

FIN4015W

Connection

November 2021 Online Submission

Ashraya Naidoo (NDXASH024)

CONNECTION

Ashraya Naidoo

2021

COVID-19 has had a cataclysmic effect which has brought many hardships, struggles and loss to people around the world. This has also caused me to question and re-evaluate my life, my identity and my purpose. This has inspired me to create *Connection*.

I believe that everything is connected. Everything is linked together by an invisible thread impacting each other and developing together.

I present *Connection* through storytelling. I believe that, by listening to other people's stories, we reach a realisation that, even though we are each different and come from different backgrounds and experiences and environments, we are so much the same.

I am 23 years old, and, in *Connection*, I explore 23 questions. I made a video and audio piece of me answering these questions. Using the Zoom application, I also reached out to 23 other people and discussed these questions with them. These Zoom chats are displayed on various screens simultaneously and are arranged around a lounge setting. This setting is used as I believe it is the warmest and most welcoming room in a home. My aim was to create an environment in which the people I spoke with felt safe and comfortable enough to discuss sensitive topics.

To respect the privacy of each person, the audio from each chat is layered over one another. This is to make it difficult to distinguish between the voices and what is being said and to create an impression of a group of people chatting together in a room.

However, due to personal reasons, not all 23 people who participated wanted me to display their conversation in the exhibit. Some of them were not ready to share their thoughts and feelings as a few of these questions broached sensitive, emotional topics.

Over the past two years, the events that have affected me the most have been the COVID-19 pandemic and the riots and unrest that took place in July 2021. As an artist and photographer, I wanted to capture the effects of these events on the emotions and lives of the people and community around me.

I created two books:

- *Making History*: consists of photographs of my family and I sewing masks for our community, and our life during the pandemic,
- *Unrest*: looks at the aftermath of the riots where I live in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal,

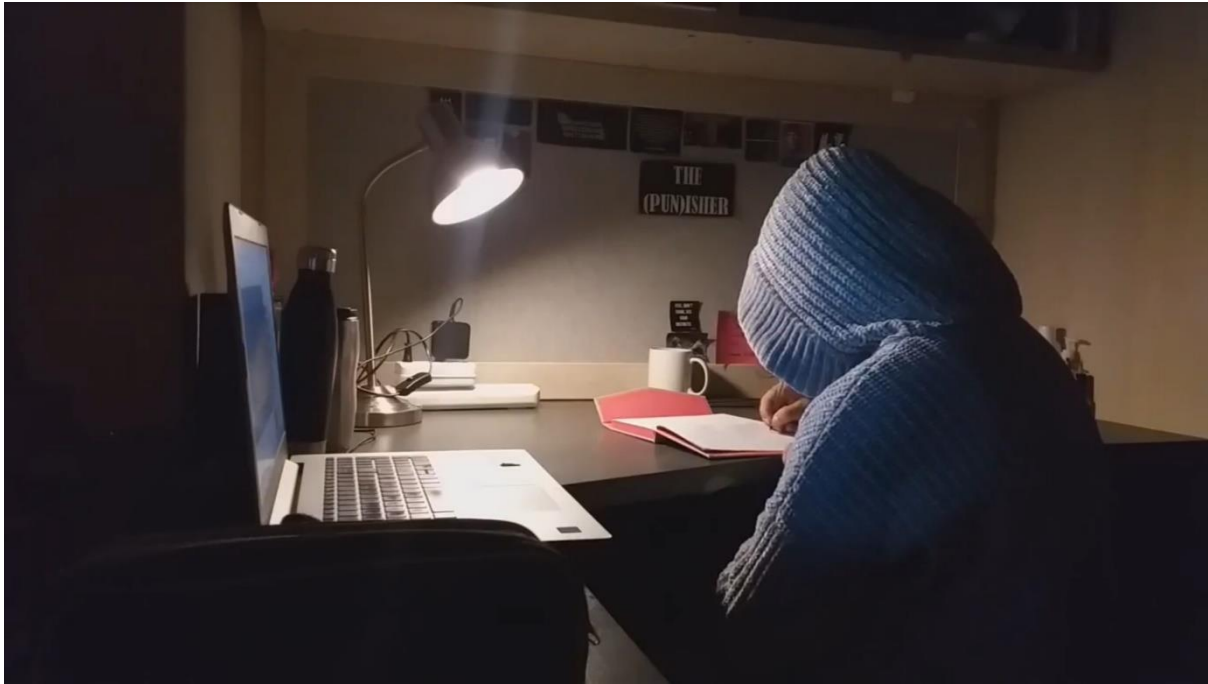
The books are displayed alongside the video installation as these are connected to each other. The conversations with the participants, the shared experiences and the coming together of communities during times of hardship serve to highlight our connection to each other in this wonderful ride called Life!

23 Questions:

1. Reflect on your experiences during Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021. How has it changed and impacted your life?
2. What was the turning point in your life?
3. Who are you?
4. How do you perceive God: a spiritual being, or a higher power?
5. What is perfection to you?
6. What if ...?
7. We each conduct ourselves differently in various spaces, living different versions of ourselves each time. How many versions of you are there?
8. What is the endgame for you?
9. What constitutes education for you?
10. What are your biggest regrets and your proudest moments?
11. Are you happy?
12. What is the purpose of life?
13. What do you constitute success and failure?
14. Do you love yourself?
15. What drives and motivates you?
16. What are some things that you never want anyone to know or discover about you?
17. If you know you would not fail, what would you do?
18. If you could live inside a book or a movie, which one would it be and why?
19. What would you say is your superpower? And if you could have any other power, what would it be and why?
20. What is the motto you live by? And create a slogan for yourself.
21. Would you rather be immortal and live the same kind of day every day, or would you rather be mortal, and every day was different?
22. What would your survival kit consist of?
23. If you had the chance to have control over something, what would it be and why?

VIDEO AND AUDIO PIECE:

Answering the 23 questions, impacted me emotionally and mentally. The hardest part was being honest with myself. These questions were difficult, and I felt I did not have the skills and ability to answer them.



Zoom has been a great tool to stay in contact with people within the Covid-19 lockdown regulations. Finding new ways to stay in contact with people has been one of the many hurdles being faced during this pandemic. How as an artist do I navigate this new way of living and still be able to engage with people and the world in an organic way?

