

Daniela is me, too.

By: Gracianna Rothering

List of committee

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To the bestest boy ever. Love you so much!

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Finally, to all my friends and family who have supported me through thick and thin, thank you. I wish I had space to name each of you, but please know how deeply I appreciate your presence in my life. Your love, encouragement, and belief in me have made all the difference. I love you all. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Before you read this terminal project paper, I would like to express my deep gratitude for the opportunity to have been adopted by loving and caring parents. The opportunities I've had because of my adoptive family are ones I will cherish forever. I don't take any of them for granted. Adoption is not uncommon, but its impact can be profoundly personal and different for everyone. I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have been raised in a home filled with love from my parents, my extended family, and the friends who have supported me along the way. The goal of this paper is not to dwell on the unique or heavy emotions that transracial adoptees might experience. Instead, it's to explore and better understand what it means to be a transracial adoptee living in a predominantly white society, surrounded by people who don't share my cultural background, and to reflect on the complicated relationship between identity, belonging, and cultural disconnection. I want to be clear: this paper is not written from a place of anger or resentment, but from a place of love, reflection, and a desire for understanding.

Thank you to everyone who has stood by me throughout my undergraduate and graduate journey, and throughout my life. Your support means everything.

As a transracial adoptee, my work explores the intersections of memory, identity, and race through photography. My practice is deeply rooted in my lived experience of growing up in a white family while navigating the complexities of my Colombian heritage. Through a combination of analog and digital techniques, I construct images that reflect the fragmentation and dissonance inherent in adoptive life. Some of my most cherished memories took place at my grandparents' house. They were warm, loving people; my grandmother was my best friend, and our time together remains deeply special. It wasn't until I began exploring themes of race and identity that I learned my grandparents initially resisted my parents' decision to adopt children of color. They worried about societal judgments and, fueled by their biases, urged my parents to consider other options. However, their perspective shifted when they met my brother, and a few years later, they embraced us unconditionally. This revelation was shocking and illuminating, reinforcing how social and historical perceptions of race influence personal relationships. These moments of belonging and alienation have shaped my work, which examines how identity is formed through fragmented memories and cultural disconnection. I am interested in how people are seen, or unseen, by others. One recurring phrase I have encountered is, "I don't see color." While often intended as a statement of love and acceptance, this notion can feel dismissive of the lived realities tied to race. It raises questions about visibility and belonging that remain central to my practice.

The following pieces of writing are stories that have become core memories in my life. Some are sad, some are joyful, but all have shaped who I am and form the foundation of my creative work. These are the stories of the place where I grew up and thrived, now changed by time; the first time I heard my birth mother's letter read aloud; the moment I felt cracked open and fragmented. Together, these memories reveal how I live in the overlap of two lives, two names, two homes.

Grandma and Grandpa's House

My grandparents' house was more than just a home. Built with their own hands (hands I



Family Photo: Grandparents House, 2009

miss so much), it was the kingdom of my childhood. The home was an earth home, a concrete mound nestled into the landscape and covered by soil like a warm, fuzzy blanket. The surrounding yard was a sprawling jungle of wild and domestic flowers, with lush green grass stretching in every direction until it collided with the surrounding woods. Majestic willow trees stood tall, like giants guarding a castle, making the land feel like something out of a fairy tale.



HomeTown: Grandparents House #30
B&W film, 2024

This place became a playground for my imagination. My grandmother, an extraordinary woman, always encouraged my creativity to flourish. We played games in the garden, creating new worlds where I could be anything I wanted. The scent of flowers was constant, even in winter.

Everything seemed alive, from the willows to the lilac bushes to Grandpa's prized lilies, which flourished year-round.

Inside, I can still smell cookies baking or one of Grandma's famous hot dishes lingering in the air. A slight mustiness mixed with the scent of damp earth was always present, a reminder that the home was built into the ground with few windows to open for fresh air. Yet, even with its limitations, it was a place of comfort. It was my kingdom, where one day I could be a fierce dragon and the next, a chef preparing an elaborate meal of imaginary tea and cookies for my grandmother.

The house itself was meticulously maintained, with white walls, white carpet, white couches, and stone pathways. My grandparents took great pride in keeping it spotless, and I was often reminded to stay off the lounge room carpet. But to me, the lounge room was made of lava, and I was constantly testing the boundaries of what I could and couldn't do. My grandmother never scolded me for it. Instead, she embraced my creativity and often joined in my playful antics.



Family Photo: Grandparents House, 2005



HomeTown: Grandparents House #21
B&W film, 2024

One of the most memorable spaces in the house was the sunroom. Located at the front, it featured six large oval windows that framed the view of the gardens. The sunroom felt like an entirely different world, hot, humid, and thriving with plant life. If I close my eyes, I can still feel the cool tile beneath my feet and smell the orchids that fill the air. I can picture my grandpa napping in his recliner, *Wheel of Fortune* playing softly in the background, and my grandma moving about the kitchen, preparing dinner or gathering ingredients for cookies.



Family Photo: Grandparents House, 2003

The memories of this place remain vivid, offering a sense of familiarity. But the house itself, once full of so much joy, has changed. It now belongs to another family. The gardens have been removed, and the flower beds have been ripped up. The giants that once guarded the castle have fallen and are now nothing more than stumps and broken limbs. The largest willow that stood tall at the back of the house has been lost to time and now exists only as a massive stump. I don't know when this once-loving and thriving landscape turned into a barren ground. What was once a welcoming home filled with laughter is now a distant memory. It exists only in my mind, a place I can never return to except through the memories that remain.



HomeTown:Grandparents House #27 B&W film, 2024

The Letters

The next memory I want to visit is when I was in the fifth grade, a moment that, looking back now, shaped so much of who I am and why I wrestle with vulnerability and identity, especially when those feelings show up in my work.

21/3/2000.

HOLA DANIELA para cuando lees esta carta estas entendiendo y preguntandote Muchas cosas entre ellas el por que fuistes dada en adopcion, no quiere que pienses que fue porque no te querian, al contrario lo hice por amor por q. tuvieras un mejor bienestar y futuro mejor para que crecieras con todo lo que yo no puedo brindarte quiero que entendas que tambien estaba sola y no contaba con la ayuda de su padre espero sepas comprender mis motivos.

DANIELA es para esta fecha 21 de marzo del 2000. Me encuentro con 21 años de edad y tu hermanita darlin con 6 años. te cuento que fuere una muy buena abuela, somos de medellin, y quiero a siete saber que nosistes el 11 de marzo del 2000, alas 10.00 PM en bogota en el hospital san ignacio. creeme que amelo mucho el que algun dia nos podemos encontrar, claro esta si tu quieres.

