expedition to uncovering self began. I traveled to different cities for my education and job. I also traveled to different countries for further education. There were moments of nostalgia, but the urge to find my own voice and the purpose of existence kept me going. Traveling to places where I didn't know anyone was never easy and often scary. Challenging my comfort zone led me to a state of freedom from social constructs imposed by society for a temporary period. There was no one to judge me, and I was suspended in an unknown place with no context, free to be whatever I wanted to be! These temporary gaps, while shifting from one point to another, helped me grow and expand my horizons. These transient journeys became my second nature. Impermanence was liberating. This nomadic lifestyle led to meaningful encounters for identifying self, so I positioned myself as a traveler.

Being in the state of voluntary displacement for some time and again, I found myself on the threshold of something new, realising that there is more to this unknown opening upon entering into that new liminal state experiencing the suspension from judgements and the eyes laid on me to make sure, I follow social protocols. I was reflecting on this state, where I felt the absence of content around due to no context in the new setting. I started researching the subject of absence and emptiness. I draw a parallel between impermanence and traveling with my continuously shifting thoughts from now to the past to the future and back to now. I started thinking about how humans are in constant transition moving back and forth within illusory realities—always wanting to be 'there'! And when we reach there, we want to be there again—stuck in an infinite loop of there. The shift is constant. In the transition, there is an experience that is betwixt and between, neither in the past nor in the future. My investigation started around these in-betweens. Suspended in this unknown space lead to my first thesis work, 'There' in a loop (Fig.1). 'There' in a loop is a performance by 13 artists within a 8'X8'X8' wooden cubical frame (2" thick) outside the Vancouver Art Gallery. The performers were wearing shiny cardboard cubes wrapped in reflective mirror film. I directed a few repetitive movements to be performed within the limits of the cube frame. The empty box was dark inside when worn. Breathing sounds were amplified for the performers. Moreover, these moments with self in an empty cube with no context — the brief instants of fear in the dark unknown — elevated the sensory experience. Situating so many performers in this tight space where their bodies had very little space to move, gave a sense of loss of intimacy, which was a metaphor to the place I come from which is India, where we were always surrounded by other people, trying to find a space of intimacy within the boxes given. The cubical within which you work becomes life, be it a glass building or a concrete cube. We work like machines, ambitiously producing in reckless exhaustion with our eyes on the shiny box, a phone screen, or a computer screen. The world fits in that, and that's life, that's the reflection. The mirror cube on the head reflected the world around it and mimicked the reflective glass buildings



surrounding the performance. It almost gave an illusion of headless humans, or heads expanded and merged in the environment.

Fig. 1. Deepali Raiththa, 'There' in a loop, 2019. Wooden cubical frame, 8'X8'X8', 13 performers with cardboard boxes wrapped with a reflective film over their head.

'There' was mainly India for me when I started thinking about my home; I wondered how I was always thinking about going to the West for further education when back in India. And this loop of being somewhere else than where you are is how we humans live our lives, there might be very few people who practice to be in the moment and are successful in doing that.

My interest in mirror, reflection, and distortion is partially inspired by Anish Kapoor, a British Indian visual artist who is one of the most influential sculptors of his generation. His later work demonstrates an exploration of what he refers to as 'the void'. Using steel and other reflective materials his sculptures integrate into their surroundings, mimicking natural shapes while somehow defying any solid contained boundaries. The vast presence merging with the atmosphere makes it almost invisible. The mirrors play a very symbolic role and create an expansive space that seems to confuse the object's status. And this illusion also reflected in my work where there was similar effect on viewers, where the performers body/identity was almost erased from the space or expanded with the environment. The reflective sculptural objects transcend their parameters and appear abstract, elevating self-reflection. As the viewer becomes part of the work, each work expresses the individual being and the expansive inclusiveness of a shared place. Fig. 2 shows Anish Kapoor's sculpture "Sky Mirror," a large, convex piece of highly polished stainless steel installed at Rockefeller Center, New York City, which greatly influenced me in terms of materiality and symbolism. Though my work differs from his in terms of the ephemeral/performative nature in my work vs. the fixedness of his, I find similarities with its placement in a public site where the buildings reflection almost merged the bodies in the environment camouflaging and erasing the trace, the movement around the work by the viewers, and the surroundings that complete the work. Anish Kapoor was distorting the bodies and surrounding onto an concave mirror where as I was distorting a part of the body for viewers but vision and hearing for the performers.



