

**The Trace of Everyday Life:  
The Interpretation of *Déjà vu* in Fine Art  
Practice**

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**The Trace of Everyday Life:  
The Interpretation of *Déjà vu* in Fine Art Practice**

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# Glossary of Terms and Definitions

**Déjà vu** — (1) The clear definition of *déjà vu* is "any subjectively inappropriate impression of familiarity of a present experience with an undefined past" (Neppe, 1983: 2). (2) It may reference feeling, suggesting an affective component, such as 'the uncanny' (Brown, 2004: 20). (3) In this research, *déjà vu* experience is more inclined to emphasize a sense of familiarity and a connection to a past experience.

**Displacement** — (1) The definitions ascribed to it by academia are various, it signifies the loss of home (Feldman, 2006). (2) In this study, displacement does not entirely mean the experience of homelessness caused by the loss of one's home. More often, it refers to a period of instability caused by periodic moves or leaving the place where the family once lived for a long time. It is more or less accompanied by the unfamiliar or unadapted to the new living environment and the memories of the familiar old residence, which represents the inner uneasiness, unsettling and possible nostalgia during this period, as well as the complex emotions of longing for 'home'. It is worth noting that the experience of displacement covered by this study is not related to persecution, conflict, or violation.

**Double / the idea of a 'double'** — (1) According to Sigmund Freud (1955: 234), it is considered identical by reason of looking alike. Later it also refers to the phenomenon of a similar situation being repeated over and over again, such as the same face, the same personality, and even the same name. (2) The *doppelgängers* (please see the definition of '**The doppelgänger**' on page III). (3) In this study, it is used to describe the architecture, dwelling spaces, and objects that are similar in appearance or configuration. In particular, it refers to a space or object 'reproduced' by artists through artistic means which looks akin to its original.

**Gestalt-familiarity** — (1) According to Alan S. Brown, 'gestalt familiarity' can be understood as a kind of similarity of the particular configuration of elements (2003: 406). The feature-matching of configuration can produce a sense of familiarity which is the key to the Gestalt familiarity hypothesis (Brown, 2003; Brown, 2004; Brown & Marsh, 2010; Cleary & Brown & Sawyer & Nomi & Ajo-ku & Ryals, 2012). (2) In the article "Familiarity from the configuration of objects in 3-dimensional space and its relation to *déjà vu*: A virtual reality investigation", published in 2012, the collective

authors (Anne M. Cleary, Alan S. Brown, Benjamin D. Sawyer, Jason S. Nomi, Adaeze C. Ajoku and Anthony J. Ryals) mentioned that they used VR technology to study the configuration of familiar objects in 3D space and the relationship with *déjà vu*. The experiment illustrated that without recall, the configuration of objects in 3D space can produce familiarity. In a new scene, the more similar it is to the previous experience, the more familiar it will be. (3) In this study, it mainly refers to the similarity in the pattern formed by the combination of the placement of objects and the configuration of the furniture in different dwelling spaces.

**Home** — (1) The definition of home is diverse, it can not only mean an abode, but also relate to one's identity or cultural background. It is a complex concept involving psychology, psychoanalysis, and sociology. It could be a 'haven', of which, the meaning of home refers to a closed, intimate, comfortable, and safe space, providing a sense of security. Meanwhile, it can mean something negative, in which one may feel insecurity, fear, and unhomely. (2) The concept of home mentioned in this study is more inclined to its positive meaning. In addition, the space in which the researcher lived was used as the object of discussion here, as these are (temporary) homes for the researcher herself.

**'Something'** — In this study, 'something' here means something that has a special meaning. It includes architecture, spaces, furniture, and objects that have a link to the past. Such objects are very similar in their appearance to the one in the past, or akin to their configuration which individuals experienced or owned in the past, sometimes even identical. This type of thing bears the quality of being a *doppelgänger*, which can bring one a strong sense of familiarity as individuals have experienced the same feeling before.

**The *doppelgänger*** — (1) With the similar meaning of **the idea of a 'double'** (please see the definition on page II). (2) In this study, it is used to describe things/ objects that are similar in appearance, such as architecture, dwelling spaces, furniture; or a particular configuration of a combination of these objects. In particular, it refers to a space or object 'reproduced' by artists through artistic means which looks akin to its original.

**The uncanny/ *unheimlich*** — (1) The unhomely. (2) According to Freud (1955), the '*unheimlich*' is 'something' long known and once very familiar to us. It is associated with a certain fear of loss and arises through the transformation of repression. The constant repetition of the same event will in-

crease an individual's psychological uncertainty, which could lead to the uncanny. (3) It is a "peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar" (Royle, 2003: 1). (4) It can be seen as a writing about a particular aspect of *déjà vu*. (5) In this research, it emphasizes a sense of peculiar familiarity that is accompanied by an equal degree of uncertainty. It describes an in-between state, in which one may feel familiar and yet unfamiliar, or real and yet unreal.

**The uncertainty** — (1) As a way of interpreting the term 'the unheimlich', which means a certain experience of a psychological uncertain or undecidable (Jentsch, 2008: 219). (2) In this study, it generally refers to the complex feeling between familiarity and unfamiliarity, real and unreal.

**The object** — It usually refers to domestic or everyday objects in the discussion of this study, such as cutlery, vases, or even certain kinds of furniture.

**'Things'** — In this study, 'things' refers to the 'lares' that I am searching for during the whole process of my research journey. Also, it refers to 'something' that feels very familiar but is easy to neglect in life.

**Three-dimensional drawing** — The practical part of this study involves the creation of works in three-dimensional form, which is referred to as three-dimensional drawing in this research. In fact, it is an image of everyday objects or furniture in the form of sculpture made from a single wire by means of electric welding. Such images are a transformation of the three-dimensional artistic language of the 'linear' images of domestic objects that appear in my drawings in *The Emptiness* series. This 'sculpture' has a special connection with my 'drawing'. From another point of view, the image of this part of the work is also quite different from the traditional cognitive image of the sculpture. Although they are still three-dimensional, they desperately lack a sense of volume. Therefore, I prefer to call this form of creation a three-dimensional drawing. Series IV is an installation composed of various three-dimensional drawings of such images of domestic objects. Each of the individual elements could exist on its own, as linear three-dimensional drawings. However, the full regiments are understood as installation when they are displayed together.

**Transitional objects** — (1) The term 'transitional object' was coined by English paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott as a designation for any material object (typically refers to something soft — the blanket or soft toy) to which an infant attributes a special value, acts as a sub-

stitute for the mother in the process of gradually separating from her. By means of this, they help children make the emotional transition from dependence to independence. This kind of object has a soothing function, and its important characteristic is continuity. For the healthy growth of children, the specific transitional object will gradually lose its significance, but the transitional phenomenon will spread to the whole cultural field. (2) The transitional objects mentioned in this study refer more to the transitional phenomena in the adult world. The transitional objects here have sentimental value as objects to soothe the anxiety and unease experienced in the face of leaving the family, facing migration or displacement, playing a role of keeping the connection with the past, and being a symbol of familiarity, security, or a sense of home.

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# ABSTRACT

This practice-based research project investigates the use of *déjà vu* as an artistic strategy of 'affect', in relation to the spatial and temporal displacement associated with *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* (i.e. uncanny/ unhomely). My practice, and its theoretical contextualisation, address ideas that are manifest in the philosophical and psychological literature on the connection between *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich*, particularly in relationship to Vernon M. Neppe's definition of *déjà vu* and the Freudian uncanny concept. My specific focus is on displacement associated with being away from home. Although various artists have likewise engaged experiences of *déjà vu*, the *unheimlich*, their works tend to address emotions connected to fear, which relate to the idea of death or what we have lost. However, Alan S. Brown's research of *déjà vu* emphasises the memory aspect of such experiences, while the explanations of Anne M. Cleary and Nikhil Shamapant investigate how *déjà vu* can be aroused by matching the current visual stimulus with a similar one in memory. Nicholas Royle argues that the uncanny is a mixture of familiarity and unfamiliarity, which has opened new insights that will be followed in this thesis.

My use of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* aims to shed light into the process of exploring the continuity of home, such that *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* can be perceived as a peculiar combination of feeling familiar and yet unfamiliar. Within the previous situation of lockdown due to COVID-19 on a global scale, the *unheimlich* becomes more ubiquitous through forced confinement. My research evolved during two periods of quarantine that I experienced respectively in March and September 2020. The first experience was when I was required to quarantine at my (familiar) parents' home after arriving back in China; the second was the time after I returned to London from China and had to quarantine again in my new (unfamiliar) dwelling place. Such experiences helped me to focus more acutely on what *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* might be in these different dwelling environments. In particular, I address my understanding from two directions in my practice: on the one hand, I use the silhouette image of everyday objects, and transparent figures in my drawing, as the metaphors for a state of 'ghosting' to discuss the *unheimlich* through the issue of absence and presence; on the other hand, I depict the changes of my perception about the composition during the process of settling down in a new dwelling space to explore the *unheimlich* and *déjà vu* (i.e. the setting of furniture and everyday objects to show a psychological change from feeling strange to familiar, or a sense of being at home). And later, the experience of moving to a new dwelling space almost in the

same area in London in 2021 was also included in this study to continue my exploration. These experiences will be explored through material processes of making and contrasting my work to other practitioners such as Rachel Whiteread and Do Ho Suh. Through the process of making and exhibiting these artworks, and through the investigation of a sense of continuity of home, the meaning of special objects, and the issue of absence, presence and displacement, the research provides a new way of insights into the constructive role of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* within fine art perspective.

# Introduction

## Research Overview

The experience of *déjà vu* and/or the *unheimlich* is closely related to 'something' once very familiar to us. When expressed through an artwork, such an impression can be presented through artistic language and be perceived by the viewer again. Therefore, that raises my first question how can an artwork, evoke such a phenomenon?

According to Vernon M. Neppe (1983: 7), the *déjà vu* experience could be an assemblage of multiple sensuous facets simultaneously, rather than just from the visual aspect, as with the translation in English which is the 'already seen'. In the book *The déjà vu experience*, Alan S. Brown (2004: 20) argued that the *déjà vu* experience also suggests an affective component, and he catalogued a number of theories that he thought could explain *déjà vu*, including the Freudian uncanny concept. In 1906 Ernst Jentsch, proposed 'the uncanny' as being a psychical uncertainty (2008: 219). Later, in 1919, Sigmund Freud (1955) defined it as something once very familiar changed into the unknown and may result in discomfort or fear. This had a broad impact on numerous subjects, including art. His theory also demonstrates the potential connection with home, as '*unheimlich*' was specifically in opposition to '*heimlich*', which literally means comfortable homely and familiar, and therefore belonging to the house (in English). Nicholas Royle (2003) alternatively identified the uncanny as an impression that affords a blend of familiarity and unfamiliarity.

In this practice-based research, I aim to ground my practice within a philosophical understanding of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich*, and to test out the theoretical ideas through practice. Being far away from home and always moving made me experience a place from strange to familiar over and over again. This always involved looking for a sense of home during this process or seeking a sense of belonging associated with the comfortable 'homely'. Thus, a feeling of unhomely has long been a focus of my research development. This responds to my understanding of both *déjà vu* and the uncanny - exploring the familiarity associated with 'my home' in an unfamiliar dwelling space and always accompanied by a feeling of displacement.



## A personal response to the exploration of the uncanny

The Freudian concept of the uncanny has had a wide influence within the realm of fine art. The uncanny was central to the work of a number of surrealist artists, most notably Salvador Dali. More recently it has been linked to the issues of home, family, trauma and repressed memory, such as Robert Gober, who works with domestic and familiar objects, and produces works that seem both ordinary and yet strange; Mona Hatoum, who has developed a language in which familiar domestic daily objects are transformed into dangerous things, offering a sense of threat and potential harm. However, my research does not depend on a description of the uncanny from the Freudian sense that brings out negative responses that might be described as scary and threatening. As he explains “It undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread” (1955: 219). Rather, my research focuses on an interpretation of it as being inclined to a peculiar feeling, as with Royle’s interpretation of the uncanny, I will firmly root the uncanny to a poetic exploration of the experience of displacement of home.

The uncanny in my research is based on Freud’s idea which is derived from ‘something’ long known, and his analysis of the etymology of the original German – *unheimlich* - meaning uncomfortable, uneasy, and unfamiliar (Freud, 1955). Furthermore, I will identify the circumstances in which Royle’s (2003:1) defined the uncanny as “a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar”, and also involving feelings of uncertainty that are bound-up with a lack of orientation (Jentsch, 2008).

My curiosity about how to understand the uncanny in art through theoretical reading, and how to create uncanny artwork based on my personal experience, arose prior to this research project: the flavour of the uncanny already permeated in my works which attempted to interpret an experience of displacement. A theoretical understanding has given me greater clarity about my own specific perspective, already apparent in my work.

Therefore, this research will build on my existing practice to explore the continuity of home. In the global environment between the epidemic and the post-epidemic era, our daily life is also changing. Both the lifestyle and the environment hover between familiarity and unfamiliarity. This situation

further promoted my research, and to think about the sense of 'home'. I draw inspiration from my quarantine experiences both in China and in the UK in my practice. It has provided an opportunity to observe aspects of my daily life that feel familiar and yet strange, or feel strange but inexplicably familiar.

During my quarantine at my parents' home in China, I was asked not to leave my room. All of my daily use, including food and water, was placed on a stool outside my room door by my parents. It resembled the life of a prisoner, living at home but to live in a different (strange) way. Instead of sitting together, my parents and I often had meals 'together' by video. All these experiences made me feel a sense of displacement, feeling unhomey even though I was at home. As a result of the pandemic, the impression of the uncanny fills every corner of my life. Meanwhile, the experience of moving to a new place, to settle down in London, from a total state of strangeness to familiarity (or feeling homely / *heimlich*) also informed the development of my research, particularly in contrast to my previous quarantine experience in my country. However, the experience of both unhomey and displacement is magnified in a completely unfamiliar dwelling environment. Thus, I attempt to respond to my understanding of *déjà vu* and the uncanny through these two experiences and locations.

### **Overview of research methodology and practice method**

A literature search strategy has developed by identifying keywords (such as '*déjà vu*', 'the uncanny' / '*unheimlich*') and key concepts: 'peculiar combination of familiarity and unfamiliarity' and the 'uncertainty'. A Research LOG has been used as an important tool to organise and track the research as well as to ensure the balance between thinking and making is maintained. Case studies on selected artists will form part of a practice review, in order to analyse ideas of *déjà vu* and *unheimlich* not only from the perspective of artists who specifically address this issue as central to their practice, but also to discuss the relations between the creative process and its materialisation to the key terms. This will be supplemented by examining the actual work, whenever possible, allowing for consideration and evaluation of the work as installation and how the viewer experiences the idea of displacement in person.

The development of works has been documented through diary, sketches, and photographs throughout the whole process. Among them, my drawing diary will serve as an important method

of recording my observations. The practice work in this study mainly focuses on exploring the experience of staying at home, observing the relationship with daily objects and furniture from both physical and psychological aspects. This was extended to the discussion of temporal and spatial aspects at the end of the study. The final thesis is in the form of a written thesis accompanied by a body of practice-based work in the form of both two-dimensional and three-dimensional, of which involves drawings, paintings, and installation work.

### **Contribution to knowledge**

This study is based on art practice, and to achieve the aim and objectives of this research study, I researched the philosophy and psychology-related theories of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich*, explored the idea of home, the meaning of special objects, the experience of displacement, as well as the relevant works in the field of fine art. The study provides a new insight into the understanding and interpretation of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* from the perspective of art. Meanwhile, this research provides a reference from psychoanalysis to those who experience displacement and when they encounter a peculiar sense of familiarity. More importantly, with my own experience, perceptions, and understanding as the background, this research also provides a unique way for art creation to interpret such a complex psychological state.

Therefore, the knowledge gained from this research is not only through theory, but also from art practices which is a crucial part of the originality of this research. This research provides an opportunity to look inward. Under the global environment between the epidemic and the post-epidemic era, the opportunity to look inward has become more urgent. It not only records the history but, in a certain way, shows the uncanny lives of this extraordinary time during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further, as an artist and researcher with a Chinese background, the study has enriched the interpretation in different cultural contexts in the field of artistic creation, which provides knowledge to bring a global perspective to the understanding of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* that is used to explore the idea of home and the sense of displacement. At the same time, through the interaction of different cultures and artistic languages, fresh blood is also injected into artistic expression, as well as concept expression, whether from the perspective of contemporary art or traditional aesthetics.

## **Chapter 1**

### ***Déjà vu, the *unheimlich*, and the idea of home*** **(Literature Review)**

## 1.1 Introduction

The term '*déjà vu*' was first used by Emile Boirac in 1876 (Brown, 2004). It is a French term, the literal translation of which is 'already seen' (Chambers Dictionary of English), which already suggests a familiarity that is *out of place*. For more than a century, the *déjà vu* phenomenon attracted researchers across many fields, such as neurophenomenology and psychology (e.g., Neppe, 1983; Brown, 2003, 2004; Kusumi, 2006). A range of theorists of the phenomenon includes reference to feeling<sup>1</sup>, suggesting an "affective component" (Brown, 2004: 20). Among them, Sigmund Freud (1955: 219) elaborates on the concept of the term 'the uncanny' in his paper "*DAS UNHEIMLICHE*", which, translated from the German word *unheimlich* (literally "unhomely"); Freud's use of the uncanny could be seen as the informal description and definition of one aspect of the *déjà vu* (Brown, 2004: 20)<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, the definitions of *déjà vu* found in published journals and books are also diverse from the late 1800s through to the mid-1900s (Brown, 2004: 18). This diversity is not limited to academic treatments of the subject, in that *déjà vu* experience has also been widely cited in many works of literature, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry *The House of Life* (1881) and Charles Dickens's novel *David Copperfield* (1849) (Sno, Linszen, & de Jonghe, 1992). However, in the field of fine art, the interpretations of *déjà vu* may tend to be less a reference to the wider phenomenon as it applies to the external world, but rather applied as an artistic strategy involving the issue of memory and perception, and the connection with a certain subject dealing with displacement.

This chapter first discusses the definitions of the terms '*déjà vu*' and 'the *unheimlich*' by scholars and historians. Then I will define the idea of home as included within this study and its relationship with daily objects to further clarify the scope of this research. Next, I explore the connection between the notion of home and the terms '*déjà vu*' and 'the *unheimlich*'. Finally, the art histories that touch on the idea of home (and even give ideas of '*déjà vu*' and 'the *unheimlich*' through visual works such as painting, sculpture, and installation) are discussed to show a broad range of awareness of these phenomena in fine art practices. It will further define the specific scope of the art field to be explored. All understanding of the terms and artworks included in this chapter have been

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1 According to Brown (2004:20), almost two thirds of the 53 definitions of *déjà vu* mention feelings.

2 According to Brown(2004), he classifies the uncanny as one of the informal descriptions of *déjà vu*. Definitions of *déjà vu* varied in books published from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries. Among the many descriptions and definitions Brown found, almost two-thirds of those used to describe or define the experience of *déjà vu* involve feelings. Brown explicitly mentioned the "uncanny(Freud,1901)" (Brown, 2004: 20), as a peculiar recurring occurrence to describe *déjà vu*.

drawn together to present my perspective of the understanding of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* under the theme of the idea of home in fine art practice.

## 1.2 *Déjà vu*

*Déjà vu* is most commonly regarded as a disorder of memory (e.g., paramnesia (Neppe, 1983), illusion, or hallucination of memory (Brown, 2003)). However, a clearer definition proposed by psychiatrist Vernon M. Neppe (1983) has become the standard in research on *déjà vu* (Brown, 2004). He defines *déjà vu* as "any subjectively inappropriate impression of familiarity of a present experience with an undefined past" (1983: 2). Briefly speaking, it is a subjective experience involving a perplexed impression, as if the subject has already experienced the same thing before but cannot successfully recall the exact recollection(s). In addition, a broader indication of *déjà vu* is presented by Neppe in 2015, where he claims that it can also mean "numerous other 'already' experience(s)", and this can refer to what he (1983: 7) suggests are ten terms or categories to comprehend the experience according to the French-English hybrid synonyms of *déjà vu*:

<i>déjà arrivé</i>	already happened
<i>déjà connu</i>	already know (personal knowing)
<i>déjà dit</i>	already said/ spoken (content of speech)
<i>déjà goûté</i>	already tasted
<i>déjà lu</i>	already read
<i>déjà parlée</i>	already spoken (act of speech)
<i>déjà pressenti</i>	already 'sensed'
<i>déjà rencontrés</i>	already met
<i>déjà rêvé</i>	already dreamt
<i>déjà visité</i>	already visited

Thus, *déjà vu* experience could be an assemblage of any of the above impressions. In other words, it is not only a single component, but also could be involved in multiple sensuous facets simultaneously. Nevertheless, all these different indications emphasise a sense of 'familiarity', which bonds intimately with 'a present experience' in Neppe's broader definition of *déjà vu*, and therefore signifies a potential recognition process (Neppe, 1983: 4). To further illuminate this, the process of one experiencing *déjà vu* is examined here, and I found that psychologist Anne M. Cleary (2008) and researcher Nikhil Shamapant (2017) hold similar views. They both analyse the phenomenon by discussing familiarity-based recognition and recognition-familiarity respectively.

Cleary (2008) points out that "*déjà vu* may at times result from familiarity-based recognition, or

recognition that is based on feelings of familiarity" (2008: 353). In particular, familiarity-based recognition is a feeling of familiarity perceived from the present moment where the source in memory cannot be found; by contrast, recollection-based recognition is 'something' one perceives currently and one can match such an experience with something that has previously occurred. However, when we perceive familiarity in *déjà vu*, the matching process belongs to the former, which is an overlap where we match perceived features or elements in the present moment with a similar one held in our memory. Shamapant (2017) puts forward two terms - k-familiarity (kind-familiarity) and r-familiarity (recognition familiarity) - to analyse the issue of recognising familiarity in *déjà vu*. R-familiarity occurs through matching of feature(s) of current perception with the feature(s) of experienced past in memory, and therefore resembles Cleary's idea of familiarity-based recognition. By contrast, k-familiarity occurs when matching the perceived feature(s) from present experience with the characteristic(s) of being a member of a category that we know. Obviously, k-familiarity cannot meet the conditions of being an experience of *déjà vu* (as it is a match to an already known concept of category), whereas the experience of r-familiarity can. It follows that, during the process of experiencing *déjà vu*, one needs to go through such a recognising process of familiarity, which may encompass multiple aspects of impression.

From the perspective of memory explanation, psychiatry investigator Alan S. Brown (2003) has also studied such matching of familiarity existing in this phenomenon. He suggests that when one experiences something in a new and changed context, such that the individual mismatches the present cognition to some features of familiarity of past memory - and hence misattributes the familiarity to the entire new setting - *déjà vu* will be aroused. These could be features such as: a single element of an old object or event; the emotional reaction to a particular stimulus; the structural details<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, Brown summarizes five interpretations for this explanation: a) conflict in source monitoring process; b) duplication of processing; c) single-element familiarity; d) single-element

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3 In Brown's paper, 'A Review of the Déjà Vu Experience', when he references Sno 's and Linszen's interpretation of gestalt familiarity, it says "different scenes and individuals often overlap in many structural details, and when perception is degraded the general framework of a prior experience may overlap considerably with the present one" (2003: 406). The 'structural details' can be interpreted as configured matches, such as similar configurations in different rooms: a round dining table is placed on the left hand side of the love seat in the room, On the background wall behind the sofa in the living room hangs a rectangular mirror, or a long L-shaped table is placed in a corner of the room, etc., which is the structural details mentioned by Sno and Linszen.

emotional association; e) gestalt familiarity<sup>4</sup>. Gestalt familiarity, by contrast, tends to be a more holistic stimulus. It is the perceptual configuration of the present stimulus elements that are similar to previous perceptions, and thus may trigger feelings of *déjà vu*. Although explanations (a) and (b) are caused by the repeated matching process of various features (perceptual, spatial, emotional) in the process and their matching degree, they emphasise the matching process of the source of the perceived familiarity. Explanations (c) and (d) are the result of a single level of similarity between 'something' in the event as a stimulus. I have to emphasise once again that the key factor to trigger a *déjà vu* experience is that individuals do not have a clear memory of the source of such an impression. In other words, there is a kind of similarity rather than an exact resemblance. This is the premise of all the discussions here. Accordingly, this study is more suitable to discuss from the perspective of 'gestalt familiarity' when it involves talking about a sense of familiarity with relatively holistic things, such as the layout of the space, which brings a strong sense of familiarity, and then, the impression of *déjà vu*.

Japanese scholar, Takashi Kusumi, (2006) suggests that *déjà vu* is based on a familiarity source in memory, which Kusumi calls a prototypical source. This theory is consistent with Brown's memory explanations. He takes "place *déjà vu*" as an example: that is, the prototypical scenes stored in an individual's memory, when people come into a new place, through the matching process of the cues (perceptual attributes, atmosphere, weather and mood) between past and present. According to this, the interpretation of place *déjà vu* is somehow similar to what Brown says about the 'gestalt familiarity' explanation. For Kusumi, the higher the match, the higher the similarity and familiarity, which results in *déjà vu*. Therefore, whatever causes a *déjà vu* experience, it involves a recognizing process of familiarity, a factor which re-emphasises the importance of the above-mentioned

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4 According to Brown, gestalt familiarity can be understood as a kind of similarity of the particular configuration of some elements (2003: 406). The feature-matching of configuration can produce a sense of familiarity is the key to the gestalt familiarity hypothesis (Brown, 2003; Brown, 2004; Brown & Marsh, 2010; Cleary & Brown & Sawyer & Nomi & Ajoku & Ryals, 2012). Later, researchers tested 'gestalt familiarity' as one of the possible causes of *déjà vu* experimentally. From here we see that such a sense of familiarity can be consciously created and that it is possible to create a sense of familiarity through artistic means as I will discuss in reference to the practice element of this study. In the article "Familiarity from the configuration of objects in 3-dimensional space and its relation to *déjà vu*: A virtual reality investigation", published in 2012, the collective authors (Anne M. Cleary, Alan S. Brown, Benjamin D. Sawyer, Jason S. Nomi, Adaeze C. Ajoku and Anthony J. Ryals) mentioned that they used VR technology to study the configuration of familiar objects in 3D space and the relationship with *déjà vu*. The experiment showed that without recall, the configuration of objects in 3D space can produce familiarity. And, in a new scene, the more similar it is to the previous experience, the more familiar it will be.



matching process by Shamapant and Cleary. Besides, Kusumi (2006) also proposed the concept of 'double-perception explanation' as the core of his theory in his research. This concept is somewhat consistent with the second theory of Brown's discussion on the cause of *déjà vu* from memory explanation, 'Duplication of processing' (2003: 404) to a certain extent. In fact, this theory was suggested by American psychiatrist Henry Osborn<sup>5</sup> in 1884 about the idea of incomplete memory. He stated that individuals actually stored information in memory without paying full conscious attention to it, and when one encountered such information again, he or she will have an inexplicable sense of familiarity as well as a sense of confusion. Kusumi goes one step further and directly develops and illustrates this concept as a cause for the evocation of *déjà vu*. Simply put, due to lack of concentration (distraction or inattention) in the initial perception of a scene or something within that scene, this results in a transient perception which is neglected (or not attended to) but unconsciously stored in memory. The perception obtained from the second full attention naturally matches the previous experience, though we do not realise that the previous experience originates from the initial perception, thus resulting in a feeling of *déjà vu*. From this, experience *déjà vu* always involves a recognising process of familiarity, which probably comes from an unconscious transient perceptual memory from the past.

In addition, according to all the experiments the researchers tested the cause of *déjà vu* in different ways, it confirms that a *déjà vu* experience can be consciously created. Architect Witold Rybczynski states that "the feeling of *déjà vu* is intentional" (1987: 2), in his book *Home: A Short History of an Idea*. He gives two examples to further interpret this: Ralph Lauren's<sup>6</sup> clothes and the eponymous designer's line of furnishings (which he named Collection). Both fashion items and the decorative products in the Collection (which has four styles in total, 'Log Cabin', 'Thoroughbred',

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5 In *Illusions of Memory* (1884), Osborn is involved in talking about the experience of *déjà vu*, but throughout the paper, he does not explicitly suggest that the memories he is discussing and certain experiences that feel familiar are related to *déjà vu*. He tends to describe that experience as "have seen or thought this all before" (1884: 476) or "having dreamt the same before" (1884: 477), and to strengthen that such experience is "vague and unaccountable" (1884: 477), it is a "mysterious impressions" (1884: 479), and "the weird and ghostly sensation" (1884: 482). For the cause of this experience, Osborn refers to what Dr. Wigan originated the notion of 'duality of mind' in 1844. The reason for this kind of experience is the ambiguity of the first impression. He believes that when people are tired or partially conscious, they will form a weak impression of what they have experienced, which will lead to fuzzy consciousness and thus the phenomenon. Besides, Osborn takes this concept a step further, pointing out that this 'faint impression' is an unconscious existence, and explicitly stating that it is due to incompleteness of recollection, "through this, obscure liness with earlier experiences is often mistaken for identity, and the portion of a process awakes the false memory of a whole by an imperfect association" (1884: 482).

6 In the book, Ralph Lauren is a businessman, who's corporation franchises manufacturers on four continents and his products are sold in more than three hundred shops carrying his name.

'New England' and 'Jamaica'), evoke a sense of familiarity, and probably an impression of *déjà vu*. Moreover, in his furnishings, a sense of comfort, nostalgia<sup>7</sup>, and perhaps a feeling of homely are evoked. Rybczynski believes Ralph Lauren offers an 'atmosphere' of home, especially for people who have one of these four cultural backgrounds implied by the distinct styles. In fact, when people are exposed to information similar to their own cultural background, they can naturally feel a sense of familiarity with that cultural information, such as patterns, languages, and colours with their own national characteristics. This information creates associations and memories of the past constituting a sense of familiarity, as well as a sense of nostalgia. In fact, this also falls under the category of matching processes for familiarity mentioned earlier. At the same time, there seems to be an attempt to find a strategy to create a sense of familiarity, even *déjà vu*, from this real-life example. This is a very important link for the specific preparation of this research practice.

In short, a *déjà vu* experience is a collection of impressions. It emphasises a sense of familiarity and a connection to a past experience. The experience of *déjà vu* is based on a familiar source in memory, it may occur when the current experience partially or fully matches the previous experience, but individuals do not have a clear memory of the source of this impression. Specifically, it can occur through the stimulation of certain elements (single or multiple elements, or even the configuration of the whole), and then, through the matching process of perceptual elements occurs to obtain familiarity. Such a sense of familiarity may come from some unconscious transient per-

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7 The difference between nostalgia and *déjà vu* must be made clear here. The processes of nostalgia are far more complex than this commercial use would suggest. In the early 1900s, nostalgia was seen as a mental disorder. "Symptoms included anxiety, sadness, and insomnia. By the mid-20th century, psychodynamic approaches identified nostalgia as a subconscious desire to return to an earlier stage of life and labeled it as a repressive compulsive disorder" (Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, and Routledge, 2008: 306). Obviously, nostalgia is a feeling people have of certain memories of life. In Lauren's furniture store in Rybczynski's book, however, one might encounter a similar experience of 'Gestalt familiarity', or single-element familiarity, single-element emotional association etc. resulting in *déjà vu*. This can match the cause of the occurrence, consistent with Brown's and Kusimi's research on *déjà vu*. Of course, what Lauren did is intentional. In order to persuade customers, he stimulated their desire to purchase his products to decorate their homes to satisfy their own assumptions about the sense of comfort and familiarity of 'home'. But it must be emphasized that *déjà vu* is an impression of experiencing something new as if it had happened before; more specifically, nostalgia is about memories of the experience which can be recalled very clearly, while *déjà vu* is about memories of inexperience. Therefore, in Lauren's case, through such a sense of familiarity, one can get a sense of nostalgia, even an impression of *déjà vu*. But the two experiences are fundamentally different. This case is only used to demonstrate that the *déjà vu* experience can be consciously created outside the laboratory, but the sense of 'nostalgia' here does not mean the '*déjà vu*' experience.

ceptual memory from the past. Besides, one can experience *déjà vu* through consciously created environments. Such intentional experience of arousing *déjà vu* is not only being used in the laboratory for research, also found to be used in other industries to evoke a strong sense of familiarity. At the same time, considering the relevance of the term to this research topic and environment, the 'gestalt familiarity' and the concept of 'place *déjà vu*' mentioned in this section have higher reference value than other theories in the practical stage of this research, which may be a strategy to guide the practice of creating an impression of *déjà vu*.

### 1.3 The *Unheimlich*

A number of psychiatrists and writers (Jentsch, 1906; Freud, 1919; Royle, 2003; Trigg, 2012) have explored and attempted to define 'the uncanny'. One of the first to publish on the subject of the uncanny was psychologist Ernst Jentsch in his essay "On the Psychology of the Uncanny"<sup>8</sup> in 1906. Jentsch emphasizes that a certain experience of a psychological uncertainty or undecidability will let the 'uncanny' sensation emerge (2008: 219). He asserts that when 'something' 'uncanny' happens, it is not quite 'at home' or uneasy under that situation, and may feel foreign to the person who experiences that. Sigmund Freud addressed Jentsch's research of the uncanny in his essay "The Uncanny" and argued that Jentsch's interpretation of the term there is "a fertile but not exhaustive paper" (1955: 220). Despite this, Freud is not able to give a precise explanation of the term. However, he still proposed that "the uncanny is that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (Freud, 1955: 220). Freud's understanding of the concept of the uncanny has been widely acknowledged as pre-eminent among such accounts. In his own paper, Freud successively analyzed and explicitly proposed that the uncanny does not only depend on the feeling of uncertainty, but "something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar in order to make it uncanny" (1955: 221), which Jentsch has also implied in his essay but fail to make it clear as much as Freud did. This does take the explanation of the uncanny a step closer. Nicholas Royle further develops Freud's idea by noting a "peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar" (2003: 1), in circumstances where such an uncanny impression may occur when 'something' familiar unexpectedly appears in a strange context, or arises in 'something' experienced as strange but inexplicably familiar. This commingling has particular relevance to feelings of *déjà vu*, something that I claim a number of artists exploit (and is certainly consistent with notions of a double

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8 This essay was later translated from German to English by Roy Sellars in 1995, later published as a chapter in the book *Uncanny Modernity* in 2008.

perception as theorized by Kusumi).

Freud had tried to find the meaning of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* in countless dictionaries. Etymologically speaking, The very term ‘uncanny/ *unheimlich*’ is paradoxical; in Freud’s initial discussion of the etymological development of the concept of ‘the *unheimlich*’ it is linked with its antonym, the ‘*heimlich*’. On the one hand, ‘heimlich’ means “what is familiar and agreeable” (Freud, 1955: 224), and is something “belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, comfortable homely etc.” (Freud, 1955: 222). So, here, the word ‘unheimlich’ is obviously the opposite of ‘*heimlich*’, meaning uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy, ghastly, and unfamiliar, etc. (Freud, 1955). On the other hand, ‘*heimlich*’ also shows the meaning that something is “concealed and kept out of sight” (Freud, 1955: 225). Thus, it can coincide with the meaning of ‘*unheimlich*’, which “is the name for everything that ought to have remained... hidden and secret and has become light” (Freud, 1955: 224). Therefore, Freud states that the word ‘*unheimlich*’ is a sub-species of ‘*heimlich*’ in certain ways.

After this, Freud studied Hoffman’s novel, *The Sand-man*<sup>9</sup>, which is a E.T.A. short story written by Hoffmann in 1817. Through Freud’s examination of this literary work, several qualities of the unheimlich were highlighted, including a sense of uncertainty, the constantly repeated experience, and a sense of fear.

Freud mentioned that one possible trigger for the *unheimlich* was a sense of uncertainty, which originates from a kind of psychological uncertainty emphasised by Jentsch. Jentsch pointed out that the word ‘uncanny/ (*unheimlich*)’ commonly meant ‘uncertainty’ about something in 1906. Like Freud, in explaining the *unheimlich* in terms of language, he states:” Without a doubt, this word appears to express that someone to whom something ‘uncanny’ happens is not quite ‘at home’ or ‘at ease’ in the situation concerned, that the thing is or at least seems to be foreign to him. “ (2008: 217). According to Jentsch, when individuals face something new or unfamiliar, they are also faced with uncertainty, and out of this feeling comes the uncanny, thus making us want to master the unknown (2008:218). He further describes such feelings of the uncanny as “intellectual uncertainty”

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9 E. T. A. Hoffmann’s story *The Sandman* (1816) a story about Nathaniel’s fear of Sand-man. The nanny in Hoffmann’s story tells Nathaniel that the Sandman is a wicked man, who comes to children when they won’t go to bed and will steal their eyes to feed his own children. He mistook lawyer Coppelius for Sand-man and he believes Coppelius killed his father. Later, he recognizes this childhood’s horror in an optician called Coppola. And got a madness, so in his delirium his father’s death intertwined with this new experience.

that results from the uncertainty. More precisely, he relates such 'uncertainty' to a feeling of lacking orientation when individuals meet 'something' new/foreign which then is easily able to take on the shading of the uncanny. Meanwhile, for those old/ known/ familiar things, the sense of uncertainty will emerge when one's subjective perception of vacillation is abnormally strong (2008: 219). Jentsch emphasises that the stronger the psychological sense of disorientation people have, the more easily a sense of uncertainty will arise. Then he claims that suspicion that a seemingly living being is really animate, or the suspicion that a lifeless object is really inanimate, is a very general effect and is particularly capable of causing such psychological uncertainty (2008:221). For instance, a life-size wax or similar figure from a human person, artificial dolls, and ghosts. Simply put, Jentsch believes that the undecidability of the living versus the inanimate is one of the root causes of the *unheimlich*. This is evident in his examination of sandman's story. In this story, Jentsch thinks that the doll, Olympia, a doll that looks like a living person in every way, is the core of the uncanny in the story.

However, Freud had a decidedly different opinion. He believes that the root of the uncanny in this story is caused by the uncertainty and the confusion of the sandman's identity, and believes that it has nothing to do with any intellectual uncertainty. As mentioned above, Jentsch believes that it is because the author deliberately does not let the reader know at the beginning whether the characters set in the story are alive or inanimate, which creates a sense of uncertainty for the reader. However, Freud believed that this feeling of uncertainty disappeared in the process of the story, and the identity of the Sand-Man (the lawyer Coppelius himself) was clearly shown at the end of the story, but even in this case, the impression of uncanniness in the story was not reduced at all. Therefore, Freud emphasised that the 'intellectual uncertainty' mentioned by Jentsch could not explain the uncanny phenomenon. It is indeed a factor in the uncanny atmosphere of the whole story. However, it is important to emphasise that this uncanny stems from the fact that there is identity confusion between real people and inanimate machines, not intellectual uncertainty. On the other hand, it deals with the idea of double, which is a cause to trigger the *unheimlich*. This will be further explained in the following paragraph. Thus, it can be said that Freud and Jentsch reached a consensus to a certain extent, that is, the psychological uncertainty of a certain thing or object can arouse an uncanny impression. Based on these analyses and studies of the *unheimlich*, Nicholas Royle points out that "the uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced" and he describes this feeling of uncanny as ghostly (2003:2).

Furthermore, when analysing uncanny elements in Hoffmann's *Elixiere des Teufels*, Freud found that Hoffman excels at producing the uncanny in literature through "the phenomenon of the 'double'" (1955: 234). For instance, *doppelgänger*, with persons who are "considered identical because they look alike" (Freud, 1955: 234). Hoffmann emphasises this relation through telepathy, "so that the one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other" (Freud, 1955: 234). Therefore, "by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self" (Freud, 1955: 234), the identity of the original person becomes confused, or another self / the *doppelgänger* replaces the original's own self. In addition, *doppelgängers* may experience "constant recurrence of similar situations, a same face, or character-trait, or twist of fortune, or a same crime, or even a same name recurring throughout several consecutive generations"(Freud, 1955: 234). Thus, this would create a certain degree of self-confusion. It can be said that such an experience of re-encountering can somehow also increase one's sense of psychological uncertainty. Moreover, these recurrences can awaken an uncanny feeling in a certain circumstance, which can recall a sense of helplessness as we experienced in dream-states (Freud, 1955: 237). This concept of 'repetition' or 'double' can also be found in Hoffmann's story of *The Sandman* (1816). This short story is a story about Nathaniel's fear of Sand-man. Throughout the story, Nathaniel is frightened and confused by the uncertain identities and doubles. As a result, he is feared of the constant appearance of sand-man surrogates, such as Coppola the optician and the lawyer Coppelius. And they all contributed to Nathaniel's sense of identities conflate. This is the embodiment of the idea of 'double' and *doppelgänger* in this story. Even at the end of the story, there is also a confusion between Clara and the doll Olympia, the identity confusion between the real person and the inanimate automaton. Therefore, in this example, the strong sense of the uncanny impression in the story pointed out by Freud mainly comes from the uncertainty and confusion of identity, which will lead to insecurity and fear. This further highlights that the repetition of the 'double' phenomenon, to a certain extent, will add a sense of psychological uncertainty to the whole event, which may cause the uncanny.

Freud later uses other uncanny examples to further elaborate that the factor that triggers the uncanny caused by the uncertainty is unconscious repetition, such as getting lost and constantly returning to the same familiar place, and constantly coming across the same number and name. It also highlights that the *unheimlich* includes a compulsion to repeat, or individuals may experience an involuntary return in a certain situation. Royal describes this experience as "a sense of repetition



or ‘coming back’”(2003:2), referring to a constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing. Looking back on the case of *The Sandman*, the various surrogates of the sandman appearing constantly is a kind of inner repetition-compulsion, which is perceived as uncanny according to Freud.

In addition, Freud believed that the emotional component of fear may, to some extent, elicit the impression of terror. Lola Aronovich builds on Freud’s analysis and points directly to the Sandman story that “the key to linking Hoffman’s tale to the uncanny is the fear of losing one’s eyes, which essentially represents the fear of castration (2018:95). According to Freud, the fear of losing one’s eyes is actually a fear of castration. What he actually implied is that the fear of ‘losing’ an important or cherished organ of the human body, its essence is the fear of losing itself, rather than the superficial concern whether the eye or the genitals. The fear turns into morbid anxiety through the repression, and such a class of anxiety is uncanny. “For this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old—established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (Freud, 1955: 241).

It is worth noting that Freud did not mention *déjà vu* in his essay *The Unheimlich*. But Royle claims “Excluded, *déjà vu* is more uncannily active in Freud’s essay than if it were included” (2003, p. 179). With the experience of *déjà vu*, Freud noted that in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, he claims that “something is really touched on which we have already experienced once before, only we cannot consciously remember it because it has never been conscious”(quoted in Royle, 2003:174). Recalling the previously analysed relevant content of uncanny double and the compulsion to repeat, such experiences satisfy the conditions for triggering *déjà vu* to some extent.

Therefore, although in the study of ‘the *Unheimlich*’, Freud explicitly denied Jentsch’s view that intellectual uncertainty caused someone to experience uncanny, he and later researcher Royle admit that psychological uncertainty is one of the most important sources of awakening the uncanny. According to Freud, from the perspective of etymology, ‘*unheimlich*’ and ‘*heimlich*’ are both opposite and coincide in certain respects. It is associated with a certain fear of loss and arises through the transformation of repression. Moreover, the constant repetition of the same event will increase an individual’s psychological uncertainty, which could lead to the uncanny. More importantly, the ‘*unheimlich*’ is ‘something’ long known and once very familiar to us. As claimed earlier, Freud’s writing

of the *unheimlich*, or literally, the 'unhomely' can be seen as writing about a particular aspect of *déjà vu*. Such feeling may be provoked by 'something' that is closely related to one's life. It must be 'something' that has been known for a long time, was once very familiar, and has been experienced repeatedly without realizing it.

#### 1.4 The idea of home and the relationship with domestic objects

The 'idea' of home is a multidimensional concept. It is constantly discussed by researchers in the fields of sociology, psychology, architecture, literature, and art. How home is understood, defined, and described is a central issue in these discussions. Indeed, this is one of the key sub-questions in this study. By exploring the space where I live (or have lived), I try to find the source of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* in my field of study while exploring the definition of home based on my own experience. Often, the concept of home refers to a physical structure - a physical living environment, such as a house, a flat or any other dwelling accommodating people. In addition, it also contains the virtual untouchable parts - that is, the memory of life associated with it, which pinpoints the time of dwelling and the location of the space there, as well as events associated with specific people or things. Here, in this section, I will first outline the diversity of the definition of home, and then further discuss the notion of home from the relation of home and house, and the relationship with the object used to fill the space respectively. Then, I will develop a specific focus around the idea of 'transitional objects' and their relationship (as a concept) with the domestic objects. This will allow me to further discuss the importance of the objects that people carry with them when they are moving. Finally, the discussion will return back to my central research question of how contested notions of 'home' might be used to explore *déjà vu* (the uncanny).

#### The notion of home

According to the online Cambridge Dictionary<sup>10</sup>, the meanings of **home** (noun) in English are multiple, and shifted from abstract notions to concrete objects:

- The house, apartment, where you live, especially with your family; when it is considered as property that you can buy or sell.

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<sup>10</sup> Cited from to the definition of *home* from the website of Cambridge Dictionary, according to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*. Available at: [https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/home#dataset\\_cacd](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/home#dataset_cacd) (Accessed: 29 Dec. 21)



- The type of family you come from.
- A place where people or animals live and are cared for by people who are not their relations or owners.
- Someone's or something's place of origin, or the place where a person feels they belong.
- Your own country or your own area.

We can sense from here that the definition of home is diverse. On the one hand, 'home' can mean an abode. Not only does it refer to a private dwelling place, but it also could be a public one. On the other hand, it could relate to one's identity or one's cultural background. The social scientist Julia Wardhaugh (1999) states that home can be understood as not merely "a physical arrangement of space, but also an expression of social meanings and identities" (1999: 94). From a phenomenological point of view, philosopher Martin Heidegger (1971) suggests that home is an expression of the existence of human be-in-the-world. In Heidegger's essay "Building Dwelling Thinking"<sup>11</sup>, he suggests that home is an expression of the building. The nature of the building is letting-dwell (cited from Bobeck, no date: 13), and to dwell, is the way humans (as mortals) exist in the world. Following Heidegger, architectural critic Kimberly Dovey (1985: 35) points out that "being at home is a mode of being". This view highlights the close connection between home and a physical arrangement of space. Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa (1995) acknowledges the inseparable relationship between home and residence in his article "Identity, Intimacy and Domicile". From an architect's perspective, he insists that the concept of home is fundamentally irrelevant to architecture and emphasises that home is not a building but a complex concept involving psychology, psychoanalysis and sociology: "Home is an expression of personality and family and their very unique patterns of life" (Pallasmaa, 1995: 132). According to the above, the description of home can be divided into two main aspects as follow: positive and negative.

Firstly, in the positive description, the home is described as a "haven" (Mallett, 2004: 70), a closed, intimate space, a comfortable and safe space, which provides a sense of security (Heidegger, 1971; Dovey, 1985; Bachelard, 1964; Mallett, 2004). "It is an intimate space that provides a context for close, caring relationships" (Mallett, 2004: 71). Gaston Bachelard (2014) describes 'home' in *The Poetics of Space*<sup>12</sup> as primarily a comfortable space and happy one, though such a view has

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11 Reference used here is the version translated and commentated by Adam Bobeck. The original reference from Martin Heidegger, published in 1971.

12 *The Poetics of Space* published in French in 1985 and then translated into English in 1964. Reference used here is the edition published in Penguin Books 2014.

been widely criticised in that it excludes those who do not share such happy memories of childhood.

However, for this positive description, Julia Wardhaugh (1999) argues that understanding home as a concept of 'haven' should be viewed from a dialectical perspective; by contrast, she favours a phenomenological understanding that "counterposes inside with outside space" (1999: 96). Generally, safety and security can be found inside while the outside is associated with fear, danger, and insecurity. However, Wardhaugh's believes this strict understanding of the separation of inside and outside is not a fixed idea. She states that "people who are abused and violated within the family are likely to feel 'homeless at home', and many subsequently become homeless in an objective sense" (1999: 97). Therefore, in such a situation, even the interior space of the home can produce fear and insecurity. June M. Campbell (2019) also proposes that the concept of home has two sides. On the one hand, she admits that the familiarity of the home itself can make people feel comforted and relaxed. On the other hand, she stresses that home "can also be terrifying, disturbing and strange" (2019: 22). For those who are homeless, and those who have lost their homes for various reasons, the meaning of home seems different from that of the former. A lost home refers to those "who have utterly lost their physical security or sense of belonging in life" (Campbell, 2019: 20); furthermore, "if the notion of home has been destroyed, any future conception of domestic space would be in some respect 'unhomely'" (Speaks, 2009: 96). Therefore, this could change such people's impression of home from in 'homely' to 'unhomely'.

## **Home and the house**

The spaces we inhabit (both long-term and temporary) are intimately connected to the concept of home. Angelika Bammer refers to the notion of 'home' as "a particularly indeterminate space" (1992: vii). Bammer points out "it can mean, almost simultaneously, both the place I have left and the place I am going to, the place I have lost and the new place I have taken up, even if only temporarily. 'Home' can refer to the place you grew up, the mythic homeland of your parents and ancestors that you yourself may never have actually seen, or the hostel where you are spending the night in transit" (1992: vii). It can be understood that the place we call home is not a fixed place. It changes as we move, but the place we live in the past, present and even future can still be called 'home'. Gaston Bachelard claimed a similar idea of home in 1964 in his book *The Poetics of Space*, he pointed out that all truly inhabited spaces carry the essence of the concept of home (Bachelard,

2014: 27). Reinforcing this idea, John Fraim (2003) stresses that a house seems to be a concrete embodiment of the concept of home in the real world, which can be seen, imagined and physically experienced. However, a house is not a home. Shelley Mallett (2004) pointed out that as a marketing method, real estate sales often confuse the notion of 'house' and 'home', but this kind of physical dwelling can only be simply described as one aspect of a multi-dimensional concept of home. In the foreword of *The Poetics of Space*, which was republished in 2014, Mark Z. Danielewski states that home as an inhabited space transcends its geometrical meaning. Likewise, Juhani Pallasmaa (1995) suggests that the house is only the shell of the home: it is not an architectural concept, but, to repeat, a concept of psychology, psychoanalysis and sociology. Its formation has a time dimension and continuum, it is “a gradual product of the family's and individual's adaptation to the world” (Pallasmaa, 1995: 133). More importantly, as time goes on, the place we dwell also affects the formation and further improvement of our personal identity, and when we feel displaced, we feel homeless (Trigg, 2012: 1).

### **Home and the relationship with the object used to fill the space**

As indicated above, a house is a physical manifestation of the concept of home. However, the home is also the carrier of memory, as well as an embodiment of an inhabitant's identity. According to Bachelard (2014: 26) the house or dwelling that we call 'home', is our 'first universe'. The past, present, and even future of the house are connected in a continuous way, and we can relive the past home through daydreaming. Home is a kind of origin; it possesses spatial and temporal orientation, “we go 'back' home even when our arrival is in the future” (Dovey, 1985). However, how do we "go back"? How do we make the connection between past, present and future home are the questions I want to explore.

As discussed in the previous section on the notion of home, the essential relationship between the house and us is one of dwelling, which is also one of the most fundamental relationships between home and us. Moreover, home is an expression of one's (not only of an individual but of the family) identity and sense of self (Pallasmaa, 1995; Wardhaugh, 1999; Mallett, 2004; Donohoe, 2011). We live in this space, we inhabit it through our lived bodies and reflect our identity through the way its decorations and furniture are arranged in that space (Donohoe, 2011:26). Meanwhile, Imogen Racz (2015: 155) states: “Many homes are structurally similar to one another, but the chosen objects that fill the spaces act, ... are acted upon, in ways that are intimately linked with our individual psy-

ches". Thus, it can be said that what we choose to fill this space are actually the crucial elements in making space the unique one of ('my') home in the world. It is a way of expressing our identity. A home is not just a space, but a space inhabited by family, people, objects, and belongings (Mallett, 2004: 63), such that our physical relationship to our home is actually closely related to the relationship with the objects and furniture used to fill this space. In response to this, Donohoe made it clear that "it (home) reflects our character in the way in which it is decorated and arranged" (2011: 26). This has an embodied dimension, in that "the body is how we make a place our own" (Donohoe, 2011: 27). We live there, we choose objects to decorate it and then experience the space with our bodies, sensing the objects, developing habits and memories. When we move to a new place, can such preferences and habits help to maintain a sense of 'home' in this new environment? This may require a specific discussion of our relationship with the objects.

Bachelard writes that "An entire past comes to dwell in a new house", consistent with "the old saying: 'We bring our lares<sup>13</sup> with us' " (2014: 27). Imogen Racz (2015) claims that certain objects stay with us throughout our lives and hence have been given different values and roles in the life beyond their association with one place. Moreover, such objects are also a medium to bridge the past and the future. Toby Israel (2003) reinforces this idea, by arguing that in such a mobile society, people change the place in which they dwell, but they continue to bring objects with them to provide a sense of continuity between the past and future. Therefore, continuity has to do with how we decorate our houses - consciously or unconsciously - in accordance with our personal preferences or habits, which is what we call the embodiment of personal identity. That's what makes our home different from everyone else's, because it is the embodiment of the 'self'. This sense of continuity comes back to the issue of the sense of home; it is a sense of familiarity or belonging. No matter whether in the past, present or future, it can help us to maintain a sense of 'home'. In the article "Identity, Intimacy and Domicile", Pallasmaa describes the story of his five-year-old daughter, his American architectural assistant, and a female architect as cases to suggest a potential connection between certain kinds of objects in life and maintaining a sense of home, and he specified such objects are the "magical instruments for recreating a sense of home" (1995: 137). They bring along, respectively, the scratching pillow, four books and a set of kitchen knives anywhere they go in order to recreate such sense. Could these objects be integral to what Bachelard calls "lares", in that they keep a sense of home from the past to the present, or the future?

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<sup>13</sup> 'lares' are the guardian deities of ancient Roman religion, which here were used to refer 'lares familiares', means 'family guardians', same as household gods.

The objects I have discussed which fill our houses not only make this space unique, but may also act as a kind of bridge between the past, present and future. In response to this phenomenon, I refer to what English paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott termed that “Transitional Object”. Although it was originally intended to describe those soft toys and blankets that children retain to build a persistent attachment and provide psychological comfort to deal with the anxiety of being separated from their mother, the phenomenon persisted and played a similar role when the baby became adults. There are, I believe, some underlying connections between the concept of ‘transitional object’ and the aforementioned ‘scratching pillow’, ‘four books’ and a ‘set of kitchen knives’, and even what Bachelard calls “lares”. Next, I will explore this connection further by discussing the concept of ‘transitional object’ in detail and further responding to the questions about how they construct a sense of home in new spaces.

### **Transitional object**

Winnicott (1951) develops the notion of ‘Transitional Objects’<sup>14</sup> as taking the place of the mother-child bond, and it originates in the phase of an infant's development when inner and outer reality begins to become apparent. Transitional objects are "perhaps some soft object or other types of objects has been found and used by the infant" (2005: 4), for example, blanket or soft toy. A transitional object is something that in the baby's fantasy, acts as a substitute for the mother in the process of gradually separating from her (to be exact the mother's breast). It is a way that a baby gradually transfers his/her attachment from the mother to a particular object, in order to seek comfort. By means of this, they help children make the emotional transition from dependence to independence. Although a transitional object (such as a blanket) is a symbol of a part-object, such as a breast (or mother), its meaning does not lie in its symbolic value. In other words, although the blanket as a transitional object in this case symbolises the breast (or mother), it is just as important as the breast (or mother) it represents, a symbol of a sense of security. Therefore, one important feature of a transition object is its continuity. The transition object is constant for the baby, and even if it gets dirty and smelly, parents should not refrain from changing it. Such continuity not only gives the baby a sense of certainty and safety, but also allows the child to gradually recognise and accept the real world. On the contrary, once the continuity is broken, the child will have a sense of

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<sup>14</sup> The original hypothesis as formulated in 1951. First published by Routledge in Great Britain in 1991. Here the reference used the Routledge classics edition/ with a new preface by F. Robert Rodman, which published in 2005.

strangeness, insecurity and begin to become anxious. However, as children grow up healthily, this phenomenon will gradually fade away, such that the specific transition object will gradually lose its meaning, and the transitional phenomena will spread to the whole field of culture (Winnicott, 2005: 14).

Transitional objects, therefore, function as comfort objects to keep a sense of familiarity and security to babies, and to let them feel homely<sup>15</sup> (*heimlich*). The phenomenon is not confined to infant babies. As adults, the transition object may still exist, and its type has become broader than children. On the one hand, "it is common for adults to keep prized possessions owned by their parents when they were growing up. Dad may have passed away many years ago but wearing his watch is a comforting reminder of that relationship"(Schwartz, no date). That photograph of your family, necklace of you mother's, or 'something' you inherited from your parents or grandparents, and other objects, all serve the purpose of reminding us of the connection with that person in the past, and help comfort us when we are feeling stressed, depressed or anxious. And vice versa, this emotion can be applied when parents encounter the separation from their children. While, in extremes, this might relate to the loss of a child, it may not be limited to death-related issues. It is an issue of separation from someone with whom you have a deep emotional connection. On the other hand, when individuals are faced with moving, displacement or homelessness, they will also experience anxiety and unease in the face of such separation, and it might mean the loss of the qualities associated with home, such as "privacy, control, refuge, and sanctuary" (McCarthy, 2020: no pagination). At this point, the photos and personal items of family members (even if they have little or no utilitarian or market value) that people carry around with them are objects that resemble Winnicott's 'transitional objects', standing for more than parents, which provide the basis for future continuity, both of 'home' and of personal identity (Parkin, 1999). David Parkin emphasises that such objects are objects of sentimental value, which are engraved with their own memories of self (1999: 304). Hence, transitional objects may serve as a sense of continuity or a kind of connection to keep the odour, or as a symbol of home (especially when you are away from home) or to represent someone who has a deep attachment.

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<sup>15</sup> And by 'homely', I mean a sense of home, where you can feel warm and comfortable. Here it refers specifically to the positive side of the meaning of home, namely the sense of security, belonging and familiarity it can provide.

## The notion of home and its relationship to the idea of *déjà vu* (the *unheimlich*) in this research

In relation to the ideas explored in the previous sections, the meaning of home explored in this study needs to be defined more clearly. The concept of home mentioned here mostly refers to its positive side, which provides warmth, familiarity, security, and a sense of belonging. However, the discussion in this study also involves analysing the emotional impact of negative aspects of the concept of 'home' - the sense of loss and unease associated with moving and displacement. It is important to note, however, that (in the context of the thesis) this does not include homelessness caused by violence, abuse, or war. Rather, I refer to the more familiar situation of being separated outside of such traumatic circumstances.

In Freud's (1955) analysis, he subtly mentioned a case of the uncanny feeling aroused by the idea of home. He wrote, "this *unheimlich* place, however, is the to the former *Heim* [Home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning ... Whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before', we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or body" (Freud, 1955: 245). The mother's womb here is one explanation of the concept of 'home', similar to the aforementioned 'house', which is a place where human beings once 'dwelt'. The feeling of warmth, closure, and protection we feel in our mother's womb is just as positive as the impression that 'home' can provide us, warm and secure. Freud makes a metaphor here, linking the female womb (where we once 'dwelt') to the physical home. In this way, the original definition of 'womb' as the female genitalia we have long known is blurred, and it is also given a new meaning. The reason why an uncanny impression is aroused here, is not only due to an association with 'home', but a peculiar mixed feeling of familiarity and unfamiliarity with what we thought we knew very well. This is what triggers the uncanny. Meanwhile, in this case, it emphasises again that the uncanny (*unheimlich*) is something *heimlich*, home-like and familiar. Crucially, it is 'something' long known and once very familiar to us.

From the previous sections 1.2 and 1.3, we can see that the *unheimlich* impression and *déjà vu* have many similarities. It could be said that the *unheimlich* is about a particular aspect of *déjà vu* that underscores the peculiar strange feeling in this experience. It is a peculiar recurring occurrence of *déjà vu*. In this research, the *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* that I explore emphasise a sense



of peculiar familiarity that is accompanied by an equal degree of uncertainty. They both describe an in-between state, in which one may feel familiar and yet unfamiliar, or real and yet unreal. Further, a particular area of concern for this in-between state in this study is always rooted in the experience of displacement associated with being away from home.

In this research, the space in which the researcher (I) lived was used as the object of discussion, as these are (temporary) homes for the researcher herself. However, as the focus of this study, the past home (specifically my parent's home in China) is the source of all subsequent reconstruction of the feeling of familiarity with the new residence, which is the core of the study. In other words, the past home in this study represents a place that I have long known and was once very familiar with. It is the source of *déjà vu* or the *unheimlich* that I may perceive later in the process of experiencing the unfamiliarity in a new dwelling place while reconstructing the familiarity. Within this context, the discussion around the internal structure of the living place, the objects placed in it, and the relationship and meaning of these objects to me (as the user) and my family is a further exploration of the specific reasons that may lead to the experience of *déjà vu* or/and the *unheimlich*. They are the specific elements that trigger *déjà vu* or the *unheimlich*. Thus, in this study, the past home serves as 'something long known' to explore how it might trigger *déjà vu* or the *unheimlich* in the later new dwelling place. Meanwhile, by exploring the meaning of everyday objects and even the configuration of a certain place to address how they work as concrete elements to trigger *déjà vu* or the *unheimlich*. In turn, it is a further exploration of the concept of home and knowing how these objects function to make up a sense of home in the new dwelling place.



## 1.5 The concept of home in contemporary fine art practice

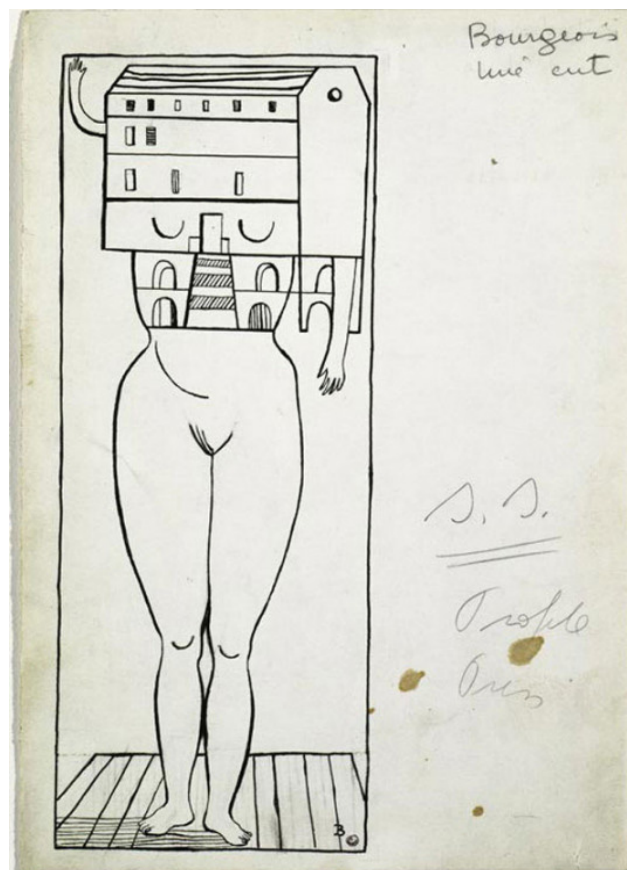


Fig. 1.1  
Louise Bourgeois, *Femme Maison*, 1947

Themes around the idea of home and family are among the central concerns of the work of many contemporary artists. For instance, in the works of Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), house<sup>16</sup> and family are her eternal themes throughout her career. Both her drawings and environmental installations of the *Cells* series are infused with traumatic memories from her troubled childhood,

16 The term 'house' here refers more to the physical form of 'home' than to a specific building. In the works of Bourgeois, she interprets the concept of home and the notions of domesticity through the space -*Cell* constructed by herself. It is more of a psychological one. Of course, the image of 'home' in the form of architecture also appears in her work, often combined with the female body, creating a sense of disharmony. This is an exploration of the concept of 'home', but also an exploration of female identity. This also reminds me once again of Freud's metaphor of the female womb and 'home', which is uncanny. At the same time, as discussed in the previous sections, the concept of home itself is controversial. On the one hand, it can be a refuge, but it can also be a hell. Although she also uses soft fabrics to construct a combination sculpture of the home (its physical form) and the female figure, seemingly trying to show the soft, warm side of the notion of 'home', the visible stitched trace of the work once again magnifies her traumatic childhood, as well as the scarred image of home to its maximum while suggesting a process of repairing of such relationship through her creation. Therefore, the soft sculpture itself is full of contradiction here. Bourgeois's thoughts about 'home' tend to be filled with negativity, scars, and aches.

interpreting her different types of pain, physically and psychologically. Her works are permeated with a strong sense of feminine and violent atmosphere, pain and fear become the theme of her expression of the idea of 'home', and also reflect the important status of women in family relations. She depicted the home as an essentially female place, and so, often makes a metaphor for the female body and the house, especially in her earliest drawings (see Fig. 1.1). Such expressions were further translated into sculptures made of different materials, hard and soft (see Fig. 1.2-1.3). Her representation of the image of 'home' reflects her complicated family relationship and a sense of pain. Mona Hatoum<sup>17</sup>, targets single household objects to explore the idea of home. The images of objects become cold and aggressive in her works, by turning familiar everyday objects such as chairs, cribs, and kitchen utensils into seemingly unfamiliar, dangerous, and even threatening works, which convey a mood of fear and conflict, implying thematic messages about family, displacement, and violence (Fig. 1.4). In this way, Hatoum allows viewers to re-examine what they think of the familiar world. As a home is originally supposed to be a safe place, her work highlights the contradiction and conflict of the concept of home, always being inundated with danger, scary, and discomfort. Similarly, in the art of Doris Salcedo, the impression or symbol of the home is not such a beautiful feeling. In her sculptures, she often fills the interior space of the deconstructed furniture with concrete, for example, *Untitled* (1998, Fig. 1.5), as a metaphor for the mercilessly destroyed domestic space. Her work also expresses a sense of unease and unspeakable grief and loss. There is a strong visual impact between the wooden material and the hard cement in the work, and through the way of filling, the object itself loses its original function, and conveys a feeling of suffocation, evoking thoughts about death as well as the experience of displacement. Although her work is based on furniture, the main focus is on Colombia's political and historical events<sup>18</sup> and as a metaphor for the fragmentation of home and family. Chinese artist Song Dong's<sup>19</sup> expression of the concept of home does not have the intense pain of these previously mentioned artists, but there is an uneasiness hidden in the relatively peaceful expression. He traces past families through everyday objects, and reveals a different cultural message through the idea of home in

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17 Born in Beirut, Mona Hatoum was forced into exile by the Lebanese civil war in 1975. As a nomad, she explores the concept of home and displacement through her work.

18 As a Colombian-born artist, Salcedo, whose own family disappeared during Colombia's political turmoil, has devoted much of her work to interpreting the personal expression of emotion in the situation. It represents a kind of human emotion, the disequilibrium, disquieting, and displacement of people who separated from their families due to the ongoing conflict in politics and the military.

19 The artist was born during China's Cultural Revolution, a period of social and economic deprivation. In order to make a living, the artist's parents insisted on a simple lifestyle, 'no waste' was the common creed of society at that time. The hoarding habit of the artist's mother also reflects the unease and anxiety of her life. However, the slogan of 'no waste' seemed to have produced results that contradict it.

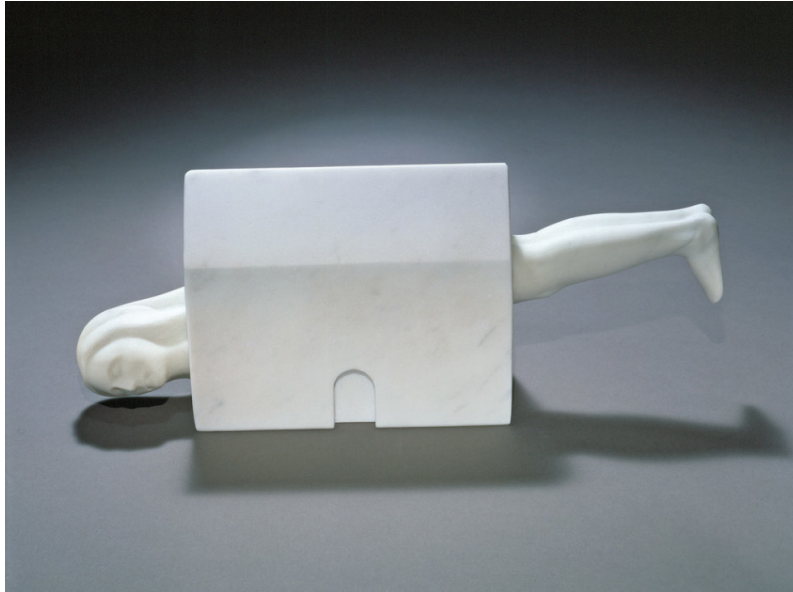


Fig. 1.2  
Louise Bourgeois, *Femme Maison*, 1994



Fig. 1.3  
Louise Bourgeois, *Femme Maison*, 1911-2010

his works. In his work *Waste Not* (2005, Fig. 1.6), by showing a large number of daily articles collected by his mother, he presents a trace of a home. This reveals the habit of a generation of Chinese people who like to hoard things like the artist's mother. For Chinese people, especially the older generation, frugality is regarded as a virtue. This so-called virtue eventually becomes a burden in life by hoarding too many useful and useless objects. However, Song Dong's works precisely make a strong visual impact on this burden through the way of displaying the living material traces of the family theory, which divides the items that the mother has hoarded compulsively for years into stages. The thin skeleton wooden house with a few windows in the middle of the work contrasts sharply with the objects that fill the entire exhibition space. The work shows the concept of family life of the generation like the artist's mother with a little irony. It also describes the social phenomenon against a significant cultural background, forming a miniature social landscape. It shows a common image of 'home' against the background of historical events in contemporary Chinese history<sup>20</sup>. While exploring the idea of home based on one's own experiences, it sometimes also serves as a microcosm to reflect the broader social and historical issue.



Fig. 1.4  
Mona Hatoum, *Grater Divide*, 2002

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<sup>20</sup> Song Dong was born in 1966 during the Cultural Revolution. He grew up with and through the tumult of modern China. His mother was born in 1938, was a member of a prosperous family, but fell on hard times after the People's Republic of China was established in 1949. His parents suffered the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. In that context, Chinese people have maintained the habit of thrift. Not wasting is a rule of life in this era in China, to make the most of what you have. In this work, the mother's hoarding for the purpose of frugality becomes a satire in this context. Against the so-called rules of life.





Fig. 1.5  
Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1998



Fig. 1.6  
Song Dong, *Waste Not*, 2005

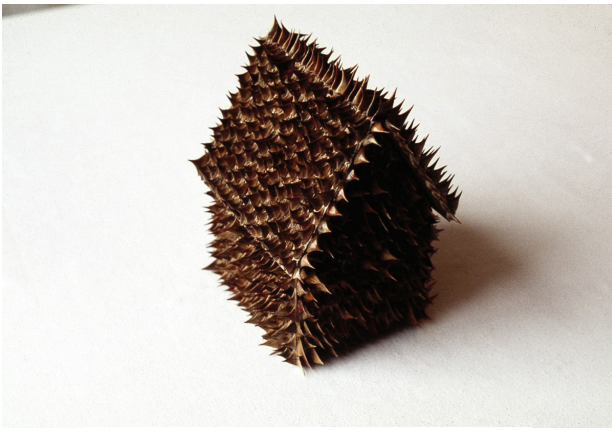


Fig. 1.7  
Alice Maher, *House of Thorns*, 1995



Fig. 1.8  
Donald Rodney, *In the House of My Father*,  
1996-1997

The discussion of the house (as the physical image of 'home' itself) is constantly appearing in art practice, tracing family life and even personal history in the form of reproduced architectural 'home' as in the work of Rachel Whiteread, Do Ho Suh, Heidi Bucher, and Micheal Landy. The discussions around the scaled-down house, for instance, Alice Maher reduces the size of houses, resulting in her work *House of Resulting* (1994, Fig. 1.7), which covers entire tiny houses at a height of only 15cm with rose thorns, images that subvert the notion of home as a shelter of comfort, adding more painful images to the image of home; Donald Rodney, miniaturized the image of home in his work *In The House of My Father* (1996-1997, Fig. 1.8), he pins his skin grafts together to create an image of a House, suggesting the artist's own (physical) intimate relationship with the house and home. In his work, this sense of vulnerability to the idea of home is magnified to the maximum, and conveys a desire for security and protection. Affected by sickle cell illness, the artist referred to racial and social diseases in his works. The expression of this type of art pictures the image of 'home' physically or psychologically in a way that traces back to the past. It is not only an examination of the past life and the expression of personal emotions, but also an exploration of personal identity. Such a way of discussion is more intimate, with a strong personal stamp. In addition, the focus on daily objects may be another major direction of artistic exploration to explore the idea of 'home'. In addition to the above mentioned works that capture the images of everyday objects for emotional expression, certain artists also focus on a specific domestic object or a certain type of one, to explore other aspects of the theme of the home, such as birth and death. For example, by using the bed, as with Rachel Whiteread's negative casts of mattresses (Fig. 1.9), Mona Hatoum's *Divan Bed* (1996, Fig. 1.10) or Tracey Emin's bed, *My Bed* (1998, Fig. 1.11). In such objects, the works often interpret the narrative of family life and everyday intimacy, as well as the broader abstract ideas and social issues, the associations and reflections of memories that may arise. Furthermore,

artists, like Giorgio Morandi, William Scott, and Paul Coldwell explore the small objects within this space, such as vases, jars or kitchen utensils. By depicting these familiar everyday objects, on the one hand, a fragment of domestic memory about these objects is presented, and on the other hand, the audience is inspired to expand the imagination of the content. With a familiar image as the object, a sense of uncertainty is created between the signified and representative, which touches on the central idea of this research.



