

re-

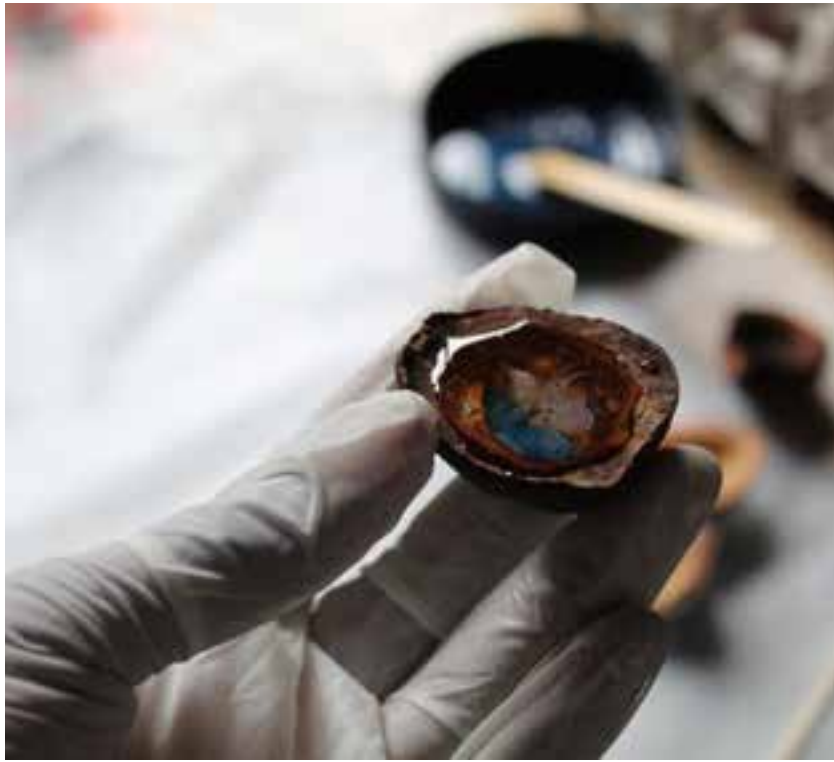
by

Lorraine Kalassa

ARTIST STATEMENT

An immigrant's journey is generally one filled with many challenges alongside personal struggles. Along my journey to a now relatively comfortable life were definitely such times. For the most part, my work is motivated by feelings of otherness and trying to make sense of home in my country of birth which often does not feel like home. There has always been a longing to return to my country of origin, however, this home I am longing for and have conjured up in daydreams is most probably not what exists today. It is possible that I am directed by the pain of nostalgia brought about by photographs and stories of my mother's upbringing. (Re)turning to these two sources have become important sites of exploration and excavation- the foundations for my orientation of place-making. My body of work (re-) is about memories, seasons of life and passages of time. It is about birth, life, death, and the complexities of trying to locate myself within my inherited history. The prefix re- means: to do something again, to do something in a different way and to go back to the way something was. Ultimately, my work is about (re)mediation and trying to find solace amongst fragmentia.

With a focus on materiality, I work with avocado seeds as a medium that speaks to themes related to my ongoing interactions with my family photo archive. re-, encompasses a range of works from paintings and resin-filled seed mementos that (re)call photographs from my mother's archive. To framed weavings and a series of prints which are abstractions of my inquiries. Finally, there is a table of avocado ink experiments and a digital installation, reckoning my process of making with (re)surfaced fragments. By dedicating myself to avocado seeds, I channel the pain of nostalgia into the (re)telling of stories through poetic transcriptions that carry the ability to oscillate between the optimism of nostalgia and reality. It is a way of (re)asserting my connection with the world (real or imaginary), intermingling personal accounts with abstractions, with a purpose of inspiring connections rather than analysis. Embarking upon this journey with avocados has strangely expanded my sense of place of belonging, teaching me valuable lessons further expanding my identity landscape with more realms to explore. Working with the seeds in particular has been like finding a poem that was lost; as Holmes and Leggo (2020:202) said: "Poetry is alchemy—a deep reflective process that explores how we live in various places. It allows us to acknowledge and embrace some of the messiness of life, finding hope and allowing surrender to what we cannot control. Surrendering, we are not giving up but participating in stories that stretch beyond imagination, abilities, and spiritual reserves arriving at a place of acceptance, while living honestly with truth, patience, courage, and care. We write in the cracks and spaces of living in attempts to find our place telling our truths critically and creatively". Poetry is indeed alchemy, and I found alchemy in the avocado pear.