MENAS espero que de encuentres muy bien, que tus padres adoptivos sean lo mejor para ti y te sientan rodeada de mucho amor por ellos, y que por medio de sus castubres virtudes y enseñanzas seas una niña de bien, el cual tus padres se sientan orgullosos de ti como yo, el solo echo de averte tenido durante nueve meses fue para mi un orgullo muy grande.

Siempre te voy albrar en mi corazón y mente fakesen lo mejor en la vida, te quiere mucho tu madre, y que siempre brille la luz para ti donde quiera que estes, y ten presente siempre a DIOS, ya que es el unico que nos ayuda, asalm adelante se despide con mucho.

Carino
YASMIN ANDREA GÓMEZ.

Letter addressed to me

In fifth grade, we had a heritage project, building family trees and tracing where we came from. My teacher, Mrs. Blomsness, had good intentions with that project, and I genuinely don't hold any anger toward her; however, what happened has stayed with me. As an adoptee from Colombia, my family history didn't map out like the others'; it felt more like a story with missing chapters. I mentioned the letter from my birth mother—the one I'd never read because it was in Spanish. Mrs. Blomsness offered to help. She said she

could ask the high school Spanish teacher to translate it. I said yes. A few days later, the translation came back, not in private, not gently, but read aloud in class. And even now, remembering that moment still hurts.

Hello,

Mr. and Mrs. Adoptive Parents I hope that you find yourselves well in health (you are well). The following is to tell you that I would like Daniela to read the letter and also know that I thank you very much for your act of love. I feel very good knowing that she is going to be with a good family and that she is going to be surrounded by a lot, a really lot of love, that she will have what I never was able to have and that you will always be able to provide her with a better tomorrow (future) and a stable home so that she never feels bad and she grows up proud of the parents she has--that she can always count on you in the good times and bad. Believe me that I don't doubt your capacity to bring her/bless her with all this because I know that you will be the best and the most beautiful thing that Daniela will have in her life and she will feel proud of you like I am feeling now. Knowing that she will have sweet/tender, dedicated parents through the great opportunity that God has given you to adopt a little girl like Daniela.

I can't find the words to describe what you are doing with so much love nor how to thank you for bringing the opportunity for such a sweet, little beautiful person to live a better life. I say goodbye to you.

Yazmin Andrea Gómez

Top of letter indicates 21/3/2000 (21/March/2000)

Hello Daniela. When you read this letter you will be understanding and asking yourself many things. Among them, why were you given in adoption. I don't want you to think that it was because I don't/didn't love you--on the contrary I did it out of love so that you would have a better well-being (life, upbringing) and a better future so that you could grow up with everything that I couldn't give you. I want you to understand that also I am alone and that I can't count on the help of your father. I hope you understand my motives.

Daniela: On this date March 21 of 2000, I am ___ (21? 20?) years old and your dear sister is 6 years old. I tell you that you have a very good grandma We are from Medellin and I want you to know that you were born the 11 of March 2000 at 10:00 p.m. in Bogota in the hospital San Ignacio. Believe me that (I want it) very much that one day we be able to find each other/meet. Of course if that's what you want.

Baby: I hope that you are well that your adoptive parents are the best for you and that you feel surrounded by much love for them and that through your customs (habits/behavior), virtues and teachings (education) that you will be a good little girl which your parents will be proud of like I am. The fact of having you for nine months was for me a very proud (I was very proud to have you (as mine) for nine months.) Always I am going to carry you in my heart and mind. I wish you the best in life. I love you very much. Your mom. And may the light always shine wherever you are and may you always have God (God be there for you). Now He is the only one to help us go forward. I say goodbye with much affection/caring.

Yazmin Andrea Gómez

English translation of letters received

I remember everything about that moment: the way the classroom looked, the way I looked, the faces of a few classmates. My hair was in a short pixie cut, the result of a summer haircut gone wrong.

I sat, frozen, listening to this deeply personal letter, the first words I heard from my biological mother, details of my history, my origin story, being shared out loud. This is among my strongest memories. A heavy, indescribable feeling swelled in my chest, making me want to disappear right into the chair I was sitting in and be forced to be an open book, acting as if what was happening was normal.

Hola
 Señores padres adoptivos espero que se encuentren bien de salud. lo siguiente es para contarles que quisiera que Daniela leyera la carta y que tambien sepan que les agradezco mucho por su acto de amor que siento muy bien al saber que ella va a estar con una buena familia que va a estar rodeada de mucho pero mucho amor que tendra lo que yo nunca pude tener y que ustedes siempre estaran dispuestos a brindarle un mañana mejor y un hogar estable para que nunca ella se sienta mal y crezca orgullosa de los padres que tiene que siempre contara con ellos en las buenas y malas. Ojala que nada de sus caprichos para brindarle todo esto por que yo se que seran la mejor y la mas linda que Daniela tendra en su vida y se sentira orgullosa de ustedes como yo me estoy sintiendo ahora al saber que ella tendra unos padres buenos y dedicados a la gran oportunidad que Dios les dio de adoptar una niña como Daniela.
 No encuentro palabras para describir lo que ustedes hacen con tanto amor ni como agradezco al que le hayan brindado una oportunidad de vivir mejor una personita hermosa y linda.
 Se despido de ustedes.
 YARELIS ANDREA GOMEZ G.

Letter addressed to adoptive parents.

It's strange how memory works: I remember the fabric of my shorts but not what anyone said afterward. Perhaps my mind blocked out all other details to protect me. My mind decided the other details didn't matter. What matters is this horrific feeling of being lost and vulnerable to the world and everyone in that classroom. That moment was the first time I ever felt truly vulnerable or questioned if my family was "normal."

Today, at 25, that memory and those letters are the emotional core of much of my creative work. But even now, I've never gone back to read that letter in full. I'm afraid the words will still have the same overwhelming weight. I don't know how to carry that yet.

The letters are the only connection I have to my birth mother. Her ID card is the only picture I have of her. These items are precious. And yet, they don't feel personal; they feel like artifacts. Like relics of a life I was meant to be a part of, but wasn't.



ID card of birth mother.

Between the Frames



Untitled #1, Vol 3 (2024)

Memory is slippery, especially when you've been adopted from another country, and the trail of your birth family is scattered or incomplete. Family photos are supposed to ground us, help us understand who we are and where we come from. But for me, they've always felt like two different puzzles forced into the same frame.

The photos from my childhood in the U.S. are easy to interpret: birthday parties with frosted cakes, summer vacations by lakes, Christmas mornings with my brother. They tell the story of a girl named Gracie, a girl who grew up in a small Wisconsin town, adored her annoying older brother, and lived a life many would describe as ordinary.

But besides the family photos, there are also photos from Colombia. Pictures my parents took while adopting me and my brother, snapshots of the orphanage, of the city, and of me as a baby before I left. These images offer glimpses of a life I never lived, yet to which I still feel tethered.