Fig. 1.9  
Rachel Whiteread, *Shallow Breath*, 1988



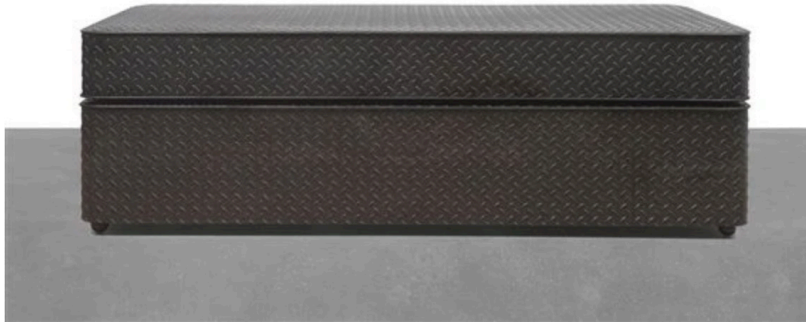


Fig. 1.10  
Mona Hatoum, *Divan Bed*, 1996



Fig. 1.11  
Tracey Emin, *My Bed* (1998)



In short, home is a significant subject and unsurprisingly influences aspects of home and domesticity that artists constantly consider in contemporary fine art practice. However, my aim is more specifically connected with the home and its relationship with the phenomenon of *déjà vu*, and *unheimlich*. Through the relationship between the objects in this space and myself, I will further explore their possible importance as the source to arouse *déjà vu*, as objects that can alleviate my feelings of displacement and unsettling caused by moving and being far away from home. A number of artists have touched upon the idea of displacement or making familiar things unfamiliar, and the above-mentioned artists' work offers brief examples I have introduced. However, in such a broad field, my exploration will focus on works around visual art that embody the concepts of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich*. It does not deal with the violent aspect of the theme of home, but more with the memories of the past dwelling space, the experience of displacement in the new space, the sense of belonging that home as a shelter brings, and also, the sense of continuity of home. Therefore, in Chapter Two, I conduct a specific case study analysis of the works of Rachel Whiteread, Do Ho Suh, Giorgio Morandi, and Paul Coldwell. Their works reproduce a fragment of life through the examination of the past living space, objects, and traces, which is closely related to the issues explored in this study. Through the discussion of different materials, production methods, and forms of expression under the theme of home, analyse the expression of the concept of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* hidden in the work.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Case studies**

## 2.1 Introduction

The case analysis of this study focuses on the works of four artists, Rachel Whiteread, Do Ho Suh, Giorgio Morandi, and Paul Coldwell. Among them, the works of the latter two artists will be studied in a section, focusing on the analysis of the sense of uncertainty presented by their works which thus pervades the sense of an uncanny impression. The case study artists were selected to explore and interrogate due to the following aspects: Firstly, their use of domestic objects and domestic spaces as the predominant subject matter in their art. Secondly, the manner in which they address issues of absence and presence, within the realm of domestic lives through visual or tactile means physical impressions. Thirdly, the specific materials and techniques used to create their works make an intimate connection with the idea of 'double' and 'uncertainty', which inevitably leads to an evocation of the uncanny. In this chapter, other works by Doris Salcedo, Marcel Duchamp, Heidi Bucher, Mona Hatoum, Jennifer Bornstein, William Scott, and Michael Craig-Martin will also be studied and discussed.

## 2.2 Rachel Whiteread- The Casting Void

British artist Rachel Whiteread (b.1963) is concerned with the voids in between and within domestic objects, furniture and space, such as the hot-water bottle, the bed, and the room. Through casting, Whiteread made the intangible tangible, the invisible visible, evoking particular histories and associations. Her work is both abstract and representational. Whiteread's works echo the simple form of Minimalism. Whether it is the sculpture of the negative space of furniture or architectural space, the use of serial, geometric shapes, and repetitive structures is obvious in Whiteread's work. For example, the series of floorpieces, automatically brings to mind Carl Andre's work - *144 Magnesium Square* (1969). Or even though the object was a large architectural space, like *Ghost* (1990), Whiteread divided it into many grids of similar size and volume for casting, it still touches upon a form of minimalist expression. Thus, her work could inevitably invoke some Minimalist artists' work, such as Donald Judd and Robert Morris, or to remind us of Eva Hesse's and Bruce Nauman's works, which responded to the cold, autonomous forms of minimalism and embody the characteristic of post-minimalism. However, minimalists largely used industrial materials, emphasising the physical properties of the work (such as, scale, weight and position), and paid attention to the bodily encounter of the viewer and the work.

Although Whiteread's work also shows a highly purified form of beauty, her sculptures are full of memory, history, emotion, and responses to social problems. This is a significant difference from the purely formal qualities of minimalism. At the same time, her works are also related to conceptual art. Unlike minimalism, in conceptual art, the idea or concept is referred to as the most important direction of the work. Marcel Duchamp opened the boundaries of art with his ready-made works and was important for the development of conceptual art. *Fresh Widow* (1920, Fig. 2.1) for example, is a miniature picture window (78.9 x 53.2 x 9.9 cm) made of painted wood framed and glass covered in black leather. It gives the impression of looking into the distance through the night sky, or conversely, denies the ability to look out, the view through the window obstructed by the opaque black leather. On the one hand, the work is ready-made. Duchamp, on the other hand, dropped the "n" in the words "French" and "window" in order to make a pun. Thus, it refers to the double Windows common in Parisian apartments and the widows of the First World War. This undoubtedly gives new meaning to the work. What we see here is no longer what we see now. Technically, unlike the ready-made (mass-produced) pieces used in Duchamp's other works, this piece was made by a New York carpenter to Duchamp's specifications. The window itself loses its function. Firstly, it does not work properly as it does not fit into a normal-sized window aperture. Secondly, as the cover is black leather, it is impossible for the audience to see out of the window. Gildersleeve & Guyotte (2019), in *Readymade Methodology*, point out that the presentation of ready-made as a work of art is a process of incapacity and disorientation of the everyday meaning of familiar readymade. This is similar to Whiteread's approach to giving new meaning to his work. Making the familiar strange, rendering them nonfunctional, leaving the viewer hovering between this sense of uncertainty about everyday things. Whiteread's work also involves the use of off-the-shelf products. Different from Duchamp, Whiteread uses ready-made products as moulds, and her work presents spaces rather than direct replicas. At the end of creation, the ready-made objects used are destroyed. Duchamp, however, took the ready-made product directly, reinvented it to a certain extent, and presented it entirely in the form of a work. Crucially, Duchamp distanced ready-made objects from their everyday uses by redefining what they meant and giving them a new concept. Whiteread, however, strives to protect the physical cues associated with everyday uses. Thus, the art of Whiteread is related to these two concepts of art, but does not belong to either of them entirely.



Fig. 2.1  
Marcel Duchamp, *Fresh Widow*, 1920

The reason I chose Whiteread's work as a case study for my research is that her work challenges what we think we know, which is an important feature of her art. In other words, her works place the viewer in the uncertainty of the familiar and the unfamiliar. In this section, the discussion will focus on the making process and the idea of death her works touch upon to explore the uncanny element hidden in the works. Three works will be included in this section, *Closet* (1988), *Untitled (Bath)* (1990) and *House* (1993). In particular, the *House* (1993) is the work most closely related to the issue of dwelling place and the idea of home discussed in this study. It tries to evoke the resonance of the audience by interpreting the traces of other residents' lives, as well as the symbolic meaning of the work itself.

## The making process – Negative Space

“Casting is a technique to ‘form [*an object*] into a shape, by pouring it when melted or soft into a mould, where it is allowed to cool or harden”<sup>21</sup> (Hornstein, 2004: 58). In general, a liquid material is usually poured into a mould, which contains a hollow cavity with a desired shape, and then wait for it to set. The cast sculpture is removed from the mould which can be reused to make the same sculpture continuously. Or, the casting is broken out of the mould to complete the process, and thus, the mould is destroyed. In this way, the sculpture is a replication of the original object, or at least as Lisa Saltzman states, “casting introduced and authorised in sculptural practice the possibility of reproduction” (2006: 84). Saltzman states that casting has physical contiguity, it “is a mode of establishing continuity in situations of utter discontinuity” (2006: 90). They are consistent in size, volume, shape, and even the slight wear and tear on their appearance. However, in Whiteread’s work, instead of following that tradition, she treated the object itself as a mould. Her creative process always involves destruction, that is, after the sculpture is cooled and fixed, the sculpture needs to be taken out by dismantling the object that was originally used as the mould. Thus, Whiteread is not casting a replica of the object’s appearance. What she made was the inside space of the object, which she called the negative space. Jon Bird indicates that Whiteread’s way of casting is the opposite of tradition in his writing in 1995. He wrote, “traditionally the mould is discarded, and the cast is left as the ‘supplement’ to the original. Whiteread utilises this familiar technique but introduces an alarming twist, for what is the cast supplementary to: the original is a space, a nothingness or void” (1995: 121). In Whiteread’s work, what we see is not what we normally see in life. Instead, the clues (the shape, imprints, and size) left by her casting construct an image in our mind of what the object originally looked like. Again, what we see is not the images of familiar objects in our lives, the familiarity is alienating during the process of making. However, the left imprint and marks keep the familiarity of us to identify the original image. If the sculpture produced by traditional casting is a *doppelgänger* of its original, Whiteread’s sculpture is not. Her sculpture is an inversion of the interior and exterior of the original, and what she replicates is the interior space of the original, so its referent is the original. That is why we feel the sculpture familiar conceptually, while we perceive a sense of unfamiliarity from what we just see. Moreover, what remains here is something that used to be absent. This increases the strangeness that the sculpture gives us. More precisely, when a material (such as plaster, cement, or resin) is used to fill the interior of the cast object, the object’s functionality has been destroyed. The spaces that were absent are now pres-

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21 Shelley Hornstein here citing the definition of ‘casting’ from Oxford English Dictionary.

ent, the presence has become absent. To some extent, Whiteread's sculpture also has the function of continuity as Saltzman said, which extends the unseen negative space of the objects. Therefore, the casting process of Whiteread is a process of gradual de-familiarisation not only in terms of its appearance, but also in terms of its functionality.



Fig. 2.2  
Rachel Whiteread, *Closet*, 1988

*Closet* (Fig. 2.2), was a cast from a 160-centimetre-high wood wardrobe, made after Whiteread graduated from the Slade School of Fine Art. It was originally a double door wardrobe with a tall central space that could accommodate numerous items of clothing and six vertical lattice spaces on the right-hand side of the wardrobe, separated by five thick brown shelves symmetrically. The sculpture is cast in plaster of the inside of a wood wardrobe and covered with black felt on the surface to reminiscent of an experience of hiding in a closet in childhood time. Whiteread made this sculpture with a desire to “make a childhood experience concrete” (Mullins, 2004: 19). To create *Closet*, Whiteread laid the rear of the wardrobe down on the floor, drilled several holes in the doors and filled its interior void with plaster until it overflowed (see Fig. 2.3). In view of this, the way Whiteread made her sculptures have something in common with Colombian artist Doris Salcedo's



works from the early 1990s. They both fill the interior spaces of the furniture with materials, and the work presents a strange sense of conflict, for example, *Untitled*, 1998 (Fig. 2.4- 5). New York based writer and curator Christian Viveros-Fauné called them “profoundly eerie installations” (2015). However, the difference between these two is that Whiteread uses the wardrobe (or other domestic, or even architectural space) as mould, the ‘skin’ of the original will be removed once the filler has set, like a snake shedding its skin. Nevertheless, Salcedo treats them as a crucial part of his work. She may demolish the door of a cabinet or closet to reveal the filled concrete space that blends in with the original furniture. Unlike *Closet*, these works recall childhood memory and have a strong sense of political tragedy. Julie Rodrigues Widholm (2015) said: “Locating the effects of war within areas of daily life, both private and public, Salcedo’s work includes sculptures made of deconstructed furniture filled with concrete—symbolic of the relentlessly disrupted domestic sphere—as well as large-scale, site-specific installations and public actions”. By contrast, for the making of the *Closet*, wooden doors and walls were stripped off after the plaster had set, only the five shelves were left inside and this allowed the cast inside to retain a more complete structure. Eventually, the whole surface of the pale plaster was covered in black felt to create a feeling of darkness and quiet. This is rare in her practice. Usually, the plaster is left exposed, while in this work, the subtle information (the mark) left on the surface of the cast sculpture was concealed in this way. Although the viewer can still recognise the image of the wardrobe from the appearance of the sculpture, Whiteread's creation method transforms familiarity into unfamiliarity, both in terms of its look and its original function.



Fig. 2.3  
Rachel Whiteread, *Closet* (construction process), 1988





Fig. 2.4  
Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1998



Fig. 2.5  
Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1998

The total darkness of the interior of the untouchable wardrobe is transformed by Whiteread into a solid void that makes viewers feel uncomfortable (Mullins, 2004: 19). This may be caused by Whiteread's creation going against our cognitive habits. By casting the negative space, she turns the original absence into presence, and presence into absence. What the audience sees here is the solidified invisible inside of the wardrobe, which is supposed to be unseen. This reverses our perception of negative space and is itself a process of de-familiarisation of the image of the wardrobe. However, with casting, the copied parts are still not too unfamiliar. It still carries identifiable information about the original object, sharing an indexical relationship (discussed in more detail in the next section) with the wardrobe itself to a certain extent. This is key to the work that can still carry a sense of familiarity to the public. Such a sculpture is not the *doppelgänger* of the original, even though it does refer to the original object. Here, although presenting the *Closet* to the public from the inside out challenges the audience's cognitive ability to a great extent, our own knowledge of the wardrobe's construction helped us identify the *Closet*. At first glance, we may perceive nothing more than a black cuboid sculpture of average human height. However, if you examine it in great detail, the shape of the wooden door of the original wardrobe and the square pattern on the inside of the door formed obvious indentations and imprints on the surface of the sculpture in the process of casting. Together with the five shelves that were retained, they formed a series of visual clues. Her sculpture is identifiable, and all of these clues point to the very familiar image of furniture – the wardrobe. The audience's sensory knowledge of familiar objects, as well as their experience with the construction and basic shape of wardrobe or other domestic objects or furniture, provide the information needed to deal with the identification of Whiteread's sculpture that inverts familiar objects. Meanwhile, with the help of these clues, the audience is invited to project their memories with the wardrobe onto the work. The black cuboid sculpture could arouse the audience to feel familiar and evoke a childhood memory of sitting inside a wardrobe as a child who was surrounded by darkness. Therefore, her sculpture invigorates the connection between our eyes and our mind<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless, it has to be said that Whiteread solidifies the invisible negative space into concrete, making the intangible tangible. This is undoubtedly the main reason for transforming the audience's image of the familiar wardrobe into something eerily strange. Therefore, the work itself puts the viewer in the contradiction between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and a peculiar uncanny feeling of being 'in-between' arise.

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22 This is what conceptual art seeks - "moving beyond art of the eye to art that provokes the mind" (Gildersleeve & Guyotte, 2019: 4).



Fig. 2.6  
Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Bath)*, 1990

However, the negative spaces Whiteread cast are not all the space inside objects, but also the space underneath. The artist's treatment of this part is slightly different, but the effect presented is still something between the familiar and the unfamiliar. For example, *Untitled (Bath)*, 1990 (Fig. 2.6). Whiteread cast the space under the bathtub rather than its inside. The original tub was placed in a rectangular mould, and then the plaster was poured into the mould and waited to cure thoroughly. Whiteread added a glass lid on the top and drilled two holes in the top at one end. Meanwhile, she also drilled a pair of holes in the plaster cast on the same side of the glass lid, suggesting the place where the taps would have been. In such a way, the rust transferred onto *Untitled (Bath)*. Although, it is more reminiscent of the tomb, the shape of the grooves and the location of the holes help us to identify the image of the bathtub.



Fig. 2.7  
Rachel Whiteread, *House*, 1993

Therefore, although the negative space of the objects reproduced by Whiteread is not the 'double' of the original objects, it still possesses the function of 'double' to point to the original objects. The making process of Whiteread's art involves a process to de-familiarise the image of the original. Although it challenges the viewer's perception of the negative space of objects through her way of making, which transforms the familiar into the unfamiliar, the cast object can still provide enough information for the viewer to recognise and catch a sense of peculiar familiarity. Her work leaves the public torn between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The exploration of negative space is also an exploration of the issue of absence and presence. Such qualities are amplified infinitely in the casting of her architectural form. The cast of Whiteread's subsequent sculpture of entire rooms and



even architectural spaces was more complicated. But it can still be understood through sensory perception, physical memory, and attention to the ordinary physical details (the marks) of everyday life experience. Here, I will further examine a feeling of in-between familiarity and unfamiliarity through her work – *House* (1993), which made Whiteread famous and the work won Whiteread the Turner Prize (1993)<sup>23</sup>.

The temporary in-situ sculpture *House*<sup>24</sup> (1993, Fig. 2.7), was a concrete cast situated in East London at Grove Road, including the basement, ground floor and the first floor. It is a space that was once a home, transformed into something that unsettles. It presents the form of a house, but it is inaccessible and is not essentially a replication of the original house. The original house was a Victorian terrace house and it was the last building in that area that was due for demolition. This is not Whiteread's first casting around for architectural space. In 1990, she completed her cast of a Victorian parlour - *Ghost* (Fig. 2.8), of which the purpose was to “mummify the air in the room” (National Gallery of Art, 2009, 01: 08). The same purpose was achieved in *House*, transforming the absent into the present, the void into volume. This anti-logical operation shows the subtle imprint of the internal space and spatial surface, which emphasises the situation that the occupant once dwelled and lived in this space as transient evidence of the past presence of memory. In this way, the *House* seems to serve as a memorial.



Fig. 2.8  
Rachel Whiteread, *Ghost*, 1990

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23 On 23 November 1993, the work won Whiteread the Turner Prize, and on the same day, it was voted to be demolished by the local council.

24 With the commission by Artangel and with the permission of Bow council, Whiteread was allowed to access to the house and create an ephemeral sculpture from it in August 1993. With the help of engineers, construction people, assistants and student volunteers, Whiteread and her team completed on 25 October 1993.

To make this giant sculpture, two layers of concrete were sprayed on the surface of the interior room by room. The first layer was approximately five centimetres deep and used white concrete which also called Locrete, the second layer sprayed much heavier concrete which was tied into the metal structure. A skin of the interior of the house formed. Before the top-coat concrete was sprayed, a release agent was applied on the surface of the inside. In order to support the weight of the work, a metal armature was constructed as a new foundation from inside to hold up the work. When the concrete dries, the exterior of the original house is stripped. Everything that used to be in the house is now exposed to the public from its opposite normal perspective. In other words, what was hidden inside is now revealed to the public. What we notice is the shape of these indentations and the associations that come from them with real objects, and so to say, *House* is a material trace of the former home. Through a series of traces, such as the outline shape of the cast house and the indentations of domestic details (windows, doors, and switches), the key information that can be identified and associated with the audience can be provided. This helps the viewers to reflect back on the general acknowledgement of a house, to locate themselves in a house, and also, the feelings of belonging. Such a method breaks the viewer's habitual logic of the things that are so familiar in our lives may seem unfamiliar at first sight. The process of such casting gradually defamiliarises the familiar, giving the sculpture an eerie feeling by recognising the inversion. When the original house effectively 'disappeared', the house at 193 Grove Road was no more. What remained was a concrete 'skin' of an absent house, or as Bird (1995: 121) indicates- the 'supplement'. This 'supplement' explores the relationship of its absence. To this, Saltzman points out that Whiteread's sculpture is a materialised absence, and her work concretises the historical spaces and the historical operations of daily domestic life (2006: 86). The sculpture that remains becomes 'something' of a reminder of the past, it seems like a mausoleum containing all the memories of the previous occupants. While a sense of familiarity is offered through the same dimensions and shapes of the interior domesticities, it is no longer a dwelling, and it stands as an echo of its disappeared original. As a materialised absence provided the viewer with an oddly alien.

Therefore, the negative space made by Whiteread retains the basic recognisable image of the copied object in the way of making it and thus conveys the original sense of familiarity, with the concept of double. It is not intrinsically a *doppelgänger* of the original. By materialising the absence, the invisible is transformed into the visible, which subverts the public's cognition and, thus, carries an eerie strangeness. Her works present a peculiar uncanny between the familiar and the unfamiliar.

## Mortality

Whiteread's works always contain a degree of connection with the idea of death. Critics often regarded her work as evocative of the idea of death, with Mullins (2004) attributing "the look of sarcophagi" to her work. A sarcophagus is a stone coffin or a container to hold a coffin. Ancient Egyptians believed in an afterlife, and the sarcophagus was to be the eternal dwelling place of those within it. The mummified body was placed into a coffin which was then into the sarcophagus. At times, the mummy was even placed directly into the sarcophagus (National Geographic, no date). Whiteread's works have the appearance of being solemn and silent which further increases the connection between the work and a sense of death. For example, *Untitled (Bath)* (Fig. 2.6) reminds the viewer of a sarcophagus (see example: Sarcophagus of Nectanebo II Fig. 2.9). Interestingly, although sarcophagi normally are associated with death, according to the British Museum's description of it, this sarcophagus was later re-used as a ritual bath in the Attarin Mosque at the location of the former Church of St Athanasius (The British Museum, no date). As a ritual bath, it is endowed with the meaning of a rebirth. *Untitled (Bath)*, on the other hand, could suggest these two meanings from its appearance and original purpose. The motif of 'death' is usually linked together with a series of related terms, such as 'loss', 'memory' or 'ghosts'. As above mentioned Whiteread intends to "mummify the air in the room" (National Gallery of Art, 2009, 01:08) when she made *Ghost*. This suggests some sort of death-related thought. What she cast is the absence, and the remaining sculpture could somehow represent the disappearance of the object to be reproduced (i.e. *House*). I am going to look at this in two ways: the relationship between casting, death mask and photograph, and the value of commemoration respectively.



Fig. 2.9  
Sarcophagus of Nectanebo II, 345BC

Casting has a similar function to the death mask<sup>25</sup> and photography. Casting is considered as the act of mummifying to a certain extent and this technique was used to make death masks (Gallagher, 2017: 13). It takes the surface or even the shape of individuals from its original to another, replicates into an object almost exactly the same as the original. A death mask was used as a model for recording the facial features of a deceased person from the Middle Ages until the 19th century (David & Wallace, 1978: 1189). The death mask is made by casting the face of a corpse, usually in wax or plaster. In doing so, it preserves the facial identity of the corpse. Therefore, the audience can imagine what the person really looked like, and so, it has the function of recognition. Whiteread's cast of negative space has such characteristics. Those retained imprints, marks as well as fine wear and tears through the process of casting, are actually an index. Saltzman also emphasised the indexing function of the death mask, he believes that "the death mask is an act of substitution, of memorialisation, a means of fixing an image of the deceased, capturing an impression of the face that it takes as its fugitive subject, portrait, and memorial in one" (2006: 85). As Rosalind Krauss (1977: 59) explains the term 'index' to the sign as "traces, imprints and clues". For example, the footprint, the death mask, and the photograph are within the category of the 'index' (Doane, 2007), and they also possess the quality of iconic signs, as these signs resemble the objects. Therefore, the traces shown in Whiteread's cast are indexical signs, and it is precisely because of this that Whiteread's sculptures retain elements that evoke a sense of familiarity in the audience. Mullins (2004: 46) describes House as alluding to both the photographic image and the death mask, recording a specific moment that then becomes the past. As it picks up the details from the original objects (or persons), it has the value of a memorial. As with a photograph, it is a kind of image that carries indexical evidence of the existence of the original. It is evidence of the existence of particular moments of the past, which then implies an absence of the present. Susan Sontag (1977) once declared that photography is a ghostly trace and could be seen as a reference to this. According to Barthes (1984), photography has not only an inescapable connection with death, but also faces an absence beneath the surface of the photograph when people look at it. He writes that photographs "mechanically repeat what could never be repeated existentially" (1984: 4). Even though, it confuses the concepts between live and dead of the original object to the viewer to a certain extent. By evidenc-

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<sup>25</sup> The process of casting the death mask could date back to the plaster masks of ancient Egyptian. The process of casting the death mask was restored in 15th-century Europe as a means of laying the monarch's body (as a mannequin) down in the state (Saltzman, 2006: 85). It was used as a model of recording the facial features of deceased person from the Middle Ages until the 19th century (David & Wallace, 1978: 1189). It usually in wax or plaster and preserves the facial identity of the corpse. "It captures all the physical accretions of the human face" and it bears a function of memorial which remind us of the dead (Shone, 1995: 52). Therefore, the audience can imagine what the person really looked like, and so, it has the function of recognition.



ing that the object has been real (also, evidence that the object has indeed existed), the photograph seduces us to believe that it is alive, to mislead us and attribute that everything in that could be eternal. However, by shifting this reality to the past (“this has been” (1984: 79)), the photograph suggests that it is already departed, or dead. Thus, the photograph represents an absent presence. Similarly, death masks and casting have the same functions, as with photographs. Especially for those casting involves destruction in the process of creation, the cast work preserves the appearance of things before last moment that are about to disappear or be destroyed. Once the process is over, it means the destruction or even the loss of the original objects. What remains is the absent presence of the original object, a ghost-like image. The casting of Whiteread has the function of these properties. As we discussed earlier, the art of Whiteread preserves the absence of the object, like a three-dimensional photograph that represents the presence of the object. What is different is that a photograph is not tactile or three-dimensional, and is also weightless; by contrast, the death mask and casting are not only manifest in tangible three-dimensional space, but also have weight.

Whiteread’s sculpture articulates more than just a symbolic function, it also represents the correlative history and memorial. As discussed earlier, her art can be understood as a kind of ‘continuation’ of the object of reproduction, playing the role of a memorial. Such quality is particularly evident in the *House*. Philipp Fehl points out that “Monuments are made for a variety of purposes, not all equally impressive; they may be tombs; marks of honour, affection, triumph or hatred; signs of a covenant; demonstrations of authority or of the possession of the property. All, however, have this in common: they are intended to last in time and to signify the importance of whatever memory they wish to pass on to the future.....” (1972, cited from Watney, 1995: 98). *House*, is such a monumental work, showing its relation to the historical space of domesticity. The original house was one of the properties of a typical row of terraced houses on the kind built throughout the East End of London on Grove Road. It was the last one of the emptied houses (the tenant, Mr. Gale refused to move out) while the rest of the street was cleared to make way for a park. Thus, *House* could conjure up powerful emotions as a place of shelter and safety, which not only includes the memory of Mr. Gale’s dwelling, but also the folk memories of the working-class homes that once spanned the street and the legacy from the devastation of World War II. Balasz Takac (2020) states, one reason why *House* remains powerful is because “it responds to a ravaging nature of gentrification, and the housing issues related to the growing class (and racial) discrepancy in British society”. Thus, the *House* has monumental qualities. As a continuation of the original, it was cast in situ and reminded us of those that were gone or lost. More importantly, it emphasises a presence (both physically and

mentally) through the reproduction of an absence.

Rachel Whiteread's creation of negative space through the process of casting bears the quality of placing the public between a sense of the familiar and the unfamiliar. By materialising the void, a sense of mortality and the issue of presence and absence are raised. Under these conditions, her sculptures are monumental, reminding the public of past histories, memories, and their absence. Moreover, her art touches on the concept of "double" which could be a response to Freudian uncanny ideas, and as a preliminary inquiry and response to the exploration of how sculpture can evoke *déjà vu*.

### 2.3 Do Ho Suh - The Reproduced Space

Korean-born sculptor and installation artist Do Ho Suh (b. 1962) renders memories which confront questions of home, displacement and identity in his works. After gaining a Master's degree from Seoul National University in traditional Asian brush painting, he left his native South Korea to study and live in the United States (gaining a Bachelors' in Painting from Rhode Island and a Masters' in Sculpture from Yale). He subsequently moved between New York, Seoul and London. Suh's peripatetic experience is referred to not only for biographical material, but provides much of the content of his work, and continues to influence works which not only show his personal attachment to home - the connection between the body and space, and the interaction of dwelling both physically and psychologically - but also express a forceful sense of cultural displacement that embodied in he's works through different architectural forms. In a series of works engaging spatial collision - *Fallen Star: A New Beginning-1/35<sup>th</sup>* (2006), *Fallen Star1/5* (2008) and *Fallen Star* (2012) - Suh suggested the destabilising dislocations of his itinerant life: disturbing and unsettling works that address the idea of falling and being broken. If *Fallen Star* discusses the issue of cultural displacement from the external point of view of architecture, Suh's tactile fabric works and *Rubbing Project* are evidence of deeper research into the internal (in terms of both space and the body). The purpose of his diaphanous hanging fabric works was to make a metaphorical portable home to carry along with him all the time. This theme is explored in works such as *Seoul Home/ L.A. Home/New York Home/ Baltimore Home/ London Home/ Seattle Home/ L.A. Home* (1999), *Home Within Home Within Home Within Home Within Home* (2013), and *The Perfect Home II* (2003). In doing so, the artist develops a recurring motif of the absent space and this can be seen as a way that Suh actively deals with the issues of longing. In his *Rubbing Project* he provides further physical information (surface texture and the imprint of subtle marks) than the fabric works while recreating such an ambience of a space. Through this tactile drawing method, Suh makes a copy of the history and memories, visually rendering them to not just himself but the public.

These duplicated dwelling spaces are actually the *doppelgänger* to the original. In this section, I will explore which elements in Suh's works trigger the 'uncanny' by talking about both the idea of the 'double' and the making of the work, in accordance with Freud's uncanny concept. I will focus on two of his works that will be fully explored as examples in this section: *Home Within Home Within Home Within Home Within Home* (2013, Fig. 2.10-11) and *Rubbing/ Loving Project: Apartment A, 348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA* (2014-2017, Fig. 2.12). The former work expli-

cates a sense of longing by replicating a traditional Korean house within a Western-style architecture, which epitomises the vital role of his Seoul home. The latter one not only renders memories as with the former, but also highlights the tactile marks that make memories more vivid. Then, the discussion will focus on the action of repetition in Suh's creation and further explore its connection to rendering memory. Finally, I will examine the meaning of his reproduced or replicated spaces (both diaphanous fabric works and paper rubbing) from the perspective of psychology.

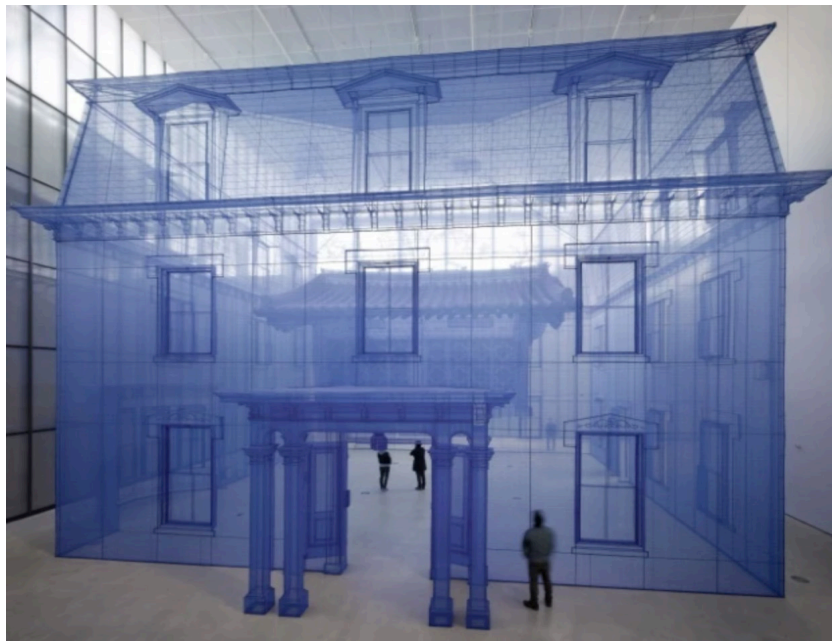


Fig.2.10,  
Do Ho Suh, *Home Within Home Within Home Within Home Within Home*, 2013



Fig.2.11,  
Do Ho Suh, *Home Within Home Within Home Within Home Within Home* (detail), 2013



Fig. 2.12, Do Ho Suh, *Rubbing/Loving Project: Apartment A, 348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA, 2014-2017*

### **The *doppelgänger***

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the meaning of the German word *doppelgänger* is “a spirit that looks exactly like a living person, or someone who looks exactly like someone else but who is not related to that person”. Freud (1919) uses the idea of double to interpret ‘*doppelgänger*’ (see Chapter One, 1.3 The *Unheimlich*, paragraph 5, the concept of the *Unheimlich* and the idea of double/ the *doppelgänger*). According to Freud, the idea of double (/the *doppelgänger*) means that an individual will encounter a constant repetition of the same event or experience a constant repetition of some characteristic. Such repeated experiences would increase one’s psychological uncertainty to some extent, thus evoking an uncanny feeling.

Suh makes *doppelgängers* in his work continuously. Whether fabric installation or large drawing project, he creates the ‘double’ by precisely replicating the buildings where Suh once lived. By making these *doppelgängers*, an indexical trace can be established between the replicated architectural installation and its original. In this way, his works show varying degrees of his longing for home. At the same time, by making such *doppelgängers*, the artist himself can take comfort in the unease caused by displacement.



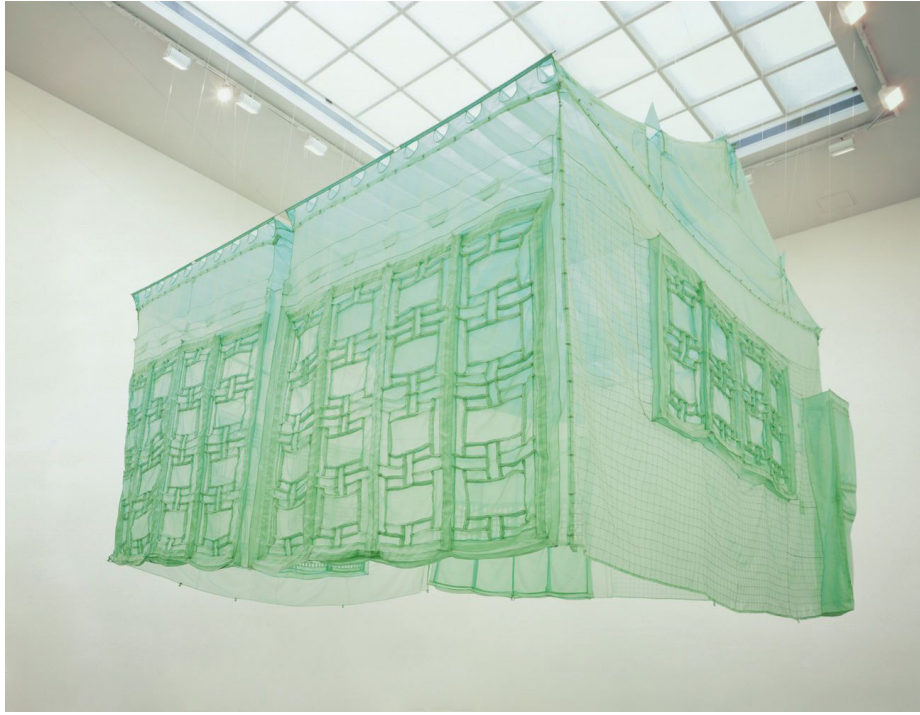


Fig. 2.13,  
Do Ho Suh, *Seoul Home/ L.A. Home/New York Home/ Baltimore Home/ London Home/ Seattle Home/ L.A. Home*, 1999

In terms of his fabric-type installations, they are highly consistent in every detail with the original architecture, such as size, proportion, and construction, just like a three-dimensional photograph. Indeed, Suh's work achieves a higher degree of reproduction than photographs. This is what makes Suh's work provide a strong sense of reality and familiarity. His choice of transparent fabric as material for reproduction has two sides. On the one hand, the material itself carries some kind of identity information, which can provide the viewer with a sense of familiarity to some extent. Suh uses material (light polyester) that is very common in Korea, and it is often used to make summer wear. It is lightweight and translucent. It has very similar features to silk, which is a material with a long history and was very common in ancient Asian cultures to be used to make clothing or as a material for painting and calligraphy. Coupled with the image of traditional architecture reproduced by Suh, the sense of familiarity can be extended to viewers with similar cultural backgrounds, generating the same sense of cultural familiarity. On the other hand, using this material to reproduce the image of the house creates its *doppelgänger* unusual, as architecture is supposed to be concrete and rigid. A sort of uncanny impression pervades in Suh's art. On the contrary, the lightness and transparency of the material itself seem to represent the image of home in the artist's memory. Clara Kim commented that it was "present but transparent, sculptural but formless, seemingly there but not" (2014: 27). It is often described as "materially ghostly" (Smith, 2014: 19), "a ghost of a house" (Richard, 2002), or "a spectral relic of a home" (Lesso, 2022). *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New*

*York Home/Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home* (1999, Fig. 2.13) is Suh's earlier fabric installation and the first appearance of his Korean architectural image. This image also reappears in his later works as the original image of his home and is usually hung in the air to be displayed to the public. This work presents such a state: the familiar past overlaps with the unfamiliar reality, which highlights the artist's own desire for home. The resonance evoked at this moment goes far beyond the limits of cultural background. It expresses the universal nostalgia and longing for home in the hearts of the public. This is where Suh's work has its power. In another of his works, *Home Within Home Within Home Within Home* (2013, Fig. 2.11), Suh once again remade his parent's house, a traditional Korean building where he grew up. He hangs the replica of the Korean house in a life-sized replica of the Rhode Island townhouse he made. It is a dwelling place he lived while studying at the Rhode Island School of Design in the early 1990s. This work presents Suh's dual memory (both in the United States and Korea), while vividly interpreting the great conflict and displacement he experienced in real life. In addition, Suh's works usually challenge the concept of time and space. Each individual replica of the building carries a link to its culture, place and even time. It is worth noting again, in *Home Within Home Within Home* (2013), although Suh reproduced two different places of his dwelling place, he hung the replicas of the Korean one above the interior space of the replicas of the American one, the memories of different times overlapping through this artistic act. What's even more remarkable is, that an idea of the home that is full of longing and 'untouchability', as well as a psychological state of contradiction and struggle of yearning for his premier home (Seoul home) is well presented. On the other hand, the act of overlapping also dilutes the link between the original building and its own site. They form symbols of different cultural backgrounds associated with the home, and as the exhibition space (venue) changes, this connection will be further blurred. Precisely because of this, it highlights the artist's idea of the untouchability of his original home (his parent's house) and his desire for that place. Therefore, the conflicts in his work are not only architectural, and cultural, but psychological. Perhaps the most important thing is to return to the issue related to 'home' and as his most intuitive response to his experience of displacement. More importantly, the reproduced images of the architecture here serve as *doppelgängers* of the artist's former living places, creating a dreamy or ghostly effect in a transparent, weightless fabric. It not only highlights the importance of the most original image of home in the artist's heart, but also allows the audience and even the artist himself to shuttle back and forth between the present and the past time and space, between the real and the unreal. In a word, to feel a sense of inner displacement from a physical experience in such a way.





Fig. 2.14,  
Heidi Bucher, *Untitled*, 1979

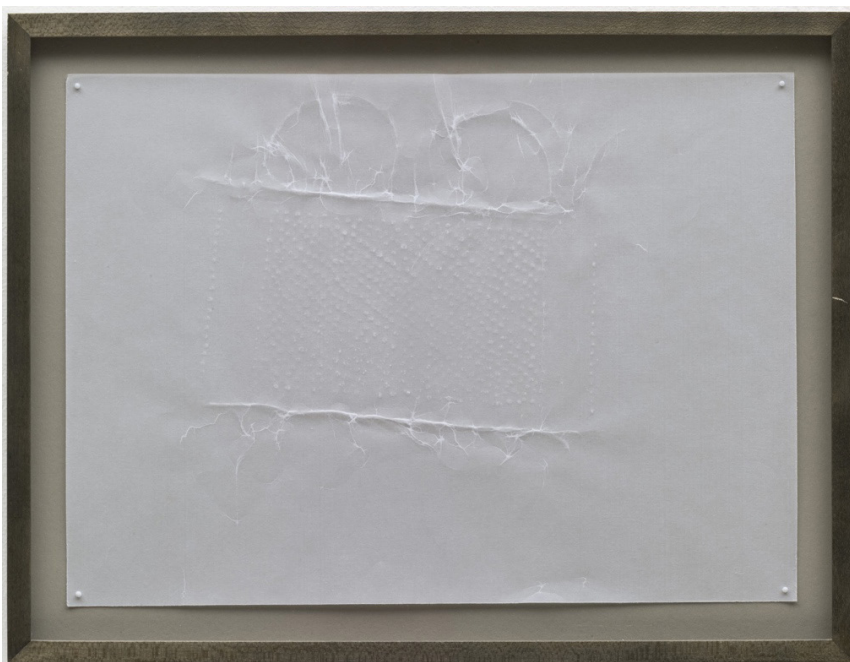


Fig. 2.15, Mona Hatoum, *Untitled (grater)*, 1996

For his rubbing project, the indexical relationship between the works and the space being copied is even closer. Moreover, this type of work is more of a 'doubled' work. More precisely, a *doppelgänger* of the inside dwelling space. By making his rubbing project, the interior of the original space was covered with paper and removed it like the 'skin' from the surface of the space after finishing rubbing. From the act of tearing the paper off the surface, one may feel the intensely painful feeling of separation from home. This highlights his inner longing for home, his reluctance to give up, and his nostalgia. The technique of rubbing (or frottage) actually has a long history and be adopted by cultures all over the world. It is a means of recording with a specific memorial meaning, which is usually associated with recording tombstone and memorial inscriptions on paper, for example, brass rubbings (Pesenti, 2015: 11). To make this rubbing, the common way is to use white lining paper laid down over the brass, which is then rubbed it with heelball or cobbler's wax. This process will result in obvious colour contrast (between the colour of black of the heelball or wax and the white colour of the paper); in doing so, the details of the brass sculpture are transmitted onto the paper. Allegra Pesenti introduces the function of this rubbing, which is to document the past and yet another means to the visualisation of memory (2015). For instance, in Heidi Bucher's *Untitled* (1979, Fig. 2.14), Mona Hatoum's *Untitled (grater)* (1996, Fig. 2.15) and Jennifer Bornstein's *Gorgeous Trench Coat, Aquascutum of London* (2014, Fig. 2.16), artists create their own individualised and ghostly memories by rubbing the paper over the clothes or daily utensils to make out the imprints on it. For Suh, the interactive process of rubbing a space is a way to rediscover the life traces, memorise the space and, probably, refresh such memories. It is not a simple process of making, it is more kind of situated performance art. By his caressing of the interior, the artist communicates with the past, to the space, and then the dialogues are recorded through pencil on paper. In this process, his fingerprints will be inadvertently kept on the paper, which seems integrated with this space, as if to enhance his identity and personal experience in the space. the notion of forensics here (another close examination of traces within a space). Therefore, the viewers can see both physical and psychological imprints of that space. At the final stage of this creation, the rubbed paper is peeled away from the surface; it is a process equivalent to stripping the 'skin' off the space, which recalls the processes of leaving or losing. This project shows affinities with Swiss artist Heidi Bucher's 'skinning' works, such as *Herrenzimmer* (1979, Fig. 2.17-18). It is a piece in which Bucher used latex to make a casting of a wall in the study of her parent's home in Wülflingen. The yellowish translucent latex film will be shed and displayed by hanging elsewhere. Similar to a snake molting, the shape, size, and position of each scale of the 'snakeskin' is carried away with the detached transparent skin, as evidence of its presence while also implying a loss. Laura Cumming (2018)

commented that “the result is somewhere between residue, facsimile and ghostly essence”. Specifically, in *Rubbing/Loving Project: Apartment A, 348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA* (2014- 2017), Suh made another *doppelgänger* of the space he once lived. By placing paper over the surface of the interior of his apartment and rubbing it with coloured pencils or graphite, the artist leaves an imprint of the actual interior. This is the process by which the artist preserves the indexical trace. There are two other major rubbing projects to date: *Rubbing/Loving Project: Seoul Home* (2013) and the project for the 2012 Gwanju Biennale. The production process is similar to the New York project. The New York apartment is a meaningful place to Suh, and his landlord as well. It took him three months to finish the project after he had lived in the apartment there for several years. This project is actually divided into three parts: the apartment, the corridor, and the artist’s studio. Clara Kim comments that “instead of alluding to three-dimensional space, the drawings depict real space...” (2014: 29). When the viewer enters this painting space, they can physically experience what Suh had experienced. Through rubbing, the outlines of the internal walls, the texture of the surface of the materials (floor, bricks, and wooden furniture) and the architectural details of this apartment were reproduced (or doubled) and revealed to the viewer. Therefore, his rubbing works not only reproduce the artist’s past living space with traces, but also reveal the traces left by his various life paths, which is a more vivid '*doppelgänger*' that carries his past life marks and space. Since it is accessible, the viewer can physically 'experience' and easily make associations.

In terms of the function, Suh’s *doppelgängers* bear a similar function to a photograph as a way of recording, evidencing, and representing, the way Suh uses in his art provides further details. Although photography, as an indexical form functions as a kind of evidence of the past. By contrast, however, photographs can only catch the visual information of an object in black or white or coloured pictures in two dimensional, whereas Suh’s work offers additional information. As they are three-dimensional and accessible, they can provide more of a physical experience. Besides, his rubbings reconstruct the tactile memory on paper by repeatedly rubbing against the surface of the paper, capturing tiny bumps and indentations of an object underneath. This is also an indexical sign, as I have mentioned earlier in the previous section (Rachel Whiteread). Thus, rubbing reproduces a physical image that in its tactility photographs can never do. In addition, we might refer to the casting methods discussed earlier in relation to Rachel Whiteread; what this has in common with rubbing is the ability to retain information (including small marks) about the surface of the object being replicated, such that and the traces symbolising the memories of everyday life are brought to the fore. More specifically, they both share an indexical relationship to the original.

However, since rubbing can use coloured pencils to rub marks on the paper and can depict the obvious 'bump' contrast of an object's surface, it can provide a much more intuitive visual effect than casting (involving intermediary processes). Casting, is concerned with a sense of volume while the rubbing method, is more akin to the skin or surface of the object.

As a result, Suh's installations (fabric and rubbing) share the Freudian idea of 'double' with their original, and retain the same indexical trace as the original. His reproductions provide a strong message for the viewer to capture the sense of familiarity of dwelling space and probably domestic life. It seems to put the viewer into the past and his memory of the scene, but from the selection of materials and the way of reproduction, it pulls the viewer back to reality. Placing the public between the real and the unreal, provides a strong sense of familiarity and at the same time makes the viewer feel his inner displacement from the physical experience his works offer. In other words, it stays between homely and unhomely.



Fig. 2.16, Jennifer Bornstein, *Gorgeous Trench Coat*, *Aquascutum of London*, 2014





Fig. 2.17  
Heidi Bucher, *Herrenzimmer*, 1979



Fig. 2.18  
Heidi Bucher, *Ablösen der Haut II – Herrenzimmer*, 1979



## Repetition and memory

By making *doppelgängers* (no matter whether making these by stitching transparent fabrics or drawing through rubbing), Suh reproduces certain memories for the public, and also deepens his memory of 'home through the act of his 'reproducing'. In *Matter and Memory*, Henry Bergson affirms that memory "is just the intersection of mind and matter (1911: ix). According to his theory, Bergson divides memory into two types: spirit memory and body memory. Spirit memory can be further categorised into two types: pure memory and image memory. The body plays the role of conductor, responsible for receiving and transmitting. Additionally, according to Bergson's idea of repetition, it can create a bodily habit by setting up a mechanism. One of the forms of memory – memory *par excellence* - is remembering objects in the sense of learnt by heart: "To learn by heart is to create a cerebral mechanism, a habit of the body", and in terms of habit, "it is acquired by the repetition of the same effort" (Bergson, 1911: 49). Therefore, by repeating an action, the body forms a habit and forms a memory in mind.

Indeed, Suh's reproduction of his dwelling space is actually an act of repetition in Bergson's sense. First of all, before the production, the image of "home" was merely an image that existed in Suh's mind. When he begins the act of making, the physical habits formed by his act will deepen the memory of the 'home' or as a temporary living space in his mind. This memory contains further details of its information, such as the physical information between these spaces and his body. In his fabric works, the size of the whole space and every particular detail should be measured before making, a process that can deepen the artist's impression and memory of the space. Suh states this is an important process as one can familiarise oneself with the space in a very different way than merely photographing it (ART21, 2011). In terms of rubbing, Pesenti once stated "the importance of rubbings not only as records of momentous times but also of the fashions, manners, and common customs of otherwise forgotten lives"(2015: 21). To create tactile drawings relies on touching the space and marking every detail on paper. Suh once said in an interview that repeated rubbing is a method to remember and memorise the space (Art21, 2016).

For Suh, the process of making his art is a process to memorise. From their dimensions and imprints, re-remember the spaces he lived in and deepened the memories of the lives that produced those imprints. Through constant repetition of his making, the artist repeatedly reveals his own past, while constantly depicting those memories deep in his heart. It appears to be a self-redemp-

tion, as a response to deal with the issue of displacement that he is facing in life.

### **Suh's works as an autobiography**

Psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu (1989) proposed a theory called the 'Skin Ego', which is a mental and spatial representation of the body constructed by human beings based on their experience of the skin. In this process, the sense of touch is crucial. It starts out between the newborn and the mother. According to Anzieu (2014: 480), "the skin ego fulfils a function of maintaining the psyche"; and the skin ego is a part of the mother, "particularly her hands" (Anzieu, 2014: 480). The mother's handling, swaddling and bathing touch leave "marks" on the baby's body-psyche (Lee, 2019: 9). Thus, each human receives the imprint of the mother, through "the imprint of an expanding range of social contacts including nonhuman 'objects' such as cloth, warmth, vibration or smell" (Lee, 2019: 9). Therefore, the skin ego has the function of registering tactile sensory traces (Anzieu, 2014: 486). In Suh's work, the full-scale rubbing of the spaces and the diaphanous fabric installation provide this tactile impression. Specifically, in his Rubbing Project, the outlines of the walls and internal structure, the surface texture of the building materials, the details of the architecture (such as kitchen appliances, built in shelving units, door locks and handles, and electrical outlets) are transferred by making marks through rubbing and touching on paper which may also leave the imprint of his fingerprints (Fig. 2.19-20 [Screenshot]). These marks are the evidence left by touch, and form the Skin Ego - the imprint of home through the relationship between body and space. To this point, Suh (Rose,2017) states that architecture as clothing, or vice versa. For him, clothing is the smallest dwelling space and is portable. Architecture is an extension of that. Both types can provide the artist with a feeling of being physically protected. Like a kind of skin, "entering inside of me"( Rose, 2017). "That's how your house gets inside of you" (Rose, 2017). As for the fabric installation, it is an architectural image, like a close-fitting garment or skin of the home, integrating the three concepts together. Therefore, we could say the artist himself constructs the skin ego with the past dwelling space through his work. His works show Suh's fascination with the material connection between the body and the space. It can be seen as relating to what Winnicott (1951) called the 'transitional object' mentioned in Chapter One. Suh's Works act as both, as the double of the original home image to deal with his unease away from home and the feeling of longing for home.

'Reproduction' or 'replication' is important in the creation process of Suh's art. Related to Freud's uncanny concept, this creative process is actually a repetitive process, which then reproduces the

*doppelgänger*s. Importantly, by his making, especially his rubbing, an indexical trace is embedded in the work, allowing the replicated architecture to achieve an almost one-to-one reproduction. It is the source of the strong sense of familiarity conveyed by the work, in the image of a home, the image of a dwelling space, and even the image of traditional Korean architecture. Both Suh's fabric installation and his rubbing project provide the viewer with the feeling of being in a dream: offering an uncanny impression to the public. Meanwhile, such repeated production and presentation of the artist's dwelling space is also an act of memory from a certain point of view. Through making, the image of 'home' in the artist's mind is deepened again and again, and even reminds the viewer of the image of 'home'. Moreover, this behaviour can also be seen as the artist's response to the issue of displacement by repeatedly making a portable 'home' and taking it away to comfort his unsettled heart as a transitional object. Suh's works further explore the expression of the image of home in art from his own experience of displacement and how to evoke the *déjà vu* experience and the uncanny impression in his three-dimensional works.



Fig.2.19 "Rubbing/ Loving" Do Ho Suh (2016) [Screenshot].

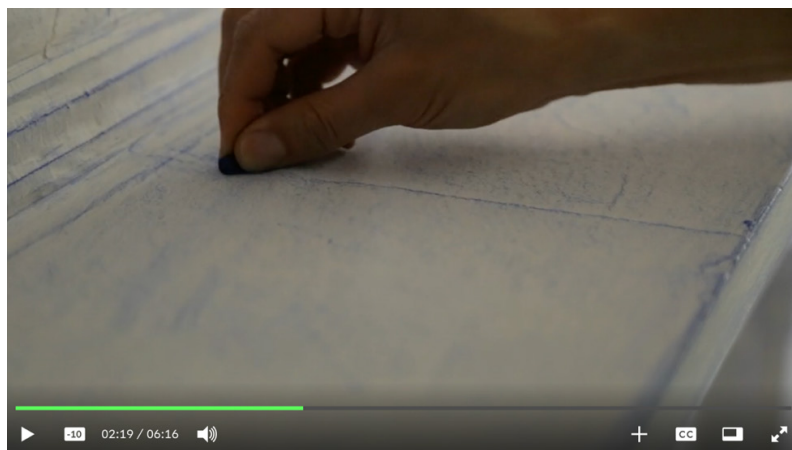


Fig. 2.20 "Rubbing/ Loving" Do Ho Suh (2016) [Screenshot].

## 2.4 Giorgio Morandi – Paul Coldwell – Uncertain Objects

### Introduction

In this section, I will discuss the works of both Giorgio Morandi and Paul Coldwell together. Their creations are mainly focused on everyday objects, and both share a similar quality of expression, including requiring the audience to have to work in order to read the image. Coldwell has been influenced by Morandi which is evident in his studio work but also his writing on Morandi and through curation. My interest is that their works possess an uncanny quality and convey a sense of uncertainty both visually and perceptually. This section will begin with a consideration of their works to the concerns of this thesis. For Morandi, the discussion will mainly focus on his still-life etchings, and how these create challenges for the viewer to recognise the image and present a sense of uncertainty. For Coldwell, the discussion will mainly concentrate on his two prints: *Uncanny Flowers*, 2016 and *Uncanny Suitcase*, 2016. To analyse the uncertainty conveyed by the effects presented through the different densities of dots in his prints and the feeling of in-between. Morandi's etchings will be discussed again to explain how a sense of uncertainty places the audience in a situation where they can feel familiar and also unfamiliar, and further explain how it works to arouse an uncanny impression that pervades their still life painting practice. Finally, the discussion of these two parts will be summarised briefly.

During this section, I will also reference the British artist, William Scott whose still-life paintings serve as a supplementary case to further illustrate how abstract artistic expression conveys both familiarity and uncertainty.

### Giorgio Morandi

Italian painter and printmaker Giorgio Morandi (1890 – 1964) specialised in still life. Although he produced few portraits, he is known for his landscapes and still lives based on the surroundings of both his studio and the apartment he shared with his sisters in Bologna. Whether in his painting or etching, his command of the tone in the picture creates a serene quality. In particular, in his monochrome etchings, the subtle changes in the tone between objects and the shadow not only suggest tranquility, but also demonstrate his exquisite techniques. His work is considered to be particularly close to the spirit of metaphysical painting, but Morandi himself denied such a view (Mundy, 1991:

15). In terms of Morandi's still lifes, Jennifer Mundy believes those as the behavioural expression of his conscious observation of what is usually overlooked (1991: 23), and as a means to "concentrate on the perceptions of 'pure' form" (1919: 24). As Morandi once said, "We know that all we can see of the objective world, as human beings, never really exists as we see and understand it. Matter exists, but has no intrinsic meaning of its own, such as the meanings we attach to it. We can know only that a cup is a cup, that a tree is a tree" (cited from Costello, 2002: 150). In his study of still life, he stripped away the additional meaning of objects from the outside world and devoted himself to depicting the essence of objects. Mariana Aguirre, on the other hand, believes that Morandi's paintings are local, showing the localism aesthetics of Bologna and the simplicity of Bologna's countryside as well as the artist's inner world (2013: 97). The landscape around his house in Grizzana and the everyday objects in his studio in Bologna, such as vases, bottles, jugs, and tins, dominate his practice. These are characteristics of Bologna (Mundy, 1991: 11), and Leo Longanesi reinforces that from his works one can learn a certain aspect about Morandi's life and the character of Bologna itself (cited from Mundy, 1991: 11)<sup>26</sup>. There is a certain correlation between Morandi's still lifes and landscapes<sup>27</sup>. This connection, to a certain extent, gives the work a sense of *déjà vu* and uncanny effect. His landscapes are somehow structurally counterparts of his still lifes (Mundy, 1991: 21), the images of long-necked vases and small pots depicted in some of his still-life paintings can be projected from the images of the architecture of Bologna depicted in his landscape paintings, for example, the chimney stacks of the arsenale and the gas works (see Fig. 2.21- 2.22). The architecture of Bologna can be found in a certain way in the daily objects he drew (James, 2001; Coldwell, 2001; Coldwell, 2016). In combination with the previously studied idea of "gestalt familiarity", in Morandi's still-life etchings, a pattern of specific structures formed by the architecture of different heights in the city of Bologna can be recognised. There is something vaguely familiar about it, as if one could find the similarity between his etching and the horizon line of Bologna. Or, it could be seen that the still life in the artist's studio project is a microcosm of the fabric of part of the city in which he lives. So there is an uncanny familiar presence in this part of his work.

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26 The original text is "Leo Longanesi exaggerated perhaps only a little when he wrote in 1928, 'To see one of his paintings is to know him, his family, his house, his street, his town. His colours, slightly muted by the dust, are those of Bologna Minore with its silent back alleys, its pottery shops, its bakery ovens, its grocery shops, and its small second-hand stalls. The delicate and fragile lights in his paintings are those that filter into the street where he lives'.

27 Cézanne was a very important influence on Morandi's painting, especially in his early landscapes (Baldinotti, 2013: 9). "Cézanne was the great exponent of 'pure painting' in which subject matter was seen as a 'pretext' for a painterly exploration of space, form, colour and light, but implicit in his work was an insistence, with which Morandi would have concurred, on the importance of studying everyday objects and the local landscape" (Mundy, 1991: 13).





Fig. 2.21  
Giorgio Morandi, *Various Objects on a Table*, 1931



Fig. 2.22  
Giorgio Morandi, *View of the Montagnola in Bologna*, 1932



In this study of Morandi's works, I will mainly focus on his still-life etchings. The monochromatic tone and the depiction of objects, often in dim light have a strong connection with the practical direction of this research. The uncertainty presented by the work about the depicted object or the space around the object has led to a discussion about the question of *déjà vu* and the uncanny in this study. This eerie uncertainty is more evident in his etchings than in any other form of his work, the other is more focused on showing the serenity and meditative qualities of the subject. Morandi's still life is, in a way, an inward look. This is where we are similar in our respective practices, we both have a similar working environment - his bedroom also functioned as the studio, as did mine throughout the two periods of lockdown and we both explore the everyday objects in this space. Meanwhile, our works both share the attempt to record a moment in that environment. Both in Morandi's and in my practice, we are actively or passively involved in responding to the issue of absence and presence. The difference, as mentioned earlier, is that Morandi explores the pure form of objects, the nature of them. The objects I discussed in my research focus on the meanings the objects have by virtue of them being given to me by my family. These are two distinct directions and must be made clear. Even in Morandi's work, which depicts the essence of still life, the air of mystery permeates through his manipulation of the images of the subjects and the tone of the picture. The whole image is shrouded in dark tones, and the image of still life gradually becomes abstract and uncertain, especially in his later still-life etchings. These will be the focus of the next part of this case study.

### **The uncertain sense in his still-life etching<sup>28</sup>**

Morandi worked mainly alone acting as his own master printer, and he understood that time<sup>29</sup> was

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28 Etching is an intaglio printmaking process in which lines or areas are incised using acid into a metal plate in order to hold the ink. In etching, the plate can be made of iron, copper, or zinc. During creation, the etching plate is polished to remove all scratches on the surface and coated with an acid-resistant varnish evenly. Next, the artist uses an etching needle to draw a pattern on the etching plate. The acid-resistant varnish that is covered in this process will be scratched away as the etching needle moves, exposing the metal base underneath. The plate is then intruded into the acid. The exposed part of metal is then eroded by the acid into grooves. The depth of the groove is determined by the time of soaking. The deeper and wider the groove on the plate, the deeper the lines will be printed. Finally, after removing varnish and acid from the surface, the plate is inked and placed on a printing press and waiting to be printed. The contrast of black and white colours forms the main expression of etching.

29 Morandi was a master of acid. He used test strips to ascertain its strength in order to get better control of the making of the lines, in which the timing of the acid bath is critical. "Too little and it will lack definition, too long and the lines melt together, disrupting the screen through which the

crucial for the artist to control and determine the final quality of the work. The longer it stays in the acid, the deeper the grooves will be created on the plate, and therefore the darker the lines will be printed. (Coldwell, 2001: 37). Therefore, it can be understood that etching itself also hints at the mark of time. It not only represents a certain moment through the object drawn by the artist, but also records the moment created by the artist through the depth of the lines in the picture, which will then become evidence of a certain absence, like photography. The objects Morandi draws are combinations of different arrangements of the same jars, bottles, candlesticks, and other small everyday objects. The majority of these works are of small size (they are all around 24 x 30cm in size, some are even smaller, in the 10 x 10cm range), but they appear particularly exquisite due to the remarkable feature of his work which he registers tones through mastery of lines of his etching. Crosshatching is the customary method of Morandi's etching. This method forms the fine web of etched lines in the print. Each line maintains its own clarity, but could create a direction to guide the audience's vision when they form a parallel set of lines. However, it is in this way that the depiction of light and shadow in his prints that forms his own characteristic, leading to an uncanny effect.



Fig. 2.23  
Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life with Drapery on the Left*, 1927



Fig. 2.24  
Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life with Vases, Bottles etc. on a table*, 1929

Morandi focuses on constructing the image of daily objects through the expression of the changes in the tone relationship. He tends to depict the object or the space around the object which the reader is not quite sure of visually. In his early still-life etchings, it can be seen that the outline of the object is very clear and accurate through his exquisite depiction of light, shadow, and even the inside details. Such prints are more akin to the black and white photographs, for example, *Still Life with Drapery on the Left*, (1927, Fig. 2.23), the edges and surfaces of every object are almost visible in detail, and even the folds of drapery are clearly delineated, as if the moment is completely recorded. Later, the image of still life in his works became blurred on the edge. There is the greatest sense of uncertainty about where objects begin and end. Indeed, the audience was unable to clearly identify the shape of the objects which were submerged in the darkness (for example, see Fig. 2.24). As if searching for something in the dark, trying to recognise the familiar image. When viewed as a whole, the print tests the viewer's ability to read the different types of vases and pots. However, when examined closely, the abstract quality commandeers the focus of the whole vision, there are no recognisable outlines, leaving cross-hatching combinations of varying density (Fig. 2.25). Alternatively, he deliberately leaves a large area unworked in the



Fig. 2.25  
Giorgio Morandi, (details) *Still Life with Vases, Bottles etc. on a table*, 1929

image, abandons the detailed description of objects, such as material, colour (because the etchings by their nature are black and white), internal structure, and only retains their outline and size information, like silhouette<sup>30</sup>, the reader can gradually identify the objects he painted by forming a white outline in strong contrast with the dark background (see Fig. 2.26). Mundy referred to them as “spectral presences” (1991: 24), objects are only apparent through a contrast of tones. They are extremely short of details, presenting a relatively abstract image of the object, giving the reader a large space for imagination and a mysterious impression. Ben Nicholson states that the objects in Morandi’s still life etching (c. 1930 - 36) retain the identity for the audience to recognise its forms, but they are present as abstract elements simultaneously (2006: 16). However, in Morandi’s etching, these two qualities are the features that I want to discuss, which bear the functionality to cause a sense of uncertainty and bring the reader to a sense of feeling familiarity while unfamiliar. Although the objects Morandi interprets are familiar to us in life, his artistic language makes these

<sup>30</sup> Silhouette was originally meant to be dark outlines that bring out by a light background, this is the opposite.

things that appear in his etchings are less familiar and strange. More accurately, they lead to a sense of visual uncertainty which may have aroused a peculiar uncanny impression. Let us see his work *Still Life of Vases on a Table* (1931, Fig. 2.26) as an example to discuss this in detail.

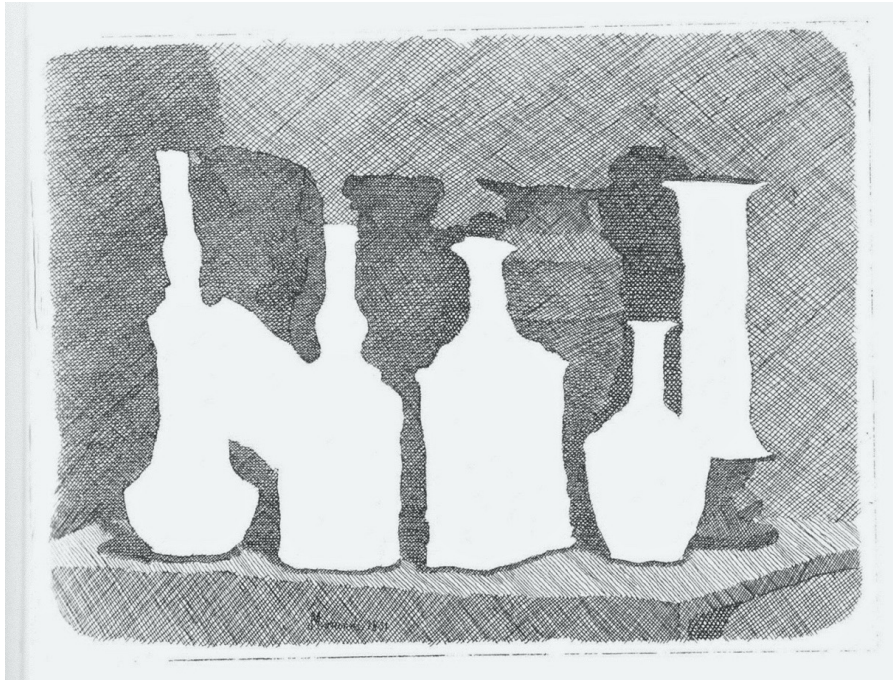


Fig. 2.26  
Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life of Vases on a Table*, 1931

In his etching - *Still Life of Vases on a Table* (1931, Fig. 2.26), the image is realised through Morandi's customary method of crosshatching and positive/ negative. In the majority of his etchings, a small number of blanks are left to represent the highlights in light and shadow. However, quite unusual for Morandi, he left the blank shapes undrawn in his etching. He tries to make the viewer recognise the objects themselves by the blank shapes he left behind. In fact, the interlacing of shadows and the blank-leaving image enhance the recognisability of the objects in this etching. The different density of the lines on the etching creates three different shades of colour in the picture: white, dark grey (shaded parts), and light grey (background and table-top). However, it is precisely because of the existence of white space that enough visual data are provided for us to construct the profile of the vases. The perception of the audience has become an important part of the work and an indispensable part of making the work complete. Careful judgment is required by the audience to identify the shape of the object, and, the category. They can only recognise these objects from limited clues, the details of which are uncertain. Paul Coldwell stresses that the audience acts as the detective, identifying objects from the shadows of intersecting lines of different densities and the identifiable shape of the blank space (Coldwell, 2006; Coldwell, 2019). The interlacing of shad-



ows and the blank-leaving image allows the whole work to be full of a strong sense of uncertainty and makes the objects themselves wander between representation and abstraction, familiarity and unfamiliarity. Through the clues he leaves behind, however, the audience can still identify the objects, even though they may hover between signified and referent. Once the image is successfully identified, the acquainted images of the arrangement or combination of those everyday objects will invite viewers to have an association with their life scenes, such as similar vases, candlesticks, pots, jars, and other small items. By then, an inexplicable sense of familiarity will arise instantly.

Similar forms of expression can be seen in the paintings of William Scott<sup>31</sup> (1913-1989). The image of an object forms a shaped laconic figure or a single-colour block in the picture. More specifically, his images often show flat tables and suggestive interpretations of kitchen objects, such as pans, pears, and plates, with shapes like circles and squares. Through such an abstractive language, we can also feel his oscillation between abstraction and representation. For example, in *Blue Still Life* (1969, Fig. 2.27), the picture is dominated by blue round blocks, two white squares, and blue lines to depict the character of the outer edge. They probably refer to an overhead view of a kitchen table with a long-handled frying pan, a square plate, and four oval plates or bowls on the top, respectively. Hesitantly, they can also be identified as a long neck vase and several plates of different shapes and maybe two of them were transparent in a side-looking situation. Since there are not too many other details, the audience can project the imagination of any objects similar to these images on the painting without too much restriction. This also illustrates a kind of uncertainty - the uncertainty of the referent. Because different people may read it as different objects. Unlike Morandi's etching, Scott's still-life painting is chromatic. He reduced more figurative elements in his painting, for example, chiaroscuro and spatial relationship. More importantly, he discarded the details of original objects and highly generalised the subject's image in geometric coloured blocks, resulting in contours similar to the silhouettes or 'spectral presences' mentioned earlier in Morandi's work. In a way, Scott's still life paintings were more abstract than Morandi's, almost turning the familiar

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31 William Scott is known for still-life and abstract painting, which seems to imply memories related to familiar family life same as what can be found in Morandi's work. In his still-life paintings, the kitchen table is his signature. Unlike Morandi, Scott's still life is coloured because most of his works are oil paintings, but the expression is almost plane, and the depiction of objects is much more concise. Therefore, the image of the subject in the work is often easy to flit between figurative and abstract. From the 1960s, his paintings become increasingly flatter and abstract, with little spatial relationship and more like a partially magnified tabletop. Yet his painting still alludes to familiar everyday life and points to images related to kitchen utensils, such as pots, bowls, dishes, etc.. More accurately, kitchen life.

kitchen element into something extremely minimalist and semiotic. This does not affect the painting to provide the viewer with effective information to associate, which also suggests a narrative about daily life and could arouse the viewer with a feeling of familiarity. By decoding such basic information (the contour), the signified can be identified, and then audiences may oscillate back and forth between abstraction and representation, between certainty and uncertainty, and between feeling familiar and not that familiar. The works of Morandi and Scott have a familiar but uncertain quality that can evoke in the audience an impression of the uncanny<sup>32</sup>.