After asking myself these questions, my everyday life started to change. The mundane stopped being just a daily occurrence, I looked at it with a new sense of appreciation and fascination. Why do I do this in this manner? Why have I just accepted that this is the way to do something? I was too busy worrying and preparing for the next step, instead of focusing on the present. I now understand that I will never have the perfect time to do anything, I only have the time right now to do it. If there is one thing this pandemic has cleared for me, is that everything could change in a second. This unpredictable and uncertain time has made me appreciate how precious the moment right now is.



Name: Prajna Naiker
Pronouns: She/Her
Location: Bedroom
Address: Observatory, Cape Town, Western Cape
Question: 4



Name: Ashraya Naidoo
Pronouns: She/Her
Location: Bedroom.
Address 1: Raisethorpe, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal

miro



Name: Sadiyah Rawat
Pronouns: she/Her
Location: Balcony
Address: Port-Louis, Mauritius
Question: 2, 4, 7 and 14



Name: Kiruban Naidoo
 Pronouns: He/Him
 Location: Dining Room
 Address: Raisethorpe, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal
 Question: 4



Name: Ashraya Naidoo
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom.
 Address 2: Observatory, Cape Town, Western Cape

miro



Name: Bokang Ntsutle
 Pronouns: She/Her/Fabulous
 Location: Bedroom
 Address: Gardens, Cape Town, Western Cape
 Question: 13



Name: Ashraya Naidoo
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom.
 Address 1: Raisethorpe, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal

miro

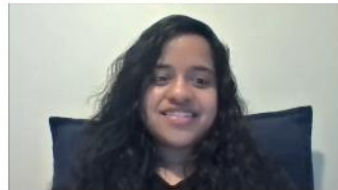


Name: Bathi Mbityi
 Pronouns: He/Him
 Location: Bedroom
 Address: Observatory, Cape Town, Western Cape
 Question: 16



Name: Ashraya Naidoo
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom.
 Address 1: Raisethorpe, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal

miro



Name: Ashalia Naidoo
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom
 Address: Observatory, Cape Town, Western Cape
 Question: 23



Name: Ashraya Naidoo
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom.
 Address 1: Raisethorpe, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal

miro



Name: Shriya Anand
Pronouns: She/Her
Location: Bedroom
Address: Chase Valley, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal
Question: 21



Name: Ashraya Naidoo
Pronouns: She/Her
Location: Bedroom.
Address 2: Observatory, Cape Town, Western Cape

miro



Name: Menzi Cetywayo
Pronouns: Him/he
Location: Bedroom
Address: Rondebosch Oaks, Rondebosch, Cape Town, Western Cape
Question: 17



Name: Ashraya Naidoo
Pronouns: She/Her
Location: Bedroom.
Address 2: Observatory, Cape Town, Western Cape

miro



Name: Laura du Toit
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom
 Address: Glenwood, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal
 Question: 18



Name: Ashraya Naidoo
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom.
 Address 2: Observatory, Cape Town, Western Cape

miro



Name: Fathima-Zahra Rahiman
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom
 Address: Lenasia, Johannesburg, Gauteng
 Question: 20

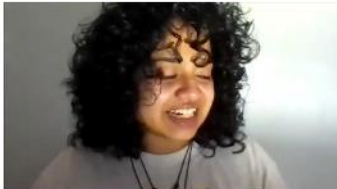


Name: Ashraya Naidoo
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom.
 Address 1: Raisethorpe, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal

miro



Name: Mbali Zimu
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom
 Address: Boughton, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal
 Question: 14



Name: Ashraya Naidoo
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom.
 Address 1: Raisethorpe, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal



Name: Devanya Govender
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom
 Address: Malvern, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal
 Question: 19



Name: Ashraya Naidoo
 Pronouns: She/Her
 Location: Bedroom.
 Address 1: Raisethorpe, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal

Video Piece Link:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/14MqmNEPBpzwXFLNM9oXpmZROO_5ex8QT?usp=sharing

Audio Piece Link:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1jcS_PCadg1Gf1TbnGrraxlMMFBUzF6?usp=sharing

Artist: Ashraya Naidoo

Title: *Making History*

Project: *Connection*, 2021

Medium: Photography

Size: A5

Making History documents my family and I making masks during Covid-19. The book contains snippets of our daily life and the interactions between my family and I.

I have incorporated images of our TV broadcasting news headlines as this was our primary source of information of what was happening around the world.

The Masked Figure is a visual representation of our responsibility and duty. We all have to do our part in helping one another during this difficult time.

This book is also a testament to the various skills that each member of my family has and which we pooled together to complete this project.

The entire book represents my experiences during the lockdown and how my family coped and survived. I learnt how to sew from my grandfather and represented this in the binding of the book. I bound the book using the same technique my grandfather uses to bind his books. Even the cover is made up of the leftover material that we used to make the masks with.

The pandemic has been a challenging and scary experience for us. However, this book has helped me piece together moments that I am grateful for and the lessons my family has imparted to me. Above all, time spent with loved ones is to be cherished.

Please refer to the PDF labelled *Making History* to look at the book.

Artist: Ashraya Naidoo

Title: *Unrest*

Project: *Connection*, 2021

Medium: Photography

Size: A5

Unrest is a documentation of the aftermath of the riots that occurred in July 2021 in my hometown of Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal. The images depicted here are of the destruction caused by the rioters and looters and of the rebuilding that happened thereafter.

The riots were a scary time where people's lively hoods and security were being threatened. Many people lost their jobs due to their workplaces being ransacked and destroyed. Even worse, many lost their lives in the ensuing violence.

The looting caused a shortage of food, petrol, medication, and other essential items and people spent hours, standing in queues, in a desperate attempt to obtain these items. Many petrol stations had to resort to fuel rationing and also restrict the supply of fuel to emergency services.

The local police force was, at times, overwhelmed and it was up to the local residents to patrol their areas to protect their homes and families. Social media and various apps were used to communicate efficiently by the residents to identify areas that needed urgent assistance.

One of the positive outcomes of this tragedy was the coming together of various communities and people, working together to protect and assist one another.

