R e P a i r

(im)possibilities of care-taking and making with care
in times of isolation

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DECLARATION
This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature Signed by candidate

Date _____


human
disaster
waiting to
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"... one of the definitions of care that is often overlooked is that of being troubled, worried, uneasy, unsettled. In this sense, to care in unsettling ways, and to be unsettled by care, means to work without a clear, normative vision, requiring instead to be attuned to relationships and to place, constantly improvising. Care is not necessarily clean; to care is to be creative, to be willing to imagine otherwise, to deal with messiness and contamination. Indeed, 'unsettling' means that it has radical transformative potential."

- Miriam Ticktin in *The politics of care* (2021)

PREFACE

The sudden and drastic impacts the recent global health crisis[1] had on my life, and on society more broadly, triggered intuitive processes of creation, whereby its context was difficult to grasp in the beginning. Thus, my motivation for conducting this research stemmed from a personal worry about the dystopian situation outside of my private sphere. The many social upheavals caused by the pandemic would ultimately shape my thinking through creative production. This allowed me to grasp the many intangible aspects of my life and my conception of the world in a productive way; and connect many disparate aspects through a process of corporeal engagement that, literally and figuratively, stitched emotional and conceptual ruptures together as can be observed in the art objects displayed in the exhibition. This body of work thus explores the complexity of the act of repairing as a frame for art-making: as a means to articulate strategies of care in times of isolation, with the full knowledge of an indefinite outcome that does not sully the endeavour.

My former profession as a surgical nurse, a profession of collective care-taking, and profiled as an 'essential worker'[2] during this pandemic, has had a substantial impact on this project. My specific interest is the transition from an act of care-taking for a stranger into artistic processes in isolation, that nevertheless involves a manner of care despite important differences. The times of social separation made me realise how interconnected we are. Thus, RePair is an attempt to emphasise the importance of relational perspectives wrought from the two subject positions I inhabited as a nurse and as an artist. I consider this document in conjunction with the body of artworks displayed as a means to explore the transformative potential of a relational and affective set of aesthetic considerations in a time of a shared crisis.

1 I refer here to the global COVID-19 pandemic that was triggered by the first case in Wuhan, China in December 2019. This contagious disease is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus with a clinical course varying from mostly mild to moderate symptoms to severe cases requiring hospitalisation.

2 Essential workers are 'key workers' in a society who conduct a range of services in industries that are essential to maintain the continuity of critical functions in a society or nation. These jobs cannot be done remotely.

NOTES ON THE DOCUMENT

This document aims to provide a contextualisation and offer productive insights into my visual research. I would like to mention that the word limit and time limitation did not allow me to exhaust all aspects of my research project. Instead, this written component seeks to emphasise a mode of relational thought and inquiry that can foster new patterns for critical rethinking and create multiple opportunities for reimagining possible futures. I would like to emphasise that this body of work is based on my personal experiences during the time of the pandemic as well as on my identification as a person of privilege. However, first and foremost, this project is anchored in my self-identification as a nurse in which I attempt to tie together artistic production with the social, relational and community-based practices of care-taking that is a fundamental component of nursing. As such, it is my aim to locate my practice within a broader spectrum of artistic and theoretical research.

Throughout the document the Harvard System is employed as a means of reference.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 global pandemic has had a substantial impact on our daily lives since its outbreak was detected at the beginning of 2020. An atmosphere of loss, grief and uncertainty has undoubtedly found its way into all of our private spheres, which in turn, would become places of isolation. To have a protected space, a shelter, a home, is a privilege. At the same time, systemic forms of hierarchies, exclusions and inequalities would become unambiguously clear, especially within the South African context.

The current capitalist system is driven by a state of exhaustion on a global scale. Profiled 'essential workers', including health care workers, have been bearing the brunt of this reality since the beginning of the pandemic. While they were celebrated with standing ovations from balconies, this gesture of solidarity nonetheless obfuscated the racial, gendered and class dimensions embedded in this 'essential' workforce. In his essay *We Need a Collective Response to the Collective Dilemma of Coronavirus*, the urban geographer David Harvey (2020) pertinently elaborates this point by stating:

> The workforce that is expected to take care of the mounting numbers of the sick, or to provide the minimal services that allow for the reproduction of daily life, is, as a rule, highly gendered, racialized, and ethnicized. This is the "new working class" that is at the forefront of contemporary capitalism. Its members have to bear two burdens: at one and the same time, they are the workers most at risk of contracting the virus through their jobs, and of being laid off with no financial resources because of the economic retrenchment enforced by the virus.

This is why the pandemic has exposed long-standing racial and structural inequalities in societies all over the world. It is the low-paid and most marginalised who had to keep the cogs of contemporary capitalism turning, while the rest of us – the privileged – could work from home in isolation and relative safety.

From my own standpoint, I experienced this particular time as marked by alternating moments of dystopian and utopian expectations towards the future. Being in a surrounding marked by constant loss and rising inequalities has led to feelings of frustration, pain and hopelessness. On the other hand, I realised that communities which embodied the values of what Hobart and Kneese (2020) term as "radical care" could come together and open up the space for deeper connections between people at a local level. From this perspective, the notion of care does not simply relate to the romanticized ideals of charity or humanitarianism. Rather, Hobart and Kneese (2020) define radical care as

> an affective connective tissue between an inner self and an outer world, care constitutes a feeling with, rather than a feeling for, others. When mobilized, it offers visceral, material, and emotional heft to acts of preservation that span a breadth of localities: selves, communities, and social worlds.

In this sense, care is not merely a sentiment but also holds a pragmatic value as was seen by the newly founded neighbourhood initiatives to provide daily 'soup kitchens' for the homeless and the most marginalised in society[3].

This moment of crisis revealed a recognisable affirmation of compassion for the loss of the strangers outside my home. It became a time with a potential to connect strangers in grief, even though someone else's suffering is not one's own; the loss that the stranger endures can traverse the personal loss that one feels. In my opinion, this global pandemic produced an awareness of interdependence and interconnectedness, raising questions about our ethical obligations to one another. What does a useful ethics of care look like in these times when I can only make assumptions regarding the suffering of others? This question of 'who am I in relation to others' proposes a perspective grounded in social relationality, interdependency and care-taking as opposed to reproducing neoliberal individualistic thought which is driven by the impetus for an accumulation of wealth and affluence. It is in this sense that in her essay *Politics of Care*, Miriam Ticktin (2021:27) describes care as "one of the methods used to imagine, prefigure and enact alternative ways of being together in a fundamentally non-exclusionary, non-sentimental manner."

The pandemic further raised questions on whose life is deemed valuable and therefore worthy of grief, and whose life is not deserving of attention and mourning. Another way to put it, is whose life is worthy of care and whose isn't? One aspect of the pandemic is that it has revealed an exploitation of the act of caring to maintain the conditions of an exclusionary, hierarchical capitalist society. Ticktin (2021:27) describe this kind of care as the "dominant liberal forms of care", which are "driven by limited moral sentiments such as sympathy, pity, or compassion, which create hierarchies by distinguishing between deserving and undeserving individuals". I mention this because I would like to emphasise that I attempt to ground my artistic practice in a kind of care that is rooted in interdependency, mutuality and 'alternate ways of being' (as conceptualised by Woodly et al. and Hobart and Kneese); as opposed to a liberal form of care that reproduces hierarchies and other forms of exclusion.

Until the beginning of my MFA studies in 2020, I have been working as a surgical nurse in Germany for nearly ten years, specialising in traumatology, reconstructive surgery and neurosurgery. The operating theatre, the site of surgery, is where acts of collective care for a stranger takes place. A team of doctors and nurses work towards healing through a specific care-taking process. They are, in a sense, performing a hard labour of care. This profession, among other 'essential' profiled jobs with inadequate working conditions, reveals the contradictory relationship between self-care and care for others. The exploitative system of neoliberalism requires a diminishment of self-care in order to sustain care for others.

3 The community project called 'friendly fridges' which began in Feburary 2020 in New York City is a specific example of an ethics of care. As described by Ticktin (2021:31), it was initiated "by a group of anarchists working to combat hunger in underserved communities during the economic crisis and pandemic, [...] they are resources that anyone can share in, anonymously, without giving reasons or showing deservingness). In South Africa visual artists collaborated on social media platforms to auction their artworks whose proceeds where distributed among social community projects to support the most marginalised with donations of all kinds. In grocery stores throughout South Africa health care workers didn´t have to stand in queue to pay their groceries. These are just some examples for mutual aid projects.

Indeed, the medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman (2012:1551) argues that "in as much as caregiving (and receiving) is done by individuals who themselves are complex and divided and who inhabit local worlds that are also plural and divided, it needs to be understood as a process that is affected by emotional, political, and economic realities". It is because of these circumstances and harsh realities that I've given up my career as a surgical nurse.