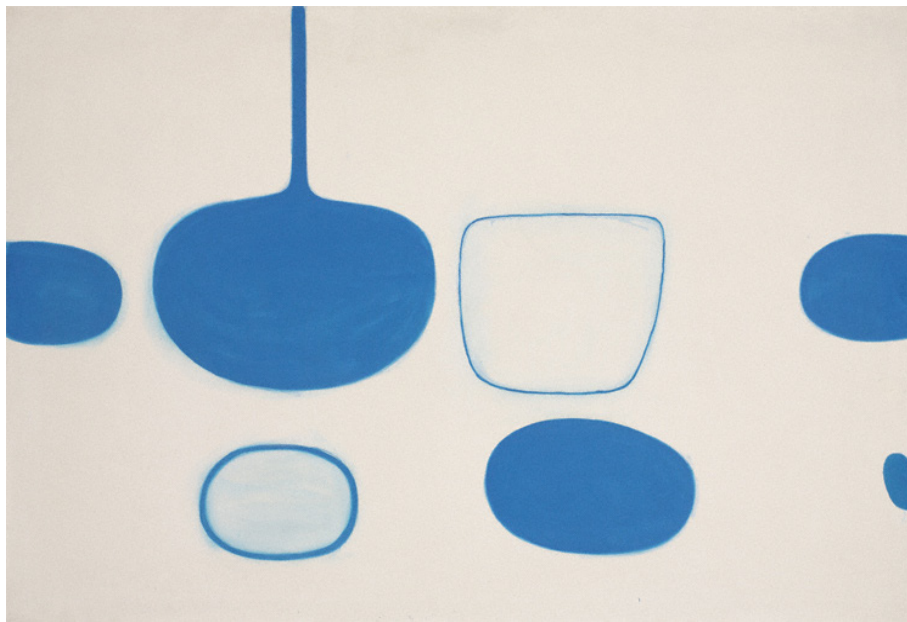


Fig. 2.27  
William Scott, *Blue Still Life*, 1969

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32 It should be further explained that both Morandi's and Scott's works discussed in this section actually have two kinds of uncertainty: 1. Visual uncertainty. 2. Uncertainty of the referent. The former refers to reading a picture without being sure what the artist is depicting. The latter refers to the audience's uncertain feeling when matching and classifying the shape of the image even after capturing the basic information of the painted object. Although both fall within the scope of perception, the former tends to be more visual, while the latter is more concerned with specific recognition processes. I think there is more uncertainty about the latter one in Scott's work. This is because the images in his works are more abstract and concise, and it may also involve what angle (overlooking or the front horizontally) the audience uses to read the images from his painting. Interpretation from different angles may produce different results. So at this point, I think there is more uncertainty in Scott's work. However, in this study, Scott's works are not singled out as a case study to discuss is because the artistic language he uses is too minimalist. Although it has a certain quality that may evoke an experience of *déjà vu* or the uncanny impression, it lacks the effect that Morandi's etchings have, which lingers the feeling between the real and the unreal. Therefore, in this part of the discussion, Scott's paintings only serve as a supplementary case to further explain a sense of uncertainty can be generated when the still-life image is interpreted by abstract artistic language.



To a certain extent, Morandi and I are both immersed in a similar creative space, which is also the same inward exploration. The ordinary and familiar daily objects are the subjects to be interpreted in our practices, which can recall the memory of familiar family life to the greatest extent. It is a real record of a moment in time in both of our works, involving the discussion of presence and absence. In addition, through the transformation and generalisation of artistic language, the functional life of objects disappears, and a sense of uncertainty arises in the subject of the work. This is the uncanny character in Morandi's etching. Morandi, however, is concerned with the 'pure form' of objects, their very nature. Therefore, these everyday objects he focuses on have no added value or personal significance beyond that. I focus on the meanings that objects have and how they relate to me and my family. This is a remarkable difference in our concept of creation.

### **Paul Coldwell**

Paul Coldwell (b. 1952) is a British artist whose practice includes prints, sculptures, and installations. He constantly explores how new technologies affect traditional printmaking, and the effect of digital technology can be found in his works. His subjects are mostly concerned with everyday objects and the issue of absence and presence. The concept of identity and journey has informed his works. He commits to evoking the presence through the connection with objects. Meanwhile, he has considerable experience in site-responsive projects and has worked with museums on such exhibitions. These include the Freud Museum, with the works he made for the museum which responded both to Freud and his objects' present in the rooms. Like Morandi, Coldwell's subjects are ordinary everyday objects, such as coats, envelopes, and picture frames. However, the difference is that what Coldwell explores is the meaning behind the object, the meaning the owner (or the artist himself) gives to it, which usually represents specific memories associated with Coldwell's journeys, or a particular history of a person in some of Coldwell's site-responsive works. Morandi explores the pure form of the object. He focuses on the light, colour, and volume of the object. It is about the essence of the object, rather than its functional character of the objects and the meaning it has been given. Comparatively, Coldwell's artistic expression shows a more powerful ability to narrate. His work emphasises its special connection to specific memories and places. The two selected prints here for the discussion are part of Coldwell's site-responsive works for the exhibition *Temporarily Accessioned – Freud's Coat Revisited* in 2017, which touches upon the exploration of the issues of what it means to have to flee one's home and become a migrant, and, the thinking of the idea of "The Uncanny". Coldwell's art has been profoundly influenced by the work of Giorgio

Morandi, since he was introduced to Morandi's art when he studied at Canterbury College of Art. He has curated exhibitions about Morandi, such as *Morandi's Legacy: Influences on British Art* at the Estorick Collection (2016), London, and published numerous articles on Morandi's work. As my supervisor, I have had the opportunity for first-hand contact with his work and his thinking about Morandi's work and his influence on him.

In particular, the focus will be on two prints Coldwell made in 2016, *Uncanny Flowers* and *Uncanny Suitcase*. These two works share similar qualities with Morandi's etching in certain ways - the pictures are filled with a sense of uncertainty that tests the audience's ability to read the picture.

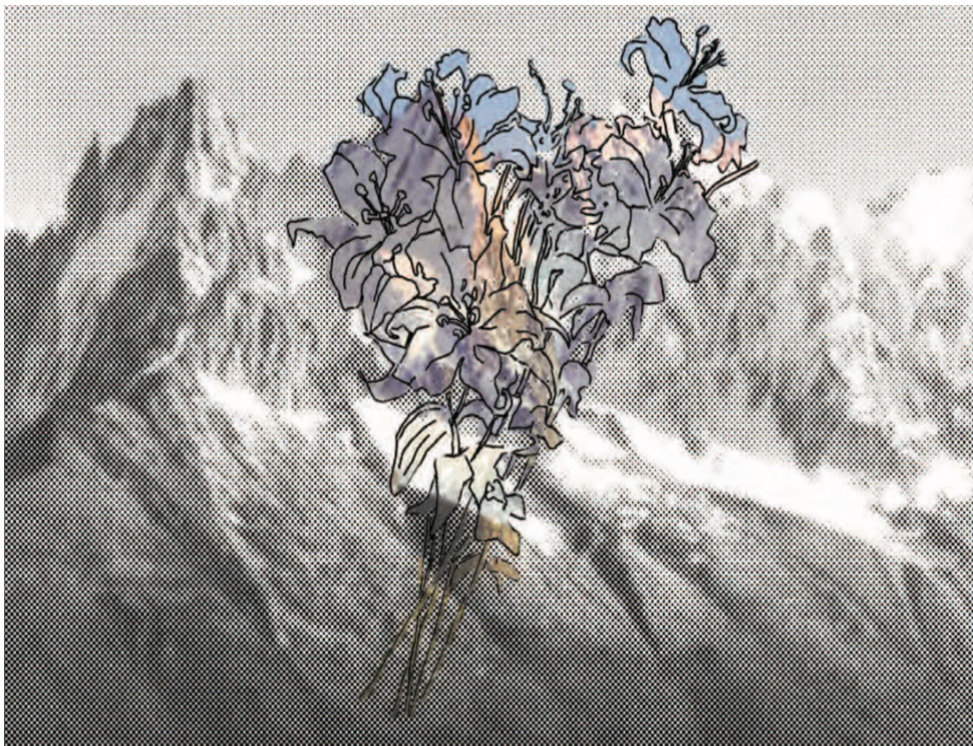


Fig. 2.28  
Paul Coldwell, *Border I*, 2002

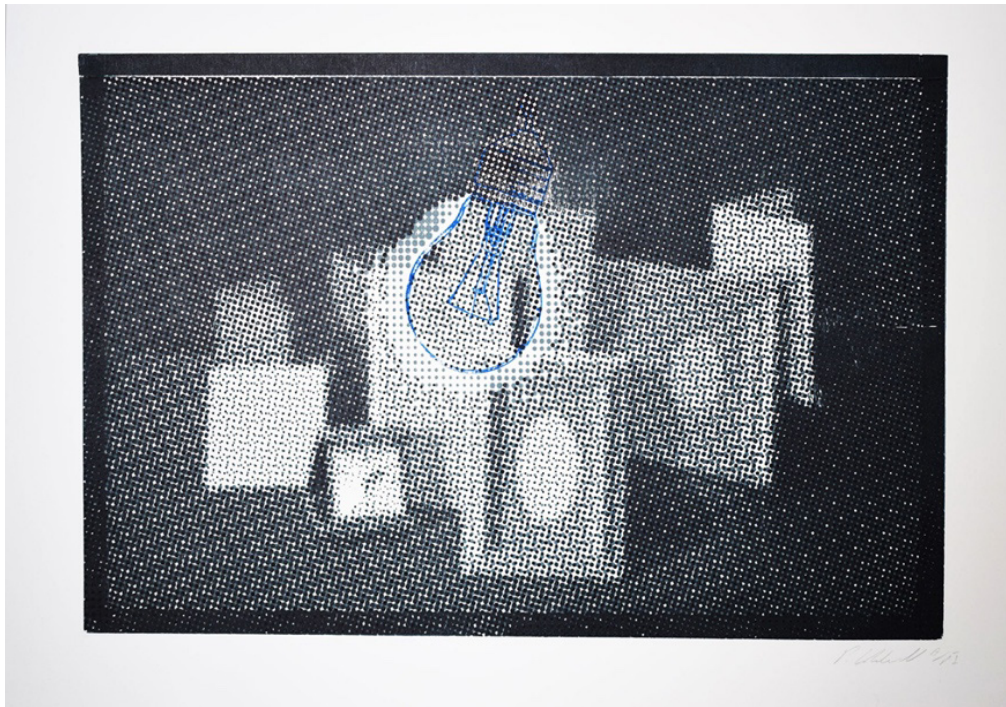


Fig. 2.29  
Paul Coldwell, *Frames & Light (Blue)*, 2019

### The half-tone dots and the uncertain in Coldwell's prints

Working digitally, Coldwell uses a mouse instead of a brush or needle to draw. His works are usually composed of different layers stacked. It represents the intermingling of memory and imagination, and explores the issue of presence and absence (Thomas, 2013: 7). His prints, usually reference photography, drawing, and a layer of the halftone dot. The halftone dot becomes a way of bringing photography into the graphic language of printmaking (UALberta Art & Design, 2020, 5'14"). In his earlier prints, although the presence of these dots reduced the sharpness of the underlying photography, slightly interfering with the viewer's vision, the background image could be easily identified. For his print *Border I* (2002, Fig. 2.28), the dots appear to be evenly spread across the picture. Coldwell manipulated a photograph of a snowy mountain, reducing the visual information, but leaving enough clues as a very blurry image to recognise the shape of a part of the mountain. Therefore, the dots here did not disturb the viewer much visually. In his later practice, Coldwell's manipulation of the dots is a subtle process that slowly evolves. They seem to form a translucent dark web over the whole picture, as in his print *Frames & Light (Blue)* (2019, Fig. 2.29). In this work, the visual distractions of the halftone dot were enhanced. There are two layers of half-tone dots, blue-gray and black respectively, and they are almost overlapped together. The dots in the



print that overlap with the images of photo frames and clock in the underlying photography is not as large and dense as the rest part, creating a sharp tonal contrast. Admittedly, the halftone dot here has a disturbing function. It reduces the detail that a photograph could present, hindering our ability to recognize the image. Zoom in on the part of the work (Fig. 2.30), and only the visual effects of different hues consisting of different densities of blue-gray and black dots can be identified. It is completely unable to extract any information that can be used to identify the image. However, when viewing the print as a whole, different degrees of halftone and focus form different light and shadow effects. Coldwell did this consciously, and he said "in order to read one part of the image the rest has to go out of focus" (UALberta Art & Design, 2020, 8' 26"). In the case of tonal contrast, very vague outline information can be roughly extracted (the boundary of the image formed by them is very fuzzy, without clear shapes), and then the image of different shapes and sizes of picture frames and small clocks can be inferred. In some ways, these dots resemble the crosshatching lines in Morandi's etchings. It has some similar function, which interferes with or reduces the function of recognition of images. From a distance, the contrast of different tones can still offer basic information for the viewer to read the image. Up close, the visual disturbance is so powerful that the image feels confusing and uncertain. In this regard, Ben Thomas suggests that such an approach, like Morandi's art, acts as a powerful means to destabilise things (2013: 6). It becomes equivalent to the way Morandi played with the possibility of crosshatching in his etchings. As a result of that, the recognition of the image is reduced. In two prints he made in 2016, however, the function of the dot seems to have been further developed.

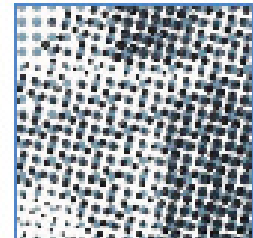


Fig. 2.30  
Paul Coldwell, (detail) *Frames & Light (Blue)*, 2019

*Uncanny Flowers* (2016, Fig. 2.31) and *Uncanny Suitcase* (2016, Fig. 2.32) are laser-cut relief prints of a vase of flowers and an opened empty suitcase respectively. They are the 'site-responsive' artworks made for the Freud Museum London, which evoke the viewer of everyday life and memories of Sigmund Freud and his family. In both two prints, it seems impossible to find traces of the photograph as a certain layer of the print for Coldwell's. It is only evidenced through the different sizes of the dots and the varying degrees of density they form, and the function of locating and describing the object itself (for example, the outline) and the spatial relationship around the object. A vase with a flower in the former print and an open suitcase in the later one can still be identified, although the blurred visual modules created by these dots provide very few clues. The dots are

evenly distributed in the print and form a web visually. The smaller dots are spaced relatively wide apart, which exposes more of the underlying dark background. Instead, it shows more light-coloured visual modules made up of white dots (both hollow and solid, which to form a mosaic-like image). The images stand out from the contrast between light and dark modules. From this point of view, after excluding the layer of photography, the halftone dot plays a different role in the print, and it becomes an important element in the presentation of the image in print. Their presence gives the viewer a way to discern the image as clues. Although not as much detail as photographs can provide, they have formed as much abstract information as possible for the viewer to identify.

In Coldwell's works, the use of the dot is visually ambiguous and uncertain. Whether it is based on the layer of the photograph or not, and whether it is used to diminish the discriminability of the image underneath or to consist of a rough contour to strengthen such ability, it offers a clue for the viewer to recognise the image. The same applies to Morandi, the image moves between abstraction and representation. In conversation with Coldwell<sup>33</sup>, he repeatedly stated that the audience of his prints are detectives, constantly searching for clues to gain a better perception. In both *Uncanny Flowers* (Fig. 2.31) and *Uncanny Suitcase* (Fig. 2.32), the image created by the halftone dot is actually less conspicuous and less noticeable. Even after careful observation for clues, one may still have a sense of uncertainty about what one perceives. A sense of an image present in the print, and yet not; about to remind the audience of particular objects, but quite not sure. Joanne Morra comments that "this image evokes the dual nature of memory: at once clear and yet fragmented" (2017: 18). Although the objects in the picture appear to be there but seem not, to resemble a ghost image that bears a degree of transparency, especially the ability to overlap a scene from the past with the present moment through association. This is exactly the concept of the uncanny that Coldwell wants to convey in his works.

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33 On August 30, 2022, I was invited by my supervisor Paul Coldwell to have a short visit to his studio. He is a prolific artist. He showed me his prints from different periods. He also patiently introduced me to his different cooperation projects with the museum. Most importantly, we had a talk about the object in his prints, the different layers he set in his prints, and his use of dots. Besides, we discussed the concept of the uncanny in his works and his understanding of this term. At the end of the visit, he was very kind and lent me some books writing on Morandi's work. This visit, to some extent, helped me better understand his works, as well as Morandi's.

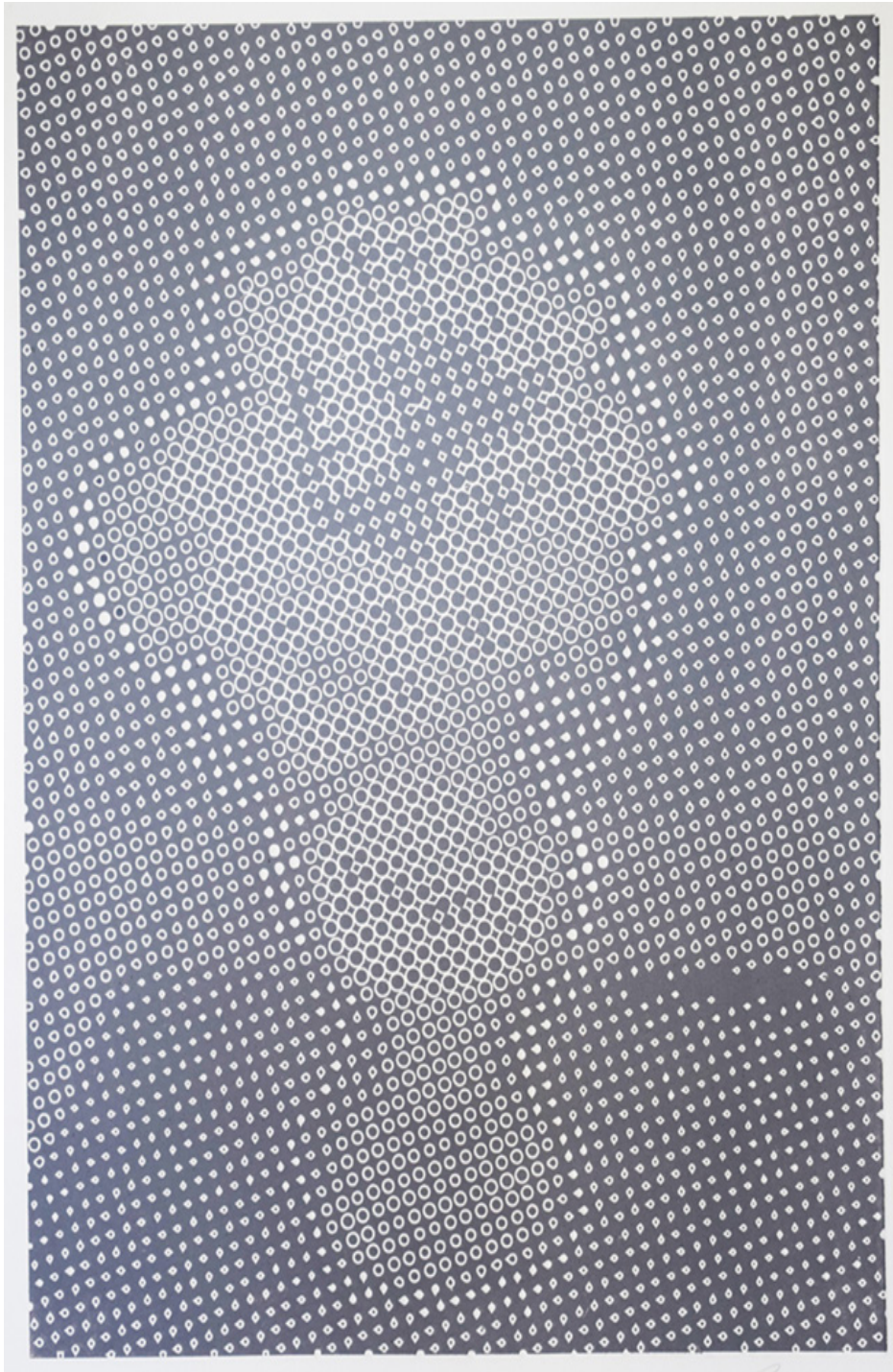


Fig. 2.31,  
Paul Coldwell, *Uncanny Flowers*, 2016



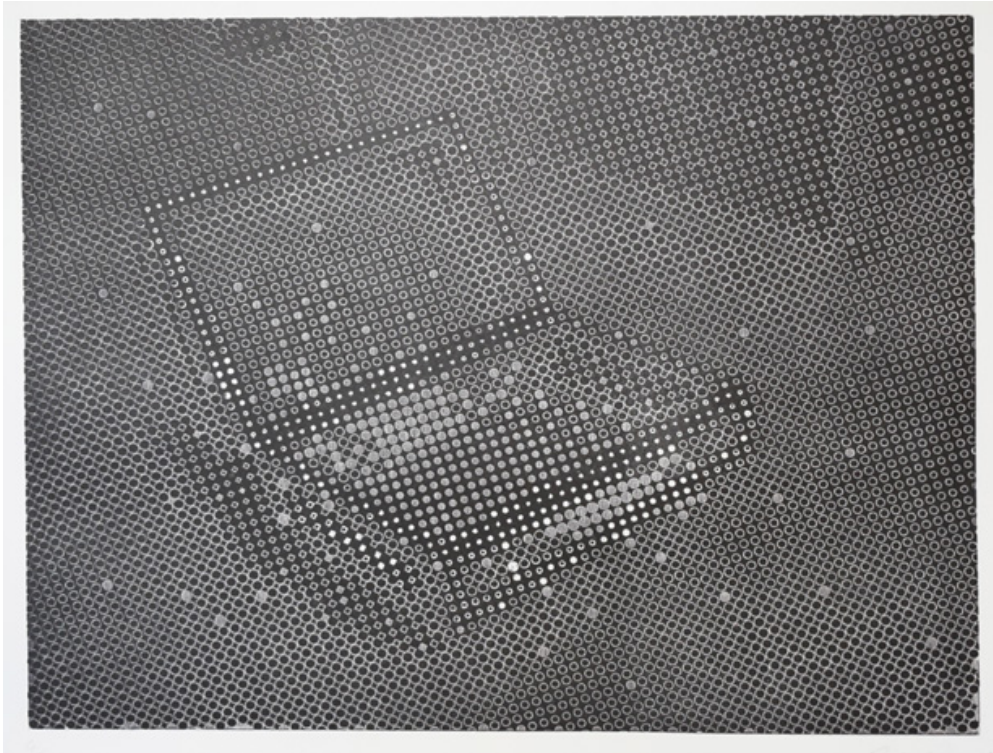


Fig. 2.32, Paul Coldwell, *Uncanny Suitcase*, 2016

### **The uncanny ideas**

In *Uncanny Flowers* (Fig. 2.31) and *Uncanny Suitcase* (Fig. 2.32), the responses to the issue of presence and absence further touch the expression of the uncanny. In conversation with Coldwell, he was very interested in trying to evoke the uncanny in his work. He wants the pieces he made to be discreet and subtle. In response to this, he always tries to blur the details of an object by using a halftone dot to reduce the recognisability of a photo or image. To form a kind of invisibility, the image oscillates between visible and invisible, presence and absence. Through Coldwell's manipulation of the dot, these two works visually form a vague image of objects that flit between visible and invisible, illusion and non-illusion. In addition, the photograph is indexable, and it represents an absent presence.

Although the *Uncanny Flowers* and *Uncanny Suitcase* have only traces of photographs, the mosaic-like images of a vase and suitcase formed by different sizes of dots also constitute recognisable outline information. As a clue, it is part of the index that can be the referent of the object. These mosaic-like images share physical relationships with their references (e.g., scale, shape, composition). As mentioned, these images somehow function as photography at the same time. The difference is that with the photos, the viewer accesses information indexed, and is more clear. Here, due

to the limitations of the information, it invites the viewer to use their imagination. A series of interlocking questions may arise regarding the object and its state (i.e., what colour are the vase and the suitcase respectively? What colour are the flowers in the vase? Is it rose, chrysanthemum or peony? What is the exact size of the suitcase? Was it ever left open on the floor? Is it still there?). Such uncertainty also exists in his work *Uncanny Suitcase* (Fig. 2.32). From the visual information formed by the dots, what the audience can recognise is that the object in the picture may be a box-like object. It could be an open suitcase, or an opened square box, like a jewellery box or a square paper parcel box. On the other hand, the mosaic-like image here is more like a sign, to evoke an association. It directs the viewer's mind from the image to the object itself. It evokes associations not only with the object itself with its owner, but with history, memory, and the possible association with the audience. When I saw *Uncanny Flowers* for the first time, the scene I perceived according to the rough image of a vase placed on a table suddenly reminded me of the vase and flowers placed on the dinner table by my mother at my parent's home, and I happened to record them in my diary (see Fig. 2.33). From these fragments we can piece together a picture of a similar scene from a memory and associate it with our own experience, thus creating a sense of familiarity with the image in the work and a sense of nostalgia. Thus, as such a 'clue', it amplifies the sense of uncertainty of the work while offering the audience a bit of sense of familiarity when having association with their own experience.

Here, the discussion focuses on Morandi and Coldwell's still-lives. Morandi's still-life etchings feel like an inward exploration. Although his unique etching technique enforces an uncertain feeling in his works, causing the images to linger between abstraction and figuration, which tests the viewer's ability to read and identify. Same to Morandi, Coldwell's prints use particular techniques to create a web-like effect on the surface of the work that interferes with audience perception. The viewer can only infer the specific objects depicted by the artist from the most basic clues of the contours of the referents constructed by their mosaic-like images. In consequence, this creates a great deal of uncertainty in the work both visually and perceptually, resulting in an uncanny effect. Meanwhile, a strong sense of familiarity hints in the works once the viewer identifies the object they depicted. This emphasises the connection between the object of their attention and a particular location (/ space) (for Morandi, is about the connotation between his still life prints and the city he lives in -Bologna; for Coldwell, it refers to the object he explores as a site-responsive art to the place of specific figures and its associations of a particular moment of history or memories). Such a sense of familiarity is intertwined with the previous uncertainty, which thus, arouses an uncanny impression.

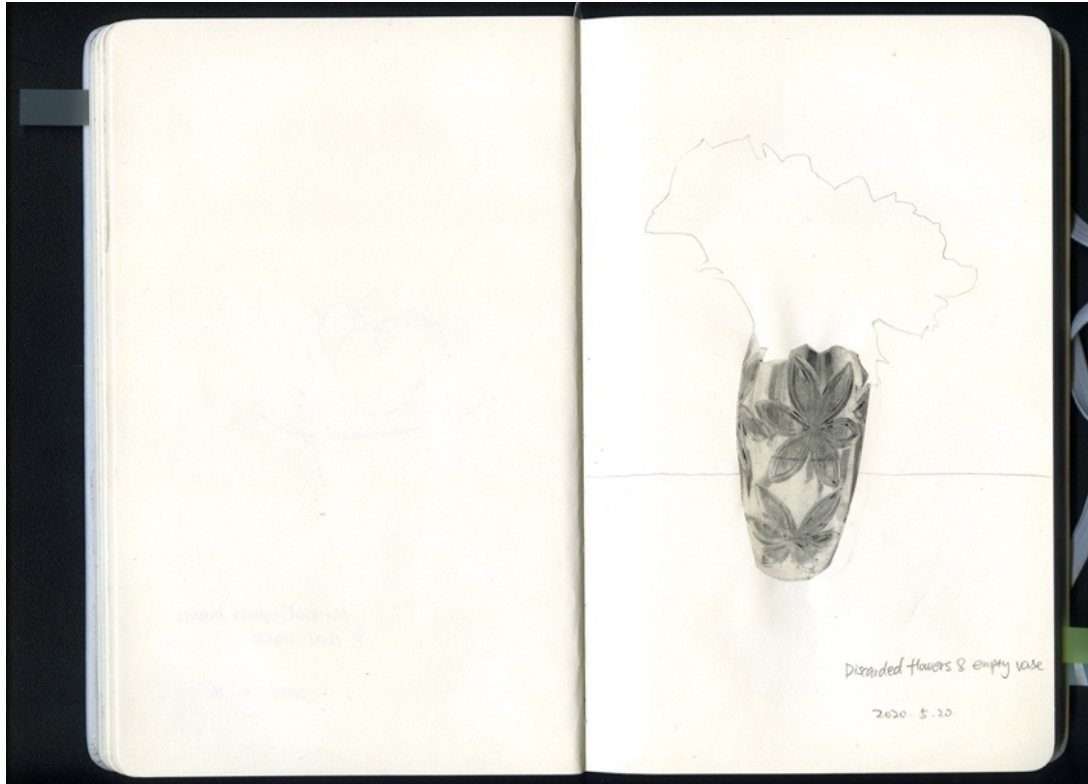


Fig. 2.33  
Lihong Liu, *Diary-China*, 2020

## **Chapter 3**

### **Practice Review**

### 3.1 A practice-based response

In the previous chapters, I set out the central issues of how contested notions of 'home' might be used to explore *déjà vu* (the uncanny)<sup>34</sup>, and conversely, how can *déjà vu* (the uncanny) be used to explore home through: exploring the concept of home, the relationship between dwelling space and daily objects, as well as the physical and psychological relationship between daily objects and the inhabitant. From these discussions, an argument emerges. The images of familiar dwelling spaces and of daily objects are the crucial elements that evoke *déjà vu* and the uncanny within the scope of this research field. The visual impact of these images will be further analyzed through Practice Review in this chapter. Meanwhile, these artworks were made to question the relationship between daily objects and the notion of 'home'.

Here in Chapter Three, I will discuss five series of artworks that I have made in my studio (my bedroom) and one made mainly in the metal workshop at Chelsea College of Arts during the research period from 2019 to 2022 to test out and further discuss the issues of *déjà vu* and the uncanny. The use of daily objects and furniture has emerged as a significant visual focus and this has been given increasing analysis within the practical work. Here, I defined my practices by materials to make further discussion, they are:

Series I – Paintings on silk;

Series II – Casts;

Series III – Drawings;

Series IV – Installation work (Three-dimensional drawings);

Series V – Diary.

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<sup>34</sup> The definition of the experience of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* is not exactly the same (see Chapter one). However, they are both closely related to something long known. They both refer to the feeling that is somehow familiar but mingled with an unfamiliar feeling. However, *déjà vu* is different from the *unheimlich* in that the former experience unfamiliar because of the inability to find or recall the specific recollection relative to the sense of familiarity, while the latter contains more of a psychological sense of uncertainty. In my research, the source of this sense of familiarity is focused mainly on the dwelling space -the home (or bedroom). The research is mainly carried out by exploring the relationship between special everyday objects and the occupant (me)both physical and psychological, as well as the relation of the familiar configuration of the dwelling space with a sense of feeling homely.

Despite the images of the main objects explored in each series differing (they investigated the particular ideas that have driven the works respectively), all practices revolve around the issue of how familiar images of everyday objects and dwelling space could be the familiar course to evoke *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich*. In particular, in Series I and II, the practices are mainly aimed at discussing the deeper meaning of the images of specific everyday objects. Series III and IV, are the practices that research the image of the whole dwelling space (my bedroom), especially the image of the layout of furniture in the whole space. Series V is diary, it plays the role of the source of making the works in my practical research and runs through the content of the previous four series. Moreover, I will analyse the hidden indexicality between works of different materials and their original objects, which implies the issue of presence and absence. Further, analyse why works provide a familiar yet unfamiliar feeling through such indexicality.



## **3.2 Series I**

### **Paintings on silk**

## Introduction

Series I are paintings on silk. These artworks were exhibited and discussed at multiple venues including the following group exhibitions: *My House Is An Island* (2020) at a private residence in Vauxhall, London; *Anchor* (2021) at Arthill Gallery in London; and *Secret Heim* (2022) at the Triangle Space in Chelsea College of Arts; RNUAL Block 2: Spring Research Symposium.

In Series I, I set out to question the emotional link between daily objects and the occupant (me). Specifically, I will use the concept of "Transitional Objects (Winnicott, 1951)" mentioned in Chapter One to explore the deeper meaning of the everyday objects selected as the main subject in this practice. These objects are represented in the silhouette image in the creation of the series. They are presented in the painting with the most simplified image, such that the internal details are removed; only the recognizable external outline is retained and painted on silk, which provides a sense of uncertainty in the work. Therefore, this forms a particular focus of the work - how could such a sense of uncertainty evoke the uncanny in the mind of the viewer. The material used in this series is silk. On the one hand, it is one of the main materials I used to be very familiar with for painting, and it is also a traditional Chinese painting material. Therefore, it not only provides a strong sense of familiarity from a technical side, but also reflects my personal identity to a certain extent. On the other hand, considering the light and relatively transparent properties of silk itself, it can help express the idea of presence and absence. Therefore, the above issues will be discussed in three parts: First, I will take one of the paintings - *The Ghosts of Toothbrush* (2020), for detailed analysis and discussion. Then talk about the process of silk painting and the silhouette respectively to make a further interpretation.

## ***The Ghosts of Toothbrush***



Fig. 3.1  
Lihong Liu, *The Ghosts of Toothbrush*, 2020  
30x30cm

*The Ghosts of Toothbrush* was inspired by notes I recorded in my diary (Diary-China, 2020. See more in Series V), when I was quarantined in my own home in China, due to the COVID-19 outbreak. During this period, I could only 'travel' within my room, which is a suite with a bedroom, study room, and bathroom. I was confined to this limited space as if I were a prisoner. I tried to explore my room in the meantime. There are certain precedents for such 'journeys' inspired by states of confinement.

Xavier de Maistre used 42-day's within his room as the subject matter for his book - *A Journey Around My Room*, first published in 1795 (de Maistre, 2017). The book was written to stave boredom from the enforced captivity of house arrest when the author was sentenced to 42 days for participating in an illegal duel. If de Maistre's book constituted an imaginative travelogue, Anthony Rudolf conducted a topographical study of his apartment in his book *Journey Around My Flat* (2021), where he recorded all the ephemera contained within the spaces of a flat he had lived in for forty years, including family memorabilia, archival letters chronicling his relations with other writers and artists, the visiting cards of theatre and other programs, postcards, and even the pots and pans. Here, as Richard Aronowitz (2021) notes in a review of the book, "Rudolf employs the spaces of

the flat and all that they contain simply as springboards for discursive enquiries into music, art, philosophy, history, identity, the atom bomb, and beyond". By contrast, my own exploration only lasted 14 days. It was more like looking for something that could represent my transitory 'presence' in a certain situation in that space, or represent an image of 'home' in my mind. In contrast to de Maistre and Rudolf's journeys around their spaces, my exploration is not a form of memoir of a period of confinement or a life lived, but it does conjure up the memories and emotions of being in that space through the items found in my room. Furthermore, like Rudolf I try to find a deeper link between these found objects and my concept of home and me. Not through letters and memorabilia, but through the everyday objects I use. It is a space I think I know all too well. In fact, there are numerous little details that I do not normally notice, and these traces become evidence of my presence in the past.

I discovered that my mother collected all kinds of toothbrushes which I then drew and this provided the basis for the painting on silk - see Fig. 3.3, *Toothbrushes (sketch)*. I had used and placed them in a cup in my bathroom, which seems both a reasonable response to the possibility that I might have forgotten to pack one, but also has a deeper function (not least in that some of the brushes were clearly worn). Other household items, such as shampoo bottles, were also collected and kept in there. These provided the subject matter for *The Ghosts of Bottles* (Fig. 3.2). It took me a long time to understand what this meant, until one day I saw a collection of family photos on a chest of drawers. I suddenly realised that these items seem to have the same quality as the photos - representing a presence. In other words, it is an absent (physical) presence, which is related to Winnicott's study on transitional objects (see Chapter One, p.21 ). These collected daily objects which I used when I was home resemble transitional objects to my mother. However, rather than simply saying (as Winnicott would argue) that they have a connection to lose in some way, these objects here represent my actual presence at home. Meanwhile, these objects carry 'affective weight', acting as memory cues, hanging on to my presence when I was away from home. They are the traces of my past and evidence of my presence at the family home.



Fig. 3.2  
Lihong Liu, *The Ghosts of Bottles*, 2020  
52x32cm



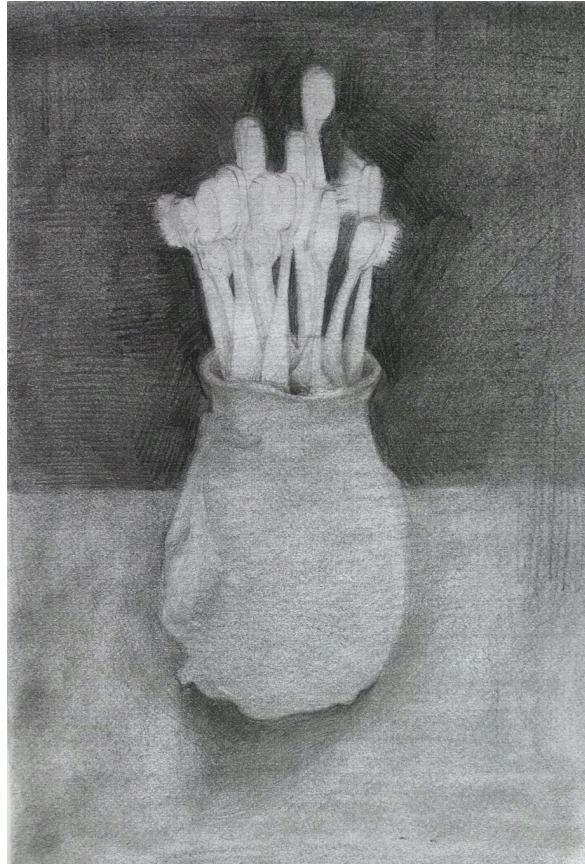


Fig. 3.3  
Lihong Liu, *Toothbrushes* (sketch), 2020

A toothbrush is a highly personal item that maintains a close relationship with the user. We do not share toothbrushes, even with partners. It is one of those objects that we use on a daily basis and has an intimate association with its user. It collects (or remains) the user's biometric information (indexical traces) on the brush head. In a way, it can represent the user himself or herself and his or her presence. Usually, the toothbrush, kept in the bathroom, is used as a personal care product. In this case, they became physical proof that I had been at home. Its (toothbrush) function is to maintain a sense of familiarity and security for my mother, allowing her to continue to feel my presence. This provides a sense of security that refers to a sense of homely (*heimlich*), once I had left home. In adults, these transitional objects may still exist, but their type has become broader than in children (Winnicott, 2005). Therefore, it serves as a sense of continuity or a kind of connection to keep the odour or to represent someone, or a sense of security. Thus, these collected daily objects resemble transitional objects to my mother and also carry 'affective weight', acting as memory cues, hanging on to my presence when I was away from home. Plus, they are the traces of my past and evidence of my presence at home.

## The process of Silk painting



Fig. 3.4  
The process of creation on Silk

I chose to paint on silk, which for me somehow echoes the 'ghost images'<sup>35</sup> that I wanted to present. The light and translucent nature of silk itself which contributes to presenting a feeling of 'ghost' and a strong sense of familiarity arises spontaneously when I returned to practice by using this once very familiar creation method. Especially in this familiar environment to create, as if back to the past - my college days. It also carries hints of my personal identity, as a student, and as a Chinese artist, highlighting the role of 'me' (my identity) in the work.

Painting on silk is a traditional Chinese painting technique with a history of thousands of years. I spent almost half of my college time at the Sichuan Fine Art Institute learning the properties of silk and receiving strict training from tutors to master the techniques of working on silk (meticulous painting). Silk is a kind of translucent fabric, it is very thin and fragile. Usually, when finishing the creation process, the silk needs to be affixed to the raw rice paper (Xuan paper) for preservation. Painting silk could be divided into two categories: sized and un-sized (also called raw silk). Since un-sized silk is non-absorbent and does not help the colour to stay, it needs to be sized with alum

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35 About the ghostly image: as the image of the 'ghost' itself, people usually use transparent or translucent images to express it visually, which also highlights what I want to explore in this series, the issue related to my presence and absence through the depicted objects, which thus can somehow enhance the feeling of uncertainty brought by the image in the work.

and glue<sup>36</sup> before using to paint on. Before being painted on, there is an important step which is to stretch the silk. The silk is stretched on a wood frame to ensure the surface of the silk is always flat, when we apply colour on the silk and it becomes wet while other parts are still dry. Painting on silk does need extra care during the whole painting process. Traditional Chinese painting pigments are used on silk, which is made from natural plants and minerals mixed with glue. Specifically, colours made from natural plants have the properties of low covering power (or high transparency). The effect of this type of colour is very similar to that of watercolour. While colours made from minerals, such as white colour (which is an abrasive mixture of zinc and titanium dioxide), are often applied to the back of the image as a backdrop for the front colour. Therefore, this type of colour is characterised by high cover power or high opacity. In addition, the process of painting on silk is sophisticated and it needs to be built up in different layers. Thus, a silk painting may consist of dozens of layers of colour superimposed. However, these varying layers of coloration reflect the indexical relationship with the artist in the process of painting. Since painting is an observation of handwriting, its signs are indexical in that they can be read as traces of the producer (Graw, 2011). When painting on silk, the darker and heavier the colour, the more time the creator has spent in the place. Meanwhile, according to the needs of different effects, the front and back of silk need to be coloured at different times. What is important during the process of painting, is washing the surface of the silk continuously with a clean brush dipped in water, repeating colouring and the fixation steps, in order to make the pigment better attached to the surface and make the painting appear breathable, not heavy. This is very different from other types of painting. Painting on silk is mainly based on lines to describe the shape of the object, while colours are the assistant of lines (see Fig. 3.5). Although there are subtle changes in light and shade, there is no such noticeable colour change in silk painting compared to the relationship between light and shadow in watercolour painting. The colour variations in silk painting are based on the inherent colour, and the painted objects are usually given symbolic meaning, while watercolour painting is regarded as being more naturalistic. This traditional technique of painting continues to be used by many artists today. However, they break through the habits of the composition of the original traditional painting and inject the contemporary concept of art creation, referred to as Contemporary meticulous painting.

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36 In general, the ratio of glue to alum is 7:3. This hybrid medium is called alum gelatin water ( 胶矾水 ). Moreover, in the whole process of painting, this medium will be used repeatedly to fix the colour on silk and help it to be continuously coloured, because of it needs to be repeated washing the surface with clean water during the process of creation. It is worth noting that the percentage of alum and glue should be strictly controlled. Too much alum will make it difficult to apply colour on silk, but if add too little alum, it can not achieve a very good effect of fixed colour on silk.



Fig. 3.5  
Zhao Ji, *Eyes Embroidered with Plums*, Song Dynasty

In my practice, I choose to use the particularity of such traditional techniques to carry out my research. Compared to other types of painting, the material of silk itself is light, thin, and has permeability, while working on canvas (for example, oil painting and acrylic painting), the material itself is much heavier and more airtight. Oil paint and acrylic paint will convey a sense of solidity on the canvas. Thus, working on silk can help to express the ghostliness of these objects and is a reason why I choose to work on silk. In my painting *The Ghosts of Toothbrush* (2020), when white pigment is applied on silk, it penetrates into the fabric and shows good transparency. It seems to reveal a ghostlike feeling, flimsy, weightless, and translucent. Its state is distinct from the solid state of other things around it, as if it does not belong in the world of the painting, but its faint transparent outer form still evidences its presence. Thus, the ghostly image here seems to alternate between absence and presence of itself. As the white colour is used only on a silhouette of toothbrushes here, the contrast with the coloured image is obvious. Which thus, could be considered as a contrast between two different states: the past and the present, and the absence and presence.



## The silhouette



Fig. 3.6  
Lihong Liu, *The Ghosts of Toothbrush* (detail), 2020

In *The Ghosts of Toothbrush* (2020, Fig. 3.6), the image of the used toothbrushes here not only records a sense of physical continuity (as would a photograph), but also acts as evidence of my past life and an object that represents me. These toothbrushes are private objects that carry my biological information as proof of my existence, representing my every presence when I am at home. Meanwhile, the particular shape recorded by painting (not only contains the basic outline information of the toothbrushes, but also covers the unique form of bristles formed by different degrees of bifurcation after repeated use) once again emphasises the particularity between the toothbrush and the user (me). Although, unlike a photograph<sup>37</sup> with a particular indexical relation to the real (Sonesson, 1989: 8), there also exists an indexical relationship between paintings and their objects. This indexical relationship also highlights the link between the artist and the object. As a result (a trace) of the painting, the image of the toothbrush is also an index sign. It represents a causal connection

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37 “According to Philippe Dubois (1983, cite from Sonesson, 1989: 8), the first semiotical theories of photography tended to look upon the photograph as a mirror of reality, or, in Peircean terms, as an icon; then came that most celebrated generation of iconoclasts who tried to demonstrate the conventionality of all signs, supposing even the photograph to present a “coded” version of reality, or, as Peirce (according to Dubois, at least) would have said, a symbol; and finally the photograph was seen for what it really is, in Dubois’ view: an index, more specifically, a trace left behind by the referent itself.”(cited from Sonesson, 1989:8). Besides, Joan Gibbons emphasized the indexicality of photography in the visual arts, he writes “the most widely used medium in the visual arts that embodies an indexical relationship to its subject is photography, which until the advent of digital photography, with its ability to produce pure simulacrum, could always claim an existential relationship, no matter how tenuous, with what has actually existed” (2007: 29), which this states is based on Susan Sontag (1977).



between the artist and the image he/she paints. The elaborately drawn image of the toothbrush not only records the feature of the object that contains the special link with me (as a user), but serves as evidence of my presence to emphasise my every presence. Also, as a result of the painting, the link between this piece of work and me is strengthened once again.

The yellow toothbrush in front is full of details, compared with the silhouette behind, as if it were a dialogue between the present and the past. The setting (a toothbrush is placed in a cup) also provides a familiar context here, which leaves clues for the viewer to evoke similar scenes in his or her own memory. Here, I draw on the approach of the 'gestalt familiarity' mentioned in Chapter One when talking about the cause of *déjà vu* experience from memory explanation, as far as possible through familiar configuration to enhance the audience's sense of familiarity, even the possibility of *déjà vu*. Thus, this provides adequate conditions for the viewer to enact 'something' deep within their own memory, through the similarity of a particular, familiar configuration that elicits an impression of *déjà vu*. Therefore, people can feel a strong sense of familiarity, not only from the familiar object itself, but also from the registering of a similar configuration (toothbrushes in a cup). However, the silhouette images offer a sense of uncertainty which has nothing to do with what Jentsch (2008) states the feelings of uncertainty in 'the uncanny' is related to disorientation (see Chapter One), but with the ability to be identified. Only if you look at the clues (the depicted object's outline shape) that help you to recognise its origin you can break the strangeness or uncertainty.

Such uncertainty also exists in the work of numerous artists, but in particular in paintings of the British artist William Scott (1913 - 1989) and Italian artist Giorgio Morandi (1890 - 1964) that I discussed in Chapter Two. In both of their works, the images of everyday objects are simplified and move towards abstraction. They abandoned the detailed description of objects, such as material, internal structure, and even the colour, and only retained their outline and size information to evoke the audience's sense of familiarity visually, thus pervading a sense of uncanny impression. Such images have somehow reduced the figurative expression of objects and thus increased a sense of uncertainty in the practice, the remaining clues are still enough to guide the viewer to recognise the image and pick up a sense of familiarity.

In conclusion, this series explores the special significance of everyday objects that suggest my presence and absence at a certain time. It also led me to explore the nature of the object itself – a sense of continuity in more detail. I then became more acutely aware the objects that I was draw-

ing from were concerned with a kind of absence. In addition, the selection of the material somehow enhanced my personal identity, which I think is important to the creation of this series. The particularity of the material also helped me to present a ghostly feeling that relates to the issue of absence and presence. In addition, the silhouette images used to depict the objects allude to this sense of absence and create a feeling of uncertainty visually for the viewer. Thus, the works express a mingled impression between the familiar and the unfamiliar. This prompted me to explore the issue of the uncanny by discussing a sense of uncertainty further and to express my understanding through practice in the next work.

## **3.3 Series II**

### **Casts**



Fig. 3.7  
Lihong Liu, *Untitled (photo frames)*, 2021

## Introduction

In Series II, I would like to discuss a group of sculptures made by casting using plaster and glass-wax, cast from six life-sized photo frames that I found in my parents' home in China. These artworks were exhibited at the group exhibition *Anchor* (2021) at Arthill Gallery in London, and *Secret Heim* (2022) at the Triangle Space in Chelsea College of Arts.

In Series I, I explored the deeper connection between the found daily objects and me. I made a similar analogy in the last section, that is, those discovered objects carry a function similar to photos. Not only because they share the indexical relationship with the user, but also represent a certain memory of a specific person, or his or her presence in the past. It is about a moment in the past, a moment that has gone. It is evidence of the absence. Although, the essence of a photograph is to recall, and it is much more than that. The family photos, however, are a record of a moment that we cherish and remind us of the event and its participants. In this series, I would like to analyse the meaning of family photos, the indexicality both in the photograph, and the making of the work - casting. The above issues will be involved in the discussion from two aspects of the work: the concept and the creation of works.

## About family photographs

Family photos are significant as a record of important events in people's lives. In addition to its function as a record, it also represents a sense of continuity recording a moment or a person. In the third chapter of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton's (first published in 1981) book *The Meaning of Things-Domestic Symbols and The Self*, the objects that have special significance to home and are cherished by people were studied. They conducted a survey of members of 82 families living in the Chicago Metropolitan Area in 1977. Of the 10 categories of objects that were significant in the lives that they offered, furniture visual art, and photographs were the top three (Fig. 3.8).

Table 3.1. *Percentage of total sample mentioning at least one special object in each category (N = 315)*

Objects	Percentage
1. Furniture	36
2. Visual art	26
3. Photographs	23
4. Books	22
5. Stereo	22
6. Musical instruments	22
7. TV	21
8. Sculpture	19
9. Plants	15
10. Plates	15

Fig. 3.8

Cited from *The Meaning of Things-Domestic Symbols and The Self* (1981: 58)

In the early 1970s, almost every American and Western European family had access to a camera. There was a marked rise in the significance and influence of personal photography at that time, and sociologists and anthropologists began to recognise photography as an important cultural ritual in family life (Dijck, 2008). In 1977, Susan Sontag also affirmed that photography has become a rite of family life and she stated in her book - *On Photography* that "through photographs, each family

constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connect- edness” (1977: 8). As such, it could say that the photograph represents a time that has passed and as a continuity of freeze-frame. Meanwhile, Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton states that photos can fulfil a function that is “a tenuous immortality to beloved persons and by providing an identity, a context of belongingness” (1981: 69). They stress that the photo is “a sense of personal continuity” (1981: 68).

Picture frames are also used to represent people or their absence. In Paul Coldwell's *Glass Frames*<sup>38</sup> (2008, Fig. 3.9), we can see that he takes photos as objects or more accurately, uses the image of the photo-frame to refer to people or family groups. It is a group of sculptures he hand- made first, and then, cast in glass. This group of sculptures was made specifically for Kettle's Yard where it was placed on the black polished surface of the grand-piano, surrounding the small sculp- ture, *Head of Prometheus*, by Brancusi. In Coldwell's work, there is a suggestive link between the Brancusi Head and the blank photo frame, referring to the people who might appear in the original photo. At the same time, these small picture frames are placed on the surface of the piano (the piano thus is played as a plinth), centred around the Brancusi Head on one side. This arrangement is somewhat similar to the position of the audience watching the performers in the street, and the tacit arrangement of the audience around the performance object in an arch queue. Thus, it might suggest the audience surrounding the piano in the room at some point in the past, which thus, suggests an absence of them. It must be acknowledged here that the picture frame, although it can be understood here as a reference to the audience/person, representing their absence, is not that relevant to the memory of family and its association that I have discussed in this section.

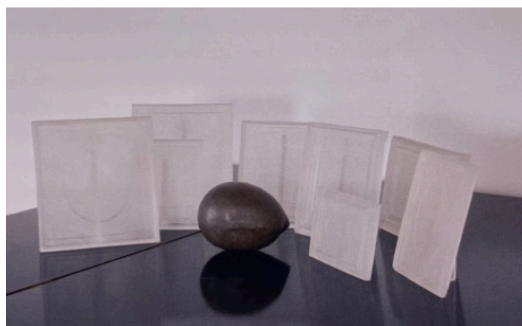


Fig. 3.9

Paul Coldwell, *Glass Frames* (2008)

Cast Glass, 8 pieces, size variable, Largest 27 x 24 x 16 cms

38 *Glass Frames* is one of the works he made in response to the exploration of Kettle's Yard.



Family photos are an important element in human lives. For some appellate reason (memorial and memory), family photos from different periods are displayed in various places around my parents' house. At the same time, I brought a family photo to my London abode as a kind of 'companion' of my family. It can offer me a sense of belonging in a certain way. Referring again to Winnicott's (1951) 'Transitional Objects', in Series I and II, the daily objects I discussed all play the role of transitional objects. To my family, they represent a continuation of a certain state of my past, and vice versa. Therefore, the significance of photos here is far more than the vehicle carrying a memory, it is a direct link to an event participant (me or my family), as a continuation of a presence. There is a hint of absence. What's more, its presence in some form also suggests ideas about home and family memory. Again, it is an object with a specific meaning. When they take the form of a group of photo frames, they mean something much broader. For example, the concept of family is like a family tree. At the same time, this is what I want to explore through Series II, to find those things that can be used as 'roots' and explore their relationship between the past and the present to find and show this potential connection. Therefore, this is a piece of evidence that I am trying to find the source of the familiarity of 'home', which hope to cause an uncanny impression.

### **Casting and its indexical relationship**



Fig. 3.10  
Lihong Liu, *Untitled* (photo frames) detail, 2021  
12.5x8.5x6cm, 12.5x8.5x6cm

Series II is made by moulding the frames of a group of photos I found in my parents' home. The majority of the sculptures were cast in plaster. It is worth noting that the minimum size frame was

moulded twice and finally cast and presented in plaster and glasswax (Fig. 3.10). They are *doppelgänger*<sup>39</sup>, while the white plaster sculpture contrasts with the transparent material here. Here, the white plaster frame represents the one I took to my London residence (the original one), it is one of the group photographs that originally should have been placed at home. Thus, the transparent one represents its presence, and reminds its absence after the original one was taken by me. This echoes the idea of 'double' that I introduced in Chapter One when I introduced the concept of 'The Uncanny'. It (the transparent one) emphasises the absence of the frame that used to be placed at home and suggests an emotional connection to home/my family. Here the 'ghost image' (a translucent state) constructed in Series I is used continually to present this state of absence. In addition, this group of sculptures is made in the images of the picture frame. Although there is not much personal information specific to me or my family on the surface, as if they could exist in any family, as a combination of a specific image (a group of picture frames picked by me and my family), it has special significance. The traces (including the wear and tear on the surface of the original frames) left due to the cast are the indexical signs of the original photo frames. Therefore, they are about my own personal archive or generic frames my family and I have selected for some aesthetic reasons. In other words, they are unique.

Richard Shone talked about the casting process in his writing- *A cast in time* in 1995 and stated that a cast of an object can present two histories - "its own past and the past of the object it replicates" (Shone, 1995: 52), which has the same function of the death mask. The relationship between the two was discussed in the previous chapter when discussing Rachel Whiteread's creative approach (see Chapter 2, section 2.2 Mortality). Although we use the same method -- casting for creation, the completed sculptures lose their original functionality (this is particularly prominent in Whiteread's works), suggesting an absence. The difference is that the cast objects in my works are my personal items with strong personal information and emotional factors, while Whiteread's are not. Despite her early works involving her personal experiences, for example, *Closet* (1988), her later casts more deal with the issues of memory and collective history by casting others' or a public spaces (i.e. a Victorian terrace house that was due for demolition (*House*, 1993), the interior of a Victorian parlour (*Ghost*, 1990), a nameless sealed library that symbolises a large number of victims of the brutal holocaust (*Holocaust Memorial*, 2000). Her work reflects the wider social memory and history. In addition, her works collect the information left on the surface of the items through the casting process, such as slight wear and tear, marks, or other traces of use.

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39 With the idea of "double" or "*doppelgänger*", please see Chapter one -The *Unheimlich*, p8-9.

These are used as a clue, waiting to be recognised by the audience, who then project their personal emotions and relate memories to the work to generate a sense of resonance. However, it still needs to be emphasised that the duplicated double not only has an extremely similar appearance to the original one, but also lost its original function. This suggests that they offer a strong sense of familiarity, at least in appearance. This can also be found in Do Ho Suh's replicated installation of his dwelling space (i.e., *Seoul Home/ L.A. Home/New York Home/ Baltimore Home/ London Home/ Seattle Home/ L.A. Home*, 1999). With his fabric installations, we can only sense a resonance of a form of residence by its almost the exact same look as the originals. The material Suh uses in his fabric installation is translucent and light, the work he made is closer to a ghostly image, which refers to an image of a double that closely resembles the original form, which seems to exist in between the real and unreal. Nevertheless, in his work *Rubbing/Loving Project: Apartment A, 348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA* (2014- 2017), all the wear and tear, the marks, or other traces of use can also be found clearly as they were already rubbed on paper, like Whiteread's casting. Therefore, these works are associated with memory, suggesting a connection to the past or 'something' that has been lost. In my work *Untitled* (photo frames), transparent frames represent some of this connection between the past and the present as well, due to the transparent properties of glasswax, it is more likely than white plaster to present a state between being and disappearing, giving it an eerily familiar feel. More importantly, both in the casting method, which Whiteread and I use, and in Suh's fabric installation and his rubbing, there is a particularity. This is because the indexical sign carried by the method of production maintains such an indexical relationship between the reproduced and its original. The process of casting as I have discussed in Chapter Two, can retain the index information from its original. Such a relationship can also be found in Suh's rubbing project. However, in his fabric installations, by reproducing the original space on an almost one-to-one scale, the characteristics of the signs are also shared to some extent by the one-to-one scale. Joan Gibbons stresses, "the indexical sign may involve abstraction or, indeed, may be heavily mimetic, but it is distinguished by the fact that the signifier retains at least something of the existential 'having been there'ness' of that which is signified" (2007: 30). Therefore, in our works, whether it is a sculpture made by cast or the replication of Suh's, there is a hint of absence. They carry or share index information about the original and thus enhance the uniqueness of the original object.

In this series, I tried to look for roots that objects could provide a sense of familiarity with home, which not only represents a record, but also carries the continuity of individuals or 'something' that has been absent. Two different materials one completely opaque plaster and the other semi-trans-

lucent glasswax were used in this series to respond to the concepts of presence and absence involved in the works. The uniqueness of the sculpture and its special relationship with the creator (me and my family) are further emphasised by discussing the indexical signs carried by the casting method itself. Finally, as the cast objects share the characteristic of the idea of 'double', it bears an impression of the uncanny to some extent. This paves the way for the subsequent discussion of everyday objects as the source of familiarity and to provide a sense of belonging to a home in a dwelling space (especially in a new place).

### **3. 4 Series III**

### **Drawings**



Fig. 3.11  
Lihong Liu, *The Darkness I*, 2020  
Pencil drawing on paper  
45 x45 cm

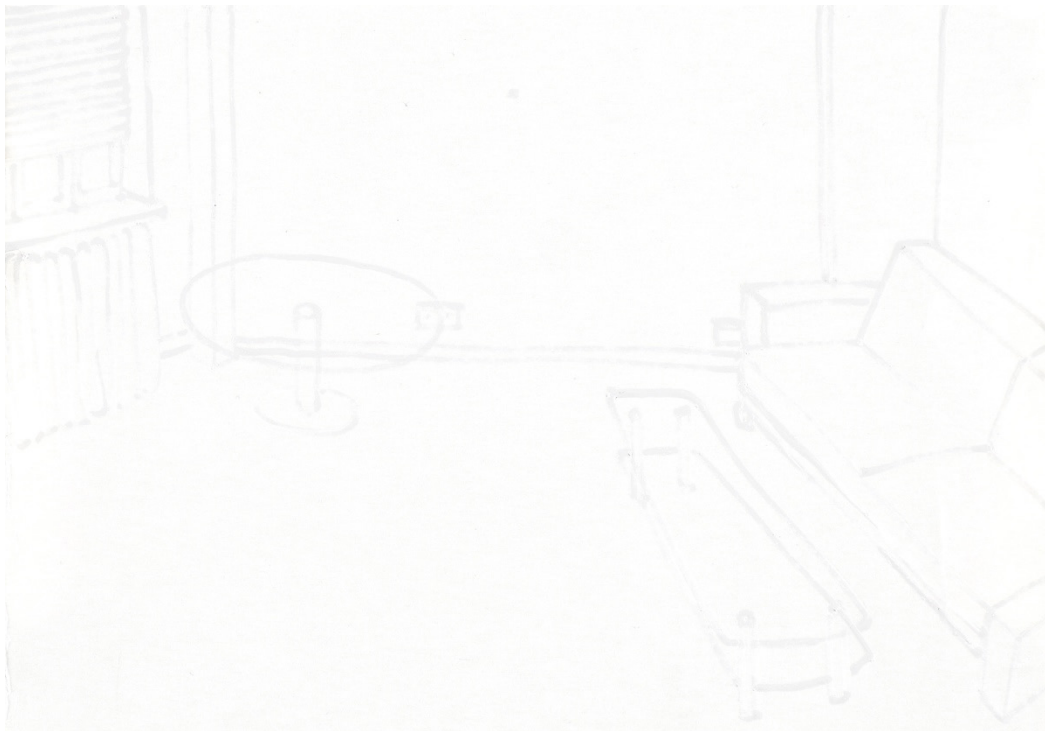


Fig. 3.12  
Lihong Liu, *The Emptiness I*, 2021  
Correct fluid drawing on paper  
18 x25 cm



## Introduction

Series III is about drawing on paper. Two groups of works will be discussed: *The Darkness* (2020-2021), which comprises seven pencil drawings painted on paper (i.e. Fig. 3.11 and Appendix 3); *The Emptiness* (2021, i.e. Fig. 3.12, Appendix 4), painted with correction fluid. These artworks were exhibited at a group exhibition, *The Reveries of The Many* (2021) at Arthill Gallery in London. They were presented and discussed in *Cultural Literacy Everywhere 2022: A virtual Symposium on Dwelling*, hosted by University College Dublin from 11-13 May 2022 by Zoom, and in one-day symposium - *Colouring In: The Past*, hosted by University of the Arts London (UAL) which took place on 9th December 2022.

Series III contains the experiences from when I first moved to this dwelling space after I was back in London until I finally moved out. It is a record of both my mental and physical experience in the whole process of living, especially a feeling of displacement. These two experiences form two different series of drawings respectively: *The Darkness* series and *The Emptiness* series. From strange to familiar, from feeling empty to a feeling of being stuffed with familiar objects which can maintain a sense of 'home', and then to a complex emotional experience of facing the empty room when everything has been moved out. These experiences were initially recorded in my diary (Series V) in stages, and then I extracted some inspiration from them to create paintings. In a way, this group of drawings shares the indexical traces recorded in the diary. In addition, each page in my visual diary<sup>40</sup> can also be seen as a separate drawing.

Although Series III continues to question the relationship between everyday objects and a sense of familiar home, it emphasises the physical and psychological feelings, which directly records the changes in my physical feeling towards the space and objects in the new residence. This interprets the psychological uncertainty I felt in trying to find and rebuild a sense of familiarity with a home, and as a response to the visual impression of *déjà vu* and the experience of the *Unheimlich*. Compared with that, the previous two series focused on the exploration of special objects, which are things endowed with special meaning by human beings, and emphasised the impact of the special meaning of the object on the past and future. And the word 'special' here means something sig-

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40 Indexability of diary is discussed in Series V.

nificant, meaningful, highly valued, cherished, or even just used by individuals. It can be said that Series III extends the exploration to the entire living place (bedroom). The continuity of a sense of 'home' is explored by looking for a sense of familiarity through familiar everyday objects and furniture themselves and by placing them in a similar position or having a similar room layout of the past in the new living environment here. More importantly, the uncertainty between familiarity and strangeness is recorded and presented by depicting the physical and psychological feelings of that present space in the dark. Next, I will first discuss the concept and creation of the works in *The Darkness* series and *The Emptiness* series separately, and then, talk about the uncertainty in both series to respond to the above-said issues.

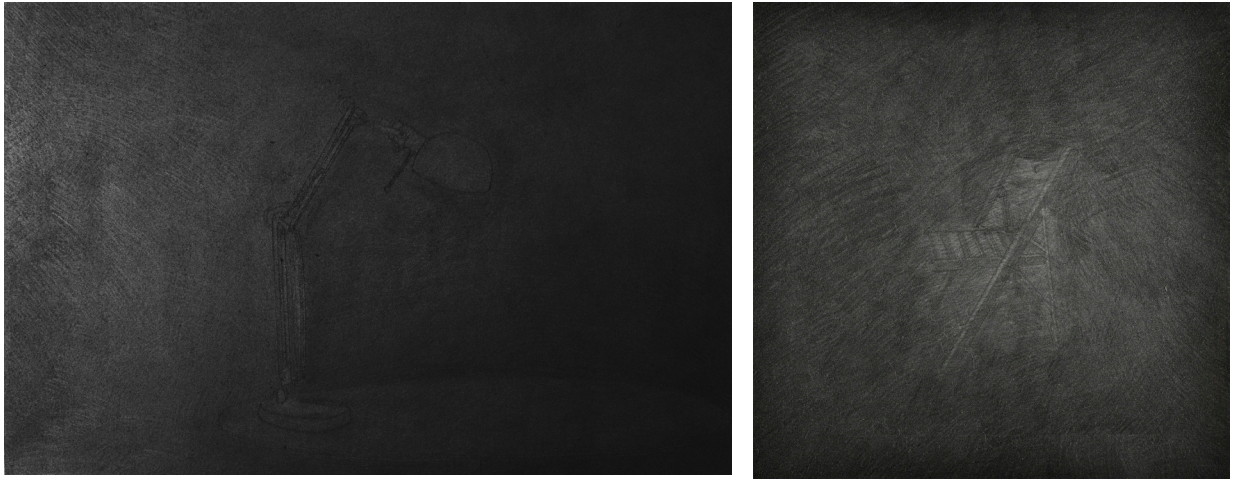


Fig. 3.13  
 Lihong Liu, *The Darkness 0 & I*, 2020  
 Pencil drawing on paper  
 73 x48 cm, 45 x45 cm

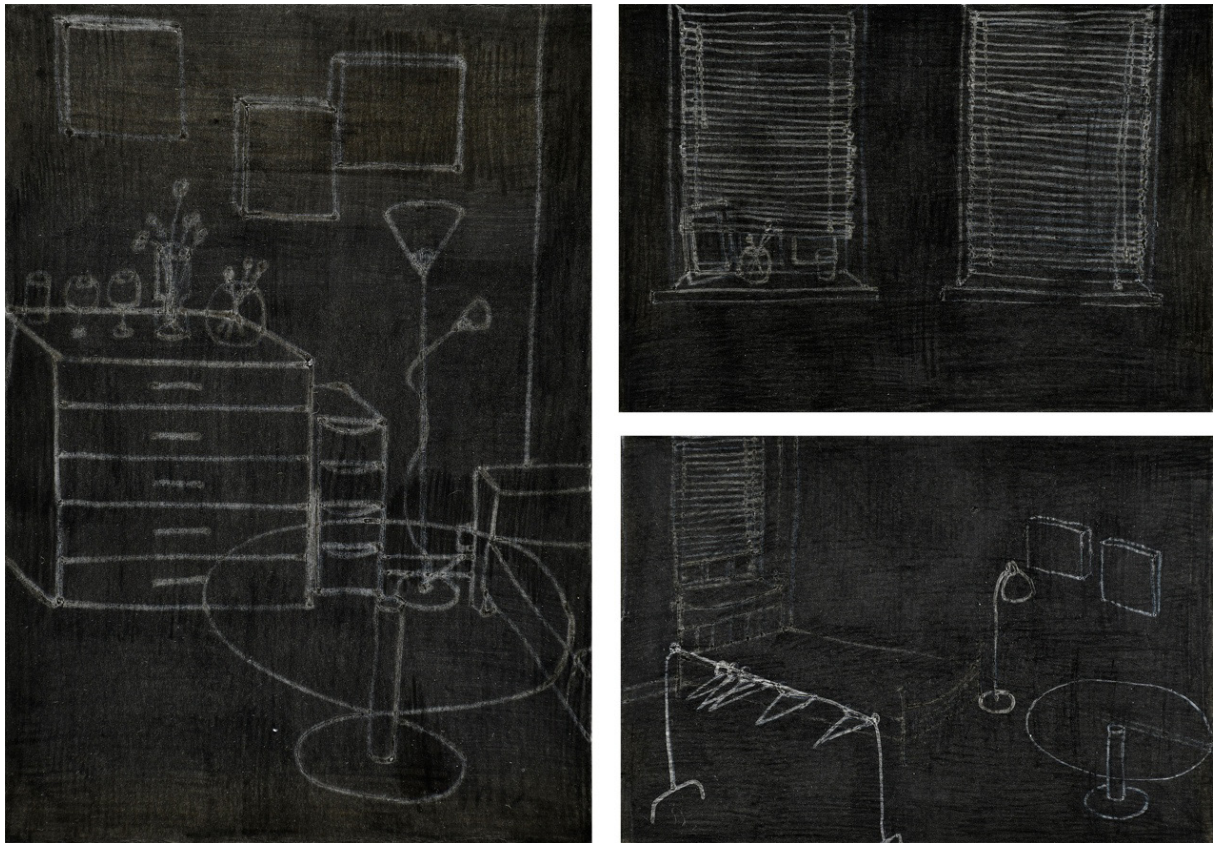


Fig. 3.14  
 Lihong Liu, *The Darkness V, VI & VII*, 2021  
 Pencil and correct fluid drawing on paper  
 18 x25 cm, 18 x25 cm, 18 x25 cm

### ***The Darkness series (2020-2021)***

Dylan Trigg describes the feelings of being in the room where he writes in *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*, as being an uncanny experience. He wrote: “At which point did I cease feeling a visitor in this room and more a fundamental part of it?” (2012: 2). This question for him is just what I want to explore in this practice.

*The Darkness I-VII* (2020-2021, for the complete set of drawings, see Appendix 3) are pencil drawings, inspired by my notes (*Diary*) from when I first moved to this dwelling space after I came back to London from China in 2020. In that period, I gradually realised that the mixed sense of familiarity and strangeness in this new living environment made me hover between feeling homely and unhomely. In addition, such feelings were magnified at night because the darkness drowned out all the familiarity that I had begun to build up gradually during the day. I started my creation based on the experience of displacement and unhomely.

There were two distinct stages attached to moving into this new space; Stage one: trying to find a sense of familiarity. It is to describe a physical and visual experience in the night after moving into a new dwelling space (Fig. 3.13, I recorded such night experiences right away in my diary and later recreated them as drawings). I covered the whole picture with a large area of black, leaving only the looming image of the objects near the centre of the drawing. The individual objects are isolated in darkness, and the space seems to be one orientate of myself around the object. The objects are familiar but the actual context within the new dwelling space is uncertain. Stage two (Fig. 3.14): familiarity is almost fully established, and start to feel an ‘at home’ feeling, I perceive a mental picture of the whole space and object. The importance of individual objects resets what comes in the place is the sense that these objects recreate a kind of special environment, which includes me. A feeling of displacement is accompanied in this stage and it can be found specifically in the drawing - *The Darkness IV* (2021, Appendix 3).

In terms of the first stage, I use *The Darkness I* (2020, Fig. 3.11) as a metaphor for analysis. For this drawing, I am still attempting to interpret an impression of the uncanny, which stays in-between the familiar and the unfamiliar through the sense of uncertainty. I covered the whole picture with a large area of black, leaving only the looming image of the chair near the centre of this drawing and trying to interpret my personal experience of such displacement. From a distance, it is difficult to

recognise the image of the chair unless you look at it from a very close distance. It is very much like trying to feel a sense of home in an unfamiliar environment. Meanwhile, the dark tones take on a quietness. This highlights a sense of confusion and uncertainty.

As for the second stage, the images of daily objects and even furniture are drawn by identifiable white lines and gradually appear in the drawings. For example, *The Darkness IV* (see Appendix 3). This painting is not so blurred and dark that it is relatively easy to recognise the image of the water sink. It is worth noting that there are two kinds of taps in this drawing. One looms in the dark, and the other forms a silhouette with white lines which is a familiar image from my memory. The two images form a sense of conflict in this drawing. Through such a sense of conflict, I further hope to express the experience of displacement between feeling familiar and unfamiliar. From *The Darkness V* to *The Darkness VII* (Fig. 3.14), there were more clearer images of furniture and everyday objects created by using correction fluid. They describe the layout of the whole room and even the position of particular small items can be very clearly seen.

