



a tension

by

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in

Printmaking

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Untitled, laser cut rugs, size variable, 2022.

It is important at this time for me to acknowledge and position myself within a white settler context. I was raised in Newfoundland and Labrador, and I am of Irish, English, and French descent. I am currently an uninvited guest in Treaty 6 territory.

The research I have encountered on topics of transgenerational trauma can largely be attributed to several groups who exist within the global majority and who have been victimised and harmed by white-bodied individuals and white systems of power. Research in transgenerational trauma has largely been produced by racialized groups, and the research I have looked at specifically has been written by Indigenous, Jewish, and Black individuals.

It is also important to note that all individuals exist in varying states of intersectionality and that occurrences of trauma and transference are heightened based on our positioning within hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, disability and class.

Through the pairing of cautionary signage and domestic objects, *a tension* seeks to reframe our understanding of the tangible marks and evidence of transgenerational trauma. Through this body of work, I'm employing visual symbols that exist to warn of hazards or give direction to highlight and question harmful ideas of normalcy and the insidious ways trauma inhabits spaces and affects relationships.

Trauma is most commonly known as the emotional response to living through a disastrous event. More recently we are coming to know that trauma also encompasses the body's response to a longer series of smaller wounds (Menakem). I am interested in the subtle ways trauma can permeate spaces and experiences, creating a reality of microaggressions, uncertainty, lack of trust, and loss and can span years and generations. I argue that the impact of this is congruent with that of a natural disaster or accident and affects victims in similar manners. When this occurs, it is referred to as transgenerational trauma. Transgenerational trauma can be defined as trauma passed from one generation to the next through family lineage or through a number of colonial and patriarchal constructed groups (ATKINSON).

Transgenerational trauma often begins with loss: death, divorce, livelihood, or trust to name a select few. The fallout from these events in and of themselves can be contained to a single individual or family unit when the initial trauma is processed and the victim(s) begin to heal (Atkinson). When healing cannot or does not happen, the cycle, although seemingly less intense or eventful, continues. For example, I can track one line of family trauma to my great grandfather, who fought in World War One. He parented my grandfather, who experienced his absence both during his time in the war and after. My grandfather developed severe mental illness and went on to parent my mother, who he abandoned along with her eight siblings. My mother parented me, truly to the best of her capabilities and with her whole heart. However, her ability to support both me and my sister was based on her own experiences of home space and relationships, which, as we know, was tricky. This condensed and simplified narrative encompasses a minutely small fraction of my family history but lays out an example of the trickle-down effect of transgenerational trauma over four generations in a singular line of my family history. Like all other people, I am a descendant of 2 parents, 4 grandparents, 8 great-grandparents, ad infinitum. We all have dozens of stories like these that play a role in the way our families relate to the world: how we care, love, parent, and harm the people around us, whether that be consciously or not. Alongside the dozens of stories I have, there are hundreds and thousands that I do not and may never know, that are a part of me. Although the work centres transference through direct contact and behaviour, we know that both known and unknown historical traumas are housed inside us, embodied in our DNA (Menakem).

