

She Guards The Things of The Past and
Keeps Them in Store

Kirstie Pietersen

She Guards The Things of The Past and Keeps Them in Store | Kirstie Pietersen

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Thank you to the 4th year class and everyone who helped me in small ways.

She Guards The Things of The Past and Keeps Them in Store.

Artist Statement

She Guards The Things of The Past and Keeps Them in Store, is a visual auto-biographical exhibition drawn from my maternal archive. The central focus of this body of work is placed on the use of analogue photographs that have documented events and people from the maternal side of my family. The events that have been preserved were all documented at a time before my birth.

Through this archive I engage with the conventions of family photography and how individuals are socialised into their particular roles. My work specifically engages the gendered dynamics that foster familial relationships and the roles of women in my family who become wives and mothers. These roles are often saturated in patriarchal beliefs and values adding to the image of the ideal family. These concerns are engaged through various processes of image reproduction.

The works that make up the exhibition look at memory – the act of looking at and through the past is often hard to discern. Therefore, the inaccessible past is communicated through images that oscillate between becoming and unbecoming; fluctuation, disappearance, erasure and negation.

The photographs I have presented in this body of work were all captured at a time in South Africa when people of colour were socially and economically immobilised. This is reflected through my family's domestic settings and spaces that they have represented themselves in and navigated through, further revealing the interconnection between private and public history

Unions :

Married 

Divorced 

Windowed X

Casual relationship and separation 

emotional relationships :

Normal : 

love : 

Distant /Poor : 

Hostile : 

Gender :

Male : 

Female: 

Unknown photographer, 1965, family archive, location unknown.



Catalogue Essay

“photography’s social function is integrally tied to the ideology of the modern family. The family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness...Because the photograph gives the illusion of being a simple transcription of the real, a trace touched directly by the event it records, it has the effect of naturalizing cultural practices and of disguising their stereotyped and coded characteristics” (Hirsch, 1997: 7).

The family photograph – a material record that acts as a conduit through which time elapses – reveals channels of relationality. It occupies a space of contradiction - it both reveals and conceals the intimate parts of ourselves and provides a telling story of moments shared alongside others, while masking the details of everyday life. It is a space where memory fluctuates, making it both accessible and inaccessible. In an essay titled *Family Frames*, Marianne Hirsch (1997) writes about how family photographs are embedded with cultural and social ideologies. The primary argument the Hirsch brings forward and elaborates on is that family photographs are constructed images where relations, roles and interactions are performed before the camera to articulate the ideal image which conflicts with the actual experiences of family life. Hirsch writes: “photography’s social function is integrally tied to the ideology of the modern family. The family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness...Because the photograph gives the illusion of being a simple transcription of the real, a trace touched directly by the event it records, it has the effect of naturalizing cultural practices and of disguising their stereotyped and coded characteristics” (Hirsch, 1997: 7).

Hirsch’s indication that family photographs are constructed by familial myths and dominant ideologies shape the way individuals

negotiate and perform their roles within the familial group is a primary concern within my practice. Whilst I perused through a collection of family photographs that I stumbled upon in a suitcase, I felt intrigued by the figures of family members and events, that now, only exist in the past and in other people’s memories as these moments were recorded before my birth. I first noticed the way family members performed masculine and feminine roles for the camera. Images typically showed women and children positioned in front of men. Men always appeared with strong and stern poses indicating male power and presence. Where there are men and children present, there are women directing affection towards them. The recording of relations and roles reflect ideological pressures that shape the way individuals present themselves (Hirsch, 1997).



My interest in my family's photographic archive emerged out of an interest in the complex roles that women perform within the familial group. My current studio practice deals with the subjects of my maternal kin – the complex maternal relations within my family and the exclusive use of historical objects belonging to the maternal side of my family that articulate this. I am concerned with the conventions of the family photograph and how this articulates the particular roles of women who become wives and mothers. Moreover, the fragility of the past – my lack of context or knowledge of the events that have shaped my mother's familial archive is something I explore. As such, my work speaks to the preservation of an archive and knowledge of my maternal forebears who were women who often lost their identities to the role of mother and wife. What I am presenting is a visual auto-biographical exhibition that reveals the gendered dynamics that underpin familial relationships and the unique intimacy of my family's life performed through different periods in time and place.

The initial experiments began in the print-making studio where I began the process of creating various photocopy transfers onto calico and canvas¹. Along with this, other methods of image reproduction involved me imposing onto my maternal archive to reveal the gendered dynamics that articulate the familial ideal.