Therefore, the first stage of this series is a 'touch' or almost a tactile relationship with isolated objects in space. This mental map gradually emerges of the unique relationship between the objects. In stage two, what emerges here is a process of mapping with a sense of familiarity. At this stage, it is a process of locating these objects in my mind. In this stage, rather than these objects floating in the darkness, they somehow build relationships with other objects and also become part of the scenario or scene.



***The Emptiness series (2021)***

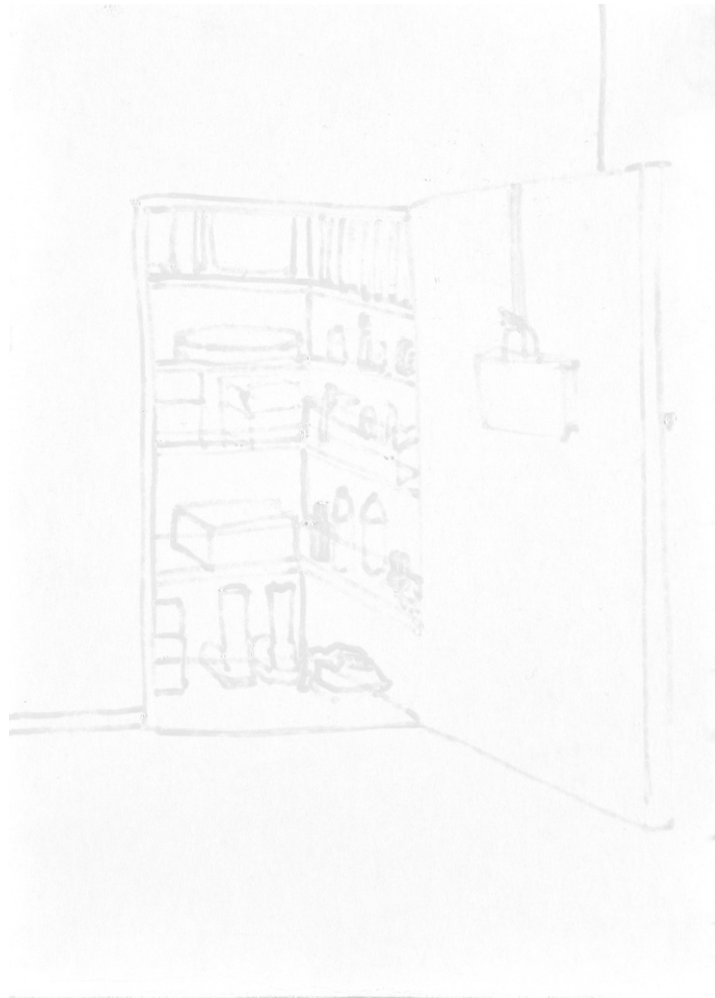


Fig. 3.15  
Lihong Liu, *The Emptiness II*, 2021  
Correct fluid drawing on paper  
18 x25 cm

The painting was created on white paper with correction fluid. It expresses my feelings at the last stage of this year's living experience, that is, finding a sense of belonging that forms a strong sense of familiarity. However, such feelings eventually changed since I had to empty the flat due to the lease ending. Facing the empty room again, I still remember clearly where the original objects were placed. As if there was still a familiar breath in this space. In addition, it was like these objects and furniture were still there, but they were not. It is a feeling of uncertainty in between. Therefore, through this series, I would like to describe the feeling of being faced with an empty room that overlaps with a mental image of the room's previous layout.

As with *The Darkness* series, the image painted with correction fluid is hardly perceptible. It was as

if the images were invisible on the blank sheet of paper. The viewer can only see it if one looks at it reasonably closely. When these drawings were exhibited, almost all the viewers when they first saw the work said they thought there were blank sheets of paper. That is exactly what I wanted to achieve. I used this seemingly blank picture as a metaphor for the fact that I was faced with an empty room. The layout of the room outlined by white correction fluid in the picture serves as an image of the past scene in my mind at that moment. It resembles my feeling of being in an empty room but with visions of past scenes. In this way, I would like to express the feeling of uncertainty that is in-between an inexplicably familiar but actually strange in this space. *The Darkness* series, so to speak, is the opposite state.

### **Drawing uncertainty**

In this practice, I have discussed the sense of uncertainty that I had during my stay in that space by describing the location of the objects and furniture in the dark and the daytime respectively. From when I had just moved in, to when I sensed such a feeling once more through the recollection of the previous layout after I removed all my belongings and faced an empty space again. There is a slight difference in that the former tries to find familiarity in an unfamiliar environment, while the latter feels a sense of strangeness due to changes in the familiar environment. In general, it is a feeling of hovering between the unfamiliar and the familiar.

In my paintings, I depicted such sense through the state of not seeing things clearly at night in contrast to the clear vision in the daytime. The obvious contrast between the drawings of the two stages also further explains the changes in the feelings of uncertainty in different periods of living in that space. Specifically, in the two groups of very different drawing effects, both convey this feeling of uncertainty by creating visual images that are difficult to distinguish, especially in colours. For example, the first stage of *The Darkness* series, is drawn mainly in black colour by pencil and is visually indistinguishable from the image of background space and objects. While in *The Emptiness*, it is all in white colour, using white correct fluid paint on white paper. My intention was to make it really hard for the audience to perceive the images in the drawing.

The sense of uncertainty that the picture formed was discussed in the last section of Chapter Two. In the works of Morandi and Coldwell, we can also feel the uncertainty of the objects depicted in the pictures caused by visual interference. Whether it is the dense cross-hatched lines of Morandi,

the half-tone dots of Coldwell, the large area of black tones in *The Darkness* series of mine, or the visual blank effect in *The Emptiness* series, the details of those familiar everyday objects are consciously hidden by the creator. This makes it difficult for the viewer to identify objects in the picture, arousing visual uncertainty. We all use a uniform tone to enhance the visual sense of uncertainty/ambiguity, which to a certain extent blurs the identifiability of objects in the image. Because of the difference in the material, every single line in Morandi's painting is very clear, whereas it is difficult to make clear notes in my drawing as if all the lines had already melted away. This effect is particularly evident in the first stage of *The Darkness* series. I use lines to summarise the image of daily objects, which is similar to Michael Craig-Martin's depiction of objects through an even line. Further, my works are consciously connected with certain emotions and record the process of searching for a sense of familiarity through everyday objects and furniture in an unfamiliar environment. To be precise, my works also explain my inner sense of uncertainty under that condition, which is a physical and psychological uncertainty. While in Morandi's etchings and Coldwell's prints, show an uncertainty caused by language hovering between abstract and representational expression, the images stay in-between the familiar and the unfamiliar, bringing a strange uncanny impression to the viewer. In my work, it is a perceptual uncertainty that tries to unsettle the viewer. Importantly, mine are more psychological and are about rebuilding a particular relationship with the object and space. It is about groping in the dark in *The Darkness* series, and rebuilding an image of the layout of my bedroom in mind in *The Emptiness* respectively.

Through these works, I continue to explore the uncanny impression between familiarity and strangeness through everyday objects and furniture. Specifically, through the feeling of seeking familiarity in an unfamiliar environment and the feeling of strangeness after the change to a familiar environment. It has been through this practice that I am clear that a sense of uncertainty runs throughout my whole research as an important aspect of my study on 'The Uncanny'.

In this practice (Series III), I gradually moved from a focus on single daily objects to the whole dwelling space. It is inspired by the experience of displacement both psychological and physical recorded in the diary at night in the new residence and the experience when standing in the empty space after moving, two kinds of psychological changes are presented: the feeling of seeking familiarity in an unfamiliar environment and the feeling of strangeness after the change to a familiar environment. In terms of visual effects, they bring a sense of uncertainty to the audience by creating images that are difficult to recognised both in *The Darkness* series and *The Emptiness* series.

Therefore, Series III not only explores a feeling of uncertainty from a psychological point of view, but also presents a perceptual uncertainty in creation. In addition, the hidden index clues in the drawings are discussed again to talk about the close relationship between the work, my bedroom, and the creator (me). Thus, an important direction of the study of the *Unheimlich* through the interpretation of an uncertain feeling is promoted in the whole practical research. Meanwhile, it laid the foundation for the conception of Series IV.

### **3. 5 Series IV**

#### **Installation work (Three-dimensional drawings)**

## Introduction

Series IV is an installation<sup>41</sup> work named *Phantom Project: Flat 506, Frobisher House, Dolphin Square, London, SW1V 3LL* (2022), consisting of a series of linear three-dimensional drawings that recreate, in life-size, the furniture and everyday items I used in flat 506 Frobisher House, London, where I lived from September 2021 to August 2022. This work was exhibited in *Secret Heim*, a Ph.D. joint exhibition at the Triangle Space in Chelsea College of Arts, in February 2022, in a semi-enclosed whiteness cube.

The three-dimensional linear drawings of furniture and objects were made through spot welding tubing (2.4mm & 1.6 mm). The structures were then uniformly painted using white spray paint. The work was realised between mid-October 2021 and February 2022, a period of nearly four months.

Through this work, I try to discuss the following issues: First, I would like to further explore the feeling of 'uncertainty' I am attempting to illustrate in Series III, especially in *The Emptiness*. Again, the sense of uncertainty here is a complex feeling hovering between the familiar and the unfamiliar; a more psychological feeling. I shall explore the use of installation<sup>42</sup> as a method of my practice to make further investigation and interpretation of my understanding of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* in this study, as well as its key role. I reproduced my personal experience in a three-dimensional way that is physically accessible and is used to test the reaction of the viewer. There are three aspects that I wanted to test out: (1) Test the viewer's ability to identify images of furniture (such as bed, desk, chair, and chest of drawers) and small daily objects (such as mirror, picture frame, and switch). (2) The 'gestalt familiarity' mentioned in exploring '*déjà vu*' in section one, paragraph three of Chapter One of this paper is used to construct the work and test the possibility of generating familiarity from the viewer. (3) To test the viewer's reaction to a sense of uncertainty by painting the

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41 Series IV is an installation work, which composed of three-dimensional linear drawings. Each of the individual elements could exist on their own, as linear three-dimensional drawings. However, the full regiments are understood as installation when they are displayed together.

42 For the two key terms in this study, I discussed and tested the two ideas I put forward - "the feeling of uncertainty" and "ghost" in the previous practice through two-dimensional and three-dimensional artistic languages respectively. From painting to sculpture to installation, I gradually transitioned from visual testing to all-round sensory experience testing process. Therefore, installation as a way of art expression is the most important link in this study. This approach emphasises the viewer's sense of presence. In addition, I will analyse how I discuss my research questions in this installation work through the use of materials, the visual effects presented by the work, the functionality of installation art itself and the reactions of the viewer.



objects white. I will discuss the above mentioned issues in two sections in this writing: the inspiration, the decision of making and the display.

### **The inspiration**

In *The Emptiness* of Series III, I recorded the experience of feeling unfamiliar again after all the belongings were moved out of my bedroom in a two-dimensional way. Specifically, when I went back to the vacated residence due to the expiry of the tenancy term, I found only blank walls, dark grey carpets, and several indentations (Fig. 3.16) on the carpet which were caused by heavy furniture placed on the carpet for a long period of time, such as cabinet, clothes rack, and

tables. The empty room has worn off the familiar atmosphere, returning to the original strangeness (It is a feeling similar to the one I had when I first entered the room and had a feeling that this place did not belong to me). What's more, being in that space, I was a detective. After I emptied the room, I was very aware that the imprints indicated where the furniture had been in the past. The imprints on the carpet provided me with evidence of my living which could be clues for me to pick up the sense of familiarity. It helped me to draw a whole image of the configuration of this room in my mind. This, thus, gave me the inspiration that it was possible to reconstruct the image of those

objects in my mind through the remnant information. I felt therefore, that by reconstructing the scene of my dwelling in this space through the residual information of the objects, it could help me to interpret the complex experience that experienced, a mixture of strangeness and familiarity, a sense in between the absence and presence. In other words, it is a sense of uncertainty.

I wanted to consciously reproduce pictorial illusion in a three-dimensional way and amplify my subjective feelings in that situation as much as possible. For this three-dimensional expression in my work, however, it was important to me to make it life-size. Through measuring the room and its contents, it created an indexical relationship to the original objects. It was my intention to reproduce my bedroom based on my own experience of displacement so that the viewer could perceive it not only visually, but physically, and mentally. I decided to replicate everything in thin, linear materials



**Fig. 3.16**  
**Indentations left on the carpet**

(see draft Fig. 3.17) to create a white installation works based on space which is akin to what I drew in *The Emptiness*.

What is important here is the one-to-one scale of the work and its relationship with the viewer. Installation involves the space as a whole and evokes a subtle sensory relationship between the work and the viewer's body. In particular, the viewer can further enhance their sensory perception of the work through the physical relationship between their bodies and the work, such as touch. Similarly, installation works include but are not limited to these functions. However, installation works can create a much more immersive experience than sculptures, described by Claire Bishop as an "immersive scene" or "theatrical experiential" (Bishop, 2005: 6).

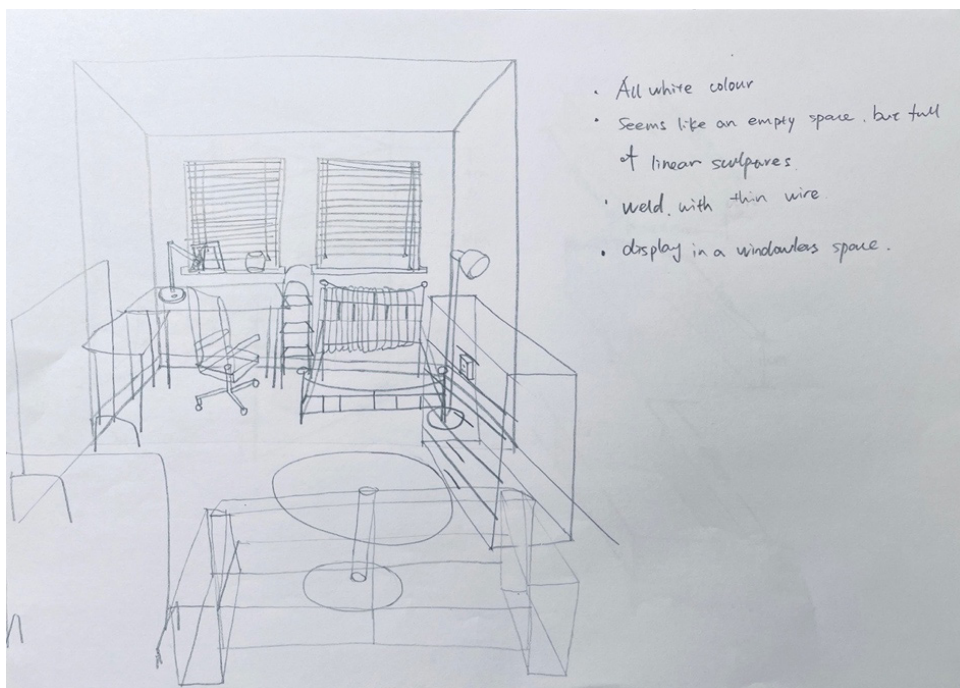


Fig. 3.17  
Lihong, Liu, Sketch of the work, 2021

With regard to the content and configuration of this installation work, I adopted 'Gestalt familiarity' as the method<sup>43</sup>. In the first Chapter, I discussed how the experience of *déjà vu* can be artificially created for the experiencers to experience. Therefore, in accordance with the 'Gestalt familiar', I reproduced my bedroom as a way to create a similar configuration of the bedroom space. In this work, I arranged the internal elements of this, which happened to be similar to the VR experiment mentioned earlier in Chapter One. My installation originally required a fixed viewing point. With-

<sup>43</sup> For this part of discussion, please see Chapter One, 1.2 *Déjà vu*.

out entering the space, the viewer can capture the whole scene of the 'room' and perceive it as an empty space. It was not a space to walk through. In that respect, it acted more like a tableau. However, at the end of the exhibition, the viewer naturally walked into the installation space, and the footprints left after accessing it, enhanced the sense of absence in my work. This is discussed in the last section of the display. For the viewer, while this is a completely new scene for them, the images of different furniture and the different combinations they form become elements that may evoke a sense of familiarity in the viewer. Therefore, the work provides the possibility for the viewer to perceive the sense of familiarity and further arouse their experience of *déjà vu* in this way.

### **Decision making**

For the making of this project, I chose to complete the internal elements of this installation by making linear sculptures. They were eventually painted in white and placed in a semi-enclosed whiteness space. Displaying the work in this way created an optical illusion that the space appears empty even though the white linear installation occupies the entire space. However, such an illusion varies with the distance between the viewer and the work. When viewing the work from a close distance, the linear elements inside the installation can be captured by the viewer and their original image can be recognised, but beyond a certain distance, there seems to be only a pure white space and the objects disappear. I chose white as the dominant hue of this work, not only in order to keep the whole work unified so as to achieve a visually indistinguishable feeling, but also, I wanted to reproduce the aforementioned uncertain feeling in a very calm way by avoiding the emotional influence of colour as much as possible. Through the remaining traces<sup>44</sup>, it seems that in this empty room, the scene that was once filled with familiar objects can be recreated. I chose white to create a quiet atmosphere, allowing the viewer to perceive a sense of peculiar feeling that stays in-between certainty and uncertainty, real and unreal, familiar and unfamiliar. In this regard, I interpreted a similar feeling in the work *Home and 'Home'* (Fig. 3.18 - 20) that was displayed in my master's graduation show in 2016 by a linear sculptural installation. In that work, I am trying to explore the

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44 When I mention the inspiration for this project above, the remaining traces refer to the indentation in the carpet left after removing all the item in the room. In the work, however, the image of the linear object become the remaining information that replace the imprint to provide the audience to identify.



Fig. 3.18  
Lihong Liu, *Home and 'Home'* (2016)  
Wire, clear plastic, cotton, plastic bottle, invisible thread, spray paint  
Size variable

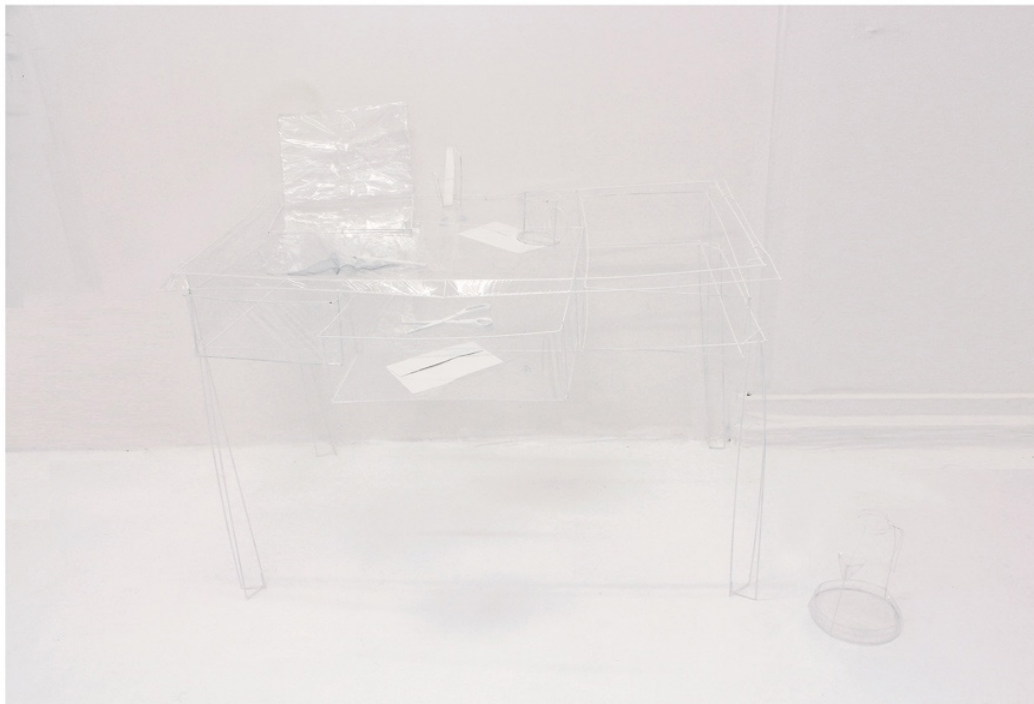


Fig. 3.19  
Lihong Liu, *Home and 'Home'* (desk) (2016)  
Wire, clear plastic, cotton, plastic bottle, invisible thread, spray paint  
Size variable



Fig. 3.20  
Lihong Liu, *Home and 'Home'* (wardrobe) (2016)  
Wire, clear plastic, cotton, plastic bottle, invisible thread, spray paint  
Size variable



interlacing experience of being trapped in memories and in the present space. Therefore, I combined the configuration of my dormitory in London with that of my bedroom in China to reconstruct a mixture of past and present living spaces. This idea came from my experience that I once had the illusion for a few seconds when I was lying in bed in my dorm thought that I was lying in bed at home in China. I asked my mother to take a measurement and take photos of my room for me. According to that, I copied the image of the bed, desk, and wardrobe I used in China and placed them according to the configuration of my dormitory in London in the display space. As it visually looks white, that work is close to 'transparent' to a certain extent. That is to say, the sculpture in that work presents an effect that is sometimes visible but sometimes not perceptible from a particular angle or at a certain distance. This reminds me when I keep thinking about how to present a feeling of 'emptiness' and 'uncertainty' in a three-dimensional way as well as what I am trying to express in my drawing - *The Emptiness* series.

For the choice of materials, I considered whether there were other materials that could better convey the feeling I wanted to express, such as transparent PVC fabric and glasswax (Fig. 3.21) (both of which I have used before, and they have a transparent visual effect). However, I decided to use a spot welding machine to connect the wire to make linear pieces of this installation one by one (Fig. 3.22 - 23). This decision leads the work into linear drawing rather than dealing with form and volume.



Fig. 3.21  
Material test-glasswax, 2020





Fig. 3.22  
Making process of using spot welding  
machine



Fig. 3.23  
Making process of the piece of chest of  
drawers

Unlike solid sculpture, a linear piece keeps a sense of emptiness while retaining recognisable information. As an image of an object drawn in the air, the environment around and even behind the linear three-dimensional drawing is still visible. It bears a feature of transparency and insubstantiality. The effect is similar to the transparent fabric that used in Suh's work and his use of transparent fabrics. While solid sculptures, their volume is very evident within the gallery space. For example, Rachel Whiteread's *House* (1993), a grey concrete house-shaped solid sculpture where the surface is slightly mottled. Although her sculptures subvert the traditional definition of sculpture<sup>45</sup> (see Chapter Two, 2.2), her works fully demonstrate the volume of sculpture. Whiteread converts the voids of the inside spaces into concrete, thus solidifying the emptiness and showing the subtle traces of history that lie on the surface, easily overlooked. However, my work is the opposite of hers. I removed the surface information of these objects as much as possible, trying to arouse the viewer's thinking about the issue of the presence and absence of my work. In this way, it helps the work to deliver a feeling of uncertainty, which is a doubt about the existence of the object, like a 'ghost'. For this, Do Ho Suh's transparent fabric installations are a good representation of this state. The

45 The main method that Rachel Whiteread uses to create her work is casting. Traditionally, the mould is something discarded after artists finish casting. So, the cast left as the filler of the mould which is the artwork. Traditionally, what artist replicates through casting is a solid object, it is an identical one of the original. However, in the case of Whiteread's is totally opposite. For Witeread, the space itself is a mould. What she casts is the inside void. So, through her cast, Whiteread changes the void into solid. And this is where I mean she subverts the convention.

transparent and soft fabric accurately replicates his living space, resembling a memory suspended in the air, conveying this untouchability through the translucent nature of the material itself. Nevertheless, in contrast to Whiteread's works, his works also question the existence and absence of architecture by transforming them into transparent works. While Suh's work replicates all the surfaces of buildings and objects, mine does not. And while the viewer can capture rich surface information from Suh's work, in my work the viewer is invited to imagine the objects as they were through simply the outline clues. In this respect my work has similarities to the work of Michael Craig-Martin also presents his works through a language of line. He uses lines to outline the shapes of objects and magnifies them in sizes to make the viewer feel as if they were in Alice's Wonderland. Veronica Simpson called the sculpture "Line Drawings in the Air" (2019). As they are hollow, his sculptures have a feeling of 'transparency'. At the same time, he uses bright colours to emphasise the presence of the sculptures, so that the viewer can capture the outdoor or indoor surroundings through these sculptures while ensuring that they will not be swallowed up by the complexity of the environment. This may be the reason why his works are 'transparent' but lack a ghostly quality. A significant difference is that my work presents the three-dimensional object in real size, while Craig-Martin plays with scale, greatly enlarging the objects. Furthermore, I consciously reduce the presence of the work by keeping them in the same colour as the whole installation space, so as to enhance the invisibility of these linear elements in that space in order to achieve the uncertain feeling I want, while Craig-Martin's brightly coloured sculptures are designed to stand out from their environment.

### **Display (Sculptural installation and its relationship with the viewer)**

The work was finally presented in a 15-square-meter space with four exhibition walls in Triangle Space at Chelsea College of Arts, which formed a semi-open display area. The floor of the display area is painted white to conduct a white space along with the exhibition walls. The finished installation was arranged to be placed there according to my memory of the interior configuration of my bedroom when I lived in Flat 506. There were 21 pieces which contained two traditional sash windows, a double bed, a desk, a folding chair, a radiator, a double sofa, a five-drawer chest, a round glass table, a floor lamp, a shelf, a cloth rack, four switches, a tabletop mirror, a book, two photo frames, and a long, round-necked vase with two flowers inside (see Fig. 3.24 - 25).



Fig. 3.24

Lihong Liu, *Phantom Project: Flat 506, Frobisher House, Dolphin Square, London, SW1V 3LL*, 2022

Wire, white spray paint  
Size variable



Fig. 3.25

Lihong Liu, *Phantom Project: Flat 506, Frobisher House, Dolphin Square, London, SW1V 3LL*, 2022

Wire, white spray paint  
Size variable

During the exhibition, a number of viewers used the word 'ghost' to describe these linear sculptures; they thought this display area was just a white space when they glanced at it from a distance. We can identify the object by a simplified line drawing instead of needing a full-coloured textured image (Biederman, 1987). According to Irving Biederman, the object can still be identified when the contour information is partially blocked but the contour deletion allows a part of the components to be recovered. Such line drawing description of the object belongs to the category of edge-based descriptions, and, is thus, sufficient for primal access<sup>46</sup>. This process of recognition is known as the Recognition-by-Components (RBC). In terms of the colour, luminance, and texture of objects are secondary ways of identification, which can help promote the perception of the identified object. In my works, the viewer can identify the image of furniture and objects through the edge-based description of them, which then can be associated with the domestic, so as to gain a sense of familiarity with home. A number of viewers entered this space, bent down and observed the work carefully (See Fig.3. 26). They walked back and forth in the limited space, looking at the photo frames placed on the sofa on the left side of the space, and then, walking to the right side of the space to look at the windows on the wall and the vases on the ground. Several viewers even tried to pick up small objects, such as photo frames, but not so easy to do. They investigated the room as if they had actually entered someone's home.

One of the noticeable comments was the feedback left by a woman who had just moved to London from Japan. She stated she was shocked when she experienced the work, especially after she entered the installation space. She could identify the majority of the furniture-shaped pieces of this installation, which she was unable to perceive at first when she was standing away from it. Through that recognition, she perceived a sense of familiarity. "Maybe it is something like reading pictures", she commented, and it made her feel like this was somebody's home. At the same time, she was unfamiliar with the space, or the space created by the artist, "it is a new experience", she said. As she had just been through a move, she described the feeling when she entered her London residence as "a strange feeling, you can feel something you feel familiar but actually, it is totally strange". She stated that was how she felt about my work. For the viewer, the three-dimension drawings that were placed away from them are relatively difficult to capture visually, which lets them fall into a state of visual illusion as if nothing is there. In fact, the objects in my work on one

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<sup>46</sup> *primal access*: "the first contact of a perceptual input from an isolated, unanticipated object to a representation in memory" (Biederman, 1987).

level are real. They correspond in size to the original making one aware of both the spaces we live in and how we project ourselves onto the objects and space. More precisely, they are drawn three-dimensionally, which is disorientating since as we move the objects become more or less readable. At the same time, because the linear pieces are made of thin wire, and the fact that the colour of the three-dimensional drawings and the background are both white, increases the difficulty for the viewer to clearly distinguish them. In addition, a number of viewers mistakenly thought that it was an artwork drawn with lines on the walls of a white space at first, until they came closer, and they realised it was a group of 3D drawings. These feelings of being in between the visible and invisible, offer and enhance a sense of uncertainty about the work itself. This echoes my understanding of 'déjà vu' and 'the uncanny' in my practice. It is a strange combination of being familiar and unfamiliar impressions, and full of uncertainty.



Fig. 3.26  
Exhibition Site of *Phantom Project*, 2022



The relationship between installation art, viewer, and artist, is interactional, and the viewer's physical participation can enrich the integrity of the work. Installation art, compared with other forms of expression, such as painting, sculpture, and video, can provide the viewer with a sense of presence. Claire Bishop (2005: 6) describes this as “rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision”. It creates a sense of atmosphere, which also provides people with an immersive experience. When the viewer enters this work, they enter the scene that the artist has pre-set. This is important for me. By replicating my dwelling space, I consciously created a scene and oriented the viewer with replicated images of furniture and daily objects that evoked memories and associations of their own familiar past. Claire Bishop (2005) points out that the starting point of installation art is that it can remind the viewer of conscious and unconscious associations and bring the viewer into their memories through the carefully designed content of the artist, thus triggering associations. She suggests these evoked recollections belong to a “deep memory”, which “seizing the consciousness of the installation viewer from within” (Bishop, 2005: 16). In addition, according to above mentioned Japanese viewer’s feedback, demonstrates the functionality of installation art that Bishop suggests - installation art can somehow stimulate the viewer to a specific range of associations.

In addition, the viewer's participation (close observation or being surrounded by the work) further completes the work to some extent. First of all, the viewer plays a crucial role in installation art. The function of the tableau of installation art is to highlight the human's ‘experience’, by physically entering the space of the work, engulfed in a scene that is ‘theatrical’, ‘immersive’, or ‘experiential’ (Bishop, 2005: 6). Secondly, the installation provides a sensory experience to stimulate the conscious or unconscious association of the viewer, while the viewer’s presence will also enrich the meaning of the work. In my work *Phantom Project*, the existence of the viewer not only makes my work more vivid but also turns the footprints (see Fig. 3.27) left by them into a certain imprint that can track their activities in this space, which thus, emphasises the absence of people as users of this space. This effect I never thought of when I first conceived the work, and it was not until the exhibition came to an end, and more and more footprints from the viewer appeared on the ground, that these indexical traces of the presence made me realise this. Although not every influence of the viewer on the installation work can inadvertently retain such traces as my work, the viewer, as an indispensable part of the work display, is the key to make works ‘live’. For example, in the works of artist Do Ho Suh, who also reproduced his own former dwelling space (see, Fig. 3.28). The pres-



ence of the viewer makes the space reproduced in transparent fabric more than just a lifeless work. It is as if one is actually stepping back into the artist's past living space through his dreamlike replicas, blurring the lines between what is real and what is fake at that moment. Therefore, as a vital existence in installation artworks, the viewer can not only obtain physical and psychological experience through the work, but also, from a certain perspective, the existence of the viewer offers the work more vitality.

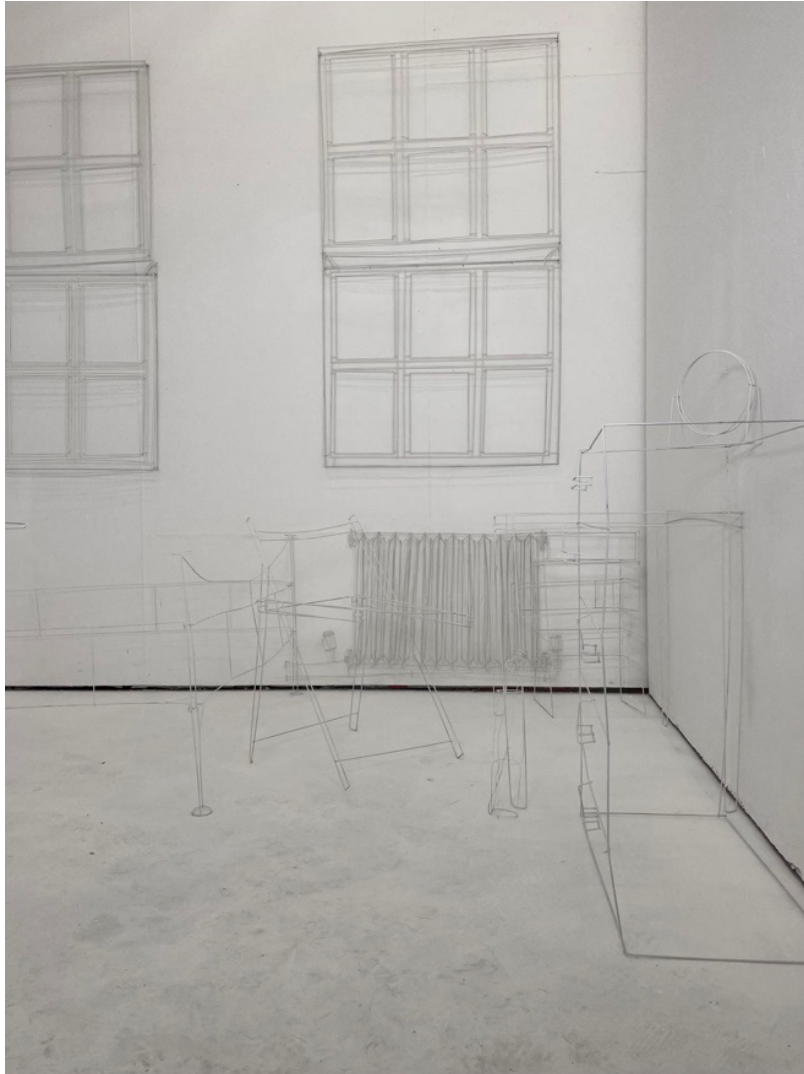


Fig. 3.27

Lihong Liu, *Phantom Project: Flat 506, Frobisher House, Dolphin Square, London, SW1V 3LL*, 2022

Wire, white spray paint, Size variable



Fig. 3.28  
Do Ho Suh, *348 West 22nd Street, Apartment A, Unit-2*, 2011–2015.

### Presence and absence

*Phantom Project* replicates the scene of a living space. Although the making of this project is not like photography, casting, and even rubbing bear specific indexical signs which can be seen directly and easily to trace back to their originals, these linear elements do have an indexical relationship to the actual space by virtue of measurement size and placement. Their structure and shape which somehow share the iconic images with their originals to invite the viewer to recognise and generate associations. Moreover, all the three-dimensional images here are almost transparent, thus, providing a sense of absence of the originals. Furthermore, as the *doppelgänger* of my bedroom, this work can be evidence of the existence of some moments of the past, which then implies an absence to the present. *Phantom Project* calls attention to a past that has become history while suggesting an absence. At the same time, the footprints left by the viewer that I mentioned in the last paragraph underline another certain absence as well in this installation - residence. It illustrates that the sense of absence contained in this work could be found in two ways. First, is the absence of the past dwelling space in the present, namely the absence of that history. Second, is the absence of the people, including the original occupant (the artist himself) and the visitor.

Recreating (or displaying) a dwelling scene emphasises this problem of presence and absence, thereby highlighting the particularity of a past existence. Like many former residences of celebrities, a number of them may change into a museum of their original occupant, for example, Sig-

mund Freud's home at 20 Maresfield Gardens in London. Joanne Morra (2018) states in her book that such personality museum is dedicated to reveal the life and work of the individual to the public through displaying the furnishings of the house, and the placement of everyday objects, which also embodies various histories and memories associates with the site and its residents. "This semblance of authenticity within the personality museum is crucial as it gives the space in which these activities took place an aura" (Morra, 2018: 9). Thus, these preserved objects emphasise a sense of presence as part of historical evidence. Meanwhile, they also seem to have a certain narrative power that allows the viewer to make associations regarding what the life of the occupant would be. More importantly, everything in this museum reveals the existence of the occupants in the past, and the absence of the present.

Freud's desk (Fig. 3.30) in his study (Fig. 3.29) was stacked with antiquities, writing tools, and various papers. When the eyes focus on the unfinished writing paper and the glasses that are placed on its surface, it seems to evoke an imagination that Freud had only just stopped writing away from his desk. Morra once described this feeling aptly, she said "although their physical body was absent, their aura remained present" (2018: 5). Thus, each item on display is not only historical evidence, but also may hint at a certain past behaviour of the resident, so as to arouse the emotional response of the audience. At the same time, a sense of absence is accentuated.

Although the personality museum shows the original interior of the preserved rooms authentically to the viewer so that they can directly trace the past of the place and histories, my work is composed of recreated three-dimensional drawings according to the original images and measurement of the interior, the replicated objects feature a function as an indexical sign that can also serve as evidence of the existence of the original. It can be said that my work also shares its function as evidence of my past living space to some extent with the personality museum. Suggesting its presence in the past, and its absence in the present. Both the room and the resident (me). However, compared with the Freud Museum, my work is actually a duplicate, more akin to the remains of the original bedroom or ghost-like images, which thus, further stresses a feeling that something has completely disappeared.

In short, this work is based on the practice of the previous three works. In this work, I made a *doppelgänger*. I replicated my bedroom and represented it in the same configuration as the one I lived in to further interpret my understanding of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* through the experience of my

displacement. It was a breakthrough from two-dimensional expression to three-dimensional expression. The work not only presented my *unheimlich* feeling as much as possible when facing the previous dwelling space (my bedroom) now has been vacated, but also invited the viewer to enter to get their own physical experience. It is a response to my thoughts on home, feelings of displacement and the issue of presence and absence.



Fig. 3.29  
Freud Museum London, Sigmund Freud's study at 20 Maresfield Gardens, 2019



Fig. 3.30  
Freud Museum London, Sigmund Freud's desk at 20 Maresfield Gardens

## **3. 6 Series V**

**Diary**

## Introduction

The diary is an important research method in my practice. Initially, I treated it as my notebook to record my quarantine experience both in China's and the UK's home. After that, it gradually became a periodical diary of mine. I use it to record the changing process of my physical experience during each moving period (by depicting the physical experience in the space and the relationship with daily objects or furniture), and thus reflect the changes in my psychological state. Thus far, the diary has recorded three periods of experience:

- Period 1: Quarantine period in China in March 2020 (see Appendix 3: Diary-China, 2020)
- Period 2: Isolation period in the UK in September 2020 (it is also a period of living in a brand new residence) (see Appendix 4: Diary -London, 2020)
- Period 3: the experience of moving from flat 506, Frobisher House to flat 609 Nelson House in London at the end of July 2021. (see Appendix 5: Diary-London, 2021)

Here, I will first introduce the importance of a diary as a way and means to record my observation of my own domestic life and thinking in my research. Then, I summarise of these three different stages of diary records. Finally, I will discuss the impact of these diaries on my research.

## Drawing diary

The diary and sketchbooks can have similar functions. Both can be used to record the artist's own experiences and to use these recorded experiences as a source for creating works of art. Sketchbooks are not just for sketching drafts but are usually carried around and kept up-to-date with the ideas that artists see and conceive (*Diary Coursework Guide*, no date). They are both sequential, as they were usually indexically linked with time. My diary is my visual sketchbook. It records what I see, what I want to remember and what arouses my special attention in my daily life at a specific time. The majority of it is recorded in the form of a drawing, but sometimes it is written in words, in order to more accurately record a moment of feeling that cannot be depicted by images. As evidence of my observation, I can read it repeatedly, think about it and find the source of inspiration in future research. Thus, my diary is reflective. In the book *Louise Bourgeois*<sup>47</sup> (2007) edited by

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47 This book is edited by Frances Morris, is all about the statements by Louise Bourgeois for the glossary that is mainly from her archive. It is like a dictionary of her art words, which shows the



Frances Morris, the word "Diary" is defined as follows:

*'The diary must be seen as a life, a separate entity. The relationship with a diary is my own relationship with a stranger, completely unknown. No, partially unknown, like a lake that we only know a little. The relationship to a river, it has affected me and I have affected it, how, needless to know, just express it.'* *Diary*, 10 Nov.1990. (Storr, 2007: 104).

This position concurs with my own thinking. The relationship between my diary and me is interactive, and the influence is constant and changing.

The diaries have a sort of indexability. Whether it is written or painted it shares this index relationship with the author and his or her life. As already discussed in the previous discussion, drawing is an index as a note-taking observation (see Chapter 3.2). As a graphic form of a diary, its symbols are indexed. The record is the trace between the diary and its producer, me. In other words, it emphasises its privacy and uniqueness. This is important for a research project that uses personal experience as an exploration and practical expression. In addition, Philippe Lejeune defines a diary as "a series of dated traces" (2009: 179). The 'traces' include writing, image, object and a relic, it involves the movement of time, and time is an important element (Lejeune, 2009: 179). On this basis, Christian Quendler expressed that these 'traces' have the characteristics of "reflexive phenomena" (2013: 340), which not only bring us closer to the world, but also can be used to discover and develop a subjective new expression. What's more, one important factor in which film<sup>48</sup> can be defined as having the same function of indexing as photography is the function of the date it is given, it "dates a trace or an imprint of the past" (Quendler, 2013: 347). A diary records the date, and to a certain extent, it has this indexability. In my cases, however, such indexability manifests itself in the relationship with me and the moment I record. Therefore, my diary shares an indexical rela-

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definition of Louise Bourgeois's. The word "Diary" is included in the section of '*Abstraction/L'Esprit géométrique*', by Robert Storr.

48 The film here is refer specifically to diary film, a genre of exploration and experimentation of film language. Quendler discussed the different senses of indexicality in the experimental diary films in his paper 'A Series of Dated Traces: Diaries and Film'. He (2013) states that Robert Huot's early diary films are perhaps closest to the classical photo-indexical example. In this way of filmmaking, the film roll used as a basic unit and format for the diary, shot on a regular time basis. Therefore, the final presenting is in chronological order. These sequences show visual traces within the time range of the shooting, while the content of the shooting also serves as evidence of the motion patterns of time captured by the film. Thus, diary films record and present continuous traces of time.

tionship with me and my life. This again underscores the importance of its existence as a research method, as a record and certain kinds of research outcomes bear great significance.

As my research is relevant to the feelings of displacement that I experience, especially when discussing a change in dwelling spaces. It is important to observe and record the experiences of these periods both mentally and physically. Therefore, my records are periodic, focusing especially on those I have just moved into a new dwelling space or am about to move out of the one I have lived in for a while. Organising time and thoughts provides me with a structure to reflect on the passing of time. Therefore, recording in the form of a diary for a specific period of time has gradually developed into one of the indispensable research methods in my research process and become an important source of inspiration for my practice. For practical reasons, drawing on one side is to ensure the page I drew on could not come through from behind, in order to tear it out for display reasons, if needed. From a certain aesthetic perspective, it isolates the drawing page more intensely. In a way, the drawing floats in the bigger space. The picture focuses on the content described/recorded, while giving the audience more imagination and thinking space. These blank spaces in my diary resemble those in traditional Chinese painting and are aesthetically highly valued.

In general, through such records, I want to reflect on my physical and psychological changes in the process of building a sense of familiarity (or searching for a sense of belonging) in a new living space. To think about how I feel when a very familiar space becomes strange again due to my moving away. The experience when I went back to my own home (my parents' house) to observe and analyse what provided me with a sense of belonging, trying to find out what Bachelard calls "lares", and what Freud keeps mentioning as the source of 'the uncanny'.

### **Period 1: China Diary 2020**

My first drawing diary started when I went back home in China on 17th March 2020. It was just a record of my quarantine at first, but gradually became a way to observe and record my home after this period. I feel that the state of 'at home' at this time seems to be familiar but also unfamiliar. I received everything (for example, my parcel, the necessities, and food) that I needed from a stool outside of my room door by my parents, and they were changed every day. Since I was not allowed to talk face to face with my family, so we spoke via video chat, and these experiences are recorded in the diary (See Fig. 3.31-33). I discovered clues and interesting 'things', which are, in my opinion,

evidence that reveals the existence of these objects and a kind of trace of home. For example, in the debris of daily life, the traces and discarded objects, such as the used masks, the used shampoo bottles, and as I was to discover, the discarded toothbrushes (See Fig. 3.34-36). These inspired me in my drawings (See Fig. 3.4) and started creating initial artwork (See Fig. 3.1).

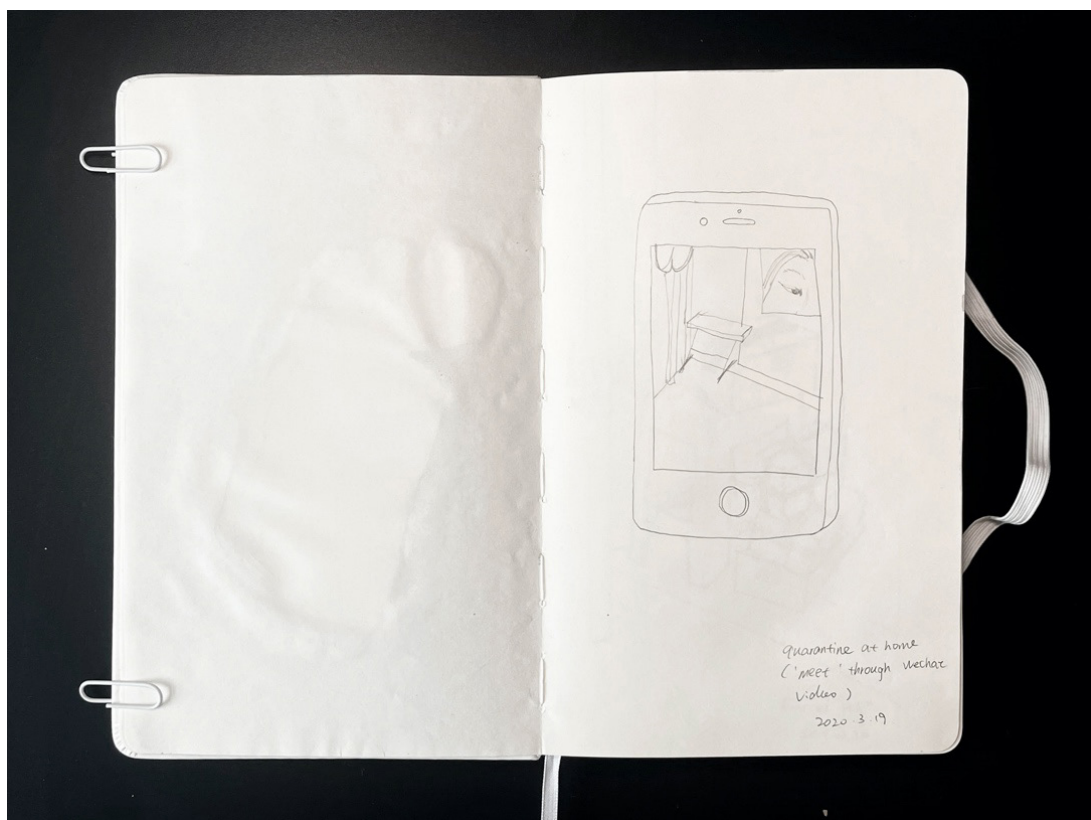


Fig. 3.31  
Lihong Liu, *Diary-China*, 2020



Fig. 3.32  
Lihong Liu, *Diary-China*, 2020

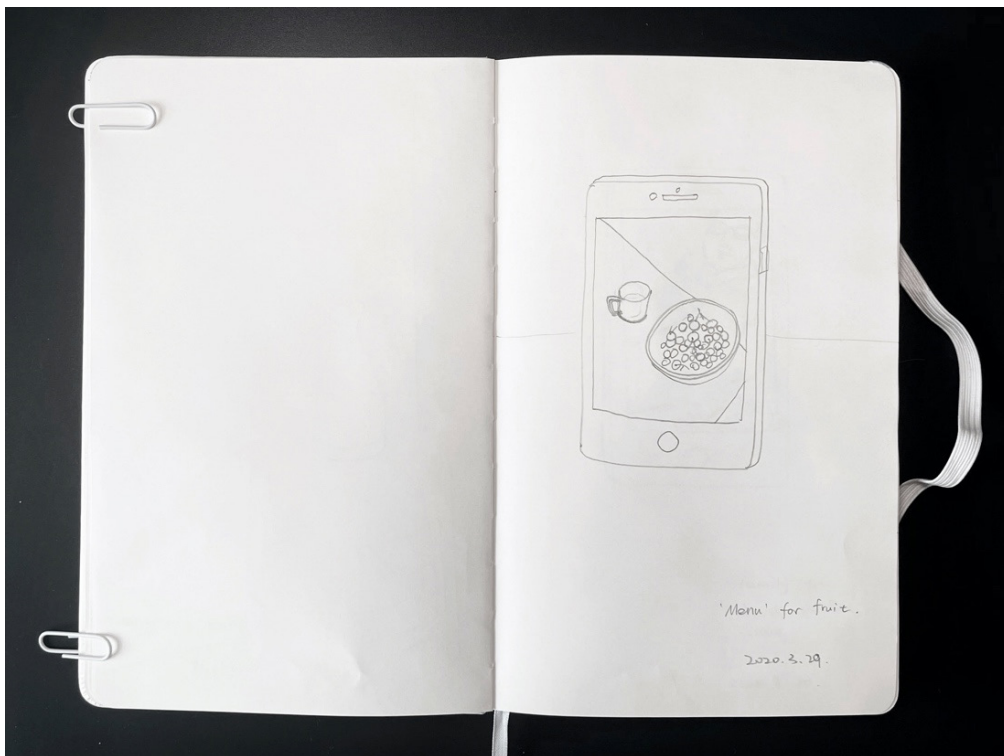


Fig. 3.33  
Lihong Liu, *Diary-China*, 2020



Fig. 3.34  
Lihong Liu, *Diary-China*, 2020



Fig. 3.35  
Lihong Liu, *Diary-China*, 2020



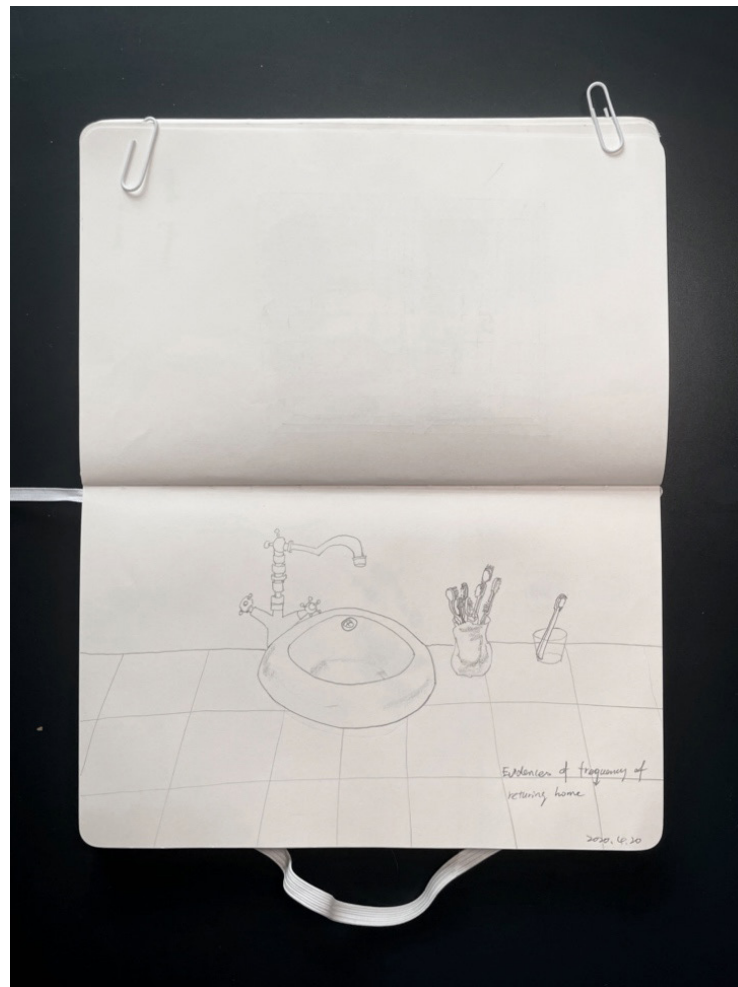


Fig. 3.36  
Lihong Liu, *Diary-China*, 2020

## Period 2: London Diary 2020

The second part of my diary recorded my quarantine after I came back to London from China on 4th September 2020. During this period, my quarantine came along with the experience of living in a totally new dwelling place. It also promotes the development of my research continuously, particularly in contrast to previous quarantine experiences in China. During this period, I felt more lonely and uncomfortable. This was more about psychological discomfort, a sense of being unhomely to the new environment. I constantly moved furniture and everyday objects around in search of a sense of comfort - a sense of familiarity to comfort my uneasiness. In my diary, I recorded this feeling through the positional relationships of various objects in my room, especially at night (see Fig. 3.37-38).



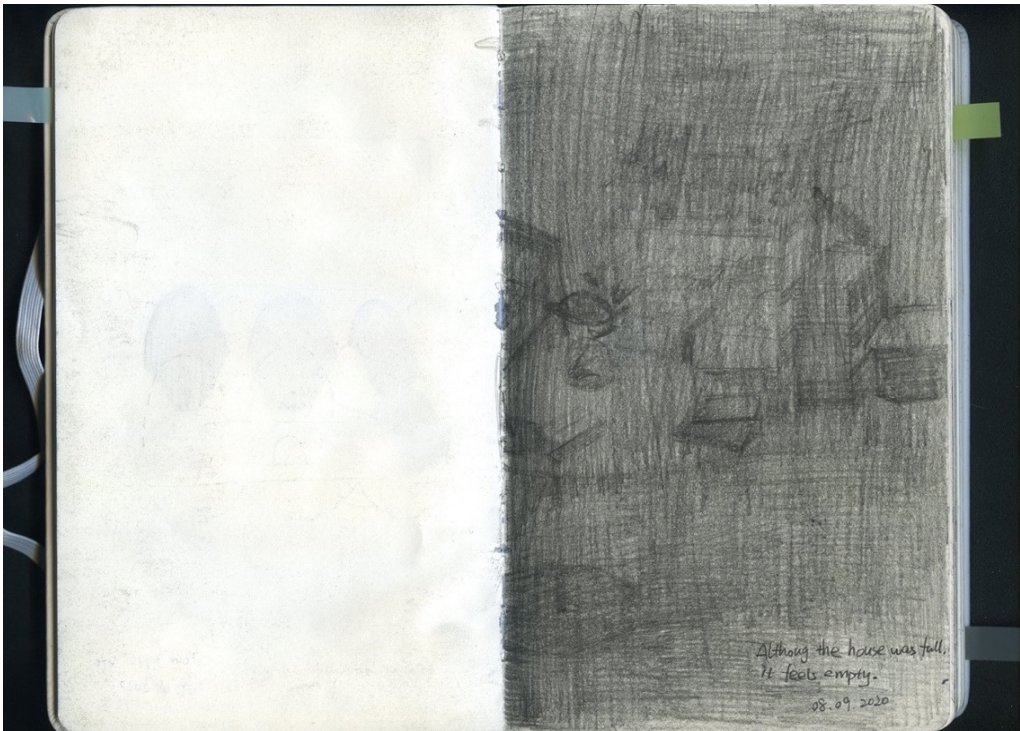


Fig. 3.37  
Lihong Liu, *Diary-London*, 2020

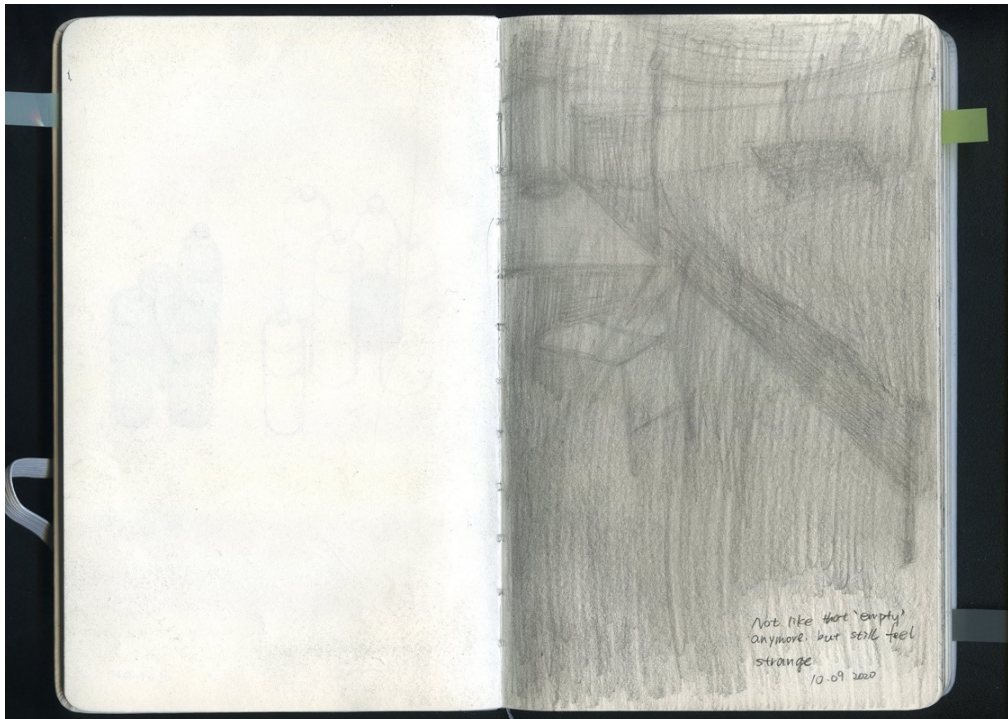


Fig. 3.38  
Lihong Liu, *Diary-London*, 2020

### Period 3: London Diary 2021

The third part of my diary was recorded from the period of being ready to move out and settle down in another new dwelling space. Here you can see some records of mental and physical experiences similar to those in the first part of my diary (Fig. 3.39). In addition, these contents ultimately promote the formation and development of Series III and Series IV.

As a record of observation and thinking, my diary not only documents my physical and mental changes in my dwelling spaces within specific periods, but also is used to look back repeatedly during the whole research process. It is a timely record of my thoughts in the process of inward examination. As a symbol of the index with a certain temporal attribute highlights the closeness between myself and my domestic life. It has been the inspiration for all of my practical projects. I collected a range of evidence for my search of my 'lares', as well as the source of 'the uncanny'. More importantly, a place for me to look for the meaning of the objects that I explore, as if these 'things'<sup>49</sup> may hold the key to my research. As a research method in this study, it is indispensable.

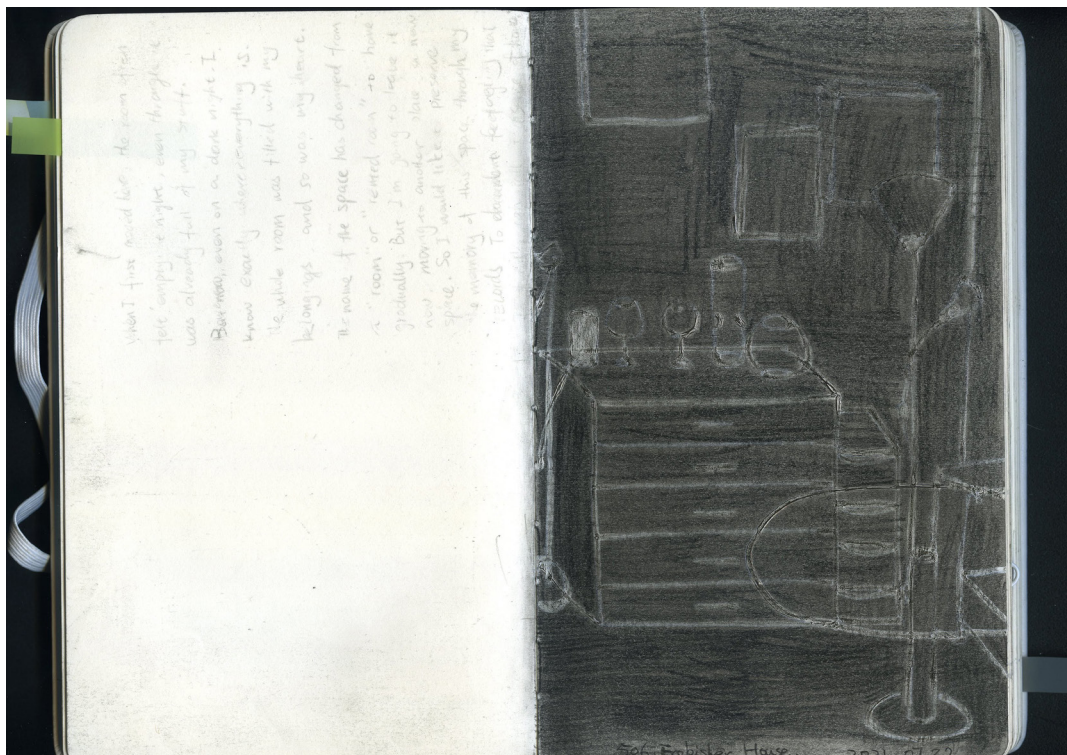


Fig. 3.39  
Lihong Liu, *Diary-London*, 2021

49 Refer to the 'lares' that I am searching for during the whole process of my research journey.  
146

## **Conclusion**



This research was informed by a sense of being away from home and exploring the material expressions of *déjà vu*/ the *unheimlich* associated with it through my practice. Being in a foreign country for a long time and having to move places to dwell periodically led me to start exploring this project quite incidentally. I am constantly exploring the characteristics of the dwelling space I can call 'home', and looking for the connections to the past, and even, to the very inside one (the 'lares') of me. Studying how those things with special meaning could provide me with a sense of familiarity, security, and a feeling of 'home'. By exploring the artistic expression of such feelings, emphasising the particular emotional connection between the past and present. Because of this, the exploration gradually leads to deeper thinking.

The project simply began to explore *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich*. By chance, it was colliding with the events (Covid-19<sup>50</sup> and the death of Queen Elizabeth II and her funeral<sup>51</sup>). During this research journey, looking at the emotion of *déjà vu* and the concept of the *unheimlich* through the personal experience of having lived through the Covid-19 pandemic, brought me into a very different set of relationships with the idea of home and memory. Meanwhile, it has become a way of understanding the impact of lockdown and the pandemic. The experience of Covid and lockdown gave me

50 In March 2020, the UK began its first lockdown period. Almost at the same time when I returned to China in March, I had a 21-day self-quarantine at my parents' home according to the regulations and requirements of the government. The intermittent lockdown that followed lasted almost a year around the world. This has brought great changes to our lives: lives which we used to be familiar with have been suddenly injected with the peculiar atmosphere of the uncanny. Most obviously, the homes we live in are given more function/ meaning during lockdown. It functions as a bedroom while acting as a studio and living room. It became the main office space. Meanwhile, because of the lockdown, the house where we dwell becomes a prison, where people are forced to stay. This is not to say that people are not comfortable living in that space, but there is a lack of freedom, people cannot go out free-willingly.

51 In addition to the epidemic era experienced during the study period, towards the end of this study, I had another uncanny experience. As an overseas student, I personally experienced a very important moment in British history -- the death of Queen Elizabeth II and her funeral. To me, this is a profoundly unreal scenario. But I did, in some way, participate and witness this history 'up close'.. The whole process and ceremony is consistent with the historical process of the death of a monarch, and it is like experiencing a documentary film. The streets were filled with people mourning the Queen's death. For a moment it was impossible to tell whether her death was real or not because it was so shocking and people got used to her presence, even though we seemed to forget that she was a very old woman. However, the flowers laid by people lying in silence around Buckingham Palace and the queues to the memorial that almost snarled traffic in central London are a constant reminder to me and the world of the Queen's farewell. But when it was over and I went back to my normal life, it was as if nothing had ever happened. It was like a peculiar dream. After all, everything about the royal family was still a long way from my life. I have to say that such experience helps me better understand the meaning of two terms of this study: '*déjà ve*' and 'the uncanny'. As research, regardless of the direction, it is to better understand life, feel life, and reflect on what is happening in life.

a personal imperative to help me explore and understand what home means to me, and what I personally have gone through, as well as to give me an opportunity to experience what these two terms mean more intuitively. The life we used to be familiar with becomes uncanny, and so does the home. This seems to echo the research question of this study: How contested notions of 'home' might be used to explore *déjà vu* (the *unheimlich*), and conversely, how can *déjà vu* (the *unheimlich*) be used to explore home? Therefore, the thesis, took on an urgency to help me to understand what I have actually experienced.

This practice-based research contributes new insights into both how my own work and the work of other selected artists in relationship to the *unheimlich*. My understanding has been gleaned from the literature of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich*, which I have then used to injects new ideas into the understanding of the selected artworks from a practitioners perspective. Through my visual works, I make a contribution to the psychological understanding of what we have been through during this process of lockdown(2020-2021). Therefore, this study not only provides a new perspective for the understanding and interpretation of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* from the perspective of art, but also enriches the interpretation of relevant works in the field of art. Moreover, in today's globalised society, it is relatively common to experience changes in the geographical location of the living environment in the face of the high-intensity trend of population mobility. Based on the personal experience of the researcher, this study provides a perspective of psychological analysis for the complex psychological state caused by the change of living environment or being far away from home. This study also provides knowledge of a global perspective to the understanding of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* that is furthermore used to explore the idea of home and the sense of displacement. More importantly, all these psychological changes have been recorded and presented by the researcher through practice. In particular, this research records the history of the special era of the COVID-19 pandemic accidentally experienced during the research journey through a visual diary, and presents the uncanny life of this special period through two-dimensional and three-dimensional art forms. Meanwhile, as a Chinese artist, I consciously applied the traditional Chinese painting techniques and traditional Chinese aesthetic thoughts throughout the artistic practice of my research. This I believe not only enriches the diversity of artistic expression, but also injects new ideas into the understanding of traditional Chinese art.

In the final part of the thesis, I will first re-elaborate on the understanding of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich*, as well as the concept of home and the relationship between the object and the owner

involved in this research. Then, it again summarises their relationship with this study and the understanding and interpretation of these two terms from the perspective of artistic practice and creation, especially in the process. Next, I will summarise the various aspects of the research question that I discussed in my practice. Finally, recommendations resulting from this study are presented.

### **My understanding of *déjà vu* / the *unheimlich* and the association with the idea of home**

As a theoretical part of the study, first, the concept of *déjà vu* in the field of psychology and phenomenology was considered in Chapter One. Among them, Sigmund Freud's influence on the idea of the uncanny was also studied in that section. With that comes the discussion of the idea of the home, its relationship to the house and the domestic objects. Among these relationships, the idea of the 'Transitional Object' proposed by Winnicott is discussed in detail. This concept became the focus of my exploration of the relationship between objects, possessor, and home, while also becoming an important factor in my choice of objects in the practice - Series I. It also acts as a source to explore how to build a sense of belonging and familiarity in a new environment, or it can be said as how to use the old/familiar object to construct a familiar sense of home in a new place.

*Déjà vu* is a collective impression that might involve multiple sensory aspects at the same time, and emphasises a sense of inexplicable familiarity. At the moment we experience *déjà vu*, our brain goes through a series of matching processes with similar features or elements in our memory to gain familiarity, but one has no clear memory of where that familiarity came from. Among the aspects of memory interpretation, Brown's explanation from the perspective of 'gestalt familiarity' has been experimentally tested later by researchers, thus, as evidence that the experience of *déjà vu* can be created consciously. It also provides a feasible strategy to evoke a *déjà vu* experience for the audience in the creation of art. In my later practice, the way of 'Gestalt familiarity' is more or less used for reference to arousing the audience's sense of familiarity with a certain object or a configuration of the room. In addition, in the analysis of *déjà vu* experience, the Freudian theory of 'The Uncanny'(1919) is considered by scholars as the informal description and definition of one aspect of the *déjà vu*.

Freud's (1919) essay on "The Uncanny" is a key text in this research. In the discussion of this concept, Jentsch first suggested that in this state of feeling, the subject may feel unfamiliar and psychologically uncertain. On this basis, Freud argued that the uncanny is related to something



that is old and once very familiar, connected to some kind of unease emotionally. In addition, he also re-emphasised the psychological uncertainty of the uncanny in his essay. Meanwhile, he stated that if one experiences a series of repetitions of the same thing or experiences the same trait repeatedly (Freud related such 'repetitions' to the idea of 'double', as well as the concept of '*doppelgänger*') could increase his or her sense of psychological uncertainty and a sense of unease. Freud's understanding of the concept was widely appreciated. Later, Royle further developed Freud's idea, stating that the uncanny is a peculiar mixture of familiarity and strangeness. Consequently, "The Uncanny" can be regarded as a description of a specific aspect of *déjà vu*, in which a person feels both a very familiar impression and an undetermined feeling. The important aspect is that the source of that familiarity is 'something' that was known before, and was once very familiar. This leads to the conclusion that both *déjà vu* and the uncanny trigger uneasy emotional responses. It can create a feeling of ambivalence, placing one in overwhelming familiarity, as if it had been experienced before.

The discussion of these two terms in the concept of home mainly revolves around those 'things'<sup>52</sup> that are rooted in the heart. Exploring the concept of 'home', its particularity, and the relationship between the objects placed inside its space and us is to find this 'root'. Particularly, to explore the sources of familiarity with home. Therefore, the concept of 'Transitional Objects' is included in this section for a separate discussion. It emphasises the special relationship between the object and the referred person, has a high emotional value, as a guarantee of security, and can make people feel homely (*Heimlich*) in a state of unease. Thus, transitional objects can be used as a sense of continuity or a connection to maintain a certain 'smell', or as a symbol of home. Especially for those experiencing displacement, it is a key item in finding or re-establishing a familiar sense of home.

Based on the understanding of these literatures, the experience referred to by *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* in my research is a comprehensive experience with a strong sense of familiarity, of which may exist multiple aspects of sensorial familiarity simultaneously. At the same time, the individual will have some doubts about the strange feeling accompanying the experience. The experience I was exploring was connected to past experiences, or to thoughts of 'home' that had an important place deep down in my mind, unconsciously. This research explores the category of the concept of 'home' with the individual as the research object. It contains the understanding of the idea of 'home', the living space, and the content of 'family' related memories.

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52 Here refer to 'something' that feels very familiar but is easy to neglect in life.

## The understanding of *déjà vu* / the *unheimlich* in case studies

In terms of case studies, the hybridisation of familiarity and unfamiliarity brought by works both in Whiteread's *House* and Suh's *Rubbing* project embody uncanny qualities. They both deal with the exploration of living space, and in their creative process show an incredibly close connection to the concept of what Freud called the idea of 'double' (/ the *doppelgänger*). The issue of loss discussed in their works further enhances a sense of uncanny and reminds the viewer of the existence of the absent through the creation itself as an uncanny continuity. Moreover, they relate the association of the concept of death and the idea of 'ghostly' in a certain manner deepening the sense of uncanny in their works. Whiteread's works studied in this paper do not involve the personal experience of the artist. She tries to arouse the public's resonance with the memory of living in a dwelling space and the idea of home by revealing the traces of other people's lives. Whereas, Suh's works show his own experience of displacement, with a very strong sense of personal identity and emotion. The research on their works, whether it is in the process of making, or the concept involved in the discussion of two terms stimulates the viewer to pay more attention to 'something' that feels very familiar but is easy to neglect in life. Thinking about the emotional changes after encountering the 'familiar' becomes 'unfamiliar', and the content of the memory of the home is discussed via the issue of presence and absence. Therefore, through these 'things'<sup>53</sup> that we may be 'very familiar' to deepen the discussion of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* in artistic creation. At the same time, this exploration constantly influences my decision to express these ideas in practice, both in making and in concept interpretation.