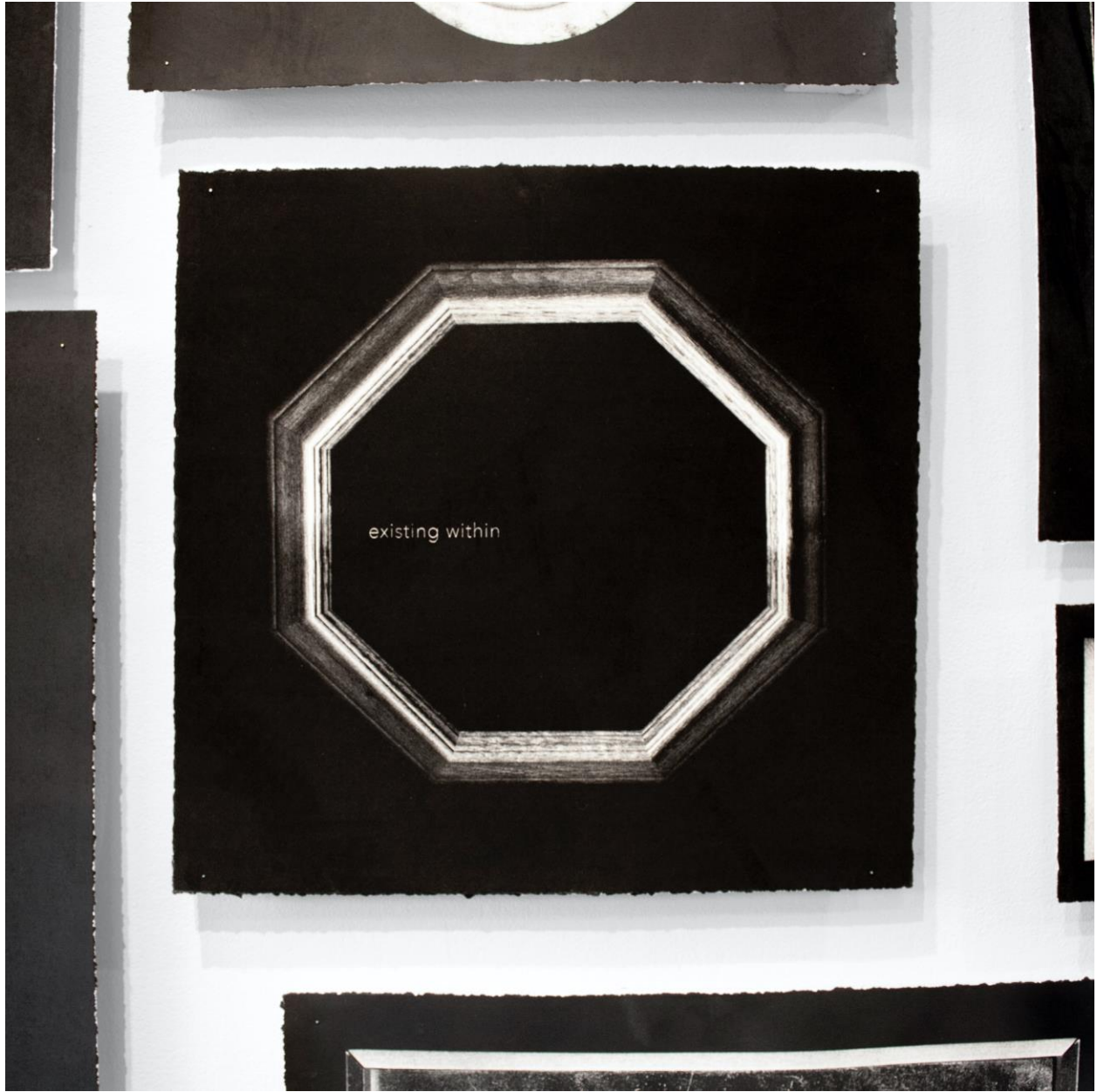
In his book 'My Grandmothers hands' Resmaa Menakem explores transgenerational trauma, its connections to race, and the many ways we are all affected by historical, cultural, and family trauma. Menakem says:

“Unhealed trauma acts like a rock thrown into a pond; it causes ripples that move outward, affecting many other bodies over time. After months or years, unhealed trauma can appear to become part of someone's personality. Over even longer periods of time, as it is passed on and gets compounded through other bodies in a household it can become a family norm. And if it gets transmitted and compounded through multiple families and generations, it can start to look like culture”.

I use domestic objects as catalysts and carriers of sign systems and testimonial text to situate the work in a home setting. I explore themes of loss, displacement, and forgetting as they relate to my personal experiences of traumatic transference. This undercurrent is present throughout the entire exhibition but is starkly present in the series of prints entitled 'inheritance.' The work for this series began with a recollection of the frames I encountered as a child when I would visit an aunt over the summer. Her frames were poster size with mats that had dozens of cutouts and accompanying photos. I would often linger, soaking in the images that depicted my mother's siblings and their children with whom I no longer had contact. I would marvel at the images, projecting myself into them, and aching over the loss of these people and the relationships I had with them. Given the poetic nature of charcoal as remnants, I formed dense fields of black into which I laser-etched images of found frames. In total, there are 29 frames, most of which are empty. This speaks to an unknown history or past that is commonly present in transgenerational trauma, as it's rare to identify the trauma we have inherited, inherently hold, and will pass on without significant intervention.



Inheritance, installation of 29 laser etched images, charcoal on rag paper, size variable, 2022.



Inheritance XXVII, charcoal coated rag paper, laser etching, 18x19 2022.

Throughout this body of work, I have employed several different symbols used in cautionary and directional signage. The work centres historically feminised processes and materials to recreate and reposition these symbols, questioning how we frame acts of care based on broader cultural understandings of gendered roles and domestic space. This is visible in the rug hooked work 'visitor's information.' With this work, my goal was to use the visual language of directional signage and my own writing to highlight the uncertainty that accompanies significant traumas and the personal desire for direction after such an

event. Over four months, countless hours were spent forming the sign, using the tedium of the mechanical process of rug hooking to allow myself the space to process the recent loss of my father. My relationship with home has almost always been a duplicitous one, an experience I feel most people can relate to whether through the lens of childhood and nuclear family or otherwise. I have often struggled with the desire to be both there and away. This rug is an open work that gives viewers a broad space to contemplate the decisions we are often faced with to move forward or stay behind, as they are often tied to personal growth and development or familial support and care, all of which can be gravely impacted by familial trauma.



Visitors Information, wool and acrylic yarns, burlap, 3.5x 8, 2020.