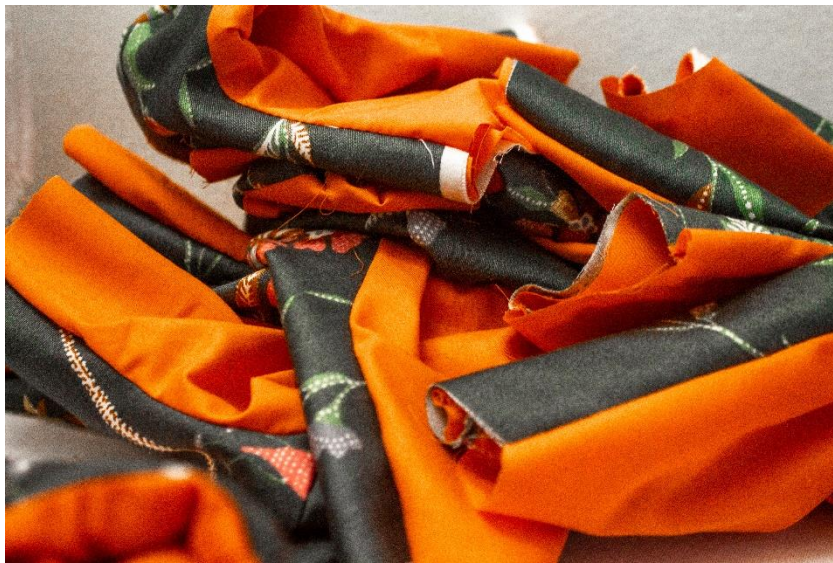
Please refer to the PDF labelled *Unrest* to look at the book.

PHOTOBOOKS:

Questioning more things within my life has led me to investigate my family, my position within my family, the history of my family and the community around me. The revelations and stories that started to accumulate as I asked more questions, led me to create books.



Making History

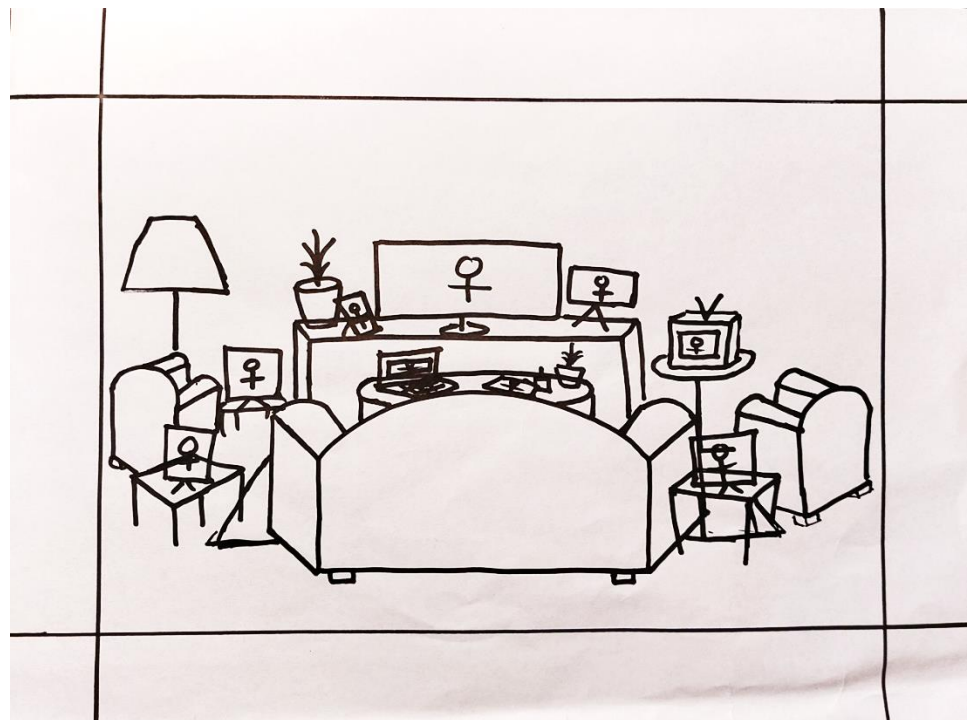
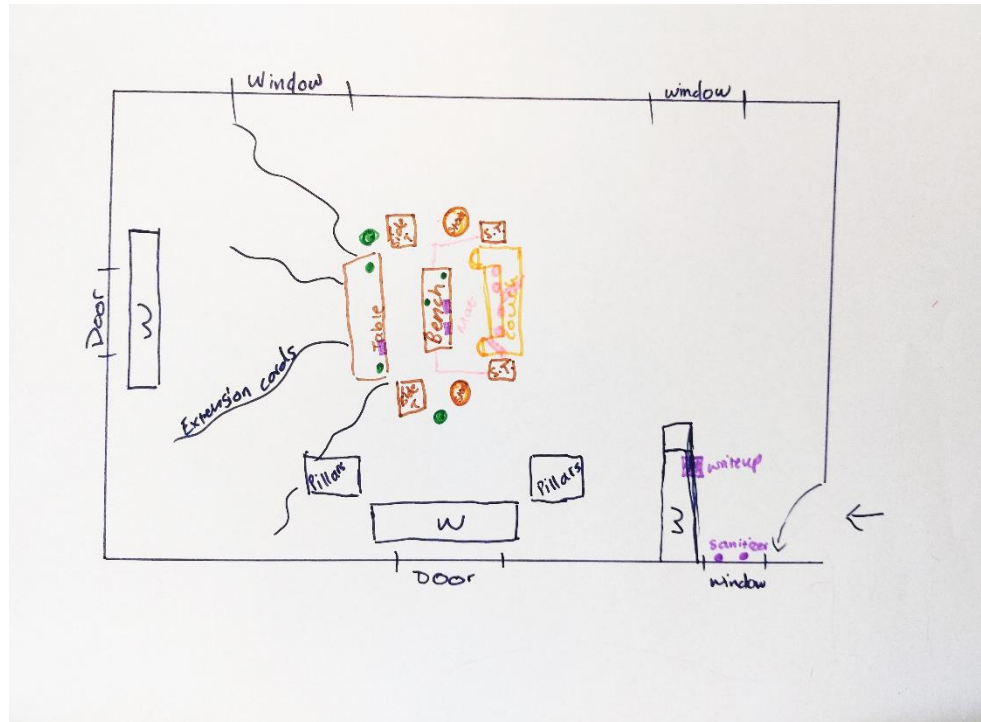




EXHIBITION SETUP

I aimed to create an environment, in which the people I spoke with felt safe and comfortable enough to open up and discuss these sensitive topics.