For the study on Morandi's etchings and Coldwell's prints, the discussion in this part mainly focuses on the visual effects of the works they create. Unlike Whiteread and Suh, these two artists do not deal with a discussion about personal living space and the concept of 'home'. Instead, their work offers a sense of uncertainty through the exploration of specific everyday objects, and more importantly it arouses an impression of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich*. While their works visually test the audience's ability to read and recognise (which gives the audience a sense of uncertainty), when the viewer identifies the object a sense of familiarity pervades immediately, and this sets the audience in-between the sense of familiar and unfamiliar. More importantly, a sense of uncanniness could also be found in the ambiguity of their depicted content. For Morandi, the still life he pays attention to involves the similarity of the layout of the city he lives in, imperceptibly diffusing a sense of famili-

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53 Here refer to 'something' that feels very familiar but is easy to neglect in life.

arity, as if the horizon of the city he lives in is reflected through the landscape. For Coldwell, the work is site-responsive. Such kind of uncertainty more implies the discussion of a historical moment of a certain figure through a specific object, and refers to an absence of an uncertain past.

Therefore, among the three case studies included in this study, the first two injected new insights into the understanding of the work from the work itself and the concept of living space/home, as well as the concepts of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* involved in the creation of the work. This part of the discussion focuses on a strong sense of familiarity in their works, which is closely related to the original of which they reproduced and the idea of 'double'. While the discussion about Morandi and Coldwell's works is also related to the sense of familiarity provided by the objects created for the audience, this sense of familiarity is more accompanied by a sense of uncertainty (both from the visual effect or to the content it could refer to). This emphasises the connection between the object of their attention to a particular place. (For Morandi, is about the connotation between his still life prints and the city he lives in -Bologna; for Coldwell, it refers to a particular moment of history in the space where his subject once lived). The discussion about *déjà vu* and the concepts of the uncanny hidden in these works, to a greater or lesser extent, guided and deepened my interpretation of these two terms in my practice.

### **Summary of my practice**

This study covers a total of four complete practice-based series of works, and one visual diary that recorded my experience of lockdown in China and the experiences of moving after I back to London in both 2021 and 2022. Each series explores different sub-questions of this research, they are interlinked, and thus drive response to the main question of the study. In my attempt to elicit an effect of the uncanny through my work, I begin by adopting the familiar image of domestic objects and the concept of 'home'. This will be my main research and practice direction of *déjà vu* and the uncanny in the field of fine art.

In Series I, I explored the emotional connection between everyday objects and their occupants. The image of the toothbrush, the empty bottles in the bathroom, and a set of picture frames were used as the subject did the creation separately. The concept of 'Transitional Object' mentioned in Chapter One was discussed here again as a reference to such a relationship. In this series, a single object is taken as the research object and presented in silhouette. This not only defamiliarised

the image of the familiar object, but also began the visual experiment regarding the feeling of uncertainty. Meanwhile, it explored the issue of absence and presence of the occupant (me) who is represented by the object. I practice with special traditional Chinese painting methods and the material to imply my personal identity and integrate cultural characteristics into the research, which is also a reflection of the self-exploration here. Therefore, the purpose of this discussion is to explore the deep relationship between the object and the owner (myself), and the family. In preparation for the subsequent exploration of rebuilding the sense of home in a new dwelling environment, as well as exploring the sources of *déjà vu* and the uncanny.

Series II, continues the focus on individual objects as in Series I, but focuses on the discussion of the special significance of the picture frame. A photo serves as a record of a precious moment and shares an indexical relationship with the user, yet the frame that holds the photo carries this suggestive meaning to a certain extent. This series further explored the source of 'familiarity' and demonstrated its important role as a continuation to keep such a sense of familiarity. The difference is that the exploration of this practice extended to the field of sculpture. By discussing the indexical relationship between the making process of casting and the original object, the discussion was also extended to the issue of absence and presence, and involved the discussion about the idea of 'double' / *doppelgänger* analysed in Chapter One. As the specific issues discussed were explored before the practice, the use of materials has also been thoroughly considered. By using both opaque and semi-translucent materials, the different states that exist in the absence and presence respectively were emphasised. This is closer to a further response to the main research questions.

Series III returns to the two-dimensional expression but expands the research object to the scope of a room (my bedroom), interpreting the feeling of displacement. It contains two different states: moving into a new home and moving away from there, which thus illustrates the feeling of seeking familiarity in an unfamiliar environment and the feeling of strangeness after the familiar environment changes respectively. They are entitled *The Darkness* and *The Emptiness*, respectively. In addition, in exploring *déjà vu* and the uncanny, this series began to involve references to "gestalt familiarity" mentioned in the first chapter formally, trying to find a familiar impression in an unfamiliar space through an alike configuration in a certain way. For the embodiment of this concept, the expression in the work is to start paying attention to the layout of the whole space, or the configuration of various objects (or furniture) in a corner of the room. Trying to reproduce this configuration in the way of drawing to evoke the resonance of an image of a familiar scene of a dwelling space.

Foreshadowing a sense of familiarity for the viewer. The main purpose of the series is to depict a sense of psychological uncertainty, and as a response to the issue of displacement. The works increase the difficulty of visual identification for the image of domestic objects to the viewer through the darkness drawn by pencil and the almost completely blank painting effect. The content cannot be clearly recognised at a distance. These visually illegible images add a great deal of uncertainty to the viewer. It reduces the familiarity of the image of everyday objects and domestic life scenes that could be provided to the public. Consequently, this series is an important direction to promote the study of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* through the interpretation of a sense of uncertainty. These works also laid a vital foundation for the final practice-based works.

The last section of the practice of the research, Series IV involves a comprehensive discussion of the various research sub-questions, and responds to the main central question. In this practice, I recreated my bedroom. The furniture and the selected particular everyday objects were reproduced life-size in a three-dimensional way, and displayed in the form of an installation. The audience was tested for the feeling of 'uncertainty' more intuitively which has been discussed before, but here such feeling can be perceived both physically and mentally. That was the reason and necessity for making this work. For the expression of this feeling, the purpose is to create visual obstacles for the audience by unifying the background of the display space and the colour of the image being produced. This effect was determined based on visual testing in the previous series. The test proved successful based on the reaction of the audience at the exhibition. In terms of production, since the objects in the original space are reproduced almost one-to-one size and placed in almost the exact same layout as my bedroom, the idea of 'double' /*doppelgänger*, the indexical relationship with the original (not only to the object, but even the space), the idea of absence and presence, and even the memory were put into discussion again. Further, by reproducing the real spatial configuration and following the rule of "Gestalt Familiarity", the probability of inducing *déjà vu* or capturing the sense of strange familiarity of the audience is consciously expanded. Like Alice in Wonderland, the audience switches back and forth between a state of reality and fiction, presence and absence, familiarity and strangeness, and of course, homely and unhomely.

Series V is my drawing diary. It is an important research method in my practice. The idea of the diary is the thoughts to be read in the future in order to reflect back, acts as an archive that is used to revisit and rethink how to respond to research questions. Time is actually embedded within the diary. In terms of content, it not only depicts the images of the objects observed, but also records the



physical experience of the space and the changes of my inner state. Therefore, recording a diary for a specific period of time is one of the indispensable research methods in my research process and become an important source of inspiration for my practice. All the traces of the ideas of the previous four practices can be found here in my diary. Of course, it can be seen as an independent project of my practice which holds a crucial role in this research journey as the first-hand resource to all my later creations.

Finally, all five series of works were exhibited in the exhibition "Secret *Heim*" in 2022, which I participated in curating and was in line with my research direction. For this exhibition, it was not enough to highlight and show my ideas, it is more important to test them. To examine whether the creation of images of everyday objects, furniture, and living spaces can be perceived and generate both familiar and unfamiliar feelings. Therefore, during the exhibition, reviews of the audience about the works were mainly obtained through informal conversation. The valuable feedback was added through the public response to further develop the research. It highlights the idea of taking the familiar or homely objects of life as the main objects of discussion, and transforming these images into unfamiliar or unhomely ones. The process of exploring the deep meaning between family space, objects, and myself, as well as studying the meaning of home is actually the process of finding the so-called 'thing', which is a thing that we feel 'long known and once very familiar'.

The main focus of this research deals with *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* in terms of the content and kind of unsettling. Tracing the uncanny is an ordinary experience, while mine, applied a much more specific perspective of familiar, how familiar might be made unfamiliar because of the context or situation. I am not representing the state of uncanniness but representing the ordinary object and 'something' about the content of that. Namely, it involves 'something' familiar or homely in life, but transformed into 'something' unfamiliar or unhomely. Besides, I have been engaged in the process of making, by discussing the indexical relationship between the reproduced one and the original to study these two terms in another way.

## Future research

The knowledge gained from this research is through a combination of theory and practice. On the one hand, this research provides a reference from psychoanalysis to those who experience displacement and when they encounter a peculiar sense of familiarity, as they are in a new dwelling place to experience the kind of weird strangeness and trying to build their own sense of belonging there, or when they experience a kind of complex emotions of a feeling of absence of familiarity and security of home. On the other hand, with my own experience, perceptions, and understanding as the background, this research also provides a unique way for art creation to interpret such a complex psychological state. While exploring *déjà vu* the *unheimlich* under the theme of home (or vice versa), it also records the history and, in a certain way, shows the uncanny lives of this extraordinary time. This research has indeed interrogated the idea of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* that has value for academics within a broad range of disciplines. It not only provides many insights for future research, but also presents and demonstrates many ideas and possibilities that can be developed through further investigation. In addition, this study provides an opportunity to look inward, which has also been forced to amplify the need for such an internal review in the particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Searching for, recording, and dissecting 'something' like 'roots' while exploring the self. Which is an important link to both home and family that is unconsciously rooted deep inside from when I was a baby. Therefore, it also provides a place for scholars and audiences to examine the issue and reflect on themselves. Further, the study has enriched the interpretation of this theme in different cultural contexts in the field of artistic creation, which provides knowledge to bring a global perspective to the understanding of *déjà vu* and the *unheimlich* that used to explore the idea of home and the sense of displacement.

My primary suggestion for further research is to continue to record my experiences in the form of a diary. Through such a visual form, focus on the exploration of the physical and psychological changes of leaving and reconstruction, in order to better understand the questions explored in this study and explore diverse artistic language of expression. The practice of this study evolved from a two-dimensional level to expression in three-dimensional form has provided the basis for exploring the possibilities of artistic expression. In the future, it is possible to try on making site-specific works as a new breakthrough in my research to find new sparks. At the same time, the study of artists' works that are relevant to this research in Case Studies will continue to track, whether in the content or art expression. I will continue to maintain an open vision to search and explore relevant

artworks, so as to enrich my research content and background, and further improve my research framework. Simultaneously, keeping constant attention to the new thinking in the two terms as they are the core of this research, to provide a new way of understanding and thinking for comprehending the world's new situation, while also bringing this new thinking into the internal and offering more possibilities for injecting new blood into the research.

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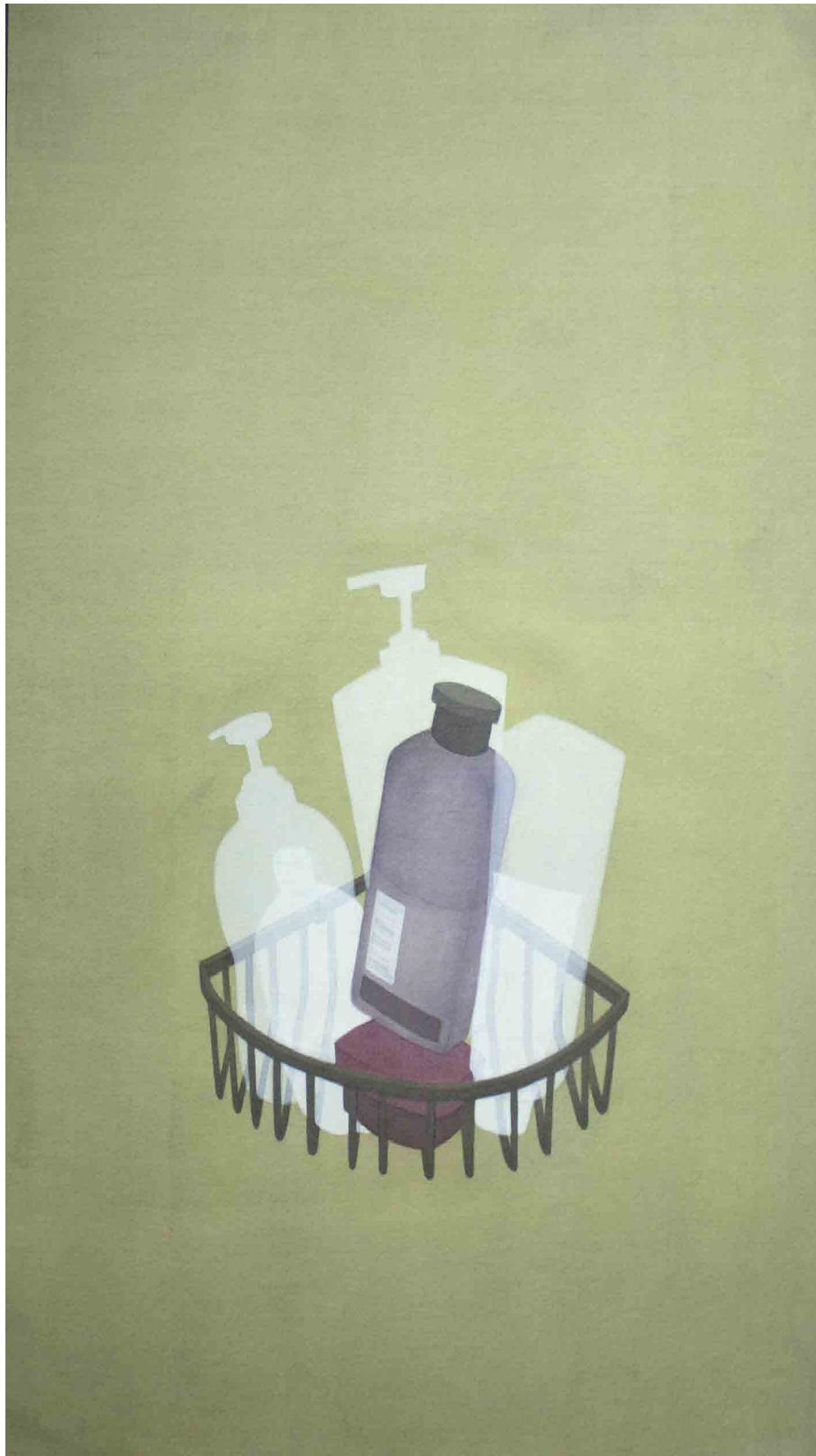
Zhao Ji, (Song Dynasty) *Eyes Embroidered with Plums*. [Painting] Available at: <http://www.chinaonlinemuseum.com/painting-birds-zhao-ji-2.php> (Accessed: 13. Jan. 2021).

APPENDIX 1 *The Ghosts series*



Lihong Liu, *The Ghosts of Toothbrush*, 2020

Chinese pigment on silk  
30 x 30cm



Lihong, Liu, *The Ghosts of Bottles*, 2020

Chinese pigment on silk  
52x 32cm



Lihong Liu, *The Ghosts of Photos*, 2020

Drawing on silk  
25x 30cm



Lihong Liu, *The Ghosts of Keys*, 2020

Painting on silk  
30 x 30cm



APPENDIX 2: *Untitled (photo frames)*



Lihong Liu, *Untitled (photo frames)*, 2020

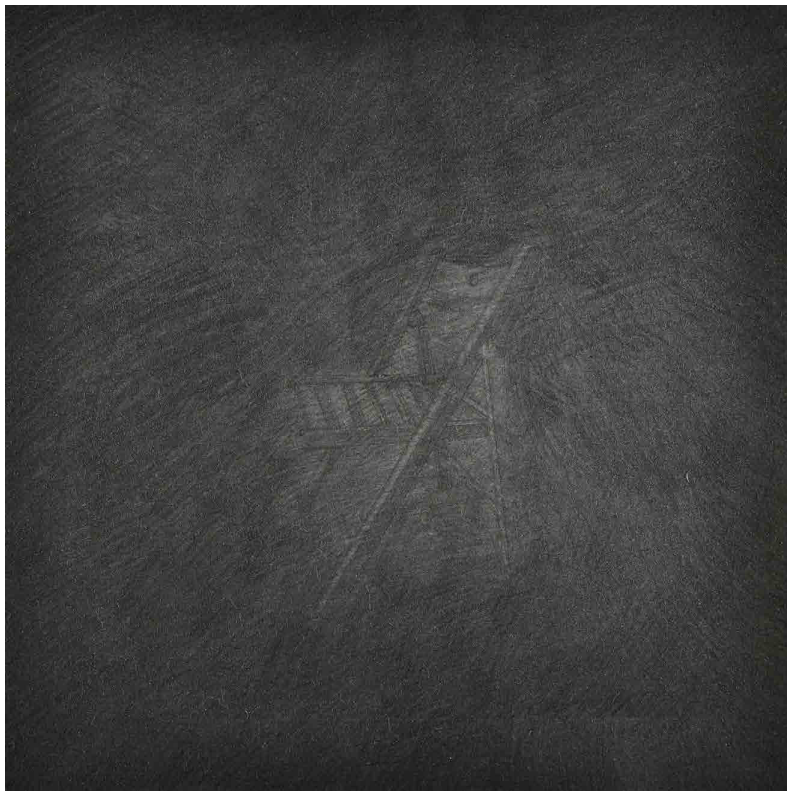
Size variable,  
Plaster, glasswax



APPENDIX 3: *The Darkness series*



Lihong Liu, *The Darkness series 0*, 2020, 73 x48 cm Pencil drawing on paper

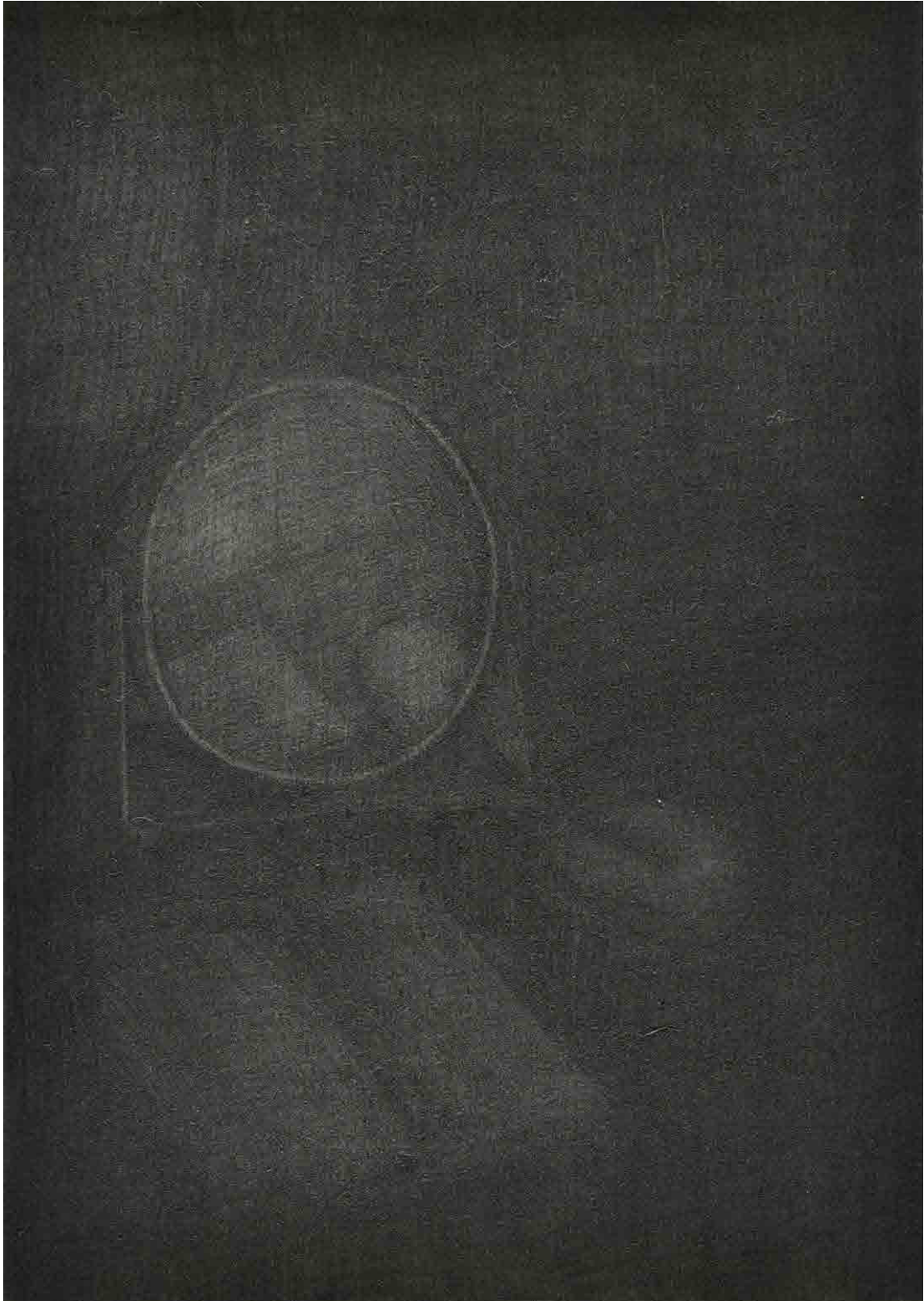


Lihong Liu, *The Darkness I*, 2020, 45 x45 cm Pencil drawing on paper



Lihong Liu, *The Darkness II*, 2020-2021, 76 x121.5 cm, Pencil drawing on paper



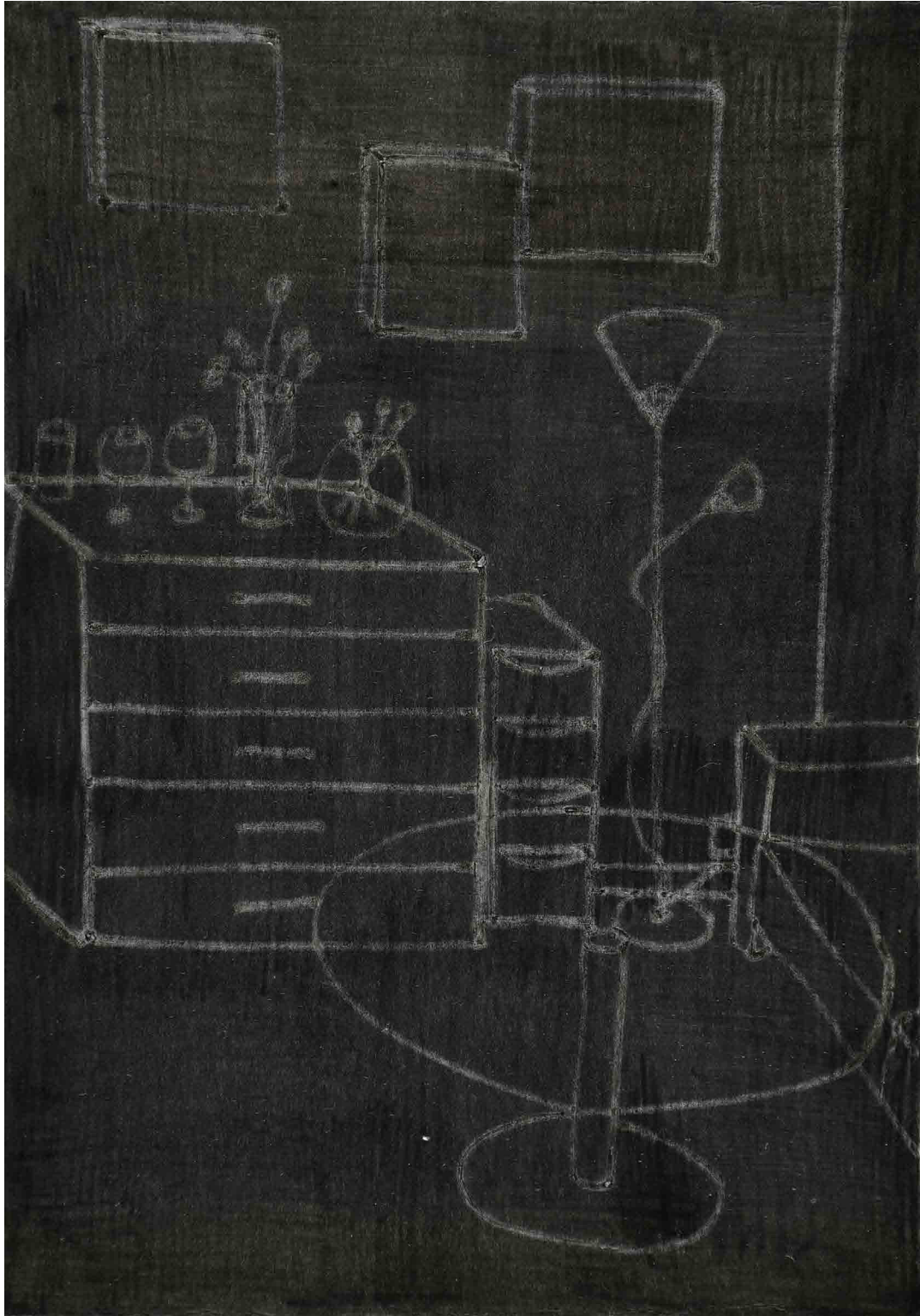


Lihong Liu, *The Darkness series III*, 2020

50 x 35.5 cm  
Pencil drawing on paper



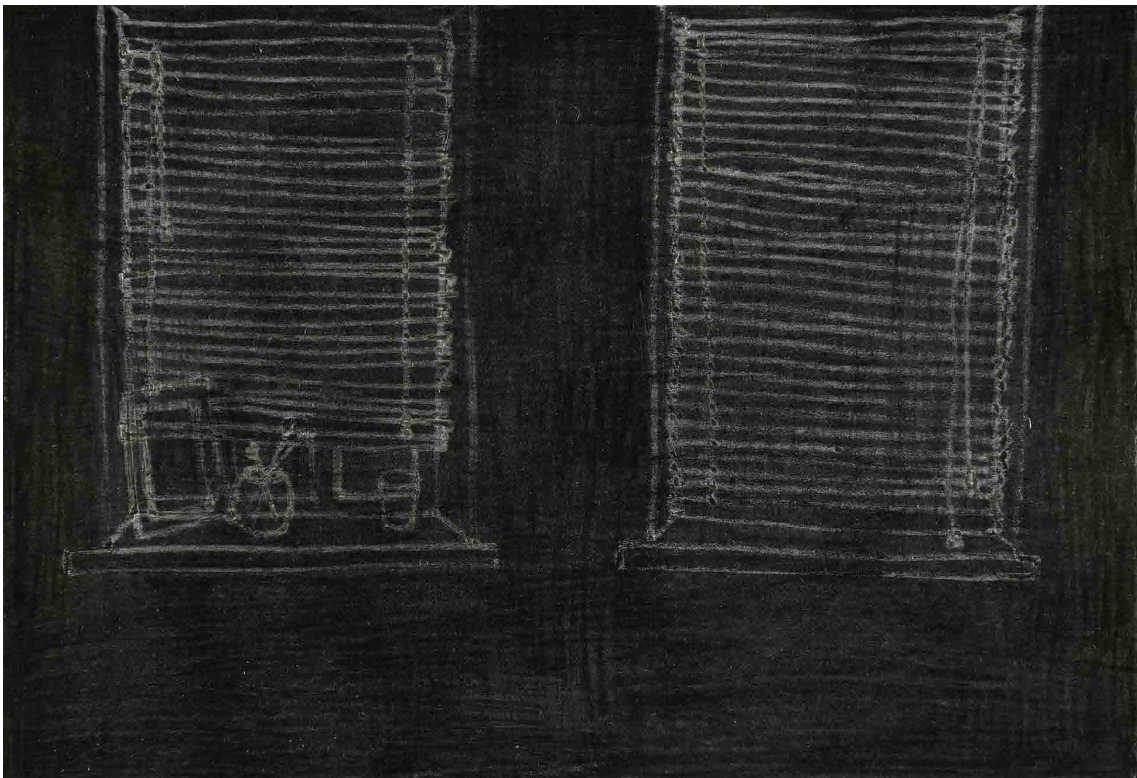
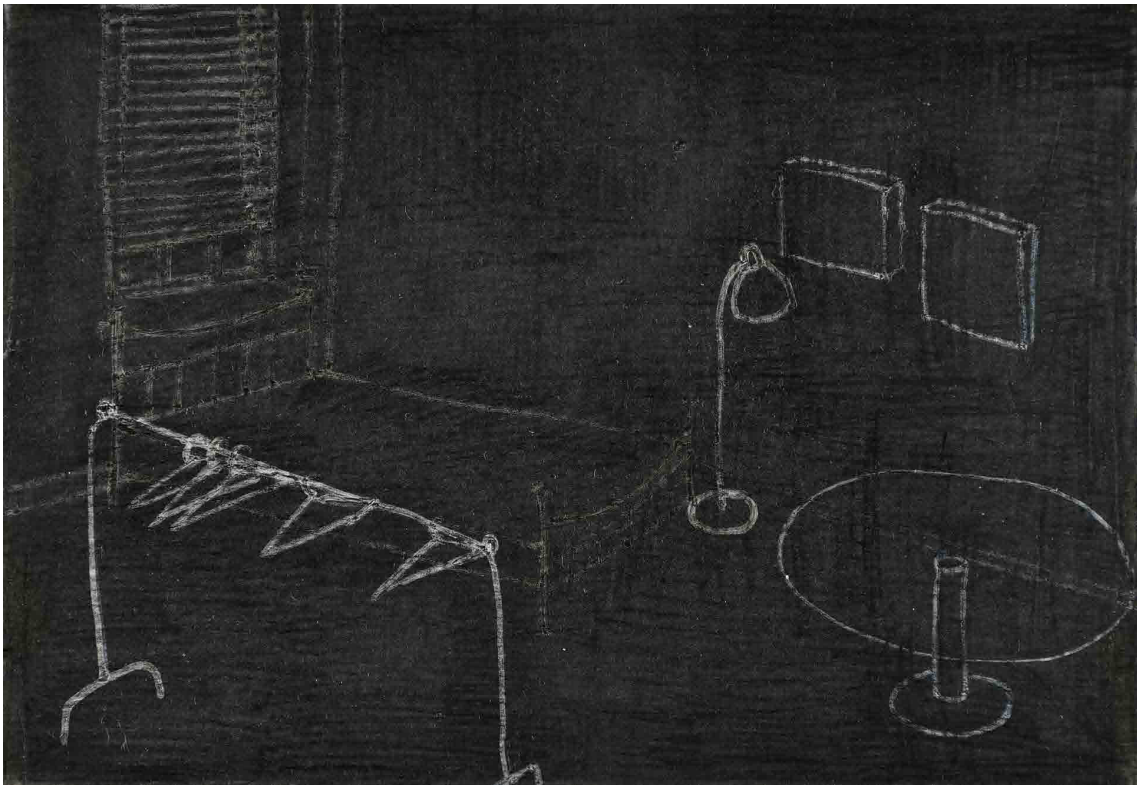
Lihong Liu, *The Darkness IV*, 2020, 51 x38.5 cm, Pencil and correct fluid drawing on paper



Lihong Liu, *The Darkness series V*, 2021

18 x25 cm Pencil and correct fluid drawing on paper



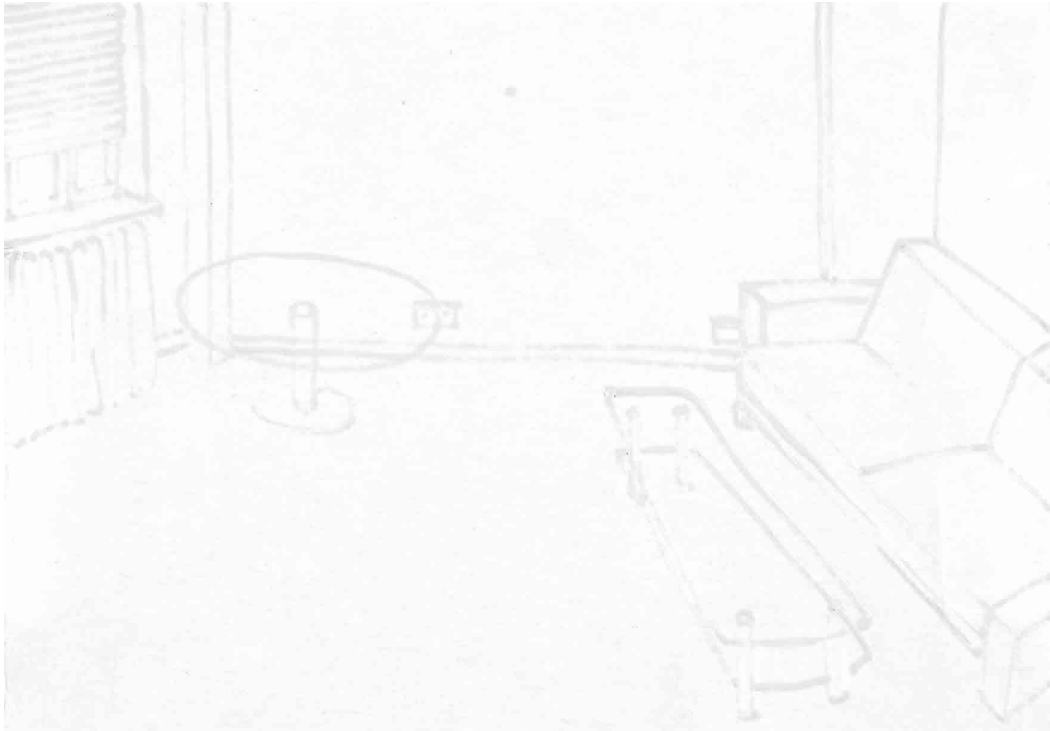


Lihong Liu, *The Darkness series VI-VII*, 2021

18 x25 cm, 18 x25 cm

Pencil and correct fluid drawing on paper

**APPENDIX 4: *The Emptiness series***



Lihong Liu, *The Emptiness series I*, 2021, 18 x25 cm, Correct fluid drawing on paper

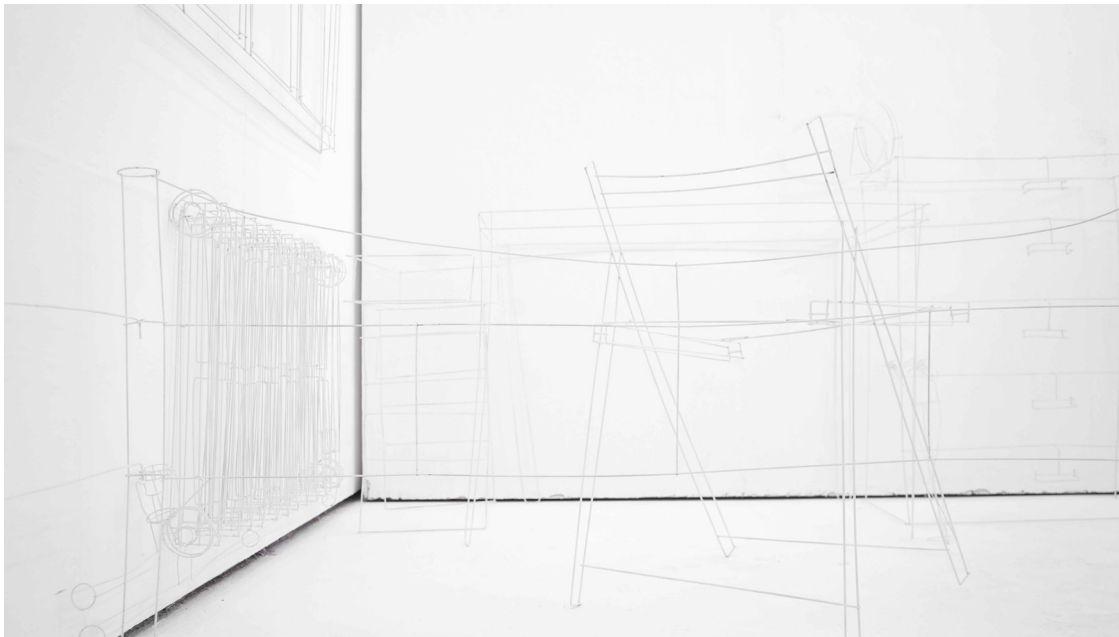


Lihong Liu, *The Emptiness series II*, 2021, 18 x25 cm, Correct fluid drawing on paper



Lihong Liu, *The Emptiness series III*, 2021, 18 x25 cm, Correct fluid drawing on paper

**APPENDIX 5: *Phantom Project***

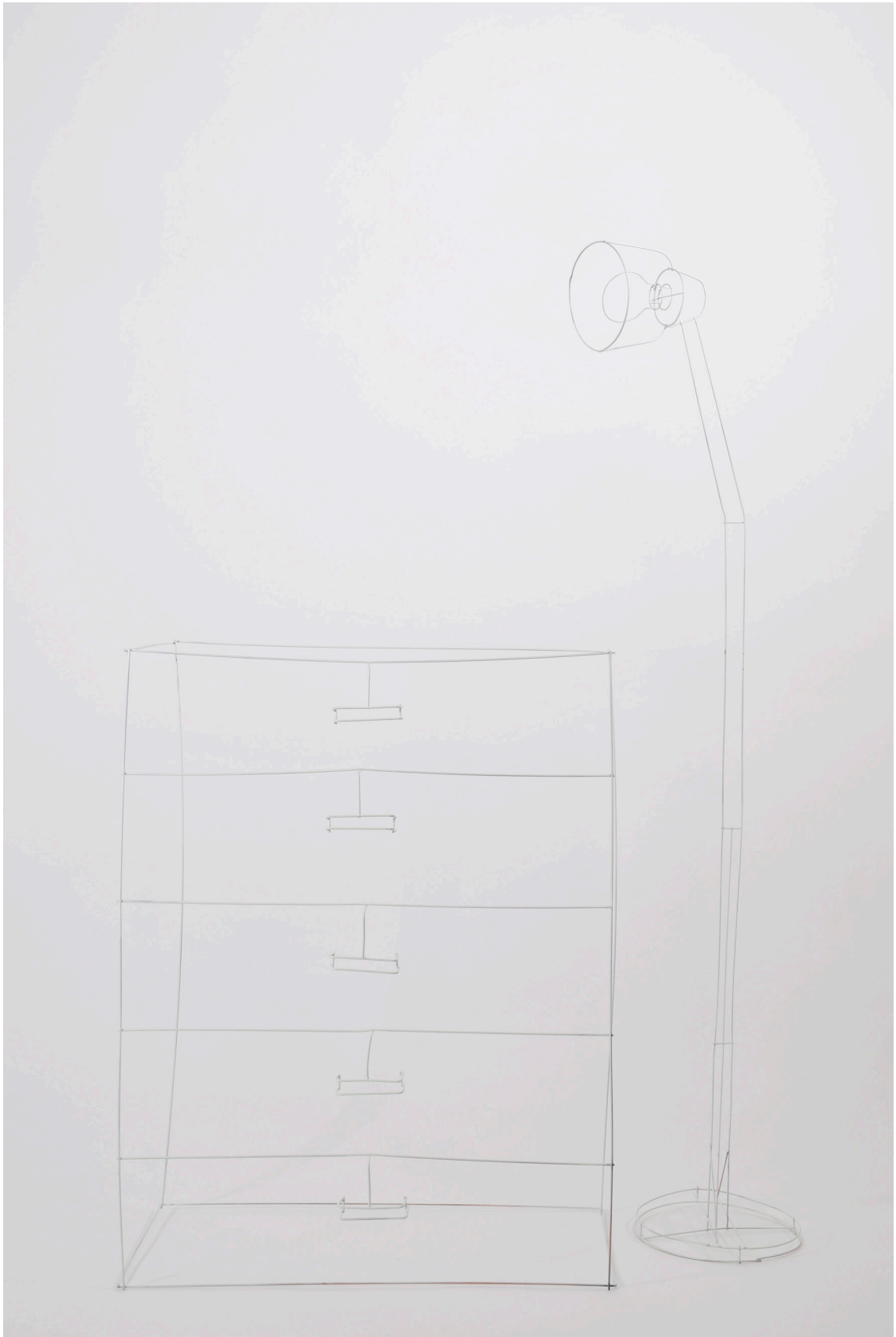


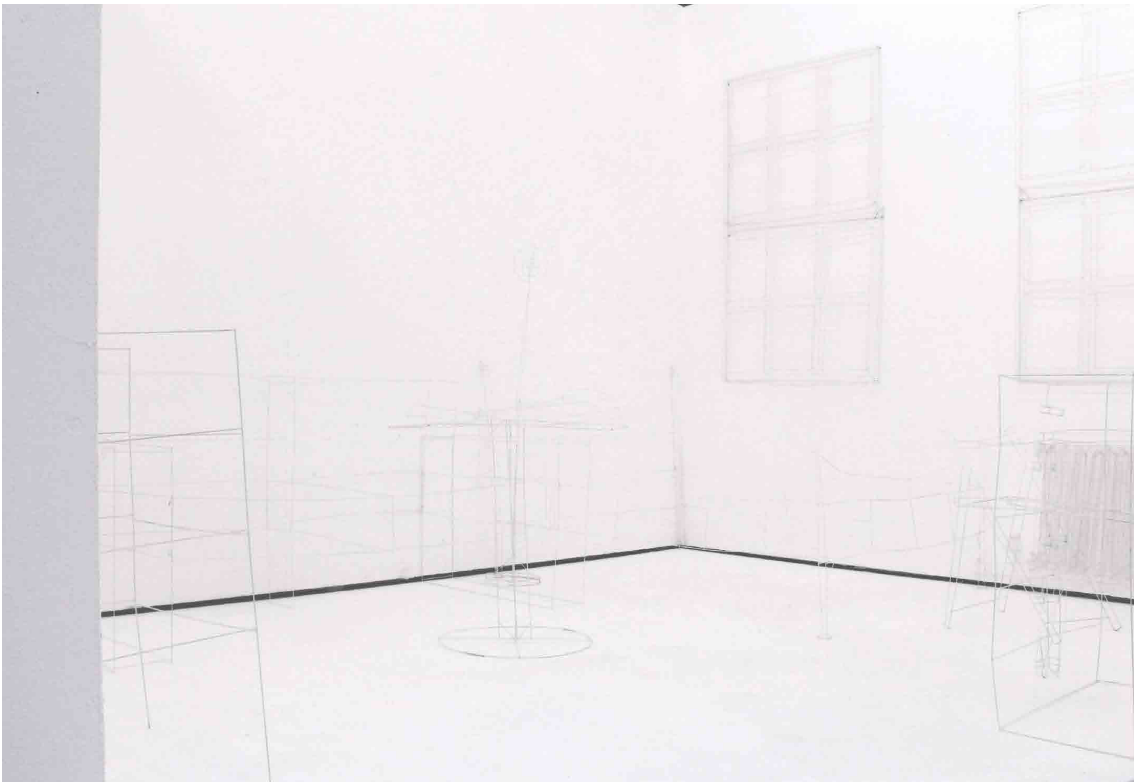
Lihong Liu, *Phantom Project: My Bedroom, Flat 506, Frobisher House, Dolphin Square, London, UK, SW1V 3LL.*  
2022

Size variable  
Wire, white spray paint

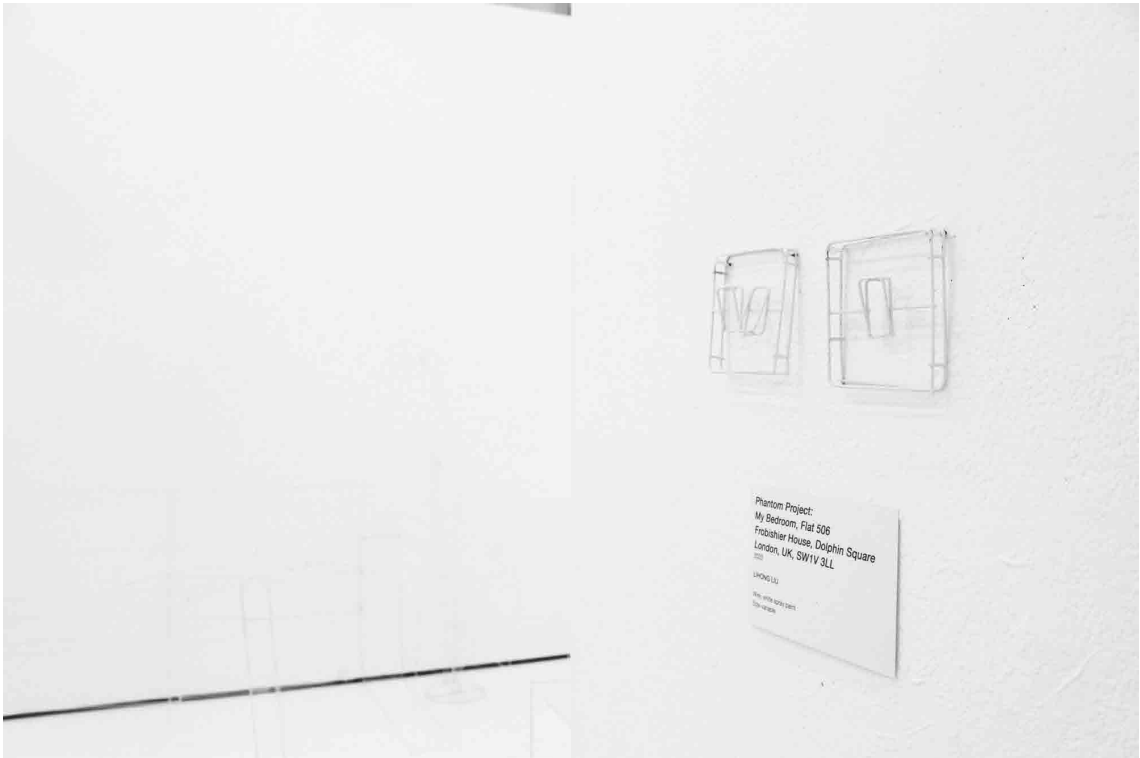






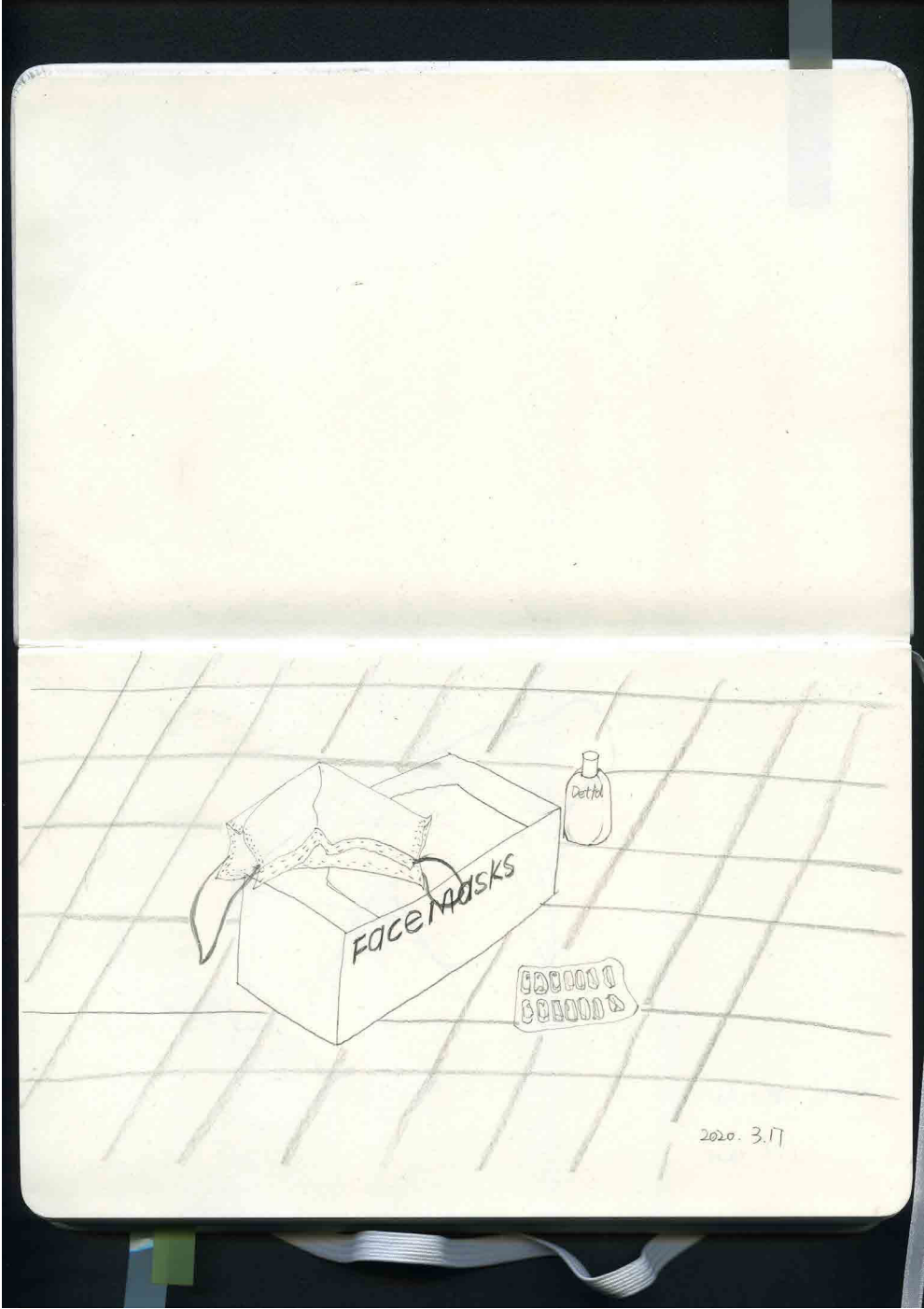




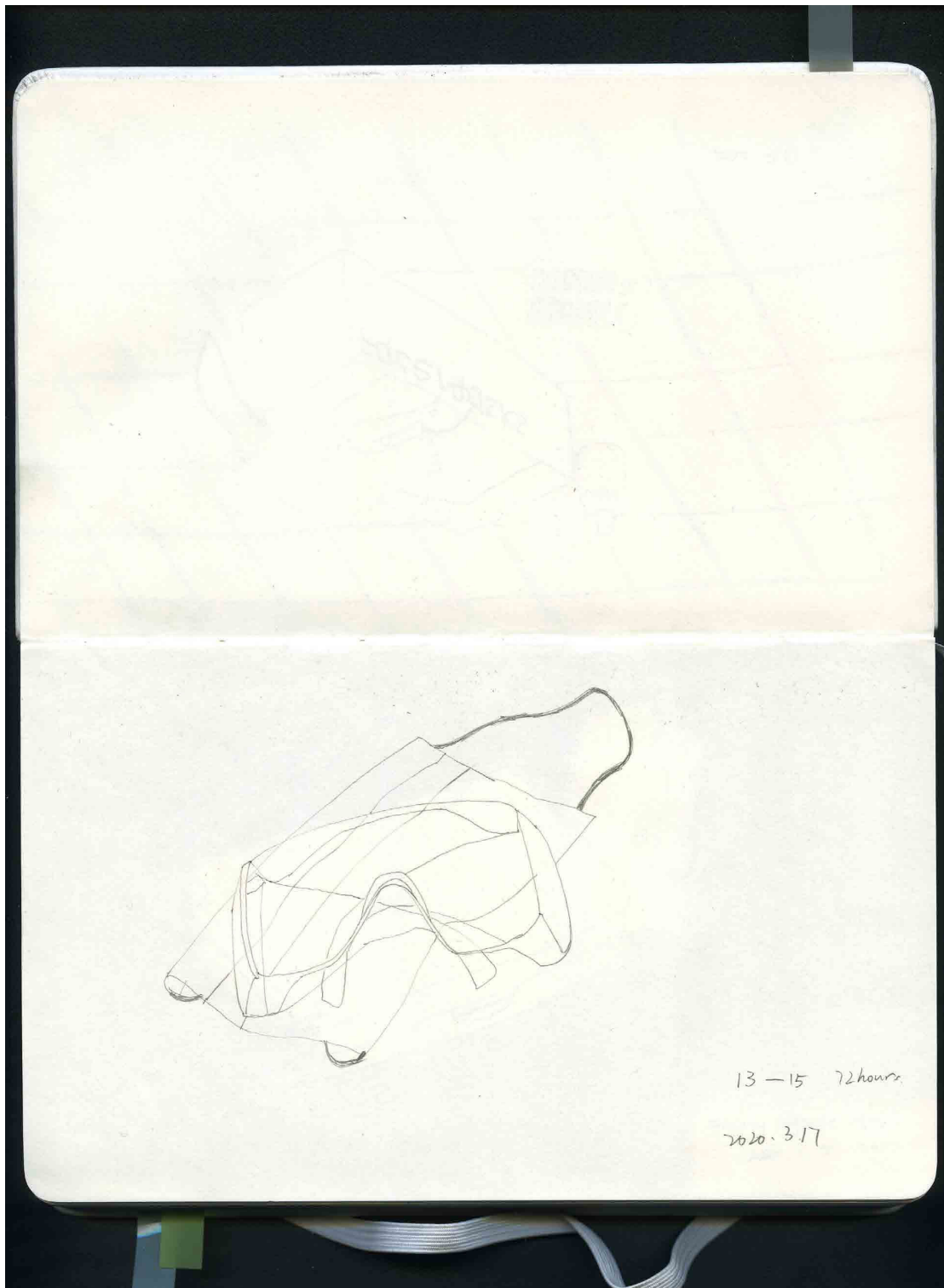


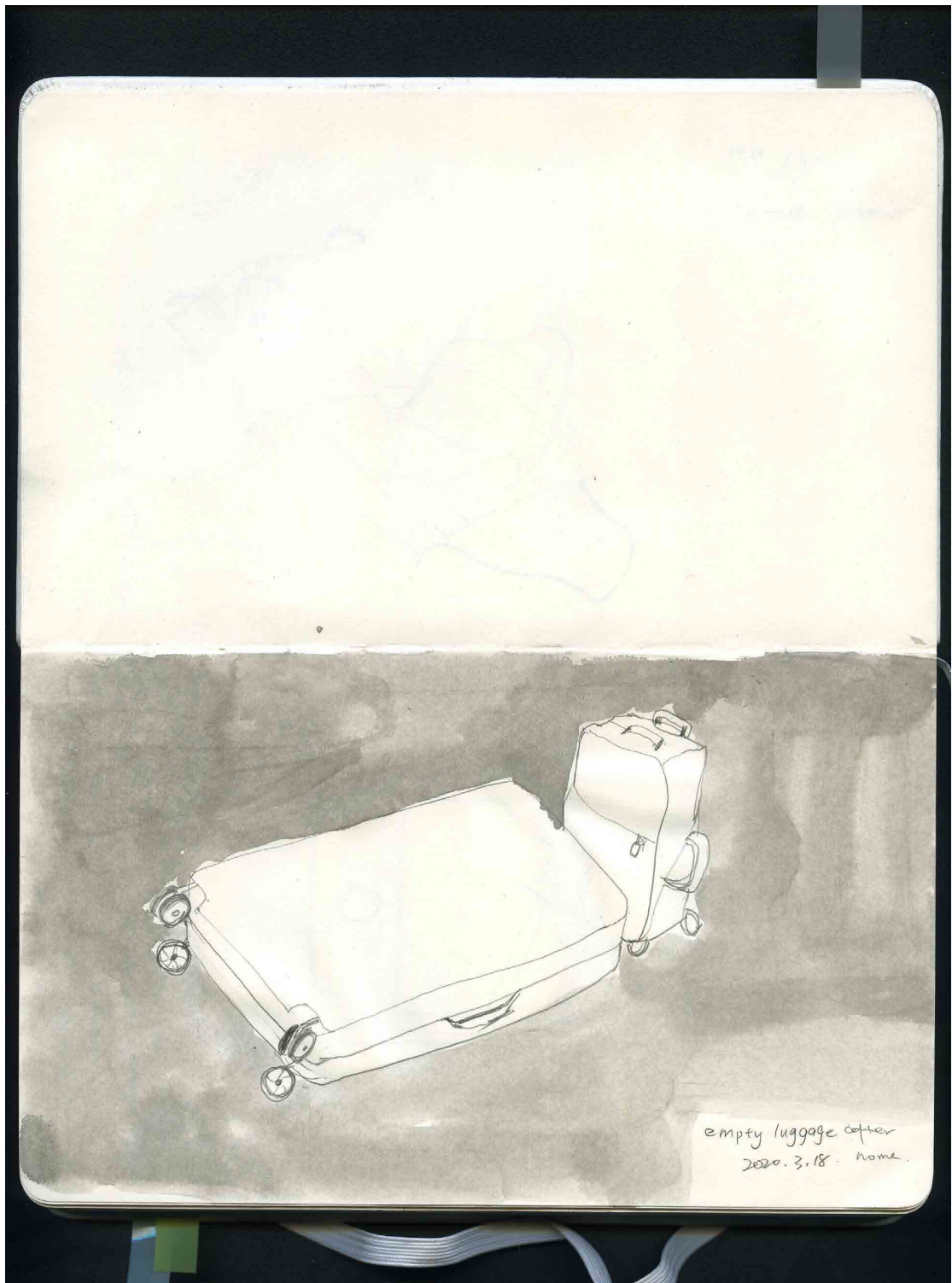
APPENDIX 6: *Diary*

*Diary - China, 2020*

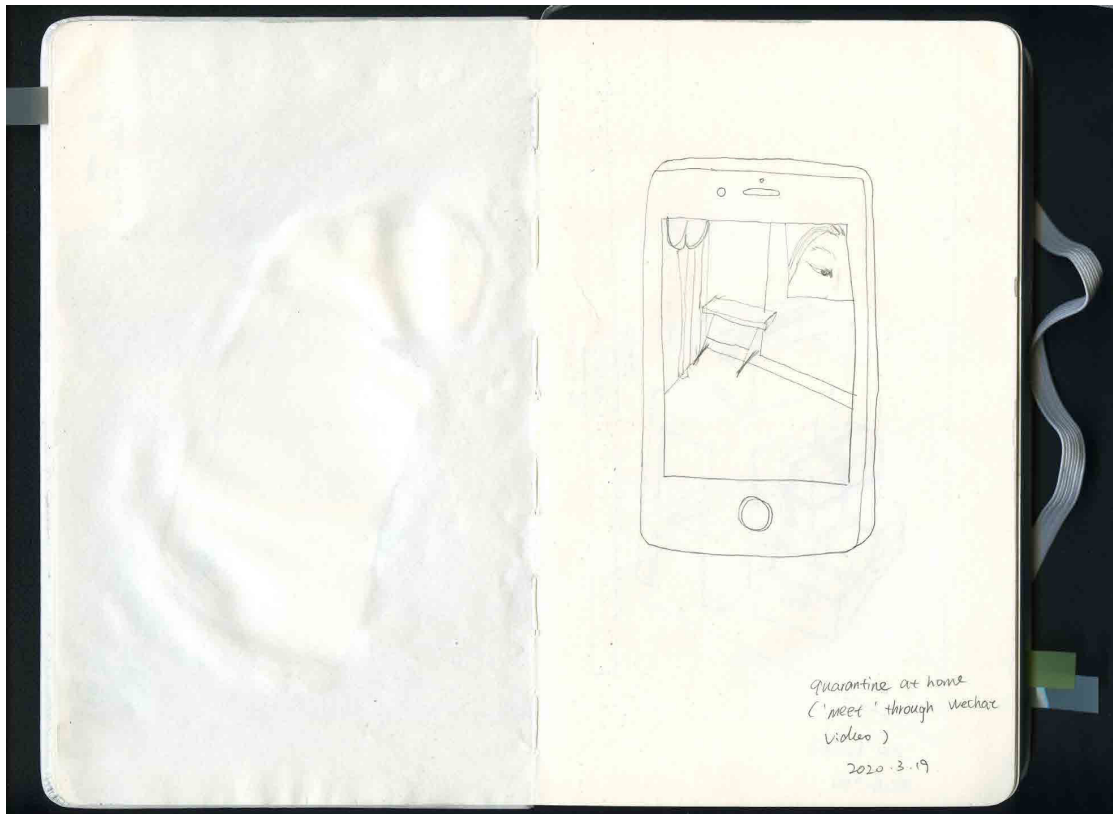




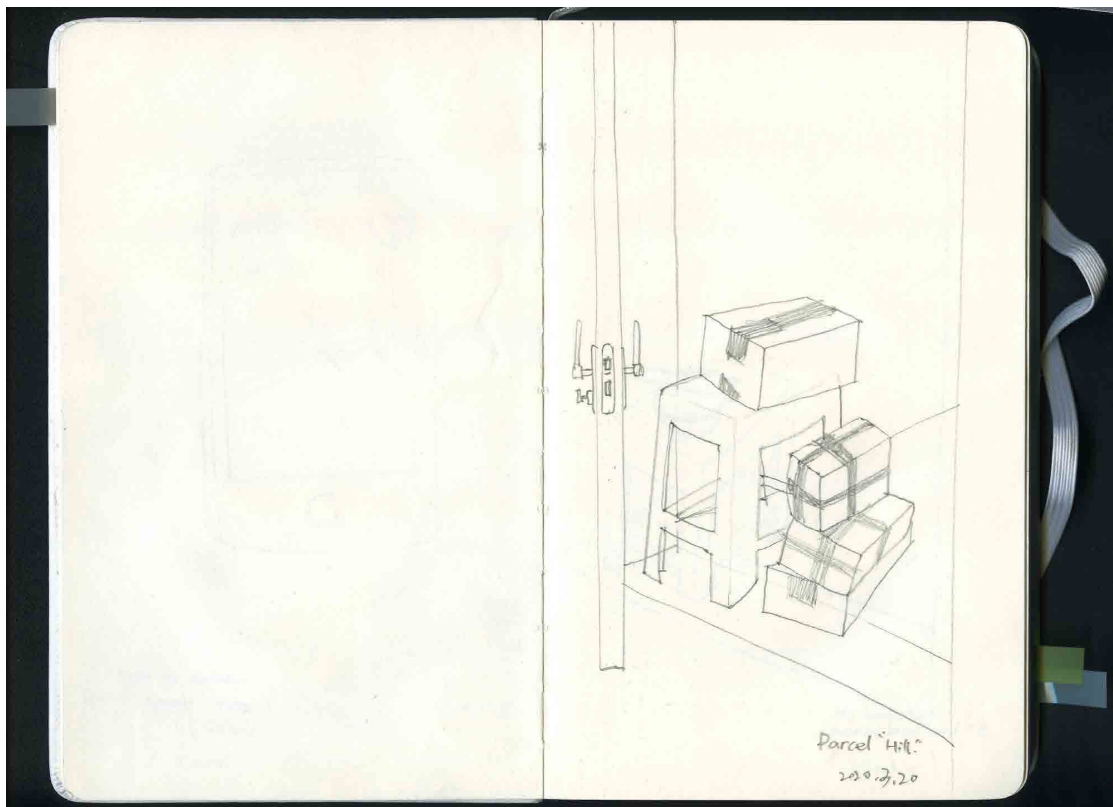




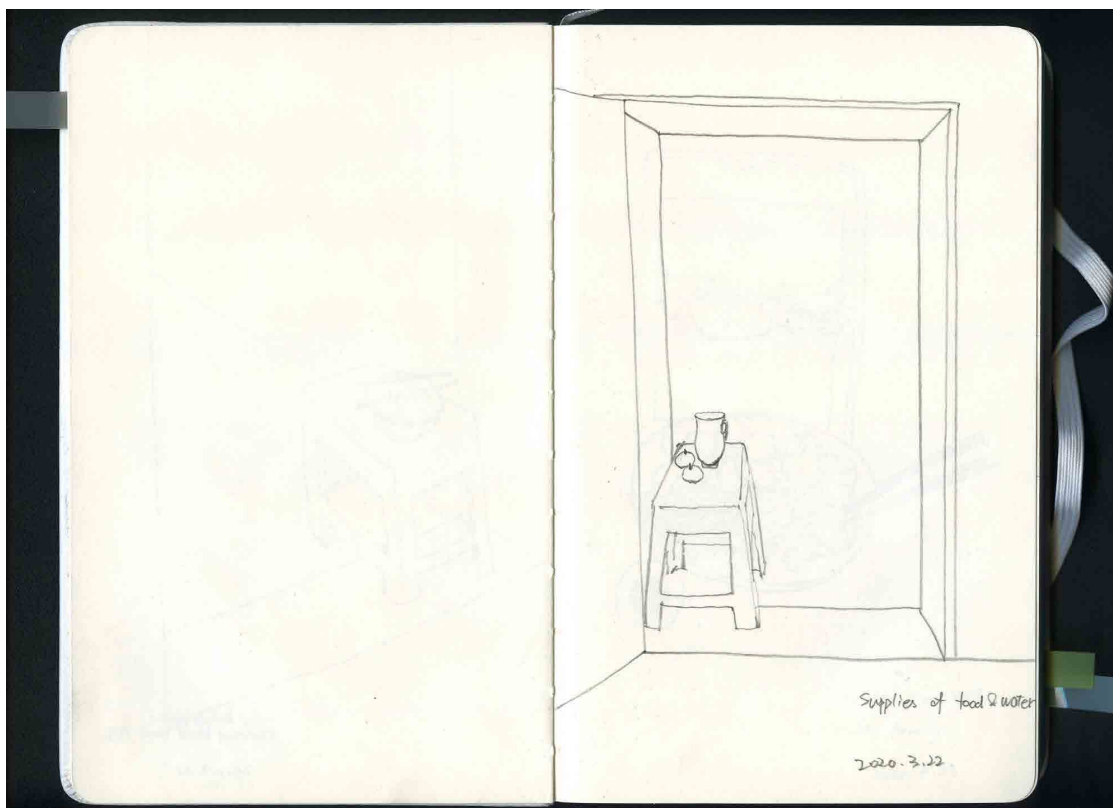
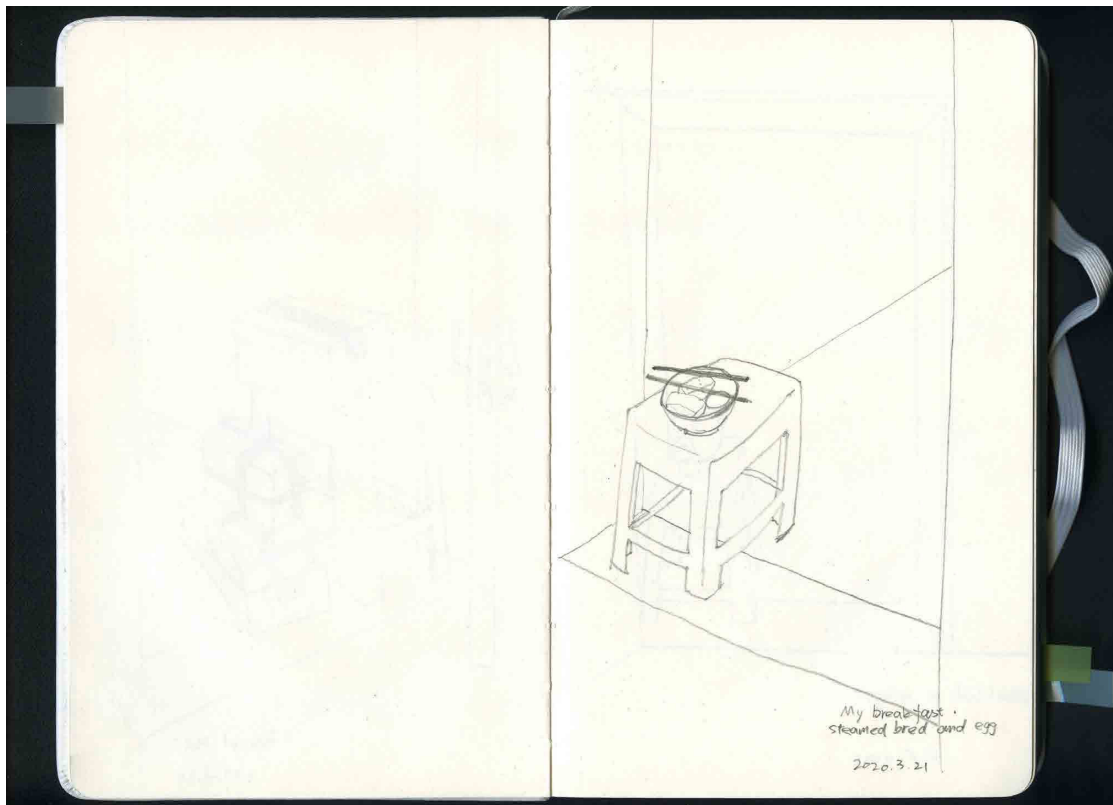
empty luggage after  
2020.3.18. home.

