

Ryan Naga
Artist, Gallerist, Educator

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*All drawings are done with graphite on acid-free 300gsm
Saunders Waterford hot-pressed watercolour paper.
Selected drawings and projects only.*



INTRODUCTION

BIOGRAPHY

'How can I artistically present the influence of my cultural heritage on my art and beyond without falling into common tropes? More importantly, how should I present culture in a way that accurately reflects myself and my identity, such that I do not lose the individual in the universal?'

Ryan Naga (*he/him*) is known for his drawings of graphite on watercolour paper. The artist constructs drawings that are light and airy yet balanced and full. While Ryan's rhythmic compositions are influenced by his training in Chinese calligraphy, his subjects are drawn from his own reference images and are rendered with a sharp attention to realistic detail, such as shadows, three-dimensional effects, and highlights that abide by a unifying light source. Ryan blurs boundaries between the foreground and background, and creates visual coherence through an intuitive use of negative space balanced by his signature and seal.

Having completed most of his practise abroad, Ryan works from the perspective of a young person of colour looking at a space from the outside in – exploring themes of nostalgia, eagerness, memory, and 'home' as an abstract idea rather than a physical location. The artist constantly questions the boundaries between the 'home' and the 'foreign', and how these definitions can often intersect and overlap. His graphite drawings are vulnerable and meditative – the marks and smudges reflective of the gradience, blurriness, and marked impacts of migration and along with-it feelings of simultaneously belonging and unbelonging. His most recognisable works are his graphite drawings of pigeons. Inspired by the pigeon's long-lasting

relationship with humankind and a passing joke from a previous partner, Ryan uses the pigeon as a subject for social commentary – exploring broad themes ranging from socio-political discourse to connections that are personal and romantic.

In 2023, Ryan conceptualised 'Homing' – a drawing-data collection hybrid project named after the homing pigeon – merging familiar subjects with the artist's fascination of people and their ideas of what 'home' is and what it could be. For the pilot launch, Ryan interviewed 125 people within a 20-day period, collecting and transcribing responses from family, friends, previous/current partners, and complete strangers, going beyond individual expression and examining ideas of (un)belonging through community participation and social engagement.

Ryan was the first artist-in-residence at the St. Regis Langkawi at the age of seventeen. He had his first solo show at G Hotel Penang in 2019, before migrating to Perth to pursue a double major in Finance and Economics at the University of Western Australia. While being a full-time student, the artist worked as a youth advisor in various arts bodies, received invitations to artist residencies in Melbourne and around WA, conducted workshops, and participated in group shows. Before returning to Malaysia, Ryan worked as a visual arts coordinator for Pigeonhole's FLOCK festival – his first introduction to curation and art writing. Ryan held his second solo show, 'Dorm Room Self Portrait' at Hin Bus Depot, Penang in December 2022, then subsequently moved to Kuala Lumpur where he was the acting manager for HOM Art Trans, Ampang, Selangor, from March to September 2023.



'Dorm Room Self Portrait', Penang, 2022

CURRICULUM VITAE

Artist, Gallerist, Educator

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

'Dorm Room Self Portrait'
Hin Bus Depot, 2022

'Animal Companion'
G Hotel Penang, 2019

ARTIST RESIDENCIES

Red Earth Arts Festival
Karratha, WA, 2022

Cool Change Contemporary
Perth, WA, 2022

AWESOME Arts Australia
Yandeyarra, WA, 2022

The Blender Studios
Victoria, Melbourne, 2021

Little Art House
Penang, Malaysia, 2019

The St Regis Langkawi
Langkawi, Malaysia, 2018

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

(selected)

'This is Family'
Moore Contemporary, Perth, WA,
2023

'Threshold'
Nysiztor Studio, Perth, WA, 2022

'Bloom'
Red Earth Arts District, Karratha, WA,
2022

'This is Family'
Cool Change Contemporary, Perth,
WA, 2022

'TULAY - Two Nations, One Art'
Online exhibition, 2021

**'Portal & Open SEA: Between
Boorloo and Singapore'**
Paper Mountain, Perth, WA, 2020

'LangUR'
Penang State Art Gallery,
Penang, Malaysia, 2021

'BELANG'
Penang State Art Gallery,
Penang, Malaysia, 2019

'8" by 6" Project'
Open Studios Penang,
Penang, Malaysia, 2019

WORKSHOPS & DEMONSTRATIONS

**The WA Museum
Boola Bardup**
Perth, WA, 2023

Hawaiian Property Group
Perth, WA, 2023

**Yandeyarra Remote
Community High School**
Yandeyarra, WA, 2022

Roeburne District High School
Karratha, WA, 2022

**Youth Week WA
KickstART Festival**
State Library of WA, Perth, 2021

Paper Mountain
ENEX, Perth, 2020

**Malaysian National
Chinese Cultural Festival**
Penang Chinese Town Hall
Penang, 2018

**Penang Chinese
Brush Painting Society**
Chulia Heritage Hotel, Penang, 2017
(collaborative demonstration with Rosalynn Teoh)

Collaborative Workshop
Hin Bus Depot, Penang, 2018
(collaborative workshop with Chng Kiah Kiean)

ORGANIZATIONS & AFFILIATIONS

HOM Art Trans
Acting Manager, 2023

Pigeonhole's FLOCK Festival
Visual Arts Coordinator, 2022

Art Gallery of Western Australia
Youth Advisory Panel, 2020, 2021

Perth Festival
Youth Advisory Council, 2020

Propel Youth Arts WA
Festival Planning Committee, 2020

Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery
Student Advisory Committee, 2020, 2021