I employ found domestic objects such as blinds, rugs, and frames, along with testimonial text and a variety of textile processes to situate the work within a female perspective. Research in transgenerational trauma shows that women and children are disproportionately affected, often bearing the overwhelming weight of intergenerational wounds (ATKINSON). I see textiles as a further contextualization of this point based on textiles and craft being designated as women's work (BLACK). In Newfoundland culture, rug hooking is revered as a creative and utilitarian skill set born of necessity, this serves as the catalyst for the other textile works in the exhibition. I use found objects as stand-ins for objects I have lost or can no

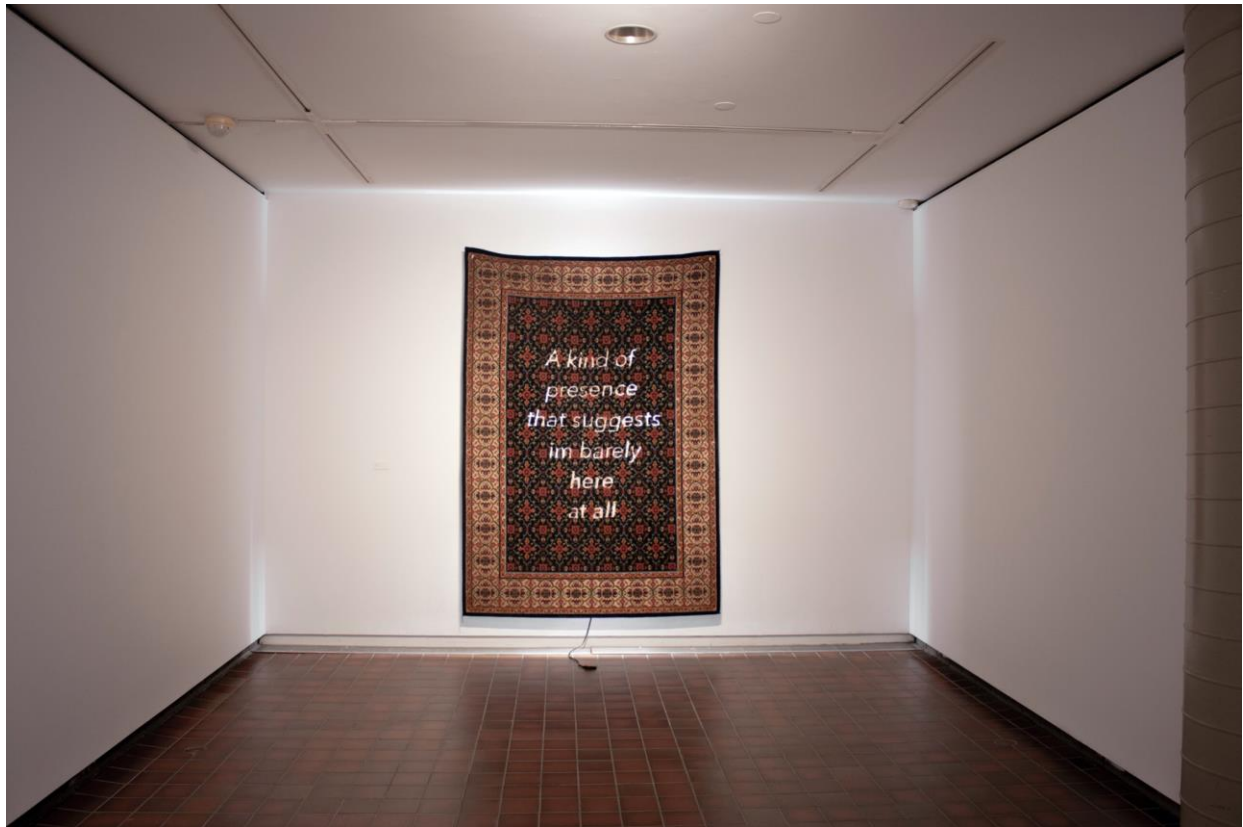
longer access to create a dialogue between material and intervention, situating the objects as a form of inheritance and the intervention as both testimony and labour.



Living Room, found rug, 3x5, 2021.



Although laborious processes are present throughout the work, I am especially considering labour in the series of dehooked rugs. In both rug pieces, I am working from behind or underneath the object to remove each strand of fibre to form the phrases chosen. The process is lengthy, physically demanding, and time consumptive. This laborious process grants me the time and space to work through, and meditate on, the many ways my family and I have been impacted by transgenerational trauma. I see the rugs as a form of inheritance in many ways, although the objects I use are simply stand-ins. The text is from my own archive of writing, and when displayed, is backlit to highlight the phrases each rug contains. My goal is to bring heightened attention to a space that is observed passively or not at all. Rugs exist in space to comfort the inhabitants, and I am drawing parallels to this object's purpose and the traditional role of women in space, as the text centres ideas of discomfort and presence. Further to this, I'm thinking about how trauma is continually passed on through silencing techniques, fear, and shame.