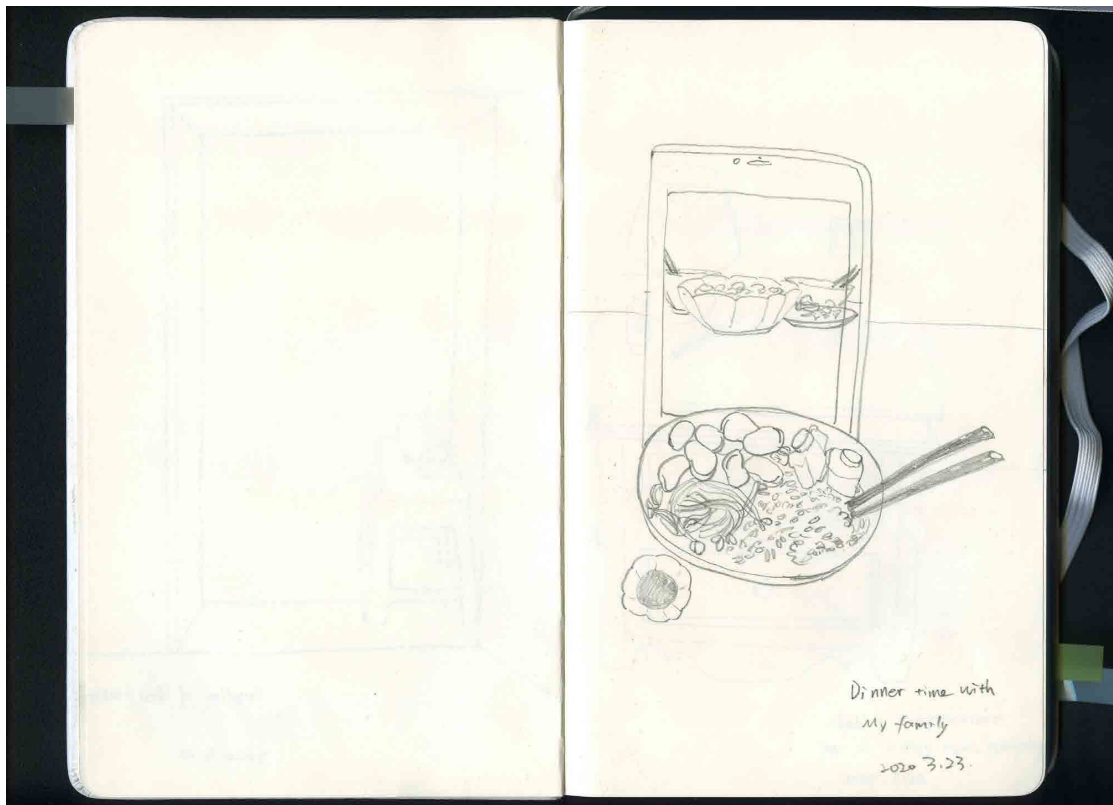


Quarantine at home  
( 'meet' through wechat  
video )  
2020.3.19

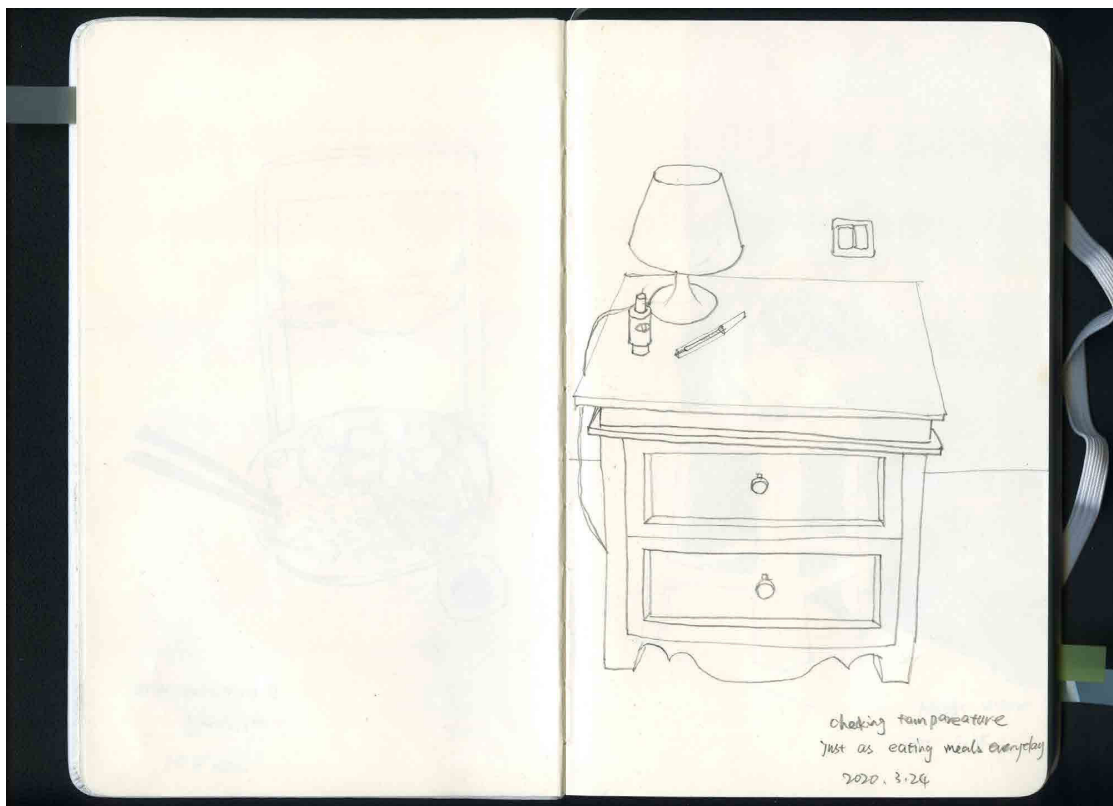


Parcel 'Hit'  
2020.3.20

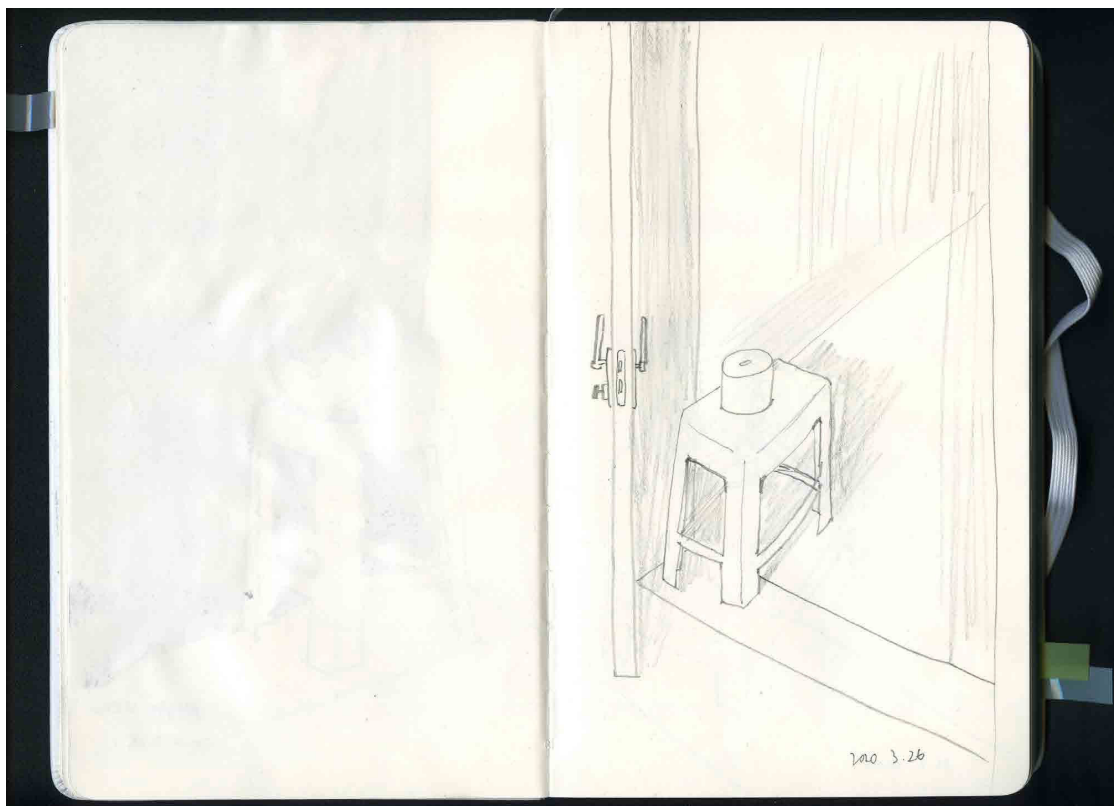
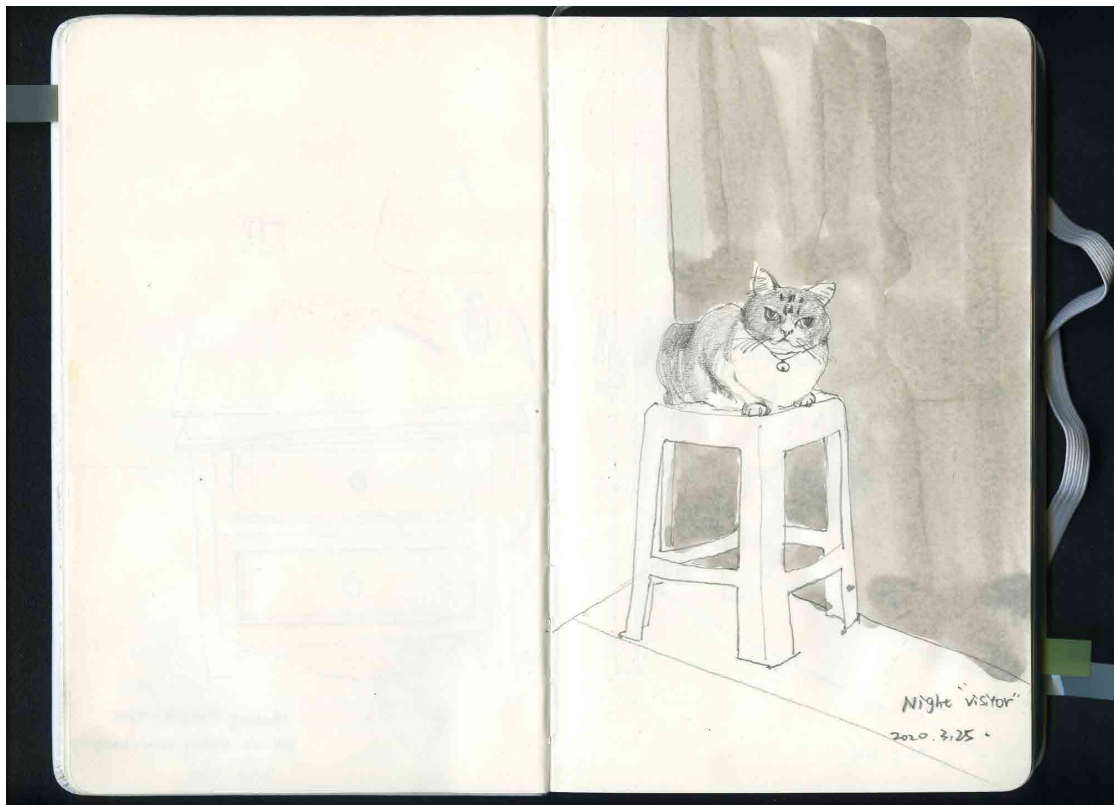




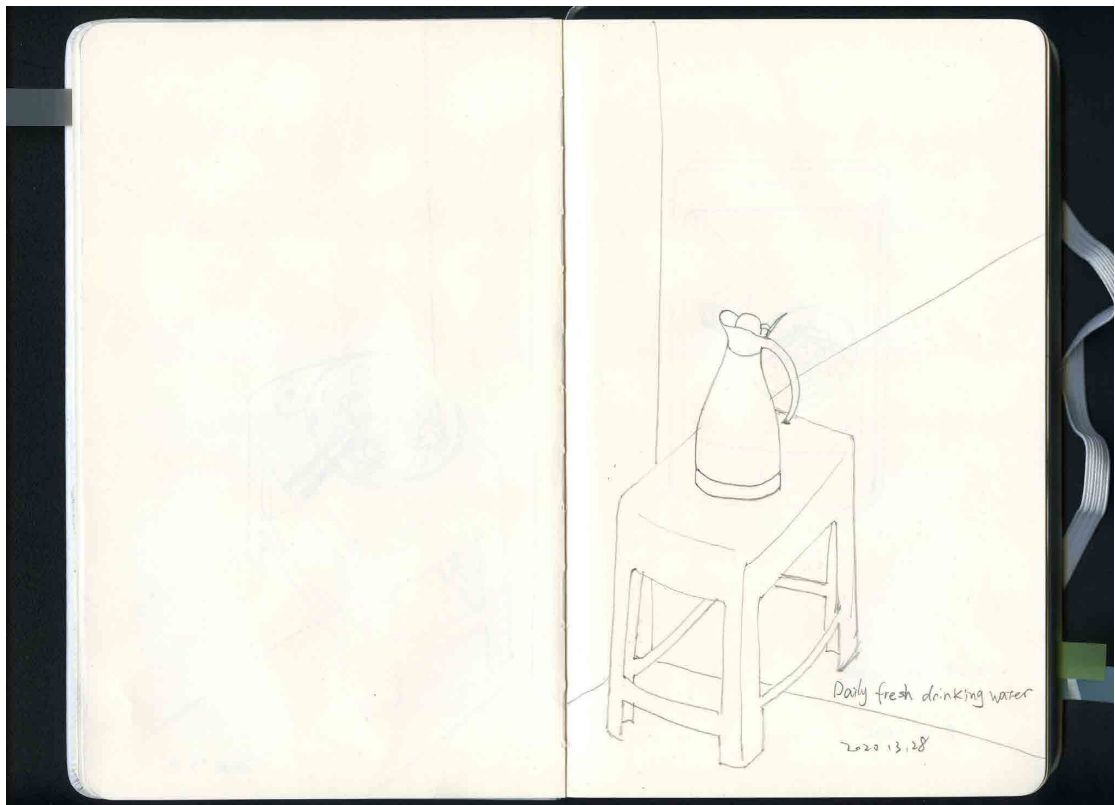
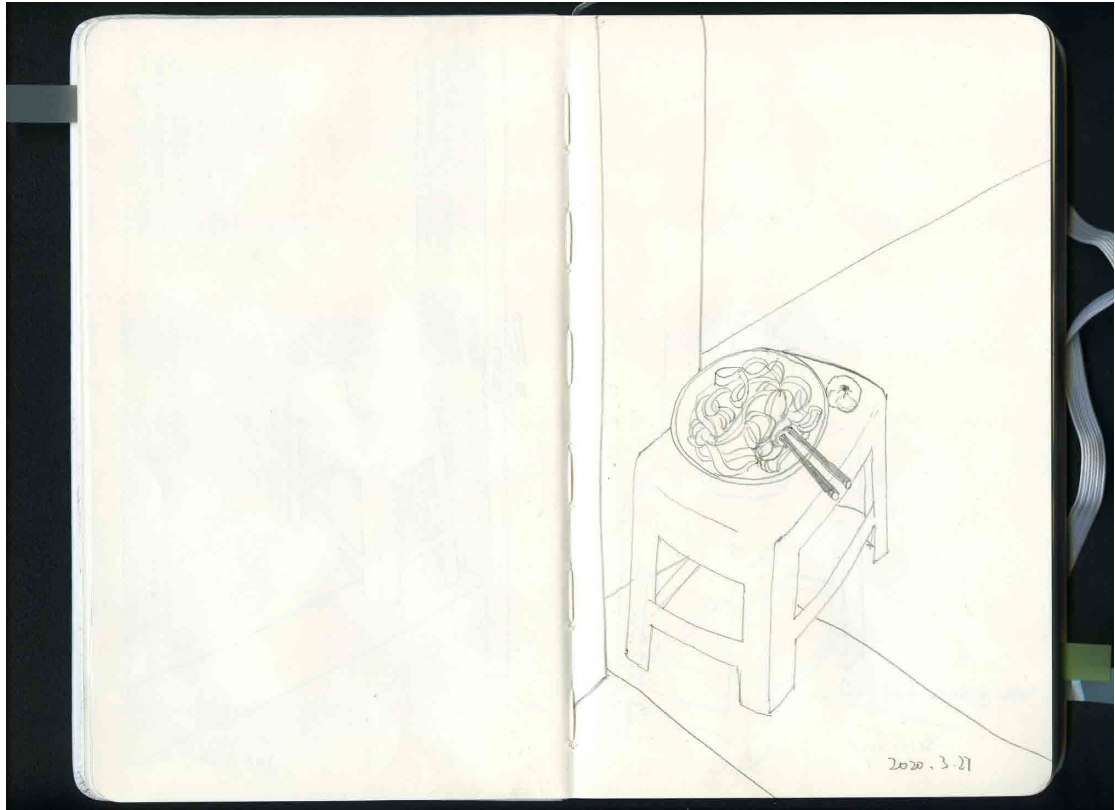
Dinner time with  
My family  
2020 3.23.

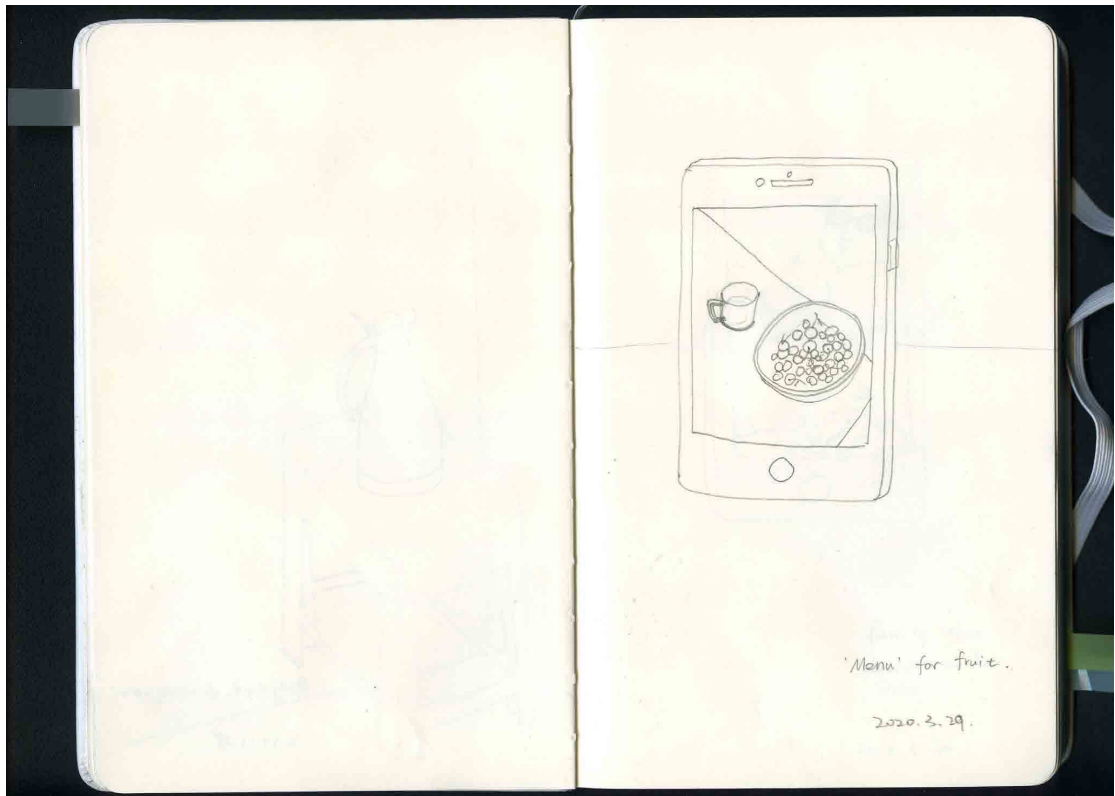


checking temperature  
just as eating meals everyday  
2020. 3.24



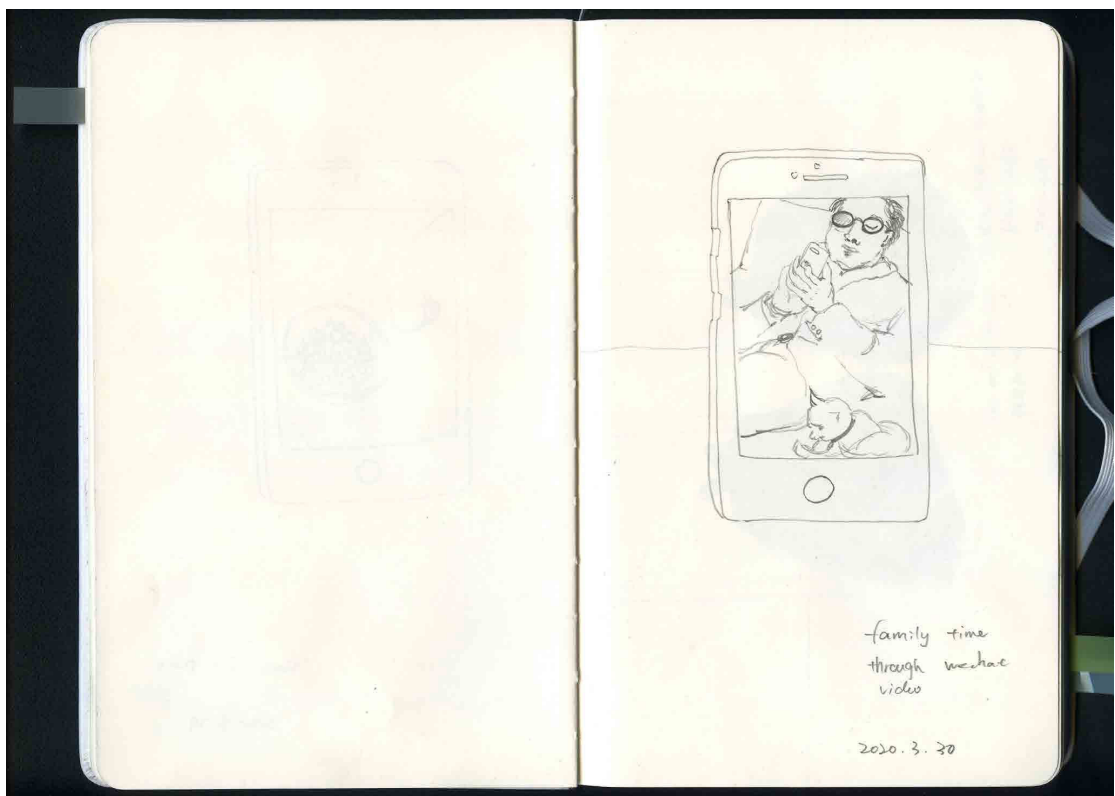






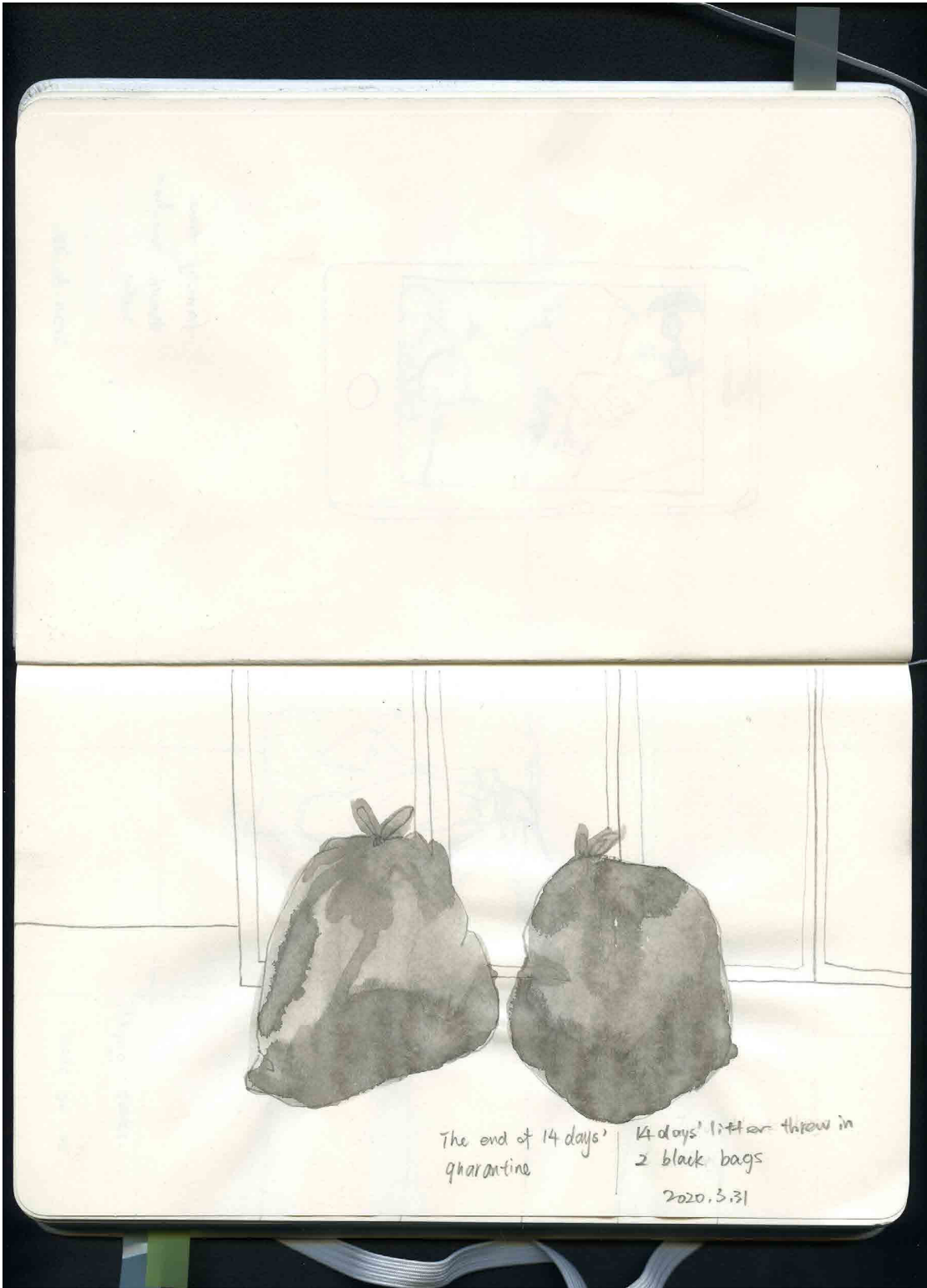
'Menu' for fruit.

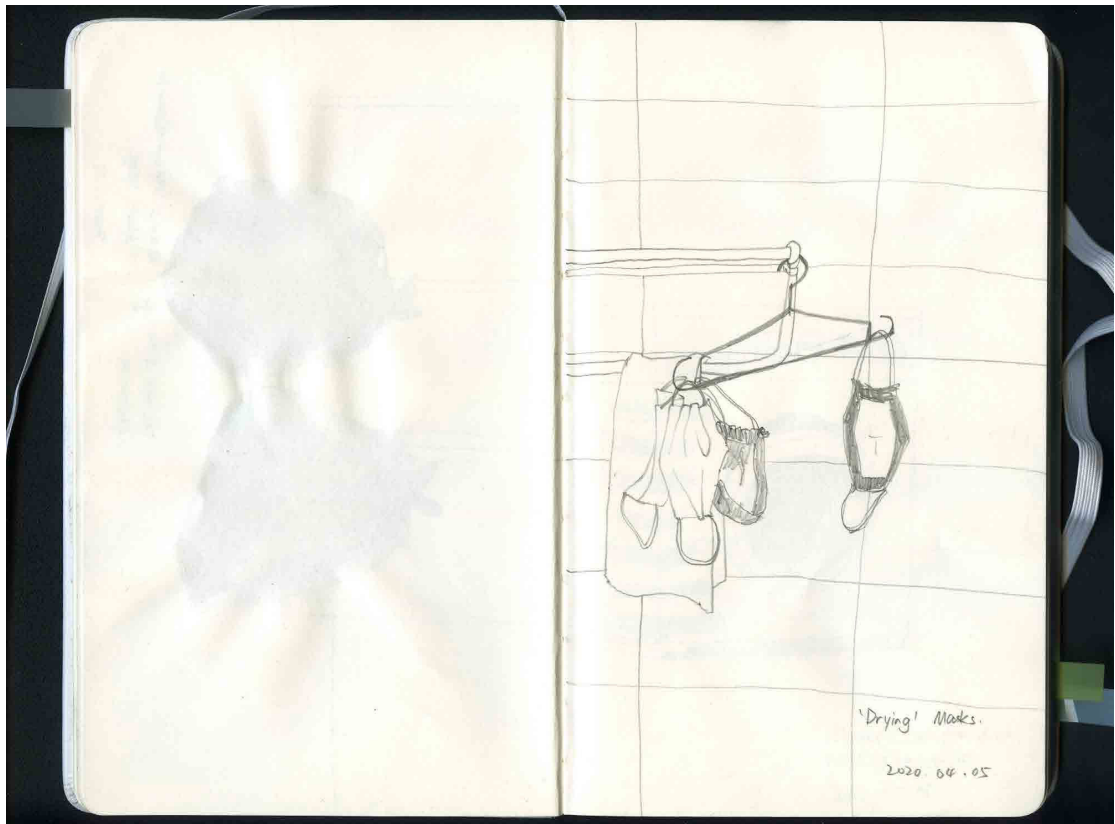
2020.3.29.



family time  
through wechat  
video

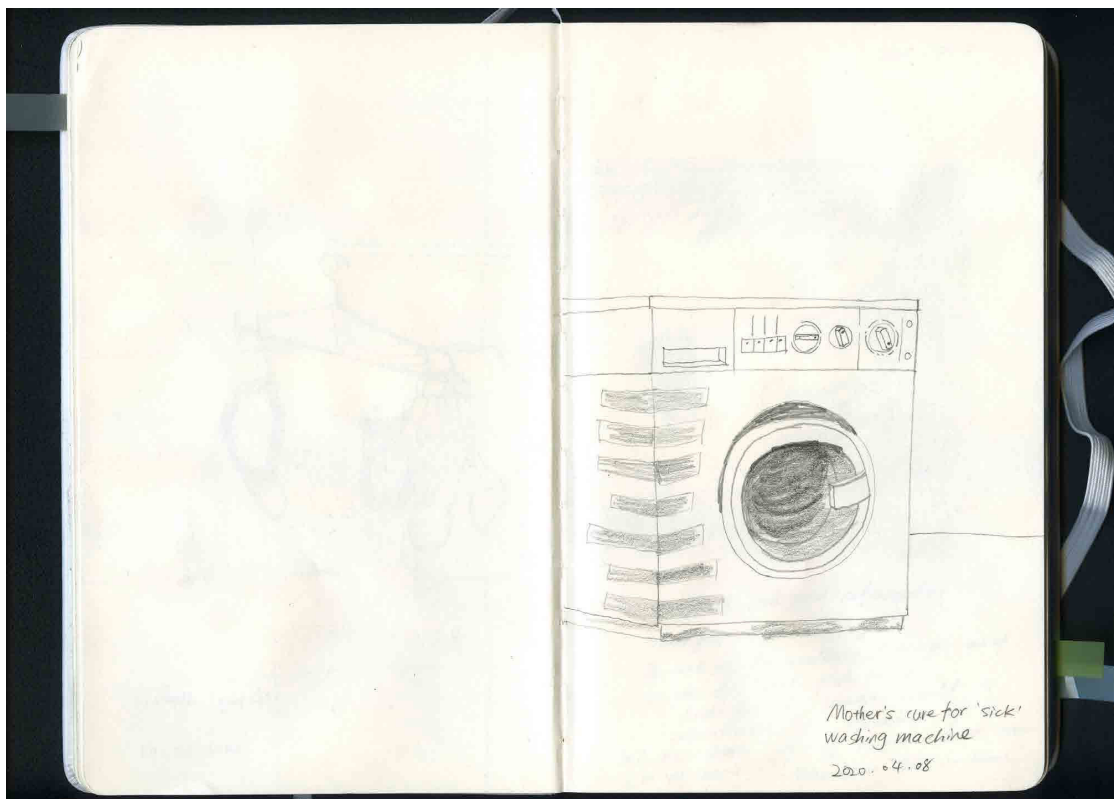
2020.3.30





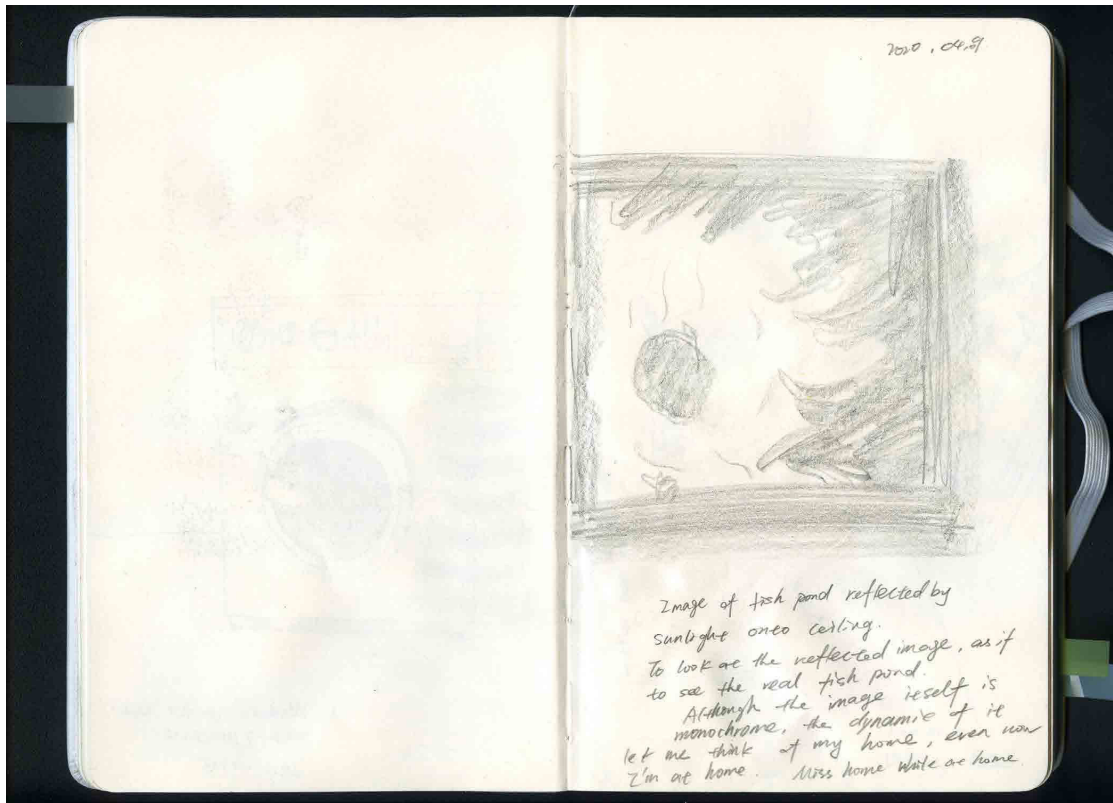
'Drying' Marks.

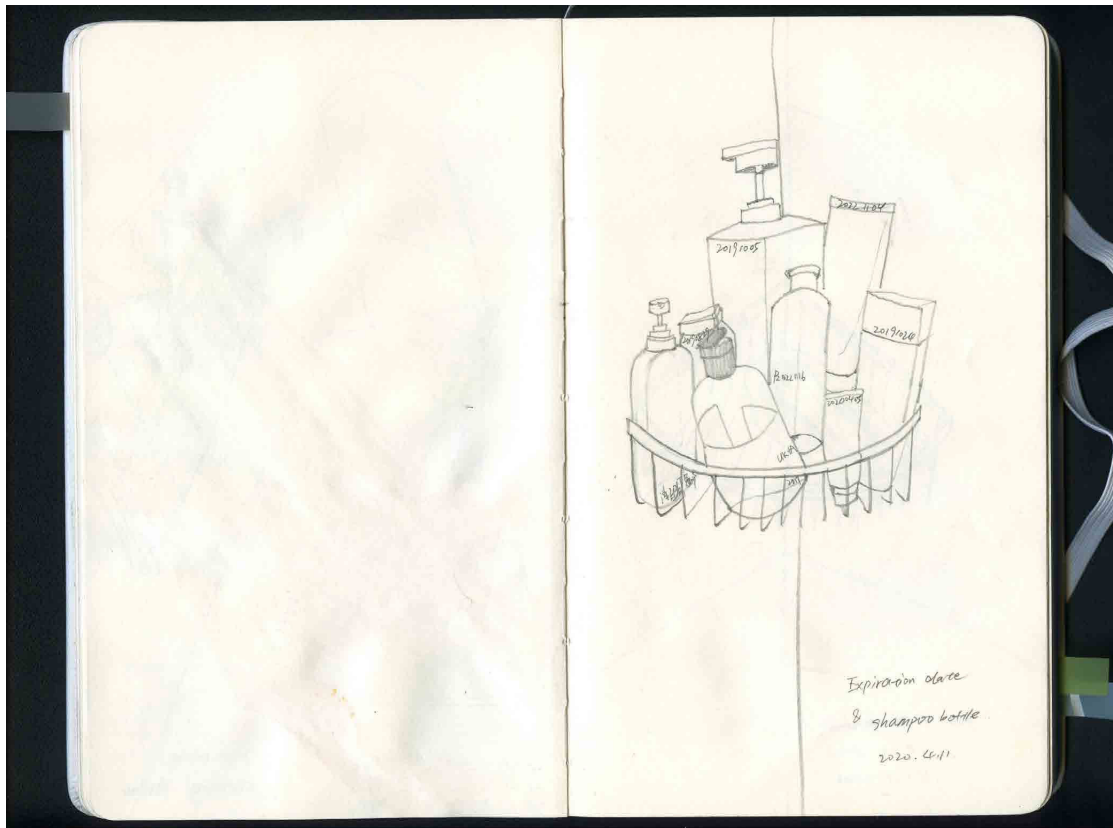
2020.04.05



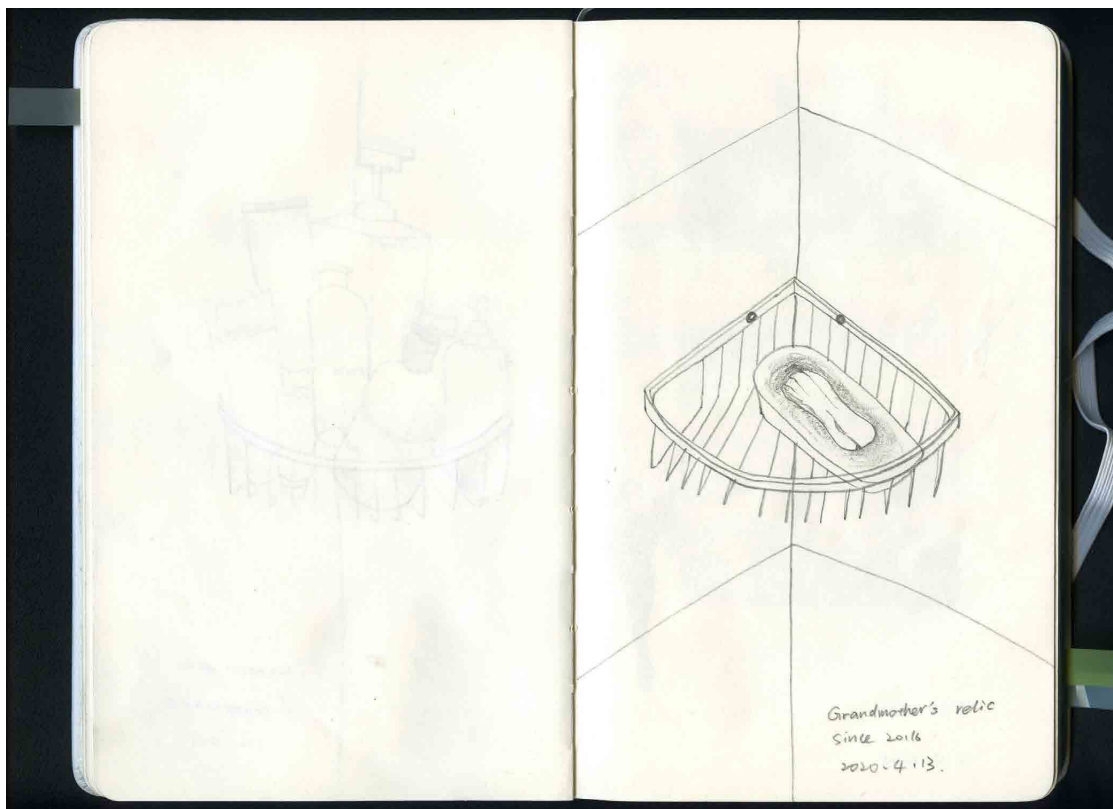
Mother's cure for 'sick'  
washing machine

2020.04.08



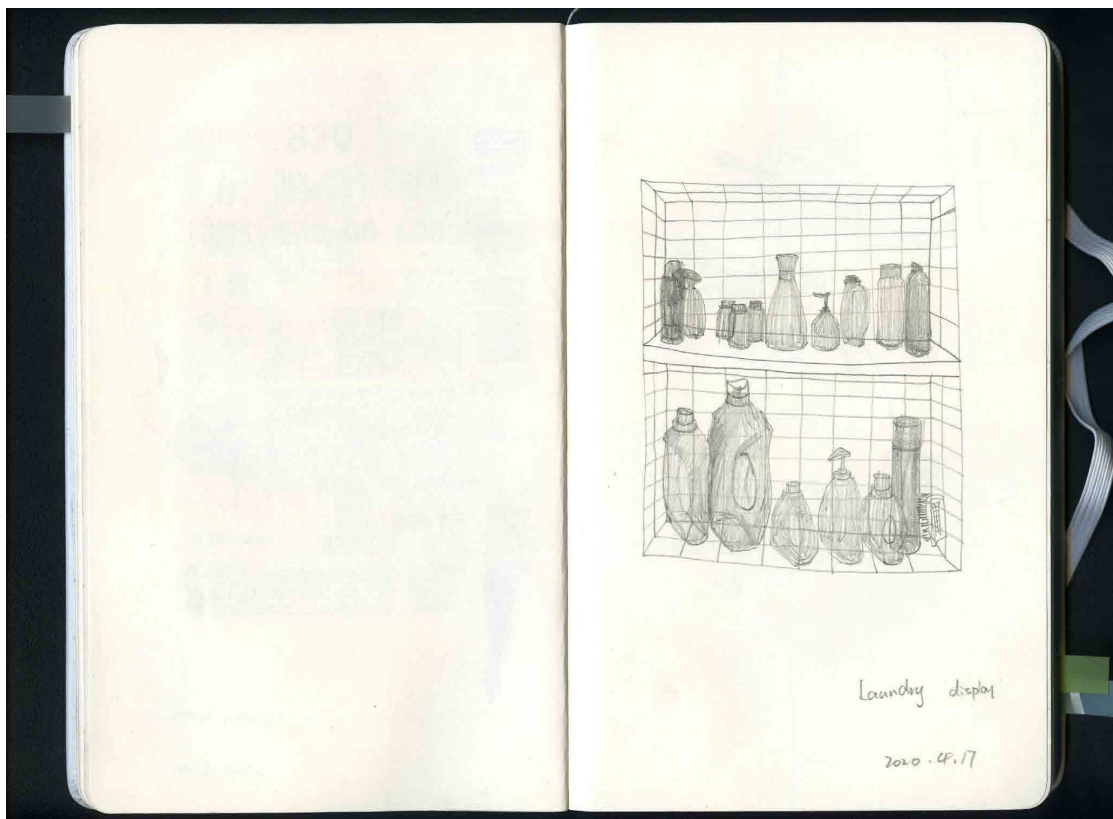
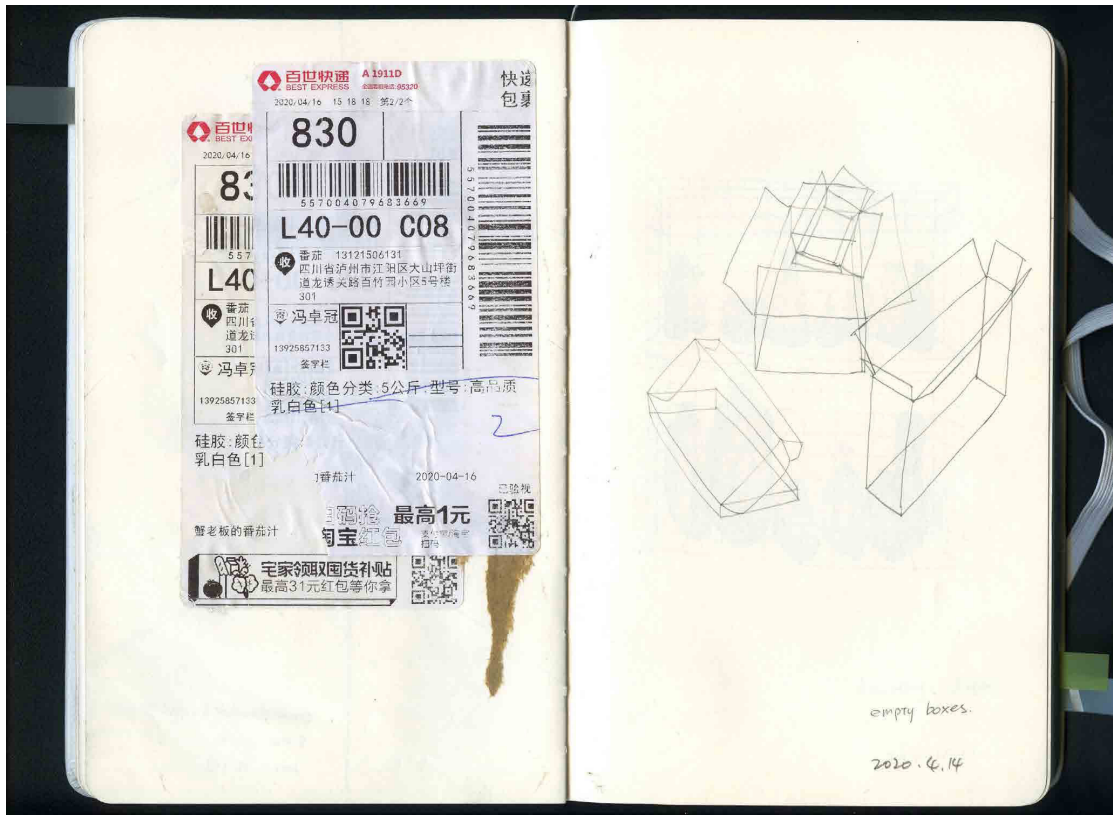


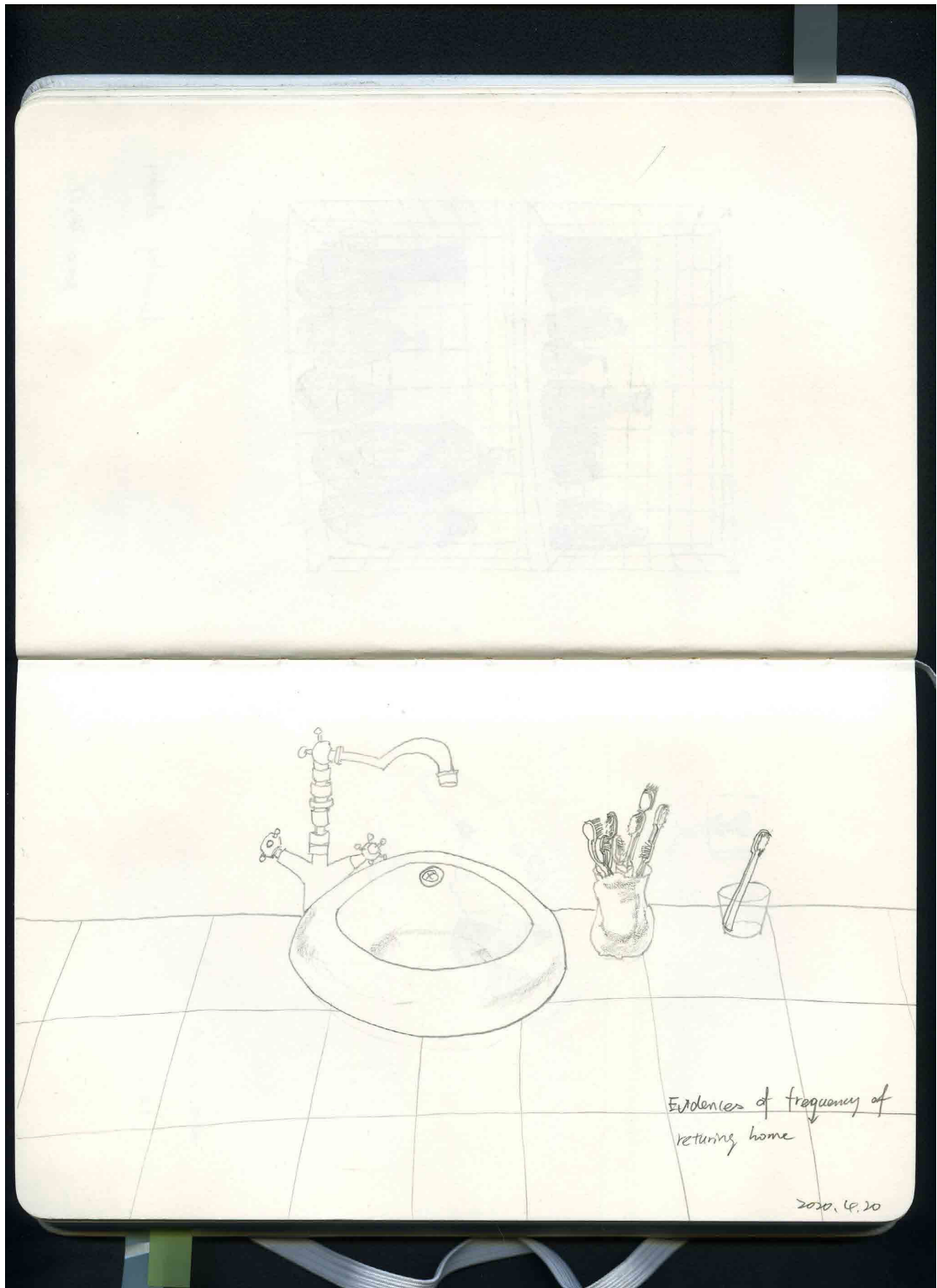
Expiration date  
& shampoo bottle  
2020.4.11

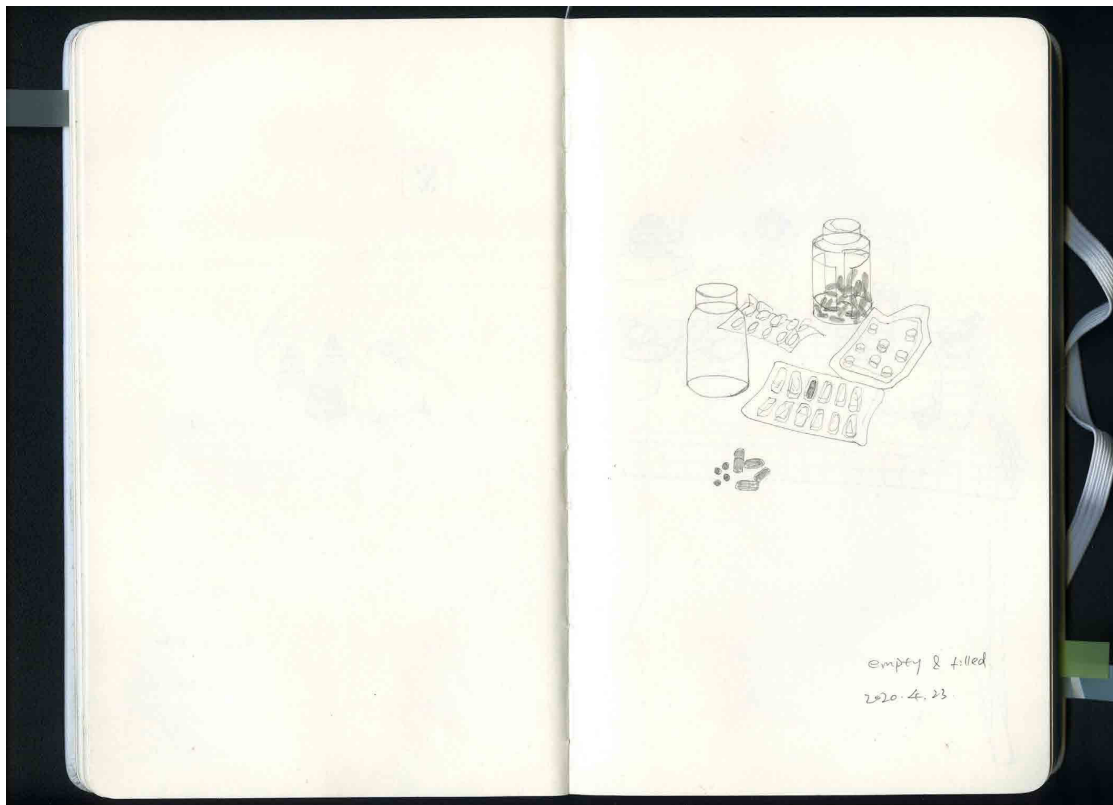
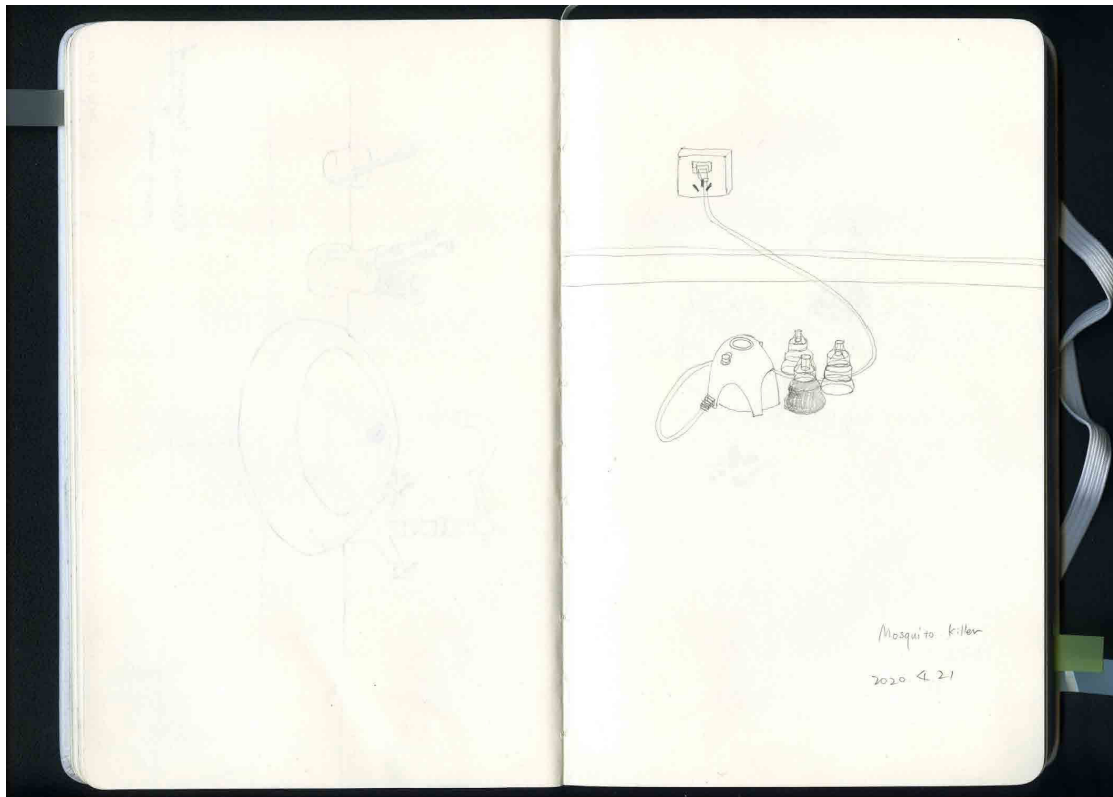


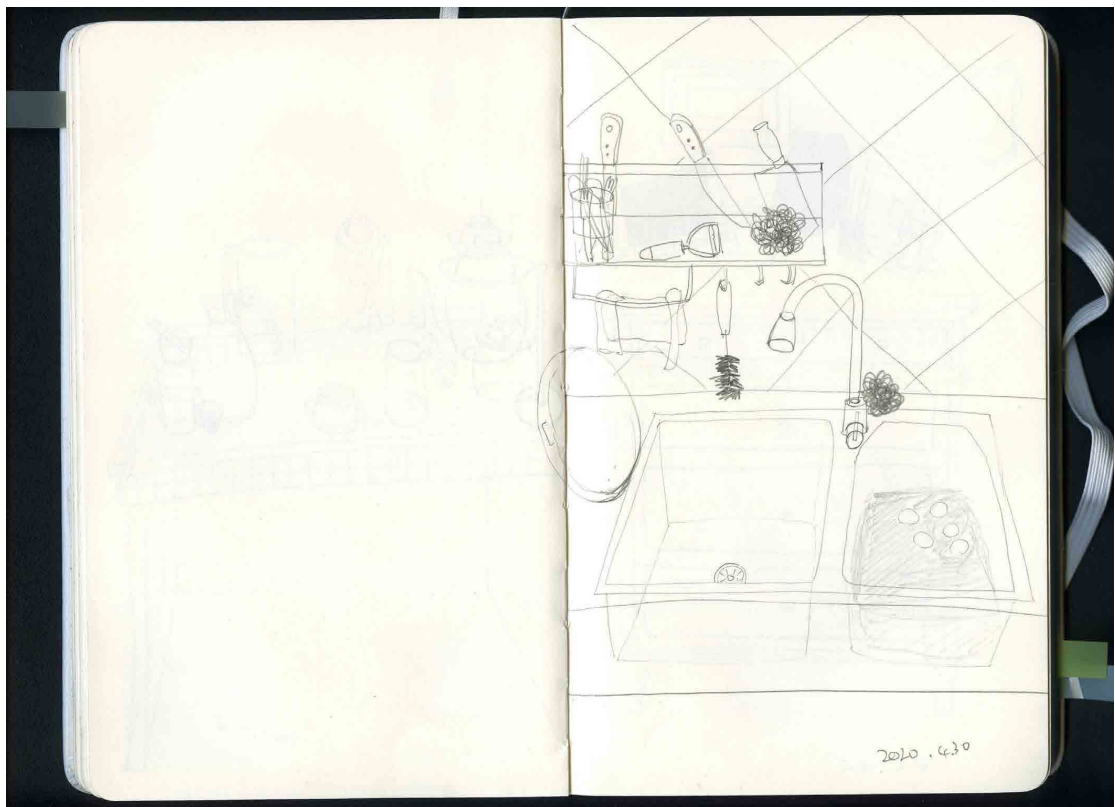
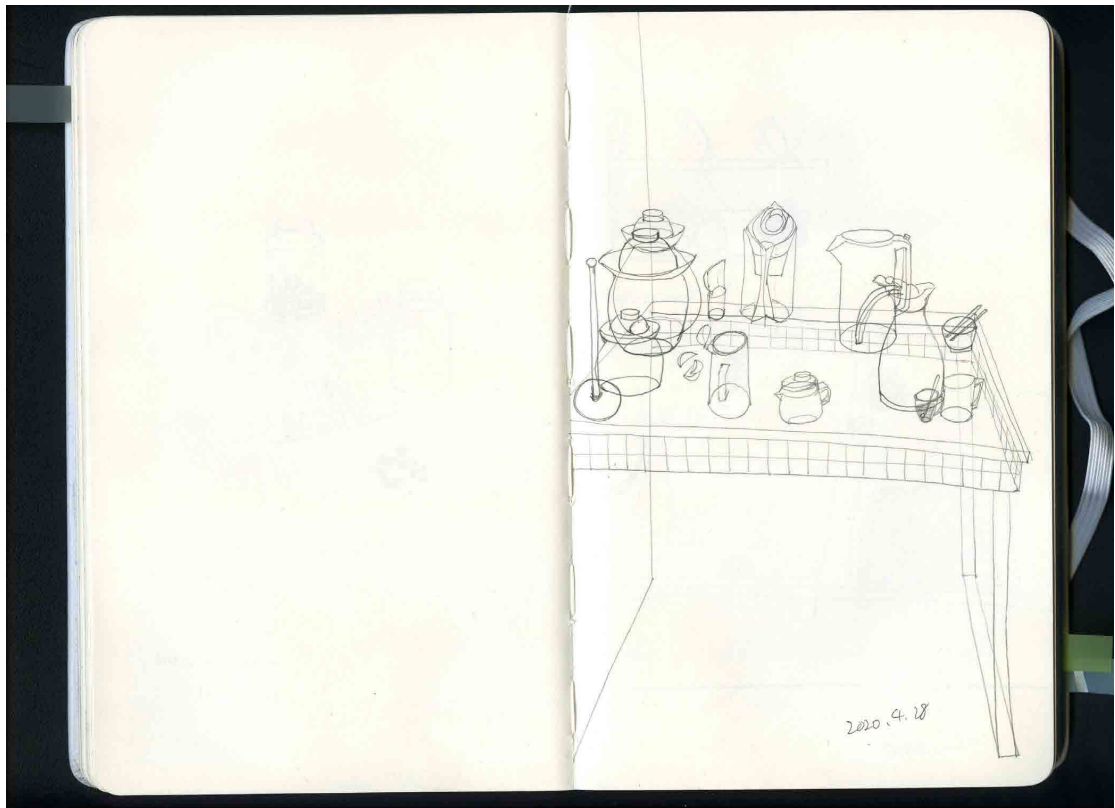
Grandmother's relic  
since 2016  
2020.4.13.

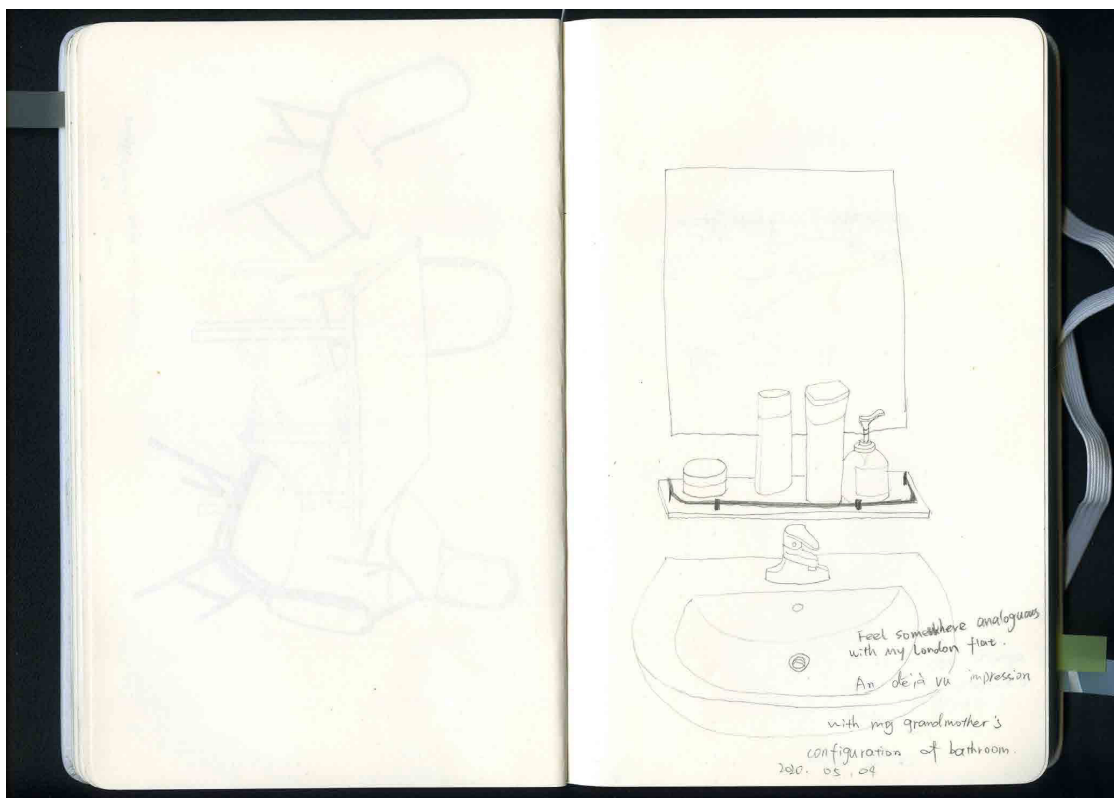
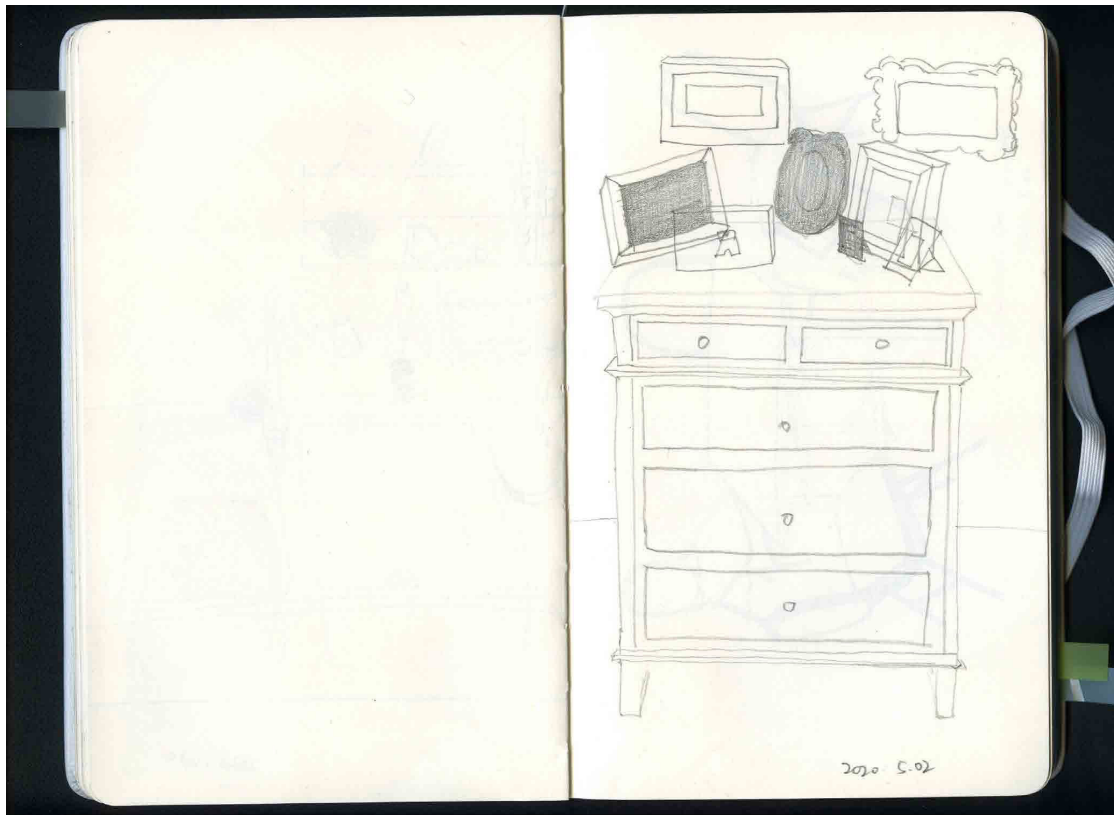


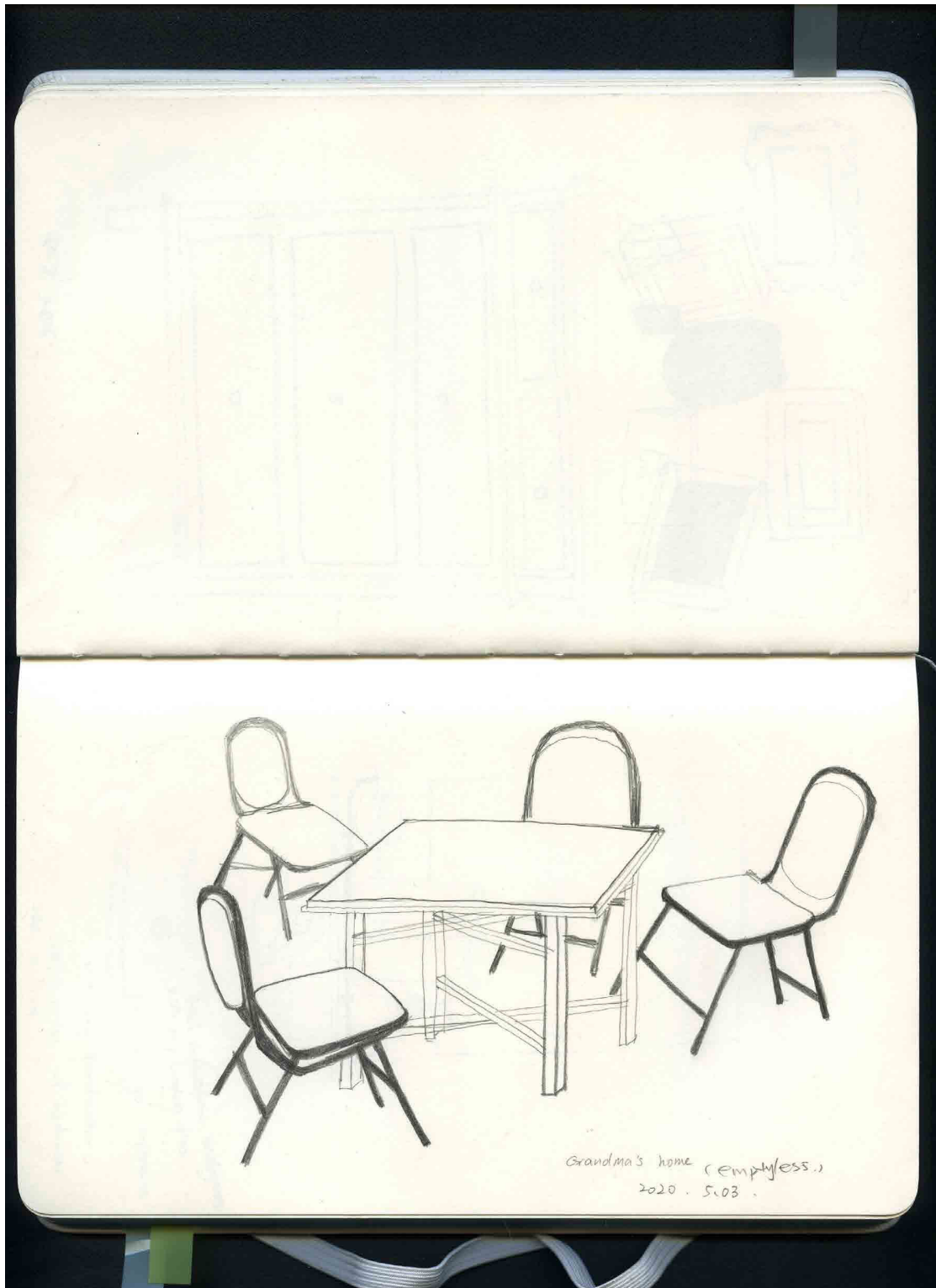






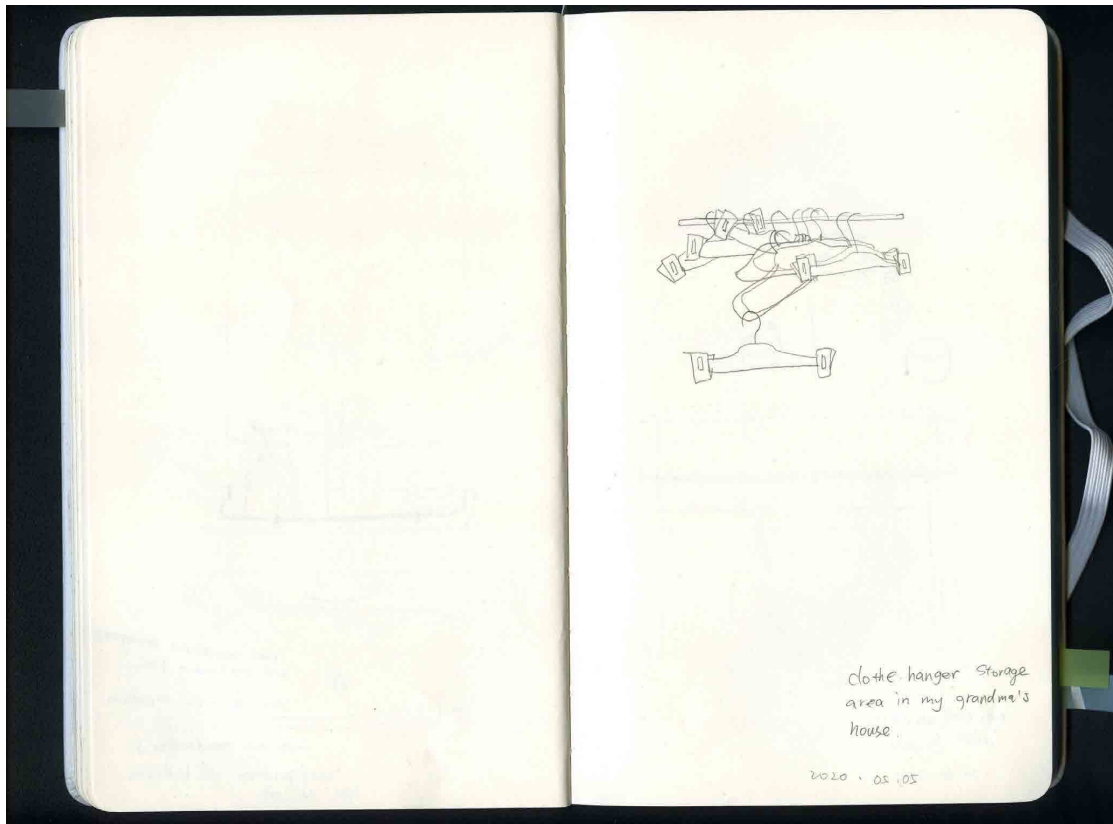






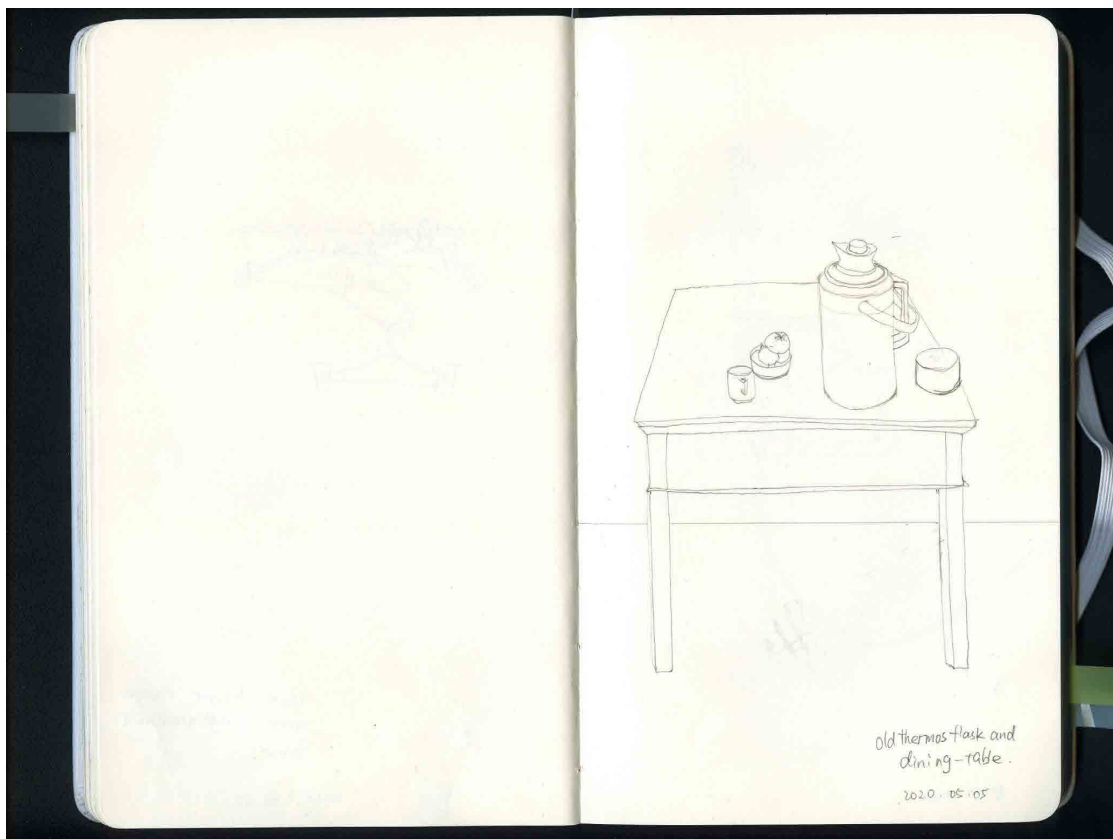
Grandma's home (empty/ess.)  
2020. 5.03.