Getting It Strait
Head Editorial Illustrator, 2021, 2022

HOMING - PROJECT LOCATIONS

The Godown Artist Market
The Godown Arts Centre, KL, Malaysia, 2023

Kuala Lumpur Design Festival
The Telekom Museum,
KL, Malaysia, 2023

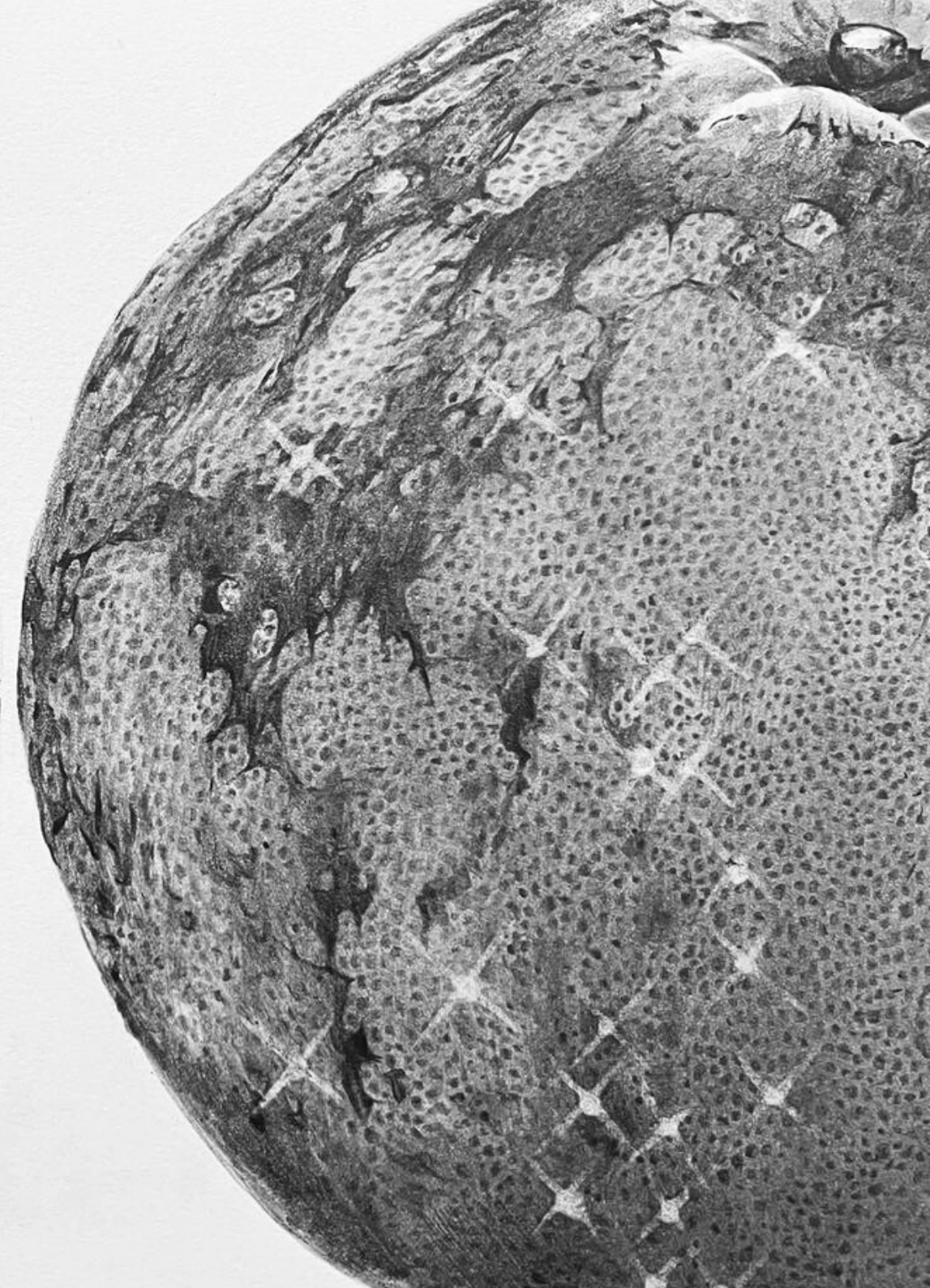
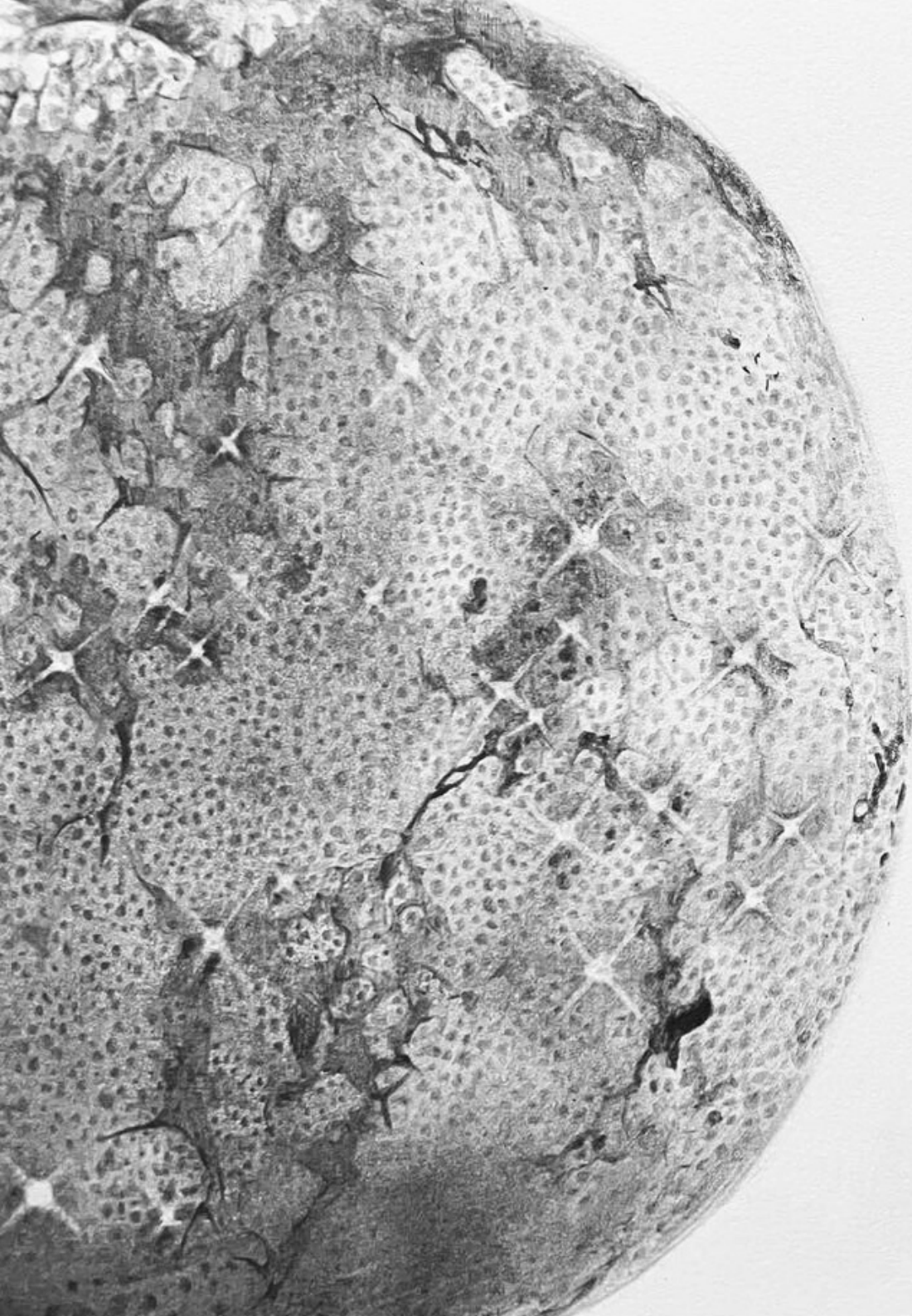
Invited Solo Exhibition
The Fluxus House, Singapore, 2023