While we were visiting II, found rug, 5x8, 2021.

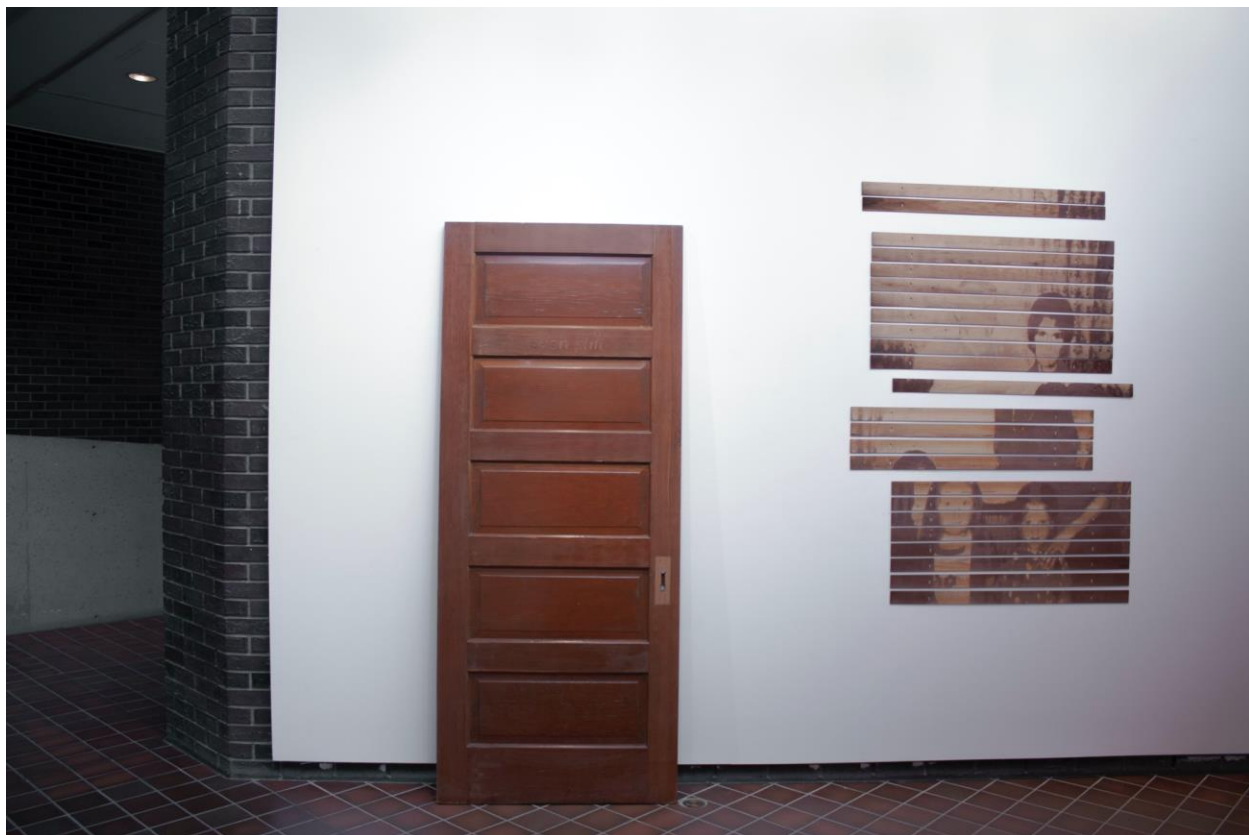


I use traditional print media to expand upon these ideas and create a distance between witness and content. In transgenerational trauma, there often is a sense of cognitive dissonance as victims grapple with the complex role of both owner and perpetrator in respect to their trauma(s). In the various works of 'altar,' I have employed my family archive of home images and inherited images in part to address the loss of knowledge and contextualization of behaviour and trauma. The amount of information I can access or that has been passed down is echoed more or less in the amount of photographs I have of each generation before me. Through this body of work I have rendered three prints, each featuring one of the three most recent generations in my maternal line. I began with the blinds as objects, revisiting a longstanding interest I've had in window spaces and what we choose to share or hide from visitors and passersby. As a child, I would often occupy the space in front of our large bay window, contemplating my relationship with my extended family. This mainly consisted of me projecting into imagined spaces about what they were doing, and what our reunion might look like when they finally came to visit me. Through researching, I've come to realise this actualization or daydreaming as something called a ghost kingdom, a term coined by physiologist Betty Jean Lifton. This is a phenomenon where children with severed family relationships create scenarios to help them understand and cope with losses. The works of 'altar' feature images from my family archive laser-etched into wooden blind slats. The photographs selected were largely impacted by availability, as images of my parents and grandparents are very limited. I choose images that depict moments of happiness or elation to illustrate the things we cast out into the world and how we ask to be perceived. The images from both my and my mother's generation are images from birthday parties, which highlight the performance of space and family that occur during these kinds of rituals. These images depict what others had a window into in respect to our family lives, but we also recognize that these images are not necessarily good representations of day-to-day family life. For that reason, the photos are two-fold. To outsiders, they depict happy family life, but within the context of the work and the treatment of the images, it becomes clear that there is more happening than we can see or perceive.



