

DIGGING

Interrogating curiosity and wonder, the artists in *Digging* have gone on a self-exploratory journey of revelation, addressing memory, loss, signs of destruction, and physicality. They have created a space to discover and be discovered: the familiar and the unfamiliar; ideas, memories, jokes; generational traumas and experiences; the continuous act of exposing vulnerability; what has been lost in translation emerging in new forms; intangible physicality; ever-changing landscapes and of experiences. Solange Adum Abdala, Mahsa Farzi, Vanessa Mercedes Figueroa, Sarah Haider and Yuan Wen juxtapose these concerns in their own ways by digging together.

Through this excavation, the artists have had to decide what to dig up, what to keep, what to draw attention to or tuck away—including the art of mark-making, the space of error, forgetfulness, remembering and questioning the reality of it all. They may have changed their course, looking back to the creases that shaped their lives, their praxis, calibrating into the present to preserve their discoveries, knowing when is enough and what is enough to see the light of day. The artists address these concerns with overexposed lines over and over, merging into disorienting sounds, fleeting scents, inventing new language where it doesn't exist, jokes that cannot be translated, such mysteries as where the water ends and the land begins, where the land ends and human skin begins, revealing the signs of trauma and re-remembering what has been lost in erasure.

Solange Adum Abdala: *“Move. Remove. Go beyond the tangible. Extract a volume to make room for the fluidity of nothingness.”* Adum Abdala's research revolves around the transversal perspective that shapes the perception of landscape, with concepts that revolve around nature, temporality, human behavior, resource exploitation, power and the conception of the Anthropocene. She investigates how photography as a medium delimits a place as one's own and allows us to critically analyze concepts such as space, territory, and historical layers. Her current practice is based on transforming the photographic object as a colonizing entity, especially of nature images fading and 're/de/constructing' spaces, inviting viewers to see the world anew.

Mahsa Farzi: *“Building and then destroying or abandoning. Relocation and exploration. Planting and dying.”* For Farzi, daily life is a zone of self-exploration, where the ordinary becomes a stage for reflecting on themes like change, continuity, life, and death.

Her work captures the humour and absurdity in the mundane, turning everyday moments into narratives that resonate on a personal level. Through her art, she explores the simplicity and complexity of daily experiences, often with a playful touch.

Vanessa Mercedes Figueroa: *“An exploratory act, searching for something further down, making active effort and gestures to push aside the surface level.”* Figueroa's experiences within this perpetual in-between, the blurring of being within her brown skin, are mediated through both text and imagery as she attempts to gain a deeper understanding of her positionality and identity. Through both written and visual gestures, she hopes to evidence the multiple ways structural violence operates in the lives of women and girls, especially in how these roles function through the lens of race - what behaviors are acceptable or unacceptable, rewarded or punished, for a woman if she is brown or white.

Sarah Haider: *“An act of lifting up the veil off of what had been concealed, one layer after the other.”* Referencing the memories from her childhood house, Haider has intertwined olfactory with self-made rituals of recollection. Her focus lies in understanding how scent, as a form of artistic expression, transcends temporal boundaries, weaving connections between past and present. She attempts to investigate what is lost and what has transformed over the years, using the scents that she grew up smelling around her house: of the food, the people, and the pets and plants she considered her siblings. She attempts to navigate a path between her South Asian Shia Muslim identity associated with her house that has dissipated since the demise of the house in physicality.

Yuan Wen: *“Unearthing hidden connections between the past and present, revealing the roots of our existence while creating space for new growth and understanding.”* Beginning with material experimentation, Wen recognizes materials' significant roles in carrying personal and collective memories and their social implications. This focus has led her to work primarily with bamboo and Xuan paper, which she extensively uses in drawing, printmaking, and installation. By studying traditional crafts and materials from Asian cultures, she integrates the history of bamboo and Xuan paper to create pieces that intertwine natural forms with social structures. This exploration delves into the transcendence between micro and macro fragments, reflecting Wen's curiosity about these dynamics.

Artists

Solange Adum Abdala

@solangeadumabdala

Solange Adum Abdala is a Peruvian-born artist who relocated to Vancouver in 2023 after a lifetime in her homeland, who explores the relationship between technology, media, art and science. Influenced by her Lebanese-Palestinian heritage and experiences of migration, through her practice, she critically engages with temporality, space, territory, and landscape. Initially focused on lens-based views, Adum Abdala now repurposes previous works to criticize colonization, incorporating drawing, video, collage, AI, and vision extension devices to invite viewers to re/de/construct their perceptions of the world.

Mahsa Farzi

@mahsafarzi_

Mahsa Farzi (b. 1992) is an Iranian artist based in Vancouver. She finds daily life to be a rich source of inspiration, believing that the small moments and routines reveal deeper truths about who we are. Her art-making process is deeply personal and introspective, focusing primarily on her experiences and observations. Farzi also culls inspiration from Iranian folk tales, memories, jokes, daily fragments, and overheard conversations. Her creative process has taken the shape of an unconventional daily diary of her life in a foreign land, expressing the loss of familiarity.

Vanessa Mercedes Figueroa

@vmercedesart

Living and working in Vancouver, Canada, Vanessa Mercedes Figueroa is an emerging artist exploring identity politics and critical theory to create a visual response and evaluate her positionality as a racialized, feminized individual. Figueroa's work primarily functions through a diaristic lens, exploring the treatment of brown bodies in the sociopolitical period to allow for reevaluation and critical reflection.