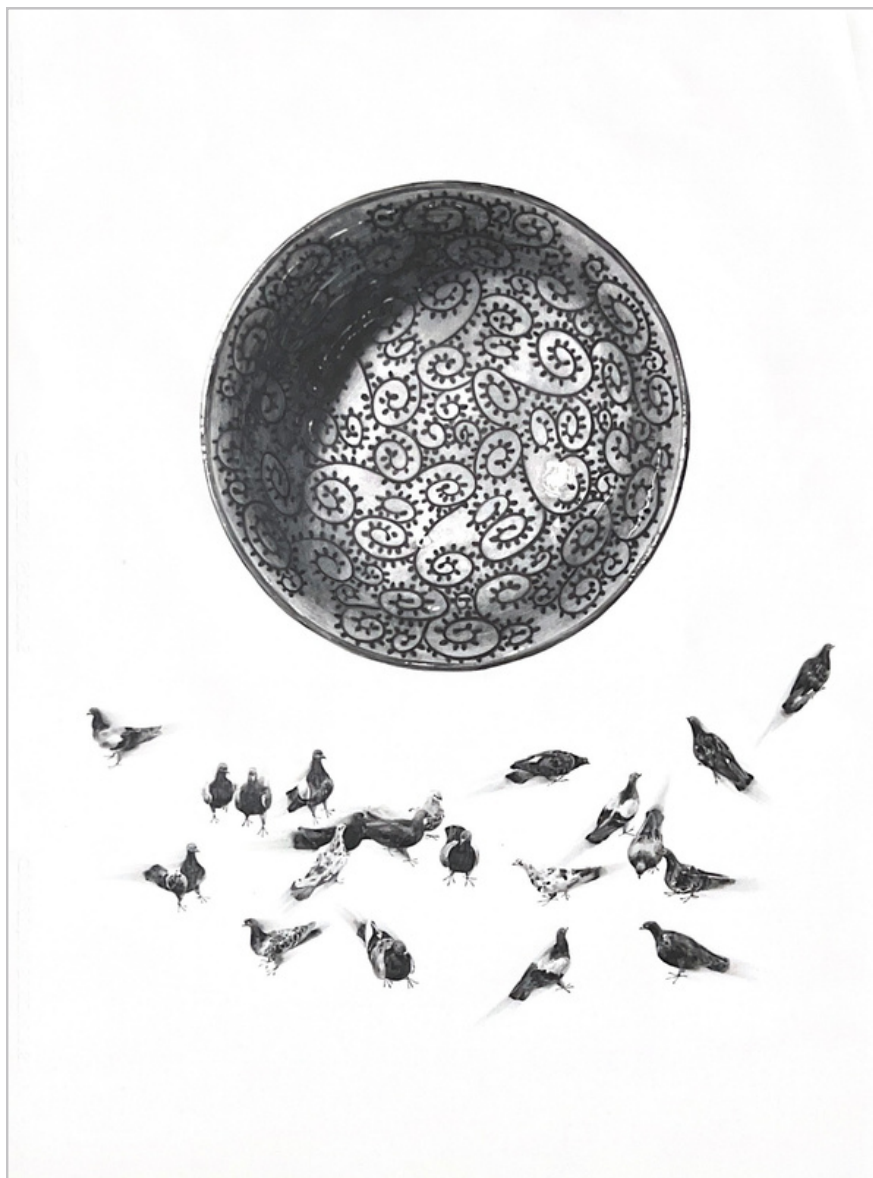
Collaboration with Staedtler MY
Triptyk, KL, Malaysia, 2023