1 The photograph above of my then young, now deceased grandparents standing beside my great-great grandmother struck me from the projects inception. Without much knowledge about what had motivated this gathering, I felt the sense of a union between people. Perhaps it was the delicacy of the gestures exchanged between my great-great grandmother and my grandmother which intrigued me or the vigour and beauty of a young couple standing beside an aged woman. My initial experiments in the printmaking studio involved the reproduction of this image.



Images from left to right:

1. unknown photorapher, circa 1900s, family archive, unknown location.
2. unknown photographer, circa 1965 , family archive, Lotus River (Cape Town.)



The contact between two surfaces rolled into the printing press provided the chance appearance of an image. The appearance of an image which seemed to be fluctuating between becoming and unbecoming began to translate the fragility of memory and time and how they react. Fragments of figures would appear and disappear as the ink chooses which parts of the surface it wants to dissolve into. As a result, I lose control of my desire to re-articulate a perfect image and the autonomy of the process proves to be more meaningful.

untitled, 2021, photocopy transfer on canvas , 18 x 18 cm

This connects with another series of work titled *Unions of Time* which is presented on a different kind of fabric: tulle - a fine, net-like fabric used in the making of veils and wedding dresses. In the making of this work, I again felt fascinated by images grandparents together and the material that holds the visual record of their union: their wedding photos.

In Charles Lewis's (1997) essay titled *Hegemony in the ideal: Wedding Photography, Consumerism, and Patriarchy*, photographs of wedded couples romance with the idea of perfection which often fail to provide a true account of the real. Lewis writes: "couples want illusion that is also natural. It is little wonder couples prefer such images because they expect the wedding to be a perfect affair" (Lewis, 1997: 169). The wedding day is often one opulent affair where the union between two individuals is celebrated. This key moment in the life of any family is documented and preserved within meta-photographic texts – family albums – "which place family photographs into narrative contexts" (Hirsch, 1997:8). Photographs of wedded couples often contain images of women and men in poses that articulate their specific gendered roles; The bride performs affectionate and submissive behaviours, whereas men perform in ways that assert their dominance and presence through bodily gestures.

The hyper-real performances of gendered roles and romance outside of the mundane lived reality is often saturated within hegemonic patriarchal ideologies (Lewis, 1997). As illustrated in the image of my grandparents, my grandmother is seated on the ground where she affectionately glances upwards at my grandfather who is standing above her and is positioned towards her. Their eyes and hands meet happily and lovingly.

Multiple images of wedded couples from my maternal archive are reproduced onto tulle and are presented as a hanging installation. From ceiling to floor the viewer is meant to encounter ghostly black and white figures that float within the exhibition space. The transparency of the fabric allows for light to pass through it further allowing images to shift as it appears and disappears making the artwork, from a distance, visually hard to read. Thus, it challenges the viewer to go up to the artwork and walk through the wedding veils translating the act of having to look closely at and through an archive to discern the past.

"It undoes the objectification of the still photograph and thereby takes it out of the realm of the stasis, immobility, mortification – what Barthes calls "flat death" - into fluidity, movement, and thus, finally, life" (Hirsch, 1997: 4).

By being intimately involved with my archive through repeated interaction: searching for answers through oral narration, holding, looking and drawing my eye closer to the physical details of these analogue photographs recorded before my birth, I felt fascinated by the accumulation of physical history. The closer I looked the more I began to recognise my grandmother within each photograph whether her figure appeared in it or not. This is because all of these images were documented at a time when she was alive. I began to make sense of time with one of the earliest images taken in 1946, and the last taken in January 1995, 2 months before my grandmother's passing and a year before the birth of my eldest sibling; consequently she is absent from my memory. Although my mother always made an effort to keep the memory of my grandmother alive, oral history never felt like it could make up for the absence and loss for a person I have never met, yet know so well. This is something I still try to comprehend.

Chronicle ii is a documentation of

my grandmother's location in the past and my mother's oral narration of these images which represent the present. *Chronicle ii* is also a documentation of my grandmother's life as a mother and wife and my grandfather's absence from the domestic space as he worked for long periods of time at sea as a steward. The work contains images from my archive that have been framed; where images are revealed while others are concealed by flipping images over.