Sarah Haider

@sarahhaider.k

Sarah Haider is an emerging Pakistani interdisciplinary artist whose practice explores time, memory and gender through smell. She is particularly interested in how smell evokes past memories, especially those connected to her childhood home, thus keeping them alive in recollection. She explores the inseparable connection between her identity, the house and the South Asian Shia Muslim culture.

Yuan Wen 文媛

@yuan.wen.site

A first-generation immigrant artist based in Vancouver, Yuan Wen navigates the intersection of natural forms, social structures, and cross-cultural experiences through aesthetics. Specializing in bamboo and Xuan paper, Wen blends traditional craftsmanship with contemporary drawing, printmaking, and installation practices. Her artwork connects cultural heritage with ecological concerns, sparking a dialogue about the relationships between humanity, nature, and materiality. Wen prioritizes sustainability and emphasizes the tactile, emotional, and intellectual experiences with materials.

Works

Solange Adum Abdala

Laisser - Passer

2024–2023

Video installation projected onto canvas, Drawing, Digital photography, Intervened archive
Dimensions variable

Laisser - Passer is is an interdisciplinary work that addresses migration through time and space, connecting the stories of displacement of the artist's family to her own journey and present place. Starting from reviewing migration documents and family stories, the artist has drawn four maps representing the speculative routes of her great-grandparents and grandparents from Palestine and Lebanon, passing through different points in the Americas to her destination in Vancouver. These maps, superimposed to create a single image, constitute a cartography that amalgamates the navigation history of her ancestors. In this work, the repetition of acts such as walking, drawing and scraping becomes a metaphor for the past that remains latent in the present, marking the body and identity of the artist.

Mahsa Farzi

Bad Summer Series

2024

Mixed media
Unsize

An Unwritten Poem

2024

Oil and pencil on unprimed canvas
Unsize

Bad Summer Series consists of numerous drawings, paintings, and sculptures created during the summer of 2024—my first summer away from home! It features images of daydreams and fantasies, very ordinary scenes, solitude, confusion, dance, tears, metamorphosis, flowers, death, thoughts, and essentially everything about this summer. This collection is chaotic, with various materials on different surfaces and dimensions. I could translate it as the turmoil of my mental state when days passed in the depths of isolation, and the only way to survive was to paint and create with whatever materials were available. In this process, experiencing and enduring each moment was more important to me than the final outcome.

Sarah Haider

حبالہ کے ہالہ! /Chalo k Chalen (Let's go!)

Glass vials, Spices, Oils, Powders, Fluids, Flowers
Unsize

حبالہ کے ہالہ! consists of 1095 vials displayed at various heights asymmetrically installed on different heights depending on the vividness, sensitivity and sharpness of the memories the scents evoke. By establishing a ratio of one scent per week, these vials represent 21 years of my life in my childhood house. Whether pleasant or pungent, each scent has a distinct story. It is an archive which inevitably changes its form upon each interaction, either through the nature of scent or storytelling. The title is a phrase used by my father as a signal to leave for home and here it translates to traveling back to a place that does not exist anymore. I further interrogate the physicalities of storing my past in amounts that I was legally allowed to carry across continents, also reminding myself of my generational history of movement and immigration.

Vanessa Mercedes Figueroa

Untitled

2024

Cotton linters, Kenaf fibre, Barely, Chestnut, Quebracho, Walnut, Artificial light
Dimensions variable

Untitled

2024

Inkjet transparency, Natural light
50" x 71"

This pair of untitled works includes 18 light boxes holding handmade paper, and a lightbox created utilizing the gallery space. Seeing paper as a membrane similar to skin, I interrogate how skin mediates femininity and the societal gaze. My skin holds a contradiction of undesirable marks through the simulation of scars and imperfections; holding the tension between the desirable, fetishizable assumption of brown skin and the reality of existing within it. By engaging in the reproduced image of the self through the use of a scanner, I interrogate ideas of the self mediated through imagery that could be myself but also a blur of any brown skin. The light within the boxes fluctuates throughout the day, naturally and unnaturally, revealing and concealing portions of text or images, allowing the viewer to catch brief, intimate moments of my day-to-day life.

Yuan Wen

Walking to the End of the River

2024

Bamboo, Xuan Paper, Hemp Cord
Dimensions variable

The Unit

2024

Bamboo, Xuan Paper, Hemp Cord
16½" x 16½" x 16½"

Rising

2024

Three channel videos
1920 x 1080 pixels x 3, 1½ min

Walking to the End of the River explores the interconnectedness of rivers, water bodies, land, and people, inspired by Wang Wei's Tang dynasty verse: “行到水窮處，坐看雲起時” (“walk to the end of the water, sit and watch the clouds rise”). This installation merges traditional aesthetics with contemporary ecological concerns, focusing on sustainability and local crafts. The work features bamboo structures and lithographic prints on Xuan paper. The bamboo units use simplified, repeating forms that reflect the material's natural characteristics, intertwining cultural metaphors and personal experiences. Central to the bamboo units is the exploration of Chinese characters: “口” (one square) symbolizes a basic unit, “田” (four squares) represents farmland, and “邑” (one square with a person) signifies a town. These characters illustrate the evolution from simplicity to complex societal structures. The fluidity of water in the prints metaphorically represents the natural process of connection and transmission as rivers converge into the ocean. My work contemplates the fundamental interplay of land and water, exploring methods to reestablish connections amidst alienation in contemporary society.

DIGGING

Opening: 18
September 18
5-7pm

Tuesday-Friday
12-4pm 18

AHVA Gallery
Audain Art Centre 10
6398 University Blvd 2024

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Yuan Wen

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Sarah Haider

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