Fig. 2. "Anish Kapoor's Sky Mirror #1" by ultrahi is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 Rockefeller Centre, New York, 2006. Stainless Steel.

EVERYWHERE

One day, as I sat at an alfresco lunch spot enjoying a view of the Acropolis, a small truck pulled to the curb and blocked the Parthenon. I was annoyed at first, but later wonderfully amused as I watched the moving men deliver some furniture to the neighbouring house. Their van said Metaphora. Of course, I realized. Phor is the verb for “carrying” and meta is a prefix meaning “change of place, order, condition, or nature.” A moving truck helps you change the order of something by carrying it from one spot to another – and is surely a metaphor. . . . A metaphor carries you from one object (which may be difficult to understand) to another (which may be more accessible and therefore helpful, by analogy, in grasping the original concern).

-Natural History, Stephen Jay Gould

As an artist, I want to take the role of the mover, traveling across distances and transporting meanings, helping viewers take imaginative leaps. Making metaphor one of the methods for my artistic research, I try to visualize my experience as a metaphor. Muting the literal meaning of linguistic expression with a visual metaphor allows for mapping resemblances between two separate areas of realities and linking them together.

My research is based on an auto-ethnographical approach where my lived practical experiences are turned into ideas. Sometimes I have lucid visions while meditating, which I then interpret through present experiences, adding layers for art-making. Most of the time, these visions shed light on the common thread amongst the previous works and give me a better understanding of past works too. I work very intuitively to convert these imageries into art. And somehow, the understanding and exploration of these visions deepen the connection between my art and life. I have worked with belief in a methodology of not knowing for some time. But as I am about to complete this MFA, I have come to know another term instead, a methodology of resisting mastery where not to know thoroughly is encouraged. So imagination and intuition can inform the structure further. A very concrete framework with presumptions can potentially limit creativity and discovery. Even the tiniest space of the unknown will allow an ability to learn something new through the process of art creation.

In Koan studies at Headland institute, an article by Zoketsu Norman Fischer mentions, in Zen Buddhism philosophy, not knowing is considered the most intimate. They believe in the beginner's mind, there are many possibilities, and in the experts, there are few. As a beginner's mind is innocent of preconceptions and expectations, it is more present to explore as things are. They practice meditation while breathing and repeating these words, "not knowing" again and again. Usually on the exhale, eventually letting go of the words and just feeling the breath as the phrase. It begins to influence them, and ordinary daily occurrences become more profound and mysterious. The purpose is not to figure out what it means—but to repeat it as a magical phrase until suddenly it reveals itself. When we know something and rest in that knowing, we limit our vision. We will only see what our knowing will allow us to see. In this way, our experience can be our enemy. (Fischer)

One of the artists I am inspired by is Ann Hamilton, who shares her wisdom about art, value of unproductive time and not knowing. Hamilton is a visual artist known for her large-scale multimedia installations, public projects, and performance collaborations. Hamilton's installations are meant to be experienced with all the senses, often incorporating elements like sound and smell that urge the viewer to connect with and engage the work on a multi-sensory level. Like poetry, her works have charm, repetitions, rhythm, rhyme, and varied moments with metaphors. Her works are highly immersive. The first time I came across her work I had goosebumps; not only did it open those pores under my skin, but the infinite possibilities of expression that existed in this art world. The impact of how she uses metaphors to describe her work swayed me. The following are her words from her essay "Making Not Knowing," adapted from her 2005 commencement address at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

One doesn't arrive — in words or in art — by necessarily knowing where one is going. In every work of art something appears that does not previously exist, and so, by default, you work from what you know to what you don't know. You may set out for New York but you may find yourself as I did in Ohio. You may set out to make a sculpture and find that time is your material. You may pick up a paint brush and find that your making is not on canvas or wood but in relations between people. You may set out to walk across the room but getting to what is on the other side might take ten years. You have to be open to all possibilities and to all routes — circuitous or otherwise.