- A lounge setup.
- Created time and space for people to be vulnerable and connect with themselves, their life, and the world around them.
- Creating a room for it to exist outside of a digital setting.
- All within Covid regulations.
- A room that is a safe and welcoming.



RESEARCH

Relational Aesthetics

I became aware of the term *Relational Aesthetics*, which could help me discover a way to create an environment for the Zoom discussions to occur.

Nicolas Bourriaud, a French art critic, historian, and curator coined the term *Relational Aesthetics* (Something Curated. 2018). Bourriaud created the term which originated from the exhibition *Traffic*, at the CAPC museum d'art contemporain de Bordeaux in 1996. He broadened the term in 1998, in his book *Relational Aesthetics* (Something Curated. 2018).

The term arose during the 1990s when the world wide web, virtual networking and cyberspace started infiltrating people's daily lives (Artspace. 2016). Artists started looking into the interactions and communication between themselves and the viewer, by creating installations and events which required the participation of the viewers to have these 'interpersonal interactions' (Artspace. 2016).

Bourriaud believes that human relationships will not be sustainable in this new world where technology is replacing human involvement (Bourriaud, N. 1998). With machines replacing human labour, and cyber and virtual spaces emerging, it is reducing the time and space for humans to engage with one another. Bourriaud sees these 'user-friendly' works as events that allow for these 'obstructed passages,' that have been separated, to clear up (Bourriaud, N. 1998). To allow for this 'shared warmth' to occur and connections to form (Bourriaud, N. 1998).

Rirkrit Tiravanija is a contemporary artist whose works falls within the ideas of *Relational Aesthetics*. Tiravanija's works investigate 'social engagement,' where he invites viewers to occupy and be active in his work (Dohmen, R. 2013). In *Untitled (Free)*, exhibited in 1992 at the 303 Gallery (Appendix A) (MoMA. 2012). He transported the back rooms of the gallery into the exhibition space to showcase the 'business of art' (MoMA. 2012). He created a temporary kitchen, where he cooked Pad Thai and served it to the viewers for free (MoMA. 2012).

Appendix A



While Tiravanija creates opportunities for real life communication, I am creating a space for conversations, a space in the world of the Internet, where people can allow themselves to be vulnerable, honest, courageous, and a place for them to reflect, within the Covid-19 pandemic. It feels a little contradictory to the purpose of Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*. The term derived from the increase of technological advances which restricted the interactions between human beings and brought about artworks that created 'social environments' for people to come together and interact in an activity together.

However, one can see my work as a look at *Relational Aesthetics* when the 'social environments' are not available to us, due to social distancing. This has forced us to have no physical human interactions in a public setting. Therefore, encouraging us to find new ways of engaging and connecting with one another that is safe to do during the pandemic.

Social media and other social platforms have allowed us to stay connected with the world and people, from the safety of our homes. Online learning and working have become the new normal for many people, working and learning from different platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and other video communication services. I am making use of these multiple online chat and communication services to connect with people and create a 'social environment' that is safe during the pandemic. My work is a take on *Relational Aesthetics* which abides to the pandemic's social distancing regulations.

To me it is almost a liberating angle on *Relational Aesthetics*, as I am using the technological advances, which according to Bourriaud is restricting human interactions, to create spaces for human socializing to occur. My work is also acknowledging how these social and virtual platforms have been useful tools, helping us carry on with our lives during the lockdown. This pandemic has shown how these technological advances make it easy to do things and interact with people without leaving our homes, clearly a picture Bourriaud saw as a possibility in the 1990s.

Brené Brown: The Call to Courage

In *Brené Brown: The Call to Courage*, she speaks about vulnerability and courage. She talks about how vulnerability and courage work together and how we need to be brave with our lives, to show up, to take chances, and 'to live in the arena' (Brené Brown: The Call to Courage, 2019). According to Brown, vulnerability is something that is not about winning or losing but having the courage to 'show up' when there is no control of the result (Brené Brown: The Call to Courage, 2019). It is not being weak, as you need to be courageous to allow yourself to be vulnerable (Brené Brown: The Call to Courage, 2019).

Brown states that when we go through a difficult time, we create a story to process and understand what we have gone through. It is to help our brains to recognize that narrative pattern and protect ourselves from it occurring again (Brené Brown: The Call to Courage, 2019). Therefore, when we want to make an emotional connection with someone else, we get scared as we associate the narrative of being emotionally open with others to the emotions we feel when we are pushed away. We associate rejection, shame, fear, and loneliness with being emotionally open, which makes it seem like a weakness due to the negative reaction we may have received from others (Brené Brown: The Call to Courage, 2019). We get scared to have

an emotional connection with someone as a defence mechanism against feeling rejection, shame, fear, and loneliness (Brené Brown: *The Call to Courage*, 2019).

However, by closing ourselves from being vulnerable, we may be preventing ourselves from feeling negative emotions, it is also restricting us from experiencing emotions like love, belonging and happiness. Vulnerability is the core to hard emotions (Brené Brown: *The Call to Courage*, 2019).

Brown says for us to have 'true belonging,' we must not betray ourselves for others, we need to tell our story (Brené Brown: *The Call to Courage*, 2019). Happiness is the most vulnerable emotion because if it is taken away, we are left with pain, trauma, and loss. We are terrified of being truly happy (Brené Brown: *The Call to Courage*, 2019).

We prevent ourselves from really experiencing these good emotions as we are foreboding the possibility that we will experience the painful emotions instead. No vulnerability equates to no creativity, as we do not want to feel like a failure (Brené Brown: *The Call to Courage*, 2019). To be vulnerable takes courage, as we need to open ourselves to the possibility of feeling failure, pain, shame, and fear if we want to experience true belonging, happiness, and love (Brené Brown: *The Call to Courage*, 2019).

I agree with Brown, as I approach the 23 questions, I need to find the courage to open myself to hard feelings, to allow an emotional connection to exist with others and to find true belonging, happiness, and love. I started applying this to answering the questions and slowly trying to integrate it into my everyday life. I want to feel things to their full extent.