To be removed from the sphere of direct embodied encounters during the pandemic evoked questions of how to speak to an extended self-care linking to loss, grievance, inequality and violence outside of my home as an artist. Here, self-care is to be conceptualised within the horizon of radical care and is to be understood in a precise sense: it involves a way of understanding "a self which is grounded in particular histories and present situations of violence and vulnerability" (Michaeli in Hobart and Kneese, 2020:5). From this standpoint, self-care is grounded in a complex set of relations (as opposed to the kind of self-care that promotes the neoliberal ideals of individualistic self-optimization). It is against this background that the production of this body of work provided a form of self-care – a possibility to unpack my emotional state, to find hope in times of crisis and to provide a mechanism for coping with an enduring sense of disorientation. But most importantly, I consider my artistic practice to relate to a form of self-care in the sense that it is "animated by a desire for something else, something more, the practice and process of undoing and then remaking" can, in my opinion, open up the space for a "different kind of relation" with oneself and with the world which surrounds me (Harris, 2021:17). To put it more specifically, my aim is to examine the act of repair – which I consider as a form of care – by highlighting its transformative potential for creating new narratives and 'undoing and then remaking' the world around me in a relational matter. I therefore attempt to analyse how my acts of repair or 'rePair' of discarded domestic materials – which are neglected and deemed unworthy by a society of affluence and wealth – can speak to the unequal distribution of care, in the sense of who is deemed worthy to receive care and who is not. Both my practice and this document are attempts to critically examine the notion of care with all its complexities, ambiguities and relational characteristics, and to analyse the act of repair as an outward extension of self-care with the tools and perspective of a surgical nurse.

I will begin my research with an analysis of the complexity of repair when anchored in the notion of care. Here, I will explore the multifaceted dimensions within the notions of repair and care and consider the need to ground them in interdependent relationships. This is followed by an elaboration of the potential of Assemblage as a method of repair within my own practical work. In the following section, I will examine how the revitalisation of discarded objects through artistic creation can stand-in for a process of care-taking grounded in relational thought. Furthermore, I will examine the notions of the unfamiliar and the 'unhomely' as artistic vocabularies for a process of unmaking in my body of work. These considerations are then followed by an examination of my artistic process with more in-depth elaborations of single artworks in my body of work. This analysis is established by an attempt to create dialogues between my body of work and the artworks of chosen artists I regard as relevant for my artistic research.

An elaboration on the terms 'repair' and 'care' are crucial to provide a framework or lens that may be used to contextualise my aesthetic production. Their complex meaning provides thoughts on ambiguity and relationality and serve as a reference with regard to the visibility of opposing forces in my body of work.

The term repair derives from the latin word reparare and is translated into English as 1. prepare again 2. renew, revive. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the verb repair as "to put something that is damaged, broken, or not working correctly, back into good condition or make it work again" (Cambridge University Press, 2014).
The term repair allows for different interpretations, whether it is to fix, to replace, to reconstitute, to rectify or to restore the original state. There are many different cultural approaches to the notion of repair. For example, *Kintsugi*, a traditional Japanese ceramic art, is a masterful craft where golden cracks are purposely produced on the ceramic teapot to allude to a sense of slowness[4] . The emphasis of cracks are signifiers of a meticulous, time-consuming process, which I interpret as a counter reaction to the constant emphasis on speed and productivity which defines our contemporary society. Rather, it serves as a kind of appreciation for various marks of disruption. The fragmentary condition of a repaired object – and its binding elements – function as relevant markers of the past within the present moment. The act of repairing the damage by stitching holds a moment of steady repetition and thus holds the potential to rebuild with acknowledgement. Though the wound has been healed, a scar remains as a form of memory.

To repair in surgery is an act of care-taking, where a group of specialists work collectively for the purpose of repairing an element of the human body. It is a labour-intensive procedure that requires precision in execution. Surgery does not give value to the mark making process. Rather, surgery, and in particular plastic surgery, functions as an embodiment of 'Western' perfection as it seeks to restore the original state without leaving any marks of the traumatic event. As Saul (2015:17) puts it, "scars are visible traces of an encounter, and the surgeon strives to remove these traces." It is often the case that the replacement of an irreparably damaged joint with a prosthetic device is the only option to improve the physical condition of a patient. At the same time, these surgical advancements push boundaries between the body and the prosthetic device "to the point that the (natural) body becomes indistinguishable from the (artificial) prosthetic" (Coffey, 2021). A denial of injury can be conceived as a denial of trauma which can occur from a preceding event, which emphasises the sense that everything can be controlled and replaced, while at the same time, imperfections can be hidden. The state of impeccability or immaculateness is a feature of present-day forms of surgery.

All these different elements of repair hold the connotations of a binding element, whether it is a surgical thread, the scar tissue or the glue that holds together the broken object. At the same time, to repair reveals a relation to a destructive force – whether it is the preceding injury or the act of piercing with a needle, a form of violent penetration into the human skin or the surface of a material object in order to mend it. In a similar way, surgical

4 The article *Exploring Japanese Art and Aesthetic as inspiration for emotionally durable Design* by Pui Ying Kwan offers detailed information on the concept of *Kintsugi*.
Available at: http://www.designedasia.com/2012/Full_Papers/Exploring Japanese Art and Aesthetic.pdf

procedures require a traumatic incision into the human body. It is a procedure which cuts in order to heal a preceding injury – a kind of paradox in of itself. This reveals the interdependence between the opposing forces of destruction and construction.

The dualities embedded in the act of repair can also be found in the meaning of care. I regard the myth of the Goddess Cura as a valuable entry point with regard to the importance of a relational perspective within my artistic practice. In Graeco-Roman mythology, the female goddess Care (Cura) moulds the first human being out of clay. It was decided that, "since Care first fashioned the human being, let her have and hold it as long as it lives" (Reich, 1995:350). The first human being was not named after the most powerful goddess, rather the choice of the name Cura is an emphasis on the duality of life. The name "entails both, an earthly, bodily element that is pulled down to the ground (worry) and a spirit-element that strives upward to the divine" (Reich, 1995:350). The ambiguity of care with its negative connotations of worry, anxiety and trouble on the one hand and its positive connotations of solicitude or solidarity with one another are both consistent parts of human life. It is Cura that holds together the human. The term care demonstrates this relationality in which we cannot externalize solicitude without having an internal worry[5].

The act of repair, when considered within the horizon of radical care, points towards a political engagement and conceptual recoding of the material world. Indeed, as argued by Rosner and Ames (2014:320), "repair is a political act, a repurposing of designed objects in ways that may or may not have been planned. Tools or facilities for repair are similarly political in that they can rewrite conventional beliefs about what we can change and how we can change it."From this standpoint, the act of repair in the context of radical care reveals the ambivalence of repair – it functions as an act which can bring about a new value to things, a form of life-extension towards objects otherwise declared as waste. At the same time, the act of repair embodies a labour-intensive form of care-taking which is too often rendered invisible and undervalued by the capitalist order. The act of repair as work is ubiquitous in our everyday society, from construction workers fixing roads, repair shops aiming to extend the life of almost every utilitarian object, to waste pickers, electricians, nurses and care workers. These labour intensive and low paid professions reflect the inequity in our societies and intersects with race and gender.

In their paper *Repair Work as Care: On Maintaining the Planet in the Capitalocene*, Corwin and Gidwani (2021:4) argue that these labour-intensive works of repair and maintenance make "legible the critical work that is primarily supportive rather than explicitly productive of capital – work that 'repairs and renews' the conditions of possibility for capitalist reproduction, as well as of the beings capital exploits and expels."

Corwin and Gidwani (2021:8) go on to point out that this vicious circle of repair and exploitation reveals the inequitable dynamics and relations embedded in our society, and have to be confronted by asking political questions such as: "Who does the work of repair and care, what is repaired/maintained, and who benefits from it?"

5 For more on the concept of 'Care' as a moment deployed in the text in highly specialized and idiosyncratic ways in early South African History as seen through the lens of Sociology/Subaltern studies that is sympathetic to my dynamic view of care despite some important differences see *To Write as a Boxer* by Campbell, K. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019.

In what way can the significance and potential of repair as a form of care-taking be emphasised instead? The visible traces of repair in objects remind us of the necessity for a permanent care-taking of the material world and human life. Repair work reminds us of the regular attention needed to sustain functionality and to live as well as possible. Corwin and Gidwani state that "this care for discarded things and people is a way of recognising and re-signifying the many webs of relations within which we all exist. We consider how intimate work with wasted things can encourage and foster relationships not as resources or tools for accelerating capital accumulation but instead as networks of interrelated caretaking." (2021:9) This emphasis on repair work can be seen as a counter reaction to a capitalist driven society, in which the replacement of a broken object denotes its shortened life and underlines a common 'throw away' mentality. Instead, the act of repair can redirect our attention to the labour needed for the maintenance of human and non-human life and their interdependent relationships.

In his book *Rethinking repair*, Steven S. Jackson (2014:221) argues for an "exercise in broken world thinking". Jackson considers 'broken world thinking' to be a subversive act with a focus on detritus, waste and decay as a starting point as opposed to a focus on growth, innovation and wealth. Therefore, this conceptual framework has the capacity to shift our thinking to "an appreciation of the real limits and fragility of the worlds we inhabit – natural, social, and technological" (Jackson, 2014:221). Here, we uncover the radical potential of the repair work as its attention to fragility and provisionality can always provide a possibility for change.

THE POTENTIAL OF ASSEMBLAGE – TO RESCULPT

A crucial aspect of conceptualising repair as a form of care is manner in which it can transform our relationship to materials and things in a global economic system which favours casual usage and disposal. In their paper Repair Work as Care: On Maintaining the Planet in the Capitalocene, Corwin and Gidwani (2021:3) emphasise "the importance of understanding repair as caring for things within webs of material, social, economic, and political interactions and that all of us, living and non-living, are fragile and in need of care – from everyday objects, infrastructure, and ecosystems". From this perspective, the act of repairing involves a kind of caring which emphasises an intentional relationality with the material world. Within an art historical context, this notion of repair as a form of care for materials has opened up a spectrum of new possibilities, creating a new potential for recognising and re-signifying the aesthetic and cultural value of discarded things.