But not knowing, waiting and finding — though they may happen accidentally, aren't accidents. They involve work and research. Not knowing isn't ignorance. (Fear springs from ignorance.) Not knowing is a permissive and rigorous willingness to trust, leaving knowing in suspension, trusting in possibility without result, regarding as possible all manner of response. The responsibility of the artist ... is the practice of recognizing. (Hamilton)

The influence of Hamilton's work is much deeper than I can express. The direct impact was my obsessiveness of working in huge scale and using metaphorical expressions. When I first was introduced to her work, I learned her works often respond to the spaces and cities in which they are created, using objects that reflect the culture's history and identity. I remember the first time I saw her work *The event of threads* I was awed with surprise. A field of swings suspended 70 feet in the air, an enormous white curtain attached to a web of ropes and pulleys, readers sitting at giant wooden tables reading to nearby pigeons. There were many more layers to this work. This was the first time I was introduced to such a level of multitudinous elements as part of one work: birds, writers, singers, swings, and sculptures. There were no rules. The engagement created with interconnected elements of the artwork stayed with me as a long-term goal. The poetic expression written in her artist statement is as beautiful as the physical work itself. I would like to quote her:

"the event of a thread is made of many crossings of the near at hand and the far away: it is a body crossing space, is a writer's hand crossing a sheet of paper, is a voice crossing a room in a paper bag, is a reader crossing with a page and with another reader, is listening crossing with speaking, is an inscription crossing a transmission, is a stylus crossing a groove, is a song crossing species, is touch being touched in return. It is a flock of birds and a field of swings in motion. It is a particular point in space at an instant of time." (Hamilton)



Fig 3. Ann Hamilton's "The event of a thread" 2012, by WarmSleepy is licensed under CC BY 2.0 large-scale interactive curtain and swing installation, with reader, writers, singers, and pigeons.

There are visual and intellectual stimuli everywhere and in everything around us: the environment, culture, geography, past, present, the in-between, and within. For me, the lived experiences turn into a conversation, and the conversation which stays with me for a prolonged period pivots into a metaphor which I tend to visualize while meditating and being still, leaving it up to intuition. The infinite thoughts narrate themselves in the interior monologue finally laid out as a rough sketch of how it visually appeared to me while still. The reason to be still with an idea is to understand and contemplate where it is coming from and detach the known from it so it can manifest itself intuitively and mysteriously—unlearning the social construct, like peeling off the layers and masks of human civilization and going towards the centre which is the source.

Once I identify the concept, I work with an interdisciplinary approach and start with technical research. This process involves a dialogue between researchers working across disciplines, reading articles, and looking at software/installation/surfing videos on how to make things, etc. Then I look into different artists who have worked on similar themes to form a contextual base. Most of the time I have a script of how my work will perform, but there are times I leave it to spontaneity depending on the concept of work. Things don't necessarily go as planned so I have this magic word called "Jugaad." It is a word in Hindi language that refers to a non-conventional, frugal innovation, often termed a hack. It could also refer to an innovative fix or a simple work-around, a solution that bends the rules, or a resource that can be used in such a way. It is also often used to signify creativity: to make existing things work or to create new things with meagre resources. Jugaad is my specialty. Jugaad goes hand in hand with the methodology of not knowing, as the unexpected is expected, fearlessly with a creative fix spontaneously.

In simple terms, this methodology is all about just being and learning to unlearn the doing. As often referred to in Tao Te Ching philosophy as doing through not doing.

MENTAL CONSTRUCT

I recognised that subconsciously I have traversed amongst water in its three phase solid, liquid, and gas. These ephemeral materials ice, water, and air, in a cycle, states my current position in transition.

SOLID STATE: ICE

To translate the experience of meditating and trying to be in present into my next work, I wanted to use a time-based medium that is as momentary as our human sentiments and experiences that constantly change from one state to another. I chose Ice for its ephemerality, exemplifying the futility of trying to freeze my ego, which generates itself continuously. My other medium of performance requires my body to be present in absolute presence. I covered my head with the hollow ice block, sitting in a meditative state on a huge mirror, letting the ice melt, with a projection of myself in various forms, on three sides of the walls looking at me judging through the past. (Fig. 4). And the viewers were on the fourth side judging and critiquing.