RECENT WORKS



Pomelo constellation / 56 x 76 cm / 2023





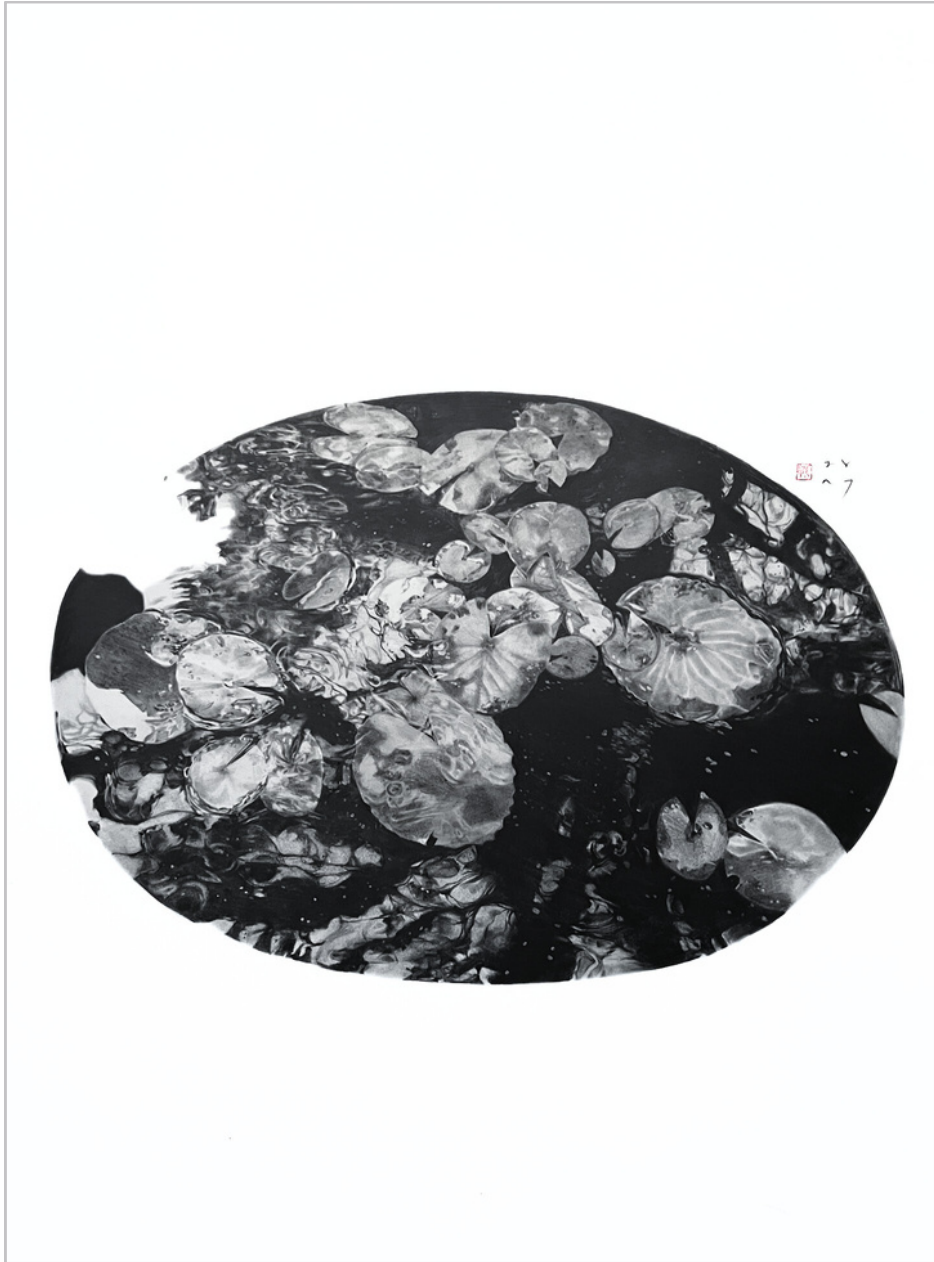
Ceramic moon
76 x 56 cm
2023



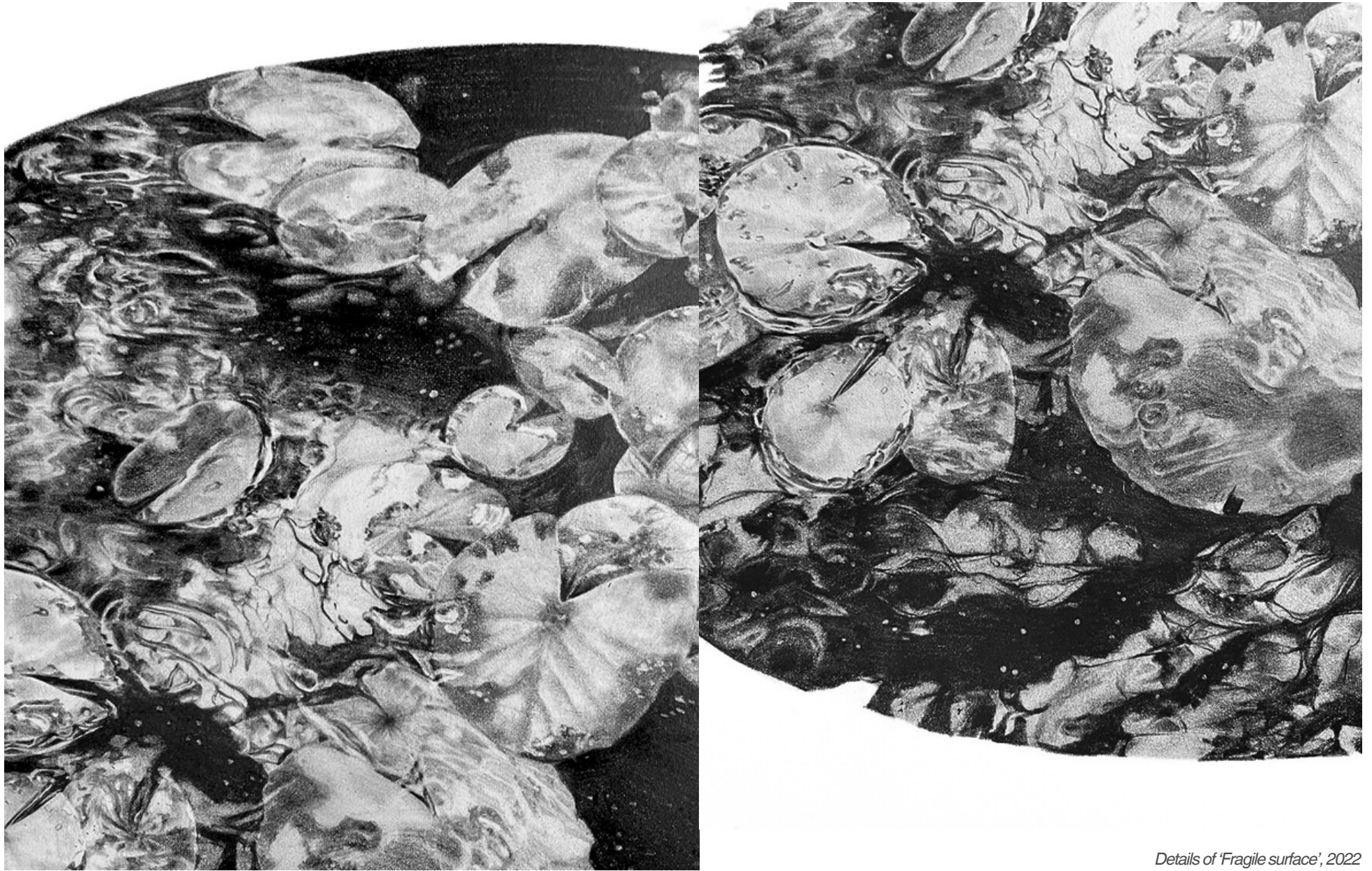
For a while it was love, wasn't it? / 56 x 76 cm / 2023