Among these are the letters I mentioned earlier: one written in Spanish to me from my birth mother and another addressed to my adoptive parents. Her ID card was included.. It listed her name, date of birth, and blood type. It had a picture of her face.

These letters and that ID card are powerful. They are the only clues I have about her, and by extension, about me. They hold so much meaning, but they also spark more questions than they present answers.

They've become central to this project, but also to the larger question I've carried with me for as long as I can remember: Who am I?

And that question only became more complicated the year I tried to get my driver's license.



Untitled #1, Vol 4 (2024)

Gracie or Daniela?



HomeTown:Grandparents House #3 B&W film, 2024

The perks of being adopted never stop, at least, that's what I tell myself sometimes. I remember being 16, and like most teens, I was excited to start the process of getting my driver's permit. But when I applied, I was told I needed an American birth certificate. Simple, right? Except... I didn't have one.

I was adopted from Colombia in 2000, during a time of shifting U.S. immigration policy. The embassy assured my parents that my Colombian birth certificate would be sufficient for obtaining a license. It was—until the laws changed. At 16, I was told I had to be re-adopted in the U.S. just to get a driver's license.

So on February 4, 2016, I went to court with my parents to be re-adopted.

Some of my friends came, too, and sat in the jury box

like it was a school field trip. What stands out most in my memory is sitting across from my parents as though I was on trial.

The judge began the proceeding. Over and over, he called me by my birth name: Daniela Gomez Osorio. At one point, he asked me if I wanted to keep it, to legally become Daniela.

I said no.

Because for sixteen years, I had been Gracianna Mae Rothering. That was who I knew myself to be. That was me.

But the strange thing is... Daniela is me, too.

How do you explain that to someone? That a name isn't just a name, it's a life, a possibility, a shadow-self. Daniela is the girl I could've been, the one who was left behind. And yet, she's still a part of me.

It's surreal to be re-adopted at sixteen, fully aware of the symbolism, the paperwork, the reality. I remember the courtroom: the fluorescent lights, the stiff wooden benches, the way I felt like I was being split in half.

The truth is, I carry both names and both identities.

Daniela is Colombian. I imagine her speaking Spanish, feeling at home in her culture. Gracie is... white. Raised in a white family, in a white town, navigating a world that often tells her she's "practically white."

Am I? What does that even mean?



HomeTown:Grandparents House #16 B&W film, 2024

People are quick to reassure: "You're Colombian." "You're valid." "You matter."

But what if I don't feel it?

Sometimes I feel like an empty peanut shell, like there should be something inside, something solid and known, but I don't know how to find it. That's the part of adoption no one talks about: you might always feel split, caught between two lives and belonging fully to neither. No one hands you a map. You just keep walking, hoping a path will appear, while your sense of self remains fragmented, like trying to piece together a scattered puzzle.



HomeTown:Grandparents House #14,B&W film, 2024

Where It All Comes Together

These artifacts: the photos, letters, and ID cards, don't just tell a story. They ask questions. They echo. They gently, painfully press against the identity you've tried to build.

Each letter, each document, is a breadcrumb I've been following my whole life, sometimes walking, sometimes running, sometimes refusing to move at all.

This project is a story about being read aloud.

About what gets left unsaid.

About the power of paper to shape everything.

It's a story about feeling fractured and learning to use memories and images as a map.

It's a story about growing up between two worlds that don't quite claim you.



HomeTown:Grandparents House #4,B&W film, 2024

This work, this writing, this project is my attempt to give form to a feeling I've never had the words to explain. To show what it means to live as a split self. What it means to have a life that could have been, and a life that is. I didn't have the words yet, so I turned to images. I began seeking out artists whose work grappled with memory, place, and identity who, like me, seemed to be reaching for something just out of frame. Their practices became both mirror and map, helping me shape my own idea of memories and my life.



Untitled #2, Vol 4 (2024)

First Steps: Foil project



Experiment SET #1

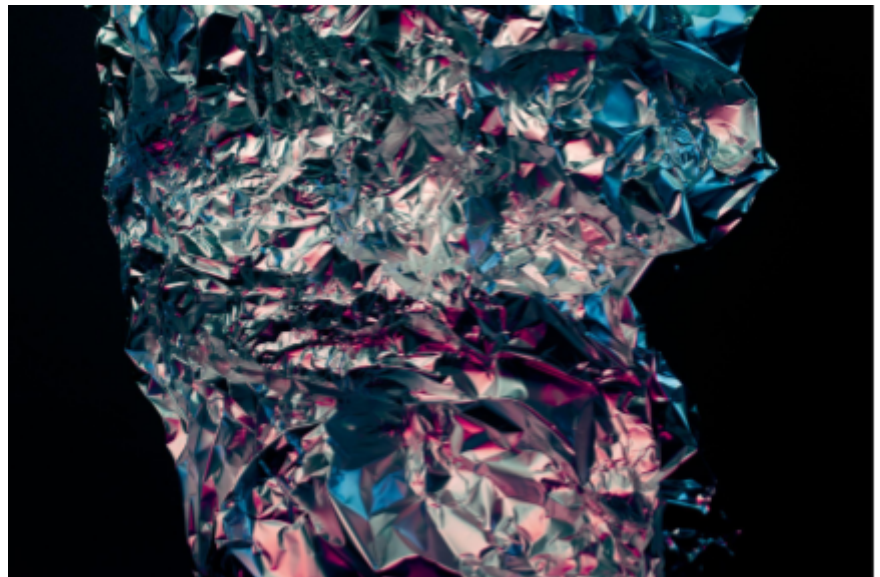
Tin foil, black out foil, colored gels, strobe light. Digital Image (2023)

While the complex ideas of memory and fragmentation continued to swirl in the back of my mind, I began experimenting more intuitively with light, shadow, and ways to manipulate them in unexpected ways. Through this process, I stumbled into what I now call the *foil project*.

I discovered that by crumpling tin foil and hitting it with colored strobe lights, I could create striking visual effects—textures and patterns that shifted

dramatically depending on how the foil was shaped. The more I played with the crinkles and the angle of the light, the more the images transformed into fragmented, abstract landscapes. Each photo became its own fractured world, shaped entirely by how the foil bent, twisted, and reflected the light.