In the 1961 MOMA exhibition titled *Art of the Assemblage*[6] (Fig.1+2), the requirement for an artwork to be considered an assemblage is that it had to consist of a juxtaposition of at least two different materials. In my opinion, this particular exhibition was a high point of a particular way of working. In being acknowledged by a leading museum, the artistic practice of assemblage attained a measure of authority in the conventional Western canon of art history. The exhibition called for artworks showing a particular materiality and nature: the materials used by the showing artists should be discarded or purloined rather than new. An example of an important body of work shown at this exhibition consists of the 35 collages by Kurt Schwitters[7] which he made out of refused cardboard, bus tickets, cloth, wood, nail heads and other collected materials. Assemblage as a method is corporeally and conceptually resonant with my praxis of 'RePair': to reassemble previously deconstructed objects or different materials. It involves a method of repurposing discarded materials in such a way that it can promote an established disciplinary logic through a wide range of artistic processes. According to Saul (2015:23), "there are several different embodiments of assemblage that include collage, montage, bricolage, construction and of course assemblage."

As a result, assemblage is a counter reaction to the act of replacing. The potential of assemblage lies in two tendencies: one is towards change and another one towards stability. It is the creation of a new object, a "third thing which has nothing to do with these things" but instead is constructed from their commonalities (Attia et al., 2014:26). Assembled pieces are a product of repair – not in the sense of restoring to an original condition but in the sense of creating something new from objects which are by nature fragmentary and fragmented.

6 This exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York took place from 4th October till 12th November 1961. This show with around 250 works by 130 artists was curated by William C. Seitz. several works from Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Meret Oppenheim, René Magritte, Jasper Johns, John Chamberlain and Kurt Schwitters were among these participating artists.

7 Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) born in Hannover, Germany studied Fine Art at the Academy of Dresden. *Merzbau*, a transformation of his family home in Hannover might be his most famous work alongside his collages. "In the war, things were in terrible turmoil. What I had learned at the academy was of no use to me and the useful new ideas were still unready.... Everything had broken down and new things had to be made out of the fragments; and this is Merz. It was like a revolution within me, not as it was, but as it should have been." (Dietrich, 1993:6f.)

Fig.1+2: Exhibition view, *Art of the Assemblage*, MoMA, 1961, (no detailed information about displayed artworks available)

Assemblage sets a focus on the act, the process of making, rather than the finished product. It is a form of presentation that creates encounters between originally unrelated forms – this encounter between different entities are then linked together to form a new whole. Its composition informs meaning and does not necessarily produce meaning in itself. As put by Clifford (1997:12), "the juxtapositions created by assemblages generate spaces of interaction, asserting connections but also sustaining a tension." Assemblage offers a relational aesthetic in the sense that it invites the viewer to decipher a myriad of interrelations. This can open up the space for a multitude of interpretations and unsettle a singular viewpoint.

In relation to my artistic practice, I would also like to focus on the notion of Bricolage – a term that is often used interchangeably with assemblage. There is, however, a subtle difference in meaning and in their application within art discourse. Bricolage is a French word loosely translating as "'do-it-yourself', and it is applied in an art context to artists who use a diverse range of non-traditional art materials" (Tate.org, n.d.). The bricoleur produces three-dimensional objects. A 'do it yourself' attitude suggests a certain provisionality in the artistic process, which emphasises a certain fluidity in relation to the notion of repair. A certain kind of provisionality becomes visible in reassembled objects. The act of repair can always be undone, revised or continued at a later stage. Indeed, as stated by Mbembe:

> If the project of repair suggests anything, then it has to do with the provisionality of things. Things are subjected to processes of repair precisely, because they are provisional, they do not enjoy that kind of duration that is limitless[...], they need to recover their integrity. (Mbembe, 2021)

THE VALUE OF THE DISCARDED AND ARTE POVERA + THE ARTWORK SITUATED IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The act of repurposing and reusing discarded and almost wasteful objects or elements within my artistic practice is an attempt to reinstate or restore a lost value and appreciation for these neglected elements. I understand this form of re-sculpting as a kind of reaction to the act of replacement. The 'West' intrinsically values all that is original or untarnished, in which there is a tendency for damaged objects to immediately be replaced. This reverence for unblemished original states extends to the human body, where surgical advancements seek to erase any traces of injury and restore the body to a state of immaculateness. The act of repairing is an attempt to oppose a mentality of constant replacement, where the erasure and hiding of damages and brokenness must be maintained in order for the lifecycles of production, consumption and disposal to self-perpetuate. To strive for immaculateness is therefore an endeavour which applies to both the material object and the human body. According to Saul (2008:24), this oscillation "stands for the unaccountable inbetweenness which is not featured in Western structures, and when it does it is viewed negatively as hybrid or contaminated."

My choices in materials for this body of work relates to the Arte Povera movement (translates as poor art) which emerged in Italy in the 1960s and was conceptualised by Germano Celant. Arte Povera artists constructed sculptures out of neglected materials in an attempt to devalue the art object and rather assert the value of the ordinary and every day (Dezeuze, 2008:32). This movement aimed to bypass the commercialisation of the art world by restructuring sculpture as an accumulation and rearrangement of obsolete objects. By recuperating the detritus of city life, the artists within the Arte Povera movement attempted to challenge the attachments of value to objects and their relation to the human body and society.

In a similar way to the Arte Povera movement, my artistic process attempts to detect the relations between human subjects and the nature of things, as well as shift away from the consumption-driven cycles of accumulation. An obsolete object no longer holds any use-value. Instead, its transformation into a thing, its 'thingness'[8] , its focus on materiality and the visible traces of mending adds value in the form of what Scarry (1985:307) refers to as 'human sentience'. In her book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), Scarry argues that a man-made object is an artefact which has the capacity to form a projection of the human body: with the creation of an artefact, a part of one's own body is placed in relation to the objective world. To put it in other words, to make something with human sentience relates to the ability to externalise an awareness of being. According to Scarry (1985:289), this internal-external reflexivity within the process of making suggests that "the human imagination reconceives the external world, divesting it of its immunity and irresponsibility not by literally putting it in pain or making it animate but by, quite literally, 'making it' as knowledgeable about human pain as if it were itself animate and in pain".

8 The concept of 'thingness' stems from Bill Brown's 'Thing Theory', which directs critical thought towards the materiality and corporeality of objects: "We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us… The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation" (Brown, 2001:4).

From this perspective, the process of making implies an endeavour to transfer an imagination of pain into the object – this allows for one's own internal state to become perceptible to the audience. In this sense, such actions of making allows for attempts to externalise a feeling of compassion for the pain and loss of strangers living outside of my immediate social world. This externalisation can, of course, apply to artistic modes of production and transformation, which can emphasise a relationship between maker and viewer, inner and outer, self and other.

To repurpose discarded materials in a process of assemblage is an attempt to reinstall this lost attribute of empathy, care and sentience into the finalised sculpture. The creation of an artefact is an attempt to make one's own privacy, or one's innermost self, sharable. Considering the fact that my assemblages were produced in a time of isolation emphasises their purpose to make one's own internal state sharable for the outside world. To re-sculpt manually in a time-consuming process – with an attention for the materiality itself and its underlying potential – stands for a process of care-taking for our broken world.

There is no part of making that is empty of ethical content. The artwork itself is never separated from its social reality that it is made in. To put it another way, the artworks I produce are always caught in a horizon of ethical expectations. I guide my viewer to focus on the City of Cape Town, in which the use of discarded objects and packaging materials within my practice inevitably raises connections to the structural issues surrounding inequality. Within my artistic practice, it is my attempt to use of these ordinary and yet neglected materials as a kind of reflection of not only my inner world, but also as a reflection of the outer world which surrounds me. It builds a relation to the private place called home, but also the public space, where structural conditions lead to suffering and a desperate need for shelter. Waste is integral and systematic, particularly within South Africa, which as stated by Jamal (2020a) is "a society more unequal than any other, brutally biopolitical". It is for this reason that I ground my body of work within the conceptual framework of 'repair as care' since it holds the possibility to highlight

> the importance of recognising people, places, and things and their inter-relationships[…] In an economic system based on creating waste in its wake, this means attending to human and non-human entities not as abstracted or alienated beings – labourers, commodities, resources, disposable objects – but instead as complex, multifaceted beings in relationships of codependence. (Corwin and Gidwani, 2021:14)

The pandemic exposed the home as a space of privilege, however, as put by Lauzon (2017:8), "home, for the millions of displaced and disenfranchised citizens of the world, is inextricably linked to loss." The confinement to the home has blurred the line between the private and the public space, since all the information from the outside concentrated itself in the inside: it is "the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world" (Bhabba, 1992:141). A kind of interconnectedness became increasingly visible during this time. Elaine Scarry exemplifies this interconnectedness by deconstructing, or unmaking, language:

> The protective, healing, expansive acts implicit in 'host' and 'hostel' and 'Hospitable' and 'hospital' all converge back in 'hospes', which in turn moves back to the root 'hos' meaning house, shelter, or refuge; but once back at 'hos,' it's generosity can be undone by an alternative movement forward into 'hostis', the source of 'hostility' and 'hostage' and 'host'. (Scarry, 1985:45)

In this consideration of interconnectedness between spaces of protection and violence, one can refer to the art historian Benjamin H.D. Buchlohs' (2001:4) argument that the "incessant overproduction of objects of consumption and their perpetually enforced and accelerated obsolescence generate a vernacular violence in the spaces of everyday life which regulates every spatio-temporal order and devalorizes all object relationships."