Rigid and still. The molecules are packed close together, preventing them from changing shape. Ice is sometimes used to symbolise the absence of emotion, like when we represent a person as cold as Ice. Icy areas in the world are not easily explored, so it can also symbolise the unexplored entity. A solid substance with a form would just melt and evaporate eventually like impermanent human life. In an ice cube, warming up and melting molecules become increasingly agitated and loose their strict connections. Entropy increases as temperature increases. An increase in temperature means that the particles of the substance have greater kinetic energy. The faster moving particles have more disorder than particles that are moving more slowly at a lower temperature. I started drawing parallel amongst entropy, theory of relativity and meditation. Einstein's theory of special relativity explains that time slows down or speeds up depending on how fast you move relative to something else. And a scientific research explains on how the entropy of the brain is increased by meditation, If speed can slow down time, then according to the theory of relativity, the increased entropy in brain due to meditation has the power to slow down time and expand the present.

I got an opportunity to be one of the speakers for TEDx Talks hosted by Emily Carr University. The talk was on Absent Presence and It was an artist statement on Ice, Eyes, and I's (Fig. 5). I would summarize my experience of this research by a quote by Rovelli "There is our past: all the events that happened before what we can witness now. There is our future: the events that will happen after the moment from which we can see the here and now. Between this past and this future there is an interval that is neither past nor future and still has a duration: fifteen minutes on Mars; eight years on Proxima b; millions of years in the Andromeda galaxy. It is the expanded present. It is perhaps the greatest and strangest of Einstein's discoveries." (Rovelli,52).

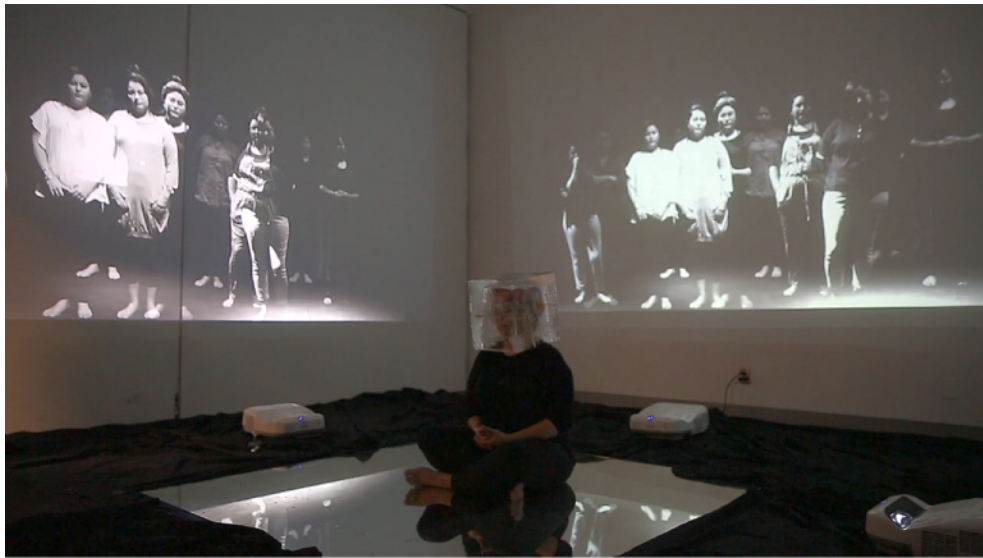


Fig. 4. Deepali Raiththa, *Ice, eyes, and I's*, 2020. Mirror, ice, video projection, and performance.



Fig. 5. Deepali Raiththa, *Absent Presence*, New Voices, 2020. TEDx Talk Emily CarrU.

This solid transparent, melting surface which was performing on its own, distorting the face, inspired me to spend more time with it. This work resulted from an intuitive experiment, keeping it open-ended with a theatrical backdrop made with paper, an exaggerated throne look, and a play of lights—a white skin clothing on the body to merge with the white background. Face, feet, and hands were painted white. The frustrated self-starts to merge itself with the background, so it cannot be seen any further. There was a struggle of making self a part of the background through a material that washes itself. The ice cube would not take on the colour forced on it; it dripped it down, again and again, making it clear and transparent. The aesthetic experience is evoked first through art's physical components and then through an intellectual engagement with materiality in the broad sense, through time. The thin transparent, almost invisible layer of Ice in between the face and the hands created an interesting narrative while distorting the face and forming a play of reflection on the neck and shoulder.



Fig. 6. Deepali Raiththa, *The Mergence*, 2020. Paper throne, ice cube over the head, white paint and, performance.