Kalassa, L. 2021. Resin- filled avocado seed – process image.



To each their own private meridians, ongoing print series, 2021.



Above: Courtesy of Peter Oki, 2021.
Right: Kalassa, L. 2021. Studio process image.



Kalassa, L. 2021. Digital installation test





Tethering, 2021
Screenprint (Acrylic ink on calico cloth)





Métissage I
Transfer on hessian cloth



Métissage II
Transfer on hessian cloth



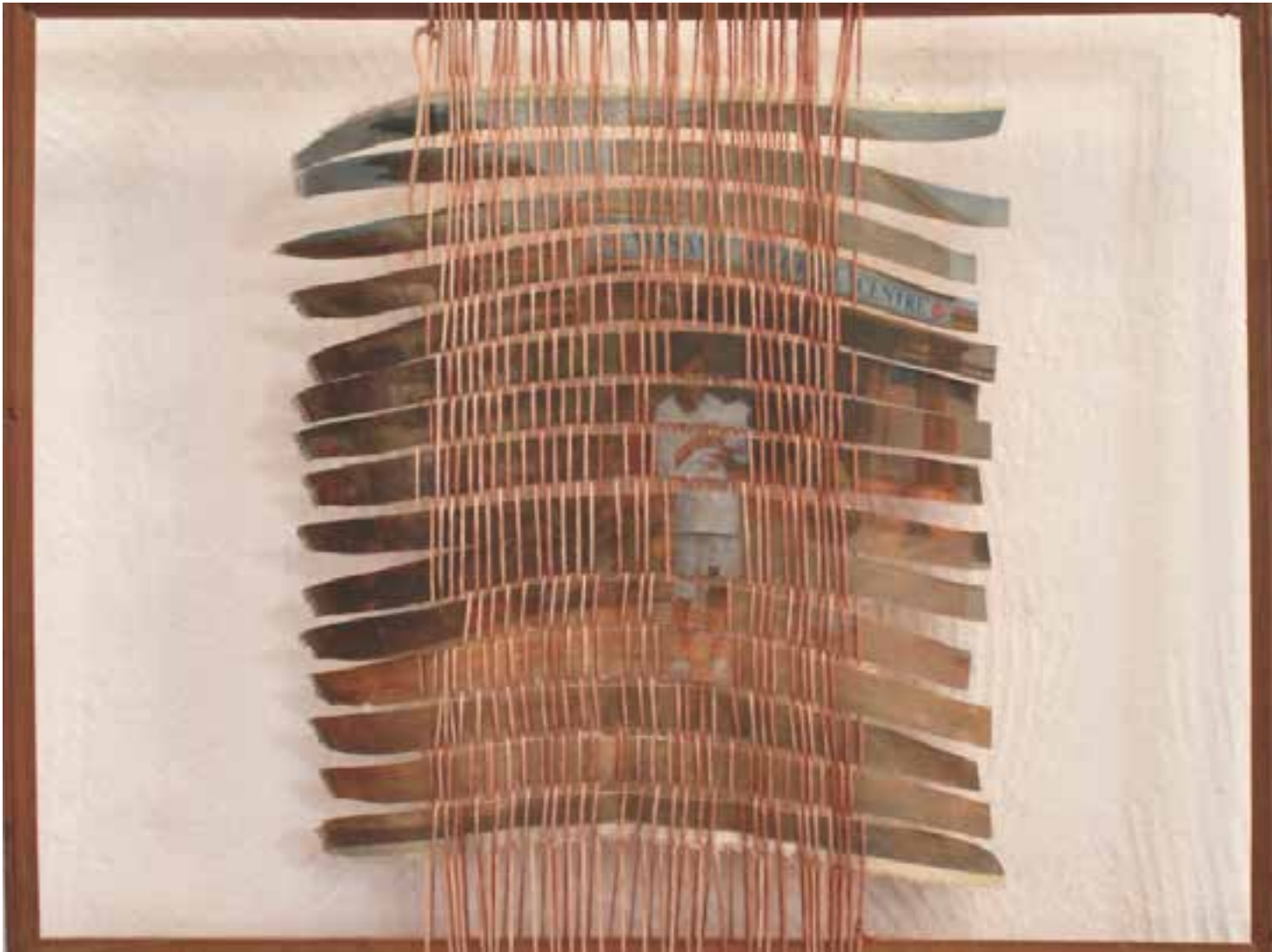
Ink Alchemy I

Ink Alchemy I



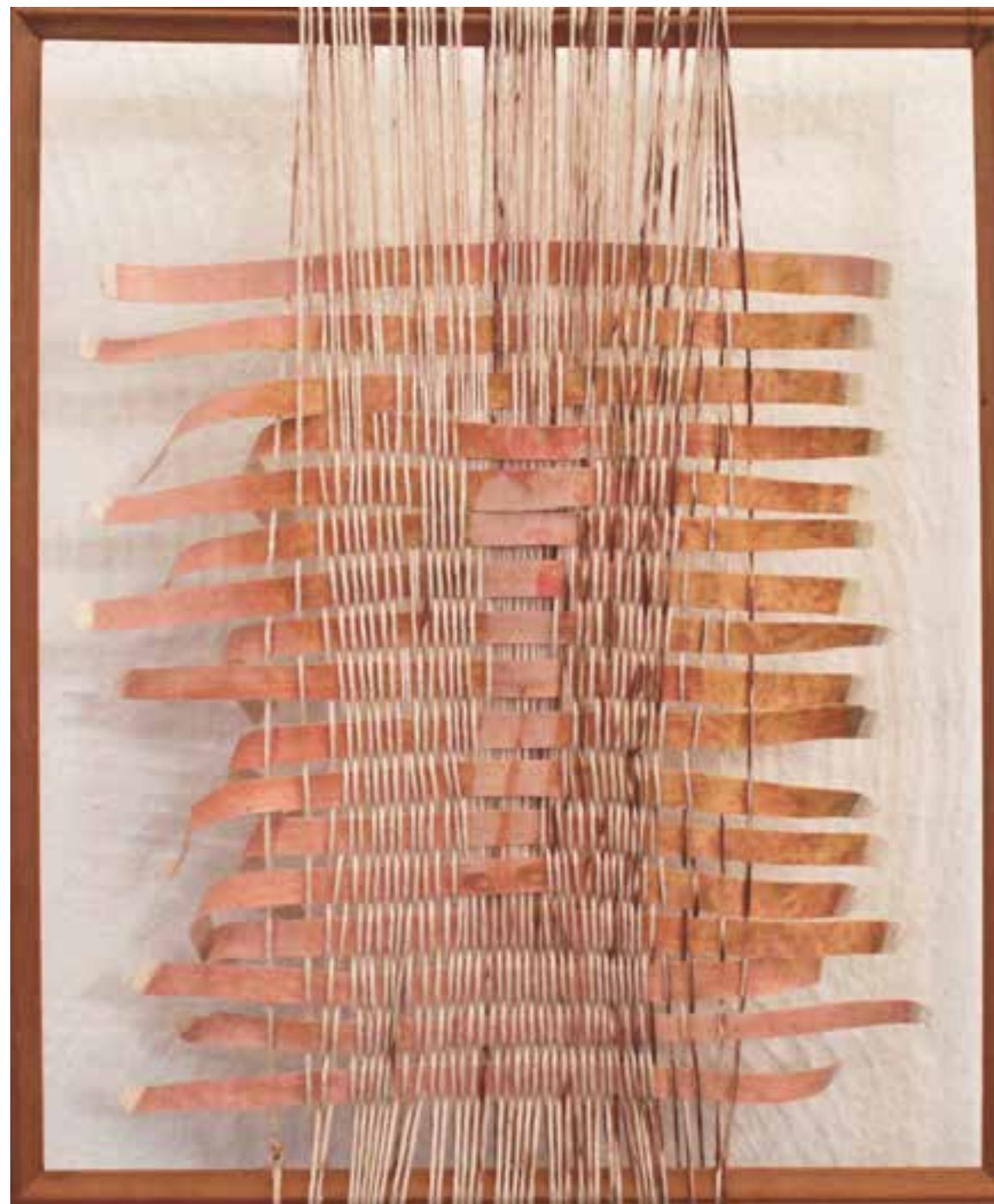


Ink Alchemy I



Métissage III
Avocado-dyed string & canvas transfer

Métissage IV
Avocado-dyed string & canvas transfer



(Re-) encompasses a range of works from paintings and resin-filled seed mementos that recall family photographs from my mother's archive. To framed weavings and a series of prints which are abstractions of my inquiries. In addition there is a table of experiments, and lastly a digital installation reckoning my current experience with (re)surfaced stories. If am to expound on piece that (re)encapsulates a lot of what I have previously expressed, it would be my evolving digital installation, titled:

"I just miss feeling rooted somewhere. 'you have to bow twice,' she said. I bowed twice."

Found in the foreword, this title is taken from tethered fragments inspired by one of the contributors in the text. Writer Eun-Ji Amy Kim, contributes short stories wherein one of them, she recounts her memory of going to visit her grandfather's grave along with her grandmother. Upon arriving at the grave her grandmother instructs her to bow as a sign of respect and greeting to her grandfather, I suppose. She bowed once, mentioning that she had never bowed to a grave