Artist residency at Cool Change Contemporary, Perth, WA, 2022



Fragile surface
76 x 56 cm
2022



Details of 'Fragile surface', 2022

HOMING - DRAWINGS, DATA, COMMUNITY

HOMING

drawings, data, community

I am curious about people and the ways they live.

I like talking and listening. I like observing patterns in people and sorting them into categories in my head. I like to think and imagine.

I lived in Perth for four years without a car. Sometimes when I am running for the bus, I see someone running even faster than me, overtaking me eventually and getting on first. I wonder if they were also late for a shift. I wonder if I will ever see them again.

A previous partner once told me I reminded her of a pigeon because I walk funny and eat garbage. Since then, pigeons have found their way onto my paper and into my thoughts.

As our domestic companion for the last 12,000 years, every modern-day feral pigeon carries rich stories of human history – migration, colonial expansion, changing values, food trends. The homing pigeon was once valued for its ability to return to a home location while taking the same route every time. Scientists pose various theories, but we do not know how they do it.

If we were to apply the homing nature of pigeons in the context of human emotions, the idea of 'home' becomes varied and multi-dimensional. We perceive the world through external stimuli. We learn as we live, creating unique individuals from every culture – not unlike how nature shapes species in the wild.

What senses do we use to navigate home?

What routes do we take?

How do we know when we are there?

Our understanding of home is tied to memory. It encompasses the complex and interconnected relationships between individuals, items, spaces, locations, and other people. Because the idea of 'home' is fluid and can be endlessly reimagined throughout every individual's life, these definitions become entirely subjective and truly unique. Yet, how often do we realize that every passer-by is also, in vivid motion, venturing to 'home' destinations just like our own? These destinations could be completely alien to one another, yet many remain charmingly familiar.

How many stories are overlooked simply because we do not have a use for the ones who tell them?

What if we pieced these stories together and viewed them not as individual fragments but as a collective human memory of being?

'Homing' is a community-led drawing + data collection hybrid project that seeks to find shared comforts through interviews and collaborative pattern-finding. The process is simple.

- 1] Sit down!
 - 2] We have a chat on homes and feelings of comfort
 - 3] You point on the paper
 - 4] I draw a pigeon where your finger is
- (Process explained in the following slide)*



'Homing', Kuala Lumpur Design Festival, 2023

FOUR STEP PROCESS

methodology explained

[1] Sit down!

The interviewee sits down. I brief them about the project and ask for their consent to record the conversation.

[2] We have a chat on homes and feelings of comfort.

Inspired by theories on how homing pigeons find their ways home, I ask questions relating to homes and houses with a focus on the senses - sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch. The conversations usually covers topics of family, nostalgia, personal habits and values, and feelings of (dis)comfort and (un)belonging.

[3] You point on the paper.

I tell the interviewee I will now draw them as a pigeon. The interviewee is asked to point on any area on the paper. I make a mark where their finger lands. The marks increase as more people get interviewed. This means that every person is aware of the areas that others have already occupied. The act of pointing can be understood as how the respondent occupies space in relation to a crowd.

At the point of writing this portfolio, I have interviewed exactly 125 people. I have divided respondents' selection rationale into six categories:

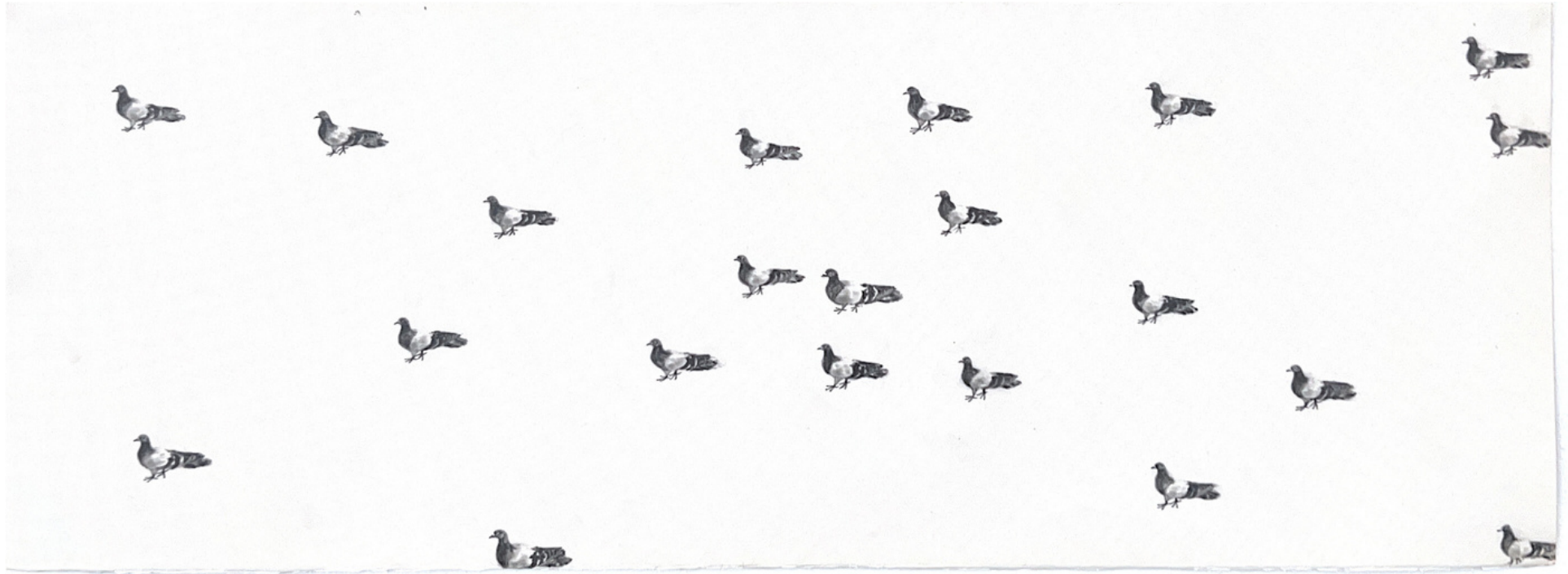
- a. Center. They point in the central region of the page. They explain that they 'want to be where everything happens'.
- b. Side. They point away from the center. They explain that they do not enjoy receiving lots of attention.
- c. Corner. They point in the corners of the page. They prefer solitude for various reasons.
- d. Buddy. They point beside someone they know who was also interviewed (*partner, family member or friend*).
- e. Goldilocks. They want to be surrounded by people but not within a crowd. Just far enough from people without being isolated.
- f. Empath. They point beside a stranger. They explain that 'it (*the mark on the paper*) just looked lonely'.

[4] I draw a pigeon where your finger is.

Following the series of interviews, I begin drawing pigeons according to the marks I made on the paper. The end product is a collection of interviews that will later be transcribed, and a collaborative drawing. Examples of these drawings are shown in the following four slides.

One pigeon drawn = one person interviewed.





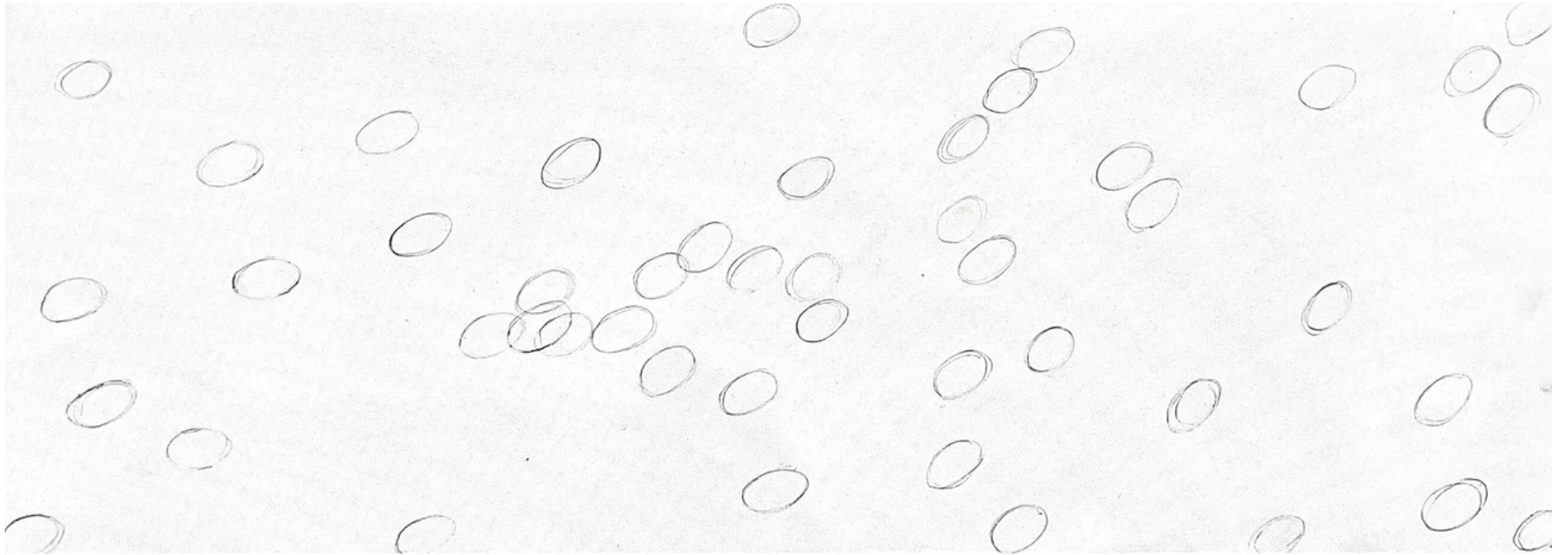
'Homing - friends and family'
28 x 76 cm
2023



'Homing - The Godown Artist's Market'
(unfinished)
28 x 76 cm
2023



'Homing - almost every art gallery in Kuala Lumpur'
(*unfinished*)
28 x 76 cm
2023



'Homing - Kuala Lumpur Design Festival'
(*unfinished*)
28 x 76 cm
2023

homing 歸巢

My name is Piyen and I am an artist.