The negation of the image is significant in *Family Frames*. Hirsch continually refers to Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* which reflects the multiple ways photographs are read going beyond its representational autonomy to acquiring truth in content and narrative life. One such image that Hirsch finds within *Camera Lucida* that attests to this, is the winter-garden image which features a textual image of Barthes' young mother at the age of five. The textual image of the winter-garden photo is a substitute for what one would normally consider an image to be - a pictorial reference that shows a moment in time fixed within a frame. Instead, Barthes acquires text to describe and reflect upon the image and presents that to the reader. For Barthes, the winter-garden image is a "very private kind of self-portrait, revealing, unexpectedly, the most intimate and unexposed

aspects of himself. The picture of his mother provokes a moment of self-recognition, which in the reading process, becomes a process of self-discovery, a discovery of a self in-relation" (Hirsch, 1997:2), thus we are only allowed to view the image through narration. The act of concealing images while making *Chronicle ii* is due to my lack of understanding or knowledge about the events that have shaped my family's past but I aim to allow the viewer to create images by projecting their own understanding onto spaces that are devoid of an image or where the image is negated. Hirsch succinctly expresses the significance of the concealed image with respect to the winter-garden image: "It undoes the objectification of the still photograph and thereby takes it out of the realm of the stasis, immobility, mortification – what Barthes calls "flat death" - into fluidity, movement, and thus, finally, life" (Hirsch, 1997: 4).

The organization of images, text and frame alludes to the connectedness of a family and how families illustrate this via the arrangement of photographs in homes. Gillian Rose (2005) writes that the act of clustering photographs together in frames and collages communicated the ideal image of shared and reciprocal affection familial individuals direct towards each other. In addition, the construction of these images placed into the "portrait chronical" (Rose,2005:230)

– the chronological construction of family photographs in albums and frames creates a portrait of a family - places women, mothers and wives into positions which render them as preservers of family history : "preservation of the history that supports a person's identity by means of caring for and arranging things is the activity of homemaking still carried out primarily by women...Such homemaking is not done exclusively by women, but to the degree that women more than men attend more to family and community ties in everyday life, the activities of preservation tend to be gender specific"(Marion Young,2005: 136).

Narratives of the present are articulated through other archival objects. White sewing thread is shown as an artwork and is read alongside a photograph that was taken on my parents second marriage to one another. The white thread is embroidered onto the image covering the figure of my mother. Complex familial and maternal relations are communicated through this. After my parents second separation and divorce, my family had to come to terms with the fact that my father was to be wed with a new woman. My mother had a hard time comprehending this and often felt anxious that a new woman has replaced her as mother and wife. This caused many challenges between her, my father, his wife and my

siblings. The coverage of the figure with sewing thread gifted to me by my stepmother, and subsequent erasure of the mothers figure registers as the salvaging of a role and family all together. Furthermore, this artwork is part of a section of work related to the present influenced by the past. The objects included all come from women in my life, most of whom are deceased. Therefore, the viewer will encounter objects – a pocket bible and a folded-up tapestry to name a few- which will be presented as artworks.

“The camera entered the domain of the ordinary and the domestic. Thus, photography quickly became the family’s primary instrument of self-acknowledgement and representation – the means by which family memory would be continued and perpetuated, by which the family’s story would henceforth be told” (Hirsch, 1997:6).

My interests are concerned with the use of the family photograph to create auto-biographical work. On one hand I am concerned with the relationship between the individual, the social and historical. On the other hand the ordinary day-to-day reality of a family of colour living with the social traumas of Apartheid is made visible by virtue of these photographs representing that particular demographic of people within a particular point in history.

This is not something I have tried to make explicit, but it inherently exists through the specific locations, domestic and class settings that my family have represented themselves in.

Chronicle ii contains images of the private familial group set against the backdrop of a racial system geared towards the social and economic immobility of people of colour. Photographs carry social value. Becker writes that nineteenth century self-portraiture was “one of those symbolic acts by which individuals from the rising social classes made their ascent visible to themselves and others and classed themselves among those who enjoyed social status” (Becker, 2001:281). A section of *Chronicle ii* contains a series of Kodak images dated within the early 1980s, a time of turbulent political tension in South Africa. Although I am not explicitly concerned with challenging or exposing the politics embedded within my family’s history, I am intrigued by how family photography makes conscious the subtle tension between self and public identity, and the interconnection between private and public history. I notice this through the geographical locations my family represented themselves in. Within the series, two Kodak images are placed beside each other in a frame. The first is an image taken in 1984 of a section of Cape Town showing Table Mountain

The second image, taken in 1983, shows my mother and uncle swimming in the waves at Strandfontein Pavilion, a non-white beach. The first image is authored by my grandfather while he was on board a ship he worked on, the SAF Marine. The distance between the authors of the two images and their subjects provides a poignant story of how the self operates within social space and how the self meets public identity within that particular time in history. It shows where families of colour were forced to spend their leisure time and where they were forced to keep their distance from.