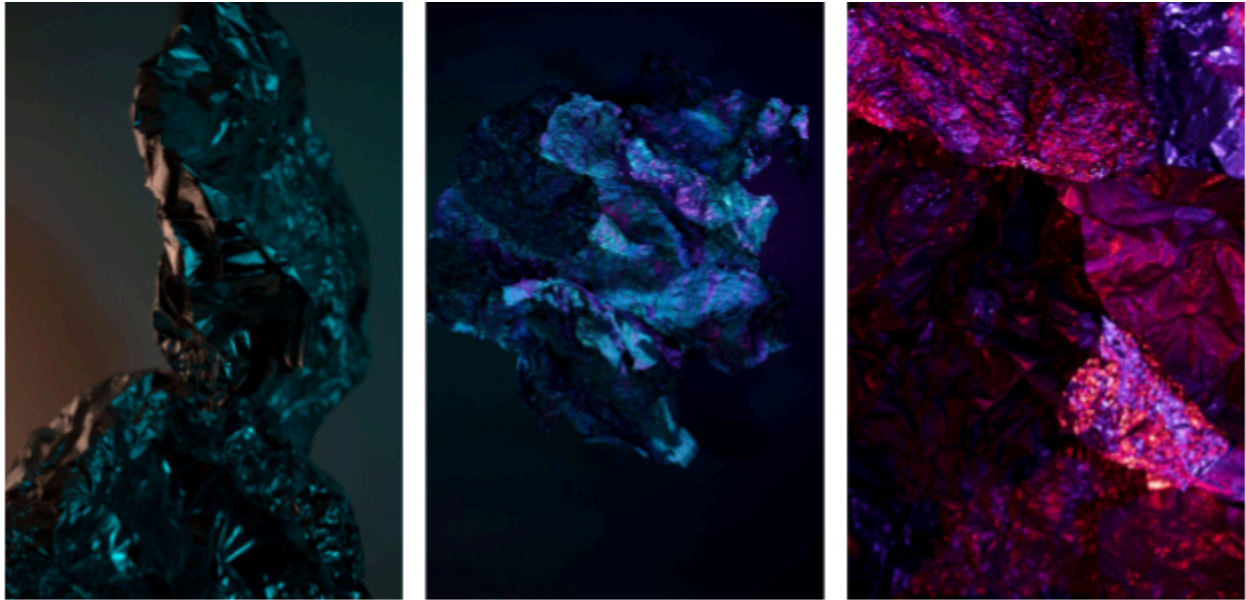
While this experiment didn't provide answers to the larger, overwhelming question of what it means to be from one place but live in another, it did reveal something important: how light, shadow, sharp angles, and material manipulation can shape perception. Each image was a miniature study in fragmentation where a simple crease or a change in the color of the light completely altered the scene. The project became a way for me to explore the construction and distortion of visual identity within the frame.



Experiment SET #2

Tin foil, black out foil, colored gels, strobe light. Digital Image (2023)

Although this wasn't a major part of my final work, the foil project gave me crucial insight



Experiment SET #3

Tin foil, black out foil, colored gels, strobe light. Digital Image (2023)

into the emotional and conceptual potential of materials, light, and perspective. It showed me how reality could be bent and reframed through photographic choices, just by repositioning a light source, changing a camera angle, or manipulating the

surface of an object.

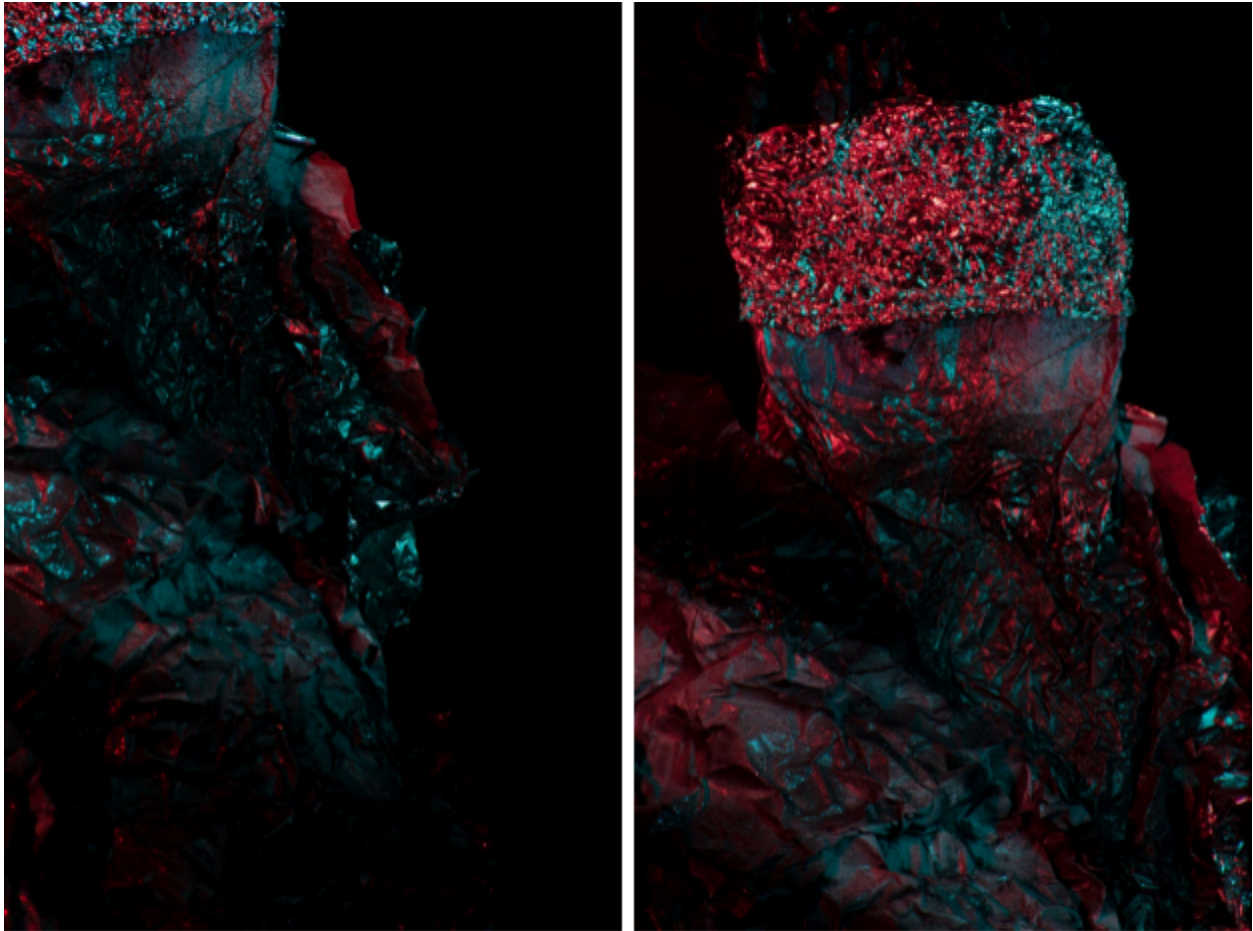


Experiment SET #3

Tin foil, black out foil, colored gels, strobe light. Digital Image (2023)

This small experiment pushed my thinking forward. It made me wonder what it would look like to apply these same principles of distortion and construction to projection. That question led me to explore artists who work with projection, memory, and identity, and whose practices

echoed my own developing interest in how images can fracture, layer, and reconstruct meaning.