I am curious about people and the ways they live. I like talking and listening. I like observing patterns in people and sorting them into categories in my head. I like to think and imagine.

I lived in Perth for four years without a car. Sometimes when I am waiting for the bus, I see someone running even faster than me, overtaking me eventually and getting on first. I wonder if they were also late for a job. I wonder if I will ever see them again.

A previous partner once told me I reminded her of a pigeon because I walk funny and eat garbage. Once then, pigeons have found their way onto my paper and into my thoughts.

As our domestic companion for the last 12,000 years, every modern-day feral pigeon carries rich stories of human history. The Homing pigeon was once valued for its ability to return to a home location while taking the same route every time. Scientists pose various theories, but we do not know how they do it.

If we were to apply the homing nature of pigeons in the context of human emotions, the idea of 'home' then becomes vast and multi-dimensional. We traverse the world through external stimuli. We learn as we live, creating unique individuals from every culture - not unlike how nature shapes species in the wild.

What senses do we use to navigate home? What routes do we take? How do we know when we are there?

Our understanding of home is tied to memory. It encompasses the complex and interconnected relationships between individuals, items, spaces, locations, and other people. Because the idea of 'home' is fluid and can be entirely rearranged throughout every individual's life, these definitions become entirely subjective and truly unique. Yet how often do we realize that every passer-by is also, in valid motion, venturing to 'home' destinations far like our own? These destinations could be completely alien to one another, yet many remain (strongly) familiar.

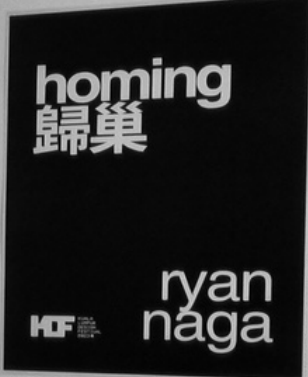
How many stories are overlooked simply because we do not have a use for the ones who tell them?

What if we placed these stories together and viewed them not as individual fragments but as a collective human memory of being?

I am excited to share 'homing' with you. I would love for you to be a part of it.

Sincerely,
Piyen Naga

@piyen.naga_ +60127272148 piyen120@gmail.com



HOMING - EXCERPTS FROM TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEWS

I remember my sister and I in my room, we didn't have a lot of money so we couldn't afford the dollhouse and everything, so we just bought the (toy) dog and a children's chair. We turned that children's chair into an apartment.

23, F, (MY)Chinese, Langkawi, Store Owner

without hesitation 'Oh, Bruno Major. Any Bruno Major song. Funny story. She didn't like Bruno Major when she met me, but she pretended to like the songs that I liked. She went to my Spotify and downloaded all of my playlists. Whenever I play a song in the car, she goes 'oh, I know this song too!' She only told me a few months later. So now every Bruno Major song reminds me of her.'

24, M, (MY)Malay, Penang, Vendor

'Seriously, mentally, these things are lingering in my mind. The moment, to be very frank, I felt a big relief, 就是没人还在操纵家里的喜怒哀乐, is when my mother passed away.'

52, F, (MY)Chinese, SP, Housewife

One cinamoroll. It's big. Two Evangelion characters, the main characters Asuka and Ray. Two fist-sized Kirbys. **gesticulating** This big. One ditto. That one I found it in JJJ. What else. Oh, and an Evangelion angel, Zuriel.

27, M, (MY)Chinese, Muar, Software Engineer

Before I left, my mum gave me her prayer robe. She would wear it consistently, and so the smell would get stuck in it. It's always with me. In my bed. So my bed feels like my home.

24, M, Sudanese, Saudi Arabia, Architect

This isn't what I think home should have, but what I think home has, is regret. A lot of it. From my own end, from our mother. I see it in Courtney as well. Things you weren't able to do and you're making do. I think that's everyone. Everyone has regrets. And I think the reason why you associate home with regret is that you don't talk about this in public.

21, M, (MY) Chinese, KL, Bank Intern

Um, the first word is I think of my son saying 'Momma!' **high-pitched**. That's what I hear. It's when you come home and that joy that your child has for seeing you is just like, yeah. **sobs** **inaudible** It's too early for me to cry!

40, F, American, California, Media Consultant

Some of us are forced to leave our homes, and we are just displaced, in this country, when all of our rights are taken away, basically. When we get here, we are always not just staying in one place. So it really is hard to find this place called home.

19, M, Dai-Burmese, Shan State Myanmar, Student

It's not fancy. Just normal Malay dishes. But it is different when you have it at home. You don't just taste the food. It's the taste of the feeling that someone thought of you.

28, M, (MY), Malay, Kedah, Operations Manager

I think of a house with a dog inside. Because I have one. In Australia. And then in Malaysia I just think of a tall building with lots and lots of people in rooms.

8, M, EU Australian, Adelaide, Student

I feel like new condos are a bit sterile, a bit too clean, nothing broken, not worn in yet. Home feels like moldy toilets. It feels like everything is broken but you just live in it somehow

24, F, (MY) Chinese, Melaka, Student

我有一件衣服穿了十多年。他已经破洞破到很烂了。灰色的。那是以前学校我们做charity去老人院的。然后他是印了他的stupid logo 大大个。我定了大件因为我要拿来穿睡衣。我没想到一穿就穿了十多年。

27, F, (MY)Chinese, Alor Setar, Entrepreneur

A glass is empty. I provide the glass. Elisa decorates the glass, and I'd say my daughter fills it up.