Artistic processes of reconstruction and assembling, as manual methods of repair, are able to "challenge the concept of home as a sanctuary from a troubled world" (Lauzon, 2017:16). This can happen when creative productivity transforms a private place by pain, originating from an internal sentience for the outside. What originally has been a place of comfort is now turned into a space bearing certain elements of uncanniness. It can be transformed into a "productive space of intersubjective relations" (Lauzon, 2017:22). With the transformation of domestic objects and materials through acts of destruction and repairing, unfamiliar things can appear in such a way as to bring a certain fragility to the private space. This transforming reality emphasises the instability of the structures that we inhabit.

The German term *unheimlich* usually translates into the English word uncanny, however, I would rather emphasise its literal translation as unhomely. In psychoanalytic theory, the term unheimlich, or unhomely served "to identify a particular manifestation of the return of the repressed" (Lauzon, 2017: 20). The Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud[9] identified the term unheimlich as "a condition of the heimlich, insofar as heimlich, which denotes comfort, familiarity, and safe enclosure, always already contains within its connotations of withdrawal, concealment, secrecy, even danger" (Lauzon, 2017:20). Freud links the uncanny to the repression of traumatic memory, which is something that is familiar and has become alienated through the process of repression.

9 Sigmund Freud (1856.1939), born in Příbor, Czech Republic (former Austria) was a neurologist and is regarded as the founder of psychoanalysis. It needs to be mentioned that Sigmund Freuds theories are seen as sexually unbalanced. His theory on 'penis envy' in particular has been criticised by feminist movements for women's inferior relationship to men.

Against this background, Lauzon (2017:20-21) suggests that an "unhomely aesthetics of contemporary art would imagine home as a place haunted not by what has been hidden or repressed within its confines, but rather by unsettled memories of its own incapacity to shelter its occupants from the terrors of the world at large." Hence, the unhomely, the unmaking of the place called home, can be transformed into a space of encounters which "fall outside the purview of the homely – the stranger, the foreigner, the exile, the refugee and asylum seeker, the urban homeless" (Lauzon, 2017:22). The unmaking of the home by repurposing discarded elements of domesticity into unhomely artefacts seeks to create relational perspectives between different spaces by blurring their lines of separation. Thus, this transformation can provide signifiers of compassion for the strangers' loss outside.

Speaking of loss leads me again to an analysis of certain ideas offered by Sigmund Freud who defined melancholy as "a pathological attachment to the lost object, or mourning without ending" (Lauzon, 2017:11). The understanding of melancholia as a refusal to transcend loss gives the chance to reconceptualise this term in favour of a not forgotten past, or a constant compassion at present. The home, as a fragile shelter for memories of lost belonging, refers to what Judith Butlers calls 'melancholic agency' – that is, the constructive "persistence of a certain unavowability that haunts the present" (Butler, 2002:468). The artistic use of domestic objects and elements that we are all familiar with, can still speak to the presence of human mediation. Broken down to fragments, these elements bear traces of past human interventions which are now transferred into the present, while their fragmentation speaks of incompleteness, forgetfulness and loss (Basualdo, 2000: 21). The act of repurposing these obsolete materials opposes a mentality of forgetfulness, rather, this act presents a form of memory restoration.

A CLOSER DISCUSSION OF MY BODY OF WORK RePair CONVERSATION WITH RELEVANT WORKS OF ART

As already mentioned in the beginning of this document, the confinement to the home was the initial reason for the choice of materials in this body of work. All the discarded and broken utilitarian objects, plastic bags and old textiles that I would find lying around the place that I stayed during the pandemic, would serve as the material foundations for my artistic creation.

An old plastic laundry basket became the main component for my first sculpture *Repaired Disparities, I.* (Fig.3) As I melted it with a heat gun, vast deformations would occur to basket's cylindric shape. Vacuum plastic sheets, used for packaging, plastic bags and textiles were cut and torn into stripes and meticulously weaved through the symmetrical designed holes of the basket. In some areas, these materials were melted together with the basket's plastic material. The characteristic of the vacuum sheet to solidify after heating helped to maintain the basket's shape. The fleshy colouration of the plastic bags and their symmetrical arrangement contrasts with areas of entanglement, which might allude to visual references of the human body and relate to my former profession as a surgical nurse. (Fig.4) This deformed and unfunctional basket is precariously balanced on an assembled pedestal, or plinth-like object made out of different wooden elements and single legs from tables. A LED light is placed through the rectangular holes of the laundry basket to prevent it from falling over. Also, a fragment of a chair pierces through the deformed basket to counter balance the basket's bend. Once again, this act of piercing a LED light through another material for the purpose of standing upright reveals a certain inherent violence. It speaks to the relation between care and violence, and the often overlooked and unsettling elements within the notion care. As Ticktin (2021:29) puts it, "to care requires admitting to and managing forms of violence, not trying to evict, expunge or expel it."

Nonetheless, these 'unsettling' material dispositions requires us to draw relationships between different elements and allow us to imagine a myriad of outcomes, which are in constant negotiation: "indeed, 'unsettling' means that it has radical transformative potential" (Ticktin, 2021:29). Such 'unsettling', or to put it in Freudian terms, 'unhomely' moments within my practice would occur by juxtaposing elements of repair with elements bearing acts of destruction – this dialectic between repair and destruction would become a recurring artistic vocabulary within my body of work. Whether it is the act of piercing, drilling, melting with a glue gun to solidify the vacuum sheets, or the stitching to connect different elements, all of these processes were utilised to form a stable, and yet fragile sculpture.

At a later stage of my artistic research, I collected broken and refused objects from the Woodstock dump in Cape Town, as well as flea markets and second-hand shops, in order to expand my sculptural body of work by following the Bricolage technique. I would often acquire fragments of utilitarian objects with the least reasonable chance of recovering their integrity in terms of their use-value, such as a back of a chair, a shower hose without a head, a broken lamp shade, a broken lamp base or a single table leg. (see images of *RePaired Disparities, I-III*)

Fig. 3: *RePaired Disparities, I*
ca. 210 x 80 x 90 cm

Fig.4: *RePaired Disparities*, I, detail

Fig.5: *RePaired Disparities, II*
ca. 150 x 80 x 90 cm

These processes of three-dimensional creation were alternating with different processes of mark-making on paper. Sketches served as a documentation of my sculptural process. (Fig. 6-11) Notes and scribbles were fixed on paper in order to provide a point of return to them at a later stage. This visual archive allowed me to develop and continuously extend my artistic practice in relation to what the philosopher Édouard Glissant (1990) terms as a 'rhizomatic network' of relational thought. For Glissant, a rhizomatic network involves an understanding of the world in which everything relates to each other and without borders; it is a network with no end and no beginning. This decentralised network can be entered from any point and allows for a plurality of thought. Of course, Glissant uses this terminology in relation to symbolically structured social practices. However, I suggest it also holds a certain usefulness when considered in relation to my artistic practice and its conceptual framework (where notions of repair and care form the central components). As put forward by Diawara (2014:54), a rhizomatic thinking offers a common ground where relationships are continually woven between different ideas, places, objects and subjectivities: "sharing a common ground with someone is to be related to him/her through rhizomes of places and imaginaries, to feel, like him/her, the vibrations and pulses of the world".

This 'rhizomatic thinking' can also apply to the interrelations between my current artistic practice and my former profession as a surgical nurse, which has become an increasing visual reference in recent years. This is caused by a personal need to find different possibilities which can transition my tasks of care-taking as a surgical nurse into my practice as an artist. I believe this oscillation between formal disciplines can generate outcomes which can speak to the act of care in a more critical light. From the perspective of a surgical nurse, it is these attempts to repair these essentially non-functional and un-valued objects which provided me with the possibility to speak to the complexities of care-taking in times of isolation. The tools I used to rePair, which involved a separation and then re-assemblage of different fragments; created a formal link to the tools and techniques present in surgical procedures. The stitch or the suture are omnipresent elements in my body of work as it is a ubiquitous and indispensable element in almost all surgical procedures. The delicate and precarious character of a suture necessitate the full attention of the surgeon and nurse. Furthermore, the use of colour, form and texture and the creation of structures with a kind of layering and entanglement of different materials, resonate with the aesthetics of the human body becoming visible during surgical procedures.