Performance with white face isn't new in contemporary art world, Suzy Lake who was born in Detroit and immigrated to Canada in 1968 often use photographic means to explore selfhood, gender, and the construction of identity. As in *A One Hour (Zero) Conversation with Allan B.*, 1973, she appeared to be in good-humoured conversation with someone off-camera. Lake makes use of photographs arranged in a gridded series to imply a time-lapsed conversation. The stills document the state of their exchange at regular, sixty-second intervals. Lake's face is caked in white make-up in an attempt to reach "zero," a condition where her gestures and not her features build narrative. White face was applied to denote mask. In mime, white face indicates zero before character. Lake's focus on the space beyond the frame presents several possibilities: she could be looking at the camera, at a viewer, or at her own reflection. This ambiguity becomes a crucial element of her performance and her notion of constructing a self. The camera operator takes pictures at regular intervals, providing a visual record of Lake's performance.

I see my work in conversation to Lake's works in terms of generating self portraits which are, experiments delimiting the boundaries of the body and the self from the social construct. As to how one begins to define one's true self, and the answer that falls from Lake's work is that it neither begins nor ends but continues moment by moment, blurring, to a vanishing point; like my continuous struggle to keep smudging the white paint onto the ice cube as an attempt to merge with the background and be invisible; but that kept melting and washing itself.



Fig. 7. Suzy Lake, *A One Hour (Zero) Conversation with Allan B.*, 1973, gelatine silver fibre-based print, felt pen on paper, 63.5 x 105.8 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery.

GASEOUS STATE: AIR

"As a man thinks, so he is; as he continues to think, so he remains."

— James Allen

Surrounded by a thought atmosphere, we exist in a world of thought. Our thoughts shape our experiences, and thus, we experience what we think. It is the quality of our thoughts, then, that create the quality of our life. Always surrounded still unaware about this invisible. Like air that we can only feel, a slow realisation of something around us. It resides in a way that is untouchable. Something we can breathe but can't see—life support. Bruno Latour is a French philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist. He is especially known for his work in the field of science and technology studies. One of his essays was suggested by one of my teachers when I was inflating 700 air bags for an art installation. It is a brief introduction to Peter Sloterdijk's work and to its notion of air-condition. Latour starts with this notion of air which is not felt until it is withdrawn, giving the example of a soldier's that starts suffocating because of a lack of oxygen around him. He speaks of Sloterdijk's concept that air has been made explicit; air has been reconfigured; it is now part of an air-conditioning system that makes our life possible. He gives examples of how our life has become dependent on this unnatural conditioning of air. Latour raises these captivating questions:

Fine, but what does it mean to be "in" some place? It always means being inside some sphere, (some atmo-sphere), hence recasting philosophy as "spherology." And hence a whole series of very practical, irreverent, funny questions. What is the envelope of this space? Through which door do you get in and out? What sort of air do you breathe in it? How do you become aware of the living conditions inside this glass house? (Latour)

Attempting to make this invisible visible I created an atmosphere using transparent inflated bags. By suspending these almost invisible floating bags in between a huge space, The installation landed in a liminal space. Air was used as a liminal space of absence. I was thinking about the fragile body surrounded by invisible and self-created troubles. The space that it occupies in our life is humongous and still invisible (Fig. 8). Repetition of these bags and each bag sewn with transparent wire presented an element of craft, giving it a steady coherency. This labor-intensive installation felt heavy and light simultaneously, portraying the fullness of emptiness we are surrounded with. The lightness to the structure was due to the floating airbags' transparency, as it felt fragile. Individually, the airbag, which looked like a cushion, was very familiar and ordinary material, but the assemblage of them in the form of a geometric structure had rhythm and dramatic appearance when read as a whole. The airbags started losing some air after a few days, not holding their shape, forming more spaces between the layers, making it less dense, and made it more free-floating.

The transformative nature of the installation recreating and changing form generates a new ephemerality narrative, like a happening, which will not happen again and will not last. A new relationship between existence and impermanence unraveled. After spending sometime under the installation this assemblage started appearing to me as accumulation of memories and history; floating and changing as living entity; moving apart and going further away as time goes creating empty gaps of detachment.



Fig. 8. Deepali Raiththa, *Envelope of Space*, 2020. 8'x8' w, 12'x12' ht. 700 Inflated air bags, suspended from ceiling with transparent wire.