The Kodak images are significant in that it allowed my family access to self-author their identity. Hirsch mentions that "the camera entered the domain of the ordinary and the domestic. Thus, photography quickly became the family's primary Instrument of self-acknowledgement and representation"(Hirsch, 1997:6). The agency to self-identify and self-author within the said period in history serves to counter the dominant ethnographic image which, throughout history, has authored the identity of people of colour. The act of self-representation through the hand-held camera that was Kodak countered the oppressive nature that racial objectification through categorisation and stereotyping had on the identity of people of colour - the loss of autonomy to construct an identity beyond the white imaginary.

In conclusion, my interest in feminine subjectivity has allowed me to look inward at my maternal archive. Through various process of image reproduction from my family's photographic archive I have dealt with and revealed the social and historical elements that are embedded within familial images. The familial ideal is constructed through roles and relations that individuals perform for the camera, thereby, exposing problematic elements such as gender and power relations within family photography. Through Hirsch's text, my thoughts about family photography is sustained. The photographs I have presented in this body of work were all captured at a time when people of colour were socially and economically immobilised and this is reflected through my family's domestic settings and spaces that they have represented themselves in and navigated through, further revealing the interconnection between private and public history.

2 The "ethnographic image" which is being referred to in the text refers to colonial anthropological studies of Indigenous and Black people, their bodies and cultures which were used to stereotype and racially categorise people to "prove" that whiteness is the standard of civilisation, thereby, creating the image of Black and Indigenous people as "other", hindering the possibility to self-identify beyond the constraints of the white gaze. This is mentioned extensively in *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons and Ideologies of the African Body* by Barbra Thompson where Thompson explains the ways colonial photography imposes on the Black body.

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Present: Maternal Relations



Untitled, 2021, sewed in rectangular shape on lace from the train of my matric ball dress,
65,8 x 65,8cm .



White sewing thread gifted to me by my step-mother who inherited it from her late mother.



My Mothers Grievances, 2021, embroidery on photograph, 15 x 12 cm



A tapestry made for myself and my sister by my grandfather's second wife.



According to my mother, this bible was gifted to my uncle by my grandmother on his 21st birthday.

NEW TESTAMENT & PSALMS

King James Version

even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

CHAPTER 5

BE ye therefore followers of dear children;

2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;

4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

8 For ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light;

9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness

and righteousness and truth;)

10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

13 But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the

name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Saviour of the body.

24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30 For we are members

We stop our own growth
because we make mountain out
of mole's heap. God is always
dealing with him.

Fax Number:-

08666 36665

→ Death Certificate

→ Deceased

→ B Form (Doctor's
Form)

→ Craig:

083400 4027

il internal.

A note found in an envelope containing various copies of original documents, amongst them were copies of my grandfather's death certificate, identity documents as well as this note.

Past: Unions of Time

Sharon
Culley

6

M

This is my mom
and dad in their
days

ALWAYS HAVE YOUR
PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN

Love.







Page 36 - 38 : Unions of Time, 2021, photocopy transfer on tulle, dimensions vary (detail).

Chronicle ii :



Helena and Audrey Majavie
Circa , 1940s



"I ve only got one photo of grandpa, sitting on his mothers arm "



"Because there's things that she knows that she remembers that I don't remember. You know I was one of the younger ones so there's things that she has like a memory of that I don't have a memory of. Like, she has a memory of Grand-pas father. I was a year old when he died. I can't remember him....I remember my mother's father... and her mother and, my father's parents I don't... ".