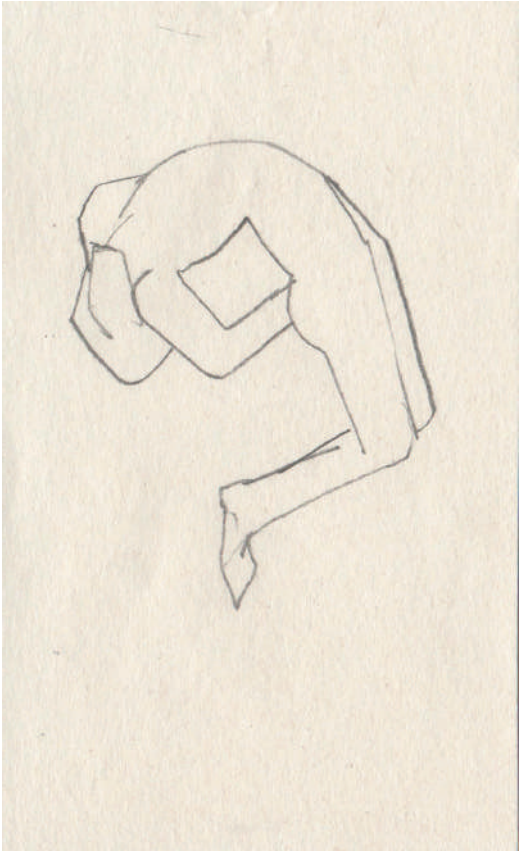
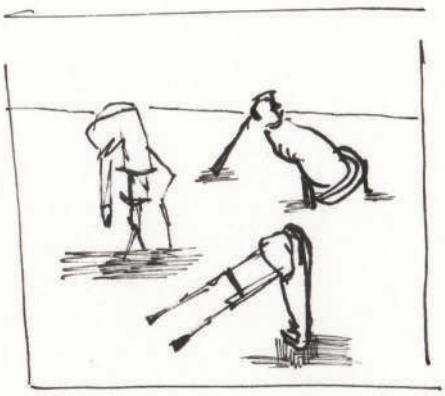
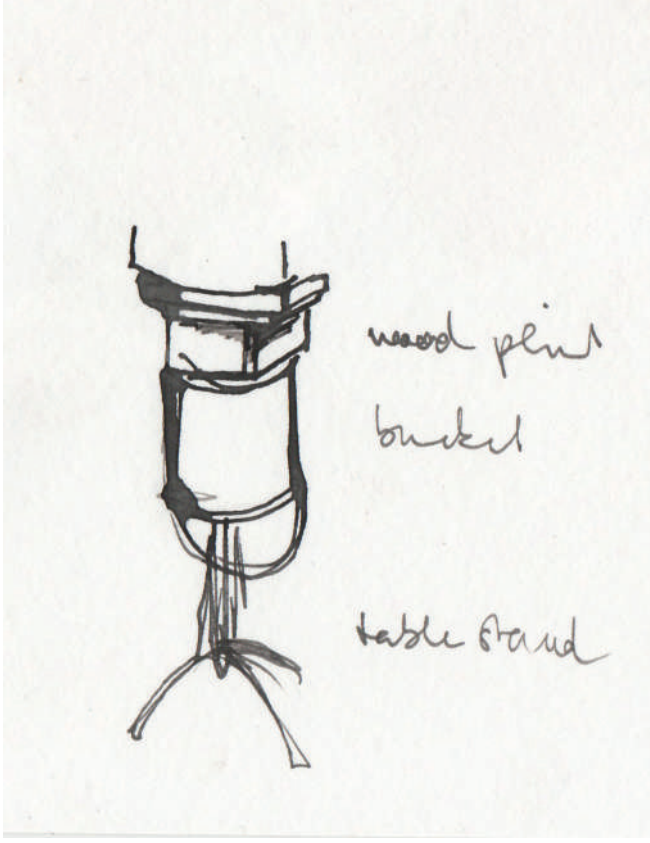


Fig. 6-11: Sketches on paper with ink, var. dimensions




wood plinth
bucket
table stand

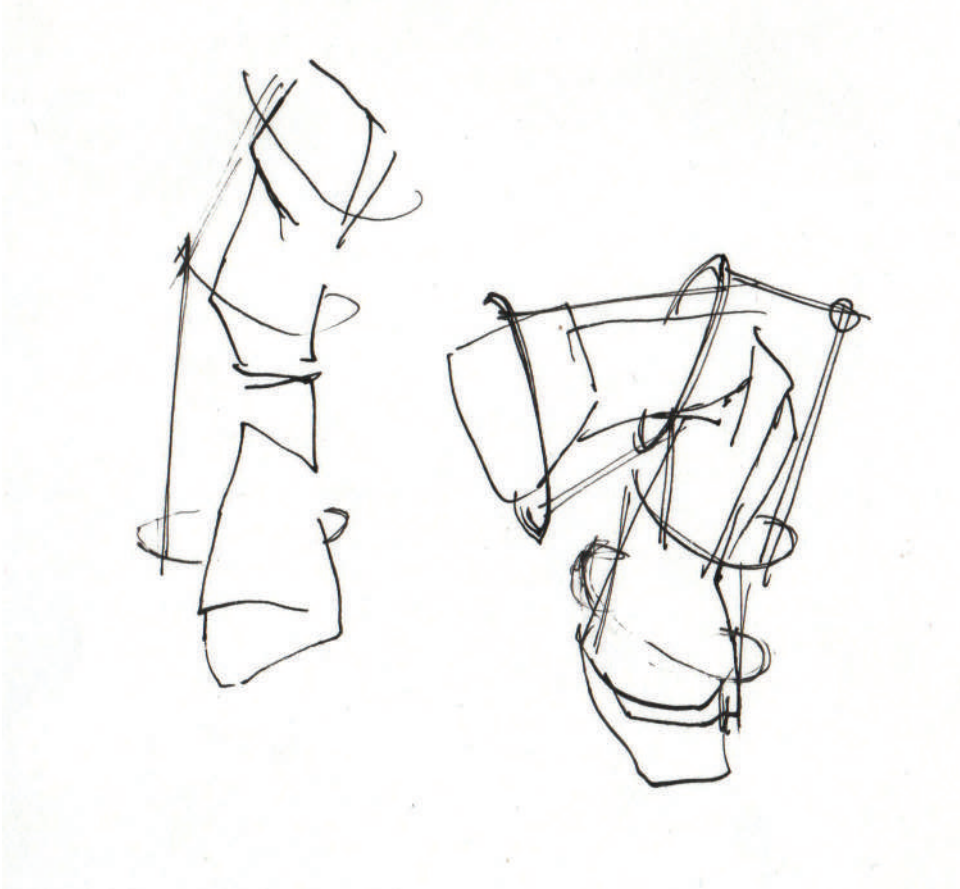


Fig.12: *Hysteria*
ca. 160 x 45 x 30 cm

Hysteria

The work *Hysteria*[10] (Fig.12) is the first piece in a series which uses a pillow as a central component. I began by painting the pillow surface with acrylic colours in a muted palette. This served as a kind of embellishment to partly cover its yellowing surface. Furthermore, this offered a moment of pause to consider different possibilities of further artistic transformation. This initial estrangement of the pillow's surface with acrylic paint was followed by manual processes of revision and alteration. Numerous transformations through alternating acts of making, unmaking and remaking, doing and undoing, adding and removing, had to be undertaken until the object found its final form. In my eyes, this is one reason why these artworks reveal a certain fragility and provisional state, as they seem to leave an opportunity for further alterations in the future – things and actions that can potentially be undone. From a metaphorical perspective, the work *Hysteria* holds the potential to oscillate between pain as a sharable imaginary and the desire to make pain unfelt within the audience. In this work, I would go on to attach red textile lacings onto the painted pillow and then bend it in such a way that it forms the shape of convulsing womb. A feeling of unease arises through the projection of bodily counterparts onto the created object. In this link between an elicitation of empathy and bodily reality, Scarry (1985:165) argues "that the more a habitual form of perception is experienced as itself rather than its external object, the closer it lies to pain; conversely, the more completely a state is experienced as its object, the closer it lies to imaginative self-transformation." In my opinion, the piece Hysteria offers these two tendencies by balancing between the recognizability of a pillow as a familiar object and its estrangement through artistic intervention.

RePaired Disparities, III

In *RePaired Disparities, III* (Fig. 13), the manual and seemingly endless repetitive stitches would create delicate sutures. This would form a kind of mesh to hold different elements from broken chairs in their upright position on a discarded, ripped carpet attached to the wall. The time-consuming labour involved in the production of my sculptural work is an attempt to emphasise material value as an indispensable part in the act of caring. Different materials, such as a shower hose, a ripped curtain and different plastics, partly melted would become entangled with each other and the carpet. In some parts of the artwork, each of the thin threads are meticulously interwoven with and around different materials. The repetitive act of a stitch ad absurdum produced a tenuous structure; forming a connective, and yet fragile tissue. (Fig.14) The transformative act formed a new object out of different fragments which have now become interdependent in such a way that the artwork could be maintained upright with stability in space.

10 In Western European history the term hysteria has marked woman for centuries and became a tool of oppression. It is listed as an extremely misdiagnosis, emphasising their volatile behaviour, their weak mental constitution and their need to be tamed physically. In the 1980's, this term was reclaimed by feminists. Next to its symbolic meaning of systematic oppression it became a symbol of resistance and rebellion. Furthermore, Slavoj Žižek uses the term hysteria in the context of commodity fetishism: "'Instead of appearing at all events as their own mutual relations, the social relations between individuals are disguised under the shape of social relations between things' - here we have a precise definition of the hysterical symptom, of the 'hysteria of conversion' proper to capitalism" (Žižek, 1989:22).