To be vulnerable and navigate topics which are sensitive and emotional, it is better to do it in a space which makes you feel safe. I wanted to create a space that feels secure, comfortable, warm, intimate, and cosy. Therefore, I decided on creating a lounge setup. I associate this particular room in a house as the most comfortable and welcoming to interact with people.

I have applied Brown's advice in finding the courage to be vulnerable with my life and it has allowed me to uncover stories about my family and history and understand more about my identity. By allowing myself to be vulnerable I can create a space where others can be vulnerable too. In this way, I have taken Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* and created a virtual space where people are safe to find the courage to be vulnerable to discuss the questions.

Artists

Zanele Muholi

Is known as a South African photographer and visual activist. She explores blackness, the concept of being feminine and being queer in a marginalized community.

The way she works with the people she photographs, is like a partnership. It is how I aimed to work in my project. I wanted to work with the people involved, not tell them what to do and how to do it.



Rena Effendi

Is an Azerbaijani freelance photographer.

Her photographic book, 'Pipe Dreams a Chronicle of Lives Along the Pipeline.' Is a work which fascinates me. She followed a 1700km oil pipeline through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, to look at the way oil industries effect people's lives. She collected stories by engaging with people along the way.



Annie Leibovitz

A famous American photographer. Is someone who inspires me by the way she can visually portray the personality and characteristics of a person by creating these sets in her photographs that tell a narrative about that person.



Chris Rock



RuPaul



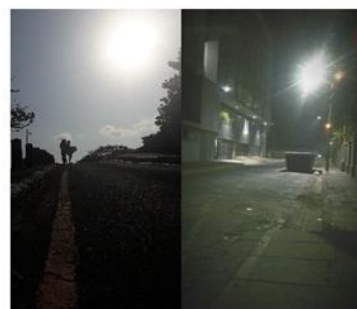
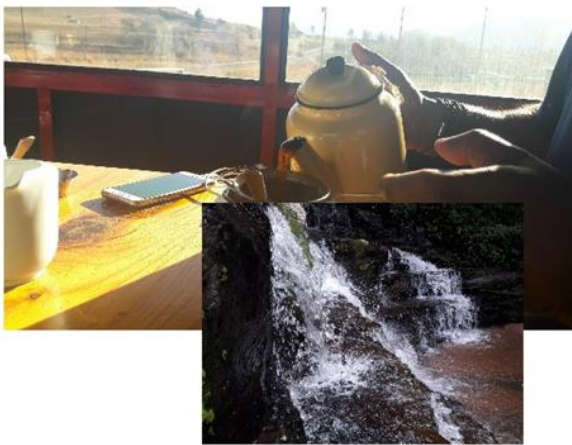
Andy Warhol

One of the things that fascinates me about all these artists, are their ability to tell a story or some sort of narrative through their work. From the subject matter to the way they work.

I would also like to add that over these years I have learnt so much from many people here, by watching and working with you all in this environment. It is something that I would not have learnt from any lecture, readings, or practical project. Being surrounded by these artists here have influenced the way I look at art, the way I work and inspires me to push my limits.

EXPERIMENTS

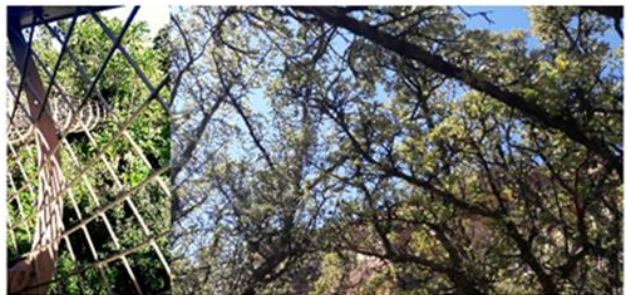
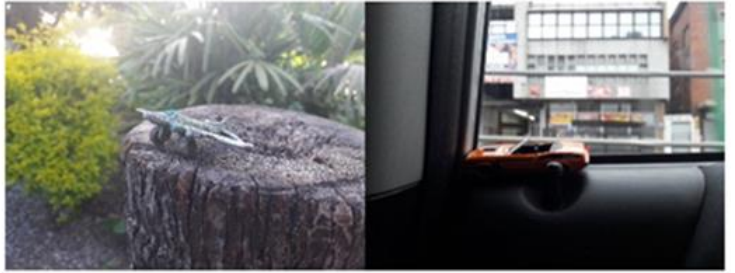
Made connections using different images I had taken over these past few years and matching them together.



miro



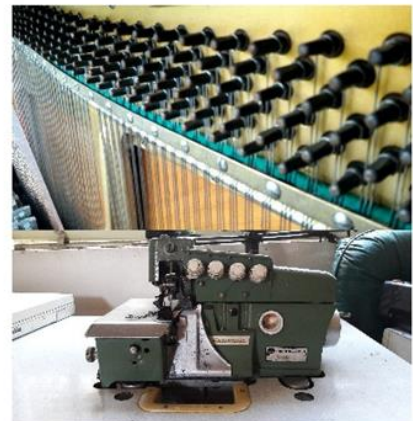
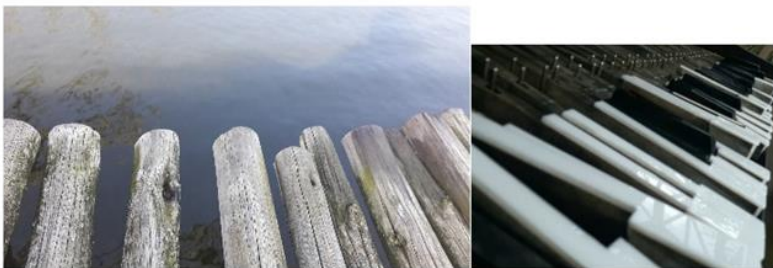
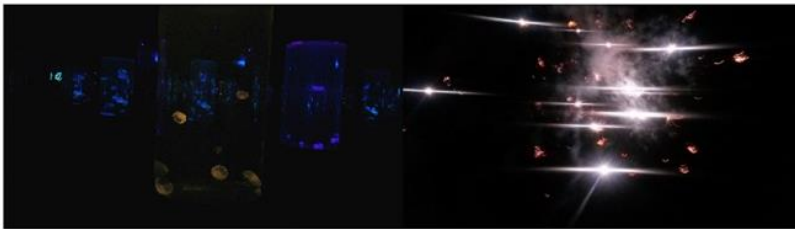
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Played with objects that I had around me and made connections with them.