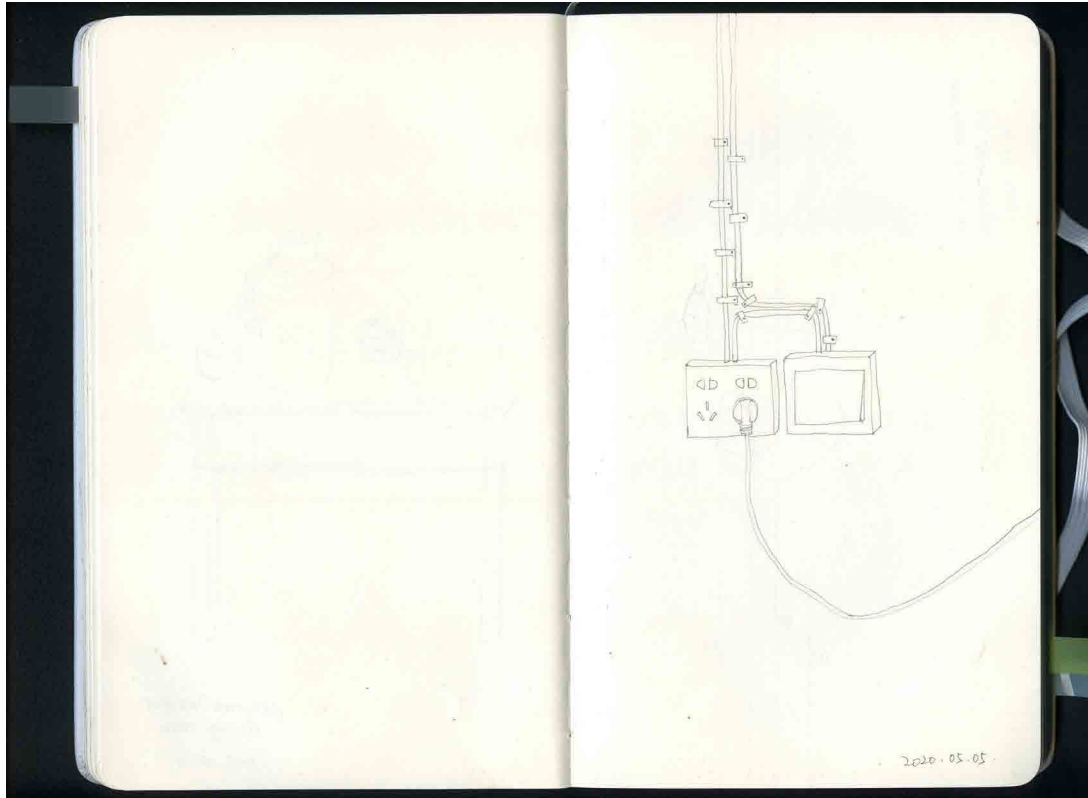
clothe hanger storage  
area in my grandma's  
house.

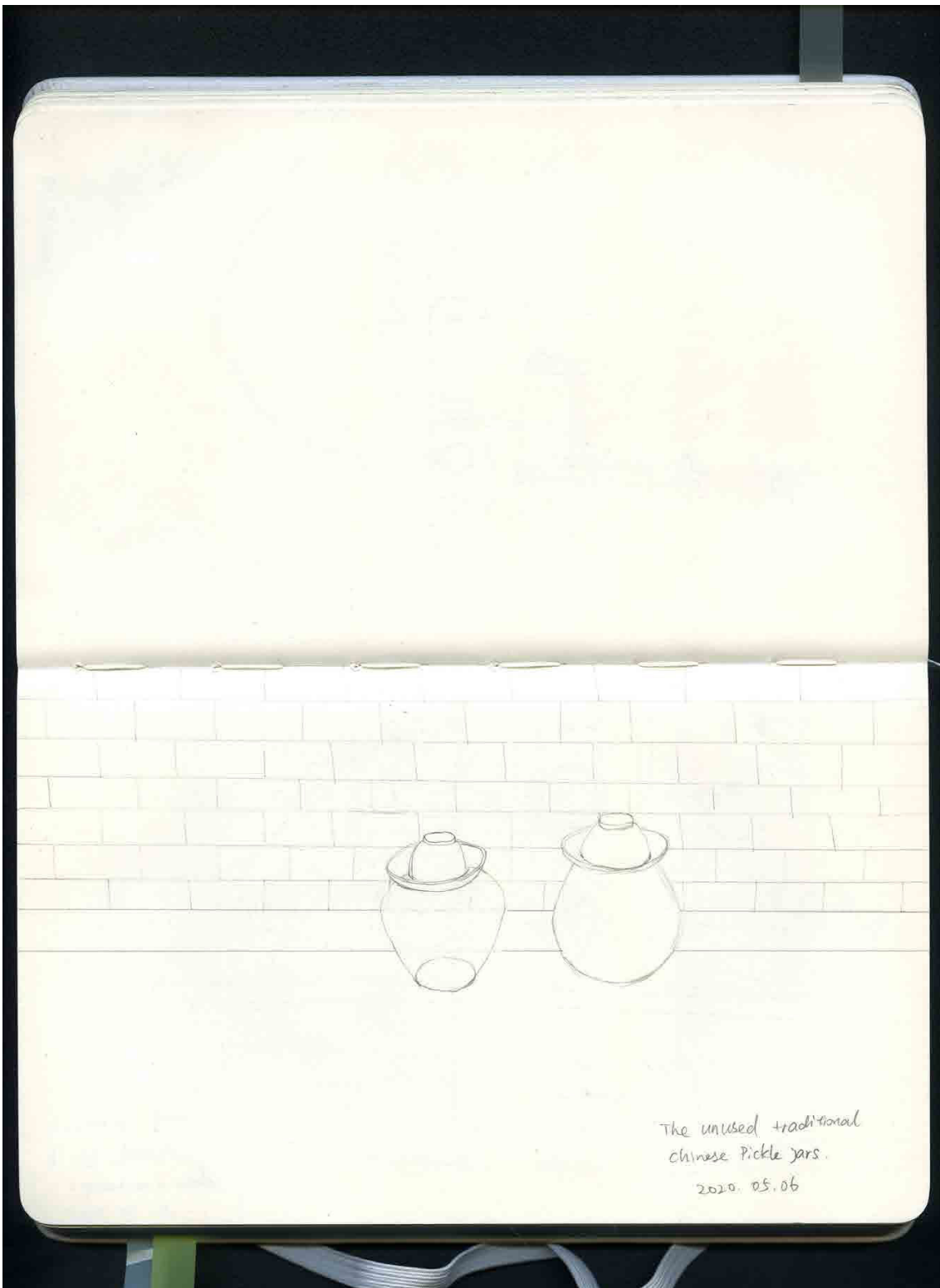
2020.05.05



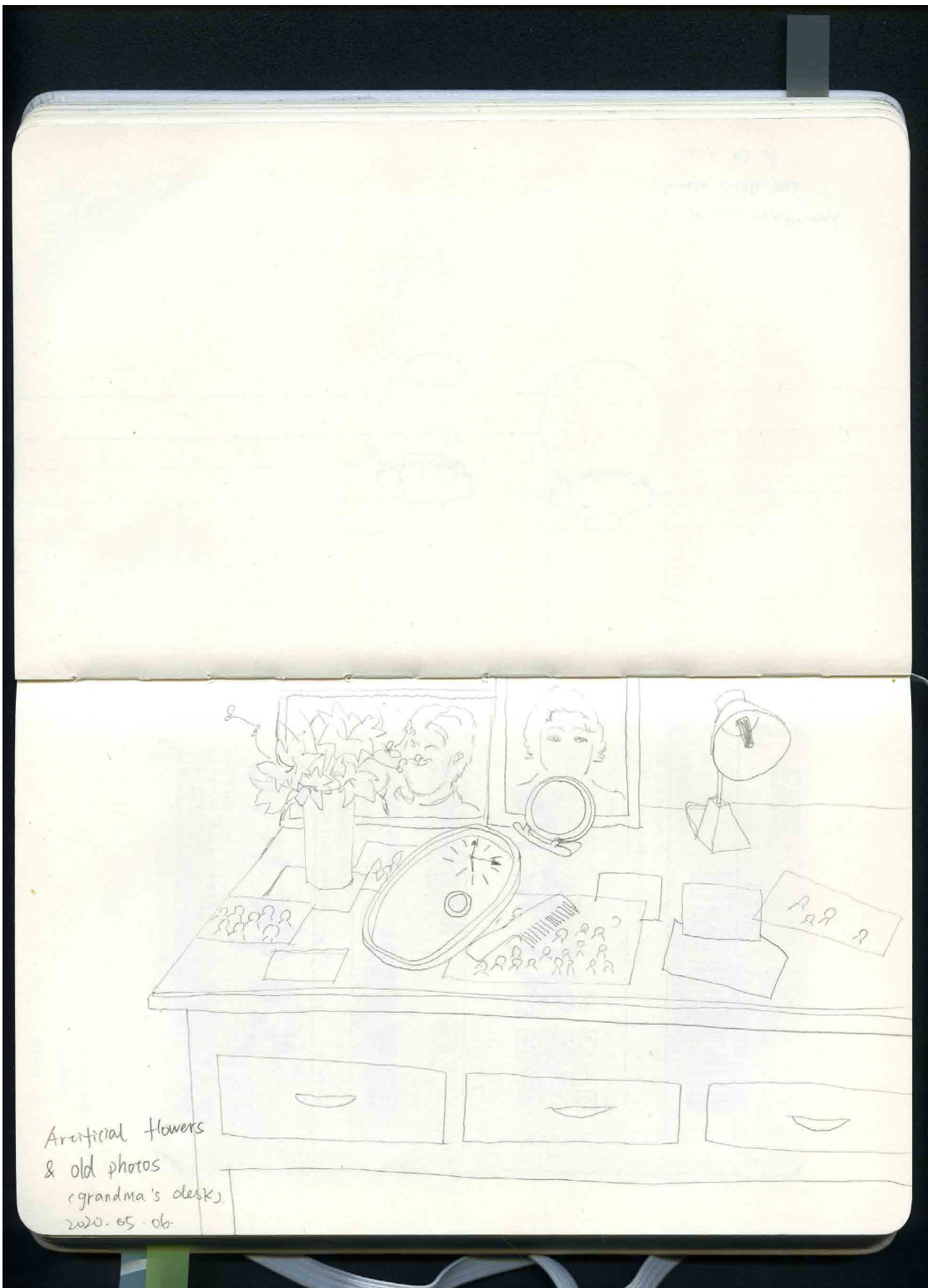
old thermos flask and  
dining-table.

2020.05.05

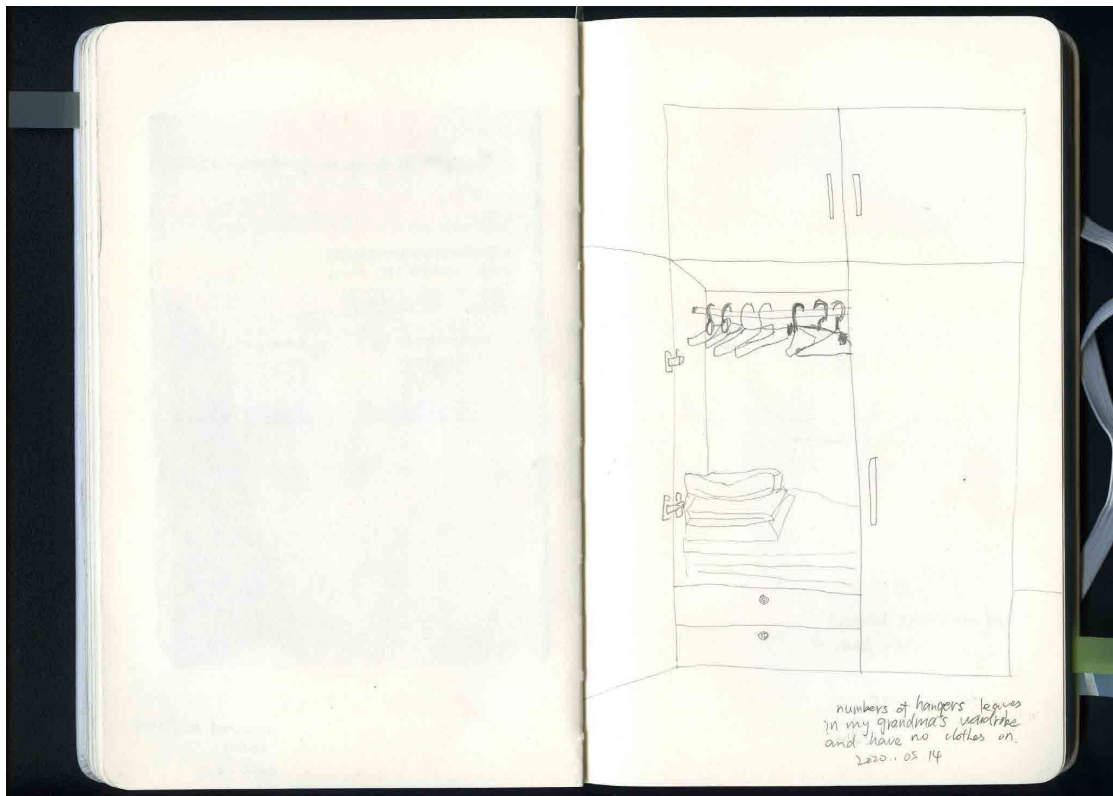
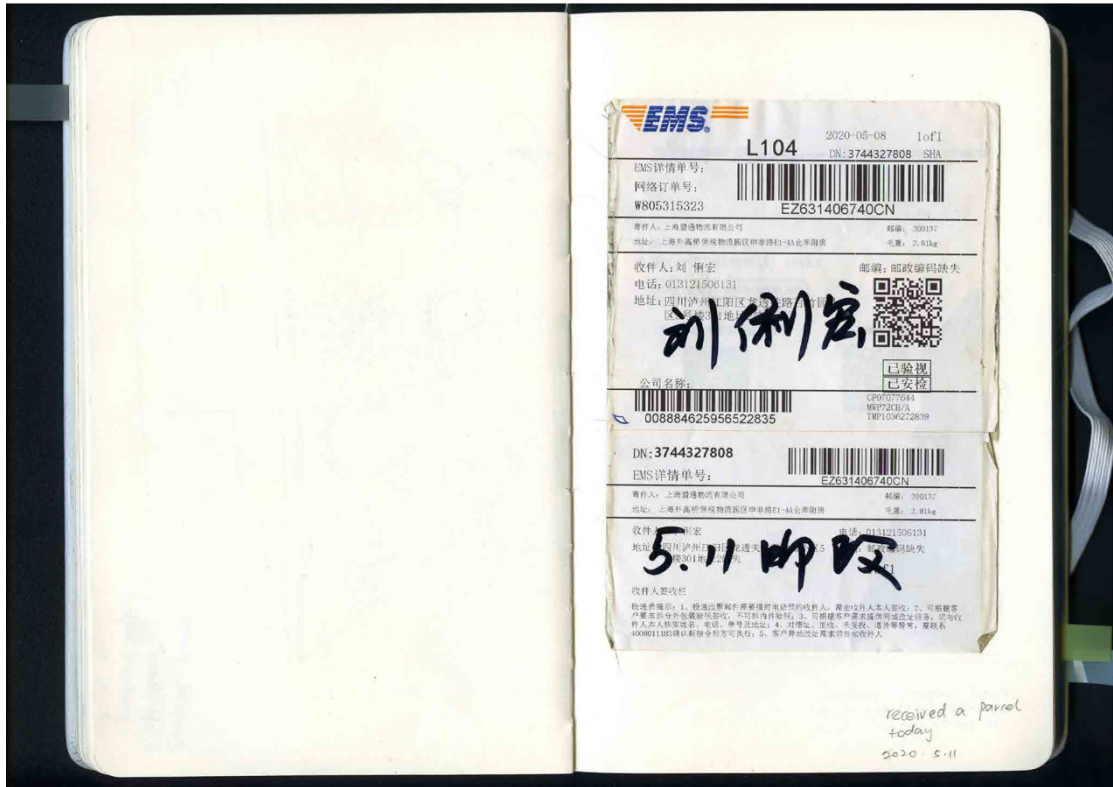


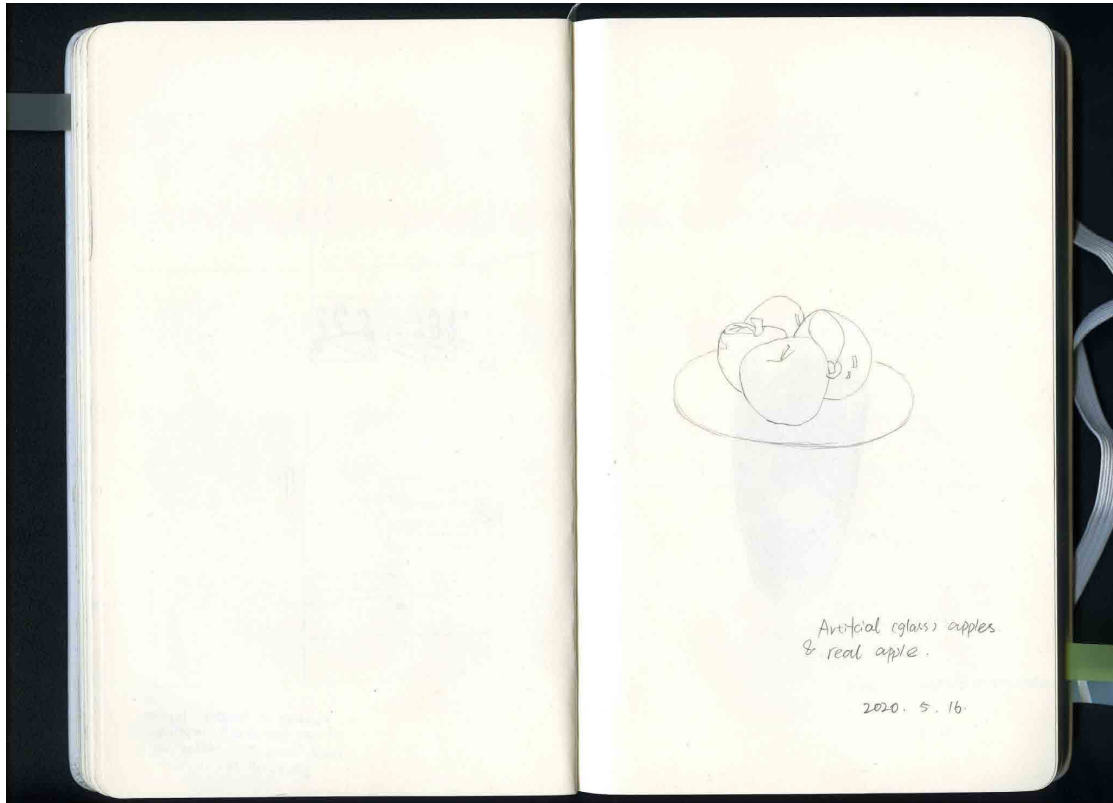


The unused traditional  
Chinese Pickle jars.  
2020. 05. 06



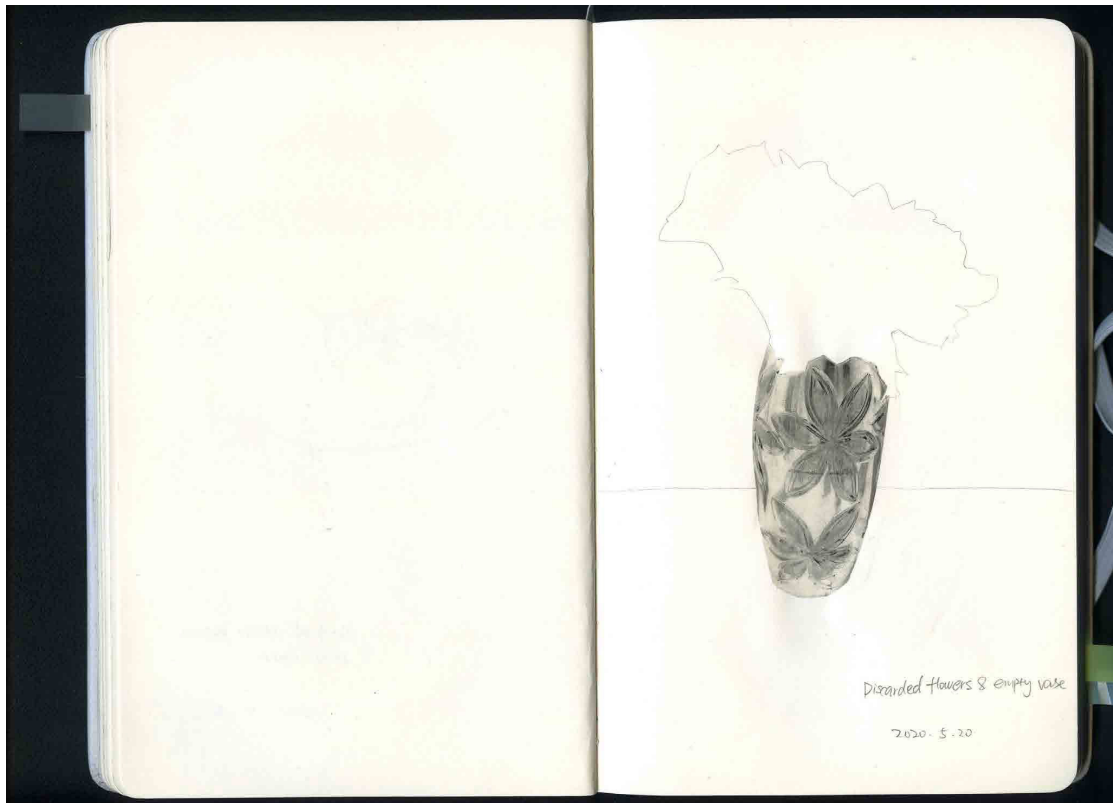
Artificial flowers  
& old photos  
(grandma's desk)  
2020.05.06





Artificial glass, apples  
& real apple.

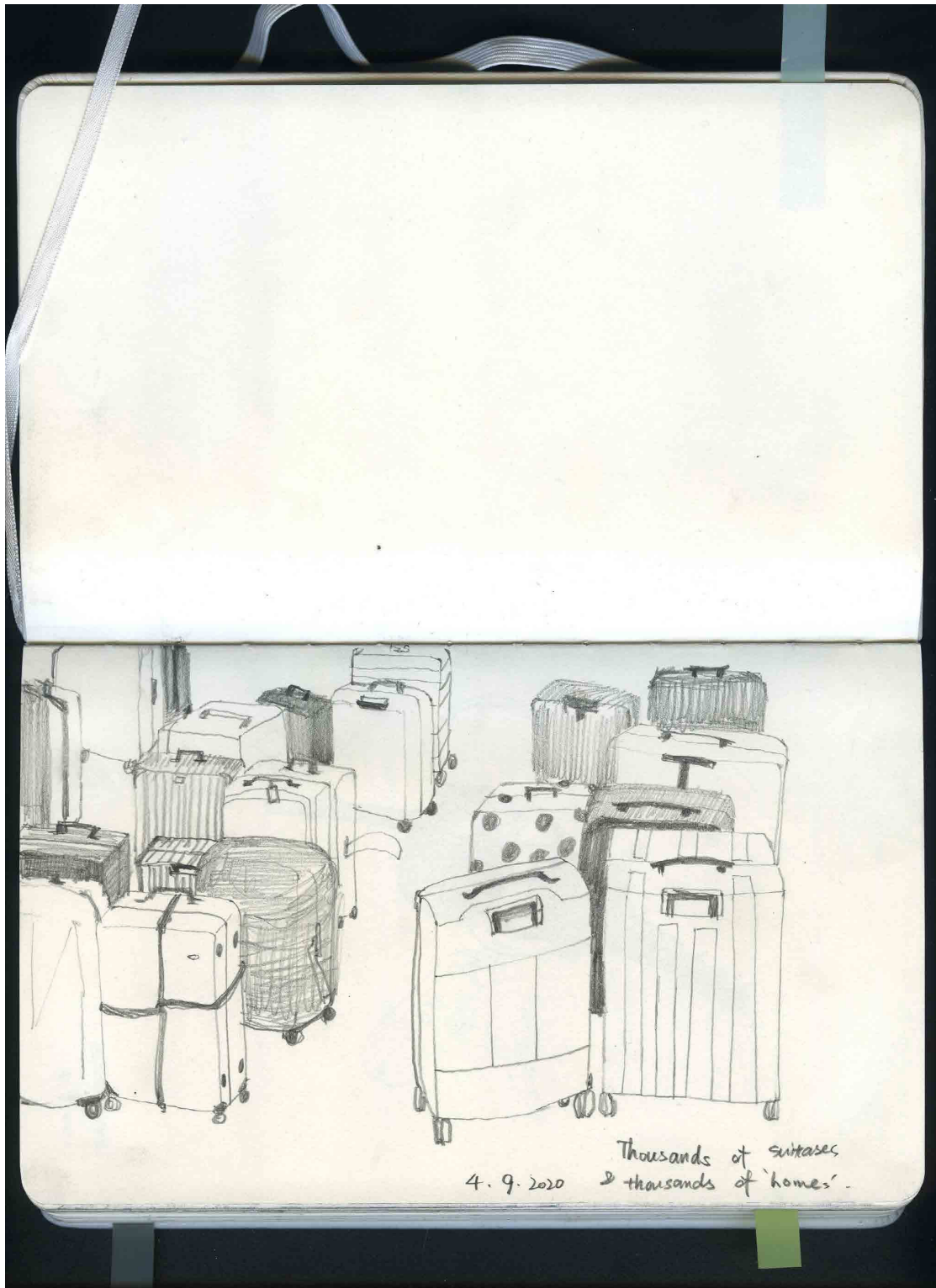
2020. 5. 16

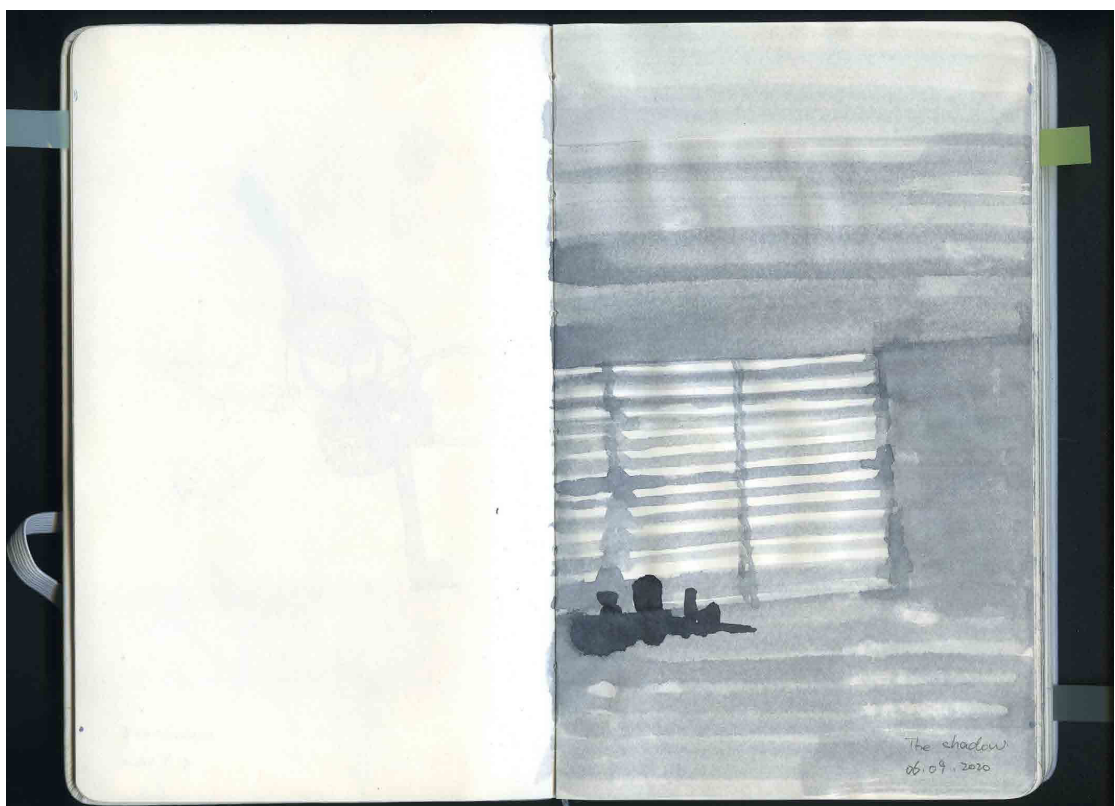
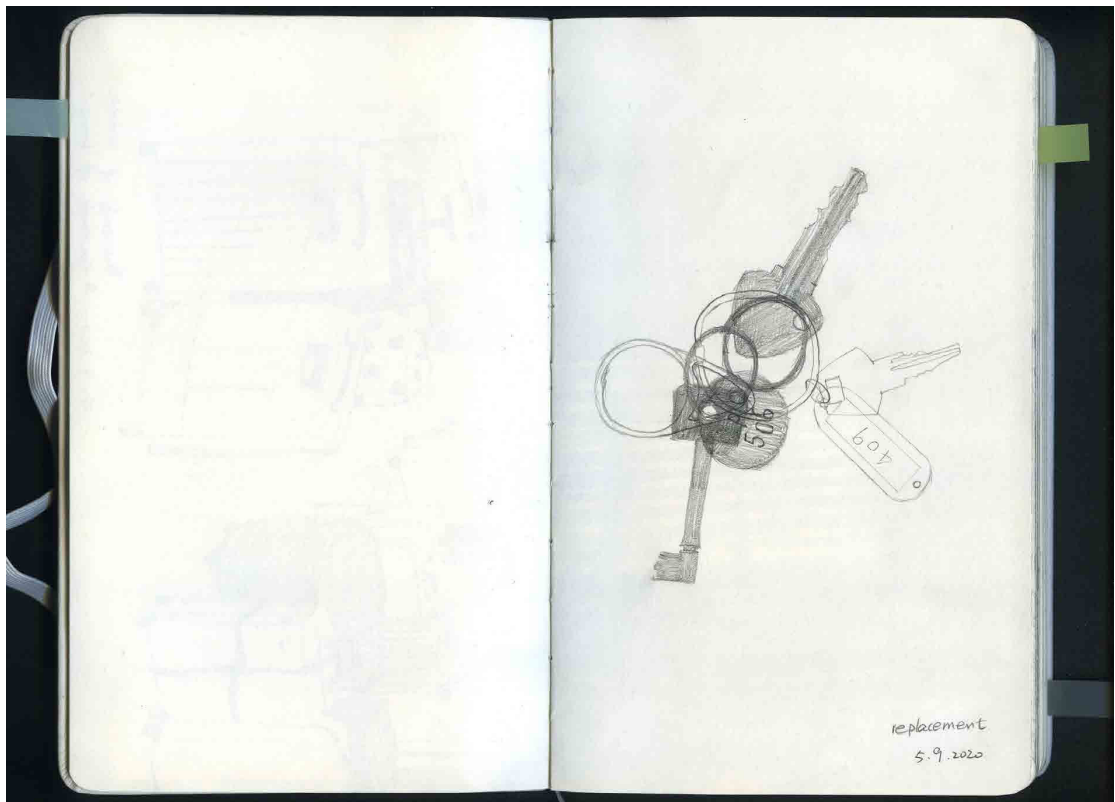


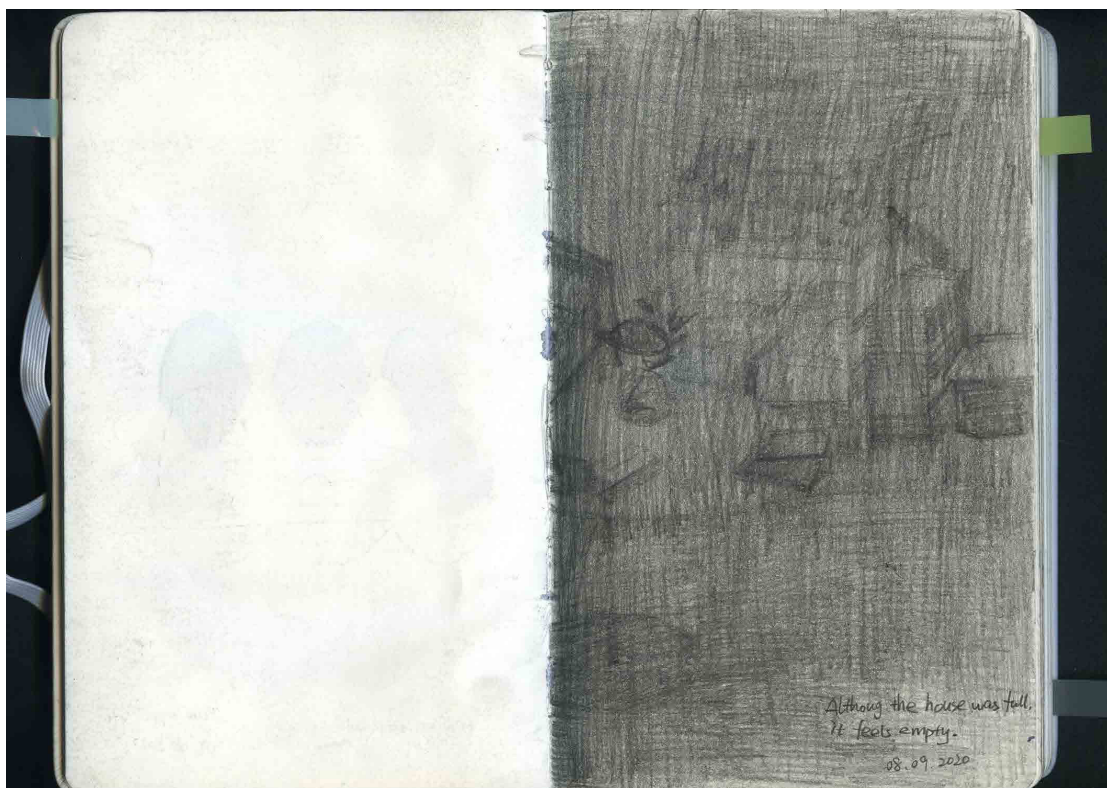
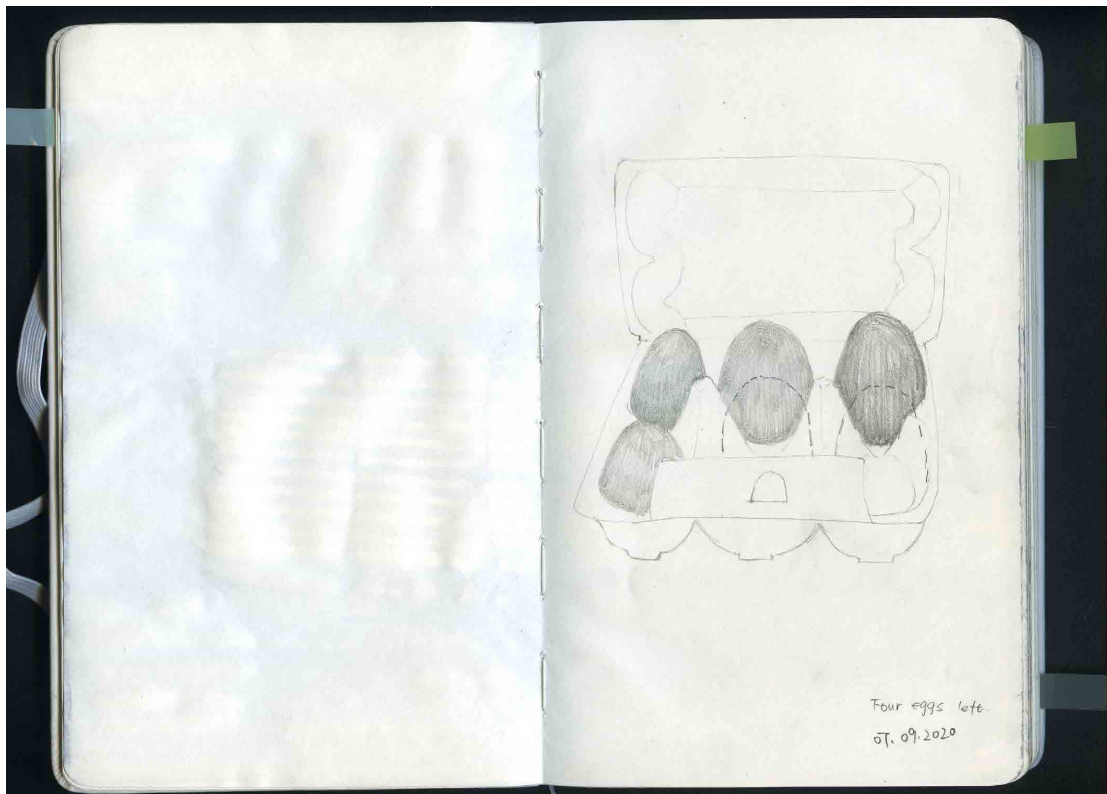
Discarded flowers & empty vase

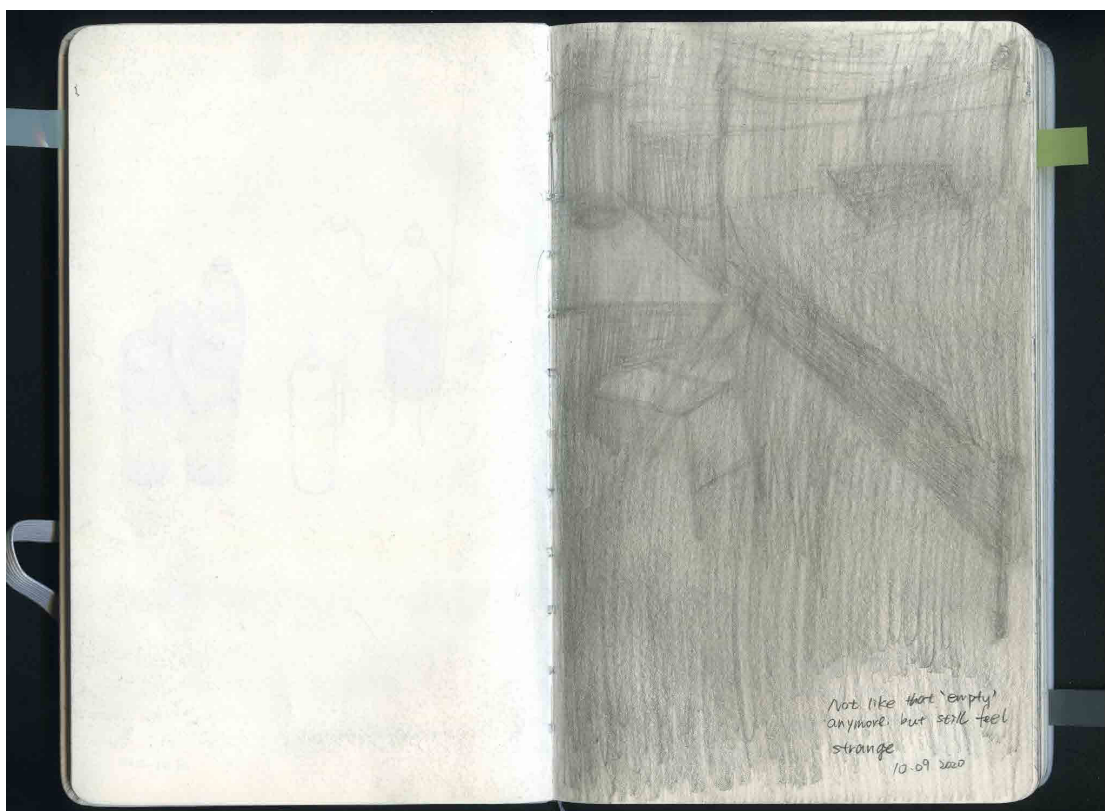
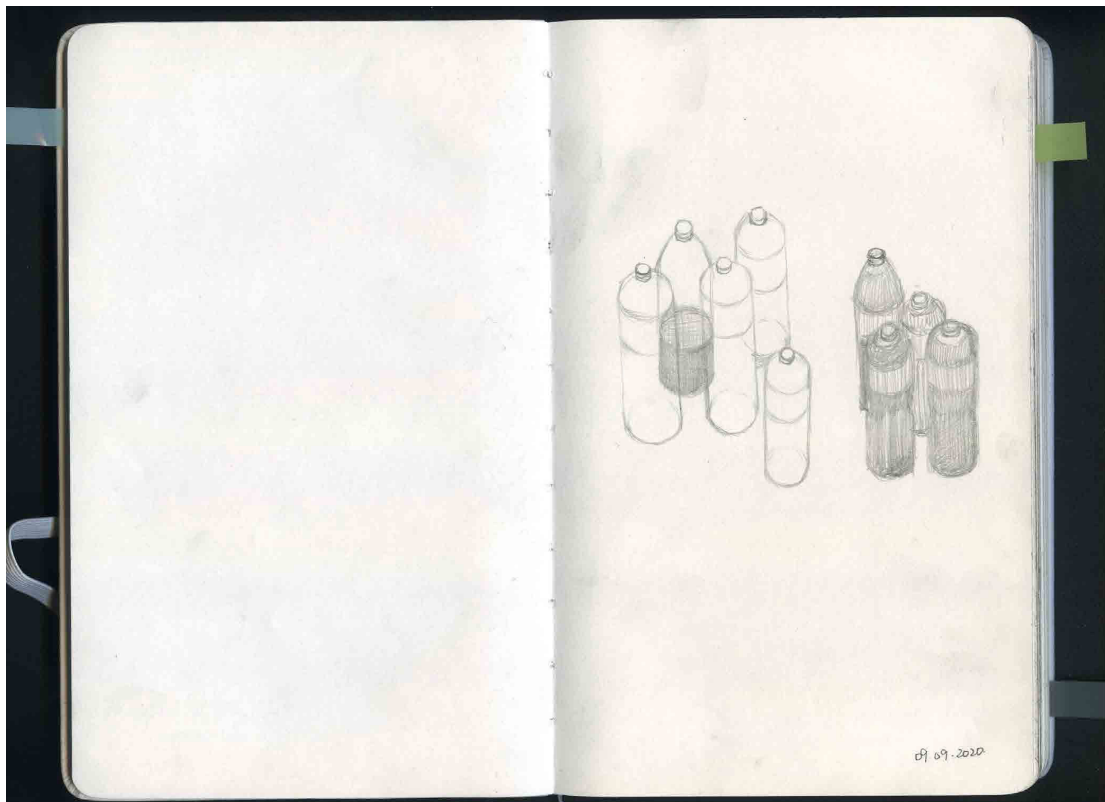
2020. 5. 20

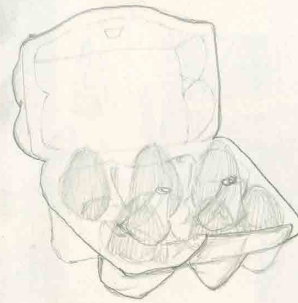








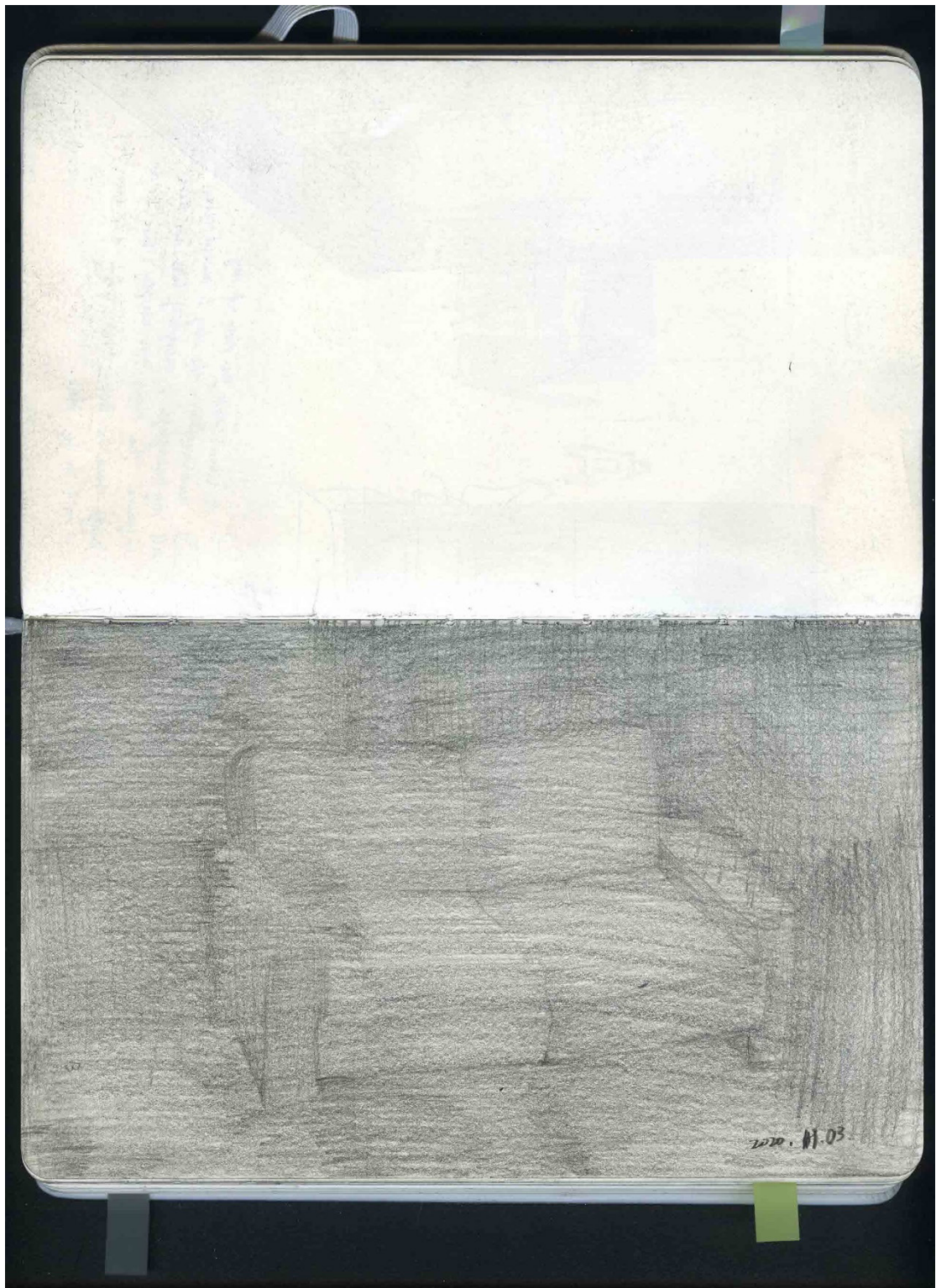




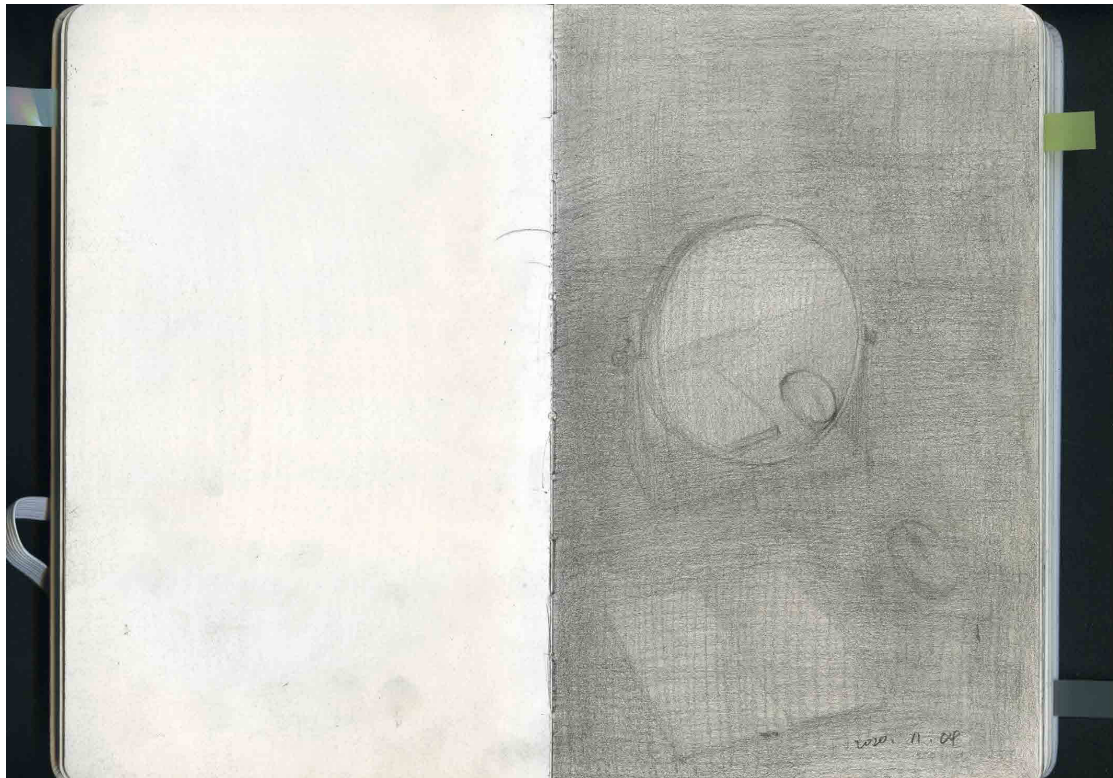
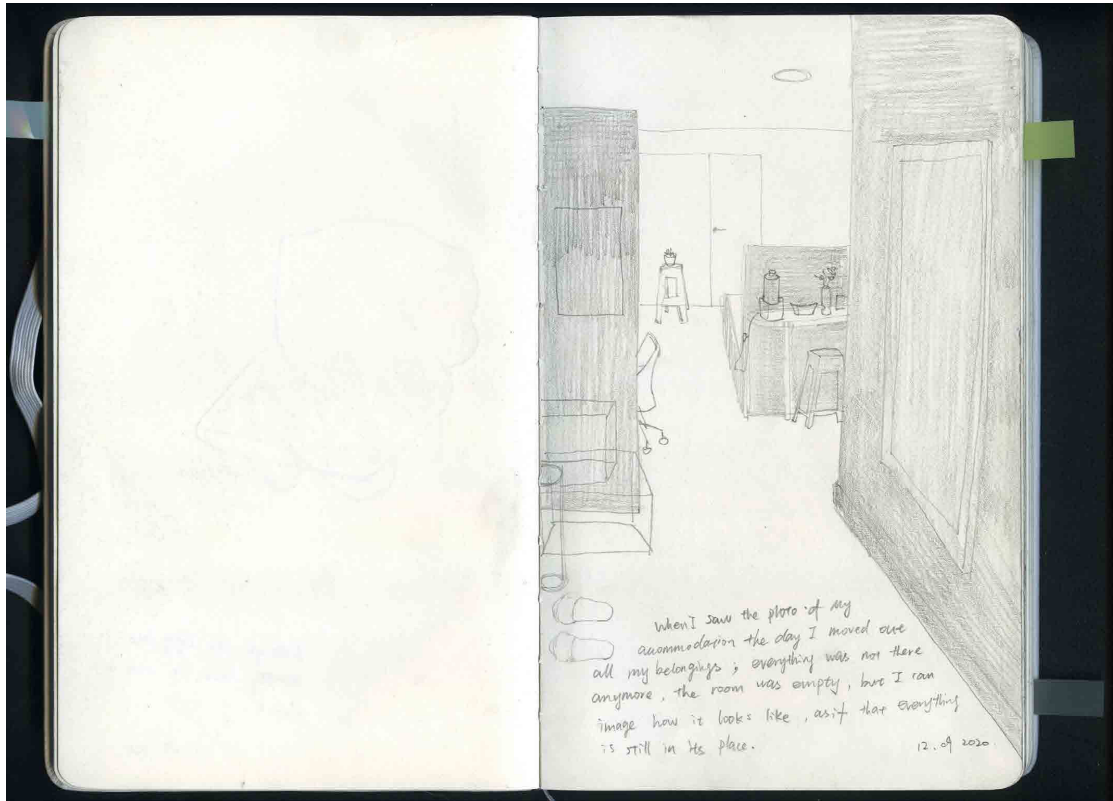
Although the egg box is  
empty, but it made me  
think of eggs.

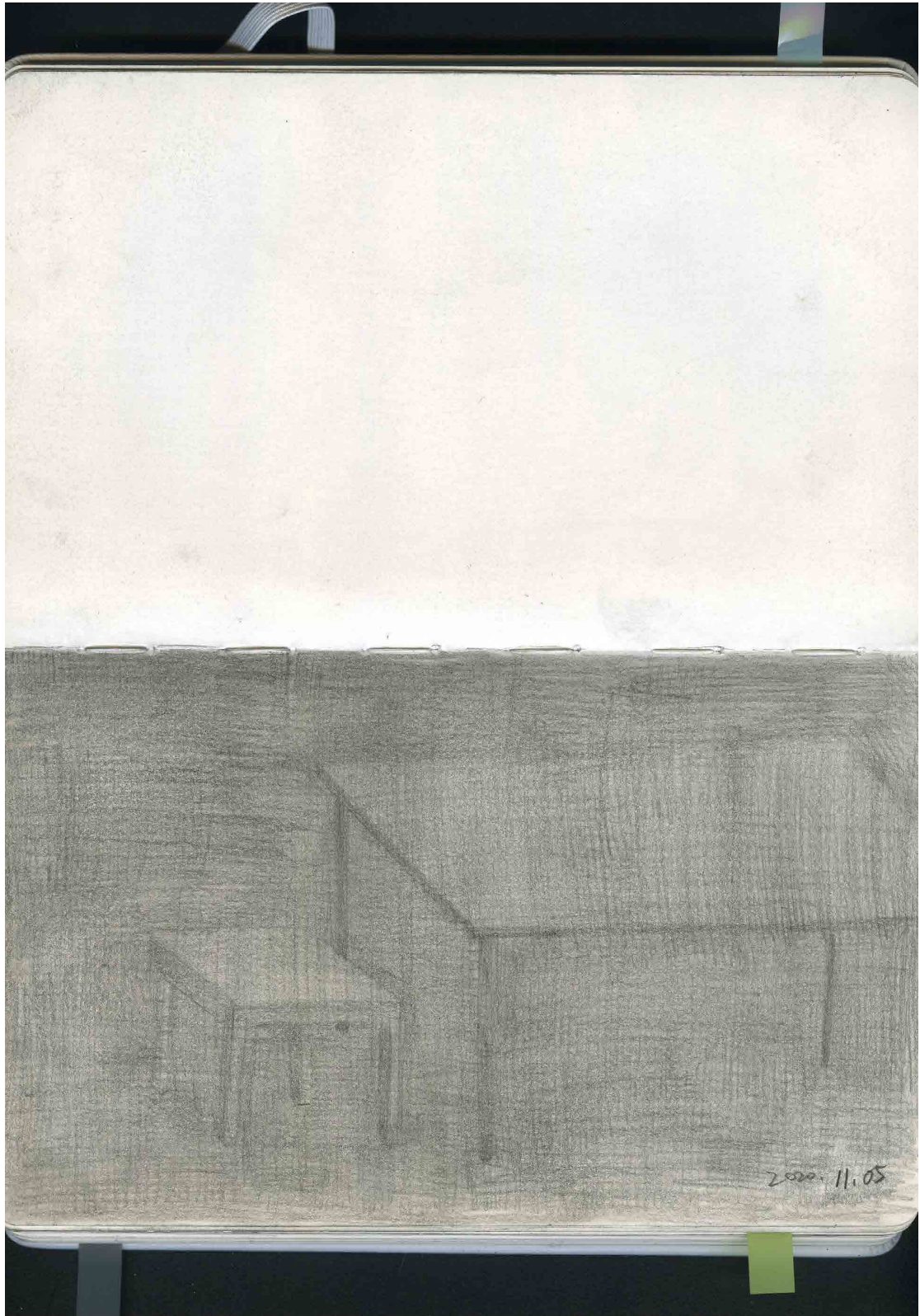
11.09.2020



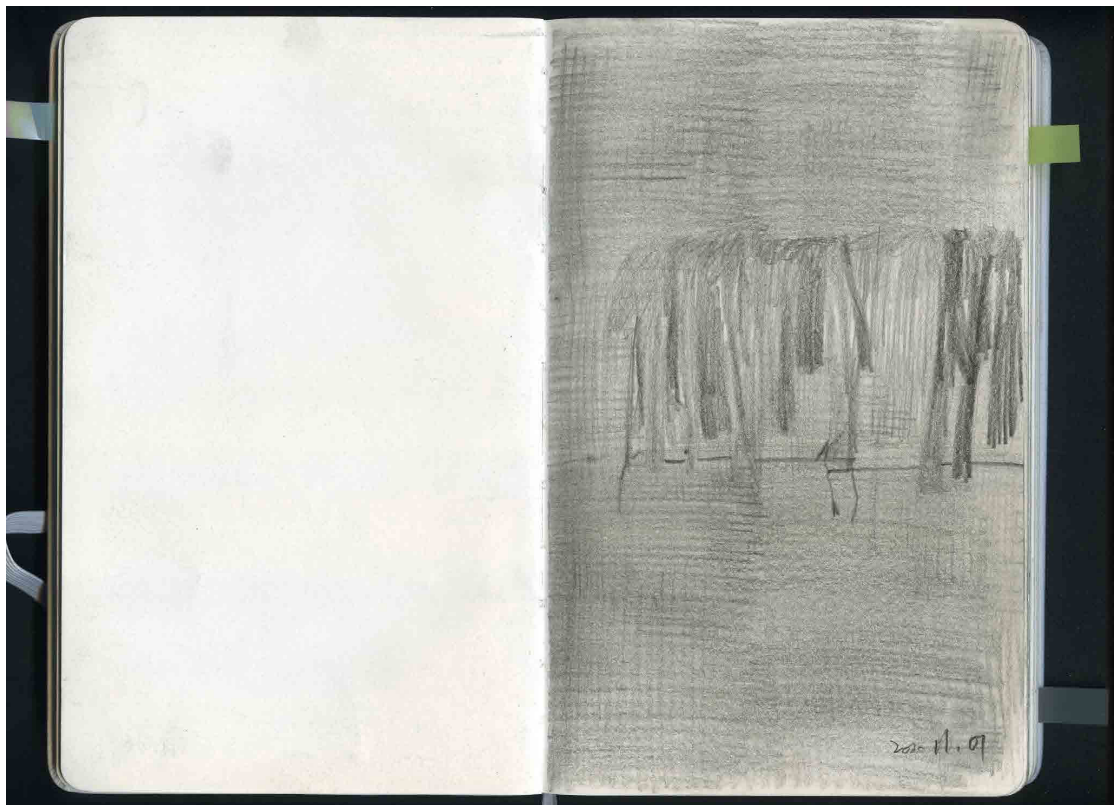
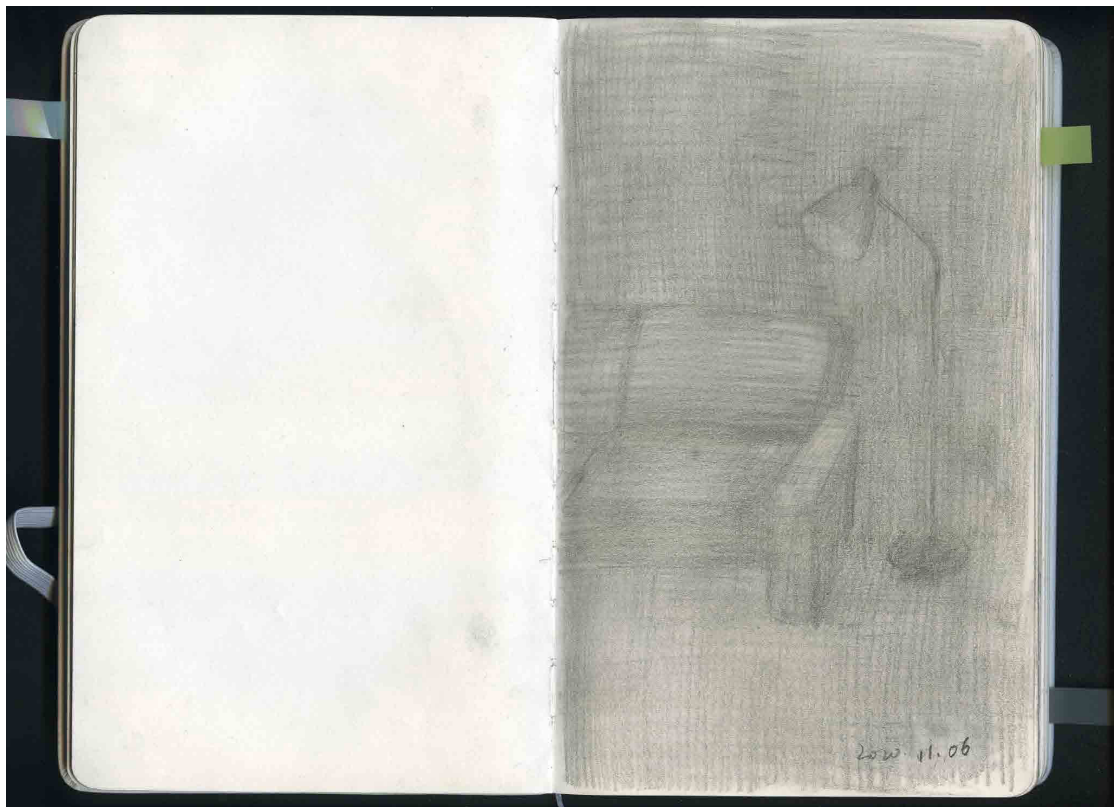


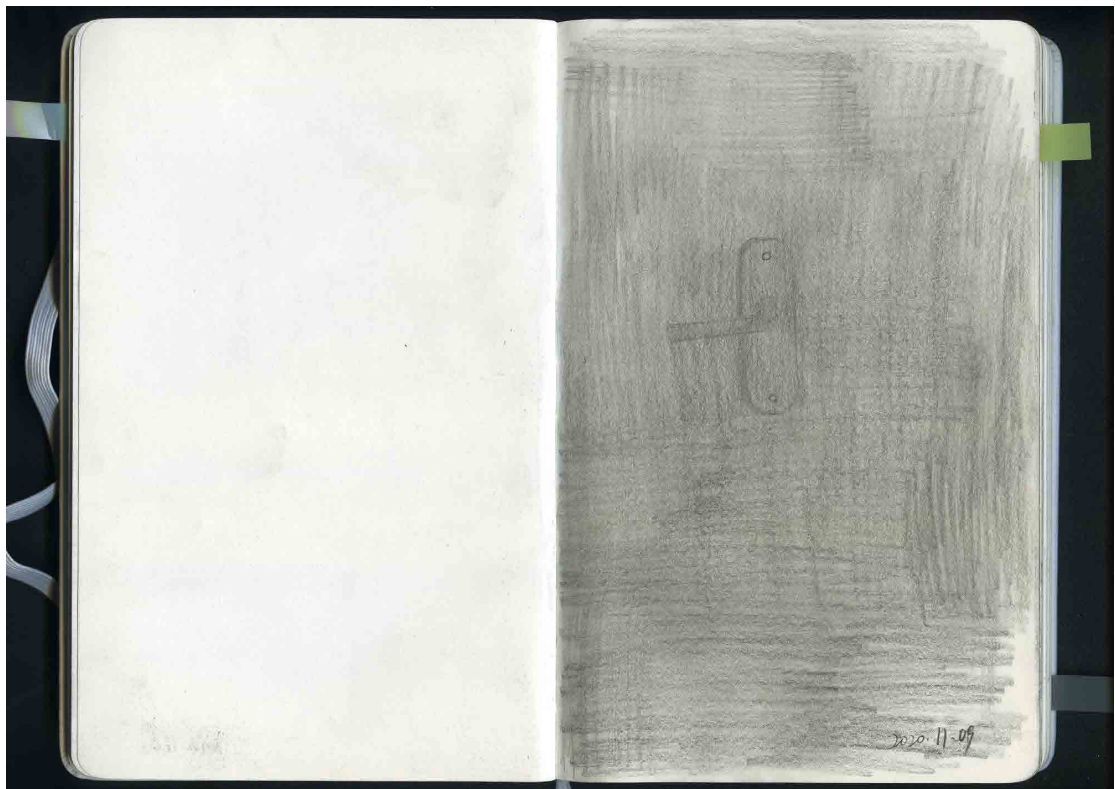
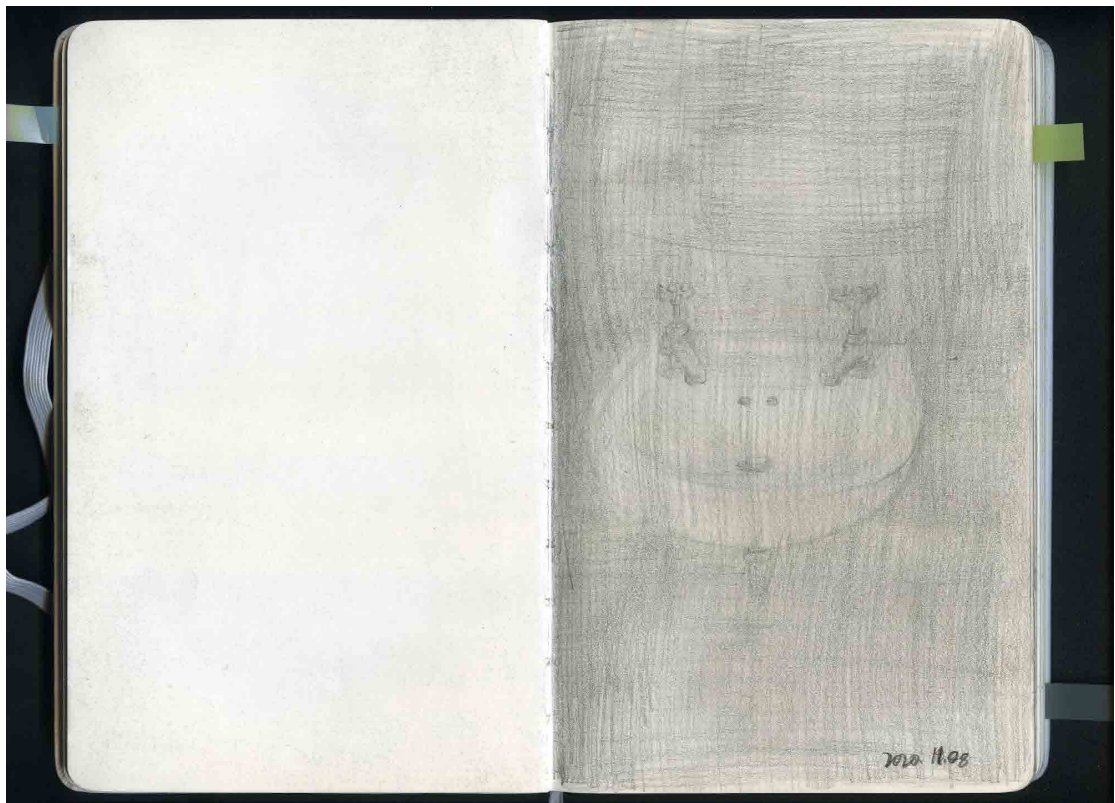


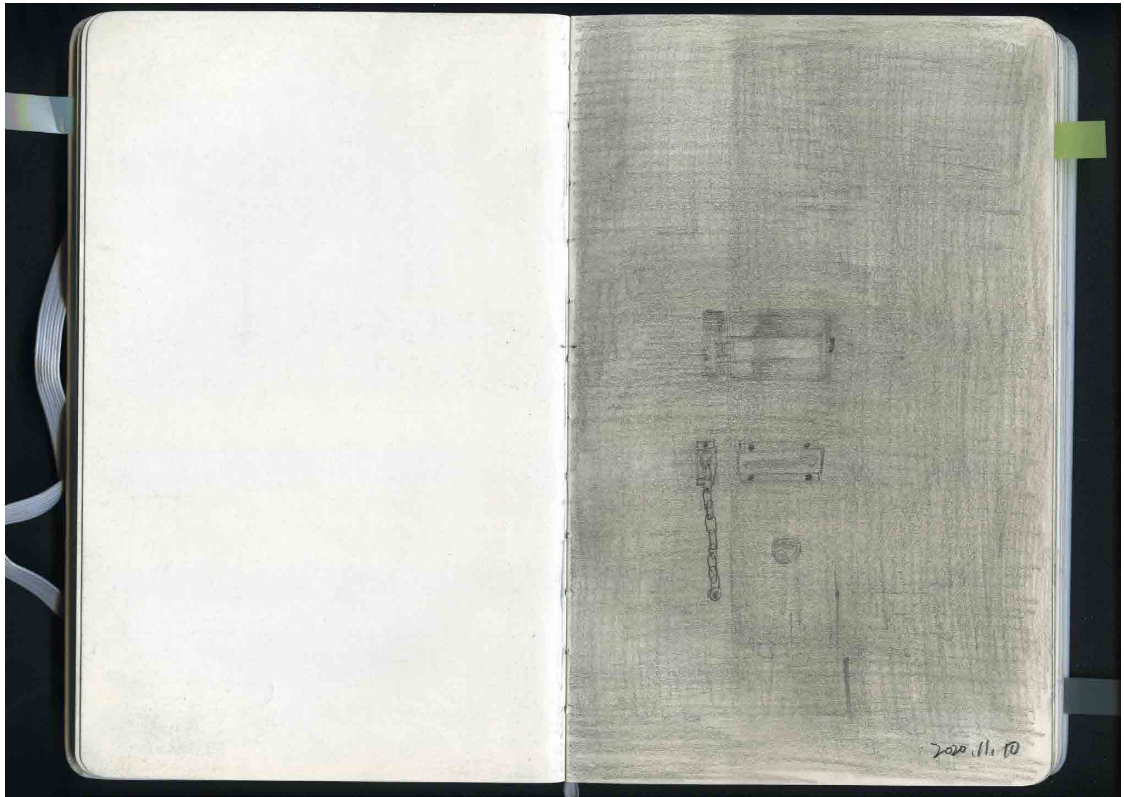






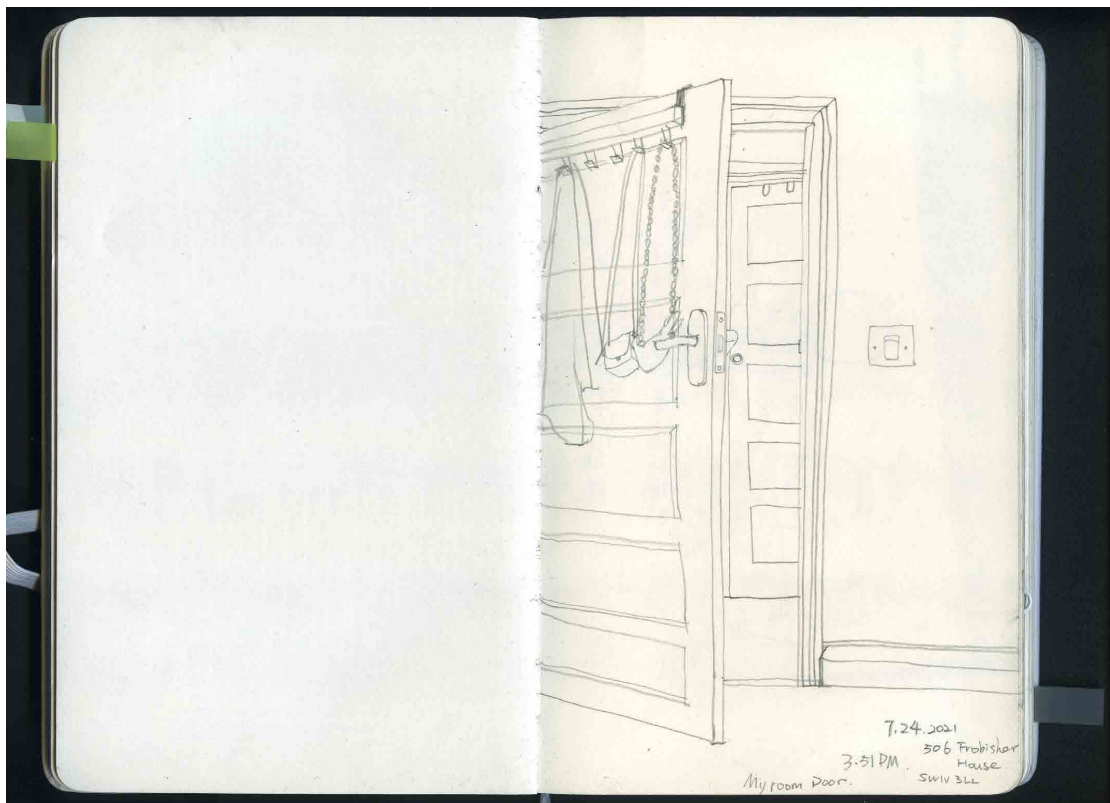
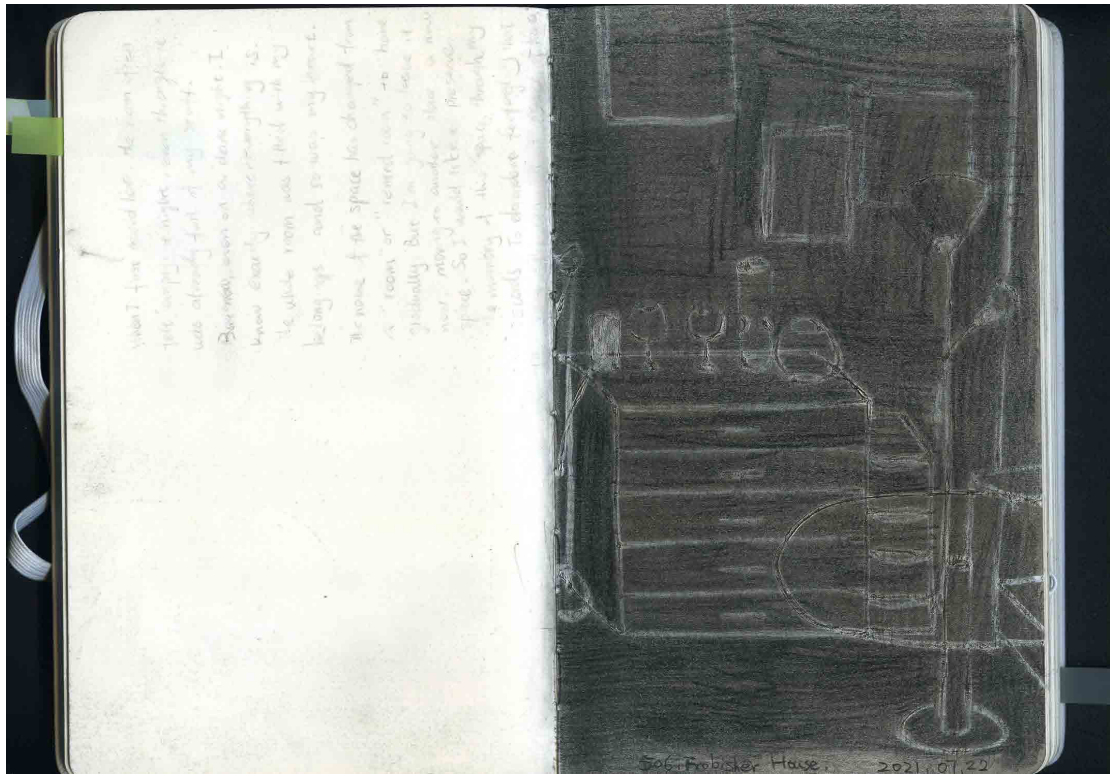








Diary - London, 2021



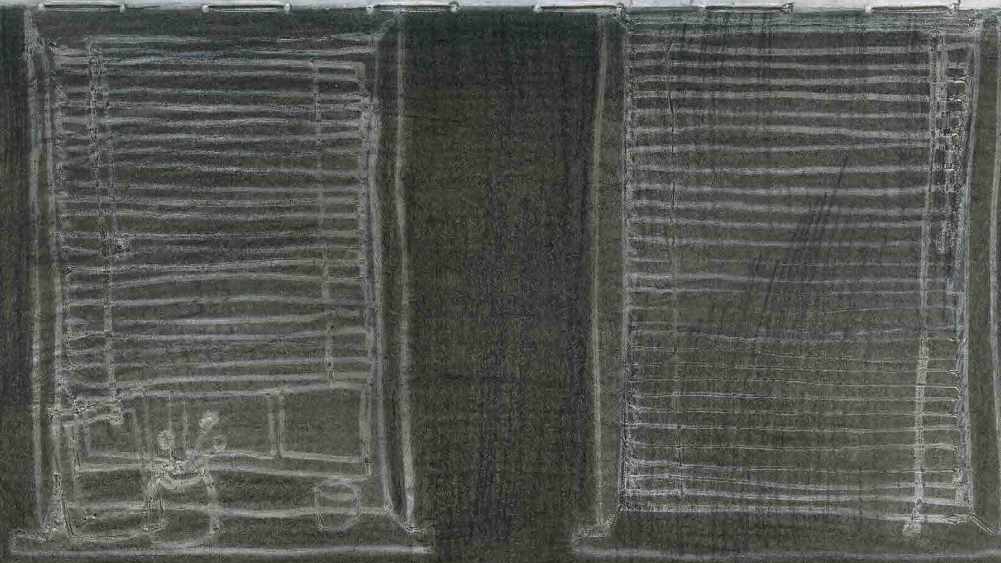


When I first moved here, the room often felt empty at night, even though it was already full of my stuff.