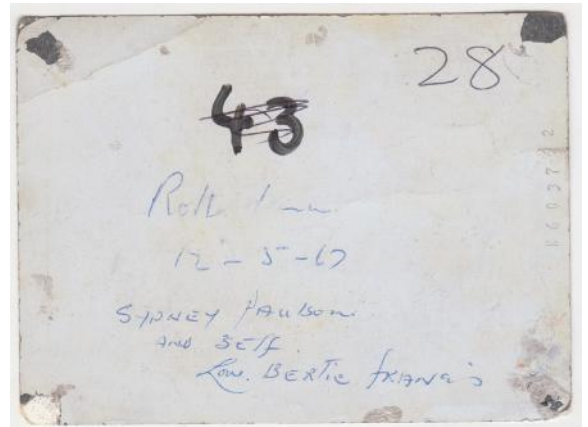


“...The old people didn't like to talk. jy moenie van die dooie mense praatie. Laat die dooie mense rus - that was the mentality...”

- Images from left to right : 1. Unknown photographer, circa 1965, family archive, Lotus River.
2. Flipped over found frame.
 3. Photographer unknown, circa 1965, family archive, Lotus River (Cape Town).
 4. Photographer unknown, circa 1965, family archive, Lotus River (Cape Town).



My grandmother married at 17



Images on this page from left to right :

1. Photographer unknown, circa 1965 ,family archive, Lotus River (Cape Town).
2. Photographer unknown, 1967, family archive, unknown location.

"You Press The Button- We Do The Rest."

ak



Print made
by Kodak
CA Apr 1983



A
C



second born child

Images form left to right:

1. Photographer unknown, 1983, family archive, unknown location.

2.. Photographer unknown, date unknown, family archive, unknown location.



Images from left to right:

1. Photograph detail from page 47.

2. Photographer unknown, circa 1980, family archive, Mitchells Plain (Cape Town).



Damien's baptism celebration, Mitchells Plain





Images from left to right:

1. Photographer unknown, date unknown, family archive, Lotus River (Cape Town).
2. Photographer unknown, date unknown, family archive., location unknown.

Some of my late grandfathers travel photos that he took while he worked as a steward on the SAF Marine.

“He would always send postcards home”



Images from left to right:

1. Sydney Paulsen, date unknown, family archive, Jerusalem.
2. Sydney Paulsen, date unknown, family archive, South America.
3. Certificate of acknowledgement and photograph of Sydney Paulsen attached to a torn-out back cover of a photo album.

זוה ציון קרית מועדנו עיניך

יבוכך ה' מעון וואה ב' ב'טוב ירושלם כל ימי חיך



וזאת ה'תעודה
THIS CERTIFICATE TESTIFIES THAT

Sidney John Paulsen

ASCENDED MOUNT ZION אשר זכה ועלה
IN JERUSALEM לעיר הקודש ירושלים
IN KEEPING WITH THE ביום הזה וקיים
ANCIENT TRADITION מצות זכר עליה לרגל
OF THE PILGRIMAGE לפי מסורת ישראל
TO THE HOLY CITY

GIVEN ON MOUNT ZION נרתן בהדר ציון
ה'תשל

24-11-1972



TO ISRAEL שלום על ישראל

DR. S.Z. KAMAY
THE CURATOR





Images from left to right:

1. Detail from page 52.

2. Sydney Paulsen, 1984, family archive, Cape Town.

3. Photographer unknown, 1983, family archive, Strandfontein Pavillion
(Cape Town).



The distance between the authors of the two images and the subject/s of the photograph is poignant story of how the self operates within social space and how the self meets public identity within that particular time in history. It shows where families of colour were forced to spend their leisure time and where they were forced to keep their distance from-
(extract from the essay).



Lotus River

"Most of these photos were all taken in Lotus River. My grandfather, the Philanders owned a plot of land that the family stayed on . He died years before any of us were born and I have no stories of him. The old people didn't like to talk. jy moenie van die dooie mense praatie. Laat die dooie mense rus - that was the mentality..."





Standard five class tour, Wentworth High School,
1984.

Images from left to right:

1. Found frame.
2. Photographer unknown, 1984, family archive, Durban (South Africa).
3. Photographer unknown, 1995, family archive, Cape Town.



"I was wondering the day that I got married, why did she cry so man, it was like she was at a funeral, the way she cried"

“Here, she was sick already...she had cancer..ja. When is Uncle Stefans birthday? In January and she died in April. She got out of her sick bed for that 21st”.

Images on the right page:

1. Julian Pietersen, 6 January 1995, family archive, Cape Town.
2. The previous image turned over.



"...The old people didn't like to talk. jy moenie van die dooie mense praat. laat die dooie mense rus -that was the mentality . Thats why I always kept photos of my mother around the house because I didn't want you to grow up not knowing her".



Sydney Paulsen ,1976, family archive, Brazil (South America).