Installation shot of Altar series, relief print on rag paper, 2022.

Through laborious process, the print and textile works of *a tension* seek to claim a distance from their original sources, enabling a slow, embodied research that disassembles and re-constructs found materials in a search to change our understanding of traumatic affect.



Installation shot of Knock, wait, enter, and untitled, laser etching on found object, 2022.



Altar, relief print on rag, size variable, 2022.



Altar III, relief on rag paper, 60x42, 2022.



Altar II, relief on rag paper, 60x42, 2022.



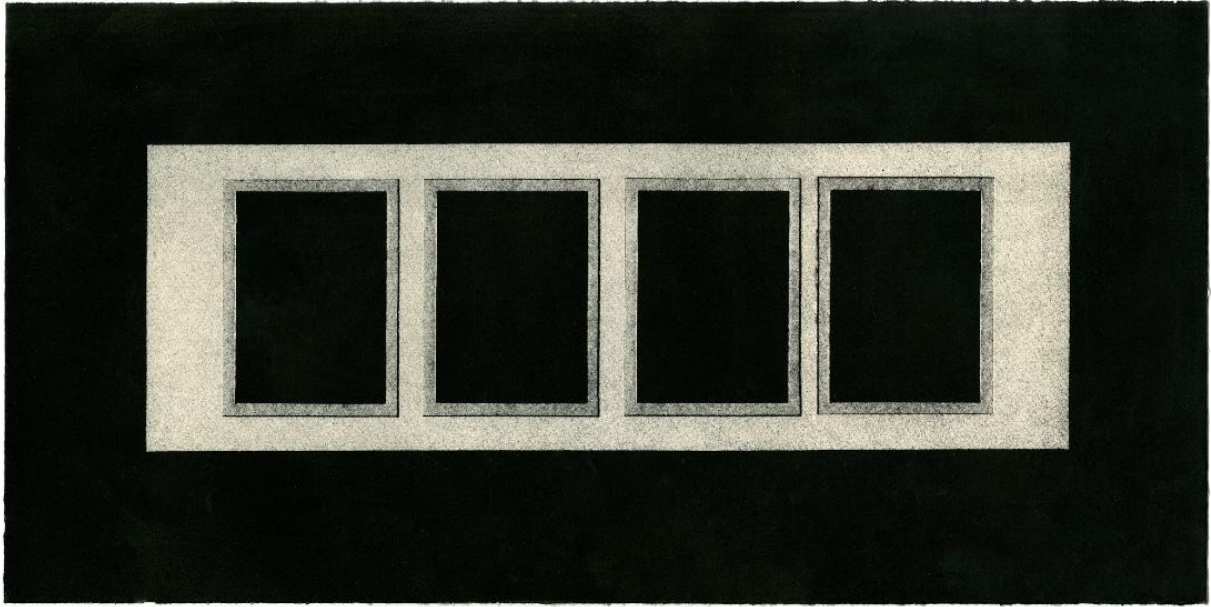
Altar I, relief on rag paper, 60x42, 2022.