before, unaware that she had to bow twice. But after her grandmother's correction, she willingly bowed twice. This story makes me think of cultural customs and makes me imagine a similar situation that I might find myself in, in the event that I am to visit my home country. The digital installation consists of a video projection onto long sheet of calico cloth that has mostly been dip dyed with avocado ink. Towards the end of the cloth are seeds laid out in sequence alluding to some sort of coded text. The suspended part of the cloth displays a video my hands as I flip through photographs superimposed with a video of an avocado tree on a windy day. Throughout the room faint recordings of my mothers voice fill the room yet not loud enough for listeners to fully grasp. This ambiguity between looking but seeing clearly and listening but not being able to hear subtly disrupts the senses and carries the message of my experiences.

Sepideh Mahani, thinking along with Holt (2001, 2003) argues that "auto-ethnography is the process of intermingling theories from the literature with personal experiences. It is a way of telling a story of personal importance that inspires connections rather than analysis. It is an attempt to share 'highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding' (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21)" As an auto-ethnographer, the purpose of my research and project is to equally inspire connections rather than analysis of themes addressed in my artworks.

Again, it is through the use of poetic inquiry that this purpose is appropriately manifested. As Glesne explains:

...poetic transcription creates a third voice that is neither the interviewee's nor the researcher's but is a combination of both... This positions research poetics as an appropriate technique for [...] participatory research because it eases the divide (and hierarchy) between researcher and researched [...] [poetic inquiry] has also been identified as a particularly appropriate dissemination venue for marginalized populations, making its role in community-engaged and participatory methods all the more important (1997, p. 215). My intention is for those who interact with fragments of my story to form their own connections and to reflect on their own interior landscapes provided that they relate to the themes found in my work.

Concluding thoughts

Embarking upon this journey with avocados has strangely expanded my sense of place of belonging and has taught me valuable lessons further expanding my identity landscape with more realms to explore. Working with the seeds in particular has been like finding a poem that was lost; as Holmes and Leggo (2020:202) said: *“Poetry is alchemy—a deep reflective process that explores how we live in various places. It allows us to acknowledge and embrace some of the messiness of life, finding hope and allowing surrender to what we cannot control. Surrendering, we are not giving up but participating in stories that stretch beyond imagination, abilities, and spiritual reserves arriving at a place of acceptance, while living honestly with truth, patience, courage, and care. We write in the cracks and spaces of living in attempts to find our place telling our truths critically and creatively”*. Poetry is indeed alchemy, and I found alchemy in the avocado pear.

EXHIBITION PLANS



Video piece (will be without sound)
<https://we.tl/t-UC7FGida6Q>