36, M, (MY) Indian, KL, Sales

HOMING - DOCUMENTATION



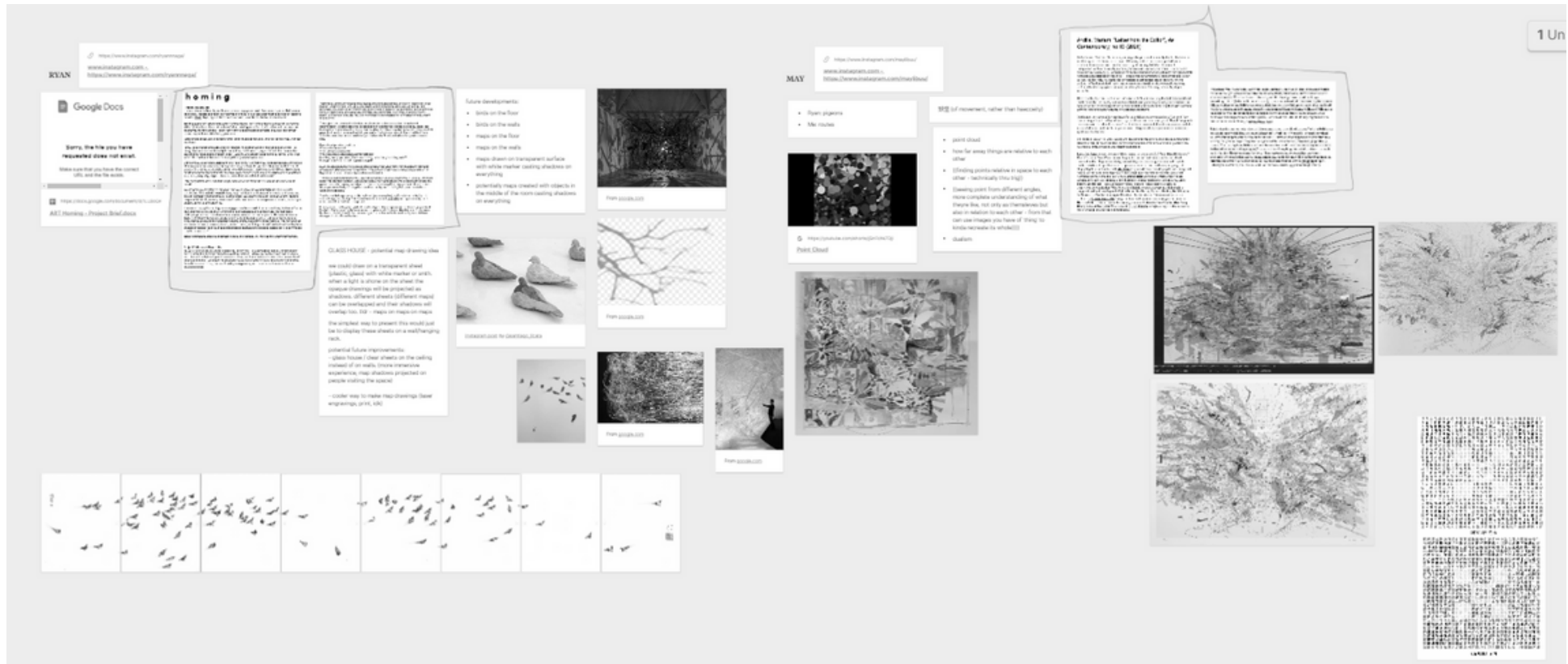
HOMING - DOCUMENTATION



HOMING - DOCUMENTATION



HOMING - FUTURE VISIONS



Segment of a collaborative brainstorm with May Li (*friend, artist*) on future presentation possibilities of 'Homing'. Ideas for film, publication, installation, activation, and group show.

PIGEONS AS PEOPLE (*SELECTED*)



'Rock dove, common pigeon, rat with wings'
28 x 76 cm
2023

ROCK DOVE, COMMON PIGEON, RAT WITH WINGS *artist statement*

Before pigeons flocked to our streets and into our balconies and air conditioning systems that, in a way, resemble mountainous topography, cliffs and rocks were used for roosting and breeding in the wild. Hence the alternative name 'rock dove.'

The rock dove, rock pigeon, or common pigeon, has been domesticated by humans 12,000 years ago in ancient Mesopotamia. We bred them for meat and used their dung as a component in fertilizer, leather, and gunpowder manufacturing. We valued them as companions and raced them against each other and strapped national secrets to their legs. We admired their peacefulness and loyalty and made them symbols for early goddesses (Mesopotamian goddess Inanna, Greek goddess Aphrodite) and incorporated them in religious text. We once viewed them as symbols of status and affluence and housed them in elaborately decorated cages (not unlike the modern-day Ferrari).

However, amid a meningitis outbreak in NYC in the 1960s, city officials blamed pigeons for its spread and coined the term 'rats with wings' in a widespread media coverage.

Despite these claims being untrue, the metaphor was effective in instilling fear and disgust in the public perception of these birds, rendering them out of place in the cityscape. This also happened to fall around the time when the birds were no longer useful to us. In the last century, pigeons have been shot, gassed, electrocuted, poisoned, trapped, and fed contraceptives, among other such efforts to repel them including spikes and sticky gel on surfaces.

The modern disdain for pigeons tells us about how the spoken word can shape and alter perception, and therefore influence treatment and drive action. It tells us about how we consume and process knowledge, about our capacity to forget very recent history, and highlights the importance of context in forming kinder and more empathetic conclusions.

How many stories are ignored simply because we no longer have a use for the ones who tell them?

How many stories are ignored simply because they were never told to us?

How many stories are ignored simply because we were specifically told to ignore them?



Detail of 'Rock dove, common Pigeon, rat with wings', 2023



'Cari makan - 搵食 - find eat'
'28 x 76 cm
2023



'It's a miracle we ever met'
'38 x 224 cm
2023



Detail of 'It's a miracle we ever met', 2022