Chronicle i , photocopy transfers on fabriano unika, 54.6 x34 cm (framed).















Untitled studio experiments :

untitled i, 2021 , photocopy transfer on calico , 24 x 15,5 cm



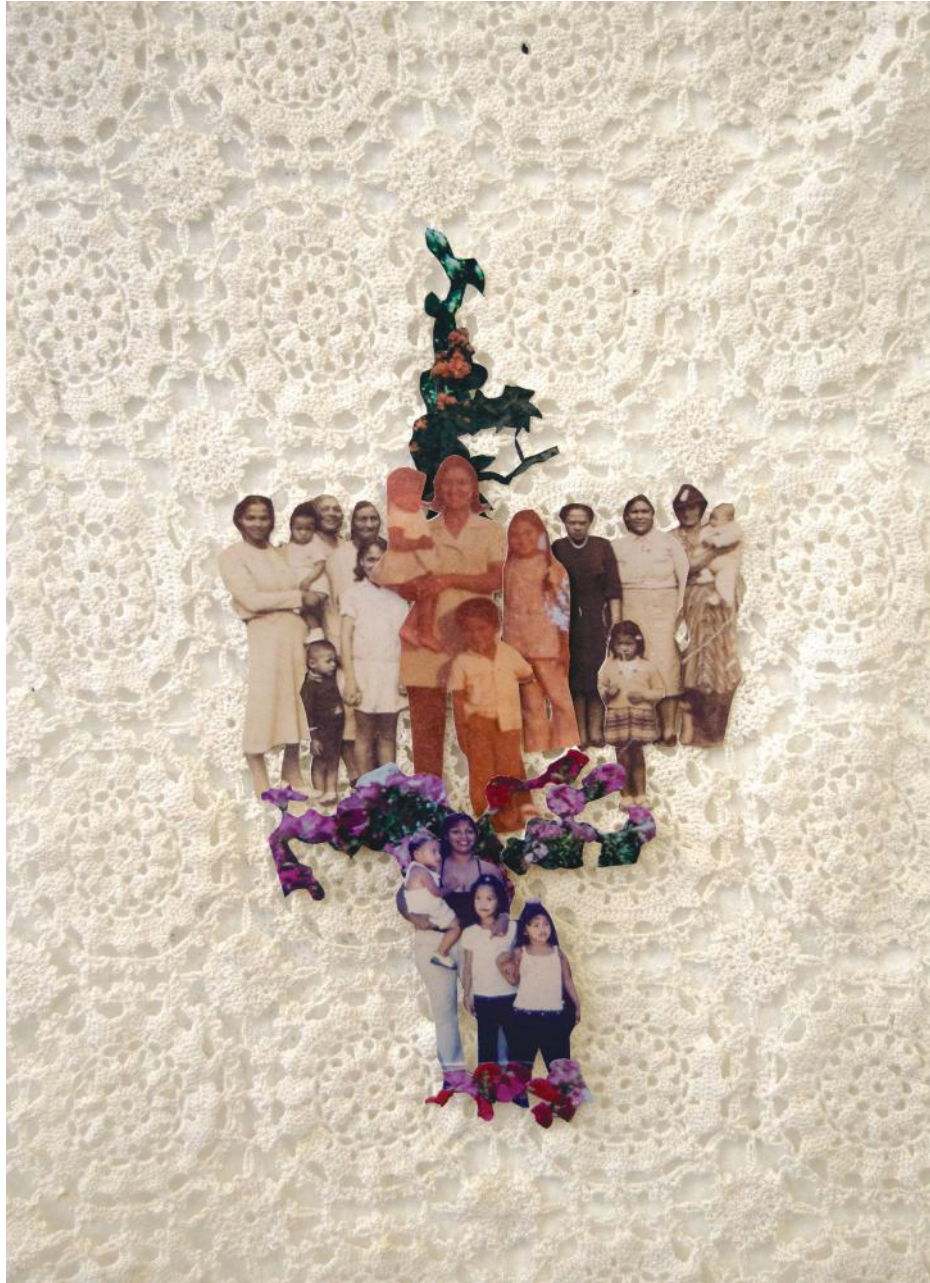




untitled iii , 2021, photocopy transfer on cotton , 16,6 x 18 cm



untitled iv, 2021, photocopy transfer and embroidery on canvas, 18,5 x 14.8 cm



our mothers, 2021, collage on doillie, 57x 34 cm (detail).