Pens in a mug.



Disposable mask and a spray bottle with sanitizer.



McDonald's cup with Listerine



Pegs and nut shells in a medicine bottle



Toilet paper with facial tissues



Toilet paper with utensils



Camera and glasses

(Idea of different ways of sight)



Pins and holes

Finding new ways to take portraits within Covid regulations.

Taking screenshots of the people through video calls.

Taking portraits of people taking part in the project in this way.



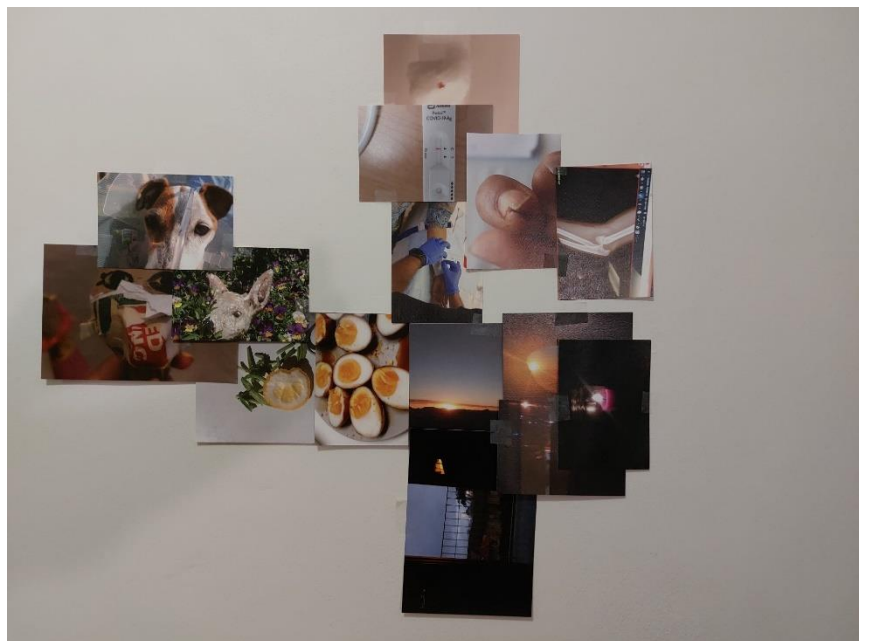
Postcards

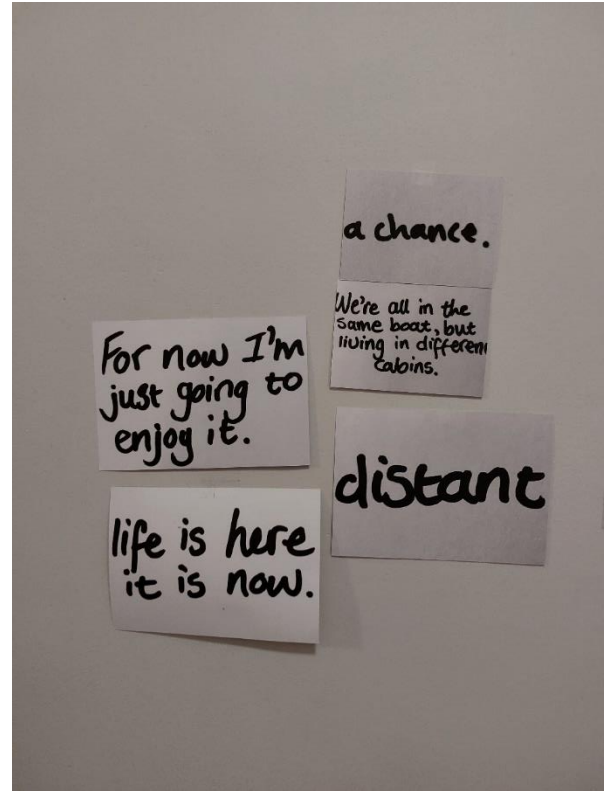
Printed out 36 postcards.

Experimented with A5 and A6 format.

Experimented by using Orms' software. Not really happy with using it. Not going to use it again. Will use InDesign instead. Some of the text and images got cut off.

Used scotch tape to stick the postcards to the wall.





Images and Quotes

- Find 5 images for each question answered.
- Each image must relate in some way to your answer.
- Find 5 quotes in your answer that sticks out to you. Then pair them off to an image.
- Write out each quote on a white piece of paper, using a black felt pen/Koki/ permanent marker. Then take a photo with your phone.

TIPS:

- Indicate which images goes with which question.
- Indicate which quotes goes with which image.

Writing out the quotes:

Use a black coloured felt pen/Koki/ permanent marker.

Write in your normal handwriting style. Just make sure it is not too small.

Taking the photo of the quote:

take the photo in landscape.

make sure the phone is parallel to the paper and is not taken at an angle.