Fig. 13: *RePaired Disparities, III*
ca. 280 x 70 x 50 cm

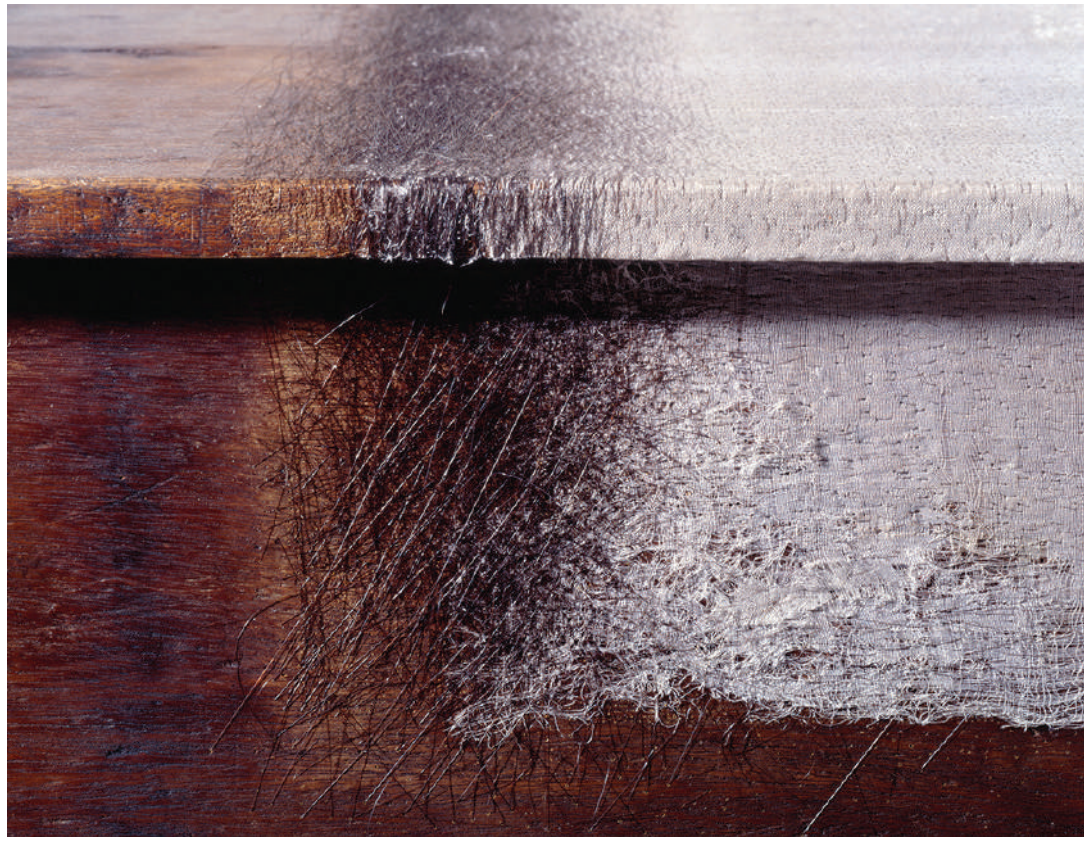
Fig. 14: *RePaired Disparities, III,* detail

In order to fully grasp the delicateness of this manual and intricate process, a closer examination by the viewer is required. This perceived difference between stepping closer and stepping back causes a visual irritation and links to the often-unnoticed inherent labour in the acts of care. The subtle web of threads is at first inconspicuous, and yet it is essential for its structure, relating to the heterogenous and multifaceted notion of care. There is a requirement to look more carefully, even though these different fragments of utilitarian objects are repaired to form a thing with no inherent functionality.

The ambivalence of a stitch relates to the heterogeneity of repair as a form of care too. A repetitive stitch produces a suture to connect a fragmented object. Yet, a stitch is a penetration of a material. This act entails a violent, disruptive element. It aligns with paradoxical aspect of surgical repair, where a cut is made in order to heal. As already explained in the previous section, this destructive element of repair reveals the unsettling and unjust elements that are immanent to the notion of care. It emphasises the underlying concerns in the concept of radical care as a survival strategy.

The installations titled *Unland* (1995-98) by the Columbian born artist Doris Salcedo provide pertinent examples that can assist the discussions surrounding my artistic practice. Salcedo reuses domestic objects in her installations to explore the "relationship between objects and bodies; between objects, place, and duration; between representation and violence; between words and materiality; and between memory and forgetting" (Moreno, 2010:96). Her works can be interpreted as an engagement with the loss of the human life due to decades of violence in Columbia, which have for many years dominated both the public and the private sphere. Her work *Unland the Orphan's Tunic* (1997, Fig.15) underlines the potential of visual irritation, which I've explained previously with reference to *RePaired Disparities, III*. Here, a kitchen table appears at first glance. With closer inspection, one might realise that this table is actually made up of two separate tables of different lengths. Both tables are mutilated, in which "they clash and are mounted into each other, the inner two sets of legs are broken off" (Huyssen, 2000: 93). A very thin silk cloth covers the tables surface like an almost invisible skin or a kind of connecting tissue. Looking even closer, one notices minuscule holes with human hair threaded through them. (Fig.16) It is not just the tables which are damaged, but also the hair, which has been cut. Moreover, the drilling of more than a thousand holes into the table represents the acts of damage and loss. One can only imagine the time-consuming, painstaking labour involved in this repetitive act of stitching. It is an action executed ad absurdum, and thus can signify an act of care-taking by providing an unexpected robustness: "the hair appears here as providing strength while the table seems to be vulnerable, an imaginative reversal of the basic nature of the materials" (Huyssen, 2000:101).

Fig.15+16: Doris Salcedo, *Unland the Orphan's Tunic* , 1997



The piecing together of unrelated utilitarian objects to make an artwork, in a manner that is different to the use normally attributed to them, holds the potential for new imaginaries. The transformation of domestic objects and materials, which all are marked by history, offer the potential to "speak of something else beyond the ordinary meanings, functions and uses normally attributed to them" (Moreno, 2010:102). The viewer might experience a kind of irritation or astonishment when objects are "removed from the sphere of daily use" and undergo a process of transformation or metamorphosis. A poetic language derives from the visual elements of disruption and discontinuity. This disruption and rupture in objects can open them up to new mnemonic uses (Moreno, 2010:98).

The constant oscillation between the states of destruction and reconstruction, continuity and disruption, suture and rupture and familiarity and defamiliarization, create visible tensions and emphasise a thought of relation rather than a single outcome. The lacings with red textiles in the work *Hysteria* speak of such a rupture, it is an act of disruption, while, at the same time, the repetition of these lacings and their symmetrical arrangements hold a moment of continuity, of repetition. A textile, which is usually shaped through its form, is reversed into a tool of forceful deformation. The pillow as an element of comfort in the domestic space is turned into a thing with a visible damage. In this way, it can be understood as a kind of troubling materiality for the viewer. The encounter with transformed everyday objects results in a coming together of contradictions, an incitement for the audience to decipher these revived objects. The marks of violence are paired with gestures of healing. John Berger states in his article *Trauma Without Disability, Disability Without Trauma: A Disciplinary Divide* that from traces and ruins, new discourses can begin to take shape (2004:567).

The tension between a suture and a rupture can be seen in the artwork *Vain struggle* (Fig. 17) as well. The continuous stitching with wire caused a continuous rupture. The attempt of repair culminates in a continuous disruption and provokes endless repetition. The domination of a tangled mass of wire evokes the question 'when do things become irreparable'? It reminds us of the limitations of repair and that our relations with other humans and non-humans are fragile and in need of maintenance and a constant care-taking.

Fig.17: *Vain Struggle*
ca. 200 x 45 x 35 cm

Struggle Upward

In *Struggle Upward* (Fig. 18) foam pieces were mended with sutures to form single cylindric shapes. Subsequently, these foam elements were dipped into pigmented plaster and, in a final process, polished with sandpaper. The visible seam runs across the piling elements, producing a continuous rhythmic line. The smooth and soft surface is juxtaposed with an irregular, yet continuous shape, and filled with protrusions caused by a specific surgical suture technique used for wound repair. The form of this endless seam might show similarities to the shape of a human spine. It is an unusual combination of a flexible, perishable and a rigid material. The plaster functions as a preservative and its usage links to the methods of fixing injuries in traumatology. This conservation aims to elevate the value of foam as a familiar domestic material, with its unappealing structure which yellows with time, and is usually covered with textile. As a result, a wounded adaptation is conserved, accentuating the marks of the previous mending process. In this way, the visible crack or damage becomes seemingly preserved for perpetuity. The dipping of foam into plaster evokes a semi-visibility and semi-legibility of the underlying materials. Again, a closer inspection by the viewer becomes necessary in order to fully grasp the material composition.

This works resonates with Constantin Brancusi's' ninety-eight feet steel memorial *The Column of the infinite* (1937, Fig.19)in Romania to commemorate the Roman fallen soldiers during World War One. Through its seemingly endless height, this column links to the eternal cycle of life and death rather than being solely a memorial of war. With the height of my sculptural piece (3.30m), I intend to suggest this potential of infinite expansion. The creation of a large column-like sculpture marked with a visible suture – which is indispensable for keeping the object's form – is an attempt to relate to the duality of the term care: "on the one hand, it meant worries, troubles, or anxieties, as when one says that a person is burdened with cares. On the other hand, care meant providing for the welfare of another" (Reich, 1995:349).

According to the Greco-Roman myth of Cura, care is what holds the human body together: "the myth also suggests that humankind as a social totality is brought into the world and sustained by care. Since it binds humans together, care is the glue of society." (Reich, 1995:350) In this manner of thinking, it is an infinite process that is sustained as long as humans exist and thus alludes to the infinite height suggested by my sculpture is opposite.