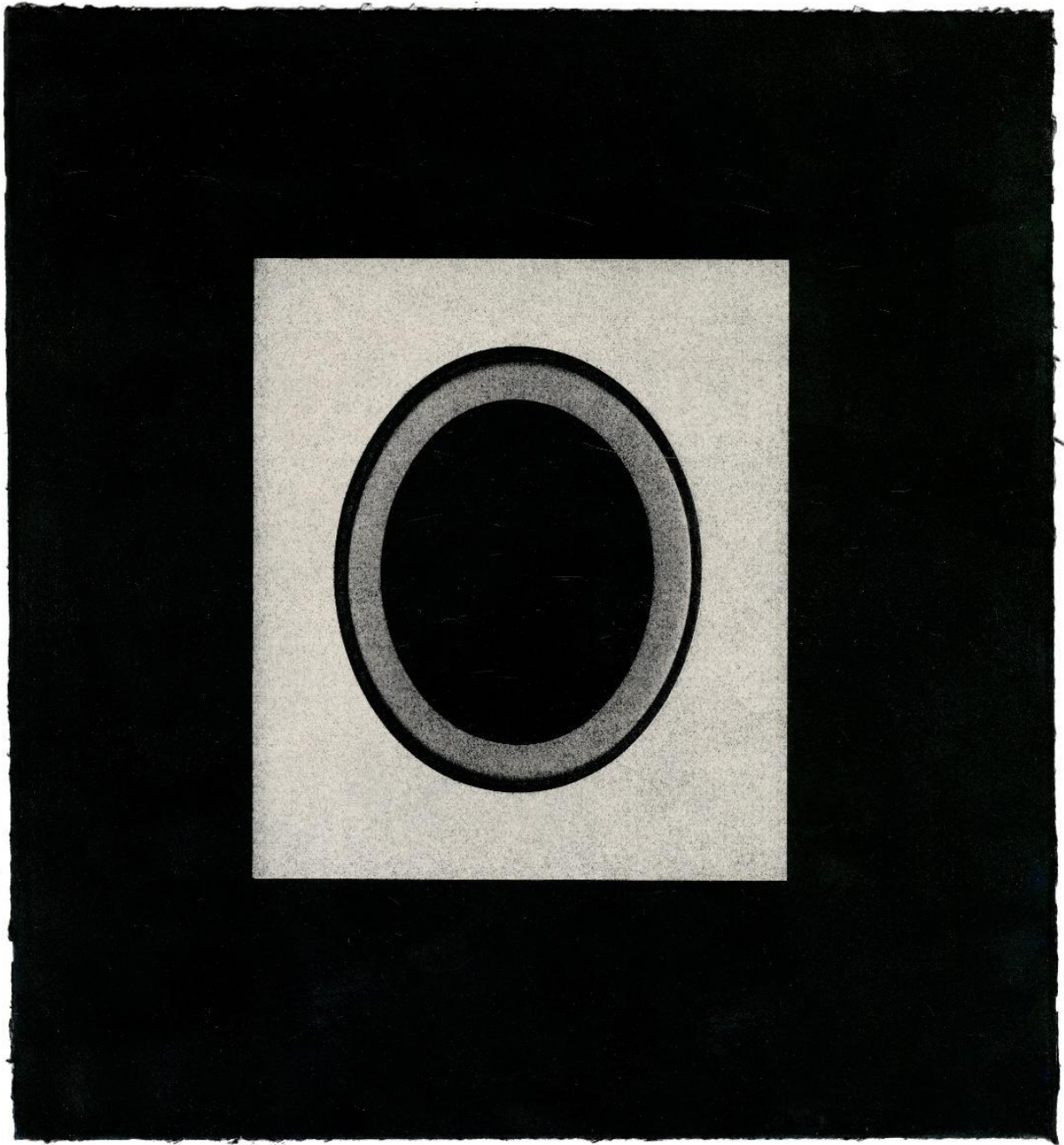
Ghost Kingdom, laser etched Plexiglas blind, 36x96, 2022.