Experiment SET #4

Tin foil, black out foil, colored gels, strobe light. Digital Image (2023)



Experiment SET #5

Tin foil, colored gels, strobe light, projected old work onto foil. Digital Image (2023)



**Experiment SET
#5**
Tin foil, colored
gels, strobe light,
projected old work
onto foil. Digital
Image (2023)



The construction

As I began to explore the themes emerging in my personal journey, questions of identity, memory, and belonging, I found myself drawn to a number of artists whose practices resonated deeply with my experience. These artists became touchstones for me as I began constructing my work. However, four artists ultimately formed the foundational



LaToya Ruby Frazier, *Huxtables, Mom, and Me*, from the series *The Notion of Family*, 2008. Gelatin silver print, 16 × 20 inches (40.6 × 50.8 cm). Anonymous promised gift. Courtesy the artist and Michel Rein, Paris/Brussels. © LaToya Ruby Frazier "Huxtables, Mom and Me, from the Series the Notion of Family." ICA Boston, August 10, 2023. <https://www.icaboston.org/art/latoya-ruby-frazier/huxtables-mom-and-me-series-notion-family/>.

framework of my project: LaToya Ruby Frazier, Joel Sternfeld, Tarrah Krajnak, and Aaron Turner. Each of them engages in acts of documentation of family, of place, of history, but does so in ways that interrogate how memory, identity, and trauma are embedded in visual culture.

When considering memory and its role in shaping one's upbringing, LaToya Ruby Frazier and Joel Sternfeld immediately come to mind. Frazier's book *The Notion of Family* documents her hometown of Braddock, Pennsylvania, and the intergenerational experience of her family.¹ It serves as a visual narrative of place, body, and history.

¹ Berger, M. (2014, October 14). *LaToya Ruby Frazier's notion of family*. The New York Times. <https://archive.nytimes.com/lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/10/14/latoya-ruby-fraziers-notion-of-family/>



LaToya Ruby Frazier, Mom Making an Image of Me, from the series The Notion of Family, 2008. Gelatin silver print, 16 × 20 inches (40.6 × 50.8 cm). Anonymous promised gift. Courtesy the artist and Michel Rein, Paris/Brussels. © LaToya Ruby Frazier <https://www.icaboston.org/art/latoya-ruby-frazier/huxtables-mom-and-me-series-notion-family/>.



Khoury League Baseball Field, 2900 Illinois Avenue, East St. Louis, August 1993

"On This Site." Joel Sternfeld. Accessed June 2, 2025.

<https://www.joelsternfeld.net/on-this-site/t243pjf0itngh8ple6wohj71k39loy>.

On June 22, 1991, Roderick Fisher, a sixteen-year-old Little League umpire, made a call that angered Curtis Fair, a thirty-one year-old coach. After being thrown out of the game, Fair returned with a revolver. He fired four shots at Fisher but did not hit him. Curtis Fair was convicted of attempted murder and sentenced to twelve years in prison.

ON THIS SITE

Afterword from the book *On This Site* - ISBN 978-3-86930-434-2

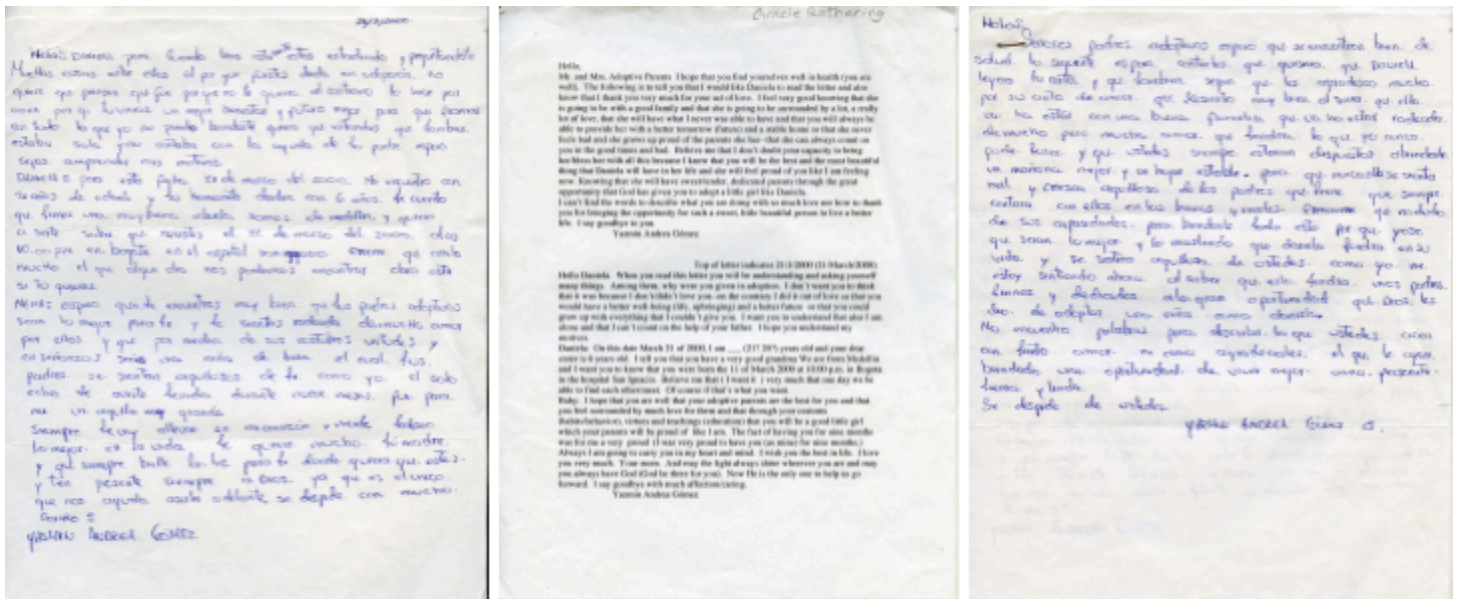
Joel Sternfeld's series *On This Site* explores locations in the U.S. where horrific events occurred, asking viewers to reconsider the surface of everyday landscapes. He writes, "Experience has taught me again and again that you can never know what lies beneath a surface or behind a façade... our understanding of photographs of the landscape is inevitably limited and fraught with misreading."² This idea that images are inherently incomplete helped articulate feelings I struggled to put into words. I may possess letters from my birth mother, photographs of the place I was born, and family pictures from my upbringing, but their meaning isn't



Friedlander, Yoav. "On This Site." Joel Sternfeld, March 25, 2020. <https://www.joelsternfeld.net/writings/2018/5/15/on-this-site>.