Connecting Photos (Postcards and Quotes): Mind Map

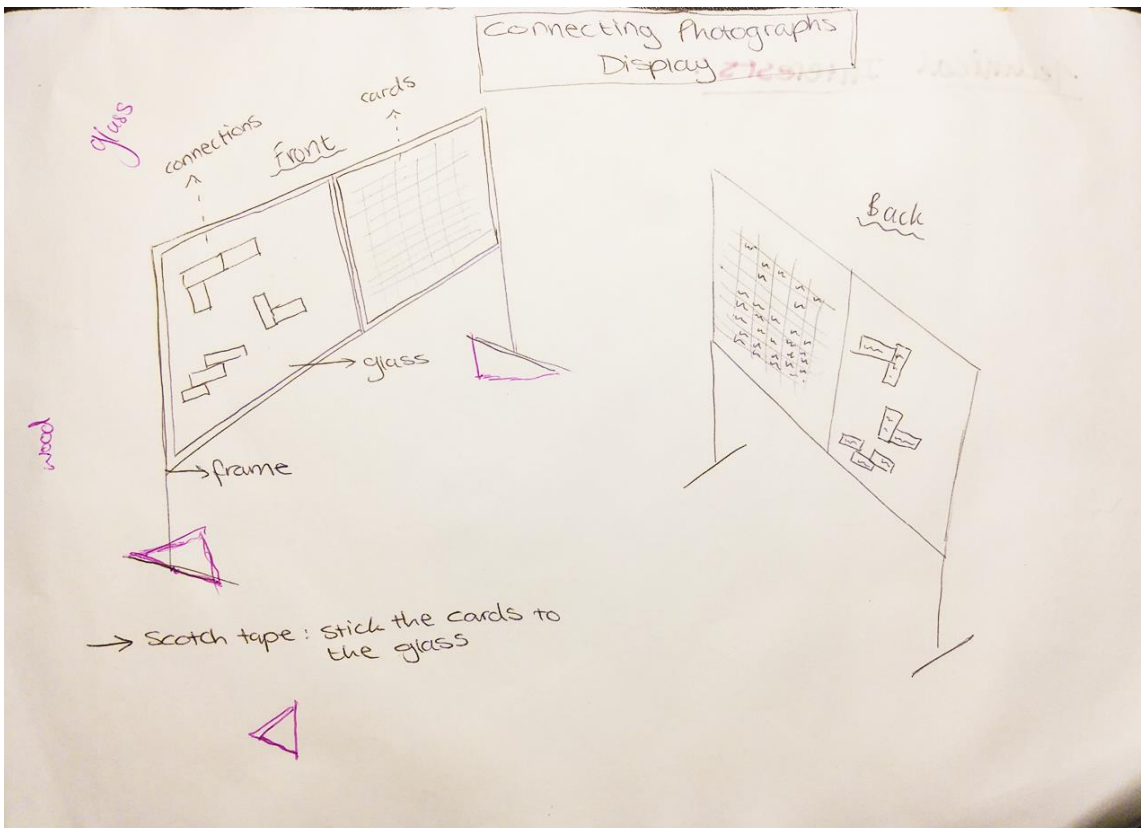
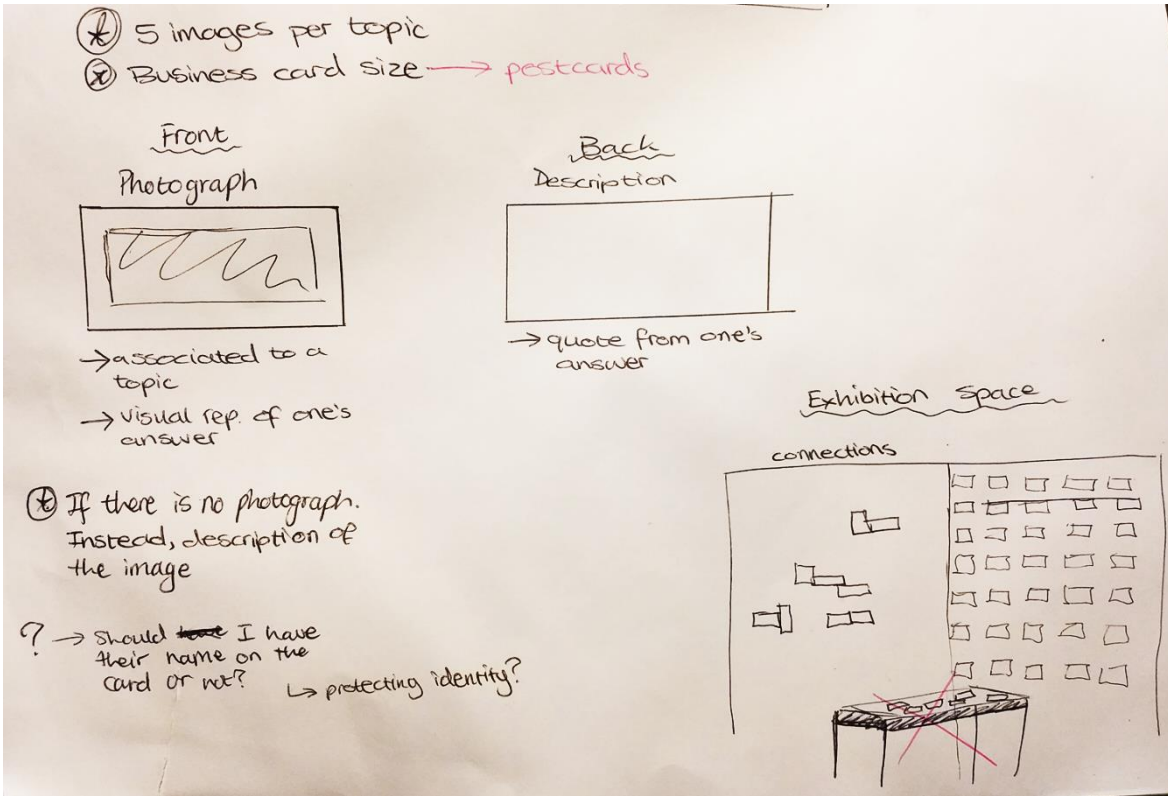
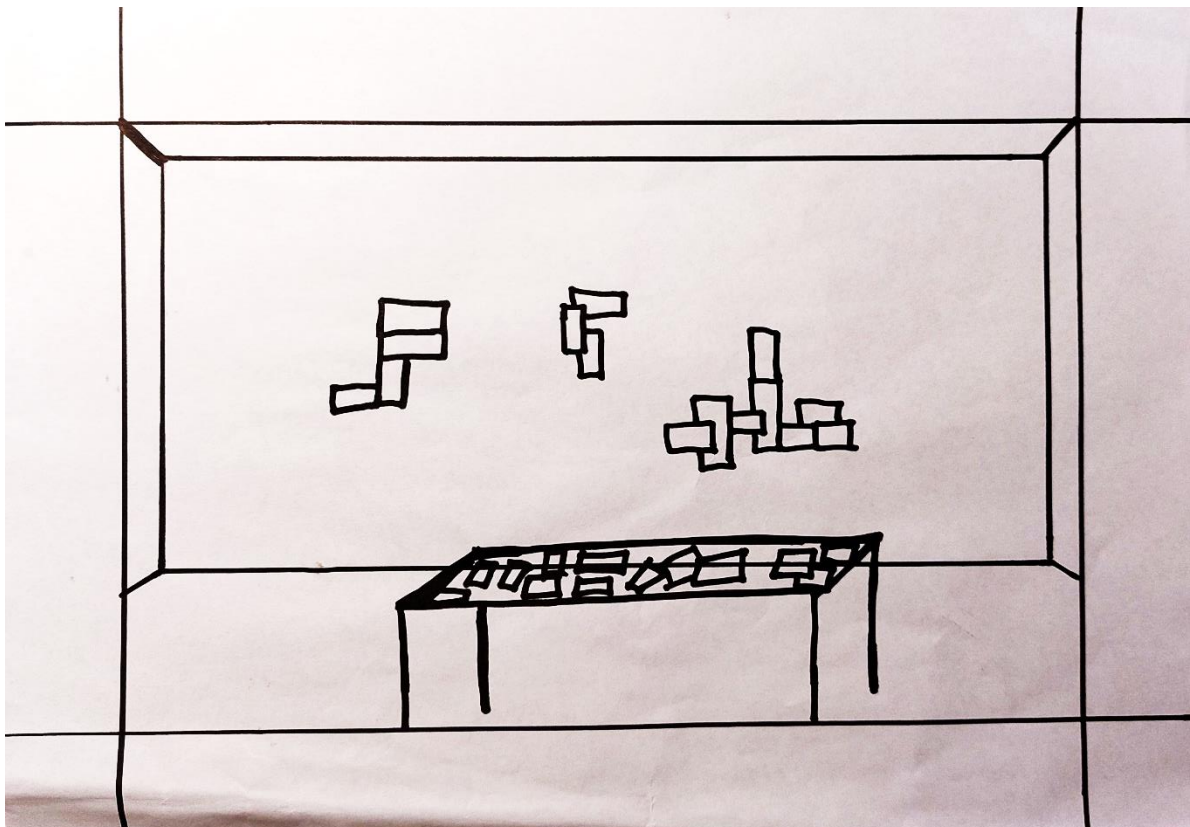
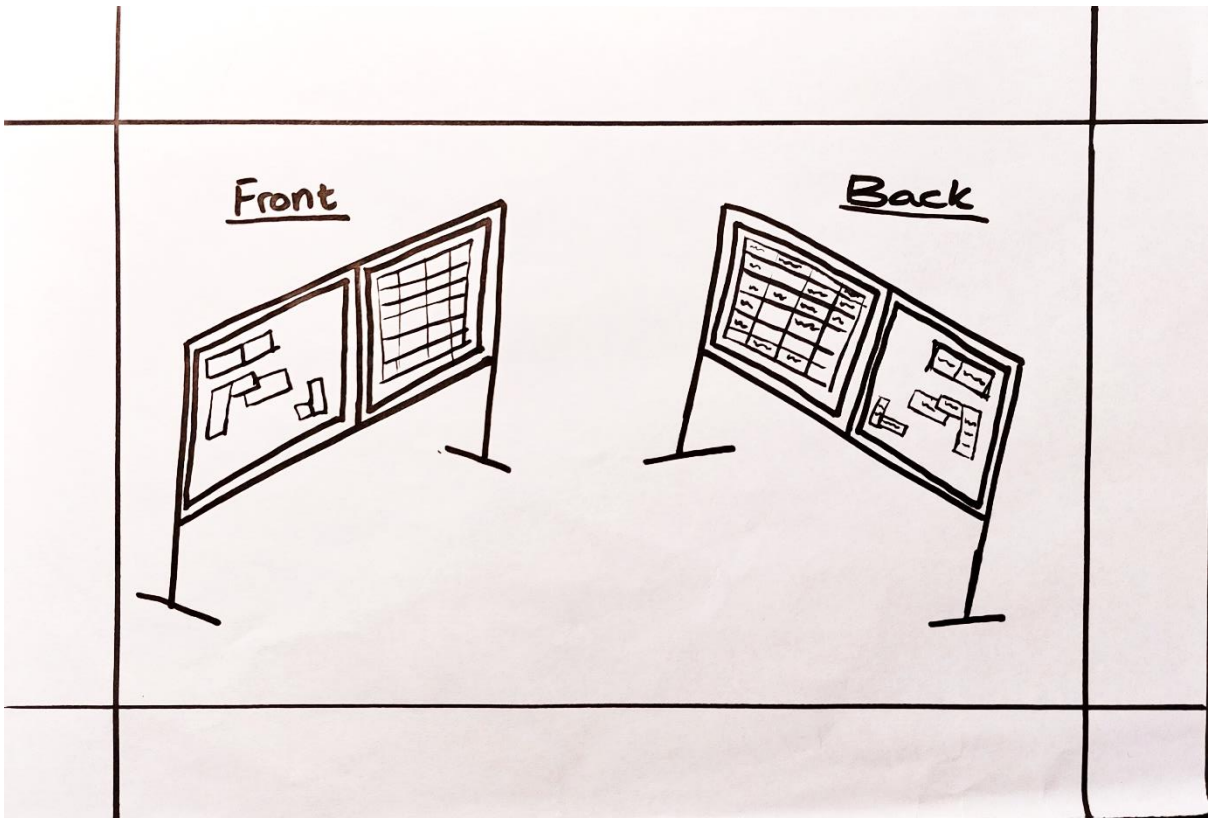