LIQUID STATE: WATER

According to Ayurveda which is an alternative medicine system with historical roots in India, there are seven basic body types. One's genetic body type or inherent nature is referred to as Prakriti (nature). And there is a dominant nature of each person when they are born. Amongst which my body is characterised by Kapha + Pitta body type. Both of these types consists of the element "Water". I have a natural tendency to draw myself towards water. Immersing myself in water calms me down. The act of swimming is meditative for me, where we are constantly aware of our breath. Each and every moment feels in rhythm with nature's flow.

I wanted to use two atmospheres, to research the liminality of transition in my artistic research. And was naturally drawn towards water to be one of my medium. A sound wave that can travel both air and water, so I chose sound, a mechanical wave, to interrogate the transition between the different genres and atmospheres. Wanting to exaggerate the sound, I decided to use the trumpet as an extension of our mouth and a passage into these mediums.

Researching more into this subject and learning about artists who have worked underwater, I came across 'Holoscenes', a multi-format installation by Los Angeles artist Lars Jan. It features an aquarium-like sculpture sited in public space, thirteen feet tall and viewable from all the angles. It creates a series of mini floods by pumping water in the cubicle, and the performers inside the cube continue with their actions like playing guitar, mopping the floor, or selling fruits. Water keeps rising and falling. The performers submerged keep doing everyday things. It was in response to climate change and the urgency to understand the problem. These underwater performers' visceral experience struck me; they were contained in this atmosphere floating like astronauts. This inspired me to use my trumpet, and the sound that would travel the passage along with my physical immersion in water that would constitute visceral embodied knowledge.



Fig. 9. "Nuit Blanche Toronto 2014: Holoscenes" by Jackman Chiu is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 Lars Jan, Still from Holoscenes, performer submerged in water cleaning the glass, NYU Abu Dhabi Arts Center, 2016.

The Passage is a video compilation of blowing the trumpet on the land and underwater. There is a transitional phase when I am in between the air and water. Blowing the trumpet, which produced a sound that was muffled and unclear and formed, these air bubbles populated on the surface of the water, bursting and forming a sound of its own. The bubble has its own entity, which was neither present in the air nor underwater. Although both air and water are transparent and without form, it existed between them and had their form and was visible. It rises upward due to buoyancy and has a temporary life span. Only in the passage of the motion/transition forms these air pockets with a thin liquid membrane that is presumably empty/void until it reaches the surface into the new atmosphere and disappears or bursts. These bubbles define my role as a traveler, always in a temporary state of the crossing; the void air pockets which are empty of content and context stay temporary, moving up towards the familiar atmosphere. As it reaches there, it merges. Until a new movement/motion doesn't occur, bubbles cannot form.



Fig.10. Deepali Raiththa, Still from The Passage, Performance with trumpet blowing in air and underwater. 2020

The Passage was selected by San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), and SF Artists Alumni (SFAA) for Three Turns, a juried exhibition of video works by SFAI alumni artists. Featuring 26 artists, Three Turns stems from the concept that engaging artworks provide a viewer with three different entry points, prompting a deeper exploration into the work itself. Projected on the historic SFAI Tower at 800 Chestnut Street, which houses the Institution's 150 year old archive, Three Turns echoed the notion of traveling three turns in time and space by showing the selected alumni video works on the Tower in dialogue with video works selected from the SFAI archive.

This new install at a public site which was a historic tower, made me think about the signalling of the trumpet to be so much more powerful. As people on the streets are looking up towards the tower hearing this signal, this muffling. The unheard, when heard in this form, elevated the concept.