² Friedlander, Y. (2020, March 25). *On this site*. Joel Sternfeld. <https://www.joelsternfeld.net/writings/2018/5/15/on-this-site>

immediately accessible to others. To most, these may appear as simple documents of memory. For me, they are fragmented roadmaps revealing and obscuring who I am and where I come from.



As I was researching Frazier and Sternfeld, Tarrah Krajnak introduced me to a podcast interview with Aaron Turner. His project *Black Alchemy Vol 1 2019-*, *Vol 2 (2018)*, *Vol 3 (2013-2016)*, *Black Alchemy: there may still be time left (2020)*. Turner says that, “Black

Alchemy provides a lens through which I see the world while simultaneously considering the past, present, and future. I use light in combination with influences of geometric abstract painting to shift questions of identity within an established, often monolithic historical narrative and address the discourse of photography.”³

What captivated me was not only the content of his images but his construction process: Turner projects photographs into a small room and rephotographs them, intentionally fragmenting the image across different picture planes.



Black Alchemy Vol. 1 (2013-2016) Aaron Turner Untitled, 22 in x 17 in, 2015 “Black Alchemy(2013-2016) - Aaron Turner Studio.” Aaron Turner Studio. Accessed June

³ Turner, Aaron. “Exhibition Space: Black Alchemy.” Penumbra Foundation – Photography Non-Profit in NYC. Accessed June 1, 2025. <https://www.penumbrafoundation.org/exhibition-space-black-alchemy>.



Black Alchemy Vol. 2 (2018) Served with Distinction (WWII), 2018 "Black Alchemy Vol. 2 (2018-), Aaron Turner Studio." Aaron Turner Studio. Accessed June 1, 2025. <https://www.aaronturner.studio/black-alchemy-vol-2-2018#3>.

This physical manipulation of space and light became a pivotal moment for me. I had never considered how projection could create a kind of visual rupture, adding new layers of meaning before the camera even captures the image again.

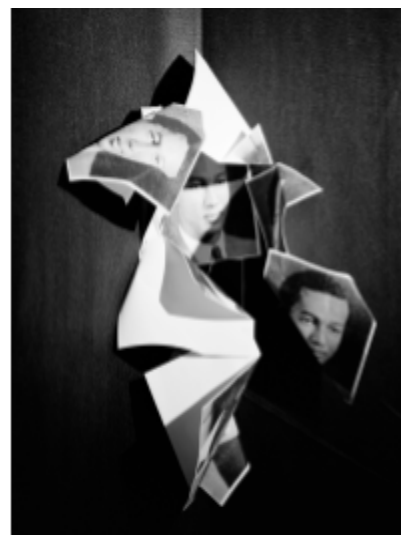
Similarly, Tarrah Krajnak's project *1979: Contact Negatives* | 2019 builds on these ideas of projection and rephotography. She writes, "Using a temporary darkroom, multiple projections, large format cameras, and re-photography, I imaginatively 'return' my body to Lima, Peru in 1979, the year I was adopted from an orphanage there."⁴ Her process merges historical absence with physical presence, using installation to express how trauma and memory are held in the body and often excluded from traditional archives. While Krajnak and Turner explore different histories and frameworks, their shared method—projecting into a space and



Black Alchemy Vol. 3 2019 - present Shift: History at Play #2 (Triptych), 2020 , 33in x 42 in (variable installation dimensions) "Black Alchemy Volume 3 - Aaron Turner Studio." Aaron Turner Studio. Accessed June 1, 2025. <https://www.aaronturner.studio/black-alchemy-vol-3-2019#6>.



Black Alchemy: There May Still Be Time Left (2020) Deny, 2020 "Black Alchemy: There May Still Be Time Left (2020)." Aaron Turner Studio. Accessed June 1, 2025. <https://www.aaronturner.studio/black-alchemy-1-here-may-still-be-time-left#6>.



Black Alchemy Vol. 2 (2018) Looking at Drue King, 2018 "Black Alchemy Vol. 2 (2018-), Aaron Turner Studio." Aaron Turner Studio. Accessed June 1, 2025. <https://www.aaronturner.studio/black-alchemy-vol-2-2018#2>.

⁴ KRAJNAK, TARRAH. "TARRAH KRAJNAK." Tarrah Krajnak. Accessed May 24, 2025. <https://tarrahkrajnak.com/1979-contact-negatives-->.



"1979: CONTACT NEGATIVES."
Tarrah Krajnak. Accessed June 1,
2025. <https://tarrahkrajnak.com/1979-contact-negatives-->.

then rephotographing it inspired my own construction process. I began experimenting with projection to engage the photographs I had collected materially. At first, I projected images into 90-degree corners, watching how the visuals split, stretched, and reformed along the walls. This method challenged conventional photographic boundaries and opened a more expansive visual experimentation path.

As I progressed, I introduced additional materials, old family photographs, suspended white paper, and textured surfaces, to interfere with and distort the projections further. The layering of image, material, and shadow began to raise important questions:

- How does a projection shift when layered with texture?
- What happens when an image is fragmented across a physical space?
- How does scale change our understanding of the projected image?
- What if I incorporate more images in increasingly complex ways?



1979: CONTACT NEGATIVES Self Portrait (Turned) as Nude Woman, 1979 Lima, Peru/2019 Los Angeles, CA "1979: CONTACT NEGATIVES." Tarrah Krajnak. Accessed June 1, 2025. <https://tarrahkrajnak.com/1979-contact-negatives-->.



1979: CONTACT NEGATIVES Self Portrait with 3 Nude Women, 1979 Lima, Peru/2019 Los Angeles, CA "1979: CONTACT NEGATIVES." Tarrah Krajnak. Accessed June 1, 2025. <https://tarrahkrajnak.com/1979-contact-negatives-->.

Each experiment led me somewhere unexpected. The work constantly evolved, uncovering new visual and emotional dimensions. Through this hands-on exploration, I began to reflect on the emotional experience of adoption, not as a single narrative, but as a fragmented, shifting process. These projections became metaphors for the ways I've felt alienated and recombined throughout my life.