Photo Pairing: Diagram Display:



Reference:

Artspace. 2016. *What Is Relational Aesthetics? Here's How Hanging Out, Eating Dinner, and Feeling Awkward Became Art*. Available at:

https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/book_report/what-is-relational-aesthetics-54164

Bourriaud, N. 1998. *Relational Aesthetics*. Les presses du reel. Pp.7-114.

Brené Brown: The Call to Courage (2019) Directed by Sandra Restrepo.

Available at: Netflix

Dohmen, R. 2013. *Towards a Cosmopolitan Criticality? Relational Aesthetics, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Transnational Encounters with Pad Thai*. University of Louisiana: Open Arts Journal, Issue 1, pp.35-46.

MoMA. 2012. *Rirkrit Tiravanija, Untitled (Free/Still), 1992/1995/2007/2011-*.

Available at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/147206?>

Something Curated. 2018. *A Guide to Relational Aesthetics*. Available at:

<https://somethingcurated.com/2018/02/14/a-guide-to-relational-aesthetics/>

Image:

Appendix A

MoMA. 2012. *Rirkrit Tiravanija, Untitled (Free/Still), 1992/1995/2007/2011-*.

[Image Online] Available at: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/untitled-free-still-rirkrittiravanija/FwH6NGFAt1tmDw?hl=en>