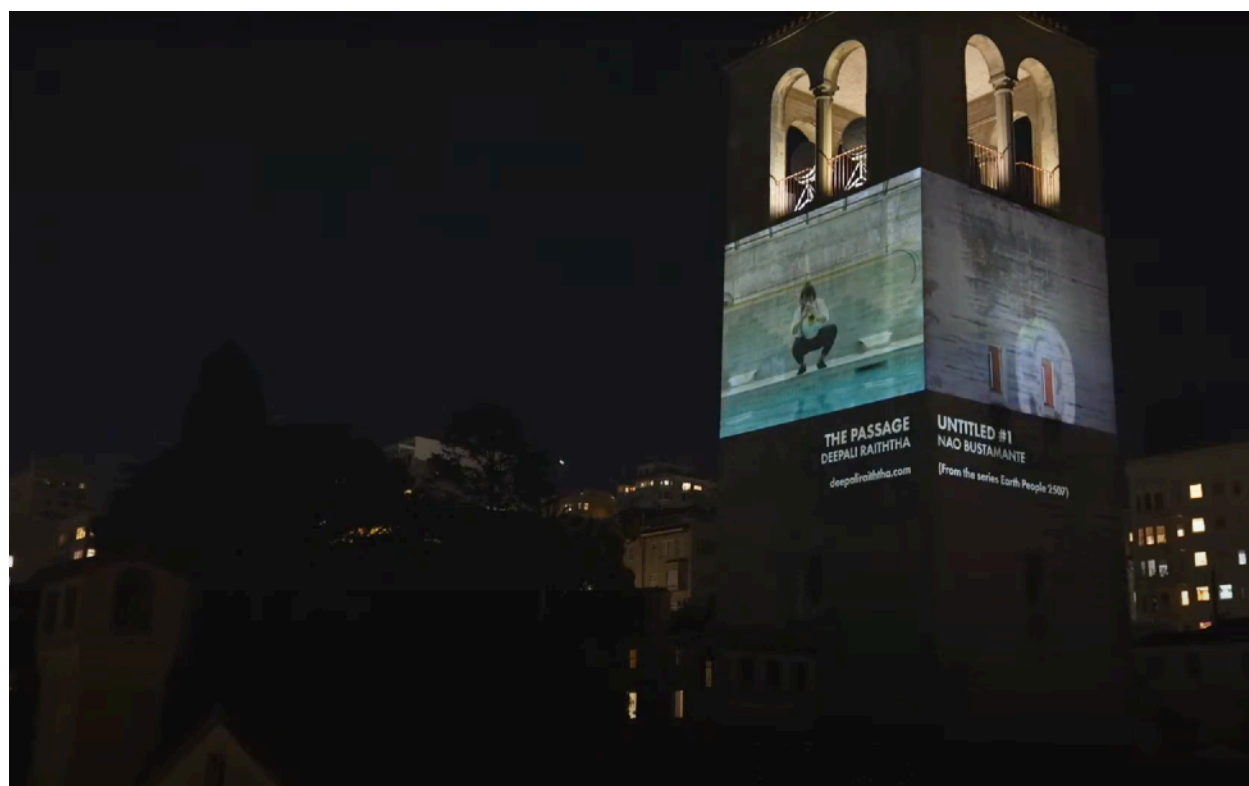


Fig. 11. Deepali Raiththa, Still from The Passage, Three Turns Exhibition, Historic tower of SFAI, San Francisco, CA, USA. 2020

IT DOES NOT CONCLUDE; IT IS A CYCLE.

Does anything ever conclude or come to an end? Or does it just moves on to the next stage? In my position as a traveller, transitioning from one place to another would require things to pass, and it is better to let them go and detach. So I can move on to the next destination, creating my bubbles of emptiness—the emptiness of social construct, restriction, and judgments. The impermanence is a motivation to cherish the time with self until the bubble bursts and merges with the society. The use of ephemeral materials like ice, water, and the air is one way to acknowledge the inevitable change and transient nature of life. This exploration leads to a body of work with a sense of lightness, laughter, and freedom; it is playful and whimsical, longing to connect using the performer's body to create intimacy with viewers.

The MFA started with the feeling of absence of content/context/subject around me, which led me to focus on the now/present moment. While researching on these brief moments of now, I came to know of the long now in Brian Eno's essay "Big here and long now" The long now is the recognition that the precise moment you are in grows out of the past and is seed for the future. The longer your sense of Now, the more past and future it includes. The last installation involves a massive, room-sized narrow wooden box in the gallery space, which invites visitors to walk in the narrow passage to experience the flickering video projection at the end of the tunnel-like structure. It reveals intricacies about the relationship between bodies and large objects in space and introduces an opening into the object to experience an interaction between embodiment, sound and visualization.