Untitled #1, Vol 1 (2023)



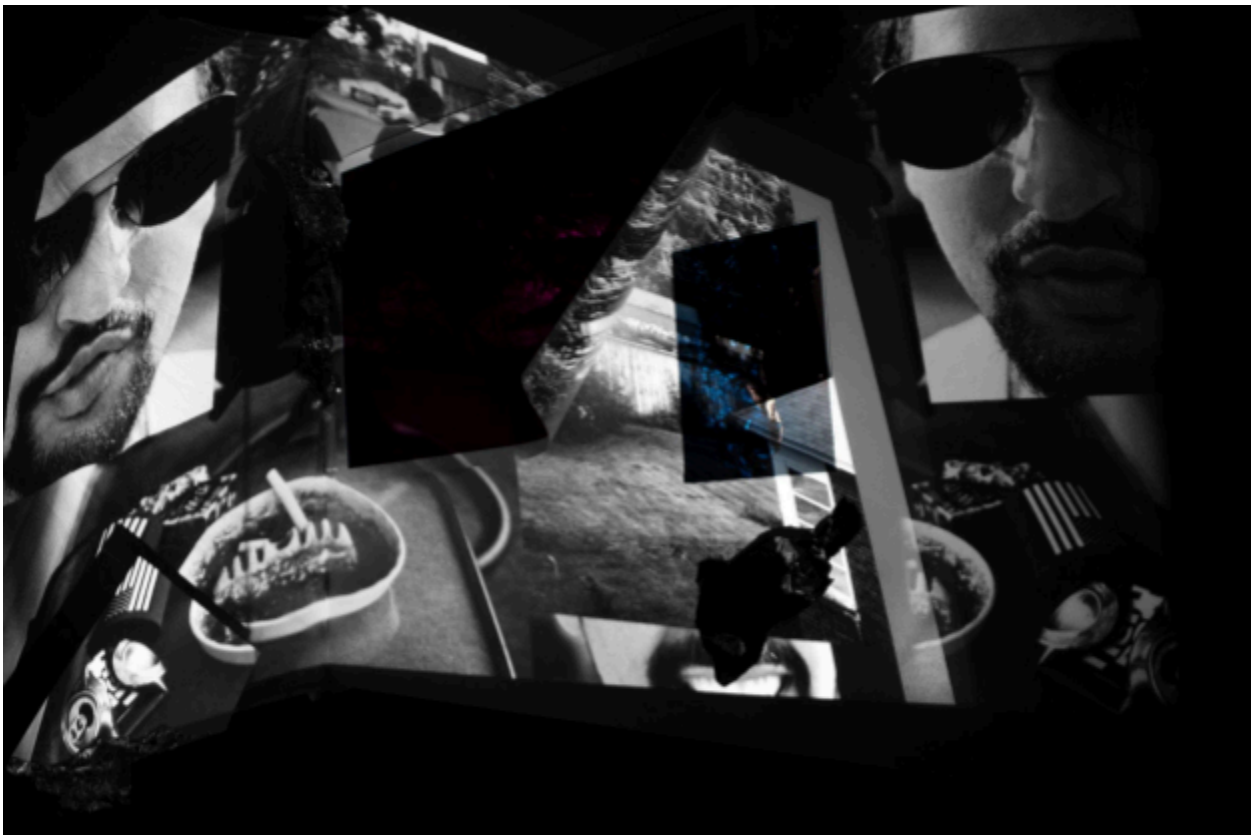
Untitled #2,
Vol 1 (2023)



Untitled #3, Vol 1 (2023)



Untitled #3, Vol. 2 (2023)



Untitled #5, Vol. 2 (2023)

While LaToya Ruby Frazier, Joel Sternfeld, Tarrah Krajnak, and Aaron Turner were my big focal points for this particular project I would like to mention several other artists who played a big part in thinking about different concepts around documenting where you come from, storytelling and narration, and experimenting with physical elements through rephotography.

The first one I would like to mention is Carrie Mae Weems' *Kitchen Table Series*⁵. This particular series stood out because Carrie Mary Weems plays with the idea of a personal narrative. While the story she creates is fictional, the work explores the idea of selfhood and how it shifts over time, the sudden distance between people and the relationships we once had, and both passable and impassable moments that occur in one's life that can't be controlled. When I started taking photos in film of my hometown and my brother, I couldn't help but think of the kitchen table series. While my particular



The Kitchen Table Series 1990 Carrie Mae Weems (American, b. 1953) America 20 platinum prints, 14 letterpress text sheets Image: 38.1 x 38.1 cm (15 x 15 in.); Paper: 50.8 x 50.8 cm (20 x 20 in.) Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 2008.116 © Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Edition: edition 2/10 Cleveland Museum of Art. *The CMA Companion: A Guide to the Cleveland Museum of Art*. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2014. Mentioned and reproduced: P. 316

⁵ Cleveland Museum of Art. *The CMA Companion: A Guide to the Cleveland Museum of Art*. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2014. Mentioned and reproduced: P. 316



The Kitchen Table Series: Untitled (Man reading Newspaper) 1990 Carrie Mae Weems (American, b. 1953) America platinum print Image: 38.1 x 38.1 cm (15 x 15 in.); Paper: 50.8 x 50.8 cm (20 x 20 in.) Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 2008.116.4 © Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Cleveland Museum of Art. *The CMA Companion: A Guide to the Cleveland Museum of Art*. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2014. Mentioned and reproduced: P. 316



The Kitchen Table Series: Untitled (Woman with Friends) 1990 Carrie Mae Weems (American, b. 1953) America platinum print Image: 38.1 x 38.1 cm (15 x 15 in.); Paper: 50.8 x 50.8 cm (20 x 20 in.) Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 2008.116.10 © Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Cleveland Museum of Art. *The CMA Companion: A Guide to the Cleveland Museum of Art*. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2014. Mentioned and reproduced: P. 316

work wasn't a fictional narrative, I constantly kept thinking about the impassable moments we have in our lives and events from the past we couldn't control that still echo today.



Untitled #2, Vol 3 (2024)



Untitled #3 Vol 3 (2024)



Gray, TN by Mike Smith, 1996. Photo courtesy of the artist. United States Artists. "Mike Smith." United States Artists. Accessed June 2, 2025. <https://www.unitedstatesartists.org/artists/mike-smith>.

The next artist and work I want to mention is Mike Smith's *East Tennessee Color and East Tennessee*, which documents the culture of his home region in both color and black and white, offering a regional specificity that mirrors my interest in place and origin.⁶ Much like Mike Smith, while creating this Archive of imagery that directly referenced my upbringing and my relationship with my brother, I was really intrigued by the type of style that Mike Smith used. It's very street photography, documenting the place where you grew up. What has changed, what hasn't, and what you remember. That's what

became very important to me as I began to build the project, I knew the reference photos I wanted to use from my hometown in Cochran, Wisconsin, were going to be places of particular interest that held special memories to me, or even bad memories.



Black & White TN by Mike Smith, 1996. Photo courtesy of the artist. "East Tennessee B&W." Mike Smith : East Tennessee B&W. Accessed June 2, 2025. <http://www.mikesmithphotographs.com/project/east-tennessee-bw/>.

⁶ United States Artists. "Mike Smith." United States Artists. Accessed June 1, 2025. <https://www.unitedstatesartists.org/artists/mike-smith>.