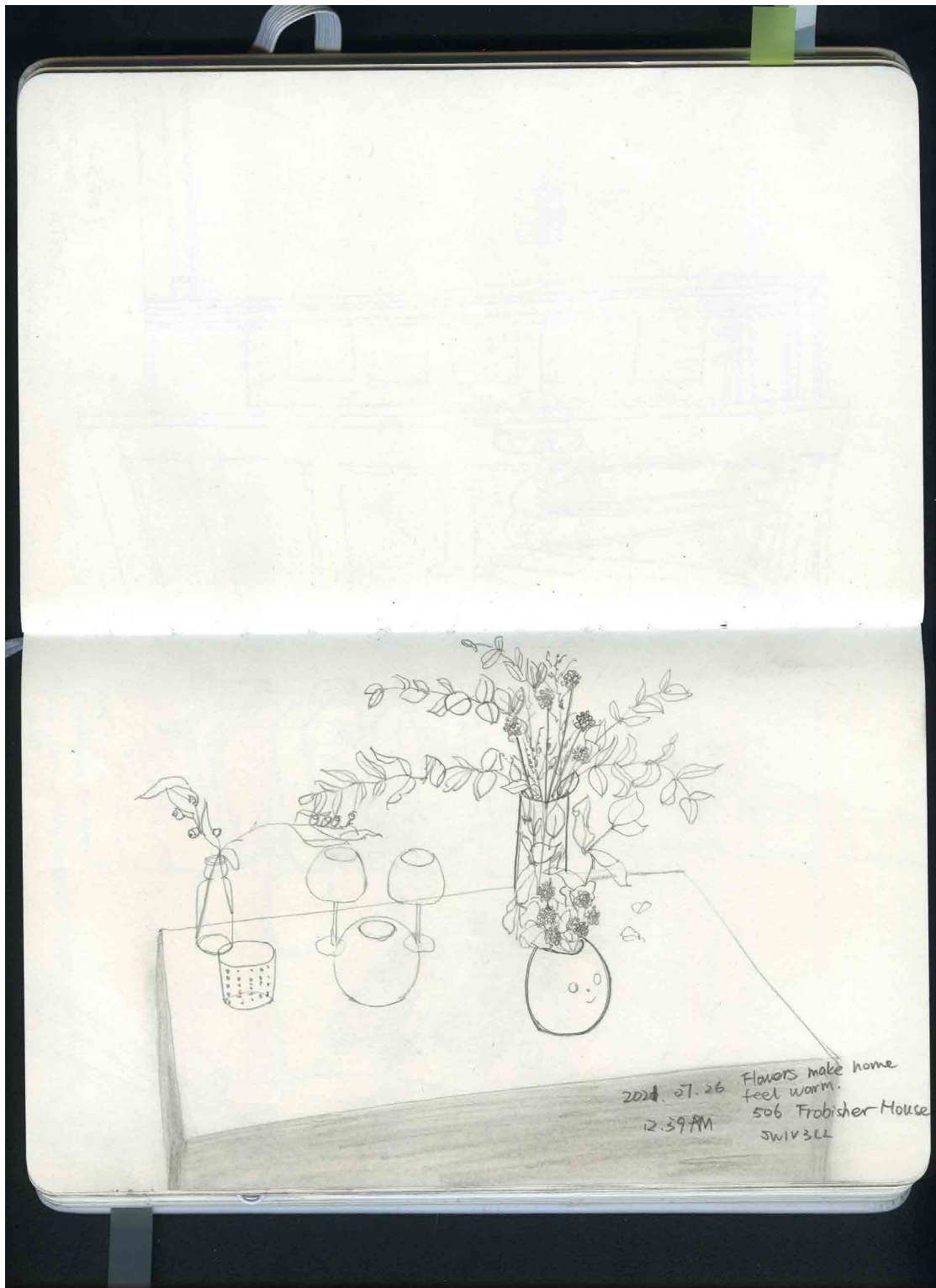
But now, even on a dark night, I know exactly where everything is.

The whole room was filled with my belongings, and so was my heart.

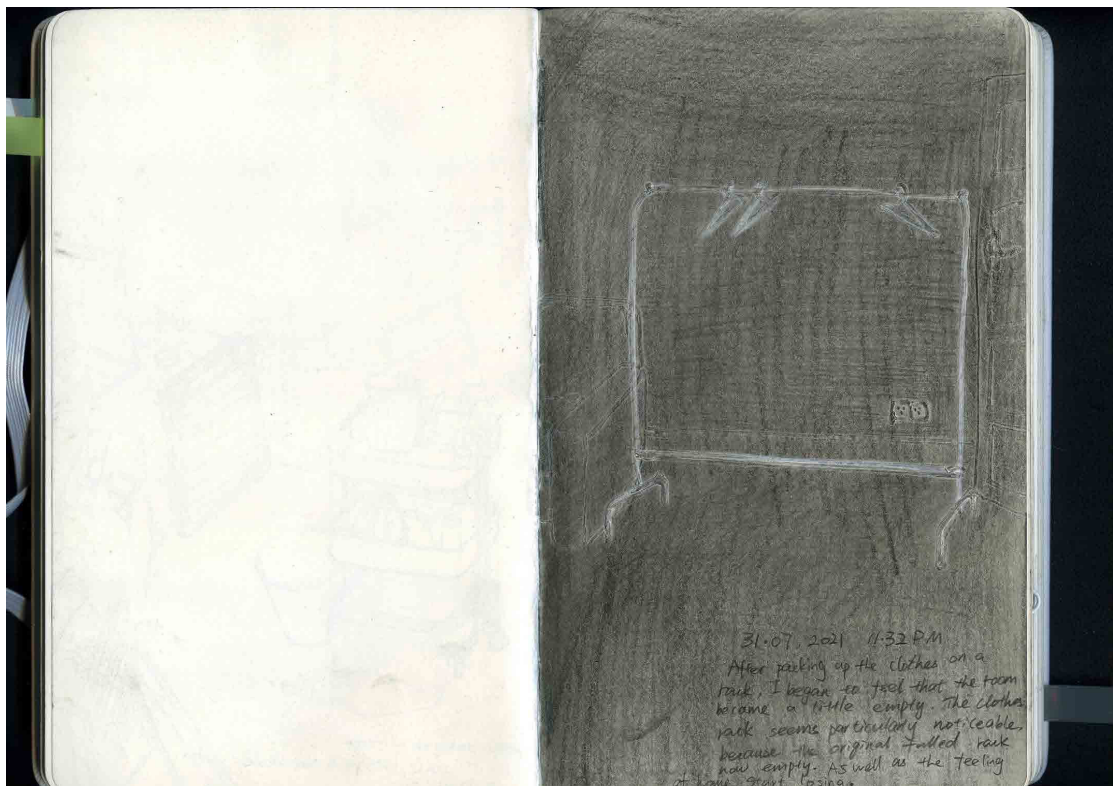
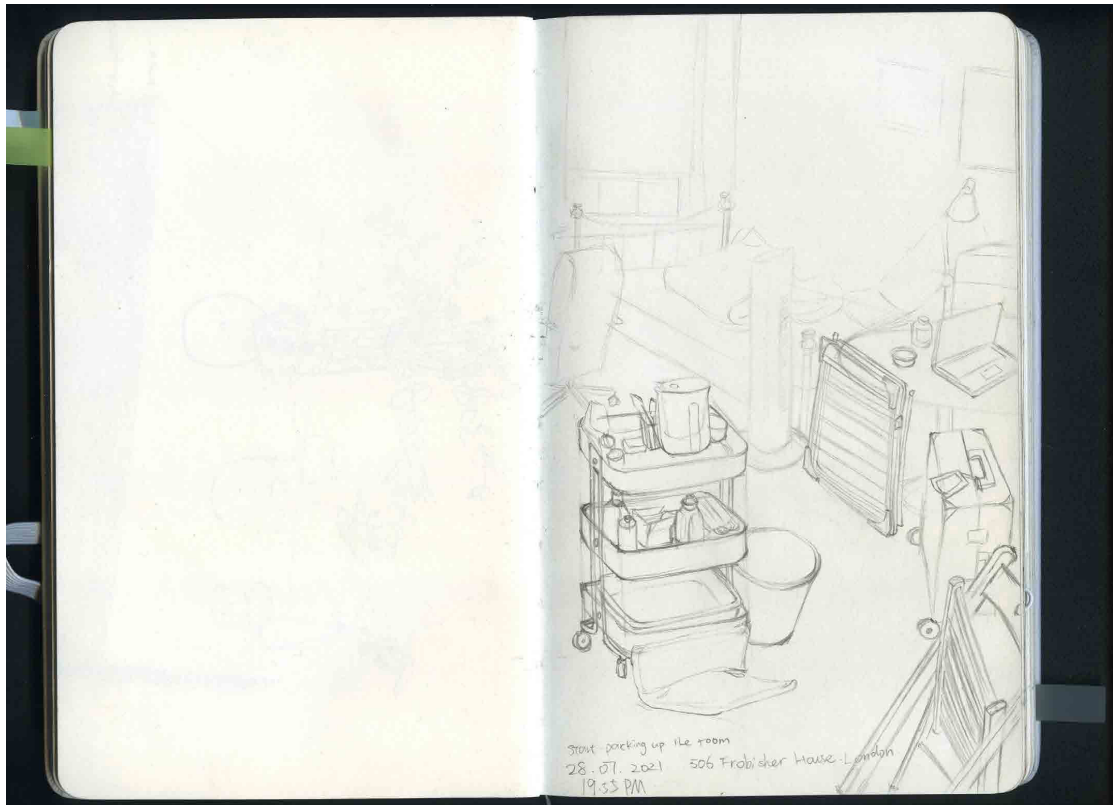
The name of the space has changed from a "room" or "rented room" to "home" gradually. But I'm going to leave it, now, moving to another place, a new space. So I would like to preserve the memory of this space through my records, to document a feeling that I finally can call it a sense of home.

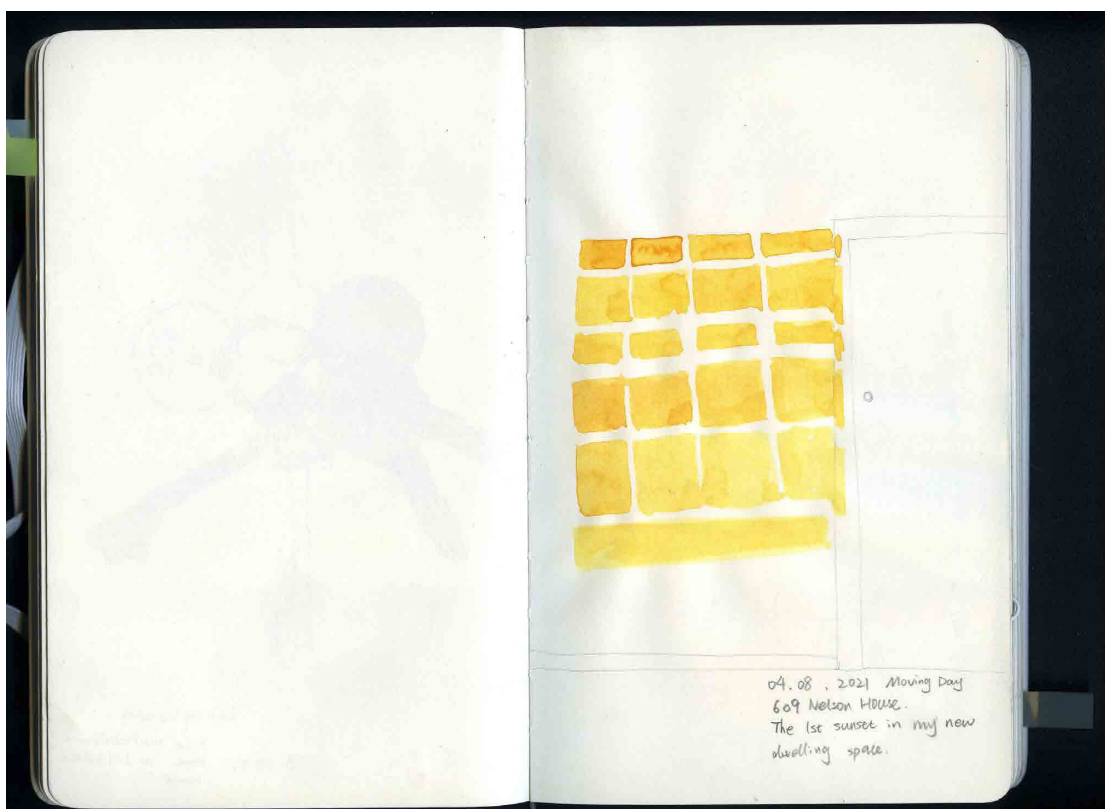
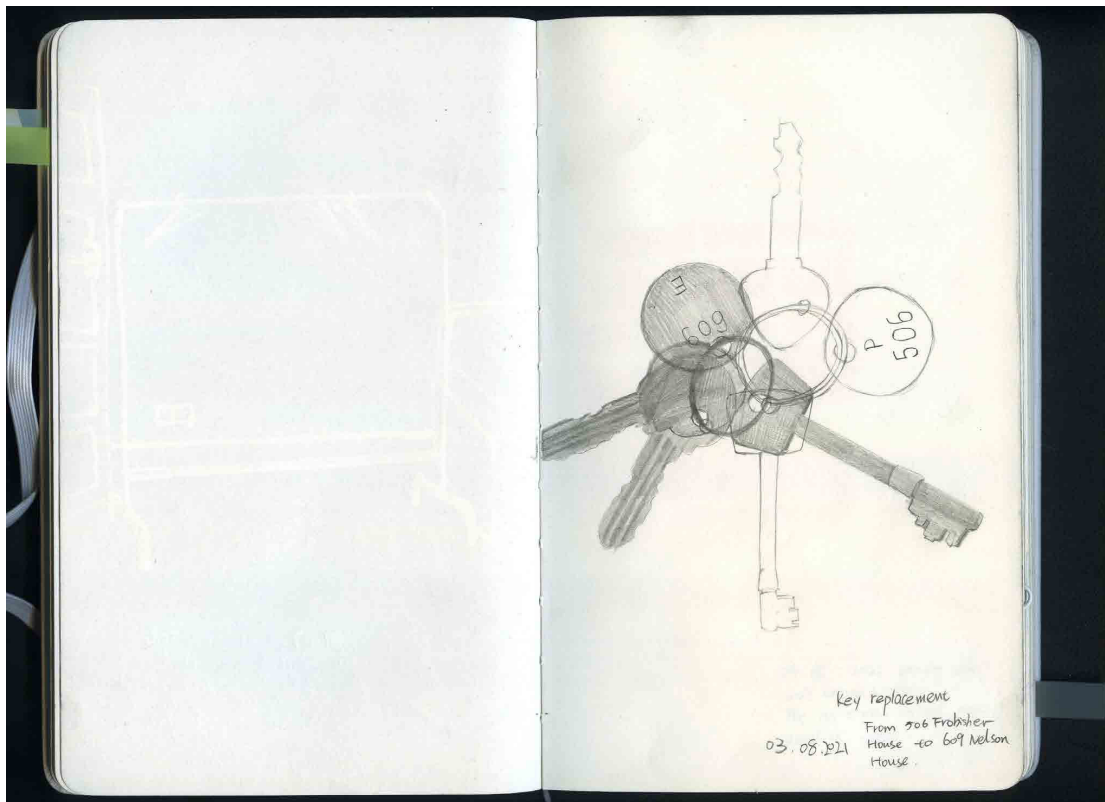


8:13 PM 506 Frohisher House 2021.07.23

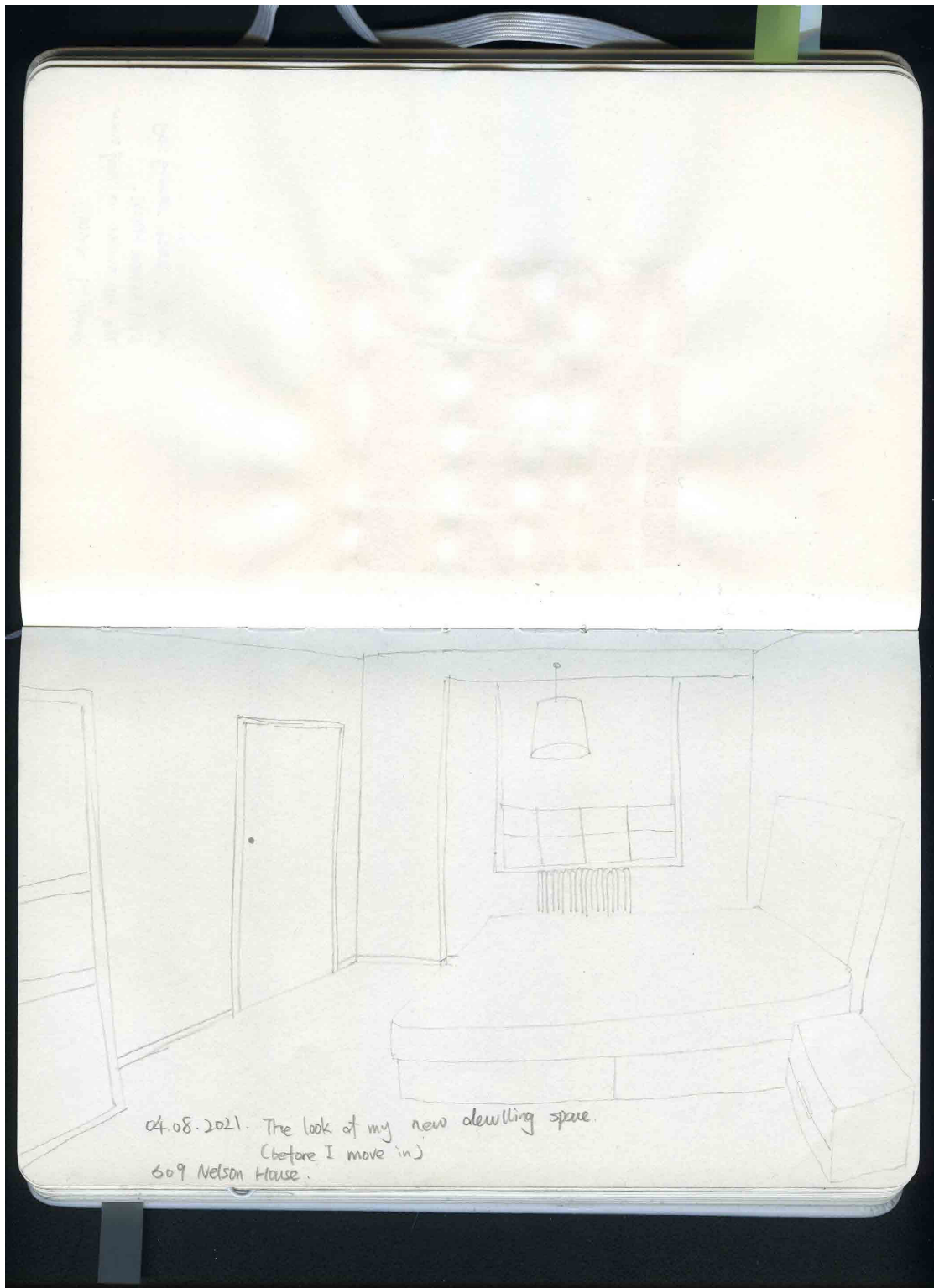


2014. 07. 26 Flowers make home  
feel warm.  
12.39 AM 506 Frobisher House  
SW1V3LL



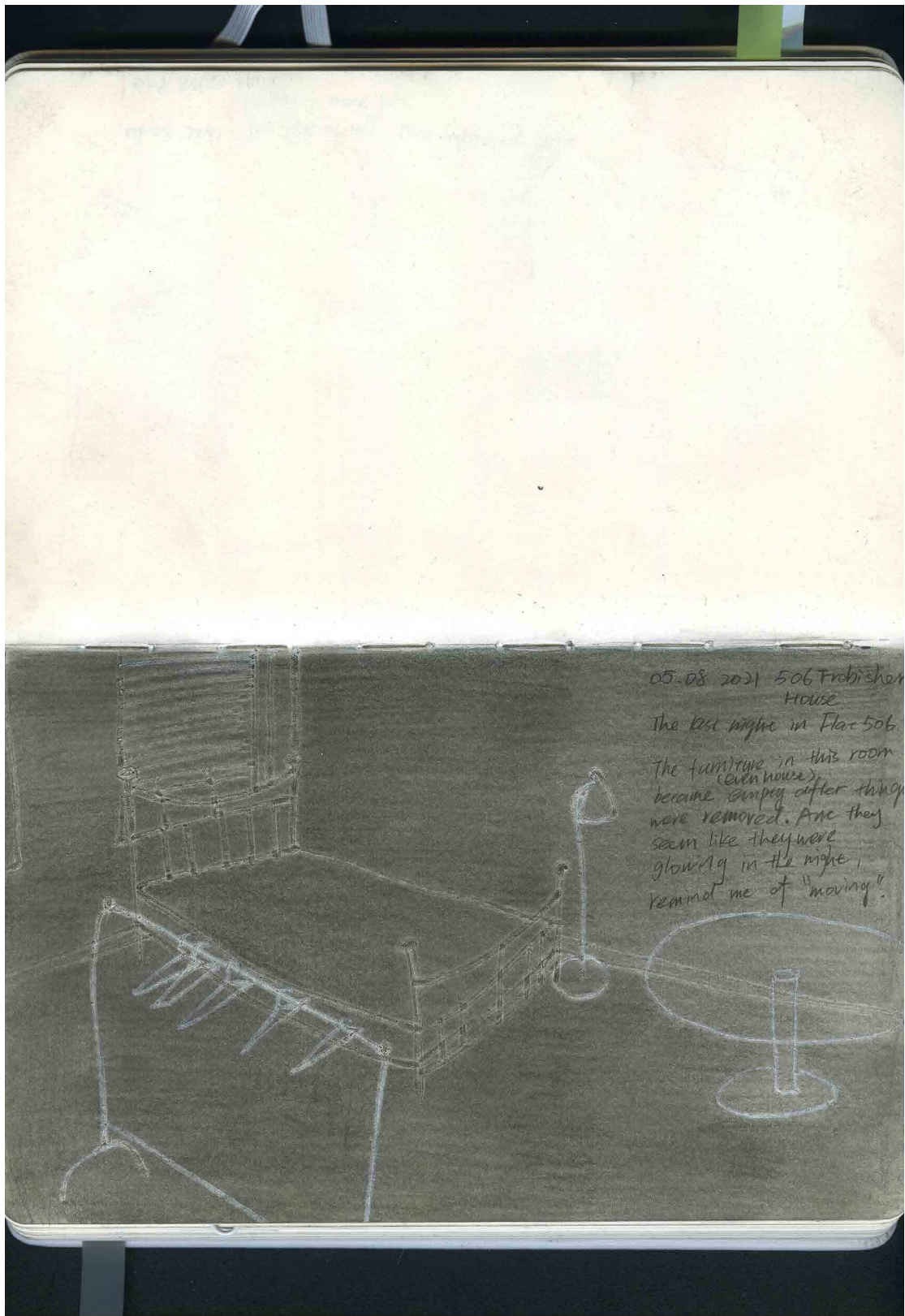


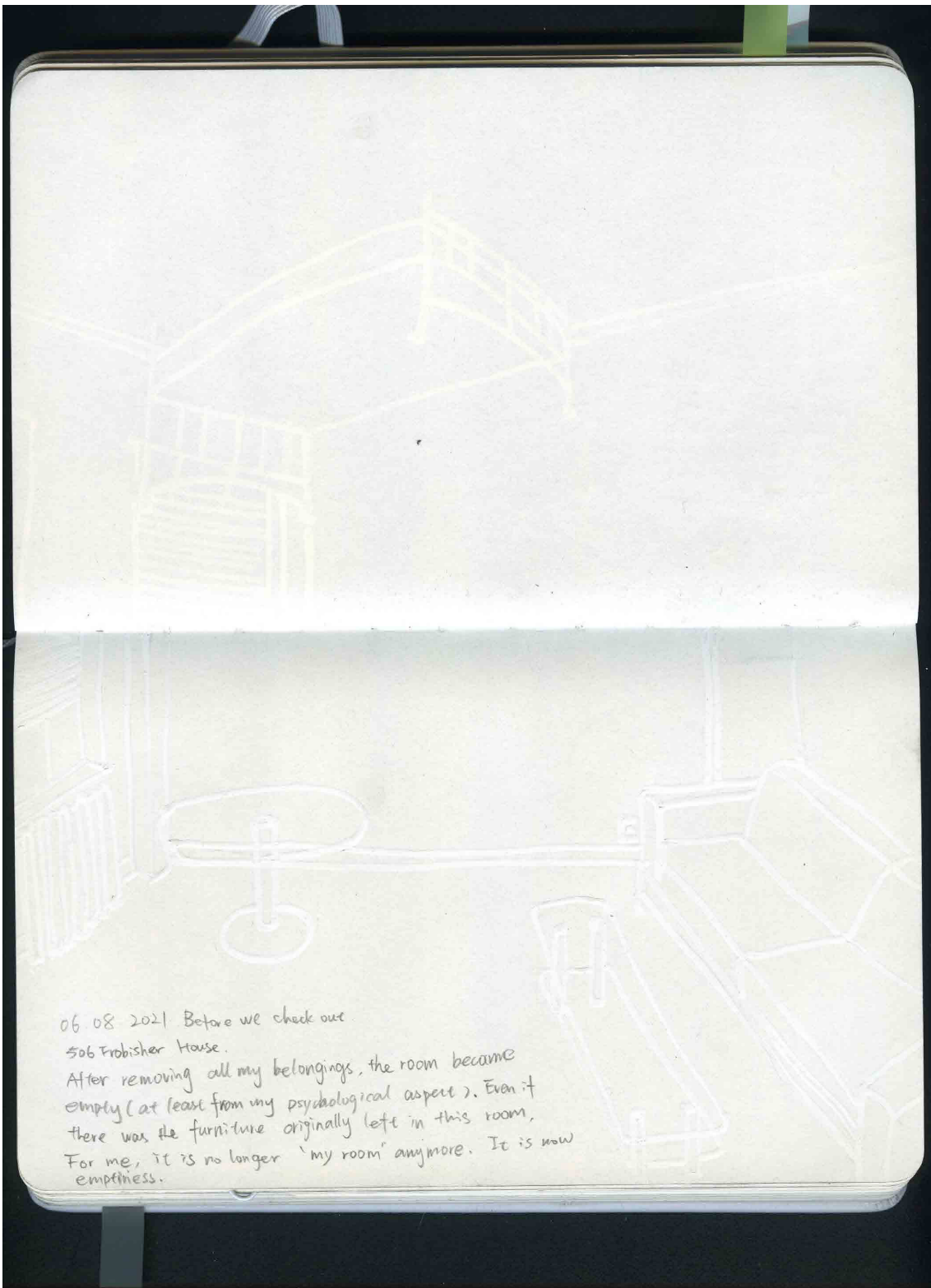




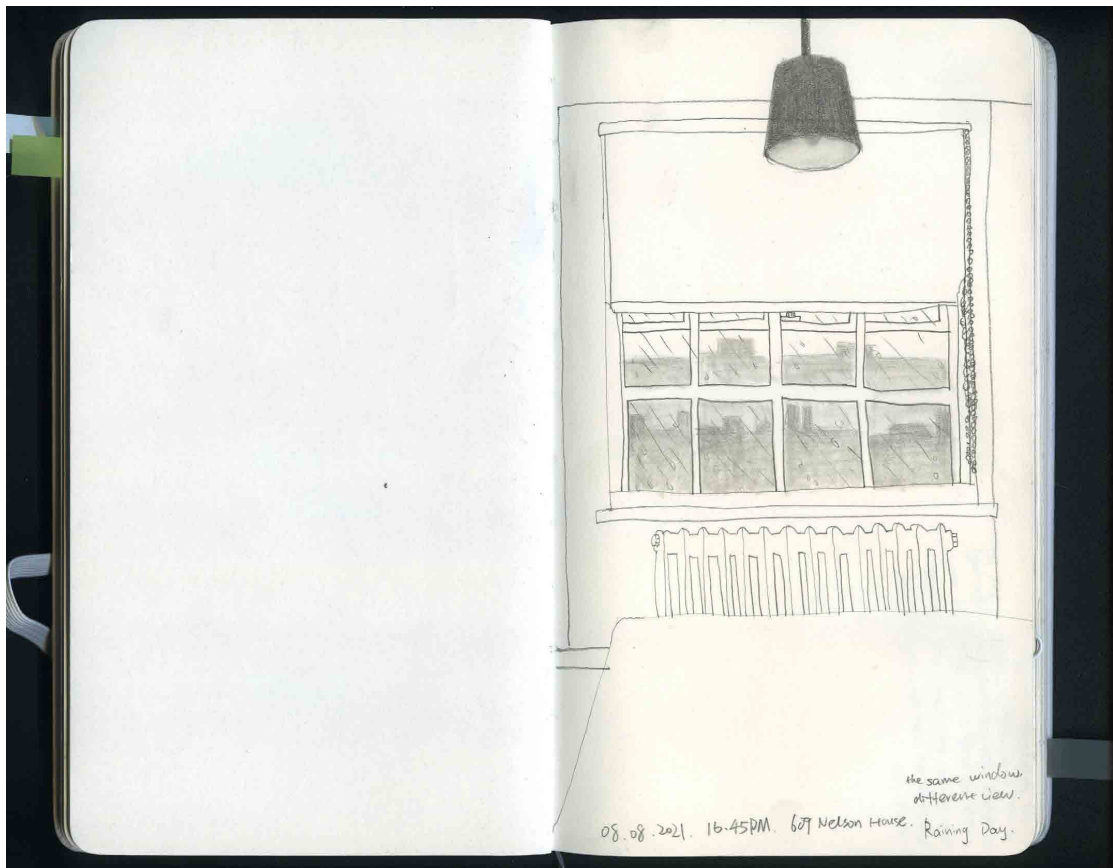
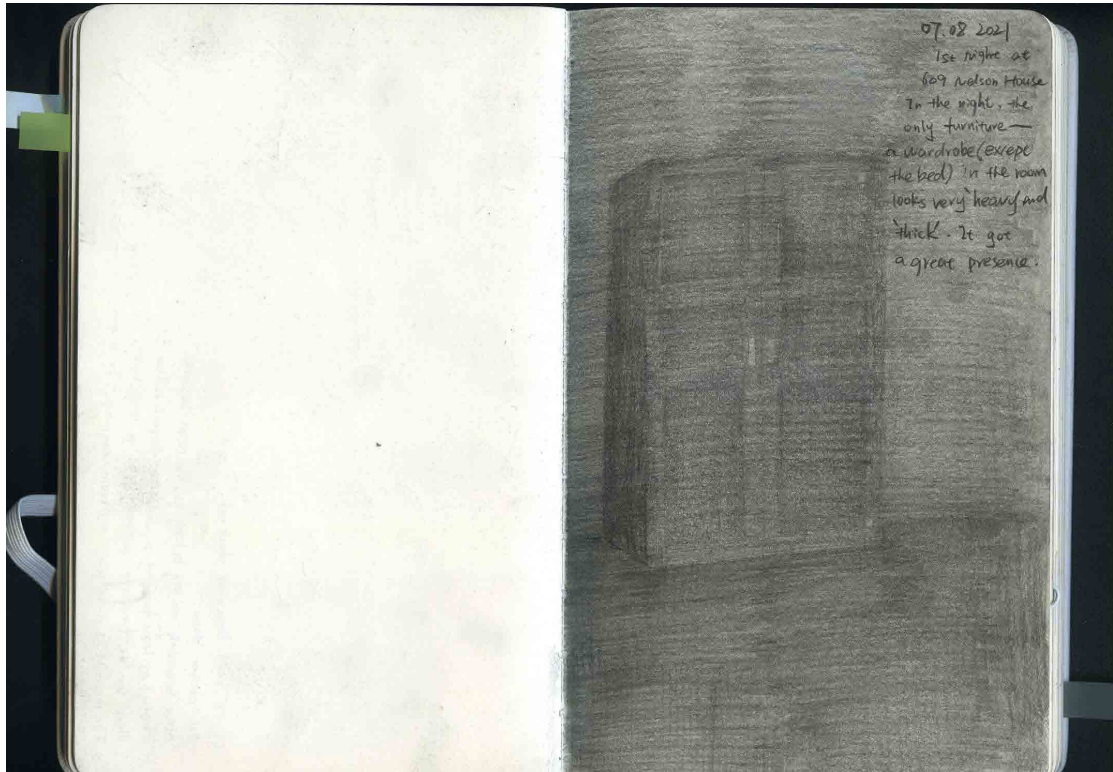
04.08.2021. The look of my new dwelling space.  
(before I move in)  
609 Nelson House.







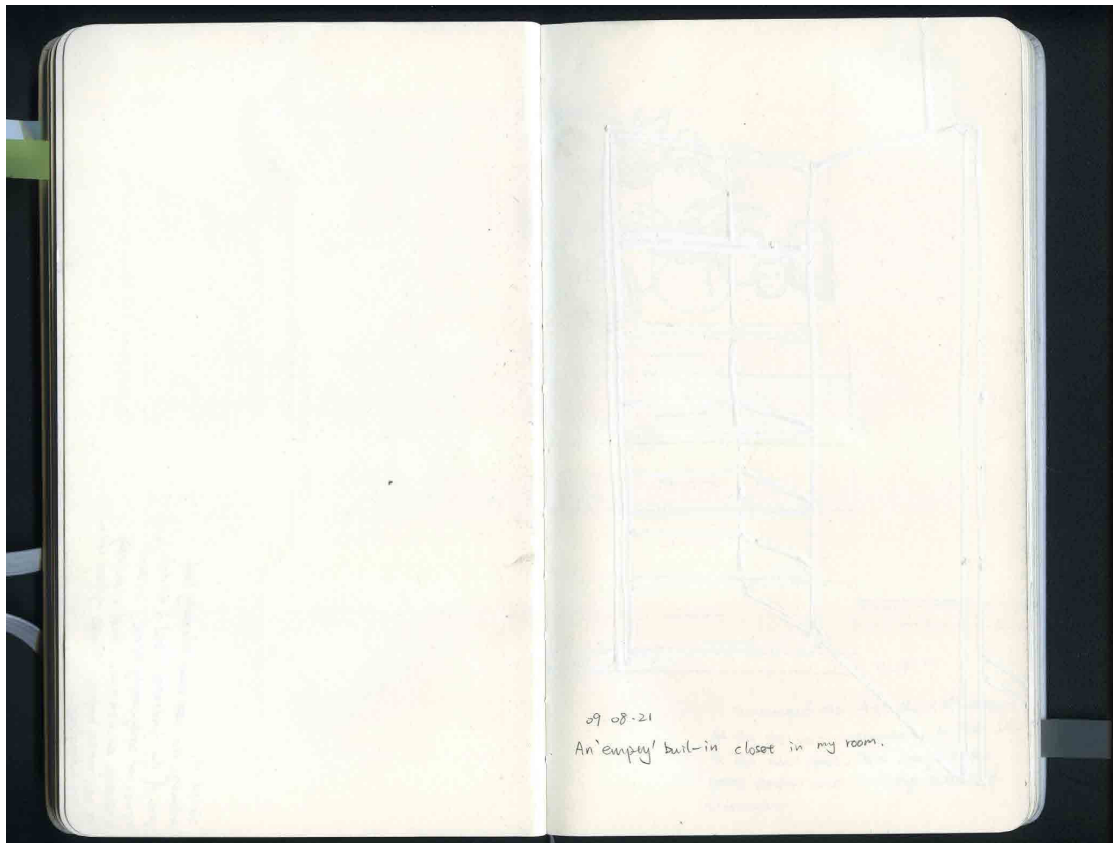
06.08.2021 Before we check out  
506 Frobisher House.  
After removing all my belongings, the room became  
empty (at least from my psychological aspect). Even if  
there was the furniture originally left in this room,  
For me, it is no longer 'my room' anymore. It is now  
emptiness.



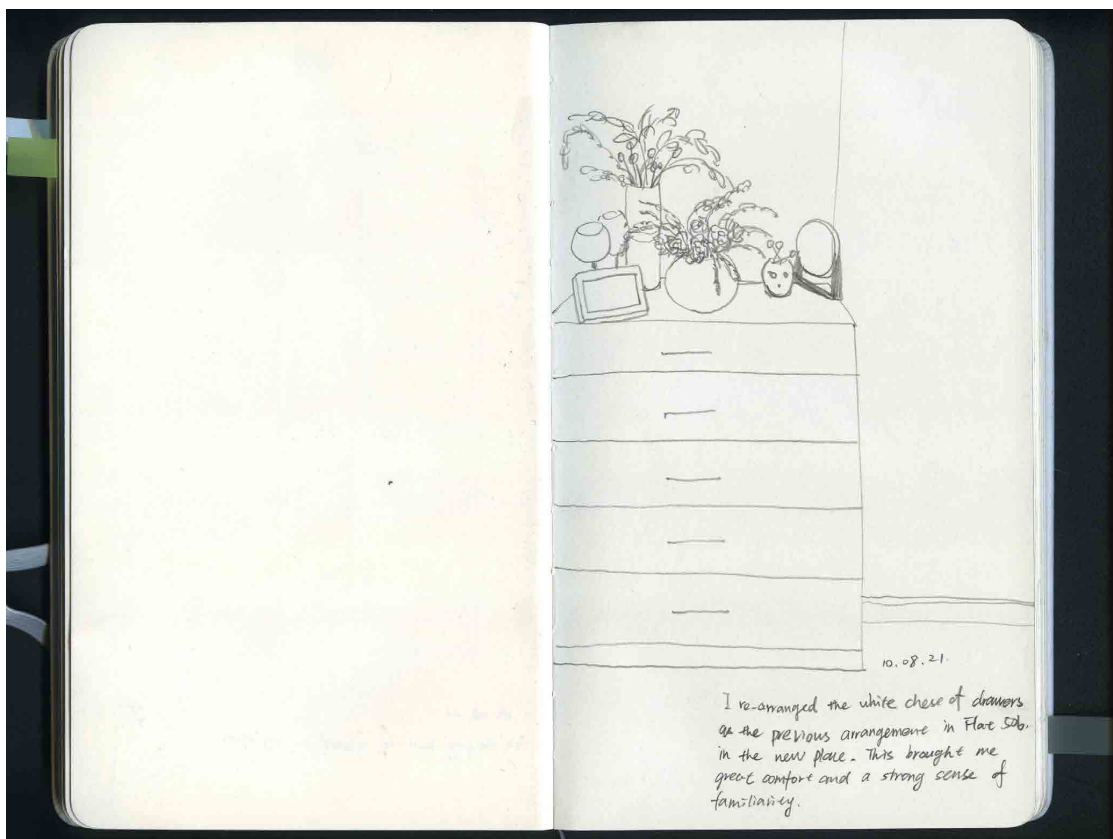
08.08.2021.

Although the new room already had  
part of the furniture (bed & wardrobe),  
it was not really empty at all, in such  
a strange environment, and especially  
it was empty before it was filled with  
my belongings.





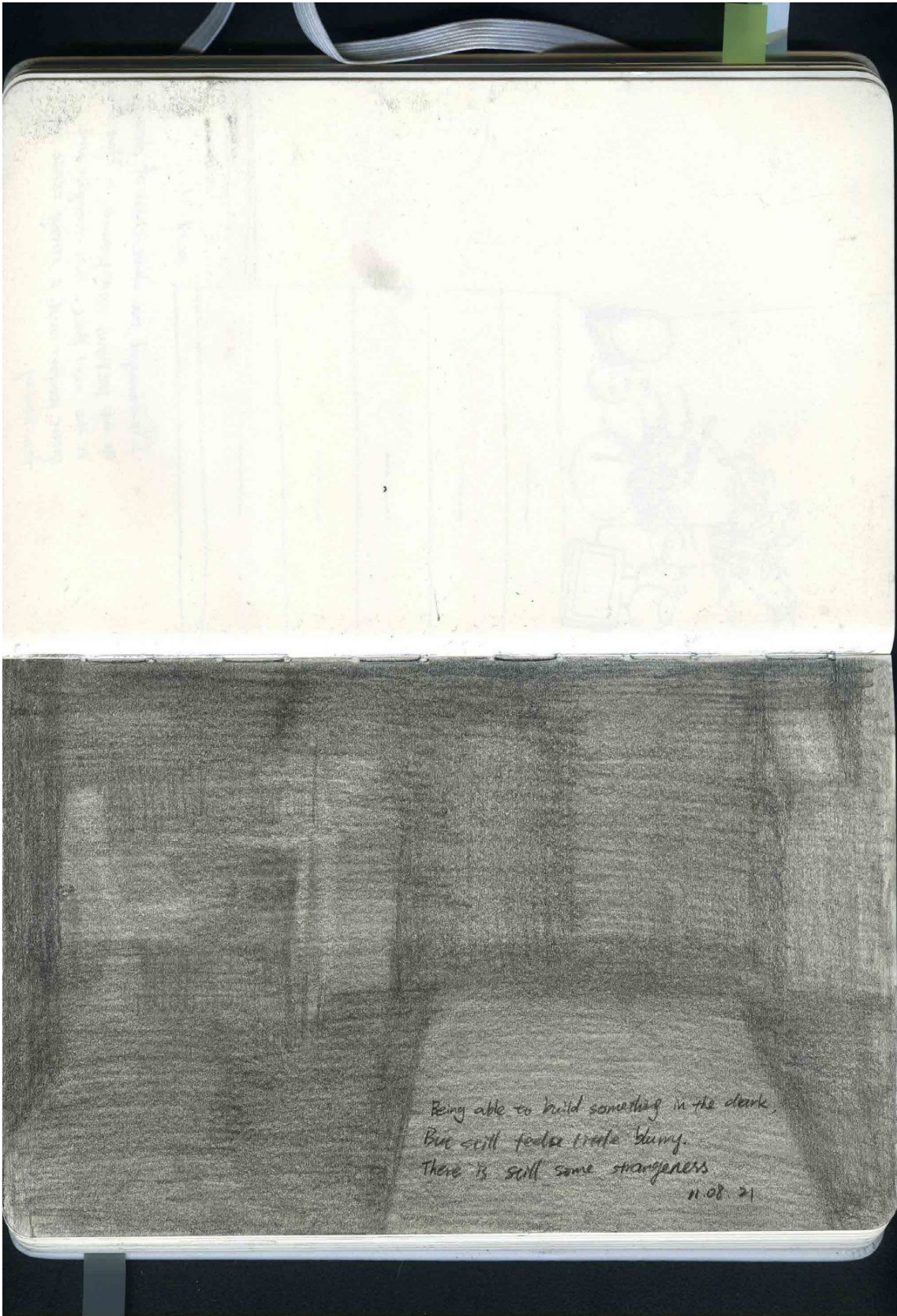
09.08.21  
An 'empty' built-in closet in my room.



10.08.21

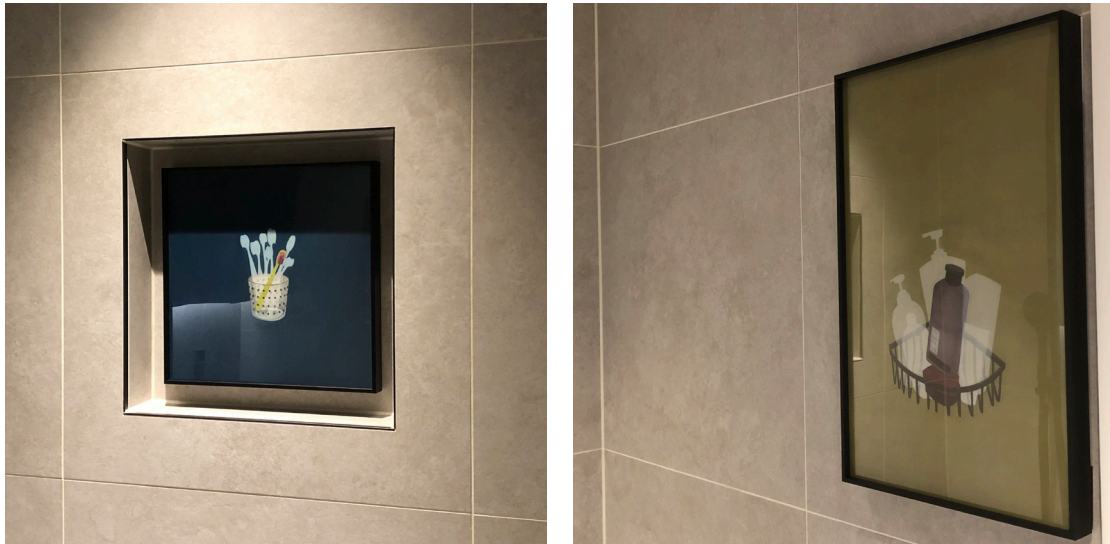
I re-arranged the white chest of drawers  
of the previous arrangement in Flac 506.  
in the new place. This brought me  
great comfort and a strong sense of  
familiarity.



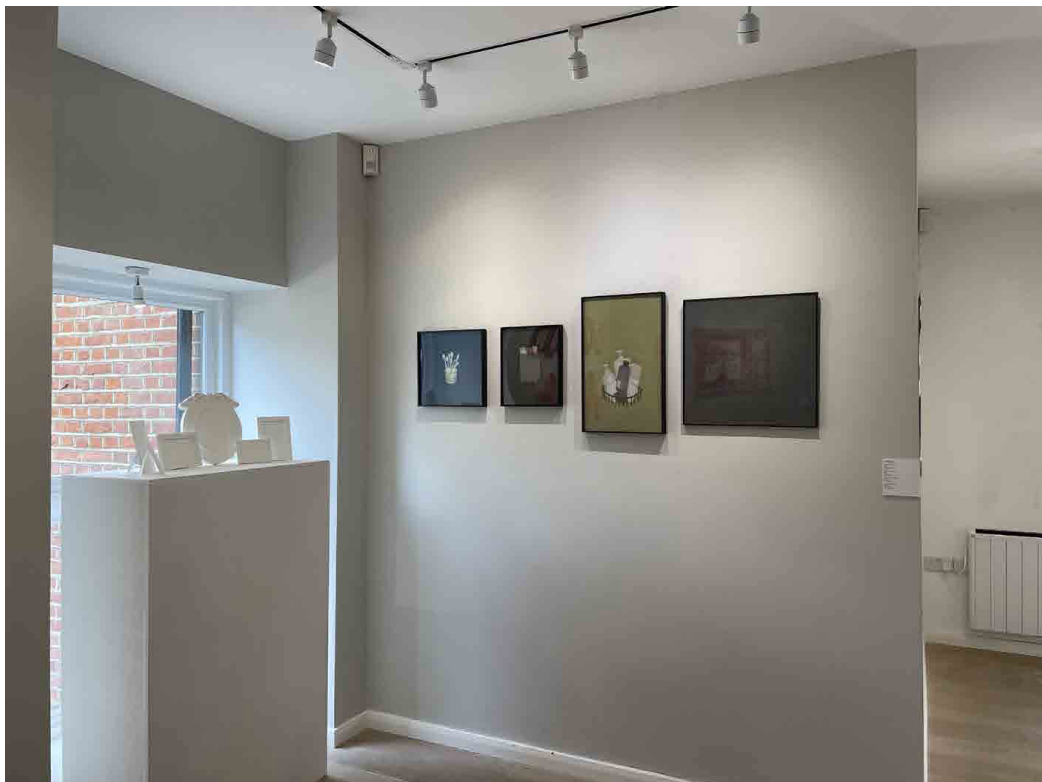


**APPENDIX 7: Exhibitions**

1. Group exhibition - **"My House Is An Island"**, 2020. Private domestic setting, Vauxhall, London.



2. Group exhibition- **"Anchor"**, 2021 Arthill Gallery, London, W14 9NU







3. Group exhibition- **“The reveries of the many”**, 2021 Arthill Gallery, London,

W14 9NU



4. The duo PhD exhibition- **“Secret Heim”**, 2022

Triangle space, Chelsea College of Arts, London, SW1P 4JU

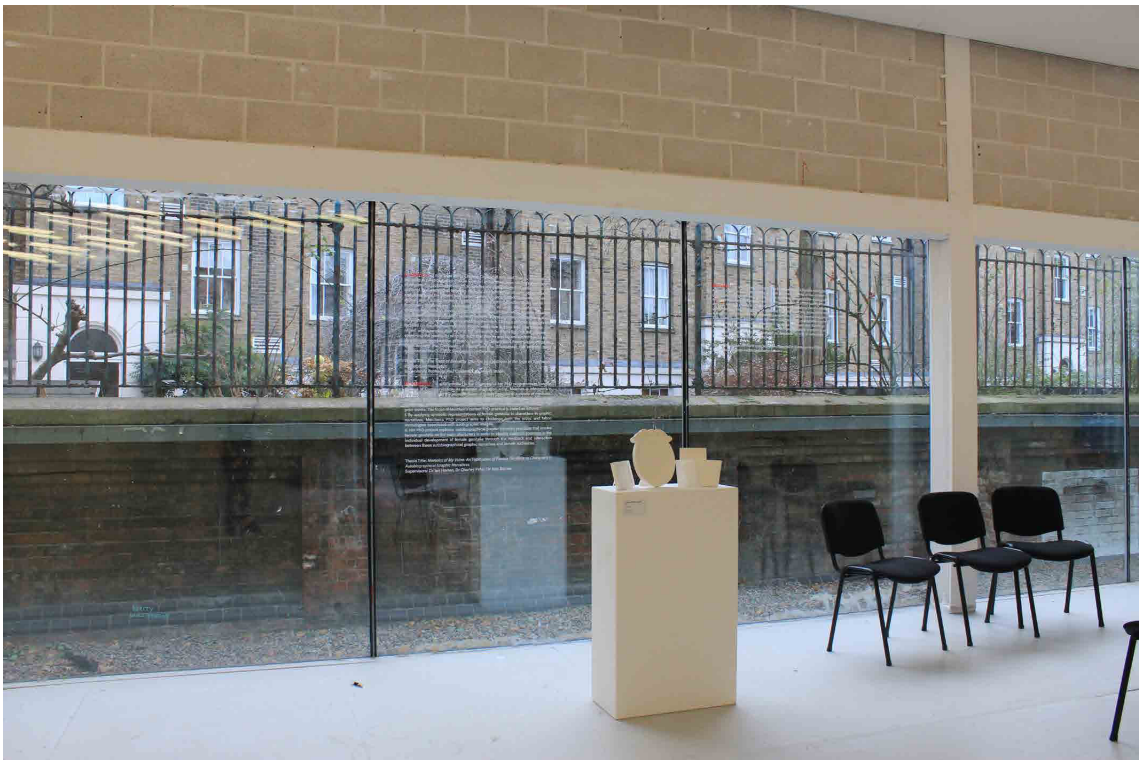














Collaboration work for the exhibition - "Secret Heim", 2022



Lihong Liu & Meichen Lu, *Enclosed Heim*, 2022  
Wire, white spray paint  
Size variable









## Exhibition catalogue:

# SECRET HEIM

Artists/Lihong Liu & Meichen Lu  
Curator/Mengwei Li

**Secret Heim** is an inter-collage exhibition project featuring third-year PhD candidates Lihong Liu from the Chelsea College of Arts and Design and Meichen Lu from the London College of Communication; it is curated by theory-based PhD candidate Mengwei Li of the Central Saint Martins. Through the use of a variety of materials and forms, including paintings, drawings, sculptures, graphic narratives, diaries, and a live performance, this duo exhibition experiments with the concepts of the *unheimlich* (which is strongly associated with the Freudian term 'uncanny, repositioned in 1919 as an encounter when something is familiar yet alien), memories, and feminine connotations and agency.

Serving as a potential testing ground for Lihong Liu and Meichen Lu to form new chapters of their PhD studies, *Secret Heim* is a creative reflection on Lihong and Meichen's current engagement with their personal memories and expressions of 'home' and 'femininity', attempting to establish a sense of security and certainty about 'self' and 'home' in the face of all the uncertainties, ambiguities, and ineffabilities that accompany this unusual period of the pandemic.



## Secret Heim

Lihong Liu & Meichen Lu  
PhD candidate duo exhibition

Curated by Mengwei Li

Triangle Space,  
Chelsea College of Arts, London  
8 February - 13 February 2022

Exhibition visual by Meichen Lu  
All text editing by Mengwei Li  
Catalogue editing by Lihong Liu, Meichen Lu

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Lihong's artwork focuses on the ordinary, the everyday objects with which we share our daily lives and the landscape of her room have provided the subject matter. Through her visual diaries, and indeed both artists employ diaries as part of their visual exploration, we are invited to follow and observe as her eye settles and dwells on various aspects of her shrinking world. We see the contents of her shower, the plates of food, coat hangers, furniture, all delineated in a delicate, slightly reticent outline as if she is tracing them in her mind's eye. Notes in the drawing indicate the date, evidence of time past, and as if the drawing represents the only significant event of that day. The blank page opposite, itself seems eloquent as if to question the facing drawing, its void waiting to be filled.

The ideas from the sketchbooks are developed into more self-contained and completed works. One such example from her *Darkness Series*, features a solitary angle poise lamp seen side on, barely discernible in the overall darkness of the drawing. The lamp is presented as a fact, in a deadpan style, an object captured in isolation as if to represent the artist herself. The darkness of the drawing, intensely worked in graphite, stands as a counterpoint to the lamp itself which itself doesn't offer any illumination.

In contrast, in the *The Emptiness Series*, drawn with correction fluid, she conceals the content of the drawing through whiteness itself, inviting the viewer to scrutinise the white of the paper to discover its secrets. Her *Ghost Series*, painted on silk, draws upon her experience of this traditional means of Chinese painting. She introduces an elegant sense of colour in the depiction of again, the casual still lives that surround us, toothbrushes in a glass, shampoo in a shower basket, picture frames on a dresser. In each case one of the objects is given substance, the others are left as voids, silhouettes stained into the fabric of the silk as if the object has passed and left a faint trace left behind.

These ideas are also carried through into linear sculptures, drawings made in space using welded rods. Here the sculpture, rather than presenting solid form (the default position for sculpture), here presents a tracing left in space, the object depicted only readable from one particular angle.

## Foreword

Transcending our memories of all the houses in which we have found shelter, above and beyond all the houses we have dreamed we have lived in, can we isolate an intimate, concrete essence that would be a justification of the uncommon value of all our images of protected intimacy?

Gaston Bachelard *The Poetics of Space* (1958)

The exhibition *Secret Heim*, which brings into interplay the work of Lihong Liu and Meichen Lu, reflects many of Bachelard's phenomenological concerns in addressing the intimacy of the home but extends these ideas by considering the complex relationship between domestic interior spaces and notions of the feminine, thereby giving the whole display a subtlety subversive dimension. These concerns are evident in the work of the artists individually and in their collaborative sculpture *Enclosed Heim* produced specifically for this exhibition. This work fuses their conceptual thinking through three-dimensional wire drawings, typical of Liu's practice, that describe form, in this case a hybrid of the roses and female genitalia that are recurring symbols in Lu's work, while additionally revealing the interior spaces of the objects. In experiencing these works the viewer is encouraged to view both the form of the sculptural objects as well engage with the external and internal spaces created. This brings into question what lies inside and outside the work, a concept closely aligned with Bachelard's phenomenological concerns when considering our relationship to ideas of home. Another shared aspect of Liu and Lu's practice is the use of the diary format in sketchbooks and artist books employing photography and digital collage, these works can be considered as memoirs that reflect on personal experience and emotional responses to selected moments in time and space which again have phenomenological concerns at their core.

The installation of the exhibition is a multimodal ensemble, an approach that is a particular feature of Lu's work which often employs combinations of text and image to explore the erotic and taboo aspects of the representation of female genitalia. Lu's work is interdisciplinary, or perhaps even intradisciplinary, in terms of both the

## Foreword

Artists in a time of Covid — Lihong Liu

This exhibition brings together two artists, Lihong Liu and Meichen Lu, both engaged in practice-based research. In the spirit of collaboration, they are presenting their own individual works as well as work made together, specifically for this occasion. The exhibition is an opportunity to draw out areas of commonality as well as difference in particular toward the notion of the *unheimlich* which is a concept central to both their research. For Meichen this research begins with the body and flesh, while for Lihong, it is the objects that the body shares in its journey through life that pre-occupies her thoughts.

In 1790 Xavier de Maistre, as a result of being arrested for duelling and sentenced to 42 days imprisonment in his room, wrote his now famous book *A Journey around my Room*. In this he meticulously examines the space and objects that defined his prison. Now, in 2022, under very different circumstances Lihong invites us to examine the space and contents of her confinement. In her case, not as a result of any misdemeanour, far from it, but along with so many people across the globe, the result of Covid 19 and the need to self-isolate.

When Lihong embarked on her course of study towards a PhD, she would have had no inclination of the events that would unfold in the form of a global pandemic. So many things that we all took for granted, such as physical contact, freedom to socialise, unfettered travel, have become part of a time before Covid 19. So, what began as a relatively straightforward theoretical and practical investigation into concepts around the idea of home has become deeply informed by her own personal experience of lockdown. She has also found herself experiencing the pandemic from both her family home in China and in student accommodation in London, enduring long periods of isolation as she met the various conditions of lockdown and quarantine imposed in both countries. As a consequence, her own subjectivity has become a lens through which to view and research her subjects of the *unheimlich* and the uncanny.

Lihong's work draws inspiration and knowledge from many artists; the still lives of Giorgio Morandi, the ethereal installations of Do Ho Suh, the negative spaces of Rachel Whiteread, William Scott's paintings derived from kitchen utensils and the drawings of Jasper Johns and Michael Craig-Martin, to name just a few. The strength of her work is in her capacity to take on and learn from these influences while imposing her own vision.

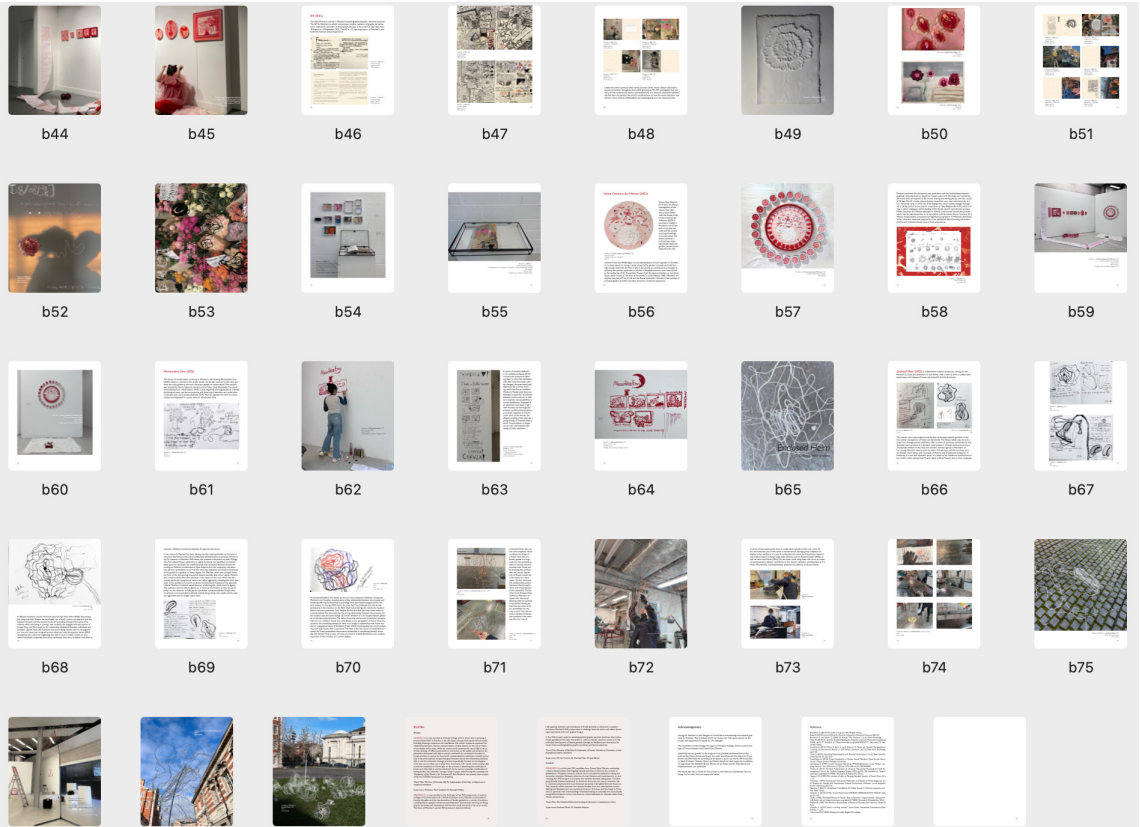
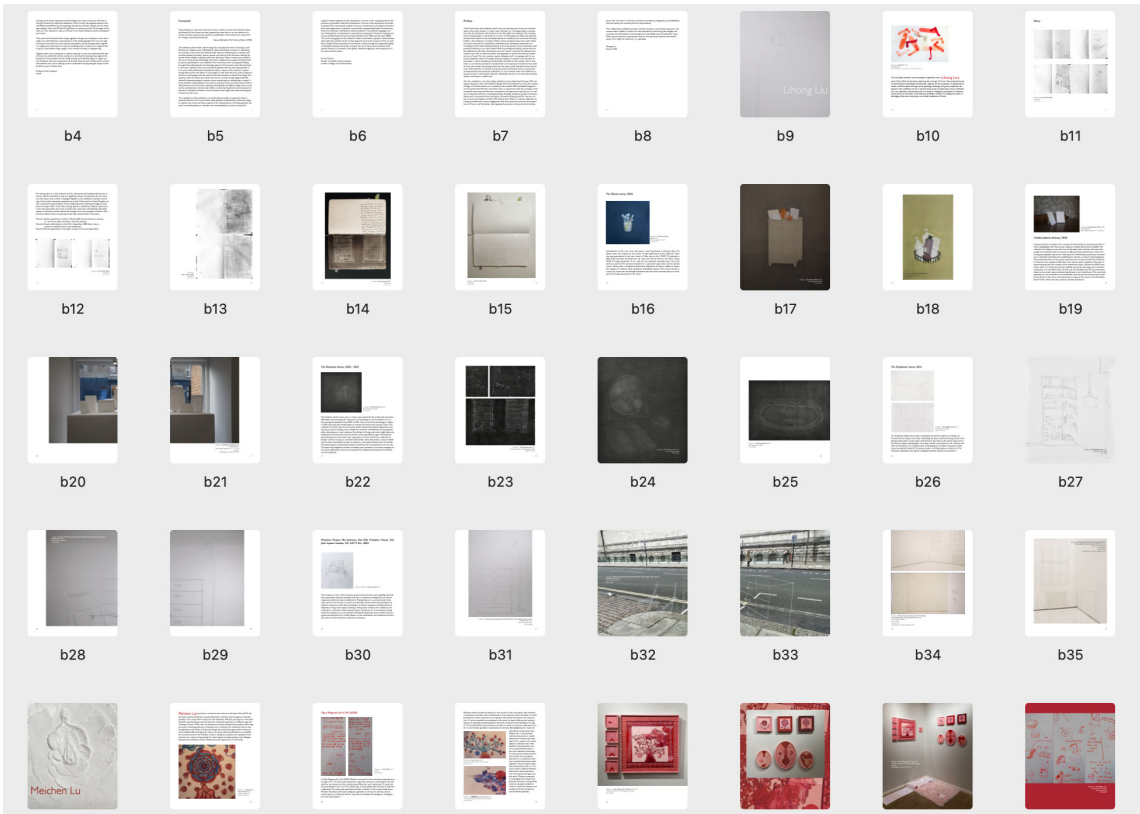
Their joint work *Enclosed Heim* brings together Lihong's use of objects, in this case a single rose with Meichen's representation of the female genitalia. The rose throughout history has had erotic and romantic associations and by bringing them together in a single piece, they seek to create an unsettling union. It exists as an image drawn in space, a speculative image caught in the moment of being or disappearing.

Together, their work represents a creative response to how we understand the idea of home, the *unheimlich* and the uncanny. It is enriched by viewing these against the backdrop of the pandemic. As we slowly emerge and hopefully begin to regain our lost freedoms, this work represents a first-hand visual account of that period of time and confirms art's role in helping us all to understand the psychological impact of the pandemic upon ordinary lives.

Professor Paul Coldwell  
CCW

range of media employed and the disciplinary concerns of the resulting practice. Her practice is grounded in the field of illustration in terms of the techniques and media employed, this is particularly evident in the use of watercolour and papercut and the decorative application of symbolic visual devices representing female characteristics drawn from Western and Eastern cultural traditions. This symbolic language is further developed by considering the visual devices employed in Feminist Underground Comix and Alternative Comics produced between the 1960s and the early 2000s. The work emerging from this research results in new kinds of graphic narratives that often leave the confines of the printed page and work in the context of fine art exhibition display. These narratives are sometimes created through the sequential display of individual canvases and works on paper but are at their most evocative when painted directly on the walls of the gallery thereby bridging the lived experience of the artist and the viewer.

Dr. Ian Horton  
Reader in Graphic Communication  
London College of Communication



**APPENDIX 8: Other completed works**



Lihong Liu, *Untitled (toothbrushes)*, 2020 Plaster, glasswax 17x6.5x6.5cm



Lihong Liu, *Memento*, 2020 Plaster, glasswax 14x 10x 4cm



APPENDIX 9: Reference material



studio table



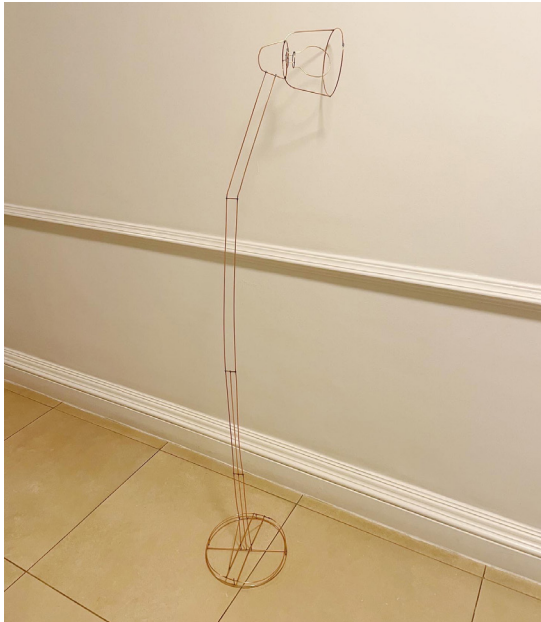


Casting material test, 2020

glasswax



studio table





Creation process :





















Some thoughts about 'home':