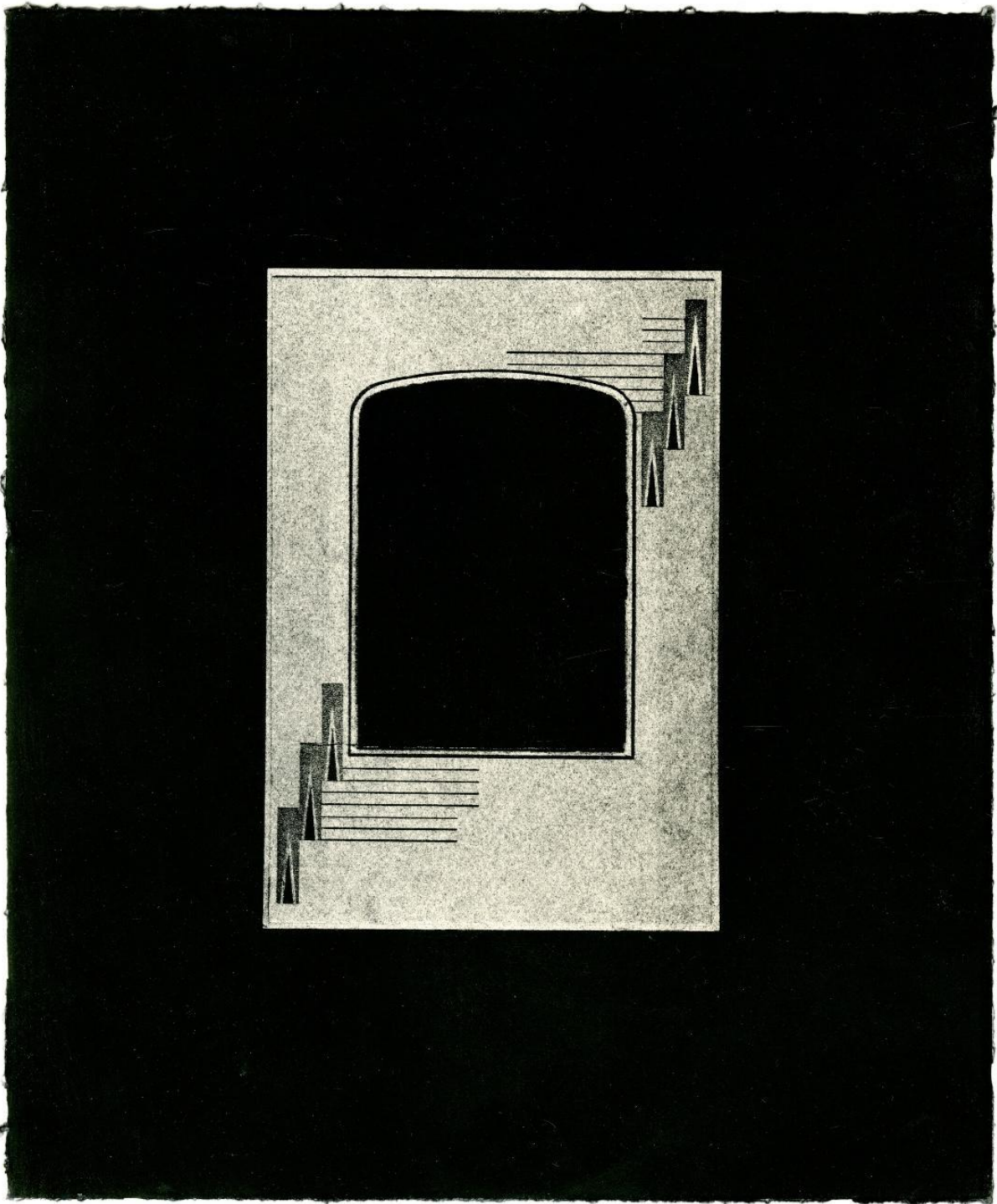




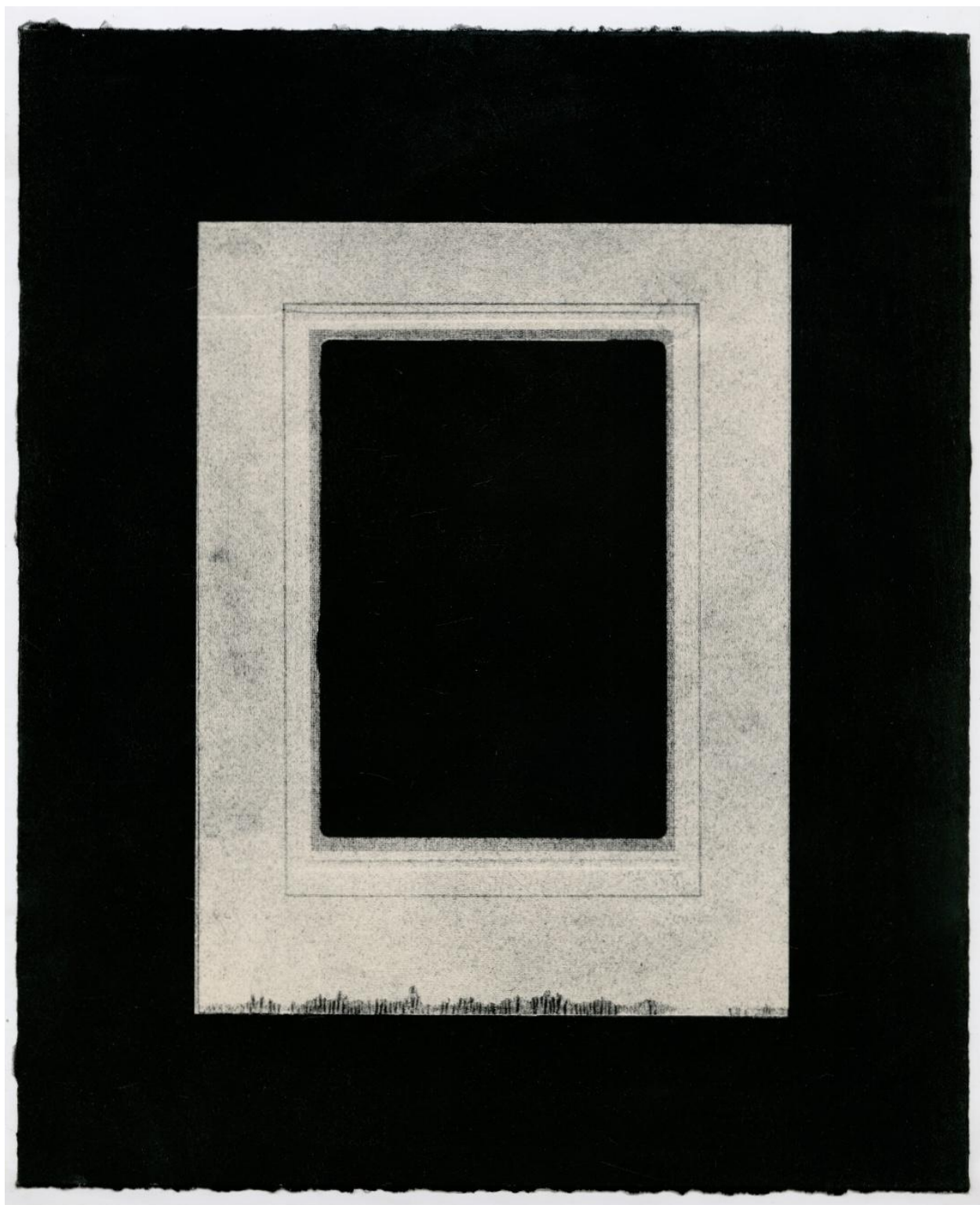
Inheritance VI, laser etched charcoal on rag paper, 2022.