Untitled #4 Vol 3 (2024)



Ben, B&W film, (2024)

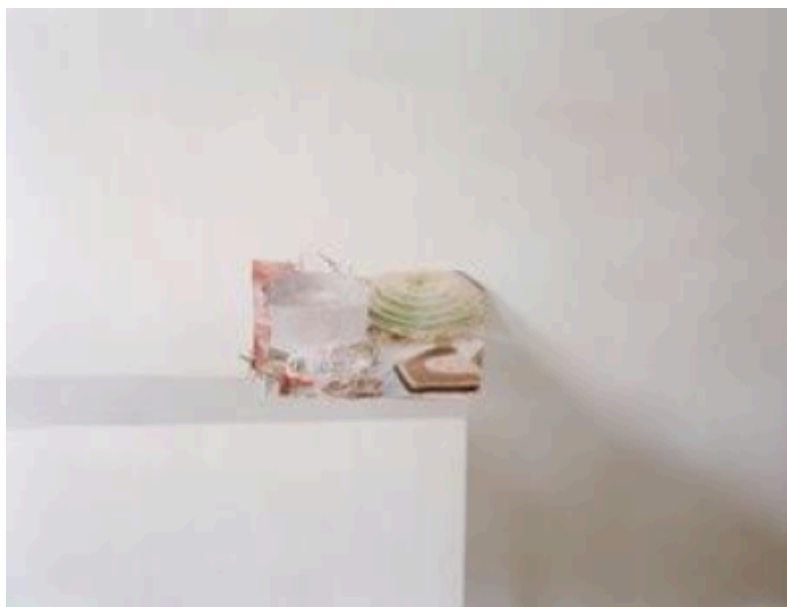


Untitled #27, From the Series *Ill Form & Void Full*, 2011.
34.5 x 45 Inches, Archival Pigment Print, Edition of 9.
"Laura Letinsky." Yancey Richardson. Accessed June 2,
2025. <https://www.yanceyrichardson.com/exhibitions/laura-letinsky2>.

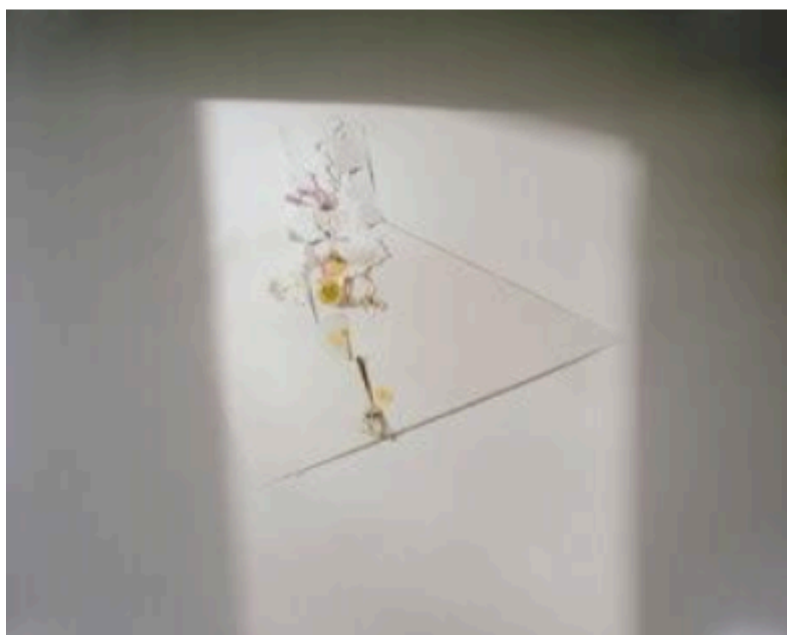
Next is Laura Letinsky's *Ill Form & Void Full* (2011), Letinsky photographed paper and physical objects in the same space, creating optical illusions that blur the lines between the real and the representational.⁷ As I began to think more about these different concepts and artists I was exploring and investigating, I found her series *Ill Form & Void Full* (2011) very intriguing because it challenges many of the ideas of contemporary photography. Some of the questions I was asking myself, as I looked at her work, were whether I was looking at a physical object or a

⁷ "Laura Letinsky." Yancey Richardson. Accessed June 2, 2025.

<https://www.yanceyrichardson.com/exhibitions/laura-letinsky8#:~:text=Through%20her%20work%2C%20Letinsky%20questions,sons%2C%20because%20flowers%20bloom%E2%80%A6%E2%80%9D>.



Untitled #19, From the Series III Form & Void Full, 2011.
35 x 45 Inches, Archival Pigment Print, Edition of 9. "Laura Letinsky."
Yancey Richardson. Accessed June 2, 2025. <https://www.yanceyrichardson.com/exhibitions/laura-letinsky2?view=slider#4>.



Untitled #13, From the Series III Form & Void Full, 2011.
40.25 x 50 Inches, Archival Pigment Print, Edition of 9.
"Laura Letinsky." Yancey Richardson. Accessed June 2, 2025. <https://www.yanceyrichardson.com/exhibitions/laura-letinsky2?view=slider#6>.

photograph. The way she played with material, construction, and bent reality was unique and something I hadn't seen done in the context of photography, and I began to wonder what happens when you start subjecting photos to a concept like this.



Untitled #5, Vol 3 (2024)

By photographing the installations I created, I forced them into a 2D format, a deliberate choice. With its inherent flatness, photography mirrors the fragmentation and emotional distance I often feel when accessing my memories. The final images function like family photos: they are visual records, but they also serve as barriers. They offer a window into my emotional connection with the materials, but they also form a



Untitled #6, Vol 3 (2024)



Untitled #3, Vol 4 (2024)

wall, preventing access to the full lived experience. For instance, the photographs I use from Colombia are ones I can see, but not truly remember. My only relationship to them is through the photograph itself, a static image of something once lived, now unreachable



Untitled #4, Vol 4 (2024)

This tension between presence and absence is at the heart of my work. The project becomes both a personal roadmap and a broader exploration of fragmented identity, especially within transracial adoption. It reflects the emotional complexity of growing up as a person of color raised in a white society by a white family, while feeling disconnected from my Colombian heritage. Even though my parents were transparent about my adoption and offered what answers they could, the emotional reality remained



Untitled #5, Vol 4 (2024)



Hola Daniela; Fractured: Past, Present, Now (2024)

unresolved. I am one of the few adoptees fortunate enough to have a letter from my birth mother. In it, she explains her decision and her hope that adoption would give me a better life. That letter gave me clarity, but it didn't erase the questions. The sense of fragmentation remains. I wonder if others in similar

situations feel the same disorientation, the same need to piece together an identity from scattered images and partial truths.

This project represents my attempt to answer those questions not with definitive truths, but through visual language. It invites dialogue about what it means to live between cultures, between families, between selves. As I continue working with these images, materials, and installations, I understand that this project may never be “finished.” Like identity itself, it is constantly evolving. I hope that in sharing it, others may find space for their own reflections on memory, belonging, and the complexity of self.



Untitled #6,
Vol 4
(2024)



Untitled #7,
Vol 4
(2024)

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