Fig. 18: *Struggle Upward*,
ca. 320 x 22 x 22 cm

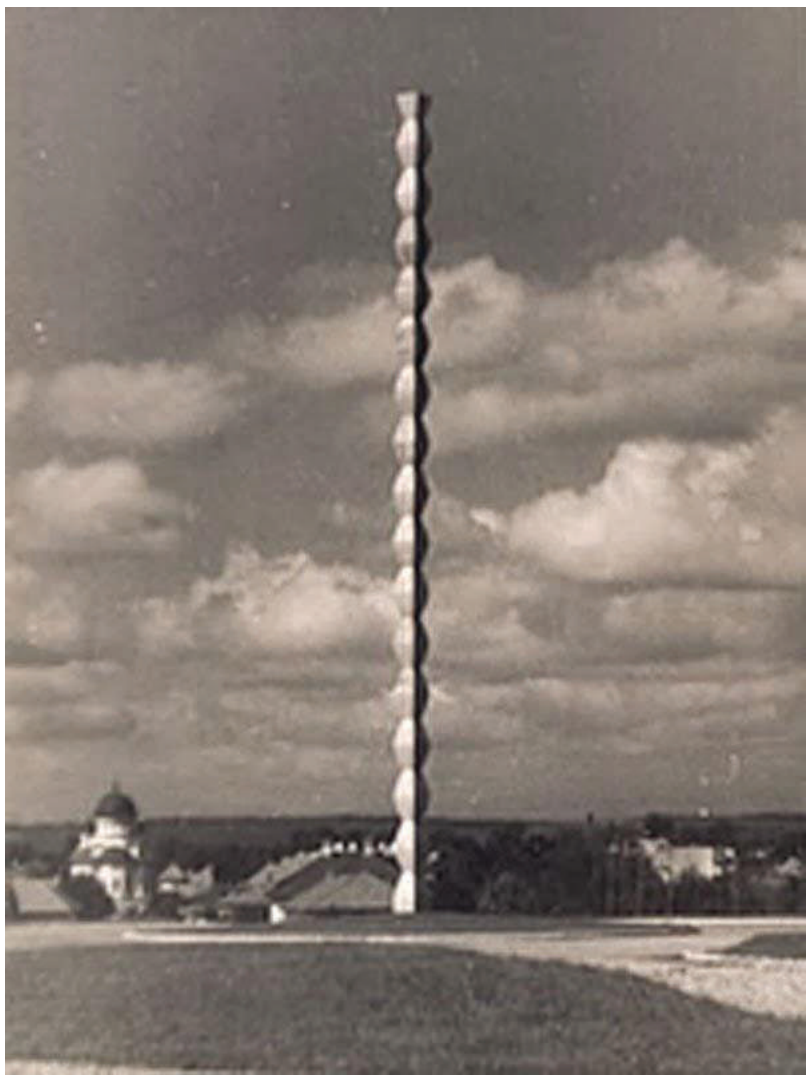


Fig.19: Constantin Brancusi, *The Column of the Infinite*, 1937. Cast iron and painted steel. 29,45m.Tirgu-Jiu, Romania

Fig.20: Thomas Hirschhorn, *Bataille Monument*, 2002, Kassel, Germany

The work *Struggle upwards* also relates to *Bataille Monument* (2002, Fig.20) by the artist Thomas Hirschhorn. It involves the visual vocabulary of cheap and unstable materials, which counter-reacts our expectations of a monument. Usually, a traditional monument serves as a collective commemoration for historical persons or events. Monuments are made to make us remember and revere. In his article Planes of immanence, or The form of ideas: Notes on the (anti-)monuments of Thomas Hirschhorn, the author Simon Sheikh (2004:94) states: "monuments must be seen to be affirmative rather than critical; they are designed to fix history and to situate the subjects of the nation within a specific narrative."

As a consequence, traditional monuments do not necessarily intend to provoke dialogues. The use of solid materials rather aims to achieve monumentality that testifies to an ideology grounded in solidity, fixity and unchangeability in relation to conception of history and affirms of status quo (Sheikh, 2004:93). In *Bataille Monument*, Hirschhorn's deliberate use of these cheap, unstable and perishable materials stands in opposition to the large scale and imposing material of official monuments we are usually familiar with. Structures we expect to be rigid have now become limp due to their unstable material foundations and almost infantile design. This provisionality suggests a focus on "interaction rather than reverence, instilling confidence in our reflective capacities, as it were. These monuments exist as microcosmos of the possible, as places where things can take place, as force fields, as energy and movement. It is thus integral that they are temporary and perishable: production and destruction" (Sheikh,2004:94).

Forgetting is a privilege

The work *Forgetting is a privilege* (Fig,21+22) further elaborates on the idea of Hirschorn's concept of 'anti-monuments', which opposes the authoritative character of monuments. This work specifically reacts to monuments which typically convey an ideology that distinguishes between people worthy of mourning and unworthy of mourning in the public space. A tied knot in a handkerchief is an old custom in specific parts of Germany. It functions as a memory aid, a kind of mnemonic trigger to remember that something specific needs to be done the following day. The knotted handkerchief is then placed next to the bed. Further, the handkerchief symbolises private acts of mourning and its waving is an act of saying goodbye to loved ones.

In *Forgetting is a privilege* dozens of white handkerchiefs were knotted together to form long strings fixed onto a pillow which is hanging on a wall. The constant repetition of tying knots into handkerchiefs aims to suggest a collection of single memories which can be preserved from forgetfulness in a non-hierarchical way. And yet, the constant repetition of this manual act can also suggest an omission of the previously specified memories symbolised by a knotted handkerchief – a reminder that our record of experiences is limited and that memories might get lost with time. Nevertheless, this piece intends to emphasise the societal need for individual memorialisation in order to oppose an ideology of unequal distribution in terms of who is deemed worthy of mourning and taken care of, and who is not.

Fig. 21+22: *Forgetting is a privilege*
ca. 200 x 70 x 350 cm

Fig. 22: *Forgetting is a privilege*, detail

Fig. 23: *Omentum,* detail

Omentum

The work *Omentum* (Fig. 23+24) is a further interrogation into the ambivalent character of a materiality, in which certain objects can be considered as supportive, conforming elements while also revealing a disruptive potential. In *Omentum*, different ropes are tied around a blue painted pillow, bending it into an unfamiliar shape. These lacings begin to form a kind of mesh. The mesh itself is interwoven with different types of thin threads, forming a tangled mass of threads in certain areas. At some point the characteristic of a mesh adapts its shape to the item it is enclosing, creating transitions into a disruptive moment by almost strangulating the wrapped pillow. An attributed function is made unclear. This piece is a reference to the ambivalent character of repair, as a life-sustaining element in our society, yet exploited by dominant power structures. It might remind us of the inherent ambiguous character of all the elements we are surrounded by and which form our society.

Fig. 24: *Omentum*
ca. 45 x 200 x 25 cm

The title *Omentum* refers to the tissue layer covering and supporting the intestines and organs in the lower abdomen. This internal mesh is an essential protective element, but its inflammation can harm all organs. I want to link my artistic reference of bodily structures to Nicholas Hlobos' work *Balindile I* (2012, Fig.25). In my eyes, this artwork evokes associations with internal organs, umbilical cords, and phallic elements.

Hlobos' installation is a pertinent example for the potential of everyday materials to be repaired in such a way so as to evoke a myriad of interpretations and challenge the viewer to reflect on societal issues. The choice of materials in *Balindile I* resonates with the use of lowly, disposable and partly dissolving materials in my own body of work. In *Balindile I*, Hlobo assembled pieces of inner rubber tubes from car tyres, which he gathered from repair garages, with hosepipes and ribbon. The potentially dissolving and wilting materials suggest the sculpture's temporality. The pairing of disparate materials, the black rubber inner tubes and satin ribbons create a tactile and intricate sculpture. The rather masculine and harsh material is juxtaposed with materials relating to domesticity such as ribbons, which is delicate and ethereal. I am drawn to this artistic quality of juxtaposing a delicate stitch with a harsh and unappealing material such as rubber. The visible and delicate seam connects the different elements, but at the same time, it can also be read as an element which closes off access to that which they bind. (Fig.26) The juxtaposition of subtle seam, with an apparently solid material creates a tension with a potential of myriad interpretations and opposes a single meaning. It is this tension created through the juxtaposition of different materials and functions, which I regard as an essential artistic vocabulary in my body of work.

Fig.25+26: Nicholas Hlobo, *Balindile I*, 2012

What is unseen cannot be defaced

What is unseen cannot be defaced (Fig.27) consists out of a painted pillow with acrylic, plastic bags, an embroidery hoop and black threads. Black plastic bags form a symmetrical, circular shape around the central pillow. The corners of the plastic bags connect to the embroidery hoop. Single black threads simulate the embroidery hoops original function to mend a hole. Yet this form of repair denies an insight into what it is covering. Once again, this work raises concerns about the produced invisibility of repair and care in our society.

Fig.27: *What is unseen cannot be defaced*
ca. 90 x 90 x 25 cm

CONCLUSION

As a means of concluding this document, I first want to mention that this research project is not completed yet, rather it serves as a reflection on my artistic practice during the MFA, with outcomes and challenges I regard as very valuable for my artistic career. The pandemic, with its limitation in sculptural possibilities, provoked an internal necessity to find artistic vocabularies responding to the challenging times I found myself situated in.