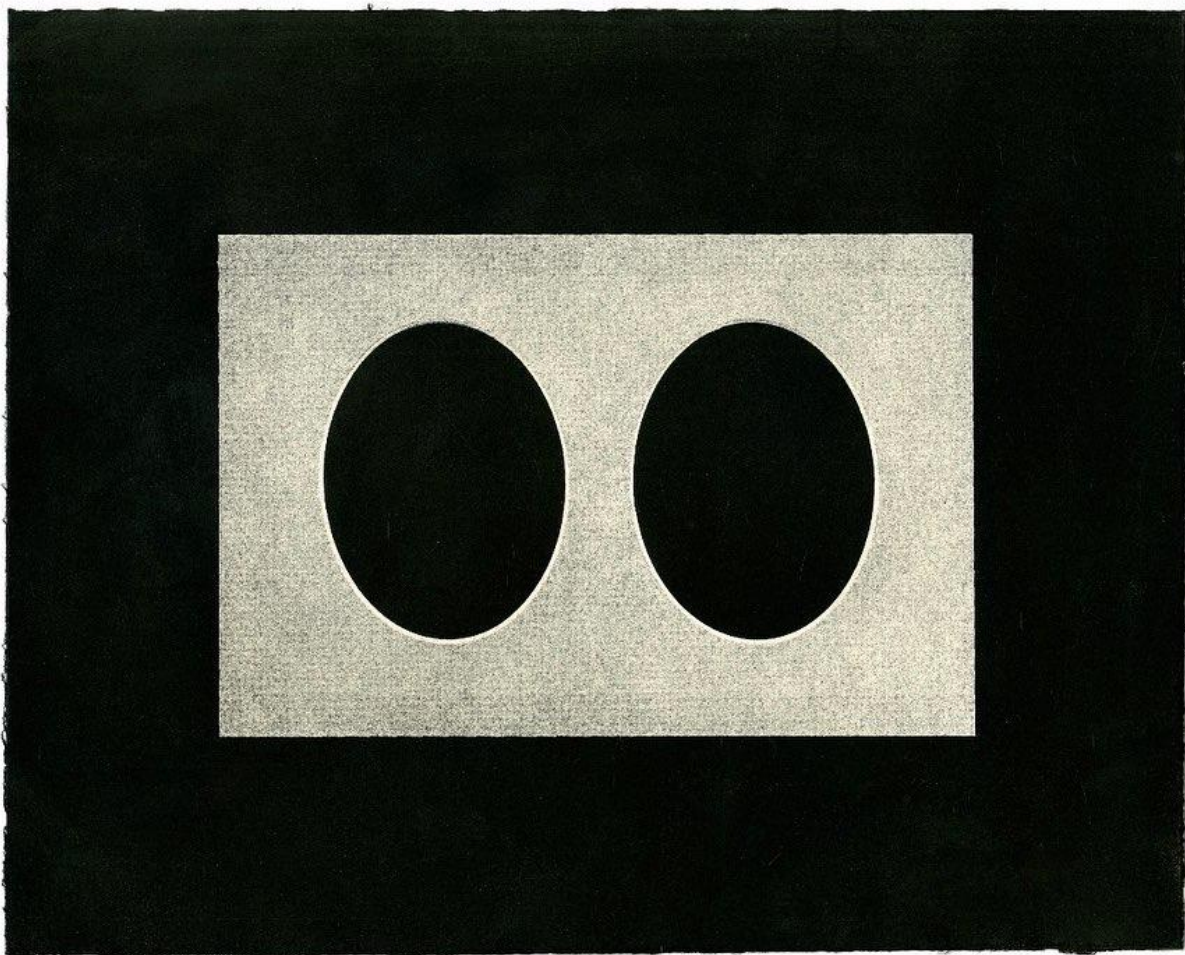
Inheritance II, laser etched charcoal on rag paper, 2022.



Inheritance VII, laser etched charcoal on rag paper, 2022.



Inheritance III, laser etched charcoal on rag paper, 2022.



Inheritance IV, laser etched charcoal on rag paper, 2022.

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