Fig. 12. Deepali Raiththa, *The Long Now*, MFA Exhibition, Emily Carr University of Art and Design, 2021

There were four videos displayed vertically on four monitors. The videos were captured inside a flickering light box setup, with a white plinth on which all the experiments took place. The performance had very bright white visuals as along with the background; my uniform was white too. To maintain the neutrality of the happening where I did not want people to focus on any colour, I chose minimum shades and hues. The videos seemed to be domestic acts, like cooking ice, trying to fill bubbles in jars, self-care activities like immersing the face in steam with a towel headband and random acts of immersing the head into the fishbowl blowing bubbles. These were accompanied by their respective sounds, which attracted viewers from far away, notifying them about the happening. The action seemed very productive initially as there were multiple activities happening inside the tunnel. The seriousness of the giant solid construction and walking the dark pathway towards the screen was in absolute contrast to the nonsensical video acts, which were humorous and empty of essence. But still, these empty gestures had a push and pull of holding on to the things which can't be, like trying to catch bubbles in the jar and letting go, like cooking ice till it evaporates. Wrapping up the final work with these ephemeral materials, which are cyclical in nature, was layered with metaphors.

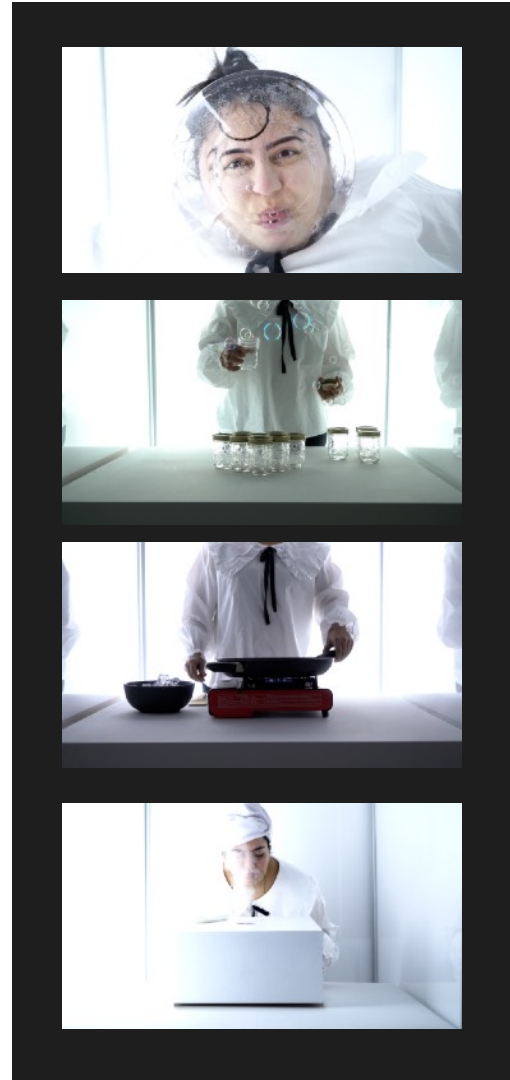


Fig. 13. Deepali Raiththa, Stills from *The Long Now*, MFA Exhibition, Emily Carr University of Art and Design, 2021

This understanding of long now leads me to a full circle of escaping from the suffocating social construct and travelling to a new place in search of space and freedom; going through the liminal state of being in between and betwixt of past and future, going through the passage of the unknown, unheard to the other side, forming jointly constructed understandings of the world that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality. Again to where it all started, a new society and newer judgments.

I have started narrowing down my complex and broader concepts into simple ideas. Separate one concept into different parts to identify if they need to be together or can be a different work altogether. My interest is growing towards digital media more, and I am trying to learn new software for editing. Also, I realized that I need experts in the area who can collaborate with me for filming and editing complex projects. Looking at different artist's works and exposing myself to a different medium, suggestions by teachers and peers to look at different artist works helped me expand my boundaries in various ways. And learning about how other artists think and their processes gave me a deeper understanding of my process. Critiques and studio visits were the most helpful while growing and thinking more about what direction I am going into and questioning certain decisions I take and rethink. It was always surprising to hear from others how they perceived my work which helped me detach from my own perception about that work. Also, through the feedback, I learnt how a different country and culture would look at my work vs my own culture. And I started thinking about the audience, and the diversity and how to cope and be! Spontaneity! Spontaneity! The creative process was mostly about making a quick decision, trusting what comes to me, grabbing what the universe was throwing at me, and allowing mistakes to be my strength rather than fixing them. Mistakes were used as strong abstract strokes with the utmost confidence in my work.

Awaiting for another journey so that I can experience the gap once again!

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