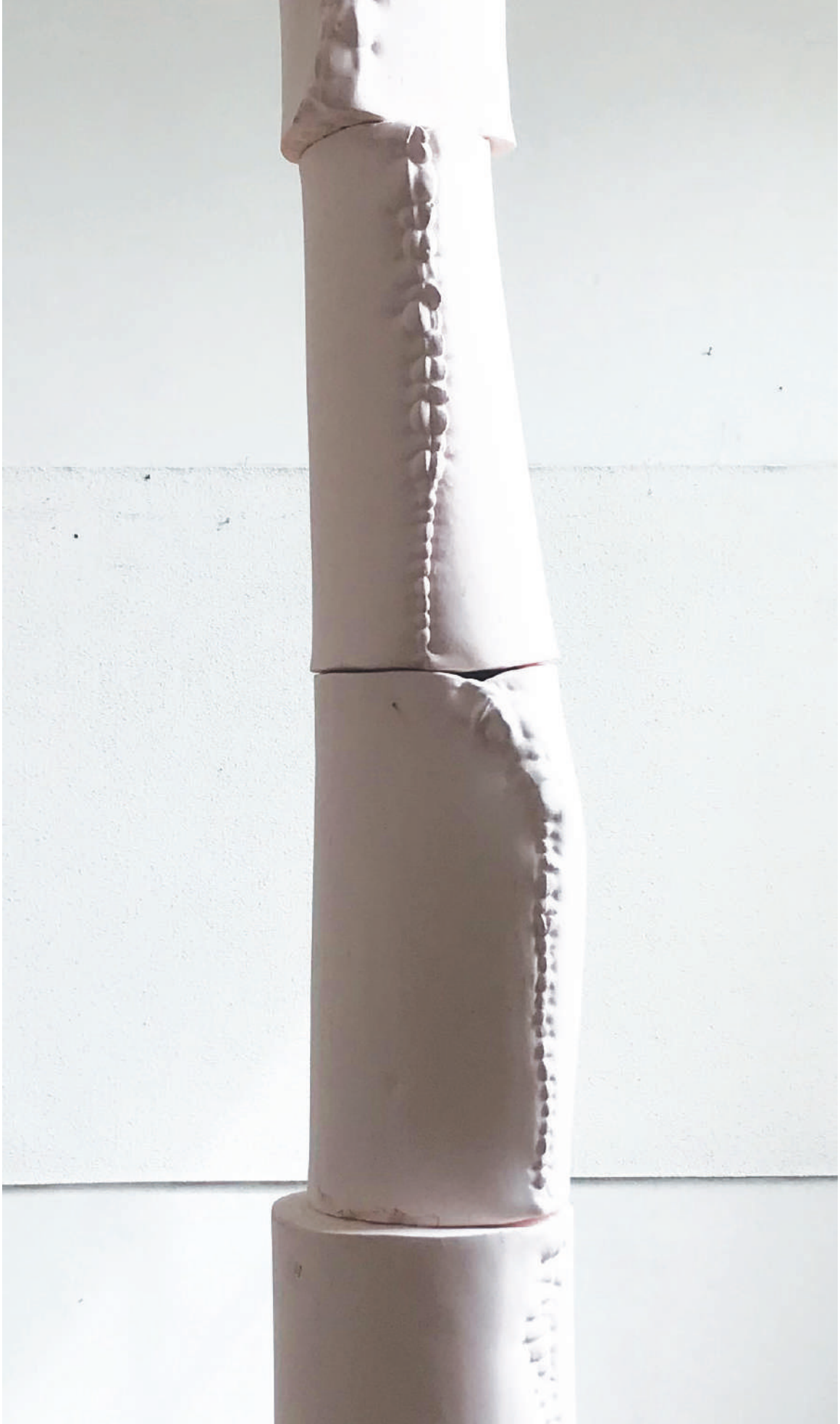
Throughout this document, I have explored the potential of RePair as a strategy of radical care and making with care in times of isolation. I have done so by investigating the complexity of the terms repair and care with its potential to provide relational perspectives. I have stressed the potential of repurposing essentially rendered useless materials in the artistic process of Assemblage and its potential to offer reflections towards the fragmented society we are living in: "by definition, assemblages' function as models of engagement with the world rather than as a formal category" (Dezeuze, 2008:31). With this in mind I have stressed the significance of transformation in my artistic process as a means to create a relationality between internal and external states in the outcome of a made artefact, as an expression of human sentience and radical care. To put it another way, I have explored the importance of an underlying relationality between sentience and objects, innermost self and the external world, and how such interrelations can create different imaginations and oppose single interpretations of an artwork. Furthermore, I have investigated the intermingling of homely and unhomely elements in my artistic practice as a means to create boundless spaces of intersubjective relations.

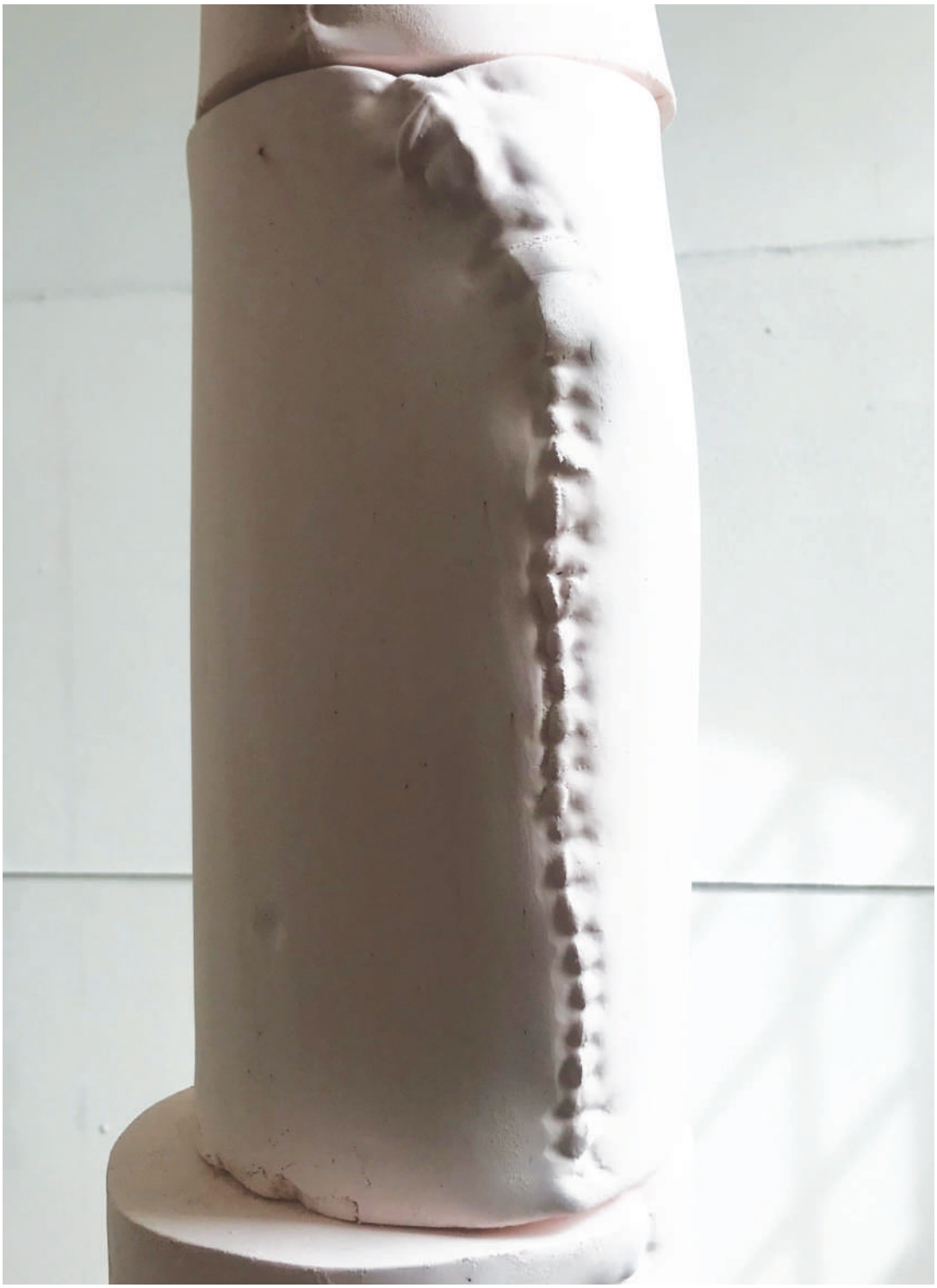
With these examinations in mind I now want to try to give an outlook for my body of work. An artwork does not produce meaning, rather it informs meaning. I argue that the opposing forces of destruction and reconstruction, the reversal of material values and characteristics and the estrangement of materials provide a multitude of interpretation for the viewer. Visible contradictions are able to produce relational perspectives with no single outcome. For Glissant, "thoughts that do not tremble, are frozen, systematic and sterile" (Diawara, 2014:62). The terms care, repair and assemblage are all vocabularies that define or are defined by relationships. They are terms which describe types of encounters between more than one entity. Indeed, as Glissant (1990:42) puts it, "the diverse, that which constitutes a quantifiable sum of all the differences possible, is the engine of the universal energy that we must preserve from systems of assimilation, passive generalizations, and standardized habits."

This body of work is the result of a time with constantly alternating moments of utopian and dystopian belief towards a better future. Nevertheless, I argue that this body of work tries to emphasise methods of repair and care-taking as tasks of world-building rather than opposing acts world-destroying. However, this task of world-building contains a process of unmaking of the world as we know it. It gives a chance to create new imaginations arising from a time of pessimism. These visual acts of reconstruction align with the established theories on trauma: "the reconstruction of language is therefore essential not only for the purpose of giving testimony to pain and suffering but also for healing, for the remaking of the world." (Saal, 2011:452)

I want to conclude this document with a quote during the pandemic from Art historian Ashraf Jamal that foregrounds the intellectual and corporeal weave I have produced to hold a special thought related to art, art-making, care and re-pair:

> It can be a time in which we relearn to care for others, for ourselves, for the world that is devouring us. The sacred care and attention we give to things, the miraculous ways in which we transfigure waste, is something which we must all the more urgently direct towards the human, towards our humanity. Failing to do so – if it is not already too late – is catastrophic. (Jamal, 2020b)





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